

GREYSTON CONFERENCE CENTER, Teachers College, Columbia University (formerly William E. Dodge House, "Greyston") 690 West 247th Street (4675 Hadley Avenue), Borough of The Bronx. Built 1863-64; architect James Renwick, Jr.

Landmark Site: Borough of The Bronx Tax Map Block 5925, Lot 411.

On April 28, 1970, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Greyston Conference Center (formerly William E. Dodge House) 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. One speaker testified in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Erected during the stormy years of the Civil War, this splendid country mansion was designed for William E. Dodge, Jr., by James Renwick, Jr., famed architect of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, of Grace Church and St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York. Construction was begun in 1863, following Dodge's purchase of land early that year from Joseph Delafield. According to family tradition, the house may already have been completed by the end of 1863, but it was not occupied until the following Spring.

This large and picturesque mansion is constructed of native gray granite, skillfully cut and laid in a random pattern. Renwick's design was strongly influenced by early Victorian houses of the English countryside which, typically, combined features of Tudor and Elizabethan manorial architecture with the earlier Gothic tradition. The present appearance of "Greyston," particularly at the north (entrance side) is, however, very largely changed as the result of the addition of a large dining room wing and other later modifications.

"Greyston" was originally a much smaller house -- as shown by an early sketch of the north side which is still preserved at the house. It was clearly conceived as a relatively unpretentious summer cottage in the Hudson River Gothic tradition. Part of the charming wood porch remains, but much of the original arched openwork and Gothic bracing have disappeared. The eastern portion of the porch was partially replaced by subsequent alterations. At the upper stories, the original rustic character of the house is evidenced, in the sketch, by the pointed dormers and picturesque little gables over the windows.

"Greyston" is three stories high, with a steep roof of polychrome slate. The mansion appears, at first glance, as a rather loose agglomeration of parts. Upon closer examination, however, a basic symmetry and balanced design is discernible, largely the result of the superimposition of a later aesthetic on the more picturesque, asymmetrical, original design. The monumental main entrance, with its beautiful door near the center of the north facade, is set off by paired Gothic trefoil niches cut into the smooth stone. The porches flanking the entrance have handsome railings with balusters carved in Gothic Revival trefoil design. An approximate balance is achieved between the projecting dining room wing, at the left side, and the gabled section at the right. The river side is dominated by a picturesque polygonal porch, of which a portion has been glazed.

At the south side, the roofline is almost hidden behind a variety of pointed gables which emphasize projecting portions of the facade. The many tall chimneys, in true Victorian Gothic manner, emphasize the picturesque verticality of the building. A great variety of decorative elements, derived from the successive phases of the English Gothic, Tudor and Elizabethan traditions, are evident, particularly in the design of the window openings, which are usually paired or tripled. Pointed Gothic arches, cusping, trefoil and quatrefoil motifs, and mullioned windows lend diversity and interest.

"Greyston" displays a sensitive response to its splendid setting. This is characteristic of the age of Emerson and the transcendentalists and illustrates the rise of interest in landscape architecture and landscape painting. There are many magnificent views from the porches and windows. Most important was the care taken by the architect not to disturb the immense oak and copper beech trees which

Greyston Conference Center

In some cases date back to the 18th century.

By the early 1860s, Riverdale-on-Hudson had become a favorite summer retreat for rich New York merchants and their families. As noted by a writer in Putnam's Monthly Magazine, in 1856, all of this was made possible by the new Age of Steam. The development of the eastern shore of the Hudson River was largely the result of the initiation of passenger service, in 1847, on the New York and Hudson River Railroad.

When New York City took over the West Bronx, incorporating it in the City limits in 1874, its rural quality was threatened and "Riverdale", the group of villas above the Hudson, might have lost its curvilinear streets and irregular-shaped properties. Frederick Law Olmsted and the municipal civil engineer submitted a report in 1876, which argued for the preservation of those streets which followed the natural contours of the terrain and that this area would provide excellent sites for villas for those New Yorkers who might wish to enjoy a country atmosphere within City limits, with obvious tax advantages accruing to the City. The recommendations of this report prevailed and Riverdale retained its character. In preserving what remains of these large country estates, and their mansions, we are aware of their rural background.

William Earl Dodge, Jr., (1832-1903), for whom this country residence was built, was the eldest son of the prominent merchant and philanthropist of the same name. Both father and son were closely associated with Phelps, Dodge & Company, international dealers in copper and other metals. George Templeton Strong's diary documents the important role played by William E. Dodge, Jr. in the mid-1860s in developing the School of Mines at Columbia College. He was also one of the moving spirits in the establishment, in 1863, of the Riverdale Presbyterian Church, an edifice designed by James Renwick, Jr., doubtless upon Dodge's recommendation.

Intimately identified with the history of "Greyston" was the eldest of Dodge's six children, Grace Hoadley Dodge (1856-1914), a social worker with an interest in education. Teachers College, founded in 1887, is the outgrowth of her formation of the Kitchen Garden Association, "for the promotion of the Domestic Industrial Arts among the laboring classes." Miss Dodge, as Acting Treasurer of Teachers College and Chairman of its Board of Trustees was hostess at "Greyston" for innumerable conferences, many of which were international in scope.

Cleveland E. Dodge, a grandson of the original owner and Grace Dodge's nephew, made his home at "Greyston" for forty years. In 1961, while Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Teachers College, he gave "Greyston" to that institution. It was formally dedicated May 27, 1963 as the Greyston Conference Center of Teachers College. Thus, the mansion continues to bear witness to the devotion to public service, education and philanthropy of the Dodge family for over a century.

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 Greyston Conference Center (formerly William E. Dodge 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, this impressive mansion, designed by James Renwick, Jr., is a splendid example of the Victorian Gothic style of the Civil War era and a reminder of the service to the city and nation of successive generations of the Dodge family, notably in the field of education.

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 Greyston Conference Center (formerly William E. Dodge House) 690 West 247th Street (4675 Hadley Avenue), Borough of The Bronx and designates Tax Map Block 5925, Lot 411, Borough of The Bronx, as its Landmark Site.