

Landmarks Preservation Commission
May 19, 1981, Designation List 143
LP-1074

67-69 East 79th Street Building (George Rives Residence),
Borough of Manhattan.
Built 1907-08; Architects Carrère & Hastings.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1491, Lot 22.

On June 19, 1979, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 67-69 East 79th Street Building and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 24). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. No witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. Representatives of the Greek government have informed the Commission that they oppose this designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

This imposing residence designed by Carrère & Hastings in a late French Baroque style was built between 1907 and 1908 for George and Sarah Rives. The building is representative of the large town houses erected on the Upper East Side of Manhattan in the early 20th century as this area became the most fashionable residential quarter of the city.

The Upper East Side of Manhattan began to be developed as a residential neighborhood in the 1860s when simple brownstone rowhouses were constructed in the area. These homes were built on speculation and sold to middle-class families. Until the last years of the 19th century the Upper East Side remained a stable middle-class community. Most of the city's wealthiest families still lived below 59th Street, but as commercial activity expanded in that area the elite families moved farther north. During the twenty-five year period between about 1890 and the beginning of World War I opulent town houses replaced the older brownstone residences. Grand mansions were built on Fifth Avenue and stylish new town houses appeared on the side streets east of the Avenue. Many of the old houses were demolished to make way for new dwellings, while others had their original facades replaced by stylish new fronts. The George Rives residence is typical of the town houses constructed during this period of intensive redevelopment. Three earlier brownstone houses, built c. 1877, stood on the site. These were purchased by the Rives in 1906, and the architectural firm of Carrère & Hastings replaced them with a single large residence.

By 1906 Carrère & Hastings was one of New York's most prestigious architectural firms. The partnership was founded in 1885 by John M. Carrère (1858-1911) and Thomas Hastings (1860-1929) who had met while studying at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Both architects trained in the offices of McKim Mead & White prior to the formation of their partnership. The firm's earliest buildings were commissioned by Florida developer Henry M. Flagler and include the Ponce de Leon Hotel and Flagler's own residence. By the 1890s Carrère & Hastings had established themselves as one of the most prominent New York firms active in the design of town houses and country residences for the wealthy. It was, however, their successful competition entry for the New York Public Library of 1897 that brought them national prominence. Most of Carrère & Hastings' residential designs, such as the Rives town house, reflect the influence of their French training. The firm favored designs with neo-French Classic and French Beaux-Arts decorative motifs, although occasionally English design elements also appear in their work.

George Lockhart Rives (1849-1917) was a prominent New York City lawyer, historian, and statesman. Rives was educated at Columbia College, at Trinity College, Cambridge, and at Columbia Law School and was admitted to the bar in 1874. In 1876 he formed the law partnership of Olin & Rives with Stephen H. Olin. From 1887 until 1889 Rives served as Assistant Secretary of State under Grover Cleveland. He was very active in New York City civic affairs, serving as a member of the Rapid Transit Commission (1896-1902), president of the Commission to revise the charter of Greater New York (1900), corporation counsel of the city (1902-1904), a trustee of Columbia University (1882-1903, chairman of the board 1903-1916), a trustee of the Astor Library (1883-1888), of the Lenox Library (1893-1895), and of the New York Public Library (1895-1914, president of the board 1914-1917), president of the Board of Governors of New York Hospital, and a director of the Metropolitan Opera House. Rives also wrote a number of books including a two-volume history of United States - Mexican relations prior to the Mexican War (The United States and Mexico, 1821-1848). In 1889 Rives married socialite Sara Whiting Belmont (d. 1924) who had divorced her first husband, Oliver H. P. Belmont, in 1882. She was Rives' second wife; his first wife Caroline Morris Kean died in 1887.

In 1926 the Rives estate sold the house to Robert Livingston Gerry (1877-1957) and his wife Cornelia Harriman Gerry (1884-1966). Robert Livingston Gerry was a prominent New York real estate broker, sportsman, and conservationist. Gerry was a descendent of Eldridge Gerry, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and

and vice-president of the United States under James Madison and he was the son of Commodore Eldridge T. Gerry whose mansion was located at the southeast corner of Fifth Avenue and East 61st Street. In 1910, after his father retired, Gerry became the head of the real estate firm of Gerry Offices (later Gerry Estates). He sat on the board of a number of New York City banks and was a director of two railroad companies. Gerry also maintained a private game preserve that was devoted to research in game conservation. Gerry's wife, Cornelia Harriman Gerry, was the daughter of financier E.H. Harriman and the sister of Governor W. Averell Harriman. In 1958 the house was sold to the Kingdom of Greece.

As designed by Carrère & Hastings, the Rives Residence was modeled after the town houses that line the Place Vendôme in Paris, designed in 1698 by Jules Hardouin-Mansart. The houses on the Place Vendôme are more ornate than the Rives Residence, but all are similarly massed and use a similar design vocabulary.

As originally built, the George Rives Residence was a five-story building with simple restrained ornamentation. The smooth ground floor was articulated by three round-arched, ground-floor openings. This arrangement of the ground-floor openings remains as designed and is based very closely on the example of the Place Vendôme. The arch to the right serves as the main entrance and originally led to a vestibule, while the subsidiary entrance to the left led to the basement servants' area. Both of these entrances are screened by ornate iron gates. In the center is a multi-paned window set on top of a balustrade.

The second and third floors are treated as a single unit with Roman Doric pilasters that support a full entablature with ornate moldings and a deep bracketed cornice. This motif is also taken directly from the facades on the Place Vendôme. The second floor serves as the piano nobile with three floor-length, double-hung windows set within full enframements that are crowned by pediments. These windows originally opened onto the library that extended along the entire front of the house. Eared enframements surround the third floor openings. With the exception of added rustication on the ground floor the three bottom stories of the house remain substantially as built.

In 1962 Greek architect Pierre Zannettos enlarged the building into a six-story structure, and the two upper floors of the Rives Residence were totally, but sympathetically, altered. The original fourth floor was composed of three openings with eared enframements flanked by vertical panels ornamented with neo-Classical decorative motifs. These panels supported a modest cornice and a balustrade that ran in front of a copper mansard roof pierced by four shed dormers. The mansard was removed during the 1962 alteration. The

vertical panels on the fourth floor were extended one floor, but their neo-Classical ornamentation was removed. The original balustrade or a replica of it was placed above the new fifth floor. This balustrade runs in front of the new sixth floor which is crowned by an identical balustrade. All of the new windows were given eared enframements modeled after those of the original fourth floor. On the ground floor Zannettos also added the rustication, iron gates, lamps, and flag staffs. These costly alterations were carried out in a sympathetic manner reflecting the great regard that the Greek government has for this building.

Report prepared by
Andrew S. Dolkart
Senior Landmarks Preservation
Specialist, Research Department

Typed by
Juanita Bryant

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 67-69 East 79th Street Building 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 67-69 East 79th Street Building is an imposing neo-French Baroque style residence modeled after the Palace Vendôme in Paris, that was designed by Carrère & Hastings, one of the country's leading architectural firms at the turn of the century; that it was associated with socially prominent New Yorkers including George Lockhart Rives, Robert Livingston Gerry, and Cornelia Harriman Gerry; that it was altered in 1962 for the Greek government in a manner that complements the original design; that it is a reminder of an important period in New York City's history and a way of life that has largely disappeared; and that it is an important part of a group of four contemporary town houses.

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 67-69 East 79th Street Building, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1491, Lot 24, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

American Architect and Building News, 43 (May 6, 1908),
No 1689; plate.

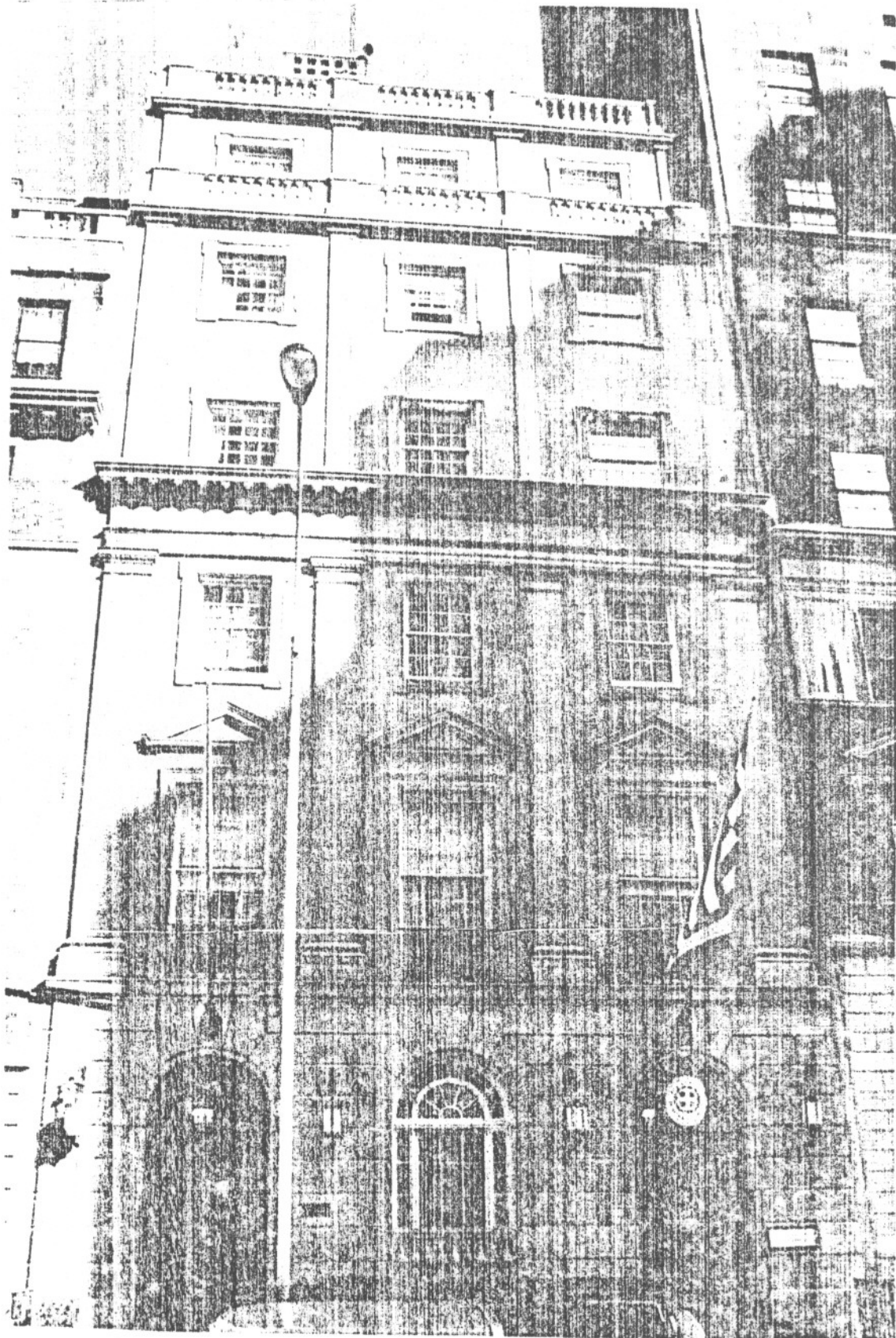
Malone, Dumas, ed. Dictionary of American Biography. New York:
Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935, pp. 634-635.

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

New York City. Office of the Register. Liber Deeds, and
Mortgages.

New York Times, August, 1917, p. 15; May 30, 1924, p. 15;
November 1, 1957, p. 27; May 30, 1966, p. 19.

"The Residence of Mr. George L. Rives," Architectural Record, 26
(August, 1909), 107-112.



67-69 EAST 79th STREET
(George Rives Residence)
Built: 1907-08

Photo: Landmarks Preservation Commission

Architect: Carrere & Hastings