



THE SOCIETY FOR THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE CITY

May 7, 2006

Chairman Robert B. Tierney
The Landmarks Preservation Commission
The Municipal Building, 1 Centre Street
New York, New York 10007

Dear Chairman Tierney:

We are writing to ask the Commission to review and reconsider an earlier decision not to hear St. Saviour's Church, Maspeth. We believe that in the light of changed circumstances and new information, it would be appropriate to take a second look.

When the original decision not to calendar was taken, St. Saviour's was a religious property, and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993 was in effect. Any designation of a religious property had the potential to become a test case, and especially so in Queens, where the Queens Council of Churches had a record of vehement and organized opposition to landmarking. Subsequently, of course, the Supreme Court found the Act unconstitutional, and in any case, St. Saviour's is no longer a church except in the architectural sense.

The Juniper Park Civic Association has just made an extraordinary discovery, the original handwritten book of Vestry minutes starting in 1847. It was given by someone who saw the attempt to save St. Saviour's on television news, and realized that the book he had found at a Flea Market was the old parish record. Everything is described: the decision to build a church on Maspeth Hill, the hiring of Richard Upjohn, the subsidy from the Corporation of Trinity Church, the details of the construction—how the foundation stones were quarried on the property, how "the removal of the earth from the foundation and the carrying of the stone to it were gratuitously performed by Mr. Stephen B. Masters." It seems that building St. Saviour's was an effort shared by everyone; while some carried the stones, James Maurice (the Congressman for whom Maurice Avenue is named) gave the land, a part of the property where he built his house in 1840.

When the decision not to calendar was taken, I wonder whether there was consideration of the role of this design in Richard Upjohn's thinking. Upjohn designed St. Saviour's in 1847, a Gothic church in wood for a parish that was then rural. Five years later, he published *Upjohn's Rural Architecture*, which, he said, was "to supply the want which is often felt, especially in newly settled parts of our country, of designs for cheap but still substantial buildings for the use of parishes..." Here Upjohn was expanding the Gothic revival he brought to America westward with the pioneers. Looking at the rendering of this church (for which he published full plans and specifications), it is hard to believe that St. Saviour's was not a prototype: the designs are in some respects identical, and in others, close. Not only does this give St. Saviour's a special place in Upjohn's life, it provides invaluable information on which to base a restoration of architectural details obscured and damaged by asbestos shingles. Local witnesses say that the fire damage was not as extensive as has been reported. We believe that this building has a special place in the history of Queens and in the history of American architecture, and we very much hope you will consider hearing it.

Sincerely,

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