

BOWNE HOUSE, 37-01 Bowne Street, Flushing, Queens. 1661; architect unknown.

Landmark Site: Borough of Queens Tax Map Block 5013, Lot 6.

On January 11, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Bowne House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 45). Two witnesses spoke in favor of designation. The Commission continued the public hearing until February 8, 1966 (Item No. 44). At that time seven speakers spoke in favor of designation, including the President and other representatives of the Bowne House Historical Society, the owners of the building. Both hearings were duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There were no speakers in opposition to designation at either meeting.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Bowne House is one of the most attractive small English Colonial houses remaining from an early period of our history. The original portion, containing a kitchen with bedrooms upstairs, was constructed by John Bowne in 1661. It still stands little changed from its original appearance in the Seventeenth Century. Nine generations of Bownes lived in this wood frame house. Additions were built in 1680 and 1691 and in 1830 the roof was raised, and the north wing was added. The steep picturesque roof over the main portion of the house shows medieval influence and has three shed dormers. This house of simple wood construction was used for over thirty years as a place of worship before the Friends Meeting House of Flushing was built in 1694.

The importance of this house, the oldest in Queens, lies not only in its age and charm but also because of its association with religious freedom in America. John Bowne, a Quaker, who defied Governor Stuyvesant's ban on those he called "an abominable sect", was fined and jailed because he refused to renounce his right to religious freedom. The trial and acquittal of John Bowne on the issue of freedom of religion helped to bring about in this new nation one of the basic concepts of freedom written into the Bill of Rights. Since 1946, the building has been owned and operated as a house museum and a "Shrine to Religious Freedom" by the Bowne House Historical Society.

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 Bowne 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 Bowne House is an extremely important example of early English Colonial architecture, that it is beautifully preserved and handsomely furnished and that it is an important symbol of religious liberty.

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 Bowne House, 37-01 Bowne Street, Flushing, Borough of Queens and designates Tax Map Block 5013, Lot 6, Borough of Queens, as its Landmark Site.