1025 PARK AVENUE HOUSE, (originally Reginald DeKoven House), Borough of Manhattan. Built 1911-12; architect, John Russell Pope.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1514, Lot 3.

On June 12, 1984, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 1025 Park Avenue House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 5). The hearing was continued to September 11, 1984 (Item No. 1). Both hearings had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Twenty eight witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. The Commission has received many letters and other expressions of support in favor of this designation.

Description and Analysis

The 1025 Park Avenue House was constructed in 1911-12 for the well-known composer of light opera and popular music, Reginald DeKoven and his wife Anna. The house is a rare surviving mansion from the period when Park Avenue was being developed into a grand and exclusive boulevard bordered by private homes and elegant apartment houses. It was designed in an unusual urban adaptation of the Jacobean Revival style by John Russell Pope, one of America's leading architects. The dominating, symmetrically arranged bay windows and the solid brick facade with stone trim are reminiscent of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century manor houses of Britain from which this style is derived. This stately home with its vast halls and elegant spaces was the scene of numerous gatherings and concerts for the DeKovens and their friends from socially elite circles of New York.

The Development of Park Avenue

Park Avenue was not always the fashionable place to live which it is today.\footnote{Before 1872, railroad tracks carrying steam locomotives with their accompanying dirt, noise and fire-producing cinders, ran down the center of Fourth Avenue, making the area quite undesirable. At that date, however, the Fourth Avenue Improvement Scheme, to lower and partially enclose the tracks in an open tunnel beneath the Avenue, was instituted by New York City and the railroad. With the grime and noise decreased, development followed in the late 1870s and 1880s with tenements and rowhouses, as well as institutional buildings, being constructed in the area. Only a scattered few examples of these buildings still remain on the Avenue, and these are greatly altered.\footnote{Only a scattered few examples of these buildings still remain on the Avenue, and these are greatly altered.}}
The street remained in this condition until 1902 when a serious train accident in the tunnel motivated the state legislature to pass an act requiring that all passenger trains in New York City be electrified by 1908. With this modernization, the tracks could be completely covered over and Park Avenue (the name of the street had been changed from Fourth Avenue in 1888 by the Common Council) finally started to live up to its name. The street was gradually transformed into a broad, peaceful parkway, lined with a mixture of handsome private residences and elegant apartment houses, many designed by the city's leading architects for prominent residents. Architects whose work could be found on this street included such well-known names as Trowbridge & Livingston, Delano & Aldrich, Ernest Flagg, and Walker & Gillette, among others. Over the years however, many of the early private homes have been replaced by large apartment buildings. One of the first mansions constructed on Park Avenue, and the oldest still extant was that for Elihu Root, built in 1903 by Carrere & Hastings.3 The Percy Pyne House at No. 680 Park, designed in 1906 (but not constructed until 1910-12) by McKim, Mead & White, is the second oldest building remaining from this period,4 while the Jonathan Bulkley House, built 1910-11 by James Gamble Rogers is the third oldest.

In 1909, when the Avenue was still undergoing change, Mr. Amos Pinchot built a large mansion on the northeast corner of Park Avenue and 85th Street. Pinchot was a man known for sound judgment in real estate matters, and he purchased numerous lots on the surrounding blocks for speculative purposes, in addition to the one for his own home.5 In 1910, Pinchot sold the lot just to the north of his own white stone house to Reginald and Anna DeKoven who built their house in 1911-12.6 Thus today the house at 1025 Park Avenue is the fourth oldest surviving mansion on Park Avenue.

Reginald and Anna DeKoven

Reginald DeKoven (1859-1920),7 the popular composer of light opera and music critic for numerous newspapers and magazines, and his wife Anna, who was also a writer, commissioned this house at 1025 Park Avenue. Continental, cultured and well-connected, the DeKovens were members of New York's artistic circles as well as its social aristocracy. When the DeKovens lived in this house it was called "one of the show places, in a district of mansions,"8 and was the scene of numerous parties and musical entertainments which the DeKovens arranged for their friends.

Reginald DeKoven was born in Connecticut, into a family with a long American heritage. Due to his father's ill health, the family moved to England when Reginald was 13, and he remained there until he attained his degree from St. John's College, Oxford in 1879. Although he pursued further musical studies in Italy and Germany, music was not considered a proper vocation for this young man and he returned to the United States in search of a career. Unsuccessful attempts at banking and business in Chicago followed, until his first opera, The Begum, was produced in Philadelphia in 1887. It was a financial and popular success, and according to his wife Anna, "was the first American-written comic opera" produced in this country.9 His success in this endeavor enabled him to devote himself to music, in various ways, for the rest of his life.
During the next 23 years he composed more than twenty comic operas and over 400 individual songs, ballets and piano pieces. Robin Hood, which first opened in 1890, is one of his best-known, and some say his best, operatic compositions. This opera, which included the popular song "O Promise Me," was called "the best light opera ever written by Americans," and received numerous revivals. The critical and popular acclaim for this piece led to DeKoven's fame as "the leading composer in America," and served as a foundation for his later work. This included other full operas, such as Rob Roy, The Three Dragons, Happy Land, The Wedding Trip, The Canterbury Pilgrims, and Rip Van Winkle.

In 1889, DeKoven began his alternate career as music critic for the Chicago Evening Post. In addition, DeKoven served as music critic for the New York World from 1892 to 1897 and from 1907 to 1912, for the New York Journal from 1896 to 1900, and for Harper's Weekly from 1895 to 1897. From 1897 to 1902, the DeKovens resided in Washington, D.C., where Reginald DeKoven attempted, unsuccessfully, to found a permanent symphony orchestra. Returning to New York, DeKoven became deeply involved in the promotion of a truly American opera form. He joined with the Shuberts to build the Lyric Theatre on 42nd Street, which was to be "a sort of clearing house for American composers." In addition, this building was to house the American School of Opera, an organization of which DeKoven was president, whose purpose was to train American singers for American operas. Ironically, only three works by DeKoven were ever produced at the Lyric.

During his extremely productive career, DeKoven was the center of much comment and controversy. In 1914, one writer called him "the best-abused composer in America," due to his wide-spread popularity. Some called his work "reminiscent," meaning that it reminded the listener of other music, but others recognized "a gift for melody with a sense for harmonic color." After DeKoven's early popular success with Robin Hood and especially the song "O Promise Me," which became a standard wedding song for years, each new piece DeKoven presented was greeted with great interest. His role as musical critic for several major newspapers kept his name before the public and kept him in touch with the rest of the music world. But despite this very active career with much contemporary acclaim, DeKoven left little music which has maintained its popularity.

The DeKovens' position in society was attained because of relationships on both sides of the marriage. Reginald's family had many ties among the socially prominent in the United States and he himself had participated in some of Europe's upper circles of society. Anna DeKoven, who was a prolific writer in her own right, was the daughter of Charles B. Farwell, wealthy merchant and U.S. Senator from Illinois. She had spent time, as a young woman, with her family in Washington, where she had had the opportunity to meet and talk to high government officials. She learned early in her life of "the pleasure and profit of knowing distinguished personalities." During the DeKovens' married years, they divided their time between New York and Washington in the winters, with summers in Newport or at Anna's parents' home in Lake Forest, Illinois, with frequent trips to Europe in between. Their associates were the wealthy and the powerful as well as those involved in the arts, and these people were helpful in furthering the DeKovens' own careers.
Appropriate to their social position, the DeKovens chose to build their New York house on the newly developing, elegant street of Park Avenue. To design their new residence, they selected one of America's leading architects and a designer popular in society circles, John Russell Pope.

**John Russell Pope (1874-1937)**

The son of a portrait painter and member of the National Academy of Design, John Russell Pope began his architectural education by working in the offices of McKim, Mead & White for several years, becoming a protege of Charles F. McKim. He then attended Columbia University where he studied under Professor William R. Ware. Upon his graduation, Pope won two prizes: one was a scholarship for the American Academy in Rome and one for travel. He spent two years in Italy and Greece, studying and drawing the classical monuments, and then attended the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, completing this course in two years. After Pope returned to New York in 1900, he worked for Bruce Price before starting his own practice in 1903.

During the almost 40 years of his professional career, Pope became one of the foremost architects in America, designing a multitude of buildings in a wide variety of styles. His early work focused mainly on residences, often for wealthy and discriminating clients. He designed huge estates on Long Island and at Newport, Rhode Island as well as city homes in New York and Washington, D.C., among other places. Later in his career, he was responsible for a host of institutional and monumental edifices, including the Temple of the Scottish Rite, the National Archives Building, the National Gallery of Art and the Jefferson Memorial, all in Washington. In New York he designed the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial at the American Museum of Natural History and converted the Frick mansion into an art museum. He drew plans for several American universities, including Yale, Dartmouth and Johns Hopkins. Abroad, his work is represented by the Duveen Wing of the British Museum, an addition to the Tate Gallery in London and a large monument at Montfaucon, France.

For this huge body of work, Pope drew on many sources, but due to his early, thorough training, many of his designs, especially the large scale, monumental work was done using classical forms. The influence of Charles McKim has been cited as being of particular importance to Pope, appearing in "the mixture of French and Italian ingredients" in his training, in his "sense for purely formal architectural values," and in "the nice feeling for what is essential and imitable in old Italian and French models."19

Like so many architects of the period, Pope worked in a variety of historically-inspired styles, especially in his residential designs. His model was French in the country homes for W. L. Stowe at Roslyn, N.Y. and for Henry Barton Jacobs in Newport, Rhode Island. He could adapt the French effect to a city building as well, as in the New York residence of Mr. Storrs Wells (now demolished) and the house for Mrs. Graham Fair Vanderbilt.20 Much of his later, monumental work had a decidedly Italian cast, as did many of the homes he designed, such as the McLean house in Washington, D.C. The the Hitt house, also in Washington, was inspired by
buildings of the eighteenth century, in the manner of Robert Adam. For Allan Lehman's sprawling country estate in Tarrytown, N.Y., Pope employed a Tudor style, but he used another rural English variation for the farmhouse of Mr. O. H. P. Belmont, on Long Island. In a monograph on Pope's work, Royal Cortissoz notes that style was not vitally important to Pope:

...every building of his is a living organism having a physiognomy, the character of which is determined not only by an historic style but by an underlying creative power.21

In this respect Pope was a practitioner, albeit an exceptionally talented one, of the eclectic revivalism which dominated American architecture during the early years of this century. The eclecticism of this period has been defined as:

an affair of taking up forms of proven and mature beauty from the formal and the vernacular architectures of the past and adapting them, learnedly but with personal touches, to modern building programs.22

Architects of this period knew about historical styles as no one had before them, through easier travel and a proliferation of books and journals on the subject. They consciously strove for a correctness of style, adapted to modern needs as well as building methods, but always linked to the "appropriate" symbolism for the building and the client. This was a comfortable manner of building, since generally everyone was familiar with the particular forms, they had their own associative value, and they could be beautiful if they were handled well, by someone with talent. And at that time, the idea of adapting sound traditions to present American needs was considered just as modern as as any other mode of thought.23

The House at 1025 Park Avenue

While Pope's early and thorough training may have led him to a personal preference for the classical styles, he was clearly able to adapt himself to the stylistic wishes of his clients. In an article about the Tudor-style, Allan S. Lehman house mentioned above, it was noted that, from the beginning, Lehman had a "decided inclination to the Early English."24 The English influence is also seen occasionally in other examples of Pope's work, such as the large Elizabethan mansion he designed for Stuart Duncan in Newport, as well as in his designs for buildings on the Yale University campus.

In the case of the house at 1025 Park, the choice of the Jacobean style was again indicated by Pope's clients. Anna DeKoven noted her fondness for early English design in her book when she described the first house she and her husband built in Chicago.

With the preference I have always had for sixteenth-century English architecture it was built with some originality on a twenty-five-foot lot, with the entrance floor designed as a high ceilinged hall, with a deep
could afford in those days, but the window on the street had diamond-paned heraldic glass, and in the paneled dining room with steps leading up from the hall, portraits were set and the wall with the door opening on the landing was also glazed and illuminated. 25

This same preference for early English design was also carried out later in their second house on Park Avenue. This time however, it was done in a much more expansive scale, on a 60-foot wide lot.

This use of the Jacobean Revival (also called the Jacobethan Revival) style 26 in an urban dwelling is unusual, however. In America, this style was more likely to be found on a large country estate following the example of the large English mansions from which it originally derived, such as Hardwick Hall (1590-97), Charlton House (1607-12), and Hatfield House (1608-12). Beginning in the 1880s, ideas from these buildings (and others) were reinterpreted by a number of British architects, including Norman Shaw, Francis Godwin and Philip Webb. 27 Although seen in scattered instances before this, the style was most often used in America beginning in the 1890s as an alternative to the more sombre and restrained classical revivals.

The Jacobean Revival is typified by the use of brick with contrasting stone window enframements, parapets, and ornamental details, semi-hexagonal bay windows with casement windows of leaded glass and stone mullions and transoms, and round-arched doorways. The rooflines are quite varied and were often enlivened by steeply pitched gables, towers and numerous chimneys, often grouped in rows. Many of these features have been incorporated in the DeKoven house.

In New York, this style was rarely used on buildings of this period, prompting an observer to call the DeKoven's house "one of the most important and original houses in the city." 28 Others were not so sure of its propriety. When a house with a similar style appeared at No. 28 East 64th Street (now demolished), critics such as Montgomery Schuyler called it "entirely out of place." 29 While numerous Manhattan buildings show some similar details, often labeled as Tudor or Elizabethan or Jacobean, there were very few which incorporated the style as completely as the house at No. 1025 Park Avenue. The house at No. 107 East 70th Street 30 appears to be another rare example with enough of the characteristic elements to be truly classified as Jacobean Revival.

In addition to following the DeKovens' desires for the style of the house, Pope designed the building to accommodate their particular way of life, as well. During the winter of 1888-89, at their first house, the DeKovens "began to invite the various actors and actresses who played in Chicago." 31 Later, when they moved to New York, in 1892, they invited "the leaders of the musical and the worldly world of New York." 32 They started their own tradition of inviting musical artists (both established and aspiring ones) to be their guests and to entertain the rest of the company as well. This was a practice they continued both in New York and during their residence in Washington. Living in rented houses, however, the DeKovens sometimes had difficulty finding a room large enough to accommodate these musical entertainments. Thus when they finally built their house on Park Avenue, its large, double-height front room was
specifically designed for such parties. This music room, which also served as a ballroom when necessary, was fitted with a plaster ceiling copied from Haddon Hall and a minstrel gallery with carved trellis work reproduced from Hatfield House, as well as stone doorways and a massive carved chimney piece. On the exterior, this grand room was indicated by double-height bays of small-paned casement windows, highlighted by heraldic designs in stained glass.

On the last day of 1912, which was just days after they moved in, the DeKovens hosted a musical party featuring Madame Sembrich and Ernest Schelling, popular musical artists of the period. In her book, Anna DeKoven remarked on the wonderful acoustics of the paneled walls, even without draperies. And later in the winter they entertained with a huge Elizabethan costume ball which filled the seventeenth-century style room with appropriately clad dancers.

Description

The DeKoven house is a brick- and stone-faced residence located on a sixty-foot wide, midblock lot on Park Avenue. The building is composed of four main stories topped by a balustrade, behind which an attic and penthouse are recessed. (The second and third stories were originally one double-height parlor floor.) Only the front facade, not including the attic and penthouse, is visible from the street.

The ground floor, faced in ashlar limestone, is symmetrically arranged around a large, round-arched entrance. This entrance arch is framed by a series of moldings crowned by a volute. Carved stone lion heads are located in the spandrels above the opening while black metal lanterns, which are not original, flank it. Within the archway, the door, painted black, is also not original to the building.

A series of classical elements surrounds the door, creating the effect of a modern Greek portico. To each side of the entrance is an engaged Doric column, with an engaged pilaster to the outside of that. Between the two, the wall is pierced by a deeply set, narrow window with decorative leaded glass. An entablature with a frieze of triglyphs and metopes crowns this part of the composition. This entablature continues across the front of the building making the lower floors distinct from the rest, but to each side of the central area, the frieze is of plain stone.

On each side of this central entrance section is a large, semi-hexagonal bay composed of six narrow windows set in deep stone reveals. Stone transoms subdivide the windows, and small-paned, leaded glass fills the casements. These bays form the dominant feature of the facade as they continue up through the next two stories and are topped by decorative stone balustrades at the fourth floor level. The fenestration pattern of the second and third floors is very similar to that of the first floor with six narrow windows. Since this was originally a single story, each window is divided through its height into two smaller sections above a taller section, with the middle window enhanced by colorful heraldic emblems in the glass.

The area between the bays on the second and third floors is now
The area between the bays on the second and third floors is now faced with ashlar limestone. Two rows of three modern, double-hung windows are evenly arranged in this area, which was originally occupied by a carved stone niche set within a brick-faced wall. The original limestone balcony, adorned by a carved heraldic shield runs in front of the modern windows at the second floor line, joining the two bays at their outermost dimensions.

The fourth story is composed of three bays, each containing three rectangular casement windows with stone surrounds, separated by two plain, narrow window openings. A plain stone frieze and simple cornice finish this section of the building and are topped by a parapet formed of alternating sections of plain brick and stone balusters. The attic and penthouse (which cover only part of the building) are recessed behind the parapet and are not visible from the street.

Each corner of this facade is finished with stone quoins. Just to the inside of each corner a drainpipe is attached to the brick facing by decorative brackets. At the second story level on each side, the pipe has been routed around an added narrow window. At ground level, near the northern corner of the facade, is a small service door.

Conclusion

Built for the well-known composer Reginald DeKoven, and his wife Anna, as their residence, and as a setting for their extensive social life, the house at 1025 Park Avenue serves as a reminder of that period in the history of Park Avenue when New York's socially elite were lining the broad boulevard with grand mansions and elegant apartment houses. This house is one of the very few of these individual homes remaining on the street today. The uniqueness of this building is further enhanced by its unusual Jacobean Revival style and the renown of its architect, John Russell Pope, designer of many of America's most famous monuments as well as numerous homes and estates for well-to-do individuals.

Notes


2. Examples of nineteenth century rowhouse and tenement buildings still extant on Park Avenue include: No. 591 Park Avenue, No. 813 Park Avenue, and No. 890 Park Avenue. An institutional building from this same period is the Seventh Regiment Armory. See the Upper East Side Historic District Designation Report, 1065-1148.


5. "The Rebuilding of Park Avenue" in Real Estate Record and Guide,
(December 4, 1909), 991.


11. Ibid., 934.


16. Anna Farwell DeKoven was a creative person in her own right as an author, producing a wide variety of works, including a well-known biography of John Paul Jones. Early in her career she wrote novels such as By the Waters of Babylon, and A Sawdust Doll. An historical work, Les Comtes de Gruyere appeared first in French and later in English. She wrote a small text book, A Primer of Citizenship for use in classrooms. Her autobiographical A Musician and His Wife recounts in great detail her full and varied life with her prominent husband. Her biography can be found in Who Was Who Among North American Authors, 1921-1939, 1 (Detroit, Mich.: Gale Research Co., 1976), 415.

17. A Musician and His Wife, 54-55.


20. Located at 60 East 93rd Street, now a designated New York City Landmark.

21. Cortissoz, 1, introduction.


30. Located within the Upper East Side Historic District.


32. Ibid., 168-69.


34. *A Musician and His Wife*, 219-220.
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 1025 Park Avenue 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 house at 1025 Park Avenue was built for Reginald DeKoven who was a popular musical composer and writer, known for such works as the song, "O Promise Me," and his wife, author Anna Farwell DeKoven, and that they were active members of New York's social and artistic circles; that the house was designed by John Russell Pope, one of America's foremost architects, who was responsible for many national monuments, as well as numerous homes for wealthy clients; that Pope worked competently in a variety of historically-based styles, depending on the type of building and the preferences of the client, in accordance with the accepted eclectic design theories of the period; that the Jacobean Revival style seen in this house was not usually applied to urban dwellings; that the choice of this particular style was the result of the DeKovens own preference for early English design; that the building's design successfully incorporated the special needs of the clients; that this house serves as a reminder of that period of development of Park Avenue when it was becoming the grand and elegant boulevard it is today; and that this is one of the very few private houses built during this period which still remain today.

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 1025 Park Avenue House, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1514, Lot 3, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.
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Built 1911-12
John Russell Pope, architect

1025 PARK AVENUE HOUSE
Borough of Manhattan

Photo by Carl Forster, 1986
1025 PARK AVENUE HOUSE
Front entrance detail