Mr. William Lebovich  
Department of the Interior  
National Register Office  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation  
Service  
18th and C Streets, NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Bill:

Re: Fort Tryon and The Cloisters  
New York County

The National Register nomination for Fort Tryon and The Cloisters includes some 8 x 10 photographs of the Cloisters which were supplied by the Cloisters and which vary in date from 1937 to 1969. Except for those sections of the Cloisters which are heavily exposed to the elements and which have suffered some stone deterioration, the Cloisters are in the same excellent condition as depicted in these photographs.

Sincerely,

Larry E. Cobrecht  
National Register and Survey Coordinator  
Historic Preservation  
Field Services

cb  
Enc.
1 NAME

HISTORIC

Fort Tryon Park and The Cloisters

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
Fort Tryon Park

CITY, TOWN
New York

STATE
New York

3 CLASSIFICATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>OWNERSHIP</th>
<th>STATUS</th>
<th>PRESENT USE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DISTRICT</td>
<td>PUBLIC</td>
<td>OCCUPIED</td>
<td>_AGRICULTURE _MUSEUM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUILDING(S)</td>
<td>PRIVATE</td>
<td>UNOCCUPIED</td>
<td>_COMMERCIAL _PARK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STRUCTURE</td>
<td>BOTH</td>
<td>WORK IN PROGRESS</td>
<td>_EDUCATIONAL _PRIVATE RESIDENCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SITE</td>
<td>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</td>
<td>ACCESSIBLE</td>
<td>_ENTERTAINMENT _RELIGIOUS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBJECT</td>
<td>IN PROCESS</td>
<td>YES, RESTRICTED</td>
<td>_GOVERNMENT _SCIENTIFIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BEING CONSIDERED</td>
<td>YES: RESTRICTED</td>
<td>_INDUSTRIAL _TRANSPORTATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>_MILITARY _OTHER</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
The Metropolitan Museum of Art and New York City Department of Parks

STREET & NUMBER
Fifth Avenue and 82nd Street, New York, NY 10028, and 830 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10021

CITY, TOWN
New York

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
City Register

STREET & NUMBER
Surrogates Court
31 Chambers Street

CITY, TOWN
New York

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
The Cloisters, Fort Tryon Park, designation report

DATE
3/19/71

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS
New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission

CITY, TOWN
New York
DESCRIPTION

CONDITON

EXCELLENT
GOOD
FAIR

DETERIORATED
RUINS
UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE
CHECK ONE

MOVED
DATE

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The area known as Fort Tryon Park is located in northwestern Manhattan and spans an area extending from the northern reaches of Washington Heights to the Inwood Section. The land consists of approximately 66.5 acres, is about half a mile long and averages 700 feet in width. Characteristic of its topography are dramatic land contours, rocky outcroppings and mature oaks indigenous to the area.

High points within the park command a magnificent view westward across the Hudson River to the Palisades and northward up the Hudson for a distance of thirty miles on a clear day. The northern boundary of the park is formed by a steep bluff. Across a valley to the north of this is Inwood Hill Park, which extends to the northern end of the Borough of Manhattan.

The parkland, unlike most of Manhattan, was spared major development and by the beginning of the twentieth century only three large estates occupied the land. One of these, the Billings mansion, burned in 1925 and with the creation of the new park, a series of terraces were constructed upon its foundations overlooking the river, one directly over the site of the British Fort Tryon with an attempt to suggest the fortification walls using native stone. Although untested, soil deposits at the base of the terrace construction may contain structural remnants and material pertaining to the Revolutionary War era fortification.

Another area within Fort Tryon Park where there is potential for archaeological remains is the Dongan Place shell heap site. Prehistoric remains have been collected from the surface of a steep bank below a stone retaining wall. This wall forms the east side of a terrace upon which sits a fan chamber for the Independent Subway. The subway itself crosses Fort Tryon Park on a trajectory from Fort Washington Avenue to Broadway, intersecting the latter between Dongan Place and Arden Street. It is probable that the subway was trenched across the park rather than tunneled. It may be that excavation of the trench or fan shaft disturbed a prehistoric site or portion thereof with the result that artifactual remains now erode from the embankment peripheral to this construction. Michael Cohn, an advocating archaeologist familiar with the site, reports finding clam and oyster shell, sherds and projectile points on the embankment (personal communication). An SHPO staff member observed fragments of clam and oyster shell there during a cursory visit to the site on November 3, 1977. The precise location and extent of the original site can only be speculated upon, but is certainly included within the boundaries of this nomination. The object here is to record the location and general nature of the site without a statement of significance, since little information on the site exists.
Because the parkland was reserved before dense building occurred in Washington Heights in the 1920's and 1930's, its natural topography was preserved, the only changes being those to accommodate access roads, pedestrian pathways, sloping lawns, and the structures mentioned above. Although the park's design called for the introduction of more than 1,600 plant species, the overall plan was made to conform with the irregular terrain. The design, moreover, had to take into account the extremely rocky and thin soil. The heather garden along the Promenade at the park entrance is one of the best maintained gardens in the city park system. The greatest use of the park is by pedestrians. In addition to eight miles of pathways, carefully graded stairways and ramps lead up the steep rise of 150 feet from Broadway and Riverside Drive to the overlooks, terraces, gardens and playlawns. On the east ledge of the highest point in the park now surmounted by an outlook and a flagpole, is a bronze plaque erected in 1909 by Mr. Billings in honor of the defense of Fort Tryon.

Below are listed the main structures within the district number-keyed to map references and photographs:

1. The Cloisters
2. Field House
3. Fan Chamber and Shed
4. Shelter (Gazebo)
5. Cafeteria and Administration Building
6. Gatehouse
7. Overlook (Billings Arcade)
8. Flagpole Terrace (Site of Fort Tryon)

The Cloisters and the Parks Department structures were all built between 1933 and 1938. Apart from The Cloisters, which was intended to be the focal point of the park's design, and the cafeteria, visible from Margaret Corbin Drive, the structures are utilitarian and inconspicuously located, serving the public and the Parks Department without interfering with the landscape. The outbuildings are two comfort stations, a subway fan chamber, a gatehouse, a field house and a gazebo-like shelter. These are primarily one-story masonry structures of cut ashlar with stone-framed windows and doors. Some of the buildings include neo-Norman and neo-Gothic details. Other structures serving the landscape scheme are the driveway arcade of the Billings estate and seventy-five foot high underpass cut through solid Manhattan gneiss, which was, when blasted out, used to built
Fort Tryon Park

retaining walls throughout the park.

Building materials for The Cloisters were chosen for their medieval appearance; for the exterior, Connecticut millstone granite, sand sawn, and for the interior, Doria limestone picked to blend with the old stonework. The red roof and floor tiles were inspired by those at Saint-Michel-de-Cuxa, and Belgian paving blocks, from New York City streets, were used for the courtyard and drives. The five-story tower rises above the park creating a landmark visible from all directions. After the tower, the buttressed limestone walls of the Gothic chapel form the most prominent aspect to visitors approaching from the south. The Romanesque chapel from Langon in southern France dominates the west side of the building. In 1961, the twelfth-century Spanish chapel from Fuentiduena was added to the north side. Ramparts that surround both the west and north sides afford vistas of the Hudson River as well as views back over the courtyard and the north side of the building. Outside the rampart walls are dense plantings, including an apple orchard along the southern walls. Within the building are several specialized gardens including a medieval herb garden.

The various cloisters of the museum occupy a unique position architecturally. While enclosed within the building, all but one have open courtyards.

The Cuxa Cloister, which forms the core of The Cloisters structure, is the most notable of the cloisters. Its medieval architectural elements are from the Benedictine monastery of Saint-Michel-de-Cuxa near Prades in the French Pyrenees, one of the most important abbeys in the Roussillon region of southern France and northern Spain in Romanesque times. Dating from about mid-twelfth century, the capitals, carved with plants, grotesque figures and animals, are the most significant elements of the arcades enclosing the courtyard.

The Saint-Guilhem Cloister, at the northwest corner of the structure, has been planned around a series of capitals, shafts, and columns from the cloister of the Benedictine abbey of Saint-Guilhem-le-Desert near Montpellier. The elaborately carved double columns supporting intricate twin capitals date from the late twelfth century. The courtyard is covered over by a skylight which allows natural illumination.
The Trie Cloister, on the south side of the building and adjoining the Bonnefont Cloister, contains capitals on three sides of its arcade which came from the convent of Trie-en-Bigorre near Toulouse. These Gothic capitals, dating between 1484 and 1490, contain religious scenes and coats of arms from families in the area of the convent.

Adjoining the upper level entrance on the east side of the building is the Froville arcade formed by nine, pointed, cusped arches from the fifteenth-century cloister of the Benedictine priory of Froville. Rising above the arcade and forming a clerestory are four pointed-arched fifteenth-century windows from the refectory of the Dominican convent at Sens in Champagne.

The most prominent feature on the north side of the building is the Fuentiduena apse from the Church of San Martin in Fuentiduena in Segovia, dated c. 1157. The semi-circular apse, built of smooth-faced golden limestone, projects from and contrasts with the simple rough-faced wall of the main building. Capitals carved with real and imaginary birds and beasts, are fine examples of the Romanesque vocabulary. These capitals crown the engaged exterior columns and support the window arches. A temporary structure presently covers the apse to protect the stonework from pollution.

An apsidial projection, designed by Collens, effectively encloses the Langon Chapel on the west side of the building. It rises impressively above the West Terrace.

The south facade, which is best seen from the park, presents a striking series of horizontal rooflines accented by several projecting features and dominated by the four-story tower. The Gothic Chapel at the southwest corner is constructed of smooth limestone and was inspired by two thirteenth-century French Gothic chapels. The pointed-arched windows, set between sturdy buttresses, are typical of this early phase of the Gothic style. Adjoining the Gothic Chapel to the east is the Bonnefont Cloister—the only cloister which is visible from the exterior of the building. The prominent pointed-arch arcades, supported on twin columns with capitals, were inspired by Gothic monasteries of the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in Toulouse. The twin capitals of gray-white marble, installed in the two sides of this cloister, originated in the ruins of the abbey of Bonnefont-en-Comminges. From behind the arcades, one looks out into a medieval-style garden. Immediately to the east, rising behind the north wall of the Trie Cloister, are six fifteenth-century stained-glass lancet windows, set within a broad gable, from the Carmelite church at Boppard on the Rhine.
SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD
- PREHISTORIC
- 1400-1499
- 1500-1599
- 1600-1699
- 1700-1799
- 1800-1899
- 1900-

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW
- ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC
- ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC
- COMMUNITY PLANNING
- CONSERVATION
- ECONOMICS
- EDUCATION
- ENGINEERING
- EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT
- INDUSTRY
- INVENTION
- LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE
- LAW
- LITERATURE
- MILITARY
- MUSIC
- PHILOSOPHY
- POLITICS/GOVERNMENT
- RELIGION
- SCIENCE
- SCULPTURE
- SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
- THEATER
- TRANSPORTATION
- OTHER (SPECIFY)

SPECIFIC DATES: The Cloisters: 1935-1938

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The area of Manhattan now known as Fort Tryon Park has attracted human attention from prehistoric times to the present. The Dongan Place shell heap site suggests that Native Americans inhabited the ridge. Also, the park preserves the site of the northern outwork of Fort Washington. The historical interest of the outwork lies more in its association with the Revolutionary War heroine, Margaret Corbin, than in its strategic importance.

Fort Tryon Park is also an area of unusual topographic and scenic beauty. Located high above the Hudson River, it commands dramatic panoramas of the Palisades and lower Hudson River Valley. The rock cliffs, varied terrain and mature hardwoods add to the natural splendor of this park, made all the more unusual for its proximity to one of the most densely populated urban centers. Perhaps it was the ruggedness of terrain more than any other factor that spared this area from dense urban development. By the early part of this century the district of Fort Tryon was still relatively untouched as only several large estates were located on it. It was due to the perspicacity of a single man, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., the leading philanthropist of his time, that this area was preserved. He systematically bought up properties, assembled what is now Fort Tryon Park and donated all the land, with the exception of the four acres on which The Cloisters is presently located, to the City of New York. The development of the land into a public park was sensitively executed by the landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., who meticulously preserved and highlighted the historical and natural features of the land. Mr. Rockefeller's philanthropy did not, however, stop here. Between 1925 and 1938 he was engaged in the designing and building of The Cloisters, a branch of the Metropolitan Museum of Art devoted to the arts of the Middle Ages. Situated on a ridge at the northern part of the park, The Cloisters is the culminating point of interest in the design of Fort Tryon Park. Echoing the monastic architecture of southern France in the twelfth century, The Cloisters incorporates a vast collection or original architectural elements of medieval Europe and houses the foremost collection of medieval art in this country. Sensitive and creative philanthropy on an immense scale, a phenomenon that is uniquely American, preserved in Fort Tryon Park a district of both historic interest and natural beauty, developed an important recreational facility, and created a cultural institution of incomparable value.
The Wiquaskeek Indian tribe held claim to the area now known as Fort Tryon Park as late as the end of the seventeenth century and were among the last tribes in Manhattan to retreat northward. The district remained thickly forested up to the Revolution when it was known as "Forest Hill" although the Dutch had previously settled the area of the Dyckman valley to the north in the early 1700's. "During the Revolution, the hills occupied by Fort Tryon, Fort Washington and Fort George, were cleared of trees, for firewood for the troops and to give openings for artillery and musket fire, but woods remained on them as late as 1855, as shown by conveyances mentioning woodlots thereon. Even as late as 1930, before development of the Park was begun by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., a few acres of woodland, second or third growth, but typical of hardwood forests of this region, with some fine oaks and tulip trees, remained on the northeast corner..."

The Revolutionary War battle redoubt on Forest Hill located about one-half mile north of Fort Washington, although a small two-gun battery, had the advantage of being atop steep sloping rock faces that helped the American garrison to hold out for two hours against the British and Hessian forces under General Knyphausen. The heroic stand of Margaret Corbin there earned her distinction as the first woman soldier and pensioner of the U.S. Government as well as an eventual burial at West Point. Margaret Corbin's courage in that battle has been commemorated by naming the park's main drive and southern plaza in her honor. When Fort Washington fell to the British, Forest Hill was renamed Fort Tryon for William Tryon, last English colonial governor of New York. The British strengthened the fortification and held it until the end of the Revolution. A smaller outpost was built, between 1777 and 1783, on the hilltop to the north, the site now occupied by The Cloisters.

1Raymond H. Torrey, "Fort Tryon Park, A New and Distinctive Unit of the City Park System, of Unusual Scenic and Historic Qualities, Given by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Landscaped by Olmsted Brothers, and Maintained with Sympathetic Understanding by the City Park Department," Scenic and Historic America.- New York: The American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, Vol. IV, No. 3, (May, 1936), 11.


4Raymond H. Torrey, op. cit., p. 15.
At the turn of the century, C.K.G. Billings built what was then one of America's most palatial estates, Tryon Hall. The mansion was designed by Cuy Lowell of Boston in the Louis XIV style and was built directly on the site of the Forest Hill fortification, the highest point in the park. Only its multi-arched driveway off the Henry Hudson Parkway survives today and has been integrated in the park's landscape scheme as a scenic overlook. The Billings property was among those purchased by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., whose plan it was to give to the City of New York the land of this whole area as a public park with provisions for the creation of The Cloisters.

Even before Mr. Rockefeller began to develop this area he acquired strategic pieces of property across the river along eleven miles of the New Jersey Palisades commencing in a northerly direction from the George Washington Bridge. It was his intention to provide an isolated setting for The Cloisters within a park removed from city structures and to assure undisturbed views of the landscape.

Rockefeller combined his keen interest in the land with a desire to build a museum for his great collection of medieval art, the core of which he had acquired from the noted American sculptor George Grey Barnard (1863-1938). Barnard's collection had first opened to the public in 1914 at his private museum, also known as The Cloisters, at 698 Fort Washington Avenue about one-half mile south of the present Cloisters. In 1925 Rockefeller donated funds to the Metropolitan Museum of Art for the purchase of the Barnard collection and building which then opened as a branch of the Metropolitan. In 1931, when Rockefeller presented to the City of New York the 56 acres he had amassed for use as a public park, he specifically set aside four acres deeded to the Metropolitan Museum of Art for the new museum. Rockefeller had since 1927 engaged Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., of the Olmsted Brothers firm to commence the landscaping of the park. In these first years before the gift to the city, Olmsted studied the parks and estates of Europe. The purpose of The Cloisters was "to provide a culminating interest in the architecture of Fort Tryon Park."  

1 An additional 10.5 acres in six parcels, Record map reference, "K," "J," "C," "D," and "E," were acquired or deeded to the park in 1944, 1941, 1936, 1937, and 1935 respectively.
The Cloisters' rocky hilltop is perfectly suited for a museum dedicated to medieval art, as its physical location parallels those of its medieval predecessors, particularly twelfth-century French monastic buildings. Construction on The Cloisters began in April 1935, while Fort Tryon Park opened to the public on October 12 of the same year. Charles Collens of the Boston firm of Allen, Collens and Willis, whom Rockefeller had chosen to design Riverside Church (completed 1930) was the architect for The Cloisters. Collens and James Rorimer, curator of the Department of Medieval Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and later curator of The Cloisters when it opened, conducted extensive studies in southern France to arrive at a proper setting for the medieval architectural sculpture. The modern structure was intended principally to incorporate elements of cloisters from five French monasteries. In addition, the chapter house from Pontaut, stonework from a chapel from Langon and about thirty doorways, windows and other architectural elements from various buildings were to be incorporated into the museum's fabric. By the time the building was completed, Mr. Rockefeller had added to his long list of munificent gifts a great number of important works of art to be housed in the museum, including the late Gothic tapestries depicting the Hunt of the Unicorn.

The Cloisters opened to the public on May 10, 1938 amidst great critical acclaim. At the inaugural ceremony, addresses were delivered by George Blumenthal, the president of the museum, Fiorello LaGuardia, Mayor of New York City, Robert Moses, Commissioner of Parks, and by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Since that date, Fort Tryon Park has been a center for art as well as scenic and historic preservation.
MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES


GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY approx. 66.5

UTM REFERENCES

A
ZONE
EASTING
NORTHING
C
ZONE
EASTING
NORTHING
B
ZONE
EASTING
NORTHING
D
ZONE
EASTING
NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

See Continuation Sheet

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE
CODE
COUNTY
CODE

STATE
CODE
COUNTY
CODE

FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE: edited by:
Elizabeth Spencer-Ralph

ORGANIZATION
Div. for Historic Preservation, Office of Parks and Rec.

ADDRESS
Agency Bldg. #1, Empire State Plaza

TELEPHONE
(518) 474-0479

CITY OR TOWN
Albany

STATE
New York

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL XXX
STATE ___
LOCAL ___

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

DATE
10/7/78

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE


Torrey, Raymond H. "Fort Tryon Park, A New and Distinctive Unit of the City Park System, of Unusual Scenic and Historic Qualities, Given by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Landscaped by Olmsted Brothers, and Maintained with Sympathetic Understanding by the City Parks Department," Scenic and Historic America, New York: The American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, IV, 3 (May, 1936).


"56-Acre Fort Tryon Park Nears Completion ..." The New York Herald Tribune, Sunday, July 23, 1933, 42.

"Revolutionary War Heroine Finally is Given Recognition," The New York Times, Friday, July 8, 1977, 57.


NOTE: Archival materials, unpublished documents and papers on Fort Tryon Park and The Cloisters as well as the George Grey Barnard Archives are available in The Cloisters Library.
Fort Tryon Park  
New York County

UTM References  
(All in Zone 18)

Easting  Northing
A.  590340  4524160
B.  590040  4523500
C.  589960  4523500
D.  589880  4523270
E.  589820  4523300
F.  589820  4523260
G.  589800  4523280
H.  589840  4523240
I.  589610  4523440
J.  590000  4524300

Verbal Boundary Description

The southwestern corner of the district is formed by the conjunction of Riverside Drive and an imaginary extending line extending directly from 192nd Street. Beginning at Riverside Drive this line runs approximately 200 feet to Cabrini Boulevard (formerly Northern Avenue) crosses Cabrini Boulevard and continues approximately 250 feet to Fort Washington Avenue and continues for approximately 250 feet to a point at which the property line turns at approximately an 85 degree angle and runs in a southwesterly direction for approximately 300 feet, then turns due east for approximately 20 feet, and turns east for approximately 150 feet until the line reaches Bennett Avenue. This is the southeastern corner of the district. The eastern boundary then follows Bennett Avenue to its intersection with Broadway. The line then follows the western side of Broadway until the corner of Broadway and Riverside Drive. This is the northeastern corner of the district. The northern boundary is Riverside Drive which curves around the northwestern corner of the district and then becomes its western boundary until the point where this description begins.
With materials and support supplied by:

1) Timothy Husband and
   John Funt
   The Cloisters
   New York, NY

2) The Landmarks Preservation Commission
   305 Broadway
   New York, NY

3) Mr. Robert Hoffman
   30 Magaw Place
   New York, NY 10038

With archeological additions by:

1) Charles Florance
   Division for Historic Preservation
   Office of Parks and Recreation
   Agency Building #1
   Albany, NY 12238
Fort Tryon Park and The Cloisters
New York
New York County

PHOTO KEY FOR THE CLOISTERS

Floor Plan of The Cloisters

Source:
Rorimer, James J. The Cloisters.
pp. 10-11.