

Landmarks Preservation Commission  
December 22, 1981, Designation List 151  
LP-2012

PRATT INSTITUTE FACULTY ROWHOUSES comprised of 220-234 Willoughby Avenue, 171-185 Steuben Street, and 172-186 Emerson Place, Borough of Brooklyn. Built 1907; architect Hobart A. Walker.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 1922, Lot 1 in part consisting of the property bounded by the eastern curb line of Steuben Street, the southern curb line of Willoughby Avenue, the western curb line of Emerson Place, and the northern curb line of the private driveway extending between Steuben Street and Emerson Place.

On October 9, 1979, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Pratt Institute Faculty Rowhouses and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 11). 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 Pratt Institute Faculty Rowhouses are a cluster of 27 dwellings located at 220-234 Willoughby Avenue, 171-185 Steuben Street, and 172-186 Emerson Place. Built in 1907, they were designed in a Colonial Revival style by architect Hobart A. Walker. The houses, situated at the northeast corner of the Pratt Institute campus, were commissioned by the institute to meet its expanding needs.

Pratt Institute was founded by Charles Pratt for the training of artisans, foremen, designers, draftsmen, and other technicians. The school was an outgrowth of Pratt's interest in manual training and his belief that the best way to help others was to teach them how to help themselves. The type of technical training established at Pratt was unprecedented in the United States at that time.

Charles Pratt (1830-1891) was born in Watertown, Massachusetts. In 1851 he moved to New York City and worked for the firm of Schenck & Downing, dealers in paints and oils. He joined the firm of Reynolds, Devoe & Pratt, which manufactured and sold paint and related products in 1854. In 1867, Pratt established the firm of Charles Pratt & Co. with the intention of marketing a less flammable kerosene for lighting, one that would have a flashpoint of more than 100 degrees F. "Pratt's Astral Oil" gained a worldwide reputation, and the firm began to manufacture tools, cans, petroleum barrels, and similar products. The Pratt Manufacturing Co. was founded to produce sulphuric acids and other chemicals used in petroleum refining. Pratt's business interests were acquired by John D. Rockefeller of Standard Oil in 1874. At that time Pratt's refineries had a capacity of 1500 barrels of oil a day and were regarded as the most successful in the country. Pratt remained with the company and quickly became a major force at Standard Oil.

Pratt, whose philanthropic interests were wide ranging, not only founded the Pratt Institute and its Free Library but also endowed the Adelphi Academy in Brooklyn, Amherst College, and the University of Rochester. He built the Astral Apartments, a model tenement development in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, near his oil refineries, and gave \$100,000 towards the construction of Clinton Hill's Emmanuel Baptist Church, a designated New York City Landmark. Pratt had moved into the Clinton Hill area in the 1870s, building his large mansion at 252 Clinton Avenue in 1875. He also bestowed houses in the neighborhood as wedding presents for his sons, and all were

built on Clinton Avenue after Charles Pratt's death in 1891.

Pratt Institute opened on October 17, 1887, with a drawing class of twelve students. From these modest beginnings, the school rapidly expanded its departments, facilities and student body. Consequently, it was logical that the school should wish to provide residential accommodations for its staff on a site convenient to the campus, on land which Pratt Institute had purchased some fifteen years earlier. The commission for the houses was given to Hobart A. Walker.

Walker, a specialist in residential design, began his architectural practice in 1895. Other known commissions are the late Romanesque Revival carriage house (1903) for J. Henry Alexandre at 173 East 73rd Street, Manhattan; the Colonial Revival Ralph H. Wilson residence (1907) at 162 Argyle Road in the Prospect Park South Historic District in Brooklyn; and the neo-Jacobean William H. Burger residence (1902) at 443 Clinton Avenue in the Clinton Hill Historic District in Brooklyn. Walker's choice of a Colonial Revival style for the Pratt rowhouses is both characteristic of his work and reflects the popular taste in residential architecture of the period. While more commonly used in freestanding houses, here the style is used to successful effect in a rowhouse design.

The 27 rowhouses are clustered in three groups with the fronts of the houses facing the streets and the rears facing a center garden divided by two alleyways. Each house has a small front yard enclosed by an iron fence. Each row of two-and-one-half-story red brick houses has two alternating house types, one with a peaked stuccoed gable, the other with a stepped gable. Paired stoops lined by railings lead to entrances with paneled double doors.

Above the doors are windows with diamond-paned sash set below dentil courses and stone lintels. Adjacent to each entrance is a two story, three-sided window bay. Square panels are placed below the windows. The sash at the second floor level are diamond paned, and the bay is surmounted by a dentil course and molding. The use of such sash and window bays is characteristic of the Colonial Revival style. At the attic story the gables are set in front of sloping roofs. The stuccoed, peaked gables have paired windows outlined by wood framing. The stepped gables have paired windows set below common arched tympana with foliate panels. Such stepped gables are based on Dutch Colonial sources, and their use adds an especially picturesque note to the design. The side walls of the end houses in the rows are pierced by rectangular window openings which have diamond-paned sash at the second floor. The walls terminate in stepped parapets, echoing the form of the front gables, at the roofline. The rears of the houses are visible from the alleyways. Each has a small brick-faced two-story wing with a small entrance vestibule.

This picturesque group of houses is an excellent example of Colonial Revival design as adapted to rowhouse architecture. Designed by Hobart A. Walker, the houses are characteristic of his residential work. Built by the Pratt Institute to serve its expanding needs, the houses are still an important element of the Pratt Campus.

Report prepared by Marjorie Pearson  
Director of Research

Research by Louis DeLaura

Report typed by Barbara Sklar

## FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of these buildings, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Pratt Institute Faculty Rowhouses have 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 their important qualities, the Pratt Institute Faculty Rowhouses, built in 1907, are excellent examples of Colonial Revival design as adapted to rowhouse architecture; that the buildings were constructed for Pratt Institute, founded by Charles Pratt for the training of artisans, designers, and draftsmen; that the buildings contribute to the distinguished architectural character of the Pratt Institute Campus; that they are characteristic of the residential work of Hobart A. Walker; that among the picturesque features of the houses are the peaked and stepped roof gables and parapets and the two-story, three-sided window bays with diamond-paned sash; that the houses were built by Pratt Institute to serve its expanding needs; and that they are still an important element of the Pratt campus.

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 Pratt Institute Faculty Rowhouses comprised of 220-234 Willoughby Avenue, 171-185 Steuben Street, and 172-186 Emerson Place, Borough of Brooklyn, and designates Tax Map Block 1922, Lot 1 in part consisting of the property bounded by the eastern curb line of Steuben Street, the southern curb line of Willoughby Avenue, the western curb line of Emerson Place, and the northern curb line of the private driveway extending between Steuben Street and Emerson Place, Borough of Brooklyn, as its Landmark Site.

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Photo: Stanley Greenberg

PRATT INSTITUTE  
FACULTY ROWHOUSES  
BROOKLYN

ARCHITECT: HOBART A. WALKER  
BUILT: 1907