

RECTORY OF THE CHURCH OF THE TRANSFIGURATION, 1 East 29th Street, Borough of Manhattan. Built about 1849-50; architect unknown.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 859, Lot 5.

On December 13, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Rectory of the Church of the Transfiguration and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 17). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Two witnesses spoke in favor of designation, and in a letter to the Commission the Rector of the Church, The Rev. Orin A. Griesmyer, D.D., favored the proposed designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Set back from the street with a peaceful garden in front of it, this five story Mansard-roofed Gothic Revival Rectory has a Victorian dignity and stateliness in keeping with its function as the home of the Rector. The brick and brownstone building's strong architectural character and artistic quality tie it to the picturesque Church contiguous with it and better known as "The Little Church around the Corner".

The Rectory, rectangular in plan, with an octagonal red brick extension projecting from the east elevation, gives the impression of having innumerable angles and surfaces. A handsome feature of the octagonal extension is a wooden window bay extending the full height of the building. The decorative panels over the third floor windows have excellent Gothic detail. At this same floor level a projecting balcony with an ornate cast iron railing adds a romantic touch to this facade. The door leading into the Rectory office is in the ground floor of this extension.

Three windows wide and facing south, the principal elevation is of smooth-faced brownstone. The ground floor, remodelled at a later date, has a service door at the far left, handsomely enframed double entrance doors off center, and a large steel casement window at the right. These elements are trimmed with light limestone, and a horizontal molded band course extends across the facade framing a carved shield over the entrance doors. The central oriel window of the third floor is a distinguished architectural feature and supplies an extra dimension to the flat surface of the elevation. Handsome drip (label) moldings adorn the windows of these three intermediate stories. At the fifth floor level is a bracketed cornice and three simple, pedimented dormers pierce the attic story of the slate Mansard roof that crowns the building.

History of the Church

Beginning in the 1860's the Church began to play a role in the life of the City. The names of many prominent New York families appear in the records of births, deaths and marriages. In the one hundred and eighteen years of its existence there have been only four rectors at The Little Church Around the Corner. The first rector, George H. Houghton, served forty-nine years. A stirring incident occurred during his ministry when some escaped slaves were given asylum by him in the basement of the Rectory. In July, 1863, during the several days of the Civil War draft riots in New York, mobs sought the lives of the fugitives and threatened to kill their savior.

Three bread lines have made history in The Little Church, one in the regime of each of the first three rectors. Dr. Houghton, the first rector, maintained a bread line to aid the many unemployed in the troubled days following the Civil War. His successor and nephew, Dr. Houghton, fed the hungry for weeks after the financial crash of 1907. Again in 1930, Dr. Ray began to aid the hungry. For many weeks an appalling queue of about 1,500 men extended each morning from the ligh-gate until the clergy appeared to hand a meal ticket to each man as he filed past.

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 Rectory of the Church of the Transfiguration 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 the Rectory of the Church of the Transfiguration (The Little Church Around the Corner) is a distinguished example of Gothic Revival architecture, that this red brick and brownstone building blends harmoniously in both color and style with the Church, and that it combines with the other structures in the garden to make this charming group of buildings one of the most picturesque ecclesiastical enclaves 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 Rectory of the Church of the Transfiguration, 1 East 29th Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 859, Lot 5, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.