Landmarks Preservation Commission
June 7, 1988; Designation List 204
LP-1554

COBBLE HILL HISTORIC DISTRICT EXTENSION, Borough of Brooklyn.

BOUNDARIES

The property bounded by a line extending northerly along the western property line of 348-352 Henry Street to the southern curb line of Amity Street, easterly along the southern curb line of Amity Street to the mid-point of Henry Street where it adjoins the boundary line of the Cobble Hill Historic District, southerly along the Henry Street boundary line, westerly across Henry Street to the southern property line of 356 Henry Street, westerly along the southern property line of 356 Henry Street, and northerly along the western property lines of 356 and 354 Henry Street, to the point of beginning.

TESTIMONY AT PUBLIC HEARING

On November 12, 1985, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of this extension to the Cobble Hill Historic District (Item No. 9). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Seven witnesses spoke in favor of designation. The Commission received several letters in support of designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Summary

The Cobble Hill Historic District Extension consists of the two Italianate houses at 354 and 356 Henry Street and the adjacent Polhemus Building at 350 Henry Street. These buildings, as well as others owned by the Long Island College Hospital were within the boundaries of the district as heard by the Landmarks Preservation Commission in 1966, but not designated with the rest of the district. The rowhouses were built in 1852-53, as part of a group of eight which once occupied the entire blockfront between Congress and Amity Streets. The other four remaining houses of this original row are within the Cobble Hill Historic

District as it was designated in 1969. The Polhemus Building, constructed in 1896-97, replaced the other two buildings of the original row. Built to serve as a free clinic for the people of the area and as a training facility for the nearby Long Island College Hospital, this building has played an important role in the Cobble Hill neighborhood. Designed in a freely adapted French Renaissance Revival style by architect Marshall Emery, its visual distinctiveness, its prominent corner site, and its large scale within the residential context of the district emphasize its significance to the community. These three buildings are a logical extension of the Cobble Hill Historic District, continuing the architectural style and historical associations of the area already designated.

Early History of Cobble Hill [1]

The Cobble Hill area, located south of Brooklyn Heights, north of Red Hook, and approximately two blocks east of the river, was settled by Europeans early in the seventeenth century. Beginning in the 1640s the Dutch governor Willem Kieft granted patents for farms in this section.

The name "Cobbleshill" appears on Ratzer's survey of Brooklyn of 1766-67, and refers to a steep conical hill on the west side of Red Hook Lane, near the present intersection of Atlantic and Pacific Streets with Court Street. During the American Revolution, this hill was the site of Cobble Hill Fort, a small platform with three cannon protected by spiral trenches. The hill's great height allowed for wide ranging observation of enemy activities. When the British succeeded in occupying this area, they leveled the top of Cobble Hill to limit its view of their headquarters in Brooklyn Heights. During the War of 1812, Cobble Hill was again called into military use as "Fort Swift," one of a line of defenses planned by General Joseph G. Swift.

Nineteenth Century Residential Development

After the Revolution, Cobble Hill was the site of much change and development. Henry Street was opened in 1828, to allow a direct route to the more populated Brooklyn Heights area. This access became especially important with the inclusion of Cobble Hill in the newly incorporated City of Brooklyn in 1834. When the South Ferry was started in 1836, providing easy transportation from Brooklyn to lower Manhattan, development of the area accelerated.

During the 1830s much of the area was taken up by large, rural homesteads, many with impressive mansions. The west side of Henry Street, with its dramatic view of the harbor was the first location for such buildings. Each blockfront had a different owner, and its own substantial structure. The grid street pattern, implemented in 1834 between Atlantic and Kane Streets,

encouraged further subdivision. By 1840 the large holdings were beginning to be developed as rows, some with as few as two or three units, others with as many as nine. Greek Revival groups, followed by Italianate and later styles, appeared, first sporadically, then with greater frequency throughout the area. By 1860, Cobble Hill had become a densely populated, suburban community, its residential sections served by a complement of banks, stores and other services as well as a number of churches and health care facilities.

As part of this wave of development, the west side of Henry Street from Amity to Congress became the location for eight rowhouses, of which numbers 354 and 356 were part. Edward Wilson, an immigrant from Ireland, had bought the entire blockfront in 1852 and immediately constructed the row. By November, 1853 he was selling the developed lots.[2] The blockfront remained unchanged until 1895 when the two northernmost houses were sold to Caroline Polhemus.[3] By 1897 they had been replaced by the Polhemus Clinic.

The Polhemus Clinic and The Long Island College Hospital

The Long Island College Hospital grew out of the Brooklyn Dispensary which was founded in 1856 to provide medical services to the many German residents of Brooklyn's 6th Ward. In 1858 the facility expanded and was incorporated as the Long Island College Hospital with the intention of creating "a hospital with an out-door and lying-in department, and a school for the education of nurses, and a medical college in which men might be taught and practically trained for the difficult and highly responsible duties of the medical profession." [4] The hospital first occupied a large old house on Henry Street, just north of Amity, still the site of the main hospital building.

In 1895, Mrs. Caroline Herriman Polhemus founded the Polhemus Memorial Clinic dedicated to the memory of her late husband Henry Ditmas Polhemus. Polhemus had been a regent of the Long Island College Hospital from 1872 until his death in 1895, and was widely known in Brooklyn for his generosity and concern for others. The Clinic was to provide free medical services for the poor people of Brooklyn's waterfront area, and the building was to house laboratories and lecture rooms for medical education.[5] From its inception, the Polhemus Clinic and the building it occupied became an important asset to its neighborhood. While it was clearly associated with the hospital the Clinic originally maintained its own Board of Trustees and separate identity.

The Polhemus Building

The site for the new clinic was cleared of the two existing rowhouses in the summer of 1895. The design for the new building was opened to a competition, with a $500 first prize. Six designs were submitted; the winning scheme was by a young architect, Marshall Emery. Construction started in the spring of 1896 and the building was occupied in December, 1897.[6]

The architect's goal was to create a building which was "dignified and pleasing, at the same time having as strongly a marked, monumental and academic character as the peculiar arrangement of the interior will permit, while refraining from an undue or lavish use of ornamentation."[7] He achieved this through the use of a freely applied French Renaissance style, designed to take advantage of its corner location. Executed in a bold combination of red brick with limestone, the exterior was planned to distinguish the different functions of the interior spaces. Separate entrances were provided on each facade; one for the clinic and one for the students and staff. The dispensary occupied the lower two stories with administration offices and a library on the third. The next three stories contained large lecture rooms and classrooms, the seventh had laboratories and the eighth housed the anatomy department.[8] The building is currently in transition, providing office space for several hospital departments.

Emery consulted with physicians and surgeons to create a thoroughly modern hospital.[9] Tremendous advances in knowledge of infection, contagion and hygiene were taking place at the end of the nineteenth century and the Polhemus Clinic, as well as other hospitals which were built during this period reflected these changes.[10] In addition, the Polhemus Building had an elevator, steam heat, a forced air ventilating system, its own electrical generators, and one of the first X-ray machines in existence.

Marshall Emery

The architect of the Polhemus Clinic, Marshall Emery, had an extensive and varied practice. He began his career with the firm of Withers & Dixon, [11] opening his own architectural practice in New York City in 1894.[12] By 1895, Emery won the commission for the Polhemus Clinic in Brooklyn. Some of the credit for this achievement was attributed to the experience in hospital design which he received in his first employment.[13] In 1899, his brother Henry joined him, after having worked for the prestigious firms of R.M. Hunt and Warren & Wetmore, and they formed the partnership of M.E. & H.G. Emery. The brothers

designed such buildings as the Jamaica Hospital on Long Island and the Elks Lodge in Albany, New York. While Marshall Emery lived in New York, his brother lived in Nyack and the firm designed many private homes in that area, as well as St. Ann's Roman Catholic Church, St. Paul's Methodist Church, the Nyack Library and the Nyack Hospital. Marshall Emery died in December, 1920 and Henry moved the practice to Nyack where he continued to work until his death in 1956. Over the years new partners joined the firm which continues today under the name of Schofield Colgan Architects.[14]

Descriptions

354 and 356 Henry Street

The two houses at 354 and 356 Henry Street were identical when constructed and are almost the same today. Three stories tall with a basement, both are brick fronted with wooden, panelled cornices, stone basements and stoops. A modern fire escape spans both buildings. Each building is three bays wide with square-headed, one over one windows with wooden sashes, marked by slightly projecting sills and lintels. The parlor floor windows of 356 have been raised and their lintels shaved. Those on 354 are still full height and are topped by bracketed lintels. Boldly projecting lintels, carried on incised brackets crown the doorway of 354. The profile is the same but the incising has been lost on 356. Each entrance has original double wooden doors with full length glass panels. Engaged colonnettes flank the doorways with panels ornamenting the deep reveals. The metal fencing around both buildings has been modernized and the areaway entrance to 356 has been removed.

The Polhemus Building

The Polhemus Building is eight stories tall with main facades on both Henry and Amity Streets. The southern facade can be seen from the street above the adjoining building at 354 Henry Street but was left as an undecorated party wall. The two lower stories are faced with ashlar limestone, while the five above are brick with limestone detail. Narrow cornices divide the building horizontally above the second and sixth stories. A broad copper cornice with deep dentils projects above the seventh story, while a simple brick attic story with its own restrained cornice rises above this and caps the building.

The Henry Street facade is three bays wide and symmetrically arranged. The central bay projects slightly and is articulated by broad stone pilasters rising between the third and seventh stories. These levels are given additional emphasis by limestone quoins at each corner of the building. Between the pilasters on the fourth through sixth stories the central bay is given

distinction by cast-iron window enframements, spandrels, colonnettes and engaged columns. An entrance (marked "College Entrance") with double wooden doors is set deep within stone reveals in the southernmost bay of this facade. An original bronze railing shields the areaway to each side of the door.

The Amity Street facade is similar to that on Henry Street, but is wider and asymmetrically arranged. A central, projecting section of this facade is flanked by a narrow bay to the west and a wider section to the east. A mid-twentieth century pedestrian bridge linking the Polhemus Clinic with the main hospital building is joined to the clinic at the third story.[15] At the center of the ground story is the main entrance, marked by an engraved "The Polhemus Dispensary." Modern doors are set deep within a large archway which is flanked by sets of fluted Ionic columns encased in stone blocks. To the west, a narrow doorway leads to a stair to the upper levels and a broad, double door was designed to provide an emergency entrance.

The distribution of materials and the horizontal divisions noted on the Henry Street facade continue on Amity Street as well. The only exception is that the broad pilasters which enframe the central section here are banded from the third through the sixth stories. At the seventh the pilasters are covered by a cartouche surrounded by elaborate ornamentation. As on the Amity Street facade, between the pilasters smaller, grouped windows are enframed by cast iron on the fourth through the seventh stories.

Report prepared by
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Landmarks Preservationist

Notes

1. For a more complete history of the area, see New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, Cobble Hill Historic District Designation Report, (New York, 1969).

2. Kings County Office of the Register, Conveyances, Liber 301, 102 and Liber 340, 323.

3. Kings County Office of the Register, Conveyances, Liber 2, 408, 409, 411.

4. Bessie M. Donaldson, The Long Island College Hospital and Training School for Nurses, 1858-1883-1933 (Brooklyn, NY, 1932) 19.

5. Ibid., 83-84.

6. The Brooklyn Daily Eagle, (Nov. 3, 1895) 22.

7. Ibid.

8. A. Jablons, M.D., ed. History of the Long Island College Hospital, College of Medicine and the State University of New York College of Medicine at New York City, (n.d.).

9. Eagle.

10. Albert J. Ochsner, The Organization and Management of Hospitals (Chicago, 1909) 26.

11. Eagle.

12. Dennis Steadman Francis, Architects in Practice, New York City,1840-1900 (New York, 1979) 29.

13. Eagle.

14. A brief history of the firm and a compilation of materials relating to Marshall Emery can be found in the research files of the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

15. The Landmarks Preservation Commission has no jurisdiction over this bridge as it presently exists. If it is ever removed, the Commission would regulate the area where it attaches to the facade of the Polhemus Building.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this area, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Cobble Hill Historic District Extension contains three buildings which, along with the Cobble Hill Historic District, have a special character and special historical interest and value which represent one or more periods or styles of architecture typical of one or more eras in the history of New York City and which cause this area, by reason of these factors, to constitute a distinct section of the City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the houses at 354 and 356 Henry Street and the Polhemus Clinic are an important part of the Cobble Hill area, continuing the architectural distinctiveness of the existing Cobble Hill Historic District; that the two houses were constructed in 1852-53 as part of a row and that the other four extant houses of the row are already in the Cobble Hill Historic District; that the Polhemus Clinic has fulfilled an important need in the community by bringing free health care to local residents; that this building was designed by the respected architect, Marshall Emery, and is a fine example of a freely adapted French Renaissance Revival style; that the exterior reflects the varied functions of the interior spaces; that the building's distinctive design, executed in a bold combination of materials, emphasizes the significance of this institution to this residential community; and that these three buildings are a logical extension of the Cobble Hill Historic District, continuing the architectural style and historical associations of the area already designated.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21, Section 534 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as an Extension of the Cobble Hill Historic District, Borough of Brooklyn, the property bounded by a line extending northerly along the western property line of 348-352 Henry Street to the southern curb line of Amity Street, easterly along the southern curb line of Amity Street to the mid-point of Henry Street where it adjoins the boundary line of the Cobble Hill Historic District, southerly along the Henry Street boundary line, westerly across Henry Street to the southern property line of 356 Henry Street, westerly along the southern property line of 356 Henry Street, and northerly along the western property lines of 356 and 354 Henry Street, to the point of beginning.

Selected Bibliography

The Brooklyn Daily Eagle Nov. 3, 1895; Mar. 31, 1896; Apr. 10, 1896; Apr. 29, 1897; Nov. 19, 1897; Dec. 30, 1897.

Donaldson, Bessie M. The Long Island College Hospital and Training School for Nurses 1858-1883-1933. Brooklyn, NY: Willis McDonald & Co., 1932.

[Emery, Henry G. Obituary]. The New York Times, May 2, 1956, p.31.

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Francis, Dennis Steadman. Architects in Practice, New York City, 1840-1900. New York: COPAR, 1979.

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Kings County Office of the Register. Liber Deeds and Conveyances.

POLHEMUS BUILDING
Cobble Hill Historic District Extension
350 Henry Street, Brooklyn

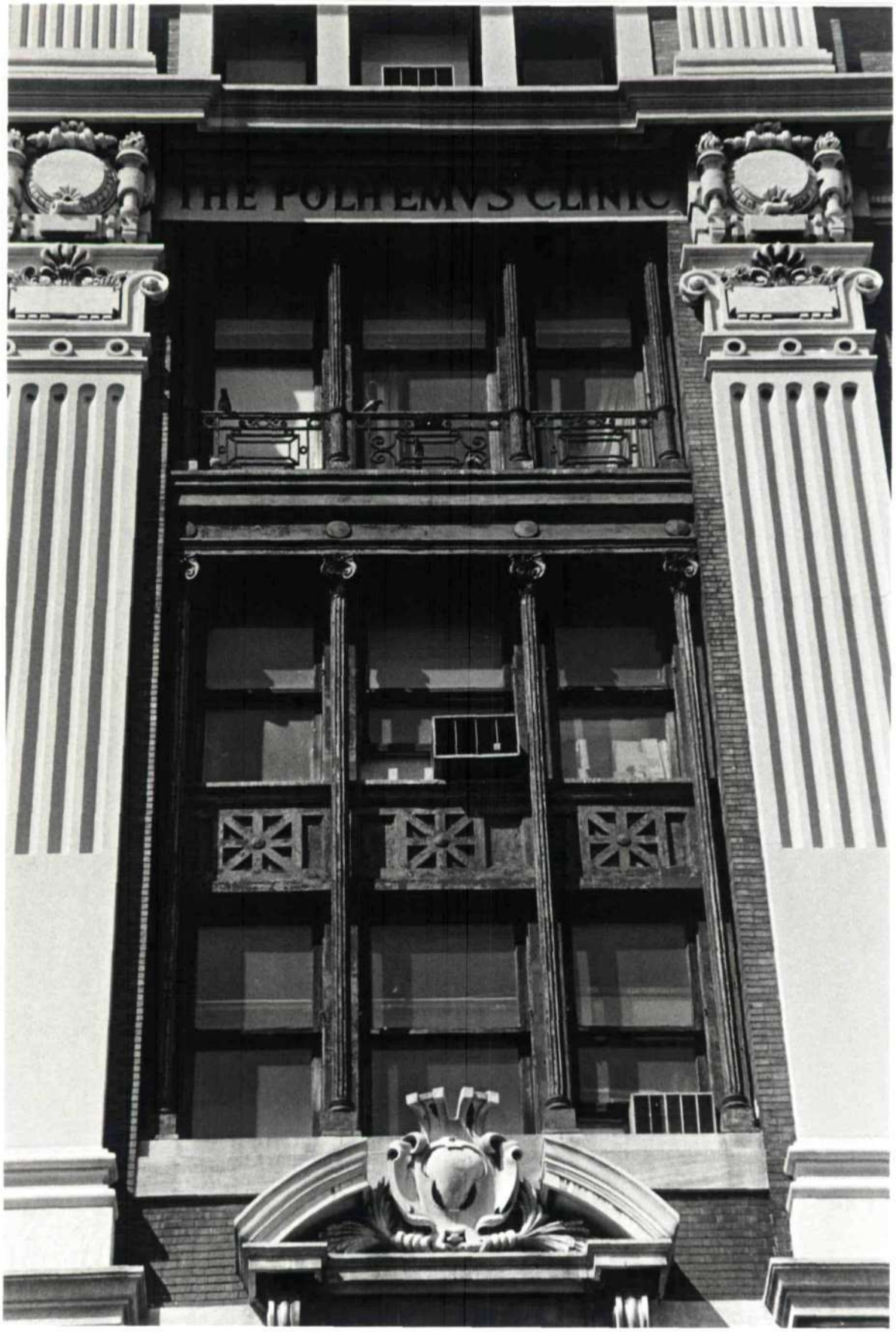
Henry Street facade

Built: 1896-97
Architect:
Marshall Emery

Photo by:
Forster, 1988

POLHEMUS BUILDING
Cobble Hill Historic District Extension
Brooklyn

Henry Street entrance



POLHEMUS BUILDING
Cobble Hill Historic District Extension
Brooklyn

Henry Street facade
Detail, Henry Street facade
Central bay, floors 4-6

POLHEMUS BUILDING
Cobble Hill Historic District Extension
Brooklyn

Henry Street Facade
Detail, third floor

POLHEMUS BUILDING
Cobble Hill Historic District Extension
Brooklyn

Henry Street facade
Detail, floors 5-8

POLHEMUS BUILDING
Cobble Hill Historic District Extension
Brooklyn

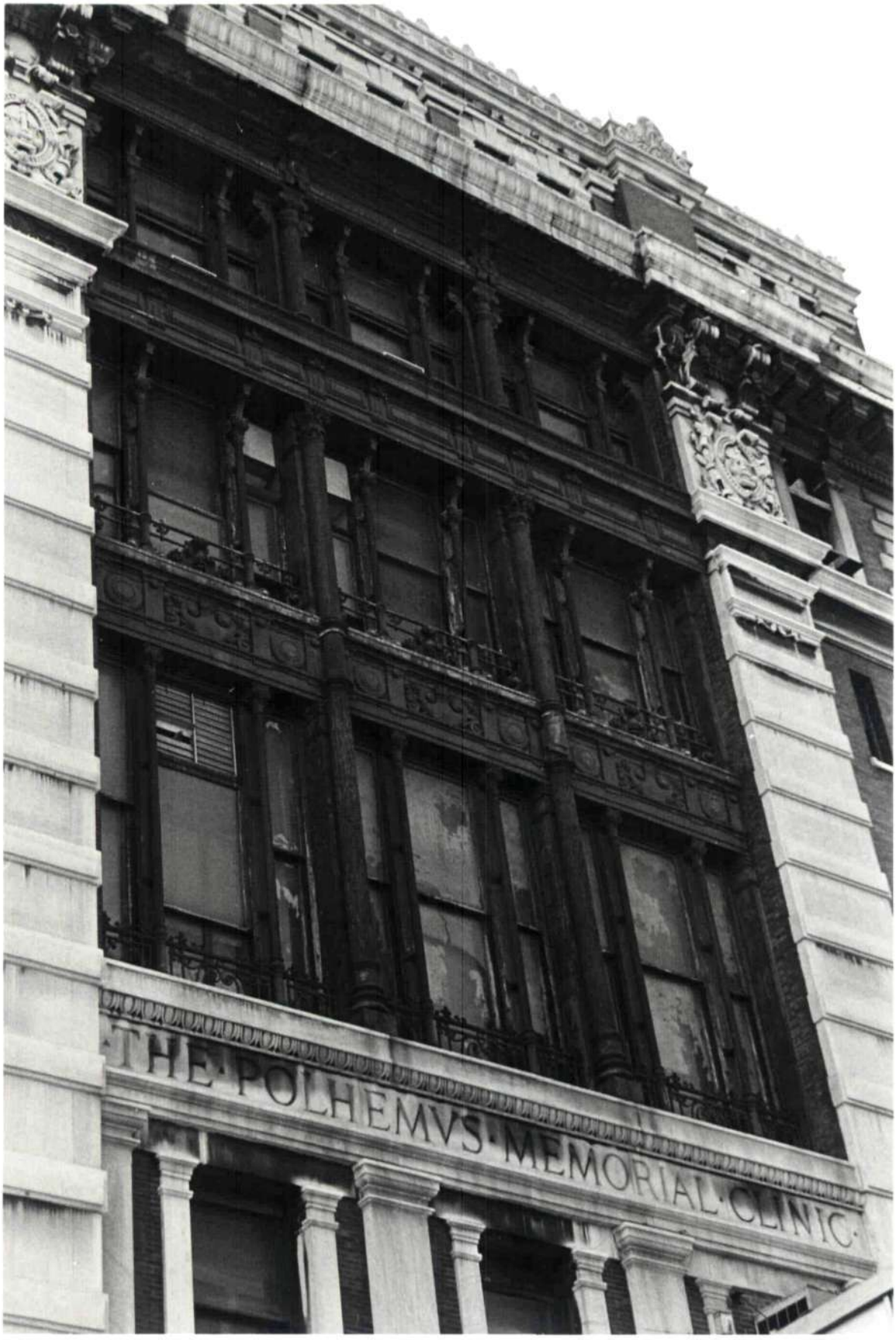
Amity Street Facade

Built: 1896-97
Architect:
Marshall Emery

Photo by:
Forster, 1988

POLHEMUS BUILDING
Cobble Hill Historic District Extension
Brooklyn

Amity Street entrance

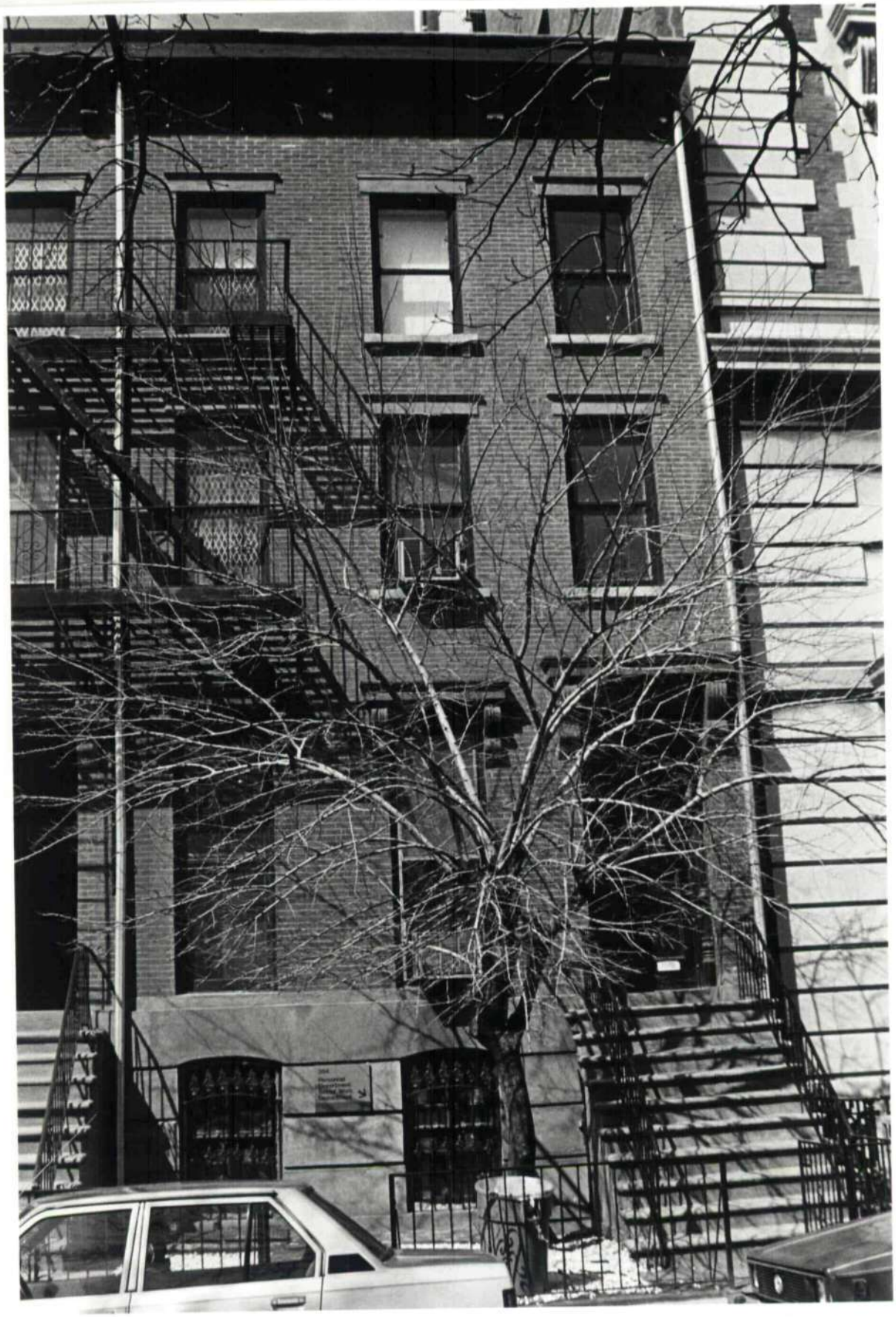


POLHEMUS BUILDING
Cobble Hill Historic District Extension
Brooklyn

Detail, Amity Street facade
Floors 4-7

POLHEMUS BUILDING
Cobble Hill Historic District Extension
Brooklyn

Amity Street facade
Detail, floors 6-8



354 Henry Street
Cobble Hill Historic District Extension
Brooklyn

Built: 1852-53

Photo by:
Forster, 1988

354 Henry Street
Cobble Hill Historic District Extension
Brooklyn

Entrance detail

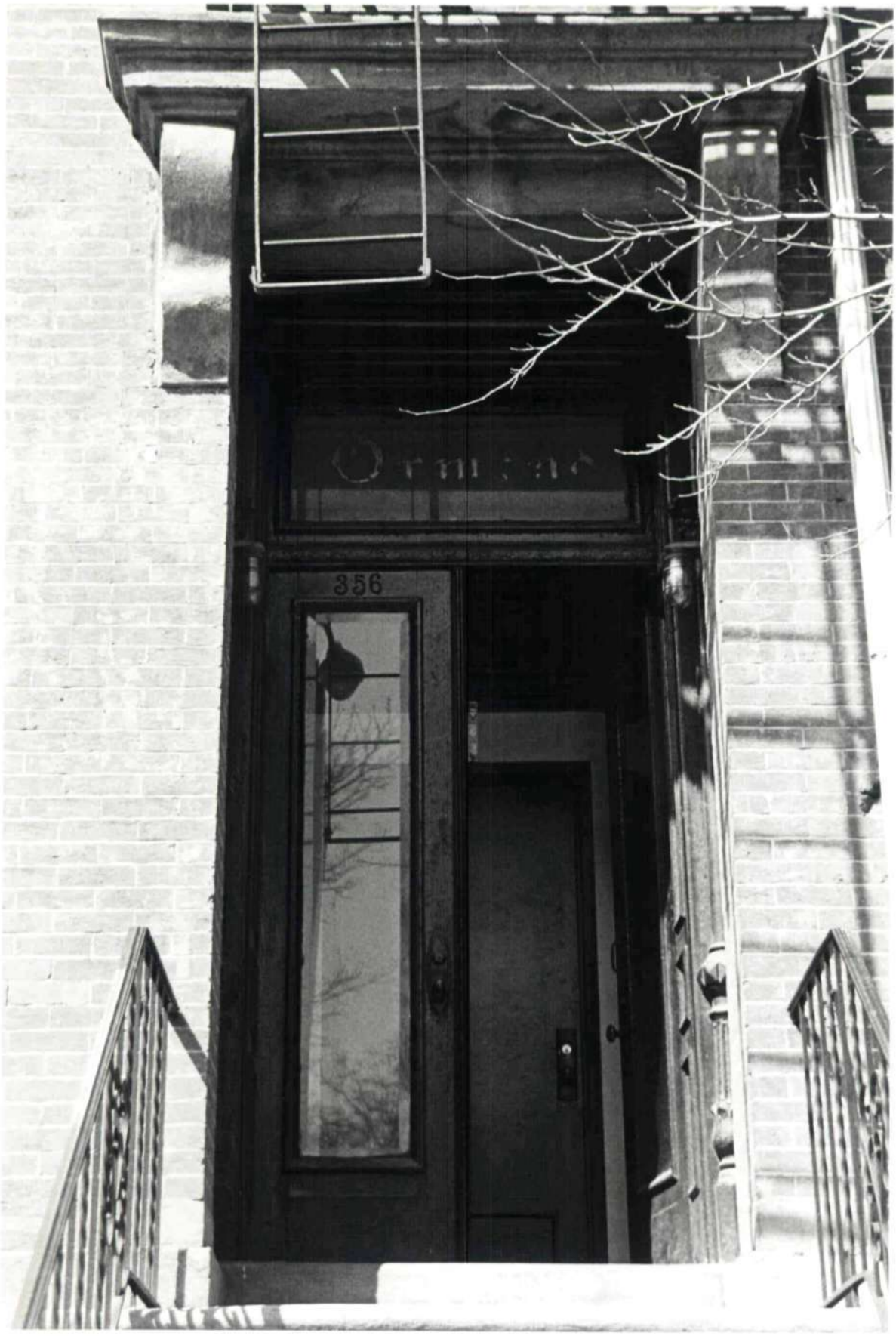
354 Henry Street
Cobble Hill Historic District Extension
Brooklyn

Cornice detail

356 Henry Street
Cobble Hill Historic District Extension
Brooklyn

Built: 1852-53

Photo by:
Forster, 1988



356 Henry Street
Cobble Hill Historic District Extension
Brooklyn

Entrance detail

356 Henry Street
Cobble Hill Historic District Extension
Brooklyn

Cornice detail