Landmarks Preservation Commission
February 10, 1987, Designation List 187
LP-1283

614 COURTLANDT AVENUE BUILDING, Borough of the Bronx. Built 1871-72; architect unknown; alterations 1882, architect Hewlett S. Baker

Landmark Site: Borough of the Bronx Tax Map Block 2398, Lot 1.

TESTIMONY AT THE PUBLIC HEARING

On April 13, 1982, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 614 Courtlandt Avenue Building (Item No. 8). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. No one was present to testify in support of or in opposition to this designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

No. 614 Courtlandt Avenue (Plate 1), an early multi-use building in the Bronx, was built in 1871-72 for Julius Ruppert and contained a saloon, public rooms, meeting rooms, and a residential flat. Most likely the work of a builder-contractor, the imposing building displays a variety of early to late Second Empire style motifs successfully combined to reconcile the several uses contained within the building with their exterior expression. Hewlett S. Baker's renovation in 1882 only further enriched the facade. The building is a monument to the first stage of urbanization within what had been the previously rural south Bronx, helping by its presence to establish a sense of place in the new village of Melrose South. No. 614 also has many of the stylistic features which characterized the buildings along the Bowery between Canal and Houston Streets in the area known as "Kleine Deutschland," where Julius Ruppert first established his business before following his fellow Germans to the Bronx. With its varied uses, the building sheltered a variety of German ethnic activities.

Melrose South and its Early Settlers

The majority of the mid-19th century settlers in New York City's future 23rd Ward (1874), the southwest Bronx, arrived from Manhattan's Lower East Side, eager to leave their noisy and dark, cramped and airless tenements. One of their earliest objectives was the sparsely populated freehold manor, seat of the Morris family who had been prominent in colonial government and the affairs of the early republic, which only recently had been opened for development. Though not a model for subsequent expansion, "New Village," the first subdivision, carries with it some of the method and some of the ingredients of those that followed. In 1848 an association 222 members strong, for the most part German and some Irishmen, mechanics and laboring men, met at the Military Hall at 193 Bowery. Represented by their agents, Jordan Mott, Nicholas McGraw and Charles W. Houghton, they had purchased 200 acres from Gouverneur Morris, Jr. Lots were drawn and assigned with but one proviso: each owner was to erect a house of no less than $300.00 value within three years, and Morris

executed a deed to each new owner. In 1850 New Village became Morrisania, when Mott's early development along the Harlem River, (which had been Morrisania) became Mott Haven.

New Village's success inspired Morris to develop his property further. With Robert Elton and Hampton Denman he had Andrew Findlay, a surveyor, lay out several more communities, Woodstock, Melrose and Melrose East and South, in 1850.[1] Melrose South was incorporated as a village a year later, and in 1864 Morrisania was incorportated as a township, embracing these and ten other villages.[2]

At the time of its incorporation as a village, the boundaries of Melrose South were East 160th Street and the Village of Melrose to the north and East 148th Street and Mott Haven to the south. Its eastern boundary was the Old Boston Post Road (Third Avenue) and its western boundary the railroad. But before the Civil War the area was principally farmland. In 1856 the number of dwellings totalled 173; twelve years later there were 488. Like the citizens of New Village, the preponderance of Melrose South's first residents were German, seeking a healthier alternative to life on the Lower East Side. Courtlandt Avenue, running north and south along a ridge, was the main shopping street, lined by beer halls and the scene of parades by German bands. Intersecting it, from south to north, were Mott, Benson, Denman, Gouverneur, Wilton, Schuyler, Springfield, Mary and Melrose streets.[3] The Protection Hall, whose members sponsored marching bands and drill teams, had its headquarters -- incorporating a beer garden, bowling alley and dance hall -- on the west side of Courtlandt between Springfield (154th) and Mary (155th) Streets. Melrose South had its own brewery, J. & M. Haffen's on Elton (152nd) between Courtlandt and Melrose. The Arion Liedertafel Hall was on the west side of Courtlandt between Benson and Gouverneur and so was the Melrose Turnverein. There were many beer gardens too. Indeed, Melrose South was compared with the area around Manhattan's Tompkins Square -- "Kleine Deutschland," and Courtlandt was called "Dutch Broadway." For example, in 1871 at the intersection of Courtlandt and Gouverneur (151st Street) -- Ruppert's building would occupy the northeast corner -- Jacob Sauter, a butcher, lived on the east side of Courtlandt north of Gouverneur; William Langrebe, a tailor, occupied the northwest corner of Courtlandt and Gouverneur; August Schulte had a grocery store on the southeast corner of the intersection. Andrew Schrenk, also listed on the southeast corner, may have lived upstairs. A rooming house occupied the southwest corner, among whose tenants there was an actor and an Irish laundress. August Frenke, a blacksmith in working in Manhattan, dwelled in the first house on the north side of Gouverneur, east of Courtlandt; John Giesner, the cabinet maker, lived next door to him in the second house east of Courtlandt.[4] Only the northeast corner was vacant.

The history of the northeast corner of Courtlandt and Gouverneur (151st) is a reflection of Melrose South's early development in microcosm. The butcher Jacob Sauter, mentioned above, engaged in speculative real-estate as well. Immediately following the Civil War (1865) he purchased three lots at the intersection of Courtlandt and Gouverneur from Philip Schuler: lot 300 on the north side of Gouverneur; lot 301 on the corner; and lot 302 on the west side of Courtlandt.[5] Sauter sold lot 300 to Henry Henning, Sr., in April 1867 and two months later lot 301 to Philip Brecher. Sauter had retained the northern seven feet of lot 301 along Courtlandt.

By 1870 Brecher had divided the remaining fifty foot frontage along Courtlandt, creating two lots, each twenty-five by one hundred feet. A year later Brecher sold the new corner lot to Julius Ruppert,[6] and immediately, Ruppert set about to build his handsome four-story brick building.[7]

The First Owner

The presence of Julius Ruppert (d.1877) is first recorded on the Lower East Side.[8] His initial place of business - a billiard hall in 1859 - was at No. 50 Bowery. In 1863 he moved to No. 5 Avenue A, at the northwest corner of 1st Street, where he maintained a saloon until his death. Beer, most likely the new German lager, was the specialty of the house, except for a short period (1865-67) immediately after the Civil War when he ran a hotel on the premises also.[9] The beer gardens along the Bowery, many of them large buildings decorated within to imitate gardens, could accommodate hundreds of guests. Music was often provided and whole families came to be entertained. Ruppert's establishment at A and 1st was in a four-story building (Plate 2), still standing, with taller second story windows which suggest this floor contained public rooms.[10] His was but one of the beer halls contributing to Avenue A's erstwhile Gemutlichkeit.

No doubt, Ruppert was aware of his countrymen's migration to the Bronx and was motivated to follow his former customers and to offer them the same hospitality in their new neighborhood along "Dutch Broadway" as that they had enjoyed in "Kleine Deutschland." The second story of his building at 614 Courtlandt (Plate 1), with second story windows even taller than those at Avenue A and 1st Street, contained public rooms, most likely designed to house the convocations of fraternal, patriotic or cultural societies. This use is suggested by the proximity of the ground floor saloon. The third story contained meeting rooms while a one-family flat occupied the fourth story.[11]

Ruppert himself never moved his residence from Manhattan,[12] but his widow Catharine (d.1926) did. One year before her husband's death, she took title to the building.[13] And though Catharine Ruppert attempted to sell the building in December of that year -- evidently an unsatisfactory arrangement -- she was residing there in 1880, and it remained her address until 1894.[14] It was Catharine Ruppert who commissioned Hewlett S. Baker, architect, to renovate the building in 1882,[15] dividing the second and third stories into two residential flats each. Baker lowered the second story ceiling and, as a consequence, the height of the distinctive windows; he also lowered the Gouverneur Street entrance.

Until her heirs sold No. 614 in 1927, Catharine Ruppert leased the ground story, and often some dwelling space above, to tavern keepers, with but one exception. Her first tenant in 1889-1894, was a butcher, Mortimer C. Langrebe, perhaps a kinsman of William Langrebe, the tailor across Courtlandt Avenue.[16]

The Building and Its Design

Julius Ruppert's multi-use, three-story building with its mansard fourth story is an imposing structure. Aside from the tall mansard, Ruppert's building has other remarkable features. Among these are the

tall, second story windows already mentioned, as well as the raised decorative ornament on the roof dormers. But most remarkable of all is the manipulation of stylistic forms to translate the varied aspects of the building's several functions into architecture.

No. 614 Courtlandt represents a combination of successive historical styles, styles characteristic of the third quarter of the 19th century. The cast-iron segmental window heads and their foliate corbels are characteristic of the late Italianate mode. The steeply pitched mansard roof is typically of the Second Empire Style. The heavy, bracketed and modillioned, galvanized metal cornice is neo-Grec. The second story window tympana with their fan motifs suggest Queen Anne ornament. The decorative reveals in the brick chimneys can be seen in both neo-Grec and Queen Anne prototypes. One explanation for this apparent multiplicity has already been touched upon; Hewlett Baker's interior renovation for Catharine Ruppert in 1882, had a definite impact on the exterior of the building her husband had built eleven years before. But despite the presence of these variegated stylistic elements, building records and stylistic analysis indicate there were but two building campaigns.

Julius Ruppert's building can be considered as generally Second Empire in style, a revival of French Renaissance forms associated with Napoleon III's ambitious program for reconstructing offical Paris. The style was accepted in the major cities of Europe as well as in post-Civil War New York. There is a German quality about its use here -- the crisp and practical manipulation of architectural elements rather than the grand and symmetrical interpretation more typical of the French. The mansard roof is, of course, de rigeur (Plates 3A and B). The imbricated slates and oval dormers, the rounded edges of the roof's metal framing and this framing's convex corners, the rosettes and the roof's iron cresting are all stock Second Empire stylistic components. Segmental-arched windows and doors are also characteristic of this style. The late Italianate window hoods (Plate 4) are not inappropriate here; many Second Empire style buildings retain Italianate features. These windows (all but the three ground story windows on Gouverneur which have straight iron lintels) with their corbelled iron sills compare favorably with those of a contemporary firehouse in Morrisania, the Lady Washington Engine Company No. 1 (1872), but now destroyed (plate 5). Even the fourth story dormers echo the segmental curve of the windows below.[17] Neither the modillions of the cornice entablature nor the circular panels of the architrave below them are foreign to the Second Empire style, but the paired brackets although somewhat neo-Grec in character are an integral part of the cornice design itself; and their placement plays a small but sensitive part in resolving the facade's conflicting symmetry. These brackets are articulated as projecting triglyphs. As such they are not inappropriate; the Second Empire style made frequent and explicit use of the classical orders. Finally, the symmetrical aspect of the Courtlandt Avenue facade, albeit clumsy, fits the Second Empire canon.

Who might have designed Julius Ruppert's building? Most likely, it was a builder-contractor, perhaps not even a Bronx man, but someone Ruppert knew in "Kleine Deutschland." He appears to have been familiar with Ruppert's establishment on the Lower East Side. Like No. 5 Avenue A , No. 614 has four stories, the entrance to the upper floors is located on the side street to the rear of the building and the second story ceilings and

windows are taller than those in the two stories above. On one hand, the combination of early and late Second Empire stylistic features, the manipulated symmetry, and the slight chronological stylistic disparity between the mansard, the cornice, and the window heads, speaks of a builder dependent upon ready-made, pre-cast elements. On the other hand, there is no doubt that No. 614 Courtlandt's builder was familiar with the rudiments of proportion and possessed a knowledge of styles. Our builder, rather than mimicking the exact symmetry of French prototypes, produced a Second Empire facade of imposing practicality. He integrated the various parts with a pleasing and confident authority.

The most conspicuous of the exterior changes caused by Baker's 1882 interior renovation are the terra-cotta, second story window tympana (Plate 4), introduced when Mrs. Ruppert had the second story adapted to residential use.[18] The decorative terra-cotta panel above the building's 151st St. entrance (Plate 6) is Baker's also (now a metallic silver color, it matched the tympana before it was painted). He introduced this design, a two-handled, classical lamp within a wreath and an ornamental frame in low relief, when he lowered the height of the original doorway. The fire escapes with their decorative iron balustrades were attached to the building at this time. In 1911 Mrs. Ruppert was required to broaden a fire escape on the 151st Street side and add another to the Courtlandt Avenue facade, both on the second story. In 1933 the firm of De Rose & Cavalieri was retained by a new owner, Leandro Casario, real-estate and insurance broker at 566 Courtlandt Avenue, to renovate within once more. New bathrooms required new windows in the building's eastern (rear) wall at the second and third stories. At this time the original 151st Street stoop was removed.

There appears always to have been some kind of structure in the rear yard. It was a frame shed in 1882, but by 1933 it had become a wooden frame, two-car garage. The present brick-faced, one-story, three-car garage was built at that time. This structure which faces 151st Street is on the Landmark site but is not being identified as a protected feature.

Description

The building is located at the northeast corner of Courtlandt Avenue and 151st Street with the main facade on Courtlandt and the secondary, although longer, facade on 151st Street. Four stories high, it is of red brick. The ground floor was planned as a commercial space. On Courtlandt, shop windows would have originally flanked a central entrance. Recently the modern roll down security gates have been painted sky blue. The current shopfront is a later addition, but remnants of the original -- one iron pilaster supporting an iron cornice which extends across the front and around the corner for one bay -- survives. At the base of the iron pilaster, at the northern edge of the building, is stamped the name of the foundry, "J. Alexander, Greenpoint" (Plate 7). On 151st Street are three ground floor window openings, now covered with grilles, with projecting iron lintels and projecting iron sills supported on pendant corbels. The entrance to the upper floors is at the eastern end, up a low stoop. A decorative terra-cotta panel with lamp motif is placed above the door. An iron door hood is aligned with the lintels of the ground floor windows. At the second floor on the Courtlandt Avenue facade are three tall window

openings with segmental, projecting cast-iron hoods on foliate corbels and stone sills. Segmental-arched tympana, bearing fan motifs, are set within the window heads. Until recently the sash had been wood four-over-four; now they are aluminum one-over one. Originally the alignment of these windows would have corresponded with the ground floor openings, unlike the 151st Street elevation where the second story windows are still aligned with the ground floor openings. Here the window openings resemble those on Courtlandt Avenue except for the projecting iron sills with pendant corbels. At the third story on both elevations, the segmental-arched window openings are not similarly aligned, reflecting the different use of this story; there are four openings on Courtlandt and six on 151st Street. The cast-iron window hoods and corbelled sills are like those seen below. Until very recently the northernmost window on the Courtlandt facade retained its original wood four-over-four sash. Now all the windows in the building have been given aluminum one-over-one sash.

A massive, bracketed and modillioned cornice of metal with paneled architrave surmounts the third story. The fourth story mansard is covered with imbricated slate and punctuated by metal-framed dormers which correspond to the alignment of the third story windows. On Courtlandt oval dormers flank a broad segmental-arched dormer with paired segmental-arched windows with two-over-two sash. The pediment of this dormer contains a central escutcheon secured with a riband and flanked by rinceaux. It is set, in turn, within a central mansard -- a reassertion of the centrality of the lower floors -- which bears a cavetto cornice. Applied to the metal surface is a raised eagle, wings outspread. Apparently this eagle is not associated with the decorative escutcheon and riband program just below. Though somewhat bloated in appearance, no doubt due to a lack of exactness in execution, this eagle may be a reflection of the enthusiasm for the impending national centennial.[19] The four segmental-arched dormers on 151st Street bear simple riband bows. Two tall, panelled brick chimneys flank these dormers. Recently, these chimneys have been parged and the mansard painted white.

Decorative iron fire escape balconies may be seen at the third story on Courtlandt Avenue and the second, third, and fifth stories on 151st Street.

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NOTES

1. John McNamara, chronicler of Bronx street names, associates Melrose with Melrose Abbey and Findlay's Scottish roots. History in Asphalt, p.439.

2. Mott Haven, North New York, Port Morris, Wilton, East Morrisania, Morrisania (New Village), West Morrisania, Claremont, Eltoona, and De Voes Neck. Frank Wuttge, "Place Names, Portals of History," p.15.

   Myron Finch suggested that New Village/Morrisania was a model for subesequent association towns along New Jersey's railroads which made an effort to attract settlers. The Harlem Railroad, he noted, had abandoned this concept. "History of Morrisania," Morrisania & Tremont Directory, 1871-72, p.xiv.

   Initially Morrisania was predominantly German, Lager breweries, beer gardens and beer halls were plentiful -- there were at least nine breweries at the end to the 19th century. The Bronx has many caverns in its steep hillsides which were used to store the lager in its clarifying period. The breweries: Eichler (later Liebman "Rheingold"), A.G. Werner, Henry Zeltner, Hoffman, Ebling, Huepfal, Northside, David Mayer and J. & M. Haffen. There were also the singing and gymnastic societies, characteristic of German cultural life.

3. These streets were numbered E. 148th St., through E. 156th St. by 1872. E. 151st St. was Gouverneur St. County Atlas of Westchester, 1892.

4. Morrisania & Tremont Directory, 1871-72,1871.

5. Schuler bought the lots from Gerard W. Morris and Henry Morris, heirs of Gouverneur Morris, in 1853.

6. The eight years following the Civil War was a period of rocketing inflation. Brecher paid Sauter $1800.00 for the fifty foot lot; Ruppert paid Brecher $2,500.00, $900.00 more for one half as much space. The value of this corner lot increased almost three times in four years. The rocket burst with the Finanical Panic of 1873.

7. The Bronx Building Dept. records include no substantial reference to this building's earliest history: no architect, no contractor, no builder, no permits. The tax records after 1874, when Melrose South became part of the 23rd Ward, show Ruppert paying a annual tax of $4000.00 for a four-story building with basement.

8. What kinship, if any, Julius Ruppert bore to the brewing Rupperts -- Franz who bought the old Turtle Bay Brewery, his son and grandson, Jacob and Jacob, Jr. -- is not known.

9. In Brewed in America, Stanley Brown relates the experience of the Antonio, Texas brewer Alfred Menger. Menger's brewery attracted so many of his parched countrymen on their way to settle the southwest,

he was forced to open a hotel. It is probable that Ruppert's short-lived hotel served a similar function. Peace now restored, veterans and newcomers alike paused in his establishment while considering their next movements.

10. Ruppert leased this space from the Winthrop family, descendants of Peter Stuyvesant.

11. See Alteration Application 127-1882, Block 2398, lot 1, Building Records, Bronx Buildings Dept.

12. His earliest (1859) home address was 22 Catherine St. After moving to West 35th St. (1860), then back down to Orchard St. (1862) he resided on 1st Ave. between 7th St. and St. Mark's Place until his death (1864-1877).

13. On February 2, 1876, Julius Ruppert sold the building to Philip M. Scherer for $3500.00; ten days later Scherer sold it to Catharine Ruppert for $4000.00. In this indenture Catharine is described as the wife of Jacob Ruppert. This is an error. After 1877 Catharine is annually indentified as Julius' widow in Trow's Directory. Jacob Ruppert's wife and the mother of Col. Jacob, Jr., owner of the New York Yankees and builder of Yankee Stadium, was the former Anna Gillig.

14. On December 29, 1876, she sold the building to John Simon of Hoboken. However, this transaction was repeated in reverse three years later. Unfortunately, we have only their names in the Conveyances Index. The actual reel is missing and the deed book is inaccessible, deep in storage on Varick Street, Manhattan, from whence records are due to be moved to a new site in Brooklyn.

15. Baker is known to have designed three buildings on Alexander Ave. and 141st St. for H. Lipps in 1879 (Building Permit 1879 - 873).

16. Mrs. Ruppert leased the store and four dwelling rooms above to Frank Scheubert, 1894 - 1997. (In 1894 she moved elsewhere in the Bronx until 1910 when she is recorded at 55 Abner Place, Yonkers until her death.) She leased the store and eight dwelling rooms above to Peter Gaudert, 1897 - 1911. She leased the whole building to the J. & M. Haffen Brewery, 1911-1916. She leased the store and floor above to Jacob Blanz in 1916.

17. It is difficult to determine of what metal the dormers are fabricated because these, like the mansard framing metal, have been coated with a cement compound. Most likely, it is the same galvanized metal of the cornice.

18. These terra-cotta tympana are interesting additions, adding further enrichment to the building's south and west elevations. They are not partofthe original scheme. Should the original secondstory ceiling height be restored, these tympana could be removed.

19. This eagle, as well as the tall second story fenestration below, are clues to the current local neighborhood theory that 614 Courtlandt

once served as a courthouse. Of course, the eagle could be a symbol of a fraternal, patriotic organization. It has been suggested that the eagle is a familiar symbol on brewery logos and, as such, not inappropriate here.

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 614 Courtlandt Avenue Building 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, the 614 Courtlandt Avenue Building, built in 1871-72, was designed by its unknown builder-contractor in a late and vernacular, though no less imposing, Second Empire style, reminiscent of the facades that distinguished the section of the Bowery known as "Kleine Deutschland," but which is unique to Melrose South; that its steep mansard roof with its imbricated slates and taller central section with its distinctive cavetto cornice, its metal relief ornament and its iron roof cresting and its brick chimneys are essential components of the style; that its asymmetrical window arrangement, expressive of interior function, contributes both to its vernacular quality and its successful design; that it is a monument to the early urbanization of the South Bronx; that with its second story public rooms and third story meeting rooms it carried on the traditional hospitality common among the beer halls and beer gardens of the Lower East Side, as typified by its first owner Julius Ruppert at his saloon at 5 Avenue A; and that it remains today an imposing reminder of Courtlandt Avenue's erstwhile reputation as Melrose South's premiere shopping street.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21 (formerly 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 Landmark the 614 Courtlandt Avenue Building, Borough of the Bronx and designates Tax Map Block 2398, Lot 1, Borough of the Bronx, as its Landmark Site.

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(C. Forster)

Plate 1. 5 Avenue A. at First Street. Site of Julius Ruppert's establishment in "Kleine Deutschland."

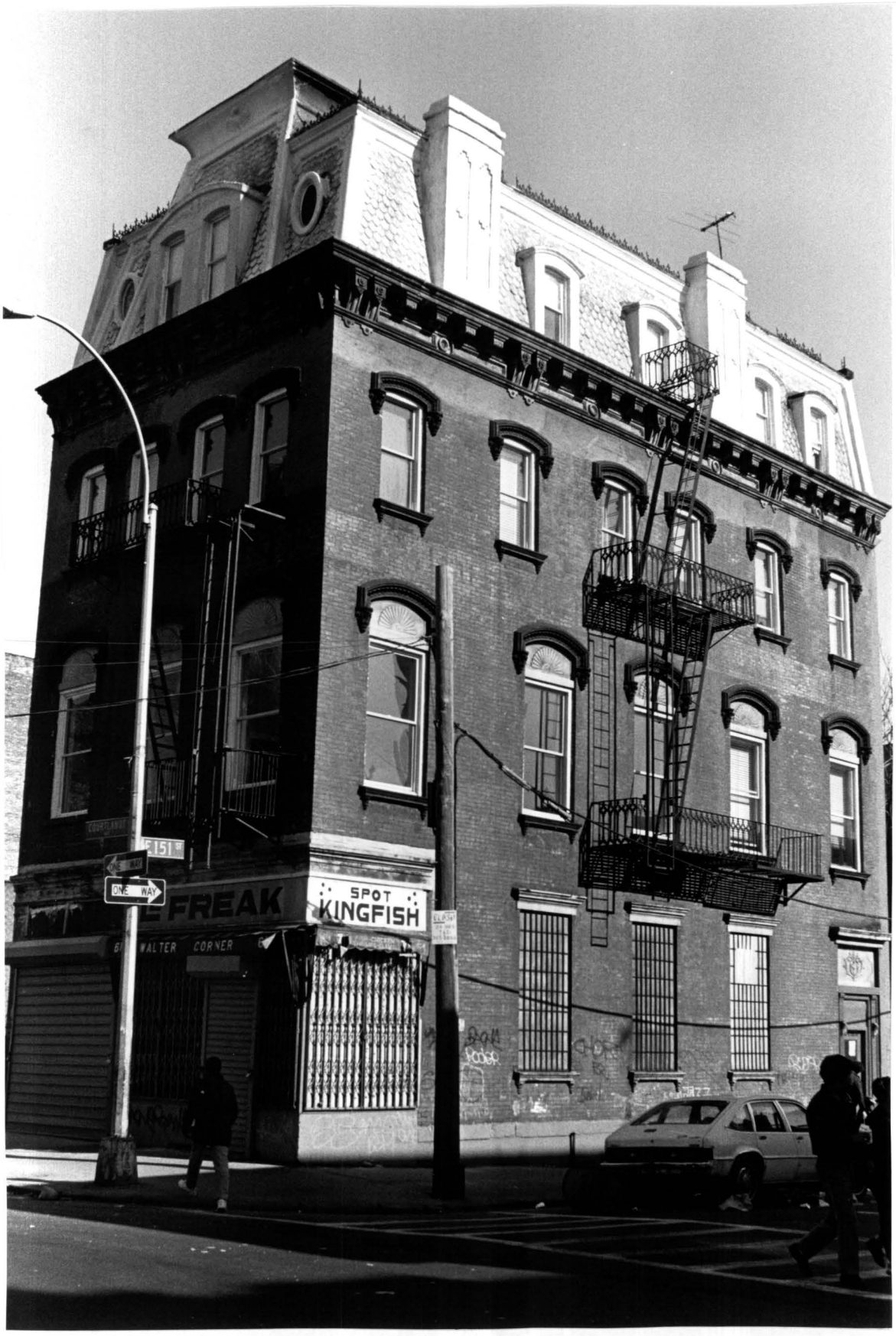


Plate 2. 614 Courtlandt Avenue, 1871-72. (C. Forster)



(C. Forster)

Plate 3A. Mansard roof, Courtlandt Ave. elevation, 614 Courtlandt Avenue.

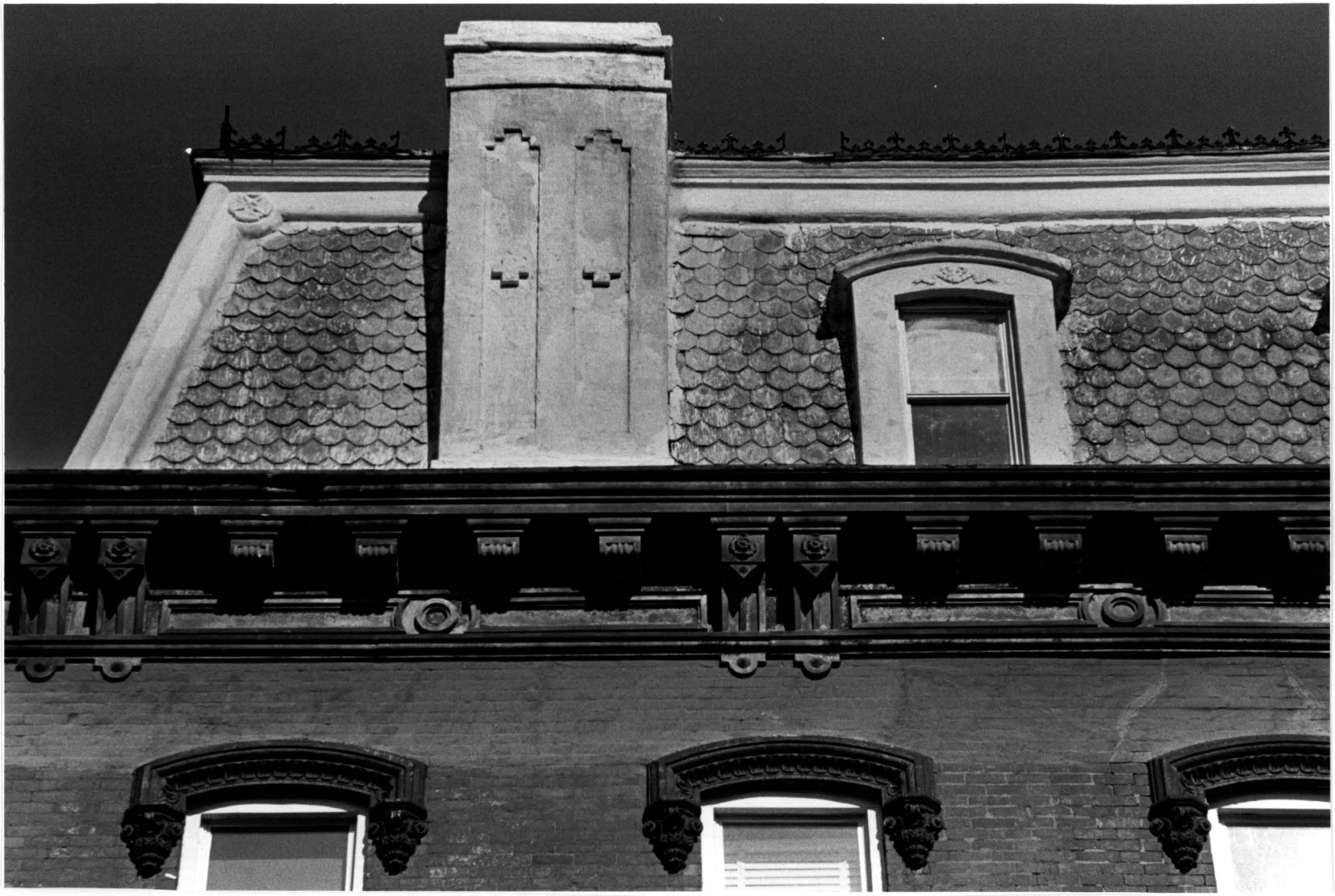


Plate 3A. Mansard roof, 151st Street elevation, 614 Courtlandt Avenue. (C. Forster)

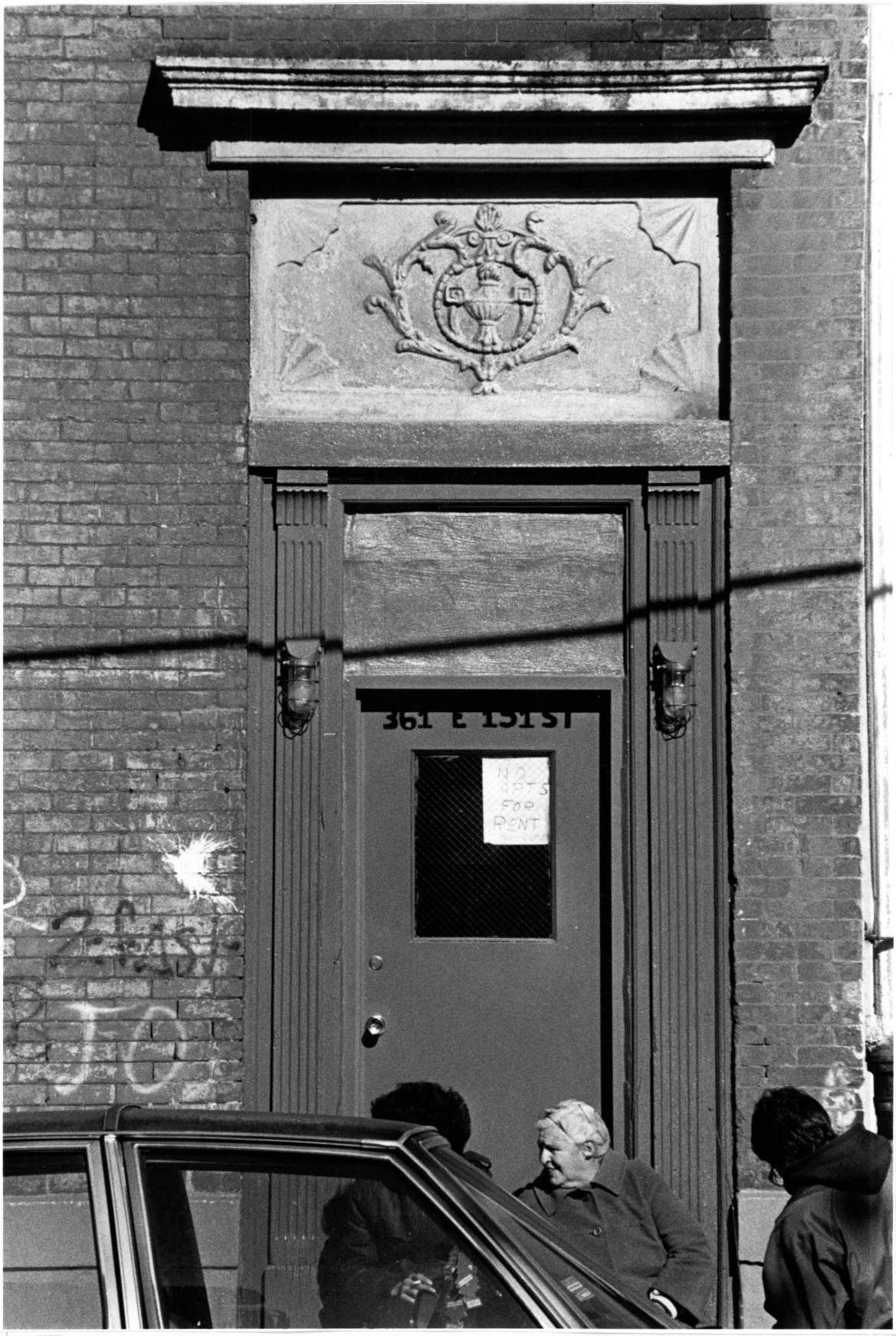


(C. Forster)

Plate 4. Segmental window heads with Queen Anne tympanum (1882)



Plate 5. Lady Washington Engine Company No. 1, Morrisania, 1872. (Devastation/Resurrection, The Bronx Museum of the Arts, p. 22, pl.2.)



(C. Forster)

Plate 6. Terra cotta panel over 151st St. Entrance.



(C. Forster)

Plate 7. Iron Founder's mark, "J. Alexander, Greenpoint."