

Landmarks Preservation Commission  
May 13, 1980, Designation List 133  
LP-1062

171 EAST 73RD STREET BUILDING, Borough of Manhattan, Built 1860.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1408, Lot 28.

On June 19, 1979, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 171 East 73rd Street Building and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 12). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. One witness spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

#### DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The 171 East 73rd Street Building is one of only two surviving Italianate style rowhouses on East 73rd Street between Lexington and Third Avenues. The house was originally one of a row of six modest brick houses constructed in 1860 for E. H. Robbins. Although most of its original ornament remains, the house has been altered by the addition of a vestibule and garden wall, designed in 1924 by the owner of the house, architect Electus D. Litchfield.

Along with the house at 175 East 73rd Street, No. 171 is the oldest component of the group of low-rise buildings that lines this street. In the early 1860s a number of streets on the Upper East Side were developed with modest rowhouses that were sold to lower-middle-class and working-class families. These rows were among the earliest buildings on the Upper East Side and they predate the large scale development of the area. In the last years of the 19th century the rowhouses that had been built between Fifth and Park Avenues to house middle-class families began to be replaced by mansions built by the city's wealthiest residents. Although the streets east of Park Avenue were still not seen as being desirable for large residences, they were directly affected by the new development near Central Park. The small rowhouses that lined the side streets east of Park Avenue began to be replaced by private carriage houses and stables built to serve the wealthy families who lived nearby.

Stables were a necessity during the period when urban transportation was limited to horses and carriages, but only the very wealthy could afford to build and maintain a private carriage house. 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. East 73rd Street

between Lexington and Third Avenues became a prime location for the construction of carriage houses and beginning in the 1880s the old rowhouses were replaced by carriage houses. With the construction of each new carriage house, the remaining residential buildings became less and less desirable until only a very few remained. In the 1920s the private carriage houses (now garages) became too expensive to maintain, and many were converted to stylish private residences. This return to a residential character on the street made the remaining rowhouses more desirable and both houses at 171 and 175 East 73rd Street were purchased by prominent architects.

The rowhouse at 171 East 73rd Street was purchased in 1924 by Electus D. Litchfield and his wife Elizabeth. Electus Darwin Litchfield (1872-1952) was a major figure in the urban planning movement of the early to mid-20th century. Litchfield was an early champion of civic causes such as slum clearance, urban renewal, municipal beautification, and historic preservation. His most famous urban renewal project was the Red Hook Houses in Brooklyn.

The 171 East 73rd Street Building is a modest, three-story and basement brick rowhouse designed in the Italianate style. The original fenestration pattern of the building was quite simple--a rectangular door and two floor-length windows with stone lintels on the first floor, three shorter windows with stone lintels and sills on the second floor, and three segmental-arched windows with brick lintels and stone sills on the third floor. A beautifully carved wooden cornice with single and paired console brackets and a segmental-arched frieze runs along the roof line. The finest feature of the building is the cast-iron veranda that shades the first floor. Once a common sight in New York City, these verandas are now extremely rare. In 1924 owner/architect Electus D. Litchfield altered the first floor of the house. Litchfield removed the original stoop and converted the main entrance into a window. A Colonial Revival style brick vestibule and garden wall were built out to the building line, visually connecting the house to the neighboring carriage houses.

With the exception of the addition of wall air conditioners, the house remains much as Litchfield left it. This modest rowhouse maintains a major position in the center of an unusual group of buildings on the east side of Manhattan.

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## 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 171 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 171 East 73rd Street Building is one of only two surviving rowhouses on this street; that it is an excellent example of the modest Italianate style rowhouses built in the early 1860s on the Upper East Side of Manhattan; that it is representative of the earliest period of speculative development in this area of the city; that it has fine ornament including a bracketed wooden cornice and a cast-iron veranda; that it was owned by architect Electus D. Litchfield who added a vestibule and garden wall in the 1920s; and that it is a vital component of the unusual group of low-rise buildings on East 73rd Street between Lexington and Third Avenues that consists of carriage houses, residences, a stable, and a garage.

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 171 East 73rd Street Building, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1408, Lot 28, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

New York City. Department of Buildings, Manhattan. Plans, Permits and Dockets.

New York County. Office of the Register. Liber Deeds and Mortgages.

New York Times, Nov. 28, 1952, p. 25.

Planning and Civic Comment, 18 (Dec., 1952), 59.



171 East 73rd Street  
Manhattan

Photo Credit:  
Gina Santucci

Built: 1860