Many places were looked at; the most reasonable among them cost from twenty thousand dollars, and not cleared (no utilities). One place, on 97th Street, three lots (75 by 100 feet), price-wise and with conveniences (utilities), was purchased by the building commission with conditions and terms outlined in the report of the commission under no. 798.

(From a report of Bp. Tikhon to the Ober-Procurator K.P. Pobedonostsev, 9 September 1899, San Francisco)

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To the Most Holy Governing Synod
8 Dec. 1899

Proposal

The Sovereign Emperor, according to my all-inclusive report, on 27, Nov. last, the most exalted (one) agreed to the proposal of the Most Holy Synod regarding permission to the Committee for construction of an Orthodox temple in New York to conduct collections everywhere in the Empire for free-will offerings for this construction.

Decision of the Most Holy Synod of 6/16 October 1899, No. 4125. Of the above permission of the most high sovereign emperor I have the honor to propose to the Most Holy Synod, adding, that together with this notification I am informing the director of the Ministry on internal affairs.

Ober-procurator K. Pobedonostsev
Director P. Ostroumov.

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20 February, Sunday... After liturgy Priest Zotikov officiated Intercession for travel for the Pastor leaving for Russia to collect donations for the construction of a temple... Concluding his talk, Father Zotikov blessed Father Alexander with an Icon of St. Nicholas the Wonder-worker.

23 February, Wednesday. The Pastor, seen off by parishioners, left New York on the ship "New York."

24 December, Christmas Eve, Monday. Pastor of the church returned from Russia at 2:00 P.M.

(From the liturgical journal of the New York Church for 1900)

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The Commission went to the upper part of the city where from a number of parcels advertised for sale, decided that the most reasonable priced and convenient place is the three lots (75x100 feet) on 97th Street to the east of Central Park, for which the asking price was 36 thousand dollars. The area where the parcel is located is rapidly being built up; thus, the prices for every free parcel of land are growing with unbelievable swiftness. Under the present conditions any hesitation by the Commission at present will be coupled with a risk of losing the advantageous acquisition of the parcel of land, unique by itself, according to the findings of the Commission. Therefore the Commission, with the participation of the Consul General, found it necessary not to tarry with discussions with the owners of the property and signing the contract with them.

According to the Commission’s explanation to refuse purchase of this
parcel means to refuse all thought in general of whatever kind to build a church in New York.

(From the presentation of the Ober-procurator of the Synod K. Pobedonostsev to the State Economic Department)

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On that Wednesday, May 9/22, 1901, the Liturgy in the Mission church began very early, as the Cornerstone Ceremony was scheduled for 11 A.M. and the distance between the Mission at 323 Second Avenue and the new 97th Street site was great...(L.M. Pokrovsky "St. Nicholas Cathedral of New York, History and Legacy" 1969)

After the blessing of the water and the sprinkling of the site, the cross was set in the place fixed for the future altar-table and hundreds of hands made the sign of the cross while beautiful prayers were chanted. The Bishop and all the clergy then went down to the deeper excavation where the cornerstone was to be laid. In a voice betraying deep emotion, Bishop Tikhon prayed for the grace of the Holy Spirit to descend and bless the cornerstone of the future building dedicated to the glory of the Holy Name and the memory of St. Nicholas of Myra. (from the same book)

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On November 10/23, 1902, for the first time in history, came a call from the Church bell in summons—calling the Orthodox people to pray for the Lord’s blessings for their new house of worship. Resounding throughout the neighborhood, the sound of the bell gladdened and penetrated deep into the hearts of the faithful. (L.M. Pokrovsky "St. Nicholas Cathedral of New York, History and Legacy" 1969)

HOLY RELIQUARY OF OUR CATHEDRAL

By the day of the 90th Jubilee His Holiness Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Alexy II presented to the Cathedral the Holy Relics of St. Tikhon together with his Holy Icon.

which will be put in a special frame (Kivot) made in Russia in the parish in Klin, Moscow region, from the money donated by our parishioners.
Pre-Consecration

By the end of the 19th century a large number of Orthodox from the western regions of Russia (now Ukraine) migrated to America in order to better their lives. A large colony of such immigrants lived in New York. The high cost of living and the lack of resources prevented them from building their own temple for some time. In 1894 the Bishop of the Aleutians and Alaska established a temporary "house church" on 2nd Avenue below 10th Street.

On 25 February 1896 Archbishop Nicholas assigned Father Alexander Hotovitzky Pastor of the church. Although services continued at the "house temple", Church authorities continued to work for the building of a temple. In the beginning of 1899, a commission was established to study the feasibility of acquiring land and building a church. In September 1899 land was purchased in New York.

In 1900 with the blessings of the Holy Synod, Father Alexander Hotovitzky traveled to Russia to seek donations for the building of an Orthodox temple in New York City. After ten months, Father Hotovitzky returned to New York and began preparations for the building of the first Orthodox temple in New York. On 22 May 1901, Feast of the Translation of the Holy Relics of St. Nicholas the Wonder-worker of Myra in Lycia, Bishop Tikhon officiated at a solemn cornerstone laying for the new temple.

St. Nicholas Parish began to flourish after 1896 under the leadership of Father Alexander Hotovitzky. Father Hotovitzky was born in Kremenetz, Volinia, Russia, the son of the rector of the Volynia Theological Seminary. He was one of the graduates of the St. Petersburg Academy to accompany Archbishop Nicholas to America in 1895. The Archbishop assigned Hotovitzky as a reader in the new parish in New York, then located in 323 Second Avenue.

On January 28, 1896, he married Maria Vladimirovna Scherbutchin, a graduate of the Petersburg-St. Paul Institute. He was ordained to the priesthood in San Francisco by Archbishop Nicholas on February 25. Since a Father Balanovich, the pastor of the New York parish, had returned to Russia, Father Hotovitzky was appointed his successor.

In 1900, Father Alexander traveled to Russia to collect funds for the construction of a cathedral. As a result of his tireless activities, on April 18, 1902, the parish moved to 15 East 97th Street and became the new St. Nicholas Cathedral. He served as Dean of the Cathedral for the next twelve years.

Father Hotovitzky was very successful in his pastoral work in America. His fluency in English aided him immensely. He was publisher of the Russian-American Orthodox Messenger, the chief publication of the Russian Mission in America. He also helped lay the foundations for founding parishes in Pennsylvania, New England, Canada and all along the east coast, and played a very instrumental role in the organization of the Russian Orthodox Mutual Aid Society (Orthodox Brotherhoods) in the East.

After a very successful career of missionary efforts, traveling, preaching, publishing and witnessing to the faith, Father Hotovitzky returned to Russia on February 27, 1914 where he was reported to be martyred by the Bolsheviks.

(From the book "Orthodox America, 1794-1976" Published Syosset, NY 1975)
Consecration
(From the book of M. Pokrovsky - “St. Nicholas Cathedral of New York. History and Legacy” N.Y. 1968)

Services for the Consecration of the Church began on the eve of the event with Vespers. A splendid central Candelabra specially made for our Church brilliantly illuminated the interior, beautifully decorated with luxurious palms donated by Mr. Charles Crane. The floor was covered with a rich carpet—a gift from Mrs. N. N. Nefcik. The altar and the Iconostasis were decorated with garlands of green. These last helped to conceal the inadequacies of our modest Iconostasis, which was retained from the old Church despite the fact that it corresponded neither in appearance nor scale with the magnificence of the new building because funds were lacking for the construction of one more appropriate.

About twenty priests arrived from nearby parishes to participate in the services on this happy occasion and Bishop Tikhon personally directed the preparations. Although the date of the consecration was announced only two weeks in advance of the event, even so short a time proved sufficient for the completion of all preparations.

Long before 10 o'clock the entire block in front of St. Nicholas was jammed with people and carriages. Our American friends had tickets of admission, but the Orthodox merely entered until the Church was filled beyond its official capacity of 900 people. It was estimated that the number of worshippers was not less than 2,000, with 1,000 standing outside the Church where they could hear the choir through open doors.

A correspondent of The New York Times of November 11/24, 1902 wrote:
With all the pomp of the rites and magnificence of the vestments, in the presence of the members of the Russian Embassy and before a large crowd of worshippers that occupied every inch of standing room, the new Russian Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas was consecrated yesterday morning. The edifice at 15 East 97th Street was decorated at the entrance with Russian and American flags. Delegates of Russian Societies marched into Church, carrying American and Russian flags and religious banners, bearing pictures of the Savior, Virgin Mary and the Saints...

Count Cassini, the Countess Margherite, and members of the Russian Embassy with their ladies were seated at the left of the altar. The Ambassador and his suite wore full uniforms of their several ranks and were brilliant in their gold lace and jewelled medals and decorations...

The table of the altar was fastened in place. The resounding strokes of the stone ringing out above the singing. It was then sprinkled with holy water, with rose water and wine; then anointed with holy chrism and the first covering was put on the table. This was bound fast with a cord. A second covering was arranged, upon which the antimens, the tabernacle, the Book of Gospels, and the Cross, all brilliant with gold and jewels, were placed...

Overcome with emotion, Father Hotovitzky felt he was unable to describe the forever memorable moments of the service, the religious exhilaration, the wonderful psalms, the singing and the prayers. When the Bishop and the clergy went in procession outside the Church, returning to the chief door of the temple. When raising the relics above his head the Bishop exclaimed before the closed door of the Church: “Receive your princes, O ye gates and be ye lifted up and the King of Glory shall come in.” The response of the choir, “Who is this King of Glory”? And finally the Bishop signed the doors of the Church in cross-form saying: “The Lord of Hosts, He is the King of Glory.” He then entered the temple and the Sanctuary. The congregation, deeply moved, participated with their whole hearts in the solemn and unforgettable moments.

When the Consecration Service was complete, Bishop Tikhon preached his first sermon in the new Church.

I greet you, Russian Orthodox people, on the solemn occasion of the dedication of your Church. The present day is as joyous for us, as was the day for Israel, when in the reign of Solomon, the temple of the Lord was erected in place of the tabernacle...

The Lord took notice of our heartfelt longings, that in this great city, there should be erected a Church worthy of the Russian nation and answering to the greatness of the Orthodox Faith.

And so, let us thank the Lord, who should Himself be so gracious to us, in moving good Russian people to sacrifice, that His Church should be erected and in consecrating it today with the grace of His Holy Spirit...

"I will build my Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16, 18), “and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world, Amen.” (Matthew 28, 20).

We believe and trust that these promises of Christ have reference to our work here as well, and so you come to this Church without fear, and gather around it daringly and form one unanimous family tied with bonds of faith and love.

Post-Consecration

In 1905 Archbishop Tikhon transferred the diocesan center from San Francisco to New York. The cathedral of the ruling bishop became the St. Nicholas temple. At that time it received the title of "Cathedral" and became the center of the Russian Orthodox Church in America. Successors of Archbishop Tikhon all occupied this cathedral. However, in the twenties normal ecclesiastical life was disrupted. The first to occupy the Cathedral was Metropolitan Platon (Rozhdestvensky). He refused to be subordinate to Patriarch Tikhon. He took the Cathedral and the entire North American Russian Orthodox Metropolitan into schism. In 1924 the married Archbishop John Kedrovsky, representative of the Renovators schism sent from Moscow, took possession of the Cathedral through
litigation (claiming to be an official representative of the Russian Church). He occupied it until his death in 1934. His children, Bishop Nicholas and Priest John, also part of the so-called "Living Church," continued to officiate in the Cathedral. In 1944, Bishop Nicholas died. His brother, Priest John, having no juridical support and hierarchical primacy, joined the representative of the Moscow Patriarchate Metropolitan Benjamin. The reunion of the Cathedral with the Patriarchate was legalized in 1945. Once again it became the Cathedral, at that time of the North American Exarchate. However, this was not the final reuniting of the Cathedral with the Moscow Patriarchate. The lawsuit started by Metropolitan Platon continued although he was no longer alive. The lawsuits and appeals lasted thirty-six years. In 1947 the New York State court turned the Cathedral over to the Metropolia. The representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate were forced to vacate the premises as well as the parish community. The Presbyterian Church offered the Cathedral community its temple at 6 West 96th Street for liturgical services. The Cathedral was returned to the Moscow Patriarchate by the Supreme Court decision of 23 November 1952. Attorney Philip Adler represented the Cathedral. Justice Frankfurter, concurring, wrote in support of the decision for the Moscow Patriarchate: "St. Nicholas Cathedral is not just a piece of real estate. It is no more than St. Patrick's Cathedral or the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. A cathedral is the seat and center of ecclesiastical authority. St. Nicholas Cathedral is an archiepiscopal see of one of the great religious organizations. What is at stake here is the power to exercise religious authority. That is the essence of this controversy."

After the return of the Cathedral to the Moscow Patriarchate, it became the U.S.A. residence of Exarchs for North America of the Moscow Patriarchate and the center of the Russian Church in the U.S.A. In 1970 the Moscow Patriarchate granted autocephaly to the Metropolia in America. According to the Tomos of Autocephaly the Cathedral became the Representation of the Most Holy Patriarch in New York. At the same time it is the center for the parishes of the Moscow Patriarchate in the U.S.A.

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The temple was constructed under the supervision of the Russian architect I.V. Bergessen. It is one of the most beautiful edifices in New York and unique in its architecture. In 1973 the Landmarks Preservation Commission designed the Cathedral a historical Landmark in New York and placed on it a bronze plaque.