

Landmarks Preservation Commission
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SEVENTH REGIMENT ARMORY, 643 Park Avenue, Borough of Manhattan. Begun 1877, completed 1878; architect Charles W. Clinton.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1401, Lot 1.

On November 10, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Seventh Regiment Armory and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 36). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Three witnesses spoke in favor of designation, including Colonel John J. Bellew, representing the Board of Trustees of the Seventh Regiment who approved the proposed designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Seventh Regiment Armory is a rare wedding of two conflicting tendencies of Nineteenth Century architecture. A "fortified" castle on Park Avenue bristling with battlements immediately announces the military character of the building. In this facade, we see the architectural expressionism of the eighteen seventies attempting to adapt an historical revival form to contemporary needs. On the other hand, the drill room, which extends back to Lexington Avenue, displays the century's determination to use new materials and techniques, expressive of function, as efficiently and as straightforwardly as possible. To the designer's credit, the functional requirements of this portion of the building shine through a minimal amount of affected medieval veneer, producing a massive armory of rugged architectural character.

Three handsome square towers of brick with granite trim set off the facade overlooking Park Avenue. The tall center tower is dominant and contains the stoop and the imposing front entrance at its base. This Park Avenue section of the building houses administrative offices and regimental meeting rooms. Large windows, necessary for these uses, pierce the "fortress" walls. Crenellated parapets crown the towers, and the corbels supporting the crenellations (machicolations) accent each tower. At the third floor the wall connecting the towers also has a horizontal band of brick corbelling, producing a rhythmic affect, that is impressive and structurally satisfying. These medieval battlements so typical of military architecture are used dramatically and with bold incisiveness. In 1909 a high belfry above the central tower was removed. In the same year another floor was added to the administration building, and in 1930 a fifth floor was added and the third and fourth floors were completely redone.

To enclose the large area needed for drill maneuvers and to attain considerable height, the architect used the contemporary train shed method of construction, which employed enormous iron trusses and other ironwork to span the enclosure and to support the great roof. The plain brick exteriors of the North and South elevations, enclosing the drill shed, are divided and relieved by three horizontal stone band courses, and a crenellated parapet with stone coping crowns the wall. With the exception of the Lexington Avenue facade, a landscaped areaway surrounds the building enclosed by a handsome low railing.

History of the Regiment

The Seventh Regiment was formed in 1806 from four volunteer militia companies. It possesses an outstanding list of battle honors including service in the War of 1812, the Civil War and two World Wars, and it rendered service to the City in controlling riots and subduing civilian disorders. The Seventh has also been one of the most socially distinguished military organizations in the City. On the night of November 1, 1954, the Regiment entertained the British Queen Mother at a ball in her honor at the Armory. Often referred to as the "silk stocking regiment", the interior quarters reflect the taste of this most affluent National Guard organization. Louis G. Tiffany who designed the Veterans Room brought together an extraordinary team of artists and architects, including Stanford White to decorate the trophy room and other regimental quarters.

Prior to 1860, the several companies of the Seventh Regiment occupied separate quarters around New York City. From 1853 to 1857 the Seventh used the Arsenal in Central Park at 64th Street and Fifth Avenue. However, on September 5, 1860, the Regiment occupied the newly created Armory above the Tompkins Market, which had been rebuilt for that purpose. This cast-iron front building was located on Third Avenue between Sixth and Seventh Streets and was headquarters for the Seventh from 1860 to 1880. October 1877 marked the laying of the cornerstone of the Seventh Regiment building on Park Avenue, and on April 26, 1880 the Regiment, with great ceremony, marched into its own Armory at this new location.

Throughout its existence, the Seventh Regiment Armory has been used by other organizations, and it has also been used for purposes other than military functions. The National Indoor Tennis Championships were held on the drill floor of the Armory from 1900-1963, with the exception of the World War II years. The Knickerbocker Greys, a junior cadet corps for school boys from the New York metropolitan area, was founded in 1881; ever since 1902, it has been drilling in the Seventh Regiment Armory. Closely patterned after the adult organization in character and in its uniforms, the Knickerbocker Greys has been a source of membership for the Seventh Regiment.

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 Seventh Regiment Armory 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 Seventh Regiment Armory has great historical value because, in its component parts, it provides an example of two conflicting tendencies of Nineteenth Century architecture, romantic military architecture and expressive functionalism; that it houses an organization with a long and distinguished military record; that the prominent citizens of New York who have always been associated with the military and social history of the organization give it great distinction and that it is a military structure of local and national renown.

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 Seventh Regiment Armory, 643 Park Avenue, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1401, Lot 1, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.