

FLEMING SMITH WAREHOUSE, 451-453 Washington Street, Borough of Manhattan.
Built 1891-1892; architect Stephen Decatur Hatch.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 224, Lot 24.

On January 10, 1978, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Fleming Smith Warehouse and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 8). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There were no speakers for or against designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Distinguished by its picturesque gabled roof and striking dark brick trim, the Fleming Smith Warehouse is an impressive commercial building on the southeast corner of Washington and Watts Streets in the warehouse district on the lower west side of Manhattan. This area, once among the city's finest residential sections, contained one of its loveliest parks--St. John's Park. In 1867, the trustees of Trinity Church who owned the park and a majority of the owners of the houses bordering it agreed to sell the park to Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt who then erected a railroad depot on the site. From then on, the area rapidly became commercial.

The building was constructed for Fleming Smith in 1891-92 and designed as a warehouse by Stephen Decatur Hatch with handsome neo-Flemish and Romanesque Revival features. By 1898, the building was being used for the storage of wine and the manufacture of shoes. Hatch, born in Swanton, Vermont, in 1839, settled in New York City where he entered the architectural office of John B. Snook as a draftsman. In 1864, after spending four years in Snook's office, he established his own practice, remaining active until his death in 1894. During his thirty year career, Hatch designed a number of imposing domestic and commercial buildings in a wide variety of architectural styles. A few of his most notable buildings that are still standing are: No. 213-215 Water Street (1868), an Italianate warehouse in the South Street Seaport Historic District; No. 1-5 Bond Street (1871), an impressive Second Empire cast-iron office building for the notable publishing house of D.D. Appleton & Co.; the famous Gilsey Hotel (1869-71) at 1200 Broadway, another striking Second Empire cast-iron building; the U.S. Army Building (1886) on Whitehall Street; and the Lafayette Street side of the former New York Life Insurance Co., 346-348 Broadway (1894). Hatch died soon after the design for the New York Life building was filed and the building was completed by Stanford White of the firm of McKim, Mead & White.

In 1886, five years before he designed No. 451-453 Washington Street, Hatch was commissioned by Fleming Smith to design a warehouse for him at 168 Duane Street overlooking Duane Park. The building, which is still standing, is a handsome example of the neo-Flemish style. Fleming Smith must have been pleased with the design of this earlier warehouse because Hatch used the neo-Flemish style again for the most striking feature of No. 451-453 Washington Street--its steep gables. It was during the 1880s, that the neo-Flemish style was most popular, although architects continued to use it until the early 1900s. Its popularity in New York began with the renewed interest in American colonial styles prompted by the Centennial Exposition held in Philadelphia in 1876. Often, neo-Flemish elements were freely combined with features of the Queen Anne and Romanesque Revival styles. In the Fleming Smith Warehouse, Hatch combined the late Romanesque Revival with the neo-Flemish. Typical of the Romanesque Revival elements that Hatch included in his design are the rough-faced stone ground floor and round and segmental arches.

The warehouse is six stories high with a rusticated, rough-faced stone first floor separated from the brick upper floors by a stone cornice. The main facade of the building, along Watts Street, is characterized by a slightly projecting central section and by three handsome gables and two unusual dormer windows. At the base of the projecting section is an entrance flanked by square-headed windows. The second and third stories join to form a single unit. Two-story high pilasters enhanced by stone blocks flank the recessed triple

window bays at the second and third floors. The fourth story window is round-arched with brick voussoirs recessed beneath an arch of dark brick accented by four stone voussoirs. The pilasters carry a three-story high section that begins at the fourth floor and is crowned by a gable. This section is outlined with quoins and an inverted crowstep pattern along the pitch of the gable in dark brick. Four square-headed windows with flat brick arches mark the fifth floor. A large round-arched window flanked by two smaller segmental-arched windows pierce the gable at the sixth floor. Above the large central round-arched window is a bull's-eye window with four radiating keystones. The gable is crowned by a finial. This central section is further enhanced by iron balconies that function as fire escapes.

The facade to either side of the central section is two bays wide. The ground floor has triple window bays with flat arches and two tall openings at each side with flat arches. The triple windows of the second and third floors are joined vertically beneath a segmental arch by dark brick enframements keyed to the facade. Spandrel panels between the second and third floors are enlivened by recessed ovals and further distinguish the bays. The triple window bays of the fourth floor have brick flat arches. A band of brick corbels extends below the fifth story which is pierced by paired round-arched windows with raised extrados and stone keystones. A brick band course, at the sill level, runs along the sixth floor. Dormer windows with conical hoods crowned by weather vanes separate the central gable from the crowstepped gables at the corners of the building. Each crowstepped gable contains three segmental-arched windows and a bull's-eye window.

The Washington Street facade is only three bays wide. The ground floor has three wide loading docks flanked by rough-faced stone piers. The windows at the second and third stories are also vertically joined beneath segmental arches and have dark brick enframements keyed to the facade as on Watts Street. At the fifth floor, three square-headed windows are flanked by paired round-arched windows. A large central gable pierced by a wide round-arched window and flanked by hooded dormer windows marks the sixth floor. The gable is ornamented with the initials "FS" and the date "1891".

The Fleming Smith Warehouse with its handsome combination of architectural elements and its picturesque silhouette is a visually striking building and enhances the commercial area surrounding it.

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 Fleming Smith Warehouse 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 Fleming Smith Warehouse is an architecturally distinguished commercial structure, that it was designed by Stephen Decatur Hatch, a notable New York City architect, that the building displays handsome neo-Flemish and Romanesque Revival features such as the striking gabled roof and round-arched windows, that the building's picturesque silhouette complements its architectural character, and that it enhances this warehouse section of New York City.

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 Fleming Smith Warehouse, 451-453 Washington Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 224, Lot 24, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.



FLEMING SMITH WAREHOUSE
451-453 WASHINGTON STREET

Date: 1891-1892

Architect: Stephen D. Hatch