

*New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission*

# **Bertine Block**

## **Historic District**



*April 5, 1994*

# **Bertine Block Historic District**

Prepared by: Andrew S. Dolkart, Landmarks Consultant

Preliminary  
research: Susan M. Strauss, Research Department

Edited by: Elisa Urbanelli, Research Department Editor  
Marjorie Pearson, Director of Research

Photography: Andrew S. Dolkart

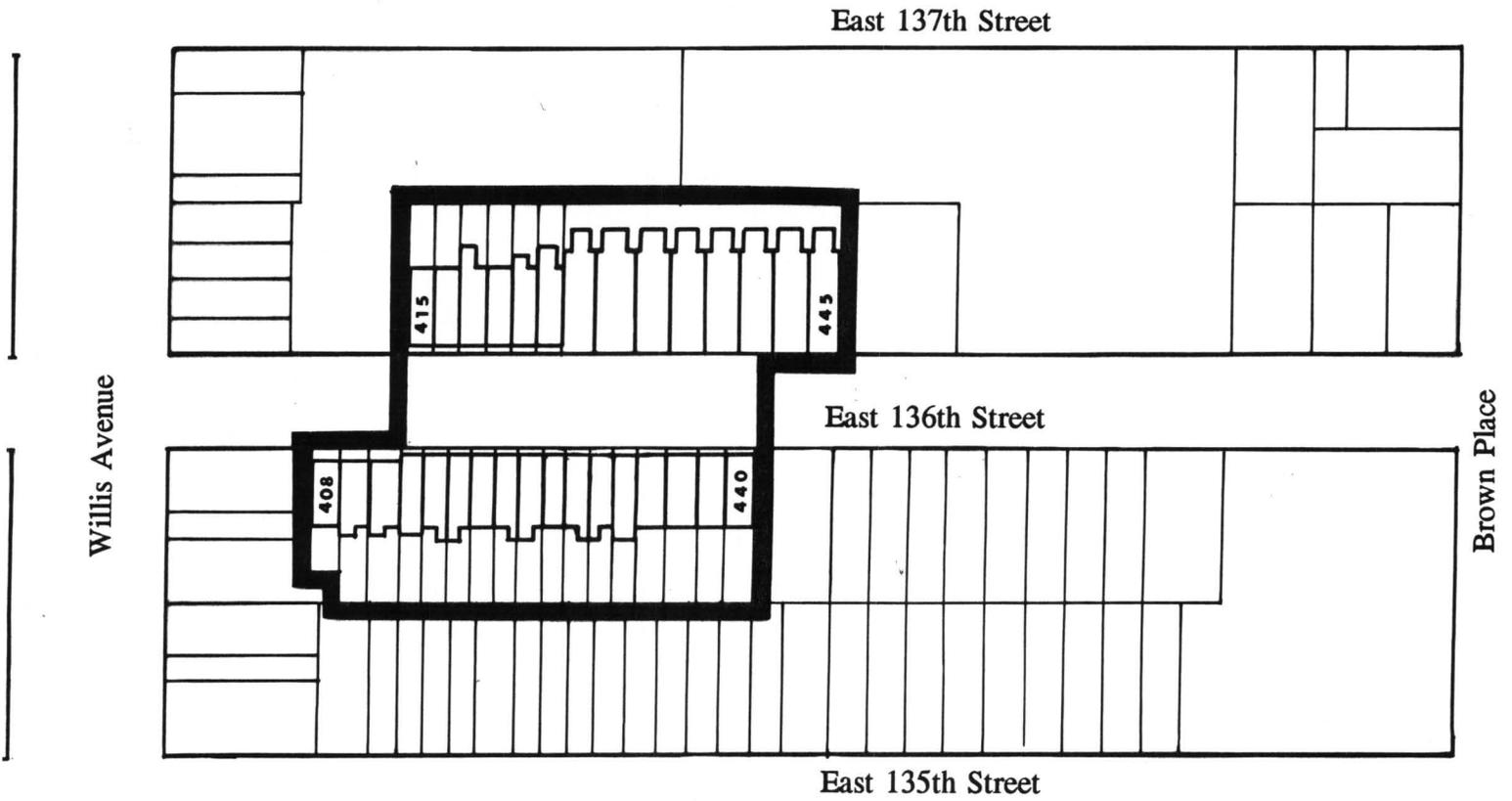
Map: Margaret M. Pickart

The Landmarks Preservation Commission

Laurie Beckelman, *Chair*  
Sarah Bradford Landau, *Vice-Chair*

William E. Davis	Rev. Thomas F. Pike
Ulrich Franzen	Stephen Raphael
Jack S. Freeman	Vicki Match Suna
Hui Mei Grove	Charles Sachs

*Commissioners*



North ↗

**BERTINE BLOCK HISTORIC DISTRICT**  
 The Bronx  
 Designated April 5, 1994  
 Landmarks Preservation Commission

Numbers indicate addresses within district boundaries

District boundary

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Boundaries . . . . .	1
Testimony at the Public Hearing . . . . .	1
Introduction . . . . .	2
Historical and Architectural Introduction . . . . .	3
Building Entries . . . . .	10
East 136th Street, south side between Willis Avenue and Brown Place . . . . .	10
East 136th Street, north side between Willis Avenue and Brown Place . . . . .	16
Selected Photographs . . . . .	[following page 18]
Findings and Designation . . . . .	27

Cover Photo: 420 East 136th Street, 1993  
Andrew S. Dolkart

## **BERTINE BLOCK HISTORIC DISTRICT**

### BOUNDARIES

The property bounded by a line beginning at the intersection of the southern curb line of East 136th Street and a northerly extension of the western property line of 408 East 136th Street, extending southerly and easterly along the western and southern property lines of 408 East 136th Street, southerly along part of the western property line of 410 East 136th Street, easterly along the southern property lines of 410 through 440 East 136th Street, northerly along the eastern property line of 440 East 136th Street, northerly across East 136th Street, easterly along the northern curb line of East 136th Street, northerly along the eastern building line of 445 East 136th Street to the northern property line of Lot 10 of Block 2282, westerly along the northern property lines of 425 through 415 East 136th Street, southerly along the western property line of 415 East 136th Street, southerly across East 136th Street, and westerly along the southern curb line of East 136th Street, to the point of beginning; The Bronx.

### TESTIMONY AT THE PUBLIC HEARING

On June 2, 1992, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Bertine Block Historic District (Item No. 16). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Nine persons spoke in favor of the designation. One person left a written statement expressing an uncertain position on the proposed designation.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>The Commission previously held public hearings for designation on portions of the Bertine Block. On July 8, 1980, public hearings were held on Nos. 414 through 432 East 136th Street (LP-1181 through LP-1190, Item Nos. 8 through 17). On November 15, 1983, public hearings were held on Nos. 408 through 440 East 136th Street and Nos. 415 through 425 East 136th Street (LP-1463 through LP-1485, Item Nos. 8 through 30). Support for designation was expressed by owners and residents at both hearings.

## INTRODUCTION

The Bertine Block Historic District consists of thirty-one residential buildings lining both sides of East 136th Street between Willis Avenue and Brown Place in the Mott Haven section of the Bronx. Within the boundaries of the district are four groups of rowhouses and two groups of tenements. Erected between 1877 and 1899, the buildings reflect the history of real estate development in the southwestern portion of the Bronx. The buildings in the historic district comprise fine examples of neo-Grec, Queen Anne, Romanesque Revival, and Renaissance Revival design, illustrating the stylistic trends in residential architecture in New York City in the final three decades of the nineteenth century.

Mott Haven was one of the few areas of the Bronx to attract nineteenth-century speculative developers interested in constructing rowhouses. Much of this construction occurred following the opening of transit lines connecting this area to Manhattan. With this transit link, Mott Haven became a convenient location drawing middle-class families who sought to purchase single-family rowhouses. Development in the district began in 1877, prior to the inception of mass transit, with the construction of three modest rowhouses, designed in the popular neo-Grec style. Most of the buildings in the district, however, were not erected until the 1890s. This development was largely the result of construction by Edward Bertine, the most active builder within the historic district. Bertine built three of the district's four rows, including the so-called "Bertine Block," an exceptional row of Queen Anne houses designed by prominent Manhattan architect George Keister.

By the end of the nineteenth century, multiple dwellings, including tenements and apartment houses, had become the most common type of housing erected in the Bronx. The historic district contains eight "Old Law" tenements, erected in two groups in 1897-99. With their facades ornamented with Renaissance-inspired detail and their apartments laid out as railroad flats, the buildings typify tenement construction planned for working-class families of the era.

The early residents of the rowhouses and tenements in the historic district represent a cross section of the population that came to settle in the Bronx in the late nineteenth century. Residents were American-born as well as immigrants. The rowhouses were purchased by middle-class people, including many professionals, some of whom commuted to work in Manhattan and others who had jobs in nearby offices and factories. The apartments in the tenements tended to be rented to laborers, shop workers, and professionals earning lower incomes.

The buildings of the historic district retain their architectural integrity to a high degree and survive today as a reflection of the character of Bronx architecture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the Mott Haven area was being developed, and as a physical manifestation of the variety of people, from varied ethnic and national backgrounds, who have lived, and continue to live, in this neighborhood.

## HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL INTRODUCTION

The Bertine Block Historic District is located in Mott Haven, one of the earliest neighborhoods in the Bronx to become urbanized.<sup>1</sup> Land in Mott Haven was part of the original purchase made in 1641 by Danish immigrant Jonas Bronck, the first European to settle in the Bronx and, of course, the namesake of the borough. In 1670 Colonel Lewis Morris and his brother, Captain Richard Morris, purchased Bronck's property. The English-born Morrises had both been officers in Oliver Cromwell's army; upon the restoration of Charles II they had moved to Barbados. Richard Morris came to New York in 1668, prior to the land purchase. He died in 1772 and one year later Lewis Morris arrived in New York. Lewis held the land in trust for Richard's son, Lewis, who inherited 1,920 acres in 1691. The second Lewis Morris became the first lord of the manor of Morrisania, receiving a royal patent on May 8, 1697. The land descended through several generations of illustrious Morrises, including the fourth Lewis Morris (known as Lewis Morris III), a signer of the Declaration of Independence.

Morrisania (including today's neighborhoods of Morrisania, Melrose, Mott Haven, and Port Morris) was located within Westchester County, which was formed in 1683 under an English charter. For a brief period in the late eighteenth century (1788-1791), Morrisania was one of twenty-one townships within that county. The sparsely settled region became a town because the fourth Lewis Morris hoped that the "healthfulness and salubrity" of the area would persuade the federal government to establish the nation's capital in Morrisania.<sup>2</sup> This effort failed and Morrisania became a part of the town of Westchester. For many decades, Morrisania remained rural, dotted by the estates of members of the Morris and other families.

The first change to the rural aspect of Morrisania occurred in 1828 when Gouverneur Morris II sold a plot on the Harlem River at Third Avenue to Jordan L. Mott who established the first major industrial works -- the Mott Iron Works -- in what would become the Bronx and established a new community that was named for his family. Jordan Mott was the inventor of a coal-burning iron cooking stove. The initial factory was a small facility on the Harlem River, at Third Avenue and East 134th Street.<sup>3</sup> The firm was incorporated in 1853 and grew rapidly, with buildings erected throughout the area. The company expanded from stove manufacturing into the production of iron, brass, bronze, and nickel-plated goods, including kitchen and bathroom fixtures, stable fittings, gates, statuary, and garden furniture.

Jordan Mott erected his own residence near the foundry and named the area Mott Haven. According to historian Stephen Jenkins, "upon being asked by an employee of Jordan L. Mott if he had any objection to the newly-purchased section being called Mott Haven, [Gouverneur Morris] replied: 'I don't care what he calls it; while he is about it, he might as well change the name of the Harlem [River]

---

<sup>1</sup>For information on the history of Mott Haven, see Stephen Jenkins, *The Story of The Bronx 1639-1912* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1912), 366-371; Harry T. Cook, *Borough of The Bronx 1639-1913* (New York: Harry T. Cook, 1913), 20-21; James L. Wells, Louis F. Haffen, and Josiah A. Briggs, eds., *The Bronx and Its People: A History 1609-1927* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1927), 330-331; New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Mott Haven Historic District Designation Report* (1969); and Lloyd Ultan, "The Story of the South Bronx 1776-1940," in *Devastation/Resurrection: The South Bronx* (The Bronx: The Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1980), 14-36.

<sup>2</sup>Jenkins, 3.

<sup>3</sup>Although the J. L. Mott Iron Works moved to Trenton, New Jersey, in 1906, several of the Bronx foundry buildings erected in the 1880s and early 1890s still stand.

and call it the *Jordan*."<sup>4</sup> Jordan Mott sought to attract other industrial establishments to the Mott Haven area, laying out the Mott Haven Canal in 1850, which eventually allowed boats to travel inland as far as 138th Street. Other heavy industry soon arrived, especially along the waterfront and along the route of the canal; by the late nineteenth century Mott Haven was a major industrial center. Among the other industries in the area were lumber yards, saw mills, metal works, stone yards, enamel works, and a number of piano factories.<sup>5</sup> Much of the industrial development of Mott Haven, as well as the corresponding residential development, occurred because of the opening of the New York & Harlem Railroad in 1841, connecting what is now the Bronx with Manhattan, and including a station stop at Mott Haven.<sup>6</sup>

An industrial enclave, consisting primarily of the Mott Iron Works, other industries, and housing for the workers in these factories, developed in Mott Haven during the mid-nineteenth century. Speculative housing development did not, however, begin in Mott Haven until the 1860s and did not reach its peak until the final two decades of the nineteenth century, following the completion of the Third Avenue El which was the first mass transit link between Manhattan and the Bronx.<sup>7</sup>

The genesis of the Third Avenue El was the formation of the Suburban Rapid Transit Company in 1880. This company was formed to build three routes through undeveloped parts of the Bronx. A competing transit company, the New York, Fordham & Bronx, was established in 1883 by Bronx residents who wanted mass transit to run through areas that were already inhabited; this company received the right to build over public streets. In 1886, with the completion of a bridge over the Harlem River, the Suburban Rapid Transit opened as far north as 145th Street. The line ran north, over private property, through the center of the blocks between Alexander and Willis avenues, with a station at 138th Street. However, construction on private property proved to be prohibitively expensive and the Suburban Company took over the routes of the New York, Fordham & Bronx, continuing north of 145th Street along Third Avenue. With the exception of three early rowhouses, all of the buildings in the Bertine Block Historic District were constructed following the completion of the Suburban Rapid Transit's elevated line.

During the late nineteenth century, Mott Haven was the only neighborhood in the Bronx that was developed with a significant number of single-family rowhouses. Rowhouses were quite common in the residential neighborhoods of Manhattan and Brooklyn, but since nineteenth-century development in the Bronx was more sporadic and much of it entailed the construction of frame houses for working-class households, few rowhouses appeared. Mott Haven's location close to Manhattan, its development as an industrial center, and the appearance of commercial and business buildings in the area led to a favorable

---

<sup>4</sup>Jenkins, 367; also quoted in Wells et al., 330.

<sup>5</sup>The piano factories were among the most impressive industrial buildings erected in Mott Haven. The piano factories included those of the Estey Piano Company on Bruckner Boulevard at Lincoln Avenue, the Haines Brothers Piano Company (later the Kroeger Piano Company and then the Mathusek Piano Company) on Bruckner Boulevard and Alexander Avenue, and the Schubert Piano Company on East 134th Street.

<sup>6</sup>The Mott Haven Station was at Mott Avenue and East 138th Street. A spectacular Romanesque Revival style building, designed by R.H. Robertson, was built in 1885 (demolished).

<sup>7</sup>For a discussion of the elevated railroad, see Evelyn Gonzalez, "From Suburb to City: The Development of The Bronx, 1890-1940," in *Building a Borough: Architecture and Planning in The Bronx 1890-1940* (The Bronx: The Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1986), 14; and Joseph Cunningham and Leonard O. Dehart, *A History of the New York City Subway System, Part I: The Manhattan Els and the I.R.T.* (1976), 12.

climate for speculative rowhouse construction. The earliest rowhouses known to have been built in Mott Haven are 276 to 294 Alexander Avenue between East 139th and East 140th streets, in the Mott Haven Historic District, built between 1863 and 1865. Since these houses pre-date the inauguration of mass transit by two decades, they were joined by few other rowhouses. Besides a lack of transit facilities, new construction was undoubtedly slowed by the Panic of 1873, a severe depression that curtailed most building until late in the 1870s.

In 1874, the townships of Morrisania, West Farms, and Kingsbridge (those sections of the present borough of the Bronx located west of the Bronx River) became part of New York City. These areas, officially the 23rd and 24th wards, were generally referred to as the "Annexed District." Residents of this area, as well as developers who were anxious to profit from building, lobbied for infrastructure improvements. Of particular interest was the introduction of new transportation lines that would allow people to move to the district and commute to work in Manhattan. Prior to the opening of these transit links, speculative development remained sporadic.

As the effects of the economic depression waned, rowhouse construction occurred in Mott Haven to a modest degree. Among the earliest new residences was the trio of rowhouses in the neo-Grec style at 408 to 412 East 136th Street of 1877-78, the first buildings erected within the Bertine Block Historic District. Although designed and built as an ensemble, each of these three houses was commissioned by a separate individual, two of whom moved their families into the completed homes. It was rare for a row of houses to be erected for individual owners, rather than for a speculative builder. Perhaps developers were still not willing to risk investing money in this neighborhood, with its poor mass transit facilities and its location far to the north of New York City's business, shopping, and social centers. The three houses were designed by the firm of Rogers & Browne whose partners were the architects John Rogers and Edward H. Browne. Although the firm had its office on Nassau Street in Manhattan, both architects lived in Morrisania. Early in the 1880s, John Rogers would design several additional rowhouses nearby in what is now the Mott Haven Historic District.

The three rowhouses on East 136th Street are identical two-story-and-basement dwellings designed in the neo-Grec style which was at the height of its popularity in the late 1870s. Neo-Grec rowhouses share the rectilinear form, rhythmic bay arrangement, three-dimensional carved window and doorway enframements, and heavy projecting bracketed cornices popular on the Italianate rowhouses of the 1850s and 1860s, but the character of their ornamental detail sets these neo-Grec buildings apart from their predecessors. Rather than the sculptural relief ornament of Italianate rowhouse facades, the detail on neo-Grec facades has a stylized, angular form, evident on the East 136th Street row at the brackets that support the entrance pediments and at the massive galvanized-iron cornices. Original plans show that each of these houses had the kitchen and dining room in the basement, front and rear parlors on the first story, and three rooms on the second story.<sup>8</sup>

No further construction occurred in the area of the historic district until after the completion of the Suburban Rapid Transit Company's elevated line in 1886. The late 1880s and 1890s were the primary years of rowhouse development in Mott Haven, with fine rows erected along Alexander Avenue (now within the Mott Haven Historic District), along East 139th and East 140th streets between Willis Avenue and Brown Place (now within the Mott Haven East Historic District), as well as on East 136th Street and elsewhere in the neighborhood. Although a significant number of rowhouses were erected,

---

<sup>8</sup>Plans and elevations for No. 408 are on file at the Bronx office of the New York City Department of Buildings [Block 2280, Lot 12, NB 649-1877].

they never entirely filled the neighborhood; much land was left vacant and was later developed with tenements and apartment houses.

In the 1890s, three rows were erected on East 136th Street between Willis Avenue and Brown Place. These three rows, comprising a total of twenty houses, were built by developer Edward D. Bertine who spent \$63,500 amassing property on 136th Street in 1891. Little is known about Edward Bertine. Listings in New York City directories indicate that he had been a Manhattan milk dealer in the 1870s and early 1880s, branching into groceries by 1883. In 1889-90, Bertine first appears in the directory as a builder. All of the buildings that Bertine is known to have erected are in the Bronx, and, following the completion of his first row on East 136th Street, he moved into a house on the block.

In 1891 Bertine began construction on a row of ten houses on the south side of East 136th Street. Designed by architect George Keister, this is one of the finest rows erected in New York City in the late nineteenth century. The row was illustrated in *The Great North Side or Borough of the Bronx* in 1897 and was given the appellation, "Bertine Block," in the first edition of the *AIA Guide to New York City* in 1967.<sup>10</sup> The row, at 414 to 432 East 136th Street, is designed in the Queen Anne style. Each house is faced with tawny brick above a rock-faced stone base, and ornamented with trim in brick, stone, stained glass, and slate.<sup>11</sup> A Queen Anne aesthetic is especially evident in the variety of design elements, including those of Romanesque, Gothic, and Flemish origin, combined within the unified row; in the picturesque rooftop silhouette, consisting of flat roofs, mansards, and pedimented, stepped, and scrolled gables; in the dynamic texture created by the flat brickwork contrasting with patterned brick and other materials; in the juxtaposition of a variety of fenestration patterns; and in the use of tall chimneys, a favorite Queen Anne design conceit employed to lend the houses an air of comfortable domesticity.

Responsibility for the creation of this unusual row lies with architect George Keister, one of the most talented architects active in New York City at the end of the nineteenth century, but a man about whom relatively little is known.<sup>12</sup> In the 1890s Keister designed several exceptional buildings with the same unusual massing and innovative use of form seen on the Bertine row. Surviving examples of these are the First Baptist Church (1891) on Broadway and West 79th Street, an eccentric Romanesque Revival work with asymmetrical towers and large expanses of stained glass, and The Gerard (1893-94) at 123 West 44th Street, an apartment hotel that combines Romanesque Revival and Northern Renaissance features and has a striking silhouette of projecting dormers and gables. Through much of his career, Keister appears to have specialized in the design of theaters. He was responsible for several Broadway houses, including Belasco's Stuyvesant (now the Belasco Theater) on West 44th Street and the Selwyn

---

<sup>10</sup>North Side Board of Trade, *The Great North Side or Borough of the Bronx* (1897), 38; there is an illustration of Bertine's house at 416 East 136th Street on 34. Norval White and Elliot Willensky, *AIA Guide to New York City* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 219. The second edition (New York: Macmillan, 1978), 312, makes a similar identification. The third edition (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), 484, identifies all of the rowhouses in the present historic district under the name "Bertine Block."

<sup>11</sup>According to the New Building Permit [NB 475-1891] on file at the Bronx office of the New York City Department of Buildings, the stone was to be Long Meadow red stone, a sandstone from Massachusetts.

<sup>12</sup>Entries on Keister can be found in the following New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission designation reports: *The Gerard* report prepared by Andrew S. Dolkart (1982); *Apollo Theater* exterior and interior reports prepared by Jay Shockley (1983); *Belasco Theater* section of report on Keister prepared by Janet Adams (1987). Keister wrote an article, "Fads in Architecture," *Architectural Record* 1(July-Sept., 1891), 49-61.

Theater (1917-18) on West 42nd Street, as well as Harlem's famous Apollo Theater (1913-14), and at least four theaters in the Bronx.<sup>12</sup>

The ten houses of the so-called "Bertine Block" are each fifteen feet wide and three stories tall with basements that extend slightly below ground level. Six of the houses were built with two-story rear extensions that were ten-and-one-half feet wide and fourteen feet deep. A low stoop (each is extant) leads to each entrance and, at the first story, each house was planned with a front parlor and rear dining room (six houses have small rooms to the rear) and a central stair hall.<sup>13</sup> This plan, with a sizable stair hall (often with a fireplace) between the front and rear rooms, became popular in the 1880s and is a characteristic feature of Queen Anne style houses. At the second story, each house had two rooms with closets and at the third story were a large front room, a small central room, and two small rear rooms. There were two rooms (including a kitchen) and a central stair hall in the basement. The original location of the toilets is not known.

With the completion of the ten houses on the south side of the street, Bertine began construction in 1892 of a row of six single-family houses at 415 to 425 East 136th Street. These were not designed by Keister. Rather, Bertine commissioned John Hauser, a local architect with an office at 1441 Third Avenue, to complete the row. Hauser is first listed as an architect in city directories in 1892 and was active at least until 1922.<sup>14</sup> In the 1890s and the first decade of the twentieth century, Hauser was a prolific designer of rowhouses and apartment buildings, primarily in the Bronx and in northern Manhattan. The row that Hauser designed for Bertine must have been among his earliest works. The six brick-faced houses are articulated with the round arches common to the Romanesque Revival style, and all have molded-brick and stone trim and high stoops lined with wrought-iron railings.

Bertine's third and final row in the historic district comprises the four Renaissance Revival style houses at 434 to 440 East 136th Street, designed in 1895 by Adolph Balschun, Jr., an architect whose office was located around the corner on East 135th Street. In 1895, an Adolph Balschun (without the "Jr.") is listed in the New York City directory as a carpenter located on East 135th Street; in the following year Balschun is listed as a builder. He first appears as an architect in 1897.<sup>15</sup> The New Building Application for the row, submitted to the New York City Department of Buildings on February

---

<sup>12</sup>Other Broadway-area theaters designed by Keister were the Colonial (1905, demolished) on Broadway at West 62nd Street; the Astor (1906, demolished) on Broadway at West 45th Street; George M. Cohan's Theater (1911, demolished) on Broadway at West 43rd Street; and the Earl Carroll (1923 and 1931, demolished) on Seventh Avenue at West 50th Street. All of these theaters (as well as the Selwyn) are illustrated in Nicholas Van Hoogstraten, *Lost Broadway Theatres* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1991). The Bronx theaters identified as having been designed by Keister are the Bronx Opera House (1912-13); Miner's Theater (later the Loew's Victory, 1910, demolished), 3024 Third Avenue; the Willis Theater (1912), 411 East 138th Street (1912); and the Empire Theater (1913), 867 Westchester Avenue.

<sup>13</sup>Plans for the row are on file at the Bronx office of the New York City Department of Buildings [Block 2280, Lot 15].

<sup>14</sup>Dennis Steadman Francis, *Architects in Practice New York City 1840-1900* (New York: Committee for the Preservation of Architectural Records, 1980), 38 and James Ward, *Architects in Practice New York City 1900-1940* (New York: Committee for the Preservation of Architectural Records, 1989), 33. Landmark buildings designed by Hauser's firm are the row at 453 to 475 West 141st Street (1906) in the Hamilton Heights Historic District and all of the houses within the Morris Avenue Historic District (1906-10), stretching along both sides of Morris Avenue between Tremont Avenue and East 179th Street.

<sup>15</sup>Francis, 13.

15, 1895, indicates that each of these houses was planned as a two-family dwelling with one family living on the first and second stories and the other residing on the top story.<sup>16</sup> However, census records from 1900 indicate that, at that time, only two of the houses were occupied by two households. Since these houses were planned for occupancy by two families, they had unusual plans, with four rooms and a hall on each floor (including a central inner room with no windows); kitchens appear to have been located on the second and third stories.<sup>17</sup>

The early residents of the rowhouses erected by Bertine were a mix of middle-class business and professional people.<sup>18</sup> The majority were American born. Among the occupations of the heads of households were builder, lawyer, doctor, salesman, minister, school principal, merchant, jeweler, and tobacco broker. While some residents commuted to jobs in Manhattan, others worked in the Bronx.<sup>19</sup> At least three residents had offices on the neighborhood's commercial strip along nearby East 138th Street. Household sizes varied, but most of the rowhouses were home to at least five or six people; many of the households had a single live-in servant.

By the final years of the nineteenth century the construction of single-family rowhouses was declining in Manhattan and in the Bronx. In the Bronx many two-family houses were erected, such as those in the Clay Avenue, Longwood, and Morris High School historic districts, but multiple dwellings -- tenements, flats, and apartment buildings -- became the most common type of new residential construction. There are eight tenements in the Bertine Block Historic District, built in two groups of four -- Nos. 429 to 435 and Nos. 437 to 443 -- between 1897 and 1899. Although each group was commissioned by a different client, all were designed by Bronx architect Harry T. Howell. Howell is another local architect about whom very little is known, except for the fact that he first appears as an architect in New York City directories in 1897, and he maintained an office at least until 1918.<sup>20</sup>

Each of the five-story tenements is faced in brick trimmed with Renaissance-inspired detail in stone and terra cotta. The window openings contained non-historic window sash at the time of designation. Each building was planned with eleven apartments, two on each floor, plus an apartment for the janitor in the basement. The buildings can be classified as "old law" tenements; that is, they were planned following the guidelines established in the Tenement House Act of 1879.<sup>21</sup> This act required that every room in a tenement (generally defined as any residence with more than three apartments, with each household having separate cooking facilities) have a window looking onto the street, a rear yard, or an air shaft; these air shafts were extremely small and offered little light or air to apartments on most

---

<sup>16</sup>New Building Permit [NB 193-1895].

<sup>17</sup>Plans for the row are on file at the Bronx office of the New York City Department of Buildings [Block 2280, Lot 25].

<sup>18</sup>Names of residents appear in U.S. Census Bureau, United States Census, 1900, Election District 975.

<sup>19</sup>Addresses for places of business are often found in New York City directories.

<sup>20</sup>Francis, 41, and Ward, 37.

<sup>21</sup>For a discussion of the Tenement House Act of 1879, see Richard Plunz, *A History of Housing in New York City: Dwelling Type and Social Change in the American Metropolis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 24-28. The act was superseded by the Tenement House Act of 1901.

floors. The eight tenements in the historic district contained five-room railroad flats.<sup>23</sup> Each building had a public hall, but the individual apartments did not have halls. Rather, rooms were lined up one behind the other, much as cars are connected on a railroad train. The kitchen, bathroom, and dining room were located in the rear, the parlor in the front, and two bedrooms in the center looking onto tiny air shafts.

Howell's eight tenements generally attracted households that were less affluent than those residing in the nearby rowhouses. Heads of households (generally men) living in these buildings included those listed in the 1900 census as salesman, cook, painter, clerk, bookkeeper, telegraph operator, confectioner, carpenter, machinist, and railroad clerk. Wives generally worked at home. Many of the children were at home or were attending school, but others, including children as young as fourteen, were employed. Residents were both American-born and immigrants (the largest number of immigrant residents were from Germany and Ireland); most of the immigrants were adults whose children were born in this country.

No. 431 East 136th Street provides a representative example of the population in these eight buildings in 1900.<sup>24</sup> The census taker recorded forty-five residents spread among nine households. All were headed by men: a restaurant waiter, a clerk in a clothing store, a "decorator artist," a painter (probably a house painter), a boot and shoe clerk, "an inspector of servers," "a grocerman," a clothing cutter, and one person whose occupation is not given. Six of these men were born in the United States and one each in Switzerland, Germany, and Russia. Eight of the men were married; of the wives, six were born in the United States and one each in Germany and Ireland. None of the wives was employed outside of the house. Also residing in the apartments were twelve sons, eleven daughters, and five other relatives. Of the twenty-three children in the nine households, six were employed: three sons (real estate clerk, grocery buyer, and auctioneer), and three daughters (bookkeeper in a neckwear establishment, clerk in a bookstore, and shirtwaist presser).

Development within the boundaries of the historic district ceased in 1899. The area appears to have remained stable through World War II. After the war many of the rowhouses were subdivided into apartments and rooming houses. In the 1970s, as economic and social problems increased in the South Bronx, a number of the buildings on the street were abandoned and the buildings at the east end of the block were demolished. At the time of designation one of the rowhouses was vacant, several were in a state of disrepair, and others were well maintained; the eight apartment buildings had recently been rehabilitated and combined into four buildings. The buildings of the historic district survive today as a reflection of the character of Bronx architecture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the Mott Haven area was being developed, and as a physical manifestation of the variety of people, from varied ethnic and national backgrounds, who have lived, and continue to live, in this neighborhood.

---

<sup>23</sup>Plans for these tenements are on file at the Bronx office of the New York City Department of Buildings [Block 2281, Lots 65 and 61].

<sup>24</sup>U.S. Census Bureau (1900).

## **BUILDING ENTRIES**

### **EAST 136TH STREET, SOUTH SIDE BETWEEN WILLIS AVENUE AND BROWN PLACE**

#### **408, 410, 412 EAST 136TH STREET**

Tax Map Block/Lots: 2280/12, 13, 14

Number of Buildings: 3

Building Type: Single-family rowhouses

Date: 1877-78 [NB 649-1877 (No. 408); NB 694-1877 (No. 410); NB 695-1977 (No. 412)]

Architect: Rogers & Browne

Style: Neo-Grec

Owners: Isaac W. Dunsmore (No. 408); H. Crosswell Tuttle (No. 410); Frederick Richards (No. 412)

These three rowhouses in the neo-Grec style are the earliest buildings in the historic district. Although designed as an ensemble, the houses were not erected by a builder on speculation, but were commissioned from the architectural firm of Rogers & Browne by three individual owners. The United States census of 1880 and New York City directories indicate that two of the original owners moved into the completed residences. No. 408 was commissioned by Isaac W. Dunsmore, a real estate broker with an office on Third Avenue and East 136th Street; Dunsmore moved into the house with his Scots-born wife, Mary, and their two daughters. No. 410 was commissioned by lawyer H. Crosswell Tuttle, but was sold to Francis B. Clark, a stockbroker who, in 1880, is recorded to have resided there with his wife, two sons, one daughter, and two female servants (Bridget Murphy, a thirty-four-year-old Irish immigrant, and Maggie Feeheary, a seventeen-year-old woman born in New York to Irish immigrant parents). The third house, No. 412, was commissioned by bookkeeper Frederick Richards who moved into the house with his wife and their young son and daughter.

The identical facades of these three-bay wide, two-story-and-raised basement houses are brick with brownstone trim and are extremely simple in design. Nos. 410 and 412 retain their original high stone stoops leading to paired wooden entrance doors set within simple brownstone enframements with stylized neo-Grec brackets supporting pediments. Brownstone trim is limited to a belt course between the basement and first story, window lintels with projecting cornices, and simple rectangular sills. Each facade is capped by a heavy galvanized-iron cornice with the stylized brackets that typify neo-Grec design. All of the original ironwork has been replaced; some of the original window sash has been replaced; a few of the brownstone lintels have deteriorated; and, at No. 408, the stoop and entrance enframement have been removed and a basement-level entrance created.

#### **414, 416, 418, 420, 422, 424, 426, 428, 430, 432 EAST 136TH STREET**

Tax Map Block/Lots: 2280/15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24

Number of Buildings: 10

Building Type: Single-family rowhouses

Date: 1891 [NB 475-1891]

Architect: George Keister

Style: Queen Anne

Developer: Edward D. Bertine

Designed by George Keister, this row of ten narrow houses (each is only fifteen feet wide), known as the "Bertine Block," is the earliest and, architecturally, the most notable of the three rows commissioned by Edward D. Bertine in this historic district. All of the houses in the row are faced with the same tawny brick, have sunken basements faced with rock-faced sandstone (now painted in most cases), have stoops and areaways lined with wavy wrought-iron railings, and are highlighted with lively Queen Anne-inspired decorative detail. Nonetheless, each house reads as an individual unit. Queen Anne features include the variety of stylistic elements chosen by the architect, including features derived from Flemish, Gothic, and Renaissance architecture; the eccentric rooftop silhouettes with their flat, stepped, scrolled, pedimented, and mansarded profiles; the juxtaposition of varied textures created by the use of different materials; and the appearance of tall chimneys. The row is arranged with facade designs following an A-B-C-D-E-E-B-C-D-A pattern, and a subtle rhythm is achieved through the variation and repetition of details. The houses marked A (Nos. 414 and 432) are virtually identical to each other, as are those marked E (Nos. 422 and 424); the A and E houses have mirror image designs at the ends (A) and center (E) of the row. Within each pair marked B (Nos. 416 and 426), C (Nos. 418 and 428), or D (Nos. 420 and 430), each house has a slightly different design. The houses toward the west have lower basements and shorter stoops than those to the east. Many of the houses have lost their original wooden window sash.

**No. 414** The end house at No. 414 has a rectangular entrance with a modest transom; the original front door has been removed. Beside the entrance is a three-part window with a central, double-hung, one-over-one opening that extends down into the rock-faced stone base, flanked by smaller windows; each of these sections is capped by a stained-glass transom light. Both the door and the window grouping are capped by splayed lintels of Roman brick with rock-faced brownstone imposts and keystones. The entrance is approached by a stoop with original wrought-iron railings. At the second story are three simple double-hung windows, each with a stained-glass transom, rock-faced stone sill, and splayed brick lintel. The third story is articulated by a pair of rectangular windows with original eight-over-eight sash. Storm windows have been installed over the sash. The windows have rock-faced stone sills and splayed brick lintels and they flank an oval window with web-like sash and a brick enframement. Above the third story, corbeled bricks support an arched brick cornice capped by a decorative corbeled brick parapet. The building retains its original wrought-iron areaway railing. According to the United States census of 1900, the first census to record residents of the Bertine Block, this was home to merchant Joseph Robitscher and his wife, Bianca, both born in Europe, and their two daughters, a son, a granddaughter, and an Irish servant.

**No. 416** The home of the row's developer, Edward Bertine, No. 416 is notable for the pointed-arched openings on the first story and for its stepped gable. The stoop of this house, with its original wrought-iron railings, leads to a rectangular door (the original has been replaced) with a pointed-arched transom (original glass replaced). To the side of the entrance is a wide window opening consisting of a central rectangular window that extends down into the rock-faced stone base in the same manner as the windows of Nos. 414 and 432. The central window is flanked by smaller openings and crowned by a large pointed-arched, stained-glass transom. The transom is extant, but the other wood window sash has been replaced by sash with white aluminum frames. The arrangement of pointed-arched entrance and wide pointed-arched window grouping is repeated at Nos. 420 and 428. The second and third stories of No. 416 each have three rectangular windows (all sash altered). At the second story these windows are capped by shallow, segmental-arched transoms (original glass removed). The central window

in the third story is capped by a blind pointed-arch transom. All of the openings have brick lintels; the windows at the upper stories have rock-faced stone sills. A stepped gable, culminating in a pediment, caps the house. The gable is articulated by a trio of narrow blind arches and an angled, vertical brick projection that rests on corbels. The gable rises in front of a low, slate-clad mansard. The house has its original wrought-iron areaway railing. This house is similar, but not identical, to No. 426. In 1900, Edward Bertine's household consisted of his wife, Sophia, his daughter, and a European-born servant.

**No. 418** No. 418 is approached by a stone stoop with original wrought-iron railings. The stoop leads to an original paneled wooden rectangular door with large glass light. It is set below a segmental-arched stained-glass transom. To one side of the entrance are a pair of windows with one-over-one wood sash and shallow segmental-arched stained-glass transoms. The first-story openings have brick lintels with rock-faced stone impostes. The second story has a pair of wide one-over-one windows with splayed brick lintels and rock-faced stone sills. In the center of the third story is a projecting bay articulated by a pair of windows, each with one-over-one sash and a transom divided into eight square lights. These windows have splayed brick lintels and a rock-faced sill that continues across the entire facade. Above the third-story windows is a modest galvanized-iron cornice that supports a scrolled gable pierced by a recessed blind arch. The gable rises above a shallow mansard with slate shingles. The mansard of this house is separated from those of the neighboring houses by stepped party walls. This house is similar, but not identical, to No. 428. The original wrought-iron areaway railing is extant. The family of Dutch-born salesman Louis Van Veen, consisting of Van Veen, his Dutch wife, a Dutch-born son, and two sons and a daughter born in New York, lived here in 1900. In 1892, the Van Veens had been the first to purchase a house in this row from Bertine.

**No. 420** The lively facade at No. 420 has a pointed-arched entrance and a parlor-story window group like those described at No. 416 and also visible at No. 428. A stoop with original wrought-iron railings leads to an iron-and-glass door that probably dates from the early twentieth century. Above the door is a stained-glass transom, still emblazoned with the original address number of 674 (addresses on blocks in this area were changed in the early twentieth century). Although the parlor-story windows have been changed, their original stained-glass transom is extant. The second story features a three-sided angled wooden oriel with six-over-one wood sash. The oriel rests on a rock-faced stone sill supported by brick corbeling. Above the oriel, recessed within a stilted-arched brick spandrel panel, is a blind rondel. The oriel is flanked by small oval stained-glass windows with brick enframements. Above the oriel, on the third story, are two segmental-arched windows with eight-over-one wooden sash, brick lintels, and a single rock-faced stone sill. Rising at each side of the second-story oriel and the third-story windows is a projecting, angled brick pier supported by corbeled brickwork. These piers appear to support a modest galvanized-iron cornice above which rises a steeply sloping pedimented gable clad with slate shingles. This gable rises above a mansard. At the east side of the house rises a very tall brick chimney with a corbeled cap; the chimney rests on brick corbeling at the second story. This chimney is shared with the house at No. 422. No. 420 is similar, but not identical, to No. 430. In 1900, No. 420 housed Alonzo Fogal, a real estate broker, and his three daughters and two sons.

**Nos. 422 and 424** The houses at Nos. 422 and 424 are virtually mirror images of each other. Each house has a segmental-arched entry with a rectangular door (original at No. 422) and stained glass transom (the transom at No. 422 retains the original address number -- 676). The entrances are approached by stoops with original wrought-iron railings. Beside each entrance is a wide segmental-arched window grouping. The openings have brick lintels with rock-faced stone imposts and keystones. No. 422 retains its original window arrangement, consisting of a central one-over-one wood sash window that extends down into the rock-faced stone base. To either side is a smaller window. Each window is capped by a stained-glass transom (the stained-glass panels have been removed and the sash replaced in the flanking windows of No. 424). The second story of each house has two rectangular one-over-one windows with segmental-arched, stained-glass transoms. The brick window lintels at No. 422 are flush with the facade, while those at No. 424 project slightly. The rock-faced stone sills of the second-story windows are part of a belt course that continues across both facades. Between the second and third stories, the facades of these two houses are ornamented with a band of brick diaperwork created by a use of projecting bricks. This band is capped by a rock-faced stone belt course that serves as the sill for the three one-over-one rectangular windows with clear-glass transoms that light the third story at each house. A galvanized-iron cornice and shallow mansard roof with slate shingles caps the pair. The houses are flanked by tall chimneys shared with the house to either side. Both houses retain their original wrought-iron areaway railings. In 1900, No. 422 was home to Isaac Cohen, a salesman, his wife Bertha, his son, his European-born in-laws, and a Swedish servant. No. 424 housed Canadian-born school principal Frances Ward, his wife, sister-in-law, niece, and a servant.

**No. 426** The facade of No. 426 has a straightforward fenestration pattern. At the first story are a pair of rectangular windows and a rectangular entrance with its original wood door (altered) and a transom (original glass replaced). Slightly projecting splayed brick lintels cap the entry and window ensemble. The entrance stoop retains its original wrought-iron railings and a similar areaway railing is also extant. At the second story are three rectangular windows, each with a segmental-arched transom (original glass replaced), a rock-faced stone sill (part of a continuous belt course), and a slightly projecting brick lintel. The third-story openings take the form of a simple Palladian window, with an arched central opening flanked by smaller rectangular openings. All window sash appear to be replacements for the original. This house originally had a stepped gable similar to that at No. 416, except that it was crowned by a fan-shaped cap, rather than the triangular cap at No. 416. The lower steps of the gable have been filled in and the upper steps and cap have been removed. The house shares a chimney with No. 424. This was home, in 1900, to lawyer Cornelius Earley, his wife and daughter, and a single servant.

**No. 428** With its scrolled gable and projecting third-story bay with paired windows, No. 428 is similar to the house at No. 418. Unlike No. 418, however, No. 428 has pointed-arched openings at the parlor story like those described at No. 416 and seen also at No. 420. Although damaged, the stained-glass transom above the parlor-story windows is extant. The building retains its original wrought-iron stoop and areaway railings. At the second story are two segmental-arched window openings with shallow projecting brick lintels. The entrance door is a replacement; the window sash at the second and third stories appear to be replacements. A tall chimney with a corbeled

cap rises between this house and its neighbor to the east, No. 426. The galvanized-iron coping at the top of the scrolled gable has been removed. Lawyer Francis Haines, his wife Mary, their two daughters, and one son, and an Irish servant lived here in 1900.

**No. 430** As at No. 426, No. 430 has a first story that is crisply articulated by rectangular openings with slightly projecting splayed brick lintels. The house is entered through its original paneled door. The house retains its original wrought-iron stoop and areaway railings. At the second story are three rectangular openings, each with a rock-faced stone sill that is part of a belt course extending across the facade. These windows are capped by a shallow projecting shingled hood. The hood rests on four brick corbels. The one-over-one windows at the first and second stories retain their transoms. On the third story are two rectangular windows with stone sills and splayed brick lintels. These windows originally had eight-over-one sash. Above these is a steep pedimented gable similar to that described at No. 420. The gable at No. 430 has lost its original slate cladding. This house shares a brick chimney with its neighbor to the west, No. 428. The house was the residence of real estate agent John Kirk, his wife, three sons, and one servant in 1900. The servant was an eighteen-year-old black woman from Virginia, a relatively rare example of an African-American who was a live-in servant to a middle-class family at the turn of the century, a time when most live-in servants were immigrants from Ireland or other European nations.

**No. 432** In design, No. 432 is a mirror image of No. 414 (see) except at the third story. The third story of this house has a pair of rectangular windows (original sash replaced), as at No. 414; however, it never had the central oval window seen on that house. Here the windows originally flanked a field of light-colored stucco with brick highlights. Similar, but smaller fields were set to the sides of the windows. All of these stucco fields have been filled in with brick. The stained-glass transoms at the second story survive; otherwise, all of the window sash have been replaced. The original entrance to the house was replaced with a glass-and-iron grille door probably in the early twentieth century, but the house retains its original wrought-iron stoop and areaway railings. In 1900, this was home to George Moran, the president of a power company, his wife Grace Moran, the Morans' daughter, and an Irish servant.

#### **434, 436, 438, 440 EAST 136TH STREET**

Tax Map Block/Lots: 2280/25, 26, 27, 28

Number of Buildings: 4

Building Type: Two-family rowhouses

Date: 1895 [NB 193-1895]

Architect: Adolph Balschun, Jr.

Style: Renaissance Revival

Developer: Edward D. Bertine

These four rowhouses in the Renaissance Revival style were the last buildings erected by Edward Bertine in the historic district. Unlike the other rowhouses in the district, each of which was designed to house a single family, each of these houses was planned for two families, and they are relatively early examples of the type. The four houses are identical, except for the placement of entrances. The entrances are paired -- Nos. 434 and 436 and Nos. 438 and 440 share wide common stoops, each with

three wrought-iron railings (one at each end and one in the center). Each house is faced with tawny, iron spot Roman brick (No. 434 has been cleaned) trimmed with modest limestone detail. The houses have partially sunken basements with three full stories above. At each house, a smooth limestone belt course (now painted) separates the basement from the parlor story. Each house originally had paired wood-and-glass doors (extant only at No. 434) capped by segmental-arched stained glass transoms. The original stained-glass transoms are extant at Nos. 434 and 438; each transom contains the original address numerals -- 688 at No. 434 and 692 at No. 436. The entry lintels are composed entirely of Roman brick, each with a projecting rock-faced stone keystone. The entrances are flanked by brick piers with rock-faced stone bands and carved stone capitals. The piers support brick impostes that, along with the projecting keystones, support modest brick entablatures with stone cornices. At the first story, each house has two segmental-arched window openings, each opening capped by a shallow projecting brick lintel, and each flanked by banded piers with stone capitals. A brick and stone belt course, incorporating the entablature above each entrance, separates the first and second stories. An additional stone belt course, resting on brick corbeling, separates the second and third stories. These two upper stories are articulated, at each house, by three rectangular windows with one-over-one wood sash (No. 440 has aluminum windows) and stone lintels supported on brick corbels. Additional corbel bands run across the facades below the lintels on each of the upper stories. Each house is crowned by a massive cornice consisting of a wide paneled frieze, a bracketed cornice, and a heavy parapet. All four houses retain their original wrought-iron areaway railings. Iron gates close off the bases of the stoops at Nos. 436 and 438.

In 1900, No. 434 was home to builder Ernest Hammer and his wife, their seven sons, one daughter, and a German servant; the second apartment was rented to day laborer Abraham Bross and his wife. No. 436 was home to real estate agent Alonzo Carr and his family, consisting of his daughter and son; the second apartment was home to a post office clerk and his wife. Canadian-born William Lewis, his wife, three sons, four daughters, son-in-law, and a boarder (a physician) lived at No. 438, while No. 440 was home to European-born builder George Daily, his wife, son, daughter, mother, and a boarder (a carpenter).

## **EAST 136TH STREET, NORTH SIDE BETWEEN WILLIS AVENUE AND BROWN PLACE**

### **415, 417, 419, 421, 423, 425 EAST 136TH STREET**

Tax Map Block/Lots: 2281/71, 70, 69, 68, 67, 66

Number of Buildings: 6

Building Type: Single-family rowhouses

Date: 1892-93 [NB 403-1892]

Architect: John Hauser

Style: Romanesque Revival

Developer: Edward D. Bertine

This group of six rowhouses in the Romanesque Revival style was Edward Bertine's second project within the historic district. The row is arranged in a symmetrical A-B-C-C-B-A pattern. The three-story and raised basement houses are faced entirely in tawny brick (some painted) with brick and brownstone trim. Each of the three-bay wide houses has its entrance set to the west. Each entrance originally had a pair of wood-and-glass doors and a transom light; these survive only at No. 425. The entrances are approached by high stone stoops, all lined with their original wrought-iron railings. Wrought-iron railings also run in front of the areaways (the original areaway railing has been replaced at No. 415). Each raised basement has a pair of rectangular windows with simple stone lintels. A smooth stone belt course separates the basement level on each house from the parlor story. Additional stone belt courses, running at sill level, separate the other stories. Another feature common to all of the houses is a brick corbel table and brick parapet with galvanized-iron coping; the design of the corbeling varies on the different houses. It appears that all of the houses except for No. 425 no longer have their original one-over-one wood window sash.

**Nos. 415 and 425** The "A" houses, Nos. 415 and 425, are entered through round-arched entries with brick voussoirs, brownstone impost blocks ornamented with circles, rock-faced keystones, and molded brick extrados. A pair of rectangular windows with stone lintels and sills is located to the east of each entrance. The three rectangular windows of the second story are capped by ornate transom-like panels. The central window has a pointed-arched panel, while the flanking windows have round-arched panels. The windows have brick lintels resting on corbeled imposts and are outlined by molded brick extrados; the central window has a stone keystone. The central window on the third story also has a round-arched panel, above which is a brick arch with recessed and molded bricks; the arch rests on smooth brownstone imposts. The openings to either side are capped by splayed brick lintels with projecting, rock-faced stone keystones and flush, smooth stone imposts. Brackets, in the form of corbeled bricks, support a round-arched brick cornice and additional corbel bands run beneath a parapet with stylized corbeled brackets. At the time of designation, No. 415 was vacant and its original windows and door were removed. No. 425 retains its original one-over-one wood sash and paired wood-and-glass doors.

**Nos. 417 and 423** The "B" houses, Nos. 417 and 423, are identical except for their entrances. No. 417 is entered through a segmental-arched entryway, while No. 423 has a flat-arched entrance. At both entrances, the brick arch has a rock-faced brownstone keystone and imposts. Each house has a pair of round-arched windows on the parlor-story level. Each window has a brick arch with molded brick extrados; rock-faced brownstone keystones; smooth brownstone imposts with ornamental circles; and

projecting stone sills. The second-story window ensemble at No. 417 and 423 is similar to that described for the third story of Nos. 415 and 425. At the third story are three rectangular windows capped by a stone belt course that doubles as a transom bar. Above this bar are round-arched, transom-like panels, each with a brick arch. The central arch has a molded brick extrados and the flanking arches have brownstone keystones and imposts. Stylized corbeled brackets support the brick cornice and additional corbeled bands run beneath a parapet with scalloped brickwork. At No. 417, no original window sash survive. At No. 423, the arched one-over-one wood sash at the parlor story appear to be original; otherwise, the sash have been replaced. At the time of designation, No. 423 was home to the Holy Cross Baptist Church.

**Nos. 419 and 421** The "C" houses, the central pair of the row, located at Nos. 419 and 421, are identical except for the arch at the entrance. No. 419 has a flat arch and No. 421 has a segmental arch. At both houses, the arches are formed from brick and have rock-faced brownstone keystones and imposts. To the east of each entrance is a pair of rectangular windows separated by a narrow wooden pier (the pier at No. 421 appears to be a replacement). Above the windows is a carved wood, segmental-arched spandrel panel. This is set beneath a segmental brick arch with a molded brick extrados. The central window at the second story is capped by a smooth brownstone lintel with a triangular pediment. The flanking windows have splayed brick lintels with rock-faced keystones. At the third story, the central window is capped by a round-arched panel, a brick arch, and a molded brick extrados. The flanking windows have smooth stone lintels. On these houses, the brick cornice, with its corbeled brackets, is in the form of pointed arches and the parapet is supported by bricks laid in tooth-like bands.

In 1900, the residents of this row were: At No. 415, English-born tobacco broker John L. Jackson, his German-born wife, and their three daughters and one son; at No. 417, German-born coal dealer Gustavus Robitzek, his wife, two sons, and two daughters; at No. 419, German-born metal worker Valentine Fischer, his German-born wife, two nephews, and niece; at No. 421, John Van Gelder, the superintendent of lightering on a railroad, his wife, son, two daughters, sister-in-law, and a German servant; at No. 423, minister George F.W. Birch, his wife Louisa, sister-in-law, and two servants -- one from Germany and the other born in New York; and at No. 425, English-born builder Frank Lyons, his daughter, and a lodger.

**429, 431, 433, 435 (now known as 431 and 435) EAST 136TH STREET**

Tax Map Block/Lots: 2281/75 in part (formerly 65, 64, 63, 62)

Number of Buildings: 4  
Building Type: Tenements  
Date: 1897-98 [NB 695A-1897]  
Architect: Harry T. Howell  
Style: Renaissance Revival  
Developer: Rachel Juster

Each of these four old-law tenements, commissioned by Rachel Juster who lived on Stanton Street on the Lower East Side, originally housed eleven families -- one in the basement and two on each of the upper stories. The five-story Renaissance Revival style buildings are clad in beige brick with limestone and white terra-cotta trim. Each building is four bays wide; at No. 429, the westernmost bay curves so

as to visually connect the tenements to the adjacent rowhouses. Each building has a centrally placed, round-arched entrance set within a limestone enframingent. The enframingents have fluted pilasters, carved spandrels, and carved intrados moldings (alternating foliate and rope moldings). The entrances at Nos. 429 and 433 have been closed and the doors replaced by windows, since each of these buildings has been combined, on the interior, with its neighbor to the east. The existing entrances at Nos. 431 and 435 have shallow stoops with stone cheek walls. At all four buildings, the first and second stories are separated by a limestone belt course, while the second and third stories are separated by courses of dogtooth brick. The third and fourth stories are articulated with two-story round-arched arcades. Carved panels separate the third- and fourth-story windows and each arch has a keystone and corbeled brickwork. The rectangular windows of the fifth story are capped by corbeled brick courses. The facades are crowned by a continuous galvanized-iron cornice. All of the original windows and doors have been replaced.

**439, 441, 443, 445 (now known as 441 and 445) EAST 136TH STREET**

Tax Map Block/Lots: 2281/75 in part (formerly 61, 60, 59, 58)

Number of Buildings: 4

Building Type: Tenements

Date: 1898-99 [NB 1037A-1898]

Architect: Harry T. Howell

Style: Renaissance Revival

Developer: Roberts & Gaines

These four, five-story Renaissance Revival style tenements, each planned for eleven families (two per floor and one in the basement), were built by Hugh L. Roberts of 703 East 135th Street and Furman V. Gaines who lived on West 93rd Street. The buildings are faced with orange iron spot Roman brick trimmed with stone and white terra cotta. The four-bay wide buildings have central entrances. Each entrance has a stone enframingent (the stone is painted) with fluted pilasters capped by massive brackets that support entablatures. The entrances at Nos. 439 and 443 have been closed and the doors replaced by windows, since each of these buildings has been combined, on the interior, with its neighbor to the east. The existing entrances at Nos. 441 and 445 have shallow stoops with stone cheek walls. The first-story windows have keyed surrounds composed of blocks of light-brown rock-faced sandstone (some painted). The upper-story windows are ornamented with white terra cotta. At the second and fourth stories, the rectangular windows have enframingents capped by cartouches, while the rectangular windows of the third story are capped by shells with garlands. At the fifth story are round-arched windows with terra-cotta enframingents having projecting keystones. The original galvanized-iron cornice spanning the group is extant only at Nos. 443 and 445. All of the original doors and windows have been replaced.



410 East 136th Street



408, 410, 412 East 136th Street



Bertine Block, historic view  
North Side Board of Trade, *The Great North Side or Borough of the Bronx* (1897), 38.



Bertine Block  
432, 430, 428, 426, 424, 422, 420, 418, 416, 414 East 136th Street



Edward Bertine House, 416 East 136th Street, historic view  
North Side Board of Trade, *The Great North Side or Borough of  
the Bronx* (1897), 34.



Edward Bertine House, 416 East 136th Street, contemporary view



428 East 136th Street



420 East 136th Street



434 East 136th Street



434 East 136th Street, detail  
(note old address number in transom)



415, 417, 419, 421, 423, 425 East 136th Street



425 East 136th Street



429, 431, 433, 435 (now known as 431 and 435) East 136th Street



439, 441, 443, 445 (now known as 441 and 445) East 136th Street

## FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this area, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Bertine Block Historic District contains buildings which have a special character and special historical and aesthetic interest and value and which represent one or more eras in the history of New York City and which cause the area, by reason of these factors, to constitute a distinct section of the city.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Bertine Block Historic District consists of a small enclave of thirty-one residential buildings, lining both sides of East 136th Street between Willis Avenue and Brown Place, which is located in the Mott Haven neighborhood, one of the oldest settled areas of the Bronx and the first in the borough to be developed with rowhouses; that the development of this district, which was closely linked to the opening of transit lines connecting Mott Haven with Manhattan, is reflected in its four groups of rowhouses and two groups of tenements, erected between 1877 and 1899; that the buildings in the historic district comprise fine examples of neo-Grec, Queen Anne, Romanesque Revival, and Renaissance Revival design, illustrating the stylistic trends in residential architecture in New York City in the final three decades of the nineteenth century; that much of the rowhouse development within the historic district is the result of construction by Edward Bertine, who built three of the district's four groups of rowhouses, including the so-called "Bertine Block," an exceptional row of Queen Anne houses designed by well-known architect George Keister; that the historic district contains eight "old law" tenements, erected in two groups in 1897-99, which typify tenement construction planned for working-class families of the era; that the early residents of the rowhouses and tenements in the historic district represent a cross section of the population that came to settle in the Bronx in the late nineteenth century, including those who were American-born as well as immigrants; and that the buildings in the district retain their architectural integrity to a high degree and stand apart from the surrounding area, thus creating a distinct section of the city.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3021 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 an Historic District the Bertine Block Historic District, containing the property bounded by a line beginning at the intersection of the southern curb line of East 136th Street and a northerly extension of the western property line of 408 East 136th Street, extending southerly and easterly along the western and southern property lines of 408 East 136th Street, southerly along part of the western property line of 410 East 136th Street, easterly along the southern property lines of 410 through 440 East 136th Street, northerly along the eastern property line of 440 East 136th Street, northerly across East 136th Street, easterly along the northern curb line of East 136th Street, northerly along the eastern building line of 445 East 136th Street to the northern property line of Lot 10 of Block 2282, westerly along the northern property lines of 425 through 415 East 136th Street, southerly along the western property line of 415 East 136th Street, southerly across East 136th Street, and westerly along the southern curb line of East 136th Street, to the point of beginning; The Bronx.