

Landmarks Preservation Commission
November 25, 1980 Designation List 138
LP-1081

ST. JAMES' EPISCOPAL CHURCH, 2500 Jerome Avenue, Borough of The Bronx.
Built 1864-1865, architect Henry Dudley; parish house, built 1891-92,
architect Henry Kilburn.

Landmark Site: Borough of The Bronx, Tax Map Block 3190, Lot 1.

On July 12, 1979, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of St. James' Episcopal Church and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 10). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provision of law. One witness spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

St. James' Episcopal Church, a picturesque stone building designed in 1863 for a rural parish in what was then a part of Westchester County, is among New York City's finest Gothic Revival style religious structures. The design of St. James', resembling that of a medieval English parish church, reflects the major philosophical movement in mid-19th century Episcopal church design known as ecclesiology. English emigré Henry Dudley, a leading architect of the ecclesiological movement in North America, designed one of his finest churches for the congregation of St. James'. The church is now located in a heavily urbanized section of the Bronx, only one block north of commercial Fordham Road. However, with its landscaped grounds situated beside St. James Park, the church is one of the few surviving reminders of the period when this part of New York City was largely farms and country estates.

In 1853, the year that St. James' was incorporated, the manor of Fordham, within the township of West Farms, in Westchester County, consisted almost entirely of old family farms and newer country estates. The country villas, such as that of Gustav Schwab, which still stands on the campus of Bronx Community College, began to be built in the mid-19th century, mainly by wealthy New York City businessmen who found the peaceful environment and the dramatic panorama afforded by the heights overlooking the Harlem River to be particularly attractive. It was primarily the wealthy villa residents who had recently moved to Fordham who sought to organize an Episcopal Church in the area and who supported the church throughout the 19th century.

St. James' Protestant Episcopal Church was officially incorporated on July 20, 1853. The fledgling congregation held services in the Reformed Dutch Church of Fordham, which, at the time, was without a minister. On April 15, 1854, the vestry of St. James' authorized the acquisition of an acre of land on the corner of Fourth Avenue and Croton Avenue (now Jerome

Avenue and East 190th Street), that had formerly been part of a large farm owned by Peter Valentine.¹ Shortly thereafter the congregation purchased, for \$90.00, a small wooden school house. They moved the old school to the new site, altered it for religious use, and began holding services in it on June 11, 1854.² By 1860 the congregation had outgrown the former school house and in October the vestry "Resolved that a Committee be appointed to procure plans for a church edifice and ascertain cost of erection."³

Plans for a new church remained dormant until July, 1863, when the Committee on Plans was "requested to call upon Mr. Withers architect in relation to a church building to hold about 350 persons."⁴ Frederick Clarke Withers (1828-1901) was a leading practitioner of the Gothic Revival in America during the 19th century. He designed a large number of Episcopal churches, such as the Chapel of the Good Shepherd on Roosevelt Island, but his choice as architect for St. James' seems odd since Withers had just received a medical discharge from the Union army and had not worked as an architect for a number of years. It is not known if Withers submitted designs for St. James', but, due to the fact that his wife had died on July 1, 1863, this seems unlikely.

In September, 1863 the vestry appointed George W. Devoe, a committee of one "to get an Architect to draw up plans of a church...to cost not over \$12,000."⁶ In October, Devoe reported that he had procured a general plan from the architectural firm of Dudley & Diaper.⁷ These plans were accepted by the vestry,⁸ and on May 28, 1864, the cornerstone of Dudley's Gothic Revival style church was laid.

Henry Dudley was a major figure in mid-19th century Gothic Revival style church design in America. In 1851 he immigrated to New York from England to become the partner of Frank Wills, the leading spokesman for ecclesiology in North America.⁹ The ecclesiological movement originated in England in the 1830s. Largely through the efforts of the Cambridge Camden Society, the classical styles and the fanciful Gothic style practiced by church architects of the 18th and early 19th centuries were replaced by a more dogmatic style that drew its inspiration from medieval Gothic style parish churches. This architectural development was part of a larger movement away from the secular quality of religion during the Georgian period towards a more doctrinaire view of Christianity. The architectural pronouncements of the Cambridge Camden Society had a tremendous influence on the restoration of old churches and on the design of new churches in England in the 19th century.

Primarily through the efforts of English-born architects such as Richard Upjohn, Frank Wills, and Henry Dudley, ecclesiological principles also influenced American church design, although American architects and patrons were never as doctrinaire as their English counterparts. In 1848 the New York Ecclesiological Society was founded to further ecclesiological teachings in America. The new society began to publish a journal, the New York Ecclesiologist, which was the first periodical in America principally devoted to architecture and design issues.¹⁰ Frank Wills was the official architect of the New York Ecclesiological Society and the leading architectural spokesman and critic for its magazine. It was largely through Wills' articles that ecclesiological principles were spread throughout the United States. Wills had trained in Exeter, England, before moving to Canada in 1846 to assist the Right Reverend John Medley, First

Bishop of New Brunswick, in the design of a cathedral in Fredericton. He was, according to Phoebe Stanton, a "young, trained, but relatively untried architect," who had been strongly influenced by English ecclesiological ideas.¹¹ Some time prior to May 1848, Wills left Canada for New York¹² and immediately became active in the formation of the New York Ecclesiological Society. By 1851 Wills' career was successful enough to allow him to enter into a partnership with Henry Dudley, "an English gentleman, who for twenty years past has been engaged in the erection of many of our best churches in England."¹³ Dudley was an extremely prolific architect who designed a large number of churches, either in association with Wills, on his own, or during a short-lived partnership with Frederick Diaper (lasting from c.1862 to c.1868). It was during his association with Diaper that Dudley was commissioned to design St. James' Episcopal Church. Diaper was not a church architect and probably had little or nothing to do with the St. James' design. In December, 1865, the vestry of St. James' tendered its thanks to "Mr. Dudley for his services as Architect"; no mention was made of Diaper at that time.¹⁴

The church building designed by Dudley for the congregation of St. James' closely follows the ideas on ecclesiology espoused by the New York Ecclesiological Society in the late 1840s and 1850s. The New York Ecclesiological Society was particularly concerned with the introduction of good design to American ecclesiastical architecture. A major issue was that a church building be honest in its use of materials. The Society was adamant in its condemnation of inexpensive materials that were used to imitate more costly materials - particularly plaster that was painted to look like stone or used to create false ribs and vaults. This belief in the honest use of materials had been espoused in England by the influential architect and theorist Augustus Welby Pugin and was to become one of the major philosophical ideas in the development of the picturesque in America, particularly after the publication of Andrew Jackson Downing's The Architecture of Country Houses in 1850.

Related to this belief in the clear and honest use of materials, is the idea that each interior portion of a church should be expressed on the exterior in a clear and straightforward manner. Thus, in good church design, the nave, side aisles, chancel, entrance porch, transepts, and other interior spaces would be clearly delineated on the exterior. Other, more doctrinal considerations also came into play in the design of an ecclesiologically correct church. These included the correct orientation of the church on an east-west axis, the size and importance of the chancel, the steep slope of the roof, the use of fully developed transepts as opposed to short, stubby transepts, and the placement of the entrance porch on the southwest corner of the building. These considerations, however, were seen as being secondary to the honest design and construction of the building.

At St. James', Dudley carefully followed ecclesiological ideas concerning church architecture, creating a simple, beautifully massed structure that is truly representative of the finest mid-19th century Gothic Revival design. The church is oriented with the front facade facing west and the chancel extending to the east. The building is constructed of stone with timber arcades and an open-beamed ceiling on the interior. The nave, side aisles, chancel and south transepts are all clearly delineated on the exterior; the nave is capped by a steep sloping roof; and the main entrance is through a porch set at the southwest corner of the building.

St. James' Episcopal Church is constructed of "native stone" laid in a random manner with lighter red sandstone trim enframing the windows and doorway openings.¹⁵ The church is generally modeled after a small Early English style parish church with simple detailing and lancet windows. The front facade is rather austere with a tall, steep nave crowned by a cross. The nave front is articulated by a centrally-placed pointed-arched entrance, a large rose window, and a small rounded window. Stepped buttresses separate the nave from the lower side aisles, each of which is pierced by a single lancet and marked by an end buttress.

The composition of the south facade of St. James' most clearly reflects ecclesiological concerns. From the south, one can view all of the carefully interrelated, but clearly delineated masses of the church - the nave, side aisle, transept, chancel, and entrance porch - that indicate the sophistication of Henry Dudley's design. The wooden entrance porch, which replaces an earlier porch, is set into the first bay of the buttressed, three-bay long, south side aisle. A small open bell cote, probably added late in the 19th century, is located on the aisle roof, just above the entrance porch.¹⁶ A substantial transept with lancet windows on all three faces, and a rose window and pointed segmental-arched door on its south front, projects from the nave and side aisle. This transept visually separates the nave and side aisle from the low polygonal chancel with its lancet openings. All of the roof slopes of the church retain their slate shingles. On the north facade of the church is a three-bayed side aisle and a parish house added to the building in 1891.

Although St. James' is representative of the mid-19th century Gothic Revival, some of its detailing reflects the Victorian Gothic movement that was just beginning to influence American ecclesiastical design in the early 1860s. The sandstone enframements of the various openings lend a subtle polychromy to the facade. Dudley's use of this low-keyed polychromatic effect appears again in his work in 1865 at the Church of the Ascension in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, where the surrounds of the lancets on the front facade are subtly banded with a stone that contrasts with that of the main mass of the building. Also reflective of a growing awareness of High Victorian design are various idiosyncratic facade details, particularly the eccentric angle of the break between the nave and side aisles, and the gablets that appear near the peak of the roof ridges of the nave and the transept facades.

Although the interior is not under consideration for designation, it follows ecclesiological principles in a particularly fine manner and is worthy of note. Among the finest elements of the interior are the pointed-arch arcade with its hexafoil spandrels and quatrefoil frieze, the ornate cross vaults, the simple side aisle arches, the chancel roof ornamented with stars, the encaustic-tile chancel floor, and the superb stained-glass windows. Some of the stained-glass windows, such as those in the chancel which represent the Evangelists and were manufactured at the Royal Stained Glass Factory at Munich, were placed in the church when it opened in 1865.¹⁷ Others were added as memorials in later years; many were designed by Tiffany Studios. The finest of the Tiffany windows is a superb floral window entitled "Lillies and Apple Blossoms" located in the second bay of the north aisle and given in memory of Julia Wheeler Tiffany, wife of Charles C. Tiffany, third rector of the church. Also of note is a rectangular Tiffany window in the north side aisle added to the building in 1889. This window, which is a copy of DaVinci's "Last Supper," is a memorial to Gustav Schwab, one of the leading members of the congregation.

In February, 1889, the vestry of St. James' discussed the need for a stone parish house to replace the decaying wooden Sunday School building (the old District School). In May, 1891, they "resolved to contract for Parish House at cost not exceeding \$17,600."¹⁸ Architect Henry Kilburn (1844-1905) was commissioned to design the parish house which was to extend from the north front of the church. A major portion of Kilburn's practice involved the design of churches, two of the finest being the Park Presbyterian Church (now the West Park Presbyterian Church) on Amsterdam Avenue and West 86th Street and the West End Presbyterian Church on Amsterdam Avenue and West 105th Street. For St. James', Kilburn designed a Gothic Revival style structure that blends with the original church building. The parish house has a rock-faced stone facade and a recessed porch with pointed-arch openings supported by boldly carved foliate capitals. In 1959, a one-story brick addition for use as offices, was attached to the north side of the parish house.

St. James' Episcopal Church has remained a major visual feature of the Fordham area of the Bronx for well over 100 years. The church has witnessed the transformation of the area from an outlying rural section of the city to a heavily built-up urban center. Presently the population of the neighborhood is changing and the church is being vitalized by the addition of new members who have recently moved to the area from the West Indies. This new membership will keep St. James' closely attuned to local concerns and assures that St. James' Church will remain a vital part of the Fordham community.

Report Prepared by:
Andrew S. Dolkart
Senior Landmarks Preservation
Specialist
Research Department

Typing done by:
Barbara Sklar

FOOTNOTES

1. St. James' Church, "Vestry Minutes," April 15, 1854.
2. St. James' Church Fordham, New York, N.Y.: The First One Hundred Years 1853-1953 (1953), p. 10.
3. "Vestry Minutes," October 10, 1860.
4. "Vestry Minutes" July 23, 1863.
5. Francis R. Kowsky, The Architecture of Frederick Clarke Withers and the Progress of the Gothic Revival in America After 1850 (Middleton, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1980), p. 59.
6. "Vestry Minutes," September 16, 1863.
7. "Vestry Minutes," October 6, 1863.
8. "Vestry Minutes," October 23, 1863.
9. For a detailed discussion of ecclesiology and its influence on the Gothic Revival in America, see Phoebe Stanton, The Gothic Revival and American Church Architecture (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1968).
10. Stanton, p. 161.
11. Stanton, p. 130.
12. Stanton, p. 132.
13. Stanton, p. 286.
14. "Vestry Minutes," December 5, 1865.
15. St. James' Church...First One Hundred Years, p. 11.
16. The bell cote does not appear in early photographs of the church.
17. St. James' Church...First One Hundred Years, p. 11. These windows were the gift of Gustav Schwab.
18. "Vestry Minutes," May 20, 1891.

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. James' Episcopal 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 St. James' Episcopal Church is an extremely fine example of a mid-19th century Gothic Revival style church; that it reflects the tenets of the philosophy of ecclesiology which was a major influence on the design of Episcopal churches in England and in North America; that its architect, Henry Dudley, a major figure in the ecclesiological movement, designed St. James' Church with clearly delineated building sections which exemplify ecclesiological principals; that it has stained-glass windows of outstanding quality, some designed by Tiffany Studios; and that the church is one of the few local reminders of the period when this section of the Bronx was a rural part of Westchester County.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21 (formerly 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 St. James' Episcopal Church. Borough of the Bronx and designates Tax Map Block 3190, Lot 1, Borough of the Bronx, as its Landmark Site.

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ST. JAMES' EPISCOPAL CHURCH
2500 Jerome Avenue
Built: 1864-65

Photo Credit: Landmarks Preservation
Commission

Architect: Henry Dudley