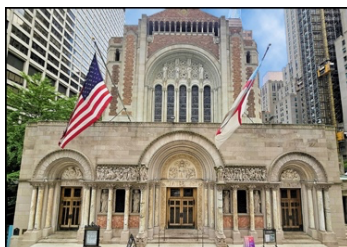


ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S
CONSERVANCY

A MASTERPIECE HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT The Stanford White Triple Portal



Fact Sheet

THE MASTERPIECE: The main entrance to St. Bartholomew's Church, the National Historic Landmark on Park Avenue between 50th and 51st Streets in New York City.

DESIGNER: Stanford White (1853-1906), Partner, McKim, Mead & White Architects

MATERIALS: Marble, Limestone, Bronze

DIMENSIONS: 75' W x 28' H

SCULPTORS: Herbert Adams, Philip Martiny, and Andrew O'Connor (a protégé of Daniel Chester French)

ARTISTIC DISTINCTION: The Stanford White Triple Portal, a recent National Park Service Save America's Treasures grant awardee, was created at the height of the American Renaissance in Art and Architecture, a period of cultural flowering between the U. S. Centennial Celebration in 1876 and the onset of World War I.

PATRON PROVENANCE: Alice Gwynne Vanderbilt and daughter Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney commissioned the Triple Portal in 1900 as a memorial to her late husband, Cornelius Vanderbilt II. Originally designed for the previous St. Bartholomew's on Madison Avenue at 44th Street, it was moved to Park Avenue in 1918.

ARCHITECTURAL PROVENANCE: The Triple Portal bears the imprint of not one but three prominent American architects—James Renwick, Jr., Stanford White, and Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue. Renwick (who also designed St. Patrick's Fifth Avenue) modeled St. Bartholomew's Madison Avenue after churches in Northern Italy. The Vanderbilt commission initially charged Stanford White with designing a trio of richly detailed bronze doors to add to the Madison Avenue entrance. It soon became apparent, however, that such an addition was ill-suited to Renwick's comparatively plain facade.

Undaunted, White produced from his files a sketch of the entrance to the medieval Abbey Church of St. Gilles-du-Gard in Provence, itself now a World Heritage site. As a young man traveling in France with Charles McKim, and the sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens, White had sketched the Abbey Church entrance which consists of three pairs of doors surrounded by elaborately carved arches inserted among an array of biblical figures rendered in three-quarter bas relief. Impressed, Mrs. Vanderbilt expanded White's commission to include the Triple Portal we see today.

THE TRIPLE PORTAL ON PARK AVENUE: In 1914, Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue (1869-1924) was chosen to design and oversee construction of a new St. Bartholomew's on Park Avenue. The foundation of the Madison Avenue church was subsiding because of commercial development taking place around it. The church leadership was advised that rather than attempting to stabilize the building, it would be prudent and less costly to move to another site. Park Avenue was chosen because at the time, from newly constructed Grand Central Station north to 59th Street, it was being transformed from a railyard and industrial zone into a grand residential boulevard evocative of Haussmann's Paris. Although Goodhue's previous churches (notably the West Point Chapel and St. Thomas Fifth Avenue) had been Neo-Gothic structures, on Park Avenue he faced the challenge of incorporating the decidedly Romanesque Stanford White Triple Portal as Mrs. Vanderbilt had volunteered to pay for transporting it to the new site. The result is the architecturally eclectic church building we see today, combining Romanesque and Byzantine features with rich sculptural ornamentation, and, importantly, the Triple Portal as its main entrance atop a flight of limestone steps, a design element missing on Madison Avenue but a prominent feature of the Abbey Church of St. Gilles-du-Gard.

TRIPLE PORTAL CONSERVATION: The Triple Portal has suffered from decades of exposure to air pollution, harsh weather, microbial colonization, and inexpert attempts to stem its deterioration. In November 2022, St. Bartholomew's Conservancy, Inc. commissioned Matthew Reiley, Excelsior Art Services Lead Conservator, to conduct a hands-on conservation evaluation of the Triple Portal. Excelsior presented its findings and recommendations in the form of a Summary Report with extensive supporting appendices. The Summary Report was published in 2024 and is available on the St. Bartholomew's Conservancy website, stbconservancy.org. Affirming that "the Triple Portal's status as an irreplaceable work of art is undeniable," it urges further exploration of a variety of potentially effective conservation techniques, including some relatively new ones, such as laser cleaning, digital scanning, and 3D printing. Shortly after publication of the Summary Report, a grant specifically for Triple Portal conservation was awarded to the Conservancy from the *Save America's Treasures* grant program from the Historic Preservation Fund administered by the National Park Service, Department of the Interior.

LEAD CONSERVATOR: On March 10, 2025, St. Bartholomew's Conservancy and St. Bart's Church agreed to engage Chatham, NY based Amanda Trienens and her firm, Cultural Heritage Conservation LLC, as the Triple Portal's Lead Conservator. Ms. Trienens has over 20 years of experience in the field. Her firm provides design, development, and testing services, but also, uniquely, conservation construction implementation. All CHC projects embrace maximizing the retention of original materials, recommending repairs that are durable but mechanically compatible with the historic fabric, and being sensitive to the historical significance of object features and the public's sense of place.

St. Bartholomew's Conservancy, Inc. is an independent 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofit organization dedicated to helping restore and preserve the exterior and gardens of the St. Bartholomew's site on Park Avenue at 50th Street in New York City. In so doing, the Conservancy also strives to educate the public about the importance of historic preservation in urban areas. The Conservancy has no involvement with the religious mission of St. Bart's Church. The Conservancy's Executive Director, Constance Evans, can be reached at (212) 710-9694 or via email at evans@stbconservancy.org. The mailing address is:

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