

ASBURY METHODIST CHURCH, 2100 Richmond Avenue between Signs Road and Rockland Avenue, Staten Island. Completed 1849; remodeled 1878.

Landmark Site: Borough of Richmond Tax Map Block 2100, Lot 400.

On September 13, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Asbury Methodist Church and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 53). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. In a letter to the Commission, the Pastor of the Church, Rev. James D. Flynn, indicated that the proposed designation had the approval of the Official Board of the Church and the concurrent approval of the District Superintendent of the Methodist Church.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Austere and severely plain in appearance, the Asbury Methodist Church is an extremely simple but appealing example of mid-Nineteenth Century architecture. It was built in the pleasing and unpretentious vernacular of the times yet is reminiscent of Federal antecedents. The building is a fine expression of brick construction and derives its distinguishing qualities from its measured orderliness, from the proportion of its tall symmetrically placed windows, from its sharp profile and from the white accents of its painted wood trim.

This structure is rectangular in plan. A square tower, projecting forward from the front wall, contains a dignified entranceway, consisting of plain, double doors with fan light above, set in a round arch. There are also three tall, round-arched windows in the front elevation, one centered above the door and one in each flanking wall. The tower and the two flanking walls were completely rebuilt in 1878. The bonded side walls date from 1849 and contain four square-headed windows with plain lintels and sills. A wide fascia-board and cornice adorn the building at roof level. The tower supports a box-like belfry with angular side openings containing a single bell.

Bishop Francis Asbury (for whom the Asbury Methodist Church is named) was a circuit rider and a very remarkable person. From a journal he kept for many years, we learn that he first came to Staten Island in 1771, when he was invited to stay at the home of Peter Van Pelt and to preach there. Bishop Asbury, largely through his own efforts, saw the five hundred Methodists of 1771 grow by 1816 to 214,000 under his jurisdiction. Over a period of forty-five years, it is estimated he preached 17,000 sermons and traveled nearly 300,000 miles. It is said that his salary was never more than \$80.00 a year.

The first Methodist Society on Staten Island was organized on May 5, 1787. Their first church services were held in a low, roughly built house on Woodrow Road, where Bishop Asbury preached in 1791. The first Asbury Methodist Church was constructed in 1802 near the site of the present building, and when Bishop Asbury preached there, it was called the North End Church. This earlier building was removed from the property in 1850. Of the many gravestones in the cemetery around the Church, the earliest dates from 1813.

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 Asbury Methodist Church has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities the Asbury Methodist Church is an impressive example of severely plain vernacular architecture, reminiscent of Federal antecedents, that it is distinctive in appearance, that it is situated in a country churchyard with early Nineteenth Century gravestones and that it is named after the Bishop who established the Methodist Church on Staten Island.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 8-A 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 Asbury Methodist Church, 2100 Richmond Avenue between Signs Road and Rockland Avenue, Staten Island and designates Tax Map Block 2100, Lot 400, Borough of Richmond, as its Landmark Site.