

Free Church of St. James (Episcopal)
1991 Massachusetts Avenue

Landmark Designation Report
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St. James Church (1888) stands at an intersection that was significant to the historic settlement patterns of the city and on the site of the historic Davenport Tavern. The Church was founded by socially-prominent Cambridge residents and built by Cambridge builders and craftsmen. It is architecturally significant as an excellent and rare example of the Richardsonian Romanesque style in Cambridge and the only Massachusetts work of the important church architect, Henry Martyn Congdon (1834-1922).

Please note that attachments referenced in the text are not available online. A copy of the report with maps, illustrations, and other attachments can be viewed in the Historical Commission office, 831 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02139. Please call with any questions, 617/349-4683 or 617/349-6112 TTY.

I. Location and Economic Status

A. Address, Parcel Number and Zoning

The Free Church of St. James is located at 1991 Massachusetts Avenue, just west of Porter Square. The church property consists of three lots, identified as parcels 49, 50 and 62 of map 181. The church and parish house occupy lots 49 (7965 square feet) and 50 (21,207 square feet) while lot 62 (14,178 square feet), which fronts on Massachusetts Avenue, is open and landscaped. The entire complex contains 43,350 square feet. As the church is a non-profit use, it is non-taxable.

The property is located in a BA2 zone, which allows for retail, professional, office, and residential uses, with an allowable FAR of 1.0 for permitted uses and 1.75 for residential and dormitory uses and a height limit of 45 feet. St. James's has an FAR of .46, indicating that a substantial amount of additional development could be considered for this property under current zoning regulations. Religious properties are governed by the terms of the Institutional Use Regulations; St. James's is subject to the Existing Lot Status regulations for properties outside of Institutional Overlay Districts. As an institutional use in existence prior to 1980, St. James's is grandfathered as an allowable use.

B. Ownership and Occupancy

The church complex is owned by the Free Church of Saint James. It consists of the church sanctuary and an attached parish hall. The sanctuary and parish hall provide space for a number of community out-reach and non-profit organizations, in addition to the regular services of the congregation that worships at St. James's. Among the organizations housed at the church are a food pantry, soup kitchen, Hebrew school, a preschool play group, music programs, foster home shelter, and a counseling center.

C. Area Description

St. James's Church stands west of modern Porter Square in North Cambridge near the Somerville city line. It occupies a lot at the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Beech Street, an intersection that formed the historic nucleus of settlement prior to the introduction of the railroad in 1841-43.

In the 17th century, the intersection of Beech Street and Massachusetts Avenue was the confluence of two roads that linked Cambridge and Concord to Medford and Charlestown. The connection of these two roads was in place by 1635 and the street pattern thus represents one of the earliest surviving elements of the topography and settlement of this part of Cambridge. In 1703 and 1724, the Cambridge proprietors divided the Cambridge Common lands so as to give tradesmen access to the junction and by the mid-18th century, various enterprises had been established at the crossroads, including blacksmiths, wheelwrights, and chaise makers. On the site of St. James' church, the Cooper-Pigeon-Davenport Tavern, built in 1757, anchored the colonial street village.

The opening of the Middlesex Turnpike (1805) at present Hampshire and Beacon streets and the establishment of a cattle market on the land opposite the tavern early in the 19th century expanded and further solidified commercial traffic and Porter's Hotel (built 1831) gave the area its name. With the opening of the Fitchburg Railroad in 1842 on the site of the present T station, the focus and center of the area permanently shifted east to the intersection of Massachusetts and Somerville avenues. The new Porter Square developed into the familiar shopping and transportation center of today.

Although somewhat removed from the activity of modern Porter Square, St. James Church today stands at a heavily-trafficked intersection amidst a number of commercial buildings. The adjacent lot at 2013-19 Massachusetts Avenue is occupied by a car wash; abutting that structure is the 1896 Engine 4 fire station. Opposite the church on Beech Street, at 1977-79 Massachusetts Avenue is an 1886 Italianate house, converted to funeral home use, is being radically remodeled. The Kingdom Hall of the Jehovah's Witnesses (built 1891 as the Woodbridge Gymnasium, reconstructed 2000) stands at 9 Beech Street behind the church. The surrounding neighborhood north of the church is residential, with single, two- and three-family houses located along Orchard Street and its sidestreets. Opposite the church to the south are two, three, and four story late 19th and early 20th century commercial blocks lining Massachusetts Avenue.

D. Planning Issues

As a non-taxable religious property, St. James Church is not directly affected by the market forces that influence surrounding commercial and residential properties. The issues affecting St. James Church derive primarily from within the parish and from the physical demands of maintaining an imposing and historic masonry structure.

The petition to initiate landmark study for St. James was presented in response to the construction of an exterior egress stair on the west wall of the parish house structure. The church has also applied for the most recent round of grant funding in the Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund program for assistance in making masonry repairs to the buttresses and bell tower. The church has previously received funding from this program (1987) as a result of which the Massachusetts Historical Commission holds a preservation restriction on the property. The church is also individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places (06/03/1983).

The church owns and maintains one of the largest surviving open spaces on Massachusetts Avenue, a 14,000 square foot landscaped side yard adjacent to the church known as the “Knight’s Garden”. Previous plans for the garden have proposed opening the space to more public use with the addition of some paving and benches for public use; these have not been implemented. It is possible that future mission or parish growth could result in pressures to develop or make more intensive use of this site.

Other public improvement projects that could affect the setting of the church could involve streetscape and infrastructure improvements that have occasionally been proposed for Massachusetts Avenue. Among the issues that have been studied are parking regulations, delivery and trash collection schedules, lighting and signage along the avenue, and improvements to landscaping in the public way.

As the renovation project at 1977-79 Massachusetts Avenue makes plain, changing property values around the church will continue to influence its setting. Gentrification of the commercial district can be expected to continue.

II. Description

A. Type and Use

St. James Episcopal Church consists of a church sanctuary building, built in 1888, an 1884 parish hall (with additions of 1912 and 1958), and the Knight’s Garden, purchased in 1915. The buildings are used for religious services and for a variety of community-based social programs. The church sanctuary is a masonry structure, constructed of brick, freestone, sandstone and slate. The parish hall incorporates a concrete block addition on the earlier wood-frame parish hall of 1884 and 1912.

B. Physical Description

St. James Episcopal Church is an imposing Richardsonian Romanesque style structure set at an angle on a corner lot at the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Beech Street. St. James’s plan is a skillful response to the constraints of a diamond-shaped site. It presents a compact centralized plan, broad for its length, which is characteristic of the “low-church” ritual of Episcopal churches while still being oriented along the east-west axis, as ecclesiologically-“correct” churches should be. The principal view is of the south elevation, with a long elevation along Massachusetts Avenue. The plan incorporates a traditional basilican apse with an abbreviated crossing. The one-story south aisle is only one-third the length of the north aisle and angles in at the chancel.

A large part of the building’s appeal is in the texture and color of its materials, including “Nova Scotia brown freestone” walls, pressed brick window surrounds and string courses, red sandstone buttress caps and coping, and gray slate roofing. The rough, tawny stone contrasts with smooth red brick and sandstone. The polychromy is even present in the mortar, with pink mortar in the brick and gray mortar in the stone.

Four possible entrances to the church include one on each transept, one on the southwestern end of the sanctuary, and a fourth on the west end; only one of the entrances is used. Each entrance has double oak doors with elaborate strap hinges.

On the right of the west-end entrance, at the southwest corner, is a tall bell-tower added in 1894. The belfry, along with a large square tower at the central crossing, are the major vertical elements in what is otherwise a strongly horizontal composition. The crossing tower is a lantern lighting the interior with five stained-glass windows in an arcade on each face. Above a modillion cornice, the hip-roofed tower rises to a copper finial that supports a cross topped with a cockerel. The contrasting vertical and horizontal elements were symbolically considered part of the religious program, according to the account published in the Cambridge Tribune (June 16, 1888) at the time:

In plan the church presses the ground in deep humility. Its broad over-reaching roof, like the mantle of charity, covers those beneath, while the lantern lets in the light of the upper air and raises the cross on high – the symbol of salvation; it is surmounted by the cock, the symbol of the preacher's vigilance, facing every blast of false doctrine that may assail his flock.

The low horizontal exterior is also reflected in the use of dormered roof windows rather than a traditional clerestory. Three small hipped dormers, each containing paired round-arched windows, punctuate the nave roof while the choir is lit on either side by a single dormer with three round-arched windows. The gray slate roof slopes down to encompass the church's side aisles and further diminishes the apparent height of the structure.

The picturesque quality of the design is achieved primarily through a profusion of forms, including the square crossing tower, transept and porch gables, hipped dormers, buttresses and arcades. Carved ornament is minimal but further enlivens the composition: crosses top the coping at the east and west end walls and the west and south porches while the south-west porch gable features a chi-rho symbol above a small gabled statuary niche. Elsewhere, gothic finials mark the peaks of the belfry gable and several buttress roofs. The apse is appropriately the focus of concentrated ornament with a continuous colonnade of stained glass windows above a series of string courses. The Richardsonian character of the design is most evident in the broad semi-circular arches of the porches. In contrast to Richardson's compositional mastery, Henry Congdon's design is less coherent, but nonetheless achieves impact and drama through dynamic juxtaposition of forms.

Windows

The most notable windows at St. James are the early stained-glass designs that were intended to complement the bold color scheme defined by the architect. Among these are English windows in the apse from the noted firm of Clayton & Bell. The angel windows in the choir are also English but likely by another maker, Spence & Ball. They have also been attributed to the firm of J. & R. Lamb of New York. Six windows in the sacristy were the work of Hemming & Co. of London.

Four windows on the west wall including the rose window and three lancets have been attributed, but not verified, as from the Tiffany studio. The Rice Memorial Window, "Christ the Light of the World" is a standard Tiffany design based on the painting of Millais of the same title. Two other memorial windows dedicated to Samuel Batchelder and George Dexter, founders of the church, are likely to be Tiffany.

Other potentially significant windows have been attributed to Harry Eldredge Goodhue or his son Wright Goodhue. The elder Goodhue, brother of the prominent Gothic Revival architect Bertram Goodhue, is considered a pioneer of stained glass design in America. Among the likely Goodhue windows at St. James are the Dorcas window on the north wall and windows in the baptistry as well as a window dedicated to founder Mary Longfellow Greenleaf and the Easter windows of the north transept. A Madonna and child window on the north transept is by Reynolds, Francis and Rohnstock and was installed in 1935.

Parish House

The Parish House was constructed in 1883 at the back of the original church on the site, an 1871 frame Gothic Revival building that faced Beech Street. The Parish House, designed and built by William Dodge, a local builder, was a 2½-story frame Stick Style structure. The Parish House was enlarged in 1912 (building permit #14584; William P. Richards, architect; F.T. Morcombe White, builder). In 1958, the Parish House was again enlarged to its present appearance with a one-story structure fronting Beech Street and the original church was demolished.

Interior

(the following description is intended for informational reference only; landmark designation is confined to the publicly-visible exterior architectural features of the building)

A planned asymmetry, evident in the exterior massing, is also present in the interior plan. The nave is oriented on

axis with the altar with a full-length side aisle on the north side, but only an abbreviated aisle on the south. The choir is asymmetrical as well, with an organ chamber on the north side and a baptismal font on the south side, adjacent to the entrance. The altar, located in the apse, is by contrast, freestanding and set at the center of a circle formed by the apse and the curving steps of the chancel platform. The most powerful feature of the interior is, however, its exposed timber framing of hard pine with ornamented trusses supported on timber columns. Oak wainscoting and pews provide additional richness.

C. Photographs

III. History of the Property

A. Historical Development Patterns

1. Deed History of the Parcel

St. James Church occupies land where the Concord Road swung tangent to the Charlestown line and connected with the Medford and Charlestown Road (now Beech Street). The deed history involves a six-acre plot of land on the Charlestown side of the town boundary that was annexed to Cambridge in 1802. This six-acre plot was purchased by Jonathan Gove from Jonathan Bowers in 1700.

In 1706, Gove purchased half of an acre for a house and barn from the Cambridge Proprietors on the south side of Massachusetts Avenue opposite Beech Street, adding another half-acre to this land in 1715. With the purchase of Lot 21 of the 1724 division of the cow common from Amos Marrett in 1726, Gove's land holdings extended from Beech Street nearly to Russell Street along Massachusetts Avenue and from Massachusetts Avenue north to Elm Street.

When Jonathan Gove moved to Weston in 1729, he conveyed his house and land to his brother-in-law, Jonathan Cooper, who sold off three lots fronting Massachusetts Avenue (Middlesex South Registry of Deeds, book 31, page 69). In 1759, Cooper's son, Jonathan, Jr., purchased the lot on the north corner of Massachusetts Avenue at Beech Street which was the site of the Cooper-Davenport Tavern, and later, of St. James Church (Middlesex South Registry of Deeds, book 63, page 341)..

The tavern, built as a house about 1757-58, was converted to a tavern some time before the younger Cooper's death in 1765. Three years later, Cooper's widow sold the tavern (Middlesex South Registry of Deeds, book 68, page 49) and the title passed through a series of Boston and Newton merchants. In 1806, John Davenport purchased the tavern from Joseph Wellington (Middlesex South Registry of Deeds, book 168, page 333) and constructed a large addition to the structure. In 1834, the property's creditor, the Charles River Bank, acquired the tavern and other property, which was conveyed to three Cambridge speculators, George Meacham, Ebenezer Kimball and Zachariah Porter (Middlesex South Registry of Deeds, book 362, page 25).

Much of the land on which the church now stands was purchased from Mary Meacham, who had inherited it on the death of her father George Meacham in 1869. The church purchased the first lot, for the church fronting Beech Street in 1870, with an additional purchase for the parish house in 1882. In 1885, the corner lot on which the historic Davenport Tavern stood, was purchased to rectify the inadvertent construction of the parish house 18" over the property line (Middlesex South Registry of Deeds, book 1702, page 33).

2. Development History of the Parcel and Surroundings

The settlement focus of this area was formed in 1638, when the road at Beech Street was first linked to what is now Massachusetts Avenue. St. James Church stands at this historically-significant intersection, which was the center of settlement in North Cambridge until the opening of the railroad at present-day Porter Square in 1841-43. The site was the location of one of the most important taverns in 18th-century Cambridge and a stopping place on the highway by which cattle had long been driven to market in Boston and Brighton. Feed lots, a cattle market and

slaughterhouses were established on open land south of Beech Street in the 1830s and continued in operation through 1868.

The introduction of a horse trolley on Massachusetts Avenue in 1856 and the subsequent construction of affluent suburban homes on the avenue in the following years were among the factors affecting the demise of the cattle market. In his sermon on June 20, 1886, the rector of St. James, the Rev. Edward Abbott described the neighborhood in 1864, when the church was founded as a mission, thus:

North Cambridge was not then the solid and substantial precinct of the city it is now, but an outlying district on the pleasant country road leading to West Cambridge. The railroad was here, and the station, and the horse-cars and Porter's Tavern and a bank and a great cattlemarket between the railroad and the avenue; but our pleasant stately North Avenue, with its handsome houses and bricked sidewalks and ample foliage was a thing of the future.

The Free Church of St. James purchased the lot at 5 Beech Street in 1870 after a fire had leveled a building on the site that had been a shoemaking shop. The original Gothic Revival frame church building was consecrated on December 21, 1871 and renovated a decade later. William Dodge, a vestryman of the church and the builder of the present church building, designed and constructed the parish house in 1883. Because the new parish house was found to encroach on the Davenport Tavern lot, the church was obligated to purchase the entire corner lot in 1885, renting the tavern to tenants to pay the mortgage. When the present church was constructed, the early Cooper-Pigeon section of the tavern was razed and the Davenport addition was moved to 81 Eustis Street, Somerville, where it still stands.

Concord Road had been even wider than present Massachusetts Avenue and the intersection at Beech Street formed a large triangle that had a row of elms at the center until it was cleared for the horse railway in 1857. Two elms flanked the prominent south transept of the 1888 church at its construction.

Following the construction of the present 1888 church, a wooden memorial tower on the west end was destroyed by lightning in 1892. A number of minor renovations to the 1871 church (converted to a chapel) and the church's outbuildings were made in 1892. The present bell-tower was rebuilt in 1897 by James Quinn of Somerville and in 1904, the west porch was added in memory of Edward Abbott. Fearing the encroaching commercial expansion on Massachusetts Avenue, the church purchased adjoining property on the west side of the church in 1915, demolished a large stable and regarded the land. On the land was planted the "Knight's Garden" designed by Cambridge city planner John Nolen and named for a group of Masons who had donated the first trees and shrubs.

In 1912, the church bought the "Woodbridge Gymnasium" property at 9 Beech Street and operated it as a private hall for dances and recitals; it was sold during the depression to the Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses. In the same year, the original 1871 church/chapel was deconsecrated and expanded the parish house. In 1951, the "Paddock Chapel" was created at the head of the north aisle of the church and dedicated to the memory of a former rector and bishop of Massachusetts. In 1958, the 1871 church/chapel was demolished for further alterations to the parish house.

B. Bibliography

C. Historic Views

Please note that attachments referenced in the text are not available online. A copy of the report with maps, illustrations, and other attachments can be viewed in the Historical Commission office, 831 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02139. Please call with any questions, 617/349-4683 or 617/349-6112 TTY.

IV. Significance of the Property

A. Historical Significance

The Free Church of St. James (Episcopal) stands at a historically-significant location in North Cambridge, on the site of an important intersection of 17th-century roads that from 1638 to the coming of the railroad in 1843 served as a major transportation corridor between Cambridge, Concord, Medford and Charlestown. The site is also the location of the historic Cooper-Pigeon-Davenport Tavern (1757-1958), one of Cambridge's important 18th-century taverns, and a witness to the events of April, 1775, and the skirmishes that attended the march of British regulars to and from Lexington and Concord. The tavern was partially preserved, with a section moved to Somerville.

The historic importance of the church also derives from the many prominent Cambridge families associated with its founders and benefactors. The mission church was founded in 1864 by the retired Episcopal priest the Rev. Andrew Crosswell (who became the church's first rector), with the support of the Rev. F. D. Huntington, Samuel Batchelder II, George Dexter, and Crosswell's wife, Caroline Augusta Greenleaf Crosswell. Batchelder, a Boston lawyer and member of Christ Church, Cambridge, was active in philanthropic and church matters.

The first services of the mission were held on Christmas 1864 at Atwill's Hall, a building at the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Russell Street; services were later held in a small bank building on Massachusetts Avenue opposite the present site. Within a decade, the Rev. Crosswell's ministry extended to the founding of missions in Somerville and Arlington. The first church, constructed on Beech Street in 1871, was the gift of Mrs. James (Mary Longfellow) Greenleaf, the sister of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, sister-in-law of the first rector's wife. She sent lilacs and trees from the grounds of her Brattle Street house to hide a stable behind the church from view. When the rector of Christ Church, where she and several founders were parishioners, attempted to persuade them to build the church as a mission of Christ Church, Mrs. Greenleaf formally transferred her membership to St. James.

In 1878, the Rev. Edward Abbott began his 25-year rectorship of St. James. During that time, the parish house and the present church were erected. Mrs. Greenleaf's role in the construction of the present church included a contribution of \$25,000 to fund the donation of the entire chancel, its stained glass windows, free-standing altar, and the Cole & Woodbury organ as a memorial to her husband. The church was consecrated in June, 1900 by the Rt. Rev. Frederick Dan Huntington, bishop of Central New York, who had presided over the first services of the mission in 1864.

B. Architectural Significance

While H. H. Richardson's own Sever (1878) and Austin (1883) Halls at Harvard University initiated the Richardsonian Romanesque style in Cambridge, it was not until the late 1880s that the style fully arrived with the construction in two years (1888 and 1889) of four major Richardsonian buildings: St. James Church, the Manual Training School (1888, Rotch & Tilden), Cambridge Public Library (1888, Van Brunt & Howe), and Cambridge City Hall (1889, Longfellow, Alden & Harlow). St. James was the first Richardsonian church in Cambridge.

Designed by a prominent New York church architect, Henry Martyn Congdon, St. James is the only church Congdon designed in Massachusetts. Congdon (1834-1922), noted for his work for the Episcopal church, was the son of Charles Congdon of Brooklyn, New York, a founder of the Ecclesiologist Society. The "ecclesiologist" movement was an architectural and religious reform movement that grew out of efforts in the Church of England to revive the forms and practice of worship in the mid 19th-century. The architectural component of this movement sought to create worship spaces that supported the theological tenets of the movement.

Henry Congdon graduated from Columbia College in 1854, apprenticed to a church architect, John Priest, in Newburgh, New York, and after Priest's death, formed a partnership with John Littel. Congdon worked briefly with J. Cleveland Cady, and from 1901-1922, he was in partnership with his son, Herbert Wheaton Congdon, but for most of his career, Congdon practiced independently. He was the architect of numerous churches, many for the Episcopal church, in cities throughout the eastern United States. In his 1935 undergraduate thesis, architectural historian John Coolidge wrote:

One of the most prominent and prolific Episcopalian architects of the later 19th century . . . [Congdon] is one of the

very few who developed a personal style, and held to it continuously. Some of his earlier churches suggest strong Victorian Gothic tendencies, but by the middle seventies he was well embarked on his own manner. The reward of this persistency came in the later '70s and '80s when his style was not infrequently imitated.

Architectural historian Sarah Bradford Landau wrote:

Bold surface detail, large dominant towers, and a picturesque grouping of elements characterize Congdon's churches. Trinity Church (1873, 1874-92) in Portland, Connecticut, in the Victorian Gothic mode, and the strikingly colorful Saint James Episcopal Church (1888) in Cambridge, Massachusetts, a Richardsonian building, are outstanding examples of his distinctive manner.

Among his other church designs, St. Michael's, High Street (Brooklyn), the Church of the Atonement (Brooklyn), and Calvary Church (Utica, NY) are often cited as particularly fine.

The general configuration and style of St. James also recalls H. H. Richardson's Trinity Church (1877) and, like Trinity, expressed the theological direction of the congregation. These two structures exemplify a new type of church building that had developed as a result of controversies between the Anglo-Catholic ("high church") and Evangelical ("low church") factions of the Episcopal Church in late 19th-century America. The Rev. Phillips Brooks, the nationally-prominent rector of Trinity Church in Boston and a leader of the "low church" movement, supported Richardson's innovative use of a centralized Greek cross plan for Trinity. This type of plan shifted the focus from the altar to the pulpit, expressing the Evangelical emphasis on the sermon over the eucharist. The broad nave, round apse, wide transepts, and dominant crossing tower of St. James directly recall those of Trinity and that way reflect the parish's alignment with the Evangelical wing.

Congdon's early church designs more typically expressed a strong Anglo-Catholic liturgical link to contemporary church design in England. An early work in this manner is St. John's Church, Dubuque, Iowa (1878) with a dominant west end tower, steep roof, and pointed arches. It is strongly reminiscent of the Church of the Advent (1875-88, Sturgis & Brigham), which was intended to be the great symbol of Anglo-Catholicism in Boston.

St. James Church in Cambridge and Christ Church, Danville, Pennsylvania (1881-83) depart from Congdon's earlier stylistic and liturgical tendencies and demonstrate the influence of Trinity Church, Boston. With bolder massing, proportionately larger features, and the tower placed over the crossing, the churches assumed a pyramidal form. As St. James, Cambridge neared completion, Congdon became involved with projects for Grace Church Cathedral, Topeka, Kansas and with a competitive design for the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City. Congdon's competition design for the New York cathedral emphasized the same functional aspects for congregational access to the liturgy that were present in the plan of St. James. (See attached, Appendix A, for a list and illustrations of Congdon churches.)

Interior finishes of St. James also reflected the impact of Trinity Church and the collaboration of architect, artists, and craftsmen. The interior walls were designed by E. J. Neville Stent of New York, a well-known ecclesiastical decorator; the original interior colors of terra-cotta, olive and old gold were intended to complement the stained glass colors. A vestryman of the parish, William L. Dodge, and its junior warden, John A. Dodge, who lived nearby, undertook aspects of the construction of the church as mason and carpenter. Other local manufacturers, including Dugan & Rutherford of East Cambridge and Sands of North Cambridge supplied the cut stone and exterior brick. The chancel furniture, wainscoting, and pulpit were manufactured by Irving & Casson of East Cambridge, specialists in interior woodwork and furnishings since the 1860s.

V. Relationship to Criteria

A. Article III, Chapter 2.78.180 a.

The enabling ordinance for landmarks states:

The Historical Commission by majority vote may recommend for designation as a landmark any property within the City being or containing a place, structure, feature or object which it determines to be either (1) importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, aesthetic, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City or the Commonwealth or (2) historically or architecturally significant (in terms of its period, style, method of construction or association with a famous architect or builder) either by itself or in the context of a group of structures . . .

B. Relationship of Property to Criteria

St. James Church is importantly associated with persons and events significant to the cultural and social history of the city and is architecturally significant in terms of its period and style of architecture and its associations with a famous architect. It meets criteria (1) and (2) of the enabling ordinance.

Historically, St. James Church is located on the site of an important 18th-century tavern in Cambridge and at the intersection of two roads prominent in the settlement and transportation patterns of 17th and 18th century Cambridge. It is also associated, through its founding, with individuals, including Samuel Batchelder and Mary Longfellow Greenleaf, prominent in 19th-century Cambridge society. Architecturally, it is significant as the first Richardsonian Romanesque church in Cambridge, as the only building designed by nationally-noted church architect Henry Congdon in Massachusetts, and as a fully-developed expression of the integration of art and architecture that characterized late 19th-century church architecture, with construction, fittings, and finishes by renowned studios and craftsmen.

VI. Recommendations

A. Article III, Chapter 2.78.140

The purpose of landmark designation is contained in the enabling ordinance, which is to:

preserve, conserve and protect the beauty and heritage of the City and to improve the quality of its environment through identification, conservation and maintenance of . . . site and structures which constitute or reflect distinctive features of the architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City; to resist and restrain environmental influences adverse to this purpose; [and] to foster appropriate use and wider public knowledge and appreciation of such . . . structures . . .

B. Preservation Options

There are two options available to accomplish the long-term preservation of St. James Church. The first is through a City Council vote to designate the property a landmark, the second through the voluntary donation of a preservation restriction or easement protecting the structure and made by the owner to the Cambridge Historical Commission or some other qualified body. An easement is currently held on St. James Church by the Massachusetts Historical Commission as a result of a previous grant of state funds to the church for exterior repairs; that easement protects the interior and exterior architectural features of the premises.

According to Article III, Chapter 2.78.190, designation of St. James Church as a landmark would establish a process wherein "the Historical Commission . . . shall review all construction, demolition or alteration that affects the exterior architectural features, other than color," of the landmark. Chapter 2.78.210 states, "No building permit for alteration of an exterior architectural feature of a landmark . . . and no demolition permit for demolition or removal of a landmark . . . shall be issued by the City or any department thereof until the certificate required by this article

has been issued by the Historical Commission . . .”

A certificate of appropriateness, hardship or non-applicability is issued by the Historical Commission depending on the nature of the alteration or construction proposed for the landmark. Applications for certificates of appropriateness or hardship are reviewed by the Commission at a public hearing, with 14 days notice provided to affected parties by legal notice and first class mail. The staff issues certificates of non-applicability administratively. The intent of the review process is to prevent “developments incongruous to the historic aspects, architectural significance or the distinctive character of the landmark” (2.78.220) The designation report may be drafted to allow specific alterations or development opportunities to take place.

Preservation easements may be donated to the Historical Commission or another qualified historic preservation organization under Chapter 184 of the Massachusetts General Laws. An easement is a “non-possessory right to control what happens to buildings or land owned by others.” It is voluntarily conveyed by the property owner to an entity, such as the Historical Commission, which holds the right and enforces the terms. To be effective, the easement must protect the publicly visible features of the property from alteration without the Commission’s prior review. It may also be drafted to allow specific development opportunities to take place or to protect significant interior features.

Donation of an easement encourages private investment in significant buildings with no corresponding expenditure of public funds. Under Internal Revenue Service regulations, the value of an easement on a property listed on the National Register of Historic Places may be taken as a charitable deduction on personal income taxes. The value of an easement is calculated by taking the difference between “before” and “after” appraisals of the property. However, the rules for charitable contribution deductions for preservation easements are very technical. Any property owner considering the donation of an easement should consult a qualified tax consultant relative to the specific circumstances. Because the church is a tax exempt property, no financial benefits would accrue from the donation of an easement.

Preservation easements protect significant property in a similar manner to landmarking, that is, through review and approval of the Historical Commission and issuance of a certificate of appropriateness or hardship for any proposed repairs or alterations that affect protected portions of the property. Unlike landmarking, a preservation easement may have certain financial benefits for an owner and can address the protection of significant interior features. As noted above, St. James is currently protected by a preservation easement protecting the characteristics of the interior and exterior that contribute to its architectural, archaeological or historical integrity from inappropriate alterations; the easement is held by the Massachusetts Historical Commission (see Appendix B).

C. Staff Recommendation

Based on the staff finding that the Free Church of St. James (Episcopal) meets the criteria for landmark designation, it is the staff recommendation that the Historical Commission consider the following two recommendations, that:

1. the Commission determine that the preservation restriction now in place does not provide sufficient regulatory basis for protecting the premises and recommends that this report be forwarded to the City Council for designation as a Protected Landmark OR
2. the Commission determine that the preservation restriction now in place provides sufficient regulatory basis for protecting the premises and declines to make a determination at this time on whether to recommend the Free Church of St. James (Episcopal) to the City Council for designation as a landmark, with the additional conditions described below or such other conditions as the Commission may determine.

It is the further staff recommendation that the Commission consider directing the Executive Director to approach the Massachusetts Historical Commission to request that the existing preservation restriction be assigned to the

Cambridge Historical Commission as provided in section 4 (Assignment) of the restriction, on the basis

1. of the content of this landmark designation report and other research on file at the Cambridge Historical Commission, which establishes a more comprehensive and accessible record on which to base determinations that alterations will not impair the contributing architectural, archaeological or historical characteristics of the premises than does the National Register of Historic Places nomination form and
2. that the Cambridge Historical Commission, through the administrative and regulatory procedures in place locally for the issuance of permits and relief for activities concerning construction, alteration, or demolition on the premises, is more effectively located to undertake the inspection of the premises contained in section 2 (Inspection) and
3. that the Cambridge Historical Commission agrees to the terms defined in Exhibit A of the restriction, including those that explain what constitutes alterations of a minor nature and ordinary maintenance and repair, and
4. that the Cambridge Historical Commission agrees to notify the Massachusetts Historical Commission in writing when any reviewable alterations of the premises are contemplated and thereby to seek the Massachusetts Historical Commission's assessment of the impact of those alterations on the integrity of the premises and to attempt to work with the property owners and the Massachusetts Historical Commission to develop mutually satisfactory solutions which are in the best interests of the property.

It is the further recommendation of the staff that, if the existing preservation restriction is not assigned to the Cambridge Historical Commission within 18 months of the date of the Commission's determination on this landmark designation study, the Commission shall schedule a public hearing for the purpose of making a further recommendation on the designation of St. James Church as a city landmark to the City Council.

VII. Standards and Criteria

A. Introduction

Under Article III, the Historical Commission is charged with reviewing any construction, demolition or alteration that affects the exterior architectural features (other than color) of a landmark. This report describes exterior architectural features that are among the characteristics that led to consideration of the property as a landmark. Except as the order designating or amending the landmark may otherwise provide, the exterior architectural features described in this report should be preserved and/or enhanced in any proposed alteration or construction that affects those features of the landmark. The standards following in paragraphs B and C of this section provide specific guidelines for the treatment of the landmark described in this report.

B. General Standards and Criteria

As subject to the Historical Commission's review and approval of the exterior architectural features that are identified in this report and according to the provisions of Article III, the following standards shall apply:

1. Significant historic and architectural features of the landmark shall be preserved.
2. Changes and additions to the landmark, which have taken place over time, are evidence of the history of the property and the neighborhood. These changes to the property may have acquired significance in their own right and, if so, that significance should be recognized and respected.
3. Deteriorated architectural features should be repaired rather than replaced.
4. When replacement of architectural features is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence.
5. New materials should, whenever possible, match the material being replaced in physical properties, design, color, texture, and appearance. The use of imitation replacement materials is discouraged.
6. The surface cleaning of a landmark shall be done by the gentlest possible means. Sandblasting and other cleaning methods that damage exterior architectural features shall not be used.
7. New additions shall not destroy significant exterior architectural features and shall not be incongruous to the historic aspects, architectural significance, or distinct character of the landmark, neighborhood, and environment.
8. New additions should be done in a way that if they were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the landmark should be unimpaired.

C. Statement of Standards

(A Statement of Standards must be developed at such time as the Historical Commission may determine that it recommends St. James Church for landmark designation; no Statement of Standards is included as of 6/2004)

1. General

2. Exterior Walls

3. Windows

4. Roof

5. Other Elements

VIII. Proposed Order

ORDERED:

That the Free Church of St. James (Episcopal) aka St. James Church, 1991 Massachusetts Avenue, be designated as a protected landmark pursuant to Chapter 2.78, Article III, Section 2.78.180 of the Code of the City of Cambridge, as recommended by vote of the Cambridge Historical Commission on _____. The premises so designated are defined as parcels 49, 50 and 62 of map 181 of the Cambridge assessor's records and recorded in book 9979, page 569 of the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.

This designation is justified by the significant associations of this building with persons and events significant to the cultural and social history of the city and is architecturally significant in terms of its period and style of architecture and its associations with a famous architect. It meets criteria (1) and (2) of the enabling ordinance.

Historically, St. James Church is located on the site of an important 18th-century tavern in Cambridge and at the intersection of two roads prominent in the settlement and transportation patterns of 17th and 18th century Cambridge. It is also associated, through its founding, with individuals, including Samuel Batchelder and Mary Longfellow Greenleaf, prominent in 19th-century Cambridge society. Architecturally, it is significant as the first Richardsonian Romanesque church in Cambridge, as the only building designed by nationally-noted church architect Henry Congdon in Massachusetts, and as a fully-developed expression of the integration of art and architecture that characterized late 19th-century church architecture, with construction, fittings, and finishes by renowned studios and craftsmen.

The effect of this designation shall be that no construction activity can take place within the designated area, and no action can be taken affecting the appearance of the premises at 1991 Massachusetts Avenue, that would in either case be visible from a public way, without review by the Cambridge Historical Commission and the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness, Hardship or Non-Applicability, as the case may be. In making determinations, the Commission shall be guided by the terms of the landmark designation report, and by Section VII, Standards and Criteria, of the landmark designation report, and by the applicable sections of Article III, Chapter 2.78 of the Cambridge City Code.

Appendix A. List and Illustration of Churches Designed by Henry M. Congdon

Appendix B. Preservation Restriction Agreement between the Commonwealth of Massachusetts by and through the Massachusetts Historical Commission and St. James Episcopal Church (recorded Oct. 20, 1987, book 17887, page 444, Middlesex South Registry of Deeds)

Please note that attachments referenced in the text are not available online. A copy of the report with maps,

illustrations, and other attachments can be viewed in the Historical Commission office, 831 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02139. Please call with any questions, 617/349-4683 or 617/349-6112 TTY.