

SURGEON'S HOUSE (Quarters "R-1"), Third Naval District, United States Naval Station, Flushing Avenue opposite Ryerson Street (on the grounds of the Old United States Naval Hospital), Borough of Brooklyn. Built 1863; builders True W. Rollins and Charles Hastings.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 2023 Lot 150 in part consisting of the land on which the described building is situated.

On September 14, 1976, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Surgeon's House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 4). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There were no speakers for or against designation. The Commandant of the Third Naval District has expressed approval of the designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

This charming house now serves as the Commandant's residence (Quarters "R-1") in the New York Naval Yard in Brooklyn. It dates from the Civil War years and was built as the quarters of the head surgeon of the U.S. Marine Hospital. The handsome old hospital building, a designated New York City Landmark, stands across from the house, and the two buildings form an architecturally interesting enclave within the historic Brooklyn Navy Yard.

The property on which the Surgeon's House and the hospital building are located was originally farmland; it was sold to the U.S. Navy in 1824 by the heirs of Martin Schenck, a member of one of Brooklyn's oldest families. The hospital site, consisting of some thirty-three acres, was then hilly land surrounded by swamps and mud-flats, which were later filled in and incorporated in the Navy Yard. In the 1820s an old house, the Livingston mansion, served as the hospital. The new building of the U.S. Marine Hospital, a fine marble-faced Greek Revival structure, was completed in 1838 and two years later, wings were added. It was planned to accommodate about one hundred and twenty-five patients and was devoted to the care of injured and ill seamen. A laboratory building and a small cemetery were located nearby.

With the outbreak of the Civil War the Brooklyn Navy Yard immediately began to expand its activities. Under the command of the distinguished Admiral Hiram Paulding (1797-1878), the Yard, with a work force of over five thousand, fitted out some four hundred merchant marine vessels as cruisers. When wounded and ill Navy men began arriving in New York, the Hospital was also enlarged to meet war-time demands. A temporary wooden annex was erected and as many as five hundred patients were treated at one time. The head surgeon from 1862 until 1866 was Dr. Thomas L. Smith. The Surgeon's House was planned during his administration.

A handsome set of framed drawings and plans, dated January 1, 1863, are still preserved at the Surgeon's House. They depict the building very much as it appears today. The construction of the house was carried out by two local Brooklyn residents, True W. Rollins, a builder, and Charles Hastings, a civil engineer.

The Surgeon's House is constructed of brick with a concave mansard roof, which shows the influence of the French Second Empire style in this country. The mansard roof, hallmark of the style, made its first appearance in America in the late 1850s. The roof of the Surgeon's House is a low mansard with concave profile, typical of early Second Empire design. The style reached its height of popularity in this country in the late 1860s. Numerous residential quarters built by the U.S. Navy reveal its influence, among them, a series of seven identical houses erected in 1867 at Newport, Rhode Island.

The Surgeon's House, now painted white with brown trim, is two stories in height with a full attic in the mansard roof. A spacious house of sixteen rooms, it is divided into two main sections, the house proper and a servants' wing. The entrance facade is symmetrically designed with a central doorway approached by stairs flanked by low balustrades. Pairs of tall elegant segmental-arched windows with small balconies are placed at each side of the entrance, and segmental-arched windows appear at the second story. The cornices and sills of these windows rest on small corbel blocks. The cornice of the building has brackets which support the overhang of the concave mansard roof. The dormer windows, with roofs which echo the profile of the main roof, are typical of the French Second Empire style. Segmental-arched and square-headed windows appear on the side elevations of the house and at the north, a handsome projecting three-sided bay is located at the first story. The house is pleasantly landscaped and approached by a curved driveway.

This residence, like the other designated New York City Landmarks in the Brooklyn Navy Yard--the U.S. Marine Hospital, the Commandant's House and the Dry Dock No. 1--is an important reminder of the long and interesting history of this military complex. Beautifully maintained and officially regarded by the U.S. Navy as "prestige quarters", the house is a very handsome example of mid-19th century American residential architecture.

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 Surgeon's House 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 Surgeon's House is a handsome example of Second Empire design, that along with the old U.S. Marine Hospital building, it is part of an attractive enclave within the Brooklyn Navy Yard, that it is an important reminder of the history of the Navy Yard during the Civil War, and that as the residence of the Commandant it is regarded as "prestige quarters" and is beautifully maintained.

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 Surgeon's House (Quarters "R-1"), Third Naval District, United States Naval Station, Flushing Avenue opposite Ryerson Street (on the grounds of the Old United States Naval Hospital), and designates as its related Landmark Site that part of Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 2023 Lot on which the described building is situated.