

Landmarks Preservation Commission
November 10, 1987; Designation List 195
LP-1645

355 CENTRAL PARK WEST HOUSE, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1892-3; architect Gilbert A. Schellenger.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1209, Lot 35.

On October 20, 1987, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 354 Central Park West House, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 5). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Thirty-eight witnesses spoke in favor of designation. Two witnesses representing the owner of the property spoke in opposition to designation. The Commission has received many letters and other expressions of support in favor of this designation.

Summary

The 355 Central Park West House is one of a group of five neo-Renaissance style houses, designed by Gilbert Schellenger and built in 1892-93 for Edward Kilpatrick. It is a component of one of two surviving rows of houses on Central Park West and the only one of the two that is intact, recalling a period when there were still many undeveloped blockfronts along Central Park West and the adjacent side street parcels were still only sparsely developed. This house is a rare survivor of the earliest development of Central Park West where there was a mixture of many building types ranging from small wooden shacks to small apartment houses and flats to individual single family houses. The construction of this house and the others of the row was the result of a restrictive agreement between the developer Edward Kilpatrick and the adjacent Scotch Presbyterian Church, an agreement which helped insure the survival of the houses. The use of light-colored Roman brick, stone and terra cotta and neo-Renaissance detail reflects the fashion for simplicity and discretely applied ornament, as in the classically-inspired carved ornament of the oriels. The overall design composition of the house is part of an A-B pattern with an alternating rhythm of oriels. This treatment adheres to a tradition set with the houses Henry Hardenburgh designed for Edward Clark in 1882 on West 73rd Street.

Development of Central Park West

Central Park West, the northern continuation of Eighth Avenue bordering on the park, is today one of New York's finest residential streets, but in the mid-nineteenth century it was a rural and inhospitable outpost, notable for its rocky terrain, browsing goats and ramshackle shanties. With the creation of Central Park in the 1860s, according to the 1857 design of Frederick Law Olmstead and Calvert Vaux, followed by Riverside Park (begun 1876), as well as a series of transportation

improvements such as the Ninth Avenue Elevated Railroad (1879), the Upper West Side experienced a period of intense real estate speculation. The 1880s were the first decade of major development, and generally set the pattern for the Upper West Side, where rowhouses line the side streets, and multiple dwellings, commercial and institutional structures are sited on the avenues, although Central Park West was an exception

Not surprisingly, those avenues closest to the parks, Central Park West and Riverside Drive, were immediately considered the most desirable. (Ninth Avenue, rechristened Columbus in 1890, Tenth Avenue, renamed Amsterdam in the same year, and Broadway--the Boulevard before 1899--were all, in varying degrees marred by cable car and elevated railway lines.) The potential of the parkside avenues for development as prime locations led to an anticipatory increase in land values; prices rose to such extravagant heights that many speculative builders shied away from row house and tenement construction, from which they would realize relatively meager returns, while the very wealthy, who could afford to build mansions, for the most part remained on the more fashionable East Side. As a result, the development of Central Park West, as well as immediately adjacent side street parcels, lagged behind the general development of the Upper West Side. In early 1893, Central Park West was described as

another of the undeveloped avenues on the West Side. It fell asleep waiting for its possibilities. Scarcely anything was done on the avenue during [1891-92], certainly nothing of a determining nature. High prices and the lack of restrictions hold the thoroughfare from the builder's hand.¹

The stage had been set by two great monuments, the American Museum of Natural History between 77th and 81st Streets, (begun 1874, architects Vaux & Mould, and a designated New York City Landmark), and the Dakota, the pioneering luxury apartments at 72nd Street (1880-84, architect Henry Hardenbergh, and a designated New York City Landmark). Yet a survey of roughly a decade later revealed that more than half the block fronts along the park from 60th to 96th Streets remained vacant or contained only old, modest frame houses.² A few rather unprepossessing apartment hotels (at least, relative to the Dakota) were constructed, among them the San Remo at 75th Street, designed in 1890 by architect Edward Angell, the Beresford (c. 1889-90) at 81st Street, and the Majestic (1892-93, architect Alfred Zucker) just south of the Dakota. (These have all been replaced by their towered namesakes of the late 1920s and early '30s.) Five-story flathouses were another residential building type. The same 1893 commentary suggested: "The improvements on the avenue thus far seem to point to its being occupied, from a residence point of view, mainly by first-class flats and apartment hotels. . . . A number of handsome residences will no doubt also creep in here and there."³

Among the "handsome residences" built on Central Park West during this period were three group of rowhouses -- 235-239 Central Park West, five houses at the southwest corner of 84th Street, none of which survive; 241-249 Central Park West (Edward Angell, 1887-88), nine houses between 84th and 85th Streets of which three (Nos. 247-249) survive; and 351-355 Central Park West (Gilbert Schellenger, 1892-93), all of which survive.⁴ It was not until the turn of the century that Central Park West's construction

boom began and it emerged as a boulevard of elegant tall apartments punctuated by impressive institutional buildings,⁵ thus making the five houses at 351-355 Central Park West -- constructed before the avenue's future was determined and when large sections of the avenue and the Upper West Side were still open land -- rare survivors of the earliest development of Central Park West.

The Development of the Houses at 351-355 Central Park West

Like many rowhouses built on the Upper West Side and other rapidly developing areas of the city in the 19th century, the five rowhouses at the northwest corner of Central Park West and 95th Street were constructed as a speculative development, in this case for sale to prosperous middle-class families. The builder-developer Edward Kilpatrick (1829?-1898), born in Ireland, immigrated to the United States at the age of 11 and learned the carpenter's trade. In the late 1860s Kilpatrick worked as a building sub-contractor, establishing himself as a builder and developer on the Upper West Side by the 1880s. In the early 1890s Kilpatrick set up a lumber yard and factory for the making of interior trim at 42 West 67th Street. By this time he had under construction ten houses on the south side of 96th Street between Central Park West and Columbus and thirteen houses on West End Avenue between 97th and 98th Streets.⁶

Kilpatrick's 96th Street site was adjacent to a parcel of land on Central Park West which extended along the blockfront between 95th and 96th streets, 201 feet, 4 inches long and 100 feet deep. The Scotch Presbyterian Church was interested in the site and wished to build both a new church building and a school building. The church and Kilpatrick entered into an agreement in July 1892 to allow him to develop the southern portion of the Central Park West frontage (a parcel 100 feet, 8 inches long and 50 feet deep) with the proviso that as long as nothing was built on the church's Central Park West parcel except the church edifice and one private one-family dwelling (presumably a parsonage), Kilpatrick would restrict construction on his parcel to "private dwelling houses of not more height than four stories with basement and designed for the use of one family."⁷ Because of these restrictions the houses would be lower than the adjacent church tower. The rowhouse commission was given to Gilbert A. Schellenger, who also worked with Kilpatrick on other Upper West Side projects, and construction was completed in June 1893. Kilpatrick began to sell the houses in March 1894: No. 351 to John G. Gerken, sold again to tobacco merchant and manufacturer Solomon Schinasi in 1903; No. 352 to Emilie Schumacher; No. 353 to James P. Cahen; No. 354 to Julius P. Cahen; (the Cahens were brothers who had a business as knitgoods manufacturers) and No. 355 to Catherine C. Carroll. The restrictions governing the church and Kilpatrick were also contained⁸ in the deeds and ultimately helped insure the survival of the houses.

Gilbert A. Schellenger

The education, training, and background of Gilbert A. Schellenger (d. 1921) are obscure, but he was a major contributor to the development of the Upper West Side. Based on records of his work as listed in the Department of Buildings he was active between about 1882 and 1904 and specialized in

residential architecture, designing rowhouses, tenements, flathouses, and small apartment buildings. A skilled designer, he followed contemporary stylistic trends: Romanesque Revival in the 1880s and early 1890s; Queen Anne in the late 1880s; neo-Renaissance in the 1890s; and Beaux-Arts at the turn of the century. His rowhouse designs may be found on the Upper East Side, in Carnegie Hill and Harlem, while examples of his apartment houses may be seen in Greenwich Village. He was particularly active on the Upper West Side; over 200 buildings designed by him remain extant. These were usually not single buildings designed in isolation but rows of houses or groups of tenements. Occasionally, as in the group of eight houses and three tenements seen at the southeast corner of 69th Street and Columbus Avenue, he designed the two building types in conjunction. Four houses of Schellenger's design, Nos. 17-23 West 95th Street, were under construction when he received the Central Park West commission. These 95th Street houses employ both Romanesque Revival and neo-Renaissance detail (a not uncommon combination in speculative rowhouses of the early 1890s), are faced in brownstone, and have facades dominated by their oriels. Other examples of his work designed in 1891/92 are similar. These include a group of tenements at 448-454 Amsterdam, and rows of houses at 27-51 West 70th Street, 8-20 West 71st Street, and 14-16 West 82nd Street.

The Design of the Houses at 351-355 Central Park West

Schellenger's Central Park West group may be seen as a continuation and outgrowth of his earlier rowhouse designs. There is a shift in materials, light-colored Roman brick rather than brownstone, (although the New Building permit stated that brownstone was to be used on the fronts),⁹ in keeping with the new contemporary preference for lighter material palates in the wake of the World's Columbian Exposition. The detail is neo-Renaissance, not used in combination with Romanesque Revival, again reflecting the current fashion for simplicity and discretely applied ornament, as seen in the classically-inspired carved ornament of the oriels and double-arched corner house entrance. All of the houses feature prominent oriels. Four of the five houses were designed to be four stories above high basements with entrance stoops from Central Park West (Nos. 352-355). (The stoops were probably removed when the houses were converted into apartments in the 1920s; there are no permits on file in the Department of Buildings for this work.) In their overall design composition, they are grouped in an A-B pattern with an alternating rhythm of oriels. This treatment adheres to a tradition set with the houses Henry Hardenburgh designed for Edward Clark on West 73rd Street between Central Park West and Columbus Avenue in 1882. The fifth, corner house, No. 351, is five stories with a low American basement and a ground level entranceway on West 95th Street. This kind of corner entrance is rare on the Upper West Side because of the commercial nature of Columbus and Amsterdam, and the redevelopment of many corner sites on West End Avenue with apartment buildings.

Description

The house, an example of the "B" type in the group of four at Nos. 352-355 Central Park West, was designed with four stories above a high basement which was later converted to a ground floor. The ground floor is

faced with rusticated limestone and contains one low window opening, a secondary entrance converted from a window opening, and a non-original entrance placed below the position of the original entrance. The limestone-faced parlor floor contains three window openings with molded surrounds. The one to the right originally contained the entrance. The upper three stories are faced with buff-colored Roman brick, set off by brick quoins, and dominated by an almost full-width three-sided angled oriel of terra cotta. The two-story oriel carried on modillions has such classically-inspired detail as incised pilasters with foliate capitals and swag-adorned friezes. A triple window at the fourth story is framed in terra cotta. The facade is terminated by a deep projecting bracketed and modillioned cornice above a swag-adorned frieze.

Notes

1. "The West Side," Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 51 (February 11, 1893), supplement, 10.
2. Ibid, 20.
3. Ibid, 20.
4. Examination of landbooks and atlases from the 1880s and 1890s as well as comparison with the Central Park West blockfront survey cited above, reveal that these were the only three groups of rowhouses constructed on Central Park West. Akin to these houses in height and scale were groups of five-story flathouses.
5. Ethical Culture School, No. 33 (Carrere & Hastings, 1902); Ethical Culture Meeting House, 2 West 64th (Robert D. Kohn, 1910); Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, 3 West 65th Street (Schickel & Ditmars, 1903); Second Church of Christ, Scientist, 10 West 68th Street (Frederick D. Comstock, 1900); Congregation Shearith Israel and Parsonage, No. 99 (Brunner & Tryon, 1897); Universalist Church, 4 West 76th Street (William A. Potter, 1898); New York History Society, No. 170 (York & Sawyer, 1908); Progress Club, 1 West 88th (Louis Korn, 1904); First Church of Christ, Scientist, 1 West 96th (Carrere & Hastings, 1903).
6. The above information is based on testimony by Mosette Broderick at public hearing on October 20, 1987, and obituaries for Kilpatrick in the New York Times, December 6, 1898, p. 9, and the New York Tribune, December 6, 1898, p. 10.
7. Quoted in "Beauvallon Corp. N.V. v. Second Presbyterian Church," New York Law Journal, October 17, 1984. The deed transferring the northern portion of the Central Park West parcel from Kilpatrick to the Scotch Presbyterian Church and containing the restrictions was recorded in the New York County Register's Office, Liber Deeds, Section 4, Liber 12, page 489. The microfiche containing the deed itself is missing from the Register's Office. Covenants governing what could or could not be built on property were common in 19th-century New York; the most common variety forbade the construction of such "nuisances" as factories and slaughterhouses.

8. Liber Deeds: Section 4, Liber 30, p. 196, March 2, 1894; Section 4, Liber 31, p. 277, April 23, 1894; Section 4, Liber 31, p. 279, April 23, 1894; Section 4, Liber 33, p. 468, June 4, 1894; Section 4, Liber 35, p. 158, July 25, 1894.
9. N.B. 524-1892.

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 355 Central Park West 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 355 Central Park West House is one of a group of five neo-Renaissance style houses, designed by Gilbert Schellenger and built in 1892-93 for Edward Kilpatrick; that as a component of one of two surviving rows of houses on Central Park West and the only one of the two that is intact, it recalls a period when there were still many undeveloped blockfronts along Central Park West and the adjacent side street parcels were still only sparsely developed; that this house is a rare survivor of the earliest development of Central Park West where there was a mixture of many building types ranging from small wooden shacks to small apartment houses and flats and individual single family houses; that the construction of this house and the others of the row was the result of a restrictive agreement between the developer Edward Kilpatrick and the adjacent Scotch Presbyterian Church, an agreement which helped insure the survival of the houses; that the use of light-colored Roman brick, stone and terra cotta and neo-Renaissance detail reflects the fashion for simplicity and discretely applied ornament, as in the classically-inspired carved ornament of the oriels; that the overall design composition of the house is part of an A-B pattern with an alternating rhythm of oriels; and that this treatment adheres to a tradition set with the houses Henry Hardenburgh designed for Edward Clark in 1882 on West 73rd Street.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21, Section 534, of the Charter of the City of New York and Article 25, Chapter 3 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the 355 Central Park West House, 355 Central Park West, Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 1209, Lot 32, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

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Photo: LPC Files

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