

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES CHURCH IN JESUS CHRIST
(St. Ludwig's Roman Catholic Church)
1400-28 N. Twenty-eighth St., northwest corner of N. Twenty-eight and Master
Streets
Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-6694

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
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Washington, DC 20240

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- Location:** 1400-28 N. Twenty-eighth Street, northwest corner of N. Twenty-eighth and Master Streets, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- Significance:** The parish buildings of St. Ludwig's Roman Catholic Church are important landmarks to both a disappeared urban community and another that endures. The structures are located in an area of Philadelphia known as "Brewerytown," which was historically home to German-Americans and their breweries. After the breakdown of the German community in the area, particularly after the passage of Prohibition, African Americans located to the area and in addition to buying and renting area houses, they appropriated extant religious structures for their own ministries.

Description:

The former Roman Catholic parish of St. Ludwig's occupies the southern portion of the block bounded by Jefferson, Master, N. Newkirk, and N. Twenty-eighth streets. The church sanctuary occupies a high-profile corner site, made all-the-more-prominent by the razing of buildings to the east along Master and N. Twenty-eighth. This Gothic-Revival structure is constructed of rock-faced ashlar Port Deposit granite laid-up in irregular courses with dressed-stone details.¹ An interesting design feature in regard to the building's form is the unmatched tower pairs. A casual eye might conclude that the west spire was not constructed or had disappeared, however closer evaluation indicates that the south (main) façade was designed in this manner—probably referencing the many unfinished Gothic churches and cathedrals throughout Europe. Another feature especially worth noting is the highly inventive stone tracery patterns in the pointed-arch window openings. The central lancet in the exterior wall of the east transept is particularly fantastical. Overall, the church remains in fair condition. Some of the stonework shows evidence of water damage and the roof is now covered in asphalt shingles. The large rose window and its stone tracery in the south wall has been removed and the space covered-over with aluminum siding.

The interior remains astonishingly intact. While peeling paint is widespread and there are areas of water damage, the church's decorative painting, furniture, and fixtures retain a high degree of integrity. The survival of these features is surprising given that virtually all of the interior Gothic elements—from the columns to the vaults to the decoration—are mostly

¹"Historical Sketch of St. Ludwig's Parish Published on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary Golden Jubilee of the Parish," 1941, Preservation Alliance, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, for stone type. The trim and detail is fashioned from Indiana Limestone.

fashioned from plaster.² There have, however, been some notable losses. A majority of the stained-glass windows have been removed and reused at St. Martha's Church, Academy Road, Philadelphia, and St. Anselm's Church, Dunks Ferry Road, Philadelphia.³ The three tower bells have likely been relocated to St. Martha's as well.

To the west of the church, also fronting Master Street, stands the former convent. This building, started one year after the church, was constructed with similar rock-faced and dressed stone as the sanctuary building. The five-bay structure draws attention to itself through the extruded central entrance bay which breaks-through the roof with a steep gable. The building remains in good condition. The windows and main door have been replaced. There has been some repointing and the stone wall extending between the church and the convent has been topped with four courses of concrete block, probably as a deterrent to trespassers. The modified hipped roof still retains its decorative roof slates.

Standing north of and integral to the church is the former rectory building. It is much simpler in articulation than the convent, being three bays and constructed of brick above the brownstone water table. The first- and second-story window openings have segmental brick lintels. This structure appears to be in good condition.

History:

St. Ludwig's Roman Catholic Church was established in 1890 to serve the Brewerytown neighborhood of Philadelphia, largely made-up of German immigrants and people of German ancestry.⁴ The first building constructed on the site was a three-story church-school-convent building located on the northwest corner of the lot, along N. Newkirk Street. Ground was broken in 1891. In 1893, a three-story rectory was constructed east of the multipurpose parish building and fronting onto N. Twenty-eighth Street. With increasing school enrollment, the parish soon desired to move the church and convent out of the original building. In 1901, the extant church building was started and the lower sanctuary completed in that year and fitted-out with the windows and furniture from the earlier church. The upper church was completed between 1906 and 1908. According to a lintel date stone, the new convent to the west of the church and fronting onto Master Street was constructed ca. 1902.

St. Ludwig's Roman Catholic Church was purchased by Acts of the Apostles Church in Jesus Christ in 1975, after the earlier congregation was dissolved.

Historian: James A. Jacobs

²Martin J. Rosenblum, architects, "Conditions Assessment: St. Ludwig's Catholic Church," 1993, summarized information obtained via electronic correspondence with Michael Stern, Instructor, Department of Design Technologies, Community College of Philadelphia, 11 January 2002.

³Ibid.

⁴Unless otherwise noted, information related to St. Ludwig's history is drawn from the Stern summary of the Rosenblum Conditions Assessment.

Work Consulted:

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