

JUNIOR LEAGUE OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK (formerly Vincent Astor House), 130 East 80th Street, Borough of Manhattan. Begun 1927, completed 1928; architect Mott B. Schmidt.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1508, Lot 61.

On November 10, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Junior League of the City of New York and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 61). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Two witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. The owner of the building indicated to the Commission that it is in favor of designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Reflecting the Neo-Classic Style of Robert Adam, one of the foremost English architects of the Eighteenth Century, this formal residence of austere elegance is five stories high with basement and sub-basement. It is one of the most successful houses designed by a very gifted architect. Constructed of ashlar masonry of Roche limestone imported from France, the facade has a flat, low relief quality resulting from the slight variation in depth between the surface of the wall and projecting planes of the decorative elements. There is an absence of deep shadows, and the architect has deliberately used understatement in expressing the true refinement to be found here.

Separated from the street by a simple iron railing, the front elevation is three windows wide and symmetrical in design. Under the central windows, the double doors, with semicircular fanlight above, have an Ionic portico that handsomely frames this main entrance, the primary accented note on the facade. Above the portico is a broad, horizontal band supporting four Ionic pilasters and forming the sill of the tall, second story windows. Of these, the central window is given emphasis both by the especially broad central spacing of the pilasters and by being surrounded by a shallow, arched recess, a characteristically Adam detail. The pilasters, which rise through the second and third floors, carry a full entablature, the flat frieze being decorated with rosettes (paterae). The cornice of this entablature, like the horizontal band below, forms the sill for the attic windows which, in turn, are surmounted by a handsome pediment that extends the entire width of the house.

This residence, built in 1927, was designed by Mott B. Schmidt for Vincent Astor, whose father Col. John Jacob Astor lost his life in the sinking of the Titanic. In 1943 the townhouse was sold to Mrs. Bertha Rainey Plum, and late in 1947 it was acquired by the Junior League of New York City, which took possession of its new quarters in 1949. At that time, the construction of the house was found to be of such exceptional character that it was unnecessary to install a sprinkler system.

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 Junior League of the City of New York 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 Junior League of New York (formerly the Vincent Astor House) is an outstanding example of the Adam Style designed by a gifted architect, that the masonry is a fine expression of good craftsmanship, that it is one of a group of adjoining houses of outstanding architectural quality, that through its original owner it is linked with the social and financial history of the City, and that through its present owner, the Junior League, it continues to play a part in the social history as well as the social service programs in the City.

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 Junior League of the City of New York, 130 East 80th Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1508, Lot 61, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.