

271 NINTH STREET HOUSE (William B. Cronyn House), Borough of Brooklyn.
Built 1856-57.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 1004, Lot 60.

On May 9, 1978, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 271 Ninth Street House (William B. Cronyn House) and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 5). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Three witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

This impressive French Second Empire house was built between 1856 and 1857 for William B. Cronyn, a prosperous Wall Street merchant. A reminder of the development of this section of Brooklyn, this large freestanding residence remains a striking feature of the area.

The site of the 271 Ninth Street House lies within the farm of Rem Adriance which extended from Third Avenue to the western limits of the Town of Flatbush, somewhere within the present day Prospect Park. This farm was crossed by the old Gowanus Road which was established in 1704, at approximately Fourth Avenue and Ninth Street. One early settler in the area was William Adriance (Bennett) who had begun purchasing property from the Indians in 1636. His descendant Rem Adriance began subdividing his farmland for sale in the 1840s, according to the 1848 surveyor's map made by Silas Ludlam. Much of this area of Brooklyn was surveyed in 1854, and the farmland was sold off for speculative development over the next forty years. During the 1850s Fifth Avenue was opened and the growing city of Brooklyn began to make inroads upon the area. The Civil War delayed development, but soon thereafter it was given impetus by the planning of "Mount Prospect Park" and of the Brooklyn Bridge.

William B. Cronyn, a prosperous Wall Street merchant, purchased four farm lots in 1854, designated lots 83, 84, 113, and 114 on the Ludlam map, and built his imposing house two years later. The property remained in the Cronyn family until his wife Elizabeth sold it in 1862. During the late 1860s other sites on this block along Fifth Avenue, Eighth Street, and then Ninth Street began to be developed. In 1879 the house at No. 271 became the residence of Daniel H. Gray who was in the sulphur refining business. Gray transferred the property to his daughter Mary C. Gray Cone in 1885, and she lived there until 1896. It is somewhat curious that she is listed in the Brooklyn directories as being engaged in the sulphur business, although the business probably belonged to her father.

Charles M. Higgins acquired the property in 1898 as the headquarters for his India ink company which occupied the building until the mid-20th century. The ink factory was located to the rear of the house facing Eighth Street. This change in use for the building reflected the change in the area to include commercial uses as well as residential ones. Today the house is again being used for residential purposes.

This handsome French Second Empire house remains a fine example of suburban residential architecture of the late 1850s, reflecting the prosperity of the original owner. Of frame and brick construction covered with stucco, the three-story house features a central half-story cupola with a clerestory which lights the interior staircase. Below the cupola is a slate mansard roof with end pavilions and ornamental iron cresting, characteristic of the French Second Empire style. The roof and end pavilions are pierced by dormers. An intricate bracketed cornice sets off the roof from the lower stories. At the second story, the windows display handsome bracketed lintels although the original sash have been replaced. Projecting three-sided bays flank the first story entrance. The tall narrow windows of the bays are flanked by paneled pilasters, and each bay is surmounted by a modillioned cornice supporting an ornamental cresting and a low conical roof. A tall portico with bracketed and modillioned cornice shelters the entrance doorway.

The handsome ornamental detail and the fine architectural quality of this large freestanding house make it an outstanding feature of the area and an unusual example of the French Second Empire style to survive in New York City.

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 271 Ninth Street House (William B. Cronyn 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 271 Ninth Street House (William B. Cronyn House) is a handsome and imposing French Second Empire residence, which retains to a remarkable degree much of its original residential and architectural character; that it is a rare surviving example of this type of mid-19th century architecture in New York City; that it is distinguished by such fine architectural details as the cupola, mansard roof, and projecting bays; and that its size and overall architectural quality make it an outstanding feature of the area.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21 (formerly 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 271 Ninth Street House (William B. Cronyn House), Borough of Brooklyn and designates Tax Map Block 1004, Lot 60, Borough of Brooklyn, as its Landmark Site.

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Photo Credit: Oliver Cheng. Landmarks Preservation Commission

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Brooklyn

Date: c.1856