

412 East 85th Street House, 412 East 85th Street, MANHATTAN

Built: c. 1860: Architect undetermined

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1564, Lot 7503

On December 27, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of 412 East 85th Street House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 82). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. On January 31, 1967 a second hearing was held on the proposed designation as a Landmark of 412 East 85th Street House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (No. 32). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. At this hearing, no one testified in opposition or in favor of the designation.

On November 12, 2015 the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a special public hearing on Backlog Initiative Items in the Borough of Manhattan, including 412 East 85th Street House and related landmark site (Item III – Borough of Manhattan Group 1, B). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. The current owners of the house, Catherine De Vido and Susan Jordan, both spoke in favor of the proposed designation. Eight others spoke in favor of the designation as well, including Borough President Gale Brewer, Council Member Ben Kallos, and representatives from Carnegie Hill Neighbors, New York Landmarks Conservancy, Historic Districts Council, Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts and the Metropolitan Chapter for the Victorian Society in America. There were eighteen written submissions in favor of the proposed designation from individuals as well as Historic Park Avenue, and the Municipal Art Society. There were no speakers or written opposition against the proposed designation.

Statements about support for 412 East 85th Street House during the backlog process reflect specific testimony given or submitted during the hearing or while the record was open. In addition, the Commission received numerous more general communications about the backlog that were directed at all items on the backlog. These items were not specially submitted while the record was open. Due to the volume and variety of these more general emails they are not tallied for individual buildings.

Summary

412 East 85th Street House is a rare wood frame house on the Upper East Side. It is a vernacular Italianate style house built by an unknown builder before 1861. The house is one of only six pre-Civil War wood frame houses to remain on the Upper East Side and serves as a reminder of the earliest period of construction in this area of Manhattan.

The house is located in the Yorkville neighborhood. It was once a largely rural area with wealthy residents such as Peter Schermerhorn and Archibald Gracie, however the neighborhood rapidly became a community of German immigrants during the late-nineteenth century. Several factors lead to the increase in population of the area including the easy access to jobs at the breweries and Steinway Piano



Company just across the river in Astoria and the 1834 construction of a railroad station at East 86th Street and Fourth (now Park) Avenue.

For approximately 50 years the building was used as home and monument shop for John Herbst and his family. While the house has had many owners and a series of alterations over time, it nonetheless retains a sense of character and history, not only through its size and proportion and window openings, but also its sensitive details that are typical to the historic features of wood frame buildings of that time. Today the house stands as a reminder of Yorkville and the rural origins of this part of Manhattan in the late 19th century.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

412 East 85th Street is a three story wood frame house, with a raised brick basement, located on the south side of East 85th Street, 150.4' from the corner of First Avenue.

Primary Façade (North)

The primary (north) façade is three bays wide, clad in wood clapboards above the raised brick basement, with a wood porch at the first floor level, and wood trim. It has gone through a series of alterations over time, while retaining its overall historic character, including the locations and sizes of its entrance and windows.

Basement Level: The raised basement level is masonry with a running bond pattern, painted grey, and recessed beneath the wood frame porch. Simple square wood columns rest along a retaining wall, as well as a balustrade that matches the main level porch balustrade.

Porch: The wood porch and its roof extend across the three-bay width of the house. It has been removed and replaced in various forms throughout the building's history; the current configuration recreates the size and details as it appeared in historical photographs from 1916 and 1925. The porch has a wood balustrade with circular sectioned balusters, and three simple square columns with molded capitals supporting a flat porch roof, which features a simple paneled fascia with paired scrolled brackets above the columns. Wooden stairs lead up to the porch and the front entry in the east bay, and feature wood handrails on each side that continue the porch balustrade, terminating in square newels with simplified acorn finials.

Windows and surrounds: The house's fenestration retains its historical configuration. Historical photographs from 1925 show segmental arched window openings, with four-over-four sash windows with no shutters at the first floor, and two-over-two sash windows at the second and third floors. Existing first floor windows are rectangular tri-partite with small molded lintels, flat sills and flat frame molding surrounds. Each window has a pair of wood slat shutters painted to match the surrounding clapboards. Existing second and third story windows are one-over-one rectangular sash windows, with wood frames featuring infill expressing the historic segmental arch shape, simple lintels, and flat sills; and painted wood shutters similar to those on the first floor.

Cladding: The building is clad in one-by-ten inch beveled clapboards; as seen in historic photographs, it originally had smaller clapboards. The one-by-ten inch boards are thought to match boards found behind a second floor exterior wall.

Cornice: The cornice consists of a simple wood fascia with frame panels between scrolled brackets delineating the three bays below, supporting an overhanging eave.

Site features: The site of the house has a small planting bed with a concrete curb, bluestone paving, and a simple iron fence and gate.

SITE HISTORY

Yorkville and Its Early Development¹

The community of Yorkville, in the vicinity of present-day Third Avenue and East 86th Street, had its beginnings as a small village along the Boston Post Road. In the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, there were working farms in this area, as well as the estates of many prominent New York families, including Peter Schermerhorn, Jacob Astor and Archibald Gracie, along the nearby waterfront. The rapid growth of Yorkville was noted in 1826 by the *New York Evening Post*:

The 3rd Avenue passes through the village. Twelve months ago there were not more than two or three buildings on the barren rock, where there are now upwards of sixty, some of them built in a good substantial manner of brick...There are already several extensive factories established in the village.

A major boost to the development of the area was the 1834 construction of a railroad station at 86th Street and Fourth (now Park) Avenue, by the New York and Harlem Railroad, which had been incorporated in 1831 as Manhattan's first railroad. Horsecar lines ran along Second and Third Avenues by 1858; these were followed by elevated railway lines in 1877-80.

With the increase in railroad access to the area, carpenter-builders constructed rows of wood frame houses for middle-class families². Until the late 1880s much of the area was still wood frame houses, although many were being replaced by masonry row houses and tenements. Wood frame houses survived longer in Yorkville because the area was not generally favored by the wealthy for their residences, due in large part to the industries, transportation lines, and working class character of much of Yorkville. A number of frame structures, such as 160 East 92nd Street, managed to survive as evidence of Yorkville's earlier days.

Several periods of German immigration helped to establish the character of the neighborhood. Between 1860 and 1890, the German population of New York City increased from 15 percent to 28 percent of the city's total population. Yorkville's German population came in large part from what was known as Kleindeutschland (Little Germany), an enclave of German immigrants in today's Lower East Side. The German immigrants moved uptown between 76th and 100th streets, where affordable housing was readily available.³ Employment was provided by three breweries and their associated businesses (coopers, bottlers, etc.), and by the Steinway Piano Factory across the river in Astoria. Residents had easy transportation from Yorkville by ferry from the 86th Street terminus across the East River to Astoria.

Yorkville's population continued to grow as Irish immigrants, who participated in the construction of Central Park, the Croton Reservoir and the transportation lines, settled in Yorkville. By the turn of the century, Yorkville had become a destination for waves of German, Hungarian and Czechoslovakian immigrant families looking to escape the overcrowded tenement districts of Manhattan's Lower East Side⁴.

Wood Frame houses in Manhattan

Wooden buildings were erected in Manhattan, beginning in the seventeenth century and continued through the nineteenth century. Wood frame building construction was regulated in the city as early as 1761 due to their vulnerability to fire. "Fire limits", which were areas that prohibited wood frame construction, were created and extended northward as the city grew and developed in that direction. This was to prevent large fires from destroying blocks of buildings at one time. At the time of 412 East 85th Street's construction, the fire boundary was located around 32nd Street. In 1866 the limits were extended to 86th Street, and by 1887 as far north as 155th Street.⁵

Frame houses were particularly susceptible to demolition for redevelopment, and were often considered a potential blight on a neighborhood.

The Inspector of Buildings in 1871 reported that: ... men of moderate means build wooden houses in the sparsely settled districts of the present, which, in the progress of the future, become obnoxious to the conditions which deprecate property values, retard the progress of better improvements and at all times and under all circumstances increase, immeasurably, the fire risks of a city.⁶

Relatively few wood frame houses have survived intact in Manhattan. Many wooden buildings have been altered, or completely demolished as the need for larger and more fire resistant housing arose. 412 East 85th Street is one of just a handful remaining intact in Manhattan north of Greenwich Village.⁷ Very few wood frame structures survive in the entire section of Manhattan between 23rd Street and Harlem. Those that remain on the Upper East Side include Gracie Mansion (a designated New York City Landmark), 120 East 92nd Street (a designated New York City Landmark), 122 East 92nd Street (a designated New York City Landmark), 160 East 92nd Street (a designated New York City Landmark), 128 East 93rd Street (located in the Expanded Carnegie Hill Historic District), and 412 East 85th Street.

412 East 85th Street

The wood frame building at 412 East 85th Street is a three-story structure originally built as a single family home. The land on which it is located was once the farm of Yelles Hopper.⁸ According to tax assessments, the house was built in 1861 for James R. Reed.⁹ During this time, many wood frame houses were built by carpenter-builders, leaving no architect of record. In the 1890s the building was altered to create a three-unit apartment house with a retail ground floor.¹⁰ Around this same time, a rear addition was added, which appears on the Bromley map of 1902.¹¹ 412 East 85th Street changed ownership at least three times before 1901, all appear to have been of German origin, in keeping with the larger demographic of Yorkville. Sometime between 1901 and 1910, the house was sold to John Herbst.

Older photos of the house, dating around 1916, show that the elevated basement level was occupied by a marble monument manufacturer, and the 1910 census lists Herbst as a marble manufacturer. Herbst started the monument business with a Mr. Otto Schaefer in 1899, but by 1901 he had stopped Mr. Schaefer from participating in the business, and was sued for dissolution of the firm. Between 1899 and 1901 Mr. Herbst had changed the name of the monument business to J. Herbst and Sons Marble and Granite Monuments, and was operating out of the East 85th Street location.¹² When operating as the monument shop, the building was altered; in a 1916 photo from the Commission on Building Districts and Restrictions, the building had a three bay wide front porch, and a raised basement level. The report also noted that a monument from the shop, displayed on the sidewalk, fell and caused injury to a child resulting in the City of New York paying \$1,400 in damages.¹³

The monument shop operated at that location until the 1950s. Around this time, 412 East 85th Street was purchased by a Dr. Douglas Torre.¹⁴ Dr. Torre, a dermatologist, removed shingles that had long replaced the clapboard siding of the home and re-clad it to match older photographs of the clapboard

siding. He recreated some of the lost details of the vernacular Italianate style house, including rebuilding the historic three bay wide porch, which over the years had been altered to just one bay around the entry.¹⁵

Later History

The home went through several owners until 1996, and during this time fell into disrepair. It was then, in 1996, was purchased by the De Vidos who completed extensive work to reconstruct the façade of 412 East 85th as closely as possible to resemble the oldest photos of the home available to them according to an interview in *Preservation* magazine.¹⁶ The exact number of alterations and precise original details cannot be known due simply to the age of the building. The thoughtful and historically sensitive renovation work by the De Vidos allows the building to maintain its historical character. Today the house stands as a reminder of Yorkville and the rural origins of this part of Manhattan in the late 19th century.

Report prepared by
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Research Department

NOTES

¹ Portions of this section were adapted from LPC, *160 East 92nd Street House Designation Report* (LP-1630) (New York: City of New York, 1988), prepared by Jay Shockley

² Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Carnegie Hill Historic District Designation Report* (LP-0861), (New York City: City of New York, 1974)

³ Burrows, Edwin and Mike Wallace, *Gotham*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 745

⁴ Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Yorkville Bank Designation Report* (LP-2510), (New York City: City of New York, 2012)

⁵ Hand, Raymond T.B. "When Yorkville was a Village: Some of its Old Frame Houses Still Stand on East 92nd and East 93rd Streets." (*New York Sun*, Jan. 28, 1939), 44

⁶ Landmarks Preservation Commission, *160 East 92nd Street House Designation Report* (LP-1630), (New York: City of New York, 1988) report prepared by Jay Shockley

⁷ Landmarks Preservation Commission, *160 East 92nd Street House Designation Report* (LP-1630), (New York: City of New York, 1988) report prepared by Jay Shockley

⁸ Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, The New York Public Library, (1891), Plate 31 [Map bounded by 2nd Ave., E. 101st St., East River, E. 84th St.] Retrieved from <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/a1ebc562-2bbd-5f02-e040-e00a18064811>

⁹ New York City Municipal Archives, Record of Assessment, Manhattan 19th Ward 1859-1861 (lot 44 between 1st Avenue and Avenue A)

¹⁰ New York City Department of Finance, Conveyance Records, block 1564 lot 44

¹¹ George W. Bromley and Walter Bromely, "Plate 31, Part of Section 5; [Bounded by E. 89th Street, Avenue A, East 83rd Street and Third Avenue.], *Atlases of New York City* (G.W. Bromley Co., 1902), NYPL, 1898-1899

¹² "Business Trouble," *New York Times*, (July 11, 1901), 5

¹³ New York City Commission on Building Districts and Restrictions, "*Final Report*," (June 2, 1916), 330

¹⁴ New York City Department of Finance, ACRIS, block 1564 lot 44

¹⁵ "Manhattan Living," *H & G Remodeling Guide*, 1964

¹⁶ "Urban Renewers: Catherine and Alfredo De Vido restored a rare 1830 farmhouse in the middle of New York City," *Preservation* (November/December 2009), 43-46

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of the building and site, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the 412 East 85th Street House, has special character and 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 412 East 85th Street House is a rare wood frame house on the Upper East Side; that it is a vernacular Italianate style house built by an unknown builder before 1861; that the house is one of only six pre-Civil War wood frame houses to remain on the Upper East Side and serves as a reminder of the earliest period of construction in this area of Manhattan; that the house is located in the Yorkville neighborhood, a once largely rural area with wealthy residents; that for approximately 50 years the building was used as a home and monument shop for John Herbst; that the house retains many characteristic features of a wood frame house of its time, including its proportions, window openings and other details; that the sensitive details and renovations are typical of wood frame houses of the late nineteenth century; that the house remains a reminder of how Yorkville developed through the years of a growing New York City.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark 412 East 85th Street House, 412 East 85th Street, Borough of Manhattan, and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map 1564, Lot 7503 as its Landmark Site.

Meenakshi Srinivasan, Chair
Fred Bland, Diana Chapin, Wellington Chen,
Michael Devonshire, Michael Goldblum, John Gustafsson,
Jeanne Lufty, Adi Shamir-Baron, Kim Vauss, Commissioners



412 East 85th Street House
412 East 85th Street, Manhattan
Photo: Sarah Moses, 2016



412 East 85th Street House
Entry Door
Photo: Jessica Baldwin, 2016

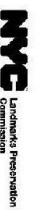


412 East 85th Street House
Photo: Landmarks Preservation Commission, c. 1965



412 East 85th Street House
Showing shingles and porch alterations
Photo: New York City, Department of Taxes (c. 1939-41), Municipal Archives

412 East 85th Street House | LP-0592



Legend

- Landmark Site
- Building Footprints
- New York City Tax Map Lots

Address: 412 East 85th Street
Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 1594,
Lot 7503
Public Hearing: December 27, 1966; January 31, 1967; November 12, 2015
Designated: December 13, 2016

Graphic Source: MAPPLUTO, Edition: 1814, Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, DHV, Date: 12.13.2016

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1 Av

