

HISTORIC DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT

ST. JAMES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

(Written Fall, 1990)

I. NAME

Historic: St. James Episcopal Church

Common: Same

II. LOCATION

833 West Wisconsin Avenue

Tax Key Number: 361-0700-000

Legal Description: PARTITION OF EAST HALF OF SW ¼ SEC 29-7-22 BLOCK 64 (W 70' LOT 1 EXC ST & LOT 4) & ½ VAC E-W ALLEY ADJ & LOT 12 BLK 64 JAMES KNEELAND'S SUBD.

III. CLASSIFICATION

Structure

IV. OWNER

St. James Episcopal Church
Attn: Rev. George E. Hillman
833 West Wisconsin Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53233

V. YEAR BUILT

1867-68; 1899 (parish house)

Architects: Gordon Lloyd (Detroit) – Church
John A. Moller – parish house

VI. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

St. James Episcopal Church is located in the middle of the block between North Eighth and North Tenth Streets on the south side of West Wisconsin Avenue at the western edge of the central business district. It is set back from the street and has a relatively large lawn with foundation plantings around the base of the church.

St. James is rectangular, end-gabled roofed, rock-faced limestone structure measuring 124 feet long by 55 feet wide. It has architecturally treated elevations facing north, east and west. At the south end of the church are two later additions that give the building its T shape. The east wing is the parish house added in 1899, while the west wing contains a chapel.

The north elevation is the façade. It is composed of the gabled nave wall and the abutting tower on the east. The nave wall contains the main entrance set within a gabled, compound-arched portal. The original wooden doors were replaced with gold-tone aluminum and glass doors in 1966. Flanking the entrance are narrow, Gothic-arched, leaded windows. Above the portal, a pair of tall, narrow, traceried, Gothic leaded-glass windows fill the upper wall. In the gable, a large, lobed window is surmounted by a tiny-quatrefoil window just below the gable peak. All of the windows have stone hood moulds. A buttressed pinnacle at the west corner of the façade is balanced by a massive square tower at the east corner.

The east tower is a massively buttressed structure that rises in three stages to a broach spire. A pair of lancet windows in the base face West Wisconsin Avenue while paneled oak doors lead into the church on the east side. The second stage of the tower has a lobed, stained-glass window high up on the wall on the north side. The third stage of the tower has a large, traceried belfry opening on all sides, above which is a slate-clad broach spire.

The east and west elevations have heavily-buttressed, one-story, side aisles abutting the clerestory-lit, two-story nave. A pair of stained glass windows fills each bay of the side aisles. At the south end of each side elevation is the parish house addition of 1899. It is also built of Wauwatosa limestone and has a black slate roof. The doors to the parish house and west chapel are paneled oak. The windows are of clear glass.

The south elevation is not readily visible. It contains the church apse added in 1873-74. The apse has tall, Gothic stained glass windows.

VII. SIGNIFICANCE

St. James Episcopal Church is architecturally significant as Milwaukee's finest and oldest example of a stone Gothic Revival Church. It is historically significant as the home of the oldest Episcopal congregation on the west side.

VIII. HISTORY

St. James Episcopal Church, probably the oldest stone church in Milwaukee, was designed by Gordon William Lloyd of Detroit and erected in 1867-68. The parish for which it was constructed was founded in 1850 as Milwaukee's fourth Episcopal parish. The first St. James church was a frame building on the corner of West Wisconsin Avenue and North Second Street. This structure was originally built for the Unitarian Society, but about 1851 the Episcopalians moved it to the present site at North Ninth Street and west Wisconsin Avenue. The original frame church was demolished in the 1920s. At the time the church was built, the site was occupied by an old cemetery. A few burial mounds and tombstones from the cemetery reportedly still survive in the church basement.

In the 1860s the lot adjoining the church on the west was acquired from James Kneeland, who donated the original parcel. Plans were laid for the new building. Alexander Mitchell, who was on the building committee, is said to have donated one-third of the cost of the church.

At the end of 1872, a fire gutted the newly completed building, and only the stonewalls, spire, bells, north windows, and several clerestory windows remained. G. W. Lloyd's original plans were still available, and the church was reconstructed in 1873-74 using the complete plans, some of which had not been used in the first building. A limestone parish house was added in 1899, and the interior was completely remodeled in 1913-14. The Nativity Chapel was created

in 1845, and the baptistery was redesigned in 1957. The woodwork in these came from a sixteenth century private chapel outside Brussels, Belgium.

The architectural and historical significant of the structure was recognized by its listing in the National Register of Historic Places in 1979 and its designation as a Milwaukee Landmark in 1980.

The Architect

William Gordon Lloyd was a prominent architect who practiced in Detroit, Michigan from 1858 into the 1890s. Lloyd was born in Cambridge, England in 1832, but spent his boyhood from 1838 to 1847 in Sherbrooke, Quebec, Canada, where his parents had settled. In 1847 Lloyd returned to England where he completed his education and apprenticed with his uncle, the well-known English architect, Ewan Christian. After attending classes at the Royal Academy and touring the continent, Lloyd immigrated to Detroit in 1858. He quickly made a name for himself designing churches and houses in the Gothic Revival style. His fame as a practitioner of the English Gothic style secured him commissions throughout the region including numerous other churches in Michigan and Ohio and as far a field as Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The Panic of 1873 plunged the nation into an economic depression that curtailed Lloyd's church designing career. St. James in Milwaukee was designed during the height of Lloyd's career as a Gothic Revival church architect and is closely related in design to his Central Methodist Church in Detroit, which was built in 1966-67.

Lloyd successfully made the transition to the High Victorian Gothic, Victorian Italianate, and Romanesque Revival styles in the later 1870s, 1880s and 1890s. The majority of his later work was commercial and residential and was concentrated in Detroit. He apparently ceased practicing in the late 1890s.

IX. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the St. James Episcopal Church, 833 West Wisconsin Avenue, be designated as a City of Milwaukee Historic Structure as a result of its fulfillment of criteria e-1, e-5, and e-9 of the Historic Preservation Ordinances.

X. PRESERVATION GUIDELINES

The following preservation guidelines represent the principal concerns of the Historic Preservation Commission regarding this historic designation. However, the Commission reserves the right to make final decisions based upon particular design submissions. Nothing in these guidelines shall be construed to prevent ordinary maintenance or restoration and/or replacement of documented original elements.

A. Roofs

Retain the roof shape and dormers. Skylights and solar collector panels may be added to roof surfaces if they are not visible from the street. Avoid making changes to the roof shape, which would alter the building height, roofline, or pitch. Retain the existing slate roofing and metal trim. If replacement is necessary, duplicate the appearance of the existing materials as closely as possible.

B. Materials

1. Masonry

- a. Unpainted stone should not be painted or covered. Avoid painting or covering natural stone. This is historically incorrect and could cause irreversible damage if it was decided to remove the paint or coating at a later date.
- b. Repoint defective mortar by duplicating the original in color, style, texture and strength. Avoid using mortar colors and pointing styles that were unavailable or were not used when the building was constructed.
- c. Clean masonry only when necessary to halt deterioration and with the gentlest method possible. Sandblasting limestone surfaces is prohibited. This method of cleaning erodes the surface of the material and accelerates deterioration. Avoid the indiscriminate use of chemical products that could have an adverse reaction with the masonry materials, such as the use of acid on limestone.
- d. Repair or replace deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the old as closely as possible. Avoid using new material that is inappropriate or was unavailable when the building was constructed.

2. Wood/Metal

- a. Retain original material, whenever possible. Avoid removing architectural features that are essential to maintaining the building's character and appearance.
- b. Retain or replace deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the appearance of the old as closely as possible. Avoid covering architectural features with new materials that are inappropriate or were unavailable when the building was constructed.

C. Windows and Doors

1. Retain existing window and door openings. Retain the existing configuration of panes, sash, surrounds and sills, doors, and hardware, except as necessary to restore the building to its original condition.
2. Respect the building's stylistic period. If the replacement of doors or window sash is necessary, the replacement should duplicate the appearance and design of the original window sash or door. Avoid using inappropriate sash and door replacements. Avoid the filling-in or covering of openings with inappropriate materials such as glass block or concrete block. Avoid using modern style window units in place of the existing sash or the substitution of units with glazing configurations not appropriate to the style of the building.

D. Trim and Ornamentation

There should be no changes to the existing trim or ornamentation except as necessary to restore the building to its original condition. Replacement features shall match the original member in scale, design, color and appearance.

E. Additions

The north, east and west elevations and roofline are integral to the structure's architectural significance. Additions require the approval of the Commission. Approval shall be based upon the addition's design compatibility with the building in terms of height, roof configuration, fenestration, scale, design, color and materials, and the degree to which it visually intrudes upon the principal elevations.

F. Signs/Exterior Lighting

The installation of any permanent exterior sign shall require the approval of the Commission. Approval will be based on the compatibility of the proposed sign with the historic and architectural character of the building.

G. Site Features

New plant materials, fencing and lighting fixtures shall be compatible with the historic architectural character of the building.