

## Washington Apartments

Individual Landmark

2034-2040 Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard

Designation Date: January 5, 1993



*Washington Apartments. Photo by Lorraine Colbert*

The Washington Apartments, built in 1883-1884 for the speculative developer Edward H.M. Just, was the earliest apartment building constructed in central Harlem. This eight-story brick building, with stone, iron, terra cotta and pressed brick trim, was designed by the talented and productive architect Mortimer C. Merritt in the popular Queen Anne style, incorporating neoGrec details. Merritt created a lively and picturesque composition using contrasting materials, and provided textural interest through the use of projecting balconies and cornices, a prominent overscaled frontispiece, and numerous decorative panels.

The extension of the elevated transit lines, which by 1881 connected lower Manhattan to West 129th Street, served as an impetus to the development of this area, previously the location of small farms and shantytowns. The amount of real estate speculation and new construction which occurred in Harlem from the 1880s through 1904 was unmatched in New York's history. Harlem was transformed from a rocky and marshy backwoods to a premier middle-class neighborhood.

The Washington Apartments was built at the start of this tide of development, when much of the nearby construction took the form of single-family row houses and occasional small flats. Throughout New York, multi-family living arrangements were just gaining acceptance among the middle and upper classes. A large apartment house, such as the Washington, was quite conspicuous amid rows and rows of brownstone-fronted rowhouses. Not only does the building retain its distinctive presence in the Harlem community, it is also one of the few surviving apartment houses of the early 1880s in New York City.

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