

The Architecture of East Liberty Presbyterian Church

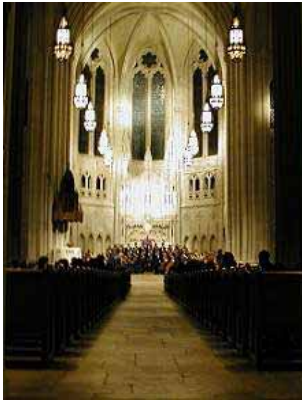
In the Gothic Style

Like many of the most famous cathedrals of Europe, the East Liberty Presbyterian Church is built in the Gothic style which emerged in the twelfth century, largely under the influence of the Cistercian Order and the remarkable Abbot Suger of St. Denis, Paris. It is characterized by the use of ogival (pointed) arches and by the emphasis on light mediated through magnificently colored stained glass. It is the first type of Christian architecture which seeks to express in virtually every detail the essence of the Biblical faith, hence its cruciform floor plan. Form and function are perfectly combined in every detail to a degree rarely, if ever, realized in other types of Christian architecture. Visitors who study the symbols on the exterior of the building have no difficulty in identifying this church as being in the Reformed tradition. The interior art proclaims its inescapable ecumenicity as a living part of the Holy Catholic (universal) Church.



ELPC from Penn Avenue

The Sanctuary



The ELPC Sanctuary

Enter by the central doors of the Narthex. The Narthex ceiling is a copy of one found in Cambridge University, England. The inner doors to the sanctuary are made from English oak. The set of windows show angels holding instruments of praise and a copy of the Scriptures. English oak was also used for the exterior doors facing Penn Mall while the inside ones, weighing four tons, are of Siamese teak. In the Narthex area are an Usher's Room and a Bride's Room.

As you stand at the head of the nave you will see the large clerestory windows (upper level) which depict Old Testament themes on the left side and New Testament ones on the right. The aisle level windows were inspired by various psalms on the left and corresponding series on the right by nine of Our Lord's miracles. One of the Psalm windows was removed when the

congregation elected to add the Trinity Chapel, half-way down on the left side, as a memorial to Mr. and Mrs. Mellon, who are interred in its vaults.

Directly in front of you in the chancel are five large windows. The three central panels tell the story of the last days of the Savior, His Crucifixion, death, burial and resurrection.

The Trinity Chapel was erected in 1942. The carving on the interior side of the Siamese teak doors was inspired by Peter Paul Ruben's paintings of the descent from the cross and the entombment of Christ. The marble legs of the altar bear the symbols of the twelve apostles and the windows depict the affirmations of the Apostles Creed. As far as is known, only one other church has ever depicted this creed in stained glass.

You might like to spend a moment examining the central panel of the last of the Psalm windows to see if you can detect an error made by the stained glass craftsman.



The Sanctuary Chancel

The large circular window over the East Transept represents the New Jerusalem "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband". The upper window to your left relates significant events in the story of American Presbyterianism and the people connected with them. It begins with the first meeting of General Assembly in Philadelphia in 1706 and includes William Tennant, Samuel Davis, Francis Makemie (father of American Presbyterianism), John Witherspoon (the only clergyman to sign the Declaration of Independence), John Lowrie, David Brainerd, Sheldon Jackson, Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson (Confederate General) and Robert Speer. The three figures in the lower window show Samuel Mills and friends, John Eliot (pioneers in Christian missions) and Benjamin Franklin praying at the Continental Congress. On the opposite wall is a tablet honoring the Rev. Dr. Stuart Nye Hutchison, pastor at the time the Church was being built.

The three panels in the pulpit deal with the preaching of God's Word. Jesus is in the center. On the left is St. John Chrysostom, a patriarch of the Eastern Church and the creator of its liturgy in the 4th century. John Knox, the Scottish Reformer, is on the right. The pulpit thus illustrates the ecumenicity of the congregation as stated in the hymn, "In Christ there is no east nor west."

The chancel floor with its Jerusalem Cross at the center is constructed with marble from many parts of the world. The Communion table (Algerian marble) has the symbols of the disciples with Matthais replacing Judas Iscariot.

You will discover Calvin, our Church mouse if you examine the choir-stall heads carefully. High above you are two small rosette windows honoring sacred musicians. David, the Psalmist, on the south wall, and Pope Gregory I on the north wall. Two other corresponding windows on the transept walls show Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (east) and Johann Sebastian Bach (west).

Beneath the main chancel windows, which deal with the passion, death and destruction of Our Lord, are the figures of Peter, James, Paul, John and Andrew (left to right). Below these the magnificent sculpture of the Lord's Supper by John Angel was carved from a single 22-ton block of marble and weighs almost 14 tons. The small stone panels below the sculpture depict instruments used in the crucifixion. As you leave the chancel, note the exquisite wood carving on the lectern and the baptismal font.

The windows on your right deal with the past centuries of Church history. Heroes of the faith include Paul, Luke, Pope Gregory I, Emperor Constantine, St. Francis and Count von Zinzendorf - a truly ecumenical group of believers. One panel (bottom right) contains the three ships of Christopher Columbus. Directly facing you is the Reformation window which displays a series of historical persons and events: John Calvin; John Knox; the Scottish Admiral Coligny; Savanorola of Florence; Zwingli of Switzerland; and William of Orange, all of whom, in various ways, sought to improve the spiritual life of the Church.

The small window on the left shows the first church in New Amsterdam (now New York), the Landing of the Pilgrims, and the James River settlement of 1607. A tablet recognizing the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Mellon is placed on the wall.

As you proceed down the west side-aisle, you will see the windows which depict miracles performed by Christ. The large clerestory windows on both sides can best be observed from the center aisle, with icons and stories from the Old Testament on the east and the New Testament on the west side of the nave.

From the chancel a view of the magnificent Revelation window can be obtained although it is best seen from the balcony. The stairway to the balcony is located in the narthex. The Revelation window contains every symbol referred to in the last book of the New Testament. The panel showing the Lamb of God, victorious on His Throne, makes this window a special source of inspiration and hope.

The Chapel

The Chapel, used for Taizé Prayer, weddings and memorial services contains a number of stained glass windows and the pews from the fourth church. One memorial window honors H.J. Heinz, a trustee of the congregation. One of the interesting features of the Chapel is the private "Mourner's Room".

The Art and Architecture of East Liberty Presbyterian Church

For fuller details you may wish to consult *The Art And Architecture of East Liberty Presbyterian Church*, available in the Church Library. This fully illustrated book with gorgeous color photographs and text by Pastor Emeritus Charles P. Robshaw, S.T.D., may be purchased in the Church Office for \$10.

History Timeline

- 1778 Alexander Negley first permanent white settler in East Liberty valley
- 1789 Negley with 41 others founded first church organization in Pittsburgh known as Pitt Township; First American Presbyterian General Assembly in Philadelphia
- 1790 First known religious service in East Liberty
- 1794 Pittsburgh incorporated as a town
- 1809 First building—a school house—erected at current church site
- 1812 Financial crisis delays organization of East Liberty Church
- 1818 Campaign to raise subscriptions for a church building
- 1819 First church building constructed after Negleys deed land to ELC
- 1828 Church organized and named First Presbyterian Church of East Liberty; first Communion and first Baptism take place
- 1830 First pastor installed—the Rev. William B. McIlvaine
- 1835 Lecture Room added to replace school house built in 1809
- 1847 Additional land donated and second church building erected
- 1848 First service held in the second church
- 1860 Resolution passed for the building of the third church; work delayed by conditions of the Civil War
- 1864 Third church building completed and dedicated
- 1865 Church purchases gas lighting
- 1867 A celebrated Meneely bell contracted to be made and installed (the tower bell)
- 1868 East Liberty incorporated; the name of the church is changed to East Liberty Presbyterian Church (ELPC)
- 1871 Highland Avenue opens as a street; 20 feet of church property lost
- 1886 Church cemetery removed from site
- 1887 The fourth church building constructed; electric lighting added
- 1888 The fourth church building dedicated
- 1930 Mellons made know their desire to build a new (fifth) church
- 1931 Construction of the fifth and present church begins
- 1935 Fifth church building completed and dedicated

Note: The information included in this brochure was researched and compiled by Friend of ELPC Cathy Regush, 2006.

The History of East Liberty and the East Liberty Presbyterian Church

The meaning of the name of “East Liberty”

A “liberty” was a designated section of land set aside for grazing cattle. Eastern Liberty was the eastern portion of liberty set aside for the small town of Pittsburgh in the late 18th Century. The western portion is now known as West Liberty, and the northern liberty is now the Strip District. The area achieved a sort of fame in Marcia Davenport’s novel, “The Valley of Decision” in which the Irish maid, and heroine of the story, left her home in Allegheny (now the North Side) to take up residence and open a dress shop in the new area of East Liberty.

- 1778** Alexander Negley moved from Eastern Pennsylvania to become the first permanent white settler in the East Liberty valley, locating on the present site of Highland Park. Negley was a descendent of “John Nägeli, the Swiss reformer, a co-worker with Zwingli in the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century.” Zwingli in part laid the groundwork on which John Calvin was to build his theological system. Thus, Alexander Negley was a son of the Reformed Church in Switzerland. The valley was then known as Negleytown by the travelers of those days.
- 1789** Alexander Negley, with 41 others, founded the first church organization in Pittsburgh known as Pitt Township. On September 29, 1787 the First Presbyterian Church was incorporated. On December 12, 1787, Pennsylvania was the second State in the Union to ratify the Constitution. In May 1789, the first American Presbyterian General Assembly convened in Philadelphia.
- 1790** The first known religious services in the East Liberty area took place, though they likely took place earlier than this in people’s homes.
- 1794** Pittsburgh was incorporated as a town, with a population of about 1,000. By 1796 Pittsburgh had 102 houses.
- 1809** Jacob Negley built a comfortable 16’x20’ frame school house which stood until 1835 on the present site of the East Liberty Presbyterian Church. The building provided educational facilities for both his and his neighbors’ children. The building was hurriedly constructed around a pole that was stuck in the ground (from *Reminiscences* by James Mellon, brother of Richard Mellon who donated the funds to construct the current church). From time to time, religious services were held in the school house, and at other times in people’s homes. In those days, it was difficult to secure both physicians and ministers. The people of the time often secured the former, and conducted the services of the church themselves— both men and women.
- 1812** Circumstances regarding the war of 1812 cause a serious financial crisis in 1819-20 “which was one of the contributing causes to the delay in the organization of East Liberty Church.” On November 18, 1818 a campaign to raise subscriptions for a church building was begun. There were 89 subscribers whose contributions ranged between \$3 and \$100. In total, \$1,562.62½ was raised.
- 1819** On Easter Monday, April 12, 1819, a meeting of the subscribers and other interested parties was held at the school house. It was at this meeting that Jacob Negley and his wife Barbara Anna Negley (nee Winebiddle) jointly deeded the one-and-one-half acres of land (the present site of the church) to its trustees for all time, to be held for a “meeting house, school house and graveyard.” The land had been part of Mrs. Negley’s ancestral inheritance.

Note: In 1762, two years before the construction of the blockhouse at the Point in downtown Pittsburgh, Col. Boquet cut a grant of land to Casper Taub. The patent for the land was taken out in 1784 by Mr. Taub, who bequeathed it to his daughter Barbara, the maternal grandmother of Mrs.

Barbara Anna Negley, to whom the title descended.

- 1819** The first "church" building built on the site (the second building to be constructed there) was known as First Presbyterian Church (of East Liberty). It was a two-story structure 44'x44' and stood until about 1862. For many years, educational work was conducted downstairs while the upper auditorium was used for church services. The building was used for educational purposes by the East Liberty Academy long after it had outgrown its possibilities as a church.
- 1819** Pittsburgh was a town of 1,400 houses and in 1820 the population of Pittsburgh was 7,248.
- 1828** The earliest services held in the church were not Presbyterian, but general services. Worship according to the Presbyterian form didn't take place until February 1828. On Sunday, September 28, 1828 the church was organized after petitioning the Redstone Presbytery for permission, which was granted earlier that year. The Church was named the First Presbyterian Church of East Liberty. On October 5, 1828 the first "Sacramental Communion as a Church in East Liberty" was held. On October 12, 1828 the first baptismal of the children of the congregation took place.
- 1830** On April 20, 1830 the Reverend William B. McIlvaine, a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary, was ordained and installed as the first pastor of the Church. His pastorate spanned forty years.
- 1835** In 1835 a third building 40'x22', called the Lecture Room, was constructed to replace the school house built in 1809. It was designed specifically for the purpose of prayer meetings and Sunday school.
- 1847** By 1847, during the period of the Mexican War, the church had outgrown the existing buildings, with the 1819 building being used entirely for educational purposes. This same year Mrs. Barbara Anna Negley donated an additional piece of property to the east of the existing site, on what was to become South Highland Avenue. A red brick church with tall windows, 50'x70' was erected there the same year. The only paint on the building was on the woodwork of the cornices and doors, which were pure white.
- 1848** The first service was held in the new church on June 12, 1848. The church was lit with candles and oil. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper took place at a table set up near the pulpit that was probably 20 feet long and 2 feet wide, and which was covered with a white tablecloth. When people gathered for evening prayer meetings at the church they carried candle lanterns which they extinguished prior to entering the building, and then sat on the aisle floor at the end of their pews. Upon leaving the church, all lanterns needed to be relit and flame would be passed from one candle to another. The lighting of lanterns resembled a large swarm of fireflies.
- 1860** A resolution passed for the building of a fifth building, the third church, which was delayed due to the Civil War. On April 9, 1860 a resolution was passed for the erection of a fifth building, which was to be the third church. The completion of the building was greatly delayed by the conditions of the Civil War and consequently it wasn't dedicated until January 1864. It was a two-story structure. The upper floor was used as the main auditorium and the lower for prayer meeting and Sunday school. In 1868 an addition was made and galleries erected, and in 1873 further improvements were made.
- 1865** The Church purchases gas lighting.
- 1867** On April 21, 1867 Mrs. Barbara Anna Negley offered to purchase a celebrated Meneely bell for the church. The bell was contracted to, made, and installed by A. Fulton & Company of Pittsburgh. The making of a bell is a difficult operation. It is made of several different metals, primarily copper and tin. The bell maker mixes the metals and then tries the mixture for tone. He continues to add more

of one or another type of metal until the alloy, and consequently the tone, is exactly right. The bell's tone is nearly as perfect as a bell's can be and is pitched in the approximate area of E above middle C.

Note: The bell weighs 2,760 pounds and cost \$1,375.00, and was paid for entirely by Mrs. Negley. It was hung during the last week of Mrs. Negley's life. While being tested, her windows were opened so that she could hear it. On May 10, 1867 Mrs. Negley passed. On Sabbath, May 12 1867, the bell's first chimes played her requiem as her remains were carried to her family lot in the Allegheny Cemetery where she now lays with her husband and 12 children. The bell currently resides in the bell tower of the current church.

- 1868** In 1868 East Liberty was incorporated. On April 14, 1879 the congregation voted to change the name of the church to East Liberty Presbyterian Church.
- 1871** Highland Avenue opened as a street, and 20 feet of church property was lost.
- 1886** To make space for the construction of the fourth church, the graves in the church yard needed to be removed. By May 1886, many bodies had already been taken to other locations. The trustees appointed Henry H. Negley and James R. Mellon to lift the remaining graves, which were transferred to a 30'x40' lot purchased in Homewood Cemetery by the church trustees. All but one or two graves were moved, the remaining ones deemed best to remain where they were.
- 1887** The fourth church (sixth building) was constructed in 1887 and on September 30, 1888 it was dedicated. It was made of stone and was illuminated with electric lighting.
- 1930** The Mellons made known their desire to build a new Church. Early in 1930 Mr. Richard Beatty Mellon, a grandson of the original donors of the property, and his wife, Jennie King Mellon, made known to the congregation their desire that a new Church of cathedral proportions be erected in memory of their parents, to serve as a monument to Presbyterianism in Western Pennsylvania, and to rank among the great Churches of the world. On April 16, 1930 a resolution of the congregations was passed to accept the Mellons' gift.
- 1931** Construction was started on the fifth and present Church. Mr. & Mrs. Richard Beatty Mellon, in 1931, donated funds for the construction of a church of "cathedral proportions" in memory of their parents. During the construction of the church Sunday services were held at the Regent Theatre.
- 1935** Church dedicated. In 1935 construction on the church was completed, and it was dedicated May 12 of the same year.

The Architect and Architectural Style

Ralph Adams Cram, the Architect

The architect who designed the current structure was Ralph Adams Cram, of Cram and Ferguson in Boston. Cram also designed Calvary Episcopal Church (1906) and the Princeton Chapel. When Mr. Cram was hired by the Mellons, he was given absolute freedom to build the finest and most beautiful church to the glory of God that he could create. In his own words (from the Presbyterian Banner, May 23, 1935), "Of all the cathedrals and churches I have built this is my masterpiece. This church has been the most profound spiritual experience of my life."

Architectural Style

The Church was built in the style of the Gothic cathedrals of Europe. This style emerged in the twelfth century, mainly under the influence of the Cistercian Order and Abbot Suger of St. Denis, Paris. The Gothic style is characterized by the use of pointed arches, the emphasis on light mediated through colored stained

glass, and the cruciform floor plan. There is a wonderful video in the church library about the building of such cathedrals.

Planning for the church occurred twice weekly for three or four years, and the meetings were held mainly at the Duquesne Club. Mr. McKelvy was the committee chairman prior to his passing. He was succeeded by Mr. Fisher, president of Jones and Laughlin Steel Company. Sessions lasting two or three days would be held to discuss things like the hundreds of doors in the church, each of which had to be studied to determine which way the door should open, and the placement of each knob.

The building, which occupies one city block, cost approximately \$4 million to construct. Interior dimensions of the Sanctuary are as follows: nave length 202 feet, nave height is 75 feet, breadth of transepts 117 feet. The windows are the work of four stained-glass companies, and a number of skilled craftsmen in wood and stone contributed their remarkable talents. The pipe organ in the Sanctuary is an Aeolian-Skinner, which ranks among the largest and finest organs in the country.

Groundwork was commenced August 18, 1931 and the cornerstone laid by Mr. Mellon June 19, 1932. Mr. Mellon died suddenly December 1, 1933, but construction continued as his family carried the work to its conclusion.

On May 12, 1935 the work was completed and the building dedicated. 5,500 people attended the dedication services. 1,700 members of the church, bearing admission cards, filled the pews of the sanctuary with 3,800 people listed to the service in the chapel, social hall and other rooms throughout the church via a permanent speaker system.



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