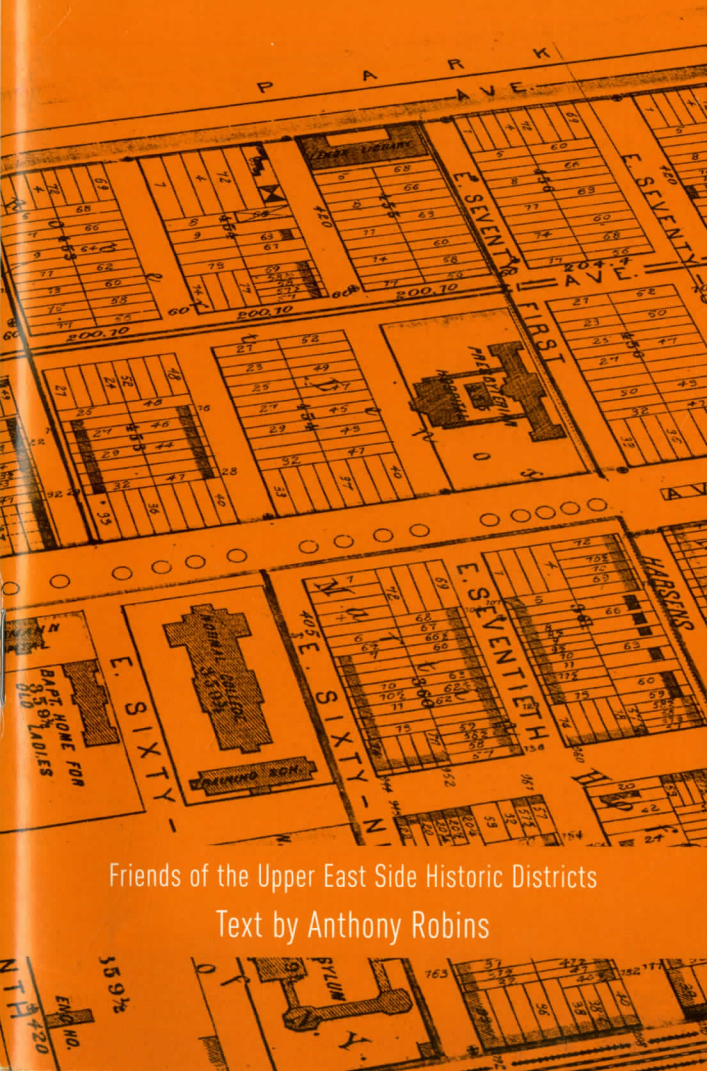


Historic Lexington Avenue: An Expansion of the Upper East Side Historic District

A Walking Tour



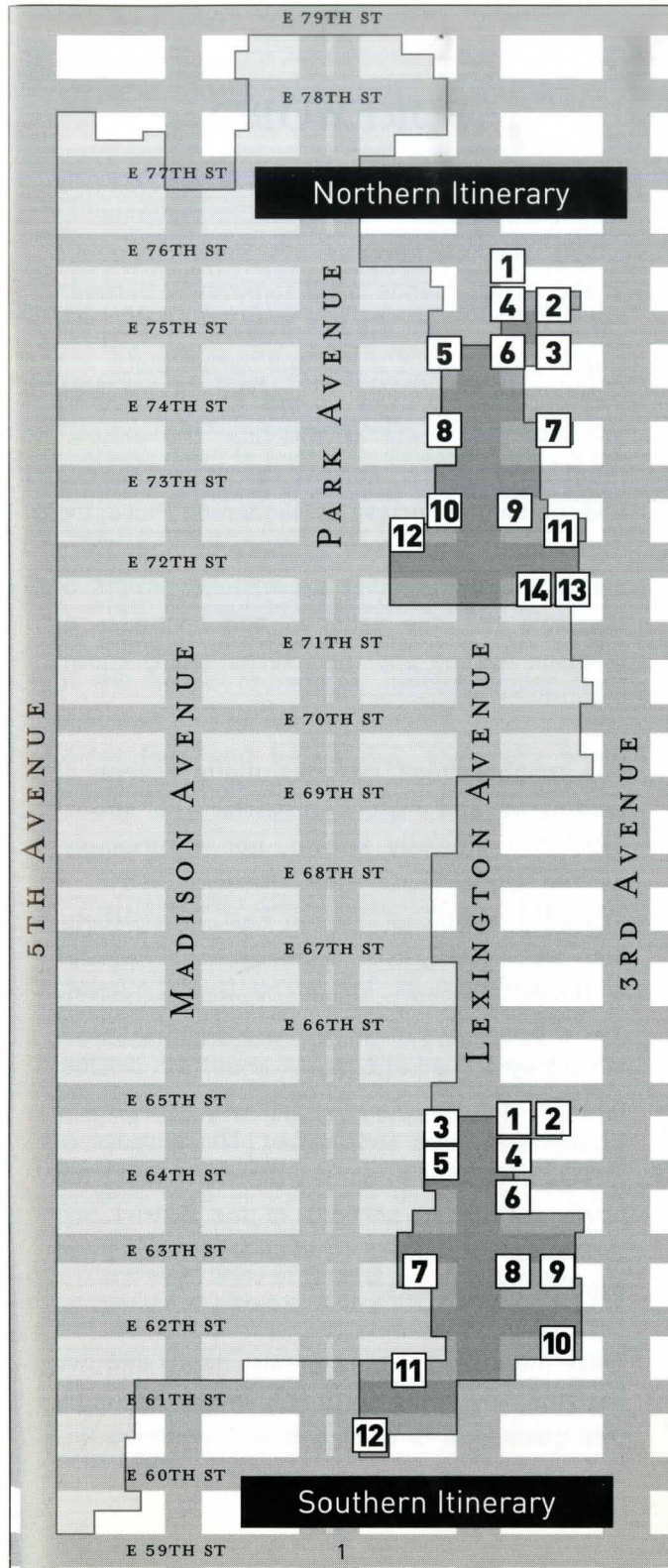
Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts
Text by Anthony Robins

A walking tour
of the
Expansion
of the
Upper East Side
Historic District

A project by

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FOREWORD

The Upper East Side is one of those New York City neighborhoods that lives in the imaginations of people who have never seen it. Though its public image varies, it tends to fall somewhere between "Gold Coast" and "singles scene." In fact, the Upper East Side is a big and varied place – it includes the exclusive co-ops of Fifth Avenue and the tenements of Yorkville, the endless manicured green islands of Park Avenue and the hidden enclave of Henderson Place, the anonymous high-rises of Second and Third avenues and the quiet brownstone streets of Carnegie Hill, the galleries and boutiques of Madison Avenue and the internationally-known institutions of Museum Mile.

The neighborhood includes many dozens of landmarks and historic districts. The largest district – officially known, not surprisingly, as the Upper East Side Historic District – stretches from East 61st to East 79th streets, but – as originally listed on the National Register of Historic Places – focuses almost exclusively on the blocks from Fifth Avenue to just past Park, all but ignoring Lexington Avenue. As of 2006, however, the district has been fully extended to Lexington Avenue and beyond. The purpose of this guidebook is to spread the word about the newly recognized portions of the district and encourage East Siders – and all New Yorkers – to explore these blocks.*

Since the district extension falls neatly into two sections, one to the north and one to the south, this guidebook is divided into two itineraries.

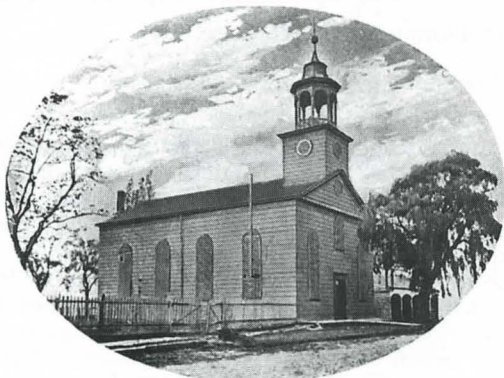
Both are organized as walks from north to south. The itineraries include detailed directions (note that as you walk south, east will be to your left, and west will be to your right.) To walk both on the same day, begin with the northern itinerary at East 76th Street and Lexington Avenue, follow it south to East 72nd Street, then continue down to East 65th Street to pick up the southern itinerary and follow that to the end at Park Avenue and East 60th Street.

A word of caution: As you walk, you might be tempted to cross the street in the middle of the block, or, worse, imitate Upper East Siders as they ignore traffic lights. Please, resist temptation, and be careful, especially when crossing Lexington or Park avenues.

* The Upper East Side Historic District – like many others in New York – actually exists in two distinct and separate universes. There is the Upper East Side Historic District designated by New York City's Landmarks Preservation Commission, and there is the Upper East Side Historic District listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The Landmarks Commission's designation of the district brings every building within it under the Commission's official jurisdiction – any work done to those buildings requires Commission approval. The National Register functions more as a planning tool for the State and Federal governments; the only time approval is required for work done on a National Register property is if and when State or Federal money is involved, as, for instance, in a preservation grant or a tax credit, and that approval comes either from Albany or D.C. The National Register's and the Landmarks Commission's versions of the Upper East Side Historic District originally corresponded exactly in their boundaries. The extension of 2006 is to the National Register district only.

INTRODUCTION

The Upper East Side Historic District, as we know it today, is largely the creation of a sixty-year building campaign stretching from the 1870s to the 1930s. Its development owes much to three major events in New York City history: 1) the adoption of the Commissioners' Plan of 1811, which set up Manhattan's grid of streets and avenues; 2) the creation of Central Park, which attracted New Yorkers moving north from older neighborhoods; and 3) the gradual introduction of mass transit (first horse-car lines, then elevated trains, trolley cars and finally the subway), which brought the Upper East Side within commuting reach of the city's business districts.



*The First St. James' Church, Sixty-ninth Street,
between Park and Lexington Avenues*

East 69th Street, mid-19th century

The district's architecture is, for the most part, residential – mansions, town houses, row houses and apartment houses, with a sprinkling of religious, educational, cultural and public buildings. Development began in the late 1860s and early 1870s. By the late 1880s, the side



Lexington Avenue between
East 74th and 75th streets, 1912

streets were lined with brownstones, while Fifth Avenue boasted a famous collection of fabulous mansions. After 1900, apartment house living became fashionable – most of the grand Fifth Avenue mansions gave way to equally grand apartment blocks, while Park Avenue developed into an elegant landscaped apartment-house boulevard. During the 1920s and 1930s even single-family brownstones found themselves converted to multiple dwellings.

Architectural styles in the historic district fall within a sixty-year range that includes the romantic eclecticism of the late 19th century, the neo-classicism of the early 20th, and the various forms of Modernism springing up in the 1920s and '30s. Particularly common are the Italianate and neo-Grec styles for late-19th-century row houses, various versions of Beaux-Arts classicism for mansions and town houses, and neo-Georgian and neo-Renaissance styles



Lexington Avenue, North from East 73rd Street, showing surface car track removal, 1936

for apartment buildings of the 'teens and 'twenties. Art Deco and early Modern are rare, but the district has some fine examples.

The new historic district's extension focuses on Lexington Avenue, which occupies the midpoint between the mansions of Fifth Avenue and the tenements by the river. Not surprisingly, it contains a mix of building types falling between those two extremes: early-20th-century luxury apartment houses next door to altered 19th-century row houses, grand churches opposite humble stables. Their history and architectural styles fit within the range of the larger district – with some unexpected twists, as we will see, peculiar to the middle ground.

Let's start walking.

NORTHERN ITINERARY

1. ST. JEAN BAPTISTE, 1067-1071 LEXINGTON AVENUE

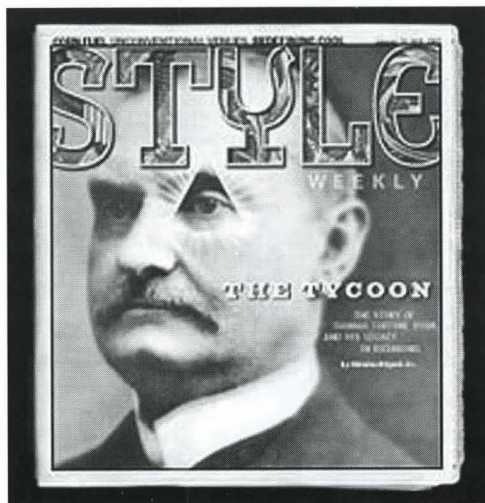
Our walk begins at the northwest corner of Lexington Avenue and East 76th Street, diagonally across from an extraordinary neo-Classical church that is an individual landmark. What is this building, with its statues of trumpet-blowing angels with head-to-toe wings, and wonderful sculpted cherubs – winged angel heads – above the entrances? Its dome suggests Michelangelo at St. Peter's in the Vatican, while the columned rotundas of its two towers suggest Bramante's Tempietto, another monument of the Roman Renaissance. So why is this Italian-inspired church named St. Jean Baptiste – French for St. John the Baptist? And why was it paid for by Thomas Fortune Ryan,



St. Jean Baptiste, 1912

the fabulously wealthy son of impoverished Scotch-Irish immigrants? Because this corner, like the Upper East Side itself, is New York City in miniature – a cross-cultural monument of the city's varied immigrant and economic history.

Ryan – a classic rags-to-riches story, a financier who made his earliest fortune operating New York City streetcars – gave half-a-million dollars (in 1912 dollars) to the Society of the Fathers of the Blessed Sacrament, a French-Canadian order he had long admired. His goal, apparently, was to provide a house of worship for his French-Canadian workers, but many of the church's



Thomas Fortune Ryan

estimated 5000 parishioners turned out to be Irish immigrants, including servants living in carriage houses east of Lexington Avenue. *The New York Times* quoted the church's pastor, the Rev. Letellier, as approving the location "because

it is near the rich of Fifth Avenue and the poor of the east side." (Ryan himself lived in a Fifth Avenue mansion, with its own private chapel.)

Despite the Canadian origins of the order, the architect hired for the job was Naples-born and -educated Nicholas Sirracino. Sirracino had no qualms about modeling the French church for Irish immigrants on an Italian monument, the Galleria Umberto I in his home town (which might explain why the church drawings won a gold medal at an International Exposition in Turin). The *Times* declared that the "renaissance basilica" would be "the single example of this style of ecclesiastical architecture in New York."

2. NO. 163-173 EAST 75TH STREET

Walk one block down along Lexington, cross East 75th Street, cross to the east side of the avenue, and walk halfway down East 75th. On the north side of the street, the newly extended district now includes the St. Jean Baptiste school (Robert J. Reiley, 1925), added to the church more than a decade later – again thanks to Ryan's beneficence. The cornerstone-laying on September 28th celebrated the 25th anniversary of the order's arrival in New York from Montreal. Reiley's brick-faced school may be somewhat less grand than Sirracino's church, but continues its architectural style: above the main entrance, a statue of St. Jean Baptiste stands within a niche, incorporating a shell, set within an arch, flanked by columns, beneath a broken pediment – a veritable catalog of Italian



Detail of niche beneath a broken pediment at St. Jean Baptiste School, 163-173 East 75th Street

Renaissance and Mannerist elements. Note the separate "Boys" and "Girls" entrances – a relic of a more innocent time (public schools once made similar provisions).

3. NOS. 168 TO 176 EAST 75TH STREET

As you walk back to Lexington, notice a row of five former stables – the kind of East-Side carriage houses, serving the Fifth Avenue crowd, whose immigrant Irish caretakers might have enjoyed the Sunday splendor of St. Jean Baptiste. Such stables were once a fixture throughout the neighborhood and the city; these are among the few survivors. Their brick façades (Hill & Stout, 1902) are designed as a group – note the symmetric placement of the gabled roofs at either end. Though much simpler than the school – never mind the church – they nevertheless display their architects' ornamental instincts. No. 168, the westernmost building of the group, and

perhaps the most intact, is faced almost entirely in brick set in unusual patterns. Projecting bricks of varying size form frames, both for the whole façade (at the building's edges), and for the large arch at the second story. At the third story the brick is laid in a diamond pattern, and in the gable above it the patterning becomes thoroughly geometric.



168 to 176 East 75th Street, 1906

4. NOS. 1065, 1059 AND 1057 LEXINGTON AVENUE

Cross to the west side of Lexington and to the north side of East 75th Street for a view of Lexington's east side between East 76th and 75th streets. St. Jean shares that block with a sedate neo-Georgian apartment house (No. 1065; Rouse & Goldstone, 1925) and a couple of altered

Italianate brownstones (Nos. 1059 and 1057; Ogden & Son, 1884) – the two residential types typical of the neighborhood. In this upper section of the district's extension, the apartment houses dominate Lexington; row houses become more common further to the south.

5. NO. 130 EAST 75TH STREET

At the southwest corner of East 75th Street and Lexington stands another neo-Georgian apartment house, this one designed in 1929 by the firm of Schwartz & Gross – the architects responsible for the largest number of apartment houses in the extension (their work includes 168 East 74th Street, 115 East 72nd Street, 127 East 72nd Street, 150 East 72nd Street, and 525 Park Avenue). Typically neo-Georgian are the double-story base with great limestone blocks and the upper stories faced in red brick. Modest stone detailing includes a stone band course above the fourth story with handsome balconies adorned with shields, still more regal shields above the ninth story, and a bracketed cornice. So sedate is the building that it keeps its entrance on the more private side street. Looking west past that entrance into the original historic district, it's hard to see any difference in architectural character – which is precisely why this district has been extended.

6. NO. 1055 LEXINGTON AVENUE

Now look diagonally across the intersection at the southeast corner of Lexington and East 75th Street. Lexington has long functioned as a commercial boulevard – logically enough given its mass transit history, first with street cars, then the subway. The apartment houses of the 1920s, like 130 East 75th Street, came with built-in storefronts. The older brownstones and townhouses of the late 19th century did not – but after the turn of the century almost all were altered to accommodate new stores. At the southeast corner of East 75th stands one of the most interesting such additions. The upper stories of the brick-and-brownstone house (William Picken, 1877) still maintain their 19th-century look – especially the heavy projecting window surrounds and overhanging cornice. A half-century newer, however, is the remarkable storefront, described in 1926 – in



Storefront detail of 1055 Lexington Avenue

plans filed with the city's Buildings Department – as a “new copper storefront” with a “new marquis,” designed by none other than apartment house specialists Schwartz & Gross. The elaborate “marquis” seems to grow out of its corner column like an opening umbrella.

7. NOS. 152 TO 166, AND 168 EAST 74TH STREET

Walk south down Lexington to the corner of East 74th Street, and look west into the original historic district. Now look east, past Lexington, and see how the district blends seamlessly into the extension. Cross to the east side of Lexington, and walk down the north side of East 74th till just past the awning at No. 157. Across the street, on the south side, is a row of eight houses that were once identical Italianate brownstones – and today demonstrate all the various things that can happen to brownstones over not quite a century and a half. The original group of twelve (John H. Prague, 1871) formed a typical post-Civil War speculative development – a group of cookie-cutter façades extending halfway down the block. Of the eight survivors, none remains completely intact, but imagine the window surrounds (with “footed sills” – little brownstone brackets supporting the window sills) and overhanging cornice of No. 158 with the stoop and first-story entrance of No. 156 to get a picture of the original intention. The most extreme change was the creation of an entirely new façade for No. 152 – a red brick neo-Georgian design (S.E. Gage, 1906). Giving facelifts to old brownstones became



Detail of 158 East 74th Street showing footed sills

common in many neighborhoods during the first few decades of the 20th century – we'll see more dramatic examples later in the walk. At the eastern end of the row, No. 168 is another neo-Georgian apartment house by Schwartz & Gross (1925) with a wonderful white urn tucked into its broken pediment over the entrance, and urns and swags above the third-story windows.

8. NO. 1034 ½ LEXINGTON AVENUE (yes, “1/2” – that's not a typographical error)

Walk back to the northeast corner of Lexington and East 75th Street, and look diagonally across the intersection at the quirky two-story commercial building of the type known as a “taxpayer.” Such buildings were common in the early 20th century – this one was built in 1923. The idea was to put up a small building, generally one or two stories, which could be rented out to produce just enough income to cover the property's real estate taxes until a larger building became economically feasible. This particular taxpayer was designed by Charles B. Meyers, an architect better known for hospitals and other



1034 1/2 Lexington Avenue, 1927

public buildings for the City's health department. Though slightly altered, this taxpayer has managed to survive the boom-and-bust-and-boom cycles of East Side real estate. Even though planned as a temporary, stop-gap economic measure, taxpayers often display imaginative ornament, and this one is no exception. Note particularly the large terra-cotta window surrounds at the second story: the windows are framed by classically-inspired columns; those at either end support a positively Baroque curlicue of a broken pediment, while the roofline includes a fanciful balustrade flanked by floral terracotta swags that would feel right at home on an Italian palazzo.

9. NO. 1028 LEXINGTON AVENUE, AND NOS. 149 AND 150 EAST 73RD STREET

Turn left (south) and walk along Lexington to the corner of East 73rd Street. No. 1028 Lexington Avenue, the handsome building on the northwest corner of East 73rd, actually falls within the boundaries of the original historic district. Cross

to that corner, then turn around to look back at the east side of Lexington. On the northeast and southeast corners are two handsome apartment buildings: No 149 East 73rd Street (J.E.R. Carpenter, 1924) and 150 East 73rd Street (Cross & Cross, 1922) – both Carpenter and Cross & Cross being well-known New York firms. Cross to the south side of East 73rd Street, and then to the east side of Lexington, and walk down East 73rd a ways. On either side of the street you will find a remarkable group of carriage houses not included in the extension, but only because they are already landmarks.



Neo-Georgian apartment house at
150 East 73rd Street, 1945

10. NOS. 1012 TO 1022 LEXINGTON AVENUE

Walk back to the southeast corner of East 73rd Street and Lexington (stop for a moment at the entrance to 150 East 73rd Street to admire the carved floral wreaths over the doorway). On the west side of Lexington, south of 73rd Street, stand six houses (Thom & Wilson, 1880), another example of what time can do to a row of once identical buildings. Designed as brownstones meant for individual families, they've all been converted to commercial use, with storefronts added in the 'teens, 'twenties and 'thirties of the 20th century. A comparison of No. 1014 – its façade stripped of any detail – with its neighbors to either side, Nos. 1012 and 1016, offers an excellent lesson in both the visual benefits of ornamental detail – with its resulting contrasts of light and shade – and the sad spectacle of a thoughtless redesign.

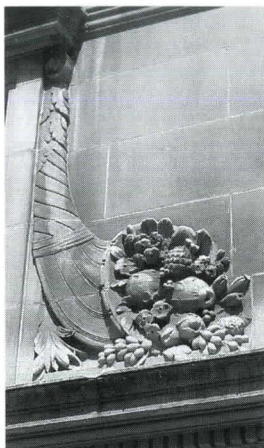
11. NOS. 145 TO 151 EAST 72ND STREET

And that brings us to East 72nd Street, the southern border of the northern half of the historic district extension. Cross to the south side of East 72nd Street, staying east of Lexington. East 72nd is one of the dozen or so extra-wide east-west streets that break up the otherwise uniform grid of narrow Manhattan streets laid out in 1811. Wide as it is, East 72nd was once lined with single-family houses built in the late 19th century – like the four that survive on the north side of the street just east of Lexington.

Three of those four – Nos. 147, 149 and 151 (Sillman & Laurant, 1881) – survive intact in their upper three stories, complete with Italianate window surrounds and heavy Italianate overhanging cornices supported on brackets. No. 145 retains its cornice, but unfortunately has lost its window surrounds – and with them, some of its dignity. All four, however, were converted in 1944 from single-family houses to multiple residences, and all have had new storefronts added, replacing their original stoops. The three that retain their original windows also have unusual projecting bay windows added at the second story. Perhaps most unusual is the multi-paned angled bay window that projects out over the ground floor at No. 151 – there is something distinctly English about it.

12. NOS. 115, 117, 125, 141, 155 AND 157 EAST 72ND STREET

In general, most of the row houses on East 72nd Street have long since disappeared, making way for a boulevard of genteel early 20th-century apartment houses. The north side of the street, to the east or west of Lexington, is lined with six such buildings, five of them in the neo-Georgian style typical of the East Side: No. 115 (Schwartz & Gross, 1934), 117 (Kenneth Murchison, 1927), 125 (Schwartz & Gross, 1916), 141 (Rouse & Goldstone, 1923), and 153-155 (Cross & Cross, 1927). "Neo-Georgian" refers to a revival of the red-brick architecture typical of the northeastern colonies under the rule of Britain's King George III – almost by definition a



Detail of cornucopia over entrance
of 125 East 72nd Street

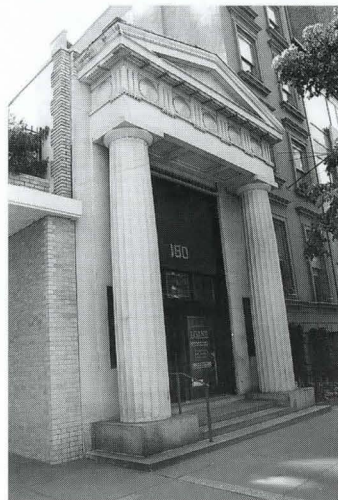
conservative style. Look closely, however, and you'll find unusual details. Cross back to the north side of East 72nd Street and cross to the west side of Lexington Avenue. No. 125 has a wonderful double-story entranceway adorned with a carved stone basket of flowers and two enormous cornucopia ("horns of plenty") overflowing with fruits and gourds (it also has stone panels with squat urns at the windows above the 4th, 6th, 8th and 10th stories). Cross back to the east side of Lexington.



Detail of 155 East 72nd Street

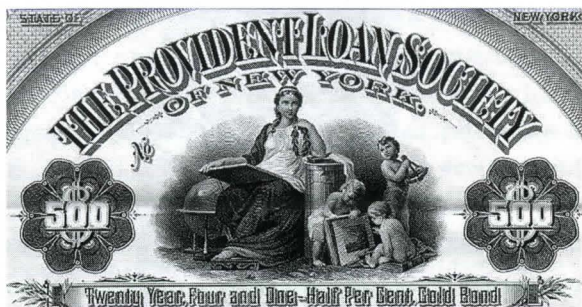
The broken pediment above the entrance to No. 141 suggests Colonial-era furniture. And No. 155 has carved roundels with images of angels drawing on easels, and a wonderful sculpted head above the entrance. No. 157 (Rouse & Goldstone, 1923), the only non-Georgian in the bunch, takes its inspiration from the Middle Ages – note particularly the group of angels playing tug-of-war with swags of fruits and nuts at the first story, and the twisted double-story columns entwined with vines framing the second and third story windows.

13. NOS. 174-176, 178 AND 180 EAST 72ND STREET



180 East 72nd Street,
Provident Loan Society of New York

Look to the south side of the street to another batch of houses. Those west of Lexington have been largely stripped of their ornament. East of



Detail of a \$500 gold bond from the
Provident Loan Society of New York, 1901

Lexington, No. 178 retains much of its Italianate detail. But the most interesting of the group is No. 174-176 (Tod Williams and Billie Tsien, 1995), among the very few single-family houses built on the Upper East Side in modern times. This house is an early work by the firm that recently designed the new Museum of American Folk Art in Midtown. Its façade is a minimalist study in limestone and plate glass, and makes quite a stylistic contrast with its neighbor at 180 East 72nd Street, a one-story-tall neo-Classical branch of the Provident Loan Society of New York (William Emerson, 1906).

14. NOS. 132, 150, 160, AND 164 EAST 72ND STREET

Nos. 132 (Cross & Cross, 1924), 150 (Schwartz & Gross, 1913), and 164 (Rouse & Goldstone, 1924) offer more of the staid neo-Georgian style so typical of the neighborhood – though it's worth looking up at No. 150 on the southeast corner for the scowling stone masks on its balconies. What a contrast those calm exteriors make with

No. 160 (Taylor & Levi, 1927), an exuberant exercise in Moorish fantasies. Note especially the rough-hewn stone, brick and terra-cotta facing at the first and second stories, the first-story window arcade with colorful tile roundels, the metal lanterns, and the triple-arched window with balconies way up at the roofline. And that ends our first walk.



Arcade and tile roundel of 160 East 72nd Street

SOUTHERN ITINERARY

Our second itinerary begins at Lexington Avenue and East 65th Street, just south of some major individual landmarks on the avenue, including the Seventh Regiment Armory on the west side, the grand limestone-faced apartment house at 131-135 East 66th Street on the southeast corner, and the St. Vincent Ferrer complex along Lexington and East 65th. Below East 65th, we will find a more homespun Lexington Avenue, lined with 19th-century row houses and their early 20th-century storefront additions.

Turn left (east) on East 65th Street to find a collection of unexpected delights.

1. NO. 132 EAST 65TH STREET

No. 132 – an eclectic stucco-and-stone fantasy – was originally an Italianate row house built in 1879. Its history took an unusual turn in 1922, when Lewis Stuyvesant Chanler – descendant of John Jacob Astor and former Lieutenant Governor of New York (he ran on a ticket with William Randolph Hearst; Chanler won, Hearst lost) – bought it, gave it a new façade, and moved in with his newly acquired second wife, a distant relative of the Vanderbilts. Chanler hired George Schmitt of Schmitt Brothers – furniture dealers specializing in English antiques – to design the new façade, which explains its unusual gingerbread cottage look, including a peaked gable at the roofline and fanciful plaster ornament. In 1929, Mrs. Chanler was instrumental in founding the New History Society, an offshoot of the Bahá'í faith. In 1930,

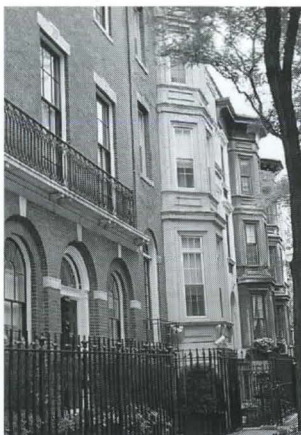


Lewis Stuyvesant Chanler

Mrs. Chanler's daughter from a prior marriage took her own wedding vows in this house in a Bahá'í ceremony – an occasion described by the *Times* as "the first time that such a ceremony...has been used at a society wedding in New York." Iranian-born Mirza Ahmad Sohrab – described in his obituary as a leader of the "Reform Bahá'í Movement" in the United States and a professed descendant of the Prophet Mohammed – co-founded the New History Society, officiated at the various Bahá'í wedding ceremonies held in the house, and lived here until his death in 1958.

2. NOS. 134, 136-138 AND 144-146 EAST 65TH STREET

No. 132 and its neighbors were originally part of a speculative group of row houses (F.S. Barus, 1870). No. 134 now sports a neo-Georgian façade. Nos. 136, 138 and 142 each has a handsome projecting angled window bay



East 65th Street

extending from the sidewalk to the roof. No. 144-146 was redesigned as a red-brick neo-Georgian complex in 1924, but neo-Georgian with a poetic streak – within the otherwise staid Georgian window lintels at the second story, carved flowers strike a languid, artistic East Side pose.

3. 866 TO 856 LEXINGTON AVENUE

Return to the northeast corner of Lexington and East 65th Street. There is a row of altered brownstones across the avenue (864 to 856 Lexington; A.B. Ogden, 1878). No. 866, however, at the southwest corner of Lexington and East 65th – part of the original row – got a particularly dramatic face-lift in 1921 from Frederick J. Sterner, an architect who left a remarkable residential legacy in these blocks of the East 60s near Lexington Avenue. An English immigrant from an artsy family (brother Albert was a painter, brother Lawrence a playwright), Sterner developed an interest in renovating old New York brownstones, turning them into what his *Times* obituary called “artistic residences, of varied design, expressive of individual taste.” He redid

his own home on East 19th Street in 1909, and before long had redesigned his neighbors’ houses as well, eventually earning his street recognition as the “Block Beautiful” (now part of the Gramercy Park Historic District). In 1914, Sterner moved up to the East 60s and started again, first with his own house at 154-156 East 63rd Street, and then, again, with the neighbors’ houses (see below). Apparently a restless man, he renovated yet another home for himself – this one, his last, in 1921.



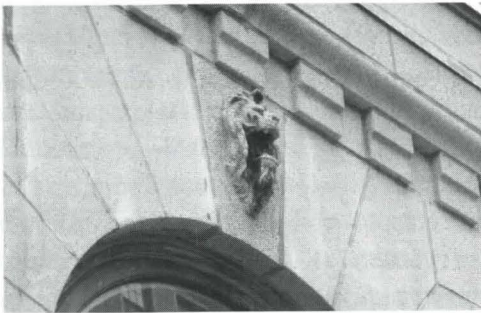
Plasterwork detail of Parge House,
East 65th Street façade

Sterner’s renovations tended to favor picturesque adaptations of historic styles, preferably using exotic materials. For No. 866 Lexington, he chose a vaguely English medieval flavor, using such English elements as chimney pots, leaded glass and a slate tiled roof. The major decorative flourish, however, is the remarkable plasterwork, lavishly laid on in fantastic decorative patterns. Sterner called his home “Parge House,” parge referring to thickly laid-on plaster. Cross to the northwest corner of the

intersection to look more closely at the details – shields, angels, children playing under trees. The more you look the more you'll see.

4. 859 TO 843 LEXINGTON AVENUE

Look back across at the east side of Lexington between East 65th and East 64th. When late-19th-century row houses get early-20th-century storefronts, the upper stories of the buildings are generally more interesting than the lower stories – but not always. The upper stories of No. 859 Lexington Avenue (original design, Robert H. Coburn, 1880), have been stripped of ornament, but the lower stories have been transformed by an unusual 1930 neo-Classical storefront with an arched window in the second story topped by a carved lion's head. The rest of the row, from 857 to 843, is intact above the lower two stories – with the geometric patterning and oddly incised ornament, in the window surrounds and the cornices, typical of the neo-Grec.



Detail of 859 Lexington Avenue

5. NO. 133 EAST 64TH STREET AND NO. 826 LEXINGTON AVENUE

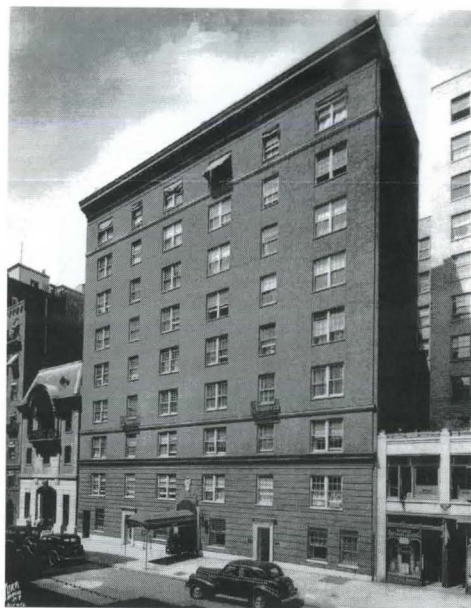


Detail of storefront at 133 East 64th Street

Walk south to the intersection of Lexington and East 64th Street. On the west side of the intersection, the street is flanked by early 20th-century apartment blocks. On the northwest corner, No. 133 East 64th Street (aka 844-852 Lexington) is an elegant neo-Georgian apartment house (Kenneth Murchison, 1926; storefronts added by Murchison in 1928). Its three-story base faced in limestone sports pairs of slender piers rising to imaginative capitals, and there are lovely curlicue spirals above the second-story windows. The metal storefronts – especially the central one, framed by exceptionally slender columns with tiny capitals – exude East Side elegance. Across the street, No. 136 East 64th Street (aka 826 Lexington; George F. Pelham, 1928), occupying almost the entire block front of Lexington between East 64th and East 63rd streets, offers a more standard version of the style.

6. NOS. 841 AND 833 LEXINGTON AVENUE

Across the avenue, the five-story building at the northeast corner of Lexington and East 64th Street (841 Lexington, aka 157 East 64th St.) is noteworthy primarily for its architect, Thomas W. Lamb (1929), generally known for theater designs – including some of the country's grandest movie palaces. In the next block, on the east side of Lexington between East 64th and East 63rd streets, No. 833 has a storefront, created in 1927, whose ornament includes roundels with angels and a keystone head in the central arched window.



125 East 63rd Street

7. NOS. 125 AND 128 EAST 63RD STREET

Continue down Lexington to East 63rd Street and turn right (west). No. 125, on the north side, is a pleasantly refined neo-Georgian apartment house (Sugarman & Hess, 1922) that won an award from the New York chapter of the American Institute of Architects in the "buildings greater than six stories in height" category. Across the street, No. 128 (1875), a converted carriage house that once belonged to financier J.P. Morgan's private secretary, has since 1939 been home to the Society of Illustrators – an association that has counted among its members such graphic luminaries as Howard Chandler Christy, James Montgomery Flagg, Maxfield Parrish and Frederic Remington. Surviving from the 1875 original are the brick and stone detailing over the third-story window arches and the fourth- and fifth-story square-

headed windows. When the Society moved in, member Leroy P. Ward, an architect, redesigned the first two stories and the ground floor entrance (1939 and 1941) – apparently in exchange for a rear-fourth-floor apartment, where he was said to entertain friends including Gloria Swanson and Joseph Kennedy.

8. 813-817 LEXINGTON AVENUE

Back on Lexington Avenue, most of the east side of the block between East 63rd and East 62nd streets is taken up by the former Barbizon Hotel for Women (Murgatroyd & Ogden, 1926-27). During the 1920s, young women in search of professional or artistic careers came to New York – but worried (or perhaps it was their parents who worried) about their physical and moral safety in the big city. The Barbizon Hotel catered to such women and their families by

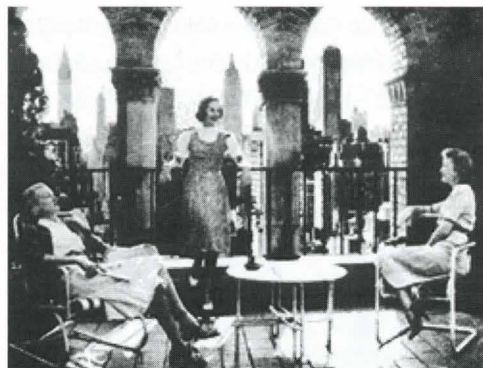


Column capital of 813-817 Lexington Avenue
The Barbizon Hotel for Women

offering a protected environment, with the hotel management acting (to use the phrase once common in undergraduate colleges) *in loco parentis*. Residents needed three character references, no male visitors were allowed beyond the lobby, and management enforced strict rules of comportment. On the other hand, the Barbizon offered stunning amenities – library, art gallery, music studios and recital hall, as well as a roof garden, solarium, swimming pool and gym. A social director organized teas and concerts, and the Junior League held meetings on the premises. Among the many Barbizon residents who found big-city success: Grace Kelly, Candice Bergen, Cloris Leachman, Farrah Fawcett, Liza Minnelli, and Ali MacGraw.

The Barbizon is a 1920s skyscraper – and like many such buildings it combines the latest in steel-cage construction, the setbacks required by the 1916 Zoning Resolution (to allow light

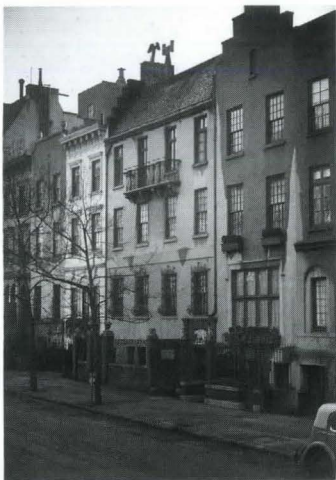
and air on the surrounding streets), and a conservative, eclectic approach to architectural style. A careful scouting of architectural details will discover fine details. Look particularly at the grand second-story window arcades, whose windows are round, but whose stone and brick arch surrounds are pointed; the stone blocks of those pointed arches connect from window to window. Each window has a handsome railing of twisted iron with a large, cursive “B” in its center. In the upper stories, patterned brick forms small pointed-arch arcades. There are also projecting angled stone bays with pointed arches, and gigantic arched windows including one central arch with spiral columns at the roofline.



The Barbizon Hotel for Women

9. EAST 63RD STREET EAST OF LEXINGTON AVENUE

East of the Barbizon lies the block of brownstones transformed in the 'teens by Frederic J. Sterner (see above, No. 866 Lexington Avenue) – sort of an uptown “Block Beautiful” on



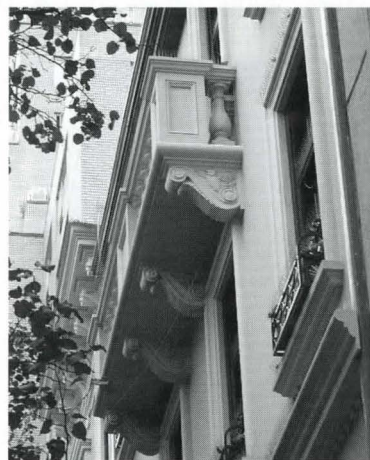
152-162 East 63rd Street, 1938

the model of his former enclave on East 19th Street. Sterner first renovated two brownstones into a new home for himself at No. 154-156 (1914). Over the next five years he renovated No. 152 (1916) directly next door, and, across the street, No. 151 (1916) and 153 (1917). In 1919 he bought five houses at 159 to 167, in order, according to a contemporary article in the *Times*, "to complete the residential development of East Sixty-third street." The article continued: "With few exceptions, every house in the block has been rebuilt. Several of them, with Italian style fronts [make] it one of the most unique residential blocks on the east side."

For his own house at 154-156, Sterner used molded window surrounds, a projecting balcony on console brackets, and dormer windows to give it something of an Anglo-Italianate flavor. No. 153 employs a Mediterranean-tile roof, heavily molded entrance and a balconied window with a fanciful surround for the Italian look. No. 159 still has its stuccoed front and Mediterranean-tile

roof, while No. 163 is a handsome red-brick neo-Georgian with heavy shutters and iron railings on the second-story balcony.

Sterner apparently had friends in high places, some of whom became his clients. In 1916, the *Times* reported on a "Gothic Back Yard Party" given by Sterner and his sister, Maud, who shared the house with him. "The guests included Mayor and Mrs. [John Purroy] Mitchel, Mrs. John Astor... Mr. and Mrs. Charles Dana Gibson... Mrs. Belmont Tiffany... Mr. and Mrs. Conde Nast..." and so on. His client for No. 153, across the street, was socialite Barbara Rutherford Hatch (daughter of Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt). Many public figures have since lived in Sterner's creations. After the Hatches left No. 153, it became home to producer Charles Dillingham (whose former Globe Theater in the Broadway theater district is today the Lunt-Fontanne); subsequent owners of the house have included



Detail of 154-156 East 63rd Street showing balcony on console brackets

Gypsy Rose Lee, Jasper Johns and Spike Lee. Sterner's own house, at 154-156, eventually became home to Judge Samuel Seabury, the political reformer considered responsible for the ascendancy of Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia. LaGuardia in fact took his first oath of office, at midnight of January 1st, 1934, at Seabury's house, and then, in the judge's library, addressed the newsreel cameras. LaGuardia also took the oath for his second (1938) and third (1942) terms here on East 63rd Street – though on the last occasion he moved the timing up from midnight to 10:00 p.m., so as not, said the *Times*, to keep his children up past their bedtimes.

In May of 1946, six of the homeowners on the block opened their homes for a tour of their gardens – Italian style gardens having been a hallmark of Sterner's work – in an event sponsored by the City Gardens Club to raise money for the Police Athletic League. Perhaps some of the young ladies of the Barbizon attended. One of the gardens belonged to the Seaburys; another, directly across the street, belonged to Gypsy Rose Lee. One wonders how the judge who backed LaGuardia – famous for shutting down burlesque houses – got along with his neighbor, the former "Queen of Burlesque."

10. 142, 144 AND 148-150 EAST 62ND STREET

Return to the corner of Lexington Avenue, and turn left (south). A few houses on Lexington still have their geometric neo-Grec ornament,



Neo-Georgian entrance of 144 East 62nd Street

including one, at No. 808, now fronted by a basement-to-roof iron grille – in the 1970s it housed "Lolly's Theater Club," an off-off-Broadway stage. Turn left again (east, this time) onto East 62nd Street. On the north side of the street, No. 155 (M.H. Grossmayer, 1871) is an unusually narrow row house. On the south side, there are two handsome neo-Georgian houses (actually new façades added to older buildings), No. 142 (1875; new façade 1929 by Edward S. Hewitt) and No. 144 (also originally 1875; new façade 1916 by Thomas Tryon). Nothing unusual there, but two doors



Church door of 148-150 East 62nd Street

down is an unexpected, lovely mid-block Gothic church (Ford, Butler & Oliver, 1937), originally the Swedish Methodist Episcopal Church, which moved here from a site further south at Lexington and East 52nd Street – no doubt fleeing the encroachment of midtown commerce.

11. EAST 61ST STREET

Walk back to Lexington Avenue, turn left (south), and walk down the block – lined with yet more altered brownstones and storefronts – to East 61st Street. This is the Upper East Side's last gasp before it yields to the high rises of Midtown. Turn right (west) on East 61st Street. Here's another block of brownstones with a history of alterations ranging from stoop removals to brand-new façades. As late as 1929, both sides of the block were lined with uniform fronts. No. 109



East 61st Street looking towards Park Avenue, 1929

(John Sexton, 1871) is perhaps the most intact, with just an altered stoop and new second-story picture window, but still retaining its typically Italianate windows, doors and overhanging cornice. Alterations range from stripped detail, to removal or replacement of stoops, to entirely new façades, some quite handsome.

12. NOS. 521, 525 AND 535 PARK AVENUE

And that brings us to the tail end of the district extension. Walk west along East 61st Street to Park Avenue, cross to the other side of Park, and look back at the three large apartment houses facing you, one to the north of East 61st, and two to the south. The earliest of the three, No. 535 (Herbert Lucas, 1909) on the northeast corner, looks like a fairly standard speculatively-built apartment house, but in fact represented a major new trend in city living. As described in a contemporary article in the *Times*: "The corporation which has been formed to carry this project through is made up by a group of well-known people, nearly all of whom will give up large residences to become tenant-owners in the new apartment house. This in itself is an interesting sign of the times and one which shows the unmistakable tendency to give up individual residences for apartments in these co-operative structures, in which one's home may have practically the same degree of individualism as in a private house, combined with a greater number of conveniences and at less expense." Lucas, the architect – "to whose efforts the entire

enterprise is to a large extent due" – designed each individual apartment "to conform to the ideas of the future occupants." The "well-known people" calling the building home included "Miss Lydia F. Emmet, the artist," whose specially built studio shared the roof with a large garden.

The transformation of 19th-century Fourth Avenue – disfigured by the train tracks running down its center – into 20th-century Park Avenue – with the tracks hidden safely underground – was well underway. As the *Times* reported in 1911, "Within the last three or four years the aristocracy of the town has been looking toward Park Avenue as a peculiarly delightful residential centre.... Park Avenue [has been selected] for some of the latest and best equipped co-operative houses in the city." William Boring – architect of No. 521 that same year – claimed that "this section will be the Mayfair of New York," referring to London's poshest West End district. And the *Times* added that "the gateway to this great residential thoroughfare is at Sixtieth Street," the corner occupied by Boring's new limestone-faced neo-Classical creation. Shortly afterwards, No. 525 Park Avenue (Schwartz & Gross, 1914), joined the pack.

CONCLUSION

And that concludes our walk through the newly extended Upper East Side Historic District. No need to leave right away, however – there's plenty of shopping in the neighborhood, and spots for a bite or a cup of coffee. You could even take a stroll through the other parts of the historic district. This is the Upper East Side, after all, and there's a lot here to keep you busy.

Text by Anthony Robins, August 2007

Anthony Robins is an historian, author, lecturer and tour-leader who has been guiding natives and visitors to the city's wonders of steel and stone for thirty years (www.BeforeYourVeryEyes.org).

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C E N T R A L

FIFTH

MADISON

FOURTH

E. SIXTY

E. SIXTY

LEXINGTON

E. SIXTY

SIXTH

FOURTH

FIFTH

WAGNER STREET
CATH. CH.

SIGNAL
HOSPITAL

CHAPIN
HOME

771 REC. ARMORY
1339 N. 2

