

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

56-994

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 National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any 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.



1. Name of Property

Historic name: Reformed Church of Melrose

Other names/site number: Greater Eternal Baptist Church; Melrose Reformed Church

Name of related multiple property listing:

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

N/A

2. Location

Street & number: 746 Elton Avenue

City or town: Bronx State: NY County: Bronx

Not For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X 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 set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

 national statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A B X C D

<p><u>Michael P. Lynch Deputy SHPO</u></p> <p>Signature of certifying official/Title:</p> <p><u>NYS OPR&P</u></p> <p>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>	<p><u>3/24/17</u></p> <p>Date</p>
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<p>In my opinion, the property <u> </u> meets <u> </u> does not meet the National Register criteria.</p>	
<p>Signature of commenting official:</p>	<p>Date</p>
<p>Title :</p>	<p>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>

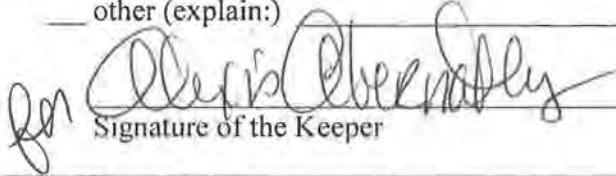
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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☒ entered in the National Register
☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register
☐ removed from the National Register
☐ other (explain:)


Signature of the Keeper

2/15/17
Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private:

☒

Public – Local

☐

Public – State

☐

Public – Federal

☐

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Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

Building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
District	<input type="checkbox"/>
Site	<input type="checkbox"/>
Structure	<input type="checkbox"/>
Object	<input type="checkbox"/>

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u> </u>	buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION/religious facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION/religious facility

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS / Gothic Revival

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Brick (Base and Façades);
Wood (Tower)

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Reformed Church of Melrose, located at 746 Elton Avenue, is situated at the northeast corner of Elton Avenue and 156th Street in the Bronx, one of New York's five boroughs, and the only part of New York City on the mainland of the United States. The church is located in the southwestern Bronx, about one and a half miles north of Randal's Island, and one mile east of the Harlem River. The surrounding neighborhood consists of mostly mid-scale residential buildings; much of it has been redeveloped in recent decades. Only a handful of nineteenth-century buildings remain in the area; a mix of wood-frame houses, small churches, and largely vacant industrial buildings. The neighborhood is also currently characterized by a number of low- and mid-rise contemporary apartment buildings constructed as part of the Melrose Commons redevelopment plan. The building is freestanding and set back from its lot line in all directions. A tall, non-historic chain-link fence runs along the border of the lot, and the building is separated from its northern neighbor by a wide driveway, accessible from Elton Avenue. This open space wraps around to a rear church yard at the east, where there is mechanical equipment and a

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concrete patio. At the south, 156th street slopes downward to the east towards Third Avenue. A concrete and CMU retaining wall separates the foundation and rear church yard from 156th street below.

Narrative Description

The Reformed Church of Melrose is a two-story, front-gabled brick church on a stone foundation; the first story is shorter in height than the second story (Figure 1). Its primary façade faces west onto Elton Avenue. The building is rectangular in plan with a projecting apse at the rear (east) façade and features a gable roof with a square tower over the west façade. The building is characterized by its simple massing, gable roof, wooden tower, and German Gothic Revival ornament. Overall, this building retains a high degree of integrity. The building has undergone very few exterior modifications over time, maintaining its original massing and many of its original features. At the interior, the building maintains some of its original layout; but many of its finishes and furnishings have been modified.

Exterior

Façade: The western, primary façade of the building features red brick laid in running bond. Brick at this elevation is of higher quality than the brick at the north and east elevations. At the base of the façade, the stone foundation has been painted red to match the brick (Figure 2). The façade features simple brick corner pilasters and is separated into three bays by additional projecting brick pilasters.

The primary entrance is located in the central bay at the ground floor. The entry consists of a raised three-step stoop and a non-historic roll-up metal door. Behind the metal door, non-historic wood doors provide access to the church. A red, wood and metal pediment projects over the entrance. The pediment is unornamented save for a small, projecting pressed-metal crocket at the gable point. Above the pediment, two limestone panels are inset into the brick façade. The panel at the left reads “Reformierte Kirche” (translated: Reformed Church) and the right panel reads “Erbaut 1879” (translated: Built 1879). Just above the stone panels the façade features ornate decorative brickwork, including four pairs of small arches, and corbelling. This section is topped with a stone belt course, painted red. The top of the central bay is dominated by a large, round window with a brick surround and wood trim. The brick surround is interrupted by four stone projections, at the top, bottom, right-most, and left-most points of the circle. The central window does not contain any stained glass.

The northernmost and southernmost bays are mirror images of each other. Each features a fixed, stained-glass window at the ground floor (Figure 3). Each window is capped with a segmental arch and features a stone sill (now painted red), and a hood molding (now painted white). At the right bay a non-

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historic plaque and letter board have been added. The plaque reads "Greater Eternal Baptist Church, Inc.; Rev. Henry Bolden, Pastor; Organized March 17, 1970; Dedicated Oct. 28, 1989." Above, corbelled brickwork and white metal flashing separate the first and second stories. At the second story, the right and left bays feature tall, pointed-arch, stained-glass windows with wood frames, wood trim, two lancet lights each, stone sills, and hood molds supported by brick corbels.

Wood Tower and Asphalt-Shingled Roof: Above the façade, a large wood and metal tower rises up over the roof of the church (Figure 4). Moving vertically, the tower has three sections: a large square base, tall middle section, and a spire. The square base features angled corner pilasters. Panels at the square base consist of blind arcades of pointed arches, created with wood trim. This section is capped by a modest cornice. Above, the tall middle section is characterized by ornamental trim, corner pilasters, four large pointed arches that mimic the shape of the windows, and a small, blind, pointed-arch arcade at the top. This section of the tower is capped by a cornice. Finally, an octagonal wood spire rises from the central section. The spire features wood slats and is crowned with a crocket. Aside from the tower, the roof is covered in asphalt shingles. The tower is also said to contain its original bell.

South Elevation: As on the façade, the south elevation of the building features higher quality face brick. This elevation has four equal bays separated by projecting brick pilasters. The first and second floors are divided by brick corbelling and red metal flashing. At the first floor, each bay features a window opening with a segmental-arch top, red stone sills, and unpainted brick hood molding (Figure 5). These windows have been replaced by non-historic vinyl sash windows with screens and rectangular tops. Additionally, each of these windows has been covered with a metal grate. Above, at the second floor, each includes a tall, pointed window with brick molding and brick corbels. Three of the four windows feature paired lancet lights with stained glass. In the second window from the east, the lancets have been replaced with a single, large, stained-glass window. Like the other elevations, the south façade terminates in ornamental brick corbelling and a metal cornice. Additions to this façade include the metal window grates and mechanical equipment mounted between the third and fourth bays (from the east.)

North Elevation: The north elevation of the building is similar to the south; however, the brick on this elevation is of lower quality than on the two primary elevations and is laid in 1:5 bond (Figure 6). Similar to the primary elevation and south elevation, the first and second floors are separated by decorative brick corbelling and white sheet-metal flashing. At the first floor, each bay includes a sealed segmental-arch window opening with a red-painted stone sill, save for the third bay from the west, which has a door opening. All four openings at the first floor feature brick hood moldings with corbels that have been painted white. The three window openings have been infilled with an unknown material painted red. At the second floor, each bay features a tall, pointed window with two stained-glass lancet

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lights. These windows have brick hood moldings, and the three easterly windows are partially covered by metal grates. Three of the four bays show signs of brick damage where features have been added and removed from the façade to the right of the windows. The façade terminates in arched brick corbelling and a sheet metal cornice. Additionally, a brick chimney has been added to the building at the brick pilasters between the first and second bays (moving from the west), and rain gutters have been added between at the brick chimney and at the center of the façade.

West Elevation: The west elevation, at the back of the church, has minimal fenestration and a projecting apse (Figure 7). Like the primary elevation, the west has two levels and is split into three bays separated by brick pilasters. A three-sided apse projects from the central bay. The apse has windows at the ground floor on each of its three walls. All three windows have been filled in with a combination of wood, brick infill, and steel reinforcement. The apse stretches halfway-up the second floor façade before terminating in an asphalt shingle hipped roof. The apse features a simple cornice and recessed, rectangular, brick panels at each of its three sides. Above the apse, the central bay also includes a small round window, filled with blue, semi-transparent glass. Like the east façade, this side of the building is capped with brick corbelling and a metal cornice at the gable roof. The right and left bays include no fenestration.

Non-historic mechanical equipment and a few storage sheds have been placed or constructed in the rear church yard, where there is a large concrete patio. A wood shed roof structure was built onto the southern half of the west elevations. Mechanical units have been constructed on the northeast corner of the building.

Interior

The interior of the church is divided into two floors and an upper gallery; (1) a ground floor, directly accessible through the primary entrance, (2) the primary floor above, and (3) a gallery built into the primary floor sanctuary space. The ground floor of the building houses a lobby and stair hall, meeting hall, storage space, and a kitchen. It has been altered over the years and contains many non-historic elements. However, it still retains its original cast-iron columns, including ornate column capitals. The primary floor serves as the main worship space for the church and features a high, vaulted ceiling. Finally, the small gallery at the western end of the building has also been altered and currently contains a pastor's office and extra seating.

The building's primary entrance is located at the west façade behind a metal roll-up door. Behind the roll-up door, wood non-historic double doors provide access to a small, carpeted lobby. To the north and south, wide, L-shaped stairs lead up to the main floor. The stairs are likely additions, as they cover up the original stained glass windows at the ground floor of the façade (Figure 8).

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Sanctuary: The second floor of the church serves as its primary worship space and can be characterized by its high, vaulted ceiling (Figure 9). In the sanctuary, the apse paintings, wall paneling, carpet, and pews were likely added when the Baptist congregation moved into the church. A few features are likely original or early additions, including the stained-glass windows, pressed-metal moldings and ceilings, altar rails, and chandelier (Figure 10 – 12). The floors of the lobby, stairs, primary floor, and gallery are all covered in non-historic burgundy carpet. Modern pews have also been added to this space, forming seven rows and a central aisle. The walls of the main space feature decorative paneling near the ground, pressed-metal trim, plaster walls, and applied wood trim in decorative patterns. The interior also features pressed-metal trim and corbels where the walls meet the ceiling. The ceiling, which has a central raised section marked by solid, angled brackets, is covered with pressed-metal panels in good condition. Additionally, an elaborate bronze or brass chandelier is suspended from the center of the ceiling.

The eastern end of the sanctuary features a raised platform and painted apse. The floor steps up once to a raised altar at the east end of the room and then three more times into the apse. Wood rails are present at the first step. The interior of the apse features a painting of John the Baptist baptizing Jesus. Text above the apse reads “One Lord,” “One Faith,” “One Baptism.” At the top of this wall, a circular window with stained glass has been covered with a translucent blue material

The north, south, and west walls of this space feature large, lancet-arched windows with stained glass. Nine of the ten stained-glass windows have two lancet lights, separated by wood trim (Figure 13). These windows, which appear to date from the nineteenth century and are probably original, are characterized by geometric patterns and pastel colors. The windows display many signs of repair of varying quality (Figure 14). All of the windows retain their wood trim, most of which is in very poor condition. A number of glass pieces, especially at the west side of the building, are missing or have been replaced with cardboard or paper. At the south wall, the wood mullions have been removed from one window (the second from the east). The stained glass in this window has been largely replaced by a stained-glass depiction of Christ as a shepherd (Figure 15).

Gallery: A small gallery has been built into the west end of the church. Its detailing, which features a similar style of wood trim and decoration, suggests that it was an early addition to the church. The gallery is supported on square wood posts, wood beams, and large carved brackets. The underside of the gallery is paneled with thin wood strips. A narrow wood staircase leads from the sanctuary up into the gallery, covering the northern window at the primary façade. An office has been built into half of the gallery wall. The other half remains open to the second floor. Its edge is defined by a low, curving wall. Like the second floor, the gallery is carpeted and has non-historic pews. The wall at the gable end of the

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gallery features a large circular window without stained glass. Instead, this opening has translucent glass that has been painted and black replacement mullions.

Ground Floor: Continuing east through lobby, the ground floor also features a large meeting room (Figure 16). The ground floor has been modified many times. Currently, it comprises restrooms and storage closets at the north, and a kitchen at the south-west corner. Two rows of cast-iron columns run east-to-west, supporting massive timber beams above. The cast-iron columns feature simple decorative capitals, currently painted gold (Figure 17)

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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 is 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 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 the 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 old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Architecture

Ethnic History: European/German

Social History

Period of Significance

1879 – ca. 1945

Significant Dates

1879

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

German-American

Architect/Builder

Henry Piering

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Reformed Church of Melrose, built in 1879 in a German-inspired Gothic Revival style, is significant under Criterion A for its association with the development of New York's German immigrant community in the Bronx. The area directly surrounding the church, known as the community of Melrose, was developed primarily by German immigrants. Similar to the development of "Kleindeutschland" in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, the development of this area of Bronx can be attributed to the expansion of rail networks and the influx of working-class European immigrants. The area's first residents sought more space, cleaner living conditions, and a feasible commute to Manhattan. The residents, primarily of German descent, were the first to develop the community into a dense and urban environment, and the Reformed Church of Melrose typifies the buildings constructed by the new population. The construction of this vernacular, German-American church is characteristic of the first major institutional developments in this part of the Bronx. Today, there are very few surviving examples of this early development, including only a handful of churches and nineteenth-century houses and commercial buildings.

The Reformed Church of Melrose is also significant under Criterion C in the area of architecture as a fine example of mid-nineteenth century German revivalist, Rundbogenstil architecture in the Bronx. It contains details commonly found in the work of German-American architects such as its corbelling and elaborate brick detailing. Additionally, this building has only been modified in minor ways. The church was built by a local German architect and builder Henry Piering for a largely German and Dutch community. The Reformed Church of Melrose is important as it typifies these patterns of early institutional development within the context of the mid-nineteenth century Bronx. The church served a working-class neighborhood and was originally one of many Protestant churches in this dense German community. This building is significant in that it maintains a high degree of integrity and is one of the last remaining examples of Melrose's nineteenth-century architecture.

The period of significance, 1879- ca. 1945, extends from the construction of the Reformed Church of Melrose through ca. 1945 when the former strongly German neighborhood of Melrose's transition into a predominantly Latino and African-American neighborhood was underway and its congregation had begun to diminish.

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Local & Building History

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Throughout the late nineteenth century, the area of the Bronx surrounding the Reformed Church of Melrose was known Morrisania and was part of Westchester County. The area drew its name from the wealthy Lewis Morris, who had been granted land from the King of England in the late seventeenth century.¹ Morris and his family managed an estate on these lands through the mid-nineteenth century, and the area was primarily used for agricultural purposes.²

The area's urban development can be attributed to the expansion of rail networks and the influx of working-class European immigrants. A few mills were built along the Harlem River in the early nineteenth century, but all of these closed after the economic devastation of the War of 1812.³ In 1830, railroad companies made plans to connect Manhattan to the mainland, connecting the port of New York to the newly opened Erie Canal via the Hudson River.⁴ In the late 1830s, the New York and Harlem Rail Line was constructed, building north from the city with plans to span the Harlem River into Westchester County. By 1841, the railroad was built as far north as Williamsbridge, passing through Morrisania.⁵ These early rail lines, originally Conrail's Harlem Division and Port Morris Branch, enabled the initial settlement of the area, known as Melrose. In the 1840s, this area was vacant land owned by cousins in the Morris family. In the 1850s, two investors, Robert H. Elton and Samuel Denman, purchased land from the Morris family. Working in conjunction with William H. Morris, they laid the existing street grid and subdivided and sold more than 1,000, 50 x 100-foot lots.⁶ Lots were often sold to families who lived in lower Manhattan.⁷

This served as the foundation for the village of Melrose, an area that attracted working-class New Yorkers, both native-born and immigrants. The new residents were primarily of German origin. In her history of Melrose, Bronx historian Evelyn Gonzalez writes, "Melrose residents came from the ranks of native-born and immigrant New Yorkers seeking a healthy country life within commuting distance who could not afford costlier houses or preferred the company of fellow workers and compatriots."⁸ Buyers were attracted by the new rail connection to the city and seized an opportunity to escape the crowded tenements of lower Manhattan, the entry point of thousands of European immigrants.

¹ John McNamarra, *The Bronx in History* (Bronx Press Review, August 1971).

² Lloyd Ultan. *The Northern Borough. A History of the Bronx* (Bronx County Historical Society: Bronx, NY, 2009).

³ Ultan, *The Northern Borough*, 116.

⁴ James L. Wells, *The Bronx and its People. A History; 1609 – 1927 vol. 2* (New York: The Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1927).

⁵ Stephen Jenkins, *Story of the Bronx, From the Purchase Made by the Dutch from the Indians in 1639 to the Present Day* (New York, London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1912), 229.

⁶ Evelyn Diaz Gonzalez, *The Bronx*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 26.

⁷ McNamarra, *The Bronx in History* (Bronx Press Review, August 1971).

⁸ Gonzalez, *The Bronx*, 28.

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Beginning in the 1820s, Germans flocked to the United States in increasing numbers, fleeing political and economic uncertainty. Civil unrest, related to attempts to unify the German states, political hardships, and rising unemployment prompted millions of citizens of the Prussian states to immigrate to America. Between 1830 and 1860, many Germans emigrated from the region along the Rhine River, mobilized by dropping toll fees along the river and the introduction of the steamboat, making large scale travel to the coast possible. Between 1845 and 1879, more than two and a half million Germans immigrated to the United States. New York's Germans were disproportionately young artisans and tradespeople.⁹ People from these first two waves of immigration were among the first residents of Melrose. These residents developed a dense collection of trade shops and residences during the nineteenth century. Among the early purchases of the Melrose lots were German craftsmen such as woodworkers and piano makers. The area attracted increased numbers of trade workers, who often formed building associations and built factories and residences on the newly subdivided, yet unbuilt lots.¹⁰

Amidst this rapid urban development, the Melrose Reformed Church was founded in 1854.¹¹ The congregation built a frame building at Washington Avenue and East 156th Street in 1856. In the mid-1870s, the congregation hired Henry Piering to design a new church at 156th Street and Elton Avenue with German inscriptions above its doors. There are very few records from this congregation's history, especially its early history, so the congregation's specific motivation for building a new brick building are unknown. However, the widespread development of contemporary Melrose institutions with Teutonic heritage suggests that a growing population demanded services such as fire companies, singing societies, saloons, parochial schools, and churches.¹² Between 1852 and 1871, seven new churches were founded in the Melrose region, including the Reformed Church at 156th Street and Elton Avenue. The increase in density likely prompted the congregation to build a more substantial brick building to replace a wood-framed structure, and a growing congregation might have provided the funds to do so.

Henry Piering, the building's architect and builder, was a local Bronx resident, originally from Saxony. In 1880, Piering was living at 145th Street in the Bronx, and he listed his occupation as a carpenter.¹³ Although Piering constructed a number of buildings in this area of the Bronx, the Melrose Reformed Church seems to have been one of his grander buildings and may be the only extant building designed by him. His other work consisted primarily of tenements and stables in the Bronx and Manhattan.

⁹ Stanley Nadel, *Little Germany; Ethnicity, Religion, and Class in New York City, 1845-80* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990).

¹⁰ Gonzalez, *The Bronx*, 28.

¹¹ Gonzalez, *The Bronx*, 28.

¹² Gonzalez, *The Bronx*, 28.

¹³ 1880 Census.

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In 1874, just before the construction of the new Melrose Reformed Church, Morrisania, as well as the nearby regions of West Farms and Kingsbridge, were annexed by New York City. These additions were known as the 23rd and 24th wards, encompassing what is presently the entire western Bronx. The southern section of the newly-annexed sections continued to grow as German and Dutch immigrants moved to the area. In the 1880s, Courtlandt Avenue, two blocks east of church, was known as “Dutch Broadway” for its concentration of Dutch businesses and prominent Dutch population.¹⁴ Although church directories list the Melrose Reformed Church as German in origin and the inscriptions on the church are written in German, atlases of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century list the building as a “Dutch Reformed Church,” suggesting that the surrounding population and likely the congregation of this church included people of German and Dutch origin.

The Melrose Reformed Church remained a small and strongly German congregation through at least the 1890s. Its 1891 report to the Synod reflects a congregation facing hardships and which, despite the pleadings of its reverend, refused to donate to larger missions: “All would but point to our own needs and great expenses, and reply, ‘Charity *first* at home.’” During the previous year, the congregation had begun holding English services once a month for the first time.¹⁵

Gothic Revival and Rundbogenstil

Stylistically, the building is an example of vernacular architecture drawing on elements of German design. The building is characterized by its corbelled brickwork, stocky massing, and pointed arch windows with lancet lights. It draws upon contemporary German revival styles, often brought to the United States by way of pattern books or emigrating German architects, builders, and carpenters.

Although the building’s pointed windows with lancet lights draw from the widespread Gothic Revival style, its corbelled brickwork also aligns with contemporary Rundbogenstil buildings.¹⁶ Rundbogenstil developed in Germany in the early nineteenth century as romantic revival of Romanesque forms; using an overall German aesthetic, the style blended Italianate forms and arches with Early Christian, Byzantine, Romanesque, and Italian Gothic details. In Germany, the style was typified by the prevalence of a round arch, a combination of Romanesque elements, geometric massing, simple walls with clearly cut openings, and expression in brick. Because of its often straightforward massing and use

¹⁴ McNamarra, *The Bronx in History* (Bronx Press Review, August 1971).

¹⁵ Reformed Church of America, *Minutes of the Particular Synod of New York, Convened at Tarrytown, N.Y., May 5th, 1891* (New York: Reformed Church in America, 1891), 43.

¹⁶ Kathleen Curran, “German Rundbogenstil and American Round-Arched Style,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* Vol. 47, No. 4. (1988): 351-73.

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of common materials, the style was used in a wide variety of architectural styles, including religious and commercial buildings.¹⁷

By the 1840s, members of the German architectural community had become advocates for the value and utility of Rundbogenstil; they argued that its stylistic synthesis and economic use of local materials especially suited it for the German climate and culture.¹⁸ The use of the Rundbogenstil design elements in New York City increased during the mid-nineteenth century along with German immigration; it was most popular between 1845 and 1865. Rundbogenstil was used on American buildings, primarily as an exterior style, by German immigrants themselves as well as by English architects who had studied the phenomenon in Europe. American architects such as Richard Upjohn and Thomas Alexander Tefft constructed well-known (and well-published) designs within the Rundbogenstil style.

Prominent New York buildings which draw from the Rundbogenstil include Charles Blesch and Leopold Eidlitz's St. George's Episcopal Church on East 16th Street, built 1846 - 1848, a few decades before the construction of the Melrose Church. Although a much grander example, the architectural detailing of St. George's includes prominent corbelling at the eaves.¹⁹ The exterior of St. George's is often attributed to Blesch, a Bavarian architect. Similar to the Melrose Reformed Church, St. George's also combined the Rundbogenstil with some Gothic features, namely pointed spires, which have since been removed. Another example of the Rundbogenstil style in New York can be found at the South Congregation Church at 360 Court Street in Brooklyn, which also features round brick corbels at its primary façade. The building's original, extant façade was dedicated in 1857, and the property was listed on the National Register in 1982.²⁰

The Melrose Reformed Church features elements such as large flat surfaces with clearly cut window openings, as well as its characteristic brick corbelling at the eaves and at the primary façade. While its simple massing was likely dictated by economic constraints, the church's simple form also aligns with the ideals of the Rundbogenstil. The church at Elton Avenue also aligns with the published works of Thomas Alexander Tefft, a Rhode Island architect who often worked in brick.²¹ Some of his earlier rural church designs are similar to the church on Elton Avenue, sharing their massing, simplicity in design, and mix of Gothic and Rundbogenstil elements. The Melrose Reformed Church's simple interior

¹⁷ William H. Pierson Jr., "Richard Upjohn and the American Rundbogenstil," *Winterthur Portfolio* Vol. 21, No. 4 (Winter, 1986), 229.

¹⁸ Curran, "German Rundbogenstil," 354-56.

¹⁹ Curran, "German Rundbogenstil and American Round-Arched Style," 351-73.

²⁰ "South Congregational Church Complex," *Carroll Gardens Brooklyn History*, Accessed July 16, 2016 at <http://carrollgardenshistory.blogspot.com/2008/04/south-congregational-church-complex.html>.

²¹ "Thomas Alexander Tefft: American Architecture in Transition 1845 - 1860," Catalog for an exhibition by the department of Art (Brown University: 1988).

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likely reflects the congregation's means, as well as the style's general application largely to exterior designs except in the grandest of cases.

Ultimately, the Melrose Reformed Church is a vernacular example of popular contemporary styles: Gothic Revival and Rundbogenstil. Often, simple church plans were reproduced in books that could be used as guides to efficiently build new churches for the burgeoning population. While it is unknown where Henry Piering was trained or how he developed the plans for the Melrose Reformed Church, the building maintains a high level of integrity and is a fine example of German institutional buildings of this time period.

Later History

After WWII, Melrose remained a dense working class neighborhood; however, its population shifted from people of predominantly European descent to an almost entirely Latino and African-American community. Severe poverty swept through the Bronx in the 1960s and 1970s; however, the church remained open through at least 1977.²² In the surrounding area, much of the building stock was abandoned and demolished as the local population density declined. In the late 1970s, the Reformed Church congregation was disbanded.

In 1979, Reverend Henry Bolden organized the Greater Eternal Baptist Church. This congregation has since occupied and maintained the building, making few changes to the exterior and main sanctuary. In the 1980s, the community and city mobilized to pass the Melrose Community Reform plan, an urban plan with the goal of revitalizing the neighborhood. As a product of this plan, most of the surrounding neighborhood has been cleared and rebuilt with contemporary, low and mid-scale affordable apartment buildings. The plan also identified the church as a worthwhile community resource, and it was spared, now sharing the block with a collection of low-rise apartment buildings. The building, now known as Greater Eternal Baptist Church, is one of the only few significant, intact structures surviving from the early period of development in the Melrose section of the Bronx.

²² Reformed Church in America, Commission on History, *Historical Directory of the Reformed Church in America* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1978).

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9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

Curran, Kathleen. "German Rundbogenstil and American Round-Arched Style." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*. Vol. 47, No. 4. December 1988, 351-73.

Fischler, Stan. *The Subway Trip Through Time on New York's Rapid Transit*. Flushing, NY: H&M Productions. Pgs. 245-249.

Jenkins, Stephen. *Story of the Bronx, From the Purchase Made by the Dutch from the Indians in 1639 to the Present Day*. New York, London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1912.

McNamarra, John. *The Bronx in History*, Bronx Press Review, August 1971.

Nadel, Stanley. *Little Germany, Ethnicity, Religion, and Class in New York City, 1845-80*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990.

Pierson, William H. Jr., "Richard Upjohn and the American Rundbogenstil." *Winterthur Portfolio*. Vol. 21, No. 4 Winter, 1986, 223-242.

Reformed Church in America, Commission on History, *Historical Directory of the Reformed Church in America*, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1978.

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"South Congregational Church Complex," *Carroll Gardens Brooklyn History*. Accessed July 16, 2016 at <http://carrollgardenshistory.blogspot.com/2008/04/south-congregational-church-complex.html>.

"Thomas Alexander Tefft: American Architecture in Transition 1845 – 1860." Catalog for an exhibition by the department of Art, Brown University, 1988.

Ultan, Lloyd. *The Northern Borough: A History of the Bronx*. Bronx, N.Y: Bronx County Historical Society, 2009.

Wells, James L. *The Bronx and its People; A History; 1609 – 1927 vol. 2*. New York: The Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1927.

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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 Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other
- Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property .14 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☒ NAD 1983

1. Zone: 18	Easting: 591613	Northing: 4519393
2. Zone:	Easting:	Northing:
3. Zone:	Easting:	Northing:
4. Zone:	Easting :	Northing:

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary is indicated by a heavy line on the enclosed map with scale.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

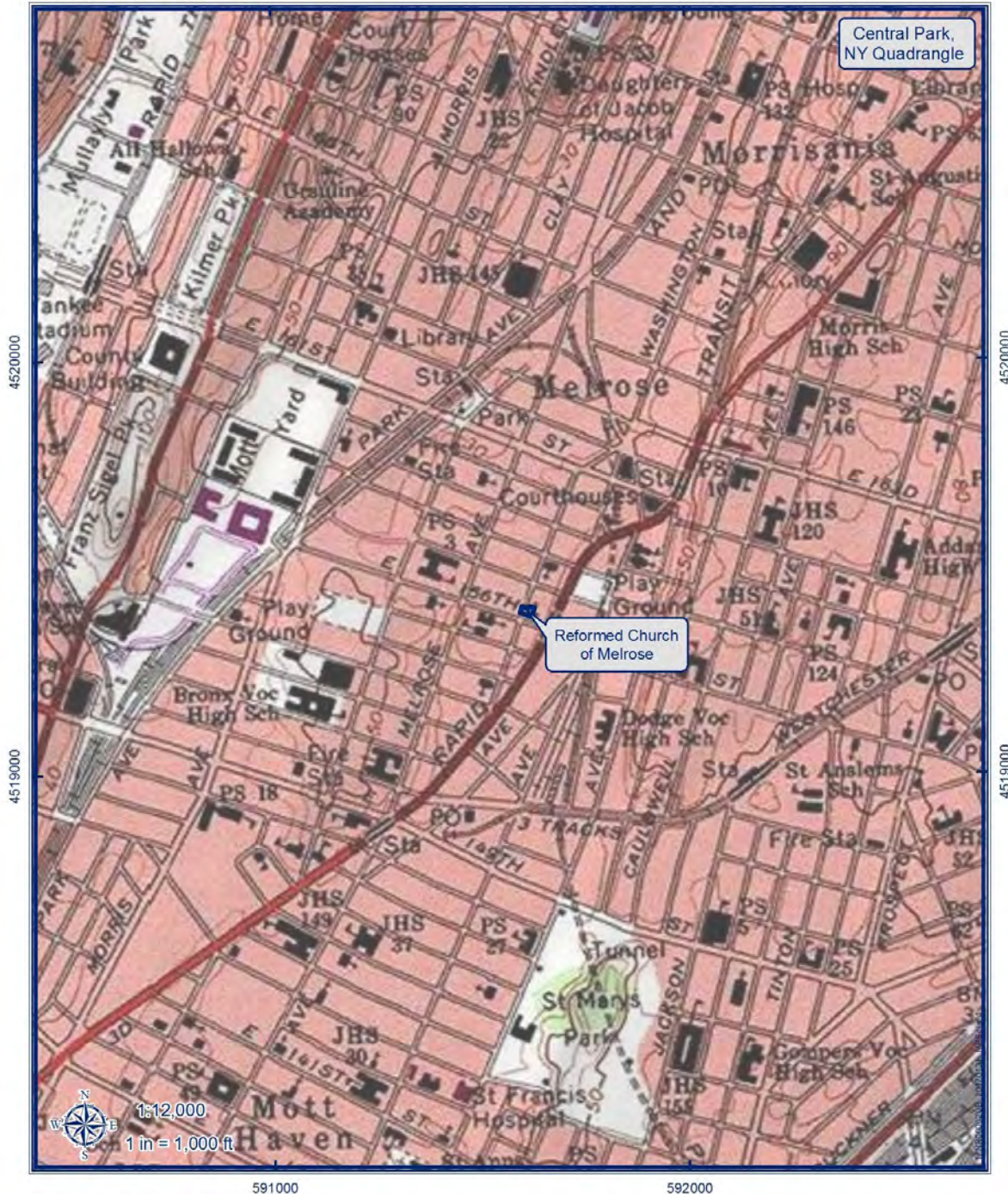
The boundaries reflect the lot historically associated with the Reformed Church of Melrose.

Reformed Church of Melrose
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Reformed Church of Melrose
Bronx, Bronx Co., NY

746 Elton Avenue
Bronx, NY 10451



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

0 380 760 1,520 Feet

Church

NEW YORK
Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation

Reformed Church of Melrose
Name of Property

Bronx Co., NY
County and State

Reformed Church of Melrose
Bronx, Bronx Co., NY

746 Elton Avenue
Bronx, NY 10451



Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation

Reformed Church of Melrose
Name of Property

Bronx Co., NY
County and State

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Allison Semrad
organization: Columbia University GSAPP Historic Preservation Student
street & number: GSAPP: 1172 Amsterdam Ave.
city or town: New York state: NY zip code: 10027
e-mail: allison.semrad@gmail.com
telephone: (608)-347-9579
date: 1/04/2017

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)
Block map

Reformed Church of Melrose

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Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: 746 Elton Avenue

City or Vicinity: Bronx

County: Bronx

State: NY

Photographer: Allison Semrad

Date Photographed: January 26, 2016 and April 28, 2016

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

New York_Bronx Co_Reformed Church of Melrose_0001

Primary, west façade and south façade. Photo taken from the southwest corner of Elton Avenue and 156th street, looking northeast and down 156th Street. (April 28, 2016).

New York_Bronx Co_Reformed Church of Melrose_0002

Primary (west) façade from Elton Avenue, looking southwest. (January 26, 2016).

New York_Bronx Co_Reformed Church of Melrose_0003

Primary (west) façade, looking west. (January 26, 2016).

New York_Bronx Co_Reformed Church of Melrose_0004

Wood tower. Photo taken from 156th Street, looking northeast. (January 26, 2016).

New York_Bronx Co_Reformed Church of Melrose_0005

South façade. Looking north from 156th street. (January 26, 2016).

New York_Bronx Co_Reformed Church of Melrose_0006

North façade. Looking southeast from Elton Avenue. (January 26, 2016).

New York_Bronx Co_Reformed Church of Melrose_0007

East façade. Looking southwest from the northeast corner of the subject property. Note the modern mechanical equipment and church yard. (April 28, 2016).

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New York_Bronx Co_Reformed Church of Melrose_0008

Looking down the primary access stairs from the main sanctuary space. Note how the stairs cover the stained glass windows. These windows can be seen from the outside at the first floor of the primary façade. (April 28, 2016).

New York_Bronx Co_Reformed Church of Melrose_0009

Sanctuary. Looking west, standing under the gallery. (April 28, 2016).

New York_Bronx Co_Reformed Church of Melrose_0010

Altar rail at the west end sanctuary space; one of few early or original features left at the interior of the building. (April 28, 2016).

New York_Bronx Co_Reformed Church of Melrose_0011

Pressed metal corbels at the ceiling of the sanctuary. (April 28, 2016).

New York_Bronx Co_Reformed Church of Melrose_0012

Chandelier hanging from the ceiling of the sanctuary space. The lightbulbs are currently all modern CFL bulbs. (April 28, 2016).

New York_Bronx Co_Reformed Church of Melrose_0013

Typical stained glass windows at the interior. (April 28, 2016).

New York_Bronx Co_Reformed Church of Melrose_0014

Modified stained glass window, featuring an image of Christ as a shepherd. (April 28, 2016).

New York_Bronx Co_Reformed Church of Melrose_0015

Meeting space at the first floor of the church, looking west. Note the original cast iron columns and large, painted timber beams. Storage closets have been built into the north side of this space. (April 28, 2016).

New York_Bronx Co_Reformed Church of Melrose_0016

Detail of cast iron column capital in the first-floor meeting space. (April 28, 2016).

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.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.





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EXIT





















**Landmarks Preservation
Commission**

Meenakshi Srinivasan
Chair

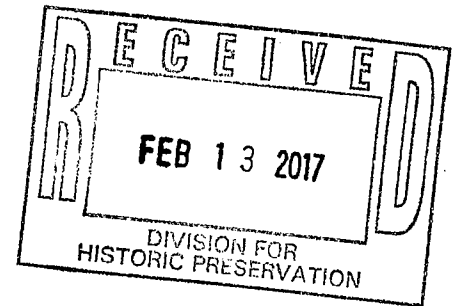
Sarah Carroll
Executive Director
SCarroll@lpc.nyc.gov

1 Centre Street
9th Floor North
New York, NY 10007

212 669 7902 tel
212 669 7797 fax

February 9, 2017

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



Re: Reformed Church of Melrose, 746 Elton Avenue, Bronx

Dear Deputy Commissioner Pierpont:

I am writing on behalf of Chair Meenakshi Srinivasan in response to your request for comment on the eligibility of Reformed Church of Melrose, located at 746 Elton Avenue in the Bronx, for the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

The New York Landmarks Preservation Commission's Director of Research Kate Lemos McHale has reviewed the materials submitted by the Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau and has determined that Reformed Church of Melrose appears to meet the criteria for inclusion on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Sarah Carroll

cc: Meenakshi Srinivasan, Chair
Kate Lemos McHale, Director of Research



**Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation**

ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

ROSE HARVEY
Commissioner



24 March 2017

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

Re: National Register Nomination

Dear Ms. Abernathy:

I am pleased to submit the following MPDF and seven nominations, all on disc, to be considered for listing by the Keeper of the National Register:

Southold Town Milestones, Suffolk County
Southold Milestone 7 (Southold Town Milestones), Suffolk County
Winans-Hunting House, Dutchess County
Reformed Church of Melrose, Bronx County
PS 186, New York County
Henry's Garage, Essex County
Nelson Methodist Church, Madison County
John S. Tilley Ladders Company, Albany County

This is the last batch until your move is completed. Please feel free to call me at 518.268.2165 if you have any questions.

Sincerely:

Kathleen LaFrank
National Register Coordinator
New York State Historic Preservation Office