

SNIFFEN COURT HISTORIC DISTRICT, Manhattan.

The property bounded by East 36th Street, the rear lot lines of 2 Sniffen Court (156-158 East 36th Street) and 4 through 10 Sniffen Court, the southern property line of 10 Sniffen Court, the southern property line of Sniffen Court, the southern property line of 9 Sniffen Court, and the rear lot lines of 9 through 3 Sniffen Court and 1 Sniffen Court (150 East 36th Street).

On April 12, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Sniffen Court Historic District (Item No. 31). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Five witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. Letters and other communications favoring designation were received by the Commission from residents of Sniffen Court. In a letter to the Commission, the president of the Sniffen Court Association welcomed designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

This intimate group of 10 houses located in a narrow, blind alley between Lexington and Third Avenues on East 36th Street is today one of the most charming in the City. These two storied structures were originally stables owned by families living in the Murray Hill district. They are of brick, some in natural color and others painted various shades of gray and green while some are black. These buildings may be classified as early Romanesque Revival, or they may be said to have been built in the vernacular of the design and construction generally used at the time by local masons and carpenters. There is no question that many of them have undergone changes during the past hundred years. The wide two story rounded arch with limestone keystone, originally the central feature of each structure, the carriage entrance, has in some cases been filled in with brick, while in others, diverse window arrangements have been introduced. Some of the original simple brick-arched doorways have been replaced by others which are more elaborate. Window heads vary from square to segmental to round, and window sash are generally double hung or of casement type. Many of these houses have attractive window boxes and planters, containing flowers and bushes. The total effect of the Court is one of unusual picturesqueness and charm.

Sniffen Court was named for John Sniffen, a local builder who was retained by four developers who took four standard 25' x 100' lots and rearranged them for resale into ten lots, with common access to an alley. When carriages became fewer, individual premises were made over into dwellings, very much as were the stables in Washington Mews, off Lower Fifth Avenue. Today, two of these stables have been converted by an amateur theatrical group for use as a small theatre, while another is used as an architect's office. In the twenties the large house, facing the street on the east side, with crow stepped gables, was remodeled by a well known architect as his home. The remaining units are small private residences. The south end of the court is terminated most effectively by the exterior wall of the sculptress Malvina Hoffman's studio. Miss Hoffman has adorned this wall with handsome, sculptured plaques of Greek horsemen.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this area, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Sniffen Court Historic District contains buildings and other improvements which have a special character and special historical and aesthetic interest and value and which represent one or more periods or styles of architecture typical of one or more eras in the history of New York City and which cause this area, by reason of these factors, to constitute a distinct section of the City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Sniffen Court Historic District is one of New York's most enchanting and picturesque areas, that it contains well preserved original buildings whose exteriors are altered only in minor details, and that it provides an excellent picture of a small area of New York as it appeared one hundred years ago.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 8-A 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 an Historic District the Sniffen Court Historic District, Borough of Manhattan, consisting of the property bounded by East 36th Street, the rear lot lines of 2 Sniffen Court (156-158 East 36th Street) and 4 through 10 Sniffen Court, the southern property line of 10 Sniffen Court, the southern property line of Sniffen Court, the southern property-line of 9 Sniffen Court, and the rear lot lines of 9 through 3 Sniffen Court and 1 Sniffen Court (150 East 36th Street).