

DE LAMAR MANSION, 233 Madison Avenue, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1902-05; architect C. P. H. Gilbert.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 867, Lot 23.

On January 28, 1975, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the DeLamar Mansion and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 3). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. One witness spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

This imposing Beaux-Arts style mansion, designed by the noted New York architect, C. P. H. Gilbert, in the great scale and elegance of the limestone mansions that once lined Upper Fifth Avenue, was built for Joseph Raphael De Lamar in 1902. De Lamar was born in Amsterdam in 1843 and emigrated to this country in the 1860s, settling in Massachusetts where he worked as a ship-contractor. With the discovery of gold in Colorado in the late 1870s, De Lamar went west and soon amassed a fortune. After a brief period in local politics, he returned east in 1888 and settled in New York City where he died in 1918.

After De Lamar's death, the mansion was sold to the National Democratic Club in 1923 for use as their headquarters. Formerly the Democratic Club of the City of New York, the club was organized in 1852. The Polish Peoples' Republic purchased the building in 1973.

The main facade and entrance of the mansion face 37th Street. The facade is designed in a tripartite division both vertically and horizontally. The vertical division is the dominant one, reinforced by projecting end pavilions. The horizontal division is created by a wide, smooth-faced, molded bandcourse above the ground floor and by the roof cornice above the third floor.

One of the most attractive features of the design is Gilbert's subtle use of asymmetry within symmetry. The first three floors display a careful balance of architectural elements while the upper two stories introduce an asymmetrical composition creating a sense of height that belies the size of the mansion and gives the building its most striking feature. The sense of asymmetry and height are further emphasized by the continuation of the rustication of the lower floors up into the fourth floor of the western pavilion, giving it a tower-like appearance.

The major windows of the first three floors of the building are paired, with the exception of those on the recessed section of the Madison Avenue facade. All have smooth-faced enframements which provide contrast with the rusticated wall surfaces. At the second floor of the end pavilions, tall paired windows with wide stone mullions and transom bars are set behind balustrades supported on massive console brackets which are decorated with classical swags. Over the windows are dentiled cornices carried on console brackets that are extended up to serve as sills for the third floor windows, uniting them vertically. The windows of the third floor have handsome ornamented, curved transom bars. Above the third floor is a dentiled and modillioned cornice carried on massive, paired console brackets at the corners.

One of the most impressive elements of the mansion is the recessed entrance facade. The double oak doors of the entrance are flanked by engaged columns and sidelights ornamented with bronze grillework, all set within the outer enframements. A lintel decorated with cherubs, resting above a foliate cartouche, surmounts the doorway. Decorated urns flank the cherubs and a rectangular transom behind them lights the entrance hall. A stone balcony carried on vertical console brackets crowns the doorway. Behind this balcony is an imposing elliptical arched window with French doors, emphasizing the high main floor. Gracefully curving brackets and a keystone are swept up from the top of the arch to carry a handsome wrought-iron balcony at the third floor paired window.

The commanding feature of the mansion is the treatment of the upper stories and the great mansard roof above the roof cornice. On the 37th Street facade, the fourth and fifth floors of the central section and the eastern pavilion are generally similar, although their design is quite different from that of the higher tower-like western pavilion where the fourth floor is rusticated and pierced by a tripartite window. By contrast, at the fourth floor, the central section and the eastern pavilion are smooth-faced. The central section has a semi-dormer window which rises up above the smooth-faced wall and has an elaborate round-arch pediment. It is flanked by two small, narrow windows with cornice slabs set in the front wall. The eastern pavilion has a double dormer window with a segmental arch that is crowned by a very deep arched pediment with a central scroll motif. The mansard roof rises from mid-height of the fourth floor of these sections, while the mansard roof of the western tower begins at the fifth floor level. Small round-arched dormers mark the fifth floor of the central section and the eastern pavilion. The towering mansard roof of the western pavilion is pierced by a central, square-headed dormer window, on each exposed side, crowned by a pediment similar to the one above the recessed central portion. The lines of this very elegant mansard roof are emphasized by copper crestings decorated with shell motifs.

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 DeLamar Mansion 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 De Lamar Mansion, in its great scale and elegance, is a reminder of the mansions which once lined Upper Fifth Avenue, that it is one of the most imposing residences in the French Beaux-Arts style of architecture in the City, that it is the work of a notable architect, and that it provides a dramatic accent at its conspicuous corner site on Madison Avenue.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of 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 DeLamar Mansion, 233 Madison Avenue, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 867, Lot 23, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.