

GARIBALDI MEMORIAL, 420 Tompkins Avenue, Staten Island. Built about 1845.

Landmark Site: Borough of Richmond Tax Map Block 2966, Lot 32.

On September 13, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Garibaldi Memorial and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 66). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. At the hearing it was reported that the owners of the building, The Order of the Sons of Italy in America, favor the proposed designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Garibaldi Memorial is an austere example of country Gothic Revival architecture built about 1845. Today the one and one-half story white clapboarded house retains the main lines of an 1882 description, but many of the details have disappeared. This early illustration indicates that the structure was moved approximately four hundred yards to its present site. It now stands on a concrete platform four steps above the surrounding ground. This small five room house, three windows wide, has a narrow porch running the length of the house supported by four posts. It has two plaques placed to the right and left of the front door, telling something of its history.

An illustration of the residence appeared on June 3, 1882 in Frank Leslie's "Illustrated Weekly". Here the house has two chimneys, one at either end, is clapboarded, and the roof appears to have been sheathed with wooden shingles. It shows a pointed arch window in a cross gable located conspicuously in the center of the gable. (This same window and gable scheme appears again on the back of the residence.) Below the pointed arch window in the gable is a "tummy-on-the-floor" window, flanked by similar ones on either side. The roof line of the gables was embellished by the application of Gothic Revival vergeboards. The motif in the vergeboards was a "fleur-de-lis" pattern with pendant and finial at their peaks. There were no windows in the side walls of the first floor but there were two windows on the second floor. The two windows have rather narrow proportions and are capped by attractive label moldings. The first floor, as illustrated, was originally enclosed by frames with rectangular glass panes and wooden lattice work, creating a sun porch.

Giuseppe Garibaldi was a lonely and impoverished man when he landed at Staten Island's Quarantine Station in 1850. He spent his first months on Staten Island in the Pavilion Hotel then located in St. George. Antonio Meucci, who is credited with having developed the telephone before Bell perfected his invention, offered to live with Garibaldi. He was working with Meucci in a candle-manufacturing business in Clifton. In seeking a place to live they asked the advice of the colorful Max Maretzek, musician, composer and impresario, who lived on the Island. It was a coincidence that Maretzek was leaving for Havana, Cuba, and so he offered the two men the use of his home in Rosebank, located on what was then called Cross Street. It was the small frame Gothic Revival house Garibaldi was to occupy as his residence for a total of eighteen months, from 1851 to 1853.

Before Garibaldi came to America, he had witnessed the failure of the attempt to establish a "Roman Republic", and he suffered the personal loss of his wife who was always his constant companion and comforter. Still imbued with the idea of helping his country, the Italian liberator departed from Staten Island in 1853. The task of leading his "One Thousand" to Sicily in 1860 to defeat the armies of the Bourbon Kings, the liberation of the south of Italy, and the unification of Italy still lay before him at this time. Garibaldi died in 1882, having realized all his goals.

In 1882, Bachman, owner of Bachman's Brewery and also the Gothic Revival house in Rosebank, permitted Antonio Meucci and his wife to continue to live in the little wood house. With that condition, Bachman made formal presentation of the house and grounds to the Italian colony of Rosebank, to commemorate it as the residence of Garibaldi, the Italian liberator. Despite this good plan a notice of public auction appeared in the "Staten Islander" of April 11, 1891 which stated: the "Garibaldi Homestead is to be sold at public auction Monday". The auction was to include the contents of the house: "an organ made of Russian wood, a wardrobe, four rustic chairs, tables, and bedsteads, and other household furniture." Many of these articles were the belongings of General Garibaldi.

After the public auction the house fell into a state of disrepair and neglect until a large square memorial structure of concrete, supported by columns with pediments, on each side, was built directly over the little house to protect it. This memorial was dedicated in 1907 on the 100th anniversary of Garibaldi's birth. Subsequently the concrete "monument" was removed leaving the little wood house once again exposed to view. The house, maintained by the Order of the Sons of Italy in America, was rededicated as the "Garibaldi Memorial" on May 20, 1956. The interior contains five rooms. The first floor consists of three rooms, one being the Garibaldi Memorial Hall. On the second floor, one room has been dedicated to Antonio Meucci and memorializes his work regarding the invention of the telephone. The other room, Garibaldi's bedroom, has been restored as it was believed to have appeared when he lived there.

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 Garibaldi Memorial 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 the Garibaldi Memorial is a visual monument to a man considered by many historians and most residents of Staten Island to have been the most important foreigner ever to have lived there, that the historical associations connected with the residence are international in scope, and that the residence pays tribute to Giuseppe Garibaldi, the great Italian liberator, and to his friends, Max Maretzek the composer, and Antonio Meucci, who furthered the technological development of the telephone at an early date.

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 Garibaldi Memorial, 420 Tompkins Avenue, Staten Island and designates Tax Map Block 2966, Lot 32, Borough of Richmond, as its Landmark Site.