

CENTER FOR INTER-AMERICAN RELATIONS (formerly Percy R. Pyne House), 680 Park Avenue, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1909-11; architect McKim, Mead & White.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 1383, Lot 33.

On May 26, 1970, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Center for Inter-American Relations (formerly Percy R. Pyne House) and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 21). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. The representative of Community Board No. 8 and two other witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. The owner of the building has indicated to the Commission that it favors the proposed designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

This house is a part of that outstanding group of neo-Federal townhouses which extends along the west side of Park Avenue, between East 68th and 69th Streets, sometimes referred to as the "Pyne-Davison Blockfront" due to the uniform architectural quality of these houses.

No. 680 Park Avenue, formerly the handsome townhouse of Percy Rivington Pyne, occupies a conspicuous site at the northwest corner of East 68th Street and Park Avenue. It was designed in the neo-Federal style by the architectural firm of McKim, Mead & White, and built in 1909-11. Percy Pyne was a New York financier and philanthropist; he resided here until his death in 1929. The house was sold in 1947 to the Chinese Delegation to the United Nations which in turn sold it to the Soviet Mission to the United Nations.

In May 1964, the Soviet Mission moved to larger quarters and sold the building to a developer who began the following January to demolish it and two adjacent townhouses to make way for a 31-story apartment building. When this became known, and after interior demolition had proceeded for ten days, there was widespread public protest against the loss of the last remaining block on Park Avenue of uninterrupted townhouses of uniformly high architectural quality.

At this critical juncture, the Marquesa de Cuevas, a granddaughter of John D. Rockefeller, Sr., in a magnanimous gesture, later cited by the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, purchased the three almost doomed houses for \$2,000,000, and on January 4, 1966 presented 680 Park Avenue to the Center for Inter-American Relations, which occupies it today. The demolition contractor had not had time to damage the exteriors, but it took eighteen months before the up-rooted floors and missing items, such as fireplaces, were replaced and refurbished and the interiors made ready for occupancy.

The mansion has four windows along Park Avenue, and seven along East 68th Street. The first story is faced with rusticated limestone interrupted by square-headed double-hung windows, and the red brickwork, above the first story, is set in Flemish bond.

The main entrance, also facing Park Avenue, has a particularly handsome porch with a beautifully carved entablature supported by a pair of fluted Ionic columns. The roof of this porch is surmounted by a well designed wrought iron railing forming a balcony, access to which is achieved through a large double-hung window at the second floor. It was from this balcony that Soviet Premier Khrushchev harangued the press on September 21, 1960. A high wrought iron railing encloses the areaways on either side of the porch.

The square-headed second floor windows are set in shallow blind-arched bays crowned with console-type keystones. To emphasize the porch and the entrance below it, the wall inside the arched bay over the entrance, unlike the others, is faced with limestone instead of brick. All the windows have double-hung sash; those at the second floor are capped by splayed limestone lintels; on the third floor they have molded limestone enframements crowned by delicate projecting cornices resting on consoles. The central window on the third floor of the street side facade is emphasized by a segmental-arched broken pediment and there are rectangular stone panels set in above the flanking second floor windows below it.

A limestone belt course runs around the entire facade at the fourth floor window sill level. A projecting limestone cornice supports a parapet with a balustered section above each window. Behind this rises a steep gambrel roof covered with slate. Pedimented dormer windows provide light and air to the fifth floor attic.

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 Center for Inter-American Relations (formerly Percy R. Pyne 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 Center for Inter-American Relations, (formerly Percy R. Pyne House) is an outstanding example of neo-Federal architecture designed by the eminent firm of McKim, Mead & White, that its excellent proportions and handsome details are conspicuous at this prominent corner site, that the refinement of its design is apparent throughout, and that after having served as a residence it has taken on a new life, of international interest, having been used successively as a headquarters for the Chinese Delegation and later the Soviet Mission to the United Nations, and now as the Center of Inter-American Relations.

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 Center for Inter-American Relations (formerly Percy R. Pyne House), 680 Park Avenue, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1383, Lot 33, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.