

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY, MEMORIAL HALL, THEODORE ROOSEVELT MEMORIAL BUILDING, Central Park West and 79th Street, Borough of Manhattan. Architect John Russell Pope; built 1929-1935.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1130, Lot 1 in part, consisting of the land on which the described building is situated.

On May 27, 1975, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as an Interior Landmark of the American Museum of Natural History, Memorial Hall, Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Building 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. Three witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. The American Museum of Natural History has given its approval to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Memorial Hall, of the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial, provides an impressive, classical main entrance to the American Museum of Natural History on Central Park West and is one of the City's grand interior spaces. The museum, designated a New York City Landmark in 1967, is one of the world's finest and largest institutions devoted to the study of the natural sciences. The museum was founded in 1869 by such distinguished New Yorkers as J. P. Morgan, Adrian Iselin, Henry Parish, Joseph A. Choate, Charles A. Dana, Morris Ketchum Jessup, and Theodore Roosevelt, father of the President.

The first home of the museum was in the old Arsenal in Central Park. Its second and permanent home, was built in Manhattan Square, as the site between 77th and 81st Street was then known. This Victorian Gothic structure of 1874-77, designed by the architectural firm of Vaux & Mould, was later enveloped within the present structures, as the museum's activities expanded under the directorship of Albert S. Bickmore. The major portion of the museum, fronting on 77th Street, between Columbus Avenue and Central Park West, was designed in Romanesque Revival style by Cady, Berg & See, and erected from 1889-1908. As early as 1912, plans were made to extend the museum along Central Park West according to the designs of Trowbridge & Livingstone. Although actual construction did not begin until 1922, it continued into the 1930s. Several wings on the inner courtyards were also constructed during this period, as was the Hayden Planetarium, also by Trowbridge & Livingstone, completed in 1935. In their plans for the extension of the museum, Trowbridge & Livingstone envisaged a monumental entrance section facing Central Park West, a forerunner of the design that later won the competition for the monumental memorial hall honoring Theodore Roosevelt.

Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919), the twenty-sixth President of the United States, in whose honor this memorial was built, first gained national attention in the 1890s. His civil service reforms and his fight against graft and crime in politics as head of the New York Police Board captured the public's imagination. In 1898, he organized the Rough Riders to participate in the Spanish-American War in Cuba. Roosevelt was elected Vice-President of the United States in 1900, and assumed the Presidency upon the assassination of William McKinley a year later. His forceful style was an important factor in expanding America's imperial role in the world. He initiated construction of the Panama Canal, settled the Alaskan boundary dispute with England in 1903, reaffirmed the Monroe Doctrine in the face of challenge, helped settle the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, and sent the American fleet around the world during 1907-09 in a demonstration of our national strength. His lifelong interest in natural history was affirmed by a series of conservation-related Acts and Commissions that were established during his Presidency. Like his father, he was also a trustee of the Museum of Natural History and donated many of his own collections to the museum. He also participated in a number of museum expeditions. His rescue of a bear cub on one of the hunting expeditions led to the manufacture of the stuffed toy bear that soon bore his nickname, "Teddy."

After Roosevelt's death in 1919, both the nation and the State of New York were anxious to memorialize him. The New York State Legislature created a Memorial Commission in 1920 to determine an appropriate monument. Henry Fairfield Osborn, president of the American Museum of Natural History, was named as chairman of the Commission. Although a number of ideas were proposed, it was finally decided that an educational institution symbolizing the character of Roosevelt as naturalist and citizen would provide a lasting and influential memorial. Osborn was naturally anxious that such an institution be made a part of the museum, while other Commission members thought that it should become a part of the State University in Albany. The matter was finally determined by the State Legislature in 1924 with the site going to New York City. The State wanted to erect a building that would be "commensurate with his greatness as well as with his international fame." It was felt that such a memorial should compare favorably to the Lord Nelson Monument in Trafalgar Square, London; Les Invalides in Paris (a monument to Napoleon); the Victor Emmanuel II monument in Rome; and the Kaiser Wilhelm monument in Coblenz.

The Law of 1924, which determined the site, stipulated that Governor Alfred E. Smith appoint a board of trustees to prepare plans and supervise the erection of a suitable memorial to New York State's "first citizen"; the cost was not to exceed \$2,500,000. Accordingly, the trustees invited eight New York State architectural firms to submit competitive designs, beginning in December 1924. The conditions for the competition were that:

"The design should symbolize the scientific, educational, outdoor and exploration aspects of Theodore Roosevelt's life rather than the political and literary.

The design should be consistent with the dignity of the Empire State and reflect the national and international influence of Theodore Roosevelt.

The memorial should be harmonious with and embody the ideals, purposes and plans of the American Museum of Natural History to which Theodore Roosevelt devoted the early and closing years of his life.

The memorial should provide not only for visitors from the City and the State but should be so planned that it would become an integral part of the school and public educational system of the State, and likewise form an extension to the educational work of the American Museum of Natural History in the City and in the State."

John Russell Pope (1874-1937), a New York City architect noted for his grand classical designs in the Roman tradition, won the competition and the results were announced in June 1925. That same year Pope also won the competition for the national Roosevelt Memorial in Washington, D. C. Planned for the tidal basin, although never executed, that project called for a fountain surrounded by classical colonnades. Other Pope buildings in the grand classical tradition are the National Archives Building, the National Gallery of Art and the Jefferson Memorial, all in Washington, D. C.

The winning design for the New York State Memorial, as published in various architectural periodicals of the time, was very similar on the exterior to the executed building. A large gray stone pavilion, it incorporated a monumental triumphal arch entryway flanked by two smaller arched openings. In the executed building the small arches were replaced by aedicule motifs. Pope's original design for the hall is quite different from what was actually executed: it incorporated large blind arches for murals, set above low one-story colonnades, and two-story freestanding columns serving as pedestals for eagles. The ceiling was flat with a central skylight. Despite the acceptance of Pope's winning design, it was later modified by him, probably at the recommendation of the Board of Trustees; however, a successful solution had been reached by 1928 when renderings of the memorial were published by the Board of Trustees.

Actual construction did not begin until 1929, although authorization and appropriation for the memorial had been voted. On July 25 of that year the City of New York deeded the site to the State of New York. The groundbreaking took place on October 16, and foundation work began under the direction of William E. Haugaard, State Commissioner of Architecture. Final plans for the superstructure were not actually approved by the Board of Trustees of the Memorial

until June of the following year. The contracts for the erection of the building were awarded to J. Harry McNally, Inc., but work was delayed because of difficulties in obtaining Jonesboro granite which had been used on the adjoining wing on Central Park West. Approval was finally obtained to use Milford pink granite instead, which weathers to a gray color.

The cornerstone was officially laid on October 27, 1931 by Governor Franklin Delano Roosevelt with a number of important officials and 500 people in attendance. Construction continued at a slow pace, much slower than anticipated, as a study of the Museum's Annual Reports will indicate.

As Pope's revised design for the hall had called for murals on three walls, a competition was held to choose a muralist; the commission was awarded to William Andrew Mackay in 1933, to represent important events in the life of Theodore Roosevelt. They were completed in 1934. Mackay had worked with Robert Reid, a noted muralist of the late 19th century, in New York, as well as with the well-known French artists, Benjamin Constant and Henri Laurens in Paris. Mackay had painted murals for the Senate Reading Room in the Congressional Library, the House of Representatives in the St. Paul Capitol, the Supreme Court Room in the Essex County Courthouse at Newark, New Jersey, and St. George's Church in Stuyvesant Square, New York, before receiving the Roosevelt Hall commission.

Although it was hoped that the memorial would be completed in time to dedicate it on the seventy-seventh anniversary of Roosevelt's birth (October 27, 1935), construction delays postponed the dedication to January 19, 1936. The ceremony was a grand affair with President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a distant cousin of Theodore Roosevelt, as the featured speaker. Peter Kiernan, vice-chairman of the Board of Trustees presided over the ceremonies due to the death of Chairman Henry F. Osborn. Governor Herbert Lehman, Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, A. Perry Osborn of the museum, Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., and James R. Garfield, head of the national Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Association, also spoke, extolling the virtues of Theodore Roosevelt and the ideals for which he stood. Later that year, the title to the land and the building was officially transferred back to the City and the State.

The Memorial Building, which encloses Memorial Hall, is a large gray granite pavilion which projects from the center of the Central Park West front of the museum. The dominant feature is the monumental triumphal arch molded on the great arches of Imperial Rome. According to a report of the Board of Trustees of the Roosevelt Memorial in 1928, it "... not only symbolizes the great spirit of Theodore Roosevelt, but echoes the dignity and majesty of the state and the nation." Colossal freestanding columns flank the archway, supporting heroic figures of Meriwether Lewis, James Rogers Clark, Daniel Boone and John James Audubon. Windows between the great columns, and at the sides, display the aedicule motif in their enframements. The sculptor, James E. Fraser, also executed the monumental equestrian statue of Roosevelt, with accompanying figures of an American Indian and an African tribesman, which stands in front of the great arched entrance to Memorial Hall. The Trustees' report of 1928 noted that the statue was intended to "symbolize the fearless leadership, the explorer, benefactor and educator, a creation that should inspire the beholder with a feeling of the truly sublime in art and in history"--again, a conscious effort to associate Roosevelt with such symbols of Imperial Rome as the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius on Capitoline Hill.

Ascending the broad staircase, one passes through the triumphal arch, which is coffered on the underside, leading to the Memorial Hall. Above this arch, a parapet is inscribed with these words: "State of New York Memorial to Theodore Roosevelt. A great leader of the youth of America, in energy and fortitude, in the faith of our fathers, in defense of the rights of the people, in the love and conservation of nature and of the best in life and in man." Deeply recessed within the coffered arch is the impressive entrance with enframed bronze doors set in green marble panels beneath an ornate frieze. Above these doors, three great bronze and glass window grilles fill the arch which provides the transitional element between the exterior and interior--Memorial Hall itself.

Memorial Hall was described by the Trustees as "a conception of the grandeur and dignity ... which elevates the emotions and impresses the soul as but few of the monuments to man have ever done." The hall, which is 67 feet wide and 120 feet long, is spanned by a barrel vaulted ceiling, with octagonal coffering,

rising 100 feet above the floor. At both ends of the vault, large segmental arched windows protected by grilles light the hall. The entrance vestibule, as well as the recesses opposite it and at the ends of the hall, are monumentalized by a giant order of Corinthian columns 48 feet high, recalling still another great Roman monument --the Pantheon. The columns are of red Alacanti and Verone marble, rising from bases of Botticino marble. Hand-carved capitals surmount the columns which, according to the same source, "stand as sentinels to the greatness of the man, and lend a note of virility and strength so characteristic of Roosevelt."

The main walls are overlaid with Renfrew marble wainscoting to a height of nine feet and are of limestone above. They are inscribed with quotations from Roosevelt's writings under the headings of "Nature," "Manhood," "Youth," and "The State." These walls are in turn surmounted by a marble paneled band of classical design, and the entire room is encompassed by a fully Corinthian entablature supporting the barrel vault.

Despite the classical formality of the architecture, Memorial Hall has a rich, warm character due to the varied tones of the marble walls and columns and the highly polished marble floor, all enhanced by sunlight filtering through the vast expanse of windows. Further adding to the warmth of the hall are the three murals, set in recesses, depicting important events in the life of Roosevelt. They are: Roosevelt's African Expedition (west panel): The Treaty of Portsmouth (south panel): and The Panama Canal (north panel). The murals also portray various mythical and historic events associated with these places. The predominant colors are bright shades of red and gold with touches of green. Bronze doors with marble enframements, centered in the recesses, lead to adjacent wings of the building.

The Landmarks Preservation Commission recognizes that Memorial Hall must function as an important element in the museum's operations. By this designation of Memorial Hall as an Interior Landmark, it is not intended to prevent future necessary alterations that may affect the condition, restoration and/or replacement of the murals. It is also not intended to prevent the use of the hall for museum purposes, exhibits, and functions, provided that necessary furnishings and structures do not constitute permanent alterations or attachment to the architectural elements of the hall. The Commission believes it has the obligation and, indeed, it has the desire to cooperate with owners of Landmarks who may wish to make changes in their properties. The Commission looks forward to working with the representatives of The American Museum of Natural History when the museum finds it necessary to consider alterations or to erect temporary structures in the hall.

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 American Museum of Natural History, Memorial Hall, Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Building, 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, Memorial Hall provides an impressive main entrance to the American Museum of Natural History, that it is one of the City's most monumental interior spaces, that it is distinguished by a high barrel-vaulted ceiling which lends grandeur to the space, that it was designed by the noted architect John Russell Pope, who made expressive use of the rich materials and fine classical detail, that it is a fitting monument to Theodore Roosevelt as a political leader and naturalist, that it is a fitting symbol of a period which witnessed the evolution of the United States as a world power, and that Memorial Hall is an important and well integrated part of the American Museum of Natural 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 an Interior Landmark the American Museum of Natural History, Memorial Hall, Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Building, Central Park West and 79th Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates as its related Landmark Site that part of the Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1130, Lot 1 in part, which contains the land on which the described building is situated.