

Landmarks Preservation Commission
December 18, 1973, Number 2
LP-0773

390 VAN DUZER STREET HOUSE, Borough of Richmond. Erected c.1835.

Landmark Site: Borough of Richmond Tax Map Block 518, Lot 7.

On July 24, 1973, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 390 Van Duzer Street House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 4). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Four witnesses, including the owner, spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

This handsome frame house, built in modified Greek Revival style, is one of the last remaining examples in the area. It is located in the old village of Stapleton which was developed by William J. Staples, after whom the village was named, and Minthorne Tompkins, the son of Daniel Tompkins, who had played a major role in the development of Staten Island. Daniel Tompkins was vice-president of the United States in the Monroe administration and governor of the State of New York.

In 1833, Minthorne Tompkins and William J. Staples bought a tract of land from Cornelius Vanderbilt and his family that had originally been part of the Cornelius Corsen Patent; it was surveyed, subdivided and, in October, 1834, the lot of 390 Van Duzer Street was sold to Richard G. Smith, who had the house built soon afterwards. Richard Smith's wife was Susannah M. Tompkins, sister of Minthorne.

The original kitchen wing still remains, giving the building the charm of a country house, yet the most striking feature is the elegant tetrastyle portico with Corinthian columns rising two stories to an entablature below an overhanging spring-eave. The use of a spring-eave on a Greek Revival house, rather than a triangular gable, is unusual and is more characteristic of the so-called Dutch Colonial style. The overhanging spring-eave began to appear in New Netherland about the middle of the 17th century, possibly as a means of protecting the front wall from the elements. It was often only a simple cantilevered projection but was sometimes supported by columns or posts. On Staten Island, this type of eave was used well into the 19th century by builders and architects. Combined, as it is here with a classical portico, an interesting, indigenous variant of the Greek Revival style has been created. The tall, elegant window enframements, the handsome doorway with sidelights and a classical enframement that opens onto the portico, and the balustered railings add to the dignity of this simple house and lend it unexpected grandeur.

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 390 Van Duzer 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 house at 390 Van Duzer Street is a fine example of a style of architecture developed on and indigenous to Staten Island, that this style is not to be found elsewhere, that it makes a significant contribution to our architectural heritage, and that it is one of the earliest houses to have been built in Stapleton, which later became one of the most important villages on Staten Island.

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 390 Van Duzer Street House, Borough of Richmond and designates Tax Map Block 518, Lot 7, Borough of Richmond as its Landmark Site.