

SAINT JOHN'S CATHEDRAL: GOTHIC REVIVAL HOME OF DENVER'S FIRST EPISCOPAL CONGREGATION

Why do you think so many of Denver's early buildings were churches?

St. John's Cathedral has deep roots in the history of Denver. It was the first Episcopal congregation, beginning in 1860 and becoming chartered in 1861 as The Church of St. John's in the Wilderness. The early congregations worshiped in several downtown locations before they built their first cathedral in 1880 at 20th and Welton. This Victorian Romanesque structure was destroyed by fire in 1903. Tracy and Swartwout Architects were selected to design the new cathedral at the current site. A chapter house was completed on the site in 1904 and construction of the Gothic Revival cathedral itself began in 1905 and was initially completed in 1911 (History).

Structure

The building was constructed of Indiana limestone in the late Gothic Revival style. The architecture of the cathedral included some contemporary features such as the center bay with a soaring window over a three-part entrance. The oak reredos with thirteen carved figures and the wrought iron and brass rood screen were saved from the old cathedral at 20th & Welton. As building progressed, plans changed and only the nave (not nave and transept) was built from Tracy and Swartwout's design. The center aisle is 185 feet long and 65 feet high (the original Tracy and Swartwout design) (Voelz Chandler, 2013).

Over the years, the cathedral has been subject to a series of changes and additions. In 1927, Burnham and Merrill Hoyt Architects designed a side chapel (St. Martin's Chapel) and a large parish hall (Dagwell Hall) in rural English style. St. Francis Chapel and the Paul Roberts Education Building were added in 1957. The Education Building replaced the original Chapter House, which was torn down. Later, the Cathedral expanded its grounds to the Plaza Cathedral Square on the north side of 14th Avenue (St. John's Cathedral National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form).

The stained glass windows have artistic significance in that they represent a 100-year collection of stained glass art of masters from the Edward Frampton Studio in England, the Charles Connick studio in Boston, and the work of Colorado artist Edgar Britton. Additional artistic elements include the commissioned woodwork and fresco that decorate the chapel and main church. There are also stones from the foundations of Canterbury Cathedral and Westminster Abby set in the narthex wall.

Currently, this complex of stone buildings occupies the entire city block bounded by east 13th and 14th Avenues and Washington and Clarkson Streets. These ecclesiastical buildings present not only the historical continuity of a local congregation from pioneer days to the present, but also demonstrate a continuous architectural and artistic development reflecting the changing tastes and capacities of the community (Peabody).

Architects

Evarts Tracy (1868–1922) graduated from Yale University in 1890, and Egerton Swartwout (1870–1943) followed in 1891. Both Swartwout and Tracy trained and worked as draftsmen with the renowned firm McKim, Mead and White from 1904 to 1909. Tracy and Swartwout were joined by architect James

Riely Gordon, and founded the firm Gordon, Tracy & Swartwout. From 1909 to 1912, the firm was joined by Electus Darwin Litchfield, a graduate of the Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute and the Stevens Institute of Technology. The firm was at this time named Tracy, Swartwout & Litchfield (National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form).

Burnham Hoyt (1887-1960) and Merrill Hoyt (1881-1933) were brothers who grew up at 2849 West 23rd Avenue in north Denver, and they both graduated from North High School. Merrill received his architectural training at the prestigious firm of William Fisher Architects while Burnham received his training at the Beaux Arts Institute in New York City. After serving in World War I, Burnham returned to Denver in 1919 to join his brother and form the architectural firm of H. B and M. Hoyt, Architects. The firm prospered in the 1920s and is credited with the design of many of Denver's iconic buildings of the era. Their designs embraced various historical styles including Greek Revival, Romanesque and Spanish Revival. Together they designed residential, commercial, academic and religious buildings. After Merrill's death in 1933, Burnham returned to New York City where he eventually became the Dean of the School of Architecture at New York University. Later he returned to Denver and ran his own architectural firm until 1955. Both Hoyt brothers had numerous civic and professional accomplishments to their credit (National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form).

References

St. John's Cathedral. History. Retrieved from www.sjcathedral.org/about/history.

Voelz Chandler, M. 2013. *Guide to Denver Architecture*. Denver: Fulcrum Group.

St. John's Cathedral National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form.

Peabody, O. St. John's Cathedral pamphlet.