

Landmarks Preservation Commission
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LP-0277

AMSTER YARD, 211-215 East 49th Street, Borough of Manhattan. Begun 1869, completed 1870. Altered in 1945; architect Harold Sterner.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1323, Lot 8.

On May 10, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of Amster Yard and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 30). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Two witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Amster Yard is a picturesque, L-shaped courtyard and is one of the most charming enclosures in the City. Like the exterior of the street facades the brick walls facing the garden have all been altered. The architectural style of the courtyard area is in the vernacular design and construction generally used by local masons and carpenters at the time for that type of structure. The painted brick walls are extremely simple in design, but are relieved by wall brackets with sculpture, hanging lamps, iron grille work, trees, shrubbery, climbing ivy and black painted window trim, all producing an enchanting atmosphere. Since the buildings are of varying heights, ranging from one to four stories, the windows are of several different types and sizes and were selected to fit each required need. They are all harmoniously blended and related in scale, size, proportion, material and color. This complex is made up of shops, business offices and apartments, grouped around an attractive landscaped garden, set down among slate covered walks. The architecture of the very elegant street facade is Federal Eclectic. The two buildings which compose it are one four stories and the other three stories high. They are faced with red brick above the stone first floor. A shop with a rear entrance into the garden area occupies the ground floor. The most conspicuous features of the street front are the arch leading into the yard and the treatment of the easterly building projected forward as a bay.

Amster Yard is named for James Amster, a designer who originated the idea in 1945, of taking this odd shaped lot, with mid-Nineteenth Century buildings and converting it into a pleasant oasis in the heart of Manhattan. Tax records show that John Molloy, who owned the lots in 1870, erected a one-story carpenter shop in the rear of the property that year. This is now a two-story building on the north side of the lot. In the Eighteenth Century, the Amster Yard area is said to have been the terminal stop of the Boston stage coach, on the old Eastern Post Road.

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 Amster Yard 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, Amster Yard has one of New York's most beautiful inner courtyards, that it possesses picturesque charm, that it contains several old buildings remodelled to meet contemporary needs, and that it represents a practical and aesthetically beautiful solution, combining these buildings into an harmonious and attractive group, of which the City may be proud.

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 Amster Yard, 211-215 East 49th Street, Borough of Manhattan, and designates Tax Map Block 1323, Lot 8, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.