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ST. VINCENT FERRER PRIORY AND SCHOOL (including the Holy Name Society Building)
869 Lexington Avenue and 141-151 East 65th Street, Borough of Manhattan.
Architects: William Schickel (Priory), built 1880-81; Wilfrid E. Anthony
(Holy Name Society Building), built 1930; Elliot L. Chisling-Ferrenz & Taylor
(School), built 1948.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1400, Lot 20.

On June 19, 1979, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the St. Vincent Ferrer Priory and School (including the Holy Name Society Building) and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 2). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There were no speakers on this item,

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The St. Vincent Ferrer Complex consists of four buildings: the church (a designated New York City Landmark), the priory, the Holy Name Society Building, and the school, all of which display elements based on the Gothic style and form a unified ensemble. The Dominican Fathers, the Roman Catholic order who developed the complex, purchased the site two years after the close of the Civil War in order to serve spiritual and educational needs of the community. The priory (1880-81), the oldest of the four, is a late, simple rendition of the Victorian Gothic by William Schickel, a noted 19th-century New York architect. The church (1916) is by Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue and was considered by him to be his finest work in the ecclesiastical field. The Holy Name Society building was built in 1930 from designs by Wilfrid Edwards Anthony and harmonizes sympathetically with the two earlier structures. The school was designed and built in 1948 by the firm of Elliot L. Chisling-Ferrenz & Taylor.

The Priory

The Priory of St. Vincent Ferrer, the oldest surviving building in the complex, was originally built as a convent. It was designed by William Schickel and is a late, simple rendition of the Victorian Gothic. Schickel (1850-1907) was born and educated in Germany and immigrated to this country about 1870. He found work as a draftsman for Richard Morris Hunt who conducted his office along the lines of a Parisian atelier such as the one he had worked in during his years at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Hunt's office was one of the few places in this country where a young architect could receive an academic architectural education. In 1873, Schickel established his own practice which was to last until the first decade of this century. During his long career he worked in partnership with Hugo Kafka and Isaac E. Ditmars. Although Kafka remained only for a short time, from 1887 to 1888, the association with Ditmars lasted until Schickel's death in 1907.

The earliest known work by Schickel is the John D. Crimmins house at 40 East 68th Street which was built in 1878-79. The present Beaux-Arts facade, however, dates from 1897-98 when Crimmins again hired Schickel to enlarge and redesign his town house. The year following the completion of the Crimmins house, 1880, Schickel received the commission from the Dominican Fathers to design a

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convent for their church at Lexington Avenue between 65th and 66th Streets. This convent, now known as the priory, is Schickel's first documented work for the Catholic Church and the beginning of a relationship that was to last throughout his career. In its stylistic relation to the priory, the most interesting of his church-sponsored works is St. Joseph's Hospital in Yonkers. Completed in 1889, the hospital, in the Victorian Gothic mode, is strongly reminiscent of the priory. Other examples of his work for the Church include: the redesign and reconstruction of the school and convent of the Sacred Heart (1888-89), now the Finley Student Center on the south campus of City College (City University of New York); St. Joseph's Seminary (1891-96) in Yonkers, a massive stone Romanesque Revival building; the imposing Church of St. Ignatius Loyola (1895-1900) on Park Avenue at East 84th Street, one of his finest churches and an official New York City Landmark; and the Wartburg Home Chapel in Westchester, dedicated in 1904, a handsome example of the Rundbogenstil, recalling Schickel's German training.

Schickel also enjoyed the patronage of New York's German community. His most notable commissions were received from Oswald Ottendorfer, noted philanthropist and publisher of the New Yorker Staats Zeitung, the influential German language newspaper. Schickel is responsible for two buildings erected to house Ottendorfer's philanthropic endeavors: the Ottendorfer Branch of the New York Public Library and the Stuyvesant Polyclinic, both on lower Second Avenue. They were designated New York City Landmarks in 1977. Characteristic of Schickel's work is his meticulous handling of materials and the combination of smooth wall surfaces and subtle polychromatic effects. His use of polychromy, reflecting his early training in German and the influence of the Bavarian architect, Friedrich von Gartner, placed him in the current of the Victorian Gothic when he designed the priory.

Some of the elements that place the priory within the broad stream of the Victorian Gothic include the pointed arched openings with alternating brick and stone voussoirs, the stone bands at impost block level, the pseudo-buttresses, and the variety of colors; the deep red-orange brick, the light brownstone, the dark gray slate, and the dark window frames. However, there are elements that reflect the German architectural heritage of Schickel; among them are the pilaster strips at the third and fourth floors, the brick dentils over the fourth floor, the stone and brick corbeling of the entablature and the elongated corbels of the gabled entrance tower. Occupying a prominent corner site, the brick building rises four stories (including an attic fifth story) above a tall brownstone basement. The attic story with slate-covered mansard roof is punctuated by gabled dormers. An oriel emphasizes the central bay of the 65th Street elevation. A high brownstone stoop with a double approach and handsome cast-iron Gothic style railings and newels leads to the recessed entrance. A pointed arch set on clustered colonnettes frames the entrance opening. The narrow yard around the building is enclosed by a handsome cast-iron fence.

The Church

By 1912, the brick church building of 1867 was inadequate for the needs of the parish and architects were engaged to design a new edifice. The result was dismissed as an unacceptable miniature of St. Patrick's Cathedral and the search for an appropriate new design continued. Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue, who had left the Boston firm of Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson in 1913, had moved to New York

City where his St. Thomas' Church on Fifth Avenue was nearing completion. Impressed by the design of St. Thomas, the Dominican Fathers commissioned Goodhue and gave him free rein in designing their new church.

Goodhue (1869-1924), born in Pomfret, Connecticut, attended Russell's College in New Haven until the age of fifteen when he moved to New York and joined the architectural firm of James Renwick who was a leading figure in the introduction of the Gothic Revival style to this country. It was while with Renwick that Goodhue was able to develop his remarkable talent in drawing and sketching. At the age of 21, he left the firm after winning a competition for a church in Dallas, Texas, and brought the commission to the Boston firm of Cram & Wentworth. In 1889, he became head craftsman for the firm and later a partner, the firm then becoming Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson. The style they developed was influenced by contemporary English and Gothic modes that had evolved from the previous Gothic Revival and Victorian Gothic as was expressed in the work of J.D. Sedding and William Morris and others in the Arts and Crafts movement. It was during this period of his career, the early 1890s, that Goodhue was involved in book design and his work in this field shows the influence of William Morris who also worked in the medium. This interest in book design was in keeping with the revival of handicrafts which was so much a part of the resurrection of the Gothic movement. This respect for craftsmanship is evident in the work of Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson and particularly in the work known to have been done by Goodhue. In the Church of St. Thomas, considered by many to be the masterpiece of the firm, the superb reredos, one of Goodhue's finest creations and executed by the sculpture Lee Lawrie, is striking evidence of the important place the ideal of craftsmanship occupied in the pantheon of the 19th-century Gothicists. But it is the Church of St. Vincent Ferrer that Goodhue considered his best work.

Built of random ashlar and dressed limestone, the church is notable for its architectural detail and sculpture which has been executed with masterly craftsmanship. The interior is extraordinarily rich in materials, textures and colors that create an aesthetically impressive and moving environment. The church was designated a New York City Landmark in 1967.

The Holy Name Society Building

As the activities of the Dominicans continued to grow, so did the need to provide adequate space for these activities. In 1930, twelve years after the completion of the present church building, Wilfrid Edwards Anthony was hired to design a new building to house meeting rooms and office space for organizations and charities connected with St. Vincent Ferrer. Anthony (1878-1948) designed a number of buildings for the Catholic Church in New York. Anthony's Corpus Christi Church on West 121st Street is a departure from the traditional Roman Catholic churches in that its style was suggested by the traditional meeting houses of New England. He also designed the Dominican Church of St. Catherine of Siena on East 68th Street. Built of stone and brick, the Holy Name Society Building is a symmetrically massed six-story structure with a recessed central section and flanking pavilions. The first two stories are marked by shallow buttresses that are copied from Goodhue's church. The arched windows of the second floor have handsome free-form tracery that again recalls the church. All the windows of the upper stories are square-headed with stone mullions and transom bars. The western pavilion is crowned by a brick gable

while the termination of the eastern one, made of stone, is squared-off and enhanced with elegant tracery and crowned by a copper-clad spire. The central section is four stories of brick and stone with a two-story-high copper mansard rising above the fourth floor. Of his known works, the Holy Name Society building is Anthony's best. It was designed with sympathy for and sensitivity to the earlier buildings of the complex.

The School

The Dominicans, long concerned with education, built their first school building here in 1884. This building was replaced in 1948 by the present structure which was designed by Elliot L. Chisling-Ferrenz & Taylor.* Five stories high, the school is faced with red brick similar to that used on the Holy Name Society Building and employs simplified Gothic motifs which stylistically link the building to the others in the complex. Like the Holy Name Society Building, the school is symmetrically massed with a recessed central section and projecting end bays. A limestone base, limestone string courses at the fifth floor and parapet, and limestone enframements at the windows and openings in the end bays provide contrast with the brickwork. Carved quatrefoil panels adorn the parapet and the wall sections between the end bay windows. All windows have steel sash. Carved shields and inscriptions enhance the two entrances.

Together the four buildings of the complex create a harmonious, unified ensemble, displaying the use of the Gothic mode over a period of some 75 years. As examples of the work of several notable New York City architects, they exhibit the abilities of each architect to work in a Gothic style and to design a building which harmonizes with its neighbors. The buildings continue to serve the needs of the Church of St. Vincent Ferrer and the Dominican Fathers and are important elements in the architectural environment of the Upper East Side and the City.

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*Although a carved inscription by the entrance indicates that the school was rebuilt in 1954, records in the Department of Buildings, Manhattan, indicate a 1948 construction date.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the St. Vincent Ferrer Priory and School (including the Holy Name Society Building) has a special character, special historic 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 St. Vincent Ferrer Priory and School (including the Holy Name Society Building) form a harmonious, unified ensemble which enhances the Landmark Church of St. Vincent Ferrer; that the building displays elements based on the Gothic style as developed in American architecture over a period of some 75 years; that as examples of the work of several notable New York City architects, they exhibit the abilities of each architect to work in a Gothic style and to design a building which harmonizes with its neighbors; that among the distinctive features of the building are the use of brick with contrasting stone trim and carved Gothic ornament; that, in addition, the priory with its alternating brick and stone voussoirs and stone bands at impost block level displays a subtle polychromy typical of the Victorian Gothic style; that the buildings continue to serve the needs of the Church of St. Vincent Ferrer and the Dominican Fathers; and that they are important elements in the architectural environment of the Upper East Side and the city.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21 (formerly Chapter 63) of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the St. Vincent Ferrer Priory and School (including the Holy Name Society Building), 869 Lexington Avenue and 141-151 East 65th Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1400, Lot 20, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

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Built: 1880-81
Architect: Willis Schickel

St. Vincent Ferrer Priory
869 Lexington Ave

Photo: Andrew
Dolkart



Photo: Gina Santucci

St. Vincent Ferrer Holy Name Society
Building and School
141-151 East 65th Street

Holy Name Society, Built 1930, architect Wilfrid E. Anthony
School, Built 1948, architect Elliott L. Chisling-Ferrenz & Taylor