United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in How to Complete National Register Forms
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic

and/or common  Houses at 647, 651-53 Fifth Avenue and 4 East 52nd Street

2. Location

647, Fifth Avenue

651-53 Fifth Avenue and 4 East 52nd Street  not for publication

city, town New York

vicinity of congressional district

state New York  code 036

county New York  code 061

3. Classification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Ownership</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Present Use</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>district</td>
<td>public</td>
<td>occupied</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>building(s)</td>
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<td>unoccupied</td>
<td>X commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>structure</td>
<td>both</td>
<td>work in progress</td>
<td>educational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>site</td>
<td>Public Acquisition</td>
<td></td>
<td>entertainment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>object</td>
<td>NA in process</td>
<td>Accessible</td>
<td>government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NA being considered</td>
<td>yes: restricted</td>
<td>industrial</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Owner of Property

name  Equitable Life Assurance Society: Arvic Realty (for all properties)

street & number  888 Seventh Avenue

city, town New York

vicinity of state New York 10019

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc.  New York County Register's Office

street & number  31 Chambers Street

city, town New York

state New York 10007

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Landmarks Designation Reports  (LP-0271), (LP-0954)

date  July 14, 1970; March 22, 1977

has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

depository for survey records  Landmarks Preservation Commission

city, town New York

state New York 10007
7. Description

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Check one</th>
<th>Check one</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>fair</td>
<td></td>
<td>moved</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The three buildings at 647, 651-53 Fifth Avenue and 4 East 52nd Street were originally constructed as private residences but have been converted to commercial use in keeping with the evolution of this section of Fifth Avenue. Today, this section of Fifth Avenue is characterized by fashionable shops, department stores, offices and apartment buildings. Olympic Tower, a modern high-rise building, occupies the rest of the block facing Fifth Avenue.

No. 647 is designed in the French neo-Renaissance style and is faced in marble. It is three bays wide and five stories in height. The first story was originally treated as an English basement with round arched windows, rusticated facing with vermiculation, and heavy paired consoles supporting a second story balcony. The first story windows were enlarged in 1917 when the building was adapted to commercial use. Today a plate glass display window has been substituted. Enframed by rusticated stone, it is almost identical with the first story of No. 651-53. A second story wrought-iron balcony runs below a composite order of fluted pilasters which links the second and third stories and is crowned by a simple entablature. An unusual feature of the facade is the termination of the range of pilasters at the north side. A broad, smooth pier, cutting off all but a narrow slice of fluted pilaster, expresses the thickness of the wall. The windows, set between the pilasters, have splayed lintels with keystones at both floors. The top two stories above the entablature are the result of a late 1930s alteration which increased the height of the building by one story. The original stone rosettes remain in place at the fourth story and the windows installed at the fourth and fifth stories resemble the originals. Stone panels above the rosettes visually unite the two stories. A simple denticulated roof cornice replaces the original, but the original stone balustrade has been retained and simply moved up a story. No. 647 was constructed as one of an identical pair of houses with neighboring No. 645 to the south, which has been replaced by a three-story annex to Olympic Tower.

No. 651-53 is designed in the neo-Italian Renaissance style and is oriented with its main facade on the side street (East 52nd), a typical arrangement for corner site Manhattan town houses. The first story of the limestone-faced building has smooth rustication and large plate glass display windows installed as part of the 1917 alteration to commercial use. On East 52nd Street a central three-bay-wide pavilion projects slightly and is surmounted by a pediment at the fourth story level. This richly carved pediment is visually supported by four fluted pilasters with Scamozzi capitals, which rise from the second story above a heavy stone balcony on consoles. These elements form a "temple front" which dominates the facade. Paired windows at the second story flank the central pavilion and are enframed by engaged columns supporting broad lintels with denticulated cornices. At the third story the windows have similar cornices, supported on scroll brackets. The fourth story has smaller, more simply detailed windows, while the fifth story contains small square windows punctuating an extremely rich frieze of acanthus foliage, which encircles the building. Above is a projecting cornice carried on brackets and surmounted by a balustrade. The Fifth Avenue facade has an iron balcony on consoles at the second story and windows of the same design as those of the 52nd Street elevation at the upper stories. An elaborately enframed clock appears above the central window at the second story.

No. 4 East 52nd Street is a smaller town house adjacent to No. 651-53 Fifth Avenue. It is neo-classical in style with a limestone facing and is five stories in height and three bays wide. The first two stories have been altered and contain broad plate glass windows and an iron marquee surmounted by a clock. At the third story the windows are simply enframed and have keystones. Above a bracketed cornice are three stone gables and a pitched roof with skylight.
8. Significance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Areas of Significance</th>
<th>Check and justify below</th>
<th>Specific dates</th>
<th>Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1500-1599</td>
<td>archeology-historic</td>
<td>landscape architecture</td>
<td>1917, 1939</td>
<td>No. 651-53: Robert W. Gibson, William Welles Bosworth</td>
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<tr>
<td>1600-1699</td>
<td>agriculture</td>
<td>religion</td>
<td></td>
<td>No. 4: 1904-05, alt. 1929 C.P.H. Gilbert, Fearsell &amp; Mills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1700-1799</td>
<td>architecture</td>
<td>science</td>
<td></td>
<td>The three buildings at 647, 651-53 Fifth Avenue and 4 East 52nd Street are architecturally significant as rare surviving examples of the opulent Beaux-Arts style residences that once dominated this section of Fifth Avenue. Constructed between 1902-1905, they are also significant for their association with Manhattan's wealthiest and most prominent families and for their designs by three of the leading architects of their day: Hunt and Hunt, Robert W. Gibson and C.P.H. Gilbert. The survival of these buildings is attributed to their early, sensitive conversions to commercial uses. Today they serve as a reminder of the splendid turn-of-the-century residential character of this neighborhood and of its transition to elegant commercial use following World War I.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800-1899</td>
<td>commerce</td>
<td>literature</td>
<td></td>
<td>In the later nineteenth century the Vanderbilts began to erect a series of grand houses along Fifth Avenue. They are said to have spent millions of dollars in purchasing land along Fifth Avenue to protect their domain from commercial encroachment. Their houses on the avenue included a Francois I style mansion for W.K. Vanderbilt by R.M. Hunt, another Francois I style mansion for his brother Cornelius by George B. Post, and twin brownstone mansions for the father William H. and his daughters by John B. Snook and the Herter Brothers, originally called the &quot;Twin Houses&quot; but soon known as the &quot;Twin Horrors.&quot; The building at 647 Fifth Avenue is the sole surviving house in Manhattan of the numerous Vanderbilt family mansions which once lined Fifth Avenue just south of Central Park.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900-</td>
<td>communications</td>
<td>military</td>
<td></td>
<td>George W. Vanderbilt bought the lots at Nos. 645 and 647 Fifth Avenue across from his father's house to prevent an office building from being erected there. In 1902, he commissioned the firm of Hunt &amp; Hunt to build two identical buildings, the Marble Twins, on this land. No. 645 was occupied by George's sister Emily and her husband and No. 647 was for William K., although the first and only occupant of the house as a residence was Robert Goelet, a Vanderbilt relation by marriage, as well as a member of a prominent old New York family. By hiring the firm of Hunt &amp; Hunt, sons of Richard Morris Hunt, George was continuing a longstanding relationship between the Vanderbilts as patrons and the Hunts as architects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>music</td>
<td></td>
<td>No. 647, executed in the style of Louis XV, is a good example of a Beaux-Arts townhouse that was converted to commercial usage at an early date. In 1917 the building became the offices and gallery of Gimpel &amp; Wildenstein, one of the world's foremost art dealers (today, Wildenstein &amp; Co.). Charles Fraser carried out the initial alterations to No. 647, which was further altered by F. Verpilleux. The new shop windows, enframed by rusticated stone and fluted pilasters, are not obtrusive. The additional floor harmonized extremely well with the original fourth story treatment, while the original balustrade was moved up a story and still caps the facade. Not only are there changes sympathetic to the Hunt &amp; Hunt design but they also accord with Bosworth's alterations for Cartier at 651-53 Fifth Avenue.</td>
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9. Major Bibliographical References

Retrospective—Louis Cartier, 101 Years of the Jewelers Art, Cartier, New York, 1976.

10. Geographical Data

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<td>Zone Easting Northing</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
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<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Verbal boundary description and justification
The properties are adjacent to one another and occupy Manhattan Tax Map Block 1287, Lots 71 and 69 as outlined on the attached map with a scale of 120 feet to one inch.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>state</th>
<th>code</th>
<th>county</th>
<th>code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

11. Form Prepared By

Contact:
name/title  Austin O'Brien, Program Analyst
organization Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau date September, 1982
street & number Agency I, E.S.P. telephone (518) 474-0479
city or town  Albany state New York 12238

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>national</th>
<th>state</th>
<th>local</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

For HCR use only
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Keeper of the National Register

Entered in the National Register

Attest:

Chief of Registration
The building at 651-53 Fifth Avenue was completed in 1905 for Connecticut millionaire Morton F. Plant. Plant had made his fortune in trolley lines and railroads, putting together the Plant system of railroads which became the Atlantic Coast Line. He was vice president of the Plant Investment Company and owned all or shares of several baseball clubs. When he bought this corner property from the Vanderbilts, he commissioned his new residence from architect Robert W. Gibson. Of British birth and training, Gibson came to this country in 1880 and worked for eight years in Albany, New York, before moving to New York City in 1888. The architect of numerous important churches in the city, Gibson was enthusiastically accepted into New York social circles, which undoubtedly helped him in obtaining the Plant commission.

In 1917, 651-653 Fifth Avenue was leased and later sold to Cartier Inc. Cartier was founded in Paris in 1847 and opened its New York store in 1908. The Cartier family numbered among their clients European royalty and American millionaires. They designed not only fine jewelry but also clocks and watches. Louis Cartier (1875-1942) created the first wristwatch—the "Santos," named for aviator Santos Dumont, in 1907. The firm today continues the fine traditions of the Cartier family.

This five-story neo-Italian Renaissance building is a handsome example of the successful conversion of a former Fifth Avenue townhouse into a distinguished commercial establishment. The Fifty Second Street elevation is especially impressive. Dominating the facade is a handsome decorative architectural feature composed of an ornately carved balcony, supported by heavy console brackets at the second floor with four fluted Doric pilasters rising two stories above the balcony and supporting the handsome low pitched pediment. The framing around the windows is especially commendable, particularly the second floor windows which are flanked by columns resting on a low balustraded wall. The fifth floor attic windows are ingeniously set in the profusely decorated frieze just below the rich cornice and the building is crowned by a balustrade at the roof line.

W.W. Bosworth (1869-1966), a Beaux-Arts trained architect, altered No. 651-53 with restraint and with sensitivity to the original design. The shop windows which replace the original ones are in keeping with the style of the house, as are the doorway and the signs.

Facing 52nd Street and adjacent to the Plant mansion, another elegant residence was built in 1904-05. C.P.H. Gilbert designed the building at 4 East 52nd Street for Edward Holbrook. While little is known of Holbrook except for his obvious financial success, Gilbert was the architect for numerous opulent residences for leading New York families. Having studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Gilbert had a good command of historical detail with which he created imaginative compositions in a variety of styles, depending on the taste of the particular client.

No. 4 East 52nd Street is a small neo-classical townhouse that was joined to No. 651-53 in an expansion move by Cartier in the 1920s. Pearsall & Mills executed the alterations to No. 4 and continued the high standards of the architects who altered the two large houses. The Cartier clock is stylistically in keeping with Gilbert design and at the same time reflects the commercial use of the building in a restrained manner.
These distinguished buildings are architecturally significant as rare surviving examples of the elaborate Beaux-Arts style residences that once dominated this section of Fifth Avenue. During the last decades of the nineteenth century, New York's wealthiest and most powerful families, including the Astors, Belmonts, Goulds, Goelets, and Vanderbilts, built lavish residences along this street. By the end of World War I, rising taxes and maintenance costs, as well as a lack of servants, caused these homes to be given up in favor of smaller residences further removed from the bustle of midtown business. While the vast majority of these elaborate buildings were replaced by high-rise offices, these three Beaux-Arts structures have survived essentially intact. Sensitive changes to these three buildings have contributed to their present usefulness while retaining the elegance and the sense of history that these former townhouses express. They are a reminder of the splendid turn-of-the-century residential character of this neighborhood and its transition to elegant commercial use following World War I.
FORM RESEARCHED AND PREPARED BY:

Nancy Goeschel
Landmarks Preservation Commission
20 Vesey Street
New York, New York

(212)566-7577
**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**
**EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET**

**Houses at 647, 651—53 Fifth Avenue and 4 East 52nd Street**
**New York County**
**NEW YORK**

- **Working No.:** AUG 1 2 1982
- **Fed. Reg. Date:** 2-7-84
- **Date Due:** 7/6/82-7/24/82
- **Action:** \[ACCEPT\] 7/8/83

**Nomination returned for:**
- technical corrections cited below
- substantive reasons discussed below

**1. Name**

**2. Location**

**3. Classification**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Ownership</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Present Use</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Public Acquisition</td>
<td>Accessible</td>
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**4. Owner of Property**

**5. Location of Legal Description**

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

Has this property been determined eligible?  □ yes  □ no

**7. Description**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Check one</th>
<th>Check one</th>
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<td>□ altered</td>
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<tr>
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<td>□ unexposed</td>
<td>□ boundary selection</td>
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Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

- □ summary paragraph
- □ completeness
- □ clarity
- □ alterations/integrity dates
- □ boundary selection
8. Significance

Specific dates
Builder/Architect
Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

☐ summary paragraph
☐ completeness
☐ clarity
☐ applicable criteria
☐ justification of areas checked
☐ relating significance to the resource
☐ context
☐ relationship of integrity to significance
☐ justification of exception
☐ other

9. Major Bibliographical References

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property
Quadrangle name
UTM References

Verbal boundary description and justification

11. Form Prepared By

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

☐ national ☐ state ☐ local

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title date

13. Other

☐ Maps
☐ Photographs
☐ Other

Questions concerning this nomination may be directed to

Signed Date Phone:

Comments for any item may be continued on an attached sheet
HOUSES AT 647, 651-53 FIFTH AVENUE AND
4 EAST 52ND STREET: 647 Fifth Avenue
New York County, New York

Photo: 1979
Neg. at: New York Landmarks
Preservation Commission

View from the west
2. HOUSES AT 647, 651-53 FIFTH AVENUE AND 4 EAST 52ND STREET: 651-53 Fifth Avenue
New York County, New York

Photo: 1979
Neg. at: New York Landmarks
Preservation Commission

View from the northwest
HOUSES AT 647, 651-53 FIFTH AVENUE AND
4 EAST 52ND STREET: 4 East 52nd St.
New York County, New York

Photo: 1979
Neg. at: New York Landmarks
Preservation Commission

View from the north