

OVERTURNED

Landmarks Preservation Commission
November 23, 1965, Calendar No. 1
LP-00014

J.P. MORGAN JR. HOUSE (Lutheran Church in America Building), 231 Madison Avenue at 37th Street, Borough of Manhattan. 1853, built for I.N. Phelps, architect unknown.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 866, Lot 58.

On September 21, 1965, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the J.P. Morgan Jr. House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Calendar No. 14). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Nine witnesses spoke in favor of designation. Their testimony indicated that there is wide support from the community for this proposed designation. It is apparent to the Commission that the designation of the Morgan House as a Landmark is a matter of great concern to many persons in the neighborhood. In letters to the Commission, the Deputy Borough President of Manhattan and the Borough President's Community Planning Board No. 5 supported the proposed designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

This three-story brownstone Anglo-Italianate mansion is one of the finest in the City. The house is memorable as the residences of J.P. Morgan Jr., one of the most eminent citizens of his time and one of our great private collectors. Morgan, as a leader of his family for a generation, exerted great influence on the financial and corporate institutions of New York City and the entire Nation.

With three sides fully exposed, this house displays a wealth of significant architectural detail. The handsome entrance porch is approached by a fine flight of steps and an open landing enclosed by an interesting stone balustrade with Doric balusters. The porch roof is supported Corinthian columns and pilasters, and it enhances the impressive entrance. The windows are all surrounded by stone frames surmounted by delicate cornices, while the sills are carried on attractive console brackets. An unusual feature of the window frames the elegant manner in which they are in which they are extended outward at the top corners (crossed), a refinement that is too rarely found.

The beautiful wrought-iron balconies, at the first floor, are strongly reminiscent of those made popular by Stanford White in the late 1880s and, along with the attic story, doubtless represent additions of that period. This unique attic story with its handsome triple window grouped under arched pediments adds distinction to the building and provides a handsome profile against the sky. The curved bay-window on the south side relates the building skillfully to this open site and forms an attractive feature overlooking the lawn and garden.

Architecturally, the house is notable for its great dignity and the simplicity of its main mass. The contrast between void and solids, as exemplified in the fenestration, contributes further to the repose to be found in this house and the architectural harmony of its features. The restrained use of refined detail is one of its outstanding qualities.

This building has considerable significance as one of the few remaining freestanding Brownstones in the City. As such, it has further importance as an example of any early Anglo-Italianate residence. The J.P. Morgan Jr. House, through the distinction of its restrained design, contributes greatly to the handsome character of the Morgan Block.

At the public hearing, the representative of the Turtle Bay Association said of the Morgan House, "For those interested in social history, its austere brown presence on Madison Avenue at 37th Street, brooking no familiarity from next-door neighbors yet squarely confronting the commercial bustle of the Avenue, admirably symbolizes the personality of the 'House of Morgan' and adds flavor to the neighborhood of which the Morgans were such well-known inhabitants."

The representative of the Murray Hill Committee testified, "The Morgan Mansion is a particularly splendid and beautiful specimen of brownstone architecture, which was dominant in the New York for more than a century and of which only comparatively small and architecturally undistinguished specimens otherwise remain."

The representative of the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects said, "The Institute is in favor of designating the J.P. Morgan Jr. House as a Landmark because 1. It is one of the few remaining examples of the complete brownstone town house which was such an important building type in the growth of the city. 2. The house is on a corner and adjoins the grounds of the Morgan Library thereby being exposed on three sides. This enhances its value for study as a brownstone prototype. 3. It is linked historically with a name famous in the development of our nation and as such gives us a unique mirror in which to see and study the era, the man and how we built to his needs."

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 J.P. Morgan Jr. 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, this building—as the home J.P. Morgan Jr. House—has importance because it was a notable New York City residence during the first half of the 20th century, that it displays an impressive amount of fine architectural detail and that with its conservative appearance, it is a handsome building of great dignity.

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 J.P. Morgan Jr. House (Lutheran Church in the America Building), 231 Madison Avenue at 37th Street, Borough of Manhattan, and designates Tax Map Block 866, Lot 58, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.