

Judson Memorial Church building

The story begins with Edward Judson (1844-1913), a Baptist minister who gave up a prosperous parish in Orange, New Jersey, to minister to the new Americans who then filled the area south of here between the two rivers. In 1875 he became the pastor of the Berea Baptist Church at 117 West 15th Street. He lived at 35 Washington Square West. One of the objects of his mission was to have a splendid church. "If I had my way," he said, "I would put the most beautiful churches among the homes of the poor, so that it would be only a step from the squalor of the tenement house . . ." This was his vision. It would not be just an ordinary church but an institutional church, with all the facilities and activities of a settlement house.

The elder Rockefeller, a Baptist communicant all his life who even taught Sunday school, had the Baptist Church as his first charity. He would visit Baptist churches and meet their pastors; in this way he came to know of Judson and his work. In 1887, when the pastor took up a campaign to build a new church building, he naturally turned to the philanthropist who was, by then, among his largest contributors.

It should be pointed out that the church was not named for him but for his father, Adinoram Judson (1788-1850), graduate of Brown University. The elder Judson was one of those Protestant missionaries who fanned out around the globe from the eastern United States. In 1813 he and his wife sailed to Burma. Very much part of his mission was to translate the Bible into Burmese. Having accomplished that, he produced a Burmese-English, English-Burmese dictionary with the help of his wife. His son, instead of following his father abroad, turned to the home mission.

The style of the church is Lombardo-Romanesque. New Englanders, familiar with the Catholic churches of Eastern Massachusetts, will recognize the style, the favorite of the architectural firm, Maginnis & Walsh. McKim, Mead & White were already the city's leading firm and, as masters of the eclectic, could handle the style. It will be noticed that the brick is the long thin Roman kind which was a favorite of theirs, also to be seen in the Century Association on West 43rd Street, built about the same time.

Artists made their contribution. La Farge designed glass windows which are still in the church, and Herbert Adams, sculptor of the bronze figure of William Cullen Bryant in Bryant Park, did a relief for the chancel.

This Baptist church was an anomaly in the wealthy residential district of Washington Square. It functioned as a mission church, stabilizing the neighborhood at the point of transition between the upper class area of the Square and the poorer neighborhood immediately to the west. In order to further this goal, the Judson Hotel--a tower for housing the poor--was added to the church in 1895. The church's activist social engagement continued through the 1960's, and up until today. The pews had kneelers, a nod to the Italian immigrants in the neighborhood. The water fountain on the northeast corner of the church provided cool water in the summer to people who couldn't afford ice.



Using his connections with the Rockefellers, the Astors and Stanford White, Judson was able to build an inexpensive but impressive home for his modest congregation. White's erudite design incorporated a variety of historical styles with which he had become familiar during his travels in Europe. The church is an eclectic composite of Byzantine, Romanesque and Renaissance forms, built in thin Roman brick embellished with terracotta, marble and limestone ornament. The tower draws inspiration from medieval Rome. White's elegant trans-historical design was meant to evoke Europe while creating a new American style. Judson's connections also enabled him to recruit John LaFarge for the stained glass windows and Herbert Adams for the marble relief on the chancel's south wall (produced according to plans by Saint-Gaudens).



Judson Memorial Church building

Judson Memorial Church - Historical Background

At the time of its construction from 1888-93, Judson Memorial Church's location on Washington Square South served to cement the church's artistic vision with its purpose. In the middle of a wealthy patrician neighborhood, Judson Memorial intended to unite the immigrants of the tenement communities near the square with the wealthy upper classes. Dr. Edward Judson, rector of the

Berean Baptist Church of Christ, sought to move his congregation to a new location. He resolved to build an ecclesiastical structure that would bring beauty to the lives of the low-income immigrants and also memorialize his father Adoniram Judson, the first American missionary in Asia.

Located on the corner of Washington Square South and Thompson Street, Judson Memorial's brick and terra cotta surface has overlooked Washington Square Park for over one hundred years. The church's most significant identifying factor remains its dedication to egalitarian membership and social concerns of the urban area.



The Building Stages

In 1886, Edward Judson studied Manhattan to determine the best position for the relocated Berean Baptist from its original place on Bedford and Downing Streets. He acquired the 130 by 100 foot lot on Washington Square in 1888 for \$132,500. John D. Rockefeller was a major donor, and Judson hired the well-known architectural firm of McKim, Mead and White to design the complex. When officially completed in 1893, primary architect Stanford White had constructed the 102 foot long church, a 165 foot high campanile tower that housed orphans and the adjoining Judson Hotel which intended to net income for the church. The entire cost of the Judson complex totaled \$240, 578 (Sloan 300-309).

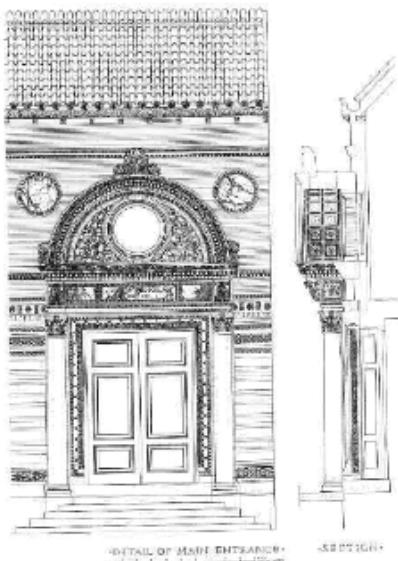
McKim, Mead and White, Architects

At the time Edward Judson envisioned his ecclesiastical masterpiece, the architectural firm of McKim, Mead and White was among the most well-known in New York, if not all of the United States. The firm introduced Renaissance-style buildings to the American metropolis, and Stanford White remains its most recognized partner. Popular culture remembers White because of his sensational life and murder at the hands of an angry jilted husband. However, White's artistic contributions to New York City and to the field of urban architecture immortalized his life and career. White designed some of the United States' best examples of neo-Renaissance architecture in the original Madison Square Garden, a structure designed like a palazzo similar to buildings in Northern Italy with a tower adapted from Spain's Moorish cathedrals, and the Washington Square Arch across the street from Judson Memorial Church.



The Finishing Touches

Construction was completed on Judson Memorial Church in 1893, although the congregation had begun worshipping there in 1891. Dedication ceremonies included a lecture series discussing social concerns of immigrants. The terra cotta exterior was heavily influenced by northern Italian churches in the early stages of the Renaissance, allegedly an attempt to lure Italian immigrants to the church. Judson's interior resembles a rectangular auditorium; its plain decor is in keeping with the Baptist tradition that focused on preaching. The main visuals in the beige-colored room included a baptistery sculpture by Augustus Saint-Gaudens, but carved by Herbert Adams, and the stained glass windows lining the walls of the sanctuary.



The structure of the church as well as its accents were fundamental to Edward Judson's goals for the church's memorial function. Judson planned the decorative baptistery and the stained glass windows to commemorate the lives of Baptist missionaries and he hoped they would be funded by family members of the missionaries because the church did not expect a wealthy congregation. The addition of John LaFarge's stained glass windows and Saint-Gaudens was not unusual to a White design. He frequently requested his friends to join his projects, thus creating a cohesive artistic vision among all aspects of the completed structure. It is known from Edward Judson's fundraising records that he intended the windows and marble frieze to fulfill a memorial and financial purpose, and it can be assumed "the patron, architect and designer(s) worked out a general scheme of imagery at the start of the project" (Sloan 300-309).

Funding difficulties affected that scheme and the windows were installed gradually over a number of years, as money became available to construct more. Only a few of the windows commemorate Baptist missionaries, according to Edward Judson's plan, and instead commemorate family members of substantial donors. Judson's final window was laid in place in 1912, two years after LaFarge's death. It had been completed by his assistant.

(Above - From *A Monograph of the Works of McKim, Mead and White, 1879-1915*. Paul Gallagher, intro. De Capo Press, New York: 1985. Stanford White's design of the main entrance to Judson Memorial Church, one of four churches in his career.)

Judson Memorial Church building

LaFarge's window of the Infant Samuel was completed in 1894 to memorialize David Malcolm Kinmouth, Jr. who donated a children's retreat home to Berean Baptist Church. The east wall window is 14 feet, 6 inches by 4 feet, 6 inches.

Judson Memorial Church is the largest church built in New York during what is known as the American Renaissance, a period of time that saw a flowering of classically-inspired architecture in the major cities of the United States. The architects of McKim, Mead and White characterized their Italianate, or Renaissance revival, design as "Romanesque, strongly influenced by an early basilica" (Sloan 300-309).

Stanford White's final design incorporated many aspects of Romanesque and early Italian Renaissance styles.



Italianate

The mid-Victorian era in the United States witnessed the first community attempt at urban renewal. Until the late 1870's, American cities were nondescript, wooden collections without age or dignity. The American Renaissance refers to a dependence on art and architectural styles, especially that characteristic of the Italian countryside, at the end of the nineteenth century. Our cities today are filled with classical structures that have lasted many generations. Stanford White was famous for alluding to Romanesque and early Renaissance architecture in his structures. Illustrated in Judson Memorial is the ability of the Renaissance style to mask the complexity of the structure and its unified design. Built to be compact and square, the Church maintains a completely uniform exterior inspired by the quattrocento churches of Florence (Roth 157), a city known for its intentionally compact buildings.

The hood over the entrance to Judson Memorial Church is said to be inspired by a Renaissance Italian church, San Alessandro, built in Lucca in 1480. The crisp movements and detail work suggest Renaissance sculptors.

Overall, the exterior and shape of Judson Memorial is said to resemble Santa Maria, a basilica in Cosmedin, Rome (Roth, 157). Different elements of the church are borrowed from a variety of structures dating from the fifth to the fifteenth century in the area surrounding Rome. Judson's light exterior and subtle detailing is characteristic of Romanesque architecture. Stanford White prided his work to maintain a serene complete aesthetic look, since art of the early Renaissance exemplifies clean lines and avoidance of over-ornamentation. While Judson Memorial Church clearly illustrates the artistry of the American Renaissance, few American churches in the mid-Victorian era revived Italian styles and the Gothic style prevailed.



The Interior

The Church itself is a rectangular, auditorium-like room. Aspects of its appearance cannot be considered very Medieval in nature. Besides a modern pantry in the northeast corner, the congregation's contemporary arts programming is responsible for very modern stage lighting. Theatrical light fixtures point toward the baptistery. The large rose window is nestled in the arch forming the south wall. Four arches crest along the length of the east, west, and south interior walls as well as the north facade over the entrance. Romanesque-style columns support the arches below a slightly vaulted ceiling (the rosette pattern on the underside of the arches mirrors the motif on the Washington Square Arch, also designed by Stanford White). Judson's interior is light and bare, with minimal ornamentation and no permanent seating. (The pews, baptistery screen, and crucifix were removed in the early 1960's.)



Minister Robert Spike addresses the congregation (c. 1955)

[click here to view a larger image](#)



Judson interior after restoration

[click here to view a larger image](#)

Judson Memorial Church building

Saint-Gaudens' Baptistry

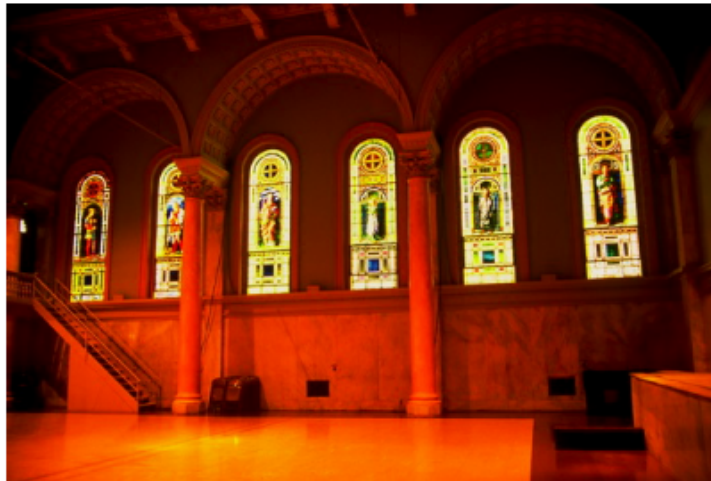
The marble baptistry is certainly the focal point of the church's interior. Raised like a small stage in the south wall, the marble walls are highlighted by a relief sculpture designed by White's close friend and famous American Renaissance sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens and carved by Herbert Adams. The sculpture received a \$5,000 donation to Judson's building and memorializes Joseph Blachley Hoyt, who sold belts and shoes. Saint-Gaudens' design of angels further illustrates classically-influenced Italianate style.

[click here for more information about the Saint_Gaudens_Baptistry](#)



The Windows of Judson

White designed four arches along both the east and west walls which house five oblong stained glass windows. Rows of gold flower bursts line the underside of all the arches supported by Romanesque columns. Ten carved columns topped with an intricately-carved Romanesque design line the perimeter of the church.



John LaFarge designed the seventeen stained glass windows in Judson Memorial Church, a project that illustrated the artistic unity of all the windows to each other and to the structure as a whole. The importance of stained glass windows to complement the complete architecture is evident on the architect's earliest plans. The opalescent glass windows "translate the Italian Renaissance niche sculptures into pictorial stained glass" (Sloan 300-309).

LaFarge designed the colors and textures of the windows to imitate the effect of sculpted marble and stone. Juliet Hanson, LaFarge's assistant, painted images on thousands of pieces of glass leaded together, and the effect is nearly photographic. LaFarge designed three tondi, or circular, windows, a square window on the stairwell leading to the sanctuary and twelve oblong windows at regular intervals along the interior walls. The designer of the south rose window is not known for sure.

It is attributed to LaFarge's friend Maitland Armstrong.

In the north facade wall the three windows of the facade wall depict the Apostle Peter (completed in 1892), Paul and John the Evangelist and each memorialize distinguished Baptist leaders of the nineteenth century.

For a detailed description of the Judson windows click the following link:

[The Stained Glass Windows at Judson Memorial Church](#)

Bibliography

A Monograph of the Works of McKim, Mead and White, 1879-1915. Dan Gallagher, intro. Da Capo Press. New York: 1985.

Roth, Leland M. *McKim, Mead and White, Architects*. Harper & Row. New York: 1983.

Sloan, Julie L. "John LaFarge and the Judson Memorial Church." *The Magazine Antiques*. New York: February 1998.

Tauranac, John. *Elegant New York, The Builders and the Buildings, 1995-1915*. Abberville Press. New York: 1985.

Joan Jacobs Brumberg's Mission For Life (New York University Press, 1984).

Special thanks to [Medieval NewYork](#) and [nyc-architecture.com](#)

Judson Memorial Church building

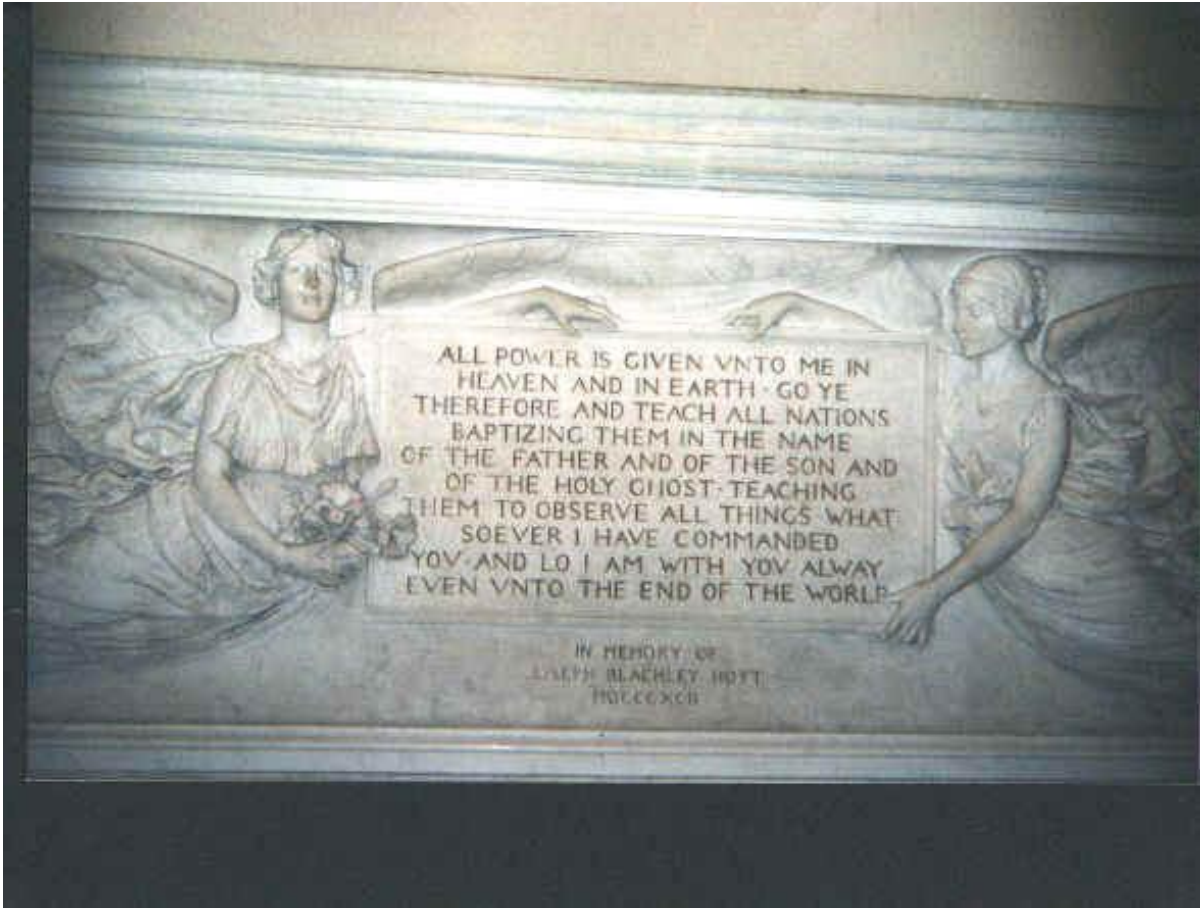


Judson Interior circa 1955

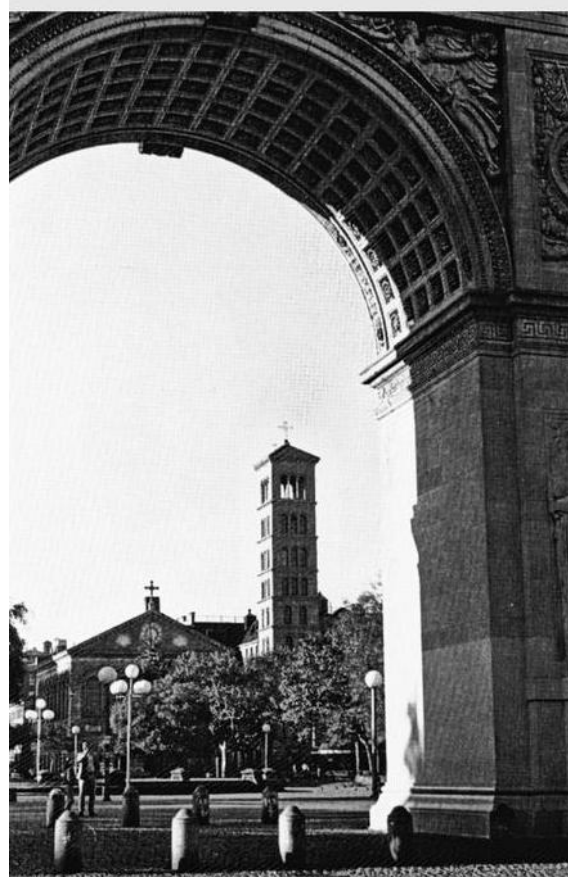


Judson Interior after restoration

Judson Memorial Church building



Saint-Gaudens Baptistry



Judson Memorial Church viewed through the arch at Washington Square