

NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY (formerly the Willard Straight House), 1130 Fifth Avenue, Borough of Manhattan. Begun 1913, completed 1915; architects Delano & Aldrich.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1506, Lot 1.

On November 10, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the National Audubon Society (formerly the Willard Straight House) and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 59). Two witnesses spoke in favor of designation. At the request of the Audubon Society, the hearing was continued until December 27, 1966 (Item No. 20) and January 31, 1967 (Item No. 16). All the hearings were duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. The Commission has discussed this proposed designation with representatives of the Audubon Society and has reviewed the provisions of the Landmarks Preservation Law with them.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The National Audubon Society occupies an outstanding example of early Twentieth Century residential architecture, designed in the best tradition of the American town house. Combining the severity of the Federal Style in its formal conservatism with a certain freedom of design, this six-story brick house with marble trim radiates an expression of vitality and a gaiety of spirit that is refreshing to behold. This large, sunny dwelling occupying a corner lot was admirably suited for the domestic city life of a socially prominent family, and since 1953 it has served as national headquarters for an important conservation organization.

The elegant doorway with its arched opening is framed by a pair of engaged Tuscan columns. It is crowned by an entablature that connects with the second floor belt course. Reminiscent of the Federal Style are the floor length windows of the second story and the plain lintels above the square-headed openings. The bulls-eye (oculus) windows of the fourth floor and the belt courses, together with the carved marble cornice and balustrade above it, have an urban richness and refinement which give the building great dignity and considerable architectural sophistication.

Willard D. Straight (1880-1918) diplomat, financier, and publicist, was born in Oswego, N. Y. A graduate of Cornell University with a B.A. in architecture in 1901, Straight went to the Orient the same year. He worked as a correspondent, then held several diplomatic posts in the Orient, and later served as acting chief of the Division of Far Eastern Affairs in the State Department from 1908 to 1909.

In 1911, Straight married Dorothy Whitney, daughter of William C. Whitney the Wall Street financier. Subsequently Straight was associated with J.P. Morgan & Co. as a Far Eastern expert. As a publisher, and with his wife's cooperation, he founded a weekly journal, the New Republic, and later in 1915 he established a monthly magazine, first known as the Journal of the American Asiatic Association and later renamed Asia. He died in 1918, while serving as a Major with the American Expeditionary Forces.

Founded in 1905, the National Audubon Society is among the oldest and largest national conservation organizations in North America. The Society is privately financed, receiving no government funds. It is supported primarily by membership dues, contributions and bequests. The official publication of the Society is an illustrated bi-monthly named Audubon Magazine. On the second floor at Audubon House, the Society maintains a library of over 18,000 books, pamphlets and periodicals. The reference library is open to members and the public on week days only.

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 National Audubon Society (formerly the Willard Straight 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 National Audubon Society (formerly the Willard Straight House) is a distinguished example of early Twentieth Century residential architecture designed in the finest tradition of American town houses, that it has excellent scale, superb architectural details executed by superior craftsmen, that it adorns a conspicuous corner site on one of our important avenues and that it houses one of the country's vital cultural institutions, serving both the local and national public.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 8-A 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 National Audubon Society, (formerly the Willard Straight House), 1130 Fifth Avenue, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1506, Lot 1, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.