

**(FORMER) JAMES HAMPDEN AND CORNELIA VAN RENSSELAER ROBB HOUSE**, 23 Park Avenue (aka 101-103 East 35th Street), Manhattan. Built 1889-1892; Stanford White of McKim, Mead & White, architect.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 891, Lot 1.

On September 15, 1998, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the (Former) James Hampden and Cornelia Van Rensselaer Robb House, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 1). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Eight witnesses spoke in favor of designation, including Samuel G. White, architect with Buttrick, White & Burtis and great-grandson of Stanford White, and representatives of the Murray Hill Association, the New York Landmarks Conservancy, the Beaux Arts Alliance, and the Historic Districts Council. A member of the 23 Park Avenue Realty Corporation, owner of the building, spoke in support of the designation. There were no speakers in opposition to this designation. At its September meeting Manhattan Community Board Six passed a resolution in support of the designation. The Commission has received a letter from the Robbs' great-granddaughter, Katherine C. Moore, in support of the designation. In the past the Commission received several letters urging the designation of this building.

#### Summary

Built in 1889-92 for J. Hampden Robb and his wife Cornelia Van Rensselaer Robb, this elegant and imposing structure is considered one of the finest urban residences designed by Stanford White of the prominent architectural firm of McKim, Mead & White and was one of the earliest Renaissance Revival townhouses by White. Articulated by White with an exceptional command of proportion and design, the building is composed with simple cubic forms which contribute greatly to its monumental character. The handsome tawny-orange Roman iron-spot brick facing complements the color of the boldly modeled brownstone base and matching tan brick and terra-cotta ornament. The richly-textured facades are beautifully detailed with a wealth of Renaissance-inspired ornament for which White is so justly renowned. Other notable features include the double-story entrance porch with paired corner columns, the beautiful iron balustrades, balustraded roof parapets, and the two-story oriel on the East 35th Street facade.



A significant reminder of the history of Murray Hill as an elegant residential district, the Robb house was praised by architectural critic Russell Sturgis as "the most dignified structure in all that quarter of the town, not a palace, but the fit dwelling house for a first-rate citizen." J. Hampden Robb, was a retired businessman and civic leader, who had a distinguished career in public service as a legislator and New York City Parks Commissioner. Acquired by the Advertising Club in 1923, the house served as the organization's headquarters until 1977 and was a gathering place for advertising industry and media leaders as well as notable politicians, business leaders, and entertainers. Subsequently, it was converted into a cooperatively-owned apartment building, and it remains in that use.

## Description and Analysis

### Murray Hill<sup>1</sup>

The area known today as Murray Hill is bounded roughly by 34th Street on the south, 40th Street on the north, Fifth Avenue on the west and Third Avenue on the east. Murray Hill took its name from the country estate of Robert and Mary Murray whose farm comprised a large hill. According to legend, during the Revolutionary War, Mary Murray invited the British General Howe and his troops to her house (which stood approximately at the corner of what is today Park Avenue and East 37th Street) for a meal, thus allowing General George Washington's army to escape to the north.

The character of the neighborhood was determined in 1847 when local landowners signed a covenant stipulating that only brick or stone houses of two or more stories could be erected in the area.<sup>2</sup> Shortly thereafter, many homes of wealthy and socially prominent people began to appear along Fifth and Madison Avenues. The Gothic Revival villa of Coventry Waddell, had already been constructed on Fifth Avenue between 37th and 38th Streets in 1844. This, along with the Samuel P. Townsend mansion on Fifth Avenue and 34th Street, built in 1853-55, set the tone for future development. In the 1860s, A.T. Stewart purchased the Townsend mansion, to replace it with his own extravagant marble-fronted, mansarded dwelling. The choicest lots were soon occupied by the houses of families such as the Belmonts, Rhinelanders, Tiffanys, Havemeyers, and Morgans.

Eastward development of the neighborhood started after Lexington and Fourth Avenues were opened in 1848 and expanded further after 1852 when the New York and Harlem Railroad constructed a tunnel beneath Fourth Avenue in Murray Hill.<sup>3</sup> Between 34th Street and 38th Street the tunnel was covered with a series of forty-foot-wide landscaped strips. This broad street with its grassy malls was renamed Park Avenue by real estate developers who hoped to market the neighboring house lots to the wealthy. By the late 1860s several millionaires, including banker James Brown and railroad magnate Collis P. Huntington, had built mansions on the improved blocks of Park Avenue. The side streets and portions of Park Avenue were developed with rowhouses. (East 35th Street between Park and Lexington Avenues retains a number of houses from this initial development phase.) The neighborhood was also served by a number of churches.<sup>4</sup>

In the late 1880s and 1890s, as commerce began to displace the fashionable residential quarter on lower Fifth Avenue, the centrally located Murray Hill section became increasingly desirable as a residential neighborhood.<sup>5</sup> Many residences were either replaced or remodeled by prominent architects in the high styles of the day. These included the English Renaissance house designed by Henry F. Kilburn for Helena Flint at 109 East 39th Street (1886-87), the Beaux-Arts alteration by Carrère & Hastings of an 1857 rowhouse at 117 East 35th Street for music publisher Gustave Schirmer (1894), and the Beaux-Arts townhouse at 123 East 35th Street (1901-03, a designated New York City Landmark) designed by Hoppin & Koen for banker James Franklin Doughty Lanier and his wife Harriet Lanier, replacing two mid-nineteenth century rowhouses. Several private clubs also moved to the neighborhood, including the New-York Club, the Manhattan Club, the Union League and the Grolier Club.<sup>6</sup> The old Park Avenue Hotel (demolished), originally designed by John Kellum for A.T. Stewart as a woman's hotel, was renovated in 1890-91 to the designs of McKim, Mead & White. The Murray Hill Hotel (1884, demolished), on Park Avenue and East 40th Street, became a well-known meeting place for New Yorkers and famous visitors such as President Grover Cleveland and Mark Twain.

In December 1887 and in January 1888, James Hampden and Cornelia Van Rensselaer Robb, who had lived on East 34th Street between Madison and Park Avenues for several years, acquired three houses on the east side of Park Avenue extending north of East 35th Street (Nos. 19 to 23) with the intention of demolishing the buildings when their leases expired in May 1889 and erecting a handsome new residence.<sup>7</sup> An article in the *Real Estate Record & Guide* indicated that "Robb has drawn his own plans but will employ some architect for supervision, etc."<sup>8</sup> By 1889 the Robbs decided to turn the commission over to Stanford White of the architectural firm of McKim, Mead & White, who had designed the Dolphins, their country house in Southampton, Long Island (c. 1885).<sup>9</sup>

### James Hampden and Cornelia Van Rensselaer Robb<sup>10</sup>

James Hampden Robb, the son of James and Louisa Werniger Robb, was born in Philadelphia in 1846. The elder James Robb (1814-73) was a merchant-banker and business entrepreneur, who established one of the finest art collections in

America and owned the grandest house in the Garden District of New Orleans, prior to suffering financial reverses in the Panic of 1857. J. Hampden Robb was educated in Europe and attended a military school in Ossining, New York, prior to entering Harvard in 1866. In 1868, Robb married Cornelia Van Rensselaer Thayer, daughter of financier Nathaniel Thayer (1808-83), one of the wealthiest men in New England. The Robbs moved to New York City, where J. Hampden Robb pursued a career in banking and the cotton brokerage business from 1868 to 1886.

During the 1880s, Robb became involved in public affairs and in the reform movement in national and state Democratic Party politics. In 1882 he was elected a member of the New York State Assembly. He subsequently served as State Senator from 1884 to 1885. As chairman of the Committee on Banks in the Assembly, Robb was instrumental in the passage of anti-usuary legislation. In both the Assembly and Senate, he played a leading role in securing the funds and selecting the land necessary to create a state park at Niagara Falls. In 1887 Mayor Abram Hewitt appointed Robb to the Board of Commissioners of Public Parks; he became president of the board the following year, serving until 1890. During his tenure a law was signed authorizing the creation "of six new parks and four parkways, quintupling the area of parkland in the city."<sup>11</sup> Known for his resistance to graft and political influence, Robb won praise for administering the parks so that "the people of New York [could] get the greatest possible benefit out of them."<sup>12</sup>

The Robbs also took an active part in New York society. J. Hampden Robb belonged to a number of private clubs, including the Knickerbocker Club, Century Association, and Shinnecock Hills Golf Club (the latter two built clubhouses designed by Stanford White) and served as a trustee on the boards of several financial institutions. The family traveled extensively (especially after J. Hampden Robb withdrew from political life, following the election of a new Tammany-Hall-controlled mayor in 1890). Robb, who had inherited a number of works of art and decorative objects from his father, was also a notable connoisseur and collector and took an active part in consulting with White about the construction and decoration of this house. These pursuits were considerably aided by his wife's large fortune, inherited following her father's death in 1883.

Stanford White of McKim, Mead & White<sup>13</sup>

One of the most famous and prolific firms in the history of American architecture, McKim, Mead & White exerted considerable influence over the development of this country's architecture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The firm was initially established in 1872 as a loose partnership between Charles Follen McKim (1847-1909) and William Rutherford Mead (1846-1928) and enlarged in 1877 to include William B. Bigelow (dates undetermined), a Beaux-Arts-trained architect, who was McKim's brother-in-law. When Bigelow left the firm in 1879, Stanford White was invited to replace him "as a specialist in drafting and interior design."<sup>14</sup>

Born in New York, Stanford White (1853-1906) was the son of the well-known literary and music critic Richard Grant White. In 1870, at the age of sixteen, he entered the office of Gambrill & Richardson as an apprentice. Two years later, White succeeded McKim as head draftsman, working first on sketches for Trinity Church, Boston, which he prepared under Richardson's supervision. White became quite adept in the Richardsonian Romanesque style and contributed greatly to many of Richardson's designs, especially in residential work, interior design, and architectural sculpture and ornament on public commissions. In 1878, he left the firm to travel in Europe, accompanied part of the time by McKim and living part of the time in the studio of his sculptor friend, Augustus St. Gaudens, with whom he was collaborating on the Farragut Memorial for Madison Square (1876-81).

Formed in 1879, the firm of McKim, Mead & White initially specialized in the design of Shingle Style resort and suburban houses. In 1882-83, the firm began to shift to a more ordered, classicizing form of design, signaled by, among other works, the Italian Renaissance Villard Houses at 451-457 Madison Avenue (Joseph M. Wells, designer, 1882-85, a designated New York City Landmark). In response to this new emphasis on ordered designs, White formulated a style that freely combined features of several classical styles, but was primarily Italian Renaissance in form. In addition to the Robb House, notable examples of the style include his Madison Square Garden (1887-91, demolished); Judson Memorial Church, Tower, and Hall on Washington Square South (church, 1888-93, tower and hall, 1895-96; all designated New York City landmarks); the King Model Houses on the north side of West 139th Street (1891-92; in the St. Nicholas Historic District); and the Century Association Clubhouse, 7 West 43rd Street (1889-

91, a designated New York City Landmark).

The firm's national reputation and influence was greatly enhanced by the Chicago's World Columbian Exposition of 1893, which presented a vision of a neo-classical city of monumental buildings, and ushered in a new era in American urban planning, known as the City Beautiful movement. These trends were subsequently reflected in a number of projects for which White served as partner-in-charge or chief designer including the New York University, now Bronx Community College, campus (plan, 1892-94; construction, 1894-1912)<sup>15</sup>; the Bowery Savings Bank, now GreenPoint Bank, 130 Bowery (1893-95, a designated New York City landmark and interior landmark). White also continued to design city and country houses for the firm's wealthy clients, working in a variety of historic styles and often acting as interior decorator, furnishing the houses with antiques and art objects he had acquired on frequent trips to Europe. Shortly before White's death, his inventory was destroyed in a large warehouse fire, leaving him in debt and forcing him to sell his partnership in the firm. In 1906, White was shot and killed on the roof garden of Madison Square Garden. McKim, despondent at the loss of his friend and the negative press coverage, retired in 1907. Mead also gradually withdrew from the firm until his official retirement in 1919, leaving the work of the firm to a talented group of junior partners.

#### The Design of the Robb House<sup>16</sup>

The first of a series of richly embellished urban houses by Stanford White in the Renaissance Revival style, the Robb house was praised by architectural critic Russell Sturgis as "the most dignified structure in all that quarter of the town, not a palace, but the fit dwelling house for a first-rate citizen."<sup>17</sup> Inspired by Central and Northern Italian Renaissance models, this imposing building has a frontage of fifty feet on Park Avenue and eighty feet on East 35th Street. The building is composed with simple cubic forms which contribute to its monumental character. The facades are faced in a handsome tawny-orange brick which complements and harmonizes with the color of the brownstone base and the tan brick and terra-cotta detailing. The articulation of the base with its facings of large smooth-faced blocks, small profileless square-headed window openings (now altered on Park Avenue), and simple moldings provides a dramatic contrast to the richly textured, decorative upper stories. Much of the textured effect is due to the use of thin iron-spot Roman bricks, especially in the coursed tan-brick corner

quoins, and to the wealth of small-scale Renaissance-inspired details. These include the molded band and sill courses, the elaborate molded window surrounds, garlands, escutcheons, paterae, and brick panels outlined by classical moldings. The repeated rectangles of the carefully proportioned window surrounds and the panel effect on the fifth story reinforces the cubic forms of the composition, contributing to the overall unity and harmony of the design. (The one arched element in the design signals a secondary entrance, now a window, at the center of the East 35th Street facade.) The repeated horizontal of the band courses also serves as a unifying device which is reinforced by the elaborate brick and terra-cotta entablature and balustraded roof-parapet. (One of the most striking features of the design is the lush foliate decoration on the terra-cotta cornice.)

On Park Avenue the symmetrical five-bay design focuses on a double-story brownstone entrance porch with paired polished granite columns and balustrades. This porch, a favorite device of the McKim, Mead & White, announces and unites the public spaces on the lower two floors (reception rooms and entrance hall with a dramatic staircase on the ground story; drawing room and music room on the second story). The tall second-story *piano nobile* is also set off by Renaissance-inspired aedicular window surrounds and wrought-iron balustrades. Aedicular window enframements are also employed at the third and fourth stories. At the third story the center bay is emphasized by an arched pediment and pendant garlands, while at the fourth story the center bay is framed by garlands and escutcheons.

On East 35th Street, programmatic considerations (notably the location of the fireplaces and the desire to have a two-story oriel to light the second-floor dining room and third floor library) prevented White from creating a symmetrical design. The seven-bay facade is therefore composed in a dynamic balance with the double-story oriel at the eastern end of the facade balanced at the western end of the facade by a tripartite arrangement of windows and decorative bays ornamented with classical motifs. At the second story, the western bays are also emphasized by an iron balcony which opened onto the drawing room. In addition to this graceful ironwork, the building also retains a handsome copper downspout head ornamented with classical motifs on the east wall of the oriel. Original leaded glass lights survive in the second-story transoms of the oriel, but the other windows in the oriel have been replaced. The low stone wall



which surrounds the building screened off a deep areaway that provided light and air to the basement kitchen and servants' hall.

Although White had employed Renaissance ornament in his designs for a number of houses in the mid-to-late 1880s,<sup>18</sup> the Robb house is regarded as his earliest Italian Renaissance urban townhouse because it is here that he first attempted to replicate the forms of the Italian Renaissance urban *palazzo*, with its ordered symmetry and hierarchial story treatment. Thus, the traditional New York stoop has been eliminated in favor of a street level entrance and the drawing room, music room, and dining room have been raised to the second story and articulated as a *piano nobile*. The ground-story base is used for reception rooms and a grand entrance hall while the kitchen, servants' hall, and other dependencies were located in an excavated basement which is surrounded by an areaway screened by a low wall on Park Avenue and East 35th Street. In his much more modest King Model Houses (1891-92), White also used a street level entrance placing a reception room, kitchen, and pantry on the rusticated ground floor and elevating the parlor and dining room to the much taller second story which he decorated with terra-cotta ornament very similar to that of the Robb House. White's Robert W. Patterson house in Chicago (1892-95), which has many features in common with the Robb House, also has a ground story entrance and a second story treated as a *piano nobile*, signaled by a double-story portico. Similarly McKim and his design assistant, William Mitchell Kendall, employed a second-story *piano nobile*, ground level entrance, and rusticated base containing a reception room, kitchen, and service rooms for the Henry A. C. Taylor house at 3 East 71st Street (begun 1892, built 1894-96; demolished), although there the detailing was based closely on the sixteenth-century Florentine Palazzo Bartolini-Salembeni by Baccio d'Agnolo. By the late 1890s, these features were standard for the firm's large urban Renaissance Revival townhouses.<sup>19</sup>

In analyzing the work of McKim, Mead & White, Russell Sturgis suggested that much of the effect of the Villard Houses, like that of its Renaissance models, depended on "good windows well spaced and constantly repeated" and added that a "uniform sequence of openings" has the power to produce buildings of great "dignity and simplicity."<sup>20</sup> Sturgis noted that, in his design for the Park Avenue facade of the Robb House, White was able to achieve almost as much regularity as Wells had in the Villard Houses. However, Sturgis argued that

"the side wall [of the Robb House], more broken up, is less successful."<sup>21</sup> White attempted to reconcile the need for symmetry and uniformity in a classical design with the exterior expression of a building's interior demanded by his architectural training. To a certain extent White was able to deal with the problem through the use of the compositional device of balanced asymmetry. He also made use of blind windows, both at the second story of the Park Avenue facade, where the southern center bay is treated as a window with inset panels of sculptural relief (the deep porch partially obscures this arrangement), and at the the eastern corner of the East 35th Street facade, where a small window opening was placed next to a much larger blind fourth-story window. In later, related designs by the firm, such awkwardnesses were avoided by using an entire vertical row of blind windows when one was needed (the H.A.C. Taylor House) or by adding a projecting bay extending from the basement to the roof rather than an oriel as in the Reverend John F. Goucher house (1890-92) in Baltimore.

Built at a time when Stanford White was at the height of his powers as a designer and featuring the beautiful decorative detailing for which he is so renowned, the Robb House has won considerable praise from critics, historians, and the general public. Russell Sturgis was particularly impressed with the "dusky" brickwork and "the excellent type of window ... chosen for the the two more important stories and the simpler windows above [which] combine well with the richer ones."<sup>22</sup> Historian Leland Roth notes the primacy of this house among White's urban houses in the Renaissance Revival style and "the wealth of small-scale ornament ... all of it ... held in check" by White's strong sense of design and proportion. For the Reverend D. Percy Stickney, rector of the Church of Ascension in 1923, when the Advertising Club of New York acquired the house, it was simply "one of the finest houses in New York," representative of White's wonderful balance of proportions that gives you a special feeling of comfort."<sup>23</sup>

#### The Robbs of 23 Park Avenue

The Robb House was largely constructed between 1889 and 1891, although the interiors were not completed until the winter of 1892 and the Robbs probably did not move in until 1893. Four of the leading firms of the day -- Herter Brothers, Pottier, Stymus & Co., L. Marcotte & Co., and Joseph Cabus -- were employed for interior decorations which also included historic woodwork and ceilings that White and Robb had purchased in

Europe. The furnishings were mostly antiques or modern pieces in period designs which complemented J. Hampden Robb's extensive collection of art, tapestries, and artifacts.

A newspaper report on a social event at the Robb mansion in 1895 noted that the house plan was particularly well suited to large-scale entertainments. That event was attended by ex-mayor Abram S. Hewitt and his wife and many of New York's elite including the Barneys, Morgans, and Mr. and Mrs. George B. Post. Because Cornelia Robb was frequently in poor health, such occasions were rare. She died in 1903, after which J. Hampden Robb continued to occupy the house with his eldest daughter, Cornelia Van Rensselaer Robb (Nellie). J. Hampden Robb died in January 1911. During the following year the contents of the house were sold to settle his estate. The house itself passed to Robb's grandson and namesake, J. Hampden Robb, II. In 1913, he leased the building to Jane E. Patterson, who had new partitions and plumbing fixtures installed to adapt the building for use as a boarding house.<sup>24</sup> In 1923 it was acquired by the Audubon Realty Corporation on behalf of the Advertising Club of New York.<sup>25</sup>

#### The Advertising Club of New York and Subsequent History<sup>26</sup>

The Advertising Club was an outgrowth of an informal organization of advertising agents and their associates in related fields who began meeting once a month for lunch at the old Waldorf Astoria Hotel on Fifth Avenue and later moved to the Aldine Association Clubhouse. In 1911 the vigilance committee of the Advertising Club sponsored a "truth in advertising" bill in the New York State legislature that became a model for similar laws in thirty-six states. In the period after World War I, when the advertising business expanded rapidly, the club established its own headquarters at 47 East 25th Street. By the 1920s, most of the agencies in the city had begun moving "almost en masse to Fifth and Madison Avenues and to the cross streets above Thirty-fourth Street."<sup>27</sup> Thus, the Robb house was ideally located for the club which also "recognized the importance of the building as a Stanford White creation and the ease with which its interior could be converted into a functional and elegant clubhouse."<sup>28</sup> Responsibility for the project was placed in the hands of F.T.H. Bacon, who acted as consulting engineer and advisor to the club's directors, and Fred F. French, who was architect for the remodeling which was executed by his construction firm. The alterations consisted primarily of a new

addition covering a former courtyard at the northeast corner of the building [not visible from the street], the installation of two elevators and upgrading of mechanical systems, and the removal of walls and partitions to create a grand dining room on the third floor.<sup>29</sup>

The renovated clubhouse opened in January 1924. The club became a gathering place for leaders in the advertising industry as well as "people in graphic arts, promotion, [and] public relations" by offering a blend of "business, social, entertainment, and educational functions in more or less equal parts."<sup>30</sup> Through its social activities, notably its Honorary Achievement Award Lunches, it hosted many of the leading celebrities of the day including the Prince of Wales (in 1924), Sir Thomas Lipton, Will Rogers, Jack Dempsey, Gene Tunney, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Eleanor Roosevelt, Bernard Baruch, Bob Hope, Ben Hogan, and Edward R. Murrow -- as well as Mayors James J. Walker, Fiorello H. La Guardia, Robert F. Wagner, and John V. Lindsay.

In 1946, the Advertising Club suffered a devastating fire which severely damaged the interiors of the top three floors of the building. In addition to making repairs to the damaged portions of the building, the club took the opportunity to make a number of renovations and to acquire the adjacent 1853 rowhouse at 103 East 35th Street which was remodeled for club use and joined to the main building. By the mid-1960s the Club had installed a canopy at the Park Avenue entrance; the present canopy was in place by 1975. The club continued to occupy the building until May 1977, when the club began renting space at the Engineering Club. In September 1977, the building was acquired by a developer, A. Albani, Inc., for conversion to apartments. At that time a number of small changes were made to exterior, including the creation of openings in the masonry for air conditioner units, lengthening of the first-story window openings, and replacement of some of the original window sash.<sup>31</sup> Over the last twenty years more of the sash has been changed but the exterior remains largely intact and was cleaned recently. Today, the Robb house remains an elegant and imposing tribute to the artistry of Stanford White and a significant reminder of its notable occupants.

#### Description

The building is located on an L-shaped lot which extends fifty feet along Park Avenue and 105 feet along East 35th Street. It is comprised of three sections: the original J. Hampden and Cornelia Van

Rensselaer Robb mansion, a five-story L-shaped building which has a frontage of fifty feet along Park Avenue and eighty feet along East 35th Street; the 1923 addition, a five-story masonry structure which occupies the former fourteen-foot-wide, thirty-foot-deep courtyard of the house; and the eastern addition at 103 East 35th Street, a five-and-one-half-story, twenty-five-foot-wide, seventy-four-foot-deep, 1853 former rowhouse which was refaced with stucco and joined to the building in 1946, and then extensively remodeled in 1977-78.

**Robb Mansion** A five-story Italian Renaissance Revival palazzo, the Robb mansion has designed facades on Park Avenue and East 35th Street, a stuccoed northern elevation, and a narrow articulated bay where the east (rear) wall projects beyond the plane of 103 East 35th Street. The basement and first story of both facades are faced in brownstone. The upper stories are sheathed in orange iron-spot Roman brick which is accented with tan iron-spot Roman brick, terra cotta, and brownstone. (The tan brick and terra cotta are matched to the color of the brownstone.) The facade on Park Avenue has a symmetrical five-bay design which emphasizes the central entrance bay. The seven-bay-wide East 35th Street facade is articulated with an asymmetric composition that balances groupings of multiple windows and classical motifs. Molded band courses of tan brick or terra cotta and sill courses of brownstone set off the individual stories and tan brick quoins frame the corners of the facades. The building is richly embellished with terra-cotta ornament and is crowned by a brick and terra-cotta cornice and balustrade. In 1977-78, many of the house's historic one-over-one wood sash windows were replaced and a number of openings were made in the masonry for air conditioners. A rare surviving copper downspout with a decorative catch basin ornamented with classical motifs has been preserved next to the oriel window on the East 35th Street facade.

#### *Park Avenue Facade*

**Base** -- The deep basement is surrounded by an areaway which has been divided into private gardens on Park Avenue. The areaway is enclosed by a low brownstone wall which has been stuccoed and painted and is topped by a non-historic wrought-iron railing. The entrance to the building is signaled by a double-story brownstone porch with paired polished-granite columns and by a vinyl-covered canvas canopy which was installed prior to 1975. The porch has recent slate facings on its steps but retains its original bluestone flooring and decorative iron railings. The entrance retains its historic wood

door surround and transom. The historic paired wood and glass doors have replacement handles and kickplates. The transom has historic frosted glass. A pair of small metal lanterns (c. 1920s-40s), attached to the entrance wall at either side of the doorway light the porch while spotlights on the pilaster responds light the areaways. The masonry has been removed between the basement and first-story windows creating long vertical openings. These contain wood frames for first story and basement windows which are separated by narrow wood spandrels. To the south of the entrance, the first-story wood windows have single panes of etched glass decorated with an interlace pattern. To the north of the entrance, the first-story openings are protected by iron grilles and have multi-light wood casement windows. The south basement openings contain metal and glass doors and iron gates. The north areaway is covered by an open iron grate which attaches to the spandrels below the first-story windows and is anchored to the areaway wall. The north basement openings have metal and glass doors. Plantings obscure the view of the areaway and basement. A bronze plaque at the south corner of the facade identifies the building as McKim, Mead & White's J. Hampden Robb House.

**Upper Stories** -- At the **second story** the facade is articulated into six window bays. The outer windows are screened by iron balustrades and have aedicular terra-cotta window surrounds which are enriched with classical moldings, bracketed keystones, and garlands. The paired windows at the center of the facade, which are partially screened from view by the porch, have simple molded surrounds. Sculptural relief panels fill the opening in the southern center bay.<sup>32</sup> The wall surface between the second and third story windows is enriched with terra-cotta paterae. (The northernmost and southernmost paterae have been removed and openings have been created for air conditioners beneath the third-story window sills.) At the **third story** the same aedicular surrounds are used to frame the windows which are also set off by contrasting orange and tan brick quoins. The center bay is capped by an arched pediment with acroteria and is framed by pendant garlands. (There is an opening for air conditioner beneath the northern garland and a small light fixture has been attached to the wall between the center window and the northern garland.) The southern outer bays (bays four and five) retain historic one-over-one wood sash, the northern outer bays (bays one and two) have non-historic paired casement windows, and the center bay has a non-historic wood and glass door topped

by a transom. At the **fourth story**, the windows have somewhat simpler molded surrounds and the center bay is enriched with escutcheons and garlands. Openings have been cut in the wall for air conditioners below the first and fifth window bays and below the northern escutcheon. On the **fifth story** the windows have molded brick surrounds. All of the windows have one-over-one wood sash. The wall surface between the windows is articulated with terra-cotta paterae and terra-cotta moldings that create a panel effect. Openings have been cut in the wall for air conditioners below the first and fifth window bays. The crowning entablature combines a terra-cotta architrave and cornice decorated with classical moldings and a brick frieze punctuated by terra-cotta paterae and framed by brick quoins. The balustrade is composed of brick piers ornamented with raised panels and terra-cotta balusters and rails.

#### *East 35th Street Facade*

Base -- The **first story** and basement have simple rectangular window openings. On the first story, an arched entrance in the fourth bay (reading west to east) has been partially sealed with stucco-covered masonry. The upper portion of the arch contains a pair of horizontal windows and an arched transom in a wood surround. A rectangular opening has been cut in the masonry beneath the arch for a through-the-wall air-conditioner which is protected by a metal grille. Just to the east of the former entrance, a section of the areaway has been filled in and the areaway wall has been removed to create a loading dock for an iron trash storage bin. The window openings in the first, second, and third bays have vinyl-covered aluminum one-over-one sashes with interlace-patterned etched glass. The wall beneath the window in the second bay has a large opening for an air conditioner which is protected by a metal grille. The fifth, sixth, and seventh bay windows also have one-over-one wood sash. Louvred vents have been inserted in the masonry above the west corner of the third window bay and just below the string course between the fourth and fifth window bays. On the western portion of the **basement** facade, the windows have aluminum sash with etched-glass lights. There is a vertical opening containing a louvred vent just to the east of the former first-story arched entrance. The eastern basement windows have one-over-one wood sash. All the original basement windows on this facade retain their original iron grilles except for the easternmost opening which has been reduced in size and is protected by an iron grille. a horizontal multilight steel sash window. Metal piping attached to basement wall just above the windows protects

the wiring for the paired spotlights that light the areaway. The western portion of the areaway has been planted with ivy and trees; the eastern portion retains its historic brick pavers.

Upper Stories -- Most of the decorative detailing of the Park Avenue facade is repeated on the upper stories of the East 35th Street facade. Here the bays are arranged in a 3-1-1-3 pattern at the second to fourth stories and in a 2-2-2 pattern on the fifth story. In the western triple bays, windows flank masonry bays decorated with classical reliefs. There is a iron balcony at the **second story**. At the eastern end of the facade, an oriel extends from the second to the third story. The oriel is supported by massive stone brackets and rests on a stone base. The tripartite surround above the oriel has a blind eastern opening which is faced with original brickwork. A simple window opening just to the east of the surround was reduced in size in the 1977-78 alterations. Most of the windows on this facade have one-over-one wood sash. At the second story access to the balcony was originally provided by tall bottom sash. The historic (perhaps original) west window survives but the eastern window has been replaced by a modern wood and glass door topped by a overdoor support for an air conditioner and a small transom. The two single bays at the center of the second story have iron balustrades. Both center windows have replacement wood upper and lower sashes separated by brick infill which support metal grilles. The oriel has wood casements with historic leaded-glass lights and 1890s-era leaded-glass transoms at the second story. Wood-framed casements and transoms with clear glass are employed at the **third story** of the oriel. Alterations during the 1970s included the removal of terra-cotta paterae beneath the two center bays and the center window of the oriel at the third story. At that time a rectangular opening was created between the center bays at the **fourth story**. That opening has been partially sealed and contains a through-the-wall air conditioner. Air conditioner sleeves were also inserted in the wall between the center bays at the second story, under the center windows and center oriel window at the third story, and beneath the fifth window bay (reading west to east) at the **fifth story**. The second-story western single bay also has a large window air conditioner which is screened from view by the iron balustrade. Small vents have been installed between the east single bay and the oriel on the second and third stories, between the triple bay and west single bay on the third story and above the east single bay on the fourth story. Several metal flues have been installed on the western chimney.



East Elevation -- The articulation of the East 35th Street facade is continued on to the exposed portion of the rear wall. The wall was originally articulated with a tall niche at the second story and pierced by narrow window openings at the third through the fifth stories. In the 1970s narrow window openings topped by openings for through-the-wall air conditioners were created at the first and second stories. The third and fourth-story windows which had been sealed and faced with brick prior to the 1970s were left unchanged, and a wood casement window replaced the historic one-over-one wood sash window at the fifth story.

North Elevation -- Originally a party wall, the north wall of the Robb House became visible in the mid-1960s when the adjacent rowhouses on Park Avenue were demolished and a driveway was created for the new apartment building at 25-37 Park Avenue. The wall is faced with stucco and has several vertical rows of windows and openings for through-the-wall air conditioners.

Roof -- Although largely screened from view by the balustrades, it appears that there is a well-established garden on the roof.

**1923 Addition** The only portion of the 1923 courtyard addition which is visible from the street is the north wall which was a party wall until the mid-1960s. It is faced with stucco and pierced by vertical rows of windows and is generally indistinguishable from the north wall of the Robb House.

**103 East 35th Street Addition** The addition is faced with stucco and is articulated into three bays. Moved to its present location in 1977, the below-grade entrance in the west bay has a steel door. It is approached by concrete stairs which are flanked by wrought-iron railings. An iron railing also extends across the front of the building to protect an areaway created in the 1970s. At that time the

center basement window was lengthened and the former entrance in the east bay was made into a window. The basement windows have one-over-one wood sash and are protected by iron grilles modeled after the original grilles on the basement of the Robb House. The first story windows have one-over-one wood sash. The second and third-story windows have paired wood casements. The fourth-story windows have one-over-one wood sash. Openings have been cut in the masonry below the windows for air conditioners at the first story beneath the center window bay, at the second story beneath the west and center window bays, and above the east window bay, beneath the third-story center window bay, at the fourth story beneath the center bay, and at the cornice line above the west and center bays.

Set back some distance from the facade is a rooftop addition with stucco walls and red Spanish tile coping. Over the western bay, a shed-roofed metal-and-glass wing extends from the addition to the southern edge of roof. An open spiral iron stair at the eastern end of the building leads to a terrace on the roof of the rooftop addition. A metal screen extends from the stair to the east wall of the Robb House.

The northern portion of the addition's western wall is visible from Park Avenue. It is faced with stucco and has one large window at the third story which contains multilight-paired-casement windows.

Report prepared by  
Gale Harris  
Research Department

#### Notes

1. This brief history of Murray Hill has been compiled from the following sources: "Mrs. Murray Had A Farm..." *Herald Bicentennial Supplement* (July 2, 1976), 12; Charles Lockwood, *Manhattan Moves Uptown* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1976), 223-231; Frederick S. Lightfoot, ed., *Nineteenth-Century New York in Rare Photographic Views* (New York: Dover Publ., Inc., 1981), 100-110; M. Christine Boyer, *Manhattan Manners* (New York: Rizzoli, 1985), 134-135; and Anita Pins, *An Historic District in Murray Hill* (New York: The Murray Hill Committee, Inc., 1977); James Trager, *Park Avenue: Street of Dreams* (New York: Atheneum, 1990), 14-20; I.N. Phelps Stokes, *The Iconography of Manhattan, 1498-1909* 6 vols. (New York: Robert H. Dodd, 1918-28).

2. In addition to requiring quality construction, certain types of businesses were prohibited as well. No "livery stable, slaughter house, smith shop, forge..." was to be established there; as well as no manufacture of "gun powder, glue, vitriol, ink or turpentine." Also there was to be no tannery, no "brewery, distillery, museum, theater, circus..." Such restrictions were fairly common in many residential neighborhoods.
3. Because of concerns about sparks, the Common Council banned steam engines from operating below 42nd Street in 1852. The tunnel was constructed so that the teams of horses that pulled trains from Grand Central to the railroad's station on Centre Street would not have to clear Murray Hill. See Lockwood, 229.
4. Among the churches represented on the *Atlas of the Entire City of New York* (New York: George W. Bromley & E. Robinson, 1879), pl. 13 and *Robinson's Atlas of the City of New York* (New York: E. Robinson, 1885), pl. 13, were the Brick Presbyterian Church at Fifth Avenue and 37th Street (1858), the Church of the New Jerusalem (Swedenborgian) on East 35th Street between Park Avenue and Lexington Avenue (1859), the Church of the Incarnation (Episcopal) at Madison Avenue and East 35th Street (Emlen T. Littell, 1864, a designated New York City Landmark; the Church of the Covenant Presbyterian at Park Avenue and East 35th Street (1865), and the Unitarian Church of the Messiah at Park Avenue and East 34th Street (1867). Only the Church of the New Jerusalem and the Church of the Incarnation remain standing.
5. For the developments in Murray Hill during this period, see "Great Investments of the Past Year," *Real Estate Record & Guide*, Mar. 31, 1888, 392; Murray Hill Committee, "Historic Building Research," prepared by the Office of Metropolitan History, 1991; Landmarks Preservation Commission, "Murray Hill Research file.
6. In 1887 The New-York Club took over the former Caswell House at Fifth Avenue and 35th Street (demolished); in 1891 the Manhattan Club purchased the former A.T. Stewart mansion at Fifth Avenue and 34th Street (John B. Kellum, 1864-69, demolished). The Union League erected a new building at Fifth Avenue and 39th Street (Peabody & Stearns, 1879-81, demolished), and the Grolier Club built a new building at 29 East 32nd Street (Charles W. Romeyn, 1889, a designated New York City Landmark).
7. The lots were purchased by Cornelia Robb who is listed as owner on the New Building Application for the house. New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 2109, p. 273, 277; New York City, Department of Buildings, Manhattan, New Building Permit 830-1889 in Block 891, Lot 1 Folder, Municipal Archives, Surrogates Court Building, New York.
8. *Real Estate Record & Guide*, Jan. 14, 1888, 42.
9. For the Dolphins see *Long Island Country Houses and their Architects, 1860-1940*, edited by Robert B. Mackay, Anthony K. Baker, Carol A. Traynor (New York: Society for the Preservation of Long Island Antiquities; W.W. Norton & Co., 1997), 278, 520; Samuel White, *The Houses of McKim, Mead & White* (New York: Rizzoli, 1998), 132-137.
10. This section on James Hampden Robb and Cornelia Van Rensselaer Robb is based on Lenore Newman, "A Stanford White Building: the Interior of the Robb House" (M.A. Thesis: Dept. of Applied Arts, Fashion Institute of Technology, 1992); "J. Hampden Robb, Ex-Senator, Dead," *New York Times*, Jan. 22, 1911, sec. 2, p. 11; "Obituary Notes -- Cornelia Van Rensselaer Robb," *New York Times*, July, 20, 1903, p. 7; and the entries on James Hampden Robb in *Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1888), v. 5, p. 269; *Who's Who in New York* (New York: L.R. Hammersley, 1909); *Who Was Who in America* (Chicago: Marquis Who's Who, 1966), v. 1.
11. Jonathan Kuhn, "Parks," *Encyclopedia of New York City*, ed. Kenneth T. Jackson (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1995), 882.
12. Obit., *NY Times*.
13. This section on Stanford White and the firm of McKim, Mead & White is based on the entry on McKim, Mead & White in the Landmarks Preservation Commission, "Architect's Appendix," *Upper East Side Historic District Designation Report* (LP-1051) (New York: City of New York, 1981); Leland Roth, *McKim, Mead & White, Architects* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983); Leland Roth, "McKim, Mead & White" and Brendan Gill, "Stanford White" in *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects*, Adolf K. Placzek, ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1982); Mosette Broderick, "McKim, Mead & White" and "Stanford

- White" in *Encyclopedia of New York*; Richard Guy Wilson, "McKim, Mead & White, 1879-1920," in *Long Island Country Houses*, 273-298.
14. Broderick, "White."
  15. White's Gould Memorial Library and Interior (1894-99), Hall of Fame (1900-01); Hall of Languages (1892-95) and Cornelius Baker Hall (1892-1912) are designated New York City Landmarks.
  16. This section on the design of Robb House is based on Roth, *MMW*, 138; Newman, 6-12; Russell Sturgis, "McKim, Mead & White," in *Architectural Record: Great American Architects Series* (1895-1899; rpt. New York: DaCapo Press, 1977), 24; Roth, *McKim, Mead & White, Architects*, 138-139; David Garrad Lowe, "Testimony on the J.H. Robb House," Historic Districts Council, "Statement in support of designation as a New York City landmark of the former Robb House at 23 Park Avenue," Samuel G. White, Testimony re 23 Park Avenue, James Hampden Robb House," Sept. 15, 1998, in the Landmarks Preservation Commission, (Former) James Hampden and Cornelia Van Rensselaer Robb House LP-2026 File. For the firm's other Italian Renaissance houses of the period see Roth, *McKim, Mead & White, Architects*, 88-90, 94-98, 138-145, 209-211; White, 78-83, 150-155; Leland Roth, *The Architecture of McKim Mead & White, 1870-1920: A Building List* (New York: Garland, 1978).
  17. Sturgis, 24.
  18. For example the Robert Garrett house on Mount Vernon Place in Baltimore (1884-87) and the Gibson Fahnestock house at 30 West 51st Street (1886-89).
  19. Other examples included White's Levi P. Morton townhouse at 681 Fifth Avenue (1896-98, demolished) and the William H. and Ada S. Moore townhouse at 4 East 54th Street (1898-1900, a designated New York City Landmark).
  20. Sturgis, 24.
  21. Ibid.
  22. Ibid.
  23. *Advertising Club News*, Mar. 12, 1923, 1 [quoted in Newman, 141].
  24. Alteration Permit 1873-1913.
  25. Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 3345, p. 215.
  26. This section on the Advertising Club of New York is based on Newman, 138-149; "Advertising Club Opens New Home," *New York Times*, Jan. 6, 1924, sec. 1, p. 7; Jaclyn Silver, "The Advertising Club of New York," *City East*, 1, no. 6 (March 1968), 6-9, 26-28; Chauncey G. Olinger, Jr., "Advertising," *Ency. of N.Y.C.*; Martin Clary, *Mid-Manhattan* (New York: Forty-Second Street Property Owners & Merchants Asso., 1929), 148.
  27. Clary, 148.
  28. Newman, 139 summarizing an article in the club's newsletter.
  29. Alteration permit 1683-1923. See also Newman, 142-145; "A Glimpse into the Advertising Club of New York," pamphlet, prepared for the Advertising Club of New York, n.d. [c. 1924], in the New York Historical Society, Prints and Drawings Collection, Miscellaneous files M-20, s.v. "Robb, J. Hampden -- Advertising Club of New York."
  30. Silvern, 7.
  31. For the sale of the building see April Koral, "Exit Ad Men as the Club Scene Shifts," *New York Times*, Sept. 25, 1977. For the alterations see Alteration Permit 443-1977.
  32. It seems likely that these panels which appear in a photograph of the house published in 1896, were acquired by White or Robb in Europe. See "Residence of J. Hampden Robb," *Architecture and Building*, v. 25, no. 1 (July 4, 1896).

## 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 (Former) James Hampden and Cornelia Van Rensselaer Robb House has a special character and 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 (Former) James Hampden and Cornelia Van Rensselaer Robb House, is considered one of the finest urban residences designed by Stanford White of the prominent architectural firm of McKim, Mead & White and was one of the earliest Renaissance Revival townhouses by White; that this elegant Renaissance Revival palazzo is faced in orange and tan Roman iron-spot brick above a brownstone base and is richly embellished with ornate terra-cotta detail; that its notable features include a double-story entrance porch with paired corner columns, wrought-iron balustrades, balustraded roof parapets, and a two-story oriel on the East 35th Street facade; that J. Hampden Robb, a retired businessman and civic leader, had a distinguished career in public service as a legislator and New York City Parks Commissioner; that the house, a rare survivor on Park Avenue, is a reminder of the history of Murray Hill as an elegant residential district and was praised by architectural critic Russell Sturgis as "the most dignified structure in all that quarter of the town"; that it was acquired by the Advertising Club in 1923, serving as the organization's headquarters until 1977 and was a gathering place for advertising industry and media leaders as well as notable politicians, business leaders, and entertainers; and that the Robb house remains an elegant and imposing tribute to the artistry of Stanford White and a significant reminder of its notable occupants.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 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 (Former) James Hampden and Cornelia Van Rensselaer Robb House, 23 Park Avenue (aka 101-103 East 35th Street), Borough of Manhattan, and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 891, Lot 1, as its Landmark Site.





(Former) James Hampden and Cornelia Van Rensselaer Robb House  
23 Park Avenue (aka 101-103 East 35th Street), Manhattan  
Photo: Carl Forster

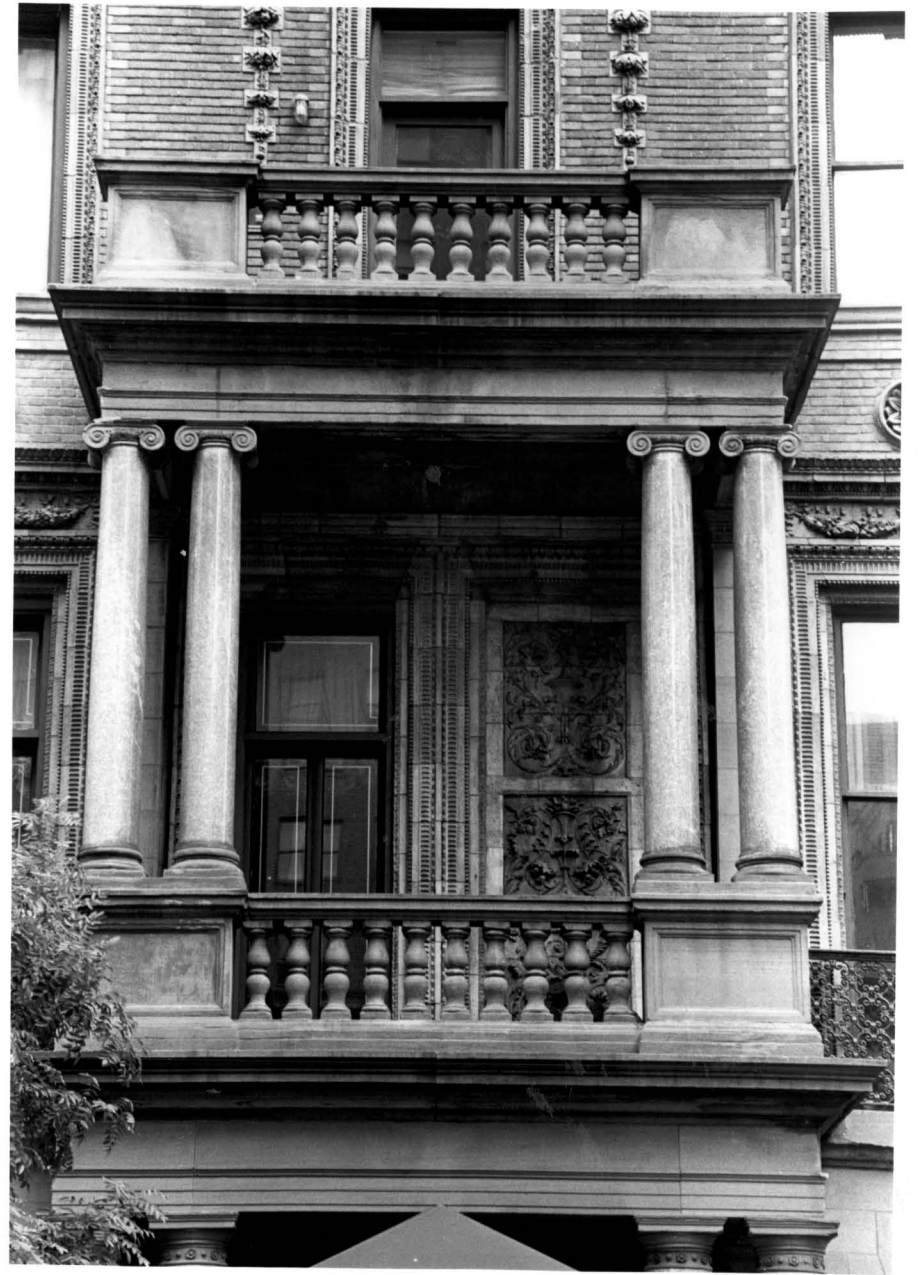


"J. Hampden Robb House, New York, N. Y."  
Photo Credit: *American Architect and Building News*, November 7, 1891



(Former) James Hampden and Cornelia Van Rensselaer Robb House  
Park Avenue facade  
Photo: Carl Forster





Entrance porch, Park Avenue facade  
Photos: Carl Forster





Terra-cotta ornament, Park Avenue facade  
Photo: Carl Forster



Roofline and upper stories, Park Avenue facade  
Photo: Carl Forster



(Former) James Hampden and Cornelia Van Rensselaer Robb House  
East 35th Street facade

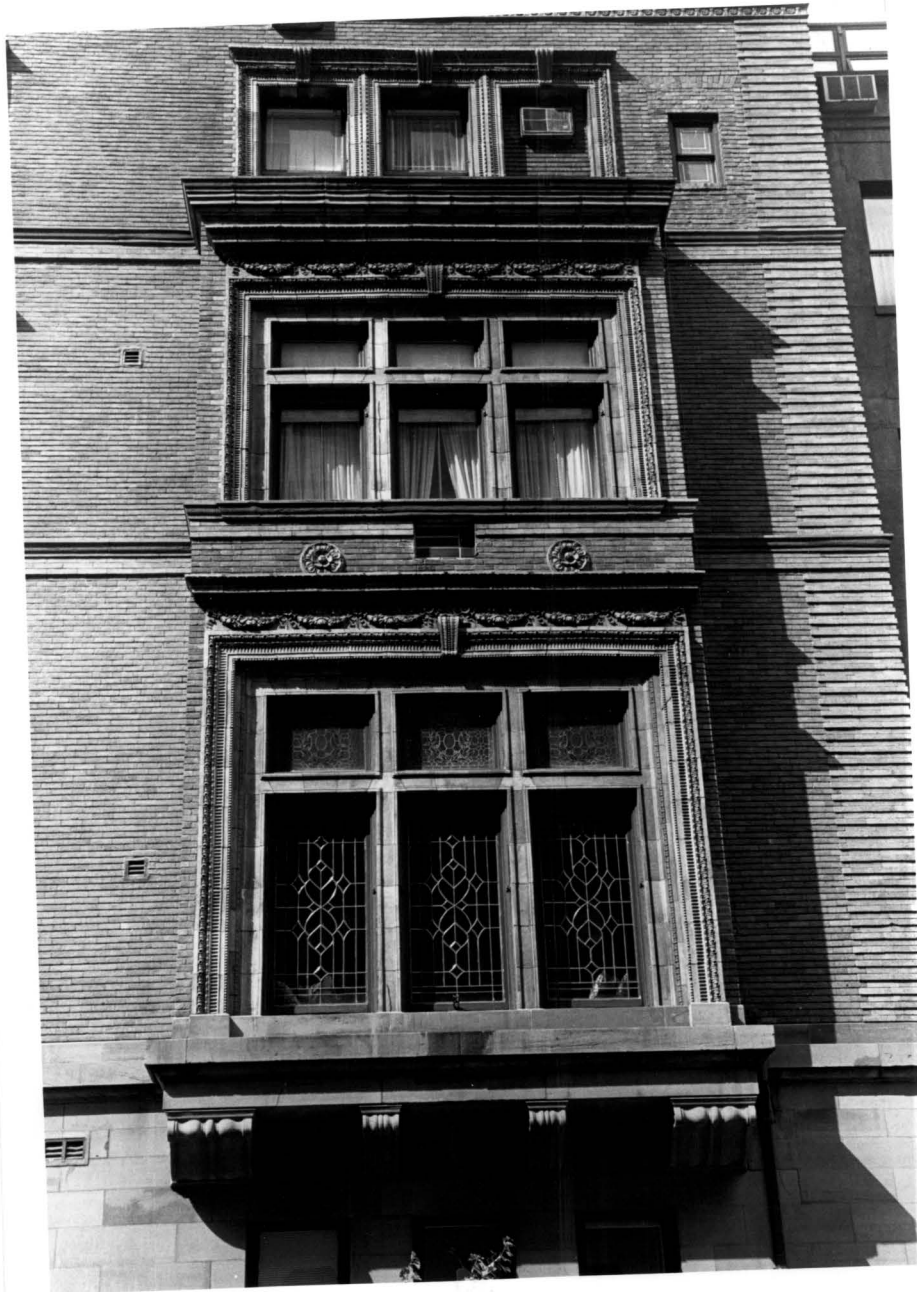
Photo: Carl Forster





Second-story windows, East 35th Street facade  
Photos: Carl Forster





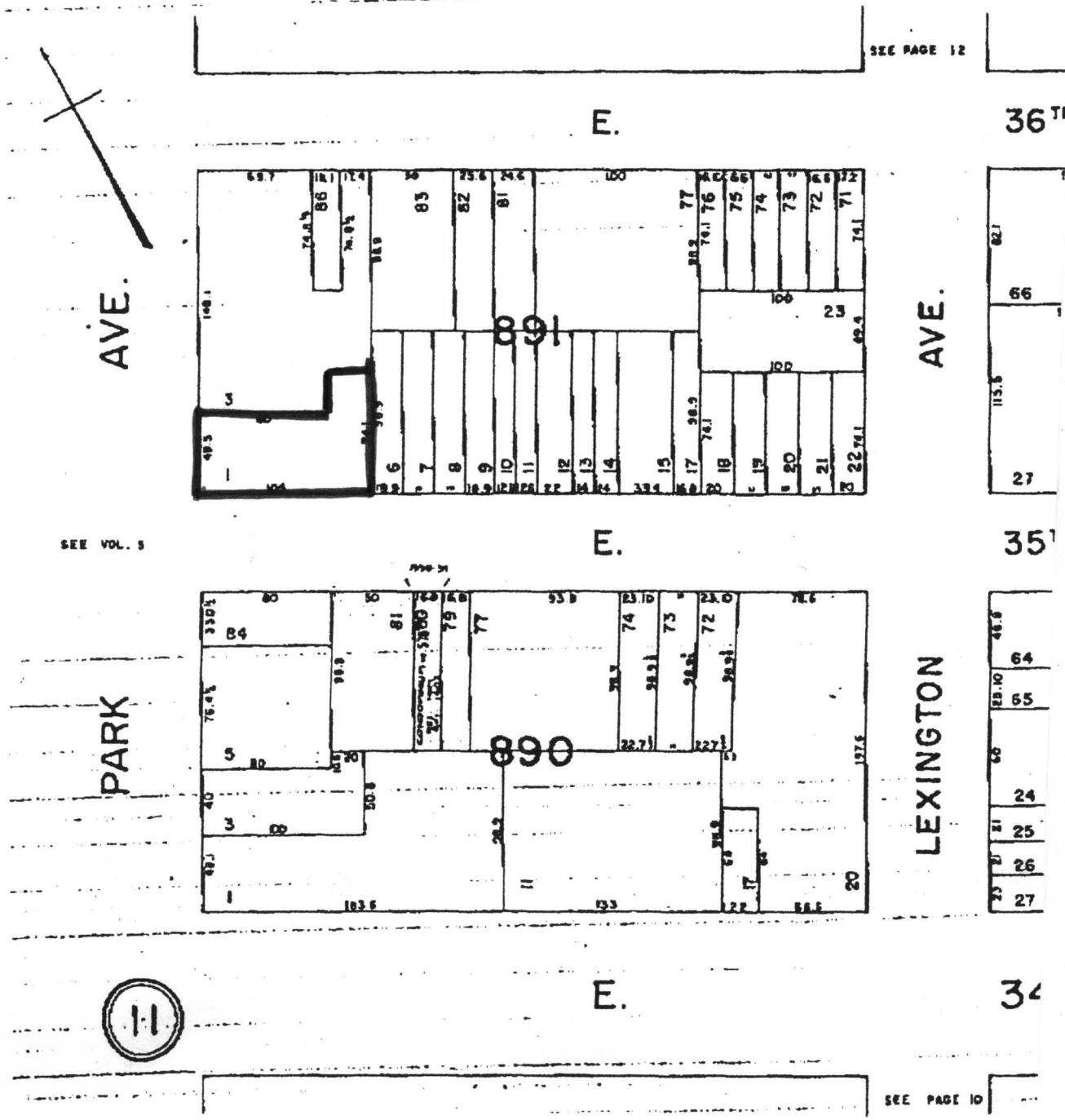
Detail East 35th Street facade showing oriel window and blind third story window  
Photo: Carl Forster



Panel decoration, fifth story, East 35th Street facade  
Photo: Carl Forster



103 East 35th Street Addition  
Photo: Gale Harris



(Former) James Hampden and Cornelia Van Rensselaer Robb House  
 23 Park Avenue (aka 101-103 East 35th Street), Manhattan  
 Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 891, Lot 1  
 Source: Dept. of Finance, City Surveyor, Tax Map



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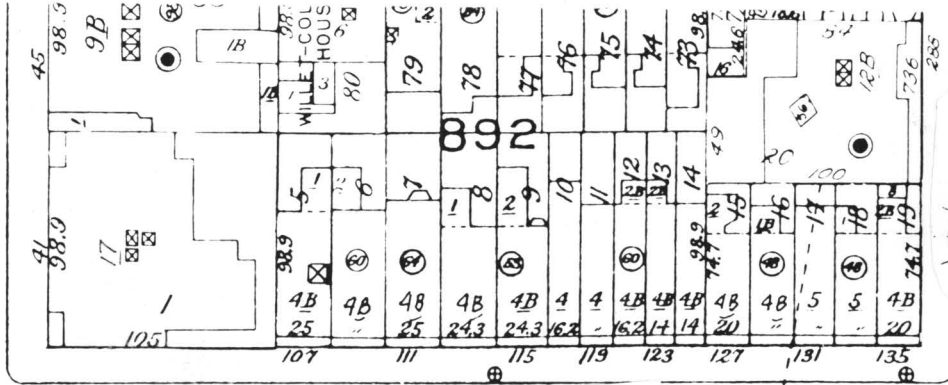
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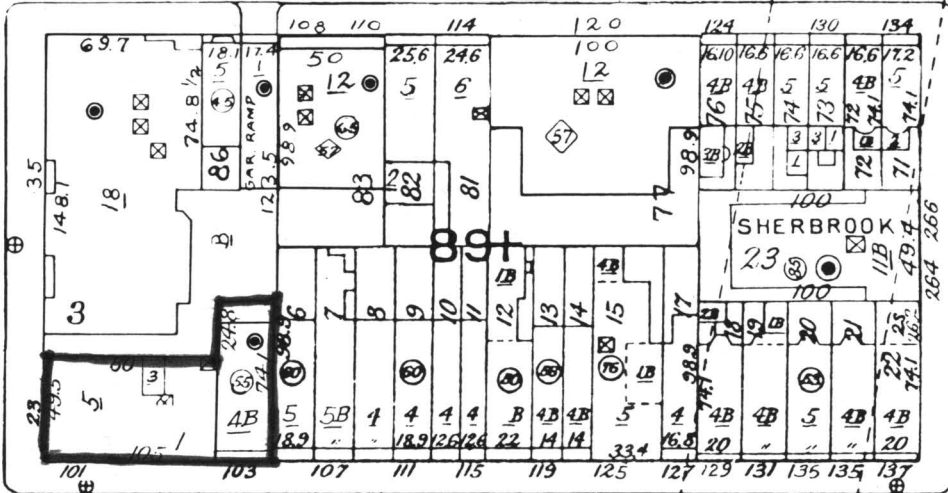
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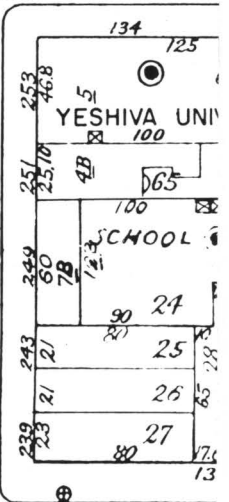
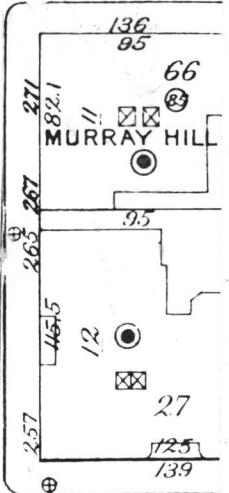
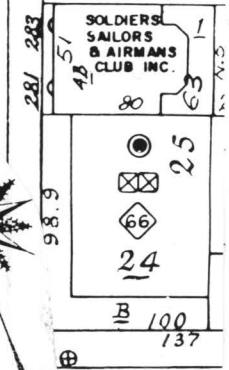
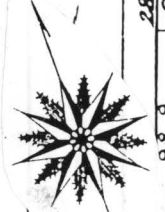
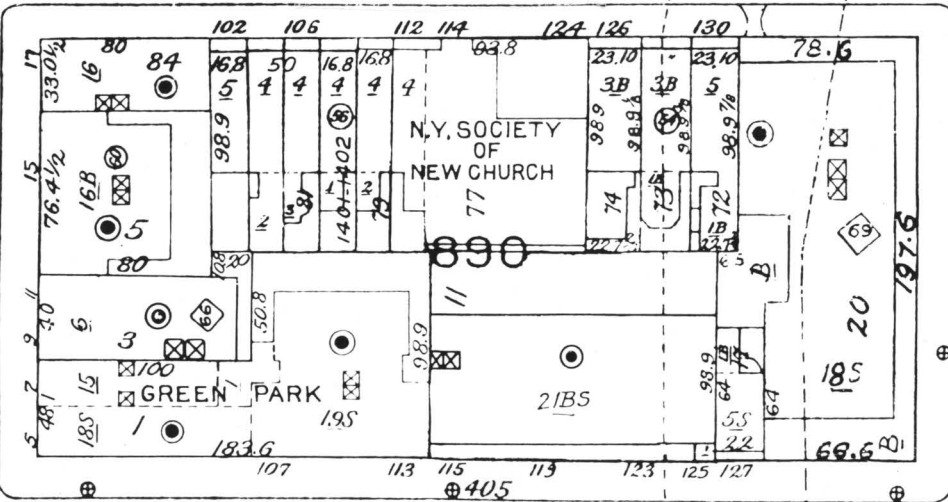
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E. 36TH



E. 35TH



(Former) James Hampden and Cornelia Van Rensselaer Robb House  
 23 Park Avenue (aka 101-103 East 35th Street), Manhattan  
 Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 891, Lot 1  
 Source: Sanborn Manhattan Landbook, 1997-98