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Landmarks Preservation Commission
March 8, 1988; Designation List 201
LP-1623

8200 NARROWS AVENUE HOUSE, Borough of Brooklyn. Built 1917; architect James Sarsfield Kennedy.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 6003, Lot 52.

On May 15, 1987, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 8200 Narrows Avenue House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 1). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. No witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. At the hearing, the owners of the property expressed reservations about the designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Summary

This distinctive residence, an important and rare example of the Arts and Crafts style of architecture in New York City, was designed in 1917 by James Sarsfield Kennedy, a Brooklyn architect, for shipping merchant Howard E. Jones. The Arts and Crafts movement, developed in the later 19th century, was influential in both the decorative arts and architecture. The protagonists of this movement emphasized the use of natural materials, craftsmanship, and picturesque silhouette and profiles. There was also a conscious reference to the rural cottage and an attempt to project its "homey" environment.

In several ways the Jones residence is characteristic of Arts and Crafts design. It is built in rubblework of large, natural rocks and boulders of various colors. Select ground-floor openings are partially filled with stucco finish applied in heavy fan swirls demonstrating the handmade aspects of the house. The varying heights of the house step up to the massive end-wall chimney creating a picturesque profile and calling attention to the importance of the hearth within the structure. The asphalt shingle roof is rendered with an undulating surface and smooth molded edges in imitation of the thatch roofs of early rural cottages.

The Neighborhood and the Client

The neighborhood in which the house is located, named Bay Ridge in 1853, is the westernmost section of the old town of New Utrecht and was named for the high ridge that defines the eastern side of the Narrows.¹ New Utrecht was established by the Dutch in 1657 and was one of the original six towns that made up what is now the Borough of Brooklyn.² The town was an agricultural community until the late 19th century when a number of resorts and substantial suburban residences were built along the shore of the Lower Bay and the Narrows. One of the most important resorts in the area was the Crescent Athletic Club which began as a football club

in 1884.³ The club grew to become the largest and most socially prominent such organization in Brooklyn and maintained facilities both in Brooklyn Heights and in Bay Ridge. The Brooklyn Heights facility was used primarily for winter or indoor sports, while the Bay Ridge property was primarily a country resort for summer sports. The first location of the club was in the Van Brunt mansion near 80th Street and Shore Road before a substantial tract bounded by 83rd Street on the north, 85th Street on the south, Colonial Road on the east, and the Narrows on the west was acquired. It was on this property that the club built its summer clubhouse, boathouse, and playing fields. The clubhouse was a very handsome Shingle Style building with broad circular towered corner and deep, rambling verandas. The boathouse, a commodious building shrouded by verandas at each of its two stories, was designed by James Sarsfield Kennedy in 1904. The site is now occupied by Fort Hamilton High School.

The presence of a prestigious organization like the Crescent Athletic Club, ferry service to Manhattan, and rapid transit to downtown Brooklyn made the area an attractive one for middle-class professionals. About the time of World War I, large suburban houses began to rise on the subdivided farmlands of the old Bay Ridge families such as the Van Brunts, the Bergens, and the Bennetts. The Jones residence is one of the earliest and most distinguished from this period of Bay Ridge's development.

Howard E. Jones, born in Brooklyn in 1884, was an active figure in New York shipping circles. In 1919 he became president of the shipping firm, James W. Elwell & Co., retaining that position until 1942, two years before his death. He was a director of the Maritime Association Board of New York and was elected a vice president in 1932. In addition, Jones was active in local civic affairs serving as administrative chairman of the Brooklyn Civilian Defense Volunteers Organization and as president of Victory Memorial Hospital, an institution in which his wife Jessie was also involved.⁴

The Architect and His Design

In 1917, Jones commissioned the Canadian-born architect James Sarsfield Kennedy (d.1946), to design his new residence. Kennedy, the son and grandson of architects, was born in Barrie, Ontario, about sixty miles from Toronto, and came to Brooklyn in 1898.⁵ His earliest known commission followed two years after his arrival in Brooklyn with the building of No. 169 Westminster Road in Flatbush. Flatbush at the turn of the century was undergoing rapid development as an attractive suburban area, part of which, Prospect Park South, was an important and influential planned community. Kennedy also designed one of Brooklyn's important early 20th-century residences in Prospect Park South, the Francis G. Delborn house at 109 Rugby Road. Built in 1919, the Delborn house is an unusual and sophisticated combination of the Prairie School and the neo-Georgian. Although Kennedy seems to have specialized in freestanding suburban residences, he also designed a particularly handsome Beaux-Arts townhouse for Charles Meads in 1909 in Park Slope.

Much as he did two years later in the Delborn house, Kennedy combined his knowledge of both modern and historic stylistic sources to create in the Jones residence a late, yet sophisticated, example of the Arts and Crafts style. The Arts and Crafts movement in the United States, like its

counterpart in Great Britain, arose as a response to the increasing industrialization and mechanization of many aspects of life in the middle of the nineteenth century. Philosophically, its roots can be traced to early decades of the century with the rediscovery of and increased admiration for the craftsmanship of the hand-carved Gothic detail of the Middle Ages. Later, John Ruskin became one of the most important voices in the propagation of the ideal of the individual, man-made creation as opposed to the mass-produced, machine-made imitations of the period. His ideas were continued and developed by his followers such as William Morris in decorative arts and Richard Norman Shaw in architecture. Hallmarks of the style are the use of natural materials, craftsmanship, picturesque profiles in buildings, and a sense of rustic domesticity.

In this country, there was an increased appreciation for the colonial past, the rise of the Shingle Style, and the spread of the Queen Anne and Romanesque Revival with its wealth of hand-carved detail. At the turn of the century, sympathy for these ideals continued with the popularity of the Colonial Revival styles, the rediscovery of the Spanish influence in the Southwest and in California, and the introduction of Mission style furniture and accessories. Gustav Stickley was highly influential in the spread of the last phase of the Arts and Crafts movement in this country through his publications, The Craftsman and Craftsman Homes, and the mass production of furniture and decorative arts by himself and others. Kennedy's familiarity with Stickley's work, the work of Henry Hobson Richardson, and the tenets of the Arts and Crafts movement can be seen in certain design elements of the Jones residence.

Description

Set well back from the street, the house rises two stories atop the southern half of a rolling site that occupies the entire blockfront along the west side of Narrows Avenue. Due to the downward slope of Narrows Avenue as it approaches 83rd Street, the southern half of the site rises well above grade level. Retaining walls at two separate levels prevent erosion along the 83rd Street side of the property. The northern half of the site, from mid-block to 82nd Street, approximately one quarter acre in extent, is lawn. The house is constructed of uncut, randomly laid stone of varying sizes, shapes, and colors — one of the most striking features of the house. This choice of materials suggests a number of references: Ruskin's advocacy of a "savageness" in architecture which shows the man-made, imperfect qualities of the building by its lack of exact finishes; the historical tradition of rubblework in rural colonial construction and the cobblestone architecture of northern New York State; and Richardson's F.L. Ames Gate Lodge (1880) in North Easton, Massachusetts. Kennedy is clearly following another element of the Ames Gate Lodge in his design of the Jones porte-cochere which seems to buttress the house as it rises from street level at this point to the dramatic and massive end-wall chimney at the southern end of the house which stands on a hill well above street level. This porte-cochere provides a gate to the enclosed garage courtyard which contains a no longer operable mechanical turn-about for automobiles. The property is enclosed by a simple iron fence with widely spaced, massive newels constructed of the same rugged stonework as the house. Curvilinear iron gates protect the approach to the terraced stoop of the main entrance and the porte-cochere.

The main entrance to the house is through a central projecting peaked-roof vestibule with a large round-arched opening facing front. The door is not the round-arched glazed opening but is on the left or south side of the vestibule. The entrance is approached from below by irregular terraced steps with sidewalls of the same stone as the facade. The approach to the entrance forces a visitor, at spaced intervals, to face three different directions, providing various views of the massing and texture of the house.

The main facade, to either side of the vestibule, has square-headed windows at the first floor and above these, at the second, are double-window segmental bays. To the left, a two-story high peaked-roof pavilion, two bays wide, projects from the main body of the house. The lower two-thirds of each of its bays is stuccoed and pierced by narrow square-headed windows with solid wood shutters. The upper part of each bay is filled by a tripartite window. An eyebrow dormer pierces the peaked roof of the pavilion.

The southern facade of the house, facing 83rd Street, is dominated by the massive end-wall chimney. Centrally located, the chimney is built of the same material as the rest of the house and steps up irregularly from a broad buttressed base to a narrow top with three chimney pots. The sides are angled back to the facade and pierced at the first floor by square-headed windows. At the second floor the angled side walls end, creating balconies for the rooms at this level. An interesting note has been added by piercing the base with a segmental-arch window. The facade treatment is similar to that of the front pavilion: the lower portion is stuccoed with narrow shuttered windows; the first floor windows are tripartite and re-headed; and the windows at the second floor balconies are segmental. The rear facade of the house steps down to a one-story extension with a patio and a kitchen herb garden enclosed by a stone wall with a traditional English-style hooded lychgate. The northern side of the house which overlooks the expansive lawn is characterized by the arched portecochere, the garage courtyard, and the nearly below-grade garage. The second story around the courtyard is faced with stucco.

The roof is one of the most unusual and appealing features of the house and well within the Arts and Crafts tradition. Designed to imitate the thatch roofs of English rural cottages, it covers the massive walls in a quiet sensuous way that counteracts their strength. It is composed of subdued polychromatic asphalt shingles laid randomly -- there are no straight lines on the roof. It rolls over the hard edges of the ridge and peaks and tucks under the eaves, softening them and uniting the various extensions under a gentle picturesque cover.

Conclusion

The Jones residence is one of the finest examples of an unusual style of architecture in New York City. Other examples of the Arts and Crafts style and elements of it may be found elsewhere in the city, but few are as creative as the design of the Jones residence which embodies the style's major aspects with a sophisticated reference to an important example of the Richardsonian Romanesque. The house is highly original and one of the important examples of early 20th-century architecture in New York City.

Report prepared by
James T. Dillon,
Research Department

NOTES

1. Glen A. Grace, "Old Bay Ridge," Journal of Long Island History, 6 (1966), 1.
2. Henry R. Stiles, ed., The History of the County of Kings and the City of Brooklyn, New-York, vol. 1, (New York: W.W. Munsell & Co., 1884), p. 257.
3. Information about the Crescent Athletic Club is derived from: The Crescent Athletic Club club book, 1891-1930 in 24 vols. The Crescent, vols. 1 and 2, June 1895-May 1897; vols. 1-22, May 1905-March 1939. The Crescent Athletic Club Scrapbook. (All are found in the collection of the Brooklyn Historical Society.) The Herald Tribune, 7/29/1900; 2/8/1904; 7/31/1904. The Brooklyn Eagle, 4/3/1933; 3/27,28,29/1939; 5/9/1946; 7/31/1949; 8/7,14,21,28/1949.
4. The New York Times, 7/8/1944; 11:6.
5. The Brooklyn Eagle, 3/24/1946.

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 8200 Narrows Avenue 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 8200 Narrows Avenue house is an important and rare example of the Arts and Crafts style of architecture in New York City; that it was built in 1917 according to the designs of James Sarsfield Kennedy, a Brooklyn architect, who specialized in freestanding suburban houses; that its picturesque profile, use of stucco, natural rocks and boulders in rubblestone, and its shingled roof with molded edges, as well as its references to English rural cottages, are characteristic of the Arts and Crafts style; that it was commissioned by Howard E. Jones, a shipping merchant; that it remains an important example of the residential development of Bay Ridge in the 1910s.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21, Section 534, of the Charter of the City of New York and Title 25, Chapter 3, of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the 8200 Narrows Avenue House, 8200 Narrows Avenue, Borough of Brooklyn, and designates Tax Map Block 6003, Lot 52, Borough of Brooklyn, as its Landmark Site.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

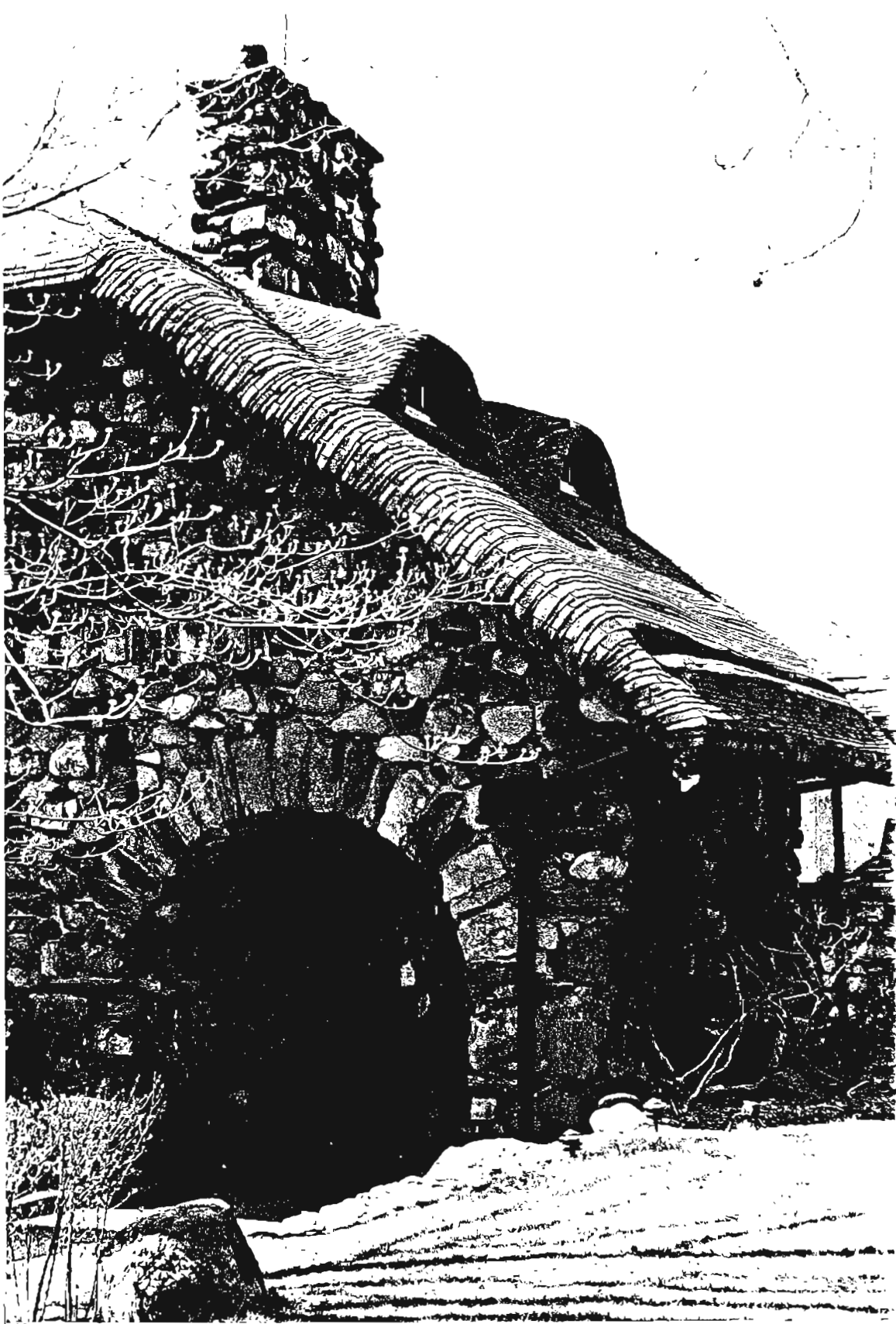
The Brooklyn Eagle. 4/3/1933; 3/27,28,29/1939; 3/24/1946; 5/9/1946; 7/31/1949; 8/7,14,21,28/1949.

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The Herald Tribune. 7/29/1900; 2/8/1904; 7/31/1904.

The New York Times. 7/8/1944.

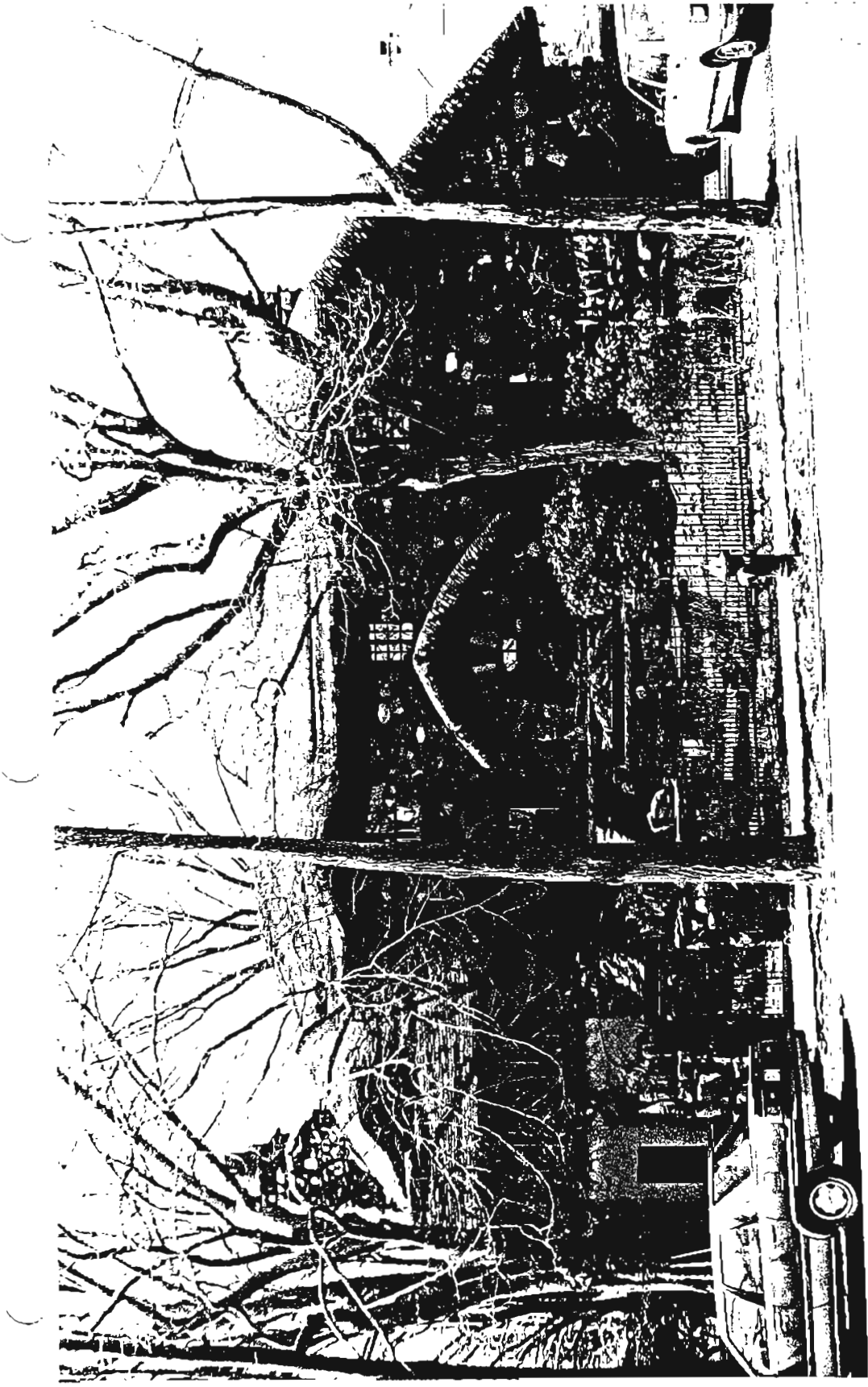
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Architect: James Sarsfield
Kennedy
Built: 1917

8200 Narrows Avenue
Bay Ridge, Brooklyn
Porte Cochere

Credit: Carl Forster



Architect: James Sarsfield Kennedy
Built: 1917

8200 Narrows Avenue
Bay Ridge, Brooklyn
Main Facade

Credit: Carl Forster



Architect: James
Sarsfield Kennedy
Built: 1917

8200 Narrows Avenue
Bay Ridge, Brooklyn
Entrance

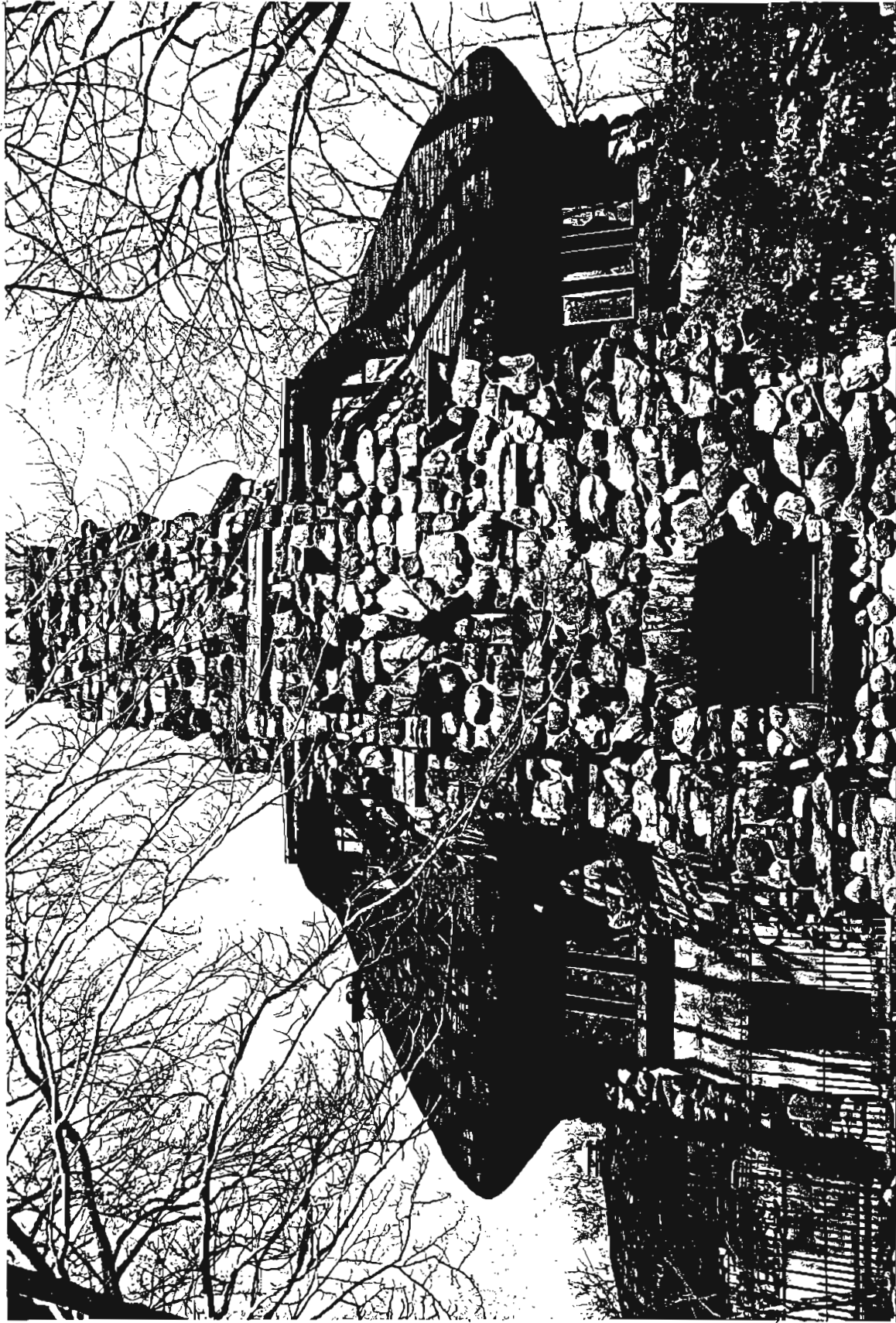
Credit: Carl Forster



Architect: James
Sarsfield Kennedy
Built: 1917

8200 Narrows Avenue
Bay Ridge, Brooklyn
Pavilion

Credit: Carl Forster



Architect: James Sarsfield Kennedy
Built: 1917

8200 Narrows Avenue
Bay Ridge, Brooklyn
South Facade

Credit: Carl Forster

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