

Landmarks Preservation Commission
May 17, 1966, Number 7
LP-0232

UNITED STATES GENERAL POST OFFICE, 8th Avenue between 31st and 33rd Streets,
Borough of Manhattan. Begun 1910, completed 1913; McKim, Mead & White.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 755, Lot 40.

On April 12, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the U. S. General Post Office and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 14). 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.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

An inscription occupying the entire height and length of the frieze of the entablature crowning one of the most monumental Classic colonnades in New York quotes Herodotus, "Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds." Although such couriers carry out their appointed tasks in a far different manner today than in 1913, the building still indicates, unmistakably, that it was designed for the ingress and egress of thousands. Fifty years later the building continues to be a beehive of activity, and its admirable plan takes the traffic in its stride.

The Post Office is one of the few buildings in the City that can be seen from all sides facing as it does Eighth Avenue, Ninth Avenue, and Thirty First and Thirty Third Streets. All of the elevations are equally well proportioned and interesting. It is the Eighth Avenue front with its majestic colonnade of 20 Corinthian columns 53 feet high that creates the greatest architectural effect. The scale and monumentality inherent in this colonnade, with its attic story terminating in square pavilions at either end, is unparalleled among classic buildings in this City. When viewed with the 31 steps which lead from the street level to the main entrance 22 feet above, the sweep of the steps is overpowering. The sense of the colonnade is repeated on all of the other elevations with pilasters used instead of columns.

It is significant that the design of this building, won in competition, was until recently, a companion piece to Pennsylvania Station designed by the same architects. Today after demolition of the latter, it remains the lone survivor.

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 United States General Post Office 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 United States General Post Office is an outstanding example of the Roman Classic Style, that it is notable for its monumental scale, impressive colonnade, attic and outside steps, that all of its four handsome elevations can be seen and that it has contributed significantly to the appreciation of notable Classic architecture in this country.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 8-A 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 United States General Post Office, 8th Avenue between 31st and 33rd Streets, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 755, Lot 40, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.