

331 WASHINGTON STREET HOUSE (William B. Nichols House), Borough of Manhattan, Completed 1828; architect unknown.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 182, 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 331 Washington Street House as a Landmark and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 46). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

This house is one of six Federal houses which compose a group that is unique in New York City. Nowhere else is there a survival of this many houses of this style - all of which retain their original pitched roofs and dormers. The fact that they wrap around a corner, showing a distinctive gable-end profile, also makes this group one-of-a-kind in the City today.

This two-and-one-half story house is constructed of Flemish bond brickwork. Though all of the original details on the ground floor were lost when these houses were converted to warehouse use, the upper stories retain most of their charming Federal character. The arched dormers are particularly rare in their condition, as are the paneled stone lintels above the original window openings. Of the three adjoining buildings facing Washington Street, only this one retains its original, hand-carved fascia board with egg and dart molding at the cornice. Handsome paneled blocks have been set at the front ends of the party walls, which extend up through the roof, to conceal the coping - which acted as a fire-break.

These houses were built for specific owners, already in possession of the property: they were not speculator's houses, as were so many of the period. Most of the original owners were master craftsmen or prosperous business men, and 331 Washington Street was built in 1828 for William B. Nichols. This house and its neighbors show the craftsman-like attention to detail and scale - so pleasing to the eye - that is characteristic of the Federal Style.

When these houses were built, they were refreshingly close to the river. The land on which 331 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, Washington and West Streets, in the block immediately west of 331 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 also the site of Harison's Brewery: "the most commodious and complete of any in America." Philip Rhinelander bought the complex in 1793 and the Brewery then became known as Rhinelander's.

After the death of William Rhinelander, the property was sold in 1827 by the executors of his estate. 331 Washington Street was built in 1828 as were the two matching houses at Nos. 327 and 329 Washington Street.

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.

331 WASHINGTON STREET HOUSE

After restoration, this house, as part of the larger group of nine houses, will retain intact the characteristic late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century scale and profile which exist nowhere else in New York City.

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 331 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, 331 Washington Street is a fine early Federal house, that it makes a clear statement of refined proportion and harmony, and that, with eight other 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 as a Landmark the 331 Washington Street House, Borough of Manhattan and designates as its Landmark Site that part of Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 182, Lot 1 which contains the land on which the described building is situated.