

1970

Landmarks Preservation Commission
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CONSULATE GENERAL OF ITALY (formerly the Henry P. Davison House), 690 Park Avenue, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1916-17; architect Walker & Gillette.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 1383, Lot 38.

On May 26, 1970, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Consulate General of Italy (formerly the Henry P. Davison House) and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 24). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. The representative of Community Board No. 8 and two other witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

This house is a part of that outstanding group of neo-Federal townhouses which extends along the west side of Park Avenue, between East 68th and 69th Streets, sometimes referred to as the "Pyne-Davison Blockfront" due to the uniform architectural quality of these houses.

The present Consulate General of Italy was designed by the architectural firm of Walker & Gillette. It was built in 1916-17 as the residence of Henry Pomeroy Davison. This splendid residence is the northern terminus of the beautiful group of neo-Federal townhouses along the west side of Park Avenue. Like the other houses in the block, this house has a rusticated limestone first story. The red brickwork above is, like that of its neighbors, laid in Flemish bond and its cornice carefully aligned with theirs. The details of its stonework, however, and most particularly, the elaboration of its main entrance doorway, give it special distinction.

The elaborate central entrance on Park Avenue is flanked by low windows in the rusticated stone base. The second floor has three handsomely framed floor-length casement windows. The third and fourth floors have four conventional height double-hung windows; those at the third floor are capped by flat arches of brick with stone keystones.

The main entrance is flanked by a pair of freestanding Ionic columns, each with its own block entablature connected above by a segmental-arch pediment with broken lower chord. The doorway itself, reminiscent of Georgian prototypes, is set in a molded stone archway crowned by a large double keystone. It enframes a pair of heavy wood doors painted black and surmounted by an arched glass fanlight.

Rising directly from the top of the rusticated base, the high second-floor casement windows have elaborately detailed stone enframements. The center window is pedimented with supporting scrolls at either side. The cornices of the flanking windows are crowned by unusual bronze motifs consisting of sphinxes guarding a central urn.

A limestone band-course separates the fourth story from the floors below and incorporates the fourth floor window sills. A simple cornice, with balustered parapet above, is the crowning feature of the facade. An attic story, with low copper roof, is hidden behind the parapet.

The 69th Street end of this house corresponds, architecturally, to the main front on Park Avenue. To the south of the main front on Park Avenue, a one-storied garage interrupts the limestone base with a pair of wide wood doors painted black. The wrought iron fence, that runs along the Park Avenue side, emphasizes the entrance to the garage with an exceptionally fine lantern supported at the top of a wrought iron archway.

Henry Pomeroy Davison (1867-1922) was one of the founders of the Bankers Trust Company and a partner of J. P. Morgan. He directed the United States Red Cross during World War I and, in 1917, organized and administered the relief missions of a special War Council appointed by President Wilson. He later conceived the idea of the World Federation of Red Cross Societies and, in 1919, launched the League of Red Cross Societies with headquarters in Geneva. His

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house, at No. 690 Park Avenue continued, for some time after Mr. Davison's death, to be used as a residence. Marshall Field, Anson W. Burchard, Henry the thirty-third, Prince of Reuss and Harry Payne Bingham lived there. Since 1952 it has been occupied by the Consul General of Italy.

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 Consulate General of Italy (formerly the Henry P. Davison 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 Henry P. Davison House is an excellent example of the large New York townhouse, built for a distinguished owner in the early part of the 20th century, that it is a good example of neo-Federal design, with Georgian overtones, that its architectural details show much study and refinement, that it is an essential and harmonious element in a blockfront of neighboring houses of outstanding character and that it continues to serve a useful purpose as the Consulate General of Italy.

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 Consulate General of Italy (formerly the Henry P. Davison House), 690 Park Avenue, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1383, Lot 38, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.