

Established 1873

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Though East Side mansions have yet to break into the pricing mesosphere (its outer limit is still set at \$88 million by the Weill-to-Rybolovlev penthouse sale at 15 Central Park West), Hay's 24-room house is certainly a top-shelf trophy. Six stories plus a penthouse with several terraces, the 1901 Buchman & Fox neo-Renaissance mansion, with elaborate neo-Gothic and neoclassical details, has almost 18,000 square feet of interior space, sporting rooms with extra-high ceilings, tall doors, big windows, herringbone floors, eleven fireplaces and a sweeping central staircase.

Lyons hadn't lived in his mansion for several years at that point. Since 1905, he'd leased it to General Lloyd S. Bryce, a son of a Civil War major. A former congressman, and married to the daughter of a New York City mayor, he'd edited a magazine and served as U.S. envoy to the Netherlands and Luxembourg under President William Howard Taft.

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Bryce left East 81st Street after Lyons sold the house to Julien Stevens Ulman, a leather exporter and director of the Manila Railway Company. A year before his death in 1920, Ulman was named a special deputy commissioner of the New York Police, charged with running stores where cops could buy cut-rate goods. He and his wife, a descendant of a Knickerbocker family whose ancestors included the first rector of Trinity Church and a founder of Columbia University, who was also the first British consul in New York, had entertained lavishly in their home, and she continued to do so after inheriting it (along with an estate valued "into the millions," according to the New York Times), with a special penchant for debutante dances. Their daughter married a Standard Oil man whose family had once owned great swaths of Glen Cove, Long Island.

In 1929, the house was reported sold to a developer with plans to assemble a large parcel for a 40-story building, but four years later, the Ulmans were again in possession when it passed to Hagop K. Kevorkian, 61, who would be its most prominent owner. An Armenian archaeologist, art dealer and collector, he was a prominent figure in the world of Islamic art, specializing in selling pieces to museums and collectors on behalf of Middle Eastern governments. His clients included J.P. Morgan and, later, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and years later his personal foundation would be a source of both objects and financial support for said museum's Islamic department. The Met cites the calligraphic Mughal's Emperor's Album, made for Jahangir and Shah Jahan, as one of the most important Kevorkian finds in its coffers.

Kevorkian used the mansion as both home and gallery for eight years before selling it to the Bentley School, an elementary and middle school that was later merged with the Dwight School. But four years later, it was back in the hands of the Kevorkian's foundation, which converted it into thirteen apartments, four of them small studios.

Over the next 30 years, the building was sold several times, mostly to real estate operators. Tenants included George Tiffany, a veteran of the two world wars who was found dead in his bed in 1946; Peter Malcolm, an IBM executive; and William Singer, once described as New York's foremost stock swindler, arrested nine times and convicted four - the last in 1960, for forgery and grand larceny to the tune of more than \$700,000; he and a former Westchester judge used counterfeit stock certificates as collateral for a loan used to lease and refurbish the Shelton Towers Hotel, on Lexington Avenue and 49th Street, which they hoped to flip for a quick profit.

The Hays bought the townhouse for about \$580,000 in 1978, and "made it less of an apartment building," says Henry Hay, ending up with only the Crown and two renters in residence. "We bought a few out," he adds, paying one of them about a half a million dollars to leave about twenty-five years ago, a record at the time, Hay believes. Another, once the mistress of a CBS executive, left at age 98. And at one point, representatives of the Mexican government "came to rent it with sixteen people," including a general and a minister, Hay says. "They built it out without permits and left in the middle of the night."

Presumably, the Hay family will stage a more dignified exit. At their asking price, they'll be able to afford it.

