Form No. 10-300 (Rev. 10-74)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC: Samuel J. Tilden House

AND/OR COMMON: National Arts Club

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER: 14-15 Gramercy Park South — __NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN: New York — __ VICINITY OF — CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT: #18

STATE: New York — CODE: 36 — COUNTY: New York — CODE: 061

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
__DISTRICT	__PUBLIC	XOCCUPIED	__AGRICULTURE	XMUSEUM
XBUILDING(S)	XPRIVATE	__UNOCCUPIED	__COMMERCIAL	__PARK
__STRUCTURE	__BOTH	__WORK IN PROGRESS	XEDUCATIONAL	__PRIVATE RESIDENCE
__SITE	**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**	**ACCESSIBLE**	__ENTERTAINMENT	__RELIGIOUS
__OBJECT	__IN PROCESS	XYES: RESTRICTED	__GOVERNMENT	__SCIENTIFIC
	__BEING CONSIDERED	__YES: UNRESTRICTED	__INDUSTRIAL	__TRANSPORTATION
		__NO	__MILITARY	__OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME: National Arts Club

STREET & NUMBER: 15 Gramercy Park South

CITY, TOWN: New York — __ VICINITY OF — STATE: New York

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC: New York City Register

STREET & NUMBER: 31 Chambers Street

CITY, TOWN: New York — STATE: New York

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. (Pending National Register nomination as part of Gramercy Park Historic District)

DATE: 1966; (197-) — __FEDERAL __STATE __COUNTY XLOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission

CITY, TOWN: New York — STATE: New York

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7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
X EXCELLENT	__DETERIORATED	__UNALTERED	X ORIGINAL SITE
__GOOD	__RUINS	X ALTERED	__MOVED DATE_____
__FAIR	__UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Although still a fashionable neighorhood, Gramercy Park itself dates to 1831, when Samuel B. Ruggles, a lawyer and developer, purchased the land and sold residential lots around the fence-enclosed private park. During the forties, lot owners began erecting townhouses, including 14 and 15 Gramercy Park South. Apparently in the 1860's, Samuel Jones Tilden acquired number 15, and subsequently he purchased number 14. He had the pair converted into an interconnecting double residence and lived here, with friends, relatives, and servants, until shortly before his death. There is no other known extant Tilden dwelling. In 1906 the prestigious National Arts Club, which itself is of landmark significance in the arts, acquired the residence for use as a headquarters.

About 1874 Calvert Vaux, coarchitect of Central Park, remodeled the house facade, apparently formerly Greek Revival in design, to the then-fashionable Victorian Gothic style. Little altered since then, the four-story building with raised basement is faced with pink sandstone and carries such rich exterior details as multicolored horizontal stone belt courses and radiating voussoirs around pointed-arch window openings. Segmental panels over many of the windows and in the wall are studded with little sculptured heads of literary figures, and at first-floor level, the head of Benjamin Franklin marks approximately the former division of townhouses. Each house has a projecting bay extending from the basement through the third story. The bay of number 15 is three-sided, while that of number 14 is rectangular.

Vermiculated pink sandstone laid in coursed ashlar faces the basement and upper story walls, and the first story is laid basically in smooth ashlar. Decorative materials include a shiny obsidian-like stone, which studs the belt courses passing both over and under the windows. Pink marble decorations include colonettes at the basement windows and pilasters flanking the entrance to number 14. Apparently the door of number 14 resembles the original door of number 15, which the National Arts Club removed to create a new entrance. The stoop at number 14 repeats the building ornamentation in pink stone steps studded with obsidian-like blocks and flanked by a decorative solid stone and low bronze railing. A triangular pediment bearing a small sculptured head tops the decorated double door. Two double-hung, two-over-two windows divided by colonettes or pilasters appear at each level above each doorway. Bronze rails decorate the projecting bays and also form cresting above the third floor. At the fourth story, a skylight replaces original windows above the projecting bay in number 15; number 14 has a small triangular parapet. A low pitched roof pierced by a central chimney tops the structure. After acquiring the rowhouse in 1906, the National Arts Club adjoined a 13-story studio building

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8 SIGNIFICANCE

Political & Art

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
_PREHISTORIC	_ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	_COMMUNITY PLANNING	_LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	_RELIGION
_1400-1499	_ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	_CONSERVATION	_LAW	_SCIENCE
_1500-1599	_AGRICULTURE	_ECONOMICS	_LITERATURE	_SCULPTURE
_1600-1699	X ARCHITECTURE	X EDUCATION	_MILITARY	_SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
_1700-1799	X ART	_ENGINEERING	_MUSIC	_THEATER
X 1800-1899	_COMMERCE	_EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	_PHILOSOPHY	_TRANSPORTATION
_1900-	_COMMUNICATIONS	_INDUSTRY	X POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	_OTHER (SPECIFY)
		_INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES ca. 1860-ca. 1885 BUILDER/ARCHITECT Calvert Vaux (see description)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Along with Rutherford B. Hayes, Samuel Jones Tilden was a central figure in the disputed election of 1876 and resulting compromise of 1877, events which for all practical purposes ended Reconstruction. Historian Allan Nevins has called Tilden his time's "most incisive intellect in public life--with sound ideas and brains and courage to execute them."[1] A wealthy, upright corporation lawyer and former State legislator, Tilden came to national attention during his successful reform campaign against Tammany Hall's infamous "Boss" William Marcy Tweed. Later, as New York Governor, Tilden defeated the equally corrupt Canal Ring. Thus, he is an outstanding representative of the conservative, political reforming impulse of the 1870's.

Tilden's townhouse is the only known extant building associated closely with him; he lived in it from the 1860's until shortly before his death, and so it represents him best. The four-story, masonry house with high basement is faced with pink sandstone. It displays contrasting horizontal stone belt courses and voussoirs over arched window openings, has multiple colonettes and pilasters, and, according to the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, "represents the height of Victorian Gothic in residential architecture."[2]

Biography

Born at the rural village of New Lebanon, N.Y., in 1814, Samuel Jones Tilden could trace his ancestry to Nathaniel Tilden, who left England for America in about 1630. Elam, Samuel's father, kept a general store, and because Elam was active in Democratic Party politics, his residence became a partisan center. A sickly boy, Sam was kept

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[1] Allan Nevins, Abram S. Hewitt, With Some Account of Peter Cooper (New York, 1935), 305.

[2] New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, "The National Arts Club," Mimeographed paper, March 15, 1966, Number 18.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Flick, Alexander Clarence, Samuel Jones Tilden; A Study in Political Sagacity (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1939).

Franklin, John Hope, Reconstruction: After the Civil War (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

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10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than 1

UTM REFERENCES

	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
A	18	585520	4509910	B			
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE Cathy A. Alexander, **Assistant Editor**

DATE September 1975

ORGANIZATION American Association for State and Local History

STREET & NUMBER 1400 Eighth Avenue South

TELEPHONE 615/242-5583

CITY OR TOWN Nashville

STATE Tennessee 37203

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL ___ STATE ___ LOCAL ___

As the designated State Historic Preservation 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.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST: DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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with a raised basement to the Tilden House rear. It faces 19th Street and stands on the site of Tilden's garden.

Both 15 and 14 Gramercy Park South follow side hall plans. The halls lie on opposite sides, though, with that of number 15 in the easternmost bay and that of number 14 in the westernmost. On the first floor, each house had three rooms until Tilden connected the rooms through the center to make six. Today the adjoining National Arts Club studio building connects as well and extends the building farther to the rear.

On the first and second story in the Tilden House, numerous original Victorian features remain. First-floor rooms have handsome dark wood--possibly walnut--floor-to-ceiling paneling. The front stairs and second-floor rooms have paneled, carved wainscots. Parquet floors remain, and when the National Arts Club removed the front door to number 15, it carried the flooring into the former entranceway. The original doorway is now a great window, but an interior stained-glass window here, between the hall and the front parlor, was created originally for Tilden by John La Farge. From front to back, first-floor rooms on the east side of the buildings are apparently former front and rear parlors and a dining room, now an exhibit room. The National Arts Club has preserved some wall panels of the dining room, however, and exhibits the ornate, carved wood pieces, which depict a profusion of birds, vines, and bunches of grapes accented with either gold paint or gold leaf, in the basement-level club museum.

On the number 14 side of the first floor, the front hall remains apparently intact. A front parlor, Tilden's library, and possibly a second dining room are connected to each other by original sliding doors. Tilden's library is particularly interesting, for although the original bookcases are gone, it contains two La Farge stained-glass panels and a magnificant stained-glass dome in yellow, gold, and white. The front and rear rooms have strapwork ceilings set with blue glass tiles.

In number 15 a broad, three-flight front staircase with two landings and a carved newel mounts from the hall to the second story. Second-floor rooms retain paneled, carved, and ornamented single and double doors, the latter set in segmentally arched openings. An

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apparently original fireplace and mantel display numerous colonettes and a beautifully painted surround. Other mantels in the house are difficult to date. In Tilden's day the uppermost floors held most likely guests' and servants' quarters; now they serve as artists' studios. The basement is a museum and recreation area.

Goldstone, Harmon H. and Martha Dalrymple, History Preserved: A Guide to New York City Landmarks and Historic Districts (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974).

Hirsch, Mark D., "Samuel J. Tilden: The Story of A Lost Opportunity," American Historical Review, LVI (July 1951), 788-802.

Nevins, Allan, Abram S. Hewitt, With Some Account of Peter Cooper (New York: Harper, 1935).

New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, "The National Arts Club," Mimeographed Paper, March 15, 1966, Number 18.

Woodward, C. Vann, Reunion and Reaction; The Compromise of 1877 and the End of Reconstruction (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1951).

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a great deal at home, where he enjoyed listening to the political discussions. Because of his health, Sam missed an active childhood, and though intelligent and precocious, he remained reserved and introspective all of his life. Also, his health never became robust.

Sam found recreation in reading, but his formal schooling was sporadic. At age 18 he went to New York City to complete his college preparation, and about this time, he began writing and publishing Democratic tracts on such issues as the United States Bank, the tariff, and nullification. In 1834 Tilden matriculated at Yale, but he remained only one term. Subsequently, he returned to New York City, where he attended New York University and continued writing political treatises in his spare time.

In 1838 Tilden began studying at New York University Law School and clerking for a city firm. Three years later he passed the bar and after beginning his practice, became increasingly known in New York City Democratic circles. As the State party divided during the 1840's, Tilden supported the free-soil "Barnburner" faction. In 1846 he backed the "Barnburner" Governor, Silas Wright; served a term in the State assembly; and became a member of the New York State constitutional convention. The "Barnburners" were, however, the weaker of the Democratic factions, and though he was not an extreme Free Soiler and never became a Republican, Tilden was disappointed with the political trends of the day. Thus, while remaining in his party's behind-the-scenes councils, until after the Civil War he concentrated primarily on his lucrative but upright corporation law practice and business interests. He specialized in railroad litigation and grew both prominent and wealthy.

When the Civil War began, Tilden supported preservation of the Union but took little part in wartime activities. Still, such disparate figures as the Radical Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton and the Democratic Governor of New York Horatio Seymour sought and listened to his advice. Eventually, in 1866, Tilden became New York State Democratic chairman, and the next year he attended his second State constitutional convention.

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Meanwhile, during and after the Civil War, history's best known city boss, William Marcy Tweed, had consolidated his control over New York City's Democratic Tammany Hall, out of which he organized a corrupt money ring. In 1868 Tweed had John T. Hoffman elected State Governor. Though long a sachem, or leader, of the Tammany Hall political organization, Tilden broke with it around 1870. Gradually, a New York Times editorial campaign convinced Tilden to battle Tweed openly and cleanse the Democratic Party. In 1871, as State chairman, Tilden called publicly for Democratic Party reform, and for that year's city elections, he organized a mostly successful anti-Tweed slate. He accumulated legal proofs against Tweed and his machine, also, and in 1872, to continue the campaign, Tilden sought and secured a seat in the New York Legislature.

His reform activities made Tilden well known both statewide and nationally. By 1874 he was the Democrats' choice for New York Governor, and he won. During his 2-year term, Governor Tilden guided anticorruption laws through the State legislature and cooperated with the court actions against the Tweed Ring. Equally important, he unmasked an upstate Canal Ring. This conspiracy included politicians of both parties who made a profit from high maintenance charges on the State canal system. To mobilize public opinion behind him, Tilden undertook a speaking tour in the upstate "canal counties" in 1875. It was a particularly arduous trip for him because, at 61, he had just suffered an apopletic stroke. The findings of the Governor's investigative commission led to a number of indictments against the Canal Ring, too. His assaults on the corrupt Tweed and Canal Rings inspired a national Tilden-for-President movement, and in 1876 he accepted the Democratic nomination. Tilden's Republican opponent, Rutherford B. Hayes, was identified with his party's reform wing also.

As befit Presidential candidates of the time, neither Tilden or Hayes made any campaign speeches, and bitter slander and vituperation became the hallmarks of the close race. Democratic spokesmen stressed corruption in the outgoing Republican administration, while Republicans strove to link Democrats with a menacing Southland. Republican spokesmen attacked Tilden personally, too, accusing him of income tax evasion and other anti-Civil War activities and collusion with election frauds and railroad rings.

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At midnight on election day, November 7, however, Democrats and Republicans alike believed that Tilden had won, and later, official popular vote returns showed a plurality of about a quarter of a million in his favor. Early on the morning of the 8th, though, the adamantly Republican New York Times stated that Tilden's election was doubtful. Returns from Oregon and three "unreconstructed" Southern States, Florida, Louisiana, and South Carolina, were subsequently contested. The Republican National Committee declared that Hayes had won the 22 electoral votes of those States and thus the Presidency with an electoral margin of 185 to 184. Fearing the rising possibility of partisan violence, Tilden refused to issue a defiant statement or to condone public protest meetings. He trusted firmly in law and justice.

Late in January 1877 the Democrat-dominated U.S. House of Representatives and the Republican-dominated Senate agreed to create a 15-member Commission to resolve the election crisis. The panel would consist of three Democratic and two Republican Representatives, three Republican and two Democratic Senators, and two Democratic and two Republican Supreme Court Justices. The four Justices would select a fifth Justice, and it was widely assumed that he would be David Davis, an Independent. Both Tilden and Hayes acquiesced reluctantly to this plan. While the bill was being passed in Washington, however, the Illinois Legislature elected Davis to the Senate. He declined therefore to serve on the Commission, and Justice Joseph P. Bradley took the place. From the first vote, Bradley cast consistently with the Republican members, and Hayes won each questionable State by a vote of 8 to 7.

Infuriated Democratic Congressmen prepared a filibuster to block Hayes' inauguration. Then a small group of Republican leaders and influential Southern Democrats negotiated a series of political and economic agreements, known as the Compromise of 1877, in which the southerners threw their support to Hayes in exchange for concessions to the former Confederacy. Hayes became President, appointed southerner David M. Key Postmaster General, and soon withdrew all the remaining Federal troops from the South, fulfilling an aspect of the bargain and ending Reconstruction for all practical purposes.

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Because he had suffered a marked decline in his ever-fragile health during the preceding tense months, Tilden rested quietly abroad from July until October 1877. His health improved, and when he returned, most Democrats agreed that he should run again in 1880, with the previous election as his issue. Meanwhile, in 1878 the House of Representatives established a committee under Clarkson N. Potter to investigate alleged frauds and corruption during the past campaign. When committee Democrats unearthed some sensational evidence against the Republicans, though, the latter countered by publishing a series of deciphered telegrams in the New York Tribune. These had passed between Democratic Party workers Manton Marble and William T. Pelton, Tilden's nephew, during the election crisis, and they dealt with negotiations for the purchase of electoral votes in the South. Soon the Potter committee called Tilden to testify, and he swore under oath that he knew nothing about them. The "cipher telegrams" clouded his future Presidential prospects, however.

In 1880 many Democrats continued to favor Tilden's candidacy, but just prior to the opening of the Democratic National Convention, he wrote the New York delegation requesting "an honorable discharge" from party leadership.[3] Though ill and partially paralyzed, Tilden may not have meant this letter as a final withdrawal, but in view of his health, the "cipher telegrams," and a Tammany Hall movement against his candidacy, it was accepted as one.

In his last years, Tilden spent his days mostly reading and collecting books for his fine library. He died in 1886, a bachelor. After providing for his nieces and nephews, he placed a large sum in trust to establish a free library in New York City. After some of his heirs broke the will, the Tilden Trust still retained $2,250,000 for the library, and in 1901 the Tilden bequest combined with the Astor and Lenox Libraries to create the New York Public Library, a lasting monument to Tilden's deep devotion to the public good.

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[3] Quoted in Alexander Clarence Flick, Samuel Jones Tilden; A Study in Political Sagacity (New York, 1939), 456.