

George S. Bowdoin Stable

149 East 38th Street, Borough of Manhattan.
Built 1902; architect Ralph S. Townsend.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 894, Lot 37.

On November 19, 1996, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the George S. Bowdoin Stable and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 5). There were five speakers in favor of designation. The hearing was continued until January 14, 1997 (Item No. 2). At the second hearing there was one speaker in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation at either hearing. Both hearings had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. The Commission has received numerous letters in support of designation. Community Board 6 has also expressed its support of designation.

Summary

This two-story stable building was constructed in 1902 for William R. H. Martin, a businessman and real estate developer active in the Murray Hill section of the city. Architect Ralph S. Townsend designed this small building in a distinctive Dutch Revival style, with an elaborate stepped gable and oversized stone quoins and voussoirs. Inset panels of horse heads allude to the building's original function, while a bulldog near the top of the gable adds a whimsical element to the facade. The stable was purchased in 1907 by George S. Bowdoin who lived nearby at Park Avenue and East 36th Street. Bowdoin's daughter Edith inherited the building from her father, had it converted to a garage in 1918, and held ownership until 1944. As a rare surviving stable structure in Manhattan, this building serves as a reminder of the period of New York's history when horses were an important part of daily life and their care and housing had to be taken into consideration in building and city planning.



DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Murray Hill¹

The area known today as Murray Hill is bounded roughly by 34th Street on the south, 40th Street on the north, Fifth Avenue on the west, and Third Avenue on the east. Murray Hill took its name from the country estate of Robert and Mary Murray whose farm comprised a large hill. According to legend, during the Revolutionary War, Mary Murray invited the British General Howe and his troops to her house (which stood approximately at the corner of what is today Park Avenue and East 37th Street) for a meal, thus allowing General George Washington's army to escape to the north.

The character of the neighborhood was determined in 1847 when local landowners signed a covenant stipulating that only brick or stone houses of two or more stories could be erected in the area.² Shortly thereafter, many homes of wealthy and socially prominent people began to appear along Fifth and Madison Avenues. The Gothic Revival villa of Coventry Waddell, had already been constructed on Fifth Avenue between 37th and 38th Streets in 1844. This, along with the Samuel P. Townsend mansion on Fifth Avenue and 34th Street, built in 1853-55, set the tone for future development. In the 1860s, A.T. Stewart purchased the Townsend mansion, to replace it with his own extravagant, marble-fronted, mansarded dwelling. The choicest lots were soon occupied by families such as the Belmonts, Rhinelanders, Tiffanys, Havemeyers, and Morgans.

Eastward development of the neighborhood started after Lexington and Fourth Avenues were opened in 1848, and expanded further after 1852 when the New York and Harlem Railroad stopped running steam engines south of 42nd Street, and the below-grade cuts of Park Avenue were filled in with a series of landscaped strips. The cross streets, proceeding eastward from Fifth Avenue, were developed with rowhouses, which became more modest the further they were located from Fifth Avenue. The block east of Lexington Avenue even had service buildings set among the modest houses. Many houses in Murray Hill however, were designed (or sometimes remodeled) by prominent architects in the high styles of their period, including the 1894 Beaux-Arts alteration by Carrère & Hastings of an 1857 rowhouse at 117 East 35th Street, the J. Hampden Robb House at 23 Park Avenue by McKim, Mead & White of 1889-90, and the 1869 Italianate townhouse at 31 East 38th Street,

designed by William Easterbrook and owned by William R. Grace while he was mayor of New York. The Murray Hill Hotel, on Park Avenue and East 40th Street became a well-known meeting place for New Yorkers and famous visitors such as President Grover Cleveland and Mark Twain.

After the turn of the century, when retailing began to move into Murray Hill along Fifth Avenue, many of New York's wealthy families relocated their residences further north.³ In 1914, as many single-family residences were divided into multiple-dwelling units and apartment houses began to be constructed, the Murray Hill Association was formed (with J.P. Morgan as one of its directors) with the intention of preserving the exclusive residential character of the neighborhood.

Stables

Horses were a vital part of the life and economy of New York until the early years of the twentieth century. Horses were used to pull omnibuses, firefighting equipment, and delivery wagons, as well as private carriages which transported people around the city. In 1896, it was reported that there were 4,649 stables in New York City, accommodating 73,746 horses.⁴ These included the private stables maintained by wealthy families for their own use, as well as large stables for the horses and equipment of peddlers and delivery services, stables maintained by riding schools, stables owned by horsecar companies, as well as commercial stables for individuals to board their own horses or to rent horses and carriages.

After around 1860 in New York City, it became common for stables, whether private or commercial, to be located in less expensive areas, a block or more away from prime residential sections, and often grouped together to create a mews.⁵ A location convenient to, but somewhat removed from individual houses also kept the smells and noises associated with the animals away from the exclusive living quarters of wealthy New Yorkers.

The George S. Bowdoin Stable

The stable at 149 East 38th Street was built during the last phase of private stable construction in New York. While horses would soon be eclipsed by automobiles as the primary method of transportation,

at this time the construction of a private stable on this lot was a logical use for the property. The block between Lexington and Third Avenues was filled with small residences and service buildings. Directly to the east stood two small stables, while further east were iron works and breweries. From the 1850s until the construction of the El in 1879, Third Avenue had been a main route for horse traffic, and fashionable New Yorkers raced their horses along the avenue, patronizing the taverns and blacksmith shops they passed along the way. In addition, not far to the south, was the city's main horse trading district.⁶

In 1902, William R.H. Martin purchased this lot, the site of a small, brick-fronted wooden building, from John W. Smith.⁷ A senior partner of the clothing firm of Rogers, Peet & Company, Martin was also a large landowner in New York City. At his death in 1912, Martin's property holdings were estimated to be worth more than \$10,000,000, and included the Martinique Hotel and the Marbridge Building.⁸ No. 149 East 38th Street was only one of numerous lots Martin owned in the Murray Hill area.

After the purchase, Martin hired noted architect Ralph S. Townsend to design a small private stable for this lot.⁹ Martin held the property for several years, selling it to George S. Bowdoin in 1907. Bowdoin was a partner in the banking firm of J. P. Morgan and Co. and resided in a large house on Park Avenue near East 36th Street (close to Morgan's residence). In an arrangement typical of private carriage houses, Bowdoin's stable housed his horses and carriage on the ground floor, and had living quarters for the coachman on the upper floor. Upon Bowdoin's death in 1913, the stable became the property of his daughter Edith, who held it until 1944.¹⁰ In 1918, Miss Bowdoin had the interior horse fittings removed and the lower floor converted from a stable to a garage for automobiles, while retaining the living quarters above.¹¹

Ralph S. Townsend (d. 1921)¹²

Ralph Samuel Townsend, one of New York City's foremost architects of fashionable hotels and apartment houses, was noted for skillful designs with bold ornamentation. He established an architectural practice in New York City in 1881 and designed a number of stores, lofts, and apartment buildings located in what is now the Greenwich Village Historic District. He also designed the Hotel Savoy and the Pierrepont Hotel in the 1890s, office and

loft buildings located in what is now the Ladies Mile Historic District, and apartment buildings and rowhouses in what are now the Riverside-West End and Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic Districts. At the turn of the century he collaborated with architect Herbert Harde in the design of a number of apartment houses on the Upper West Side. In what is now the Tribeca West Historic District, Townsend designed a neo-Renaissance store and loft building, constructed in 1901. In 1906 Townsend joined with Charles Albert Steinle and William Cook Haskell in the firm of Townsend, Steinle & Haskell, which was known for its designs of large apartment buildings and was active through 1936.

The Stable Building

At 149 East 38th Street, Townsend designed a distinctive brick stable building with a tall, stepped gable and contrasting stone trim. Bold ornamentation of the type seen so often on Townsend's larger apartment buildings and hotels is also prominent on this smaller example of his work. The building's purpose is also immediately obvious from the sculpted horse heads above the first story.¹³ The head of a mean-looking bull dog stands guard over the facade from the top of the gable, adding a whimsical note.

This stable is characteristic of those dating from the early twentieth century which tended to have more picturesque designs than the simpler and more utilitarian structures built during the late nineteenth century. Strong rooflines and forceful design features such as those on the Bowdoin stable helped to distinguish these buildings on their small lots and narrow streets. The Helen Miller Gould Stable at 213 West 58th Street (York & Sawyer, 1902-03, a designated New York City Landmark), designed in a flamboyant French Renaissance style, is another example of the type.

Private stables, particularly those adjacent to owners' homes, were usually designed in a style similar to the main house. For the Bowdoin stable, built on speculation and not associated with another residential building, the developer desired a distinctive building which would be attractive for resale.¹⁴ The Dutch Revival was one of a number of historical revival styles which were used during the end of the nineteenth century and in the early twentieth century.¹⁵ The Dutch Revival style, while not the most common, suggested New York's beginnings as a Dutch colony when houses with tall,

stepped gable fronts lined the narrow streets of early New Amsterdam, reminding the colonists of the land they had left behind. This style can be seen on large buildings such as the Fleming Smith Warehouse at 451-453 Washington Street (Stephen D. Hatch, 1891-92, a designated New York City Landmark), the DeWitt Clinton High School at 899 Tenth Avenue (C.B.J. Snyder, 1904-06), and on smaller structures such as this building and another carriage house at 168 East 73rd Street (Charles W. Romeyn, 1899, a designated New York City Landmark).

Description

This brick building is two and one-half stories high including a tall, stepped gable emerging from a tiled mansard roof. The ground story is three bays wide; a large central opening, originally the carriage entrance, containing its original double wooden doors, is flanked by a narrow doorway on each side. Each of these arched openings is defined by overscaled stone quoins and voussoirs. The western doorway, originally a window, was lengthened to match the doorway on the east. Each has a single wooden door topped by a rectangular transom. A stone bandcourse marks the top of this story and, along with a continuous stone sill at the second story, forms a narrow spandrel. This spandrel has a sculpted horse head near each end and a shield

with the address number "149" in the middle. The second story has two squared window openings (with replacement sash), also marked by large stone quoins and voussoirs. Additional quoins define the corners of the facade at this level. Between the two windows is another large stone panel with a shield noting the date "A.D.1902." Another bandcourse tops this second level, and differentiates it from the large gable. In the gable, stone quoins mark each vertical edge, each step is capped by a stone volute, and the topmost area is crowned by a rounded stone pediment. In the center of the gable is a round, bull's eye window with an elaborate stone surround and above it is a bulldog head in high relief.

Subsequent History

After Edith Bowdoin's death, the stable building was sold to George Nichols.¹⁶ At this time the building was used as a private garage for four cars, with a single family residence above. Since then, different owners have reconfigured the upper stories to accommodate either one or two families. It currently serves as a single-family dwelling.

Report prepared by
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Research Department

NOTES

1. This brief history of Murray Hill has been compiled from the following sources: "Mrs. Murray Had A Farm..." *Herald Bicentennial Supplement* (July 2, 1976), 12; Charles Lockwood, *Manhattan Moves Uptown* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1976), 223-231; Frederick S. Lightfoot, ed., *Nineteenth-Century New York in Rare Photographic Views* (New York: Dover Publ., Inc., 1981), 100-110; M. Christine Boyer, *Manhattan Manners* (New York: Rizzoli, 1985), 134-135; and Anita Pins, *An Historic District in Murray Hill* (New York: The Murray Hill Committee, Inc., 1977), 9.
2. In addition to requiring quality construction, certain types of businesses were prohibited as well. No "livery stable, slaughter house, smith shop, forge..." was to be established there; as well as no manufacture of "gun powder, glue, vitriol, ink or turpentine." Also there was to be no tannery, no "brewery, distillery, museum, theater, circus..." Such restrictions were fairly common in many residential neighborhoods.

3. While the other families cited moved their residences further north, the Morgans stayed in Murray Hill. The J.P. Morgan, Jr. house is located at Madison Avenue and East 37th Street, and the library (a designated New York City Landmark), built to accommodate J.P. Morgan's vast art and literary collections, is located at Madison Avenue and East 36th Street.
4. Kenneth T. Jackson, ed., *The Encyclopedia of New York City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 1108.
5. Some Manhattan streets were devoted almost exclusively to private and livery stables. These included West 17th and West 18th Streets between Sixth and Seventh Avenues (constructed in the 1860s), East 35th and East 36th Streets between Lexington and Third Avenues (developed largely in the 1860s and 1870s), East 73rd Street between Lexington and Third Avenues (stables erected between 1883 and 1904), and West 58th Street between Broadway and Seventh Avenue (stables erected c. 1885-1905). Of these, Nos. 126-132, 136, and 140 West 18th Street, Nos. 166-174, 178-180, 161-167, 173 East 73rd Street, and the Helen Miller Gould Stable at 213 West 58th Street are designated New York City Landmarks.
6. *Atlas of the City of New York and Part of the Bronx* (New York: E. Robinson, 1885), Plate 13. *Atlas of the City of New York: Borough of Manhattan* (Philadelphia: G.W. Bromley & Co., 1899, corrected to 1909), Vol. 2, Plate 10.
7. New York County Register's Office, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Section 3, Liber 86, page 174, August 15, 1902.
8. "William R.H. Martin Dead," *The New York Times*, Jan. 31, 1912, 11:5.
9. New York City, Department of Buildings, Manhattan, NB 518-1902. Martin subsequently employed the same architect, Ralph S. Townsend to design a nearby rowhouse at 122-124 East 38th Street in 1903-04, also on speculation.
10. "Bowdoin Estate Set at \$6,600,998," *The New York Times*, Aug. 10, 1917, 6:1. Edith Bowdoin also received the Park Avenue residence.
11. New York City, Department of Buildings, Manhattan, Alt. 2170-1918. This alteration included removing the wood finish on the walls and installing fireproof material, and laying new cement floors which would be better for a garage. In addition, the attic was extended to the rear, creating a full third story to accommodate additional living quarters. On the application it was noted that the building had been used as a garage since 1916 and the proposed ground floor alterations were necessary to make this use safer and more convenient.
12. Information in this section was taken primarily from Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Tribeca West Designation Report* (LP-1713) (New York: City of New York, 1991).
13. This was not a unique design detail. A photograph in Julius Trousdale Sadler, Jr. and Jacquelin D.J. Sadler, *American Stables, An Architectural Tour* (Boston: New York Geographical Society, 1981), 143, shows a similar horse's head decorating the front gable of the Vernon Manor carriage house.
14. In Sadler and Sadler, *American Stables*, 104-105, this stable is shown in association with a Dutch Revival mansion on Park Avenue called the Flagler house. No record of this building or its relation to this stable has been found by this writer.
15. Architects of the period could choose from among a variety of revival styles (all more or less historically accurate, and adapted to a more contemporary way of life) to enhance a growing nationalistic feeling and to suggest earlier, perhaps simpler, or more idyllic times.
16. New York County Register's Office, Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 4258, Page 363.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

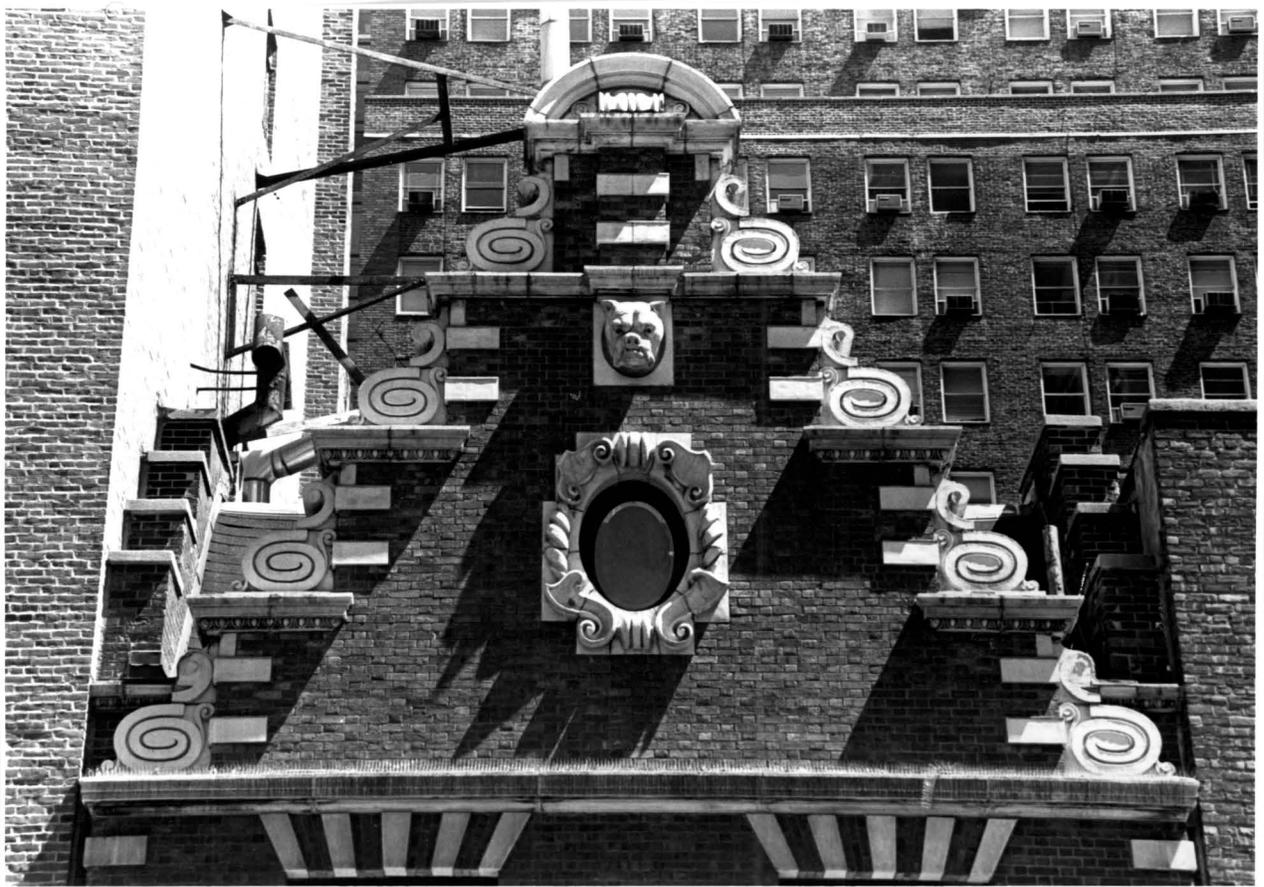
On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the George S. Bowdoin Stable has a special character, and a special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that the George S. Bowdoin Stable, built as a speculative venture in 1902 for real estate developer William R. H. Martin, was designed in a flamboyant Dutch Revival style by noted architect Ralph S. Townsend; that it was purchased in 1907 by George S. Bowdoin, a partner in J. P. Morgan Company, for use as his private stable and later converted to use as a garage; that, when it was built, this stable was representative of the fine structures being constructed in Murray Hill for New York's wealthiest families; that the unusual Dutch Revival design, marked by a high stepped gable, oversized quoins and voussoirs and sculpted horses and dog heads creates a distinctive presence in this quiet area of Murray Hill; that the building, used today as a private residence, was constructed as part of the final phase of stable construction in New York and serves as a reminder of that period of the city's earlier history when horses, their care and housing were important parts of the development of the city.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the George S. Bowdoin Stable, 149 East 38th Street, and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 894, Lot 37, as its Landmark Site.



George S. Bowdoin Stable, 149 East 38th Street, Manhattan
Photo: Carl Forster



George S. Bowdoin, gable detail

Photo: Carl Forster

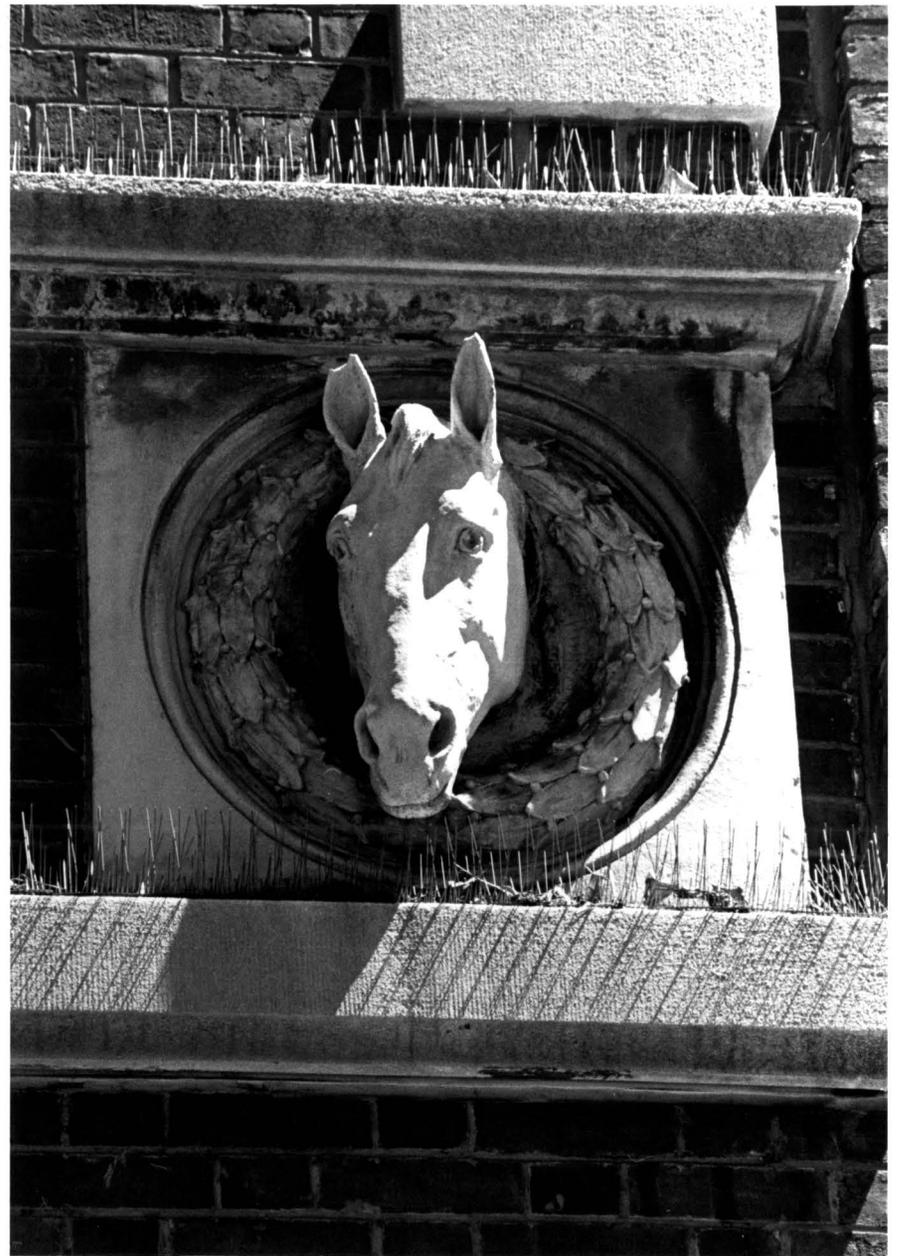


George S. Bowdoin Stable, first story detail

Photo: Carl Forster



George S. Bowdoin Stable
First story detail
Photo: Carl Forster



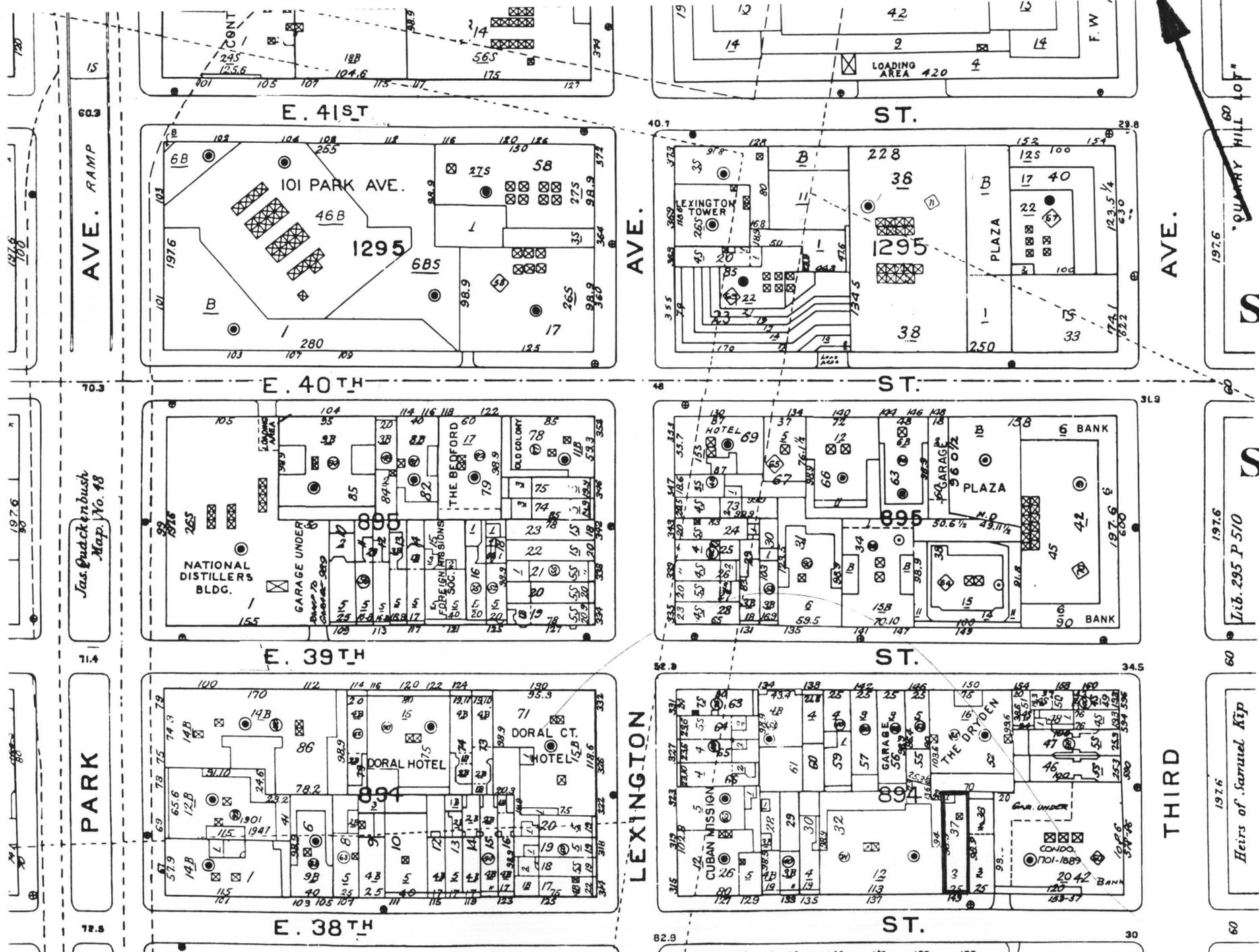
George S. Bowdoin Stable
Detail of horse head
Photo: Carl Forster



George S. Bowdoin Stable
Gable detail
Photo: Carl Forster



George S. Bowdoin Stable
Detail of bulldog head
Photo: Carl Forster



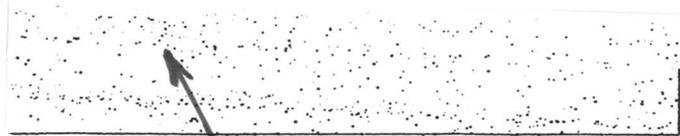
SEC. 1

SEC. 2

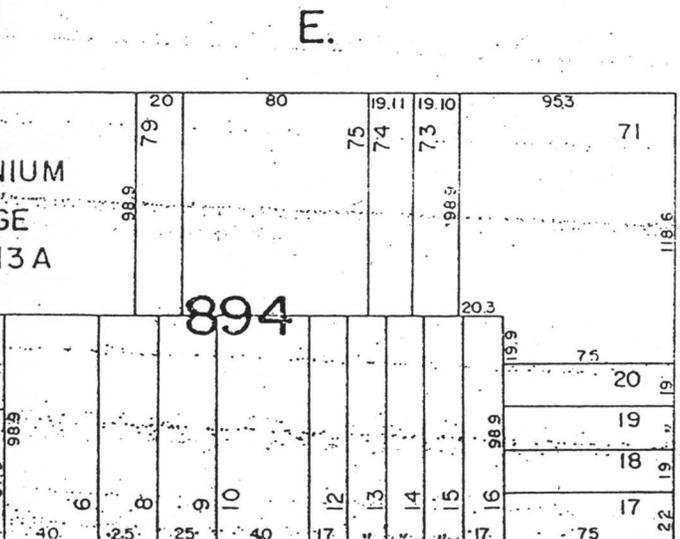
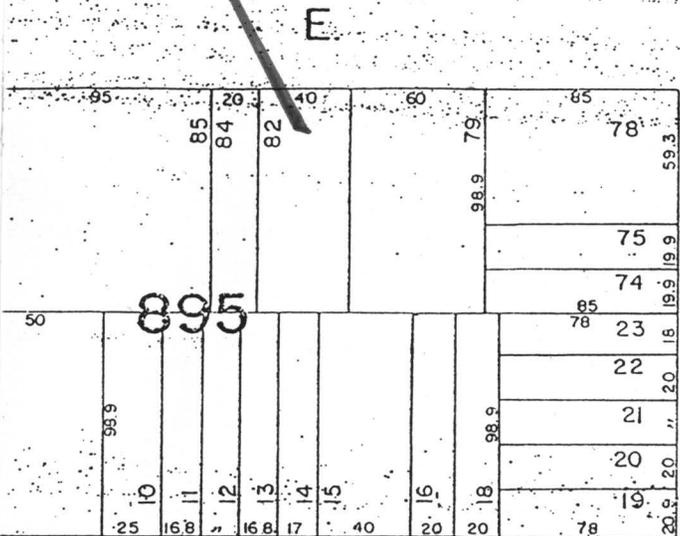
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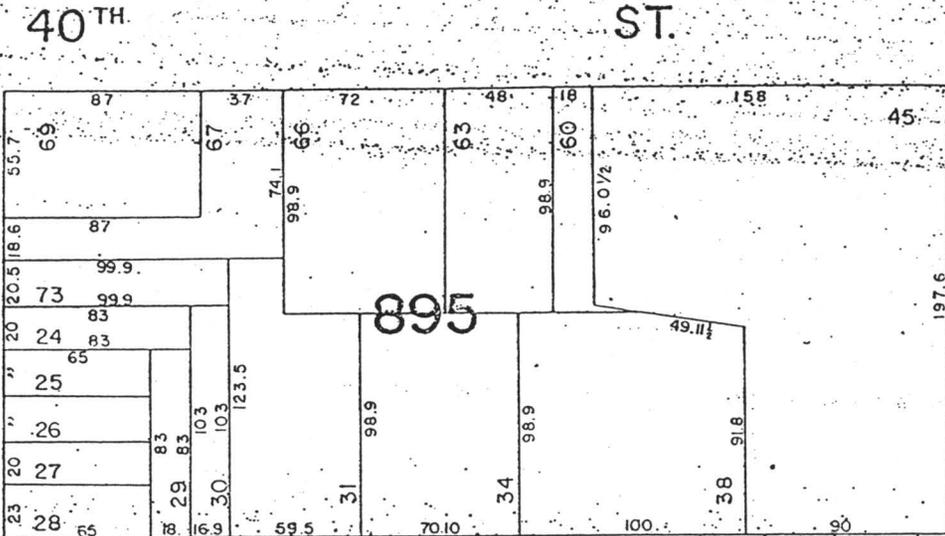
George S. Bowdoin Stable, 149 East 38th Street, Manhattan
 Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 894, Lot 37
 Source: Sanborn Manhattan Landbook, 1996-97, pl.67



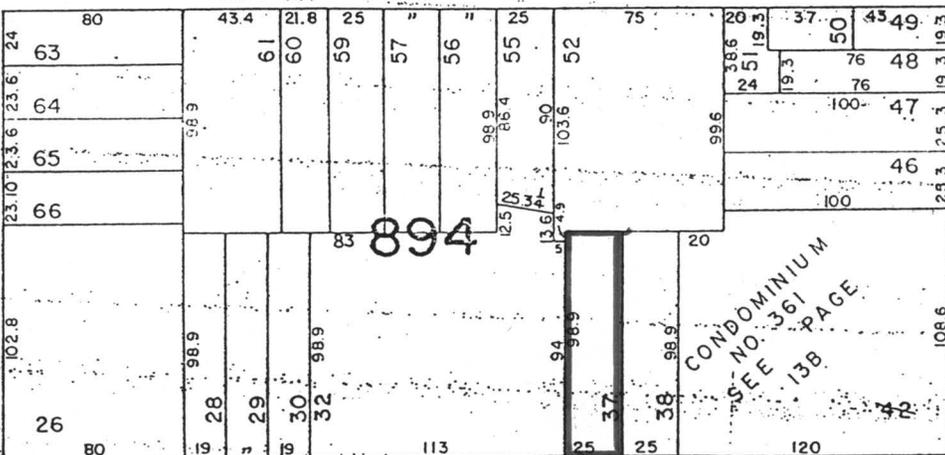
SEE SEC. 5



E.



E. 40TH ST.



E. 39TH ST.

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