

MORRIS-JUMEL MANSION, West 160th Street and Edgecombe Avenue, Borough of Manhattan. Built about 1765.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 2109, Lot 106.

On June 14, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Morris-Jumel Mansion and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 40). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Two witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Of this impressively handsome pre-Revolutionary Georgian Mansion, it can truly be said that Washington slept there. This historic house with its columned and pedimented portico displays a true feeling of grandeur and elegance. Well sited, on sloping landscaped grounds on one of the highest elevations in Manhattan, this two and one-half story spacious country residence renovated, restored and refurbished as a museum, now ranks among the most beautiful of our nation's historic shrines.

The architectural massing of this imposing residence is superb. Its formal arrangement of well proportioned windows is typically Georgian in style. The pedimented portico with its slender two-story Doric columns seemingly belongs to the Federal period, however, it is part of the original house. The columns resting on pedestals support a low-pitched pediment with dentils, containing a handsome half round window, with double keystone blocks. Steps set between the center columns lead to the portico and to a stately front entrance doorway with flanking sidelights and handsome elliptical fanlight. The sidelights contain delicate tracery filled with tinted glass. Another feature of the front facade is the elegant central Palladian window at the second floor, above the entrance, with an ornamental balcony in front of this window. Built of brick, this house is encased in wood with wood corner blocks (quoins) imitating stone. The house has a fine dentilled cornice at the roof line, while the captain's walk which crowns the roof consists of an ornate balustrade.

Colonel Roger Morris, a loyalist sympathizer, built this country house in 1765 when he was a member of the Executive Council of the Province of New York. In 1746 he had come to America, a youthful Captain in the British Army. He fought with General Braddock in the French and Indian War and then, as a Major and later as a Colonel, he served with General Wolfe on the Plains of Abraham in Quebec. Colonel Morris and his family lived in the Mansion, which they named Mount Morris, until 1775, when he fled to England at the beginning of hostilities. Upon his return to New York in the latter part of 1777, Colonel Morris, at the insistence of the British Government, was given the post of Inspector of the Claims of Refugees, a position he held until 1783, when he and his family returned to England.

After the disastrous Battle of Long Island, General Washington retreated to Harlem Heights and made the Morris home his headquarters. (September 14-October 18, 1776). Upon evacuation by the American forces, the British moved in, and the Morris Mansion housed General Sir Henry Clinton and his officers and at intervals the Hessians, during the seven years the British occupied New York City. When peace was declared, the house and land were confiscated and sold by the Commissioners of Forfeiture.

For a quarter of a century the Mansion changed hands several times and for a while it even served as a tavern. In 1810 Stephen Jumel, a wealthy French merchant, purchased it. Madame Jumel restored, renovated and refurnished the neglected mansion, not as it was in the Morris family's day but in the Napoleonic Empire Style with Nineteenth Century Federal Style detail so popular with our new nation. The year after the death of Stephen Jumel, in 1832, Madame Jumel married Aaron Burr, former Vice-President of the United States. She lived on in the house until 1865.

In 1903, when the old Mansion was put on the market for sale, a group of patriotic women petitioned the City to buy the house and grounds and preserve it for posterity. The City of New York purchased the property and, by a special act of legislation, the custodianship was given to the Washington Headquarters Association founded by the Daughters of the American Revolution, who restored it as a Museum. The house is owned and maintained by the City of New York under the Department of Parks and is open to the public.

In 1945 the house was again renovated and refurnished and the grounds landscaped again. There are many fine architectural features within the interiors. A rear wing contains an exceptionally handsome pre-Revolutionary octagonal drawing room at the first floor. The many rooms contain personal belongings of Roger Morris, President George Washington, Madame Jumel and Aaron Burr. It is superbly furnished combining the pre-Revolutionary Georgian pieces with those of the American Federal and French Empire styles.

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 Morris-Jumel 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 Morris-Jumel Mansion is a superb example of Georgian architecture, that it is one of the few Eighteenth Century houses left in New York City, that it has great historical significance, that today it stands as one of the finest historic house-museum shrines in America and that it is of great cultural importance to the City and the nation.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 63 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 Morris-Jumel Mansion, West 160th Street and Edgecombe Avenue, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 2109, Lot 106, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.