

THE IRON FENCE AT SAILORS' SNUG HARBOR, located on the north side of the property extending along Richmond Terrace and Snug Harbor Road between Tysen Street and Kissel Avenue (Brighton Boulevard), Sailors' Snug Harbor, Richmond Terrace, New Brighton, Borough of Richmond. Original portion designed 1842 by Frederick Diaper; subsequent additions designed to match original portion.

Landmark Site: Borough of Richmond Tax Map Block 76, Lot 1 in part, consisting of the land on which the described improvement is situated.

On June 23, 1970, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Iron Fence along the northerly boundary of Sailors' Snug Harbor and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Calendar No. 55). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. One witness spoke in favor of designation. The President of the Board of Trustees of Sailors' Snug Harbor, the owner, appeared in opposition to the proposed designations.

On August 16, 1972, the City of New York acquired the portion of the fence that generally follows, for approximately 874 feet, the frontage of the property along Richmond Terrace that was acquired by the City at this time.

Under the same date, the City of New York acquired the remainder of the fence as it extends along Richmond Terrace and Sailors' Snug Harbor Road for approximately 965 feet (not including the interruption at the West Gatehouse which the City did not acquire). The City agreed with the Trustees of Sailors' Snug Harbor to remove this latter portion of the fence within 180 days of the closing of the sale to the City. The Trustees of Sailors' Snug Harbor have sold the portion of their property on which this latter portion of the fence is located to Sorel Realty Corporation. The City of New York, the Trustees of Sailors' Snug Harbor, and Sorel Realty Corporation are currently revising the provisions for the removal of this latter portion of the fence. The City will retain the right to remove the fence within 90 days notice by Sorel to do so. Until the fence is removed, or until the City fails to exercise its option to remove it, Sorel will agree to maintain the fence to the City's satisfaction.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The handsome Greek Revival iron fence that runs for over a third of a mile along the northerly boundary of the former Sailors' Snug Harbor property is almost as old as the great Greek Revival buildings it protects. The central building of the row of five (LP-0024) was built between 1831 and 1833. The two flanking structures, Building "B" (LP-0023) and Building "D" (LP-0025) were constructed in 1839-40 and 1839-41 respectively. Recent research by I. Barnett Shepherd was corroborated a date in the early 1840s for the central portion of the fence opposite these buildings. It was fabricated and erected by William Alexander of Broome Street, Manhattan, from designs by the noted British-born architect, Frederick Diaper (1810-1906), a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects and a founding member of the American Institute of Architects. Since William Alexander's sons continued the business of "smith and ornamental ironwork" after their father's death in 1860, it is more than likely that the same firm executed subsequent additions to the fence which match the original.

The fence as it stands today consists of over 330 panels, 5'-2" wide by 5'-9" high. Each unit consists of nine 1 1/8" square wrought iron pickets that extend vertically through a pair of 3/4" x 2 1/4" horizontal flats top and bottom as well as through a pair of 3/4" x 2 1/4" flats that form an "X" across the central portion of each panel. At the center of each "X" is a 4" diameter cast iron cylinder ornamented by a rosette. Between the top pair and the bottom pair of the horizontal flats a series of small "X's" separate the vertical pickets. Above the top band of "X's" the pickets terminate in 12" high cast iron spikes. The various flats are all cold-punched to accommodate the vertical pickets.

Where the panels join, a 1 1/2" x 2 1/4" post is formed by the abutment of the end pickets of two adjacent units. The spike that caps this double picket is similar to the others. At the bottom, the double pickets are extended downward and let into a granite curb. The bottom band of "X's" is thus raised 3 1/2" above the granite base and the overall height of the fence, from the top of the curb to the top of the spikes, is 7'-0 1/2".

The Iron Fence at Sailors' Snug Harbor

At the juncture of each pair of panels a 1 1/2" x 2 1/4" S-shaped back brace supports the fence. The top of the brace is welded to the back of the double picket; the bottom is let into an 18" x 40" piece of granite turned at right angles to the main line of the fence to receive it. The curb itself is thus made an integral and expressive part of the design, consisting, as it does, of granite slabs laid alternately parallel and at right angles to the line of the fence, forming in plan the shape of a wide-toothed "comb". On the inside of the fence, cobble stones have been neatly laid so as to form a gutter between the projecting "teeth" of the granite "comb", and four rows of cobble stones extend in a continuous band behind the gutters and the inner ends of the granite "teeth". Since all the cobbles are laid so as to pitch sharply away from the fence, they were obviously intended to drain water and piled-up snow away from the iron work. That the design was effective as well as aesthetically pleasing has been born out by the fine condition of the fence today. Except for the loss of some of the ornamental rosettes, it is in almost perfect condition.

From the start, the fence has been interrupted by a number of gates -- wide double gates for carriages and various single gates for pedestrians. The major gates are flanked by monolithic granite posts, 2'-3" square, and capped with simple cornice blocks. Identical granite posts mark the terminus of the fence at its easterly and westerly ends. Counting these, a total of eight granite posts are still in place.

The minor gates are hung from fluted cast-iron posts topped by a ball and spike -- somewhat suggestive of the crowning feature of an Imperial German dress helmet of the First World War. The design of the gates themselves follows closely the design of the typical fence panel, modified only as needed to fit the width of the openings. Their location can be correlated with old views and plans of the property; they were added as the layout of roads and paths was modified. An iron hoop still bridges between the two granite posts that lead to the pedestrian Gatehouse (LP-0742), though the lantern it once supported is no longer there. Some of the old lamp-posts also survive where the fence turns inward to meet the carriage entrance at the Western Gatehouse, though the lamp brackets are gone.

The present fence and its additions replaced an earlier wooden fence, just as the present gatehouses replaced the porters' lodges shown on the earliest plans. According to local legend, the purpose of these fences and gates was less to keep trespassers out of the property than to keep the old sailors in -- or at least to discourage too frequent visits to neighboring purveyors of unauthorized forms of refreshment.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this improvement, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that The Iron Fence at Sailors' Snug Harbor 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, this handsome fence and its appurtenances represents a rare surviving example of monumental ironwork by early New York craftsmen, that its Greek Revival design by a distinguished architect is most compatible with the Greek Revival buildings it encloses, that subsequent extensions and additions have remained faithful to the original design and that its recent acquisition by the City of New York insures the preservation of this significant part of the City's cultural heritage.

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 Iron Fence at Sailors' Snug Harbor, located on the north side of the property extending along Richmond Terrace and Snug Harbor Road between Tysen Street and Kissel Avenue (Brighton Boulevard), Sailors' Snug Harbor, Richmond Terrace, New Brighton, Borough of Richmond, and designates as its related Landmark Site that part of Borough of Richmond Tax Map Block 76, Lot 1 on which the described improvement is situated.