

STEELE HOUSE, 200 Lafayette Avenue, Borough of Brooklyn, Architect unknown.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 1943, Lot 13.

On February 8, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Steele House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 62). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Four witnesses spoke in favor of designation, including the owner's daughter. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Occupying a corner lot at a busy intersection is this imposing two-story frame house with attic and basement, Greek Revival in design, and dating from the second quarter of the Nineteenth Century. It is so situated that its noble proportions can be viewed advantageously from the other corners of the intersection. This residence has the unique distinction of being unequalled in its style, in Kings County, as an example of clapboard Greek Revival architecture. There is a charming shuttered, octagonal cupola rising above the roof which gives the House an added distinction.

On two street fronts, an ornate iron railing encloses the lot with the building set back a few feet behind it. A flight of wooden steps projects from the front of the House. Complete with newel posts, turned spindles and a wide hand rail, it is a fitting approach to the handsome pilastered doorway, supporting a fine entablature with a modillioned cornice. The windows of the front elevation are pedimented, while all others have entablatures, with the exception of the small rectangular attic windows with decorative trim set in the smooth fascia board below the cornice which crowns the House. The cornice with modillions is an outstanding feature of this impressive residence and is repeated at the octagonal cupola atop the roof.

A two-story wing set back from the front wall of the House may well have been from another building on the property, moved over and joined to the main body of the residence. The lower ceiling and floor levels would indicate that the wing was not built as an extension, and these smaller dimensions could mean that it is of an earlier date than the main part of the House. Despite the smaller scale, the attached wing has the same character and dignity as its larger companion. Two windows wide, the wing contains a narrow porch raised several feet above the ground. An engaged pilaster and two fluted Ionic columns support an entablature and low pitched roof. The second floor windows are also pedimented. The first floor openings at the porch are French doors. A handsome dentiled cornice crowns this attractive wing.

It has been ascertained that Joseph Steele, a resident of Brooklyn Heights, sold the house and property in 1853 to Joseph K. Brick, the first President of the Brooklyn Union Gas Company. Mr. R. N. Skinner, father of the present owner, purchased the house on November 1, 1903 from the estate of Julia E. Brick. The interiors have handsome period fireplaces and beautiful wood paneling. The House has not been modernized.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Steele House has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Steele House is an impressive example of frame architecture of the 1840's, that it has noble proportions and fine classical detail and that, in the Borough of Brooklyn, this corner house is a unique example of the Greek Revival style.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 8-A of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Steele House, 200 Lafayette Avenue, Borough of Brooklyn and designates Tax Map Block 1943, Lot 13, Borough of Brooklyn, as its Landmark Site.