

Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine and the Cathedral Close

Individual Landmark

1047 Amsterdam Avenue

Designation Date: February 21, 2017



*Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine and the Cathedral Close March 8, 2017
Image courtesy of the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission*

One of the great religious complexes of the world, the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine and the Cathedral Close, located at Amsterdam Avenue and West 112th Street, is the seat of the Episcopal Diocese of New York. The Cathedral is considered the crowning glory of its 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. The Cathedral and the complex represent many phases of development over a long period of time and remain incomplete. Even in its unfinished state, the Cathedral of St. John the Divine remains one of the largest churches in the United States and the world.

The cathedral was chartered in 1873 under the leadership of Bishop Horatio Potter. An architectural competition for the cathedral church was held in 1888 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 remains unfinished.

Along with the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, the auxiliary buildings of the Cathedral Close, constitute one of the outstanding ecclesiastical ensembles in the city. Partially extant from the era prior to the 1887 sale of this site for the Cathedral is the Leake & Watts Orphan Asylum (1838-42, Ithiel Town, architect; Samuel Thomson, builder), the oldest building in Morningside Heights. It is one of the most significant examples of a Greek Revival style institutional building of the 1830s, with Ionic columns, surviving in New York City (it has served a variety of Cathedral functions over the years). The Collegiate Gothic style St. Faith's House (1909-11, C. Grant LaFarge) was built as the home of the New York Training School for Deaconesses, an independent Episcopal institution, founded in 1890, that was granted a location on the Cathedral grounds by Cathedral trustees.

The Collegiate Gothic Style Choir School (1912-13, [Walter] Cook & [Winthrop A.] Welch) housed the school that was founded in 1901 in order to educate boys who would sing in the Cathedral choir. Ralph Adams Cram, of Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson, designed the remaining three of the Cathedral's auxiliary buildings: the neo-Gothic style Synod House (1912-14), built for the specific purpose of New York hosting the Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in 1913, and the more domestically scaled French Chateausque style Deanery (1913), and Bishop's House (1912-14). The buildings that form the Cathedral Close, also designed by prominent New York architects, represent significant examples of their style and type. Together, the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine and the Cathedral Close form one of New York City's most important religious complexes.

[Read the full NYC LPC designation report here.](#)