

OLIVER GOULD JENNINGS RESIDENCE, 7 East 72nd Street, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1898-99; architects Flagg & Chambers.

Landmark Site; Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1387, Lot 8.

On July 13, 1976, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Oliver Gould Jennings Residence and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 7). At the request of the Lycée Français de New York, the hearing was continued to September 14, 1976 (Item No. 1) and again to November 9, 1976 (Item No. 1). All hearings had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. A total of three witnesses spoke in favor of designation at the three hearings. The representative of the Lycée de Français de New York spoke in opposition to designation. The Commission has received several communications in favor of designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Oliver Gould Jennings residence on East 72nd Street is an especially opulent and handsome example of a Beaux-Arts townhouse. Designed in 1898 by the Paris-trained architects Ernest Flagg and Walter B. Chambers, the house harmonizes very effectively with the adjoining Sloane residence which had been completed two years earlier. These two houses lend a note of true Parisian elegance to Manhattan's Upper East Side. Appropriately, they are now part of the Lycée Français de New York.

Oliver Gould Jennings, a graduate of Yale, also studied law at Columbia University. He was a director of several large corporations, including the National Fuel Gas Company, Bethlehem Steel, and McKesson & Robbins. He was married to Mary Brewster, a family tie which reflected the business ties between the Jennings and Brewsters. In partnership Oliver B. Jennings and Benjamin Brewster had invested in the business ventures of John D. and William Rockefeller; these oil interests greatly augmented both the Jennings and Brewster family fortunes. Oliver Gould Jennings later moved to a new residence at 882 Fifth Avenue, and No. 7 East 72nd Street was sold and passed through various hands until it was acquired by the Lycée Français de New York in 1964.

A series of photographs of No. 7 East 72nd Street appeared in the Architectural Record (April 1902) in an article of the work of Ernest Flagg. Ernest Flagg (1857-1947) was born and educated in Brooklyn. Financial assistance from his relative Cornelius Vanderbilt enabled him to study architecture in Paris at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts where he was a student of Henri Blondel (1832-1897), architect of the Place de l'Opera. In 1888, after his graduation, Flagg returned to New York and opened offices which he maintained until 1940. He received wide acclaim for his designs in the Beaux-Arts style for the Naval Academy at Annapolis. Later notable works include the Singer Building and Scribner Buildings in New York, and the Corcoran Art Gallery in Washington. At the time the Jennings residence was under construction, Flagg was also building his own imposing residence on Staten Island, now a designated New York City Landmark. Along with great townhouses he was also interested in the design of model tenements, such as the Cherokee Apartments on the Upper East Side of Manhattan and the Flagg Court Apartments in Brooklyn.

Walter B. Chambers (1866-1945) was also a native of Brooklyn, and after graduating from Yale University, attended the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Upon his return to New York, he entered the office of Flagg as a draftsman and became a junior partner in 1895. Chambers opened his own office in 1906, and was best known for his apartment house designs.

No. 7 East 72nd Street is executed in Indiana limestone which harmonizes with the stone facade of the adjoining Sloane house. Flagg and Chambers further coordinated the facades through aligning floor heights and maintaining a similar disposition of windows. This sensitivity to the surroundings of individual houses was a feature of Parisian urban design and clearly Flagg and Chambers had profited from this example.

The Jennings house is three stories in height above a basement and is crowned by a prominent convex mansard roof with dormer windows. Like the neighboring Sloane house it is boldly scaled and has the main floor at the second story. The first story is rusticated with vermiculated stone courses alternating with smooth-faced ones. A wide arched window balances the arched doorway at the left. The upper two stories have smooth-faced rustication and at the second story the tall windows have blind arches which display recessed scallop shell motifs. These elegant windows are set behind a balcony with an ornate iron railing which is supported on closely spaced carved brackets. The third story has low segmental arched windows with iron railing guards supported on richly carved corbels adorned with cartouches. The handsome bracketed cornice supports an iron railing which extends the width of the house behind which rises the tall convex mansard roof with ornate copper crestings which provides exceptionally rich termination to the facade. Mansard roofs of this type were often employed in Second Empire France but were rarely accented with such strikingly rich copper crestings and richly adorned dormers.

This handsome, richly-detailed Beaux-Arts townhouse is one of the few to remain in New York. Viewed from Central Park, the Jennings residence and the neighboring Sloane house form an elegant pair of survivors from turn-of-the-century Manhattan which with their striking ornament are not at all overwhelmed by the adjoining apartment houses.

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 Oliver Gould Jennings Residence 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 Oliver Gould Jennings Residence is an opulent and strikingly elegant example of the Beaux-Arts style, designed by the prominent New York architectural firm of Flagg and Chambers, that the house displays their understanding of French design principles, that the Jennings residence is beautifully harmonized with the adjoining Sloane house, and that with its rich ornament, it is one of the few surviving townhouses of this style in Manhattan.

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 Oliver Gould Jennings Residence, 7 East 72nd Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1387, Lot 8, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.