

Landmarks Preservation Commission
August 14, 1990; Designation List 226
LP-1622

254 WEST 102ND STREET HOUSE, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1892-93; Schneider & Herter, Architects; Schneider & Company, Developers.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1873, Lot 160.

On November 18, 1986, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 254 West 102nd Street House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 13). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Three witnesses spoke in favor of designation. No witnesses spoke in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Summary

The 254 West 102nd Street House is one of an intact group of four residences designed by the architectural firm of Schneider & Herter and built by the firm of Schneider & Company as a speculative venture.¹ The rowhouse group is the sole surviving example of a type of site planning used on several corner plots along West End Avenue in the early 1890s where a group of houses facing the Avenue featured a prominent corner house and an additional house which was built facing the side street behind the Avenue-facing houses, of which 254 West 102nd Street is one of the few remaining examples. The group of residences was built in 1892-93 during the first period of intense residential development for the comfortable professional class along the northern portion of West End Avenue where the suburban qualities of landscaped streets, the views of the Hudson River, and the amenities of nearby Riverside Park created a desirable residential area. The quality and distinctiveness of the Queen Anne/Romanesque Revival style design of the house reflects the desire for individuality in the appearance of houses within rowhouse groups and is representative of the eclectically-styled residential architecture of West End Avenue dating from the 1890s. No. 254 West 102nd Street is distinguished by ornament characteristic of the mannerist aesthetic of the firm of Schneider & Herter, the juxtaposition of contrasting textures of rough, smooth-faced, and carved brownstone, and the emphasis on a lively roofline punctuated by a pedimented parapet and carved panel.

Development of the Upper West Side²

Despite its long history beginning soon after the colonial Dutch settlement, the Upper West Side, known as Bloomingdale prior to its urbanization, remained largely undeveloped until the 1880s. In the early eighteenth century, Bloomingdale Road (later renamed the Boulevard and finally Broadway in 1898) was opened through rural Bloomingdale and provided the northern route out of the city which was then concentrated in the southern tip of Manhattan. The Upper West Side was included in the Randel Survey of 1811 (known as the Commissioners' Map) which established a uniform grid of avenues and cross streets in Manhattan as far north as 155th Street, although years elapsed before streets on the Upper West Side were actually laid out, some as late as the 1870s and 1880s, and the land was subdivided into building lots. The city grew rapidly northward during the nineteenth century, but it was not until after Central Park (a designated New York City Scenic Landmark) was laid out in 1857 that development began around the perimeter of the Park, setting off the first wave of real estate speculation on the Upper West Side.

Improved public transportation to the area contributed to the growth and sustained development of the Upper West Side. By 1880 the horse car line on Eighth Avenue had been replaced by street rail service up to 125th Street and the Elevated Railway on Ninth Avenue (renamed Columbus Avenue in 1890) had been completed. However, the biggest boost to the development of the West End (the area west of Broadway) was the creation, between 1876 and 1900, of Riverside Drive and Park (a designated New York City Scenic Landmark) located north of 72nd Street along the Hudson River. The presence of the park and drive, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, was an important factor in making this area desirable for high-quality residential development.

Development of the West End began slowly, due, to a large degree, to the hesitation of would-be residents, but by 1885 it had emerged as the area in the city experiencing the most intense real estate speculation. The expectation that the blocks along Riverside Drive and West End Avenue would be lined with mansions kept the value of these lots, as well as adjacent land, consistently higher and developers were willing to wait to realize profits from the potentially valuable sites. The real estate developers, including the West End Association, founded in 1884 by the prominent developer, W.E.D. Stokes, ultimately stimulated the demand for houses in the West End. Real estate brochures and the local press drew attention to the area, emphasizing the scenic quality of the setting, the nearness of parks, and the availability of public transportation.

West End Avenue (formerly Eleventh Avenue) was opened in 1880 from 72nd Street to 106th street and was paved with asphalt by 1893. West End Association members set twenty-year restrictive covenants governing West End Avenue which closed the avenue to commercial traffic and initially limited development to single-family houses, thus enhancing the desirability of the residential area. By 1890 the character of the avenue had emerged as completely residential and was promoted as a suburban-like setting with such amenities as grass plots and trees along the sidewalks. The absence of

flats and apartment houses on the avenue provided the opportunity for various treatments of the corners with rowhouses and larger attached residences.

In the mid-1880s the most attractive areas for development along West End Avenue were located near the El stations and along the higher elevations of the hilly avenue. Construction of mid-size rowhouses, rather than the more grand type of mansions originally projected for West End Avenue, began in 1885 near 104th Street which was convenient to a Ninth Avenue El station and by 1895 the high plateau between West 99th and 104th Streets had been built up with three- and four-story rowhouses. The architectural tone of these private residences was set by the presence of costly mansions such as the W.F. Foster residence at 102th Street and Riverside Drive and the Bacon residence at 104th Street and Riverside Drive.

The Schneider & Company's Houses³

The site at the northeast corner of West 102nd Street and West End Avenue appears to have been first sold for development purposes in 1881 and at that time an open-ended restrictive covenant was initiated which prevented the construction of a variety of commercial and industrial buildings. The property changed hands several times before Hannah O'Brien filed plans in 1890 to build five three-story limestone-fronted houses designed by Andrew Spence; within a year O'Brien lost control of the property and this project was abandoned.

Two New York architects, Ernest W. Schneider and Henry Herter, along with two partners -- John Fish, a previous client, and Eugene Schultz -- acquired the property and soon after filed plans for the construction of a group of four residences. The centerpiece of the group of three-story houses with raised basements is the corner house which has a cylindrical tower with an additional story and an entrance near the center of its long West 102nd Street facade. Beside this house facing West End Avenue are two narrow houses, nearly identical in design. Situated across the rear of the three West End Avenue houses, the 254 West 102nd Street house features a freestanding side facade.⁴ The houses, built between May, 1892, and April, 1893, were appropriately finished on the interior with decorative mantels, hardwood trim, and horseshoe openings ornamented with fretwork dividing the music rooms from the parlors, as well as up-to-date plumbing and utility areas. The placement of the stairhall in the center of each house permitted large full-width front rooms on the upper floors.

The first house to be sold of the Schneider & Company rowhouse group, in 1893, was No. 856 West End Avenue. In 1895 the remaining houses were divided among the investors and Eugene Schultz acquired title to No. 254 West 102nd Street. In 1896 Schultz sold the property to Jeanette Hilgers who owned it for three years.

The Schneider & Company development venture is the sole surviving example of a site development pattern that emerged on West End Avenue in which large corner parcels were purchased for the construction of rowhouse

groups. By decreasing the depth of the avenue-facing houses, an additional house could be built on the plot facing the side street; the plan worked to the advantage of the developer who sought a maximum return on the expensive West End Avenue lots. Slightly larger and more prestigious corner houses, with highly visible design features such as corner towers, were characteristic of this site development plan. The side street-facing house was small but wider than the narrow avenue-facing rowhouses, twenty-eight feet wide and fifty feet deep, and had several windows in the side facade, including a bay window near the rear of the house. This scheme was particularly favored in the early 1890s when the area between 99th and 104th streets was developed. Rowhouse groups facing West End Avenue, with a side street-facing house (or houses) across the rear of these lots, were built at the southeast corners of West End Avenue and 99th, 100th, 102nd, and 103rd Streets; all of the groups except the Schneider & Company group have been demolished. The rowhouse group at the southeast corner of 103rd Street and West End Avenue, designed by M.V.B. Ferdon in 1891, included five houses facing West End Avenue and one facing 103rd Street; only the house facing West 103rd Street remains standing. Another group of houses designed by M.V.B. Ferdon and built by Increase Grenell in 1892 at the northwest corner of West End Avenue and 104th Street (demolished) included a corner house very similar to the Schneider & Company house, featuring the entrance near the center of the 104th Street facade.⁵

Picturesque Architecture on West End Avenue⁶

During the intense period of rowhouse development on the Upper West Side, from 1885 to 1900, residential design was dominated by a reaction to the conformity and homogeneity of older Italianate style brownstone rowhouses found elsewhere in the city. The first wave of development along West End Avenue in the period between 1885 and 1895 produced a number of individually-designed houses and speculatively-built, yet distinctive, rowhouse groups which, along with houses in the West End as a whole, represent the culmination of single-family house construction in Manhattan. Many of the most prominent architects working in New York City designed these residences, often for speculative developers who invested in the area. The residences designed for West End Avenue were characteristic of the picturesque eclecticism of late-nineteenth-century architecture, drawing from a wide variety of stylistic sources and expressing the desire of architects and clients for originality, variety, and novelty in residential architecture. There was a movement away from smooth brownstone as a facing material and a new emphasis on the sculptural and textural qualities of surfaces, as well as on the mixture of colors and materials.

Unusual, picturesque house design on West End Avenue had been initiated by the construction of two groups of houses with a "Dutch" flavor in 1885-86, designed by Frederick B. White and McKim, Mead & White. Clarence True and other architects continued to design residences for West End Avenue in unusual and picturesque revival styles which were executed with a high-degree of artistic experimentation. Strong rhythmic patterns, asymmetrical massing, and a lively streetscape were created by the profusion of bowfronts, bay and oriel windows, gables, turrets, chimneys, dormers,

cornices, stoops, and ornamentation associated with the popular Queen Anne and Romanesque Revival styles as well as more exotic revival styles. These rowhouses on West End Avenue, and throughout the Upper West Side, unlike their Italianate brownstone predecessors from earlier in the nineteenth century, were purposely designed to be distinguished from one another, while together forming visually coherent ensembles. Along West End Avenue in particular, there emerged a characteristic treatment in the design of rowhouse groups. A larger corner house served to terminate a row of houses or became the focal point in a rowhouse group that turned a corner; the design of these corner houses frequently included an entrance in the longer, street-facing facade, a curved corner bay and tower, and a lively roofline.

The houses designed by Schneider & Herter are representative of this picturesque design movement, and although based on the common hybrid of the Queen Anne and Romanesque Revival styles they are enlivened by unusual carved ornament. The treatment of each of the four houses individually within the easily recognizable group provided the architects with the opportunity to create variations on a theme. The high degree of modulation in the plane of the facades through the use of recessed entrances as well as projecting bay windows and balconies (which afforded views of the river and park) adds depth and grandeur to the rowhouse designs. Schneider & Herter explored the range of surface effects achievable from smooth-faced and rough-cut brownstone, and incorporated both geometric and figural carving of the material. The repetition of several ornamental elements unites the houses, including paired stringcourses, gridded panels of rough-faced stone, chamfered window surrounds in the smooth-faced facades, sheet-metal panels at the roofline, and elements of the carved stone program. The two smaller West End Avenue houses are identical except for the shape and detailing of the window openings while the design of the 254 West 102nd Street house repeats elements of the entrance to the corner house, also on West 102nd Street.

The design of picturesque rowhouses in New York was influenced by trends in the design of architectural ornament in the later nineteenth century, a time when ornament was treated by many architects as an opportunity for creative experimentation. European theorists such as Owen Jones, James K. Collings, and Christopher Dresser encouraged an abstract interpretation of vegetation executed with an emphasis on geometricized form and their publications influenced designers in the United States. At the same time, technological change also influenced the design of ornament. The availability of steam-powered tools encouraged the use of bold, machine-cut ornament while the growing use of terra cotta prompted the design of intricate ornament that could be easily reproduced.

The popularity of several revival styles, and the inventive blending of these styles, encouraged the architect/designer to adopt an individualized aesthetic in the design or architectural ornament. This trend can be seen in the abstracted naturalistic ornament developed by such recognized American innovators as Frank Furness and Louis H. Sullivan, as well as in the pioneering work of architects like Henry Hobson Richardson, who developed a highly personal style drawing on Romanesque sources. Many architects working in New York City also developed identifiable personal

styles, such as Clarence True with his interpretation of the "Elizabethan Renaissance Revival" style.

Schneider & Herter developed a somewhat idiosyncratic and mannerist aesthetic characterized by a lack of reverence for the traditional placement of ornament, an unexpected combining of architectural styles, and asymmetry in the composition of facades and their detailing; these characteristics appear in the firm's early designs for tenements, rowhouses and synagogues. In the ornamental programs of several buildings, including the 254 West 102nd Street House, Schneider & Herter combined incised, machine-cut ornament with both abstracted naturalistic designs of the column capitals and romantic figurative carving which includes lion newel posts at the stoop (identical to those which once fronted the 854 and 856 West End Avenue houses) and a carved panel featuring a human head and wings that is framed by classically-inspired pediment above the roofline entablature. An uncommon approach to the composition and placement of ornament appears in the design of the columns framing the entrance where balusters, with incised horizontal bands and necks at the bottom, are topped with capitals of unmatched abstracted designs. The placement of the capitals at the height of the window transoms requires the insertion of a scored block above the capitals and the resulting compound vertical forms support an entablature suggested by a section of molding cut into the lintel above the columns; this door surround and the balcony above create an unconventional entrance portico.

Schneider & Herter⁷

Ernest W. Schneider and Henry Herter began an architectural partnership in New York City around 1887; within a very short time they had a thriving business designing tenements, flats, and industrial buildings, primarily on the Lower East Side. Schneider & Herter worked repeatedly for a group of German-Jewish clients with ethnic backgrounds similar to theirs, the most prominent of whom were the real estate developers Jonas Weil and Bernard Mayer for whom the architects designed a number of multiple dwellings. This association led to the firm's commission for the Park East Synagogue, 163 East 67th Street (1889-90, a designated New York City Landmark), which Weil financed and led as president of the congregation. Schneider & Herter also designed Congregation Kol Israel Arshi at 20-22 Forsyth Street (1892, now owned by the Hellenic Orthodox Community).

The firm of Schneider & Herter had acted as architect-developers prior to its venture on the Upper West Side, designing and building a pair of French flats at 731-735 East 5th Street in 1890-91 and a French flat at 233-35 Delancey Street in 1891-92; the firm began a warehouse project at 141 West Broadway in 1893. Schneider & Herter later erected a five-story apartment building at 79-81 Perry Street in 1895 (in addition to designing several other buildings now within the Greenwich Village Historic District) and a pair of flats buildings at 309 and 317 West 93rd Street in 1901-02 (within the Riverside-West End Historic District).

The West End Avenue-102nd Street project was a departure from Schneider & Herter's usual work designing multiple dwellings, and was among the firm's first projects on the Upper West Side. Many of the firm's more than 100 multiple dwellings in Manhattan no longer stand, but those remaining exhibit the firm's individualistic approach to the use of ornament and facade compositions often featuring round-arched windows characteristic of the Romanesque Revival style.

Description

This brownstone-fronted house with three stories above a raised basement completes the group built at the corner of West End Avenue and 102nd Street by Schneider & Company by enclosing the rear yards of the avenue-facing houses. The two-bay house has a projecting two-story angled bay at the west with a balcony above; stringcourses mark the horizontal divisions of the smooth brownstone facade. A rock-faced brownstone stoop with carved newel posts with lion heads and an ornate cast-iron balustrade leads to the recessed parlor-story entry flanked by a pair of compound columns composed of incised cylindrical balusters and unmatched carved capitals topped by scored blocks; there is a small balustraded balcony above. Chamfered surrounds enrich the top portions of the one-over-one double-hung wood windows which on the parlor story are topped with stained-glass transoms. The rock-faced brownstone gridded panels on the upper half of the third story and the voussoirs of the semi-elliptical-arched tripartite window with carved wood mullions add to the picturesque quality of the roofline which has a pedimented parapet with a carved panel depicting a head with wings extending from a low sheet-metal parapet with sunflower motifs immediately above the cornice.

A rock-faced pier, which supports the west end of the parlor story in front of the recessed basement facade that has similar piers between the windows, supports one end of the arched gateway (with a wrought-iron gate) leading to the rear yards of the rowhouse group. The western elevation, which faces the yard, is brick with simple window openings. A cast-iron angled bay window projects at the parlor story.

The entrance door is a modern replacement, and grilles have been added to the window adjacent to the door and the one above at the second story which opens onto the balcony; grilles identical to those on the adjacent corner house are found at the basement windows and under the stoop door. Cast-iron railings have been placed above the brownstone balcony balustrades.

Report Prepared by
Betsy Bradley, Research Department

Report Edited by
Elisa Urbanelli, Research Department

NOTES

1. The group includes the houses at 854, 856 and 858 West End Avenue.
2. This section was based on information in the LPC, 520 West End Avenue Residence Designation Report, Riverside - West End Historic District Designation Report, "West Side Number," Real Estate Record & Guide 51 (Feb. 11, 1893), supplement, 6-41, and Real Estate Record & Guide 51 (March 25, 1893), 444.
3. This section is based on information in the "West Side Number," 32-33; NYC, Department of Buildings, Plans, Permits and Dockets, Block 1873, Lots 61, 62, 160, 162, New Building Permit No. 785-1892.
4. The house at No. 854 West End Avenue is 17' wide and the adjacent house at No. 856 is 16' wide; both have two-story rear extensions; the corner house at 858 West End Avenue is 17'11" wide and 72' deep.
5. These rowhouse groups are readily identified on historic maps such as the 1898 Bromley Atlas of New York City. The rowhouse group at the southeast corner of West End Avenue and West 104th Street also featured a larger corner house, but as did other corner groupings, used a different plan to fill the corner plot.
6. This section is based on information in LPC, 520 West End Avenue Residence Designation Report.
7. This section is based on information in LPC, Greenwich Village Historic District Designation Report, Riverside-West End Historic District Designation Report, and Park East Synagogue Designation Report, Francis, and information in New York City, Department of Buildings, Plans Permits, and Dockets.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

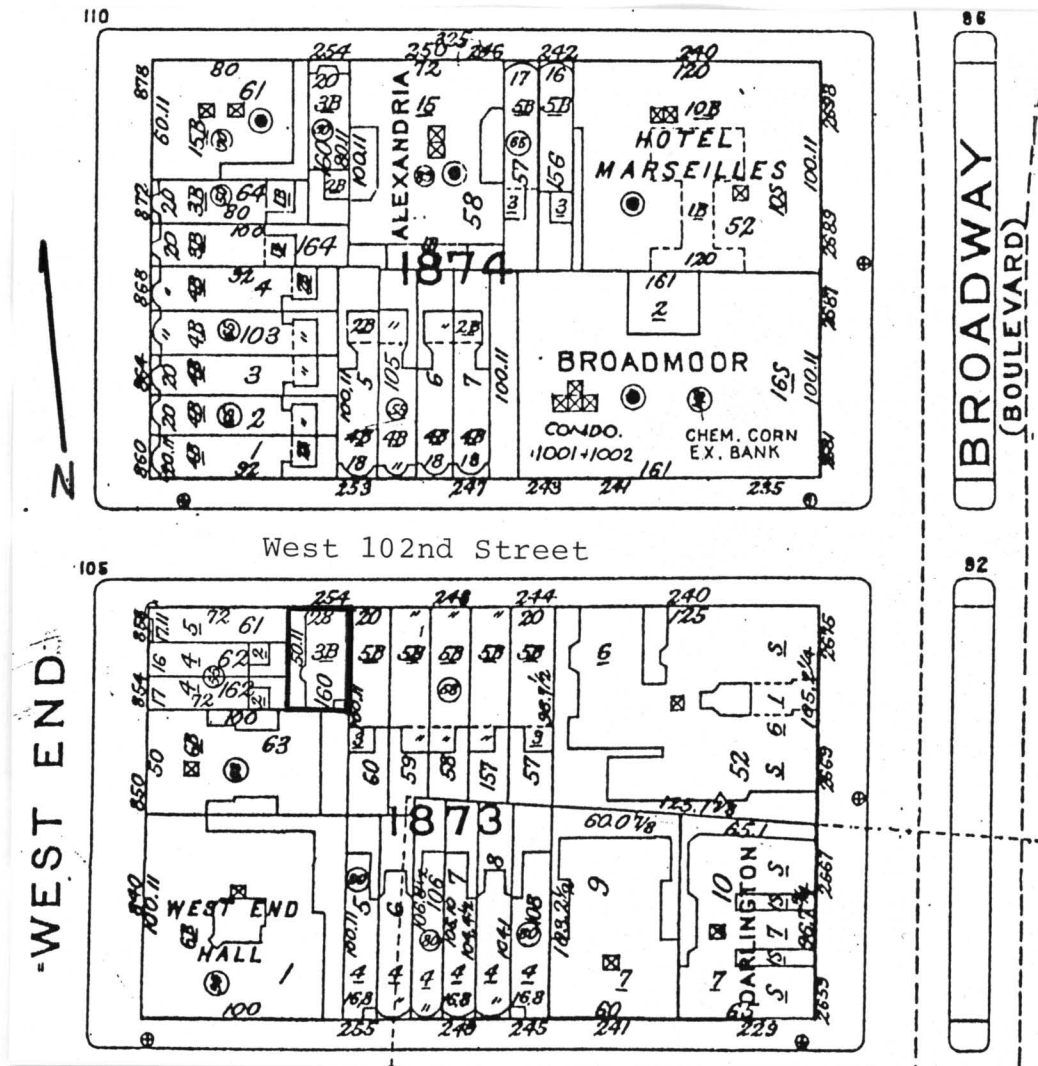
On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the 254 West 102nd Street House has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the 254 West 102nd Street House, as part of a rowhouse group designed by the firm of Schneider & Herter, was built in 1892-93 by the firm of Schneider & Company as a speculative venture; that the Schneider & Company project is the sole surviving intact example of a frequently used development scheme for the northern end of West End Avenue in the early 1890s where corner sites were planned with a prominent corner house and a side-street facing house across the rear of the plot of which the 254 West 102nd Street House is one of the few remaining examples; that the design of this Queen Anne/Romanesque Revival style residence is representative of the contemporary picturesque trend in rowhouse design characterized by an emphasis on the use of a variety of surface textures, a high degree of modulation in the facade of the house, and a lively roofline punctuated by a pedimented parapet and carved panel; that the design of No. 254 West 102nd Street is distinguished by ornament which reflects the mannerist aesthetic of the firm of Schneider & Herter; that this ornament takes the form of unusual, asymmetrically-designed columns framing the entrance and the romantic figurative carving of the newel posts and the panel at the roofline; and that the quality and individuality of the residence reflects the nature of the first wave of residential development along West End Avenue for the comfortable professional class where picturesque houses and the amenities of the nearby Riverside Park created an attractive and desirable residential area, as well as the trend toward individuality in rowhouse design in the 1890s throughout the city.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 (formerly Section 534 of Chapter 21), 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 254 West 102nd Street House, Borough of Manhattan, and designates Tax Map Block 1873, Lot 160, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

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254 West 102nd Street House Landmark Site, Manhattan.
Block 1873, lot 160.

Graphic Source: Sanborn Manhattan Land Book, 1988-89 Edition.



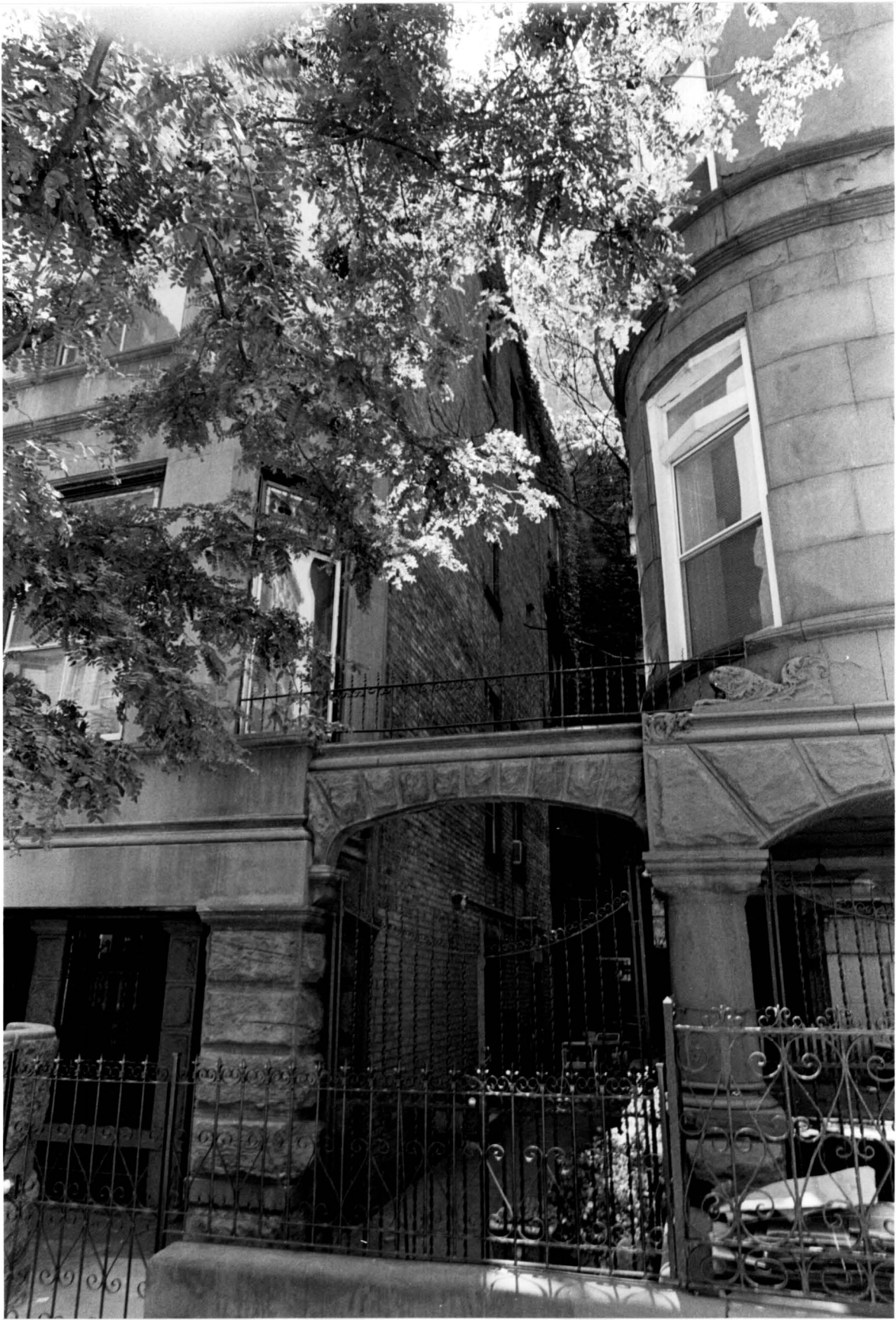
254 West 102nd Street House, Manhattan.
1892-93; Schneider & Herter, architects. Photo Credit: Carl Forster



254 West 102nd Street House, Manhattan. Detail, stoop.
1892-93; Schneider & Herter, architects. Photo Credit: Carl Forster



254 West 102nd Street House, Manhattan. Detail, upper story.
1892-93; Schneider & Herter, architects. Photo Credit: Carl Forster



254 West 102nd Street House, Manhattan. West facade.
1892-93; Schneider & Herter, architects. Photo Credit: Carl Forster



254 West 102nd Street House, Manhattan. Bay window in west facade.
1892-93; Schneider & Herter, architects. Photo Credit: Carl Forster