

A Walk through Audubon Park

Take a walk through Audubon Park, a thriving neighborhood in northern Manhattan.

Examine architectural treasures

Experience Audubon Park's unique history

Find clues to help you capture Audubon Park's fascinating past

For nearly sixty years, from about 1850 until 1910, a tract of land in upper Manhattan was known as Audubon Park.

George Bird Grinnell
Audubon Park,
1927



Broadway at Audubon Park, May 1905

There is a clause in the titles to these villas and grounds that none of them can be sold into building lots without the consent of a majority of the villa owners. It is probable, therefore, that Audubon Park...will withstand the march of progress for some time to come.

New York Times
October 30, 1892

In my opinion the next section to develop...will be that land lying between 155th and 165th Streets, between Broadway and the Hudson River.

Charles Griffith Moses
New York Times
April 26, 1908

...within another year there will be no trace of the little garden spot laid out by Audubon about seventy years ago.

New York Times
October 10, 1909

Practically all of the grand old trees have been leveled, the artistic frame houses have given way to solid rows of brick and stone apartments, and within a few blocks a miniature city has grown up within a startlingly short space of time.

New York Times
May 28, 1910

Introduction

Begin your walk near the uptown Number 1 subway stop at Broadway and 157th Street, in a small triangular park that is now officially named the Ilka Tanya Pagan Park. Locals still call it Pigeon Park, for reasons that are apparent even to the first-time visitor. Standing amidst apartment buildings and shops, you may have difficulty imagining the dense forests that Native Americans once hunted and that Dutch settlers later lumbered to build their Harlem stockades, the wildlife that thrived here, or – most difficult to imagine – the tranquility.

The Audubon Park story began in 1842, when John James Audubon, the naturalist, painter and woodsman, bought about forty acres here in northern Manhattan and built a sprawling house by the Hudson (pictured below, in a drawing by W. R. Miller, engraved on wood by Richardson & Cox), where he lived until his death in 1851. Audubon called his estate Minnies Land in honor of his wife, Lucy, whom he and his two sons called Minnie, a Scottish endearment for mother. In Audubon's day, the streets that you see around you were nothing but parallel lines drawn on a map. A stream ran past this spot on its way down the hill to join the Hudson, just about where 157th Street is now. Rocky outcroppings and dense stands of oak, elm, and hemlocks covered the slope and here at the crest of the hill, deer roamed freely.

After Audubon's death, Lucy and her sons, Victor and John Woodhouse, finding themselves land-rich and cash-poor, built and rented several houses on their property. Then, when their financial situation continued to deteriorate, they began parceling their property into lots, which they sold. By the 1860s, both Victor and John Woodhouse had died and Minnies Land had passed out of the Audubon family's hands, though Lucy continued to live nearby for another decade.



In the 1850s, Minnies Land residents had begun calling their neighborhood – which by then was a small enclave of about ten large homes – Audubon Park, a name that appeared in print as early as 1854 and on city maps by the 1860s. Audubon Park remained secluded, resisting external change, until the early 1900s when – with Riverside Drive encroaching upon the western side and the subway urging New York up town here on the eastern side – the bucolic landscape yielded to a cityscape that looked much like what you see today. Within just a few years, from 1909 to 1911, the apartment buildings around you had replaced the mansions, drives, and gardens and the name Audubon Park had disappeared from city maps and eventually from the city's collective memory.

After wandering for some hours, I turned into a rustic road which led directly down towards the river. A noble forest was planted on the one side of it, and on the other vast grain fields lay laughing in the sun...my walk soon brought a secluded country house into view...

Parke Godwin
Homes of American Authors
 1842

It consisted of forty-four acres, all heavily wooded, and at that time was almost as remote from the city as a lodge in the Catskills.

Rufus Rockwell Wilson
New York Old and New
 1902

Sixty-five years ago the upper part of Manhattan Island was still wood-land, as wild almost as the Southern savannahs, or the unpeopled prairies of the West...into this quiet and beautiful land in search of a retired home wandered Audubon, the naturalist, one of the great men of the world.

M. E. Audubon
 Audubon's Granddaughter
New York Times
 April 30, 1905

Your walk will lead you through today's Audubon Park where you will examine architectural treasures that date from the early 1900s, experience history, and find some clues that will help you capture Audubon Park's colorful past.

Broadway (The Boulevard)

To find the first of those clues, start walking south on Broadway towards 155th Street. In 1842, when the Audubons moved here, Broadway reached only as far as 59th Street. In late 1868, the city began building a new public drive that originated at a grand circle at 59th Street and extended north along the path of the old Bloomingdale Road, cutting through Trinity Cemetery, and ending at 155th Street, right at the entrance to Audubon Park.

As earlier drives – intended to provide gentlemen a place to exercise their horses without regard for speed – had developed into residential districts, with maximum speed limits of six miles per hour, the need for a new drive grew, so the city employed approximately 740 men to blast through 350,000 cubic yards of rock and earth and then deposit another 300,000 cubic yards of earth to perfect the grade for a new drive.

The other, perhaps more important purpose of the drive was the expectation that it would spur real estate development on Manhattan's upper west side. The reasons for the drive were not entirely altruistic. This project, like others controlled by the Tweed Ring, included the usual graft, kick-backs, and land speculation. Tweed relatives and cronies owned land along the projected route and Tweed, himself, owned a large plot bordering the west side of 59th Street where the drive was to begin (now Columbus Circle). The Boulevard, as this new drive was named, did not immediately spawn the expected growth along its route; nevertheless, before it was complete, plans proceeded for extending it further north. Eventually, on Valentine's Day, 1899, by proclamation of the mayor, the name "Boulevard" disappeared and the thoroughfare became "Broadway" for its entire length.

As you approach 156th Street, look across Broadway at the six-story apartment building with an APA inscribed on a cartouche above the front entrance (the building with the Subway sandwich shop at street level). Schwartz and Gross, well-known apartment building architects, designed this 1905 structure, the Audubon Park Apartments, which was one of the first apartment buildings to appear in the vicinity of Audubon Park. Its owners quickly appropriated that evocative name, though the building sits outside the park's official boundaries.

Along your walk, you will notice that all of the buildings dating from the early 1900s are named. In the building boom that followed the opening of the subway in 1904 – aptly called the subway boom – numerous apartment buildings of similar style and structure appeared along its

We live in a fast age, and New Yorkers are a fast people...a great public drive, broad and long, where hundreds of fleet horses could be exercised in a single hour, was the demand that came welling up from the hearts of thousands. One was accordingly laid out on the line of the old Bloomingdale Road, beginning at 59th Street with an immense circle for turning vehicles...This street is expected to be one of the later wonders of Manhattan, and land is held at fabulous prices along its entire length.

The Rev J. F. Richmond
**New York and its
Institutions**
1872

The Commissioners for the Boulevard extension above 155th St., running through Washington Heights, met yesterday to hear the views of parties interested in or affected by this proceeding...No valuations were places upon the property. It was decided, however, that by express authority of the law, one-half of whatever expense may be incurred shall be assessed on the City at large.

New York Times
December 19, 1872

route. Naming a building helped distinguish it from its neighbors and lent it a certain pretension that apparently appealed to the middle class – the group developers were attempting to lure uptown.



Circa 1911: Broadway looking south, with the bridge connecting Trinity Cemetery in the distance. Entrances to the new subway are in the foreground.

155th Street

Just before you reach 155th Street, you will pass Audubon Terrace. You can return for a full examination of this unique museum complex at the end of your walk, so for now, continue to 155th Street, which is the southern border of Audubon Park, as well as the official southern border of Washington Heights.

In the early 1800s, New York's aldermen realized that the city was growing rapidly and that they needed to manage that growth. After several false starts at the city level, the state legislature assumed the project and appointed a commission, which in turn created a plan. The commission hired John Randel, Jr. to survey Manhattan as far north as was necessary to accommodate the projected population growth for the next several hundred years. When the Commissioners Plan Map appeared in 1811, 155th Street was the northernmost street, though like most of the streets above 14th, it only existed as a straight line drafted on a map. Incidentally, by 1911, New York City had grown well past 155th Street, a couple of centuries ahead of the commissioners' projections.

Clues to the past

Look across the street at the cemetery. Notice the difference between the cemetery's elevation, which closely approximates its 1842 topography, and the street's, which has been graded. This view of the

By 1804, New York's mayor and aldermen knew that the city was on the verge of rapid growth and began eyeing the undeveloped land. If their city was to expand in an orderly way, they needed a comprehensive plan.

*Robert T. Augustyn and
Paul E. Cohen
Manhattan in Maps
1997*

The physical transition from the nineteenth century to the twentieth century was one of the most vivid in New York history. As a whole section of the city like the Upper West Side changed its contours, it was like a great geological event...Dynamite blasts rocked the neighborhood, shaking houses and scaring horses in the street. Broadway opened up like a fault... there were yawning pits in the bedrock, created by the vast excavations necessary for the foundations of the new, oversized buildings.

*Elizabeth Hawes
New York, New York
1993*

cemetery will give you a sense of the rocky, uneven terrain that dominated Minnies Land (and Audubon Park) until nearly incessant blasting in the early 1900s, excavations for the subway and apartment-building foundations, created the relatively smooth streets and sidewalks that we travel today.

Battle of Fort Washington

Before you continue down 155th Street, look south along Broadway to the end of the stone wall. In November, 1776, at the beginning of the American Revolution, that spot marked the “second line of defense” erected by the Continental Army. In September, after the Battle of the Heights of Harlem, which was fought south of here around 120th Street, Washington evacuated most of his troops to New Jersey. About 2,800 men remained under Nathanael Greene to defend Fort Washington. Washington thought the position was indefensible, but Greene refused to abandon it. On November 16, 1776, the British attacked from the south, pushing the lines of defense back into the fort, and then from the north, overcoming the fort completely. With that battle, the British took control of Manhattan for the duration of the revolution. A plaque on Broadway and 153rd Street, at the southern side of the cemetery commemorates that November 1776 battle.

Trinity Cemetery

By the early 1800s, cemeteries in lower Manhattan were filled almost to capacity. To alleviate the situation, in 1841, the Trinity Corporation purchased a large tract between 152nd Street and 155th Street for a new burial ground. The first burial in Trinity Cemetery took place May 1, 1843, one year after the Audubon family moved to Minnies Land. When John James Audubon died in 1851, he was buried in a simple crypt in the southwest part of the cemetery, within sight of his house. In 1892, his body was reburied in the eastern part of the cemetery under a tall, elaborately-carved monument of bluestone that was quarried in the Catskills near Saugerties. Apparently, the city planned to extend Audubon Avenue south from its terminus at 165th Street and have it intersect 155th Street directly in front of Audubon’s monument, but that plan never materialized. The grave with its elaborate marker is directly behind the Church of the Intercession, which you see across Broadway.



From its creation, Trinity cemetery proved popular, not only as a final resting place, but also as a venue for riding and strolling. Manhattanites came uptown in their carriages and on foot, and after 1847, via the Hudson

Trinity Cemetery is much the largest and most generally used of those that remain on the island... This was far out of town in 1846, when the enterprise was started, but it is already approached by City improvements, and it is only a question of time when it will be abandoned.

New York Times
March 30, 1866

This burial place [Audubon's], deeply shaded by original forest trees and varieties that have been planted, affords a most delightful retreat on a warm summer's day. It lies upon the slopes of the river bank. Foot-paths and carriage-roads wind through it in all directions, and pleasant glimpses of the Hudson may be caught through vistas at many points.

Benson J. Lossing
The Hudson
1866

The Manhattanville line of Stages leaves the corner of Chatham Street and Tyron Row every half hour for the cemetery... passengers are taken to the Cemetery for 18 3/4 cents.

From a pamphlet quoted in
Churchyards of Trinity
Parish
1948 & 1955

River Railroad, which had a station by the river at 152nd Street. After the Boulevard split the cemetery into its eastern and western halves around 1870, the Trinity Corporation contracted Vaux, Withers & Co. to build a Gothic suspension bridge across Broadway just a few feet from the corner where you are standing. The bridge came down in 1911 to make way for the new Church of the Intercession, the third building to house its congregation. The first building, whose congregation included members of the Audubon family, was in Carmansville, at 154th Street and 10th Avenue (now Amsterdam Avenue). The second, built in 1872 and dedicated in 1873, was on the Boulevard at 158th Street, three blocks north of here (where the Corral Restaurant now sits); its spire rose 180 feet, dominating the skyline above Audubon Park. The picture here, views that church in 1905, looking north from 155th Street.



Before you leave this spot, you might be interested to know that Alfred Tennyson Dickens, son of Charles Dickens and godson of the poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson, is buried on the hill just above where you are standing. In 1912, the centenary of his father's birth, Dickens was making a lecture tour of the United States when he suddenly died of a heart attack in Manhattan. With the consent of his family, he was buried here in Trinity Cemetery under a simple stone marker.

Now, start down the hill towards the river. You are walking along the back of the Audubon Terrace museum complex, but notice how even the rear exteriors of these magnificent Beaux arts structures are beautifully finished. Just past the middle of the block, if you look across 155th Street at the cemetery from the end of April to the middle of May, you will see blooming pink and white dogwood trees – a species that once covered this entire slope. Just a little further on, you might want to pause to admire the bronze doors that Adolph A. Weinman's created for the rear of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Weinman, who was elected to the Academy in 1910, dedicated these doors (as you can read above them) to "Mary Wilkins Freeman and the woman writers of America." The architectural firm of McKim, Meade, and White, all three of whom were academy members, designed this building.

The Hudson River

When you reach the corner, cross the street and walk along the sidewalk, with benches and a low wall to your left. Continue walking to the end of the wall, then turn left and walk to the middle of the cement plaza where you will have a view of the Hudson River and downtown

The corner-stone of the new Church of the Intercession, One Hundred and Fifty-eighth street and Eleventh-avenue, was laid yesterday by Bishop Potter, assisted by Rev. Postlethwaite, rector of the parish, and other clergymen. Previous to the ceremony, many of the residents of Washington Heights assembled on the lawn of "The Hemlocks," the residence of George B. Grinnell, and a procession was organized...The procession then moved toward the scene of the ceremony in the following order: The Sunday-school children, the congregation, invited guests, vestrymen, wardens, clergy, rector and Bishop...The new building will be in the florid Gothic style of the thirteenth century, cruciform, with transepts. On the south-east corner will rise a tower, 180 feet high, surmounted by a gilt cross of 10 feet. On the south-west corner will be a turret and two clustered pinnacles. The walls will be of reck-faced brown stone, trimmed with light-colored Ohio stone...The whole structure will occupy eleven City lots...and will cost about \$89,000. After the proceedings a number of gentlemen were entertained at "The Hemlocks" by Mr. Grinnell. Mr. Wm. B. Harrison also had a select party at his residence.

New York Times
June 13, 1872

Manhattan. In the mid-distance, you can see Riverside Church's tower, at the right, and in the far distance, you can see the top of the Empire State Building. (When the trees are fully leaved, you may need to adjust your position.)

Now, turn 180 degrees and look up the river. You will see the George Washington Bridge, which opened on Sunday, October 25, 1931. From your present angle, the bridge obscures most of the magnificent Palisades on the New Jersey side of the river, but in 1842, you would have had a spectacular view of both the river and the Palisades from Audubon's house. In Trinity cemetery below you is a simple gravestone marking the burial place of Clement Clarke Moore, theologian and scholar, and best remembered today as the author of "A Visit from St. Nicholas" (Twas the night before Christmas and all through the house...). When the trees are bare, you have a splendid view of the ascending rows of vaults on its steep slope.

The Audubon Houses (Minnies Land)

Across Riverside Drive, the building with a curved front and crenellated roof-line that resembles a battlement is 765 Riverside Drive. Opening in November 1932, it occupies the site of the Audubon house, which sat some fifty feet below the present street level. (You might want to look down into the cemetery again to envision that depth.) The Audubon house was a two-story structure with an English basement. Broad piazzas ran across the second floor at the front and the back. Later owners "improved" it with a mansard roof and bay window. Samuel Morse, a friend of Audubon's, may have sent the first telegraph message across the Hudson from a laundry in the basement. In the 1840s, Audubon's two sons, Victor and John Woodhouse, built their own houses along the river just north of here. The Audubon property included outbuildings and a barn where unsold copies of the folio edition of *The Birds of America* were stored. Although the Audubons refer to their entire estate as Minnies Land, with time and with the adoption of "Audubon Park" for this area, the name "Minnies Land" became associated with the original house only.

When the George Washington Bridge opened in October 1931, the ninety-year-old Minnies Land still sat on its original site, with the Riverside Drive retaining wall at its back (pictured right). The city had already condemned the property in the mid '20s and the house was scheduled for demolition. For more than a decade, individuals and community groups had been lobbying to save the Audubon house, but to no avail. In November 1931, workmen began dismantling the Mansard roof and bay window. At the last minute, Harold W. Decker, an ornithologist, came forward with funds to move the house to a plot of land that the



Moving Minnies Land (1931)

The old house...will be lifted sixty feet to the level of the viaduct... and then rolled to its permanent site...

New York Times
November 11, 1931

The plan of a civic committee to save the old Audubon homestead ... seemed endangered yesterday when it was revealed.. that Henry Brandt...had threatened to withdraw the offer to sell the house...

New York Times
November 11, 1931

Reginald Pelham Bolton...said yesterday that the house would be demolished. "We can't do a thing to stop it," Mr. Bolton said...

New York Times
November 22, 1931

Wreckers began yesterday to raze the John James Audubon house at 155th and Riverside Drive...

New York Times
December 2, 1931

The house in which John James Audubon...spent his last years is to be saved to posterity after having been abandoned to the wreckers, it was announced yesterday by Harold W. Decker, an ornithologist of the Bronx.

New York Times
December 6, 1931

Reconstruction of the old home of John James Audubon...upon a permanent park site at Riverside Drive and 161st Street, was begun yesterday..

New York Times
December 9, 1931

city had donated at Riverside Drive and 161st Street. Decker, working with the Audubon Society, intended to restore the house and convert it to a museum. By early December, the house, sliced into several pieces, was on its new site and fund-raising efforts were underway for its restoration. Then the paper trail disappeared, as did the house. Most likely, it sat decaying while Decker attempted to raise the restoration funds, eventually succumbing to the elements, looters, and the scrap heap. Its removal and disappearance marked the symbolic end of Audubon Park, though use of that name had already begun to wane.

765 Riverside Drive opened barely a year after the Audubon house's removal. The architect was Albert E Schaeffer; his associate, Harry B. Rutkins. The crenellated roof line and the piers that extend above it, lend this six-story building the aura of a castle. As you can see, the façade is split into three sections with the outer two curved to fit gracefully into the path of Riverside Drive. What you can not see is that this building sits on steel piles that run forty-five feet below the curb level and then another forty feet down to bedrock. In November 1932, the *New York Times* reported that the foundation alone contained over 1,600 tons of steel. The space below, once Audubon's lawn, is now used as a series of garages, where Riverside Drive's stone retaining wall is still visible.

The Vauxhall (780 Riverside Drive)

On your right, up the street a little, is the Vauxhall, the eleven-story apartment building that sits on the corner closest to the cemetery. Wellington Clapp's four-story house once occupied that spot. Records indicate that the house already existed when Clapp, a wealthy dry goods merchant, bought the property from John Woodhouse Audubon and his wife, Caroline, in September 1852, though he probably enlarged and modified it considerably. In 1857, Clapp rented his house to another dry goods merchant, George Blake Grinnell, who wished to move his family to Audubon Park. Within three years, Grinnell bought an adjoining house, The Hemlocks, from Lucy Audubon. In 1867, Grinnell and Clapp formed a brokerage firm, with Horace F. Clark, son-in-law of Commodore Vanderbilt, as their silent partner. That firm folded in the financial crash of 1873, just three weeks after Grinnell had retired and turned the firm over to his son, George Bird Grinnell. The elder Grinnell's *New York Times* obituary reported that "during his retirement he accumulated extensive real estate interests on Washington Heights." Those "real estate interests," as you have just learned, afforded his heirs leverage to determine Audubon Park's future.

George and Edward Blum designed the Vauxhall in the Arts and Crafts style. Completed in 1914, it is the last of the subway boom apartment buildings built in Audubon Park. Like the others, it sat on the eastern side of Riverside Drive where its occupants had magnificent views of the Hudson – at least until 1932, when 765 Riverside Drive appeared. This was originally a rental building. Advertisements in the *New York Times*

Forty tenants in the Vauxhall apartment house, a ten-story building at 780 Riverside Drive, bought the property yesterday from Michael Kaufman...The Vauxhall, which houses seventy-four families, covers a plot 106 by 150 at the northeast corner of 155th Street. It is arranged in suites of from four to seven rooms, which show an annual rent return of about \$95,000.

New York Times

April 7, 1920

This is a story for everyone who thinks New York is the Ebenezer Scooge of cities...It is about 780 Riverside Drive, an apartment building roughly 70 years old...780 Riverside Drive has things that many buildings farther downtown, in better neighborhoods, do not... what 780 Riverside Drive has that a lot of other buildings in the city do not have is a sense of neighborhood.

Anna Quindlen

New York Times

December 18, 1982

Extended by a viaduct over the valley at 125th Street to a junction with the Boulevard Lafayette, the Drive would open up one of the most picturesque and interesting parts of the city, now quite unknown to its people.

New York Times

January 29, 1897

promised large rooms, southern exposures, large closets and spacious foyers and vestibules, as well as the expected amenities: dumbwaiters and twenty-four hour phone service. The telephone room, now empty of its equipment, still exists just off the lobby. In 1920, forty of the tenants bought the building and operated it as a co-operative apartment house; eventually it reverted to a rental building.

Riverside Drive

What eventually doomed the Audubon home was Riverside Drive. You will notice that the drive splits here at the traffic light and proceeds in two directions (the 155th Street sign is deceptive). This odd split is another clue to Audubon Park's past: the parallel metal bands in the street mark the original drive's inward curve.

The first portion of Riverside Drive, which opened in 1880, terminated around 125th Street, just before the Manhattan valley. Contention and debate had nearly derailed construction of Riverside Avenue (as it was originally called) and the predicted real estate boom it was to have brought did not immediately materialize. Even so, the city began making plans to extend the drive northward to meet Boulevard Lafayette, which began at 156th Street and Broadway, where you began your walk.

However, some property owners along the proposed route of the Riverside Drive Extension protested, especially here at 155th Street, where the directors of the Trinity Corporation balked at the idea of ceding the one hundred feet of land necessary for the drive's construction. Their reluctance antagonized other landowners, especially the Grinnell family which was fully aware of the economic advantages of a Riverside Drive address. The Grinnells would derive the greatest benefit if the extended Riverside Drive crossed Audubon Park on a diagonal from 155th Street to 158th Street, as that path would give them maximum frontage on what many believed would become the most desirable avenue in Manhattan.

These opposing forces came to a head on Christmas Eve, 1897, when a group of land-owners, including Newell Martin (who was married to Laura Grinnell) de-scended on Albany. A compromise bill passed that day. The Trinity Corporation agreed to give up fifty-five feet of the hundred needed; the remaining forty-five feet would be cantilevered over the railroad tracks. For their (apparently undisclosed) role in negotiating the compromise, the Grinnells received a plum: Riverside Drive would turn at 155th Street and cross Audubon Park on a snaking diagonal to meet Boulevard Lafayette at 158th Street. A fifty-foot retaining wall supporting the new drive would separate the three Audubon houses – property that the Grinnells did not own – from the rest of Audubon Park.

Over the next decade, politicians would try to halt, hinder, and change the drive's path. Despite that, this portion of Riverside Drive officially opened in February 1911. Immediately, drivers began complaining about the three

Extended by a viaduct over the valley at 125th Street to a junction with the Boulevard Lafayette, the Drive would open up one of the most picturesque and interesting parts of the city, now quite unknown to its people.

New York Times
January 29, 1897

The Riverside Drive Extension Association was incorporated to-day by the Secretary of State... The Directors are Robert J Hoguet, William Milne Grinnell, Francis M Jencks, Newell Martin, and Charles V E Gallup, all of New York City

New York Times
January 15, 1897

Borough President Cantor came in for considerable adverse criticism in connection with the Riverside Drive extension yesterday in Special Term, Part I., of the Supreme Court, when the attorney for the Lansing Investment Company, owners of Audubon Park, sought to obtain from Justice McCall a writ of peremptory mandamus to compel the Borough President to proceed with the improvement.

New York Times
March 10, 1903

It is doubtful if such a project ever would have been started had it not been for the indomitable perseverance of a few large landholders along the upper part of the planned course of the drive, who persisted in the face of almost overwhelming opposition for many years before they gained their objective.

New York Times
July 10, 1904



sharp curves between 155th and 158th Streets. So, the city went back to the drawing board.

The solution – a viaduct along the river to bridge the gap between 155th and 161st Streets – had been one of the original options. The new viaduct, which left the Audubon house in a dark well with access via a service road that bore the euphemistic name of Audubon Lane, led directly to the house's demise. The viaduct is pictured here, shortly after its completion. Minnie's Land is invisible, below Riverside Drive. In the foreground is Trinity Cemetery and in the distance the eastern tower of the George Washington Bridge, then under construction.

775 Riverside Drive

Now, cross the street to 765 Riverside Drive and follow Riverside Drive around the bend. The next building on your left is 775 Riverside Drive, which at first glance appears to be part of 765. The New York State Legislature approved a charter for the 775 Riverside Drive Corporation on December 20, 1926, but the corporation could not build on the site for several years due to the ongoing activity to save the Audubon house and turn the river frontage into a park. Six years later, in February 1932, the *New York Times* classified section advertised apartments at the “new building” from 2 ½ to 4 rooms, with 2 baths and gas refrigeration. The Depression-era rentals ranged from \$65 to \$125 a month.

Charles and Murray Gordon Memorial Park

In the center of Riverside Drive, is one of the focal points of this neighborhood. Though a neighborhood committee attempted to have this park named Audubon Park in the early 1900s, it had no official name until the Charles and Murray Gordon Post of the Jewish War Veterans dedicated it in 1925. Just inside the gate on the eastern side are plaques commemorating Charles and Murray Gordon, who died within days of each other in October 1918, at the end of World War I.

That section of Riverside Drive Extension between 145th and 158th Streets has been completed and was opened to the public last week.

New York Times
February 2, 1912

The ending of Cuban Week, which this year celebrated the thirty-sixth anniversary of Cuban independence, was observed yesterday by the Comite Pro-Cuba in a brief ceremony at 1.30 P.M. in the plaza at 156th Street and Riverside Drive.

New York Times
May 23, 1938

The towering plane trees date from the late 1920s. One early photograph shows a sculpture (possibly a fountain) in the low octagonal stone structure at the southern end of the park, but it has long since disappeared. In the last 1970s, John Cassavetes used this neighborhood for several sequences in his film, *Gloria*, starring his wife, Gena Rowlands. A spectacular shoot-out scene and car crash in that film occur around this park.

Walk a little further on Riverside Drive, until you are about even with the northern end of the oval park (the opposite end from the octagonal stone structure). From this spot, where a large house once sat, you can see the entire Riverside Drive frontage in Audubon Park and can admire the architectural harmony among neighboring buildings, one of the principals of the Beaux arts style. At your far right is the Vauxhall, which you have already examined. Next is Rhinecleff Court, then the Riviera, and then the imposing, triangular Grinnell, which from this vantage-point resembles a massive ship ready to set sail down Riverside Drive to the Hudson. Up the street at your far left, you can see the Sutherland, an elegant copper-domed building on a three-story limestone base.

All of these buildings sit on property once owned by the Grinnell family. At first, intending to develop this land themselves, they retained George Fred Pelham to design several six-story apartment dwellings that would have fronted Riverside Drive; however, they soon decided to sell the land to real estate developers, who erected what you see before you. Through the 1920s, the effect from this spot must have been stunning. Looking inward, as you are doing now, you would have seen these majestic apartment buildings framing this lovely little park (though without the towering plane trees). Turning one-hundred and eighty degrees, you would have had a breath-taking, panoramic view of the Hudson River and Palisades.

Rhinecleff Court (788 Riverside Drive)

Now, walk back to the other end of the park. If you look up 156th Street, you will have a fine view of the ornate cross and bell atop the Church de Nuestra Señora de la Esperanza (Our Lady of Hope), which you will examine in a few moments. First, look across the street at Rhinecleff Court and notice how the cornice line continues that of its neighbor, The Vauxhall, and the building materials of the two buildings complement each other.

Designed in the Beaux arts style by Schwartz and Gross, who also created the Audubon Park Apartments that you saw on Broadway, this building dates from 1911 and had a construction cost of \$400,000. When you view the façade from a slight distance, as you are doing now, the deep court dramatically projects a full-height entry to the building even though the entry doors reach only one-story. The apartments on either side of this entry courtyard mirror each other, symmetry that director Noel Black used to great effect in the 1989

*Rhinecleff Court - Southerly corner Riverside Drive and 156th St. New - 11 story - Fireproof. Highest type of Residential Apartments - Just completed and ready for occupancy. - Permanent light and air. Overlooking Grounds and Buildings of Hispanic Society of America. Unusually large room - compactly arranged. 4 rooms and bath, \$750
5 rooms and bath \$975
7 rooms, 2 baths \$1,100
8 rooms, 2 baths \$1,500
Large Foyer & Butler's Pantry
-
Bert G. Faulhaber & Co.
(Agents)*

New York Times
September 10, 1911

teleplay, *The Hollow Boy*, based on a short-story by Hortense Calisher and filmed in this building.

Now, cross Riverside Drive and start up this side of 156th street. After you pass a side entrance to Rhinecliff Court and a solitary brass door, you will come to three pairs of embossed brass doors. This is the exterior entrance to an auditorium that serves the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Tim Robbins used this façade, disguised with a marquee, and the surrounding streetscape in his Depression-era film, *Cradle Will Rock* (1999).

Nuestra Señora de la Esperanza

A few steps further and you have reached Nuestra Señora de la Esperanza. Archer M Huntington, the philanthropist who developed the Audubon Terrace complex donated the land for this church and gave \$50,000 towards its construction, approximately half of the total cost. Charles P Huntington designed the original structure, which was consecrated in July 1912. The original church, in the Greek Revival style (pictured here), was quite different from what you see today. At the sidewalk, a long flight of stone stairs began at the left side and rose to the right, across the entire front of the church, ending at a broad porch surrounded by a low stone balustrade. Four Ionic columns supporting a cornice and pediment sheltered the main doors. In the 1930s enlargement, upper and lower vestibules replaced the dramatic stairs and porch. In place of the entry pavilion, double doors open off the street with statuary decorating the simple façade that rises above.



Cardinal Farley presided at the consecration of this church, and in his homily alluded to some infighting in the congregation. Calling for unity, he said, "In this church let there be no North and South among you, as we say here. Let South Americans, Cubans, Mexicans and Spaniards all come here without thought of racial distinction and kneel together as Catholics."

Cortez (625 West 156th Street)

Across the street, is another example of the Beaux arts style, the eight-story Cortez, designed by Neville & Bagge and constructed in 1910 at a cost of \$250,000. Although this building sits on a side-street, less desirable than a Riverside Drive address, the original apartment layout was impressive: two apartments per floor, each having nine rooms and three baths. As you continue up the street, pause a moment just past Nuestra Señora de la Esperanza and inspect the stone formations

There is a project on foot to build a Spanish Roman Catholic Church near Audubon Park, at 156th Street...Miss Maria de Barril has arranged to have a concert benefit given to raise funds for the building. Mme. Emma Eames, assisted by Emilio de Gorgoza and Victor Herbert and his full orchestra are to be the artists.

New York Times

April 11, 1907

Foremost among the Spaniards interested was King Alfonso, who presented to the church a magnificent lamp, the work of Señor Felix Granda, which is an exact copy of a beautiful lamp now hanging in the church of San Antonio de la Florida at Madrid... The date engraved on this gift is Jan. 23, 1912, King Alfonso's last birthday.

New York Times

August 11, 1912

visible through the fence. Similar to the outcroppings in Trinity Cemetery, this is the sole reminder of the early terrain left within Audubon Park's borders.

Hispanic Society (north building)

The original entrance to the Hispanic Society combined with that of Nuestra Señora must have made a grand spectacle along the south side of 156th Street. In the center of this block, a broad staircase rose from the sidewalk to a wide landing where it split into a double-staircase leading up to the museum plaza. A gated iron fence between stone pillars separated the museum from the street, but left the view open to the apartment buildings opposite. The looming back of the Hispanic Society's north wing now stretches across that space, its plain, institutional surface separating the museums from this street, symbolically cutting them off from the neighborhood and literally obscuring the splendid view. Fortunately, the double staircase still survives as part of a sculpture court just off of the museum plaza.

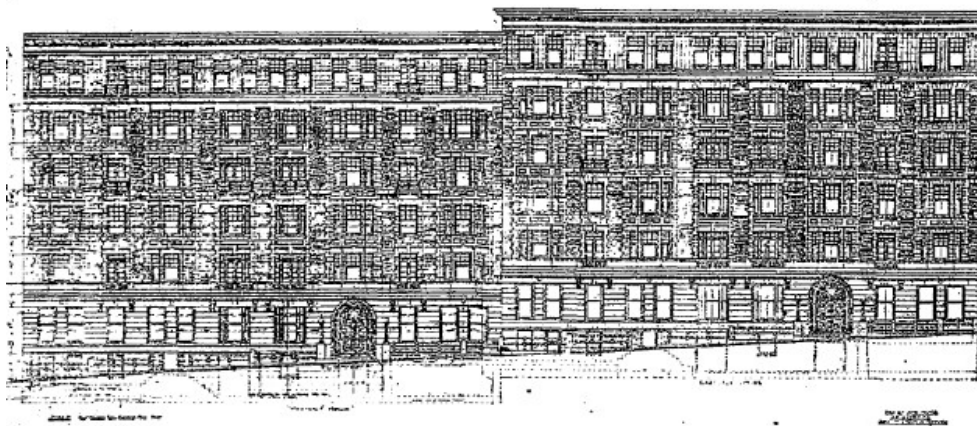


The opening of the museum of the Hispanic Society without fuss or fanfare means a good deal more than appears on the surface...It is merely the visible result of many years of preparation for a line of actions always well calculated, definitely foreseen, and slowly carried out by a vigorous intellect sustained by a more than ordinary allowance of this world's goods.

New York Times
January 19, 1908

Goya and Velazquez (605 & 611 West 156th Street)

Turning your back to the unattractive wall of the Hispanic Society's north building, focus your attention across the street on one of the two sets of twins in Audubon Park, the Goya and Velazquez. Architects Denby & Nute designed these six-story twins (pictured in an artist's rendering below) in a "modern Renaissance" style. In 1910, each cost \$175,000 and originally contained twenty-nine apartment of four-to-eight rooms.



Among the new buildings that are springing up around the Hispanic Museum at 156th Street and Broadway are two new six-story elevator apartment houses which are being constructed by James O'Brien on the south side (sic) of the street, between Broadway and Riverside Drive, directly opposite the museum itself. The buildings will cost \$175,000 each and will be ready for occupancy in April or May, 1910.

New York Times
September 10, 1911

Continue up the street towards Broadway. Just before the corner, notice the entrance to 601 West 156th Street, with its arched entry. Lion's head

brackets on either side support a cornice and ornamental iron balcony. Above the door is a keystone cartouche. This is Hispania Hall, one of the second pair of twins; you will examine the other in a moment on 157th Street. When you reach the corner, turn left and cross 156th Street.

Broadway and Edward M. Morgan Place

In the 1870s, Boulevard Lafayette began at this corner and ran north, along the cliffs above the Hudson. To obtain rights to this stretch of property, the city reimbursed the owner, George Blake Grinnell. You will remember from earlier in your walk that in 1897, the Grinnell family negotiated a compromise that brought the Riverside Drive extension across their property to meet Boulevard Lafayette at 158th Street. That left this two-block stretch of street without a name. Since Broadway had no buildings on its western side, the block between 156th and 157th Streets took the name Broadway and the remaining block, between 157th and 158th Streets, became Audubon Place. In 1926, the city renamed it Edward M. Morgan Place in honor of a long-serving postmaster general, who had died the previous year. Morgan was the first postal employee to rise through the ranks from postal carrier to postmaster general.

In 1905, this triangle became a source of litigation between Grinnell's heirs and Adolf Lewisohn, who owned the adjacent property where the row of stores now sits along Broadway. The Grinnell heirs, operating as Lansing Company, had enclosed this triangle with a fence and built a shed on it, which they leased to the Rapid Transit Company. Lewisohn claimed an easement of light, air and access, and brought action because the shed interfered with his enjoyment of the easement. The crucial point in the case was that while the city had condemned 157th Street on either side of this little triangle, it had never condemned the triangle itself. The judge, citing various case-law, ruled in favor of Lansing Corporation. Reading the case is particularly enlightening because it cites names of some of the previous owners of the property, James Beekman in the early 1800s and Samuel Watkins in the 1820s.

Audubon Hall (Broadway and 156th Street)

Hispania Hall (Broadway and 157th Street)

The six-story Hispania Hall and Audubon Hall stretch between 156th and 157th Streets at Broadway, their curved façades following the path of Broadway. Both date from 1909, each with a construction cost of \$300,000. The architect was George Fred Pelham, a specialist in apartment buildings. (You may remember that he is the architect who designed the six-story structures that the Grinnell family originally intended to erect along "their" Riverside Drive.) Again, you will notice that these buildings have bases of one material, in this case, rusticated stone, out of which rises another material for the upper stories, in this case, tan brick.

*Edward M Morgan,
Postmaster of the New York
Post Office, died at 1.50
o'clock this morning...
following an operation for
appendicitis performed there
Monday night. He was 69
years old...When President
Roosevelt appointed Mr.
Morgan Post-master of New
York City in August, 1907, he
satisfied the life ambition of a
man who had assiduously
devoted himself to the postal
service since he entered it as
a letter carrier thirty-four
years before. So far as
records indicate, Mr. Morgan
was the only man to rise from
postman to Postmaster in
this city* New York Times
January 19, 1925

*The Charles F Noyes
Company has secured on
mortgage \$510,000 at 4 1/2
per cent for five years for
the Aurora Investing
Company, (Fleishmann
Brothers). This loan covers
two apartment houses,
\$265,000 being loaned on
Hispania Hall...and
\$245,000 on Audubon
Court...overlooking
Audubon Park. These two
apartment houses are now
completed, and are
considered among the best
structures on upper
Washington Heights.*

New York Times
December 23, 1909

Now, another clue into the past: if you look closely at the fence in front of Hispania Hall, you will notice that the Star of David is worked into the design. In the 1930s, many German Jewish refugees found a new home in this neighborhood. Within a few blocks of this corner were ten Jewish institutions, including the Prospect Unity Club, Lublo's Palm Garden, and several synagogues.

Continue to Edward M. Morgan Place and cross 157th Street, then turn left down the street. The back of the Grinnell, a nine-story apartment building that fills this triangular block, is on your right. If you direct your attention across the street, you will see the entrance to Audubon Hall, an identical twin to Hispania Hall's entrance that you saw a few minutes ago.

Do you remember the lion's head you saw a few moments ago above the door of Hispania Hall? You are now in a good position to see others at either end of the roof, this time as ornamentation on a pier that projects beyond the roof. In 1911, you could rent a five-room apartment in Audubon Hall for \$650 or a six-room apartment for \$780.—per year. And, often, one month was given free at signing! Besides fireproof construction, spacious rooms, and telephone and elevator service twenty-four hours a day, as an added bonus, each apartment had a wall-safe.

Hortense Arms (602 West 157th Street)

The next building is the Hortense Arms. In 1910, this apartment building replaced the last house in Audubon Park, which wreckers had dismantled only months before. The Reverend Mile Gates, rector of the Church of the Intercession, was the last resident of that house, which he apparently rented from the Grinnells, who had owned this strip of property since the late 1860s.

The Hortense Arms, which cost \$150,000 in 1910, is a six-story Beaux arts structure with a central courtyard that is not visible from the street. The architects were Neville and Bagge, who designed the Cortez, which you saw across from Nuestra Señora de la Esperanza in 156th Street. You will notice some similarities between the two buildings. The base is rusticated granite, matching that on the Grinnell, on your side of the street. As with earlier buildings you have examined, the Hortense Arms has ornamental balconies and large keystones over the windows. Like the Cortez, a linkage between the doorway and windows above create the illusion of a grand entrance. Here, two-story coupled Doric pilasters flank the entry and rise above the ornamental iron doors where they support a cornice at the second floor, which in turn, supports double windows surmounted by a pediment appear. Notice the shell detail under the cornice. At the roof, arches in the projecting metal parapet complement the pediments at the third floor and, more practically, mask elevator equipment water tanks on the roof. The Hortense Arm's ironwork fence, with its fleur-de-lis design, is original; the fence around the Grinnell is a later addition.

It is common for real estate brokers to place stress upon the healthiness of a house which is located on high ground. It is a fact that buildings on low ground do not usually rent well, for people have an instinctive dread of the possibilities that may arise, from a sanitary point of view, to endanger their health in such a locality.

Record and Guide
September 6, 1890

Ferdinand Czernin, author and son of the late Count Ottokar Czernin, last Foreign Minister of the old Austro-Hungarian Empire (1916-18), died last Saturday in his home at 602 West 157th Street...He wrote "Europe – Going, Going, Gone" (1939), and "This Salzburg" (1938).

New York Times
December 4, 1965

In September 1911, a *New York Times* advertisement describing the many amenities of the “just-completed” Hortense Arms, listed wainscoted dining rooms, beamed ceilings, serpentine glass doors and crystal chandeliers. Each apartment had a telephone, vacuum cleaner, steam clothes dryer and milk locker. And, “uniformed Otis Electric Elevator Service” was round the clock. The five-to-eight room apartments rented for \$600 to \$1,200 (again, that was the yearly rate).

Kanawah Court (614 West 157th Street)

Continuing down the street, stop a few paces past the Grinnell’s back door, and examine Kanawah Court, which sits across the street. Built in 1910, it is architect Joseph C. Cocker’s sole contribution to Audubon Park, though a similar Gothic-style building exists several blocks north at 548 West 161st Street.

Like the Vauxhall and Rhinecleff Court, the Kanawah has a recessed entry, reached through a deep courtyard, in this instance, elevated four steps from the street. The courtyard divides the symmetrical façade into two sections. Repeating that pattern on a smaller scale, a recessed fire escape then divides each of those two sections into symmetrical halves. Tan brick upper floors rise from a smooth limestone first floor. Beveled quoins at the second floor windows softly echo the beveled corner pilasters that rise from floors two through five, above which is a projecting cornice below the windows to the sixth floor. Stepped lintels on the sixth floor windows complement the stepped parapet above, while the central beveled piers at the roofline elaborate the decorative stone lintels on the windows at the third, fourth, and fifth story windows.

The origin of the name Kanawah (also spelled Kan-a-wah and Kanawha) is uncertain, though it may refer to the Kanawah River, in West Virginia, a Native American name that means “place of the white stones.” Underlining the profitable real estate speculation that marked the subway boom, Kuhn and Lawson completed Kanawah Court in August 1910 at a cost of \$150,000 and sold it at the end of December, four months later, for \$260,000.

The Sensational Grinnell Murder: 1933

Before you move on to examine the Riviera, pause here a moment, on the spot where police detectives found an important piece of evidence in a sensational 1933 murder case that hit front pages all over the nation. In the early morning hours of New Year’s Eve, 1933, Catherine Phelan, fifty-two, a housekeeper here at the Grinnell, murdered her employer, Douglas Sheridan, a sixty-eight-year-old widowed stockbroker with an eye for younger women, bludgeoning him over the head with a tack hammer while he was in the shower. After she had hidden her bloodied clothes and his pajamas on a window ledge just above where you are standing, she threw the hammer out of the dining room window and then called the police, attempting to cast suspicion on guests who had visited Mr. Sheridan earlier in the evening. Specks

Nathan B. Porter, 55 years old, a Director in the wholesale hardware firm of Chapman, Porter & Woelfling...was made a prisoner, charged with attempted suicide, in the Washington Heights Hospital last night after he had drunk a bottle of chloroform liniment at his home, 614 West 157th Street.

New York Times
September 8, 1914

An elderly broker’s fondness for young women friends flamed into a jealous frenzy the secret love borne him by a faithful housemaid. He was found beaten to death with a claw-hammer in his expensively furnished Riverside Drive apartment yesterday.

Head bashed and face battered beyond recognition, Douglas Sheridan, 68, and a widower, was slumped in the bathtub when detectives, summoned by telephone, entered the delicately tinted chamber...Official interest last night centered around Mrs. Catherine Phelan, 52, and an employee in the Sheridan household at 800 Riverside Drive for twenty years.

Robert McNamara
Daily News
January 1, 1934

www.audubonparkny.com

of blood on her glasses gave her away, however, as did the tack hammer which landed approximately where you are standing.

Mrs. Phelan, who stood trial for the murder the following October, had served the Sheridan household for twenty-eight years and was apparently enamored of Mr. Sheridan and had good reason to believe he returned her regards: she was the main beneficiary of his will. Allowing that it was a crime of passion, the jury found her guilty of murder in the second degree. In early December, the judge sentenced her to twenty years in Auburn State prison. Newspapers reported that when Mrs. Phelan heard her sentence, she sarcastically replied, "Thank you for this Christmas present, your honor."

Riviera (790 Riverside Drive)

At the corner of 157th and Riverside Drive, you see to the front entrance of the Riviera, one of the queens of Audubon Park, across from you. At thirteen stories and with five wings, this majestic building rules the entire Riverside frontage between 156th and 157th Streets. It sits on the grounds of the Hemlocks, the mansion where the Grinnells lived from the early 1860s until 1910. Though all of the early apartments in Audubon Park are named, the Riviera has its name permanently inscribed in the frieze above the 157th Street doorway, which is flanked by Tuscan columns.

Designed by Rouse and Goldstone, the Riviera cost \$1,700,000 when it was completed in 1911, significantly more than any other building in Audubon Park. As early as June 1909, the *Record and Guide* reported that Rouse and Gold were beginning work on plans and specifications and anticipated that it would be ready by the 1910 renting season. That estimate was off by almost a year.

The delay, however, only added to the extensive media coverage that preceded the Riviera's opening. Advertisements for the new apartment building (sample at the right) began appearing in the *New York Times* and *New York Herald* in late winter, 1911. In addition to the expected amenities, the Riviera would offer "clothes dryers and outlets for small electric stoves or heating irons in every kitchen." Emphasizing selling-points that had drawn New Yorkers to Audubon Park for decades, the advertisements also highlighted the altitude, views of the river, and fresh air. Because of the Riviera's design, with courtyards breaking the façade into five wings, the builders could declare "every room an outside room."

In 1938, a *New York Times* article reported that Wood, Dolson Company, which had been managing the Riviera for a decade, was overseeing alterations to two wings of the building. "Fifty-two

Architect William L. Rouse...has just been commissioned to prepare plans and specifications for the immediate erection of one of the largest elevator apartment houses so erected on Riverside Drive north of 125th Street...Excavating is to be started at once, and it is the aim of the owners to have the building completed and ready for occupancy by October, 1910.

Record and Guide
June 5, 1909

The situation is particularly attractive, being right at the curve at the end of the present Riverside Drive extension and which, when continued northward, will turn into the old Lafayette Boulevard at 158th Street...There will be only two larger apartments in the city, the Belnord and the Apthorpe.

New York Times
May 22, 1910

apartment of seven, eight and nine rooms are being replaced by ninety-two suites of two, three, four and six rooms."

Although the original plan of Riverside Drive through Audubon Park was for the apartment houses on the southeast side of the drive to have unobstructed views of the river, by the 1920s, land prices and the ever-increasing need for apartments enhanced the market for developing the land on the northwestern side.

Cragmoor Dwellings (801 Riverside Drive) Crillon Court (789 / 790 Riverside Drive)

Looking directly across Riverside Drive, you have a good view of the recessed entrance to the Cragmoor Dwellings (801), an apartment building that appeared in the early 1920s. To the left of this building is Crillon Court (789 Riverside Drive), which was built around an open courtyard in the mid 1920s. 775 Riverside Drive and 765 Riverside, which you examined earlier, filled in the remaining spaces on the northern side of Riverside Drive in 1932. The Cragmoor Dwellings are currently on the market as condos, and Crillon Court is undergoing extensive exterior renovations.

While the Cragmoor Dwellings and Crillon Court employ simpler construction materials than the earlier buildings and even though they lack their rich detail, they do have architectural interest. Note, for example, the elegant, curved arches at the entrance to the Cragmoor Dwellings and the detail at the roof line. Ornamental balconies decorate Crillon Court's upper façade and its courtyard, divided from the street with a high brick and iron fence, creates a rather dramatic entrance for the building, setting it off from the street and, simultaneously, providing light (or outside rooms) to many of the apartments.

While these buildings may fall short of the grandeur of the older examples of apartment building architecture in Audubon Park, they do represent an intermediate period of apartment building design that lies between the highly decorated Beaux arts style and the anonymous brick boxes that began populating Manhattan shortly thereafter. A city-built example of the later, River Terrace, looms over Crillon Court, effectively blocking the view of the river its apartments once had. Sadly, when the city built this eyesore on property that had once been part of Audubon's Minnies Land (and later Audubon Park), officials in charge lacked sufficient imagination to at least incorporate "Audubon" into the building's name.

Now, turn right and start walking towards the front entrance of the Grinnell, Audubon Park's other queen.

The Grinnell (800 Riverside Drive)

The Riviera enjoyed her position as queen of Audubon Park for only a few months before the completion of the Grinnell, in July 1911.

The large buildings [on the southeast side of Riverside Drive] were erected some years ago facing Audubon Park upon the assumption that the Riverside Park system would naturally be extended north of 155th Street... These groups of buildings ... have made the 157th Street district a most attractive and high class residential centre, contributing by their influence to the construction and occupation of other high class properties. Any interference with their attractiveness... would have a detrimental effect upon other values...

**A Statement by
Washington Heights
Taxpayers Association**
1920

Buildings placed on certain sites may completely block the most desirable street openings and may affect the grades best suited for other parts of the tract... One such building has been recently undertaken on the northwest side of the present driveway... Unless early action be taken by the Board of Estimate, this building will be erected facing the handsome and superior types of buildings on the east side of the drive, and it will stand across the line of 157th Street...

**A Statement by
Washington Heights
Taxpayers Association**
1920

Although it is four stories shorter, and its cost was only \$600,000, less than half the Riviera's price tag, the Grinnell possesses ample majesty of her own. Sitting on higher ground than the Riviera, her nine stories rises from a triangular block like an imposing fortress, towers on each corner extending her height another two stories. Instead of a moat, three surrounding streets set her off from the rest of the neighborhood, both physically and psychologically. This triangular lot, by the way, was once the Grinnell's cow pasture.

Do you remember the leaf-and-berry motif from Rhinecleff Court? Here it is again, around the two story arched entrance of the Grinnell. An oft-told tale suggests that when the Grinnell was new, the entrance on Edward M. Morgan Place was the pedestrian entrance and this was the vehicular entrance, though the heavy granite sill and limited space for turning a vehicle in the courtyard would have made that impossible. A long passageway at this entrance, which leads into a central courtyard, cuts through apartment lines on both the first and second floors. To accommodate the grand entrance, Schwartz and Gross combined the interrupted lines into duplexes, one on either side of the archway. A few paces further up Riverside Drive is the entry to a third duplex apartment; this one with an exterior entrance.

When it was new (the picture at the right appeared in the *New York Times*, in May 1911 a few months before the first tenants moved in), the Grinnell featured many of the standard amenities, with layouts "designed to meet the requirements of those accustomed to private houses" and "rentals 30% less than the Middle West Side." Until World War II, the Grinnell had uniformed staff, twenty-four hour elevator service, and mail delivery to apartment doors – twice a day. Every apartment had a dumbwaiter so that deliveries could be made through the rear entrance and basement. The dumbwaiters also served to transport rubbish and soiled clothes to the basement, which contained a building-operated laundry. Until recently, large drying racks remained as a reminder of those days. Stories passed on by early residents report that the Grinnell's management gave dances for the residents every spring – on the roof, with a full orchestra.



The Grinnell
157th Street and Riverside Drive

An interesting foot-note to the Grinnell's history: In the late 1940s, Daddy Grace, an evangelist noted for his flamboyant appearance – he painted his fingernails red, white, and blue and favored cut-away coats and flowing hair – purchased the Grinnell in the name of the Church of the House of Prayer for All People, which he had founded. He re-christened it the Grace, a name it carried until he sold it in the late 1950s.

In the large triangular block... another magnificent apartment has just been finished, bearing the name Grinnell, commemorating one of the early families.

New York Times
May 28, 1911

Among the new buildings which have been erected in Riverside Drive is the Grinnell, a nine story structure, which occupies a portion of old Audubon Park. The building is triangular, having frontages in the drive, Audubon place and 157th Street, two entrances being provided, one in each of the two first named streets. The building is named after the Grinnell family, which once owned the ground, and will be ready for occupancy shortly. Owing to Riverside Drive and Broadway practically converging at this point the Grinnell holds a strategic position... The central court of the Grinnell is finished in faced brick, limestone and terracotta and in design and appointment treated in a manner at once simple, imposing and attractive. Owing to the width of the court the rooms, which have outlet into it, are as light as those facing in ordinary streets. The building is laid out with ten apartments on each floor containing from five rooms and bath to nine rooms with three baths. On the entrance and first floors there are several duplex apartments containing seven and nine rooms each.

New York Herald
June 4, 1911

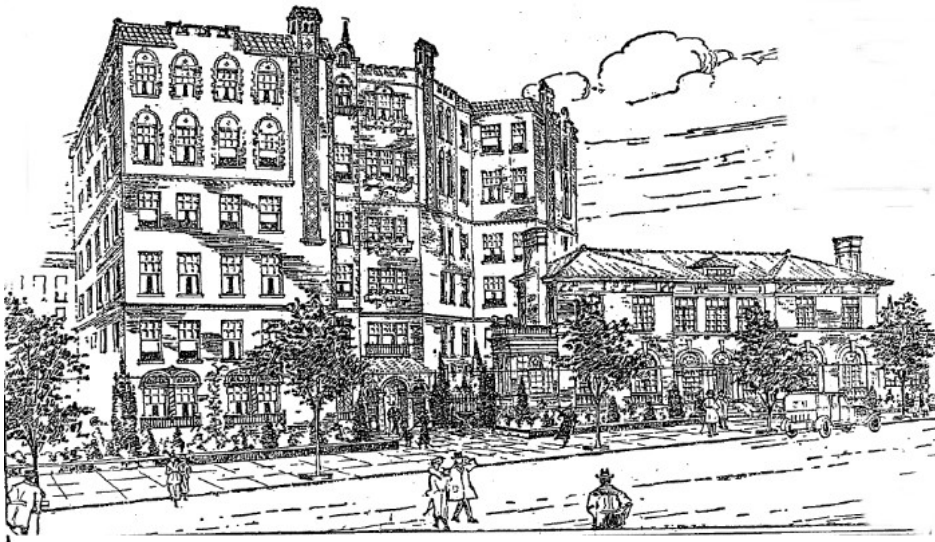
Designed by Schwartz and Gross who also executed Rhinecliff Court that you examined earlier, the Grinnell's predominantly brick façade rests on a rusticated granite base that runs continuously around the first floor, with stepped sections that rise to the second floor at the corners and mid-block.

Berler House (809/811 Riverside Drive)

Directly across Riverside Drive from the Grinnell's front entrance, the Berler House, or more properly, the Berler duplex, is one of the most interesting structures in Audubon Park (at right in architect's rendering below). Nathan Berler, a wholesale clothing manufacturer, built this double house as a prototype for an alternative housing to apartment dwelling in Washington Heights. Although he owned several parcels of land in the vicinity, this is apparently the only example he built. Designed by Moore & Landsiedel in a Spanish style, this symmetrical two-storied brick house has a tiled roof and a one-story conservatory at either end.

To meet the demand for the highest type of four, five and six-room apartments, the Enesbe Realty Corporation, of which Nathan Berler is President, has just completed a unique structure at 807 Riverside Drive, corner of West 158th Street... the apartment (sic) has not only three fronts and two entrances but several interior courts, including a landscaped garden court.

New York Times
December 21, 1924



New apartment to be erected on West side of Riverside Drive between 157th and 158th St. By Nathan Berler George-Fred Pelham, Architect

The slope of 158th Street accommodates a quadruple garage on the rear. On the first floor, notice the detail: arched windows with fanlights surmounted by keystones, pairs of Doric columns flanking the doors and a balustrade at each window. End chimneys and the central dormer complete the symmetry of these joined houses.

Berler lived in the left half and leased the right half, which according to an article in the *New York Times* contained a \$25,000 pipe organ. Built in 1922, this structure was the first to appear on the "river side" of the drive; it probably caused no small amount of dismay to those Grinnell residents who lost part of their river views. However, as the only structure in present-day Audubon Park that approximates the scale and grandeur of the villas that had existed here previously, the Berler House is a potent reminder of Audubon Park's past.

Some local residents insist that this is the Berlin House, home of the famous composer, Irving Berlin, while others are equally sure it is the Gershwin House, one half for George, the other for Ira. Tantalizing as those legends may be, they have no basis in fact.

807 Riverside Drive ("Rio Rita")

Two years after moving to 809 Riverside Drive, Nathan Berler built the adjoining 807 Riverside Drive, which elicited quite a bit of news coverage. In February, 1924, a *New York Times* article, that included an artist's rendering of the front elevation, reported that the building would be "of stucco, brick and tiles in old Italian style." The architect was George Fred Pelham, who designed Audubon and Hispania Halls, the twins on Broadway, as well as the unrealized plans for several six-story structures on Riverside Drive between 156th and 158th Streets.

Among the modern innovations provided for the fifty-two units at 807 Riverside Drive were radio aerial service, moth-proof cedar closets and kitchens with breakfast alcoves. A unique feature of the building would be a ballroom, decorated in Louis XVI style, for the use of the tenants. Reports continued through the following May, when Mr. and Mrs. Berler formally opened the ballroom and dedicated it to the use of the tenants, with "a vocal and instrumental concert followed by a formal dinner and dance."

Though the initial article reported that the architecture would be Italian and a later one termed it Colonial, the pitched and tiled roof and the multi-curved mission parapet all give the façade a Spanish flavor. The Riverside Drive façade masks the actual size of this building, which has double that frontage on 158th Street. At some time in this building's history, an enterprising individual painted "Rio Rita" above the front entrance, perhaps in tribute to the movie theatre by that name that once existed around the corner on Broadway.

Sutherland (611 West 158th Street)

The Sutherland (which is across the six-pointed intersection), like the Audubon Park Apartments that you saw early in your walk, sits outside what was Audubon Park. However, its position on the corner of 158th Street and Riverside Drive and the similarities between its architecture and that of the buildings you have already examined, draw it into the grouping of apartment buildings fronting on the portion of Riverside Drive that runs through Audubon Park. The Sutherland's heavy projecting balustrade at the second floor and its arched dormers at the top, surmounted by a weathered copper roof, demand attention. Completed in 1910 (1910 advertisement, at right), the Sutherland preceded both the



The apartment (sic), which contains fifty-two apartments, was entirely leased before completion and one of its most interesting features is the grand ballroom for the exclusive use of the tenants. This, just off the main lobby, is 40 feet wide and 60 feet long. Elaborately decorated in antique gold and polychrome, with velvet hangings, and lighted with crystal chandeliers, it is a copy of a grand ballroom of the Italian renaissance period.

New York Times
 May 3, 1925

The nine-story Sutherland apartment house at 611 West 158th Street, north-east corner of Riverside Drive, has been purchased by Minnie Weber from Carl Mildner. It covers a plot 83.9 by 97.8 feet and irregular. The property is subject to \$217,500 mortgages.

New York Times
 February 10, 1921

Riviera and the Grinnell; its construction cost, \$250,000 seems paltry compared the costs of its sister buildings. While most of the apartments at the Sutherland have long since lost the “unsurpassed views of the Hudson” promised in original advertisements, those with windows facing down 158th Street still have at least partial river views.



Audubon Park in May 1905

Finish

Turn right onto Edward M Morgan Place and you will see ahead of you Pigeon Park where you began your walk. On the way, stop for a moment to inspect the Grinnell’s “side” entrance, this one leading down a flight of stone steps into the courtyard, which you can see through the glass doors.

At the corner of 157th Street and Broadway, you have access to public transportation again, should you want to conclude your walk here. Or, if you have time, you may want to walk two blocks down Broadway to visit the Audubon Terrace Museum Complex, or to 155th Street to spend some time inspecting Trinity Cemetery and Church of the Intercession. The Morris-Jumel Mansion and Sylvan row are a short walk to the north-east of Audubon Park, at 160th Street. Walk up Broadway and turn right onto 160th Street.

Riverside Drive between 158th Street and 161st Street, originally Boulevard Lafayette, contains an interesting combination of apartment buildings and single-family residences, including one of the oldest houses in the neighborhood, wedged between two large apartment houses.

Thank you for visiting Audubon Park. Please come again!

Your tour guide has been Matthew Spady,
Audubon Park resident for the last 20 years
For further information about Audubon Park, please visit:

www.AudubonParkNY.com

While Audubon Terrace, the name of the historic district and the museum complex at Broadway and West 155th Street, may be one of New York City’s biggest secrets, the neighborhood surrounding it is even less well known. The pocket of Beaux-Arts apartment buildings and row houses falls roughly within the old boundaries of Minniesland, the estate where John James Audubon, the painter and naturalist, lived out his last years before his death in 1851.

Nancy Beth Jackson
New York Times
April 11, 2004

Once considered under the radar for trendy startups, Washington Heights has come up in the world. In recent years, the neighborhood-which stretches from West 155th Street to Dyckman Street and from river to river-has begun attracting artists and families priced out of the Upper West Side and other areas. In response, a number of local businesses have spruced up and expanded, and many new shops and eateries have opened.

Cara S. Trager

Crains

July 21, 2003

An Elegant Secret...the Grinnell, sometimes called the “Dakota of the North,” whose 83 apartments have never been chopped up.

Johanna Robledo

New York

December 20-27, 2004