

2876 RICHMOND TERRACE HOUSE, (Stephen D. Barnes House) Borough of Staten Island.
Built c. 1853.

Landmark Site: Borough of Staten Island, Tax Map Block 1211, Lot 87.

On May 11, 1976, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 2876 Richmond Terrace House (Stephen D. Barnes House) and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 5). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. One witness spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. The owners have given their approval of the designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The handsome residence at 2876 Richmond Terrace was built in c. 1853 for Stephen D. Barnes, an oysterman, and his wife Judith. This substantial brick house combines elements of the Italianate and Gothic Revival styles--both of which were popular at that date. Located in Mariners' Harbor, it is one of the very few surviving houses of the "Captains' Row" which once lined the Shore Road (now Richmond Terrace) facing the Kill van Kull and Newark Bay. These houses, many of which were in the Greek Revival style, were built in the 1840s and 1850s by the prosperous oystermen who anchored their boats on the shore opposite their homes.

In the early 1800s natural oyster beds were plentiful around the waters of Staten Island, but by the 1840s the beds were exhausted so oyster seed and immature oysters were brought from bays in Long Island and New Jersey as well as Norfolk Bay, Virginia, and Chesapeake Bay, Maryland, and planted in Prince's Bay on the south side of the island and in the Kill van Kull. As the trade developed, the small skiffs of the oystermen were replaced by sloops and schooners thus leading to the development of such auxiliary industries as ship building on the Island. During the Civil War the oyster trade flourished since oysters were not obtainable from the South. According to an account written in 1886, it was common to grow the oysters in Prince's Bay, then bring them in small quantities to the oyster floats in Mariners' Harbor where they could drink the fresher waters of the Hackensack and Passaic Rivers flowing into Newark Bay before they were harvested and sold at the foot of Charles and West 10th Streets in Manhattan. The oyster trade continued in Staten Island until about 1900 when the waters of the harbor became polluted from industrial waste, shipping, and sewage.

In contrast to the oyster trade along the shore of Mariners' Harbor, was Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, which opened in the 1880s at Frastina in the section between Union and Van Pelt Avenues just south of the Shore Road, very near the Barnes House. It was planned by Staten Island entrepreneur Frastus Wiman to encourage people to ride the Staten Island Railroad.

On May 1, 1853, Stephen D. Barnes purchased the property for his house from David Post who owned the adjacent land to the east. In the sale was included the beach property on the north side of the Shore Road which Barnes presumably found necessary for his oyster trade. In 1882 Barnes was granted the rights to the water lot in front of his property by the State of New York. Also in that year the property and the house were transferred to Judith Barnes. Following the death of Judith Barnes, the property came under litigation. It passed into the hands of William Wheeler at public auction in 1890, and he then transferred it to Jane Van Pelt Wheeler. Wheeler had run a saloon and boarding house at Shore Road and Ferry Street in Port Richmond in the early 1880s. He then established himself as the proprietor of a newstand at St. George which he eventually expanded into a larger news distribution business.

When built in 1853, Stephen D. Barnes' house contrasted greatly with the Greek Revival houses of his fellow oystermen along the Shore Road. Charles Gilbert Hine in Legends, Stories and Folklore of Old Staten Island (1925) notes that it is different in style from any other house along the entire North Shore.

This freestanding two and a half story brick house is basically Italianate in style. The white painted brick gives the geometrical simplicity of the cubical form of the house even greater clarity. The broad symmetrical facade has a central doorway with windows on each side. Paneled pilasters flank the doorway and support an arched transom enframed by rope molding which is a typical detail of the Italianate style. A curious decorative feature is a row of Gothic finials placed above the double doors. The square-headed windows at the first floor have ogee arches which are Gothic Revival in character. The spaces between these arches and the window enframements display stylized foliation executed in low relief. The muntins of the upper ogee-shaped sash are interlaced to follow the profile of the ogee arches. Stone lintels supported on small brackets have ball pendants. The open wood porch with its original decorative cast-iron railing extends out laterally to include the first floor windows thus giving the appearance of balconies.

At the second story the simple central window with segmental brick arch is enhanced by a handsome cast-iron balcony. The arches of the windows at each side are again outlined by rope moldings and are supported on stylized brackets. At the attic level just beneath the roof are a central pair of small arched windows sharing a common sill on brackets and bulls-eye windows at each side. The flat roof with its broad overhanging eaves is supported on exceptionally handsome paired vertical brackets on all four sides of the building. These brackets have stylized ornament in low relief on their sides--similar to that in the panels above the ogee window arches--and have stylized foliate terminations.

The windows at the sides and rear of the house have flat brick arches and plain granite sills. An interesting feature at the rear of the house is the Gothic Revival enclosure sheltering the back door. The front yard is still enclosed by its original cast and wrought-iron fence.

This handsome house, which is simple yet elegant in form, is enhanced by the ornamental detail of two styles which were popular in the 1850s--the Italianate and the Gothic Revival--combined in an interesting and harmonious manner. It is a rare survivor and a reminder of a once-important Staten Island industry which has now disappeared.

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 2876 Richmond Terrace House (Stephen D. Barnes 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 2876 Richmond Terrace House (Stephen D. Barnes House) is a handsome residence which, combining elements of the Italianate and Gothic Revival styles, is unique along the North Shore, that it was built in c.1853 for Stephen D. Barnes, an oysterman, that it is a rare surviving house of the "Captains' Row" along Richmond Terrace, and that it stands as a reminder of the oyster industry which once flourished on Staten Island.

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 2876 Richmond Terrace House, (Stephen D. Barnes House), Borough of Staten Island and designates Tax Map Block 1211, Lot 87, Borough of Staten Island, as its Landmark Site.