

SAILORS' SNUG HARBOR---BUILDING "C" INTERIOR, first floor interior consisting of the main hall, the transverse halls off the main hall, the stair hall and the staircase leading to the second floor; second floor interior consisting of the upper level of the main hall up to and including the ceiling and the dome, and the stair hall; and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces including but not limited to, wall and ceiling surfaces, floor surfaces, woodwork, doors, stair railings, gallery railings, stained glass and murals, and other painted decorations; Sailors' Snug Harbor, Richmond Terrace, Staten Island. Built 1831-33; architect Minard Lafever; redecorated 1884.

Landmark Site: Tax Map Block 76, Lot 200 in part, consisting of the land on which the described building is situated.

On September 9, 1980, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as an Interior Landmark of the Sailors' Snug Harbor--Building "C" Interior, first floor interior consisting of the main hall, the transverse halls off the main hall, the stair hall and the staircase leading to the second floor; second floor interior consisting of the upper level of the main hall up to and including the ceiling and the dome, and the stair hall; and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces including but not limited to, wall and ceiling surfaces, floor surfaces, woodwork, doors, stair railings, gallery railings; stained glass and murals, and other painted decorations (Item No. 1). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of Law. Four witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Sailors' Snug Harbor was founded by shipping merchant Robert R. Randall who stated in his will of 1801 that his property in Greenwich Village be used to care for "aged, decrepit and worn-out sailors." Land on the north shore of Staten Island near the Kill van Kull was purchased in May of 1831 and a design competition was announced by the trustees of the Harbor for the erection of the first building. The commission was awarded to Minard Lafever, a young New York architect who was to become one of the country's most influential designers. Construction was begun late in the summer of the same year and the building was completed in August of 1833. That building, Building "C", is the centerpiece of one of the most notable groups of Greek Revival buildings in the United States, and it created the stylistic and monumental character followed by later architects in the design of the major buildings at the Harbor. The interior spacial arrangement dates largely from Lafever's design and the decorative elements from a rehabilitation of the building in 1884.

Lafever was born in New Jersey in 1798 and raised in upstate New York near Seneca Lake where he was trained as a carpenter. He returned to New Jersey in 1824, settling in Newark where he remained for about four years before relocating to New York City in 1828. Lafever's greatest fame and influence is the result of the builders' guide books he produced and which are, in part, responsible for the popularization of the Greek Revival style throughout the country. His first guide book, The Young Builder's General Instructor, was published in 1829,

followed by The Modern Builder's Guide in 1833 and The Beauties of Modern Architecture in 1835. The Modern Practice of Handrail Construction was released in 1838, and his last book, The Architectural Instructor, was published in 1856, two years after his death.

Building "C" of Sailors' Snug Harbor is Lafever's earliest known work. It is two-and-one-half stories high with a domed attic and high basement. The stone portico, approached by a handsome flight of stairs, consists of eight Ionic columns supporting an imposing pediment. The sides of the building which extend back eight bays and the rear elevation are of brick with square-headed windows. One story high, four bay wide wings or hyphens at the first floor level of the side elevations connect the building to those on either side. A third hyphen at the rear connects it to a later building directly behind it. When first opened, the building housed administrative offices, bedrooms for the inmates, kitchen, dining and wash rooms, and recreational space. The main hall was used to hold religious services until the Chapel was built in 1855-56.

One enters the main hall directly from the central entrance beneath the portico. The rectangular interior space which is two-and-one-half stories high and features a groined-arched ceiling, elliptical dome, and a gallery at the second floor, dates from the Lafever design. On the first floor, slightly south of the center are transverse halls leading to the enclosed passages or hyphens connecting Building "C" to those flanking it on the east and west. These transverse halls are also part of the 1831 design and originally contained wooden stairs which were removed in 1883. Iron staircases were then built in former bedrooms on either side of the main hall immediately north of the transverse. The western staircase was removed in 1907 and the space merged with an adjoining room. The present staircase was enclosed with a fire wall about 1932. The interior was completely redecorated in 1884 and the architectural elements rendered in the neo-Grec mode, the murals and other painted details, and the stained glass date from this period. They are an excellent representation of that period of American interior decoration.

Nine rooms open onto the main hall at the first floor. Their segmental-arched openings are enframed by panelled pilasters on plinths and they carry full entablatures with center and end blocks. The center blocks are carried by the keystone of the arched opening. The north and south entrances have double swing doors with clear glass and both originally had stained-glass transoms. The south entrance is flanked by stained-glass windows with enframements similar to the entrance. North of the transverse halls the doors have etched-glass panels and stained-glass transoms while the two large doorways south of the transverse have sliding doors also with etched-glass panels under a single stained-glass transom. Much of the stained glass depicts nautical themes. The walls have panelled wood wainscotting from the floor to the height of the plinths of the door enframements and are plaster above to the molded cornice that encircles the room below the gallery. The wood of the doors, enframements and wainscotting is a dark cherry. The ash floor is enhanced by a Greek fret border, an eight-pointed star in the center under the dome, and two five-pointed stars. The transverse halls are marked by shouldered segmental arches carried on plaster pilasters with double foliate brackets. This enframement is repeated at the entrances to the hyphens that lead to the adjoining buildings.

At the second floor is the projecting gallery with a cast-iron balustrade and wood handrail. Each fluted baluster is supported by a curved rope bracket

and has a foliate base and capital. The balusters support a round-arched arcade that carries the handrail. The spandrels of the arcade have foliate designs. Between the rope brackets are early light fixtures installed in 1898. Fourteen doorways open onto the gallery and their cherry wood enframements consist of simple panelled pilasters supporting bracketed lintels enhanced with dentils. The doorways are segmentally arched with panelled and louvered doors and stained-glass transoms. The plaster walls are pierced at the attic level by six segmental windows with stained glass depicting various constellations. These windows have corbelled sills and rope lintels.

The vaulted ceiling which rises at each corner from elongated brackets is frescoed with paintings in a nautical theme while the fresco in the dome depicts foliate panels, scalloped pilasters, and an iron fence. In the center of the skylight that crowns the dome is a compass with an eight-pointed star echoing the one inlaid in the floor directly beneath it. Other painted decoration includes hawsers just below the ceiling and the name of the founder of the Harbor "Richard Robert Randall" over a niche on the south wall which once contained his bust, "Christ is my anchor" on the north wall, and "Port after stormy sea" and "After dangerous toil" on the east and west wall respectively.

The stair hall between the first and second floors has many of the decorative elements of the main hall: cherry wainscotting along the north and east walls, a balustrade identical to the one which encircles the gallery, a large polygonal cast-iron newel, and a window with an enframement similar to those in the main hall.

The interior of Building "C" represents an important aspect of the works of Minard Lafever in that it is the earliest known work by this most important architect. The decorative elements of the space are an excellent statement of that period of American interior decoration during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the nautical theme displayed in the frescoes, stained glass, and railings recalls the purpose of the Harbor which was to care for men who had spent their lives at sea. The building continues in active use as part of the Sailors' Snug Harbor cultural complex.

Report prepared by James T. Dillon,
Landmarks Preservationist

FOOTNOTES

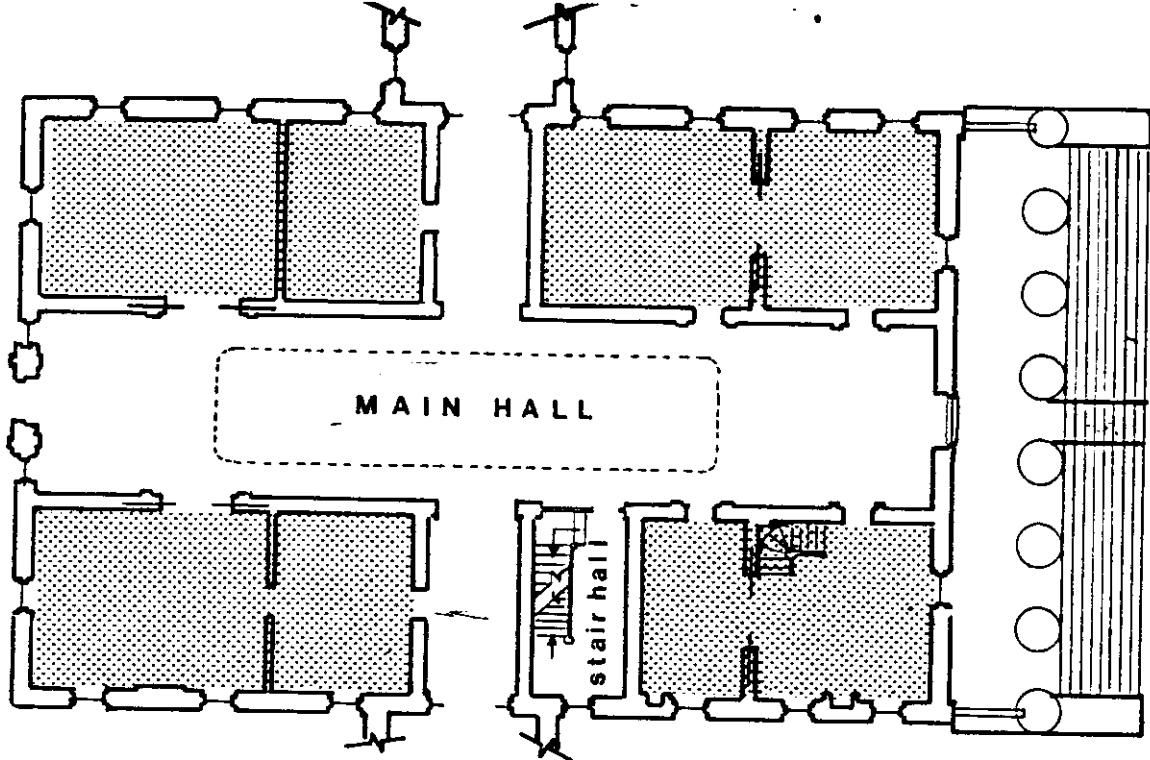
1. The information contained in this report is taken from Sailors' Snug Harbor, An Historic Structures Report, vol. 2, (New York: P.S. Ross & Company, 1979), pp. 4.3/1-4.3/116 by David Gibson, Barnett Shepherd and Steven Bauer, and "Sailors' Snug Harbor Reattributed to Minard Lafever," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, 35 (May 1976), 108-123.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

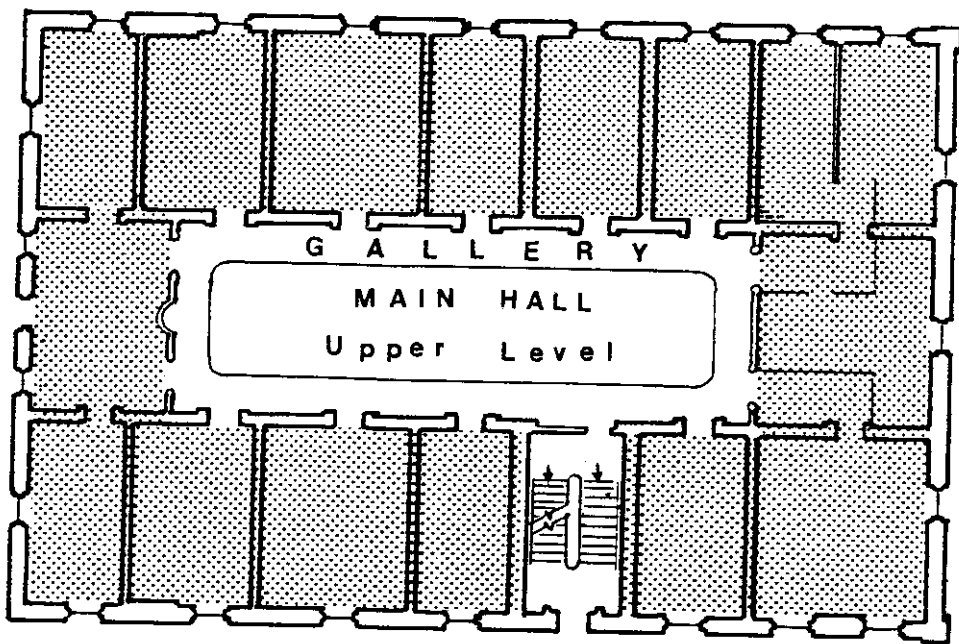
On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this Interior, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Sailors' Snug Harbor--Building "C", first floor interior consisting of the main hall, the transverse halls off the main hall, the stair hall and the staircase leading to the second floor; the second floor interior consisting of the upper level of the main hall up to and including the ceiling and the dome, and the stair hall; and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces including but not limited to, wall and ceiling surfaces, floor surfaces, woodwork, doors, stair railings, gallery railings, stained glass and murals, and other painted decorations has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City, and that the Interior is one which is customarily open and accessible to the public and to which the public is customarily invited.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Sailors' Snug Harbor--Building "C" Interior was designed by the noted architect, Minard Lafever, in 1831; that it is an essential part of the earliest known work by Lafever; that the building is the centerpiece of one of the most notable groups of Greek Revival buildings in the United States; that the interior space is one of the finest of its kind in New York City; that the door enframements, wainscoting, stained glass, gallery railing, ceiling and wall frescoes were largely added in 1884; that these elements form an excellent example of American interior decoration from the last quarter of the nineteenth century; and that the nautical theme displayed in the frescoes, stained glass, and railings recalls the original purpose of the Sailors' Snug Harbor which was to care for "aged, decrepit, and worn-out sailors"; and that it continues to play a part in the Sailors' Snug Harbor cultural complex.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21 (formerly Chapter 63) 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 an Interior Landmark the Sailors' Snug Harbor Building "C", first floor interior consisting of the main hall, the transverse halls off the main hall, the stair hall and the staircase leading to the second floor; second floor interior consisting of the upper level of the main hall up to and including the ceiling and the dome, and the stair hall; and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces including but not limited to, wall and ceiling surfaces, floor surfaces, woodwork, doors, stair railings, gallery railings, stained glass and murals, and other painted decorations; Sailors' Snug Harbor, Richmond Terrace, Borough of Staten Island, and designates Tax Map Block 76, Lot 200 in part, consisting of the land on which the described building is situated, Borough of Staten Island, as its Landmark Site.



FIRST FLOOR PLAN



SECOND FLOOR PLAN

SAILORS SNUG HARBOR
 BUILDING C INTERIOR
 RICHMOND TERRACE
 STATEN ISLAND

Architect: Minard Lafever
 Built: 1831 - 1833

Not Drawn to Scale
 Areas Deleted



Photo Credit:
Carl Forster
1982

BUILDING C: INTERIOR
Sailors' Snug Harbor
914 Richmond Terrace
Staten Island

Built: 1834 and 1884
Architect: Minard LaFever