

LINCOLN CLUB/now Mechanics Temple, Independent United Order of Mechanics of the Western Hemisphere, 65 Putnam Avenue, Borough of Brooklyn. Built 1889; architect Rudolph L. Daus.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn, Tax Map Block 1984, Lot 78.

On October 9, 1979, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Lincoln Club/now the Mechanics Temple, Independent United Order of Mechanics of the Western Hemisphere and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 14). 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.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The building formerly housing the exclusive Lincoln Club of Brooklyn is a striking Queen Anne style structure designed in 1889 by Brooklyn-based architect Rudolph L. Daus. The club is located in the Clinton Hill area, once the home of some of Brooklyn's wealthiest citizens. It is one of a number of large, sumptuous clubhouses erected in Brooklyn in the last two decades of the 19th century, and it is one of the few to retain its architectural integrity.

Beginning in about 1830 the independent city of Brooklyn began to attract a substantial number of middle-class residents who were seeking a pleasant and morally healthy environment in which to reside and raise their families. The large scale residential development of Brooklyn was made possible by the advent of dependable ferry service between the cities of Brooklyn and New York, thus allowing for regularly scheduled commuting. Brooklyn Heights was the first residential area to be built up as a result. As the 19th century progressed and Brooklyn experienced a tremendous population growth, residential development spread outward from the Heights into areas that had previously been rich farmland. By the late 19th century much of Brooklyn had been developed with housing for a relatively affluent population. Four Brooklyn neighborhoods were particularly exclusive -- the Heights (Brooklyn Heights), the Hill (Clinton Hill), the Slope (Park Slope), and St. Marks (the St. Marks Avenue/Grant Square area).

As these new neighborhoods developed, local social, cultural, and religious organizations were founded to cater to the needs of the new residents. Churches, schools, theaters, hospitals, and clubs were founded and each organization sought to erect an impressive new home. These buildings came to symbolize the civic grandeur of Brooklyn and their size and beauty brought a sense of respectability and permanence to the newly built-up neighborhoods.

The late 19th century was a period of great expansion for the institutions of both Brooklyn and New York City. This was a period when wealth and social prominence were frequently expressed by the erection of distinguished edifices. Private clubs were an important part of life for many affluent men and women and the clubhouses that they built were often designed in the most advanced architectural styles with little expense spared in exterior ornament and interior appointments. During the last two decades of the 19th century eight notable clubhouses were erected in Brooklyn's most prosperous neighborhoods: the particularly exclusive Hamilton Club, the Germania Club (Frank Freeman, 1890), and the Jefferson Club (Frank Freeman, 1889-90) in the Brooklyn Heights area; the Montauk Club (Francis Kimball, 1889-91) and the Carlton Club (1890) in Park Slope; the Union League Club (P.J. Lauritzen, 1890) on Grant Square; the Bushwick Democratic Club (Frank Freeman, 1892) in a wealthy section of Bushwick; and the Lincoln Club in Clinton Hill. In an 1889 article entitled "Brooklyn's Palaces Purely for Pleasure" the New York Herald praised the clubs, noting that "the new club houses...certainly rival in architectural dignity and picturesqueness those of other cities in the United States."¹ Of these once proud clubs, only the Montauk is still functioning. The Germania, Jefferson, Hamilton, and Bushwick Democratic Clubs have been demolished and the Union League Club has been severely altered. The Lincoln Club, and the far less architecturally distinguished Carlton Club, remain standing, although they are no longer social clubs for wealthy leisured gentlemen.

The Lincoln Club was founded in January 1878 by a small group of men from Clinton Hill who sought to band together for social purpose and to further the interests of the Republican Party. In 1879 the club was officially incorporated and its political activities were dropped. In 1883 the club purchased two frame houses on the north side of Putnam Avenue between Irving Place and Classon Avenue and converted them into a clubhouse. A masonry extension was constructed at the rear of the wooden buildings in 1886, but this proved to be inadequate for the club's needs and in 1889 architect R.L. Daus was commissioned to draw up plans for a new building that would incorporate the recently constructed extension. In the fall of 1889 Daus' sumptuous new clubhouse was ready for occupancy.

Rudolph Laurent Daus (1854-1916) was born in Mexico and educated in Berlin and Paris where he was a graduate of the Ecole des Beaux Arts. In 1885 he established an architectural office in Brooklyn, and although his office moved to New York City in c.1896 and he designed a number of buildings in Mahattan, his practice was centered in Brooklyn. In 1898 Daus was appointed secretary of the Commission to frame New York City's building laws and in 1899-1900 he served as surveyor of buildings for Brooklyn. During the 1880s and early 1890s Daus designed a substantial number of Romanesque Revival and Queen Anne style residences in Brooklyn. Besides the Lincoln Club, Daus was responsible for such prominent public buildings as the Brooklyn Hall of Records and the German Hospital of Brooklyn, both of which have been demolished; the Thirteenth Regiment Armory (1891) on Sumner Avenue; and the Bethlehem Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church (1894) on Pacific Street. In the 1890s the Romanesque Revival and Queen Anne styles declined in popularity and were supplanted by a more uniform Renaissance-inspired style. Daus' work of this period reflects this shift in taste and he designed some very fine neo-Renaissance and Beaux-Arts style buildings including the New York County National Bank (now Manufacturers Hanover Trust Co.) located on the southwest corner of West 14th Street and Eighth Avenue in Manhattan.

The Lincoln Club is the finest of Daus' surviving buildings in Brooklyn and is one of the most sophisticated Queen Anne style structures in New York City. The best Queen Anne style buildings display a rich variety of subtly contrasting textures and colors created by a careful juxtaposition of various materials -- particularly rock-faced and smooth-faced stone, Roman brick, and terra-cotta. A hallmark of Queen Anne design is the massing of a building's facade in an asymmetrical manner, frequently heightened by an unexpected play of eccentric ornamental forms. This asymmetrical arrangement of forms is most evident in the upper portion of a building, where it created an unusual roof profile that generally contrasts with the more solid and symmetrical lower floors. In addition, many Queen Anne style buildings are adorned with rich decorative detailing, either carved in stone or molded in terra-cotta.

The Lincoln Club beautifully exemplifies the finest principles of Queen Anne design. The building is constructed of Roman brick and rock-faced Lake Superior brownstone enlivened by smooth brownstone bands and sumptuous terra-cotta ornament. These materials create a lively chromatic and textural contrast, although the subtle polychromy of the front facade is now hidden under a coat of red paint. The lower stories of the clubhouse are faced with heavy blocks of rock-faced brownstone that form a massive base supporting the brick stories above. The sunken basement of the club is set behind an areaway enclosed by a parapet wall that is capped by a fine wrought-iron fence of twisted bars alternating with Gothic quatrefoils. The basement entrance is reached by a flight of steps that passes beneath a flying butress set between the main facade and the areaway wall. The basement originally had a kitchen, a bar, and a set of bowling alleys.

The main entrance to the club is from a raised terrace enclosed by solid walls. These replaced the original wing walls that were in the form of an open square grid. The entrance door is set in the third of four symmetrically-massed round-arched openings, each with a stone transom bar and terra-cotta voussoirs molded in an accordian pattern. The arched transom of the door is filled with a magnificent wrought-iron screen while the window transoms originally contained allegorical stained-glass windows representing Prosperity, Friendship, and Concord. Only the Concord window remains in place; the other two were recently stolen. The two windows to the left of the door are separated by a free-standing Corinthian column that rests on the flying butress of the basement entrance and supports a stylized bracket that is set within the ornate corbel of a shallow oriel window. The corbel is richly decorated with winged lizards, twining oak leaves, and acorns. The two-story oriel is constructed of light brown, smooth-faced brownstone that originally provided a handsome contrast to the rich brown brick. It is capped by a parapet wall with carved quatrefoils and is articulated by heavy stone transom and mullion bars. Above the oriel are a pair of unusual windows that exemplify the ingenuity of the finest Queen Anne architecture. The windows are deeply recessed within segmental-arched enframements and each has a simple lower sash and an upper sash that is divided into 36 small square panes. The arched corners of the enframements are marked by a single brick soldier course, while a huge, overscaled splayed brick lintel with a stone keystone and hood molding rises above. The upward thrust of these lintels leads the eye to the most ornamental feature of the building -- the roof gable. This gable is

decorated with a baroque pattern of terra-cotta foliate ornament set around a central cartouche marked with the club's seal and the date of the building's construction.

Set to the right of the oriel and gable is a round tower that rises from the third floor. The austere mass of this tower is articulated by two small round-arched openings. The tower is topped by an extremely large, flamboyant galvanized-iron cornice designed with a bold pattern of ripe grape vines. This ornate cornice is in sharp contrast to the simplicity of the main mass of the tower. Above the cornice is a steep conical roof. The tower has a French Renaissance feeling and is undoubtedly the explanation for 19th-century descriptions of the Lincoln Club which note that the building was designed in the style "of the early French Renaissance."²

The tower serves as a separation between the gabled portion of the facade and the slightly recessed section to the right. This part of the clubhouse is set behind a second floor terrace that was originally enclosed by a wall similar to those once on the stoop. The textural contrast that animates much of the facade is clearly evident on this section of the building. Here the brick facade is interrupted by rock-faced and smooth-faced stone bands and smooth stone transom and mullion bars. A heavy terra-cotta cornice composed of a row of club insignias supported by Gothic bosses separates the third floor from a steep mansard roof that is articulated by two dormers with eccentric angular profiles. This mansard, as well as the roof of the tower, were originally clad with Spanish tile that added an additional sense of texture to the facade.

When the Lincoln Club opened in 1889, the contemporary press commented on the building's solid, substantial, and comfortable character.³ The club had stringent rules regulating admissions and the behavior of members. The house rules noted that:

Any member guilty of disorderly or ungentlemanly conduct, boisterous or improper language, violation of the Rules, or of anything prejudicial to the interest or character of the Club, shall be liable to censure, suspension, or expulsion.⁴

Typical of the private clubs of the period, new members were carefully screened. Membership was limited to 400 men. Prospective members had to be vouched for by two active members and two negative ballots would reject a candidate's application. In 1900 members had to pay an admission fee of \$50.00 and annual dues of \$40.00.

In the 20th century, as American life styles began to change, and as Brooklyn's elite families began to settle elsewhere, most of the private clubs were disbanded. In March, 1931 the Lincoln Club was dissolved. The clubhouse was purchased by the Independent Order of Mechanics of the Western Hemisphere in the 1940s. The Mechanics Lodge takes great pride in its beautiful building and has undertaken an extensive campaign to return it to its former glory.

FOOTNOTES

1. New York Herald, November 3, 1889 (in Long Island Historical Society, "Scrapbook," Vol. 128, p. 112).
2. Harper's Weekly, February 15, 1890 (in Long Island Historical Society, "Scrapbook," Vol 40 p. 23) and Henry W.B. Howard, ed., The Eagle and Brooklyn: History of the City of Brooklyn, part III (Brooklyn: New York Daily Eagle, 1893), p. 881.
3. Harper's Weekly.
4. The Lincoln Club of Brooklyn, N.Y. 1900, p. 30.

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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 Lincoln Club/now Mechanics Temple, Independent United Order of Mechanics of the Western Hemisphere 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 Lincoln club is among the best Queen Anne style buildings in New York City; that it is the finest surviving building in Brooklyn designed by prominent architect R.L. Daus; that its facade, which exhibits the sophisticated juxtaposition of various materials found on the best Queen Anne design; is adorned with extremely rich and unusual decorative ornament; and that the Lincoln club building is a reminder of the period when the Clinton Hill section of Brooklyn was one of most exclusive enclaves in the city.

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 Lincoln Club/now Mechanics Temple, Independent United Order of Mechanics of the Western Hemisphere. Borough of Brooklyn and designates Tax Map Block 1984, Lot 78, Borough of Brooklyn as its Landmark Site.

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LINCOLN CLUB/nOW MECHANICS TEMPLE
65 Putnam Avenue
Built:1889

Photo Credit:Andrew S. Dolkart
Landmarks Preservation Commission

Architect:Rudolph L. Daus