

317 WASHINGTON STREET HOUSE, Borough of Manhattan. Built by John McComb. Begun 1796, completed 1797; architect John McComb.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 142, Lot 1 in part, consisting of the land on which the described building is situated.

On December 27, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the 317 Washington Street House as a Landmark and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 42). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Nos. 315 and 317 Washington Street Houses have a special interest to New York City: both were designed and built by John McComb, the City's first native born architect. McComb, the leading designer of his day, was the architect of a wide variety of private and public buildings; the two most famous of those which still survive are the nationally famous Landmarks: City Hall, and Alexander Hamilton's country house, The Grange.

All of John McComb's town houses are gone, with the exception of these two on Washington Street. Number 317 was the architect's own house in which he lived during his earlier, very productive years. It is further noteworthy because it is one of the very few houses surviving in Manhattan which date back to the 18th Century: 1796. Number 315 replaced a McComb stable, and was built in the style of the earlier house in 1819. Both houses stood on what must have been a very pretty spot - in the cove on the south side of the little point, just 100 feet from the river.

The pair is built of brick, laid in Flemish bond, and though third stories have been added, and the ground floor was completely altered for commercial use, the two upper stories retain their original window openings and the splayed stone lintels, which once had keystones.

The land on which No. 317 Washington Street stands was originally part of the well-known farm of Annetje Jans. The dutch Director General, Van Twiller, had granted it in 1636 to her and her first husband, who were both Scandinavian born. On this farm of sixty-two acres extending between the present Chambers and Canal Streets, they constructed a building on a point at the then Hudson River shoreline between the present Harrison, Jay, and Washington and West Streets, in the block immediately northwest of No. 317 Washington Street. After the death of her husband, Annetje Jans married the minister of the province, Dominie Bogardus, and the farm became known as the Dominie's Bowery. Annetje's heirs sold it in 1671 to Col. Francis Lovelace, the English Governor of the province, but three years later he lost it to the crown in the satisfaction of a debt. Meanwhile the Dutch province had been granted by the English King to his brother, the Duke of York, who later became James II, King of England. He was succeeded on the throne by Queen Anne. Hence, Annetje Jans bowery came to be known successively as the Duke's Farm, the King's Farm, and the Queen's Farm.

In 1705 Queen Anne gave it by patent to Trinity Church. This portion of the farm was leased for ninety-nine years, in 1765, and became the site of Harison's Brewery: "the most commodious and complete of any in America." Philip Rhinelander bought the complex in 1793 and it then became known as Rhinelander's Brewery.

As the City grew in the early nineteenth century, the commercial activities of the Washington Market, located on a site to the south, expanded northward until, by the end of the nineteenth century, this entire area was wholly commercial, and there were no more than a handful of the original town houses left.

These houses, and their neighbors, show the craftsman-like attention to detail and scale - so pleasing to the eye - that is characteristic of the Federal style. Restoration of these two houses of John McComb would present very little design problem because original drawings of the owner-architect's plans for very similar town houses are on file at the New York Historical Society, and can be used as guides. When moved and restored, these houses will regain intact the characteristic late eighteenth century domestic scale which exists nowhere else in New York City.

317 WASHINGTON STREET HOUSE

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this house, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the 317 Washington Street House has a special character, special historic 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, 317 Washington Street is a fine early Federal house, that it makes a clear statement of refined proportion and harmony, and that, with the other eight houses in the area, it preserves a characteristic late eighteenth century domestic scale and profile unique in New York City.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of 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 the 317 Washington Street House, Borough of Manhattan, as a Landmark and designates as its Landmark Site that part of Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 142, Lot 1 which contains the land on which the described building is situated.