

Landmarks Preservation Commission
January 24, 1967, Number 2
LP-0301

CHURCH OF NOTRE DAME, Morningside Drive at West 114th Street, Borough of Manhattan. Sanctuary begun 1909, completed 1910; architects Dans & Otto. Church (unfinished) begun 1914; architects Cross & Cross.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1867, Lot 20.

On June 14, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Church of Notre Dame and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 33). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Two witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Church of Notre Dame is a magnificent stone structure designed in the elegant French neoclassic style of the early Nineteenth Century. The architects' refined sense of scale has skillfully imposed on this comparatively small site atop Morningside Heights an image of true monumentality.

This church on the corner of Morningside Heights and 114th Street expresses a square building, Greek Cross in plan, by the shallow eastern portico and the semicircular apse. The principal facade on the east is dominated by a handsome pedimented portico, carried on four fluted Corinthian columns. The pediment and cornice are strengthened by well detailed modillions. The order and regularity of this type are seen in the repetition of the principal portico motif in shallow projection on the south side. Here four pilasters take the place of the columns of the east front while their height and the pediment above them are similar and reinforce the quality of symmetry. Another feature reminiscent of French antecedents is the band of swagged garlands which follows the entablature for the entire perimeter of the building, similar to that on the Church of the Madeleine in Paris and so typical of Nineteenth Century classicism.

The original section of the church was built by Dans & Otto between the years 1909 and 1910. This section survives in the semicircular apse around which Cross and Cross constructed the main body of the church as it stands today. The work on this part of the church continued from 1914 until 1928 when it was finally discontinued. If the architects had been able to realize their plans for a large dome over the main mass of the building, the silhouette of the church would have been more nearly reminiscent of Soufflot's Pantheon in Paris which was surely one of its models.

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 Church of Notre Dame, 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 Church of Notre Dame despite its relatively small size is monumentally imposing in its site on Morningside Heights, that it is built of fine materials, handsomely detailed and that, with its Greek Cross plan, it serves its congregation well, architecturally reminiscent of the best of French Nineteenth Century classicism.

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 Church of Notre Dame, Morningside Drive at West 114th Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1867, Lot 20, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.