

Landmarks Preservation Commission
November 23, 1965, Calendar No. 4
LP - 0029

CASTLE CLINTON, the Battery, Borough of Manhattan. 1807, architect John McComb, Jr.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 3 in part, consisting of the land on which the described building is situated.

On October 19, 1965, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of Castle Clinton and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Calendar No. 1). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Three witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

This stone fort, once located offshore at the end of a causeway, is one of the original harbor forts which guarded New York. Its handsome doorway and imposing curved walls are notable architectural features. The walls of the fort are remarkable for their massive quality, measuring eight feet in thickness at the gun ports. The handsome doorway is, in all probability, based on a design by Vauban, the great French military engineer.

Although none of the 28 guns of the fort ever fired a shot in a military engagement, the fort was important for the protection of New York City during the War of 1812. The fort was ceded to the City in 1823 and became a place of amusement, known as Castle Garden. In 1845 it was covered by a domed roof and served as the City's principal hall for the performance of opera and concerts. In 1855 it became a depot for immigration, and approximately 7,500,000 immigrants passed through its doors. Following this use the building was remodelled in 1896 by McKim, Mead & White as an aquarium, remaining as such until 1941. At that date it was to have been razed to make way for the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel approaches. The fort was saved, however, in 1946 when it was renamed Castle Clinton and became a National Monument under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service, U. S. Department of the Interior.

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 Castle Clinton 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, Castle Clinton is one of New York City's notable harbor forts, now restored to its original appearance, that it is an outstanding example of early 19th century military architecture in this country and that for many years the building played a significant part in the life of New York.

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 Castle Clinton, the Battery, Borough of Manhattan and designates as its related Landmark Site that part of Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 3 which contains the land on which the described building is situated.