

GAGE & TOLLNER, 372 Fulton Street, Borough of Brooklyn.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 154, Lot 17.

On November 27, 1973, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of Gage & Tollner and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 6). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Four witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Gage & Tollner, one of Brooklyn's best known restaurants, had its beginnings in 1879 when Charles M. Gage opened an eating establishment at 302 Fulton Street. In 1880 Eugene Tollner joined Gage, and in 1882 the restaurant was renamed Gage & Tollner. They moved the restaurant to its present advantageous location at 372-374 Fulton Street in 1892 in the center of downtown Brooklyn, close to the Brooklyn City Hall, now Borough Hall. Fulton Street was then one of Brooklyn's main thoroughfares, leading east and south to join King's Highway, the main access route to Long Island, and west and north to the ferry terminals on the East River and to the Brooklyn Bridge, opened in 1883. The Gage & Tollner restaurant became widely known for its outstanding food and service. Its excellence attracted many noteworthy patrons, among them Henry Ward Beecher, the noted abolitionist preacher, and Frederick A. Schroeder, one of Brooklyn's last mayors. Brooklyn's best families, and the Manhattan elite alike, enjoyed dining in the 1890s elegance of Gage & Tollner.

When Messrs. Gage and Tollner retired in 1911, they sold the business to A. H. Cunningham and Alexander Ingalls on condition that they maintain the customs and traditions established by the founders. Seth Bradford Dewey, in association with his father Hiram S. Dewey who had been well established in the restaurant business for many years, purchased the restaurant in April 1919, again on condition that the establishment retain the name of Gage & Tollner and that it continue to be run in accordance with its traditional standards. The Dewey interests purchased the building which housed the restaurant in 1923. The management continues in the hands of the Dewey family, maintaining the traditions which have characterized Gage & Tollner and enhanced the quality of life in Brooklyn for almost 100 years.

The four-story building which houses the restaurant dates from the mid-1870s and is basically late Italianate in design. Most striking is the unusually high, painted wooden storefront, in neo-Grec style, which was probably added in 1892 when the restaurant opened at this location. The entrance is protected by a portico with modified Doric columns. Secondary entrances set at each side of the front and a large front window are flanked by slender colonnettes with stylized foliate capitals. A continuous cornice above the ground floor is carried on closely spaced angular brackets with incised motifs on the ends. The brackets alternate with raised eight-pointed star motifs in the frieze. Through the large front window one may see the elegant 1890s interior with its mahogany furnishings, mirrored and brocade velvet walls, and cut-glass chandeliers. A three-story brownstone front rises above the storefront. The windows with molded enframements have projecting sills carried on corbel blocks and are surmounted by individual cornices. A simple modillioned roof cornice with wide fascia crowns the whole.

Gage & Tollner continues in the tradition of many great restaurants. Speaking at the Public Hearing, Brooklyn Borough Historian, Dr. Joseph Palisi, noted that it had "esquisite food, excellent service and a sense of timelessness through which something of a carefully preserved past is made to contribute to the fullest enjoyment of the present."

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 Gage & Tollner 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, Gage & Tollner is distinguished by its fine late Italianate style architecture, that the restaurant and building have remained architecturally intact since 1892, and that it has enhanced the quality of life in Brooklyn for almost 100 years.

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 Gage & Tollner, 372 Fulton Street, Borough of Brooklyn and designates Tax Map Block 154, Lot 17, Borough of Brooklyn as its Landmark Site.