

Mason Stable Building, later Dakota Stable and Pyramid Garage 348-54 Amsterdam Avenue

Constructed in two stages, in 1891-92 and 1893-94, the former Mason (or Mason's) Stable Building is a striking reminder of the time when horses were the predominant mode of transportation in New York City and structures to quarter the animals were common. The opening of the Ninth Avenue el in 1880 brought many new residents to the area and Tenth Avenue (renamed Amsterdam Avenue in 1890) became the neighborhood's chief service corridor, with multiple stables gathered here. One of the largest stables in the area, the five-story structure accommodated more than 150 horses and 300 carriages. Like the New York Cab Company (1888-90), at the corner of Amsterdam Avenue and 76th Street, it was a livery stable where vehicles and drivers could be leased on a long or short-term basis. Commissioned by Edmund Coffin, Jr. (1844-1929), a banker and real estate investor, the building is notable for its distinctive design, combining features associated with both the Romanesque Revival and Dutch Renaissance Revival styles. Color and texture, rather than ornament, were skillfully used to give the structure its simple, yet monumental character.

Bradford Gilbert (1853-1911), a prolific railway station and exposition building architect, was responsible for the design and construction. He is best remembered for the Tower Building (1890, demolished), the first steel skeleton framed skyscraper to rise in New York City. This pioneering work is recalled in some of the Mason Stable's ornament and in the general arrangement of the fenestration. Some alterations have been made to the base and the tawny brick has been painted, but for the most part the original features remain intact: slender groups of windows set into keyed reddish brick surrounds, a shallow cornice incorporating a continuous blind arcade, and a pair of stepped gables that originally served as entrance portals.

After 1912, the building was renamed the Dakota Stables and was converted to use as a garage. At this time, the elevators were repositioned, the floors were strengthened with reinforced concrete, and gasoline pumps and automobile turntables were installed on the ground floor. In the 1950s it was called the Pyramid Garage, perhaps inspired by the entrance gables that enliven the base of each façade.