

1973

Landmarks Preservation Commission  
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LP-0760

312 STATE STREET HOUSE, Borough of Brooklyn, Built 1847-1848.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 176, Lot 16.

On June 23, 1970, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 312 State Street House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 73). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Twenty-six witnesses spoke in favor of historic preservation in the Boerum Hill neighborhood and for the creation of the Boerum Hill Historic District. There were no speakers in opposition to designation of the houses on State Street.

#### DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

No. 312 State Street is one of a row of four houses built in 1847-48 for John and Diederick Westfall in the Greek Revival style which was still popular for row houses in this area. The Westfalls, who were liquor merchants, acquired the lots for Nos. 310-316 in September 1847, and they commissioned the construction of the row. Both brothers were living in newly built houses on these lots by the next year.

These residences were part of the Boerum Hill community which had formed the original Town of Breuckelen founded in 1646 by Dutch colonists. It was incorporated into the larger City of Brooklyn in 1834. The development of Boerum Hill as an urban community began in the 1840s and continued into the 1870s. Many of the houses which remain from this period incorporated Greek Revival and Italianate elements in the row house design. These houses were built for merchants and professional people, many of whom worked in the Wall Street area or in the vicinity of the Fulton Street ferry.

All the land in this block had originally been part of the Jacob Van Brunt farm. He willed it to his daughter Jane, wife of Samuel T. Gerritsen, in 1824. State Street was originally known as Gerritsen Street. The Gerritsens and the Van Brunts, both old Dutch families, had long been inter-connected by marriage and had some of the largest landholdings in Kings County. Charles Hoyt and Russell Nevins, two Manhattan real estate developers with extensive interests in Brooklyn, acquired the properties on this block in 1833. Both Hoyt and Nevins had streets named after them to the east of this block.

The handsome Greek Revival brick front of No. 312 is painted and rises three stories above a brownstone basement. The two square-headed basement windows, set behind ornamental iron grilles, are accented by carved sunburst motifs in the stone bandcourse above them which are neo-Grec in character. The bold entranceway, above a high stoop is the most impressive Greek Revival element of the front. Heavy pilasters with Doric-type capitals support a bold horizontal entablature with a low pediment above the cornice. The pilasters and the frieze are decorated with carved rose motifs. The glass-paned wooden double doors, of a later period, like the carved ornaments, are set beneath a rectangular glass transom. The full-height parlor floor windows like the windows above them, have simple rectangular lintels. The roof cornice crowning the front is also characteristic of the Greek Revival, enhanced by a row of closely spaced brick dentils set above a wide brick fascia.

The wrought-iron yard railings and the handrailings at the stoop are of a delicate nature with curvilinear ornament at the top of the handrailings and fretwork at the base of the yard railing--both derived from Greek sources. The use of decorative wrought ironwork for railings became popular in New York City in the Federal period and continued in fashion in this area until mid-century. The craftsmanship displays the skill of the local ironworks.

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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 312 State Street 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 312 State Street House is a fine example of the Greek Revival style of architecture, modified by ornament of a later period, that it forms part of a handsome group of four houses, that it contributes to the dignity of the street and that this house and its row add significantly to the overall character of the Boerum Hill community.

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 312 State Street House, Borough of Brooklyn and designates Tax Map Block 176, Lot 16, Borough of Brooklyn, as its Landmark Site.