

Morningside Heights Historic District

Historic District

West 109th-119th Streets between Amsterdam Avenue and Riverside Drive

Designation Date: February 21, 2017



601 West 112th Street, George F. Pelham, 1901-02. New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission Morningside Heights Historic District Designation Report. Photo by Sarah Moses, 2017.

The Morningside Heights Historic District consists of approximately 115 residential and institution buildings representing the district's rapid transformation at the turn of the last century into a densely populated neighborhood. Isolated by its topography, lack of public transportation, and the presence of an orphanage and insane asylum, Morningside Heights remained largely undeveloped through the 19th century.

In the 1890s, the Leake and Watts Orphan Asylum and the Bloomingdale Insane Asylum sold their parcels to the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine and Columbia University which, along with the arrival of other institutions, began the transformation of Morningside Heights into the "acropolis" of New York. New residential development began in 1892-93 when Henry

O. Chapman designed the first-row houses in Morningside Heights at 633 and 635 West 115th Street for two Columbia law professors. With Morningside Heights still underserved by public transportation, speculative development within the district remained minimal with only scattered row houses and a few early flats buildings, along with a few fraternity houses, constructed through the first years of the 20th century.

This changed with the arrival of the IRT along Broadway in 1904, which connected Morningside Heights with midtown and lower Manhattan. Beginning in 1903 with the construction of six small apartment buildings along West 111th Street between Amsterdam Avenue and Broadway, speculative developers, many of whom were Italian or Jewish, rapidly filled the plateau with apartment houses marketed to the middle and upper middle classes, giving the Morningside Heights Historic District its character as “probably the most distinctive high-class apartment house quarter in the city.” By 1911, another 69 apartment buildings had been constructed. Smaller buildings joined the district’s existing row houses on the side streets while larger structures filled the main thoroughfares of Cathedral Parkway, Riverside Drive, Claremont Avenue, Broadway, and West 116th Street. Eight more apartment buildings were completed by the end of the 1920s when this rapid period of growth came to an end.

As the district developed, churches and clubs like the Broadway Presbyterian Church (Louis A. Jallade, 1911-12), Westside Unitarian Church (now Congregation Ramath Orah, Hoppin & Koen, 1921-22) and the Explorers Club (now Harmony Hall, Charles E. Birge, 1928-29) were attracted to the neighborhood with its large residential and academic population. The Morningside Heights Historic District is remarkable for its many fine apartment buildings, by some of New York’s premier residential architects of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Designed in a range of revival styles popular in the era, the apartment buildings create a distinct character, animating the streetscapes through their materials, ornamentation, and facade articulation.

[Read the full NYC LPC designation report here.](#)