

Brooklyn in the Landmark Limelight

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Brooklyn's Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Arch.

The Fulton Ferry historic district, a low-rise waterfront area beneath Brooklyn Heights, is roughly bounded by Doughty, Front, Water and Main Sts. Ironically the street from which the area gets its name and which bisects the still active commercial district is no longer called Fulton. It is now Cadman Plaza West, renamed after the recent housing complex at its inland border. It had been changed from Ferry to Fulton Street in 1814 to honor the steamboat inventor but ferry service had originated there under the Dutch in the 17th Century.

According to the commission's designating report, "by the 1850s this splendid waterfront of brick warehouses . . . was the pride of Brooklyn and, in many ways, rivalled and was superior to

the warehousing facilities of Manhattan."

Today, the area is dotted with historically interesting and varied structures, considerable vacant land owned by the city and Con Ed, light industry employing some 8000 workers and modest, low-rent residential buildings.

The district, with its strong maritime heritage and its potential for both residential and industrial redevelopment, has been studied and restudied by several city agencies since the late 1960s.

Its golden age ended with the opening of the Brooklyn Bridge in 1883, when, according to the commission report, the "area began a rapid decline which was to virtually terminate its active existence 40 years later with the abandonment of ferry service to Manhattan." At one time, 50 million passengers yearly traveled to and from Manhattan by ferry.

At the water's edge still stands the simple yellow

wood frame fireboat station building which has been proposed as a small museum. Alongside is a still-to-be-completed mini-park with generous seating areas and flowering bushes. Eventually a restaurant barge will dock at its pier. Also planned for the future is the resumption of ferry service to the South St. Seaport Museum.

At 1 Fulton St. is the 1840s Barnum's Hotel, a once-elite structure whose current tenants are on a rent strike to force needed repairs. Across the street is a former toilet seat factory which a few years ago was bought and renovated into apartments by architect David Morton, son of Commerce Secretary Morton.

The 1897 Bayard-Condict Building at 65 Bleecker St. has been considered for designation several times by the commission since the mid-60s. It has long been considered an unofficial landmark in the city's architectural history because of its

design by Sullivan, who, the commission report notes, was "the first American to work in a non-historic, modern architectural style... [It] is the most significant commercial building utilizing skyscraper structural techniques in New York City."

Sullivan was the leader of the Chicago School of modern architecture, teacher of Frank Lloyd Wright and, the commission notes, "the first to solve the design problem of the tall building — most significant new problem confronting architects in the late 19th century."

The building's terra-cotta facade is rich in ornamentation that serves a functional as well as aesthetic purpose — a radical technique of the day.

It was "the first truly modern skyscraper" here, the commission says, "where architects continued to design skyscrapers based on historical precedents and the Beaux Arts tradition until well into the 1920s."