

FISK-HARKNESS HOUSE, 12 East 53rd Street, Manhattan.
Built 1871; Architect Griffith Thomas.
Remodeled 1906; Architect Raleigh C. Gildersleeve.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 1288, Lot 63.

On March 23, 2010, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Fisk-Harkness House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Public Hearing Item No. 4). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. A representative of the Historic Districts Council spoke in favor of designation, and written testimony in favor of designation was submitted by the Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society in America.

Summary

The Fisk-Harkness House is a town house originally constructed in 1871 and substantially altered in 1906 to the designs of architect Raleigh C. Gildersleeve, who transformed the building into a grand five-story American Basement-plan house with an asymmetrical neo-Tudor Gothic style limestone facade. Gildersleeve practiced architecture in New York City and New Jersey between 1892 and 1915, and is best known for the Tudor-inspired buildings he designed for the campus of Princeton University. Harvey E. Fisk, the owner of the house at the time of the alterations, was a prominent investment banker attracted to this area of Fifth Avenue because of its residential prestige. This town house is a rare survivor of the period when the area around Fifth Avenue in Midtown was home to Manhattan's wealthiest citizens, who built mansions or updated existing row houses for their private residences. In 1909 Fisk sold his town house to Standard Oil heir William L. Harkness, whose widow sold the building to an art gallery in 1922. Later occupants of the Fisk-Harkness House included the Automobile Club of America (1924 to 1932); Symons Galleries (1938 to 1949), an antiques dealer; and the Laboratory Institute of Merchandising (1965 to the present), a college of fashion merchandising and business.



DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

East 53rd Street, between Fifth and Madison Avenues¹

The area surrounding Fifth Avenue between 42nd Street and the southern end of Central Park remained rural in character until the second half of the 19th century, when speculative residences and mansions began to be constructed on lots newly mapped by the city.² By 1900, the character of the neighborhood on the blocks north of 42nd Street began to change yet again with the construction of, or the conversion of private residences to, exclusive retail shops, restaurants, and office buildings.

The block of East 53rd Street between Fifth and Madison avenues belonged to the city until 1799, when it was sold into private hands for development.³ Historic maps indicate that the immediate area developed sporadically from the 1850s onward; it was not until the late 1860s that residential development intensified, and by 1886 modest brownstone row houses lined the north and south sides of East 53rd Street between Fifth and Madison avenues.⁴ In 1871 Charles Moran purchased the lot at 12 East 53rd Street, which measured 37 ½ feet wide by 100 feet deep, and hired architect Griffith Thomas⁵ to erect a four-story row house with a basement, stoop, brownstone front, flat roof, and galvanized iron cornice that would cover virtually the entire lot. The house was generously sized compared to houses built on the standard 25-by-100-foot New York City lot, and by the mid-1880s the house had been made even larger by the construction of an addition extending approximately 19 feet to the rear.⁶

By the early 20th century, the area had gained the reputation of a first-class business and commercial zone, but the older, affluent residential character persisted as many of the outmoded brownstone row houses dating from the 1860s, 70s and 80s were given new facades, or were replaced altogether with more up-to-date Colonial Revival and Renaissance Revival style town houses, in keeping with the popular architectural taste of the time. As part of this trend, the row house at 12 East 53rd Street was altered in 1906 with the erection of an entirely new limestone facade designed by the architect Raleigh C. Gildersleeve. Gildersleeve's facade is an excellent example of the neo-Tudor Gothic style applied to a residential building in Manhattan,⁷ and the house a rare survivor of the period at the turn of the 20th century when this section of Fifth Avenue was Manhattan's most fashionable residential district.

The Fisks and Harknesses⁸

Harvey Edward Fisk (1856-1944) was a banker and research writer in finance, the eldest son of banker Harvey C. Fisk and Louisa Green Fisk of New Jersey. After his graduation from Princeton in 1877, Fisk joined his father's New York banking house, Fisk & Hatch. He married Mary Lee Scudder (1861-1941) of Trenton, New Jersey, in 1879. When Fisk & Hatch dissolved in 1885, the elder Fisk started the firm of Harvey Fisk & Sons, where the younger Fisk worked with two of his brothers until resigning in 1898. In 1899 Harvey E. Fisk started his own banking concern with George H. Robinson. The initial success of Fisk & Robinson faltered, forcing the firm to close in 1914. After a brief return to Harvey Fisk & Sons, this time working in publicity, Fisk joined the Bankers Trust Company of New York in 1917 as a research writer. During his 13-year career at Bankers Trust, he wrote numerous pamphlets and books on public finance; a collection of Fisk's writings and personal papers is held in the archives of Princeton University Library.⁹ The Fisks were involved in various philanthropic causes, including the Riverside Association, a social settlement founded on Manhattan's Upper West Side in 1892, and Mercer Hospital in Trenton, New Jersey, where Harvey Fisk died in 1944.¹⁰

William Lamon Harkness (1858?-1919), “capitalist and yachtsman”,¹¹ was an heir to the Standard Oil fortune and moved from Cleveland, Ohio, to New York in 1896, where he soon married Edith Hale (1864?-1947) and settled on an estate in Glen Cove, Long Island. A multi-millionaire at the time of his death in 1919, he left half his estate to his wife, and the rest to his children. During and after her marriage to William Harkness, Edith Hale Harkness was active in civic life, supporting several institutions including the Connecticut State Tuberculosis Commission, the New York Music Week Association, the New York League for the Hard of Hearing, the American Red Cross, the National War Fund, the Cleveland Medical Center, Yale University, and New York Genealogical and Biographical Society. Edith Harkness was also a member of various social clubs, including the Automobile Club of America, which would later purchase the Fisk-Harkness House for its clubhouse.

The Architect: Raleigh Colston Gildersleeve (1869-1944)¹²

Born in 1869 in Charleston, South Carolina, Raleigh Colston Gildersleeve was the son of celebrated Greek scholar and Civil War veteran Basil L. Gildersleeve (1831-1924). Raleigh Gildersleeve grew up in Baltimore, Maryland, where he attended Johns Hopkins University before receiving his training in architecture at the Technische Universität of Berlin between 1888 and 1890. By 1890 he was working as an architect in New York City, and by 1892 he had established his own practice and was very active in New Jersey. Gildersleeve’s surviving works include buildings designed in the Tudor and Collegiate Gothic styles on the campus of Princeton University in Princeton, New Jersey (1896-1917); Drumthwacket (c. 1835, attributed to Charles Steadman; 1893-1900, additions and out buildings, Raleigh C. Gildersleeve), the estate of Princeton alumnus Moses Taylor Pyne and later the official residence of the Governor of New Jersey, also in Princeton; The Chimneys (c. 1902-14), a Colonial Revival-style mansion and estate in Massachusetts; and the Beaux-Arts style Elizabeth W. Morris Memorial Library in Ridgefield, New Jersey (completed 1903). In New York City, Gildersleeve designed the 12-story Beaux-Arts style hotel building at 14 East 60th Street (1902; 1905 addition), located within the Upper East Side Historic District; a nine-story apartment house at 65-67 West 45th Street (1900, demolished); a Georgian Revival-style facade for a town house at 64 East 55th Street (c. 1902, demolished); and several alterations to commercial buildings and private town houses in Manhattan. He was a member of the New York chapter of the American Institute of Architects from 1898 until 1920, and a member of the Architectural League from 1894 until 1900. By 1915, Gildersleeve had left the architectural profession to devote himself to suburban real estate development. The Fisk-Harkness House was one of Gildersleeve’s few major commissions in New York City.

Design & Construction of the Fisk-Harkness House

Harvey and Mary Fisk purchased the row house at 12 East 53rd Street in June 1905, and soon hired architect Raleigh Colston Gildersleeve to design a major alteration to the building.¹³ As a Princeton alumnus and lifelong benefactor of the Princeton University library, Harvey Fisk would have been familiar with the campus buildings designed by Gildersleeve in the Tudor and Collegiate Gothic styles, the latter being the dominant style of architecture on campus after the 1890s.¹⁴ At the same time as the Fisks retained Gildersleeve to design their city residence, they also commissioned him to design a country house for them in Elberon, New Jersey.¹⁵ Gildersleeve’s plans for the Fisks’ 53rd Street residence were submitted to the Buildings Department in November 1905, and renovations were underway from January to August 1906.¹⁶

The project cost the considerable sum of \$25,000 and entailed demolition of the front facade, extension of the building line forward by 8½ feet, erection of a new limestone facade, construction of new stairs, installation of an electric elevator, and construction of a one-story rear addition. Gildersleeve's alteration to the Fisk residence resulted in an impressive neo-Tudor Gothic style town house with an asymmetrical facade featuring a four-centered arched entry with molded chamfered reveals and a crocketed hood molding, buttresses, leaded-glass windows with stone mullions, a two-story oriel, drip moldings, gargoyles, heraldic emblems, and a stepped gable. The design reflected the architect's past work at Princeton and also at Drumthwacket, where he designed a dairy in the half-timbered Tudor Gothic style for Moses Taylor Pyne,¹⁷ and perhaps influenced his later buildings for Princeton, McCosh Hall (1907) and the Cap and Gown Club (1908).

The Fisks enjoyed their newly renovated town house for just four years before financial difficulties compelled them to sell it, along with all the furnishings, antiques, and tapestries inside, in October 1909.¹⁸ The social stature of the buyers, William and Edith Harkness, and the unprecedented price of \$400,000 made the sale a newsworthy event and elicited praise for the town house, which was described as "one of the finest residences in the Fifth Avenue section" and "an unusual dwelling in several particulars."¹⁹ It was surely regarded as both fine and unusual for its large size, but also for its distinctive neo-Tudor Gothic style, a style generally associated with institutional buildings in New York City and suburban or rural buildings outside the city.

The renovation of the Fisk-Harkness residence totally reconfigured the house's interior layout, transforming it from the typical speculatively-built brownstone row house into an American Basement town house.²⁰ As constructed in 1871, the house had an off-set main entrance located at the top of a tall stoop, with a short flight of steps below the stoop leading to the basement, which was partially sunken below street level. Gildersleeve's 1905 design relocated the main entrance to sidewalk level and shifted the floor heights to allow for three tall middle stories between a low ground story and a gabled, picturesque top story. The 119-foot lot depth allowed for a spacious interior plan; the ground floor had a reception hall, probably focused on a prominent staircase,²¹ a music room, and a dining room with "light from all sides."²² The updated facade, and the resulting changes to the interior layout, thus represented the new "American Basement" type of row house design that became popular among New York City's architects, developers, and well-to-do clientele towards the end of the 19th century. Descriptions of the house's interior indicate that it was sumptuously finished in a neo-Tudor Gothic manner to match the imposing exterior.²³ Moreover, the Fisks had filled their house with antique furniture, paintings, and tapestries from Europe- an appropriate way to create an "olde English"²⁴ feel for the space, while at the same time signifying the Fisks' wealth and cultural refinement.²⁵

It remains unclear to what extent Gildersleeve's choice of neo-Tudor Gothic was influenced by the personal preferences of the Fisks, but the new facade was certainly in keeping with the architect's body of work and conformed to the tastes of the time, described by historian Andrew Dolkart as a general preference for "traditional European and early American designs."²⁶ The architecture of the Tudor period in England experienced a native revival during the latter half of the 19th century that gradually began to influence American buildings. It was not until the turn-of-the 20th century, however, that American architects began producing designs closely based on historical precedent, emulating the materials, forms, and details of 15th and 16th-

century English buildings, from vernacular half-timbered cottages to grand stone manor houses.²⁷

Subsequent History

Three years after William Harkness's death in 1919, Edith Harkness sold the five-story town house to Proctor & Company, art dealers. Proctor & Co. was probably responsible for removing the original tracery and enlarging the center ground story window to create a show window. The house was sold again in 1924, this time to the Automobile Club of America.²⁸ Founded in 1899 in New York City, the Automobile Club of America was the "pioneer organization of its kind" and "did much for the cause of good roads, sign posting, traffic regulation and the promotion of motoring as a sport and recreation in the United States."²⁹ The Fisk-Harkness house became the club's fourth home and marked its "entrance among the more exclusive social organizations of the city."³⁰ The former private residence proved well suited to its new club use, with several features of the original interior preserved by the club's Women's Committee, who were in charge of refitting and redecorating the new clubhouse. The club facilities included "touring, supply, and map departments" on the ground floor; a restaurant on the second floor; a library, card rooms, sitting room, and lounge on the third floor; baths, locker rooms, and dressing rooms for men and women on the fourth floor; and executive offices on the top floor.³¹ But early in 1932 the Automobile Club was forced to dissolve, owing to the "inroads of the depression on luxuries" and a drastic decrease in membership.³² The property was foreclosed upon later that year, and may have remained vacant until 1938, when Symons Galleries, Inc., art and antiques dealers, leased the building.³³ Symons Galleries may have been responsible for removing the original stone mullions and transoms from the window in the second bay of the second story, and then installing the current leaded-glass casement and transom windows. Aside from this change and the change to the ground-floor window, the facade remains remarkably intact. By 1940, apartments occupied the upper floors of the building, and in 1949 an advertising agency took over the building's ground-floor commercial space. In 1964 the building was purchased by the Laboratory Institute of Merchandising, a college for fashion merchandising and business founded in 1939 by New York fashion entrepreneur Maxwell F. Marcuse.³⁴ LIM still owns and occupies the building.

Description

Historic: five-story, two-bay, neo-Tudor Gothic style row house clad in limestone with Tudor-arch window and door openings, cross-gable and parapet, and Gothic ornament including gargoyles, buttresses, crocketed hood molding and drip molding, tracery, finials, escutcheons, and crenellations; main entrance recessed within four-centered arch framed by crocketed hood molding and stepped buttresses; stone tracery removed and opening enlarged for installation of show window with metal grille below (c. 1922) in second bay of ground story; secondary entrance to right of show window; limestone cheek wall at foundation removed (c. 1922); leaded-glass wood windows with stone mullions and transoms on second, third, and fourth stories (stone mullions, transoms and tracery removed from window in second bay of second story and replaced by current leaded-glass casement and transom windows, between 1925 and c. 1938); leaded-glass windows in first and second bays of fifth story; first bay of fifth story features balcony with balustrade and recessed, copper roof with flat-roofed dormer; copper-roofed cross-gable with stepped parapet, crenellations and pinnacle in second bay; chimney at parapet of western party wall.

Alterations: signage, exposed electrical conduit, Siamese standpipe, and utility box at base of north (primary) facade; address numbers to right and left of main entry; plaque affixed to buttress to right of main entry; non-historic wood door and wood transom panel at main entry; non-historic metal-and-glass door at secondary entry on ground story; flag pole with banner anchored to facade at second and third stories; east and west facades are party walls, partially exposed and clad in non-historic material of a similar color to limestone on 53rd Street (north) facade.

Site Features: Standpipe at foundation to left of main entry; a 30-story office building known as 510 Madison Avenue, completed in 2010, cantilevers over the eastern portion of the building.³⁵

Report prepared by
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NOTES

¹ This section is adapted from LPC, *(Former) Manufacturers Trust Company Building (now Chase Bank Building) Designation Report* (LP-1968) (New York: City of New York, 1997), prepared by Gale Harris.

² William Bridges, *Map of the City of New York and Island of Manhattan with Explanatory Remarks and References* (New York: William Bridges, 1811).

³ I.N. Phelps Stokes, *The Iconography of Manhattan Island, 1498-1909*, 6 (New York: Robert H. Dodd, 1928), 65; New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, “General Statement of Early Title” for Block 1288.

⁴ *Plan of New York City, from the Battery to Spuyten Duyvil Creek* (New York: Mathew Dripps, 1867); *Atlas of the City of New York, borough of Manhattan* (New York: G.W. Bromley & E. Robinson, 1879); *Atlas of the city of New York: embracing all territory within its corporate limits from official records, private plans & actual surveys* (New York: E. Robinson & R.H. Pidgeon, 1885).

⁵ Griffith Thomas (1820-1879) was born and educated in the Isle of Wight, and arrived in New York City in 1838. He immediately began training in the architectural firm of his father, Thomas Thomas. He assumed control of the firm in the 1860s and grew popular for his use of the Second Empire Style and cast-iron framing, examples of which can be found in the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District. The firm also designed office buildings, hotels, churches and brownstone residences throughout the city, and in the 1850s was responsible for many stores on Broadway. Thomas enjoyed a fruitful career; at the time of his death he was recognized as the single most prolific architect in the city. In addition to the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District, buildings designed by Thomas can be found within the Ladies Mile, NoHo, Tribeca West, Tribeca East, and Metropolitan Museum historic districts; Thomas also designed the center

section of the Astor Library (1849-52 Alexander Saeltzler; 1856-69 Griffith Thomas; 1879-81 Thomas Stent), located at 425 Lafayette Street. LPC, *Ladies Mile Historic District Designation Report* (LP-1609), vol. 2 (New York: Landmarks Preservation Commission, 1989), 1026; LPC, *Webster Hall and Annex Designation Report* (LP-2273) (New York: Landmarks Preservation Commission, 2008), prepared by Jay Shockley, 4.

⁶ In 1871 Moran also purchased the lot at 11 East 52nd Street, directly to the rear of 12 East 53rd Street, for stables; his ownership of both lots allowed for the construction of an addition to the house on East 53rd Street that extended approximately 19 feet beyond the original 100-foot lot depth; the house was already approximately 92 feet deep. In 1905, when the owner of 11 East 52nd Street and 12 East 53rd Street sold the latter property, the majority of the lot line separating the two properties was shifted south by about 19 feet, probably to accommodate the existing rear addition to 12 East 53rd Street. See Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 1190, p. 40, Liber 1166, p. 663, Liber 41, p. 390, and Liber 114, p. 296; New York City, Department of Buildings, New Building Permit No. 1076-71 (1871); *Atlas of the city of New York*, 1885. The Commissioners' Plan of 1811 established the grid of streets and 25-by-100-foot lots that eventually covered virtually all of Manhattan above 14th Street. Kenneth T. Jackson, ed. *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 558.

⁷ The Mary Hale Cunningham House, a designated New York City Landmark located at 124 East 55th Street, is another example of an existing row house substantially renovated around the turn-of-the century to suit contemporary architectural tastes. Completed three years after the renovation to the Fisk-Harkness House, in 1909, the Cunningham house renovation was the work of architect Harrie Lindeburg, a specialist in the Tudor Revival style. Lindeburg's design for the Cunningham House features a striking Tudor-inspired facade of brick and limestone, dominated by a gable and long, multipane windows. See LPC, *Mary Hale Cunningham House Designation Report* (LP-2085) (New York: City of New York, 2001), prepared by Jay Shockley.

⁸ Information in this section is based on the following sources: Francis Bazley Lee, ed. *Genealogical and Personal Memorial of Mercer County, New Jersey*, vol. 2 (New York: the Lewis Publishing Co., 1907), 730; William L. Harkness Dies," *New York Times*, May 11, 1919, 21; "\$53,439,000 Estate of Wm. L. Harkness to Pay Tax Here" *NYT*, Apr. 10, 1921, 1; "Harkness Estate Taxed on \$51,419,819," *NYT*, Mar. 28, 1922, 33; "Mrs. W. Harkness, Financier's Widow," *NYT*, Jan. 15, 1947, 25.

⁹ "Harvey E. Fisk Papers, 1889-1944," Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey (Finding Aid MC050 accessed online January 18, 2011).

¹⁰ Charles Richmond Henderson, *Social Settlements* (New York: Lentilhon & Co., 1899): 65-66 (retrieved from Google Books on January 18, 2011); "Harvey E. Fisk Dies, Retired Banker, 88" *NYT*, Oct. 9, 1944, 23.

¹¹ "William L. Harkness Dies," *NYT* (May 11, 1919), 21.

¹² This section is based on information from the following sources: Francis, Dennis Stedman, *Architects in Practice in New York City: 1840-1900* (New York: Committee for the Preservation of Architectural Records, 1979), 34; James Ward, *Architects in Practice in New York City: 1900-1940* (New York: Committee for the Preservation of Architectural Records, 1989), 28; and LPC Architects File.

¹³ See Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 114, p. 296.

¹⁴ Gildersleeve's Upper and Lower Pyne dormitory-and-shop buildings, located at the corner of Nassau and Witherspoon streets across from Princeton University's main building, were completed in 1896 in the "half-timbered Chester style,"¹⁴ referring to the 16th-century residential vernacular of northern England (Upper Pyne was demolished in 1963). Gildersleeve's choice of a historically accurate Tudor-period residential style for the Pyne dormitories was appropriate given Princeton's simultaneous adoption of the Collegiate Gothic style, symbolized by the construction of Pyne Library, designed by William A. Potter and completed in 1897. Tudor and Collegiate Gothic were terms often used interchangeably to describe buildings recalling the colleges and universities of medieval and Elizabethan England, with their characteristic "quadrangles, mullioned windows, battlemented parapets, picturesque chimneys, bays, and oriels." Russell Sturgis, *A Dictionary of Architecture and Building*, 3 vols (New York and London: The Macmillan Company, 1902), reprint Detroit: Gale Research Company, Book Tower,

1966: vol. 1: 638. In 1902, university president Woodrow Wilson reflected on the significance of Collegiate Gothic architecture for Princeton's campus, writing in the *Princeton Alumni Weekly* that "Gothic architecture has added a thousand years to the history of the university, and has pointed every man's imagination to the earliest traditions of learning in the English-speaking race." Gildersleeve's later buildings for Princeton, McCosh Hall (1907) and the Cap and Gown Club (1908), employed the Collegiate Gothic style. David J. Neuman and Stephen A. Kliment. *Building Type Basics for College and University Facilities* (Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, 2003), 21; "An Interactive Campus History," Princeton University website, <http://etcweb.princeton.edu/Campus/> (Retrieved from the internet January 24, 2011).

¹⁵ "Dwellings," *Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, vol. 76, no. 1965 (Nov. 11, 1905): 739.

¹⁶ New York City, Department of Buildings, Alteration Permit No. 3311-05 (1905).

¹⁷ As a Trustee of Princeton University, Pyne was a major proponent of the Collegiate Gothic style of architecture for campus buildings. "An Interactive Campus History," Princeton University website.

¹⁸ See Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 154, p. 29.

¹⁹ "W.L. Harkness Buyer of \$400,000 Residence," *NYT*, Oct. 17, 1909, xx1; "New Fifty-third St. Home of William L. Harkness," *NYT*, Oct. 24, 1909, xx2.

²⁰ The interior of the Fisk-Harkness House is not part of the landmark designation. For a full discussion of the American Basement row house type, see LPC, *Edith Andrews Logan House Designation Report* (LP-2329) (New York: Landmarks Preservation Commission, 2009), prepared by Olivia Klose.

²¹ Russell Sturgis notes that in the Tudor period the staircase came into new prominence as an interior feature and object of decoration. Sturgis, vol. 3: 880.

²² The allusion to a light-filled dining room indicates that this room was probably located in the three-story rear wing of the house, which was narrower than the main part of the house. "New Fifty-third St. Home of William L. Harkness."

²³ References from the 1920s and 1930s called attention to an "artistic" ceiling on the second floor, probably alluding to ornate plasterwork, and a room of "carved oak" with a stone mantel; indeed, decorative plaster ceilings, "linenfold" oak paneling, and fireplaces were all typical elements of Tudor-inspired American interiors from the early 1900s into the 1920s. Andrew Scott Dolkart, *The Row House Reborn* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 31; Mark Alan Hewitt, *The Architect and the American Country House* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 346.

²⁴ Dolkart, 35.

²⁵ Hewitt, 77. Architectural historians writing about the Tudor Revival in America often cite the "aristocratic associations" of the style, noting that it was particularly favored by wealthy people such as bankers, financiers, and stock brokers. Lee Goff, *Tudor Style: Tudor Revival Houses in America from 1890 to the Present* (New York: Universe, 2002), 29; Hewitt, 71.

²⁶ Dolkart, 36.

²⁷ "Tudor" architecture in late-19th and early-20th century America was variously referred to as Elizabethan, Jacobean, half-timber, Old English, or Jacobethan; now it is generally referred to as Tudor Revival. By the early 20th century, the Tudor Revival style was most closely associated with planned suburban communities. Goff, 26-30; Leland Roth, *American Architecture: A History* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books, 2001), 346-352; Hewitt, 77. In his book *The Architect and the American Country House*, historian Mark Alan Hewitt illustrates how "traditional" styles, in particular the American Colonial Revival and the English Tudor Revival, came to dominate American country house design in the early 20th century. Of the popularity of the English Tudor aesthetic for American

country houses, Hewitt writes: “In the midst of America’s greatest commercial and industrial growth, the persistent English ideal of the manor and the country gentleman remained a mark of social and cultural status, just as it had in the Victorian era in England” (Hewitt, 7). Although not a country house, the Fisk-Harkness House was designed by an architect with demonstrable experience executing country houses in the Tudor and Colonial Revival styles, and thus reflects the importance of the historically-accurate architectural style to the design of homes for wealthy Americans at the turn-of-the 20th century.

²⁸ See Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 3263, p. 208, and Liber 3391, p. 287.

²⁹ “Auto Club to Open New 6-Story Home,” *NYT*, Apr. 26, 1925, E1; “Automobile Club of America to Dissolve; Oldest Group of Kind Doomed by Depression,” *NYT*, Jan. 22, 1932, 1.

³⁰ “Auto Club to Open New 6-Story Home”. The club’s new location was close to the core of New York social clubs, including the Calumet Club (McKim, Mead & White, 1899-1901; alteration, J.E.R. Carpenter, 1924) at 12-14 West 56th Street, the Knickerbocker Club (Delano & Aldrich, 1913-15) at 2 East 62nd Street, the Union Club (Delano & Aldrich, 1930-32) at Fifth Avenue and 51st Street, and the University Club (McKim, Mead & White, 1896-1900) at Fifth Avenue and 54th Street, all designated New York City Landmarks.

³¹ “Auto Club to Open New 6-Story Home”.

³² “Automobile Club of America to Dissolve”.

³³ See Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 3847, p. 50; “Art Firm Leases 6-Story Building,” *NYT*, Feb. 9, 1938, 36.

³⁴ See Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 5301, p. 55; LIM College homepage, “History” (<http://www.limcollege.edu/html/history.htm>) (Accessed July 31, 2009).

³⁵ DOB Document ID 200802150029002 (Transfer of Air Rights).

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of the buildings and site, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Fisk-Harkness House has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest, and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Fisk-Harkness House is a town house originally constructed in 1871 and substantially altered in 1906 to the designs of architect Raleigh C. Gildersleeve, who transformed the building into a grand five-story American Basement-plan house with an asymmetrical neo-Tudor Gothic style limestone facade; that Gildersleeve practiced architecture in New York City and New Jersey between 1892 and 1915, and is best known for the Tudor-inspired buildings he designed for the campus of Princeton University; that Harvey E. Fisk, the owner of the house at the time of the alterations, was a prominent investment banker attracted to this area of Fifth Avenue because of its residential prestige; that this town house is a rare survivor of the period when the area around Fifth Avenue in Midtown was home to Manhattan's wealthiest citizens, who built mansions or updated existing row houses for their private residences; that in 1909 Fisk sold his town house to Standard Oil heir William L. Harkness, whose widow sold the building to an art gallery in 1922; and that later tenants of the Fisk-Harkness House included the Automobile Club of America (1924 to 1932); Symons Galleries (1938 to 1949), an antiques dealer; and the Laboratory Institute of Merchandising (1965 to the present), a college of fashion merchandising and business.

Accordingly, pursuant to 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 Fisk-Harkness House, and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1288, Lot 63 as its Landmark Site.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair
Pablo E. Vengoechea, Vice Chair
Frederick Bland, Michael Devonshire, Michael Goldblum,
Christopher Moore, Roberta Washington, Commissioners



Fisk-Harkness House
12 East 53rd Street, Manhattan
Built: 1871; Renovated: 1906
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2011



Fisk-Harkness House, 1925

Photograph courtesy of the New York Public Library (NYPL ID 713648F)



Photograph of Harvey E. Fisk, c. 1877

Photograph courtesy of Princeton University Library
(*Historical Photograph Collection: Alumni Photographs Series, 1748-1920*)



Photograph of Architect Raleigh C. Gildersleeve, 1930?

Photograph courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution, Archives of American Gardens, Chimneys Collection



Fisk-Harkness House

Four-centered arch framed by crocketed hood molding

Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2011



Fisk-Harkness House

Bay window on 2nd story with leaded-glass, stone mullions, and crenellated parapet
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2011



Fisk-Harkness House
Detail of gargoyle
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2011

