

**ROCKEFELLER GUEST HOUSE**, 242 East 52nd Street, Manhattan.

Built 1949-50; Philip C. Johnson, in association with Landis Gore and Frederick C. Genz, architects.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1325, Lot 34.

On November 14, 2000 the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Rockefeller Guest House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark site (Item No. 2). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with provisions of law. A representative of the owner, the Landmarks Conservancy, and of the Historic Districts Council spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. The Commission received three letters in favor of designation, as well as a resolution from Manhattan Community Board Six. The Commission previously held a public hearing on the Rockefeller Guest House (LP-1919) on June 15, 1993 and September 21, 1993.

Summary

Designed by Philip C. Johnson in 1948 and built in 1949-50, the former Rockefeller Guest House is one of the earliest buildings in New York City to reflect the influence of the modern movement in architecture and the celebrated German-American architect Mies van der Rohe. The house, which was described by the noted architectural critic Ada Louise Huxtable as “sophisticated . . . handsome, unconventional,” is remarkably intact. Johnson’s subtle and elegant design incorporates features borrowed from two earlier projects by Mies: his unbuilt “court houses” of the 1930s, and the elevations he designed for various buildings at the Illinois Institute of Technology (hereafter, IIT). Built without the use of traditional ornament, the striking two-story street facade is articulated with precisely arranged structural elements, including a symmetrical first story consisting of a handsome wood door and flanking polished reddish brown ironspot brick walls laid in Flemish bond, surmounted by a grid of six fixed translucent windows faced with four steel H-sections. The house was commissioned by Blanchette Rockefeller, the wife of John D. Rockefeller 3<sup>rd</sup> and a major patron of the Museum of Modern Art (hereafter, MoMA), to display her collection of modern painting and sculpture and to entertain guests. The Rockefellers donated the house to the museum in 1955, and in the years that followed it had a succession of owners, many of whom were associated with the international art community, including Johnson who lived in the house from 1971-79. A significant early work by one of the country’s leading architects and his only private residential building in New York City, in May 1989 the Rockefeller Guest House became the first work of architecture in the city to be sold by a leading art auction house.



## DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

### Philip Cortelyou Johnson

For more than seven decades, the architect, curator and critic Philip C. Johnson has remained a pivotal figure in American architecture.<sup>1</sup> Born in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1906, he studied classics at Harvard University, moving to New York City after graduation in 1928. The following year he became acquainted with Alfred H. Barr, Jr., the founding director of MoMA, who invited him to join the new museum's advisory committee. In 1932, Johnson and the architectural historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Jr., organized the museum's first exhibition devoted to architecture, "Modern Architecture: International Exhibition." The catalogue and the concurrent publication *The International Style: Architecture Since 1922* helped introduce the larger American public to such innovative European architects as Le Corbusier, Alvar Aalto, Walter Gropius, and Mies van der Rohe. The museum's Department of Architecture was established later that year, with Johnson as chairman. Between 1932 and 1934 he organized seven exhibitions, including the landmark exhibition "Machine Art" of 1934, which examined the beauty and aesthetic characteristics of industrial objects.

Johnson returned to Cambridge in 1940 to enroll in the Harvard Graduate School of Design. For his senior project, he designed and built a one-story house at 9 Ash Street. Completed in August 1942, Johnson's low flat-roofed design consisted of a single bedroom and living area enclosed by a sixty-five foot long expanse of floor-to-ceiling glass facing a tiled court surrounded by a nine-foot high wall. Inspired by Mies's unrealized "court houses" of the 1930s, this uncompromisingly modern design helped position Johnson as one of the leading exponents and interpreters of the architect's work in the United States. Many of the ideas and strategies explored in this early project would later be incorporated into his design for the Rockefeller Guest House.

In early 1945, Johnson settled in New York City, opening his architectural practice at 205 East 42<sup>nd</sup> Street. By the end of the year, he hired the architect Landis Gore, a fellow classmate at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, as his associate.<sup>2</sup> Since Johnson would not pass the New York State licensing exam for architects until 1954, his early projects were filed by either Gore or another qualified associate. During these years, Johnson continued to work at MoMA, serving as the unsalaried chair of the Department of Architecture and Design. He benefitted immeasurably from this affiliation since it provided him

with a platform from which to promote his vision of what modern post-World War II American architecture should be, as well as the social contacts that resulted in architectural commissions.

The work that Johnson produced during his first decade as an architect demonstrates an unmistakable debt to Mies. In 1929 and 1930 he first encountered the architect's work, traveling to Brno, Czechoslovakia, where he visited the recently completed Tugendhat House. In a letter to a friend he compared it to the Parthenon, calling it "without question the best looking house in the world."<sup>3</sup> Johnson displayed a model of the house in the 1932 MoMA exhibition, and in 1938 Mies moved to Chicago where he accepted a position as head of the architectural program at the Armour Institute of Technology, later IIT. Johnson organized the first major survey of the architect's work at MoMA in 1947, including a model of Mies's 1946 proposal for the Edith Farnsworth House at Fox River, Illinois. This austere steel design, which featured a single room enclosed only by glass walls, served as the inspiration for Johnson's weekend residence in New Canaan, Connecticut (1946-49), the so-called "Glass House." This and other projects led to a brief association with Mies, in which Johnson designed the interiors of the Four Seasons Restaurant in the Seagram Building (1956-58, a designated New York City Landmark and Interior Landmark).

In the early 1960s Johnson's work shifted direction. He began to experiment with primarily classical forms, which he incorporated into an unbuilt proposal for Asia House (1959), as well as in his design for the New York State Theater at Lincoln Center (with Richard Foster, 1964). This tendency would culminate more than a decade later, with his design for the AT&T (now Sony) Building at 550 Madison Avenue (1975-84). Other notable works by Johnson in New York City include: the New York State Pavilion at the 1964 World's Fair (with Foster, 1964), located in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park, the Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York University (with Foster, 1972), and 885 Third Avenue (with John Burgee, the so-called Lipstick Building, 1988). He received the American Institute of Architect's highest honor, the Gold Medal, in 1978, and was the first recipient of the Pritzker Prize in 1979.

### Turtle Bay as Bohemia

The Rockefeller Guest house is located in Turtle Bay, a neighborhood roughly bound by East 53<sup>rd</sup> Street to the north, 42<sup>nd</sup> Street to the south, Third Avenue to

the west, and the East River. The area, which gets its name from a swampy cove that once existed between 45<sup>th</sup> and 48<sup>th</sup> Streets, remained relatively rural until the early 1880s when elevated trains began serving both Second and Third Avenues. Turtle Bay's east-west streets gradually filled with brick and brownstone townhouses, as well as working-class tenements. Many early residents found work in the "nuisance" industries that gathered near the banks of the East River, such as slaughterhouses and breweries. In 1939, the *WPA Guide to New York City* described the area as a "riverside backyard for the more imposing mid-town section."<sup>4</sup>

Turtle Bay developed a bohemian character in the 1920s, attracting a varied population consisting of journalists, writers, actors, artists, architects and philanthropists. Many chose the neighborhood for its innovative housing, which included recently-completed Tudor City (begun 1925, a designated New York City Historic District), a verdant complex of medieval-style apartment houses and apartment hotels, Beekman Place, a two block-long enclave of townhouses and luxury apartment buildings overlooking the East River, and Turtle Bay Gardens (Edward C. Dean and William Lawrence Bottomley, 1920, a designated New York City Historic District), facing 48<sup>th</sup> and 49<sup>th</sup> Streets, between Second and Third Avenues, where twenty adjoining townhouses and their interiors were renovated and reconfigured to face a 100 by 200 foot communal garden.<sup>5</sup> Developed by Charlotte Martin, the project was a great success, attracting such distinguished tenants as E. B. White, Henry Luce, Dorothy Thompson, Mary Martin, Katherine Hepburn, and Stephen Sondheim.

A similar project at 211-15 East 49<sup>th</sup> Street (1869-70; renovation, Harold S. Sterner, a designated New York City Landmark) was conceived by James Amster in 1945. Known as "Amster Yard," the L-shaped landscaped courtyard is enclosed by shops, offices, and apartment buildings.<sup>6</sup> Isamu Noguchi established his sculpture studio here in the early 1940s, and an early tenant was the famed decorator Billy Baldwin. Other celebrated Turtle Bay residents included Peggy Guggenheim and Max Ernst who lived together at 440 East 51<sup>st</sup> Street from 1941-43, Alfred Stieglitz, who lived at 405 East 54<sup>th</sup> Street from 1936-42, and Irving Berlin, who lived on Beekman Place. From 1963-68, the pop artist Andy Warhol worked at 231 East 47<sup>th</sup> Street, occupying a loft he called "The Factory."

Architects began to gather in Turtle Bay following the opening of the Beaux-Arts Institute of Design (Dennison & Hirons, a designated New York City Landmark) at 304 East 44<sup>th</sup> Street in 1928.

Immediately east of the school, the Beaux-Arts Apartments (Kenneth Murchison and Raymond M. Hood, a designated New York City Landmark) were built in 1929-30, providing housing for students and faculty. Residents included the noted sculptor Jo Davidson and the architect/writer Talbot Hamlin.

The first modern-style building to be erected in New York City was the William Lescaze House and Office (1933-34, a designated New York City Landmark) at 211 East 48<sup>th</sup> Street. Inspired by the Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier, the three-story white stucco and glass brick building was a bold addition to the block which featured several late 19<sup>th</sup> century brownstone townhouses as well as the south section of Turtle Bay Gardens.<sup>7</sup> Lescaze was an influential figure during the 1930s whose clients included Edward and Dorothy Norman, the Brooklyn Museum, and MoMA. Additional members of the profession who lived or worked in the area included the architects Everett V. Meeks, the Dean of the Yale School of Fine Arts, and Edward C. Dean, who lived in Turtle Bay Gardens, Russel Wright who lived and worked on East 48<sup>th</sup> Street, Morris Sanders and Morris Lapidus on East 49<sup>th</sup> Street, Jan Pokorny on East 51<sup>st</sup> Street, and Paul Rudolph who moved his office to Beekman Place in 1965.<sup>8</sup>

Johnson lived and worked in Turtle Bay for more than three decades. The neighborhood was convenient to MoMA and his architectural practice. During 1930-31, he occupied an apartment in the same building as Alfred H. Barr, Jr. at 424 East 52<sup>nd</sup> Street, east of First Avenue, in 1932 he rented a larger apartment in Turtle Bay Gardens at 230 East 49<sup>th</sup> Street, and later, a duplex at 241 East 49<sup>th</sup> Street. These three residences were all notable for their unconventional modern decor, featuring furniture, fixtures, and fabrics designed by Mies and his frequent collaborator Lilly Reich. In 1939, Johnson began leasing a small house hidden behind a row of apartment buildings at 751 Third Avenue, between East 46<sup>th</sup> and 47<sup>th</sup> Streets. He held onto the lease throughout the 1940s, moving to an apartment building on East 55<sup>th</sup> Street in 1952.

#### Blanchette Ferry Hooker Rockefeller (1909-1992)<sup>9</sup>

Blanchette Rockefeller lived in a duplex apartment overlooking the East River at One Beekman Place (Sloan & Robertson, with Corbett, Harrison, and MacMurray, 1930), at the east end of 48<sup>th</sup> Street, approximately six blocks from the future site of the guest house. Born in New York City, Blanchette Ferry Hooker attended the Chapin School and then Vassar College, graduating with a degree in music in 1931. A year later, in November 1932, she married John D.

Rockefeller 3<sup>rd</sup> (1906-78), the eldest son of John D. Rockefeller, Jr. (1874-1960) and Abby Aldrich Rockefeller (1874-1948), in a ceremony at the recently-completed Riverside Church (1928-30, a designated New York City Landmark).

Blanchette Rockefeller was a major benefactor of MoMA. The museum was co-founded by her mother-in-law in 1929 and in subsequent decades various members of the Rockefeller family would be closely associated with its activities, particularly Abby and John D. Rockefeller Jr.'s second son, Nelson Rockefeller (1908-1979), who served as the museum's president, and their fourth son, David Rockefeller (born 1915), who served as chairman of the board. John 3<sup>rd</sup>, however, devoted most of his attention to collecting Asian art and American painting. In addition to serving as the founding president of Lincoln Center, he was a major supporter of Asian culture in New York City; he revived Japan Society in 1952, founded Asia Society in 1956, and helped finance construction of a Japanese exhibition house in the MoMA sculpture garden in 1954.<sup>10</sup>

During the first years of her marriage, Blanchette Rockefeller served as the vice chairman of the Central Council of the Community Service Society and as a trustee of the Brearley School and Vassar College. Her affiliation with MoMA began in the late 1940s; she modestly recalled:

... after I was married and had three children, she [Abby Aldrich Rockefeller] suggested I get involved . . . It was such an exciting institution and the people who worked there were so fascinating . . . I wasn't up on modern art . . . But I learned.<sup>11</sup>

With her brother-in-law Nelson Rockefeller's encouragement, she formed MoMA's Junior Council in 1948, a group of "young, well-heeled enthusiasts who might be groomed for the board."<sup>12</sup> Under her leadership the council sponsored many programs, including a lecture series, exhibitions, and an "art-lending service" for members that was conceived to encourage the purchase of contemporary art. She also served on the museum's executive committee, exhibition committee, and acquisitions committee. In 1955, she helped found the International Council, an independent corporation organized to raise funds for the museum and to travel exhibitions to foreign cultural institutions.<sup>13</sup> She served as the council's first president and three years later was elected the first female president of the museum, a position she held until 1972. As chairman of the board of trustees during the 1970s and 1980s, she led the campaign to free MoMA from

private support, promoting the construction of Museum Tower (Cesar Pelli & Associates, completed 1985) and the concurrent expansion.

Blanchette Rockefeller began to collect modern art in the late 1940s. On her visits to galleries she was often accompanied by Barr and Johnson.

Her first acquisition was a bronze horse and rider by Marini of which Barr showed her photographs. When it turned up at Beekman Place, it was a great deal larger than she had any notion it would be. It looked out of place among the Chinese porcelains and sculptures, the Impressionist paintings, and the English furniture as if it had wandered out of its stall...<sup>14</sup>

Throughout his career, Johnson served as MoMA's unofficial architect. He proposed his first project, an unrealized "House of Glass" for the sculpture garden in 1948 and later that year Blanchette Rockefeller commissioned him to design a sculpture pavilion in the garden of the family estate in Pocantico Hills, New York. She and her husband John 3<sup>rd</sup>, however, disagreed on its merits and project did not proceed.<sup>15</sup>

Neither John 3<sup>rd</sup> nor his father John Jr., appreciated modern sculpture and painting. In response to John Jr.'s antipathy, her mother-in-law, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller adopted an unusual strategy. She hired the architect Duncan Candler and the designer Donald Deskey in late 1929 to convert a children's playroom in their house at 10 West 54<sup>th</sup> Street (demolished) into a picture gallery, ceramics room, and print room. Located out of her husband's sight, on the top floor of the house, the gallery functioned as her private salon and it became a favorite venue for MoMA-related events, with lectures by such influential speakers as Barr, Hitchcock and Johnson.

Two decades later, Blanchette Rockefeller would follow her mother-in-law's example. Rather than trying to integrate modern artworks into the traditional-style decor of her Beekman Place duplex, in 1948 she commissioned Johnson to design a separate building -- what she called her "guest" house -- where she could display her growing art collection and entertain friends.<sup>16</sup>

### Design and Construction

In June 1948, the Empire Mortgage Company, acting on behalf of the Rockefeller family acquired a 25 by 100 foot lot on East 52<sup>nd</sup> Street, west of Second Avenue. It was an ideal location -- midway between her home in Turtle Bay on Beekman Place and the museum. On the site were two vacant structures, both dating

from circa 1870. Johnson later described them as “completely nondescript, [a] small house, wedged between brick walls, a gap and a weed patch, with a dumpy coach house.”<sup>17</sup> This sequence of spaces – closed, open, and closed – would shape Johnson’s plan. Whereas most urban townhouses have gardens at the rear of the lot, the “gap” and “weed patch” would become an internal courtyard, filled with water and partly open to the sky.

An associate in Johnson’s office, Frederick C. Genz, filed plans for the guest house in late 1948.<sup>18</sup> Since the existing brick walls were retained, it was classified as an alteration, consisting of mainly plastering, plumbing, carpentry, and masonry work. The project’s estimated cost was \$64,000.<sup>19</sup> Construction began in 1949, and the house was ready for use in 1950.

The Rockefeller Guest House was one the first buildings in New York City to reflect the influence of the modern movement in architecture and the celebrated German-American architect Mies van der Rohe. It would also be Johnson’s first and only private residential building in the city. Located on the south side of 52<sup>nd</sup> Street, the simple two-story brick and glass facade stood in sharp contrast to the late nineteenth century buildings adjoining it, a tenement and schoolhouse. Johnson’s spartan design reflects two projects by Mies: the unbuilt “court houses” of the 1930s, where he explored the “flow of space . . . confined within a single rectangle formed by the outside walls of court and house conjoined,” and the architect’s elevations for the various buildings at IIT which were notable for their “subtleties of detailing.”<sup>20</sup> In describing these facades, Johnson wrote in 1947:

Structural elements are revealed as are those of a Gothic cathedral . . . And whereas the medieval architect relied on the collaboration of the sculptor and painter for his ultimate effect, Mies, so to speak, had to perform the functions of all three professions. He joins steel to steel or steel to glass or brick, with the taste and skill that formerly went into the chiseling of a stone capital or the painting of a fresco.<sup>21</sup>

Johnson followed Mies’s example; rather than embellishing the guest house facade with traditional ornament, he articulated the street facade with precisely arranged structural elements. He divided the two-story facade into two visually-distinct sections. The lower portion of the first floor facade, which projects slightly in front of the windows, consists of a wood door at center flanked by polished reddish brown brick walls

laid in Flemish bond. The brick, which resembled that used on the cylinder that enclosed the bathroom in Johnson’s New Canaan residence of the previous year, was chosen to compliment the facade of the adjacent schoolhouse.

Above the solid base of the first story is a grid of six “unpolished plate glass” windows.<sup>22</sup> The mullions that divide the fixed translucent windows are faced with two decorative steel H-sections that rest atop the brick sill. Whereas the second story has vertical floor-to-ceiling windows, the lower horizontal panes act as clerestories, enclosing the upper portion of the first floor facade. These two sets of windows have been traditionally hung with identical white draperies, giving the impression of a single floor above the brick base.

The first floor interior (not part of this designation) was designed as a single flowing space. In front was a large living area with a fireplace and a compact kitchen hidden by folding doors, and in the rear, a bedroom with bath and dressing area. Between the rooms was an interior court with a pool that extends the full width of the building. A grid of floor-to-ceiling windows face the courtyard, similar in effect to the courtyard Mies designed for the Chemical Engineering and Metallurgy Building (1945-46) at IIT. Uninterrupted brick walls painted white extended from the living area through the courtyard, providing a neutral backdrop for the owner’s art collection; which included pieces by Alberto Giacometti, Hans Arp, Robert Motherwell, Elie Nadelman, Jacques Lipchitz, Jackson Pollock, and Mark Rothko.<sup>23</sup>

Above the living area on the second floor (not part of this designation) were two unheated bedrooms and a bathroom. These rooms served two purposes; providing additional space for guests, but also giving the guest house a stronger presence on the street. Johnson later claimed that he designed the second story mainly to “give the facade height” and because a one-story house “would look all wrong.”<sup>24</sup> These second-floor bedrooms face the interior courtyard.

#### Critical Reception

The Rockefeller Guest House received considerable attention, with articles and photographic spreads in *The New York Times*, *Interiors*, and the *Architectural Review*. *House & Home* admired the simplicity of the living areas, suggesting that such “restraint” could “help make a cheap house look more expensive.”<sup>25</sup> In a 1961 guide to modern architecture in New York City, published by MoMA and the Municipal Art Society, the noted critic Ada Louise Huxtable described the house as “sophisticated . . . handsome, unconventional.”<sup>26</sup> While many writers noted Johnson’s long-standing debt to Mies and the

intricate detailing on the facade, his friend and ally, the critic Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Jr., highlighted the building's "classical leanings" and how the arrangement with a central courtyard resembled "Pompeiiian domestic planning."<sup>27</sup>

Several critics detected a subtle Asian influence in Johnson's design.<sup>28</sup> In August 1950, a writer for *Architectural Forum* described the "inward-directed plan" and the emphasis on the "restful" courtyard:

The idea of a quietly serene and empty space at the very core of the house and its busy life is one that might have appealed to Lao Tse the philosopher.<sup>29</sup>

Modern architecture's minimalist character is also likely to have appealed to the owners who made frequent trips to Asia and were avid collectors of Asian and particularly Japanese art. White and black predominated throughout the sparsely-furnished interiors, and the pool in the courtyard was traversed by three raised travertine stepping stones that MoMA historian Russell Lynes later speculated were a "concession" to the Rockefeller's fondness toward "things Japanese."<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, round wood pegs, set flush into the outer section of the doorjamb, suggest the hand-crafted quality of traditional Japanese woodwork.

#### Subsequent History

During the early 1950s, the Rockefeller Guest House became "an informal arm" of MoMA.

It was presided over by a butler named Charles, who could and frequently did run up luncheons for a small number of trustees and donors to the Museum, for Important Persons and those being wooed. There, too, were cocktail parties and small dinners and the ever present hazard of someone accidentally backing into the shallow pool . . .<sup>31</sup>

In 1954 the house was the site of an exhibition to benefit the activities of the Junior Council. Curated by Barr, Dorothy C. Miller and William Lieberman, it displayed paintings, sculptures and prints owned by various council members. Although *The New York Times* critic Aline Saarinen was disappointed by the cautious character of the artworks displayed, the exhibition offered the public a rare opportunity to view the elegantly minimal interiors.

Despite his antipathy to modern art, John 3<sup>rd</sup> attended functions at the house and on one occasion he and their children stayed overnight. He regretted the amount of time his wife devoted to running the guest

house and eventually convinced her to donate the building to MoMA in the summer of 1955.<sup>32</sup> Until the museum's East Wing (designed by Philip Johnson) was completed in 1964, the near-by guest house was used for a various museum events and functions, including receptions, conferences, and special exhibitions.

The guest house was purchased by Robert C. Leonhardt, a Manhattan business consultant, in 1964 for \$100,000. At the time of the sale, *The New York Times* described the house as "one of Mr. Johnson's most striking designs."<sup>33</sup> With the death of Mr. Leonhardt in 1971, his widow, Lee Sherrod, sought a suitable tenant, inviting Johnson and his partner, the former art dealer and exhibition designer, David C. Whitney, to lease the house. Johnson, who described their previous residence as a "ratty old two-room walk-up," made few changes, repainting the interiors white and hanging paintings by such celebrated contemporary artists as Roy Lichtenstein, John Chamberlain and Frank Stella. Andy Warhol, who occasionally visited Johnson, admired the openness of the plan, calling it "a prototype of loft living in New York."<sup>34</sup>

Robin Symes, a London antiquities dealer, acquired the house in 1979. Ten years later, in May 1989, he consigned it to the Sotheby's auction house. Sold to Ronald S. Lauder, a MoMA trustee since 1973, the building was described by *The New York Times* as "the first ever offered at a New York art auction -- and the first piece of real estate auctioned anywhere in the world by Sotheby's."<sup>35</sup> Anthony d'Offay, a London gallery owner specializing in modern art, purchased the guest house in the mid-1990s. In May 2000, Christie's auctioned the Rockefeller Guest House. Six bidders competed, and the final price was \$11.16 million.

#### Description

The Rockefeller Guest House is located on the south side of East 52<sup>nd</sup> Street, between Second and Third Avenues. The street facade is symmetrical and two stories high. The lower section of the first story projects forward and is faced with reddish-brown Flemish bond brick with tan mortar, similar to that used on the adjoining school building.<sup>36</sup> To the east, the brick facade recedes to metal extending the full height of the building, to brick that extends south and is visible from both the front and the side until it intersects with west wall of the adjoining school building. To the west, the brick facade recedes to metal extending the full height of the building, to brick that extends south to the adjoining tenement building.

The entrance is at the center of the first story, marked by a wood door that is divided by vertical lines into seven sections. The historic door, which rises as

high as the brick walls, is opened with a brass handle located to the east. At approximately eye level is a peephole, and centered below, a brass mail slot. The historic doorframe is made of identical wood. Round wood pegs, set flush into the outer frame, are visible. The east side of the door jamb incorporates (from top to bottom) a non-historic brass security camera, a brass speaker/microphone, and brass lock. The historic brass saddle, screwed to the threshold, is scored with incised lines. The door head incorporates a flush rectangular lighting fixture. To the west of the door is the building's address "2 4 2" in historic raised brass letters. Below these numbers, close to the ground, is a circular black metal vent. To the far right, near the west edge of the facade, aligned with the vent, is a small non-historic plastic apparatus. To the west of the door, set into the sidewalk, is a non-historic metal grate.

Six fixed historic translucent windows rise above the brick facade. Four projecting steel H-sections are welded to the columns that divide and frame the

windows. The two outer beams extend the full height of the building, from the roof to the ground, framing the east and west edges of the brick facade and windows. The two center beams rest on the brick facade. A continuous horizontal metal panel, set behind the H-sections, divides the upper and lower windows, creating horizontal clerestory windows that illuminate the first story, and the larger, vertical, floor-to-ceiling, second-story windows.

An unadorned metal fence, set back several feet from the front of the building, extends across the roof from east to west. Behind the fence, pipes are visible to the west and east, as well as an irregularly shaped ventilation unit. All of these elements are painted black. At the rear of the building, adjoining the tenement, rises a black chimney.

Report researched and written by  
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#### NOTES

1. This section is based primarily on Franz Schulze, *Philip Johnson: Life and Work* (New York: Knopf, 1994).
2. A resident of New Canaan, Connecticut, Landis Gore (1920-71) graduated from the Harvard Graduate School of Design in 1942. He was associated with Johnson from 1946 to 1951. See *New York Times* obituary, "Landis Gore, 71, Designer of His Own Avant-Garde House," March 29, 1991, B9, as well as Landis Gore, "Philip Johnson comes to Ponus Ridge," *New Canaan Historical Society Annual*, Volume X, No. 2, 1986.
3. Schulze, 68.
4. *The WPA Guide to New York City*, reprint of 1939 edition (New York: Octagon Books, 1970), 208.
5. Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Tudor City Historic District* (LP-1579) (New York: City of New York, 1988), May 17, 1988, and *Turtle Bay Gardens Historic District* (LP-279) (New York: City of New York, 1966), June 21, 1966.
6. Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Amster Yard Designation Report* (LP-277) (New York: City of New York, 1966), June 21, 1966.
7. Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Lescaze House Designation Report* (LP-0898) (New York: City of New York, 1976) January 27, 1976.
8. Robert A. M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin and Thomas Mellins, *New York 1930: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Two World Wars* (New York; Rizzoli, 1987) , 429; Robert A. M. Stern, Thomas Mellins and David Fishman, *New York 1960: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Second World War and the Bicentennial* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1995), 303-305, 569, 548. Paul Rudolph was living at 23 Beekman Place by 1965.
9. Obituary, *New York Times*, December 1, 1992, B12. She was the daughter of Elon Huntington Hooker, an engineer who became president of the Hooker Electro-Chemical Company and Blanche Ferry, heiress to the Ferry Seed fortune. At present, there is no biography of Blanchette Rockefeller or John D. Rockefeller 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Also see obituaries in *Newsday*, December 1, 1992, 108; *The Guardian*, December 3, 1992, 14; *Time* (December 14, 1992), 25, as well as *American National Biography* (1999), 700.

10. In 1951, John 3<sup>rd</sup> became a cultural advisor on the Peace Treaty Mission in Japan. See Clarice Stasz, *The Rockefeller Women* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 314.
11. Berenice Kert, *Abby Aldrich Rockefeller: The Woman in the Family* (New York: Random House, 1993), 333.
12. Russell Lynes, *Good Old Modern: An Intimate Portrait of the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Atheneum, 1973), 380. At present, the Junior Council is known as the Contemporary Arts Council. See Peter Reed, "The Space and the Frame," *Philip Johnson and the Museum of Modern Art, Studies in Modern Art 6* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 74.
13. The traveling exhibition program was supported, in part, by a five-year grant from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. Lynes, 387.
14. Lynes, 382.
15. Schulze, 203.
16. In 1998, MoMA curator Peter Reed wrote that the guest house was "nothing less than a modern, urban Petit Trianon" – the neoclassical pavilion at Versailles designed for Mme. Pompadour in 1763 and used by Marie-Antoinette. See Reed, 75.
17. "Architectural icon: Philip Johnson's Manhattan 'Court-House,'" in *Living With Art* (New York: Christies), May/June 2000, 16.
18. During the design and construction phases, the project was called "O'Hare House." See Reed, note no. 14, 101.
19. New York City, Department of Buildings, Block 1325, lot 20, Alt 2343-48. Although no mention of Genz is made in Schulze's biography, an article on the house in *Architectural Forum* lists him as the "Associate Archt." See *Architectural Forum* (August 1950), 87. Before his association with Johnson, he worked on a number of important projects in New York City, including Tudor City and Rockefeller Center. See *American Architects Directory* (New York: R.R. Bowker Company, 1962).
20. Philip C. Johnson, *Mies van der Rohe* (New York: MoMA, 1947), 96, 138.
21. *Ibid.*, 138.
22. "Townhouse," *Interiors* (December 1950), 80 ff.
23. The Lipschitz sculpture is now in the New York State Theater at Lincoln Center.
24. "Architectural icon," 17.
25. "Good Design for Production," *House and Home* (September 1954), 134-35.
26. Ada Louise Huxtable, *Four Walking Tours of Modern Architecture in New York City* (New York: MoMA and the Municipal Art Society, 1961), 46. The house and several of its neighbors along 49<sup>th</sup> Street were also included in *A Guide to New York Architecture 1650-1952* by Huson Jackson (New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1962), 24.
27. Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Jr. "Philip Johnson," *Architectural Review* (April 1955), 244.
28. The relationship between Mies's work and traditional Asian architecture has been examined by the scholar Werner Blaser. See *West Meets East: Mies van der Rohe* (Basel: Birkhauser Verlag, 1996).
29. *Architectural Forum*, 86. Furthermore, in a May/June 2000 interview with Johnson, the architect sidestepped a question comparing his design to a "traditional Oriental tea house." See "Architectural icon," 16.



30. Lynes, 383. Other examples of Japanese influence may include the use of sliding glass panels, the planting of a single honey locust tree in the pool, and the waterfall which ran from a pierced pipe above the partially covered courtyard.
31. Ibid.
32. John Ensor Harr and Peter Johnson, *The Rockefeller Conscience* (New York: Scribners, 1991), 229. New York City, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances; June 17, 1955, Liber 4927, p. 415; and July 8, 1955, Liber 4930, 30.
33. "Museum Building on 52<sup>nd</sup> Street is Sold," *New York Times*, February 7, 1964, 12.
34. "To Johnson, It Feels Like Home," *New York Times*, January 16, 1974, 44.
35. "Philip Johnson Town House Brings \$3.5 Million at Auction," *New York Times*, May 2, 1989.
36. At present the building to the east is used by the Turtle Bay Music School. In 1909, it was known as the Lincoln Academy.

## FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

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 Rockefeller Guest House has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City.

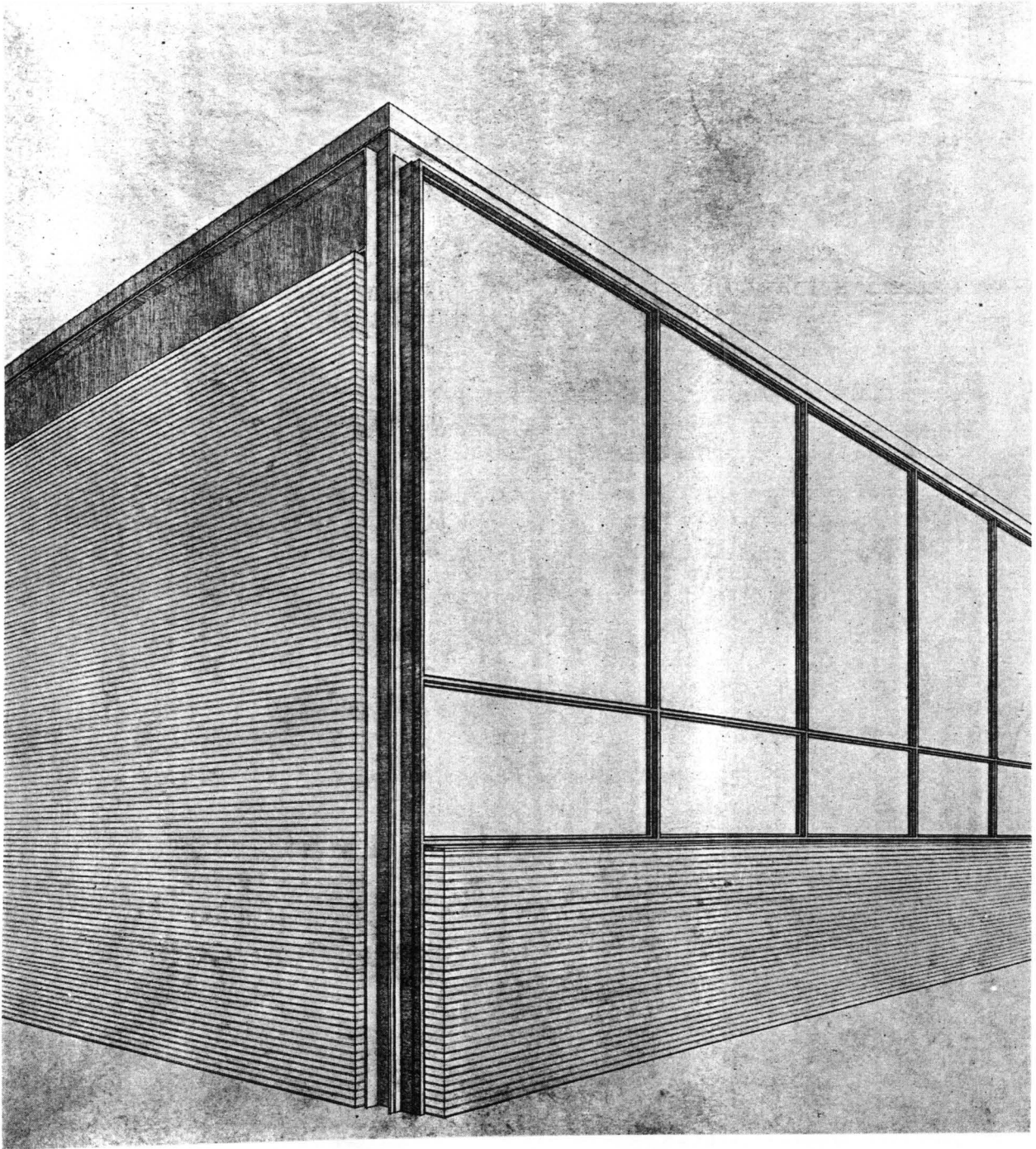
The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Rockefeller Guest House, designed by the noted architect, curator and critic Philip C. Johnson in 1948 and built in 1949-50, is one of the earliest buildings in New York City to reflect the influence of the modern movement in architecture and the German-American architect Mies van der Rohe, that it was commissioned by Blanchette Rockefeller, the wife of John D. Rockefeller 3<sup>rd</sup> and a major patron of the Museum of Modern Art, to display her collection of modern painting and sculpture and to entertain guests, that the symmetrical two-story facade incorporates many features used by Mies, including a first story of polished ironspot brick and a grid of six unpolished glass panels framed by exposed steel H-sections, that the Rockefellers donated the house to the Museum of Modern Art in 1955, that in the decades that followed it had a succession of owners, many of whom were associated with the international art community, including Philip Johnson, who lived in the house during the 1970s, and that in 1989 the Rockefeller Guest House was the first work of architecture in New York City to be sold by a leading art auction house.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Rockefeller Guest House, 242 East 52<sup>nd</sup> Street, and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1325, Lot 34 as its Landmark Site.



**Rockefeller Guest House**

Photo: Carl Forster

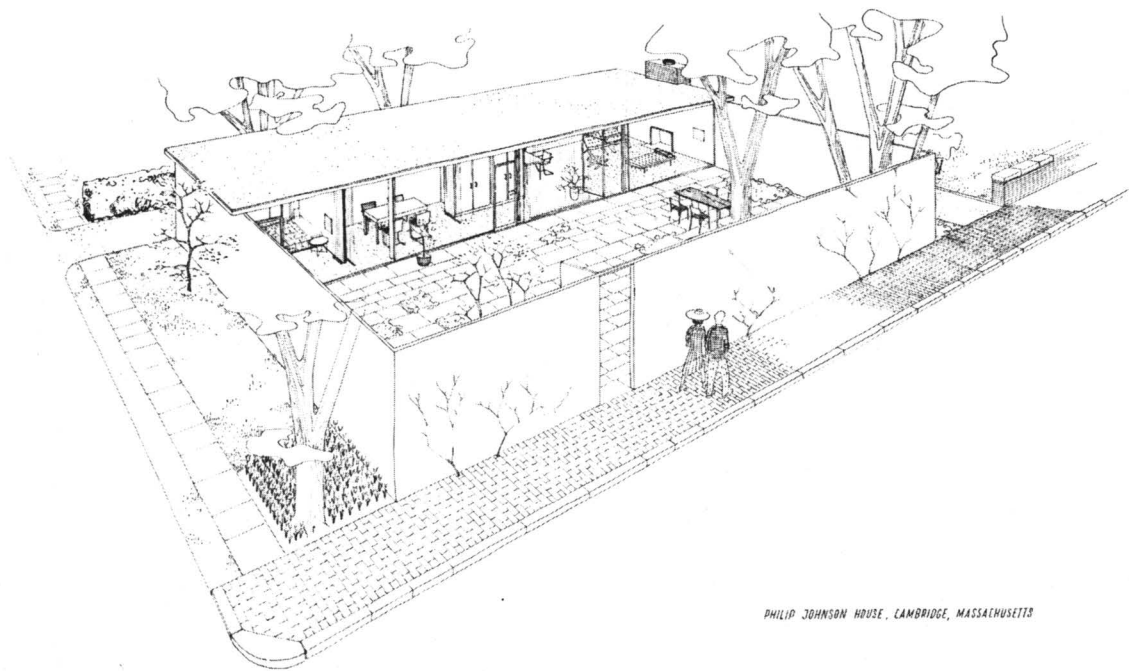


**Mies van der Rohe: IIT Library and Administration Building, Chicago, Project.**

Southeast corner, perspective view, 1944

Mies van der Rohe Archive, MoMA

Source: *Studies in Modern Art 6* (MoMA, 1998), 74.



PHILIP JOHNSON HOUSE, CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

**Philip Johnson: 9 Ash Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts**

Perspective view, 1941-42, MoMA

Source: *Studies in Modern Art 6* (MoMA, 1998), 134.

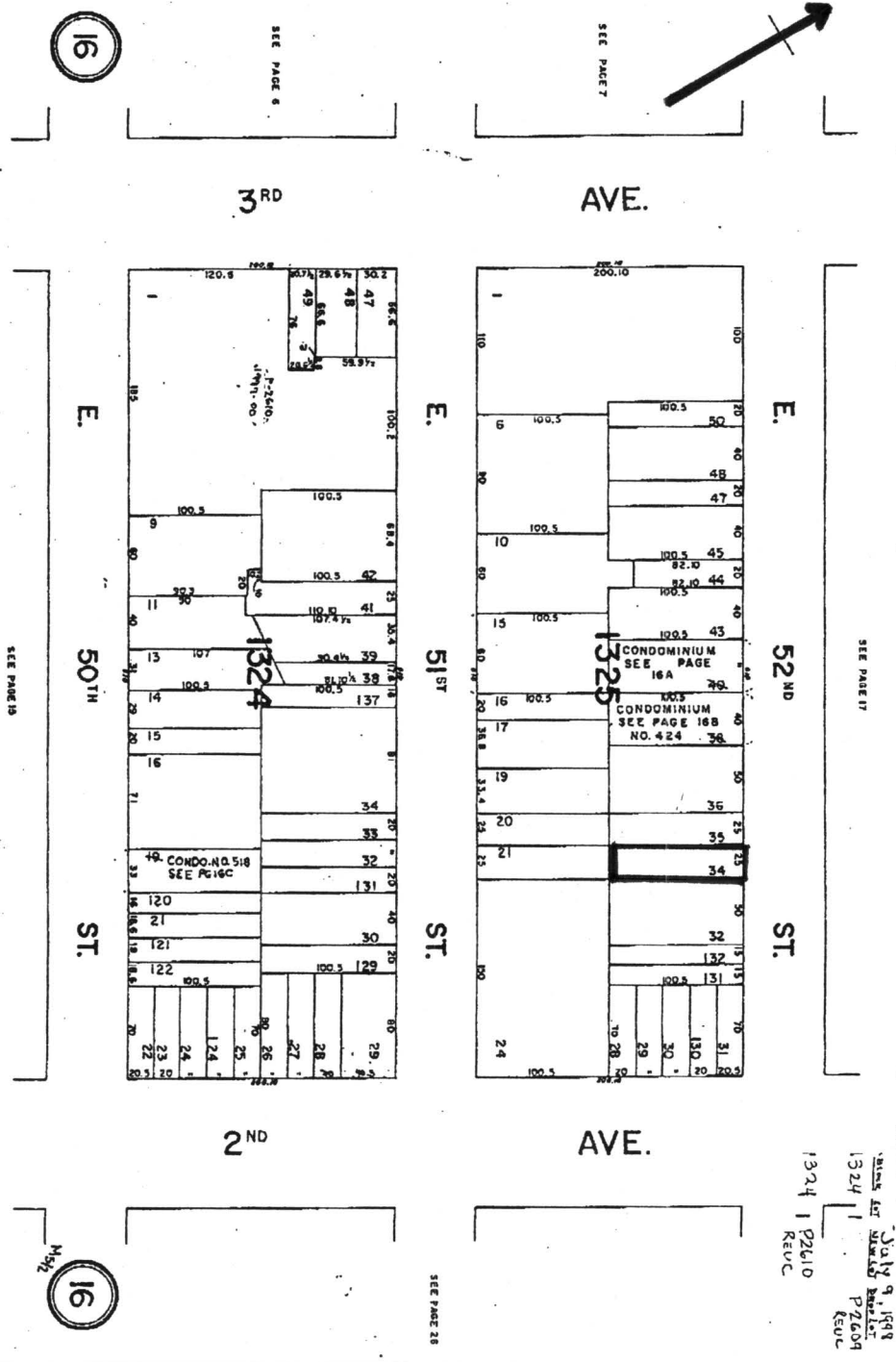


**Rockefeller Guest House, first story**

Photo: Carl Forster

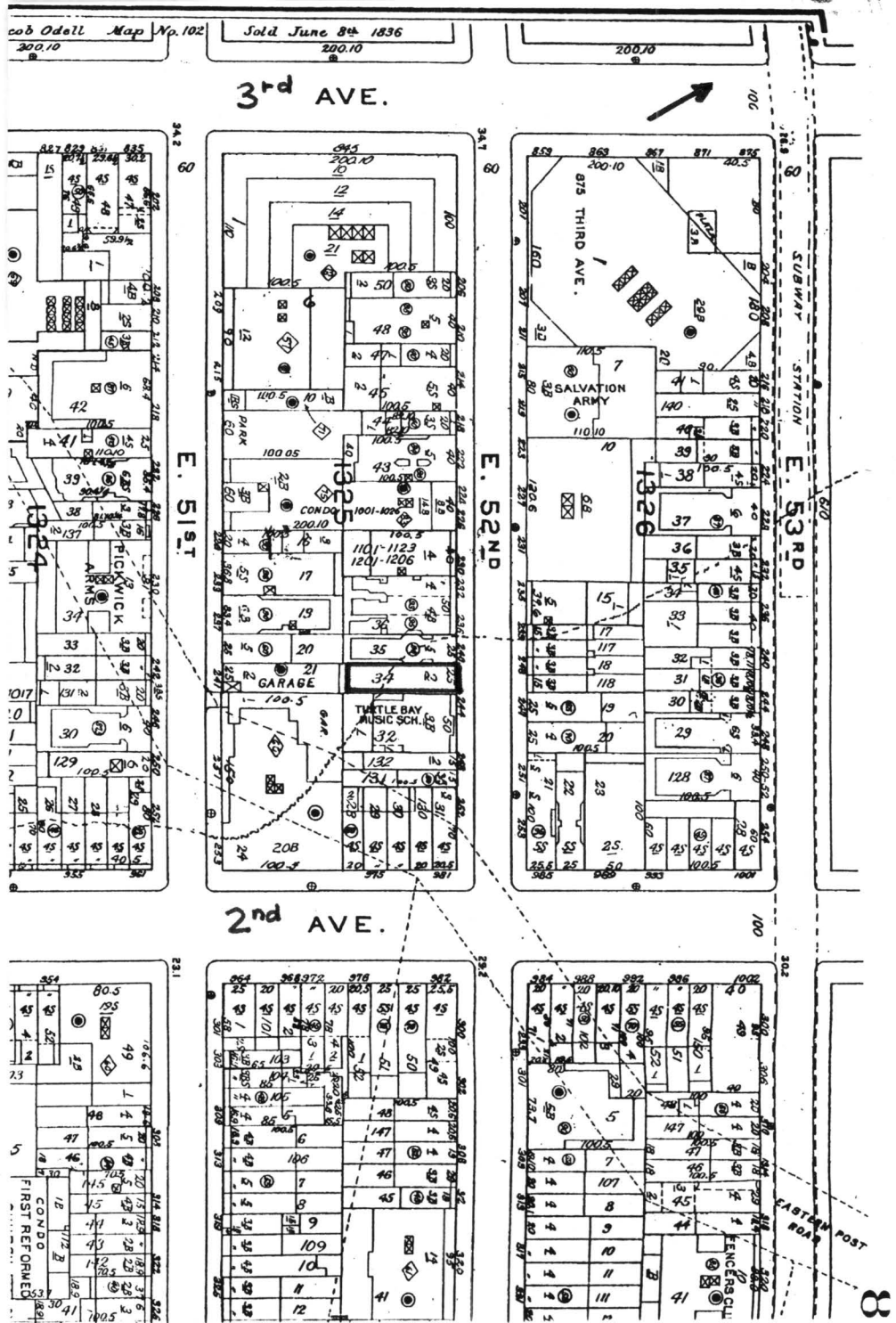


**Rockefeller Guest House**  
Photo: Carl Forster



**Rockefeller Guest House**  
 242 East 52<sup>nd</sup> Street, Manhattan  
 Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1325, Lot 34  
 Source: Dept. of Finance, City Surveyor, Tax Map

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**Rockefeller Guest House**  
 242 East 52<sup>nd</sup> Street, Manhattan  
 Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1325, Lot 34  
 Source: Sanborn Manhattan Landbook, 2000