

Westmont Presbyterian Church  
Westmont Neighborhood  
601 Luzerne Street  
Johnstown  
Cambria County  
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5721

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

WESTMONT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

HABS No. PA-5721

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Location: 601 Luzerne Street, Westmont, Johnstown, Cambria County, Pa.

Description: Large English Gothic front-gable church faced with rough-faced Bedford limestone. The church building is of stone construction with a stone exterior. The facade is dominated by one vast lancet window surmounting the arched portal. Six buttresses between windows and one flying buttress support the exterior side walls.

One enters the church through a low-ceilinged, dimly-illuminated narthex, then passes into a highly illuminated main space. This contrast of space and luminescence is characteristic of Romanesque architecture. The interior has a steeply-pitched dark wooden roof transversed by cross-beam bracing. Heavy wooden trussing is held by oversize brackets that end in large corbels.

The focus of the front of the church is an immense stone pointed medieval arch which creates a recessed apse. The apse is filled by a huge pipe organ which almost reaches the ceiling. The center brass pipes are in the form of a cross. A large wooden pulpit dominates the front of church.

The walls are of white plaster, absent of ornamentation. Opalescent stained glass windows illuminate the interior and serve as the chief decorative element. Large lancet windows with reticulated tracery are executed in blue, green and gold flowing geometric designs surmounted by a cross. A choir gallery is located in the rear of the church, illuminated by the front lancet window. All of the pews and woodwork are of dark oak wood.

History: The current church building dates from 1926, but the congregation is the oldest in Westmont. In October 1894 the First Presbyterian Church of Johnstown organized a Sunday School for children of Westmont residents. The school was held in a vacant room over Kramer's store, Tioga Street Market, in Westmont, a general store that has retained its historic appearance. On April 14, 1902, construction of the Westmont Chapel was approved. The chapel was built on Mifflin St., and dedicated November 30, 1902. The chapel was razed sometime after 1913. It has been replaced by an apartment building.

The cornerstone for the current church was laid on May 9, 1926, by the Rev. John Rhys Roberts, of the Vine Street Presbyterian Church in Johnstown. He subsequently became pastor of the church on March 5, 1927. The church office has preserved an early filmed recording of the laying of the cornerstone and other church activities made in 1926. The videotape also shows the area of Luzerne Street surrounding the church.

The architect for the church was A. G. Lamont of 156 Fifth Avenue, New York City. Berkehile Bros., engineers and contractors of Johnstown, constructed the church.

Sources:

Interview with church office staff, August 22, 1988.

Lamont, A.G., architectural drawings for the church, Archives of Carnegie-Mellon University, Hunt Library, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

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Sanborn Map Co. Westmont, Pennsylvania, (New York, 1913).

The Westmont Primer, A New Member Introduction. A chronology of the early history of the Westmont Presbyterian Church, 198?.

Project Information: This report was part of a larger project to document the city of Johnstown, Pennsylvania. The project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), Robert Kapsch, chief, at the request of America's Industrial Heritage Project (AIHP). An overview of history of the city (HABS No. PA-5669) and an overview of the neighborhood of Westmont (HABS No. PA-5671) provide context for these buildings as well as a comprehensive list of sources. See also additional HABS reports on buildings in the downtown and other neighborhoods.

This report was prepared by Natalie Gillespie in August 1988 under the direction of Alison K. Hoagland, HABS historian, and Kim E. Wallace, the supervisory historian of the project. Gillespie's and other project historians' work was published as The Character of a Steel Mill City: Four Historic Neighborhoods of Johnstown, Pennsylvania (Washington, D.C.: HABS/HAER, National Park Service, 1989), edited by Kim E. Wallace. Illustrations in the publication include large format photographs taken by HAER photographer Jet Lowe and 35 mm photographs taken by the project historians.