

Landmarks Preservation Commission
March 23, 2010, Designation List 427
LP- 2340

JOSEPH B. AND JOSEPHINE H. BISSELL HOUSE, 46 West 55th Street, Manhattan
Built, 1869; architect, Thomas Thomas; altered, 1903-04, Edward L. Tilton

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1270, Lot 60

On June 23, 2009, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Joseph B. and Josephine H. Bissell House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 18). The hearing was duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Three people spoke in favor of designation, including representatives of Councilmember Daniel R. Garodnick, the West 55th Street Block Association and the Historic Districts Council. A representative of the owner spoke in opposition to designation.

Summary

The Joseph B. and Josephine H. Bissell House was originally constructed as one of five Italianate style brownstone row houses designed by architect Thomas Thomas and built in 1869 by owner and builder John W. Stevens. When the Bissell House was initially constructed, many row houses were being built on the side streets in the area below Central Park while larger mansions were being constructed along Fifth Avenue. By the early 20th century this area was the city's most prestigious residential neighborhood and was known as Vanderbilt's Row because of that family's involvement in maintaining the elite character of the neighborhood. The house was purchased by Josephine H. Bissell in 1903 and she hired prominent architect Edward L. Tilton to alter the house by removing the traditional Italianate style brownstone facade and its high stoop and replacing it with a more fashionable neo-Classical style brick and limestone facade with an American basement plan. The Bissell House facade is a rare example of a private residential commission by Tilton, who is particularly associated with the design of libraries. The facade features a bowed front, red and black brick laid in a Flemish bond pattern and limestone details including two prominent cornices with block modillions and scroll brackets. Mrs. Bissell lived in the house with her husband, Dr. Joseph B. Bissell, and their children and sold it shortly after his death. Dr. Bissell was a surgeon who did pioneering research in the treatment of cancer with radium. Several prominent physicians lived in the house in the first half of the 20th century. The next owner was Dr. James Ramsay Hunt who lived and maintained an office in the house. Dr. Hunt was a preeminent neurologist who is known today because several neurological disorders bear his name. In 1943, Drs. Harry Sidney Newcomer and Marian Anastasia Staats Newcomer purchased the house. Dr. H. Sidney Newcomer was an inventor as well as a physician and his wife, Dr. Marian Newcomer, was the author of a book that provided medical advice to laypersons. Gradually the house went from residential to non-residential use and it is currently owned by a clothing manufacturer based in Italy.



DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Development of “Vanderbilt Row”¹

The area surrounding Fifth Avenue between 42nd Street and the southern end of Central Park was far removed from the center of population at the tip of the Manhattan and remained rural in character well into the first half of the 19th century. Most of the territory was originally owned by the City of New York, which had been granted “all the waste, vacant, unpatented, and unappropriated lands” under the Dongan Charter of 1686. The city maintained possession of these common lands—which once totaled over one-seventh of the acreage on Manhattan—for over a century, only occasionally selling off small parcels to raise funds for the municipality. The city’s policy changed after the American War of Independence. In 1785 the Common Council commissioned surveyor Casimir Theodore Goerck to map out five-acre lots to be sold at auction. A new street called Middle Road, now known as Fifth Avenue, was laid out to provide access to the parcels. A second survey of additional lots was undertaken by Goerck in 1796 and two new roads, now Park and Sixth avenues, were created.² Under the city’s plan, half of the lots were to be sold outright while the other half were made available under long-term leases of 21 years. Many of the parcels were acquired by wealthy New Yorkers as speculative investments in anticipation of future growth in the area. John Mason, one-time president of the Chemical National Bank, for example, acquired most of the lots on the east side of Middle Road in the East 50s in 1825.³ A number of public or public-minded institutions also purchased or were granted large plots along the avenue; the Colored Orphan Asylum was located between 43rd and 44th streets, the Deaf and Dumb Asylum on 50th Street just east of Fifth Avenue, the Roman Catholic Orphan Asylum between 51st and 52nd streets, and St. Luke’s Hospital between 54th and 55th streets. St. Luke’s was located at the eastern end of the same block as the Bissell house. The rough character of the neighborhood—other tenants at this time included Waltemeir’s cattle yard at the corner of Fifth Avenue and 54th Street—persisted into the 1860s, when development pressures finally began to transform the area into a fashionable residential district.

The inexorable northward movement of population and commerce in Manhattan picked up momentum during the building boom that followed the Civil War. Four-story brick- and brownstone-faced row houses were constructed on many of the side streets in the area, while larger mansions were erected along Fifth Avenue itself. Pioneers in this development were the sisters Mary Mason Jones and Rebecca Colford Jones, heirs of early Fifth Avenue speculator John Mason and both widows of established Knickerbocker families. In 1867, Mary Mason Jones commissioned a block-long row of houses, later known as the “Marble Row,” on the east side of the avenue between 57th and 58th streets. Two years later in 1869, her sister hired architect Detlef Lienau to design her own set of lavish residences one block to the south. Having established the area as an acceptable neighborhood for the city’s elite, other wealthy New Yorkers soon followed the Jones sisters northward up Fifth Avenue. This was the same year that the row of houses of which the Bissell house is a part was built. The gentrification of the area was further motivated by a number of important civic and institutional building projects initiated in the mid-19th century. Most notable was the planning and construction of Central Park in the late 1850s and 1860s; the preeminence of Fifth

Avenue as the fashionable approach to the park was solidified by 1868 when an entrance plaza was created between East 58th and 60th streets.⁴

The status of the area as the city's most prestigious residential neighborhood was firmly cemented in 1879 when the Vanderbilt family began a monumental house-building campaign on Fifth Avenue. William Henry Vanderbilt—the family patriarch since the death of his father Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt in 1877—located his own palatial residence on the western block front between 51st and 52nd streets, while his two eldest sons each erected mansions just to the north. The scope of the work was so impressive and the influence of the family on the neighborhood so great that the ten blocks of Fifth Avenue south of Central Park came to be known as “Vanderbilt Row.” By the turn of the 20th century, however, the march of business up Fifth Avenue had progressed such that the Vanderbilts were engaged in a constant struggle to protect their enclave from unsympathetic commercial redevelopment.

Further change was precipitated when the Roman Catholic Asylum announced plans to vacate its midtown property—which occupied the entire block front facing directly across Fifth Avenue from William H. Vanderbilt's twin brownstone houses—to move to larger facilities in the Fordham Heights section of the Bronx. At the close of 1899, a real estate syndicate lead by Charles T. Barney and George R. Sheldon finalized negotiations with the Asylum for the purchase of a large portion of the institution's property stretching between 51st and 52nd streets from Fifth Avenue to just shy of Madison Avenue. In the ensuing months most of the lots along the side streets had been sold off to individual owners. The deeds for these lots contained a number of restrictive covenants; most important was the stipulation that only single-family houses could be erected on the land for a period of 25 years. The lots along Fifth Avenue, however, did not find ready purchasers. The parcel at the northeast corner of Fifth Avenue and 51st Street was eventually taken by the Union Club—not a residential tenant but still in keeping with the exclusive character of the neighborhood. The plots immediately to the north, however, were acquired by Stewart H. Chisolm, who soon announced plans to erect an 18-story hotel on the site. The Vanderbilt family acted quickly to block the project by directing their New York Realty Corporation to acquire the property. The family subsequently sold the northern lot at 651-653 Fifth Avenue to Morton F. Plant, a Vanderbilt associate, with the understanding that he would erect a first-class private residence. The mid-block parcel at 645-647 Fifth Avenue was retained by the Vanderbilts, who commissioned architects Hunt & Hunt to design a pair of elegant marble row houses later known as the “Marble Twins” (both the Plant House and the sole survivor of the Marble Twins, 647 Fifth Avenue, are designated New York City Landmarks). With the Fifth Avenue frontage secured and elegant row houses now in construction along the side streets, it appeared that the Vanderbilts had succeeded in their efforts to maintain the residential character of Vanderbilt Row.

Early History of the Site and House

The site of the Bissell house was part of the common land of New York City⁵ until 1851 when the Mayor, Aldermen and Commonality of the City of New York sold it to Stephen V. Albro,⁶ a grocer who had his business and residence at 328 Bowery at the time.⁷ The land remained vacant until 1869, when owner and builder John W. Stevens constructed five Italianate style brownstone row houses designed by architect Thomas

Thomas at 44-52 West 55th Street.⁸ The first owners of No. 46 were Felicia S. Lowndes and Louise A. Alker,⁹ who appear to be related,¹⁰ although it appears from the *Trow's City Directories* that Lowndes did not live in the house. Members of the Alker and Lowndes families lived in the house until 1886.¹¹ By 1900 subsequent owners, who do not appear to have lived in the house, rented the house to Maria L. Grouard and her sister Elizabeth P. Grouard. The Grouard sisters lived and ran a school for girls in the building.¹² Blondelle Malone, an artist from South Carolina, was also living in the house in 1899-1900.¹³

Joseph B. and Josephine H. Bissell

The house had a number of owners before Josephine H. Bissell purchased it from Sadie S. Dearborn in early 1903.¹⁴ Mrs. Bissell hired architect Edward L. Tilton to completely alter the front facade of the house by replacing the Italianate style brownstone facade and its high stoop with a more fashionable neo-Classical style facade with an American basement plan. The alteration was carried out between May 21, 1903 and June 27, 1904.¹⁵ Josephine H. Bissell and her husband, Dr. Joseph B. Bissell lived there with their four children and two female servants.¹⁶ Joseph B. Bissell was a surgeon who did pioneering research in the treatment of cancer with radium and was visiting surgeon for many years at Bellevue and St. Vincent's Hospitals. He graduated from Yale University and the College of Physicians and Surgeons at Columbia University. In July 1915, he opened the Radium Sanatorium of New York at 203 West 70th Street.¹⁷ Earlier that same year, the Bissell's eldest daughter Eugenie married Lawrence Millet, son of the late American artist Francis D. Millet, in the drawing room of the house.¹⁸ Dr. Bissell, a major in the U.S. Army during World War I, died in December 1918 while working as chief surgeon at Fort McHenry near Baltimore, Maryland. In the following year, Josephine Bissell sold the house to Dr. J. Ramsay Hunt.¹⁹ She later moved to Great Neck, Long Island and married William Bradford Merrill, general manager of the Hearst newspapers and the uncle of her son-in-law Lawrence Millet.²⁰

Edward L. Tilton of the firm Boring & Tilton²¹

Edward Lippincott Tilton (1861-1933) was born in New York City. He attended the Chappaqua Institute, Westchester County, New York, and as a teenager worked for the banking firm of Corlies, Macy & Co. In 1886, he was hired by McKim, Mead & White, where he met William Alciphron Boring (1859-1937) who started in the firm a year later in 1887. Boring, born in Carlinville, Illinois, the son and grandson of building contractors, initially trained as a carpenter (1874-78) and studied architecture at the University of Illinois (1880-82) before his family moved to Los Angeles in 1882. Boring moved to New York City in 1886 to attend Columbia University, studying with William R. Ware for a year before he was hired by McKim, Mead & White. Boring and Tilton decided to continue their studies at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris (1887-90). After traveling in Europe, they both returned to New York in 1890 to the office of McKim, Mead & White. In 1891, they formed Boring & Tilton. Nathan C. Mellen joined them in partnership until 1894 for the Casino (1891-92), Belle Haven, Connecticut, and the grand Hotel Colorado (1891-93) in the resort town of Glenwood Springs, Colorado.

Boring & Tilton secured its distinguished reputation through winning the competition in 1897 for the first phase of new buildings at the U.S. Immigration Station

on Ellis Island. These included the Main Building (1897-1900), Kitchen and Laundry Building (1900-01), Main Powerhouse (1900-01), Main Hospital Building (1900-01), all located within the Ellis Island Historic District, and the incinerator (demolished). The firm was awarded a gold medal at the Exposition Universelle, Paris (1900); a gold medal at the Pan-American Exposition, Buffalo (1901); and a silver medal at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, St. Louis (1904). Among the firm's commissions were the Town Hall (1899), East Orange, New Jersey; Tome School for Boys complex (1900-05), Port Deposit, Maryland; Brooklyn Heights Casino (1904-05) and the Casino Mansion Apartments (1910, Boring), 75 Montague Street/200 Hicks Street, located within the Brooklyn Heights Historic District; Eastern District YMCA (1904-06), 177-185 Marcy Avenue, Brooklyn; and residences in New York and Connecticut. The formal partnership of Boring & Tilton ended in 1904, although both men continued in association until 1915, sharing offices and equipment as they worked independently.

Edward Tilton was responsible for the design of the J. C. Blair Memorial Hospital (1910-11), Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania; Central High School, Johnstown, Pennsylvania; and the New Hampshire Fire Insurance Co. Building, Manchester, New Hampshire. Tilton is particularly associated with the design of libraries, credited with over one hundred libraries in the United States and Canada, including over sixty buildings during World War I. Tilton became the partner of Alfred M. Githens in 1920. Tilton & Githens specialized in the design of libraries and institutional buildings, including the Wilmington Public Library (1922-23), Delaware, which was awarded the A.I.A. gold medal in 1930; St. Luke's German Evangelical Lutheran Church (1926), 308-316 West 46th Street; Currier Gallery of Art (1927) and United States Post Office, Manchester, New Hampshire; the Museums of Fine Arts and Natural History (1933), Springfield, Massachusetts; and Bergen County Administrative Building (1933, with William F. Schwanewede), Hackensack, New Jersey.

The Bissell house is a rare example of a private residential commission by Tilton. There is one other known example of a row house that was altered with a new front by Boring & Tilton. The house at 132 West 72nd Street (within the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District) was one of five Renaissance Revival style brownstone row houses built in 1883-84 and designed by Gilbert A. Schellenger. In 1901-02, the front was replaced by Boring & Tilton's design for a new brick and ashlar facade that featured a bowed front at the third and fourth stories²² and stone details such as quoins and keystones.²³

Subsequent History

James Ramsay Hunt bought the house from Josephine Bissell a few months after being discharged from the military in 1919, and lived in the house with his wife Alice St. John Nolan Hunt and their two children until his death in 1937.²⁴ He was a preeminent neurologist who is known today because several neurological disorders bear his name.²⁵ Dr. Hunt was educated at the University of Pennsylvania and was stationed in France in the medical corps of the U.S. Army during World War I. The Hunts hosted dinner parties each week in their home that were attended by others within the medical profession and wealthy members of the business world, according to their daughter, Alice Hunt Sokoloff.²⁶ During this time, he was a professor of neurology at Columbia University and had consulting privileges at several hospitals. He eventually moved his office to the

ground floor of the house. He recorded his experiences with private patients from 1903 to 1937 in what are known as the James Ramsey Hunt Casebooks.²⁷ The Hunt family continued to live in the house after his death; however, the house was foreclosed by the Bowery Savings Bank in 1940 and then sold by the bank to Drs. H. (Harry) Sidney Newcomer and Marian Anastasia Staats Newcomer in 1943.²⁸

Dr. Marian Newcomer was educated at the Syracuse University Medical School and was best known as the founder of the Mater Christi Guild, a Catholic guidance center for the assistance of young people in family difficulties, and as the author of a 1936 book, *Bewildered Patient*, which provided medical advice for laypersons.²⁹ She maintained an office in the house.³⁰ Her husband, Dr. H. Sidney Newcomer, developed a three-stage amplifier using thermionic valves that amplified nerve action currents with fellow Johns Hopkins School of Medicine student Herbert S. Glasser in 1921.³¹ Newcomer also invented and received several U.S. patents for optical devices. In 1930 he exhibited an anamorphic lens that was used as a projection device. Similar research was being done in France by Henri Chretien at the same time. This technology developed into Cinemascope in the 1950s.³² Newcomer was associate medical director of the pharmaceutical company, E. R. Squibb and Sons, when they lived in the house. According to a Certificate of Occupancy issued in 1944³³ and the *New York Telephone Company Address Directories*, there were non-residential uses in the building while the Newcomers lived there; these included Marian Newcomer's Mater Christi Guild, Dioptric Instrument Corp., a manufacturer of precision lenses, and Reach Yates Matton Inc., an advertising firm.³⁴

In 1954, H. Sidney Newcomer sold the house to Edward A. Viner and it served as the main office of Edward A. Viner & Co., Inc., an investment firm.³⁵ In addition to offices, a Certificate of Occupancy dated 1954 indicates that there was a laboratory in the cellar and a duplex apartment at the fourth and fifth stories.³⁶ After the building was sold by the Estate of Edward A. Viner in 1956 it housed a variety of commercial firms, mostly in the garment industry.³⁷ The owner Jean Robert Ltd., a clothing retailer, altered the building by replacing the windows and enlarging the door opening in 1987 and received a new Certificate of Occupancy that did not include any residential use.³⁸ Les Copains, a manufacturer of women's clothing based in Italy has occupied the premises as its U.S. headquarters since purchasing the building in 2001.³⁹

Design and Construction⁴⁰

In the late 19th century, the New York City row house began to be transformed by architects and housing developers interested in moving beyond the traditional form to achieve a more "scientific division of space," while at the same time effecting an "artistic disposition" on the interior as well as the exterior.⁴¹ One of the most notable solutions was what came to be called the American basement plan. According to architectural historian Russell Sturgis, the American basement plan was first introduced around 1880. It gained widespread popularity during the 1890s and first few years of the 1900s, when it was promoted in the architecture and real estate press as a practical, stylistic, and even social improvement over the speculatively built brownstone row houses that had predominated into the latter half of the 19th century. In the traditional row house plan, the main entrance was reached by a tall flight of stairs—the stoop, from the Dutch for "step"—which was set to one side of the facade. The main reception hall shared the first

floor with the parlor, beyond which was usually another parlor, a library, or sometimes a dining room. More often the dining room was located in the front of the raised basement, which was entered via a short flight of stairs sunk beneath the stoop; visitors to the house would therefore enter on the level of the family's main living space. The Bissell house, when constructed in 1869, was a traditional row house.

The entrance to an American basement plan row house was instead lowered virtually to street level, and was often centered on the facade. The resulting changes in the interior arrangement of space were quite dramatic; the main entrance hall and stair now occupied the front of the ground story with the kitchen behind, and on the first floor the parlor now occupied the entire building frontage, separated from the rear dining room by a stair hall that functioned as a secondary reception hall. Moving the entrance to the center of the ground floor created the possibility of a generous foyer leading to a grand main stairway, and a larger, better lit parlor occupying the entire building frontage on the first floor.⁴² Architecture critic Montgomery Schuyler summed up the innovations embodied by the "New New York House," writing in 1906 for *Architectural Record* that "...there is a practical consensus to the effect that the "American basement," with the full frontage available on the second floor, is the most convenient arrangement, and the most economical in reality in spite of the 'waste' of the entrance hall. And the narrower the front, the more desirable it is, practically and especially architecturally, that the entrance be at the centre."⁴³

The introduction of this new row house type coincided with increased stylistic experimentation by architects and developers seeking to create distinguished facades that would be readily marketable as private, upper-class residences. Fostered in part by the classical styles used at the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, many of the row houses employing the American basement plan were given facades in a variety of architectural styles including Renaissance Revival, Modern French, Beaux-Arts, and Georgian Revival.

After the turn of the century, brownstone row houses throughout the city were remodeled by the removal of the stoops, rearranged of the interior floors layouts and, sometimes, the replacement of the whole front facade.⁴⁴ In 1903 architectural critic Herbert Croly observed that high-stooped brownstone dwellings had become "extremely unfashionable, both in design and plan" and described a new movement "gradually gathering momentum toward the substitution of reconstructed American basement dwelling for old brownstone fronts."⁴⁵ There was also an increasing desire for individualized designs. Reacting against "the monotony of the once fashionable ... brownstone-front, in blocks of a dozen of more houses exactly alike,"⁴⁶ architects and developers entered into "a persistent and deliberate striving after individuality" using a variety of different styles, designs, and materials to create distinctive facades that would be readily marketable as private upper-class residences.⁴⁷

The facade alteration by Edward L. Tilton in 1903-04 for the Bissells altered the house from a traditional row house plan to an American basement plan row house and removed the Italianate style brownstone facade and replaced it with a then-fashionable neo-Classical style brick and limestone facade. Tilton employed red and black brick laid in a Flemish bond pattern with limestone details and a bowed front at the first through fourth stories. The house has two prominent limestone cornices above the first and fourth stories with block modillions and scroll brackets. The triple windows at the second and

third stories have continuous limestone surrounds with pilasters between the windows and a paneled spandrel between the second and third stories. The Bissell house is a distinguished example of the fashionable townhouses that once characterized the neighborhood.

Description

The Bissell House is a five-story building that is situated on a rectangular lot measuring 20 feet by 100.5 feet. The front facade is constructed of red stretcher and black header bricks laid in a Flemish bond pattern above the first story; except that at the eastern and western lot lines, where the facade is slightly recessed, it is constructed of red brick and projects above the cornice forming side parapet walls that are capped by stone. There are two wide granite steps that lead to the front door. The first four stories have a bowed front. The first story is constructed of limestone with a wide molded door surround having the building number ("46") at the center above the door and is surmounted by a prominent cornice with large block modillions and scroll brackets. The door and window openings at the first story were altered in 1987⁴⁸ to accommodate an enlarged door opening that has four paneled wood doors set within a wood return. Non-historic light fixtures and bronze plaques ("Les Copains") are located on either side of the doors and there is a siamese connection, two remote utility meters with exposed conduit and a metal plate to the east of the door. There is an intercom and card entry panel on the eastern end of door return.

A two-story molded limestone window surround at the second and third stories has square pilaster mullions with simple capitals, inset panels between the second and third stories and above the third story windows and is surmounted by a molded cornice. There is a molded limestone band between the third and fourth stories behind the cornice that forms a continuous sill for the fourth story windows. The second and third stories have triple windows with multi-pane wood casements and multi-pane wood transoms. A flagpole was attached to the sill of the center third story window after 1939. The fourth story has three multi-pane wood casement windows, above the windows is a prominent limestone cornice with block modillions and scroll brackets and a molded band beneath the brackets that form a continuous lintel for the fourth story windows. The fifth story is set-back from the bowed front of the lower stories and has three single windows with splayed red brick lintels and one-over-one double-hung windows that appear to be wood sash. The windows were replaced in 1987.⁴⁹ The molded roof cornice is partially constructed of bronze and has four roundels. There is a non-historic metal rooftop railing and a metal leader at the western end of the facade.

The visible part of the western facade, which projects beyond the adjacent set-back row house, is constructed of red stretcher and black header bricks laid in a Flemish bond pattern.

Report by
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NOTES

¹ This section is taken almost in its entirety from Landmarks Preservation Commission, *John Peirce Residence Designation Report* (LP-2327) prepared by Christopher D. Brazee with additional research by Olivia Klose (New York: City of New York, 2009).

² The Commissioner's Plan of 1811, which established the principal street grid of Manhattan, borrowed heavily from Goerck's earlier surveys and essentially expanded his scheme beyond the common lands to encompass the entire island. The three existing north-south avenues were incorporated directly into the plan, and the size of the 5 acre parcels fixed the spacing of the 155 east-west streets at approximately 200 feet.

³ There does not appear to be any evidence that John Mason had enslaved persons in his household.

⁴ A number of ecclesiastical organizations also opened impressive new buildings on the avenue at this time; St. Thomas Episcopal Church at 53rd Street in 1870, the Collegiate Reformed Protestant Dutch Church at 48th Street in 1872, the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church at 55th Street in 1875, and the Roman Catholic St. Patrick's Cathedral between 50th and 51st streets in 1879.

⁵ In April 1686 Governor Thomas Dongan (1634-1715) granted control over all "waste, vacant, unpatented and unappropriated" land in Manhattan to the Common Council in a document known as the Dongan Charter. There does not appear to be any evidence that there had been a Native American encampment on the site of the Bissell house.

⁶ New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 573, page 464. There does not appear to be any evidence that Stephen Albro had enslaved persons in his household.

⁷ *Doggett's New York City Directory 1850-51* (New York: John Doggett, Jr., 1850).

⁸ New York City Department of Buildings, Manhattan, NB 286-69.

⁹ New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 1135, page 61 and Liber 1137, page 122.

¹⁰ A passenger record (arrival date October 29, 1825 in New York City, ship name Lewis, port of departure Le Havre, France) and marriage certificate (dated March 9, 1848, New York City) indicate that Felicia's maiden name was Alker.

¹¹ *Trow's Directories 1870-71 through 1885-1886*; "Died," *New York Times*, November 26, 1886, 5 (notice of death of Henry Alker).

¹² 1900 U. S. Census; the only other occupants listed in the 1900 census are Louise Tebbets (housekeeper) and Annie Cooper (cook). Grace Powers Thomas (ed.), *Where to Educate 1889-1899: a Guide to the Best Private Schools, Higher Institutions of Learning, etc. in the United States* (Boston: Brown and Company, 1898), 254. Advertisements for a school on the premises appear as early as 1891 in the *New York Times*, September 10, 1891, 7. The owners in 1900 were James H. Young, Charles S. Brown, and Charles W. Barnes, Trustees of Henry Young and Mary Barnes, et al. New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 32, page 495.

¹³ *Architectural League Year Book 1900*; personal letters contained in the papers of Blondelle Malone at the Manuscript Division, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina (information courtesy of Henry G. Fulmer, Curator of Manuscripts).

¹⁴ New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 89, page 159.

¹⁵ New York City Department of Buildings, Manhattan, Docket Book, ALT 614-03. The alterations also included a rear yard extension at the basement, first and second stories that was 9 feet and 4 inches wide and 26 feet deep.

¹⁶ 1910 U. S. Census.

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- ¹⁷ Biographical information about Joseph B. Bissell is based on “Obituary: Major Joseph B. Bissell,” *Radium* XII, no. 4 (January 1919), 63 and “Obituary: Major Joseph B. Bissell,” *New York Times*, December 3, 1918, 15.
- ¹⁸ “Millet-Bissell Wedding,” *New York Times*, April 7, 1915, 7.
- ¹⁹ New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 3101, page 333.
- ²⁰ “Mrs. Bissell is Wed to Bradford Merrill,” *New York Times*, January 25, 1922, 13.
- ²¹ This section is based on Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Gansevoort Market Historic Designation Report* (LP-2132) prepared by Jay Shockley (New York: City of New York, 2003).
- ²² The first and second stories were extended to accommodate a store and office in 1929. New York City Department of Buildings, Manhattan, ALT 1393-29. No photograph of the house prior to this alteration has been found.
- ²³ New York City Department of Buildings, Manhattan, NB 1007-83 and ALT 1478-01.
- ²⁴ According to the 1930 U. S. Census there were also three female servants living in the household.
- ²⁵ Biographical information about J. Ramsay Hunt is based on Elan D. Louis and Marc Williams, “A Biography of James Ramsay Hunt (1874-1937),” *Journal of the History of the Neurosciences* 12, no. 3 (2003), 266-275 and “Dr. James Hunt, 63, Neurologist, Dead,” *New York Times*, July 23, 1937, 19.
- ²⁶ Louis and Williams, 270-271.
- ²⁷ The James Ramsay Hunt Casebooks are in the collection of the Augustus C. Long Health Science Library of Columbia University.
- ²⁸ New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 4070, page 436; New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 4202, page 77.
- ²⁹ “Dr. Newcomer, Led in Welfare Work: Woman Physician, Author and Lecturer Dies – Established Catholic Guidance Center,” *New York Times*, December 31, 1949, 15.
- ³⁰ *New York Telephone Address Directories* 1947-49.
- ³¹ Horace Winchell Magoun and Louise H. Marshall, *American Neuroscience in the Twentieth Century: Confluence of the Neural, Behavioral and Communicative Streams* (Lisse, the Netherlands: Swets & Zeitlinger, 2003), 145. Glasser continued research on nerve action currents with Joseph Erlanger, and in 1944 they won the Nobel Prize for physiology or medicine.
- ³² Waldemar Kaempffert, “Science in Review: Three-Dimensional Movies Make Use of Some Old Inventions in the Field of Optics,” *New York Times*, February 8, 1953, E9.
- ³³ New York City Department of Buildings, Manhattan, Certificate of Occupancy No. 30479 dated August 30, 1944; the cellar was used for storage and laboratory, the first story was used for business and 5% manufacturing, the second story was used for business and office, the third and fourth stories were residential and contained a duplex apartment, and the fifth story was also residential and contained four furnished rooms.
- ³⁴ *New York Telephone Address Directories* 1945-1954.
- ³⁵ *New York Telephone Address Directories* 1955-1956; New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 4889, page 680.
- ³⁶ New York City Department of Buildings, Manhattan, Certificate of Occupancy No. 42200 dated February 11, 1954.
- ³⁷ *New York Telephone Address Directories* 1957-1993.
- ³⁸ New York City Department of Buildings, Manhattan, ALT 25-87 and Certificate of Occupancy No. 094964 dated October 6, 1989.

³⁹ New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 3321, page 1336; Christina Gair, “A New House of Fashion: 46 West 55th Street,” *National Real Estate Investor* (August 14, 2001).

⁴⁰ This section is based on *John Peirce Residence Designation Report* and Landmarks Preservation Commission, *E. Hayward and Amelia Parsons Ferry House Designation Report* (LP-2330) prepared by Gale Harris (New York.: City of New York, 2009).

⁴¹ “The ‘American Basement House,’” *Real Estate Record and Builders’ Guide* 52 (September 16, 1893), 315.

⁴² In the American basement row house a visitor would enter the dwelling at street level and then proceed upstairs, the foyer and main stairway serving as a buffer between the public and service areas, and the family’s main living space above.

⁴³ Montgomery Schuyler, “The New New York House,” *The Architectural Record* 19 (February 1906), 89.

⁴⁴ Robert A. M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin and John Massengale, *New York 1900* (New York: Rizzoli, 1983), 348.

⁴⁵ Herbert Croly, “The Renovation of the New York Brownstone District,” *Architectural Record* 13 (June 1903), 555-571.

⁴⁶ A. D. F. Hamlin, “Architectural Art,” *The Forum* 34 (July 1902-June 1903), 100.

⁴⁷ Croly, 561.

⁴⁸ New York City Department of Buildings, Manhattan, ALT 25-87.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and the other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Joseph B. and Josephine H. Bissell House has a special character and a special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and culture characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Joseph B. and Josephine H. Bissell House was originally constructed as one of five Italianate style brownstone row houses designed by architect Thomas Thomas and built in 1869 by owner and builder John W. Stevens; that when the Bissell House was initially constructed, many row houses were being built on the side streets in the area below Central Park while larger mansions were being constructed along Fifth Avenue; that by the early 20th century this area was the city's most prestigious residential neighborhood and was known as Vanderbilt's Row because of that family's involvement in maintaining the elite character of the neighborhood; that the house was purchased by Josephine H. Bissell in 1903 and she hired prominent architect Edward L. Tilton to alter the house by removing the traditional Italianate style brownstone facade and its high stoop and replacing it with a more fashionable neo-Classical style brick and limestone facade with an American basement plan; that the Bissell House facade is a rare example of a private residential commission by Tilton, who is particularly associated with the design of libraries; that the facade features a bowed front, red and black brick laid in a Flemish bond pattern and limestone details including two prominent cornices with block modillions and scroll brackets; that Mrs. Bissell lived in the house with her husband, Dr. Joseph B. Bissell, and their children and sold it shortly after his death; that Dr. Bissell was a surgeon who did pioneering research in the treatment of cancer with radium; that several prominent physicians lived in the house in the first half of the 20th century; that the next owner was Dr. James Ramsay Hunt, a preeminent neurologist who is known today because several neurological disorders bear his name; that in 1943, Dr. Harry Sidney Newcomer, an inventor and a physician, and his wife, Dr. Marian Anastasia Staats Newcomer, a physician and the author of a book that provided medical advice to laypersons, purchased the house; and that gradually the house went from residential to non-residential use and it is currently owned by a clothing manufacturer based in Italy.

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 Joseph B. and Josephine H. Bissell House, 46 West 55th Street, Manhattan, and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1270, Lot 60, as its Landmark Site.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair

Pablo Vengoechea, Vice-Chair

Frederick Bland, Stephen F. Byrns, Diane Chapin, Roberta Brandes Gratz,
Christopher Moore, Elizabeth Ryan, Roberta Washington, Commissioners



Joseph B. and Josephine H. Bissell House
46 West 55th Street, Manhattan
Block 1270, Lot 60
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2009



Joseph B. and Josephine H. Bissell House

First story

Photo: Christopher D. Braze, 2009



Joseph B. and Josephine H. Bissell House
Second and third stories
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2009



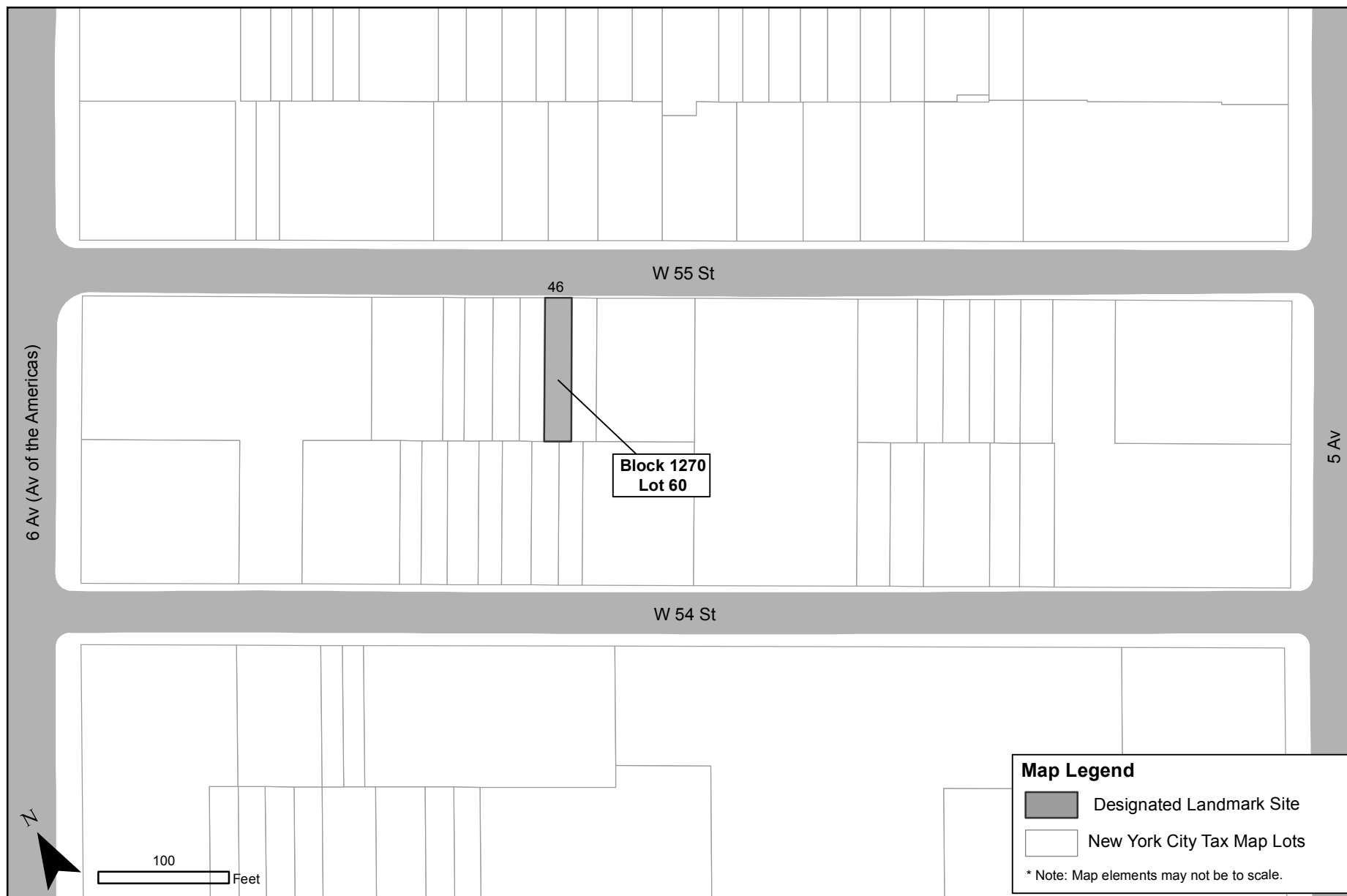
Joseph B. and Josephine H. Bissell House
Fourth story
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2009



Joseph B. and Josephine H. Bissell House
Fourth and fifth stories
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2009



Joseph B. and Josephine H. Bissell House
New York City Department of Taxes Photograph, c. 1939
Source: NYC, Department of Records and Information Service, Municipal Archives



JOSEPH B. AND JOSEPHINE H. BISSELL HOUSE (LP-2340), 46 West 55th Street.
 Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1270, Lot 60.

Designated: March 23, 2010