



## From Symphony Space to Inner Space

By Marlene Lee

Perhaps you've heard a soprano vocalizing in the building next to yours, or a violinist practicing across the street. You've no doubt passed George Gershwin's house at 316 West 103rd where he lived with his parents and adult siblings in the 1920s at the time he was beginning to compose *An American in Paris*.

Ours is a musical neighborhood. Take, for example, Joel Fram of Alexandria House, 250 West 103rd Street: pianist, coach, music director, conductor, composer, and now producer. When he was a senior in his Houston, Texas high school a teacher told him, "You ought to apply to Yale."

He'd never set foot in the East. But by 1989, with a Yale diploma in his backpack, he was living in New York. "This was a foreign land," Joel says, "and I loved it." Within a few years he'd worked at almost every level of the Broadway musical.

He played piano in *Flower Drum Song* and *Ragtime*, among other productions, and conducted the orchestra for *Cats*, *The Music Man*, and *Sweet Smell of Success*. As music director he taught shows to singers. "Before the production of *Sweet Smell of Success* we held a five-week workshop

*Continued on Page 4*

# The West 102nd & 103rd Streets Block Association NEWSLETTER

## Questionnaire Responses Encourage New Activities

By David L. Reich

The response to the March issue's questionnaire was heartening but not hearty. Those who responded, just over 1% of our recipients, offered diverse ideas for new Block Association activities and for expansion of Newsletter coverage.

Several neighbors would like to see us get together at social events. Others asked the Association to do more to clean and beautify our streets. Reporting on crime and neighborhood history were at the top of the list of Newsletter suggestions.

The only complaint concerned the delayed distribution of the last Newsletter.

Particularly encouraging were the people who not only offered suggestions but also indicated they'd like to help turn their ideas into realities. One new member will soon be reviewing and refreshing our list of building representatives. If you would like to be on that list, please see the box on page 2 for contact information.

Participation is the key to an effective Block Association. Your few hours during the year organizing the Halloween Parade, acting as an interface with film crews or supervising treewell repairs would make a big difference to us all. Join us at a monthly meeting (see box at right) and offer

your help and ideas.

In addition, we need participation in the form of contributions to meet Block Association expenses, mainly for the private guard on our streets every evening. Over the past three months we have seen a significant lag in those contributions. It's been raining and our rainy day fund is being used up.

Our participation rate is only 15% while our neighbors to the north on W. 104th Street achieve closer to 50%! Just a small increase in our rate would assure continuation of the guard service and put all manner of new activities into the realm of the possible.

If you are not a member of the Block Association, join us now! If you are a member, maintain your paid-up status with a current donation. A contribution envelope is enclosed in this Newsletter for your convenience.

### BLOCK ASSOCIATION MEETINGS

Regular Block Association meetings are held twelve times a year on the second Tuesday of every month.

TIME: 8:00 p.m.  
PLACE: 306 W. 102nd St.

The next three meetings will be held on June 17\*, July 8 and August 12.  
\*Rescheduled date

## Columbia Presents Plans for Building on Broadway at W. 103rd Street

At a public meeting on April 29, representatives of Columbia University presented plans and schedules for the construction of a 13-story residential building on the northeast corner of Broadway and W. 103rd Street, including 24,700 square feet of retail space at the ground and basement levels. An overflow crowd of more than 70 neighborhood residents packed a conference room at the American Youth Hostel on Amsterdam Avenue. Many had come to demand that a low-cost supermarket be included in the retail area to replace the Associated Supermarket that was lost when CVS bought out their lease on Broadway near W. 102nd Street a few years ago.

Emily Lloyd, Columbia's Executive Vice President for Government and Community Affairs, tried to run the meeting in an organized manner but was repeatedly interrupted from the floor by people who questioned Columbia's concern for the community. She called on Bill Scott, Deputy VP for Institutional Real Estate, to handle many of these issues. Scott emphasized that Columbia's deal for the property left the previous owner with control over the retail space which Columbia is leasing for 49 years at market rates. This seems to preclude the low-cost aspect of the desired supermarket. Some suggestions were made about using the basement to reduce costs but Scott did not seem too hopeful.

Scott expressed his appreciation to Westsiders for Viable Neighborhoods (WVN) whose members passed out a questionnaire seeking community advice on what type of retail establishments might be sought for the building. He offered to help fund a wider distribution of the questionnaire.

Marcelo Velez, an Assistant VP in the Facilities Design and Construction

Department, said that demolition at the site is expected to begin in mid-July after lead painted surfaces and materials containing asbestos are removed under controlled conditions. Starting in mid-August 2003, excavation and foundation work is expected to run for about four months. Exterior construction should be finished by the summer of 2004 with occupancy planned for January of 2005.

In addition to those raising questions about retail space, two Broadway neighbors of the site expressed apprehension about potential damage to their building, and several people

spoke about housing needs in the neighborhood. Cynthia Doty, a founding member of WVN, challenged Columbia to "give something back" by helping to bring low-income housing to the neighborhood. As with other suggestions and demands voiced throughout the evening, the Columbia representatives listened attentively but made no promises.

Details of plans for this development and other Columbia University projects are available on their website [www.neighbors.columbia.edu](http://www.neighbors.columbia.edu).

## Murder at the Malibu Hotel

The headline screams like the title of a bad mystery novel but it's true. On May 1 at 9:00 a.m., a woman, initially described as in her 40's and later identified as Lynda Ford, age 60, was found strangled with her hands tied behind her back in room 55-6 at the Malibu Hotel on the east side of Broadway at W. 103rd Street. To date, no arrests have been made. The police investigation is continuing.

## Environmental Committee Forming

The Block Association is thinking of creating a committee to focus on environmental issues affecting our block and our neighborhood. We would explore projects we might undertake to increase our awareness of local issues and promote new environmentally safe practices for our neighborhood. We could focus on both local and city issues: from local concerns about pollution from idling trucks and school buses, recycling, waste reduction, composting, and garbage collection, to the city issues of opening the marine garbage transfer station at 135th Street, moving some bus and truck depots, monitoring the North River sewage treatment plant, development of the bike path and the Harlem Piers Greenway, truck traffic, and reducing usage of diesel fuels.

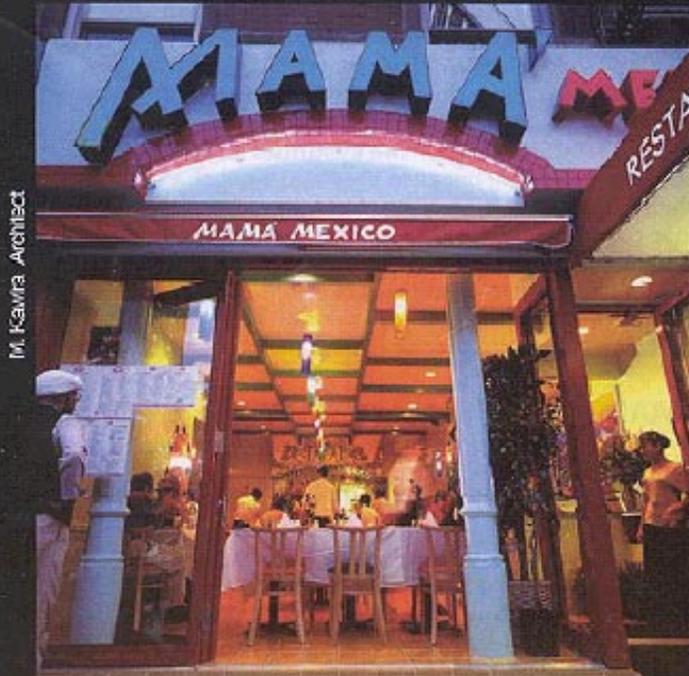
If you are interested, please contact Cynthia Doty at 212-749-4085 or any other Board member. Join your neighbors and share your ideas on how to protect and improve our environment.

### The West 102nd & 103rd Streets Block Association Newsletter

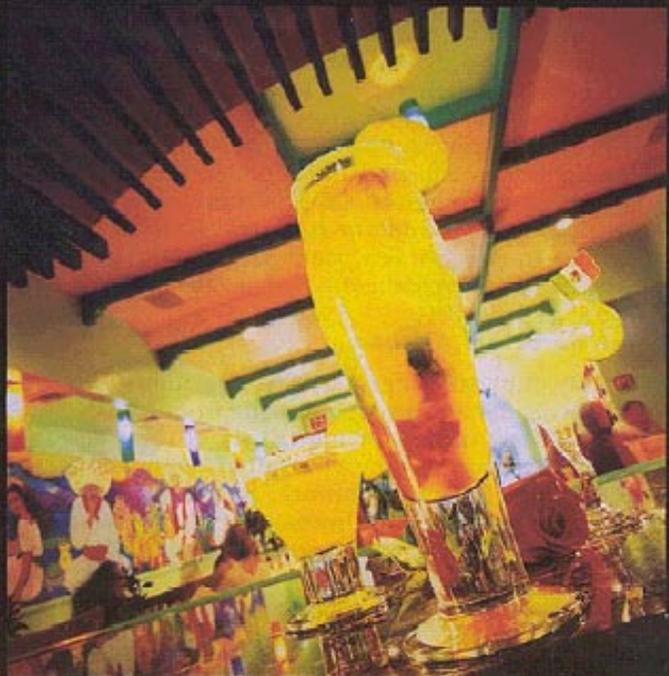
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EXTRACT FROM NEW YORK MAGAZINE DATED SEPT-15-97

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## NEW YORK

**Mamá's Boys**  
 Juan Rojas Campos and his brother Bernabé grew up with six brothers in a tiny Mexican village, where their mother taught them to cook. Now, with their brother-in-law, the homies have opened Mamá Mexico, a festive cantina with a roster of frozen margaritas, a festive of Mexican village life, and a strutting mariachi singer. The extensive menu ranges from the traditional (tacos, burritos) to the less familiar (grilled marinated rack of lamb and red-sneaker soup). (2572 Broadway, near 102nd Street.) Extract from New York magazine dated September 15, 1997.

## DAILY NEWS

**VIVA**  
 "Incredible Array of Yummy Dishes"

**el diario LA PRENSA**  
 El mas autentico sabor pobliano

**MANHATTAN Spirit**  
 Margarita Heaven

**CRAIN'S NEW YORK BUSINESS**  
 Mexican network takes fresh root in northern climes

**ZAGAT SURVEY 2000**  
 "Strong, full margaritas" and huge sangrias fuel the "fiesta" feel of the winning Upper West Side Mexican that also showcases an "over-the-top" mariachi band on Fridays. critics commended the "fab staff" and only "wish the place weren't so popular."

**The New York Times**  
 Friendly and Likable... Spicing is Tame but Drinks are Potent

**NEW YORK POST**  
 Cheap Eats  
 The Mama of All Fiestas  
 Mariachis - Three Stars and More

**EatOut**  
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# From Symphony Space to Inner Space

*Continued from Page 1*

where we explored the show without using sets or costumes. With only the music and script," Joel explains, "you learn the structural strengths and weaknesses of a production." He coached John Lithgow, winner of the Tony for his role in *Sweet Smell*. "The amount of time, energy, and money that went into that production was incredible." Joel looks out the window—it's a foggy day—with a meditative expression. "The critics dismissed it rather quickly."

Joel coaches singers/actors in lean times and in flush. "I love teaching. Coaching singers is a constant in my life. They need technical mastery of the voice as well as interpretation of the song. I like to show them how to act the lyrics."

These days he's up to something new. For several years he's been a closet composer. "I have a number of friends who are serious composers," he says, looking a little shy. "For a long time I didn't show anyone my songs." A friend who works at Symphony Space told him the building was about to be renovated and that the Thalia would be rebuilt from the old art film theatre into a multiuse space.

"I'd always thought the Thalia would be a perfect recital space for the Upper West Side. I knew I wanted to produce concerts there." Joel decided to "come out" with his art songs. He invited three others to present their works with him. Five of Broadway's best singers, equally comfortable with musical theatre, pop, and classical idioms, sang the songs and became, literally, "the new voices."

"The Symphony Space administration is excited about the acoustic, unamplified concerts," Joel says. "In the theatrical online service *playbill.com* someone referred to us as The New

Voices Series, and suddenly—we're a series. With community support and attendance, we can create a vibrant cultural and performance space here in our own neighborhood."

There are many kinds of space. There is Symphony Space, and there is inner space. Franklin Latner, a quiet man who lived for many years at 316 West 102nd, composed privately. So privately that members of an Upper West Side poetry group to which he belonged didn't even know he was a musician.

"We found out by accident when one of our members mentioned that her niece studied piano with him," says Mildred Speiser, a long-time friend of Latner's. "Frank was a remarkably creative person, animated, with a quirky sense of humor. He was a Mets fan and used to say to me, 'Mildred, you're the only woman I can discuss baseball with.'"

Frank Latner died suddenly of a heart attack in 1998, a man in his fifties. He left boxes and boxes of music in manuscript form. His mother, who lives in the Hamptons, and his two brothers asked one of Frank's friends, pianist Richard Goode, what they should do with all the compositions.

"Richard Goode suggested"—and now we jump to a conversation I'm having with Ishmael Wallace, a young pianist, composer, and former student of Goode's—"Richard suggested that I might be interested in cataloging Latner's music." Ishmael accepted the task. He has nearly completed the catalog of chamber music, songs, piano sonatas, and orchestral pieces. On November 11th at 8:00 p.m. in St. Peter's Church on Lexington

Avenue between E. 53rd and 54th Streets, Ishmael Wallace and his sister, violinist Vita Wallace, will perform Latner's composition *Nickelodian*, as well as a piano sonata and several songs, some of which are set to Latner's own texts.

"A few years ago Richard Goode gave a concert of some of the piano works," Ishmael says. "Frank was supposed to speak to the audience and introduce his work. But he disliked crowds and failed to appear at his own concert."

Frank Latner received an A.B. degree from Juilliard where he studied piano with Adele Marcus. Uncomfortable in groups of people, he could not perform before audiences. "And so," explains Ishmael, "he made a perfect life for himself. Twice a week he taught piano at Mannes School of Music. He lived simply and arranged his life so that he could spend his time composing, writing, and painting."

After the November 11th concert, Ishmael will perform Latner's music again, probably in February, at Bloomingdale House, 108th and Riverside Drive, a venue for neighborhood composers and musicians. And one fine day when Frank Latner's compositions are frequently performed, and when Richard Goode, Ishmael Wallace, and other musicians have recorded his music, we, too, will know what is in those boxes.



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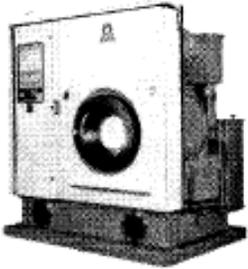
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## Strange Sidewalk Symbols Seen

Peru has its Nazca drawings and Colorado has its petroglyphs. Now our neighborhood has been visited by equally mysterious white chalk markings on the sidewalks.

Mystery no more! The New York City Department of Transportation (DOT) has been inspecting the sidewalks, marking unsafe areas and issuing violation notices to the owners of the adjacent properties. The City spent more than \$40 million in fiscal '95 paying off personal injury awards to people who claimed to have tripped on unsafe sidewalks, so the motivation for removing these hazards is clear.

The property owner has 45 days from the notice date to make the repairs. If that is not done, the Department of Design and Construction (DDC) can come in to do the work and bill the property owner. The owners prefer this route since it is cheaper than hiring a private contractor.

On a beautiful day late in April, Ike, a construction manager with DDC, was out with his crew of contract

workers on the east side of West End Avenue between W. 102nd and 103rd Streets. They had removed the old flags (concrete squares) and curbs from about a third of the block and were laying the new sidewalk. Unfortunately, the old granite curbs had been carted off to a dump upstate and were being replaced with steel edging filled in with concrete, much to the dismay of some residents who are asking Community Board 7 to put a stop to this practice.

Oddly, not all broken sidewalk in the neighborhood had been marked. A stretch of W. 102nd on the south side between West End Avenue and Riverside Drive is notable for its irregularities and broken flags pushed up by tree roots. No markings were to be found there, even though sidewalks nearby on West End Avenue, Riverside Drive and the north side of W. 102nd Street bore signs of eagle-eyed inspectors.

Calls to DOT revealed that violations had been issued to the south side property owners in October, 2002. Some-

how these areas had not gotten on DDC's list of repairs to be done.

By the middle of May, all City sidewalk work in CB7 came to a halt when the contractor defaulted, leaving some jobs unfinished. According to a DOT representative, the contractor was being issued summonses for unsafe practices. No date has been given for resumption of sidewalk repairs.

Back on W. 102nd Street the plot thickens. A sidewalk broken by the roots of a street tree would be repaired free of charge by the City. But if the work is done privately, the City will not reimburse the owner. Furthermore, a private contractor cannot touch the tree whose roots broke the sidewalk. For that, the Parks Department must be called. A Parks Department inspection of the situation on W. 102nd Street has now been scheduled.

To report a sidewalk in need of repair, go to the website [nyc.gov](http://nyc.gov) and select "Transportation" from the list of agencies, or call 311, the new, non-emergency number for City services.

# When Luxury Apartments Came to Our Neighborhood

By Richard de Thuin

On April 14, 1912, Isidor and Ida Straus perished with the Titanic. Subsequently, their clapboard, Italianate-style house at the northeast corner of West End Avenue and West 105th Street was sold by their heirs to the developer Harry Schiff who proceeded to construct the Clebourne apartment house. This trapezoidal-shaped building at 924 West End Avenue, completed in May 1913, heralded a new age of majestic apartment buildings above 96th Street which changed the landscape of what was once farms and country houses, and then brownstones and small apartment buildings.

Straus had purchased his house in 1884; it was one of the last country dwellings in the neighborhood to survive demolition. By the end of the first quarter of the 20th century, the area was dotted with high rise apartment buildings twelve to fifteen stories tall.

Two blocks south of the former Straus home, construction of "The House with 1,500 Windows" began on January 24, 1924 at the southwest corner of West End Avenue and West 103rd Street. The projected building cost was \$1,200,000. Leasing started on October 1, 1924 upon the completion of this majestic fifteen story high-rise at 875 West End Avenue. "The Top of the World," proclaimed a *New York Times* advertisement which described the four elevators and apartments of three to seven rooms with one to three bathrooms, including four-room apartments with eastern, western and southern exposures (865 WEA had not yet been constructed).

This "largest and most modern on the West Side" building was built and owned by Ralph Ciluzzi and designed by the noted architect, Rosario Candela,

who also did 280 Riverside Drive, erected in 1926, on the northeast corner of 100th Street. Candela went on to design even more luxurious structures on Sutton Place South and Park Avenue. When the building first opened, a long entrance canopy, flanked by planting strips, extended over extra-wide sidewalks. These amenities were removed when the roadway was widened to accommodate more automobiles.

Back in 1873, according to a New York City survey map, a wooden two-story house had stood on the southwest corner of Eleventh Avenue (which was renamed West End Avenue in 1880) and West 103rd Street and was built halfway into the present street. Also noted in this survey was a wooden one-story dwelling a little way in from the same corner and built on the site of the present day street. Neither of these houses appears on a subsequent 1880 survey map. On the 1890 map, five brownstones are shown on West End Avenue with addresses of 871 to 879 and four brownstones numbered 300 to 306 appear on West 103rd Street. These nine brick and stone dwellings each had three stories and a basement and measured 20ft. x 20ft. x 60ft. Seven of these brownstones were demolished at the end of 1923 by the Seagrist Brothers Wrecking Company to allow for construction of 875 West End Avenue.

Residents who lived at 875 West End Avenue in the years prior to World War II enjoyed an elegant lifestyle befitting members of the upper middle class. Persian rugs and ornate furniture decorated the lobby areas that were cared for by a devoted and somewhat haughty staff of Irish doormen and elevator operators. Their full uniforms, hats, and white gloves mirrored the look of employees who

worked for the most desirable buildings on Fifth and Park Avenues.

A dozen employees serviced the building 24 hours a day. Then as now, the staff consisted of doormen, a handyman, porters, and a superintendent. Mail was brought to every apartment by the doormen, and later by other staff members. The basement laundry room contained a separate area where maids ironed the clothes and linens of their employers.

In the years before air-conditioning, apartments were kept cool by billowy shades in multi-colored fabrics that the building staff removed, cleaned, and reinstalled every six months. Walking up West 103rd Street from Broadway, one gazed upon a carnival of colors peeking out from the numerous apartment windows facing West End Avenue. According to a resident who moved here in 1943, the shades appeared to glisten in the sun.

After World War II, the population of the area shifted as many residents moved to the East Side or the suburbs. In their place came a large number of middle class people, many of whom worked as artists, musicians, and writers. They fell in love with the charm and unpretentiousness of the streets and avenues and found the spacious pre-war apartments and Victorian brownstones ideal for working at home and raising families.

As the era of white-gloved building personnel faded into history, 875 West End Avenue fell into disrepair. The Persian rugs were removed and just a smidgen of furniture remained in the lobby that once had looked so grand. During the middle of the 1980s the lobby underwent a cosmetic change in an attempt to return it to its former grandeur. Walls and floors were marbled, wall sconces replaced the old

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# On Broadway

**O**penings and closings: ♦♦ **The Metro** movie theater has re-opened, still in the Clearview Cinemas chain. No renovations or other changes have been made and the management was not forthcoming about why the theater had suddenly closed and just as abruptly reopened. The re-awakened marquee advertised “Chicago” and “Head of State” as its first offerings, indicating that the fare will continue to be mainline Hollywood productions. ♦♦ **The Wiz** that was: at the beginning of April the bankrupt electronics chain’s outlet at Broadway and W. 97th Street started its closing sale. By April 27 the doors were finally shut. No information is available at this time about a new tenant for the prime retail space. ♦♦ Following the closing of the **Olympia** movie theater on the east side of Broadway between W. 106th and W. 107th Streets, the adjacent restaurant **Presto’s** and the small retail shop **La Piccola Cucina** served their last meal and peasant bread on April 13. Presto’s had been a neighborhood fixture for about 12 years according to the counterman at La Piccola Cucina, the aptly named tiny delicatessen occupying the space that was probably an alley between buildings long ago. For now, both establishments will close but they will probably reopen at an unspecified location, he said. ♦♦ The large, low-cost clothing store **Fowad**, long a fixture at Broadway and W. 96th Street, has closed. Part of the space fronting on Broadway is now occupied by **Adells**, a clothing store similar in merchandise to Fowad. The space on the corner of the property is undergoing renovation for a branch of the **Washington Mutual Savings Bank** which is planned to open in July. Called an Occasio store

(from the Latin for “favorable opportunity”), it has been designed to be casual and family-friendly. It will join neighbors **Citibank** and **Chase** (and **Commerce Bank** two blocks south on Broadway at 94th Street) enhancing the corner as the neighborhood financial hub. ♦♦ The pet store known as **Aquatics** which was previously operating above the Plant Shed on W. 96th Street just east of Broadway has relocated to a street-level shop on the east side of Broadway between W. 98th and 99th Streets. It is doing business there under the new name of **Petqua**. In addition to the many fresh and salt-water fish, birds, small reptiles, gerbils, hamsters and a koi pond in the renovated basement, the store offers cat and dog supplies as well as visits with the resident (and uncaged) parrot, tortoise and friendly black cat. Sam, the owner, is glad to introduce children to his “zoo” and has invited school groups to come for a visit. ♦♦ **Fresh Bites**, a lunch and takeout

place on the southeast corner of Broadway and W. 100th Street that opened and closed and then reopened has closed once again. Plans for the space were not available at this time. ♦♦ **Columbia University** expects to begin construction of a 13-story residential and retail building on the northeast corner of W. 103rd Street and Broadway by mid-July. See page 2 for an article on Columbia’s public meeting describing their plans. ♦♦ “GOING OUT for BUSINESS”: two local eateries have applied to Community Board 7 for approval to operate unenclosed sidewalk cafés. **Hot Bread**, expected to open by the end of June at Broadway and W. 104th Street, wanted to add 12 tables and 30 seats but approval was put off for a year. A similar request for **Josh’s Place** (Broadway near W. 102nd Street) has yet to be decided by CB7.

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## Thank You, Members!

To all of our contributors, heartfelt thanks. Your donations keep the Block Association going and the guard on the street. Names of those who are "paid up" through the *previous* quarter (approximately) appear below; please let us know of errors.

**New donors and those donating quarterly: please use the enclosed envelope to send in your contribution as soon as possible.**

We ask that you please fill out the envelope stub completely (including your apartment number) and legibly when making your contribution (the stubs are the basis of our record-keeping) and indicate if you prefer anonymity.

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## When Luxury Apartments Came to the Upper West Side

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lamp fixtures, benches were given new upholstery, and the public doors were sanded and stained a rich mahogany color. New upholstered chairs were positioned on each side of a decorative table at the front lobby that heretofore had been a repository for packages and oversized mail and now is used to showcase various dried flower arrangements designed by one of the residents. Wood-grained passenger elevators with digital controls debuted in 1987.

Until 1979, when rent stabilization went into effect, apartments at 875 West End Avenue remained rent-controlled. The following year the building became a co-op. At the present time, about 80% of the building's apartments are owner-occupied with the remaining number either rent-controlled or rent-stabilized rentals.

I wish to thank Ginger Lief for her invaluable research materials, acquired from the New York City Department of Buildings and the New York Historical Society, which were used for this article. An excellent source for more information on Candela's designs is Alpern, A., [New York Apartment Houses of Rosario Candela and James Carpenter](#). New York: Acanthus Press, 2001.

### Apology to Our Readers

Distribution of the March Newsletter was not up to our usual standard of timeliness and completeness. We regret that some of our readers received the issue after coming events described in the Newsletter had already occurred. Our aim is for distribution in the first week of March, June, September and December. If you can help with distribution in your building, please let us know.