

SARA DELANO ROOSEVELT MEMORIAL HOUSE, 47-49 East 65th Street (No. 47, formerly the residence of Sara Delano Roosevelt; No. 49, formerly the residence of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt), Borough of Manhattan. Completed 1908; architect Charles A. Platt.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1380, Lot 30.

On May 26, 1970, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Sara Delano Roosevelt Memorial House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 19). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Three witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

This dignified Georgian style double townhouse was designed by Charles A. Platt and built in 1907-08. The residence was commissioned by Sara Delano Roosevelt, with No. 47 to be occupied by her and No. 49 by her son and daughter-in-law Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, and their family. The design of the house is similar to Nos. 6 and 8 East Seventy-Sixth Street, the Ludlow-Parish houses, where, in 1905, Eleanor had been given in marriage to her cousin Franklin by her uncle, President Theodore Roosevelt.

The young family moved about a great deal, but beginning with the autumn of 1908 they lived in the Sixty-Fifth Street residence whenever they were in New York City, where Franklin Roosevelt carried on his activities as a lawyer and an officer of an insurance firm. In August 1921 he was suddenly stricken with poliomyelitis. Upon being released from the hospital at the end of October, he insisted on going directly to the townhouse--rather than to the seclusion of Hyde Park--and began his convalescence in the fourth floor front bedroom. In the remaining months of 1921 and in 1922, the house became the scene of the most critical struggle in the life of Franklin Roosevelt: his determined recovery from the illness and his gradual resumption of an active life. After 1928, members of Franklin Roosevelt's family lived at No. 49 only for brief periods.

Sara Delano Roosevelt occupied No. 47 until her death in 1941. Shortly thereafter, funds were raised by a group of interested citizens, and in 1942 the double house was purchased for a moderate sum and presented to Hunter College for use as a social and interfaith center. This use was assured when the residence was acquired in 1943 by a membership corporation created by a special act of the New York State Legislature.

President Roosevelt was delighted that the Sara Delano Roosevelt Memorial House was to serve a function which he felt would have pleased his mother; he furnished the library in No. 47 and donated a large number of books for it. Few physical changes were made to the interiors, but in order to accommodate large gatherings, the two dining rooms and the two parlors were thrown together. All of the rooms were refurnished.

Architecturally, this five-story double residence is well-conceived. It is built of brick laid up in Flemish bond, with limestone used at the basement and first floor and as trim at the upper stories. A handsome stone cartouche is set in the center of the brick wall between the third and fourth floors.

The building is separated from the street by a simple, low wrought iron railing enclosing the areaways on either side of the common entrance. A low flight of steps leads up to the boldly rusticated, arched doorway enframing a pair of handsome wrought iron doors surmounted by a fanlight. Behind the doorway is a vestibule, with separate doors leading into the two houses.

The facade is divided horizontally into three sections: a low basement and first floor, the three middle stories above, and an attic below a dominant roof cornice. At the first floor, the entrance is flanked at each side by a wide subdivided window. The continuous wrought iron balcony below the second story windows is an important architectural feature. Four limestone enframed windows are

set into the brick wall at each of the upper stories. Crowning the tall second story windows are individual entablatures with projecting cornices which extend up to the third floor windowsills. The strong feeling of verticality which this creates is harmoniously balanced by a wide limestone bandcourse which connects the entablatures. A narrow bandcourse sets apart the fifth story and also forms the windowsill of the smaller attic windows. The pair of houses is further unified by a single cornice, set off from the fascia by a row of dentils and ornamented above by lion-head masks.

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 Sara Delano Roosevelt Memorial 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 Sara Delano Roosevelt Memorial House is a fine early twentieth century townhouse in neo-Georgian style, that its well-integrated architectural elements have excellent scale and its details are executed in the best tradition of workmanship, that this double house served as the city residence of Sara Delano Roosevelt and her son Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his family for many years, that it was the scene of his heroic struggle and recovery from a crippling illness, and that it continues to serve a useful function as a social and interfaith center of one of the City's foremost institutions of higher 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 Sara Delano Roosevelt Memorial House, 47-49 East 65th Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1380, Lot 30, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.