

Landmarks Preservation Commission
May 13, 1980, Designation List 133
LP-1058

161 EAST 73RD STREET BUILDING, Borough of Manhattan.
Built 1896-97; architect Thomas Rae.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1408, Lot 24.

On June 19, 1979, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 161 East 73rd Street Building and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 8). 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

The 161 East 73rd Street Building and its twin at No. 163 are fine examples of the type of private carriage house built during the late 19th and early 20th centuries in this area of Manhattan. They were constructed between 1896 and 1897 for William H. Tailer who lived at 14 East 72nd Street. Architect Thomas Rae designed both carriage houses in the late Romanesque Revival style and ornamented them with the Renaissance-style decorative forms which were then gaining in popularity.

The carriage house at No. 161 is a component of the rare surviving group of carriage houses, stables, and garages built on East 73rd Street between Lexington and Third Avenues to serve the wealthy families who lived on or near Fifth Avenue. Stables were a necessity during the period when private urban transportation was limited to horses and carriages. Only the very wealthy, however, could afford to build and maintain a private carriage house such as those found on this street. Others boarded their horses in large commercial stables such as that at 182 East 73rd Street.

The private carriage houses tended to be two- or three-story structures often designed in the most stylish architectural modes of the period. On the interior were two major ground-floor spaces--a front room for the carriages and a rear room with stalls for the horses. At the upper stories were one or two apartments for the coachman, groom, or related employees. Some of the larger carriage houses had interior ramps on the ground floor that led to additional horse stalls on the second floor. Early in the 20th century, as automobiles began to replace carriages as the primary means of transportation for the wealthy, these stables were converted to garages and chauffeur's residences. Later in the 20th century, when private garages became too expensive

to maintain, most of the buildings were converted to stylish residences.

The carriage houses were built on streets that were convenient to the East Side mansions, but were not so close that their noises and smells would mar the exclusive character of the residential streets. A few carriage houses were erected between Madison and Park Avenues, but most were constructed on the less elegant streets east of Park Avenue. Like many streets on the Upper East Side, East 73rd Street between Lexington and Third Avenues was initially developed in the 1860s with modest Italianate style residences. Most of these houses were replaced as the block became a prime site for carriage houses; only two of the original rowhouses (Nos. 171 and 175) survive.

The building at No. 161 is designed in a form characteristic of contemporary carriage houses. A two-story structure, it is constructed of unusual rock-faced brick and trimmed with rock-faced and smooth-faced Indiana limestone beltcourses, lintels, sills, and transom bars. A central, round-arched carriage entrance with a molded-brick intrados and limestone impost blocks and foliated keystone is flanked by a round-arched pedestrian entry and a round-arched window with a wrought-iron guard. All of the ground-floor openings are ornamented with equestrian details indicating the use of the building. The keystone of the central entrance is in the form of knotted reins, while the transom bars of the other opening have horses' heads carved in relief. A wide limestone beltcourse separates the utilitarian ground floor from the residential upper story. The second floor, with its shallow central oriel, is simply articulated with rectangular windows.

The textural quality provided by the rough-cut brick and stone marks the building as a Romanesque Revival style structure. Additional Romanesque Revival features include the round-arched openings with stone transom bars on the ground floor and the deep, recessed second-story windows with their multi-paned upper sash. The limestone keystones and pulvinated, galvanized-iron cornice with its frieze embossed with garlands and rosettes, are inspired by Renaissance design. With the exception of new entrance doors, the building retains all of its original integrity.

The original owner, William H. Tailer, retained the carriage house until 1901 when it was sold to John Woodruff Simpson (1850-1920), who lived at 926 Fifth Avenue. Simpson was the senior member of the law firm of Simpson, Thatcher and Bartlett and a collector of old master paintings and Rodin sculptures. His collection is now part of the National Gallery in Washington, D.C.

In 1907, the carriage house was purchased for private use by Edward S. Harkness (1874-1940), who at that time was building a mansion on the corner of Fifth Avenue and East 75th Street. This imposing neo-Italian Renaissance palazzo, designed by Hale & Rogers and completed in 1909, is one of the few Fifth Avenue mansions still standing. Edward Harkness was the heir to one of the largest estates in America. The family fortune was founded by Edward's father, Stephen V. Harkness, an early partner in John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil.

Edward Harkness "made a career of distributing the vast fortune that he inherited from his father."¹ Harkness sponsored social welfare projects and patronized the arts. Among the recipients of his largess were Columbia, Yale, and Harvard Universities, Union Theological Seminary, the New York Botanical Gardens, the New York Public Library, the Save the Redwoods campaign, and the Commonwealth Fund, the Harkness family's own philanthropic organization, now housed in the Fifth Avenue mansion. In 1909, Harkness hired architect James Gamble Rogers (one of the architects of the Harkness Mansion) to make interior alterations to the stable. The ground floor was converted to a garage, and the second floor was altered to a squash court, locker room, and chauffeur's apartment. After Edward Harkness's death the mansion and stable became the property of his wife Mary Stillman Harkness (1874-1950), who continued her husband's philanthropic ventures.

In 1950 the building was purchased by its present owner, the Dalcroze School of Music. The Dalcroze School is a music school and teacher's training institute that follows the philosophy of Swiss educator and composer Emile Jaques-Dalcroze (1865-1950). Dalcroze was an innovative teacher who believed that the musician must respond physically to music. He developed a method of teaching that combined musical theory with body movement (Eurhythmics) and a study of melody and harmony (Solfege). Dalcroze's ideas were ridiculed in Switzerland, and in 1902 he was forced to leave the Geneva Conservatory of Music and set up a school in Hellerau, Germany. Musicians such as Paderewski and Rachmaninoff and dancers such as Martha Graham and Ted Shawn came to study with Dalcroze. Serge Diaghlev's dance-dramas were also influenced by Dalcroze's theories. At the outbreak of World War I Dalcroze returned to Geneva where his ideas had been recognized and founded the Institut Jaques-Dalcroze. In 1911 the Dalcroze method was first introduced in America, and in 1915 the Dalcroze School of Music was founded in New York. In 1929 it became a teacher's training school as well as a music school. Today the school is run by a former student of Dalcroze's, Dr. Hilda M. Schuster, and it is the only teachers' training school in the Western hemisphere that was authorized by Dalcroze himself. The Dalcroze method is still widely respected among musicians, dancers, and educators including Dimitri Mitropoulos who considered "Dalcroze Eurhythmics (to be) one of the most outstanding methods of teaching the art of music" and George Balanchine who commented that "The study of Dalcroze Eurhythmics provides anyone with an experience which will make him vitally aware of design in musical time. The more dancers experience it, the more readily will they provide their movement with a musical intention."²

The Dalcroze School of Music has continued to maintain the building virtually in its original form on the exterior, despite the new use. It remains an impressive component of the unusual agglomeration of stables and carriage houses on East 73rd Street.

Report Prepared by
Andrew S. Dolkart
Research Department

FOOTNOTES

1. New York Times, January 30, 1940, p. 1.
2. "Comments by Distinguished Musicians, Artists and Educators on the Dalcroze Method," (Pamphlet), New York: Dalcroze School of Music, n.d.

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 161 East 73rd Street Building 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 161 East 73rd Street Building is a fine example of a late 19th-century carriage house; that it is a beautifully massed late Romanesque Revival style structure ornamented with Renaissance detail; that it is adorned with equestrian details indicating its original use; that the building, a rare survivor, is a reminder of an elegant lifestyle that has passed; that the carriage house was owned by important New Yorkers including John W. Simpson and Edward Harkness; that today it houses the most important music school in America teaching the Dalcroze method; and that the carriage house is a vital component of the group of unusual buildings on East 73rd Street between Lexington and Third Avenues.

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 161 East 73rd Street Building, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1408, Lot 24, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- New York Times, May 17, 1920, p. 15; Jan. 30, 1940, p.1.; Jan. 12, 1943, p. 23; June 7, 1950, p. 29.
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161 East 73rd Street
Architect: Thomas Rae

Photo Credit: Gina Santucci

Built: 1896-97