

RAINEY MEMORIAL GATES, Concourse Entrance (facing Pelham Parkway between Lake Agassiz and Cope Lake), New York Zoological Park, Bronx Park, Borough of the Bronx. 1934; sculptor Paul Manship.

Landmark Site: Borough of the Bronx Tax Map Block 3120, Lot 20 in part, consisting of the land on which the described improvement is situated.

On January 11, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Rainey Memorial Gates and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 10). One witness spoke in favor of designation. The Commission continued the public hearing until February 8, 1966 (Item No. 9). At that time two speakers spoke in favor of designation, including the representative of the New York Zoological Society. Both hearings were duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There were no speakers in opposition to designation at either meeting.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Rainey Memorial Gates at the Bronx Zoo are monumental, free-standing bronze-sculptured gates designed to express animal and plant motifs. For them, the noted American sculptor, Paul Manship, chose a naturalistic style with stylized simplifications so much admired in the '20's and influenced by the French Exposition des Arts Decoratifs. With its plant and animal themes these gates serve as a pleasing transition from the world of the concrete highway to the foliage and natural forms of the park. Manship solved the problem of making the design equally satisfying from both sides by modelling the animals and plant forms in profile. At the dedication in June of 1934, the President of the Zoological Society declared that the gates were unrivaled in this country as a work of art.

A central post separates the two gate openings. The theme for the design of this post is a tree trunk modelled in an ascending crescendo of curves which are filled in with figures of birds. This central post culminates in a seated lion enframed by a soaring burst of curves in which the tree limbs are seemingly metamorphized into the wings of birds. The arched pediments above the twin gate openings are also filled with stylized plant and animal forms representing animals resident in the zoo at the time the gates were designed. Bronze screens link the gates to the flanking granite lodges for gatekeepers. A monolithic twenty-six ton piece of granite neatly roofs each lodge.

Paul Manship began work on the gates in 1926. In the five years he devoted to the design, the sculptor expanded his plans from the original wrought iron project to the final, full-scale sculptural treatment in bronze. The casting of the gates, and their enframements, was done in Belgium and took two years.

Mrs. Grace Rainey Rogers gave the gates to the park as a memorial to her brother, Paul Rainey, a big game hunter. Mr. Rainey was a generous patron of the Bronx Zoo and as a result of his expeditions, particularly one to the Arctic regions, the zoo was enriched by several magnificent animals, including polar bears, walrus, musk oxen, and other animals. He died at sea in 1923, while on his way to Africa on another big game hunting expedition.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this improvement, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Rainey Memorial Gates have 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 Rainey Memorial Gates are significant because of their great scale and sumptuous decoration, that they are an outstanding example of a sculptural style which was briefly dominant during the 1920's and which is no longer practiced, that they effectively introduce visitors to the zoo, and that they are noteworthy as a memorial to a man, who was an outstanding patron of the zoo.

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 Rainey Memorial Gates, Concourse Entrance, New York Zoological Park, Bronx Park, Borough of the Bronx, and designates as its related Landmark Site that part of Borough of the Bronx Tax Map Block 3120, Lot 20 which contains the land on which the described improvement is situated.