

# Holyrood Episcopal Church- Iglesia Santa Cruz



## DESIGNATION REPORT

# Holyrood Episcopal Church- Iglesia Santa Cruz

## LOCATION

Borough of Manhattan  
Tax Map Block 2176, Lot 30  
715 West 179th Street  
(aka 715-721 West 179th Street; 426-434 Fort  
Washington Avenue)

## LANDMARK TYPE

Individual

## SIGNIFICANCE

Holyrood Episcopal Church – Iglesia Santa Cruz, built in 1911-1916, is a striking example of the Gothic Revival style and has been an important social and religious anchor for Washington Heights’s Latino community for the past 40 years.



**Holyrood Episcopal Church, c.1939-40**  
Tax Photograph, Municipal Archives, City of New York

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# **Holyrood Episcopal Church – Iglesia Santa Cruz**

715 West 179th Street, Manhattan  
(aka 715-721 West 179th Street; 426-434 Fort  
Washington Avenue)

## **Designation List 523 LP-2649**

**Built:** 1911-16

**Architects:** Bannister & Schell

**Landmark Site:** Borough of Manhattan  
Tax Map Block 2176, Lot 30

**Calendared:** January 19, 2021

**Public Hearing:** March 23, 2021

**Designated:** May 18, 2021

On March 23, 2021, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of Holyrood Episcopal Church – Iglesia Santa Cruz (Research Department Public Hearing Item No. 1). The public hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. At the Public Hearing, three people spoke in support of the proposed designation including Reverend Luis Barrios, priest-in-charge of Holyrood Episcopal Church – Iglesia Santa Cruz, and representatives of the New York Landmarks Conservancy and the Historic Districts Council. There was no testimony in opposition to the proposed designation. Additionally, the Commission received a letter of support for designation from Manhattan Community Board 12.

## Summary

### Holyrood Episcopal Church – Iglesia Santa Cruz

Holyrood Episcopal Church – Iglesia Santa Cruz is architecturally significant as a sophisticated and well-executed Gothic Revival design by the architectural firm of Bannister & Schell, and culturally significant as an important social and religious anchor for Washington Heights’s Latino community for the past 40 years.

Holyrood Church’s construction in 1911-1916 reflected the stability and resources of the Washington Heights neighborhood as it transitioned from sparsely settled to a thriving residential area. It has remained an important resource within the neighborhood, its congregation changing to reflect the influx of residents from the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico and other Spanish-speaking areas. In recognition of its role in this community, the church is now known as Holyrood Church – Iglesia Santa Cruz, adding the Spanish translation to its name. Recently it has also become a center for the hearing impaired.

Holyrood parish was founded in 1893 by Rev. William O. Embury, chaplain at a nearby home for girls. The congregation outgrew its 1895 church building at 181st Street and Broadway and in 1911 commissioned William F. Bannister and Richard M. Schell to design the much larger present-day church building. The architectural firm was a well-respected partnership that designed a broad range of buildings, including many religious properties in the New York City area.

Successfully adapted to its corner lot, the design of Holyrood Church – Iglesia Santa Cruz reflects the Episcopal Church’s preference at that

time for the English Gothic style. Constructed of stone and brick with a profusion of intricate terra cotta details and trim, the building exhibits the traditional medieval arrangement of nave, side aisles, clerestory, and apse. Its front facade is dominated by a tall stained-glass window with intersecting geometric tracery, flanked by stepped pier buttresses with pinnacles that extend high above the roofline. Shorter stepped buttresses extend along the West 179th Street side aisle framing pointed arch windows.

Holyrood Episcopal Church – Iglesia Santa Cruz is remarkably intact with excellent integrity of design and materials. This outstanding example of a Gothic Revival church has served Washington Heights with its religious services, ministry, and outreach programs since its construction over 100 years ago. It continues that tradition today providing programs and humanitarian assistance to people from diverse backgrounds, particularly within Washington Heights’s Spanish-speaking community.



## Building Description

Holyrood Episcopal Church – Iglesia Santa Cruz

Holyrood Episcopal Church – Iglesia Santa Cruz is prominently located at the northeast corner of Fort Washington Avenue and West 179th Street.<sup>1</sup> The building consists of the sanctuary with its entrance facing west onto Fort Washington Avenue and an attached parish house along West 179th Street. The north facade faces the church's narrow parking lot and the east facade sits along the property line next to an alley. Directly across West 179th Street from the church is the busy George Washington Bridge Bus Station.

The free-standing masonry church is striking with its rough-faced stone masonry, dramatic roofline, and filigreed terra cotta ornament. The sanctuary's composition is a classic basilica with a rectangular footprint since the transepts are in line with the aisles.<sup>2</sup> A steep slate-clad gabled roof covers the nave, shed roofs are over the two side aisles, and a faceted roof tops the apse.

Above a smooth ashlar stone base and water table, rough-faced random ashlar clads the building's primary west and south facades, accented by impressive terra-cotta details and trim, including smooth quoins at corners and window surrounds. The church features an abundance of Gothic Revival details that readily distinguish this building as an academic revival of English medieval ecclesiastical design.<sup>3</sup> In contrast to the more visible facades, both the north and east facades lack ornamentation and are clad simply with brick above a random rubble-stone base.

Window openings in the church proper are pointed arch with stone or terra-cotta tracery, sills,

voussoirs, and quoins. Most of the windows are leaded with stained or clear glass in either a diamond-pane or decorative-art glazing pattern. The arched clerestory windows on the north side have clear glass. In addition, there are several figurative stained-glass windows throughout the church, two of them by Heaton, Butler, and Bayne of London.<sup>4</sup>

Secondary spaces such as the parish house and the basement feature square-topped or segmental-arch window openings. The parish house window openings along West 179th Street are trimmed with voussoirs and quoins similar to the church proper.

### Fort Washington Avenue Facade (West, Main Entrance Facade)

The symmetrical composition of the entrance facade consists of three bays with the widest and tallest below a gable with a highly decorative parapet. Central to this bay is a large pointed-arch stained-glass window with geometric tracery.<sup>5</sup> At each side of this bay there is a prominent stepped buttress topped with a decorative pinnacle that extends high above the parapet. At the base of the buttress to the south of the entrance is a marble stone inscribed with "HOLY ROOD CHURCH."

The entrance portal features a steep, slightly projecting gable end with a lobed pointed arch and is flanked by engaged colonettes that recede to the doors. A pair of wood plank doors with decorative metal strapwork are separated by an engaged colonette. The doors are topped by a tympanum with geometric low relief. Above the portal is a shallow gallery with a decorative railing.

The narrower and shorter side bays each exhibit a pointed-arch window with decorative tracery. Each window sits below a parapet that slopes with each side aisle roof. There are stepped buttresses at each corner creating a solid termination to both the front and side facades.

There is a profusion of textural details that include niches, colonettes, foliate capitals, blind arcades, sculptural moldings, crockets, and tiny orbs known as ballflowers. On close inspection, the facade exhibits many variations of geometric shapes, including trefoils, quatrefoils, and cinquefoils. These finely crafted details in terra cotta contrast to the rough-faced stone of the facade walls.

**Alterations:** Alterations include concrete steps that replaced narrower historic steps at the main entrance; accessible ramp and metal pipe-railings; added signboard under south side window; a bracket sign; planter box between two buttresses; light fixture; and translucent panels that cover the windows.

### **West 179th Street Facade (South)**

The south facade continues the stone cladding and terra-cotta trim of the front facade, but with fewer ornamental details. The nave with its clerestory, the transept, and the apse are visible above and set in from the side aisle and parish house that are lower and closer to the sidewalk.

The one-story side aisle with a partially above-ground basement consists of five bays. This aisle is divided by stepped buttresses with smooth quoins and caps. A crenelated parapet with coping hides the aisle roof from the street. Each bay has a pointed-arch window opening below a string course with ballflowers. Each window in turn exhibits decorative tracery and is trimmed with voussoirs, quoins, and label molding with decorative stops. Short square-topped basement windows are set within the smooth stone base of the church.

The one-story parish house, also with a basement, projects beyond the aisle and continues the cladding and crenelated parapet design of the aisle, but without the buttresses. The parish house has its own separate entrance, a pair of wood plank doors with decorative strapwork, located at right angles to

the building.<sup>6</sup> Above the doorway is an ornamental masonry shield. Steps to this side entrance are enclosed by a one-bay wide masonry wall with an ornamental iron fence and gate. The wall continues the masonry design of the building. In addition, there are two additional entrances to the parish house at the basement level along the sidewalk.

The parish house has five bays of windows under the crenelated parapet. Segmental-arch window openings are at the basement level and square-headed openings are at the main story. Each window continues the pattern of quoins and voussoirs. The roof of the parish house holds a large bell, partially visible through the crenelated parapet.<sup>7</sup>

The parish house terminates at the southeast corner with a section under a gabled roof with a kicked parapet. Since the street slopes downward here, this section has two distinct stories, each with three wood rectangular windows separated by masonry mullions. The lower story here has masonry transom bars, while the upper has wood transom bars. The entrance at this section consists of a pair of vertical-wood doors at the sidewalk. Above the doorway is a small window at the top story. At the southeast corner just above the base is a cornerstone with a partially eroded inscription.<sup>8</sup>

The clerestory has six bays divided by engaged piers trimmed with smooth quoins.<sup>9</sup> The quoins and voussoirs around each of the clerestory's pointed-arch window openings are smooth and flush with the cladding. Each pointed-arch window incorporates a central mullion and tracery into the design.

The tall south transept with a large pointed-arch window opening in the south wall is topped with a gable roof and kicked parapet. Its corners and window are trimmed with smooth stone quoins. Like the south aisle, the window is trimmed with label molding. Visible beyond the transept and above the parish house are a chimney and the partially hidden

faceted roof of the five-sided apse.

**Alterations:** Alterations include filling in one of the aisle basement window openings; the addition of a doorway in one of the aisle basement openings that had been a window; replacement door in one of the parish house basement entries, accessible concrete ramps with metal pipe railings; added concrete steps; added signboard above basement door; translucent panels over the windows (two of the clerestory windows are only partially covered with a protective pane); security camera; window air conditioning units in the parish house; metal grilles at the lower story windows at the east end of the parish house; planter boxes; and light fixtures.

### **Secondary North Facade**

This is similar in massing to the south facade with its aisle, clerestory, transept, and pointed-arch window openings in the church proper. The facade cladding is brick without the terra cotta trim. The one-story side aisle has a stepped-brick cornice and is topped by a standing-seam shed roof.

The basement windows are segmental-arched set within the rubble stone foundation. There are four bays of pointed-arch windows at the aisle level; the rest is a solid wall that terminates in line with the transept.

The clerestory level has six bays of pointed-arch windows. The transept has a rectangular window at the north side and a gable roof with a parapet with coping.

**Alterations:** Alterations include the addition of translucent panels covering the windows; security lights attached to the brick; and brick that has been painted at the aisle level.

### **Secondary East Facade**

The east facade is clad in brick. It extends to the lot

line and faces a narrow alley of the adjacent property. Along the wall and set back from the street are two stories of three closely spaced segmental-arch window openings with masonry sills. The wood one-over-one double-hung windows themselves are square-topped.

**Alterations:** The brick is painted, the lower story window openings have metal grilles, and there is a window air conditioner unit at the top story.



## History and Significance

Holyrood Episcopal Church – Iglesia Santa Cruz

### Washington Heights Neighborhood

Holyrood Episcopal Church – Iglesia Santa Cruz is located within the Washington Heights neighborhood of northern Manhattan.<sup>10</sup> The neighborhood extends from 155th Street to Dyckman Street between the Hudson and the Harlem rivers. Characterized by hilly terrain, Washington Heights includes the highest point on Manhattan just a few blocks north of the Holyrood site.

“At the time of European contact, the northern portion of Manhattan Island was occupied by bands of Reckgawawanks, a Native American group closely related to the Wickquaesgecks, both of which belonged to the Algonquian-speaking Munsee branch of the Delaware.”<sup>11</sup> They continued to live in this woodland area throughout the 17th century during which time the Dutch and later the English attempted to drive them out. Ignoring the property claims made by the Native Americans, the English partitioned and allotted parcels to colonists between 1691 and 1712. In 1691 Joost Van Oblienis, a magistrate of New Harlem, received a parcel of land that encompassed much of the area.<sup>12</sup> The Reckgawawanks eventually relinquished their land claims in 1715 when a special tax raised funds for a final settlement.

Rich in Revolutionary War history, this area became the site for strategic forts that were constructed on the bluffs during the summer of 1776. The Continental Army built Fort Washington at the site of today’s Bennett Park between West 183rd and 185th streets north of Holyrood Church.<sup>13</sup> These forts remained the last Continental strongholds in the

battle for New York fighting the British in November 1776. Holyrood’s first church building along West 181st Street occupied one of the Revolutionary War battlefields.

The area that became known as Washington Heights remained sparsely settled during most of the 19th century. The land west of Broadway in particular retained its pastoral setting during that time and became one of the most elegant and fashionable outlying areas of the city for country estates. In fact, most of the east-west streets did not extend west beyond Broadway because of the large tracts of land.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to estates, the area became a popular location for large sprawling institutions. Several that were once located south of the Holyrood site included the Deaf and Dumb Asylum near Fort Washington Avenue and 165th Street, and the New York Juvenile Asylum between 176th and 178th streets near Saint Nicholas Avenue. North of Washington Heights in Inwood, the Episcopal House of Refuge for Problem Girls once stood where Inwood Hill Park is located today. William Oliver Embury, who established Holyrood Church in 1893, was a chaplain at that House of Refuge during the early days of the parish.<sup>15</sup>

Before the area experienced a dramatic increase in residential development west of Broadway, there were already a number of religious properties built in Washington Heights near the site of Holyrood Church. The nearby Roman Catholic Church of Saint Elizabeth had been built in 1872, the Washington Heights United Presbyterian Church in 1894, and the very early Mount Washington Presbyterian Church in 1844.<sup>16</sup>

Northern Manhattan began to be developed with the arrival of the IRT Subway Line (today’s 1 Line) which reached 181st Street by 1906. Hundreds of new apartment and flats buildings filled the blocks of Washington Heights. As a result of improved

transportation, the neighborhood grew with waves of immigrants and people moving north from lower Manhattan. After World War I, many from the Jewish, Irish, and Greek communities arrived to take advantage of the housing opportunities, parks, and convenient public transportation.<sup>17</sup>

As the neighborhood grew, many religious denominations either established new congregations in Washington Heights or moved their parishes northward following residential development.<sup>18</sup> For example, the impressive neo-Georgian Fort Washington Presbyterian Church was built in 1913 by a congregation that was the result of a merger of two Presbyterian churches located farther south in Manhattan.<sup>19</sup> It is now Iglesia Presbiteriana Fort Washington Heights, a designated New York City Landmark.

Major impacts to the neighborhood occurred with the construction of the George Washington Bridge in 1931 and later for the Bus Station in 1963. Blocks of five- and six-story apartment buildings were demolished as a result. This urban renewal project also demolished two nearby churches along West 178th Street: Chelsea Methodist Episcopal Church (also designed by Bannister & Schell) and the Fourth Church of Christ Scientist.

After World War II, many of the first wave of early 20th century residents moved out of Washington Heights. At the same time, the neighborhood began to attract additional Jewish residents who had immigrated from Europe. During the 1950s and 1960s, a growing number of African Americans, Cubans and Puerto Ricans also moved to Washington Heights. It continued to attract a significant Latino population throughout the 1980s and 90s, with increasing numbers from the Dominican Republic.

Dominicans had been immigrating to the United States in small numbers from about 1930, restricted by the Dominican Republic's political

regime. In 1961 the country's dictator Rafael Trujillo was assassinated and a popular revolt was defeated in 1965. Political uncertainty continued but more Dominicans were able to leave with most moving to New York City. Large numbers settled in upper Manhattan and western sections of The Bronx.<sup>20</sup>

By the 1980s Washington Heights and Inwood had the largest concentration of Dominicans in the country.<sup>21</sup> Like earlier residents, they were drawn to the area by the reasonable cost of housing for working families and the proximity to public transportation. Two subway lines that serviced the neighborhood made it easier to commute to jobs in the Garment District where many worked.<sup>22</sup> Illustrating the importance of the Dominican community in New York City, the annual Dominican Republic parade began in 1981 and continues to celebrate the strong Dominican presence in northern Manhattan. In 2018 Washington Heights was also honored with the cultural and commercial designation of "Little Dominican Republic."<sup>23</sup>

### **The Episcopal Church in New York City**

During the English rule before the Revolutionary War, the Church of England was the official state church in the Province of New York.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, there were only two formally organized Church of England parishes during the 1600s in what is today New York City: Saint Peter Church in Westchester Square in what is now The Bronx, established 1693, and Trinity Church in lower Manhattan at Broadway and Wall Street, established 1696. Both churches are New York City Landmarks.<sup>25</sup>

Despite being a government-supported institution, the Church of England struggled during the 1700s, partially because the colony had attracted a wide variety of religious denominations with congregants who resented the Church of England's control. After the American Revolution, the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States was

officially established in 1789 independent of any government support. They adapted the Church of England's liturgy, traditions, and prayer book for American use and attracted members who had formerly belonged to the English church.

When Holyrood was established in 1893, the Episcopal bishop of New York was Henry C. Potter (1834-1908). His years as bishop from 1887 until his death in 1908 were characterized by an ever-changing city, the growth of the Episcopal church, and the development of a cathedral for the diocese.<sup>26</sup> Many Episcopalians were moving "uptown" during his tenure and as such, Episcopal parishes were being established in less congested areas north such as Washington Heights and Inwood.<sup>27</sup> It was during this time of expansion that Holyrood Church was founded.

### **Holyrood Episcopal Church**

The parish of Holyrood was established in 1893 by Reverend William Oliver Embury.<sup>28</sup> As such it became the northernmost Episcopal parish in Manhattan.<sup>29</sup> The name was sometimes written Holy Rood during its early years, emphasizing the word "rood" that means cross or crucifix in Old English. Reverend Embury was already familiar with the Washington Heights area since he was the resident chaplain at the nearby House of Refuge for Problem Girls in Inwood. This institution was later known as the Episcopal House of Mercy, operated by a religious order, the Community of St. Mary.

The newly formed parish met in a rented storefront at 182nd Street where its first service was held April 9, 1893. Holyrood's first permanent sanctuary was a Gothic Revival building designed by R. D. Chandler, built in 1895 and located on the southwest corner of what is now West 181st Street and Broadway. "It was an attractive stone edifice of rural design, located on the rear of the property with a lawn and many trees between the two

thoroughfares."<sup>30</sup>

A few years later in 1901, the church, under the leadership of Holyrood's rector Rev. Clarence Morton Murray, played a public role in the dedication of a monument to the American Revolution located nearby.<sup>31</sup> Since the church was built on a battlefield, many Revolutionary War artifacts were recovered during construction in 1895. These were placed on display in the church during the dedication's activities. Around that same time, the New York City Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution placed a plaque in the church building dedicated to Margaret Corbin. She was considered a war heroine during the Battle for New York City, purportedly fighting in her husband's place after he was killed.<sup>32</sup>

By 1910, Washington Heights had extensively urbanized and the congregation outgrew its 15-year old building that could accommodate only 200 people.<sup>33</sup> The parish began plans to build a larger sanctuary, the present-day Holyrood Church. They decided to relocate a few blocks south to a residential area on a bluff overlooking the Hudson River. When the parish moved to the new church building a few years later, they took with them the wood cross that had been part of their sanctuary furnishings.<sup>34</sup>

The first service was held April 28, 1912 in a partially constructed building consisting of the chancel (apse and transept) and parish house. It was completed in 1916 and dedicated on All Saints Day, November 1, 1917.<sup>35</sup>

### **Architects**

The architectural firm of Bannister & Schell designed the elegant Holyrood Church.<sup>36</sup> They were commissioned by the parish a couple of years after the firm had designed the nearby 1908 Chelsea Methodist Episcopal Church on West 178<sup>th</sup> Street.<sup>37</sup>

William P. Bannister (1865-1939) and

Richard M. Schell (1874-1924) formed a partnership in 1899 with an office on Wall Street.<sup>38</sup> Bannister was born in New York City and gained experience in the offices of a number of New York architects before Richard Schell joined him. Most of the firm's Manhattan work, primarily churches, tenements, and store-and-loft buildings, occurred during the first decade of the 20th century.<sup>39</sup>

Bannister & Schell's church commissions included a range of mainstream Protestant denominations in the New York area. In addition to Chelsea Methodist Episcopal Church, other Manhattan designs included North Presbyterian Church, built 1904 on West 155th Street, the Collegiate Dutch Church built 1906 on Convent Avenue, and Hamilton Grange Reformed Church also built in 1906 on West 149th Street, but demolished 1963. These churches and Holyrood followed a similar pattern of a large central window and Gothic details. The larger churches added a prominent tower and exhibited a more Collegiate or Tudor Gothic style.

Richard Schell died in 1924 at the early age of 50. A graduate of Columbia University, his obituary noted, "He was prominently known as a designer of churches and of other public buildings not only in the metropolis but in many other large cities throughout the country."<sup>40</sup> Despite Schell's death, the firm continued into the 1930s.

Bannister later became active in professional administrative work and became a fellow of the American Institute of Architects. He served as the Secretary of the New York State Board of Examiners. After a long career Bannister died in 1939 at his home in Brooklyn.<sup>41</sup>

### **Architecture of Holyrood Episcopal Church**

In January of 1911 architectural plans were submitted to the rector, Reverend Stuart Crockett, and the trustees for a large and handsome new

church designed by Bannister & Schell. The plans included the church, an attached parish house, and a chapel that would later be built on the lot just north of the church proper.<sup>42</sup> It was to be Early English Gothic in style and noted to be freestanding, separate from other buildings.

In 1911 a building permit was issued by the City of New York for a one-story brick, terra cotta, and stone ashlar church and chapel, located at the corner of Fort Washington Avenue and West 179th Street.<sup>43</sup> The church was only partially constructed by 1912 when the first service was held in the chancel. It was still unfinished in 1913 as indicated on a fire insurance map that shows the footprint of the apse, transept, and part of the parish house. The building then was described as one story with a basement, steam heat, electric lights, 40 feet to the eaves, and 50 feet to the peak.<sup>44</sup> Several years later the parish voted to resume construction.

The building of Holyrood Church is to be resumed. The chancel and transepts of a fine edifice were erected two years ago, and have been in use by the congregation since. They are now inadequate. A meeting of the congregation was held on April 29th for the purpose of discussing the building of the nave and the parish house, and the result was a vote almost unanimous, only two dissenting, in favor of proceeding with the work. It will cost about \$55,000. ... Immediate steps will be taken to begin work as soon as possible. The church, designed to seat 1,000, will be a handsome structure, the facade being patterned after that of the Cathedral of Hereford,

England...The rector is the Rev. Dr. Stuart Crockett.<sup>45</sup>

In 1916, the construction was finally completed, and the church was officially dedicated on November 1, 1917.<sup>46</sup>

As part of the Episcopal Church's identification with England and English ecclesiastical designs in particular, Gothic Revival designs for religious properties were increasingly preferred during the last half of the 19th and early 20th century. This interest in English medieval architectural precedents occurred both in the United States and England. "The architecture is Gothic because that is the idiom best able to remind Americans of a bygone time redolent of strength and security."<sup>47</sup> In addition, New York City rectors were often graduates of Manhattan's General Theological Seminary where the stone buttressed and crocketed buildings were an example of what a church or church-related buildings should look like.<sup>48</sup>

By the time Holyrood was constructed during the beginning of the 20th century, the Gothic Revival for religious buildings had evolved stylistically and used "correct" features that directly referenced the various stages of English Gothic design.<sup>49</sup> Holyrood, as noted above, was designed in a Gothic style very similar to the Cathedral in Hereford, England.

Holyrood exhibits a Decorated Gothic style, also known as the Geometric Gothic style, popular in England from c. 1275 to c. 1375. Windows became larger and wider, clerestories higher, and the large west end windows had five, seven, or nine vertical lights with complex tracery with circles, quatrefoils, and trefoils. On the exterior of the stone churches, "...carved ornament became increasingly vigorous and dynamic with intense and detailed naturalism evolving into more stylized forms..."<sup>50</sup>

Architects interpreted and adapted the

medieval Gothic by using vertical proportions, bold geometric forms, tracery-filled pointed arch windows, hood moldings, molded and sculpted ornament, and foliated patterns, all hallmarks of the Gothic Revival ecclesiastical style. Instead of the more expensive carved stone, Holyrood used glazed terra cotta for its decorative trim and sculptural features.

Successfully adapted to a corner lot, this elegant church has a commanding presence in the neighborhood with its refined Gothic design, but it is also significant for its important role in the Washington Heights neighborhood.

### **The Church's Role in its Community**

Holyrood Episcopal Church – Iglesia Santa Cruz has been a vital part of the Washington Heights community and has played an important role in responding to social and humanitarian needs as the neighborhood has changed over the years.

Shortly after Holyrood Church was dedicated, Reverend Gustav Carstensen became rector and served the church from 1919 to 1927. He remained at the parish as rector emeritus until his death in 1941. He had previously ministered at Christ Church in The Bronx and had permitted Black children from a nearby "Negro orphan asylum" to attend services. This caused an outcry in that parish, and subsequently led to his resignation at the request of the vestry. He was then called to Holyrood where his "liberal" positions garnered "widespread publicity" according to the *New York Times*.<sup>51</sup> He was known in his day as very progressive and often came to the support of causes that were unpopular with some of his fellow clergy in the diocese. For example, he was in the minority when he denounced prohibition during that time. He was particularly supportive of the youth of the parish, defending their activities in the church and in the community. Under his leadership Holyrood became one of the leading



churches in Washington Heights.

Continuing its tradition of inclusivity and outreach to the community, Holyrood parish initiated an early program for Spanish-speaking parishioners during the 1960s when Reverend Nicholas H. Holt was rector.<sup>52</sup> Also during that time the parish established the Community Project of Holyrood Church NYC. It was a program for young people in the neighborhood directed by Reverend John H. Gill.<sup>53</sup> In addition to working with the youth, Reverend Gill was also active in the Episcopal Diocese as co-chair of the Clergy Committee for Uniform Labor Laws.<sup>54</sup>

Although there previously had been occasional programs for Spanish speakers, regular Spanish language services became an integral part of the parish during the 1970s. Since then, Holyrood's priests-in-charge, vicars, and associates have worked with the Latino community and neighborhood at large. It is notable that in 1988 Holyrood's Reverend Juan E. Irizarry from Puerto Rico was the chairperson of the Committee on the Mission and Strategy of the Hispanic Commission of the Diocese of New York.<sup>55</sup> He was the priest-in-charge and later the vicar at Holyrood from 1987 to 1990 during which time he also started a homeless shelter at the parish. By 2012, Holyrood Church – Iglesia Santa Cruz was one of five Manhattan Episcopal parishes that provided services for and with the Latino community.<sup>56</sup>

For over 40 years, Holyrood Episcopal Church – Iglesia Santa Cruz has served as an anchor and resource to the residents of the neighborhood, particularly the Spanish-speaking community. Recently the church incorporated “Iglesia Santa Cruz” into its name to express its dual identity. The English and the Spanish both translate to “Holy Cross.” In 2012 an article about the parish noted, “Our members represent the diversity of the neighborhood, mostly Latino, some West Indians,

and some young Anglo professionals.”<sup>57</sup> In the same year, members of this bilingual parish were described as consisting of two-thirds Spanish-speakers and one-third English-speakers.

Holy Rood is...one parish with two languages. The majority of Hispanics are Dominicans with representation from El Salvador, Peru, etc. Except for separate Masses almost all committees and the Vestry are bi-lingual. Occasionally there are bi-lingual Liturgies.<sup>58</sup>

Illustrating the parish's close ties with the Dominican community, the church had provided facilities for many years to the Alianza Dominicana Family Center. More recently the church has extended space to the Dominican Women's Development Center (DWDC).<sup>59</sup>

Reverend Luis Barrios has led Holyrood Episcopal Church – Iglesia Santa Cruz since 2017 and is currently the priest in charge of this multicultural, multiracial, multiethnic, and multigenerational parish, as noted on the parish website.<sup>60</sup> Actively involved with humanitarian causes, Reverend Barrios, originally from Cuba, and his congregation minister to the parish and the neighborhood with an impressive array of outreach programs.

Many people from a variety of backgrounds contribute their time and talents to Holyrood's programs.<sup>61</sup> As a result, the parish has added more neighborhood initiatives including those for the youth, the elderly, LGBTQ people, and those experiencing drug addiction or homelessness. Recently the food pantry expanded from one to five days a week and the church has become a community center for young musicians. In addition to these programs, the parish has added services and

liturgy for the hearing impaired, one of two Episcopal churches in the New York Episcopal Diocese to do so.

Holyrood Church – Iglesia Santa Cruz has become the primary Episcopal parish in Manhattan that is actively involved in a humanitarian effort with the New Sanctuary program, offering a safe haven and help for immigrants in need. For the past two years they have provided a home to a family from Honduras and continue to provide care and support to those who need resettlement assistance.<sup>62</sup>

Holyrood Church – Iglesia Santa Cruz continues to play an important and crucial role in creating a ministry by and for the Latino community, expanding on its years as a bilingual parish to one that is also taking a more socially active role in the neighborhood. This evolving mission has many goals, but one of them is to rediscover and reconnect to the heritage of the many Latin American countries represented in the community.<sup>63</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Holyrood Church – Iglesia Santa Cruz has followed a tradition of humanitarian and culturally diverse ministries throughout its history and has become an important anchor for the neighborhood and the Latino community of Washington Heights.

The distinctive church building is remarkably intact and exemplifies the composition and ornamental features that were popular for Gothic Revival churches at the time of construction. The parish continues to serve its congregation with services in English, Spanish, and American Sign Language. It is a significant resource within the Washington Heights neighborhood, helping the people in need, recent immigrants, and hosting community and non-profit organizations.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> The lot measures 100 feet by 174 feet.
- <sup>2</sup> Basilican Plan "... a simple rectangular plan with a nave that is both higher and wider than the aisles, from which it is usually divided by colonnades, and with an apse at the eastern end." Stephen Friar, *A Companion to the English Parish Church* (Phoenix Mill, United Kingdom: Sutton Publishing Limited, 1996), 36.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 285-87. Holyrood exhibits characteristics of the Decorated, also called Geometric, phase of Gothic architecture.
- <sup>4</sup> Reverend Luis Barrios, email message to author, April 22, 2021. Included was a description by Caroline Raftery of the interior of the church and windows.
- <sup>5</sup> This large stained-glass figurative window, the major decorative art piece of the church, is in memory of John Schureman Sutphen (1823-1900) and his wife Hyacinth Sutphen (1826-1907).
- <sup>6</sup> The parish house, originally the rectory, provides space for the sacristy, offices, multi-purpose room, small chapel, etc.
- <sup>7</sup> Luis Barrios email April 22, 2021. According to oral tradition, the bell came from the bell tower of the first church building on 181st Street.
- <sup>8</sup> The inscription reads "Holyrood Parish House(?), A.D. 1903(?); A. D. 1914" along with a biblical verse.
- <sup>9</sup> On the exterior, the aisle exhibits one fewer window bay than the clerestory because the parish house begins at the aisle's sixth bay.
- <sup>10</sup> This section is adapted from Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), *Fort Washington Presbyterian Church Designation Report (LP-2337)* (New York: City of New York, May 12, 2009), prepared by Gale Harris, 3-4. Additional information from Robert W. Snyder, "Washington Heights," in Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Encyclopedia of New York City, 2nd. ed.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 1380.
- <sup>11</sup> Hunter Research, Inc., *Archaeological Assessment for the Reconstruction of Fort Washington Park from 145th Street to Dyckman Street Along the Hudson River, Borough of Manhattan, New York* (Trenton, New Jersey, November 2008), 3. Consultant for Stantec for New York City Department of Parks and Recreation.
- <sup>12</sup> (LPC), *Jeffrey's Hook Lighthouse Designation Report (LP-1654)* (New York: City of New York, May 14, 1991) prepared by Betsy Bradley, 3; Reginald Pelham Bolton, *Washington Heights Manhattan: Its Eventful Past* (New York: Dyckman Institute, 1924), 82.
- <sup>13</sup> Snyder, "Washington Heights," 1141.
- <sup>14</sup> Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, The New York Public Library (NYPL). "Sanborn-Perris Map Co., 1900, Manhattan, Atlas 128, V. 12, Plate No. 5." (digital collection accessed August 20, 2020).
- <sup>15</sup> "Fiftieth Anniversary 1893-1943 Holyrood Church: Historical Notes of the Parish," Two-page typewritten summary on file at the Episcopal Diocese of New York archives.
- <sup>16</sup> David W. Dunlap, *From Abyssinian to Zion: A Guide to Manhattan's Houses of Worship* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 201, 37, 153. The Church of Saint Elizabeth was located at West 187th Street and Broadway from 1872 until it moved in 1927 to 268 Wadsworth Avenue. Washington Heights United Presbyterian Church still stands at 141 Audubon Avenue. The Mount Washington Presbyterian Church building was demolished in 1927.
- <sup>17</sup> Robert W. Snyder, *Crossing Broadway: Washington Heights and The Promise of New York City* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2015), 17.
- <sup>18</sup> Dunlap, 32-33, 81. Chelsea Methodist Episcopal Church also moved from West 30th Street to a Tudor Revival complex designed by Bannister & Schell on West 178th Street in 1907. Similarly, the Fourth Church of Christ, Scientist, moved from West 82nd Street in 1913 into a new neo-Classical sanctuary on Fort Washington Avenue. Both of these churches were located one block south of today's Holyrood and both were demolished for the George Washington Bridge construction.
- <sup>19</sup> Dunlap, 80, 293. West Presbyterian Church had been established in 1829 on Carmine Street and the Eighty Fourth Street Presbyterian Church (Park Church) on West End Avenue in 1854.
- <sup>20</sup> Beginning in the 1960s when travel became easier, a number of Episcopal parishes in the United States established missions in the Dominican Republic. As a result, many Dominicans who emigrated at that time were

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already familiar with the Episcopal Church and became members.

<sup>21</sup> Jackson, *Encyclopedia of New York*, Eugenia Georges, “Dominicans,” 373.

<sup>22</sup> The ‘Garment District’ in Manhattan is considered the area from Fifth to Ninth avenues and from 34th to 42nd streets.

<sup>23</sup> Brendan Krisel, “Upper Manhattan Designated First ‘Little Dominican Republic,’” *Patch*, September 7, 2018, <https://patch.com/new-york/washington-heights-inwood/upper-manhattan-designated-first-little-dominican-republic> (accessed January 10, 2021).

<sup>24</sup> Information on the Episcopal Church in New York is taken from James Elliott Lindsley, *This Planted Vine: A Narrative History of the Episcopal Diocese of New York* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984); LPC, *Old Saint James Episcopal Church (Old Sant James Parish Hall) LP-2593* (New York: City of New York, September 19, 2017), prepared by Marianne Hurley.

<sup>25</sup> LPC, *Trinity Church and Graveyard (LP-0048)* (New York: City of New York, August 16, 1966); LPC, *Saint Peter’s Church, Chapel and Cemetery (LP-0917)* (New York: City of New York, March 23, 1976).

<sup>26</sup> Lindsley, 238-239.

<sup>27</sup> Dunlap, 104-05. The movement north also resulted in The Episcopal Mission of the Redeemer in Inwood on Seaman Avenue founded shortly after Holyrood was established. The mission became today’s Holy Trinity Church when that congregation moved from Harlem.

<sup>28</sup> “Fiftieth Anniversary:1893-1943.”

<sup>29</sup> Before Holyrood’s formation, the Church of the Intercession at Broadway and 158th Street was the northernmost Episcopal parish in Manhattan.

<sup>30</sup> “Fiftieth Anniversary:1893-1943.”

<sup>31</sup> Sons of the American Revolution and Reginald P. Bolton, *Fort Washington: an account of the identification of the site of Fort Washington, New York City, and the erection and dedication of a monument thereon Nov. 16, 1901* (New York: Sons of the American Revolution, 1902). The monument is located at 183<sup>rd</sup> Street and Fort Washington Avenue.

<sup>32</sup> *Report of Daughters of the American Revolution*, May 13, 1902, 238. The plaque has remained with the parish, relocated within the present-day church.

<sup>33</sup> “109<sup>th</sup> Convention, Diocese of New York, 1902,” *Journal of Proceedings*, 119-120.

<sup>34</sup> Reverend Luis Barrios, email message to author, April 23, 2021. The wood cross is documented as being part of the earlier building. The bell on the parish house roof most likely (not documented) came from that building too.

<sup>35</sup> “Fiftieth Anniversary:1893-1943.”

<sup>36</sup> Information about Bannister & Schell is included in LPC, *Morse Building Designation Report (LP-2191)* (New York: City of New York), September 19, 2006, prepared by Jay Shockley. In 1901-02 Bannister & Schell were responsible for the remodeling of the 1878-80 Morse Building into a stylish neo-Classical 14-story office building.

<sup>37</sup> “The Latest Word in Church Building,” *The New York Observer*, Vol. 88, January 6, 1910, 25-26.

<sup>38</sup> Bannister also designed a church on his own, the Lutheran Church of the Incarnation, built in 1902-04 on 4th Avenue in Brooklyn.

<sup>39</sup> Office of Metropolitan History, compiled by Christopher Gray, Building Permit Search Online Database, <https://www.metrohistory.com/> (accessed April 20, 2020).

<sup>40</sup> “Richard Schell, Philanthropic Architect, Dies,” *The Ithaca Journal*, July 28, 1924, 5.

<sup>41</sup> “W. P. Bannister, 70, An Architect Here: Secretary to the State Board of Examiners Dies in His Home in Brooklyn,” *New York Times*, (NYT), January 10, 1939, 25. Bannister was 73 when he died. New York City Department of Records & Information Services; New York City, New York; *New York City Death Certificates*; Borough: *Brooklyn*; Year: 1939. <https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/> (accessed May 17, 2021).

<sup>42</sup> The chapel was never built.

<sup>43</sup> Office of Metropolitan History.1911-NB 140; Cost \$100,000; Architects and Superintendent, Bannister & Schell.

<sup>44</sup> NYPL, “Sanborn Map Co., 1913, Manhattan, V. 12, Plate No. 14.” (digital collection accessed August 20, 2020).

<sup>45</sup> “Holyrood Church Is to Be Completed,” *The Living Church*, Volume 51, May 16, 1914, 78; NYPL, “Bromley, G. W., Atlas of the City of New York, 1916, Plate No. 172.” (digital collection accessed August 20, 2020).

<sup>46</sup> “Anniversary Marked by Holyrood Church,” *NYT*, April 25, 1938, 16.

<sup>47</sup> Lindsley, 171.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Friar, 281. Thomas Rickman classified medieval architecture in his 1817 publication, *An Attempt to Discriminate the Styles of English Architecture from the Conquest to the Reformation*.

<sup>50</sup> Friar, 285.

<sup>51</sup> "Dr. Carstensen, 90, Minister 65 Years," *NYT*, June 27, 1941; 17.

<sup>52</sup> J. Gordon, "An Anecdotal History of Work with the Hispanic People Within the Diocese of New York," 2012, 3-6. This is a 16-page report on file at the Episcopal Diocese of New York archives.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. Reverend Gill later served at the Church of the Intercession as one of the priests who conducted Spanish language services there during the 1970s.

<sup>54</sup> "Cleric Supports New Labor Laws," *NYT*, April 13, 1966, 29.

<sup>55</sup> The Committee on the Mission and Strategy of the Hispanic Commission of the Diocese of New York, Rev. Jose Enrique Irizarry, Chairperson, "*The Hispanic Challenge to the Diocese of New York*," October 1988. This is a 28-page report on file at the Episcopal Diocese of New York archives. This report examined, among other things, the demographics of New York City and reviewed where Spanish-speaking parishes and programs were located in the diocese.

<sup>56</sup> J. Gordon, 4-5. The other parishes were the Church of the Intercession, Saint Edward the Martyr, Saint Matthew and Saint Timothy, and the General Theological Seminary

Chapel.

<sup>57</sup> "A Spirit to Grow and Serve the Community," *New York Daily News*, August 5, 2012, 40.

<sup>58</sup> J. Gordon, 4-5.

<sup>59</sup> Alianza Dominicana offers day-care services, job training, and help for those newly arrived from the Dominican Republic. The DWDC is an independent nonprofit that advances gender equality, social justice, education, and health causes.

<sup>60</sup> Chuck Offenburger, "Think US policy on Cuba Can't get much worse? You must think bigger," Offenburger.com, June 12, 2019.

<http://offenburger.com/index.php/puzzled-about-u-s-policy-toward-our-neighbor-cuba-you-need-to-hear-rev-luis-barrios-this-saturday-night/> (accessed February 12, 2021). Reverend Barrios was also mentioned in an article about a fellow activist minister in New York, Juan Carlos Ruiz who was one of the founders of the New Sanctuary Coalition in 2006. Blitzer, Jonathan, "Higher Calling," *The New Yorker*, August 24, 2020, 29.

<sup>61</sup> <https://www.episcopalurbancaucus.org/saintsof2020> (accessed April 24, 2021). For example, Eleanor Rainford (1927-2020), along with her late husband Charles, were long time Holyrood parishioners who worked tirelessly for those in need, creating and participating in a multitude of outreach programs.

<sup>62</sup> Liz Robbing, "[Told to Go Back to Guatemala, She Sought Sanctuary Instead](#)," *NYT*, August 18, 2017.

<sup>63</sup> Reverend Luis Barrios, email message to author, April 22, 2021.



## Findings and Designation

Holyrood Episcopal Church – Iglesia Santa Cruz

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and the other features of this building and site, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that Holyrood Episcopal Church – Iglesia Santa Cruz 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.

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 Holyrood Episcopal Church – Iglesia Santa Cruz and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 2176 Lot 30 as its Landmark Site, as shown in the attached map.



**Holyhood Church – Iglesia Santa Cruz, 715 West 179th Street,  
Fort Washington Avenue facade**  
Jessica Baldwin, May 2021



**Holyhood Church – Iglesia Santa Cruz, 715 West 179th Street  
Fort Washington Avenue (West) and North facade**  
Jessica Baldwin, May 2021





**Fort Washington Avenue Facade Details**  
Jessica Baldwin, May 2021



**West 179th Street Facade (West End)  
Clerestory and Aisle**  
Jessica Baldwin, May 2021



**West 179th Street Facade (East End)  
Clerestory, Aisle, Transept, and  
Parish House**  
Jessica Baldwin, May 2021

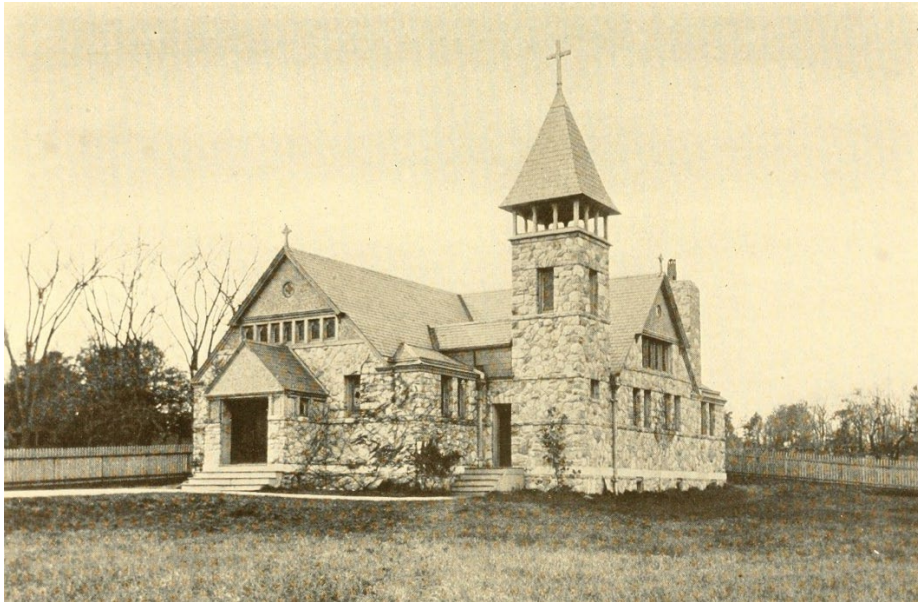




**North and West Facades  
Fort Washington Avenue**  
Jessica Baldwin, May 2021



**South and East Facades  
West 179th Street  
Parish House in Foreground**  
Jessica Baldwin, May 2021



**First Holyrood Episcopal Church Building**  
181st Street and Broadway; Built 1895

Photograph from Sons of the American Revolution and Reginald P. Bolton  
*Fort Washington: an account of the identification of the site of Fort Washington, New York City, and the erection and dedication of a monument thereon Nov. 16, 1901* (1902), after page 16

