

1009 FIFTH AVENUE HOUSE, Manhattan. Built 1899-1901; architects Welch, Smith & Provot.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1493, Lot 69.

On July 24, 1973 the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 1009 Fifth Avenue House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 36). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Thirty-one witnesses spoke in favor of designating the buildings under consideration in the Fifth Avenue - 82nd Street area, including 1009 Fifth Avenue. There were no speakers in opposition to designation of 1009 Fifth Avenue. Prior to the public hearing, the owner of 1009 Fifth Avenue wrote to the Commission in support of the designation of her building, and her representative testified at the public hearing in favor of this designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

This handsome Fifth Avenue mansion, prominently located at the southeast corner of Eighty-second Street, was built during the years 1899 to 1901. It is one of the few surviving houses which once formed part of an almost uninterrupted series of palatial residences facing Central Park. In recent years the majority of these grand town houses have fallen victim to rising property values, and have been replaced by apartment buildings. No. 1009 is exceptional, as it remains in the possession of the family of the original owner, and today provides us with a fine example of turn-of-the-century architectural opulence.

The Manhattan architectural firm, Welch, Smith & Provot, were commissioned to design the house by W.W. Hall & T.M. Hall, speculative builders specializing in the construction of large private residences. Alexander M. Welch, before entering into partnership with Bowen B. Smith and George W. Provot, had worked with the Hall brothers, and No. 1009 appears to be his design. Welch was a graduate of the School of Architecture of Columbia University and had also studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, an educational background shared by many successful New York architects of that period. While in independent practice, Welch designed numerous Manhattan town houses, buildings which reveal his mastery of the elegant Beaux-Arts style employed by contemporary Parisian architects. Welch also received commissions for suburban houses and designed St. Stephen's Methodist Church in the Kingsbridge section of the Bronx, a simple but extremely handsome shingled structure. Later in his career Welch helped to restore the Dutch Colonial Dyckman house, ancestral home of his wife's family.

No. 1009 Fifth Avenue is one of the most impressive houses built on speculation by Hall & Hall. Soon after completion it was purchased by Benjamin N. Duke, a director of the American Tobacco Company which he and his brother, James B. Duke, had formed in 1890. The Duke brothers had begun their joint business enterprise on a North Carolina farm, and had risen from the poverty of the post-Civil War South to become wealthy industrialists, philanthropists, and residents of New York's most fashionable Avenue.

Benjamin Duke sold No. 1009 to his brother James in 1907. After James' new mansion at the corner of Seventy-eighth Street and Fifth Avenue (now the Institute of Fine Arts), was completed in 1912, No. 1009 was occupied by Angier B. Duke, son of Benjamin Duke. Angier Duke's sister, Mary, married A. J. Drexel Biddle in 1919, and the couple took up residence at No. 1009. The present owner, Mrs. Mary D.B. Semans, is their daughter.

This five-story corner mansion has a narrow exposure facing on Fifth Avenue and a long entrance facade on Eighty-second Street. A moat-like areaway, surmounted by a cast-iron railing, separates the house from the street. The basement and first floor are executed in rusticated limestone, while the upper stories are of brick (now painted), with heavy limestone trim. Limestone quoins outline and clearly define the major architectural components of the design. The roof, with two towers rising above the ends of the main block of the house, is covered with red tiling and crowned by handsome, boldly scaled copper cresting.

The main block of the Eighty-second Street facade is symmetrically composed; two slightly projecting corner pavilions flank a central four-story curved bay, a tripartite composition very typical of Beaux-Arts design. The main entrance, at the first floor of the curved central bay, has an elegant glass and iron marquee. Glass and wrought-iron doors are separated from similarly treated side windows by engaged columns. Stone balconies on carved brackets appear below the windows of the second floor. These second floor windows are surmounted by handsomely carved cartouches in the curved bay, and by pediments in the flanking pavilions. Limestone enframements link the windows at the third and fourth floors where low wrought-iron railings are employed as window guards. Above the fourth floor there is a projecting continuous band course on brackets, a horizontal accent which is repeated with stronger emphasis by the elaborate modillioned roof cornice. The roof cornice is crowned by a stone balustrade behind which appear dormer windows with richly adorned arched pediments.

At the east end of the Eighty-second Street facade is a four-story wing which lends a sophisticated note of asymmetry to the over-all design. A curved metal conservatory window supported by a fluted corbel appears at the second floor level. Delicate floral borders surround the transoms of this window which is surmounted by a profusion of carved ornament.

The Fifth Avenue facade is dominated by a broad, curved limestone bay which extends from the basement through the fourth floor. Like the curved bay of the entrance facade it is crowned by a balustrade. Rich garlands adorn the wall of this bay between the second and third floors, and iron window guards appear at the third and fourth floors.

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 1009 Fifth Avenue 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 finds that among its many important qualities, the mansion, 1009 Fifth Avenue, is one of the few surviving great residences which once adorned Fifth Avenue, that it is a handsome and impressive example of Beaux-Arts design, that it is constructed of fine materials, and that it is an important reminder of the social and architectural history of New York.

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 1009 Fifth Avenue House, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1493, Lot 69, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.