



The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission

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150-YEAR-OLD ITALIANATE VILLA IN BROOKLYN'S CLINTON HILL IS GRANTED LANDMARK STATUS

Graceful Home Formerly Owned by Followers of Reverend Major Jealous Divine, the Charismatic Leader of the International Peace Mission Movement

The Landmarks Preservation Commission today unanimously designated as a New York City landmark the James W. and Lucy S. Elwell House, at 70 Lefferts Place in Brooklyn. Located between Grand and Classon avenues, the villa was completed in the mid-1850s and is one of the few single-family homes remaining in the neighborhood, formerly a commuter suburb of Manhattan during the mid 19th century.



The house was built circa 1854 by James W. Elwell, owner of a Manhattan-based shipping and freight business. It was purchased in 1939 by the followers of Reverend Major Jealous Divine, also known as Father Divine.

Father Divine was the leader of the International Peace Mission Movement, which appeared in Brooklyn around 1919, and embraced racial equality, peace and non-violence. His oratory talent and practice of hosting lavish banquets for the public at little cost during the Great Depression propelled the movement's expansion from about 30 to 40 people in 1924 to tens of thousands in the late 1930s.

“This elegant home has defined the character of this neighborhood for a century and a half, and we are thrilled that it will continue to have a presence for generations to come,” said Commission Chairman Robert B. Tierney. “It is an architectural, historic and cultural treasure and deserves to be protected.”

Crowned by an intricate cupola, the 2 ½ story house still has many of its original Italianate features, including a low-pitched roof with wide, overhanging eaves and decorative wood brackets, attic windows, a pronounced front pediment, and paired arched windows on the second story of the front façade.

The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission is the largest municipal preservation agency in the United States. Since its creation in 1965, the Commission has designated nearly 23,000 buildings in all five boroughs, including 1,148 individual landmarks, 107 interior landmarks, nine scenic landmarks and 85 historic districts.