

(FORMER) ST. GEORGE’S SYRIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH, 103 Washington Street, Borough of Manhattan. Built c.1812; 1869 addition; main façade 1929-30, Harvey F. Cassab, designer

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 53, Lot 3

On January 13, 2009, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the former St. George’s Syrian Catholic Church (Item No. 7). The hearing was duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. A total of eleven witnesses spoke in favor of the building’s designation, including historian Mary Ann Haick DiNapoli, historic preservation consultant Mary B. Dierickx, co-author of *The Financial District’s Lost Neighborhood* Joanne Medvecky, and representatives of the Historic Districts Council, Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society in America, Municipal Art Society, and New York Landmarks Conservancy. The Commission also received several emails in support of designation, including a message from Dr. Philip M. Kayal, Chairman of the Department of Sociology/Anthropology at Seton Hall University; Kathleen Benson, curator of a 2002 exhibit on Arab-Americans in New York City at the Museum of the City of New York; and scholar of Arab-American history Paula Hajar. No witnesses spoke in opposition to designation. The building’s owner testified, but did not speak in favor of, or in opposition to, the building’s designation.

Summary

The former St. George’s Syrian Catholic Church is the most significant remnant of the Lower Manhattan immigrant enclave known as the “Syrian Quarter,” the “Mother Colony” of Syrians and Lebanese in America. Immigrants from the former Ottoman province of Syria, which included modern-day Syria and Lebanon, began coming to this country in the 1880s, and over the next 40 years, thousands of them settled on and around lower Washington Street in a neighborhood that was their commercial and cultural center in the United States. Nearly half of these immigrants were Melkite Greek Catholics, who recognize the primacy of the Pope but worship using the Byzantine Rite. In Lower Manhattan, in 1889, they formed America’s first Melkite parish; by 1925, as St. George’s Syrian Catholic Church, they moved into this building, which had been purchased for their use by George E. Bardwil, an importer of fine linens and embroideries. In 1929, the church engaged Harvey F. Cassab, a young Lebanese-American draftsman, to design a new façade for the building. Cassab’s vibrant neo-Gothic composition, executed in bright white terra cotta, features a polychrome relief of St. George and the Dragon, and remains remarkably intact today.

The former St. George’s Church building was constructed around 1812; three stories high with a peaked roof, it served as an immigrant boardinghouse by the 1850s. In 1869, it was raised to its present five stories and continued to function as a boardinghouse and tenement until Bardwil’s purchase. With the decline of Lower Manhattan’s Middle Eastern population after World War II, St. George’s was converted to a Roman Rite church for a period, and in 1982, the building was sold to Chapel Moran, Inc., which has owned and maintained the building and its unique Washington Street façade for the past 27 years. It remains Lower Manhattan’s most vivid reminder of the vanished ethnic community once known as the Syrian Quarter, and of the time when Washington Street was the Main Street of Syrian America.



DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Lower Manhattan's "Syrian Quarter"¹

The area west of Lower Broadway near Manhattan's southern tip has long been a place of residence and commerce. Greenwich Street was New York's most fashionable residential street at the turn of the nineteenth century, and Washington Street was once lined with early-nineteenth-century houses and maritime stores, which fronted the Hudson River before the completion of West Street in the 1840s. By the 1850s, when Castle Clinton (1808-11, Lt. Col. Jonathan Williams and John McComb, Jr., a designated New York City Landmark) off the Battery was converted to the Castle Garden immigration station, the wealthy had deserted the neighborhood; their historic peaked-roof Federal-style houses and many of the old buildings along Washington Street were converted into boardinghouses, shops, and saloons, or replaced with new tenement buildings. In the 1880s, immigrants from the Ottoman province of Syria started moving into the neighborhood, joining its residents of Irish, German, and Scandinavian heritage, as well as Greek and Eastern European immigrants who were also settling there. By the following decade, lower Washington Street was widely known as the center of New York's "Syrian Quarter" or "Little Syria," the "principal Syrian colony in the country."²

At the turn of the twentieth century, "Syria" had a much different meaning than it does today. Syria was not yet a country, but an enormous territory within the expansive Ottoman Empire roughly encompassing the current boundaries of Syria, Lebanon, Israel, the Palestinian territories, and Jordan. Coming from isolated rural areas or segregated urban "quarters," immigrants from this area had no national identity, and initially identified themselves by religion, hometown, or home region. Although frequently classified as Turks because of their Ottoman passports, most American immigrants from the region were Christians from present-day Lebanon who did not consider themselves Turkish. Once settled in this country, they adopted the Syrian-American identity, and historians and sociologists writing about them and their early-twentieth-century communities have generally called them Syrians or Syrian-Americans as well.³

Late-nineteenth-century Syrian immigration was fueled by several factors, including economic hardship caused by the 1869 opening of the Suez Canal, which devastated the Syrian silk industry. By the 1880s, Syrians were trickling into the United States. Although almost 60,000 entered the country by 1910, they never accounted for more than a tiny fraction of those arriving at Ellis Island.⁴ Many were attracted to Paterson, N.J.—a major silk-production center—and other textile cities, and by 1910, Syrian communities had developed in many of the nation's largest cities. Syrian immigrants were also scattered throughout smaller cities and towns, where they worked as peddlers, "the base industry through which the [Syrian] community entered the American mainstream."⁵ Dealing in exclusive Middle Eastern goods and fine laces that were not widely available, many peddlers saved enough money to open their own stores.

Although Syrian immigrants were settling across the United States at the turn of the twentieth century, Lower Manhattan's community, with Washington Street as its spine, was the country's largest and most influential Syrian neighborhood: forty-two percent of Syrians entering the United States through New York remained in the city in 1901. Culturally rich, prosperous, and complex, the Washington Street neighborhood was "the 'Mother Colony' for subsequent Syrian colonies that were spread across the country."⁶ According to historians Philip M. and Joseph M. Kayal, "Washington Street ... ushered most of the Syrian immigrants into American economic life."⁷

Manhattan's Syrian Quarter began to develop during the earliest years of the group's immigration. In 1904, Lucius Hopkins Miller published a study of the community, finding 1,661 Syrians within 454 families in the area bounded by Cedar Street on the north, Battery Place on the south, West Street on the west, and Greenwich Street and Trinity Place on the east. He also noted the existence of two smaller, Brooklyn Syrian communities, one in southern Brooklyn with about 43 families scattered throughout Sunset Park, Bay Ridge, and Sheepshead Bay, and the other, with about 161 families, in the Atlantic Avenue area between present-day Cobble Hill and Brooklyn Heights. Manhattan's Syrian Quarter was "the workshop of almost the entire New York colony," according to Miller: Syrian-Americans operated cigarette, kimono, suspender, brush, and mirror factories there, and it was the

preeminent wholesaling center of Syrian America, with several large warehouses supplying peddlers and retailers across the United States, Canada, South America, and the West Indies.⁸

In addition to its far-reaching commercial influence, Manhattan's Syrian Quarter was a cultural center of national importance, the "literary capital of the Arabic world in the United States."⁹ Several Arabic-language newspapers were published there, including *Al-Hoda*, which was founded in 1898 and considered the country's most important Arabic paper; the *Syrian World*, the first English-language Syrian-American journal, was headquartered on lower Greenwich Street.¹⁰ New York was also the home of the Pen League, an influential literary group whose "experiments with Western literary forms revolutionized Arabic poetry in the Arab world," and whose members, the celebrated Khalil Gibran and William Catzefflis, were frequently published in the *Syrian World*.¹¹

Like most other immigrant groups, Syrians experienced substantial discrimination during their early years in this country; their right to citizenship was not established by United States courts until 1914. Ten years later, reflecting the belief that "Mediterranean people [were] morally below the races of northern Europe," Congress passed the "Quota Law," which cut immigration from Syria, among other areas, down to 100 persons per year, except for spouses and children of American citizens.¹² While Syrian-Americans fought for their naturalization rights and against the bigotry they encountered here, they typically "responded to prejudice not with protest but by concentrating on acculturation"; for most Syrian-Americans, professional achievement was the path to assimilation.¹³ By the 1930s, many Syrians with roots within the boundaries of the newly created Lebanese Republic were calling themselves Lebanese-Americans.¹⁴ By the third generation, New York's Syrians and Lebanese were "Americanized and assimilated," had extensively intermarried with members of other ethnic groups, and had left their old ethnic enclaves for more prestigious neighborhoods, or for the suburbs of Westchester County, Long Island, and New Jersey.¹⁵

During the 1920s, Lower Manhattan began losing ground to the Atlantic Avenue area of Brooklyn as New York's Syrian-American center, largely because of economic pressure caused by the 1920s building boom in the adjacent Financial District. In 1920, an article in the *New York Times* stated that the "Syrian business quarter ... is having a rise in its real estate prices," and by 1921, several large office buildings were under construction or had been completed there.¹⁶ By 1935, when the *Syrian World* described Atlantic Avenue as "the new Washington Street," the torch had been passed from Lower Manhattan to Brooklyn.¹⁷ Two Middle Eastern restaurants remained on Washington Street in 1946, but property condemnation for the impending construction of the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel approach and Battery Parking Garage on lower Washington and Greenwich Streets drove out most of the remaining residents and stores.¹⁸

In 1975, Philip and Joseph Kayal found that "the only remaining evidence of the Syrians' presence in downtown Manhattan" were its two "Syrian churches," one of which was St. George's.¹⁹ The only one of these two still standing, the former St. George's Syrian Catholic Church at 103 Washington Street is the city's most vivid reminder of the time when Washington Street was the Main Street of Syrian America.

Early History of 103 Washington Street²⁰

In June of 1928, an article in the *Syrian World* spoke of the "ancient buildings" of Washington Street, "in the shadow of New York's financial district and hemmed in by ... skyreaching structures."²¹ No. 103 Washington Street, the former St. George's Syrian Catholic Church, is among the last of these venerable old buildings. Possibly constructed in the first decade of the nineteenth century, 103 Washington Street almost certainly retains portions of its original fabric, despite alterations to the building throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

At the turn of the eighteenth century, Lower Manhattan's Hudson River shoreline remained largely in its natural state, and was located to the east of present-day West, Washington, and Greenwich Streets. As early as 1729, the Common Council planned to fill in areas west of the shoreline and construct Washington and Greenwich Streets on the landfill, but this work was held up until the 1780s. Greenwich Street apparently opened by 1797; also by that year, the block upon which 103 Washington Street stands,

bounded by Greenwich, Rector, and Carlisle Streets, and by present-day Washington Street, had been filled in. (Because Washington Street had not yet opened, the lots on the western side of the block fronted directly on the Hudson River.) In 1799, Ryneer (variously spelled as Rinier, Reigneer, and Rynier) Suydam, a merchant of 4 Stone Street, purchased the lot at present-day 103 Washington Street.²² Suydam and his immediate family appear to have lived in Manhattan through 1804; in 1810, they were living in Brooklyn and had three slaves.²³

By 1817, Washington Street was Lower Manhattan's westernmost avenue, and piers and basins lined its shore between the Battery and Greenwich Village.²⁴ No. 103 Washington Street's construction date has not been definitively determined, but it clearly was constructed during the Federal Period, which lasted from 1789 to about 1834. Prior to an 1869 expansion that raised it to its present five floors, the building was three-and-one-half stories in height with a peaked roof, a telltale Federal-style feature.²⁵ Tax assessment records show that while Suydam had not developed his lot in 1802, a store that is likely this building had been constructed on his property by 1812. Subsequent tax assessments strongly support a construction date for 103 Washington Street of no later than 1819.²⁶

Following Suydam's death, 103 Washington Street was sold in 1835.²⁷ Until the early-1840s opening of lower West Street, which blocked Washington Street from the Hudson River, 103 Washington possessed a prime waterfront location; fittingly, it was occupied by a ship chandlery from 1831 to 1843.²⁸ By 1852, the building had been converted to an "emigrant boarding house"; seven years later, it was described as a "German dance-house" in a report of a stabbing there.²⁹ Dance houses, also called dancehalls, were notorious places that particularly catered to seamen; patrons were "required ... to order drinks for themselves and their dancing partners after each dance. Some of the women were candidly prostitutes and made business arrangements while waltzing," according to Irving Lewis Allen.³⁰

In 1865, 103 Washington Street was sold to John Hermann Schutte, an operator of seamen's boardinghouses.³¹ In the summer of 1869, Schutte filed an application to add two full floors to the building and change its roof from peaked to flat. Schutte, who did not list an architect or builder on the application, told the Buildings Department that 103 Washington Street, after its renovations, would have two apartments on each of its top three floors; the 1870 Census found about a dozen couples and small families there, almost all headed by German or Irish immigrants.³² In addition, the building apparently served as the transient home of over 300 seamen, most of whom were at sea at the time of their enumeration.³³ Twelve families, most of them German immigrants, occupied the building in 1880, but an Irish-born sailor and his wife, and a Norwegian-born sailor and his wife, also lived there.³⁴

Changes at 103 Washington Street at the dawn of the twentieth century reflected those of the entire neighborhood. In 1900, the building apparently had its first resident from the Middle East, a restaurant operator named Naif Chehab who had immigrated to the United States in 1899.³⁵ For a period, it housed the firm of George Forzly & Company, a bank and dry-goods merchant; many of the neighborhood's Syrian-American residents deposited money with Forzly.³⁶ Between approximately 1905 and 1908, the ground-floor storefront of 103 Washington Street, which has since been removed, was occupied by H.&J. Homsy, a shirtwaist and kimono manufacturer.³⁷

By 1910, the population of 103 Washington Street had drastically changed, as most of its residents in that year were Central and Eastern European immigrants of Polish, Croatian, Slovak, Moravian, or Bohemian descent. Some were dock laborers, and many others were window or office cleaners, jobs undoubtedly performed on and in the skyscrapers of the adjacent Financial District. Two Syrian families lived in the building, including a 32-year-old widow and dry-goods merchant who was raising her son and two daughters there, and a 55-year-old widow with one daughter who worked as a dressmaker, and two sons who were peddlers.³⁸ In 1920, 103 Washington continued to house a large number of Central European immigrants. No Syrian-Americans appear to have lived in the building in that year, although about two-thirds of the 35 residents of 105 Washington Street, the tenement next door, were Syrian immigrants or their American-born children.³⁹

St. George's Syrian Catholic Church⁴⁰

In the early twentieth century, nearly all of the Syrians living in Lower Manhattan were Christians. Lucius Hopkins Miller, in his 1904 study of the Syrian Quarter, found only one Muslim family there and just a handful of Syrian Jews, who typically settled with other Jewish families rather than with Syrian Christians. A few-dozen Syrian Protestants resided there, and nearly a quarter of the neighborhood's Syrian residents were Orthodox Christians. But the majority of Lower Manhattan's Syrians were Melkites or Maronites, Catholics whose churches are in full communion with Rome but follow Eastern liturgical traditions and customs. Melkites were the larger of the two groups in the Syrian Quarter, and they constituted the oldest Melkite parish in the United States. As the home of a historic Melkite parish and an expressive and picturesque reminder of religious life in a vanished immigrant neighborhood, the former St. George's Syrian Catholic Church is an important reminder of Lower Manhattan's rich and diverse residential history.

Melkite Greek Catholics trace their roots to the earliest days of the Christian Church, but they did not come to be known as Melkites until after the Council of Chalcedon, which convened in 451. After Chalcedon, many church members who disagreed with the Council split off from the Church; among those who stayed were a group of "Syrians who followed the lead of the [Byzantine] Emperor in staying faithful to the Church [and] were dubbed Melkites, or 'kings men,' from the Syriac word for 'king' (*Melko*)."⁴¹ After the seventh century, Melkites experienced a long period of persecution as Christians, and for their allegiance to the Byzantine Emperor. This "brought the Melkites in closer touch with and made them more dependent on Byzantium (Constantinople)," according to Philip and Joseph Kayal; "as the persecutions increased, the Melkite patriarchs were forced to live in exile, usually in the imperial city itself, and their followers eventually adopted the city's Byzantine religious style," including the Byzantine Rite.⁴² Following the Great Schism of 1054, which split the church into its eastern (Orthodox) branch centered in Constantinople, and western (Catholic) branch centered in Rome, Melkites remained "within the Orthodox Byzantine orbit."⁴³ In 1724, however, following a period of Western missionary activity in the Middle East, a schism occurred, as Melkite Catholics reaffirmed their ties to Rome, while those who remained loyal to Constantinople formed the Antiochean Orthodox Church. Today, Melkite Catholics continue to recognize the primacy of the Pope, while retaining the Byzantine Rite and other customs traditionally associated with Eastern churches.

New York's Melkites were the founders of America's pioneering Melkite parish. In the 1880s, the community wrote to the Archbishop of New York,

We the Syrians pray and beseech you to permit us a Syrian priest as a shepherd, a preacher to preach the gospel for us and lead us into the truth. We are about 2,000 persons living without a priest and very few of us understand English.... Now we are very eager to have a Syrian priest who is able to understand our language, so that we many confess our sins, and have prayer, meetings, baptism, etc. We know a Syrian priest who is pious and who can understand our language, whose name is Rev. Ibrahim Bachewate, in Rome now and very fit for us all.⁴⁴

When Fr. Bachewate arrived in New York in 1889, he was "the first permanent priest in the United States from the Middle East among the Melkite, Maronite, and [Syrian] Orthodox churches."⁴⁵ Shortly after his arrival, Fr. Bechawate led Melkites in Christmas liturgy in the basement of historic St. Peter's Church on Barclay Street (John R. Haggerty and Thomas Thomas, 1836-40, a designated New York City Landmark), the home of the city's oldest Roman Catholic parish.⁴⁶ The parish Fr. Bachewate headed, St. Peter's Syrian Roman Catholic Church, served the entire Melkite community of New York from 1889 until 1910, when Brooklyn's Church of the Virgin Mary opened.

In his 1904 study, Lucius Hopkins Miller profiled the Melkites of the Syrian Quarter. About three-quarters of Melkites were from present-day Lebanon—primarily from the Beqaa Valley and Beirut—and about 20% were from Damascus and other parts of present-day Syria. About 2% of New York's Melkites were Palestinians. Melkites generally were the least-educated of the neighborhood's Syrians, with only 13% able to read and write in English, and 34% able to read and write in Arabic. They

also lived in the most crowded conditions of any religious group; three-quarters were engaged in peddling or factory work.

During his tenure at St. Peter's, Fr. Bachewate was a prominent figure who "was instrumental in bringing other clergy from the Middle East to serve various communities in America."⁴⁷ In addition to overseeing the early growth of New York's Melkite community, Fr. Bachewate saw its reorganization, around 1916, as St. George's Syrian Catholic Church. With that change, the church moved from St. Peter's to rented quarters at 98 Washington Street. By 1918, Fr. Bachewate had two assistants, and the church had an estimated 100 Sunday School students.⁴⁸

In June of 1920, George E. Bardwil, an importer of fine linens and embroideries, purchased the building at 103 Washington Street for the use of St. George's Church.⁴⁹ Five months later, W.B. Wills, a Brooklyn architect, filed an application to alter the building's first two floors to house the church. Wills' work, which included the replacement of the main façade's first two stories, was completed in 1921; his design was austere, with a large first-floor pointed-arch door opening crowned by a cross and flanked by smaller pointed-arch openings. The second floor featured a large central oculus, possibly containing a rose window, and two segmental-arch-headed window openings. Above the second floor, the main façade remained unchanged, and the building continued to house apartments on its third through fifth floors.⁵⁰

Fr. Bachewate retired in 1923 and was replaced by Fr. (later Msgr.) Bernard Ghosn, a native of Damascus. St. George's Church moved into 103 Washington Street by 1925, the year in which the church was officially incorporated; in the following year, Bardwil and his wife, Matilda, conveyed the building to St. George's parish.⁵¹ Four years later, the *Syrian World* reported that "elaborate improvements are planned for the Greek Melchite church at 103 Washington Street along designs prepared by Harvey Cassab, a Syrian architect of this city."⁵² Cassab's work, which involved replacing the building's front with the exuberant full-height, terra-cotta façade that remains today, was completed in 1930.⁵³

With the ebbing away of the neighborhood's Middle Eastern population after World War II, the New York Archdiocese considered closing St. George's following Msgr. Ghosn's 1955 death. Instead, a priest from the Melkite parish of the Church of the Virgin Mary in Brooklyn was assigned to the church, and he "began a renovation program ... which made St. George's one of the most attractive of Melkite churches in the country."⁵⁴ In 1957, however, the Archdiocese, citing the departure of the neighborhood's Melkite population, assigned a Roman Rite priest to the church. In 1967, St. George's Church apparently relocated to 83 Washington Street, and four years later, it moved to 157 Cedar Street, the home of the neighborhood's historic Maronite church, St. Joseph's. In 1977, St. George's Church returned to 103 Washington Street and regained a Melkite priest.⁵⁵ St. George's closed for good by 1982, when it was sold to Chapel Moran, Inc., which has owned and maintained the building and its historic Washington Street façade for the past 27 years.⁵⁶ Today, Moran's Restaurant and Bar occupies the former church space of the building, while apartments occupy its upper floors.

Harvey F. Cassab⁵⁷

When he designed the striking neo-Gothic façade of St. George's Syrian Catholic Church in 1929, Harvey Farris Cassab was a young draftsman living in Brooklyn. His father, Farris Cassab, was born in Beirut in present-day Lebanon, and came to the United States in 1900.⁵⁸ While in San Francisco, Farris met his future wife, Naza, and the two were married by 1902. Harvey, their first child, was born in California on April 21, 1903; four years later, the Cassabs left America for the village of Salima, just east of Beirut. While they were there, Naza apparently died and Farris remarried, and in 1913, Farris and his second wife, Amelia, returned to the United States, settling in Charleston, W. Va.⁵⁹ Harvey stayed behind to complete his studies at the College National of Baabdat, near Beirut, and around 1919, he returned to the U.S. with a Degree in Virtue and Science (equivalent to a baccalaureate) with coursework in calculus, geology, calligraphy, drawing, surveying, bookkeeping, and commercial and common law.

The Cassabs apparently prospered in Charleston, where they were active in the local real-estate business.⁶⁰ They soon left Charleston, however, and by 1926, when Harvey filed a Buildings Department application for minor work at St. George's Church, he, and possibly the entire family, were living in Park Slope, Brooklyn.⁶¹ Although Harvey Cassab's religion had been listed as Melkite Catholic on his 1919

passport, it is unknown whether he was a member of St. George's Church—the Church of the Virgin Mary, Brooklyn's historic Melkite church, would have been closer to his home—and whether this may have influenced St. George's parish to engage him for its renovations.

Harvey Cassab and his wife, Victoria, married in New York in 1932. By 1933, he was chief draftsman for Ira Charin, an architect who worked throughout Brooklyn and Queens in the 1930s and 1940s.⁶² By 1935, Cassab had formed a partnership with Harry Milgram, who would go on to serve as chief engineer of the Bureau of Highways and Sewers of the Brooklyn Borough President's Office in the 1940s and 1950s.⁶³ Little is known about the work of the Cassab & Milgram Engineering Company, except that it apparently designed a pair of two-family dwellings on the border of Sunset Park and Borough Park, Brooklyn in 1935.⁶⁴ Whether or not Cassab was a licensed architect during his time in New York is unclear, as he was listed as an “agent” and “applicant” on his Buildings Department applications for St. George's Church.⁶⁵

The Cassabs moved back to Charleston between 1935 and 1937. By December of 1937, the Cassab Construction Company, with Harvey as its head, had been founded, and the company was building a four-family apartment house there.⁶⁶ In the following summer, Cassab Construction ran a full-page advertisement in the *Charleston Gazette* highlighting its recently completed work, including several large neo-Tudor-style houses, a small neo-Tudor-style apartment house, the clubhouse of the Charleston Boat Club, and a Moderne-style store and office building. The advertisement noted that Cassab had “returned to Charleston after several years' absence, during which he was an associate architect in New York City,” adding that “each of these buildings was designed by Mr. Cassab, and was erected under his supervision.”⁶⁷ Occasional small articles in the Charleston newspapers showed Cassab's houses as they were completed over the next five years.⁶⁸

Between 1943 and 1945, Harvey and Victoria Cassab, and their son and two daughters, moved to Bridgeport, Conn. In 1946, with an additional infant daughter, they moved again, to Richmond, Va. In Richmond, Cassab continued to design and construct residential and commercial buildings, including his own family's home, and renovated the interior of the city's Maronite church. Many of his houses in Richmond were neo-Tudor in style, but he also completed several Modern homes there, and at least one Modern apartment house. Harvey F. Cassab died on a work site in Richmond on June 15, 1962 at the age of 59.⁶⁹

Design of St. George's Syrian Catholic Church⁷⁰

The standout feature of the former St. George's Syrian Catholic Church is unquestionably its vibrant terra-cotta main façade, designed by Harvey F. Cassab, completed in 1929-30, and extending the full height of the building. Neo-Gothic in style, its design appears to have resulted from two major factors: the “Latinization” of Melkite churches in the early-to-mid twentieth century, which caused many to be built in Western rather than Eastern styles, and the need to adapt a historic design language to an existing structure, five stories high, 25 feet wide, and hemmed in by buildings on both sides.⁷¹

The decision by Cassab and St. George's parish to employ the neo-Gothic style may seem counterintuitive, given the Eastern heritage of St. George's parishioners and of the Melkite Church itself. But it was precisely the style's long association with the West that made it attractive to people who were assimilating into American life and acculturating themselves to Catholicism as it was practiced in the United States. When Syrian Melkites immigrated to this country, they found that virtually all American Catholics worshiped using the Roman Rite, the most widely used rite within the Latin Rite, or Western Catholic Church. Melkites, however, used the Byzantine Rite and followed other Eastern traditions: they crossed themselves differently, their priests were able to marry, and their churches contained icons, not statues. The Church's “foreign-born priests, lifted out of their natural environments, were suddenly alone and at a loss as to how to adapt to the American church scene,” and they soon began, with the approval of their parishioners, to adopt a variety of Western Catholic customs.⁷² According to Fr. Allen Maloof, who briefly headed St. George's Church in the 1950s and served for many years at the Melkite Church of the Virgin Mary in Brooklyn, Syrian immigrants

wanted to be more ‘American’ in all aspects of the word. Americanization remolded home, family, work, and recreation.... The general idea seemed to be, ‘We are in America now, therefore, our churches and customs should be the same as those of the other American Catholics (Latins), so that we may all be alike; we should not confuse people.’⁷³

Latinization, the adoption by Melkites of Western Catholic practices, occurred across the United States into the 1960s, and it was a major influence on the design of American Melkite churches. As a result of Latinization, many Melkite churches were constructed not in the Byzantine or other Eastern styles, but in the neo-Gothic style, which linked them symbolically with the historic Catholic cathedrals of Western Europe and the monumental Gothic-inspired Catholic cathedrals of New York, Chicago, and other American cities.⁷⁴ St. Ann’s Greek Catholic Church (1930) in New London, Conn., was a typical, though modest, neo-Gothic-style Melkite church of this period: with three large lancet openings, a statue of St. Ann within a lancet niche, and a main-entrance tablet simply reading “St. Ann’s R.C.” (Roman Catholic), it looked no different from churches constructed by Western Catholic parishes. Indeed, its exterior gave no hint that St. Ann’s was a Melkite church.⁷⁵

The choice of the neo-Gothic style for St. George’s Church likely reflected the desire of a Latinizing parish to affirm its place within what Syrian Catholics called the “American Church.”⁷⁶ In 1924, the pioneering Arab-American studies scholar Philip K. Hitti wrote of American Melkites that “a great deal of confusion exists within the public mind and in current literature” regarding their religious practices;⁷⁷ from the earliest days of St. George’s Church, its parishioners emphasized their standing within mainstream Catholicism, leaving the word “Melkite” and the synonymous term “Greek Catholic” out of the names of their original church, St. Peter’s Syrian Roman Catholic Church, and its successor, St. George’s Syrian Catholic Church.⁷⁸ They had also started, to some degree, to Latinize by 1921, when confessionals, which are not traditionally present in Eastern churches but are a fixture of Western Catholic churches, were installed as part of the initial renovation of 103 Washington Street into St. George’s Church.⁷⁹

Despite its relatively small size, St. George’s projects an aura of permanence and monumentality, gained largely through Cassab’s use of terra cotta manufactured to look like stone.⁸⁰ On St. George’s, Cassab used two types of simulated-stone terra cotta; nearly all of the main façade mimics white marble, but its base is sheathed in terra cotta with a dark granite glaze. While the church is essentially monochromatic—its bright color made the building stand out on a street of old, weathered brick buildings—Cassab provided a burst of color at the second floor, where the façade’s chief highlight appears: St. George in armor on a white horse, slaying a green dragon with a long, red tongue, all finely modeled in vivid polychrome terra cotta. Reflecting the trend of Latinization, St. George bears little resemblance to his traditional, highly stylized, depiction on Byzantine icons, which are characterized by their visual flatness and the manner in which their “figures are elongated, made almost abstract, and set in symbolic or non-realistic settings.”⁸¹ Instead, the figure’s physical depth and realistic appearance is decidedly Western, resembling the carved figures residing within niches on the West’s great cathedrals.

As a style with emphatic verticality, the Gothic worked well for a building that was much taller than it was wide, and the main façade of St. George’s Church displays a wealth of Gothic-style ornament. Because of the building’s height, Cassab concentrated most of its ornament within the first three floors, where it would be most readily noticed by passing pedestrians and those entering the building. This lower portion of the building is richly textured and separated into three bays defined by buttresses; its first floor features a recessed main entrance, which is flanked by grouped, engaged columns supporting an archivolt decorated with foliate ornament and grapes. Above the main entrance, “St. George Chapel” is spelled out in a medieval typeface, below a tympanum filled with quatrefoils. At the second floor, a blind half-round opening with simulated tracery mimics a rose window. The first three floors terminate with an angular gable containing a quatrefoil and crowned by a cross; Gothic pinnacles above the buttresses assist in setting off the lower three floors from the upper two, making the lower portion of the façade read as a smaller church within the larger, five-story composition.

The façade's top two floors have the sense of being extruded from the lower three, with the large buttresses at the building's edges extending beyond their third-floor pinnacles, to additional pinnacles above the roofline. An ogee arch spanning the otherwise blank façade above the fifth-floor openings appears to be Cassab's sole nod to the East, recalling, perhaps, the domes of Byzantine churches. A small belfry crowns the façade. Many of the building's historic multi-pane, cusped window sashes—including figurative stained-glass sashes at the second floor—remain; all of the window openings, in Gothic tradition, are headed by lancet or depressed arches, and many retain their historic terra-cotta mullions and plate tracery with small oculi.

The main façade of the former St. George's Syrian Catholic Church has experienced few alterations, other than the replacement of its main-entrance doors, the replacement of some historic window sashes, mullions, and tracery with paired casement sashes, and the installation of several through-the-wall air-conditioning units. Overall, it remains remarkably well preserved, and one of a handful of outstanding twentieth-century Melkite churches in the United States.⁸²

Description

The former St. George's Syrian Catholic Church is five stories high with a neo-Gothic main façade executed in terra cotta manufactured to look like stone. While nearly all of the façade is executed in white terra cotta with a marble finish, the base, including the bases of the engaged columns flanking the main entrance, is of terra cotta with a dark granite glaze. The main façade is divided into a highly ornamented and textured lower, three-story portion and a more austere upper portion, with the lower portion terminating in an angular gable above the third-floor window openings. Buttresses at the building's edges extend the full height of the façade. These buttresses are crowned by pinnacles at the third floor, and at the building's parapet line.

At the time this description was written, a sidewalk bridge spanned the width of the main façade at the first floor. Photographs taken in 2006 were used to describe second-floor features that were concealed by the bridge.

The lower portion of the main façade is separated into three bays by narrow, channeled buttresses that flank the central bay and extend from the first through third floors. The ground floor features a recessed main entrance, which is reached by a granite step and granite landing, and is flanked by groups of three engaged columns with Corinthian capitals supporting an archivolt decorated with foliate ornament and grapes. The main-entrance opening, which likely originally contained a pair of slatted wood doors with metal strap hinges, now contains a pair of non-historic, paneled wood-and-glass doors.⁸³ A bar above the opening reads "St. George Chapel" in a medieval typeface; the half-round tympanum above the bar is filled with a pattern composed of large quatrefoils. The main entrance is flanked by lancet-arched door openings, each behind two granite steps and containing a single-leaf slatted wood door with metal iron strap hinges that fills its entire opening. A metal plate reading "103" is attached to the south door, and a bronze doorbell, possibly historic, is attached to the doorway's reveal. Each of the north and south door openings is crowned by a molding that largely follows the line of the door head but jogs upward near its ends and center, creating a space above the door opening that contains a cross. Adjacent to the south ground-floor entrance is the façade's "cornerstone," which reads:

ST. GEORGE
—SYRIAN—
R.C. CHURCH
A.D. 1929

Ground floor alterations include the installation of metal gooseneck pipes in the sidewalk in front of the cornerstone; the installation of a projecting metal sign armature secured by metal rods, which are attached at the second floor, and a hanging sign ("Moran's Ale House & Grill") over the main entrance; the installation of metal light fixtures on the buttresses flanking the main entrance; the installation of a flood light over each of the north and south door openings; the installation of flagpole cleats on the northernmost and southernmost buttresses; the installation of a metal plaque ("James Joyce Pub Award")

on the northernmost buttress; the installation of a doorbell and sign (“Ring bell for wheelchair access”) on the buttress adjacent to the main entrance on the south; the installation of an intercom box and postal release box adjacent to the south door opening; the installation of a small blue sign (“A Tribute to the Heroes of September 11, 2001”) on the southernmost buttress; the installation of brass kickplates on the north and south doors; the installation of a transparent plastic pouch on the north door; and the installation of a metal lock guard on the south door.

A projecting molded sill, interrupted by the buttresses, extends the width of the second floor. The second floor’s central bay is set off from its flanking bays by an enframing consisting of its flanking buttresses, which are crowned above the second floor with gablets, and a wide third-floor sill decorated with recessed quatrefoils and crowned by crockets with foliate caps. The north gablet is crowned by a pinnacle, but the south gablet has lost its pinnacle. Within the central bay are a central lancet niche containing a polychrome terra-cotta relief of St. George and the Dragon, flanked by two smaller lancet openings, each containing a cusped single-pane sash and plate tracery with a small oculus. Four engaged colonettes with Gothic pinnacles frame the central niche and window openings. Taller engaged colonettes at the central bay’s edges support a molded archivolt that frames a half-round blind window with simulated tracery. Depressed, cusped panels fill the spandrel areas between the archivolt and the third-floor sill.

The third floor contains three depressed-arch window openings. The area above the central third-floor window opening contains a quatrefoil and foliate corbels supporting a round arch, which in turn supports the third floor’s molded gable line and a plain cross extending above the gable line. Gablets and pinnacles decorate the façade’s four buttresses at and above the gable line, which is decorated with foliate bosses. Two depressed-arch window openings are present at the fourth floor, and three depressed-arch window openings are present at the fifth floor.

Above the fifth floor, foliate corbels support an ogee arch with foliate central finial that spans the width of the façade between the two outer buttresses. The façade is crowned by an angular parapet and a central belfry, which projects above the parapet, has an angular roofline, and is framed by pilasters with pinnacles. The belfry contains a lancet opening containing two round-arched openings separated by a mullion. The main façade’s parapet line, and the roofline of the belfry, are decorated with foliate bosses. The outer buttresses terminate with gablets and large Gothic pinnacles that extend above the parapet line.

Each of the window openings within the outer bays of the second floor, and the central bays of the third and fifth floors, retains its historic, thick vertical mullion, which separates two sashes with cusped heads. The upper portion of each of these openings is filled with plate tracery and a small oculus. The southernmost second-floor opening contains historic, figurative stained-glass casement sashes; the northernmost second-floor opening contains replacement, single-pane sashes. Historic multipane sashes with cusped heads remain within the central third- and fifth-floor openings. Within the outer third-floor, the fourth floor, and the outer fifth-floor openings, the original mullions, tracery, and oculi have been removed, and paired, single-pane casement sashes that fill their openings have been installed.

Other alterations to the main façade include the installation of flagpoles on the northernmost and southernmost buttresses; the installation of two through-the-wall air-conditioning units at each of the third, fourth, and fifth floors; the installation of round wall anchors at the fourth and fifth floors; the removal of a cross from atop the belfry (its supporting rod remains); and the installation of individual metal clamps that wrap around from the south façade at the first, second, third, and fourth floors, and just below the parapet line.

The south façade of 103 Washington Street is of brick; large portions of it have been coated with stucco. The line of the building’s earlier peaked roof appears to be visible on the façade. Numerous metal wall anchors have been installed on this façade. A stucco-coated rooftop bulkhead with angled roof is visible over the south façade.

The rear façade is three bays in width at the fourth and fifth floors, with projecting windowsills. Replacement one-over-one, double-hung sashes have been installed within the window openings. A through-the-wall air-conditioning unit is present below the southernmost fifth-floor opening, and the

façade has been coated with stucco. The northernmost fifth-floor opening appears to be smaller than the other fifth-floor openings.

A three-story addition of unknown date, which appears to have been constructed in two stages, extends behind the building. The addition's lower two stories are of brick, and the top story is constructed of cinderblock. The entire south façade of the addition has been coated with stucco and has several wall anchors. The top of its south parapet is covered by a tarpaulin. A metal structure supporting an HVAC unit extends behind the addition at the first floor; the area beneath this structure is accessed by means of a non-historic door. Two cylindrical flues extend vertically on the rear of the addition from the first floor to the addition's roof.

Report researched and written by
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NOTES

¹ The main sources for this section are Mary Ann Haick DiNapoli, "The Syrian-Lebanese Community of South Ferry from Its Origin to 1977," in Kathleen Benson and Philip M. Kayal, Eds., *A Community of Many Worlds: Arab-Americans in New York City* (New York: the Museum of the City of New York; Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 11-27; Paula Hajar, "Syrians and Lebanese," in Kenneth T. Jackson, Ed., *The Encyclopedia of New York City* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995), 1147-48; Philip M. Kayal and Joseph M. Kayal, *The Syrian-Lebanese in America: A Study in Religion and Assimilation* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1975), 60-111; Alixa Naff, "New York: The Mother Colony," in *A Community of Many Worlds*, 3-10; Barbara Rizek, Martin Rizek, and Joanne Medvecky, *The Financial District's Lost Neighborhood: 1900-1970* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Arcadia Publishing, 2004); Adele L. Younis, *The Coming of Arabic-Speaking People to the United States* (Staten Island, N.Y.: Center for Migration Studies, 1995), 122-141; and James Zogby, Ed., *Taking Root, Bearing Fruit: The Arab-American Experience* (Washington, D.C.: American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, 1984), 47-53. Other sources include Konrad Bercovici, *Around the World in New York* (New York: Century Company, 1924), 25-45; Cromwell Childe, "New York's Syrian Quarter," *New York Times* (August 20, 1899), IMS4; Rian James, *All About New York: An Intimate Guide* (New York: John Day, 1931), 240-41; Saloum A. Mokarzel, "History of the Syrians in New York," *Syrian World* (November 1927), 3-13, and "The Syrians in America," *Syrian World* (May 1930), 37-40; "Foreign Types of New York Life," *New York Times* (August 28, 1898), IMS14; "Little Syria," *Syrian World* (August 1926), 41-43; "Sights and Characters of New York's 'Little Syria,'" *New York Times* (March 29, 1903), 32; "The Syrian Colony of New York and Its Characteristics," *New York Times* (May 25, 1902), SM12; and "Wedding in Pure Arabic," *New York Times* (October 18, 1897), 7. Portions of this section on the neighborhood's early history are adapted from LPC, *94 Greenwich Street House Designation Report* (LP-2218) (New York: City of New York, 2009), prepared by Jay Shockley.

² *The Syrian-Lebanese in America*, 86. The earliest *New York Times* article to call the neighborhood the Syrian Quarter appears to have been "Foreign Types of New York Life," in 1898. In the following year in the *Times*, Cromwell Childe used the terms Syrian Quarter and Little Syria interchangeably. In 1904, Lucius Hopkins Miller, in *Our Syrian Population: A Study of the Syrian Population of Greater New York* (New York), 6, noted that "New York has always been the main center of Syrian life in this country."

³ In their 1975 work, *The Syrian-Lebanese in America*, 77, Philip M. and Joseph M. Kayal explain that they use the term "Syrian" to "include all turn-of-the-century immigrants from the modern nations of Jordan, Israel (Palestine), Lebanon and Syria who are either Melkites, Maronites, or Syrian-Orthodox Christians. Most scholars agree that this was the custom of the immigrants themselves."

⁴ Only 9,210 Syrians came to the United States in 1913, the peak year for Syrian immigration. Slightly over 100,000 Syrians immigrated between 1899 and 1932 (*The Syrian-Lebanese in America*, 70).

⁵ *The Syrian-Lebanese in America*, 101.

⁶ “New York: The Mother Colony,” 4-5. The Kayals have called Washington Street “the cradle from which practically all Syrian ‘colonies’ in the country emerged” (*The Syrian-Lebanese in America*, 96).

⁷ *The Syrian-Lebanese in America*, 121.

⁸ *Our Syrian Population*, 28.

⁹ *The Coming of Arabic-Speaking People to the United States*, 137.

¹⁰ In 1912, the editor of *Al-Hoda*, Saloum A. Mokarzel, “adapted the linotype to Arabic characters in the cellar of 55 Washington Street. *Al-Hoda* adopted the machine in 1912 and was the first Arabic paper to use it commercially. This invention made possible and immeasurably stimulated the growth of Arabic journalism in the Middle East” (“Arabic Paper Here Now 50 Years Old,” *New York Times* (August 9, 1948), 21). Six Arabic-language dailies were published in New York in 1928, according to “Arabic Newspapers in America,” *Syrian World* (May 1928), 36-39.

¹¹ “Syrians and Lebanese,” 1147. Gibran’s poem, “To Young Americans of Syrian Origin,” appeared in the premiere, July 1926 issue of the *Syrian World* (4-5).

¹² Edward Rose, *The Old World and the New* (New York: Century Company, 1914), 168, cited in *The Syrian-Lebanese in America*, 74.

¹³ “Syrians and Lebanese,” 1147. One major voice for assimilation was the *Syrian World*, which began publication in 1926 for the generation of Syrian-Americans “born and bred on American soil and under the influence of the ideals represented by the Stars and Stripes” (“Editor’s Comment,” *Syrian World* (July 1926), 54). New York’s Syrian-Americans excelled in the business world. In 1927, according to one estimate, they controlled “the manufacture and importation of 80% of the Madeira embroideries and about 50% of all other embroideries and laces of both Europe and the East” (“History of the Syrians in New York,” 7). By the 1930s, their “modern-looking, efficient business places” lined Fifth Avenue in the 20s and 30s (“The Romance of the Lace and Linen Industry,” *Syrian World* (June 1, 1934), 2).

¹⁴ As one example of this trend, the New England Federation of Syrian Clubs changed its name to the Syrian and Lebanese American Federation of the Eastern States in 1934. The name change was instituted, in part, to “satisfy those Lebanese patriots who objected to the sole use of the word ‘Syrian,’” according to “New England Federation Expands to Include All Eastern States,” *Syrian World* (October 26, 1934), 1.

¹⁵ *The Syrian-Lebanese in America*, 124.

¹⁶ Walter B. Parsons, “Syrian Business Section Changing,” *New York Times* (March 21, 1920), RE1. Buildings constructed in the early 1920s in the Syrian Quarter included the eighteen-story Barrett Building (Warren & Wetmore, 1921) at Washington, Rector, and West Streets; the fifteen-story Frasc Building (Henry Otis Chapman, 1921) at West and Rector Streets; and the National Surety Company Building (Arthur C. Jackson, 1922, demolished) at Washington and Albany Streets. See Michael Caratzas and Ken Lustbader, *Greenwich Street South Preliminary Historical Documentation* (New York: Lower Manhattan Emergency Preservation Fund, 2003), 18, 108-109, 123.

¹⁷ “Gorayeb Creates Own Market With Sailors,” *Syrian World* (January 17, 1935), 3.

¹⁸ Ruth Karpf, “Street of the Arabs,” *New York Times* (August 11, 1946), 112.

¹⁹ *The Syrian-Lebanese in America*, 87. The other church referred to by the Kayals, St. Joseph’s Maronite Church, was located at 57-59 Washington Street in 1910; when the church was demolished for the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel project, St. Joseph’s moved to 157 Cedar Street. The parish moved to Gateway Plaza in Battery Park City around 1984, according to *New York City Directories, 1786-1933/34* (New York: New York Public Library, 1950). No. 157 Cedar Street was demolished by 1992, according to *Insurance Maps of the City of New York* (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1923, updated to 1992). On St. Joseph’s Church, see Very Rev. Francis J. Marini, “A Brief History of Maronites in New York City,” accessed online at the U.S. Maronites website (usmaronites.com/Documents/NY%20Maronite%20History.doc).

²⁰ Portions of this section are adapted from *94 Greenwich Street House Designation Report*. Additional sources include Ann L. Buittenwieser, *Manhattan Water-Bound: Planning and Developing Manhattan's Waterfront from the Seventeenth Century to the Present* (New York: New York University Press, 1987), 21-55.

²¹ "Syrians in America," 19.

²² New York County, Office of the Register, conveyance liber 298, 354; *New York City Directories*.

²³ *New York City Directories*; United States Census (1790, 1800, 1810).

²⁴ Thomas H. Poppleton, *Plan of the City of New York* (New York: 1817).

²⁵ New York City Department of Buildings, Borough of Manhattan Alteration Record 878-1869. Shortly before this designation, the demolition of a parking structure that abutted 103 Washington on the south revealed what appears to be the building's original south wall, with the line of its old peaked roof, and contrasting pre- and post-1869 brick courses, visible.

²⁶ New York City Tax Assessments (1802-1880). In 1812, Suydam was assessed on a lot, presumably the lot of present-day 103 Washington Street, containing a store building. No. 103 Washington acquired its present street number in 1818; assessments of that year show Suydam's lot at 103 Washington containing a house. In 1819, the same lot contained a store. Inconsistent street numbering between 1812 and 1818 makes it difficult to definitively conclude whether the building present in 1812 was the same one present in 1819. The consistency in assessments over subsequent years strongly supports the conclusion that the building at 103 Washington Street in 1819 was not later demolished and replaced, and that portions of its exterior walls remain today.

²⁷ The executors of Suydam's estate sold 103 Washington Street to Edward Van Solingen, likely a relative of Suydam's son-in-law, Dr. Henry Van Solingen (conveyance liber 329, 162; "Court of Hymen," *The Weekly Museum* (February 22, 1794), 3).

²⁸ *New York City Directories*. The stretch of West Street below Albany Street appears to have opened in 1841, as the 1842-43 edition of Longworth's directory is the first to show West Street completely open between Battery Place and "Ganzevoort" (*Longworth's American Almanac, New-York Register, and City Directory for 1842-43* (New York: Thomas Longworth, 1842), appendix).

²⁹ "News of the Day," *New York Times* (January 11, 1859), 4; "City Intelligence," *New York Times* (January 1, 1859), 5. From 1846 to 1865, 103 Washington Street was owned by Charles Rowald, a grocer. Rowald's business was on Front Street; he appears to have been an absentee owner of 103 Washington except in 1847-48, when he lived there and operated a liquor store in the building, while maintaining his Front Street grocery (conveyance liber 476, 306; *New York City Directories*).

³⁰ Irving Lewis Allen, *The City in Slang: New York Life and Popular Speech* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 170.

³¹ In addition to owning 103 Washington Street, Schutte was shown in the 1870 United States Census as the proprietor of a large seamen's boardinghouse in New York City's Third Ward, which lay west of Broadway between Reade and Liberty Streets.

³² Alteration Record 878-1869; United States Census (1870).

³³ Most of the seamen enumerated at 103 Washington Street were described as "seamen at sea, ages unknown."

³⁴ United States Census (1880).

³⁵ United States Census (1900).

³⁶ "Syrian Banker Surrenders," *New York Times* (June 1, 1899), 14. Upon hearing of the bank's failure, hundreds of depositors anxiously gathered around the building.

³⁷ *New York City Directories*; undated photograph of 103 Washington Street storefront (LPC files).

³⁸ United States Census (1910).

³⁹ United States Census (1920).

⁴⁰ Sources for this section include *Melkites in America: A Directory and Informative Handbook* (West Newton, Mass.: Apostolic Exarchate for the Melkites in the United States, 1971), 85-86; *The Syrian-Lebanese in America*, 23-46; Fr. John Faraj, “The Melkite Family Heritage: History of the Melkite Community of New York,” accessed online at the website of the Church of the Virgin Mary (www.churchofthevirginmary.net/documents/church_his.html); Fr. John Faraj, “Outline of the History of Our Parish,” in *Church of the Virgin Mary Rededication* (Brooklyn: Church of the Virgin Mary, 2002); “The Melkites,” accessed online at the Melkite Catholic Eparchy of Newton (www.melkite.org/Melkite.htm); and *Our Syrian Population*.

⁴¹ *The Syrian-Lebanese in America*, 31.

⁴² *The Syrian-Lebanese in America*, 32. Constantinople was renamed Istanbul in the 1920s.

⁴³ *The Syrian-Lebanese in America*, 33.

⁴⁴ “The Melkite Family Heritage.” Fr. Bachewate’s name was sometimes spelled Beshwaty or Beshawate.

⁴⁵ “The Melkite Family Heritage.”

⁴⁶ Andrew S. Dolkart and Matthew A. Postal, *Guide to New York City Landmarks* (Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 25.

⁴⁷ “The Melkite Family Heritage.”

⁴⁸ *Brooklyn Daily Eagle Almanac* (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 1918).

⁴⁹ Conveyance liber 3174, 453. For more on Bardwil, see “The Romance of the Lace and Linen Industry,” *Syrian World* (June 1, 1934), 2.

⁵⁰ New York City Department of Buildings, Borough of Manhattan Alteration Record 3306-1920; Percy Loomis Sperr, “Manhattan: Washington Street-Rector Street, 1929,” *Photographic Views of New York City, 1870s-1970s* (New York Public Library).

⁵¹ Conveyance liber 3518, 337. A 1925 directory is the earliest New York City directory found that lists St. George’s Church at 103 Washington Street. The annual *Brooklyn Eagle Daily Almanac* shows St. George’s at 98 Washington Street through 1924, and at 103 Washington Street in 1925. The author wishes to thank Fr. Antoine Rizk of Brooklyn’s Church of the Virgin Mary for allowing him to review the official incorporation papers for St. George’s Church.

⁵² “Extensive Improvements in Washington Street,” *Syrian World* (September 1929), 52.

⁵³ New York City Department of Buildings, Borough of Manhattan Alteration Record 1721-1929.

⁵⁴ *Melkites in America*, 86.

⁵⁵ *New York City Directories*; “St. George Melkite Church” (c. 1978 church pamphlet, LPC files).

⁵⁶ Conveyance liber 644, 1095.

⁵⁷ The author wishes to thank Harvey F. Cassab’s daughter, Ellen C. Parker, who provided much of the information upon which this section is based.

⁵⁸ The 1930 United States Census is the source of Farris Cassab’s year of immigration.

⁵⁹ Ancestry.com (online database), *New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1957* (Provo, Utah: The Generations Network, 2006). Farris and Amelia Cassab arrived in New York on December 4, 1913. That year is also given as her year of immigration in the 1930 U.S. Census.

⁶⁰ In 1924, the *Charleston Daily Mail* reported that Farris and Amelia Cassab had sold Harvey a \$35,000 half-interest in “a valuable piece of ... realty known as the Cassab apartment building ... with business rooms in the first story and living suites above” (“Deed Share in Cassab’s Apartment for \$35,000,” *Charleston (W. Va.) Daily Mail* (March 26, 1924), 6).

⁶¹ New York City Department of Buildings, Borough of Manhattan Alteration Record 1805-1926 shows Harvey Cassab residing at 157 Prospect Park West (Frank Holmbert, 1899, within the Park Slope Historic District). By

1930, according to the U.S. Census of that year, the Cassabs, including 27-year-old Harvey, his father and stepmother, and his sister and two brothers, had moved to 181 Prospect Park West (William Debus, 1901, within the Park Slope Historic District). At that time, Harvey was listed as a draftsman in an architecture firm.

⁶² The 1932 Brooklyn telephone directory shows Cassab and Charin at the same address, 186 Joralemon Street; *Polk's City Directory* of 1933-34 shows Cassab as Charin's chief draftsman. On Charin, see "Business Records," *New York Times* (March 1, 1933), 24; "Building Plans Filed," *New York Times* (June 20, 1933), 35; "Real Estate Notes," *New York Times* (July 29, 1937), 37; "Building Plans Filed," *New York Times* (October 12, 1939), 50; "Building Plans Filed," *New York Times* (December 5, 1939), 51; and "Building Plans Filed," *New York Times* (September 12, 1941), 38.

⁶³ "Harry Milgram, 56, Engineer for City," *New York Times* (December 12, 1957), 30.

⁶⁴ "Building Plans Filed," *New York Times* (May 15, 1935), 40.

⁶⁵ Alteration Record 1805-1926; Alteration Record 1721-1929.

⁶⁶ "Building Permits Total \$21,000 for Apartments, Dwelling, Remodeling," *Charleston (W. Va.) Gazette* (December 19, 1937), 9.

⁶⁷ "New Charleston Homes Constructed by Cassab Construction Company" (Advertisement), *Charleston Gazette* (August 7, 1938), 9.

⁶⁸ "Edgewood Home," *Charleston Gazette* (September 22, 1940), 27; "Two Attractive Homes Recently Built in City," *Charleston Gazette* (May 11, 1941), 29; "Homes Recently Completed in Charleston," *Charleston Daily Mail* (May 11, 1941), 12; "Home on Virginia Avenue Sold," *Charleston Daily Mail* (July 5, 1942), 7.

⁶⁹ "Harvey F. Cassab," *Charleston Daily Mail* (June 16, 1962), 11.

⁷⁰ Sources for this section include *Melkites in America; The Syrian-Lebanese in America*, 23-59, 125-181; "1920s Through 1960s Acculturation and Assimilation," accessed online at the website of St. George Melkite Church of Milwaukee (www.melkite.org/Acculturation.htm); "Latinizations: Roman Catholic Influence in Eastern Churches," accessed online at the website of the Melkite Catholic Eparchy of Newton (www.melkite.org/latin.htm); Marvin Trachtenberg and Isabelle Hyman, *Architecture: From Prehistory to Post-Modernism/The Western Tradition* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1986), 225-277; and David Watkin, *A History of Western Architecture* (London: Laurence King, 1996), 126-177.

⁷¹ In 1929, the church adjoined the five-story Downtown Community House (John F. Jackson, 1925-26) on its north, and a nineteenth-century five-story tenement with Italianate-style detailing on its south. These buildings are shown in the c.1939 New York City Division of Taxation photograph for Manhattan Block 53, Lot 3; see *Greenwich Street South Preliminary Historical Documentation* for information on the Downtown Community House.

⁷² *Melkites in America*, 19.

⁷³ *The Syrian-Lebanese in America*, 149. As *Melkites in America* describes the Latinizing influence on Melkite parishes, "Churches were built to look like Latin churches: Stations of the Cross and altar rails were installed, Communion was given in the form of hosts to communicants who knelt at a rail, bells were rung during the Liturgy as during the Latin Mass, Latin Rite vestments were used for altar boys (and sometimes for priests), Ash Wednesday, All Saints, and All Souls observances, First Fridays and other Western devotions were introduced to prove to one and all that Melkites were Catholics, too" (*Melkites in America*, 19). St. George Melkite Church in Milwaukee took on at least 23 Western practices between the 1920s and 1960s as part of the parish's "adapt[ation] to the prevailing Roman Rite tradition," including the adoption of unmarried clergy, the replacement of icons with statues, and the installation of confessional boxes ("1920s Through 1960s Acculturation and Assimilation"). Melkite churches substantially restored their historic Eastern customs following the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), which decreed that Eastern Catholics, including Melkites, "should take steps to return to their ancestral traditions" (*Melkites in America*, 8).

⁷⁴ Melkite churches with Eastern-influenced designs include the neo-Byzantine-style St. George Melkite Greek Catholic Church in Milwaukee (Erhard Brielmaier & Sons, 1916), and St. Joseph Church in Lawrence, Mass. (1951-52), which is decorated with onion domes, a half-round parapet recalling a dome, and Byzantine icons (*Melkites in America*, 65-66, 107-108; www.melkite.org/georgehome.htm; www.stjosephmelkitecatholicchurch.org). Gothic

Revival-style Catholic cathedrals in America include St. Patrick's Cathedral (James Renwick, Jr., 1853-88, a designated New York City Landmark) in New York; the Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart (Jeremiah O'Rourke and Isaac E. Ditmars, 1898-1954) in Newark; the Cathedral of the Holy Cross (Patrick Keely, 1866-75) in Boston; and Holy Name Cathedral (Patrick Keely, 1874-75) in Chicago.

⁷⁵ For a photograph of St. Ann's Church, see *Melkites in America*, 49.

⁷⁶ *The Syrian-Lebanese in America*, 140.

⁷⁷ Philip K. Hitti, *The Syrians in America* (New York: George H. Doran, 1924), 36.

⁷⁸ The "cornerstone" of the building's 1929-30 façade identifies it as "St. George Syrian R.C. Church." The church's official name, as shown in conveyance records and the church's incorporation papers, was St. George's Syrian Catholic Church. The church variously appeared in city directories and telephone white pages as St. George's Syrian Catholic Church (1916), St. George Roman Catholic Church (1925), and St. George's Roman Catholic Church (1934 through 1972). After it moved to 83 Washington Street, the church was listed as "St. George's Roman Catholic Church of Washington Street." When it returned to 103 Washington, it appeared in telephone directories simply as "St. George Church." The church never appears to have been listed with the words "Melkite" or "Greek Catholic" in its name (*New York City Directories*).

⁷⁹ In a 1921 amendment to Alteration Record 3306-1920, the architect noted that the space underneath the first-floor stairs was being changed from closets to confessionals.

⁸⁰ The use of terra-cotta glazes that imitated stone began around the turn of the twentieth century, according to Susan Tunick, *Terra-Cotta Skyline: New York's Architectural Ornament* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997), 62-67.

⁸¹ *Melkites in America*, 25.

⁸² In 1971, at the time of the publication of *Melkites in America*, about two dozen Melkite parishes existed in the United States. Among the finest historic Melkite churches extant at that time were the neo-Classical Our Lady of Redemption in Detroit (1924-29), and Milwaukee's St. George Melkite Greek Catholic Church.

⁸³ The slatted doors appear on an original drawing of the building's 1929-30 main façade within the Department of Buildings file for Alteration Record 1721-1929.

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 the (former) St. George's Syrian Catholic Church has a special character and special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that among its important qualities, the (former) St. George's Syrian Catholic Church is the most significant remnant of the Lower Manhattan immigrant enclave known as the "Syrian Quarter," the "Mother Colony" of immigrants from the former Ottoman province of Syria, which included present-day Syria and Lebanon; that Lower Manhattan's Syrian Quarter was the commercial and cultural capital in the United States of immigrants from the former Ottoman province of Syria for several decades beginning in the 1880s; that Melkite Greek Catholics living in this community formed America's first Melkite parish in 1889; that by 1925, as St. George's Syrian Catholic Church, the parish moved into this building, which had been purchased for its use by George E. Bardwil, an importer of fine linens and embroideries; that in 1929, St. George's Syrian Catholic Church engaged Harvey F. Cassab, a young Lebanese-American draftsman, to design the building's vibrant neo-Gothic, terra-cotta main façade, which features a polychrome terra-cotta relief of St. George and the Dragon, and remains remarkably intact today; that the building was constructed around 1812, served as an immigrant boardinghouse by the 1850s, was raised to its present five stories in 1869, and continued to function as a boardinghouse and tenement until its purchase by Bardwil; and that it remains Lower Manhattan's most vivid reminder of the vanished ethnic community once known as the Syrian Quarter.

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 the (former) St. George's Syrian Catholic Church, 103 Washington Street, Borough of Manhattan, and designates Manhattan Tax Map Block 53, Lot 3 as its Landmark Site.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair

Pablo E. Vengoechea, Vice-Chair

Frederick Bland, Stephen F. Byrns, Diana Chapin, Joan Gerner,

Roberta Brandes Gratz, Elizabeth Ryan, Margery Perlmutter, Commissioners



(Former) St. George's Syrian Catholic Church
103 Washington Street, Manhattan
Main facade
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2009



(Former) St. George's Syrian Catholic Church,
103 Washington Street, Manhattan
First floor, main facade
Photo: Christopher D. Brazeo, 2009



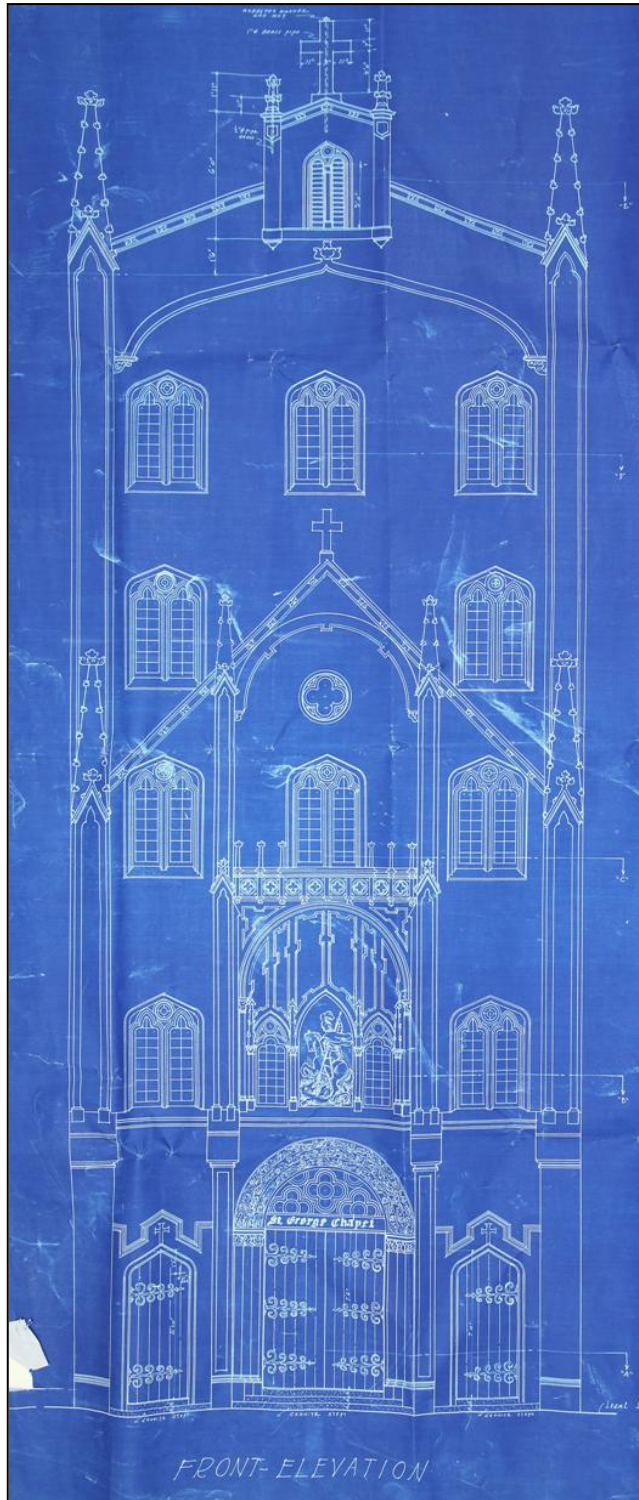
(Former) St. George's Syrian Catholic Church,
103 Washington Street, Manhattan
South facade
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2009



(Former) St. George's Syrian Catholic Church
103 Washington Street, Manhattan
Main facade
Photo: Carl Forster, 2004

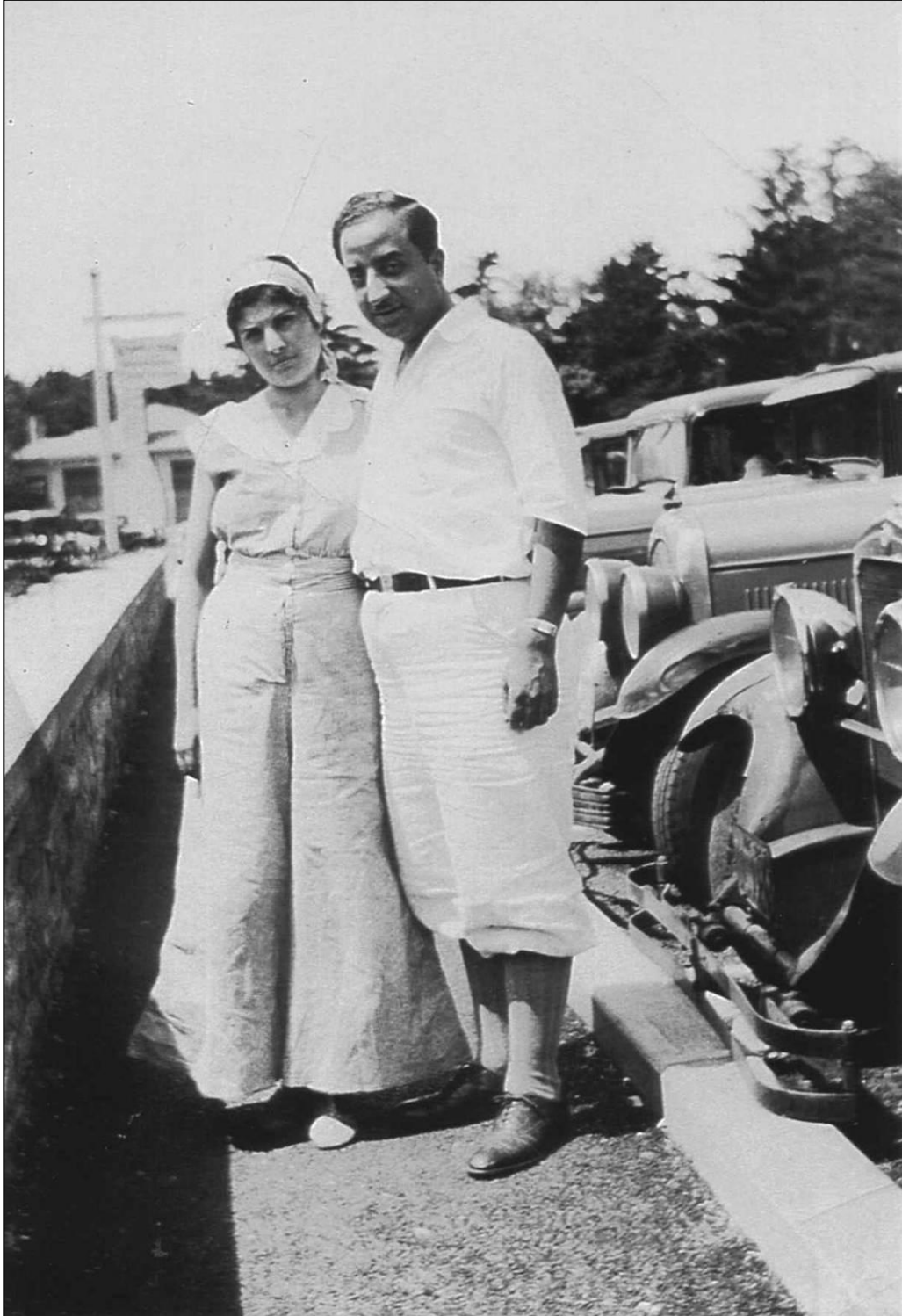


(Former) St. George's Syrian Catholic Church
Polychrome terra-cotta relief of St. George and the Dragon, main facade
Photo: Carl Forster, 2004

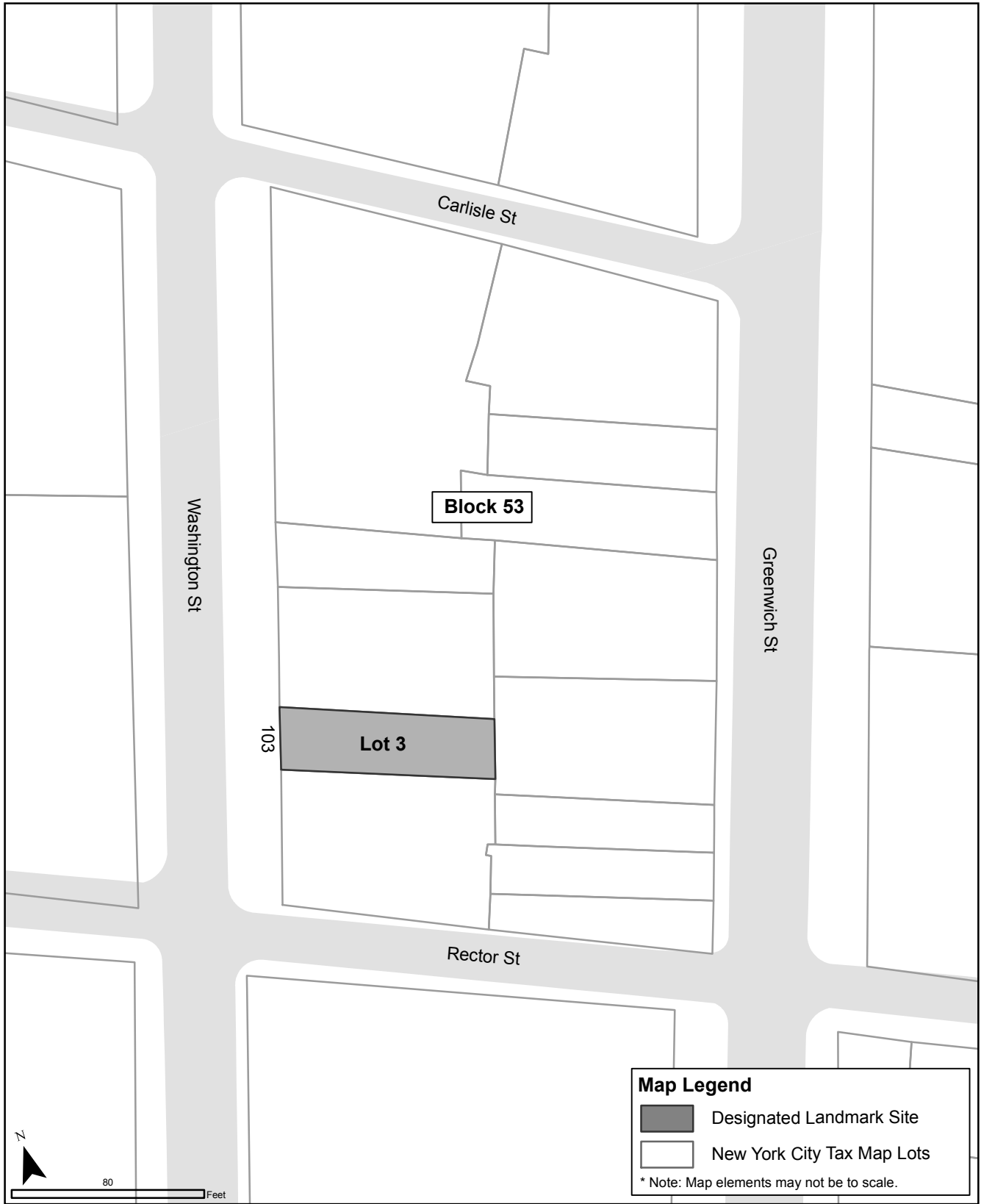


(Former) St. George's Syrian Catholic Church
Front Elevation Drawing, 1929

Source: New York City Department of Buildings, Borough of Manhattan
Block and Lot Folder, Block 53, Lot 3



Victoria and Harvey F. Cassab, 1932
Photo courtesy of Ellen C. Parker



(FORMER) ST. GEORGE'S SYRIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH (LP-2167), 103 Washington Street.
 Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 53, Lot 3.

Designated: July 14, 2009

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