

JAMES F.D. LANIER RESIDENCE, 123 East 35th Street, Borough of Manhattan.
Built 1901-03; architects Hoppin & Koen.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 891, Lot 15.

On May 8, 1979, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the James F.D. Lanier Residence and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 11). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Six witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

This imposing residence of Beaux-Arts design was built in 1901-03 for James and Harriet Lanier in the fashionable Murray Hill section of New York. Designed by the architectural firm of Hoppin & Koen, it remains one of their finest residential works in New York City.

Murray Hill had begun to be developed with residences in the mid-19th century. The area took its name from the country estate of Robert and Mary Murray.¹ According to legend, during the Revolutionary War, Mary Murray had detained General Howe at the family house on their country estate, thus allowing George Washington to escape further northward.² Following the opening of Lexington and Fourth Avenues through the area in 1848, rows of brownstone residences were quickly built along the side streets. Socially prominent and wealthy residents, such as A.T. Stewart and J.P. Morgan, moved into the area, concentrating their residences along Fifth and Madison Avenues. Although by the turn of the century commercial development was beginning to encroach upon Fifth Avenue, the streets to the east of Madison still remained fashionable, due in large part to the efforts of J.P. Morgan.³ Consequently in 1901, James F.D. Lanier purchased two 1854 brownstone houses on East 35th Street with the intention of replacing them with an elegant "up-to-date" mansion.⁴

James Franklin Doughty Lanier (1858-1928), a member of a prominent New York family, was a banker associated since 1880 with the firm of Winslow, Lanier & Co., one of the oldest private banking houses in the United States. The firm had been founded in 1849 by his grandfather James F.D. Lanier. An avid sportsman, Lanier was one of the founders of the Meadowbrook Hunt Club and a pioneer automobile driver in America with a strong interest in motor touring and racing. In 1885 Lanier married Harriet Bishop (1866-1931) who achieved renown as president of the Society of Friends of Music, founded by her in 1913. Its aim was to bring before the musical public of New York "rare and little-known works, old and of today."⁵ To perform choral works which would not otherwise have been performed in New York, the society formed its own chorus which from 1921 was under the leadership of Arthur Bodanzky. Mr. and Mrs. Lanier had two sons, Charles (d.1918), and Reginald Bishop Lanier, who retains ownership of the family residence.

By 1901 the brownstone-fronted rowhouse was considered old-fashioned, so it is not surprising that the Laniers would commission a new, more fashionable residence for themselves in Murray Hill where they and other members of the Lanier family had already resided for a number of years.⁶ Their elegant new mansion was the design of the architectural firm of Hoppin & Koen.

Francis L.V. Hoppin (1866-1941), a graduate of Brown University, studied architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Hoppin met Terence A. Koen (1858-1923) when both were draftsmen in the office of the prestigious architectural firm of McKim, Mead & White, and in 1894 they formed their own firm. While best known for the design of the Landmark New York City Police Headquarters (1905-09) on Centre Street, drawings for which were in progress while the Lanier House was under construction, the firm also designed many fine residences, among them 7 East 78th Street of 1899-1900, within the Metropolitan Museum Historic District, and 334-336 Riverside Drive of 1901-02, within the Riverside-West 105th Street Historic District. In addition, the firm designed other precinct station houses for the New York City Police Department. Hoppin also designed the main pavilion building at the fashionable Bailey's Beach in Newport, Rhode Island, where he had his summer residence, "Auton House." About 1904 Franklin B. Huntington joined the firm, and the Lanier House was published under the firm name of Hoppin, Koen & Huntington.⁷

In keeping with the academic background of the partners and their training with McKim, Mead & White, the work of the firm, including the Lanier residence, reflects the principles and influence of Parisian Beaux-Arts design. The style was particularly popular for fashionable residential architecture at the turn of the century, and the Lanier residence is an especially fine example of the type.

Five stories high, the house is a generous 33 feet wide since it replaced two houses previously on the site. The ground floor forms an imposing rusticated stone base which is set with three arched openings with swagged and bracketed keystones. The arched entrance contains handsome carved and paneled doors set beneath an ornate *oeil de boeuf*, flanked by cornucopia, which fills the arch. The house number is set into this opening. Low steps approaching the entrance are lined by stone balustrades with paneled end posts topped by stone urns. The areaway to the left of the entrance is enclosed by an elegant wrought-iron fence intersected by urn-topped posts.

Rising above the rusticated base is the main red brick portion of the facade, handled as a two-story unit. The three bays of the facade are indicated by two-story high fluted stone pilasters with swag-adorned Ionic capitals. A continuous balustrade is set at the base of the pilasters. The boldly-enframed full-length windows at the second story have shallow cornices and French doors, while the windows at the third story have projecting sills and keystones flanked by swags which intersect with the capitals of the pilasters. A bold dentilled, modillioned, and bracketed stone cornice surmounts the third floor. Swags also hang from the brackets. The cornice is crowned by a lacy wrought-iron balustrade which shields the enframed fourth story windows. Pilasters of paneled brick flank the window bays. The fifth story takes the form of a copper-covered mansard roof rising above a dentilled cornice. Three copper-clad pedimented dormers project from the mansard roof. The total composition is both elegant and dignified, one that could be at home in Paris as well as in New York. Views published of the

interior shortly after its completion reveal many other elegant features inspired by French design.⁸

Today the Lanier residence remains as a gracious symbol of life in Murray Hill at the turn of the century. A visual asset to the Murray Hill community, the residence with its fine Beaux-Arts design makes a distinguished addition to the work of Hoppin & Koen and to New York City architecture.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Anita Pins, An Historic District in Murray Hill (New York: The Murray Hill Committee, Inc., 1977), p. 9.
2. Pins, p. 7.
3. Pins, p. 12.
4. Pins, p. 34. Section 3, Liber Deeds 72, page 364, and Liber Deeds 75, page 110, New York County, Register's Office.
5. "Lanier, Harriet Bishop (Mrs. James F.D. Lanier), "The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography, vol. 34, p. 290.
6. The Social Register for 1897 shows Mr. and Mrs. Charles Lanier, the parents of James F.D. Lanier, living at 30 East 37th Street. The following year Mr. and Mrs. James F.D. Lanier are also living at 30 East 37th Street. The Social Register for 1900 shows Mr. and Mrs. James F.D. Lanier living at 52 East 34th Street.
7. "House of J.F.D. Lanier, Esq.," American Architect, 84 (December 24, 1901), plates.
8. Ibid.

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 James F.D. Lanier 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 James F.D. Lanier Residence is an elegant and dignified Beaux-Arts design; that among its significant features are the rusticated ground floor base, the two-story pilasters, the mansard roof, and the graceful carved stonework; that it was designed by the noted architectural firm of Hoppin & Koen and is a distinguished addition to their work; that it was built for members of a prominent New York family; that it remains as a gracious symbol of life in Murray Hill and New York City at the turn of the century; and that it is a visual asset to the Murray Hill community.

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 James F.D. Lanier Residence, 123 East 35th Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 891, Lot 15, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

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Photo Credit:
Landmarks Preservation Commission

J.F.D. Lanier Residence
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Architects:
Hoppin & Koen