

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Armour-Stiner House

AND/OR COMMON

Carmer Octagon House

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

45 West Clinton Avenue

— NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Irvington

— VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

23 Peter A. Peyser

STATE

New York

CODE

36

COUNTY

Westchester

CODE

119

3 CLASSIFICATION**CATEGORY** DISTRICT BUILDING(S) STRUCTURE SITE OBJECT**OWNERSHIP** PUBLIC PRIVATE BOTH**PUBLIC ACQUISITION** IN PROCESS BEING CONSIDERED**STATUS** OCCUPIED UNOCCUPIED WORK IN PROGRESS**ACCESSIBLE** YES: RESTRICTED YES: UNRESTRICTED NO**PRESENT USE** AGRICULTURE COMMERCIAL EDUCATIONAL ENTERTAINMENT GOVERNMENT INDUSTRIAL MILITARY MUSEUM PARK PRIVATE RESIDENCE RELIGIOUS SCIENTIFIC TRANSPORTATION OTHER:**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Mrs. Elizabeth Black Carmer

STREET & NUMBER

45 West Clinton Avenue

CITY, TOWN

Irvington

— VICINITY OF

STATE

New York

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Land Records Office

STREET & NUMBER

Westchester County Courthouse

CITY, TOWN

White Plains

STATE

New York

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Historic American Buildings Survey

DATE

February, 1975

 FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Library of Congress

CITY, TOWN

Washington,

STATE

District of Columbia

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> remodeled	

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Surveyed by the Historic American Buildings Survey in February, 1975, the Armour-Stiner Octagon is situated on a three-acre wooded lot at the south-west corner of W. Clinton Avenue and the Croton Aqueduct. The house stands on the original foundations, located about 1650 feet east of the river at the crest of a ridge about 145 feet above the river.

Research conducted by HABS indicates that when erected in 1859-60 by Paul J. Armour, a New York City financier, the house stood two stories in height. It is believed to have been covered by a mansard roof and was probably encircled by a veranda. An 1870 map indicates that the entrance drive from W. Clinton Avenue approached a turn around circle that repeated the form of the house from the east.

Joseph Stiner, an importer of tea, purchased the house May 31, 1872, for a country retreat. Stiner commissioned an unidentified architect to remodel and enlarge the house. It was at this time, c. 1876, that the present veranda and living room bay window were added and the structure's height was increased to ninety-five feet by the addition of the present dome and cupola. According to Mr. Carmer, "the porch alone cost about \$26,000 for 56 pillars, cast iron grillwork with dog-head medallions, each labeled 'Prince', and ornate cornice carvings." A late 19th century photograph of the house (New York Historical Society negative no. 53386) depicts several features which are no longer extant: decorative iron filigree work atop the capped chimney, cupola oculi, dome dormers and oculi; elaborate sawn brackets flanking each of the dormers and surrounding the dome oculi; urns centered on the veranda railings; exterior shutters on the second floor windows; symmetrically placed coachman's lanterns at the base of both surviving porch stairs; and a very pronounced color scheme showing greater contrast between lightly and darkly painted areas.

The vertical emphasis of the dome and cupola are tempered by the strong horizontal line established by the veranda that projects from the mass of the building. This effect is aided by the darkly painted cornice and frieze with brackets that serves visually as a base for the dome which contains the third and fourth floors. The dome and roof of the cupola are sheathed with gray slate. A decorative pattern which resembles a necklace with drops composed of red, yellow and black slates cascades from the cupola that crowns the whole ensemble down the eight facets of the dome. The single brick chimney south of the cupola is the only architectural feature which breaks the symmetry of the dome's composition.

The first floor rooms within the house are arranged on a cross axis which is blocked on the south by the staircase that extends from the basement to the fourth floor. In addition to the first floor bathroom

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 checked="" 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 checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1859-60; 1875-76 BUILDER/ARCHITECT unidentified

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Armour-Stiner House is the only fully domed octagonal residence in the United States. Its concept, plan, mechanical systems and siting reflect the contemporary mid-nineteenth century architectural philosophies of Orson Squire Fowler, noted phrenologist, sexologist, amateur architect-builder and author of the popular Octagon House: A Home for All. This interesting and important architectural folly exhibits a unique combination of elements resulting from the mid-century reforms championed by Fowler and the architectural forms and decorative motifs from the 1870s. Standing on the crest of the river's bluff, south of Irvington, this house, known today as the Carmer Octagon, has been a major symbol of the Hudson River. In addition, since 1946 the house has been the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Carl Carmer. A nationally prominent author, poet and historian, Mr. Carmer is an authority on American folklore and served as general editor of the Rivers of America series, for which he wrote several of the volumes.

Orson S. Fowler (1809-1887), originally accompanied by Henry Ward Beecher, set himself up as an authority on the reading of heads. According to Carl Carmer in an essay for Town and Country (April, 1939), "he had the unerring taste of a born writer of nonfiction best sellers." In addition to his initial work, Phrenology Proved, Illustrated and Applied, he turned out books on sex, temperance, tight lacing and matrimony. At the height of this strange career, he published in 1848, by his own firm of Fowler and Wells, A House for All or a New, Cheap, Convenient and Superior Mode of Building, and commenced to personally build a giant concrete octagon in Fishkill, New York. Although it was the only building he designed, Walter Creese in "Fowler and the Domestic Octagon", (The Art Bulletin, 1946), stated:

Yet it does seem permissible to call Fowler a significant architect. His extraordinary importance for his own age was the result of his faculty for accurately estimating and capitalizing upon the bubbling intellectual currents that surrounded him. A House for All is still easily accessible. This little volume had at least seven printings between 1848 and 1857 [A reprint of the second edition, 1853, was issued by Dover Publications, Inc. in 1973.] and was the main instrument of propagation for octagonal house plans throughout the United States. These same years saw scores of octagons appear. But the best testimony to Fowler's importance

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See continuation sheets, Bibliography, pages 1 and 2.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 3

UTM REFERENCES

A 18 594900 4542580
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C

D

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

See continuation sheet, Geographical Data, page 1.

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

Thomas M. Slade, Office of Properties

ORGANIZATION

DATE

National Trust for Historic Preservation

August 19, 1976

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

740-748 Jackson Place, N.W.

(202) 638-5200

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Washington,

District of Columbia

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 2

installed by the Carners for the writer Sam Adams, the first floor contains the reception, music, dining and elongated living rooms, pantry and kitchen. An office, five bedrooms and two bathrooms are distributed around the central hall and staircase on the second level. The third floor contains two studios, a library and an upstairs reception room. The south wall of this reception room is composed of glazed panels and double doors with decorative designs incorporating Stiner's initials in the etched glass. Traces of stenciled designs on the woodwork and walls are similar in style to the Eastlake inspired motifs found on the painted porcelain sink recessed in the east wall of the reception room. Primary spaces such as the kitchen, living and dining rooms rectangular, while subsidiary ones such as pantry, sitting rooms and closets are triangular. This spatial arrangement is repeated on the second and third floors of the house. The fourth floor is a single large octagonal game room with octagonal oculi in each wall.

The frame structure with brick nogging is sheathed within by lath and plaster on the first three floors and by wainscoating on the fourth and in the cupola. Door enframements throughout the dwelling are for the most part composed of moldings in the Gothic Revival Style. Other notable features of the interior include elaborate plaster ceiling medallions, metal and etched glass newel-post lamps on the first and second stories, original hardware from the remodeling on the doors, gas wall fixtures on the third floor, and etched glass in some doors on the first three floors.

Most of the plumbing system and fixtures appear to date from early in the 20th century. The hot air heating system may be original. Decorative heating grills remain in many of the rooms and there is a brick encased Boynton's Square Pot Crusader Furnace in the cellar.

Stiner's alterations to the house were extensive. Almost all the decorative features and visible surfaces on the interior and exterior appear to date from the remodeling executed in the mid-1870s. In contrast to the increased dimensions and elaboration, Armour's original house would seem to have adhered to the Fowleresque principles of solidity, economy and practicality.

The exotic flavor of the property is also seen in the unusual varieties of trees and shrubs that have been planted through the years. A small octagonal frame gazebo stands east of the house adjacent to the entrance driveway. The rectangular carriage house which appears on an 1881 map of Irvington along the east boundary adjacent to the Croton Aqueduct was destroyed sometime after 1933.

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CONTINUATION SHEET Significance ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

for the times remains in the pages of contemporary carpenters' and builders' books. The authors paid him the supreme compliment of quotation and illustration, and often included polygonal schemes of their own.

It was through the combination of a rationalized plan and unique modes of construction that Fowler sought "TO CHEAPEN AND IMPROVE HUMAN HOMES, and especially to bring comfortable dwellings within the reach of the poorer classes...." A Home for All explained how an octagonal plan residence was cheaper to erect, more convenient for the housewife, easier to heat, admitted more light, and, by being more accessible for greater numbers of people, would result in an improvement of society. To complement his unique plan, Fowler championed the installation of various home improvements like the furnace, cooking stove, dumb waiter, speaking tubes, gravity water system, hot water heater, and indoor toilets. While Fowler's concepts did not envision the octagon house as "a machine for living," he did seek the universal adoption of his "pseudo-scientific octagon" as an answer to the housing and home ownership problems of the middle and lower classes.

The Armour-Stiner octagon is an ornate and most striking architectural composition. The extraordinary dome and veranda of 1876 have caused some to refer to the house as the "Taj Mahal of the Hudson Valley," an "arrested carousel," a "pastry chef's nightmare" and, according to Turpin C. Bannister, "that marvel of the jig-saw." Considered by John Zukowsky "the most visually unique house in the country," "the picturesque quality of the structure is symbolic of the enchanted character and lore of the region so visibly depicted in the stories of Washington Irving, a neighbor to the north."

Since 1937, Carl Carmer has written numerous essays on Orson S. Fowler and the Armour-Stiner house. Born in Cortland, NY (1893), Carl Carmer taught at Syracuse University, University of Rochester, Hamilton College, and the University of Alabama before becoming a columnist for the New Orleans Morning Tribune, assistant editor for Vanity Fair, and finally associate editor for Theatre Arts Monthly. The success of his first book, Stars Fell on Alabama (1933) permitted him to devote himself to writing. This work was followed by Listen for a Lonesome Drum (1936), The Hudson (1939), Dark Trees to the Wind (1949), Windfall Fiddle (1950), and The Susquehanna (1955). He also edited The Rivers of America Series and The Regions of America Series. A member, officer and director of numerous

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CONTINUATION SHEET Significance ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 3

societies and organizations, Carl Carmer's concern for the Hudson River Valley and preservation of its architecture resulted in his serving as president of Boscobel Restorations, Inc. He purchased the Armour-Stiner octagon in 1946. Although he has always referred to the structure as the "Octagon House", his residency, care and the life he wrote about in the house has caused it to be known today as the "Carmer Octagon." In order to assure the future maintenance and preservation of this most significant example of mid-19th century architecture which, according to Walter Creese was the "result of an uninhibited individualism," the National Trust for Historic Preservation has entered into negotiations to purchase the house.

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CONTINUATION SHEET Bibliography ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 1

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CONTINUATION SHEET Bibliography ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 2

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CONTINUATION SHEET Geographical Data ITEM NUMBER 10 PAGE 1

BEGINNING at the Northeast corner of premises herein described at the intersection of the Southerly side of Clinton Avenue with the Westerly line of the Old Croton Aqueduct; thence running South 16 degrees 54 minutes 09 seconds West along the division line between the property herein described and said lands known as the Old Croton Aqueduct 323.77 feet to a monument at the Southeasterly corner of said premises herein described, being the Northeasterly corner of lands now or formerly owned by Alice Du Pont North 87 degrees 33 minutes 30 seconds West 321.90 feet to a monument and a point of curve; thence still running along said lands last mentioned and on a curve concave to the East having a radius of 155 feet and a central angle of 22 degrees 33 minutes 00 seconds, a length of 61 feet to a monument and lands now or formerly of Anna H. Patton; thence running along said lands last mentioned North 3 degrees 47 minutes 52 seconds East 294.52 feet to the Southerly side of Clinton Avenue; thence running along the said Southerly side of Clinton Avenue South 85 degrees 21 minutes 54 seconds East 444.76 feet to the point or place of beginning.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER

PAGE

Photographs and Their Descriptions

Location: Armour-Stiner House, 45 Clinton Avenue, Irvington, New York
Westchester County.

Photo credit: Thom Loughman, HABS, 1975.

- photo description:
1. Facade
 2. Southeast bay of veranda
 3. Gazebo from east
 4. Third floor reception room from northeast
 5. Livingroom looking northeast
 6. Looking south into library from entrance hall
 7. Main stairway, second floor