

NEW-YORK CAB COMPANY STABLE

318-330 Amsterdam Avenue, aka 201-205 West 75th Street, Borough of Manhattan.
Built 1888-90; C. Abbott French & Company, architect.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1167, Lot 29.

On October 17, 2006, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the designation of the New-York Cab Company Stable and the related landmark site (Item No. 2). The public hearing was duly advertised in accordance with provisions of law. Twenty-two witnesses spoke in favor of designation, including City Councilmembers Gail Brewer and Tony Avella, representatives of New York State Senator Tom Duane and Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer, as well as representatives of Manhattan Community Board No. 7, the Historic Districts Council, Landmark West!, the Landmarks Conservancy and the Municipal Art Society. In addition, the Commission has received numerous letters in support of designation.



Summary

The former New-York Cab Company Stable is a striking reminder of the time when horse-drawn carriages crowded Manhattan streets. Built in 1888-90, 318-330 Amsterdam Avenue was one of the earliest commercial stables on the Upper West Side and a fine example of a utilitarian structure erected in the Romanesque Revival style. It was designed by C. Abbott French, a New York architect who specialized in speculative residential and commercial work, particularly in this neighborhood and Harlem. The New-York Cab Company grew out of the livery firm Ryerson & Brown, founded by John Ryerson in the 1830s. Proposed in 1876 and incorporated in 1884, it sought to supply New York City with a “cheap and improved system of transit.” To accomplish this, the company adopted practices that are common in today’s taxicab industry. Passengers were charged a “fixed and moderate” fare, drivers were identified with badges, and carriages were painted the conspicuous color yellow. The company had at least ten midtown offices, particularly in the Herald Square and Times Square entertainment districts. Investors in the business included many prestigious New Yorkers, many who were involved in horse-related social activities, including William Jay, Frederic Bronson, and William K. Vanderbilt. The New-York Cab Company leased the Amsterdam Avenue building from its completion in 1890 to 1909. The gradual introduction of the automobile during the first decade of the twentieth century hurt business and beginning in 1910 the stable was leased to a succession of automotive tenants, including Sherman Square Motors and the Berkeley Garage. To accommodate these uses and retail tenants, the ground story of the Amsterdam Avenue façade was altered and various modifications were made to the interiors. Despite changes, the exterior of the garage is extremely well preserved, displaying an unusual scalloped cornice, intricate decorative brickwork, and much of the original fenestration.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Livery Stables and Transportation

Horse-drawn vehicles crowded the streets of American cities during the nineteenth century. These included omnibuses and street cars that followed a set route, and hackney coaches, carriages, and cabs that could be hired at specific locations. By the end of the century, there were an estimated 74,000 horses and 4,600 stables in New York City.¹ Unlike cars, which can be stored outside, horses must be quartered overnight in stables, structures built specifically to house, feed, and care for the animals. Wealthy families often commissioned private stables, small but often architecturally distinctive structures to accommodate horses, carriages, and attendants (grooms and coachmen). Typically located away from residential blocks, picturesque rows can be found along McDougal Alley, West 18th Street, East 69th Street and East 73rd Street in Manhattan, as well as on Grace Court Alley and Hunt's Lane in Brooklyn Heights and Verandah Place in Cobble Hill, Brooklyn (most of these stables are designated New York City Landmarks or are located in Historic Districts).

For commercial purposes, much larger stables were built: peddler stables, used by delivery firms and small businesses, and livery stables, where horses and carriages, sometimes with driver, could be leased by the hour. Commercial stables employed large staffs, including drivers, stable hands, washers, and hostlers. Most late nineteenth-century examples were multi-story structures, with separate levels for the vehicles and horses, as well as blacksmith shops and maintenance facilities. Typically, horses were kept on the lower level. Each stall "was provided with a rack for hay, a manger for the feed, and plenty of clean straw for bedding purposes." There was also a sewer to carry off waste and a central area where the animals could be "currycombed, brushed, and washed down."²

After the Civil War, many livery stables were built in Manhattan. The city was growing rapidly and most were in new residential districts, neighborhoods populated by the middle and upper middle class who increasingly lived in apartment houses. Livery stables that have become designated New York City Landmarks include the still-functioning Claremont Stables (Frank A. Rooke, 1892), a Romanesque-Revival structure on West 89th Street, and 117 East 75th Street (George Martin Huss, 1887-88, converted to a garage in 1912), a five-story-structure located in the Upper East Side Historic District, close to Lexington Avenue. Also of note is 157 Hudson Street (part of the Tribeca North Historic District), a commercial stable erected in stages, between 1867 and 1902. Today, a small number of commercial stables continue to operate in each of the five boroughs, with the majority of horse-drawn carriages serving tourists in Central Park.

Development of the Upper West Side³

Following the creation of Central Park (designed 1858), the Upper West Side became one of Manhattan's most desirable residential neighborhoods. While the earliest row houses date from the 1870s, the first major decade of development occurred during the 1880s – the same period the New-York Cab Company was planned and built. Such real estate speculation was shaped by the introduction of rapid transit. Major improvements included the extension of the 8th Avenue car line along Central Park to West 84th Street in 1864, the paving and widening of the Boulevard (later renamed Broadway) in the late 1860s, and the construction of the elevated railway, which began service along 9th Avenue (renamed Columbus Avenue in 1890), with stations at 72nd, 81st, 93rd, and 104th Streets, in 1879. Alongside the railway, multiple dwellings were built, primarily five-story structures with ground-level stores. Called tenements and flats, most were leased to working-class and middle-class tenants. The side streets, to the east and west, were developed as single-family residences, mainly row houses, four and five-stories tall. Both types of buildings were designed in popular revival styles, chiefly neo-Grec and Romanesque Revival.

The significant exception to this pattern was Amsterdam Avenue (known as 10th Avenue until 1890) the neighborhood's chief service corridor.⁴ Located between 9th Avenue and Broadway, it was an important transit route, served by a horse car line starting in 1878. Though tenements with street-level stores and an occasional hotel were built on or close to the avenue during the late 1880s, many structures were utilitarian, particularly a cluster of stables between 75th and 77th Streets. One of the earliest, proposed for the south side of 75th Street, was designed by Charles W. Romeyn in 1883. Though this building was not constructed, many stables would be built close by, along Amsterdam Avenue, and between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue on 75th and 76th Streets. The New-York Cab Company was the first large commercial stable constructed in the

area, followed soon after by the Mason Stable (later called the Dakota Stable, Bradford Lee Gilbert, 1891-92, significantly altered) at the southwest corner of Amsterdam Avenue and 77th Street.

The New-York Cab Company

More than twelve thousand yellow taxicabs currently operate in New York City. An important component of our public transportation system, they can be hailed on the street or found at taxi stands by hotels, train stations, and airports. It was in the late seventeenth century that the hackney coach, a horse-drawn vehicle for hire, was introduced in New York City.⁵ Public regulation of cab service originated in the early nineteenth century and by the mid-1870s the city was served by approximately 1,500 cabs and coaches – a number far lower than most European cities.⁶

The New-York Cab Company, Limited, was organized in 1876, but did not begin to operate until 1884. An ambitious and innovative firm, it sought to supply “a cheap and improved system of transit in New York.”⁷ To accomplish this, the company adopted or introduced practices that are common in today’s taxicab industry. Up until this time, local carriage drivers worked independently and charged fares that were considerably higher than cities in Europe. With \$500,000 in capital, the company intended to create a large fleet, charging customers a fixed rate of fifty cents (or less) per hour. The *New York Times* reported: “the cabs will be constructed of the best material, comfortable seats inside for four persons, and space on top for luggage. They will be drawn by good horses and supplied with careful and civil drivers in uniform.”⁸

Investors included many prestigious New Yorkers. At the heart of the enterprise were the livery stable owners (William T.) Ryerson & (Ira) Brown. Ryerson’s father, John, founded his livery business on University Place in the 1830s and by 1881 Ryerson & Brown employed 150 men.⁹ Brown served as the New-York Cab Company’s general manager and Ryerson as secretary and treasurer. Among the partners, a large number were involved in horse-related social activities. They included William Jay and Frederic Bronson, members of the New York Coaching Club, and William K. Vanderbilt, founder of the Jockey Club.

Based at the American Horse Exchange (1881-85, mostly demolished in 1910, incorporated into the Winter Garden Theater, a designated New York City Interior Landmark), just north of Times Square, the company managed approximately ten stables in midtown Manhattan. These locations were linked by telegraph (and later phone), making it possible to request carriages from railway stations, clubhouses, hotels and theaters. Service began in April 1884 with 17 four-wheeled cabs and by January 1885, the firm planned to have 100 two and four-wheeled vehicles available.¹⁰

To distinguish their cabs from rival firms, the New-York Cab Company began to paint them yellow in 1883, embellished with the “three plumes of the Prince of Wales.”¹¹ This is one of the first instances in New York City that a vehicle for hire was painted this color and the *Brooklyn Eagle* reported that “in another month every car in New York will be streaked with yellow.”¹² Legal action was taken to stop this trend and the court sided with the New-York Cab Company, ruling that while the color was not their exclusive property, they had established a trademark that deserved protection. In subsequent years, yellow became standard for cabs. John D. Hertz, founder of Chicago’s Yellow Cab Company in 1915, reportedly chose yellow having read a study at the University of Chicago that determined it to be the most visible color from a distance.¹³ The New-York Cab Company also experimented in a “small way” with timed fares, anticipating the present-day taximeter. According to William Fearing Gill, one of the company’s founders, the success of this experiment “proved incontestably what it would be were it adopted into general use or made mandatory by public ordinance.”¹⁴

After 1885, the New-York Cab Company began to expand operations, leasing additional offices, in midtown, Coney Island, and the Upper West Side. City directories list as many as eleven Manhattan locations during the 1890s when the firm was located on Amsterdam Avenue. These stables were strategically located, close to the entertainment districts in Herald Square and Times Square, near Fifth Avenue, and in the vicinity of Central Park. By 1896, the company employed nearly 200 drivers.¹⁵

Automobiles, introduced in the late 1890s, would transform the cab industry. Various technologies were tested during this period, including engines run by electricity and compressed air.¹⁶ In 1907, gasoline-powered cabs began operating in the city, equipped with modern taximeters. Though the New-York Cab Company continued to operate, it appears to have merged with a group of competitors, specifically the Taxi Service Company of New York, in 1910.¹⁷ The goal of such mergers was to reduce operating costs and at this time directories stopped listing the company at the Amsterdam Avenue location. In subsequent years, “driverless automobiles” were rented at livery stables and the number of horse-drawn vehicles sharply declined.

C. Abbott French & Company

The architect Charles Abbott French was active in New York City from approximately 1886 to 1907. He was based in Manhattan, working under the firm names of C. Abbott French & Co. (1887-90, after 1896), French, Dixon & DeSaldern (1890-93), and French & Dixon (1894-96).¹⁸ Little is known about his training and personal life. During the 1880s, his office was located at 200 West 57th Street. In 1892 he planned an “ideal country seat” for himself in Summit Ridge, New Jersey. A writer for the *New York Times* was impressed by the “old English design” and remarked that the cost of the home was “upwards of \$100,000.” The generous budget suggests that French had a successful practice and earned a good living building mostly row houses, apartment buildings, and commercial structures.¹⁹

Like many of his American contemporaries, French was an eclectic designer who worked in various popular styles. His earliest known buildings are located in the Carnegie Hill Historic District, two rows of Romanesque Revival-style houses on East 93rd and East 95th Streets, built in 1886-88. In the vicinity of the New-York Cab Company, he designed a Neo-Grec/Queen Anne style apartment house (1888-89) at the corner of Columbus Avenue and West 76th Street, and three Renaissance Revival-style houses along West 76th Street (1888-89, part of the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District). French, Dixon & Desaldern was also responsible for the Romanesque Revival-style Excelsior Stables (c. 1891), incorporating a similar multi-story brick arcade, located at 166-172 East 124th Street.²⁰ In subsequent years, French produced loft buildings and multiple dwellings throughout Manhattan, in SoHo, Greenwich Village, Chelsea, and Harlem.

Commercial Architecture and the Romanesque Revival

At the base of the stable’s 75th Street façade are three monumental round arches with decorative brick trim. These entrances, as well as the multi-story arcades and textured stone trim, distinguish the building as an adaptation of the Romanesque Revival. Inspired by French medieval sources and the German Rundbogenstil, this style was introduced in New York City during the 1840s. Early round-arched designs, such as the original sections of the Astor Library (now the Public Theater, begun 1854, a designated New York City Landmark), anticipate the work of the American architect Henry Hobson Richardson. Active from the 1860s until his death in 1883, he was one of the most influential architects of his age. Frequently imitated by his contemporaries, his bold designs typically incorporated rock-faced masonry, monumental arches, and multi-story arcades. A great variety of buildings in New York City were decorated in variants of this manner from the early 1880s to the mid-1890s. Notable surviving examples built for commercial purposes include the Puck Building (1885-86, 1892-94, a designated New York City Landmark), the United States Appraisers Stores (1892-99, a designated New York City Landmark), as well as buildings in the Tribeca Historic Districts. Architects who worked in the Romanesque Revival style frequently adapted decorative features taken from other contemporary architectural styles. The round-arched windows and mullions that crown each bay at the fifth story, for instance, suggest fanlights, features associated with the Queen Anne or Colonial Revival styles. Also suggestive of the Queen Anne style are the lines of decorative brick work that embellish the upper half of the pilasters. Both facades terminate in an elaborate and well-preserved cornice. While the rows of denticulated moldings are conventional, the projecting scalloped arches are unusual and suggest the influence of Moorish architecture. Cast iron reliefs of similar decorative origins also flank the entrance at the north end of the Amsterdam Avenue facade.

Construction

The building occupied by the New-York Cab Company was commissioned by William T. Walton. Residents of the Upper West Side, the Walton family owned a dry goods store on Eighth Avenue, near 51st Street.²¹ Walton acquired the Amsterdam Avenue site in July 1884 and plans for construction were filed with the Department of Buildings in March 1888. The estimated cost of construction was \$45,000. Work on the stable began in May 1889 and was completed in July 1890. The builder has not been identified. At the time of completion, the only stable in the immediate area was immediately to the west, on 75th Street. This location of the New-York Cab Company was first listed in city directories during 1891.

Subsequent History.

The introduction of the automobile hurt the New-York Cab Company and by 1910 most of the firm's stables had closed or were converted to garages. At this time, the Walton estate began a series of alterations, adding runways, walls, partitions, staircases, and storefronts during 1910 and 1911 (ALT 32-10, 1301-10, 3204-11).²² The architects were George F. Pelham, Fred Ebeling, and Eugene Schoen. It is likely that at this time the ground story of the Amsterdam Avenue façade underwent substantial change and that the building briefly served both horse-drawn vehicles and automobiles.

These changes guided future alterations made by the Walton family. Sherman Square Motors Corporation became the main tenant around 1924.²³ In addition to managing a three-hundred-car garage, it operated an auto repair shop. To accommodate such uses, the floors were strengthened with concrete and new elevators and signage were installed in 1921-22 (ALT 3019-21). The cost of these improvements was estimated to be more than \$20,000. A painted advertisement for Sherman Square Motors remains visible on the upper floors of the west elevation. Retail tenants included: the Graves Sales Corporation, for "Efficient, Prompt, Courteous, Battery Service;"²⁴ the Autopiano Company, a player piano store; a restaurant; and the Delce Hand Laundry.

The Walton family sold the building in 1946. From this time until the 1980s, it was occupied by the Berkeley Garage. The 4th edition of the *AIA Guide to New York City* described the building as: "Three great Romanesque Revival half-round arches on 75th Street trumpeted the entrance to the horses and drivers using this onetime multistory stable."²⁵ At present, the structure contains two restaurants and the Champion parking garage. The entrances are located on Amsterdam Avenue and 75th Street.

Description

The New-York Cab Company Building is located at the northwest corner of Amsterdam Avenue and West 75th Street. There are two *street facades*, faced in red brick and light-colored stone trim. Both the Amsterdam Avenue and West 75th Street facades are divided into four double bays. Each bay begins at the second story, rising from a continuous brick frieze that terminates at the fifth story with a round-arched window that consists of two windows crowned by a fanlight. The second, third, and fourth-story windows are flanked by shallow brick pilasters, with three vertical rows of brickwork that begin at the third story and conclude near the top of the fourth story. Both façades terminate with a prominent cornice. Painted black, it incorporates denticulated moldings, small scalloped arches, and a curved decorative element where the two facades meet.

On *Amsterdam Avenue*, the base has been altered to accommodate a sizable restaurant. It has a non-historic awning, windows, doors, and the surface is painted green. The entrance to the garage is located at the north end where there is a large entrance and an emergency exit. Both are painted white. Above the wide entrance are two non-historic signs, one horizontal, and the other, attached to the second and third stories, vertical. At the north end of the façade is a narrower opening, flanked by original cast-iron panels. Above this entrance, some windows have been sealed and a low bulkhead is visible on the roof.

The *West 75th Street façade* has fewer alterations. There are three monumental round arches. Trimmed with decorative brick work, the west and center arch rest on a textured granite base, painted white and black. The east arch is sealed and painted maroon. The granite base that flanks the east arch is not painted. The center arch incorporates a non-historic roll-down metal elevator door and a large entrance. There are fragments of historic iron lighting fixtures, left of the west arch and right of the center arch. A non-historic sign projects out from the west arch. There is a small window opening, with vertical bars, directly west of the west entrance. Between the west and central bay, projecting from the second and third stories, is a non-historic illuminated sign. Aligned with the center arch, on the roof, the brick bulkhead is visible. The east bay, second through fifth story, has a historic metal fire escape. Directly east of the fire escape is a non-historic parking sign. Below the fire escape, a small section of the ground story is painted green and has two glazed openings that serve the restaurant. The *west façade*, visible above the adjoining building, is faced in brick. Two historic painted advertisements are visible from the third story to the roof. The *north façade* is obscured by the neighboring structure.

Researched and written by
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NOTES

- ¹ “Stables” in Kenneth Jackson, ed.; *Encyclopedia of New York City* (Yale University Press, 1995), 1108.
- ² “How Horses Are Hired,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, June 19, 1873, 4.
- ³ This section is based on the *Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District Designation Report*, New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (1990).
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.
- ⁵ I. N. Phelps Stokes, *The Iconography of Manhattan Island, 1498-1909*, vol. IV, 392.
- ⁶ “A New Cab Company,” *New York Times*, September 26, 1876, 8.
- ⁷ *New-York Cab Company, (Limited)*, New York, New York, s.n. 1876.
- ⁸ “A New Cab Company.”
- ⁹ “Ryerson & Brown’s Failure,” *New York Times*, April 8, 1885, 8; “Death of William T. Ryerson,” *New York Times*, December 29, 1890, 5.
- ¹⁰ *Annual Report* (New-York Cab Company, 1884). In the first year of service, cheap cabs were a small part of the business. Much of the revenue was derived from general livery service.
- ¹¹ *Brooklyn Eagle*, April 20, 1884, 3.
- ¹² *Brooklyn Eagle*, May 4, 1884, 3.
- ¹³ “Yellow Cab,” last viewed at *Wikipedia*, October 13, 2006.
- ¹⁴ “Cheap Cabs in New York,” a letter to the editor of the *New York Times*, January 11, 1903, 33.
- ¹⁵ “The Cab Drivers’ Strike,” *New York Times*, December 19, 1896, 10.
- ¹⁶ “To Use Compressed Air for Cabs,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 9, 1897, 1.
- ¹⁷ “Taxicab Trust,” *New York Times*, April 6, 1910, 1; “Taxicab Combination,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 13, 1910, 5.
- ¹⁸ Dennis Steadman Francis, *Architects in Practice in New York City, 1840-1900* (1979), 32. Also see “Manhattan NB Database,” last viewed at www.methistory.com. During the 1890s, he worked with Robert Dixon, Jr., who designed several groups of row houses in the Park Slope Historic District, and Arthur DeSaldern.
- ¹⁹ “An Ideal Country Seat,” *New York Times*, June 19, 1892, 16.
- ²⁰ Michael Henry Adams, *Harlem, Lost and Found* (Monacelli, 2001), 218.
- ²¹ Little is known about the Walton family. Both father and son were named William. Both seem to have been involved in the dry goods business and lived on the Upper West Side. The 45-year-old son died in 1911.
- ²² Cited in the *Real Estate Guide and Record*, January 15, 1910; May 28, 1910; and December 1911.
- ²³ Sherman Square is located at the intersection of Broadway, Amsterdam Avenue and 70th Street. Also see “Commercial Leases,” *New York Times*, April 4, 1924, 34.
- ²⁴ *New York Times*, May 23, 1921, xx12; and May 2, 1921, 6.
- ²⁵ Norval White and Elliot Willensky, *AIA Guide to New York City* (2000), 344. Also see Robert A. M. Stern, Thomas Mellins and David Fishman, *New York 1880* (Monacelli, 1999), 750, footnote 75.

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 New-York Cab Company Stable 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 the New-York Cab Company Stable is a striking reminder of the time when horse-drawn carriages were an important mode of transportation in New York City; that this five-story Romanesque Revival style structure was built in 1888-90 and was designed by the New York architect C. Abbott French, a specialist in speculative residential and commercial work who active from the late 1880s to 1907; that the New-York Cab Company, incorporated in 1884, was one of the first firms to introduce low fare cab service in New York City; that it was one of the first companies to import hansom cabs and paint them yellow; that it operated offices in as many as ten midtown locations; that this location, at the northwest corner of Amsterdam Avenue and West 75th Street, was chosen because it was close to many new residential buildings and Central Park; that the company leased space in the building from 1891 to 1909; that in subsequent years it was converted to automotive use, accommodating cars, a repair shop, and retail uses; and that despite changes to the ground story, much of the building's brickwork and original fenestration is preserved.

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 New-York Cab Company Stable at 318-330 Amsterdam Avenue, aka 201-205 West 75th Street, as a Landmark, and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1167, Lot 29 as its Landmark Site.

Commissioners:

Robert B. Tierney, Chair; Pablo Vengoechera, Vice Chair

Stephen Byrns, Joan Gerner, Roberta Brandes Gratz, Christopher Moore, Richard Olcott, Margery Perlmutter, Jan Pokorny, Elizabeth Ryan.



The New-York Cab Company Stable
318-330 Amsterdam Avenue, aka 201-5 West 75th Street, Manhattan
Photo: Carl Forster



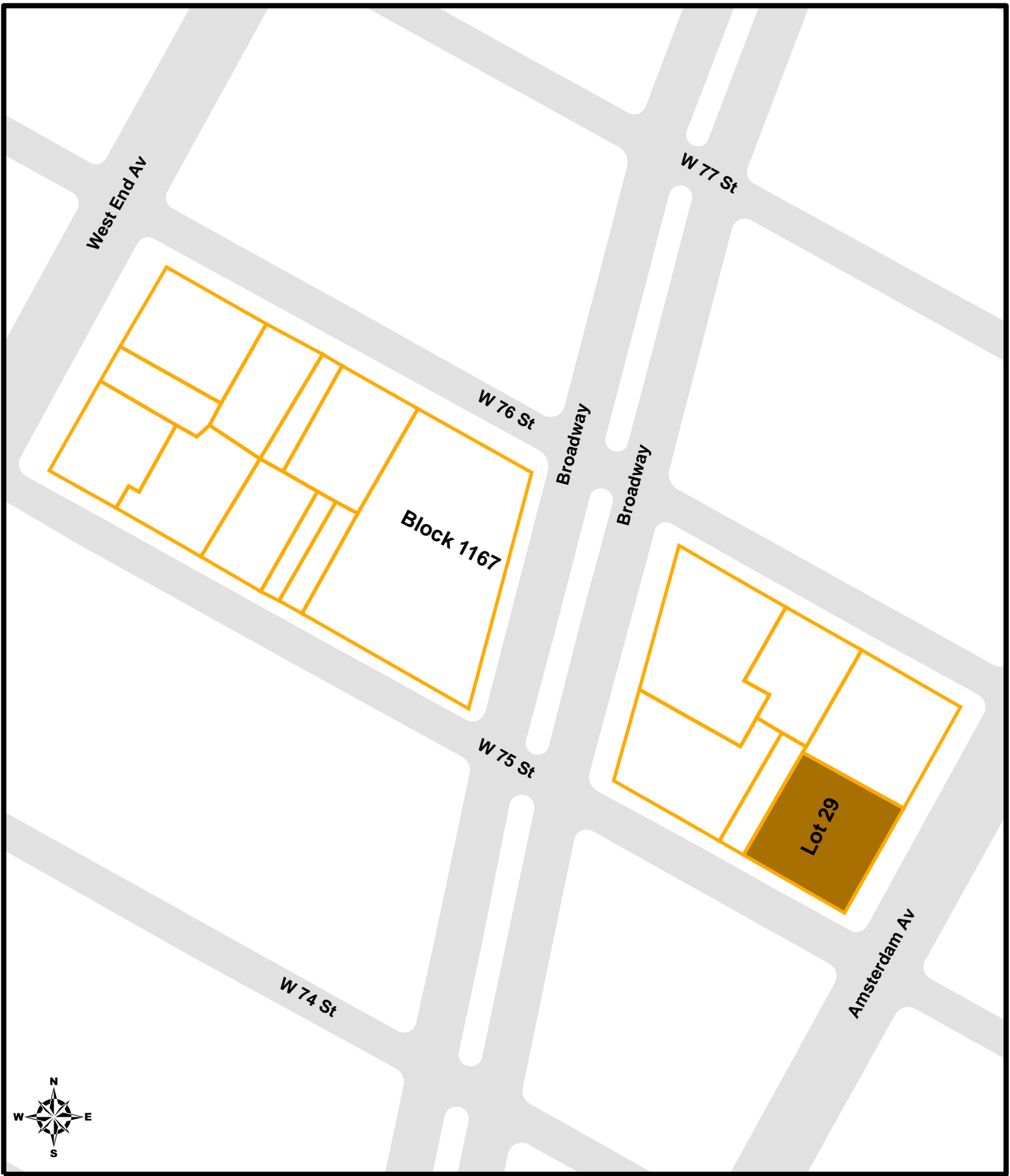
New-York Cab Company Stable
Views of West 75th Street elevation
Photos: Carl Foster



New-York Cab Company Stable
Views of windows on West 75th Street
Photos: Carl Forster



New-York Cab Company
Views of Amsterdam Avenue elevation
Photos: Carl Forster



New-York Cab Company Stable (LP-2209), 318-330 Amsterdam Avenue
aka 201-205 West 75th Street, Manhattan,
Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1167, Lot 29.

Graphic Source: New York City Department of City Planning, MapPLUTO, Edition 03C, December 2003