

17 EAST 70TH STREET HOUSE, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1909-11; architect Arthur C. Jackson.
Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1385, Lot 14.

On November 27, 1973, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 17 East 70th Street 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. Three witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The handsome house at 17 East 70th Street was built in 1909-11 and designed in the French Classical manner, one of the prominent styles during this period. The architect, Arthur C. Jackson was with the prominent New York City architectural firm of Heins and LaFarge when he designed this building; he was later noted for his public and commercial buildings in New York City.

The properties on this block were held by the Estate of James Lenox until 1907 when they were transferred to the New York Public Library--Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations. The Lenox Library which stood on this block was completed in 1875; in 1911 the collections were removed from the location on Fifth Avenue and 70th Street to the new New York Public Library building on Fifth Avenue at 42nd Street, and the Lenox Library building was subsequently replaced by the Henry Clay Frick mansion.

The Library began selling the properties on the north side of East 70th Street in 1909, and this new residence was among the first to be built on the block. Fifth Avenue and its side streets above 59th Street had already been well developed in the 1880s and 1890s, so for this land to remain open until 1909 was quite unusual. The wealthy New Yorkers who bought the lots commissioned houses for themselves, thus continuing a well-established residential trend in the development of this area. Alvin W. Krech purchased the lot for No. 17 in June 1909, and construction began on the house in October.

This five-story limestone residence was built in a style inspired by French Classicism. The rusticated ground floor is sheltered by a handsome projecting stone balcony supported on horizontally placed console brackets. The balcony has an imposing balustrade with paneled stone uprights separating the balusters. The center window on the second floor is crowned by a cornice slab supported on vertical scrolled and foliate console brackets set above paneled pilasters. The flanking windows are accentuated by handsome foliate keystones. Elegant wrought-iron grilles with curvilinear and swag motifs guard the bases of the third floor windows. The fourth floor windows are set off above a foliate bandcourse. The windows have "eared" enframements. This floor is crowned by a prominent modillioned cornice supporting a low stone balustrade with Classical urns at the ends. The balustrade sets off the copper-clad mansard roof to advantage at the fifth floor. Three gabled dormer windows appear at the roof which is crowned by a finely executed coved molding.

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 17 East 70th 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 17 East 70th Street House is a distinguished town house designed in the French Classical manner, that the rusticated ground floor and the balcony above it, with its boldly enframed central window, form a striking feature of the design, that the facade is further enlivened by many fine architectural details and that the house contributes to the dignified character of the fine row of town houses on this side of the street.

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 17 East 70th Street House, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1385, Lot 14, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.