

Landmarks Preservation Commission
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LP-0330

HAMILTON PARK COTTAGE, 105 Franklin Avenue, Staten Island. Built between 1859 and 1872; architect unknown.

Landmark Site: Borough of Richmond Tax Map Block 58, Lot 27.

On April 28, 1970, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of Hamilton Park Cottage and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 7). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. The owners of the house testified that they favor its designation as a Landmark, and one other speaker also supported the proposed designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Hamilton Park Cottage is one of the original houses built in a charming suburban district, Hamilton Park, which was developed in New Brighton during the Civil War period. This cottage (the term then applied to any suburban or country dwelling of ten to fourteen rooms), was built between the years 1859 and 1872. Its design and elegant wood trim are characteristic of the Italianate style which was still popular in the mid-1860's. Important in itself, for its architectural qualities, and as a pleasing example of an Italianate cottage built of brick, it is, in addition, significant as a survivor of an early suburban park. The plan of this park was derived from the romantic landscapes created by Andrew Jackson Downing, the influential Hudson River landscape gardener whose books on architecture were so important.

The dominant architectural feature of Hamilton Park Cottage is the way in which the central triple-arched porch, in front of the main entrance, links the bay windows of the parlor and dining room together. The fine wood arches of the porch and windows have deep moldings and "keystones" and are supported on paneled pilasters. The roof of the porch, ornamented by modillions, is also carried out over the tops of the bay windows. Behind the porch, double entrance doors are set in a handsome arched doorway.

Another interesting feature of the design is the way in which the small third story windows are set in the fascia board below the roof cornice. These windows alternate with molded panels from which they are separated by beautifully carved console brackets. The windows on the first and second floors have stone lintels with cap moldings and, where unaltered, are glazed with two-over-two panes. The window above the main entrance has a sill resting on corbels and is crowned by a sheetmetal pediment. The double windows at the sides of the house are divided vertically by central mullions.

A porch at the rear of the second story fills in the ell of the floor plan and continues to provide a fine view of the Kill Van Kull, as it has for one hundred years. Set back from the tree shaded street, on its carefully landscaped and terraced lawn, Hamilton Park Cottage, carefully maintained as a residence, still fulfills its original purpose.

History

Thomas E. Davis, a New York speculative builder (No. 20 St. Marks Place, Manhattan, is one of his row houses which has been designated a Landmark) conceived the idea for New Brighton. It was named for the English seaside resort and contained a group of fashionable hotels extending along Richmond Terrace, then, as now, only twenty minutes from The Battery by ferry. Davis' own summer home formed the nucleus of what later became the Pavilion Hotel. Handsome summer cottages were built on the hill above the hotels.

The land for New Brighton had been assembled by Davis in the triangle formed by Richmond Turnpike and Richmond Terrace, extending as far as the Sailors' Snug Harbor property. It was conveyed to the trustees of the New Brighton Association on August 30, 1836. Developed by New York merchants, New Brighton fulfilled Davis' original plan. Frederick Law Olmsted, in a report written to the Staten Island Improvement Commission in 1871, praised the quality of planning in New Brighton.

Hamilton Park Cottage

Charles K. Hamilton, and his wife Margaretta, purchased thirty-two acres in New Brighton in 1851 and 1852. He was a native of Halifax, Nova Scotia and was one of those New York merchants who, at an early date, saw the attractions of commuting from New Brighton.

Leng and Davis, the Staten Island historians say: "Hamilton long advocated a bridge from the Heights above York Avenue to New Jersey as a speedy way of reaching lower Manhattan." The Heights above York Avenue were the heights which became Hamilton Park, bounded by Buchanan Street, Prospect (once Hamilton Place), York and Franklin Avenues.

The Butler Map of 1853 shows that Hamilton built at least four houses on the hill. It is not until 1874, however, that this unusually charming and attractive community can first be seen laid out on a map. Carefully planned, and influenced by the landscaping of Andrew Jackson Downing, most of the houses were scattered far apart on the hillside. They were approached by winding carriage roads from the two entrances on Franklin Avenue. A centrally located stable served the development, and it is said that common quarters were also provided for the servants of the residents. A short distance away, at the foot of York Avenue, was the pier for the ferry to New York.

Hamilton Park must have proven both convenient and attractive to families of comfortable means who wished to rent houses in pleasant physical surroundings and still be able to travel to work in reasonable time.

In 1878, Hamilton defaulted on his mortgage, and William P. Dixon, the referee, conveyed the entire property to the Mutual Life Insurance Company of New York in 1881. The year 1894 marked the beginning of the end for Hamilton Park as a single ownership residential development. The Mutual Life Insurance Company filed a map showing the present street plan and cutting up the development into lots for sale individually. In 1889, No. 105 Franklin Avenue was sold to Edwina Fowler.

Thus the end came to an example of an important concept, wherein distinguished architecture had been combined with an advanced plan for community living.

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 Hamilton Park Cottage 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, Hamilton Park Cottage is a fine example of late Italianate architecture, that it displays a novel feature in the incorporation of its porch between two bay windows, that the architectural detail is exceptionally fine, that it was built in a subdivision of New Brighton and that this subdivision, Hamilton Park, was a carefully planned community of attractive houses built by a single developer.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 63 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 Hamilton Park Cottage, 105 Franklin Avenue, Borough of Richmond and designates Tax Map Block 58, Lot 27, Borough of Richmond, as its Landmark Site.