

136 WEST 18TH STREET STABLE, 136 West 18th Street, Borough of Manhattan.
Built 1865-66. Architect unknown.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 793, Lot 59.

On September 11, 1990, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 136 West 18th Street Stable and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 19). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Two witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. The Landmarks Preservation Commission has received two letters in support of designation.¹

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Summary

The stable building at 136 West 18th Street is one of nine remaining brick-fronted stables from an original row of thirteen erected in 1864-66. Designed in a round-arched utilitarian style related to the German Rundbogenstil, it still features a mix of Romanesque and Renaissance Revival details. No. 136 West 18th Street has a tripartite triumphal arch composition which focuses on a central bifurcated Renaissance arch at the second story. The building has had several notable owners, among them Charles Landon and Benjamin H. Hutton, partners in one of the most prestigious dress goods importing firms in the New York City during the second half of the nineteenth century. As a component of one of the two uniformly designed mid-nineteenth-century private carriage house groups remaining in Manhattan, it is a rare survivor. These stable rows reflect a period in the city's developmental history when private carriage houses began to be erected some blocks away from their owners' homes, on streets devoted almost exclusively to private stables and commercial liveries. An early manifestation of this trend, which became common practice during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the West 18th Street row was one of the most extensive of the period and contained unusually large and handsomely decorated stables.

The Tonnele Estate and the Development of the Private Stables on West 18th Street

Once part of the eighteenth-century farm of Peter Warren, the lots on the south side of West 18th Street between Sixth Avenue and the old Warren Road to the west were acquired by John Tonnele around 1817. Senior partner in the firm of Tonnele & Hall, the country's leading dealer in wool, Tonnele had extensive real estate holdings in Manhattan including large tracts on

Sixth Avenue, 14th and 15th, and 17th and 18th Streets.² In his will of 1846, Tonnele divided his real estate among his family, giving them the option of selling the property and investing the proceeds in trust for their heirs. A total of thirty-two lots on West 17th and 18th Streets were left to his daughter Susan G. Hall. In March of 1863, she and the executors of the estate, her husband Valentine G. Hall and his brother George Hall, began selling her lots which were then occupied by small dwellings and wood shanties. As the area was semi-industrial in character, with a brewery located on the north side of 18th Street and the Weber piano factory occupying the northeast corner of Seventh Avenue and 17th Street, the Halls must have regarded the lots as unsuitable for first-class residential or commercial development. However, the lots' proximity to the fashionable Fifth Avenue residential district north of Union Square must have made them seem ideal for private stables and apparently they were offered for sale as such. By 1867, all the former Tonnele Estate lots on 17th and 18th Streets were occupied by private stables with restrictive covenants on the properties prohibiting their conversion to factories or commercial livery stables.

Stables were a necessity during the period when private urban transportation was limited to horses and carriages.³ While the majority of New Yorkers rented or boarded their horses in large commercial stables, the very wealthy maintained private stables. (Since private stables invariably provided storage space for carriages, the terms carriage house and private stable are used interchangeably hereafter.) Traditionally, these were located directly behind their owners' houses, sometimes facing onto the less desirable street front of a through-the-block lot. By the mid-nineteenth century, carriage-house rows developed to serve a few of the city's most exclusive streets. Remnants of these stable rows survive at 127 and 129 East 19th Street, originally part of a group of stables serving the houses on Gramercy Park South and Irving Place,⁴ and at 57 Great Jones Street, the sole survivor of a long row of stables which once backed onto the mansions on the north side of Bond Street between Broadway and Lafayette Street.⁵ Around 1860, carriage houses began to be erected a few blocks from their owners' homes, on convenient but less fashionable streets, where land costs were lower and where the noises and smells associated with stables would not mar the character of a residential neighborhood. Eventually a number of streets in Manhattan were devoted almost exclusively to private and livery stables. These included East 35th and East 36th Streets between Lexington and Third Avenues (developed largely in the 1860s and 1870s), East 73rd Street between Lexington and Third Avenues (stables erected between 1883 and 1904), and West 58th Street between Broadway and Seventh Avenue (stables erected c. 1885-1905).⁶ The twenty-nine stables erected on the former Tonnele Estate in the 1860s, extending from 121 to 143 West 17th Street and from 112 to 146 West 18th Street, were an early example of this type of development and together formed one of the most extensive groups of private stables built in Manhattan in the 1860s.

It should be noted that throughout the 1860s, most of the private carriage houses on these "stable streets" were commissioned on an individual basis and that speculatively-built rows were a rarity.⁷ Perhaps the most extensive speculative development was Sniffen Court, a group of ten private

carriage houses on a blind alley off East 36th Street, erected in 1864 for four investors by local builder John Sniffin, and subsequently sold to wealthy residents of Murray Hill.⁸ Although uniform in design, the row from 122 to 146 West 18th Street was created through a combination of small-scale speculative development and individual commissions. In May and June of 1864, Elisha Brooks, a partner in the successful Brooks Brothers clothing firm, purchased the lots from 122 to 126 West 18th Street and had three identical stables erected on the site.⁹

As work was proceeding on the Brooks stables, Susan Hall and her children agreed to use part of the proceeds from the sale of the lots on 18th Street to build a stable at 128 West 18th Street which would be retained for the family's use.¹⁰ Though commissioned by a different client, this stable was identical in plan and design to the recently completed Brooks stables. By 1866, the nine remaining lots extending from 130 to 146 West 18th Street had been sold. Their new owners also had stables erected which followed the articulation established by the Brooks stables, creating a uniform row of thirteen stables.¹¹ This would suggest that Brooks had made the plans for his stables available to the other owners and/or that the same builder or architect was commissioned for all thirteen buildings. The result was one of the most extensive stable rows in the city, containing unusually large and handsomely decorated buildings whose owners included a number of New York's wealthiest and most prominent citizens, among them Samuel F.B. Morse who was the original owner of the stable at 144 West 18th Street (demolished).

The stable at 136 West 18th Street was constructed for Cornelia Gilman, wife of Samuel Gilman, a merchant with offices in the financial district at 91 Beaver Street.¹² The Gilmans lived at 29 West 20th Street and presumably built the West 18th Street stable for their personal use. In 1870, Cornelia, then a widow, sold the stable to Benjamin H. Hutton and Charles G. Landon.¹³ Hutton and Landon were brothers-in-law and partners in a leading drygoods business located at 419-421 Broome Street. Hutton, the senior of the two partners, began his career in the firm of James Benkard, an importer of dress goods. Hutton became a partner in Benkard's firm in 1831 and brought Landon into the business following Benkard's death in 1864. Their firm imported French, German, and English fabrics and was the American representative for some of the most important textile manufacturers in France. Both partners grew wealthy and Landon's business acumen earned him directorships on the boards of several major financial institutions including the Equitable Life Assurance Company, the Central Trust Company, the Bank of America, and the Greenwich Savings Bank.

In 1865, when Hutton and Landon bought the stable at 136 West 18th Street, Hutton was living on 14th Street near Fifth Avenue -- thus, it is likely that the building was first employed for his personal use. In the late 1870s, however, he moved to Orange, New Jersey, where he was involved in the development of a suburban villa community known as Hutton Park. Landon then moved into the 14th Street house and presumably took over the 18th Street stable. In 1880, perhaps motivated by the increasing commercialization of East 14th Street, Landon moved uptown to Fifth Avenue

and 38th Street. It seems probable that the stable was put up for rent at that time.

The Design of the 136 West 18th Street Stable

The stable at 136 West 18th Street is characteristic of contemporary carriage house design as adapted to a narrow urban lot. Typically, the stable would have been divided into two major ground-floor spaces -- a front room for carriages and a rear room with stalls for horses. The front portion of the second floor would have contained quarters for the coachman or groom, while the rear would have been used as a hayloft. Windows were restricted to the front of the building to spare neighbors the sights and smells associated with horses, but two large skylights provided additional light to the second-floor rooms.

The facade is designed in a round-arched utilitarian style derived from the German Rundbogenstil (round-arch style). The Rundbogenstil evolved in Germany in the 1820s among a group of progressive architects who sought to create a synthesis of classical and medieval architecture by drawing on historic precedents in the round-arched Byzantine, Romanesque, and Renaissance styles.¹⁴ Transmitted to this country through the immigration of German and Central European architects in the 1840s, as well as through architectural publications, the Rundbogenstil tended to be conflated with other mid-nineteenth century round-arched styles such as the Romanesque and Renaissance Revivals. Among the major American examples of the round-arched style are Charles Blesch and Leopold Eidlitz's St. George's Church (1846-56) on Stuyvesant Square at 16th Street, Alexander Saeltzer's Astor Library (1849-53, later additions 1859, 1881), at 425 Lafayette Street,¹⁵ and Thomas Tefft's Union Depot, Providence, R.I. (1847, demolished). The style is reflected in the design of the stable at 136 West 18th Street by the choice of materials (unstuccoed brick and locally available sandstone), an emphasis on flat wall surfaces, and a clear definition of architectural elements. The meshing of classical and medieval motifs is apparent in the the composition, which recalls both a Roman triumphal arch and the elevation of a medieval nave arcade, and in the incorporation of such details as the Renaissance-inspired cornice and diamond-pointed keystones and the Romanesque-inspired arcades and rusticated bands. The facade's chief feature is a large central arch with a pair of inscribed arches and a bull's-eye tympanum. This motif, which was thought by nineteenth-century theorists to have originated in northern Italy during the Romanesque period and was widely used during the Renaissance, became a hallmark of the nineteenth-century round-arched styles, both here and in Germany.

Interestingly, the only other remaining group of mid-nineteenth century carriage houses in Manhattan, located at Sniffen Court, was also designed in the round-arched style and featured a triumphal arch composition with arched windows and doors flanking a central two-story arch. At 18th Street, the stables are larger and more elaborate in design.

In addition to its ties to the round-arched style, the design of the 136 West 18th Street stable is distinguished by its skillful superimposition of recessed and projected planes. The double-height arcade, carried on

slender projected piers, is on a forward plane, while the wall membrane with its door and window openings is recessed. A series of horizontal moldings break forward over the piers to unite the two planes. The moldings at the arches' imposts at the second story form the capitals for two pilaster orders (a major order which articulates the piers, and a minor order which frames the windows). In addition to their function in this individual design, the repeated use of horizontal elements and the alternation of large and small arches are important elements in creating a strong sense of rhythm and harmony within the row.

Description

The two-story stable structure at 136 West 18th Street has a frontage of twenty-three feet on West 18th Street, and has been extended from its original depth of eighty-one feet to occupy the entire length of its ninety-two-foot-deep lot. Its painted brick and stone facade is designed in the round-arched style and incorporates Romanesque and Renaissance details. The facade is organized in a tripartite triumphal arch composition that focuses on a double-width center bay. At the ground story, the bays are articulated by projected piers. Originally, the wide center bay contained a pair of wood carriage doors, the eastern bay an arched entrance, and the western bay an arched window; the arches were ornamented by diamond-pointed keystones and stone bands ran across the facade at the sill, watertable, impost, and cornice lines. Today, most of the stonework has been cut flush with the brickwork. The eastern bay of the ground story remains relatively intact, although the door and transom are replacements. The center and west bay were joined in 1936 when the vehicle entrance was enlarged. This opening is filled by a wood storefront, installed in the 1980s, which echoes the window treatment employed in the center bay on the second story. Only a few traces remain from the cornice that originally separated the first and second stories.

On the second story the piers carry an arcade in which the center arch is both wider and taller than the flanking arches. The arches are set-off by stone keystones. Stone bands mark the impost line of the arches and stone sills are set beneath the windows. (The stone bands and sills have been cut flush with the brickwork and the keystones have lost their original profile due to weathering.) A small pilaster bisects the center bay into a pair of arched windows which are topped by a molded wood surround that features a central bull's-eye. The windows retain their original four-over-four wood sash. The building is crowned by a simple molded brick entablature.

Subsequent History

In the 1870s and 1880s, the neighborhood to the east of the stables on 18th Street, which had once been exclusively residential, became the heart of New York's chief shopping district as the retail trade expanded along Broadway, Sixth Avenue, and 14th and 23rd Streets. Several of the original owners of the stables on 18th Street responded to the change in the character of the neighborhood by moving uptown or to the suburbs. At least two of the stables were sold to neighboring businesses. Other owners

retained their stables as investments, property values on Sixth Avenue having skyrocketed with the opening of such department stores as B. Altman's at 19th Street (begun 1876) and Hugh O'Neill's near 20th Street (original store opened 1870, present building 1887),¹⁶ and the completion of the Sixth Avenue Elevated Railway in 1878. In 1887 the stable at 136 West 18th Street was purchased by Nicholas Sheldon, a Rhode Island resident who owned a soap business, Nicholas Sheldon & Company, located at 154 Chambers Street.¹⁷ Soon after acquiring the West 18th Street property, Sheldon commissioned Napoleon Le Brun & Son to remodel the interior and raise the sloping roof at the rear of the building by three feet.¹⁸ In 1891, Sheldon purchased the adjoining building at 134 West 18th Street. A few years later he moved his soap business to the two 18th Street buildings. At his death the two properties passed to his daughter Helen Sheldon Potter and in 1917 they were acquired by William Leslie. No. 136 was leased to various businesses including the Atlantic Food Products Company (1924) and the Chelsea Botanical Products Company (1931). The building was in use as a garage in 1936 when the original carriage entry was enlarged.¹⁹

Today, the 136 West 18th Street stable building is a component of one of the two remaining mid-nineteenth century carriage house groups in Manhattan. While the ground story has been partially altered, the second story is generally well preserved and distinguishes the building as a notable example of the round-arched style as applied to a utilitarian building type.

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NOTES

1. On June 10, 1986, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 136 West 18th Street Stable (LP-1606, Item No. 27); the building was one of seven buildings, from No. 126 to No. 140-142 West 18th Street, each being heard as an individual item. Six witnesses spoke in favor of designation of the related items. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. The Landmarks Preservation Commission received one letter in support of the designation of the stable buildings at No. 126 to No. 140-142 West 18th Street at the time of the hearing.
2. For Tonnele see Moses Y. Beach, Wealth and Biography of the Wealthy Citizens of New York City, ... estimated to be worth \$100,000, and upwards... (1845), reprinted in Henry Wysham Lanier, A Century of Banking (New York, 1922), 29; New York County, Surrogates Office, Wills, Liber 98, p. 294. For his real estate holdings see New York

County, Office of the Register, "Block Index to Conveyances," Block 793; "Map of the Property of John Tonnele, in the Ninth and Sixteenth Wards," File Map 128; Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 875, p. 62; Liber 913, p. 413; and New York City, Tax Assessment Records, Sixteenth Ward, 1863-67.

3. This section on the development of private stables in New York is based on an examination of contemporary atlases including Maps of the City of New York (New York, 1853-54); Plan of the City of New York (New York, 1867); Insurance Maps of the City of New York (New York, 1868-69), vols. 3 and 4; Atlas of the Entire City of New York (New York, 1879); Atlas of the City of New York and Part of the Bronx (New York, 1885); Atlas of the City of New York (Philadelphia, 1891-94).
4. No. 127 was built with the house at 66 Irving Place for W.S. Johnson in 1853-54; No. 129 was erected for J. Cooper Lord in 1860-61. Both buildings are within the Gramercy Park Historic District.
5. Other carriage house groups were located on the north side of West 13th Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues (serving houses on the south side of 14th Street) and on the south side of East 18th Street between Broadway and Park Avenue South (serving the mansions on Union Square North). The depth of the two blocks between Washington Square North and East 8th Street permitted the owners of the houses on those streets to have alleys opened in the middle of each block and private carriage houses constructed on what became Washington Mews and MacDougal Alley, now in the Greenwich Village Historic District.
6. The stables at 166 to 174, 178 to 180, 161 to 167, and 173 East 73rd Street are designated New York City Landmarks, as is the (former) Helen Miller Gould Stable at 213 West 58th Street.
7. For example the New York City Department of Buildings, Manhattan, New Building Dockets, list only seven applications for speculator-built private stable rows between 1866 and 1868. Most of these were small developments containing only two or three buildings.
8. For Sniffen Court see Landmarks Preservation Commission, Sniffen Court Historic District Designation Report (LP-0249, 1966). Sniffin was also the designer and co-developer with Joseph W. Duryee of a pair of "first-class private stables" at 55 and 57 West 41st Street in 1867 (demolished).
9. Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 914, p. 192.
10. Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 913, p. 413. Subsequent transactions are recorded in the "Block Index to Conveyances." See also the Tax Assessment Records for the Sixteenth Ward, 1863-67.
11. This design was limited to the stables at No. 122 to No. 146 West 18th Street. Other surviving stables which had been erected on the former Tonnele lots vary in their articulation.

12. Addresses and occupations taken from Trow's New York City Directory, 1864/65-1888/89. For property transactions see Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 935, p. 300; Liber 1150, p. 23.
13. This section on Benjamin Hutton and Charles Landon is based on Benjamin H. Hutton obituary, New York Times, Feb. 19, 1884, p. 6; and "Charles Griswold Landon," National Cyclopaedia of American Biography, vol. 29, pp. 407-08.
14. For the Rundbogenstil and its American manifestations see Kathleen Curran, "The German Rundbogenstil and Reflections on the American Round-Arched Style," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 48 (Dec., 1988), 351-73; and Arabella Berkenbilt, "European Influences on Thomas A. Tefft; Theory and Practice," in Thomas Alexander Tefft: American Architecture in Transition, 1845-1860 (Providence, R.I., 1988), 35-41.
15. St. George's and the former Astor Library, now the New York Shakespeare Festival Public Theater, are designated New York City Landmarks.
16. Both the B. Altman and Hugh O'Neill Buildings are within the Ladies' Mile Historic District.
17. For the transactions involving this property in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries see Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 2051, p. 293; Section 3, Liber 209, p. 267; Liber 3007, p. 5; Liber 3178, p. 55. For 134 West 18th Street see Section 3, Liber 7, p.p. 423-425. For Sheldon see also Trow's New York City Directory, 1886/87-1907/08.
18. New York City Department of Buildings, Manhattan, Alteration Docket 1219-1887.
19. Alteration Docket 1598-1936.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

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 136 West 18th Street Stable has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as a part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the 136 West 18th Street Stable is one of nine remaining buildings from an original row of thirteen brick-fronted stables erected in 1864-66; that it is designed in a round-arched utilitarian style related to the German Rundbogenstil and still features a mix of Romanesque and Renaissance Revival details; that its facade has a tripartite triumphal arch composition which focuses on a central bifurcated Renaissance arch at the second story; that the building has had several notable owners, among them Benjamin H. Hutton and Charles G. Landon, partners in one of the most prominent drygoods firms in New York during the nineteenth century; that the 136 West 18th Street Stable is a component of one of the two remaining uniformly designed mid-nineteenth-century private carriage house groups in Manhattan and as such is a rare survivor; that these stable rows are a reminder of a period in the city's developmental history when private carriage houses began to be erected some blocks away from their owners' homes, on streets devoted almost exclusively to private carriage houses and commercial liveries; that the construction of this building and the other stables in the row was an early manifestation of this trend which became common practice during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; and that the 18th Street stable row was one of the most extensive of the period and contained unusually large and handsome stables.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 (formerly Section 534 of Chapter 21), of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the 136 West 18th Street Stable, 136 West 18th Street, Borough of Manhattan, and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 793, Lot 59 as its Landmark Site.

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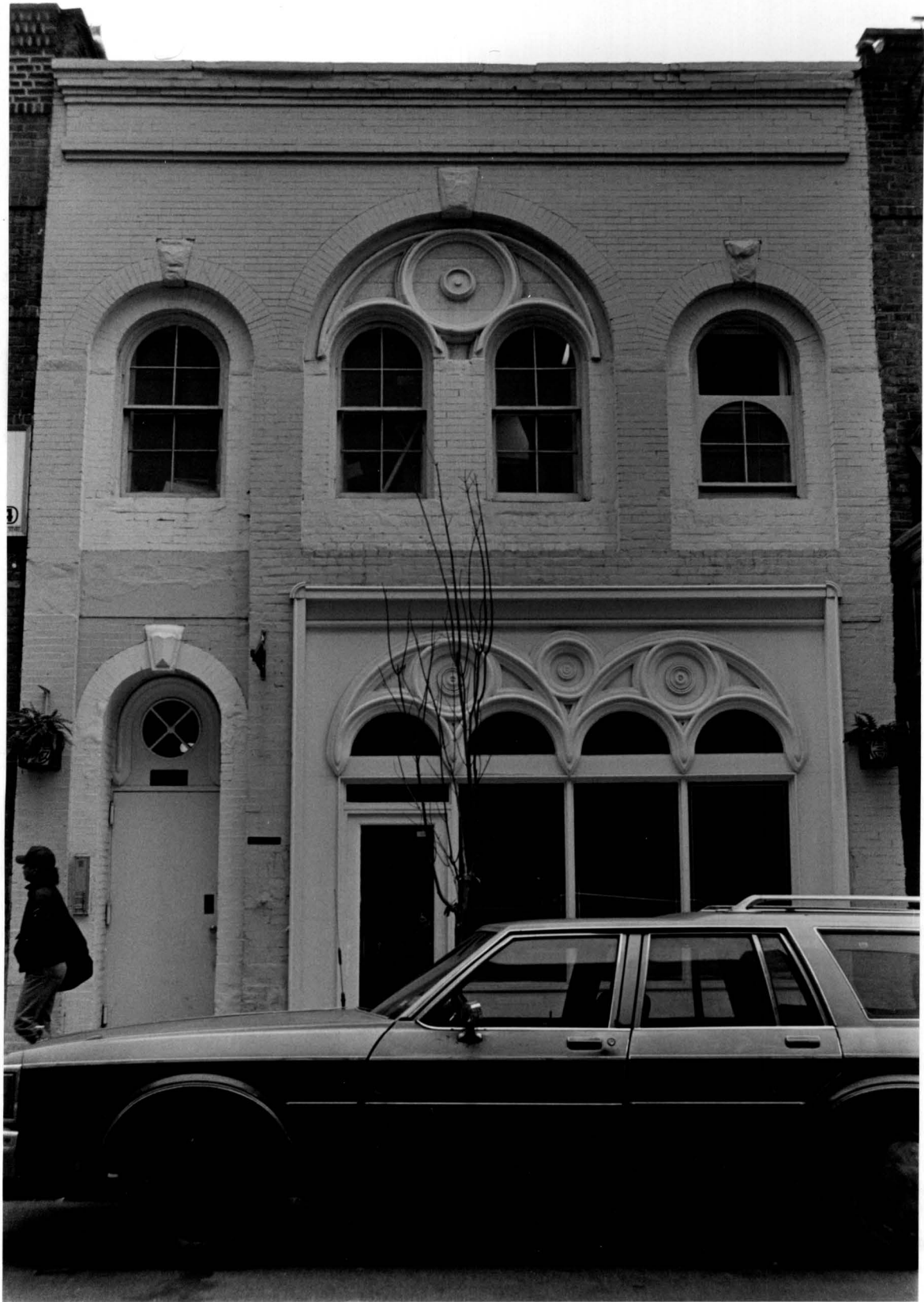
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136 West 18th Street Stable, 136 West 18th Street (1865-66)
Photo Credit: Gale Harris



136 West 18th Street Stable (detail)
Photo Credit: Gale Harris

