Landmarks Preservation Commission
November 20, 1973, Number 21
LP-0764

320 STATE STREET HOUSE, Borough of Brooklyn. Built c. 1847

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 176, Lot 20.

On June 23, 1970, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 320 State Street House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 77). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the 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. 320 State Street was built as one of a pair with No. 318 about 1847, in the Greek Revival style, which was very popular for New York row houses in the 1830s and 1840s. John Nix, a partner in a Washington Market produce business with John Combes, acquired No. 320 in November 1846 for investment purposes. Combes acquired the adjoining lot, No. 318. The houses must have been built early in 1847. They were among the first constructed on the block front.

These residences were part of the Boerum Hill community which 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 row house 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 on 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.

The three-story brick front of No. 320 is separated from the basement by a broad stone bandcourse. The entranceway, placed above a high stoop, is capped by a low pediment, typical of the Greek Revival. The wood door, which is of a later period, is set beneath a rectangular transom. The vertical areas on each side of the door once contained sidelights, but the glass has been replaced by wood panels. Stone lintels with slightly projecting cap moldings top the windows. The roof cornice with its closely spaced brick dentils, and wide brick fascia is also typical of the Greek Revival.

The wrought-iron yard railings and the hand railings of the stoop are of a delicate nature with curvilinear ornament at the top of the hand railings and fretwork at the base of the yard railing, derived from Greek sources. The use of decorative wrought ironwork for railings became popular in New York City in the Federal period and continued in fashion in this area until mid-century. The craftmanship displays the skill of the local iron works.

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 320 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 320 State Street House is a fine example of the Greek Revival style of architecture, that it is one of a handsome pair of houses, that it contributes to the dignity of the street and that this house adds 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 320 State Street House, Borough of Brooklyn and designates Tax Map Block 176, Lot 20, Borough of Brooklyn, as its Landmark Site.