

STOOTHOFF-BAXTER-KOUWENHOVEN HOUSE, 1640 East 48th Street, Borough of Brooklyn. Small wing built c.1747; large portion built 1811.

Landmark Site: Tax Map Block 7872, Lot 54 in part consisting of the land on which the described building is situated.

On January 27, 1976, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Stoothoff-Baxter-Kouwenhoven House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No.4). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Stoothoff-Baxter-Kouwenhoven House, a rare survivor from Colonial times, is a fine example of the type of farmhouse constructed in this country by Flemish farmers who came to New York via Holland in the 1700s. The name of the house is a reflection of the succession of related Brooklyn families that occupied it during a century and a half.

Flatlands, the area in which this handsome "Dutch Colonial" house is located, was the first in Kings County to be occupied by settlers of European origin. It was purchased from the Indians by Andries Hudden and Wolpert G. van Couwenhoven in 1636, just ten years after Peter Minuit bought Manhattan Island from the Indians. Its Indian name, Keskachogue or Keskateuw was changed to Nieu Amersfoort in honor of Couwenhoven's home in the Netherlands. By 1654 it had received a town charter and by 1657 it boasted seventeen families in residence. The English changed the name to Flatlands in 1665, one year after they took over the Colony from the Dutch.

Like many "Dutch Colonial" houses, the Stoothoff-Baxter-Kouwenhoven House was built in two sections, the small wing is of c. 1747, and the large main portion dates from 1811. Set behind a white picket fence in ample grounds, it is an attractive element in streetscape. The house has been moved twice. Originally, the small wing stood alone, north of Mill Lane, facing south on land which Garret Stoothoff had inherited from his father Wilhelmus Stoothoff who is believed to have built the house. Garret Stoothoff's daughter, Altje, married John Baxter, a native of Ireland, who had come to this country in 1784 and who was teaching school in Flatlands by 1790. The diary which he kept has proved most valuable as a source of local history. After his marriage to Altje in 1791, they went to live in the house of her father who died sometime before 1796.

In 1811 Baxter decided to move the house south of Mill Lane and, in traditional Dutch manner, he oriented it facing south. On March 29, 1811 he wrote: "Today I had ten wagons to cart the frame for my new house." On May 17, 1811, he raised the new portion of the house, attaching it to the smaller old portion with the assistance of about sixty of his neighbors. On July 11, 1811, the Baxter family moved into the enlarged house, and early in January of 1812 they held a housewarming party.

John Baxter's son, Garret, who was born in 1792 in the old house, married Abigail Wyckoff in 1816. She died, however, in 1817, just one month after giving birth to a daughter, also named Abigail. In 1835, when she was only eighteen, Abigail's father died bequeathing her the house. Nine years later she married William I. Kouwenhoven. She bore him nine children, the youngest to whom, Kitty, was destined to stay on in the house, to marry John M. Remsen, and to bear him four children. Their daughter, Mabel Suydam Remsen, married

Holmes Van Brunt Ditmas, and they, in turn, lived in the house. They had two children, Kitty and Edna, and it was Mabel and her daughter Kitty, who, in the 1920s, were the last members of the family to occupy this house. In about 1900 the house was shifted around to its present position facing east on East 48th Street, and the surrounding family farmland was sold at auction by the Germania Improvement Company.

The so-called "Dutch Colonial" frame house of Long Island is a highly individual, readily recognizable building type quite different from that of Manhattan and the Hudson River, where a masonry tradition prevailed with steep roofs and stepped gables or low hipped roofs. On Long Island, the early houses were generally farmhouses. They had gable-ended roofs with gracefully curved overshot eaves and often high-shouldered gambrel roofs which were Flemish in origin.

The Stoothoff-Baxter-Kouwenhoven house is known as "Dutch Colonial", but this term is not precise as no comparable houses existed in Holland. Actually, the Flemings and Walloons who built these houses had fled from Flanders (Southern Holland, Western Belgium and the northern tip of France) to Holland at the time of the Spanish occupation in the 1620s. They were seeking new farmlands, but, since Holland was already densely populated, many of them sailed with the Dutch to seek their fortunes in New Netherland where they established farms and built houses on Long Island.

Flemish projected eaves may have been originally designed to protect the walls of masonry buildings. This type of eave was employed for farmhouses in New Netherland where, although no longer purely functional, it provided a welcoming sense of shelter above the small porches or benches at the entrances. The projection gradually became deeper until, in the late 18th century, posts were added to carry the weight of the overhang, and the full-fledged porch came into being.

The Stoothoff-Baxter-Kouwenhoven house is one-and-a-half stories high and has a picturesque profile with pitched roofs, projected eaves, and end chimneys. The older low portion contrasts with the greater height of the later main portion. The house is shingled, with over fourteen inches of each course exposed to the weather. The windows in the front are twelve-over-twelve at the main floor and have paneled shutters. At the upper floor of the newer portion two small windows are set directly under the projected eaves, while at the upper floor in the rear, windows are set at the same height as those on the front but cut up into the soffits of the eaves to provide light and ventilation. The picturesque end chimneys are typical features of colonial design. The front door is of Dutch design, with the upper half hinged independently from the lower one, permitting the top to be opened in warm weather without admitting farm animals. Above the door there is a rectangular glass transom.

Today this small house, with which a long family history is associated, serves as an important and valuable reminder of our heritage.

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 Stoothoff-Baxter-Kouwenhoven 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 Stoothoff-Baxter-Kouwenhoven House is a rare survivor from Colonial times, that it is a remarkably attractive in appearance on its present site, that it is a fine example of the type of farm house constructed in this country by Flemish farmers who came here via Holland, that the projected eaves of the roof are a distinctive feature of this style of architecture, that the house remained in the possession of one family for one hundred and fifty years, and that it represents both architecturally and historically a valuable reminder of our heritage.

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 Stoothoff-Baxter-Kouwenhoven House, 1640 East 48th Street, Borough of Brooklyn, and designates as its related Landmark Site that part of Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 7872, Lot 54 on which the described building is situated.