

The Apthorp and Belnord:
Grande Dames of the Upper West Side

Elsa Gilbertson
Columbia University

Working Paper #2
New York Neighborhood Studies

These papers are partially funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

My research has focused on the two courtyard apartment buildings of Manhattan's Upper West Side which cover entire blocks. The Apthorp, completed in the fall of 1908, is bounded by Broadway, 79th Street, West End Avenue, and 78th Street. The Belnord, finished in the fall of 1909, is bounded by Broadway, 87th Street, Amsterdam Avenue, and 86th Street. When built, the Apthorp and the Belnord were advertised as the biggest and most luxurious housing for the the rapidly growing successful middle class. Much of this middle class wanted to live fashionably in the city but could not afford the high cost of owning and maintaining a private home. These two buildings successfully solved many of the problems of building housing in Manhattan, as will be made clear in this paper.

For this project I researched the social history of these two buildings, placing them in the context of apartment house development in New York City. How and why did this type of housing develop? Did the courtyard apartment building have any historical precedents? What were the attitudes of people at that time about living in apartment houses? What about the architectural style of the Apthorp and the Belnord, the development of their floor plans and the amenities offered to attract tenants? What kind of people lived in these buildings during the early years?

For this paper I used the resources of Columbia University's Avery and Butler Libraries, the New York Public Library, and the New York Historical Society Library. Especially useful were newspapers of the time period, the Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide, and architectural journals. To find out about the tenants, I used the New York State Census tracts of 1915 and 1925 for Manhattan. Some specifics about the buildings were in the Manhattan Buildings Department records. A few old photographs of the Apthorp and the Belnord can be found in the photo collections of the New York Historical Society and Museum of the City of New York.

THE AGE OF THE APARTMENT

Around the turn of this century, there was a great need for housing in Manhattan for the growing middle class, the professionals and businessmen who were contributing to the development of the city. Traditionally in nineteenth century Manhattan, housing for the well-to-do consisted of private dwellings, from brick and brownstone rowhouses to fashionable mansions. Although this new middle class wanted the same type of comfortable and luxurious housing, economic and population pressures in the city made it difficult for them to afford the high cost of buying and maintaining their own homes.¹ The population of Manhattan was increasing by leaps and bounds, growing from 1,164,673 people in 1880 to 1,441,216 in 1890, and to 1,850,093 in 1900. The peak of 2,331,542 was reached in 1910.² Land values and the cost of housing were also rising. The price of an average rowhouse jumped from \$15,000 in 1890 to \$64,000 in 1902.³ And even if rowhouses were affordable for everyone, there just was not enough land available in Manhattan.

This growing middle class needed an acceptable alternative to single family housing. Some apartment houses had been built in New York City, but James Richardson, writing in Scribner's Monthly in 1874, said that as yet they were for "the privileged few."⁴ First class "French flats" were one attempt at providing acceptable housing. Often these flats were in five-story buildings 21 feet wide and 80 feet deep, with small light wells on the long sides of the building. The flats consisted of a front parlor, adjoining hallway, two center rooms (bedrooms) facing

a light well, dining room, kitchen, servant room, and bathroom ventilated by a shaft. Although these flats did meet a housing need, their plan was awkward and did not provide enough privacy or sunlight. The light wells were too narrow to allow light and air into the bedrooms, and people complained about the neighbors peering in on them from across the way.

Part of the problem of French flats, and also rowhouses, stemmed from the rigidity of New York's grid system, which was laid out in 1811. Each block, generally 800 feet long and 200 feet wide, was usually divided into 25-foot by 100-foot lots. These long, narrow lots made it difficult, if not impossible to build housing with adequate light in all the rooms.⁶ The architectural firm of Hubert, Pirsson, and Hoddick pointed out in an article in the Architectural Record in 1892 that it was impossible to build decent housing on small lots of land. What was needed was a "radical change in the division of our land, our mode of building, and a study of yet unsolved and most intricate social questions."⁷ Sarah Gilman Young, commenting earlier in 1881 on European and American apartment houses, wrote that New Yorkers just did not understand how to build apartment houses. "To pack people at night, like herrings in a cask, in dark unventilated sleeping rooms, may suit the idea of a soul-less New York landlord," but this certainly would not be tolerated in Europe where she felt they understood the need for enough light and air. She said too many American landlords thought tenants were made for houses, rather than houses made for tenants, and suggested that apartment houses be built around gardens or courts for proper lighting and fresh air.⁸

But apartment house living for everyone, even the well off? Many people in the last half of the nineteenth century equated apartment houses with the squalid tenements which were far too common in the city. They also

felt that they were moving down in the world if they had to share a building for living with other families. Commenting on both these concerns,

Sarah Gilman Young wrote:

There are no objections to apartment houses in American cities, except prejudice, and this is stronger in the United States than elsewhere. To Americans it is a question of rank. Anything which resembles what we term a tenement is tabooed. There being no fixed caste in America, as in foreign states, we have established a certain style of living and expenditure, as a distinctive mark of social position.

She felt that Americans were always trying to appear better than they were. "Especially do we seek an exterior air of respectability and wealth in our homes. The desire to live in a fine house is peculiarly American." She suggested that apartments would become much more acceptable in America if they were well designed, constructed, and managed.⁹

Young and others looked to the French, who had been living in apartment houses for years, for solutions. Young observed that French apartments were "the product of another kind of civilization, which has conquered the first wants of life, and had time to consider and wealth to lavish on the best mode, consistent with hygiene and economy, of constructing its homes."¹⁰ In these apartment buildings, the lower floors were occupied by the wealthy, the upper floors by poor artisans, and the servants were under the roof. Hubert, Pirsson, and Hoddick felt that people from so many social ranks could live together under one roof because their social status was so clearly defined. They did not have to try to be better than they were, so there were no claims to social superiority. This firm saw the plan of these apartment buildings as a series of "small private dwelling houses, built on one level on the top of another and reached by a narrow ascending street (stairway)."¹¹

In 1882, Hubert, Pirsson, and Hoddick tested their ideas and theories about apartment house living by building the Navarro Apartments (also called the Central Park Apartments) on Central Park South. Looking like one large block, the Navarro was actually eight twelve story buildings arranged around a long narrow courtyard on a plot of land 200 feet wide by 425 feet long. It was an investment of nearly five million dollars. After Hubert's death, G. Matlack Price commented in the Architectural Record that when built, "these apartments were said to be the finest and largest of their type in the world, and remain today as models, in many respects of what a luxurious and well-appointed apartment home should be." They were torn down in 1927.¹²

Just two years later, the Dakota, on Central Park West and 72nd Street, was completed. Begun in 1880 by Edward Clark, President of the Singer Sewing Machine Company, it was a great success despite the now famous initial ridicule by skeptics. Clark offered luxury and convenience to other than the wealthy established "gentry" of New York. Successful businessmen such as Gustav Schirmer, music publisher, and the Steinway family, piano makers, lived here.¹³ The nine-story apartment house was built around an "I" shaped courtyard, which was a combination carriage turnaround and garden. Entrances to the building were located in the corners of the courtyard. The elevators in each of these corners provided access to two apartments per floor, creating a feeling of privacy within a large building.¹⁴

Around 1890, Hubert, Pirsson, and Hoddick designed an apartment building which was to have been built on the site of the Madison Square Garden, but was made impossible, they wrote, by the passage of the high building law. Their plan was to build a thirteen story courtyard building,

which would cover the whole lot. Stores were to occupy the first floor, extending the complete depth of the lot. The roof of these stores, 80 feet by 280 feet, was to be asphalted and would have been the floor for the courtyard. The remaining floors were seen as six layers of two-story houses, each house being 22 feet by 50 feet, and connected at alternate floors by aerial sidewalks (balcony walkways going around the outside of the building). Two large elevators were to be located in each corner of the building to provide access to the walkways.¹⁵

Of course these designs and buildings for the well-to-do were only a small part of housing construction in Manhattan during this time period. Tenement houses were a major issue, and there was much heated debate on the subject. Many times the smaller apartment houses deteriorated into tenements over the years because of poor construction, and lack of light and fresh air. The Hubert, Pirsson, and Hoddick firm, among others, worried about the impact of these buildings on the city.

Are we wasting millions in the building up of a city so radically defective in plan and construction, that a few decades will find it honeycombed with squalid tenement districts, ever spreading and ever tending towards lower depths of fetid degradation?¹⁶

We have already seen some of their suggestions to solve these problems. As far as construction went, they pointed out that brick and iron fire-proof buildings certainly are not more expensive to build in the long run when one considered the number of years they will last.¹⁷

Be it tenement or apartment house, the American Architect and Building News was worried about the evils of this type of "community" living. In an article in 1907, they warned that if one family in the building was better off than the others or spent money recklessly, all the other families would try to keep up, with the result that everyone

would fall in debt. They said that the architects must plan well to solve this sociological problem. "...while they cannot contend successfully against all the evils of gregarious living they can do much good by segregating each independent home with the most sedulous care to protect its privacy at every point."¹⁸

All these concerns were kept in mind with the building of large luxury apartments because, as noted before, people often equated apartments with overcrowded tenements. This image had to be overcome by showing people that apartment houses were even better and more comfortable than their own private homes.

The further development of the elevator and passage of the "New Law" in 1901, which allowed buildings to be one and a half times as tall as the width of the widest street they fronted on, encouraged the construction of taller apartment houses.¹⁹ Between 1902 and 1910, 4425 apartment houses were built in Manhattan.²⁰ Many were located on the Upper West Side, along Riverside Drive, Morningside Heights, Harlem, and Washington Heights. The largest buildings, such as the Ansonia (an apartment hotel), Dorilton, Apthorp, Belnord, and Turrets, were built on the Upper West Side. They were much more luxurious than most of the others, and set a certain standard that apartment houses for the middle class tried to live up to.²¹

An editorial in the New York Times in 1908, "The Huge Apartment House," noted that "the time is coming when there will be comparatively few private dwellings on this island, except the palaces of the rich." These large apartments were the answer for people who wanted to both work and live in the city. The Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide noted as early as 1876 that even though the development of more rapid transportation made it possible for well-to-do families to have their own houses with plenty of

garden space in the suburbs, "more and more families were choosing to live in the city and in apartments." "Our women crave companionship other than that of their own families," and living in apartments gave them more leisure time for socializing. "The facilities of these houses for lighting, heating, for getting rid of domestic labor, for allowing women abundance of leisure, is what is their attraction to the ordinary American matron."²²

Apartment houses were also popular with investors, being more profitable than the cold water tenements of fifty years earlier. In 1876, an article in the Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide stated that apartment house investors "are making a higher rate of interest upon their property than in any other branch of the building business." The New York Times editorial mentioned above explained the increase in the number of apartment houses:

This entire change was brought about by the increase in value of land and a corresponding addition to the height of the improvement, coupled with the universal demand of the public for more comfort, with less care and expense than entailed in private house maintenance.

As Elsie DeWolfe wrote in 1913, "This is the age of the apartment."

BACKGROUND:

THE UPPER WEST SIDE AND DEVELOPMENT ON BROADWAY

At the turn of the century, the Upper West Side was firmly established as a residential area. Numerous rowhouses had been built along the sidestreets, and some apartments and private houses were located on the Boulevard, Broadway.²⁴ But this area still had a substantial number of vacant lots waiting to be developed. Real estate speculators had hoped that the West Side would become THE fashionable area to live in Manhattan, but "despite the high ground, the superb river view and the many splendid mansions there, [it] has never been taken up by fashion..."²⁵ Although the height of fashion may not have been interested, many prosperous families lived in a district from 72nd to 82nd streets, bounded by the Hudson River and Central Park West. In 1899, E. Idell Zeisloft observed that "the dwellers here are not as a rule of the old and historic New York families, or very wealthy as a class, but all are people exceedingly well-to-do, a fair proportion of them are Hebrews, and many are former residents of other cities who have found here the best value for their money."²⁶

The Boulevard ran from 59th to 157th Streets and "had always been the best and most favored bicycle road in the city..." In the center, grass and trees planted by the Tweed ring flourished and served as "a dividing line for the bicycles and vehicles going north or south."²⁷ It was not quite so lovely when the IRT was under construction. "Broadway was a sight to be remembered, as the work was done from the surface and the street and the car tracks had to be supported by temporary bridges of planks, and it was no unusual thing for a vehicle to fall into the excavation." The

subway opened in 1904, but not until 1910 however was the Broadway mall replanted.²⁸

Broadway, "which was intended to be the central line of business and population," was a disappointment to earlier developers and "had been severely left alone" until as late as 1898.²⁹ Between 1885 and 1900, there were buildings along Central Park West, West End Avenue, and rowhouses along the cross streets. Columbus and Amsterdam Avenues "were being improved with 5-story corner and inside apartments with stores, the character of which was so vastly superior to any offered to the tenant in other sections of the city at the same rental, that they were soon fully occupied."³⁰ After 1900, development on Broadway picked up and the value of property skyrocketed. The Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide commented in 1906, "as to the West Side the unimproved land which remains is for the most part so high-priced that it will have to be improved with fire-proofed apartment houses..."³¹ And indeed this was the case. One of the most famous was the Ansonia, completed in 1904. It was followed shortly thereafter by the Apthorp, finished in 1908, and the Belnord, ready for occupancy in 1909.

Observers felt that the "rapidity of this development has doubtless been much assisted by the opening of the subway, but it was in any event bound to have occurred."³² The IRT officially opened on October 27, 1904, and provided easy access to all other parts of the city. In many cases it was more convenient to live on the West Side than other parts of the city because "the subway takes us from 72nd to the Grand Central depot in five minutes, to City Hall in sixteen minutes, to Wall Street in twenty minutes."³³

The convenient transportation system and the scenic area made the West Side a popular place to live. Above 72nd Street "has settled down into the

apartment house district, though many blocks are still devoted to private dwellings. These, however, are being done away with every year. If the present rate is kept up, it will not be a long while before the private house is almost extinct."³⁴

"There is probably no greater or more charming residential section in any of the commercial capitals of the world, for none can boast of a Central Park West with its unobstructed view of Central Park, or a Riverside Drive with its superb view of the Hudson."³⁵

With this background in mind, let us now turn specifically to the Apthorp and the Belnord.

THE APTHORP AND BELNORD

The Apthorp was built for William Waldorf Astor on property that John Jacob Astor bought from George W. and Rachel Ann Poillon in 1879.³⁶ It was the site of the Van den Heuval mansion, built in 1759 by John C. Van den Heuval (see plate 1). This stone mansion became Burnham's Tavern in 1839. The grounds in the back of the tavern wound their way down to the Hudson River, helping to make this a popular roadside stop.³⁷ When torn down in 1905 to make way for the Apthorp, the building was in a great state of disrepair,³⁸ and offered quite a sharp contrast to all the new construction, especially apartment houses, in that area of Broadway. The Astors owned a lot of property on the Upper West Side, and it seems that they had been waiting for the opportune time to develop this choice one block lot.³⁹ In 1908, the Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide noted that William Waldorf Astor had bought 383 West End Avenue (the northwest corner of 78th Street) "presumably to get control of this corner and to prevent the erection of any building" which might detract from the Apthorp across the street.⁴⁰

The firm of Clinton and Russell, prominent New York architects, designed the Apthorp in the style we might call Italian Renaissance Eclectic. Charles W. Clinton, born in 1838 and died in 1910, studied architecture with Richard Upjohn, the influential architect of the nineteenth century who designed Trinity Church. Clinton was a charter member of the American Institute of Architects and was its first president. William Hamilton Russell, born in 1854 and died in 1907, was educated in architecture at

Columbia University's School of Mines. He worked for his great uncle, James Renwick, until 1894 when he and Clinton formed their productive partnership. Renwick was another very important American architect, the designer of Grace Church and St. Patrick's Cathedral. Clinton and Russell designed numerous office and commercial buildings in Manhattan in the late 1890s, and after the turn of the century designed several apartment buildings.⁴¹

Their Graham Court, of 1901, at 116th Street and Seventh Avenue, was the basis for the Apthorp (see plate 2). It too was built for William Waldorf Astor. An eight-story courtyard building, it is smaller than the Apthorp, but foreshadowed many of the luxuries to be found in the later building.⁴² The Astors built other luxury apartment houses on the Upper West Side, including Astor Court, on Broadway between 89th and 90th Streets, built in 1916.⁴³

Work on the Apthorp began in 1907, but had been announced in the Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide as "Largest in the World" on January 13, 1906. This article included small renderings of the proposed building. Two thirds of the apartments were fully rented by July 1908, even though it was not ready for occupancy until September of that year.⁴⁴

The Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide noted early in 1907, "[o]ne hundred commodious homes under one roof--this will be the unique feature of William Waldorf Astor's 'Apthorp' apartments, on upper Broadway."⁴⁵ The article went on to stress the enormity of the building, which covers 49,000 square feet and is thirteen stories high. The Apthorp "will be larger than the St. Regis Hotel or the 26-story Hotel Belmont, each of which has a ground

area of 20,000 square feet." The total floor area is eleven and one-half acres, equaling the thirty-two story City Investment Building "which is expected to be the largest skyscraper office building in the world."⁴⁶

The Apthorp is built around a central courtyard, 95 feet wide and 134 feet long. The facade is beautifully carved limestone (see Plate 3). Four full-length carved figures stand watch over the three-story high arched entranceways on Broadway and West End Avenue (see plates 4 and 5). The three-story base is heavily rusticated with stringcourses articulating the floors. Above this, the facade is smoother with rusticated stones defining the end bays. A heavy stringcourse between the tenth and eleventh floors sets off the eleventh and twelfth floors. A copper cresting runs around the roof line.

The structural system of the building is steel. "Thousands of tons of steel, valued at half a million dollars, have gone into the structural framework. The steel columns and beams for the floors, if placed end to end, would reach 25 miles." The structure and individual suites of rooms were very thoroughly fireproofed with "nearly 1,500,000 square feet of terra cotta tile."⁴⁷

Carriage entrances to the courtyard (see Plate 6) are on the Broadway and West End Avenue facades of the building. The service entrance is on the 79th Street side, and leads to a driveway underneath the courtyard.⁴⁸ The first floor (see Plate 7 for floor plans) provided for a bank and drugstore on the Broadway side, several doctors' offices on 79th Street and Broadway, and five duplex apartments. The third floor had twelve apartments, ranging from six rooms and a bath to nine rooms and three baths per apartment. The



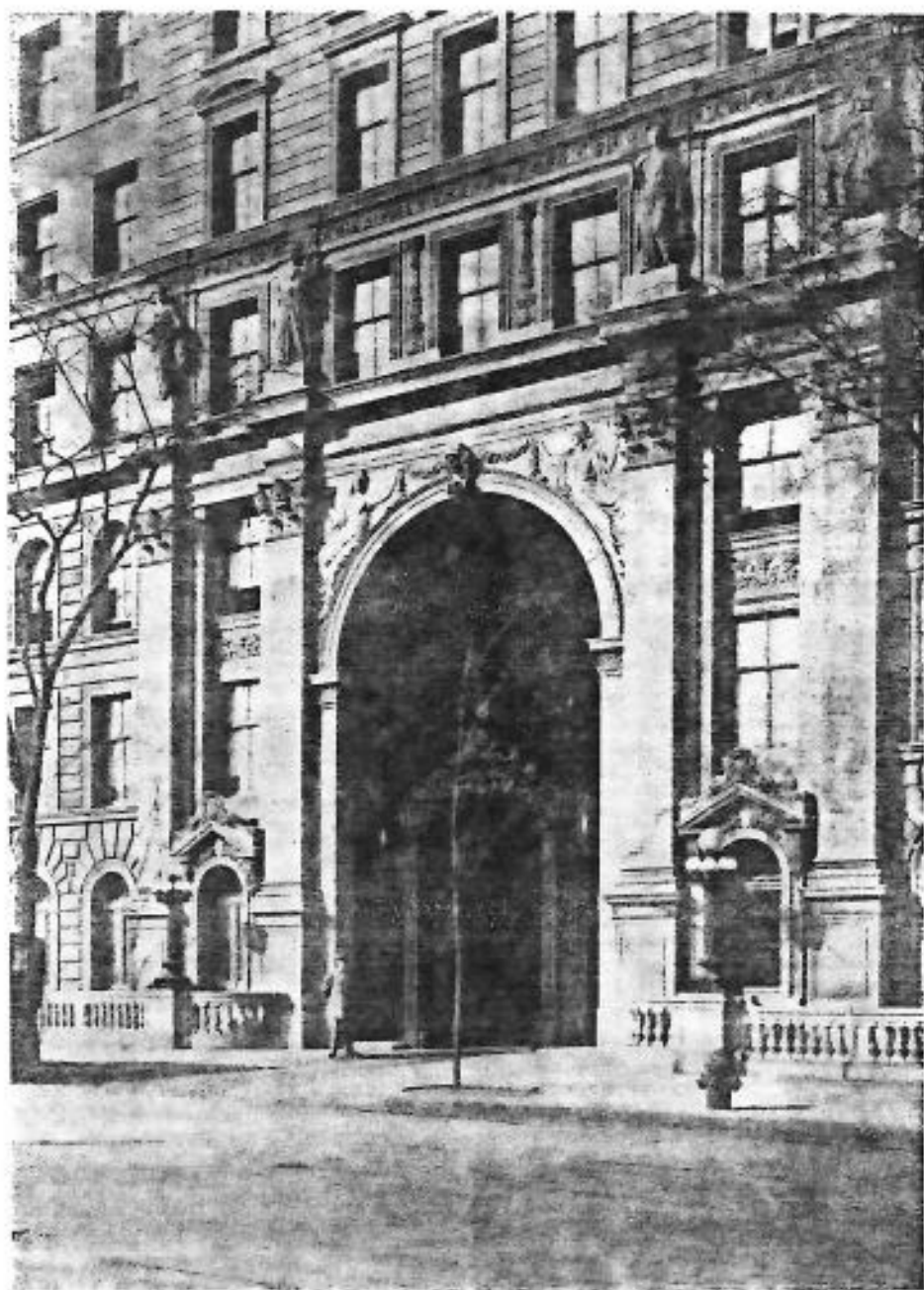


PLATE 4 Courtyard entrance to the Apthorp.

From The American Architect and Building News, v. 97, n. 1778
(January 19, 1910): plates.

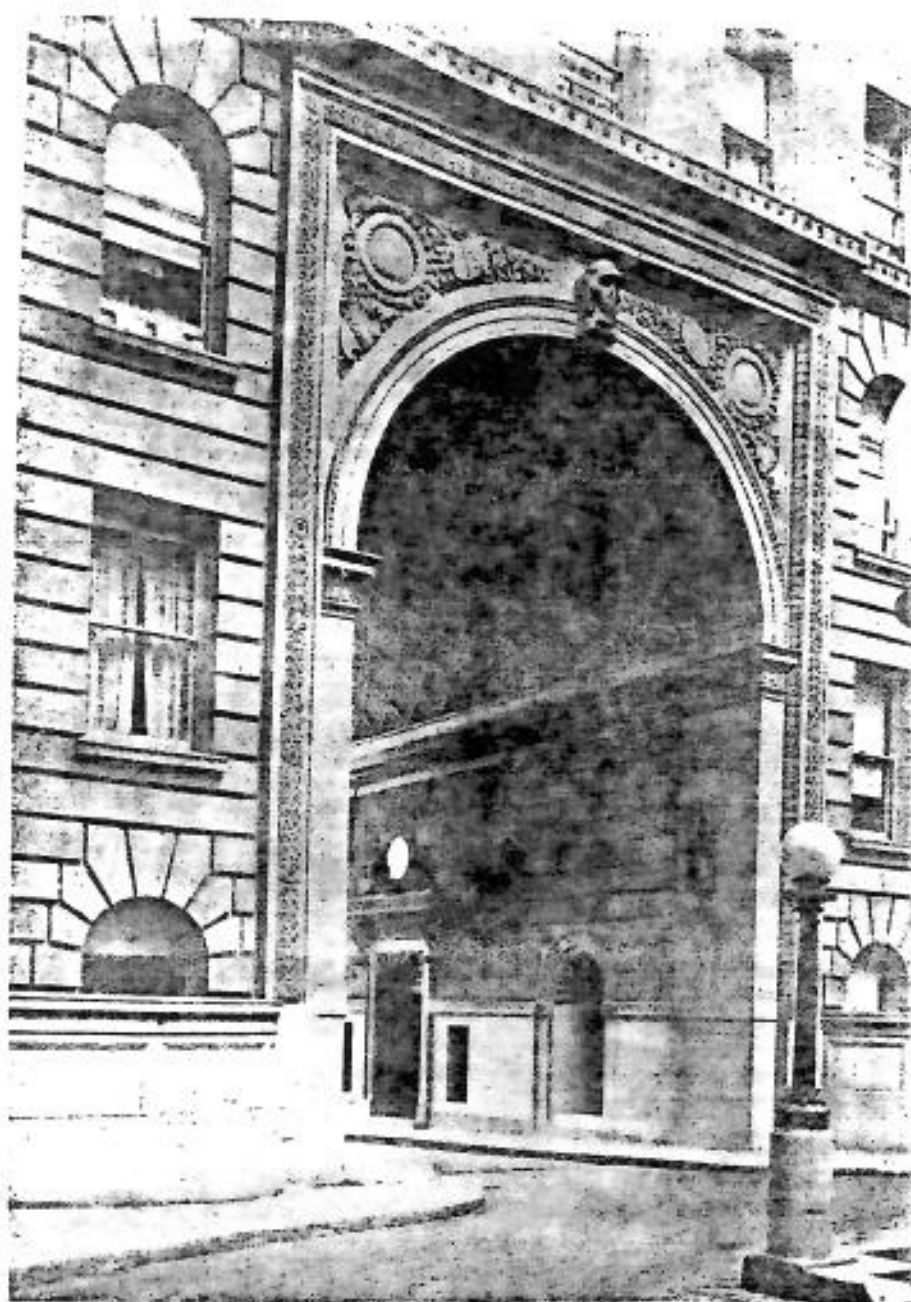


PLATE 5 Inside of courtyard entrance of Anthorp

From The American Architect and Building News, v. 97, n. 1778
(January 19, 1910): plates.

fourth through eleventh floors had ten apartments each. The building had a total of 104 apartments. On the twelfth floor were extra rooms for servants, extra guest rooms, and the laundry, which consisted of 140 tubs, two large drying rooms with steam dryers, two large ironing rooms, and an open area for sun drying. Above this, on the 78th and 79th Street sides of the building, were shaded promenades. The Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide said in 1908 of the promenades, "This will be one of the most attractive features..."⁴⁹

The Belnord was built for the Belnord Realty Company, organized by the Hoyt estate and Henry S. Thompson, ex-commissioner of Public Works. The property had been in the Hoyt family for over twenty years, awaiting the most profitable development scheme.⁵⁰ According to Manhattan atlases, the land had always been vacant.

This was the first apartment house design for the architectural firm of Hiss and (H. Hobart) Weekes, at 1123 Broadway. Later Weeks designed the Gotham Hotel on Fifth Avenue. Other than this, little is known about the firm. The builder was the George A. Fuller company.⁵¹

Plans for the building were filed in October 1908, but excavation of the site had already begun in July. It was ready for occupancy on September 15, 1909, just in time for the fall renting season.⁵²

The building had much advance publicity. The New York Times hailed it as "Mammoth Apartment House" in July 1908, and in a front page article on September 4, 1908, said "New Flathouse to be Biggest in the World."⁵³ The Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide wrote in 1908 that when completed, the Belnord would be the largest elevator apartment building in the United States, outclassing the Apthorp in size.⁵⁴





The fireproof Belnord (see Plate 8) was also built in the style of the Italian Renaissance around a large court, 94 feet wide and 231 feet long, in limestone and terra cotta. The exterior walls are backed by six million common bricks.⁵⁵ It is similar to the Apthorp in massing, but the detailing is not as elegant. The three-story base of the building is deeply rusticated limestone and is topped by a heavy stringcourse. The fourth and fifth floors are articulated by white bricks or terra cotta set in a rusticated ashlar pattern. Another heavy stringcourse runs above this. The remaining floors have this brick pattern to define the end bays, with a smooth brick surface in between. A stringcourse runs below the thirteenth (top) floor. The soffit of the roofline is heavily denticulated.

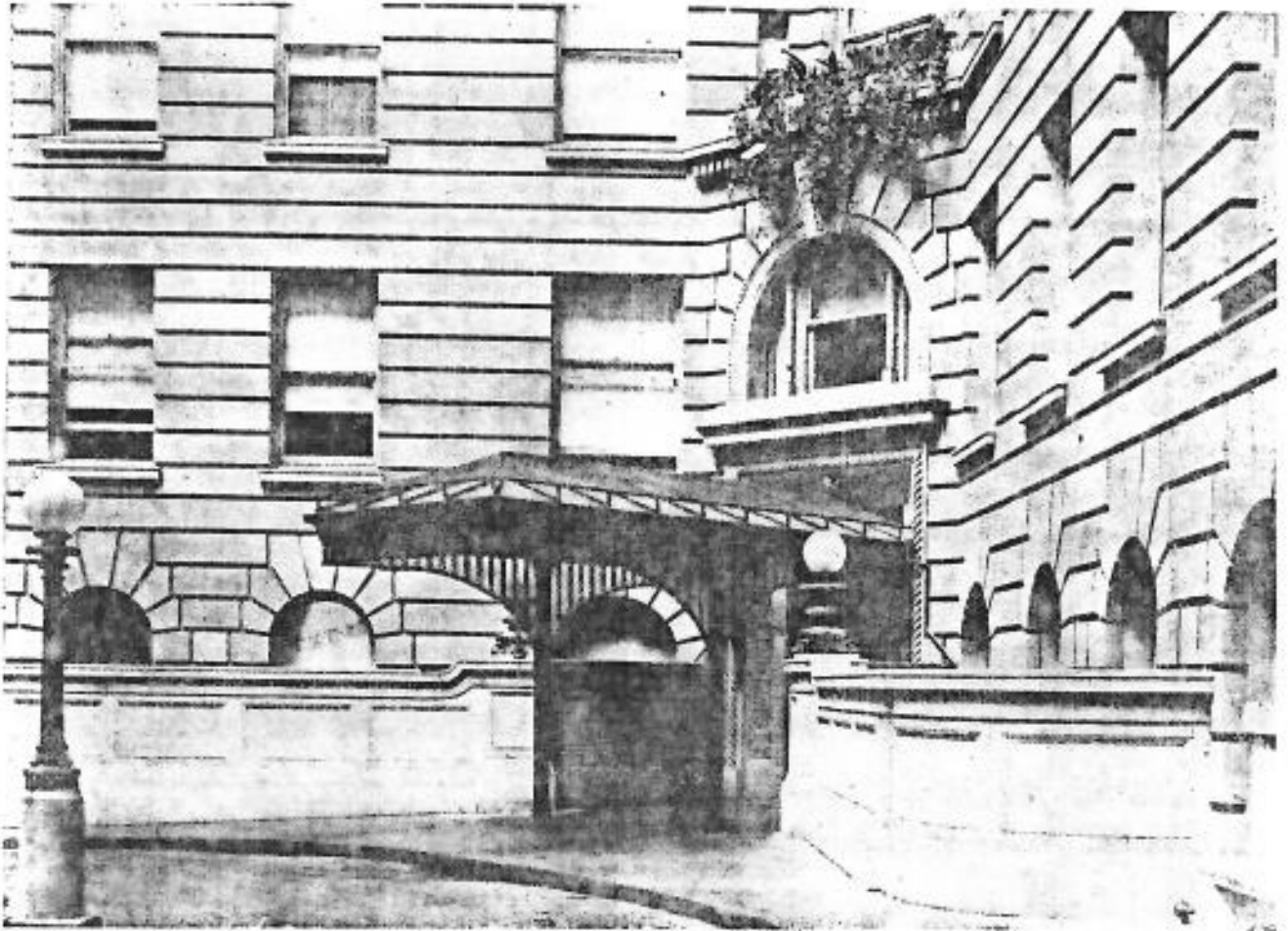
As mentioned, the Belnord is built around a large courtyard. Access to the court is gained by a footway entrance on Broadway and on 87th, and a twin arched entrance driveway on 86th.⁵⁶ When built, it had 175 apartments, each having seven to eleven rooms with one to four baths and one to three servants. (See Plate 9 for sample floor plan.) "All rooms compare favorably in size with those of private dwellings, some drawing rooms being thirty-three feet in length by fourteen feet in width."⁵⁷ Under the roof were the laundry and storage areas.

The floor plans of apartments of the time period were often extremely awkward and contorted, with long corridors, public rooms like parlors and dining rooms right next to bedrooms, and not enough light or privacy.⁵⁸ The Apthorp and Belnord were exceptions to this, being very carefully laid out. Because both were built around large courtyards each side of the buildings is not nearly as deep as a smaller building on a 25 foot by 100 foot lot (the building usually being 70 or 80 feet long). This eliminates long cor-

ridors, which would otherwise be needed to run from the front to the rear of apartments in smaller buildings. It is interesting that in an article announcing construction of the Apthorp in an architectural journal, renderings of the exterior were published but the editors noted that the architects were not going to release the plans until the building was completed.⁵⁹ It is as if the architects did not want anyone to copy them immediately, and perhaps take away their publicity. By the time the Belnord interiors were designed, the architects Hiss and Weekes certainly must have had access to the Apthorp plans, because the similarities are numerous.

Tenants entered both buildings by driving into the carriage turn-arounds where they could alight in privacy away from the busy street. In the Apthorp, the main entrances were located at the four inner corners of the courtyard (see Plate 10). Here there were four passenger and four service elevators. Each elevator served two to three apartments per floor, thus avoiding large elevator banks and public hallways, and giving a feeling of privacy in a large building.⁶⁰ The Belnord plans were similar, with the corner elevators, but as this building is larger than the Apthorp there is one entrance in the middle of the two long sides of the building.⁶¹

In both buildings each apartment has a large foyer hall, acting as a buffer zone between the elevator area and the rest of the apartment. Rooms which could be used for public entertaining (parlors, dining rooms, and sometimes libraries) were located near each other. The private bedrooms remained private, away from these public spaces. In the Belnord "nearly all of the bedrooms open on the court, thus insuring quiet to all the sleeping or living rooms..."⁶² Most of the service rooms face the street,⁶³ The only problem



DETAIL OF DOORWAY IN COURTYARD

PLATE 10

From The American Architect and Building News, v. 97, n. 1778
(January 19, 1910): plates.

with having service rooms face the street is that the small windows for bathrooms and kitchens cause irregularities on the imperial facade.

All the apartments were elegantly appointed. The Apthorp was decorated in the periods of Louis XIV, Louis XV, Louis XVI, Francis I, Elizabeth, Adam, and Colonial, with the Colonial predominating. Radiators were concealed under sills and covered with wainscoting. The walls of the main corridors were marble on the first floor, and Caen stone "imported in powder form" for the other floors.⁶⁴ The Belnord advertised that "[t]he interior decorations and finish of the apartments are of the highest order in all cases."⁶⁵ It was decorated in Louis XIV style, with the mantels and wall decorations made and imported exclusively for the Belnord. Tenants were able to choose their own wallpaper from an expansive stock right in the building. "Many thousands of rolls will be available to meet the wishes of this discriminating group and to inspire those not familiar with foreign masterpieces in interior finish."⁶⁶ Other luxuries were also provided. Every apartment in the Belnord had a wall safe, and each bedroom had mirrored doors.⁶⁷

The courtyards of these two buildings were also a great drawing card for tenants. It certainly was the utmost in luxury to be living in an apartment in the bustling city and be able to enjoy a large private garden. The garden of the Apthorp was arranged formally, with two fountains, unusual plants, benches and handsome lighting fixtures arranged around the edge.⁶⁸ It might have been a bit gloomy though, except at mid-day, because the building is rather tall in relationship to the court area. The 1911 Fall Renting Guide advertised about the Belnord Court:

This great formal park of over 22,000 square feet adds more to the desirability of the Belnord as a dwelling place than any other feature...Its playing fountains, hedges, trees and grass plots present a charming and peaceful outlook.

No other apartment house in the world can boast of a court approaching it in size, its dimensions being two hundred and thirty-one feet long by ninety-four feet wide...⁶⁹

In the various newspaper and journal articles announcing the Apthorp and Belnord, and in the ads for the Belnord, there is a great fascination with the mechanical systems of these buildings. The ads and articles often mention the following. Two large refrigerating plants were in the basement of the Apthorp, so if one ever broke down the other would take over right away (causing no inconvenience to the tenants).⁷⁰ The Belnord had its own boiler and generating plant, located under the courtyard to avoid vibrating the building itself. This plant provided all the power needed for heating, lighting, refrigeration, and for the elevator. The refrigerators even made their own ice. The building also had a built-in vacuum cleaning system. And, like the Apthorp, there was a laundry under the roof, with steam drying racks, electric irons, and an open air drying area.⁷¹ Both buildings had mail chutes for added convenience.⁷²

There was much advance notice for both the Apthorp and Belnord, and as mentioned before the Apthorp was two-thirds rented even before it was completed. It is noteworthy that I was unable to find any ads for the Apthorp in the New York Times, the Herald or the many fall renting guides that were published before the building was finished or in the few years following. A Times article in 1910, entitled "Princely Prices for Apartments," did say that the Apthorp, the great Astor apartment, had no vacancies.⁷³ This might indicate that there was a great demand for these apartments, and that once people rented them they stayed for quite a while.

The Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide did extol the virtues of the Apthorp: "conveniences for promoting the physical comfort in housekeeping apartments and interior finish to satisfy the aesthetic taste of the most exacting have been combined in the Apthorp, 78th Street and Broadway, in a manner that almost defies criticism."⁷⁴

Unlike the Apthorp, there were numerous ads for the Belnord. There were large ads with photographs or drawings in the Times and Herald, and in all the fall renting guides. They stressed over and over again, "in the heart of the city's finest residential district," and "the utmost in luxury, comfort, convenience and service."⁷⁵ Sections of several ads bear quoting here:

...No amount of description can convey an idea of the Belnord's immensity or completeness. Every one desiring to obtain the most modern and desirable apartment house accommodations in New York City should see what the Belnord affords before making a decision.⁷⁶

Another ad, in the 1914 Fall Renting Guide, stresses that the Belnord is "[a]ccessible to everywhere--amusement, business and shopping centres--by subway, surface cars and auto-bus..." In describing the apartments, it goes on to say:

Each apartment of rare size and arrangement--light, cheerful living rooms--quiet, restful bedrooms--plenty of closets.

Every room is an outside room, broadly exposed to sunlight and air, with beautiful outlook over wide asphalt streets, and the largest private open air garden in the world. Night and day elevator and 'phone service. Refrigeration. Special service quarters. In fact, every facility, appointment, and convenience that can be desired...Make your home in this splendid house...⁷⁷

And yet another ad assured us, "An apartment in the Belnord is superior to a private residence in every particular."⁷⁸

The big question is how much did all of this luxury cost? Charles Israels, writing on New York apartment houses in 1904, said the public distinguishes a home as an apartment rather than a flat when the rental is more than forty or fifty dollars a month, if the building has an elevator, and if each suite has seven or more rooms with a bath.⁷⁹ A 1912 New York Times apartment house directory stated that tenements usually cost seven to twenty dollars per month, but that an apartment could cost as much as fifty to two thousand dollars per month.⁸⁰ When the Apthorp was finished, the rents ranged as high as \$6500 per year.⁸¹ The Belnord rents ran from \$2100 to \$7000 a year. Two duplexes, on the first and second floors, which were convenient for the practice and home of doctors, cost \$5000 a year.⁸²

For comparison, housekeeping suites in the Ansonia, an apartment/hotel, ran from \$1800 per year for five rooms and a bath to \$5000 for a thirteen-room suite with four baths.⁸³ Alwyn Court, an extremely luxurious apartment house at 58th Street and Seventh Avenue, had suites from fourteen rooms and five baths to thirty-four rooms and nine baths. These rents ranged from \$6500 to \$22,000 a year.⁸⁴

Although the Apthorp and Belnord were certainly expensive, they were not the most expensive apartments to be had in the city. These two buildings helped to define the Upper West Side as a fine and fashionable residential area. Although a few years after they were built there was a growing demand for apartments on the East Side,⁸⁵ the New York American Renting Guide to High Class Apartments wrote in 1911:

The popularity of Broadway continues undiminished, as is shown by the number of new apartment houses there. People who like to live amid life and movement, and yet to have pure air and quiet and to be near some of the great parks, naturally gravitate to Upper Broadway.⁸⁶

And who were the people who could afford the princely rents of these two buildings? As noted on page 9, residents of the Upper West Side were not from the old and historic New York families, but were prosperous and well-to-do. Examining the New York State census records for 1915 and 1925 confirms that this same type of people also lived in the Aphorp and Belnord.⁸⁷ As there seem to be some errors and omissions in the census tracts, I cannot state exactly how many heads of households held what jobs, but I can draw many general conclusions.

In most of the families listed for these two buildings the parents were usually over 35 or 40 years of age. The heads of household were professionals, doctors and lawyers or were in business (merchants, stockbrokers, members of the Stock Exchange, real estate investors, manufacturers, bankers, and officers in companies). In the 1915 census, there were a number of men listed as having no occupations so presumably they were independently wealthy (or the census takers made mistakes in taking down their information, as may very well be the case).

Children in the families ranged from quite young to those in college. In some households, there were nurses for the younger children, and also a few governesses. Some children continued to live with their parents after they were married. Otherwise there are no young couples in their own apartments. In other examples of extended families, elderly widowed mothers or fathers lived with their grown-up married children, or grown-up children, usually single, lived with their widowed mothers or fathers. Quite a number of widows maintained households in these two buildings, either living

by themselves, with companions, with nieces or nephews, or with several sisters.

Most people in the families were American citizens, but their ethnic heritage was often evident by their last names. It seems that a number of Jews from eastern Europe lived in the Belnord, including one rabbi and his family.

There were numerous servants living with families in both apartment houses, the number depending on how large the family was. It is interesting that in 1915, the ratio of servants to the people they served was about two to three, but by 1925 it was only one to two. Perhaps people were economizing a little bit or employing more outside help. The servants were mainly white women, a few were black. A good number were immigrants, many having only been in this country for a few years. They came mainly from England, Ireland, Austria, Germany, Scandinavia, Hungary, and Switzerland, with a few from Barbados and the British West Indies. There were a few Japanese men employed as butlers.⁸⁸

It seems clear from the census records that families living in the Apthorp and the Belnord were quite firmly established. No young couples lived here, except with parents. The heads of household appear to have held high level positions, enabling them to afford the rents. These people were prosperous, and the Apthorp and Belnord provided them with the fine living they demanded.

CONCLUSION

In the early 1900s, New York was transforming into a "city of princely apartments," and there was getting to be as much of an exclusiveness in apartments as there had been in private homes.⁸⁹ The following quote from an article in the Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide on Alwyn Court is useful to understand this change. This analysis can be applied to the Apthorp and Belnord as well, if we keep in mind that as noted before the rents of these two were considerably less than Alwyn Court.

For the city home, apartments are coming to be preferred over the private dwelling, for one reason, because a private dwelling may not be obtainable in the particular neighborhood where the family wishes to reside when in town. The really high-class apartments offer to tenants of wealth and standing the choice of the finest locations in Swelldom. Emerson says that there is a price on everything—pay the price and the thing is yours. If one wishes to live in the most fashionable neighborhood in America, he must pay the price fixed by the market.⁹⁰

The Apthorp and the Belnord were built in an area which already had a residential character with its many rowhouses and some smaller apartment buildings. They reinforced this image, further establishing the Upper West Side as a fashionable neighborhood. The 1913 Fall Renting Guide, commenting on all that the Belnord had to offer, also holds true for the Apthorp.

To secure these superior advantages it was necessary to erect a structure occupying an entire city block that was already on all sides surrounded by the highest type of private dwellings and apartment house construction. Thus by the improvement of this block there has been eliminated for all times all undesirable elements and the possibility of intrusion, such as often ruins the desirability of tenancy in an apartment house after you have taken a long term lease.⁹¹