

95 Madison Avenue (The Emmet Building)

Madison Avenue and East 29th Street, Manhattan
Tax Map Block 858, Lot 58

Built: 1912

Architect: Barney & Colt

Style: Neo-Renaissance Skyscraper

Proposed Action: Proposed for Calendaring December 12, 2017



This richly ornamented sixteen-story limestone and terra-cotta building, designed by Barney & Colt, was constructed between 1911 and 1912 for the prominent physician and collector Thomas Addis Emmet (1828-1919). A pioneering gynecological surgeon, Dr. Emmet occupied a house at 89 Madison Avenue for almost half a century and acquired the buildings at 91, 93, and 95 Madison Avenue for his medical practice. In the early 1900s, as new businesses were entering the area north of Madison Square, Dr. Emmet replaced the four old houses with this building. Primarily a commercial structure leased to tenants for wholesale showrooms, it also contained Dr. Emmet's elegant penthouse apartment designed to showcase his extensive library and collection of art and antiques. While it was common to have a janitor's apartment at the top of a commercial building it was thought that this was the first time in New York City that such an elaborate residential space was incorporated into a skyscraper.

The architects, John Stewart Barney (1869-1924) and Stockton Beekman Colt (1863-1937), were both Columbia graduates who had worked as draftsmen in the offices of George B. Post. Barney subsequently worked in partnership with Henry Otis Chapman from 1894 to 1910 and was well known for his medieval and Northern Renaissance Revival churches, hotels, and commercial buildings. Colt had partnered with Trowbridge & Livingston from 1894 to 1897 before establishing an independent practice. The Emmet Building was probably the first work of Barney & Colt's partnership, which lasted until around 1922.

The design of the Emmet Building combines Early French Renaissance ornament with a Neo-Gothic vertical effect and state-of-the-art steel frame construction. Located on a corner site and almost square in plan, the building features a tripartite articulation with heavy corner bays framing three lighter four-window-wide center bays. The three-story base is faced with Indiana limestone with Italian marble revetments accenting the column shafts. Elaborate composite capitals, medieval figures surmounted by canopies, cartouches, and gargoyles also provide decorative interest on the lower stories. The upper stories are faced with terra cotta and feature a series of Gothic-inspired colonnades with clustered piers and shafts that rise unbroken from the fourth to the eleventh story. The five-story crown is liberally encrusted with Renaissance motifs including baluster columns, elaborate cornices, foliate friezes, grotesques, console brackets, herms, and a mansard roof with stepped dormers.