

National Society of Colonial Dames in the State of New York Headquarters

215 East 71st Street (aka 215-217 East 71st Street), Manhattan
Tax Map Block 1426 Lot 10

Built: 1929-30

Architect: Richard Henry Dana, Jr.

Style: Colonial Revival

Proposed Action: Propose for Calendaring December 12, 2017



The National Society of Colonial Dames in the State of New York Headquarters was designed in 1929 by the noted architect Richard Henry Dana, Jr. a specialist in colonial architecture and is an exceptional example of the Colonial Revival style.

The National Society of Colonial Dames in the State of New York is one of the early members of the federation collectively known as the National Society of Colonial Dames in America, which was founded in Philadelphia in 1891. The members, all of whom must prove direct descent from a significant figure in the development of the country during the colonial period, have been among the earliest proponents of historic preservation in the country. The New York Society has been responsible for the Van Cortlandt Mansion in the Bronx, a designated NYC Landmark, since 1896. By the 1920s with its membership growing, the New York Society commissioned a new building in 1929 at East 71st Street to serve as their headquarters and a house museum showcasing colonial residential architecture and interior design.

The building's facades reflect Dana's knowledge of colonial architecture and display his deft ability to meld elements from Dutch and English influenced colonial era houses from New York, Massachusetts, Virginia and Pennsylvania into a cohesive design reminiscent of the country's early history. The red brick, Flemish bond facade is defined by stone stringcourses and brick quoins, and a modillioned cornice above which is a quartet of pedimented dormers and stone balustrade. The fenestration replicates colonial era multi-light double-hung sash and is set within keyed, brick surrounds with stone keystones, further enhanced at the first story by paneled shutters. Based largely on the Colonel John McEver house (c. 1750) which once stood at 34 Wall Street, Dana adapted the design to the size of the lot paring the five bays to four resulting in the asymmetrical placement of the entrance with its rusticated stone surround topped by a scrolled pediment with central cartouche bearing the New York Society's shield.

Dana's skillfully developed design provided the organization with a headquarters that reflected its mission to promote an understanding of America's colonial past while furthering the development of the Colonial Revival as a style.

National Society of Colonial Dames in the State of New York Headquarters Interiors

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Dining Room, 2017 (LPC)

The National Society of Colonial Dames of America was founded in Philadelphia in 1891 as a federation of Corporate Societies whose members are descendants of significant figures in the development of the nation during the colonial period. As part of their mission, the National Societies have been in the forefront of historic preservation. The National Society of Colonial Dames in the State of New York has been responsible for the Van Cortlandt Mansion in the Bronx, a designated NYC Landmark, since 1896. Another part of the Society's mission is promoting knowledge of the history of the colonial period through their collections and educational programs which are available to the public. Much of this mission has been carried out in their headquarters building at 215 East 71st Street, where the building's architect Richard Henry Dana, Jr. incorporated references and borrowed details from 18th century houses located from Maine to South Carolina as well as from England.

The areas proposed for the Commission's calendar include the main foyer, Members' Dressing Room, and Dining Room on the first floor; the central stair hall and monumental staircase that connects the publicly accessible rooms of the first, second, and third floors; the Members' Room and Members' Lounge on the second floor; and the Exhibition Hall on the third floor.

These spaces freely combine common elements of 18th-century interior design such as low paneled wainscots with molded chair rails, multi-light sash windows with deep paneled reveals and window seats, paneled doors with Colonial Revival reproduction hinges and locksets, and crown moldings, with more elaborate decorative elements of the period, into a cohesive design reflective of the taste and styles of the colonial era as interpreted through a 20th century lens.

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