

STEINWAY HOUSE, 18-33 41st Street, Steinway, Borough of Queens. Built about 1840; architect unknown.

Landmark Site: Borough of Queens Tax Map Block 802, Lot 31.

On December 27, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Steinway House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 122). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Three witnesses spoke in favor of designation, including the owner, who approved the proposed designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Steinway House was originally built in a delightful rural setting on the river as a spacious Italianate country villa. It is built of handsome, rough-hewn blocks of granite. In the 1850's when it was built, American architects had departed from the rigid square or rectangular plan, introducing designs which expressed, with greater freedom, the many different functions of the large country house. In this respect this villa typifies remarkably well the merchant's country home of the mid-Nineteenth Century.

In the Steinway House the plan for its twenty-seven rooms is both rambling and asymmetrical. The central element is a two-storied, T-shaped section. The vertical projection toward the north is a central hall, two full stories in height. The main entrance opens on this hall from the river side. There are several parlors, a dining room and kitchen on the first floor and handsome bedrooms on the second floor. The west end of the cross-section burgeons into a striking four-story tower containing additional living quarters. The areas which fit into the intersections of the "T" are occupied on the west by a one-story library-den and on the east by an open porch. Other porches and terraces flank the South and East.

The freedom expressed in the plan can also be seen in the imaginative combination of classical and medieval elements. Decorative details judiciously combine the styles of different periods. The main entrance porch, one bay in depth, rests on four cast-iron Corinthian columns. Modillions (brackets) project from beneath the eaves of the porch, the library wing and from the cornices of the upper stories, and the tower. The gable of the central hall and of the eastern elevation recall the triangular pediment of the classical temple. On the other hand, the double-arched window in the main hall and the rows of round-arched windows in the tower are typical features of the Italianate villa. The rough surface of the stonework, by contrast, is reminiscent of medieval domestic architecture.

The house was originally built for Benjamin Pike. During the 1870's William Steinway, the piano manufacturer, bought it, and his family occupied the house until the 1920's. The Steinways had a piano manufacturing plant and a village for their workers in the area. Originally the house was surrounded by tennis courts, stables, lawns and orchards.

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 Steinway 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 Steinway House is typical of a country mansion of the type that certain wealthy merchants favored in the middle of the Nineteenth Century, that the freedom of its design and its well balanced, though diverse elements, represent a version of the Italianate villa style which played such an important part in the development of American architecture and that its location near the water reminds us of the originally rural quality of this area.

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 the Steinway House, 18-33 41st Street, Steinway, Borough of Queens and designates Tax Map Block 802, Lot 31, Borough of Queens, as its Landmark Site.