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COMMON BOND

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Medieval to Modern: Celebrating New York's Religious Art and Architecture



In this issue:

"A Modern Church on Madison Square"

**"From Popcorn to Prayers:
The Transformation of New
York City Movie Palaces and
Theaters to Churches"**

**"Sanctuary Interior Decoration:
Balancing Beauty, Liturgy,
Public Programming, and
Historic Architecture"**

**Notes on this year's Sacred
Sites Open House**

and more!

From the President

Dear Friends,

We are delighted to present our latest edition of *Common Bond*. In keeping with our 2019 Sacred Sites Open House theme, “Medieval to Modern: Celebrating New York’s Religious Art and Architecture,” this issue highlights the broad spectrum of historical periods, faith traditions, and styles of religious architecture found in communities throughout New York City and State. Enclosed you’ll find articles demonstrating the variety and of New York’s religious architecture: the repurposing of magnificent movie palaces and theaters as houses of worship; the philosophy and practice of renewing historic sanctuary interiors; and the development and unfortunate loss of Stanford White’s magnificent Madison Square Presbyterian Church.



Highlights of this year’s 9th annual open house included popular walking tours encompassing multiple faith traditions and architectural styles, a tour of New York City’s oldest mosque, and two sold out tours at over-the-top theater-church, United Palace in Upper Manhattan. Preservation Buffalo-Niagara facilitated a tour of mid-century modern masterwork Temple Beth-El, by U.N. architects Harrison & Abramovitz. Rutgers Presbyterian Church boosted family-friendly participation by recruiting 12 neighborhood sacred sites to join them in hosting a multi-site scavenger hunt with prizes. We hope more sites around the state will pick up these programs next year.

The Landmarks Conservancy’s 33-year-old Sacred Sites program is dedicated to the preservation of historic religious architecture throughout New York State. We are one of a handful of programs in the country offering financial help to religious properties and the only program covering an entire state. Over the past three decades, our program has granted over \$11 million, helping restore 800 religious buildings across the state, regardless of denomination.

We hope you find this edition interesting and useful. We look forward to providing you with annual opportunities to be a “tourist in your own town,” exploring houses of worship in your area and beyond. We appreciate your interest and support.

Peg Breen
President

Common Bond is the technical journal of the **Sacred Sites Program**.

The New York Landmarks Conservancy’s Sacred Sites Program offers congregations throughout New York State financial and technical assistance to maintain, repair, and restore their buildings. In addition to providing hundreds of thousands of dollars in matching grants each year, the Conservancy offers technical help, workshops for building caretakers, and publications.

Editor: Ann-Isabel Friedman
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Back issues are available in print and online at www.nylandmarks.org and at www.sacredsitesopenhouse.org

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On the cover (from left to right): Sacred Heart Ukrainian Catholic Church, Johnson City (photo by Jean Siegrist). St. Agnes Roman Catholic Church, Brooklyn. Nevelson Chapel at St. Peter’s Church, New York City (photo by Thomas Magno).

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From Popcorn to Prayers: *The Transformation of New York City Movie Palaces and Theaters to Churches*

by Mari S. Gold

Mari S. Gold is a New York City-based freelance writer who contributes to several magazines and websites. Among the topics she covers are food, travel, dance, theater and other arts. Her blog, "But I Digress...", focuses on cultural events, travel and food at: www.marigoldonline.net

Photo by Wikimedia Commons.

Beginning in the 19-teens, but accelerating in the 1920s into the early 1930s, in New York City as elsewhere in the country, large, grand, purpose-built movie theaters or "movie palaces" were created to house large audiences looking to be entertained in style, encouraging wealthier clientele while elevating the experience for all movie-goers. In an era when the movie studios owned and built movie houses, studio heads like Marcus Loew noted "we sell tickets to theaters, not movies."

Designed by world class architects and interior designers to house thousands of patrons, these were not ordinary theaters but huge, ornate spaces with magnificent lobbies, glittering chandeliers and elaborately decorated ceilings. Many of the theaters had an atmospheric style giving audiences the illusion that they would be watching a film in an exotic locale like an Italian garden, a Persian court or a Spanish patio.

Starting in the 1950s with the advent of television as well as the migration of city audiences to the suburbs, movie attendance dropped. Some theaters were razed, others still stand empty but some have a new life, transformed into churches.

One example is Manhattan's United Palace, constructed in 1930 as Loew's 175th Street Theatre. At 4140 Broadway in Washington Heights at 175th St, this landmarked building is

View of the stage at United Palace.



View of the Grand Foyer at United Palace.



View of the Mezzanine at United Palace.



Music concert at United Palace.

the City's fourth largest theater, with 3400 seats. One of five, renowned Loew's 'Wonder Theaters,' so-called because of their opulence and grandeur, the structure was designed by noted Master architect Thomas W. Lamb. Lamb, one of America's great theater architects, was responsible for over three hundred theater buildings in the United States and around the world, most of which were movie theaters. The interiors were overseen by decorative specialist Harold Rambusch who was also responsible for work on the Waldorf Astoria, Radio City Music Hall and churches all over the U.S. The building's elaborate style was summarized by New York Times reporter David W. Dunlap as "Byzantine-Romanesque-Indo-Hindu-Sino-Moorish-Persian-Eclectic-Rococo-Deco."

United Palace of Spiritual Arts, (formerly known as United Christian Evangelistic Association,) purchased the building in 1969 to house its congregation, then headed by charismatic Spiritual Director Frederick J. Eikerenkoetter II, known around the world as Reverend Ike. Although the theater was already lavish, Reverend Ike added new embellishments, buying Louis XV and Louis XVI furniture for what had been the men's smoking room, which he used as his library.

Today, according to Heather Shea, Spiritual Director and Head Minister, "United Palace is a transformational venue that fuses culture, spirituality and entertainment. We promote spiritual artistry, stressing the importance of people communing with the artist within themselves," she says. The venue hosts a variety of events including concerts, some of which are spiritual in nature. These include a 2018 event with hugely-popular Mexican-born singer and Pastor Jesus Adrian Romero, presenting Latin Christian Music. A Christmas Cantata performed annually by a Korean church also brings in large audiences. In addition, United Palace shows movies, hosts dance events, invites local artists to perform and provides community programming through partner organizations. The space is also

rented out for graduations, films, special events like a Carnival Cruise product launch and photo shoots. According to both Shea and Executive Producer Mike Fitelson who manages programming, public events are popular with both onsite visitors and attendees who participate online. "The space serves performing arts well as it has excellent sight lines and acoustics from its old movie palace days," Fitelson notes.

On the spiritual side, there are Sunday services and programs such as Open Heart Conversations where teachers and leaders share their ideas, helping to foster dialogue, understanding and human connection. Monthly Shamanic Circles incorporate drumming, meditation and movement encouraging visitors to connect with their innermost selves.



Photos by United Palace.

United Palace employs an integrated marketing campaign using tactics including classic public relations, advertising, social media and cross-promotions with other organizations. According to Fitelson, in 2018, two hundred days were occupied with public programming. "The place was built as a place for the neighborhood to congregate," he says. "We are delighted it continues to fulfill that function."

Other landmarked New York City buildings that began as theaters have also been converted to churches. The Loew's Paradise Theater at 2403 Grand Concourse in The Bronx was constructed during the era of grand movie palaces and later also used for live entertainment. Built in 1929, it was designed by John Ebersohn who wanted the Paradise to evoke the art and architecture of the late Renaissance or early Baroque period. The exterior was designated as a landmark in 1997 with interior designation following nine years later. As audiences dwindled, the building ran into financial difficulties and was

leased in 2012 by the World Changers Church, led by Atlanta-based televangelist Creflo Dollar.

The Regent Theater was also a significant motion picture theater. Located at 1906-1916 Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Boulevard in Manhattan, it was built from 1912-13 and also designed by Thomas Lamb. In 1994 the exterior of the buildings was landmarked; the interior was renovated and renewed in 2006. After many changes in ownership, in 1964 The Regent Theater was purchased from RKO Theatres, Inc., by the First Corinthian Baptist Church, an African-American congregation formed in March, 1939. The congregation worked with the Conservancy on restoration of portions of its polychrome terra cotta façade in 2002-2004, but this large building has additional deferred maintenance, including the former theater's marquee entrance. Today, First Corinthian is led by Michael A. Walrond Jr., a charismatic and sought-after teacher and preacher. Under his leadership, the church

Left: Different events held at United Palace.
Bottom: Loews Paradise Theatre, current World Changers Church.



Photo by Jim Henderson.

Photo by United Palace.



Left: Loews Valencia Theatre, current Tabernacle of Prayer. Right: Rolland Theatre (or Parkway Theater), currently Holy House of Prayer.

has experienced exponential growth, and has undertaken major window restoration and interior renovations.

Thomas Lamb was also the architect for The Mark Hellinger Theater at 237 West 51st Street in Manhattan's theater district. Built for Warner Brothers in 1929 as the Hollywood Theater, it has a lavish display of Baroque-inspired gilded plaster statuary and elaborate wall and ceiling paintings. The Mark Hellinger showcased movies and then vaudeville until 1934, when it was first converted for use as a legitimate theater where it was home to many Broadway plays. The highly decorated interior was landmarked in 1987. In 1991 the building was sold to the Times Square Church.

Loew's Valencia Theater at 165-11 Jamaica Avenue, Queens, was designed by architect John Eberson and built in 1928. The 3554-seat structure was the first of the "Wonder Theaters" built to serve major population centers outside midtown Manhattan. The building's exterior, with a brick and glazed terra-cotta facade inspired by Spanish and Mexican architecture, was landmarked in 1999. In 1977 Loew's closed the Valencia Theater and donated it to the Tabernacle of Prayer for All People, a church congregation formerly located in Brooklyn. Since the Tabernacle took over the property it has maintained the building's exterior almost completely intact.

The 700 seat Holy House of Prayer at 1768 St. John's Place, Brownsville, Brooklyn, once had a "huge congregation," according to volunteer Dorothy Crawford who has been affiliated with the church for twenty-five years. Now, Dorothy says, "it's a challenge to fill the seats" at Sunday, Friday and Wednesday worship services.

Time, bad weather and lack of funds have resulted in burst pipes as well as a collapsed ceiling and wall damage so that sometimes church services have had to be cancelled. (Issues with the physical plant have besieged many of the large theater/churches where congregations have deferred



Bottom: Worship at First Corinthian Baptist Church, former Regent Theater.



maintenance of roofs, marquees and facades.)

The theater originally in this space was built for William Rolland, a Yiddish theater producer. It opened in 1929 having cost a million dollars to build with a neo-Moorish design by Harrison Wiseman. In 1935, the theater's name was changed to the Parkway Theater. By then, Brownsville was one of the city's largest Eastern European Jewish communities, with Yiddish still spoken everywhere. Since the theater could hold large audiences, many High Holy Days celebrations also took place here, as did rallies for voter registration.

In 1954, the Hebrew Actors Union, a group of actors from the old Yiddish theaters, chose the Parkway as home base for their productions that year, planning to become a traveling theater group on the Yiddish playhouse circuit. As Yiddish theater became less popular, and many Jews moved out of Brownsville, the plan failed. In 1956 the theater was sold to the Holy House of Prayer for All People and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2010.

Although facing obstacles, Holy House of Prayer remains a community fixture where Crawford runs a soup kitchen that feeds as many as three hundred diners Wednesday evenings. Another community entity, St. John's Bread and Life, brings its mobile soup kitchen to the building's grounds on Mondays and Thursdays for lunch.

Changing worship patterns are pushing many religious communities toward innovation and reinvention in order to remain vital community organizations. Former vast movie theaters, like United Palace, were once cathedrals of entertainment. Then they transformed into cathedrals of worship; today they are revamping and renewing themselves further by showcasing an array of performances and movies along with spiritual offerings.

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A Modern Church on Madison Square

by Glen Umberger

Left: Madison Square Presbyterian Church. (Richard M. Upjohn, 1853, demolished 1906).

Of the nearly 1,700 landmarks designated in New York City since 1965, approximately ten percent are sacred sites.¹ Included on this exclusive list are many iconic houses of worship such as Trinity Wall Street (Richard Upjohn, 1846), St. Patrick's Cathedral (James Renwick, Jr., 1878), and Temple Emanu-El (Robert D. Kohn, 1927). Also on this list are many lesser-known, though equally significant buildings such as Oliver Street Baptist Church (Mariner's Temple, attrib. Minard Lafever or Isaac Lucas, 1842); Riverdale Presbyterian Church (James Renwick, Jr., 1863), and Reformed Church of Huguenot Park (Ernest Flagg, 1924). Landmark designation is granted to protect architecturally, historically, and culturally significant buildings throughout the five boroughs yet New York City has also been home to countless sacred sites that could have been designated as landmarks but are no longer extant.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the neighborhood surrounding Madison Square (a six acre parcel which opened to the public as a city

park in May 1847) boasted several grand houses of worship including an Episcopal Church, a Baptist Church, a Methodist Church, and a Presbyterian Church; these would be joined by several others constructed over the next two decades to serve the spiritual needs of the growing population in this part of New York City. Of these original four congregations, the Presbyterians occupied the most visually prominent location on a lot directly facing the Square along Madison Avenue at East 24th Street.²

The congregation of **Madison Square Presbyterian Church** was organized in early 1853 when the former Pearl Street Presbyterian Church then located at Elm (today Elk Street) and Pearl Street was dissolved due to declining membership and was merged with the Central Presbyterian Church, located on Broome Street (fig. 1).³ The merger of the two congregations increased the viability of Central Presbyterian, which allowed the congregation to remain on Broome Street until 1866 when it moved uptown, but also provided for the establishment of a new congregation, "to supply more adequately the religious wants in what was then the upper part of the city."⁴ The site chosen for the new church, on the southeast corner of Madison Avenue and East 24th Street was a vast improvement over the crowded conditions parishioners faced downtown. As the church's minister, the Rev. Dr. William Adams, explained "[t]he site ... must strike all as peculiarly pleasant and favorable. It was at once conspicuous and retired; it was accessible, central, and yet removed from general



Fig. 1

disturbance."⁵ Additionally, the site chosen reflected a desire that the new church building "should occupy no obscured or invisible position, but at the same time they would not obtrude it upon a noisy thoroughfare."⁶ Accordingly, the southeast corner of East 24th Street and Madison Avenue met the congregation's specific criteria.

5 "Laying of the Corner-stone of Madison-square Presbyterian Church—Address by Rev. Dr. Adams," *New York Times*, July 13, 1853.

6 Ibid.

On Tuesday, February 8, 1853, the elders of the newly formed church appointed a Building Committee to oversee the erection of their church building. The committee hired as its architect, Richard Michell Upjohn (1828-1903), the son of the famous British-born architect, Richard Upjohn (1802-1878) who was well-known for his innovative Gothic Revival designs, the most famous of which was for Trinity Church (constructed between 1839 and 1846 on Broadway at the head of Wall Street). The younger Upjohn had just joined his father's firm in 1853 and the commission for the new Madison Square Presbyterian church was his first individual design project. Interestingly, it came at the time when the elder Upjohn had just completed the design for a new uptown chapel for Trinity Church then being constructed on West 25th Street, just two blocks west of the site for the new Madison Square Presbyterian Church. Located on the opposite side of Madison Square, Upjohn's Trinity Chapel was an imposing brownstone structure with especially fine proportions (fig. 2). Built in the English Gothic Revival style at a cost of \$260,000, it would serve Trinity Church's uptown



Fig. 2

2 Ibid.

3 Currently the site of the Jacob K. Javits Federal Office Building, 26 Federal Plaza (Alfred Easton Poor and Kahn & Jacobs, 1969).

4 Rev. Charles H. Parkhurst, *A Brief History of the Madison Square Presbyterian Church and its Activities* (New York: Irving Press, 1906), 22.

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Fig.3



communicants until World War II.⁷

In the 1850s, the Gothic Revival style was a tremendously popular and fashionable choice for many urban church buildings in New York City. This modern style offered a new architectural language for churches based in the historicism of the great Medieval Gothic cathedrals of Europe and was a marked departure from the more austere Christian church structures then common throughout the city, including the Greek Revival style Central Presbyterian Church on Broome Street.⁸ The Presbyterians, like the Episcopalians, thoroughly embraced the Gothic Revival style when constructing new buildings for several of their prominent congregations including: First

7 Located at 15 West 25th Street, Trinity Chapel was consecrated in 1855. In 1945, it was purchased by the Serbian Orthodox Church and renamed the Cathedral of St. Sava. It was designated a New York City Landmark on April 18, 1968 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places on December 16, 1982. The historic building suffered a catastrophic fire on May 1, 2016. See also James Miller, ed. *Miller's New York As It Is or, Stranger's Guide-book to the Cities of New York, Brooklyn and Adjacent Places: Comprising Notices of Every Object of Interest to Strangers; Including Public Buildings, Churches, Hotels, Places of Amusement, Literary Institutions, etc.* (New York: James Miller, 1867), 74.

8 Cf. Another fine example of the Greek-Revival style is the now defunct Village Presbyterian Church (formerly Thirteenth Street Presbyterian Church) at 145 West 13 Street (attributed to Samuel Thomson, 1846, altered, 1982).

Presbyterian Church, or “Old First” at Fifth Avenue and West 11th Street (Joseph C. Wells, 1846); Rutgers Presbyterian Church (today Church of St. Teresa of Avila) at Henry and Rutgers Street (Minard Lafever, 1841); and University Place Presbyterian Church (Richard Upjohn, 1845, demolished c. 1925) (fig. 3).⁹

The choice of this particular style by New York City Presbyterians is noteworthy. Traditionally, Presbyterians constructed “meetinghouses” in which the congregation (or the “church”) met for worship. These meetinghouses were simple in architectural form with interior spaces that were austere with the pulpit as the centerpiece. These buildings also lacked the stained glass windows, ostentatious furnishings, and iconography commonly found in traditional Gothic church buildings. The design and furnishing of the meetinghouse was not to be a distraction from the act of worshipping God. By the mid-nineteenth century, as congregations grew and became more prosperous, each began constructing imposing stone buildings that reflected the more fashionable styles of the day. The new building for the Madison Square Presbyterian Church accordingly would be a magnificent building that would be a modern and stylish addition to the developing urban neighborhood. In fact, as one contemporary guide book of the city later called Upjohn’s design, it was “exceedingly neat in style.”¹⁰ Another critic heralded it as one of

9 Upjohn himself considered this design to be one of his best pieces of work.

10 The Church was included with a short description under the heading of “The Churches of New York,” noting that “[i]t is estimated that there are about 800 churches in New York; many of them being of great elegance. We annex brief notices of the more prominent and noteworthy.” James Miller, *Miller's New York as it is, or, Stranger's Guide-Book to the Cities of New York, Brooklyn and Adjacent Places: Comprising Notices of Every Object of Interest to Strangers; Including Public Buildings, Churches, Hotels, Places of Amusement, Literary Institutions, etc.* (New York: James Miller, 1867), 76.

the best examples of “Early English” architecture in the city.¹¹

On Sunday, February 13, 1853 the church, not yet officially named, held its first public worship at Union Theological Seminary, on University Place with the formal organizational meeting held two weeks later on March 3rd, at which time the church was officially designated the Madison Square Presbyterian Church of the City of New York.¹² The congregation initially met at Union Theological Society and then at Hope Chapel on Broadway (between Fourth Street and Astor Place) until their new building was completed.

On the evening of Tuesday, July 12, 1853, a ceremony was held at the construction site of the future Madison Square Presbyterian Church to officially lay the cornerstone. Rev. Dr. Adams’ address that evening included the reasoning behind such a ceremony:

It [is] very natural and proper, in the commencement of public enterprises, to make some exposition of their object and design. In the erection of Christian churches and public edifices, custom appears to have rendered it almost imperative that, at an early stage in the proceedings, some appropriate exercises should mark the interest and importance of the occasion.¹³

During the ceremony, Adams “deposited a handsome copy of the Bible, printed in the present year; with a parchment sheet of paper containing the names of the Ruling Elders, Building Committee, Architects, etc.” into the

11 “What Has Been Done and What Can Be Done,” *The New Path* 1, no. 5 (September 1863), 58.

12 Rev. Charles H. Parkhurst, D.D. *A Brief History of the Madison Square Presbyterian Church and its Activities* (New York: Madison Square Presbyterian Church, 1906), 24.

13 “Laying of the Corner-stone of Madison-square Presbyterian Church—Address by Rev. Dr. Adams,” *New York Times*, July 13, 1853.

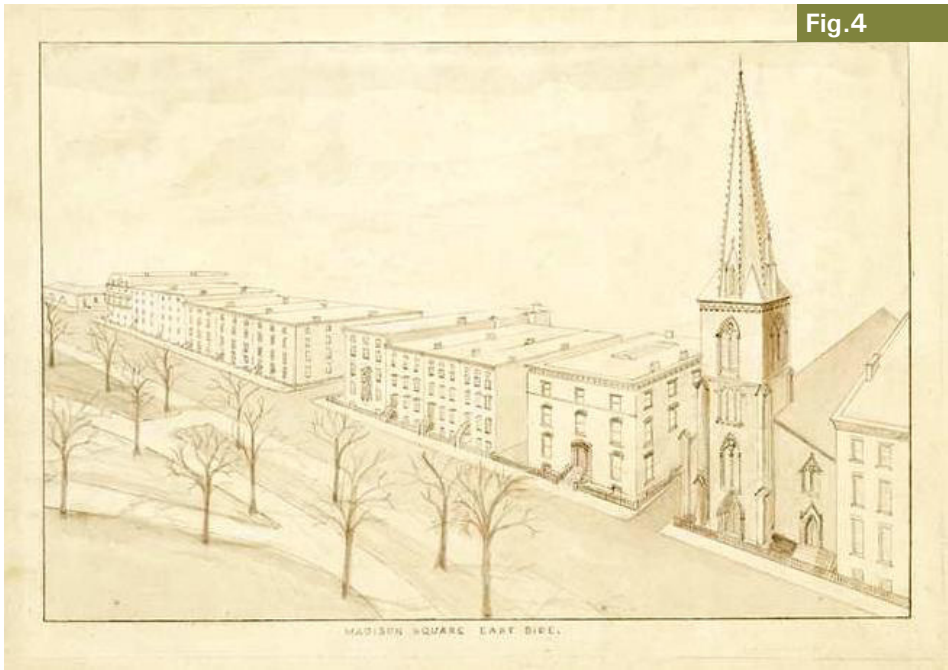


Fig.4

cornerstone.¹⁴

In reporting the occasion, during which “a large and respectable attendance [had] assembled,” the *New York Times* provided the following detailed description of the new church building:

The foundations are laid 14 feet deep... The entire length outside, including tower and lecture-room, will be 146 feet; breadth 74 feet 4 inches; space inside, 62 by 85, with a pulpit recess of 5 feet, making the entire length 90 feet. The tower will be 29 feet square, including the buttresses; height of tower and spire 208 [feet]. The edifice will be entirely built of Jersey freestone, similar to that of Trinity church. The walls 3 feet thick, with buttresses of 3 feet additional. The roof to be open, and supported without columns. There are to be galleries on either side, and an organ gallery. The lecture-room and Sunday-school room will each be 78 feet by 25 feet—the latter over the former. The pews to be of black walnut, and to seat

14 Also included was the following inscription: “Madison-square Presbyterian Church of the City of New York, organized in the Chapel of the Union Theological Society, University-place, on Thursday evening, March 3, 1853, by an association of 142 members; to which number there have been added 43, making a total of 185 members. Pastor Rev. Wm. Adams, D.D. Corner-stone laid July 12, 1853.” “Laying of the Corner-stone of Madison-square Presbyterian Church—Address by Rev. Dr. Adams,” *New York Times*, July 13, 1853.

1,200 persons. The style of architecture, transition of first and second pointed English (Gothic).¹⁵

The church’s 208-foot-tall spire was the tallest structure in the neighborhood at the time, yet still significantly shorter than the 281-foot spire at Trinity Wall Street, then the tallest structure in New York City (fig. 4).¹⁶ The *Times* observed that Dr. Adams “confessed a long cherished attachment to the spire of a Christian church ... [which] made the churches distinctive throughout a metropolis.”¹⁷ The spire served not only an aesthetic purpose, but a spiritual one as well: “the spires of our Churches pierce the skies, as so many conductors to avert the wrath of Heaven, and to point a whole population to the City of God.”¹⁸

15 “Laying of the Corner-stone of Madison-square Presbyterian Church—Address by Rev. Dr. Adams,” *New York Times*, July 13, 1853.

16 Irma and Paul Milstein Division of United States History, Local History and Genealogy, The New York Public Library. “Broadway, East Side. Madison Square. 23rd to 25th St.” *New York Public Library Digital Collections*. Accessed January 31, 2019. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e4-4235-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>

17 “Laying of the Corner-stone of Madison-square Presbyterian Church—Address by Rev. Dr. Adams,” *New York Times*, July 13, 1853.

18 Quote attributed to a Mr. Burke. “Laying of the Corner-stone of Madison-square Presbyterian Church—Address by Rev. Dr. Adams,” *New York Times*, July 13, 1853.

In the coming decades, it would also mark the location of another house of worship on the skyline of the expanding city (fig. 5).

On Sunday, December 24, 1854, Christmas Eve, the building was dedicated, having cost \$175,000 to construct and furnish.¹⁹ While the Rev. Dr. Charles H. Parkhurst briefly mentions a few details of the early days of the new congregation in his *Brief History of the Madison Square Presbyterian Church and its Activities* written a half a century later, is it curious to note that there is nothing specifically recorded about the congregations’ hopes for their new church in 1854.²⁰ Nevertheless, on the occasion of the cornerstone laying, the *New York Times* offered this insight:

If God should prosper them, and they should rear this building, their imaginations might not conceive all that might occur within its walls. They looked forward to the great multitude, who for many years should occupy its seats and join in its worship; and their hearts ascended in prayer to God, that it might be the birth-place of many religious hopes, and that a long line of faithful ministers should stand at its altars and proclaim the truth of the Lord.²¹

Unbeknownst to those early congregants, their Richard M. Upjohn-designed, Gothic Revival building would be relegated to the dustpan of history in less than five decades.

Perhaps the most famous building on Madison Square at the turn of the last century was the second incarnation of the famed Madison Square Garden (McKim, Mead & White, 1890, demolished 1925) (fig. 6). As the second tallest structure in New York City upon its completion, its

19 Rev. Charles H. Parkhurst, *A Brief History of the Madison Square Presbyterian Church and its Activities* (New York: Irving Press, 1906), 28.

20 “Church” here refers to both the physical building and the congregation as a whole.

21 “Laying of the Corner-stone of Madison-square Presbyterian Church—Address by Rev. Dr. Adams,” *New York Times*, July 13, 1853.



Fig.5



Fig.6



Fig.7

Moorish-Venetian-Renaissance-style tower and cupolas dominated the northeast corner of Madison Square Park, dwarfing the slender Gothic Revival spire of Madison Square Presbyterian Church two blocks to the south (fig. 7). The large scale of this civic structure may have inspired the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, which constructed an eleven story, full block headquarters building next door to the church in 1893 and with this development, the church became “increasingly restive under the growing encroachment of our neighbor’s building operations, for while we could not deny the elegance of the structure they were erecting,

it none the less on that account excluded what we considered our fair share of light and air, and by force of contrast practically destroyed the architectural grace and dignity of our church (fig. 8).”²² The neighborhood’s dramatic transformation was amplified a few years later with the completion of the 285-foot tall Fuller Building, colloquially known as the Flatiron Building (Daniel Burnham, 1902) on the southeast corner of Madison Square.

Madison Square Presbyterian Church, which *Munsey’s Magazine* noted in 1893 as one of the “[t]wo Presbyterian churches that stand

22 Rev. Charles H. Parkhurst, D.D. *A Brief History of the Madison Square Presbyterian Church and its Activities* (New York: Madison Square Presbyterian Church, 1906), 62.

among the most important of the denomination [in New York City],” was faced with a daunting decision.²³ The congregation could remain in their building that was quickly becoming functionally obsolete, hemmed in by the soaring towers of their commercial neighbors or, as so many contemporary congregations were doing, continue the march uptown to a more spacious locale and construct a modern edifice near where their parishioners were now living. The Rev. Charles H. Parkhurst (1842-1933), the senior minister at Madison Square Presbyterian Church, was resolute in his feelings that the church remain at Madison Square: “The fact is that

23 “The Presbyterian Church in New York,” *Munsey’s Magazine* 10, no. 3 (December 1893), 258.



Fig.8

every church that picks itself up bodily and runs away from the populations that swarm in the lower parts of the town make Christianity a smaller and cheaper thing in the estimation of the general community, and in that way subtracts from the efficiency of the churches that do not move up town.”²⁴ Parkhurst would later lament that “[o]ne of the most serious difficulties to which all churches situated below Forty-second Street are now or soon will be subjected is the uptown drift of our city population.”²⁵

When the Presbyterians chose the site for their building in 1853, it was purposeful and strategic. By placing the church in a visually prominent location away from the distractions of major thoroughfares, namely 23rd Street, Fifth Avenue, and Broadway, the church could attract the attention of the general public without having noisy neighbors interrupt Sunday services. Fronting the Square, their building would open onto green oasis in the midst of the ever expanding urban grid. Five decades later, their prime corner lot at East 24th Street and Madison Avenue would turn out to be the church’s greatest asset.

24 Rev. Charles H. Parkhurst, D.D., “Not ‘Church Extension’ at All,” *The Congregationalist* 77, no. 44 (November 3, 1892), 388.

25 Rev. Charles H. Parkhurst, D.D. *A Brief History of the Madison Square Presbyterian Church and its Activities* (New York: Madison Square Presbyterian Church, 1906), 73.

The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, less than five years in their new headquarters directly to the south of the church, was already looking to expand and desired to occupy the entire block of Madison Avenue between East 23rd Street and East 24th Street for their operations. In May 1894, after considering their options, members of the church leadership “unanimously agreed that we would not entertain the idea of ‘moving uptown,’ [and made] enquiries as to whether three suitable contiguous lots were obtainable elsewhere on the Square or upon some street or avenue adjacent thereto.”²⁶ A careful and lengthy search ensued and on Monday, February 2, 1903, the congregation of the Madison Square Presbyterian Church held a “Special Corporate Meeting” and approved the resolution to sell their building to the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. As a result of this complex real estate transaction, Metropolitan Life received the lot and improvements (the building) of the Madison Square Presbyterian Church in exchange for the sum of \$325,000 in cash and the conveyance of the lot directly across the street on the northeast corner of Madison Avenue and East 24th

26 Rev. Charles H. Parkhurst, D.D. *A Brief History of the Madison Square Presbyterian Church and its Activities* (New York: Madison Square Presbyterian Church, 1906), 61.

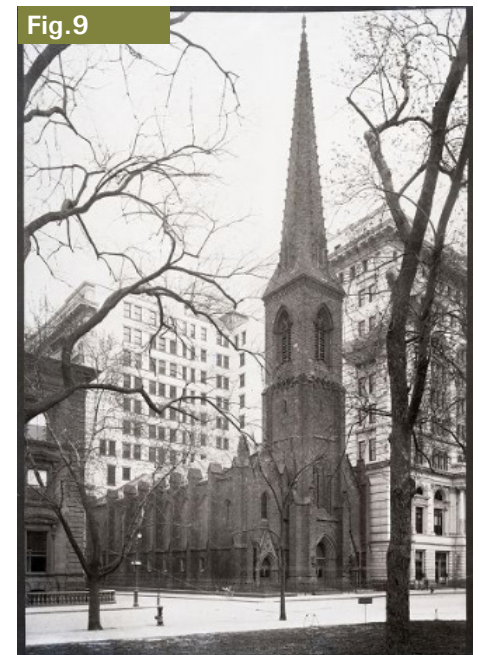


Fig.9

Street, which was then occupied by the Bishop mansion (fig. 9).²⁷ The mansion was purchased separately by Metropolitan Life and deeded to the Church as part of the transaction.²⁸ In response to the news of the sale, the *New-York Observer* pronounced, “[i]t is gratifying to know that this historic and useful church is to be known for another generation at least, as the Madison Square Presbyterian Church.”²⁹ Furthermore, the Church resolved “to proceed, without unnecessary delay, to erect thereon a church edifice and chapel of suitable character and dimensions, and to furnish and equip the same.”³⁰

A design of a church edifice of “suitable character” was awarded to the architectural firm of McKim, Mead & White, the premier “starchitects” of the day (long before such a term was coined) with the expressed understanding that “the sum which

27 “Vanishing of a Church,” *zz78*, no. 2004 (August 11, 1906), 252.

28 Rev. Charles H. Parkhurst, D.D. *A Brief History of the Madison Square Presbyterian Church and its Activities* (New York: Madison Square Presbyterian Church, 1906), 65-68.

29 “Sale of the Madison Square Church,” *The New-York Observer* 81, no. 2 (January 8, 1903), 49.

30 Rev. Charles H. Parkhurst, D.D. *A Brief History of the Madison Square Presbyterian Church and its Activities* (New York: Madison Square Presbyterian Church, 1906), 68.

Fig. 10



Fig. 11



the church could expend did not exceed \$325,000.”³¹ Stanford White (1853-1906) submitted a general scheme to the church’s building committee at the end of April 1903, “the elements of which were a bold portico and front, a dome above, the exterior materials to be brick and terra-cotta and the columns of marble and granite...” (fig. 10).³² White, a purveyor of the American Renaissance style of architecture had designed the nearby Madison Square Garden a decade earlier and the commission for the new Madison Square Presbyterian Church would stand as a beacon of modern architecture in stark contrast to the medieval-inspired dreary brownstone church building across the street. Both buildings would briefly stand together, side-by-side on Madison Square as a tangible illustration of the fleeting architectural history of the

neighborhood (fig. 11).³³

Stanford White’s Madison Square Presbyterian Church was still under construction on the evening of Monday, June 25, 1906 when White was murdered two blocks away at Madison Square Garden’s Roof Garden Theatre. Originally scheduled for completion in time for Easter Sunday, April 15, the project was already behind schedule and would not be completed until the autumn.³⁴

In July 1906, only a few weeks after White’s demise and while parishioners of the Madison Square Presbyterian Church were absent from the city on their respective summer holidays, Richard M. Upjohn’s first major architectural commission was succumbing to the wrecking

33 “The Madison Square Presbyterian Church in New York,” *The New-York Observer* 84, no. 27 (July 5, 1906), cover. Under the heading, “Secular and Religious,” the *Observer* editorialized that “[t]he picture on the front cover of this issue...will be of special interest not only to the members of Madison Square Church and friends and admirers of Dr. Parkhurst, but to all lovers of righteousness in and out of New York.”

34 “Not Open Until the Autumn,” *The New-York Observer* 84, no. 13 (March 29, 1906), 412. It is interesting that the *Observer* also noted that “[i]t has been customary to close the Madison Square Church from June to October, and this plan will be followed during the coming summer, the closing service in the old church being the last in the old building.”

crew. *The New-York Observer* noted under the heading of “Christian Activities in New York,” that “[t]he work of demolishing the old building of the Madison Square Presbyterian Church was begun last week.”³⁵ Less than a month later, the *Real Estate Record and Builders’ Guide* reported that “[t]he wrecking of the old Madison Square Presbyterian Church is nearly complete” adding that the crew was “seven days ahead of the 45-day limit on their contract.”³⁶ While demolition on Upjohn’s building was quickly proceeding during the summer months, construction on White’s building was nearing completion (fig. 12).³⁷

On Sunday morning October 14, 1906 at 11:00 a.m., the congregation of the Madison Square Presbyterian Church gathered to dedicate their new building. The Rev. Charles H. Parkhurst’s sermon, entitled “The Christian Church: The Source of Its Power and the Exercise of that Power in Moral Leadership,” included many references to the new church’s home, including one that dubbed it “an ecclesiastical gem in the midst of a commercial setting.”³⁸ Shortly before his death, Stanford White had described the style of the building accordingly:

The style of architecture of the Madison Square Presbyterian Church is that of the

35 “Tearing Down an Historic Church,” *The New-York Observer* 84, no. 29 (July 19, 1906), 89.

36 The New York House Wrecking Company, 514 East 23rd Street was responsible for the demolition work. “Vanishing of a Church,” *The Real Estate Record and Builders’ Guide* 78, no. 2004 (August 11, 1906), 252.

37 Rev. Charles H. Parkhurst, D.D. *A Brief History of the Madison Square Presbyterian Church and its Activities* (New York: Madison Square Presbyterian Church, 1906), 71. *The New-York Observer* reported on October 4, 1906 that the “main auditorium is being rushed to completion...” “Plans of the Madison Square Church,” *The New-York Observer* 84, no. 40 (October 4, 1906), 443.

38 George Redington Montgomery, *Dedication of the Madison Square Presbyterian Church* (New York: 1906), 17. Cf. “Madison Square Church Dedicated: Sermon by the Rev. Charles H. Parkhurst, D.D.,” *The New-York Observer* 84, no. 42 (October 18, 1906), 505.

Fig. 12



Fig. 13



early Christian, with a modified Byzantine treatment in the interior. It is to a certain extent a protest against the prevalent idea among laymen that a building to be churchlike must be built in medieval style. The style of architecture known as Gothic has nothing to do with the simple forms of early Christian religion, or with that of the Reformation, or with the style of architecture which prevailed in our own country when it had its birth as a nation.

All these, which belong to the Protestant religion and to us, have no affiliation whatsoever with Gothic, but with the classical style. The Gothic or medieval form of architecture belongs absolutely to the Roman Catholic Church, and was developed under monastic influences and traditions which were obtained from the ninth to fifteenth century. Nor is the plan of the churches and cathedrals built in medieval style that of a modern

church, but is properly fitted only to the forms and rituals of the Catholic Church. *In the design of the Madison Square Presbyterian Church the chief aim is to treat it as a modern church and in a style natural to and belonging to the religion which it represents and the country in which it is built* (emphasis added).³⁹

The *Record and Guide* also declared that it was “a radical departure from old forms of ecclesiastical architecture, as all can see.”⁴⁰ White had clearly thought about the relationship between the building’s style, location, and purpose and as such, this was a building specifically designed to be recognized by passersby as a modern, New York City Protestant church.

The new building was also intended to inspire a sense of reverence and awe in the congregation. As Parkhurst opined in his dedicatory sermon:

We have the right in a humble way to be proud of this splendidly architected [sic] home in which we are to meet, some of us for a good many years, some of us for not so many years, but I hope for a good while. God, who was the first architect and decorator, has, of course, an architectural sense of proportion and of beauty, and must like nice things with an infinite liking and so, I believe, is particularly pleased with this new building on the Square. He is too careful in his own production of beautiful objects not to be appreciative of beauty—and not to be inclined interestedly toward those who have wrought here with affectionate skill to the gratification of the human eye, and of the divine eye, and to the promotion of the splendid solemnity of his temple of

31 Rev. Charles H. Parkhurst, D.D. *A Brief History of the Madison Square Presbyterian Church and its Activities* (New York: Madison Square Presbyterian Church, 1906), 70. In March 1907, it was conservatively estimated that the new building cost \$400,000. See William T. Demarest, “A Great Year of Presbyterian Church Building in New York City,” *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society* 4, no. 1 (March 1907), 2.

32 Rev. Charles H. Parkhurst, D.D. *A Brief History of the Madison Square Presbyterian Church and its Activities* (New York: Madison Square Presbyterian Church, 1906), 70.

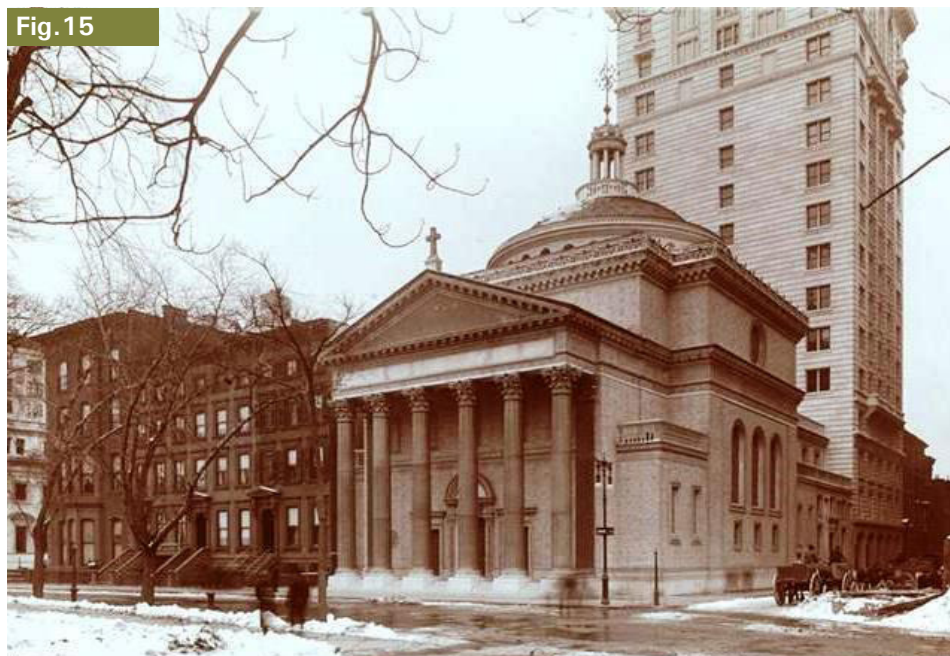
39 George Redington Montgomery, *Dedication of the Madison Square Presbyterian Church* (New York: 1906), 17. Cf. “Madison Square Church Dedicated: Sermon by the Rev. Charles H. Parkhurst, D.D.,” *The New-York Observer* 84, no. 42 (October 18, 1906), 505.

40 “Vanishing of a Church,” *Real Estate Record and Builders’ Guide* 78, no. 2004 (August 11, 1906), 252.

Fig. 14



Fig. 15



worship.⁴¹

The congregation must certainly have been in awe when they listened to that sermon and looked around their sumptuous new sanctuary which had “a charming color effect—the light gray oak of the woodwork lending a sort of atmospheric effect through

which one realizes the beauty of the gold and colors of the decoration. The dome, with its mosaic lining, towers above one” (fig. 13).⁴² It must have been especially impressive to longtime congregants who were used to the relatively dark, Gothic-inspired interior of their former church home (fig. 14).

41 George Redington Montgomery, *Dedication of the Madison Square Presbyterian Church* (New York: 1906), 17. Cf. “Madison Square Church Dedicated: Sermon by the Rev. Charles H. Parkhurst, D.D.,” *The New-York Observer* 84, no. 42 (October 18, 1906), 508.

42 William T. Demarest, “A Great Year of Presbyterian Church Building in New York City,” *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society* 4, no. 1 (March 1907), 2.

There were some architectural critics of the day who were not impressed with what was Stanford White’s final design commission (fig. 15). Based on its unique architectural style, both for its dramatic departure from the Gothic and for its heavy reliance on ancient Roman architecture, it was criticized as “heathen.”⁴³ Others suggested that the exterior was more “scholastic rather than the ecclesiastical,” inferring that the church looked no different than White’s Gould Memorial Library (1900) for the University Heights campus of New York University (fig. 16).⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects awarded it their Gold Medal of Honor, recognizing it as an important work of modern architecture. Likewise, the *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society* lauded that of the seven “fine [Presbyterian] structures” built in the city in 1906, “the most notable of these new edifices, architecturally and artistically, is the Madison Square Presbyterian Church.”⁴⁵ As for style, the *Journal* noted that it “differs from any other Presbyterian church building in the city.”⁴⁶

One remarkable architectural characteristic of the new Madison Square Presbyterian Church was the use of a variety of rich materials to create a vibrant color scheme. In fact, it was the first time in the United States that glazed tiles were used to execute such a polychromatic

43 Richard Guy Wilson, “Architecture and the Reinterpretation of the Past in the American Renaissance,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 18, no. 1 (Spring 1983), 83.

44 William T. Demarest, “A Great Year of Presbyterian Church Building in New York City,” *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society* 4, no. 1 (March 1907), 2.

45 Collectively, the seven new structures and lots cost the denomination \$2.5 million and were located from Madison Square in the south to West Farms in the Bronx. William T. Demarest, “A Great Year of Presbyterian Church Building in New York City,” *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society* 4, no. 1 (March 1902), 1.

46 William T. Demarest, “A Great Year of Presbyterian Church Building in New York City,” *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society* 4, no. 1 (March 1902), 2.



Fig. 16

façade.⁴⁷ In contrast to the dark monochromatic brownstone of its predecessor across the street, White’s building featured ornamental details executed in lively hues of green, blue, and yellow, set against buff-colored brick (fig. 17). Especially noteworthy were the six, 30-foot-tall, green granite Corinthian columns supporting the portico, and the colored terra-cotta elements were especially made to perfectly harmonize with these polished granite columns, creating a “jewel of architecture.”⁴⁸ The columns, in turn, supported a heavy terracotta pediment with gold painted figures set against a blue background in the tympanum.⁴⁹ *The New York Tribune* described the pediment:

The decoration has for its subject ‘The Adoration of the Shrine of Truth.’ The central shrine or tabernacle is supported by floating angels with harp and scroll, and these angels, who, with the cherubs placed at different points in the composition, chant the praises of God, are symbolic of religious song and word. The knight on the right of the shrine represents the Church Militant. In the same position on the other side is a shepherd whose meaning is equally obvious, and the two together illustrate

47 Donn Barber, “The Hartford Times Building,” *The American Architect and Architecture* 118, no. 2328 (August 4, 1920), 140.

48 Donn Barber, “The Hartford Times Building,” *The American Architect and Architecture* 118, no. 2328 (August 4, 1920), 140.

49 The pediment was a gift of Miss Flora E. Isham in memory of her brothers, Samuel and Charles H. Isham.

the equality of the mighty and the humble. The celestial bodies are also indicated against a starry blue background. The idea embodied in this decoration is very beautiful and it has been developed with remarkable grace and skill. Both in its linear qualities and in the play of subtle modulation which belongs to a work in relief the sculpture is free and even picturesque, yet kept well in hand, so that the final impression received is one of suave delicacy.⁵⁰

White’s triangular pediment, with its gilded sculptural figures and colored tympanum, softened the severe Roman-inspired architecture and provided an additional artistic element to building’s façade.⁵¹

The distinctive style of White’s Madison Square Presbyterian Church was also used to set the building apart from surrounding buildings, and in particular, the new Metropolitan Life Insurance Tower across East 24th Street on the site of the old church edifice (fig. 18).⁵² The tower, designed by Napoleon LeBrun & Sons and officially completed in 1909 was modelled on St. Mark’s Campanile

50 “Re-Erection of a Well-Known Pediment,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 15, no. 12, part 1 (December 1920), 276.

51 The pediment sculpture was executed by sculptor Adolph A. Weinman and painter H. Siddons Mowbray.

52 The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company Tower was added to the National Register of Historic Places on January 29, 1972; listed as a National Historic Landmark on June 2, 1978; and designated an Individual Landmark by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission on June 13, 1989. It was the tallest building in the world from 1909 to 1913.

Fig. 17



Fig. 18



in Venice, the 323-foot, 16th century bell tower that had collapsed in July 1902 and was then being reconstructed; it was completely restored in March 1912. Soaring to a record-breaking height of 700 feet, the Met Life Tower (as it is today known) was considerable taller than



its ecclesiastical neighbor across the street and, according to the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects,

a[n architectural] treatment was necessary, therefore, in which delicacy and beauty of detail would be combined with scale which could not be crushed by surrounding skyscrapers, and, for this reason, a domed structure was decided upon, which permitted the use of an imposing portico of columns, the shafts of which, in pale green granite, would be over 30 feet high, and would outweigh in scale anything in the surrounding buildings.

The Church was built upon a marble basement, of a special molded brick, and terra-cotta, semi-glazed. Running through the brick was a checker pattern of slightly varying color, at the intersections of which the brick headers were stamped with a cross (fig. 19). As a foil to the white marble of surrounding buildings, a more liberal use of color in the terra-cotta was adopted than in any building yet erected in this country. In fact it was the first important structure actually built of glazed white and colored terra-cotta. The dome was covered with yellow and green tiles, crowned by a gold lantern (fig. 20).⁵³

53 See Edward Warren Hoak and Willis Humphry Church, "The Madison Square Presbyterian Church," *Masterpieces of American Architecture: Museums, Libraries, Churches and Other Public Buildings* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2002).



While White's church building was not the tallest on the square, like Upjohn's earlier version had been when it was finished, even so, its architectural style and color gave it the *gravitas* it deserved. Unfortunately, it would only occupy its site facing Madison Square for 13 years (fig. 21).

On Tuesday, May 6, 1919, the *New York Times* reported that "[w]orkmen began yesterday to tear down the Madison Square Presbyterian Church at the northeast corner of Madison Avenue and Twenty-fourth Street [and] it's destruction will remove one of the most interesting as well as one of the most costly religious edifices in the city" (fig. 22).⁵⁴ In its obituary, the *Times* lamented, "its demolition is a distinct architectural loss to the city."⁵⁵ To add insult to injury, the *Times* concluded,

54 "Raze Parkhurst Church: Famous Piece of Architecture Making Way for Office Building," *New York Times* (May 6, 1919). Irma and Paul Milstein Division of United States History, Local History and Genealogy, The New York Public Library. "Manhattan: Madison Avenue - 24th Street" New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed March 26, 2019. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47dd-4634-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>

55 Raze Parkhurst Church: Famous Piece of Architecture Making Way for Office Building," *New York Times* (May 6, 1919).

[t]he handsome building, which would cost over \$500,000 today to build, was valueless, and the wrecking firm, in addition to being paid for removing the structure, will get all of the valuable material, including the six magnificent pale green granite columns in front of the classical portico. These columns are among the largest and finest in the city, being thirty feet in height.⁵⁶

Some architectural elements from the building found their way into museum collections, including a doorway that turned up in storage at the Brooklyn Museum; a Corinthian capital (comprised of 32 individual terra-cotta sections) is in storage at the Ohio State University, and several pieces were salvaged and removed to Stanford White's former summer home, Box Hill in the village of St. James on the North Shore of Long Island.⁵⁷ Other fixtures, including the church's Tiffany windows, pews, and pipe organ found new homes. Most notably, the pale green granite columns, along with windows, pilasters and cornices were repurposed and used in the construction of the new Hartford Times Building (Dunn Barber, 1920) in Hartford, Connecticut (fig. 23).⁵⁸

In August 1919, the *Architectural Review* printed an *in memoriam* of the Church with a photograph captioned, "An architectural masterpiece that is now being demolished."⁵⁹ But, Madison Square Presbyterian Church as a congregation had already ceased to exist two years earlier when it was consolidated along with the University Place Presbyterian Church into the First Presbyterian Church on Fifth Avenue in Greenwich Village. The church building on Madison

56 Raze Parkhurst Church: Famous Piece of Architecture Making Way for Office Building," *New York Times* (May 6, 1919).

57 Eve M. Kahn, "Madison Square Church Survives in Fragments," *New York Times* (December 1, 2011).

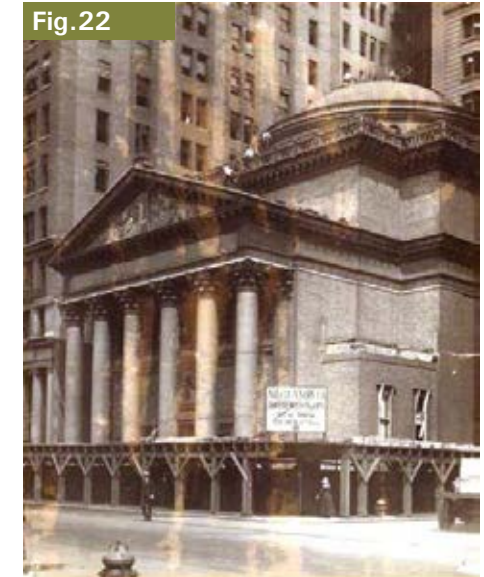
58 Donn Barber, "The Hartford Times Building," *The American Architect and Architecture* 118, no. 2328 (August 4, 1920), 140-143.

59 *The Architectural Review* 9, no. 2 (August 1919), frontispiece.

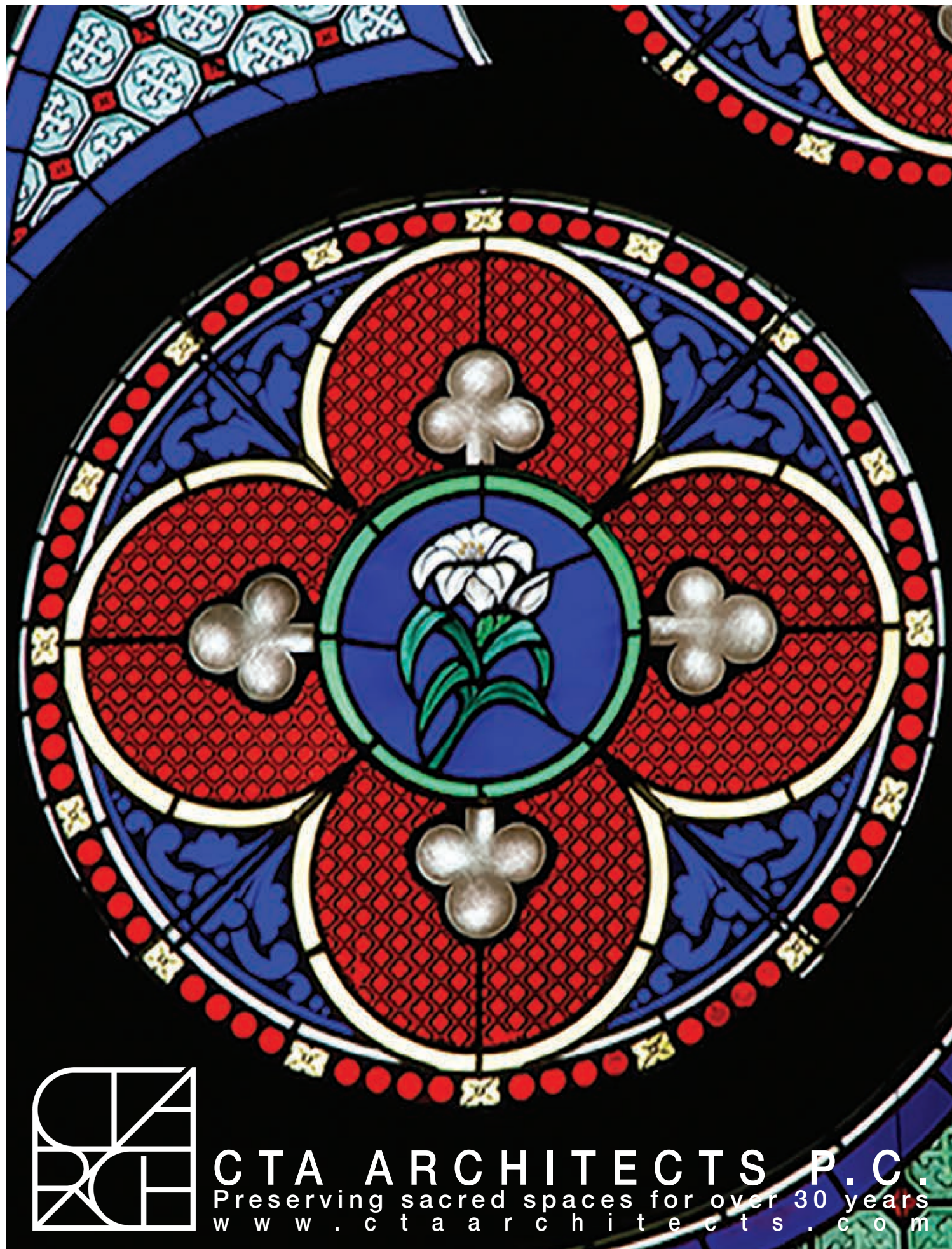


Square, recognized as Stanford White's architectural masterpiece was sold, like its predecessor to the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company for the paltry sum of \$500,000. While it is no longer possible to climb the marble steps and pass between the polished green granite Corinthian columns into the domed sanctuary of the Madison Square Presbyterian Church, David Dunlap reminds us that "New York's shortest-lived landmark and Stanford White's own favorite building were one and the same: the Madison Square Presbyterian Church."⁶⁰

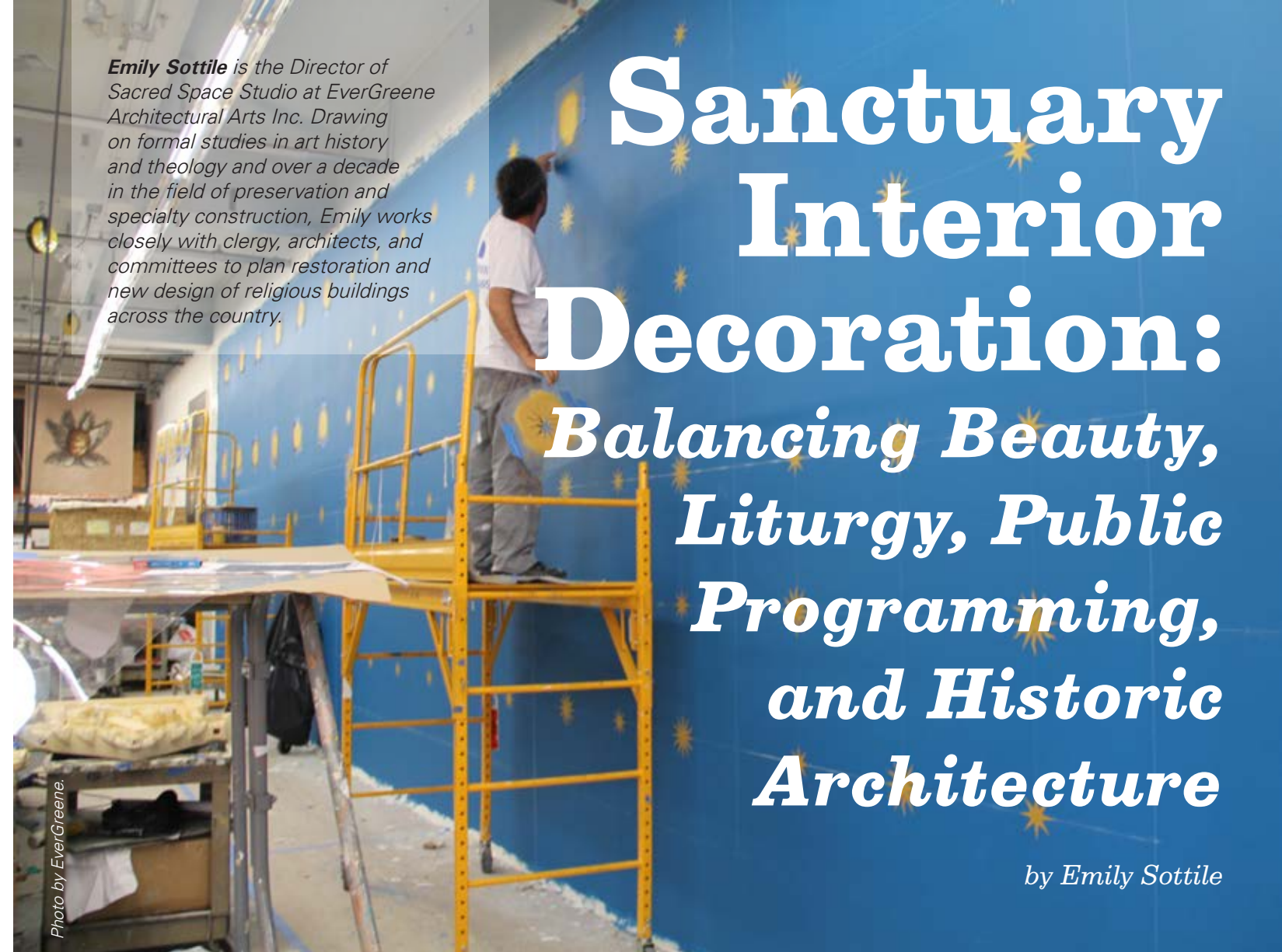
60 David W. Dunlap, *From Abyssinian to Zion: A Guide to Manhattan's Houses of Worship* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 136



of two masterful Madison Square Presbyterian Church buildings, buildings which offer us a tantalizing glimpse into the rich architectural diversity of nineteenth-century New York houses of worship.



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Emily Sottile is the Director of Sacred Space Studio at EverGreene Architectural Arts Inc. Drawing on formal studies in art history and theology and over a decade in the field of preservation and specialty construction, Emily works closely with clergy, architects, and committees to plan restoration and new design of religious buildings across the country.

Sanctuary Interior Decoration: *Balancing Beauty, Liturgy, Public Programming, and Historic Architecture*

by Emily Sottile

Above: Artwork in progress for St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Student Center, Lincoln, NE.

"Religion & Art are a celebration of Man's relationship with the divine. They share very much in common; religion reveals a unity of truth and art renders this truth imaginable. Each gives life to the other. Religion without art could be beyond man's grasp and art without religion would have no place in man's heart." - Dedication plaque in McGill University's interfaith Birks Chapel.

Beauty may feel superficial when weighing investing in restoring or renovating an old house of worship against feeding the hungry. But when we look to nature, we find beauty is never frivolous. Art has a very specific job: to draw in. We need only look at a flower that beckons a bee, or a peacock a mate, to see this in action and to know beauty is not the end point but an entry point.

The answer to the question of whether to dedicate resources to mission or the building is: both. They are integrally related. Communities are often surprised to discover how willing donors are to support the reinstatement of lost historic artistry. Stabilization of the plaster may be the most pressing component of a restoration but it's often the introduction or reinstatement of the artwork that galvanizes a community.

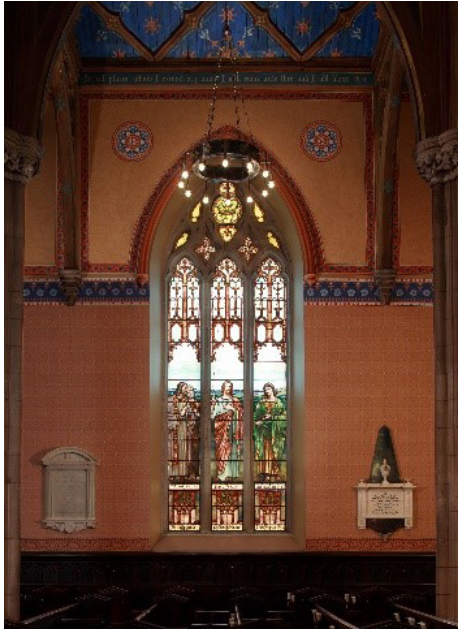
GRACE CHURCH, BROOKLYN:
Restoration of Lost Artistry

Grace Church in Brooklyn’s Historic Garden District (Hicks Street, Brooklyn Heights) was originally conceived of as a mediation on salvation history, specifically the reinstatement of the Garden. Using patterns taken from Augustus Pugin’s design books, every surface at Grace Church invites theological engagement: A vine motif in the aisle flooring, patterning of seed pods opening into crosses on the lower walls, a celestial ceiling featuring stars on a blue background amid wood grained neo-gothic beams recalling gazing at the firmament through tree branches. Through much of the twentieth century this

vibrant Victorian artistry program was hidden beneath beige and brown post-historic paint, but clues from the magnificent historic artistry were ghosting (barely visible) through the presentation layers. A significant part of the restoration of Grace Church was comprised of plaster stabilization (using consolidation methods) and preparation of the substrate for a long-lasting painting campaign. A historic finishes investigation and plaster survey revealed original paint colors and patterning, and informed treatment recommendations and budgets.

Well-designed liturgical artistry programs are layered and work on a number of levels. Symbolism can speak explicitly to those literate in the vocabulary, while the formalistic qualities can work in a more subtle way. Color, rhythm, and scale can have profound psychological impacts. At Grace Church the color palette was carefully evaluated in a collaborative process with church leadership, architecture and design team, and lighting specialists. Using the Victorian palette as a place of departure the colors were adjusted to harmonize with the architecture under the new lighting conditions (making colors read very differently from the historic gas light). In the early stages of the restoration it was assumed reinstating the decoration would be cost prohibitive but the options were evaluated holistically and the team arrived upon creative solutions to remedy plaster pathologies while bringing back the lost artwork.

Left: Grace Church before restoration.
Right: Grace Church after restoration.



ST. JOSEPH’S CO-CATHEDRAL: Restoration &
New Design in a Historic Building

The Co-Cathedral of St. Joseph’s in Brooklyn underwent a comprehensive renewal in 2013. The building was 101 years old and had just been elevated to cathedral status. The historic plaster, scagliola, paint, and murals were severely compromised. While significant stabilization and restoration was needed, much of the renewal involved adjustments to serve the liturgical functions specific to a cathedral. This included reconfiguration of the predella (altar platform) to ensure sufficient space for candidates for the priesthood to lay prostrate during ordinations, choir stalls to accommodate diocesan liturgies, and a canopy to better integrate the cathedra (Bishop’s seat) from the historic St. James Cathedral into its new environs.

For the first century of its life, St. Joseph’s parish served the Prospect Heights community, but in its new role as a cathedral it was suddenly responsible for serving and representing a diverse diocese (including the boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens) where liturgies are celebrated in more than thirty languages. In keeping with tradition St. Joseph’s used art to

Left: St. Joseph’s Co-Cathedral before restoration.
Right: St. Joseph’s Co-Cathedral after restoration.



signal her role as the mother church. Notable elements include murals of apparitions of Mary (patroness of twenty-two countries with significant populations in the diocese), symbols of the sacraments above the central aisle which invite parallels between the procession towards the altar with the heavenward Christian pilgrimage, and a new mural of American saints and New Yorkers with causes for Sainthood set amongst familiar landmarks of the diocese (the Brooklyn Bridge, and Queens Globesphere), and ethnically diverse celestial beings. All of the new artwork was created to seamlessly integrate with the style, palette, and

scale of the figures and ornament in the historic murals and stained glass. When confronted with the decision to invest in the restoration of St. Joseph’s in Brooklyn, Co-Cathedral pastor, Monsignor Kieran Harrington, asked, “Don’t the poor deserve to spend time amid beauty?” Indeed, while access to museums, the symphony, and fine homes may be restricted to those who can afford it, houses of worship have long served as venues for encounter with musical and visual arts to all who enter as congregants or visitors.



Theoretical Framework
for Ecclesiastical Art &
Decoration

- Ecclesiastical art has two primary jobs:
- Formalistic: to support the architecture
 - Theological: to support the liturgy

Supporting the architecture may mean selecting appropriate colors and treatments to help the ornament read the way it was meant to: to give a sense of scale to vast areas; to anchor elements that may appear to float; to give visual weight to the lower areas and a sense of the heavens to those above; to give the eye dynamic engagement in some places, and rest in others. It also means solving logistical issues such as hiding or better integrating a joint, HVAC component, repair, or new liturgical consideration. It also means working in a language compatible with the architecture.

Supporting the liturgy may mean something as abstract as creating a sense of procession or as practical as ensuring sufficient room for rites to take place unimpeded. Artwork should help all who enter understand what's important by giving visual primacy at a glance and may provide opportunities to engage with the unfolding of the mysteries of faith through imagery specific to the devotions of the community.

When done well, the liturgical artistry program is guided by the architecture, liturgy, and historic precedent. The key to a successful project, whether historic restoration, new construction, or adaptive re-use, is making appropriate decisions about visual language, style, palette, and materials. The Roman Catholic church codified a visual language of ecclesiastical art and architecture still in use today, but the principals of good ecclesiastical decoration are applicable to any denomination.

MARBLE COLLEGIATE CHURCH,
MANHATTAN: Preservation

When we talk about art and beauty in houses of worship we tend to think of stained glass, murals and statues, but architectural artwork encompasses the walls themselves (which may bear simple or elaborate two-dimensional ornamentation), as well as, three-dimensional ornament such as molding, ribs, and capitals. Marble Collegiate Church in Manhattan is an 1854 building with elegant Victorian stenciling, patterning, and finishes throughout the sanctuary. The community's restoration efforts focused on consolidation of delaminating plaster (cleaving from the attachment system or general deterioration), painting in the historically-informed palette, and reinstatement of compromised patterns with an eye to preserving the 19th century interior for use in the 21st century.

Deferring maintenance can be costly, but the funds aren't always available to do everything at once. Congregations are often surprised by how developing a wholistic restoration or renewal program can elevate a scope of work from maintenance to revitalization. Looking at the big picture (which may include all the things that need to be repaired for life safety and access to reach it, straight painting, conservation of historic artwork, as well as the beautiful things that may fall under a wish list if funds are available) can seem like a very tall order, but has concrete benefits. A comprehensive vision with associated budgets allows for a strategic plan of attack and allocation of resources on a project that may seem unsurmountable.



ELDRIDGE STREET SYNAGOGUE,
MANHATTAN: Capturing a Moment in Time

Eldridge Street Synagogue is an amazing example of a successful fight to save a threatened religious landmark and spiritual home. Investigation of the plaster conditions revealed the most appropriate restoration methodology, but there were important decisions to make about what preservation of the 1887 interior meant in the context of a severely compromised building that would reinstate its liturgical function, while simultaneously operating as a museum. Rather than making it look brand new, the decision was made to return the historic artwork

(some of which was conserved and some of which was replicated) in sound condition but with a patina of age, appearing as if the synagogue had been well preserved for over a century. The patinaed artistry program is liturgically appropriate for the synagogue's religious services and a powerful tool used by the Museum at Eldridge Street to transport visitors to a time when the synagogue served the growing Eastern European Jewish population setting in the Lower East Side by way of Ellis Island.

Opposite page
Top: Restoration work at Marble Collegiate Church.
Bottom: Marble Collegiate Church after restoration.

Right: Restoration work in progress in the gallery (top) and sanctuary (bottom) of Eldridge St. Synagogue.
Bottom: Eldridge St. Synagogue after restoration.



Photo by EverGreene.

Photo by EverGreene.

Photo by Whitney Cox.

ST. MEL’S, QUEENS: Renovation in a Modern Vocabulary

When St. Mel’s Academy was built in the mid-20th Century, the church was supposed to be across the street. Concern for children crossing a busy road led to putting the church in what had been intended to be the gym. Practical though it may have been, a church in a gym struggles to suggest a foretaste of heaven, but St. Mel’s community was vibrant and committed to redeeming their spiritual home. A challenge of the renewal was keeping within the architectural language of the building. As magnificent as a baroque baldacchino or gothic stations of the cross may be in their own right, nothing of the sort could be introduced into St. Mel’s because a key aspect of the fittingness of any element is how it harmonizes with the aesthetics of its unique location.

At St. Mel’s it was essential the new artistry be in dialogue with the very modern stained glass dominating

a full wall, that proportions of the artwork and furnishings be of an appropriate scale in a space wider than it is tall. To break up the strong vertical thrust of the ceiling, panels featuring symbols of the sacraments, and shields of bishops and orders significant to the parish’s history were introduced. The carpeted floor was replaced with tile with borders and marble inlay to lend the space a stronger sense of order and procession. Confessionals that looked like utility closets were given simple surrounds to invite participation in the sacrament. New murals, scriptural passages, and decorative painting behind statuary now engage parishioners in prayerful contemplation. At the dedication a parishioner remarked, “When you have an ugly baby you still love it, but that’s what we had here with our church, and now it’s so beautiful! It feels like a church!”

The goal of timeless artistry programs is best achieved when the tendency to incorporate things we like (or are handy) is cast off in favor of elements whose form, color, location, proportions, material properties, visual vocabulary, and content are informed by the architecture, liturgy, and historic precedent. This principle is applicable to any style. When the artwork and architecture speak the same language, especially in a house of worship, they conspire to help us ask and answer questions about why each element is there and the conversation they are drawing us into.

Left: St. Mel’s before restoration.
Right: St. Mel’s after restoration.



Photos by Tim Schenck

Photos by EverGreene.

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St. Cornelius Chapel, Governors Island, NY, Laser-Scanning Documentation, Conditions Assessment

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Some facts about this year's Sacred Sites Open House: “Medieval to Modern: Celebrating New York's Religious Art and Architecture”

Participating sites encompassed the amazing diversity of architectural styles found in our Sacred Sites throughout New York State. One wonderful example of the Romanesque Revival style is **Willard Memorial Chapel** (Andrew Jackson Warner, 1894) constructed as part of the former Auburn Theological Seminary. Distinctive architectural elements of this style include the tripartite arch entrance portal, the corbel table below the roof gable, and semi-circular arches used for all window and door openings.



Willard Memorial Chapel, Auburn, New York.

Photo by Wikimedia Commons.

Central Synagogue, New York.



Photo by Wikimedia Commons

The Sacred Sites Open House showcases sites that have been deemed architecturally and culturally significant with landmark designation. Such designations may include listing on the National and State Registers of Historic Places, recognized as a National Historic Landmark, and in New York City, designated a landmark by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. A rare example of a Sacred Site that has all three designations is **Central Synagogue** at East 55 Street and Lexington Avenue. Designed by Henry Fernbach in 1870, Central Synagogue displays the exotic Moorish Revival style and is one of the oldest synagogue buildings extant in the United States.

United Methodist Church of Bay Shore.



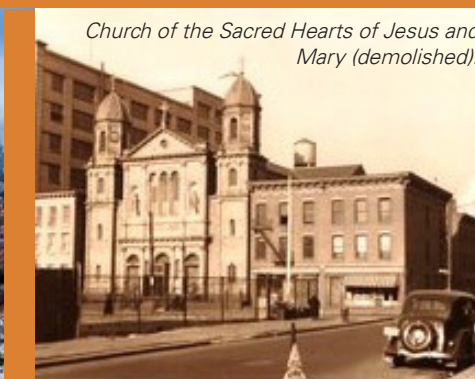
Photo by United Methodist Church.

New York's historic sacred sites incorporate architectural details that could be considered delightful works of art on their own merit. The Star of David, found in both Jewish and Christian iconography is displayed in the round window at the picturesque **United Methodist Church of Bay Shore**.



Photo by Sacred Hearts & St. Stephen Catholic Church.

Sacred Hearts & St. Stephen Catholic Church, Carroll Gardens.



Church of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary (demolished).

Photo by Unknown Author.

This year, it celebrated the incredible art and architecture found in our Sacred Sites. But, there are so many more magnificent examples that can only be found in historic photographs. These are New York's lost sacred sites, one of which was the **Church of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary**, the former Roman Catholic Church constructed in 1906 on Degraw and Hicks streets in Carroll Gardens. In 1940, Robert Moses proposed the construction of the Brooklyn Queens Expressway which forced the congregation to vacate their building. On Sunday, December 7, 1941, the church celebrated its final mass and the congregation moved into **St. Stephen's Roman Catholic Church**, creating the combined parish of **Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary - St. Stephen**.

2019 Sacred Sites Open House Weekend Included Many First-Time Participating Sites and Events!

by Mari S. Gold



Photo by Steve Fisher.

Guided tour at Blessed Sacrament Church.

The ninth annual Sacred Sites Open House May 18-19, 2019, showcased the broad spectrum of historical periods, faith traditions, and styles of religious architecture around New York State. The weekend's theme: Medieval to Modern: Celebrating New York's Religious Art and Architecture inspired a number of 'firsts' including pre-booked tours at mid-century modern masterpieces: **St. Peter's Church and Nevelson Chapel** in Midtown Manhattan and **Temple Beth Zion** in Buffalo. Other 'firsts' included the participation of New York City's oldest mosque, **Moslem Mosque, Inc.**, in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, and a multi-site scavenger hunt organized by **Rutgers Presbyterian Church** on Manhattan's West Side that attracted dozens of families and individuals.

Among the 157 sites opening their doors across the state, thirty-two were participating for the first time, from Woodhaven, Queens to Northport Long Island, Newburgh to Albany, Seneca Falls to Buffalo, and Rome to Watertown. Walking tours offered by open house co-sponsors Queens Historical Society and Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts, plus curated, pre-booked tours offered by ten New York City religious institutions were quickly "sold out," providing 300-plus visitors with in-depth tours and ample opportunity for questions. A New York

City visitor was delighted that there was "someone nice and interesting at every site—in fact, the volunteers were often as interesting as the sites themselves."

At **United Palace of Spiritual Arts**, a first-time participating site located in Manhattan's Washington Heights, Atlanta resident Marjorie K. visiting with New York friend, Joyce F., said she was "awestruck by the grandeur of the fifty-foot movie screen and velvet-covered seats surrounded by beyond-Baroque bling." Joyce praised the venue's "astonishing grandeur and detail."

Two dozen visitors enjoyed a guided tour of picturesque Gothic Revival landmark **Christ Church in Riverdale** where they particularly enjoyed learning that the altar rail had been donated by Babe Ruth in memory of Church member and neighbor, Lou Gehrig.

A Poughkeepsie family saw the Conservancy's Sacred Sites Open House announcement posted in a



Photo by Cherie Sprosty.

Visitors at St. Francis Cabrini Church.

"We're grateful to the Conservancy for enlightening us with the history of our hometown."

local paper and planned a rendezvous in the Bronx, travelling together to the three Bronx churches—**Christ Church, Riverdale Presbyterian** and **St. James Fordham**.

Jennifer, a Chicago native and one-year resident of Manhattan, heard about the Sacred Sites Open House tours while on a Municipal Arts Society-sponsored program. She joined the Scavenger Hunt on Saturday; the Queens Historical Society Flushing Walking tour on Sunday morning, and the featured tour of newly redecorated, Art Deco-filled, **Blessed Sacrament Church** in Jackson Heights Sunday afternoon. "I'm so glad the Conservancy organized this Sacred Sites Open House," she enthused. New York Deco-philies Bob and Harriet termed the Blessed Sacrament tour "magnifico!"

In addition to guided tours and music, **Trinity Memorial Church**, Binghamton, displayed a story board on High Victorian Gothic Architecture. **Blessed Trinity Roman Catholic Church**, in Buffalo, featured a display of the three churches in Pavia, Italy that were models for their look-alike 12th Century Lombard Romanesque edifice, a creative approach that resulted in the site's largest visitor turnout ever.

Smithfield Presbyterian Church, Amenia, used the year's art theme to create a children's art project. Children of all ages were invited to

"I'm so glad the Conservancy organized this Sacred Sites Open House"

"there was someone nice and interesting at every site—in fact, the volunteers were often as interesting as the sites themselves."

"Worth every minute"



Photo by Mike Vanderhall.

Guided tour of Nevelson Chapel, St. Peter's Church.



Photo by Rev. Andrew Blume.

Open House at St. Ignatius of Antioch Church.



Children at Smithfield Presbyterian Church.



Scavenger Hunt at Rutgers Presbyterian Church.

contribute to a 15-foot long stretch of mural paper on the community room, attracting artists ranging from a ninth-grader to three toddlers.

A visitor who learned about the program from the Conservancy website and email went to eight never-visited-before sites, joining programs both Saturday and Sunday and being "particularly dazzled" by St. Vincent Ferrer on Manhattan's Upper East Side.

"Worth every minute," reported a visitor to Staten Island sites Church of **St. Andrew, Calvary Presbyterian Church** and **Immanuel Lutheran Church**. Staten Islanders Lisa and Eugene C. attended a pre-booked tour at **St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church** and noted that "not realizing how rich with history Staten Island is, it was a pleasure learning all of this great information from Glen (Umberger) and the New York Landmarks Conservancy. We're grateful to the Conservancy for enlightening us with the history of our hometown."



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St. Bartholomew's Church

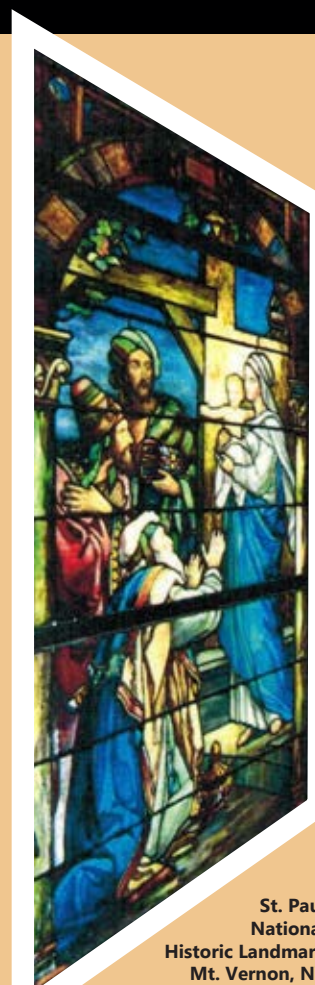
Winner of a 2018 Lucy G. Moses
Preservation Award



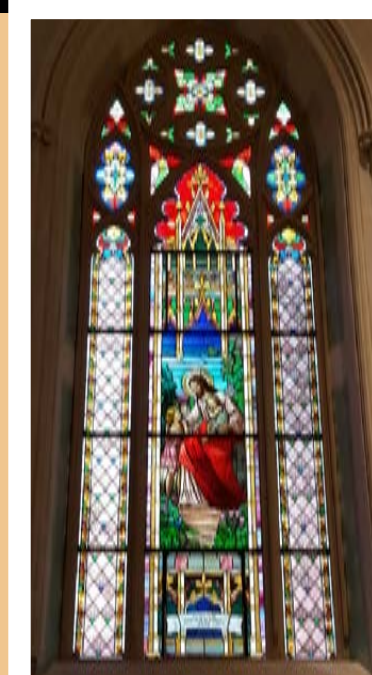
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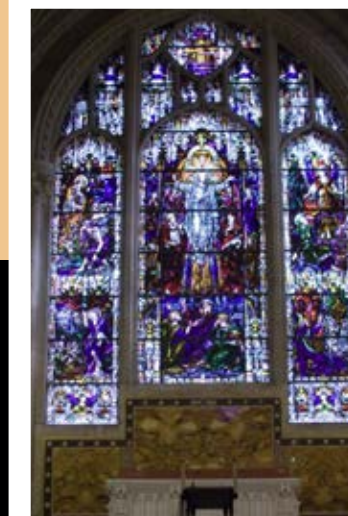
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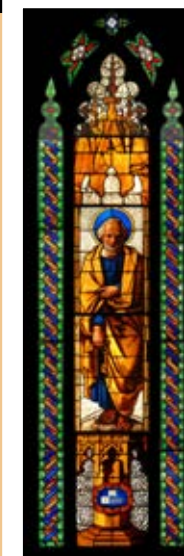
St. Paul
National
Historic Landmark
Mt. Vernon, NY
John Lafarge



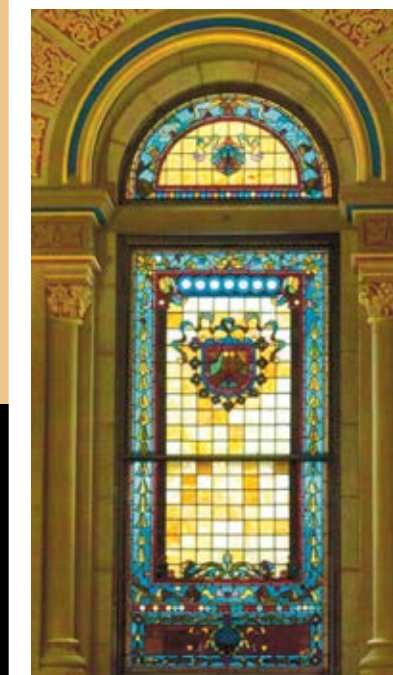
The Basilica of St. Patrick's Old Cathedral
New York, NY
1 of 17 Windows



Cathedral of St. John the Divine
New York, NY



Fordham University Church - Bronx, NY
1865 Nave Stained Glass Windows



New York State Assembly Chamber
Albany, NY
1 of 20 Windows



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Church of the Resurrection, Kew Gardens.

Returning Sacred Sites

2019 was the Conservancy's 9th annual statewide Sacred Sites Open House. We are grateful to all the staff and volunteers at participating congregations that make this event possible.

Here, we celebrate sixteen sites that have enthusiastically opened their doors to the public year after year since 2011-2012.



St. Patrick Roman Catholic Church, Binghamton.



Eldridge Street Synagogue, Manhattan.



Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Manhattan.



First United Church of Christ, Elmira.



Christ and St. Stephen's Church, Manhattan.



Blessed Trinity Roman Catholic Church, Buffalo



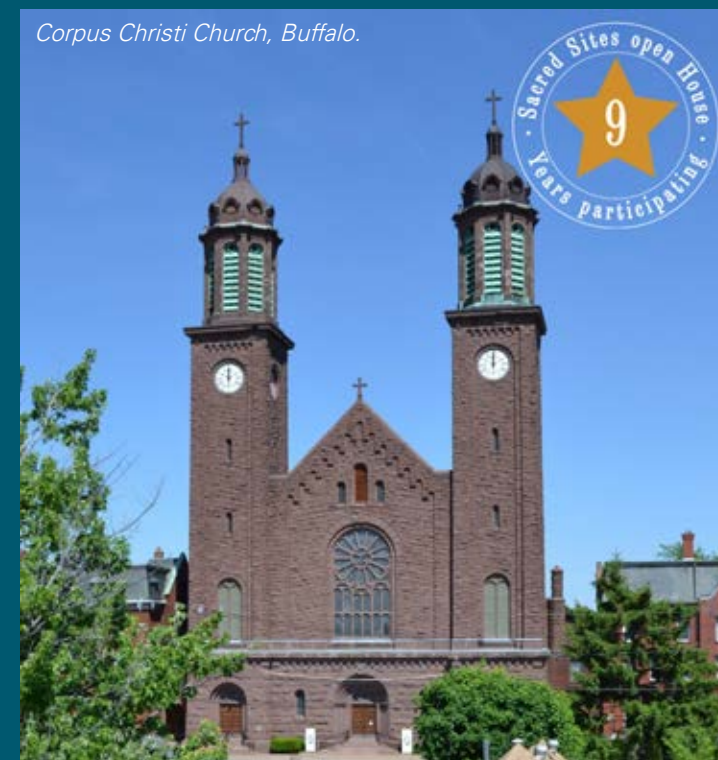
St. Ann and the Holy Trinity Church, Brooklyn.



Temple Emanu-El, Manhattan.



Greek Orthodox Church of the Annunciation, Manhattan.

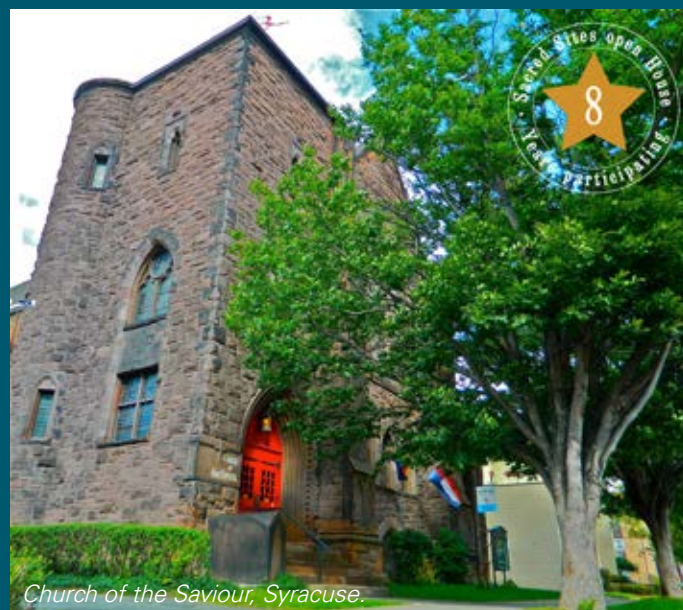


Corpus Christi Church, Buffalo.

to all...
**THANK
YOU!**



Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue, Manhattan.



Church of the Saviour, Syracuse.



Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Cathedral, Brooklyn.



Chapel of the Holy Name (The Stone Church), Cragmoor.



Bridgehampton Presbyterian Church, Bridgehampton.

The New York Landmarks Conservancy awards matching grants to congregations that are planning or undertaking the restoration of historic religious properties. In 2018, the Sacred Sites program pledged 41 grants totaling \$487,500 to 40 religious institutions throughout New York State, leveraging over \$10.6 million in repair and restoration projects.

To be eligible for our grant programs properties must be located in New York State, owned by a religious institution, actively used for worship, and listed on the State or National Register of Historic Places or designated pursuant to a local landmarks ordinance. Eligible properties include churches, synagogues, meetinghouses, mosques, and temples.

Albany

United Church of Cohoes
Cohoes, New Roof

\$9,000

Bronx

St. Anselm's Church
Bronx, Roof and Masonry Restoration

\$40,000

Chautauqua

Trinity Episcopal Church
Fredonia, Restoration and Re-leading of the Memorial Windows

\$7,000

Columbia

Christ Church Episcopal
Hudson, Window Restoration

\$2,000

Delaware

Jay Gould Memorial Reformed Church
Roxbury, Architectural services for East Wall Masonry Repair

\$10,000

Dutchess

Church of the Messiah
Rhinebeck, Water Infiltration Mitigation and Repair

\$25,000

Smithfield Presbyterian Church
Amenia, Window Restoration

\$6,000

Erie

Corpus Christi Church
Buffalo, North Aisle Roof, Clerestory Masonry
and Drainage System Repairs

\$30,000

Our Savior Lutheran Church
Buffalo, Slate Roof and Copper Flashing Repair

\$15,000

Fulton

St. Francis of Assisi Church
Northville, Replacement of Masonry Entrance Steps

\$2,000

Kings (Brooklyn)

Bridge Street African Wesleyan Methodist Episcopal Church
Bedford-Stuyvesant, Stained Glass Window Restoration

\$25,000

Sacred Sites Grants



First Presbyterian Church, Southold.



*Eato House, Bethel AME Church,
Setauket.*



Hurley Reformed Church, Hurley.



Union Presbyterian Church, Scottsville.



St. John's Getty Square, Yonkers.



Trinity Episcopal Church, Fredonia.

First Unitarian Congregational Society
Brooklyn Heights, Exterior Accessibility Project

\$10,000

Flatbush Reformed Church
(Reformed Protestant Dutch Church of Flatbush)
Flatbush, Steeple, Roof, Roof Drainage and Masonry Restoration

\$25,000

Flatbush-Tompkins Congregational Church
Ditmas Park, Sanctuary Window Restoration

\$10,000

Stuyvesant Heights Christian Church
Bedford-Stuyvesant, Roof and Window Assessment and Project Management

\$3,500

Monroe
Union Presbyterian Church
Scottsville, Roof Replacement

\$2,500

New York (Manhattan)
Broadway Presbyterian Church
Upper West Side, Exterior Envelope Restoration

\$30,000

Congregation B'nai Jeshurun
Upper West Side, Conditions Assessment

\$5,000

Metropolitan Baptist Church
Harlem, Thermal Imaging Roof Leak Investigation

\$4,000

Mt. Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church
Hamilton Heights, Conditions Assessment and Feasibility Study

\$7,500

West Park Presbyterian Church
Upper West Side, Community House Roof Replacement

\$10,000

Oneida
First Baptist Church
Rome, Bell Tower Restoration

\$25,000

First United Methodist Church
Oneida, Preparation of Plans and Specifications for Exterior Restoration

\$3,500

Onondaga
St. Paul's Syracuse
Syracuse, Masonry Restoration

\$6,000

Ontario
Temple Beth El
Geneva, Structural Repairs to Historic Tea Porch

\$7,000

Otsego
St. Matthews Episcopal Church
Unadilla, Steeple, Church Façade Repair and Restoration

\$10,000

Queens
Beth-El Temple, Church of God in Christ
Far Rockaway, Sanctuary Window Repair

\$5,000

St. Joan of Arc Church
Jackson Heights, Parapet Reconstruction, Masonry and Roof Drainage Repair

\$25,000

Rensselaer
St. Joseph's Church
Troy, Exterior Rehabilitation

\$3,000

Saratoga
First Baptist Church of Saratoga
Saratoga Springs, Stained Glass Window Restoration

\$5,000

Steuben
St. Thomas Church
Bath, Shingle Roof Replacement, Bluestone Coping, Roof Drainage and Rose Window Restoration

\$10,000

Suffolk
Bethel A.M.E. Church - Eato House
Setauket, Conditions Assessment

\$3,000

First Congregational Church
Riverhead, Wood Window Restoration

\$4,000

First Presbyterian Church
Southold, Tower Conditions Assessment

\$3,500

St. Paul's United Methodist Church
Northport, Steeple, Stained Glass Window and Exterior Wood Restoration

\$35,000

United Methodist Church of Patchogue
Patchogue, Roof, Masonry and Window Waterproofing Repairs
Conservation Report to Address Water Damage

\$20,000
\$5,000

Sullivan
St. John's Episcopal Church
Monticello, Window Restoration

\$10,000

Ulster
Reformed Church of Hurley
Hurley, Window Restoration and Storm Window Installation

\$4,000

Warren
Hague Baptist Church
Hague, Reconstruction of Steeple and Belfry

\$25,000

Westchester
St. John's Church, Getty Square
Yonkers, Design and Implementation of Clerestory Window Shoring

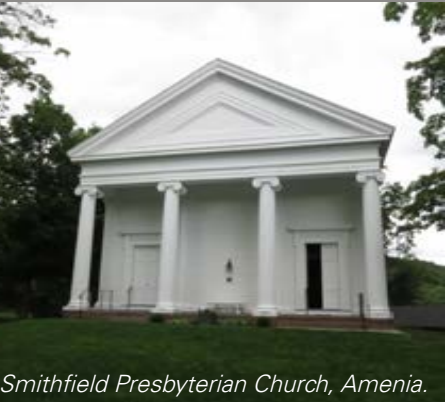
\$10,000



United Methodist Church, Patchogue.



Corpus Christi Church, Buffalo.



Smithfield Presbyterian Church, Amenia.



St. Joan of Arc, Jackson Heights.



Special thanks to this year's Sacred Sites Open House Sponsors!



United Palace, Washington Heights, NY.

Photo by Katie Lentz

Winner of the 2019 Sacred Sites Open House Photo Contest

*On the back-cover (from left to right):
Religious Society of Friends, Flushing,
Queens. Cathedral of the Immaculate
Conception, Albany (photo by Matt. H.
Wade). Temple beth-Zion, Buffalo.*

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