

Landmarks Preservation Commission
March 20, 1973, Calendar Number 1
LP-0667

THE FRICK COLLECTION (including the Frick Art Reference Library), 1 East 70th Street, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1913-14; architect Carrere & Hastings. Frick Art Reference Library, 10 East 71st Street; built 1931-35; architect John Russell Pope.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1385, Lot 1.

On March 31, 1970, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of The Frick Collection and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 9). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. One witness spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. The Frick Collection has indicated its support of the proposed designation of its building.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Set in spacious grounds and surrounded by retaining walls, this great mansion presents a striking picture of imposing grandeur and architectural distinction on Fifth Avenue, where it occupies the entire blockfront between 70th and 71st Streets. Built as the residence of Henry Clay Frick, it has been a museum since 1935. The entrance to The Frick Collection is at No. 1 East 70th Street. Adjoining the mansion to the east and connected to it at basement level, is the newer Frick Art Reference Library Building at No. 10 East 71st Street.

When Mr. Frick purchased this site for his mansion in 1911, it was then occupied by the Lenox Library which, at that time, was about to unite its holdings with those of the Astor and Tilden Libraries in the newly completed New York Public Library at 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue. It is worthy of note that Mr. Frick selected the firm of Carrere & Hastings, the architects of the New York Public Library, to design his mansion. His residence was planned from the beginning to serve as a future museum. The famed coke and steel magnate had gradually built up an outstanding art collection which he intended to open to the public in the mansion after his wife's death. After the death of Mr. Frick and his wife in 1931, the Board of Directors of his collection, which had been incorporated in 1920, immediately advanced plans for alterations and additions to the mansion and for the construction of a research library building. The entire complex was opened to the public on December 16, 1935.

The mansion takes full advantage of the magnificent site, facing Central Park. Separating it from Fifth Avenue, and slightly above it, is a wide lawn and garden which create a feeling of spaciousness. Making the transition to the house, a raised terrace is approached from the lawn by a broad flight of steps flanked by monumental urns. These steps lead up to the central and most prominent feature of the Fifth Avenue facade: a shallow projecting bay is given dramatic emphasis by four Ionic pilasters which enframe the three arched windows of the first story and the windows above it. The main body of the mansion is three stories high, including a classical attic story. The top of a wide bandcourse, surmounting the rusticated first floor, serves as a sill for the second story windows and is the dominant unifying feature of the building, linking the north and south wings to the main body of the mansion. The attic story is set back behind a handsome parapet with balusters in front of each window. Full-length, square-headed windows at the first floor, at either side of the central feature, are given emphasis by panels above, with delicate bas-relief carvings.

The lawn is framed at the north by a charming loggia which extends along the south side of the gallery wing and terminates in a pavilion at the Fifth Avenue corner. This long one-story wing, set above a rusticated base, encloses the property on the 71st Street side and extends eastward 275 feet from Fifth Avenue. A shorter two-story wing on 70th Street overlooks the garden facing Fifth Avenue and runs eastward until it meets the small forecourt to the main entrance. It continues the theme of the rusticated first floor and has two handsome pedimented windows at the Fifth Avenue end.

THE FRICK COLLECTION

The French Louis XVI character of the mansion, established by Carrere & Hastings, was faithfully maintained by John Russell Pope when he altered it in 1931-35 after Mr. Frick's death. The handsome doorway with arched pediment at the main entrance on East 70th Street was originally a carriage driveway which led through to East 71st Street, passing through an open courtyard. In order to provide a larger entrance hall with coat rooms and additional space for The Frick Collection, Pope made provision for extra facilities and transformed the open courtyard into an enclosed atrium with arched glass skylight supported on coupled columns. He also extended the north wing to provide additional space: the Oval Room, the East Gallery and Lecture Room. The site of the East Gallery had previously been occupied by a separate building housing Mr. Frick's two-story Art Reference Library which he had opened to the art world as early as 1924. When further expansion was decided upon, the adjacent property to the east, No. 10 East 71st Street, was purchased and Pope was commissioned to design a new six-story library building, founded by Miss Helen C. Frick in memory of her father.

The Art Reference Library Building, completed in 1935, is an impressive structure, approached through a monumental arch supported on paired Ionic columns which rest on a low base of the same height as that of the north wing of The Frick Collection. The entablature from which the arch springs is also approximately the same height as that of the adjoining wing. Above the central arch there are four stories behind a plain limestone wall, pierced only by three monumental pedimented windows with balusters below them. A deep entablature, with an elaborately decorated frieze and projecting roof cornice, crowns the blank wall above the windows which contains the library stacks.

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 Frick Collection, including the Frick Art Reference Library, 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 Frick Collection is one of the finest examples of French Louis XVI architecture in New York City, that it is well-proportioned and displays beautiful detail, that it has been greatly enhanced by the sensitive architectural blending of alterations and additions with the original mansion, that the complex has a truly monumental quality enhanced by spacious grounds, and that it houses one of the finest art collections and art reference libraries in the world.

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 Frick Collection, 1 East 70th Street, including the Frick Art Reference Library located at 10 East 71st Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1385, Lot 1, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.