

**SAINT NICHOLAS OF MYRA ORTHODOX CHURCH**, 288 East 10<sup>th</sup> Street (aka 155-157 Avenue A), Manhattan. Built 1882-3; Architect, James Renwick, Jr.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Block 437, Lot 25.

On October 28, 2008, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of St. Nicholas of Myra Orthodox Church and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 2). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There were seven speakers in favor of designation including Councilmember Rosie Mendez and representatives of the Municipal Art Society, the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, the Landmarks Conservancy, the Historic Districts Council, the Society for the Architecture of the City and the Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society in America. There were no speakers in opposition.

### Summary

This lively and picturesque brick and terra cotta church complex was constructed in 1882-83 as the Memorial Chapel of St. Mark's Parish, and was donated to the church by Rutherford Stuyvesant in memory of his deceased wife, Mary Rutherford Pierrepont. It replaced a small mission building on Avenue A, previously established by St. Mark's. This church and its attached school building were designed by James Renwick, Jr. (1818-1895), one of the most prominent architects in nineteenth century New York.

Since 1925, this building has been occupied by the St. Nicholas of Myra Orthodox Church. This Carpatho-Russian Church was organized in New York in 1925 by a group of immigrants who had come from the Carpathian Mountain region of Czechoslovakia. Naming their church after St. Nicholas, Archbishop of Myra, they rented the building from the Episcopal Diocese of New York until 1937 when they purchased it.

During his long and varied career, architect James Renwick designed many of New York's most well-known churches, including St. Patrick's Cathedral, Grace Church, and St. Stephen's Church. He worked in many different styles, but is especially known for his Gothic Revival style churches. St. Nicholas of Myra Church displays a simplified Gothic Revival style that is enriched with a highly varied roofline and areas of intricate, terra-cotta trim, executed in a Renaissance Revival style. It is large and complexly massed, with each section clearly defined. The library and school are located at the corner of 10<sup>th</sup> Street and Avenue A and are distinguished by a tall, square bell tower topped by a steep pyramidal roof. The front of this section is embellished by a terra-cotta bas relief of a lion, the symbol of St. Mark the Evangelist. The dramatic entranceway, with an intricate stained-glass transom, is set within a recessed Gothic arch and is asymmetrically located between the school and the chapel. The street-facing, gable end of the chapel is marked by three tall, gothic-arched windows united by an applied pointed-arch lintel. The peak of this gable is ornamented by an arcade and an section of terra-cotta ornament. The chapel, the entrance porch and the tower are all crowned by Orthodox-style copper crosses.

This building has been an important part of this densely-populated neighborhood for more than 100 years and through the work of various church organizations has served as a cornerstone for many immigrants in their adaptation to their new country.



## DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

### Development of the East Village<sup>1</sup>

Prior to the arrival of European fur traders and the Dutch West India Company, Manhattan and much of the modern-day tri-state area was populated by bands of Native Americans from the Lenape tribe. The Lenape traveled from one encampment to another with the seasons. Fishing camps were occupied in the summer and inland camps were used during the fall and winter to harvest crops and hunt. The main trail ran the length of Manhattan from the Battery to Inwood following the course of Broadway adjacent to present day City Hall Park before veering east toward the area now known as Foley Square. It then ran north with major branches leading to habitations in Greenwich Village and the Lower East Side at a place called Rehtauck or Naghtogack in the vicinity of Corlears Hook. In 1626, Dutch West India Company Director Peter Minuit “purchased” the island from the Lenape for sixty guilders worth of trade goods.<sup>2</sup>

Under the Dutch, most inhabitants of New Amsterdam lived south of Fulton Street, where they could be close to each other for protection and close to the harbor for the essential shipping activities on which the colony depended. North of the settlement, many wealthy families owned large estates, used as farms and plantations and as country retreats, especially for those recurring times when epidemics threatened the crowded populace on the island’s tip. The area now known as the Lower East Side and the East Village was divided into a series of large farms which, by the mid-eighteenth century were owned by three families: the Stuyvesants, Rutgers and De Lanceys. The Rutgers property ran from Chatham Square to Montgomery Street between the East River shore and Division Street. The De Lancey holdings consisted of two large parcels (approximately 340 acres) abutting the Rutgers property on the north and east, acquired by Lieutenant Governor James De Lancey around 1741. Peter Stuyvesant, who came to the colony in 1647, owned a large working farm he called his Bowerie. It lay approximately between present day 5<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Streets, from Fourth Avenue to the East River.<sup>3</sup>

Stuyvesant’s house, also called Bowery, was located near present day Fourth Avenue, just north of Astor Place.<sup>4</sup> Stuyvesant cultivated large sections of his land, employing the approximately 40 slaves he owned. He donated land from this estate for the Second Reformed Church, where he was a member and where he was later buried.<sup>5</sup> The farm remained in the ownership of Stuyvesant’s descendents for many years. Peter Stuyvesant’s grandson Gerardus (d. 1777) was the last to live in the original family house (which burned in 1778), and Gerardus’ sons, Petrus and Nicholas divided the property between them. Nicholas called his section Bowery while his brother’s was called Petersfield. Peter’s house of the same name was located between present-day 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Streets, between First and Second Avenues. A small village grew up nearby, called Bowery Village. Since it lay outside the limits of New York City and was not subject to its taxes, markets flourished here in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. When slavery was outlawed in New York in 1827, many of Stuyvesant’s former slaves settled in this area.

By the 1830s an economic boom attracted many more people to New York, with a concurrent need for more commercial space as well as housing. African-Americans and other poor people were forced northward as land that had previously been agricultural began to be developed for upper class housing. The Stuyvesant descendants began to divide their property into lots and sell it in 1836. The areas around Great Jones, Bleecker and Bond Streets were all paved and built up with “genteel residences,”<sup>6</sup> large Federal style marble- and brick-clad town houses. These streets, as well as Lafayette Place, East 4<sup>th</sup> Street and St. Mark’s Place comprised

some of the city's most fashionable addresses, while the streets to the east tended toward more middle class populations.

In the 1850s, the population of New York soared, due primarily to an influx of European immigrants as well as to newly-freed African-Americans who were drawn to Manhattan because of the availability of employment.<sup>7</sup> In 1825 over one fifth of the population of New York was foreign born. In the 1840s, many immigrants were Irish who started coming in large numbers looking for work after the collapse of Irish agriculture and the rapid industrialization that displaced many workers. Germans also had a strong presence in New York, especially after the failed revolutions of 1848, when 70,000 German immigrants arrived in the city, fleeing "land shortages, unemployment, famine and political and religious oppression."<sup>8</sup> Many were poor and unskilled and tried to find housing in Manhattan's notorious slum known as Five Points but the Irish and free Blacks who were already there did not welcome them. The German immigrants first congregated in the five-block span between Canal and Rivington Streets, but later arrivals were forced to look elsewhere as landlords continued to crowd more and more people into inhuman living conditions. They moved northward, up the eastern side of Manhattan island, pushing out existing residents of this area, including the African-Americans who had previously settled there.<sup>9</sup> Some of the existing homes in what is now the East Village<sup>10</sup> were subdivided or changed into boardinghouses, while others were torn down to make way for tenement buildings, constructed to fit more people into the same space and creating one of the most densely populated areas in the world.<sup>11</sup> Eventually the area north of Division Street up to 18<sup>th</sup> Street and from Third Avenue to the East River filled with German immigrants until it became the third largest concentration of German speakers in the world.<sup>12</sup> This section came to be known as *Kleindeutschland*, Little Germany, Dutchtown, or *Deutschlandle* and was "the first large immigrant neighborhood in American history that spoke a foreign language" and remained the major German-American center in the United States for the rest of the century.<sup>13</sup>

In 1904, a large group of German families and children were aboard the steamboat the *General Slocum* for an outing on the East River. A fire on board resulted in the deaths of over one thousand residents of *Kleinedeutschland*, devastating the neighborhood. Many members of the remaining German community moved away, to the newly developing German area of Yorktown or elsewhere. Their places were taken by other immigrant groups who moved into the East Village, including Eastern European Jews, Italians and countries such as Hungary, Bulgaria, Slovakia, and Ukraine. As other immigrant groups had done previously, they established their own institutions, such as the Hungarian Reformed Church on 7<sup>th</sup> Street (later St. Mary's American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Church), the Polish Catholic St. Stanislaus Church on East 7<sup>th</sup> Street, the Russian and Turkish Baths, founded in 1892 and the Christadora House, founded in 1867 as a settlement house devoted to Russian, Polish, Hungarian, Ukrainian and other Slavic immigrants.<sup>14</sup>

The existence of low cost housing in this neighborhood continued to attract new groups of immigrants, usually among New York's poorest residents. From World War I to the 1940s, Second Avenue between East 14<sup>th</sup> Street and Houston Streets was considered the heart of New York's Eastern European Jewish community. After World War II, the ethnic make-up of the neighborhood was dominated by Latin American immigrants, especially those from Puerto Rico.<sup>15</sup> Beginning in the 1960s, artists started to move into the neighborhood, and the area became the locale for outdoor rock concerts and hippie gatherings. Since the 1970s more professional people have been moving to the area, often replacing the old immigrant population.<sup>16</sup>

### St. Mark's in the Bowery Church

St. Mark's in the Bowery Church (a designated New York City Landmark) was founded in 1795 and is located on the corner of 10<sup>th</sup> and Stuyvesant streets. It sits on what was a section of Peter Stuyvesant's former farm, on the site where Stuyvesant had built a Dutch Reformed Church in 1660. Stuyvesant's remains were buried there. After the old church was torn down, Stuyvesant's great grandson Petrus offered the site and \$4,000 to Trinity Church in 1793 for a new building to serve the area's growing population. It was constructed in 1795-99, making it the second oldest church in Manhattan.<sup>17</sup> The steeple, designed by Ithiel Town, was added in 1828 and the cast-iron portico in 1854. This church served the wealthy residents of the neighborhood who were building substantial residences there in the 1830s and 40s.

An important part of the Episcopal religion has always been outreach to others in the form of missionary work. A sermon preached by Rev. E.D. Huntington in 1863 put it succinctly:

There is a church law that says that 'a church that is not constantly adding to its possessions, and enlarging its domain, by the earnestness of the souls already organized within it, however affluent, comfortable, and punctilious, is a backslider, and has a curse preparing. Not to grow is to die. Not to spread abroad' is to wither away.<sup>18</sup>

To this end, as early as 1838, St. Mark's in the Bowery established an infant school for local poor children and formed the Ladies Benevolent Society in 1860. They also established mission chapels, at 6<sup>th</sup> Street and Second Avenue, from 1857 to 1859, and then at 139 West 48<sup>th</sup> Street, between 1859 and 1861. In 1861 this church was consecrated as the Anthon Memorial Church.<sup>19</sup>

Shortly thereafter, St. Mark's Church reached out to its neighbors in the East Village and organized the St. Mark's Mission Chapel. By the mid-nineteenth century the East Village had begun to accommodate a large poor and immigrant population. At first this mission was located in rented rooms above a feed store but in 1868, members of St. Mark's Church donated money to purchase a small building on Avenue A, just south of East 10<sup>th</sup> Street. The work of this mission was led by members of the St. Mark's Church in the Bowerie Mission Society whose purpose was

the maintenance of religious worship and education among the poor in the city of New York in connexion [sic] with the Protestant Episcopal Church of the Diocese of New York.<sup>20</sup>

Episcopal churches reached out to all immigrant groups to bring them into the church and to help them learn the ways of their new community. This universal purpose of mission churches was explained in an article in *The New York Times* in 1881 (even though it was a description of the Italian Mission then being held at Grace Church).

The mission was not established to perpetuate the habits, the language, and the education of those Italians who come to these shores to give a hand in building Uncle Sam's grand fabric; but on the contrary, it was originated and it is maintained for the purpose of educating the strangers to our systems, aspirations, and free institutions, and chiefly to keep kindled in the hearts of these refugees that spark of religion which too often becomes obliterated while crossing the Atlantic.<sup>21</sup>

St. Mark's Church supported the work of its Mission Society for many years so that by 1882, this mission church had 125 "communicants."<sup>22</sup>

## Rutherford Stuyvesant and the Memorial Chapel

Rutherford (originally Rutherford) Stuyvesant,<sup>23</sup> born Stuyvesant Rutherford, was the son of Lewis Morris Rutherford<sup>24</sup> and Margaret Stuyvesant Chandler. Margaret Chandler's great uncle, Peter Gerard Stuyvesant died childless and left his property to Stuyvesant Rutherford on condition that he invert his name to make sure the Stuyvesant family name continued. Rutherford Stuyvesant inherited a considerable amount of property on the east side of Manhattan, some of which he gradually developed with rowhouses and other developments. He studied in Paris where he became friends with Calvert Vaux. While there he became convinced of New York City's need for apartment houses, like those he had seen in the French city. Employing the well-known (and Beaux Arts-trained) architect Richard Morris Hunt, Stuyvesant built the first apartment building in New York in 1869, on East 18<sup>th</sup> Street (demolished). After his father died in 1892, Stuyvesant converted his family home on Second Avenue at 11<sup>th</sup> Street into another apartment building, by adding another floor and moving the entrance from 11<sup>th</sup> Street to Second Avenue.<sup>25</sup>

Rutherford Stuyvesant married Mary Rutherford Pierrepont, the daughter of Henry E. Pierrepont, and lived with her at Tranquility Farms, an estate in western New Jersey that originally belonged to Peter Stuyvesant, as well as in a town house at 15<sup>th</sup> Street and Second Avenue. After she died in 1879, Stuyvesant lived in Paris, where he met and married his second wife in 1902.<sup>26</sup>

In 1881 Stuyvesant purchased a lot on the corner of Second Avenue and East 10<sup>th</sup> Street<sup>27</sup> to build a mission church for St. Mark's in the Bowery. He purchased the lot next to the one bought previously by "St. Mark's in the Bowerie Mission Society."<sup>28</sup> Both properties originally lay within the holdings of Nicholas W. Stuyvesant, who had begun to divide his property into individual lots in 1837. Combining the corner lots, Stuyvesant commissioned the prominent architect James Renwick, Jr. for the design and dedicated the building as a memorial to his first wife, Mary Rutherford Pierrepont. He then transferred the property to the Rector, Church Wardens and Vestry of the Protestant Episcopal Church of St. Mark's in the Bowery in 1882.<sup>29</sup>

## Architect

James Renwick, Jr. (1818-1895)<sup>30</sup> was one of the most renowned New York architects of the nineteenth century. His architectural practice was long and varied, and he produced designs for many houses, institutions and churches. In his church designs, he showed himself to be a sophisticated practitioner of the nineteenth century Gothic Revival style, as it evolved from its Ecclesiological beginnings to the picturesque Victorian version. Never "much of a purist," as Montgomery Schuyler described him,<sup>31</sup> Renwick was also comfortable working in the Romanesque Revival, Italianate or "modern French" styles. Renwick has been described as having an "alert curiosity and cultivated taste" that made him "one of the most accomplished eclectic architects of his time."<sup>32</sup>

James Renwick, Jr. was born into a wealthy and influential American family; his mother was a descendant of the Brevoort family, while his father was a successful merchant and engineer, and later a professor of physics and chemistry at Columbia College. James Jr. was educated as an engineer at Columbia College, graduating in 1836, and then received a master's degree in 1839. His early experience was as an engineer on the Erie Railroad and then as supervisor of construction of the Distributing Reservoir of the Croton Aqueduct water system. In 1843, at the age of 24, James Renwick, Jr. received the commission to design Grace Church (1843-1846, 800 Broadway, a designated New York City Landmark) for one of the wealthiest and most fashionable congregations in New York. This white marble church and rectory

complex shows the influence of French medieval churches as well as the ideas expressed in Pugin's *True Principles*.<sup>33</sup>

Other church designs by Renwick in New York City followed, including the Romanesque Revival style Church of the Puritans (1846-47) on Union Square (demolished) and its contemporary Calvary Church (1846-47, located within the Gramercy Park Historic District) patterned after twin-towered French cathedrals but executed in brownstone. Near the middle of his career, Renwick received the commission for St. Patrick's Cathedral on Fifth Avenue (1858-69, a designated New York City Landmark). The front was based on the many twin-towered, triple-portal cathedrals in Europe, such as Rheims, Amiens and Cologne, while English cathedrals provided the source for the nave design.<sup>34</sup> After this project, Italian Gothic and Romanesque buildings began to be more of a source for Renwick's designs and he used a variety of "richly colored, highly textured materials providing dazzling polychromatic effects." Renwick was more concerned with a synthesis of form and fabric than stylistic purity, and in the Clinton Avenue Congregational Church he set round-arched Romanesque windows into a Gothic Revival style building (1854-55, Brooklyn, demolished), while in his Church of the Covenant (1863-65, demolished) he used stone of alternating colors to outline the arched window openings, and added a rose window and gables at all the roof terminations. At St. Bartholomew's Church (1871-72, demolished) Renwick lavishly used polychromy inside and out in a style that has been described variously as "Lombardo-Gothic," "Byzantine," and "Italian Romanesque." St. Ann's Episcopal Church in Brooklyn (1868-69, demolished) was an exemplary version of the finely-detailed, elaborately decorated High Victorian Gothic style advocated by John Ruskin. The brownstone walls contrasted strongly with white stone bands which gave a distinctly horizontal emphasis to the design.

In addition to ecclesiastical work, Renwick supplied designs for many other types of buildings, executed in a wide variety of styles. Among these, the most well-known of Renwick's work is one of his earliest, the medieval, Romanesque Revival style Smithsonian Institution building in Washington, D.C., for which he won the design competition in 1846. Inspired by the work on the new Louvre in Paris, he worked in the Second Empire or "Modern French" style to create the Corcoran Gallery in Washington (1859-61 and 1870-71, later renamed the Renwick Gallery) where he was able to fully integrate the complex decorative and spatial characteristics of the new style.<sup>35</sup> His residential work included a Romanesque Revival style house for his parents on lower Fifth Avenue (demolished), a simple Gothic style cottage (West Haven, Connecticut, 1851), the elaborate, mansarded Greystone in Riverdale (for William E. Dodge, 1863-64, a designated New York City Landmark), and an Italianate townhouse at Fifth Avenue and 53<sup>rd</sup> Street (1881-83, for Almy and Frederic Gallatin, demolished). Among his numerous other designs were several Italianate style hotels from the 1850s (all demolished), the Renaissance Revival style main building of Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, NY (1861-65), and two structures on Blackwell's Island (Lighthouse 1872, and Smallpox Hospital, 1854-56, both designated New York City Landmarks).

As Renwick's architectural practice expanded, especially with the increase in commercial commissions, he could no longer complete all the work himself. In 1858 he joined in partnership with Richard Tylden Auchmuty and two years later he brought in Joseph Sands as partner. Sands died in 1880 and in 1883 Renwick promoted James Lawrence Aspinwall and William H. Russell to partnerships in the firm, which then was renamed Renwick, Aspinwall & Russell.

#### Design and Building of the Memorial Chapel

The design of the Memorial Chapel was a late work of James Renwick. During his long career Renwick was able to create buildings in styles appropriate to each purpose and setting.

The Memorial Chapel for St. Mark's in the Bowery Church is less ornate than many of his other churches, which were often heavily encrusted with complex terra cotta or carved stone, but it is appropriate for this particular place and function.

By the mid- 19<sup>th</sup> century Episcopal church designs were influenced by the ideas promoted by the Cambridge Camden Society, through their publication, "The Ecclesiologist." This group was established in England 1839 to encourage the use of the Gothic style for church buildings. They believed that designing church buildings that were based on medieval architecture would help bring the church back from what they considered to be secular and corrupt practices.<sup>36</sup> They promoted the use of the early English Parish Church as a model because these buildings were perceived to be more pure, and unadulterated by modernity. The New York Ecclesiologists, begun in 1848, promoted these ideas in the United States. They had a strong influence on the designs of Episcopal churches, an influence that can be seen in New York in Trinity and Grace Churches (both designated New York City Landmarks).

Although Renwick was capable of designing churches that were acceptable to this group (such as Grace Church) he was not much interested in adhering strictly to their dictates. By later in the century their influence was on the wane, although the use of some variation of the Gothic style for Christian buildings would remain standard for many years. The building of the Mission Church of St. Mark's (now St. Nicholas) shows only the slightest reference to these concerns. Its Gothic Revival style can be seen in the lancet windows that pierce the otherwise plain brick walls. Its irregular massing acknowledges the picturesque compositions of early English parish churches, but since this building is set on a crowded city block, it is tightly composed on its lot. A single, square tower with a steep, pyramidal roof is located near the center of the building which, along with several gables, dormers and a tall, irregularly-shaped chimney on 10<sup>th</sup> Street, provides a highly picturesque roofline. Architects of this period felt that such rooftop variations added essential visual interest, particularly on a street that was otherwise likely to be dark and crowded.<sup>37</sup> Each section of the building is clearly expressed: the large sanctuary that seats almost 500 people on the western side and the school wing facing Avenue A. The school wing was designed to house a kindergarten, a parochial school, a Sunday school, a free circulating library, a free reading room and a crèche for the care of small children of working mothers.<sup>38</sup>

As a mission church, this building was intended to reach out to the people of the neighborhood and provide a place of worship and education. A highly decorated, elaborate building would have been considered inappropriate for such a congregation. It is hardly plain however, with distinct areas of applied terra-cotta ornament on both façades, generally placed to emphasize an architectural element such as a gable or chimney. Renwick used terra cotta on many of his buildings because it was easy to create a specific type of ornament and less expensive than carved stone. The terra cotta used on this building was likely to have come from the Boston Terra Cotta Company, one of the primary suppliers of this material to the building trade.<sup>39</sup> Other decorative features on the building consist of brick string courses that subdivide the facades and hooded, lancet windows, many of which are enhanced with stained glass or stained-glass transoms. Brick and terra cotta were considered durable materials that also could be shaped in a multitude of ways to provide visual interest without great extra cost. Here brick forms many of the string courses while terra cotta is used as hood moldings over the windows, crockets on the gables and in multiple moldings around the main doorway. The terra-cotta panels under the large gable on Avenue A, in the transom of the top window in that gable, at the peak of the large gable facing 10<sup>th</sup> Street and on the oriel that leads to the chimney fronting on 10<sup>th</sup> Street are executed in the Renaissance revival style, with ornate, all-over foliate designs. A smaller panel on the chimney on 10<sup>th</sup> Street shows a dragon which is a symbol of St. Mark the Evangelist.

This church ceased functioning as the mission church of St. Mark's Church in 1911 and for a few years the building was rented by the Holy Trinity Slovak Lutheran Church. The St. Nicholas of Myra Carpatho-Russian Church was formed in 1925 and immediately rented the church building. They added the distinctive copper crosses to the top of the tower, the peak of the sanctuary gable and the entrance porch.

#### Carpatho-Russians and the St. Nicholas of Myra Orthodox Church<sup>40</sup>

The St. Nicholas of Myra Church was started by a group of people who had come to this country from the Carpathian Mountain region of Eastern Europe. Their homeland is located in what is now northern and eastern Slovakia, southeastern Poland and southwestern Ukraine and is also known as Transcarpathia. Throughout its history this area has been invaded frequently, first by the Hungarians, then the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Nazis and the Soviet Union. It has had numerous names, including "Hungarian Russia," "Ruthenia," or "Transcarpathian Ukraine." The people of this area are descendants of Slavs, who have lived there since at least the sixth century. They are generally known as "Rusyn" which refers to the political entity of Kievan Rus, or the "Russichi" or the people of Rus, Eastern Slavs who mixed with other peoples over the centuries. The name Rus is retained only in the Carpathian Mountains, as these people were generally integrated into a variety of other geographical and demographic entities.

By the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the Rus had received Orthodox Christianity from Saints Cyril and Methodius, although over the years other groups attempted to convert them to their faiths, notably Roman Catholics, who succeeded during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In the nineteenth century, both in the United States and in Europe, there was movement back to Orthodoxy and a variety of specific nationalistic churches developed among Slavic peoples.

Beginning in the 1880s, Slavic immigrants were sought out by Pennsylvania coal mine operators as cheap replacement labor for striking German, Welsh and Irish miners. By 1892, there were more than 40,000 Slavs in Pennsylvania and they started their own parish and seminary. In the early twentieth century many more immigrants from this part of the world had settled near other Eastern Europeans in New York's East Village. They came primarily for the jobs and better economic conditions that they could not attain in their homelands, although they were not easily accepted by other immigrants. They tended to keep within their own ethnic groups, forming fraternal societies, schools and other social and cultural institutions as well as churches where they could speak their own language and maintain their customs.

The first organizational meeting to form a Carpatho-Russian Church in New York City occurred in September, 1925. They celebrated their first Divine Liturgy on September 13, 1925 in the SS Peter and Paul Orthodox Church on East 7<sup>th</sup> Street. Three weeks later, they moved into this building on East 10<sup>th</sup> Street, sharing it at first with the Leonardo Da Vinci Art School that was using the school wing. Before long, the church rented the entire building for \$100 a month. By January, 1937, they were able to purchase the building with the help of loans provided by several of their members. The church was named after "the patron saint of all our people, Saint Nicholas, Archbishop of Myra." This church became the ethnic center for all Carpatho-Russian people in the area and provided school, and social and cultural activities such as choirs, dance groups and language courses. It is still in use by the same congregation.

#### Description

The St. Nicholas of Myra Church consists of a large, three and a half-story school block at the southwestern corner of Avenue A and East 10<sup>th</sup> Street, connected by a two story, side-gabled section to a front facing gable-roofed sanctuary facing East 10<sup>th</sup> Street. A gable-fronted



porch between these two main sections shields an elaborate, recessed doorway while a square tower with pyramid roof marks the western edge of the school block. The building is situated near the lot lines with a non-historic iron fence surrounding the property and shielding the areaway and the raised basement windows. The squared basement windows are all covered by protective metal grilles. The church is faced with red brick, highlighted by areas of matching terra-cotta ornament. The window sills and the water table are brownstone, some of which has been painted. Most of the roof sections are covered with asphalt shingles, except for the pyramidal roof on the bell tower which is faced with a standing seam metal roof. Unless otherwise stated, the lancet windows have non-historic, one-over-one double-hung sash with original stained glass transoms. They are also covered by non-historic storm or protective windows.

*Sanctuary:* The sanctuary is located in the westernmost section of the complex. The large, gable-fronted end faces East 10<sup>th</sup> Street and projects from the sections on either side by one bay. The front is punctuated by three tall, narrow lancet windows of graduated sizes, filled with stained glass and set on a continuous stone sill and grouped under a large pointed-arch, brick molding. Beneath the peak of the main gable is a triangular panel of terra-cotta ornament consisting of a diaper-work pattern of foliate terra cotta, with a hexafoil design in the middle. Under this terra-cotta panel is an open arcade of lancet windows separated by small terra-cotta columns with terra-cotta capitals and spandrel panels that sits on a continuous foliate, terra-cotta string course. A copper cross in the Eastern Orthodox style crowns the gable.

A small bay is located to the west of the chapel. The first story is flush to the street and has two pointed-arch openings: a window filled with stained glass and an original, wooden entrance door reached by a small flight of concrete stairs with an iron railing. The second story is set back one bay from the street and has two lancet windows filled with stained glass. Above the windows is a terra-cotta string course and a steeply pitched, side-gable roof. Beneath this side entrance is a service door, reached by a steep flight of non-historic concrete stairs in the open areaway.

*Main Entrance:* Located between the sanctuary and the school block is a two-story section with a side-gabled roof that holds the building's main entrance and serves as a connector. The second story is set back one bay from the front plane and has five, evenly-spaced lancet windows, each topped by a terra-cotta molding. These window sash are filled with small squares of stained glass. The first story is in line with the front plane of the building and has a gable-fronted entrance porch topped by a copper Eastern Orthodox cross. Its roofline is adorned with terra-cotta crockets and there are decorative terra-cotta rondels beneath the peak of the gable. A series of terra-cotta and brick moldings carried on thin stone columns with terra-cotta capitals shields an ornate entranceway that consists of original wooden doors enriched with bronze scroll work under a stained glass transom subdivided into five sections. The stained glass displays Eastern Orthodox symbols. Narrow lancet windows with brick moldings flank the entranceway which is reached by concrete stairs with brick side walls and non-historic iron railings. A small, non-historic sign is attached near the eastern side of the door.

*School Wing:* At the westernmost side of the school block is a square tower with stepped lancet windows. These windows are capped by brick moldings and projecting terra-cotta lintels and are filled with stained glass. A denticulated brick cornice continues around the tower from the adjacent school building. Two lancet windows rest on this cornice and extend into a broad band of terra-cotta ornament that wraps around the top of the fourth story of the tower. Another narrow band of foliate terra-cotta ornament caps this section and is topped by a terra-cotta cornice crowned by a band of stone that forms the base for the fifth story. This final story is identical on all four sides. It is comprised of an open arcade with pointed-arch openings carried

on square columns with terra-cotta capitals. Similar but larger columns are at each of the four corners of the tower. Formed brick string courses run between the corner columns. A steep, pyramidal metal roof crowns the tower, with a copper cross at its peak.

The rest of the school block that faces 10<sup>th</sup> Street is two bays wide with a hipped roof above the third story. At the ground level, the areaway has been filled in. Each level has two windows and is marked by narrow brick string courses. Those on the first and second story have double-hung sash with stained glass transoms, while those on the third story no longer have their transoms. An ornate chimney rises above the cornice in the middle of this section of the façade. It rises with a stepped base from a broad, brick oriel-like projection that is highlighted by a terra-cotta bas relief of a lion in the center and another terra-cotta panel at its base.

The stone water table and brick cornices carry around horizontally from 10<sup>th</sup> Street onto the Avenue A façade, which is also divided vertically into two sections. The northernmost part of the building, closest to 10<sup>th</sup> Street, has an open areaway with a non-historic metal stair leading to a service door in the basement. There are two windows on the raised first story and three narrower windows grouped together by a stone sill at the second story. The third story is three bays wide, with the center bay occupied by a two-story wall gable that rises above the cornice line. The base of this gable is marked by a broad band of terra-cotta ornament on which sits a large, pointed-arch window topped by an ornate terra-cotta transom. The top of the gable is occupied by a large, recessed pointed arch with three small windows and a transom filled with ornate terra cotta. The top edge of the gable is marked by crockets and a finial. Behind this gable is the eastern side of the hipped roof.

The southern side of this façade has another, two-bay section. A non-historic single door is located at ground level close to the southernmost edge of the façade. There are three grouped, lancet windows at the raised first story and two groups of two windows at the second story. The third story has two single, gabled dormer windows topped by crockets and finials that project from the gambrel roof. A smaller, plain gabled dormer is located at the fourth story level, and it is edged in copper. All of the windows on the third and fourth stories of this façade have replacement sash and their transoms have been removed. The roof of this section is capped by simple terra-cotta cresting.

Report researched and written by  
Virginia Kurshan  
Research Department

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Much of the introductory material is from: Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), *513 Grand Street House Designation Report* (LP- 2270) (New York: City of New York, 2007), report prepared by Marianne S. Percival; LPC, *Hamilton-Holly House Designation Report* (LP-2157) (New York: City of New York, 2004), report prepared by Jay Shockley; and LPC, *Children's Aid Society, Elizabeth Home for Girls (LP-2274)* (New York, City of New York, 2008), report prepared by Virginia Kurshan.

<sup>2</sup> *Gotham*, 5-23; Historian R. P. Bolton speculates that the land of lower Manhattan may have been occupied by the Mareckawick group of the Canarsee which occupied Brooklyn and the East River islands. Upper Manhattan was occupied by the Reckgawawanc. The Native American “system of land tenure was that of occupancy for the needs of a group” and that those sales that the Europeans deemed outright transfers of property were to the Native American closer to leases or joint tenancy contracts where they still had rights to the property. The Weckquaesgeek fled to Rehtauck/Naghtogack to escape the Mohawks only to be massacred by order of Willem Kieft of the Dutch West India Company. Reginald Pelham Bolton, *New York City in Indian Possession*, 2d ed. (New York: Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, 1920; reprint, 1975), 7, 14-15, 79; Robert Steven Grumet, *Native American Place Names in New York City* (New York: Museum of the City of New York, 1981), 69.

<sup>3</sup> *Gotham*, 55. Further information about the Stuyvesant family comes from [www.forgotten-ny.com](http://www.forgotten-ny.com) and Kenneth Holcomb Dunshee, *As You Pass By* (New York, Hastings House, 1952), 146-9.

<sup>4</sup> Stuyvesant Street, which does not conform to the city grid began as a small road leading to the house.

<sup>5</sup> The current St. Marks' in the Bowery Church sits on the same land on which this church was constructed.

<sup>6</sup> *Gotham*, 448.

<sup>7</sup> *Gotham*, 479.

<sup>8</sup> “Germans,” in *The Encyclopedia of New York*, Kenneth Jackson, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 463.

<sup>9</sup> Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery, African-Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 267.

<sup>10</sup> The section now known as the East Village was actually part of the Lower East Side until determined real estate salesmen coined the term “East Village” in the 1950s in an effort to give it more cache.

<sup>11</sup> *The New York Herald*, in the 1860s, described the area as having “that incredibly dusty, dirty, seedy, and ‘all used up’ appearance peculiar to the East Side of town,” quoted in Andrew Roth, *Infamous Manhattan* (New York: Citadel Press, Carol Publishing Group, 1996), 231.

<sup>12</sup> *Gotham*, 745.

<sup>13</sup> “Germans,” *Encyclopedia of New York*, 463.

<sup>14</sup> Slavs of New York, <http://nycslav.blogspot.com/2005/08/legacy-of-faith.html>

<sup>15</sup> The community later named itself Loisaida to symbolize the second generation Hispanic roots that had developed in the context of the African-American and Latino movements for social and economic justice, equality and identity.

<sup>16</sup> Information about the later development of the East Village comes from Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Children's Aid Society, Tompkins Square Lodging House for Boys and Industrial School aka Eleventh Ward Lodging House Designation Report* (LP-2055) (New York: City of New York, 2000) and LPC, *Webster Hall and Annex Designation Report* (LP-2273) (NY: City of New York, 2008), both reports prepared by Jay Shockley.

<sup>17</sup> David Dunlap and Joseph J. Vecchione, *Glory in Gotham, Manhattan's Houses of Worship, A Guide to their History, Architecture and Legacy* (New York: A City and Company Guide, 2001), 59.

<sup>18</sup> <http://anglicanhistory.org/usa/fdhuntington>

<sup>19</sup> *Memorial of St. Mark's Church in the Bowery* (New York: Published by the Vestry, 1899), 151-2.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

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- <sup>21</sup> “Italians Brought into Church,” *New York Times* (Feb. 7, 1881), 8.
- <sup>22</sup> “Church Life in the City,” *New York Times* (July 10, 1882), 1.
- <sup>23</sup> Information about Rutherford Stuyvesant comes from several articles in the research files of the Landmarks Preservation Commission, as well as “R. Stuyvesant Dies Suddenly in Paris,” *New York Times* (July 5, 1909), 7 and various Stuyvesant websites.
- <sup>24</sup> Lewis Morris Rutherford was trained as a lawyer but was more interested in scientific investigations and spent a good deal of time observing the moon and other planets from an observatory he set up in the corner of his house. He was a Trustee of Columbia College, helped start the National Academy of Science, and was an associated of the Royal Astronomical Society of Great Briton.
- <sup>25</sup> “Old Rutherford House,” *New York Times* (Sept. 16, 1895), 5.
- <sup>26</sup> Stuyvesant’s second wife was the Countess Mathilde E. De Wassenaer, the widow of a Dutch nobleman. Stuyvesant died in Paris in 1909.
- <sup>27</sup> New York County Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 1599, p. 159 (April 28, 1881).
- <sup>28</sup> New York County Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 1040, p.442 (Mar. 3, 1868).
- <sup>29</sup> New York County Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 1668, p. 325 (June 14, 1882).
- <sup>30</sup> Much of the material in this section was taken from “Renwick, James, Jr.” by Selma Rattner in *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects*, Adolf K. Placzek, ed., Vol. 3 (New York: The Free Press, 1982), 541-548, and LPC, *Church of All Saints Designation Report (LP-2165)* (New York: City of New York, 2006), report written and researched by Virginia Kurshan.
- <sup>31</sup> *Macmillan Encyclopedia*, 541.
- <sup>32</sup> William H. Pierson, Jr., *American Buildings and Their Architects, Technology and the Picturesque, The Corporate and the Early Gothic Styles* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1980), 217.
- <sup>33</sup> Phoebe B. Stanton, *The Gothic Revival and American Church Architecture, An Episode of Taste, 1840-1856* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968), 65.
- <sup>34</sup> St. Patrick’s was intended to be the culmination of Renwick’s work in the Decorated Gothic Revival style, including a monumental stone tower over the crossing and the first large masonry vault in the United States. Budget constraints forced him to change or abandon many of his plans. The crossing tower was eliminated and the interior was finished with lath and plaster, rather than stone, making the already-completed buttresses structurally unnecessary.
- <sup>35</sup> *Macmillan Encyclopedia*, 543.
- <sup>36</sup> Stanton, 324 and Peter Williams, *Houses of God, Region, Religion and Architecture in the United States* (Urbana and Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1997), 63.
- <sup>37</sup> See discussion of Calvert Vaux’s buildings for the Children’s Aid Society in LPC, *Children’s Aid Society, Elizabeth Home for Girls*, 8-9.
- <sup>38</sup> “The New Church at Tompkins Square, Avenue A and Tenth Street,” *Frank Leslie’s Sunday Magazine*, 280.
- <sup>39</sup> The Boston Terra Cotta *Catalogue* (Boston: P.H. Foster & Co., 1885), shows that the company supplied terra cotta pieces for the alter and rerados on the interior, so it is likely that they created the exterior terra cotta ornamentation as well.
- <sup>40</sup> The information in this section comes from a number of sources, including: the website of the Orthodox Church in America, <http://oca.org>; Stephen Thernstrom, “Carpatho-Russians,” in *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, 200-07; and <http://simkovich.org/religion.htm>; and a history of the St. Nicholas of Myra Church, published by the congregation on the occasion of its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, November, 1975.

## FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that St. Nicholas of Myra Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Church has a special character and a 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 building that houses the St. Nicholas of Myra Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Church was constructed as the Memorial Chapel of St. Mark's in the Bowery Church in 1882-3; that this building, designed by one of New York's most prominent nineteenth century architects James Renwick, Jr., was constructed as the mission church of St. Mark's, with the purpose of serving the local immigrant community; that the property and building were donated to St. Mark's Church by Rutherford Stuyvesant in memory of his wife, Mary Rutherford Pierrepont; that Rutherford Stuyvesant was a descendant of Peter Stuyvesant who owned a large farm in this part of Manhattan in the seventeenth century; that after 1911, the building ceased to be used by St. Mark's and became the Holy Trinity Slovak Lutheran Church, reflecting the large numbers of Eastern Europeans who had settled in the East Village area; that, beginning with its founding in 1925, this building was home to the St. Nicholas of Myra Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Church; that many immigrants from the Carpatho-Russian community came to the United States in the early years of the twentieth century, most settling in the East Village with other people of Eastern European descent; that the Carpatho-Russians come from the Carpathian Mountain region that now encompasses parts of Slovakia, Poland and the Ukraine and are descendants of the Slavic peoples who lived there since the sixth century; that they have their own unique language and customs; that the building is designed in a Gothic Revival style with elements of Renaissance Revival ornament; that the architect, James Renwick, was a prolific designer who worked in many different styles and building types during his long career; that the design of this church is suitable to the idea of a mission church in a poor neighborhood and that it is carefully arranged with clearly delineated sections for different purposes and has a picturesque variety in its massing, roofline and facades that adds interest to the crowded neighborhood; that the brick walls are enlivened by numerous lancet windows with stained glass or stained glass transoms and areas of complex terra-cotta ornament; that the elaborate entranceway with its embellished wood doors shielded by a series of moldings and an intricate stained glass transom provides a distinctive welcoming element for the church; that the bold and dramatic gable-fronted sanctuary serves to catch the eye of those passing by and advertise the building's religious affiliation; that this building continues in its original religious purpose and continues to serve as an anchor for this neighborhood and its residents.

Accordingly, pursuant to the 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 St. Nicholas of Myra Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Church, 288 East 10<sup>th</sup> Street (aka 155-157 Avenue A), Manhattan, and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 437, Lot 25 as its Landmark Site.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair, Pablo Vengoechea, Vice-Chair,  
Frederick Bland, Diana Chapin, Roberta Brandes Gratz, Christopher Moore,  
Margery Perlmutter, Elizabeth Ryan, Roberta Washington, Commissioners



Saint Nicholas of Myra Orthodox Church  
288 East 10<sup>th</sup> Street (aka 155-157 Avenue A)  
Manhattan  
*Photo: Chris Brazee*



Saint Nicholas of Myra Orthodox Church

288 East 10<sup>th</sup> Street

Manhattan

*Photo: Chris Braze*



Saint Nicholas of Myra Orthodox Church  
East 10<sup>th</sup> Street Façade, Sanctuary and Main  
Entrance

*Photos: Chris Brazee*





Saint Nicholas of Myra Orthodox Church  
Terra-cotta details, East 10<sup>th</sup> Street facade  
*Photos: Chris Brazee*





Saint Nicholas of Myra Orthodox Church  
East 10<sup>th</sup> Street façade, school block

*Photo: Chris Brazee*



Saint Nicholas of Myra Orthodox Church  
East 10<sup>th</sup> Street details  
*Photos: Marianne Percival*



Saint Nicholas of Myra Orthodox Church  
Avenue A facade  
*Photo: Chris Brazee*

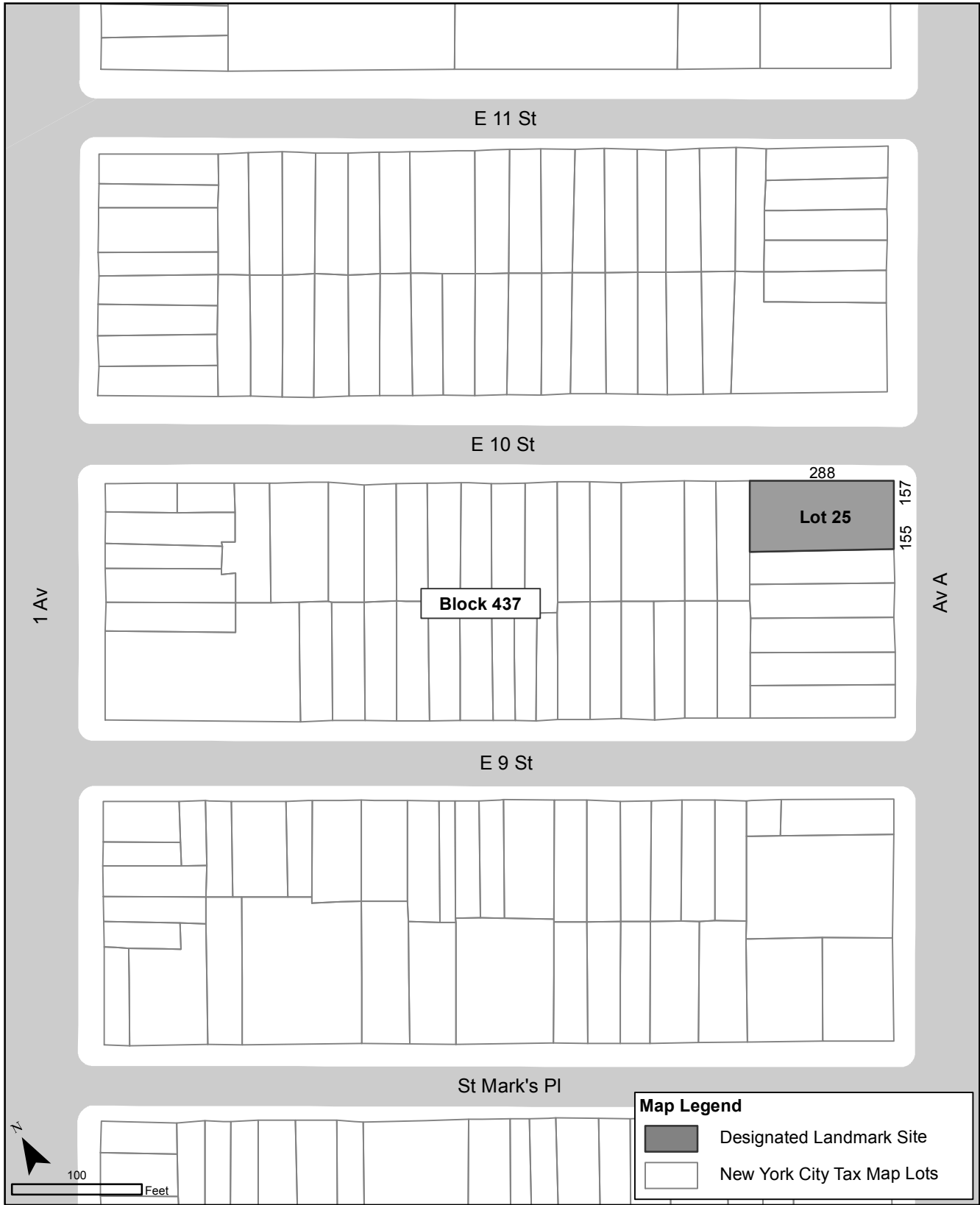


Saint Nicholas of Myra Orthodox  
Church

Avenue A details

*Photos: Chris Brazee and  
Marianne Percival*





ST. NICHOLAS OF MYRA ORTHODOX CHURCH (LP-2312), 288 East 10th Street (aka 155-157 Avenue A).  
 Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 437, Lot 25.

Designated: December 16, 2008

Graphic Source: New York City Department of City Planning, MapPLUTO, Edition 06C, December 2006.  
 Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, JM.