

EDWARD S. HARKNESS HOUSE, 1 East 75th Street, Borough of Manhattan. Began 1907, completed 1909; architects H. D. Hale and J. G. Rogers.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1390, Lot 1.

On November 10, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Edward S. Harkness House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 34). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Two witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

This imposing residence in the style of an Italian Renaissance palazzo is outstanding not only for excellence of design and beauty of execution but also for subtle richness of detail. Five stories high with basement and sub-basement, its dignity and quiet elegance are due in part to the large plain wall areas of Tennessee marble and the sparing but effective use of ornament.

Set back from the street the building is separated from it by a handsome iron fence, the main elevation on Seventy-fifth Street has seven bays while the Fifth Avenue elevation has but two. The ground floor stone work has grooved joints (rustication) with pseudo paired pilasters between the windows which are implied rather than stated as only the capitals are clearly defined. The three upper floors are of smooth (ashlar) stonework with corner stones (quoins) capped by an ornate frieze and cornice surmounted by a balustrade which conceals the top floor.

The center bay of the 75th Street facade forms the main entrance and consists of two free-standing Tuscan columns supporting a balustraded balcony. The height of the windows on the second floor clearly shows the location of the grand reception rooms here. These tall windows, with balustrades below and cornices carried on consoles above are made to appear even taller than they are by the introduction of wide decorated lintels set between the consoles. The second floor window of the center bay is surmounted by a broken pediment and has scrolls flanking the window frame. On the floor above there is a handsome little balcony with marble tracery. The third floor windows have simple lintels and cornices, by contrast and projecting sills that rest on bracket blocks.

On the fourth floor, the window sills are set in a decorative band that encircles the building. The tops of these almost square windows are crowned by the wide frieze of elaborately patterned foliage beneath the main roof cornice. The frieze rests directly on their lintels so that the small shields in the center of each window head overlap the carved decoration of the frieze. The rich ornament in the frieze is in higher relief than that of any of the other decorative stonework.

This residence, built in 1907, was designed by Hale & Rogers for Edward S. Harkness, a son of one of the six original partners of the Standard Oil Company. It remained Mr. Harkness's home until his death in 1940 and his widow continued to reside there until she died in 1950. Two years later it became the headquarters of the Commonwealth Fund, a philanthropic foundation established in 1918 by Mrs. Stephen V. Harkness, with the stated purpose "to do something for the welfare of mankind." The foundation is concerned with child guidance and health, medical research education and educational fellowships. No architectural changes have been made to the house except to convert the servants' rooms into offices.

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 Edward S. Harkness 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, Harkness House is one of the few remaining residences in New York designed in the style of an Italian Renaissance palazzo, that it is exceptionally distinguished in its architectural design, that the masonry and carved ornament are the work of fine craftsmen and that its quiet elegance and massive dignity are characteristics of a period in New York residential design which is almost forgotten.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 8-A 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 Edward S. Harkness House, 1 East 75th Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1390, Lot 1, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.