

POMANDER WALK, Numbers 3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,15,16,17,18,19,20,21,22, Pomander Walk, 261, 263,265,267, West 94th Street, and 260,262,264,266,270,272,274, West 95th Street, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1921; architects King & Campbell.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1242, Lot 10 in part excluding the land on which the Healy Building at 2521-2523 Broadway is situated.

On February 9, 1982, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of Pomander Walk (Item No. 10). The hearing was continued to April 6, 1982 (Item No. 6). Both hearings were duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. A total of 71 witnesses spoke in favor of designation at the two hearings. There were four speakers in opposition to designation. In addition, the Commission has received many letters and petitions in support of this designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Pomander Walk extends through the middle of the square block bounded by Broadway and West End Avenue, 94th and 95th Streets, on Manhattan's Upper West Side. The complex is composed of sixteen two-story houses facing the private walk and nine three-story and two two-story buildings facing onto the street. Pomander Walk has a unique sense of place; secluded from the street, the walk is a delightful world of picturesque dwellings replete with half timbering, gables, and other vernacular Tudoresque embellishments. The almost magical atmosphere created by this small residential enclave was very much the intention of Thomas Healy, who in 1921, commissioned the architectural firm of King & Campbell to design a residential complex that would recreate the village atmosphere of Lewis Parker's then popular period comedy, Pomander Walk. The area around the walk is now entirely built up, but the buildings of Pomander Walk, both interior and exterior, remain largely unchanged since "light housekeeping" flats were first rented there some 60 years ago. Pomander Walk has special interest not only for its unique sense of place and architectural merit but also for the story of its creation; it is a prototypically "American" tale combining a pragmatic entrepreneurial spirit with an unabashed romanticism.

The Development of the Area¹

Until its urbanization at the end of the nineteenth century, the Upper West Side of Manhattan was referred to as Bloomingdale. By the end of the eighteenth century Bloomingdale Road, which ran through the area, provided the main link between the city in lower Manhattan with the farmland of the Upper West Side; its presence gradually encouraged the growth of small villages along its course and the establishment of country seats in the adjoining areas by wealthy New York families.

The Bloomingdale area itself retained much of its rural character until late in the nineteenth century. Eventual development as an integral part of the city was foreseen, however, as early as 1811, with the Commissioners' plan which imposed the uniform grid of broad avenues and narrow streets on Upper Manhattan. The residential development of Bloomingdale continued slowly until accelerated by the opening of transportation links. The first was provided by the Hudson River Railroad, which opened several local stations along the Bloomingdale Road on the route between New York and Albany. In 1878, the Ninth Avenue El was extended to 155th Street and the cable traction cars followed along Amsterdam Avenue in 1885. Finally, in 1893, approval was given for the extension of the proposed Broadway subway line, with a station provided for 96th Street.

complementary landscaping. Thus, it may be seen as part of a historicizing architectural tradition which seeks to recall values and associations of an earlier era in a modern context. This tradition produced such buildings as Roman temple facades in the eighteenth century, Gothic Revival buildings in the nineteenth century, and colonial-style residences in the twentieth-century American suburbs. In this tradition, the effect created is just as important as the overall design and details used to create the effect. Built by an immigrant Irishman able to indulge his "dream," Pomander Walk is a delightful architectural whimsy which now everyone can enjoy.

Pomander Walk, the narrow street onto which sixteen of the houses front, extends through the block from 94th Street; it is closed to all but pedestrian traffic. The entire Pomander Walk complex is situated on an L-shaped lot with the outer perimeter lined by twelve buildings facing 94th and 95th Streets. These facades form a protective wall enclosing the single "village" street within. The walk itself is raised above the level of the street and entered through a gate at either end; this accommodates a change from the three-story building height of the houses facing the street to the two-story building height of the structures on the Walk.

Each house in the complex was designed to accommodate two families, but single entrance doors create the illusion of individual cottages. The cottages, though similar to each other, express much individuality. Many of the houses (Nos. 4, 7, 9, 15, 17, and 20) are crowned by gables of uniform height. The others (Nos. 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 16, 18, 19, 21, 22) have sloping roofs. The facade materials of the houses on the Walk are a mixture of brick, stucco, painted wood trim and wood half-timbering. Those on the street use ashlar along the ground story with brick and stucco, with half-timbering above. It is an interesting feature of the design of the Walk that all the inner buildings are constructed of more fragile materials whereas the outer buildings are faced in large parts with the relatively sturdier brick and stone. This use of contrasting materials as well as the prominent round brick bays which project into the Walk at either end reinforce the feeling that the inner walk is an enclave protected by heavier outer skin. Color is an important element at Pomander Walk. The stone is gray, the brick is russet, and the stucco uniformly buff white. The inner complex is enlivened, however, by painted wood details in bright colors such as green, red, and blue. The entrances have single-leaf painted wood doors with square heads (Nos. 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22) or round heads (Nos. 6, 8, 18). One of the door entrances is capped by a gabled hood (No. 20) while several have shed roofs (Nos. 3, 5, 7, 10, 15, 16, 19, 22). All buildings have concrete stoops of two or three steps.

The vernacular Tudoresque vocabulary is used with great authority in the King & Campbell design, particularly on the houses facing the Walk itself. Typical are the roof gables and door hoods as well as the window detailing which includes painted wood shutters and window boxes attached with brackets. Half-timbering is the Walk's most characteristic Tudor feature. It is used on second stories and placed in the intersecting roof gables (Nos. 4, 7, 9, 17, 20). All windows have double-hung wood sash. Parapet walls with tile copings mark the boundaries between the individual buildings.

One of the impressive features of Pomander Walk is its skillful use of landscape elements. On this narrow pedestrian street the small-scale houses are set behind individual miniature hedges and flowerbeds, creating a tranquil, secluded, livable environment -- a startling contrast to the bustle of nearby Broadway. The small Tudoresque window boxes also contribute to the charm of the Walk. Additional property features of note are the sentry box located close to the 95th Street gate and the two small iron lampposts located at either end of the Walk.

The outer facades of the Walk along 94th and 95th Streets also have features of note. Along the 94th Street side two buildings flank the entrance gateway on either side. These are faced with rough-cut gray ashlar on the first floor with brick and stucco above. Some half-timbering is also used. The gateway itself is of stone and crowned by a crowing rooster of painted metal -- a well-beloved symbol of the Walk. A painted wooden sign announces the name of the Walk. On West 95th Street the gateway created by a rough stone arch is likewise flanked by buildings (two toward the east, five to the west). The name of the Walk is inscribed on the datestone which crowns the gateway. The paired buildings which flank the 95th Street gateway are similar to those on 94th Street. At the first story level they are continuous ashlar with stucco above; the outer buildings of the pairs (Nos. 258 and 266) also use half-timbering. Iron grille-work is found on the street buildings at ground floor level. To the west on the 95th Street side there is a secondary gateway entrance leading to the rear service yards. Three two-story buildings fill in the corner of the lot on 95th Street and West End Avenue. One of these (No. 270 West 95th Street) is of stucco with half-timbering while the end buildings (Nos. 272 and 274) combine brick with stucco and wood.

Although often compared to other New York City enclaves, Pomander Walk stands apart as it was planned -- a residential private street introduced into Manhattan's regular grid plan. Other similar streets, usually mews, are lined with buildings originally intended for other uses, most typically stables and carriage houses. Pomander Walk is one of the last rowhouse developments in Manhattan and certainly on the Upper West Side. The Walk is also different from the usual rowhouses which were built facing the city streets in groups and intended for speculative sale. Pomander Walk embodies a plan to create a self-contained, unified residential community. Thomas Healy built the Walk as a residential rental property, and it continued to be so held.

Pomander Walk with its unique residential ambience, contrasts greatly to the remainder of the Healy Block. Since Pomander Walk was primarily inspired by the theater, it seems appropriate that many of its residents, both past and present, should be connected with the performing arts and with New York's cultural life. Many prominent New Yorkers have lived on the Walk. One is able to say with a probable degree of certainty that the following well-known people lived or now live there. These include the actress Rosalind Russell, actors Louis Wolheim and Herbert Stoddard, film stars Madeline and Nancy Carroll as well as the well-known theater critic Ward Morehouse. One of the Walk's most famous residents,¹² Lotta Van Buren, a world authority on ancient music, gave cottage concerts at the Walk during the 1930s. These concerts and the publicity they received helped to bring this hitherto little-known music of the medieval and Renaissance periods to the attention of a wider audience. In addition to Pomander Walk, Healy built his famous Sunken Garden restaurant on the block and one of the early interior ice skating rinks was also located on the site. Later the Thalia Movie Theater came to the Healy block where it still remains. Another movie theater, the Symphony, also was located on the Healy block; it is now the Symphony Space.¹³

Although the face of the Healy block and the surrounding neighborhood has been greatly altered, Pomander Walk continues to be an enclave much prized both by those who live there and the many who visit it. From its inception, Healy's Pomander Walk has commanded attention. Written about with enthusiasm in the 1920s, Pomander Walk is praised in our day for its unique sense of place and unparalleled contribution to the urban fabric.

FOOTNOTES

1. This information on the history of the Upper West Side is taken from: Landmarks Preservation Commission, Riverside Drive - West 105th Street Historic District Designation Report (LP-0323), (New York: City of New York, 1973).
2. For biographical information on Healy see his obituary, New York Times, May 10, 1927, p. 27, and Solomon Asser and Hilary Roe, The Development of the Upper West Side to 1925, Thomas Healy and Pomander Walk (M.S. Thesis, Columbia University, 1981).
3. Danton Walker, "Broadway," New York Daily News [May 1927?], clipping.
4. Ibid.
5. New York Times, May 12, 1927, p. 46.
6. New York Times, April 29, 1920, p. 26. In 1928 the lease was transferred by Higgins to Healy's heirs. (New York County Register's Office, Liber Deed 3649, page 278 ff). In 1952 the trustees of Higgins' estate transferred the land title to the Healy heirs; the 200-year lease was reaffirmed at the same time (Liber Deeds 4766, page 675 ff).
7. New York Times, January 8, 1978, Section 8, p.1.
8. Louis M. Parker, Pomander Walk (New York: John Lane Co, 1911), p.2.
9. Ibid, p.3.
10. New York Times, March 5, 1935.
11. New York Times, February 8, 1958.
12. New York Times, April 30, 1937, p. 10.
13. The Thalia is a unique movie theater. Many New Yorkers had their first opportunity to see a wide spectrum of avant-garde, foreign, and documentary films at the Thalia. For further history see: New York Times, August 31, 1973, p. 8.

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FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, architecture, and cultural features of this property the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that Pomander Walk has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City.

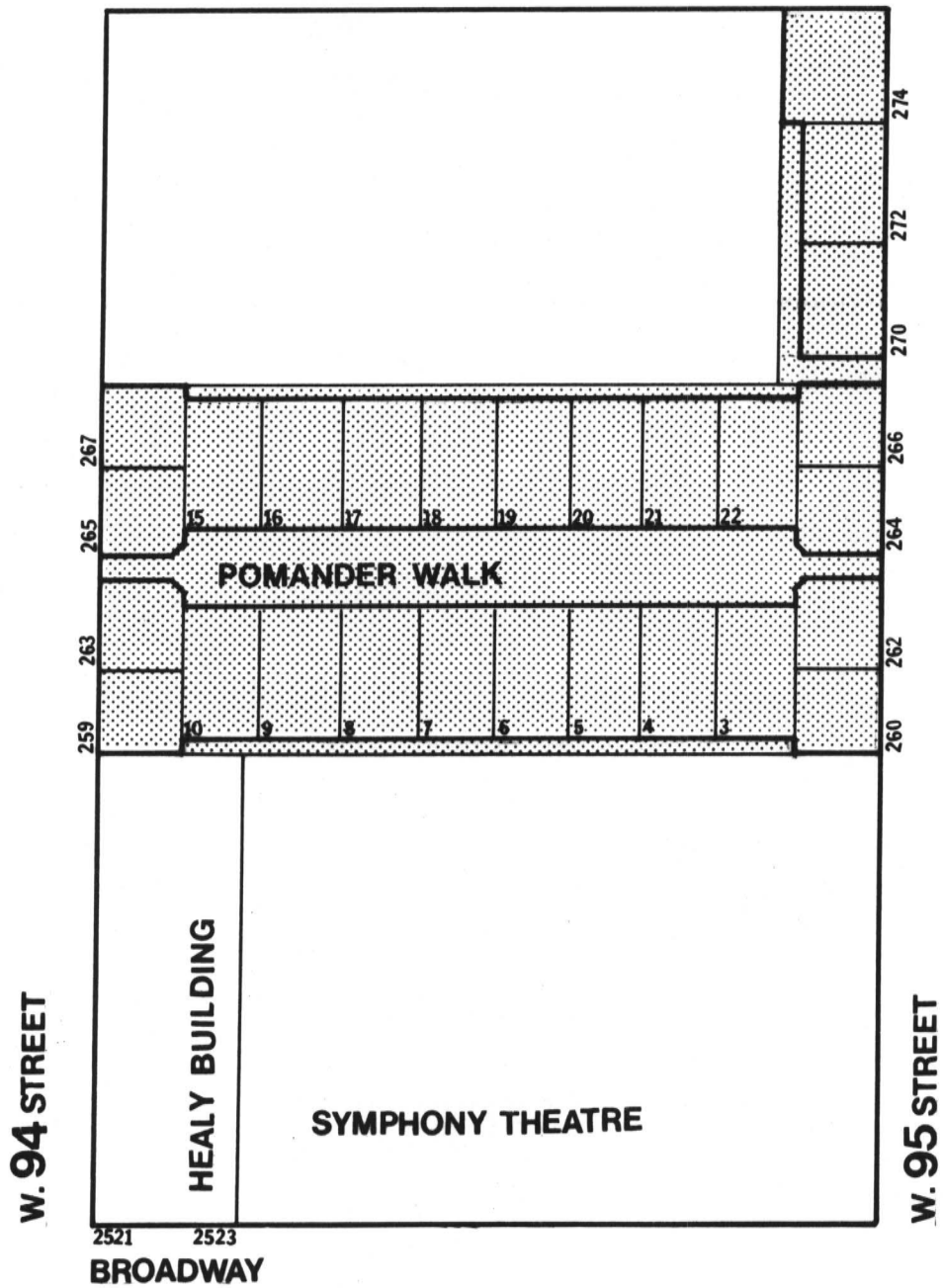
The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, Pomander Walk is a planned residential enclave designed by the architectural firm of King & Campbell; that it was commissioned in 1921 by Thomas Healy, a successful restaurateur and real estate developer with a long-time interest in the theater; that the design was intended to recreate the atmosphere of the successful Broadway play, Pomander Walk; that the complex evokes the atmosphere of an idyllic English village street through the use of intimate scale, Tudoresque detailing, contrasting materials and textures, and complementary landscaping; that Pomander Walk may be seen as part of a historicizing architectural tradition which seeks to recall associations of an earlier era in a modern context; that with a design closely inspired by the theater, it has had many residents associated with the performing arts and theater; and that as a carefully-planned secluded enclave set apart from the bustling Upper West Side about it, Pomander Walk has a unique sense of place and lasting appeal.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21 (formerly Chapter 63) of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark, Pomander Walk, Numbers 3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10, 15,16,17,18,19,20,21,22 Pomander Walk, 261, 263,265,267 West 94th Street, and 260,262,264,266,270,272,274 West 95th Street, Borough of Manhattan, and designates Tax Map Block 1243, Lot 10 in part excluding the land on which the Healy Building at 2521-2523 Broadway is situated, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

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- Asser, Solomon, and Røe, Hilary. The Development of the Upper West Side to 1925, Thomas Healy and Pomander Walk. M.S. Thesis, Columbia University, 1981. Contains a detailed bibliography.
- Landmarks Preservation Commission. Riverside Drive-West 105th Street Historic District Designation Report (LP-0323). New York: City of New York, 1973.
- New York County Register's Office. Liber Deeds and Mortgages.
- New York Times. April 29, 1920, p. 6; April 19, 1921, p. 11; April 24, 1921, Section 9, p. 1; May 10, 1927, p. 27; May 12, 1927, p. 46; March 5, 1935 (King obit.); April 30, 1937, p. 10; February 8, 1958 (Campbell obit); Jan. 8, 1978, Section 8, p. 1.
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- _____. Pomander Walk: A Comedy in Three Acts. New York: Samuel French, 1915
- "Pomander Walk, New York," Architecture and Building, 54 (January 1922), 3-5.

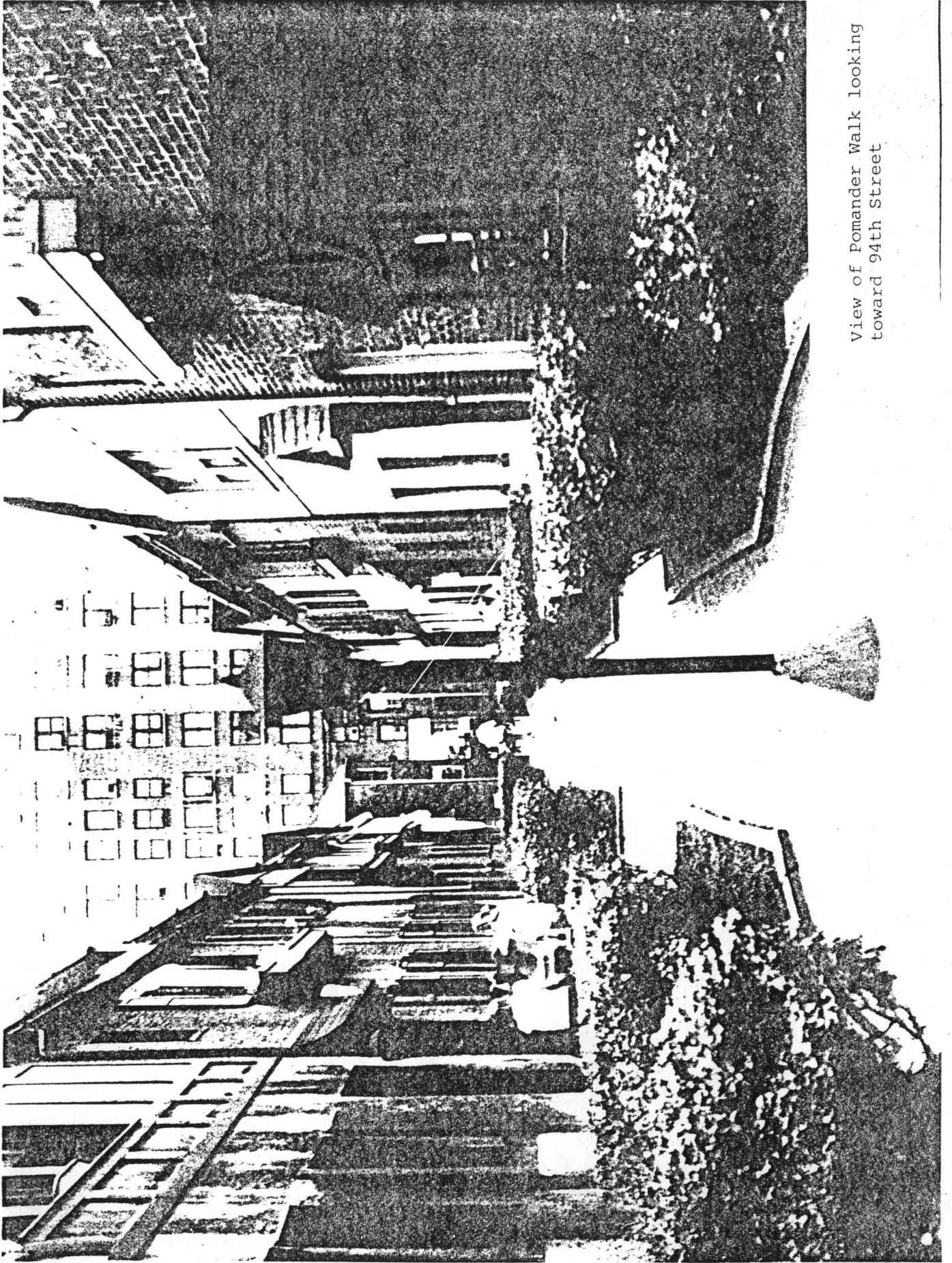
WEST END AVENUE



POMANDER WALK
MANHATTAN
Block 1242, Lot 10 (part)



View of Pomander Walk:
West 95th Street between
West End Avenue and Broadway



View of Pomander Walk looking
toward 94th Street



Pomander Walk Street Sign