

ST. ANN'S CHURCH AND GRAVEYARD, 295 St. Ann's Avenue, Borough of the Bronx. Completed 1811.

Landmark Site: Borough of the Bronx Tax Map Block 2267, Lot 44.

On January 11, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of St. Ann's Church and Graveyard and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 1). One witness spoke in favor of designation. The Commission continued the public hearing until February 8, 1966 (Item No. 2). At that time no speakers appeared to testify. Both hearings were duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There were no speakers in opposition to designation at either meeting.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Situated in a landscaped area on irregular rising ground, amid rock outcroppings, rough terrain and a graveyard, this 1810 fieldstone country Church has austere dignity and rugged architectural character. Conceived by its donor as a family memorial, St. Ann's is a simple Gothic Revival building, with a Greek Revival vernacular tower. In its mood and setting, this enclave brings to mind Thomas Gray's "Elegy written in a Country Churchyard."

Cruciform in plan, with shallow transepts, the east and west elevations of this small parish Church are only three bays wide. The plain English Gothic pointed-arch windows are framed with brick as are the other windows and doors of the building. The south elevation contains a large, centrally located, stained glass window with arched tracery, the whole flanked by two entrance doors. This facade embraces a broad platform, extending the width of the building, and five steps comprise the entrance stairs to the Church. Rising above the low-pitched gable roof a square base, handsomely framed with plain pilasters, supports an octagonal-shaped louvered belfry, surmounted by a low spire and topped with a bold, yet simple cross.

Adjacent to and northeast of the chancel, a parish house was added at a later date. Gothic in style, this section with a covered walkway containing a series of seven Gothic arches, dates from 1916. Built of random ashlar stone walls pointed up with brick, it is handsomely related to the Church building in scale and architectural character. A sharp gable centered in the second floor dominates the facade and contains three pointed arches with traceried windows.

Historical Significance

St. Ann's was erected by Gouverneur Morris, in a field on his estate, which had been hollowed for some time, as it contained the sepulchre of his parents. A brass tablet to the right of the chancel bears the inscription "Gouverneur Morris born Feb. 9, 1813; died Aug. 20, 1888. Founder of this Parish, to which he gave church and lands for the glory of God and in memory of his mother." She was Ann Cary Randolph of Roanoke, Va., a lineal descendant of Pocahontas, wife of the Hon. Gouverneur Morris. She died in 1837 and is interred in a large vault beneath the chancel. Also in the crypt are vaults containing the remains of Judge Lewis Morris (d. 1746), first Lord of the Manor of Morrisania and first Governor of the Province of New Jersey; Major General Lewis Morris (d. 1798), a member of the Continental Congress, signer of the Declaration of Independence and Commander of Westchester Militia Continental Army. This vault is known as the "Signers Vault"; and it contains the remains of

other illustrious members of the family. In the graveyard in an area east of the Church and south of the parish building are vaults in a crypt, where repose the remains of the Hon. Gouverneur Morris (d. 1816) and a dozen other distinguished members of the family. It was from the Morris family that the village of Morrisania received its name.

The most conspicuous member of the Morris family was Gouverneur Morris, who was born at Morrisania, January 30, 1752. He graduated from King's College in 1768 at the age of sixteen. He studied law and became one of the ablest and most brilliant lawyers in America. Upon the approach of hostilities he became a member of the Provincial Congress, and on July 8, 1775, a member of the Committee of Safety of Westchester County. During the whole of the struggle with Great Britain he was in the active service of his country, serving it in a political capacity. He was a close friend and confidant of Washington. Morris was a member of Congress during the war, and he was also a member of the Constitutional Convention of 1787. As a member of the latter body he framed the final draft of the Constitution as submitted to the States for ratification, and the beautiful, clear and forceful English of that instrument is almost entirely his work. As a financier, he ranked after the financier of the Revolution, Robert Morris, whose assistant he had been, and after Alexander Hamilton, the first great Secretary of the Treasury. Gouverneur Morris was a man of brilliant parts, with a rough, caustic tongue and pen which made him many enemies. Morris was at last made minister to the Court of Versailles, and he remained in Paris during the period of the Reign of Terror. After his replacement as minister by Monroe in August, 1794, he returned to the United States. He was United States Senator from the State of New York from 1799 to 1803. Morris was nominated chairman of the first commission to inquire into the feasibility of the Erie Canal, and he went to much trouble to promote the idea. He was the first president of the New York Historical Society.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the St. Ann's Church and Graveyard 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. Ann's Church and Graveyard is a forgotten "country churchyard" in the heart of the sprawling City, that the buildings have outstanding architectural value, and that the historic associations of the Church and the individuals interred in the graveyard are of great interest to the City and to the Nation.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 8-A of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a landmark the St. Ann's Church and Graveyard, 295 St. Ann's Avenue, Borough of Manhattan, and designates Tax Map Block 2267, Lot 44, Borough of the Manhattan, as its landmark site.