



The **Long Distance Building** of the American Telephone & Telegraph Company, 32 Avenue of the Americas, between Lispenard and Walker Streets is still occupied by A.T.&T. Called the "**Tower of Speech**," the building is no longer the largest long distance center in the world, but the company uses it for administrative, technical, sales, legal and regulatory offices. In the lobby, a beautiful Art Deco mosaic by Hildreth Meière, best known for her three large medallions on the exterior of Radio City Music Hall, shows a map of the world with the words, "TELEPHONE WIRES AND RADIO UNITE TO MAKE NEIGHBORS OF NATIONS." Ceiling mosaics symbolically depict "the continents linked by the telephone and wireless."

At one point, Rudin Management Co. planned to dedicate about half the 1.1 million-square-foot property to telecom space, but the collapse of the telecommunications industry convinced New York's Rudin family to scale back its plan. About 250,000 square feet of space formerly earmarked for telecom companies has been marketed as office space for lower rents.

"We did support the building becoming a landmark," said Laura Abbott, a spokeswoman for A.T.&T. "We believe this is an important building with a rich history. And we are pleased that the city has named it a landmark."

Designed by Ralph Walker (1889–1973) from 1930-1932, it employs the requirements of the 1916 zoning code in an expressive manner. Walker's emphatically vertical design rises through a series of dramatic setbacks to a buttressed crown and is highlighted with a distinctive nontraditional, naturalistic ornamental vocabulary. The building in its present form was finished in 1932.

After study at M.I.T. and work in architectural offices around the country, Ralph Walker settled in New York in 1916 where he was employed at the firm of McKenzie, Voorhees, and Gmelin. In 1923, Walker was put in charge of the design of the new headquarters for the New York Telephone Company, known as the Barclay-Vesey Building. In 1926, Walker became a partner in the firm of Voorhees, Gmelin, and Walker. He also designed an expressive skyscraper for Western Union (1930) on Hudson Street, and the Salvation Army Temple (1930) on 14th Street. His career culminated with the design of the Irving Trust Building (1931) at 1 Wall Street with its undulating facade, crystalline crown, and sumptuous public interiors.



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