

REQUEST FOR EVALUATION (RFE) - INDIVIDUAL, INTERIOR, SCENIC

INSTRUCTIONS:

The Landmarks Preservation Commission is responsible for identifying and designating the special buildings and sites that represent the architectural, historical and cultural heritage of New York City. The Commission's Research Department accepts suggestions from the public regarding potential historic resources throughout the five boroughs. If a property appears to rise to the level of significance necessary to be considered for Landmark designation, the agency may conduct additional research, and may recommend it for consideration by the Commission.

Please complete all 5 sections of this form. Fields marked with an asterisk (*) are required. An incomplete submission may slow down review of your request. You may mail this form to the address above or send it by email to RFE@lpc.nyc.gov.

Requests will only be considered if a property is 30 years or older and if it is not already designated as a New York City Landmark. Please be advised that if a property is located within the boundaries of a Historic District or Scenic Landmark, the exterior of the property is already protected under the full extent of the law. LPC does not regulate the use or occupancy of Landmark buildings and sites.

1. SUBMISSION CHECKLIST

To request the evaluation of a property's Landmark eligibility, you must include ALL of the following materials:

- Completed Request for Evaluation Application Form (5 sections)
- Statement of Significance (on Page 2 of application form)
- Current photographs of the site. Photographs should comprehensively reflect current conditions.

2. PROPOSED LANDMARK TYPE (Please select ONE of the following)

- Individual:** The exteriors of individual structures, ranging from farmhouses to skyscrapers. (e.g., Woolworth Building; Pieter Wyckoff House; Cyclone Roller Coaster)
- Interior:** Building interiors that are customarily open or accessible to the public, and meet the criteria for individual landmarks (e.g. Empire State Building lobby; Grand Central Terminal concourse and waiting room). The site cannot be a private residence or religious property
- Scenic:** City-owned parks or other landscape features (e.g., Prospect Park; Central Park; Ocean Parkway)

3. REQUESTOR INFORMATION

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E-MAIL ADDRESS gregoryd@gdpreservationconsulting.com	AFFILIATION/REPRESENTING* Morningside Heights Historic District Committee	
ADDRESS* 615 West 113th Street	APT./STE./FLR.* 3	
CITY, STATE* New York, NY	ZIP CODE* 10025	DATE OF REQUEST* 1/29/18

4. PROPERTY TO BE EVALUATED

PROPERTY/ADDRESS* 99 Claremont Drive		BUILDING OR INTERIOR NAME (IF APPLICABLE) McGiffert Hall	
BOROUGH* Manhattan	TAX MAP BLOCK* 1991	TAX MAP LOT* 31	DATE OF CONSTRUCTION (IF KNOWN) 1931
ORIGINAL USE (IF KNOWN) Dormitory/Apartments		ARCHITECT (IF KNOWN) Allen & Collens	

5. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Please provide a statement explaining why you think this building or site should be considered for designation as an Individual, Interior, or Scenic Landmark by the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

McGiffert Hall is significant as a distinct yet contextual work of architecture that bridged two period revival styles by a firm that was a notable pioneer of Collegiate Gothic design. Located on the southwest corner of Claremont Avenue and West 122nd Street next to Riverside Church, it was designed as an apartment building for Union Theological Seminary by Allen & Collens in 1931, which was wholly responsible for the design of the seminary to the east, and partially responsible for the design of the adjacent church to the west in association with Henry C. Pelton (1867-1935). Despite these two institutions' association with a single design firm, each one embodied a different period revival style, with the seminary characterized by the English Perpendicular Gothic Revival style, reminiscent of Oxbridge, and the church characterized by the French Gothic Revival style, reminiscent of Chartres Cathedral. Situated between these two complexes, Allen & Collens produced a contextual design that referenced the materials, massing, and detailing of both styles.

(See continuation sheet)

5. Statement of Significance (cont.)

Allen & Collens

Following the establishment of their partnership in Boston in 1904, Allen & Collens had a successful collaboration for twenty-seven years that was distinguished mostly by institutional buildings and complexes designed in an array of Collegiate Gothic styles referencing English and French prototypes.¹ In fact, National Register Nomination author, Bradley Frandsen, maintained that Union Theological Seminary can be considered one of the earliest examples of the Collegiate Gothic style in the United States, having predated the more well-known examples of Princeton University's Graduate College (Ralph Adams Cram, 1913) and Yale University's Harkness Quadrangle (James Gamble Rogers, 1917).²

Francis Richmond Allen (1843-1931) was born in Boston, graduated from Amherst College in 1865, and then received his architectural training at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) between 1876 and 1877.³ The following year he attended the École des Beaux Arts in Paris. Between 1878 and 1891, he worked in partnership with Herbert Phipps Kenway, and between 1896 and 1898, he worked in partnership with James MacArthur Vance. Although no information was uncovered regarding the architectural training and early work of Charles H. Collens (1873-1956), Eugene C. Carder, an associate pastor and member of the building committee of Riverside Church, praised Collens as "the guiding genius and recognized specialist in all decisions concerning the Gothic tradition" in its design.⁴

Allen & Collens work between 1904 and 1931 was distinguished by a host of institutional commissions that were both monumental and picturesque, referencing the most popular period revival styles of the early twentieth century in various iterations of the Collegiate Gothic style.⁵ These included the firm's French Renaissance Revival design for The Woman's Hospital and its additions (now demolished; 1906-1913, West 109th Street and Amsterdam Avenue); the English Perpendicular Gothic Revival design for Union Theological Seminary, including the NYC landmarks, Brown Memorial Tower, James Tower, and James Memorial Chapel (1906-1916, West 120th-122nd Street, Broadway and Claremont Avenue); the neo-Gothic Irving Arms Apartments (1908, 222 Riverside Drive); the neo-Tudor apartments for Teachers College (1923, 502-508 West 121st Street); the English Perpendicular Gothic Revival Park Avenue Baptist Church in association with Henry C. Pelton (NYC Upper East Side Historic District; 1922, 593 Park Avenue); the English Perpendicular Gothic Revival Russell Hall for Teachers College (1922-1924, West 120th Street, between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue); the French Gothic Revival Riverside Church, in association with Henry C. Pelton (NYC landmark; 1928-1930, 490 Riverside Drive); and the medieval-inspired Cloisters, incorporating historic and contemporary Gothic and Romanesque elements (NYC landmark; 1934-1938, Fort Tryon Park). Outside of New York City, Allen & Collens designed the original campuses of Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, NY; Williams College in Williamstown, MA; and Andover Theological Seminary in Newton, MA.

History

On February 24, 1931, *The New York Times* reported that Rev. Dr. Henry Sloane Coffin, President of Union Theological Seminary (UTS), had announced that the seminary would be building an eight-story apartment house for "furloughed missionaries, married students, women students, and younger professors" at a cost of \$500,000.⁶ Funding was to come from "friends of the seminary," and the Board of Directors had decided to name the building after Arthur C. McGiffert, who had served as the president of UTS between 1917 and 1926. President Coffin also noted that the new building would be harmonious with that of the seminary complex and Riverside Church, and occupy street frontage of 225 feet along Claremont Avenue and 100 feet along West 122nd Street.⁷ A subsequent notice in *The*

New York Times indicated that the building would be designed by Allen & Collens, whose design had “been slightly modified to make it harmonize with the French Gothic of the Riverside Church.”⁸ The article also noted that the new building would be replacing two apartment buildings on the site (one of which was owned by UTS) and completed by the start of the fall term the following year. McGiffert Hall was anticipated to accommodate approximately 25% more residents than the seminary’s existing apartment house in its location.⁹ Although it is unclear as to its original interior layout, a Certificate of Occupancy, dated May 21, 1993, indicated that the building contained numerous apartments and dormitory rooms, a community kitchen, maids’ rooms, a laundry facility, reception rooms, a day care center, and a playroom on the eighth floor.¹⁰

Description

McGiffert Hall is a combination six-and-a-half- and eight-story institutional residence in an “L” plan, designed in a Collegiate Gothic style that incorporates English and French Gothic Revival motifs. The walls are faced in irregularly-coursed ashlar granite with limestone trim under a fanciful roofline that features a steeply-pitched, hipped roof, gable-front roofs, side-gable roofs with hipped-roof dormers, a pyramidal roof, chimney pots, and a turret that connects to the adjacent Riverside Church. Both facades feature multiple bays that are alternately projecting and recessed, exhibiting an array of Gothic Revival elements such as Gothic-arched window surrounds, trefoil and/or quatrefoil tracery and spandrels, buttress-like pilasters, quoining, and a machicolated cornice. Windows consist of multi-light, metal-sash casements under multi-light, metal-sash transoms, and a combination of flat-arched lintels and label moldings. The main entry consists of a pair of wood-and-glass doors with strap hinges under a stained-glass transom that are set within a recessed entry surround consisting of a series of Gothic arches, crowned by a pointed arch that is flanked by finials that are altogether decorated with crockets. A square tower forms the juncture between Claremont Avenue and West 122nd Street, while the turret connecting to Riverside Church at its westernmost end is primarily clad in limestone, enabling a seamless transition to the limestone-clad church.

Analysis

As a transitional building that straddles two monumental works by Allen & Collens, McGiffert Hall manages to synthesize architectural elements of both Union Theological Seminary and Riverside Church to produce a work of Collegiate Gothic design that is seamlessly integrated into its setting. Its massing forms an imposing streetwall that wraps around Claremont Avenue to West 122nd Street that mirrors the one created by the UTS campus along these same streets. Moreover, the designer’s incorporation of irregularly-coursed ashlar granite walls and limestone trim not only provide visual cohesion with UTS, but also solidify its physical connection to the campus. English Gothic design elements include gable-front roofs, chimney pots, buttress-like pilasters, quoining, multi-light casements under multi-light transoms, label moldings, and trefoil and/or quatrefoil tracery and spandrels. In addition, the main entry is also consistent with this style, consisting of wood-and-glass doors with strap hinges under a stained-glass transom that are set within a recessed entry surround consisting of a series of Gothic arches, crowned by a pointed arch that is flanked by finials that are altogether decorated with crockets. French Gothic design elements include Gothic-arched window surrounds, machicolated cornices, and a fanciful roofline, incorporating a steeply-pitched, hipped roof, side-gabled roofs with hipped-roof dormers, a pyramidal roof, and a turret that is visually integrated into the Riverside Church design at its easternmost end on West 122nd Street. Based on this analysis, McGiffert Hall possesses special historical and aesthetic interest in the area of architecture for its distinct yet contextual Collegiate Gothic design that was the work of Allen & Collens, a pioneering design firm that helped popularize this style during the early twentieth century.

Endnotes

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- ¹ Collegiate Gothic is defined as “A secular version of Gothic architecture, characteristic of the older colleges of Oxford and Cambridge.” Cyril M. Harris, *Illustrated Dictionary of Historic Architecture* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1977), 125.
 - ² Bradley Frandsen, “Union Theological Seminary” National Register Nomination (Washington, D.C.: US Department of the Interior, 1980), 8:1.
 - ³ Unless otherwise noted, information on Francis R. Allen and the work of Allen & Collens was obtained from “F.R. Allen Dead; Boston Architect,” *The New York Times*, November 8, 1931.
 - ⁴ Matthew A. Postal, “The Riverside Church” Designation Report, May 16, 2000, Designation List 313, LP-2037 (New York: Landmarks Preservation Commission, 2000), 5.
 - ⁵ Information on Allen & Collens’ New York City projects was obtained from “Allen & Collens,” Office for Metropolitan History, accessed 1/22/2018, <http://www.metrohistory.com/dbpages/NBsearch.lasso>.
 - ⁶ “Seminary to Erect \$500,000 Building,” *The New York Times*, February 24, 1931.
 - ⁷ Ibid.
 - ⁸ “New Seminary Unit Begun,” *The New York Times*, July 31, 1931.
 - ⁹ Ibid.
 - ¹⁰ “97-101 Claremont Avenue aka 620 West 122nd Street” Certificate of Occupancy, May 21, 1993, NYC Buildings, accessed 1/22/18, www.a810-bisweb.nyc.gov/bisweb/CofoJobDocumentServlet.

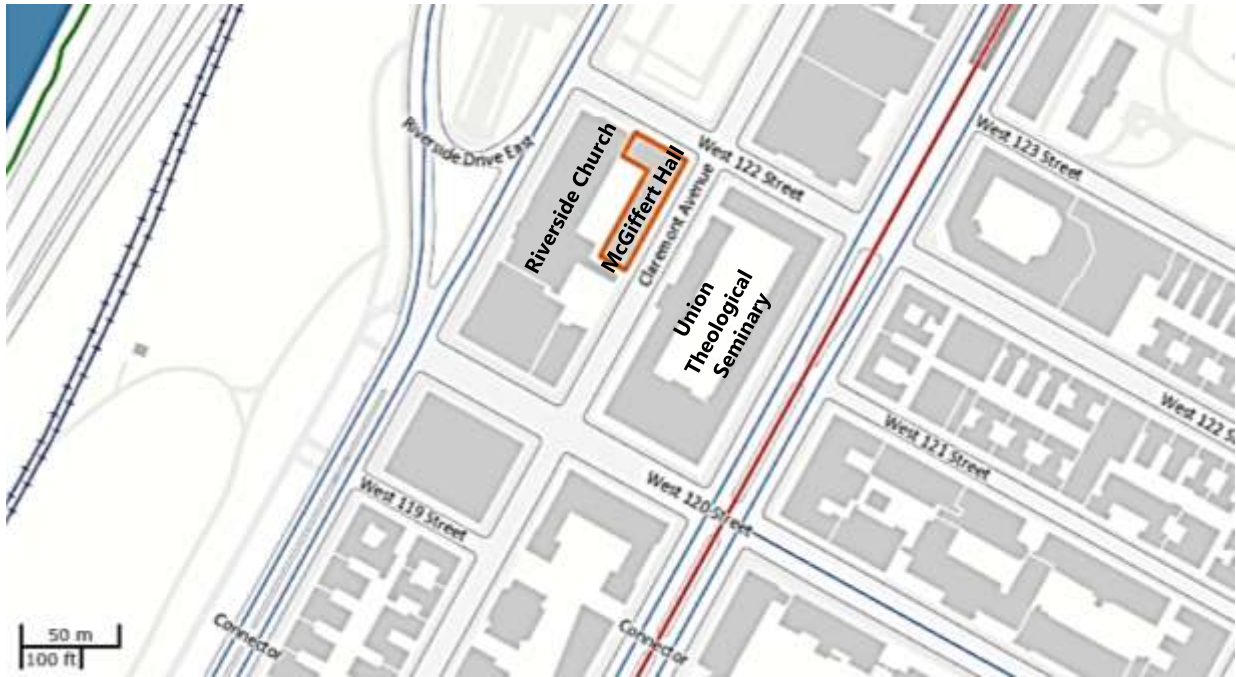


Figure 1. Locator map showing McGiffert Hall bounded in orange.
Base map: www.oasisnyc.net/map.aspx



Figure 2. McGiffert Hall, c. 1931.
Source: Museum of the City of New York
www.collections.mcny.org

Figure 3. McGiffert Hall main entry detail, c. 1931.
Source: Museum of the City of New York
www.collections.mcny.org





Figure 4. McGiffert Hall (lower right), surrounded by Union Theological Seminary (left), and Riverside Church (top), view southwest. Gregory Dietrich, Photographer 1/24/18

Figure 5. McGiffert Hall primary façade along Claremont Avenue, view northwest. Gregory Dietrich, Photographer 1/24/18



Figure 6. McGiffert Hall secondary façade (left), with Riverside Church (right and top), view south. Gregory Dietrich, Photographer 1/24/18



Figure 7. McGiffert Hall secondary façade (right), with Union Theological Seminary (left), view east.
Gregory Dietrich, Photographer
1/24/18



Figure 8. McGiffert Hall secondary façade (left), showing turret connection to Riverside Church (right), view southeast.
Gregory Dietrich, Photographer
1/24/18



Figure 9. McGiffert Hall secondary façade rooftop detail (left), with Riverside Church apse in the background, view southwest.
Gregory Dietrich, Photographer
1/24/18