

23RD REGIMENT ARMORY, 1322 Bedford Avenue, Borough of Brooklyn. Built 1891-95; architects Fowler & Hough.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 1199, Lot 15.

On January 11, 1977, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 23rd Regiment Armory and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 3). 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. The New York State Guard has expressed approval of the designation.

#### DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Designed to resemble a great medieval fortress, the 23rd Regiment Armory, located in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, is a vast and impressive example of late 19th-century military architecture. One of eight armories constructed in Brooklyn before 1900, the 23rd Regiment Armory was praised for its "massive grandeur. . .the product of a considerable expenditure on the part of the state and the country." (New York Tribune, July 18, 1897). When the armory was completed in 1895, contemporaries were struck by its monumental scale, as well as by the richness of its architectural detail--qualities which still distinguish this handsome structure today.

The 23rd Regiment, part of the Second Brigade of the National Guard, was formed from the Brooklyn Relief Guard, Company G, 13th Regiment, a group founded in April 1861, to replace the Brooklyn City Guard which was then fighting in the Civil War. Later in 1861 the name of the Relief Guard was changed to the City Guard Reserve and at the same time the company patterned its organization on that of National Guard regiments. Very soon thereafter, Governor Edwin D. Morgan authorized the formation of four new regiments and the Guard Reserve became the 23rd. This regiment served briefly in the Civil War during the summer of 1863.

An armory for the 23rd Regiment was constructed on Clermont Street in 1872-73. This building had high mansard roofs and pointed-arch windows. As the 23rd Regiment, nicknamed "Ours," grew in size and status, a larger and more imposing armory was desired and plans for the new building were formulated. Land for the new armory was acquired off Bedford Avenue. On the site at the time the land was purchased were St. Bartholomew's School, two farmhouses, and a row house owned by M.P. Fowler, one of the architects of the armory. Colonel John N. Partridge was at that time head of the regiment. An important figure in Brooklyn as President and General Manager of the Brooklyn City and Newtown Railroad Company, Partridge was instrumental in obtaining a state grant of \$300,000 for the new armory. The architectural firm of Fowler & Hough prepared plans and on November 14, 1891, the cornerstone was laid. Four years later the building was completed, and a great fair was held to raise funds for furnishing the armory company rooms, reception and council rooms. Nearly \$70,000 was collected and the rooms were lavishly decorated. The Council Room is especially elaborate and contains an enormous fireplace, twenty-four feet high. In the article in the New York Tribune (July 18, 1897), the reporter noted: "Certainly nothing in any other American armory compares (with the Council Room) and visitors from abroad say they have never seen anything like it." With regard to the company rooms, a newspaper article of 1898, the year of the Spanish-American War, commented: "The members of 23, if they are looking for consolation over their failure to get a call for duty at the front can find it in the thought that they are staying at home in the armory whose company rooms are the best in all the armories of the state."

The architects of this highly praised armory were Halsted P. Fowler (1859-1911) and William C. Hough, who maintained offices at 280 Broadway in Manhattan. The firm was active in the greater New York area, and Fowler and Hough designed several buildings in Brooklyn besides the Armory, among them the Throop Avenue Presbyterian Church, a church and Sunday school at 1170 Bushwick Avenue, the Cumberland Street Hospital, and the Dudley Memorial Building, 110 Amity Street, within the Cobble Hill Historic District.

The 23rd Regiment Armory, a massive and rugged example of the Romanesque Revival style, is composed of an administration building or head house and a vast drill hall--the standard elements of all later 19th and early 20th-century armories. These armories were used not only for training exercises and the storage of arms and equipment, but also as military clubs, and therefore they often had handsome company rooms, libraries, and dining rooms. The exteriors of these military buildings were not, generally, designed to be inviting, but rather they most often resembled great medieval fortifications with heavy walls, small windows, and crenelated roofs. This armory is an excellent and representative example of this type. Executed in heavy, dark materials--deep red, pressed brick, rough-faced, brownish-red Potsdam stone, and red terra-cotta detail--it has, as its most salient feature, a series of circular corner towers, the largest of these being 136 feet in height. The main Bedford Avenue facade has a gabled entrance bay flanked by seventy-foot tall crenelated towers with rusticated first stories. These enframe the great round-arched entrance, two stories in height, which is ornamented with terra-cotta friezes with the regimental motto and coat of arms. The entrance arch can be closed off by means of a heavy steel portcullis which is activated by hydraulic pumps. Above the entrance are three high, narrow, round-arched windows and the smooth, now stuccoed, center gable which is flanked by turrets with rounded, foliate terminations.

The facade at each side of this impressive central composition is two bays wide and three stories in height, with round-arched windows at the first story and square-headed ones above. A portion of the Bedford Avenue facade closest to Atlantic Avenue is adorned with a large sculptured bronze plaque in memory of the soldiers of the regiment who fought in World War I. At the Atlantic Avenue corner is a tower similar in design and height to those flanking the entrance, as well as to those at the rear corners of the administration building and drill hall. The great round tower at the corner of Pacific Street and Bedford Avenue is the most dramatic, imposing, and picturesque feature of the armory, rising high above the building and dominating the entire structure. To the height of the armory roof line the tower is of rusticated stone with round-arched windows at the first story and square-headed ones above. The upper portion of the tower is of brick and is pierced by paired slit-windows. Handsome brick corbelling and crenelation crown the tower. A much smaller round tower abuts this great one at the north side and adds interest to its design. The Pacific Street elevation of the administration building contains a gabled section, seven bays wide, at the center which echoes the gabled form of the entrance facade. The corbelled turrets which flank the gable have the same rounded, foliate, terra-cotta terminations as those at the gable of the main facade. This gabled section is five stories in height with round-arched windows at the first, fourth, and fifth stories, while the flanking portions of the building are three stories in height with copper dormer windows set at the roof. Above the rusticated basement of this Pacific Street elevation of the administration portion of the building are a series of round-arched windows at the first story which, like all the others, have rusticated stone enframements. Behind the administration building is the huge drill hall with its buttressed brick walls. The Atlantic Avenue elevation of the armory is the most simply treated and shows clearly the division between the administration building and the drill hall. An enclosed metal staircase is attached to the brick buttressed wall of the hall.

This handsome and imposing Romanesque Revival armory has been in constant use since its dedication in 1895 and today is still used for training programs and storage by the National Guard. It currently houses the Division of Support Command and the headquarters of the 106th Infantry of the First Battalion and the 20th Internal Security Battalion of the New York Guard.

#### 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 23rd Regiment Armory 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 23rd Regiment Armory is a vast and impressive example of late 19th-century military architecture, that the scale and richness of architectural detail of the building are especially notable, that the armory was long the headquarters

of an important Brooklyn regiment of the National Guard, that it is an excellent example of the Romanesque Revival style used for armories, and that the building has been in constant use for over seventy-five years.

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 23rd Regiment Armory, 1322 Bedford Avenue, Borough of Brooklyn and designates Tax Map Block 1199, Lot 15, Borough of Brooklyn, as its Landmark Site.