



The Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine

A House of Prayer for All People

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Written History

The last four decades of the nineteenth century constituted a period of mass immigration into the United States, most of it into the port of New York. Much was made of the slogan that America was the "melting pot" of the world. On the basis of this ideology, all of the progenitors of the new Cathedral insisted that it be built as a "house of prayer for all nations." It was a magnificent concept at the time, and is even more significant today. The location in New York of the United Nations, in 1946, underscored the importance of the idea.

THE FIRST PHASE, 1892-1911

In 1888, the Board of Trustees initiated a contest for the Cathedral's design. The firm of Heins & Lafarge won the contract with a Romanesque, Byzantine design. Their plan called for a cathedral 520 feet in length crowned at the crossing by a towering conical spire. It would be built in the customary cathedral shape -- that of a cross.

The next challenge was finding a site for this extraordinary house of worship. One spring day in 1887, a devoted layman, George Macculloch Miller, glanced west on 111th Street while walking up Fifth Avenue. Within a few days, Mr. Miller had shown the site to Bishop Henry Codman Potter. Both of them perceived the heights rising above Morningside Avenue as a potential acropolis. The thirteen heavily wooded acres were the site of the Leake and Watts Orphan Asylum. The property was purchased for \$850,000.



On December 27, 1892, St. John's Day, Bishop Potter laid the corner stone of the Cathedral. Bishop Potter struck the massive stone three times with a large wooden mallet, "Other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid which is Jesus Christ."

Construction immediately ran into foundation problems, but Bishop Potter refused to change locations. J.P. Morgan, the financier, who was a trustee of the Cathedral, gave \$500,000 "to get us out of the hole."

By 1911, the choir and the crossing with its four immense arches were completed . The renowned mason Rafael Guastavino built a dome of tile, 162 feet high at the apex, to cover the crossing. The original plans called for the dome to be replaced by a spire, but the Guastavino dome is still there today.



**Construction
of the choir**

The Heins & Lafarge Plan for the Cathedral



**Digging the Cathedral's
foundation**

(Next)

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Written History

THE SECOND PHASE, 1911-1941

In 1907, Heins, of Heins & Lafarge, passed away. The firm was released from the contract. A new firm was selected. A rising Boston architect, Ralph Adams Cram, was chosen to complete the Cathedral.



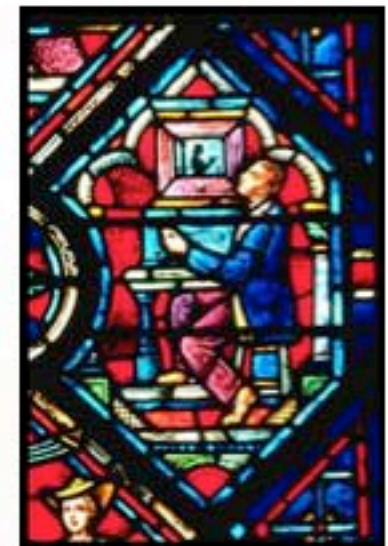
The foundation of the nave

Unlike Heins & Lafarge, Cram was a Gothic architect. He had to use what had previously been built, but he began to implement a Gothic style. In order to achieve his Gothic design, the length of the nave was changed from 520 to 601 feet. Ground was broken for the Nave in 1916 and the entire foundation laid.

The press gave immense impetus to the drive for funds. The "Communications Bay" in the Nave is a well-deserved tribute to the media which has done much toward the building of the Cathedral. Few questioned the validity of the undertaking. A model for the completed Cathedral stood in the north balcony of Grand Central station in 1921, a symbol of civic pride. Although World War I and the Great Depression occupied much of people's time, the Cathedral's construction continued.

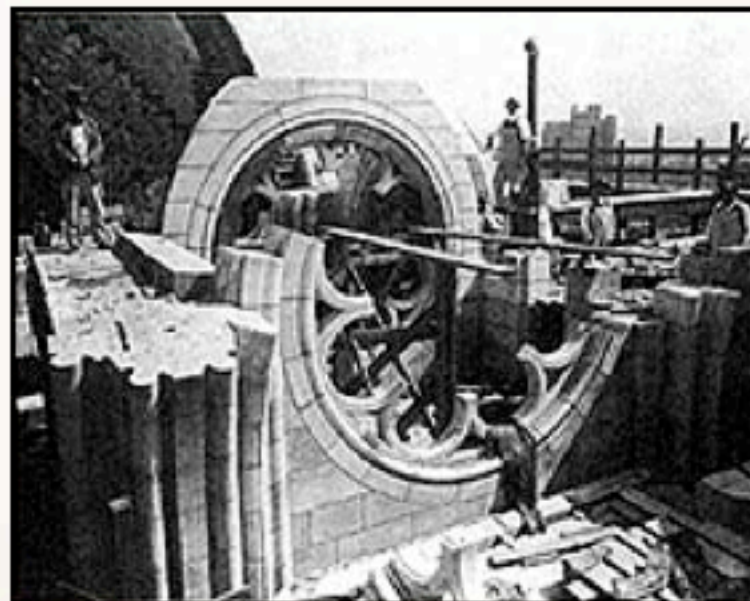
By 1918, the seven Chapels of the Tongues, around the Choir and High Altar were completed. Each chapel is dedicated to a different immigrant group. Images and descriptions of all seven chapels are available from the Chapels page.

Click [here](#) to visit all seven chapels.



A television is depicted in the stained glass of the Communications Bay

The Nave was virtually completed in less than ten years. Bishop William Thomas Manning, Episcopal Bishop from 1921-1946 oversaw the construction of the Nave, the West Front, the Baptistry, and part of the North Transept.



Construction of a Rosette

The vaulting of the Choir and Sanctuary were reconstructed in Gothic style to match the vaulting of the Nave.

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The Vaulting of the Nave

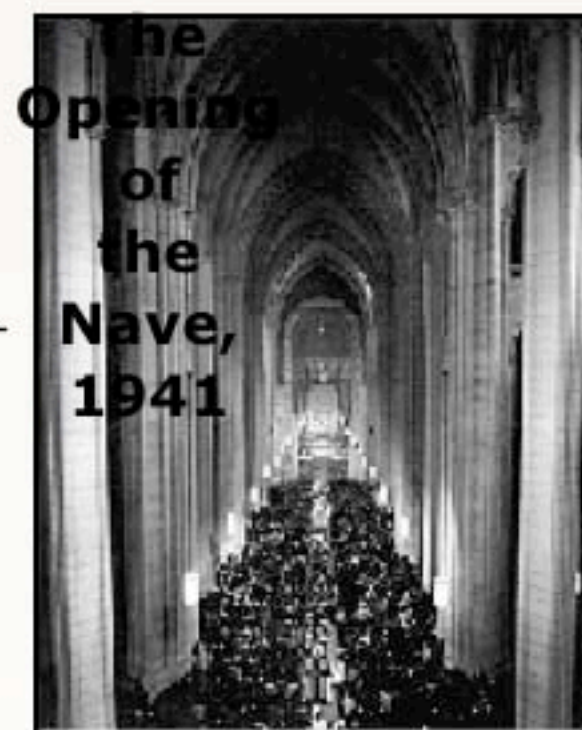
On Sunday November 30, 1941, the opening of the full length of the Cathedral was celebrated. The public could now see the full interior -- the greatest indoor length (601 feet) of any cathedral in existence. "Two football fields, end to end, with room left for the football," became the popular imagery of this magnificent length of uninterrupted space.

Alas, the joy was short lived. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor occurred the very next week, December 7th, 1941.

CONSTRUCTION STOPS

With the onset of World War II, construction of the Cathedral screeched to a halt. The Pearl Harbor Arch, as it is called, shows incomplete masonry where a stonecarver did not return to his work.

For 32 years, all plans for completing the Cathedral were held in abeyance.



THE THIRD PHASE, 1972-1997

Those interested in the Cathedral in 1941 had no idea that the effort to complete the Cathedral would have to be delayed for so long. But then nobody foresaw the unprecedented social upheavels which followed World War II. By the early 70's, New York City had barely moved back from the brink of bankruptcy. But the question was raised: While the Church concerns itself with particular human needs, must all artistic expressions of the love of God be laid aside?

The Very Rev. James Parks Morton, Dean at the time, pressed for a revival of the building program, but with a new emphasis. The Cathedral would hire and train the unemployed and underemployed from the neighborhood to do the work. He urged, "We will revive the art of stonework ... and provide our city with a massive symbol of hope and rebirth."

The Stoneyard was dedicated on June 21, 1979, and on September 29, 1982, aerialist Philippe Petit crossed Amsterdam Avenue on a 150-foot high wire to deliver a silver trowel to Bishop Paul Moore, marking the start of the next phase of construction. Because stonework was a moribund skill in the United States, professionals had to be brought from England to train the stoneworkers. The great work was underway again. Blocks were cut, and both the North and South Towers progressed upward.

When Mayor Edward Koch addressed the festive gathering at the Stoneyard's dedication in 1979, he stated, "I am told that some of the great cathedrals took over five hundred years to build. But I would like to remind you that we are only in our first hundred years." The Cathedral is now in its second century, which has offered its own snags. In the early 1990's, The United States was lagging in an economic recession, and the work on the towers was again brought to a halt.

The only stonework which continued was the carving of the Portal of Paradise, the central entrance of the Cathedral. Simon Verity, the master sculptor who trained the Stoneyard apprentices and won the international competition for the Portal Carving Project in 1988, now worked with stonecarver Jean Claude Marchionni on completing the Portal's statuary. The statuary, comprised of 8-foot and 3-foot figures from the Old and New Testaments, was completed in the summer of 1997 and dedicated that fall. Click [here](#) to learn more about the Portal of Paradise carvings.



Participants in the Cathedral's Stoneworks Program



Written History

THE FOURTH PHASE, 1998-

Hundreds spontaneously congregate at the Cathedral within hours of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. In December, a 5-alarm fire destroys the Cathedral's north transept and the gift shop within it.

In 2002, The Very Reverend Dr. James A. Kowalski is installed as the 9th Dean of the Cathedral. He begins the process of addressing the Cathedral's financial situation. "A Time for Hope," a special exhibition of religious art treasures from Spain, attracts tens of thousands visitors.

Cleaning and restoration after the fire begins in 2004; the Cathedral's Chorus, High Altar and Chapels (the East End) are closed to the public. Cleaning and restoration of the Cathedral's East End is completed in 2006. The Chorus, High Altar and Chapels are reopened to the public and the Nave is closed.

In the fall of 2007, scaffolding is removed from the Cathedral's south tower, illuminating the additional 50 feet of the tower built by the Stoneworks Project in the 1980s and 1990s. Madeleine L'Engle, author and Cathedral librarian for many years, passes away and is memorialized in the Cathedral.

Restoration of the Nave is completed in July of 2008. The East End of the Cathedral is closed while the Great Organ is reinstalled.

The Cathedral of St. John the Divine is Rededicated as its entire interior is reopened to the public on November 30, 2008. The New York Times called it "...arguably the most significant (service) at St. John the Divine since its interior was dedicated exactly 67 years earlier, on Nov. 30, 1941, a week before the attack on Pearl Harbor."





Senator Hillary Clinton and The Very Rev. Dr. James Kowalski
at the Service of Rededication on Nov. 30, 2008

A frequently asked question is "When will the Cathedral be finished?"

Although no new construction is planned for the immediate future, efforts have been underway to preserve the Cathedral and its auxiliary buildings for the enjoyment of New Yorkers and visitors from around the world for the centuries to come.

Group Tours for Adult and College Students

The Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine is a special place of learning for people of all ages. Visitors discover the myths, mysteries and spirit of this exuberant place. The Cathedral is a symphony of stone and glass, full of art and soaring architecture...a world of wonder.

Call the Public Education & Visitor Services Department at (212) 932-7347 for more information or to make reservations for your group.

The Cathedral's Public Education Programs enrich and enliven each visit. People of all ages will experience the joy of inquiry through programs adapted to the special needs and interests of each group. The following is a list of tours appropriate for adult and college groups:

History & Highlights

Discover soaring stonework and brilliant stained glass windows in the Cathedral's bustling nave and serene chapels. Learn about the history of this great sacred space from 1892 to the present, and hear about the many social, cultural, and educational programs of the Cathedral.

Architecture

Gaze upwards at ribs and vaults, columns and cornices, buttresses and beasts, prophets and pinnacles in this survey of how successive styles of architectural history are reflected in the stages of Cathedral construction.

Vertical Tour

Climb more than 124 feet through spiral staircases to the top of the world's largest cathedral. Get a close look at the magnificent stained glass windows and study the grand architecture of the nave while standing on a buttress. The tour culminates on the roof with a wonderful view of the Morningside Heights area of Manhattan.

Arts

Explore the magnificent collection of art at the Cathedral, which includes glorious stained glass windows, tapestries, paintings and stonework, as well as a triptych by Keith Haring and a Peace Fountain by Greg Wyatt.

Stained Glass

Experience the radiant stained glass windows of the Cathedral including the magnificent rose window, the largest in the United States. Learn about the history, creation, and meaning of stained glass through the ages, and discover the fascinating historical and contemporary

themes unique to the Cathedral's stunning windows.

Customized Tours

The Cathedral of St. John the Divine is dedicated to providing dynamic tours and programs suited to the needs and interests of each group. To customize a tour with a particular focus, please contact the Public Education Department. Themed tours may include: Gardens and Grounds, Cathedral and Community, the Middle Ages, and Organ Demonstrations.

Performance Opportunities

Visiting Choirs and orchestras are welcome to perform in this architectural symphony of stone and glass. Performances are held inside the Cathedral and resound amid its magnificent architecture.

Arrangements and Prices for Adult & College Group Tours

Guided visits are available for groups of 10 or more, Tuesday - Saturday at 10:00, 11:00, 1:00, 2:00, 3:00. Each program is an hour long, unless otherwise noted. Many programs can be combined for a longer visit. To arrange a program, call the Public Education & Visitor Services Department at (212) 932-7347.

To Download the Group Visits Brochure Click Here: [2010-2011 Group Visits](#)

The Cathedral provides free bus parking on Amsterdam Avenue at 112th Street.

Your driver and group leader are may participate in all guided programs for free.

A \$60 non-refundable deposit is required for each group of 25 people.

Adult/College Guided Tours

\$10 per adult, \$8 per student/senior

Vertical Tours

\$16 per person, \$14 per college student/senior.

Visiting Choirs

\$250 for a 1/2 hour a cappella sing - Use of the piano is an additional \$50.

Visiting Orchestras

\$1,200 for 1-hour instrumental performance (40-person limit).

Call 212 932-7347 for pricing information.

ALL PROGRAMS REQUIRE A RESERVATION AND A DEPOSIT.

For more Information & Reservations Call (212) 932-7347.