

POMANDER WALK, Numbers 3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,15,16,17,18,19,20,21,22, Pomander Walk, 261, 263,265,267, West 94th Street, and 260,262,264,266,270,272,274, West 95th Street, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1921; architects King & Campbell.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1242, Lot 10 in part excluding the land on which the Healy Building at 2521-2523 Broadway is situated.

On February 9, 1982, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of Pomander Walk (Item No. 10). The hearing was continued to April 6, 1982 (Item No. 6). Both hearings were duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. A total of 71 witnesses spoke in favor of designation at the two hearings. There were four speakers in opposition to designation. In addition, the Commission has received many letters and petitions in support of this designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Pomander Walk extends through the middle of the square block bounded by Broadway and West End Avenue, 94th and 95th Streets, on Manhattan's Upper West Side. The complex is composed of sixteen two-story houses facing the private walk and nine three-story and two two-story buildings facing onto the street. Pomander Walk has a unique sense of place; secluded from the street, the walk is a delightful world of picturesque dwellings replete with half timbering, gables, and other vernacular Tudoresque embellishments. The almost magical atmosphere created by this small residential enclave was very much the intention of Thomas Healy, who in 1921, commissioned the architectural firm of King & Campbell to design a residential complex that would recreate the village atmosphere of Lewis Parker's then popular period comedy, Pomander Walk. The area around the walk is now entirely built up, but the buildings of Pomander Walk, both interior and exterior, remain largely unchanged since "light housekeeping" flats were first rented there some 60 years ago. Pomander Walk has special interest not only for its unique sense of place and architectural merit but also for the story of its creation; it is a prototypically "American" tale combining a pragmatic entrepreneurial spirit with an unabashed romanticism.

The Development of the Area<sup>1</sup>

Until its urbanization at the end of the nineteenth century, the Upper West Side of Manhattan was referred to as Bloomingdale. By the end of the eighteenth century Bloomingdale Road, which ran through the area, provided the main link between the city in lower Manhattan with the farmland of the Upper West Side; its presence gradually encouraged the growth of small villages along its course and the establishment of country seats in the adjoining areas by wealthy New York families.

The Bloomingdale area itself retained much of its rural character intillate in the nineteenth century. Eventual development as an integral part of the city was forseen, however, as early as 1811, with the Commissioners' plan which imposed the uniform grid of broad avenues and narrow streets on Upper Manhattan. The residential development of Bloomingdale continued slowly until accelerated by the opening of transportation links. The first was provided by the Hudson River Railroad, which opened several local stations along the Bloomingdale Road on the route between New York and Albany. In 1878, the Ninth Avenue El was extended to 155th Street and the cable traction cars followed along Amsterdam Avenue in 1885. Finally, in 1893, approval was given for the extension of the proposed Broadway subway line, with a station provided for 96th Street.

Urban residential development, which began on the Upper West Side in the early years of the 1880s, was concentrated in the area between 72nd and 79th Streets. By the 1890s improved rapid transit links, development of parks and other amenities and inexpensively priced land greatly accelerated the pace of both residential and commercial construction. The area around 96th Street was one of the last areas of the Upper West Side to be developed. Apart from some wooden structures, remnants of the period before urbanization, almost all the buildings in the immediate area of 96th Street date from the twentieth century. By the mid-teens the area around Pomander Walk was characterized by a mix of apartment buildings, well-kept tenements and small commercial establishments. Scattered among them were undeveloped or underdeveloped lots ripe for real estate speculation; Pomander Walk was built on just such a site.

### Thomas Healy and Pomander Walk

Pomander Walk is the realization of the dream of one man -- Thomas Healy.<sup>2</sup> Healy, an Irishman, arrived in New York in 1886 at the age of fifteen. He was as ambitious as he was penniless and determined to make his mark in the world. After serving as an apprentice in a small restaurant located on 103rd Street and Broadway, Healy went to work at the famous Jack's of Sixth Avenue. Not long thereafter Healy opened a small cafe of his own at Columbus Avenue and 66th Street and quickly established himself as a man of considerable business acumen. At the height of his success Healy owned five major eating establishments and held catering concessions for both the Empire City and Aqueduct Race Tracks.

Healy's restaurant drew a diverse clientele. He is recalled in contemporary accounts as greeting the celebrated and the unknown with equal grace.<sup>3</sup> Those from the sporting and theatrical circles especially favored Healy's restaurants. Many political notables were also greeted at the door by Thomas Healy. The most famous included Teddy Roosevelt returning from the Spanish American War, and Admiral Dewey fresh from his triumphs in the Philippines. King Albert of Belgium considered Healy's Golden Glade to be one of New York's most impressive sights -- it had a sixty person cabaret show and a floor space which allowed for 1000 patrons.

Contemporary accounts suggest that Healy was genial, generous, and hard-working.<sup>4</sup> But, angered by what he saw as harassment of restaurant owners, he formed the Society of Restaurateurs in 1913 and served as the Society's first president. Healy successfully defied the one o'clock curfew mandated by the Raines Act and is further remembered for being one of the first indicted under the notorious Prohibition Laws. In the early teens, Healy turned his attention increasingly to real estate speculation on the Upper West Side. He made several profitable investments, including the one involving the property on 95th Street which encompasses Pomander Walk. When he died in 1927, Thomas Healy left an estate valued in excess of three million dollars. This was divided, except for small legacies among Healy's widow and seven children.<sup>5</sup>

In April 1917 Healy purchased the recently built three-story Astor Market (1915) complex, facing onto Broadway between 94th and 95th Streets. His original plan was to demolish the market and construct a sixteen-story hotel on the site. This plan did not materialize and instead Healy transformed the market into a restaurant called the Sunken Garden and an indoor skating rink. In 1920 Healy acquired the vacant lot abutting the market on the south (94th Street) and mid-block on the west; this latter portion is the site of Pomander Walk. This lot was held by Healy on a long-term two-hundred year lease from Eugene Higgins. The original plan for the development of this lot called for an entirely commercial enterprise.<sup>6</sup> Eventually, however, only a small three-story office building was built on the southern part of the lot at the corner of 94th Street and Broadway; the rest of the Higgins estate site was developed with the low-rise residential buildings of Pomander Walk.

Healy's long time interest in the theater and association with theatrical personalities led directly to the design for Pomander Walk, for the architectural firm of King & Campbell was instructed to recreate on the site something of the atmosphere of Lewis Parker's play, Pomander Walk. According to the reminiscences of Healy's daughter-in-law, he liked the play, enjoyed all aspects of theater, and she suggests the village lane recreated at Pomander Walk reminded Healy of his native land.<sup>7</sup> The major appeal of the play and its sets was, however, not in the specifics but rather the generalized halcyon past which was conjured up by this romantic comedy.

Pomander Walk, set at the time of George III, was based on Parker's novel of the same title. It had a successful London run and came to Broadway in 1911. The play was sufficiently popular to be revived in New York later in the decade. The stage set for the play, designed by George Tyler was a recreation of a street in Georgian London; there is in fact a Pomander Walk in the London suburb of Chiswick and it is from this that Tyler purportedly drew his inspiration. Clearly it was Healy's desire, which the architects faithfully carried out, to recreate this environment. The architectural design is not, however, based directly on the stage set, although the scale and charm of Tyler's creation are successfully translated into the actual buildings.

Tyler's sets show two-story buildings on a crescent; the overall flavor is early Georgian. This is, of course, different from the vernacular Tudor employed by King & Campbell. A comparison to the description of Pomander Walk found in the novel shows clearly that King and Campbell's conception was independent of this as well. The walk in the novel is described as "mellowed"<sup>8</sup> Queen Anne and dated to around 1710, nor does the informal atmosphere of the Broadway walk conform directly to that pictured in the novel. "The architect," of the imaginary walk is described as "taking a slyly humorous delight in making them (the houses) miniature copies of much more elaborate town mansions. Each little house had its elaborate door with a shell-shaped lintel..."<sup>9</sup> King & Campbell preferred to take the vernacular village cottage rather than the elegant townhouse as a model.

### The Architects

Pomander Walk was a unique commission in the careers of the architects. Beverly King was primarily known for his public buildings, while Shiras Campbell specialized in private residences. Beverly King<sup>10</sup> (1879-1935), the better known of the partners, began his career in New York City. His best known buildings in the city are the Inchley Building at 564 Fifth Avenue and the Engineers' Club at 32 West 40th Street. The Engineers Club, built in part with Carnegie money, was erected in 1905. King designed this building while still associated with the firm of Whitefield & King. The club is a fine example of turn-of-the-century Renaissance-inspired architecture and shows King's command of classical idiom. In the 1920s King moved his practice to White Plains, New York. He was responsible for several public buildings in Westchester including the Carnegie Library in White Plains. At the end of his career, King went to Washington D.C. where he served as deputy administrator of the N.R.A. (National Recovery Administration). Shiras Campbell<sup>11</sup> (1879-1958) worked primarily in his native New Jersey after his graduation from the Columbia University School of Architecture. He is best known for the courthouse building in Elizabeth, New Jersey, and many large private residences in that area.

### Pomander Walk and Its Design

The architects designed Pomander Walk to evoke the atmosphere of an idyllic English village street through the use of intimate scale, Tudoresque detailing, and

complementary landscaping. Thus, it may be seen as part of a historicizing architectural tradition which seeks to recall values and associations of an earlier era in a modern context. This tradition produced such buildings as Roman temple facades in the eighteenth century, Gothic Revival buildings in the nineteenth century, and colonial-style residences in the twentieth-century American suburbs. In this tradition, the effect created is just as important as the overall design and details used to create the effect. Built by an immigrant Irishman able to indulge his "dream," Pomander Walk is a delightful architectural whimsy which now everyone can enjoy.

Pomander Walk, the narrow street onto which sixteen of the houses front, extends through the block from 94th Street; it is closed to all but pedestrian traffic. The entire Pomander Walk complex is situated on an L-shaped lot with the outer perimeter lined by twelve buildings facing 94th and 95th Streets. These facades form a protective wall enclosing the single "village" street within. The walk itself is raised above the level of the street and entered through a gate at either end; this accommodates a change from the three-story building height of the houses facing the street to the two-story building height of the structures on the Walk.

Each house in the complex was designed to accommodate two families, but single entrance doors create the illusion of individual cottages. The cottages, though similar to each other, express much individuality. Many of the houses (Nos. 4, 7, 9, 15, 17, and 20) are crowned by gables of uniform height. The others (Nos. 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 16, 18, 19, 21, 22) have sloping roofs. The facade materials of the houses on the Walk are a mixture of brick, stucco, painted wood trim and wood half-timbering. Those on the street use ashlar along the ground story with brick and stucco, with half-timbering above. It is an interesting feature of the design of the Walk that all the inner buildings are constructed of more fragile materials whereas the outer buildings are faced in large parts with the relatively sturdier brick and stone. This use of contrasting materials as well as the prominent round brick bays which project into the Walk at either end reinforce the feeling that the inner walk is an enclave protected by heavier outer skin. Color is an important element at Pomander Walk. The stone is gray, the brick is russet, and the stucco uniformly buff white. The inner complex is enlivened, however, by painted wood details in bright colors such as green, red, and blue. The entrances have single-leaf painted wood doors with square heads (Nos. 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22) or round heads (Nos. 6, 8, 18). One of the door entrances is capped by a gabled hood (No. 20) while several have shed roofs (Nos. 3, 5, 7, 10, 15, 16, 19, 22). All buildings have concrete stoops of two or three steps.

The vernacular Tudoresque vocabulary is used with great authority in the King & Campbell design, particularly on the houses facing the Walk itself. Typical are the roof gables and door hoods as well as the window detailing which includes painted wood shutters and window boxes attached with brackets. Half-timbering is the Walk's most characteristic Tudor feature. It is used on second stories and placed in the intersecting roof gables (Nos. 4, 7, 9, 17, 20). All windows have double-hung wood sash. Parapet walls with tile copings mark the boundaries between the individual buildings.

One of the impressive features of Pomander Walk is its skillful use of landscape elements. On this narrow pedestrian street the small-scale houses are set behind individual miniature hedges and flowerbeds, creating a tranquil, secluded, livable environment -- a startling contrast to the bustle of nearby Broadway. The small Tudoresque window boxes also contribute to the charm of the Walk. Additional property features of note are the sentry box located close to the 95th Street gate and the two small iron lampposts located at either end of the Walk.

The outer facades of the Walk along 94th and 95th Streets also have features of note. Along the 94th Street side two buildings flank the entrance gateway on either side. These are faced with rough-cut gray ashlar on the first floor with brick and stucco above. Some half-timbering is also used. The gateway itself is of stone and crowned by a crowing rooster of painted metal -- a well-beloved symbol of the Walk. A painted wooden sign announces the name of the Walk. On West 95th Street the gateway created by a rough stone arch is likewise flanked by buildings (two toward the east, five to the west). The name of the Walk is inscribed on the datestone which crowns the gateway. The paired buildings which flank the 95th Street gateway are similar to those on 94th Street. At the first story level they are continuous ashlar with stucco above; the outer buildings of the pairs (Nos. 258 and 266) also use half-timbering. Iron grille-work is found on the street buildings at ground floor level. To the west on the 95th Street side there is a secondary gateway entrance leading to the rear service yards. Three two-story buildings fill in the corner of the lot on 95th Street and West End Avenue. One of these (No. 270 West 95th Street) is of stucco with half-timbering while the end buildings (Nos. 272 and 274) combine brick with stucco and wood.

Although often compared to other New York City enclaves, Pomander Walk stands apart as it was planned -- a residential private street introduced into Manhattan's regular grid plan. Other similar streets, usually mews, are lined with buildings originally intended for other uses, most typically stables and carriage houses. Pomander Walk is one of the last rowhouse developments in Manhattan and certainly on the Upper West Side. The Walk is also different from the usual rowhouses which were built facing the city streets in groups and intended for speculative sale. Pomander Walk embodies a plan to create a self-contained, unified residential community. Thomas Healy built the Walk as a residential rental property, and it continued to be so held.

Pomander Walk with its unique residential ambience, contrasts greatly to the remainder of the Healy Block. Since Pomander Walk was primarily inspired by the theater, it seems appropriate that many of its residents, both past and present, should be connected with the performing arts and with New York's cultural life. Many prominent New Yorkers have lived on the Walk. One is able to say with a probable degree of certainty that the following well-known people lived or now live there. These include the actress Rosalind Russell, actors Louis Wolheim and Herbert Stoddard, film stars Madeline and Nancy Carroll as well as the well-known theater critic Ward Morehouse. One of the Walk's most famous residents,<sup>12</sup> Letta Van Buren, a world authority on ancient music, gave cottage concerts at the Walk during the 1930s. These concerts and the publicity they received helped to bring this hitherto little-known music of the medieval and Renaissance periods to the attention of a wider audience. In addition to Pomander Walk, Healy built his famous Sunken Garden restaurant on the block and one of the early interior ice skating rinks was also located on the site. Later the Thalia Movie Theater came to the Healy block where it still remains. Another movie theater, the Symphony, also was located on the Healy block; it is now the Symphony Space.<sup>13</sup>

Although the face of the Healy block and the surrounding neighborhood has been greatly altered, Pomander Walk continues to be an enclave much prized both by those who live there and the many who visit it. From its inception, Healy's Pomander Walk has commanded attention. Written about with enthusiasm in the 1920s, Pomander Walk is prized in our day for its unique sense of place and unparalleled contribution to the urban fabric.

FOOTNOTES

1. This information on the history of the Upper West Side is taken from: Landmarks Preservation Commission, Riverside Drive - West 105th Street Historic District Designation Report (LP-0323), (New York: City of New York, 1973).
2. For biographical information on Healy see his obituary, New York Times, May 10, 1927, p. 27, and Solomon Asser and Hilary Roe, The Development of the Upper West Side to 1925, Thomas Healy and Pomander Walk (M.S. Thesis, Columbia University, 1981).
3. Danton Walker, "Broadway," New York Daily News [May 1927?], clipping.
4. Ibid.
5. New York Times, May 12, 1927, p. 46.
6. New York Times, April 29, 1920, p. 26. In 1928 the lease was transferred by Higgins to Healy's heirs. (New York County Register's Office, Liber Deed 3649, page 278 ff). In 1952 the trustees of Higgins' estate transferred the land title to the Healy heirs; the 200-year lease was reaffirmed at the same time (Liber Deeds 4766, page 675 ff).
7. New York Times, January 8, 1978, Section 8, p.1.
8. Louis M. Parker, Pomander Walk (New York: John Lane Co, 1911), p.2.
9. Ibid, p.3.
10. New York Times, March 5, 1935.
11. New York Times, February 8, 1958.
12. New York Times, April 30, 1937, p. 10.
13. The Thalia is a unique movie theater. Many New Yorkers had their first opportunity to see a wide spectrum of avant-garde, foreign, and documentary films at the Thalia. For further history see: New York Times, August 31, 1973, p. 8.

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FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, architecture, and cultural features of this property the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that Pomander Walk 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, Pomander Walk is a planned residential enclave designed by the architectural firm of King & Campbell; that it was commissioned in 1921 by Thomas Healy, a successful restaurateur and real estate developer with a long-time interest in the theater; that the design was intended to recreate the atmosphere of the successful Broadway play, Pomander Walk; that the complex evokes the atmosphere of an idyllic English village street through the use of intimate scale, Tudoresque detailing, contrasting materials and textures, and complementary landscaping; that Pomander Walk may be seen as part of a historicizing architectural tradition which seeks to recall associations of an earlier era in a modern context; that with a design closely inspired by the theater, it has had many residents associated with the performing arts and theater; and that as a carefully-planned secluded enclave set apart from the bustling Upper West Side about it, Pomander Walk has a unique sense of place and lasting appeal.

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, Pomander Walk, Numbers 3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10, 15,16,17,18,19,20,21,22 Pomander Walk, 261, 263,265,267 West 94th Street, and 260,262,264,266,270,272,274 West 95th Street, Borough of Manhattan, and designates Tax Map Block 1243, Lot 10 in part excluding the land on which the Healy Building at 2521-2523 Broadway is situated, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

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- "Pomander Walk, New York." Architecture and Building, 54 (January 1922), 3-5.



Pomander Walk Street Sign





View of Pomander Walk:  
West 95th Street between  
West End Avenue and Broadway



View of Pomander Walk looking  
toward 94th Street