

**CHRIST CHURCH COMPLEX**, 76 Franklin Avenue (aka 72-76 Franklin Avenue and 96 Franklin Avenue), Staten Island

Church: 1903-04; architect, Isaac Pursell; Parish House: 1906-07, architect, Isaac Pursell;  
Rectory: 1879, architect, Henry M. Congdon, altered 1909-10, architect, William H. Mersereau

Landmark Site: Borough of Staten Island, Tax Map Block 66, Lot 158 and Lot 178

On August 11, 2009, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Christ Church Complex, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 9). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. A total of seven witnesses, including City Council member Kenneth C. Mitchell, Susan Fowler, Chair of the Christ Church Plans & Equipment Committee, vestry member Paul Smith, speaking on behalf of Rector Charles Howell, and representatives of the Historic Districts Council, the New York Landmarks Conservancy, and the Preservation League of Staten Island testified in support of this designation. The representative of the Preservation League also appeared on behalf of the North Shore Waterfront/Greenbelt Association, the West Brighton Restoration Society and the Four Boroughs Neighborhood Preservation Alliance.<sup>1</sup>

### Summary

Picturesquely sited on a wide expanse of lawn, the Christ Church complex, with its church, parish house, rectory, and cloisters, is an outstanding and on Staten Island rare example of turn-of-the-20<sup>th</sup>-century neo-Gothic ecclesiastical design. Christ Church was established in 1849 and the present church (built 1903-04) and parish house (built 1906-07) replaced earlier buildings on the site. Their size and substantial construction are indicative of the importance of Christ Church's congregation, which in the early 1900s was regarded as "the largest and most fashionable" in the borough. Designed by the Philadelphia architect Isaac Pursell, a noted specialist in church and institutional design and apparently his only known works in New York City, the church, parish house, and connecting cloister are modeled on English country parish architecture of the late Gothic period. All are clad with randomly-laid granite trimmed with limestone or cast stone. The church's cruciform plan, the clear expression of interior spaces in the exterior massing, the incorporation of a massive crossing tower, buttresses, porches, and crenellations to convey the weight and solidity of medieval masonry, the austerity and quietness of the design, the compact massing, the monochromatic palate, the rugged textured wall surfaces, and the restriction of ornament primarily to the historically accurate late Gothic window tracery all contribute to making Christ Church an excellent example of neo-Gothic church design. The church is also distinguished by its unusually rich stained and opalescent glass windows including works by Tiffany Studios, J. & R. Lamb Studios, Nicola D'Ascenzo, and the Gorham Company. Reflecting the growing trend in the Episcopal Church to provide large multipurpose parish houses that would enable the church to be a part of the daily life of its community, the parish house is designed to harmonize with the church and features picturesque elements such as a stone and timber-framed gabled entrance porch, stepped buttress, cross gables, asymmetrically-placed towers, and a bell cot. The two-story rectory, originally erected in 1879 to the designs of noted New York church architect Henry M. Congdon (1834-1922) was remodeled by Staten Island architect William H. Mersereau (1882-1933), in 1909. Mersereau moved the building and rotated it to face the church. He also extended the building at the rear, stuccoed



the exterior, added faux half-timbering and two crenellated limestone bays with Tudor arches to recall late medieval English vernacular buildings. The three unusually intact buildings are joined by covered walkways or cloisters reflecting the trend among neo-Gothic architects to employ cloisters to arrange churches, rectories, and parishes around a quiet landscaped courtyard reminiscent of a medieval church close. Over its 160 year history Christ Church played a prominent role in its community and continues to serve parishioners in the Episcopalian tradition.

## DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

### New Brighton<sup>2</sup>

New Brighton is located on the north shore of Staten Island, adjacent to New York Harbor and the Kill van Kull, the strait between Staten Island and Bayonne, New Jersey. In 1834 Manhattan real estate developer, Thomas E. Davis acquired a triangle of land extending along the North Shore from the Quarantine Station and Richmond Turnpike to Sailors' Snug Harbor for an exclusive and fashionable summer retreat named New Brighton after the famous English resort favored by the Prince Regent. Davis conveyed his New Brighton property to five New York businessmen who formed a corporation, under the name of the New Brighton Association in 1836. One of the five investors, George A. Ward, wrote a prospectus on behalf of the association extolling the advantages of New Brighton, noting its "proximity to the great commercial mart of the western hemisphere, ... beauty of location, extent of prospect, and salubrity of climate, ... unrivaled in this country."<sup>3</sup> By the end of the 1840s, New Brighton had developed into a fashionable summer resort with several major hotels and facilities for bathing, boating, fishing, and sports. In the 1860s, it began to develop as a commuter suburb. The opening of a consolidated ferry and railroad service in 1886 with its terminus in nearby St. George and its first stop at New Brighton further accelerated the demand for new housing in the area. By 1893 New Brighton was "one of the largest, if not the largest, unincorporated towns in the State of New York with a population of 17,000."<sup>4</sup> The village continued to attract a mix of summer and year round residents. A number of prominent athletic clubs were headquartered there and during the season there was a continual round of social events. Residents included eminent authors and jurists; "men with vast business enterprises; ... men, who in science, literature and the arts, have gained an enviable place; people of affairs, people of leisure, all ... attracted and held by the unsurpassed charms of this beautiful spot."<sup>5</sup> The residents were served by a number of churches, schools, and other institutions, including Christ Church, the first Protestant Episcopal Church in the village, organized in 1849.

### The First Christ Church<sup>6</sup>

Prior to the opening of Christ Church, Episcopalian residents of New Brighton had to travel to St. Paul's Church in Tompkinsville for services. New York City businessman George Wotherspoon, who had joined the church after moving to a house on Richmond Terrace near Nicholas Street in 1845, strongly objected to the church's use of cross-shaped floral arrangements, which he believed were "out of place in a Protestant church."<sup>7</sup> Wotherspoon quit St. Paul's for an Episcopal chapel in Factoryville (West Brighton), which had been established by St. Andrew's Church to serve the English and Welsh millworkers residing nearby. He then began canvassing his neighbors with the idea of establishing an Episcopal church that would be

“within ordinary walking distance of New Brighton” and “accessible in winter.”<sup>8</sup> Wotherspoon also was responsible for securing a grant of land at the corner of Franklin Avenue and Second Street (now Fillmore Street) and a gift of \$400 towards the cost of erecting a church building from the New Brighton Association. He secured pledges from a number of other prominent residents including William S. Pendleton, banker David A. Comstock, lawyer and New Brighton Association partner Francis B. Cutting, Chemical Bank president John Q. Jones, import merchant Samuel T. Jones, and Commodore, later Rear Admiral, John D. Sloat. Wotherspoon, Comstock, and Pendleton formed a building committee and secured designs for the new church from James Renwick, Jr., designer of Grace Church (1843-46) and St. Patrick’s Cathedral (1853-88, both designated New York City Landmarks). Wotherspoon was responsible for selecting the Rev. Pierre Paris Irving (nephew of writer Washington Irving and an assistant minister at St. George’s in Manhattan) to serve as the church’s first rector. Commodore Sloat contributed a baptismal font carved from the bowsprit of the U.S.S. *Constitution*, which remains in use today. The first service was held in the new church on May 5, 1850.

Over the next decade the congregation grew to include 52 families of permanent residents and 15 families of summer residents, who rented pews, and a number of workers, including textile factory operatives and hotel employees, who occupied free pews within the church. In the mid-1850s Wotherspoon and William S. Pendleton quarreled over an addition to the church; both men withdrew to join other churches, although the Pendleton family eventually returned to Christ Church. In 1867 the church constructed a Sunday School building and in the early 1870s the church was enlarged and refurbished. The well-regarded Rev. Irving continued to serve as rector until 1875.

Christ Church’s second rector was the Rev. George D. Johnson. A descendant of the Puritan minister Jonathan Edwards and graduate of Trinity College and the Berkeley Divinity School at Middletown, Connecticut, Johnson had led congregations in Owego, New York, and Massachusetts before accepting the call from Christ Church. When Johnson and his family arrived in New Brighton, they first rented the house at 105 Franklin Avenue (aka the Hamilton Park Cottage, Carl Pfeiffer, c. 1864, a designated New York City Landmark). At about the time Johnson assumed his duties, the vestry commissioned plans from the noted church architect, Henry M. Congdon for a rectory and a new chancel for the church.<sup>9</sup> The rectory was given priority and was constructed in 1878-79. Originally Queen Anne in style, the two-and-one-half story rectory was faced with brick at the first story and sheathed with shingles on its upper stories. Its design incorporated a picturesquely-massed gabled roof with overhanging eaves, gabled dormers, and reeded chimneys that remains largely intact in the building’s present form. In 1880 the old Sunday School building was moved to face Fillmore Place and greatly enlarged to serve as a parish house as well as a Sunday School. In 1885 the church had 450 members including many members of “New Brighton’s social elite.” Prominent members included banker-industrialist Anson Phelps Stokes, Staten Island Rapid Transit System president Erastus Wiman, and Customs Service official Alexander E. Outerbridge. By the late 1880s, there were calls to replace the original board-and-batten church building with a less old-fashioned structure that would be more in keeping with the elegant villas going up in the New Brighton neighborhood. The Panic of 1893 put a damper on fundraising and by the time the recovery began in the late 1890s the Rev. Johnson was nearing retirement and decided the matter was best left to his successor. In November 1900, as Johnson celebrated his silver anniversary as rector,

he announced his retirement. Johnson handpicked his successor, the Rev. Frank Warfield Crowder, who became assistant rector in the spring of 1901. In August, Johnson was named rector emeritus and Crowder was unanimously elected rector.

#### Construction of the Present Church, Cloister, Parish House, and Rectory

Frank Warfield Crowder (1869-1932) was born in Baltimore and attended Randolph-Macon College, finishing his undergraduate degree at Dickinson College in 1890.<sup>10</sup> He graduated from Drew University Theological Seminary in 1893 and earned a Ph.D. from the University of Tübingen in Germany in 1894. He began his career as a Methodist minister but after six years he became an Episcopalian and was ordained in 1901. Prior to his appointment at Christ Church, he served as a lay assistant at New York's pro-cathedral in Lower Manhattan. The Rev. Crowder was installed as the minister of Christ Church, on September 22, 1901, heading what the *Staten Island Gazette* described as "the largest and most fashionable congregation in the borough."<sup>11</sup> According to the *Staten Islander* he was an "enterprising and up-to-date minister' who practiced 'sincere Christianity,' was 'a stirring and cultured speaker,' and 'showed indefatigable energy' and 'extraordinary executive ability.'"<sup>12</sup> Crowder energized the congregation through the establishment of several social and service groups as well as through a renewed emphasis on the church's choir and musical programs. He placed great importance on youth groups and held the first ecumenical service in an Episcopal Church on Staten Island in 1908 for students from four prep schools on Staten Island, featuring a sermon by the Rev. J. Frederic Berg of the Reformed Church on Staten Island.

Within six months of the Rev. Crowder's installation, plans were underway for a new church. A ringing endorsement of the project was offered by Bishop Henry Codman Potter at a confirmation ceremony in April 1902, where he promoted the project by saying:

And now this brings me to a subject which some of you may think very secular: your new church enterprise. Some might suggest that the church edifice has nothing to do with the spiritual life of the parish; but it is just as important as the body is to the soul. The church building should be beautiful in proportion to the means of those who worship in it. I do not wish to pain you, and yet I must say that I do not think this building worthy of God or of your means. People cannot live in handsome houses and worship in an unworthy church without sooner or later bringing God into contempt.<sup>13</sup>

Shortly after Bishop Potter's address, the vestry commissioned plans for a new church from Philadelphia architect, Isaac Pursell, who the *Staten Islander* described as "a man of great repute in church architecture in that city and regarded as one of the most tasteful and judicious architects in this country."<sup>14</sup> Pursell's plans for a relatively modest church were filed with the Staten Island Department of Buildings in late July 1902 and were placed on view in the vestibule of Christ Church.<sup>15</sup> Less than a week later the plans were withdrawn and Pursell began planning a larger, more imposing building. These plans were approved by the vestry in January 1903 and Wakeham & Miller, a Manhattan firm specializing in the construction of religious and institutional buildings, was retained as the primary contractor. In mid-February 1903 a new application was filed with the Department of Buildings and on March 1 the congregation gathered in the old building for a brief ceremony presided over by Rector Emeritus Johnson.<sup>16</sup> Demolition began the next day. The rose window from the old church was put in storage and

later used for the parish house auditorium; the old pews, organ, and wall hangings were given to other churches. In April 1903 Bishop Potter laid the cornerstone for the new building, which was inscribed with the dates "1849-1903."<sup>17</sup> Construction was completed in January 1904 and building opened for services on January 24.<sup>18</sup>

A number of generous gifts allowed the vestry to retire the church's mortgage in early May 1905 and on May 30 a consecration service was held with the Rt. Rev. David Hummell Greer, Bishop Coadjutor of New York, officiating, assisted by Archdeacon George D. Johnson, rector emeritus of Christ Church.<sup>19</sup> In October 1905 planning began to replace the old parish house, which was located to the west of the new church in the area now used as a parking lot, as the old building was deemed to be "unattractive, incommodious, and uncomfortable."<sup>20</sup> A donation allowed the church to acquire a house and lot formerly occupied by the Hobby family to the south of the church's property providing an expanded site for the new parish house.<sup>21</sup> Isaac Pursell was commissioned to design the parish house and an enclosed passageway or cloister linking it to the church. The Staten Island building firm of Henry Spruck & Son was given the contract to construct the new structures. The cornerstone was laid on July 8, 1906 and the parish house was dedicated in May 1907. The new parish house was intended to aid Christ Church in becoming an "Institutional Parish," a term used during the period for a church that aimed to minister to all the needs of its members and to foster the well-being of the larger community. Thus the parish house was equipped with a gymnasium, bowling alley, and locker rooms at the basement level; a parlor, library, kitchen, two large guild rooms, which could be converted into one large meeting room, and a suite with a sitting room, bedroom and bath at the first story; and a large auditorium and gallery with seating for 450 to 500 people and a platform that could be used as a stage at the second story. Accordion doors along the sides of the auditorium allowed the space to be divided into ten classrooms for Sunday school classes and small meetings. Among the groups using the new building were the Daily Kindergarten, a sewing school, a men's club with 100 members, a Cadets Corps for boys, and a championship winning basketball team. The church's auditorium was also used for dances and theatrical events.

By early 1909 the vestry had retired most of the debt from the construction of the parish house and a campaign began to raise money to relocate and remodel the rectory.<sup>22</sup> It seems likely that this had been planned prior to the construction of the parish house since its entrance was uncomfortably close to the rear of the rectory. For this project the vestry retained Staten Island architect William H. Mersereau. Under his supervision the rectory was moved southward and pivoted 90 degrees so that its entrance faced the church. The building was enlarged and stuccoed and a Gothic-arched bay window and entrance porch were added to the façade. A covered passageway was built linking the parish house with the rectory. The spacious yard formed by the buildings set well back from the street created a picturesque ensemble suggestive of a medieval church close.

The remodeling of the rectory and construction of the passageway was completed in January 1910. In early spring, Dr. Crowder received a call from Grace Church, Providence, Rhode Island, which he accepted. In a statement accepting his resignation, the vestry stated:

In the erection of the new church, parish house, and rectory, the whole scheme and plan of which were entirely due to him, he has left a monument not only to his energy, judgment, and business ability, but to his faith for at no time has he

ever wavered, in the face of great difficulties, in the belief that the work would be accomplished.<sup>23</sup>

### Isaac Pursell and William H. Mersereau

A leading designer of religious buildings, schools, and domestic architecture, who practiced in Philadelphia for over thirty years, Isaac Pursell (1853-1910) apprenticed with the prominent Philadelphia architect, Samuel Sloan.<sup>24</sup> Pursell opened an independent office in 1878. He worked briefly in partnership with Joseph W. B. Fry between 1885 and 1887 then practiced on his own until shortly before his death in 1910. He published 32 designs for churches and church manses in the Presbyterian Board of Election's annual reports and his church designs also appeared in the *American Architect & Building News* and *Philadelphia Real Estate Record & Builder's Guide*. During the 1890s, he served as staff architect for Sarah Tyson Rorer's *Household News*, producing model house designs for that publication, prior to its being absorbed into the *Ladies Home Journal*.

An extremely prolific architect, Purcell designed numerous Presbyterian, Baptist, Lutheran, and Episcopalian churches throughout Pennsylvania and New Jersey as well as the B'nai Abraham Synagogue on Lombard Street in Philadelphia. Among his earliest known commissions are the Moravian Church of the Holy Trinity on Oxford Street in North Philadelphia (c.1879) and two half-timbered Queen Anne style residences, in Merchantville, New Jersey, including his own house at 101 East Walnut Avenue (1881). The extensive publication of his work led to commissions "for various denominations from Maine to Tennessee."<sup>25</sup> In the New York City metropolitan region, he was responsible for the Westminster Presbyterian and Fourth Baptist Churches in Patterson, New Jersey, and the Bethel Presbyterian Church in East Orange, New Jersey. Christ Church and its cloister and parish house appear to be his only known New York City works.

The majority of Pursell's churches were Gothic Revival in style, although he also produced some Romanesque Revival designs. He seems to have preferred stone for his religious buildings, but he also designed brick and frame churches. He also planned the Cumberland and Camden Asylums for the Insane and buildings at the Home for Feeble Minded Women in Vineland, New Jersey. Sometime after 1900, Pursell moved to Wenonah, Gloucester County, New Jersey, where he designed the Memorial Presbyterian Church and manse in 1903. Pursell was very active in the Philadelphia Chapter of American Institute of Architects and became a member of the National AIA in 1901.

William Howard Mersereau (1862-1933),<sup>26</sup> a descendent of a distinguished family that settled on Staten Island in the 1680s, entered the office of architect Ebenezer L. Roberts as an apprentice in 1878 and in 1879 took architectural courses at Columbia University under William R. Ware. Mersereau continued working in Roberts' firm where he was in charge of several projects for substantial office buildings and private residences during the 1880s. In 1887 he established a partnership with John A. Hamilton under the name of Hamilton & Mersereau. One of their first commissions was for alterations to the Charlotte Garbe house at 168 Cebra Avenue (within the St. Paul's Avenue – Stapleton Heights Historic District). By 1890 Hamilton & Mersereau were involved in the development of the Oakwood Heights section of Staten Island, where Mersereau built a residence on Leeds Street. In 1891 Mersereau designed the parish house at St. Andrew's Church in Richmondtown, where his father-in-law, the Rev. Thomas S.

Yocom, was pastor. Mersereau began working on his own in Manhattan in 1895, maintaining a general practice designing houses, office buildings, and public structures. In 1897-98 he added a wing to Sunnyside, the former home of author Washington Irving, which had been inherited by his grand-nephew, insurance executive A.D. Irving. This led to commissions for renovations to the Old Dutch Church in Sleepy Hollow (1897), and a new house for A.D. Irving on Grymes Hill, Staten Island (1898). In 1902 Mersereau was given charge of the restoration of Westover, the Georgian mansion of William Byrd in Charles City, Virginia. Between 1904 and 1907 he undertook his best known project, the reconstruction of Fraunces Tavern at 54 Pearl Street for the Sons of the American Revolution (Fraunces Tavern is both an individually designated New York City Landmark and within the Fraunces Tavern Block Historic District.) Mersereau was a member of the Architectural League and American Institute of Architects, the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences, and the Society of the Sons of the American Revolution.

### The Design of the Church, Parish House, and Rectory

Isaac Pursell's designs for Christ Church (1903-04) and its connecting cloister and parish house (1905-07) are excellent examples of turn-of-the-20<sup>th</sup>-century neo-Gothic ecclesiastical design reflecting the growing interest within the Episcopal Church in English Medieval architecture as a source of inspiration.<sup>27</sup> This last phase of the Gothic Revival Movement is generally thought to have been initiated by the English architect Henry Vaughan, who had apprenticed with George Frederick Bodley, a major Gothic Revival-style architect, before emigrating to this country in 1881 and establishing a practice in Boston. In his design for the chapel at St. Paul's School, Concord, New Hampshire (1886-94), Vaughan broke with the exuberant architecture of the High Victorian Gothic period, to create something that was in the words of his chief disciple Ralph Adams Cram "a model of calm composition," and "absolutely correct in detail." Inspired by Vaughan's example, the theories of Pugin, and the Oxford Movement, Cram published a series of articles in the influential Episcopalian journal, *The Churchman*, that were reprinted in his 1901 book, *Church Architecture*, in which he advocated a return to the pre-Reformation church architecture of fifteenth-century England, as "a starting point for new stylistic developments. For Cram the small parish church of England was "the most perfect type ever produced" and therefore must be "for us a model in every way."<sup>28</sup> Cram's own churches, designed in collaboration with his partners Charles Francis Wentworth, Bertram Goodhue, and Frank W. Fergusson; Vaughan's buildings; and the works of several other Boston architects helped popularize the neo-Gothic style, which began to be used by a number of denominations, although it remained closely identified with the Episcopal Church.

Praised by the *Staten Islander* for its "simplicity and grace of design,"<sup>29</sup> Christ Church draws its inspiration from English country parish churches of the late Gothic period.<sup>30</sup> Unlike Pursell's churches for other Protestant denominations, it is cruciform in plan, reflecting the Episcopalian preference for a processional architecture in which the chancel is clearly distinguished from the nave. The parts of the church – the nave, chapel, sacristy, chancel, transepts, chapel and porches – are clearly articulated on the building's exterior. The facades are clad with grayish pink granite from Holmesburg, Pennsylvania, laid in a coursed rubble pattern with gray mortar and trimmed with smooth-cut Indiana limestone. A massive crossing tower, buttresses, porches, and crenellations convey the weight and solidity of medieval masonry. The austerity and quietness of the design, the compact massing, the monochromatic palate, the use of rugged textured wall surfaces, and the restriction of ornament primarily to the historically-

accurate late Gothic Revival-style window tracery all contribute to making Christ Church an excellent example of neo-Gothic church design. In addition certain features of the design seem to be closely related to prototypes by Cram and Vaughan. Cram, Wentworth & Goodhue's Church of Our Saviour, Marlborough, Massachusetts (1897-98) has a very similar cruciform plan featuring an entrance porch, square crossing tower, and a number of ancillary rooms — chapel, organ pipes, sacristy, choir — occupying the area between the cross arms and chancel. The exterior articulation of the two churches also has a number of common features, including the gray rubble walls trimmed with simple smooth-cut stone trim of a slightly lighter hue, the proportions of the low, square spireless crossing towers with their flaring corner water spouts, and the domestic character of the sacristies, which are faced with plaster and half-timbering. Cram also employed a subordinate and somewhat domestic treatment for the sacristy at All Saints Church Ashmont, in Dorchester, Massachusetts (1891). Like Christ Church, All Saints Ashmont features a low spireless tower with stepped corner buttresses, arched openings, a crenellated parapet, and, most tellingly, a rounded corner stair tower treated as a turret.<sup>31</sup>

Another notable feature of Christ Church is the extensive collection of stained and opalescent glass windows including works by some of the country's leading stained glass makers. These include five works by Tiffany Studios: "The Resurrection" (1904), designed by Tiffany's lead designer Frederick Wilson, on the rear wall of the chancel; "Christ Blessing the Little Children" (1904) in the fourth bay on the south wall of the nave; "Christ in the Home of Mary and Martha" (1904) in the third bay on the north side of the nave; "The Presentation in the Temple" (1905) in the fourth bay on the north wall of the nave; and "The Adoration of the Magi" (1919) on the north transept wall. Another leading stained-glass manufacturer, J. & R. Lamb Studios, is represented by an early opalescent glass work depicting "The Ascension" (dedicated 1908) on the east wall of the nave above the entrance porch and a later medievalizing stained glass window "The Sermon on the Mount" (1945) on the south transept wall. There are also two windows by the leading Philadelphia decorator and stained-glass designer Nicola D'Ascenzo "Christ with Two Lesser Disciples at Emmaus" (1909) on the rear wall of the chapel and "Christ Among the Doctors" (1909) in the third bay of the south nave wall. The Gorham Company, best known for its metalwork, also had a branch specializing in the production of opalescent and "English stained glass" in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The company is represented by three opalescent glass windows — "Christ the Good Shepherd" of 1912, located on the east wall of the north transept, and "Christ Stilling the Storm" and "Christ's Call to Peter and Andrew" of 1913, located opposite each other in the second bay of the nave.

Pursell's designs for the parish house and cloister echo that of the church employing rusticated Holmesburg grayish pink granite, cast stone trim and slate-covered pitched roofs. The cloister is treated largely as an adjunct to the church. It has Perpendicular Gothic arch window openings with a continuous cast stone sill course. The water table is coped with rusticated cast stone that aligns with the rusticated limestone coping of water table on the church.<sup>32</sup>

In his design for the parish house Pursell created visual interest for what was essentially a large rectangular box by framing the long eastern and western facades with corner pavilions set off by stepped buttresses, by creating a picturesque Gothic stone and timber framed gable-roofed entrance porch, and by breaking the roofline with cross gables, asymmetrically placed chimneys, and a bell cot. The multifunctional character of the building, which was used for religious, educational, social, and athletic functions, was reflected in the blending of features usually



associated with religious architecture such as the bell cot and arched window openings with more domestic and utilitarian elements. One historic element from the earlier church, a rose window dating from 1883, was reused on the south wall of the second story auditorium. Other features contributing to medieval character include the cusped moldings used on the transoms of the arched windows, the paired wood doors with decorative strap hinges used at the main entry, and the diamond pane leaded glass window lights, which now survive only in the transom above the main entry but, based on a historic photo of the building also appear to have been used for the upper lights of the first story windows.

In his alterations for the rectory William Mersereau moved the building away from the church and parish house rotating it 90 degrees so that its front entrance now faces the south nave wall. Bays window were added to the front and west sides of the building, new stone porches were constructed on the front (north) and east facades, several new dormer windows were created, and the building was lengthen by two bays at the rear (south). In order to blend these new additions with the older parts of the building and give it a late medieval-Tudor character more appropriate to the style of the church and parish house the brick base and frame upper stories were parged with stucco. On the upper floors timber framing was added. On the west wall a first floor window was altered to create a doorway opening onto a newly constructed granite-and-timber walkway connecting the rectory to the parish house. The incorporation of these walkways and arrangement of the parish house, church, and rectory to form a quadrangle were also very much a reflection of the ideals of the neo-Gothic Episcopalian reform movement, which stressed the importance of the church's being a part of the daily life of its community and erected large multipurpose parish houses to foster that goal, but also demanded that the church buildings be surrounded by "ample land with trees and shady paths, so that the church may stand withdrawn a little from the streets and secular life around."<sup>33</sup>

Aside from Christ Church relatively few neo-Gothic churches were built on Staten Island. Closest in style and date to Christ Church was the small chapel, St. Cuthbert's-by-the-Sea, built by Cuthbert Mills on his estate in Arrochar in 1901. Like Christ Church this small cruciform plan chapel was simply composed and massed and featured unadorned, rusticated stone facades, and a square, spireless tower. Located on Sand Lane, it has been deconsecrated and altered to point that it is no longer recognizable. Upjohn & Conable's Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church and Parish House at St. Paul's Avenue and Cebra Avenue in the St. Paul's Avenue-Stapleton Heights Historic District, built 1913-14, is a later and more ornate example of the neo-Gothic style incorporating Continental as well as English features. The restricted urban site of the Lutheran Church and Parish House, however, did not permit the incorporation of a garden or close-like setting.<sup>34</sup> That sort of arrangement was employed for St. John's Church (Episcopal) on Bay Street in Clifton where the church, parish house, and rectory were ranged round a central quadrangle. At St. John's, however, the church is High Victorian Gothic in style (Arthur D. Gilman, 1869-71, a designated New York City Landmark), the rectory is a Queen Anne (Arthur D. Gilman, 1887), and the parish house (1911), which incorporated a neo-Gothic frontispiece and tower, has been demolished and replaced by large building with a wide driveway bisecting the former churchyard. Thus, the Christ Church complex appears to be sole surviving example of this type on Staten Island.

## Later History<sup>35</sup>

In September 1910 the Rev. Duncan H. Browne (1879-1954) became the rector of Christ Church.<sup>36</sup> The son of Trinity Corporation's senior sexton, Browne graduated from Columbia College in 1905 and attended the General Seminary and Union Theological Seminary prior to his ordination in 1909. Dr. Browne served as rector until 1921. Christ Church was known for its musical programs and choir, its championship-winning athletic teams, and for its extensive social service programs modeled on community service programs at St. George's and Grace Church in Manhattan. In 1913 the church's corporate name was changed to Christ Church, New Brighton. In 1915, following a change in the New York State Religious Corporations Law, women were given the right to vote in church elections. Changes to the church building during Browne's tenure included the installation of three opalescent glass windows from the Gorham Company between 1912 and 1913 and the installation of Tiffany Studio's "Adoration of the Magi" in the north transept in 1919.

The Rev. Browne was succeeded by the Rev. Charles William Forster (1880-1947), a Canadian-born clergyman, who had previously served as the rector of St. James's Church in Providence and of Emmanuel Church in Newport, Rhode Island.<sup>37</sup> In 1939, despite having suffered financial losses during the Depression, the church reached a membership of 1,073 baptized persons and 976 communicants. During the Rev. Forster's tenure the massive oak doors at the main entrance to the church were installed as a memorial to Edward Bronson King (1923). Two new music-themed stained glass windows were also installed — a 1928 representation of "St. Cecilia at the Organ" by the Pennsylvania stained-glass artist Valentine d'Ogries on the north chapel wall and a 1934 depiction of "King David Playing His Lyre" on the east wall of the south transept (artist unknown).

In 1941 the vestry selected the Rev. Andrew Clifford Long (1904-89), a Pennsylvania-born graduate of General Theological Seminary, to replace the Rev. Forster as Rector. During the war the parish house became "a center for Red Cross work and war time activities." From March 1944 to September 1945 the Rev. Long took a leave of absence to serve as a navy chaplain. His return to the pulpit coincided with the dedication of "The Sermon on the Mount" stained glass window by Lamb Studios, which was installed on the south wall of the transept.

In the late 1950s the church completed its stained glass program. Frederich L. Leuchs, a stained glass maker, who had trained at the Rambusch Decorating Company prior to establishing his own firm in 1957, produced two opalescent glass windows: "Christ's Entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday" and "The Good Samaritan," which were installed in the first bay of the nave in 1959. Thomas W. Harland, a Staten Island realtor whose hobby was stained glass making and whose work is also found in a number of other churches on the island, made a number of windows for the church, which were installed between 1958 and 1959. These included the eight lancets with depictions of cherubs on a blue ground in the windows at the base of the tower, and numerous windows with leaded diamond-shaped window panes and central painted shields. These are employed for the side windows on the east porch where the shields are decorated with Evangelist symbols, the arched transom above main entry, where the two center shields are decorated with Alpha and Omega symbols, the four side windows of the north porch with symbols of the Annunciation, Incarnation, Atonement, and Resurrection, the seven sacristy windows representing the Seven Sacraments, and twelve cloister windows with symbols of the apostles.<sup>38</sup>

In 1946 the Staten Island architectural firm of Tryge & Andrew Anderson filed plans with the Staten Island Department of Buildings to repair rotted window sills and sash and repair the roofing on the church rectory and parish house.<sup>39</sup> By 1950 the church roof had become so deteriorated that it required almost complete rebuilding. Work began, stopped until more money was raised, and was completed around 1952.

In 1965 the Rev. Long resigned his pastorate and the vestry called the Rev. Frederick P. Lefebvre (1935-2000) as Christ Church's seventh rector. A Staten Islander he was a graduate of Wagner College and the Berkeley Divinity School and had served in various capacities at churches in Connecticut and New Rochelle before taking over at Christ Church in January 1966. The church repaired and refurbished the rectory in preparation for the new pastor and his family. In the early 1970s some alterations were made to interior of the parish house, which continued to be used for numerous community activities as well as church functions.<sup>40</sup> These included a nursery school and daycare center, a New Brighton extension of the YMCA in the gymnasium, a ballet school, the Staten Island Civic Theater, and Direct Action for Snug Harbor, a neighborhood civic group responsible for the city's acquisition of Snug Harbor for use as a city park.

During the late 1960s and 1970s church membership declined, dwindling into the 200s by 1979. The Rev. Lefebvre was in ill health in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The Rev. John H. Walsted (1932-), who was residing in St. George, began assisting him in 1981 and on the Rev. Lefebvre's retirement in October 1982 became Priest-in-Charge. In July 1983 Father Walsted was elected the eighth rector of Christ Church. In 1983 Shirley Elfers was elected warden, becoming the first woman to serve as an official of the church. Women also began serving as counters and ushers in the mid-1980s. In 1987 Florence Mills became the first African-American to serve on the vestry and in 1990 "the pulpit itself became integrated when the Rev. James Manning became Assistant Minister and Director of Religious Education."<sup>41</sup> Father Walsted remained at Christ Church until 1994, when he retired to paint full time and with his partner, the Rev. Gerald W. Keucher to restore the High Victorian picturesque villa at 1 Pendleton Place (1860; Charles Duggin, architect, a designated New York City Landmark).<sup>42</sup>

Under Father Walsted's direction church attendance increased and a capital campaign was initiated in 1989. That and two generous bequests in the late 1980s made it possible undertake a program of "restoration, redecoration, and refurbishment." The church's 16 major memorial windows were cleaned and restored in the summer of 1991 by Church Art Glass Inc. of Minneapolis. In addition the church's stonework was repointed.<sup>43</sup>

Father Walsted was succeeded in 1997 by the Rev. Earl Michael Allen. Under his direction, Staten Island architect Albert Melniker altered portions of the basement gymnasium in the parish house for use as meeting rooms and offices. In the course of that work the basement windows of the parish house were replaced and the basement entrance and areaway on the south side of the building were rebuilt. In 2003 structural repairs were made on six of the roof trusses in the parish house. In 2004 the Christ Church complex was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The present rector, the Rev. Charles H. Howell, was called to Christ Church in 2006.

### Description

The Christ Church complex is located on two adjoining lots at the southwest corner of Fillmore Street and Franklin Avenue. The northern T-shaped lot extends for 290 feet along Fillmore Street and 230 feet along Franklin Avenue. The southern lot has a frontage of 100 feet

on Franklin Avenue and is 125 feet deep. Together the two lots comprise approximately one and one half acres. The site is landscaped and slopes upward north to south and downhill east to west. The church, parish house, and rectory are arranged in an open-ended quadrangle with an enclosed passage (cloister) linking the church and parish house and a covered stone and timber pergola extending between the parish house and rectory. A U-shaped driveway and concrete sidewalk provide access to these buildings from Franklin Avenue. A blacktop parking lot, with an entry from Fillmore Street, extends behind the rear of the church, clerestory, and the northern end of the parish house. Buchanan Street (formerly Third Street) between Franklin Avenue and Lafayette Avenue dead-ends behind the southern end of the Parish Hall. Much of the property is fenced with non-historic chain link fencing. There is a non-historic metal light post with floodlights on the lawn between the north wall of the nave and Fillmore Place. A non-historic metal flagpole is located at the center of the U-shaped lawn in front of the rectory. There are two non-historic signs — a wood sign with a triangular top located on the lawn between the concrete path to the Franklin Avenue entrance to the church and the U-shaped driveway and a triangular topped metal-and-glass sign with movable lettering near Franklin Avenue at the center of the U-shaped lawn. There are also non-historic metal “handicapped parking” signs in the grass near the entrances to the church, parish house, and rectory. A non-historic wood picket fence creates an enclosure for trash bins near the southeast corner of the property along Franklin Avenue. There is also a non-historic trash can enclosure at the southwest corner of the parking lot.

### **The Church**

The neo-Gothic Christ Church is cruciform in plan. It has a one story entrance porch, aisleless nave, transepts, chapel, stair towers, and sacristy wing. Except for the sacristy wing, which is clad with stucco and half-timbering, the walls are constructed of grayish pink granite from Holmesburg, Pennsylvania, laid in a coursed rubble pattern with gray mortar and Indiana limestone trim. Paired stepped buttresses set off the corners of the nave, transepts, chancel, main entrance porch, and towers. Single stepped buttresses articulate the nave walls and frame the entrance to the north entrance porch. The nave, transepts, chancel, chapel and porches have slate-covered gabled roofs. The crossing is marked by a square tower with crenellated parapet, a crenellated corner turret, and a hipped roof. The rear section of the sacristy wing has a flat roof while the portion closest to the transepts is gabled and clad with slate shingles. All of the windows have Gothic-style tracery and most of the larger windows contain historic stained and opalescent glass by important designers such as Tiffany Studios (5 windows), J. & R. Lamb Studios (2 windows), Gorham Company (3 windows), Nicola D’Ascenzo (2 windows) and Valentine d’Ogries (1 window). There are also a number of small lancet windows with tinted diamond pane leaded glass and decoratively painted shields produced by Staten Island stained-glass maker Thomas W. Harland in 1958-59. The tower windows contain wood louvers with cusped tracery decorations.

*Franklin Avenue Façade:* The main (eastern) façade facing Franklin Avenue is approached by a one story gabled porch with a four-centered pointed arch entry containing paired oak doors installed in 1931 that retain their historic wrought-iron door hinges and door handle plates. Surmounting the doorway is a transom that is divided by original wood tracery into four cusped lights. The windows have leaded diamond-pane tinted lights. The windows are protected by non-historic plexiglass panels. The hanging metal-and-glass lantern above the entry is non-historic. The stone coping edging the gable terminates in a capstone that forms the base

for a stone Celtic cross. At the sides of the porch are windows with limestone lintels and beveled limestone sills. Each window opening contains a pair of trefoil windows set in original stone moldings. The diamond-shaped leaded window lights with center shields date from the 1950s. The side window openings are protected by non-historic metal-and-glass or more probably plexiglass storm windows.

Above the entrance porch on west façade is a four-centered pointed arch divided by stone tracery into five main vertical lights. The gable wall is coped with a limestone molding terminating with a central capstone that forms the base for a stone Celtic cross.

*South Façade:* The south wall of the nave is articulated into four bays set off by stepped buttresses. The basement has small horizontal window openings with non-historic brick moldings and sash. There are sealed pipes coming from the window in the third bay (reading east to west). In the fourth bay the window has been replaced by a non-historic metal cover for a coal chute. The arched window openings contain stained glass windows set in stone tracery divided into two lancets and four upper lights. Each lancet is divided into a bottom pivoting light, upper and lower sashes, and a cusped transom. These windows were conserved in recent years at which time the plexiglass covers were removed from the lower portion of windows although they remain in place for the transom lights.

The east wall of the south transept has a single arched window opening. Stone tracery divides the opening into a single lancet and a pair of upper lights. As in the nave the lancet comprises a bottom light, upper and lower sashes, and cusped transom. The stained glass window was installed in 1934.

The south wall of the transept has a basement hatch opening with paired non-historic metal doors. There is a non-historic light fixture attached to basement wall to the west of the entry. While the present hatch is non-historic, a basement hatch appears in this location in historic photos and is probably an original feature. The large south transept window is divided into four lancets surmounted by paneled tracery.

*North Façade:* The north wall of the nave is articulated into four bays set off by stepped buttresses. The basement has small horizontal window openings. The easternmost window opening retains its historic wood brick moldings. The window is recessed behind a wood frame with a historic iron grille covered with non-historic wire mesh. The middle basement windows have non-historic brick moldings and non-historic vinyl-covered sliding windows. The westernmost window has been filled with metal grilles and pipes. These connect to mechanical equipment concealed by a non-historic chain-link fence enclosure with vinyl webbing. The arched window openings of the nave contain stained glass windows set in stone tracery divided into two lancets and four upper lights. Each lancet is divided into a bottom pivoting light, upper and lower sashes, and a cusped transom.

The east wall of the north transept has a single arched window opening. Stone tracery divides the opening into a single lancet and a pair of upper lights. As in the nave the lancet comprises a bottom light, upper and lower sashes, and cusped transom.

The north façade of the transept has two horizontal window openings immediately below the water table. The eastern window has non-historic brick moldings and sliding vinyl-covered windows. A pipe and a sprinkler tap protrude from the wall at the bottom corners of the window. The west window retains its historic wood framing and single light window, which is protected by a non-historic iron barred window grille covered by non-historic wire mesh.

Extending from the northwest corner of transept is a porch, which is similar in design to the main entry porch except that it has only one set of stepped buttresses framing the entry. It is approached by a historic stone stoop. The paired paneled wood doors with iron hardware are historic, probably original, however, the metal door handle and splash guards at the bottom of the doors are non-historic. The transom above the door is divided by original wood tracery into four cusped lancets, which contain leaded diamond-pane tinted lights. The windows are protected by non-historic plexiglass panels. The lantern on the gable above the entry is non-historic. At the sides of the porch are windows with limestone lintels and beveled limestone sills. Each window opening contains a pair of trefoil windows set in original stone moldings. The diamond-shaped leaded window lights with center shields date from the 1950s. The windows are protected by non-historic storm windows which match the storms covering the side windows of the front entrance porch.

Set at a right angle to the porch with its long axis paralleling that of the chancel, the gable roofed chapel is distinguished by its tall narrow proportions and by the paired buttresses that anchor the northwest corner of the north facade. The horizontal basement window on the north wall of the chapel is sealed with non-historic materials. The traceried lancet above contains a stained glass window.

*West Façade:* The western façade comprises the western faces of the chapel, chancel and sacristy. The horizontal window opening in the basement of the chapel has been sealed with non-historic materials. The arched window opening on the west façade of the chapel is divided by stone tracery into two lancets and four upper lights. The chancel façade is characterized by the stepped buttresses, which brace the north and south ends of the chancel and are set at right angles to the chancel wall. The basement choir room beneath the chancel is lit by two arched windows, which retain their historic wood brick moldings, but have non-historic one-over-one sash windows and non-historic wood panels covering their upper sashes. The windows are protected by historic iron grilles. A non-historic floodlight has been installed near the top of the west-facing buttress. There is also a non-historic wood panel, presumably an old sign, near the north end of the wall.

*Sacristy Wing:* The sacristy wing comprises a flat-roofed one-story-plus basement space that contains the first floor sacristy, rest-room, and clean up room, and a gable-roofed space that contains an area for storing altar hangings, the organ piping chamber, staircases and a corridor connecting to the cloister. The basement walls of the wing are constructed of the same Holmesburg granite with limestone window sills and water table as the church. The upper portions of the sacristy walls are stuccoed and half-timbered. All of the wood elements including the basement window lintels and first story window casings have been covered with non-historic aluminum sheathing. The southern end of the basement is lit by two trabeated windows. These retain their historic wood brick moldings. The windows are non-historic one-over-one vinyl-covered aluminum sash. The openings are protected by historic iron grilles and non-historic wire mesh screens. The arched windows at the first story are covered with non-historic metal and plexiglass, but retain their historic paired casement with leaded diamond pane lights and paired cusped wood tracery transoms. Just to the north of the southern line of windows are several non-historic electrical conduits and an electric meter. A non-historic light fixture has been installed near the southwest corner of the sacristy roof.

At the western end of the south sacristy wall the two basement windows match the

basement windows on the western wall. The horizontal basement window in the gabled area of the wing retains its historic iron grille, but the opening has been sealed with non-historic materials. The two short arched windows lighting the first floor restroom and utility room have non-historic metal and plexiglass covering original casement windows with leaded diamond pane lights and cusped wood tracery transoms. The triple window in the gabled area retains its historic leaded diamond pane lights with decorative oval medallions. The windows are protected by plexiglass and the wood casings are covered with non-historic aluminum sheathing.

*Roof and Tower:* All of the church's gabled roofs have historic slate shingles. The battlemented square crossing tower is braced by paired corner buttresses and has a staircase tower at its northeast corner. Each face of the tower has three arched openings, which retain their original wood louvers decorated with tracery. At the base of the tower, there are also small arched windows with stained glass windows dating from the 1950s. A corbel table extends beneath the crenellations acting as a dripstone for the windows. Original water spouts project at angles from the corners of the towers. The tower is capped by a low slate-covered pyramidal roof, which terminates in an original decorative metal weathervane.

### **The Cloister**

The cloister is treated largely as an adjunct to the church. It has Perpendicular-style arch window openings. All of the windows retain their historic wood brick moldings and sashes that contain leaded glass lights dating from the 1950s. The continuous sill courses that extend beneath the windows and rusticated water table are cast stone. The water table aligns with the rusticated limestone coping of church's water table, stepping up to form a lintel over a basement level passageway at the north end of the cloister and then aligning with the water table of the parish house. The gabled cloister roof retains its historic slate shingles.

### **The Parish House**

The parish house is a rectangular two-story plus basement building capped by a hipped roof with cross gables on the east and south facades. The facades are clad with the same Holmesburg granite as the church and cloister. The window sills, water table, and copings are cast stone. Much of the cast stone trim appears to have been parged with a light-colored coating, which is now weathering in places. The building's long east and west facades are articulated into nine bays with two-window-wide end pavilions set off by stepped buttresses. The narrower side elevations are also framed by stepped buttresses and articulated into five bays on the north side of the building and four bays on the south side. All of the basement and first story windows have been replaced with non-historic one-over-one vinyl-covered aluminum sash. The arched second story windows retain their original wood brick moldings and paired or single-leaf four light windows casement windows surmounted by transoms with cusped tracery. There is a historic rose window, salvaged from the first church, at the center of the second story on the south façade.

*The Franklin Avenue (east) Façade:* features a picturesque Gothic stone-and-timber framed gable-roofed entrance porch, and a picturesque roofline enlivened by gables above the end pavilions, asymmetrically placed chimneys, and a bell cot. The entry retains its historic stone steps. They are flanked by granite side walls trimmed with a cast stone course that aligns with the building's water table and are coped with cast stone slabs that support the porch's wood superstructure. This is ornamented with trefoil arches, shaped braces and decorative rafter ends. The gabled porch roof retains its historic slate shingles and metal flashing. The porch retains its

historic wrought iron railings. The Arts and Crafts style light fixture at the front of the porch is probably a modern reproduction. The paired flood lights affixed to the apex of the gable is non-historic. The porch rafters and ceiling are currently concealed by non-historic netting. The paired wood vertical plank doors with decorative strap hinges are historic, probably original, but they have been modified by the addition of non-historic windows and hardware including the latch plates, handle bar, and mail slot. The four-centered Tudor arch transom above the doors retains its original lintel, brick moldings, and plate tracery. The leaded glass diamond-pane window was installed in 1959. Just to the north of the entrance at the base of the northeast corner of the building is a cornerstone with the number "1906" in raised numerals. At the basement level the northern and southernmost windows have been sealed with non-historic materials. At the first story the upper portion of second and third bays contain non-historic metal infill and ducts. At the second story all of the windows retain their four-light casements, which are topped by cusped transoms containing frosted glass. The bell cot above the north entrance pavilion retains its historic metal bell.

*West façade:* The western rear façade is simpler and less ornamented than eastern façade. Because the ground level is considerably lower there are full height basement doors at the southwest end of the façade and in the sixth bay (reading north to south). Both entrances have non-historic metal doors. Except for the seventh bay, all of the windows have non-historic one-over-one sashes and brick molds and are protected by historic iron grilles and non-historic wire mesh. The seventh bay has been sealed saved for a small non-historic metal louver.

A tall narrow granite stoop with marble treads and non-historic wrought-iron railings provides access to the first story entrance in the north pavilion. This is distinguished by a simple recessed arched entry. It retains a historic wood door, which has been reinforced with non-historic wood boards, and historic arched wood transom. The glass-and-metal light fixture above the entry appears to be historic. To the north of the entry the narrow arched lancet window retains its original wood cusped single light with frosted glass. All of the first story windows have non-historic vinyl-covered aluminum brick moldings and one-over-one sash. At the second story, the end pavilions have paired square-headed windows that retain their historic wood brick molds and historic one-over-one wood sashes, which are protected by non-historic storm sash. The five arched center bays retain their historic wood brick moldings and paired wood casement windows topped by cusped transoms. All but the fourth transom (reading north to south), which has been boarded over, retain their historic frosted glass. Some of the transoms have historic frosted glass panes, others clear replacement panes, while several panes are broken in the north casement of the bay five. The taller center bay (bay 3) retains a historic wood paneled bulkhead beneath the casement windows

*North façade:* The north wall of the parish house is partially screened from view by the cloister, which intersects with the center of the wall at the basement and first story levels. At the basement there are two square-headed window openings which retain their historic wood brick moldings and have one-over one sash windows protected by non-historic wrought iron grilles and non-historic wire mesh. At the first story there are trabeated window openings with wide cast stone lintels and sills at both the east and west ends of the walls. The window openings have non-historic one-over-one sash windows. The five arched window openings at the second story retain their historic paired wood casement windows and cusped transoms with frosted glass lights.



*South façade:* The south façade is largely screened from view by the walkway that connects it to the rectory and by foliage. At the western end of the basement is an areaway, which was largely rebuilt in the late 1990s. It has non-historic concrete sidewalls topped by non-historic wrought iron railings, non-historic concrete stairs and a non-historic concrete floor. The one-over-one sash window in the westernmost bay also was installed in the 1990s. The window opening in bay two (reading west to east) has been modified to create an entrance with a non-historic metal frame and metal door. There are two non-historic light fixtures a small light for the areaway and a larger floodlight for the yard above the entry. The window opening in bay three has been sealed and covered with stucco. At the first story there are two single trabeated window openings on the western half of the façade, a pair of windows at the center of the façade which lights the center corridor of the parish house and a wide opening at the eastern end of the façade that opens onto the walkway connecting the parish house to the rectory. The two single windows and the paired center windows retain their historic brick molds but have non-historic one-over-one window sashes. The doorway is concealed from view by the walkway. The second story has arched window openings at the east and west ends of the façade and a large round window set just below the triangular pediment of the center gable. Visible only in an angled view from Buchanan Street the end windows appear to retain their historic wood brick molds and to have one-over-one historic (not original) sash windows. The round center window still retains the 1887 stained glass rose window salvaged from the first Christ Church.

#### **Walkway**

The walkway or pergola connecting the parish house and vestry has a rubble granite base with smooth-cut cast stone copings. The masonry forms a base for square wood posts with four point arch braces and exposed rafters supporting a gabled asphalt-shingle-covered roof. Wood lattices extend beneath the hand rails on the north side of the porch and full-height lattices on the south side of the walkway contribute to a sense of enclosure while partially screening the walk from view. A staircase on the north side of the walk provides access to the rectory's backyard.

#### **Rectory**

Constructed in 1879 and extensively remodeled in 1909-10, the two-and-one-half-story rectory is irregular in plan and massing and features a variety of neo-Gothic and Tudor Revival decorative elements. The house is oriented so that its entrance faces southward towards the church and close. The rectory basement and the base of its front and side porches are faced with gray granite rubble trimmed with smooth-finished stone to harmonize with the church, parish house, and cloisters. The upper walls are stuccoed with half-timbering accenting the second story and attic. Many of the first story and attic windows retain their neo-Gothic lattice-work lights. The original one-over-one second story windows have been largely replaced with non-historic vinyl-covered one-over-one sash. A historic photograph shows that the long one-story porch extending along the east side of the house was originally open but has been enclosed with historic multi-light wood and glass windows.

*North façade:* The primary or north façade features a limestone-and-cast-stone-clad arched entrance porch and projecting angled bay at the first story, half-timbering at the second story and a cross gable and shed-roofed dormer at the attic. The porch is approached by a broad stoop with historic stone steps flanked by stepped granite rubble sidewalls coped with limestone. The metal pipe rail on the north side of the stoop is historic. The upper portions of the porch are constructed of limestone and cast stone and feature paneled square posts, four-point (Tudor) arch

spandrels and a crenellated parapet adorned with a shield decorated with a cross. The wrought-iron side rails and light fixture suspended from the porch ceiling are non-historic. The paneled wood door with a large square window is historic but is partially concealed by a non-historic storm door. The first story window to the west of the entry retains its historic wood moldings and one-over-one wood window sash. The basement of the polygonal bay to the east of the porch has a single center window, which retains its historic wood brick moldings and appears to have a historic single light wood sash. The first story has four-pointed arch openings that retain their original brick moldings and paired wood casements and cusped transoms. Both the casements and transoms retain their historic diamond-pane leaded lights. The second story windows retain their historic wood brick moldings and but have replacement one-over-one window sashes. The large window in the gable retains its original paired wood casements with leaded diamond-pane lights. The shed roofed dormer has two smaller pairs of casement windows, which also retain their original leaded diamond-pane lights.

*East façade:* The long east façade, which faces on to Franklin Avenue, is articulated into three sections divided by a projecting center pavilion surmounted by a gabled roof. The one-story shed-roofed porch with stone base and wood posts similar in design to posts used for the walkway extends across the northern and center sections of the first story façade. Originally the roof above the angled center wing was surmounted by a wood balustrade, which no longer survives. Because the porch has been enclosed with historic wood-and-glass windows, a large portion of the original first story façade is no longer easily seen; however it appears that at least two of the original paired windows have been replaced with paired multi-light French doors. On the southern face of the pavilion the first story window retains its original wood surrounds and brick moldings but has non-historic one-over-one window sash. The small rectangular window opening just to the north of the pavilion retains its original diamond-pane leaded one-over-one lights. The two windows at the south end of the main house retain their historic wood casings and have one-over windows topped by pivoting transoms. The window on the one-story rear porch appears to retain its historic wood surround but probably has a non-historic one-over-one sash window.

The windows at the second story retain their historic frames and brick molds but have one-over-one replacement sashes in all three sections. A small non-historic metal alarm box has been attached to a diagonal timber brace at the north end of the façade.

At the attic level the gable roofed dormer in the northern section of the façade, the window at the center of gable in the center section, the shed roofed dormer that projects from the south slope of the center gable, and the shed-roofed dormer at the north end of the south section of the façade all have paired casement windows which retain their original wood casement frames and diamond pane leaded glass lights.

*West façade:* This façade can only be seen in sections due to the walkway, which screens off all but the northern portion of the wall for viewers in the church close, and the extensive foliage surrounding the rear of the house, which blocks views from Buchanan Street. Like the east façade, the west facade is organized into three sections: the northern gabled section, which has a first story entry to the walkway and a second story oriel, the central section, is a pavilion with a two-story polygonal bay topped by an angled roof, and the setback two-bay-wide south section which has a one-story shed-roofed enclosed porch that wraps around to the rear of the house. At the north end of the façade, the entry retains its historic wood-and-glass door, which is protected

by a non-historic storm door. The second story window directly above the door has its original wood surround, brick molding, and one-over-one window sash. Part of the house's original 1879 design and updated in 1909, when stucco was applied to its base and side walls, the oriel is rectangular in plan, has a curving base, tall, narrow one-over-one windows, and shed roof. The window at the center of the attic gable retains its original wood frame and paired casements with diamond-shape leaded-glass lights.

The center bay has four-point-arched window openings at the first story. These retain their original wood casement windows and transoms with diamond-shaped leaded glass lights. The trabeated second windows retain their historic one-over-one wood sash windows. On the south face of the pavilion, where the wall sets back, there is a horizontal window at the second story, which retains its original wood molded frame and historic one-over-one wood window sash.

The projecting first story at the south end of the west wall has a shed-roofed open porch that is approached by a broad wood stoop. The wood posts that support the roof and wood railing appear to be historic. The two windows to the north of the entry and the single window to the south of the entry retain their historic diamond pane casements. The two second story windows retain their historic moldings and one-over-one wood sash. At the attic level there is a wide shed roofed dormer that matches the dormer on the north façade. It retains its historic paired diamond pane casements.

*South façade:* Because the land slopes sharply upward to the south of this property and the rear yard is densely planted, it is difficult to see the south wall of the rectory. As on the other facades, the first story is stuccoed. The second story and attic overhang the first story and are surmounted by a gable. The rectangular window opening at the attic level retains its historic paired wood casements with leaded-diamond-pane lights.

*Roof:* Both the porches and the complexly massed main roof are covered with multi-hued shingles. The three tall chimney stacks with decorative corbelling are historic but they have non-historic metal flue caps.

Report researched and written by  
Gale Harris  
Research Department

#### NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> This item was previously heard at a public hearing on September 13, 1966, October 11, 1966, November 10, 1966 and December 1966.

<sup>2</sup> This section on the early history of New Brighton is based on Landmarks Preservation Commission, *St. George Historic District-New Brighton Historic District Report* (LP-1883) (New York: City of New York, 1994), 7-11;); Richard M. Bayles, *History of Richmond County, Staten Island, New York* (New York: L. E. Preston & Co., 1887); Ira K. Morris, *Memorial History of Staten Island* (New Brighton, Staten Island: printed privately, 1900), 2, 275-77;

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Charles W. Leng and William T. Davis, *Staten Island and Its People: A History, 1609-1929* (New York Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1930), v. 1, 71-164, 429-440.

<sup>3</sup> George A. Ward, *Description of New Brighton, on Staten Island, opposite the City of New York* (New York, 1836).

<sup>4</sup> “Descriptive Sketch of New Brighton,” *Stapleton, Tompkinsville, New Brighton, West New Brighton, Clifton and Port Richmond Staten Island: Their Representative Businessmen and Points of Interest* (New York: Mercantile Publication Company, 1893).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> This section on the early history of Christ Church is based on John B. Woodall, *Christ Church, New Brighton* (Staten Island : Christ Church, 1993), 1-29; Susan Fowler, Christ Church New Brighton (Episcopal) National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Apr. 2004).

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Woodall, *Christ Church*, 4.

In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century when Christ Church was founded, the Episcopal Church was for the most part divided between two schools of thought — the Evangelical movement, which sought spiritual renewal through a highly personal experience of religion with great importance given to preaching and bible study and ritual and church decoration kept to an absolute minimum and the High Church movement, which stressed the Catholic Heritage of the Episcopal Church, placed great emphasis on the sacraments and ceremony, and the architectural heritage of the middle ages. Wotherspoon was adherent of the Evangelical branch of the Church and objected strongly to the incorporation of crosses and stained glass in church designs.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Woodall, *Christ Church*, 4.

<sup>9</sup> For Henry M. Congdon, see his obituary in the *Journal of the American Institute of Architects* 10 (1922)134; Sarah Bradford Landau, “Henry M. Congdon,” *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architecture* (New York: Free Press, 1982), 1, 446.

<sup>10</sup> For the Rev. F.W. Crowder see Woodall, *Christ Church*, 49-50; “Dr. Crowder’s Change of Faith,” *New York Tribune*, Apr. 3, 1900, 6; “Religious News and Views: A New Assistant Rector for Christ Church, New Brighton,” *New York Times*, Aug. 11, 1901, 16; “Rev. Crowder Comes to St. James Church,” *New York Tribune*, Apr. 2, 1916,6; “Rev. Dr. Crowder Dies in 64<sup>th</sup> Year,” *New York Times*, Sep. 28,1932, 19.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Woodall, *Christ Church*, 49.

<sup>12</sup> *The Staten Islander*, Dec. 13, 1903, quoted in Woodall, *Christ Church*, 50.

<sup>13</sup> *Staten Islander*, Apr. 30, 1902, quoted in Woodall, *Christ Church*, 51.

<sup>14</sup> “The New Christ Church,” *Staten Islander*, Aug. 2, 1902, 1. One account of the church’s history indicates that Pursell first came to the vestry’s attention in 1893 when it was considering building a new church.

<sup>15</sup> New York City, Department of Buildings, Staten Island, New Building Docket [NBD], 159-1902.

<sup>16</sup> NBD 37-1903; “The New Christ Church,” *Staten Islander*, March 4, 1903, 1.

<sup>17</sup> “Bishop Potter Lays Cornerstone,” *New York Times*, Apr. 27, 1903, 7; “Christ Church, New Brighton,” *New York Times*, May 2, 1903, 8.

<sup>18</sup> “Opening of New Episcopal Church,” *New York Observer and Chronicle*, Feb. 11, 1904, 178; Woodall, *Christ Church*, 52.

<sup>19</sup> “Church Consecrated,” *Staten Islander*, June 3, 1905, 1, 5.

<sup>20</sup> Vestry minutes quoted in Woodall, *Christ Church*, 54.

<sup>21</sup> The project aroused considerable controversy because the Hobby lot occupied an unopened portion of Third Street (now Buchanan Street) and the Irish Catholic families who lived west of Franklin Avenue had grown accustomed to taking a short cut through the Hobby yard on their way to St. Peter’s Church. When Christ Church acquired the

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Hobby property it constructed a high fence at the western end of the lot and posted signs warning against trespass. The residents brought suit and petitioned to have Third Street opened through the lot. About 200 people, mostly women, attended a meeting of the local Board of Public Improvement at which angry words were exchanged. Dr. Crowder requested police protection for the cornerstone laying ceremony which took place on July 9, 1906. The ceremony passed without incident. Around 1910 the church provided an exit from its property to Buchanan Street enabling the neighbors to use the pass through beneath the corridor linking the church to the parish house as a short cut to their homes. See Woodall, *Christ Church*, 54; "Some Talk of Bombs for Cornerstone," *New York Times*, July 8, 1906, 3; "Rector Asks Protection," *New York Tribune*, July 8, 1906, 7; New Brighton Parish House Opened," *New York Times*, July 9, 1906, 2.

<sup>22</sup> New York City, Department of Buildings, Staten Island, Alteration Permit Docket, 188-1909.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Woodall, *Christ Church*, 61.

<sup>24</sup> This biography of Isaac Pursell is based on "Pursell, Church Architect, Dead," *Trenton Evening News*, Aug. 22, 1910, 3; "Isaac Pursell, A. A.I.A.," *AIA Quarterly Bulletin* 11, n. 1 (Apr. 1910), 197; "Pursell, Isaac (1853-1910)" Philadelphia Architects and Buildings @ [http://www.philadphiabuildings.org/pub/app/ar\\_display-projects.cfm/85792](http://www.philadphiabuildings.org/pub/app/ar_display-projects.cfm/85792); Carol A. Benenson, "Merchantville, New Jersey: The Development, Architecture, and Preservation of a Victorian Commuter Suburb (MS Thesis, Historic Preservation: University of Pennsylvania, 1984).

<sup>25</sup> "Pursell, Church Architect," 3.

<sup>26</sup> This information on William H. Mersereau is based on Leng & Davis, 4, 401; "W. H. Mersereau Architect, Dies, 71," *New York Times*, Oct. 16, 1933; Edward Mayhew Bacon, "Irving's Sunnyside Enlarged," *New York Times*, Apr. 23, 1898, BR265'; William H. Mersereau, "How Fraunces' Tavern Was Restored," *New York Times*, Mar. 17, 1907, SM11; Staten Island Historical Society, "Mersereau File," MS 24, 1.4; Barnett Shepherd to Rev. & Mrs. Frederick P. Lefebvre, Oct. 2, 1977 in the Staten Island Museum, Archives, Churches and Cemeteries Collection, s.v. Christ Church, New Brighton, Box 3.

<sup>27</sup> For the neo-Gothic style see William Morgan, *Henry Vaughan: The Almighty Wall* (New York: Architectural Foundation, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983); Richard Oliver, *Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue* (New York: Architectural Foundation, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985); Douglass Shand-Tucci, *Boston Bohemia, 1881-1900: Ralph Adams Cram: Life and Architecture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995); Ralph Adams Cram, *Church Building: A Study of the Principles of Architecture in their Relation to the Church* (Boston: Small, Maynard & Co., 1901); Ethan Anthony, *The Architecture of Ralph Adams Cram and His Office* (New York: W.W. Norton, c. 2007); Ann Miner Daniel, *The Early Architecture of Ralph Adams Cram, 1889-1902* (Ph.D. Thesis – University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1978; Ann Arbor, Mich. UMI, 1984); Christine B. Lozner, *Historic Churches of the Episcopal Diocese of Central New York* (National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, May 1996).

<sup>28</sup> Cram, *Church Building*, 16.

<sup>29</sup> "Church Consecrated," 5.

<sup>30</sup> On the design of this church see also Fowler, sec. 8, 2-4; Woodall, 51-53.

<sup>31</sup> Variations on this combination of a square tower with a rounded corner turret, which became a signature feature of neo-Gothic church design, are also found at Vaughan's St. Martin's Church, New Bedford, Massachusetts (1891-92), St. Thomas Church, Dover, New Hampshire, and his Christ Church, Swansea, Massachusetts (1899-1900) and in Cram, Ferguson & Goodhue design for the entrance tower at the Church of the New Jerusalem (Swedenborgian), Newton, Massachusetts (c. 1893).

<sup>32</sup> See note 26 above.

<sup>33</sup> Cram, *Church Building*, 65.

<sup>34</sup> In addition to the examples cited above there is also a neo-Gothic chapel with an Expressionist tower dating from

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the 1920s at Oceanview Cemetery on Amboy Road in Oakwood.

<sup>35</sup> This section on the later history of Christ Church is based on Woodall, *Christ Church*, 63-125; Elizabeth M. Conger “Historical Sketch of Christ Church,” *Christ Church Centennial* (Staten Island : Christ Church, 1949); Christ Church, *Annual Report*, 1916, Staten Island Museum, Archives, Churches and Cemeteries Collection, s.v. Christ Church, New Brighton, Box 3; Staten Island Historical Society, John B. Woodall, “The Memorial Windows of Christ Church,” unpublished pamphlet [copy in the Landmarks Preservation Commission, “Christ Church,” research file]; “Christ Church” vertical file; Christ Church New Brighton, “Our History,” @ <http://christchurchnbrighton.org/history.htm>.

<sup>36</sup> See also “Rev. D.H. Browne Dead,” *New York Times*, Dec. 10, 1954, 27.

<sup>37</sup> Rev. Charles W. Forster, *New York Times*, Sept. 30, 1947, 25; “Christ Church Rector Resigns,” *Staten Island Advance*, Aug. 2, 1940.

<sup>38</sup> There are five windows on the east wall, six windows on the west wall. Inside the cloister, a matching blind window at the north end of the east wall has a shield representing Judas.

<sup>39</sup> New York City, Department of Buildings, Staten Island, Block 66, Lot 158 folder, Building Notice 42-1946.

<sup>40</sup> Building Notice 272-1973.

<sup>41</sup> Woodall, *Christ Church*, 118.

<sup>42</sup> Father Walsted works in tempera producing religious images using the style, techniques, and iconography of Eastern icon painters and Flemish and Italian Late Medieval and Early Renaissance masters. His works have been installed in the palace of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the residence of the Metropolitan of Moscow, the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine and numerous churches. Father Keucher is the comptroller for the Episcopal Diocese of New York.

<sup>43</sup> Fans and lights were installed in the church, the choir robing room was refurbished and the church office rebuilt. The parish house was rewired and its auditorium refinished. The rectory was redecorated, and the parking lot repaved. See Woodall, *Christ Church*, 117.

## FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

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 Christ Church Complex has a special character and 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 Christ Church complex, with its church, parish house, rectory, and cloisters, is an outstanding, and on Staten Island, rare example of turn-of-the-20<sup>th</sup>-century neo-Gothic ecclesiastical design; that Christ Church was established in 1849 and the present church (built 1903-04) and parish house (built 1906-07) replace earlier buildings on the site; that their size and substantial construction are indicative of the importance of Christ Church's congregation, which in the early 1900s was regarded as "the largest and most fashionable" in the borough; that designed by the Philadelphia architect Isaac Pursell, a noted specialist in church and institutional design and apparently his only known works in New York City, the church, parish house, and connecting cloister are clad with randomly-laid granite trimmed with limestone or cast stone and are modeled on English country parish architecture of the late Gothic period; that the church's cruciform plan, the clear expression of interior spaces in the exterior massing, the incorporation of a massive crossing tower, buttresses, porches, and crenellations to convey the weight and solidity of medieval masonry, the austerity and quietness of the design, the compact massing, the monochromatic palette, the rugged textured wall surfaces, and the restriction of ornament primarily to the historically accurate late Gothic window tracery contribute to making Christ Church an excellent example of neo-Gothic church design; that the church is also distinguished by its unusually rich stained and opalescent glass windows including works by Tiffany Studios, J. & R. L Lamb Studios, Nicola D'Ascenzo, and the Gorham Company; that the parish house reflects an early twentieth century trend in the Episcopal Church to provide large multipurpose parish houses that would enable the church to be a part of the daily life of its community; that the parish house was designed to harmonize with the church and features picturesque elements such as a stone and timber-framed gabled entrance porch, stepped buttress, cross gables, asymmetrically-placed towers, and a bell cot; that the two-story rectory, originally erected in 1879 to the designs of Henry M. Congdon, was remodeled by Staten Island architect William H. Mersereau, in 1909; that Mersereau moved, reoriented, and enlarged the rectory, refacing it with stucco and faux half-timbering and adding a crenellated bays and entrance porch with Tudor arches to create a design inspired by late medieval English vernacular architecture that would harmonize with the church and parish house; that these three unusually intact buildings are joined by covered walkways or cloisters reflecting the trend among neo-Gothic architects to employ cloisters to arrange churches, rectories, and parishes around a quiet landscaped courtyard reminiscent of a medieval church close; that over its 160 year history Christ Church played a prominent role in its community and continues to serve parishioners in the Episcopalian tradition.

Accordingly, pursuant to the 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 Christ Church Complex, 76 Franklin Avenue (aka 72-76 Franklin Avenue and 96 Franklin Avenue), Staten Island, Borough of Staten Island and designates Borough of Staten Island Tax Map Block 66, Lot 158 and Lot 178, as its Landmark Site.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair  
Stephen Byrnes, Diane Chapin, Joan Gerner,  
Marjorie Perlmutter, Roberta Washington, Commissioners





Christ Church Complex  
76 Franklin Avenue (aka 72-76 Franklin Avenue and 96 Franklin Avenue)  
Landmark Site: Borough of Staten Island Tax Map Block 66, Lot 158 and Lot 178  
*Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, July 2010*



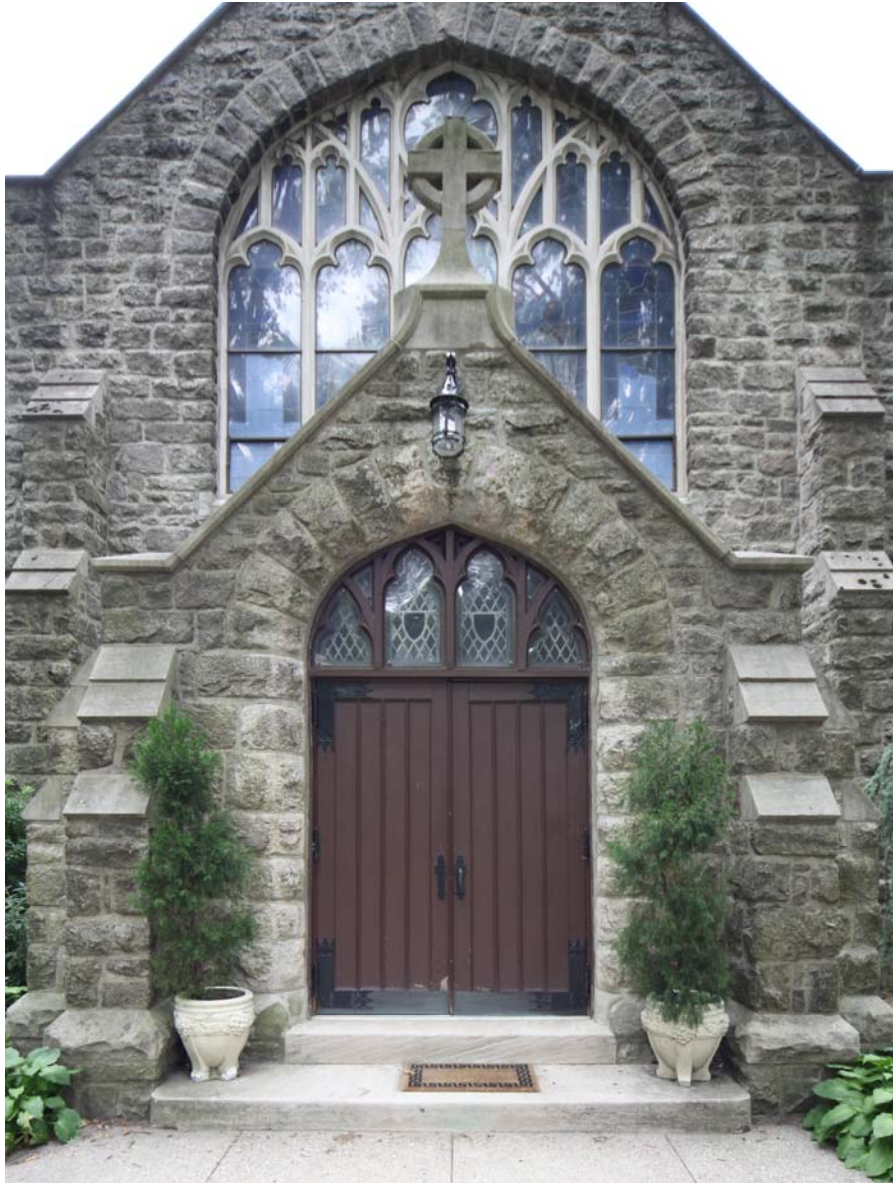


Christ Church

View from the northwest

*Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, July 2010*





Christ Church  
Details of the entrance (east) façade and entrance porch  
*Photo: Christopher D. Braze, July 2010*





Christ Church

View from the southwest

*Photo: Christopher D. Braze, July 2010*





Christ Church  
South nave wall

*Photo: Christopher D. Braze, July 2010*





Cloister

View from the east

*Photo: Christopher D. Braze, July 2010*





Parish House  
View from the east  
*Photo: Christopher D. Braze, July 2010*



Parish House  
View from the northeast  
*Photo: Christopher D. Braze, July 2010*





Rectory

View from the northeast

*Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, July 2010*





Rectory  
View from the northwest  
*Photo: Gale Harris, June 2010*



CHRIST CHURCH COMPLEX (LP-2383), 76 Franklin Avenue (aka 72-76 Franklin Avenue and 96 Franklin Avenue).  
 Landmark Site: Borough of Staten Island, Tax Map Block 66, Lots 158 & 178.

Designated: August 10, 2010