

Landmarks Preservation Commission
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LP-0117

FORDHAM UNIVERSITY CHAPEL (ST. JOHN'S CHURCH), Fordham University, Rose Hill Campus, East Fordham Road and East 191st Street, Borough of The Bronx. Completed 1845; architect William Rodrigue. Transept completed 1929; architect Emile Perrot.

Landmark Site: Borough of The Bronx Tax Map Block 3273, Lot 1 in part, consisting of the land on which the described building is situated.

On March 3, 1970, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Fordham University Chapel (St. John's Church) and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 11). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Five witnesses spoke in favor of designation, including Professor Irma B. Jaffe, Chairman of the Department of Fine Arts, who represented the University. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. The Commission also received a letter from Joseph R. Cammarosano, Executive Vice President of the University. Writing on behalf of Rev. Michael P. Walsh, S. J., President of Fordham, Mr. Cammarosano said; "We are delighted to learn that the City's Landmarks Preservation Commission is moving forward with its recommendation to have three of our buildings on the Rose Hill Campus officially designated as Landmarks. We are grateful to you for bringing this good news to our attention, and we shall, of course, be pleased to cooperate with the Commission in any way we can."

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Romantic in feeling, the 19th century Gothic Revival St. John's Church, (formerly known as Our Lady of Mercy), stands in a spacious landscaped setting, where its impressive profile can be admired and viewed to advantage. Constructed of rough hewn stone, it is adjacent to and wholly sympathetic in materials and style to the equally old St. John's Residence Hall; together they frame Queen's Court, formerly the "Old Quad".

The dominant feature of the church is the tall square tower, with large stepped buttresses projecting from the corners and rising above the louvered belfry, to terminate in graceful pinnacles, decorated with crockets and finials. Originally the church was an austere chapel without a transept. In 1928-29, in order to increase its capacity, a large transept was added. Crowning the crossing of the transept and the nave is a heavily decorated copper lantern which features small flying buttresses.

Contributing to the richness of the interior and relieving the simplicity of the exterior are stained glass windows donated by King Louis Philippe of France. The present altar, installed in 1943, came from St. Patrick's Cathedral on Fifth Avenue, where it had served for over sixty years.

Fordham University takes its name from the Manor of Fordham, granted in 1671 to John Archer (Jan Arcer) by the Royal Governor, Francis Lovelace. The manor was a very large tract, later divided into many farms. The site of this campus was known, for almost a century, as the Corser Farm. Benjamin Fletcher Corser, born on the farm, about 1692, was the grandfather of Andrew Corsa (1762-1853) who, as a member of the Westchester Guides, served as a scout for the American and French commands during the Revolution.

Robert Watts (1743-1814) acquired the property in 1787, and it remained in the possession of Robert Watts, Jr., his son, until 1824. The estate was bought in 1836 by Horatio Shepheard Moat, a Brooklyn merchant, and in 1839, by Bishop Hughes, for a seminary for his diocese. The arrangements for a college started at the same time. The University began as St. John's College, Fordham, on June 24, 1841. On that date it was formally opened by the Right Reverend John Hughes, D.D., then Coadjutor-Bishop of New York, and later its first Archbishop. The Reverend John McClosky, subsequently Bishop of Albany, Archbishop of New York and the first American Cardinal, was appointed President. The college opened in September, 1841, with six students. In 1905, the Charter of St. John's College was amended and the institution received the corporate and academic name of Fordham University.

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 Fordham University Chapel (St. John's Church) 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, the Fordham University Chapel (St. John's Church) has intrinsic value as a Gothic Revival building and is executed in fine materials, and that it has historic association with St. John's College, and along with St. John's Residence Hall of 1845, combines to form, in the best tradition of collegiate Gothic architecture, the campus complex known at Fordham as the "Old Quad", or Queen's Court.

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 Fordham University Chapel (St. John's Church), Fordham University, Rose Hill Campus, East Fordham Road and East 191st Street, Borough of The Bronx and designates as its Landmark Site that part of Borough of The Bronx Tax Map Block 3273, Lot 1, which contains the land on which the described building is situated.