

Tremont Baptist Church, 324 East Tremont Avenue, Bronx.
Built 1904-1912; Architect, William H. Birkmire.

Landmark Site: Borough of the Bronx Tax Map Block 2803, Lot 26.

On December 14, 1999, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Tremont Baptist Church, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 4). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Three witnesses spoke in favor of the designation, including representatives of the Bronx Landmarks Task Force, the Historic Districts Council, and the New York Landmarks Conservancy. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. A letter was received from Adolfo Carrion, Jr., Council Member, 14th District, in support of the designation. The congregation has expressed its support for the designation.

Summary

The Tremont Baptist Church, a noteworthy example of a neo-medieval auditorium church, is located in the west central Bronx neighborhood of Mount Hope, which is part of the larger Tremont section of the borough. Construction began in 1904, at a time when the population of the Bronx was growing rapidly and the Baptist denomination's influence in New York City was increasing. Construction of the church was phased: the foundation and basement were finished in 1906, while the upper part of the church was built in 1911-12. During the intervening years, services were held in the basement. The church was an unusual commission for its architect, William H. Birkmire, who usually designed commercial buildings, many of which are found in the Ladies Mile and Tribeca Historic Districts. For the church, Birkmire chose a picturesque version of the neo-Gothic style, based on the French- and Norman-influenced Early English Gothic style. The Tremont Baptist Church was organized in 1884, during the early suburbanization of this section of the Bronx. The church's current East Tremont Avenue site is its third location in the neighborhood. Early on, the church defined itself as a major social institution in the Tremont neighborhood, establishing many activities mainly for young people. These programs were strengthened and expanded during the 1970s and 1980s; today, the church remains a cornerstone in the neighborhood. The church building sits prominently upon a sloping site that follows the curve of East Tremont Avenue. It is polygonal in plan with an offset tower at its southeast corner. The main facades and the tower are faced in rough-cut gray marble ashlar. The church has five buttressed bays, consisting of intersecting, angled gables that follow the curve of East Tremont Avenue. The bays contain pointed-arch window openings, situated in smooth marble surrounds, featuring stained glass, tracery, and cusping. The church's imposing gray marble exterior, steeply sloping roof, crenellated tower, and remarkable intactness enhance its visual prominence in the neighborhood.



DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

History of the Neighborhood¹

The Tremont Baptist Church is located in the west central Bronx neighborhood of Mount Hope that is part of the larger Tremont section. The land, which once belonged to the Morris family, was farmed well into the nineteenth century. In 1841, the New York and Harlem Railroad opened a station at what is now East Tremont Avenue near Park Avenue; a small village subsequently developed around the station. Many German and Irish immigrant families settled in the area in the mid to late nineteenth century. Churches serving these populations - Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist, Congregationalist, as well as Baptist, followed these congregants. Improvements in transportation made by the early 1890s - a trolley line on Tremont Avenue, a new subway station at nearby West Farms, and the extension of the Third Avenue elevated line - spurred residential development, consisting primarily of detached houses. Around the turn of the century, Jews from the Lower East Side and Italians from East Harlem and Little Italy joined Tremont's existing German and Irish population.

When the New York Baptist Mission Society acquired the church site on East Tremont Avenue in October 1902, the neighborhood immediately surrounding the site consisted mainly of freestanding houses on large lots, although scattered groups of row houses had been built mostly north of the area toward Burnside Avenue, about three blocks away. Industrial buildings were found to the east, surrounding the New York and Harlem Railroad tracks on Park Avenue, while the neighborhood's commercial core, which included most of the area's churches, was located on Washington Avenue, one block east of Park Avenue.²

The population of New York City grew tremendously in the first decades of the twentieth century; by 1925, more than one million people inhabited the Bronx; most were crowded into the southern part of the borough including Tremont. During this period, six-story apartment buildings were replacing existing two- and three-story, detached residences. They were quickly filled by immigrant families, attracted to Tremont by its reasonable rents, easy access to jobs in Manhattan via the Third Avenue El and the IRT Subway, and the green respite of nearby Crotona Park. Apartment house construction and population growth continued into the 1930s.

Following the Second World War, the farms and countryside surrounding New York City were transformed into suburban residential areas made accessible by newly-constructed highways and

parkways. Tremont's existing residents, overwhelmingly of European extraction and increasingly prosperous, began a slow but steady exodus from the neighborhood. They were replaced by African-Americans and Puerto Ricans of lesser means. At the same time, New York City's manufacturing base began to decline, removing a major source of jobs for area residents.³ Redlining by banks in the 1960s, New York City's fiscal crisis in the 1970s, and disinvestment by landlords led to the deterioration of many apartment buildings.

The neighborhood's worst blow occurred in 1959, however, when Commissioner Robert Moses routed the Cross Bronx Expressway through Tremont, which required the demolition of hundreds of apartments and separated much of Tremont from Crotona Park. Fortunately, the neighborhood immediately surrounding the Tremont Baptist Church, four blocks north of the Cross Bronx, was spared this devastation, enabling the parish to continue its ministry to area residents. Renovation of existing apartment buildings and the construction of new housing began in the 1980s, spurred by New York City's ten-year, \$5.1 billion program to create affordable housing. This, along with community activism by motivated residents and local clergy, led to Tremont's resurgence, which has continued through the 1990s.

The History of New York City Baptists and the Tremont Baptist Church⁴

The earliest-known Baptist activity in the province of New Netherland took place in what is now Flushing, Queens, in 1657 when a preacher from Rhode Island, William Wickendon, baptized several residents in a local stream. Wickendon was banished from the province shortly thereafter. Nicholas Ayres organized the earliest Baptist congregation in Manhattan in 1724. Meetings were held at Ayres's home until a meeting house was built a few years later. In 1732, a trustee of the church claimed the meeting house as his property, and the congregation was dissolved. The first permanent Baptist congregation was the First Baptist Church of New York, which was established in 1762 and built a meeting house on Gold Street a few years later. Other congregations eventually followed, including the Abyssinian Baptist Church (1808), which was made up of free black worshippers who were former members of the Gold Street church.⁵ The first organization of Baptist churches in greater New York was formed in 1791 by three congregations from the city, three from New Jersey, and one from Long Island.

Eventually, this body became the Southern New York and the Long Island Baptist Association. New York City developed into a center for national Baptist organizations during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Several were founded here, including the Baptist Female Missionary Society (1806), the Baptist Sunday School Society (1816), the American Baptist Home Mission Society (1832), the Baptist Widows and Orphans Fund (1839), the Northern Baptist Convention (1907), and the Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board (1911).⁶ The New York Baptist Mission Society, incorporated in 1893, conducted mission work throughout the city; the Society also helped to form new Baptist congregations and to expand others by purchasing land for new churches, such as for the Tremont Baptist Church, and then deeding the land to the congregations.

The Tremont Baptist Church, located in the Mount Hope section of the Bronx, was organized on April 9, 1884 by twenty-three local residents. The first pastor was the Reverend Frank Fletcher. The church descended from the Mount Hope Mission that was founded in 1864.⁷ Its original location was the Mount Hope Chapel at 176th Street and Monroe Avenue, about three blocks from the present church. In 1885, the church relocated to Washington Avenue between 175th and 176th Streets, about four blocks from the present church. It remained at the Washington Avenue site until the church building opened in 1906.⁸ The church's membership grew rapidly during the last decade of the nineteenth century as the surrounding residential neighborhood developed, and by the turn of the century had outgrown the Washington Avenue building. Under the leadership of Pastor Alvah E. Knapp, the congregation embarked on a campaign to construct a new, larger church. With the assistance of the New York Baptist Mission Society, the church acquired the present site of the church on East Tremont Avenue at 176th Street in 1903. Construction of the church began soon thereafter; however, available funds permitted the only immediate completion of the basement; services were held here until the superstructure was completed in 1912 under Pastor Knapp's successor, the Reverend Kenneth C. MacArthur. The church's stained glass windows were installed over time and were dedicated to various members and pastors

The church reached its peak membership of 261 in 1927-28, during the pastorate of the Reverend Lester Simon, who led the church for 31 years, from 1919 to 1950. Many church activities were organized under his leadership: the Helpers' Society, Girl Reserves, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Fidelis Society, World Wide

Guild, Fellowship Circle, Sunday Night Club, Extension League, Mission Study Class, Young Peoples' Dramatics, Prayer League, King's Daughters, Men's Bible Class, Greystone Club, Christian Endeavor, and the Young Worshipers' League.

The church lost membership after World War Two, as the population shifted out of the neighborhood, but it continued building improvements, such as the redecoration of the sanctuary, into the 1960s. The church was reorganized in the early 1970s, under the direction of the pastor, the Reverend Dr. John Robinson, Jr. As a result of his efforts to strengthen the church's programs and to further extend its ministry into the community, church membership steadily grew. The church focused on young people by establishing a youth organization which offered a choir, after-school programs, and tutoring. The church's social programs have been complimented by a concern with maintaining its physical structure. Dr. Robinson and the congregation raised funds for the restoration of the church's stained glass windows.

Further improvements have been made under the Reverend Sylvanus Jarrett, who succeeded Dr. Robinson in 1976. These include alterations in the sanctuary to accommodate program changes, improvements in security, and repairs to the pipe organ, and the formation of new programs.⁹ The church was incorporated and its by-laws amended in 1989 to admit twelve elected trustees. That year, the church purchased the adjacent lot from the City of New York for parking. Site improvements, including a pedestrian bridge and walkway from the back of the church to the parking lot, were made in the 1990s. The church's stone facades were repointed in 1998. As a result of the congregation's continuing efforts, the Tremont Baptist Church remains an important social and physical presence in the neighborhood.

Design and Construction of the Church¹⁰

In October 1902, the New York City Baptist Mission Society acquired a plot of land along the curve of East Tremont Avenue at East 176th Street from Henry A. Koelsch, upon which the new Tremont Baptist Church would be built.¹¹ At the time, the site was occupied by a large frame house and a smaller outbuilding, which were subsequently demolished. The church's construction plans were made public in August 1903, when it was announced that Manhattan architect, William H. Birkmire, had been engaged to design the building. Plans were filed on February 23, 1904, and building commenced on June 10, 1904.¹² Construction of the church was phased: the foundation and basement were finished first in 1906, while the upper part of the

building was not completed until 1911-1912.¹³ Between the completion of the basement in 1906 and the resumption of construction in 1911, the congregation gradually raised the additional funds needed to finish the building. Bids for the completion of the church were requested in August 1910, but building did not commence again until October 1911, with Birkmire remaining the architect of record.

For the church, which was completed on August 31, 1912, Birkmire chose a picturesque version of the neo-Gothic style, based on the French- and Norman-influenced Early English Gothic style,¹⁴ and an auditorium plan for the church. The neo-Gothic style was widely employed in the design of a large variety of building types in the United States, including churches, college campuses, and office buildings beginning in the 1890s and lasting well into the twentieth century.

The earliest phase of the Gothic Revival style in the United States began in the 1830s and lasted through the 1850s. It was popular for domestic and ecclesiastical architecture, such as the George Hastings House (1846, Richard Upjohn), at 36 Pierrepont Street in the Brooklyn Heights Historic District, St. Patrick's Cathedral (1853-88, James Renwick, Jr., a designated NYC Landmark) in Manhattan, and the Peter S. Hoe House, Sunnyslope (c.1860, a designated NYC Landmark) at 812 Faile Street, the Bronx. The next phase of this style, the polychromatic or High Victorian Gothic, was popular for civic architecture from the mid 1860s through the 1880s. Examples include the Jefferson Market Courthouse (1874-77, Vaux & Withers) at 425 Sixth Avenue in the Greenwich Village Historic District and St. Paul's Memorial Church (Episcopal) and Rectory (1866-70, Edward T. Potter, a designated NYC Landmark) at 217-225 St. Pauls Avenue, Staten Island. Following the High Victorian Gothic period, the neo-Gothic style was widely employed in ecclesiastical, collegiate, and commercial architecture. Examples of neo-Gothic buildings in New York City include, in addition to the Tremont Baptist Church, the Union Theological Seminary (1906-07, Allen and Collins, a designated NYC Landmark, in part) on Morningside Heights, the City College Campus (1897-1930, George B. Post and George B. Post and Sons, a designated NYC Landmark, in part) on Convent Avenue in Manhattan, and the Trinity and United States Realty Company Buildings (1904-07, Francis H. Kimball, designated NYC Landmarks) at 111 and 115 Broadway in Manhattan.

The auditorium church plan became enormously popular with evangelical Protestant congregations, such as Methodists, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Baptists in the 1880s and 1890s. However, by the time

the Tremont Baptist Church was completed in 1912, its popularity was subsiding. In the 1850s, evangelical Protestant architecture in the United States was based mainly on British and other European precedents, featuring a nave, side aisles, and transept. By the 1870s, evangelical Protestants had abandoned their dependence upon such influences and produced an unprecedented, open worship space enclosed within a medievalized shell: the neo-medieval auditorium church. The rugged exteriors of these churches featured quarry-faced stone or brick facades containing Gothic and/or Romanesque elements, steeply-pitched roofs and gables, which lend these buildings "a feeling of massiveness, of great weight and solidity."¹⁵ The neo-medieval exteriors enclosed large central-plan auditoriums, which provided a large seating space, unhindered by ceiling or roof supports. The auditorium plan interior "comprised a radical shift away from the rectangular nave with a chancel located at one end that characterized almost all Christian architecture in the United States at mid-century."¹⁶ The Tremont Baptist Church, with its open interior plan and rustic, Early English Gothic-influenced exterior adapted to a sloping site, is a late, but noteworthy, example of a neo-medieval auditorium church. While it is not clear whether Birkmire or the Tremont congregation initiated the use of the auditorium plan and medieval exterior for the church, however, their combination complements both the program of the church and context of the sloping, curved site.

The first church in the United States to feature the auditorium plan appears to be the Plymouth Church (1849-50, Joseph C. Wells), which is located on Orange Street in the Brooklyn Heights Historic District. It has a nearly square auditorium with straight rows of pews facing a stage. A decade later, the Luther Place Memorial Church (1870, architect unknown) in Washington D.C. was constructed with a similar plan. Other auditorium churches, apparently influenced by these two prototypes, soon followed, reaching a peak by the 1880s that continued through the 1890s before subsiding during the first decade of the twentieth century. Other early auditorium-plan churches in New York City include the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church (1883, Carl Pfeiffer, 705 Fifth Avenue, Manhattan), the New York Presbyterian Church, now the Metropolitan Baptist Church (1884, John R. Thomas and Richard R. Davies, a designated NYC Landmark, 151 West 128th Street, Manhattan), and the Emmanuel Baptist Church (1888, Francis H. Kimball, a designated NYC Landmark, 279 Lafayette Avenue, Brooklyn). Hundreds more auditorium churches were built in the United States in the 1890s and 1900s,

including several in New York City. Besides the Tremont Baptist Church, the Green Avenue Baptist Church, now the Antioch Baptist Church (1887-92, Lansing C. Holden and Paul F. Higgs, a designated NYC Landmark, 828 Greene Avenue, Brooklyn), the Greenwood Baptist Church (1900, architect unknown, 461 6th Street, Brooklyn), and the Abyssinian Baptist Church (1922-23, Charles W. Bolton & Son, a designated NYC Landmark, 132 West 138th Street, Manhattan) are among the auditorium churches built in New York City. The churches, which typically contain seating arranged in semicircular rows facing a central platform, represent a manipulation of interior space to accommodate as many congregants as possible and affording fewer visual obstructions. In these structures, preaching rather than ceremony, takes center stage.

The neo-medieval auditorium church remained popular for only a relatively brief period. Peaking in the 1890s, its use waned after the turn of the century, with only a handful of examples completed after 1910. By then, church architecture was becoming increasingly influenced by the high church ideals of Ralph Adams Cram and Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue, as well as the Arts and Crafts movement. The neo-medieval exterior was eventually abandoned by most denominations. The auditorium plan, however, re-emerges in Protestant architecture from time to time, and even had a period of popularity in the design of post-Vatican II Roman Catholic churches.

William H. Birkmire¹⁷

Born in Philadelphia, William Harvey Birkmire (1860-1924) graduated from the Philadelphia Academy of Music in 1883 and studied architecture with the influential American architect, Samuel Sloan. In Philadelphia, Birkmire was associated with the Penncoyd Steel Works and Rolling Mills and in New York with the Jackson Architectural Iron Works where he was head of the construction department in 1885. After 1892, he was employed by the J.B. & J.M. Cornell Iron Works. His work with these companies and his interest in advanced building techniques led Birkmire to become known as an authority on modern steel construction. He often focused on the engineering aspects of design, developing steel details for the Astor Hotel in New York and the Mexican National Opera House in Mexico City.

By 1895, Birkmire was established as an architect in New York City with offices on Franklin Street, and later on Broadway. Birkmire applied his knowledge of structural techniques to the design of large commercial buildings, examples of which are found in the Ladies Mile, the Tribeca West, the Tribeca East, and the

Tribeca North Historic Districts. The Tremont Baptist Church appears to have been an unusual ecclesiastical commission for Birkmire. Except for this church and an apartment house located in the Upper East Side Historic District, all of his known designs within New York City are commercial buildings. In the 1890s, Birkmire compiled his extensive knowledge of modern building methods into several publications. An early work, "Skeleton Construction in Buildings" (1893), provided information about the rapid improvements in iron and steel construction. This was followed by "The Planning and Construction of High Office Buildings." First published in 1896 as a series of articles in *Architecture and Building* and later published in book form, this work incorporated his practical experience since the earlier publication. Birkmire wrote other articles including "Architectural Iron and Steel" (1891), "The Planning and Construction of American Theaters" (1896), and "Compound Riveted Girders" (1893). He practiced architecture through 1923. The commission for the Tremont Baptist Church broadens the understanding of William Birkmire's career.

Description

The Tremont Baptist Church occupies a fan-shaped lot that slopes from west to east along East Tremont Avenue, following the curve of that street near its intersection with East 176th Street. A stone retaining wall of random, rough-faced blocks, follows the contours of the building's foundation and angles toward the northwest corner of the lot; the wall divides the site into two levels. The church occupies the lower level to the east, while the upper level contains a small lawn and the church's parking lot. The church is surrounded by an historic, wrought-iron fence.

The church is one-story above a raised basement and a smooth, marble water table. The building is polygonal in plan with an offset tower at its southeast corner and a one-story pavilion containing a secondary entryway at the southwest corner. Its dimensions are approximately eighty feet north to south and sixty feet east to west. The church is fifty feet tall with a 75-foot tower. The north and south facades and the tower are faced in rough-faced gray marble ashlar, while the west elevation is covered with non-historic cement stucco. The building's south elevation is obscured by the adjacent apartment house. The church has a steeply sloping roof, which is covered with historic slate tiles and copper flashing. The north slope of the roof has a triangular, louvered vent. There is a copper finial at the roof's peak.

The church has five buttressed bays, consisting of intersecting, angled gables that follow the curve of East

Tremont Avenue. The central bay features a group of three lancet windows, a blind arch, and the main entryway, consisting of historic batten doors with non-historic metal gates set within a pointed arch. The entryway is approached by way of an angled, marble stairway with rough-faced marble sidewalls. A pointed-arched niche sits above the doorway. A flat-roofed, one-story vestibule with an arched window and angled wall is adjacent to the north side of the main entryway. The remaining bays contain pointed-arched window openings, situated in smooth marble surrounds, that are filled with stained glass, tracery, cusping, and protective plexiglass. The gables are coped with molded terra-cotta blocks. A variety of historic windows and doors with non-historic wrought-iron grilles pierce the bays at basement level.

The buttressed tower, square in plan and also constructed of rough-faced marble, has four vertical stages. All four stages are visible only on the east and north sides of the tower. The west side, which abuts the church, offers a view of the uppermost stage only. The adjacent apartment house obscures the tower's south facade. The first stage has a basement level entryway with a wrought-iron gate on the east side and a grilled window facing north. The second stage features grouped lancet windows on the east side and a single window on the north side, all with smooth surrounds

springing from the imposts. The second level is topped by a smooth band at the level of the setbacks of the buttresses. The third level contains pointed-arched window openings on the east and north sides with stained glass, tracery, cusps, and a smooth marble surround. The window facing north, however, is smaller in size. The third stage is topped by elaborate stone moldings that surround decorative panels containing circular and geometrical carvings. The fourth stage contains pointed-arched openings with copper louvers and smooth surrounds. The tower is topped by an crenellated parapet.

A square chimney, constructed of the same rough-faced marble of the church, sits near the northwest corner of the facade. A one-story pavilion, containing a secondary entryway flanked by non-historic windows, is located at the southwest corner of the building, facing the side yard. The pavilion is covered with non-historic cement stucco, and is accessible by way of a non-historic wrought-iron bridge leading from the parking lot.

Report prepared by
Donald G. Presa
Research Department

NOTES

1. *Insurance Maps of the City of New York*, Vol. 14 (New York: Sanborn-Perris Map Co., 1901), plates 4, 7, 15 and 16; John McNamara, *History in Asphalt: The Origin of Bronx Street and Place Names* (Bronx: The Bronx County Historical Society, 1984), 94-95, 518; "An Old Area Surges With New Energy," *New York Times*, August 7, 1990, p. B1; *Real Estate Record and Guide*, May 9, 1903, p. 935; Lloyd Ultan et al, *Devastation/Resurrection: The South Bronx* (Bronx: Bronx Museum of the Arts), 21, 31, 34-36, 40, 42-44, 70-71; Lloyd Ultan, "Tremont," *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, ed. Kenneth T. Jackson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 1198; "Mount Hope," 777.
2. These churches, including the Tremont Baptist Church, were concentrated on a five block stretch of Washington Avenue from East 174th to East 178th Streets.
3. The city lost approximately 600,000 factory jobs during the 1960s, many of which had been located in the Bronx.
4. This section is based upon information provided by the Reverend Sylvanus Jarrett, Pastor of the Tremont Baptist Church, dated February 18, 1999. Other sources include LPC, *Abyssinian Baptist Church and Community House Designation Report* (LP-1851) (New York: City of New York, 1993), prepared by Christopher Moore and Andrew S. Dolkart; Stephen Jenkins, *The Story of the Bronx* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1912), 287-288; and George D. Younger, "Baptists," *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, ed. Kenneth T. Jackson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 75-76.
5. Over time, many other ethnic and foreign-language congregations were formed in the city, including those for Germans (1846), Swedes (1853), Italians (1897), Norwegians and Danes (1903), Czechs (1905), Latvians (1905), Hungarians (1906), Estonians (1919), Spaniards (1919), Russians (1923), Chinese (1926), Poles

- (1926), Haitians (1965), Koreans (1976), Rumanians (1979), Portuguese-speaking people (1982), Filipinos (1986), and Indonesians (1993).
6. Until 1963, New York City remained the site of the headquarters of the Northern Baptist Convention and the national offices of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, the Woman's American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, the American Baptist Home Mission Society, and the Woman's American Home Baptist Mission Society. The Benefit Board remains in the city. Baptist leaders and thinkers who have lived and worked in the city include: soap manufacturer William Colgate, the first female Baptist minister Mabel Lee, financier and philanthropist John D. Rockefeller, Jr., activists Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. and Jr., and theologians Walter Rauschenbusch, Samuel Zane Batten, Nathaniel Schmidt, and Leighton Williams.
 7. Earlier Baptist congregations in the Bronx included the German Bethel Baptist Church of Morrisania (1857), the first Baptist church organized in the Bronx, and the Pilgrim Baptist Church (1858) in West Farms.
 8. Tremont Baptist was the first of the aforementioned churches to move from Washington Avenue in the early twentieth century.
 9. These include the Nurse's Unit, Pastor's Aid Club, Willing Workers' Club, Love Fellowship, and the Tremont Baptist Players, a drama club.
 10. Bronx County, Office of the Register, Deeds Liber 60, p. 73; Liber 68, p.15; *Bronx Home News*, July 13, 1911, p.3; October 5, 1911, p. 3; Margaret Henderson Floyd, "A.W.N. Pugin and the Gothic Movement in North America," *A.W.N. Pugin Master of Gothic Revival*, ed. Paul Atterbury (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 201-221; *Illustrated Dictionary of Historic Architecture*, ed. Cyril M. Harris (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1977), 180; Jeanne Halgren Kilde, "Spiritual Armories: A Social and Architectural History of Neo-Medieval Auditorium Churches in the U.S., 1869-1910," Ph.D. dissertation (University of Minnesota, 1991), iii-iv, 5, 10-11, 100-101, 204-205, 219; New York City Department of Buildings, Borough of the Bronx, NB 90B-1904; *Real Estate Record and Guide*, Oct. 4, 1902, p.479; May 9, 1903, p.935; August 15, 1903, p.296; August 13, 1910, p.277; Montgomery Schuyler, "Recent Church Buildings in New York," *Architectural Record*, v. 13, June 1903, 508-534; and telephone conversation with Amanda Badgett, Historic Preservationist, October 19, 1999.
 11. The Mission Society transferred the property to the Tremont Baptist Church on October 4, 1904, during the course of the church's construction.
 12. According to the New Building application, the non-fireproof church was to have a stone foundation, wood and iron posts and trusses, brick walls covered with four to eight inches of marble facing, and a slate roof.
 13. From 1906 until the completion of the upper part of the building in 1912, church services were held in the basement.
 14. The Early English Gothic style, the first of the three phases of English Gothic architecture, lasted from c. 1180 to c. 1280. It was followed by the Decorated and the Perpendicular or Rectilinear styles.
 15. Kilde, 11.
 16. Kilde, 5.
 17. William Harvey Birkmire, "The Planning and Construction of High Office Buildings," *Architecture and Building* 25 (Dec. 5, 1896), 269; "William Harvey Birkmire," *Who Was Who in America* (Chicago, 1967), vol. 5, 97; "William Harvey Birkmire," *Who's Who in New York City and State* (New York, 1905), 91; William Harvey Birkmire obituary, *American Art Annual* ed. F.N. Levy (New York, 1924), vol. 21, 283; William Harvey Birkmire obituary, *New York Times*, Feb. 10, 1924, p. 23; Dennis Steadman Francis, *Architects in Practice in New York City, 1840-1900* (New York, 1979), 16; Landmarks Preservation Commission, "Architects' Appendix," *Ladies Mile Historic District Designation Report* (LP-1609), (New York, 1989); "Architects' Appendix," *Tribeca West Historic District Designation Report* (LP-1713), (New York, 1991); "Architects' Appendix," *Upper East Side Historic District Designation Report* (LP-1051), (New York, 1981); and James Ward, *Architects in Practice New York City, 1900-1940* (New York, 1989), 8.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Tremont Baptist Church has a special character and 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 Tremont Baptist Church, designed by architect William H. Birkmire and built in 1904-1912, is a noteworthy example of a neo-medieval auditorium church; that it is located in the west central Bronx neighborhood of Mount Hope, which is part of the larger Tremont section of the borough, that construction began in 1904, at a time when the population of the Bronx was growing rapidly and the Baptist denomination's influence in New York City was increasing; that construction of the church was phased: the foundation and basement were finished in 1906, while the upper part of the church was built in 1911-12; that during the intervening years, services were held in the basement; that the church was an unusual commission for its architect, William H. Birkmire, who usually designed commercial buildings, many of which are found in the Ladies Mile and Tribeca Historic Districts; that for the church, Birkmire chose a picturesque version of the neo-Gothic style, based on the French- and Norman-influenced Early English Gothic style; that the Tremont Baptist Church was organized in 1884, during the early suburbanization of this section of the Bronx; that the church's current East Tremont Avenue site is its third location in the neighborhood; that early on, the church defined itself as a major social institution in the Tremont neighborhood, establishing many activities mainly for young people; that these programs were strengthened and expanded during the 1970s and 1980s; that today the church remains a cornerstone in the neighborhood; that the church building sits prominently upon a sloping site that follows the curve of East Tremont Avenue; that it is polygonal in plan with an offset tower at its southeast corner; that the main facades and the tower are faced in rough-cut gray marble ashlar; that the church has five buttressed bays, consisting of intersecting, angled gables that follow the curve of East Tremont Avenue; that the bays contain pointed-arch window openings, situated in smooth marble surrounds, featuring stained glass, tracery, and cusping; and that the church's imposing gray marble exterior, steeply sloping roof, crenellated tower, and remarkable intactness enhance its visual prominence in the neighborhood.

Accordingly, pursuant to provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Tremont Baptist Church, 324 East Tremont Avenue, the Bronx, and designates Borough of the Bronx Tax Map Block 2803, Lot 26 as its Landmark Site.



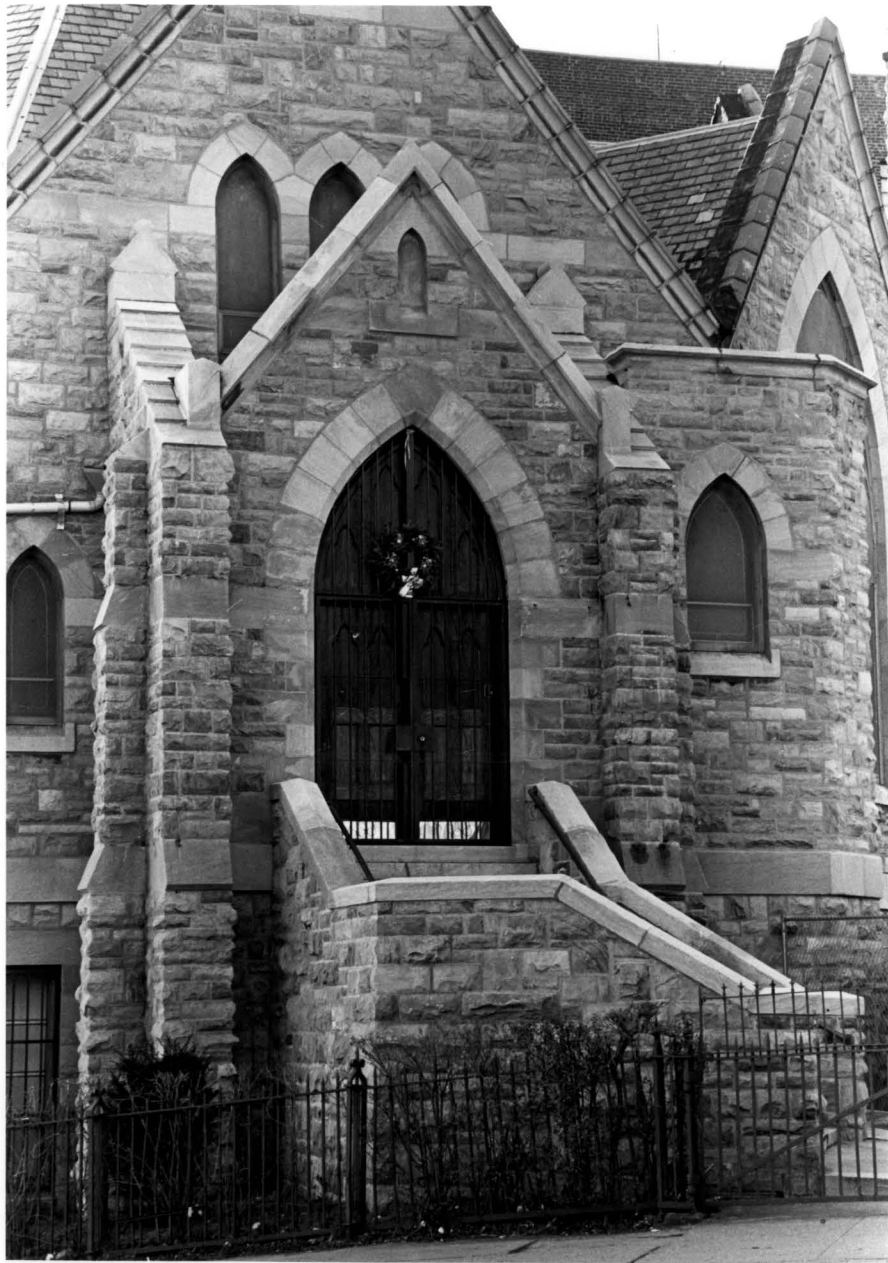
Tremont Baptist Church, 324 East Tremont Avenue, Borough of the Bronx.

Photo: *Carl Forster*, 1999.

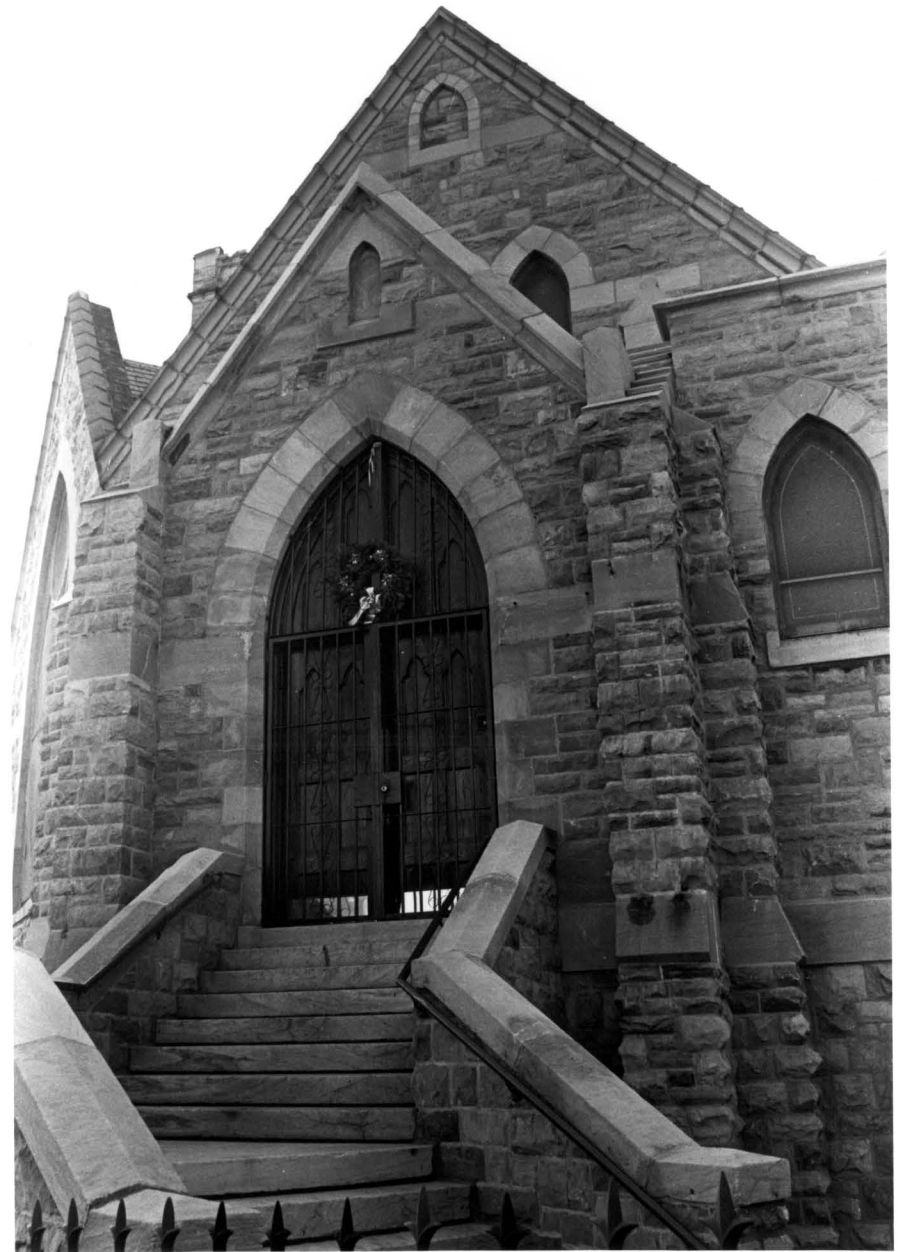


Tremont Baptist Church, 324 East Tremont Avenue, Borough of the Bronx.

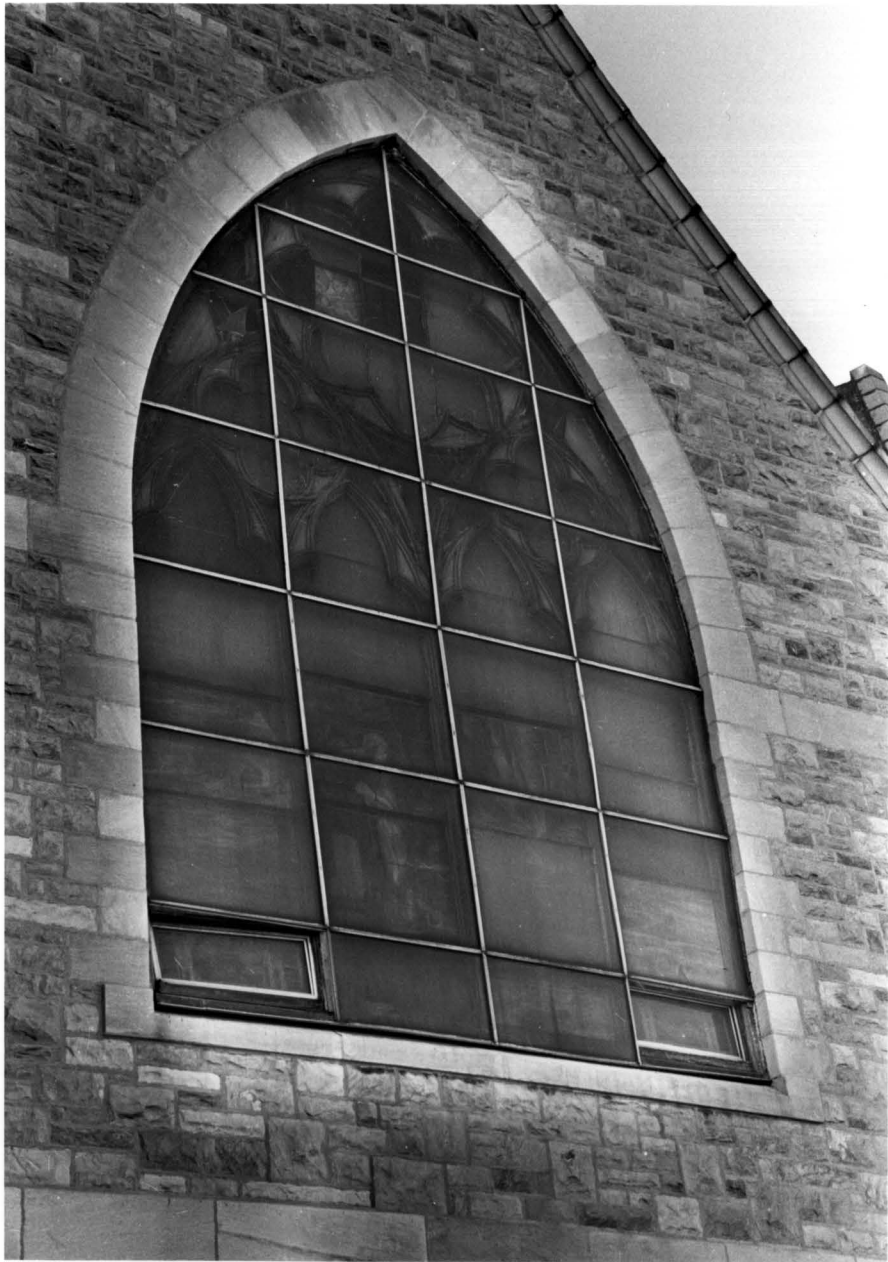
Photo: *Carl Forster, 1999.*



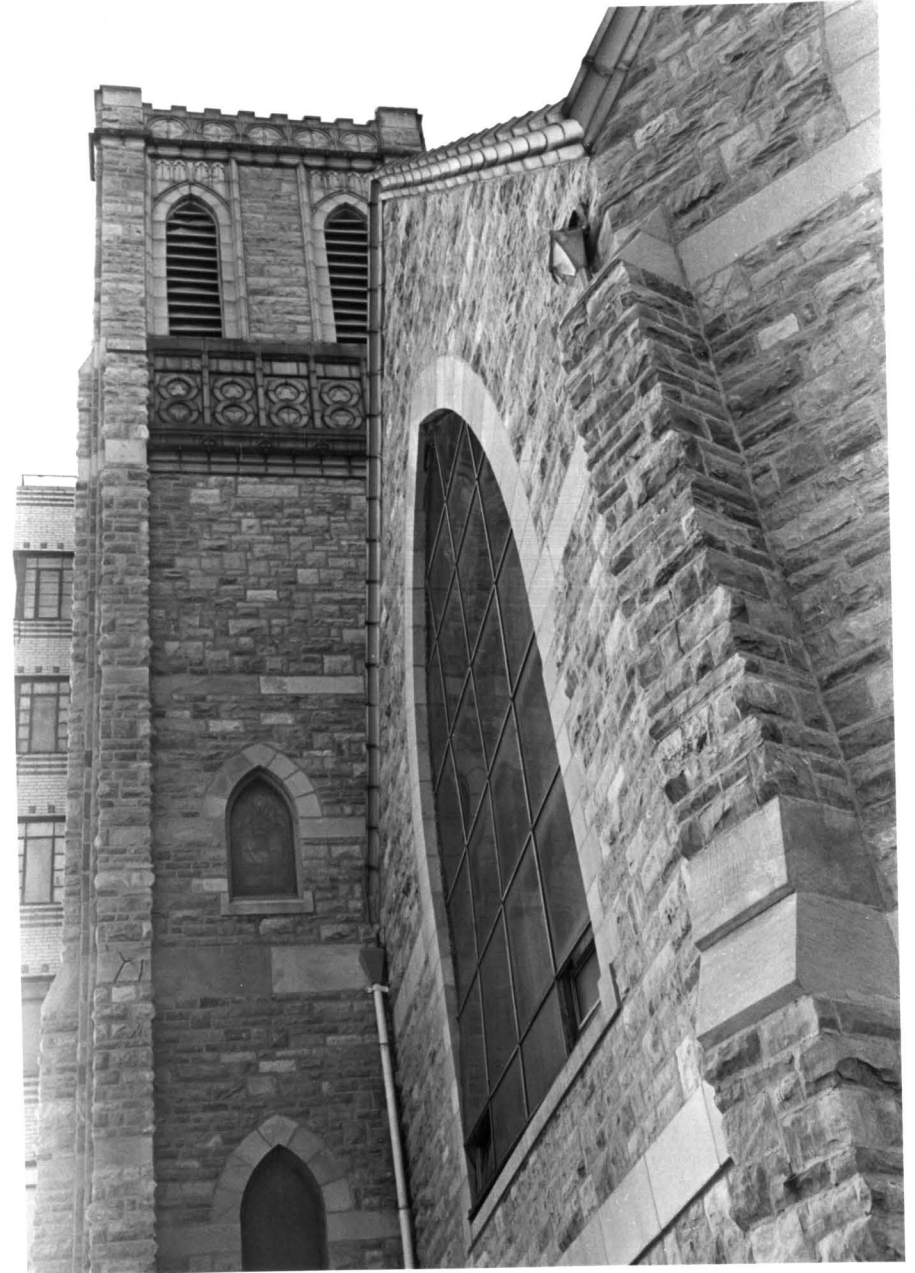
Tremont Baptist Church, 324 East Tremont Avenue,
Borough of the Bronx. Photo: *Carl Forster*, 1999.



Tremont Baptist Church, 324 East Tremont Avenue,
Borough of the Bronx. Photo: *Carl Forster*, 1999.



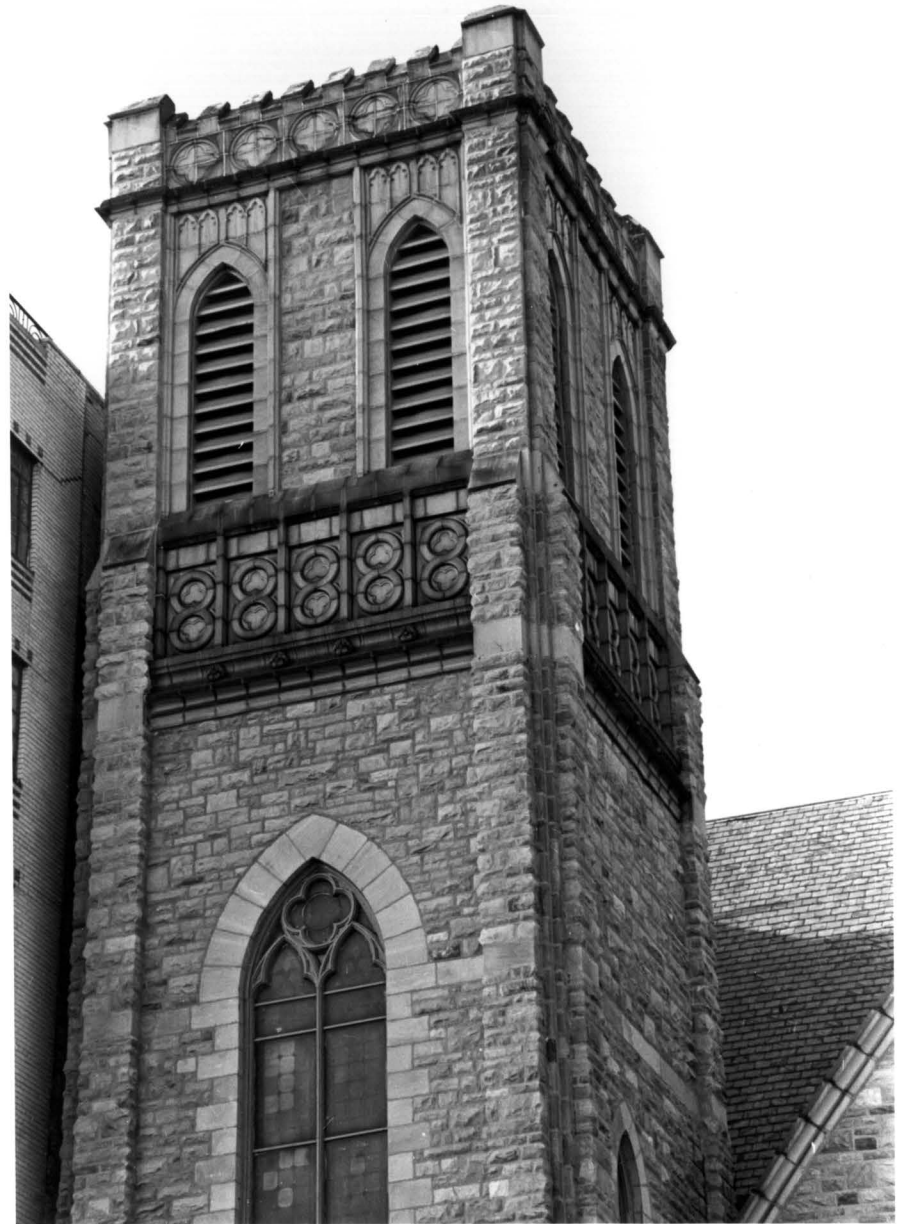
Tremont Baptist Church, 324 East Tremont Avenue,
Borough of the Bronx. Photo: *Carl Forster*, 1999.



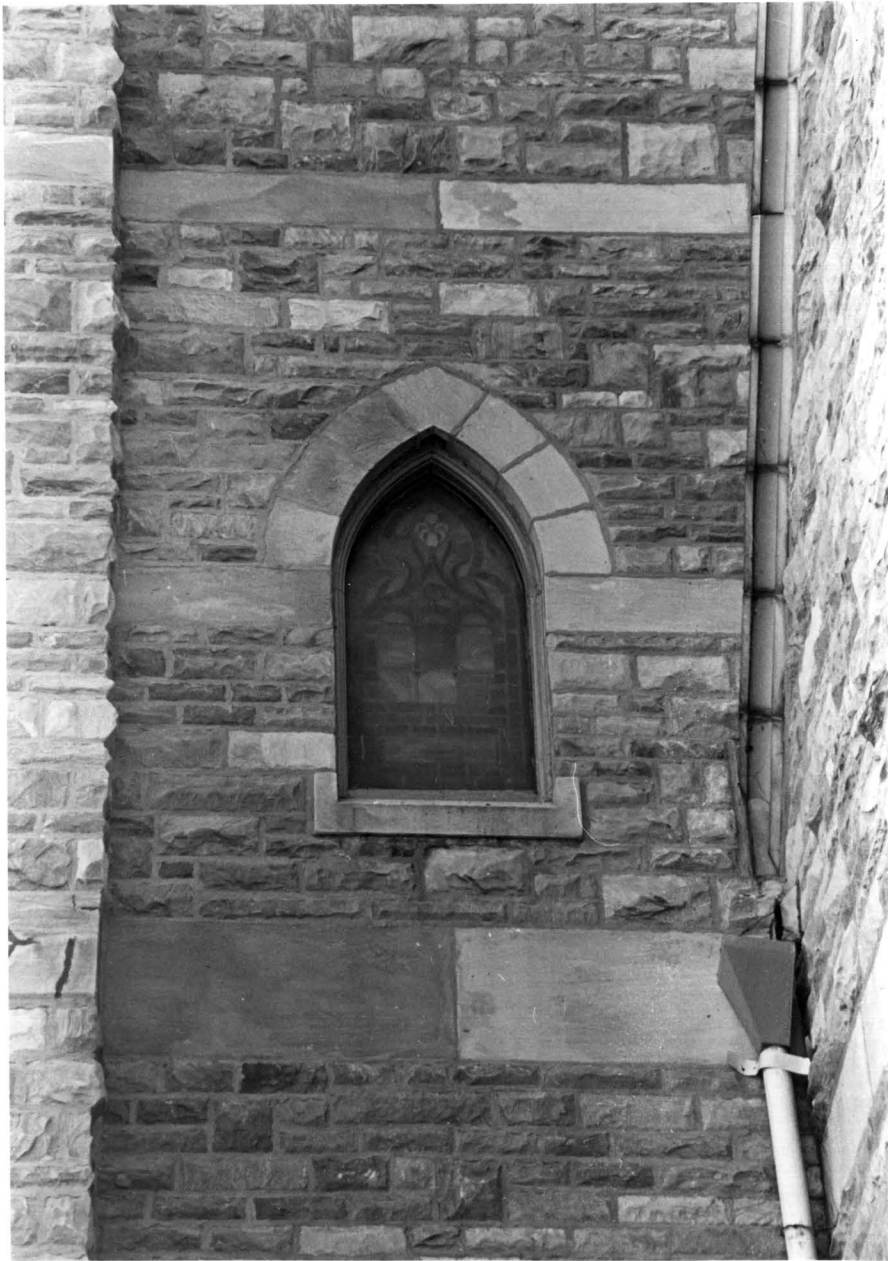
Tremont Baptist Church, 324 East Tremont Avenue,
Borough of the Bronx. Photo: *Carl Forster*, 1999.



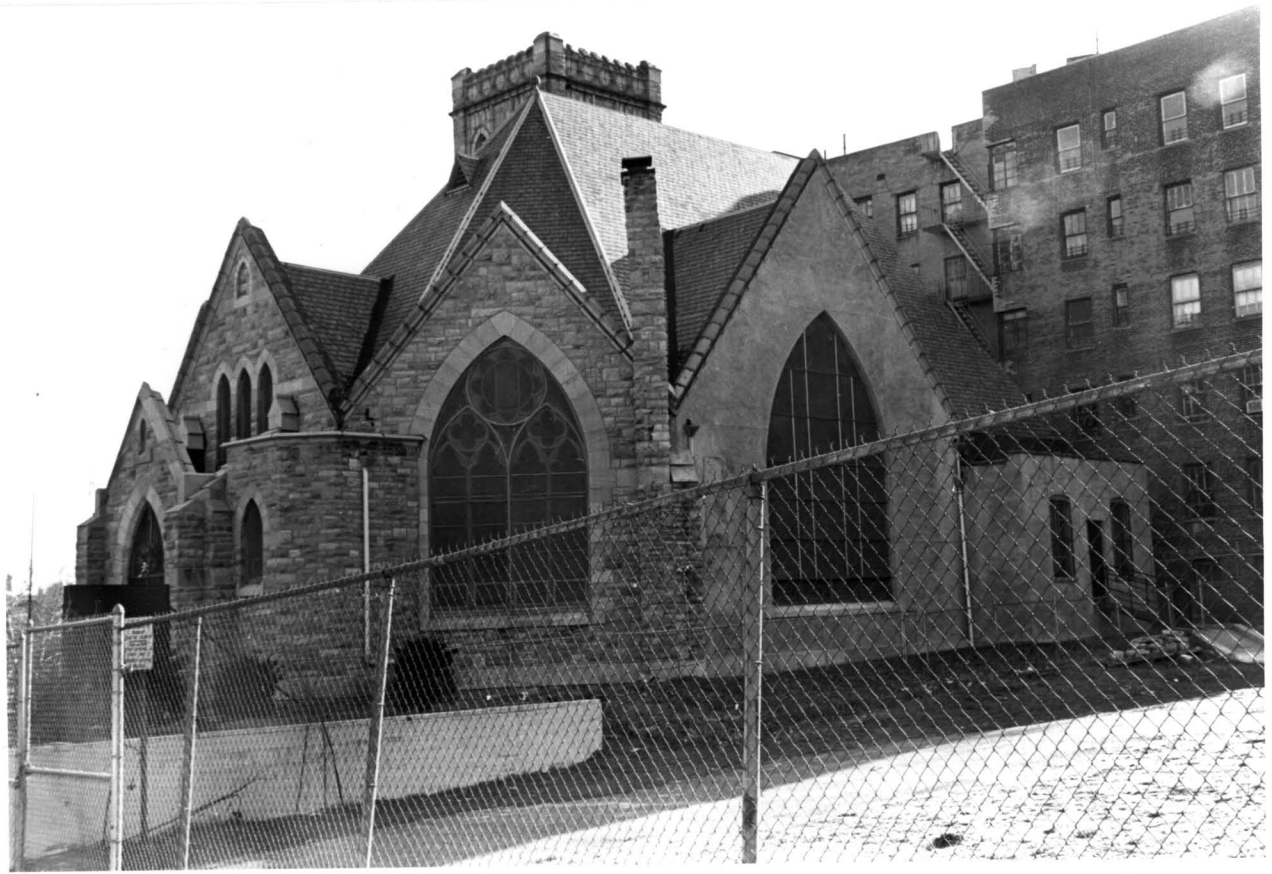
Tremont Baptist Church, 324 East Tremont Avenue,
Borough of the Bronx. Photo: *Carl Forster*, 1999.



Tremont Baptist Church, 324 East Tremont Avenue,
Borough of the Bronx. Photo: *Carl Forster*, 1999.



Tremont Baptist Church, 324 East Tremont Avenue,
Borough of the Bronx. Photo: *Carl Forster*, 1999.



Tremont Baptist Church, 324 East Tremont Avenue, Borough of the Bronx.
Photo: *Carl Forster*, 1999.



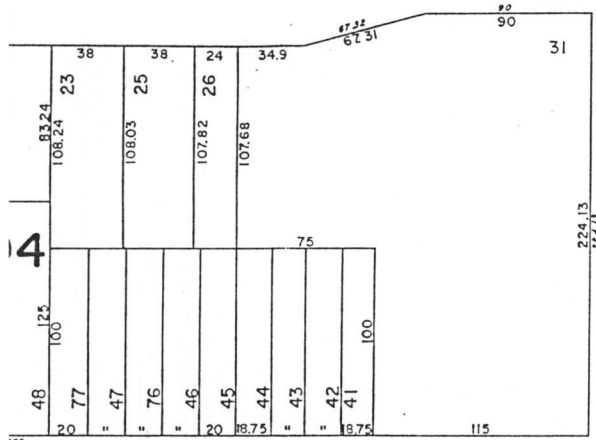
Tremont Baptist Church, 324 East Tremont Avenue, Borough of the Bronx. View toward the southeast, showing stuccoed west elevation, one-story addition, and bridge.
Photo: *Carl Forster*, 1999.

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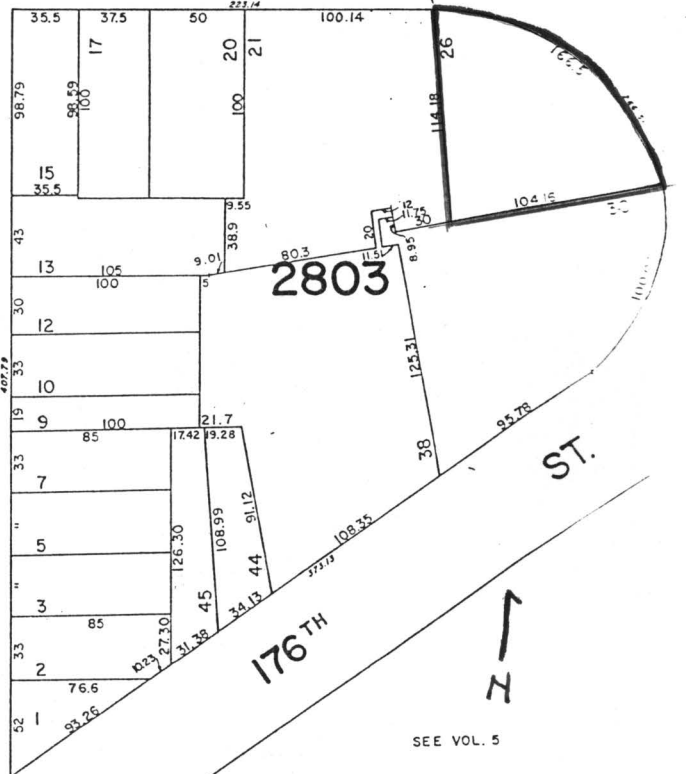
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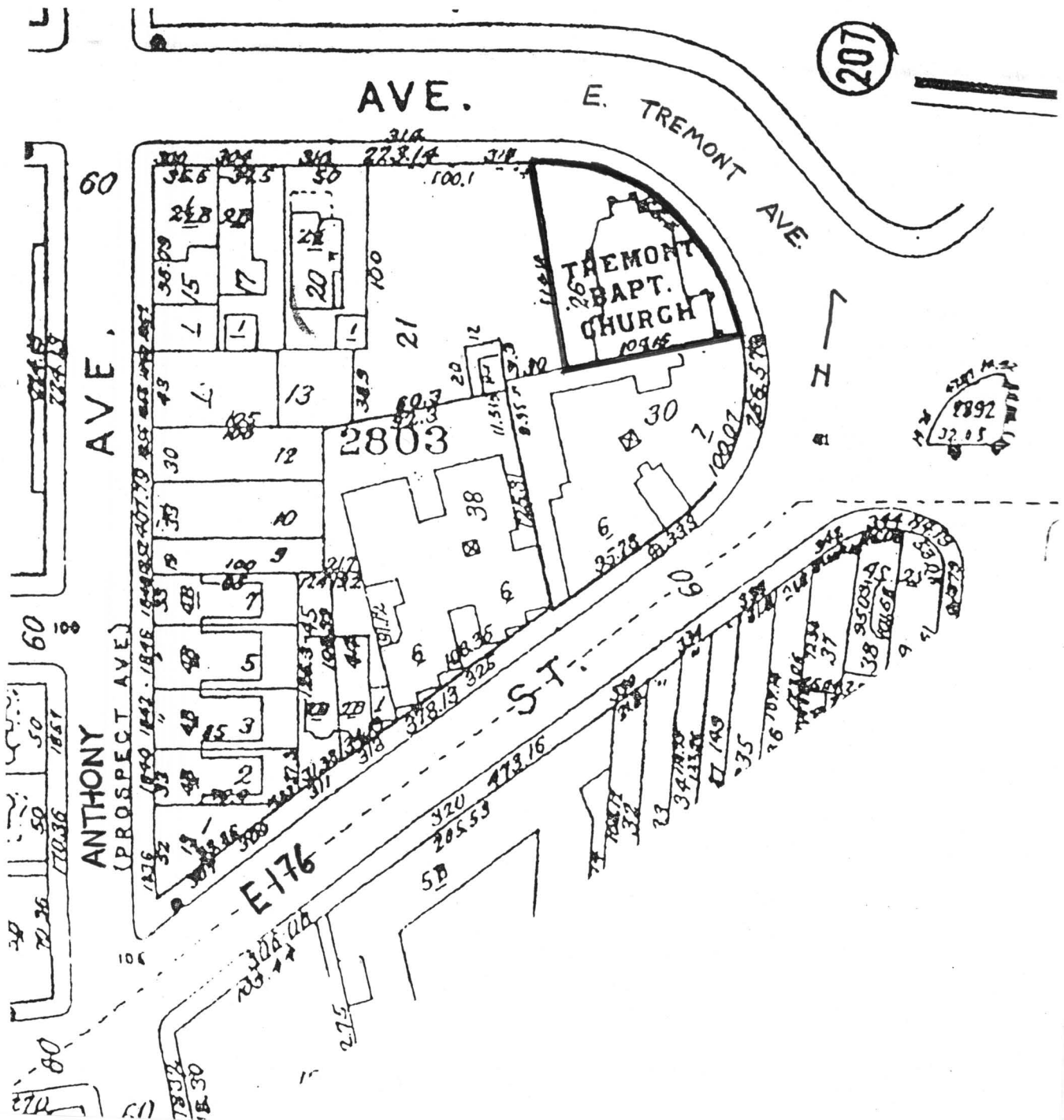
176 TH

ST.

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Tremont Baptist Church, 324 East Tremont Avenue, Borough of the Bronx. Landmark Site:
 Bronx Tax Map Block 2803, Lot 26.
 Graphic Source: New York City Department of Finance, City Surveyor, Tax Map.



Tremont Baptist Church, 324 East Tremont Avenue, Borough of the Bronx. Landmark Site: Bronx Tax Map Block 2803, Lot 26. Graphic Source: *The Sanborn Land Book, The Bronx, New York*, (Weehawken, NJ: First American Real Estate Solutions, 1999), Sec. 3, pl. 213.