

1966

Landmarks Preservation Commission
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FOUNDATION BUILDING, COOPER UNION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE & ART; Cooper Square between Astor Place and East 7th Street, Borough of Manhattan. Begun 1853, completed 1859; architect Frederick A. Peterson.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 544, Lot 76.

On March 8, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Foundation Building, Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science & Art and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 26). 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. The Commission received a letter from Richard F. Humphreys, President of Cooper Union, endorsing designation of the building.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The main building of Cooper Union is one of those proud buildings on the American Scene which may rightly take its place with the pioneer buildings of all lands. It was here that innovations were made both in the physical structure of the building and in the use for which it was designed - all of them brain-children of the great philanthropist Peter Cooper.

Employing some of the first rolled sections (wrought-iron beams) ever used in New York City, this large six-story brownstone building was built in the Anglo-Italianate Style. It displays the heavily-enframed round-arched windows which were such a conspicuous feature of this style and two handsome round-arched porches (loggias) at the north and south ends. The building was designed to accommodate an elevator practically before that invention had been made available for passenger use. Peter Cooper not only assisted in the perfection of the rolling machinery necessary to produce beams but paid for and had built the machinery from which they were rolled in his own plant at Trenton, New Jersey. These pioneer beams are an integral part of this great building. They made possible the later development of the skyscraper.

Established as one of New York's earliest free institutions equipped to give its pupils the equivalent of a college education, Cooper Union nonetheless stressed the trades and the useful arts whereby its pupils could make a living in the world. It also opened its doors for women, further indicating the breadth of Peter Cooper's vision and his anticipation, by many years, of women's rights movements. In this building in February of 1860, Lincoln gave the speech which he later credited with winning him the Presidency.

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 Foundation Building of Cooper Union 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 Foundation Building of Cooper Union is a revolutionary structure in its early adoption of rolled-iron beams to support its floors, that it is a handsome Anglo-Italianate building, that it houses a free school which was equally revolutionary when conceived and that it has continuously maintained the plans and ideals set forth by its founder at its inception.

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 Foundation Building, Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science & Art; Cooper Square between Astor Place and East 7th Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 544, Lot 76, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

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