

**ST. STEPHEN'S CHURCH** (The Church of Our Lady of the Scapular & St. Stephen),  
151 East 28<sup>th</sup> Street (aka 141-155 East 28<sup>th</sup> Street and 144-152 East 29<sup>th</sup> Street), Manhattan.  
Built 1853-4, extended 1861-5; original architect, James Renwick, Jr.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 884, lot 30 in part, consisting of the land on which the church is situated.

On October 30, 2007, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of St. Stephen's Church (The Church of Our Lady of the Scapular & St. Stephen) and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 2). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There were six speakers in favor of designation, including a representative of Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney, and representatives of Community Board 6, the Historic Districts Council, the Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society, and the Landmarks Conservancy, as well as a parishioner of the church. There were no speakers in opposition.<sup>1</sup>

#### Summary

St. Stephen's Church (The Church of Our Lady of the Scapular and St. Stephen)<sup>2</sup> is a particularly early example of the Romanesque Revival style, located on East 28<sup>th</sup> Street near Murray Hill and Kips Bay in Manhattan. Designed by prominent architect James Renwick, Jr. and constructed in 1853-54, during the 1860s this church was one of the largest and most influential Catholic congregations in New York. The Parish of St. Stephen's was founded in 1848 and this was its second building. In the mid-nineteenth century this area was a fast-growing part of Manhattan, and the church's popular pastor, Rev. Cummings, attracted many people to the services. The local population had grown so much that by 1865-6 St. Stephen's extended the church north through the block to 29<sup>th</sup> Street. The Romanesque Revival style, which Renwick had used on his Church of the Puritans on Union Square (1846-7, demolished) and the Smithsonian Institution (1846) was more commonly applied to Evangelical Protestant Churches at this time and is highly unusual for a mid-nineteenth century Catholic Church. Here Renwick created a lively façade with round-arched entrance and window openings, blind arcades and corbel tables capped by a large rounded pediment, all of which animate the streetscape in this densely developed part of Manhattan. Its wider, 29<sup>th</sup> Street façade is equally interesting with a variety of gabled bays, niches, stained glass windows and a polygonal tower. The Church of St. Stephen joined with Our Lady of the Scapular in 1989 and continues to serve this vibrant community.



## DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

### The Neighborhood<sup>3</sup>

St. Stephen's Parish is located in a loosely defined area of Manhattan that could be described either as greater Murray Hill or Kips Bay. The name Murray Hill derives from the eighteenth century farm owned by Robert Murray that extended from near present-day 33<sup>rd</sup> Street to just north of present-day 38<sup>th</sup> Street, running from the old Eastern Post Road (near Lexington Avenue) on the east to near present-day Madison Avenue on the west. The Murrays were dedicated to many humanitarian causes; upon his death Robert left £200 to promote the manumission of slaves, and to support a free school for Negro children.<sup>4</sup> To the east and south of Murray's property lay the colonial-era farm of Jacobus Kip. This property extended from the East River to the Eastern Post Road, between East 28<sup>th</sup> Street and East 39<sup>th</sup> Street.

In 1807, the state legislature of New York appointed a commission consisting of Gouvenour Morris, State surveyor Simeon De Witt, and merchant John Rutherford to produce a plan for the future growth of New York City. Determining that "a city is composed principally of the habitations of men and that strait-sided, and right-angled houses are the most cheap to build and the most convenient to live in,"<sup>5</sup> the Commissioners resolved to adopt a grid plan with twelve wide avenues running north and south and 155 cross streets extending across the island from river to river. Previously laid-out streets that had not been accepted by the Common Council, including the Bloomingdale Road (an extension of Broadway) and the Eastern Post Road (aka the Boston Post Road), an extension of the Bowery, were to be suppressed in the parts of the city that had not been built up. Although the commissioners failed to change the course of Broadway and Bloomingdale Road, most of the old roads were eventually closed following the opening of new streets. Third Avenue, which eventually replaced the Eastern Post Road was opened between 1815 and 1821 and extended for the length of Manhattan. In April 1844 the Common Council ordered that the Old Eastern Post Road between East 23<sup>rd</sup> Street and East 31<sup>st</sup> Street be closed and title to the land be conveyed by quit claim to the owners of the land on each side of it. Lexington Avenue was not originally included on the Commissioner's Map but was created in 1832 at the request of real estate developer Samuel Ruggles to provide access to his holdings in the vicinity of Union Square and Gramercy Park.<sup>6</sup>

The opening of Fourth Avenue (now Park Avenue South) between East 17<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> in 1833 was also tied to Ruggles' real estate speculations and to the establishment of the New York & Harlem Railroad, which, in 1831, secured permission from the Common Council to run its track along the center of this street. Before this time Fourth Avenue stopped at 32<sup>nd</sup> Street.<sup>7</sup> Tracks for this rail line were laid north to Harlem but in heavily populated lower Manhattan, the trains were pulled by horses to avoid the sparks and dangers associated with coal-fired engines. A depot complex was constructed at Fourth Avenue between 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> streets where the trains were assembled for the trip north. Eventually this depot included offices, a produce terminal, and stables for the horses.<sup>8</sup> The hill at Murray Hill was difficult for the engines to mount and so a tunnel was dug through it to 43<sup>rd</sup> Street. With the opening of more streets and access to public transportation assured, Murray Hill and other nearby areas were poised for residential development in the early 1850s.

Investors, many of them lawyers and businessman who could afford to hold the property for a few years, until the city's residential district expanded northward into Murray Hill, began to purchase portions of the old Murray farm. Partly due to the restrictive covenants put in place by the Murray family in 1835, expansive mansions for some of Manhattan's wealthiest families were constructed in the early 1850s along Fifth, Park and Madison Avenues in the area of 34<sup>th</sup>

Street.<sup>9</sup> Other nearby streets were largely developed with speculatively built brownstones and were occupied by affluent members of the middle class during the 1850s and early 1860s.

Further to the east, no covenants existed; the land along the river was devoted to undesirable industrial uses such as tanneries, abattoirs and stables, while Bellevue Hospital covered several blocks east of Second Avenue, between 24<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> Street. Between the eastern and western sections, Manhattan's growing population pushed northward, with many members of New York's working class (mostly Irish) crammed into small houses and tenements. There is no indication of any African American settlement in this area. As development reached Madison Avenue between 23<sup>rd</sup> and 42<sup>nd</sup> Streets this area was called the 18<sup>th</sup> Ward.<sup>10</sup>

### Catholics in New York<sup>11</sup>

Although the number of Catholics in New York remained small until after the Revolutionary War, huge numbers of Catholic immigrants during the first half of the nineteenth century created New York City's largest denomination. When Bishop John Connolly arrived from Ireland in 1815, there were three churches and four priests in the whole diocese, serving about 15,000 parishioners. The Catholic population increased to about 200,000 by 1842, mostly due to immigration from Ireland and Germany, and created the need for many more churches. Many of the immigrants were extremely poor and their arrival in New York incited an outbreak of anti-Catholic bigotry. Priests attempted to deal with some of the problems of their parishioners by opening numerous social service agencies and starting Catholic newspapers intended for their own people as well as "for the enlightenment of Americans generally as to the character of the Catholic Church."<sup>12</sup> The Church's fourth Bishop, John Hughes (1842-1864), was extremely active in trying to improve conditions for Catholics in the city. He built many new churches and parochial schools and his firm leadership kept the peace when nativist mobs tried to attack local churches. He encouraged the formation of new religious communities such as the Paulist Fathers and started institutions of higher learning to train priests and teachers (such as St. John's College, later Fordham University). In 1850, due to a continuing flood of new immigrants, New York was restructured as an Archdiocese and Hughes was appointed its first Archbishop. (Brooklyn and Newark, NJ were separated from New York and each became its own diocese.) Between 1840 and 1860, the Catholic population of New York reached 400,000, mostly Irish immigrants, and during his tenure Hughes created 61 new parishes. The Parish of St. Stephen dates to this period of rapid growth. Created in a growing part of the city that included wealthy residents as well as Irish who were moving north of their original base in the Five Points, St. Stephen's became one of the most fashionable Catholic churches in the city.

### Church of St. Stephen

Bishop John Hughes created the Parish of St. Stephen in 1848 at a time when the entire city of New York had only 88 priests.<sup>13</sup> Hughes was determined to create new churches to serve the rapidly expanding population. At the time it was established, the Parish of St. Stephen was located well north of most of the city's residents although the Murray Hill and Madison Square areas were attracting many new inhabitants. Even before the official creation of St. Stephen's Church, the Diocese purchased property at the corner of Madison Avenue and 27<sup>th</sup> Street on October 28, 1847.<sup>14</sup> The original church was opened in 1849 on the south side of 27<sup>th</sup> Street. It soon became clear that this location was too close to the railroad that ran along Fourth Avenue. The Harlem Railroad's depot was down the street and they wanted to expand. They purchased the church property (along with the rest of the block), incorporating part of the church building into the new depot.<sup>15</sup>

In 1852 the Diocese acquired property on 28<sup>th</sup> Street between Lexington and Third Avenue.<sup>16</sup> The prominent architect James Renwick was chosen to design the new church. The building was begun in April, 1853 and dedicated in May, 1854.<sup>17</sup> Original construction costs for the church were \$50,000.<sup>18</sup> The first pastor of St. Stephen's was Dr. Jeremiah Cummings, a native of Washington, known for his linguistic and musical abilities. "He made his church most attractive by the beauty of the services and the quality of the choir, so that strangers flocked to it."<sup>19</sup> The developing neighborhood was filling with wood and stone rowhouses and Dr. Cummings attracted many of their residents to his church. Dr. Cummings' great interest in music attracted such famous singers as Jenny Lind and Marietta Piccolomini.<sup>20</sup>

By 1865, the parish had grown so much that the building could not accommodate everyone. It was extended northward to 29<sup>th</sup> Street, creating a nave 200 feet long, supported on thin cast iron columns, which added to the sense of grandeur on the interior. (The architect of this addition has not been determined.) This addition also created a second and larger transept. At the same time the forty-three interior murals by Constantine Brumidi and 100 stained glass windows by Meyer of Munich were added. (These interior elements are not included in this designation.) "The church became noted for its great beauty"<sup>21</sup> and received many visitors. Rev. Cummings died before the expansion was completed in 1866, after which the church was led by Dr. Edward McGlynn, (who had served as assistant pastor) until 1887. Under his leadership, a large orphan's house and an industrial school for girls were built nearby.<sup>22</sup> At the time of Dr. McGlynn's appointment, St. Stephen's had between 25,000 and 28,000 parishioners and was considered one of the most important parishes in the country.<sup>23</sup>

### Architect

James Renwick, Jr. (1818-1895)<sup>24</sup> was one of the most renowned New York architects of the nineteenth century. His architectural practice was long and varied, and he produced designs for many houses, institutions and churches. In his church designs, he showed himself to be a sophisticated practitioner of the nineteenth century Gothic Revival style, as it evolved from its Ecclesiological beginnings to the picturesque Victorian version. Never "much of a purist," as Montgomery Schuyler described him,<sup>25</sup> Renwick was also comfortable working in the Romanesque Revival, Italianate or "modern French" styles.

James Renwick, Jr. was born into a wealthy and influential American family; his mother was a descendant of the Brevoort family, while his father was a successful merchant and engineer, and later a professor of physics and chemistry at Columbia College. James Jr. was educated as an engineer at Columbia College, graduating in 1836, and then received a master's degree in 1839. His early experience was as an engineer on the Erie Railroad and then as supervisor of construction of the Distributing Reservoir of the Croton Aqueduct water system. In 1843, at the age of 24, James Renwick, Jr. received the commission to design Grace Church (1843-1846, 800 Broadway, a designated New York City Landmark). This white marble church and rectory complex shows the influence of French medieval churches and is said to be the earliest American church to have a cruciform plan.

Other church designs by Renwick in New York City followed, including the Romanesque revival style Church of the Puritans (1846-47) on Union Square (demolished) and its contemporary Calvary Church (1846-47, located within the Gramercy Park Historic District), patterned after twin-towered French cathedrals but executed in brownstone. Near the middle of his career, Renwick received the commission for St. Patrick's Cathedral on Fifth Avenue (1858-69, a designated New York City Landmark). The front was based on the many twin-towered, triple-portal cathedrals in Europe, such as Rheims, Amiens and Cologne, while English cathedrals provided the source for the nave design.<sup>26</sup> After this project, Italian Gothic and

Romanesque buildings began to be more of a source for Renwick's designs and he used a variety of "richly colored, highly textured materials providing dazzling polychromatic effects." More concerned with a synthesis of form and fabric than stylistic purity, in the Clinton Avenue Congregational Church Renwick set round-arched Romanesque windows into a Gothic Revival style building (1854-55, Brooklyn, demolished), while in his Church of the Covenant (1863-65, demolished) he used stone of alternating colors to outline the arched window openings, and added a rose window and gables at all the roof terminations. At St. Bartholomew's Church (1871-72, demolished) Renwick lavishly used polychromy inside and out in a style that has been described variously as "Lombardo-Gothic," "Byzantine," and "Italian Romanesque." St. Ann's Episcopal Church in Brooklyn (1868-69, demolished) was an exemplary version of the finely-detailed, elaborately decorated High Victorian Gothic style advocated by John Ruskin. The brownstone walls contrasted strongly with white stone bands which gave a distinctly horizontal emphasis to the design.

In addition to ecclesiastical work, Renwick supplied designs for many other types of buildings, executed in a wide variety of styles. Among these, the most well-known of Renwick's work is one of his earliest, the medieval, Romanesque Revival style Smithsonian Institution building in Washington, D.C., for which he won the design competition in 1846. Inspired by the work on the new Louvre in Paris, he worked in the Second Empire or "Modern French" style to create the Corcoran Gallery in Washington (1859-61 and 1870-71, later renamed the Renwick Gallery) where he was able to fully integrate the complex decorative and spatial characteristics of the new style.<sup>27</sup> His residential work included a Romanesque Revival style house for his parents on lower Fifth Avenue (demolished), a simple Gothic style cottage (West Haven, Connecticut, 1851), the elaborate mansarded Greystone in Riverdale (for William E. Dodge, 1863-64, a designated New York City Landmark), and an Italianate townhouse at Fifth Avenue and 53<sup>rd</sup> Street (1881-83, for Almy and Frederic Gallatin, demolished). Among his numerous other designs were several Italianate style hotels from the 1850s (all demolished), the Renaissance Revival style main building of Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, NY (1861-65), and two structures on Blackwell's Island (Lighthouse 1872, and Smallpox Hospital, 1854-56, both designated New York City Landmarks).

As Renwick's architectural practice expanded, especially with the increase in commercial commissions, he could no longer complete all the work himself. In 1858 he joined in partnership with Richard Tylden Auchmuty and two years later he partnered with Joseph Sands. Sands died in 1880 and in 1883 Renwick promoted his wife's cousin, James Lawrence Aspinwall and William H. Russell to partnerships in the firm, which then became Renwick, Aspinwall & Russell.

### Style of St. Stephen's Church<sup>28</sup>

St. Stephen's Church was designed in the Romanesque Revival style, an unusual stylistic choice for a Catholic church built in the mid-nineteenth century. Before St. Stephen's, Renwick had designed several churches in the Gothic Revival style, including Grace Church (1843-46) which showed "a genuine understanding of the medieval Gothic mode" based on English and French sources.<sup>29</sup> Most architects and churchmen of the time believed that the Gothic style as promoted by Ruskin, Pugin and Viollet-le-Duc was the "true Christian architecture."

Renwick was not attached to any one style however. He used the Romanesque Revival style on the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. (1847-1855)<sup>30</sup> as well as a house for his parents on lower Fifth Avenue (1849-51). In 1846-47, Renwick designed the Congregationalist Church of the Puritans on the northwest corner of Union Square (demolished in 1869).<sup>31</sup> This white marble building was probably influenced by the striking Bavarian Romanesque Revival

style St. George Episcopal Church by Eidltiz and Blesch (1846-8, East 16<sup>th</sup> Street, a designated New York City Landmark). Eidlitz, from Prague and Blesch, from Bavaria, were familiar with and influenced by recent German designs, particularly von Gartner's Ludwigskirche (1829-43) and Schinkel's Moabitkirche (1832-34) in Munich.

This period marked the beginning of the use of the round-arched style in the United States. Called *Rundbogenstil* in German, it was also known as Norman (if influenced by French sources) or Byzantine, Romanesque or Lombard (if inspired by the Italians) and became "the dominant type of building ...from 1850 to the Civil War."<sup>32</sup> Its popularity continued for the rest of the nineteenth century as many American buildings such as hospitals, schools, railroad stations and stores, as well as churches, were constructed in this style. It was a precursor to the hugely popular and idiosyncratic Richardson Romanesque in the later years of the century. The style derived from medieval European sources dating from 1000 to 1200, and in this country it came to be seen as more earthy and pragmatic than gothic styles, permitting variety and invention without being fancy or exotic. According to Robert Dale Owen, who wrote *Hints on Public Architecture* with James Renwick in an attempt to justify the choice of the Romanesque Revival for the Smithsonian Institution, this style provided picturesque irregularity, was flexible and economical, and easily accommodated additions or modifications depending on the need. It provided more mass and breadth than the Gothic, but still expressed verticality, was imposing rather than ornate and less ostentatious and "more republican" than buildings in the Gothic style.<sup>33</sup>

In these early applications, the Romanesque Revival style was often used for Protestant evangelical churches, generally Congregationalist, Baptist or Low Church Episcopalian. This type of architecture tended to appeal to strong, independent clergy who knew what they wanted and who preferred preaching to heavy liturgy. This situation was similar to that in Prussia at the time and helped lead designers to the use of German-inspired Romanesque Revival churches similar to what was being built in that country.<sup>34</sup> The use of this style for the Roman Catholic St. Stephen's Church was therefore unusual at the time, although later in the century this style was applied more broadly, without these denominational distinctions. Later Catholic churches in New York designed in the Romanesque Revival style include St. Patrick's Church on Staten Island (1860-62) and the Church of the Annunciation in Brooklyn (1870).

As applied to churches at the middle of the century, the Romanesque Revival details were generally applied in a picturesque, rather than academically correct manner. Churches of this style were usually constructed of monochrome brick or brownstone with fine joints to give a smooth appearance. Gabled roofs were enhanced by corbel tables and round-arched openings, whether windows or doors, were often grouped in threes. Strong beltcourses subdivided the facades and emphasis was placed on the central doorways. Churches were often topped by towers or spires of differing heights or sometimes by parapets, while the plan was usually basilican, with a long, narrow nave.

The main façade of the Church of St. Stephen's, on East 28<sup>th</sup> Street has many features associated with the Romanesque Revival style. It is faced with brownstone and dominated by large, round-headed window and door openings, many grouped in threes and carried on attenuated columns. There are strong beltcourses and cornices that define each section of the facade and that are set off by corbel tables. Instead of towers, the 28<sup>th</sup> Street roofline is crowned by a large round parapet filled by a rose window and edged by another corbel table. The 29<sup>th</sup> Street façade, finished in a later addition, is larger and faced in brick with stone trim but carries many Romanesque Revival style elements. These include round-arched windows, doors and niches, gabled roofs, corbel tables and a wide, polygonal tower topped by a corbel table rising above the easternmost section. When constructed, this façade was even more ornate, with

intricate stained glass rose windows under the three main gables and a polygonal hipped roof crowning the tower (both have since been removed).

### Subsequent History

Under Bishop Henry Colton (who served as pastor of St. Stephen's between 1887 and 1903) a Catholic school was begun in 1887, housed in the building on 28<sup>th</sup> Street that had previously held the orphan asylum.<sup>35</sup> He also freed St. Stephen's of debt and then embarked on the construction of a new school building, located next to the church at 114 28<sup>th</sup> Street. Designed by Edward Lynch and opened in 1899, this building is not part of this designation.

During the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the section of Manhattan comprising St. Stephen's Parish became more commercial than residential and the number of parishioners declined considerably. Father Francis Cummings served St. Stephen's only from 1919-1922 but during that time he installed electric lighting and a new organ in the church and renovated the building at 134 East 29<sup>th</sup> Street as a settlement house.

Father McGuire was appointed to St. Stephen's in 1948 and immediately undertook major repair work on the church building. He updated the school building and installed a new roof on the church, repaired the stained glass windows, repointed the exterior walls and removed the staircases on the 29<sup>th</sup> Street entrances.<sup>36</sup>

St. Stephen's had acquired five brownstones east of the church on 29<sup>th</sup> Street and for many years these served as a Parish House, a residence for the New York Apostolate and as a convent for the Sisters of Charity. In 1957 these buildings were demolished and a new rectory was constructed on the site (not included in this designation).

In 1967 the Sisters of Charity, who had been running the school since its inception, left and the school came under the care of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart. At this time the school also provided education to the children of two other parishes that had been closed, Sacred Heart and Our Lady of the Scapular.<sup>37</sup> The Carmelite Order began to operate St. Stephen's in 1988 and the two parishes formally merged in 1990, forming the Church of Our Lady of the Scapular and St. Stephen.<sup>38</sup>

### Murals

Although these interior murals are not included in the designation, their importance merits a brief note.

Constantine Brumidi was born in Italy in 1805. Trained at the Accademia di San Luca in Rome, his artistic talents brought him to the attention of Pope Pius IX and they became close personal friends. Brumidi was commissioned by Pope Gregory XVI and Pope Pius to work on restorations and portraits for the Vatican Palace. Due to these close ties, Brumidi moved to the United States in 1852 when revolutionaries in Italy tried to overthrow the authority of the Papal state. In 1868, Brumidi was hired to create murals in St. Stephen's church, a type of decoration that was commonly used on Romanesque Revival style churches in this country.<sup>39</sup> He created 43 murals in the church, including the large Crucifixion over the high altar, two large canvasses over the side altars (including one of St. Stephen receiving martyrdom), as well as the Stations of the Cross. Brumidi also painted church decorations in Philadelphia and Mexico City. Later in his career, Brumidi was commissioned to create the historical murals on the rotunda of the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C., where he died in 1880.

### Description

*28<sup>th</sup> Street Façade:* The main façade of the Church of St. Stephen faces 28<sup>th</sup> Street, is faced with painted brownstone, and is two stories high on a raised base. Narrow alleys flank the building on

both sides and a narrow side wall, set back from the main façade screens the alley on the eastern side of the lot. Apart from this screen, the building is symmetrical and divided by projecting piers into three bays. A strong cornice between the first and second stories furnishes horizontal separation. A non-historic iron fence encloses the property at the lot line including the three sets of stairs that lead to the entrance doors. There are also non-historic iron railings on each stairway. All of the door and window openings are deeply set in the façade and are capped by round-headed arches.

The central section projects from the façade and is framed by piers with broad stone bases that extend forward to the lot line and rise to the roof. Each pier has a narrow inset round-arched panel on the first story, and then steps back two more times, topped at each level by a plain, projecting capital and finally a square finial.<sup>40</sup> At the first story of the central section, stairs lead to the large, central doorway. It has non-historic double wood doors with square windows. Similar round-arched openings are located to each side of the doorway and shelter large statues on pedestals.<sup>41</sup> Each arch is framed by multiple thin columns and moldings around bifurcated stained glass transoms. Large iron and glass lanterns are attached over the doors.<sup>42</sup> A gabled cornice framed by a corbel table divides the two stories and a blind arcade with contrasting panels fills the space between the door openings and the cornice. At the second story there are three tall, narrow windows deeply set in the façade and framed by thin engaged columns, rounded moldings and lintels. They rest on a continuous sill ornamented by incised quatrefoils. The central window is taller and broader than those on the two sides and all are filled with stained glass. Above this central section is a large rounded pediment. It is outlined by a narrow corbel table and is topped by a small simple bronze cross. Within the pediment is a deeply set rose window.

Flanking the central section on each side is an identical, shorter and narrower bay framed by smaller but similar piers. The first story has stairs leading to a similar non-historic double wood doors topped by a bifurcated stained glass transom and framed by columns, moldings and rounded lintel. A blind arcade with contrasting panels fills the space from the arch to the cornice. A broad plain cornice divides the two stories. At the second story a pair of arched stained glass-filled windows framed by columns, moldings and rounded lintels rests on the cornice. A narrow corbel table ornaments the area above windows and a cornice crowns this bay, topped by a flat parapet with inset quatrefoils.<sup>43</sup>

On the east side of the building, set back from the rest of the façade is a narrow stone section that appears to be another bay, but is actually a screen for the alley that lies beyond it. It has an arched opening at the ground level, enclosed by a non-historic iron gate, and two smaller, arched openings at the levels above this. The gable fronted roof of this screen is crowned by a small geometric finial and outlined by a corbel table.

*29<sup>th</sup> Street Façade:* The 29<sup>th</sup> Street façade of St. Stephen's Church is much wider than that on 28<sup>th</sup> Street and is faced in brick with stone trim. It sits on a raised basement that is topped by a granite water table.<sup>44</sup> The squared basement windows as well as the projecting piers of the central bay are framed by stone quoins. All the other windows have round-arched openings. This façade is 7 bays wide with a steeply pitched roof with side gables. A squat polygonal tower rises just above the roofline over the easternmost bay.<sup>45</sup>

Three large, gable-fronted wall dormers project slightly from the front façade and extend above the cornice line. The one in the middle is the largest while those on the two sides are almost identical and hold basement level entrances and first story windows under gabled porches. These stone porches project slightly from the wall dormers and have a round-arched opening defined by rounded moldings supported on thin columns with elaborate capitals set on



tall bases. The roofs of the porches are topped by elaborate crosses. Above each porch and under the main gable is a large, round, flat stone panel that originally held a rose window. The one on the east now displays a large “Alpha” while the one on the west has a large “Omega” symbol.

The central and largest wall dormer has a large front-facing gable roof capped by a cross. Within the gable is a large round panel (also originally a rose window) that displays a large cross. The gable and its supporting piers are outlined by brick piers that are edged by bricks laid in a dentil pattern. Beneath the large round panel, and running across the façade, is a blind arcade sitting on a stone string course. Below this are three empty stone niches centered in the large wall dormer. Each one is topped by a gable carried on engaged columns with elaborate capitals. They rest on a continuous stone sill supported by four pairs of brackets that continues across the façade as a stone string course.

The recessed areas between the wall dormers have single, round-arched windows openings sitting on stone string courses at each level. On the easternmost bay, a polygonal tower with narrow, round-arched louvered openings rises slightly above the roof line. Since its original roof was removed, it is finished by a slightly projecting brick corbel table. The asphalt shingle-covered roof is visible above and behind the gables.

Researched and written by  
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#### NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> The Commission held a previous hearing on this item in 1966, LP- 0472.

<sup>2</sup> Hereafter St. Stephen’s Church.

<sup>3</sup> Much of the information about Murray Hill and adjacent areas comes from Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Murray Hill Historic District Designation Report LP-2102* (New York: City of New York, 2002) by Gale Harris and Donald Presa.

<sup>4</sup> Portions of this section adapted from: Charles Monaghan, *The Murrays of Murray Hill*, Urban History Press, (Brooklyn, NY 1998), 112.

<sup>5</sup> *Murray Hill Designation Report*, 8.

<sup>6</sup> *Murray Hill Designation Report*, 9.

<sup>7</sup> 1927 Map of the City of New York, New York City Archives.

<sup>8</sup> In 1845 the depot burned and was replaced by a two-building complex. This depot complex later incorporated the original St. Stephen’s Church building. *St. Stephen’s Parish Commemorative Brochure, 1848-1918*. This and other church documents are located at the archdiocese archives at St. Joseph’s Seminary.

<sup>9</sup> The nature of that development had been determined as early as 1835 when the Murray heirs imposed a series of restrictive covenants on their land. These covenants stated that all residences should be “brick or stone dwelling houses of at least three stories” except for stables of brick and stone for private dwellings and churches. The covenants also prohibited a number of uses which might constitute nuisances by presenting fire hazards or producing noxious odors and pollution. *Murray Hill Designation Report*, 10.

<sup>10</sup> By 1850, maps show the area east of Fourth Avenue was fully developed to 27<sup>th</sup> Street, while the blocks east of Lexington were filled to 34<sup>th</sup> Street. In 1854-55 the blocks between Fourth Avenue and Third Avenue from around East 30<sup>th</sup> Street to around 40<sup>th</sup> street were completely undeveloped except for a few old farm buildings and some early speculative homes on 35<sup>th</sup> Street. Further development toward the east did not reach this area until late in the 1850s and 60s.

<sup>11</sup> “Catholics,” in *Encyclopedia of New York* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 190-222; Rev. John Talbot Smith, *The Catholic Church in New York, A History of the New York Diocese from its Establishment in 1808 to the Present Time* (New York: Hall & Locke Co., 1905); Moses King, *King’s Handbook of New York* (Boston: Moses King, 1893), 355-360.

<sup>12</sup> Smith, 72.

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- <sup>13</sup> Charlotte McIlvain Moore, *The Church of St. Stephen, An Historical Sketch, 1849-1894*. Consecration Souvenir (New York: The Calendar Co., 1894), 28.
- <sup>14</sup> Commemorative booklet, *St. Stephen's Parish, 1848-1948*, n.p.
- <sup>15</sup> The railroad paid \$46,000.00 for the improved property, on January 6, 1853, but continued to occupy this building until the construction of their new home. Ibid.
- <sup>16</sup> New York County Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 609, p. 141, Liber 609, p. 305, 307, and 342, Dec. 1, 1852 and Liber 622, p. 101, Dec. 2, 1852.
- <sup>17</sup> Moore, 28.
- <sup>18</sup> Effingham Humphrey, "The Churches of James Renwick, Jr." (Unpublished master's thesis, New York University, 1942), 56.
- <sup>19</sup> Smith, 170.
- <sup>20</sup> Moore, 34.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid, 57.
- <sup>22</sup> King's Handbook, 360-1.
- <sup>23</sup> Commemorative Booklet, *St. Stephen's Parish, 1848-1948*.
- <sup>24</sup> Much of the material in this section was taken from "Renwick, James, Jr." by Selma Rattner in *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects*, Adolf K. Placzek, ed., Vol. 3 (New York: The Free Press, 1982), 541-548, and LPC, *Church of All Saints Designation Report (LP-2165)* (New York: City of New York, 2006), report written and researched by Virginia Kurshan.
- <sup>25</sup> *Macmillan Encyclopedia*, 541.
- <sup>26</sup> St. Patrick's was intended to be the culmination of Renwick's work in the Decorated Gothic Revival style, including a monumental stone tower over the crossing and the first large masonry vault in the United States. Budget constraints forced him to change or abandon many of his plans. The crossing tower was eliminated and the interior was finished with lath and plaster, rather than stone, making the already-completed buttresses structurally unnecessary.
- <sup>27</sup> *Macmillan Encyclopedia*, 543.
- <sup>28</sup> Information about the early Romanesque Revival style in the United States comes from the following sources: New York Landmarks Conservancy, *Common Bond* vol. 13 (May, 1997), 2-4; Carroll Meeks, "Romanesque Revival Before Richardson," in *The Art Bulletin* vol. 35 (Mar., 1953), Kathleen Curran, *The Romanesque Revival* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2003), Robert A.M. Stern et al, *New York 1880, Architecture and Urbanism in the Gilded Age* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1999), 314-5.
- <sup>29</sup> *Macmillan Encyclopedia*, 541.
- <sup>30</sup> Contrary to the rules, Renwick submitted two designs for the Smithsonian competition, one Gothic Revival and one Romanesque Revival. He preferred the Gothic Revival for such an important institution, but the building committee chairman, Robert Dale Owen had made clear his partiality for the Romanesque.
- <sup>31</sup> Effingham Humphrey, Jr. in his master's thesis "The Churches of James Renwick, Jr.," compares the Church of the Puritans to St. Denis in France, with its three horizontal and vertical divisions. Humphrey notes that this French church had been receiving a considerable amount of publicity in the 1830s.
- <sup>32</sup> Meeks, 28.
- <sup>33</sup> Meeks, 22.
- <sup>34</sup> Kathleen Curran, 262.
- <sup>35</sup> This institution had been incorporated into a new, larger orphanage in New Dorp, Staten Island.
- <sup>36</sup> Commemorative Booklet, *St. Stephen's Parish, 1848-1948*.
- <sup>37</sup> Our Lady of the Scapular had been organized (farther east on 29<sup>th</sup> Street) in 1889 by the Carmelite Fathers.
- <sup>38</sup> This information was provided by Sister Margarita Smith, archivist at St. Joseph's Seminary, Yonkers, New York.
- <sup>39</sup> Kathleen Curran, "The Romanesque Revival, Mural Painting, and Protestant Patronage in America," in *The Art Bulletin* vol. 81 (Dec., 1999), 693-722.
- <sup>40</sup> Historic photos show that these piers were originally crowned by large, spire-like finials that were replaced at some point before 1924 by small, urn-shaped finials. Originally there were also open-work finials crowned by conical roofs topping the first story set-backs. These were removed sometime prior to 1924.
- <sup>41</sup> These side openings were originally entrance doors.
- <sup>42</sup> The lanterns do not appear in a photo from 1924 but are there in a photos dated 1948.
- <sup>43</sup> Historic photos show an elaborate volute with graceful curves was originally located over these parapets.
- <sup>44</sup> Originally there were double staircases that rose to first story entrances under the two stone gables. Since their removal, entrance to this façade has been on the ground level.
- <sup>45</sup> This tower was originally capped by a polygonal hipped roof, removed sometime before 1948.

## FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

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. Stephen's Church (The Church of Our Lady of the Scapular and St. Stephen) has a special character and a 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. Stephen's Church (The Church of Our Lady of the Scapular and St. Stephen) was constructed in 1853-54 as the second building for the Parish of St. Stephen, established by Bishop John Hughes in 1848; that the building was designed by prominent New York architect James Renwick, Jr., designer of Grace Church, St. Patrick's Cathedral and numerous other well known and highly admired New York church buildings; that Renwick used the Romanesque Revival style for St. Stephen's, an early use of this style and an unusual choice for a Catholic church at this time; that St. Stephen's Church was established at a time of great expansion by the Catholic Church due to the huge numbers of immigrants to New York from such heavily Catholic countries as Ireland and Germany; that the Church was first led by Dr. Jeremiah Cummings who created exceptionally beautiful services and attracted many worshipers, making St. Stephen's, in the 1860s, the largest and most influential catholic church in New York; that St. Stephen's was so popular that in 1865-6 the church was expanded to the north as far as 29<sup>th</sup> Street; that most of Renwick's designs for church buildings were in the Gothic Revival style and before this he only used the Romanesque Revival style on the Smithsonian Institution and the Church of the Puritans; that the deeply-set round-arched openings, the corbel tables and blind arcades create a lively façade on this densely developed street; that the church design is the work of a master architect in an unusual and distinctive architectural style that makes it stand out as an important architectural monument in the Murray Hill section of Manhattan.

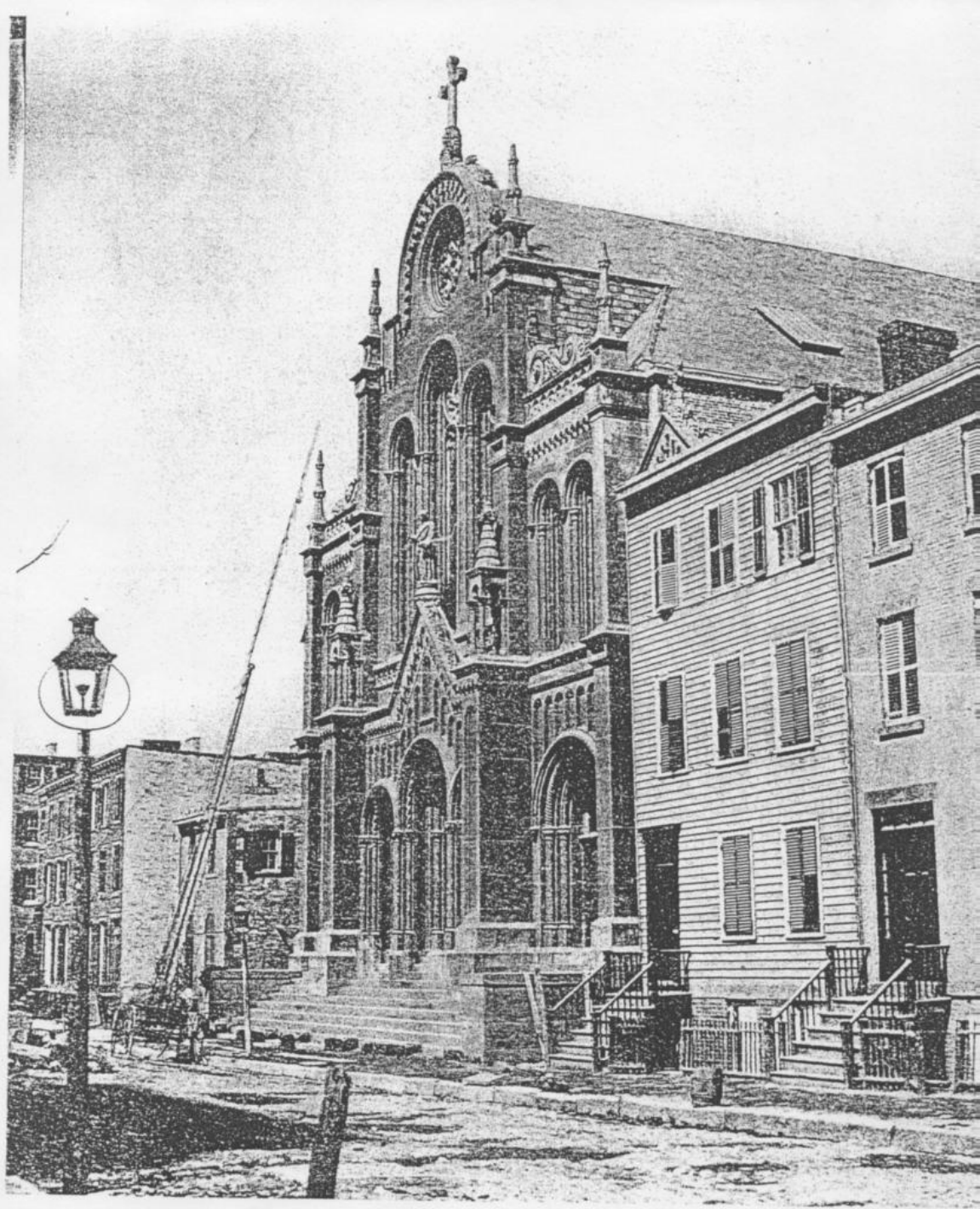
Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark St. Stephen's Church (The Church of Our Lady of the Scapular and St. Stephen), 151 East 28<sup>th</sup> Street (aka 141-55 East 28<sup>th</sup> Street and 144-152 East 29<sup>th</sup> Street), Manhattan, and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 884, lot 30 in part, consisting of the land on which the church is situated as its Landmark Site.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair  
Frederick Bland, Stephen F. Byrns, Diana Chapin,  
Roberta Brandes Gratz, Christopher Moore, Margery Perlmutter,  
Elizabeth Ryan, Roberta Washington, Commissioners



**ST. STEPHEN'S CHURCH** (The Church of Our Lady of the Scapular & St. Stephen),  
151 East 28<sup>th</sup> Street (aka 141-155 East 28<sup>th</sup> Street and 144-152 East 29<sup>th</sup> Street), Manhattan.

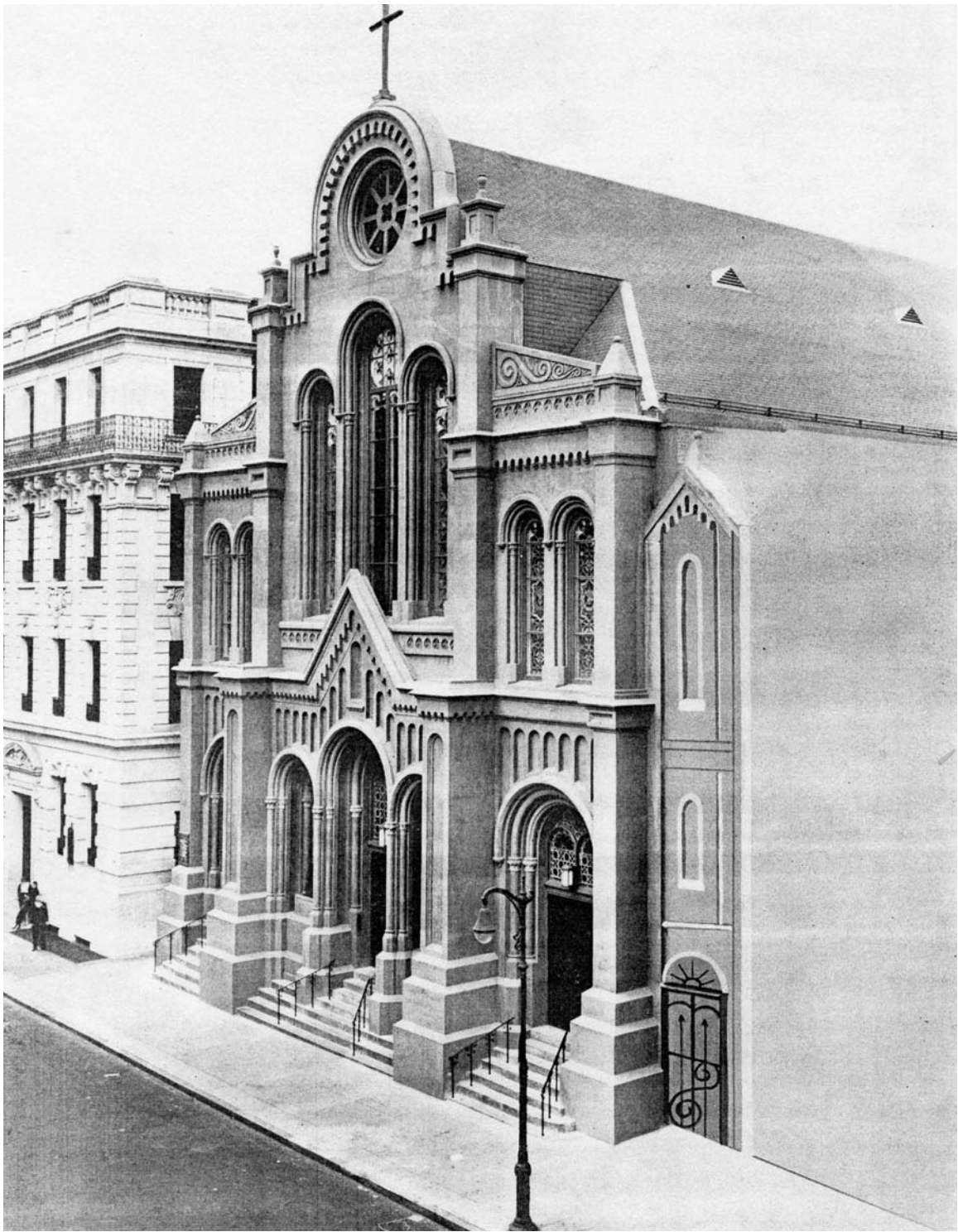
*Photo: Carl Forster, 2008*



ST. STEPHEN'S CHURCH, 1854

The above photograph shows the building just after completion and before the grading of 28th Street. From a view never repeated.

St. Stephen's Church  
Just after completion, 1854  
Archives of the Archdiocese of New York  
St. Joseph's Seminary



St. Stephen's Church  
Photo c. 1870  
Archives of the Archdiocese of New York,  
St. Joseph's Seminary



St. Stephen's Church  
28<sup>th</sup> Street details  
*Photos: Carl Forster, 2008*



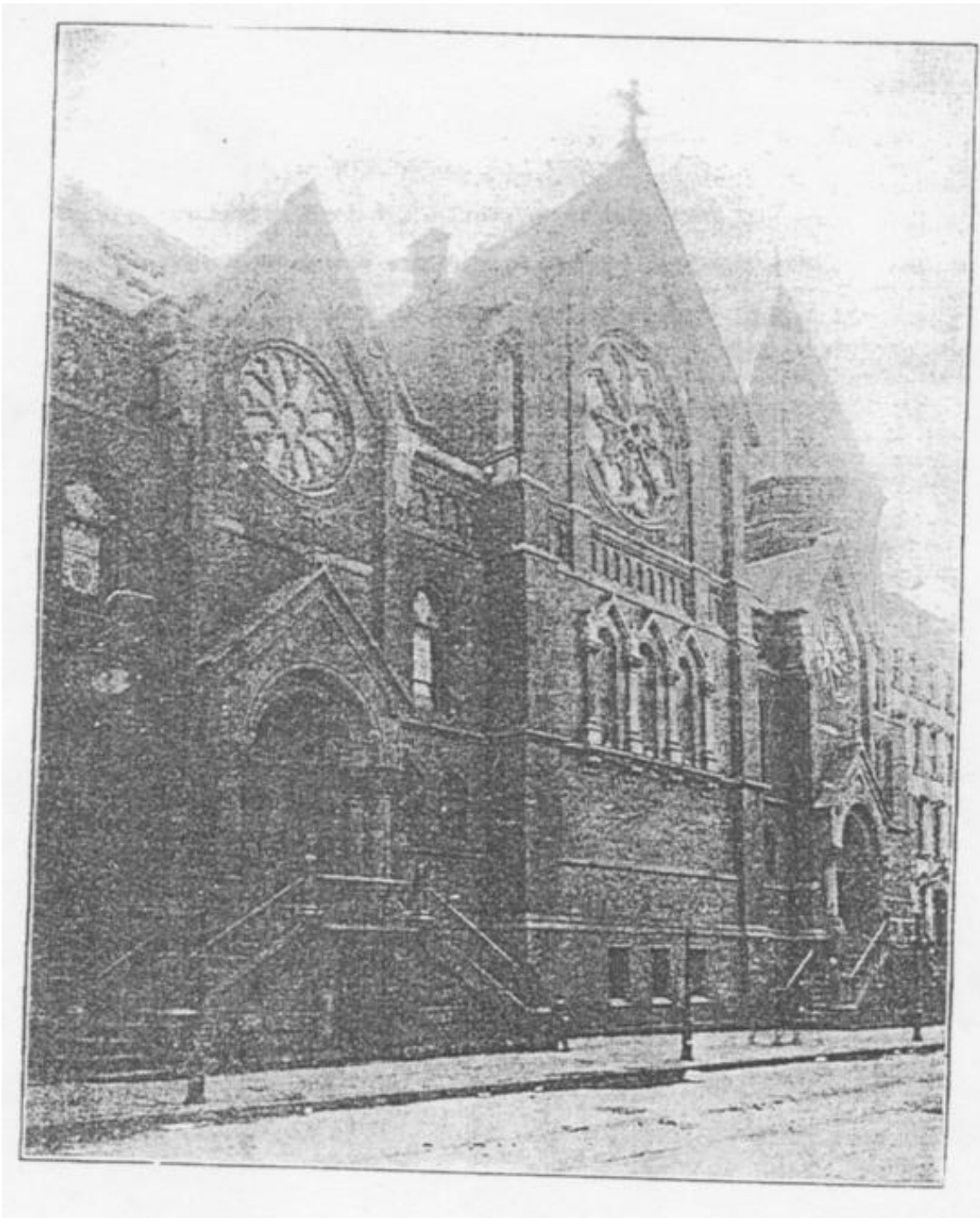


St. Stephen's Church  
28<sup>th</sup> Street façade details  
*Photos: Carl Forster, 2008*





St. Stephen's Church  
29<sup>th</sup> Street Façade  
*Photo: Carl Forster, 2008*



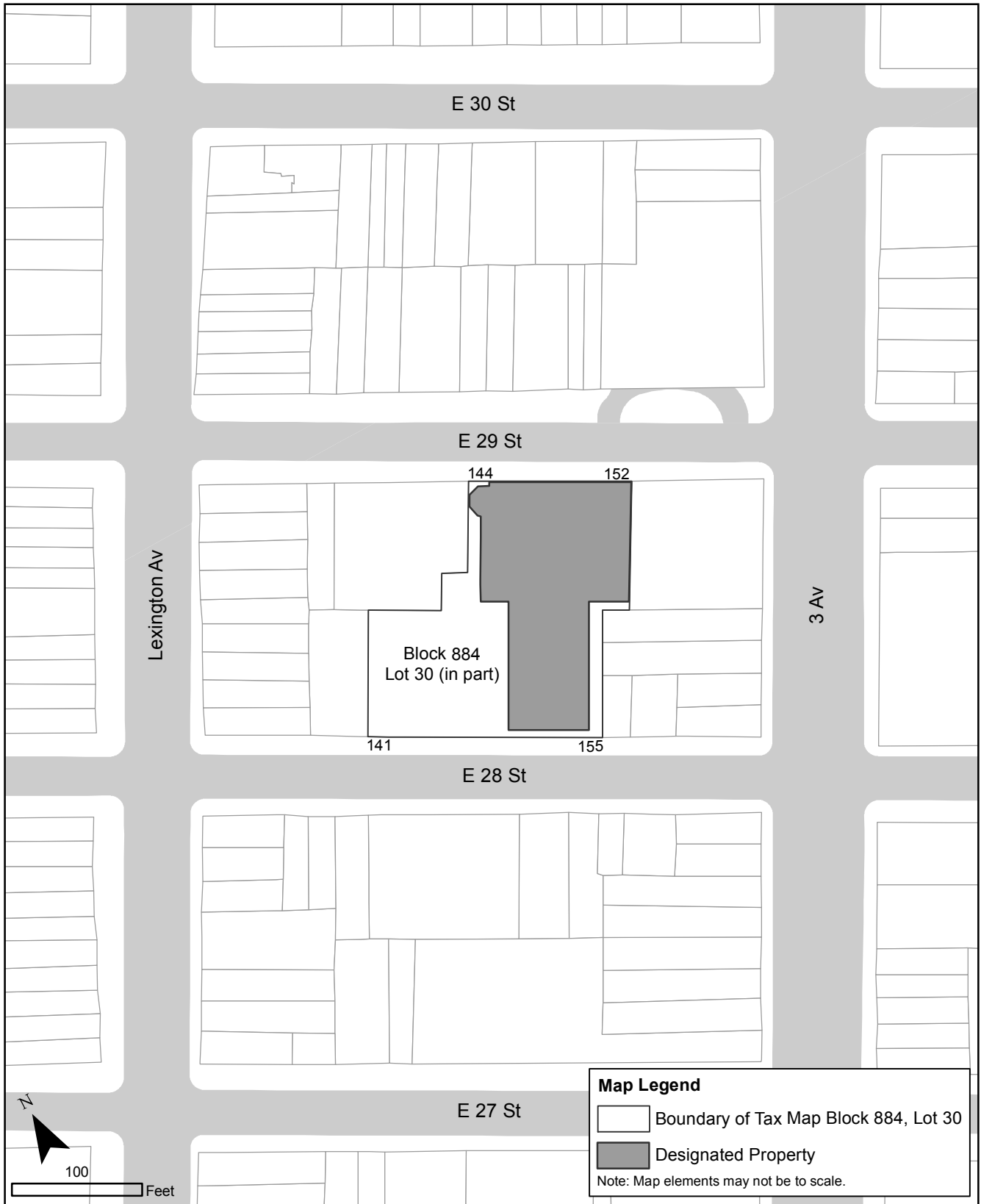
St. Stephen's Church  
29<sup>th</sup> Street façade shortly after construction  
Archives of the Archdiocese of New York  
St. Joseph's Seminary



St. Stephen's Church  
29<sup>th</sup> Street façade details  
*Photos: Carl Forster, 2008*



St. Stephen's Church  
29<sup>th</sup> Street façade details  
*Photos: Carl Forster, 2008*



ST. STEPHEN'S CHURCH (THE CHURCH OF OUR LADY OF THE SCAPULAR & ST. STEPHEN) (LP-2259)  
 151 East 28th Street (aka 141-155 East 28th Street and 144-152 East 29th Street). Borough of Manhattan,  
 Tax Map Block 884, Lot 30 in part, consisting of the land on which the church is situated

Designated: October 28, 2008