

Landmarks Preservation Commission
January 13, 1998, Designation List 287
LP-0172E

NEW UTRECHT REFORMED DUTCH CHURCH, EXPANDED LANDMARK SITE, AND PARISH HOUSE, 8301-8323 18th Avenue, 1802-1818 83rd Street, 1801-1823 84th Street, and 1827 84th Street, aka 1825-1833 84th Street, Brooklyn. Built 1828 and 1892; architect for parish house, Lawrence B. Valk.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 6327, Lot 10.

The Landmark and the original Landmark Site (Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 6327, Lot 10 in part, consisting of the land on which the described building is situated) were designated on March 15, 1966.

On November 18, 1997, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Expanded Landmark Site of the New Utrecht Reformed Dutch Church and Parish House (Item No. 2). The hearing was duly advertised according to the provisions of law. There were eight speakers in favor of designation and the expansion of the Landmark Site, including the minister of the church representing the Consistory. There were no speakers in opposition. The Commission received one letter in favor of designation.

Summary

The New Utrecht Dutch Reformed Church, founded in 1677, is one of the oldest surviving congregations in New York. As one of the five original Dutch towns of Kings County, the town of New Utrecht and this congregation recall New York's era of Dutch settlement. The Georgian-Gothic style church building, constructed in 1828 with stones from the original 1700 structure, is an important reminder of the town's earliest development. (The church was designated a New York City Landmark in 1966.) South of the church building is the parish house, constructed in 1892 to meet the needs of the expanding congregation for meeting rooms and classrooms. Designed by the prolific architect Lawrence B. Valk in a simple, Romanesque Revival style, the brick building's asymmetrical massing and varied roofline add a picturesque element to the church complex. These two buildings, along with the Liberty Pole, first erected in 1783 to commemorate the departure of the British from Long Island, are sited on a large wooded lot, creating a unique setting for an important local complex.



of what is now 83rd Street, was constructed for this purpose in 1844. The Lecture Room also served other church organizations, such as the Women's Missionary Society, the oldest such organization in the denomination, which was also begun in 1825, and continues until this day.

After the Civil War, changes began to take place in the area of New Utrecht which ultimately transformed it from a rural to a suburban district. Improved transportation and demands for housing resulted in farms being sold for development. In 1890, the Church Consistory made plans to sell the Lecture Room because 83rd Street was to be paved. The Consistory reported the sale of the Lecture Room in November 1890, to J. Lott Nostrand, who also agreed to open 83rd Street. At the same time, the Church arranged to sell the large parsonage farm which was located further north on 18th Avenue, keeping only the parsonage house and grounds around it, with frontage on 83rd Street. The proceeds from the sales of both these properties were to be used for the construction of a new Chapel and Sunday School building.⁹

The Consistory appointed a committee to proceed with plans for the new building. The committee visited other churches in Brooklyn to observe their facilities and also had the architectural firm of Parfitt Brothers draw plans to help the Church create a budget for the new building. While there was no discussion in the Consistory minutes of hiring an architect, there was an announcement in April 1892, that plans had been accepted for the new Chapel and a construction company engaged to do the work. The committee chose the architect Lawrence Valk to design the new building, possibly having seen some of his work on their visits to other churches in Brooklyn.

Lawrence B. Valk¹⁰

Lawrence B. Valk, who maintained an architectural practice in Manhattan between 1859 and 1890, produced numerous houses and church designs during his career. In 1860, he shared an office with Alexander Saeltzer.¹¹ After 1890, the firm moved to Brooklyn and was known as L. B. Valk & Son, and included his son Arthur. Lawrence Valk's name continues to appear in Brooklyn directories until 1903, after which nothing further is known. In 1874, *The American Builder Magazine* featured his work, which included houses in several New Jersey coastal towns, as well as in Rhinebeck, and Auburn, New York, and Bay Ridge, Brooklyn. Valk also designed a group of houses in the Park Slope Historic District at the same time he was working on the New Utrecht Parish House.

Examples of his church designs can be found in numerous cities, including Baltimore, Philadelphia, Bennington, Vermont, and Lynne, Massachusetts, but the majority of his work was constructed in Brooklyn. Valk's early church designs were mostly in the Victorian Gothic style, with examples being the Sixth Avenue Baptist Church (1880-81, Sixth Avenue and Lincoln Place, in the Park Slope Historic District) and the Centennial Baptist Church (1885, 222-232 Adelphi Street, in the Fort Greene Historic District). In his later work he tended to use the Romanesque Revival style, as seen in his Swedish Evangelical Pilgrim Congregational Church (1893) on Atlantic Avenue, and the St. Matthew's Evangelical Lutheran Church (1895) at Sixth Avenue and Second Street, both in Brooklyn. Valk published a book of his church designs in 1873, entitled *Church Architecture, General Description of Some of the Most Prominent Buildings Recently Erected in Iron, Brick, and Stone*.

The Parish House Design

The Parish House for the New Utrecht Reformed Dutch Church was designed in a simplified Romanesque Revival style that characterizes many of Valk's later works. The Church's requirements were for a large meeting room, as well as smaller rooms which could be used for classrooms, and a kitchen. Valk fitted these rooms into an irregularly-shaped building with towers and turrets for a picturesque quality, brick facing, and round-arched windows which gave the building more of a sense of solidity, and bifurcated windows suggestive of church design.

The Romanesque Revival style was popularized in this country through the work of Henry Hobson Richardson beginning in the 1870s. His use of masonry, round arches, and irregular rooflines established a picturesque style which appealed to people throughout the United States. As it was adapted by other architects and designers, the style was often simplified to retain the most basic elements, as in this building. In the Parish House, the dark brick is set off slightly by contrasting brick around the windows and at the corners to imitate quoins. The wall surfaces are mostly plain, but the round-headed windows are prominent. The bifurcated windows were an element associated with ecclesiastical designs, particularly during the Romanesque Revival which occurred earlier in the century inspired by the German *Rundbogenstil*.¹² These windows openings were originally filled with stained glass, most in geometric designs in shades of brown and gold.

Subsequent History

With the exception of moving the main entrance to the base of the tower, the Parish House has remained mostly unchanged throughout its history. The stained glass in several of the smaller windows and that on the upper level of the front has been replaced with clear glass. Two other windows were replaced, in 1908 and 1924, by stained glass memorial windows. The large window on the western wall contains a Tiffany-like stained glass window which was donated in 1908 as a memorial to J. Roger Van Brunt by his parents. A smaller memorial window is located at the center of the rear platform and was donated in 1924 to honor Mr. and Mrs. Henry Jasper Holt. Mr. Holt had served as superintendent of the Sunday School for twenty-four years.

The Parish House has been the scene of many activities of the New Utrecht Church throughout its more than 100 years of existence. The Sunday School and the Women's Missionary Society have met here through the years without interruption. In 1893, a Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor was formed in this location. Boy Scout Troop Number 20 began here in 1911, and is today the U. S. troop which has functioned for the longest, continuous time. The building is also used today by a Korean church and a Chinese church, and numerous other community service organizations, as well as for Church groups and activities.

Description

The New Utrecht Reformed Dutch Church Complex is set within a large, wooded lot at one end of the block bounded by 18th Avenue, 84th and 83rd Streets. The entire site is enclosed by a simple, iron fence comprised of plain uprights and cross bars. On the lot is the stone church building which faces, but is set back from, 18th Avenue and is located closer to 83rd Street; the Liberty Pole which is in front of the church, close to the intersection of 18th Avenue and 83rd Street; and the parish house which sits near the southeastern corner of the lot. A large parking lot is adjacent to both the church and the parish house.

The parish house of the New Utrecht Reformed Dutch Church is a two-story, irregularly-massed structure. Highlighted by round-arched openings, pyramidal towers, and gables, its main entrance fronts on 84th Street. The building is faced in dark red brick with a slightly contrasting brick forming voussoirs for the round-headed window openings, and imitating quoins at the corners. The building sits upon a raised basement capped by a rusticated granite band course. The windows (most are

bifurcated) retain their original wood sash, and the original wooden cornice and brackets border the roofline. Much of the stained glass has been restored and covered with Lexan for protection, but several decorative windows are missing.

The 84th Street facade is two stories high, and is gable-fronted with a centered round-arched window with tracery but no stained glass. A one-story section which originally housed the main entrance projects in front of this facade. The central doorway has been filled with brick but its framework is evident, and it is flanked by smaller, round-arched windows. To the west is a squared, corner tower rising two and one-half stories to a pyramidal roof. Recessed from the main facade, the tower now contains the building's main entrance which is reached by a short flight of brick stairs. At the base of the tower is an engraved cornerstone with the date May 29, 1892. Narrow, paired windows and flaring eaves supported on bold, wooden brackets highlight the upper areas of the tower.

The building's plan is a modified Greek cross, and the ridge line of the main roof runs from east to west. It is crowned at the center point by a finial, now shingled, in the shape of a dove-cote with a shallow, pyramidal roof. Each of the side facades has a large gable featuring a central tall, stained-glass window flanked by two smaller ones. An engaged, half-hexagonal tower projects from the eastern facade near the front, and is capped by another pyramidal roof. A single, smaller door leads to the kitchen, located at the base of this tower. An iron fire escape has been installed leading to a door in the second story of this tower. At the rear, the building projects in an angular, apsidal form with its own pyramidal roof. Below this apse two non-historic doors lead to the basement, reached by a non-historic concrete stairway. A rear entrance to the building is located beneath a small porch at the northwestern corner of the Parish House.

Report prepared by
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Research Department

NOTES

1. The history of the development of this area was compiled from the following sources: "New Utrecht" in *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, Kenneth T. Jackson, ed. (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1995), 821-822; Henry R. Stiles, *History of the County of Kings and the City of Brooklyn*, (NY: W.W. Munsell & Co., 1884), 255-269; Jerome Hoffman, *The Bay Ridge Chronicles* (New York: Bay Ridge Bicentennial Committee of Planning Board 10, 1976); *Historical Discourse Delivered on the 18th of October, 1877 at the Celebration of the 200th Anniversary of the Reformed Dutch Church of New Utrecht, L.I.*, Rev. David S. Sutphin, Pastor of the Church; Charlotte Rebecca Bangs, *Reminiscences of Old New Utrecht and Gowanus*, 1911, n.p.; "New Utrecht, Brooklyn" *Brooklyn Eagle*, 1946; and various clippings in the New Utrecht file of the Local History room of the Brooklyn Public Library.
2. The others being Flatlands, Flatbush, Brooklyn, Bushwick and Gravesend.
3. A painting of this early structure hangs in the vestibule of the present church.
4. This date is from the *History of the Metropolitan Baptist Church, 1652-1898*, in the church archives.
5. Which is now in front of the present church building.
6. This was the site of the previously mentioned school. The school building burned and the church replaced it.
7. This church is very similar in style to St. Augustine's Chapel, 290 Henry Street, Manhattan, a designated New York City Landmark, built at the same time.
8. This description has been adapted from U.S. Department of Interior: Heritage, Conservation, and Recreation Services, National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form, "New Utrecht Reformed Church Complex," (Form prepared by Holly Huckins for the Landmarks Preservation Commission, September, 1979).
9. Consistory Minutes of the New Utrecht Reformed Dutch Church, 1851-1896, Box 1, File 9, in the archives of the Reformed Church in America, New Brunswick Seminary.
10. Much information on Valk's Brooklyn church designs comes from Andrew Dolkart, "The City of Churches: The Protestant Church Architecture of Brooklyn 1793-1917," unpublished master's thesis, Columbia University, School of Architecture, 1977.
11. Saeltzer, a German immigrant about whom little personal information is known, designed the Astor Library on Lafayette Street (now the Public Theater, a New York City Landmark) and the Anshe Chesed Synagogue on Norfolk Street (a New York City Landmark).
12. Valk's earlier association with Alexander Saeltzer may have introduced him to this style coming out of Germany.

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 the New Utrecht Reformed Dutch Church, Expanded Landmark Site, and Parish House 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, the Expanded Landmark Site of the New Utrecht Reformed Dutch Church, and Parish House, with its Liberty Pole first erected in 1783, its Georgian-Gothic church building of 1828, and its Romanesque Revival-style parish house constructed in 1892, incorporates the important features that reflect the growth of this historic congregation, first established in 1677 and one of the oldest in New York; and that their arrangement on a large, wooded lot creates a unique setting for this complex which serves as an important reminder of the town's earliest development.

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 the New Utrecht Reformed Dutch Church, Expanded Landmark Site, and Parish House, 8301-8323 18th Avenue, 1802-1818 83rd Street, 1801-1823 84th Street, and 1827 84th Street, aka 1825-1833 84th Street, Brooklyn, and designates Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 6327, Lot 10 as its Landmark Site.



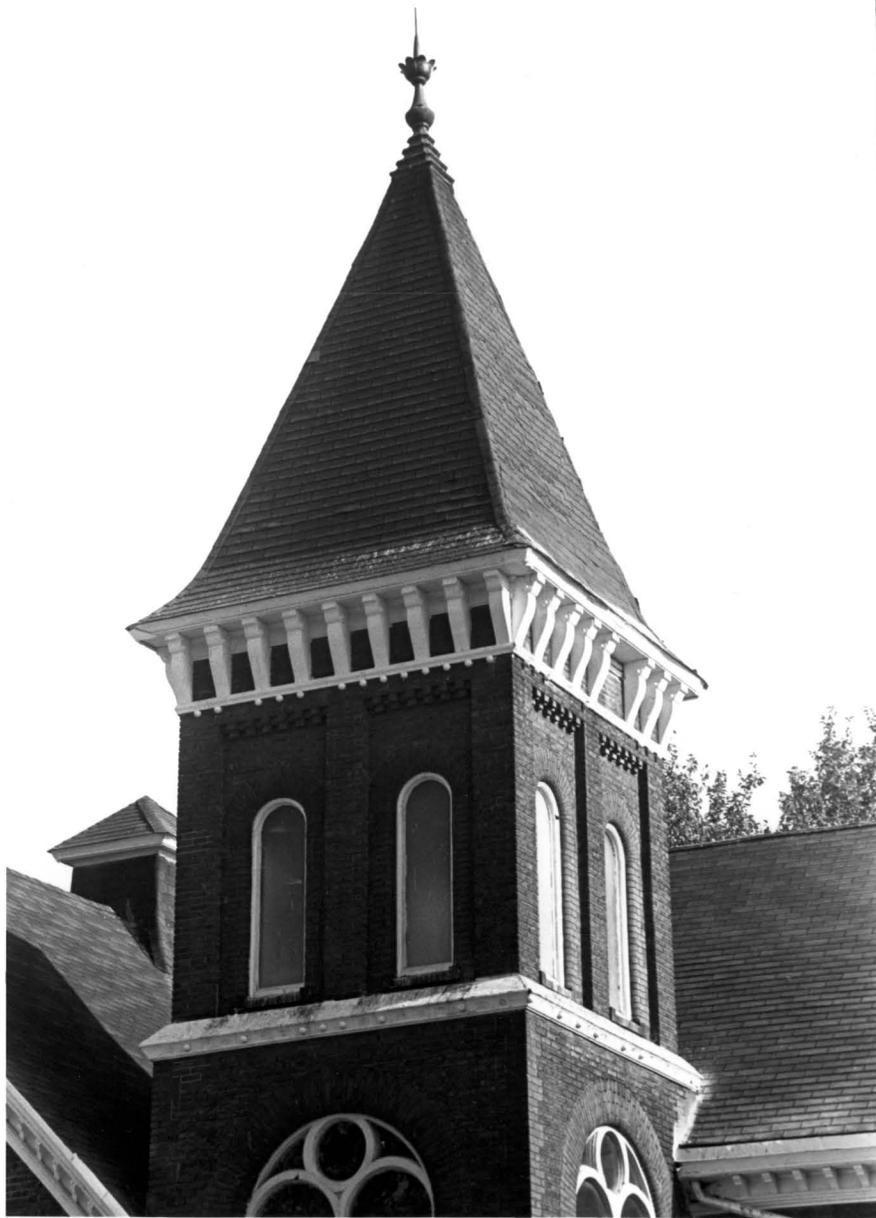
New Utrecht Reformed Dutch Church, Parish House
1827 84th Street, Brooklyn
Photo: Carl Forster



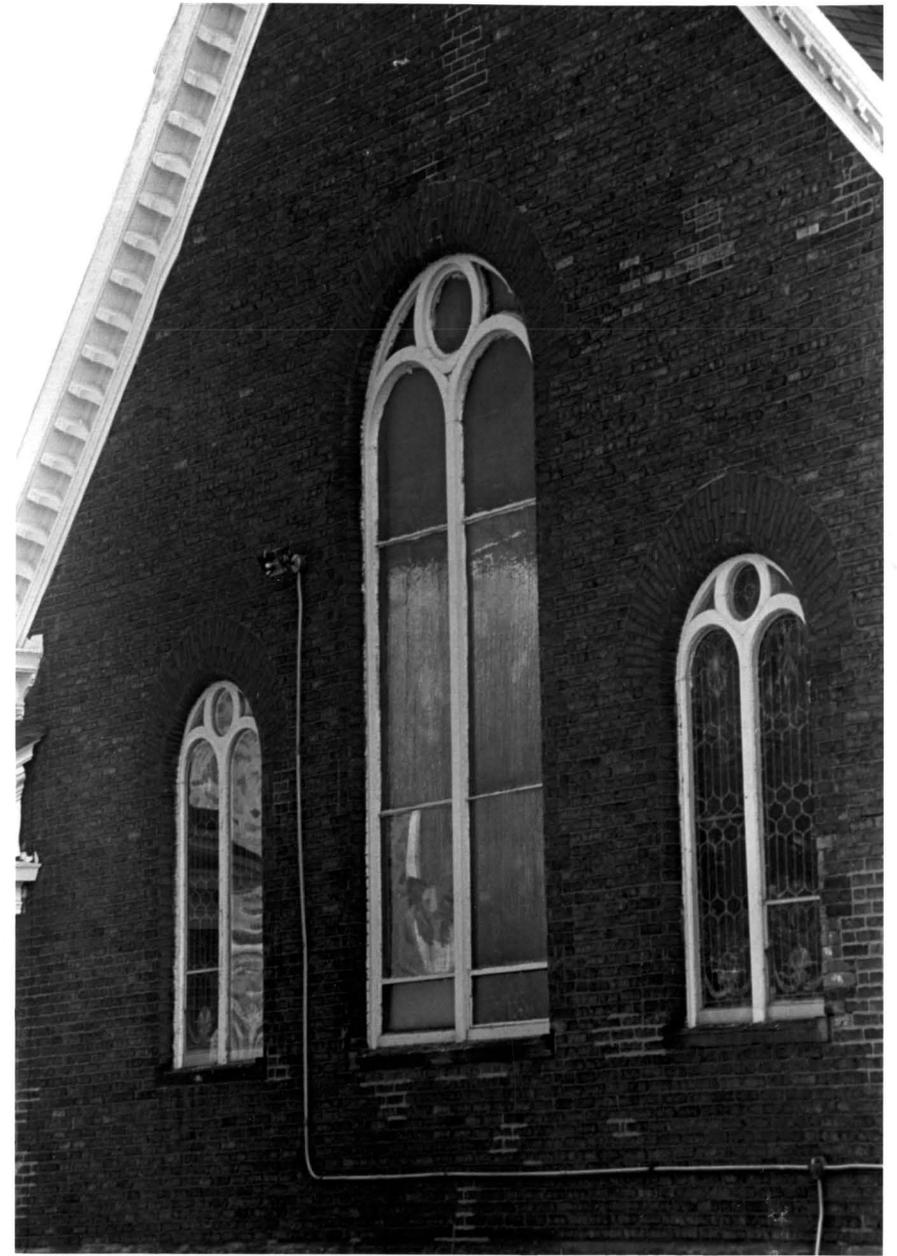
New Utrecht Reformed Dutch Church, Parish House
1827 84th Street, Brooklyn
Photo: Carl Forster



New Utrecht Reformed Dutch Church, Parish House, rear elevation
1827 84th Street, Brooklyn
Photo: Carl Forster



New Utrecht Reformed Dutch Church
Parish House, tower detail



New Utrecht Reformed Dutch Church
Parish House, window detail

Photos: Carl Forster



New Utrecht Reformed Dutch Church
Parish House, Window Detail

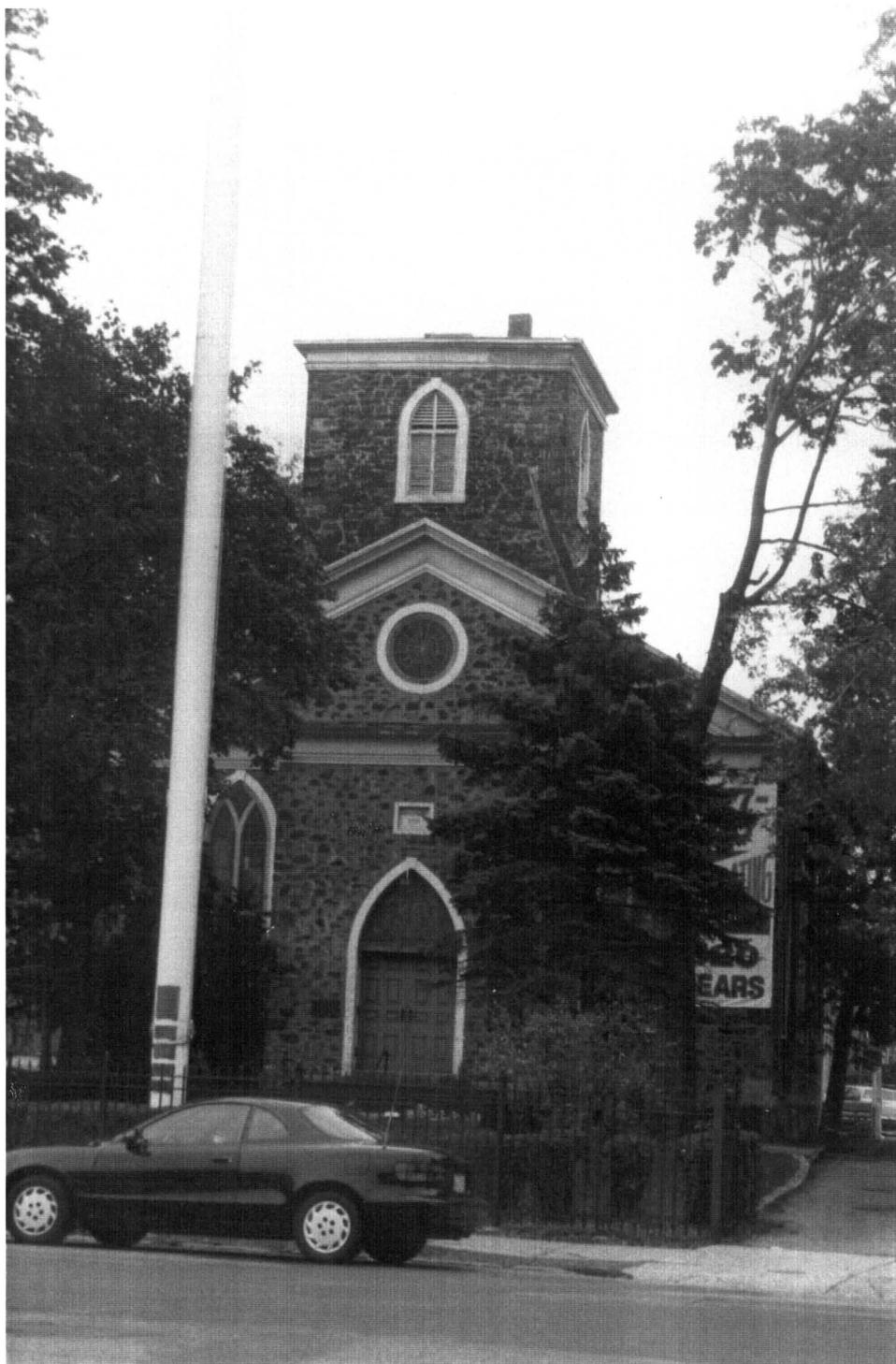


New Utrecht Reformed Dutch Church
Parish House, Front facade detail



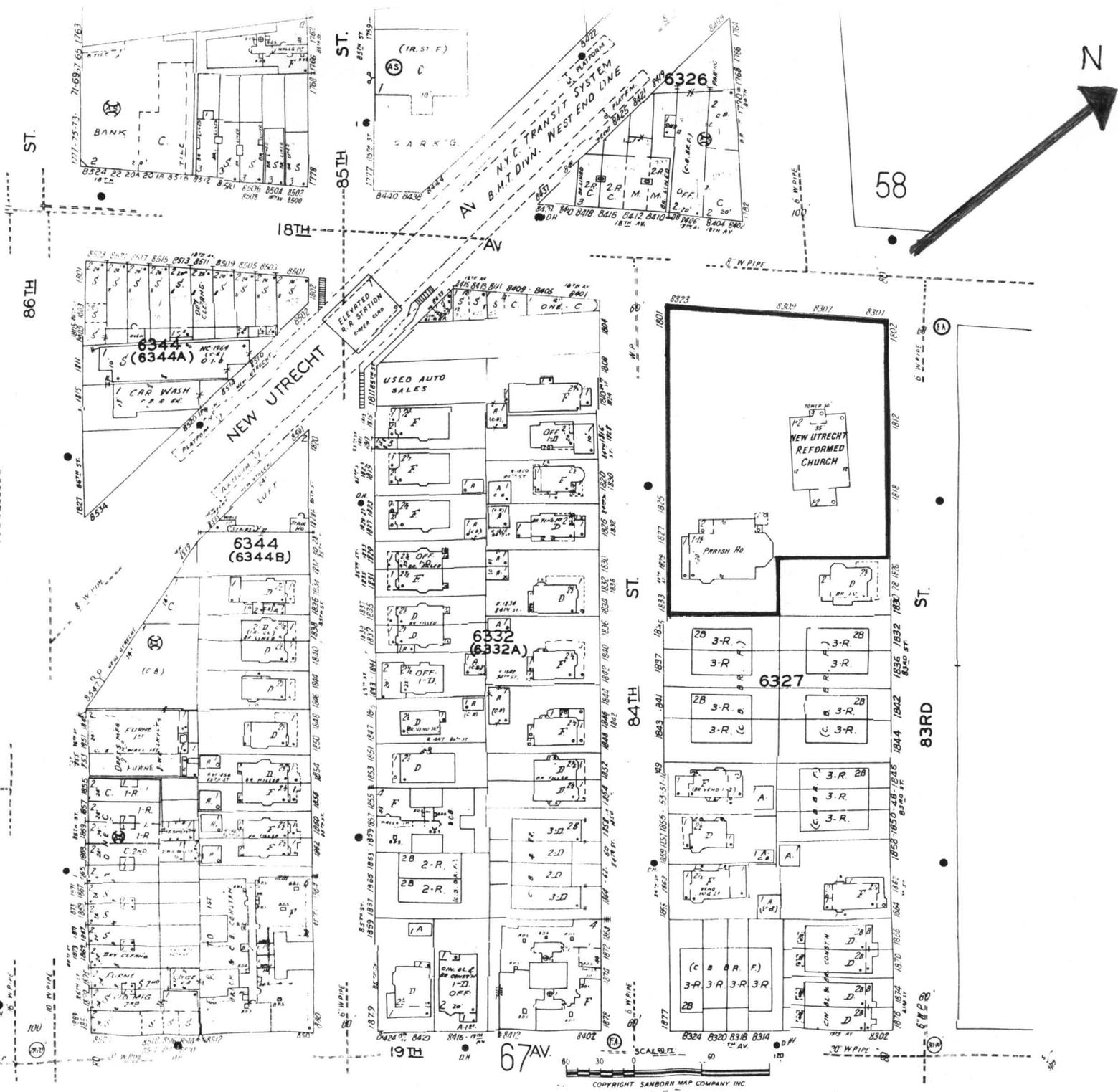
New Utrecht Reformed Dutch Church
Parish House, side elevation

Photo: Carl Forster



New Utrecht Reformed Dutch Church
Church and Liberty Pole

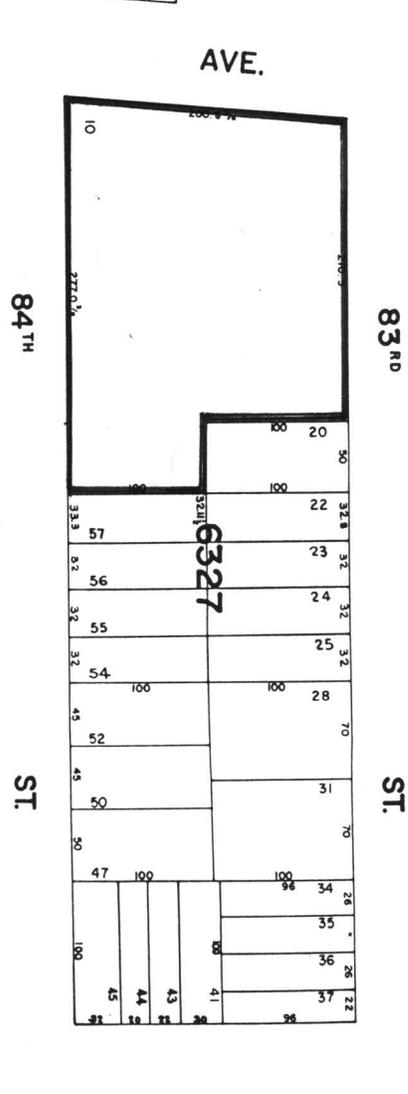
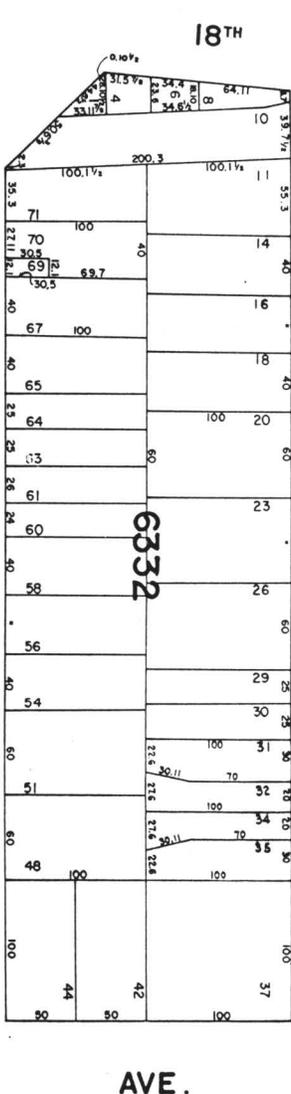
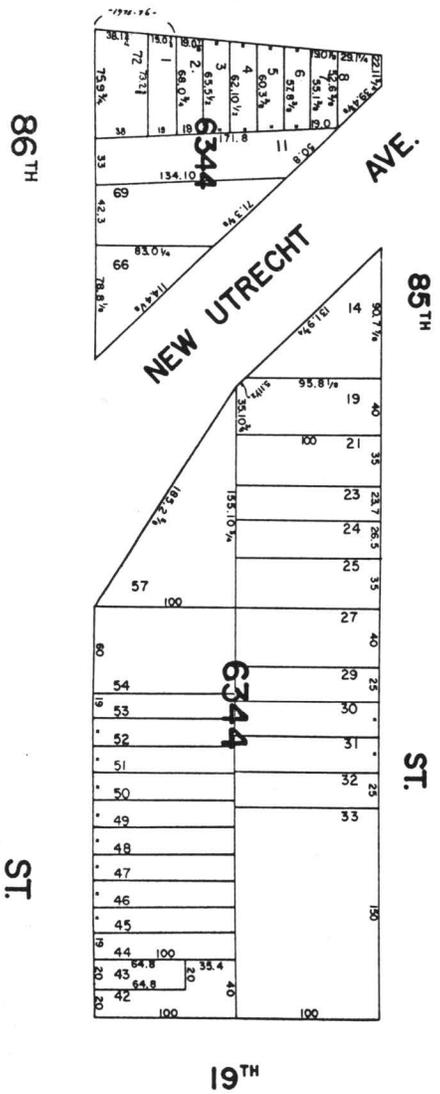
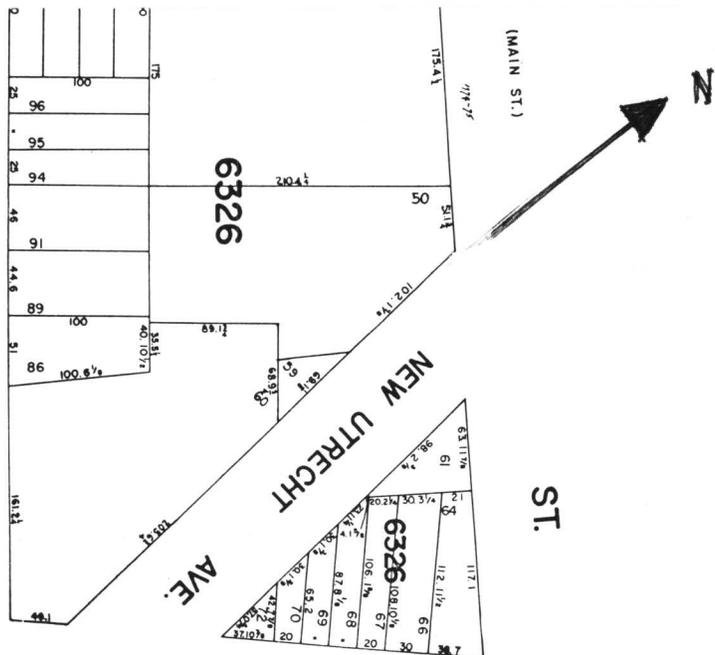
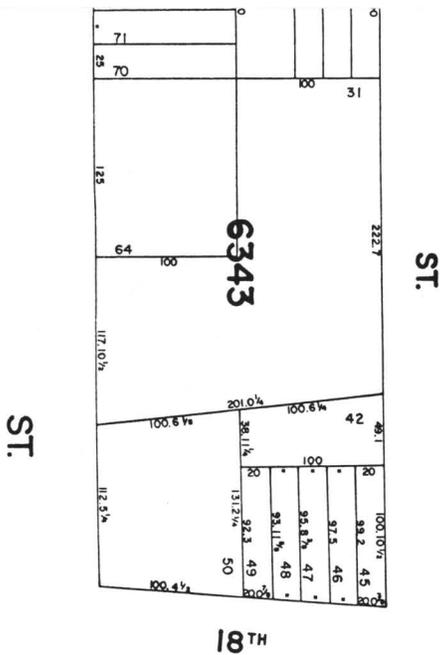
Photo: courtesy Pam Ander



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 8301-8323 18th Avenue, 1802-1818 83rd Street. 1801-1823 84th Street, and 1827 84th Street,
 (aka 1825-1833 84th Street), Brooklyn

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 6327, Lot 10

Source: *Sanborn Building and Property Atlas of Brooklyn, N.Y.* 18th ed. (Anaheim, Ca.: Experian, 1997), vol. 12, plate 57



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 Source: New York City Department of Finance, City Surveyor, Tax Map