

SHELTON HOTEL (LATER HALLORAN HOUSE)

525 Lexington Avenue (AKA 523-523 Lexington Avenue,
137-139 East 48th Street, 136-140 East 49th Street), Manhattan
Tax Map Block 1303, Lot 53

Built: 1922-23

Architect: Arthur Loomis Harmon

Style: Romanesque Revival

Actions: Calendared September 17, 2013

Designed by architect Arthur Loomis Harmon and completed in 1923, the Shelton Hotel is one of the first “skyscraper” residential hotels. With its powerful massing it played an important role in the development of the skyscraper in New York City. It is one of the premiere hotels constructed along the noted “hotel alley” stretch of Lexington Avenue, which was built as part of the redevelopment of this section of East Midtown that followed the opening of Grand Central Terminal and the Lexington Avenue subway line.



The Shelton Hotel is considered the first building to successfully embody the massing requirements of the 1916 Zoning Law, and it became a model for subsequent setback skyscraper buildings. The impact of the Shelton was reflected in the design of numerous hotels and apartment houses in New York City and throughout the country. Hailed by contemporary critics, as well as historians, his scheme influenced many subsequent skyscrapers, including the Empire State Building, designed by Shreve Lamb & Harmon, which Harmon joined in the late 1920s.

The 31-story building is designed in the Romanesque Revival style, with three setbacks, stepping up to a central tower, and a two-story limestone base. Alternating flush and recessed bays topped with corbelled friezes emphasize the structure’s verticality. Harmon employed entasis, causing the building’s mass to bulge out as it rose, which was associated with the design of classical columns, he inclined the lower floors inward to counter the illusion of sagging, relieved the repetition of hotel rooms windows with recessed vertical panels that fostered shadows and contributed to the building’s three-dimensionality, and suppressed horizontal lines to emphasize the structure’s verticality. While the building is nominally Romanesque Revival in style above the base, Harmon deliberately attempted “to avoid any evidence of any pronounced style in the details, as the masses of such modern buildings have no architectural precedence.”

When it opened critics hailed the design of the building, as do contemporary historians, who highlight its significance in influencing the design of New York City’s earliest skyscrapers. Architect and historian Robert A. M. Stern writes that the Shelton’s design “thrilled the public and profession alike. Here for the first time, one could see the new zoning laws skillfully translated into a complexly massed, powerfully modeled composition that combined bold scale with a fine sense of detail.” In 1977 *New York Times* critic Ada Louise Huxtable also recognized

the importance of the Shelton, calling it “this landmark New York skyscraper,” arguing for its significance in the interpretation of the zoning law, and noting that at the time of its completion it was hailed as a major architectural event and that it was an icon depicted by Georgia O’Keeffe and “immortalized” by Hugh Ferriss. The Shelton Hotel received awards from the Architectural League of New York and the American Institute of Architects. At the time it was built, the Shelton was considered the tallest hotel in the world at 31 stories. Articles on the Shelton Hotel appeared in all of the major architectural journals. The *WPA Guide to New York City* devoted a paragraph to the Shelton because it embodied “the great aesthetic possibilities inherent in a studied proportioning of the huge masses of the modern skyscraper.”

Originally built as a men’s residence with 1,200 bedrooms plus library, lounge, and athletic facilities, the building opened its doors to women in 1924. It is currently the New York Marriott East Side. The Shelton Hotel is remarkably intact; it retains its iconic form and most of its original Romanesque Revival ornament.

