

BOOK REVIEWS

Roger W. Moss. *Historic Sacred Places of Philadelphia*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005. Pp. ix, 314, glossary, bibliography, index. Cloth \$34.95).

Religious tolerance was the hallmark of William Penn's concept for Pennsylvania. The success of his idea is evident today in Philadelphia's astonishing collection of historic churches and synagogues that are still in daily use. Architectural historian Roger Moss and photographer Tom Crane have created an exquisitely beautiful and wonderfully readable tribute to these historic religious buildings. Essays on 50 of these venerable structures describe the sites and provide the historical information that shaped their design. Moss employed several criteria to guide his choices for this volume: the structures predate 1900, they are architecturally and aesthetically significant, and they remain accessible.

The buildings date from 1698 (Gloria Dei 'Old Swedes' Church) up through the late 1800s (First United Methodist Church of Germantown). Each profile contains information about location and visitation. The author describes the historical trends—the growth or diminishment—of their congregations, changes in their ethnicity, and the related alterations in architectural detail or religious artifacts. The author and photographer worked closely to ensure that the narrative and photographs complement one another and stories emerge about carved marble memorials from the early 19th century, wooden baptismal fonts dating to the 16th century, and burial markers in the walls and floors of many sanctuaries. Full-page color photographs show the exteriors and interiors, along with significant artifacts.

In addition to the profiles on specific sites, the author provides a concise history of the various religious groups in Philadelphia prior to 1900—the Society of Friends, the Swedes and Welsh, Church of England, the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, the Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, Jews, Roman Catholics, Orthodox congregations, and the Swedeborgians. Woven throughout the site profiles are the stories and commissions of famous architects, including Thomas U. Walter, John Haviland, John Notman, and Charles M. Burns. The author has strong opinions about the value and aesthetics of their architectural designs. He laments the loss of many sacred places through the centuries due to declining populations, rising land costs, and shifting demographics. While he cautions about the dangers of decline and decay, and the potential for losing even more sacred sites, Moss also points to several examples of new conservation

and restoration where original colors have been re-introduced, and stained glass reproduced.

Winston Churchill's famous quote, "We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us", is amply illustrated in this volume. Moss discusses, for example, the effects of the anti-Catholic "nativist" riots of 1844 and their effect on design. He describes Mother Bethel, the mother church to the African Methodist Episcopal Church this way: "The overall effect is grave and substantial; this is a building for the ages. Here a congregation might gather to worship in safety."

This is the second book in a series being developed by Roger Moss, Tom Crane, and designer Adrienne Onderdonk Dudden. The first was their *Historic Houses of Philadelphia* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998). Roger W. Moss is a nationally-recognized historic preservationist who, as executive director of the Athenaeum of Philadelphia, has created archives of significant early American buildings. He is also an Adjunct Professor of Architecture at the University of Pennsylvania. Tom Crane is a leading architectural photographer in the Philadelphia region.

The book is beautiful and informative, but even more, it is a call to visit these great historic structures.

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