

THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH OUTSIDE OF RUSSIA (formerly George F. Baker, Jr. House), 75 East 93rd Street, Borough of Manhattan. Begun 1917, completed 1918, northern addition 1928; architects Delano & Aldrich.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1505, Lot 33.

On November 10, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of The Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 57). 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. His Eminence Metropolitan Philaret, President of The Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, has informed the Commission that he approves of the proposed designation. He indicated to the Commission, "We all think that it is doing very important work and wish it much success."

DESCRIPTION & ANALYSIS

Formerly a part of one of the most extensive early Twentieth Century town houses in New York and now The Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, this handsome L-shaped unit has great architectural distinction, dignity and restrained simplicity. Although definitely belonging to the Eclectic Period, this characteristic is subordinate to that of its superior quality of design and to the free interpretation of an historic style. The magnificent ensemble, comprising the main house with a ballroom wing, and a dower house set across a courtyard, forms the outstanding illustration in the City of modified Federal style as applied to a town house of the first rank.

The original portion of the complex, completed in 1918, for Francis F. Palmer consists of an almost square, three-story brick house with a low stone basement, and two stories of dormer windows set in the steeply pitched high slate roof, which is reminiscent of Georgian antecedents. Five windows wide on Park Avenue with four on Ninety-third Street, the evenly spaced windows are set in wide wall areas set up in English bond brickwork. Crowning these red brick walls is a well-proportioned stone cornice composed of classical moldings, dentils and ornate modillions. The parapet wall set back from the cornice is pierced in front of each pedimented dormer by open balustrades. With the exception of the fifth floor bull's-eye windows, all those of the east and south elevations are symmetrically arranged. Two tall brick chimneys, prominently placed in the steep roof of the west and south elevations, play a dominant role in the architectural scheme of this residence.

The sparing of ornament is effective because it creates a strong contrast with the simple wall planes of brick. The tall second story windows have low pedimental stone lintels with carved ornament, and the three center ones of the east elevation are grouped together by means of a balcony with a metal railing. Other single windows at the second floor are adorned with slightly bowed railings, resting on the stone band course. An imposing doorway on 93rd Street is composed of two three-quarter round, engaged Tuscan columns supporting a high entablature surmounted by a handsome iron railing. The decorated frieze of the entablature contains bucrania joined together by swags, below dentils, and the carved modillions which support the cornice. A large semi-circular doorway with fanlight is contained in the enframingent.

The courtyard elevation of the original house is less severe than the street elevations. The central section of the three-story brick wall projects forward slightly from the facade. In the center, framed together in stone as a single architectural unit, is a doorway with an arched window above, crowned by an arched pediment resting on consoles. Another arched window with keystone is effectively placed higher in the brick wall. Crowning this projected wall section is a raked cornice framing a bull's-eye window, enriched with handsome carved swags. Left and right of this projected center section, single tiers of windows flank it to form a symmetrical design.

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When George F. Baker, Jr. bought the property in 1928 he added a large L-shaped ballroom wing to the Francis F. Palmer mansion. This northern addition to the house is set well back from the Park Avenue property line forming a courtyard. A three-story brick building with a low basement and balustraded parapet, it was skilfully incorporated into the revised overall scheme by means of its design, scale, materials and details. This long arm of the "L" at the north, extending west beyond the main body of the house, forms this "ballroom" wing. The short arm, forming the garage with a private apartment above, is now Number 69 East 93rd Street. A spacious open court created by this addition became a formal flagstone garden enclosed on the street side by a wall.

Sergei Semenenko, a Russian-born Boston banker, contributed funds to The Synod of Bishops, who purchased the main house and the ballroom wing in 1958. Considerable interior and exterior changes were made in the large ballroom pavilion in order to convert the structure into a place of public assembly. In complying with the building code, the three tall, double-hung windows were replaced by large panel French doors, which open onto a new balcony which was added at this time. An outside staircase was installed giving access to the assembly room. The central flight rises to an intermediate landing, then divides symmetrically, leading to the balcony which extends the width of the facade. The first floor design is barely visible behind this outside staircase. Three tall open arches form a loggia and beyond them are windows set in the recessed inner wall. To create a main entrance into the paved courtyard, which replaced the formal garden, the wall at the property line was opened in the center, steps were inserted, and gates were installed. These changes were accomplished with skill and taste and do not in any way detract from the distinction of the original ensemble.

George F. Baker, Jr. (1878-1937) had a reputation for reticence and a dislike of publicity. After graduating from Harvard in 1899, he began his banking career with J. P. Morgan, a close friend of his father, George F. Baker, known as the dean of American banking. In the First National Bank of the City of New York, he rose from clerk to Vice-Chairman and at the death of his father in 1931, succeeded him as Chairman of the Board. He inherited \$60,000,000.00, much of which he helped to accumulate as Vice-Chairman of the bank. He was a director of many corporations and, like his father, a generous philanthropist. He was a trustee of the Frick Collection, the New York Public Library and the American Museum of Natural History. In 1931 he received an honorary degree of Doctor of Laws from New York University. In his will he provided for the George F. Baker Trust to be used for charitable, religious and educational purposes.

Church History

In the days of the evacuation of the White armies and of the people, The Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia was created by the issuance of an edict (ukase), by the Patriarch Tykhon, together with the Saint Synod and the legal authority of the Church Council on November 20, 1920.

After holding the First Council meeting abroad in 1921, the Patriarch Tykhon, was forced by the Soviets to dissolve the Supreme Church Administration. He issued a message to that end from prison dated May 3, 1922. However, the Council of Bishops abroad then reorganized their administration on the ground of a general Patriarchal order of November 20, 1920, providing instructions for dioceses which would be unable to have regular relations with the Church Center in Moscow in connection with the political situation. By virtue of that ukase a new governing body, The Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia was created.

The Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia is significant throughout the world: it has more than 400 congregations scattered over almost all the countries of the free world. These congregations consist of hundreds of thousands of believers, several hundred priests and 24 bishops.

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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 Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia 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 Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia is part of what was once one of New York's most extensive town houses, that it is an outstanding example of a modified Federal style, that it is dignified in character and spacious in conception, that it is one of the finest works in New York City by the architects, Delano and Aldrich, whose highly personal style and elegant manner are evident in this group of houses and that it adds an imposing and distinguished architectural ensemble to our City.

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 Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, 75 East 93rd Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1505, Lot 33, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

Chairman Harmon H. Goldstone did not participate in the consideration of this Calendar item.