

316 STATE STREET HOUSE, Borough of Brooklyn. Built 1847-1848.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 176, Lot 18.

On June 23, 1970, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 316 State Street House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 75). 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. 316 State Street is one of a row of four houses built in 1847-48 for John and Diederick Westfall in the Greek Revival style which was still popular for row houses in this area. The Westfalls, who were liquor merchants, acquired the lot for Nos. 310-316 in September 1847, and they commissioned the construction of the row. Both brothers were living in newly built houses on these lots by the next year.

These 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.

All the land in this block had originally been part of the Jacob Van Brunt farm. He willed it to his daughter Jane, wife of Samuel T. Gerritsen, in 1824. State Street, was originally known as Gerritsen Street. The Gerritsens and the Van Brunts, both old Dutch families, had long been interconnected by marriage and had some of the largest landholdings in Kings County. Charles Hoyt and Russell Nevins, two Manhattan real estate developers with extensive interests in Brooklyn, acquired the properties on this block in 1833. Both Hoyt and Nevins had streets named after them to the east of this block.

The handsome Greek Revival front of No. 316 is enhanced by the careful preservation of its Greek Revival elements. The three stories of painted brick rise above a rusticated basement. The two square-headed basement windows are set behind ornamental iron grilles. The bold entranceway, above a high stoop, is the most impressive Greek Revival element of the front. Heavy flanking pilasters with Doric-type capitals support a bold horizontal entablature with a low pediment above the cornice. Both the cornice and the capitals are enhanced by the extra bands beneath them. The wooden doors of a later date, with full-length glass panes, are set beneath a rectangular glass transom. The doors are enframed by a handsome rope molding. The windows are crowned by stone lintels with slightly projecting cap moldings of characteristic Greek Revival design. The roof cornice crowning the front is also characteristic of the Greek Revival period with its row of closely spaced brick dentils above a wide brick fascia.

The wrought-iron yard railings and the handrailings at the stoop are of a delicate nature with curvilinear ornament at the tops of the handrailings and fretwork at the base of the yard railing, derived from Greek sources. The use of decorative wrought ironwork for railings became popular in New York City in the Federal period and continued in fashion in this area until mid-century. The craftsmanship displays the skill of the local iron works.

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 316 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 316 State Street House is a fine example of the Greek Revival style of architecture, that it forms part of a handsome group of four houses, that it contributes to the dignity of the street and that this house and its row add significantly to the overall character of the Boerum Hill community.

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 316 State Street House, Borough of Brooklyn and designates Tax Map Block 176, Lot 18, Borough of Brooklyn, as its Landmark Site.