

NOONAN PLAZA APARTMENTS, 105-149 West 168th Street (aka 1231-1245 Nelson Avenue/ 1232-1244 Ogden Avenue), the Bronx. Built 1931, Horace Ginsberg and Marvin Fine, architects.

Landmark Site: Borough of the Bronx Tax Map Block 2518, Lot 1.

On December 15, 2009, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Noonan Plaza Apartments and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 5). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Four people spoke in favor of designation, including representatives of Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr., the Historic Districts Council, and New York Landmarks Conservancy.¹

Summary

Noonan Plaza Apartments, in the Highbridge section of the Bronx, is one of the most impressive Art Deco style apartment complexes in the borough. Built in 1931 for Irish-born developer Bernard J. Noonan, it was designed by the firm of Horace Ginsberg, with the exterior credited to Marvin Fine. The prolific Ginsberg and Fine helped to provide the Bronx with one of its architectural signatures, the urban modernist apartment building, including Park Plaza Apartments (1929-31) on Jerome Avenue. Noonan and Ginsberg had previously collaborated on a number of speculative 1920s apartment buildings in Highbridge, prior to Noonan Plaza. Situated on a large sloping site, with frontages along Ogden and Nelson Avenues and West 168th Street, the complex is six-to-eight stories with a sophisticated site plan – it is divided into units with exterior perimeter light courts and an interior garden court, an arrangement that provided for apartment layouts with multiple exposures for maximum light and air. The building is clad in tan ironspot brick, with a vertical emphasis consisting of continuous piers contrasting with brown-and-black brick spandrel panels and black brick and geometric pattern accents on the top story. The main entrance, at the corner of Nelson Avenue and West 168th Street, has an angled portico leading into the garden court, flanked by towers (originally with ornamental lanterns) with corner windows.



DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Apartment Buildings in the Bronx in the 1920s-30s²

Noonan Plaza Apartments (1931), in the Highbridge section of the Bronx, is one of the most impressive Art Deco style apartment complexes in a borough characterized by its number of significant urban modernist apartment buildings. The enormous growth of New York City's population in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was accompanied, after World War I, by a housing shortage. As observed by Carla Breeze in *New York Deco* (1993),

Manhattanites turned to suburbs in Queens and the Bronx where reasonably priced apartments and houses were available, often in more pastoral surroundings. The garden apartment complex, built around a green commons, was appealing in comparison to the vertical congestion of Manhattan. ... The Bronx became a viable suburb as railroad and subway lines opened vast tracts of land to development. Open space was assiduously protected, and six major parks were within reach of the major new projects along the Grand Concourse.³

Many of these Bronx apartment buildings, for professionals and upwardly mobile middle-class families, were among the best in the city in terms of architecture, planning, size of living space, and amenities. Housing historian Richard Plunz identified the garden apartment as

a short-lived phenomenon in New York City development, reaching its apogee in the 1920s. It was (and still is) among the most liveable housing in New York. It set a standard of urban housing that has remained unmatched since. Fundamental to the success of the garden apartment was the balance between building mass and open space so that a level of proximity was maintained which involved a strict definition of the public realm to be shared by neighbors. Important to this neighboring was a sense of theater, which required use of architectural language bordering on the scenographic. The language of the "garden" of the garden apartment, together with its enclosing facades, was critical to the transformation of housing from a consequence of economic formulas to a unique environment. This entered a realm of fantasy, providing every building with an identity that called forth particular places or tenants. The garden was a critical symbol of arrival for the new middle class, while also facilitating the making of a kind of public theater in which the most joyous myths of urban existence could be acted out.⁴

The conception and development of speculative garden apartments was influenced by two movements in New York City by the beginning of the 20th century: the "model tenement," or improved housing, movement, and "Garden City" movement. Exemplars of these were the City and Suburban Homes Co. Estates, First Avenue (1898-1915) and Avenue A (1900-13), Manhattan, and Sunnyside Gardens (1924-28, Clarence Stein and Henry Wright), Queens. Architect Andrew J. Thomas, in the Jackson Heights neighborhood in Queens in the 1910s-20s, developed by the Queensboro Corp.,⁵ and elsewhere, was one of the masters of garden apartment design in a wide variety of styles. Plunz wrote that

Jackson Heights... [was] unusual for the notable concentration of a wide range of garden apartment types, but similar building was prominent throughout the city for moderate-income private housing development until the end of the 1930s. The "garden" spaces tended to become more elaborate as time went on. The Queens,

Bronx, and Manhattan versions varied, however, with coverages reflecting their differing conditions of density.⁶

During the housing boom in the Bronx of the 1920s, the design of apartment houses evolved from simpler brick-clad buildings in historical revival styles of previous decades towards more luxurious and ornamented structures and complexes. Around 1929, influenced in part by Manhattan skyscraper, apartment, and commercial design, variations on “Art Deco,” “Moderne,” or “modernistic” styles came to dominate Bronx apartment buildings through the 1930s. Park Plaza Apartments (1929-31, Horace Ginsberg and Marvin Fine), 1005 Jerome Avenue, is usually considered one of the first and most influential in the borough in the Art Deco style.⁷ Many of the apartment architects in this period were recent immigrants from Europe, and European modernist trends seen in social housing and other projects, were also incorporated in the borough’s buildings. An example is the United Workers’ Cooperative Colony second complex (1927-29, Herman Jessor with Stefan S. Sajo), 2846-2870 Bronx Park East, reflecting Northern European Expressionist influences.⁸ Among the hallmarks of the 1930s modernist modes in apartment houses were decorative and polychrome brickwork (usually lighter in palette), vertical and horizontal patterning, abstracted decoration, streamlined elements, curved walls, recessed spandrels, corner windows, and “Machine Age” materials such as steel, chrome, and glass brick. As observed by Paul Goldberger of the *New York Times*,

Art deco was style built largely on the image of a new kind of elegance – sleek and streamlined. It was not so much truly modern as romantically evocative of the modern, using modernism as a decorative theme rather than as a justification for the absence of decoration. Thus the art deco buildings of the Bronx are full of striped metal ornament, abstract geometric patterns on the door and radiator grilles, and vertical stripings of brick.⁹

The west Bronx, like Miami Beach, became renowned for the large number and variety of apartment houses in the modernist styles of the 1930s; though there was not a distinct Bronx district of these buildings per se, many are located along the Grand Concourse and environs. Located near the Grand Concourse, Noonan Plaza, with its elaborate garden court and impressive Art Deco style, exemplifies the significant trends of this neighborhood and era.

Horace Ginsberg and Marvin Fine, Architects¹⁰

Among the leading and most prolific architects of apartment house design in the Bronx were Horace Ginsberg and Marvin Fine. Ginsberg (originally Ginzberg) (c. 1897-1969),¹¹ born near Minsk, Russia, of Jewish descent, immigrated to the U.S. as a boy. He graduated from Stuyvesant High School, attended the Cooper Union and Columbia University, and worked for the architectural firm of Jacob Gescheidt & Co. before establishing his own architectural firm by 1921. Ginsberg (he changed his name to Ginsbern c. 1933) was especially active in the design and layout of hundreds of apartments in the Bronx from 1924 to 1940. The task of designing the facades of these buildings, however, was assigned to Marvin Fine after he joined Ginsberg in 1928. Born in Harlem and raised in Upper Manhattan, Fine (1904-1981) was a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania (1929), where he was influenced by the work of architect Paul Cret. Early in his career, Fine had worked as a draftsman for Cass Gilbert (1925-26) and George and Edward Blum (1927-28). After the Park Plaza Apartments (1929-31), Fine’s first major job with the Ginsberg firm, they produced designs for numerous modernist apartments on the Grand Concourse and elsewhere throughout the city. Fine is known to have been directly influenced by the contemporary work of architects Raymond Hood

and William Van Alen, who were responsible respectively for the American Radiator and Daily News Buildings, and the Chrysler Building.¹² Carla Breeze in *New York Deco* opined that the Ginsberg firm “developed a unique style featuring streamlined forms with modernistic detailing. His [sic] experiments in brick, while planer [sic] rather than three-dimensional, rival those of Ely Jacques Kahn.”¹³ Noonan Plaza is significant as one of the earliest Ginsberg and Fine collaborations, as one of their early works in the modernist/Art Deco vein, and as a large apartment project with a highly sophisticated planning scheme.

Ginsbern participated in the design of the Harlem River Houses (1936-37, in association with Archibald Manning Brown and other architects), Harlem River Drive and 151st - 153rd Streets, the first federally-funded, -built, and -owned housing project in New York City, constructed to house African-American residents of Harlem, and was architect of the Chock Full O’ Nuts restaurant chain. Horace Ginsbern & Assocs. was organized in 1944, with Fine; Ginsbern’s son, Frederick Morton Ginsbern (1919-1986), a graduate of New York University (1942); and Jules Kabat (1913-1991). Kabat, born in Brooklyn, graduated from New York University (1934), worked as a draftsman and designer for Ginsbern (1934-41), and practiced independently and for Kindland & Drake (1941-45). Horace Ginsbern & Assocs. lasted until 1986.

Bernard J. Noonan¹⁴

Bernard J. Noonan (c. 1875-1943), the Bronx developer of Noonan Plaza Apartments (1931, Ginsberg and Fine), was born in Edgeworthstown, County Longford, Ireland. He emigrated in 1886, lived in Pennsylvania, and attended St. Bonaventure’s College in Allegany, N.Y., prior to moving to New York City, where he was first listed in a city directory, and naturalized, in 1899. From 1901 until 1918, he was a saloon proprietor, in Greenwich Village, then Hell’s Kitchen, and later, the Upper West Side. For a few years (c. 1919-21), Noonan was working as a dry goods merchant -- through relatives, he became owner of “Flood’s Department Store” on Sixth Avenue in Greenwich Village. After venturing into real estate in Yonkers, he acquired several Manhattan apartment buildings, then decided to become involved in real estate full-time around 1921, both as developer and insurance broker. Noonan selected the Highbridge neighborhood in the Bronx as “the most desirable location”¹⁵ in New York City for constructing better apartment buildings, and by 1925 had moved his office to one of his buildings there.

The village of Highbridge (originally Highbridgeville) had developed on the high ridge of land along the Harlem River located to the east of High Bridge (1838-48, John B. Jervis, engineer), which was constructed as part of the Croton Aqueduct system that brought New York City its first adequate fresh water supply. The Bronx shore of the Harlem began to be subdivided in the 19th century for building lots along the main thoroughfare, Highbridge (now Ogden) Avenue. The village was initially settled by the workers who built the Croton Aqueduct and High Bridge, as well as the railroad along the river. Almost entirely Irish originally, these workers were followed later by Jewish immigrants. Development of large apartment buildings was spurred by the Jerome Avenue elevated railroad in 1918 and the subway (with a stop at the Grand Concourse and 161st Street) in 1933. Remnants of the earlier days of Highbridge include the Union Reformed Church of Highbridge (1887-90, Alfred E. Barlow), 1272 Ogden Avenue, and Public School 91 (1889, George W. Debevoise), 1257 Ogden Avenue.¹⁶

Noonan’s apartment projects in Highbridge, at first centered in the southern portion of the neighborhood around West 162nd and 163rd Streets, appear to have mostly been collaborations with Horace Ginsberg as architect. Bernard Noonan served as president of the various real estate firms responsible for their construction, including the Manonga Realty Corp., R&B Building Corp.,

Woodycrest Building Corp., and Killsalough Realty Co., and in 1925 he also served as a director of the Broadway Central Bank. Noonan constructed Bernard Court (1921; demolished), 942-948 Woodycrest Avenue; Maryknoll Terrace (1924, Ginsberg), 957-965 Woodycrest Avenue; Wynne Terrace (1925-26, Ginsberg), 963-975 Anderson Avenue; Rose Terrace (1927, Ginsberg), 950 Woodycrest Avenue; Summit Lodge (1927, Ginsberg; demolished), 979-981 Summit Avenue; Noonan Towers and Annex (1924-28, Ginsberg), 939 Woodycrest Avenue and 930 Ogden Avenue, called by the *New York Times* in 1937 “one of the largest apartment properties in the Bronx;”¹⁷ and Noonan Manor (c. 1930), 1001 Woodycrest Avenue. In 1923, Noonan also purchased No. 1130 Woodycrest Avenue (demolished).

Noonan Plaza Apartments¹⁸

After the mid-19th century, descendants of the James Anderson family began to sell parts of their Highbridge property, previously a farm and then an estate called “Woody Crest,” with a villa at today’s Anderson Avenue and West 164th Street. Following the death of Andrew Anderson, his executors in 1925 sold a large (312 by 288 feet) parcel on the sloping site at West 168th Street and Nelson and Ogden Avenues to real estate investor Stanley Murray for \$42,500. This parcel was transferred in July 1930 to Walter J.M. Donovan, a wealthy real estate operator and stockbroker, for \$100 subject to the \$35,000 mortgage. In October, the newly-chartered Nelden Corp. (Bernard J. Noonan, president; Morris E. Gallo, treasurer) acquired the property, also for \$100 subject to the mortgage, of which \$25,000 was due. In March 1931, a ten-year, \$1 million dollar first mortgage was obtained for the construction of an apartment complex that came to be known as Noonan Plaza. The *Times* announced that the six-to-eight-story building, of the garden apartment type, would contain 283 apartments, including suites ranging from one-and-one-half to five rooms (the larger units having two baths), with the layout permitting “at least two exposures for each apartment,” 14 stores, and a “garden court 125 by 110 feet.”¹⁹ The Nelden Corp.’s prospectus, stating that “the style of architecture is modernistic,” boasted that

Noonan Plaza, as planned, represents the highest development in the art of the modern apartment house design and construction. The quality of workmanship used in the structure is unquestionably perfect, showing the finest type of craftsmanship possible. ... One may confidently choose NOONAN PLAZA as one’s permanent home, with the assurance that an attractive and perfectly planned apartment has been selected in a location destined to remain ever free from mediocrity.²⁰

A later advertisement claimed that Noonan Plaza and Noonan Towers were the “most modern apartment houses in the Bronx.”²¹ Noonan Plaza was touted as convenient to transportation, via bus, New York Central Railroad, subway, and elevated lines; nearby public and parochial schools; and “the Heights shopping and theatre section.”²²

With principal frontages along Ogden and Nelson Avenues and West 168th Street, Noonan Plaza is clad in tan ironspot brick with a vertical emphasis consisting of continuous piers contrasting with brown-and-black brick spandrel panels and black brick and geometric pattern accents on the top story. The complex, with a sophisticated site plan, is divided into eight units (each with an elevator) with exterior perimeter light courts and an interior garden court – this arrangement provided for apartment layouts with multiple exposures for maximum light and air. The stores in the building were originally accessible from the interior of the complex. The main entrance, at the corner of Nelson Avenue and West 168th Street, features an angled “portico” (with cast-stone elements) with a gate lodge (“protect[ing] tenants from unwelcome passers-by”),²³ and steps and a walkway leading

to the interior terraced and landscaped Garden Court. Richard Plunz called the “courtyard entry at Noonan Plaza... one of the best-known examples of the [garden apartment] genre.”²⁴ This entrance is flanked by twin towers with corner windows, intended as “an outstanding landmark of distinction,”²⁵ which were originally ornamented with etched-glass lanterns (flanked by fins, according to original drawings). The large Garden Court, onto which all of the interior apartments look and which has five building entrances, originally featured “mosaic” patterned cement walks, trees and shrubbery, statuary, a pond (with fish and swans) crossed by rustic wooden bridges, a lighthouse, and a waterfall in one corner. The complex contained a ballroom and community room, as well as a roof garden promenade (protected by a high balustrade) and playground with sand boxes, swings, and games. Noonan Plaza was assessed at \$950,000 in 1931, at a reported investment of \$2 million.

The New York Irish (1996), edited by Ronald H. Bayor and Timothy J. Meagher, stated that, despite Bernard Noonan’s heritage as an Irish immigrant and the fact that the Highbridge neighborhood was heavily Irish, Noonan Plaza was rented to upper-middle-class Jewish tenants until they began moving out in the 1950s.²⁶

Later History²⁷

Noonan Plaza Apartments was continuously owned by the Nelden Corp. until 1962, when the complex was sold to Southern Assocs., Inc., an entity of what the *New York Times* called the “largest real estate empire in New York City,”²⁸ that of partners Alex DiLorenzo, Jr., and Sol Goldman. The building’s mortgage (originally \$1 million), held by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Co., was assigned to the Union Life Insurance Co. of Cincinnati, which consolidated it with a second mortgage of \$580,000. At the time of DiLorenzo’s death in September 1975, the DiLorenzo-Goldman holdings encompassed over 400 apartment and office buildings just in Manhattan, including the Chrysler Building, as well as hotels, shopping centers, and industrial structures. The partners were notorious for shielding their ownership through a variety of corporate names – Noonan Plaza was later owned by their Oxford Associates, Inc., Chatham Associates, Inc., and Avon Associates, Inc. The *Times* reported in May 1976 that Goldman had been “forced by financial reversals and the legal problems of Mr. DiLorenzo’s estate to relinquish more than 40 properties” and that his “setbacks have consequences not only for himself and his late partner’s heirs but also for the banks that hold mortgages on his properties, for tenants – 10,000 live in his apartment buildings and hundreds of thousands work in his office structures – and for the city government, which is owed taxes, and further affected by a drop in property values.”²⁹

At the same time as the reverses in the fortunes of the DiLorenzo-Goldman real estate empire, the west Bronx, including the area of the Grand Concourse, was suffering a severe decline that had begun after World War II. The rapid de-industrialization of the city, increasing suburbanization, heavy-handed urban renewal policies, disinvestment by area landlords, and the redlining of much of the Bronx by local banks all contributed to the economic downturn of the area. In the 1970s, many apartment buildings were abandoned by their owners and were set on fire, and the neighborhood suffered a catalogue of ills until it began to stabilize in the 1980s. The demographic composition of the Highbridge neighborhood also underwent substantial changes. The area’s residents, largely of European Jewish extraction, began to move to suburban areas, and the west Bronx became a diverse urban community as African-Americans and Latin Americans settled here.

After the DiLorenzo-Goldman interests defaulted on Noonan Plaza, in 1976 the property fell under the receivership of the Union Central Life Insurance Co., holder of the mortgage. The apartment building was featured in an exhibition that year organized by Donald G. Sullivan and Brian J. Danforth (with the Hunter College Graduate Program in Urban Planning) spotlighting the

Art Deco style apartment houses of the Bronx, in which they called Noonan Plaza “nearly devastated” and “represent[ing] the worst that can happen to our fragile housing stock when it is left unprotected.”³⁰ This referred to charges of stocking the building with welfare families, followed by squatters, drug dealers, vandals, and hundreds of housing code violations. The *New York Times* observed that “vandalism has destroyed much of the art deco detailing that once made the building... one of the prides of the Bronx.”³¹ A rescue of Noonan Plaza was attempted in 1976 by the Settlement Housing Fund, a nonprofit housing development corporation, with plans to rehabilitate the complex and convert it into a coop, with the participation of the Noonan Plaza Tenants Association and financing from the New York City Dept. of Housing Preservation and Development. Title to the property was taken by the Highbridge Development Corp., and in 1977 by the Highbridge Housing Development Fund Corp. By 1980, however, the situation reached its nadir, with only six families living there; the Settlement Housing Fund, too beleaguered by the project’s problems and costs, was forced to petition to sell the property, a decision followed by another round of vandalism.

In 1980, the property was acquired by Noonan Plaza Assocs., an entity of Glick Development Affiliates. A \$9 million rehabilitation for federally subsidized apartments was completed in 1982 by Glick Construction Co., with the participation of Frederick Ginsbern, son of the original architect. This project received a 1982 Certificate of Merit Award from the Municipal Art Society of New York. Ownership passed in 2004 to Noonan Plaza Assocs., L.P., then in 2005 to Noonan Plaza LLC.

Description

With principal frontages along Ogden and Nelson Avenues and West 168th Street, Noonan Plaza is six to eight stories due to its sloping site, and has a sophisticated site plan, divided into units with exterior perimeter light courts (there are four sections and three light courts along Ogden Avenue; three sections and two light courts along West 168th Street; and two sections and one light court along Nelson Avenue) and an interior garden court. Storefronts are located at the corner of Ogden Avenue and West 168th Street. The complex is clad in tan ironspot brick with a vertical emphasis consisting of continuous piers contrasting with brown-and-black-brick spandrel panels (above the third through seventh stories), brick patterning, and black brick and geometric pattern accents on the top story. The windows of the end bays of each section have polygonal-shaped heads (with brown-and-black-brick spandrels) on the second story, and historic ornamental wrought-iron railings on the third story. Some windows in the light courts on the second and uppermost stories have polygonal-shaped heads (with brown-and-black-brick spandrels). The original three-over-three double-hung metal sash were replaced by one-over-one double-hung anodized aluminum sash (1980-82). Fire escapes are placed in the light courts. Metal mesh grilles have been placed over the lower story windows. The walls are terminated by metal coping (1980-82).

Ogden Avenue Facade: The base has stepped sections of brown-and-black-brick retaining walls (with concrete coping) with historic wrought-iron fencing with a geometric design. The front of the northern light court has a low tan brick wall (with concrete coping), and non-historic wrought-iron fence and gates. The central light court has concrete steps, non-historic wrought-iron fence and gates, and concrete courtyard paving; a tunnel to the interior Garden Court has a geometric-design black-brick entrance surround. The southern section has an exterior fire escape. The southern light court and southern section of the building have five small shopfronts (all with non-historic entrances, windows, rolldown gates, and awnings); a section of historic black-brick cladding survives, with three windows (two with metal mesh grilles and one with a metal panel) and a geometric-design panel.

West 168th Street Facade: The two western sections and the western light court have continuous shopfronts (all with non-historic entrances, windows, rolldown gates, and awnings); significant portions of the historic black-brick cladding survives. There is a visible roof bulkhead above the western light court. The front of the eastern light court has a low tan brick wall with posts (all with concrete coping), and non-historic metal mesh fence and gates. A concrete ramp with metal railings leads to a basement entrance with non-historic metal doors; basement windows have been covered with metal. The eastern section has an exterior fire escape. The openings of the base of the eastern section of the building have a non-historic metal door, four windows covered with metal, and the rest with metal mesh grilles.

Nelson Avenue Facade: Many of the windows of the base have been covered with metal; the others have metal mesh grilles. The southern section has an exterior fire escape. The front of the light court has a low tan brick wall with posts (all with concrete coping), and non-historic wrought-iron and metal mesh fence and gates. Bluestone steps (with metal railings) lead to a sunken courtyard, paved with asphalt. The upper portion of the wall of the unarticulated setback northernmost portion of the complex has been parged with concrete.

North Facade: This facade, at the rear of the property, consists of four sections and three light courts (having fire escapes), as well as the northern side of a section along Nelson Avenue (which has a rubble stone base). The tan brick walls are unarticulated. There are concrete steps and a non-historic metal gate at Ogden Avenue; a concrete walkway along the building with a chainlink fence; and a concrete ramp with a metal railing leading to the basement, with a metal mesh gate and chainlink fence, at Nelson Avenue.

Entrance Portico and Towers: The complex's main entrance, at the corner of Nelson Avenue and West 168th Street, features an angled "portico" set on a concrete base with tan-brick piers and geometric-design parapets (with cast-stone elements) supported by steel plates above the openings; the red-brick edging of the parapets and piers dates from 1980-82. There are non-historic wrought-iron security gates (1980-82). The portico has an historic geometric-patterned ceiling, a section of surviving historic concrete paving with a geometric pattern, and end walls with black-and-brown-brick geometric-patterned panels. Several signs and functional boxes have been placed on the walls. In the center of the interior side of the portico is a round gate lodge, clad in tan brick, with historic multi-pane metal windows, and (on the interior side) a curved metal door (1980-82). The entrance portico is flanked by twin "towers" with corner windows (originally with multi-pane steel casements, now paired one-over-one double-hung anodized aluminum sash (1980-82)); the lintels of these windows have been re-built. The towers were originally terminated by etched-glass lanterns (flanked by fins, according to original drawings); the bases have been parged (1980-82). These are flanked by sections of historic ornamental wrought-iron railings.

Garden Court: Beyond the entrance portico is an angled two-level forecourt, paved in concrete, with a polygonal balcony (with tan brick walls (with metal vents), concrete coping (now painted), and historic ornamental wrought-iron railings), two sets of concrete steps and a later (1980-82) concrete ramp (with metal railings) flanked by similar tan brick walls with historic railings, leading to another set of concrete steps, flanked by similar brick walls (now painted) with historic railings and lamp bases, and the central walkway, which is lined with chainlink fencing set on concrete edging and planting strips. Originally, the landscaped Garden Court featured a large polygonal pond, crossed by rustic wooden bridges, with a lighthouse and a waterfall in one corner. Today, there is a central round planted area (edged with concrete and a chainlink fence) and a circular concrete walkway with benches, radial walks to the apartment entrances, and outer planting areas with chainlink fencing. In the northwest corner is the altered

rubble stone remnant of the waterfall, with a stone archway with a metal mesh door.

Garden Court Facades: The five entrances are ornamented with geometric brown-and-black-brick surrounds with molded openings with polygonal heads, piers with brick patterning supporting historic ornamental wrought-iron balcony railings (that at the northwestern corner is missing), historic milk glass transoms with wrought-iron decoration, and historic metal-and-glass double doors. The original entrance sconces are missing; there are modern light fixtures and brick patching. The tunnel leading to Ogden Avenue has a simple geometric black-brick surround with historic wrought-iron brackets, and non-historic wrought-iron gates. The walls follow a scheme similar to those on the exterior of the complex, with continuous piers contrasting with brown-and-black-brick spandrel panels and panels between windows, brick patterning, and black brick and geometric pattern accents on the top story. There are bowed brown-and-black-brick panels below some second-story windows. Fire escapes are placed on three sides of the court.

Report researched and written by
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Research Department

NOTES

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1. The building was previously heard at public hearing on June 2, 1992 (LP-1893).
 2. New York City Landmarks Preservation Comm. (LPC), *Park Plaza Apartments Designation Report* (LP-1077), written by Anthony W. Robins, *Jackson Heights Historic District Designation Report* (LP-1831), and *Sunnyside Gardens Historic District Designation Report* (LP-2258) (New York: City of New York, 1981, 1993, and 2007); Richard Plunz, *A History of Housing in New York City: Dwelling Type and Social Change in the American Metropolis* (New York: Columbia Univ. Pr., 1990); Donald Sullivan and Brian Danforth, *Bronx Art Deco Architecture: An Exposition* (New York: Hunter College, 1976).
 3. Carla Breeze, *New York Deco* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), 46.
 4. Plunz, 164.
 5. Both City and Suburban Homes Co. Estates are designated New York City Landmarks. Sunnyside Gardens and much of Jackson Heights are designated Historic Districts.
 6. Plunz, 147.
 7. Park Plaza is a designated New York City Landmark.
 8. The United Workers' Cooperative Colony first and second complexes are designated New York City Landmarks.
 9. Paul Goldberger, "From Deco to Decay in Concourse Area," *NYT*, Jan. 15, 1976, 37.
 10. LPC, architects files and *Park Plaza Apartments Designation Report*; "Horace Ginsberg," U.S. Census (New York City, 1920, 1930) and Draft Registration Card (1918); Nancy G. Coryell, *Educating Superior Students* (New York: Assn. of First Assts. in the High Schools of the City of N.Y., 1935), 12; "Real Estate Notes," *NYT*, May 9, 1945, 35; Ginsbern obit., *New York Times (NYT)*, Sept. 22, 1969, 33; *American*

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- Architects Directory* (1962), 212, 249; Fine obit., *NYT*, June 24, 1981, B4; Constance Rosenblum, *Boulevard of Dreams: Heady Times, Heartbreak, and Hope Along the Grand Concourse in the Bronx* (New York: New York Univ. Pr., 2009), 66-77.
11. There are conflicting birth dates for Ginsberg – some sources give the year 1900.
 12. Fine interview, cited in *Park Plaza Apartments Designation Report*, 5-6. All three buildings are designated New York City Landmarks.
 13. Breeze, 46.
 14. “Bernard Noonan,” U.S. Census (New York City, 1910, 1920, 1930), Draft Registration Card (1918), U.S. Passport Application (1919), *New York City Directories* (1895-1934), and New York City Death Index (1943); “Real Estate Field,” *NYT*, Aug. 28, 1918, 13; “Leasing Activity Features Market,” *NYT*, June 10, 1921, 27; “Latest Dealings in Realty Field,” *NYT*, Nov. 15, 1921, 39; “Buys Highbridge Apartment,” *NYT*, May 20, 1923, 17; “Died: Flood,” *NYT*, July 17, 1923, 19; “\$160,000 Loan Placed,” *NYT*, May 30, 1924, 22; Broadway Central Bank, advertisement, *NYT*, Jan. 17, 1925, 20; “Buyer to Improve Highbridge Plot,” *NYT*, Jan. 10, 1926, W19; “Highbridge Apartment,” *NYT*, Dec. 4, 1927, RE2; Nelden Corp., “Noonan Plaza” prospectus (1931); Noonan obit., *NYT*, Dec. 9, 1943, 27.
 15. Nelden Corp.
 16. The school is a designated New York City Landmark.
 17. “\$565,000 Building is Bought in Bronx,” *NYT*, Sept. 18, 1937, 31.
 18. Bronx County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances; Noonan Plaza drawings (1931), Horace Ginsbern Architectural Records and Papers, Dept. of Drawings & Archives, Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia Univ.; “Broadway Corner Sold to Investor,” *NYT*, Feb. 2, 1928, 43; “Bronx Buyers to Build,” *NYT*, Oct. 3, 1930, 49; “New Incorporations,” *NYT*, Oct. 29, 1930, 34; “Bronx Mortgages Filed,” *NYT*, Nov. 23, 1930, 32; “\$1,000,000 Mortgage Finances New Apartment in the Bronx,” *NYT*, June 4, 1931, 52; “1932 Assessments on Realty in City Rise \$1,117,166,654,” *NYT*, Oct. 2, 1931, 1; “New Garden Suites Erected in Bronx,” *NYT*, Oct. 11, 1931, RE11; Walter J.M. Donovan obit., *NYT*, Jan. 4, 1934, 19; Nelden Corp.; Sullivan and Danforth, 5-6; John McNamara, *History in Asphalt: The Origin of Bronx Street and Place Names* (New York: Bronx County Histl. Soc., 1984).
 19. June 4 and Oct. 11, 1931.
 20. Nelden Corp.
 21. “Noonan Towers/Noonan Plaza” advertisement, *NYT*, Apr. 1, 1933, 32.
 22. Nelden Corp.
 23. Ibid.
 24. Plunz, 164.
 25. Nelden Corp.
 26. Ronald H. Bayor and Timothy J. Meagher, eds., *The New York Irish* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Pr., 1996), 412-413.
 27. Bronx County; “Blockfront Deal is Made in Bronx,” *NYT*, Dec. 2, 1961, 35; Alex DiLorenzo, Jr., obit.,

NYT, Sept. 6, 1975, 22; "New York's Big Landlord is Feeling Financial Pinch," NYT, May 23, 1976, 1, 60; "Fortune Smiles on Once-Elegant Flats," *Daily News*, Aug. 20, 1976; "Money Coming to Restore A Lived-In Art Form in Bronx," NYT, Aug. 20, 1976, 42; Richard Pommer, "Architecture: Castles in the Bronx," *Art in America* (May-June 1976), 54-55; "Bronx Apartment-Rehabilitation Project Starts Off With a Warm Heart," NYT, Feb. 4, 1978, 23; "Nonprofit-Housing Producer Criticizes City," NYT, Feb. 17, 1978, B5; "A Dream Dies at Noonan Plaza," *Daily News*, May 4, 1980; "Swans Are Gone, but Art Deco Grace Returns to a Bronx Apartment House," NYT, Feb. 7, 1982, 49; "Municipal Art Society Giving Awards," NYT, June 3, 1982, C16; Rosenblum, 189-190, 222.

28. DiLorenzo, Jr., obit.
29. May 23, 1976, 1.
30. Sullivan and Danforth, 5.
31. Goldberger.

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 Noonan Plaza Apartments 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, among its important qualities, Noonan Plaza Apartments, in the Highbridge section of the Bronx, is one of the most impressive Art Deco style apartment complexes in the borough; that it was designed by the firm of Horace Ginsberg, with the exterior credited to Marvin Fine, and that the prolific Ginsberg and Fine helped to provide the Bronx with one of its architectural signatures, the urban modernist apartment building, including Park Plaza Apartments (1929-31) on Jerome Avenue; that Noonan Plaza was built in 1931 for Bernard J. Noonan, an Irish-born developer who had previously collaborated with Ginsberg on a number of speculative 1920s apartment buildings in Highbridge; that situated on a large sloping site, with frontages along Ogden and Nelson Avenues and West 168th Street, the complex is six-to-eight stories with a sophisticated site plan, divided into units with exterior perimeter light courts and an interior garden court, an arrangement that provided for apartment layouts with multiple exposures for maximum light and air; and that the building is clad in tan ironspot brick, with a vertical emphasis consisting of continuous piers contrasting with brown-and-black brick spandrel panels and black brick and geometric pattern accents on the top story, and that the main entrance, at the corner of Nelson Avenue and West 168th Street, has an angled portico leading into the garden court, flanked by towers (originally with ornamental lanterns) with corner windows.

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 Noonan Plaza Apartments, 105-149 West 168th Street (aka 1231-1245 Nelson Avenue/ 1232-1244 Ogden Avenue), Borough of the Bronx, and designates Bronx Tax Map Block 2518, Lot 1, as its Landmark Site.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair; Pablo E. Vengochea, Vice Chair
Frederick Bland, Stephen F. Byrns, Joan Gerner, Roberta Brandes Gratz, Christopher Moore, Margery Perlmutter,
Elizabeth Ryan, Roberta Washington, Commissioners



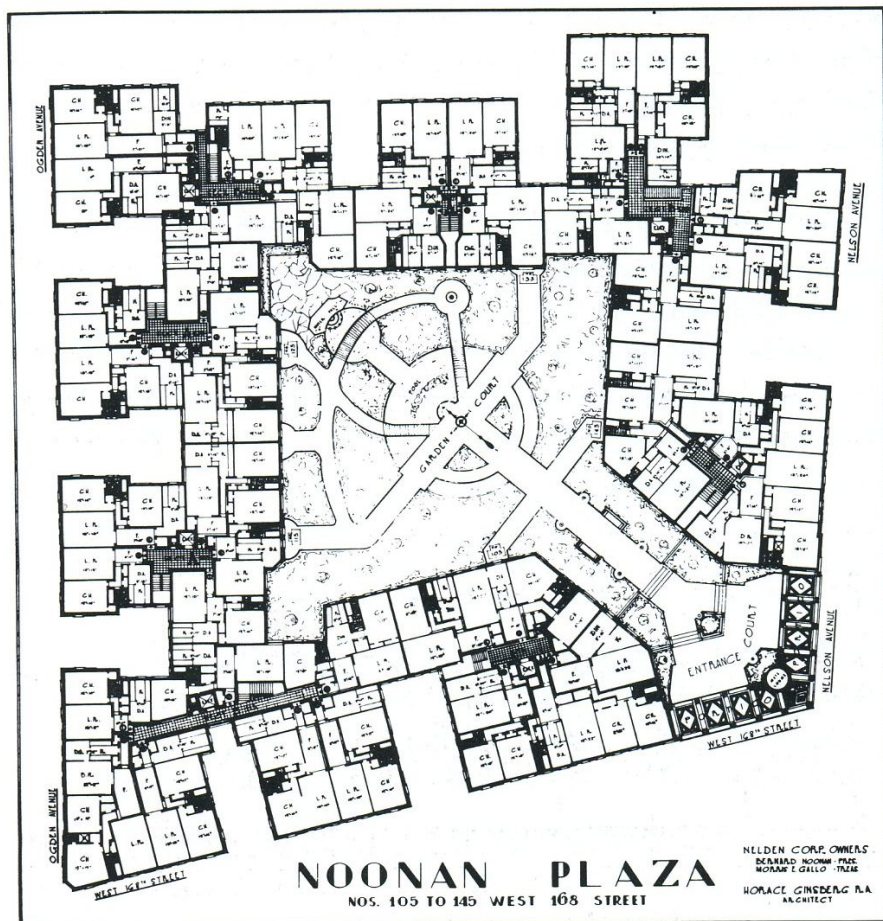
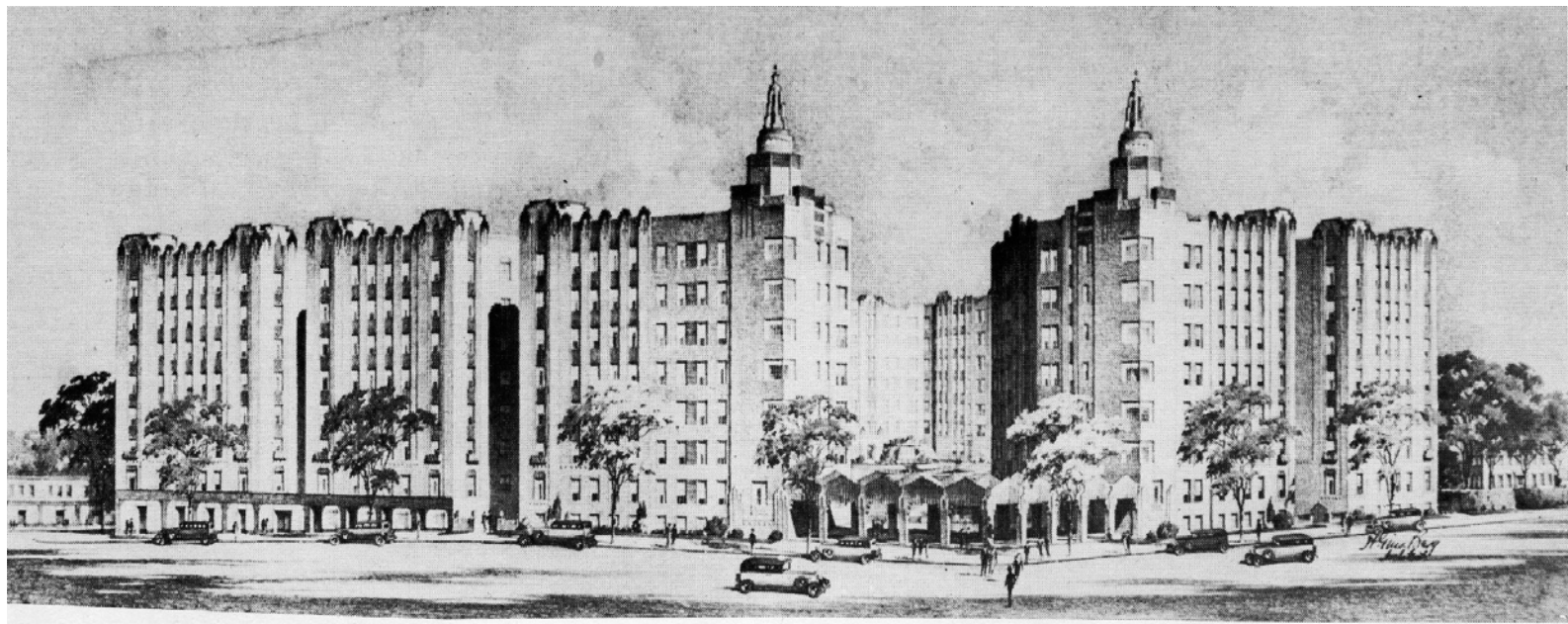
Noonan Plaza Apartments, entrance at Nelson Avenue and West 168th Street

Photo Credit: Christopher D. Brazee (2010)



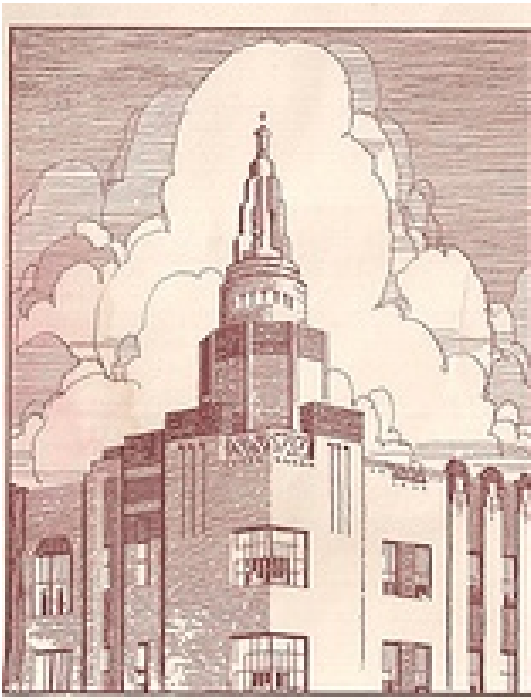
Bernard J. Noonan
Cover of Noonan Plaza Prospectus

Source: Nelden Corp., Noonan Plaza prospectus (1931)



Noonan Plaza Apartments, rendering and site plan

Source: Nelden Corp., Noonan Plaza prospectus (1931)



Noonan Plaza Apartments

Photo Credit: Christopher D. Brazee (2010)

Insert: Rendering of tower lantern, from Noonan Plaza prospectus (1931)



Noonan Plaza Apartments, Ogden Avenue facade

Photo Credit: Christopher D. Brazee (2010)



Noonan Plaza Apartments, upper-story detail

Photo Credit: Christopher D. Brazee (2010)



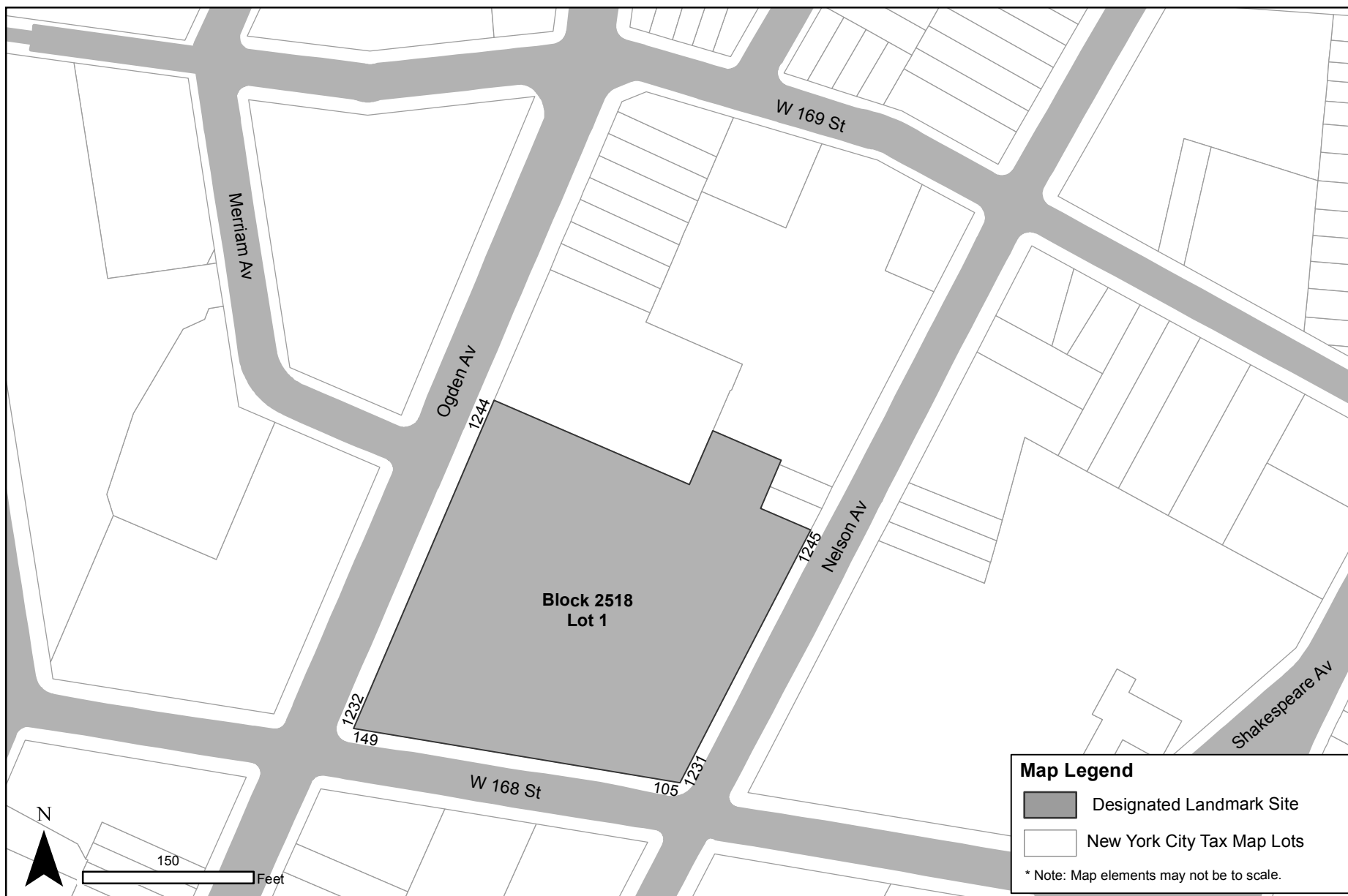
Noonan Plaza Apartments, garden court

Photo Credit: Christopher D. Brazee (2010)



Noonan Plaza Apartments, garden court entrance surround

Photo Credit: Christopher D. Brazee (2010)



NOONAN PLAZA APARTMENTS (LP-2400), 105-149 West 168 Street (aka 1231-1245 Nelson Avenue; 1232-1244 Ogden Avenue).
 Landmark Site: Borough of the Bronx, Tax Map Block 2518, Lot 1.

Designated: June 22, 2010