

Landmarks Preservation Commission
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LP-0305

ST. PAUL'S CHAPEL, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, Amsterdam Avenue at 117th Street, Borough of Manhattan. Begun 1904, completed 1907, architects Howells & Stokes.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1973, Lot 1 in part, consisting of the land on which the described building is situated.

On June 14, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of St. Paul's Chapel, Columbia University and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 37). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Two witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. In a letter to the Commission, Grayson Kirk, President of Columbia University, said that the University was "happy to accept this designation."

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

St. Paul's Chapel attains an altogether pleasing dignity from its beautiful proportions and handsome architectural details. This brick building with limestone trim is highlighted with terra cotta ornament and ornamental bronze carefully integrated into an harmonious ecclesiastical design. Because of its Greek cross plan, surmounted by a high drummed dome over the crossing and its four columned portico (porch) with a Florentine gable, this Byzantine Chapel displaying much Italian Renaissance detail makes an attractive contribution to American architecture.

This small chapel is set within a landscaped area east of Low Memorial Library, and is well sited among the buildings on the Columbia campus. Flanking the low rise of steps leading into the main porch are two handsome bronze torcheres. The unusual columns of the vaulted portico instead of having classic capitals are topped by winged cherubs. Large bronze doors, handsomely enframed, provide a fitting entrance for the Chapel. At the east end the building terminates in a semi-circular apse. The north and south transept walls are pierced by large, arched windows of great beauty.

The Chapel, bearing the inscription, "For the Church of God", was a gift of Olivia and Caroline Stokes in memory of James Stokes and his wife Caroline Phelps. The twenty four windows in the drum of the dome are adorned with the arms of notable old New York families, whose names are associated with the history of the University, and include such prominent names as Philip Van Cortlandt, Abraham de Peyster, Gerard Beekman, DeWitt Clinton, and William C. Rhinelanders.

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 St. Paul's Chapel, Columbia University 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, St. Paul's Chapel of Columbia University is a unique example of American architectural design, that this Byzantine Chapel displaying much Italian Renaissance detail has great beauty and charm and that it enhances the Columbia campus where it stands.

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 St. Paul's Chapel, Columbia University, Amsterdam Avenue at 117th Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates as its related Landmark Site that part of Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1973, Lot 1 which contains the land on which the described building is situated.