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THE CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION, PITTSBURGH

A Brief Chronicle of Its Seventy-five Years

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LIKE a huge rock the great grey tower of the Church of the Ascension stands foursquare on the edge of Oakland, the cultural district of Pittsburgh. Surrounded by large buildings, its fortress-like medieval bulk still holds its own among its more conspicuous neighbors, and its familiar "pepper pot" turrets are affectionately regarded by Pittsburghers who may not know much about the building beneath them.

The tower will well repay closer acquaintance, however, because it is the "trademark" of one of the largest and most active Episcopal parish churches in the Pittsburgh Diocese. Since 1898, it has borne witness to the tradition and solidity of the faith it so notably exemplifies, in a quarter where many of the city's institutions of higher learning are located. Although it is a highly interesting example of Gothic Revival architecture, it is by no means a late-Victorian relic. The effective headquarters of a church organization comprising over a thousand members, it is a bulwark of Christian work, witness, and education in a neighborhood where education is a major industry.

Since the church and its district are practically inextricable, a

Mr. Van Trump, who is a specialist in church architecture of the 18th and 19th centuries, also is well known locally as an architectural historian and editor. His work often has appeared in this magazine, and he has in preparation a book on the architecture of Pennsylvania. This article is abstracted from an historical sketch commissioned by the church for its seventy-fifth anniversary. —Ed.

consideration of the history of the Ascension parish¹ will not only record the essential facts for the members of the church, but also throw some light on the development of the Oakland neighborhood itself.

Actually the church stands on the eastern boundary of Oakland, where the district known as Shadyside begins and from whence in its early days it drew many of its parishioners. However, the beginnings of the parish are actually to be found in the eastward portion of Oakland.

Most of that area had been known as Belle Field or Bellefield. Much of the land in this area formed part of the holdings of Neville B. Craig (1787-1863).² The property eventually was sold in lots, houses were built, and a village was formed which at one time was known as East Pittsburgh, but which soon reverted to the earlier name, Bellefield.³

Near where the church now stands, the great Aiken property, out of which much of the present Shadyside district was formed, intersected the Neville B. Craig holdings. The 1854 McGowan Map of Pittsburgh and Allegheny shows the boundaries of the two domains. A map in Hopkins' *Atlas* of 1882⁴ indicates that the present location of the church was then the property of Mrs. Eliza Wallingford,⁵ whose

1 Since the early records of the church apparently are no longer in existence, much of the material on the history of the parish has been taken from the research published by Mrs. Marcellin C. Adams, a former parishioner, who began to compile a history of the church some years ago, but did not continue it. The present writer gratefully acknowledges his debt to her pioneer efforts; her partial account was published in *The Ascension Bulletin* of January 1949. There also is some historical material in the church's *Programme of the Fiftieth Anniversary Service, 1889-1939* (29 October 1939). The author also has used other sources which will be duly noted.

2 "Belle Field" was the name of a tract of 154 acres, surveyed June 20, 1769, and patented to Catharine Thompson, daughter and heir of General William Thompson, January 2, 1788. See plate 9, *Warrantee Atlas of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, 1914*.

3 In regard to Bellefield in 1863 see also George T. Fleming, *History of Pittsburgh and Environs* (Chicago, 1922), II, 215-216. In the same work (IV, 118) we are informed that Neville B. Craig spent his last days with his youngest daughter, Mrs. Annie Neville Davison, at his farm, Bellefield. The home stood where the Fairfax Apartments now stand. There was a tradition that Bellefield was named in honor of one of Craig's daughters, Isabella, but the name was used as early as August 4, 1762, by Major Edward Ward in a letter to Colonel Henry Bouquet, headed Bellefield.

4 *Atlas of the Cities of Pittsburgh and Allegheny* (Philadelphia: G. M. Hopkins, 1882), pl. 18.

5 Eliza Craig, daughter of Neville B. Craig, who married Alexander M. Wallingford. "The mantle of her distinguished father . . . was truly wrapped about the late Mrs. Eliza Wallingford, a woman of rare culture, strong intellect and general knowledge." Adelaide M. Nevin, *The Social Mirror* (Pittsburgh, 1888), 166.

married name is perpetuated in the nearby Wallingford Street.

About the time of the Civil War, church attendance was somewhat of a problem in the then semi-rural Bellefield, and various residents banded together to form a Union Sunday School and a prayer meeting group. This association of neighbors later bought a lot on Henry Street in 1864 for the use of various Protestant denominations.⁶

At that time the nearest Episcopal church was Calvary in East Liberty, which had been founded in 1855, and which undertook the charge of a mission called St. Philip's in the Oakland district, probably in the late 1860's. In 1871 the Report of the Board of Missions in the *Diocesan Journal* states that "at Bellefield, services are held every Sunday afternoon, and there, too, in a few weeks, we shall have a chapel of our own."⁷

"St. Philip's Mission" is mentioned in most of the Diocesan journals during the 1870's and the 1880's, nearly always as under the charge of the clergy of Calvary Church. It is probable that a Sunday School and Sunday afternoon services, as part of this mission, were held in the little building constructed by the Bellefield residents. It was this mission that Bishop Whitehead visited on 2 October 1887 (as noted in his *Official Diary*) when he read evening prayer and delivered an address. He says that the service was held in Shadyside, but at that time the mission services were being held in "Miss Ward's School," which housed a private school and sometimes dancing classes during the week. In those days buildings often had to serve more than one purpose.

The year 1887 saw the beginning of attempts to organize what was to become Ascension parish, and as early as 17 May of that year, Reuben Miller (1839-1917), a local industrialist, called a meeting toward that end. At a meeting of the Vestry of Calvary Church on 9 May a letter from Miller was read requesting the aid of Calvary Church in this endeavor. The Vestry acted favorably upon this request.⁸

On 13 October 1887, Bishop Whitehead notes in his *Official Diary* that he "conferred in the evening with various gentlemen concerning the formation of a church in Shadyside" and on 21 October, he records "a meeting to organize a parish . . ." On 5 December, the

6 *Bellefield Presbyterian Church — 75th Anniversary 1866-1941* (Pittsburgh, 1941).

7 Protestant Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh, *Journal of the Annual Convention*, 1871 and following years.

8 *Centennial History Calvary Episcopal Church, 1855-1955* (Pittsburgh, 1955), 12.

Bishop's *Diary* continues, "In the evening assisted at the organization of the Memorial Church of the Ascension, Shadyside. This church is to be a memorial to the first Bishop of Pittsburgh.⁹ A temporary Chapel or Parish Building will soon be erected and the Parish starts off on what promises to be a most profitable career."

At this meeting the first Vestry was elected; it consisted of Reuben Miller, H. L. Mason, E. M. Ferguson, Samuel Martin, L. M. Plumer, William L. Chalfant, John B. Doyle, Edwin Bindley, P. C. Knox, Alan W. Wood, J. D. Long, and C. C. Briggs.

On 15 December 1888, a decree of the Court of Common Pleas granted "A charter for the incorporation of the Rector, Wardens and Vestrymen of the Church of the Ascension of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America." The twenty-four subscribers to the application for a charter, who were named as corporators were Reuben Miller, P. C. Knox, James McKay, W. L. Abbott, Alan W. Wood, A. B. Wrigley, L. M. Plumer, C. C. Briggs, Robert Sproul, H. L. Mason, J. D. Long, Edwin Bindley, Samuel Martin, George W. Morris, W. L. Chalfant, J. T. Denniston, A. H. Denniston, A. E. Frost, E. M. Ferguson, H. H. Byram, Henry King, F. LeMoynes, James McCrea, and H. G. Hale.

It was first proposed that the church be called St. Philip's, but by the time of the organization meeting it had been changed to the Church of the Ascension, in view of the memorial character of the new building. Edmund M. Ferguson and his wife donated a lot at the corner of Ellsworth Avenue and Neville Street on which the newly organized parish planned to build. The building committee entered on its duties enthusiastically with the result that the *Church News* of January 1888 announced that "a magnificent Episcopal Church is to be built at Shadyside." The *Diocesan News* of January 1889 recorded that "the foundation walls are built at Shadyside for a frame chapel to be speedily erected by the new parish of the Ascension. Occupancy and, it is hoped, consecration will mark the coming Feast of the Ascension. The Church is to be a Memorial of Bishop Kerfoot and offerings of any kind from those who desire to give money or furniture — or adornments in memory of the late Bishop — will be gladly received. Our readers should not let this pass from their minds."

In this early period of the parish, the clerical duties devolved upon the Rev. Mr. George Hodge in charge at the time of St. Philip's Mission, but in December of 1888, he was made Associate Rector of

9 The Right Rev. John Barrett Kerfoot (1816-1881).

Calvary Church, so that it was necessary to find a priest for Ascension Parish. In March 1889 *Diocesan Notes* records that the Rev. Dr. Robert W. Grange had been made rector of the new parish and that he was to assume his duties after Easter. The Bishop's *Official Diary* notes that on Ascension Day, 30 May, the new church was opened with a Service of Benediction at which Mr. Hodge preached.

St. Philip's Mission, having fulfilled its task in Oakland, was transferred to East Liberty, and it finally was merged with St. James' Parish when that organization constructed its new church in Homewood in 1904.¹⁰ When one considers that some urban parishes have moved two or three times since their foundation, Ascension has been singularly fortunate in remaining at its original site.

The new frame church had hardly been finished before the increasing size of the congregation made necessary the consideration of enlarged quarters. In June 1892, the Diocesan Convention was held in the church. The building served well enough for a few years, but it became increasingly crowded.

On 13 April 1895, E. M. Ferguson donated a lot adjacent to the church property with the proviso that a church costing at least \$50,000 be built. A building committee was formed and plans procured. Ground was broken for the new Ascension structure in 1897 and on 4 July of the same year, the cornerstone was laid. On 30 December 1898, the first service was held in the new church.

On Ascension Day, 20 May 1909, the last service was held in the old church, which had been retained as a chapel. This service marked the 20th Anniversary of the Parish. The old building was then demolished and on 8 September 1909, the construction of the present parish house was begun; in May 1910 the new structure was finished and opened for use.¹¹ In 1912 the Shadyside School property adjoining the church grounds was purchased.

The Rev. Dr. Grange, after a period of illness, resigned on 29 October 1910,¹² and the Rev. Mr. R. J. McFetridge was called as rector in October 1911.¹³ Mr. McFetridge resigned in May 1914, and

¹⁰ *Centennial History Calvary Episcopal Church, 1855-1955* (Pittsburgh, 1955), 16, 23.

¹¹ There is an account of the opening of the new parish house in the *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, 1 June 1910.

¹² See extracts from the Minutes of the Vestry of the Church of the Ascension relative to the death of the Rev. R. W. Grange which occurred on 9 January 1919, in the *Year Book* (December 1920-June 1925) of the Church of the Ascension (Pittsburgh, 1925), 26.

¹³ This and all following historical items through the year 1925 are taken from the 1925 *Year Book*.

it was not until October 1915 that a new pastor, the Rev. Mr. Wyatt Brown, was chosen. In November 1920 Mr. Brown resigned and the next month the Rev. Dr. Frederick G. Budlong became rector.

Changes meanwhile were carried out within the church. On 25 May 1919 the Gordon Chapel was consecrated by Bishop Whitehead. In 1921 a marble floor was put in the church and the woodwork was changed, and in 1924 a new organ was dedicated, and the chancel was plastered as a McKay Memorial.

The funeral of Bishop Whitehead,¹⁴ who had lived nearby, was held from the church on 21 September 1922, and in December 1923 a memorial tablet to Dr. Grange, who had died in 1919, was dedicated.

In August 1925, Dr. Budlong resigned as rector to accept a call to Christ Church, Greenwich, Connecticut, and the Rev. Mr. Albion C. Ockenden was made priest in charge. In the early months of 1926 the Right Reverend W. H. Overs preached at the church,¹⁵ and in July 1926, the Rev. Harry C. Walker was priest in charge.

The Very Reverend H. Boyd Edwards, Dean of Trinity Cathedral, Little Rock, Arkansas, next accepted a call to the Church of the Ascension, taking up his duties late in September 1926. With the exception of that of Dr. Grange, his was the longest rectorship. As of 1 May 1946, he resigned to retire from active service.

In May 1946, the Rev. Dr. Wilburn C. Campbell was transferred from the Diocese of Long Island to become rector. During his service Ascension Academy, an Episcopal school for children, was founded in September 1947, and maintained for a time at the church. In September 1951 the pre-school section was moved to Calvary Church and the first five grades to the Church of the Redeemer in the Squirrel Hill district. This last portion, which at present consists of eight grades, is now known as St. Edmund's Academy.¹⁶

In May 1950 Dr. Campbell was made Bishop Coadjutor of West Virginia, and the Rev. Mr. J. Lawrence Plumley became rector of Ascension on 15 August of the same year. On 1 September 1953 Mr. Plumley was called to the Diocese of Louisiana. The Rev. Dr. A. Dixon Rollit, who had previously been rector of St. Stephen's Church in Wilkinsburg, then became rector of Ascension, a position

¹⁴ The Right Rev. Cortlandt Whitehead (1842-1922), second Bishop (1882-1922) of the Protestant Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh.

¹⁵ After 1925 the chronicle of changes in rectorship has been supplied from church records as well as recent volumes of the *Journal of the Diocesan Conventions*, *q.v.*

¹⁶ The early history of the Academy is recorded in a pamphlet *Ascension Academy 1947-1952*.

which he discharged with great brilliance until 1 April 1964, when he resigned to become Dean of Trinity Cathedral, Pittsburgh. In June 1964, the Rev. Mr. William J. Bradbury was installed as rector.

This is the chronicle so far, and the Church of the Ascension stands ready to meet the challenge of the years to come.

THE ARCHITECTURAL IMAGES OF THE CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION

The first church, erected in 1889, was a frame building with low side walls, a large sloping roof, and a small tower with a porch in front; this structure stood on the site of the present parish house.¹⁷ The interior bore a marked resemblance to Richardson's Emmanuel Church (1885-1886) in the North Side district of Pittsburgh; architectural echoes of Emmanuel's great beamed truss roof and its curved apse were distinctly noticeable in the Oakland chapel, but the apse of Ascension had a continuous band of windows that flooded the interior with light. This little building, for as long as it stood, presented a decidedly pleasant and engaging image of the American suburban church of the 1880's.

The present church represents, very forcibly in its way, the type of the large urban or suburban late-Victorian parish church of an essentially English pattern as interpreted in American terms. The architect, William Halsey Wood (1855-1897)¹⁸ of Newark, New Jersey, was a very talented and original designer who deserves to be better known. An Episcopalian of the Anglo-Catholic persuasion, he was famous in his day chiefly as an ecclesiastical architect, although he did execute many commissions for public buildings and private houses. The Church of the Ascension was his last important work; he died of tuberculosis in 1897 while it was building.

At the age of twenty-four, he had opened his own office. The most engaging of his early domestic designs was his own house, Winmarleigh, at Newark, which might be considered a kind of precursor

17 Photographs of both the exterior and the interior of this structure are to be found in the archives of the church. It has not been possible to ascertain the name of the architect.

18 The only biographical study of Wood is that by his wife, Mrs. Florence Wood — *Memories of William Halsey Wood* (Philadelphia, 1938). Most of the personal data found in this section of the article comes from this source. Wood's notebooks, sketches, etc., are now in the possession of the New York Historical Society. See also Wayne Andrews, *Architecture, Ambition and Americans* (New York, 1955), 169, 300; and James D. Van Trump, "Pittsburgh's Church of the Ascension," *The Charette*, XXXVI, 6 (June 1956), 14-15, 29. There is also an entry for Wood in *Thieme-Becker Künstler Lexikon*, XXXVI, 245.

of Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin, but Wood's dependence on medieval precedent was too evident for true originality, and he did not possess Wright's genius.

Like many young American architects of his day, he was influenced by H. H. Richardson (1838-1886), the great genius of 19th century American architecture, whose preference for the Romanesque style was continued by his many disciples with more or less success according to their abilities. The example of Richardson is abundantly evident in Wood's competition drawings for the Carnegie libraries of both Allegheny (1887)¹⁹ and Pittsburgh (1891),²⁰ but in both of them (he did not win either commission) Wood's handling of the Romanesque formula is creative and dramatic. He also competed unsuccessfully for the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York in 1888-1890, and his drawings, despite their grandiosity and overpassionate medievalism, are, even today, quite impressive.²¹

Since Wood was a devout Episcopalian, he began to use the Gothic style, which was more amenable to his own temperament and interests. The Gothic Revival was rather intensely an English phenomenon; and his strongest ties were with that variegated group of Revivalists, William Butterfield, G. E. Street, and J. L. Pearson, the last of whom he knew personally. Wood is also not the least interesting figure among that array of High Church American Gothicists, the earliest of whom was Richard Upjohn (1802-1878) and the last Ralph Adams Cram (1863-1942).

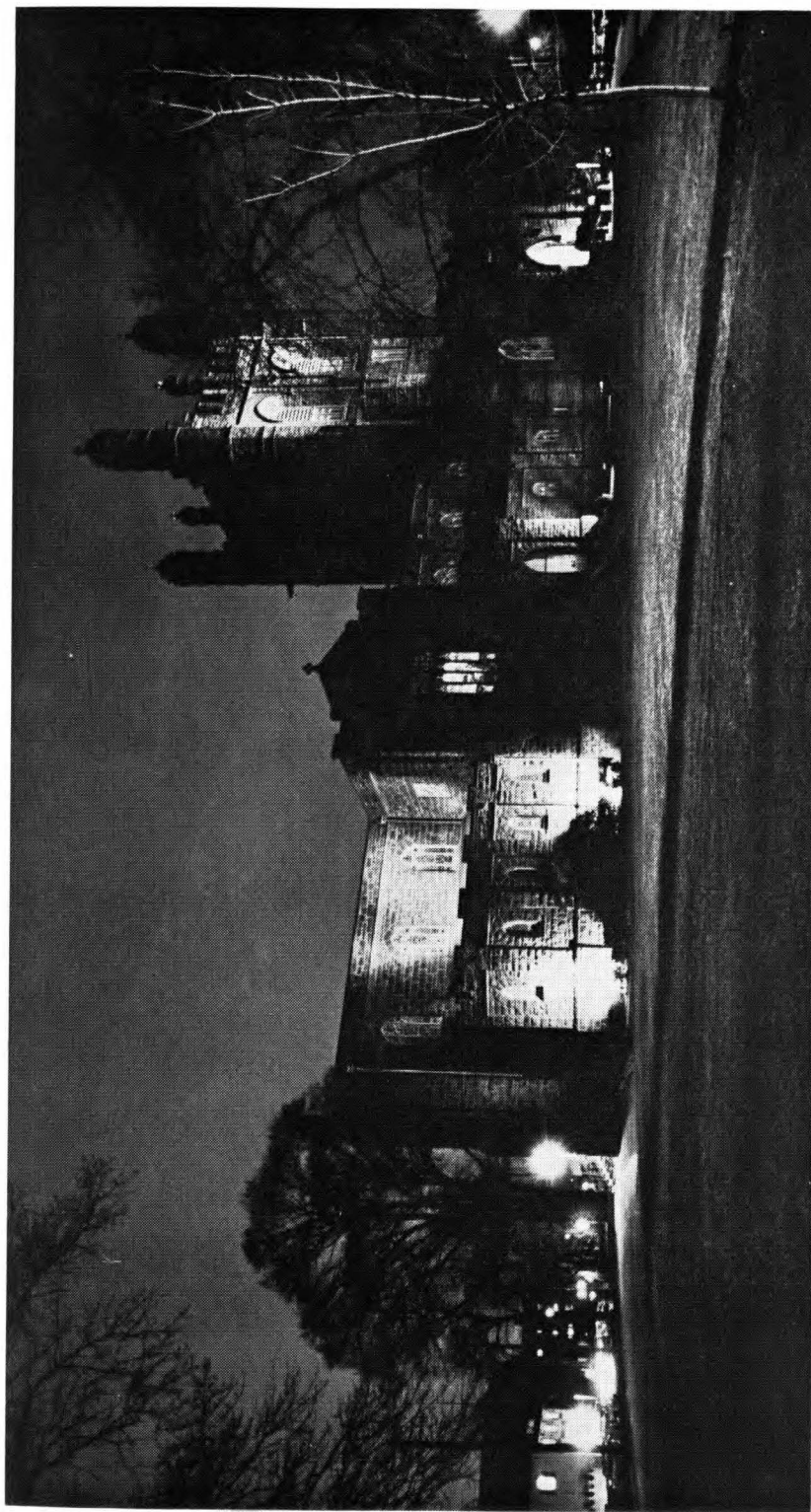
The Englishmen were working creatively and with considerable freedom in an old tradition which they knew thoroughly; Wood, while he tried valiantly to follow their precept, did not always, by any means, measure up to their practice. His work has, for us, however, an abiding interest as an American reflection, not without its own originality and power, of that of the English Revivalists.

Wood's work in general is marked by a considerable force, vigor, and freedom of expression, but he did not possess the ability or perhaps the physical hardihood to develop a personal manner that would have assured him a greater place in the annals of American architecture. He lacked very often the knowledge, grace, or constructional ingenuity of his English contemporaries, and he simply did not possess

19 See *American Architect and Building News*, XXI, pl. 592 (30 April 1887), illus., plan.

20 See *American Architect and Building News*, XXXVI, pl. 856 (21 May 1892), illus., plan.

21 See *American Architect and Building News*, XXXVI, pl. 855 (14 May 1892), illus.



Photographer: Forest Harris

The Church of the Ascension by night



Photographer: Forest Harris

The 16th century tapestry of the Ascension in the chancel of the church

the enormous vitality or the genius of his early exemplar, Richardson. Although he was not an architect of the first rank, he would seem to have been unjustly forgotten; and when the full history of the Romanesque and Gothic Revivals in America is written, his talents should receive their just due.

There is no doubt that Wood was, in his day, in some demand as a church architect, and in 1896 he was among the prominent designers asked by the building committee of the Church of the Ascension to submit competition drawings. In those days a commission for a large public building rarely was given outright, and designs often were chosen by competitive methods.²²

Among those firms asked to submit drawings in the Ascension competition were Cram, Wentworth and Goodhue; Shepley, Rutan and Coolidge; D. H. Burnham and Company; McKim, Meade and White; Alden and Harlow; Peabody and Stearns; and Wilson Eyre. All firms submitting sketches were to be paid \$150 each, and most of them accepted. The competitors were asked to design a church not to exceed \$60,000 in cost.

The Rev. Dr. Grange, the rector of the Ascension, favored those drawings submitted by Wood seemingly because Wood was a churchman and understood the needs of the Episcopal Church. Wood was finally given the commission in October 1896, but the contract for construction hardly had been signed when the architect died in March 1897.²³ After some negotiation the final working drawings were received from his estate, and Frank E. Alden of the important Pittsburgh firm of Alden and Harlow was appointed to supervise the construction. There is no evidence, however, that any major changes were made subsequent to Wood's death, so the church probably was built as he planned it.

Ascension Church, although it is typical of his later Gothic work, has a certain interest as Wood's last large design in his own personal manner. The details of the church are Gothic and the tower, particularly, is Perpendicular Gothic (almost Tudor) in form, but the generally massive proportions of the building recall Richardsonian precedent.

²² In the archives of the Church of the Ascension are two Letter Books containing all the transactions of the Building Committee for the second church. They constitute a very complete record of the planning and erection of the structure and most of the following material in this section has been taken from this source.

²³ See obituaries in the *American Architect and Building News*, LV, 1108 (20 March 1897), 90; the *Newark, N. J. Sunday Call* (21 March 1897), 4; and the *Newark Evening News* (15 March 1897), 8.

It is the rugged, masculine mass of the building, the rock-like texture of its walls and the paucity of ornament which give an especially "Pittsburgh" tone and feeling to the structure. Wood, like Richardson before him in the design of the great Allegheny County Court House and Jail, succeeded almost spectacularly in interpreting the spirit of the Steel City.

As a rule, Wood's towers tend to be the massive focal points of his compositions, and in connection with that of Ascension one thinks of the powerful Romanesque campanile of St. Michael and All Angels (1890) at Anniston, Alabama,²⁴ and his great Gothic central lantern at Christ Church (1893), Bloomfield, New Jersey.²⁵ The square tower at the end of the nave is a marked feature of some medieval English parish churches, and Wood had used this type at St. John's (1895),²⁶ New Haven, Connecticut, but not so powerfully as at Ascension.

The great Pittsburgh tower bears a striking resemblance to that of the Welsh parish church of St. Giles at Wrexham, Denbigh,²⁷ which is very late Gothic (1506), but the British prototype quite lacks the brutal assertiveness that he gave his own creation, which broods over the church like a thunderhead and seems to proclaim unequivocally the power and majesty of God. Montgomery Schuyler, the American architectural critic, writing in 1911,²⁸ called it "one of the best things in Pittsburgh."

It is also interesting to compare this structure with the Wrexham Tower in the Memorial Quadrangle (1917-1921) at Yale University in New Haven. (Wrexham is of especial interest to the University because Elihu Yale is buried there.) James Gamble Rogers (1867-1947), a well known Gothacist of the early 20th century, was the architect; and his version of Wrexham, although it is much smoother than Wood's, also lacks the latter's originality of treatment.

The Ascension tower, as first designed and constructed, featured wrought iron finials resembling old-fashioned lightning rods that projected from the tops of the turrets; these were removed some years ago.

The composition of the rest of Ascension exterior is not so inter-

24 See pamphlet *Saint Michael and All Angels, Anniston, Alabama* (Anniston, n.d.).

25 *American Architect and Building News*, LXXXVIII, pl. 1566 (30 December 1905), illus.

26 *A History of St. John's Episcopal Church, New Haven, Connecticut, 1852-1952* (New Haven, 1952).

27 See Francis Bond, *An Introduction to English Church Architecture* (Oxford, 1913), II, 901, illus., 894.

28 "The Building of Pittsburgh," *The Architectural Record*, XXX, 3 (September 1911), 247-248.

esting as that of the tower, but the remaining ensemble has a certain powerful, ground-hugging vigor.

The same breadth and freedom of handling is evident in the interior, where Wood's debt to contemporary English work can be most clearly seen. Both nave and chancel are generally broad and low in their proportions, and seating accommodations for the congregation are ample. A series of plain brick arches carried on octagonal stone pillars separate the side aisles (here mere passageways), and they serve to announce major themes in the composition — the great reticulated brick arch at the entrance to the chancel, which is matched at the other end of the nave by an unadorned arch marking off the space under the tower. Similar plain arches demarcate the transepts from the crossing. An interesting note is supplied by the bold foliated caps of the nave piers, which have no abaci and which sharply project directly beneath the springing of the arches. Carved faces peering out from among the stone leaves of these caps stare mysteriously out into the nave.

There is a low-pitched beamed ceiling with tie-beams supported on wooden corbels. As originally built, the inside walls were of buff brick, but they have in recent years been painted after the advice of Ralph Adams Cram, who in 1923 was consulted as to the re-decoration of the church.²⁹ The general tone of the interior is that of the North Italian brick Gothic architecture of the 13th and 14th centuries as interpreted through Victorian English practice.³⁰

The old church was demolished in August 1909 and the new parish house and the interesting curved passageway connecting it with the church were begun in September of the same year. The new work was designed by the well-known local firm of Janssen and Abbott.³¹ Benno Janssen (1874-1964), the senior partner, was one of the most talented designers working in Pittsburgh during the early 20th century and has an impressive list of buildings to his credit.

The firm did not do much ecclesiastical work, and the parish house therefore is doubly interesting on that score. Its general form is broad and low like that of the church building proper, but the rather sparse Tudor ornamentation of Wood's great tower is echoed

29 Cram's report to the Vestry was in the church archives in 1954 when the writer first examined them, but it has since disappeared.

30 There is a photograph of the church interior as it was when first completed in *The Brick Builder*, VIII, 7 (July 1899), 146. See also photos in *The Bulletin* (Pittsburgh), XXXVIII, 10 (31 December 1898), 4.

31 There is a photograph of the parish house in the church archives which bears the names of the architects.

here very pleasantly. A certain broad simplicity of mass and refinement of proportion characteristic of the firm's work is also evident here. The new structure was finished in May 1910.

In the autumn of 1947, coincident with the founding of the Ascension Academy, certain renovations were carried out in the parish house, including the re-location of the stairway. This work was done from designs by William Manning and executed by Crump and Company, who also were responsible for the addition of the new choir room in 1950.

Any building which is still a living organism or which is performing a definite function in the community will continue to be subject to change as new conditions arise. The Church of the Ascension is no exception. More room is needed in the parish house, and a project is under study to augment the existing and now venerable buildings and to make them more useful to a modern congregation. The great sentinel tower, which for so long has watched over Oakland and the church, seems destined to look upon a new period of Christian work and witness.

THE ADORNMENTS OF THE CHURCH A BRIEF GUIDE

The heart of any 19th or early 20th century Anglican parish church is the chancel, although changing liturgical requirements now dictate new arrangements in the most modern churches. The desire of Victorian liturgists to emulate English cathedral services in which both choir and clergy occupy the Choir, gave rise to the Episcopal chancel with which most of us are familiar.³²

Since not only the choir and the clergy but the congregation (at communion time) had to be accommodated in the chancel, the architect of Ascension was wise to make his structure not only deep but wide, so that those persons participating in the services could move about easily and efficiently. One of the markedly favorable aspects of Ascension's interior as a whole is its spaciousness, but this openness is especially commendable in the chancel.

When the church was consecrated, only the necessary altar and choir furniture were installed. Beginning in 1898, most of the primary and later installations of furniture and fittings (with the exception of the windows) were carried out by the famous American firm of ecclesiastical craftsmen, the J. and R. Lamb Studios of Tenafly, New

³² See George W. O. Addleshaw and Frederick Etchells, *The Architectural Setting of Anglican Worship* (London, 1948), 203 ff.

Jersey. During the period of research for this article, Karl B. Lamb, president of the studios, was kind enough to have a search made of his records in order to secure information on work done for Ascension. In the following notes, the reader may assume that the Lamb Studios were responsible for the work under discussion, unless otherwise noted.

The salient decorative feature of the chancel is the great reredos of dark carved oak touched with gilt and color that serves as a setting for the mural of the Ascension. Only the lower portion of this was executed in 1916. The general style of the work picks up the theme of the late Perpendicular Gothic and the Tudor ornament used by Halsey Wood for the exterior of the tower (it was also used by Janssen and Abbott for the adornment of the parish house), infused faintly with a touch of then fashionable Beaux-Arts elegance.

The choir stalls (1898)³³ are of a rather more rugged type of early Gothic in keeping with the simplicity of the arches of the nave and transepts, but the later chancel parapet and canopies (1916) again return to the late Gothic style. The seven chancel lamps (1916) with their opalescent glass, faintly Art-Nouveau in character, were first ranged in a line at the great arch demarcating the choir from the nave, but they have been moved to their present positions on the longitudinal axis of the chancel.

The great mural of the Ascension, which dominates the church, was painted in oil on canvas and placed in its present position, as a memorial to Reuben Miller given by members of his family, in 1918.³⁴ This is the second largest wall painting devoted to this theme in the United States, the prototype and larger version of which is the famed mural executed in 1888 by the noted American painter John LaFarge for Richard Upjohn's Church of the Ascension (1840-1841) on lower Fifth Avenue in New York City. The rather extensive fame of LaFarge's work, and the very similar subject and placement of the Pittsburgh painting, have led some uninformed observers to attribute the latter to LaFarge.

Although the Pittsburgh mural is a competent piece of academic painting, LaFarge had nothing to do with it. It has been attributed to Leon Dabo (1868-1960),³⁵ but Karl Lamb (in a letter of 19 July 1961)

33 There is a description of this furniture in *The Bulletin* (Pittsburgh), XXXVIII, 10 (31 December 1898), 10.

34 Reuben Miller (1839-1917), one of the founders of the parish, who was a prominent Pittsburgh industrialist. He was also a founder of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania.

35 For Dabo see Mantle Fielding, *Dictionary of American Painters, Sculptors and Engravers* (Flushing, New York, 1961), 85; and *The American Art Annual*, X (1913), 243.

asserts that the painting was conceived and executed by his uncle, Frederick Stymetz Lamb (1863-1928)³⁶ "who was one of the really great religious muralists of his day."³⁷ Dabo, who was occasionally associated with the Lamb Studios, may well have assisted with the painting; and he was in charge of its installation in the church, but there now seems to be little reason for doubt that the mural belongs to Frederick Lamb.

The outstanding work of art in the chancel is unquestionably the great tapestry of the Ascension, which hangs to the right of the altar (as the observer faces the mural wall) just beyond the door to the sacristy.

A handsome example of late Renaissance art, it was given to the church in 1952 by Roy Arthur Hunt and the late Mrs. Hunt. It was dedicated on 14 September 1952. According to Milton Samuels of French and Company of New York (from whom the tapestry was purchased) it was formerly in the Palais de Sagan in Paris.³⁸

This magnificent 16th century Flemish panel, woven of wool, silk, and gold thread (9'6" wide by 10'3" high), provides a complementary version of the mural itself. On the Mount of Olives, a hillside in open country — with the city of Jerusalem in the distance — are gathered the Apostles and Disciples of Our Lord, including, in the immediate foreground, SS. Peter, James, and John. With arms extended, they gaze at the figure of the Christ ascending among clouds. He is adorned with a nimbus and holds a staff in his left hand. With his right hand extended in benediction he gazes downward at the Blessed Virgin, who kneels at the left. The strangely twisted, ecstatic figure of St. James in the center with its delicate, bearded face seems to uphold the vision as if it were some imminent chalice. The whole scene is enclosed in its original border composed of palm stalks bearing clusters of fruit, leaves, and flowers. In each of the lower corners is a parrot perched on a vase, while approximately in the center of both upper and lower borders, a butterfly lights on a flower. The entire tapestry is enclosed in a narrow blue and red selvage border.

The cartoon of this tapestry is associated with the School of Bernard Van Orley (1492-1542), sometimes called the "Flemish Raphael" because he studied under the great master, who influenced his designs. Associated with Van Orley was one of his pupils, Michel Coxcie (1499-1592). To both of these masters are attributed the de-

³⁶ See *Thieme-Becker Künstler Lexikon*, XXII, 248.

³⁷ Letter to the writer dated 19 July 1961.

³⁸ Letter of Milton Samuels to the writer dated 12 June 1961.

signs of many great tapestries in the national collections of Europe, such as the Louvre and the London National Gallery.

As tapestries enriched with gold thread were generally woven at royal command, it is not unlikely that this panel was ordered by one of the contemporary royal families.

There is an almost identical tapestry in the Metropolitan Museum, which had formerly been in the collection of the Electors of Saxony.³⁹ The Ascension tapestry in the Metropolitan Museum and that now in Pittsburgh's Ascension Church are the only period tapestries of this subject known to exist.

On the south wall of the chancel, below the Redemption window, hangs a rare Flemish tapestry of the 16th century, given to the church by Mr. and Mrs. Hunt in 1962. Woven in Tournai about 1510, it represents the figure of St. John the Apostle holding a chalice and standing in a *mille fleurs* background, a flowery field containing a number of birds. The panel (4 feet wide x 5 feet 10 inches high) is beautifully woven in natural colors on a dark blue ground; it is enclosed in a narrow selva border and mounted on a stretcher placed in a gold frame. It is not known from whom it was bought, but according to Mr. Samuels,⁴⁰ it was probably purchased in Europe some years ago by Mrs. Hunt.

Aside from the chancel, the Gordon Chapel contains some carved fittings of exceptional quality. This chapel, which had been part of the original church as designed by Wood, was completely refitted in 1919 by Mr. and Mrs. George B. Gordon as a memorial to their children. It is not known, however, who redesigned this elegant little room or who executed the fine carved oak altar, one of the best things in the church. The Lamb Studios did not carry out the work, and the general high quality of both the altar and the parclose screen at the entrance of the chapel has caused the renovations to be attributed to Ralph Adams Cram, but although it is known that he was consulted in 1923 concerning the church and the parish house, there is no record of any work actually done by his office in the church prior to that time.

The reredos of the altar above the mensa features a triptych of the Virgin and Child enthroned with saints and music-making angels, the panels of which have delicate incised shutters which open or close at will. In panels of floral carvings at the sides are shields bearing in-

39 See an article by John Goldsmith Phillips, "Two Famous Tapestries from Saxony," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, III, 7 (March 1945), 172-175.

40 Letter of Milton Samuels to the writer dated 20 March 1964.

struments of the Passion. The altar frontal has the Lamb of God (a couchant lamb holding a banner) flanked by two angels. Constructed entirely of dark oak and richly carved, painted, and gilded, this altar is, again, very late Gothic and early Renaissance in style. In an ambry to the right of this small sanctuary, the Sacrament is kept.

The parclose screen, also of dark carved oak and very freely designed, is a highly original composition vaguely reminiscent of William Morris and Sir Edward Burne-Jones. Panels of elaborate foliage culminate in a representation of the Annunciation over the door to the chapel. This dark pattern of complex forms, very effective when seen against the dimly lighted space of the chapel, would seem to be a genuinely creative expression of its period.

Perhaps the most interesting portable ornaments in the chapel consist of a pair of candlesticks in the form of acolytes (21½ inches high) given to the church in 1947 by Mrs. Harold Kennedy. These little figures with their long curling hair and green and crimson robes, were executed probably in France about 1500. Purchased from French and Company, they were formerly in the collection of the dealer Demotte of Paris.⁴¹

The stained glass of the church, mostly memorial in character, dates principally from the time of the erection of the building, except in the case of the clerestory windows, most of which were executed in 1962-1963 by the Hunt Stained Glass Studios, Inc., of Pittsburgh.

The memorial windows in the vestibule, aisles, and transepts were made by Healy and Millet of Chicago in 1898 under a single contract.⁴² Of the opalescent, pictorial type so popular around the turn of the century, their merit varies; probably the best of them is the large Plumer memorial window in the west wall of the nave. Its quiet pleasant colors and simple geometric patterns make it a very agreeable example of its type.

Slightly earlier specimens of the same type of glass are the three small, round-arch windows in the end wall of the assembly room of the parish house. These, which employ Richardsonian Byzanto-Romanesque design motifs as well as pictorial elements, came from the apse of the old church, which formerly stood on the site.

⁴¹ Letter of Milton Samuels to the writer dated 20 March 1964.

⁴² See entry in the Letter Books II, under 5 January 1898, which records the transactions of the sub-committee on stained glass. A scheme of the windows was submitted to Tiffany of New York, Healy and Millet of Chicago, and Leake and Greene of Pittsburgh. All firms were asked to submit color sketches. On 17 February 1898 the contract was awarded to the Chicago firm.

The small lancets without tracery in the Gordon Chapel, done in grisaille with touches of color, were created by Charles J. Connick Associates of Boston late in 1918. These are very graceful examples of the work of one of America's leading stained glass studios.⁴³

The clerestory window in the nave wall next to the north transept, done in 1918 by the Pittsburgh Stained Glass Studios in memory of Philip Benney, who died in the First World War, makes use of modern flight symbols, new motifs in stained glass iconography. The fallen hero, a young aviator, is represented as St. George in the medieval tradition.

The new clerestory windows, very rich in color and generally light in tonality, their traditional medieval style handled in rather a modern manner, help to brighten the dark interior of the church.⁴⁴

Modern though they are, these windows show very pervasively the influence of English 13th century medallion windows wherein the colors, particularly the primary red and blue, were utilized to transmit full and vibrant intensities in the primary and secondary ranges. The medallions are the salient elements in the composition of the design; each compartment has a single color background, either blue or red.

The three windows on the Gospel side of the chancel (that is, on the same side as the Gordon Chapel) symbolize those prophetic utterances concerning the coming of the Messiah and the final redemption of man by the Advent of Christ, his ministry and final sacrifice.

The window next to the crossing proclaims the message of the prophet Isaiah. Here Redemption is symbolized by the budding flower held by the prophet as well as the sword, the cross, and the moon and stars.

In the middle or Advent window, St. John the Baptist, "the voice crying in the wilderness," heralds the coming of Christ. The lion symbolizes the voice, and the shell and moon speak of rebirth in Christ through Baptism and the Advent season.

The window nearest the altar proclaims the fulfillment, through Christ's ministry and death, of the Redemption cycle. Standing, with the cup between the spear (left) and cross (right), the figure of Christ symbolically recalls the Last Supper at Calvary. Beneath him is the Lamb of God holding a banner (also used on the frontal of the altar in the Gordon Chapel). The Lamb also symbolizes the victory

⁴³ Information contained in a letter to the writer from Orin E. Skinner, president of Charles J. Connick Associates, Boston, dated 10 October 1961.

⁴⁴ Information supplied on these windows by George Hunt of Hunt Stained Glass Studios, Inc., Pittsburgh.

over sin and death by the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The clerestory windows in the nave, on the Gospel side, are dedicated to the British saints, St. Alban, the first martyr in the British Isles; St. Hilda of Whitby; St. Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury; and St. George (of whom we already have spoken). On the Epistle side are St. David, the patron saint of Wales; St. Elfreda, Abbess of Whitby; St. Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury and Martyr; and St. Edward the Confessor.

The dark oak altar and reredos of the Oliver Memorial Chapel in the north transept, executed by John W. Winterich and Associates of Cleveland and dedicated in July 1958, echoes the style and tone of the chancel fittings.

The old and the new in church adornments meet dramatically in the great eagle lectern from the old church — a very handsome piece of Late-Victorian brasswork — and the two alms basins of wood adorned with modern enamel plaques by Eliza Miller. These last were commissioned in 1955 by the Brotherhood of St. Andrew to commemorate the rectorship of Dr. Campbell.

The church possesses some very tasteful needlework kneeling cushions at the main and chapel altars; these were executed by the women of the church during the last few years. The basic cornflower blue of these kneelers is echoed in the velvet pew cushions, and the bright color helps to enliven the stretches of sombre oak so characteristic of the church.

Through seventy-five years each generation has continued to add new furnishings, new adornments to the church; but despite changing fashions, the decorative tone of the interior is marked by unity and quiet elegance.