

MARY HALE CUNNINGHAM HOUSE, 124 East 55th Street, Manhattan. Built 1880-81; new facade and front extension, 1909, Harrie T. Lindeberg, of Albro & Lindeberg, architect.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1309, Lot 62.

On December 19, 2000, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Mary Hale Cunningham House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 2). 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. In addition, the Commission received letters in support of designation from a representative of the owner and 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 Mary Hale Cunningham House resulted from the 1909 remodeling, with a front extension, of a French Flats building originally constructed in 1880-81. The new facade was designed by Harrie T. Lindeberg, of the firm of Albro & Lindeberg, who was one of the leading American specialists in large revival-style country houses in the first half of the twentieth century. Mary Hale Cunningham was the widow of James Cunningham, a partner until his death in 1890 in the successful San Francisco firm of Cunningham, Curtiss, & Welch, importers, jobbers, book publishers, and stationers. Sometime before 1905, Mary Cunningham moved to New York City, where she had family and financial interests, and later commissioned this house for her family and servants. East 55th Street, between Park and Lexington Avenues, was one of the fashionable side street blocks of Midtown Manhattan, where older rowhouses and multiple dwellings were replaced by new town houses or altered with new facades. The Cunningham House, four stories (plus basement) in height and twenty-five feet in width, is clad in rough-faced purplish brick with limestone-colored terra-cotta trim above a marble base. The abstracted neo-Tudor style facade features a ground-story enframingent with paired fluted Doric pilasters; a monumental keyed enframingent on the second and third stories, capped by a drip molding, with long, narrow windows with multi-pane sash and ornamental terra-cotta spandrel panels; a fourth-story band of windows; a brick gable flanked by crenels; and wrought-iron railings. From at least 1925 to 1941, this was the home of real estate investor-broker Richard Collins and his wife, Harriet de Raismes Cutting, an interior decorator. From 1941 to 1978, it was the noted antiques gallery of the firm founded in 1906 by Arthur S. Vernay, later known as Vernay & Jussel, specialists in fine English furniture and art. The Cunningham House is an unusual example of a neo-Tudor style town house and 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 Avenues¹

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 Chesed)(1871-72, Henry Fernbach), 652 Lexington Avenue.² The covering of the railroad tracks and the construction of Grand Central Terminal (1903-13, Reed & Stem and Warren & Wetmore),³ 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 and multiple dwellings 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; 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., a prominent businessman, sportsman, and head of several foundations for the blind; and Charles F. Noyes, real estate broker.⁴

Mary H. Cunningham and Her Family⁵

Mary Hale Cunningham (c. 1856-1923) was the well-to-do widow of James Cunningham. Her husband, born in New York (presumably City), was by the 1880s a partner in the successful San Francisco firm of Cunningham, [Edward B.] Curtiss, & [Samuel B.] Welch, importers, jobbers, book publishers, and stationers. Mary Hale was born in Michigan to parents both born in New York State. James Cunningham died in November 1890, leaving Mary with children aged seven, five, three, and another born the following

year. His "large estate," much of which was left to her and to a trust for the children, consisted of interests and real estate in New York (including in Greenpoint, Brooklyn)⁶ and in California, as well as his interest in Cunningham, Curtiss, & Welch.

Mary Cunningham continued to live in San Francisco until about 1901. She and her family moved to New York City. It appears that among the reasons for the move were the presence in New York of members of her and her late husband's families, financial interests, and the fact that her children attended East Coast schools. New York City directories list a "Mary Cunningham, widow of James" in 1902, but it is unknown if this is the same woman. Mary Hale Cunningham is listed residing at 381 West End Avenue around 1905-07, and at 24 East 74th Street around 1907-09. She commissioned a town house for her family, at 124 East 55th Street, in 1909. The 1910 census lists Mary Cunningham and her four children, her elderly sister Susan Hale, and four servants in this residence.

By 1922, Mary Cunningham had returned to San Francisco, and filed a will there that year. In January 1923, she died in New Haven, Connecticut.⁷ This house was left to her children, but her estate was not settled until 1929. Her son, James Cunningham (born c. 1883), attended Yale and Harvard Universities, studying law. He married a widow, Marjorie Wilder English, in 1927, and resided in New York City and Farmingdale, Long Island. Her eldest daughter, Sara M. Cunningham (1885-1972), attended Rosemary Hall in Greenwich, Connecticut, and the Briarcliff School. In 1922, Sara married Cornelius van Hemert Engert (1887-1985), a diplomat born in Vienna and raised in California. The Engerts served in Havana, San Salvador, Santiago, Caracas, Peking, Cairo, Teheran, and Beirut. Sara was recognized for her service, which included volunteer nursing in France in World War I and in Afghanistan in World War II, and the defense of the U.S. legation from attack in 1936 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The Engerts lived in Washington, D.C., after 1946. Her sister, Mary Hale Cunningham (born c. 1887), married Murray Sargent (1884-1974) in 1913. Sargent worked for his family's firm, Sargent & Co., hardware manufacturers in New Haven, Connecticut, and was executive administrator of New York Hospital (1934-48). The youngest daughter, Elizabeth T. Cunningham (1891-1978), also attended Rosemary Hall. She married Willard Cole

Rapplee (1892-1976), who became dean of the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons, and was called by the *New York Times* “the guiding spirit in the growth and development” of Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center.⁸ Elizabeth Rapplee, active in philanthropy, directed Everybody’s Thrift Shop for thirty years.

The Cunningham House⁹

In March 1907, Mary Hale Cunningham acquired a rowhouse at 118 East 55th Street, but sold it in June, and a week later purchased a brownstone-clad French Flats building at 124 East 55th Street. This building, abutting the Central Synagogue, had been built in 1880-81 to the design of architects Thom & Wilson for Jane Jacobs, who developed a number of properties on this block. Mary Cunningham hired architects Albro & Lindeberg to alter the flats building by extending the front sixteen feet and designing a new neo-Tudor style facade, at an estimated cost of \$20,000. Construction began in June 1909 and was completed at the end of December. The design of the facade of the Cunningham House is similar in arrangement to that of the Edward T. Cockcroft House (1907, Albro & Lindeberg), 59 East 77th Street,¹⁰ which was just three blocks away from where Mary Cunningham was then a resident, at 24 East 74th Street. The Cockcroft House, also a remodeling of an older house, but in a style that combined elements of the neo-Classical and Arts and Crafts styles, featured a tripartite ground story with a central entrance, a large window grouping on the second and third stories, and a band of windows on the fourth story.

The Cunningham House is four stories (plus basement) in height and twenty-five feet in width. The neo-Tudor style has been employed here in an abstracted manner and mixed with neo-Classical elements. The house is clad in rough-faced purplish brick with limestone-colored terra-cotta trim above a white marble base. The ground story features an enframingent with paired fluted Doric pilasters and end keys, flanking a central entrance, that supports an entablature that is capped by a wrought-iron balcony railing. The steps and areaway are bordered by wrought-iron railings. The second and third stories have a monumental keyed enframingent, capped by a drip molding, and long, narrow windows with multi-pane sash and transoms. The spandrel has terra-cotta panels ornamented with diamond and foliate motifs. The fourth story has a band of six windows above a band course and wrought-iron railing. The building is terminated by a brick gable, which is flanked by

crenels.

The original interior arrangement of the house consisted of a reception hall, dining room and butler’s pantry on the first story; drawing room and library on the second story; and Mrs. Cunningham’s and three other bedrooms and a sewing room on the third story. A photograph of the house and floor plans were published in the *American Architect & Building News* in May 1910. A photograph was also featured in the *Real Estate Record & Guide* in September 1911. The Cunningham House is an unusual example of a neo-Tudor style town house in New York City.

The Architects: Albro & Lindeberg¹¹

Harrie Thomas Lindeberg (1880-1959) established a reputation as one of the leading American specialists in the design of revival-style country houses for the very wealthy, throughout the United States, in the first half of the twentieth century. He is credited with the design of over one hundred country houses, many suburban houses, and a number of public and commercial buildings. Born in Bergen Point (Bayonne), New Jersey, he was the son of Swedish immigrants. He studied at the National Academy of Design in New York between 1898 and 1901, and then worked for the firm of McKim, Mead & White from 1901 to 1906. One of that firm’s projects on which he served as assistant was “The Orchard” (1898-1907), the house of stockbroker James L. Breese in Southampton, New York, which was inspired by George Washington’s Mount Vernon. In 1906, Lindeberg formed a partnership with Lewis Colt Albro, with whom he had worked at McKim, Mead & White. Albro (1876-1924), born in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, attended the Metropolitan Museum’s Art School in New York around 1894, then entered the office of McKim, Mead & White around 1896, working as a draftsman until his promotion to designer. During his nine years with the firm, he was associated with the design of Low Library and other buildings at Columbia University, as well as the neo-Federal style Charles Dana Gibson House (1902-03), 127 East 73rd Street.¹² Through this latter connection, Albro received his first independent commission, the Gibson House in Newport, Rhode Island.

Albro & Lindeberg were in partnership until 1914, executing mostly residential commissions. Lindeberg was the head designer in the firm, while Albro mostly oversaw the business and construction details, and used his social connections to provide the firm with clients. One of their first projects was the North College Building on the campus of Wesleyan

University, Middletown, Connecticut. Influential in establishing the firm's success with country houses were two early commissions: "Mondeanne" (1907), the estate of James A. Stillman, the president of National City Bank, in Pocantico Hills, New York, and "Foxhollow Farm" (1909), for Tracy Dows and his wife, a descendant of the Livingston family, in Rhinebeck, New York. Albro & Lindeberg was responsible for at least nine large country residences on Long Island, as well as suburban homes in Westchester County, New York, and Short Hills and other enclaves in New Jersey. Many of Lindeberg's designs reflect the English vernacular or cottage style, some employing "thatched" roofs, or were derived from American Colonial buildings. The firm also received a number of commissions for town houses in Manhattan.

Lindeberg continued to design country houses until his death, for such prominent clients as the Armours, Pillsburys, Havemeyers, and DuPonts, including many on Long Island. Some of his residential designs displayed the direct influence of the English architects Edwin Lutyens and Charles F.A. Voysey. He later became an architectural consultant for the U.S. State Department for buildings in locations such as Helsingfors, Shanghai, and Managua. Albro also practiced until his death, specializing in country houses and estate buildings.

Later History¹³

In 1922, after Mary Cunningham had moved to San Francisco, she filed for the interior alteration, apparently for the creation of apartments, of her house on East 55th Street in New York. After her death in 1923, her children rented the house (by 1925) to Richard Collins and his wife, Harriet de Raismes Cutting. The property was sold to Collins and Cutting in 1930. Collins (d. 1938), descendant of an old English Quaker family with ties to John Bowne of Flushing, was a prominent real estate investor and broker. He worked for the firm of William F. Dennison & Co. and later was a partner with his brother, Minturn Post Collins, in the firm of Collins & Collins, which was active in real estate along Fifth, Madison, and Lexington Avenues, from roughly 34th through 95th Streets. According to directories, although Collins and Cutting lived here, the building was also occupied by another three to five residents. Ms. Cutting operated an interior decoration studio in the building.

In 1941, Harriet Cutting sold the building to Begon, Inc., which used it as the showroom of the

antiques business founded by Arthur S. Vernay. Arthur Stannard Vernay (c. 1877-1960), born in England, was known in the 1920s and 30s as a big game hunter employed by the American Museum of Natural History. His antiques gallery, established in 1906, had been located at 12 East 44th Street and 19 East 54th Street. Vernay sold the business in 1941 to his three senior employees, Stephen J. Jussel, J. Gordon Irving, and J.L. van den Broek (Begon, Inc.). In 1952, the property at 124 East 55th Street was conveyed to Arthur S. Vernay, Inc. The gallery continued under the ownership of Stephen J. Jussel (who had been with the firm since 1928), becoming one of the oldest American antiques businesses specializing in fine English furniture and art. After 1972, his son, Chris Jussel, headed and owned the firm.¹⁴ Vernay & Jussel (as it was named in 1977) moved to Madison Avenue in 1978, and was dissolved in 1994. Jussel leased this building to Banco de Chile in 1981, and the bank purchased it in 1986. In 2000, it was acquired by Alpha Property Holdings. The Cunningham House is a rare surviving unaltered, revival-style town house in Midtown, an area dominated by tall office buildings.

Description

The neo-Tudor style Cunningham House is four stories (plus basement) in height and twenty-five feet in width. The house is clad in rough-faced purplish brick laid in all-stretcher bond (except at the edges), with limestone-colored terra-cotta trim, above a white marble base. The ground story features a neo-Classical enframing with paired fluted Doric pilasters and end keys, flanking a central entrance and windows (with transoms), that supports a bracketed entablature that is capped by a wrought-iron balcony railing. The windows and transoms were originally multi-pane but are currently single-pane. The entrance has double wooden doors with panels (ornamented with diamond motifs) and a transom, and is flanked by metal bracket light fixtures. The white marble steps and areaway are bordered by wrought-iron railings, fence (which is set on a stone border), and gates. The areaway is covered by metal mesh grilles. There are also similar grilles over openings on the base of the building and the sides of the stoop. Metal stairs on the east side lead to a metal door at the basement level. The second and third stories have a monumental keyed enframing, capped by a drip molding, and six long, narrow windows with six-over-eight and four-over-six double-hung wood sash and four-pane transoms. The spandrel has terra-cotta panels ornamented with

diamond and foliate motifs. Above the spandrel are two metal flagpoles. The fourth story has a band of six windows with a keyed enframing and four-over-six double-hung wood sash above a band course and wrought-iron railing. The building is terminated by a terra-cotta-coped brick gable, which is flanked by crenels.

Report prepared by
JAY SHOCKLEY
Research Department

NOTES

1. Andrew S. Dolkart, "East 54th-55th Streets Historic District, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form" (1999).
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); 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); William Ziegler, Jr., was at No. 116-118 (1926-27, William L. Bottomley); and Charles F. Noyes was at No. 119 (1934, Aymar Embury II). The Ziegler House is a designated New York City Landmark.
5. "A Large Estate: James Cunningham's Will Filed for Probate," *San Francisco Morning Call*, Nov. 14, 1890, 3; *San Francisco Directories* (1888-1904); *New York Directories* (1901-20); *Dau's Greater New York Blue Book* (N.Y.: Dau Publg. Co.)(1907-19); New York City Census (1910), enumeration district 1131, sheet 12A, 124 East 55th Street; *Social Register San Francisco* (N.Y. Social Register Assn.)(1918-21); *Social Register New York* (N.Y. Social Register Assn.)(1915, 1925, 1935); New York County, Office of the Surrogate, Mary H. Cunningham will (1929), liber 1411, pages 30-45; "Mrs. English Weds James Cunningham," *New York Times (NYT)*, Aug. 2, 1927, 18; Sara Cunningham Engert obit., *NYT*, July 28, 1974, 34; Murray Sargent obit., *NYT*, Oct. 22, 1974, 44; Elizabeth Cunningham Rappleye obit., *NYT*, Feb. 28, 1978, 36.
6. Some of his property had been inherited from Frank G. Cunningham, likely his father.
7. This was most likely while visiting her daughter Mary, who lived in New Haven.
8. Rappleye obit.
9. New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances; New York City, Dept. of Buildings, Manhattan, Plans, Permits and Dockets (NB 725-1880, Alt. 1231-1909, and Alt. 1561-1922); "House, No. 124 East 55th St., New York," *American Architect & Building News*, May 4, 1910; *Real Estate Record & Guide*, Sept. 16, 1911, 383.

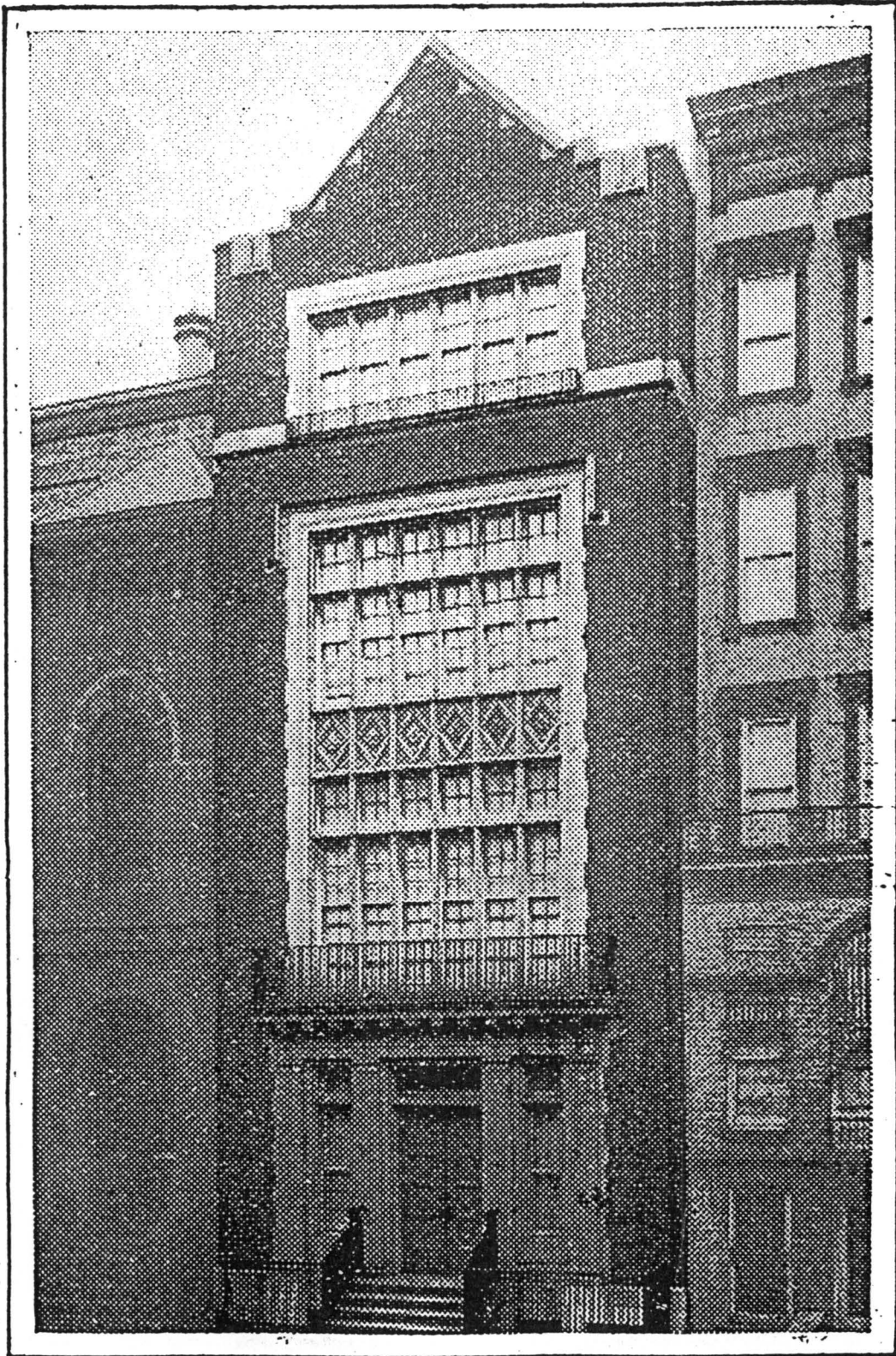
10. This house is included within the Upper East Side Historic District. It was published in *American Architect & Building News*, Oct. 14, 1908. See also: Robert A.M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, and John Massengale, *New York 1900* (N.Y.: Rizzoli, 1983), 348.
11. Lindeberg obit., *NYT*, Jan. 11, 1959, 88; "Harrie Thomas Lindeberg," *Who's Who in America* (Chicago: A.N. Marquis Co.)(1930-60); Mark A. Hewitt, "Harrie Thomas Lindeberg," in *The Architect and the American Country House, 1890-1940* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Pr., 1990), 279; *Domestic Architecture of H.T. Lindeberg* (N.Y. Acanthus Pr., 1996), reprint of 1940 edition with new introduction by Hewitt; Robert B. MacKay, Anthony Baker, and Carol A. Traynor, *Long Island Country Houses and Their Architects, 1860-1940* (N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Co., 1997); *East Hampton's Heritage: An Illustrated Architectural Record*, ed. Robert J. Hafner (N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Co., 1982); John Zukowsky, *Hudson River Villas* (N.Y.: Rizzoli, 1985); "Lewis Colt Albro," *Dictionary of American Biography* 1 (N.Y.: Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1958), 137; "Illustrations: the Work of Messrs. Albro & Lindeberg," *American Architect & Building News*, Oct. 14, 1908, and Apr. 7, 1909; "Two Houses by Albro & Lindeberg," *Architectural Record* (Oct. 1910); "Two Houses of Individuality," *Architectural Record* (Oct. 1911); "Five Recent Country Houses by Albro & Lindeberg," *Architectural Record* (Oct. 1912); C. Matlack Price, "The Recent Work of Albro & Lindeberg," *Architecture* (Jan. 1915); Russell J. Whitehead, "Harrie T. Lindeberg's Contribution to American Domestic Architecture," *Architectural Record* (Apr. 1924); Price, "The New Spirit in Country House Design," *House Beautiful* (Feb. 1925).
12. Low Library is a designated New York City Landmark and Interior Landmark. The Gibson House is located within the Upper East Side Historic District.
13. New York County, Register; *Manhattan Address Directory* (1929-50); *Social Register New York* (1925, 1935); *New York Directories* (1925, 1933); Richard Collins obit., *NYT*, Dec. 12, 1938, 19; *Real Estate Record & Guide*, Feb. 1, 1941, 38; Vernay obit., *NYT*, Oct. 26, 1960, 39; "An Interview with Chris Jussel," www.pbs.org website; "Chris Jussel Joins Sothebys," www.shareholder.com website; Telephone interview with Chris Jussel, Apr. 2001; "For Tudor Fanciers: E. 55th Street Offering," *NYT*, Nov. 23, 1986, VIII, 1; Christopher Gray, "Amid Midtown Canyons, 8 Picturesque Town Houses," *NYT*, Dec. 27, 1998, II, 7; "Landmark Status is Sought for 'Bastions of Elegance'," *NYT*, Feb. 6, 2000; "Landmarkers and Owners At Odds Over Town Houses," *NYT*, May 14, 2000; "TIAA-CREF to Save Townhouses," *New York Post*, Apr. 17, 2001, www.nypost.com website..
14. Chris Jussel later, from 1996 to 2001, was host of the popular "Antiques Roadshow" on television.

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 Mary Hale Cunningham 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.

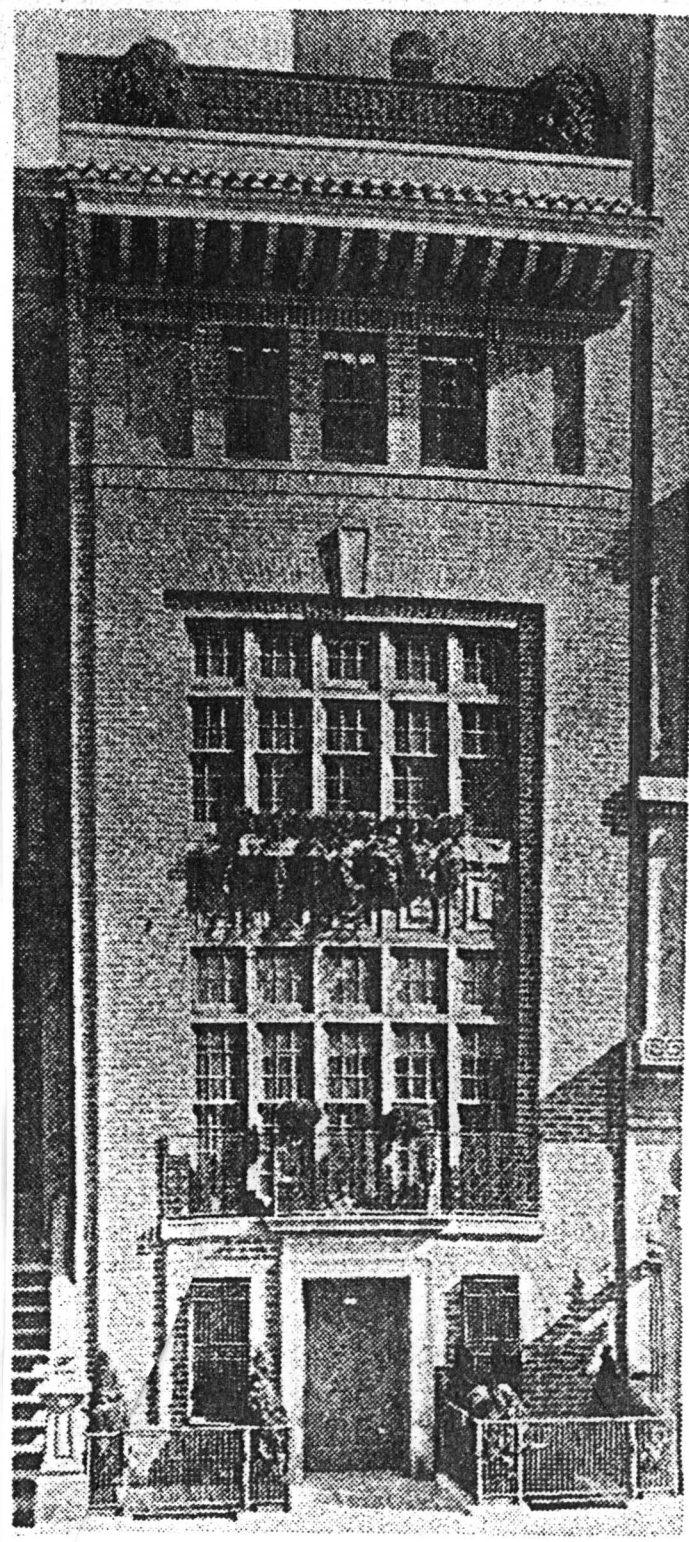
The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Mary Hale Cunningham House resulted from the 1909 remodeling, with a front extension, of a French Flats building originally constructed in 1880-81; that the new facade was designed by Harrie T. Lindeberg, of the firm of Albro & Lindeberg, who was one of the leading American specialists in large revival-style country houses in the first half of the twentieth century; that, by 1905, Mary Hale Cunningham, the widow of James Cunningham, a partner until his death in 1890 in the successful San Francisco firm of Cunningham, Curtiss, & Welch, importers, jobbers, book publishers, and stationers, moved to New York City, where she had family and financial interests, and later commissioned this house for her family and servants; that the Cunningham House, designed in an abstracted neo-Tudor style, is four stories (plus basement) in height and twenty-five feet in width, is clad in rough-faced purplish brick with limestone-colored terra-cotta trim above a marble base, and features a ground-story enframingent with paired fluted Doric pilasters, a monumental keyed enframingent on the second and third stories, capped by a drip molding, with long, narrow windows with multi-pane sash and ornamental terra-cotta spandrel panels, a fourth-story band of windows, a brick gable flanked by crenels, and wrought-iron railings; 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 and multiple dwellings were replaced by new town houses or altered with new facades; that, from at least 1925 to 1941, this was the home of real estate investor-broker Richard Collins and his wife, Harriet de Raismes Cutting, an interior decorator; that, from 1941 to 1978, it was the noted antiques gallery of the firm founded in 1906 by Arthur S. Vernay, later known as Vernay & Jussel, specialists in fine English furniture and art; and that the Cunningham House is an unusual example of a neo-Tudor style town house and 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 Mary Hale Cunningham House, 124 East 55th Street, Borough of Manhattan, and designates Manhattan Tax Map Block 1309, Lot 62, as its Landmark Site.

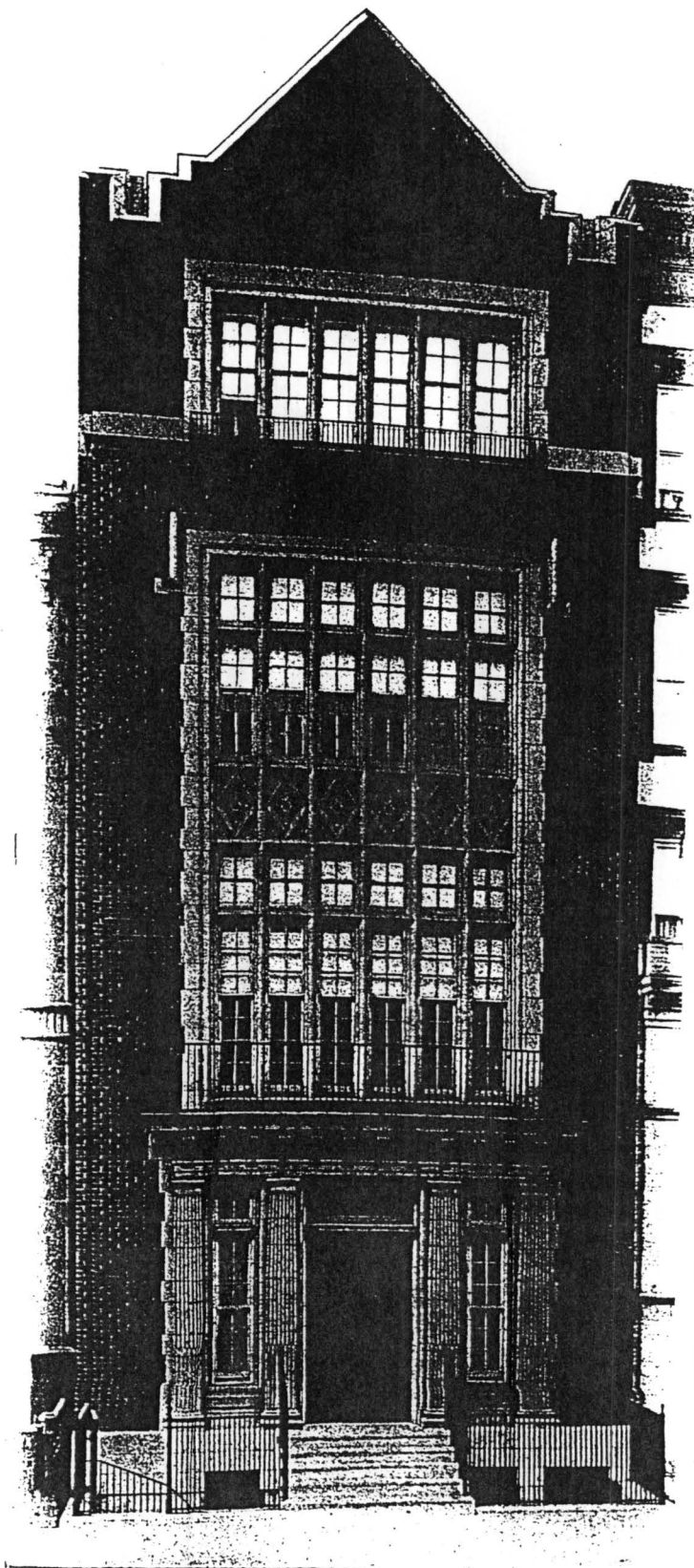


Mary Hale Cunningham House

Source: *Real Estate Record & Guide*, Sept. 16, 1911



Edward T. Cockcroft House (1907, Albro & Lindeberg), 59 East 77th Street
Source: *American Architect & Building News*, Oct. 14, 1908



Mary Hale Cunningham House

Source: *American Architect & Building News*, May 4, 1910



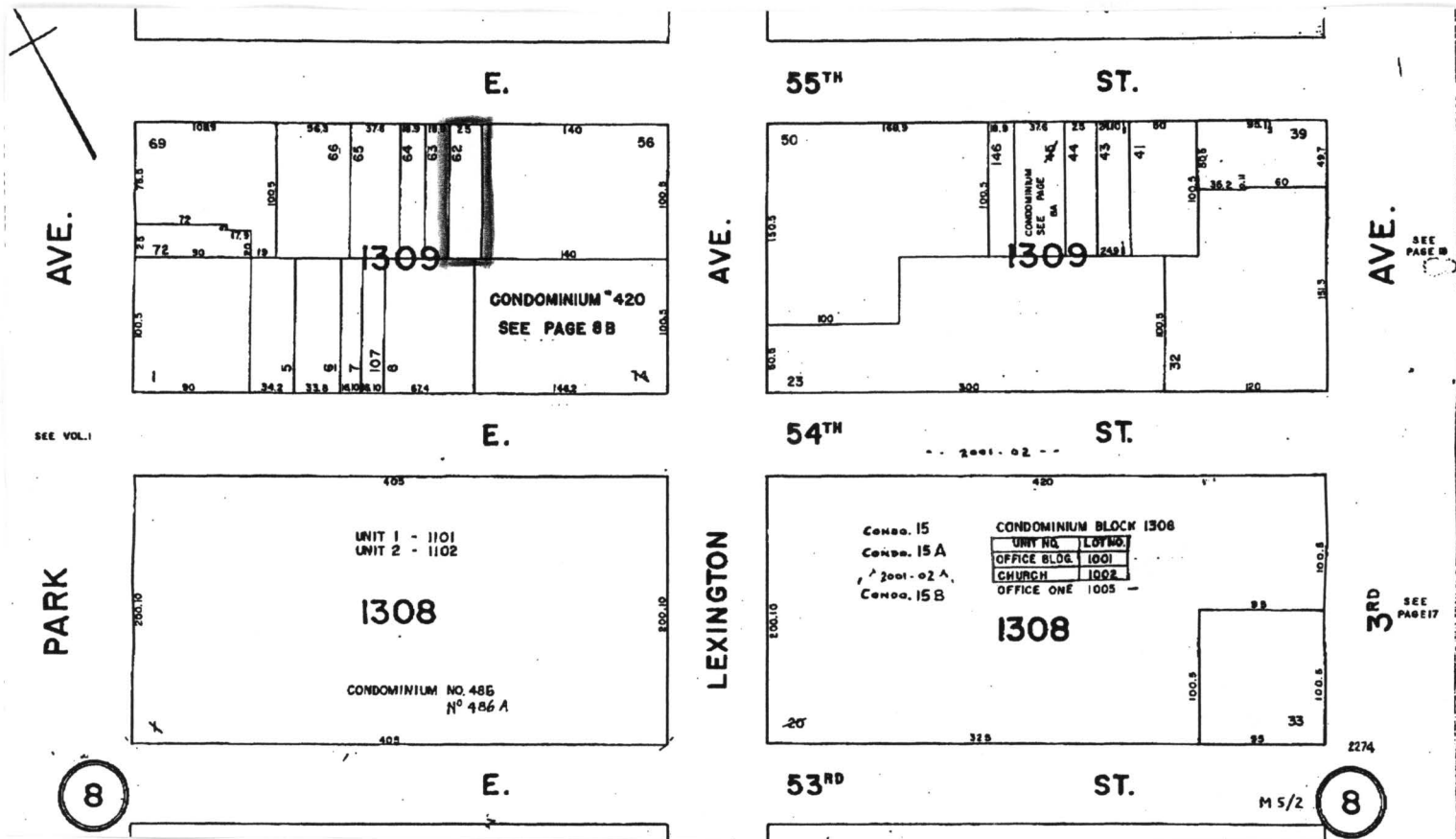
Mary Hale Cunningham House
Photo: Carl Forster



Mary Hale Cunningham House

(upper) second- and third-story windows and spandrel panels (lower) ground story

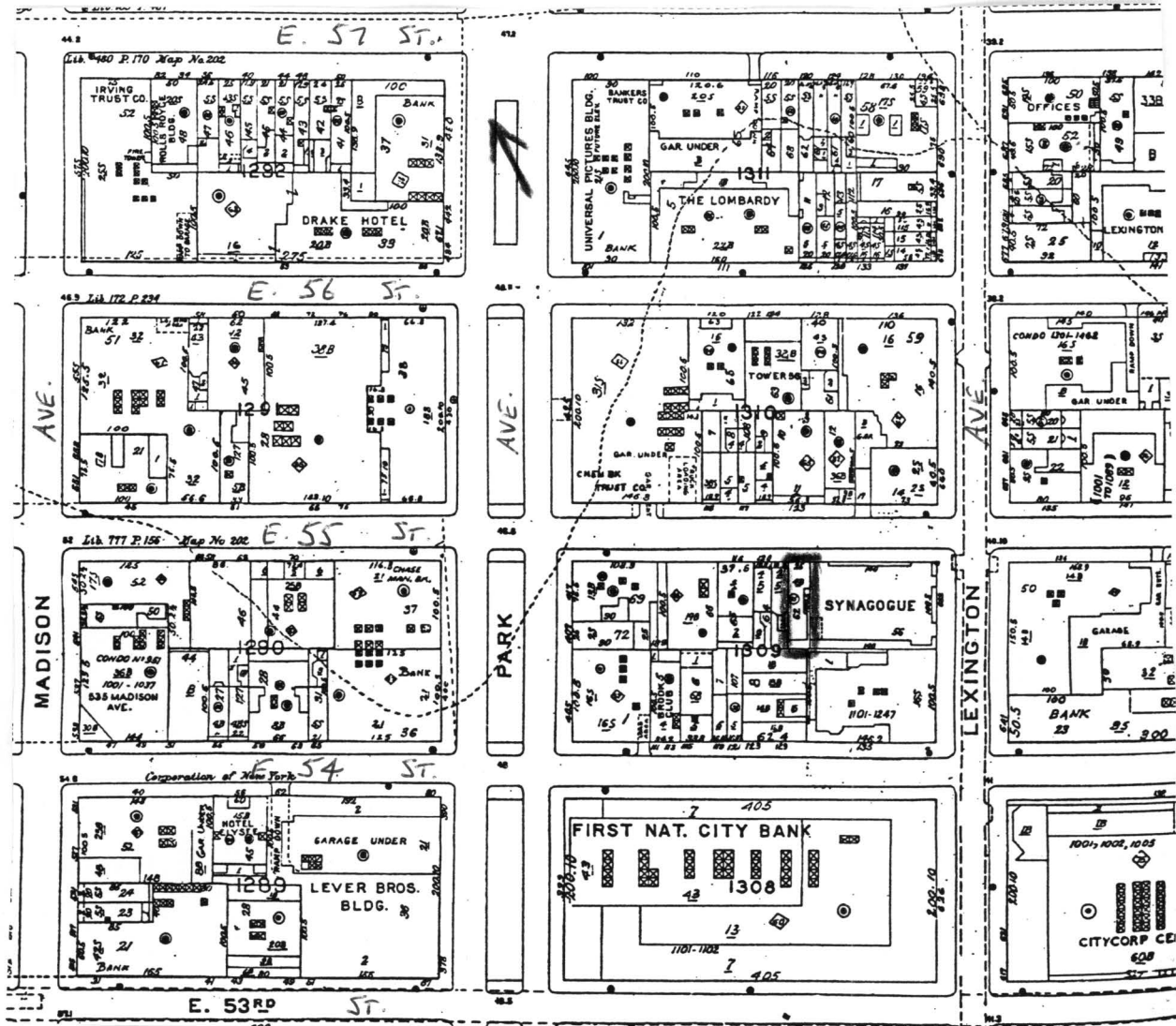
Photos: Carl Forster



Mary Hale Cunningham House

Landmark Site: Manhattan Tax Map Block 1309, Lot 62

Source: Dept. of Finance, City Surveyor, Tax Map



Mary Hale Cunningham House

Source: Sanborn, *Manhattan Land Book* (1999-2000), pl. 84