

St. Aloysius Roman Catholic Church

Individual Landmark

209-217 West 132nd Street

Designation Date: January 30, 2007



St. Aloysius R.C. Church

Photo: Carl Forster, LPC

The richly ornamented, polychrome St. Aloysius Roman Catholic Church was built in 1902-1904 to the design of William W. Renwick, based on Italian Gothic prototypes, an unusual source of stylistic inspiration for buildings in New York City. Named after the 16th-century Italian St. Aloysius Gonzaga, the church was organized in 1899 by Rev. John A. McKenna and constructed during a church-building campaign in Harlem to accommodate the growing immigrant population. William W. Renwick, nephew of noted architect James Renwick Jr., joined his uncle's firm in 1885 and became a junior partner in 1890. In his work at that firm and its successors, and in independent practice after 1900, he specialized in ecclesiastical architecture and decoration.

The intricate facade of St. Aloysius, considered one of William W. Renwick's most important commissions, consists of alternating bands of red brick, celadon-colored glazed brick (by the Grueby Faience Co.), and glazed "granitex" (with the color and texture of grey granite) terra

cotta with cobalt blue accents (by the New York Architectural Terra Cotta Co.) in a wide variety of molded motifs. The design also features four sculptural reliefs depicting the Holy Family, the head of Christ, and angels, set on cobalt blue densely-glazed backgrounds. It is a very early example in New York City of the use of polychromatic architectural ceramic.

Noted critic Montgomery Schuyler praised the color and decorative scheme and Renwick's handling of the terra cotta. The original congregation was made up mostly of German, Irish, and Italian immigrants, but in 1935, in response to the changed demographics of Harlem, St. Aloysius became a mission church for the conversion of African Americans to Catholicism. In 1947, the parish ceased its mission status and again became independent. St. Aloysius, with its handsomely decorative polychrome facade, is one of New York City's most distinctive Catholic church designs.

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