

Landmarks Preservation Commission
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ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH AND COMMUNITY HOUSE, 109 East 50th Street, Borough of Manhattan. Church begun 1917, completed 1919; architect Bertram G. Goodhue (porch by McKim, Mead & White); Community House completed 1928, B. G. Goodhue Associates, architects.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1305, Lot 1.

On May 10, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of St. Bartholomew's Church and Community House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 28). Two witnesses spoke in favor of designation. This hearing was continued to subsequent hearings of the Commission. The public hearing on St. Bartholomew's Church and Community House was closed on January 31, 1967. (Item No. 9). The hearings had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There were no speakers in opposition to the designation at any hearing.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Imposing in mass, striking in appearance and in form, this impressive Church occupies a prominent Park Avenue site where it sits enthroned in all its splendor. One of the most striking features of St. Bartholomew's is its polychromy produced by the attractive blending of salmon colored brick with greyish limestone, marble, and tiles of various hues. The inspiration for the dome is undoubtedly Byzantine and derives more particularly from adaptations of the Byzantine style in Venice.

St. Bartholomew's Church is built on a Latin cross plan and owes its basic architectural characteristics to Byzantine models. A high arched central portal is framed by two lower arched side doors. A frieze of low relief sculpture, resting on slender columns, unifies these three openings. The bronze doors, whose panels depict Old and New Testament themes, are considered by many critics to be the finest of their kind in the City. The clerestory walls of the nave rise high above the comparatively narrow side aisles and are pierced for almost their entire length by large, round-arched windows. A beautiful rose window, with intricate tracery, lights the south wall of the shallow transept. Over the crossing, atop a high drum, sits the octagonal dome sheathed with tiles and marbles in highly colored and intricate designs. When this handsome dome glitters in the sun, its brilliance offers a glowing contrast to its surroundings.

St. Bartholomew's Church was organized in 1835. Its first site was at Lafayette Place and Great Jones Street. In 1872 they moved to their second home at Madison Avenue and 44th Street, where they remained until the erection of the present edifice, in 1918. The congregation includes some of the City's most prominent families.

The construction of St. Bartholomew's was begun in 1917 according to the plans of Bertram G. Goodhue. Goodhue incorporated in his new building the beautiful Romanesque porch then part of the church at Madison Avenue and 44th Street. This porch, designed by McKim, Mead & White, was given by his family as a memorial to Cornelius Vanderbilt II. Its model was the much admired portico of the Church of St. Gilles du Gard at Arles, in southern France, one of the earliest Romanesque examples of the grouping of three doorways into a single composition. Royal Cortissoz, the famous art critic, has called the portal of St. Bartholomew's Church one of the most noble works of its kind in modern times.

In 1926, Mayers, Murray & Phillip, associates of B. G. Goodhue, drew the plans for the adjoining terraced Community House which was completed in 1928. Although the style of this building is well suited to its functional requirements, it harmonizes with the Church through the use of the same warm-colored building materials, the continuation of the limestone band courses from the Church and chapel, and the interspersing of decorative details similar in character and scale to those used in construction of the main house of worship. These same architects put up the present dome in 1930 when the Church was completed.

The Landmarks Preservation Commission recognizes that the Landmark and the Landmark Site are used by St. Bartholomew's Church for religious and charitable purposes and that, in the future, the Church may consider it necessary to alter or expand the existing structures or erect additional structures on the Landmark Site. By this designation of the Landmark and Landmark Site, it is not intended to freeze the structures in their present state or to prevent the alteration or expansion of existing structures or the erection of other structures needed to meet the Church's requirements in the future. The Commission believes it has the obligation and it has the desire to cooperate with owners of Landmarks in such situations and looks forward to working with representatives of St. Bartholomew's Church should such contingencies occur.

The Commission is also aware that several times in the past, due to changes in the character of the neighborhoods in which its Church has been situated, St. Bartholomew's Church has found it necessary to dispose of its Church structures and erect others elsewhere. The Commission recognizes that such a condition may recur making it advisable for St. Bartholomew's to dispose of the Landmark and Landmark Site and that the proceeds of the sale of the Landmark and Landmark Site will be required in order to effect a relocation. In that event, the Commission will give due consideration and act promptly in accordance with the provisions of the Landmarks Preservation Law.

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 St. Bartholomew's Church and Community House have 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, St. Bartholomew's Church and Community House are handsome modern versions of Romanesque and Byzantine architecture, that the unusual use of polychromy in their building materials makes them outstanding in New York, that their decorations include significant works of art and that the Church and the Community House are outstanding examples of this style of architecture in the United States.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 8-A 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 St. Bartholomew's Church and Community House, 109 East 50th Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1305, Lot 1, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.