

CUBBERLY-BRITTON COTTAGE, 3737 Richmond Road, Borough of Staten Island.  
Built c.1670; additions c. 1700 and c. 1750.

Landmark Site: Borough of Staten Island Tax Map Block 2359, Lot 1 in part consisting of the land on which the described building is situated.

On September 14, 1976, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Cubberly-Britton Cottage and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 6). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. One witness spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. The Richmondtown Restoration has expressed its strong support in favor of the designation.

#### DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Cubberly-Britton Cottage, located in the Richmondtown Restoration of Staten Island, is an outstanding example of civil and domestic architecture of the 17th and 18th centuries. Built in three sections in about 1670, 1700, and 1750, the building was moved in 1967 from its former site at the foot of New Dorp Lane when it was threatened with destruction.

The earliest section of the house, the stone center portion, was built on the "Governor's Lot" as the "Town House" of Staten Island to serve court and government functions. Obadiah Holmes, the town clerk who came to Staten Island from Long Island in 1670, also lived in the "Town House." The "Governor's Lot" was not formally conveyed to Holmes until 1677, and in 1679 he transferred it to his son Obadiah, Jr. Holmes was a justice of the peace in 1685 and 1689.

Nathaniel Britton and his wife Elizabeth acquired the "Governor's Lot" with its stone cottage in 1695. Among the ancestors of Nathaniel Britton were William, Richard, and Nathaniel Britton who had lived in the English colony of Long Island before 1660. During the first half century of British rule, the descendants of Nathaniel and William Britton were among the most constructive leaders in the development of Staten Island. The Nathaniel Britton who purchased the cottage in 1695 was either the son or grandson of William Britton-- historical records do not make the exact relationship clear. He and his son were deacons of the Presbyterian Society and helped establish the English Presbyterian church in Staten Island in 1729.

In 1761 Isaac Cubberly, who came to Staten Island from New Jersey, bought the property which had been deeded to Obadiah Holmes in 1677. Members of the Cubberly family lived in the house for eighty-six years, hence, the association of the family name with the house.

Dr. Nathaniel Britton, a descendant of the Nathaniel Britton who acquired the house in 1695, became the owner in the late 19th century. A botanist and founder of the New York Botanical Garden, Dr. Britton deeded the house to the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences in 1915.

The Cubberly-Britton Cottage is sited facing Richmond Road, originally the King's Road, opposite Court Place. The site, overlooked by scenic hills, is on a lawn adjacent to the mill pond in the Richmondtown Restoration, making the setting rural and bucolic.

The stone center portion of the house, the earliest section, was built about 1670. The frame kitchen section on the west side was added in 1700, and the two-room frame addition on the east side was constructed in 1750 as a continuation of the original fieldstone structure.

The center portion, one and a half stories high like each of the flanking additions with which it shares common walls, is constructed of random ashlar. Keyed brickwork enframes the entrance with a batten-type door. Two shuttered windows to the right of the entrance have wood frames set into keyed brick enframements. When the house was moved in 1967, fragments of diamond-shaped leaded lights were found beneath the floor. These window panes were probably set into casement sash, and the windows will be restored in this form. The steep

shingled roof with deep overhang contains two gabled dormers which are probably later additions to the house.

The kitchen section to the west is of a slightly lower profile than the two adjoining portions of the building. All the walls are clapboarded except for the lower portion of the wall beneath the end gable. Instead it is constructed of random ashlar as the back of the kitchen fireplace with a large beehive oven projecting from it. The clapboard wall beneath the gable is pierced by two small windows, while two larger windows are set in the front wall at the first floor.

The clapboarded frame section at the east has a roof with deep overhang of the same height and pitch as the original center portion. A single gabled dormer like those in the center portion is set in the roof. Two windows with twelve-over-eight sash are set in the front wall.

One of the interesting features of the interior is a meeting room extending across the entire front of the center portion--a reminder of the building's original use as the Staten Island "Town House." The kitchen with its large cooking fireplace has a brick oven reflected on the exterior in the beehive projection.

The simple handsome building is an important reminder of the colonial heritage of Staten Island. Although built in three stages, the Cubberly-Britton Cottage is a harmoniously unified composition displaying important features of colonial architecture. In its present site it is an important component of the Richmondtown Restoration.

Richmondton, in which this house is located, is an unusual survival of an early town and county center. It represents a cross section of development, varying from the late seventeenth to the late nineteenth century. Historically and geographically the center of Staten Island, Richmondton is about seven miles from St. George and is located in LaTourette Park.

The town is in process of restoration and reconstruction. Certain notable buildings on Staten Island, which would otherwise have been lost, have been moved to Richmondton to insure their preservation. Some reconstructions are planned to fill in historical gaps. Some modern buildings, in character with their surroundings, will also be added to provide necessary services. Streets within the area will be closed to vehicular traffic; peripheral highways will give access to parking fields and to the visitors entrance.

The houses will eventually be completely furnished and shops equipped with tools to show how previous generations lived and worked. Quiet tree-lined streets, gardens and orchards will form an attractive part of the setting of the town.

The Richmondton Restoration, which includes this house within its boundaries is the only project of its kind in the metropolitan region. It is administered by the Staten Island Historical Society under a contract between the Society and the New York City Department of Parks.

The first European colonists settled in the area that is now known as Richmondton in about 1680, the date of the first land grant. In 1695, a combined church, school and home for the lay reader and school teacher, known as the Voorlezer was built by the congregation of the Dutch Reformed Church. In 1696 the Dutch received a lease of land in Coclestown (Richmondton) upon which stood the Voorlezer's house. This hamlet was probably known as Coclestown because of the heaps of oyster and clam shells or "cocles" left there by the departing Indians.

Many of the buildings we see in Richmondton today were built in the early part of the eighteenth century including a church, a county house, a jail and several houses. The Revolution had little effect on this quiet community, except for the fact that the courthouse and church were destroyed because the Dutch were believed to be sympathetic to the rebel cause. In 1898 Staten Island became a borough of the City of New York, and the many county functions and offices which had been at Richmondton were moved to St. George. By 1920 all the remaining offices had also been transferred.

## 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 Cubberly-Britton Cottage 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 Cubberly-Britton Cottage is an outstanding example of civil and domestic architecture of the 17th and 18th centuries, that it was built in three sections in about 1670, 1700, and 1750; that the oldest stone portion of this building served as the "Town House" of Staten Island, that it is named for two early Staten Island families long associated with the house, that it is an important reminder of the colonial heritage of Staten Island, and that it is a noteworthy component of the Richmondtown Restoration.

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 Cubberly-Britton Cottage, 3737 Richmond Road, Borough of Staten Island, and designates as its related Landmark Site that part of Borough of Staten Island Tax Map Block 2359, Lot 1 on which the described building is situated.