Landmarks Preservation Commission  
February 3, 1981, Designation List 139  
LP-1102

7 WEST 54TH STREET HOUSE (Philip Lehman Residence), Borough of Manhattan.  
Built 1899-1900; architect John H. Duncan.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 1270, Lot 29.

On December 11, 1979, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a  
public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 7 West  
54th Street House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark  
Site (Item No. 8). The hearing was continued to January 8, 1980 (Item  
No. 3). Both hearings had been duly advertised in accordance with the  
provisions of law. A total of 20 witnesses spoke in favor of designation.  
There were no speakers in opposition to designation. Letters and peti-  
tions have been received supporting designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

This elegant residence was built in 1899-1900 for Philip Lehman, a  
prominent New York banker. Designed in the French Beaux-Arts style by  
architect John H. Duncan, it is a distinguished example of the fashionable  
town houses that once characterized the West Fifties between Fifth and  
Sixth Avenues and is one of an ensemble of five town houses on West 54th  
Street.

Midtown Manhattan remained open farmland until the first half of the  
19th century when shanty towns, rubbish dumps, stockyards, and factories  
began to appear above West 40th Street. The landscaping of Central Park,  
commenced in 1857, helped spur the development of midtown, and during the  
building boom that followed the Civil War, the West Forties and Fifties  
became lined with brick and stone residences. These new houses ranged  
from lavish Fifth Avenue mansions commissioned by such individual clients  
as the Vanderbilts to middle-class dwellings erected on a speculative basis.

The house at 7 West 54th Street occupies part of the original site of  
St. Luke's Hospital (1858), which fronted on West 55th Street at the south-  
west corner of Fifth Avenue. The hospital dominated the east end of the  
block until new quarters were erected on Amsterdam Avenue at 113th Street  
in 1896. That same year, construction began on the University Club, de-  
signed by the firm of McKim, Mead & White and located on the northwest cor-  
nor of West 54th Street and Fifth Avenue. During the next few years, sev-  
eral fashionable residences were constructed on the north side of West 54th  
Street. Together with the University Club, a designated New York City Land-  
mark, they typify the fine turn-of-the-century residences and private clubs  
that transformed the Fifties near Fifth Avenue and Fifth Avenue itself into  
an exclusive neighborhood--part of the continuing northward residential  
trend in Manhattan. Many of the buildings were designed by New York's  
leading architects for the city's most affluent and prominent citizens, such  
as Philip Lehman.

Philip Lehman (1861-1947), the cousin of New York Governor Herbert H.  
Lehman, was the son of Emanuel Lehman, a founder of Lehman Brothers. This  
successful firm began in the 1850s as a cotton brokerage and developed after  
the Civil War into one of the world's leading investment banking houses.  
Philip Lehman became a partner in the firm in 1887. He served as first
chairman of the board of directors from 1929 to 1941 and was also a
director of the F.W. Woolworth Company from 1912 to 1947. Philip
Lehman is perhaps best known, however, for his fabulous private art
collection, enlarged after his death by his son Robert.

Philip Lehman commission his splendid Beaux-Arts style town-
house from the architect John H. Duncan in 1899. Duncan (1855-1929) was
well known as the designer of two of New York's most imposing monuments,
the General Grant National Memorial (1891-97) in Manhattan and the Sold-
iers' and Sailors' Memorial Arch (1892) on Grand Army Plaza in Brooklyn,
both designated New York City Landmarks. In both cases his designs were
chosen in competition with many others and his success must have helped
Duncan establish a clientele of notable New Yorkers for his residential
and commercial work. The architect designed many fine residences in New
York, often using the neo-French Classical style; examples of his work may
be seen at 8-10 West 76th Street in the Central Park West-76th Street
Historic district and at 11 East 70th Street, a designated New York City
Landmark. In designing the Lehman residence, Duncan was able to show his
aptness in the Beaux-Arts style.

The handsome exterior of the Lehman residence is faced with rustica-
ted limestone that provides a background for a profusion of luxuriant
relief carving. The four-and-one-half story, two-bay residence is sym-
metrically massed and distinguished by an elaborately designed two-story
mansard roof. A central front entrance is located at ground floor level,
approached by a low stoop. The arched entry frames double glass doors and
is flanked by a pair of windows crisply recessed into the facade and orna-
mented with decorative iron grilles. Ornate console brackets with carved
garlands and fruit appear above the windows and entrance, supporting a
bowed balcony at second story level. The balcony fronts two pairs of
French windows that are crowned by richly carved, extremely ornate cartouches.
Double-hung windows with eared architraves and fronted by decorative iron
balcony grilles light the third story. The third story is crowned by an
impressive cornice designed with heavy console brackets and foliate orna-
ment that marks the beginning of the steep, slate mansard roof. Two dormer
windows with egg-and-dart moldings and heavy crowning cartouches, pierce
the roof at fourth-story level, while the attic above is lit by three oval
lucarnes, also surmounted by copper foliate cartouches. Even the limestone roof
coping bears carved foliate detailing, and it terminates in console brackets.
The original design is remarkably intact, the only alterations being the
replacement of the second and third story window sashes. The pleasing pro-
portions, scale, and skillful application of rich ornament to the rusticated
stone facade is testimony to the talents of John Duncan as a designer of
fine residential architecture.

In the years following World War I, the mansions of Fifth Avenue and
the fine residences on the adjacent Fifties side streets began to give
way to commercial and apartment house development. Most of the town houses
which survived were altered for commercial use on the ground floors. A
portion of 54th Street west of Fifth Avenue was a rare exception to this
trend. The Lehman residence stayed in the possession of the Lehman family
until the 1970s. After his father's death in 1947, Robert Lehman occupied
the residence, supervising the redecoration of the interiors in the early
1960s, and expanding the family art collection which was composed of the
works of such masters as El Greco, Rembrandt, and Goya. After Robert
Lehman's death in 1969, the collection was transferred to the Metropolitan Museum of Art where it is installed in a specially designed pavilion which includes recreations of the interiors of the 7 West 54th Street House. The house itself was acquired by the 7 West 54th Street Realty Corp. in 1974. With its exuberant Beaux-Arts design it is a distinguished reminder of the fine residences that lined the blocks west of Fifth Avenue during the turn of the century.

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FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the 7 West 54th Street House (Philip Lehman Residence) 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 7 West 54th Street House (Philip Lehman Residence) is a handsome French Beaux-Arts town house; that it is a distinguished example of the residential architecture that once characterized the Fifties between Fifth and Sixth Avenues; that the pleasing proportions, scale, and skillful application of rich ornament to the rusticated stone faced is testimony to the talents of John H. Duncan as a designer of fine residential architecture; that the house forms part of a handsome ensemble of five town houses on West 54th Street; that it was built for Philip Lehman, a prominent New York banker and art collector; and that with its distinguished architectural features, it is a reminder of the exclusive neighborhood of the Fifties and Fifth Avenue at the turn of the century.

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 7 West 54th Street House (Philip Lehman Residence), Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1270, Lot 29, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


"The Contemporary Metropolitan Residence." Real Estate Record and Guide, 73 (June 11, 1904), 1447-1462.


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


7 West 54th Street
Built 1909-1910 Architect John H. Duncan