

ARTHUR HAMMERSTEIN HOUSE, 168-11 Powells Cove Boulevard, Borough of Queens. Built 1924; architect Dwight James Baum.

Landmark Site: Borough of Queens. Tax Map Block 4574, Lot 110.

On February 9, 1982, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Arthur Hammerstein House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 13). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Twenty-five witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were ten speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Arthur Hammerstein House, built in 1924, is a significant survivor of the period when the Beechhurst-Whitestone community on the north shore of Queens was a theatrical enclave. Designed by Dwight James Baum, an architect known for his suburban and country residences, the house is a handsome and carefully developed example of the neo-Tudor style. Built for theatrical producer Arthur Hammerstein, the house was named "Wild-flower" in honor of one of his most successful Broadway productions.

Arthur Hammerstein (1876-1955) today is less well known than either his father Oscar Hammerstein I or his nephew Oscar Hammerstein II, but still remains a significant figure in American theater. Oscar Hammerstein I, a German immigrant, began his career in the cigar manufacturing business in New York shortly after the Civil War, then branched out into Harlem real estate development in the 1880s. In 1871 he unsuccessfully co-produced his first opera season at the Stadt Theater, and in 1880 he built the Harlem Opera House for the production of operas in English. It was not until the 1890s that he ventured into theatrical production on a full-time basis, building his first Manhattan Opera House in 1892 on 34th Street, it later became Koster's & Bial's New Music Hall. He subsequently built the Olympia in 1895 on Broadway and 44th Street which began the move of theaters to Times Square and the Victoria in 1899 at 42nd Street and Seventh Avenue, which became a major vaudeville house. Two other theaters were also on 42nd Street, the Republic of 1900 and Lew Field's of 1904.

Arthur Hammerstein, Oscar's second son, influenced by his father's real estate ventures, received training in the building trades and established a business as a contractor. In 1904 Oscar commissioned Arthur to redecorate the interior of the Victoria. That same year Oscar was making plans to proceed with his long time dream of building "an opera house in which he would present his own company in his own productions,"¹ an enterprise which would be in direct competition with the Metropolitan Opera. Arthur was asked to build the opera house, which he did, and it opened on December 3, 1906, with Bellini's I Puritani. Moreover, Oscar pressed Arthur into service as his chief assistant, and they worked together as impresarios. Two years later, in 1908, Oscar expanded his opera ventures building the Philadelphia Opera House with Arthur serving as contractor. Meanwhile the competition with the Metropolitan was proving extremely costly, and the Hammerstein resources were severely strained. Arthur, who had no great love for opera, sought a solution which would save his father from ruin. In 1909 he began negotiations with Otto Kahn of the Metropolitan for a merger of the two companies. A \$1,250,000 settlement was reached in April 1910, and Oscar and Arthur were barred from opera production in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Boston until 1920.

Arthur was now free to begin an independent career as a producer of operettas and musical comedies. His first show (1910)² was Victor Hubert's Naughty Marietta, followed by Rudolf Friml's The Firefly in 1912. As a theatrical producer, Arthur Hammerstein brought 26 productions to the Broadway stage, working with such composers (in addition to Herbert and Friml) as George Gershwin, Jerome Kern, Sigmund Romberg, Herbert Stothart, and Vincent Youmans, and such lyricists as his nephew Oscar Hammerstein II and Otto Harbach. The younger Oscar Hammerstein had begun his theatrical career with Arthur in 1917, and his first two Broadway shows, Always You and Tickle Me, were both produced by Arthur Hammerstein in 1920. A major success for both was Wildflower (1923), in collaboration with Otto Harbach, Vincent Youmans, and Herbert Stothart. Arthur continued to produce many of Oscar II's shows throughout the 1920s.³

Upon the success of Wildflower which ran for one year and four months on Broadway and his marriage to the actress and film star Dorothy Dalton, Arthur Hammerstein purchased a large plot of land on Cryder's Point in the Beechhurst-Whitestone section of Queens to construct his residence which he called "Wildflower." By the 1920s Beechhurst had become a popular residential enclave for members of New York's theatrical community. The Whitestone Landing station of the Long Island Railroad provided ready commuting access to Manhattan, while the secluded location on Long Island Sound provided an exceptionally pleasant suburban setting. Among Hammerstein's neighbors were singer and actress Helen Kane, entertainer Harry Richman, movie producer Joseph Schenck, and magician Howard Thurston--only a few of the many entertainment figures associated with Beechhurst.

The architect of "Wildflower" was Dwight James Baum (1886-1939). Baum, born in Little Falls, New York, received his architectural training at Syracuse University, graduating in 1909. He opened his own office in New York City in 1914, establishing himself as a talented and versatile designer. Among his public and institutional buildings were several at Syracuse University, Syracuse Memorial Hospital, the Federal Post Office Building in Flushing, and the Westside Y.M.C.A. Building in Manhattan.

Baum is best known as a designer of suburban homes and country estates. In 1923, he received the Medal of Honor of the Architectural League of New York "for the simplicity and charm of his residential work."⁴ The geographic extent of his practice varied from a villa in Newport for Count Alphonso to John Ringling's mansion in Sarasota, Florida, but the majority of his residential commissions were in the New York City area, including many in Riverdale (where he built his own home and office) and Fieldstone. An eclectic architect, in the best sense of the word, Baum was adept in a wide variety of styles including variants of the Colonial, the Italian Renaissance, the French Classic, and the Tudor. Baum's design for the Christ Church parish house in Riverdale displays both Gothic and Tudor characteristics. Most of his residential clients appear to have preferred the Colonial-inspired⁵ styles, but some of Baum's most distinguished residential work was in other styles.

Matlack Price praised the Robert Law house ("Lawridge," Portchester, N.Y.) and the Hammerstein house "as definite contributions to the adapted Tudor house in America, outstanding examples, in fact, of a type by no means easy to grasp."⁶ Both houses were profusely illustrated in the 1927 monograph of Baum's work.⁷ Baum himself featured the Hammerstein house in his entries to the 1926 Annual Exhibition of the Architectural League.⁸

Examination of contemporary houses in New York City, as well as of contemporary architectural literature, reveals that the neo-Tudor style was used far less than various neo-Colonial styles and that the style was most commonly expressed through the use of applied half-timbering on stuccoed facades shadowed by gables. The Hammerstein house,

by contrast, is a much more fully developed example of the neo-Tudor style with its intricate brickwork, half-timbering, asymmetric massing, and picturesque silhouette and it is among the masterpieces of the style in New York City.⁹ Price notes that "the characteristics of Tudor architecture are by no means confined to form. Technique, the appreciation of materials and their values in color and texture together with a corresponding feeling for craftsmanship in fashioning and constructing are essential to any result that will come seriously under consideration as architectures."¹⁰

"Wildflower" on Cryder's Point is the only residence known to have been commissioned by Arthur Hammerstein and thus, has strong personal associations with the man. Given his background as a building contractor, Hammerstein must have taken a keen interest in the construction of the house.¹¹ In addition to naming it after one of his most successful shows, Hammerstein laid a tile inscription in the entrance hall which reads: "AH. Thys Hovse was Bvilt in the Yere of owre Lorde MCMXXIV." In addition, another personal note was added in the design of many of the windows. Designed and executed in lead by J. Scott Williams, they display characters in Shakespearean dress, some in the typical theatrical poses of actors and musicians. This is a specific reference to Hammerstein's theatrical career. Several of these designs were featured in the Architectural and Allied Arts Exposition sponsored by the American Institute of Architects and the Architectural League in 1925.¹²

An aerial photograph of the property taken in 1930¹³ indicated that the house was enlarged during Hammerstein's tenure. The compatibility of these first additions with the original suggests that Baum may have been responsible for them.

Unfortunately for Arthur Hammerstein, with the onset of the Depression he was forced to sell the house in 1930 in an effort to sustain the Hammerstein Theater (now the Ed Sullivan Theater), built in 1927 in memory of his father. Subsequently, the house served as the headquarters of the Clearview Yacht Club and as a restaurant. As the adjacent estates were sold off for development, the character of the surrounding area has changed from large suburban houses to apartment towers. The construction of the Throgs Neck Bridge in 1961 has linked the community with the Bronx and the expressway system and has added a dramatic new element to the view of Long Island Sound. Only the Hammerstein mansions survives as a reminder of the secluded theatrical enclave of the 1920s.

The appearance of the Hammerstein house shortly after its completion is well documented in the Baum monograph.¹⁴ The house was enlarged prior to 1930, and its exterior features survive largely intact from that date. A picturesquely massed two-and-a-half story brick structure, the house is sited close to the shoreline and originally had extensively landscaped grounds. Portions of the lawn area have been replaced by parking lots and an outdoor terrace. A section of beachfront and a pier still survive.

The house is composed of two sections, the main portion of the house to the north, linked to a garage and servants' wing to the south. The entrance facade on the west is dominated by a steep peaked tiled roof intersected by gables and pierced by chimneys. The center gable encompasses the entrance bay which features patterned brickwork, half-timbering, and a projecting oriel with multi-paned windows at the second story, and stucco and half-timbering within the peak of the gable. The use of half-timbering is one of the most characteristic features of the neo-Tudor style, and here, as elsewhere on the house, it is used very expressively. The entrance itself, originally set flush with the wall, has been remodeled, using the original stone enframingent, to create a vestibule. The entrance is flanked by two windows with multi-paned casements; all three openings have segmental pointed arches. The openings on the sides of the vestibule are similar, and the whole is enframed by a Tudor drip molding. To the

south, the brick wall is punctuated by irregularly placed windows with multi-paned casements, while the gabled end bay features a large arched opening. The wall now also incorporates several large ventilating ducts, which while unattractive, have only minimally disturbed the original fabric. To the north the brick wall terminates in another gabled end bay featuring a large window with a handsome brick arch at the first story, patterned brickwork and half-timbering at the second story, and stucco and half-timbering within the gable.

At the north side the elevation is dominated by a projecting two-story stone bay with segmental pointed arch openings and a crenellated parapet, added to the original house before 1930, and by a stuccoed and half-timbered gable. A one-story addition, also prior to 1930, projects below the gable. Constructed of brick it features large openings with stone arches.

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Like the entrance facade, the waterfront facade at the west features a steep peaked tile roof and picturesque gables and chimneys. One large gable and one small gable rise above segmental pointed arch openings at the first floor to the north. Both gables have stucco and half-timbering, while the large one also has patterned brickwork. The wall to the south of these gables incorporates a picturesque stepped gable supporting a double stack chimney. A handsome wooden balcony adorns one of the second story windows in this section. Another group of large and small gables also features patterned brickwork, stucco, and half-timbering and incorporates openings with multi-paned casements. The bay below the larger gable is bowed out. A wrought-iron lantern in this bay was originally placed over the entrance door. The arrangement and configuration of the gables and openings on this facade differ somewhat from the house as built but are prior to 1930.

Extending to the south from the main section of the house is the garage and servants' wing. These two sections were originally linked by an open brick arcade around a service court. This arcade was enclosed and enlarged prior to 1930 at the time that the garage and servants' wing was enlarged. The original garage, with servants' quarters on the top floor, had a brick base and a stuccoed and half-timbered upper story with casement windows intersecting the slope of the picturesque hipped tile roof. The garage still retains this essential form, but the garage doors have been removed and the openings filled in. The addition immediately to the south of this, which doubled the size of the garage, uses the same forms and materials as the original; a small shed-like section placed on the south face features half-timbered details. On the waterfront facade, major portions of the service wing are obscured by a one-story metal and glass terrace enclosure which also extends partially in front of the main portion of the house. While this enclosure is not compatible with the neo-Tudor design of the house, it has only minimally disturbed the significant architectural fabric where it has been attached to the house.

As one views the house today, one is impressed by the quality of craftsmanship, the excellence of materials, and the carefully worked details. They are a tribute to the attention that Hammerstein lavished on the house and Baum's fine design.

Report prepared by
Marjorie Pearson
Director of Research

Report typed by
Barbara Sklar

FOOTNOTES

1. Vincent Sheehan, Oscar Hammerstein I (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1956), p. 122.
2. Oscar Hammerstein I was officially listed as the producer but his biographer, Vincent Sheehan (p. 309), credits the show to Arthur.
3. These include: Dobby Dill (1922), Mary Jane McKane (1923), Rose Marie (1924), Song of the Flame (1925), The Wild Rose (1926), Golden Dawn (1927), Good Boy (1928), and Sweet Adeline (1928).
4. This quoted by Matlack Price in his introduction to The Work of Dwight James Baum, Architect (New York: William Helburn, Inc., 1927), n.p.
5. The vast majority of houses pictured in The Work of Dwight James Baum fall into this category.
6. Price's introduction to The Work of Dwight James Baum, "The English Type," n.p.
7. Ibid , pls. 100-138.
8. The Architectural League of New York: Index of Exhibits. Forty-First Annual Exhibition (Jan. 30 - Feb. 28, 1926), p. 5.
9. Among Baum's contemporaries only Grosvenor Atterbury equalled his work in New York City, particularly at Forest Hills Gardens. Another notable Queens example of a neo-Tudor style country house is the mansion at the foot of Mott Avenue in Far Rockaway built in 1907 by an unknown architect.
10. Price, op.cit., n.p.
11. Legend has it that Hammerstein himself assisted in the bricklaying and plastering, although that cannot be substantiated. In any case, his experience would have fostered the high level of craftsmanship evinced throughout.
12. Architectural and Allied Arts Exposition: Index of Exhibits. Fortieth Annual Exhibition (April 20 - May 2, 1925), p. 67.

13. Photo taken by Fairchild Aerial Survey, Inc.
14. The Work of Dwight James Baum, pls. 126-138.

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 Arthur Hammerstein 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 Arthur Hammerstein House is a significant survivor of the period when the Beechhurst-Whitestone community on the Queens north shore was a theatrical enclave; that the house was built for the noted theatrical producer Arthur Hammerstein and was named "Wildflower" in honor of his most successful Broadway productions; that the house is the only residence known to have been commissioned by Arthur Hammerstein and thus has strong personal associations with the man, reflected in its name, the date inscription, and the window designs; that the house was designed by Dwight James Baum, an architect known for his suburban and country residences; that the house is an elegant and carefully developed example of the neo-Tudor style; that the house is an excellent example of a style that is relatively rare in New York City; that the design features intricate brickwork, half-timbering, asymmetrical massing, and a picturesque silhouette; and that the house displays an impressive quality of craftsmanship, excellence of materials, and carefully worked details that are a tribute to the attention Hammerstein lavished on the house and Baum's fine design.

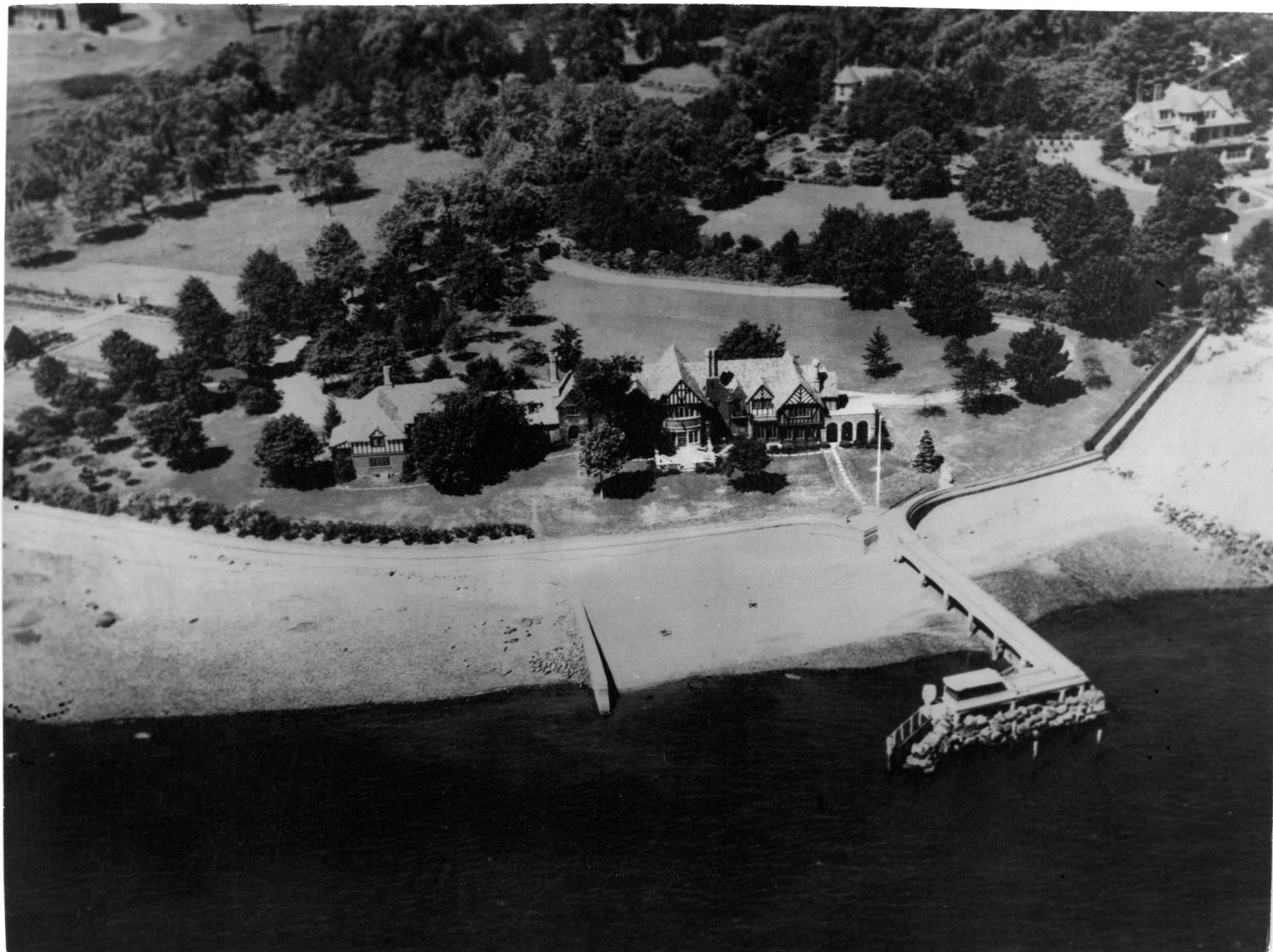
Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21 (formerly Chapter 63) of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Arthur Hammerstein House, Borough of Queens and designates Tax Map Block 4574, Lot 110, Borough of Queens, as its Landmark Site.

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ARTHUR HAMMERSTEIN RESIDENCE
168-11 Powells Cove Boulevard
Aerial View, 1930

Photo: Fairchild Aerial
Survey, Inc.

Architect: Dwight James Baum
Date: 1924



ARTHUR HAMMERSTEIN RESIDENCE
168-11 Powells Cove Boulevard

Photo: Carl Forster

Architect: Dwight James Baum
Date: 1924