

Landmarks Preservation Commission
February 10, 1987; Designation List 187
LP-1292

102-45 47th AVENUE HOUSE, Borough of Queens. Built c. 1871; architect unknown.

Landmark Site: Borough of Queens Tax Map Block 1981, Lot 37.

On April 13, 1982, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 102-45 47th Avenue House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 16). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Three witnesses spoke in favor of designation. No witnesses spoke in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Built for Edward E. Sanford about 1871, this small, two-story, frame house is one of the last intact 19th-century buildings remaining in what was the village of Newtown, one of the oldest settlements on western Long Island. Rendered in a modified Italianate style, the house is stylistically within an architectural tradition established in the second quarter of the 19th century for the design of suburban and rural cottages of a type often illustrated in builders' handbooks. The house retains most of its original fabric and is particularly notable for the decorative detailing of its porch, eaves, and property-line fence. These fancifully carved elements display the craftsmanship of 19th-century carpenters and builders, who, using simple techniques, could transform a humble, domestic structure into an architectural delight.

Development of Newtown

From its first settlement until 1898 with the Act of Incorporation of Greater New York, the boundaries of Queens County also included Nassau County. At the time of incorporation, only the three western townships of the county voted to become part of New York City: Jamaica, Flushing, and Newtown. Newtown, which borders the East River and lies closest to Manhattan, was first settled by the Dutch in 1640. About the middle of the 17th century, they were joined by a steady flow of New Englanders; however, population growth was slow. In 1790, the number of inhabitants of the township hovered at about 2,000. By 1850, there had only been an increase of 5,000 residents.¹

The town's economic base was agriculture, particularly the cultivation of vegetables and fruits for the people of Manhattan. This market expanded rapidly during the 1850s due to the exceptional growth taking place on Manhattan and in downtown Brooklyn. It was noted at the time that:

The introduction of turnpike roads, the establishment of daily stages and steamboat communication with the city of New York, have increased the facilities for travel and transportation of produce to a remarkable degree. 2

This growth, although interrupted by the Civil War, continued through the rest of the century, spurred on by the extension of railroads and street railways throughout the county. Real estate developers, recognizing the proximity of Newtown to Manhattan and Brooklyn, began buying parcels and tracts of farmland on the outskirts of the village. One of the earliest investors was Benjamin W. Hitchcock who owned the site of the Sanford house and the surrounding area, which he called the Village of West Flushing in 1854.³ Daniel Sanford Duncomb (1813-1883), a Manhattan merchant, began to invest in village real estate and, having acquired the present site of the 102-45 47th Avenue House, sold it to Edward R. Sanford in April 1871.⁴ The house that Sanford built and which remained in his family for over 100 years is one of the rare intact houses remaining from this period of suburbanization.

The Architecture of the Sanford House

It is unlikely that the house was designed by an architect or by the owner.⁵ The usual practice in suburban and rural areas was for a property owner to hire a builder, either a mason or a carpenter, to erect a house on his site. Since the vast majority of the houses of the period had similar floor plans and methods of construction, a practiced builder needed little outside aid. Builders' guidebooks, which gave practical advice on construction techniques to those in the building trade and often included plans for houses and architectural details, were widely used. A.J. Downing's, The Architecture of Country Houses, and Calvert Vaux's, Villas & Cottages, exemplify these very popular mid-19th-century handbooks. Moreover, architectural elements such as foliate brackets, window and entrance enframements, and wooden doors, sashes, and shutters were mass-produced and available at local lumberyards. Hence, it is quite likely that Sanford hired a local carpenter from the village to erect his new house, following the building traditions of the period.

Stylistically, the house is a vernacular or simplified version of the highly popular Italianate style. Architectural elements such as the square-headed windows and doors, the cap-molded lintels, and porch colonnettes are typical of the Italianate mode, while the carved details follow the picturesque tradition of country "Italian villas," once so much a part of America's rural and suburban landscape.

Description

The house, set back from the street behind a wooden fence of simulated balusters, occupies the western half of a 50' wide lot. It rises two-and-one-half stories with a gable roof, is three bays wide, and is sheathed in clapboards. Extending to the east of the house and set back from the facade is a two-bay wide, one-story extension. A porch, raised above ground level and tying the extension to the main house, shades the first story. The porch has seven squared colonnettes on thin plinths which are crowned by capitals that carry cut-out panels supporting the pitched roof. Between the colonnettes are parapet panels with punched-out, propeller-like

cuts that create balusters in silhouette. Along the edge of the porch roof is a cut-out skirt of exaggerated egg-and-dart design.

The two full-height parlor windows have two-over-four sash and cap-molded lintels. The transomed entrance also has a cap-molded lintel and double-leaf doors. Each leaf of the door has eight beaded panels, two of which are glazed. The three windows of the second floor have two-over-two sash and simple cap lintels. A bull's-eye window pierces the gable.

The western elevation of the house has a three-sided bay at the ground floor with square-headed windows above which is an architrave panel of cut-out diamonds.⁶ The double-hung windows have two-over-two sash and the egg-and-dart skirt trims the roof edge. Above the bay at the second floor are two square-headed windows with cap lintels. At the attic level, a gablet with a bull's-eye window pierces the roof and breaks the line of the eaves. To the north of the gablet is a brick chimney. A modified version of the egg-and-dart skirt extends around the roof at the eaves. The eastern elevation (the side with the one-story extension), has a square-headed window with a cap-molded lintel at the first floor. At the second floor of the main house there are no windows but, at the center, is a refaced chimney with metal venting stacks rising above the roof.

Conclusion

The Sanford house at 102-45 47th Avenue is an handsome, simple example of the Italianate mode embellished with fanciful wooden details that testify to the craftsmanship of 19th-century carpenters. The house is also an important reminder to the people of Queens and the entire city of that period in our history that marked the transformation of the landscape of the city from a rural, agrarian countryside to what would become one of the most densely populated urban areas in the Nation. The house evokes a time and place in our history, now so unusual in the city, that it is even more important to preserve it.

NOTES

1. James Riker, Jr., The Annals of Newtown in Queens County, New York, New York: D. Fanshaw, 1852, 258.
2. Ibid.
3. The current name for the neighborhood, Corona, came into common usage after a branch of the Post Office was opened in the community in 1882.
4. Queens County, Liber Deeds and Mortgages, Register's Office, Queens County, New York, Liber 345, Page 57, April 21, 1871.
5. The Buildings Department is where plans, drawings, etc. for new buildings are filed, and it is where information concerning the architect, owner, builder is usually found. However, the Queens Buildings Department was not established until after Incorporation in 1898. Therefore, there is no documentation concerning the architect of the house.
6. This diamond motif has been restored by the current owner to the architrave of the roof cornice as has the egg-and-dart skirt within the front gable. Elements of the property-line fence which had deteriorated with age, have also been restored.

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 102-45 47th Avenue 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 102-45 47th Avenue House is one of the rare intact houses from the 19th century remaining in the historic township of Newtown; that it is an handsome example of the vernacular Italianate style; that it is embellished with fanciful detailing that testifies to the craftsmanship of 19th-century carpenters; and that the house is an important reminder of that period in the development of the City that marked the transformation of our landscape from rural countryside to a densely populated urban area.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21, Section 534, 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 102-45 47th Avenue House, Borough of Queens and designates Tax Map Block 1981, Lot 37, Borough of Queens, as its Landmark Site.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Photo Credit: Carl Forster
Landmarks Preservation

102-45 47th Avenue
Corona, Queens

Built: c. 1871



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Photo Credit: Carl Forster
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102-45 47 Ave.
Corona, Queens
Main Entrance

Built: c. 1871



Photo Credit: Carl Forster
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102-45 47th Avenue
Corona, Queens
Front Gable

Built: c. 1871



Photo Credit: Carl Forster
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102-45 47th Avenue
Corona, Queens
Gablet
Western Elevation

Built: c. 1871