

Landmarks Preservation Commission
April 19, 1966, Number 19
LP-0216

CHURCH OF THE HOLY COMMUNION AND SISTERS' HOUSE AND CHAPEL, Avenue of the Americas at West 20th Street, Borough of Manhattan. Church begun 1844, completed 1846; Sisters' House completed 1850; Chapel completed 1879; architect Richard Upjohn.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 822, Lot 1.

On March 8, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Church of the Holy Communion and Sisters' House and Chapel and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 40). Four speakers favored designation including The Rev. Charles A. Elliot, Rector representing the Church, who urged the Commission to designate the Church. The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Although an urban church, this small Gothic Revival group of buildings has more nearly the feeling of a rural parish. The extreme simplicity of the architecture and the picturesque profile of roofs and towers give to the buildings an indescribable charm rarely to be found in the hard rectangularity of the City. Its chief significance lies in the fact that this is a group of buildings executed in a uniform style of architecture and that, at a glance, it tells its own story. The church with tower, rose windows and gabled entrances built of uncoursed stonework proclaims itself at once for what it is, while the Sisters' House is set ever so slightly apart and has its own smaller tower, gable and gabled entrance door.

Historically, it is significant as the first "free church", that is, the first church in the City in which the pews were free to all comers, as today. At this church they were/sold to pew-holders. It can also boast the introduction of the first "boy choir" in the City. The Sisters' House is notable for having housed the first Anglican Sisterhood in this country.

Another notable achievement associated with these buildings was the founding of St. Luke's Hospital, under the Rectorship of the Rev. William Augustus Muhlenberg. It began in the Sisters' House under the auspices of the "Sisters of Charity" and was later removed to the large building which once stood on Fifth Avenue at 54th Street. Today the Hospital is located at 113th Street and Amsterdam Avenue.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Church of the Holy Communion and Sisters' House and Chapel has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Church of the Holy Communion and Sisters' House and Chapel form a remarkably attractive homogeneous architectural group of buildings executed in the Gothic Revival Style of architecture, that it was the first "free" church in the City, that it had the first boys choir, that it was the home of New York's first Anglican Sisterhood and that the Sisters founded St. Luke's Hospital in the Sisters' House, destined to become one of the great hospitals of New York City.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 8-A of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Church of the Holy Communion and Sisters' House and Chapel, Avenue of the Americas at West 20th Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 822, Lot 1, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.