

MOUNT OLIVE FIRE BAPTIZED HOLINESS CHURCH (FORMER SECOND REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH), 308 West 122nd Street (aka 304-308 West 122nd Street). Borough of Manhattan. Built 1897. James W. Cole, architect.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1948, Lot 41.

On March 24, 2009, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Mount Olive Fire Baptized Holiness Church and the related landmark site (Item No. 4). The public hearing was duly advertised with the provisions of law. Four witnesses spoke in favor of the proposed designation, including a representative of the church, as well as representatives of the Municipal Arts Society, the Historic Districts Council, and the Society for the Architecture of the City. There were no speakers in opposition to the proposed designation.

Summary

The Mount Olive Fire Baptized Holiness Church, with its distinctive façade combining elements of the Gothic Revival and Romanesque Revival styles, was constructed in 1897 for the Second Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America was founded in the late 18th century by Irish and Scottish worshippers who were fleeing persecution at home for their refusal to take oaths of loyalty to the British government. As church membership in New York City grew, so did the need for a second geographical division that would serve congregants living in Manhattan north of Chambers Street. On June 11, 1830, the Second Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America was organized, occupying a structure at 166 Waverly Place. In 1897, the Second Reformed Presbyterian Church constructed this house of worship at 304-308 West 122nd Street. The selection of the Harlem site for the building is reflective of the increasing popularity of the neighborhood as a residential community, largely a result of the opening of elevated rail lines through northern Manhattan in the late 1870s and a proposed subway route in the late 1890s. In 1943, the Mount Olive Fire Baptized Holiness Church of God of the Americas purchased the church and continues to worship there today, 45 years later. The Fire Baptized Holiness Church of God of the Americas was founded in 1898 in Mountville, South Carolina, by a Methodist preacher, William Edward Fuller, Sr., after he received the “Baptism of the Holy Ghost and Fire” while praying alone in a corn field near his home. The one-story, beige brick building was designed in the Gothic- and Romanesque-Revival styles by architect James W. Cole. Distinguishing features of the building include its symmetrical facade featuring pointed-arched window openings, terra-cotta ornament, stained-glass windows, crenellated brick corbelling at a prominently gabled roofline, and decorative pinnacles. James W. Cole designed numerous commercial and residential buildings throughout Manhattan, and examples of his work can be found in the Gansevoort Market, Greenwich Village, Mt. Morris Park, and Upper West Side / Central Park West Historic Districts. Among Cole’s notable works is the Gothic Revival style Charles A. Vissani Residence at 143 West 95th Street, a designated New York City individual landmark, constructed in 1889.



DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

History of Harlem¹

The Harlem neighborhood of Manhattan includes the area north of 110th Street to 155th Street, south of Washington Heights. The original village of Harlem was established in 1658 by Dutch Governor Peter Stuyvesant and named Nieuw Harlem after the Dutch city of Harlem. Throughout the Dutch, British, and colonial periods, rich farms were located in the region's flat eastern portion, while some of New York's most illustrious early families, such as the Delanceys, Bleeckers, Rikers, Beekmans, and Hamiltons maintained large estates in the western portion of the area.² Like many large landowners, the Delanceys, Beekmans, and Rikers owned slaves, while no evidence has been found identifying either the Bleeckers or the Hamiltons as slave owners.³

The advent of new and better forms of transportation, as well as the rapidly increasing population of New York following the Civil War, brought about the transformation of Harlem into a middle and upper-middle class neighborhood. Although the New York and Harlem Railroad operated from lower Manhattan to Harlem beginning in 1837, service was unreliable and the trip was long. The impetus for new residential development in this area came with the arrival of three lines of elevated rail service which, by 1881, ran as far north as 129th Street and by 1886 extended farther north.

Beginning in the 1870s, Harlem was the site of a massive wave of speculative development that resulted in the construction of numerous new single-family rowhouses, tenements, and luxury apartment houses. Commercial concerns and religious, educational, and cultural institutions – such as the distinguished Harlem Opera House on West 125th Street – were established in Harlem to serve the expanding population.⁴ Those who relocated from downtown included recent immigrants from Great Britain and Germany.

Anticipated transportation improvements in the late 1890s, such as the proposed subway routes to west Harlem, ignited another wave of real estate speculation that led to highly-inflated market values. Between 1898 and 1904, when the Lenox Avenue subway opened at 145th Street, virtually all the vacant land in Harlem was developed. This tremendous increase in residential construction led to overbuilding. A general collapse of the real estate market hit Harlem in 1904-05 as loans were withheld and mortgages foreclosed; landlords dropped rents in an effort to attract tenants. Taking advantage of the deflated market and the housing surplus, a black businessman named Philip Payton and his Afro-American Realty Company, founded in 1904, played a major role in the development of Harlem as an African-American community. In the aftermath of the real estate collapse, Payton acquired five-year leases on white-owned properties, managed, and rented them to African Americans at ten percent above the deflated market prices. Thus, New York's black middle class – long denied access to “better” neighborhoods – began moving to Harlem.⁵

Harlem was considered an ideal place to live, with its broad tree-lined streets and new, up-to-date housing stock.⁶

The migration of African Americans to Harlem continued during the 1920s as people came to New York in record numbers from the American south and the West Indies. During the “Harlem Renaissance” of the 1920s, Harlem became the urban cultural center of black America, with 125th Street between Lenox and Seventh Avenues as its

hub. Accomplishment in black theater, literature, music, religion, and politics began during this period and continued to flourish in Harlem for decades to follow. The Apollo Theater⁷ became famous in the 1930s when the theater began to feature black entertainers, and continues to as a world-renowned stage for African American performing artists.

By the 1920s, most of the major African-American institutions and churches that were once located in lower Manhattan and in midtown had moved northward along with their constituents. New churches were built by some of these congregations, such as St. Philip's Episcopal Church (214 West 134th Street, built 1910-11, Tandy & Foster architects) and the Abyssinian Baptist Church (132 West 138th Street, built 1922-23, Charles W. Bolton & Son architects), while others took over the buildings of former congregations, such as the Mt. Olive F.B.H Church and the Metropolitan Baptist Church (formerly New York Presbyterian Church, 151 West 128th Street, built 1884-85, John R. Thomas architect).⁸ These churches also played a major social role in Harlem. As stated by Cynthia Hickman in a guidebook on Harlem churches:

The sheer number of active churches in Harlem makes it, perhaps, the most "churched" community in the world. More than fifty of these institutions have been havens in the community since the Great Depression, with nearly two dozen of these churches playing a pivotal role in the establishment of Harlem as the "Negro Mecca" during the renaissance of the 1920s.⁹

The Panic of 1929 and the Great Depression of the 1930s was felt throughout the country, and devastated black communities such as Harlem. The pressure of high rents, unemployment, and racist practices culminated in riots in Harlem in 1935 and 1943. Militant activities during the 1940s set the stage for further protests during the 1950s and 1960s, when Harlem played a significant role during the Civil Rights Movement. During the 1960s, figures like Malcolm X, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., Queen Mother Moore, and Preston Wilcox used Harlem as a launching pad for political, social, and economic empowerment activities.

Social problems caused a decline in Harlem's population during the late 1960s through the 1970s, leaving behind a high concentration of underprivileged residents and a decaying housing stock. By the late 1970s and 1980s, years of economic recession and abandonment, redlining, and disinvestment had taken their toll.

Since the late 1990s and into the twenty-first century, Harlem is experiencing a new renaissance. Unlike the cultural and literary renaissance of the 1920s, the current rebirth is based on economic development and showcasing Harlem's cultural history. Today, Harlem is one of the most desirable places to live in New York City.¹⁰

The Second Reformed Presbyterian Church of New York¹¹

In 1897, the Second Reformed Presbyterian Church, which had been located on West 39th Street near Seventh Avenue, purchased land on West 122 Street for the construction of a new church for its congregation,¹² due to the displacement of most of its congregation to newly-developing uptown neighborhoods as a result of the increasing commercial development in midtown Manhattan. Previously, the church had been located on West 11th Street.

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America is an offshoot of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland, which separated from the original Presbyterian Church of Scotland in the late 1600s. The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America was founded in the late 18th century by Irish and Scottish worshippers who were fleeing persecution at home for their refusal to take oaths of loyalty to the British government. Reformed Presbyterians are also known as Covenanters because their historical practice of public covenanting, which requires taking an oath of loyalty professing patriotic loyalty only to Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The Rev. William Gibson organized New York's first congregation in late 1797, and its first services were held in 1798 in a school located on Cedar Street. In 1804 a frame church was built on Chambers Street near Broadway, which was replaced by a larger brick structure in 1818. This church stood near the city's Alms House, and the congregation established the city's first Sunday school in order to provide religious training to the poor children residing at the home.

By the 1820s, several of the church's members had moved uptown to Greenwich Village and in 1828 decided to purchase an existing Dutch Reformed church at the corner of Waverly Place and Grove Street for the establishment of a new church, which was formally recognized in 1830 as the Second Reformed Presbyterian Church. For the next two decades, the church was racked by a series of disagreements and splits among its members, resulting in the establishment of the Third Reformed Presbyterian Church of New York in 1848. The new organization kept the Waverly Street church, while the Second Reformed Presbyterian Church erected a new building on West 11th Street near Sixth Avenue.

Further growth and movement in the congregation of the church prompted the church to purchase and move to an existing synagogue on West 39th Street near Sixth Avenue in 1875. It remained at this location until the new church on West 122nd Street was built in 1897. Changing demographics and religious traditions in Harlem during the mid-twentieth century pushed the congregation to close its West 122nd Street church in 1943, selling the building to its current owner and occupant, the Mount Olive Fire Baptized Holiness Church for \$40,000.¹³

Mount Olive Fire Baptized Holiness Church¹⁴

The Fire Baptized Holiness Church of God of the Americas was founded in 1898 in Mountville, South Carolina, by a Methodist preacher, William Edward Fuller, Sr., after he received the "Baptism of the Holy Ghost and Fire" while praying alone in a corn field near his home. Fuller's congregation began with two members who lived nine miles apart, and grew to more than thousand members by 1908. Since then, the church has vastly increased its membership and geographic presence, and now consists of three dioceses located throughout the United States, Canada, the West Indies, the Virgin Islands, and England. The Mount Olive F.B.H. Church is part of the New York District of the First Episcopal Diocese. The Mount Olive congregation was organized in 1918 from a mission that was established the previous year by Bishop Fuller. Daniel Matthews was appointed the first minister of the church. Mount Olive's first home was at 6 West 126th Street. In 1932, it moved to 2395 Eighth Avenue, where it remained until it acquired its present home on West 122nd Street under the leadership of Reverend McDonald Brown.

The Architect and His Design¹⁵

James W. Cole (1856-1919) was listed in directories as a designer as early as 1883 and was established as an architect by 1886, but was listed in New York City directories as a designer in 1883-84. His office was located at 401 West 46th Street until 1888-89, when it moved to 403 West 51st Street, where it remained until he ceased practicing architecture in 1916. Most of his work consisted of commercial and apartment buildings, many of which are found in the Greenwich Village, Gansevoort Market, Mt. Morris Park, and Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic Districts. At the turn of the twentieth century, Cole's representative works were listed in Forbes's *Keys to the Architects of Greater New York* as the Lion Palace Music Hall at Broadway and 110th Street (demolished) and the Sacred Heart School (built 1900-01, 446 to 460 West 52nd Street). Some of his other extant works include the Jeanne d'Arc, a flats building at 200 West 14th Street (1888-89) and the Gothic Revival-style Vissani Residence¹⁶ (built 1889, 143 West 95th Street, a designated New York City Landmark).

For the Mount Olive F.B.H. Church, Cole chose the Gothic Style in designing its brick and terra-cotta facades, combining that style with elements taken from the Romanesque Revival style. Many of the details were inspired by fourteenth-century English, or Perpendicular, Gothic church architecture, such as the pointed arch windows and doors, label moldings, and foliated crockets, as well as features taken from Romanesque-style churches, such as buttresses, a central rose window, and corbelled brick friezes. The symmetrical design of the main façade makes a simple, but elegant statement of the building's purpose, projecting a solid, but not overwhelming presence on West 122nd Street. Cole carried the combined stylistic approach to the less visible side facades, which were executed in red brick with simpler terra-cotta detailing.

His other existing Gothic-inspired building constructed for a religious group, the aforementioned Vissani Residence, is in a more ornate late-Victorian-Gothic style than found at Mount Olive. His Romanesque Revival-style Sacred Heart Roman Catholic School was built a few years after Mount Olive and includes corbel frieze that is similar to the one he used on the West 122nd Street church, and on his earlier industrial buildings in the Gansevoort Historic District. The Mount Olive Church appears to be among Cole's last works using Gothic and Romanesque idioms; his later designs employed the more formal Beaux-Arts style, as evidenced by his apartment house at 42-44 West 120th Street (1901) in the Mount Morris Park Historic District.

Description

The three-bay-wide main façade is clad in a light brown brick and is trimmed in terra-cotta. The bays are framed by brick buttresses, coped with sloping terra-cotta blocks, that spring from projecting, molded bases containing the basement fenestration. It consists of wood casements (the glass has been painted) covered with non-historic metal grates on a continuous stone sill at ground level. The centrally-located main entryway sits in a pointed-arch opening and is approached by concrete steps (painted) with a center rail made of cast-iron tubing. There is a full-width, historic wrought-iron fence and marching gates. There are non-historic paneled wood doors and wood transoms beneath ribbed stained glass windows that fill the upper part of the arched entry bay. Non-historic wall lamps flanked the doorway. Pointed-arch windows on projecting terra-cotta sills fill the other two bays. They contain ribbed and leaded stained-glass windows. The pointed-arch

upper parts of the entryway and windows are lined with brick and terra-cotta voussoirs and terra-cotta labels topped by foliated crockets. An oculus filled with ribbed stained-glass windows sits directly above the entryway. It is surrounded with radiating brick and terra-cotta blocks and molded surround with a foliated crocket and a foliated pendant. There is a metal-and-glass sign board attached to the façade beneath the west window, and a bracketed sign with exposed electrical conduits attached to the buttress located on the west side of the entryway. The prominently gabled roof is covered with asphalt shingles and has two bull horns attached near the front peak. The gable has crenellated brick corbelling, molded terra-cotta coping, and decorative pinnacles.

The red brick side elevations, which are partially visible through narrow alleyways, also contain pointed-arch fenestration separated by brick buttresses. The windows, which sit on projecting stone sills, contain ribbed and stained glass, header brick surrounds at the upper parts, and molded brick labels. There are copper gutters at the eaves with metal drainpipes. There are two-story wings at the southern part of the alleyways, which are entered through non-historic metal gates. Both contain secondary entryways consisting of non-historic metal doors, transom lights, and stone lintels. The east alleyway door is approached by a flight of concrete steps, while there is a metal stairway in the west alley. A single window filled with non-historic replacement sash and stone lintels and sills sits above each of the alleyway entrances.

The rear façade is presently visible from West 121st Street through some vacant lots located directly behind the church. The church's peak and apse's roof rise up from beyond a two-story rear wing. A louvered vent, topped by a stone lintel, is situated in the gable and the roof is surmounted by a flat wall with stone coping. A pipe runs along the east ridge of the roof. The rear wing is three bays wide and constructed of red brick with iron coping at the parapet. The center bay is recessed and has concrete-sealed, former windows or doorways fronted by a wrought-iron fire escape. The other bays have one-over-one wood sash with projecting stone sills and flat stone lintels. There is a projecting brick chimney on the east side of the elevation. The roof of the wing appears to be flat, and is topped by metal HVAC channels.

Report written and researched by
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NOTES

¹ This section is adapted from Landmarks Preservation Commission (hereafter LPC), *New York Public Library George Bruce Branch* (LP-2304) (New York: City of New York, 2009), by Theresa C. Noonan, and *St. Aloysius Roman Catholic Church* (LP-2164) (New York: City of New York, 2007), by Jay Shockley and includes the following sources: James Weldon Johnson, *Black Manhattan, Studies in American Negro Life* (New York: Atheneum, 1977); LPC, *Abyssinian Baptist Church* (LP-1851) (New York: City of New York, 1993), by Christopher Moore and Andrew S. Dolkart; Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto, Negro New York, 1890-1930*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper Torch Books, 1971); Jervis Anderson, *This Was Harlem 1900-1950* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1981); Andrew S. Dolkart and Gretchen S. Sorin, *Touring Historic Harlem: Four Walks in Northern Manhattan* (New York: New York Landmarks Conservancy, 1997); Thelma Willis Foote, *Black and White Manhattan: The History of Racial Formation in Colonial New York City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); <http://www.si.umich.edu/CHICO/Harlem/index.html>; and <http://www.nyc-architecture.com/HAR/HAR-History.htm>.

² Harlem suffered economic decline in the 1830s when many of the farms, depleted from decades of cultivation, were abandoned and the great estates were sold at public auctions. The area became a refuge for those desiring cheap property and housing, including newly-arrived and destitute immigrants who gathered in scattered shantytowns. However, most of the scenic topography and rural character of Harlem was left untouched.

³ Jill Lepore, *New York Burning Liberty, Slavery and Conspiracy in Eighteenth-Century Manhattan* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), Appendix C, The Owners, 262-273 and Graham Russell, *Root & Branch, African Americans in New York & East Jersey 1613-1863* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 164, 174, 178.

⁴ The western half of Harlem, beginning in the 1880s, became a fashionable and prosperous neighborhood. Luxury elevator apartment buildings with the most modern amenities were constructed, such as Graham Court Apartments (a designated New York City Landmark), which was built in 1898-1901 on Seventh Avenue (now 1923-1937 Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., Boulevard) as well as more modest types of multi-family housing.

⁵ In the late nineteenth century, the major center of African-American New York had been the section west of Herald and Times Squares, from the West 20s to the 60s, comprising the overcrowded areas known as Hell's Kitchen, the Tenderloin, and San Juan Hill. A dramatic increase in Harlem's African-American community came when hundreds of families living in the Tenderloin were displaced during the construction of Pennsylvania Station in 1906-10. This real estate climate offered for the first time decent and attractive housing in large quantities to a segment of New York's population that had never had such opportunity.

⁶ Quoting an Urban League report of 1914, Gilbert Osofsky noted that Harlem was "a community in which Negroes as a whole are...better housed than in any other part of the country." The author explained, "The creation of a black Harlem was one example of the general development of large, segregated Negro communities within many American cities in the years before and following World War I."

⁷ Originally Hurtig & Seamon's New (Burlesque) Theater, 253 West 125th Street (George Keister, 1913-14), a designated New York City Landmark.

⁸ All are designated New York City Landmarks.

⁹ Cynthia Hickman, *Harlem Churches at the End of the 20th Century: An Illustrated Guide* (New York: Dunbar Press, 2001), xi.

¹⁰ Information in this section adapted from: Regina Sass, *History of Harlem, New York*, http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/98780/history_of_harlem_new_york.html?page=2.

¹¹ This section is based on the following sources: W. Melancthon Glasgow, *History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in America* (Baltimore: Hill & Harvey, 1888), 193-201; *New York Times* (Nov. 16,

1874), 3; (Nov. 3, 1896); and Michael Wagner, *Up from Reconstructionism; or A Short History of the Puritan Reformed Church of Edmuntou* (1996) <http://www.reformedpresbytery.org/history.html>.

¹² New York County, Office of the Register, Deeds Liber 46, Page 291 (Aug. 7, 1897).

¹³ New York County, Office of the Register, Deeds Liber 4235, Page 263 (Oct. 13, 1943).

¹⁴ from fbhchurch.org, website of the Fire Baptized Holiness Church of God of the Americas (February 2009) and a telephone interview with Deacon Robert Stewart of the Mount Olive F.B.H Church on April 1, 2009.

¹⁵ This section is adapted from LPC, *Gansevoort Market Historic District* (LP-2132) (New York: City of New York, 2003), by Jay Shockley and includes the following sources: City of New York, Death Records, 1919; Dennis Steadman Francis, *Architects in Practice in New York City 1840-1900* (Committee for the Preservation of Architectural Records, 1979); LPC, 143 West 95th Street House (The Charles A. Vissani Residence) (LP-1689) (New York: City of New York, 1991), by Margaret M. Pickart; Trow's New York City Directory; and James Ward, *Architects in Practice in New York City 1900-1940* (Committee for the Preservation of Architectural Records, 1989).

¹⁶ It was built for a Franciscan priest, Charles A. Vissani, who founded a religious order, to serve as his home and to house other priests belonging to his order.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of the building and site, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Mount Olive Fire Baptized Holiness Church (former Second Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America) 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 Mount Olive Fire Baptized Holiness Church, with its distinctive façade combining elements of the Gothic Revival and Romanesque Revival styles, was constructed in 1897 for the Second Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America; that the selection of the Harlem site for the building is reflective of the increasing popularity of the neighborhood as a residential community; that the Mount Olive Fire Baptized Holiness Church of God of the Americas purchased the church in 1943 and continues to worship there today, 45 years later; that the one-story, beige brick building was designed by the noted architect James W. Cole; that the building's distinguishing features include its symmetrical facade with pointed-arched window openings, terra-cotta ornament, stained-glass windows, crenellated brick corbelling at a prominently gabled roofline, and decorative pinnacles; that the building embodies and exemplifies both the Gothic and Romanesque architectural styles; that its history manifests important periods and trends in New York City history, and that the building has remained continuously in use as a church since its construction and is remarkably intact.

Accordingly, pursuant to 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 Mount Olive Fire Baptized Holiness Church (former Second Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America), and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1948, Lot 41 as its Landmark Site.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair
Pablo Vengoechea, Vice Chair
Stephen Byrnes, Diana Chapin, Joan Gerner,
Roberta Gratz, Elizabeth Ryan, Roberta Washington, Commissioners



**Mount Olive Fire Baptized Holiness Church
(former Second Reformed Presbyterian Church)**

304-308 West 122nd Street
Borough of Manhattan.

Photo: Christopher Brazee, 2009



Mount Olive Fire Baptized Holiness Church
Main Entryway
Photo: Christopher Brazee, 2009

Mount Olive Fire Baptized Holiness Church.
Photos: Christopher Brazee, 2009



Lower Façade



Corbels and finial

Mount Olive Fire Baptized Holiness Church
Photos: Christopher Braze, 2009



Rose Window



Ridge and pinnacle



MOUNT OLIVE FIRE BAPTIZED HOLINESS CHURCH (Former Second Reformed Presbyterian Church) (LP-2320), 308 West 122nd Street (aka 304-308 West 122nd Street). Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 1948, Lot 41.

Designated: June 23, 2009

Graphic Source: New York City Department of City Planning, MapPLUTO, Edition 06C, December 2006.
 Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, JM.