

ST. MICHAEL'S CHAPEL OF OLD ST. PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL, 266 Mulberry Street, Manhattan, Built 1858-1859; architect James Renwick, Jr. in association with William Rodrique.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 509, Lot 1 in part.

On May 10, 1977, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of St. Michael's Chapel of Old St. Patrick's Cathedral and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 5). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. One witness spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

St. Michael's Chapel of Old St. Patrick's Cathedral, a fine example of Gothic Revival architecture, was built in 1858-59 as a chancery office and was designed by James Renwick, Jr., in association with William Rodrique. It is one of several buildings in the Old St. Patrick's Cathedral complex--the others are the cathedral itself and the convent, girls' school, both designated New York City Landmarks, and the rectory. Calvary Cemetery, which originally served St. Peter's Church on Barclay Street, surrounds the chapel and the cathedral.

Although the Roman Catholic Church was formally established in New York City with the founding of St. Peter's Church in 1785, New York did not become a separate diocese until 1808. The cornerstone of St. Patrick's, the seat of the new diocese, was laid the following year. Dedicated in 1815, the new church was designed by Joseph Francois Mangin, one of the architects of City Hall. It is the earliest Gothic style church still standing in Manhattan. In 1817, St. Patrick's was incorporated as a congregation separate from St. Peter's Church.

Under the leadership of Archbishop John Joseph Hughes (1797-1864), the New York diocese expanded and grew in strength, aided in part by the great influx of Irish and German Catholic immigrants. In 1838, Hughes became the first bishop to be consecrated in New York; the ceremony took place at St. Patrick's. A strong advocate of religious education, Hughes founded a number of educational institutions and religious communities in the diocese. Himself an Irish immigrant, Hughes was an active supporter of immigrant associations as an Americanizing force. In April, 1844, he defended St. Patrick's and Roman Catholicism against the threats of the Native American Party. Because of his influence he was able to turn back charges that Catholicism was hostile to American institutions.

Because the size and function of the Church had greatly expanded, New York was created an archdiocese in 1850 with Hughes as archbishop. In keeping with New York's new status as an archdiocese, in 1853 a new St. Patrick's Cathedral was planned uptown on Fifth Avenue between 50th and 51st Streets. Meanwhile, St. Patrick's downtown continued in use even though it was extensively damaged by a fire on October 6, 1866. It was rebuilt and then rededicated on March 17, 1868. Archbishop John McCloskey was invested as the first American cardinal on April 27, 1875, in Old St. Patrick's. Upon completion of the new uptown cathedral in 1879, St. Patrick's downtown became a parish church. The architect of the new cathedral was James Renwick, Jr., in association with William Rodrique.

James Renwick, Jr. (1818-1895), one of New York's most fashionable and prominent architects, achieved great success as a designer of Gothic Revival churches. Self-trained as an architect, he first gained recognition with his design for Grace Church (1843-46) when he was only 25. St. Patrick's Cathedral (1858-79) was the climax of his career as a church designer. For a number of years Renwick was Supervising Architect for the Commission of Charities and Correction and designed a number of buildings on Roosevelt, Ward's, and Randall's

Islands; several of these are designated New York City Landmarks. Renwick also designed the Smithsonian Institution building (1846-55) and the Corcoran Art Gallery (1859-61), (now the Renwick Gallery), both of which are in Washington, D.C. In addition to designing various commercial buildings, he was also a successful designer of residences in New York and suburban localities. One of these, the William E. Dodge villa (1863), now the Greyston Conference Center in the Bronx, is a designated Landmark.

William Rodrique was a brother-in-law of Archbishop Hughes and received a number of commissions from the diocese. He designed two early Gothic Revival style buildings on the campus of St. John's College (now Fordham University). These are the St. John's Chapel and Residence Hall, both of 1845, and both designated New York City Landmarks. While these buildings were under construction, Rodrique lived on the college campus in the building now called Alumni Hall which he also designed. He taught mathematics and engineering at the college and designed a number of churches in New York City.

Renwick was chosen as the designer of the new St. Patrick's Cathedral by Archbishop John Hughes. It seems entirely appropriate that Renwick was asked to design a new chancery office for St. Patrick's downtown in the same year that construction of the new cathedral was begun according to his designs. For this commission he continued in association with William Rodrique. This chancery office is now St. Michael's Chapel. The building has served a number of functions since its construction in 1858-59. Although first used as the chancery office, it later became the annex for St. Patrick's School which once stood at 274 Mulberry Street. The school, also a Gothic Revival structure, was very similar in appearance to St. Michael's. By 1885, as shown in the Robinson Atlas of New York City, St. Michael's was the office of Calvary Cemetery. During the centennial of Old St. Patrick's in 1909, a photograph was published of the building captioned "Parish Hall, former office of Calvary Cemetery." The building continued to be used as a parish hall until after World War II when Catholics of the Russian Rite were given the use of it. They renamed it St. Michael's Chapel, the name by which it is still known.

Although St. Michael's Chapel was not built as a place of worship, Renwick, nonetheless, designed the building in such a way that it would harmonize with the neighboring cathedral. In addition, it displays a number of Gothic features that seem appropriate to an ecclesiastical structure. This small red brick building is three stories high and faces onto Mulberry Street. The most prominent feature of the facade is the central projecting stone entrance vestibule with pointed arch doorway outlined by a drip molding. The handsome double doors with traceried panels are original. Surmounting the vestibule is a balustrade with quatrefoil panels which serves the double pointed arch window above it at the second floor which has a mullion and wood tracery. Two pointed arch blind windows flank the entrance at the first floor and the central window at the second. At the third floor paired windows at the center are again flanked by blind single windows. At each floor the windows have stone enframements, while at the second and third floors there is stone tracery in the blind window arches. Quatrefoil panels are set in the bases of the third floor windows. Crowning the front is a crenellated cornice carried on small corbeled arches. A projecting and crenellated pediment of stone crowns the building and is carried on two larger pointed arches set on corbels at the center. Stone-trimmed buttresses flank both sides of the building at the front corners up through the second floor. On the side elevations there are four pointed arch windows at each floor. At the roof line on each side a row of diminutive corbels carries the cornice. A simple but handsome iron fence encloses the area in front of the building.

St. Michael's Chapel remains an important part of the Old St. Patrick's Cathedral complex. As a Gothic Revival structure, it is a fine example of the work of James Renwick, Jr., and a reminder of his association with the uptown St. Patrick's Cathedral. In its present use for worship by Catholics of the Russian Rite, it continues to serve an important community function.

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. Michael's Chapel of Old St. Patrick's Cathedral 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. Michael's Chapel of Old St. Patrick's Cathedral is a fine example of Gothic Revival architecture, that it was designed by the prominent New York City architect, James Renwick, Jr., that it is a reminder of Renwick's association with St. Patrick's Cathedral, that it has been used for several purposes since it was built, and that it continues to serve the community in its present use for worship by Catholics of the Russian Rite.

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. Michael's Chapel of Old St. Patrick's Cathedral, 266 Mulberry Street, and designates as its related Landmark Site that part of Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 509, Lot 1 on which the described building is situated.