

OLD WEST FARMS SOLDIER CEMETERY, 2103 Bryant Avenue and 180th Street, Borough of The Bronx. 1815

Landmark Site: Borough of The Bronx Tax Map Block 3133, Lot 25.

On December 27, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Old West Farms Soldier Cemetery and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 114). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. One witness spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Standing on a stone pedestal on sloping ground and almost hidden from view by the trees which surround it, the bronze statue of a Union Army soldier maintains a lonely vigil over the oldest public veterans' burial ground in the Bronx, Old West Farms Soldier Cemetery. Here, among shade trees in a modestly landscaped wire-fenced enclosure, the remains of forty veterans of four wars lie beneath well marked stones in a quiet, sequestered and historic place of about two-thirds of an acre. There is not a building in this Cemetery, but there are handsome tombstones, some honoring the last resting places of those who made the supreme sacrifice in defense of the Union.

The first interment, in 1815, was that of Samuel Adams whose family owned land in the area. A nearby street bears the name. The last interment was that of Pvt. Valerius Tulosa, a World War I veteran. Among the many veterans of four wars buried there are two from the War of 1812, thirty-five from the Civil War, two from the Spanish-American War and two from World War I.

The Sixth New York Heavy Artillery, which recruited several companies from West Farms for the Civil War, is well represented in this Cemetery as is the New York Duryea's Zouaves. Several of the bodies were originally interred on Harts Island where a marker still stands. Noting a few of the well known veterans, there lie here Captain John Butler, 2nd Light Dragoons, War of 1812; Captain William R. Raspberry, 6th N.Y.H.A., who was killed in the battle of Cedar Creek, Virginia, during Sheridan's ride; August Weicking, originally in the Navy, serving on the Merrimac before she fell into the hands of the Confederates, and later transferred to the Army, Fifth N. Y. Regt.; Samuel Pierce, whose family once owned much land on Tremont Avenue; and Pvt. Alexander DiFrancisco, 327th Ambulance Co., 82nd Division, awarded the Silver Star, who received a special citation for bravery under fire in World War I, a copy of which is engraved upon his stone.

This section of the Bronx received its name in 1663 when Edward Jessup, a Quaker, and John Richardson, both from Connecticut, purchased the land from the Indians. They named the area West Farms to distinguish their property from the settlement at Westchester Village. West Farms Cemetery was founded in 1815, on land purchased the year before by John Butler, who had plots laid out for a private burial ground. The Butler family retained control of the Cemetery until 1954, when the City assumed possession on a "quit claim" deed.

The burial ground has been maintained by a Civil War Memorial Committee which was reconstituted about 1950. During the early part of the century there was a cemetery committee composed of inhabitants of the Bronx, among them General John Ross Delafield. In 1909, they erected the Civil War monument and supplied the three Nineteenth Century field pieces in the Cemetery. Due to vandalism and the elements, the statue was removed from the monument about 1950, and its whereabouts was unknown until located by the newly created committee. The statue was reclaimed, repaired, and restored to its present site and rededicated on November 18, 1959. The improvements on the grounds were made possible by the existing Civil War Memorial Committee.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this cemetery, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Old West Farms Soldier Cemetery 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, Old West Farms Soldier Cemetery stands as a memorable reminder of our past, that it serves as the last resting place for veterans of four wars, some of whom made the supreme sacrifice for their country, that they are interred in a modest landscaped enclosure, and that it is an attractive cemetery representing an important part of our heritage.

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 Old West Farms Soldier Cemetery, 2103 Bryant Avenue and 180th Street, Borough of the Bronx and designates Tax Map Block 3133, Lot 25, Borough of The Bronx, as its Landmark Site.