

KINGSBRIDGE ARMORY (Eighth Regiment Armory), 29 West Kingsbridge Road, Borough of the Bronx. Built 1912-1917; architects Pilcher & Tachau.

Landmark Site: Borough of the Bronx Tax Map Block 3247, Lot 2.

On September 25, 1973, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Kingsbridge Armory (Eighth Regiment Armory) and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 5). 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.

#### DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Kingsbridge Armory, officially the home of the 258th Field Artillery (Eighth Regiment), is an outstanding example of military architecture. Reputedly the largest armory in the world, it gives the appearance of a medieval Romanesque-style fortress with its massive towers and crenellated parapets. It is one of the few remaining armories in New York City. Today it is used by several battalions of the National Guard.

Built between 1912 and 1917, the Armory was designed by the firm of Pilcher & Tachau which gained acclaim for its competition design of 1901 for the Squadron C Armory in Brooklyn. Lewis Pilcher was appointed to the Office of New York State Architect in May 1913; consequently, most of the work on the armory was carried out while Pilcher was serving in his official capacity. He was associated with many armory designs during his career, both with his firm and in his capacity as State Architect. The Kingsbridge Armory displays the qualities of "simplicity, directness, convenience and adaptation to special requirements," according to an article in the Architectural Record of January 1923. Pilcher, quoted in the same source, considered this armory as: "perhaps the most interesting of all the armory designs in the country. The necessities of mobilization ... were successfully met in the development of the scheme."

The armory was built on the site of the proposed eastern basin of the Jerome Park Reservoir. Excavation had begun for the eastern basin in the early 1900s, but the State Legislature authorized the site for a National Guard Armory in 1911. Interestingly enough, a number of military relics were dug up during the excavation, as the armory site was near the sites of Fort Independence and Fort Number Five of the Revolutionary War.

When the armory was built, the military organization using the building was known as the Eighth Coast Artillery which traces its history back to 1786 with the establishment of the peace-time militia in New York City. Because the regiment formed part of the honor guard at the Presidential inauguration of George Washington, it later adopted the nickname of the "Washington Greys." Before the present armory was built, the organization occupied the armory at Park Avenue and 94th Street, the remaining portion of which facing Madison Avenue, is a designated New York City Landmark.

The vast expanse of the armory, which extends along Kingsbridge Road, covers an entire city block. The red brick walls, which display some of the finest brickwork in the city, are trimmed with stone and are punctuated at regular intervals by slit window openings.

Flanking the main entrance are two semi-engaged, tall round towers rising well above roof level of the drill hall. Decorative stone bands at the level of the parapet of the main wall, narrow windows which light the interior stairs, corbels, and crenellated parapets accent the towers. Each is crowned by a conical roof. A stone stairway with flanking stone walls leads up to the round-arched doorway with massive iron gates protecting paneled double doors. The doorway is sheltered by a stone projection carried on corbels and crowned by a crenellated parapet.

A stone string course carried on corbels accentuates the parapet above the main wall for the length of the building. The section above the entrance contains the regimental motif, a shield above an eagle with draped flags. Turrets carried on corbels are spaced at regular intervals along the wall and accent the corners.

Two low round towers, two square ones with crenellations, and angled walls help to make the ingenious transition from the front office section to the main wall of the drill hall and add further variety to the long front wall of the armory. Although these round towers are much shorter than those flanking the entrance, each also has a conical roof, but is crowned by a cupola. The short end walls of the building have corbels, parapets, crenellated turrets and other architectural details similar to those on the long side walls of the drill hall.

Although the vast size of the building, with its massing of forms and monumental towers, would alone make it impressive, one cannot overlook the engineering feat which produced the metal and glass roof of the great drill hall, superbly expressed on the short ends of the armory. Such a roof form had obvious precedents in 19th-century train sheds. The vast four-centered double truss arch spans the width of the hall. The tops of the trusses are over 100 feet high, and the drill floor is 300 by 600 feet. Because of the slope of the terrain such auxiliary features as a 400 foot rifle range, a bowling alley, and a gymnasium and lecture hall are placed beneath the drill hall floor.

#### 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 Kingsbridge 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 Kingsbridge Armory is an outstanding example of military architecture, one of the largest of its kind in the world, that it is one of the few remaining armories in New York City, that it gives the appearance of a medieval Romanesque-style fortress with its massive towers and crenellated parapets, that it is distinguished by well executed details, that the vast roof spanning the drill hall is an outstanding example of engineering having precedents in 19th-century train sheds, that it is the headquarters of an illustrious military organization, and that it continues to serve the needs of the National Guard.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of 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 a Landmark the Kingsbridge Armory (Eighth Regiment Armory), 29 West Kingsbridge Road, Borough of the Bronx and designates Tax Map Block 3247, Lot 2, Borough of the Bronx as its Landmark Site.