

IMPERIAL APARTMENTS, 1327-1339 Bedford Avenue a/k/a 1198 Pacific Street, Borough of Brooklyn. Built 1892; architect Montrose W. Morris.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 1206, Lot 5.

On June 14, 1983, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Imperial Apartments, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 7). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Five witnesses spoke in favor of designation. No witnesses spoke in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Imperial Apartments, one of the most dignified and imposing apartment houses in Brooklyn, was designed in 1892 by Montrose W. Morris for Louis F. Seitz.¹ Located on Grant Square, it is among several distinguished buildings in the area, recalling the area's prestige at the turn of the century. The Imperial also is one of a number of commissions Morris carried out for Seitz including two other exceptional apartment buildings, the Alhambra on Nostrand Avenue between Macon and Halsey Streets; and the Renaissance, also on Nostrand Avenue at the corner of Hancock Street. The design of the Imperial is based on the 16th-century chateaux of Renaissance France and executed in a skillful combination of buff-colored Roman brick, terra cotta, slate and metal.

The Imperial stands on the east side of Grant Square in an area now known as Crown Heights. Originally, the area was open farmland just south of the village of Bedford Corners which was founded in 1663. The land was part of the extensive holdings of the Lefferts family which had obtained a grant from the Dutch government in 1666. The family began to divest itself of its Bedford tracts in the 1850s after nearly 200 years of stewardship. There are a few houses in the neighborhood that date from before the Civil War but most construction took place in the 1880s and '90s after the opening of the Brooklyn Bridge when the area became more accessible to lower Manhattan.²

Grant Square, named after Ulysses S. Grant, is a wide, open plaza formed by the juncture of Rogers Avenue with Bedford Avenue. At the turn of the 20th century, Grant Square was one of the most prestigious sections of Brooklyn. In 1890, the Union League Club built its handsome Romanesque Revival clubhouse designed by P.J. Lauritzen, on the eastern side of the square on the southeast corner of Dean Street. Strictly a Republican Party association, the Union League Club was one of the most respectable

organizations in Brooklyn. The club commissioned William Ordway Partridge (1861-1930), an highly regarded sculptor at the time, to create the equestrian statue of Grant which it donated to the City of Brooklyn in 1896.³ Now sadly deteriorated and neglected, the clubhouse was the first of a number of truly distinguished buildings to be erected on the square, which give it an importance second only to Grand Army Plaza.

The most imposing building on the square is the 23rd Regiment Armory. Built between 1891 and 1895, it was designed by the firm of Fowler & Hough to resemble a great medieval fortress. When the armory was completed, contemporaries were struck by its monumental scale and its massive grandeur as well as by the richness of its architectural detail. The armory was built to house an important Brooklyn organization--the 23rd Regiment, a part of the National Guard. The regiment had its beginning in the Brooklyn Relief Guard which was founded in 1861 to replace the Brooklyn City Guard which had been sent south to the warfront. Within the year the Relief Guard became part of the National Guard and saw service in the Civil War in the summer of 1863. The armory, a designated New York City Landmark, is also noted for its lush and lavishly decorated council and reception rooms.⁴

Across the square from the Armory is the headquarters for the Medical Society of the County of Kings, a venerable institution founded in 1822. The present neo-Georgian building was designed in 1900 by the Brooklyn architectural firm of Waid & Cranford and at one time housed the fourth largest medical library in the United States.⁵

Around the corner from the Medical Society, on the north side of Pacific Street, is the Episcopal Church of St. Bartholomew, a designated New York City Landmark. Originally established in 1881 as a chapel of St. Luke's Church on Clinton Avenue in Clinton Hill, the main building was completed in 1886, although other buildings were added to the complex at later dates. This picturesque Queen Anne-style church designed by George Chappell is set in a garden in pleasing contrast to its densely urban neighborhood.⁶ Grant Square, so closely linked to the social, political, religious, military and educational history of Brooklyn, is the appropriate setting for one of Brooklyn's grandest residences, the Imperial Apartments.

Montrose W. Morris, the architect of the Imperial, was born about 1861 in Hempstead, New York, and moved to Brooklyn while he was still a boy. Educated in the public schools of Brooklyn and at the Peekskill Academy, he began his practice in 1883 with his own office on Exchange Place in lower Manhattan. He maintained his office in lower Manhattan until his death in 1916 when two of his sons who had been associated with the firm continued the practice.⁷ When Morris first opened his office, he employed an interesting advertising technique to promote his firm. On land he owned on Hancock Street between Marcy and Tompkins Avenues in Brooklyn, he designed and built his own residence and opened it to the public. It attracted many visitors and favorable notices in the press. One of the visitors impressed with Morris's work was Louis F. Seitz who commissioned him to design an apartment house for the property Seitz owned on Nostrand Avenue opposite the new Girls' High School. Known as the Alhambra, the new building so pleased Seitz that he soon commissioned Morris to design two other large apartment houses, the Renaissance and the Imperial. These three apartment buildings were among the most prestigious and most impressive multiple-

family residences in Brooklyn. The Imperial is one of the earliest apartment houses to be built in Brooklyn that was designed for the middle class. During the 19th century, the single-family rowhouse was the standard residential building type for the middle class. In fact, there was a distinct prejudice against living in a "flathouse." It was only toward the end of the century that it became socially acceptable to live in an apartment house. The high quality of the design and richness of the materials of the Imperial were an inducement calculated to attract middle-class families, as were the building's scale and mass which blends so harmoniously with its surrounding neighborhood of brick and brownstone rowhouses.

Morris executed scores of residential commissions throughout Brooklyn, from some of the borough's most imposing mansions such as the Henry Carlton Hulbert mansion (1892) at 49 Prospect Park West and the Clarence Walker Seamens residence (1900-03) on St. Marks Avenue (now demolished), to groups of distinctive rowhouses such as those at 282-290 and 285-289 DeKalb Avenue, and 236-244 Hancock Street, to striking apartment houses such as the Alhambra, the Renaissance, the Imperial, the Montrose, and the Chaterlaine. Fortunately, most of Morris' work still stands in Brooklyn adding greatly to the borough's architectural heritage.⁸ Morris worked in the prevalent architectural styles of the period, beginning in the 1880s with the picturesque Queen Anne and Romanesque Revival with their highly articulated details and vibrant palette of materials, as in the Alhambra, and shifting in the 1890s to newly-popular classically-inspired styles with their more refined detail and lighter-toned materials, seen in the Imperial and the Renaissance.

The Imperial rises from a stone base for four stories with a picturesque slate mansard fifth story. The facade is designed in a striped pattern of continuous bands of terra cotta separated by courses of buff Roman brick. The main entrance facade which faces Pacific Street is brought forward, creating a central pavilion flanked by full-height round corner towers. The entrance consists of large Ionic columns supporting a foliate frieze which continues around the entire building above the first floor. All the windows of the first floor are square-headed and flat-arched with voussoirs laid up in soldier courses of alternating Roman brick and terra cotta. Above the entrance, the second, third, and fourth floors are vertically joined in a monumental Palladianesque triumphal arch. The central windows at the second and third floors of the arch are shallow, three-sided metal bays with a pediment over the second floor window and a simple entablature at the third. On either side of this metal bay are monumental, two-story high engaged fluted columns with Corinthian capitals. At the corners of the pavilion, the columns are echoed by square, attached columns of the same order. Between the columns are square-headed windows with round-arched pediments at the second floor and windows with triangular pediments at the third. The columns carry an entablature broken over the central bay. Spanning the break, a deep, coffered round arch rises at the fourth floor. To either side of the arch are flat-arched windows similar to the first floor windows. The fifth floor is pierced by four square-headed windows with simple enframements above which are a simple modillioned cornice and a steep four-sided mansard framed by tall chimneys. Between the central pavilion and the corner towers are three-story high round-arched bays designed in the same manner as the central bay of the pavilion. Above the fourth floor is the modillioned cornice from which

risers the mansard with tall pedimented dormers.

The three round corner towers have three square-headed windows at each story that are identical in design to those of the first floor. The windows at the fourth floor are round-arched with Florentine arches echoing the deep rich classical arches of the entrance facade. The fifth floor windows are square-headed and simply enframed like those of the central entrance pavilion. Each tower is topped by a picturesque slate conical roof with crowning finials.

The Grant Square facade is the longer of the two. The major architectural feature is a dignified arcade rising three stories between the second and fourth floors. This arcade consists of paired Corinthian columns carrying deep coffered arches. Within each arch are shallow three-sided bays at the second and third floors and tripartite round-arched windows at the fourth. The treatment is like that in the outer arches on the Pacific Street facade. Above the central three arches, the fifth floor is pierced by six simple square-headed windows. This section is crowned by a high slate mansard with projecting gabled dormer. Flanking this central mansard, the roof has tall pedimented dormers. There is a simply enframed secondary entrance to the building next to the southern tower on Grant Square.

The Imperial Apartments remains a dignified edifice of stately proportions by one of the most prominent Brooklyn architects of the period. The strong curves of its corner towers and monumental arches, the romantic silhouette of its conical roofs and steep mansard roofs, and the buff tone of the Roman brick and terra cotta all recall its French Renaissance antecedents and make the Imperial a major structure in the Grant Square area which figures so notably in the historical development of Brooklyn.

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NOTES

1. New York City. Department of Buildings, Brooklyn, New Building Permit Number 154-1892.
2. Landmarks Preservation Commission, Brooklyn Survey: Crown Heights North Proposed Historic District, (New York: Landmarks Preservation Commission, 1978), pp. 5-9.
3. Ibid., p. 57.
4. Landmarks Preservation Commission, 23rd Regiment Armory Designation Report (LP-0950), report prepared by Nancy Goeschel (New York: Landmarks Preservation Commission, March 8, 1977). The armory was designated March 8, 1977.
5. Moses King, King's Views of New York 1896-1915 & Brooklyn, 1905 (New York: Arno Press, 1980), p. 52.
6. Landmarks Preservation Commission, Saint Bartholomew's Church Designation Report, (LP-0820), report prepared by Marjorie Pearson (New York: Landmarks Preservation Commission, March 19, 1974). The church was designated March 19, 1974.
7. Dennis Steadman Francis, Architects in Practice, New York City, 1840-1900, (New York: Committee for the Preservation of Architectural Records, 1979), p. 56. Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide, New York, April 22, 1916, p. 634, Montrose Morris Obituary.
8. Andrew Dolkart, "Visible City," Metropolis, 4 (September 1984), 26ff.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

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 Imperial Apartments 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 Imperial Apartments is one of the most impressive early apartment houses built in Brooklyn; that it is a distinctive structure designed in a style inspired by the 16th-century chateaux of Renaissance France; that it is executed in a skillful combination of buff Roman brick, terra cotta, slate and metal; that its architect, Montrose W. Morris, was one of the most prominent and creative Brooklyn architects of the period; that its scale and massing harmoniously blend with its rowhouse neighborhood; that it is a dignified edifice of stately proportions; that the strong curves of its corner towers and monumental arches, and its conical roofs and mansards create a romantic silhouette; and that it is an essential element in Grant Square which is so closely linked to the social, political, religious and military history and development of Brooklyn.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21, Section 534, 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 Imperial Apartments, 1327-1339 Bedford Avenue a/k/a 1198 Pacific Street, Borough of Brooklyn and designates Tax Map Block 1206, Lot 5, Borough of Brooklyn, as its Landmark Site.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Dolkart, Andrew. "Visible City." Metropolis, 4 (September, 1984). 26ff.
- Francis, Dennis Steadman. Architects in Practice, New York City, 1840-1900. New York: Committee for the Preservation of Architectural Records, 1979.
- King, Moses. King's Views of New York 1896-1915 & Brooklyn, 1905. New York: Arno Press, 1980.
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- Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide. New York. April 22, 1916, p. 634. Montrose Morris obituary.



Architect: Montrose W. Morris

THE IMPERIAL APARTMENTS
1327-13339 Bedford Avenue
a/k/a 1198 Pacific Street
Brooklyn
Built: 1892

Photo Credit: Carl Forster
LPC



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1327-1339 Bedford Avenue
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Brooklyn
Built • 1892

Photo Credit: Brooklyn
Historical Society
c. 1893