

Request for Evaluation, Individual Landmark Statement of Significance

Submitted by Save Chelsea, September 4, 2026

Church of the Guardian Angel

185 Tenth Avenue

Block 693, Lot 31

Guardian Angel School

191 Tenth Avenue

Block 693, Lot 34



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The Church of the Guardian Angel and Guardian Angel School were completed in 1930 and are virtually intact. They have architectural, cultural, and historic significance meriting evaluation for individual landmark designation. Evaluation is urgently needed as the Roman Catholic Archdiocese has announced its intention to sell the school, which would almost certainly lead to its demolition and development of its site with new construction. Church and school were conceived as an ensemble that is greater than the sum of its parts. Together they are here referred to simply as “Guardian Angel” unless distinction is needed.

Description

The Roman Catholic Church of the Guardian Angel and adjacent Guardian Angel School, both completed in 1930, are located on the west side of Tenth Avenue immediately north of West 21st Street, with the church standing at the intersection. The buildings appear to extend to their property lines on all sides. The church has 58'-8" of frontage on Tenth Avenue and the school 64'-9". Both are on 100'-deep lots. The school has a crescent-shaped plan that together with the church encloses an internal, open-air play yard. Guardian Angel's façades are publicly visible on Tenth Avenue, West 21st Street, and the High Line. The church and school exteriors and the church interior are in excellent, unaltered condition.



Guardian Angel viewed from the southeast, with West 21st Street at lower left and Tenth Avenue at lower right



Church of the Guardian Angel (left) and Guardian Angel School (right), Tenth Avenue façades



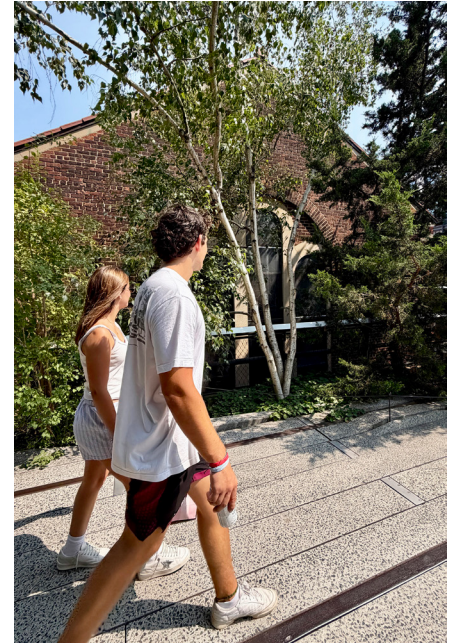
Church of the Guardian Angel, West 21st Street façade

Guardian Angel and the High Line

The cost of building Guardian Angel was paid by the New York Central Railroad as part of its construction of the High Line, in compensation for demolition of the parish's 1910 church on West 23rd Street to make way for the elevated freight line. This explains why mere feet separate the High Line from the back of Guardian Angel; they were designed in concert.



Street-level freight trains continued to run along Tenth Avenue in front of Guardian Angel until the High Line was put into operation in 1934. The last train ran on it in 1980. The High Line reopened as a park in phases from 2009-2014 and was immediately celebrated for providing a new urban perspective, including a backstage view of the neighborhood's industrial architecture and layered history.



Guardian Angel adds historic resonance and a unique sense of place to the High Line experience.

Architect John Vredenburgh Van Pelt (1874-1962)

According to his *New York Times* obituary:

At the age of 14 Mr. Van Pelt and his mother moved to Paris where he entered the Ecole des Beaux Arts. He also attended the Ecole des Arts Décoratifs and the Atelier Droillard Thierry Deglane. For five years he studied architecture and painted in his spare time. He received the title of Architect Diplômé par le Gouvernement in 1895, the first American to be so honored.

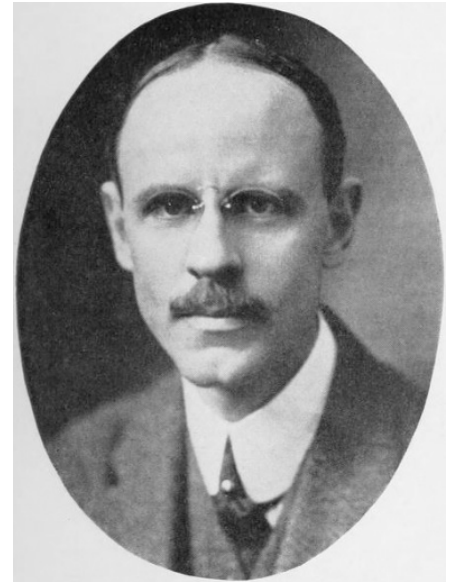
Receiving this title meant Van Pelt had earned the formal diploma awarded by the French government to students who completed the full course of study and passed the required state examinations at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, rather than simply attending ateliers there like many of the leading American architects of his time. His obituary continues:

In 1896 and 1897 he won honors in graduate courses in architecture at Beaux Arts and in both years was named laureate of the Société des Architectes Diplômés par le Gouvernement.

Mr. Van Pelt returned to this country in 1897 to become Assistant Professor of Architecture in charge of design at Cornell. He returned to Europe in 1900 for two years of travel and study. Resuming his post at Cornell he was soon made a full professor and served as dean until 1904 when he resigned to become director of the Hastings Atelier at Columbia University. By this time he had written extensively in his field and was the author of *Discussion of Composition [Especially as Applied to Architecture]* and later revised this work under the title *Essentials of Composition as Applied to Art*. Leaving Columbia after nine years Mr. Van Pelt became Professor of Design at the University of Pennsylvania. He served from 1914 to 1917. From 1918 to 1921 he was at the Cooper Union Women's Art School and he returned to Columbia for a six-year term directing the extension studios in architecture. From 1929 to 1935 he was lecturer on architectural composition and planning there.

Van Pelt also authored *Selected Monuments of French Gothic Architecture* (1924) and *Masterpieces of Spanish Architecture: Romanesque and Allied Styles* (1925).

The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission's Guide to New York City Landmarks, Fourth Edition cites Van Pelt's pedestal for Anna Hyatt Huntington's 1915 sculpture, Joan of Arc, at West 93rd Street in the Riverside Park and Riverside Drive Scenic Landmark, which the *LPC Guide* ranks among the city's finest monuments. His *New York Times* obituary states that he was responsible for its setting.



John Vredenburgh Van Pelt



Van Pelt's pedestal for the Joan of Arc Monument

The AIA Guide to New York City, Fifth Edition cites Guardian Angel and two of Van Pelt's earlier works:

- The 1912 Nippon Club (now Templo Adventista del Septimo Dia) at 161 W. 93rd St., the cornice of which the *AIA Guide* calls “extraordinary: it sails overhead with the assurance of Lorenzo de’ Medici”;
- The 1925 St. John Nepomucene Church at 411 E. 66th St., which the *AIA Guide* calls “a romantic paeon to the Romanesque style” and “another version” of Guardian Angel.

Its citation for Guardian Angel notes its “lush brick and limestone, Italian Romanesque, backed up snug against the High Line.”



The former Nippon Club



St. John Nepomucene Church

Architectural Analysis

According to the Church of the Guardian Angel's website (<https://guardianangelstcolumba.org/guardian-angel-church-history>):

Architect John V. Pelt, a fan of Pugliese style, fashioned Guardian Angel's design after Puglia's Cathedral of Bitonto. The stunning yet understated exterior is made of brick, limestone and marble panels that flank a row of stone columns across the front of the church. A main frieze depicts the religious history of the world with periods separated by guardian angels. Hand-sculpted limestone angels, at work casting out evil spirits, grace the areas above the panels and over the entrance doors.

Van Pelt's debt to Bitonto is clear. The 12th-century Italian cathedral also inspired his St. John Nepomucene Church completed five years earlier. St. John added a corner tower to the Bitonto model. Guardian Angel added an unusual front colonnade framing marble panels with a historiated frieze above, derived from another twelfth-century Romanesque model by way of an extraordinary New York lineage. This explains much of Guardian Angel's special appeal and underscores its significance.

In 1900, Alice Gwynne Vanderbilt and her daughter Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney commissioned Stanford White of McKim, Mead & White to design a new entrance for the old St. Bartholomew's Church, by James Renwick Jr., on Madison Avenue and East 44th Street. It would serve as a memorial to Mrs. Vanderbilt's late husband, Cornelius Vanderbilt II. White's design, now famed as the Triple Portal, was inspired by the Abbey Church of St. Gilles. After seeing it while touring a dozen years earlier, he described St. Gilles in a letter to his parents as having "the best piece of architecture in France, the triple marble porch of the church."

In 1914, the renowned church architect Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue was commissioned to design a new St. Bartholomew's. He was charged with incorporating the Triple Portal, which would be moved to the new church at Park Avenue and 50th Street. Goodhue stated: it "is universally regarded by architects and public alike, as one of the most beautiful things, perhaps the most beautiful thing, of its kind in America." He allowed it to "set the key" for the church's design, taking him out of his usual Gothic mode and into Romanesque. St. Bartholomew's 1967 landmark designation soon after creation of the Landmarks Preservation Commission attests to its importance. The Designation Report states that "Royal Cortissoz, the famous art critic, has called the portal of St. Bartholomew's Church one of the most noble works of its kind in modern times." It is currently being restored under a Save America's Treasures grant.



Bitonto Cathedral, Puglia, Italy



The Abbey Church of St. Gilles in southern France



Guardian Angel echoes both Bitonto and St. Gilles.



Stanford White's Triple Portal includes sculptures by Daniel Chester French and Andrew O'Connor, and magnificent bronze doors by Philip Martiny and Herbert Adams. Its frieze depicts scenes from Biblical history. In 1903, it replaced the original street-level façade of the 1872 St. Bartholomew's Church by James Renwick, Jr. In this historic photograph, it reads as a discrete, flat-topped podium for the upper façade.

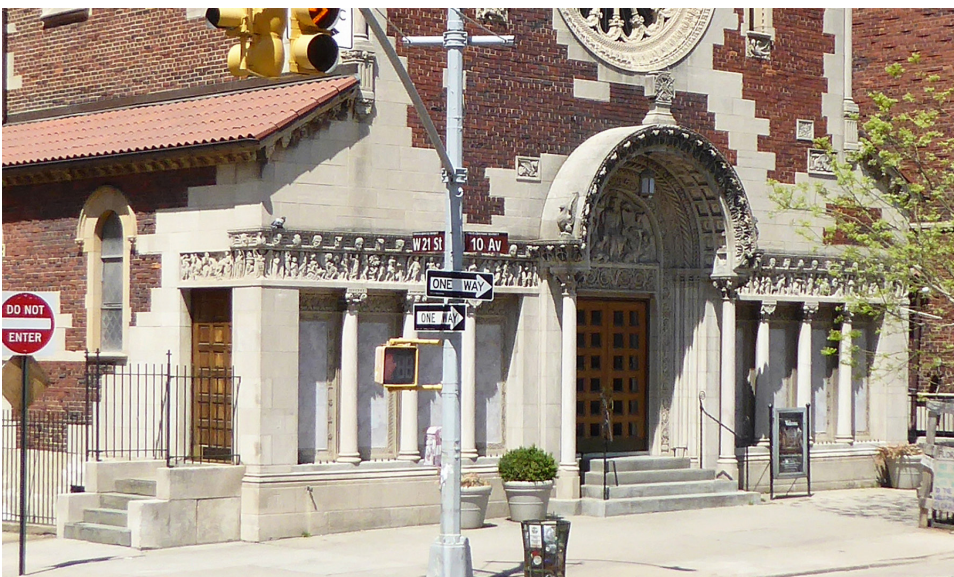


The Church of the Guardian Angel is shown shortly after completion in this 1931 Wurts Brothers photo (Museum of the City of New York). Three front entrances would have crowded the small church's façade. Van Pelt instead provided side entrances just around the front corners. He adapted the Triple Portal to Guardian Angel's narrower front by adopting only its central arched opening and extending its flanking colonnades and friezes the full width of the façade. This interpretation of the Triple Portal uniquely embraces and integrates with the body of the church.



The relocated Triple Portal at St. Bartholomew's Church. According to Richard Oliver's monograph, *Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue*:

In reusing the portal, Goodhue did not wish to replicate its position in the old church, where the arches bore the mass of the façade above. Instead, he was inspired by the original example at Sainte Gilles where the portal stands as the front of the narthex, separate from the wall of the church proper. This strategy at the same time honored the Triple Portal and freed Goodhue to develop a harmonious but personal design.



Van Pelt carried the frieze around the front corners and over the tops of low-key side entrances. This gave the Triple Portal motif an unprecedented three-dimensionality and unity with its church. The upper façade's interspersed limestone blocks weave it into the portal level, avoiding a hard boundary like that of the old St. Bartholomew's.

Nothing would have prevented Van Pelt from discovering and interpreting St. Gilles for himself or taking its Triple Portal as his direct inspiration, but it is clear how much else of Goodhue's design for St. Bartholomew's influenced his work at both St. John Nepomucene and Guardian Angel.

New York 1930: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Two World Wars by Stern, Gilmartin, and Mellins places Guardian Angel within "a minor renaissance of Romanesque church designs" inspired by St. Bartholomew's, saying of Guardian Angel:

John V. Van Pelt's façades were among the most exquisitely crafted of the period. Rendered in rough-textured terra-cotta [sic], brick and irregularly spotted with stone quoins and carved ornament, they conjured up the image of a humble Lombard country church decorated piecemeal over time.

In *The City Observed: New York – A Guide to the Architecture of Manhattan*, the architecture critic Paul Goldberger wrote of Guardian Angel:

This is a curiosity, a small but exceedingly elaborate Romanesque-Byzantine hybrid. The combination of red brick and limestone is an odd one for a church in this style, as if the materials intended for a Georgian church had ended up being used for this one. If the style is anything, it could be called Picturesque Romanesque, and if the building looks like anything else, it is what one would imagine a Romanesque chapel in Bronxville or Greenwich to look like. To find it on Tenth Avenue in Chelsea heightens the oddity, and also the pleasure. For whatever its suburban yearnings may be, this is an appealing building from that too-little appreciated period of late American eclecticism between the wars.

There is nothing Byzantine about Guardian Angel, but its family resemblance to St. Bartholomew's may have called its Byzantine dome and interior to Goldberger's mind. Van Pelt's tailoring of Triple Portal material to suit Guardian Angel is so deft and organic that the appropriation has never been commented on.

He owes a more obvious debt to St. Bartholomew's façade fabric, where stone in the mainly brick surfaces bleeds out from the usual corner-quoins and window-surround locations, assuming random shapes. This answers Ruskin's call for imperfection that shows the free hand of the craftsman, those "irregularities and deficiencies which are not only signs of life, but sources of beauty." Van Pelt first adopted this technique at St. John Nepomucene Church, where his use of salmon-colored brick echoes St. Bartholomew's. At Guardian Angel five years later, he mixed red brick and limestone for the more vivid effect Goldberger associated with Georgian architecture. This related the church to its red-brick Greek Revival rowhouse context.



A section of the Triple Portal at St. Bartholomew's Church



Van Pelt's interpretation of the Triple Portal for Guardian Angel has a longer frieze accommodating more scenes from Biblical history.



Randomly placed limestone at St. Bartholomew's



As seen in this 1931 Wurts Brothers photo (Museum of the City of New York), the Church of the Guardian Angel's triangular pediment and street-level colonnade with frieze distinguish it from Van Pelt's Bitonto Cathedral model and his earlier Romanesque churches, Our Lady of Victory in the Bronx (1911), and St. John Nepomucene (1925).

The triangular pediment allows for a horizontal corbel table at its base aligning with one at the top of the school's main volume. A string course defines the school's first floor level, relating it to the church's colonnade tier. These divide both church and school into a base, a taller middle section, and an attic level that includes the church's pediment and the school block's similarly pedimented penthouse, creating a coherent whole. The church's deviations from Van Pelt's preferred model show how focused he was on its relationship to the school and the overall effect rather than on the church in isolation. (The tower at St. John Nepomucene had been requested by its parish, according to a 1925 *Architectural Record* article by Van Pelt.)

The school volume, which also contains the rectory, steps up to match the height of the five-story rowhouse to the north. It also provides a stylistic transition from the adjacent block-front to the north, giving the church a medieval-village setting. Together with the church's open-corner location and the rear spatial buffer of the High Line, this contributes to its place-apart quality that has been remarked upon.



Bitonto Cathedral



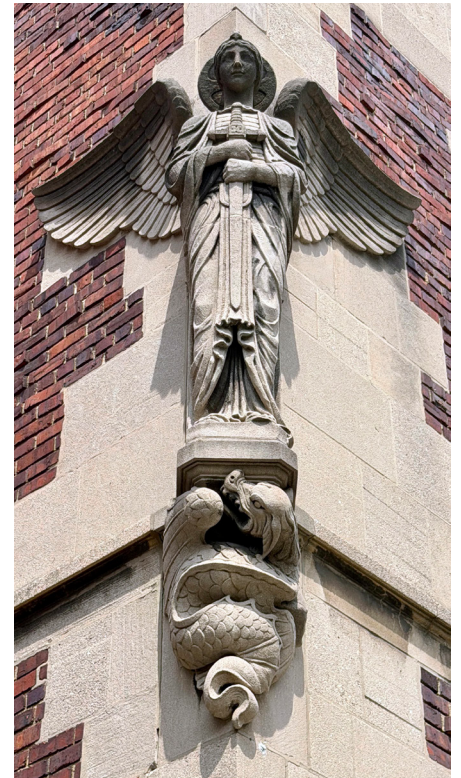
Our Lady of Victory Church



St. John Nepomucene Church



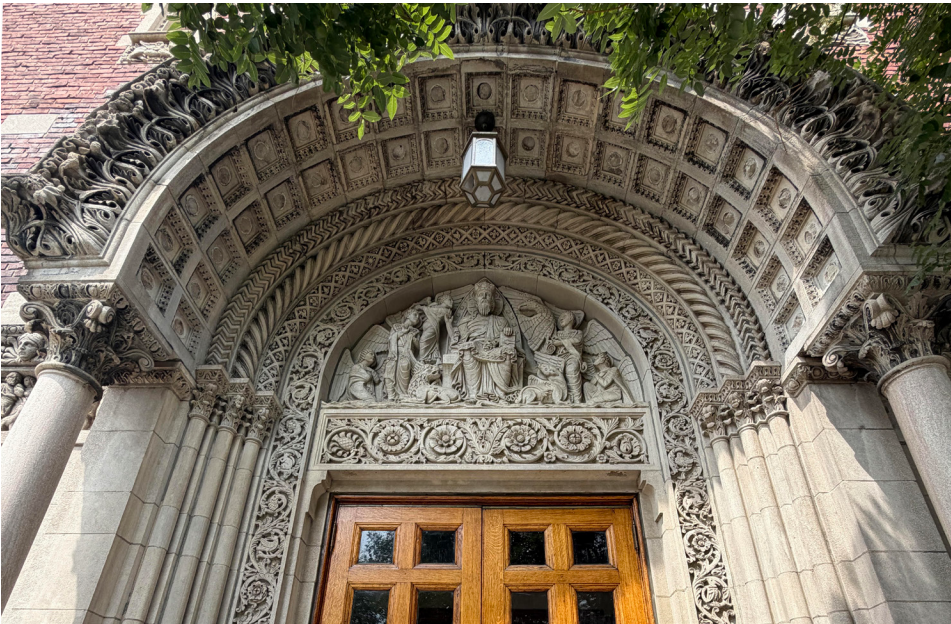
Guardian Angel School's dramatic corner angel watches over the church's congregants as they come and go. In the complex's first years, before the High Line opened, this protecting spirit also addressed a Tenth Avenue still known as "Death Avenue" for the hundreds of lives, mostly children's, its freight trains claimed. It is the keynote element, visible from afar, of a complex distinguished by its extraordinary sculptural program. As one approaches Guardian Angel, its extraordinarily intricate, human-scaled exterior further engages the viewer and rewards close examination.



The school's monumental angel is a neighborhood icon.



Smaller angels appear at the frieze corners.



Just as Van Pelt built upon St. Gilles's Triple Portal, he modeled his interpretation's tympanum on that of the 12th-century Abbey of Moissac, France, a Romanesque masterpiece. In a 1925 *Architectural Record* article on St. John Nepomucine Church, he describes personally taking a hand in modeling its sculpture to ensure a result that "was more than usually difficult of achievement because of the subtle combination of archaism and sophistication of this period of Romanesque." He cites Moissac's tympanum, "imbued with a spiritual idealism that could only emanate from an art entirely untrammelled by preoccupation with photographic reproduction," noting "the uncanny skill with which the contrasts are handled and the actual modeling and carving is done, while the figures, faces and graceful lines of the composition are perfect in their beauty and grace."



The Moissac tympanum



The Holy Family's flight into Egypt, at St. Bartholomew's frieze (top) and Guardian Angel's (bottom)



Guardian Angel's wraparound frieze is much longer than St. Bartholomew's and more fully depicts Biblical history, from the Creation to Christ's Ascension. Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden is seen at left. Angels above column capitals and at frieze corners separate scenes. The sculptural quality derives from Van Pelt's personal attention and the artistic sensitivity seen in his appreciation of the Moissac tympanum.



An example of spolia at Ravenna's 5th-century Baptistry of Neon



One of Guardian Angel's simulated spolia on the south face of the Church near the High Line

Guardian Angel is peppered with sculptural vignettes recalling fragments in historic buildings salvaged from ruins, known as spolia (same root as "spoil"). These are either randomly placed or deliberately aligned with tops or bottoms of door and window openings. They further contribute to the pre-modern, ad hoc effect of the façades' irregular brick and limestone, and suggest construction from scavenged materials with a deeper history. While providing more opportunity for sculpture, they seem to comment on Van Pelt's appropriation of St. Gilles's Triple Portal and Moissac's tympanum. Like Guardian Angel's Romanesque style, this visible reaching back through history evokes continuity with the deep Catholic past even as the church's frieze goes back to the Book of Genesis.



The school's gable-roofed fourth-floor element, set back from the church to avoid standing over it, is like a little church unto itself with a miniature quatrefoil rose window in a pediment of its own. Under its eaves, a row of engaged columns framing windows or blank limestone panels calls back to the main church's street-level colonnade, its corbel-table columns, and its plain limestone pediment.



The pitched, clay-tile roof of the school penthouse recalls the old-world context of Romanesque churches like Moissac Abbey's, above, which inspired the Church of the Guardian Angel's tympanum.



Guardian Angel's red brick (at left above) harmonizes with unpainted brick of the adjacent rowhouse (center right), and with similarly colored brick that characterizes the neighborhood. This enlists the rest of the community in the conceit of a medieval-village context.

A 1925 *Architectural Record* article by Van Pelt on the construction of his St. John Nepomucine Church sheds light on Guardian Angel. It focuses on the difficulty of achieving a picturesquely irregular effect in modern times, with union rules calling for aligned and level brick joints, and strict trade separation between stonemasons and bricklayers complicating intermixed façade materials. As Van Pelt points out, there was another hurdle:

When we first began to lay up face brick I encountered a most disquieting opposition from the congregation. Some of them were practical bricklayers and freely criticized what they considered rottenly careless work. Disquieting is an inadequate description of the rector's feeling when the contributions and gifts of the people began to fall off. However, I stuck to it, argued against a machine made front and Fordesque architecture and loaned the rector books to show the trustees and the insistent members of his flock. Finally I won out and the ones who objected the most are now loudest in praising the result.

His opposition to “a machine made front and Fordesque architecture” is straight out of Ruskin, who saw over-supervised workmen as industrial-age slaves deprived of the creative participation that gives buildings variety and liveliness.

Van Pelt wrote in the piece that Romanesque lent itself to “decoration in deep and rich coloring” and described how involved he became in pursuing this potential. He called for St. John's façades to have two “black” (dark red) bricks for every five red. In modern brickwork, bunching of highlight bricks is strictly avoided, but he took pains to achieve a less uniform and more painterly result:

The first samples of wall came out evenly peppered with the black brick. I dropped everything else and lived on the job for a few weeks directing the placing of practically every piece of rubble and all the massing of the black brick. Finally the masons began to understand what I was driving at, and after that everything changed.

Guardian Angel would have required a similar investment of Van Pelt's time, attention, and artistic sensibility. A few examples of the period like the Master Building on Riverside Drive expressionistically but uniformly change brick color from bottom to top, but Van Pelt's unique approach to color mixing suggests a time before industrial standardization and enlivens his façades seemingly by chance, as drifting shadows would.



St. John Nepomucene's rubble was abandoned at Guardian Angel, but it underscores Van Pelt's affinity for the Arts and Crafts movement inspired by Ruskin. He complained that bricklayers wouldn't abandon level coursing to accommodate rubble.



Van Pelt continued using fields of darker and lighter brick at Guardian Angel, where bricklayers were apparently convinced to relax their coursing. Slightly askew bricks almost read as brushstrokes. Clinker bricks, an Arts and Crafts staple, were added for a rustic, impasto-like effect.

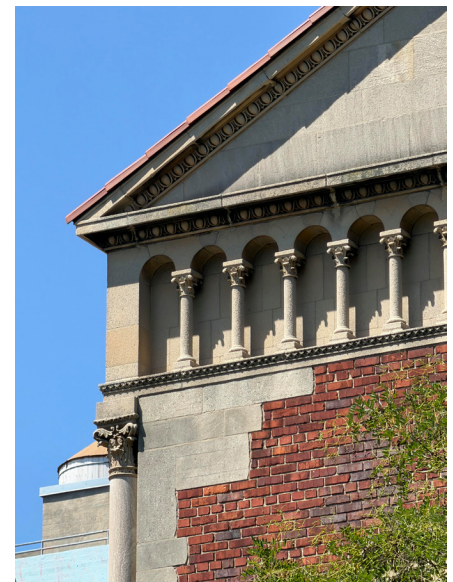


The interior of the Church of the Guardian Angel features an altar ciborium similar to the 13th-century one in the Metropolitan Museum. According to the parish website: “The main altar, made of rare and richly colored marbles that reflect Puglia’s medieval style, was built at the Italian studios of the Bernardini Statuary Company.” The high windows on either side of it are wider than others in the nave. The one on the left is the church’s only figurative stained-glass window. Its uniqueness and atypical size suggest that it was salvaged from the parish’s earlier church, which would be a literal instance of spoliation. The blind arcades below the nave windows recall the arched colonnade at the base of church’s façade pediment.

1930, the year Guardian Angel was completed, saw the culmination of a mythic era for New York architecture that was cut short by the Great Depression. When construction resumed a generation later, the sober functionalism and abstract forms of the International Style held sway. Guardian Angel represents the high-water mark of the city’s earlier representational architecture. Its church and school are a unified work of extraordinary creative synthesis, innovative artistic vision, sensitivity to context, and brilliant execution.



The church’s interior has carved stone column capitals similar to the exterior colonnade’s.



Freestanding columns supporting the arched corbel table below the church pediment add shadows and depth. The larger hinge-like corner column below them elegantly softens the transition between the church’s front and side faces while recalling the ciborium’s hierarchy of large and small columns.

Guardian Angel and the Irish Waterfront



Chelsea Piers around 1910. The centerpiece of the Port of New York, they stood one block west of Guardian Angel.

Guardian Angel played a pivotal role in the period between Chelsea's nineteenth-century development as the genteel rowhouse village planned by Clement Clarke Moore and the late-twentieth-century gentrification that now defines it. This was the period when it stood at the center of the nation's busiest port and was home primarily to Irish Catholic waterfront laborers and their families—a world captured in largely oral histories like Joseph L. Long's "On the Waterfront: Irish Life in Chelsea & Greenwich Village" in the periodical *New York Irish History*, and James T. Fisher's *On the Irish Waterfront*, which refers to Guardian Angel no fewer than 24 times.

New York saw decades of heavy Irish immigration beginning with the Great Famine of 1845-52. This brought rural newcomers without transferable skills, driving the women into domestic service and the men into unskilled labor on the docks or in related industries nearby. The opening of the Erie Canal in 1825 had established New York as the nation's busiest port. By the late 19th century, shipping had moved toward the wider, deeper Hudson River piers as vessels grew too large for the crowded East River. Greenwich Village and Chelsea were at the heart of the port and became predominantly Catholic as Irish and then Italian immigrants settled near the working waterfront.

According to Joseph Long's article:

St. Joseph's on Waverly Place and Sixth Avenue, established in 1829 with responsibility for the West Side between Canal Street and Thirty-Fourth Street, was the "Mother" parish from which six more were started in order to serve the needs of the Irish faithful. St. Columba was opened in 1845, followed by St. Francis Xavier in 1847, St. Michael's in 1857, St. Bernard's in 1868 and, in 1887, both Guardian Angel and St. Veronica.... While there were eventually also national parishes in the neighborhood for Germans, Italians, and Spanish, until the middle of the twentieth century the Irish were the dominant Catholic ethnic group on the lower West Side, especially in those sections near the Hudson River.

St. Veronica's, on Christopher Street in the Greenwich Village Historic District, and Guardian Angel were the parishes closest to the waterfront, each within a thousand feet of it. This proximity was critical to the daily lives of the dockworkers, many of whom attended mass before reporting to work.

Among the six Catholic churches on the lower West Side, Guardian Angel had only 3,000 of 36,500 parishioners in 1914, but the small size of the "Shrine Church of the Sea" as it was called was no indication of its waterfront significance. Fisher's *On the Irish Waterfront* states that few rank-and-file longshoremen worshipped at Guardian Angel, which became known as the stevedore's (i.e., employer's) parish. Its pastor from 1934 to 1967 was Monsignor John J. O'Donnell. According to Fisher, "O'Donnell was a highly prominent figure in the archdiocese" who exercised "unrivaled spiritual authority on the West Side," and whose "role as port chaplain barely hints at his true power." *On the Irish Waterfront* refers to Guardian Angel no fewer than 24 times.

O'Donnell was close with his parishioner, "King Joe" Ryan, a Tammany chieftain and president-for-life of the corrupt and all-powerful union that controlled the waterfront—the International Longshoremen's Association, or ILA. Ryan lived half a block east of Guardian Angel on West 21st Street and was a regular at its eight o'clock weekday-morning mass. Fisher writes that Monsignor O'Donnell "reveled in his warm alliance" with Ryan and describes the labor boss as a "bountiful trustee" of Guardian Angel. He notes that Van Pelt's 1930 church replaced "an earlier and much less elegant incarnation," suggesting Ryan's wealth and political clout contributed to its exceptional architecture. Its construction predated O'Donnell's tenure as pastor, but not Ryan's as ILA president, which began in 1927.



Steamship funnels at Chelsea Piers are visible down West 21st Street from Guardian Angel in this 1940s tax photo.

Guardian Angel and *On the Waterfront*

The “shape-up” hiring system was the most notorious form of waterfront corruption. Each morning, longshoremen looking for work would gather in a semi-circular crowd at a pier gate. A hiring boss—often with mob or ILA connections—would point to the men he wanted for that day. Priority went to those who would kick back part of their pay to the hiring boss. Another corrupt practice involved “public loaders,” men authorized to unload ships onto waiting trucks who coerced drivers into paying for services they didn’t need or want. Cargo theft, bookmaking, gambling, loansharking, no-show jobs, and extortion of shippers were rampant. Longshoremen disappeared and murders went unreported by witnesses intimidated into a code of silence.

In 1936, the Jesuits opened a Labor School at the Church of St. Francis Xavier on West 16th Street to train workers in labor rights and Catholic social teaching. Guardian Angel’s Monsignor O’Donnell avoided such involvement. According to historian Bruce Nelson, he “spoke regularly at ILA gatherings” but always promised to “stick to my own business, which is spiritual.”

The Xavier School’s associate director, Father John Corridan, was assigned to the waterfront, bringing him into direct conflict with O’Donnell. Cardinal Spellman had to step in when O’Donnell falsely accused Corridan of posing as a dockworker and throwing punches to instigate a strike.

In 1948, the *New York Sun* investigative reporter Malcolm Johnson published a Pulitzer Prize-winning series, “Crime on the Waterfront,” covering Corridan’s crusade against corruption and racketeering on the docks. Johnson’s series and Corridan’s ongoing activism were instrumental in the 1953 creation of the Waterfront Commission of New York Harbor, which introduced significant reforms including abolition of the shape-up and rules that kept mob figures and criminals off the books.

The drama of this period has been lastingly impressed on the American consciousness by the classic 1954 film *On the Waterfront*, based on Johnson’s reporting. Father Corridan is the model for Father Barry, who convinces the film’s protagonist Terry Malloy to break the code of silence and testify before the Waterfront Crime Commission.

Guardian Angel’s place at the center of these events adds historic importance to its cultural and architectural significance.



A 1948 shape-up at Manhattan’s Pier 92



Marlon Brando as Terry Malloy and Karl Malden as Father Barry in *On the Waterfront*

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