

BARBARA RUTHERFORD HATCH RESIDENCE, 153 East 63rd Street, Borough of Manhattan.
Built 1917-19; architect Frederick J. Sterner.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1398, Lot 27.

On November 9, 1976, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing of the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Barbara Rutherford Hatch Residence and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 3). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Three witnesses, including the owner, spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Hatch residence, located on East 63rd Street between Lexington and Third Avenues, is a distinctive example of townhouse design from the period immediately following the First World War. It was commissioned by Barbara Rutherford Hatch, a recently married young New York socialite, and designed by Frederick J. Sterner, an architect who had become well-known for his fashionable remodeling of 19th-century New York townhouses. Sterner created a new townhouse for Mrs. Hatch, which contrasts with its older traditional brownstone neighbors, and which in the early 1910s must have seemed quite "modern". Today, this handsome structure with its red tile roof and restrained stucco facade still commands attention, while at the same time it harmonizes gracefully with its surroundings.

Mrs. Hatch in moving to 153 East 63rd Street was choosing an address which New York society then considered a bit "too far east". Her mother, Mrs. W.K. Vanderbilt, may have influenced her daughter's decision, since Mrs. Vanderbilt, at the death of her husband, had sold her great Fifth Avenue mansion, and caused a sensation by moving to Sutton Place which at that time was far from being a fashionable part of town. Barbara Rutherford was married in 1916 to Cyril Hatch, a clubman and leader of Newport's social set. Their marriage ended in divorce four years later, and the 63rd Street townhouse then passed into the possession of Charles B. Dillingham, one in a series of illustrious owners.

Charles B. Dillingham (1868-1934) was a prominent figure in the Broadway Theater. He began his career as a reporter and critic, and later became a theatrical agent who managed many of the stage's great stars, among them, Irene Castle, Beatrice Lillie, Fred Stone, and Maxine Elliot. He was for many years in partnership with Florenz Ziegfeld and A.L. Erlanger and, as an owner of the Globe Theater as well as a producer, he was responsible for the staging of over 200 plays and musical comedies, including "The Red Mill," and "The Old Town." In 1914 he took over the Hippodrome from the Schuberts and there presented everything from a special appearance by Pavlova to ice skating contests. He was married twice and lived in the East 63rd Street house with his second wife from 1921 to 1924, when the marriage ended in divorce. The house was then sold to Mr. and Mrs. Charles Lanier Lawrance.

Charles Lanier Lawrance (1882-1950) was a graduate of Yale and of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. He became interested in aeronautical engineering in 1915 and, during the First World War, he conducted aeronautical research in the U.S. Navy. After the war he founded the Lawrance Aero Engine Corporation which later merged with the Wright Aeronautical Corporation. In the 1930s he organized the Lawrance Engineering and Research Corporation of which he was president until 1944. Lawrance invented the air-cooled Wright Whirlwind Engine which made the first long-distance flights possible. The first of these flights which used the Whirlwind Engine was Admiral Byrd's expedition to the North Pole in 1926. When Charles Lindbergh made his famous flight to Paris in 1927, the "Spirit of St. Louis" was powered by the Lawrance engine, as were the planes of Amelia Earhart, Frank Hawks and Kingsfield Smith. Lawrance was acclaimed as a pioneer aviation engineer and received numerous honorary degrees and awards.

In 1935 the Lawrance family sold the house and moved next door to No. 151 East 63rd Street, which had also been designed by Sterner. A lawyer, apparently acting for Mrs. W.K. Vanderbilt, took title to No. 153; Barbara Hatch had

remarried to Mr. Winfield J. Nichols, and perhaps her mother intended the house as a New York residence for her daughter who had been spending much of her time abroad. In any event, by 1940, both mother and daughter had died, and the house was eventually sold to Rose Louise Novick, better known as Gypsy Rose Lee.

Gypsy Rose Lee (1914-1970), the well-known entertainer, began her rise to fame as a child star in Vaudeville. At 15, under the tutelage of Tessie the Tassie Twirler, she became a burlesque star, and soon after came to New York where she was a great success, appearing first on burlesque stages then in Florenz Ziegfelds "Follies" where she acquired her stage name. She later appeared in Broadway musicals such as "Star and Garter" of 1942. Gypsy also appeared in films, among them "The Belle of the Yukon," and wrote several books including The G-String Murders and Gypsy, a memoir which later was adapted to the stage where it was a hit Broadway musical. In her early years in New York, Gypsy was befriended by Walter Winchell and his circle, and later she was taken up by New York society. According to the New York Times, "Becoming fashionable, she operated a salon in a 26-room house (it had seven baths and a marble living room floor) on East 63rd Street." The house was elaborately decorated; trompe l'oeil paintings adorn the walls, the initials 'GRL' in gold ornament every door. To the credit of the present owner, Dr. Ferruccio di Cori, much of this fanciful and charming decor has been maintained.

The noted architectural historian Talbot Hamlin has praised the individuality of the Hatch house as well as its "true dramatic romance". Much of the work of the architect Frederick J. Sterner (1862-1931) displayed this interest in the romantic and picturesque--whether the commission be for a mansion near Pike's Peak, Colorado, or a townhouse in Manhattan. Sterner was a native of England who came to this country in the 1870s. He settled in Denver, Colorado, where, in partnership with Ernest Varian, and later George H. Williamson, he practiced architecture for nearly thirty years. Among his important commissions were the Denver University and Athletic Clubs, the Antlers Hotel and a castellated mansion called "Glen Eyrie" both in Colorado Springs, and the Greenbrier Hotel in White Sulphur Springs. In 1909 Sterner moved to New York where he received many commissions for the remodeling of townhouses. His designs often included charming little "Italian" gardens, and the addition of picturesque details to the facades, such as Spanish patterned tiles and delicate iron railings. Many of his clients were artists, among them George Bellows and Robert Chanler. He remodeled several townhouses on "Beauty Row," East 19th Street, within the Gramercy Park Historic District. He designed his own house at No. 139 East 19th Street. Like the Hatch residence it has a tile roof and shows the influence of Spanish prototypes. Sterner later moved uptown to 154 East 63rd Street, which he remodeled, across the street from the Hatch house. At about the same time he also remodeled the houses at No. 151 and No. 152 East 63rd Street, creating a small enclave much as he had done several years earlier on East 19th Street.

The Hatch residence is three stories high and is of gray stucco with a low red tile roof. At the first floor a tall elegant wrought-iron fence encloses the areaway in front of the house. Two small windows with ornate iron grilles are set between two doorways. The main round-arched entrance at the left has a stone enframingent with carved brackets which support the little balcony of the French window above. This window forms a visual unit with the door below and is set behind an iron railing and crowned by a very handsome broken-arch pediment. The richness of these combined elements contrasts effectively with the broad expanses of stuccoed wall and with the simple framing of the windows at the first and second stories. The third story is separated from those below it by a band course which serves as window sills for the three small windows placed directly under the overhang of the tile roof. These windows are evenly spaced, unlike the asymmetrical disposition of the windows below.

Talbot Hamlin described the Hatch residence as an eclectic design, combining elements of Spanish and Italian Renaissance styles. The stucco walls, the red tile roofs and the ornate iron railings and grilles are all traditional elements found in the architecture of Mediterranean countries, while the handsome pedimented enframingent of the main entrance and window above it are derived from High Renaissance prototypes. The house is U-shaped in plan, with the two main wings parallel to the street. This allows for a rather spacious interior courtyard--a rare feature in New York townhouses--

which is also based on Mediterranean prototypes. The Spanish Colonial style, with which the style of the Hatch house has much in common, was very popular in the West in the early 1910s. Sterner's design for this house is a rather unusual adaptation of the Spanish Colonial to a sophisticated urban setting.

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 Barbara Rutherford Hatch 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 Hatch Residence is a very handsome townhouse designed by the fashionable and well-known architect Frederick J. Sterner, in a sophisticated version of the Spanish Colonial style, that its design is distinctive and original while still harmonizing with its surroundings, and that it has been the home of several important and famous people.

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 Barbara Rutherford Hatch Residence, 153 East 63rd Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1398, Lot 27, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.