

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
Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington Residence
AND/OR COMMON
935 St. Nicholas Avenue, Apartment 4A

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER		___ NOT FOR PUBLICATION	
935 St. Nicholas Avenue, Apartment 4A		CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT	
CITY, TOWN		VICINITY OF	
New York		19	
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
New York	36	New York	061

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 checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> NO	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER: Apartments

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
St. Nicholas Realty Company
STREET & NUMBER
935 St. Nicholas Avenue
CITY, TOWN
New York
VICINITY OF
STATE
New York

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC
Surrogate Court, House Office
STREET & NUMBER
31 Chamber Street
CITY, TOWN
New York
STATE
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		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		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The six-story, elevator building is located on the southwest corner of St. Nicholas Avenue and W. 157th Street. To the south of the building is the landscaped playground and parking lot of Public School #28. The building's bold vertical lines, its rectilinear arrangement of the bands of quatrefoils above openings and square mouldings over the depressed arched openings with decorated spandels make it an excellent example of the late Gothic Perpendicular style. This Gothic character as well as the impressive scale of the building make a dominating architectural statement as the first building on the west side of St. Nicholas Avenue north of W. 155th Street.

The building plan is rectangular with the main entrance on the shorter side (St. Nicholas Avenue) and a service entrance on the W. 157th Street side. The site slopes to the west making the basement above ground at the west end of the building. Construction of the building is masonry exterior bearing walls and interior wood stud walls on concrete slab floors and a built-up roof.

Both the main (St. Nicholas Avenue) elevation and the W. 157th elevation, are brown-face brick above the first floor cornice and a lighter brown below it. These two elevations are each divided into five vertical bays by brick corbelling and variation of window detail. Each end bay and the center bay of these elevations have limestone panels with quatrefoil tracery and crests below each window. The parapet wall at the end bays have panels with trefoil tracery centered between stone turrets topped with stone pinnacles. While the center bays have identical panels centered between three turrets, the parapet wall above the remaining bays have battlements with a centered brick pediment with a stone coping and pinnacles. Steel fire-escapes extend down the bays on either side of the centered entrance bay, and in the center bay of the W. 157th Street elevation.

The secondary elevations (west and south) are without any trim or ornamentation. All the wood double-hung windows have stone sills and are uniform and symmetrically located one below the other. The common exterior brick has been painted and the parapet wall above is capped with plain tile coping.

Horizontally the main two elevations of the building are divided by four continuous, projecting stone cornices. One below the parapet wall and two below the sixth floor windows, with stone panels below in the frieze below the windows in the end and center bays, and patterned brick in the others. The first floor cornice is interrupted by the vertical pilasters of the center entrance bay on the St. Nicholas Avenue side.

The sixth floor windows all have a flat drip mould, and a depressed arch above and stone jambs and sills. The end bays have a single centered wood double-hung window with the center bays having four projected casement type wood windows. In the other two bays there are four windows in

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 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 checked="" 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) Afro-American History
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES **1939-1961**

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

Not Known

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington was one of America's most important composers as well as its most influential jazz musicians. His career spanned more than a half-century and his reputation was not only in jazz, which he legitimized as a serious form of music, but in popular, classical and sacred music. Mr. Ellington's compositions totaled more than 1,500 pieces and he applied his talents to music for jazz groups, symphony orchestras, the theater, films, television, ballet and opera.

Ellington's contributions went beyond "Tin Pan Alley" successes. As a composer and orchestrator, he earned the respect of classically trained musicians like composer A. Gunther Schuller, president of the New England Conservatory of Music, who called him "one of America's greatest composers" and ranked him with Stravinsky, Ravel and Villa-Lobos as an important musical figure of the twentieth century.

Born in Washington, D. C. on April 29, 1899, Edward Kennedy Ellington received the nickname "Duke" from a young associate because of his "impeccable dress and sophisticated manner." During the early years of his life, Ellington was exposed to both music and art. His first music lessons were short lived, around the age of seven. In high school he studied art as a career objective and won a scholarship through an art contest to the Pratt Institute of Fine Arts in Brooklyn. But, he declined the offer three months before graduation to take private piano lessons. Throughout high school Ellington developed a reputation as a popular ragtime pianist, playing at night spots and socials in Washington, D. C. It was during this period that he composed his first piece, "Soda Fountain Rag," before he began his formal music education. In 1917, Ellington formed his own group, "The Duke's Serenaders" after having played in numerous other groups.

In 1922, Ellington and four members of his group, including Otto Hardwick and Arthur Whetsol went to New York City. However, after running out of money and engagements they returned to Washington. The band went back to New York the following year where they played at the Kentucky Club until 1927. The sweetness of the band's music received a hotter sound in 1924, when trombonist Charlie Irvis and trumpeter Bubber Miley joined. In 1926, the great baritone saxophonist Harry Carney, and growl trombonist Joe "Tricky Sam" Nanton, also added to the band.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Dance, Stanley. The World of Duke Ellington. New York: C. Scubner's Sons, 1970.

Dreyfuss, Joel. "Duke Ellington: Musician." Washington Post, May 25, 1975.

(PARTIAL LISTING)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Less than 1 acre

UTM REFERENCES

A | 1,8 | | 5,8,8 | 2,3,0 | | 4,5 | 2,0 | 4,5,0 |

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

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

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington Residence is located at the corner of St. Nicholas and W. 157th Street, New York City. The building sits flush against another apartment building to the west. The property is bounded on the north by St. Nicholas Avenue, on the east by W. 157th Street, and on the south by an access alleyway.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Lynne Gomez Graves, Historical Projects Director

ORGANIZATION

Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation

DATE

October 30, 1975

STREET & NUMBER

1420 N Street, N.W., Suite 101

TELEPHONE

(202) 462-2519

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

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each on the main elevation and five on the W. 157th Street elevation. All openings on the floors below the sixth are the same size and directly below each other and differ only in detail.

The center bay of the St. Nicholas Avenue elevation with its pronounced Gothic style, details is the focal point of the building. The exterior finish, of the two-lower floors of this bay is all stone. Three stone pilasters capped by a stone crest at the second floor divide the bay into two equal smaller bays. At the first floor there are two arched deeply recessed openings with the main entrance in the left bay and wood casement windows in the other. Directly above there are two wood casement windows with a pointed arch above in each of the second floor bays. The spandels are decorated, above which runs a continuous stone frieze with trefoil tracery. The entrance door is a double wrought-iron and glass door.

The building is in good repair and has been well kept. Minor exterior repair would be required and cleaning and pointing of the brick to restore the building to its original condition.

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In 1927, Ellington began his tenure at the Cotton Club that was to send him well on his way to international fame. As producer of new stage shows for the Club, Ellington was given the opportunity to develop his talent as a composer as these shows required fresh new music to accompany dance routines. Beside the development of his composing abilities, Ellington's engagement at the Cotton Club gave him and his band the public exposure which led to important recording contracts between 1928 and 1931. Irving Mills had joined the group in 1927 as its promoter and manager, and in 1928 he began arranging recordings for the band with such respected big named companies as Columbia and Victor. Between 1928 and 1931 the orchestra which had been enlarged from seven to ten musicians did more than 160 pieces including "Double Check Stomp," "Old Man Blue," "Awful Sad," and "Mood Indigo." "Creole Rhapsody," also composed in 1931, was the first extended jazz composition to be recorded. Its experimentation with five bar phrases and asymmetrical structure represented, as Gunther Schuller stated "... a first important stumbling step that had to be made, and Ellington, ten years ahead of his competitors, had the creative vision to try it."

Ellington's experimentation with extended jazz freed music from the restrictions of the classical form. As indicated with the recording of "Creole Rhapsody," Ellington was the first jazz musician to write extended compositions for orchestras. Most of these pieces combined the playing of the entire orchestra with the playing of mini-type concerto improvisations by solo instruments. In this way he displayed the many and diverse talents of the geniuses who performed with him. Such men as Cootie Williams, Harry Carney, and Paul Gonsalves were prevented from becoming obscure and anonymous faces in the musical ensemble by being well-known members of the Ellington orchestra.

During the decade of the late thirties and early forties when he moved into 935 St. Nicholas Avenue in New York City, Ellington began to near the height of his creativity and productivity. He released such masterpieces as "Ko-Ko," "Bonjangles," "Concerto for Cootie," "Dusk," "I'm Beginning to See the Light," and "Harlem Air Shaft." He also wrote his first extended long composition for chorus and orchestra, "Black, Brown and Beige." An attempt at a Broadway show, "Jump for Joy," whose purpose was to destroy racial stereotypes, proved to be unsuccessful. The Duke's popularity was becoming so great at this point in his career that the man and his music were creating an expressionable style of culture. His sophisticated manner and dress, much of which he designed himself, became as distinctive a trademark of the man as his music.

The "bop" music of the late forties and early fifties, that of such people as Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker, put a temporary stop to the climbing greatness of the Duke and his music. However, in 1956 he made a spectacular reemergence at the esteemed Newport Jazz Festival, surprising his most astute critics and making the beginning of the most adventurous period of his musical career. At this

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point, Ellington began to concentrate on composing extended works for performance at specific occasions. In 1963, on the anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, Ellington produced "My People," a composition that traced the history of blacks throughout the nation's history. When commissioned to compose his first piece of sacred music, Ellington performed the piece in 1965 at the Grace Cathedral in San Francisco. It was repeated a few months later at the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York. It was also during this period that Ellington composed and performed works exhibiting a more international flavor, "Far East Suite," and the "Latin American Suite," were inspired by his numerous engagements abroad.

Ellington's commanding demeanor came from a deep pride and respect not only in the art of music, but also in his race and its achievements and essence. He once stated that, "My men and my race are my inspiration. I try to catch the character and mood and feeling of my people." And he succeeded. As he stated in a description of his inspiration for the composition "Harlem Air Shaft," recorded in 1940:

"So much goes on in a Harlem air shaft. You hear fights, you smell dinner, you hear people making love. You hear intimate gossip floating down. You hear the radio. You hear the janitor's dog. The man upstairs' aerial falls down and breaks your window.

"You smell coffee. A wonderful thing, that smell. An air shaft has got every contrast. One guy is cooking fried fish and rice and another guy's got a great big turkey. You hear people praying, fighting, snoring. Jitterbugs are jumping up and down always over you, never below you. I tried to put all that in 'Harlem Air Shaft.'"

Ellington's genius and impact on American culture and society was given more concrete and tangible form by the numerous honorary degrees he received from colleges and universities. In 1969 he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom and in 1973 the French Legion of Honor. On his seventieth birthday he was honored by President Richard Nixon with a party at the White House and in February 1974, three months before his death, he was actively involved in performances in the D.C. public schools to help promote an artists-in-the-schools program. As another participant in that program, Julie Nixon Eisenhower presented a letter from her father addressed to "his excellency, the Duke of Ellington ... there will never be another you."

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Gammond, Peter, ed. Duke Ellington: His Life and Music. New York: Roy Publishers, 1958.

Toppin, Edgar. A Biographical History of Blacks in America Since 1528. New York: David McKay Co., Inc., 1971.

Wilson, John S. "Duke Ellington, A Master of Music, Dies at 75." The New York Times, May 25, 1975.