

THE LAMBS CLUB, 128 West 44th Street, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1904-05; architects McKim, Mead & White.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 996, Lot 46.

On May 30, 1974, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Lambs Club 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. Four witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. The Commission had previously held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Lambs Club in 1966.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Lambs, built in 1904-05, is a handsome neo-Georgian style clubhouse designed by the prominent New York City architectural firm of McKim, Mead & White. An extension, added in 1915 by architect George A. Freeman, matched the original facade and doubled the width of the building.

The Lambs was founded in 1874 by a small group--which included several members of the Wallack Theatre Company--for "the social intercourse of members of the dramatic and musical professions with men of the world, and the giving of entertainments for mutual amusement and instruction." Henry J. Montague, one of the founders, had belonged to a similar club in London named the Lambs (in honor of Charles and Mary Lamb who had held weekly open house for theatre people) and suggested the name for the New York group.

The club was formally incorporated under New York State law on May 10, 1877. Rented social halls in the vicinity of Union Square served as headquarters for the organization for a number of years. The meeting place was known as the Fold, the President and Vice President were called the Shepherd and the Boy, respectively, and the club's annual outings were called Washings or Shearings. The club became well-known in New York City for its public and private Gambols--satiric theatrical revues--which began in 1888. Members also presented many plays which later achieved popular success on Broadway in the club's private theater.

The Lambs moved into a building at 70 West 36th Street in 1897 to which alterations had been made by Stanford White. The club soon outgrew these quarters and began to make plans for a new building, designed to meet their specific needs. The commission was given to the firm of McKim, Mead & White--all three were members of the Lambs--and the design is largely attributed to Stanford White.

McKim, Mead and White were the senior partners of one of New York City's most prestigious architectural firms during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The firm received many noteworthy commissions for both public and residential buildings throughout its existence. In 1882, the firm received a commission from Henry Villard for a blockfront of houses on Madison Avenue. Their design, based on the Roman palazzo tradition, not only brought the firm national recognition, but also initiated a Renaissance revival in the United States. This trend was later intensified by the classicism of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago of 1893, in which McKim, Mead & White played such an important role.

Although the firm favored prototypes of the Italian Renaissance for their public buildings, they also executed work in other styles as can be seen in the Lambs Club. The six-story neo-Georgian style clubhouse is constructed of brick and marble with terra-cotta ornament. The fine decorative details add greatly to the quality of this building. The ground floor is faced with smooth marble surmounted by an attractive bandcourse containing a Greek fret motif. Identical doorways with Doric columns support full entablatures and accent the two entrances. The upper stories are faced with red Flemish bond brickwork and are flanked by stone quoins. At the second floor, graceful loggias with French windows and wrought-iron balcony railings provide light for the principal rooms, and the windows are separated by paired Ionic columns. Ornamental terra-cotta pilasters flank the ends of the loggias. A continuous entablature with foliate frieze surmounts the loggias.

Round-arched windows at the third floor have brick arches with terra-cotta keystones and impost blocks. Stylized lambs' heads are set between the spandrels of the arches. The flat splayed arches of the fourth floor windows have similar lambs' heads above the keystones. A large centrally placed wall plaque surmounted by a cartouche, flanked by figures of lambs, gives further emphasis to the special nature of this building. A bold projecting cornice surmounts the fifth floor, and a classical attic with cornice above the sixth floor is crowned by a roof balustrade.

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 Lambs Club 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 clubhouse of The Lambs is a handsome neo-Georgian style structure designed by the prominent architectural firm of McKim, Mead & White, that the graceful loggias and fine decorative details give visual emphasis to the special nature of the building, and that this Club has provided an attractive place for actors to meet in the theatrical district and has made an important contribution to the cultural life of New York City through its theatrical productions.

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 Lambs Club, 128 West 44th Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 996, Lot 46, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.