Landmarks Preservation Commission February 19, 1991; Designation List 232 LP-1618

294 RIVERSIDE DRIVE HOUSE (William Baumgarten Residence), 294 Riverside Drive, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1900-01; architect Schickel & Ditmars.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1889, Lot 76.

On November 18, 1986, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 294 Riverside Drive House, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 9). The hearing was continued until May 5, 1987 (Item No. 5). The hearings had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. A total of nine witnesses spoke in favor of designation at both hearings. At the second hearing, the owners spoke in opposition to designation. The Commission has received a letter supporting this designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Summary

Built in 1900-01, the 294 Riverside Drive House is a rare survivor which exemplifies the character of Riverside Drive from the time when it was developed with many luxurious single-family residences. Located between West 101st Street and 102nd Street, today it is one of the very few remaining houses on the thoroughfare along Riverside Park which was commissioned by a particular client rather than built on speculation. house was designed in the then popular Beaux-Arts style by the distinguished architectural firm of Schickel & Ditmars, and was built for William Baumgarten who had been, from 1881 to 1891, the head of the firm of Herter Brothers which executed some of the most important interior design work being done in New York City at that time. Baumgarten had successfully established a firm under his own name, William Baumgarten & Company, at the time he built this house, and had a long-standing professional association with the notable architect William Schickel. The most striking features of the facade of 294 Riverside Drive -- the orderly, asymmetrical arrangement, the finely carved limestone detailing, the graceful Ionic portico, the slate mansard roof, the elaborate dormers, and the ornate ironwork -- eloquently express the richness embodied in the Beaux-Arts style.

The Development of Riverside Drive 1

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 Commissioner's 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.

Improved public transportation to the area contributed to the growth and sustained development of the Upper West Side, particularly the completion in 1879 of the Elevated Railway on Ninth Avenue (renamed Columbus Avenue in 1890). However, the biggest boost to the development of the West End (the area west of Broadway) was the creation of Riverside Drive and Park (a designated New York City Scenic Landmark). The presence of the park and drive was an important factor in making this area desirable for high-quality residential development.

In 1865 the first proposal for converting the land on the Upper West Side along the eastern shore of the Hudson River into an ornamental park had been presented by Park Commissioner William R. Martin. The purchase of the park site and initial plans were approved in 1866. The drive, as proposed at this time, was to be a straight 100-foot wide road; this plan was impractical, however, due to the existing topography. Hired by the Commissioners in 1873, Frederick Law Olmsted (1822-1903), alreadv distinguished by his role with Calvert Vaux (1824-1895) in the successful design for Central Park, proposed an alternate scheme. Olmsted's design for Riverside Park and Drive took into consideration the pre-existing topography, landscape possibilities, and views. He designed a drive that would be adapted to the topographic features, would be amenable for horses and pleasure driving, would provide shaded walks for pedestrians, and would also allow easy access to and scenic vistas from the real estate bordering it on the east. Olmsted's plan was adopted by the Commissioners but the park was not executed under his supervision; it was actually developed between 1875 and 1900 by other designers including Vaux, Samuel Parsons, and Julius Munckwitz, who did not adhere to Olmsted's original scheme in its entirety. 3 The Drive, from West 72nd Street to approximately 129th Street, where it is effectively terminated by the viaduct and the Manhattanville fault, 4 has a particularly strong character derived from its curves that break with the regular street grid and its location overlooking the park and the Hudson River.

By the fall of 1879, work was completed between 72nd and 85th Streets and Riverside Avenue (as it was called until 1908) was opened to the public in 1880. The numerous and exceptional advantages of the location, namely, its situation on a plateau, its "advantages of pure air and beautiful surroundings, glimpses of New Jersey hills . . . and, the nearness of parks," assisted in making the area along Riverside Drive prime real estate, deserving of the highest character of residential development.

By 1885 the Upper West Side 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 initial development along Riverside Drive mostly took the form of single-family town houses and rowhouses, although luxury apartment buildings, as they gained in popularity toward the turn of the century, also appeared. Most of the single-family residences on the Upper West Side were speculatively-built rowhouses; along West End Avenue and Riverside Drive the houses tended to be larger and more elegant than those on the side streets. Architect-developer Clarence True, in particular, was largely responsible for the promotion of lower Riverside Drive as an attractive residential True characterized the drive as "the most ideal homesite in thoroughfare. the western hemisphere - the Acropolis of the world's second city."7 The speculative development of Riverside Drive in the 1890s by True and others provided a residential context for the new area and was an impetus for a wealthier class of homeowners -- those who could afford more than speculatively-built houses -- to commission noted architects to custom design town houses and mansions for them.

Of the roughly thirty freestanding mansions that were erected along Riverside Drive, today only two remain, the Rice Mansion at 170 Riverside Drive (1901-03, Herts & Tallant, a designated New York City Landmark), and the Schinasi Residence at 351 Riverside Drive (1907-09, William B. Tuthill, also a designated New York City Landmark). Like Rice and Schinasi, William Baumgarten had achieved a level of success in his career that would allow him the luxury of an individually-designed residence by a prominent architect. A self-made businessman in the field of interior design, Baumgarten was a professional peer of architect William Schickel; as a client, Baumgarten had not only the financial means, but also the aesthetic sensitivity to have Schickel design a house that would meet his personal specifications. Most of the single-family houses built along Riverside Drive — only a few of which, like Baumgarten's, were custom built — have been replaced by apartment buildings.

The Client: William Baumgarten8

Born in Wolfenbuttel, Germany, in 1845, William Baumgarten was the son of a master cabinet-maker. After studying engineering and immediately before he was to serve in the army, he left for America in 1865. In New York he met Theodore Steinway, the piano manufacturer, and through him he became associated with the furniture and decorating company of J. Ziegler & Co. For the next five years he assisted in that firm's design work and general business operations. In 1870 Baumgarten met Christian Herter, the head of the famous New York furniture and interior decoration firm of Herter Brothers, and soon began assisting him. In the late-nineteenth century Herter Brothers executed some of the most important work in interior design being done in New York City. Among the architects with whom the firm collaborated was William Schickel, the architect who later designed Baumgarten's house.

Founded in 1865 by two Stuttgart-born brothers, Gustave and Christian Herter, the firm of Herter Brothers set the standard for elegance and fine craftsmanship in American interior decoration. Furniture and even whole

rooms, complete with woodwork, fixtures and fittings, textiles, mosaics, stained glass, decorative plasterwork, and carpets were designed for some of the grandest private residences and public interiors ever built in the United States. Although the furnishings designed by Herter Brothers were often derived from a variety of historical styles, including Gothic, Renaissance, and Queen Anne, the firm is best known for its progressive Anglo-Japanese style, inaugurated at the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, which placed it at the forefront of the Aesthetic Movement in this country. Herter Brothers was responsible for the interiors of residences for a number of the most prominent and wealthiest Americans of the time, including William H. Vanderbilt, Darius O. Mills, J. Pierpont Morgan, Mark Hopkins, Josiah M. Fisk and numerous others.

After Christian Herter's retirement in 1881 Baumgarten succeeded him as the head of the firm and for ten years maintained the firm's unrivaled prestige. Other equally important interiors were then completed, including those of the William Rockefeller residence in Tarrytown, New York. At that point Baumgarten Brothers became a stock company in 1891. established William Baumgarten & Company, at 321 Fifth Avenue, with his younger brother Emile as his partner. The new firm was also very prestigious and successful and was patronized by a clientele similar to that of Herter Brothers. The year 1893 marked the highest achievement in Baumgarten's career. He established the making of Gobelin tapestries in this country by importing four French weavers. Later over eighty weavers were employed in the creation of wall panels for the interiors of stately residences. Many years later Baumgarten's son erected a plaque on the site of the factory on Williamsbridge Road in the Bronx stating that it was the location where his father "wove the first tapestry in the United States." 10 It was felt that the quality of these tapestries equaled those from the Gobelin works in Paris.

Baumgarten was married to Clara Frankel in New York on May 7, 1887. They had a daughter and three sons, two of whom, Robert and Paul, succeeded their father in the firm, which continued for many years. Later the company moved to 715 Fifth Avenue and established branches in Chicago and Paris. Baumgarten died on April 29, 1906, and the family sold the house at No. 294 Riverside Drive in 1914.

The Architects: Schickel & Ditmars 11

William Schickel (1850-1907) and Isaac Edward Ditmars (1850-1934) practiced together from 1896 until Schickel's death in 1907. Schickel, a German-born architect, immigrated to New York at the age of twenty. He received his American training in the office of Richard Morris Hunt which was one of the few places in the United States at that time where a young architect could receive an academic architectural education. Schickel worked for Hunt for about six months in the early 1870s, then entered the office of Henry Fernbach. In 1873, he established his own practice. Throughout his career Schickel received the patronage of wealthy German immigrants, such as the Ottendorfers, for important commissions. 12 He was especially prominent as an architect of commercial structures which are distinguished not only in their architectural quality but also in their

innovative use of such materials as terra cotta and cast iron. A notable example of Schickel's commercial work is the Queen Anne style Century Building at 33 East 17th Street (1880-81, a designated New York City Landmark).

Schickel expanded his office in the 1880s and in 1887 formed the firm of William Schickel & Company with Isaac Ditmars and Hugo Kafka. Ditmars, born in Nova Scotia, had been associated with the New York architect John F. Miller before joining Schickel. He was a founder and past president of the Brooklyn Chapter of the American Institute of Architects and was nominated a Fellow in 1895. Ditmars was responsible for the business operations of the firm, while Schickel was the principal designer.

As early as 1882, Schickel and Baumgarten had established a professional association that would last for many years. In 1883, Schickel carried out alterations to the Herter Brothers showroom, then located at 154 Fifth Avenue. Later, when Baumgarten began his own business, Schickel was commissioned to renovate the William Baumgarten & Company showroom at 321 Fifth Avenue. 13

Schickel's firm designed major department stores now within the Ladies Mile Historic District, including two cast-iron fronted buildings, Ehrich Brothers (1889) and a major addition to Fernbach's 1878 design for Stern Brothers (1892). Herter Brothers supplied the partitions and fixtures for the Ehrich Brothers store and William Baumgarten & Company provided millinery fixtures for Stern Brothers. ¹⁴ The office of William Schickel & Company was in a Neo-Renaissance style store and office building designed by the firm at 109-111 Fifth Avenue, also within the Ladies Mile Historic District.

Kafka left the firm after a short time to practice on his own. The firm, then Schickel & Ditmars, remained active until 1907. Among its works this partnership designed buildings for the Lenox Hill Hospital, St. Vincent's Hospital in 1900, several impressive Roman Catholic churches, the Ehret Mausoleum in Woodlawn Cemetery in 1907, and five commercial buildings now within the Ladies Mile Historic District. The firm's work from the turn of the century is characterized by the use of the Neo-Renaissance and Beaux-Arts styles, as evidenced in the John D. Crimmins House (1897-98), 40 East 68th Street (in the Upper East Side Historic District) and Baumgarten's house, built in 1900-01.

Baumgarten's professional relationship with Schickel extended to the architect's residential commissions, for which first Herter Brothers and then William Baumgarten & Company received numerous contracts to carry out interior work that included cabinetry, furniture, wall coverings, and decorations. Among the contracts received by Herter Brothers were the Robert L. Stuart House (1882, demolished) at Fifth Avenue and 57th Street; the Adolf Kuttroff House (1883) on 69th Street between Lexington and Third Avenues; the first of two houses for Isaac Stern of Stern Brothers (1884-85, 835 Madison Avenue, in the Upper East Side Historic District); three houses commissioned by Max Nathan (1886-87) on the south side of East 72nd Street between Park and Madison Avenues; and the Peter Doelger House (1887-89,

demolished) at Riverside Drive and 100th Street. William Baumgarten & Company carried out varnishing, painting, wallpapering, and decorating in an extension to the Nathan House on East 72nd Street (1891); provided cabinetwork and wall coverings for an alteration to the W. Caspary House (1891-92) at 19 East 71st Street; and designed interior woodwork and furnishings for the second house for Isaac Stern (1893-95) at 858 Fifth Avenue. Schickel & Company also designed a Renaissance Revival style rowhouse at 121 West 79th Street for Hugo Jaeckel (1891-92, now within the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District), a commission for which William Baumgarten & Company was contracted to do mantels, mirrors, and a sideboard. 15

Design and Construction

The site of the No. 294 Riverside Drive House, at Riverside Drive between West 101st and 102nd Streets, was originally part of the George Dyckman Farm and had been undeveloped until construction began in October of 1900. 16 The house was completed in September of the following year.

Designed with an American basement plan, the house has a low stoop. This type of stoop and its related interior planning features were popularized in the 1890s by the architect Clarence True, although this scheme is said to have been introduced at least a decade earlier but not widely adopted. 17

The Beaux-Arts style design of the facade reflects the popularity of classically-inspired academic architecture following the influential 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Based on the principles of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, this style was advocated by the increasing number of Americans who had studied at the Ecole, the era's premiere school of architecture; over 350 of them had enrolled between 1890 and 1910. 18 That generation of American architects shifted their attention toward interpretations of Renaissance and Baroque prototypes for inspiration for their designs. Leading practitioners of this style such as McKim, Mead & White and Richard Morris Hunt -- with whom Schickel had trained -- had a great impact on the design of residential architecture during this period through their commissions for mansions for the wealthy. More than any other style, with the possible exception of Chateauesque, this style expressed the tastes and values of America's upper class at the turn of the century. 19 The design of No. 294 Riverside Drive, with its ornate ironwork, finely carved limestone, graceful Ionic portico, and mansard roof with elaborate dormers, evokes the affluence and prestige of the client.

Description

The twenty-five foot wide, asymmetrically organized facade of the 294 Riverside Drive House, located on the east side of Riverside Drive between 101st and 102nd Streets, is all that is visible of the building from the street. The building extends back into the block 102 feet and is nearly eighty-three feet high. Faced in limestone, the four-and-a-half-story house has a slate mansard roof. The house is of the American basement type with the entrance slightly above the street level. Two bays wide, the house's

southern bay projects forward and curves on the northern edge. The entrance portico on the north, reached by four sandstone steps, is formed by Ionic columns (now stuccoed) which are surmounted by a balcony with a wide decorative wrought-iron railing extending the width of the facade. original wood double doors with oculus windows and their original hardware are extant. The balcony is supported at the southern bay by carved limestone consoles above a segmentally-arched window opening with a vermiculated keystone and casement sash. It is fronted by its original ornate wrought-iron grille with intricate, naturalistic forms. At street level is an original wrought-iron areaway fence and gate leading to a basement entrance with an original iron grille, flanked by a window with a non-historic grille. The two French windows at the second story balcony level are original (with recent storm sash/screens) and their openings have carved scrolled keystones. The transom to the south has a rectangular window cut into it at a later date. Paneled spandrels separate the second The third story has segmentally-arched openings. The and third stories. casement windows are original on the north (with one altered panel), but white aluminum multipane replacements exist on the south. At the fourth story, decorative wrought-iron balconies underscore tall openings with The balconies are supported by scrolled consoles scrolled keystones. flanking ornate cartouches. The French doors and transoms are brown aluminum replacements. A pulvinated laurel frieze and cartouches with pendants underscore the modillioned cornice, broken at the south by an ornate, round-arched dormer decorated with laurel swags and a cartouche. This dormer has a double-hung one-over-one aluminum sash window. At the north, the mansard roof is pierced by a dormer.

Subsequent History

The 294 Riverside Drive House was occupied by the Baumgarten family until it was sold to Emery L. Ferris in 1914. Ferris, who was a real estate lawyer, sold the home to Julia J. Cohen in May of 1940. In August of 1940 the house was converted to a multiple dwelling. Few alterations have occurred on the exterior and it remains largely intact.

Report prepared by Lynne D. Marthey, Research Department

Additional Research by Gale Harris, Research Department

Report edited by Elisa Urbanelli, Research Department Editor

NOTES

- 1. This section based on LPC, <u>Riverside-West End Historic District Designation Report</u> (LP-1626), (New York, 1989); and LPC, <u>Prentiss Residence Designation Report</u> (LP-1715), report prepared by Margaret M. Pickart, (New York, 1991).
- 2. The information on Riverside Park and Drive was adapted from LPC, Riverside Drive and Riverside Park Designation Report, (New York, 1980); and Department of Parks and Recreation, Riverside Park-Evolution and Restoration, (New York, 1984).
- 3. Additional changes to the park have been made over the years. Monuments and sculptures were added beginning in the early 1900s, the railroad tracks were covered, the Henry Hudson Parkway constructed (1934-37), playing fields added, and the park replanted.
- 4. A later portion resumes at 135th Street, meeting Fort Washington Park at 158th Street.
- 5. Other sections of the road remained incomplete until 1900-02 when the viaduct at 96th Street was built.
- 6. LPC, <u>Riverside-West End Historic District Designation Report</u>, (New York, 1989), p. 20.
- 7. Clarence True, A True History of Riverside Drive (New York, 1899), 12.
- 8. This section was based on "William Baumgarten," The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography, vol. 2 (New York, 1901), 466; and William Baumgarten obituary, New York Times, April 29, 1906, p. 11.
- 9. On Herter Brothers, see <u>In Pursuit of Beauty: Americans and the Aesthetic Movement</u> (New York, 1986), 438-39 and 446-47.
- 10. Paul J. Baumgarten obituary, New York Times, Feb. 25, 1950, p. 17.
- 11. On Schickel & Ditmars, see LPC, The Century Building Designation Report (LP-1539), report prepared by Gale Harris, 1986; LPC, Ladies Mile Historic District Designation Report (LP-1609), 1989; LPC, Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District Designation Report (LP-1647), 1990; and Isaac Edward Ditmars obituary, New York Times, Mar. 2, 1934, p. 19.
- 12. Schickel designed a number of institutional buildings for the Ottendorfers, including, in 1883-84, the German Dispensary (now Stuyvesant Polyclinic) and the Ottendorfer Branch of the New York Public Library; both are designated New York City Landmarks.

- 13. This information is documented in William Schickel, Contract Books, 1873-1907, (27 Vols.), Rare Book Room, Pennsylvania State University Library. Copies in the collection of Gale Harris. Herter Brothers contract, Book 5, pp. 93-104; Baumgarten & Co. contract, Book 12, pp.188-89.
- 14. Schickel, Contract Books: Ehrich Brothers, Book 10, pp. 200-02; Stern Brothers, Book 13, p. 174.38.
- 15. Schickel, Contract Books. The following references are for the contracts cited: Stuart House, Book 4, pp. 79-82; Kuttroff House, Book 5, pp. 37-38; Stern House (835 Madison), Book 6, pp. 36-38; Nathan Houses, Book 8, pp. 18-18B; Doelger House, Book 9, pp. 72-74; Nathan House extension, Book 12, p. 125; Caspary House alteration, Book 12, pp. 174-75; Stern House (858 Fifth Avenue), Book 14, p. 17, and Book 16 (also documented in Architecture & Building 23, no. 19, and "House of Isaac Stern, Esq.," Architects & Builders Magazine (July, 1902), 357-68); Jaeckel House, Book 13, p. 78.
- 16. New York City, Department of Buildings, Manhattan, Plans, Permits and Dockets, [Block 1889, Lot 76] NB 997-1900. Clara Baumgarten had acquired Lot 76 in 1896 from David Brown, who also owned Lots 70, 71, and 72 fronting onto West 102nd Street. An earlier Schickel & Ditmars plan for the Baumgarten house was filed in 1898 (NB 403-1898) but abandoned April 1, 1899.
- 17. Sarah Bradford Landau, "The Row Houses of New York's West Side," <u>Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians</u> 37, no. 1 (March, 1975), 19-36.
- 18. James Philip Noffsinger, <u>The Influence of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts on the Architects of the United States</u> (Washington D.C., 1955), 106-109.
- 19. Virginia and Lee McAlester, <u>A Field Guide To American Houses</u> (New York, 1985), 380.
- 20. (ALT 2830-40). Twenty-three apartments were created and a Certificate of Occupancy was issued in February of 1941. An existing passenger elevator was altered to conform with the Multiple Dwelling Law.

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 294 Riverside Drive House (William Baumgarten Residence) has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as a part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the 294 Riverside Drive House, built in 1900-01, was designed by the distinguished firm of Schickel & Ditmars and is a fine example of the then popular Beaux-Arts style; that it is one of the very few remaining houses on Riverside Drive which was commissioned by a particular client, rather than built on speculation; that this structure has a striking design distinguished by an orderly, asymmetrical facade, finely carved limestone detailing, a graceful Ionic portico, a slate mansard roof, elaborate dormers, and ornate ironwork; that it was built for William Baumgarten who had been, from 1881 to 1891, the head of the firm of Herter Brothers which executed some of the most important interior design work being done in New York City at that time; that at the time he built this house Baumgarten had successfully established a firm under his own name, William Baumgarten & Company, and had a long-standing professional association with the notable architect William Schickel; and that No. 294 Riverside Drive exemplifies the character of Riverside Drive from the time when it was developed with many luxurious single-family residences.

According 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 294 Riverside Drive House (William Baumgarten Residence), 294 Riverside Drive, Borough of Manhattan, and designates Tax Map Block 1889, Lot 76, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

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294 Riverside Drive House, 1900-01 (William Baumgarten Residence)

Architect: Schickel & Ditmars

Photo Credit: Lynne Marthey



294 Riverside Drive House (William Baumgarten Residence) Historic Photograph, c. 1940 Photo Credit: New York City, Dept. of Taxes Collection, Municipal Archives



294 Riverside Drive House (William Baumgarten Residence)

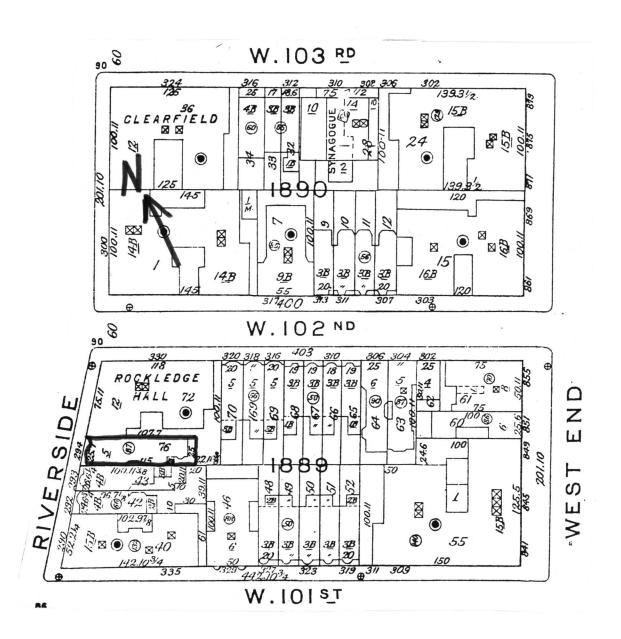
Detail of Second-Story Balcony
Photo Credit: Lynne Marthey



294 Riverside Drive House (William Baumgarten Residence)

Detail of Southern Dormer

Photo Credit: Lynne Marthey



294 Riverside Drive House (William Baumgarten Residence)

Graphic Source: Sanborn Manhattan
Land Book, 1988-89