

Landmarks Preservation Commission  
July 28, 1981, Designation List 145  
LP-1083

H.F. SPAULDING HOUSE (Coachman's Residence), 4970 Independence Avenue, The Bronx.  
Architect: Charles W. Clinton, 1880.

Landmark Site: Borough of the Bronx Tax Map Block 5940, Lot 455.

On July 12, 1979, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the H.F. Spaulding House (Coachman's Residence) and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 12). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Two witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. Letters were received in favor of designation.

#### DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Few domestic building types have experienced as much popularity and longevity in America as the picturesque cottage, a simple, small, inexpensive dwelling type that was developed during the mid-19th century. Intended for rural locations, cottage architecture is seldom found in urban areas, and the H.F. Spaulding coachman's house at 4970 Independence Avenue in Riverdale, the Bronx, is one of only a few of the type known to exist in New York City. Its location, Riverdale, however, is not unexpected, as it was built in 1880 when the area was a private community of country estates. The Spaulding cottage also reflects the development in the 1870s of Stick Style architecture, which used crossed exterior sticks and brackets to express the underlying wood construction.

#### History

The frame house at 4970 Independence Avenue was designed as a coachman's residence for Parkside, the estate of Henry Foster Spaulding that is now part of Riverdale Country School. The coachman's house originally stood on the west side of Independence Avenue, but was moved across the street in 1909. First known as Palisade Avenue, Independence Avenue was opened as a carriage route in 1864 and was a logical location for a coachman's house.

Spaulding's estate was part of a planned, private community on the banks of the Hudson River overlooking the spectacular Palisades. In 1856 Spaulding headed a group of four New York businessmen in forming a residential park called The Park, Riverdale. Strict covenants protected the natural beauty of the area, and restricted the locations of outbuildings; five acres near the river, now part of Riverdale Park, were reserved for "ornamental

pleasure gardens and walks."<sup>1</sup> Handsome, imposing villas were soon constructed, including Spaulding's Parkside, William E. Dodge's Greyston, and Percy Pyne's stately Alderbrook, all of which stand today. Prominence, influence, and wealth were evidently the prerequisites for residence in the community. Henry Foster Spaulding himself ranked high among the city's successful businessmen, heading the woolens firm of Spaulding, Vail & Fuller, Co. (Walter Vail built an adjacent estate just east of Palisade Avenue) and later a commissions business called Spaulding, Hunt & Co. He was a director of many prominent concerns, active in community affairs, and a member of Tilden's committee to overthrow the notorious Tweed ring.<sup>2</sup>

The Park, Riverdale developed slowly and only a few villas were constructed in the late 1850s. Most, including Parkside, were designed by architect Thomas S. Wall.<sup>3</sup> Spaulding's coachman's house was designed by Charles W. Clinton in 1879, some fifteen years after the main house was completed. Charles W. Clinton (1838-1910) was one of the leading New York City architects at the turn of the century, responsible, by himself and with his partner William H. Russell, for scores of prominent skyscrapers, apartment houses, hotels, and townhouses. Clinton received his architectural training in the office of Richard Upjohn. After leaving Upjohn's employ in 1858 he established a short-lived partnership with Anthony B. MacDonald Jr., before opening an independent practice. Clinton was briefly associated with architect Edward Potter before establishing the noted partnership of Clinton & Russell in 1894. It was during his years of independent practice that the Spaulding House was designed. Through his association with Richard Upjohn, Clinton undoubtedly acquired a knowledge of the cottage mode, as both Upjohn and his son and partner R. M. Upjohn were masters of wood-frame design.

Strictly residential with no commercial center the Riverdale section retained its pastoral character for many decades, and some families stayed in the area for generations. After Spaulding's death in 1893, his house came into possession of Percy Pyne, Jr. Around 1900, the Spaulding estate was purchased and incorporated as the center section of the large George Walbridge Perkins estate known as Wave Hill.

In the 1930s, Mrs. Perkins donated the Spaulding House, Parkside, and its neighbor, Oaklawn, to the Riverdale Country School. The eastern portion of the original Spaulding property, with the coachman's house, remained part of Wave Hill. The coachman's house, originally situated near the present rose garden, was moved across the street in 1909 and remodeled in 1914. A smaller, simpler cottage, which also had been moved from Wave Hill proper in 1909, was attached to the coachman's house by a connecting addition in 1968. In spite of its removal to a new location and the subsequent alterations, the Spaulding coachman's house retains much of its original character and is a fine example of the picturesque cottage mode.

#### The Picturesque Cottage

When architect Alexander Jackson Davis, who published a cottage design in his 1837 Rural Residences, introduced the type to this country a decade after it had first appeared in English journals, he planted the seeds of a

long and healthy architectural tradition. The simple, functional cottage mode had taken firm hold by the 1840s, particularly in the northeast, and was to remain fashionable until the 1890s. Perhaps its most influential proponent was Alexander Jackson Downing (1815-1852), an associate of Davis.

A landscape architect, horticulturalist, self-taught architect, and prolific writer, Downing was one of the most authoritative tastemakers ever to reach the American public. His popular books, A Treatise on the Theory and Practise of Landscape Gardening (1841) and Cottage Residences (1842) presented the cottage briefly. The type was more fully explored in his 1850 work, The Architecture of Country Houses, where he distinguished it from the farmhouse and villa:

...not only should the cottage look like a cottage, but it should avoid all pretension of what it cannot honestly and faithfully be. And as its object is first utility, and then beauty, the useful should never be sacrificed to the ornamental, but the latter should be more obviously connected with, and grow out of the former, in a cottage than in the more elaborate dwelling.<sup>4</sup>

The picturesque cottage's principal characteristics--functional simplicity, convenient arrangement, and small size--were the reason for its immense success. Here, for the first time, was a house type specifically designed to meet the needs of the average working-class American. Cheap to build and humble in aspirations, the cottage was destined to become a national house type, clearly identified with the ideals of democratic American society.

The potential of the cottage type was recognized and exploited by Davis, Downing, and many others who published hundreds of architectural pattern books that had a tremendous impact on 19th-century American taste. Books such as Charles Dywer's The Economic Cottage Builder (1855), John Bullock's The American Cottage Builder (1854), and Downing's works, written for architects and local builders alike, boasted "homes for the People" and offered advice for simple living. Also included were building plans and recommendations for choosing the most economical building materials at hand.

Significantly, the most common primary building material was wood. In the 1840s, Downing had suggested board and batten as an inexpensive and natural exterior sheathing. This vertical cladding method simply expressed the underlying studs that composed the actual building frame. This concept of structural expressiveness was to be more fully realized in buildings designed in the Stick Style. This style combined the influence of the wooden domestic architecture of Switzerland and Japan with an interest in structure, in effect, to turn buildings inside out.

Ultimately, sticks were criss-crossed on house exteriors in an effort to express the structural framework. Designs became readily available through pattern books, such as those by G.E. Woodward including Woodward's Country Houses of 1865 and Woodward's Cottage and Farm Houses of 1867. The Stick

Style peaked in the late 1860s and 1870s, but died out in the east with the advent of the so-called Shingle Style in the 1880s.

#### Description

The main section of the two-and-one-half story Spaulding house is a charming example of cottage architecture. Although a one-story addition appears on the south side of the building, the north entrance facade retains its original character as do the other elevations above the level of the additions. Board-and-batten siding at the first story, crossed exterior sticks above, dormer windows with jigsaw ornament, chimneys, and the polychromed slate roof with overhanging bracketed eaves are typical and requisite features of the cottage mode. The compact, symmetrical massing with intersecting gables and bracketed entrance porch set beneath an overhanging gable, is also a standard design. An additional one-story contemporary extension with board-and-batten siding, slate roof and skylight effectively joins the eastern wing to the main residence. This eastern wing, originally the separate building moved from the Wave Hill estate, is itself a good example of the very simple cottages published in pattern books during the mid-19th century (see illustration). The board and batten siding, bracketed eaves, and simple porch used in this one-and-one-half story gabled structure, were the essential elements of these tiny, inexpensive dwellings.

The Spaulding coachman's house although designed by a prominent New York architect, Charles W. Clinton, remains within the builder's picturesque cottage tradition. Intended as a servant's dwelling, it is appropriately simple and unpretentious design, yet handsomely detailed and soundly constructed. The use of exterior stick work, reflecting the structural frame, demonstrates Clinton's interest in the 1870s Stick Style, and thereby makes this small house even more representative of its period.

FOOTNOTES

1. Ellen DeNooyer and Regina Kellerman, "The History of Wave Hill," unpublished manuscript, November, 1978, p.7.
2. National Cyclopaedia of American Biography, Vol. 5. (New York: James T. White Co., 1903), p. 265.
3. DeNooyer and Kellerman, p. 8.
4. A.J. Downing, The Architecture of Country House 2nd ed. (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1969), p. 44.

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## 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 H.F. Spaulding House (Coachman's Residence) 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 Spaulding house was built in 1880 as a coachman's house for Henry F. Spaulding's estate; that it is an excellent example of the picturesque cottage, which was an extremely popular architectural mode in the 19th century; that it was designed for a rural setting and therefore is a very rare residential building type in New York City; that although it belongs within the builder's pattern book tradition, it was designed by an eminent New York architect, Charles W. Clinton; that Clinton employed the cottage mode as an appropriate style for a servant's dwelling; that the house displays exterior stick work and is thus within the tradition of not only the cottage mode but the 1870s Stick Style.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21 (formerly 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 H.F. Spaulding House (Coachman's Residence), 4970 Independence Avenue, Borough of the Bronx and designates Tax Map Block 5940, Lot 455, Borough of the Bronx, as its Landmark Site.

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H.F. SPAULDING HOUSE  
(Coachman's Residence)  
4970 Independence Avenue

Photo: Landmarks Preservation  
Commission

Architect: Charles W. Clinton  
1880



(Cottage)