

21 Tier Street House, 21 Tier Street, The Bronx.
Built 1896; Samuel H. Booth, builder.

Landmark Site: Borough of the Bronx Tax Map Block 5633, Lot 36.

On April 25, 2000, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of 21 Tier Street 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 people spoke in favor of designation: the building's owner and representatives of the Bronx Landmarks Task Force and the Historic Districts Council. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

Summary

The building at 21 Tier Street was constructed on City Island, the Bronx, in 1896 as a summer home for the politician and real estate investor Lawrence Delmour and his wife Mary Delmour. The building was designed by Samuel H. Booth, a local builder whose office was on City Island. The structure is a rare surviving example of the Shingle style, an important American architectural style that was never popular in New York City and has become even rarer as former suburban areas and seaside resorts have been redeveloped. Facing the Eastchester Bay, the house at 21 Tier Street is a quintessential Shingle style waterfront residence. It features shingled surfaces, horizontal lines interrupted by the towers of the building and porch, interlocking geometrical forms, and an expansive porch, all elements of the Shingle style. The house is still used as a single-family residence.



DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

History of City Island

Located just south of Pelham Bay Park in Long Island Sound, City Island was originally called Magnets, or Great Minnefords, Island. The name was changed to City Island in 1761 when Benjamin Palmer purchased the land for a syndicate whose intention was to transform the island into a commercial center that would rival Manhattan.¹ To provide a proper setting for his city, Palmer laid out streets, building lots and allocated space for a public square.² The plan was interrupted by the Revolutionary War, revived in the 1790s, but ultimately failed to materialize. City Island was annexed by New York City in 1895.³ Limited access to the island discouraged dense development, and as a result, the urban development was slow and the island has retained its small-town atmosphere. In 1901, City Island Bridge was opened, which still provides the only ground route to the island.

Water has traditionally provided access to the island and the basis of its economy. The first successful businesses were based on salt and oysters harvested from the sound. During the mid-nineteenth century Orrin Fordham revolutionized the oyster business when he deliberately planted oyster shells for seeding on the east side of City Island.⁴ Oystering grew to dominate the economy of City Island, and the lucrative oyster-planting business brought prosperity and settlers to the island. But, by 1895, competition and water pollution ended the island's oyster business.

City Islanders also profited by servicing, supplying and building ships, which supported the island's economy throughout most of the twentieth century. There were many small yards serving the oyster boats throughout the nineteenth century but the first commercial shipyard, D. Carll Shipyard, was established in 1862.⁵ After the Civil War, the Carll yard became known for the construction and rebuilding of large luxury yachts. Capitalizing on the Carll shipyard's success, other commercial boatyards were soon established resulting in the construction of numerous luxury and racing yachts including a number of America's Cup winners. The federal government also commissioned vessels from the City Island boatyards during both world wars. After World War II, the leisure-boating industry rose to prominence.

Numerous yacht clubs, marinas and popular seafood restaurants continue to play a role in the island's economy. In the late nineteenth century City Island became known as a resort and still attracts weekend tourists.

Lawrence and Mary Delmour and Samuel H. Booth

In July 1896, Mary Delmour (1860-1902) contracted Samuel H. Booth⁶ to build the house at 21 Tier Street as a summer home for her and her husband, Lawrence Delmour (1840-1907), on land she had purchased the month before.⁷ Booth was a builder whose office was on Centre Avenue in City Island.⁸ Mary Delmour's obituary lists her as "being one of the shrewdest women real estate operators in the city."⁹

Lawrence Delmour was an Irish immigrant active in New York City politics and the real estate market. He was nicknamed 'Whispering Larry' because he spoke so softly "that only those within a few feet of him could hear what he was saying" as well as "his ability to keep secrets."¹⁰ He was "the closest man to [Richard] Croker,"¹¹ who was the leader of Tammany Hall from 1884-1903. Delmour became leader of the Thirtieth Assembly District in the mid-1890s, after being the city's Collector of Taxes and Under Sheriff.¹² He left politics after Croker left office.

Delmour built a large fortune based on real estate, an interest he shared with his first wife, Mary. In 1905, three years after Mary's death, Delmour married Jean Walsh, a young nurse, who survived him. The present owner reports that the house was inherited by the Delmours' daughter in 1940.¹³

The Shingle Style and the Design of 21 Tier Street¹⁴

The Shingle style evolved out of an increased interest in seventeenth and eighteenth century American architecture during the 1870s. Architect Charles Follen McKim began to study and document American colonial buildings during this period culminating in an 1877 sketching trip to New England coastal towns with architects William Bigelow, William Rutherford Mead and Stanford White. The architects sketched many colonial buildings clad with shingles. The first Shingle style buildings in American architecture are frequently identified as McKim, Mead & White's 1879 Casino in Newport, Rhode Island, and William Ralph Emerson's 1879 country house in Mt. Desert, Maine.¹⁵ The style was also derived from the English Queen Anne style but was adapted to American needs through the use of open planning, gambrel roofs, sweeping gables and porches. In its mature form, the Shingle style combined a variety of materials and details and drew from different styles.¹⁶ It became the preferred mode for domestic architecture, especially for elaborate summer homes and country cottages built throughout the 1880s and early 1890s. By 1893 the popularity of the style began to be eclipsed by the Classical Revival.¹⁷

Characterized by a complex footprint enclosed within a skin of shingles, Shingle Style houses were intended to blend into their natural settings through irregular massing and numerous openings leading to porches and grounds. Natural colors and textures of materials were used to emphasize harmony between a house and its site. Finally, a Richardsonian stone foundation was used to ease the transition between ground and structure. Shingle style houses also feature the functional placement of the fenestration, prominent roofs, chimneys and turrets.

The house at 21 Tier Street exhibits many of these characteristics. The roofline varies on each facade and a number of projections add a play of light and shadow to the surface. At the junction of the southern (front) and western (waterfront) facades, a two-story tower connects the lower part of the house with the upper part and contrasts with the horizontal emphasis of the porch roof. Complementing the tower, a circular projection within the porch makes the turn from the eastern end of the front facade to the side facade. One of the unusual features of the house is the curving upper portion of many of the window frames that enrich the rectangular window reveals and echo the curving forms found throughout the house. Another unusual Shingle style detail is found on the southern, northern and western facades--two rows of shingles bow out over windows. Throughout the building, window placement is dictated by the need to provide light to interior spaces rather than the desire for an alignment of exterior forms.

The Shingle style was never prevalent in New York City. Along with 21 Tier Street the few extant Shingle style houses include 9 Carroll Street, 115, 119, 125 and 131 St. Mark's Place, on Staten Island (in the St. George Historic District), and 1205 Beverly Road and 101 Rugby Road, in Brooklyn (in the Prospect Park South Historic District).

Later History

The style and waterfront setting of 21 Tier Street evoke the architecture of coastal New England villages. Consequently, producers selected it as a set for the 1962 movie, *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. In 1977, 21 Tier Street was purchased by the present owner.¹⁸ Today 21 Tier Street is a large, Shingle style, waterfront house that is mostly intact and is still used as a single-family residence.

Description

The house at 21 Tier is an elaborate three-story Shingle style house with Colonial Revival detailing. Uniformly covered in wooden shingles, the building sits

on a concrete and rubble foundation. The wooden wrap-around porch is supported by piers of the same material. This porch shades the entire first floor on the west and south facades as well as one-third of the east side. Each facade is individual, with the street (south) and water (west) facades being the most formal. The dark shingling contrasts against the white porch, eaves' trim, and window frames. The irregular roof line, a rounded bay that softens the corner where the west and south facades meet, and a rounded projection situated at the southeast corner of the porch are picturesque.

Site Features: The house is situated towards the back (east) side of a three-quarter acre lot. The southern side faces the street and the western side faces the water. Neighboring properties are located to the east.

Street/South Facade: The Tier Street facade is formal and impressive. It is divided into three bays. Slightly right of center, four wide wooden steps lead to the one-story porch that runs the length of this elevation and turns the corners at the western (left) and eastern (right) ends. At the western corner, the porch makes a ninety-degree turn. Marking the transition from the front of the house to the eastern side is a one-story circular projection with a conical roof to the right of the main staircase. Unlike the rectangular section of the porch to the left of the stairs, which is supported by concrete and rubble piers, the circular projection is supported by a concrete and rubble base. The porch floor, eaves, railing and columns are painted wood. Six narrow Tuscan columns support the porch roof and screen the planar surface of the first floor of the house. A simple balustrade of rectangular balusters stretches between the columns.

Immediately to the right of the stairs is the white-painted wooden frame of the main entrance with a non-historic aluminum storm door. Above the door is a rectangular, stained glass fanlight with a three-quarter length beveled-glass sidelight on the right side. The remainder of the sidelight is a blind wooden panel separated from the stained glass by a denticulated molding. The absence of a corresponding sidelight on the left side of the door is unusual.

To the left of the door is a window, also framed in painted wood, as are all the windows. Only the windows on the second floor of the west side have been recently replaced with one-over-one sash, the rest of the windows are historic with nonhistoric storm windows. At the western end of the street facade is a curved, two-story tower that rises through the porch and is capped with a tall conical roof. On the first floor the tower has one curved window. The tower's second floor window and two windows on the main portion of the second floor have the curved upper sash.

except for a central window that is set into a recessed trapezoidal opening. About six inches below the attic window is a curved projecting ledge that follows the curve of the tower and upper window sashes.

East Facade: The porch wraps around the corner from the south facade but only extends about one-third the length of the east side. A single Tuscan column is on this side. Much of the porch's original concrete and rubble base has been replaced by wooden boards while some portions have been repaired with solid concrete.

Above the foundation, the wall surface of the eastern facade is planar except for a three-sided oriel on the first floor. A second Colonial Revival denticulated molding is used under the oriel window's eaves. A stained glass oval window is located directly to the right of the porch on the first floor. The remainder of the fenestration on this facade is rectangular.

The second floor windows are asymmetrically-placed with a single window to the left and a double window to the right. On the third floor, there is one double-window centered under the single gable of the roof and a small half-moon window to the right of the double window. Above the windows on the second and third floors are two courses of shingles that bow out from the wall in a shallow segmental arch.

North Facade: This is the simplest of the facades. A non-historic addition projects from the center. The addition is capped by a gable and entered through a center door at the top of six stairs. It has one modern double window on the west side. The cellar is aligned with the windows in the third bay and has a slanting entrance covered with a bright white steel door. A half-grade basement window is in the first bay.

The projecting addition is flanked by two windows with two curved rows of shingles above the window frame. A chimney was removed from the eastern portion of the second floor and roof of this elevation. The east bay of the second floor is set back within a rectangular niche that is lit by a nine-pane window. At the western side a drain pipe runs from the roof to the ground level.

West/Water Facade: The west facade is divided into three uneven bays, each denoted in the roof line by a separate form. The two-story first bay is marked by a rectangular projection that is connected to the center gable by a sloping roof. The three-story center bay concludes in a single gable. The two-story third bay has the tall conical roof of the tower at the southern corner.

The porch screens the first floor of this facade. Its length almost matches that of the facade except for a narrow section on the northern end where seven steps

provide access to the path leading to Eastchester Bay. The stairs at this end of the house originally faced north, leading to the northern side of the yard. The stairs now face west toward the water. A non-historic double door with two side windows, originally a window, opens onto the porch.

Except for the central bay windows on the first and second floors the windows on the first and second floors do not align. Above the porch door is an enclosed rectangular space (a bathroom) with a white drain pipe extending along the edge between its north and west sides. Rectangular non-historic double windows are located on each side.

The central section has projecting bay windows on the first and second floors. Each light in the bay window has both the curved upper sill and the two rows of curving shingles above it. The bays have a single window on their lateral sides and double windows in the center. To accommodate the projection of the bay windows, a shallow dip occurs in the porch roof. Centered under the gabled roof of the bay is a rectangular attic window, horizontally positioned under its curving shingles but with a straight upper sill. Above the middle bay are the projecting eaves of the gable.

The tower denotes the transition from the western facade to the southern facade. On the western facade the tower has two windows on the first floor and one on the second. These windows follow the curve of the tower and also have the curving upper sill and two rows of shingles that bow out.

Roof: The varied roof line contributes to the picturesque quality of the house. At the corner of the southern and eastern elevation the conical roof of the porch projection relates to the tall conical roof of the tower at the southwestern corner of the house. Directly adjacent to and butting against the tall conical roof of the tower is the truncated left slope of a gambrel roof. The right slope of the gambrel roof is fully extended; a drain pipe runs along this eave and then extends to follow the window frame. The roof of the eastern elevation consists of a single gable. On the northern face, the roof line of the niche in the first bay is marked by a curved eave that flows from the hip roof covering the second and third bays. Slightly to the left of the middle gable in the western face, a tall brick chimney rises from the ridge of the gambrel roof.

Research by
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NOTES

1. Lloyd Ultan, "City Island," *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, Kenneth T. Jackson, ed. (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1995) 231.
2. Lockwood Barr, *Ancient Town of Pelham* (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, Inc., 1946), 82.
3. James C. Wells, et al, eds., *The Bronx and Its People 2* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., Inc., 1927), 806.
4. Alice Payne, *Tales of the Clamdiggers* (Floral Park, New York: Graphicopy Inc., 1969), 11.
5. Richard F. Welch, *An Island's Trade: Nineteenth-Century Shipbuilding on Long Island* (Mystic, Connecticut: Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc., 1993), 35.
6. *Real Estate Record and Guide*, July 18, 1896, 105.
7. *Real Estate Record and Guide*, June 27, 1896, 1112.
8. *Trow's New York City Directory* (New York: Trow Directory Printing and Bookbinding Company, 1897), 144.
9. "Death of Mrs. Delmour: The Tammany Politician's Wife Had Undergone an Operation for Cancer," *New York Times* (November 24, 1902), 5.
10. "Larry Delmour Dies of Pneumonia," *New York Times* (December 26, 1907), 7.
11. *Ibid.*, 7.
12. *Ibid.*, 7.
13. The daughter must have been a child from his second marriage since he and Mary had no children, Dolensek, 1, "Death of Mrs. Delmour," 5.
14. Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Prospect Park South Historic District Designation Report (LP-0979)* (N.Y.: City of New York, 1979); LPC, *St. George Historic District Staten Island (LP-1883)* (N.Y.: City of New York, 1994) report prepared by Gale Harris with Betsy Bradley, David Breiner, and Donald Presa; Leland Roth, *McKim, Mead & White, Architects* (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1983), 44-46.
15. Mark Girouard, *Sweetness and Light: The Queen Anne Movement 1860-1900* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Pr., 1977), 215. The general description of the Shingle style is mainly drawn from pages 215-23 of this book.
16. Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Edgehill Church of Spuyten Duyvill Designation Report*, (LP-1086) (N.Y.: City of New York, 1980), 3, report prepared by Andrew S. Dolkart.
17. William H. Jordy, *American Buildings and Their Architects: Progressive and Academic Ideals at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1976), 182-3.
18. Dolensek purchased the property from the Estate of Edgar P. Feeley. It is not clear how Feeley acquired property although it may have been in exchange for legal work Dolensek, 1.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of careful consideration of the history, architecture and other features of the building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the 21 Tier Street House, has a special character and a 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 21 Tier Street House was constructed on City Island, the Bronx, in 1896 as a summer home for the politician and real estate investor Lawrence Delmour and his wife Mary Delmour; that the building was designed by Samuel H. Booth, a local builder; that the structure is a rare surviving example of a Shingle style residence in New York City; that the Shingle style is an important American architectural style that was never prevalent in New York City and that it has become even rarer as former suburban areas and seaside resorts have been redeveloped; and that the building's Shingle style features include shingled surfaces, horizontal lines interrupted by the towers of the building and porch, interlocking geometrical forms, and an expansive porch.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the 21 Tier Street House, 21 Tier Street, Borough of the Bronx, and designates Borough of the Bronx Tax Map Block 5633, Lot 36 as its Landmark Site.



21 Tier Street House, The Bronx
West elevation

Photo: Carl Forster



Delmours Point, City Island, N.Y., aka 21 Tier Street House, circa 1905-1910
Source: City Island Historical Society



North and West Elevations
Photo: Carl Forster



West and South Elevations
Photo: Carl Forster



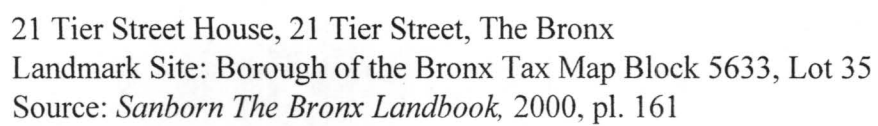
South and East Elevations
Photo: Carl Forster



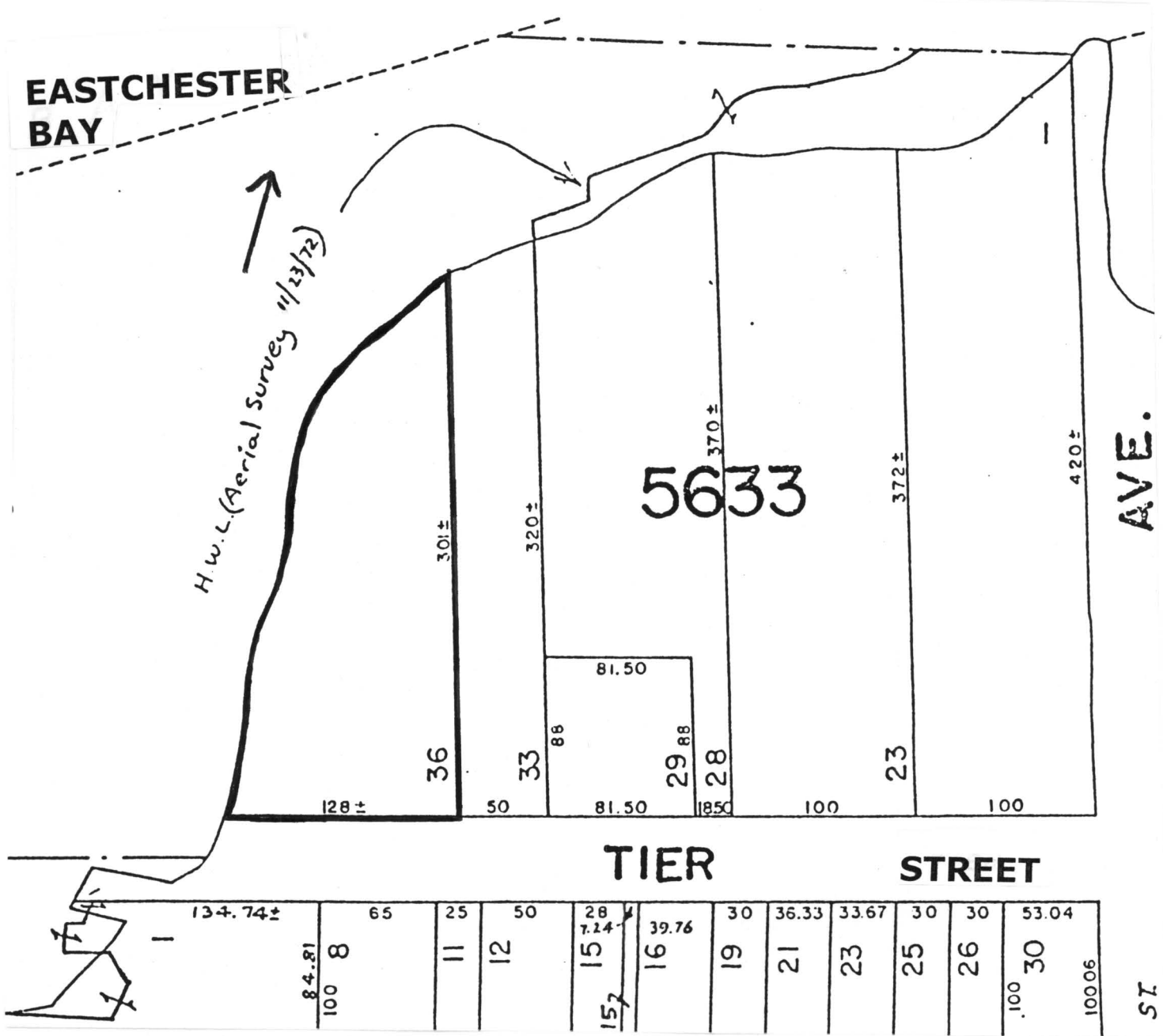
North and West Elevations
Photo: Carl Forster



Detail of South Elevation
Photo: Carl Forster



Source: *Sanborn The Bronx Landbook*, 2000, pl. 161



21 Tier Street House, 21 Tier Street, The Bronx
 Landmark Site: Borough of the Bronx Tax Map Block 5633, Lot 35
 Source: Dept. of Finance, City Surveyor, Tax Map