

ST. THOMAS' CHURCH AND ST. THOMAS' PARISH HOUSE, 1-3 West 53rd Street, Borough of Manhattan. Begun 1909, completed 1914, architects Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1269, Lot 30.

On May 10, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of St. Thomas' Church and St. Thomas' Parish House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 13). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Three witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. In a letter to the Commission, the rector of St. Thomas' Church, the Reverend Frederick M. Morris, D.D. approved the designation and said, "We are interested in the work of the Landmarks Preservation Commission and commend you for the purposes it seeks to serve. Indeed you do have our support and good will."

#### DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

To many, this Church is the most beautiful in the City. Although influenced by French Gothic architecture, this limestone structure is quite unlike any Gothic Church to be found on the continent. Its detail is based on Gothic prototypes, but it is used with great inventiveness throughout and in its asymmetry and the design of its facades, it is not in any way reminiscent of specific French prototypes. Credit for this is due to architect Bertram Goodhue, a master craftsman, who, when this Church was designed in 1906, had outgrown the slavish copying of traditional types and had arrived at a new interpretation of Gothic work as a living, architectural language. In order to achieve an impressive nave and chancel in width and height (Cram was responsible for the plan) Goodhue created asymmetrical elevations ideally suited to the restricted site. This architectural scheme gives full recognition to a main entrance, on center with the nave which is beautifully wedded to a square tower at the corner. Here the tower can be seen to best advantage from all directions and is in itself a striking feature.

The elevations are replete with ornament. The buttresses of the square tower, as well as those on the 53rd Street side, are extremely simple and serve as beautiful foils for the elaboration of the main entrance and rose window above it. The concept of this Church becomes more amazing as one studies it. In beauty, detail and construction, it is a masterpiece. The Parish House (formerly the Rectory) nestles alongside the Church on 53rd Street to the west of the chapel, and the integration of these elements is a superb accomplishment.

St. Thomas' parish has lived through many vicissitudes since it broke away from Trinity Church in 1823. The first of its two churches near Broadway & Houston Street burned in 1851, the second became engulfed by slums and was closed in 1866. A third church was then designed by Richard Upjohn on the present site. Built in 1870, it burned in 1905, leaving only enough of the old building, to permit a large, temporary chapel seating 1200 to be erected within it. The shell was later removed and replaced by the present Church without any interruption of church services.

#### 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 St. Thomas' Church and St. Thomas' Parish House 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. Thomas' Church and Parish House is an outstanding example of the French Gothic Style, that it is notable for its excellent main portal, with rose window and apostled arcade above, and for its impressive corner tower, that the fine detail, relating to all parts of the exterior, makes a significant contribution to our legacy of masonry and sculptural craftsmanship, and that skillful use of its limited site, in a strategic corner location, has resulted in the creation of one of the most beautiful churches 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 St. Thomas' Church and St. Thomas' Parish House, 1-3 West 53rd Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1269 Lot 30, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.