

CHURCH OF ST. VINCENT FERRER, 869 Lexington Avenue, Borough of Manhattan.
Completed 1918; architect Bertram G. Goodhue.

Landmark-Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1400, Lot 20 in part,
consisting of the land on which the described building is situated.

On November 10, 1966 the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Church of St. Vincent Ferrer and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 35). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. One witness spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Impressively monumental in scale, this outstanding architectural achievement was considered by Bertram Goodhue, the architect, to be his best work in the ecclesiastical field. St. Vincent Ferrer is designed on a Latin Cross plan in the Gothic Style and built of random ashlar and dressed limestone. Its architectural detail and sculpture, particularly the Crucifixion panel over the entrance portal by sculptor Lee Lawrie, are equal to comparable work found on European cathedrals. The Great Rose window at the west end of the nave is composed of intricate stone tracery, a series of conjoined trefoils. It displays some of the most beautiful stained glass in this country. Above the great arch of the rose window connecting the two octagonal towers which rise above the massive buttresses flanking the entrance portal, the Apostle Arcade, here called the Great Gallery, is a handsome crowning feature.

As the church is built on a corner lot, the beauty of the symmetrical front elevation and the five bays with their great pointed arch windows in the clerestory of the nave, as well as the north transept are to be enjoyed by the pedestrians moving south along Lexington Avenue. The repetitive rhythm of the great, simple buttresses of the nave, in contrast to the delicacy of the stained glass windows between them, together with the steep pitched green copper roof and glorious front facade combine to make this one of the great examples of church architecture in this country. A 150 foot high fleche, planned for the crossing of the nave and transepts, was unfortunately never built, although structural supports and the base for it are an integral part of the existing construction.

The present church is the third built by the Dominican Fathers on or near this site. The first, a small frame chapel built in 1867 on the northeast corner of 64th Street at Lexington Avenue was almost immediately followed by a second large brick church on the present site, in 1869. In 1912 the church engaged architects to design a new church, but the solutions were rejected as being "approximately a miniature of St. Patrick's Cathedral". Subsequently, impressed by St. Thomas' Church on Fifth Avenue, which had been completed in 1914, the church selected Bertram Goodhue, who had recently opened his own office in New York, as architect and he was given free rein in designing the new church. This he did with great originality from a wide combination of Gothic forms. The cornerstone was laid on October 22, 1916 and the dedication took place on May 5, 1918.

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 St. Vincent Ferrer 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, St. Vincent Ferrer is an outstanding example of the Gothic style with beautiful proportions, that it presents a skillful use of an extremely limited corner site, that its west facade is particularly notable for its magnificent entrance portal, and that the stonework, sculptural detail and magnificent stained glass windows all executed with masterly craftsmanship, result in the creation of one of the most aesthetically significant monuments in the City.

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 St. Vincent Ferrer, 869 Lexington Avenue, Borough of Manhattan and designates as its related Landmark Site that part of Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1400, Lot 20 which contains the land on which the described building is situated.