



HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL



A GUIDE TO HISTORIC NEW YORK CITY NEIGHBORHOODS

# MORNINGSIDE HEIGHTS

## MANHATTAN





The Historic Districts Council is New York's citywide advocate for historic buildings and neighborhoods. The Six to Celebrate program annually identifies six historic New York City neighborhoods that merit preservation as priorities for HDC's advocacy and consultation over a yearlong period.

The six, chosen from applications submitted by community organizations, are selected on the basis of the architectural and historic merit of the area, the level of threat to the neighborhood, the strength and willingness of the local advocates, and the potential for HDC's preservation support to be meaningful. HDC works with these neighborhood partners to set and reach preservation goals through strategic planning, advocacy, outreach, programs and publicity.

The core belief of the Historic Districts Council is that preservation and enhancement of New York City's historic resources—its neighborhoods, buildings, parks and public spaces—are central to the continued success of the city. The Historic Districts Council works to ensure the preservation of these resources and uphold the New York City Landmarks Law and to further the preservation ethic. This mission is accomplished through ongoing programs of assistance to more than 500 community and neighborhood groups and through public-policy initiatives, publications, educational outreach and sponsorship of community events.

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## A BRIEF HISTORY

Morningside Heights is graced with the highest concentration of institutional complexes built in a relatively short period at the turn of the 20th century, both in the city and anywhere in the United States. It is home to monumental places of worship, higher learning and healing, which accentuate its backdrop of rowhouses and apartment buildings, culminating in streetscapes that are both elegant and eye-filling. Topographically, it is situated on a plateau historically known as Harlem Heights, while geographically it is bounded by West 110th Street to the south, West 125th Street to the north, and two Frederick Law Olmsted–designed parks to the east (Morningside Park) and to the west (Riverside Park).

The first institution to move into the area was New York Hospital, which began purchasing land in 1816 to establish the Bloomingdale Insane Asylum (on the present-day campus of Columbia University) and the Leake and Watts Orphan Asylum (on the present-day campus of St. John the Divine) in 1821 and 1834, respectively. The stigma of an insane asylum, compounded by inadequate transit access to the area, hindered other development until the late 19th century, when the hospital auctioned off its real estate holdings and relocated to White Plains in favor of more space and fresher air. The asylum's relocation prompted a flurry of development by other institutions intent on expansion, starting with the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in 1887 and followed by St. Luke's Hospital, Columbia College and Teacher's College in 1892.

The introduction of the subway into Morningside Heights in 1904, coupled with the neighborhood's magnificent parks and prestigious institutions, led to a frenzy of speculative apartment house construction, attracting middle-class residents who could now commute directly downtown to work. Even before the advent of zoning regulations for land use, developers erected rowhouses and modest apartment buildings on the side streets and grand apartment houses on the avenues, with particularly monumental examples on Riverside Drive, Claremont Avenue and Cathedral Parkway, and mixed-use commercial buildings along Broadway, giving the neighborhood a heterogeneous yet cohesive character. Morningside Heights' unorthodox yet distinctive sense of place comes from the coexistence of residential and institutional clusters, as exemplified by elegant rowhouses and apartment buildings just steps away from renowned academic institutions and houses of worship.

Today the neighborhood still enjoys this singular sense of place. Its institutions are impressive examples of Beaux-Arts planning and design, including the graceful approach to Grant's Tomb, the entrance façades of St. John the Divine and Riverside Church aligned with the axes of 112th Street and 122nd Street, and especially Charles McKim's plan for Columbia University, whose symmetry and axial layout emphasize the monumentality and unity of the surrounding architecture. The residential architecture, though sometimes grand, offers a human scale and balance to the whole neighborhood.

## I. BRITANNIA

### 527 West 110th Street Waid and Waller, 1909

This grand apartment house was designed in the style of an Elizabethan manor house and resembles England's famed Hardwick Hall, which was described as having "more glass than wall" due to its numerous windows. The building features projecting bays, steep gables, multi-colored brickwork, and limestone and terra cotta trim.



## 2. ST. JOHN THE DIVINE

Amsterdam Avenue to Morningside Drive, West 110th to West 113th Streets

2a. Cathedral: Heins & LaFarge, 1891–1911, Ralph Adams Cram 1911–42

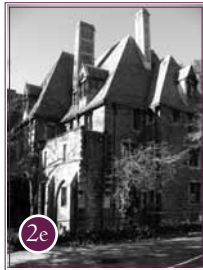
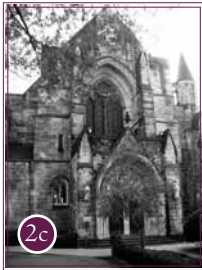
2b. St. Faith's House: John LaFarge, 1909



2c. Synod House: Ralph Adams Cram, 1911–13

2d. Choir School: Walter Cook and Winthrop A. Welch, 1912–13

2e. Episcopal Residence: Ralph Adams Cram, 1912

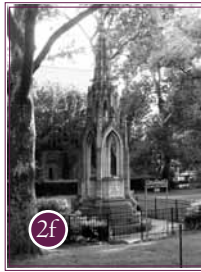


2f. Open-Air Pulpit: Howells & Stokes, 1913

2g. Leake and Watts Orphan Asylum: Ithiel Town, 1837–42

Heins & LaFarge won the design competition for their Byzantine/Romanesque/Gothic cathedral conception. One of its most prominent features is the Guastavino tiled dome, constructed as a temporary roof during fundraising for the massive central crossing tower, which was never completed. The cathedral famously suffered many setbacks, including waning public interest to provide funds, significant design alterations, the replacement of Heins & LaFarge

with Ralph Adams Cram, and building hiatuses during two world wars. Despite its uneven developmental history, the cathedral remains a fascinating juxtaposition of styles and construction technologies. Its subsidiary structures were built around the Close in Gothic variations. In spite of being unprotected by the Preservation Commission. In 2007, the cathedral leased the Close's southeast parcel for the construction of a residential high-rise, and there is currently a proposal to build two residential high-rises next to the Cathedral's north wall. The Greek Revival Leake and Watts Orphan Asylum, restored in 2006 and currently the home of the cathedral's tapestry conservation studio, is Morningside Heights' oldest extant structure.



ing an international icon, the New York City Landmarks



### 3. CROTON AQUEDUCT PUMPHOUSES

Amsterdam Avenue at West 113th and 119th Streets

Unknown Architect, 1870–73

West 119th St.:

*New York City Individual Landmark*

The Croton Aqueduct was constructed in 1835–42 as the city's first fresh water system, delivering water via a raised platform along Amsterdam Avenue. When the system was moved below ground, these granite pumphouses powered the water flow through the underground pipes.

### 4. FIRE ENGINE COMPANY 47 FIREHOUSE

500 West 113th Street

Napoleon LeBrun & Sons, 1889–91

*New York City Individual Landmark*

In the late 19th century, the city's fire services extended to Upper Manhattan through the construction of new firehouses. This Romanesque Revival firehouse, characterized by a highly ornamental façade of yellow brick, brownstone, terra cotta and cast-iron, was one of many designed by the firm of Napoleon LeBrun & Sons.



## 5. ST. LUKE'S HOSPITAL

Amsterdam Avenue to Morningside Drive,  
West 114th to West 115th Streets

Ernest Flagg, 1893

Plant & Scrymser Pavilion for Private

Patients: *New York City Individual Landmark*

The hospital's original design consisted of nine marble-clad pavilions with a central domed pavilion set back from 113th Street by a small courtyard. Its symmetrical Renaissance style bears much resemblance to the Luxembourg Palace in Paris. Due to lack of funds, some pavilions were simplified and not completed until much later. In the mid 20th century, alterations included the demolition of two pavilions along Amsterdam Avenue and removal of the central dome.



## 6. CHURCH OF NOTRE DAME

405 West 114th Street

Daus & Otto, 1910; Cross & Cross,  
1914

*New York City Individual Landmark*

*State and National Registers of Historic Places*

This French Neo-Classical church was donated by Geraldine Redmond after her son was cured at the famous pilgrimage site and sanctuary at Notre

Dame de Lourdes in France. Its interior grotto recalls the grotto of its namesake.

## 7. MORNINGSIDE PARK

Roughly between Morningside Drive  
and Morningside Avenue, West 110th  
to West 123rd Streets

Park: Frederick Law Olmsted &  
Calvert Vaux, 1883–95

Statue: Karl Bitter & Henry Bacon,  
1912

*New York City Scenic Landmark*

Morningside Park was an early city initiative to create an amenity out of undevelopable land. It is comprised of a narrow strip extending from West 110th to 123rd Streets and encompasses the dramatic escarpment which gives credence to “The Heights.” The park’s tiered design incorporates the land’s natural topography with a mix of picturesque and pastoral landscapes. The promenade on Morningside Drive features observation platforms, imposing stone steps and a statue of social reformer Carl Schurz.



## 8. COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Roughly between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue, West 114th to West 120th Streets

8a. Low Library: Charles McKim, 1895–97: *New York City Individual and Interior Landmark, State and National Registers of Historic Places*



8b. Butler Library: James Gamble Rogers, 1931–34

8c. Macy Villa/Buell Hall: Ralph Townsend, 1885

8d. St. Paul's Chapel: I. N. Phelps Stokes, 1903: *New York City Individual Landmark*

8e. Casa Italiana: McKim, Mead & White, 1926–07: *New York City Individual Landmark, State and National Registers of Historic Places*

Charles McKim designed the campus in the Beaux-Arts style popularized at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. Its focal point is Low Library, designed in the Roman Classical style, with Italian Renaissance–inspired classroom buildings flanking it in the forecourt and rear. Fashioned after the Baths of Caracalla and the Pantheon, the library's granite dome is the country's largest. The university outgrew Low Library in the 1920s, and a new library named for then president Nicholas Murray Butler was built on the campus' southern end. A highlight of the campus is St. Paul's Chapel, designed in a Lombardic style using the red brick and limestone motif of the campus classroom buildings. The only extant building of the Bloomingdale complex is Macy Villa (currently Buell Hall), which was constructed as a residence for mentally-ill, wealthy male patients. On Amsterdam Avenue is Casa Italiana, a cultural center designed to evoke a Renaissance palazzo.



## 9. BARNARD COLLEGE

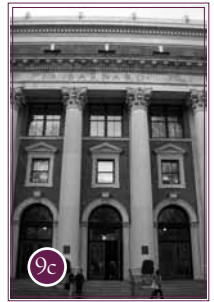
Roughly between Claremont Avenue and Broadway, West 116th to West 120th Streets

9a. Milbank, Fiske and Brinckerhoff Halls: Charles Rich, 1897–98

9b. Brooks and Hewitt Halls: Charles Rich, 1906–08 and McKim, Mead and White, 1926–27

9c. Students' Hall/Barnard Hall: Arnold Brunner, 1916

After a lengthy campaign for women's education at Columbia College, Barnard College was established with funds from wealthy female donors. The college was named after Frederick A. P. Barnard, the recently deceased president of Columbia College. Its first buildings, Milbank, Fiske and Brinckerhoff Halls, form a U-shaped complex that references Columbia's Beaux-Arts style, with red brick and limestone façades incorporating Classical and Renaissance motifs such as ornamental quoins, cartouches, roundels and keyed window surrounds. The construction of dormitories soon followed. Brooks Hall mimics the Milbank complex, but includes a large portico. The Renaissance-inspired Hewitt Hall was built later to accommodate the college's growing population. With views to the river blocked by new construction on Claremont Avenue, Barnard re-oriented itself eastward with a new student center called Students' Hall (later renamed Barnard Hall), aligned with an entrance gate on Broadway.



## 10. TEACHERS COLLEGE

Roughly between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue, West 120th to West 121st Streets

10a. Main, Macy and Milbank Memorial Halls: William Potter, 1892–97

10b. Horace Mann School: Howells

& Stokes with Edgar A. Josselyn, 1899–1901

10c. Whittier Hall: Bruce Price, 1900–01

10d. Grace Dodge Hall: Parish & Schroeder, 1909



Teachers College began as the Kitchen Garden Association, a charity to educate working class youth in domestic arts. The campus' buildings are remarkable in their stylistic cohesion despite being the work of numerous architects. The Collegiate Gothic-style Main, Macy and Milbank Memorial Halls are the campus' first buildings. They are made of red brick with brownstone trim and feature picturesque rooflines with gables, dormers and lantern towers. Horace Mann School, the campus' most westerly building, features Gothic and Renaissance details, including burned brick diaper patterns, a steeply sloped roof and a large ornate cupola. Whittier Hall, the campus' most easterly building, takes design inspiration from Horace Mann, but on a grander scale, with red brick diaper patterns, stone trim, large gables and a central cupola. Grace Dodge Hall (not pictured), oriented to the south and barely visible, is distinguished by a clock tower above the main entrance.



## II. BANCROFT HALL

509 West 121st Street  
Emery Roth, 1910–11

This fanciful Vienna Secessionist style building features copper-clad bay windows and a timber Tuscan-style roof. Originally an apartment house, Teachers College purchased the building in 1919 to serve as a dormitory. Emery Roth is renowned for the iconic Central Park West apartment buildings The Beresford, The San Remo and The Eldorado.



## 12. UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Roughly between Claremont Avenue and Broadway, West 120th to West 122nd Streets

Allen & Collens, 1910

*State and National Registers of Historic Places*

This English Gothic complex was inspired by the institutions of Oxford and Cambridge, England and was widely praised by architecture critics and the media. The James Memorial Chapel is the architectural crown of the campus. Its façades are clad in Manhattan schist quarried directly from the foundation, a novel but lauded concept at the time. Its architects designed many institutional buildings in the neighborhood.

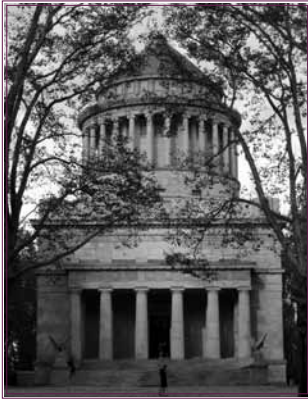


### 13. JEWISH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

3080 Broadway

William Gehron, 1930

The Jewish Theological Seminary building is made up of three interconnected wings in the Colonial Revival style. The building's most pronounced feature is its tall entry tower, which features a Lee Lawrie-sculpted representation of the burning bush above its grand arched entryway.



### 14. GENERAL GRANT NATIONAL MEMORIAL

West 122nd Street and Riverside Drive

John Duncan, 1890–97

*New York City Individual and Interior Landmark*

*State and National Registers of Historic Places*

This Classical Revival mausoleum, the largest in the United States, is the resting place of President Ulysses S. Grant and his wife, Julia Dent Grant. Its design is based on the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Once one of the most popular tourist destinations in the city, it is run by the National Park Service.

### 15. RIVERSIDE CHURCH

490 Riverside Drive

Allen & Collens with Henry C. Pelton,

1927–30

*New York City Individual Landmark*

Riverside Church, conceived as an ecumenical Christian center and funded by John D. Rockefeller, features the tallest Gothic-style tower in the United States at 392 feet. The church is clad in Indiana limestone and its interiors are faced with Guastavino acoustical blocks. Though invisible, the church's most marked feature is its steel structure, which used skyscraper construction methods rather than medieval load-bearing wall construction, like St. John the Divine. Harnessing this modern technology, Riverside Church was completed in just three years. Consistent with its ecumenical mission, its entrance portal bears the faces of scientists, philosophers and leaders of diverse religions.



## 16. RIVERSIDE DRIVE AND PARK

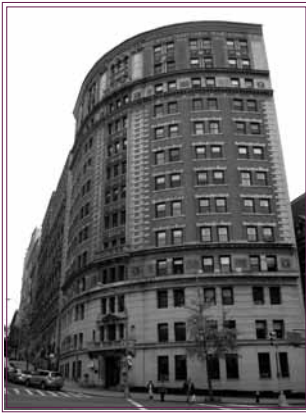
Drive: West 72nd to West 181st Streets, east of Riverside Park; Park: West 72nd to West 158th Streets, west of Riverside Drive

Frederick Law Olmsted, 1873–80

*New York City Scenic Landmark*

*State and National Registers of Historic Places*

In 1865, the Parks Department proposed a park and drive to stretch from 72nd to 129th Streets along Manhattan's western cliff to obscure the industrial waterfront below and attract residential development at grade. As conceived by Olmsted, the drive was both scenic and functional, while the park afforded access to river views via winding foot paths and a promenade along the park's edge. Augmented by service roads and mini green spaces to enhance the park-going experience, Riverside Drive is an outstanding example of Olmsted's vision for parkway planning.



## 17. THE PATERNO

440 Riverside Drive

## THE COLOSSEUM

435 Riverside Drive

Schwartz & Gross, 1909 and 1910

Joseph, Charles, Michael and Anthony Paterno were prolific apartment house builders in Morningside Heights between 1898 and 1924. The Paterno (not pictured) and the Colosseum were constructed across 116th Street from one another on the corner of Riverside Drive. Both buildings feature curved corner façades with stone bases and Renaissance ornamentation.

## 18. 619–627 WEST 113TH STREET

C. P. H. Gilbert, 1897–08

This sophisticated row of single-family houses features Colonial motifs such as rounded bays and oriels, rectangular and segmental-arch entrances and leaded-glass transoms and fanlights. Numbers 623–627 housed an Episcopal convent before they were purchased in 2010 by Columbia University, which plans to convert them into a student-faculty center.



# MORNINGSIDE HEIGHTS

