

ABIGAIL ADAMS SMITH HOUSE (Headquarters of the Colonial Dames of America), 421 East 61st Street, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1799; architect unknown.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1456, Lot 12.

On November 10, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Abigail Adams Smith House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 45). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Three witnesses spoke in favor of designation, including a representative of the owners. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The charm of this Federal style stone stable converted into a comfortable headquarters for the Colonial Dames is to be found in its superb masonry construction and its excellent proportions. The sharp profiles of the lowpitched pedimented gable roofs cut a clean line that is both severe and pleasing to the eye. A smooth-faced stone belt-course separates the rock-faced masonry of the lower floor from that of the second story clearly defining the building's perimeter.

Attractive brick-work is to be found around the round windows and the bulls-eye windows of the attic story. In the restoration careful attention was given to the details of the doors, windows and columns of the porch and to many other features of this unique building. Handsome landscaping of old world charm surrounds the building.

Smith's folly or "Mount Vernon on the East River", as it was called by the owner, consisted of a twenty-three acre farm planned as a country-seat for Col. William S. Smith and his wife, Abigail Adams. Colonel Smith purchased the property in 1795. Because of his financial losses, work was discontinued on the mansion and out buildings. In 1798, the property was purchased by William T. Robinson who, it is believed, completed construction of the stable in 1799. The Headquarters of the Colonial Dames was formerly this stable, for the mansion burned down in 1826 and was never rebuilt. In the same year the "stone stable" was converted into an inn known as the "Mount Vernon Hotel". In 1833 the Hotel was bought by Jeremiah Towle who converted it into a private home for his family, and in 1924 the building was purchased for the Headquarters of the Colonial Dames of America, who saved it from destruction.

Colonel William S. Smith (1755-1816) was the son-in-law of President John Adams. During the period when Adams served as the American Minister at the Court of St. James, Colonel Smith served as secretary of the Legation. Abigail Adams Smith, for whom the house was named, met the young military aide, and fell in love with him. They were married in London in 1786. Colonel Smith had been an aide to General Washington and to General Sullivan. He also served as Inspector and Adjutant General to General Lafayette. As an honored and prosperous citizen of New York, he was President of the Order of the Cincinnati and held successively the offices of Federal Marshal, Supervisor of the Revenue and Surveyor of the Port of New York.

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 Abigail Adams Smith 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 Abigail Adams Smith House (Headquarters of the Colonial Dames of America) is a distinguished example of a Federal style stable converted into a fine headquarters building with rugged stone masonry and attractive brick-work, that the restoration is of superior quality and that with its historical significance it is a worthy headquarters for the Colonial Dames of America.

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 Abigail Adams Smith House (Headquarters of the Colonial Dames of America), 421 East 61st Street, Borough of Manhattan, and designates Tax Map Block 1456, Lot 12, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.