

SAINT GEORGE'S PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH, 600 Marcy Avenue, Borough of Brooklyn. Built 1886-87; addition 1889; architect Richard M. Upjohn.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 1813, Lot 41.

On November 9, 1976, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of Saint George's Protestant Episcopal Church and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 6). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. The rector of the church spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

St. George's Protestant Episcopal Church in the Bedford section of Brooklyn is one of New York City's distinguished Victorian Gothic structures. Built in 1886-87, it was designed by New York City architect Richard Michell Upjohn and is a fine example of his work in the Victorian Gothic style.

The church parish was begun under the leadership of Rev. Alvah Guion in April 1868 and was incorporated as St. Thomas Church in January 1869. Nine months later the cornerstone of the first church building was laid at Greene Avenue near Tompkins Square Park and the name was changed to Guion Church in honor of its founder. Rev. Alvah Guion (1796-1872), one of the oldest Episcopal clergymen in Brooklyn at the time of his death, spent much of his life in the establishment and building up of parishes. After coming to Brooklyn from Westchester County he established a St. George's Church in Gowanus near Greenwood Cemetery in 1852 and Grace Church in Williamsburg in 1853. The area of Brooklyn around Tompkins Square was new and growing in the late 1860s when Rev. Guion resolved to set up a new parish there. After Rev. Guion's death, Rev. Charles H. Babcock assumed the rectorship of Guion Church, and the church applied for membership in the diocese of Long Island. The diocese objected to the name of Guion Church as being contrary to the policies of the Episcopal Church. Meanwhile another St. Thomas Church--the original name of the parish--had been organized in Brooklyn so the name of Guion Church was changed to St. George's Church of the City of Brooklyn.

During the next ten years the congregation expanded greatly and in 1883 the site of the present church was acquired. Fundraising for the new building was carried out by Rev. H. Richard Harris, the rector, and in June 1886 the cornerstone was laid by Bishop Abram N. Littlejohn. Services were first held in the new church, designed by Richard Michell Upjohn, in January 1888. An extension to the church building, which was added in 1889 for Sunday School and parish activities, was also designed by Upjohn.

Richard Michell Upjohn (1828-1903), son of the noted Gothic Revivalist Richard Upjohn (1802-1878), was born in Shaftesbury, England, but came to this country with his parents at an early age. Joining his father's office in 1846, he was made a partner in 1851. The firm was named R. Upjohn & Co. in 1853 and established offices in the Trinity Building at 111 Broadway. Richard Upjohn is best remembered for his ecclesiastical structures, especially Trinity Church in New York. While Richard M. Upjohn followed in his father's footsteps in designing many churches, he also did a number of commercial and school buildings. The Mechanics Bank on Wall Street of 1858 was an early building in the City to use rolled-iron beams and brick floor arches.

Until Richard Upjohn's retirement in 1870, all work was produced in the name of the firm. Consequently it is often difficult to determine which designs were by Richard Upjohn and which by Richard M. Upjohn. Among Richard M. Upjohn's works in Brooklyn, in addition to St. George's Church, were the entrance gates and lodges of Greenwood Cemetery (1861), a designated New York City Landmark, his home church, St. Paul's, at Clinton and Carroll Streets (1867), and Holy Trinity Chapel in East New York (1858), all in the Victorian Gothic style. His most famous work was the state capitol at Hartford, Connecticut, built between 1872 and 1879. Built in the Victorian Gothic style, it was crowned with a dome instead of merely a tower at the insistence of the state authorities. A founder with his father and a fellow of the American Institute of Architects, Richard M. Upjohn was president of the New York Chapter for two years. In the opinion of his grandson Everard M. Upjohn, the noted architectural historian, he was "one of several successful practitioners of the High Victorian manner."

St. George's Church, a striking red brick building with light stone trim, is designed in the vivid polychromatic tradition of Victorian Gothic architecture. Located at the corner of Marcy and Gates Avenues, the church is sited facing Marcy Avenue with the nave running parallel to Gates. The nave with its steep slate roof is flanked by broad side aisles. A very shallow clerestory with square windows rises slightly above the roof of the side aisles. The western end of the nave is intersected by gabled transepts, while the nave terminates in a polygonal apse.

One enters the church through an arched doorway set within a small porch with pitched roof. The gable above the entrance doorway echoes the large frontal gable of the nave above. The entrance with its gable projects from the main porch in front of the nave which is adorned with squat colonnettes set beneath the pitched roof. Two high arched windows with a circular window above, all with stone tracery, are set in the gable end of the nave. Rising to the left of the nave from the porch, in place of a buttress, is the most distinctive feature of the building. This polygonal tower--which serves as a chimney--with its almost checkerboard pattern of brick and stone is one of the most characteristically Victorian Gothic features of the church being adorned by slender stone colonnettes keyed to the brickwork and supporting gablets about two-thirds of the way up the tower and pointed arches at the top. The ends and side walls of the aisles have traceried pointed-arch windows as do the buttressed and gabled end walls of the transepts. Large traceried rose windows are set above these windows in the transepts. All arches and window enframements are formed by alternating voussoirs of light stone and red brick. The polychromatic effect of the building is further enhanced by stone bandcourses across the gable ends of the nave and transepts. Stone coping following the rake of the gables and lapped stones capping the buttresses contrast effectively with the red brickwork of the walls. A large corner tower with belfry and broach spire was originally planned by Upjohn for the church but was never built, probably due to lack of funds.

St. George's Church with its polychromy, picturesque massing of elements, and such distinctive features as the small polygonal tower is an excellent example of Victorian Gothic architecture. Still used by the original congregation, it remains an important feature in the Bedford community.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that Saint George's Protestant Episcopal Church has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, St. George's Protestant Episcopal Church is an excellent example of Victorian Gothic architecture, that it was designed by the noted New York City architect Richard M. Upjohn, that the building is distinguished for its polychromy, picturesque massing, and an unusual polygonal tower, and that the church is still used by the original congregation and continues to serve the Bedford community.

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 Saint George's Protestant Episcopal Church, 800 Marcy Avenue, Borough of Brooklyn and designates Tax Map Block 1813, Lot 41, Borough of Brooklyn, as its Landmark Site.