

QUEENSBORO BRIDGE (excluding the service building and elevator on Roosevelt Island), 11th Street and Bridge Plaza North and Bridge Plaza South, Borough of Queens, to Second Avenue and East 59th Street and 60th Street, Borough of Manhattan. Begun 1901, completed 1908; architect Henry Hornbostel.

Landmark Site: Queens Tax Map Block 465, Lots 375 in part, 400 in part, 425 in part, and Block 477, Lot 7 in part and Manhattan Tax Map Block 1474, Lot 8 in part, Block 1454, Lot 1 in part, and Block 1434, Lot 1 in part, consisting of those parts of these Lots which contain a portion of the Queensboro Bridge.

On September 25, 1973, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Queensboro Bridge and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 10). 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.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

After the close of the Civil War, there were a number of proposals calling for the construction of bridges across the East River to facilitate communications between New York City, the City of Brooklyn and the farms of Queens and Long Island. Among the earliest bridges planned, and the first one to be built, was the Brooklyn Bridge (1867-1883), but as early as 1877 plans had been submitted to the City for a bridge across the East River at Blackwell's (now Roosevelt) Island. A majority of the board of consulting engineers who studied the various plans agreed that the proposal drawn up by Charles Macdonald, of the Delaware Bridge Company, would be the most economical and practical to construct. Macdonald's proposal for a cantilever type bridge to span the river was the type that was actually built almost thirty years later.

The City, after the consolidation of 1898, began to acquire the land for the bridge and, in September of 1901, work on the bridge began. The Pennsylvania Steel Company contracted to furnish the steel superstructure for the bridge in accordance with the plans and specifications of the Department of Bridges, under the Commissionership of the engineer, Gustav Lindenthal, and of the architect Henry Hornbostel. Because of modifications made in the original plans, the bridge was not completed until June 15, 1908. It was opened to traffic on March 30, 1909 and to pedestrians on June 12, 1909.

Hornbostel's design for the bridge appears to have been influenced by Jean Resal's Pont Mirabeau in Paris which was completed in 1895, while Hornbostel was a student at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. Montgomery Schuyler, the noted architectural critic, described the two outside spans of the Queensboro Bridge as having "the shape of the universally admired curves of the Pont Mirabeau" in The Architectural Record of October, 1905.

The Queensboro Bridge is a "through-type" cantilever in which the roadway passes between the towers and trusses as opposed to a "deck-type" cantilever in which the roadway is carried on top of the cantilever. The bridge lacks the more usual type of suspended span that would normally connect the ends of the cantilever arms and is designed instead with only one hinge in each of the main spans. The cantilevers off each side of the towers, consist of a chain of flat eye-bars at the tops and diagonal and vertical stiffeners beneath them, all supporting the deck of the bridge. The length of the bridge is over 7,000 feet and it has a clearance of 135 feet above high water level.

When the bridge was first opened, there were four elevated railroad tracks for the Second Avenue "El" on the upper level; four trolley tracks and a roadway ran on the lower level. The trolley terminal and four of the original five entrances and exit kiosks still remain on the Manhattan side of the bridge. The fifth kiosk and the two monumental candelabra have been removed to be refurbished and restored and then re-erected as an entrance to the Brooklyn Children's Museum. The large areas below the bridge, known as the Cathedral, are notable for their Guastavino tile vaulting. Since access to the City's facilities on Roosevelt Island was a necessity, each of the towers of the piers on the island was equipped with an elevator accommodating both passengers and horses, a stairway and a comfort station. The anchorage piers were also provided with stairways for pedestrian access near York Avenue in Manhattan and from Vernon Avenue in Long Island City. (The service building and large elevator, subsequently added to the north of the bridge on Roosevelt (Welfare) Island, is specifically excluded from this designation).

Beaux-Arts style stair towers at the mainland anchorages have segmentally-arched pediments beneath low, stone domes and the piers of the bridge are of rough-faced masonry with smooth quoins. The steel towers are crowned with spiky pinnacles. Whether the bridge is seen from Manhattan against the low horizon of Queens or from the Queens side against the sleek background of midtown Manhattan, it presents an inspiring and dramatic silhouette.

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 Queensboro Bridge 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 the Queensboro Bridge, spanning the East River between Manhattan and Queens over Roosevelt Island, is a notable engineering achievement, that it was an essential factor in the development of the Borough of Queens, that it is a Landmark known to countless New Yorkers and that it is a magnificent element in the skyline of the City.

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 Queensboro Bridge (excluding the service building and elevator on Roosevelt Island), Eleventh Street and Bridge Plaza North and Bridge Plaza South, Borough of Queens, to Second Avenue and East 59th Street and 60th Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates as its Landmark Site those parts of the following Lots which contain a portion of the Queensboro Bridge: Borough of Queens Tax Map Block 465, Lot 375 in part, 400 in part, 425 in part, Block 477, Lot 7 in part, and Manhattan Tax Map Block 1474, Lot 8 in part, Block 1454, Lot 1 in part and Block 1434, Lot 1 in part.