

THE UNIVERSITY CLUB, 1 West 54th Street, Borough of Manhattan. Begun 1897, completed 1899; architects McKim, Mead & White.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1270, Lot 34.

On May 10, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of The University Club and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 16). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Three witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. The Commission received several letters approving designation. In a letter to the Commission the President of the University Club said, "it is the sentiment of the Club's governing body that the Club will be honored by being thus designated." In connection with possible later alterations to its building, the Club said, "we reserve the right to appeal, to your Commission itself or to the courts, any initial adverse decision by your Commission, or even to seek to have the Law declared unconstitutional as so applied to us."

#### DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The University Club on its conspicuous corner site is one of the handsomest buildings on Fifth Avenue. Although this granite building of stately and noble proportions closely resembles a sixteenth century Italian Renaissance palazzo,<sup>D</sup> its exterior displays a combination of original architectural features.<sup>E</sup> The handsome facade is divided into three main horizontal divisions separated by two strongly defined band courses. Each of the three divisions contains a row of large arched windows. The first two divisions above street level have small, rectangular mezzanine windows above the arched windows, alternating with carved, marble shields. Each arched window has a large keystone block embellished with an heroic sized head. On the Fifth Avenue side, attic windows are ingeniously worked into the frieze of the superb deep cornice crowning the building.

Among the conspicuous architectural features of the exterior are the elaborately ornate bronze railings of the six projecting balconies, which are supported on large stone brackets. The dominant arched entrance doorway, on the Fifty-fifth Street side, is enframed by two handsome banded (rusticated) columns supporting a heavily ornamented lintel or entablature. Well emphasized horizontal stone courses in continuous bands cover the surface of the building; the corners are slightly projected, rising the full height of the building, to create a feeling of enframing and strength in this truly imposing structure.

Early in 1864, a group of men who had been intimate friends in college discussed the idea of founding a University Club. They had previously met on Saturday evenings for three years as an organization known as the Red Room Club. The following year, a Charter, "for the purpose of the promotion of literature and art, by establishing and maintaining a library, reading-room and gallery of art, and by such other means as shall be expedient and proper for such purpose", was granted by the legislature on April 28, 1865. They originated something that was new in the club life of New York, a club that required an intellectual and cultural background for membership, a college degree. For fifteen years, prior to occupying their present home in 1899, the club had its headquarters in the Jerome Mansion, at the southeast corner of Twenty-sixth Street and Madison Avenue on Madison Square. The University Club membership today totals over 4,000 members, representing more than 230 American colleges and universities, and some forty foreign institutions.

#### 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 University Club 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 University Club, in this Italian Renaissance style clubhouse, achieves an excellence in its proportions rarely surpassed in this country, that the building has many superb architectural details executed in fine materials, that it is monumental in scale and that a building of this type will probably never again be built in the United States.

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 University Club, 1 West 54th Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1270, Lot 34, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.