

# Vertner Woodson Tandy

Vertner Woodson Tandy, the son of Henry A. and Emma Brice Tandy was born in Lexington, Kentucky on May 17, 1885. [Below: birthplace of Vertner Tandy at 642 W. Second Street, Lexington, KY] His father, Henry, was a brick mason who became one of the leading contractors and builders in Lexington. Henry Tandy's work includes the Fayette County Courthouse of 1898-1900. Vertner Tandy's education was obtained at the Chandler School on Georgetown Street in Lexington. Watching his father build and develop homes, Vertner Tandy found interest not in building but designing and decided early that he wanted to be an architect. In 1904, Tandy entered Tuskegee Institute to study architecture and



was for a short time under the tutelage of Professor Booker T. Washington and the Tuskegee machine. Tandy transferred to Cornell University in Ithaca, New York to continue his architectural education in September of 1905. After graduating from Cornell in 1909, Tandy established his architectural office at 1931 Broadway in New York City, the first by a black man in New York or any major northern city.

It is believed that Tandy met his future wife while attending Tuskegee. Her name was Sadie Dorsette. She was the daughter of Montgomery, Alabama doctor

Cornelius Nathaniel Dorsette. He was not just a doctor in Montgomery, but the first African American to pass the Alabama Medical examination and was a confidant of Booker T. Washington. Vertner and Sadie Tandy became parents of one son, Vertner Woodson Tandy, Jr. in 1922.

## Alpha Phi Alpha

Vertner Tandy was among a group of young men on the campus of Cornell University who saw the need for greater fellowship among the African American students that attended the majority white university. On December 4, 1906, Alpha Phi Alpha, the first intercollegiate Greek-letter fraternity established for African Americans was founded. The visionary founders, known as the "Jewels" of the Fraternity are Henry Arthur Callis, Charles Henry Chapman, Eugene Kinckle Jones, George Biddle Kelley, Nathaniel Allison Murray, Robert Harold Ogle, and Vertner Woodson Tandy. Tandy served as Treasurer from 1907-08 and took initiative to get the Fraternity incorporated. He also designed the fraternity pin [right], spoke often at banquets and worked on the Committee of Initiation, and Committee on the Grip.



In 1916, the threat of war caused New York Governor Charles Whitman to authorize the formation of the all-black 15th Regiment, the first black troops associated with the New York National Guard. Vertner Tandy was the first black candidate to pass the officers examination and became, in December of that year, the first black lieutenant of the regiment. Lieutenant Tandy organized and operated the Regiment's recruiting station



in Harlem's black-owned Lafayette Theatre. Shortly after, Tandy was promoted to Commander of the Regiment's Company "A". His troops were reviewed by Governor Whitman. He was promoted to major in 1917 and made commander of the 15th Regiment's depot battalion.

Vertner Woodson Tandy's career as an architect was legendary. As the first licensed African American registered architect in the state of New York, Tandy helped to design many buildings in Harlem, including the St. Philip's Episcopal Church, the Housing Authority Abraham Lincoln Houses on 135th Street, the popular night club Small's Paradise, and Mother Zion A.M.E. Church. Tandy was also the first African American to become a member of the American Institute of Architects.

Sources: HABS no. NY-5618 Historic American Building Survey, National Park Service, Department of the Interior; The Talented Tenth, by Skip Mason; Alpha Phi Alpha East

### **Vertner Tandy House**

221 West 139th Street, New York, NY

(Designed by McKim, Mead & White; Standord White, partner in charge, 1891-93)

The houses along what is called "Strivers Row" are traditional New York row houses with high stoops and parlor-floor entrances. They are early examples of Colonial Revival design and are a reflection of a new interest among architects in the nation's Colonial heritage. In the 1920s and 1930s, several of the houses on this block were owned or rented to prominent African-American professionals or successful entertainment and sports figures including Vertner Tandy, W.C. Handy, Fletcher Henderson, and Harry Wills.

Source: New York Landmarks Conservancy, Touring Historic Harlem



Left: Strivers Row in the 1920s or 1930s. Photo by M. and M. Smith.

Above: Strivers Row today.

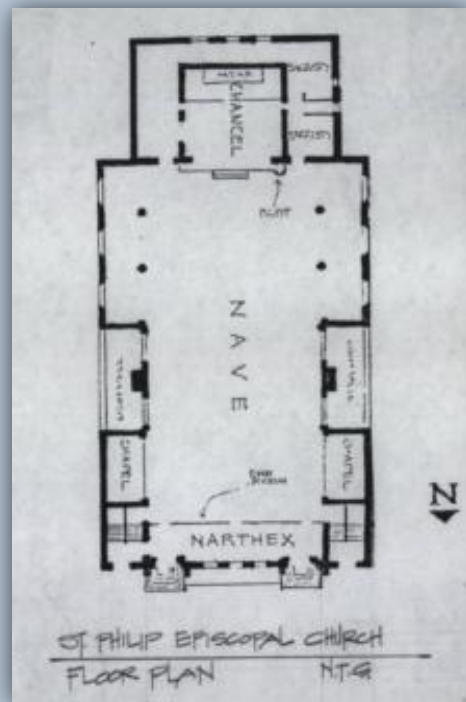
## St. Philip's Episcopal Church

210-216 West 134th Street, New York, NY

(Tandy & Foster, 1910-11)

Officially organized in 1818, St. Philip's is the oldest African American Episcopal congregation in New York City. The history of the congregation echoes the development of the city's black community. The church initially thrived under the sponsorship of liberal bishop John Hobart, but suffered intermittent discrimination within the Episcopal hierarchy after his death. From its original home on Centre Street, St. Philip's followed the black community north, first to Mulberry Street, then to West 25th Street, and finally to West 134th Street where property was purchased in 1909. The initial commission in 1909 was for a rectory and parish house. By 1910, construction was underway for a church as well, also designed by Tandy, who was a member of the parish. The church still stands today and is a Neo-Gothic design using Roman brick and terra-cotta. The rectory and parish house have been torn down.

Source: New York Landmarks Conservancy, Touring Historic Harlem



## Webster Hall of Chandler Normal School

548 Georgetown Street, Lexington, KY

(Vertner Tandy, 1915)

Webster Hall was probably erected about 1915 as a teachers' and principal's home for nearby Chandler Normal School. It was probably named for Miss Fanny Webster, a white woman who served as principal of the Chandler School during the first decade or so of the 20th century. She retired or died about 1914 and was replaced by Prof. Frederick J. Werking, who remained until the school closed in 1923.

Perhaps the major significance of the building is that it is the only building in Kentucky that has been identified as the work of Vertner Tandy.

Source: Kentucky Historic Resources Inventory FAW 4



## Imperial Elks Lodge

160 West 129th Street, New York, NY

(Vertner Tandy, 1922)

The Imperial Elks Lodge is a handsome Neo-Federal style structure and described as the finest and most commodious of any lodge owned by the order. It was built at a cost of approximately \$150,000.

Source: "Souvenir Brochure for the Elks" (New York, n.p., 1927) p. 43 Schomburg Collection





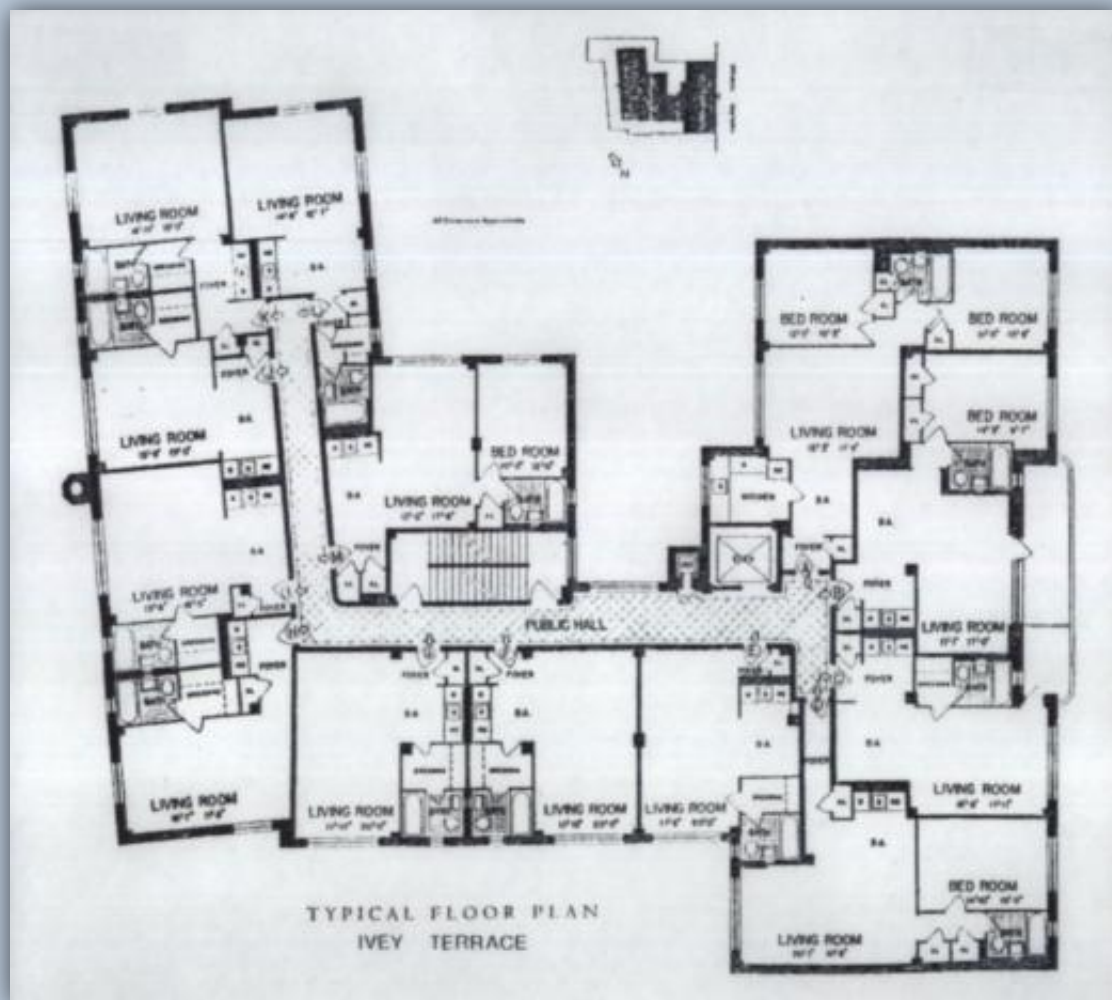
## Ivey Terrace Apartments

19 Hamilton Terrace, New York, NY

(Vertner Tandy, 1948)

The house project was commissioned by Dr. Walter Ivery Delph, a physician on staff at the Harlem Hospital and a neighbor of Tandy's from Strivers Row. The apartment complex is of interest from an engineering standpoint because it was the second building in New York to employ a new construction technique referred to as the "flat plate method" of reinforced concrete construction. The system is a concrete slab that acts as both a beam and girder, which allows the designer to eliminate beams at the edges of the building. The six-floor structure contains seventy-eight (78) apartment units.

Source: *The Architectural Practice of Vertner W. Tandy: An Evaluation of the Professional and Social Position of a Black Architect* by Carson Anthony Anderson



## Architectural Work of Vertner Woodson Tandy

### Project:

### Date:

#### St. Philips Episcopal Church\*

204-208 West 134th Street  
New York, NY

(1909, Rectory and Parish  
House; 1910, Church)

#### Mother Zion A.M.E. Church\*

58-60 West 138th Street

(1911)

#### Store House

64 Riverside Drive  
New York, NY

(1913)

#### C.J. Walker Townhouse

108-110 West 136th Street  
New York, NY

(1915)

#### Parsonage- Webster Hall

Chandler Normal School  
548 Georgetown Street  
Lexington, KY

(1915)

#### Villa Lewaro

North Broadway  
Irvington, NY

(1918)

#### Open Air Theatre

7th Avenue and 138th Street  
New York, NY

(1920)

#### Imperial Elks Lodge

160-164 West 129th Street  
New York, NY

(1924)

#### Mount Moriah Baptist

45-47 West 134th Street  
New York, NY

(1924)

#### Prince Hall Lodge

(1925)



James Vadnerzee/ Tea Time at Walker Beauty  
Parlor, 1929/ G.G.G. Studio

**Abraham Lincoln Housing Project\*\*** (1945)  
132-135th Streets at Madison Avenue  
New York, NY

**Ivey Delph Apartments** (1948)  
19 Hamilton Terrace  
New York, NY

**Garage and Tool Storage** (1949)  
503-507 West 181st Street  
New York, NY

**Shipping Room and Loading Platform** (1949)  
2334 Third Avenue  
New York, NY

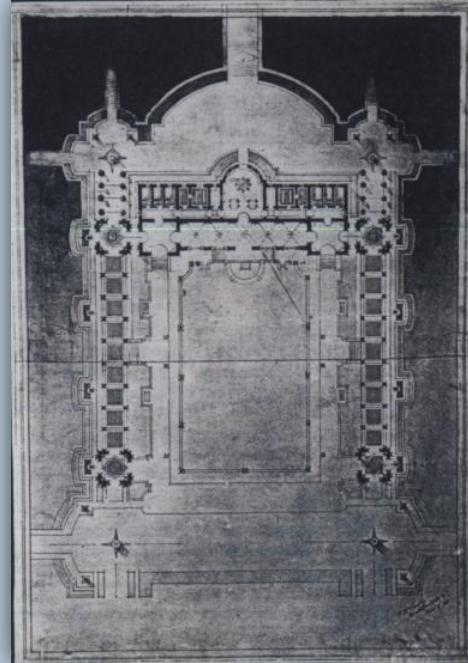
**Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters**  
129th Street  
New York, NY

**369th Infantry Regiment Armory**  
New York, NY

**Dr. Vincent's Sanitarium**

\*Designed with Foster.

\*\*Designed with Skidmore, Owings & Merrill



Plan A for an Out-of-Doors Swimming Pool and Pavilion

Society of Beaux Arts Architects Competition  
(Vertner Tandy, Delineator 1907-08)

Source: *The Architectural Practice of Vertner W. Tandy* by Carson Anthony Anderson