

ST. JOHN'S CHURCH, 1331 Bay Street, Borough of Richmond. Completed 1871; architect Arthur D. Gilman.

Landmark Site: Borough of Richmond Tax Map Block 2832, Lot 18.

On November 27, 1973 the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of St. John's Church and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 13). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Three witnesses, including the rector and the warden of the Church, spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

Previous hearings on the proposed designation as a Landmark of St. John's Church and its related Landmark Site were held in 1966.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

St. John's Church was built in 1869-71 and designed by the prominent architect, Arthur D. Gilman, best known in New York City for his work on the old Equitable Life Assurance Building which formerly stood at 20 Broadway. In its style and setting, this charming Church is reminiscent of an English parish church; its prototype is said to have been Holy Trinity, a medieval church, in Stratford-on-Avon, but its detail is Victorian Gothic.

The congregation was formally organized on September 23, 1843, at the home of William B. Townsend, to serve the needs of the Protestant Episcopal worshipers in the area of Clifton. Today the Church is in the Rosebank area. Services were held at the Clifton Hotel on Cliff Street prior to the consecration of the first Church on March 30, 1844. That first building was on the west side of the road, almost opposite the present Church. The cornerstone of the present building was laid on November 10, 1869, and the Church was consecrated on September 30, 1871. The nearby rectory and parish house, also designed by Arthur Gilman, were built in 1862 and 1865 respectively.

This handsome rose-colored granite building, typically Victorian Gothic in style, is dominated by a tower surmounted by a high spire above the crossing. The Church has three aisles and is cruciform in plan. Appropriately sited, according to ecclesiastical practice, the main entrance is set within a pointed arch on the western front facing Bay Street. A secondary entrance to the nave is provided on the south side of the building through a picturesque carved wooden porch.

Flanking buttresses on the western and eastern ends and at the transepts accent the large pointed-arch windows with graceful stone tracery under the gables. A steep peaked roof extends the length of the nave and above the transepts. Windows, consisting of three pointed-arch sections under a stilted segmental arch, are set in the clerestory walls above the low angled roofs of the side aisles. The aisle side walls have pointed-arch windows set between buttresses. The Church is noted for its colorful stained-glass windows.

The square belfry tower above the crossing has a louvered pointed-arch opening on each side, and is topped by a crenellated parapet. An eight-sided pointed spire of the 1960s crowns the tower--a replacement of the original one which was divided into five stages by horizontal bands with pointed-arch windows under steep small gables at the first and third stages. Access to the belfry is provided by an octagonal stairtower at the northeastern corner of the tower.

The front churchyard is set behind a handsome cast-iron fence of the period. The spire has always been a prominent landmark for ships coming through the Narrows along the shore of Staten Island, and the church bells tolled a welcome to troops returning from Europe after World War I.

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. John's Church 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. John's Church is a handsome example of Victorian Gothic architecture, that in its style and setting it is reminiscent of an English parish church, that it is one of the few churches in this area which is cruciform in plan, and that it has served the needs of Protestant Episcopal worshipers in the Clifton and Rosebank areas of Staten Island for over 100 years.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 63 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. John's Church, 1331 Bay Street, Borough of Richmond and designates Tax Map Block 2832, Lot 18, Borough of Richmond as its Landmark Site.