

Landmarks Preservation Commission
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LP-0597

THE OLD GROLIER CLUB (now the Gilbert Kiamie House), 29 East 32nd Street, Borough of Manhattan. Completed 1890; architect Charles W. Romeyn.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 862, Lot 25.

On April 28, 1970, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Old Grolier Club (now the Gilbert Kiamie House) and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 11). At that time one witness spoke in favor of designation. The hearing was duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. The owner has indicated to the Commission that he is in favor of the proposed designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Old Grolier Club (now the Gilbert Kiamie House) is a good example of how attractive and interesting the conventional "twenty-five foot front" can be made in New York. Here, in designing this three-story clubhouse, Charles W. Romeyn chose the Romanesque Revival style. The design is masterful both in its restrained use of ornament and in its feeling for texture, where Roman brick and stone are skillfully juxtaposed throughout. This scheme reveals the architect's skill in the successful grouping of windows and in his bold handling of the arches.

He designed a first floor with two linked arches, one for the entrance and one for a window, and at the top floor he produced a rather typical but handsome row of windows with columns between, extending the width of the building, supporting a stone lintel with ornamented cap molding. It is at the second floor that he introduced a completely novel composition: an arched central window flanked by high, narrow windows with the central arched one slightly higher than those at the sides. A slim molded sill joins them at the base, and a richly ornamented but slender band course divides the two side windows cleanly at mid-height, while serving as bases for the spring of the arch of the window. Five concentric rings of headers form the arch, while contrast is further achieved by introducing a multiplicity of small panes into the arched window and clear single panes in the flanking, vertical windows on either side. The first floor arches display handsome carving, and the inner stone roll molding at the door is differentiated from that at the window in such manner that it lends importance to the doorway. Another refinement is observable in the returns at the sides of the front wall, using rounded brick. This makes it possible to return the roof cornice to the wall at the ends.

The Grolier Club was formed in 1884 for the literary study and promotion of the arts pertaining to the production of books; it was formally incorporated in 1888. The original clubhouse was completed in 1890 with a large lecture-exhibition hall at the first floor and a library at the third. From 1884 to 1890 the Club rented space at 64 Madison Avenue. The Club derives its name from the Sixteenth Century French bibliophile, Jean Grolier and continues its scholarly traditions today in its new uptown clubhouse at 47 East Sixtieth Street.

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 Old Grolier Club (now the Gilbert Kiamie 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 Old Grolier Club (now the Gilbert Kiamie House) was an exceptionally fine small clubhouse, that it was designed in a highly original version of the Romanesque Revival style and that it housed an exceptionally learned and distinguished membership.

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 Old Grolier Club (now the Gilbert Kiamie House), 29 East 32nd Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 862, Lot 25, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.