
1 Monroe Place: A 175-Year History in Brooklyn Heights, Now Reborn

By Jeremy Lechtzin

The house at 1 Monroe Place was built in the early 1850s for Samuel Bell, a Manhattan merchant. Originally, 1 Monroe Place was three stories tall, designed in a late Greek Revival style. It was a simpler, smaller house than today, with no Mansard roof, no rear extension, and no bay windows overlooking Clark Street.

Samuel Bell never lived in the house and instead rented it out. He died within a couple years after its construction. Bell's daughter Elizabeth and her husband David Barker then bought the house and lived there for about a decade. David Barker was a portrait artist and gallerist in Manhattan.

Mary Jessop, the widow of a steel magnate, bought the house for \$25,000 in 1868. Jessop lived there for over 20 years. Daughter Jane, her husband Henry Stevenson and their three sons shared the home with Mary – and four live-in servants, befitting Mary's wealth.

In 1881, Jessop hired architect John Mumford to add the distinctive Mansard roof to the house, featuring slate tiles and delicate iron cresting. Mumford was a very prominent architect in 1870s and 1880s Brooklyn. He designed several mansions in fashionable Clinton Hill, and civic projects in Downtown like the old Municipal Building.

Jessop's alterations significantly expanded the house's size by adding the fourth story and an extension in the rear. With its spacious new interior, fancy design and prominent corner location, the house had turned into a true Gilded Age mansion.



1 MONROE PLACE, IN 1916.



JAMES WEIR & SON FLORIST SHOP, IN 1915, CORNER OF FULTON AND PIERREPONT STREETS. GREENHOUSE AT REAR. (TODAY SITE OF ONE PIERREPONT PLAZA.)

Agnes Weir bought the house at 1 Monroe Place from the Jessop and Stevenson estates in 1895, getting a bargain at just over \$16,000. Her husband John R. Weir ran the florist business known as "James Weir & Son."

At the time the Weirs bought the house, James Weir & Son operated its flagship Brooklyn Heights shop at the corner of Fulton and Pierrepont Streets. James Weir & Son continues in business today, having moved to Montague Street in the 1950s under new owners.

Within a year of buying 1 Monroe Place, the Weir family made more renovations. Notably, they expanded the bay window on the Clark Street side to today's signature double height.

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After about 10 years in the house, the Weirs downsized, a popular trend as New York City apartment living became fashionable. Agnes and John moved nearby to “The Plymouth” apartments on Orange Street along with their daughter Agnes, her husband and young son.

Like many single-family homes in Brooklyn Heights in the first decades of the 20th century, whose owners decamped for apartments or the suburbs, 1 Monroe Place then became a boardinghouse. The Weirs’ situation was somewhat unusual however, because they chose not to sell the house. By leasing out the building instead, they probably saved it from demolition. Many former mansions on large or corner lots in Brooklyn Heights were being sold at this time as development sites for hotels.

By 1910, the boardinghouse was being run by former hotel manager John Hagenloch. In that year, the census recorded 23 boarders in residence – teachers, salesmen for box and typewriter companies, clerks, stockbrokers and lawyers.

The Hagenloch family ran the boardinghouse for a decade. A photo from that period shows the house still looking elegant, much as it would have during its grandest days when the Jessop and Weir families lived there.

In 1920, John Weir died, and Agnes sold the house to a local building contractor named Joseph Parascandola for \$19,000. Though he might’ve been expected to remove the house’s stoop in an apartment conversion process, as was typical in the Heights of that period, this doesn’t appear to have happened. Parascandola rented out flats in the house, but a photo of the building from 1922, when he sold it, showed the stoop still in place.

The house then changed hands frequently over the next decade. It was during this time that the stoop was removed. Then, the main entrance to the house was moved to ground level at the side, and the house began to be known as 100 Clark Street.

In 1934, dentist Maxwell Lanes bought the house. Lanes lived upstairs with several tenants and ran his practice downstairs. Early on, Lanes tried to convince the city to rezone the ground floor for commercial use, to allow a storefront and not just medical offices. But the residents and churches of Monroe Place (backed by the Brooklyn Heights Association) successfully objected to his plan.

Lanes died in the 1970s and then the house was owned by a series of investors. After many decades in poor repair, the house hit bottom in 2008. Conditions had deteriorated so badly that an emergency call to the Department of Buildings on Memorial Day weekend led to an immediate demolition order. The wreckers managed to take off the Mansard roof and the third story, before the Brooklyn Heights Association convinced the Landmarks Preservation Commission to intervene and save the rest of the building.

The current owner bought the building in 2010 and undertook an arduous transformation. Based on archival photographs, the house’s exterior has been restored to its most glorious era following the Jessop and Weir renovations of the 19th century. And the interior has been reimagined for the 21st century, on display in the rooms of today’s Brooklyn Heights Designer Showhouse.

To read more about 1 Monroe Place, please visit www.oldbrooklynheights.com for additional history and images related to the house’s former owners and occupants.



“IN MEMORY OF MARY A. JESSOP AND HER DAUGHTER JANE C. STEVENSON” – TIFFANY STAINED GLASS WINDOWS IN FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH LOCATED DOWN THE BLOCK FROM 1 MONROE PLACE, AT THE CORNER OF PIERREPONT STREET. DONATED BY MARY’S GRANDSON GEORGE STEVENSON IN 1909.