

EMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH, 279 Lafayette Avenue, Borough of Brooklyn.  
1887; architect Francis H. Kimball.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 1932, Lot 42W.

On February 8, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Emmanuel Baptist Church and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 61). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Three witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. The Commission has been informed that the Corporate Body of the Emmanuel Baptist Church has voted in favor of the proposed designation.

#### DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Emmanuel Baptist Church, with its square twin towers, resembles a small French cathedral. This imposing structure, monumental in appearance, was inspired by Romanesque and early Gothic prototypes. It occupies a corner lot, and its two richly decorated principal elevations are fully visible from a distance and can be appreciated to the full. The somber and stolid character of this late Nineteenth Century stone edifice is relieved by a varied and fanciful use of carved ornament and structural forms, creating an outstanding example of ecclesiastical architecture.

The Church was organized in 1881, and its construction program was completed in three stages. Before the Chapel was finished in 1883, early services were held in the nearby Adelphi Academy Chapel. The Church, sited North and South on the property with its entrance facing South on Lafayette Avenue, was dedicated in 1887. The New Church School Building adjacent to and west of the front entrance was dedicated in 1927.

The impressive front elevation is skillfully organized. The twin towers which flank the center section have massive stepped buttresses at the corners, which recede as they rise and terminate at the solid parapet walls which crown the towers. Vertically, the towers are divided into five sections, each separated by a band course. The base is plain. The second and third sections each have two round arched windows. The fourth section has a colonnade of arches supported on short columns. Separated by clustered shafts, the belfry has three high, narrow arches with two windows placed one above each other within them. Corbelling enriches the cornice below the parapet wall.

Four dominant elements make up the center section of the front elevation. Three arched and pedimented portals comprise the main entrance at the base. A huge pointed-arch window is centered in the middle section above the doors and a low arcade, with pediment above it, crowns the front. Two engaged columns, which rest on corbels at the spring line of the arch of the window, rise up to the arcade and anchor the ends of the gable. The triple portal is majestic in scale and quality. Each double doorway is flanked by paired banded columns with handsome capitals. The wooden doors have superb curvilinear strap hinges. The tympanum over the central doorway contains a beautiful bas-relief of Christ blessing the children. Carved bands decorate the arches over the doorways, and the gables above them are crowned with large carved finials. The four stained glass windows, in the large arch above the doors, are separated by Gothic shafts which support two arches with round windows above them. They, in turn, support a larger rose window and two small round windows with trefoils all bound together by stone tracery. In the diapered surface of the gable crowning the building is a bas-relief of John the Baptist. Crockets decorate the coping of the pediment, and it is crowned by a large finial.

The east elevation of the Church, anchored between the square tower at the South and the Chapel at the North, has five windows. Separating the windows are large stepped buttresses which are stepped back as they rise and terminate just below the parapet wall, under the eave of the steeply pitched roof. Superbly carved gargoyles project out from the tops of the buttresses. Between the buttresses the windows are separated by a center column and are flanked by columns. They are each surmounted by a small rose window in the upper part of the arch and are crowned by a large gable with finial.

The Chapel, now known as the Emmanuel Christian Center, is located on St. James Place at the northeasterly extremity of the property. The three-story former Chapel flanked by a tower and turrets is more reminiscent of a chateau than a cathedral. With its free use of Romanesque and Gothic forms and details it is decidedly Victorian Gothic in character. This striking facade is dominated by a very large pointed-arch window centered in a high gabled wall. The window arch rising above an ornamented band course at the second floor, contains five narrow stained glass windows at second floor level, a corbelled band course and the main window filling the upper portion of the arch, has tracery of unusual quality. At street level, the doorway, placed left of center, is deeply recessed in a pointed arch. Here double doors, with leaded transom above, are flanked by paired and engaged columns. At the right of the doorway and centered in the smooth faced sandstone is a triple window with pointed arches and leaded sash, between engaged columns, also deeply recessed. A narrow platform with three steps leads up to the door.

The New Church School Building adjoining the front to the west is a dignified two and one-half story structure dedicated in 1927. Solidly constructed of smooth faced stone laid up in random ashlar, it blends very well in character with the main Church. The entrance is set back in the corner of a square forecourt, retained by a low wall at the sidewalk. The doorway, sheltered by a steeply pitched roof covering a stoutly built porch, adds a quaint note of medieval character of the building. On the second floor of the wing abutting the street, is a triple window set in a gable ornamented with crockets and an attractive finial. It is a very handsome feature silhouetted against the slate covered roof.

The Landmarks Preservation Commission recognizes that the Landmark on the property in question (and the Landmark Site) is wholly used for religious and directly related charitable purposes by Emmanuel Baptist Church and that the needs of the Emmanuel Baptist Church for such uses may change in the years ahead, entailing alterations in the existing structures or the creation of other structures on the Landmark Site. By this designation of the Landmark above described and the Landmark Site on which it is located, it is not intended to freeze the structure in its present state or to prevent future appropriate alterations needed to meet changed requirements of use for religious and directly related charitable purposes. The Commission believes it has the obligation and, indeed, it has the desire to cooperate with owners of Landmarks who may wish to make changes in their properties. In this connection the Commission wishes to state at this time that it recognizes that the Emmanuel Baptist Church may want to erect new buildings on its grounds in the future. The Commission recognizes that the Emmanuel Baptist Church may also wish to make exterior alterations to its existing buildings. The Commission looks forward to working with the representatives of the Emmanuel Baptist Church when the Church desires to erect new buildings on its grounds or to make exterior alterations on its existing buildings.

### 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 Emmanuel Baptist 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 Emmanuel Baptist Church is an outstanding example of ecclesiastical architecture derived from Romanesque and Gothic prototypes, that with its impressive twin towers it resembles a small French cathedral, that in the massing of its structural features it is monumental in appearance and distinguished in character and that it lends great architectural prestige and dignity to the community.

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 Emmanuel Baptist Church, 279 Lafayette Avenue, Borough of Brooklyn and designates Tax Map Block 1932, Lot 42W, Borough of Brooklyn as its Landmark Site.