

PROPOSED RIVERSIDE-WEST END HISTORIC DISTRICT EXTENSION II  
BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN

The proposed Riverside-West End Historic District Extension II encompass approximately 338 buildings, including row houses, French flats, large apartment buildings, mansions, apartment hotels, schools, and religious buildings, constructed during three major waves of residential development, primarily between the late 1880s and the late 1920s, that transformed the West End section of the Upper West Side from a rural landscape into a dense urban enclave of speculatively built single-family dwellings and grand high-rise apartment buildings. Stretching from West 89<sup>th</sup> Street to West 109<sup>th</sup> Street between Broadway and Riverside Drive, the area is proposed as an extension to the existing Riverside-West End Historic District, designated in 1989 and consisting of row houses built from the late 1880s to the early 1900s and early-20<sup>th</sup> century apartment buildings. The proposed extension also surrounds the existing Riverside-West 105<sup>th</sup> Street Historic District and encompasses Pomander Walk, an individually designated landmark. As development moved westward from Central Park after the opening of the Ninth (now Columbus) Avenue elevated rail line in 1879, speculative real estate interests raced to develop land in the West End, already valuable for its proximity to Riverside Park and Drive. The first wave of residential development, lasting from the late 1880s to the turn of the century, was characterized by three- and four-story row houses with raised basements designed in picturesque groups by several prolific residential architects, including Clarence True, Ralph S. Townsend, Janes & Leo, George Keister, John G. Prague, M.V.B. Ferdon, and George F. Pelham, all of whom were active in the extension area. Designs for row-houses represented in the extension are characteristic of the period, executed in a variety of styles including Queen Anne, Romanesque and Renaissance Revival, Beaux Arts, and Colonial Revival, and featuring an exuberant use of materials such as terra cotta, copper, limestone, and molded brick. With the opening of the Broadway subway line in 1904, land values on the Upper West Side rose so sharply that row-house development was rendered infeasible. This condition, coupled with the growing respectability of apartment living among Manhattan's affluent citizens and the expiration of 20- or 30-year covenants originally placed on the properties to restrict development to single-family dwellings, led to the construction of several large elevator apartment buildings of up to 12 stories in height, constituting the second major wave of development in the West End section. The rapid transformation of West End Avenue and the surrounding neighborhood, in which high-end dwellings less than thirty years old were demolished and re-developed with more technologically and stylistically up-to-date apartment buildings in a very short period of time, represents a rare development pattern in the history of the city. Designed by architects like Schwartz & Gross, Neville & Bagge, Schneider & Herter, Rouse & Goldstone, and George and Edward Blum—all specialists in high-class apartment house architecture—these new apartment buildings were generally clad in light-colored brick and featured a stone base, elegant classical ornament at windows and doors, decorative metalwork, and flat roofs. In addition to those mentioned above, architects who designed apartment houses within the proposed Riverside-West End Historic District Extension II include Mulliken & Moeller, Gaetan Ajello, Nast & Springsteen, and Herman Lee Meader, who is notable for his unusually exotic, American Indian-influenced design for the so-called "Cliff Dweller" apartments at Riverside Drive and 96<sup>th</sup> Street. The parameters of the 1901 Tenement House Act determined the form, massing, and fireproof construction of these substantial buildings, which were almost uniformly built up to the property line and up to the maximum height allowable, and generally had courtyards located on side elevations. The scale of the

buildings allowed for lavish interior plans of expansive, seven to 14-room apartments furnished with modern amenities and servants' quarters. A smaller number of French flat-style apartment buildings in the West End section date to the turn of the century, such as the building designed by Thom & Wilson and erected in 1898 at 739 West End Avenue, and these buildings catered to middle-class residents. In the period after World War I, as the building industry recovered from a war-time hiatus and as middle-class tenants began to displace more affluent residents moving to the fashionable suburbs of Westchester and Fairfield counties, high-rise apartment buildings of up to 22 stories, including setbacks, began to line West End Avenue. This second wave of apartment houses were designed by many of the same prolific architects of the earlier apartment houses, as well as architects such as Rosario Candela, Jacob M. Felson, Lucian Pisciatta, Emery Roth, Gronenberg & Leuchtag, Arthur Lobo, and Sugarman, Hess & Berger. These new apartment buildings were designed in generally the same manner as the earlier ones, but were distinguished by their superior height—which required setbacks in order to conform to the height restrictions of the 1916 zoning law—more restrained classical ornament, and smaller apartments of three to six rooms and no servants' quarters. Building construction in the area virtually ceased after 1929, resulting in a small group of residential and institutional buildings constructed from the late 1930s to the early 1950s. These later apartment buildings are characterized by modest scale, an economical use of building materials, and modern floor plans. The work of a distinguished group of residential architects defines the character of the proposed Riverside-West End Historic District extension, which features the grand town houses and later apartment buildings that transformed West End Avenue into a desirable residential boulevard between 1900 and the late 1920s.