

WATER TOWER, High Bridge Park opposite Amsterdam Avenue at West 173rd Street, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1872; attributed to John B. Jervis.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 2106, Lot 1 in part, consisting of the land on which the described improvement is situated.

On July 12, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Water Tower in High Bridge Park and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 22). 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. In a letter to the Commission read at the hearing, former Park Commissioner Thomas Hoving approved the proposed designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Since 1872, a slender and graceful water tower overlooking old High Bridge and the Harlem River has been one of Manhattan's most picturesque architectural monuments. This impressive Tower resembling a medieval campanile is a rugged manifestation of the early Romanesque Revival style of architecture. The lantern of this rough-cut masonry structure is nearly four hundred feet above Harlem River high water level. Once part of the Croton Water System, when it served as a booster tower to supply water pressure for the neighborhood and as far south as the Murray Hill section of Manhattan, it now contains an electronic carillon. It stands as a lone reminder of New York's first major water supply system, outstanding for its day.

The octagonal Tower consists of a base, a simple but high shaft, a louvered belfry, with conical roof surmounted by a lantern, spire, and weather-vane. The rough cut stone base resting on a low footing is separated from the shaft by a shouldering of smooth-faced stone making the transition from the base of the Tower to the shaft. The arched doorway is crowned by a massive horseshoe arch with heavy voisoirs carried on corbels at each side. It is a striking feature of the Tower. Windows in the Tower have handsome round-arched drip moldings. The belfry contains a series of narrow round-arched louvered openings supported on large corbels. The conical roof above them likewise has a corbelled cornice.

High Bridge Tower, the first to be built in New York, is the only one which remains today. In 1866, the City acquired the property at High Bridge and commenced work on the reservoir and pumping station, which was part of the Croton Aqueduct system. The reservoir was completed in 1870 and the Tower in 1872. The masonry Tower was intended to support a stand-pipe and iron tank with a capacity of 47,000 gallons. In 1934 the High Bridge Reservoir was turned over to the Parks Department and converted into a swimming pool. The pumping station was permanently removed from service in the water supply system in 1949. Through the generosity of the Altman Foundation, a five-octave carillon was installed in the belfry of the High Bridge Tower as a memorial to the late Benjamin Altman, distinguished merchant, philanthropist and patron of the arts. It was dedicated May 30, 1958.

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 Water Tower in High Bridge Park 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 Water Tower in High Bridge is an outstanding example of early Romanesque Revival architecture, that it signalizes the location on which it stands, that it is a unique architectural phenomenon in New York City, that it stands as a reminder of our City's remarkable water supply system and that it now serves as an attractive memorial in the form of a carillon which sends out its joyful music to the surrounding area of the City.

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 Water Tower, High Bridge Park opposite Amsterdam Avenue at West 173rd Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates as its related Landmark Site that part of Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 2106, Lot 1, which contains the land on which the described improvement is situated.