

Landmarks Preservation Commission
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LP-0668

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE OF FINE ARTS (formerly James B. Duke Mansion),
1 East 78th Street, Borough of Manhattan. Begun 1909, completed 1912; architect
Horace Trumbauer.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1393, Lot 4.

On March 31, 1970, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the New York University Institute of Fine Arts building (formerly James B. Duke Mansion) and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 10). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Three speakers testified in favor of the proposed designation, including Craig Hugh Smyth, Director of the Institute of Fine Arts, who represented the University. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The impressive splendor of the Duke mansion is achieved through the simple grandeur of the French Classical style of Louis XV. It was designed in 1909 by the well-known architect, Horace Trumbauer of Philadelphia. He modeled it after the Labottiere mansion in Bordeaux, which had been designed by Laclotte in the 18th century.

The Duke mansion is constructed of limestone of an unusually fine quality, suggesting marble. As viewed from the street, it appears to be only two stories high, since the attic story is hidden by an imposing stone balustrade above the roof cornice. The high ceilings and ample proportions of the two main stories, together with the repetitive pattern of very long windows, give a grand scale to the mansion. Its freestanding setting at the Fifth Avenue corner is enhanced by a surrounding open area behind an imposing sidewalk balustrade.

The impressive entrance is at center of the long facade on 78th Street. It consists of a two-story portico, crowned by a pediment, enframed by quoins of generous proportions, and projecting slightly forward. Doric columns flank the recessed entrance, while a similar treatment of the balcony above has Ionic columns and a handsomely designed wrought iron railing. Quoins of generous proportions likewise emphasize the corners of the house. The windows achieve grandeur by their size and simplicity. Enframed by stone moldings, the ground floor windows have stone balustrades connected by a band course, while the second story windows have iron guards and are surmounted by carved swags. Handsome low relief stone panels occupy the generous spaces between the windows. A band course between floors, a plain entablature and the modillioned roof cornice emphasize the horizontal theme.

James B. Duke represents the American dream and tradition -- the poor boy who became a success. Growing up in post Civil War days on a farm in North Carolina, he learned the hard way how to grow, cure and sell tobacco. In the 1880s he fought to draw the five principal cigarette manufacturers in the celebrated "tobacco war", and in 1890 they united to form the American Tobacco Company, with him as president. After the Supreme Court order of 1911 dissolving the company under the antitrust laws, Duke succeeded in the difficult task of implementing the decision and setting up competing companies. In 1924, the year before his death, he created the trust fund that was used chiefly in founding Duke University in North Carolina. In 1957-58 his widow and only child, Doris Duke, gave the No. 1 East 78th Street property to New York University. Since that time, it has been the center for the University's Institute of Fine Arts.

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE OF FINE ARTS

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 New York University Institute of Fine Arts (formerly James B. Duke Mansion) 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 New York University Institute of Fine Arts building is one of the adornments of Fifth Avenue and one of the last reminders of the Age of Elegance, that it is architecturally distinguished in itself, that it has excellent scale and superb architectural details executed by superior craftsmen, that it is an integral part of the last complete block of impressive town houses remaining on the Avenue and that it houses one of the country's vital cultural institutions.

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 the New York University Institute of Fine Arts building (formerly James B. Duke Mansion), 1 East 78th Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1393, Lot 4, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.