

Landmarks Preservation Commission
May 13, 1980, Designation List 133
LP-1065

177-179 EAST 73RD STREET BUILDING, Borough of Manhattan.
Built 1906; architect Charles F. Hoppe.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1408, Lot 31.

On June 19, 1979, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 177-179 East 73rd Street Building and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 15). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provision of law. One witness spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The 177-179 East 73rd Street Building is a fine example of the type of commercial garage built in New York City during the early years of the 20th century, at a time when automobiles were beginning to supplant horses and carriages as the primary mode of private urban transportation. The garage was designed in 1906 in the fashionable Beaux-Arts style by Charles F. Hoppe for the Automobile Realty Co. With its bold massing and detailing, the building reflects a sophistication of design unusual for a utilitarian structure.

The building at No. 177-179 is a component of the rare surviving group of carriage houses, stables, and garages built on East 73rd Street between Lexington and Third Avenue to serve the wealthy families who lived on or near Fifth Avenue. The garage is the only building on the street designed specifically for automobiles. Most of the buildings on East 73rd Street are private carriage houses and stables that were converted to garages and chauffeur's residences in the early years of the 20th century. Only the wealthiest urban residents could afford to maintain a private carriage house or garage. Others rented space in commercial establishments such as the stable at 182 East 73rd Street (converted to a garage in 1908) or the garage at No. 177-179.

The carriage houses, stables, and garages 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 of these buildings 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 forerunners of the modern automobile were developed in Europe in the last decades of the 19th century. By the 1890s horseless carriages were being manufactured in the United States, and in the first decade of the 20th century they became the major means of transport for the rich. The 73rd Street garage was built to serve a clientele that was then converting from carriage transport to automobiles and it is one of the earliest surviving "auto garages" in New York City.

The garage at No. 177-179 is a five-story structure designed in a stylized Beaux-Arts manner with a one-story limestone and granite base, a three-story brick shaft with terra-cotta trim, and a crowning mansard roof. The massive limestone base with its high granite watertable is pierced by a rectangular vehicular entrance. A series of unornamented transom panels fills the upper portion of the entranceway. A typical Beaux-Arts style address cartouche is located in the center of the transom. Pendants in the form of stylized cartouches are located to either side of the entrance. Deep recessed rectangular windows with ornamental iron guards light the interior ground-floor offices.

The second, third, and fourth floors of the garage are designed as a single unit with the main mass projecting slightly from the line of the building. A centrally placed expanse of windows is divided by heavy transom and mullion bars and by wide horizontal panels that mark the floor levels. The entire grouping is set within a coved, rectangular, terra-cotta enframing capped by a stylized keystone. Each of the brick end piers is cut by a continuous recess with slit windows that adds a sense of verticality to the facade.

A simple terra-cotta block cornice separates the main mass of the garage from the mansard roof. The steep slope of the mansard supports three unusual dormers with massive terra-cotta enframements. The central dormer is in the form of a pedimented triumphal arch constructed of heavy stone blocks. The flanking dormers have heavy terra-cotta enframements with round pediments. Brick end parapets with terra-cotta caps rise above the roof line and form the climax to this superbly designed utilitarian structure.

The building remains in excellent condition and, although the design of automobiles has changed tremendously since the construction of the building, it still serves its original function as a commercial garage. The sophistication of the design is unusual for this type of building and it is a suitable complement to the low-rise carriage houses that comprise the major portion of the street.

Report prepared by
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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 177-179 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 177-179 East 73rd Street Building is one of the earliest buildings in New York City built as an auto garage; that it is an extremely fine Beaux-Arts style structure reflecting the importance accorded to this utilitarian building; that the massing and detail of the garage are especially notable, particularly the bold dormers that project from the mansard roof; 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 this 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 177-179 East 73rd Street Building, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1408, Lot 31, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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



177-179 East 73rd Street
Architect: Charles F. Hoppe

Photo Credit:
Gina Santucci

Built: 1906