

GAGE & TOLLNER, INTERIOR OF GROUND FLOOR DINING ROOM, 372 Fulton Street,
Borough of Brooklyn.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 154, Lot 17.

On January 28, 1975, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as an Interior Landmark of Gage & Tollner, Interior of Ground Floor Dining Room and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 4). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Four witnesses, including the owner, spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Gage & Tollner, one of Brooklyn's best-known restaurants, had its beginning in 1879 when Charles M. Gage opened an eating establishment at 302 Fulton Street. In 1884 Eugene Tollner joined Gage, and the restaurant was renamed Gage & Tollner. They moved the restaurant to its present advantageous location at 372 Fulton Street in 1889 in the center of Downtown Brooklyn, close to the Brooklyn City Hall, now Borough Hall. At this time, Fulton Street was one of Brooklyn's main thoroughfares, leading east and south to join King's Highway, the main access route to Long Island, and west and north to the ferry terminals on the East River and the Brooklyn Bridge, opened in 1883. The Gage & Tollner Restaurant became widely known and attracted many noteworthy patrons.

When Messrs. Gage and Tollner retired in 1911, they sold the business to A. H. Cunningham and Alexander Ingalls on condition that they maintain the customs and traditions established by the founders. Seth Bradford Dewey, in association with his father Hiram S. Dewey, who had been well-established in the restaurant business in Manhattan for many years, purchased the restaurant in April 1919, again on condition that the establishment retain the name of Gage & Tollner and that it continue to be run in accordance with its traditional standards. The Dewey interests purchased the building which housed the restaurant in 1923. The management continues in the hands of the Dewey family under the direction of Ed Dewey who came into the management in 1949. In 1973, he was joined by John B. Simmons in ownership and management. Gage & Tollner maintains the traditions which have always characterized it and have enhanced the quality of life in Brooklyn and the City for almost 100 years. Speaking at the Public Hearing, Brooklyn Borough Historian, Dr. Joseph Palisi, noted that it had "exquisite food, excellent service and a sense of timelessness through which something of a carefully preserved past is made to contribute to the fullest enjoyment of the present."

Gage & Tollner is one of the very few interiors in the City, open to the public, which so successfully project the atmosphere of the "Gay Nineties." Upon entering, one is immediately transported back to the period of Diamond Jim Brady. At either side of the entranceway are two bays where patrons may await seating. These bays are created by two projecting wood-enframed windows which resemble the storefront windows of the period. The ceilings of these bays are handsomely embellished by the once popular Lincrusta-Walton type of wall covering embossed in a sunburst design. The walls have swirling designs of a more classical type. This type of wall covering is used to great advantage throughout the long, narrow room, which seats about 150.

The series of tall, elegantly arched mirrors along three sides of the restaurant lends a remarkable sense of spaciousness to the interior which actually measures only 25 x 90 feet. The dark red cherry wood trim, enframing the mirrors and providing a cornice beneath the deep cove of the ceiling, is a unifying feature for this long room. The arched mirrors along the walls rise above a wainscot at table level and are separated by dark red panels of patterned cut-velvet. These panels are crowned by wood entablatures with pulvinated friezes from which the molded wood arches of the mirrors spring. The arches have center wood blocks, simulating keystones, upon which the horizontal wood cornice which encircles the room is set. In the spandrels between the arches an embossed wall covering of the Lincrusta-Walton type is painted a restrained gold color. The back end of this remarkable room has three arches enframing mirrors which create an effect of infinite distance and depth. The wide flat-arched central mirror is complemented by two narrow arched deeply recessed mirrors set behind the entrance and exit doors to the kitchen and service area.

A recessed area for the serving bar is located about midway down the left-hand side of the room. The handsome paneled bar was transferred from the old restaurant at 302 Fulton Street and has cabinets and a long mirror behind it. The restaurant also retains its handsome original mahogany tables.

Gage & Tollner is probably the only restaurant in the City which uses both gas and electricity for illumination. This is accomplished by means of the original combination gas-electric fixtures which were installed in 1888, when a permit was issued to the restaurant to burn gas or "the new incandescent light." These elaborate brass fixtures, with widely spread arms, are evenly spaced along the center-line of the ceiling extending from front to rear. At the end of each arm, on either side of the curvilinear central portion adorned with hollow metal oval and circular urns, there are two gas jets with flues and handsome cut-glass bowls to diffuse the light. Also, at the end of each arm set between the jets, extending outward and downward at an angle of 45 degrees, is an incandescent light bulb. The light bulbs which were originally bare now have flower-like glass bowls.

The reawakened interest in Victoriana has resulted, in the last decade, in the creation of a number of "Gay Nineties" bars and restaurants in the City. Gage & Tollner has one of the few remaining authentic Victorian interiors in the City, a reminder of the quality of life in the "Gay Nineties", of equal interest to the connoisseur and to the gourmet.

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 Gage & Tollner, Interior of Ground Floor Dining Room 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 handsome interior of the Gage & Tollner Restaurant successfully maintains its original "Gay Nineties" atmosphere, that the arched mirrors which line the walls create an effect of distance and depth which enlarges the long and relatively narrow room, that by night it is still lighted by gas as well as by electricity, and that here a carefully preserved past contributes to the full enjoyment of the present, maintaining the traditions which have enhanced the life of Brooklyn and New York City at this location since 1839.

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 an Interior Landmark, Gage & Tollner, Interior of Ground Floor Dining Room, 372 Fulton Street, Borough of Brooklyn and designates Tax Map Block 154, Lot 17, Borough of Brooklyn, as its Landmark Site.