

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: New York	
COUNTY: New York	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

**1. NAME**

COMMON:

AND/OR HISTORIC:  
Al Smith House

**2. LOCATION**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
25 Oliver Street

CITY OR TOWN:  
New York (Borough of Manhattan)

STATE New York	CODE	COUNTY: New York	CODE
-------------------	------	---------------------	------

**3. CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure 	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both 	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress 	Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No 

PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural	<input type="checkbox"/> Government	<input type="checkbox"/> Park	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation	<input type="checkbox"/> Comments
<input type="checkbox"/> Commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> Industrial	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private Residence	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify)	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Educational	<input type="checkbox"/> Military	<input type="checkbox"/> Religious	medical offices	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	_____	_____

**4. OWNER OF PROPERTY**

OWNER'S NAME:  
St. James' Catholic Church

STREET AND NUMBER:  
23 Oliver Street

CITY OR TOWN: New York	STATE: New York	CODE
---------------------------	--------------------	------

**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:  
County Clerk's Office

STREET AND NUMBER:  
60 Center Street

CITY OR TOWN: New York	STATE: New York	CODE
---------------------------	--------------------	------

**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE OF SURVEY:

DATE OF SURVEY:  Federal  State  County  Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:	STATE:	CODE
---------------	--------	------

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE:  
COUNTY:  
ENTRY NUMBER  
DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

152

7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered		<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site	

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Differing little from thousands of other Victorian rowhouses in New York, the home of Al Smith is a three-bay, three-story dwelling constructed of pressed brick above a basement of rusticated ashlar. There is a bracketed tin cornice above the third-floor windows. A railing of cast iron edges the well-space providing light and air to the two grilled basement windows at the left of the flight of five steps which lead to the narrow stoop before the front door. Surmounted by a rectangular transom with the street number "25" painted in gold lettering, the double-leaf outer door with paneled reveals matching the moulded panels of the door itself gives into a narrow vestibule with an encaustic tile floor. Beyond a second set of doors, each containing a single etched pane of frosted glass, lies the corridor which extends through the house to the narrow ell at the rear. The interior arrangement follows the usual rowhouse plan, with two high-ceilinged rooms to the left of the passage, which is partitioned mid-way into a front and a reverse-back hall. From the latter, a reverse-flight stairway ascends to the third floor. The front hall still boasts a polychromatic encaustic tile floor similar to that found in the vestibule.

The adjacent parlor and dining room retain matching, white marble mantelpieces, with arched openings. A pair of glass doors, leading from the hall into the parlor are obviously of a later vintage than the dwelling itself, and may have been installed during Smith's occupancy since he refurbished the house about 1920. From the front parlor, two windows with one-over-one sashing overlook Oliver Street, while opposite them, another pair of glass doors connects with the back sitting room. At the rear of this chamber, French doors opening onto a pair of small iron balconies look out upon a secluded court and the apse wall of St. James' Church beyond. A single-leaf doorway leads into the stairhall. While clay tiles have here been placed over the original floor and the hall itself painted a dark green and gold, the stairway, with its ponderous newel topped by a bulbous fixed lamp, and its heavy wooden balustrade, is original. A stained glass window bearing a floral pattern illuminates the stair landing. Beyond the stairway in the single-story ell added several years after the house was completed, is a narrow hall off which lie, to the left, a bath, and to the rear a small room--both having only a courtyard exposure.

The upper two stories have been converted into living quarters by the physician whose offices have occupied the main floor. Kitchen and dining facilities were apparently on the second floor during the Al Smith period. When the present residents moved in about 1930, several partitions on this floor were removed, and the kitchen extensively remodeled. Stained glass was also installed in the front windows. The mantelpieces remain, however, as does a substantial portion of the woodwork. The third floor is little-changed. The basement is now a separate apartment.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |                                       |                                       |  |
|--|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century  | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 19th Century |  |

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1907-1924

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |   |   |   |  |
|---|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Abariginal     | <input type="checkbox"/> Education              | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Political | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric    | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering            | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy  | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic       | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry               | <input type="checkbox"/> Science              | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture    | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention              | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture            | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture   | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian  | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art            | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature             | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater              | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce       | <input type="checkbox"/> Military               | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation       | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Music                  |   |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation   |   |   |  |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The life and career of Alfred E. Smith represent a critical juncture in the evolution of American politics: the first urban challenge to the traditional domination by rural America and its values of the national political life. Smith's defeat in the 1928 Presidential campaign underscored the prevalent mood of the twenties. Even deeper than opposition to Smith's Catholicism, or his stand on prohibition, Walter Lippmann correctly perceived among many of his fellow citizens the still-dominant "feeling that the clamorous life of the city should not be acknowledged as the American ideal."<sup>1</sup> Yet Smith, called "our first urbanite" by William Allen White,<sup>2</sup> foreshadowed an irresistible change. "A man of great ability," historian William Leuchtenburg says in summary, "Al Smith arrived too early on the political scene to be accepted as a national symbol."<sup>3</sup>

The unaffected brick house at 25 Oliver Street, on Manhattan's East Side, where Smith lived from 1907 to 1923 during the formative period of his career--a house with which he is "so closely identified," according to biographer Oscar Handlin, "that there is a rather widespread belief that he was born there"<sup>4</sup>--stands among surroundings that shaped the man from his earliest years. He was born only a few blocks away, and served as an acolyte at adjoining St. James' Church during his boyhood. It was, in fact, from the church that he later leased his Oliver Street home. Nearby was the Tamany Club where his political career began. Although predominantly Chinese at the present time, Oliver Street is still a neighborhood of many complexions. The Alfred E. Smith Houses (1952), a low-income residential project,

<sup>1</sup>Quoted in William E. Leuchtenburg, The Perils of Prosperity (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 239-40.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 232.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 240.

<sup>4</sup>Oscar Handlin, Al Smith and His America (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1958), p. 54.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Graham, Frank. Al Smith: American. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1945.  
 Handlin, Oscar. Al Smith and His America. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1958.  
 Roosevelt, Franklin D. The Happy Warrior. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1928.

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
NW	° ' "	° ' "		40°	42'	44"
NE	° ' "	° ' "		73°	59'	55"
SE	° ' "	° ' "				
SW	° ' "	° ' "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: **1/8 acre**

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE:  
**Robert S. Gamble and Chris Redburn, Historic Sites Survey**

ORGANIZATION: **National Park Service**      DATE: **July 1972**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**1100 L Street, N.W.**

CITY OR TOWN: **Washington**      STATE: **D.C.**      CODE:

**12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION**

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National       State       Local

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation*

Date \_\_\_\_\_

ATTEST:

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Keeper of The National Register*

Date \_\_\_\_\_

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

STATE	New York
COUNTY	New York
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

Al Smith House

(Continuation Sheet)

(Number all entries)

7. Description (Continued) (1)

Built, it seems, some time between 1870 and 1890, the house was leased by Al Smith from neighboring St. James' Catholic Church in 1907. The rectory of the church stands next door, at 23 Oliver Street. When Smith left Oliver Street and moved uptown in 1923, the structure became an Irish undertaking establishment for a time, until it was leased from the church by Dr. Abraham Babbin, who continues to reside there. While modifications have occurred in order to accommodate the dwelling to its present dual function, and all of the rooms have been repainted, most of the original fabric and interior trim survives. When the flagstone sidewalk in front of the house was removed about the time of the Second World War, one of the paving stones was presented to the U.S.S. Al Smith. Urban redevelopment and high-rise apartment construction have substantially changed the physical character of Al Smith's Lower East Side, but the short block of Oliver Street, between Madison and Henry, has thus far largely survived,--except for the repeated ethnic turnover in the neighborhood,--as it was during the early part of this century.

(15)

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

STATE	New York	
COUNTY	New York	
FOR NPS USE ONLY		
ENTRY NUMBER		DATE

Al Smith House

(Continuation Sheet)

(Number all entries)

8. Significance (Continued) (1)

recalls the name of the district's most illustrious son, and, so Handlin has written, "in the old houses and on the corners of the old streets, they still talk of him almost as if he had left Oliver Street only yesterday."<sup>5</sup>

Biography

In his biography of Al Smith, Handlin has written, "The buoyant optimism of Americans has often deceived them into thinking that their whole history was one great success story. Yet the failures have, in their own way, been as significant and as important as the successes. The life of Alfred E. Smith had a full measure of both."<sup>6</sup> Born in an Irish ghetto in 1873, Smith grew up in the teeming streets of Lower Manhattan. He had little formal education before his father died and he was forced to go to work in order to help support the family. After holding a variety of odd jobs, he finally found steady employment at the Fulton Fish Market. Ambitious and bright, he had in the meantime become acquainted with the local Tamany politicians, and in 1895 they brought him into the fold as an investigator for the Commissioner of Jurors.

His loyalty as a Tamany man was rewarded in 1903, when he was sent to the New York State legislature. Over the next decade, he made a brilliant record in the area of social legislation, and by 1913, he was Speaker of the Assembly, and a power in the Tamany machine as well as the State Democratic Party. In 1915, he became Sheriff of New York County, and two years later was elected President of the Board of Alderman of Greater New York. He had served for only a short time when he was tapped to run for the governorship. He was elected, and entered the first four outstanding terms, interrupted only between 1920 and 1922, when he was temporarily unseated by the Harding deluge. He thoroughly reorganized the State government and created a loyal, honest State bureaucracy. Using this newly-invigorated machinery and always fighting an opposition--controlled legislature, Smith--viewed as the spokesman of the city's masses--faced squarely the problems wrought by industrialization and urbanization. His administration made significant strides in the areas

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. v.

184

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

STATE	
New York	
COUNTY	
New York	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

Al Smith House

(Continuation Sheet)

(Number all entries)

8. Significance (Continued) (2)

of transportation, power, housing, labor, education, and the entire gamut of Progressive concerns. His stand against Prohibition, however, aroused rural antipathy.

The governorship of New York, then as now, was a platform for Presidential aspirants, a fact that was not lost on Smith, and early in the 1920's he began working quietly toward that goal. He failed to capture the nomination in 1924, but in 1928--as "The Happy Warrior"--he was successfully nominated by Franklin D. Roosevelt. In the atmosphere of the time, the Republicans would have been almost unbeatable by any Democrat, but, as Leuchtenburg points out, the lack of a sharp distinction between Smith's moderately Progressive platform and that of the Republicans focused the campaign upon religion, prohibition, and personalities, and brought to the surface the societal dichotomies within the nation.<sup>7</sup> Not merely the fact that he represented to many "rum and Romanism," but his immigrant origins and his East Side mannerisms, made Smith unacceptable to millions of non-urban, non-eastern Americans. Like Sacco and Vanzetti he symbolized values that were feared; he was a different kind of "American." Much of the "Solid South" defected to the Republicans, and Smith was resoundingly defeated by Herbert Hoover.

After the election, he entered private business, but experienced major financial difficulties. Shunted aside for the Democratic nomination of 1932, he nevertheless supported Roosevelt from a sense of party loyalty. Later, he broke entirely with what he viewed as the excesses of the New Deal and bitterly attacked the President.

The pinnacle of Smith's success had been reached in 1928. An urban populist before urban America had fully seized power from the rural interests, he was the prophet of a later era, though not really tolerated by his own. He was also a symbol of the national failure to deal fully and honestly with religious and cultural prejudice. Though Smith had realized the American dream of success and upward mobility, he was struck down in large part by the intolerance and bigotry which flawed that vision.

<sup>7</sup>Leuchtenburg, p. 234.

18