WILLIAM and HELEN MARTIN MURPHY ZIEGLER, Jr. HOUSE,

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1309, Lot 65.

On December 19, 2000, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the William and Helen Ziegler, Jr. 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. Six people spoke in favor of designation, including representatives of the Historic Districts Council, New York Landmarks Conservancy, Community Board 5, Association of Neighbors on the Upper East Side, and Historic Neighborhood Enhancement Alliance. A representative of the then owner spoke in opposition to designation (the ownership changed in March 2001). In addition, the Commission received a letter in support of designation from the Municipal Art Society, and many letters in support of the designation of a group of houses in the vicinity that included this house.

Summary

The William and Helen Ziegler, Jr. House was built in 1926-27, at the end of the era of large single-family town houses for the wealthy in Manhattan. It is one of the most distinguished New York City residences by architect William L. Bottomley, who established a reputation as one of the preeminent American architects of neo-Georgian style residences in the 1920s and 30s, often inspired by eighteenth-century Virginia plantation prototypes. William Ziegler, Jr., a prominent businessman, sportsman, and head of several foundations for the blind, moved into this house after his marriage in 1927 to Helen Martin Murphy. East 55th Street, between Park and Lexington Avenues, was one of the fashionable side street blocks of Midtown Manhattan, where older rowhouses were replaced by new town houses or altered with new facades. The Ziegler House, quite substantial at four-and-a-half stories (plus basement) in height and thirty-seven-and-a-half feet in width, has a beautifully detailed, symmetrical three-bay front facade. Bottomley successfully and creatively adapted an elegant neo-Georgian style design to an urban town house. Among its notable features are the Flemish bond brickwork with burnt headers, splayed lintels, and end quoins; the entrance with a bowed-arched pediment; multi-pane wood sash windows and paneled shutters; the modillioned cornice; the steeply-pitched, grey slate-covered roof with dormers and end chimneys; and the wrought-iron fence with brick piers at the sidewalk line. Since William Ziegler’s death in 1958, the house has been used for offices, including those of architects Welton Becket & Associates, the Radio Advertising Bureau, Inc., and Allied Bank International. The Ziegler House is a rare surviving unaltered, revival-style town house in Midtown, an area dominated by tall office buildings.
DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

East 55th Street, between Park and Lexington Avenues

The neighborhood of today's eastern Midtown Manhattan was largely developed after the Civil War. Initially, the area to the east of the railroad tracks running along Park Avenue was considered to be less desirable than that closer to Fifth Avenue, which was where the wealthy moved. East 55th Street, between Park and Lexington Avenues, was developed with speculatively-built rowhouses for the upper-middle class in the late 1870s, following the construction of the Central Synagogue (Congregation Ahavath Chasidah) (1871-72, Henry Fernbach), 652 Lexington Avenue. The covering of the railroad tracks and the construction of Grand Central Terminal (1903-13, Reed & Stem and Warren & Wetmore), at East 42nd Street and Park Avenue, initiated changes in the character of the neighborhood. The vicinity of the terminal was redeveloped with office buildings, while Park Avenue north of the terminal became fashionable for residences and apartment buildings. On the nearby side street blocks, older rowhouses were purchased by very wealthy owners, who hired architects to design new town houses or to alter existing buildings with new facades.

This block of East 55th Street became one of these desirable locations. Prominent residents after the turn of the century included Arthur Bourne, an heir to the Singer Sewing Machine Co. fortune; Arthur W. Butler, an investment banker, broker, and lawyer; Mary H. Cunningham, a well-to-do widow; Elsie deWolfe, interior decorator, and Elisabeth Marbury, theatrical agent; Elizabeth and Martha White, daughters of Horace White, editor of the New York Evening Post; architect William L. Bottomley; William Ziegler, Jr.; and Charles F. Noyes, real estate broker.

William and Helen Martin Murphy Ziegler, Jr.

William Ziegler, Jr. (1891-1958), a prominent businessman, sportsman, and president of several foundations for the blind, was the adopted nephew of the millionaire William Ziegler (1843-1905). The elder Ziegler, born in Pennsylvania to German immigrant parents and raised in Iowa, moved to New York around 1863 and worked for a wholesale drug firm. After studies at the New York School of Pharmacy, he began a bakery supply business in 1868. Venturing solely into baking powder with two partners in 1870, they formed the Royal Chemical Co., which was incorporated as the Royal Baking Powder Co. in 1873. Their product became the most popular brand in the United States for years, making the company highly successful. After disagreements with his partners, however, Ziegler sold his interest in the company in 1888 for three million dollars, and purchased the Price Baking Powder Co. in Chicago and the Tartar Chemical Co. in Jersey City. His companies were later consolidated with Royal and two other firms in 1899 in the “Baking Powder Trust.” Ziegler invested his profits in large-scale real estate holdings in New York City and the metropolitan area, including those in downtown and Fifth and Madison Avenues in Manhattan; Morris Park in the Bronx; Flatbush, New Utrecht, and Sea Gate in Brooklyn; Malba, Flushing, and Corona in Queens; Staten Island; and Linden, New Jersey. He left an immense estate estimated at thirty million dollars at his death.

The day after her husband died in 1905, Electa Matilda Curtis Gamble Ziegler (1841-1932) read a letter in the newspaper written by Walter George Holmes (1861-1946), a visiting Memphis newspaperman. In his letter, Holmes, who had a blind brother, challenged rich benefactors to establish circulating libraries for the blind, since they were isolated from nearly all sources of news and entertainment, and specially-printed books for the blind were beyond the financial reach of most. Mrs. Ziegler, who had a blind son through her first marriage and who had once worked for a national magazine, immediately hired Holmes to start a magazine for the blind. The Matilda Ziegler Magazine for the Blind, the first such general interest periodical and a pioneer in printing for the blind, began publication in March 1907 by the Matilda Ziegler Publishing Co. for the Blind. She also founded the E. Matilda Ziegler Foundation for the Blind in 1928 to issue grants. Both the publication and the foundation are still in operation.

William Ziegler, Jr., born William Conrad Brandt in Iowa, was adopted as a boy by his uncle (his father's half-brother) and his name was changed. He graduated from Columbia and Harvard Universities. As a businessman, he was president of the Royal Baking Powder Co. until its merger into Standard Brands, Inc., in 1929; chairman of the board of the American Maize Products Co., the Huttig Manufacturing Co., the Southworth Management Corp., and the Realty Administration Corp.; and president and director of the Great Island Holding Co., Noroton, Connecticut, and the Park Avenue Operating Co., through which he “played a major part in the development of that thoroughfare,” according to the New York Times. He was quite active in organizations for the blind, continuing his adoptive
mother’s work. He became president of the Matilda Ziegler Publishing Co. for the Blind and the E. Matilda Ziegler Foundation for the Blind after her death, and was also president of the American Foundation for the Blind and the American Foundation for Overseas Blind, as well as a director of the National Industries for the Blind, the Society for the Prevention of Blindness, and the Eye-Bank for Sight Restoration, Inc. After his death, Helen Keller wrote a letter of tribute to the New York Times for his activities in support of the blind. Ziegler was also well known for his sports activities, including yacht racing, show dogs, and breeding, showing, and racing horses.

Ziegler lived in a large neo-Italian Renaissance style house at 2 East 63rd Street (1919, Frederick J. Sterner) until his divorce from his first wife, Gladys. In 1927, he married Helen Martin Murphy, with whom he moved to 116-118 East 55th Street (1926-27, William L. Bottomley). Ziegler died in this house in 1958. Bottomley also designed the Zieglers’ “Burrland Hall” (c. 1927-29, demolished), and its estate buildings, located in the hunt country near Middleburg, Virginia. Burrland Farm became one of the best known thoroughbred horse farms on the East Coast.

The Architect: William L. Bottomley

Born in New York City to an affluent Irish family, William Lawrence Bottomley (1883-1951) graduated from Columbia University with a degree in architecture (1906). He began his architectural career in the firm of Heins & LaFarge in New York, then in Albany in the office of the state architect. Awarded the McKim Fellowship, he studied at the American Academy in Rome (1907-08), followed by the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris (1908-09). In 1909, he married Harriet Townsend, an architectural writer whose father’s family was from Virginia. Returning to practice in New York around 1909, he established a partnership, [Edward Shepard] Hewitt & Bottomley, which lasted from 1912 to 1919.

Bottomley was responsible for the design of a number of Colonial Revival style public buildings, including high schools in Port Chester, Malvern (with Laurence F. Peck), and Southampton (1912, later Town Hall), New York, and the Municipal Building (c. 1917, with Peck), Plainfield, New Jersey. With Edward C. Dean, in 1919-20 he renovatd and re-designed the twenty houses, at 227-245 East 48th Street and 226-246 East 49th Street, that had been acquired by Charlotte Martin. This development, dubbed Turtle Bay Gardens, featured a combined rear-yard garden and is today a designated New York City Historic District. With James L. Mills and Arthur Paul Hess, Bottomley designed the apartment house at 1049 Park Avenue in 1921. That year, he received an award from the New York chapter of the American Institute of Architects for apartment house design.

An eclectic designer, Bottomley mostly employed variations of the neo-Classical idiom, but established a reputation as one of the preeminent American architects of neo-Georgian style residences in the 1920s and 30s. While his office was always in New York City, he received country and urban house commissions all along the East Coast and in the South, as far west as Texas. Among his notable residences are a number in Richmond, Virginia, and on Long Island. It is thought that his interest in the eighteenth-century plantation houses of Virginia, which he used as precedents for many of his designs, began through acquaintance with the state as a result of visits to his wife’s family. Bottomley also designed town houses in New York City, a number of which (all remodelings of older rowhouses from 1922 to 1940) are found in the Upper East Side and Expanded Carnegie Hill Historic Districts. The William and Helen Ziegler, Jr. House (1926-27) is one of the most distinguished of his New York City town houses. This house was one lot away from a town house at 112 East 55th Street that had been in the Bottomley family since 1912, and that was conveyed to Harriet Bottomley in 1920 and owned by them until 1942; his architectural office was located here, as listed in directories, in 1924-25 and 1937-40.

From 1928 to the early 1930s, he was a partner in Bottomley, [William Sidney] Wagner, & [A.J.] White, whose most prominent commission in New York was the twenty-six-story River House (1931-32), a luxury apartment building at 435 East 52nd Street. Bottomley was active in the formation of the Architects’ Emergency Committee, which provided employment to architects during the Depression through documentation of historic buildings, and chaired its editorial committee that published the two-volume Great Georgian Houses of America (1933 and 1937). Bottomley was awarded the silver Medal of Honor of the Architectural League of New York (1934) for “masterly accomplishments in the preservation of a precious phase of our architectural heritage and the skillful keeping alive of this noble style in the solutions of modern problems.”

The Ziegler House

Two older rowhouses at 116 and 118 East 55th Street were acquired in August 1926 by William Ziegler, Jr., through the Park Avenue Operating Co. (the property was officially conveyed by the company
to Ziegler in 1939). After demolition of the existing buildings, construction of the new house began in October 1926. It was completed in November 1927. Built at the end of the era of large single-family town houses for the wealthy in Manhattan, the house is quite substantial at four-and-a-half stories (plus basement) in height and thirty-seven-and-a-half feet in width. Bottomley successfully adapted an elegant neo-Georgian style design to a New York City town house, while taking subtle creative liberties with some of the motifs. The symmetrical three-bay front facade is beautifully detailed. Among its notable features are the brownish brickwork laid in Flemish bond with burnt headers, splayed lintels, and end quoins; the central ground-story entrance with a bowed-arched pediment; multi-pane wood sash windows and paneled kalamein shutters; the modillioned cornice; the one-and-a-half-story, steeply-pitched, grey slate-covered central ground-story entrance with a bowed-arched pediment; multi-pane wood sash windows and paneled burnt headers, splayed lintels, and end quoins; the three small semi-circular windows, and brick end chimneys; and the wrought-iron fence with gates and brick piers capped by eagles and globes, at the sidewalk line.

The original interior arrangement of the house consisted of reception and stair halls, kitchen and servants quarters on the ground story; the dining room, library, and a rear terrace on the second story; guest bedrooms on the third story; the master bedroom and sitting room on the fourth story; and the children's rooms on the top story.

The Ziegler House, and particularly its lavish neo-Georgian style interiors, was featured in an article in the Architectural Forum in August 1928. The author, Matlack Price, found it definitely American in its major characteristics, with a certain cosmopolitan urbanity in the whole manner of its rendering. ... In these days when so many of the younger architects are spurning and discarding all use of precedent in their designs, it is both gratifying and reassuring to find one of our foremost younger architects using Georgian precedent with such complete success. ... This house of Mr. Ziegler's shows unusual originality and inspiration. It is a perfect example of the way architectural precedent should be studied and adapted to modern requirements. 14

Later History 15

The later history of the Ziegler House followed the general pattern found on the block: after single-family occupancy, these houses were converted to apartment buildings or to commercial use. Following William Ziegler's death in 1958, the house was sold to Welton D. Becket and served as the New York office of Welton Becket & Associates. One of the largest American architectural firms, with offices also in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Houston, the firm was the successor in 1949 to [Walter] Wurdeman & Becket, itself the successor in 1938 to [Charles F.] Plummer, Wurdeman & Becket, formed in 1932. Welton Davis Becket (1902-1969), born in Seattle, studied at the University of Washington and the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Wurdeman & Becket was particularly noted for the famous Pan Pacific Auditorium (1935, demolished), Los Angeles. Welton Becket & Associates is known for the Beverly Hilton Hotel (1955-56), Beverly Hills; Capitol Records Building (1954-56), Hollywood; Havana Hilton Hotel (1959), Cuba; Los Angeles Music Center (1964-69), including the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion and Mark Taper Forum; and the General Electric and Ford Motor Co. Pavilions (1964), New York World’s Fair.

In 1962, the property was acquired by the Radio Advertising Bureau, Inc. Established in 1950 as the Broadcast Advertisers Bureau, it was a national trade organization promoting radio for local and national advertising. The name was changed in 1955 to distinguish it from television. The Bureau collected notable radio advertisements from around the United States, mainly between 1954 and 1968, to showcase their potential. This later became the Radio Advertising Bureau Collection of the Library of American Broadcasting, University of Maryland. In the mid-1960s, the Radio Advertising Bureau became the partner of the Clio Awards for recognition of each year’s best radio advertisements.

This building was the headquarters of Allied Bank International from 1969 to 1986. It was then owned by Ancla Investments, a subsidiary of Banco Bilbao Vizcaya, until its purchase in March 2001 by the Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association. The Ziegler House is a rare surviving, unaltered, large revival-style town house in the East 50s in Midtown, an area dominated by tall office buildings.

Description

The neo-Georgian style Ziegler House has a symmetrical three-bay front facade. It is four-and-a-half stories (plus basement) in height, and thirty-seven-and-a-half feet in width. The three lower stories are clad in brownish brick laid in Flemish bond with burnt headers. There are brick quoins at both ends. All windows have splayed brick lintels with ornamental keystones (including Tudor rose, fleur-de-lis, thistle, and horse head designs) and multi-pane wood sash (six-over-nine double-hung on the ground story; eight-
over-eight-over-eight triple-hung on the second story; and twelve-over-twelve double-hung on the third story). Each paneled kalamein shutter has a perforated star motif and an S-shaped metal clasp.

The house is set back from the lot line. Along the sidewalk is a wrought-iron fence, set on a molded brick base, with gates and six brick piers, capped by eagles on globes on the central ones and by globes on the outer four. The areaway has flagstone paving, stone entrance threshold, and two metal grilles at the east end. The central ground-story entrance, originally with a paneled wooden door and currently with a wrought-iron and glass door, has a wooden surround with a bowed-arched pediment (within which is a panel with the number "116") supported by a keystone and by brackets above fluted pilasters. The entrance is flanked by metal light fixtures set on curved iron brackets. The three ground-story windows have wrought-iron grilles. There is a western service entrance with a door that has wood panels on the lower half and a glass panel with decorative wrought iron on the upper half; the transom is currently filled with a louver. The ground and second stories are capped by brick band courses. Two iron flagpoles flank the central window on the second story. The third story is surmounted by a modillioned cornice.

The one-and-a-half-story, steeply-pitched, grey slate-covered roof has three dormers with double-hung wood sash windows (the round-arched upper sash has Gothic muntins above six panes; the lower sash has nine panes) and three small semi-circular windows with Gothic muntins. The brick end chimneys are paneled and corbeled; the eastern one has ventilating pipes. The western party wall has non-historic metal flashing. The roof is capped by a non-historic metal pipe railing. The elevator bulkhead is visible on the western side.

Report prepared by
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NOTES


2. Central Synagogue is a designated New York City Landmark.

3. Grand Central Terminal is a designated New York City Landmark and Interior Landmark.

4. Arthur Bourne lived at No. 117 (1905-06, Pickering & Walker); Arthur W. Butler was at No. 120 (1907-08, Lord & Hewlett); Mary H. Cunningham was at No. 124 (1909, Albro & Lindeberg); Elsie deWolfe and Elisabeth Marbury were at No. 123 (1911, demolished); Elizabeth and Martha White were at No. 115 (1919, F.B. & A. Ware); William L. Bottomley was at No. 112 (c. 1920, demolished); and Charles F. Noyes was at No. 119 (1934, Aymar Embury II). The Cunningham House is a designated New York City Landmark.


8. This house is located within the Upper East Side Historic District. It was published in “House of William Ziegler, Jr.,” American Architect, Jan. 3, 1923.


10. One was a new facade (1924) for a town house at 34-36 East 70th Street for James P. Warburg, son of financier Paul M. Warburg.


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 William and Helen Ziegler, Jr. House has a special character and a 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 William and Helen Ziegler, Jr. House was built in 1926-27, at the end of the era of large single-family town houses for the wealthy in Manhattan; that it is one of the most distinguished New York City residences by architect William L. Bottomley, who established a reputation as one of the preeminent American architects of neo-Georgian style residences in the 1920s and 30s, often inspired by eighteenth-century Virginia plantation prototypes; that Bottomley successfully and creatively adapted an elegant neo-Georgian style design to this New York City town house; that, quite substantial at four-and-a-half stories (plus basement) in height and thirty-seven-and-a-half feet in width, the Ziegler House has a beautifully detailed, symmetrical three-bay front facade and that, among its notable features, are the Flemish bond brickwork with burnt headers, splayed lintels, and end quoins, the entrance with a bowed-arched pediment, multi-pane wood sash windows and paneled shutters, the modillioned cornice, the steeply-pitched, grey slate-covered roof with dormers and end chimneys, and the wrought-iron fence with brick piers at the sidewalk line; that William Ziegler, Jr., a prominent businessman, sportsman, and head of several foundations for the blind, moved into this house after his marriage in 1927 to Helen Martin Murphy; that, after the turn of the century, East 55th Street, between Park and Lexington Avenues, was one of the fashionable side street blocks of Midtown Manhattan, where older rowhouses were replaced by new town houses or altered with new facades; that, since William Ziegler’s death in 1958, the house has been used for offices, including those of architects Welton Becket & Associates, the Radio Advertising Bureau, Inc., and Allied Bank International; and that the Ziegler House is a rare surviving unaltered, revival-style town house in Midtown, an area dominated by tall office buildings.

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 William and Helen Ziegler, Jr. House, 116-118 East 55th Street, Borough of Manhattan, and designates Manhattan Tax Map Block 1309, Lot 65, as its Landmark Site.
William and Helen Martin Murphy Ziegler, Jr. House

Source: Architectural Forum (August 1928)
William and Helen Martin Murphy Ziegler, Jr. House
Photo: Carl Forster
William and Helen Martin Murphy Ziegler, Jr. House
(upper) third story and roof
(lower) entrance
Photos: Carl Forster
William and Helen Martin Murphy Ziegler, Jr. House
Source: Sanborn, Manhattan Land Book (1999-2000), pl. 84
William and Helen Martin Murphy Ziegler, Jr. House
Landmark Site: Manhattan Tax Map Block 1309, Lot 65
Source: Dept. of Finance, City Surveyor, Tax Map