Landmarks Preservation Commission
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LP-0749

290 STATE STREET HOUSE, Borough of Brooklyn, Built c. 1871.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 176, Lot 5.

On June 23, 1970 the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 290 State Street House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 62). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Twenty-six witnesses spoke in favor of historic preservation in the Boerum Hill neighborhood and for the creation of the Boerum Hill Historic District. There were no speakers in opposition to designation of the houses on State Street.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

No. 290 State Street was erected c. 1871 for real estate developer William Hobday as one of a row of four houses. They are good examples of builder's houses which were designed in the late Italianate style. William Blossfeld, a tailor, acquired the property in 1872 after Hobday defaulted on the mortgage payments.

These residences were part of the Boerum Hill community which had formed the original Town of Breuckelen founded in 1646 by Dutch colonists. It was incorporated into the larger City of Brooklyn in 1834. The development of Boerum Hill as an urban community began in the 1840s, and continued into the 1870s. Many of the houses which remain from this period incorporated Greek Revival and Italianate elements in the rowhouse design. These houses were built for merchants and professional people, many of whom worked in the Wall Street area or in the vicinity of the Fulton Street ferry.

All the land in this block had originally been part of the Jacob Van Brunt farm. He willed it to his daughter Jane, wife of Samuel T. Gerritsen, in 1824. State Street was originally known as Gerritsen Street. The Gerritsens and the Van Brunts, both old Dutch families, had long been interconnected by marriage, and had some of the largest landholdings in Kings County. Charles Hoyt and Russell Nevins, two Manhattan real estate developers with extensive interests in Brooklyn, acquired the properties on this block in 1833. Both Hoyt and Nevins had streets named after them to the east of this block. Much of this side of the street had already been developed by the time Hobday built Nos. 288-294 as an investment venture in 1871. Constructed only one or two years earlier than Nos. 289-299 across the street, the surviving three, Nos. 290-294 (No. 288 has been demolished), are a more modest adaptation of the late Italianate style to the middle class row house. These three houses have brick fronts with simple brownstone trim, instead of the more usual brownstone front. Even though architectural taste had already shifted away from the Italianate in Manhattan at this period, builders in Brooklyn continued to utilize this popular style for row houses. These simple, dignified residences have undergone few exterior alterations; consequently, they give a homeogeneous character to this section of the block.

No. 290 State Street stands near the southeast corner of Smith Street. The three-story red brick facade is separated from the brick basement by a wide brownstone bandcourse. The rectangular basement windows have ornamental iron grilles. The doorway, rising above a high stoop, has a projecting stone cornice slab supported on two plain brackets which may once have displayed carved ornament as at No. 294. The arched wood double doors with small quadrant lights at the top are embellished with beveled panels beneath the rectangular glass panes and the doors are enframed by slender engaged wood columns. The two full-height parlor floor windows are set with flush rectangular lintels, while each of the windows of the upper stories has a similar lintel and a stone sill. The roof cornice is the most ornate, as well as the most characteristically Italianate, element of the front. Foliate brackets with panels between them in the frieze support the modillioned and dentiled cornice.

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 290 State Street 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 290 State Street House is a fine example of the late Italianate style of architecture, that it forms part of a handsome group of three houses, that it contributes to the dignity of the street and that this house and its row add significantly to the overall character of the Boerum Hill community.

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 290 State Street House, Borough of Brooklyn and designates Tax Map Block 176, Lot 5, Borough of Brooklyn, as its Landmark Site.