

ST. PAUL'S MEMORIAL CHURCH AND RECTORY, 225 St. Paul's Avenue, Stapleton, Borough of Staten Island. Architect Edward T. Potter; built 1866-1870.
Landmark Site: Borough of Staten Island Tax Map Block 516, Lots 21 and 24.

On May 27, 1975, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of St. Paul's Memorial Church and Rectory and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 4). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Three witnesses including the Assistant Rector spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

St. Paul's Memorial Church and Rectory, begun in 1866 and designed by architect Edward T. Potter, are outstanding examples of High Victorian Gothic style. In their picturesque design and excellent use of local stone, the two buildings seem especially appropriate to the rural setting of Stapleton, one of the oldest sections of Staten Island.

St. Paul's Church was organized on March 11, 1833, at the Planters' Hotel as the second Protestant Episcopal parish in Staten Island. Caleb T. Ward, after whom Ward's Hill was named, gave the land for the first church building which was consecrated June 22, 1835. The senior warden of the church, Judge Albert Ward, son of Caleb T. Ward and grandson of Stephen Ward, a member of the Colonial Congress and Judge of the County of Westchester, donated the present church building "to the glory of God" and "as a fitting monument to the honor and sacred memory" of his sister, Mary Mann Ward.

Edward Tuckerman Potter (1831-1904), the architect of St. Paul's Memorial Church and Rectory, was one of the children of Bishop Alonzo Potter, Bishop of Pennsylvania, long associated with Union College in Schenectady. Two of his younger brothers, Henry Codman Potter and Eliphalet Mott Potter, were also Episcopal clergymen; his older brother Robert Brown Potter distinguished himself as a Union soldier during the Civil War. William Appleton Potter, eleven years Edward's junior, also an architect, received his training in his older brother's office.

Edward began his architectural career under Richard Upjohn, the country's foremost church architect and advocate of the Gothic Revival style for Episcopalian houses of worship. Upjohn had absorbed such tendencies from the English Ecclesiological movement, which preached a return to the Gothic style as a means of symbolizing the principles of the true Church. From Upjohn, Potter learned the precepts of the Gothic style, although many of his structures displayed the polychromy and boldness of the later Victorian Gothic sensibility. He also worked in the Romanesque Revival style. His extensive family connections with the Episcopalian hierarchy were, no doubt, a factor in the many church commissions he received. Although Potter designed a number of structures in New York City, St. Paul's Memorial Church and Rectory are the only ones to survive. At the time of construction, he was associated with Charles W. Clinton in the firm of Potter & Clinton.

The cornerstone of St. Paul's Church was laid on September 29, 1866 by the Right Reverend Dr. Horatio Potter, Bishop of the Diocese of New York (which includes Staten Island), assisted by a number of other clergymen. Rev. Potter, uncle of the architect, was assisted and later succeeded in his episcopate duties by his nephew Henry Codman Potter, the architect's brother. Construction apparently took several years, for the new building was not formally consecrated until May 31, 1870, again with Bishop Potter presiding.

As a freestanding structure situated on a hill, the church is not only readily seen from all four sides but also has a view of the Narrows. The design of the church is extremely effective, both in plan and detail. It is built of rough-faced, irregularly cut stone blocks of Staten Island traprock, sometimes erroneously called granite. The use of local material and the quiet contrast of color afforded by the warm gray traprock and russet-colored Connecticut brownstone impart a pleasantly subdued quality to the church, which seems to grow naturally out of the ground. The building is distinguished by its broad gabled ends which are fifty-four feet in height and was originally intended to have a tower which was never built. The buttressed side walls are surmounted by a steeply pitched roof, and angled buttresses are placed at the corners. The buttresses are stepped up and coped with brownstone.

A handsome enclosed entrance porch is placed on the south side of the building. The pointed arch entrance, set beneath the gable, is flanked by freestanding mottled granite colonnettes with very naturalistic floral capitals branching out from an unusual, slender necking. Voussoirs of traprock and brownstone form the double course arch, introducing the Ruskinian banded arches popularized in England in the 1850s by the architects Butterfield and Street. The sides of the porch are lit by triple groups of stained-glass windows set within cusped arch openings of brownstone. Squat freestanding columns also of mottled granite with squared floral capitals separate the windows. In character they are striking examples of Victorian Gothic.

One of the most attractive features of the building is the treatment of the front end which has a handsome central rose window defined by cusped circles and encircled by a double course of alternating blocks of brownstone and traprock, creating a subdued polychromatic effect. Carved ornamental blocks with the date "1867" are placed at each end of the front gable. The numerals "18" in one block and "67" in the other are intertwined in the intricate foliate ornament. An arched entrance within a double course of voussoirs, set beneath the rose window, is flanked by tall narrow lancet windows with cusped arches. Slender stained-glass lancet windows, also with alternating voussoirs of brownstone and traprock, are set in the side walls between the buttresses. The end gables are crowned by crosses. Stepped brownstone coping crowns the tops of the gables.

The east end of the church is also distinguished by a number of striking features. The original cornerstone at the northeast corner reads "St. Paul's, New York, 1866." Carved brownstone blocks set beneath the coping of the gable are inscribed with the words, "Lux," "Rex," and "Dux." An impressive double arch with alternating voussoirs of brownstone and traprock encloses a stained-glass window, of which the upper portion remains. The lower section, damaged in a storm many years ago, is now hidden from view.

Attached to the southeast corner of the church is a smaller auxiliary chapel dating from 1889. Simpler in design and architectural detail, the chapel is similar in character and utilizes the same materials as the main church building, although it was not designed by Potter.

On the adjoining lot to the south of the church and aligned with it, is the rectory, also designed by Potter and begun at a somewhat later date than the church. The funds for its construction were appropriated by the congregation.

The minister at the time was the Reverend Thomas W. Punnett.

Complementing the church in its overall design and use of materials, the rectory is a handsome example of post-Civil War domestic architecture. Carefully sited to take advantage of the sloping land, the house incorporates an extra half-story at the rear to form a basement. Stylistically it also shows characteristics of the picturesque Victorian Gothic mode, and is reminiscent of many country gate lodges of the period.

Like the church, the rectory is built of traprock with brownstone trim. The front has a five-sided projecting wing with slender triple windows and corbels separated by stone mullions. The wing is surmounted by a steeply pitched roof with projecting dormer partially engaged in the wall. A similar but broader dormer is also set above the entrance to the house, which is to the left of the projecting wing. Picturesque three-sided oriels are set on the north and south sides of this house. Windows on these sides are also set beneath cusped arches. Horizontal brownstone bandcourses, set in the walls, extend around all four sides of the house contrasting with the darker tones and rougher texture of the random ashlar traprock wall surfaces.

One of the most picturesque features of the rectory is the steep roof, accentuated by its handsome chimneys which are also constructed of traprock. At front and rear a brownstone bandcourse, with unusual vertical iron brackets, runs beneath the eaves, while at the sides the gables are edged by decorative bargeboards with an open-work timber motif at the peak.

The harmonious setting, the complementary materials, the picturesque design elements and the skill of the architect, combine to make this pair of buildings an outstanding example of Victorian Gothic church architecture on Staten Island. They are the sole surviving buildings in New York City by one of America's most distinguished 19th-century architects.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of these buildings, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that St. Paul's Memorial Church and Rectory have 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 their important qualities, St. Paul's Church and Rectory are outstanding examples of high Victorian Gothic architecture, that these buildings are particularly distinguished by their interesting use of ornament and local materials, introducing subdued polychromatic effects, and by their excellent workmanship, that their picturesque design seems especially appropriate to the rural setting of Stapleton, and that they are the sole surviving buildings in New York City by the distinguished 19th-century American Victorian architect, Edward Tuckerman Potter.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 63 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. Paul's Memorial Church and Rectory, 225 St. Paul's Avenue, Stapleton, Borough of Staten Island and designates Tax Map Block 516, Lots 21 and 24, Borough of Staten Island, as its Landmark Site.