

HOLY TRINITY CHURCH AND ST. CHRISTOPHER HOUSE (Rhineland Memorial), 312-316 East 88th Street, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1897; architects Barney & Chapman.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1550, Lot 35.

On November 10, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Holy Trinity Church and St. Christopher House (Rhineland Memorial) and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 65). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Two witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. The Rector of Holy Trinity Church has expressed approval of the proposed designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The bell-tower of Holy Trinity Church is without question one of the most beautiful in New York City. Dominating the remarkable group of buildings of which it is a part, the tower is an outstanding example of the French Gothic spirit adapted to a late Nineteenth Century brick and terra-cotta religious structure.

Holy Trinity Church and Parish House (St. Christopher House) together with the Parsonage occupy a plot on the south side of East 88th Street having 175 feet street frontage and 100 feet in depth. Due to the restricted area and unusual shape of the plot, the architects' ingenuity was taxed to the utmost to find a satisfactory arrangement for the three units, allowing full individuality to each, while relating them functionally to the whole ensemble. This was accomplished in a masterly fashion by making the main axis of the church which is in the form of a Latin cross, parallel with the street, placing the parsonage directly adjacent to the chancel and connecting the church, by a cloistered walk, with the Parish House located at the extreme westerly end of the plot.

The church entrance is at the west end in the base of the handsome bell tower which is twenty feet square and 150 feet high. This tower is accented vertically on four sides by three open belfry slots each one consisting of deeply revealed concentric Gothic arches. It terminates in a cluster of turrets, pinnacles and dormers and is crowned by a simple eight-sided spire. At the main entrance, deeply revealed arches, above the doors in the Gothic manner, display groups of sculptured figures while the tympanum above the doors depicts the Trinity and saints, all executed by the distinguished sculptor, Karl Bitter.

St. Christopher House, the first unit of this complex to be built, containing a gymnasium, club rooms and auditorium, looked like a French Renaissance Chateau of the Loire Valley, but it complemented the French Gothic Church extremely well. Three large arches grace a recessed ground floor porch which is repeated on the second floor, while steep roofs intercepted by pinnacled dormers grow out of the remodelled face of the building at third floor height. All sculptural and decorative features on this group of buildings are of terra-cotta, while the Roman brick is of a mottled golden brown, and was made especially for this project.

The present complex was built in 1897, a gift of Miss Serena Rhineland as a memorial to her grandfather and her father, William C. Rhineland. Designed by architects Barney & Chapman, who had just completed a similar church group for Grace Church on East 14th Street, the many ideas initiated there were carried to full fruition in Holy Trinity. The buildings occupy a portion of the old Rhineland Farm, purchased in 1798 by the first William Rhineland.

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 Holy Trinity Church and St. Christopher House (Rhineland Memorial) has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

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The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, this complex of Ecclesiastical buildings, Holy Trinity Church and St. Christopher House (Rhineland Memorial), presents a most interesting and homogeneous group, admirably unified in its architectural distinction, that the placing of the church parallel to the street is most unusual, that the church tower, as it dominates the entire composition, is an outstanding example of the French Gothic spirit, adapted to the late Nineteenth Century building materials of brick and terra-cotta and that this group is an impressive memorial which continues to serve the religious purpose for which it was built.

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 the Holy Trinity Church and St. Christopher House (Rhineland Memorial), 312-316 East 88th Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1550, Lot 35, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.
