

Landmarks Preservation Commission
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LP-0139

FLUSHING MUNICIPAL COURTHOUSE, 137-35 Northern Boulevard,
Flushing, Borough of Queens. 1862

Landmark Site: Borough of Queens Tax Map Block 4960, Lot 1.

On February 8, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Flushing Municipal Courthouse and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 40). 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.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Striking in the picturesqueness of its profiles, the Flushing Courthouse or Town Hall is a noteworthy example of an early phase of the Romanesque Revival style so popular in the United States, just prior to the Civil War. This two-story brick building, used in later years as a courthouse, is important architecturally as a representative example of the small town hall which was so much a part of the American scene. The structure, in an excellent state of preservation, has retained in unaltered condition all of its exterior ornamental details. The 1862 building contributes immeasurably to the cityscape of Flushing.

The impressive front facade is divided into three parts, separated by tall, thin buttresses which rise above the walls. All the walls are finished at the roof line with a continuous band of diminutive arched corbels and a plain cornice. The arched windows are paired under large round arches, and those on the second floor are quite high. Dominating the front entrance, and standing on a raised platform five steps above the sidewalk, is a striking triple-arched portico, crowned by a classic entablature with low balustrade. The entablature is supported by massive pilasters and the arches by half round, engaged columns.

The Flushing Town Hall was the focal point of every important town function from 1862 to 1900. It was used for community meetings, fancy dress balls for military and volunteer fire company celebrations and for small opera productions. Tom Thumb performed there, and Teddy Roosevelt gave one of his Presidential campaign speeches from the steps of the portico. It also served later as a courthouse, offices for municipal bureaus, and a police precinct for the World's Fair of 1964-65.

During the Civil War, Flushing's Volunteer Artillery Unit, later to become the 34th Independent N. Y. Battery of the Union Army, was housed in the structure. The Hall was used for a farewell ceremony when the men marched to war. The Old Hamilton Rifles, later to become the 17th Separate Company of Flushing, also had quarters in the building. It is located in a historic setting, for in the direct vicinity are the Quaker Meeting House, the Bowne House, and on an island in the boulevard are monuments to the dead of various wars.

Preservation of the building until now is due in large measure to community interest, the Borough President's Office, and in the cooperation of several New York municipal departments. It is at present owned by the City and leased to a charitable organization. There is every reason to envisage a long and useful future for this building, either in continued City ownership or in private ownership.

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 Flushing Municipal Courthouse 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 Flushing Municipal Courthouse is a noteworthy example of the early Romanesque Revival style of architecture, that in this City it represents the sole remaining example of the small town hall of the 1860 period, that it stands in a district surrounded by historic buildings and that because of its excellent state of preservation, it can again serve the area as a useful building for years to come.

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 Flushing Municipal Courthouse, 137-35 Northern Boulevard, Flushing, Borough of Queens, and designates Tax Map Block 4960, Lot 1, Borough of Queens, as its Landmark Site.