

First Manhattan Chapel in 25 Years

by *Anne Knight*

Since 1996, members of the Manhattan Fifth and Sixth branches shared rented space at the Heber L. Birch Early Childhood Education Center, a primary school located at 554 Fort Washington Avenue.

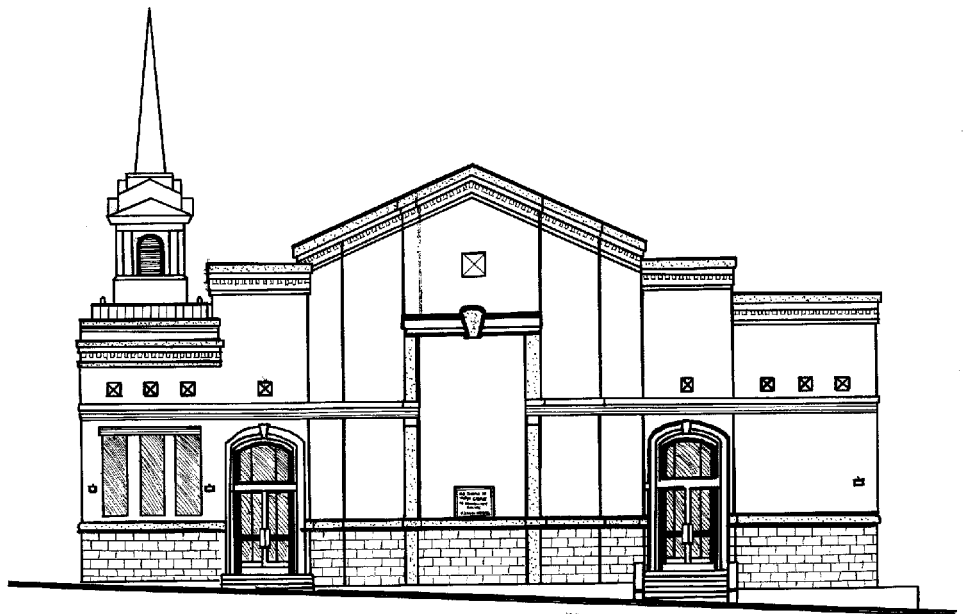
While these temporary arrangements provided meeting space for both branches, relations between the school and church were occasionally strained because of scheduling conflicts and maintenance problems. The solution came when a new LDS chapel was completed in early 2000.

The church units, now the Inwood First and Second Wards, met for the first time on March 26, 2000, in their new chapel on the corner of Riverside Drive and Payson Street. The first services were held the day after a large open house was held for the community, local civic leaders and local church members.

The new Inwood chapel is the first new construction initiated by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in New York City since the current Stake Center at Lincoln Square was completed in 1975. The building includes a full-scale chapel, cultural hall, classrooms, and office space for up to four wards and is built to become a future Stake Center. Building construction began in November of 1998.

Following are some interesting facts about the construction of the Inwood Chapel:

- The architect for the building was Frank Fernandez who is based in Irvington, New Jersey. His firm, Fernandez Architects and Planners, has designed several other Church buildings.
- An apartment complex previously occupied the lot but was torn down in the early 1980s because a stream beneath the building eroded its foundation. To overcome this obstacle, the chapel's foundation is built on concrete-filled steel piles. There are approximately 130 piles, some of which go down nearly 70 feet into solid bedrock.
- Parts of the design, begun in 1993, were based on the LDS temple in Salt Lake City. Some of the exterior designs were initially modeled after the temple—but were abandoned for budgetary reasons and because they didn't fit the feel of the neighborhood.
- W. Haywood Burns School kindergarten/first grade class of Ms. Marilyn Hernandez followed the construction closely, visiting the site and speaking to the contractors throughout the construction period to learn about buildings.
- Animator Howard Better, whose daughter was in the class of Ms. Hernandez, created an animated short of the entire project and gave it to the Church as a gift.
- The chapel has a parking garage with no entrance—although there are plans to open it. The LDS Church also purchased the property directly behind the chapel and intends to tear down the buildings in the space once the lease expires in 2001. At that point, a garage entrance will be built and the possibility of expanding the back end of the church will be explored.



Inwood LDS Chapel, 1815 Riverside Drive, Dedicated 11 June 2000

Next-door Neighbor: The Chapel Lot

Interview with Arthur Sherry

Arthur and Jessica Sherry moved into 1825 Riverside Drive in May 1981, the same month their first child, Rachel, was born. Since their arrival, they have seen the building next door to them condemned, torn down, the property turned into a garden and, finally, watched the new Inwood LDS chapel being built one step at a time. Following are some of Arthur's thoughts on the development of his "next-door neighbor."

Q: When you moved into your building, what was the property like next door?

A: The building next door was already condemned and most of the people had moved out. I remember seeing cracks in the walls and hearing something about how the building had been undermined by a stream. I have heard it said that bottles would roll down the hall and people had to step down to get into their apartments.

Q: After the building was torn down, what happened to the property?

A: In early 1983, Brian Murtaugh held a meeting in the Episcopal Church asking what to do about the site. Maggie Clarke, Ted Galligher and about 50 other people were there when she put up her hand and said, "Why don't we throw some wild flower seeds and maybe they'll take." Maggie went to Keukenhoff gardens in Holland that summer and brought back some bulbs, the Horticulture Society gave the group shovels and hoses, and Green Guerrillas gave them more bulbs and promised plants when they could use them, even though they did not even have soil yet... Later that year, Maggie found a contractor who had topsoil that he had to get rid of. He came by with 38 dump trucks full and a front-end loader to spread it all around.

Q: What do you remember about the garden?

A: I loved that garden, playing with Rachael and her little friends. There was a large pile of sand in the back where they built castles and dug almost all the way to China. A small forest was well under way in the back when we received word that the landlord wanted the lot unencumbered so it could be sold.

Q: What happened to the garden?

A: We had to get off the property in November 1987. The boy scouts from Troop 525 helped us haul the plants away and we started working with the community board for The William Tighe Triangle where the Ring Garden now stands neat the intersection of Broadway and Dyckman Street... we raised new funds and started over. As you can see our efforts have been well rewarded with a new makeover the Ring Garden recently received.

Q: The lot stood vacant for more than a decade. How did the Church end up purchasing it?

A: In 1994, I was talking with Stake President David Stone and he mentioned that they were looking for a site to build a new church uptown. He went through a litany of possibilities that were all falling down like dominoes. It was then that I mentioned the old garden site. It was convenient to the A Train and Broadway bus lines and with fort Tryon Park across the street, what could be better?