

Landmarks Preservation Commission
November 20, 1973, Number 1
LP-0744

291 STATE STREET HOUSE, Borough of Brooklyn, Built 1872.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 170, Lot 47

On June 23, 1970, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 291 State Street House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 57). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Twenty-six witnesses spoke in favor of historic preservation in the Boerum Hill neighborhood and for the creation of the Boerum Hill Historic District. There were no speakers in opposition to designation of the houses on State Street.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

No. 291 State Street was erected as part of a row of six houses (Nos. 289-299), by Michael Murray, a local builder who lived at 240 DeKalb Avenue. The first owner and occupant of the house was Sarah Hayes Sherman, wife of Frederick Taylor Sherman, a grocer; they acquired the property in 1873.

These handsome residences were part of the Boerum Hill community, which had formed the original Town of Breuckelen, founded in 1646 by Dutch colonists. It was incorporated into the larger City of Brooklyn in 1834. The development of Boerum Hill as an urban community began in the 1840s and continued into the 1870s. Many of the houses which remain from this period incorporated Greek Revival and Italianate elements in the row house design. These houses were built for merchants and professional people, many of whom worked in the Wall Street area or in the vicinity of the Fulton Street ferry.

Murray, the builder, acquired the land for Nos. 289-295 in 1872, and the land for Nos. 297 and 299 in 1874, from William Schermerhorn. The Schermerhorns were one of Brooklyn's old, wealthy Dutch families; Peter Schermerhorn, William's father, was, with his brother Abraham, one of Brooklyn's largest landholders. Schermerhorn Street, one block north of State Street, was named after them.

The north side of State Street was largely undeveloped when Murray began erecting Nos. 289-295 in 1872 (No. 289 has been demolished). Nos. 291-299 are five, almost identical, brownstone houses built in a late version of the popular Italianate style. They have undergone only minor alterations in the past one hundred years and the row retains an integrity and a unity which greatly enhance the entire block.

The twenty-five foot wide brownstone front of No. 291 rises three stories above a rusticated basement which has two segmental-arched windows with their original iron grilles. The arched doorway, above a high stoop, is flanked by ribbed pilasters terminating in large grooved console brackets, which support a bold segmental-arched pediment. Springing from foliate side-brackets within the enframing of the doorway is an arch with beveled keystone and beveled panels in the spandrels of the arch. Within the arched doorway are set wood engaged colonettes with elongated bases of carved geometric and foliate design.

The present glazed double doors are set under an arched glass transom. The slender full-height parlor floor windows are crowned by projecting cornice slabs supported on brackets. The upper-story windows are accented by cornices above the lintels, while their projecting sills are supported on small corbel blocks. The roof cornice, crowning this dignified Italianate front, is returned to the wall at the ends and has modillions and a row of dentils above an unadorned frieze.

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 291 State Street 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 291 State Street House is a fine example of the late Italianate style of architecture, that it forms part of a handsome row of five houses, that this house contributes to the dignity of the street, and that this house and its row add significantly to the overall character of the Boerum Hill neighborhood.

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 291 State Street House, Borough of Brooklyn and designates Tax Map Block 170, Lot 47, Borough of Brooklyn, as its Landmark Site.