

Landmarks Preservation Commission  
February 19, 1980, Designation List 132  
LP-1089

ISAAC L. RICE MANSION, 346 West 89th Street, Borough of Manhattan.  
Built 1901-03; architects Herts & Tallant.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1250, Lot 61.

On September 11, 1979, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Isaac L. Rice Mansion and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 3). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Twenty witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were fifteen speakers in opposition to designation. The Commission has received many letters, petitions, and similar expressions both supporting and opposing the designation. A hearing was held previously by the Commission on this item on July 24, 1973.

#### DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The imposing Isaac L. Rice Mansion, built in 1901-03, is one of two freestanding mansions to survive on Riverside Drive. As such it is a reminder of the period in the early 20th century when Riverside Drive was lined by elegant single-family residences, serving as the West Side counterpart to Fifth Avenue on the East Side. Impressively sited, the Rice mansion was designed by the noted theater architects Herts & Tallant and is one of their rare residential commissions in New York City.<sup>1</sup> While it features elements of neo-Georgian and Beaux-Arts design, the mansion displays the highly individualistic character which Herts & Tallant brought to residential architecture.

While Riverside Park and Riverside Drive had been planned by Frederick Law Olmsted in 1873, construction of the park and roadway continued until 1898. The presence of the park and drive as well as that of the Ninth Avenue elevated railroad--opened in 1879--were an incentive to the development of the West Side which was carried out primarily between 1885 and 1900.<sup>2</sup> While the first stages of West Side development were concentrated on the side streets, development also began about 1885 on the choice and higher-priced lots facing Riverside Drive itself. By 1900 there were approximately 135 single-family residences located along Riverside Drive.<sup>3</sup> While most were rowhouses, approximately 30 were freestanding residences commissioned by a specific client from an architect.<sup>4</sup> In 1899 Isaac L. Rice purchased the site on the southwest corner of 89th Street and Riverside Drive for his mansion from William W. Hall, a prominent builder and real estate developer active on both the East and West Sides during this period.<sup>5</sup> Earlier that year the site for the Soldiers and Sailors Monument (1900-02, Stoughton & Stoughton and Paul Duboy), a designated New York City Landmark, just across the drive, had finally been chosen, Just north

of 89th Street on the drive were two residences commissioned by members of the unrelated Clark families who had done much to aid development on the Upper West Side.<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Scriven Clark, the widow of Alfred Corning Clark and later wife of Henry Codman Potter, Episcopal bishop of New York, built her house at 89th Street in 1898-99 from designs by Ernest Flagg, while Cyrus Clark, honored with a plaque in Riverside Park as the "the father of the West Side," had built his house at 90th Street in 1887 from designs by Henry F. Kilburn. Both have now been replaced by apartment buildings.

Isaac L. Rice (1850-1915), born in Bavaria, Germany, immigrated to the United States as a child with his parents. After studying in the schools of Philadelphia and then in Paris, he began to write and teach, publishing a book entitled What Is Music? in 1875. Turning his attention to the study of law, he graduated from Columbia Law School in 1880. He became counsel to several railroads which were in a period of reorganization and made his fortune with the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad. As an early promoter of electrical inventions he became president of the Electric Storage Battery Co. in 1897, founded the Electric Vehicle Co. in 1896, and also the Electric Boat Co. In keeping with his early literary interests, Rice established the Forum, a political and literary review, in 1885. Rice was also a noted chess player who invented an opening called the "Rice gambit." In 1885 he married Julia Hyneman Barnett. His tribute to her was to name the new family residence "Villa Julia."

Julia Barnett Rice (1860-?) was a notable figure in her own right. Born in New Orleans, she studied medicine at the Women's Medical College of the New York Infirmary, receiving an M.D. degree in 1885. Although she never practiced medicine, her concern for hospital patients suffering from excessive noise on the boats plying the East River led her to found the Society for the Suppression of Unnecessary Noise. Not only was a bill passed to regulate the boat whistles of river traffic, but quiet zones were established around city hospitals.

To design their new residence the Rices commissioned the architectural firm of Herts & Tallant which at that time was just beginning to make its reputation in theater architecture.<sup>7</sup> Henry B. Herts (1871-1933) and Hugh Tallant (1870-1952) had met while students at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris from which Tallant had received a medal of honor in 1896. Herts, a talented painter, also exhibited at the Paris Salon. Upon returning to New York the two formed a partnership in 1897.<sup>8</sup> Their first commission was to refurbish and to add an extension to the Harmonie Club, 45 West 42nd Street (now demolished). Isaac Rice had been a member of this exclusive German-Jewish club since 1885. His firsthand knowledge of Herts & Tallant's work for the club was undoubtedly a factor which led him to give them the commission for his residence. The firm had also received other commissions from Jewish clients--the Aguilar Free Library at 110th Street and Third Avenue (1898) and the Guggenheim Mausoleum (1900) in the Salem Fields Cemetery, Brooklyn. About 1900

the architects embarked on the design of the many theaters which were to create their reputation: the New Amsterdam (1902-03), the Lyceum (completed 1903), the Gaiety (completed 1909, now the Victoria), the Folies-Bergere (completed 1911, later the Fulton and now the Helen Hayes), the Booth (completed 1913, Henry B. Herts alone), the Longacre (completed 1913, Henry B. Herts alone), the Shubert (completed 1913) Henry B. Herts alone), all in Times Square; and the Brooklyn Academy of Music (completed 1908). The partnership dissolved in 1911, but the two continued in architectural practice separately. While architect to the Playground Commission, Herts continued his relationship with the Rice family, designing the Betsy Head Memorial Playground (1915) in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn--then a neighborhood with many Jewish immigrants--and the Isaac L. Rice Playfield in Pelham Bay Park (1920-22), both financed by Julia Rice.

For his residence Rice had acquired an irregularly-shaped plot occupying half the Riverside Drive blockfront between 88th and 89th Streets for 111 feet, extending back 148 feet at midblock and 101 feet on 89th Street. The shape resulted from the curve of Riverside Drive in that block. Not only was the plot generous in size, but also the curve of the drive made the location notable and complementary to the planned Soldiers and Sailors Monument across the drive. Under the terms of a restrictive covenant made in 1898 between William W. Hall and Benjamin Altman, the owner of the property at 88th Street and Riverside Drive, any house built on that property had to "be a high class private dwelling house, not less than four stories, and designed for the use of one family only."<sup>9</sup> In keeping with the covenant, Rice commissioned a free-standing house. Herts & Tallant first designed it to be located in the center of the plot with a semicircular extensions on the north side.<sup>10</sup> A new set of plans was filed with the Buildings Department in 1901, the following year.<sup>11</sup> As built, the Rice mansion is placed near the eastern property line with the northern building line aligned with that of the adjacent rowhouses on 89th Street. This placement both urbanistically complements the houses on the side street and allows for a grand facade on Riverside Drive. This placement seems designed to take the fullest dramatic advantage of the site--a factor undoubtedly derived from Herts & Tallant's theatrical sensibility. The terraced garden through which one approaches the house is another feature which enhances its siting. Herts & Tallant also designed a marble and brick wall surrounding the property.

Within the context of Manhattan development the freestanding mansion is a rare type. Both high land values and the rigid street grid system tended to promote the construction of rowhouses with common party walls and closely-spaced, if technically freestanding, town houses. By contrast, the winding configuration of Riverside Drive made large lots and freestanding houses in the middle of those lots an attractive proposition. The Rice mansion on its spacious grounds was built as part of a tradition which prevailed for about 20 years on Riverside Drive. Its survival, when others were replaced

by apartment buildings, largely in the 1920's, is a reminder of that tradition.

Four stories high the house is faced with red brick laid up in Flemish bond and has contrasting marble detail. Certain features--such as the brickwork--are reminiscent of the popular neo-Georgian style of the period, but other elements strongly reflect the traditions of Beaux-Arts design. The total effect is highly individualistic and not readily classified by stylistic terms. The 89th Street facade is dominated by a curved projection, two stories high and faced with marble. At ground floor it contains a porte-cochere--undoubtedly intended to accommodate one of Rice's electric vehicles--with two segmental-arched openings with keystones. The use of such a porte-cochere is very unusual for Manhattan residences. A pediment placed between the openings contains an unusual sculptured bas-relief portrait depicting six children bearing the symbols of the Liberal Arts. They may represent the six Rice children whose artistic accomplishments are listed in their mother's entry in the National Cyclopedia of American Biography.<sup>12</sup> The sculpture, signed with the artist's monogram, appears to be the work of Louis St. Lanne, a French-born sculptor and member of the National Sculpture Society.<sup>13</sup> St. Lanne later designed the statue of the "American Boy" at the Isaac L. Rice Memorial Stadium. The stadium in Pelham Bay Park was a gift to the City of New York from Mrs. Rice. At the second story, engaged Doric columns flank the windows and carry a modillioned entablature which continues at the Riverside Drive facade.

The Riverside Drive facade is approached by a series of broad steps. The entrance, which is at second floor level, is encompassed by a bold arch which rises to the full height of the third story and gives vertical emphasis to the facade--an unusual treatment for a residential building. The form of this arch is very similar to that used by Herts & Tallant on their contemporaneous New Amsterdam Theater. The area beneath the arch is faced with marble and contains a pedimented doorway with a pair of small windows above. Tall windows, flanked by Doric columns and placed above small balconies enclosed by stone panels, are set at either side of the entrance. The modillioned entablature above the second story intersects with the arch which is outlined by a modillioned stringcourse. A swag-adorned keystone in the form of a console bracket is placed at the top of the arch. Marble bandcourses terminate the third and fourth stories on both facades, and the window treatment of these stories on both facades is similar. The third floor windows have splayed brick lintels with keystones, a neo-Georgian feature. Above the fourth story the mass of the house is terminated by a hipped roof with broad eaves carried on vertically-placed brackets. Escutcheon panels are placed between the brackets. Small dormers and tall chimneys punctuate the roof, which was originally covered by Spanish tile.

The present appearance of the Rice mansion also reflects some additions made to the original Herts & Tallant design. In 1907 Isaac Rice suffered reverses in a financial panic and sold the family residence to Solomon Schinasi (1861-1919). A partner in the firm of Schinasi Brothers, Schinasi was, according to the National Cyclopedia of American Biography, a pioneer in the importation of Turkish tobacco and in the manufacture of Turkish cigarettes in the United States. By 1907 his firm was the largest independent manufacturer of Turkish cigarettes in the world.<sup>14</sup> That same year his brother Morris began to build a house at 351 Riverside Drive, designed by William B. Tuthill. Now a designated New York City Landmark, the Schinasi residence is the other freestanding mansion to survive on Riverside Drive.

In 1908 Solomon Schinasi commissioned the noted New York architect C.P.H. Gilbert (1863(?)-1952) to add several elements to the house.<sup>15</sup> The major one, an extension at the southeast corner of the house is barely visible from the street and joins the main body of the house solely at the roughly finished east wall. At the south facade Gilbert provided a semicircular bay which in its detail echoes the original Herts & Tallant design, including engaged Doric columns flanking the window openings and a modillioned entablature above the second story. Because the original brick and marble wall designed by Herts & Tallant had extended beyond the property line, it had to be taken down in 1912. Gilbert was again given the commission.<sup>16</sup> He designed a new balustraded marble wall and also narrowed the lower portions of the steps leading to the house. The design of the balustrade reflects and complements that of the balustrades of the Soldiers and Sailors Monument across the drive. Leon Schinasi, Solomon's son, had a garage added in 1927 off 89th Street behind a gate which Herts & Tallant had provided at the east side of the house.<sup>17</sup> Also in that year the third story of the bay on the south facade was added.<sup>18</sup> These additions and changes have all been compatible with the original Herts & Tallant design.

The mansion remained occupied by members of the Schinasi family until about 1945 when it was leased to the Heckscher Foundation for Children. This long occupancy and the obvious affection for the house by the Schinasi family kept the site from being developed for an apartment building in the 1920s. The trustees of the estate of Leon Schinasi sold the mansion to the Yeshiva Chofetz Chaim in 1954, and it has served since to house the school.

Report prepared by  
Marjorie Pearson  
Director of Research



## Footnotes

1. Other residential commissions known to be by Herts & Tallant are the Abraham L. Erlanger residence, 232 West End Avenue (1904), and the Philip S. Henry residence, 1053 Fifth Avenue (1903). These were carried out under alteration permits, a very common building practice in the early 20th century. The party walls and floor levels of an existing rowhouse would be left intact, but a new facade would be erected and the interior spaces would be completely redone.
2. See Sarah Bradford Landau, "The Row Houses of New York's West Side," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, 34 (March 1975), 19-36.
3. See George W. and Walter S. Bromley, Atlas of the City of New York, vol. 3 (Philadelphia: G.W. Bromley and Co., 1899), plates 6, 7, 10, 11, 14, 15, 18; and Joy M. Kestenbaum, Isaac Leopold Rice Mansion, unpublished typescript (New York: Citizens' Coalition to Preserve the Isaac Rice Mansion, 1979), p. 5.
4. See Kestenbaum, p. 5. It was a common practice in the early 20th century for affluent New Yorkers to purchase residences which had been constructed by real estate developers and designed by architects who worked for those developers. It was less common for the potential owner to commission a residence directly from an architect.
5. Landmarks Preservation Commission, Metropolitan Museum Historic District Designation Report (LP-0955), September 20, 1977, p. 119.
6. Clarence True, Riverside Drive (New York: Press of Unz & Co., 1899); Landmarks Preservation Commission, Central Park West - West 73rd - 74th Street Historic District (LP-0964), July 12, 1977, pp. 2-6.
7. Both the New Amsterdam Theater, 214 West 42nd Street, and the Lyceum Theater, 149-157 West 45th Street, had been commissioned.
8. The date of the establishment of the partnership has been ascertained through examination of Trow's Business Directories for the period. Because of an error in Herts' New York Times obituary (March 28, 1933, p. 19), it often has been stated that the partnership was established in 1900.
9. New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds, Memorandum of Agreement, Section 4, Liber 64, pages 448-450.
10. New York City, Buildings Department, Manhattan, New Building application 785-1900. The plan is illustrated in "The Soldiers and Sailors Monument, Riverside Drive, New York," Architectural Review, 7 (1900), pl. 71.

11. New York City, Buildings Department, Manhattan, New Building application 1350-1901.
12. "Mrs. Isaac L. Rice, " The National Cyclopedia of American Biography, vol. 14, pp. 508-509.
13. Kestenbaum, p. 10.
14. "Solomon Schinasi," The National Cyclopedia of American Biography, vol. 10, p. 521.
15. New York City, Buildings Department, Manhattan, Alteration application 593-1908.
16. New York City, Buildings Department, Manhattan, New Building application 97-1912.
17. New York City, Buildings Department, Manhattan, New Building application 23-1927.
18. New York City, Buildings Department, Manhattan, Alteration application 2718-1927.

## FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

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 Isaac L. Rice Mansion 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, the Isaac L. Rice Mansion is one of two freestanding mansions to survive on Riverside Drive; that as such it is a reminder of the period in the early 20th century when Riverside Drive was lined by elegant single-family residences; that it was designed by the noted theater architects Herts & Tallant; that while it features elements of neo-Georgian and Beaux-Arts design it also displays the highly individualistic character which Herts & Tallant brought to residential architecture; that the house is impressively sited in such a way as to urbanistically complement the adjacent houses on 89th Street and to allow for a grand facade on Riverside Drive; that the terraced garden and the balustraded stone wall further enhance the siting; that the curve of Riverside Drive in that block between 88th and 89th Streets makes the location of the Rice Mansion particularly notable and also complementary to the Soldiers and Sailors Monument in Riverside Park across the drive; that among the important features of the mansion are the porte-cochere and the bas-relief portrait on the 89th Street facade and the bold entry arch on the Riverside Drive facade; that the mansion was built for Isaac and Julia Rice, both of whom achieved notable accomplishments in their fields; that in 1907 it became the home of tobacco importer Solomon Schinasi who commissioned several compatible additions to the building; and that because of the long occupancy by the Schinasi family, the mansion survived when most others on the drive were replaced by apartment buildings in the 1920s.

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 the Isaac L. Rice Mansion, 346 West 89th Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1250, Lot 61, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

Architectural League of New York. Catalogue of Annual Exhibition, 15th exhibition, 1900, p. 61, nos. 1139-40.

Bromley, George W. and Walter S. Atlas of the City of New York, vol. 3. Philadelphia: G.W. Bromley and Co., 1899.

"The Contemporary Metropolitan Residence." Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 73 (June 11, 1904), 1447-1462.

Goldberger, Paul. The City Observed: New York, A Guide to the Architecture of Manhattan. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

Herts, Henry B. Architects Clipping File, New York Public Library, Art and Architecture Division.

"Isaac Rice Residence, Riverside Drive and Eighty-Ninth Street, New York." Architecture, 7 (May 1903), plates 38 and 39.

Kestenbaum, Joy M. Isaac Leopold Rice Mansion. unpublished typescript New York: Citizens' Coalition to Preserve the Isaac Rice Mansion, 1979.

King, Moses. King's Notable New Yorkers. New York: Moses King, 1899.

Landau, Sarah Bradford. "The Row Houses of New York's West Side." Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, 34 (March 1975), 19-36.

Landmarks Preservation Commission. Central Park West - West 73rd - 74th Street Historic District (LP-0964). New York: City of New York, July 12, 1977.

\_\_\_\_\_. New Amsterdam Theater (LP-1026). Report prepared by Marjorie Pearson, Director of Research. New York: City of New York, October 23, 1979

\_\_\_\_\_. Riverside - West 105th Street Historic District (LP-0323). New York: City of New York, April 19, 1973.

\_\_\_\_\_. Schinasi Residence (LP-0844). New York: City of New York, March 19, 1974

\_\_\_\_\_. Soldiers and Sailors Monument (LP-0932). New York: City of New York, September 14, 1976.

Moore, Abbot Halstead. "Individualism in Architecture: The Works of Herts & Tallant." Architectural Record, 15 (January 1904), 55-91.

National Cyclopedia of American Biography, vol. 10, p.521; vol. 11, pp. 447-448; vol. 14, pp. 508-509.

National Register of Historic Places Inventory - Nomination Form - Isaac L. Rice Mansion. Prepared by Joy Kestenbaum, The Citizen's Coalition to Preserve the Isaac L. Rice Mansion, November 1979.

New York City. Buildings Department, Manhattan, Plans, Permits and Dockets.

New York County. Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Mortgages. Hall of Records, Surrogate's Court, 33 Chambers Street, New York.

New York Daily Tribune, September 30, 1902.

New York Times, November 3, 1915, p. 13(Isaac L. Rice obituary).

New York Times, March 28, 1933, p. 19 (Henry B. Herts obituary).

New York Times, December 9, 1952 (Hugh Tallant obituary).

"Rice, Isaac L." Dictionary of American Biography. New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1935. vol. 8, p. 541.

"Saint-Lanne, Louis." Who's Who in American Art, 2 (1938-39), 456.

Tallant, Hugh. Architects Clipping File. New York Public Library, Art and Architecture Division.

True, Clarence. Riverside Drive. New York: Press of Unz & Co., 1899.

White, Norval, and Willensky, Elliot. AIA Guide to New York City. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1978.

Withey, Henry F. and Elsie Rathburn. Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased). Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, Inc., 1970.



Isaac I. Rice Mansion  
346 West 89th Street  
Manhattan  
Built 1901-03

Photo Credit:  
John Barrington Bayley

Architect  
Herts & Tallant