

Proposed West 147th to 149th Street Historic District



Top: West 147th-149th Street Historic District. Photos: The National Park Service

The proposed 147th to West 149th Street Historic District is bounded by Fifth Avenue and Malcolm X Boulevard, and consists of Nos. 203 to 287 on the north side of West 147th Street, Nos. 202 to 220 on the south side of West 148th Street; Nos. 203 to 215 and 229 to 241 on the north side of West 148th Street; Nos. 22 to 252 on the south side of West 149th Street; Nos. 2540 to 2574 on the east side of Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard; and Nos. 2974 to 2880 on the east side of Frederick Douglass Boulevard.

The proposed District consists of five- and six-story tenement buildings, and one school. The 57 tenement buildings in the district were erected between 1894 and 1907, except for 208 West 149th Street, which was erected in 1926, during the latter part Harlem's speculative real estate development.

All of the buildings in the proposed District were designed in the Neo-Renaissance architectural style, some with Romanesque, Renaissance or French Beaux-Arts influences. Exceptions include Nos. 285 and 287 West 147th Street, designed by architect J. Averit Webster and constructed between 1894 and 1895, and Nos. 202 to 206 West 149th Street, designed by architect W. C. Bolton and constructed 1898. These buildings are Romanesque Revival style. Although Webster's traditional and Bolton's lighter, modern interpretation of the style differ, both architects employ characteristic Romanesque Revival elements: heavy, grounding, rock-faced brick on the first floor, and smooth brick in a lighter color on the upper floors, and arched windows.

George Pelham, one of the most prolific architects of the era, designed 17 of the 57 buildings in the proposed District, and is one of two architects to design buildings with red brick facades. Nos. 233 to 241 West 148th Street stand out, not just because of the color, but also the French Beaux Arts style-inspired ornaments. Although George Pelham designed these buildings for four different owners, using varying surface ornamentation, his use of red brick, limestone, white glazed terra cotta, and limestone entrance enframements and bellcourses on the first floor for all seven buildings created a cohesive and harmonious tableau. All seven buildings were constructed between 1905 and 1906.

Public School 90, located at 220 West 148th Street, was constructed in 1905, and designed by architect and Superintendent of School Buildings, C. B. J. Snyder. Snyder utilized his "H Plan" to bring light and air to classrooms for this Collegiate Gothic Style building. During his tenure as Superintendent of School Buildings (1891–1923), Snyder designed more than 400 public schools, including the landmark-designated Wadleigh Junior High School 88 (215 West 114th Street), Stuyvesant High School (345 Chambers Street), and Erasmus Hall High School (911 Flatbush Avenue, Brooklyn).