

GENERAL GRANT NATIONAL MEMORIAL INTERIOR consisting of the rotunda, crypt, and reliquary rooms, 122nd Street and Riverside Drive, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1891-97; architect John H. Duncan.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 1897, Lot 100.

On September 23, 1975, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as an Interior Landmark of the General Grant National Memorial Interior consisting of the rotunda, crypt, and reliquary rooms, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 5). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. The representative of the National Park Service spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The General Grant National Memorial, the work of architect John H. Duncan, is one of the most impressive monuments in the City. The interior, incorporating a domed rotunda, is dominated by a center crypt with twin sarcophagi holding the earthly remains of Ulysses S. Grant, Civil War hero and eighteenth President of the United States, and Julia Dent Grant, his wife.

Ulysses Simpson Grant (1822-1885), trained at West Point, began his professional life as a career soldier in the Mexican-American War. Discontented with army life, he retired to the family business in Galena, Illinois, until the outbreak of the Civil War. Enlisting as a colonel in an Illinois regiment, Grant quickly rose in the ranks because of his successful campaign operations in the Mississippi Valley. Major victories at Vicksburg and Chattanooga led President Lincoln to give Grant supreme command of the Union armies in 1863. Grant's personal direction of the Army of the Potomac ultimately led to the final battle of the war and Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox on April 9, 1865. Grant's renown as a war hero led to his election as President as the candidate of the Republican Party in 1868 and again in 1872. The years in the White House were shadowed by political passions bred by the war and the Reconstruction period. Perhaps the greatest accomplishment of Grant's administration was in the field of foreign relations, where serious disputes with Great Britain were peacefully arbitrated. Following his second term Grant's last years were spent in a two-year world tour, an unsuccessful business venture, and in the writing of his Personal Memoirs.

Before his death Grant requested burial in New York City. Interment of the body on August 8, 1885, in a temporary vault in Riverside Park was followed by the organization of the General Grant Monument Association to build a permanent structure. After two architectural competitions for the tomb design, John H. Duncan was announced as the winner on November 10, 1890.

John Hemingway Duncan (1855-1929), a New York City architect, had achieved professional success with his design for the Soldiers' and Sailors' Memorial Arch at Grand Army Plaza, Brooklyn, built in 1889-92. His success with this Civil War monument may have led to his invitation for the Grant Monument competition. He later designed the Knox Building on Fifth Avenue and many handsome town houses.

While ground was broken for the new monument on April 27, 1891, the structure was not completed until 1897. About 90,000 subscribers contributed \$600,000 to build the tomb. Final dedication with President William McKinley presiding took place on April 27, 1897, the anniversary of Grant's birth, after the transfer of Grant's body on April 18.

While the exterior of the building was inspired by 19th-century reconstructions of the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus, the interior plan is modeled on the Church of the Dome at the Hôtel des Invalides in Paris, final resting place of Napoleon. The interior also reflects the classical monumentality of the exterior. Cruciform in plan, the General Grant National Memorial is focused about the crypt, visible through a circular opening in the main floor, and set directly beneath the dome.

Each of the four arms of the building, equal in length, is spanned by a coffered barrel vault extending from the dome at the center of the building. The walls, which are lined with white marble panels, are surmounted by a continuous entablature. End walls in the north, east, and west arms are pierced by windows filled with amber-colored glass. Above these windows, in the tympanums formed by the arcs of the barrel vaults, are brightly-colored mosaics executed by Allyn Cox in 1966. They represent Grant's victories at Vicksburg and Chattanooga and Lee's surrender to Grant at Appomattox. Twin bronze doors fill the end wall of the south arm.

Rising above the center of the building is a great coffered dome resting on pendentives carved with allegorical figures. Executed by J. Massey Rhind at the time the tomb was built, each pendentive depicts two women representing a phase of Grant's life. In the first pendentive, at the southeast corner of the dome, each of the women holds one of her breasts to represent Grant's birth and infancy. Running counter-clockwise, the second shows one woman holding a helmet while the other holds a shield to symbolize Grant's military career. In the third, representing Grant's civil career, one woman carries a cornucopia and the other holds a fasces, a symbol of civil authority in ancient Rome. The fourth which represents Grant's death depicts the women with heads bowed in mourning while a votive lamp shines behind them.

Rising above an enriched entablature, a colonnaded gallery forms the drum of the dome. The gallery is subdivided into twelve balcony openings by pilasters crowned with spread-winged eagles. Thirteen openings were originally intended, each to represent one of the original thirteen states. Two Ionic columns in each opening support double-tiered panels decorated with shields and wreaths. A coffered ceiling encloses the top of the dome.

Access to the crypt, set one level below the main floor, is provided by a double staircase at the rear of the north arm. A balustrade, interrupted by supporting piers, separates the public from the red granite sarcophagi. Niches in the outer wall of the passage surrounding the crypt contain bronze busts of five of Grant's generals, all executed in 1938. The busts of Sherman and Sheridan were designed by William Mues, while Jens Juszko was responsible for those of Thomas, Ord, and McPherson.

The northwest and northeast corners of the building are occupied by exhibition rooms on the main floor, which were originally intended as reliquary rooms. Completely round in form, each room is surmounted by a small false dome, not reflected on the exterior.

The Grant Monument Association gave the tomb to the Federal government in 1959 which changed the name to the General Grant National Memorial. It is now maintained by the National Park Service.

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 General Grant National Memorial Interior consisting of the rotunda, crypt, and reliquary rooms 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 General Grant National Memorial Interior is dominated by a center crypt with twin sarcophagi holding the bodies of General Grant and his wife, that it reflects the classic monumentality of the exterior of the building, that the General Grant National Memorial is one of the most impressive monuments in New York City, that the Memorial is a testimony to the devotion Grant inspired among the American people in the late 19th century, and that it is a fitting monument to Grant as a Civil War hero and American president.

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 an Interior Landmark the General Grant National Memorial Interior consisting of the rotunda, crypt, and reliquary rooms, 122nd Street and Riverside Drive, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1897, Lot 100, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.