

THE BLOCK HOUSE, Governors Island, Borough of Manhattan. Completed 1843; architect Martin E. Thompson.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1, Lot 10 in part, consisting of the land on which the described building is situated.

On December 27, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of The Block House, Governors Island and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 34). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. In a letter to the Commission, the Coast Guard questioned the proposal to designate the building, saying that Federally-owned property is not subject to regulation by local law.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

In its severe classic simplicity, this almost square, two-story Greek Revival 1840 building with basement has superb architectural character. Extremely austere in appearance and dubbed the "Block House", this stone trimmed brick structure derives its dignity and aesthetic quality from the strict, disciplined scale expressed in its components and from the large surfaces of brick interspersed with evenly spaced, well-proportioned openings.

The upper two floors of brick construction rest on a wide stone band course while the basement below is of rough-cut masonry construction with some brick rustication. Surrounding the building is an open areaway, enclosed by a low curb and a plain railing. At the roof line a combination of simple moldings with brick dentils and a coping of stone crowns the building.

The building, five windows wide, has windows of the double hung sash type with plain sills and lintels. A note of richness was added to the wide center window of the upper story, with its mullions and sidelights, by the addition of an ornate balcony with railing projecting from the wall. A flight of steps, contained by large stone blocks and a graceful curvilinear iron railing, leads to the entrance doorway. Enframed with plain pilasters and a very low pitched pediment of stone, it encloses a Twentieth Century version of the original Greek Revival door.

The building is surrounded by brick walks and is set among large trees in the Northeast corner of the island. It now contains officers' apartments. Over the years the structure has served as a blockhouse, general's headquarters, officers quarters and a hospital.

The question has been raised by the Federal Government as to whether this building should be designated by New York City as a Landmark. The Commission wishes to honor a building of which New Yorkers are proud. The Commission is cognizant of the jurisdictional question. Nevertheless, it is very important for the Government of New York City to state officially its deep concern that this building be preserved. There should be no uncertainty about this in anyone's mind.

The Commission would be negligent if it failed to act in this situation. At some time in the future this building may be in jeopardy. Our designation will be especially helpful in alerting New York City's elected representatives in Washington of the importance of saving this building. At present the Commission's specialists can be of service in providing advice so that the architectural integrity of this building is maintained. Indeed a fine relationship already exists with many local representatives of the Federal Government.

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 Block House 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 Block House is a distinguished example of Nineteenth Century Greek Revival utilitarian architecture, that it has excellent proportions and fine scale, that it is extremely well sited, that it served the armed forces of the nation for over a hundred years and that it continues to serve a useful purpose as a multiple dwelling for officers of the Coast Guard.

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 Block House, Governors Island, Borough of Manhattan and designates as its related Landmark Site that part of Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1, Lot 10 which contains the land on which the described building is situated.