

# 935 St. Nicholas Avenue Building

**935 St. Nicholas Avenue (aka 929-939 St. Nicholas Avenue, 462-466 West 157th Street)  
Manhattan Tax Map Block 2107 Lot 72**

**Built:** 1915

**Architect:** Gronenberg & Leuchtag

**Style:** Gothic Revival

**Proposed Action:** Propose for Calendaring April 4, 2023

Public Hearing June 6, 2023



935 St. Nicholas Avenue, Cyclomedia

Located prominently at the corner of West 157th Street and St. Nicholas Avenue in Hamilton Heights, Manhattan, 935 St. Nicholas Avenue is a Gothic Revival style brick and limestone apartment building designed by Gronenberg & Leuchtag in 1915. Along with its intact historic architectural character, the building is culturally significant as the home to Edward Kennedy “Duke” Ellington and Noble Lee Sissle, two pioneers of jazz music who were among the most prolific composers, musicians, and bandleaders in American history. Jazz pianist and composer Ellington resided in the building from 1939 to 1961, While Sissle, a noted ragtime jazz musician and music producer, resided here from 1950 to 1972.

Born in Washington, D.C., Duke Ellington (1899-1974) was one of America’s most innovative and prolific jazz orchestra leaders from the start of his career in New York in 1923 until his death in 1974. Ellington is best remembered for the over 3,000 songs that he composed during his lifetime. In 1939, Ellington moved into an apartment at 935 St. Nicholas Avenue with his family. During his time in the building in the 1940s and 1950s, Ellington wrote many songs that have become American jazz standards, such as “Sophisticated Lady,” “Satin Doll,” “Don’t Get Around Much Anymore,” and “I Let a Song Go Out of My Heart.” Ellington also composed musical suites consisting of pieces linked by subject matter, including “Black, Brown and Beige” (1943), a portrayal of African American history; “Liberian Suite” (1947); and “A Drum Is a Woman” (1956), and created music for film and television scores. Ellington received accolades and awards throughout his illustrious career. He was on the cover of Time Magazine in 1956 while he lived on St. Nicholas Avenue and would later be awarded the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 1966 and the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1969, among many other honors.

Noble Sissle (1889-1975) was born in Indianapolis and moved to New York in 1916. During World War I, Sissle was a member of the 369<sup>th</sup> regimental band organized by James Reese Europe, part of the primarily African American regiment known as the “Harlem Hell Fighters.” Sissle began to collaborate with Eubie Blake around 1914. Their first musical, *Shuffle Along*, opened in 1921 and ran for two years. It was the first successful Broadway musical with an all-Black cast. This musical introduced such songs as “I’m Just Wild about Harry,” (which would later be the campaign song for President Harry S. Truman), “Love Will Find a Way,” “Simply Full of Jazz,” and many more. Sissle later formed his own orchestra which toured Europe and the U.S. during the 1930s through the 1950s and appeared in movies and television shows. In 1937, Sissle founded the Negro Actors Guild of America, an organization established to try to eliminate the stereotyping of African Americans in theatrical and cinematic performances. Sissle was president of the Guild from 1937 to 1957. Duke Ellington was the organization’s co-vice-president along with Ethel Waters and Marion Anderson. During the time Sissle lived at 935 St. Nicholas Avenue, he became known as the unofficial “Mayor of Harlem,” writing many articles for the *New York Age* and the *New York Amsterdam News*, and with a show on the local New York radio station WMGM starting in 1954 and ending in 1971.

935 St. Nicholas Avenue is architecturally and culturally significant as a reflection of Harlem’s history in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It retains a high degree of integrity to its period of construction, and to the mid-century period when the building was home to jazz leaders Duke Ellington and Noble Sissle for more than 20 years each.

