

Landmarks Preservation Commission
May 14, 1985, Designation List 180
IP-1390

369TH REGIMENT ARMORY, 2360 Fifth Avenue, Borough of Manhattan. Drill shed, built 1921-24, architects Tachau & Vought; administration building, built 1930-33, architects Van Wart & Wein.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1740, Lot 17.

On September 14, 1982, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a landmark of the 369th Regiment Armory and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 7). 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. The Division Commander of the 369th Transportation Battalion and the members of the 369th Veterans' Association have expressed support for this designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The 369th Regiment Armory occupies the eastern half of the block bounded by West 142nd Street and West 143rd Street at 2360 Fifth Avenue, just off the Harlem River Drive. Like other New York City armories built in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the 369th Regiment Armory is a highly specialized structure built to serve as a training and marshaling center for the National Guard. The armory consists of two sections, the drill shed and the administration building; these were designed and built in two stages by the firms of Tachau & Vought in 1920-24 and Van Wart & Wein in 1930-33 respectively. The 369th Regiment Armory combines the medieval design forms of earlier armories with contemporary Art Deco elements. It is particularly noted as the home of the "Harlem Hell Fighters," New York's official black regiment, whose efforts in World War I brought military success and well deserved accolades.

New York's Armories

Following the Civil War, an increase in enrollment in the militia and the development of new and heavier military equipment led the State of New York to require by law that each county provide suitable armories for its volunteer regiments. By 1900 New York City held the foremost position in the organized funding and erection of armories through the work of the Armory Board of the City of New York.

Created in 1884 to support statewide public defense efforts, the board acted quickly to improve the city's then-deficient facilities for the training of militia and the storage of arms.¹ Prior to 1884 only one of Manhattan's eight regiments had its own armory headquarters.² Other National Guard units met and drilled in public markets, city arsenals, or rented loft

space until funds from armory bonds were appropriated by the new board for the construction of suitable and permanent quarters for each of the city's regiments.

The first armories to appear in Manhattan were modeled stylistically after the medieval fortress-like Seventh Regiment Armory of 1880 located on Park Avenue at 66th-67th Streets. The 69th Regiment Armory, Park Avenue and 25th Street, completed in 1906, was the first to reject the picturesque medieval prototype. Both are designated New York City Landmarks. While post-1906 armories erected in other boroughs and in other cities continued to incorporate medieval references in their designs, the four armories built in Manhattan from 1906 on were all of modern inspiration.³

History and Development of Harlem

Harlem, originally called Nieuw Harlem, derives its name from the Dutch city of Haarlem. The village was established by Peter Stuyvesant in 1658, and embraced generally the northern area of Manhattan, above Central Park. From the colonial period, through the 18th century, the region retained its rural cast, supporting farms and estates of some of New York's most illustrious early families, including the Delanceys, Beekmans, Bleekers, Rikers, and Hamiltons.

Harlem suffered a decline in the 1830s when its lush farmland was depleted and many great estates were sold at public auction. The area was sought by those desiring cheap property and housing, including many newly-arrived and destitute immigrants who gathered in scattered shanty-towns. However, most of the scenic topography was left untouched and the striking vistas and unspoiled country attracted fashionable downtowners on picnics and daytrips, particularly after the 1860s.

It was the advent of new and better forms of transportation, as well as the increasing population of New York which brought about the change in Harlem from a rural village to a fashionable upper- and upper-middle class neighborhood. The New York & Harlem Railroad had run trains from lower Manhattan to Harlem, starting in 1837, but service was poor and the trip long. As the population of New York swelled in the 1870s residential development continued in a northerly direction. Harlem was annexed to New York in 1873, and by 1881 three lines of elevated railroad reached as far north as 129th Street, precipitating the development of new neighborhoods.

Practically all the residential structures that stand in Harlem today were built in the period beginning in the 1870s through the first decade of the 20th century.⁴ Exclusive homes, such as those on Striver's Row in the St. Nicholas Historic District, helped establish Harlem as a center of fashion and elegance. The area also boasted rows of more modest brownstones, the popular Polo Grounds, and the distinguished Harlem Opera House. Some speculators made tremendous profits by buying and

re-selling land. Prices increased so dramatically that one old-timer complained in 1889, "When I see the prices real estate is now bringing in Harlem, it makes me feel that I was a fool for not making . . . investments years ago when property was so cheap."⁵

The character of Harlem changed considerably during the early years of the 20th century. Proposed subway routes to West Harlem in the late 1890s had sparked another wave of real estate speculation which led to highly inflated market values. Tremendous numbers of new residential buildings were constructed around the turn of the century. Extensive vacancies and artificially high rents led to a general collapse of the real estate market in 1904-05 as loans were withheld and mortgages foreclosed.

Taking advantage of the deflated market and the housing surplus which followed, a black businessman named Philip Payton and his Afro-American Realty Company, founded in 1904, played a major role in the development of Harlem as a black community. In the aftermath of the real estate collapse, Payton acquired five-year leases on white-owned properties and rented them at higher rates to black families. Blacks who could afford high rents had begun moving to Harlem at the turn of the century. A dramatic increase in Harlem's black population came, however, as hundreds of black families were uprooted when their homes in the Tenderloin area near 34th Street were destroyed during the 1906-1916 construction of Pennsylvania Station. For the first time good housing in large quantities was available to New York's blacks. Just as Harlem had been an exclusive white community, it became an exclusive black community, with more than 50,000 blacks living there by 1914.⁶

History of the 369th Regiment

The formation of the 369th Regiment began in 1916 when over 100 members of Harlem's Lenox Community Center expressed their interest in joining a local military organization.⁷ The 15th Regiment was organized on June 29, 1916, in accordance with state legislation which provided for the formation of a "colored" regiment of infantry in New York City. Two West Point graduates, Major Charles Young and Captain Benjamin Davis, were appointed as its officers. The regiment was then organized into twelve companies which included a machine gun unit and a band.⁸ In November, Governor Whitman officially presented the State colors to the Regiment in a parade along Fifth Avenue.⁹ They were the only unit to fly a state flag in Europe during World War I.¹⁰ The U.S. War Department assigned Colonel William Hayward as commander in April 1917. It was the first regiment to reach full war strength of over 2000 men. They began their training immediately at camps in New York, where they guarded captured German ships, and in South Carolina. Arriving in France in January 1918, the regiment was put under the command of General LeGallais of the 16th Division of the Fourth French Army.¹¹ In the port of St. Nazaire they built docks, hospitals, and railroad

tracks. The regiment's band was led by James Reese Europe who, prior to the war, had helped to popularize jazz in New York through appearances in Harlem night clubs and at Carnegie Hall. Together with Noble Sissle and Frank DeBroit, who played in Europe's New York band, the Clef Club, the regiment's famous bandmaster introduced jazz to Paris.¹²

By April 1918, the regiment, then designated the 369th Infantry, had been sent to the front lines along with the French troops.¹³ Despite their inexperience in actual battle, the 369th Regiment made significant advances into enemy territory and played a major role in countering the German attack on the Reims-Argonne front. The runners who kept communication lines open under the threat of enemy attacks were commended for bravery by the French.¹⁴ On July 23, at the Battle of Le Mesnil, the men of the 369th pushed the Germans back despite a barrage of heavy artillery, gas, and shells.¹⁵ Two months later, the regiment captured the town of Riport from the enemy along with prisoners and machine guns.¹⁶ This accomplishment won them another commendation, this time from their division general.

One of the most outstanding achievements of the "Harlem Hell Fighters" took place on November 20, 1918, when they reached the Rhine along with their French comrades. As the first American unit of the army of occupation to march into Germany, they captured the towns of Blodelsheim, Fessenheim, and Balgan.¹⁷ The Germans, who called them blutlustige schwarze Maenner, feared the 369th as strongly as the French praised their feats on the battlefield. Henry Johnson and Needham Roberts were the first to receive the Croix de Guerre from the French.¹⁸ These two fought hand to hand with over 20 German soldiers. William Butler launched a single-handed attack of such ferocity that a report by captured Germans described him as an "enemy group of overwhelming numbers."¹⁹

A collective Croix de Guerre was recommended for the regiment by Generals Le Bonc, Gourmard, and Pershing, which read:

369th Regiment Infantry United States, under command of Col. Hayward, who though injured insisted on leading his regiment in battle, of Lt. Col. Pickering admirably cool and brave, of Maj. Sgt. Little a true leader of his men fought with great bravery, stormed powerful enemy positions, energetically defended, captured many machine guns, large numbers of prisoners and cannons and took after heavy fighting the town of Sechault.²⁰

In addition to this award, members of the 369th were decorated with the Congressional Medal of Honor, the Distinguished Service Cross, and the Legion of Honor Awards.²¹ Although the Regiment had less training than any other unit (three weeks in New York, ten days in South Carolina, and two weeks in France), they were engaged at the front for 191 consecutive days, longer than any other American unit in World War I, during which time they did not lose any ground to the

On February 18, 1919, the men of the 369th Regiment were welcomed home as heroes with a parade up Fifth Avenue.²³ James Europe and the regiment's drum major, Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, led the band in appropriate military songs until they neared the home of the 369th in Harlem, where they broke into "Here Comes My Daddy." Thirteen hundred strong, the Harlem Hell Fighters marched past Governor and Mrs. Alfred E. Smith, Henry Clay Frick, Mrs. Vincent Astor, and Mr. and Mrs. William Randolph Hearst, and other prominent citizens joined the rest of the community in honoring their fellow New Yorkers for their bravery and patriotism.

The regiment, which was reorganized after the war, was federally recognized as a National Guard unit on September 6, 1924. A prominent regiment member during this period was Vertner A. Tandy, the first registered black architect in New York. He rose to the rank of major and commanded the regiment briefly.²⁴ The unit was converted to the 369th Coast Artillery Regiment on August 30, 1940. It was called into service in World War II on January 13, 1941, undertaking its major responsibilities in the Pacific in three different sections: the 369th Anti-aircraft Gun Battalion, the 870th Anti-aircraft Artillery Automatic Weapon Battalion, and the 726th Searchlight Battery. Both the 369th and the 870th were assigned to Okinawa, the 870th engaging in combat. The 726th was stationed in the Hawaiian Islands.

The 369th Anti-aircraft Artillery Battalion was called into active duty from September 11, 1950, to September 10, 1952, during the Korean War. On February 1, 1968, the 369th Artillery Battalion was designated the 569th Transportation Battalion, and on March 1, 1974, redesignated the 369th Transportation Battalion, its traditional number. Since 1959 the 369th Veterans' Association has sponsored an annual memorial parade, which in 1968 was named in honor of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Armory and its Design

In its early years the 369th was headquartered at 58 West 130th Street (one of the houses of Astor Row),²⁵ but with reorganization of the unit, a proper armory was required. A midblock site between 142nd and 143rd Streets was acquired in 1921, and the tenements on the site were demolished. The first stage consisted of the drill shed, designed by Tachau & Vought, the successor firm of Pilcher & Tachau. Ground was broken on November 6, 1921, and the cornerstone was laid on May 27, 1923. The drill shed was completed in 1924.

Lewis F. Pilcher(1871-1941), who served as New York State Architect from 1913 to 1923 as well as consulting architect to the U.S. Veterans Bureau at the time the armory was created, specialized with William G. Tachau in designing armories.²⁶ Both were graduates of the Columbia University School of Architecture,

in 1895 and 1896 respectively. They worked together on the ~~Kingsbridge Armory (1912-17) in the Bronx, a designated New York City landmark,~~ and the Troop C Armory (1903-07) in Brooklyn. Both of these designs followed the castellated, medievalizing forms so popular for armory design. Theodore H. Vought (1876-1945), winner of the Avery Gold Medal of the Architectural League in 1900, served during World War I as assistant to Pilcher in the State Architect's office. After the war he joined the firm and collaborated with Tachau on a number of buildings in the metropolitan area, including the U.S. Marine Hospital on Staten Island, the First Baptist Church of Montclair, New Jersey, and the B'nai Israel Synagogue in Elizabeth, New Jersey. These designs follow Romanesque and other medieval prototypes.

Initial state appropriations for the armory called only for the construction of the drill shed. To be fully functional an administration building portion was required. The remainder of the block fronting onto Fifth Avenue was acquired in 1929, and construction was carried out in 1930-33, although to the designs of a different architectural firm, Van Wart & Wein, than the original.

John S. Van Wart (d.1950) and Sidney Wein (d.1960) appear to have been specialists in apartment house design. Among their known works are neo-Georgian apartment houses at 40 Fifth Avenue and 7-13 Greenwich Avenue, both in the Greenwich Village Historic District, the neo-Georgian Beekman Mansion apartment building at 435-443 East 51st Street, the classicizing Art Deco apartment building at 21 East 79th Street, and the Tudoresque Blind Brook Lodge garden apartment complex in Rye, New York. Van Wart joined forces with Frederick Ackerman to design the Knickerbocker Village housing complex (1934) on the Lower East Side.

Description

The armory occupies a site which is approximately 510 by 199 feet, filling about half of the block bounded by Fifth Avenue, 142nd Street, Lenox Avenue, and 143rd Street. Located at the edge of the Harlem River Drive, it is an especially conspicuous presence in the community. The drill shed portion, situated midblock, is approximately 300 feet by 200 feet. In their design Tachau & Vought chose a vocabulary of medieval forms that echoes their earlier armory designs. The walls on 142nd and 143rd Streets, of reddish brown brick, are articulated by regularly spaced simulated buttresses with stone copings, flanking narrow window openings set within brick arches. A red sandstone beltcourse sets off the base. The square-headed entrances are set in stone enframements below foliate spandrels and marked by overscaled red sandstone pediments resting on bartizan-like corbels. Large arched window openings set with a honeycomb motif rise above several of the entrances. The parapet terminates in a crenellated motif. A gabled roof rises above the parapets.

The administration building portion of the armory fronts onto Fifth Avenue. While its forms and massing recall medieval

FOOTNOTES

1. The Armory Board 1884-1911; Official Deliberations and Proceedings (New York: The Armory Board, 1912), p.3.
2. Ibid., p.5.
3. These are the 69th Regiment Armory, Park Avenue and 25th Street (1906); the 102nd Regiment Armory, Fort Washington and 168th Street (1911); and the 42nd Division Armory, 125 West 14th Street (1971); in addition to the 369th Regiment Armory.
4. Gilbert Osofsky, Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 75.
5. Quoted in Osofsky, p. 76.
6. Landmarks Preservation Commission, Metropolitan Baptist Church Designation Report(IP-1134) by Rachel Carley, February 3, 1981, p.4.
7. New York Times, May 3, 1916.
8. New York Times, June 26, 1916.
9. New York Times, October 2, 1916.
10. David Levering Lewis, When Harlem Was in Vogue(New York: Vintage Books, 1982), p. 3.
11. Charles Halston Williams, The Negro Soldier in World War I: The Human Side(New York: AMS Press, 1923), p. 197.
12. Lewis, p. 31.
13. Williams, p. 197.
14. Ibid., p. 198.
15. Ibid., p. 199.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., p. 204.
18. Arthur West Little, Harlem to the Rhine(New York: Covici Friede, 1936), pp. 198-201.
19. Williams, p. 206.
20. Ibid., p. 205, and New York Times, November 29, 1918.
21. Williams, p. 205.

22. Ibid., p. 207.

23. Lewis, pp. 3-15, and New York Times, November 29, 1918.

24. Richard Dozier, "The Black Architectural Experience in America," AIA Journal, July 1976, 166.

25. William Thompson Bonner, New York, the World's Metropolis (New York: R.I. Polk, 1924), p. 95.

26. "Pilcher, Lewis F.," Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased) Henry F. and Elsie R. Withey, eds. (Los Angeles: New Age Publishing Co., 1956), p. 473.

27. New York Times, May 26, 1916.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the 369th Regiment 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 369th Regiment Armory is the home of the "Harlem Hell Fighters," New York's official black regiment, whose efforts in World War I brought military success and well-deserved accolades; that the armory was built to house this successful regiment following these World War I triumphs and to serve as a training and marshaling center for the National Guard; that it was built in two stages, the drill shed and the administration building, in 1921-24 and 1930-33 and designed by the firms of Tachau & Vought and Van Wart & Wein respectively; that in this two-part design the armory follows a vocabulary of traditional forms while at the same time it looks to contemporary Art Deco sources for its massing and stylistic inspiration; that the structure is handsomely articulated in brick and terra cotta; and that the 369th Regiment Armory is considered a community symbol of unity, service, and pride.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21, Section 534, 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 369th Regiment Armory, 2360 Fifth Avenue, Borough of Manhattan, and designates Tax Map Block 1740, Lot 17, Borough of Manhattan, as its related Landmark Site.

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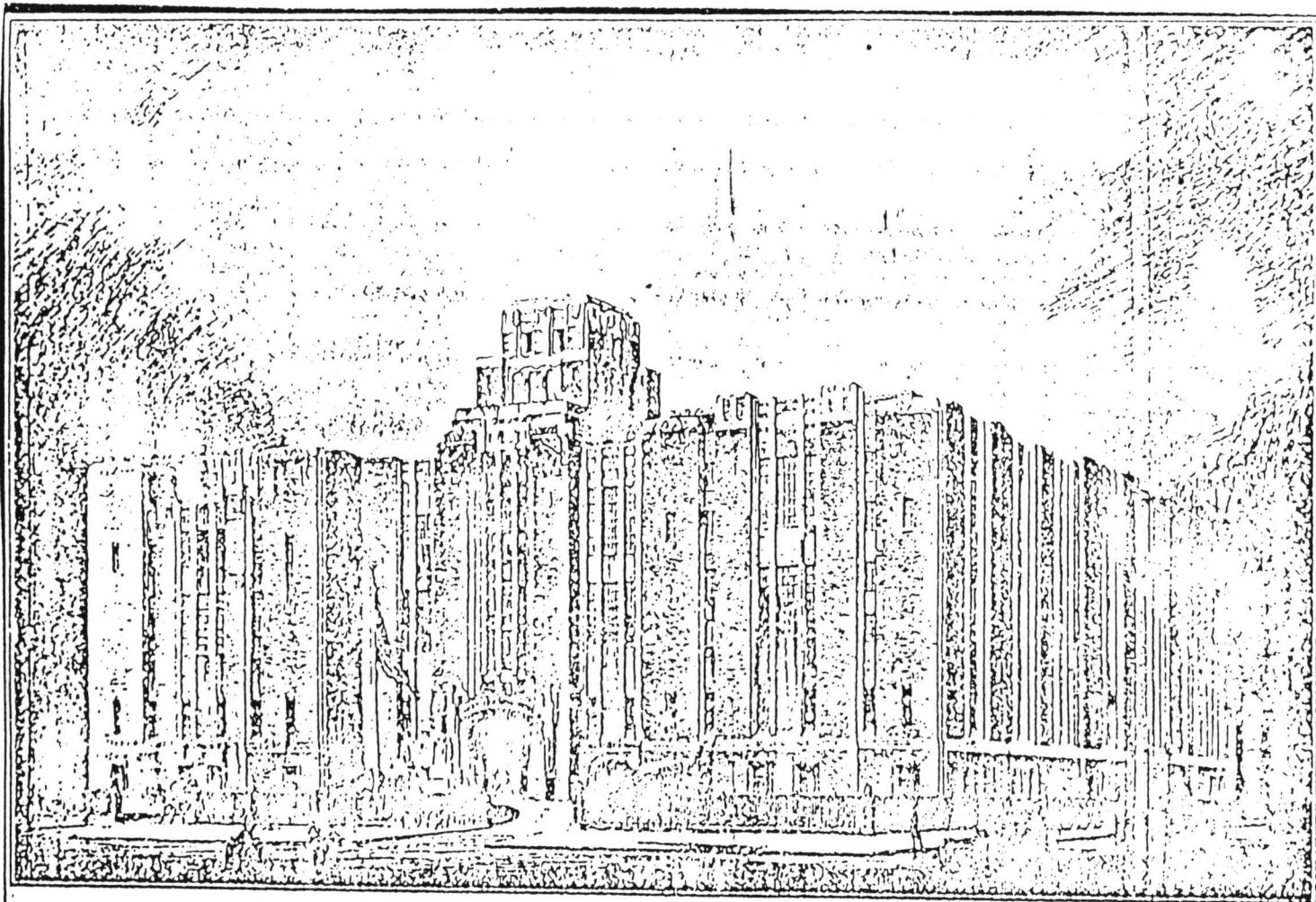
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The Armory, Three Hundred and Sixty-ninth Infantry, N. Y. N. G.
Fifth Avenue and One Hundred and Forty-second Street, New York City

From: Judith Salzman, "Armories of Manhattan"



Photo: Andrew Dolkart
Landmarks Preservation Commission

369TH REGIMENT ARMORY
2360 Fifth Avenue
Manhattan

Built 1921-24, 1930-33
Architects Tachau & Vought,
Van Wart & Wein