Landmarks Preservation Commission
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LP-0127

VAN CORTLANDT MANSION, Broadway and West 242nd Street, Van Cortlandt Park, Borough of The Bronx. 1748; architect unknown.

Landmark Site: Borough of The Bronx Tax Map Block 5900, Lot 150 in part, consisting of the land on which the described building is situated.

On January 11, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of Van Cortlandt Mansion and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 29). One witness spoke in favor of designation. The Commission continued the public hearing until February 8, 1966 (Item No. 28). At that time three speakers favored designation. Both hearings were duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There were no speakers in opposition to designation at either meeting. In a letter Park Commissioner Thomas Hoving recommended designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Truly one of the City's most notable mid-Eighteenth Century Georgian manor houses, Van Cortlandt Mansion is set in a tree-surrounded area of Van Cortlandt Park. Built of local field stone and brick, the restored building is operated as a house museum by The National Society of Colonial Dames in the State of New York. The interesting combination of field stone and brick trim around the windows is to be found in certain Eighteenth Century buildings in this area. Carved masks serve as keystones over the windows. The heads of the men and women carved in this manner have not as yet been identified. Its roof is pierced by attractive regularly spaced dormer windows. Small wooden porches which shelter the south and east entrance doorways are doubtless additions of a later period.

The house is set on property long owned by the Van Cortlandt family. North of the mansion is Vault Hill, site of the Van Cortlandt burial ground and family vault. It was in this vault that the City Records of New York were said to have been hidden and preserved during the Revolution. Here in 1781, to deceive the British, General Washington kept campfires burning for several days while he gained time for safe withdrawal of his troops across the Hudson.

The architectural importance of this building lies in its straightforward expression of vigorous design, its beautiful stone and brick masonry and its excellent wood details in both windows and cornice. The mansion is in a fine state of preservation, with its original architectural character preserved as an outstanding New York manor house.

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 Van Cortlandt Mansion 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 Van Cortlandt Mansion is an outstanding example of early domestic Georgian architecture, that it is well constructed of good materials, that it is beautifully restored and preserved and that it stands on a site having important historical associations.

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 Van Cortlandt Mansion, Broadway and West 242nd Street, Van Cortlandt Park, Borough of The Bronx and designates as its related Landmark Site that part of Borough of The Bronx Tax Map Block 5900, Lot 150 which contains the land on which the described building is situated.