

KING MANSION, First Floor Interior consisting of the hall, parlor, library and dining room; the staircase leading from the first to the second floor; Second Floor Interior consisting of the hall, sitting room, Rufus King bedroom, and children's playroom, King Park, Jamaica Avenue and 153rd Street, Borough of Queens. Interiors c. 1755 and c. 1805.

Landmark Site: Tax Map Block 9682, Lot 1.

On January 27, 1976, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as an Interior Landmark of the King Mansion, First Floor Interior consisting of the hall, parlor, library, and dining room; the staircase leading from the first to the second floor; Second Floor Interior consisting of the hall, sitting room, Rufus King bedroom, and children's playroom, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 8). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Three witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. The Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs Administration has expressed its approval of the designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The King Mansion, designated a New York City Landmark in 1966, is a distinguished Colonial residence situated in King Park, Jamaica, Queens. Named a National Historic Landmark in 1974, the house is now maintained as a museum by the King Manor Association. The interiors, which display notable architectural detail of both Georgian and Federal styles, are an interesting reflection of the several periods of the construction of the house and the taste of its residents.

This large two-and-a-half story house is L-shaped in plan, and was built in three stages. The oldest section at the rear dates from about 1730, while the main portion of the house which contains the most notable interiors was built in two phases. It is believed that the Rev. Thomas Colgan, rector of Grace Episcopal Church, Jamaica (1732-1755), built the western section of the main portion of this gambrel-roofed house in about 1755. One of his daughters, who married Christopher Smith, inherited the house. Rufus King purchased the property from the Smith estate in 1805 and enlarged the house, incorporating the newly constructed eastern portion with the older western section while renovating a number of the rooms.

Rufus King (1755-1827), statesman and legislator, entered public life as a delegate to the Continental Congress where he served during 1784-87, introducing a resolution against slavery in the Northwest Territory. As a delegate to the Constitutional Convention in 1787, he helped draft and signed the final version of the Constitution as it was submitted to the states for ratification. Moving to New York City soon after his marriage to Mary Alsop in 1786, King was elected to the New York Assembly, then in July 1789 was chosen by the legislature as United States senator from New York. As an ardent Federalist, he vigorously upheld the fiscal policy of Alexander Hamilton. President George Washington appointed King Minister Plenipotentiary to Great Britain, a post he held from 1796 to 1803. Similarly, in 1825-26 he served as British Ambassador under the appointment of President John Quincy Adams. King was the unsuccessful Federalist candidate for Vice-President in 1804 and 1808 and was defeated in a race for the Presidency by James Monroe in 1816. He served two more terms in the United States Senate, being elected in 1813 and 1820. In his last term he took a strong anti-slavery stance, opposing the Missouri Compromise and advocating the emancipation of all slaves and their removal from the United States at the nation's expense. The King Mansion is the only extant residence associated with Rufus King.

Five of King's sons were active in public service. Charles King (1789-1867) merchant, editor, and ninth president of Columbia College, and James Gore King (1791-1853), merchant, banker, creator of the King system of collecting internal revenue, and member of Congress, both married daughters of New York merchant Archibald Gracie. His residence, Gracie Mansion, is now a designated New York City Landmark.

and official home of the Mayor. Gracie Mansion was acquired by Rufus King in 1819, possibly in return for loans he had advanced to Gracie, but Gracie continued to live in the house with his daughter Sarah and her husband James Gore King. Edward King founded the Cincinnati Law School, and Frederick King was a physician.

John Alsop King (1788-1867), the eldest son of Rufus King, occupied the King Mansion after his father's death. He married Mary Ray in 1810, at which time agriculture was his main interest, but politics soon gained his attention. He served as a member of the State Assembly and the State Senate, and became a member of Congress in 1849. Instrumental in the founding of the Republican party, he was a delegate to the first Republican National Convention in 1856. That same year he was elected Governor of New York State.

Cornelia King, granddaughter of Rufus King and daughter of John Alsop King, was the last member of the family to occupy the house. After her death, it was purchased in 1897 by the Village of Jamaica, and when the village was absorbed by the City of New York, the house and grounds, now King Park, came under the jurisdiction of the Department of Parks. The King Manor Association, founded in 1900, is responsible for the maintenance of the house and the preservation of its furnishings.

When Rufus King enlarged the house, he preserved the general mid-18th century character of the exterior, but many of the interior architectural features reflect the period of his occupancy. Although the main portion of the house is basically symmetrical in plan with rooms arranged on either side of a central hallway, closer inspection reveals that some deviations had to be made to accommodate the newer portion of the main house. For example, the wide entrance door with sidelights and transom is not centered on the central hall.

In the hall the plaster walls are adorned by baseboard and chair rail. The elaborate ceiling cornice, composed of several rows of molding and a row of dentils, was probably added when the house was enlarged after 1805. Four doorways open off the hall into the principal rooms of the house.

The parlor, in the older western section of the house, must have been renovated several times since it was originally built c. 1755 because the most notable feature of the room is the Greek Revival mantelpiece set on a deep chimney breast. Dating from the late 1820, this elegant mantelpiece is of dark gray and white marble. A simple white marble shelf is supported on semi-oval reeded pilasters; the mantel infill is of dark gray marble and the fireplace is enframed with panels of white marble. The cast-iron coal grate also displays the simple elegance of Greek Revival design. The elaborate ceiling cornice, with several rows of molding, a row of Greek fretwork, and a row of dentils, is also a later addition. The windows with six-over-six sash are admirable disposed to provide cross-ventilation. Original features of the room include the baseboard, chair rail, and paneled door with its fine brass hardware.

At the rear of the older portion of the main house is a room now called the library which displays many mid-18th century architectural features. A mantel with pulvinated frieze and paneled overmantel surmount the fireplace which is surrounded by blue and white Dutch tiles charmingly decorated with landscape scenes. In overall character the chimney piece is typical of the period when this portion of the house was constructed. The most interesting feature of the room is the treatment of three plastered walls, for rather than being paneled with wood, they are painted to simulate wood grained paneling. Used in combination with a chair rail, the graining gives the effect of a wainscot at the lower section of the wall. During restoration work in 1965, the original painted wood graining was discovered and the walls were redone in accordance with the original scheme. The six-paneled door has its original brass hardware.

On the right side of the hall in the newer section of the house is the dining room with an elegant curved end wall. Fiske Kimball, authority on Colonial houses, notes that the use of curved bays became popular in the post-Revolutionary period. In most residences of the early 19th century such bays are expressed on the exterior, but here the curved end wall is inscribed within the rectangular walls of the house, thus preserving its Colonial integrity on the exterior. Closets set behind paneled doors fill the corners. The fireplace is characteristically Federal in style. Wrapping around the chimney breast is a mantel shelf with breaks which follow the lines of the chimney breast and those of the supporting pilasters. Adorning the frieze of the mantelpiece is a central ellipse with reeded radiations, an ornamental motif which was extensively used in the New York area during this period according to architectural historian Talbot Hamlin. Also common to the area but less usual is the type of flanking pilaster supporting the mantel shelf seen here. The pilasters culminate in stylized urn forms near their base. The entire chimney piece was skillfully designed to join the chair rail and baseboard which encompass the room.

At the rear of the central hall, a graceful staircase placed along the eastern wall leads to the second floor. Scalloped motifs, typical of the Georgian period, decorate the ends of the risers. A graceful hand rail ends in a curved volute and displays graceful easements at changes of direction and height. Spindles which are square in section support the railing. A molding similar to a chair rail is placed on the wall along the staircase; it makes easements at the two stair landings. There is a window at the second landing.

The generous proportions of the second floor hall indicate that it was probably used as a sitting room, a common practice in the 18th and early 19th centuries. The ceiling cornice, with several rows of moldings and a row of dentils is like that in the hall below and probably also dates from the early 19th century.

The large room in the southwest corner is now called the sitting room. Unlike the parlor beneath it, however, this room retains architectural features that appear to date from the actual construction of this section of the house--the most notable being the chimney piece. An elaborate overmantel with cornice and console-flanked paneling surmounts the elaborate mantelpiece. The unusually high shelf, with a row of dentils beneath, is supported on ornate pilasters. The original white marble fireplace enframingent is now partially covered by an arched Victorian fireplace of the mid-19th century--a reminder of the changes that owners so often made in their residences over the years for reasons of style and practicality. While the chair rail, baseboard and door are original, the ceiling cornice, which is like the one in the parlor below, is probably also a 19th-century addition.

Located in the northwest corner of the house is the Rufus King bedroom. As in the library below, the south wall features wood paneling around and above the fireplace. The mantel shelf is supported by a frieze which ends in a curved swan's neck motif, while an eared enframingent surrounds the fireplace. This is now filled in with a mid-19th century arched marble panel to accommodate a cast-iron coal grate. A molded ceiling cornice, chair rail, and baseboard are original features of the room.

Just off the staircase leading to the third floor in the eastern section of the house is a room called the children's playroom. One descends three steps to enter this room in which both the ceiling and floor are at lower levels than the other rooms on this floor. This provides a graphic demonstration of some of the problems that must have been encountered when the three sections of the house were joined together. The room is very simple with paneled east wall and built-in closet.

The interiors of the King Mansion are architecturally diverse and reflect the several periods of construction of the house. The changes that have been made through the years not only filled the needs of the residents, but also reflect the taste of various periods during the 18th and 19th centuries. The house is the most tangible reminder of Rufus King, the notable statesman who did so much to serve the United States.

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 King Mansion, First Floor Interior consisting of the hall, parlor, library, and dining room; the staircase leading from the first to the second floor; Second Floor Interior consisting of the hall, sitting room, Rufus King bedroom, and children's playroom, have special character, special historic 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 King Mansion, a New York City Landmark, is a distinguished Colonial residence situated in King Park, Jamaica, Queens, that is the most tangible reminder of the notable statesman and legislator, Rufus King, who did much to serve the United States, that the interiors are an interesting reflection of the several periods of construction of the house, that notable architectural detail of both Georgian and Federal styles can be seen, that among the most distinguished features are the staircase, the curved end wall of the dining room, and the many handsome chimney pieces, and that the house is effectively preserved through its maintenance as a museum by the King Manor Association.

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 King Mansion, First Floor Interior consisting of the hall, parlor, library, and dining room; the staircase leading from the first to the second floor; Second Floor Interior consisting of the hall, sitting room, Rufus King bedroom, and children's playroom, King Park, Jamaica Avenue and 153rd Street, Borough of Queens, and designated Tax Map Block 9682, Lot 1, Borough of Queens as its Landmark Site.