

Landmarks Preservation Commission
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LP-0437

56 EAST 93RD STREET HOUSE (formerly William Goadby Loew House) Borough of Manhattan. Completed 1932; architects Walker & Gillette.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1504, Lot 47.

On March 3, 1970, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 56 East 93rd Street House (formerly William Goadby Loew House) and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 19). 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. Last month the Commission received a letter from the owner of this building, the Republic of Algeria, opposing the designation of this building at this time.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

This impressive town house was erected in 1932 as the residence of William Goadby Loew, son-in-law of the banker George F. Baker, whose nearby mansion at 75 East 93rd Street is now the property of the Synod of Bishops, Russian Orthodox Church outside Russia. Loew was a wealthy socialite stockbroker. He owned a racing stable and was a prominent clubman. He and his wife, Florence, entertained at this house, at their villa in Newport and on their estate at Old Westbury, Long Island. The Loew residence was the last of the large private town houses to be built in the City, due to the financial depression. Designed by Walker & Gillette, in a modified version of the English Regency style, it recalls the work of Sir John Soane in its restrained but elegant use of ornament.

This large, modern town house is framed in steel. Nevertheless, it has a handsome smooth ashlar masonry facade with rusticated English basement. As it stands, it is a remarkably free interpretation of the style in which it was designed, utilizing 19th century elements in a facade which belongs to the 20th century. It is three stories high and crowned by a roof with dormer windows set behind a parapet. This symmetrical building is set back from the street and has two-story wings, one at each end, extending forward to create a shallow recessed forecourt at the center. These wings are joined to the house, on the court side by concave curved walls with square-headed windows in them, further enhancing the gracious porticoed entry.

Few town houses in the City have ever had more thoughtful care bestowed upon their design, and few have ever achieved the striking elegance we find here. This building of the 1930s is quite different from its contemporaries and stands today as a unique design.

A shallow driveway, open at the front, leads up to the central portico. It approaches the house from either side with a gracefully curved curb on the side toward the house. This curb serves as a unifying feature which supports the bases of the columns and establishes the floor level of the portico. It also supports a low wrought-iron fence which is crowned by ornamental iron crestings on either side of the portico.

At the second floor, above the entrance portico, there is a high, recessed arch set in a slightly projecting central bay. Within the arch there is a bull's-eye window, the upper half of which is enframed by radial fluting. The two-story projecting wings have beautifully designed Palladian windows at the second floor, repeating the radial fluting motif around their arches. They have stone balusters set below a stone bandcourse at sill level. Beneath these windows, in the rusticated wall of the English basement (1st floor), are tall windows at sidewalk level, protected by handsome wrought iron grilles. The projecting wings, at either side, are crowned by a delicate ornamental cornice which extends across the front, following the recess of the forecourt. Stone bosses are set high in the walls on either side of the arches of the Palladian windows.

It is the sparing use of ornament which, contrasted with the smooth walls, gives this house such a dramatic quality. The very simple third floor, which reveals the plane of the main mass of the building rising up behind the wings, has five rectangular windows. Four of these windows have no ornament, but the

central window has a crossetted frame and keystone and is located directly above the entrance portico. This narrow window is visually related to the wider projecting bay enclosing the bull's-eye window below it, by means of simulated folds of drapery swept out at the base of the window to meet stone blocks ornamented with rosettes.

After the death of William G. Loew in 1955, the house was sold. Its striking appearance appealed to Billy Rose, the theatrical producer, who acquired it in 1956 and lived here until his death in 1966. Remembered as a writer of popular songs, he is best known for the shows he produced, such as "Crazy Quilt", "Jumbo" and "Carmen Jones", and especially for the spectacular "Aquacade" at the 1939 New York World's Fair. The serious plays he produced include "Clash by Night", "The Immoralist" and "The Wall". Billy Rose was also a syndicated newspaper columnist and the author of an entertaining book, Wine, Women and Words, published in 1948. In 1965, he presented his fine sculpture collection to the Israel Museum in Jerusalem for which he provided a beautiful sculpture garden designed by Isamu Noguchi.

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 56 East 93rd Street House (formerly William Goadby Loew 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 56 East 93rd Street House (formerly the William Goadby Loew House) is an impressive and dignified town house, that it displays a restrained use of Regency style ornament which is beautifully contrasted with its smooth masonry walls, that when built in the 1930s it was significantly different from the town houses then being erected, that it stands today as a unique design in New York City, that it is a strikingly elegant building and that it makes a notable contribution to the architecture of this City.

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 56 East 93rd Street House (formerly William Goadby Loew House) Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1504, Lot 47, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

Chairman Harmon K. Goldstone did not participate in the consideration of this designation.