

## **TRINITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH: A GOTHIC REVIVAL JEWEL IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CITY**

**What do you think are some of the architectural aspects most important to the design of religious buildings?**

Designed by Robert Roeschlaub, Colorado's first licensed architect, the Trinity Methodist Church is a splendid example of the Gothic Revival style or "Modern Gothic." What made the building "modern" in 1888, when it was designed and built, was the marriage of Gothic detailing and a Rococo theater with the latest technology. The church is located in the heart of downtown Denver, surrounded by skyscrapers on every side, multi-story parking garages, busy streets and pay-to-park lots.

### **Structure**

The church was constructed entirely of lightweight, rough texture rhyolite from Castle Rock, Colorado, in Douglas County. The stone allowed Roeschlaub to design a 181-foot-high hexagonal corner steeple in stone. The stone reflects multiple hues with hints of red and blue and the subtle glitter of mica. The accent stone is Utah sandstone, which can be seen on the three horizontal stripes in the steeple. A latticework Maltese cross tops the building drawing the eye "toward Heaven." It was one of the tallest stone structures in the United States at its time of completion (Noel and Wharton, 2016).

The theme of the trinity can be seen throughout, starting with the triple-arched entry on Broadway, in the Gothic windows, the three intertwined circles on the ends of each pew, interior doors, communion rail, in much of the woodwork throughout the sanctuary, the three sections of the spire and in the wooden arches above each side of the balcony. Within the proscenium arch and above the organ's pipes, you can count 66 lights, each representing a book of the Bible.

The 1,200 to 1,300-seat sanctuary resembles a theater with a large proscenium arch that frames the 4,202-pipe Roosevelt organ, designed by G.A. Audsley of London, to fill the space. Built by Hilborne Roosevelt (cousin of Theodore) of New York, it is one of only twelve known Roosevelt pipe organs in the country. The organ cost roughly \$30,000 in 1887. Number 308 on Roosevelt's records, it was powered by a dynamo in the church's basement, a curiosity since electricity had not yet come to the rest of the city. The dynamo was powered by a waterwheel, which was turned by a natural spring that had been discovered in the church's basement. The nave has great acoustics and has often been used for lectures and concerts (Noel, 2002).

Most of the stained glass windows are by Healy and Millet of Chicago, fabricators for Louis Sullivan. The most outstanding window is called "Resurrection," a three-panel window symbolic of the Holy Trinity, by the J. & R. Lamb Company of New York at an original cost in 1888 totaling \$2,500. Since the original installation, the Watkins Stained Glass Company of Englewood has played a vital role in the continued beauty of the windows. Four generations of the Watkins family have repaired and maintained Trinity's stained glass artwork over the years (Noel and Norgren, 1993).

In 1982, Trinity sold its air rights to a Toronto developer for a \$2 million endowment, restoration of the church and construction of a subterranean office, education, and parking complex.

## People

The church's most famous pastor, the Reverend Henry Buchtel, who also served as chancellor of the University of Denver and governor of Colorado, is celebrated with the solid bronze and oak pulpit which he gifted to the church. Trinity's is the oldest congregation in the city. Among its well-known members were John Evans and the controversial John M. Chivington, an American army officer known for his role in the Sand Creek Massacre. When work on Trinity began on August 2, 1859, Denver lacked churches, hospitals, libraries and schools (Trinity United Methodist Church).

## Architect

In 1873, Robert S. Roeschlaub (1843–1923), who designed the church, left Quincy, Illinois after eight years as an apprentice and set off for Denver with his family. The early years for Colorado's first licensed architect were lean. There was plenty of need for rudimentary design at bargain prices. Ultimately, the architect was responsible for many major buildings in Colorado. Trinity is considered by many to be his finest. Roeschlaub felt as if this was the crowning achievement of his extensive career. The use of local materials in the building reflects Roeschlaub's intentions to stay true to the tenets of the Arts and Crafts Movement.

In 1875, he established himself as the area's leading architect by designing Central Presbyterian's first church home at 18th and Champa. As a result of his work, the East Denver School Board offered him a permanent position to design plans for needed schools in the area, the grandest being East Denver High School. The late 1880s brought an influx of commissions. Not only did Roeschlaub design Trinity, but numerous other historic buildings across the state: the Central City Opera House (1879), Pueblo's Central High School (1881); the University of Denver's Chamberlin Observatory (1888); University Hall (1890); and Carnegie Library (1906). He spearheaded the creation of the Colorado Chapter of the AIA as Colorado's first major architect. In 1909, when the architect's licensing law was passed, Roeschlaub was given license Number One. He retired in 1912 and later passed away in San Diego, but was returned to Denver for burial at Fairmount.

## References

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