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Landmarks Preservation Commission
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NEW YORK MARBLE CEMETERY, interior of block between East 2nd and East 3rd Streets, Second Avenue and the Bowery (entered from Second Avenue), Borough of Manhattan. 1830.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 458, Lot 30.

On December 13, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the New York Marble Cemetery and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 12). 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. The Commission has reviewed the City's Landmarks Preservation program with the Secretary of the New York Marble Cemetery, and he has indicated that the Cemetery favors the proposed designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

This obscure and dignified cemetery, once located in a fashionable neighborhood, is largely surrounded by houses and tenements today. It is entered through iron gates protecting both ends of a long passage between Nos. 41 and 43 Second Avenue. Established in 1832, it was used as a place of interment by some of New York's oldest families. On the east portion of the wall surrounding the cemetery, there was an inscription testifying that it was a "place of interment for gentlemen."

In this cemetery there are no monuments or individual tombstones, only the walls with greensward and trees in between and squares of marble of uniform size, set in the walls, bearing the names of the owners and the vault numbers. The north and south walls have marble tablets affixed to them in tiers of three on which are inscribed the names of one hundred and fifty-six original vault owners. At the southwest corner of the cemetery the old "dead-house" once stood, a primitive rough-hewn structure of stone.

This was Manhattan's first non-sectarian burial ground open to the public. It was the product of a business enterprise undertaken by Perkins Nichols and his agents or partners, Anthony Dey and George W. Strong, two noted lawyers. On July 13, 1830, Dey and Strong bought some land in the block bounded by the Bowery and Second Avenue, between Second and Third Streets, from shipwright Henry Eckford and his wife. Then, according to their agreement, Nichols had 156 underground vaults constructed of Tuckahoe marble (hence the name of the cemetery) and was reimbursed from their sale. Some months later, Nichols, Dey and Strong, together with the vault owners, applied to the State Legislature for a special act of incorporation as the New York Marble Cemetery. This was granted on February 4, 1831, and on May 1, 1832 Dey and Strong conveyed title to the land to the new corporation.

Some of the important people who are buried there include: Aaron Clark, Whig Mayor of the City from 1837 to 1839, David Olyphant, a wealthy China trade merchant known for his refusal to deal in opium and for his support of the Protestant missions and James Tallmadge, member of Congress, 1817-1819, one of the founders and first presidents of New York University. In addition, branches of several well-known New York families such as the Varicks, Beekmans, Hones, Van Zandt, Hoyts and Quackenbushes have vaults there. Uriah Scribner and his son Charles, the publishers, are also buried there. Peter Lorillard II, who established the Snuff Mills, owned vaults, but his remains were later removed to another cemetery.

Helen W. Henderson, who visited the cemetery some time prior to 1917, tells us that it was very run-down when she saw it. Interments had virtually ceased, and the ten dollar fees, usually charged for opening vaults and once applied against maintenance, had become so few and far between that there was no longer any income to pay for a caretaker.

By 1915, J. Frederick Kernochan and Edward C. Parish, descendants of two of the original vault owners, had started an endowment fund to preserve the Marble Cemetery from the spread of decay in the neighborhood and the development of tenement housing in the area. By 1934 this fund was worth about \$25,000.

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So, despite the changing of the times and after many vicissitudes, this little Cemetery, with its greensward and trees, has regained its well deserved dignity.

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 New York Marble Cemetery 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 New York Marble Cemetery is one of those lost areas of old Manhattan, of another day and age so rarely to be found today, that it contains the family vaults of some of New York's most distinguished families and that it preserves, as the first non-sectarian cemetery, an important segment of New York history.

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 New York Marble Cemetery, interior of block between East 2nd and East 3rd Streets, Second Avenue and the Bowery, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 458, Lot 30, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.