

Landmarks Preservation Commission
October 2, 1990; Designation List 227
LP-1632

THE NEW YORK HOUSE AND SCHOOL OF INDUSTRY, 120 West 16th Street, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1878; architect Sidney V. Stratton.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 791, Lot 54.

On September 15, 1987, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the New York House and School of Industry, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 8). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Seventeen witnesses, including a representative of the Young Adult Institute, the lessee of the property, spoke in favor of designation. No witnesses spoke in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Summary

The New York House and School of Industry is a two-story brick building designed in the Queen Anne style by Sidney V. Stratton.¹ Erected in 1878 on West 16th Street between Sixth and Seventh Avenues, this unusual building is one of the earliest known examples of the Queen Anne style in New York City. Its remarkably intact facade, with its picturesque massing, features finely crafted ornamental details and multipane windows that create a striking composition. It was built to house a charitable organization founded in 1850 by wealthy women to help women in poverty. Though it is no longer the home of the founding charity, the building still, after 100 years, houses a social service organization that provides care and shelter for New Yorkers.

History of the New York House and School of Industry and Its Site

In 1850, when the New York House and School of Industry was founded, the city was experiencing one of its greatest periods of expansion. Political unrest in Central Europe, famine in Ireland, and the discovery of gold in California drew immigrants to this country in unprecedented numbers and a large part of this wave of immigrants was drawn to New York, the major port of entry to this country. Between 1845 and 1850, the population of the city grew by 30,000 people per year and, in 1850, over 212,000 immigrants landed in the port of New York.² As a result, the city faced major social problems. The few institutions established at the beginning of the nineteenth century to deal with the problems of a small, homogeneous society were swamped by the sheer mass of humanity pouring into the city. Philip Hone, a former mayor and noted diarist of the period, recorded on January

29th, 1847,

This state of things [the contrast between rich and poor] has been hastened in our case by the constant stream of European paupers arriving upon the shores of this land of promise....If we had none but our own poor to take care of, we could find employment for them, and individual charity, aiding the public institutions, might save us from the sights of woe with which we are assailed in the streets....Nineteen out of twenty of these mendicants are foreigners cast upon our shores, indigent and helpless....³

The New York House and School of Industry was just such an "individual charity" designed to address the problems of poor women. Founded and administered by women, the list of members of the Board of Directors, consisting of "about fifty Christian ladies, with an advisory committee of gentlemen to assist them in managing their finances,"⁴ reads like a census of the leading merchant families of New York: Fish, Livingston, LeRoy, DePeyster, Gracie, Van Rensselaer, Astor, Griswold, et al..⁵ Those members who were not related to each other by blood or marriage were socially connected through their involvement in business, New York University, Columbia University, or the Episcopal Church. Many of these families maintained active participation in the organization for decades.

The expressed purpose of the charity was "...to afford to infirm and destitute females employment in needlework...,"⁶ "...trusting thus to lighten the burthen [sic] of poverty and to lessen the chances of vice...."⁷ Those women judged suitable for "service," i.e., work as domestic servants, were not eligible for aid by the charity. To provide employment, fabric was purchased, prepared, and distributed to the poor who made finished clothing and goods which were then sold at the society's store.⁸ Two types of goods were produced: "fine ordered work" and "house-work." The "fine ordered work" consisted of bridal ensembles, embroidery, braiding, knitting, quilting, and other delicate handwork. "House-work" included everyday, mundane sewing for household use and various garments for men and women. The management of the charity was conducted by the women of the Board and was carried out by committees headed by Board members. There were a number of these committees charged with various functions. The visiting committee screened applicants by visiting each applicant and making inquiries concerning her character. Committees were established for purchasing and cutting material, for establishing the sales price of the finished garments and the price to be paid to the sewer which, according to Section 12 of the By-Laws, "...shall be moderate; that no encouragement be given to the needy to flock to our city;...."⁹ Instruction in sewing was also given and a sewing school for young girls was conducted at the building, as was an "infant industrial school" for small children. The "infant industrial school" was run by the Children's Aid Society, a distinct, separate charity, yet it shared the building's facilities with the New York House and School of Industry.¹⁰

Three years after its founding in 1850, the directors of the New York House and School of Industry purchased the frame building the charity had been occupying on the south side of West 16th Street between Sixth and

Seventh Avenues from the estate of Samuel S. Howland.¹¹ The street at that time was almost fully developed with rowhouses, a Congregational church, and a factory near Seventh Avenue.¹² It was located between the Union Square neighborhood which was a fashionable residential area for New York's wealthy families and Chelsea, a highly desirable district for the middle class.¹³ After nearly thirty years of service, the building was judged inadequate and, in February, 1878, Mrs. John C. Green whose family, the Griswolds, had been active in the charity since its founding, donated \$15,000 for the construction of a new building. Sidney V. Stratton was chosen as the architect.¹⁴

The Architect

Sidney V. Stratton was among the first American architects who received their professional training at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. During the late 1860s, Stratton was studying at the atelier Daumet where he met and became a close friend of fellow student, Charles Follen McKim, later a partner in the firm of McKim, Mead & White.¹⁵ After returning to this country in 1870,¹⁶ Stratton entered the office of another Ecole-trained architect, Richard Morris Hunt.¹⁷ Stratton established his own office at 57 Broadway in 1877 and shortly after received the commission for the new building of the New York House and School of Industry.¹⁸ Hunt was probably instrumental in having the commission awarded to Stratton. Hunt's wife, Catharine Clinton Howland, had been raised on Washington Square North near the residence of Mrs. John C. Green who donated the money for the new building, and Mrs. Hunt was the daughter of Samuel S. Howland whose estate sold the property and the original building to the New York House and School of Industry in 1853.¹⁹ Stratton also received a commission from Mrs. Green to design a memorial room dedicated to her husband in the New York Society Library which was then located on University Place.²⁰ During the mid-1880s, Stratton worked in a loose partnership with the firm of McKim, Mead & White which ended about 1886.²¹ Between 1890 and 1892, Stratton maintained a partnership with Francis L. Ellingwood and, in 1895, Stratton closed his office in New York.²² Most of Stratton's practice consisted of houses in New Jersey and Bar Harbor, Maine; the New York House and School of Industry is one of the few buildings designed by Stratton in New York.

The Design of the New York House and School of Industry

The New York House and School of Industry is one of the earliest buildings in New York designed in the Queen Anne style. The style became popular in Britain at the beginning of the 1870s and in the United States toward the end of that decade. The style was claimed to be derived from English domestic architecture of the early eighteenth century and is named after the then reigning Queen of England. Its leading advocate in England was Richard Norman Shaw who occupied the center of the architectural stage at that time. Used for country and suburban houses, as well as urban town houses, and adapted to other building types such as schools, it was considered the progressive architecture of its time. The Queen Anne style

is a brick architecture of asymmetrical massing using crafted details, textured and molded brick, and clay tiles. Architectural details often referred to elements from earlier English periods and were combined with strong, picturesque roof silhouettes composed of gables, often derived from Flemish precedents, dormers, and prominent chimneys. The facade was enlivened and given an extra dimension by the use of oriels with multipaned windows, polygonal bays, and deep recesses. The design of the New York House and School of Industry closely follows British examples of the style; constructed of brick, the building is asymmetrically massed and is characterized by a projecting oriel, recessed bays, and details such as stylized foliate plaques that recall the English Arts and Crafts aesthetic.

In the United States, in general, the appearance of this style accompanied a growing appreciation for America's colonial heritage that was particularly strong following the celebration of the Centennial in 1876. As in Britain where architectural motifs of the Queen Anne referred back to earlier indigenous styles, in New York reference was made to the city's Dutch heritage. It was also common to combine it with other contemporary American styles such as the neo-Grec, the Romanesque Revival, and the Renaissance Revival. The style was primarily used for residential architecture, both multiple dwellings and single-family rowhouses. Apartment houses such as the now demolished Spanish Flats (1883) on Central Park South between Sixth and Seventh Avenues, and the Chelsea Hotel (1883, a designated New York City Landmark) on West 23rd Street, both designed by the firm of Hubert & Pirsson, and the Astral Apartments (1885-85), a model tenement designed by Lamb & Rich in Greenpoint, are prominent examples. Scores of distinctive rowhouses were erected, many of which are still standing. In Manhattan, residential districts such as Hamilton Heights, Mount Morris Park, and the Upper West Side all boast instances of striking and handsome rowhouses in the style. Brooklyn has some of the finest and most interesting groups of houses rendered in the Queen Anne style. George Chappell, C.P.H. Gilbert, Alfred Zucker, William E. Mowbray, and John G. Prague were some of the New York architects practicing in the style. Freestanding, wood-frame suburban houses built in the United States, designed in a variant of the Queen Anne style now termed the Shingle Style, made historical reference to the colonial buildings of New England. Masters of this form of architecture were the firms of Richard Morris Hunt and McKim, Mead & White, with whom Stratton worked.

The Queen Anne style was also applied in the design of commercial buildings in New York, although much less frequently than in residential architecture. Prominent examples, built slightly later than the New York House and School of Industry, include the Century Building, an office building designed by William Schickel (1880-81, 33 East 17th Street, a designated New York City Landmark) and the Gorham Building, a mixed-use store and residential building designed by Edward Hale Kendall (1883-84, 889-881 Broadway, in the Ladies' Mile Historic District). The Century and the Gorham Buildings are both located in the Union Square neighborhood, not far from the New York House and School of Industry.

The New York House and School of Industry is not only important as one of the earliest New York buildings in the Queen Anne style but it is one of the rare instances in New York in which the style was used for an institutional building. At the time it was constructed, most buildings used to provide a social service were in the Victorian Gothic or Second Empire modes and schools were either Italianate or Second Empire. Stratton's choice of the Queen Anne style for the building, which distinguished it from its peers, may have been influenced by contemporary examples of new school buildings in London that employed a restrained version of this style.²³ Also, the Queen Anne style, which was most often associated with a domestic architecture using crafted details as an important design element, was appropriate for a building in which a domestic craft -- fine and ordinary needlework -- was taught. According to the 1879 Annual Report, completed garments were exhibited in the windows of the oriel. Furthermore, the style helped integrate an institutional building with the street's residential character; rather than dominate its neighbors, the New York House and School of Industry harmonized with them.

Description

Built of brick with stone, terra-cotta, and slate trim, the New York House and School of Industry rises two stories above a low, smooth-faced, stone basement. The facade is asymmetrically massed, divided into two parts by an entrance bay: the eastern half is characterized by a projecting, two-story, stone oriel and the western half is simply rendered in brick with crisply cut, deeply recessed windows. When first seen, the building can be misread as two separate structures of standard rowhouse dimensions rather than as a single building.(Fig. 1)

The central entrance is within a slightly recessed, two-story bay. The original doors have been replaced by two solid wood doors. Approached by a box stoop with a brick parapet, it is in a three-centered arched opening with an ornamental enframing. The arch has a wood transom bar with numerous small lights and a tripartite transom with a central, multipaned oval flanked by multipaned quarter circles. Above the entrance are two recessed panels with highly stylized terra-cotta plaques in bas-relief. Above these panels is a large panel containing a terra-cotta plaque inscribed with the name and date of the building. The bay is topped by a simply molded cornice.(Fig. 2)

The eastern part of the facade consists of a two-story, paneled, stone oriel with chamfered sides and a fish-scale slate roof.(Fig. 3) The first story of the oriel is an arcade of three round-arched windows with double-hung wood sash: the lower sash of each is divided into two tall rectangular panes topped by three small square panes and the upper sash is a fan of diminutive lights. Above the arcade are six, small, fixed transoms each with a grid of small lights surrounding a central circular light. A cornice of many stringcourses tops the first story.(Fig. 4) The sides of the oriel at this level have recessed panels and narrow, pedimented openings with fixed gridded windows. The second story is pierced by six, narrow multipaned double-hung windows. Above are six gridded transoms. The oriel

is crowned by a cornice of multiple stringcourses and a fish-scale slate roof.(Fig. 5) Above the oriel, the facade has a simple stone cornice carrying a high parapet with stone coping.(Fig. 6) East of the facade is a recessed court providing secondary access to the building. Within the court, the walls are brick and, at the west, above the roofline, is a chimney. At the second story is a small pedimented window similar to those in the chamfers of the oriel.(Fig. 7)

The western part of the facade at the first story has three, crisply cut, round-arched windows that echo the arcade in the oriel. With the exception of the stone sills, these windows have no ornamental enframements. The deeply recessed wood sash is double-hung: the lower sash has four panes and the upper sash has two multilight panes each topped by a quarter fan with small lights.(Fig. 8) Above a recessed panel, the three windows of the second story form an abstract Palladian window -- a round-arched central window flanked by smaller square-headed windows. The three are united by a boldly projecting stone sill and, as with the first-story windows, are crisply cut with no enframements and with deeply recessed wood sash. The flanking windows have four-paned lower sash and gridded upper sash. The central window has a lower sash with two panes and an upper sash similar to that of the first-story windows.(Fig. 9) The facade is terminated by simple stone coping. The ironwork at the first-story windows and the basement entrance below the stoop is simple and straight-forward. The entrance gate to the court is covered by a solid protective panel. The facade has been painted red.

Subsequent History

The New York House and School of Industry continued its charitable work independently until 1951 when it merged with Greenwich House, a settlement house serving Greenwich Village. With the merger, the directors of the New York House and School of Industry became board members of Greenwich House and the focus of the charity's efforts changed to the needs of elderly women and men in Greenwich Village and Chelsea. Later in the decade, the building was acquired by a Jewish philanthropic organization which leased the property to New York State in 1977; New York State purchased the property in 1987. The New York State Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities funds a not-for-profit organization, Young Adults Institute, which uses the building as a residence for its clients, continuing the original function for which the building was erected -- to aid citizens of New York.

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NOTES

1. New York City, Department of Buildings, Manhattan. Plans, Permits and Dockets, Block 791, Lot 54. NB 77-1878.
2. I.N. Phelps Stokes, Iconography of Manhattan Island, vol. 5 (New York, 1915-28), 1850.
3. Philip Hone, The Diary of Philip Hone, vol. 2, ed. Allan Nevins (New York, 1927), 785.
4. Rev. J.F. Richmond, New York and Its Institutions 1609-1871, (New York, 1871), 497.
5. D.T. Valentine, Manual of the Corporation of the City of New York, (New York, 1851), 290.
6. Twenty-first Annual Report of the New York House & School of Industry, (New York, 1872), frontispiece.
7. Twenty-fifth Annual Report of the New York House & School of Industry, (New York, 1876), 11.
8. The charity did not provide housing for poor women.
9. Twenty-first Annual Report, 9.
10. Richmond, 498-99.
11. New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances.
12. New York City Tax Assessment Records, Municipal Archives and Record Center, 1850.
13. The character of the Union Square area has changed dramatically over the years but buildings from the residential period survive on West 16th Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues. Much of Chelsea's mid-nineteenth-century appearance remains. Landmarks Preservation Commission, 5 West 16th Street Building Designation Report (LP-1581), report prepared by Virginia Kurshan (New York, 1990). In addition to No. 5, six other houses on this block are also New York City Landmarks: No. 7 (LP-1582), No.9 (LP-1583), No. 17 (LP-0939), No. 19 (LP-1585), No. 21 (LP-1586), and No. 23 (LP-1587). LPC, Chelsea Historic District Designation Report (LP-0666), (New York, 1970) and Chelsea Historic District Extension Designation Report (LP-1088), report prepared by James Dibble (New York, 1981). The block in which the New York House and School of Industry is located is now characterized by six-story brick apartment buildings.
14. Twenty-eighth Annual Report of the New York House & School of Industry, (New York, 1879), 12.

15. Leland M. Roth, McKim, Mead & White, Architects, (New York, 1983), 21.
16. _____, The Architecture of McKim, Mead & White, 1870-1920, A Building List, (New York, 1978), 25-26.
17. Paul R. Baker, Richard Morris Hunt, (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), 494, footnote 6. In his Autobiography of an Idea, architect Louis Sullivan explains how he met Stratton at Hunt's office, cited in Baker, 165.
18. Dennis Francis, Architects in Practice, New York City, 1840-1900, (New York, 1979), 73.
19. Landmarks Preservation Commission, Greenwich Village Historic District Designation Report (LP-0489), vol.1 (New York, 1969), 52-59.
20. Mosette Broderick, Testimony given before the LPC at a public hearing, September 15, 1987, Item No.8, (LP-1632).
21. Roth, A Building List, 26. Stratton's commissions with the firm are also listed.
22. Francis, 73,
23. Mark Girouard, Sweetness and Light, the 'Queen Anne' Movement 1860-1900, (Oxford, 1977), 64-70. This English variant is even referred to as the London School Board style.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

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 New York House and School of Industry 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 New York House and School of Industry, built in 1878 from designs of architect Sidney V. Stratton, is one of the earliest extant Queen Anne style buildings in New York City; that it is an unusual example in the city of the use of this style for an institutional building; that its remarkably intact facade, with its picturesque massing, features finely crafted ornamental details and multipane windows that create a striking composition; and that the building was erected to house a charitable organization founded in 1850 and administered by women to aid needy women.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 (formerly Section 534 of Chapter 21), of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the New York House and School of Industry, 120 West 16th Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 791, Lot 54, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

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Twenty-first Annual Report of the New York House & School of Industry. New
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York: McSpedon & Baker, 1851.



Photo Credit:
Carl Forster

The New York House and School of Industry
120 West 16th Street
Manhattan
(Fig. 1)

Architect:
Sidney V. Stratton

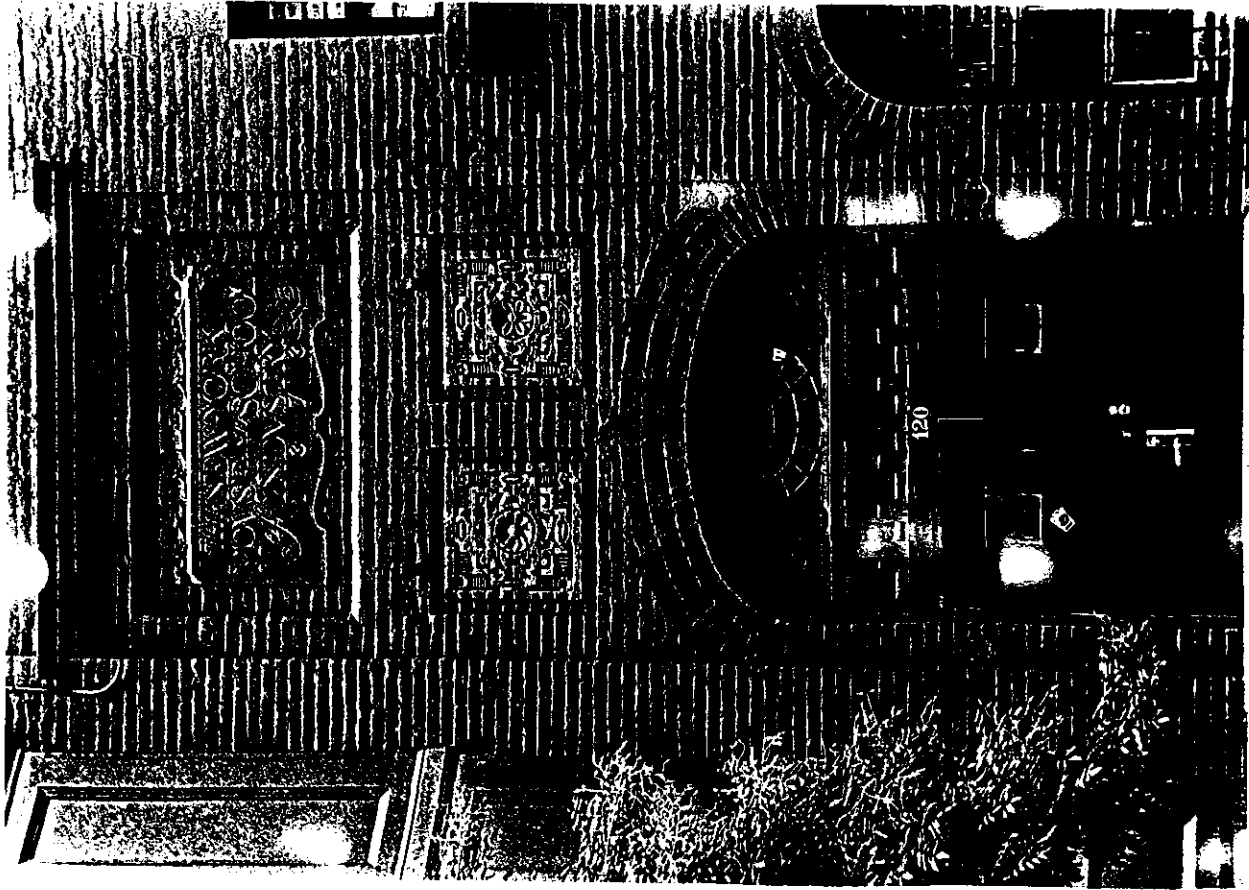


Photo Credit: Carl Forster
Entrance (Fig. 2)

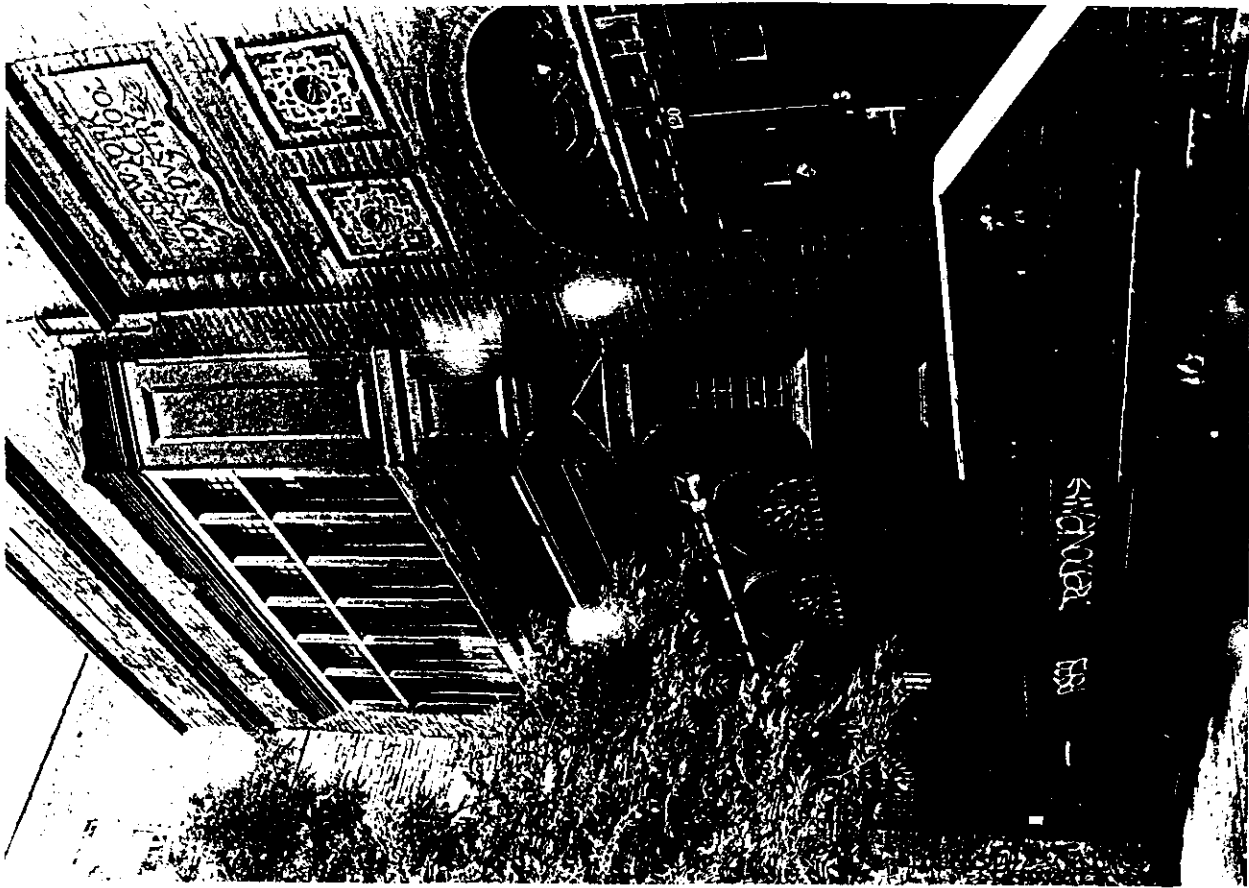


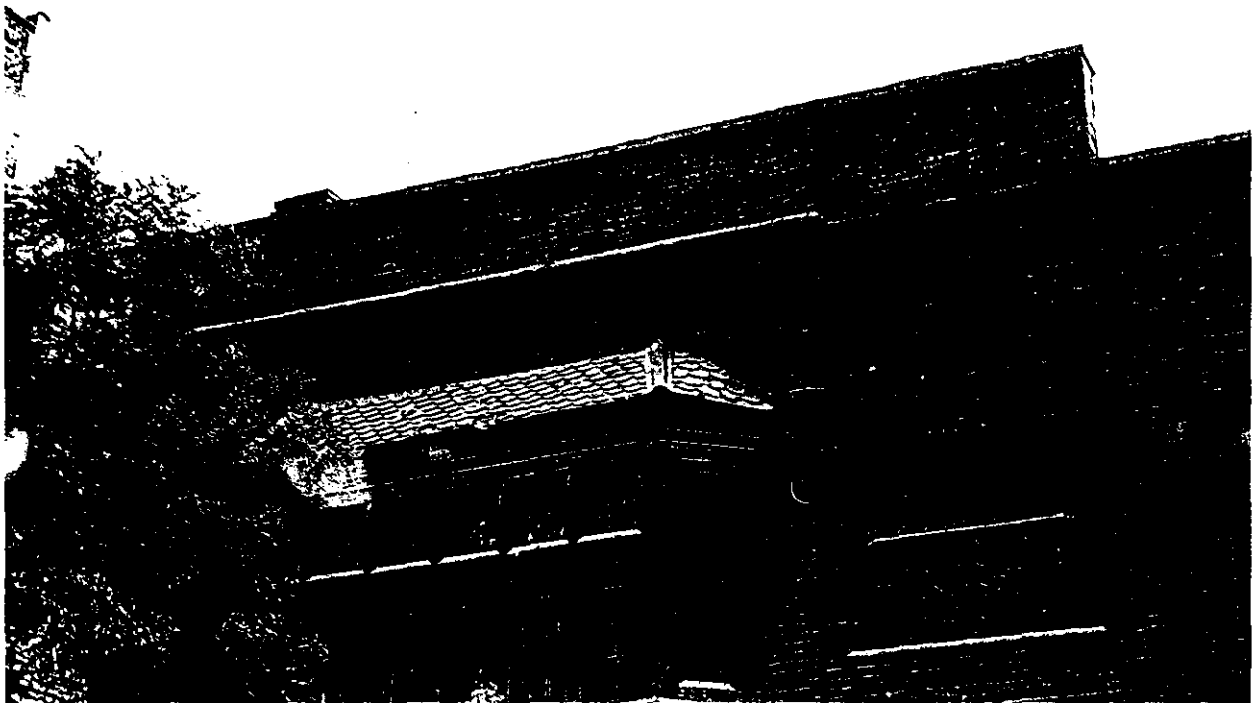
Photo Credit: Carl Forster
Oriels (Fig. 3)



(Fig. 5)

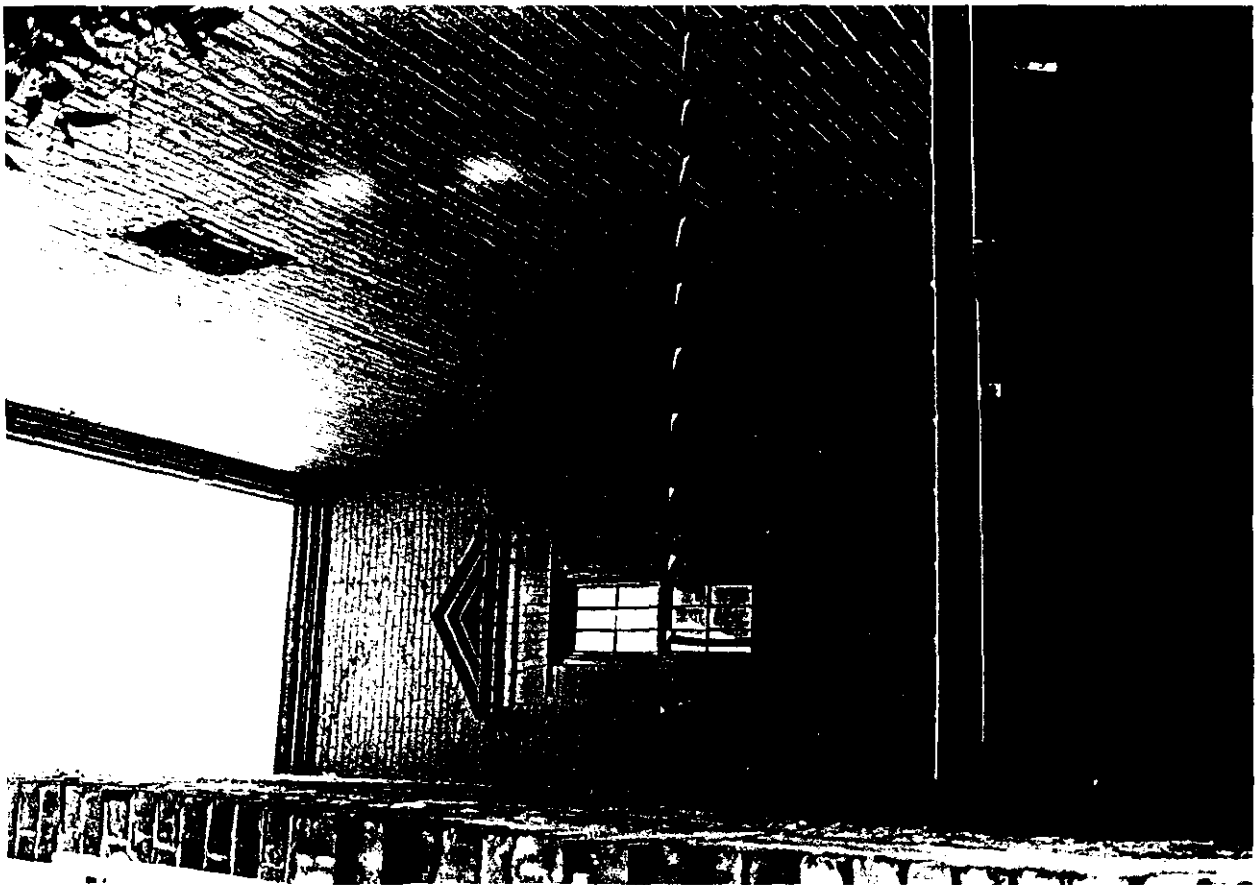


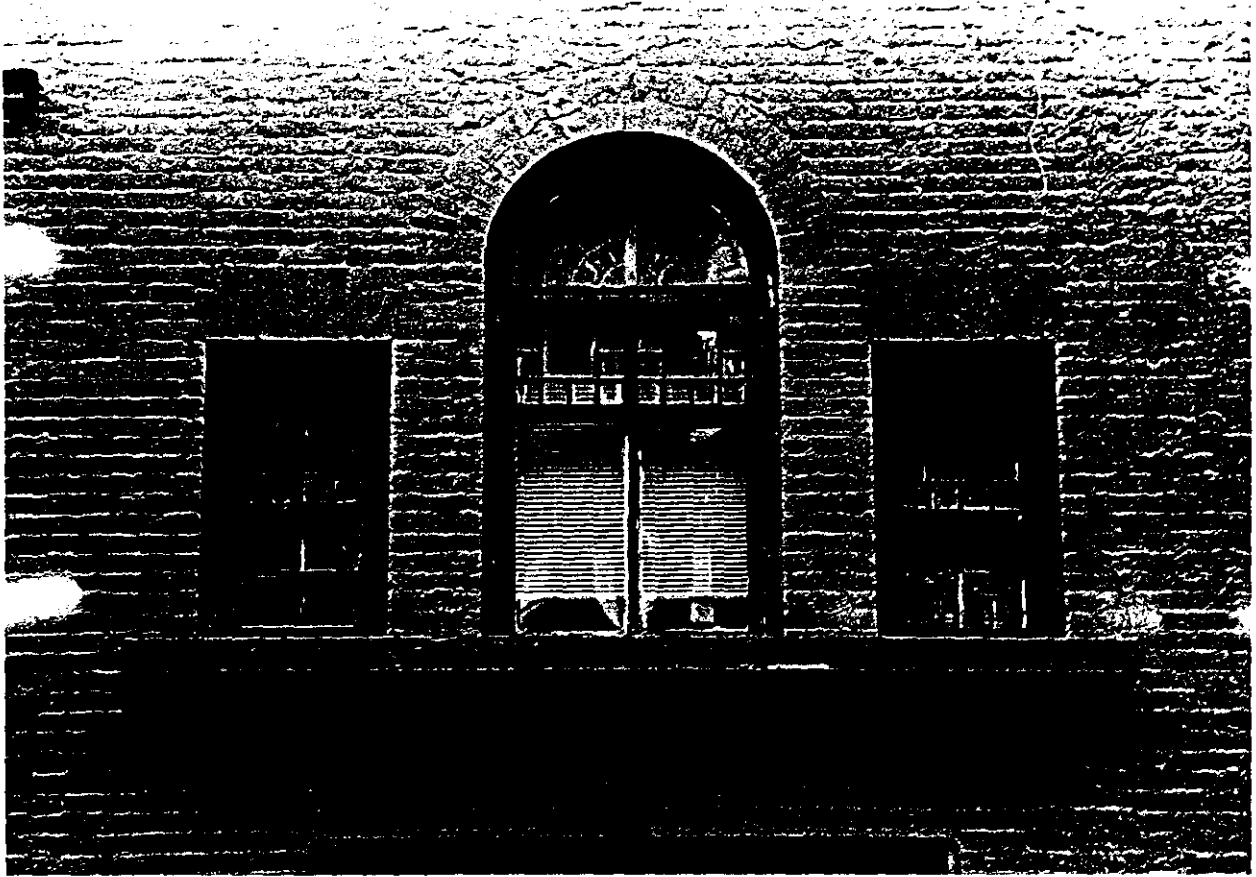
(Fig. 4)



(Fig. 6)

(Fig. 7)





(Fig. 9)

(Fig. 8)



