

FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE, 144 East 20th Street, Borough of Manhattan. 1859, architects King and Kellum.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 875, Lot 53.

On September 21, 1965, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Friends Meeting House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Calendar No. 18). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Fifteen witnesses spoke in favor of designation. Representatives of the building's present owner and the attorney for the contract purchaser of the property opposed designation. In letters to the Commission, the Deputy Borough President of Manhattan and the Borough President's Community Planning Board No. 6 supported the proposed designation.

Support from the community for this proposed designation has been extremely heavy. Many local groups and leading New Yorkers have written the Commission. More than 75 letters and telegrams supporting the proposed designation have been received from organizations and individuals. In addition, numerous telephone messages have been received by the Commission favoring designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Friends Meeting House is a two-story building with basement. It is a restrained and successful example of Anglo-Italianate architecture. Its calculated restraint and understatement reflect the English component in its design. The building has a handsome facade with a classic pediment as its dominant feature. The design of all of the individual elements of the structure reflect the work of an architect of special competence. Compared with typical examples of Anglo-Italianate architecture, this building makes an unusually effective architectural statement of outstanding merit.

At the public hearing, the chairman of the trustees of Gramercy Park testified, "This appealing old building, in its very simplicity, its serenity, reflects an outlook, a spiritual attitude which needs to be remembered today..... Built most sturdily in Dorchester olive stone, its stark lines and stately windows symbolical in a way of the beliefs and attitudes within, it gives an irreplaceable distinction to the southeastern corner of Gramercy Park."

The retired editor of Architectural Forum Magazine said, "In his modest building, architect John Kellum in 1859 achieved an aesthetic rarity for New York or any other city: not pretentious but direct, reticent, of good proportions, and superior to many a more ambitious effort then or now."

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Friends Meeting House has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Friends Meeting House is a worthy and distinctive example of the Anglo-Italianate Style of architecture in this country and that its clean-cut lines, sound construction and admirably restrained design provide a significant building which reflects the outlook of the important group which built it.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 8-A of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Friends Meeting House, 144 East 20th Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 875, Lot 53, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.