

ITALIAN CULTURAL INSTITUTE, Istituto Italiano di Cultura (formerly William Sloane House), 686 Park Avenue, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1916-1919; architect Delano & Aldrich.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1383, Lot 36.

On May 26, 1970, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Italian Cultural Institute (formerly William Sloane House) and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 23). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. The representative of Community Board No. 8 and two other witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

This house is a part of that outstanding group of neo-Federal townhouses which extends along the west side of Park Avenue, between East 68th and 69th Streets, sometimes referred to as the "Pyne-Davison Blockfront" due to the uniform architectural quality of these houses.

The chief reason why the four houses on the west side of Park Avenue are considered as a group is that they are all brick above and have rusticated stone bases and that their floor and window heights are approximately the same. Their cornices, balustrades and red Flemish bond brickwork are all very similar.

This circumstance resulted from the fact that the architects responsible for the design of these houses had, in each case, respect for the design of the neighboring houses and for the work of their professional confrères.

No. 686 Park Avenue was designed by Delano & Aldrich and built in 1916-19 as a residence for William Sloane. With a broader frontage on Park Avenue than its neighbor, No. 684 to the south, it has slightly larger windows with wider wall spaces between them. The entrance, located at the left-hand side, is framed by pilasters and by two well proportioned Corinthian columns in front of them. They are surmounted by an entablature with a richly decorated cornice which is in line with the top of the rusticated limestone first story. An attractive wrought iron railing protects the balcony above this entry. The entrance itself, recessed within a stone arch, consists of a pair of wood doors with a glass fanlight above. The second floor windows are topped by handsomely ornamented low pedimented stone lintels. The lintels above the third and fourth floor windows have simple rectangular panels. Crowning the simple cornice is a parapet with balusters above the windows. Three round-headed dormer windows are set in the slate gambrel roof.

William Sloane was president of the family firm of W. & J. Sloane, from 1906 until his death in 1922. In later years, the Sloane family sold the house to Thomas E. Murray, a well known New York engineer. Today it is owned by the Republic of Italy, and is occupied by the Istituto Italiano di Cultura.

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 Italian Cultural Institute (formerly William Sloane 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 Italian Cultural Institute (formerly William Sloane House) is an excellent example of neo-Federal design created by an eminent firm of architects, that it has fine proportions and architectural detail, which harmonize well with its neighbors, and that it has been well adapted to serve the Republic of Italy as a cultural center.

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 Italian Cultural Institute (formerly William Sloane House), 686 Park Avenue, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1383, Lot 36, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.