

ALUMNI HOUSE (now Housing Office), Fordham University, East Fordham Road and East 191st Street, the Bronx. Built 1840.

Landmark Site: Borough of the Bronx Tax Map Block 3273, Lot 1 in part consisting of the land on which the described building is situated.

On July 12, 1979, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Alumni House (now Housing Office), Fordham University and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 13). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. Letters have been received in support of designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Among the oldest buildings on the Fordham University campus is a small fieldstone house in the Greek Revival style. This house, along with the three other Fordham Landmarks--University Chapel, St. John's Residence Hall and the Greek Revival mansion, Rose Hill--formed the original college complex. A modest, well-proportioned, simply detailed structure, the house has served a host of functions over the years and is today occupied by the University Housing offices.

St. John's College, renamed Fordham University in 1907, formally welcomed its first six students on June 24, 1841. Plans for a school and seminary had been under way for at least two years. In 1839, the Right Reverend John Hughes, D.D. (1797-1864), then Coadjutor-Bishop of New York, and later its first Archbishop, had purchased a 106 acre tract of land from Horatio Sheppard Moat, a Brooklyn merchant. This land, originally a small portion of the vast Fordham Manor granted to John Archer by a royal patent of 1671, had from the 1690s been the farm of the Corser family. In 1787, the property had been acquired by Robert Watts for a country estate, which he christened Rose Hill. This name was retained by Moat after he purchased the estate in 1836 and erected his handsome Greek Revival mansion.

Bishop Hughes bought the house and property from Moat for slightly less than \$30,000, and made the alterations necessary to transform the house into a seminary and school. Prior to Hughes arrival in New York City in 1838, the Bishopric, which encompassed all of New York State and part of New Jersey, had no important seminaries or colleges. Hughes, himself an Irish immigrant of humble origins, was deeply concerned with the development of Catholic education in the United States. St. John's College was first headed by Reverend John McCloskey (1810-1885), later America's first Cardinal. In its earliest years, the school was staffed by "secular" priests, that is, those not belonging to a specific order or congregation. Lay instructors were engaged, among them William Rodrigue, who taught mathematics and engineering. Rodrigue, brother-in-law of Bishop Hughes, and a successful architect was also involved at this time with the design of two new buildings for St. John's--St. John's Church (now University Chapel) and

the Residence Hall, both completed in 1845. The following year, Hughes recruited from St. Mary's College in Kentucky a group of French-born Jesuits, headed by Father Augustus Thebaud. With the arrival of the Jesuits, members of an order traditionally associated with intellectual and educational endeavors, St. John's College was empowered to confer degrees and diplomas. In the 1860s, the seminary was transferred to Troy, New York, and St. John's became exclusively a Catholic institution of higher learning administered by the Jesuit Order.

The small Greek Revival house has served many college related purposes since the founding of Fordham University. Its earliest function, however, remains unsure. Traditionally the building has been thought to be the work of architect Rodrigue, and also his family home during the construction of the adjacent church and residence hall. The simple, vernacular design of the house, very unlike the Gothic Revival style of the other two structures does little to confirm this attribution. In style and materials, the house much more closely resembles Rose Hill, the design of an unknown architect. The smaller house, however, displays certain "retardataire" details--most notably the window lintels, in form a hold-over from the Federal period--which do not appear on the grander house. Interestingly, a stone plaque set beneath the central attic window of the small house, bears the date "1840", that is, two years after the completion of Rose Hill. A Fordham University publication of 1966 states that the house "appears to have been built for the use of a few theological students while the seminary building was in the course of erection."¹

In any event, the house soon became the Parish house and office of the pastor of St. John's Church, and later served as the college infirmary, earning the nickname the "Pill-box". Offices of the "Fordham Monthly" and the "Ram" were subsequently housed in the building, and for a time a bakery in the basement produced a campus specialty, "Fordham Buns". Prior to being occupied by the Housing office, the building contained Alumni offices.

A simple, freestanding structure, the house is constructed of random laid dark-colored fieldstone, a material commonly used for domestic architecture in the Bronx from the 17th into the 19th centuries. The simple detailing includes brownstone window lintels and sills, door enframing and stairs, and watertable. The corners of the building are quoined in fieldstone, while keyed red brick enframes the windows. The attic story--typical of the Greek Revival is of wood with three small rectangular windows inset on both the entrance and back facades. The entrance facade is straightforwardly composed with two windows to each side of a central doorway. This doorway has wood pilasters and sidelights flanking the door. The end walls of the house are simple solid planes of fieldstone, while the rear facade contains a double door (replacing the original), symmetrically flanked by paired windows. The roof appears to be flat (although it actually peaks very slightly), another typical feature of the Greek Revival.

In plan, elevation, and detail, this house should be classified as an example of Greek Revival at "the folk level",² described by

William H. Pierson, Jr., as "the traditional colonial house type, with its door at the center of the long side, simply modified by the addition of Greek details."³ Usually such houses were constructed in wood, and painted white, and thus the dark stone of this house is notable. An unpretentious, solidly constructed, handsome building, the house is not only a fine example of its type and period of which very few are to be found in New York City, but also a visual reminder of the evolution of St. John's College from a tiny college to the Fordham University of today, one of America's foremost Catholic educational institutions.

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This project was funded in part with the assistance of a preservation survey and planning grant authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, administered by the U.S. Department of the Interior Heritage Conservation, and Recreation Service; through the New York State Office of Parks and Recreation.

Footnotes

1. "Fordham University," vol. 26 (1965-66), p.9.
2. William H. Pierson Jr., American Buildings and Their Architects: The Colonial and Neo-Classical Styles (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1976), pp. 450-451.
3. Pierson, American Buildings, pp. 450-51

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 Alumni House (now Housing Office) Fordham University 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 Alumni House (now Housing Office), Fordham University is one of the oldest buildings on the Fordham University campus, and part of the original college complex; that it has served a host of college related functions; that it is a well-proportioned, simply detailed example of the Greek Revival style; that it is a handsome building solidly constructed in fieldstone, a typical Bronx material, but a rare one in Greek Revival house design; and that it is an important visual reminder of the evolution of Fordham University from a small college, to one of America's foremost Catholic institutions of higher learning.

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 Alumni House (now Housing Office), Fordham University, Borough of the Bronx and designates Tax Map Block 3273, Lot 1, in part consisting of the land on which the described building is situated, Borough of the Bronx, as its Landmark Site.

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FORDHAM UNIVERSITY

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