Landmarks Preservation Commission  
May 9, 1978, Designation List 115  
LP-0983

212 EAST 78th STREET HOUSE, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1861-65.  
Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1432, Lot 142.

On January 10, 1978, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a  
public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 212 East 78th  
Street House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item  
No. 4). The hearing was continued to March 14, 1978 (Item No. 5). The  
hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law.  
One witness spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in  
opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

This charming house at No. 212 is one of a row of six surviving houses  
(Nos. 208-218) built between 1861 and 1865 as a speculative venture for  
several successive developers. As such, they may be seen as representative  
examples of New York City row house development during the 1860s. The  
builders, Warren and Ransom Beman and John Buckley, were probably responsible  
for the design. While the Italianate style had been popular for row house  
design in New York during the 1850s and 1860s, this row is given particular  
distinction by the treatment of the elliptically-arched door and window  
openings, which are very unusual on Italianate-style houses.

The block of East 78th Street between Second and Third Avenues on which  
this row is located was considered a part of the village of Yorkville at the  
time of construction. Until 1851 the block was part of the property of the  
City of New York known as the Common Lands. In 1852 the Third Avenue Rail­  
road opened, making it possible for residents of Yorkville to commute to  
lower Manhattan.

Although the residential sections of the city had gradually moved north­  
ward from the lower tip of the island during the 19th century, the block was  
still undeveloped in 1861 when Howard A. Martin purchased 200 feet of property  
fronting the south side of East 78th Street. As a condition of sale, Martin  
was assessed $128 for the opening of 78th Street in a judgment handed down by  
the New York State Supreme Court in 1860. Martin subdivided his property into  
fifteen lots (Nos. 206-234), each 13 feet 4 inches wide; construction had  
already begun when William H. Brower, an investment broker, purchased them in  
1862. Because each of the fifteen lots was the same width and the same  
builders were responsible for the construction of all, the fifteen houses in  
the row were probably identical in appearance even though Brower sold all of  
the properties to several different owners before construction was completed in 1865. The four-year construction period is long for a row of houses of  
this type in New York City, but the rate of building was affected by the  
ocurrence of the Civil War during these years. Samuel O. Howe, also an  
investment broker, purchased the properties at Nos. 210-218 in 1864; after  
the houses were completed in 1865, he sold this house, No. 212, and No. 216  
to Eugene McGrath. McGrath lived in one of the houses for a short time,  
Late in 1865, McGrath sold No. 212 to Joseph Bissicks who moved in the  
following year. Bissicks purchased the adjoining house at No. 210 in 1867,  
and in 1868 Bissicks sold both houses to Adolphus G. Mandel who was in the  
varnish-selling business. Mandel treated them as an investment and did not  
live there.

The brick house at No. 212 rises three stories above a basement. Because  
the house is only 13 feet 4 inches wide, the facade has only two bays. Each  
have distinctive elliptically-arched openings which are very unusual for an  
Italianate design. A tall stoop leads to the doorway at the left with original  
arched transom. Both the doorway and the full-height parlor window have  
crispely-detailed stone enframements with decorated keystones. The elliptically-  
arched windows at the second and third stories have similar enframements.  
Projecting sills resting on corbels accent the window bases. All the window  
sash are original. Crowning the facade is a handsome cornice with closely­  
spaced vertical brackets. Original ironwork may be seen lining the stoop. All  
of these elements work together to create a particularly noteworthy Italianate  
row house design.

1. Trow's City Directory for 1865-66 lists Eugene McGrath, agent, as living  
at East 78th Street near Third Avenue.
This house with the other five of the row which survive is a handsome component of the streetscape and a distinctive example of the Italianate style. It continues to be used as a residence.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the 212 East 78th Street House has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the 212 East 78th Street House is one of a charming row of six surviving houses; that its elliptically-arched openings make it a distinctive example of the Italianate style; that it, with the other houses in the row, is a handsome component of the streetscape; that it is a representative example of New York City row house development during the 1860s; and that it continues to be used as a residence.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21 (formerly Chapter 63) of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the 212 East 78th Street House, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1432, Lot 142, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Property Conveyances (Office of the Register, New York County).


Tax Assessment Records, New York County, 1860-68 (New York City Department of Records and Information Services).

Trow's Directories for New York, 1860-1870.
212-218 East 78th Street Houses
Manhattan
Built 1861-65