

HISTORIC DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT

EPIPHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH

I. NAME

Historic: Epiphany Lutheran Church

Common name: All People's Gathering Lutheran Church

II. LOCATION

2600 N. 2nd St.

6th Aldermanic District

Legal Description: John B. A Kern's Subdivision in SE ¼ Sec 17-7-22 Block 212 Lots 21-22 &23

III. CLASSIFICATION

Structure

IV. OWNER

All People's Gathering Lutheran Church

2600 N. 2nd St.

Milwaukee, WI 53211

V. YEAR BUILT: 1906 (Church)
1925 (Social hall)

ARCHITECTS: John Roth, Jr. (church)
Hugo Haeuser (social hall)

VI. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Epiphany Lutheran (All People's Gathering Lutheran Church) is a fine example of the Neo-Gothic Revival styles which was a new architectural form at the time the church was finished in 1906. Located on a level lot at the northeast corner of N. 2nd and W. Clark Streets, Epiphany is one of the pivotal structures in the North 1st Street National Register Historic District. Epiphany is the only non-residential structure in the immediate neighborhood which includes some of the city's best remaining examples of late nineteenth century German ethnic and period revival style residences. Most of the houses are large, two and one-half story structures that were built for Milwaukee's turn-of-the-century entrepreneurs and professionals.

Epiphany Lutheran church and an attached social hall is a large L-shaped structure that was built in two phases. The church, which is rectangular in plan, rests on a raised, rusticated, Milwaukee limestone basement and the walls above it are made of rock-faced, Bedford limestone blocks of varying sizes laid in a classic opus reticulatum pattern. A large, two story,

multi-gabled social hall, completed in 1925, was added to the rear of the church transforming the building into a large L-plan structure. The walls of the addition are finished with rusticated Milwaukee-area limestone on the first story and stucco and wooden half-timbering on the second story. The entire complex is further embellished with extensive dressed limestone trim around the windows, doors and on the tops of the gables. The roof is covered with cement asbestos shingles that have weathered to a silver-gray color.

The main elevation of the church facing N. 2nd Street is asymmetrical in composition and consists of a square, three story corner tower topped with a crenellated parapet wall, a central gabled block, and a small one story flat-roofed entry pavilion at the far northwest corner of the building. The central, gabled block is fenestrated with a large, segmental-arched, English Perpendicular Style art glass window. The main entrance to the church, located in the base of the corner tower at the street corner, is through a set of double-leafed, Gothic-arched entry doors that are sheltered by a Gothic style porch.

The side elevation facing south is composed of two gabled transepts that are flanked by regularly placed art-glass windows. A large, English-style Gothic window is centered in each of the two transepts. The rest of the elevation is fenestrated with rectangular art glass windows. The rear addition, completed in 1925, faces east and meets the edge of the alley. This addition is two stories in height and finished with random rubble, Milwaukee limestone on the first story and stucco and wooden half-timbering on the second story. A pair of small, English Cotswold style gables project above the eaves of the steeply pitched roof. Windows are randomly placed to respond to the needs of the interior.

The side elevation facing north is composed of the original church and a projecting bay of the 1925 addition at the rear of the building. The original wall of the church that is similar in composition to the south elevation, is fenestrated with regularly-placed rectangular art glass windows and a large, English perpendicular style art glass window centered in the transept which is located at about the mid-point of the elevation.

VII. SIGNIFICANCE

Epiphany Lutheran Church is architecturally and historically significant to the City of Milwaukee as a fine example of a Neo-Gothic revival style structure that was meticulously constructed of local and imported limestone. The church is also significant as a fine example of the design work of local architect John Roth, Jr. who made important contributions to Milwaukee's built environment. The architectural and historic importance of the church makes it an irreplaceable part of the city's unique and nationally significant collection of churches.

VIII. HISTORY

Architecture

The Neo-Gothic style, which began to appear around 1905 in America, was a fresh and decidedly streamlined approach to the earlier, spiky designs of Victorian Gothic style churches. Neo Gothic design peaked in popularity during the teens and twenties and went into decline during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Despite the major changes in architectural tastes after World War II, the style continued to influence the designs of some new Gothic style churches and related institutional buildings through the late 1940s and early 1950s. American Architect Ralph Adams Cram was one of the acknowledged champions of Neo-Gothic design in the United States during the early twentieth century. The church designs

produced by Cram and his firm were highly influential on the work of many other American church architects including John Roth, Jr.

Some historians regard the Neo-Gothic style as a unique and scholarly synthesis of American and European church architecture. English church architecture was highly influential on the American Neo-Gothic style and the design of Epiphany, with its ground-hugging character and boxy-looking corner tower, shows the unmistakable hallmarks of Early English Style churches. The English influence in the architecture of the church also reflects the fact that Epiphany was one of Milwaukee's earliest "English Lutheran" congregations. From the inception of the church only the English language was used to conduct services and meetings. This factor made the church socially distinct from most of the city's other, turn-of-the-century Lutheran congregations where the German language was used almost exclusively.

Epiphany is also unique in the city's inventory of older churches because its walls were built with two types of limestone. The raised stone basement and the walls of the 1925 addition were made from the Milwaukee area's unique, buff-colored limestone while the walls of the church above the raised foundation are made of limestone imported from Bedford, Indiana.

The local limestone was quarried from a large vein of rock called the Niagara Formation that differs from other limestone around the country in terms of appearance and working characteristics. The stone can only be found beneath the surface of Wisconsin in an area bounded on the north by Door County, on the south by the state line, on the east by Lake Michigan and by the Fox River Valley on the west. According to the *Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey of Building and Ornamental Stones*, published in 1897, Niagara stone was "one of the best limestone's on the market and not surpassed by any similar limestone imported from neighboring states."

The Niagara limestone used in the construction of Epiphany Lutheran was probably quarried in Waukesha County or Wauwatosa where there were at least 15 major quarries in operation around the turn of the century. Today, limestone quarried in the Milwaukee area is generally crushed and used for gravel but some of it is made into blocks for building construction.

Compared with the Milwaukee area's native limestone, the Bedford, Indiana limestone used for the majority of the walls in the church building is grayer in color, but because it is relatively easy to cut and shape it is prized for its working characteristics by ornamental stone carvers. Bedford limestone was a very popular building material around the turn of the century. Indiana limestone quarries are still in operation today and the stone is used extensively for renovation and new construction work. Epiphany is believed to be the only church in Milwaukee that is constructed mostly of Bedford stone.

Church History

Epiphany Lutheran Church traces its origin to a weekend bible school for children that was founded on June 9, 1901 in a small house at the northwest corner of N. 4th and W. Locust Streets. Two years later, on April 30, 1903, the Epiphany Mission church was born when the bible school began its first regular Sunday church service with thirteen people in attendance. The mission congregation quickly outgrew the small house and on Sept. 18, 1904 they moved to a rented facility in the Strauss building at 914 N. Third Street. The move that day was highlighted when the members marched in a procession from the old location to the new one.

When the mission grew to 49 members a decision was made to formally incorporate the group as Epiphany Lutheran Church on March 2, 1905. Controversy erupted in October of that same year when the lot on which the present church stands at N. 2nd and W. Clarke was purchased

for \$2,000. In what stacks up as one of the city's earliest recorded battles over city planning and zoning, neighbors complained that the construction of a new church at the site would erode the value of the area's residential properties. A letter sent to the City of Milwaukee building inspector that was signed by 28 residents of the neighborhood and dated June 6, 1905 read as follows:

Dear Sir:

We the undersigned residents or owners of property within one block of the corner of Second and Clark Streets in the 13th ward of this city respectfully inform you:

That we are advised that the congregation of the English Lutheran Church contemplate building a church building at the northeast corner of Second and Clark Streets. We respectfully protest against permission being granted such congregation or its officers for the reason that the building of the church in that locality will largely destroy the value of improved residence property now already made on land adjoining the proposed site. We do not object to the building of the church in the neighborhood but think a site should be selected which will not destroy the value of residence property already improved and respectfully suggest the following locations:

Northeast corner of N. 2nd and W. Center Streets now for sale

Southwest corner of N. 4th and W. Center Street, [which is now] vacant

These two locations are within one block of the streetcar line and an additional location can be secured at the southeast corner of 1st and Center two blocks from the car line. If either of these sites are selected no residence property already improved will be seriously injured.

After neighbors' concerns apparently dissipated to some degree, construction began on the new church. By December of 1906, the basement of the building was completed and put into use as a temporary worship facility. Construction continued on the rest of the building that was completed on April 21, 1907 at a reported cost of \$28,000. Remarkably, the project was undertaken with only \$325 in cash and pledges with which to work. Generous donations by the members allowed the congregation to retire its debt on November 2, 1919

Epiphany grew rapidly after World War I during the economic boom of the 1920s and by 1924 the consideration, however, they decided to stay put and enlarge their church complex with a \$40,000 addition that was designed by local architect Hugo C. Haeuser. The brick, two-story, 8,000 square foot addition to the north elevation of the church was completed in April of 1925. The only other significant alteration to the exterior of the building was the construction of a small, 12' x 14' vestibule in 1962 at the northwest corner of the building.

The post-World War II era brought about significant social and economic changes in the neighborhood around Epiphany and by the early 1990s only about 20 people attended the church. In 1991 Epiphany disbanded and passed on their assets to a new Lutheran congregation called All Peoples Gathering. The new name highlights the congregation's interest in serving the city's ethnically and socially diverse population. Since 1991, membership and participation has grown impressively and now an average of about 150 people fills the sanctuary every Sunday. Throughout its long history the church has been affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the largest Lutheran synod in the country, or its predecessor institutions.

Architects

Epiphany Lutheran is one of two limestone churches in Milwaukee designed by **John Roth Jr.** (1866-1944) in the Neo-Gothic style. He also designed Reformation Lutheran Church (1908)

located at 2201 N. 35th Street. Roth was born in the farming community of Cedarburg, WI, which is about 20 miles north of Milwaukee. His mother, Helen (Steele) was a German immigrant and his father, John Sr., was born in Ohio and died in Milwaukee on May 8, 1915.

Roth's father was a pattern maker and a carpenter and his work is likely to have influenced young John's decision to pursue a career in architecture. Roth's German heritage might have helped to inspire his design for the Edward Schuster House (1901), located at 2756 N. 1st Street, which is one of the city's most outstanding German Revival Style residences. Although relatively little is known at present about Roth's life, research continues into his work and professional associations. His representative work in Milwaukee indicates that he was a competent, talented architect who worked mainly in the period and ethnic revival styles of his day. Examples of his work include: Otto Schomberg Residence (1912) 2575 N. Lake Drive; Merchant and Farmers State Bank (1910) 3338 N. Green Bay Ave. and two investment residences for H.G. Razall located at 2017 E. Bellevue (1909) and 2023 E. Bellevue Pl. (1909).

In his final years Roth and wife Eleanore lived at 139 W. Locust Street. They both died in Milwaukee on the same day, November 9, 1944, reportedly of heart disease.

The designer of the addition to Epiphany, **Hugo C. Haeuser**, (1882-1951) was known as an outstanding church architect. He made a specialty of Gothic and Neo-Gothic Revival style buildings and reportedly designed more than 300 churches across the United States. He preferred to see churches built with limestone from the quarries in the Milwaukee area and had the stone shipped around the country for his building projects. Local examples of his church design work in Milwaukee area includes Our Saviors Lutheran, 3022 W. Wisconsin Ave.; St. John's Lutheran 7809 Harwood Ave. in Wauwatosa; and Luther Memorial, 2840 S. 84th St. in West Allis

He was born in Milwaukee and after graduating from West Division High School he began working as apprentice architect and draftsman for the prestigious Milwaukee architectural firm of Ferry and Clas. Between 1905 and 1918 he worked as chief draftsman for the another outstanding Milwaukee architectural firm, Alexander C. Eschweiler and Co. While working for Eschweiler, Haeuser was credited with playing a significant role in the design of Milwaukee's unique pagoda- roofed gas stations that were built for the Wadhams Oil Company. Haeuser was a master of architectural detailing and particularly demanding about the quality of the stonework that went into his buildings. It was not uncommon for him to go a job site, pick up tools and materials and actually show the masons exactly how the stone should be laid and the joints finished. Haeuser was known to have been an admirer of the church design work of architect Ralph Adams Cram who had offices in Boston and New York. Haeuser died at age 71 in Milwaukee just before his last Neo Gothic style church, Our Saviors Lutheran, was completed.

IX. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that Epiphany Lutheran Church be considered for designation as a City of Milwaukee Historic Structure as a result of its fulfillment of criteria e-4, e-5, e-6 and e-9 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance, Section 308-81(2)(e) of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances.

- e-4. Its portrayal of the environment of a group of people in an era of history characterized by a distinctive architectural style.
- e.5 Its embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen.

- e-6. Its identification as the work of an artist, architect, interior designer, craftsperson, or master builder whose individual works have influenced the development of the City of Milwaukee, State of Wisconsin or the United States.

- e-9. Its unique location as a singular physical characteristic which represents an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community or the City of Milwaukee.

X. PRESERVATION GUIDELINES

The following preservation guidelines represent the principal concerns of the Historic Preservation Commission regarding this historic designation. However, the Commission reserves the right to make final decisions based upon particular design submissions. Nothing in these guidelines shall be construed to prevent ordinary maintenance or the restoration and/or replacement of documented original elements.

A. Roofs

Retain the original roof shape. Avoid making changes to the roof shape that would alter the building height, roofline or pitch. Retain the historic roofing materials on the church if at all possible.

B. Materials

1. Masonry

- a. Unpainted brick or stone should not be painted or covered. This is historically incorrect and could cause irreversible damage if it was decided to remove the paint at a later date.
- b. Repoint defective or deteriorated mortar by duplicating the original in color, style, texture and strength. Avoid using mortar colors and pointing styles, which were unavailable or were not used when the building was constructed.
- c. Clean masonry only when necessary to halt deterioration and with the gentlest method possible. Sandblasting and other abrasive blasting to brick or stone surfaces is prohibited. These methods of cleaning erode the surface of the material and accelerate deterioration and the accumulation of dirt on the exterior of the building. Avoid the indiscriminate use of chemical products that could have an adverse reaction with the masonry materials, such as the use of acid on limestone or terra cotta.
- d. Repair or replace deteriorated material with new materials that duplicate the hold as closely as possible. Avoid using new material that is in appropriate or was unavailable when the building was constructed.

2. Wood/Metal

- a. Retain original material, whenever possible. Avoid removing architectural features that are essential to maintaining the building's character and appearance. The church steeple and entry porch and the rectory porch and gable details are essential features of the buildings in the complex and should be retained.
- b. Retain or replace deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the appearance of the old as closely as possible. Avoid covering architectural features with new materials that are inappropriate or were

unavailable when the building was constructed. The use of vinyl or aluminum trim or siding is prohibited

C. Windows and Doors

1. Retain existing window and door openings. Retain the existing configuration of panes, sash, surrounds and sills, except as necessary to restore to the original condition. Avoid making additional openings or changes in existing fenestration by enlarging or reducing window or door openings to fit new stock window sash or new stock door sizes. Avoid changing the size or configuration of windowpanes or sash.
2. Respect the building's stylistic period. If the replacement of doors or window sash is necessary, the replacement should duplicate the appearance and design of the original window sash or doors. Avoid using inappropriate sash and replacements. Avoid the filling-in or covering of openings with inappropriate materials such as concrete block or glass block. Avoid using modern style sash in place of double-hung sash or the substitution of units with glazing configurations not appropriate to the style of the building. The leaded glass windows in the church should not be altered or removed except for restoration.

D. Trim and Ornamentation

There should be no changes to the exiting trim or ornamentation except as necessary to restore the building to its original condition. Replacement features shall match the original member in scale, design and appearance, but not necessarily in material.

E. Additions

All elevations of the church building are integral to the structure's architectural significance. Additions are not recommended and require the approval of the Commission. Approval shall be based upon the addition's design compatibility with the building in terms of height, roof configuration, fenestration, scale, design and materials, and the degree to which it visually intrudes upon the principal elevation.

F. Signs

The installation of any permanent exterior sign shall require the approval of the Commission. Approval will be based on the compatibility of the proposed sign with the historic and architectural character of the building. No internally illuminated box sign will be approved.

G. Site features

New plant materials, fencing, paving and lighting fixtures shall be compatible with the historic architectural character of the building.

H. Guidelines for New Construction

It is important that new construction be designed so as to be as sympathetic as possible with the character of the church.

1. Siting

New construction must respect the historic siting of the church. It should be accomplished so as to maintain the appearance of the church from the street as freestanding structure.

2. Scale

Overall building height and bulk, the expression of major building divisions including foundation, body and roof, and individual building components such as overhangs and fenestration that are in proximity to a historic building must be compatible to and sympathetic with the design of the church.

3. Form

The massing of new construction must be compatible with the goal of maintaining the integrity of the church as a distinct freestanding structure. The profiles of roofs and building elements that project and recede from the main historic church should express the same continuity established by the historic building if they are in proximity to it.

4. Materials

The building material , which are visible from the public right-of-way and in proximity to the church, should be consistent with the colors, textures, proportions and combinations of cladding materials used on the church. The physical composition of the materials may be different from that of the historic materials, but the same appearance should be maintained.

I. Guidelines for Demolition

Although demolition is not encouraged and is generally not permissible, there maybe instances when demolition may be acceptable if approved by the Historic Preservation Commission. The following guidelines, with those found in subsection 9(h) of the ordinance, shall be taken into consideration by the Commission when reviewing demolition requests.

1. Condition

Demolition requests may be granted when it can be clearly demonstrated that the condition of a building or a portion thereof is such that it constitutes an immediate threat to health and safety and is beyond hope of repair.

2. Importance

Consideration will be given to whether or not the building is of historical or architectural significance or displays a quality of material and craftsmanship that does not exist in other structures in the area.

3. Location

Consideration will be given to whether or not the building contributes to the neighborhood and the general street appearance and has a positive effect on other buildings in the area.

4. Potential for Restoration

Consideration will be given to whether or not the building is beyond economically feasible repair.

5. Additions

Consideration will be given to whether or not the proposed demolition is a later addition that is not in keeping with original design of the structure or does not contribute to its character.