

OLD SAINT JAMES EPISCOPAL CHURCH (now Old Saint James Parish Hall)

86-02 Broadway (aka 85-08 51st Avenue), Queens

Built: 1735-36; enlarged: c. 1772; altered: 1883

Landmark Site: Borough of Queens Tax Map Block 1549 Lot 1 in part, consisting of the portion of the lot bounded by a line beginning at the southeast corner of the lot, continuing westerly along the southern lot line to a point five feet west of the rear roofline of the church, thence continuing northerly along a line parallel with the rear of the church to the northern lot line, thence continuing easterly along the northern lot line to the northeast corner of the lot, thence extending easterly along the sidewalk fence contiguous with the northern lot line, thence continuing southerly along the sidewalk fence in front of the east frontage of the church, thence continuing westerly along the sidewalk fence to the point where it meets the eastern lot line, thence continuing southerly to the point of beginning, as shown in the attached map.

On August 8, 2017, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of Old Saint James Episcopal Church (now Old Saint James Parish Hall) (Research Department Public Hearing Item No. 1). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. Five people spoke in favor of designation, including two representatives of the owner, the Episcopal Diocese of Long Island and CWB Architects; and representatives from the New York Landmarks Conservancy, Historic Districts Council, and the Society for the Architecture of the City. The Commission also received letters in favor of designation from New York City Council Member Daniel Dromm, United States Congresswoman Grace Meng, State Senator Tony Avella, the Queens Preservation Council, the Juniper Park Civic Association, Newtown Historical Society, Communities of Maspeth and Elmhurst Together (C.O.M.E.T.), and two individuals.

Summary

Built in 1735-36, Old Saint James Episcopal Church is significant for its association with the early Colonial settlement of Queens and with the mission activity of the Church of England in the American colonies. A remarkable Colonial-era mission church, it retains its early 18th-century rectangular box-like form, wood shingle siding, round-arched windows, and heavy-timber framing. It is New York City's oldest Church of England (Episcopal) building and the City's second oldest religious building that is still standing. The exterior appearance today is the result of a late-19th-century remodeling that was typical of stylistic preferences for religious buildings at the time. As a parish hall in the 19th and 20th centuries, it served an important role in the community's social and religious life.



Elmhurst (formerly Newtown) was founded in 1652, one of the earliest European settlements in Queens. In 1702, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, under the Bishop of London, formed a Church of England mission parish composed of Newtown, Flushing, and Jamaica. In 1735-36 the Newtown congregation constructed Old Saint James Church on land that had been deeded by the town. As built, it was a meetinghouse design with a west-end tower. In 1761 the parish separated from Jamaica and Flushing and formally became the “Church of England Parish of Saint James.” In 1772, the building was lengthened and the main entry moved from the south side to the Broadway facade. Prominent citizens associated with the parish included the Reverend Benjamin Moore, a president of Kings College (later Columbia College), and the Reverend Samuel Seabury, Jr., the first American Episcopal Bishop.

British troops spared the building during the Revolutionary War. In 1787 Saint James became one of the founding parishes in the New York Episcopal Diocese. In 1848, after a period of growth, the parish built a larger church a block away and Old Saint James Church became a chapel and later a parish hall. In 1883 a small rear addition replaced the west-end tower and the entire building was updated with Gothic Revival and Stick style details such as pointed-arch windows, truss-like trim in the gable ends, label molding, and decorative brackets.

During the 20th century, Old Saint James Church served the parish and the Elmhurst community as a centrally-located meeting place for many organizations. In 2004, the building was restored to its late 19th-century appearance using grants from the New York Landmarks Conservancy’s Historic Properties Fund and other sources.

BUILDING DESCRIPTION

Old Saint James Episcopal Church (now Old Saint James Parish Hall) is located at the southwest corner of Broadway and 51st Avenue within the central district of Elmhurst, Queens. The fenced lot is long and narrow, with paved parking at the rear of the property (the rear of the lot is not part of the designation). The free-standing wood structure is oriented with its front facade facing east, close to Broadway. The building consists of the main section, built in 1735-36 and updated in 1883, and an attached rear addition that replaced a Colonial-era tower in 1883. Both sections are one story tall and similar in form and ornamental details.

The main section (58 feet by 30 feet) is clad with wood shingles and has three bays of round-arched window openings along each long (north and south) side; each contains a pair of lancet windows with a small inset of stained glass. The eaves of the overhanging roof are flared slightly over closely-spaced brackets. Three concrete steps lead to a pair of entry doors at the front (east) facade. Above the doors is a round window that is centered below the gable. At the west end of the main section, there is a brick chimney and two round-arched windows that flank the rear addition. The dominant decorative feature at the front and rear of the main section is the truss-like trim within each gable end.

Colonial-era features of the 1735 main building include a rectangular box-like form with a front-facing gable roof, wood-shingle siding, round-arched window openings and heavy-timber framing.¹ Nineteenth-century details include the gable-end truss-like trim, flared eaves, stained glass, and round window at the front facade.

The 1883 rear addition (25 feet by 15 feet) with clapboard siding is narrower and shorter than the main section. Like the main section, it has eave brackets and two bays of round-arched

window openings with lancet windows along each of the longer sides. There are two single lancet windows and a gable-end half-round window at the rear facade.

Nineteenth-century details on both building sections include profiled brackets, lancet windows, clipped gable roofs, and drip molding.

Restored to its late 19th-century appearance, this heavy-timber-framed building exhibits both the Colonial-era's basic form and shingle siding along with ornamental details from its last significant alteration in 1883.²

All Facades

Historic: wood-shingle siding on main section and clapboard siding on rear west-end addition, masonry foundation; wood-framed one-over-one double-hung windows (except round window on Broadway facade and semi-circular window at rear addition)

20th-century alterations: composition shingle cladding on roof; security cameras; exterior paint; metal fence around perimeter of the lot

Front (East) Facade

Historic: front-facing clipped gable roof with deep overhang; truss-like trim with brackets within gable end; pierced fascia-trim of round "pin holes"; a five-foot diameter central round window (fixed or casement) with vertical mullion and half-round trim; paneled and glazed pair of wood entry doors; door surround of flat trim with a shallow flat-board "pediment" at entry

20th-century alterations: removal of shed-roof porch (present in early 20th-century photographs) at front (east) entry; missing drip molding around circular window; light fixture mounted above entry; concrete steps with pipe railing; free-standing framed signage board at northeast corner of building

North and South Facades

Historic: Main building: round-arched window openings, three on each side, with a pair of lancet windows placed within the openings; scallop-shaped leaded and stained glass between the upper portion of the lancet windows; drip molding at window trim; closely-spaced profiled knee brackets supporting slightly flared roof; wood water table

Historic: Rear addition: closely-spaced profiled brackets under eaves (no flare); smaller round-arched window openings, two at each side, with pair of lancet windows placed within the openings; drip molding at window trim; wood glazed- and paneled-door at south side

20th-century alterations: stained glass missing in places; metal gutter and downspouts along roof edges; light fixtures, three on each side of main building; concrete steps with pipe railing at south side of rear addition

Rear (West) Facade

Historic: Main building: clipped gable roof with deep overhang; truss-like trim with brackets within the gable end; pierced fascia trim of round "pin holes"; two round-arched windows with drip molding, one on each side of the rear addition; red-brick chimney

Historic: Rear addition: shorter and narrower than main section; clipped-gable roof; two lancet windows; one semi-circular fixed window opening with lancet-top muntins

HISTORY

Newtown before 1735³

Old Saint James Episcopal Church in Elmhurst was built in 1735-36 in what was known then as Newtown Village, located along Horseshoe Creek where today's Broadway and Queens Boulevard intersect. The village was the population center for the larger town of Newtown, an area that once extended from the East River to Flushing Bay, and from Brooklyn to today's Forest Hills and Corona.

The town was founded much earlier in 1652 as Middleburgh, an outpost of New Amsterdam near the west end of Long Island. In 1656, the Algonquian-speaking Lenape people, whose settlement was known as Mas-pet or Wandowenock, agreed to share hunting, fishing and gathering lands with the colonists.⁴ Middleburgh was renamed Newtown under English rule and has the distinction of being one of the earliest towns in Queens County.⁵

The first Europeans in Newtown were primarily English men and women, many of whom came from Connecticut, Massachusetts, and parts of Long Island. Most of these early settlers farmed and supplemented their income with cottage industries. Like the rest of Long Island, Newtown also counted African slaves among its population. Census and tax data from the late-17th century indicates that approximately two out of five households in Queens County included one or more slaves.⁶ Although it is not clear how many parishioners of Old Saint James Church owned slaves, a newspaper account noted in 1678 that Newtown counted "...183 white inhabitants and 93 Negro slaves."⁷

As was common during this time period, there was a strong connection between the civil and religious life of the community. It was within this environment that the town's first planner and leader, (Reverend) John Moore (c. 1620-1657), set up a local government and provided a system of taxes. He also conducted church services, taught school, and established liaisons with the Native Americans. Although this patriarch of the Moore family is sometimes identified as a minister, the record is unclear about an official ordination.⁸

Under John Moore's leadership, the townspeople constructed a meetinghouse that served a variety of community and religious purposes as the schoolhouse, hall, church, and minister's house.⁹ This common facility was financed by the townspeople and used cooperatively by everyone regardless of religious preference. It was not until the late 17th century that the townspeople began planning for the construction of church buildings for individual denominations.¹⁰

The Ministry Act of 1693¹¹

The Ministry Act of 1693 established the Church of England as the official church in the Province of New York. As such, the provincial government supported the Church of England congregations through special taxes on all townspeople, regardless of religious preference. Many settlers, particularly in Long Island, were dissidents and non-conformists, who had left England or New England to practice religion unencumbered by a state church. As such, many townspeople, like those in Newtown, resisted attempts by the authorities to interfere in their local affairs. Even the individual Church of England congregations that were the recipients of the tax

money balked at the governor's prerogative of appointing a minister, in one case supporting a Presbyterian minister instead of the Anglican minister appointed by the governor.¹²

Despite being state-supported, the Church of England struggled in the colonies during the 17th century. There were only two formally organized parishes in what is today's New York City: Trinity Church in lower Manhattan, a New York City Landmark, and Saint Peter Church, Westchester Square, in what is now The Bronx. More common at the time were scattered, loosely organized congregations, like the one in Newtown, who used the Church of England prayer book for worship. It was not until the 18th century that the Church of England became more prominent in the colonies with the establishment of a mission society headquartered in London.

Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts

To counteract both the mismanagement of the colonial government and the perceived disorganization of many Church of England congregations, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG) was established in 1701. Its purpose was to support fledgling Church of England congregations and to promote mainstream English culture in the colonies. The SPG, under the direction of the Bishop of London, created mission parishes, appointed ministers, extended financial support, and gifted prayer books and religious items for services. Shortly after the society was established, the SPG sent missionary clergymen to congregations in the New York Province: Richmond, Westchester, Rye, Hempstead, New York (city), and Jamaica.¹³ These mission parishes covered large areas and many included adjacent towns.

Saint James Parish in the Colonial Era¹⁴

Saint James parish celebrates its official beginning in 1704 as "The Church of England in America, Mission Church at Newtowne." Along with Flushing, it was established as part of the three-town mission church under Jamaica (the main location).¹⁵ Organized like other multi-town missions sponsored by the SPG, one minister served multiple congregations. The minister assigned to the Jamaica congregation traveled to Newtown and Flushing on a rotating schedule to conduct services. It was during these early years as an SPG mission that construction of Old Saint James Church began in 1735.

One of the most famous clergymen of the Jamaica three-town mission parish was Reverend Samuel Seabury, Jr., (1729-1796) who served from 1757 to 1766. He later became America's first consecrated bishop in 1784. In 1761 during his ministry and with his support, the Newtown congregation petitioned the provincial governor for the right to appoint their own clergyman, separate from Jamaica and Flushing. A special charter was granted and Newtown formally became the stand-alone "Church of England Parish of Saint James."¹⁶ The 1761 charter also noted the acquisition of an additional ¼ acre for the church cemetery.¹⁷

In addition to the well-known Seabury as a clergyman, Saint James attracted influential members of the community as congregants, including many members of the Moore family. A Joseph Moore directed the construction of the church building in 1735. He may have been the Joseph Moore (1679-1756) who was the grandson of the family patriarch, (Reverend) John Moore, who helped organize Newtown in 1652.¹⁸ Another well-known congregant and Moore descendant was Reverend Benjamin Moore (1748-1816). He was born in Newtown, ordained in 1774, and became acting president of King's (now Columbia) College from 1775 to 1784 and president of Columbia College from 1801 to 1810. He later became the second bishop of the

Episcopal Diocese of New York, serving from 1815 to 1816. Author and landowner Clement Clarke Moore of Chelsea, New York, was his son.

Old Saint James Church fared well during the struggle for independence. Many members and clergy of the Church of England parishes remained loyal to England during the Revolutionary War (1775 to 1783). As such, many of their churches, including Old Saint James Church, were left standing.¹⁹ The parish minister at that time, Reverend Joshua Bloomer, was a loyalist and continued to support the Crown while the British army was encamped in Newtown Village. Some of the army's highest-ranking officers attended services at the church including General William Howe, Commander-in-chief, and Prince William, who later became King William IV of England.²⁰

After the Revolutionary War, ties with the English church were broken and support from the SPG ended. Nevertheless, former Church of England members and parishes like Saint James wanted to continue as congregations within an Anglican tradition.

The Protestant Episcopal Church

In the newly-formed United States, there were no Anglican bishops to ordain ministers, consecrate new bishops, or lead future dioceses. The consecration ceremony for newly appointed bishops in the Anglican tradition included an oath of loyalty to the Crown. To circumvent this requirement and still maintain the line of succession, the enterprising Reverend Samuel Seabury, Jr., who had ministered at Saint James Church from 1757 to 1766, became the first American Episcopal bishop by traveling to Scotland in 1784 where he was consecrated by bishops of the Scottish Episcopal Church who did not require the oath.²¹

Beginning in 1786, conventions were held to establish the American Protestant Episcopal Church. Long Island's nine former Church of England parishes, including Saint James, sent delegates to the yearly conventions.²² In 1787 the Episcopal Diocese of New York, consisting of the entire state, was formed. Saint James Church has the distinction of being one of the original parishes of the new diocese.²³ Several years later in 1789, the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States was officially established, adapting the Church of England prayer book, liturgy, and traditions for American use. Bishop Seabury played a major role in that transition and is credited with being an important leader in the formation of the American Episcopal Church.

Saint James Parish after the Revolutionary War

In 1793 the official name of the Saint James parish became "The Rector and Inhabitants of the Town of Newtown in Queens County in Communion of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the State of New York."²⁴ In 1797, the parish received its own rector, the Reverend Henry Van Dyke, who served until 1803. This was the first time that the parish did not share their minister with Jamaica and Flushing.

Although the church building survived the war, the parish struggled financially. Like other former Church of England parishes, some of their wealthiest parishioners had been loyalists and moved out of the country after the War. Under the leadership of Reverend Van Dyke, Saint James petitioned Trinity Church in Manhattan, considered the Episcopalian "Mother Church," for help. As a result, in 1809 the parish received three parcels of land in Manhattan. The income from the properties was the beginning of what would grow into a generous endowment over the years.²⁵

By the close of the War of 1812, Saint James Church and other Episcopal parishes were no longer looked upon with suspicion by patriotic Americans because "churchmen" had fought

on the American side in the war...”²⁶ Concurrent with a period of overall growth in New York State, there was also an increase in the number of Episcopal clergy, parishes, and members.²⁷ Likewise Saint James Church prospered while Queens County developed into an important agricultural center that supplied products to Manhattan’s growing population. In 1827 the parish added 3/8 of an acre to the rear of their lot for the second expansion of the cemetery.

During the early years of the 19th century, the parish made a major contribution to the educational development of the town. Newtown’s primary school, originally begun by (Reverend) John Moore in 1652, became inadequate for the growing town. A school of higher education was established by both Saint James Church and the First Presbyterian Church nearby.²⁸ The clergy of both churches supervised the curriculum and occasionally taught classes. The school was located along 51st Avenue and was later known as The Henrietta Moore Academy until it closed in the 1870s.²⁹

The parish eventually outgrew their 1735 Old Saint James Church building. In 1848 a new church was erected along Broadway, a block to the north. It was a wood Gothic Revival building designed by Minard Lafever (1798-1854), a well-known New York City architect who designed a number of churches in New York.³⁰ When this new church was built, Old Saint James Church became the parish chapel. A few years later in 1851, graves from the Old Saint James churchyard were moved to the new church’s cemetery at 84-07 Broadway, located between Corona and St. James Avenue.³¹ In 1868, after the Civil War, the Long Island Episcopal Diocese was created, composed of Long Island counties including Kings (Brooklyn) and Queens. Saint James again enjoyed the distinction of being one of the founding parishes of a new Episcopal diocese.

Construction of Old Saint James Church

Old Saint James Church was built in 1735-36 on land deeded by the town of Newtown.³² The deed was dated April 19, 1733, and signed by seventy-eight freeholders “...that twenty square rods of land....to have and to hold unto the people or Society of ye Church of England that shall join with them to worship God in that way forever.”³³

The mission parish at that time was under the leadership of Reverend Thomas Colgan, rector from 1732 to 1755, well respected and known for his impressive preaching. “The members still worshipped one Sunday each month in the town hall, but the group had grown so in numbers and prestige that it was deemed advisable to have a church building of their own.”³⁴ After funds were raised construction began in the spring of 1735. Joseph Moore, identified as a freeholder, served as the director of the building committee and James Renne, Jr., as carpenter. “By May [1735], the frame was raised and the roof placed...”³⁵ The church was completed in 1736, but the interior was not furnished until 1740.

Old Saint James Church’s design consisted of a box-like form with round-arched windows, wood shingles, and an attached tower and steeple to the west, where today the rear extension sits. This heavy-timber-frame building’s appearance was based on a meetinghouse type that was popular in New England before the Revolutionary War.³⁶

Minnie Germond described the original church as follows in *A Brief History of St. James Parish*, published in 1954:

This original church...was a quaint structure with a square tower in the rear, topped by a steeple with a spire surmounted by a huge weathervane in the form of a crowing cock. The entrance was in the middle of the south side of the building. Inside were high-

backed pews, each having its own little door which was securely locked when the owner and his family were seated.³⁷

Descriptions of the interiors of historic meetinghouses include references to hierarchical seating arrangements in the design and use of the building. The most important parishioners (freeholders) sat closest to the minister in boxed pews. “Apprentices, indentured servants, black household slaves, Native Americans... [were] relegated to the upstairs where they would be out of sight.”³⁸ Old Saint James Church followed this typical arrangement as noted in an 1882 newspaper article with a reference to the presence of a separate room for slaves in the tower.³⁹ Additional description in the 1954 parish history indicates the room was accessed by a “...small stairway [that] led ...to an upper room called “the slave room,” which was directly on a level with the pulpit and had a window opening into the church.”⁴⁰

Colonial Meetinghouses and Churches

The 1735 Old Saint James Church was built according to the prevailing style of meetinghouses and small rural churches that were common during Colonial times. Although the term meetinghouse refers to a structure that was used by multiple groups and served multiple purposes, many Colonial churches used the meetinghouse model.⁴¹

Since many settlers to Long Island had come via Connecticut and Massachusetts, their meetinghouses and early churches naturally reflected the New England type. “Documents show that more than 2,189 houses of worship in New England and related communities in Long Island were raised between 1622 and 1830.”⁴² The builders rarely adopted new ideas, so there was a uniformity of style. “The most frequent instruction of a society to its building committee when they were about to erect a new meetinghouse was to fashion it after the one in such and such a town.”⁴³ Old Saint James Church in Newtown, as built, was reported to be identical to the 1734 Saint George Church in Hempstead, Long Island (no longer standing).

Old Saint James Church, before remodeling, and Saint George Church were typical of what some scholars have called the second type of New England meetinghouses constructed from about 1725 to 1800.⁴⁴ In general, this type was a gabled oblong building, often with a squared tower at one (short) end. The main entrance was centered along the long side, but there was sometimes an additional entrance through the tower. This heavy-timber-framed building was constructed of hand hewn wood, with small-pane multi-light windows using clear glass. Its siding consisted of boards or wood shingles. Reflecting the Puritan influence in New England, there were usually no religious symbols on the exterior. Following this pattern, many of the tower steeples, like the one noted at Old Saint James Church, were topped with weathervanes.

The interior of Old Saint James Church exhibited the Colonial-era design favored by most Protestant churches at the time, including the Church of England.⁴⁵ The focus of the services was the ministers’ sermons or readings from scripture. As such, the tall pulpit dominated the space and was placed in the middle of a long wall close to the congregation and opposite the main entrance. A sounding board hung over the tall pulpit that was reached by winding steps. The plan and furnishings emphasized the need for the congregation to hear and see the minister during services. Although many larger meetinghouses and churches had a gallery that extended along three walls, Old Saint James Church had a one-wall choir gallery along the Broadway (east) end of the building.

Early Alterations

When the parish officially became the “Church of England Parish of Saint James,” in 1761, the congregation made repairs and reconfigured the interior of the building. “The tower was rebuilt...the room in the rear was enlarged and became the Vestry Room. The exterior and interior...were painted and more pews were installed...the entrance on the [long] south side was closed...” and two new entrances were added along the east facade.⁴⁶

Enlargement and reconfiguration of meetinghouses were common in the 18th century, often “...by adding lean-tos or by cutting the frame to insert sections.”⁴⁷ Based on historic ledger entries and physical examination, the building was enlarged again in 1772 with the addition of rafter bents toward the east end of the main section, making the building longer in the east-west direction. The 1999 Historic Structure Report on the church further notes: “The findings...of exposed framing and supplemental wooden elements within the attic support the historical assumption that the building was enlarged c. 1772.”⁴⁸

1883 Alterations

Today’s exterior of Old Saint James Church is the result of a major remodeling in 1883.⁴⁹ The remodeling, as reported in the vestry minutes of November 28, 1882, included “...the removal of the tower, and all carpenter work, according to the original plans and specifications...”⁵⁰ According to Minnie Germond, *A Brief History of St. James Parish*,

The rear room was rebuilt; the pews were replaced by long benches, and the panels became the wainscoting on the side wall. The windows were changed—a center mullion added and each one fitted with cathedral glass, and the exterior and interior of the building was painted.⁵¹

The Gothic Revival and Stick style features were most likely added at the same time. These included the truss-like trim below the clipped gable ends, overhanging eaves with brackets, the round window at the front facade, drip molding, and a shed-roof entry porch. Photographs attributed to 1900 and 1928 show these features in place. In addition to its continued use as a chapel, the building was adapted for Sunday school and use as a parish hall.

Stick and Gothic Revival Styles

As the 19th century progressed, the preferred styles for religious buildings gradually moved away from the (often austere) New England meetinghouse types to picturesque revival styles. In the mid-19th century the Gothic Revival became a particular favorite for Episcopal churches.⁵² In semi-rural areas, small wood churches often used a vernacular variation of the Gothic Revival, sometimes called Carpenter Gothic. Examples of the use of this style for Episcopal churches in the Newtown area include Saint Savior Episcopal Church (1847) in Maspeth, designed by Richard Upjohn, and Saint Paul Episcopal Church (1874) in Woodside.⁵³

Old Saint James Church was used as a chapel after 1848, and was referred to as such in vestry minutes and newspaper articles as late as 1925.⁵⁴ It is possible the addition of Gothic Revival features were a response to its continued religious use or to its identity as an Episcopal parish building.⁵⁵ With its wood exterior, diminutive ecclesiastical form, and semi-rural setting, Old Saint James Church lent itself to updating in the picturesque mode with vernacular Gothic Revival ornamentation. The Gothic Revival influence can be seen in the lancet windows, stained

glass, drip molding, and a round window above the main entrance that may reference a Gothic rosette window.

Related to the Gothic Revival is the Stick style, a late 19th-century style that also referenced picturesque medieval features. The prominent gable-end trusses at the front and rear of the church, closely spaced and profiled eave brackets under slightly flaring eaves, and the clipped gables are all associated with the Stick style. These ornamental features were a possible attempt to upgrade and modernize the “old church” as it was called in an 1894 newspaper article published before Queens became part of New York City: “...the old church...of rich historic and colonial memories and traditions, is girding itself for an enlarged career of usefulness and honor in what will be soon be a great wing of Greater New York.”⁵⁶

Later History

In 1897 Newtown’s name was changed to Elmhurst. The following year Queens County became a borough of New York City, absorbing the individual towns and converting them into neighborhoods.⁵⁷ Until then, Newtown “...remained mainly an agricultural community... producing vegetables and fruits for the growing urban markets in Long Island City, Brooklyn, and Manhattan.”⁵⁸ As the early-20th century progressed, the area around Old Saint James Church changed from a village landscape to a residential community with detached houses. The neighborhood later evolved into a more densely-settled urban area with apartment buildings, expanded thoroughfares, and large-scale commercial centers. During this time of development and changing streetscapes, Old Saint James Church continued to function as a community resource and as an auxiliary facility to the main parish church a block away.

Elmhurst experienced substantial infrastructure changes in the 20th century. In the 1920s and 1930s, the City constructed tunnels for the Independent Subway System (IND), a section of which runs under the rear of the Old Saint James Church’s lot.⁵⁹ The western portion of the lot was reduced when the City constructed Reeder Street in the 1920s, and the later widening of both Broadway and 51st Avenue decreased the building’s frontage to the east and north. In 1957 the parish paved the rear of the lot, which is not included in the landmark site, for church parking. Throughout these changes, Old Saint James Church remained intact in its original location.

In 1924 there was a small fire that caused minor damage to the rear room of the building. During the time it was repaired, electricity and plumbing were installed.⁶⁰ Old Saint James Church continued to be used as a Sunday school until 1941 when Saint James Parish House was built adjacent to the 1848 church. Although many activities moved to the 1941 Parish House, the parish and community continued to use Old Saint James Church.

In the 1960s Saint James Parish refused to sell the property for a new Elmhurst post office, with the vestry noting that the old church was historically significant.⁶¹ Despite its importance, by 1965 the building’s painted wood shingles were covered with cement-asbestos shingles and it had lost its front porch, front doors, and gable-end trusses.⁶² Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops continued to use the building for their activities into the 1980s. In 1989 a local chapter of Vietnam veterans arranged to refurbish the interior in exchange for using it for meetings. As a result of their work, the building became a community center for a number of Elmhurst organizations during the 1990s.⁶³

In 1999 Old Saint James Church was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Its exterior was restored to its late-19th-century appearance in 2004 with the help of loans and grants from the city, state, and the New York Landmarks Conservancy. Work included

stabilizing the foundation, installing replicated wood doors, windows, clapboards and missing trim, and exposing and restoring the historic wood shingles, replacing those that were damaged beyond repair.⁶⁴

Conclusion

The 280-year Old Saint James Church is a remarkable Colonial-era religious structure located on its original site in what was one of the earliest European settlements in Queens. Retaining 18th-century features including its box-like form, wood shingles, heavy-timber framing, and certain interior finishes, it is closely associated with the Colonial history of Queens and with one of the first religious congregations in New York. It pre-dates Saint Paul's Chapel in Manhattan as New York City's oldest Church of England mission church, and is the second-oldest extant religious building within the five boroughs, after the Friends (Quaker) Meetinghouse in Flushing (a New York City Landmark built 1694 and enlarged 1719).⁶⁵ Featuring both 18th-and 19th-century design, workmanship and materials, the church is an architecturally significant example of the Colonial meetinghouse form, combined with picturesque Gothic Revival and Stick style decorative details.

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NOTES

¹ No photographs of Old Saint James Church taken before 1900 were located. Information about the Colonial-era building and the 1883 alterations is based on written descriptions, drawings, paintings and information included in William A. Hall Partnership, *Historic Structure Report for St. James Parish Hall*, 1999, (funded in part by the New York Landmark Conservancy's Sacred Sites program). This report documented the presence of 18th-century hand-hewn heavy-timber framing and physical evidence of alterations over the years. The report also reproduced selected pages from the Saint James Parish vestry minutes.

² The front porch was not restored in 2004; there was not enough frontage between the building and the sidewalk. The 2004 paint scheme of a reddish-brown body color and cream trim differs from the 1928 black and white photograph on file at the Municipal Archives where both the body and the trim appear to be a similar dark color.

³ Information in this section is based on the following sources: James Riker, Jr., *The Annals of Newtown* (New York: D. Fanshaw, 1852); James W. Moore, *Rev. John Moore of Newtown, Long Island, and Some of His Descendants* (Easton, Pa.: Chemical Publishing Co., 1903); Jessica Kross, *The Evolution of an American Town, Newtown, New York, 1642-1775* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983); New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), *St. George's (Episcopal) Church, Old Parish House and Graveyard Designation Report (LP-2053)* (New York: City of New York, 2000), prepared by Gail Harris; LPC, *Moore-Jackson Cemetery Designation Report (LP-1956)* (New York: City of New York, 1997), prepared by Gail Harris.

⁴ Reginald Pelham Bolton, *Indian Paths in the Great Metropolis* (New York: Museum of American Indian, Heye Foundation, 1922), 171-186.

⁵ Early Queens County consisted of Newtown, Flushing, Jamaica, Hempstead and Oyster Bay. Hempstead and Oyster Bay later became part of Nassau County after Queens County became a borough of New York City in 1898.

⁶ Hofstra University Library, Special Collections Department, "Slavery on Long Island," https://www.hofstra.edu/pdf/library/libspc_soli.pdf. "African slaves, along with the occasional Native American slave, often worked [domestic and rural trades] alongside free African workers, European indentured servants, paid European workers, and even slave owners themselves."

⁷ "Newtown's Old Church," *New York Herald*, December 16, 1894, Brooklyn Supplement. Shortly before slavery was outlawed in New York, the 1790 population of Newtown was estimated around 2,000 including 200 slaves; Kross, xv.

⁸ Many of John Moore's descendants would later become very prominent citizens and active in both the Episcopal and Presbyterian churches.

⁹ National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), *Saint James Church, Elmhurst, New York (#99001331)* (listed November 12, 1999), nomination prepared by Kathleen A. Howe & G. Brian Hutchinson, Section 8; 1.

¹⁰ The major Newtown congregations at that time (Presbyterian, Reformed Dutch, Church of England, and Quakers) continued to share facilities and supported each other at the community level even after they built their individual church buildings.

¹¹ The sections on the Ministry Act, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, and the Protestant Episcopal Church are based on James Elliott Lindsley, *This Planted Vine: A Narrative History of the Episcopal Diocese of New York* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984); Peter W. Williams, *America's Religions: Traditions and Cultures* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), "The Anglican Tradition," 74-81 and "Colonial Anglicans," 93-94; and William Warren Sweet, *The Story of Religion in America* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950).

¹² NRHP, *Saint James Church*, Section 8, 4.

¹³ By 1710 there were a total of ten mission parishes in New York Province supported by the SPG. Lindsley, 27

¹⁴ Major sources of information for the history and construction of Old Saint James Church include the following: Hall Partnership, *Historic Structure Report for St. James Parish Hall*; NRHP, *Saint James Church*; and Minnie M. Germond, *A Brief History of St. James Parish, 1704-1954* (Elmhurst, New York: St. James Parish, 1954).

¹⁵ The 1693 Ministry Act had previously combined the three towns into one parish, but the congregations lacked consistent support and dedicated ministers before the establishment of the SPG.

¹⁶ Despite that official status granted by the charter, the Newtown church continued to share the Jamaica Church of England minister for another thirty-five years.

¹⁷ Riker, 114.

¹⁸ Moore, 54.

¹⁹ The First Presbyterian Church of Newtown a few blocks away on what is now Queens Boulevard was destroyed by the British during the Revolutionary War.

²⁰ Germond, 29.

²¹ The Episcopal Church in Scotland was legally recognized, but oppressed by the English for their refusal to acknowledge the English Hanoverian kings. After the Revolutionary War, Seabury was elected the second Presiding Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States and later became Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese in Connecticut.

²² Long Island parishes included St. James, Newtown; St. George, Flushing; Grace Church, Jamaica; St. George, Hempstead; Christ Church, Oyster Bay; Saint John, Huntington; Saint Anne, Brooklyn, and congregations in Setauket and Islip. Lindsley, 80.

²³ There were 40 original parishes in the New York Diocese; most have prospered and remain active today. Lindsley, 81.

²⁴ Act of the New York State legislature on March 12, 1793. Hall Partnership, *Historic Structure Report for Saint James Parish Hall*, 8.

²⁵ "Historical Discourse: Old St. James and Older Newtown-The Rev. Edward M. McGuffey's Eleventh Anniversary," *Newtown Register*, November, 1901; Germond, 33.

²⁶ Sweet, 263.

²⁷ By 1845 the Episcopal Diocese of New York counted 165 churches and 198 clergy. Lindsley, 126. During this period of growth after the War of 1812, the first Episcopal seminary in the United States, General Theological Seminary in New York City, was established in 1817. Lindsley, 27.

²⁸ The First Presbyterian Church of Newtown is located at Queens Boulevard and 54th Avenue near Broadway. The parish was formally established in 1715; their present-day church building dates from 1895.

²⁹ Germond, 32.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 37. Lafever designed Holy Trinity Church (1847), now Saint Anne and the Holy Trinity Episcopal Church located today within Brooklyn Heights Historic District. Other Lafever-designed churches include Saint James Roman Catholic Church (1837) and Church of the Holy Apostles (1848-54) in Manhattan, First Presbyterian Church (1844) in Sag Harbor, and Strong Place Baptist Church (1851) in Brooklyn. In 1975 a devastating fire destroyed the Minard Lafever-designed Saint James Church of 1848. A new church building was built on its site in 1976

³¹ Hall Partnership, *Historic Structure Report for St. James Parish Hall*, 12. Grave markers and remains were also removed in 1882.

³² The other two Church of England congregations of the three-town parish constructed their own church buildings around the same time (neither extant): Jamaica (Grace Church) in 1734 and Flushing (Saint George) in 1746.

³³ Germond, 19. Twenty square rods is approximately a plot of land 62.5 feet by 86.8 feet. The current lot is 62.42 feet along Broadway by 179.78 along 51st Street.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Germond, 20.

³⁶ The other major Protestant congregations in Newtown Village built their early church buildings around the same time, (neither extant). The First Presbyterian Church built a large church in 1741. NRHP, *First Presbyterian Church of Newtown (#13000696)*(listed September 9, 2013), nomination prepared by Jonathan Taylor, Section 8, 4. The Reformed Dutch Church of Newtown built their first church in 1731.

³⁷ Germond, 21.

³⁸ Peter Benes, *Meetinghouses of Early New England* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 70.

³⁹ "Ancient Newtown," *Long Island Weekly Star*, December 15, 1882.

⁴⁰ Germond, 22.

⁴¹ Edmund W. Sinott, *Meetinghouse & Church in Early New England* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1963), 19.

⁴² Benes, 4.

⁴³ Sinott, 10.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 19-23. The first and earliest type of meetinghouse (up until about 1720) had a square or nearly square plan, often with a steep hipped roof. Most of the meetinghouses during the 18th century were of the second type, oblong with a gable roof. After the Revolutionary War, the meetinghouse type evolved into Georgian, Federal, and Greek Revival styles.

⁴⁵ The interior is not part of this designation, but the discussion is pertinent to the building type.

⁴⁶ Germond, 27; and Hall Partnership, *Historic Structure Report for St. James Parish Hall*, "Wood Preservationist Report" np. During the survey for the historic structure report, a header was found along the long (south) side, indicating the probable presence of an entrance door before the 1761 remodeling.

⁴⁷ Benes, 4.

⁴⁸ Hall Partnership, *Historic Structure Report for St. James Parish Hall*, "Wood Preservationist Report," np.

⁴⁹ This was done under the direction of Rev. Dr. Samuel Cox who was rector from 1868 to 1888. He later became the Dean of the Cathedral (Episcopal Diocese of Long Island) of the Incarnation in Garden City. Germond, 46.

⁵⁰ Hall Partnership, *Historic Structure Report for St. James Parish Hall*, Appendix C, "Copies of Historic Texts of Saint James Church." Also, "...the steeple of the old Episcopal Church was pulled down on Tuesday evening, December 5, 1882..." "Ancient Newtown," *Long Island Weekly Star*, December 15, 1882.

⁵¹ Germond, 44.

⁵² Lindsley, 174.

⁵³ Saint Michael Episcopal Church (1854, demolished in 1891) was a Manhattan example of a small wood Gothic Revival(Carpenter Gothic) style church at West 99th Street, built when that area was semi-rural.

⁵⁴ In 1901 it was noted that Old St. James was used as a chapel, "Historical Discourse..." *Newtown Register*, November, 1901; also in Saint James "Report of the Rector," December 1, 1925, Hall Partnership, *Historic Structure Report*, Appendix C, "Copies of Historic Texts of Saint James Church."

⁵⁵ In particular, Richard Upjohn's 1852 pattern book, *Upjohn's Rural Architecture: Designs, working drawings and specifications for a wooden church, and other Rural Structures*" promoted the Gothic Revival style.

⁵⁶ "Newtown's Old Church," *New York Herald*, December 16, 1894, Brooklyn Supplement.

⁵⁷ Elmhurst is a diverse neighborhood in the northwestern part of Queens. Today its borders extend from Roosevelt Avenue to the north, Long Island Expressway to the south, Junction Blvd. to the east, and the New York Connecting Railroad (CSX) right-of-way to the west.

⁵⁸ LPC, *Newtown High School* (LP-2131), (New York: City of New York, 2003), prepared by Donald Presa, 2.

⁵⁹ Saint James Parish granted an easement to the City's Board of Transportation for subway work. Hall Partnership, *Historic Structure Report for St. James Parish Hall*, Appendix C, "Copies of Historic Texts of Saint James Church."

⁶⁰ Hall Partnership, *Historic Structure Report for St. James Parish Hall*, 12.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶² A photograph from the early 1940s shows Old Saint James Church missing its gable-end truss along Broadway "New York's Changing Scene," *New York Sunday News*, August 26, 1973.

⁶³ *Ibid.*; also Edward Frost, "A Labor of Love for Vietnam Vets," *Daily News*, May 14, 1989.

⁶⁴ Nicholas Stein, "From a Crumbling Present, a Parish's Past is Reborn," *New York Times*, July 25, 2004.

⁶⁵ Saint Paul's Chapel, a New York City Landmark, the best known Colonial-period church in New York City was completed in 1764-66 thirty years after the construction of Old Saint James Church. 59 Arthur Kill Road, Staten Island, was built in 1690-1700 and used for church services, but was built as a residence, not a church. In New Jersey, the oldest surviving church building is the brick Old Saint Mary Church of 1703 in Burlington City.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of the buildings and site, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Old Saint James Episcopal Church (Old Saint James Parish Hall) 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, Old Saint James Episcopal Church of Elmhurst, built in 1735-36, is significant for its association with the mission activity of the Church of England in the American colonies and significant for its association with the early development of Queens and the town of Elmhurst; that it is notable in New York City as the second-oldest extant religious building and the oldest associated with The Episcopal Church; that it is a remarkable example of a meetinghouse design used for the Colonial period's early churches; that it retains its early 18th century box-like form, wood shingle siding, round-arched windows, and heavy-timber framing; that it is associated with Elmhurst (Newtown) founded in 1652, one of the earliest European settlements in Queens; that in 1702, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts formed a Church of England mission parish composed of Newtown, Flushing, and Jamaica; that was under the direction of the Bishop of London; that Newtown constructed its own church building in 1735-36, "The Church of England in America, mission church at Newtowne"; that it was originally built with a tower at the west end that faced the churchyard; that in 1761 the Newtown church became the stand-alone "Church of England Parish of Saint James"; that prominent citizens associated with the Colonial parish included the Reverend Benjamin Moore, a president of Columbia College, and the Reverend Samuel Seabury, Jr., the first American Episcopal Bishop; that British troops spared the building during the Revolutionary War; that in 1789 it became one of the founding parishes in the New York Episcopal Diocese; that in 1848 it became a chapel, and later a Sunday school and a parish hall; that in 1883 a small rear addition replaced the west-end tower and the entire wood building was repaired and updated with Gothic-revival and Stick-style details such as pointed-arch windows, truss-like trim in the gable ends, label molding, and decorative brackets; that its exterior appearance today is the result of a late-19th-century remodeling that has not diminished its basic Colonial form; that as a parish hall in the 19th and 20th centuries, it served an important role in the community's social and religious, and life as a centrally-located meeting place for many organizations; and that in 2004, the building was restored to its late 19th-century appearance (except the porch) using grants from the Landmarks Conservancy's Historic Properties Fund and other sources.

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 Old Saint James Episcopal Church (now Old Saint James Parish Hall) and designates Borough of Queens, Tax Map Block 1549, Lot 1 in part, consisting of the portion of the bounded by a line beginning at the southeast corner of the lot, continuing westerly along the southern lot line to a point five feet

west of the rear roofline of the church, thence continuing northerly along a line parallel with the rear of the church to the northern lot line, thence continuing easterly along the northern lot line to the northeast corner of the lot, thence extending easterly along the sidewalk fence contiguous with the northern lot line, thence continuing southerly along the sidewalk fence in front of the east frontage of the church, thence continuing westerly along the sidewalk fence to the point where it meets the eastern lot line, thence continuing southerly to the point of beginning, as shown in the attached map.

Meenakshi Srinivasan, Chair

Frederick Bland, Wellington Chen,
Michael Devonshire, Michael Goldblum,
John Gustafsson, Jeanne Lutfy,
Adi Shamir-Baron, and Kim Vauss,
Commissioners



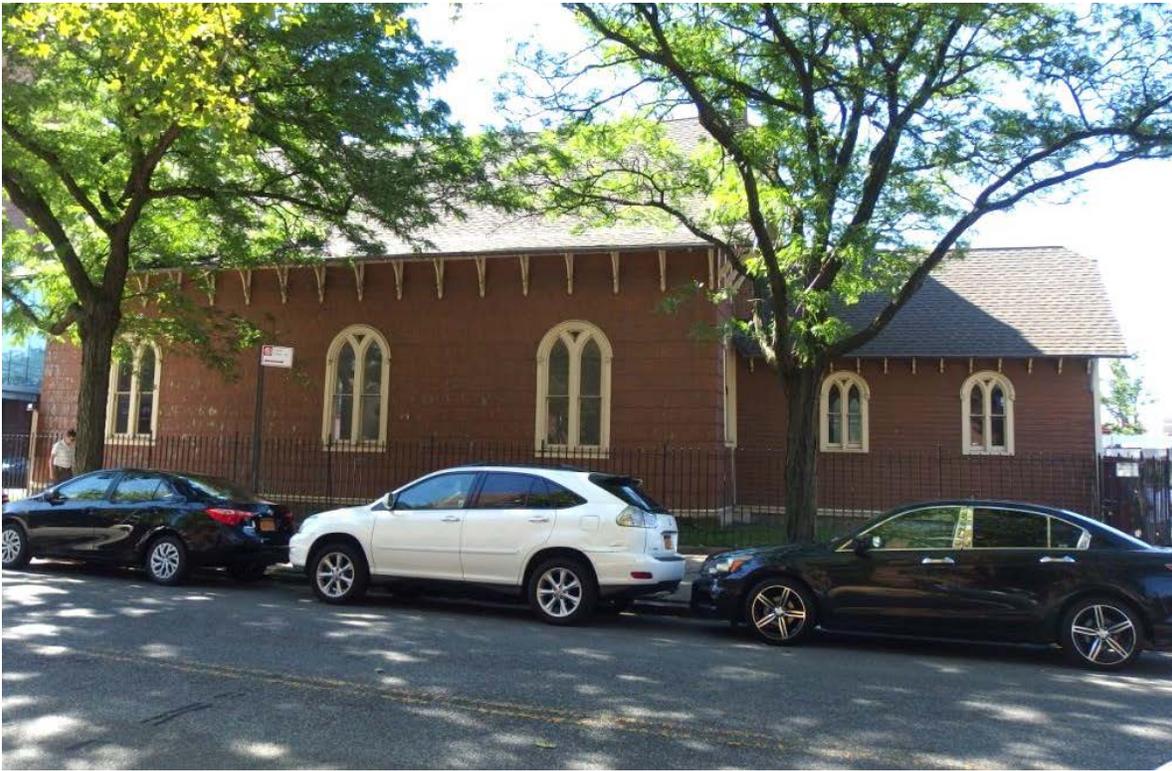
**Old Saint James Episcopal Church
(now Old Saint James Parish Hall)**
Borough of Queens
Tax Map Block: 1549, Lot 1 in part
86-02 Broadway
Broadway (East) and 51st Street (North) Facades
(Photograph: Marianne Hurley 2017)



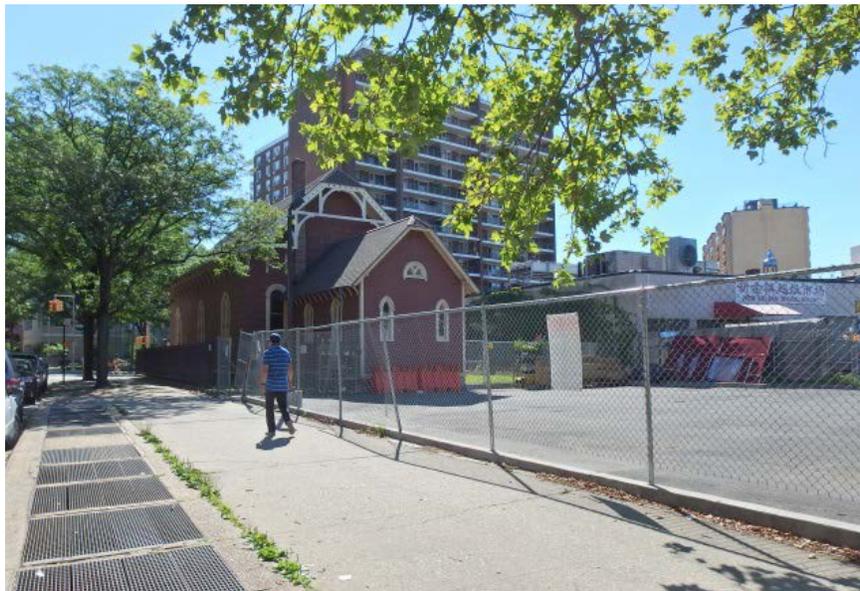
**Old Saint James Episcopal Church
Front (East) Facade**
(Photograph: Sarah Moses, 2017)



**Old Saint James Episcopal Church
Front (East) Facade along Broadway and South Facade**
(Photograph: Sarah Moses 2017)



**Old Saint James Episcopal Church
51st Street (North) Facade**
(Photograph: Marianne Hurley 2017)



**Old Saint James Episcopal Church
Northwest Facade along 51st Street showing rear parking lot**
(Photograph: Marianne Hurley 2017)



**Old Saint James Episcopal Church
Rear (West) Facade**
(Photograph: Marianne Hurley 2017)



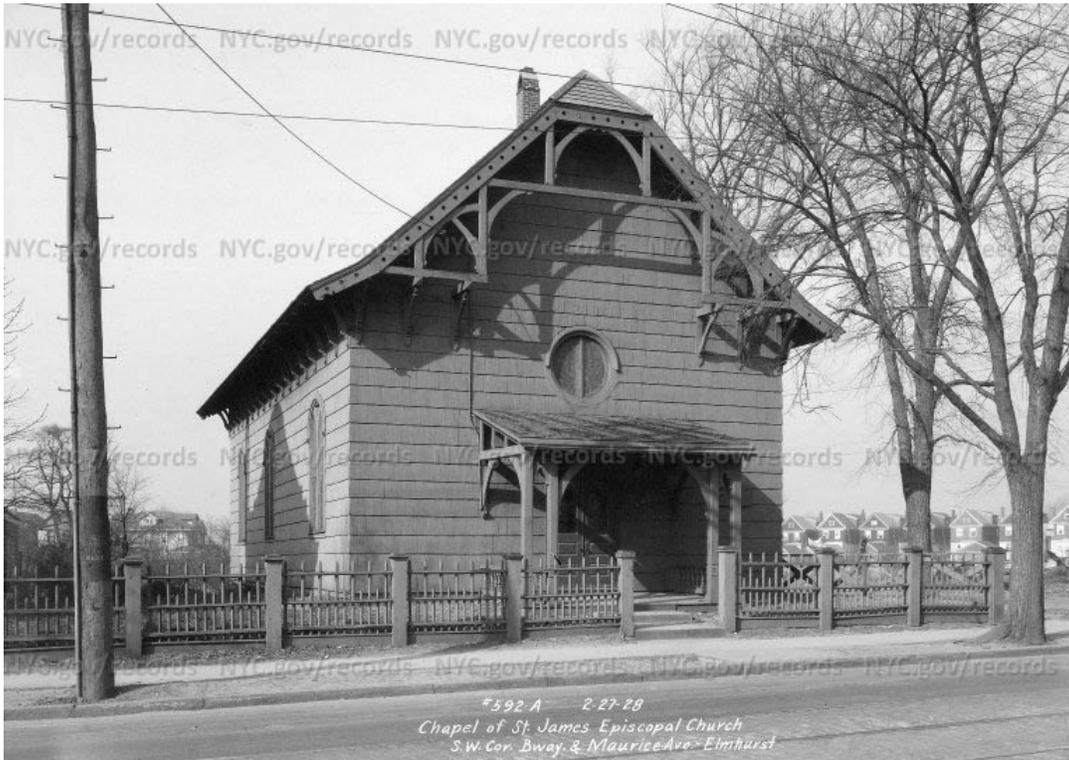
**Old Saint James Episcopal Church
Southwest Facade**
(Photograph: Marianne Hurley, 2017)



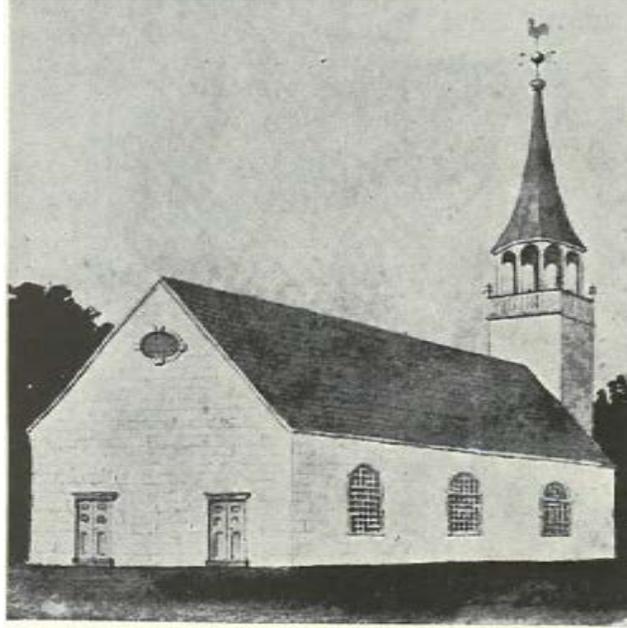
**Typical Round-Arch Window
with Lancet Windows and Drip Molding)
North Facade**
(Photograph: Marianne Hurley, 2017)



**Detail of Brackets and Truss
North Facade**
(Photograph: Marianne Hurley, 2017)



Old Saint James Episcopal Church
Historic Photograph, 1928
Municipal Archives, New York City

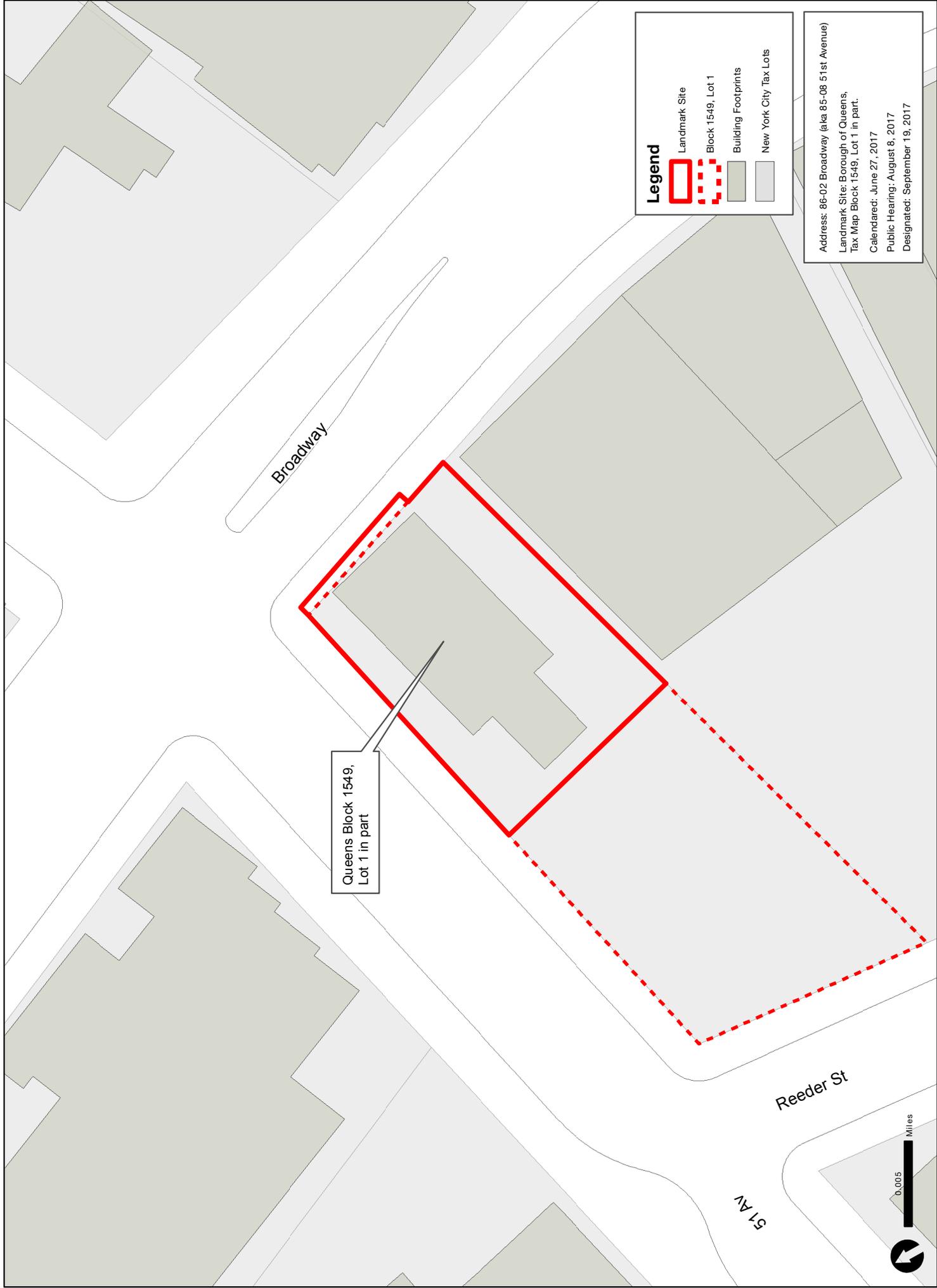


Old Saint James Episcopal Church 1773
(*A Brief History of St. James Parish, 1704-1954*)



Landscape Elmhurst, Long Island 1839 (Newtown)
Old Saint James Episcopal Church center, Reformed Dutch Church of Newtown with domed steeple at left, First Presbyterian Church at right
(Collection of the Society for the Preservation of Long Island Antiquities)

Old Saint James Episcopal Church (now Old St. James Parish Hall)



Legend

- Landmark Site
- Block 1549, Lot 1
- Building Footprints
- New York City Tax Lots

Address: 86-02 Broadway (aka 85-08 51st Avenue)
Landmark Site: Borough of Queens,
Tax Map Block 1549, Lot 1 in part.
Calendared: June 27, 2017
Public Hearing: August 8, 2017
Designated: September 19, 2017

