

HAMILTON GRANGE, 287 Convent Avenue, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1801;
architect John McComb.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 2050, Lot 4.

On July 12, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of Hamilton Grange and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 20). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Six witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The almost square architectural mass of Hamilton Grange is impressive in its symmetry and handsome proportions. Designed by one of the City's best early architects, John McComb, Jr., and incorporating features suggested by Hamilton, this Federal style house, with its porches and unpretentious clapboard exterior, has a gracious dignity. "The Grange" was planned as a country seat by Alexander Hamilton for the open countryside and was named after his paternal grandfather's home in Scotland. It is one of the few remaining notable historical houses, designed in the Federal Style, of true architectural distinction.

In 1889, the two-story frame mansion was moved five hundred feet from its original site necessitating the construction of a new foundation and basement to receive it. At its present site the mansion first served as a chapel and later as a rectory for Saint Luke's Church and the original front now faces the church. The original front porch was moved around and added to the side veranda which now faces the street, and the original entrance door was moved to a corner of the veranda. It is an exceptionally fine Federal doorway with leaded sidelights and has a fan design within the transom. Due to vandalism the leaded sidelights will have to be restored. The front door is set in panelled reveals, and pilasters adorn and flank the exterior sidelights.

The front facing the street has a featured central window at the second floor; the rear is five windows wide, while the sides have four. In the rear supported by six evenly spaced Doric columns is one of the two side verandas which extend the full width of the house. Two handsome octagonal rooms reflect themselves externally by projecting as three-sided bays into the side verandas. These bay windows have the elegant full length triple sash so typical of Federal houses.

The handsome roof cornice is Doric, with triglyphs in the frieze, and as seen in photographs taken of the house in 1933, was once surmounted by a fine Federal balustrade which encircled the low-lying hip roof. Similar balustrades were to be found above the side verandas and the entrance and rear porches. Four large chimneys (two of brick and two false ones of frame) rise prominently and emphasize the symmetry of the house.

History of the House

Alexander Hamilton built the house with assistance from his father-in-law, General Philip Schuyler. It was erected in 1801 with Ezra Weeks as builder and was intended to provide a county seat from which Hamilton could escape the rigors of his career as soldier and statesman. The thirty-five acre property was once located on Kingsbridge Road (The Old Albany Post Road) so it was convenient for him to take the stagecoach to the State Capitol when the occasion arose.

Alexander Hamilton (1757-1804), one of the ablest leaders of his day, was a staunch Federalist with strong passions and prejudices which finally brought on his duel with Aaron Burr. In the Revolutionary War he served as secretary and aide-de-camp to General Washington with the rank of lieutenant colonel. Later he commanded a regiment under General Lafayette. In 1798 he was appointed Inspector-General of the Army. A brilliant lawyer, he served in the Continental Congress of 1782 and of 1788. A member of the New York State Legislature in 1787, he was appointed Secretary of the Treasury in 1789. He is credited with proposing a national bank in 1791 and the mint in 1792, and he advocated the excise tax on spirits. With some friends he founded the New York Evening Post in 1801. He left a rich legacy of political writings, including many Federalist papers, to his country and to posterity.

FILE COPY
NOT TO BE
REMOVED

FILE COPY
NOT TO BE
REMOVED

As the building is now situated, the Grange cannot be made to reflect either its architect's conception or its condition when it was Alexander Hamilton's residence.

However, Congress has passed legislation (76 Stat. 57) establishing the Grange as a national memorial and appropriating funds for its restoration contingent on the satisfaction of the Secretary of the Department of the Interior that "the lands which have been donated are sufficient to assure the relocation of the Grange...." The National Park Service is preparing several alternate site proposals, all within one or two blocks of the present site, and there is every indication that a good new site will indeed soon be agreed upon.

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 Hamilton Grange 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, Hamilton Grange is an outstanding example of Federal architecture, one of the few country seats of the period remaining in New York; that the structure contains excellent proportions and distinctive architectural features; and that the historical associations connected with its original builder and owner are of importance to the history of the country and to the people of the City of New York.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 8-A 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 Hamilton Grange, 287 Convent Avenue, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 2050, Lot 4, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

FILE
NOT TO BE
REMOVED