The Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine, 1047 Amsterdam Avenue, aka 1021 Amsterdam Avenue, 1061 Amsterdam Avenue, 419 West 110th Street, Manhattan. Built 1892-1911 (architects Heins & LaFarge); 1916-1941 (architects Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson); 1979-82 (architects Hoyle, Doran & Berry).

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1865, Lot 1 in part, consisting of the present footprint of the Cathedral, including the front steps. (Please see the attached map.) This designation is limited to building’s exterior.

On November 12, 2002, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine and the close, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 1). The hearing was duly advertised according to the provisions of law. Twenty-one witnesses spoke in support of designating the cathedral, including the Dean of the Cathedral, who requested the ability to develop unused perimeter parcels and spoke of the Cathedral Trustees’ commitment to preserve the existing structures on the close and to complete the construction of the cathedral. Other witnesses supporting designation included Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields, State Assemblyman Edward C. Sullivan, Manhattan Community Board 9, the Morningside Heights Historic District Committee, the Morningside Heights Neighborhood Association, Landmarks West, Friends of the Upper East Side Historic District, Morningside Heights Residents’ Association, the Historic Districts Council, the Society for the Architecture of the City, and the West 112th Street Block Association. Many of these witnesses testified in favor of designating the entire cathedral site, including all the buildings on the cathedral close. The public hearing was continued on November 26, 2002 (Item No. 1). The hearing was duly advertised according to the provisions of law. Ten witnesses spoke in favor of designating the cathedral, including State Assemblyman Edward C. Sullivan and representatives of State Senator Eric Schneiderman and the Municipal Arts Society. Many of these witnesses testified in favor of designating the entire cathedral site. The hearing was continued again on December 10, 2002 (Item No. 1). The hearing was duly advertised according to the provisions of law. Two representatives of owner of the cathedral testified in favor of the designation. The Commission also received correspondence regarding the proposed designation, including letters from former Mayor David N. Dinkins, the Victorian Society of America, and the Women’s City Club of New York. Many letters also expressed an interest in designating the entire site. The cathedral was the subject of earlier public hearings on July 12, 1966, September 13, 1966, and October 11, 1966 (LP-0315); a subsequent public hearing on December 11, 1979 (LP-1106) included the cathedral and the close.

Summary
One of the great religious structures of the world, the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine, located at Amsterdam Avenue and West 112th Street in Morningside Heights, is the seat of the Episcopal Diocese of New York. The cathedral was chartered in 1873 under the leadership of Bishop Horatio Potter. In 1888, an architectural competition was held and won by the architectural firm of Heins & LaFarge. The winning proposal was an eclectic design incorporating elements of the Romanesque, Byzantine, and Gothic styles. The first phase of construction began in 1892 with the laying of the cornerstone and continued to 1911 when the crypt, choir, and crossing were completed. Changes in taste and the death of Heins in 1907 brought about a new French Gothic design for the completion of the cathedral by architect Ralph Adams Cram of the firm Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson. A second construction phase began in 1916 and continued until 1941. During this period, the nave was completed and joined to the choir by a rough-finished crossing, the imposing west front was added, and the north transept was begun. Work resumed in 1979 on the towers of the west front and a proposal for the design of the south transept was adopted. The church’s main vault rises to a height of 124 feet; its entire length is 601 feet. Its monumental size was intended to take advantage of its lofty location. Its stained-glass windows feature both biblical and modern characters. The Cathedral of St. John the Divine is considered the crowning glory of the Morningside Heights neighborhood, which came to be known as “the Acropolis of the new world” for the many cultural
institutions that moved there in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Even in its unfinished state, the Cathedral of St. John the Divine remains the largest church in the United States and the largest cathedral in the world.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Episcopalians in New York

The Episcopal Church in New York began as part of the Church of England; the earliest-known Anglican service in the city took place in 1674 and by 1686, the bishop of London had jurisdiction over Anglican churches in the colony. By the early 1690s, there were two Anglican congregations in the province, and about ninety Anglican families in New York City. Trinity Church was chartered in 1697; ten more congregations were formed in the province in the first decade of the eighteenth century. King’s College, an Anglican institution, was founded in 1754, and by 1770, St. Paul’s Chapel had been opened.

After the American Revolution, a large number of Anglicans who remained loyal to the Crown left the city; however, the church expanded greatly during the following years. The New York Episcopal diocese was founded in 1785, and the following year Samuel Provoost was appointed its first bishop. Trinity Church became the diocese’s first principal church. By 1800, New York had about twenty-six Episcopal parishes; there were fifty by 1810, including St. Mark’s Church In-the-Bowery, the first independent Episcopal church in the new world, founded in 1799, and St. Phillip’s, the city’s first African-American congregation. The General Theological Seminary, founded in 1817, is the oldest Episcopal seminary in the United States. The Seamen’s Church Institute, serving the sailors and workers of the East River docks, was founded in 1844.

Although the diocese of western New York split off in 1838, the number of parishes continued to grow in the mid-nineteenth century, spurred on by the Oxford Movement, which called for the revival of High Anglican traditions and the Gothic style. In addition, William Augustus Muhlenberg, who advocated the total community movement, founded the Church of the Holy Communion in 1844, St. Luke’s Hospital in 1850, and the Sisters of the Holy Communion in 1852 that expanded women’s social ministries. The Episcopal Church and its many social organizations continued to grow after the Civil War. In 1890, New York County’s Episcopal community consisted of 40,000 members, which represented the largest single Protestant sect. It was during this period of growth that New York’s Episcopalians decided to construct a major religious edifice to serve as the seat of the diocese, the Cathedral of St. John the Divine.

The late nineteenth century also brought about new opportunities for women within the church and increased ministries for the poor. A number of women’s orders were formed, including those of St. John the Baptist and St. Margaret. The Church Club of New York was formed in 1887; it sponsored a library, club rooms, and other services for the poor. Many of New York City’s wealthiest and most influential people were followers of the Episcopal faith.

Membership in the Episcopal Church began to decline after World War Two. Nevertheless, the church adapted to meet the changing needs of its parishioners with a new emphasis on social work, help for the poor, human rights, and social action.

Morningside Heights

Amsterdam Avenue on a raised structure, bisected Morningside Heights. Beginning in 1865, the city began burying the aqueduct beneath Amsterdam Avenue, constructing fortress-like gate houses along the route. Two of these structures still remain in the neighborhood. The gate house at 113th Street and Amsterdam Avenue, built in 1875-76, sits diagonally across from the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. The gatehouse at 119th Street and Amsterdam Avenue, built in 1894-95, is now a designated New York City Landmark.

Development in Morningside Heights had been encouraged by a number of civic improvements, including the building of Riverside Park and the adjacent Riverside Drive (1873-1902; a designated New York City Scenic Landmark), the construction of Morningside Park (1873-1895), the opening of an elevated railroad nearby in 1887, and the beginning of
subway service along Broadway between City Hall and 125th Street in 1904. Initially, these projects attracted
real estate speculation, mostly middle-class apartment
buildings, but with the arrival of large institutions, such as Columbia University, Barnard College, Teachers
College, the Jewish Theological Seminary, the Union
Theological Seminary, St. Luke’s Hospital, and the
Cathedral of St. John the Divine, as well as the
installation of such civic monuments as Grant’s Tomb,
the neighborhood was fast becoming what one journalist
called “the Acropolis of the new world.”

To this day, these institutions maintain a major presence in the
neighborhood.

Planning, Design, and Construction of the Cathedral
Church

New York’s Episcopal community had been
considering the construction of a great cathedral since
the late 1820s. The first proposal, envisioned in 1828
by Bishop John Henry Hobart, was for a cathedral on
Washington Square; however, the proposal was dropped
when concerns arose about creating a monumental
building for the American wing of the Church of
England while American resentment over the
Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 remained
tangible. Over seventy years were to pass before another
proposal was put forth. In 1873, under the leadership
of Bishop Horatio Potter, who was Bishop Henry Codman
Potter’s uncle and immediate predecessor, the New
York’s Episcopal cathedral was incorporated.

The full name of the cathedral would be “The
Cathedral of St. John the Divine in the City and Diocese
of New York.” The word “cathedral” is derived from the
Greek word “Cathedra,” which means “seat.” The seat
of the Bishop of the Diocese of New York, a part of the
Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States, is
located in the cathedral, which makes it the mother
church of the diocese. The Cathedral of St. John the
Divine is named after the author of the Fourth Gospel,
the three Epistles bearing the name of John, and is
associated in Christian tradition with The Revelation

The response to Bishop Henry Codman Potter’s
call to New Yorkers to support the construction of
the Protestant Cathedral, was overwhelming, including
financial contributions from Protestants and non-
Protestants, editorial praise from the press, and moral
support from the religious leaders of other denominations.

The Cathedral Committee set out to
find a suitable location, which would accommodate a
monumental building and assure its visibility. The
committee rejected a number of locations, including the
Polo Grounds at Eighth Avenue and 155th Street, before
settling in late 1887 on a site atop Morningside Heights
that was occupied by the Leake and Watts Orphan
Asylum. Located between Amsterdam Avenue,
Morningside Drive, 110th and 113th Streets, the asylum

St. John the Divine. The word “Divine” in the title is
not an adjective, but a noun which means “theologian.”

A prime location - two vacant blocks near Central
Park, between 57th and 59th Streets and Sixth and
Seventh Avenues, was chosen for the proposed
cathedral’s site. Nevertheless, this campaign was halted
by the Panic of 1873 and the following economic
depression. The collapse of this proposal, however,
only briefly interrupted the dream of building a great
Episcopal cathedral in New York City.

By the late 1880s, strong economic growth, which
catapulted New York City to its preeminent position as
the center of economic, cultural, and intellectual life in
North America, finally made construction of the
cathedral church possible. This period of increasing
affluence and civic aspirations saw the start of major
institutional building campaigns, such as the
Metropolitan Opera House (1881-84), Carnegie Hall
(1892), the New York Botanical Garden (1891),
Columbia University (1892), New York University
(1892), the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1894), City
College (1897), and New York Public Library (1898).
All of these projects sought to emulate major
institutions of European cities and the great works of
European culture as New York City vied for
international status. Against this backdrop, New York
City’s Episcopalians were finally to get their great
cathedral.

Bishop Henry Codman Potter announced on June
1, 1887 that New York City’s Episcopalians would
build a great cathedral in the city that would serve as
their ecumenical seat and as a symbol of New York
City’s cosmopolitanism, “an American Westminster
Abbey.” In 1889, a committee chose the site for the
Cathedral of St. John the Divine at the southeast corner
of the rugged plateau that formed Morningside Heights.
The cathedral’s most generous donors included
members of some the city’s most prominent families,
such as the Astors, Vanderbilts, and Belmonts.
The First Design (1888-1911)

site was the committee’s second choice. Its favored
location was on higher land situated on Morningside
Drive between 116th and 119th Streets; however, that
site, which consisted of separate lots with different
owners, proved too difficult and expensive to assemble.
The 110th Street site, a huge plot with no bisecting cross
streets located at the edge of a high plateau, was
nevertheless an ideally-sized and highly-visible spot for
the new cathedral. The large site would allow the
construction of a cathedral comparable in size to the
great churches of Europe. Bishop Potter’s
announcement that the asylum site had been selected
for the cathedral was met with universal praise.

The Committee on Architecture was immediately
formed in consultation with Columbia University
architecture professor William R. Ware. Fourteen architects were paid to submit designs, although the competition was open to all architects.\textsuperscript{XIV} By January 1889, sixty-eight proposals were accepted by the Board of Trustees, which created a professional committee consisting of Ware, architecture professor Charles Babcock, and engineer John Bogart to review the designs.\textsuperscript{XV} In May, the four finalists were chosen by the Trustees in private; they were William Potter and R.H. Robertson, Huss & Buck, William Halsey Wood, and Heins & LaFarge. The four finalists were then instructed to revise their proposals for a final round of competition. In April 1891, the finalists’ submissions were received and put on public display. Finally in July, after much internal debate and compromise, the cathedral trustees agreed on the eclectic design scheme of Heins & LaFarge, which incorporated Byzantine, Romanesque, and Gothic influences.

In its design for the cathedral, Heins & LaFarge employed a centrally-massed plan with a prominent crossing tower, an apsidal end, apsidal chapels, and rounded transepts. The exterior combined round-arch Romanesque and Byzantine elements with Gothic detail. The richly ornamented interior was also based on Romanesque and Byzantine precedents. The interior arrangement was similar to Henry Hobson Richardson’s influential layout at Trinity Church in Boston. The structural system at St. John’s was proposed to consist of barrel vaults and domes of tile-arch construction; the crossing would be created by four monumental round arches supporting a dome topped by large tower. Heins & LaFarge’s inspiration was Santa Sophia in Istanbul, St. Mark’s in Venice, and St. Front in Perigueux.\textsuperscript{xvi} The design of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine epitomized the eclecticism that defined the architecture of that era, which favored the “exotic” over the “didactic” to solve contemporary design dilemmas.\textsuperscript{xvii} It tried to capture some of the character of European cathedrals which were built over long periods of time and contained elements of many styles.

Heins & LaFarge

Heins & LaFarge’s design scheme for the Cathedral of St. John the Divine underwent extensive revisions prior to the start of construction at the behest of the church’s Board of Trustees, which favored a more Gothic look. Thus, the spires over the west towers were removed and the windows were lengthened.\textsuperscript{xviii} Gothic decorative detail and porches were added, and the building’s overall length was increased. The biggest change, however, was the reorientation of the cathedral to east-west from north-south. This change was made to bring the building into alignment with the mandated Episcopal tradition of having the apse facing east toward the rising sun, symbolizing the resurrection of Christ. Although this repositioning would reduce the church’s visibility from the south, the shifting of its axis

George L. Heins (1860-1907) was born in Philadelphia and educated in that city’s public schools before attending the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. After graduating, he practiced briefly in Minneapolis-St. Paul before moving to New York City where, in 1886, he maintained an office in the Studio Building at 51 West 10\textsuperscript{th} Street. Christopher Grant LaFarge (1862-1938) was born in Newport, Rhode Island and, at an early age, assisted his father, the noted painter and stained-glass maker John LaFarge. In 1880, he entered the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. After spending two years there, he joined the offices of Henry Hobson Richardson in Brookline, Massachusetts. LaFarge also had an office in the Studio Building in New York by 1886, but the firm Heins & LaFarge was not formed until 1888, when the new partnership opened an office at the Temple Court Building (a designated New York City Landmark) on Beekman Street. The firm gained prestige for its ecclesiastical work. Besides the first design for the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, the firm designed the following churches: St. Matthew’s in Washington, D.C.; Fourth Presbyterian on West 91\textsuperscript{st} Street and West End Avenue in Manhattan; and the Roman Catholic Chapel at West Point; the firm also designed the Chancel and Clergy House of Grace Church on Broadway in Manhattan. The firm’s other well-known commissions in the city include the control houses and stations of the first New York subway system. Heins & LaFarge also designed several houses in the Upper East Side Historic District.

Heins & LaFarge was a relatively new firm when it won the competition for the Cathedral of St. John the Divine; prior to that, its only major building was the Roman Catholic Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament in Providence, Rhode Island. Its later work in New York City includes the original structures of the New York Zoological Park (1896-1914) in the Bronx, many of which are now designated Landmarks.

Construction Begins

to West 112\textsuperscript{th} Street would produce a dramatic closed vista along that street. In addition, the trustees wanted to eventually build seven chapels radiating from the apse that were called the “Chapels of Tongues” in recognition of many ethnic groups that comprised the population of New York City. Individual donors would be sought for each chapel, the interiors of which were designed by the architects of their choice.\textsuperscript{xix}

The design was finalized and construction began in 1892 with the choir at the east end of the site. The cathedral’s cornerstone ceremony took place on December 27, 1892, the feast day of St. John. Actual construction, however, began in spring of the following year. A few months later, work on the building was halted after soft stone and an underground spring were
discovered while the foundation was being excavated. For a time, the trustees considered moving the church to the south part of the site, but it was determined that the present location could be made suitable by pouring concrete pits to bedrock level to support the church’s piers and apse. The foundation was finally completed in 1895, after a three-year delay and at additional cost.

A milestone was reached in January 1899, when the richly-ornamented crypt was consecrated and opened for services.\textsuperscript{xx} By 1900, the crossing arch was completed at the east end of the site. Highly visible from points to the south, east, and west, the crossing arch was literally the neighborhood’s “crowning glory.”\textsuperscript{xxi} Soon thereafter, the cathedral’s superstructure, consisting of cream-colored granite from Lake Mohican, New York, began to rise, but construction was slowed while new engineering problems were solved and design revisions were made. The main challenge was erecting the apse’s eight monumental columns. At 130 tons each, these gray-granite monoliths, fifty-four feet high and six feet in diameter, were to be the largest columns ever quarried in America and the second largest stone columns in the world.\textsuperscript{xxii} Unfortunately, their extraordinary weight, which caused the columns to crack during the turning process, made them impossible to produce, and columns divided into two sections had to be settled for. Heroic effort was still required to transport them to the site from the quarry in Vinalhaven, Maine, and to hoist them into place. After time delays and additional expense, the columns were finally erected during the summer of 1903. Work on the cathedral’s vast crossing also began in 1903.

The enormous construction job progressed slowly as fund-raising continued. Some of the largest donors were the banker J.P. Morgan and former New York State governor Levi P. Morton, as well as John Jacob Astor, William Astor, and Cornelius Vanderbilt. Support from the general public, however, fell short of expectations as enthusiasm for the project diminished over time. Many smaller Episcopal churches were being built during the same period, especially in the nearby developing neighborhoods of Harlem and the Upper West Side, and the cathedral project suffered accordingly. Still, progress on St. John’s had been rapid.

Cram’s five-aisle-wide plan was similar to the plan of the cathedral at Bourges, France, which also inspired its three major entrances. He also adapted various features of the French cathedrals at Notre Dame (Paris), Amiens, and Rheims, as well as the cathedral at Wells, England. The most innovative feature of the design was the placement of the triforium and the clerestory in full-height central aisles and the addition of chapels along spacious side aisles, producing an effect of verticality and openness. This unusual design, however, was chosen in order to create a harmonious transition in scale between the existing one-hundred-foot square compared the many of the great cathedrals of Europe that had been built centuries earlier.

In September 1907, George Heins died, but despite having the contractual right to change architects, the surviving partner was retained to complete the choir and the crossing. Work continued on the apse, choir, crossing, and the first two apsidal chapels, St. Saviour and St. Columba. Temporary walls and roofing, which were meant to be removed for construction of the nave, transepts, and crossing tower, were built.\textsuperscript{xxiii} The partially-completed building, consecrated on April 19, 1911, was widely praised. Within a month, however, LaFarge was removed as cathedral architect and was replaced by Ralph Adams Cram. The appointment of Cram created ethical and public relations problems for both the church and the architect. The cathedral board was accused of having hired Cram before LaFarge was notified of his removal and Cram was blamed for actively seeking LaFarge’s removal. Although Cram was exonerated by the American Institute of Architects, the daily newspapers continued to criticize the manner in which the change was carried out.

\textit{The Second Design (1911-1942)}

By the time of the completion of the first phase of construction in 1911, the cathedral’s Byzantine-style design had fallen out of fashion and architecture based on English Gothic precedents was again being used in the plans for most Episcopal churches. New Episcopal cathedrals being built in Denver, Boston, Washington, D.C., and Liverpool, England, were English-inspired, and Cram was one of the biggest proponents of this new Gothicism. Thus, Cram immediately began to develop a plan to transform the Cathedral of St. John the Divine into a Gothic-influenced edifice by employing that style for the building’s new portions and by Gothicizing what already existed. He worked on the new proposal for two years, completing the preliminary design in late 1913. His original intention to use the English Gothic form was thwarted by the height of the existing crossing and sheer size of the proposed cathedral, which were not consistent with the low, horizontal massing of English Gothic churches. Instead, Cram turned to French Gothic prototypes.

crossing and the new fifty-foot-wide nave. The resultant freestanding nave arcade suggests “a synthesis of a traditional French Gothic basilica and a vast German \textit{Hallenkirche}.\textsuperscript{xxiv} On the exterior, Cram included a pair of five-hundred-foot spires on either side of the crossing.\textsuperscript{xxv}

Construction of the Cathedral of St. John Divine resumed in May 1916 on the foundations of the nave; during the interim, the church concentrated on erecting several auxiliary buildings on the south close of the complex.\textsuperscript{xxvi} By the end of the year, however, construction was halted due to lack of funds and World
War I. After the war, poor economic conditions caused further delay. Cram presented a new design for the cathedral in 1921. This version retained the French Gothic vocabulary of his first redesign, but included a single four-hundred-foot spire over the crossing. It was similar in massing to the spire of Heins & LaFarge’s designs. Spearheaded by Bishop William Thomas Manning, work finally resumed in 1924, when construction began on the cathedral’s octagonal baptistry, which was designed in the tradition of the great baptistries of Florence and Pisa. However, large-scale construction at the cathedral did not occur until 1925, following a major fund-raising effort begun that year by Franklin D. Roosevelt. Construction then resumed on the nave and began on the west facade.

Cram issued his third redesign for the cathedral in 1929. The large spire over the crossing was eliminated and replaced with a square tower, rising approximately three-hundred feet, and the number of portals on the west facade was changed from three to five. In December of that year, construction began on the north transept, known as the Women’s Transept, using funds donated entirely by women.xxviii

From 1925 through 1933, the nave, the west facade except for the towers, and the baptistry, as well as part of the north transept were constructed. The Depression interrupted further work until later in the decade. Then, from 1939 through 1941, the vaulting of the choir and the sanctuary were partially rebuilt in the Gothic style to match the vaulting of the nave. The dedication of the enlarged cathedral took place on November 30, 1941, only seven days prior to the United States’ entry into World War II. Work on the cathedral again ceased, with the Women’s Transept only one-third complete, and with no work begun on the south transept, west towers, central tower, and other areas.xxix What had been completed, however, was dramatic. The 520-foot long nave featured an uninterrupted one-tenth-of-a-mile vista from the rose window to the choir.

Shortly before his death in 1942, Cram issued his final design for the cathedral, which incorporated a slender spire or fleche similar to that at St. Chapelle over the crossing, instead of the enormous square tower.

Cram’s other works include St. James Episcopal Church (1923-24; Madison Avenue and 71st Street in the Upper East Side Historic District) and the Chapel of the Intercession and its Vicarage (1911-14; Broadway and 155th Street; both designated New York City Landmarks). Outside of New York City, he designed the Graduate College at Princeton University and many of the buildings at the United States Military Academy at West Point. Cram continued in active practice until his retirement in 1930, after which he spent most of his time at his country estate at Sudbury, Massachusetts.

Subsequent History.xxxi

of his earlier proposals. He also proposed lowering the height of the west towers. As opposed to the synthetic eclecticism of Heins & LaFarge’s earlier scheme, Cram’s final redesign of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine was conservatively-toned: a carefully-studied copy of medieval cathedral architecture.xxxii Ralph Adams Cram

No architect is so closely identified with the Gothic Revival style in twentieth century American ecclesiastical and collegiate architecture as Ralph Adams Cram (1863-1942). Deeply religious, Cram was almost a latter-day Pugin in his combination of a prolific architectural practice with writing and lecturing aimed to explain and foster his point of view. Like Pugin, Cram visualized the middle ages as representing a way of life unblemished by the harsher aspects of industrialized society and sought to realize an image of his faith and beliefs in his churches. His philosophy is best expressed in The Gothic Quest, one of his many publications, in which he described Gothic architecture as “a mental attitude, the visualizing of a spiritual impulse.”

Cram, the son of a Unitarian clergyman, later converted to Anglicism. He began his architectural career in Boston at the age of twenty four in partnership with Charles Wentworth. Later, Frank Ferguson and Bertram Goodhue, who had joined the firm in 1889 and 1892, respectively, were made partners. From the start, the firm specialized in church design and favored English and French Gothic styles. Both of these styles can be seen in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, no doubt his most famous work in New York. Although many of Cram’s works, such as the exceptionally fine Church of St. Thomas at Fifth Avenue and 53rd Street (1906-13; a designated New York City Landmark), show his particular knowledge of and affection for the French Gothic, the spirit of his work continues in the tradition of the late work of the great English architect, George Frederick Bodley (1827-1907). Cram’s admiration for Bodley, made explicit in his writing, is apparent in his preference for the attenuated verticals of late Gothic styles, finely-worked stone, and taste for refined decorative detail.

After the war, the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, under the leadership of newly-appointed bishop, the Rt. Rev. Charles Gilbert, refocused its efforts to addressing the social problems in the surrounding area, and construction was halted for more than three decades. Fund-raising for the project became more difficult as the neighborhood deteriorated. In the interim, however, debate raged over how to finally complete the cathedral. Studies were made and several designs put forth, none of which were seriously considered.

In 1966, however, the Cathedral Trustees approved a simplified redesign of the crossing and west towers by architects Adams & Woodbridge.xxxiii It was not carried
out, and in 1969 Bishop Horace William Baden Donegan announced that all building and consideration of building would end. Donegan believed that money should be directed to social mission, rather than to building. During these years, the Cathedral of St. John the Divine was becoming a center of the Morningside community’s life and culture with programs for the arts, local youth, the elderly, and the environment, and was active in international issues and movements, such as the civil rights struggle and war resistance during the Vietnam era.

In 1973, however, Dean James Parks Morton, revealed at his installation ceremony his long-term intention to resume construction. In 1978, he announced that a stone yard would be opened on the cathedral premises that would employ local young people as apprentices to help build the cathedral and teach them the art of stone cutting. Morton intended to complete the west towers according to Cram’s 1929 design and to finish the sculptural elements of the facade. While this work was to proceed following Cram’s design, Dean Morton called for a modern re-design of the yet-unbuilt south transept. A design competition was held, which was won by architect Santiago Calatrava. A design competition for the carving of the central portal statues was also held and was won by Simon Verity. In 1979-84, an on-site stoneyard was established and work continued on the southwest tower. However, fund-raising for the stoneyard and implementation of the south transept design lagged, and both projects were deferred with only a small portion (some fifty feet) of the southwest tower having been built. The carving of the central portal statues on the main facade commenced in 1988 and was completed in October of 1997.

Later, the cathedral’s leadership committed itself to the repair and maintenance of the existing complex. The gabled portals contain compound arches with heavily-carved ornamentation, entryways that are recessed behind secondary arches, grouped piers springing from the bases and the responds, carved statues on pedestals or blocks of stone yet to be carved, and elaborately-carved screens filled with biblical scenes. The gables, which feature cusps, tracery, crockets, are topped by pedestals with statuary, the center gable being surmounted by a fourteen-foot carved crucifix. The central gable contains the arms of the See of New York, flanked by Arms of the Cathedral and the Seal of the City of New York. The doors of the west front, except for those in the center bay, are made of Burmese teakwood, embellished and reinforced by wrought iron. The center bay has two pairs of bronze doors that were cast and fabricated in Paris by M. Barbedienne, who also cast the Statue of Liberty. One pair shows scenes in bas-relief from the Old Testament, the other from the New. Each door is six feet wide and eighteen feet high, and each weighs approximately three tons. There are sixty panels on both the outer and inner sides of the doors. The stiles and framework are foliated. The trumeau, or central stone pier, of the center bay carries the statue of St. John the Divine. The majestas, which is the sculpted screen located in the typanum, shows the vision of the Lord. The Lesser Rose Window, which sits behind the majestas, contains seven divisions relating to the Apocalypse and has the sacred monogram of our Lord at its center. In the friezes above the five sets of doors are incised religious texts, and the arched transoms above the entryways feature biblical scenes in carved relief. The inner wall of the entryway recesses are decorated with arched panels and carved moldings.

The arcaded gallery consists of paired, open arches, located between the buttresses and features piers, cusps, and tracery. The central rose window, which sits within a great pointed, blind arch, is forty feet in diameter and contains over ten thousand pieces of stained glass and delicate stone tracery. It is dominated by the figure rather than new construction. The north transept was substantially damaged by a fire that occurred on December 18, 2001. The cathedral is presently about three-fifths complete.

Description
The plan of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine is cruciform; and is oriented so that the head of the cross faces east. Seven chapels radiate from the apse. The cathedral’s exterior is 601 feet long, including the fifty-foot narthex, the 248-foot nave, the 100-foot crossing, the 145-foot choir, and the 58-foot Chapel of St. Saviour at the rear of the apse. Its widest point is presently the 207-foot west front, as the transept and crossing - intended to be 330 feet - remain uncompleted. The nave and aisles are 146 feet across; the choir is fifty-six feet in width; and the ambulatory is fourteen feet wide. It is 177 feet to the ridge of the nave. The cathedral is 121,000 square feet in area, and seats 8,600 people. Built entirely of stone, the core of the building is of Maine granite and its outer walls are of Mohegan granite from Peekskill, New York.

West facade. The west facade has five bays, formed by arched buttresses. Each bay contains one of the cathedral’s five portals. The cathedral has four vertical stages divided by heavily-carved moldings. The lowest stage of the facade features the portals; the second contains the gallery; the third has the central rose window, the grisaille windows, and the lancet windows of the towers; and the forth stage consists of the central gable and the top of the partially-built south tower. The buttresses, featuring niches of which only the northernmost two presently contain statues, and are topped by carved finials.
of Christ, surrounded by the seven gifts of the Spirit, a choir of angels, symbols of the beatitudes, the four evangelists, symbols of Divine Love, the major prophets surrounded by Cherubim, and symbols of Divine Wisdom. The stained-glass grisaille windows each contain two lancets and a tracery rose. The north grisaille depicts the seven archangels and their distinctive symbols, while the south grisaille window has figured symbolizing the Seven Churches of Asia. Slender lancets pierce the recessed arches of the towers. There are small multi-faceted rose windows over the grisaille windows and multi-faceted carvings in the spandrels above the central arch. The stepped central gable contains lancets and a central medallion. The south tower is covered with scaffolding with a large, applied sign.

The West Narthex. The west narthex includes the two front towers, which are square in plan, and the vestibule of the cathedral into which the portals feed. The buttressed towers are flush with the cathedral’s west facade, but protrude from the facades of the naves. The north tower is built only to the third stage, while the south tower rises up to about the same level as the peak of the nave’s gable. The towers’ west facades have been previously described. The east facades of the towers consist of buttressed walls pierced by lancets and feature relieving arches, corbels, pinnacles, and niches with statuary. The north facade of the north tower and the south facade of the south tower feature the narthex windows, arcaded galleries, blind arches pierced by lancet windows, buttresses decorated with pinnacles, and niches containing statuary. The stained-glass narthex windows are composed of two lancets and a rose.

The Nave. The nave is five aisles wide in the cathedral’s interior, the center aisle being the same width as West 112th Street between the building lines. Both facades of the nave consist of four double bays, divided by arched buttresses. Each double bay is further divided into sub-bays by narrower flying buttresses, and contain the windows of the side chapels and the clerestory. There are seven chapels on each side of the nave, with one chapel per sub-bay, except for the easternmost sub-bays, which contain entryways at floor level. Each sub-bay has its own dedication. On the north side, they are the Sports Bay, the Arts Bay, the Crusaders’ Bay, the Education Bay, the Lawyers’ Bay, the Ecclesiastical Origins Bay, the Historical and Patriotic Societies’ Bay, and the Fatherhood Bay. On the south side, they are All Souls’ Bay, the Missionary Bay, the Labor Bay, the Press Bay, the Medical Bay, the Religious Life Bay, the Armed Forces Bay, and the Motherhood Bay. The chapel bays have a standing-seam shed roofs protected by carved parapets. The arched chapel and clerestory windows all consist of two lancets below a rose, and feature stained-glass iconography that corresponds to each dedication. All of the buttresses are gabled and are topped by pinnacles. The roof, which is comprised of standing-seam metal, is protected by carved parapets and has gabled dormers. There is a non-historic, one-story storage shed attached to the north facade of the nave.

The Crossing and the Transepts. The unfinished crossing consists of four gigantic arch-ribs of granite, braced by eight buttresses. Enclosing nearly 16,000 square feet, the crossing is topped by self-centering dome that was designed by Rafael Guastavino. The dome and its supporting pendentives are covered with cement stucco. The partially-constructed north transept and narthex are built up to the level of the spring of the main portal arch on the exterior. The temporary north elevation of the crossing is composed of cement stucco with buttresses and arched fenestration presently sealed with wood due to the fire in 2001. The south transept remains completely unbuilt. The temporary south elevation of the crossing is similar to that on the north side of the crossing. There is a non-historic smoke stack affixed to the south side of the crossing, as well as a series of non-historic sheds, iron stairways, and elevated walkways, providing access to the crossing, the apse, and the basement.

The Apse. The apse contains the seven radiating statue of the Christ Child in the gable, Angels of the Resurrection in niches of the buttresses on either side of the window, and beneath the window, the Virgin seated between St. Simeon and St. Zacharias. The gable of St. Saviour’s is topped by a crucifix. The interstices between the chapels are pierced by stained-glass lancet windows and are topped by arcades.

Report prepared by
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FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine has a special character and 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, the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine is one of the great religious structures of the world; that it is the seat of the Episcopal Diocese of New York; that it was chartered in 1873 under the leadership of Bishop Horatio Potter; that the cathedral was initially designed in a competition held in 1888 and won by the architectural firm of Heins & LaFarge, known for its ecclesiastical work; that the winning proposal was an eclectic design incorporating elements of the Romanesque, Byzantine, and Gothic styles; that, at the time, New York City was vying for international status and the cathedral project sought to emulate in size and design the major churches of Europe; that the cathedral’s monumental size was intended to take advantage of its lofty location; that with the construction of the cathedral and other cultural institutions in the neighborhood, the Morningside Heights neighborhood came to be known as “the Acropolis of the new world;” that the cathedral’s most generous donors included members of some of the city’s most prominent families and individuals, such as the Astors, the Vanderbilts, and the Belmonts; and that later fund raising for its completion was spearheaded by Franklin D. Roosevelt; that the first phase of construction began in 1892 with the laying of the cornerstone; that a saucer dome made of overlapping tiles reinforced with metal rods was constructed at the cathedral in 1909 by the noted builder Rafael Guastavino; that the first phase of construction ended in 1911 when the crypt was completed and that the completed portion of the cathedral was highly praised; that changes in taste and the death of Heins in 1907 brought about a new French Gothic design for the completion of the cathedral by architect Ralph Adams Cram of the firm Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson; that Cram was one of the biggest proponents of the new Gothicism and of using the Gothic Revival style in American ecclesiastical and collegiate architecture; that Cram’s design for the Cathedral of St. John the Divine was a carefully-studied copy of medieval cathedral architecture and was inspired by the French cathedrals at Bourges, Notre Dame (Paris), Amiens, and Rheims; that the most innovative feature of Cram’s design for St. John’s, the placement of the triforium and the clerestory in full-height central aisles and the addition of chapels along spacious side aisles, produces an effect of verticality and openness; that the cathedral’s octagonal baptistry was designed in the tradition of the great baptistries of Florence and Pisa; that the second construction phase lasted from 1916 until 1941; that during this period, the nave was completed and joined to the choir by a rough-finished crossing, the imposing west front was added, and the north transept was partly built; that work resumed in 1979 on the west towers and on the ornament of the west facade; that the cathedral’s main vault now rises to a height of 124 feet; that its stained-glass windows feature both biblical characters and modern personages; that the cathedral produces a dramatic closed vista along West 112th Street and that the highly visible edifice is considered the neighborhood’s “crowning glory;” that the 520-foot long nave features an uninterrupted one-tenth-of-a-mile vista from the rose window to the choir; and that, even its unfinished state, the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine remains the largest church in the United States and one of the largest in the world.

Accordingly, pursuant to provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine, 1047 Amsterdam Avenue (aka 1021 Amsterdam Avenue, 1061 Amsterdam Avenue and 419 West 110th Street) and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1865, Lot 1 (in part) as its Landmark Site, consisting of the present footprint of the Cathedral, including the front steps. (Please see the attached map.) This designation is limited to building’s exterior.


ii. All of these congregations were supported by the Church of England.
iii. The church was finally admitted into full membership of the diocesan convention in 1853, thanks to the efforts of William Jay and John Jay, Jr., on behalf of African-American congregations, challenging discriminatory diocesan rules.

iv. This section is based on the following sources: Dolkart, 1-35; Michele Herman, “Morningside Heights,” The Encyclopedia of New York City, 771; LPC, Croton Aqueduct West 119th Street Gatehouse Designation Report (LP-2051), researched and written by Jay Shockley (New York, 2000); LPC, Plant and Scrymsor Pavilions for Private Patients, St. Luke’s Hospital Designation Report (LP-2113), researched and written by Jay Shockley (New York, 2002); and LPC, The Riverside Church Designation Report (LP-2037), researched and written by Matthew A. Postal (New York, 2000).

v. By the late-nineteenth century, the area was called by various names, including Bloomingdale, Bloomingdale Heights, Riverside Heights, Columbia Heights, University Heights, Cathedral Heights, and Morningside Heights, which by the 1920s, became firmly established as the neighborhood’s name.

vi. One of the Asylum’s buildings, designed by Ithiel Town, survives on the grounds of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, and is attached to the cathedral itself. It is not part of this designation, but remains calendared by the Commission.

vii. Dolkart, 1.


ix. By this time, the concept of building an Episcopal cathedral had become more viable. Such an endeavor became more affordable to the Episcopalian community, which had grown larger, wealthier, and more powerful. At the time, the city’s largest church and only cathedral was St. Patrick’s, which was built by less-affluent Roman Catholics. Thus, the Episcopalians wanted to build an even greater cathedral for themselves.

x. In 1882, the church was offered a parcel of land on Eighth Avenue and Seventy-Fourth Street, but the price was too high, and the elder Bishop Potter by this time was in poor health, so the plan was dropped in its very early stages.

xi. Stern, 1900, 396.

xii. Prominent Presbyterian layman, D. Willis James, contributed $100,000.

xiii. One old building remains from the Leake and Watts Orphan Asylum. It is a Greek Revival-style structure constructed c.1840.

xiv. The paid architects were reportedly J.C. Cady, Carerre & Hastings, Henry Congdon, Frank Furness, Robert Gibson, Charles Haight, Richard Morris Hunt, McKim, Mead & White, Renwick, Aspinwall & Russell, R.H. Robertson, Van Brunt & Howe, Henry Vaughn, Frederick Clarke Withers, and William Halsey Wood.

xv. Most of the submissions were from American architects, although some were received from England, France, and Italy. Only four had extensive experience with cathedral commissions, three of whom were British.

xvi. Dolkart, 47; Stern, 1880, 366.
xvii. Stern, 1900, 17.

xviii. The look was similar to the competition entry by the architectural firm Huss & Buck.

xix. These chapels were all built between 1911 and 1918, and were designed by either Heins & LaFarge, Henry Vaughn, Carrere & Hastings, or Cram & Ferguson.

xx. The glass mosaics in the crypt were designed by Louis Comfort Tiffany for the World’s Columbian Exposition. They were later donated and moved to the New York cathedral in 1898. In 1916, they were repossessed by Tiffany and installed at his Long Island Estate, which later burned.

xxi. Salwen, 72.

xxii. The largest are at the Cathedral of St. Isaac in St. Petersburg, Russia.

xxiii. The domed roof constructed over the crossing, although intended to be only temporary, remains in place. A saucer dome made of overlapping tiles reinforced with metal rods, it was constructed by the noted builder Rafael Guastavino, who patented the system of structural tile vaulting that was widely-used in the early twentieth century. It was completed in fifteen weeks in 1909.

xxiv. Stern, 1930, 156.

xxv. The crossing tower was revised several times; its final design, which was inspired by the cathedrals at Amiens and St. Chapelle in Paris, wasn’t settled upon until 1942.

xxvi. The Synod House, a neo-Gothic structure by Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson, was built in 1912-14. The Diocesan House, originally the Deaconess Training School, was built in 1909-11 and designed in a Tudor version of the neo-Gothic style by Heins & LaFarge. The Cathedral House, originally the Bishop’s House, built in 1912-14, also is a neo-Gothic design by Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson. It is connected to the Deanery of 1912-13, again by Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson in a neo-Gothic style. The Cathedral School, originally the Choir School, was built in 1912-13 in a simple neo-Gothic style and designed by Walter Cook and Winthrop A. Welch.

xxvii. This nation-wide fund-raising campaign solicited contributions from people of all races and creeds for a “place of worship for all people.” New York City Guide, 381.

xxviii. It remains incomplete.

xxix. Bishop William Thomas Manning donated the remaining iron and steel from the construction site to support the war effort.

xxx. Even its structure would be traditional, supported by load-bearing piers constructed stone upon stone. The only structural steel is in the trusses of the copper roof for fire-proofing.


xxi. Significantly scaled back from the final Cram design, this new scheme eliminated the west towers above the level of the nave and placed over the crossing a low octagonal tower that lit the interior through concrete louvers filled with colored-glass panels. The stripped-down towers and transepts were to be built of concrete sheathed in granite to reduce costs.

xxii. It opened in 1979. The master mason was James R. Bambridge, the noted restorer of the Gothic cathedrals of
England, who apprenticed with Trollope and Colls, the London firm which restored the Houses of Parliament after World War II. The architect was John Doran of the Boston firm Hoyle, Doran & Berry, the successor to Cram & Ferguson.

xxxiv. Much of the carving on the west facade was done by the sculptor John Angel.

xxxv. Both rose windows and the grisaille windows were designed and fabricated by Charles J. Connick.

xxxvi. The north tower is named in honor of St. Peter, while the south tower is named after St. Paul.

xxxvii. There were designed and made by Ernest W. Lakeman.

xxxviii. The sculpture on the exterior of the Chapel of St. Saviour and at the choir clerestory was done by Gutzon Borglum.