Landmarks Preservation Commission
January 30, 2007, Designation List 385
LP-2164

ST. ALOYSIUS ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH, 209-217 West 132nd Street, Manhattan. Built 1902-04; William W. Renwick, architect; New York Architectural Terra Cotta Co., terra cotta; Grueby Faience Co., glazed brick.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1938, Lot 124.

On September 21, 2004, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of St. Aloysius Roman Catholic Church and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 1). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Sixteen people spoke in favor of designation, including U.S. Congressman Charles B. Rangel, the pastor of St. Aloysius Roman Catholic Church, former Landmarks Preservation Commission Chairman Gene A. Norman, and representatives of the Archdiocese of New York, City Councilman Bill Perkins, the Municipal Art Society of New York, Historic Districts Council, New York Landmarks Conservancy, Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society in America, and Landmarks West! One speaker opposed designation. In addition, the Commission has received letters in support of designation from State Senator David A. Paterson and Manhattan Community Board 10. The Commission had previously held a public hearing on the church on June 14, 1966.

Summary

The richly ornamented, polychrome St. Aloysius Roman Catholic Church was built in 1902-04 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. W.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 in 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 W.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.

Photo: c. 1965

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Harlem and its Churches [1]

As the population of New York increased after the Civil War, development spread rapidly far uptown. By 1881, three lines of the elevated railroad, along Second, Third, and Eighth Avenues, opened new neighborhoods, such as the Upper West Side. The introduction of electric cable car service in 1885 on Amsterdam Avenue and along 125th Street made Harlem more accessible. New residential and institutional buildings, including churches, were constructed lining the newly paved avenues and streets, while many elegant homes, such as the King Model Houses (1891) on West 138th and 139th Streets, helped establish Harlem as a fashionable community.[2]

The character of Harlem again changed dramatically during the early years of the 20th century. A proposed subway route to Harlem in the late 1890s ignited a new round of real estate speculation, leading to highly inflated market values. Excessive vacancies in the many new residential buildings, however, caused a collapse in Harlem's real estate market prior to the completion of the subway. Taking advantage of this deflated market was Philip Payton, a black realtor who founded the Afro-American Realty Co. in 1904. Promoting easy access to Harlem via the I.R.T. subway to 145th Street, Payton negotiated leases on white-owned properties and rented them to blacks. Despite the fact that they were charged higher rents than were whites, New York's black middle class – long denied access to "better" neighborhoods – seized the opportunity for decent and comfortable new housing and moved uptown. In 1906, the demolition of housing in the "black Tenderloin" neighborhood of western midtown for the construction of Pennsylvania Station uprooted hundreds of families, who flocked northward to Harlem. Black immigrants from the Caribbean and the American South soon joined the migration to Harlem.

By the 1920s, most of the major black institutions and churches that were once located in lower Manhattan and in midtown had moved northward along with their constituents. Harlem emerged as the African-American center of New York City. New churches were built by some of these congregations, including St. Philip's Episcopal Church (1910-11, Tandy & Foster), 214 West 134th Street, and Abyssinian Baptist Church (1922-23, Charles W. Bolton & Son), 132 West 138th Street, while others took over the buildings of former congregations that had moved from the area, such as Metropolitan Baptist Church (formerly New York Presbyterian Church), 151 West 128th Street.[3] Harlem has an especially fine architectural ensemble of religious structures. These churches have also had a major social role in Harlem. As stated by Cynthia Hickman in a recent guidebook on Harlem's churches,

> *The sheer number of active churches in Harlem makes it, perhaps, the most "churched" community in the world. More than fifty of these institutions have been havens in the community since the Great Depression, with nearly two dozen of these churches playing a pivotal role in the establishment of Harlem as the "Negro Mecca" during its renaissance in the 1920s.* [4]

Construction of St. Aloysius Roman Catholic Church [5]

The Church of St. Aloysius of the City of New York was organized in 1899 after Archbishop Michael Augustine Corrigan appointed Rev. John Aloysius McKenna to found a new Harlem parish to be located between those of All Saints, on East 129th Street, and St. Charles Borromeo, on West 141st Street. Rev. McKenna (1852-1913), a graduate of St. Joseph's Seminary, Troy, N.Y., had been ordained in 1884, served as assistant priest at the Church of All Saints until 1894, and was then appointed pastor in Liberty, N.Y., during which time he presided over the construction of St. Aloysius Church, Livingston Manor. McKenna remained the first pastor of St. Aloysius Church (Harlem) until his death. The new St. Aloysius parish included the area bounded by West 125th and 135th Streets, Lenox Avenue, and St. Nicholas Terrace. Named after the 16th-century Italian St. Aloysius Gonzaga (a young Jesuit who died serving victims of the plague), the church was incorporated in December 1899. In anticipation of the future construction of a new church edifice, the Church of St. Aloysius obtained a mortgage that same month from the Mutual Life Insurance Co. and purchased six adjacent rowhouses at 209-219 West 132nd Street (between Seventh and Eighth Avenues) for $71,150. Services were held in a meeting hall located at West 131st Street and Seventh Avenue. The congregation, mostly German, Irish, and Italian immigrants, grew quickly, overcrowding the temporary church hall.

Rev. McKenna petitioned the archbishop in February 1902 to commission a new church structure. The archdiocese retained architect William W. Renwick, a specialist in ecclesiastical architecture, who filed plans in

June 1902 for a structure expected to cost $60,000.[6] But an item in August in the *New York Times* stated that the "new brick and stone edifice" would cost $100,000, and that one of the rowhouses owned by the church was "to be altered for use as a rectory."[7] Construction began in November 1902. The *Times* reported in November 1903 that St. Aloysius, "about completed," was part of the nearly one million dollars in Roman Catholic church construction then underway in New York City (Protestant churches then being built in the city totaled about three million dollars).[8] St. Aloysius was the fourth of seven central Harlem Catholic parish churches that were constructed (or altered) in the late-19th and early-20th centuries to meet the religious needs of the burgeoning immigrant population in the area.[9] As completed in March 1904, the church was clad in brick and terra cotta. It was dedicated on April 17 at a ceremony officiated by Archbishop John Murphy Farley. The interior was not fully finished at this time, and four religious sculptural reliefs planned for the front facade had not been installed.

The Architect [10]

William Whetten Renwick (1864-1933), a nephew of the eminent architect James Renwick, Jr., was born in Lenox, Mass., and graduated from the Stevens Institute of Technology in 1885 after studying mechanical engineering. He also studied sculpture at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Paris, and painting in New York, Paris, and Rome. He entered the office of his uncle (then Renwick, [James Lawrence] Aspinwall & [William H.] Russell) in 1885 as a draftsman, and was admitted as a junior partner in 1890. The firm became Renwick, Aspinwall & Renwick in 1892; after the senior Renwick's death in 1895, it became Renwick, Aspinwall & [Walter T.] Owen, with Aspinwall as senior partner. Aspinwall (1854-1936), born in New York City, had entered the office of James Renwick (a cousin of his wife) as a draftsman in 1875, and became a partner in 1883.

In his uncle's office, William Renwick had participated in several church commissions, including St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Cathedral (1853-88), Fifth Avenue and East 50th Street, and Church of All Saints (Roman Catholic) (1889-93, Renwick, Aspinwall & Russell), 47 East 129th Street, for which he is credited with working out the details of his uncle's general design.[11] He was the architect of the neo-Classical style Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul (1891-92), Indianapolis. In his independent practice after 1900, he specialized in ecclesiastical architecture and decoration. Among his major commissions were St. Aloysius R. C. Church (1902-04); Church of All Saints School (1902-04), 50-52 East 130th Street; and, at Grace Church (Episcopal), the south porch and open-air pulpit (1910), and alterations to the Chantry (1879, Edward T. Potter).[12] He is credited with developing the decorative mural process of "fresco relief" which utilizes both sculpture and painting (this technique was employed on the north wall of the interior of St. Aloysius in 1911).

With Aspinwall and Fitz Henry Faye Tucker (dates undetermined), he established the firm of Renwick, Aspinwall & Tucker in 1905. Little is known of Tucker, who became an architect in New York by 1904; his association with Renwick and Aspinwall lasted until 1925 (after which the firm continued as Renwick, Aspinwall & [Shirley R.] Guard). Among the commissions the firm received, executed in Gothic and neo-Classical styles, were the Grace Church Neighborhood House (1906-07), 98 Fourth Avenue;[13] Provident Loan Society Buildings (1908-09), 61 East 25th Street and 734 Seventh Avenue; American Express Co. Building (1914-17, Aspinwall credited with the design),[14] 65 Broadway; Seaview Hospital, Sanitarium additions (1917), Staten Island,[15] Pictorial Review Co. Building (1919; demolished), Seventh Avenue and West 59th Street; Dollar Savings Bank (1919), Willis Avenue and East 147th Street, Bronx; and Lawyers' Mortgage Co. Building (1921-22; demolished), 56 Nassau Street.

The Design of St. Aloysius Roman Catholic Church [16]

The design of the richly ornamented, polychrome St. Aloysius R. C. Church is based on Italian Gothic prototypes, not often seen as the source of stylistic inspiration for buildings in New York City. It appears to have been most directly influenced by the 19th-century main facade of the Duomo (Cathedral) (1867-86, Emilio de Fabris) in Florence, Italy, which was executed in polychrome marble and inspired by the polychrome facades of Italian Gothic cathedrals such as Siena and Orvieto. St. Aloysius is articulated with a monumental pedimented central section, flanked by pilasters, with a Gothic-arched entrance pavilion surmounted by a rose window, and side aisle sections having entrances, end pilasters, and terminating cornices following the slope of the roof. The intricate facade 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.[17] The design

also features four sculptural reliefs (installed c. 1905-09) depicting the Holy Family, the head of Christ, and angels, set on cobalt blue densely-glazed backgrounds.

St. Aloysius, with its combination of two colors and textures of glazed terra cotta and two types and colors of brick, is a very early example in New York City of the use of polychromatic architectural ceramic. The church is contemporary with three far better-known examples of this trend: the Broadway Chambers Building (1899-1900, Cass Gilbert), 273-277 Broadway; the Beaver Building (1903-04, Clinton & Russell), 82-92 Beaver Street; and Madison Square Presbyterian Church (1903-06, McKim, Mead & White; demolished).[18] It is also a major early example of the use of granitex terra cotta. Terra cotta expert Susan Tunick has noted that, in contrast to previous usages of terra cotta in the late 19th century as a distinct material,

> *at the turn of the century, as new glaze textures and finishes became available, once again the issue of terra cotta as a substitute material arose. This time* glazed *terra cotta was produced to intentionally mimic other building materials. ... Since terra cotta was cheaper than stone, it was often chosen as an economic substitute and was made to look as much like stone as possible. Company advertisements boasted of new glazes with names like "Granitex" that replicated the texture and color of granite and other natural stones.* [19]

The New York Architectural Terra Cotta Co., manufacturer of St. Aloysius' terra cotta, was established in 1886 by Orlando B. Potter (with Asahel Clarke Geer) after his experience in the construction of his Potter Building (1883-86, Norris G. Starkweather), 35-38 Park Row,[20] which used extensive architectural terra cotta. The only major architectural terra cotta firm in New York City, it became one of the largest such American manufacturers, producing ornament for such notable structures as Carnegie Hall (1889-91, William B. Tuthill), Montauk Club (1889-91, Francis H. Kimball), West End Collegiate Church and School (1892-93, Robert W. Gibson), Ansonia Hotel (1899-1904, Paul E.M. Duboy), and Plaza Hotel (1905-07, Henry Hardenbergh).[21] The company's factory was located in Long Island City. The New York Architectural Terra Cotta Co. lasted until bankruptcy in 1932. The Grueby Faience Co., manufacturer of St. Aloysius' celadon-colored glazed brick, was established in Boston in 1894 by William Henry Grueby. Apprenticed as a boy (1880-90) with the eminent J. & J.G. Low Art Tile Works, in 1891 Grueby formed the partnership of [Eugene R.] Atwood & Grueby, which manufactured architectural ceramics and glazed bricks. Grueby Faience became most noted for its matte green glaze, introduced in 1897. Though the company's art pottery was highly prized, tile production was the main source of its revenue. In 1898, two separate divisions were created -- the Grueby Pottery Co., for the manufacture of art pottery, and the Grueby Faience Co., for architectural faience. After Grueby Faience went bankrupt in 1909, William Grueby established the Grueby Faience & Tile Co., which manufactured architectural faience and tiles until 1919, when the firm was purchased by Calvin Pardee of Perth Amboy, N.J.[22]

St. Aloysius, as a relatively small parish church on a mid-block site in Harlem, did not receive much notice in the contemporary architectural press, despite the provenance of the Renwick firm. It was, however, favorably reviewed by the noted architectural critic Montgomery Schuyler. He wrote that "it is one of the innumerable oddities in the vicissitudes of fashion that there should be in New York so few examples of the mediaeval art of Italy,"[23] such as the Italian Gothic Revival style New York Academy of Design (1862, Peter B. Wight; demolished) and several churches by Jacob Wrey Mould, including All Souls Church (1852; demolished). Schuyler compared St. Aloysius with the earlier Italian Gothic Revival style Church of All Saints, also by the Renwick firm, calling St. Aloysius "a more recent and less pretentious church in the same style [and] at least equally successful." He praised its architectural solution, as a mid-block church which required side clerestory windows, as well as its decorative scheme, color, and terra cotta, writing:

> *But how many solutions of it do we find better than this, or as good? A rich front, of which the enrichment is produced by modifications of form, but still more by applications of color, a front quite "blind," except for the great wheel window, a sufficient and effective depth for the splayed jambs of the main central portal, and an undeniable effect of richness and refinement. Observe that the central gable is evidently an excrescence, the actual slope of the roof appearing in the coping of the aisle walls. ... Really, what better can you do with a church front which is only a front? It seems that the architect devised a still higher degree of enrichment by color for the central feature. ... For those interlaced arcades over the side doors and above the central portal one recalls no Italian precedent... but how effective they are as intricate enrichment! And the coloring is very effective also -- a ground of excellent rough red brick, banded with gray terra-cotta, set off between courses of green glazed brick,*

the terra cotta everywhere so elaborately moulded as to show that the architect knew his material, and a sparing introduction of gold on fields of blue enamel. [24]

More recently, David W. Dunlap, in his guidebook to Manhattan's houses of worship, said of St. Aloysius:

If this church were in Italy – and it could be – it would be a compelling draw, its facade a scintillating quiltwork of decorative masonry. ... it is a little-known treasure, one of many in which Harlem abounds. [25]

Despite the fact that St. Aloysius is relatively unknown, it is one of New York City's most distinctive Catholic church designs.

Later History [26]

By the 1920s, the demographics of Harlem were greatly changing. The immigrant groups that had constituted the Catholic churches' original congregations were leaving for other areas, while African-Americans were moving in substantial numbers into Harlem. Many of the new arrivals lived within the bounds of St. Aloysius and other parishes, but few African-Americans were Catholics. The first attempt by the archdiocese to address this situation had been in 1912, when Cardinal Farley requested that St. Mark the Evangelist Church, 65 West 138th Street, become the first Catholic church in Harlem to welcome black congregants. St. Mark thus became a community meeting place for black organizations. In 1931, Monsignor Thomas M. O'Keefe was assigned the pastorate at St. Charles Borromeo R.C. Church, 211 West 141st Street. O'Keefe had previously been pastor at St. Benedict the Moor R.C. Church, 342 West 53rd Street, since 1898 considered the first center of African-American Catholicism in New York City. Rev. William R. McCann succeeded O'Keefe as pastor of St. Charles Borromeo after the latter's death in 1933. The archdiocese determined that one of the major purposes of the Harlem Apostolate, under McCann's leadership, was to be the conversion of African-Americans to Catholicism. St. Aloysius's membership by then was a mere 50 people, and the church was closed for much of 1935. Beginning that year, St. Aloysius was administered by Rev. McCann and became a mission church and the centerpiece of the conversion effort in Harlem. Whereas in 1940 there were only an estimated 7000 African-American Catholics in Manhattan, McCann was credited with some 8000 Harlem conversions by his death in 1949.[27]

In 1922, St. Aloysius had acquired the nearby site at 225-233 West 132nd Street, then built up with five rowhouses, for an anticipated parish school building. Construction, however, would not occur for almost two decades. The cornerstone of St. Aloysius School was finally laid in 1940, and the building was dedicated by Archbishop Francis Joseph Spellman in May 1941. The school has been continuously staffed by members of the Franciscan Handmaids of the Most Pure Heart of Mary, an order of African-American nuns. By 1943, the congregation of St. Aloysius had grown to 1000. The parish ceased its mission status in 1947, becoming independent again. Rev. Walter L. McCann succeeded his brother as pastor, until 1960. The parish came under the administration of the New York Province of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) in 1984.

A profile on the church in the *New York Times* in 1993 called it as "one of several black Catholic congregations trying to secure a future by embracing a form of worship more often found in the black Protestant churches," and noted the inclusiveness of the congregation, its social concern, and the quality of its school.[28] A proclamation of the Council of the City of New York on the church's 100th anniversary in 1999 praised St. Aloysius as "a longstanding and extraordinary community and religious institution which has provided spiritual guidance, community leadership and quality education for several generations."[29] Among notable congregants of St. Aloysius have been Rev. Joseph E. Price, first African-American permanent deacon of the Archdiocese of New York; Monsignor Owen J. Scanlon, an assistant pastor and, later, pastor from 1969 to 1979; U.S. Congressman Charles B. Rangel, also an alumnus of St. Aloysius School; and composer and musician Daniel Coakley.

Description

The highly decorative front facade of St. Aloysius R.C. Church is clad in bands of red brick, glazed "granitex" (having the color and texture of grey granite) terra cotta with inset cobalt blue glazed accents (manufactured by the New York Architectural Terra Cotta Co.), and pale celadon glazed brick (manufactured by the Grueby Faience Co., the color now weathered), above a stone base. It is articulated with a monumental pedimented central section, flanked by pilasters, with a Gothic-arched entrance pavilion surmounted by a rose window, and side aisle sections having entrances, end pilasters, and terminating cornices following the slope of

the roof. Main Entrance The main entrance, set within a slightly projecting pavilion, has a Gothic-arched surround with spiral, rope, rose, decorative flat, and foliate moldings springing from pilasters and spiral columns with foliate capitals. The double wooden doors are surmounted by a leaded glass transom set within a surround with spiral, decorative flat, and foliate moldings and a puti keystone. The entrance is surmounted by a plain stone plaque and a terra-cotta relief of the Holy Family and Dove, with a cobalt blue densely-glazed background, set within the arch. The pavilion is terminated by a pedimented foliate cornice with a molded stone cap and copper coping. A sign is placed to the west of the doorway. Side (Aisle) Entrance Sections Each entrance, set within a surround with spiral, decorative flat, and foliate moldings and a putto keystone, has double wooden doors surmounted by a leaded glass transom and plain stone plaque. This is surmounted by a blind Gothic interlaced arcade that is terminated by a foliate cornice. The upper portion has a trapezoidal-shaped terra-cotta relief of an angel set on a cobalt blue densely-glazed background and having a disk motif surround. Each side is terminated by a foliate cornice following the slope of the roof and molded copper coping. The cornerstone, at the east corner, bears the inscription "A + D MCMII". Areaway An original decorative wrought-iron fence is set on a bluestone base. Paving is concrete, with bluestone steps leading to the entrances. Central Upper Section The central section is flanked by the banded pilasters rising from the main entrance section; these pilasters have articulated side returns. The large molded central rose window, embellished by a decorative metalwork cross and flanked by four corner rosettes, is set within a molded square surround, set above a blind Gothic interlaced arcade. Above the window, the typanum is clad in diaperwork consisting of triangular sections of cream- and blue- (now weathered) colored terra-cotta accented with copper stars. A terra-cotta roundel with a cobalt blue densely-glazed background bears a relief of the head of Christ. The section is terminated by a pedimented foliate cornice and molded copper coping. A simple cross, placed at the peak, replaces the original, more elaborate one. West Wall The west wall of the church, clad in red brick, is unarticulated and pierced by windows. A side areaway has a metal gate and steps. East Wall The east wall of the church, clad in red brick, is unarticulated and pierced by windows. A Gothic-arched entrance at the south end has bluestone steps, a non-historic metal door, and a pointed-arched transom (now painted). A side areaway has a metal gate/fence and steps. At the north end of the areaway, the south wall of the side chapel, with a Gothic stained glass window, is partially visible.

Report prepared by
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NOTES

1. Adapted from: LPC, *Abyssinian Baptist Church and Community House Designation Report* (LP-1851)(N.Y.: City of New York, 1993), prepared by Christopher Moore and Andrew S. Dolkart.
2. These houses are located within the St. Nicholas Historic District.
3. All three churches are designated New York City Landmarks.
4. Cynthia Hickman, *Harlem Churches a the End of the 20th Century: An Illustrated Guide* (N.Y.: Dunbar Pr., 2001), xi.

5. New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances; NYC, Dept. of Buildings (NB-385-1902); St. Aloysius R.C. Church, *100th Anniversary St. Aloysius R.C. Church, Harlem, New York, 1899-1999* (N.Y.: 1999); "St. Aloysius," *Works Progress Administration Inventory of the Church Archives in New York City (Roman Catholic Church)* (N.Y.: Histl. Recs. Survey, 1941), entry 116; "In the Real Estate Field," *New York Times (NYT)*, Dec. 10, 1899, 14; "Recorded Real Estate Transfers," and "In the Real Estate Field," *NYT*, Jan. 24, 1900, 12; "St. Aloysius Parish Entertainment," *NYT*, Apr. 27, 1900, 9; "The Building Department," *NYT*, June 19, 1902, 14; "New Edifice for St. Aloysius," *NYT*, Aug. 2, 1902, 6; "Miscellaneous," *Real Estate Record & Builders Guide*, Aug. 16, 1902. 235; "Many Churches Building," *NYT*, Nov. 15, 1903, 10; "What's Going on in City Churches," *The Catholic News*, Apr. 16, 1904, 18; "Church of St. Aloysius Dedicated," *NYT*, Apr. 18, 1904, 5; "The New Church of St. Aloysius," *The Catholic News*, Apr. 23, 1904, 3; "Death of Father McKenna," *The Catholic News*, Sept. 20, 1913, 3.

6. There are currently no locatable records from the Dept. of Buildings on the church. A note in the files of LPC dating from 1966 indicates that the church plans were signed by architect Henry H. Holly, apparently then in the employ of the Renwick firm.

7. Aug. 2, 1902.

8. Nov. 15, 1903.

9. The other central Harlem parish churches are: St. Joseph of the Holy Family (1860; 1871; 1889, Herter Bros.), 405 West 125th Street; All Saints (1889-93, Renwick, Aspinwall & Russell), 47 East 129th Street; St. Charles Borromeo (1901, George H. Streeton), 211 West 141st Street; St. Thomas the Apostle (1904-07, Thomas H. Poole & Co.), 262 West 118th Street; St. Mark the Evangelist (1907-08, George F. Pelham), 65 West 138th Street; and Resurrection (1908), 276 West 151st Street.

10. Dennis S. Francis, *Architects in Practice, New York City 1840-1900* (N.Y.: Comm. for the Pres. of Archl. Recs., 1979); James Ward, *Architects in Practice, New York City 1900-1940* (N.Y.: Comm. for the Pres. of Archl. Recs., 1989); W.W. Renwick obit., *NYT*, Mar. 16, 1933, 20; "William Whetten Renwick," *Who Was Who in America* 1 (Chicago: Marquis Who's Who, 1981), 1022; Selma Rattner, "James L. Aspinwall," *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects* 1 (N.Y.: Macmillan Co., 1982), 109-110; Aspinwall obit., *NYT*, May 16, 1936, II, 9; LPC, *Tribeca West Historic District Designation Report* (LP-1713) (N.Y.: City of New York, 1991); LPC, architects files.

11. Both churches are designated New York City Landmarks.

12. The school is part of the designated New York City Landmark and the Grace Church complex is a designated New York City Landmark.

13. This building is a designated New York City Landmark.

14. Rattner; Aspinwall obit. This building is a designated New York City Landmark.

15. This building is part of the N.Y.C. Farm Colony-Seaview Hospital Historic District.

16. Grueby Faience Co., advertisement, *Brickbuilder* (Jan. 1905), 57; Herbert Croly, "The Use of Terra Cotta in the United States; How It Has Increased. No. 1," *Architectural Record* (July 1905), 87; Montgomery Schuyler, "Italian Gothic in New York," *Architectural Record* (July 1909), 46-51; Susan Tunick, *Terra-Cotta Skyline* (Princeton: Princeton Archl. Pr., 1997), 149; Michael H. Adams, *Harlem Lost and Found: An Architectural and Social History, 1765-1915* (N.Y.: Monacelli Pr., 2002), 197-201.

17. St. Aloysius's main entrance has terra-cotta moldings similar to those on the main entrance of W.W. Renwick's Church of All Saints School, which was built at the same time. The school's terra cotta has been painted.

18. The two extant buildings are designated New York City Landmarks.

19. Tunick, 62.

20. This building is a designated New York City Landmark.

21. The Montauk Club is located within the Park Slope Historic District; the other buildings are designated New York City Landmarks.

22. Susan J. Montgomery, *The Ceramics of William H. Grueby: The Spirit of the New Idea in Artistic Handicraft* (Lambertville, N.J.: *Arts & Crafts Quarterly* Pr., 1993); Norman Karlson, *American Art Tile 1876-1941* (N.Y.: Rizzoli, 1998), 20-22.

23. Schuyler, 46.

24. Schuyler, 49-50.

25. David W. Dunlap, *From Abyssinian to Zion: A Guide to Manhattan's Houses of Worship* (N.Y.: Columbia U. Pr., 2004), 188.

26. St. Aloysius R.C. Church; "Church Buys Parochial School Site," *NYT*, Apr. 15, 1922, 26; "School Cornerstone is Laid," *NYT*, Dec. 9, 1940, 27; "Archbishop to Dedicate School," *NYT*, May 21, 1941, 16; "New Parochial School Dedicated in Manhattan," *NYT*, May 26, 1941, 11; "The Glorious Mosaic," *NYT*, Dec. 5, 1993, CY1; Hickman, 178-180; Claude J. Mangum, "Have We Not All One Father?: A Historical Review of Black Catholics in the Archdiocese of New York," in *One Faith - One Lord - One Baptism: The Hopes and Experiences of the Black Community in the Archdiocese of New York* 2 (N.Y.: Archdiocese of New York, 1988).

27. Florence D. Cohalan, *A Popular History of the Archdiocese of New York* (Yonkers: U.S. Catholic Histl. Soc., 1983), 261; Mangum, 138.

28. Dec. 5, 1993.

29. St. Aloysius R.C. Church.

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. Aloysius Roman Catholic 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 richly ornamented, polychrome St. Aloysius Roman Catholic Church was built in 1902-04 to the design of William W. Renwick based on Italian Gothic prototypes, an unusual source of stylistic inspiration for buildings in New York City; that, 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, the original congregation made up mostly of German, Irish, and Italian immigrants; that W.W. Renwick, nephew of noted architect James Renwick, Jr., joined his uncle's firm in 1885, became a junior partner in 1890, and in his work in that firm and its successors, and in independent practice after 1900, he specialized in ecclesiastical architecture and decoration, with St. Aloysius being considered one of his most important commissions; that the intricate facade of St. Aloysius 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 featuring four sculptural reliefs depicting the Holy Family, the head of Christ, and angels, set on cobalt blue backgrounds; that it is a very early example in New York City of the use of polychromatic architectural ceramic, with noted critic Montgomery Schuyler praising the color and decorative scheme and Renwick's handling of the terra cotta; that in 1935, in response to the changed demographics of Harlem, St. Aloysius became a mission church for the conversion of African-Americans to Catholicism, but in 1947 the parish ceased its mission status and again became independent; and that St. Aloysius, with its handsomely decorative polychrome facade, is one of New York City's most distinctive Catholic church designs.

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. Aloysius Roman Catholic Church, 209-217 West 132nd Street, Borough of Manhattan, and designates Manhattan Tax Map Block 1938, Lot 124, as its Landmark Site.

Commissioners:
Robert B. Tierney, Chair; Pablo E. Vengoechea, Vice-Chair
Steven F. Byrns, Joan Gerner, Roberta Brandes Gratz,
Margery Perlmutter, Thomas F. Pike, Jan Hird Pokorny

St. Aloysius R.C. Church

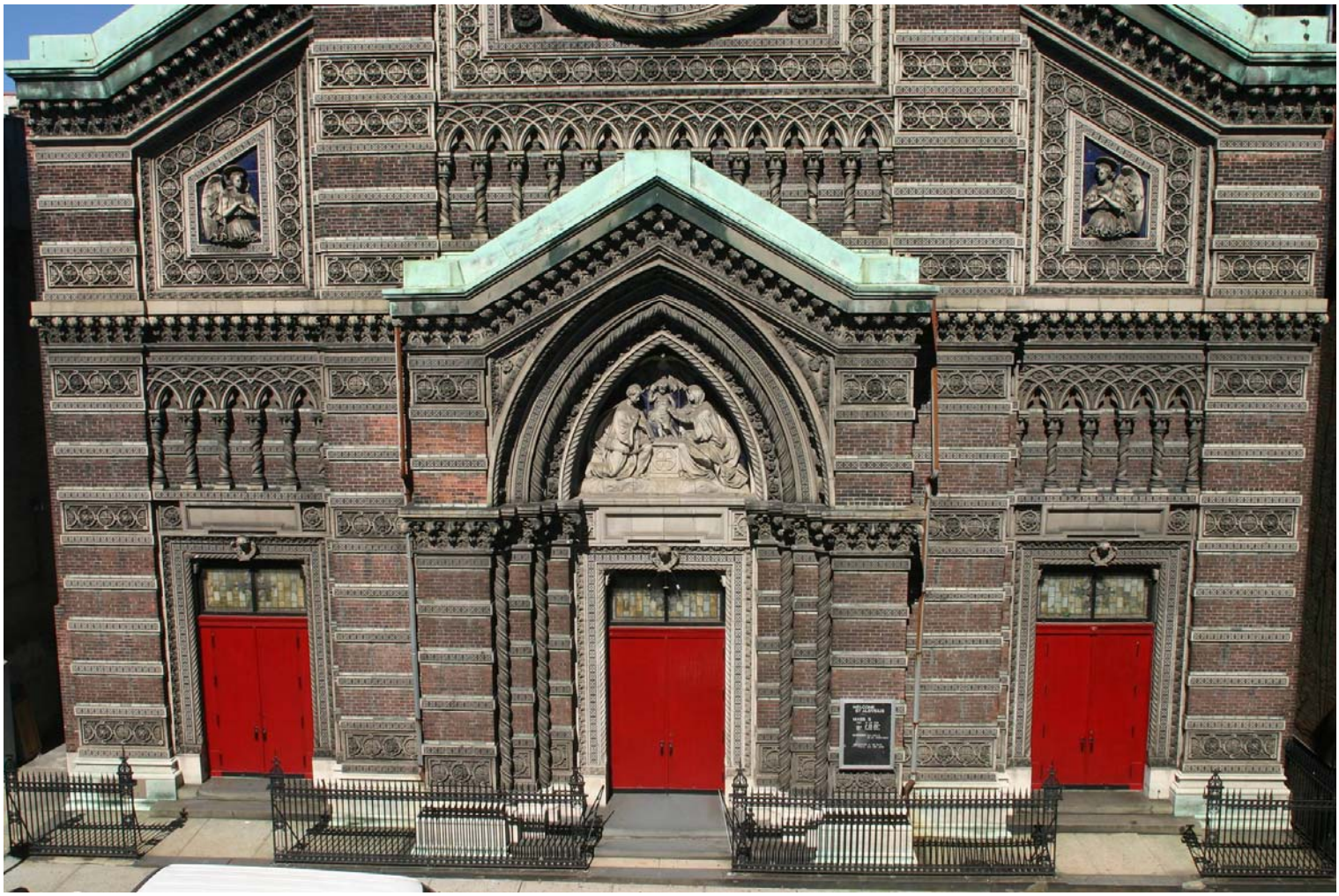
Photo: Carl Forster, LPC

St. Aloysius R.C. Church

Photo: John Barrington Bayley, LPC (c. 1965)

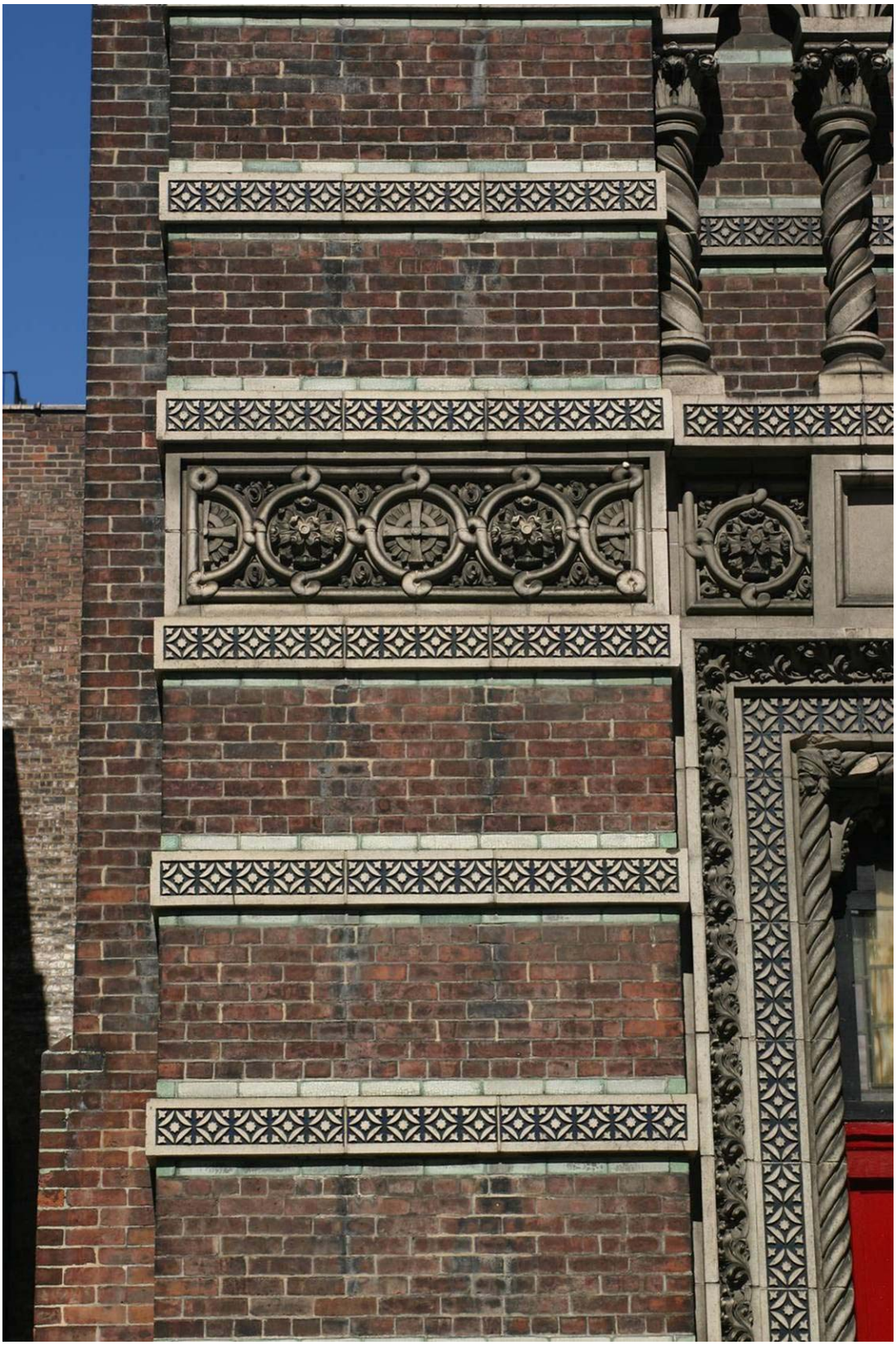
St. Aloysius R.C. Church

Photo: Carl Forster, LPC



St. Aloysius R.C. Church

Photo: Carl Forster, LPC



St. Aloysius R.C. Church, pilaster detail

Photo: Carl Forster, LPC

St. Aloysius R.C. Church, façade detail

Photo: Carl Forster, LPC

St. Aloysius R.C. Church, Holy Family relief

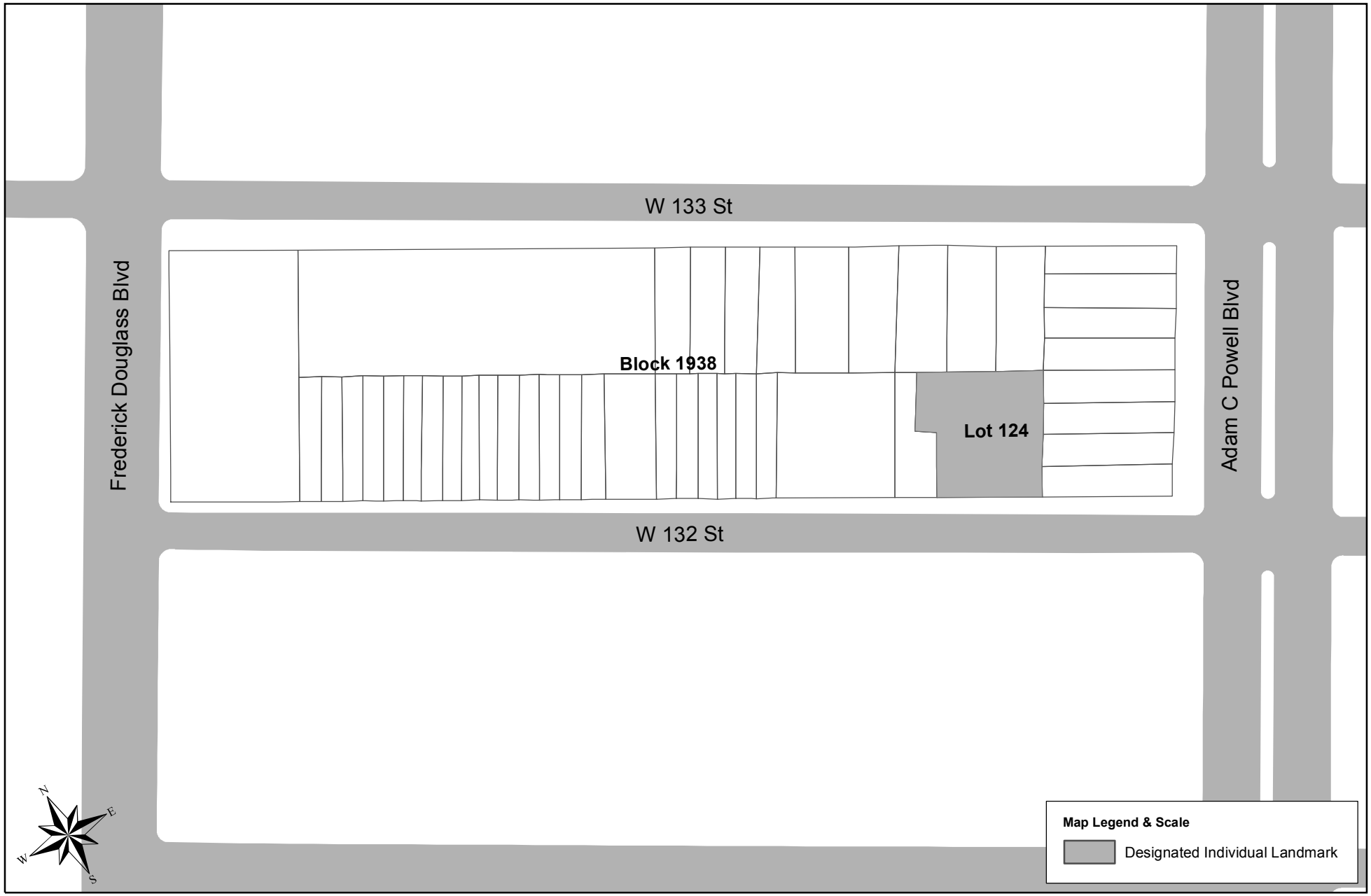
Photo: Carl Forster, LPC

St. Aloysius R.C. Church, head of Christ relief

Photo: Carl Forster, LPC

St. Aloysius R.C. Church, angel relief

Photo: Carl Forster, LPC



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St. Aloysius Roman Catholic Chuch (LP-2164), 209-217 West 132nd Street.
Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1938, Lot 124.

Designated: January 30, 2007

Graphic Source: New York City Department of City Planning, MapPLUTO, Edition 03C, December 2003.
Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, JM.