

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK, 1220-1227 Fifth Avenue, Borough of Manhattan.
Begun 1929, completed 1930; architect Joseph H. Freedlander.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1609, Lot 1.

On November 10, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Museum of the City of New York and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 67). 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. In a letter to the Commission, the President of the Museum said, "I am writing this letter to evidence the Museum's great pleasure in being so nominated and to express our hope that the designation will be made".

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The use of the Late Georgian Style of architecture for the Museum of the City of New York was appropriate for this structure. Dignified in appearance, symmetrical in plan, the five-story red brick building with white marble trim, has a feeling of restrained elegance and formality well expressed in the limited, yet careful, use of decorative elements and in the fine choice of details incorporated in the scheme. With his design, the architect Joseph H. Freedlander, won the competition for this building.

From the street, an approach of gracious steps leads to a short entrance walk, which divides a landscaped forecourt, contained behind a handsome balustrade. To the right and left of the courtyard two projecting wings extend to the building line and rest on low, rusticated basement walls. Adjacent to these wings, on the courtyard side, are two attractive arched loggias. The pedimented end walls of the two pavilions display enframed niches containing bronze figures. White marble cornerstones (quoins) handsomely outline the corners of the building.

The dominant feature of the Fifth Avenue facade is a central four story architectural motif projecting forward from the main wall. This motif contains a pilaster enframed doorway, surmounted by a very elegantly curved broken pediment. Above the doorway at second floor level, a four columned Ionic portico (porch) supports a low pitched pediment containing the sculptured shield of the City of New York. At the main wall pilasters, alternating with handsomely enframed French doors, are set behind the columns of the portico.

The Museum opened in 1923 in the old Gracie Mansion on the East River. Funds for construction of the present building were raised by private subscription. Income for maintenance is derived from four sources; City appropriations, endowments, admission fees and contributions. To quote the Museum's Director, "New York is a City without a past." In the rooms and galleries of its handsome interiors, the Museum belies this statement to some extent by illustrating the history and life of the City with permanent and special exhibitions. Ship models, dioramas of unfamiliar scenes, miniatures, vehicles, fire engines, photographs, rare books and manuscripts are among the choice collections to be found in the Museum. Two complete rooms, from the City residence of the late John D. Rockefeller, give the viewer a glimpse of the opulent taste of the Victorian era.

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 Museum of the City of New York 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 Museum of the City of New York is a distinguished example of civic architecture, that its central portico is a dominant feature of the design and that the Late Georgian Style, employed for the Museum, is appropriate for a building whose contents depict the history of New York City, the first seat of the Capitol of the United States, when the English Georgian Style was still dominant in this City.

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 Museum of the City of New York, 1220-1227 Fifth Avenue, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1609, Lot 1, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.