

MINNIE E. YOUNG HOUSE

19 East 54th Street, Manhattan
Tax Map Block 1290, Lot 14

Built: 1899-1900

Architect: Hiss & Weekes

Style: Renaissance Revival

Proposed Action: Item Proposed for the Commission's Calendar on May 10, 2016

The Minnie Young House is one of the earliest works by the prominent architectural firm of Hiss & Weekes, who designed the distinguished Renaissance Revival style townhouse, which was built in 1899-1900. The house is an excellent example of a fashionable town house that was designed by classically-trained architects to reflect the upper class tastes and preferences of wealthy New York City families during the early 1900s. The house represents the period, prior to the construction of Grand Central Terminal, when the area around Fifth Avenue in East Midtown was a prestigious residential enclave.

One of the earliest works by the prominent architectural firm of Hiss & Weekes, this distinguished Renaissance Revival style townhouse was erected in 1899-1900 for Minnie E. Young, widow of stockbroker Albert Young. Minnie Young was one of five siblings who had inherited a fortune from their uncle, American Tobacco Company founder-Richmond real estate developer Lewis Ginter. Her husband Albert was a partner in the successful brokerage house of Arents & Young with her brother George Arents, who also served as treasurer of the American Tobacco Company.



Paris-trained architect Philip Hiss (1857-1940) and H. Hobart Weekes (1867-1950), established their partnership in 1899 and practiced together until 1933. Their firm was particularly noted for its Italian Renaissance Revival style designs including the Gotham Hotel (now Peninsula Hotel) at Fifth Avenue and 54th Street (1902-05) and Belnord Apartments, 201-225 West 86th Street (1908-09), both designated New York City Landmarks.

The Young House features a 40-foot-wide granite facade with a monumental entrance portico, molded window enframements including pedimented window surrounds and balustrades at the second story, rusticated piers, recessed panels, elaborate belt courses and a boldly projecting stone cornice. Soon after its completion, architectural critic Russell Sturgis praised the Young House for the simplicity, fine proportions, and "general dignity" of its design.

By the 1910s the East 50s was rapidly changing from a prestigious residential enclave to a bustling business center. In 1920 the Young Residence was converted for commercial use by architect Mott B. Schmidt for the fashionable dressmaking firm Lucille Ltd., headed by Lady Duff Gordon. Later occupants of the Minnie Young House were antiques and historic-interiors dealer Arthur S. Vernay (1923-1940) and the national headquarters for the English Speaking Union (1940-1957).

In 1962, 19 East 54th Street became headquarters of the Kenneth Beauty Salon, whose owner, Kenneth Battelle, was the first “star” hairdresser credited with creating Jacqueline Kennedy’s signature bouffant hair style in the 1960s. Other clients included Marilyn Monroe, Happy Rockefeller, Brooke Astor, and Katharine Graham. The salon was destroyed in a fire in 1990 but aside from the loss of its historic windows and doors the building’s facade remained almost completely intact. In 1993 the setback fifth and sixth stories were enlarged when the building was altered for occupancy by the Bank Audi, now Interaudi Bank.

