

SURROGATE'S COURT (Hall of Records), 31 Chambers Street, Borough of Manhattan. Begun 1899, completed 1911; architects John R. Thomas and Horgan & Slattery.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 153, Lot 24.

On October 19, 1965, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark the Surrogate's Court and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 54). Two witnesses spoke in favor of designation. The Commission continued the public hearing until November 17, 1965 (Item No. 4), at which time no speakers appeared to testify. Both hearings were duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. There were no speakers in opposition to designation at either meeting.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Surrogate's Court was designed in the French Classic Eclectic Style and is a fine example of civic architecture at the turn of the Century. Representative of a period when the Municipality of New York felt itself coming of age, this imposing building with its towering Mansard roof typifies what was then considered the best in architecture. Both within and without, it was intended to set an example and to elevate standards of design and construction throughout the City.

This building displays rich materials, elaborate details, carving and sculpture. Here was shown an awakening interest in the fine arts, as applied to buildings, which was destined to have far reaching effects not only on civic structures but on mercantile and commercial buildings as well.

In a letter to the Commission, the Hon. Joseph A. Cox and the Hon. S. Samuel DiFalco, Surrogates of the County of New York, endorsed the proposed designation. Among their comments were the following: "This building for more than a half century has played an important role in the government of New York City.... This eight story structure of classic design has a particularly beautiful exterior and interior. The facade of this imposing structure is graced by columns and fine statuary, depicting important historical figures..... Replacement at today's costs would be prohibitive, if not impossible..... This public building is one of the finest examples of governmental architecture of New York at the early part of this century. It would serve the aesthetic interests of this City to preserve this structure as an example of the architecture of its time. It may be utilized to advantage in its present condition."

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 Surrogate's Court 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 Surrogate's Court is a fine expression for its time of civic art and architecture, that it is constructed of the finest materials utilizing rich marbles and that it is a good example of French Classic Eclectic architecture.

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 Surrogate's Court (Hall of Records), 31 Chambers Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 153, Lot 24, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.