

Calvary Presbyterian Church
935 West Wisconsin Avenue
Milwaukee
Milwaukee County
Wisconsin

HABS No. WIS-264

HABS
WIS,
40-MILWA,
22-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

CALVARY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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Location: 935 West Wisconsin Avenue (southeast corner of West Wisconsin Avenue and North Tenth Street), Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin.

Present Owner and Occupant: Calvary Presbyterian Church

Statement of Significance: The first Presbyterian congregation and Presbyterian church edifice west of the Milwaukee River, and the third Presbyterian church in Milwaukee, Calvary is one of the city's older surviving churches and an important, relatively well-preserved local example of the Victorian Gothic style.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Contracts were awarded in October, 1870, the cornerstone (dated 1870) laid May 10, 1871, and dedication of the \$60,000 church held March 3, 1872.
2. Architects: Koch and Hess, Milwaukee. Henry Koch (1841-1910) was born in Celle, north of Hanover, Germany, and came to Milwaukee as a child with his family. In 1856 he entered the office of George W. Mygatt, reportedly the first professional architect in Milwaukee, and worked until 1862, at which time he entered the Union army in the Civil War. Returning to Milwaukee in 1866, he entered into partnership with Mygatt. During his architectural career, Koch associated with Julius Hess (1870-73), Hermann J. Esser (1891-98) as well as practicing independently or with his sons. Other Milwaukee buildings by Koch include the Pfister Hotel, Union Depot, and City Hall (WIS-254).
3. Original and subsequent owners: The structure was built for and has remained the property of Calvary Presbyterian Church.
4. Builders and suppliers: Hiram R. Bond, masonry and brickwork; Simeon Babcock, carpentry; Louis Vogel, interior woodwork; William Bayley and William Greenslade, ironwork; Eustace P. Bowman and Robert L. Jones, galvanized iron (and slate roof?); William E. Goodman, gas fixtures; John H. Harding, frescoes; George Calloway, painting and

graining; Stark Brothers, upholstery and carpeting; Marshall Brothers, organ installation.

5. Alterations and additions: Although church historian Elizabeth Ells (see below) states that Calvary was enlarged in 1887, this was not the case. The church was redecorated and refurbished in that year, but saw no new construction until 1910, when a two-story brick addition, 18 feet x 18 feet x 20 feet, housing the pastor's study and church office, was erected on the southwest corner of the building. Architect for the addition may have been Garret van Pelt; mason and carpenter were William Winter and Charles Kleppe, respectively. During 1836-37 Calvary was restored and again redecorated. A fire on January 8, 1947, caused considerable damage at the south end of the church and necessitated rebuilding the sanctuary as well as extensive repairs to the nave and nave roof. E. W. Grossman was contractor for this \$20,000 project, completed by March 17, 1948. Finally, under the direction of Milwaukee architect Fritz von Grossmann, a two-story brick church school wing was constructed on the southeast corner of the building and a small elevator wing near the northeast corner in 1957-58.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

Two years ago representatives of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, Philadelphia, visited Calvary and formally recommended on the basis of the church's location and beauty that it never be demolished and always be maintained as a Presbyterian church.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views:

- a. Ells, Elizabeth H. The Days of Our Years; Calvary Presbyterian Church 1869-1939. Milwaukee: 1939. 10 (old view of the interior).
- b. Milwaukee Illustrated, II, Milwaukee, n.d., n.p. (uncatalogued, oversize volume in the collection of the Milwaukee County Historical Society; illustrates exterior of church with original patterned slate roofing and iron crests and finials).

2. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Building permits and other documents for December 5, 1910, January 8, 1947, and June 16, 1947 in the files of the General Office, Inspector of Buildings, Municipal Building, Milwaukee.

Inspection of church building March 3, August 20, and December 15, 1968.

Interviews with George Wood, church member and historian, December 16, 23, and 27, 1968.

Research notes of 1965 and 1967 of Virginia A. Palmer, University of Wisconsin Extension, Milwaukee.

b. Secondary and published sources:

"Another Landmark Moved," Milwaukee Sentinel, March 5, 1872, 4.

"A Beautiful Temple," Milwaukee Sentinel, March 4, 1872, 4.

"Brevities," Milwaukee Sentinel, December 3, 1870, 4; December 7, 1870, 4; May 11, 1871, 4; June 17, 1871, 4; August 11, 1871, 4; September 15, 1871, 4; September 21, 1871, 4; January 18, 1872, 4; February 29, 1872, 4; March 2, 1872, 4; March 4, 1872, 4; March 6, 1872, 4; and March 23, 1872, 4.

"Calvary Church," Milwaukee Sentinel, August 8, 1870, 1 and March 22, 1871, 4.

Calvary Presbyterian Church, Milwaukee, n.d. (1968?).

"Concert at Calvary Church," Milwaukee Sentinel, March 1, 1872, 4.

"Dedication Services Tomorrow," Milwaukee Sentinel, March 2, 1872, 4.

Ells, Elizabeth H. The Days of Our Years; Calvary Presbyterian Church 1869-1939. Milwaukee: 1939.

History of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Chicago, 1881, 831-832.

"Local Brevities," Milwaukee Sentinel, October 10, 1870, 4 and October 31, 1870, 4.

Milwaukee City Directory 1870-1871, Milwaukee, 1870.

"New Church," Milwaukee Sentinel, September 1, 1870, 1.

Pagel, Mary Ellen and Palmer, Virginia A. Guides to Historic Milwaukee: Kilbourntown Walking Tour. Milwaukee: 1967. 18, 19.

Perrin, Richard W. E. "Milwaukee Landmarks; Part I, Churches," Lore, XV (Fall, 1965), 133.

"Pews in Calvary Church," Milwaukee Sentinel, March 5, 1872, 4.

c. Potential sources not consulted:

Church minutes, files, and other documents and records.

Newspaper accounts of the period 1870-72 in papers other than the Milwaukee Sentinel; contemporary newspaper accounts of the remodelling of 1887, the addition of 1910, the renovation of 1936-37, the fire of 1947 and subsequent rebuilding, and the addition of 1957-58.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Victorian Gothic in style, Calvary is particularly interesting for the mannered verticality and slenderness of its forms and details. Notable features include the attenuated west spire and the nave's delicate, linear hammerbeam ceiling.
2. Condition of fabric: Good

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Calvary extends the full 150-foot depth of the lot from north to south lot lines and is 70 feet wide from the facade to a point near the rear where the wing of 1957-58 extends an additional 30 feet to the east.
2. Foundations: Cream-colored, rock-faced local limestone
3. Wall construction: Above its high limestone basement, the original church was built of cream-colored Milwaukee pressed brick trimmed with pressed brick and Cleveland

sandstone. Walls and masonry trim about basement level are now painted red. Both additions are also of brick construction, that of 1910 painted red, that of 1957-58 unpainted cream-colored brick.

4. Chimneys: Two; brick; painted red
5. Spires: The west spire, an octagonal spire rising from a square tower, is 202 feet high; the east spire measures 105 feet in height.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: In all there are nine doorways on the exterior: 1) and 2) main entrances on north and in northwest corner; 3) and 4) basement entrances on the west; 5) entrance on the north wall of the 1910 addition; 6) in the entrance on the north side of the 1957-58 elevator wing; 7) and 8) on the north wall of the 1957-58 church school wing; 9) on the west wall of the 1957-58 church school wing. The main entrances to the church proper are Gothic-arched double doors, painted and stained dark brown, and recessed within a gabled entrance porch.
 - b. Windows: On the main level of the church proper the windows are Gothic lancets; on the basement level they take the form of Tudor arches. Windows in both the additions of 1910 and of 1957-58 are rectangular.
7. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: A steeply pitched gabled roof covers the nave and is intersected by the gables of the transepts. The original patterned slate has been removed and the roof is now covered with asphalt shingles. The addition of 1910 also has a gabled roof, while that of the most recent addition is flat.
 - b. Framing of church roof and spires: Timber

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: On the main level of the church proper are, from north to south, the narthex--extending the width of the facade; the auditorium--an unobstructed, nearly rectangular space with very shallow transepts; and the elevated sanctuary--the area rebuilt after the fire of 1947. Above the narthex is the gallery, now closed. Below the narthex is the kitchen suite, and beneath the

auditorium and sanctuary are, from north to south, two meeting rooms and a parlor (all separated by sliding doors), a small nursery, and a corridor at the rear of the building. This corridor now joins the original fabric and the two later wings. That of 1910 includes two rooms--the church office on grade level and the pastor's study above--and a stairhall. The two-story wing of 1957-58 houses a chapel, church school facilities, and rest rooms.

2. Stairways: 1) in the northeast corner of the narthex giving access to the balcony (now closed); 2) in the northwest corner of the balcony, leading into the west spire; 3) in the southwest corner joining rooms of 1910 wing and lower level of church; 4) in the wing of 1957-58 joining the two levels. There is, further, an elevator joining the narthex and basement levels, which is housed in a small wing near the northeast corner of the church. This was added in 1957-58.
3. Flooring: Originally the entire main level of the church was carpeted. The narthex and portions of the auditorium now have vinyl flooring. Sanctuary and portions of the auditorium are carpeted. Elsewhere vinyl-covered and wood floors predominate.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: In the narthex and auditorium, the walls are lath and plaster above the waist-level wainscot. Walls and ceiling, originally frescoed and otherwise ornamented, are now painted cream-white. The addition of 1910 has lath and plaster walls; the wing of 1957-58, walls of concrete block. The hammerbeam ceiling is painted or stained a very dark brown.
5. Doorways and doors: On the interior, main level, original doors are located in the narthex and the gallery. On the lower level, the sliding glass and wood doors are original.
6. Windows: The stained glass of Calvary Presbyterian presents an harmonious, if unpretentious, ensemble--consistent in design and color scheme and appropriate to the character of the interior. Above the double doors of the two main entrances are foliate designs dominated by red, blue, gold, and white. Two small, narrow lancets flank the north portal. The central areas of this pair are filled with patterns of translucent white diamonds defined by gray lines. At their borders and in the tympana are stylized foliate motifs similar in color and form to those in the windows above the doorways. Windows

of auditorium and balcony follow the theme of these narthex lancets predominated by gray and white diamond patterns edged with semi-abstract designs in vivid primary colors. The east and west walls of the auditorium have five windows set in shallow, Gothic-arched niches. From north to south are, first, three tall, slender lancets; then, the larger transept window--a triple lancet surmounted by a rose; and then a final lancet. In the north (balcony) wall are three windows, two slim lancets flanking a larger window with a composition echoing, on grander scale, that of the transept windows. Memorial plaques at the rear (north) of the auditorium and beneath the ten auditorium windows record that all the windows were restored in 1936.

7. Trim: On the main level of the church as first built, all wood trim and such church furnishings as pulpit and pews were of black walnut and butternut. In the vestibule and auditorium, much of the original wood trim survives, though that of the sanctuary post-dates the fire of 1947. The wainscot of vertical panelling is waist-high and finished a mellow golden brown. All wooden mouldings above the wainscot are painted or stained a very dark brown. Both wainscot and other early woodwork contrast with the pale wooden trim of the rebuilt sanctuary.
8. Lighting: Originally gas fixtures and candles, now electric lighting throughout.

D. Site:

General setting and orientation: Calvary faces north and stands on a 100 foot x 150 foot lot closely bounded on the north by Wisconsin Avenue, on east and south by the Y.M.C.A., and on the west by North Tenth Street.

Prepared by Mary Ellen Wietczykowski
1111 North Astor Street
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
December 27, 1968

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were made during the 1969 Milwaukee Project which was sponsored by the Historic American Buildings Survey, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, National Park Service, Department of the Interior, and the Milwaukee Landmarks Commission of the City of Milwaukee, Richard W. E. Perrin, Chairman. The project was done under the direction of James C. Massey, then Chief of HABS, and the team members included architect John N. DeHaas, Jr. (Montana State

University), Project Supervisor, Mary Ellen Wieczykowski--now Mary Ellen Young--(Milwaukee Landmarks Commission), Project Historian and student architects Larry Mermsen (Iowa State University), Roger Little (Kansas University), Thomas Sanford (Washington State University), and Donna Woodrum (Virginia Polytechnic Institute). The data was prepared for transmittal to the Library of Congress by HABS editors Carolyn R. Heath, Mary Farrell, Candace Reed and Philip Hamp. Photographs were taken by HABS staff photographer Jack Boucher.