

Landmarks Preservation Commission
August 18, 1970, Number 13
LP-0646

37 EAST 4th STREET HOUSE, Borough of Manhattan. Completed 1845; architect unknown.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 544, Lot 67.

On February 3, 1970, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 37 East 4th Street House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 9). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Two witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There was one speaker in opposition to designation. The owner of the house has informed the Commission that he is in favor of the proposed designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The dignified Greek Revival residence at No. 37 East 4th Street and the Seabury-Tredwell (Old Merchant's) House at No. 29 are the only houses of note that have survived on this block.

No. 37, built in 1844-45, is unusually impressive. Although this brick house is only three and one-half stories high, it aligns perfectly with the five-story 20th century apartment house that abuts it at the east. It is also a deep house, occupying a larger than usual portion of the lot. A high stoop, over a stone basement which still retains traces of rustication, leads to a handsome doorway with full entablature supported by a pair of Ionic columns, a typically Greek Revival feature. The inner doorway, behind paneled reveals, is flanked by blocked-up sidelights, set between square pilasters. A three-paned transom crowns the doorway. Traces of a delicate carved molding, which once surrounded the transom, are still visible. Vestiges of the cap moldings, which originally surmounted the window lintels, remain above the windows of the third story. Six-over-six window sash is still in place at the third story, and the low attic windows and simple wood roof cornice, with fascia below, are likewise features of the Greek Revival style. Although none of the ironwork of the 1840s survives, it was almost certainly identical with the ironwork of the nearby Tredwell house, judging by fragments found by the present owners.

Samuel Tredwell Skidmore (1801-1881), for whom the house was built, was one of the City's best known businessmen, and a cousin, once removed, of Seabury Tredwell. At the time he built the house, Skidmore was engaged in the wholesale drug business, under the firm name of Skidmore & Co. Later he served as president of the Howard Insurance Company, at 66 Wall Street, and as a trustee of the U. S. Trust Company. He served as vestryman of Trinity Church from 1845 to 1874 and as Senior Warden from 1874 to 1880. Together with his wife, Angelina, and their eight children, Skidmore lived in this house (known successively as No. 369, then as No. 385 Fourth Street, and finally as No. 37 East 4th Street) for almost four decades. In 1883, after Mr. Skidmore's death here on November 8, 1881, his widow sold the house.

In the 1840s, this was one of the most fashionable residential neighborhoods in the City. Around the corner, on Lafayette Place, was William B. Astor's residence. On the west side, across that street, stood LaGrange Terrace. A large part of Vauxhall Garden, a favorite summer evening resort since 1805, offering band music, theatrical performances, fireworks, cakes and ale, was located in the middle of the block bounded by Fourth Street, the Bowery, the present Astor Place and Lafayette Place. The area to the north was still largely undeveloped at the time Skidmore built his house. Grace Church, at Tenth Street and Broadway, was then in the process of construction. Within a few years, however, the Astor Library was erected on the east side of Lafayette Place, followed by Cooper Union, in 1857. By the early 20th century, the area had become almost entirely commercial, making two surviving early residences, Nos. 37 and the previously designated No. 29, all the more precious.

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 37 East 4th Street 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 37 East 4th Street House, is one of the two remaining early residences on this once fashionable residential block, that it is a distinguished example of the New York townhouse of the Greek Revival period and that its present condition lends itself well to the restoration which the present owners contemplate.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 53 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 37 East 4th Street House, Borough of Manhattan, and designates Tax Map Block 544, Lot 67, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.