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# Daytonian in Manhattan

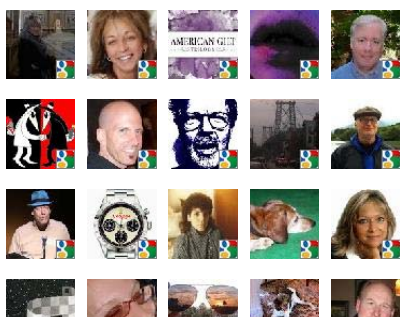
The stories behind the buildings, statues and other points of interest that make Manhattan fascinating.

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Thursday, August 8, 2013

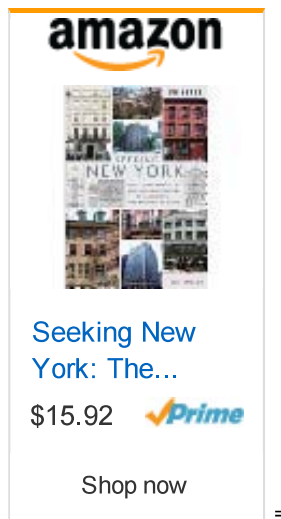
## The Mansion in the Shadow -- No. 28 East 72nd Street



upper east side (315)  
upper west side (169)


photo by Alice Lum

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In 1885 the architectural tradition of Manhattan's great houses was changing. William Kissam Vanderbilt's wife, Alva, broke the tedious mold of brownstone mansions when she instructed Richard Morris Hunt to design a gleaming white limestone chateau at No. 660 Fifth Avenue, completed in 1883.

But despite the Vanderbilt vote of confidence in "Millionaire's Row," already wealthy Manhattanites were abandoning the neighborhood for sites uptown, away from encroaching commerce. Among them would be the wealthy widow of Francis Waldo, the former Gertrude Rhineland.

A stockbroker, Waldo had died in 1878 just two years after the marriage, having lost his own fortune in the Panic of 1873. Gertrude, however, had her own millions. Born into a venerable New York family that traced its roots in America back 200 years, she began planning a mansion just four years after her husband's death that would outdo even Alva Vanderbilt's palace.






Gertrude chose the southeast corner of Madison Avenue and 72<sup>nd</sup> Street for what would be one of the largest private mansions in the city. But she stalled. The plot remained vacant; and in 1887 she purchased the side lot at No. 28 East 72<sup>nd</sup> Street.

Finally, in 1894—a dozen years after planning had begun—construction started on Gertrude Rhineland Waldo's massive [French Loire Valley chateau](#) designed by Kimball & Thompson. At the same time the mansion next door that would be dwarfed by its hulking big brother began rising.

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Gertrude Rhineland Waldo's massive French-style mansion stretched along Madis



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Gertrude traveled throughout Europe purchasing artwork, tapestries, sculptures and other decorative furnishings for her new mansion. Packing crates were stacked in the rooms and hallways but were never opened. The somewhat eccentric socialite lived with her sister across the street at No. 81 East 72<sup>nd</sup> Street, directly opposite her vacant mansion.



The smaller mansion, somewhat hidden by a tree here, looked much like part of the W

Meanwhile, the smaller house at No. 28 East 72<sup>nd</sup> Street, too, sat empty. The harmonious architecture blended so smoothly with the massive corner structure that it lost its own identity. Without close inspection, it could be mistaken for an elegant service wing to the Madison Avenue house.

On May 7, 1908 a sign was nailed to the door of one of the houses, announcing that they were for sale. *The New York Times* reported the following day that "For more than thirteen years there have been at the southeast corner of Madison Avenue and Seventy-second Street two fine mansions which in all those years have never housed a tenant." The newspaper said that despite their remaining "empty and gloomy" and the dirty "from the constant beating of wind and rain," the "houses are said to be in all material respects in good shape."

The Francis Key Pendleton House --  
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A Real West Side Story -- No. 330 W.  
47th St.

The Lost McMurtry Mansion -- No.  
812 Fifth Avenue

The 1896 Yerkes Carriage House --  
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The Church of the Covenant -- 310 E.  
42d Street

The 1844 Walsh House -- No. 23 East  
11th Street

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Nevertheless, Gertrude Waldo did not seem over-eager to part with either house. "The price asked is said to have been put at such a figure that buyers have not been eager to take over the property from Mrs. Waldo."

Indeed, neither house sold. And in the meantime, Gertrude Waldo's millions were slipping away. On October 17, 1910 a *lis pendens* to foreclose on the 72<sup>nd</sup> Street house was filed against her. *The Times* noted that "The house adjoins the famous Waldo mansion....and has never been occupied." Gertrude lost the empty mansion to the County Holding Company in foreclosure.

Finally on March 7, 1914, nearly two decades after the mansion was completed, *The New York Times* reported that "negotiations are pending for the sale of the dwelling at 28 East Seventy-second Street." Less than three months later, on May 27, the once-wealthy Gertrude Rhinelander Waldo died penniless—her estate was in debt of \$135,329.







*photo by Alice Lum*

Brown Bros., builders, purchased the house under the corporate name of the 784 Sixth Avenue Company. The contractors “rebuilt” the mansion that had stood vacant and deteriorating for so long. The renovated building was resold in April 1922 for \$85,000—about \$1 million today.

The buyer was James Butler, the founder of the first American chain of grocery stores. Butler had amassed a fortune through his James Butler Grocery Company and one-by-one he presented his four children with a house. No. 28 East 72<sup>nd</sup> Street went to his daughter Beatrice.

Beatrice Katherine Butler had married Dr. Daniel Phillip MacGuire in 1914. The busy doctor not only installed his practice in the house, but acted as Associate Professor of Surgery at St. Vincent’s Post Graduate Hospital, and served on the

faculty of the Physicians and Surgeons College as well. Like his father-in-law MacGuire had a passion for horse racing.

In 1900 James Butler had purchased the Empire City track at Yonkers and later bought interests in Laurel Park, the horse-racing track in Maryland, and another in Mexico. He was a prominent owner of race horses. Following his death in 1934 MacGuire became a vice-president of both the Laurel Park and Empire City tracks.



On May 22, 1951 when this photograph was taken, Dr. MacGuire was still living in the house - of the City of New York, <http://collections.1>  
[VP3=SearchResult\\_VPage&VBID=24UP1GH54NMB&SMLS=1&RW=1280&RH=894&PN=1#/SearchRes](http://collections.1)

The MacGuire's son, James Butler MacGuire, grew up in the house. Then, following Beatrice's death, Dr. MacGuire gave up his private practice in 1951. On June 16 of that year while he was still living in the house, the estate of Beatrice MacGuire sold the property for around \$50,000. It was purchased by Mrs. Marion Zeckendorf and Mrs. Franciska Bator who, probably not coincidentally, owned the house next door at No. 30.


Dr. MacGuire moved to Staten Island and continued to spend his summers at Saratoga Springs. In the meantime the new owners converted the old house to apartments and a first floor art gallery. High-end art was sold from the space throughout the 1950s and 60s. Then in 1973 another conversion resulted in a two-story beauty parlor on the basement and first floor level, with two apartments on each floor above.

Despite the bunker-like addition that replaced the mansard roof, the skinny mansion at No. 28 East 72<sup>nd</sup> Street survives reasonably intact. It still plays second fiddle to the massive Waldo mansion on the corner, most often mistaken for a part of that grand structure.



*photo by Alice Lum*

Posted by [tom Miller](#) at 3:44 AM 

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