

VERDI SQUARE, Broadway at 72nd Street (The triangular area bounded by the southern curb line of West 73rd Street, the eastern curb line of Broadway, and the western curb line of Amsterdam Avenue), Borough of Manhattan.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1164, Lot 32.

On May 30, June 25, July 23, October 8, and November 26, 1974, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held public hearings on the proposed designation as a Scenic Landmark of Verdi Square, Borough of Manhattan, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. The hearings had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. A total of seventeen witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Verdi Square, a triangular lot lying in the northern section of Sherman Square, is formed by the intersection of Broadway, Amsterdam Avenue, and 73rd Street. Sherman Square consists of two triangles of land above and below West 72nd Street. It was acquired by the City on November 14, 1887, and was named in honor of General William Tecumseh Sherman on March 3, 1891.

The park lies within the old village of Harsenville, one of the many hamlets that arose along the Bloomingdale Road in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Bloomingdale Road was laid out in 1703 and at that time was about thirty-three feet wide. It was widened to seventy-five feet and renamed Broadway in 1849, then widened to 150 feet from 59th Street to 155th Street in 1863 when its name was changed to the Boulevard; and was so known until 1899 when it was again changed to Broadway.

Harsenville took its name from the Harsen family whose house stood on the west side of Broadway between 70th and 71st Streets. Seventy-first Street was originally Harsens Lane and led from the east side of Broadway across the island to the Old Post Road (Third Avenue). Harsenville was the site of a number of country seats and of the summer villas of wealthy New Yorkers who were attracted to it because of its rustic charm and its view of the Hudson River. After the French Revolution, a number of French emigres settled in the area. A house that once stood west of Broadway between 72nd and 73rd Streets was built by Madame d'Auliffe, a lady-in-waiting to Marie Antoinette. Her home became a stopping place and refuge for many Frenchmen forced to flee the Reign of Terror. While in exile, Louis Philippe, later King of France (1830-1848), taught school and lived in the Somerindyck House on the northwest corner of Broadway and 75th Street. Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigord, the noted statesman, lived for a time near West End Avenue and 74th Street. All traces of this early village disappeared with the development of the West Side in the 1880's.

The memorial to Giuseppe Verdi, from which the square takes its name is centrally located at the north end of this triangular park. It was unveiled on October 12, 1906, and is the work of Pasquale Civiletti, the brother of the noted Sicilian sculptor, Benedetto Civiletti. The heroic size figure of Verdi in Carrara marble stands on a fifteen-foot high dark granite pedestal that is encircled by four life-size figures representing the leading characters from Aida, Falstaff, Othello and "La Forza del Destino". The monument was paid for by the Italian community of New York City with funds raised by Charles Barsotti, founder and editor of the Italian language newspaper Il Progresso. Barsotti, who was born near Pisa in 1850 and emigrated to New York in 1872, was a dynamic man responsible for many of the City's striking civic monuments that commemorate famous Italians. The Garibaldi statue in Washington Square, the Columbus Monument in Columbus Circle, the Dante statue at 63rd Street and Broadway, and the statue of Verrazano at the Battery are all the result of Barsotti's activities.

The large neo-Florentine Central Savings Bank on the north side of 73rd Street, between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue, provides a visually dramatic backdrop for the square and for the statue. The open space of Verdi Square allows the full play of light on the rusticated facade of this bank so that the controlled movement of light and dark on the surface of the bank, created by the deep rustication and recessed bay, contrasts well with the soft moving shadows of the square. Together the square and the bank produce a quiet ambience in spite

of the traffic on Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue. The fact that so many nearby residents are attracted to the park testifies to the serene and tranquil effect that this small open space provides for the citizens of the West Side.

Verdi Square is scheduled for renovation in the near future as a result of the rearrangement and enlargement by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority of the West 72nd Street station of the Interborough Rapid Transit line.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, sculpture and other features of this park, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that Verdi Square has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, Verdi Square provides a necessary open space in this area of the City, that it enhances the visual effect of the large neo-Florentine bank adjoining it on the north side of 73rd Street, and that it contains an impressive monument to one of the greatest composers of the 19th century--Giuseppe Verdi.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 63 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Scenic Landmark, Verdi Square, Broadway at 72nd Street (the triangular area bounded by the southern curb line of West 73rd Street, the eastern curb line of Broadway, and the western curb line of Amsterdam Avenue), Borough of Manhattan, and designates as its Landmark Site, Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1164, Lot 32.