

MADISON AVENUE FRONT (INCLUDING CORNER TOWERS) OF THE SQUADRON "A" ARMORY, Madison Avenue Between 94th and 95th Streets, Borough of Manhattan. Completed 1895; architect John A. Thomas.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1506, Lot 21 in part, consisting of the land on which the described improvement is situated.

On October 11, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Madison Avenue front (including corner towers) of the Squadron "A" Armory and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 16). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Twelve witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were four speakers in opposition to designation; they were fearful that the retaining of the Madison Avenue front of the Armory might delay the construction of the new public school on the Park Avenue side of the site. The Commission has received numerous letters from residents in the neighborhood favoring designation. Several prominent New York architects wrote favorable endorsements of the Madison Avenue front of the Armory. In a letter to the Commission, the Borough President's Community Planning Board No. 8 supported the preservation of the Madison Avenue facade of the 94th Street Armory as a Landmark, provided it did not delay the construction of the new school.

#### DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The two brick towers of the Madison Avenue front of the Squadron "A" Armory evoke strong memories of a fortified medieval castle. This last remaining wall with the towers at each corner, executed in military architectural style, form an imposing structure of monumental scale and stark simplicity. Although the turrets and battlements are reminiscent of twelfth century French prototypes, the result as expressed here is a product of American inventiveness, while being, at the same time, an excellent example of a medieval castle.

The details of this structure were handled by the designer in a vigorous and rugged manner. This building as an armory represented a straightforward, honest expression of its intent and function. The curve of the arched entranceway is severe yet bold in form and shape. The towers present a solid mass, and their profiles are clearly silhouetted against the sky. Three round turrets project from the corners of each of the square towers to enrich the overall profile and to enhance its form and character. In the parapet wall at the roof line the crenellations (notches) are clean cut openings shapely defining the top of the building.

In 1884, a number of gentlemen interested in riding formed a private group, called the "First New York Hussars" or "First Dragoons". They adopted the full dress uniform of the 10th Hussars, a London Regiment. In 1889, under Captain Roe, the unit of 53 men became troop "A" and was mustered into the N.G.S. of New York. By 1895 the unit became large enough to be divided into two troops, and became Squadron "A". That same year, they took possession of the new armory and on January 31, 1896, the formal opening of the Armory took place with a reception and ball. The volunteer unit of "Troop A" saw service in the Spanish American War. As a National Guard unit Squadron "A" responded to riot duty in Buffalo - 1892, in Brooklyn - 1895 and at the Croton Reservoir in 1900. Squadron "A" was called into Federal Service in World War I and was reorganized as the 105th Machine Gun Battalion on October 13, 1917.

At the public hearing the representative of the Historic Buildings Committee of the American Institute of Architects, New York Chapter, testified saying that he "urges this Commission to do all it can to preserve these remains," and that "what remains today is dear to us in its own right. Of that, especially the towers with their machiculated parapets, their rounded turrets and corbelled galleries, we who have studied and practiced architecture find of particular aesthetic merit their color, their massing, their interesting silhouettes, their detail, and their beautifully executed brickwork (masonry). We are of the opinion these towers and connecting wall provide an effective background for the school to be, and a romantic environment for those using the playground."

The representative of the City Park Department testified that, "the facade is an example of a type of Military Gothic architecture and workmanship, which is no longer being built in New York City and which will probably soon disappear entirely from the urban scene. The design is a type which will without doubt provide a tremendous amount of delight to the small children who will play in the playground of the newly proposed school. The castle effect which the wall creates certainly

provides an enormously varied setting for all forms of play. We are in favor of preserving the facade!"

#### 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 Madison Avenue front (including corner towers) of the Squadron "A" 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 Madison Avenue front (including corner towers) of the Squadron "A" Armory is an outstanding example of military architecture, that it is notable for its massive size and bold detail, that it is a fine example of masonry construction, and that of its type it is one of the few remaining examples of regimental armories in New York 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 Madison Avenue front (including corner towers) of the Squadron "A" Armory, Madison Avenue between 94th and 95th Streets, Borough of Manhattan and designates as its related Landmark Site that part of Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1506, Lot 21 which contains the land which the described improvement is situated.