

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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**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

Villa Lewaro

AND/OR COMMON

Anne E. Poth House

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

North Broadway

__ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Greenburgh, Village of Irvington

__ VICINITY OF

23

STATE

CODE
36

COUNTY
Westchester

CODE
119

New York

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER, Private Nursing Home

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Anna E. Poth Corporation

STREET & NUMBER

North Broadway

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Greenburgh, Village of Irvington

__ VICINITY OF

New York

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Town Hall

STREET & NUMBER

85 Main Street

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Village of Irvington

New York

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

None Known

DATE

__ FEDERAL __ STATE __ COUNTY __ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

EXCELLENT
 GOOD
 FAIR

DETERIORATED
 RUINS
 UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

UNALTERED
 ALTERED

CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE
 MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Villa Lewaro, Madame C. J. Walker's residence at Irvington-on-Hudson, was designed by the black architect Vertner Tandy and completed in 1918. Tandy, a 1909 graduate of Cornell University, was New York's first licensed black architect. His Villa Lewaro is a stately example of early Italian Renaissance style, skillfully adapted to early twentieth century American architecture. The stately scale of the building resembles Italian palaces. Originally built on a four and one-half acre site, sloping down east to west towards the Hudson River, the residence had a commanding view of the river.

The residence is approached by two circular drives from North Broadway, and a hand laid stone retaining wall surrounds the north and west sides of the site. The house is a rectangular plan, with three floors and a basement. It is a fireproof building of structural tile, with an exterior finish of white stucco and red tile roof. Its deep cornice, decorative concrete balustrades and its 113 feet long by 60 feet wide dimensions, give it the horizontal character of Italian Renaissance architecture. Its long dimension is covered by a hip roof intersecting the two end hip roofs. The roof framing is wood truss. Two gabled dormers extend from the roof on each side except the North Broadway (east) side of the house. There are two chimneys, symmetrically located on the longer roof, with red tile hip roofs as covers.

Both the north and south sides of the house have a two-story portion extending beyond the roof at the cornice line. On the north, this portion is an arched covered drive and main entry, over which is a sleeping porch, enclosed with French glass doors on three sides, opening on to a concrete balustraded open porch. From the south side, extends a semi-circular room with a similar sleeping porch above, except that the open porch and balustrade are semi-circular. At the center of the North Broadway (east) elevation is a semi-circular two-story portico supported by six ionic columns on large square bases. Deeply recessed in the portico are French glass doors opening to the living room. The windows are slightly recessed with semi-circular arches on the first level and rectangular on the second level with wrought iron balustrades on the front. A concrete terrace, with a concrete balustrade, extends across the rear of the house. From this, stairs from either end extend down to a second terrace with a fountain recessed in an arched niche. A sunken garden and swimming pool below may be reached by stairs from the second terrace. At the west end of the garden is a Pergola supported by concrete ionic columns. The rear walls of the basement are above grade and open out in an enclosed areaway below the terrace. There is a split level unattached two car garage with servants quarters above on the south side of the site. It has a tile roof and a stucco finish. The west side has a lower level which opens to the back of the site and was once used as a stable.

During Mrs. Walker's occupancy, the original house contained thirty-four rooms. The most impressive were located on the first floor. These included the 21 x 32 foot living room and the "Gold Room," which was trimmed in gold. This room contained a \$25,000 organ that was designed to pipe music throughout the house. The ceilings were decoratively hand painted by imported European artists. The ceiling height of these two rooms, is 18 feet. The second floor contained sleeping rooms, while the third floor served as the servants quarters.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
	<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			Afro-American History

SPECIFIC DATES **Constructed 1918**

BUILDER/ARCHITECT **Vertner Tandy (1885-1949)**

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The architectural significance and greatness of Villa Lewaro is tied inextricably to race pride and thereby contributes to it being Tandy's best work. Villa Lewaro demonstrates the architectural genius of Vertner Woodson Tandy. His adoption of the classical form, early Italian Renaissance, skillfully compromised to adapt to early twentieth century American architecture remains one of his greatest achievements.

In 1907, twenty-two years after his birth in Lexington, Kentucky, Vertner Woodson Tandy became the first black architect of New York state. As a youngster, Vertner had assisted his father, Henry A. Tandy, a prominent contractor, who often acted as his own architect and contractor. The elder Tandy built some of Lexington's finest late-nineteenth century homes, and had been the brick contractor for its City Hall.

Young Tandy completed Chandler Normal School in Lexington before finishing the five-year program at Tuskegee Institute's Academy and School of Architecture in 1905. Mr. Robert R. Taylor, the first black graduate of Massachusetts Institute of Technology was the Director of Tuskegee's Architecture Program. Since opportunities were almost non-existent for black architects, teaching and designing buildings at blacks schools was one way to survive. Tandy's teachers, during his Tuskegee tenure, included distinguished scholars John A. Lankford, Wallace Rayfield and William S. Pittman. All of these men made significant contributions to the profession and later operated their own offices in different cities. Aside from good instructors, under the Tuskegee plan, student Tandy performed every job from brickmaking to designing. The Administration Building, Douglass Hall, Collis P. Huntington Building and the Armstrong Memorial Trades Building, among others, were erected while he was there. With this kind of diversified practical building and drafting experience at Tuskegee, he was admitted to Cornell as a special student and completed the four-year program in 1907 within three years.

After graduating from Cornell, Tandy established his architectural office at 1931 Broadway in New York City, the first by a black man in New York or any major northern city. His office remained in this area of New York for his entire 42 year career. At the time of his death in 1949, he was located around the corner at 36 West 66th Street.

Architect Tandy's first identifiable major project was a new home in Harlem for the St. Phillip's Episcopal Church, whose history dates back to 1697. Harlem's increasing black population, soon warranted plans for a church, rectory and parish house. Vertner Tandy, a member of St. Phillip's, was engaged to prepare plans first for a rectory and parish house, in 1909. By 1910, construction was under

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Files of Vertner W. Tandy. Department of Manuscripts and University Archives. Cornell University.

Hall, Sadie. "Dark Tower Once Habitat of Harlem's Literati, Now Houses Health Center."
The Afro-American, July 18, 1936.

(PARTIAL LISTING)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 3 1/8 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A | 18 | 59.5 | 3610 | 454.2 | 8610 |

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

D | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Villa Lewaro (Vertner W. Tandy) is located on North Broadway on a small rise. The house grounds occupies approximately 3 1/8 acres. From a point of intersection of North Broadway and entrance road proceed east along the south edge of the entrance road continuing in a line, along a wall a distance of 100' east of the house, then proceed due south 300', then west to a point of intersection with North Broadway, then north to the place of origin.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE CODE COUNTY CODE

STATE CODE COUNTY CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Lynne Gomez Graves, Historical Projects Director

ORGANIZATION

Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation

DATE

30 October 1975

STREET & NUMBER

1420 N Street, Northwest

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN

Washington

STATE

D. C.

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS.

NATIONAL ____

STATE ____

LOCAL ____

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 National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION
ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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CONTINUATION SHEET DESCRIPTION ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE TWO

The house, today has been kept in excellent repair although minor cracking and water damage inside is visible. Only minor changes seem to have been made to conform to codes and change of use. The room on the south side below the sleeping porch has been converted to a chapel and all original windows have been replaced with stained glass. The second floor windows have been replaced in the rear by aluminum windows. An elevator has been added at the north entrance (original main entrance) of the house and an unsightly elevator equipment room extends approximately 8 feet above the rear (west) roof slope. Also on the west side of the house, a steel fire escape from the third floor to the terrace has been added. A heavy overgrowth of trees and brush obscure the once commanding view of the Hudson River. The garden and the Pergola are no longer in existence and code restrictions do not allow the use of the swimming pool.

The residence has been occupied by its current owners and has been known as the Anne E. Poth Home, since 1931.

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CONTINUATION SHEET SIGNIFICANCE ITEM NUMBER #8 PAGE TWO

way, for a church, also designed by Vertner Tandy.

Tandy's brick, early Gothic style church at 208 West 134th Street, with adjoining parish house and rectory that extended through to 133rd Street, an impressive symbol of black accomplishment, was opened March 25, 1911. Although, today, the rectory and parish house have been torn down to make way for a church school and new parish house, the imposing brick church (one of New York's last with the rise of reinforced concrete) stands, today, a Harlem landmark.

Three years after St. Phillip's was completed, the business potential of Harlem's growing black population attracted Madame C. J. Walker. She engaged Vertner Tandy to design her \$100,000 townhouse at 108-110 West 136th Street. The lower floor of the three story elegant Georgian style townhouse was used as her beauty shop and school. While the upper two floors were her much talked about palacious residence. The three-story red brick townhouse with limestone trim, was the pride of black Harlem and among the most costly built during that period.

When Madame Walker built her country home in 1918, the townhouse was given to her daughter, Lelia Walker Robinson. It was under her ownership, during the Harlem Renaissance Era, that the house became known as the "Dark Tower." Lelia Robinson hosted Harlem's most lavish parties for writers, poets, musicians and people interested in the arts, during this period. One room, on the second floor, was redecorated in black, red and gold; on the wall were two poems, "The Weary Blues," by Langston Hughes and "From the Dark Tower," by Countee Cullen, for which the house was named. "Dark Tower" and Lelia Walker Robinson, one of the country's most avid patrons of the arts, gained national and international prominence during the Renaissance. Vertner Tandy, a frequent guest, must have realized a certain feeling of "success" there, with notables, such as James Weldon Johnson, Arna Bontemps, Charles Johnson (then editor of Opportunity) and Carl Van Vechten, author of "Nigger Heaven" and later photographer for Yale's James Weldon Johnson Collection, among others. The "notables" of Harlem were no strangers to Harlem's novel black architect. The house was sold during the Depression after the death of Mrs. Robinson. In 1951, the new Countee Cullen Public Library was built on the site.

With the possibility of war, New York Governor Charles Whitman, had authorized in 1916, the forming of the all-black 15th Regiment; the first black troops associated with the New York National Guard. Vertner Tandy was the first-black candidate to pass the officers examination and became, in December, 1916, the first black Lieutenant of the Regiment. Lieutenant Tandy organized and operated the Regiment's recruiting station in Harlem's black-owned Lafayette Theatre. Shortly after, Tandy was promoted to Commander of the Regiment's Company "A". His troops were reviewed by Governor Whitman. When the Regiment went overseas, Captain Tandy remained in Harlem with other married men. He was promoted to Major in 1917 and made Commander of the 15th Regiments depot battalion.

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CONTINUATION SHEET SIGNIFICANCE ITEM NUMBER #8 PAGE THREE

When sent overseas, the black 15th Regiment was attached to French troops, where they won France's highest award, the "Croix de Guerre." Returning home in 1919, the famed 15th Regiment troops were joined by Major Tandy's troops in a victory parade.

It was during his service in the National Guard, in 1917, that Madame Walker commissioned Major Tandy to design Villa Lewaro, valued at \$400,000. The home, from its five-acre site in Irvington-on-the-Hudson, over-looks the Hudson River. With 34 rooms, the three-story residence was designed in Italian Renaissance style on the scale of a palace. The first floor contains, among other rooms, a 21 x 32 foot livingroom and a room called the "Gold Room." The walls and ceiling of the "Gold Room" were trimmed in gold leaf decore; there were gold-trimmed draperies; and a \$25,000 specially made organ that was designed to chime on the quarter hour and pipe music throughout the house. A marble stairway extends from the first floor to the second-floor bedrooms, the sleeping porches and five bathrooms. The third floor was designated as the servants quarters. Throughout the house, the detail and scale are almost exact replicas of Italian palaces, giving a most impressive account of architect Tandy's skill and Madame Walker's taste.

The story of her home, completed in 1918, was widely reported throughout the country by black and white newspapers. At her palatial home, Madame Walker entertained some of the country's most influential people of both races. The great Caruso, at the request of her daughter, named the luxurious home, "Villa Lewaro" - derived from the first two letters of her name: Lelia Walker Robinson. When asked by her guest why she'd built this home, Madame Walker, once responded that it was not for her, but for her people in order to see what could be accomplished, no matter what their background.

Villa Lewaro, was left to Lelia Walker Robinson, following her mother's death, just eight months after its completion. In 1951, upon the death of Lelia Walker Robinson, as her mother had requested, the Villa Lewaro was left to the NAACP. However, prohibitive upkeep expenses and taxes prevented them from accepting it. Most of the house's priceless interior furnishings were sold at public auction in 1930, at incredibly low prices. In 1931, the dream of this pioneer black woman entrepreneur, "Villa Lewaro" was sold at auction for \$47,000, to become Anna E. Poth Home. It remains that today.

Of Tandy's identified work, beyond a doubt, this is his most "complete architectural design." Every part is a contribution to the whole, a monumental Italian Renaissance Palace. The landscape design, i.e., the location on the site, views, approach, gardens and terraces, demonstrate Tandy's ability and understanding of these as well as the structural problems of a sloping site. The exterior forms reflect the interior spaces and there are no "false" exterior forms. Further, the complete plan and interior details reflect to outstanding detail, the Italian Renaissance style. While it may or may

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CONTINUATION SHEET SIGNIFICANCE ITEM NUMBER #8 PAGE FOUR

not "rank" high with other architectural critics, in the selection of the era's "great buildings," it was one of the first projects of that scale by a black architect. The fact, also, that it was owned by blacks, designed and built by blacks is somewhat remarkable for that period. Villa Lewaro required more architectural skills, i.e., engineering, planning, design and incorporation of many interior specialities, such as a beauty shop, than other building by black architects, or built by black contractors of that day - and Tandy as the designer and overall "clerk of the works," did an outstanding job.

Tandy's office became nationally known. It was of great national significance as the only architectural office young black architects could gain employment in the Northern United States. For a number of years, the only other black architects in New York state had gained their early professional experience at the Tandy office. John Brent, first black architect of Buffalo, New York, and John L. Wilson, Columbia University's first black graduate in architecture were among this group. Others, such as Hilliard Robinson of Washington, D.C., and William Moses, from Virginia, came from farther away. Besides providing opportunities for young black architects, the Tandy office contributed to the success of black builders in New York. Miller and Reed, black contractors, of Harlem were the contractors for Madame Walker's townhouse, country home, Mother Zion and St. Phillip's Church.

Until recently (1965) Tandy had designed more buildings in Harlem than any other black architect. His greatest building period in Harlem was during the twenties, when Harlem was becoming known as the largest black urban community in the United States. Mother Zion A.M.E. Church (1921), the Imperial Elks Lodge (1924), Prince Hall Lodge (1925) and Dr. Vincent's Sanitarium, are the only known "Tandy" buildings of that period currently standing in Harlem.

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CONTINUATION SHEET RESEARCHERS

ITEM NUMBER #11

PAGE TWO

Richard Dozier, Architect
2333 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10037
October 30, 1975