

Landmarks Preservation Commission
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JAMES A. BURDEN HOUSE, a part of the Convent of the Sacred Heart, 7 East 91st Street, Manhattan. Built 1902-05; architects Warren & Wetmore.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1503, Lot 7.

On April 28, 1970, and May 26, 1970, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held public hearings on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the James A. Burden House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. The hearings had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Seven witnesses spoke in favor of designation at the hearings. Three representatives from the Convent of The Sacred Heart spoke in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The grandeur of the "Belle Epoque" is reflected in this palatial residence built between 1902 and 1905 for steel manufacturer James A. Burden, Jr., and his wife, the former Florence Adele Sloane, a granddaughter of Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt. This superb mansion was designed by the noted architectural firm of Warren & Wetmore, who were also responsible for such well-known structures as Grand Central Terminal and the adjoining Biltmore Hotel. Whitney Warren, the noted architect, designed the Burden House with detail reminiscent of his training in Paris.

The Burden House, with its great ballroom windows, is the finest Beaux-Arts town house in the City.

In 1898, Andrew Carnegie purchased several parcels of land for investment purposes, including that upon which the Burden House is now located. These plots were all situated near the proposed site of the Carnegie Mansion, which was begun in 1899. The Burden House and the Otto Kahn House at No. 1 East 91st Street, both of which are opposite the Carnegie Mansion, are today owned and operated by The Academy of the Sacred Heart, a private school for girls.

A dramatic play of light and shade is achieved through the bold massing of this magnificent town house. The street level assumes the character of a high granite base, with a boldly rusticated surface and segmental-arched openings: on the 91st Street facade, two windows and a broad carriage entrance and on the east facade, adjoining the driveway, three windows and a carriage exit. The low mezzanine story is also rusticated and has three small square windows on the entrance facade, one on the west facade and two at the front of the east facade. Four larger rectangular windows are placed at the rear of the east side. Superbly carved console brackets support the projecting balconies of the main ballroom floor and flank the front mezzanine windows.

This great house was designed to meet the requirements of lavish entertainment. The piano nobile, or ballroom floor, features great arched windows set within deep concave reveals on the 91st Street facade and on the north portion of the east facade. There are blind arches, flanked by rectangular recesses, toward the front of both side walls. The delicately conceived iron railings of the balconies are placed in front of these great arched windows. The building is crowned by a modillioned cornice with a deep frieze which is boldly fluted and broken by paired attic windows which are carefully related to the great windows beneath them. The cornice, in turn, is surmounted by a balustrade. The roof of the Burden House is accented by ornamented chimneys placed behind the parapet and dormer windows at the rear of the east facade.

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 James A. Burden 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 James A. Burden House is, with its great ballroom windows, the finest example of the French Beaux-Arts town house in New York City, that it was designed by one of the most noted architectural firms of the day, that it was built for a family prominent in both social and business circles, that it was designed for the lavish entertainment which was an important aspect of New York social life at that period, and that it remains an integral part of a superb group of early 20th-century mansions.

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 James A. Burden House, 7 East 91st Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1503, Lot 7, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.