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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

### National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

#### 1. Name of Property

historic name St. Anselm's Roman Catholic Church and School

other names/site number N/A

#### 2. Location

street & number 683 Tinton Avenue [ ] not for publication

city or town New York, Bronx [ ] vicinity

state New York code NY county Bronx code 005 zip code 10455

#### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination [ ] request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements as set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant [ ] nationally [ ] statewide  locally. ([ ] see continuation sheet for additional comments.)

*Ruth A. Pierpont*

*12/12/13*

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [ ] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria. ([ ] see continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

entered in the National Register

[ ] see continuation sheet

[ ] determined eligible for the National Register

[ ] see continuation sheet

[ ] determined not eligible for the National Register

[ ] removed from the National Register

[ ] other (explain) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper

date of action

*Edson B. Beall*

*2-5-14*

**St. Anselm's Roman Catholic Church and School**

Name of Property

**Bronx County, New York**

County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>  </u>	<u>  </u>	sites
<u>  </u>	<u>  </u>	structures
<u>  </u>	<u>  </u>	objects
<b><u>2</u></b>	<b><u>0</u></b>	<b>TOTAL</b>

**Name of related multiple property listing**

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/ church & school

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**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/ church & school

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**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS/

Byzantine Revival (Church)

Classical Revival (School)

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**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick (Church) & Concrete (School)

walls Brick (Church & School), Terracotta,

Limestone (School)

roof Asphalt

other   

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or that represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all boxes that apply.)

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location
- C** a birthplace or grave
- D** a cemetery
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F** a commemorative property
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by historic American Building Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Areas of Significance:**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture \_\_\_\_\_

Social History \_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance:**

1892 – 1956 \_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates:**

1892, 1908, 1917, 1956 \_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person:**

N/A \_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation:**

N/A \_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder:**

Gustave E. Steinback (Church) \_\_\_\_\_

John E. Kirby (School) \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other repository: \_\_\_\_\_

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**10. Geographical Data**

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**Acreeage of Property** 1.51 acres

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 1|8| 5|9|2|2|8|7| 4|5|1|8|9|3|0|  
Zone Easting Northing

3 1|8| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |  
Zone Easting Northing

2 1|8| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

4 1|8| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

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**11. Form Prepared By**

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name/title Julie Kroon [Edited and arranged by Jennifer Walkowski, NYSHPO]

organization Columbia University date December 2013

street & number 19 Flintlock Road telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town Flemington state NJ zip code 08822

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**Additional Documentation**

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Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location  
A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items**

(Check with SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner** (Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO)

name St. Anselm's Roman Catholic Church

street & number 683 Tinton Avenue telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town Bronx state NY zip code 10455

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**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

**Estimated Burden Statement:** public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, D.C. 20503

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St. Anselm's Roman Catholic Church and School

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Narrative Description of Property

St. Anselm's Roman Catholic Church is located at 683 Tinton Avenue, at the northwest corner of Tinton Avenue and East 152<sup>nd</sup> Street, in the Melrose section of the New York City Borough of the Bronx, Bronx County, New York. The site consists of the approximately 2-story church building, which is connected to a 4-story Classical Revival school building to the north by a 1-story auditorium hyphen wing. A 3-story addition was constructed to the north of the school along Tinton Avenue in 1956. To the south is a parking lot, formerly a garden and the site of a church rectory that was demolished in the early 1960s. Part of this area now contains a small grotto and garden. At the rear (west) of the school is the playground space, defined by high brick walls, which has a blacktop and basketball court. The St. Anselm's property is surrounding by a modern metal fence. The church is located in a mainly residential area with small supporting stores. To the south of the church property, on the south side of East 152<sup>nd</sup> Street, is a row of five-story 1910 brick buildings with stores on the ground floor and apartments above. Surrounding the church property to the west, north, and east (across Tinton Avenue) are the John Adams Houses, seven brick residential towers of 15- to 21-stories that were built in the 1960s.

St. Anselm's Roman Catholic Church is inspired by the design of the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, Turkey, and is Byzantine Revival in style, utilizing the solid, heavy-feeling brick masonry, simplified and geometric motifs and round arches and domes that distinguish that style. The church is an approximately 2-story common-bond brick building, set on a raised basement of brick and surmounted by a roof consisting of a large dome with a series of smaller domes. Where the Hagia Sophia is more of a square plan church, St. Anselm's has been adapted to fit a more rectilinear plan, being constructed on the basement of a previously constructed church. The church has a wide but shallow central dome with a clerestory of round-arch openings with stained glass, separated by buttresses and surrounded by smaller domes. The domes were historically clad in copper but have now been covered in silver-painted bitumen.

The primary façade faces east onto Tinton Avenue and is characterized by the use of brick in both common-bond and decorative patterns with colorful decorative tilework. This façade has a projecting 1-story full-width

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brick entry portico with three arched openings supported with granite columns with abstracted Byzantine limestone cushion capitals. The voissors of the arches are articulated with color geometric tiles. Inside the portico is a series of vaults made of structural glazed tiles by a company called Comerma. The entrances to the church are through three sets of double doors made of wood and painted red and white. Above the portico, the second story of the church is a broad segmental arch set between two piers ornamented with crosses and a green tile parapet capped by a cross. In the center of this facade is a half-circle of diaper-pattern polychrome brick delineated by colorful tiles and a brick arch. Set within this semicircle are three round-arched stained-glass windows with tile heads. Two wings extend to the left and right of the portico. Each has a round-arched window with a decorative tile lintel. Above each are three small rectangular windows set within a herringbone brick rectangle pattern with tiles at each corner. An additional wing to the left that once connected to the rectory (demolished) has a ramp leading from ground level to a set of double doors, now covered with a roll-up garage door. At the top of this connector wing is a small rectangular stained-glass window and tile depictions of the four apostles.

Secondary elevations of the church are far less decorated, primarily consisting of the brick masonry with little of the decoration found on the primary façade, but they convey the volume of the stacked domes and arches typical of Byzantine architecture. During the construction of the church, these secondary elevations were less visible due to the surrounding density of adjacent buildings, hence their lack of ornament, but due to demolitions over past decades, these are now more visible. The south elevation, which is the most visible from the church's parking lot, is characterized by its long, rectangular, planear wall surface, with a prominent central segmental-arched portion with twelve round-arch stained-glass windows on two levels. Below this is a one-story wing with twelve low brick segmental arches; this once was an open arcade connecting to a garden that has since been enclosed due to vandalism. The clerestory of the main dome and the surrounding domes are visible from this side.

The St. Anselm Parochial School is connected to the north elevation of the church by a 1-story hyphen that contains an auditorium. The brick hyphen contains a modern metal roll-up door and a double-leaf entry door with a narrow band of windows separated by tile panels with motifs of "Love," "Health," "Body" and "Mind."

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The school itself is a 4-story, 3-bay brick Classical Revival style building constructed of light-colored brick with terra-cotta accents. The ground level is rusticated with a central entrance articulated with a limestone surround of Doric pilasters with a broken segmental-arched pediment and is flanked by windows to either side. Fenestration is typically paired or tripartite window groups with flattened arch stone headers, some with keystone motifs. A modest cornice band separates the first and second floors and the third and fourth floors; however, the main cornice at the building parapet has been removed and was replaced by a band of metal paneling. The light-colored brick used on the front façade continues for one bay on the side elevations, and then transitions to common red brick. The side elevations are articulated with rectangular windows, similar but simplified from those of the front elevation. The 3-story flat-roofed north addition is more modern in its appearance, but it utilizes a similar brick color as the original school building. Lacking the ornamentation found on the church and school building, its primary features are three large 3-story windows consisting of five window units at each floor level along the primary eastern elevation. Within the window groups, each floor level is highlighted with a spandrel of tiles set in a recessed cross motif.

Upon entering through the main doors, the narthex is entered into before arriving in the main nave. The church plan is laid out with a central nave separating two rows of pews, and side aisles separated from the nave by rows of six columns like those used on the outside portico. The side aisles contain the confessionals and sculptures of the Stations of the Cross. To the left and right sides of the narthex are the stairs that lead to the balconies. The left side contains a baptistery in the curve of the stairs. The baptistery is a bronze octagonal gazebo-like structure. The floor is made of mosaic tiles depicting eight zodiac signs. In the middle is the baptismal font. The bronze lid is connected to the top of the baptistery and can be raised and lowered on a weighted pulley system so that it will stay up. In the staircase that wraps around the baptistery, the Comerma tile vaulting is visible. The walls contain more frescoes. At the top of these stairs is an ironwork gate.

The sanctuary, true to its Byzantine influence, is a brilliant play of colors and materials, with nearly every surface ornamented with frescoes or decorative tilework. The first space is a half-dome volume. The ceiling of the dome is painted mostly gold-colored and depicts Jesus with angels and the heavens. A verse from Psalms lines the bottom of the painting: "The zeal of thy house hath eaten me up." Moving into the central volume,

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the space opens up even more. Overhead is the large central dome with its vaulted clerestory stained-glass windows. The windows were originally operable for ventilation but have since been sealed shut. The design on the underside of the dome is of gold tiles and is a cross with Latin lettering, which is the reverse side of the Benedictine medal. The majority of the domed areas are covered in brown tiles, lined with colorful mosaic tile patterns. A metal lantern hangs above each column from the side balconies. The balconies have different cutout patterns reminiscent of Islamic ornament. At the crossing of the church is another half-dome volume. A set of two vaulted windows is cut into each side of the dome. In between run the words "Let the service of God be thy first delight." The path splits at the crossing - to the right is an exit into the school, and the left side leads out to the arcade seen from the south façade. This is now closed in to form extra administrative space for the services. The walls here are bare brick, and there are dark wood rafters on the ceiling. Back inside the sanctuary, the main altar is centrally placed, beyond the domed crossing and up a flight of steps. There is a ciborium around the altar - four columns hold up a gold-painted octagonal roof that is designed to look like a miniature arcade with columns. Located behind the altar is an apse, which features a dome painted gold with religious scenes. In the middle, the crucifixion of Jesus is depicted, with angels above and a dove at the top. Looking back from the altar, above the entrance, is a gold and green painted balcony. This balcony is used as the choir loft. It is still unrestored and is a dark purple color. The original organ was removed and a new smaller organ box was installed in 1962.



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St. Anselm's Roman Catholic Church and School is significant as an excellent and largely intact local example of a relatively uncommon Byzantine style church building with an attached parochial school, meeting Criterion C. Like its inspiration, the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, St. Anselm's church features multiple domes and a relatively austere brick exterior that conceals a highly ornamented interior with glittering mosaics and frescos. Founded in 1892 to serve the large German immigrant community, St. Anselm's has played a prominent role in the spiritual, social and educational lives of those in the surrounding neighborhood, meeting Criterion A for its role in the Bronx's social history. Located in the South Bronx's diverse Melrose neighborhood, as the original German congregation left the area in the mid-twentieth century, the church continued to serve the growing Hispanic and African-American community. Like many churches, St. Anselm's has played host to a variety of community, religious and social groups

History of the Melrose Neighborhood

St. Anselm's Roman Catholic Church and School are located in the South Bronx's Melrose neighborhood. The neighborhood is roughly bounded by 149<sup>th</sup> Street to the south, Park Avenue to the west, and Brook Avenue to the north and east. During the early nineteenth century the Melrose area, like much of the Bronx, was largely unsettled, vacant land. In the 1840s, the area was separated into three separate tracts (North Melrose, Melrose, and South Melrose) and the land was owned by four cousins from the Morris family. From these early rural origins, by the twentieth century the Melrose neighborhood became a densely built-up area characterized by freight yards, the commercial Hub area, many owner-occupied townhouses, public housing towers, all criss-crossed with rail and transit lines.<sup>1</sup>

In the 1850s, Melrose began to develop as a suburban area as New York City began a period of rapid growth that moved northward toward the Bronx. During this era, the Morris family began to sell off its land in the Melrose area, selling to real estate developers who platted right-angle streets and parceled the land into more than 1,000 regular 50 x 100-foot lots. Real estate developers touted the area's rural location as well as its access to rail lines. However, unlike other developments, no deed restrictions were imposed on setbacks from the street

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or the type and use of buildings to be constructed.<sup>2</sup> These factors helped entice many craftsmen and artisans, who could easily construct houses and manufactories to suit their needs, to the area. Construction in the Melrose neighborhood occurred rapidly, growing from 400 houses reported in 1853 to more than 800 in 1868, and many of these buildings were quickly constructed, modest structures. Already by the 1870s, there were few lots left vacant for speculation, creating a climate of demolition and reconstruction early in the area's history.<sup>3</sup>

Irish and German Catholics came to the United States in large numbers during the second half of the nineteenth century, building up the Catholic Church's presence in New York. In the Bronx, the Melrose neighborhood became predominantly characterized as German at the end of the nineteenth century. While many of the early South Melrose residents in the 1850s and 60s were of German extraction and North Melrose was initially settled by some Irish and old-stock Americans, the early residents of the Melrose area were attracted to the affordable, healthy country living offered within commuting distance of the growing urban city.<sup>4</sup>

The growing number of German residents in the Melrose area created the need for religious services in the community. As early as 1853, a German Catholic newspaper commented that "the new German church of the Immaculate Conception in Melrose...will supply an urgent need," as "many Catholic German families have in recent times settled in that beautiful and healthy region."<sup>5</sup> Several other German churches were founded in the area in subsequent years, including the German Methodist Church on Elton Avenue at 158<sup>th</sup> Street (1852), Melrose Reformed Church in America on 157 Street and Elton Avenue (1854), and St. Matthew's Lutheran Church on East 156<sup>th</sup> Street (1862).<sup>6</sup> St. Joseph's, another German Catholic parish, was established in 1873 on Washington Avenue near 177<sup>th</sup> Street.<sup>7</sup> The establishment of an additional German Catholic parish in the area reinforced the growth of the German Catholic community, as St. Anselm's Roman Catholic Church was founded by German Benedictines in 1891.

<sup>1</sup> Evelyn Diaz Gonzalez, *The Bronx* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 26.

<sup>2</sup> Gonzales, 27-28.

<sup>3</sup> Gonzales, 29.

<sup>4</sup> Gonzales, 28.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Gonzales, 28.

<sup>6</sup> Gonzalez, 28-29.

<sup>7</sup> Shelley, 216.

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The bucolic German community began to transform in the late nineteenth century as transportation improvements allowed residents to easily commute between the South Bronx and Manhattan. Already by the 1870s, three- and four-story tenement buildings began to replace the smaller cottages and workshops as land values began to increase. During the 1890s alone the population of the Bronx increased from 88,000 to 139,000. One reason for this growth was the expansion of transportation from Manhattan. The Third Avenue El was extended to Fordham Road between 1886 and 1902, and the Interborough subway extended from Harlem across 149<sup>th</sup> Street to Third Avenue in 1904.<sup>8</sup>

Like many urban communities across the nation, the population of Melrose and the South Bronx changed over time. These shifts are reflected in the changing makeup of the St. Anselm congregation. From its predominantly German origins at the turn of the twentieth century, by the late 1930s the population of the congregation consisted mostly Irish working-class families. A growing Spanish-speaking population also began to emerge at St. Anselm's, and in 1938 the cardinal sent Father Bonafacio Garcia to the parish in response.<sup>9</sup> In the 1940s and 1950s the Irish population declined, and a new influx of congregants of Puerto Rican descent began to worship at St. Anselm's. This trend was consistent with the changing character of New York City as a whole, as the number of Puerto Rican-born people living in the city in 1940 was 61,463, while by 1950 the population was 187,420, a staggering over 200 percent increase in the span of only a decade.<sup>10</sup> In 1976 the Benedictines left the parish to the archdiocese, and in 1985 the Augustinian Recollect Fathers were put in charge.<sup>11</sup> Today the area is mostly Hispanic and African-American.

While the ethnic makeup of the Melrose neighborhood has remained largely consistent during the late twentieth century, the urban fabric surrounding St. Anselm's Roman Catholic Church has been transformed by Urban Renewal activities. As late as the 1940s, the neighborhood was characterized by modest rows of 3-, 4- or 5-story brick and stone tenement buildings. Frequently constructed quickly and cheaply, by the mid-1900s, much

<sup>8</sup> Shelley, 296.

<sup>9</sup> Saint Anselm's Church, 7.

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *United States Census of Population: 1950: Special Reports: Puerto Ricans in the Continental United States* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, 1953), ch. 12, 3D-11.

<sup>11</sup> Saint Anselm's Church, 7.

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of the building stock in the neighborhood was utilized by only the poorest of residents, being so unsuitable for habitation. The decline in the neighborhood made it a prime target for Urban Renewal development, and the John Adams Housing Projects were built in the 1960s on land surrounding the church. All of the buildings already there were torn down to make way for the seven residential towers. The church rectory was also torn down around this time and the current parking lot put it. This has changed the context of the Church and School, but the church building itself still stands as a testament to the long history of Catholicism in the neighborhood.

History of St. Anselm's Roman Catholic Church and School

With the large German population thriving in the Melrose neighborhood at the close of the nineteenth century, Archbishop Corrigan invited Benedictine monks from St. John's Abbey in Minnesota to come to the Bronx in 1891. This group of Benedictines founded St. Anselm's parish in July 1891. Led by Fr. Alexius Edelbrock, a parcel of land on the west side of Tinton Avenue was purchased in 1891 at a cost of \$16,744.93. At the time, the lot was described as "wooded swampland." In order to house the group of monks who had arrived to found St. Anselm's, the first building constructed on the land was a three-story rectory started on July 9, 1892 with work finished in November. A relatively grand brick building with 31 rooms, Fr. Alexius rather optimistically hoped that the building would someday become a Benedictine Abbey in New York City.<sup>12</sup>

With work on the rectory underway, construction efforts turned to building of the church. Construction of the church began on August 29, 1892, and the cornerstone for the building was laid on November 24<sup>th</sup> of the same year. One year later, on November 19, 1893, the lower portion of the church building was complete and dedicated by Archbishop Corrigan. Known as a "basement church" or the "lower church," it was not uncommon for Catholic churches at the time to start by constructing just a basement worship area first and build

<sup>12</sup> Saint Anselm's Church, *Saint Anselm's Church: 1892 – 1992* (Bronx, NY: St. Anselm's Church, 1992), 8.

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a larger worship space above as the congregation acquired more money. This "basement church" was 1-story in height and constructed of brick in a Gothic style, and the building cost approximately \$170,000.<sup>13</sup>

Shortly after the turn of the twentieth century efforts turned towards work on building a school for St. Anselm's. With the large German community, the church saw the need to provide education and community services to children. Ground was broken for the building on February 10, 1908; however, Fr. Alexius passed away only three months later. Under the leadership of his successor, the Very Rev. Bernard Kevenhorster, O.S.B., the school was rapidly built in only nine months, at a cost of \$100,000. The school opened in September 1908 with an enrollment of 560 students. It was run by the Dominican Sisters from Blauvelt, NY, who continued to operate the school into the late twentieth century. In October of 1912 a playground was added, said to have been one of the first organized playgrounds attached to a Catholic school in New York.<sup>14</sup>

With the success of the school and a congregation growing to more than 1,000 parishioners, St. Anselm's church was noted as being free from debt by 1914. This stable financial situation must have allowed the church to finally realize its goal of building a large "upper church," and planning for the present church began in 1915. New York City-based architect Gustave E. Steinback was hired to prepare the plans for the building.<sup>15</sup> These plans entailed utilizing the existing foundation and "basement church" and constructing essentially a new church on top. Alterations were anticipated to cost about \$100,000.<sup>16</sup> Initial plans for the building were for a Gothic style church; however, the Byzantine style was ultimately chosen for the new church. Although it is unknown exactly why the St. Anselm's parish desired a Byzantine style church rather than a more typical Romanesque or Gothic Revival design, perhaps Steinback was influenced by a growing national architectural trend that sought out new architectural expressions and forms and was influenced by the "exotic" ornament and images of the Middle East and other cultures only recently being explored in the early twentieth century.

<sup>13</sup> Rev. Michael J. Riordan et al, *The Catholic Church in the United States of America, Vol III* (New York: The Catholic Editing Company, 1914), 381.

<sup>14</sup> Riordan, 381. Also, Saint Anselm's Church, 14.

<sup>15</sup> A Brooklyn-based architect, Anton Kloster, is listed in the Bronx Department of Buildings on a 1907 new building application for a one-story brick church, but the application expired the following year. It may be that this was an earlier design that never got built, and may have been designs for the Gothic style church that never got constructed. The 1988 and 2010 editions of the *AIA Guide to New York City* appear to incorrectly attribute St. Anselm's to Kloster.

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Whatever the reason, the design for the new St. Anselm's church was modeled on the Hagia Sophia, originally constructed in Constantinople (Istanbul), Turkey in 537 A.D. Construction for the new "upper church" began on October 15, 1916, and when construction was finished, the final cost for the building, including furnishings, came to \$165,000. The first service held was Midnight Mass on Christmas Day of 1917.<sup>17</sup>

Throughout the twentieth century, St. Anselm's church and school played a prominent role in the local community. Beyond just church services, St. Anselm's hosted numerous community groups and social organizations including the Holy Name society, Christian Mothers society, Young Women's society, boys and girls Angels societies, the Athletic Club (consisting in 1914 of 175 young men and boys), the Men's Club, the Fife and Drum Corps, and a Boys Choir (with 1,000 members in 1914). St. Anselm's also hosted branches of the W.C.B.L and L.C.B.A.<sup>18</sup> St. Anselm's school also played a vital role in the community, offering a variety of classes and courses often at little to no cost. In fact, for the first 33 years of its existence, St. Anselm's school was a "free school," with students paying only 10 cents to rent books. It was not until 1941 that families were asked to pay \$1.00 per month in tuition, making sure that even those of the most modest means had an opportunity for a good quality education. For several years after its construction, German classes were offered free of charge, helping to keep the traditions and languages alive in the primarily German neighborhood. Between 1911 and 1932 a two-year Commercial Course was offered at the school. Between 1913 and 1934 eight classrooms were leased to the Board of Education for use as an annex to P.S. 52, further broadening the engagement of the school with the larger community.<sup>19</sup>

St. Anselm's church and school continued to grow in size, as the South Bronx itself grew in population. After World War II improvements in transportation, including expanding the subway, streetcar and bus systems, and many new high-rise and larger scale housing structures began to spring up in the surrounding neighborhood, including the 21-story St. Mary's Houses housing project. By the mid-1900s, St. Anselm's was conducting ten masses, and more than 1,200 students were enrolled at the St. Anselm's School. In order to accommodate the

<sup>16</sup> "Plan to Rebuild St. Anselm's Church," *New York Tribune*, September 1, 1915, 11.

<sup>17</sup> Saint Anselm's Church, *Saint Anselm's Church: 1892 - 1992* (Bronx, NY: St. Anselm's Church, 1992), 8.

<sup>18</sup> Riordan, 381.

<sup>19</sup> Saint Anselm's Church, 14.

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growing needs of the school, an addition containing 12 classrooms was constructed on the north side of the school along Tinton Avenue. Designed by John E. Kirby, the new wing was added in 1956.<sup>20</sup>

However, the South Bronx neighborhood and St. Anselm's faced challenging times in the late twentieth century. During the 1970s, the South Bronx faced a total economic collapse and significant urban decay as a result of a rapidly decreasing population and high levels of poverty and crime. With the German and Irish community leaving the area, moving largely to the suburbs, the Benedictine Fathers also surrendered their leadership of the parish in the 1970s. While under the administration of the archdiocese, a Cuban-born pastor, Msgr. Raol del Valle, was named to lead St. Anselm's in response to the new wave of immigrants predominantly from Puerto Rico who were coming to the South Bronx. In 1985, leadership of St. Anselm's church was assumed by the Augustinian Recollect Fathers, an order with roots in Spain. St. Anselm's responded by embracing this new immigrant group, offering services in English, Spanish and bilingual masses. By the 1990s, the school's student body was 83 percent Hispanic and 16 percent African American.

In the face of changing economic and cultural times, St. Anselm's Roman Catholic Church and School continues its strong role in the rebuilding of the South Bronx community. Approximately 1,500 people attend Sunday Mass at St. Anselm's and more than 500 students attend St. Anselm's school. The church also continues to host a variety of religious and community-based associations and activities, including the South Bronx Churches Association, Damas of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Children of Mary, altar boys, and a choir. To aid the economically struggling community, St. Anselm's school offered breakfast and lunch programs and was open for use by students until 6:00 pm to provide a safe and stable environment for the children. And although a new group has inherited the Byzantine style church building, it continues to serve as a beloved center for religious and social life in the community.<sup>21</sup>

Architect Gustave E. Steinback

<sup>20</sup> Saint Anselm's Church, 17.

<sup>21</sup> Kathleen Nowacki Correa, *Catholic New York* XIII, no. 11 (December 3, 1992).

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Gustave E. Steinback was a well known and notable architect specializing in the design of Catholic church buildings. Born September 29, 1878 in New York City, Steinback appears to have had a traditional Beaux Arts-style education. He attended the Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn and graduated in 1900 from the Columbia School of Architecture, as well as traveling throughout Europe, spending three years in Germany, and studying at the Atelier Bernard in France. Between 1902 and 1903 he worked as a draftsman in the office of Hornbostel and Palmer, a nationally prominent design firm in New York City, before establishing his own practice in 1903. Between 1903 and 1913 Steinback partnered with fellow Columbia graduate Robert Reiley. Among the many Roman Catholic schools and churches that Steinback is known to have designed are the Blessed Sacrament Church, School and Rectory in at 152 West Seventy-First Street in New York City (1917), St. Benedicts School in the Bronx (1931), St. Joseph College in Brooklyn (1928) and St. Michaels Church and Monastery in Brooklyn (1921). Gustave E. Steinback was active in the architectural community, serving on the Stamford Associated Architects as well as holding membership in the American Institute of Architects (AIA) from 1931 until his death in 1959.<sup>22</sup>

Byzantine Revival Architecture

St. Anselm's Roman Catholic Church is unusual in its Byzantine style, rarely used by Steinback or other architects of the time. Byzantine architecture is broadly characterized as a continuation of Roman architecture in the Eastern Roman Empire during the early first millennium. Byzantine architecture freely blended Roman classical forms with ornamentation and elements derived from Islamic architecture in the Middle East, as the two cultures blended in the Byzantine capital of Constantinople (now Istanbul). The Hagia Sophia is perhaps the most identifiable Byzantine church building, originally built as an Eastern Orthodox Church and briefly a Roman Catholic Church until being converted into a mosque. Another example is the smaller and more modest Basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna, Italy. Constructed in 547 A.D. as an octagonal-plan church, the Basilica of San Vitale is notable for its elaborate interior mosaics concealed by a relatively humble brick exterior. Like its inspiration, St. Anselm's is a masonry building with a large central dome surrounded by smaller half-domes,



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although they are shallower. Both Hagia Sophia and St. Anselm's have round-arched windows, ornamentation that is abstracted and simplified rather than realistically rendered, and richly decorated interiors. Typical of Byzantine churches, St. Anselm's exterior portrays a sense of strength and massiveness, concealing an interior that is more delicate and refined. The layouts of the plans are different – St. Anselm's is more rectangular to fit on the pre-existing basement church.

The church is noteworthy for the artwork inside, which incorporates Byzantine influence with Benedictine images and motifs. The magnificent interiors of the sanctuary are covered in tilework, gilding, and frescoes. The artwork was done by Beuronese monks. The Beuron Art School originated in Germany in the abbey of Beuron in the late nineteenth century, and became associated as the style of the Benedictine order. The style is characterized by simplicity of lines and serenity in portraying the human figure. Saints and monks were given a penetrating, spiritual expression. Geometry plays a large role in determining forms. In the Beuronese style, fabric garments of saints and religious figures hang straight without folds, giving a formal effect that also relates to Byzantine artistic traditions. The use of straight lines in murals and artwork, rather than flowing curved lines, was thought to harmonize with the architectural lines. Dom Adalbert Gresnicht, said to be the foremost expert of Beuronese art at the time, was invited to create the artwork at St. Anselm's church in 1922 after completion of the decoration of the abbey church of Saint Paul in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Arriving in New York in May 1923, Gresnicht spent five years with the help of two assistants completing the interiors, high altar and liturgical vessels.<sup>23</sup> St. Anselm's Church is one of only a few extant examples of the Beuronese School. Dario Cano, a noted art restorer from Colombia, is currently restoring the frescoes, most of which had been painted over.

The double-dome structure and the underside of the outside portico were made by Comerma. Comerma was a competitor of Rafael Guastavino that used a very similar cohesive tile system. This is a system for making a thin skin of strong, self-supporting tile arches and vaults of interlocking terracotta tiles and mortar. The Comerma Company was founded in 1909 by John Comerma, a Spaniard and former assistant of the Guastavino

<sup>22</sup> Francis William Wyn Kervick, *Architects in America of Catholic Tradition*. (Rutland, VT: C. E. Tuttle, 1962), 128.

<sup>23</sup> Saint Anselm's Church, 9.

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Company. Through an oversight of the patent office, Comerma managed to obtain a patent in 1917 for a tile-vaulting construction technique. The run of the Comerma Company was short, however, as Guastavino took the firm to court and won in 1918, taking over whatever projects they were working on.<sup>24</sup> St. Anselm's is one of the only confirmed completed Comerma projects.

Other notable features in the sanctuary interiors include the colored mosaic tiles used throughout, Byzantine column capitals, and patterned brickwork on the façade. The colorful stained-glass windows were designed by Stephan Haweis, an artist from Munich, Germany.<sup>25</sup>

The 2010 *AIA Guide to New York City* praises the ornamentation of the church, saying, "Bare-bones brick nearly everywhere except at the entrance, where poetically illustrated glazed tile plaques and neo-Romanesque ornament soften the bluntness of the masonry. Within a blue-green light washes the sanctuary from a circular, stained glass clerestory as though lighting a grotto. The walls shimmer with the brothers' ceramic tile tesserae. Moving."

Throughout the history of the South Bronx, the St. Anselm's Roman Catholic Church and School has played a prominent role as a hub for the local community. During its more than 100 year history, St. Anselm's has witnessed a dramatic transformation in the South Bronx neighborhood, from serving the German immigrant population in a growing residential suburb on the fringes of New York City to sheltering a Hispanic and African-American community from the difficult economic, social and political climate of the South Bronx in the late twentieth century. While much has changed over its history in the surrounding neighborhood, the glittering Byzantine church building acts as not only a physical landmark in the area but also a community icon as well.

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<sup>24</sup> John Ochsendorf, *Guastavino Vaulting: the Art of Structural Tile* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2010).

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<sup>25</sup> Saint Anselm's Church, 10.

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Name of Property

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**Other Resources:**

Materials provided by St. Anselm's Roman Catholic Church

Block 2654, Lot 41, Bronx Department of Buildings, Bronx, NY.

Guastavino/Collins collection, Avery Drawings & Archives, Columbia University, New York, NY.

Digital Sanborn Fire Insurance maps

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**St. Anselm's Roman Catholic Church and School**

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Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary is an irregularly shaped parcel located at the northwest corner of Tinton Avenue and E 152<sup>nd</sup> Street in the Bronx, New York. Refer to the attached maps.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries have been drawn to reflect all land currently associated with St. Anselm's Roman Catholic Church and School. These boundaries encompass land historically associated with the church since its founding in 1892.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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St. Anselm's Roman Catholic Church and School

Name of Property

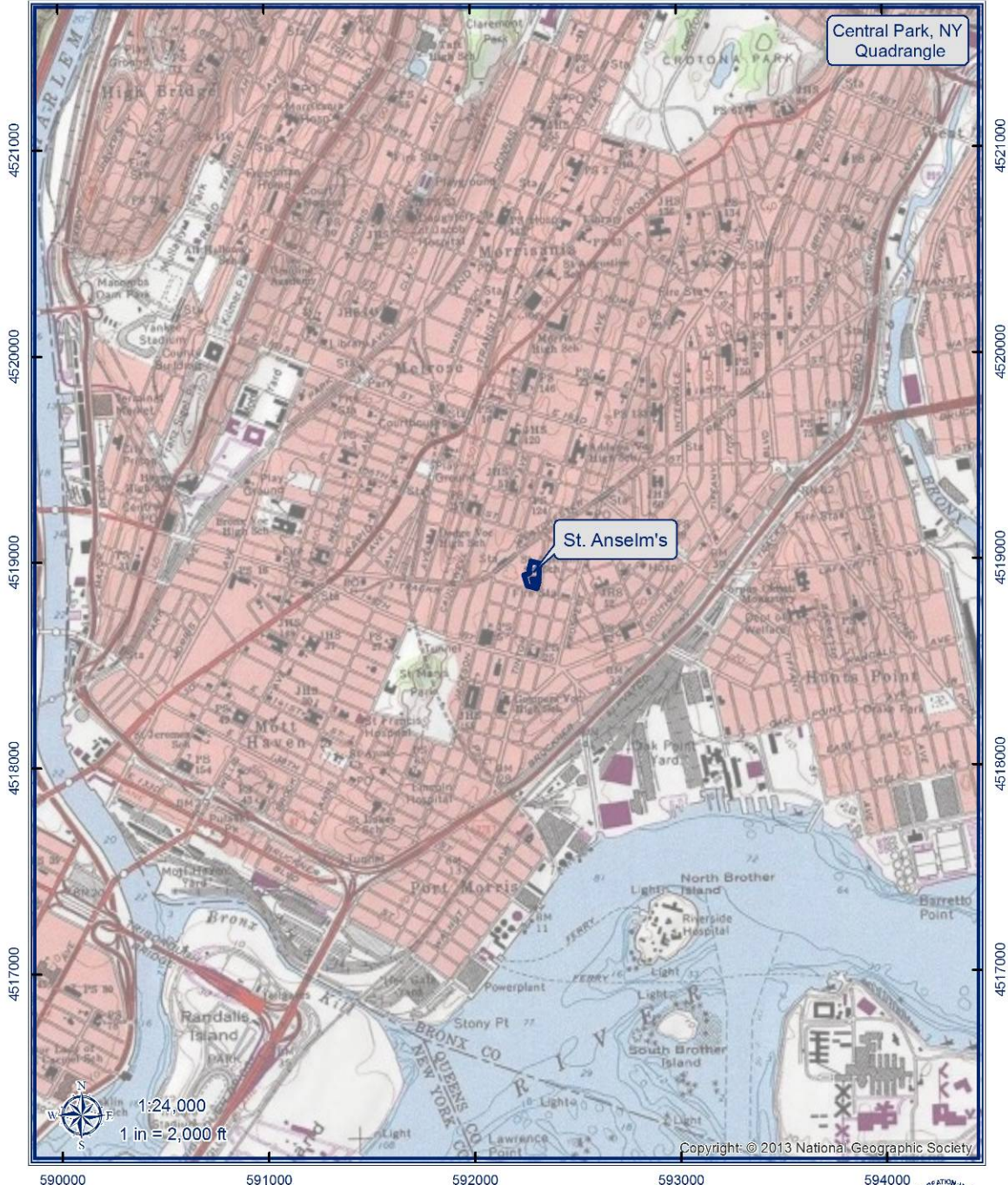
Bronx County, New York

County and State

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St. Anselm's Roman Catholic Church Complex  
Bronx, Bronx Co., NY

683 Tinton Avenue  
Bronx, NY 10455



Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N  
Projection: Transverse Mercator  
Datum: North American 1983  
Units: Meter



Tax Parcel Data:  
NYC PLUTO  
<http://www.nyc.gov/>



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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Continuation Sheet

St. Anselm's Roman Catholic Church and School

Name of Property

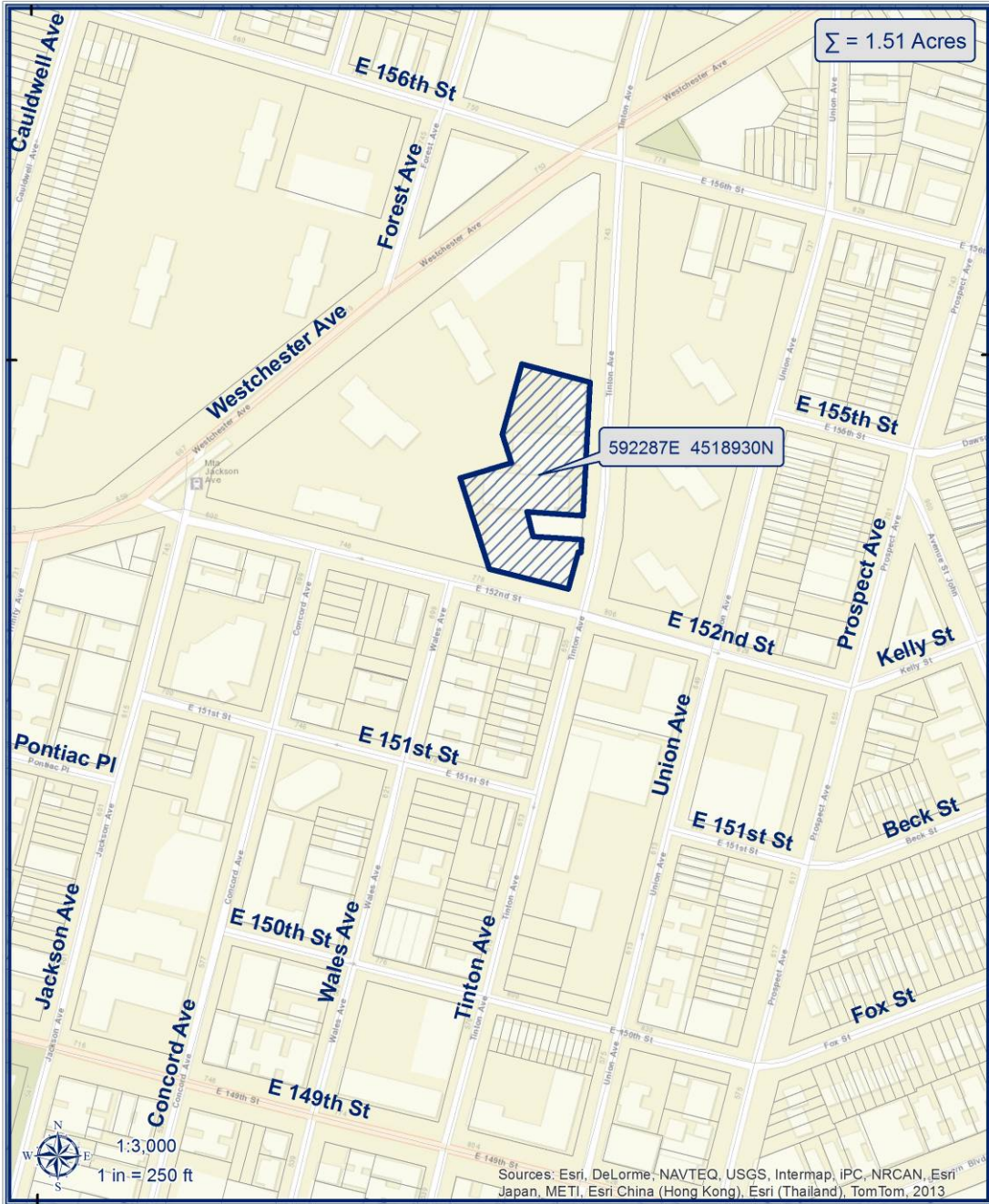
Bronx County, New York

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St. Anselm's Roman Catholic Church Complex  
Bronx, Bronx Co., NY

683 Tinton Avenue  
Bronx, NY 10455



592000

Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N  
Projection: Transverse Mercator  
Datum: North American 1983  
Units: Meter



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National Park Service**

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Additional Information

Name of Property: St. Anselm's Roman Catholic Church and School  
City or Vicinity: New York City  
County: Bronx  
State: NY  
Name of Photographer: Julie Kroon  
Date of photographs: January-February 2013  
Location of Original Digital Files: 19 Flintlock Rd, Flemington, NJ 08822

NY\_Bronx County\_St Anselms Church\_0001  
East façade of church, camera facing southwest.

NY\_Bronx County\_St Anselms Church\_0002  
South façade of church, camera facing north.

NY\_Bronx County\_St Anselms Church\_0003  
East façade of school, camera facing northwest.

NY\_Bronx County\_St Anselms Church\_0004  
Under entrance portico of church, camera facing north.

NY\_Bronx County\_St Anselms Church\_0005  
Detail of east façade of church, camera facing west.

NY\_Bronx County\_St Anselms Church\_0006  
Interior of church sanctuary, camera facing west.

NY\_Bronx County\_St Anselms Church\_0007  
Interior of church sanctuary, camera facing east.

NY\_Bronx County\_St Anselms Church\_0008  
Baptistry in church narthex, camera facing south.



United States Department of the Interior  
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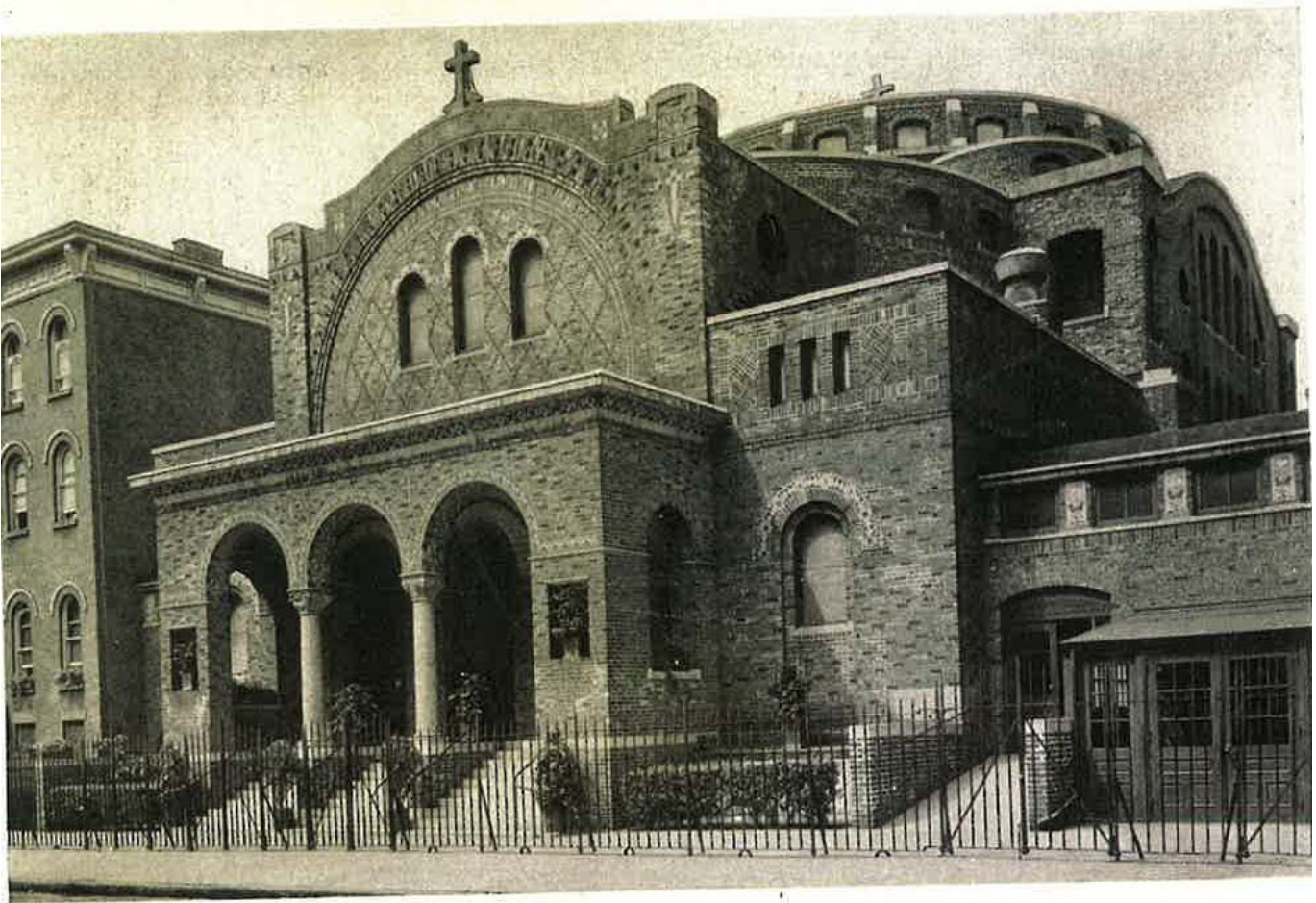
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St. Anselm's Roman Catholic Church and School

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St. Anselm's Roman Catholic Church (ca. 1932)

Source: *Church Architecture: Building for a Living Faith* by Frank Brannach



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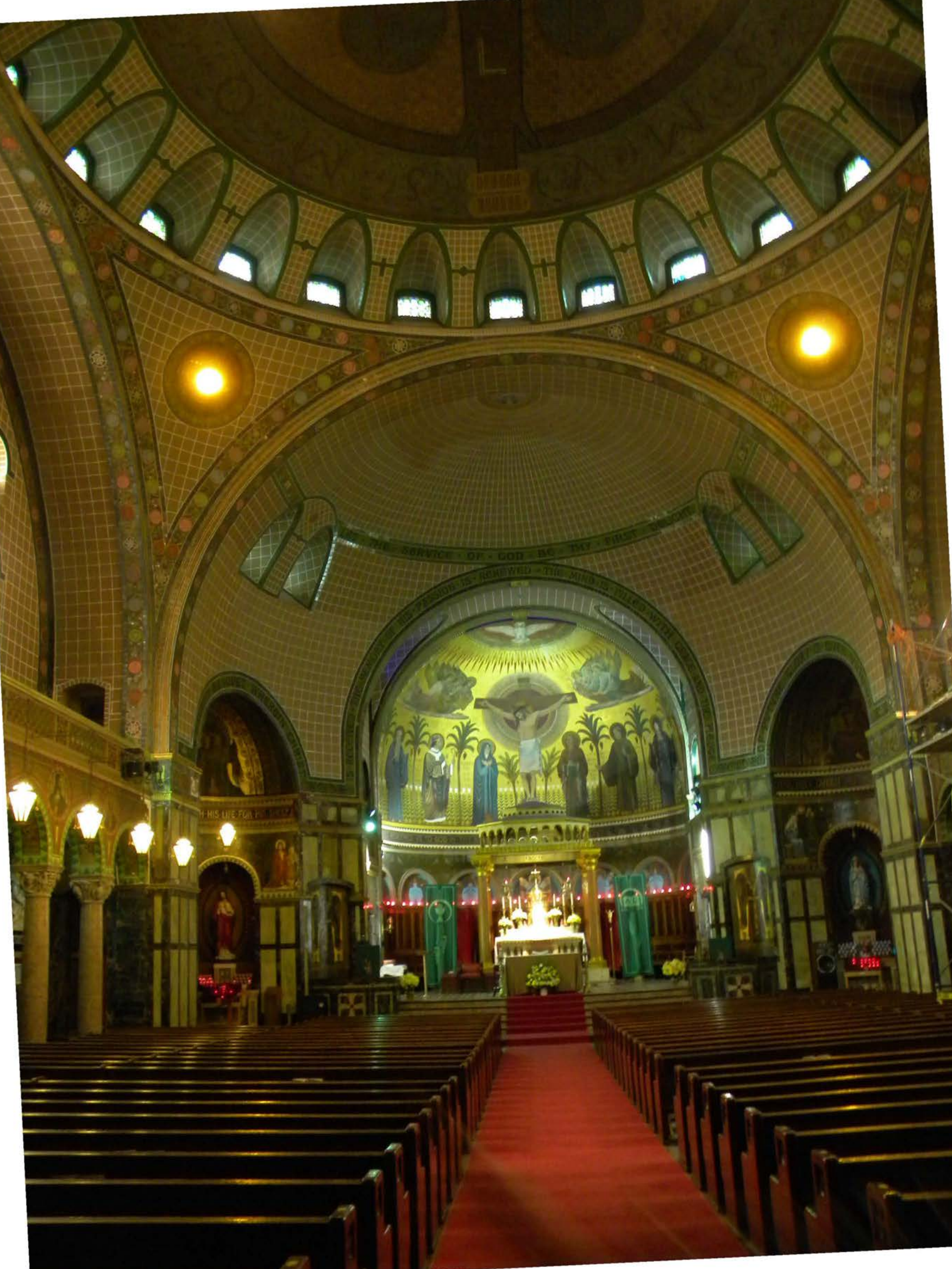
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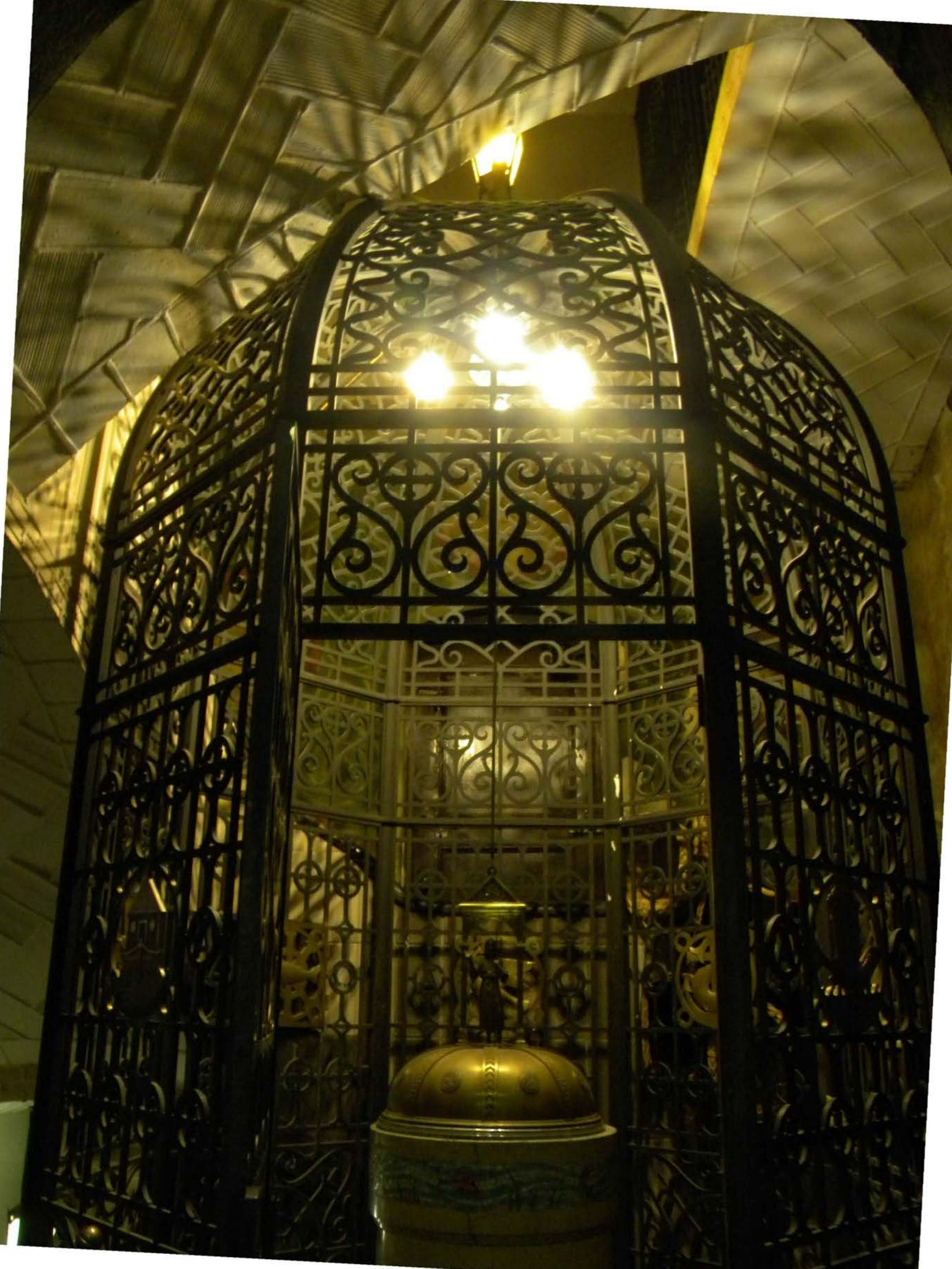
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: St. Anselm's Roman Catholic Church and School

MULTIPLE NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: NEW YORK, Bronx

DATE RECEIVED: 12/20/13      DATE OF PENDING LIST: 1/21/14  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 2/05/14      DATE OF 45TH DAY: 2/05/14  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 13001151

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N    DATA PROBLEM: N    LANDSCAPE: N    LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N    PDIL: N    PERIOD: N    PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: N    SAMPLE: N    SLR DRAFT: N    NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT     RETURN     REJECT    2.5.14 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Entered in  
The National Register  
of  
Historic Places

RECOM./CRITERIA \_\_\_\_\_

REVIEWER \_\_\_\_\_ DISCIPLINE \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.



## New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Division for Historic Preservation  
P.O. Box 189, Waterford, New York 12188-0189  
518-237-8643



**Andrew M. Cuomo**  
Governor

**Rose Harvey**  
Commissioner

13 December 2013

Alexis Abernathy  
National Park Service  
National Register of Historic Places  
1201 Eye St. NW, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Washington, D.C. 20005

Re: National Register Nominations

Dear Ms. Abernathy:

I am pleased to enclose six National Register nominations, all on discs, to be considered for listing by the Keeper of the National Register:

Rockaway Courthouse, Queens County  
New York Bible Society, New York County  
North Presbyterian Church, New York County  
Temple of Israel Synagogue, Queens County  
St. Anselm's Roman Catholic Church and School, Bronx County  
Bellevue Country Club, Syracuse, Onondaga County

Please feel free to call me at 518.237.8643 x 3261 if you have any questions.

Sincerely:

Kathleen LaFrank  
National Register Coordinator  
New York State Historic Preservation Office



**Landmarks Preservation  
Commission**

**Robert B. Tierney**  
Chair

October 23, 2012

**Kate Daly**  
Executive Director  
kdaly@lpc.nyc.gov

Ms. Ruth Pierpont, Deputy Commissioner  
New York State Office of Parks, Recreation  
and Historic Preservation  
P.O. Box 189  
Peebles Island  
Waterford, NY 12188-0189

1 Centre Street  
9<sup>th</sup> Floor North  
New York, NY 10007

212 669 7926 tel  
212 669 7797 fax

Re: St. Anselm's Roman Catholic Church & School, The Bronx, New York

Dear Ms. Pierpont:

I write on behalf of Chair Robert B. Tierney in response to your request for comment on the eligibility of St. Anselm's Roman Catholic Church & School, located at 683 Tinton Avenue in the Bronx, for the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

The New York Landmarks Preservation Commission's Director of Research Mary Beth Betts has reviewed the materials submitted by the Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau and has determined that St. Anselm's Roman Catholic Church & School appears to meet the criteria for inclusion on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Kate Daly

cc: Robert B. Tierney, Chair  
Mary Beth Betts, Director of Research

