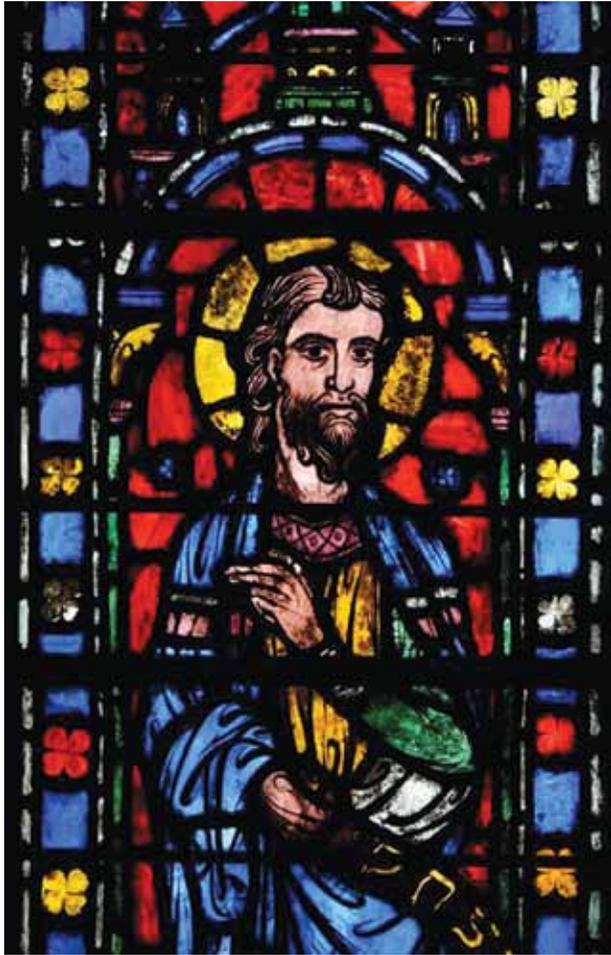


Sacred Places in Pennsylvania

Signs of Religious Freedom and Diversity



COURTESY BRYN ATHYN CATHEDRAL

The renowned stained glass windows (above) of Bryn Athyn Cathedral (facing page, bottom) in Bryn Athyn, Montgomery County, were inspired by medieval period colored glass. Largely financed by the philanthropic family of John Pitcairn (1841–1916), founder of the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company, now PPG Industries, the cathedral serves as the Episcopal seat of the General Church of the New Jerusalem, an international Swedenborgian church. Dedicated in 1919, it was built using methods highly unusual for the twentieth century; workshops for stone, wood, metal, and glass were erected on site, encouraging collaboration among designers and artisans.

Robert Jaeger

When William Penn established Pennsylvania, he did so in part to create a place where his own faith community, the Religious Society of Friends (or Quakers), could worship freely, just as the Puritans did in Massachusetts and the Baptists in Rhode Island. But Penn went further—he established freedom for other faiths and creeds, welcoming one and all, regardless of their beliefs and liturgies.

The fact that Pennsylvania's residents were free to worship as they pleased is well known. What is less well known is the spectacular consequence of that freedom; in an era when religious tolerance was so rare, Penn's invitation attracted a wide range of believers who sought a haven in which to practice their religion without constraint. In essence, freedom led to diversity.

The early diversity of faith traditions in Penn's colony led, naturally, to a highly varied spectrum of sacred places built to house each distinctive denomination. When religious groups settled in Pennsylvania before any other colony, they constructed what is now called first churches or first congregations—the first buildings constructed in America for their faith traditions. Pennsylvania has more first churches than any other state in the nation. It is home to the oldest German Reformed Church in America, the first Church of the Brethren; the oldest Mennonite Church; and the first Methodist Church. Philadelphia was a major center for free African Americans, and so the first African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church was built in the city, as was the first African Presbyterian church, the first African Episcopal Church, and the first African church in the Methodist denomination. Philadelphia's Rodeph Shalom is the nation's first Ashkenazic congregation, a landmark in American Jewish history.

Since its founding, Pennsylvania has witnessed the formation and organization of many religious denominations. Churches that spawned the organization of their denominations are sometimes called mother churches. Both the First Presbyterian Church and the First Baptist Church in Philadelphia claim this honor. In addition, unique religious communities were formed in Pennsylvania, including Ephrata Cloister, an eighteenth-century pietist community founded by Conrad Beissel (1691–1768) in

Lancaster County, and Old Economy Village in Ambridge, Beaver County, a self-sufficient religious community led by George Rapp (1757–1847), which became internationally recognized not only for its religious devotion but also for its prosperity. Both historic sites are administered by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) as destinations along the Pennsylvania Trails of History™.

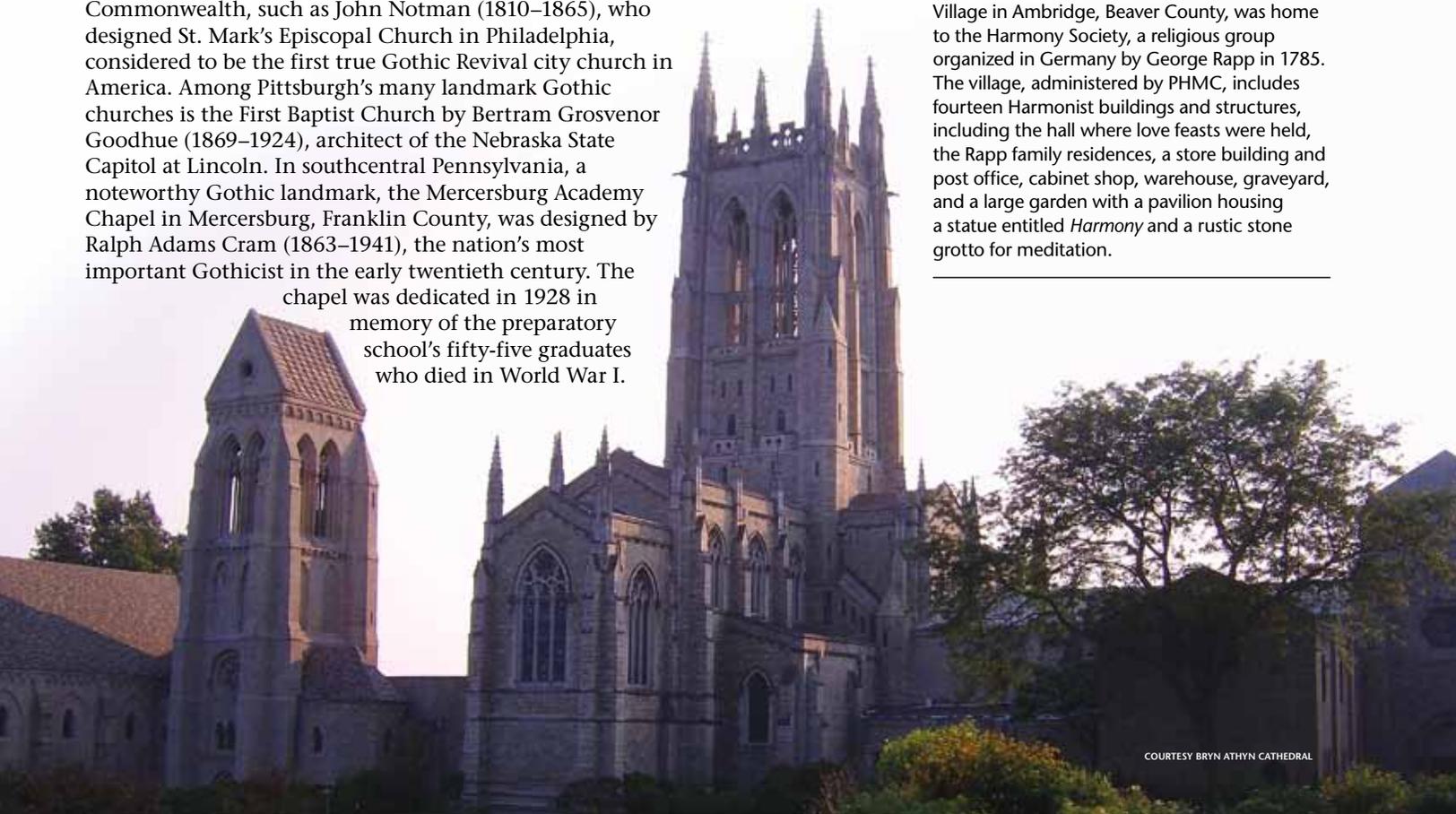
Pennsylvania's diversity of sacred places does not end with these religious landmarks. The Commonwealth is home also to sacred places designed by many of the country's finest architects. William Strickland (1788–1854), one of the great practitioners of the Greek Revival style in the United States, designed St. George Greek Orthodox Cathedral in Philadelphia, originally built in 1821 for the congregation of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church. Henry Hobson Richardson (1838–1886), considered by many to be America's first great modernist architect, who influenced a line of architects spanning from Louis Sullivan (1856–1924) to Frank Lloyd Wright (1867–1959), designed Pittsburgh's diminutive Emmanuel Episcopal Church in a simplified medieval era style now identified as Richardsonian Romanesque. Shortly after his death, Richardson's firm designed Shadyside Presbyterian Church, also in Pittsburgh, in the same style.

Many of the nation's foremost architects practicing in the Gothic Revival style have given great monuments to the Commonwealth, such as John Notman (1810–1865), who designed St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, considered to be the first true Gothic Revival city church in America. Among Pittsburgh's many landmark Gothic churches is the First Baptist Church by Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue (1869–1924), architect of the Nebraska State Capitol at Lincoln. In southcentral Pennsylvania, a noteworthy Gothic landmark, the Mercersburg Academy Chapel in Mercersburg, Franklin County, was designed by Ralph Adams Cram (1863–1941), the nation's most important Gothicist in the early twentieth century. The chapel was dedicated in 1928 in memory of the preparatory school's fifty-five graduates who died in World War I.



PHMC OLD ECONOMY VILLAGE

Built between 1824 and 1831, Old Economy Village in Ambridge, Beaver County, was home to the Harmony Society, a religious group organized in Germany by George Rapp in 1785. The village, administered by PHMC, includes fourteen Harmonist buildings and structures, including the hall where love feasts were held, the Rapp family residences, a store building and post office, cabinet shop, warehouse, graveyard, and a large garden with a pavilion housing a statue entitled *Harmony* and a rustic stone grotto for meditation.



COURTESY BRYN ATHYN CATHEDRAL



PHMC BUREAU FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Philadelphia's Rodeph Shalom dates its founding to 1795 with the coalescing of the first Ashkenazic congregation in the Western Hemisphere. When Rodeph Shalom outgrew its first house of worship, the congregation razed the building, designed by Frank Furness (1867–1959), and built the present-day temple on the site. Inspired by the great Synagogue of Florence, Italy, the temple is one of the few in the United States that retains its distinctive Moorish-Byzantine style. For the restoration of its sanctuary, Rodeph Shalom received a preservation award in 2006 from Preservation Pennsylvania and PHMC.

In response to the religious and social needs of a growing population of followers of Hinduism and other Indic religions in western Pennsylvania, seven acres in Penn Hills, near Monroeville, Westmoreland County, were acquired in 1973 for the building of the Hindu Jain Temple of Pittsburgh. Ground was broken for construction in 1981 and the building, administered by the Hindu Temple Society of North America, was completed seven years later.

St. Peter Cathedral in Erie is one of the greatest Gothic churches designed by Patrick Keely (1816–1896), the most important and prolific architect for the Roman Catholic Church in the late nineteenth century, whose religious commissions exceeded six hundred. A monumental example of the Victorian Gothic style, the cathedral's foundations were built in part with dismantled stone from the Erie Extension Canal. In Pennsylvania's small towns and rural areas, there are many fine examples of simpler, sometimes vernacular Gothic churches, some built from catalogues printed and promulgated by denominational offices. Among these handsome churches is a series of Carpenter Gothic churches, constructed of wood, which was cheap and plentiful, and embellished with fanciful bargeboard and towers. The distinctive board-and-batten façade of the Linfield United Church of Christ built in 1878 in Linfield, Montgomery County, emphasizes the vertical lines of the Gothic style.

The Gothic style predominated for a half-century, but many other styles and materials proliferated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Congregations of all sizes and descriptions could choose a style and manner that befitted them, and many chose designs that reflected their ethnic or religious heritage. The twin domes of St. Michael the Archangel Orthodox Church in the anthracite mining town of St. Clair, Schuylkill County, recall the Eastern European origins of the parishioners. The Polish parishioners of the old Cambria City neighborhood of Johnstown who constructed St. Casimir Church, now Saints Casimir and Emerich Roman Catholic Church, chose the Romanesque style for their church.

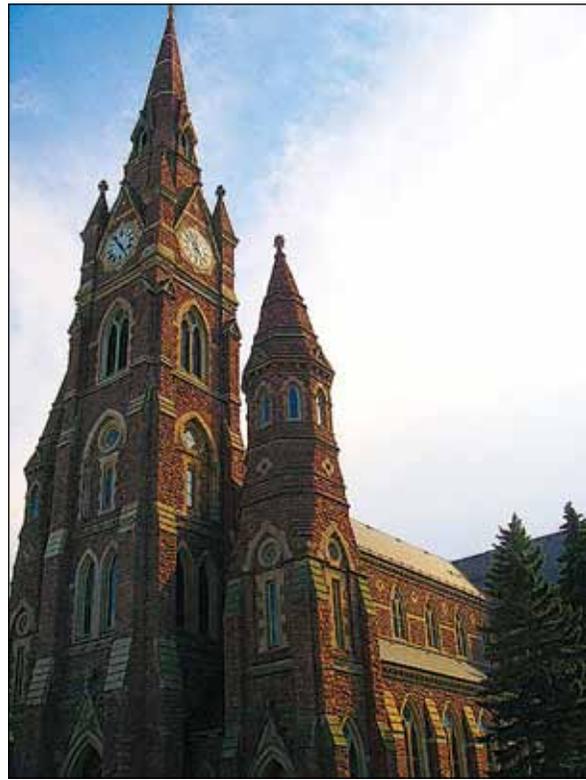
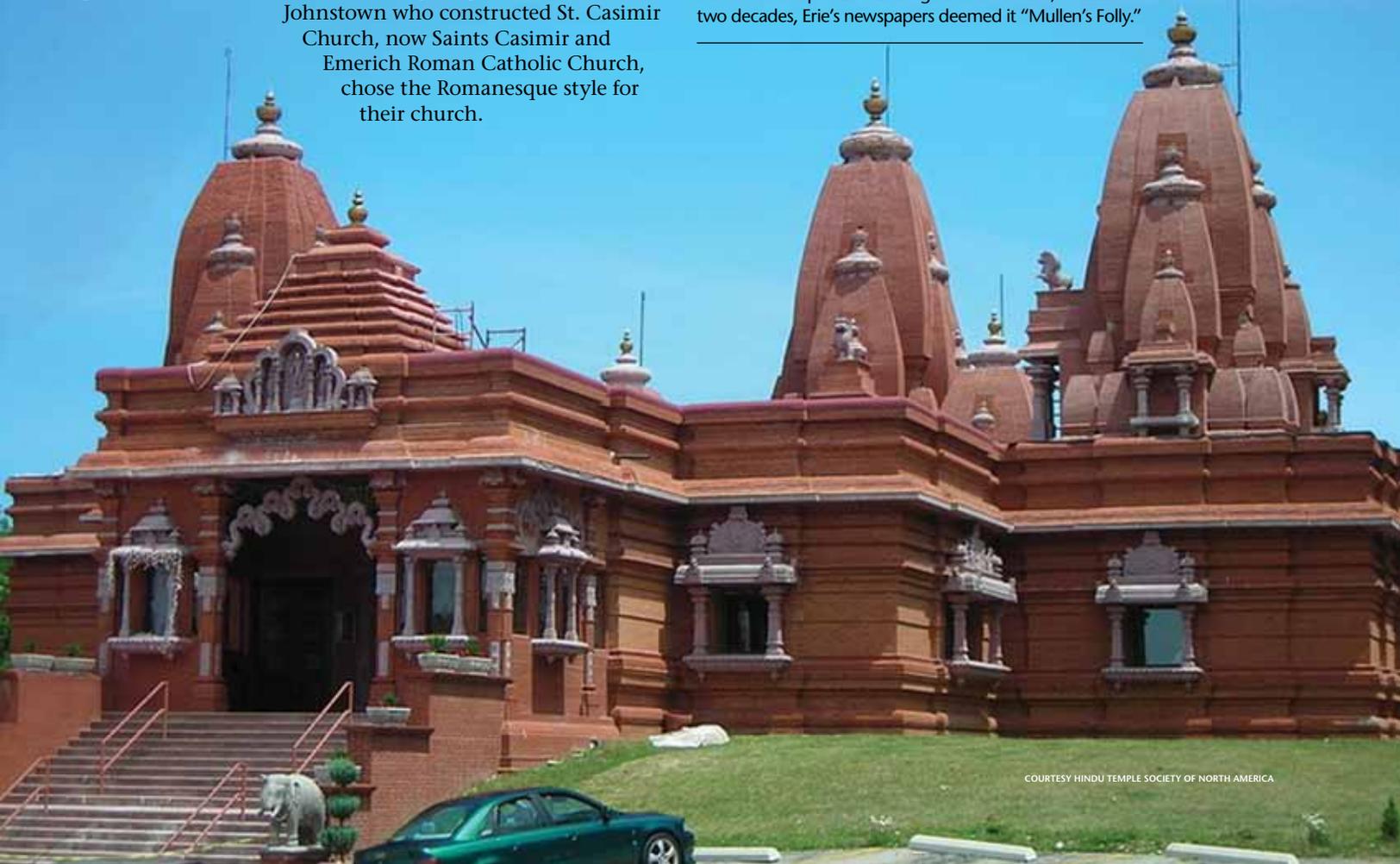


PHOTO BY PAT NOBLE

Built in thirteenth-century French Victorian Gothic style, Erie's St. Peter Cathedral—like many cathedrals throughout the world—was designed in the form of a cross. Red sandstone for the exterior was quarried in Orleans County, New York, and the white stone trim came from Mercer County. Construction of the building began in 1873 at the behest of Bishop Tobias Mullen, the third bishop of Erie. During its construction, which took two decades, Erie's newspapers deemed it "Mullen's Folly."



COURTESY HINDU TEMPLE SOCIETY OF NORTH AMERICA

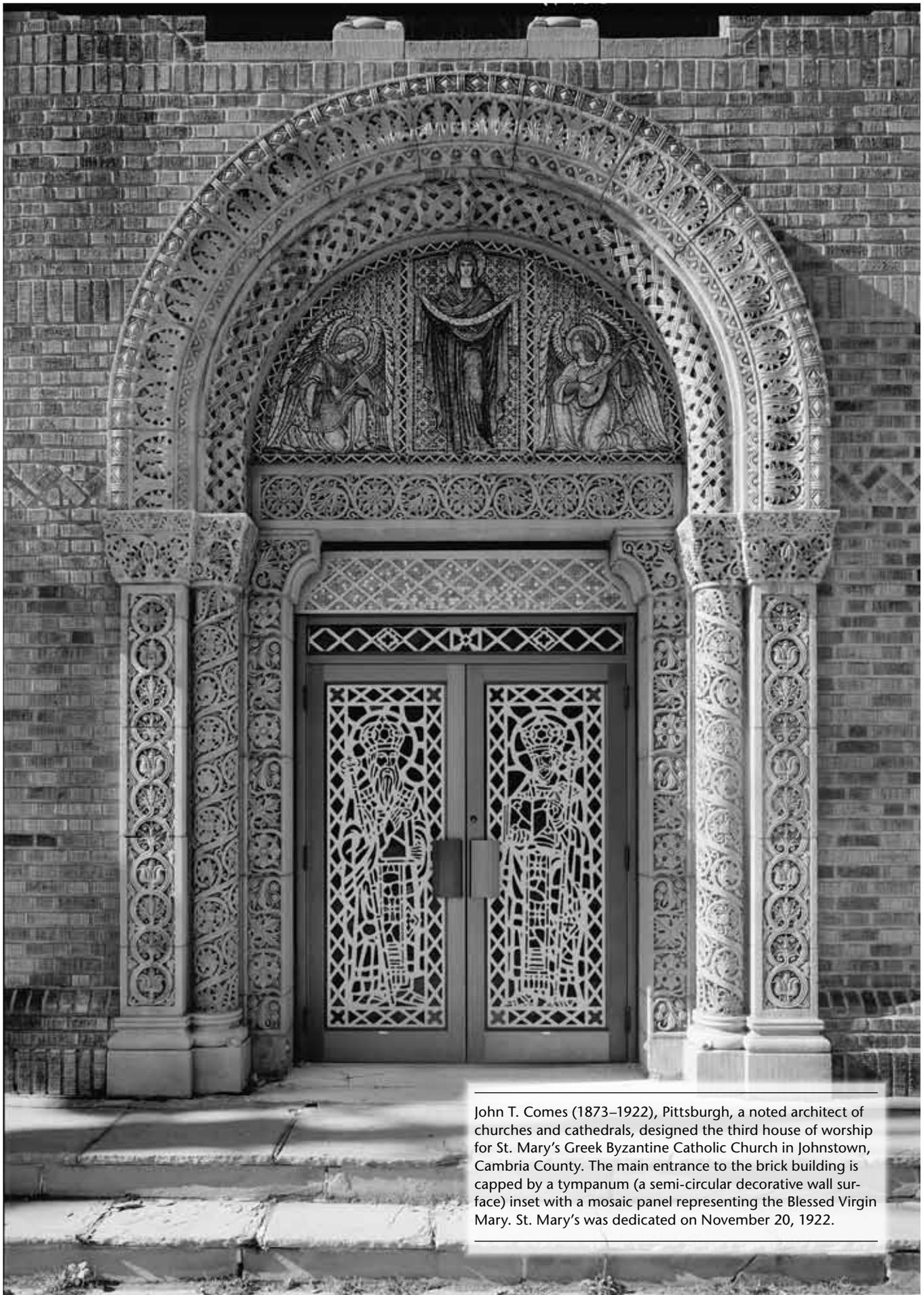


PHMC BUREAU FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

The dramatic Beth Shalom Synagogue, Elkins Park, is one of only four synagogues in the country designated a National Historic Landmark by the U.S. Department of the Interior. It was the only Jewish temple designed by American architect Frank Lloyd Wright (1867–1959) and the last project he completed before his death.

Pennsylvania's historic ecclesiastical edifices include spectacular monuments by architects not generally known for religious buildings, such as Beth Shalom synagogue in Elkins Park, Montgomery County, one of Frank Lloyd Wright's last great designs before his death in 1959. Designed in close collaboration with Rabbi Mortimer J. Cohen (1894–1972), Beth Shalom's monumental form suggests a glass and metal mountain, which was no accident. Cohen and Wright intended the building to evoke Mt. Sinai, one of the most important sacred places in Abrahamic religions. The synagogue's highly unusual form is a dramatic reminder that Pennsylvania is home to many sacred places that took on new forms reflecting modernity and change.

Chester Eastside Ministries, originally erected as the Third Presbyterian Church, in Chester, Delaware County, is octagonal in form, suggesting the open, theatrical form of its sanctuary. Elm Park Methodist Church in Scranton, Lackawanna County, was perhaps the finest design of George Washington Kramer (1837–1938), who helped popularize the auditorium seating plan for houses of worship and the Akron Plan Sunday School, a late nineteenth-century arrangement of a central rotunda surrounded by individual classrooms that had become the norm among most Protestant churches by the late nineteenth century.



John T. Comes (1873–1922), Pittsburgh, a noted architect of churches and cathedrals, designed the third house of worship for St. Mary's Greek Byzantine Catholic Church in Johnstown, Cambria County. The main entrance to the brick building is capped by a tympanum (a semi-circular decorative wall surface) inset with a mosaic panel representing the Blessed Virgin Mary. St. Mary's was dedicated on November 20, 1922.



PHMC BUREAU FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION/PHOTO BY BRYAN D. VAN SWEDEN

The elaborate interior (below) of Saints Cyril and Methodius Ukrainian Catholic Church (above) in Olyphant, Lackawanna County, dedicated in 1910. The present-day building is the third church to serve the congregation, which dates its history to 1888.



PHMC BUREAU FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION/PHOTO BY BRYAN D. VAN SWEDEN

The congregation of St. James Episcopal Church in Lancaster conducted its first recorded Anglican service in 1744 and built the first portion of its second house of worship in 1820. The building was remodeled and expanded through the years; in 1880, an earlier steeple was replaced with a Romanesque Revival style tower. Among nineteenth-century worshippers at St. James were James Buchanan, the nation's fifteenth president, and his niece Harriet Lane, who served as first lady during Buchanan's White House years.



PHMC BUREAU FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION/PHOTO BY BRYAN D. VAN SWEDEN

ABOUT PARTNERS FOR SACRED PLACES

Partners for Sacred Places (PSP) is the only national, nonsectarian, nonprofit organization dedicated to the sound stewardship and active community use of America's older religious properties. PSP brings together a national network of expert professionals who understand the value of a congregation's architectural assets, its worth as a faith community, and the significance of its service to the community at large.

Programs and services offered by PSP value and respect the spirituality and faith of all congregations that open their doors to the community. Designed to stimulate success, it changes the ways congregations view their role so that their sacred place remains a rich and vital part of the social fabric of a community. Through its training programs, information clearinghouse, and professional alliance, the organization has assisted congregations in all fifty states to leverage existing and new resources, solidify their continued relevance, and ensure their sustainability.

Founded in 1989 by a national task force of religious, historic preservation, and philanthropic leaders, PSP's advocacy and research activities are helping to build a shared sense of responsibility for the future of sacred places through legislation, funding, training, technical assistance, and public policy. For more information, write: Partners for Sacred Places, 1700 Sansom St., 10th Floor, Philadelphia, PA 19103; telephone (215) 567-3234; or visit www.sacredplaces.org on the Web.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

The Keystone State claims more than its share of landmarks and monuments, but some of the most beautiful are the simplest in design. The Quakers espoused simplicity and plainness in the design of their meetinghouses, and many of them dating to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries survive, including the Arch Street Meetinghouse in center-city Philadelphia and the Merion Meetinghouse at Merion Station, Montgomery County.

Other religious sects, including the Mennonites, preferred the meetinghouse form as well, although the design of these buildings varied considerably. Depending on the sect, as well as the region and era in which it was built, a meetinghouse could be one- or two-story in height, and constructed of wood, log, stone, or brick. All share a simple, unadorned

vernacular appearance and an open, undetailed interior. The Amish, a plain sect often identified with Lancaster County but also found elsewhere in the Commonwealth, prefer to hold services in their homes and do not maintain houses of worship. Meetinghouses and plain houses of worship may be located only a few hours away from the large, elaborate churches of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, but they are equally iconic and representative of the long, rich history of faith and religion in Pennsylvania. ■



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

In March 1941, U.S. Farm Security Administration photographer John Collier (1913–1992) documented young Mennonite women (top) waiting for “Deutsche school” to begin at their church (left) near Hinkletown, Lancaster County.

Measuring thirty by twenty-seven feet, the one-story log Catawissa Friends Meetinghouse in Catawissa, Columbia County, was built in 1789. The building was entered in the National Register of Historic Places in 1978.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Robert Jaeger earned his M.A. degree in preservation planning from Cornell University and an M.B.A. from the University of Michigan. He co-founded Partners for Sacred Places in 1989 and currently serves as the organization's executive director. He previously served as senior vice president of the historic religious properties program for the Philadelphia Historic Preservation Corporation. He coauthored *Sacred Places at Risk* (1998) and *Strategies for Stewardship and Active Use of Older and Historic Religious Properties* (1996) and authored *Sacred Places in Transition* (1994). From 1985 to 1989, he served as editor of *Inspired*, a bimonthly magazine featuring news and technical articles on the preservation of religious properties.

For their invaluable assistance during the researching and writing of this article, the author acknowledges Pamela W. Reilly, historic preservation specialist, and Bryan D. Van Sweden, community preservation coordinator, for PHMC's Bureau for Historic Preservation, and Neeta McCullough, editor of *Sacred Places*, published by Partners for Sacred Places, Philadelphia.

FOR FURTHER READING

Chiat, Marilyn J. *America's Religious Architecture: Sacred Places for Every Community*. Washington, D.C.: John Wiley and Sons, 1997.

Cohen, Diane, and A. Robert Jaeger. *Sacred Places at Risk: New Evidence of How Endangered Older Churches and Synagogues Serve Communities*. Philadelphia: Partners for Sacred Places, 1998.

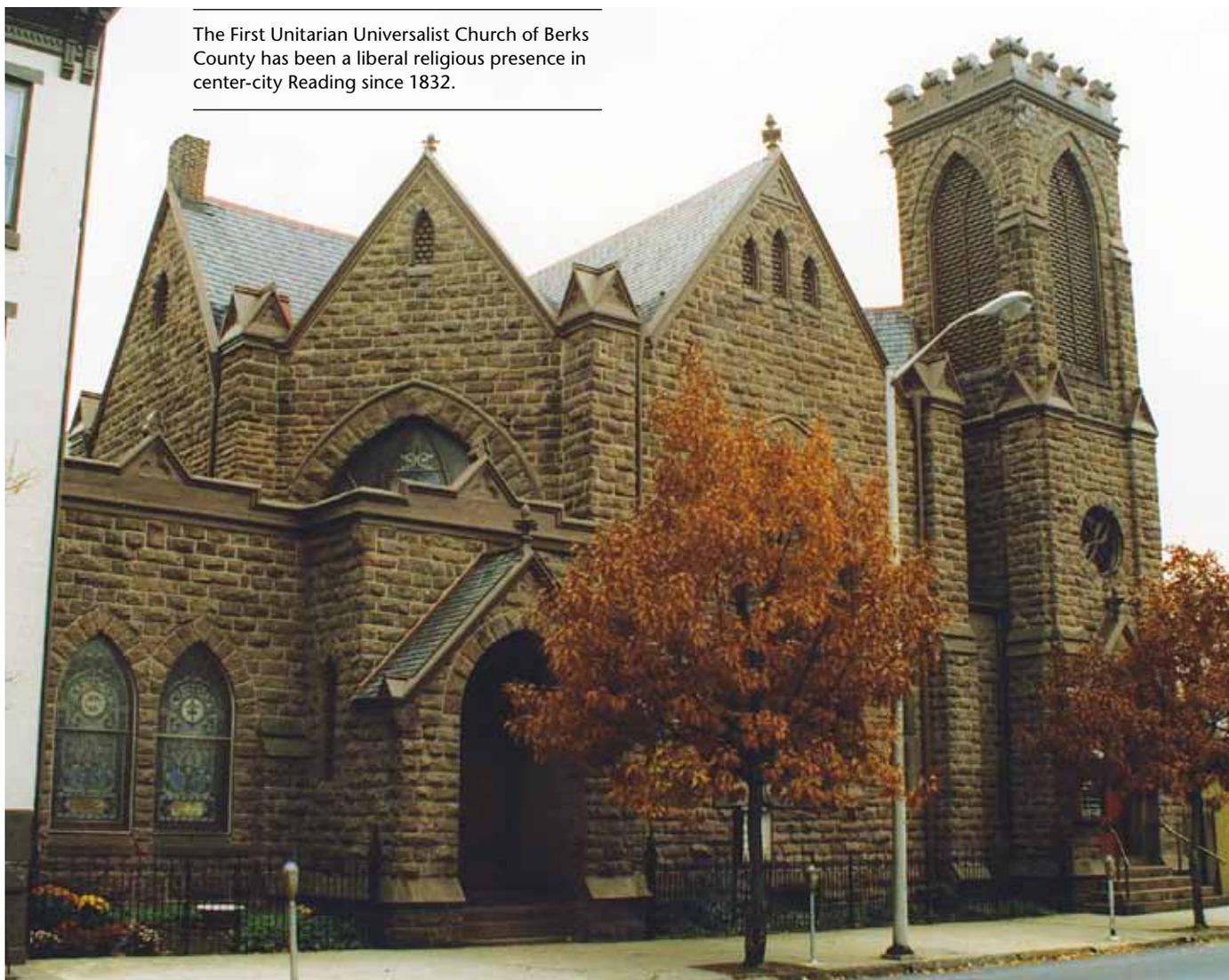
Howe, Jeffrey W. *Houses of Worship: An Identification Guide to the History and Styles of American Religious Architecture*. Charlotte, N.C.: Thunder Bay Press, 2003.

Moss, Roger W. *Historic Sacred Places of Philadelphia*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

William, Peter W. *Houses of God: Region, Religion, and Architecture in the United States*. Champaign, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2000.

Wind, James P. *Places of Worship: Exploring their History*. Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press, 1990.

The First Unitarian Universalist Church of Berks County has been a liberal religious presence in center-city Reading since 1832.



PHMC BUREAU FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION