

Prospect Park

SOLDIERS' AND SAILORS' MEMORIAL ARCH, Grand Army Plaza, Brooklyn. Completed 1892; architect John H. Duncan.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 1117, Lot 1 in part, consisting of the land on which the described improvement is situated.

On September 25, 1973, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Memorial Arch and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 2). 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.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Soldiers' and Sailors' Memorial Arch, dedicated to the men who fought in the Union forces during the Civil War, is located on the southern side of the oval in the Grand Army Plaza. The memorial is the dominant feature of the group of fine civic structures which mark the entrance to Brooklyn's famous and beloved Prospect Park. The idea for this memorial was first proposed by Seth Low while he was mayor of Brooklyn (1882-1885), but serious attention was not given to the project until the mayoralty of Alfred C. Chapin (1888-1891) when veterans of the Grand Army of the Republic sought subscriptions for its construction. Because the fund was slow in attaining the necessary amount, action was taken by the State Legislature for the issuance of bonds to cover the costs of its erection. The state eventually appropriated \$250,000 for this purpose.

John Hemingway Duncan, who later was the architect of Grant's Tomb on Riverside Drive, won the one thousand dollar prize for the design of the arch, and Bernard Gallagher received the contract to build it. Construction began in August of 1889, and the cornerstone was ceremoniously laid by General William Tecumseh Sherman on October 30, 1889. The monument was essentially complete by 1892.

The Soldiers' and Sailors' Memorial Arch is reminiscent of the Arch of Titus in Rome, and it is made of light colored granite with a base-course of dark, polished granite. The memorial is eighty feet wide and eighty feet high, and it encloses a single arch fifty feet high and thirty-five feet wide. Pedestals, on the north and south sides, are faced with engaged columns having Composite capitals made up of the fruits of the sea and the fruits of the land, eagles and ships' prows. On panels between the columns, carved medallions represent the several Army and Navy corps in which Brooklyn men served during the Civil War. The soffit of the arch consists of deeply recessed coffers; the carved stone spandrel panels reputedly weigh fourteen tons each and the carved keystones nine tons.

The leading sculptors of the day were commissioned by Brooklyn's Park Commission to decorate the Arch. Frederick William MacMonnies, a native of Brooklyn who had studied under Augustus Saint-Gaudens, was the sculptor of the heroic groups of soldiers and sailors mounted on the pedestals on the south side of the memorial and of the magnificent triumphal quadriga atop the monument. The pedestals on the north side of the arch remain unoccupied.

✓ The bas-reliefs on either side, beneath the arch, were carried out by Thomas Eakins and William R. O'Donovan in 1893-1894. Eakins, who is better known as one of the leading painters of 19th century America, had worked with O'Donovan on the Battle Monument in Trenton, New Jersey, where he designed the bas-reliefs and O'Donovan did the statue of Washington. On the Soldiers' and Sailors' Memorial Arch, Eakins designed the horses on which O'Donovan's figures of Lincoln and Grant are mounted. The ornamental sculpture in the spandrel panels on the south side of the monument were done by Philip Martiny who had worked in the studio of Saint-Gaudens when he first came to this country. Martiny is responsible for much of the statuary in the Library of Congress building at Washington, D. C., and on the Surrogates Court building in lower Manhattan.

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 Soldiers' and Sailors' Memorial Arch 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 Soldiers' and Sailors' Memorial Arch occupies a commanding place at the entrance to Prospect Park, that its monumental grandeur and dignity are a considerable addition to Prospect Park and to the adjoining Park Slope Historic District, and that it contains some of the finest ornamental sculpture by leading artists of the United States during the second half of the 19th century.

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 Soldiers' and Sailors' Memorial Arch, Grand Army Plaza, Borough of Brooklyn and designates as its related Landmark Site that part of Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 1117, Lot 1 which contains the land on which the described improvement is situated.