

preservation
issues

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MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
 HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM

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Missouri's Christian Science Churches Reflect Ideals of Rational Theology

PHOTO MIMI STIRITZ



First Church of Christ, Scientist, St. Louis, designed by Mauran, Russell and Garden, 1903 is listed in the Holy Corners National Register Historic District.

A notable exception to the broad appeal and popularity of the Gothic style in church design during the 19th and early-20th centuries was found among Christian Science churches constructed in St. Louis between 1903 and 1940. All designed in variants of classical revival, the seven churches identified in a citywide survey reflect a national pattern found in Christian Science buildings from coast to coast.

Formally organized in Boston in 1879 by Mary Baker Eddy, the Christian Science denomination was a late entry into ecclesiastical building traditions in this country. The religion's first building was erected in Boston in 1894, the year that the Christian Science Church was chartered in Missouri and St. Louis' First Church of Christ, Scientist was established with 50 members. The strong Beaux-Arts classical

influence of buildings erected for Chicago's Columbian exposition in 1893 coincided with the formative period of Christian Science church construction.

Chicago architect Solon S. Beman, whose own designs for the Chicago Fair were admired by church founder Mary Baker Eddy, early became a lead-

ing designer for the Christian Scientists. A convert to the Christian Science faith, Beman designed the First Church of Christ, Scientist in Chicago in 1896. This monumental Greek Revival edifice with typical columned portico served as a model for Beman's four other Christian Scientist churches in Chicago and as a prototype for numerous Christian Science churches built throughout the country over the next three decades.








Writing in 1907, Beman noted an affinity between the classical style and Christian Science belief. He explained that "architecture along classic lines has found most favor with Christian Science" because the style, "with its sense of calm, power and dignity, . . . its true systems of proportion, its sincerity and refinement, and . . . its rationalism, seems to represent the

faith of those who employ it in their house of worship."

Charles D. Faulkner, another prominent Chicago church architect and Christian Science member, also advocated classical design in his 1946 book, *Christian Science Church Edifices*. He stated that symbolism had no place in Christian Science architecture; thus the Gothic style, exemplifying the "old theology," was not suitable due to its dependence on symbolic ornamentation. Objections were also raised to Gothic window design, which restricted light entry and contributed to a "mysticism of church ritual" considered antithetical to Christian Science. Architect of the classical interior of St. Louis' Seventh Church of Christ, Scientist (1930), Faulkner emphasized good acoustics and values of

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November/December 1992

A Sacred Trust: Preserving Missouri's Historic Religious Properties

Deputy
State
Historic
Preservation
Officer

One of the greatest and most emotionally charged challenges facing preservationists in Missouri and throughout the nation is the preservation of churches, synagogues, and other religious properties. Urban or rural, architect-designed or vernacular, such historic religious properties are significant elements on the American cultural landscape. But, as a result of economic, social, and demographic changes, they are, as a category, one of our most endangered property types.

Missouri is fortunate in having a rich variety of historic religious buildings reflecting the state's ethnic, religious, and geographical diversity. When constructed, these churches and synagogues were critical elements in the social fabric of the community, neighborhood, or rural area. In addition to functioning as houses of worship, they served as centers for social events that drew a community or congregation together. Simple or lavish in style, as the church coffers allowed, the buildings were a source of inspiration and pride.

Today, some of these structures are neighborhood eyesores or financial burdens rather than sources of inspiration. Shifts in population, decline in

congregations, and the diminished role of the church in everyday life have resulted in the abandonment of churches, particularly in inner urban and rural areas. Many of the state's finest examples of ecclesiastical architecture have been lost or are in jeopardy.

Efforts are underway statewide to address the challenge of religious property preservation. A fundamental effort is the compilation of a comprehensive database of information on religious properties.

Information on more than 1,100 properties in the Historic Preservation Program's (HPP) Missouri Cultural Resource Inventory has been entered into a computer database. This will make it possible to obtain quick information, such as dates, construction materials, and locations, on religious structures throughout the state. Historic Preservation Fund grants have been awarded to both the City of Kansas City's Landmarks Commission and the St. Louis Landmarks Association to assist in identification and evaluation of religious properties in these urban areas. Information on the number, location, and significance of religious properties is critical in planning for the protection of endangered religious landmarks.

Numerous adaptive reuse projects are underway as well. A small frame

church in the Rocheport Historic District has been rehabilitated as a restaurant and art gallery under the preservation tax incentives program; three blocks away, a historic brick church is now used as a community center.

In northwestern Missouri, a group has been formed to save the historic Queen of the Apostles complex. The not-for-profit group, Twin Spires Inc., has successfully negotiated a donation of the properties from the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph and is actively engaged in fund raising.

The HPP has become directly involved through the acquisition of an abandoned rural church under the Historic Preservation Revolving Fund. The former Wheeling Methodist Church was accepted by donation and sold subject to preservation covenants. The purchaser is using the building for a summer youth camp, proof that creative solutions can be found for the preservation of rural churches.

While we can boast of many successes, many more religious properties face an uncertain future. We hope that increased awareness of these issues and the possible creative alternatives to abandonment, deterioration, and demolition will bring about positive results. — *Claire Blackwell*

Listing Churches in the National Register

National
Register
Historic
Places

Churches are one of a group of properties, which includes cemeteries and moved build-

ings, which may not normally be listed in the National Register of Historic Places. This prohibition against the listing of churches and other religious properties is intended to avoid the per-

ception of a judgment by the federal government about the validity or merits of any religion or belief. The exclusion applies to all properties constructed by a religious institution, presently owned

PHOTO EARL SIMS



St. Oswald's Protestant Episcopal Church, ca 1892, located in rural Atchison County, is an example of the Shingle style of architecture.

by a religious institution or used primarily for religious purposes, or owned by a religious institution during its period of significance, and to all properties for which religion is selected as an area of significance.

Each year, however, the Historic Preservation Program (HPP) receives numerous requests from individuals and groups interested in recognizing the historic significance of their church. Fortunately, as with so many prohibitions and restrictions, there are exceptions to the rule which forbids the listing of religious properties in the National Register. A religious property may be listed if its significance can be established based on architectural or artistic values or if it can be demonstrated that the property is representative of important historic or cultural trends. In order to evaluate National Register eligibility, state preservation offices, state review boards, and the Keeper of the National Register must evaluate the significance of religious properties on purely secular terms.

Three Missouri churches listed in the National Register this year illustrate how religious properties may be nominated under these exceptions to the National Register criteria. Most churches, such as St. Oswald's Protestant Episcopal Church in rural Atchison County, are listed for their architectural or artistic values. Although St. Oswald's, which was constructed in 1892, served as the focus of the social and cultural, as well as

religious, life of a group of English immigrants, it is most significant as a virtually unaltered example of the Shingle style of architecture. The nomination and accompanying documentation demonstrated that the church originally employed and still retained many of the characteristic features of the picturesque style, including shingle cladding, an asymmetrical facade and irregular massing, a steeply pitched roofline with intersecting gables, and an overall emphasis on the horizontal rather than the vertical. Designed by English-born Kansas City architect Arthur H. James, the church is also the only extant example of the work of this prolific designer that has been identified in the state.

PHOTO MIMI STIRITZ



The Anna Bell Chapel, ca 1893, New Haven, Franklin County. The church served as the focal point for New Haven's African-American community.

The African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in New Haven, Franklin County, was not architecturally designed, and, although essentially unaltered and still reflective of its 1893 construction date, its vernacular form never featured the embellishments that characterize or define a style. The church, however, was the chief social agency and the focal point for New Haven's African-American community and offered its members one of their only forums for self-determination. Listed under the area of significance Ethnic Heritage-Black, the church was largely the dream and accomplishment of Anna Pryor Bell who, according to local tradition, founded the congregation in 1865 near Eilah

and, when Missouri River floods forced the church to relocate to New Haven, led efforts to raise the funds to construct the present building. Following her death in 1905, the church was renamed the Anna Bell Chapel.

Completed in 1907, the Washington Chapel Colored Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church in Parkville also served as the focus for the African-American community in the Platte County town and is also listed for its significance in the area of ethnic heritage. Built in an area intended for a "Negro Annex" to Park College, the church was the first building owned by the congregation, which was established in 1870. The annex to the Presbyterian college never materialized, although construction of the church was supervised by the college's Superintendent of Buildings Charles Patrick Breen, a master builder who, in his 23 years as superintendent, built 12 buildings on the campus. The church, also listed for its architectural significance, was designed in a subdued interpretation of the Late Gothic Revival style with locally quarried limestone. It was built by the labor of Park College students and members of the CME congregation. — Steve Mitchell

PHOTO DEON WOLFENBARGER



Completed in 1907, the Washington Chapel CME Church in Parkville interprets the late Gothic Revival style in locally quarried limestone.

The View From Mount Nebo

Investment Tax Credits

Vacant for nearly 25 years, the Mount Nebo Baptist Church faced condemnation by the City of Rocheport and probable demolition when it was purchased by local entrepreneurs John and Vicki Ott, who planned to restore it.

Named for the Biblical mountain from which Moses saw the Promised Land, the small frame church was the center of cultural life for Rocheport's African-American community for more than 75 years. But when the town's black population, which once numbered more than 100, declined, the church was abandoned.

The Otts, who had already restored four historic buildings in Rocheport, were undaunted by the severely deteriorated condition of the church building. A leaking roof and missing windows had allowed weather infiltration and caused the collapse of the interior floors and supporting joists. The foundation of stone pilings had also settled on one side, causing a precarious list of one-and-one-half feet to the north. Demolition by neglect appeared imminent.

Few people shared the Otts' vision for the building, including the area's

lending institutions. After numerous applications, a construction loan was secured from a Columbia bank contingent on finding a long-term lessee for the building. It took two years to find a tenant willing to chance a lengthy lease commitment for a building that looked like it might fall down with the next breeze.

Construction, under the close supervision of local contractor Brian Christianson, began in the late fall of 1991 and was completed the following spring. Total construction costs of more than \$100,000 included a new foundation, wood shake roof, windows, doors, mechanicals, and plumbing. The building's open floor plan and cathedral ceilings were maintained and restored along with a baptistry under a trap door in the elevated chancel.

Today, the former church building, located adjacent to the Katy Trail State Park, houses the Mount Nebo Art Gallery and Deli owned by local artist Bob Casati. Casati believes the building and its location have been a decided asset to his business.

More important, perhaps, with its long-term preservation ensured, the former house of worship is once again an asset to the Rocheport community and a visible reminder of the city's rich multi-cultural heritage. — *Karen Grace*
(See *UPDATES*, Page 6)

"Religious structures are among our most important landmarks. Intertwined as they are with beliefs learned from childhood, humankind's most lofty aspirations, and the benchmark events of human life, they evoke a strong emotional reaction even in those who do not worship there." — Sacred Trusts II

Often the sole remaining landmark in the countryside, Missouri's rural vernacular churches are generally modest frame structures, traditionally painted white, with little ornament. A few brick or stone examples exist in some areas of the state. Always gable roofed, most can be classified as one of four types, distinguished by the placement of their steeple or belfry.

Approximately half of Missouri's rural vernacular churches are **gable-end** churches. Many have no steeple or belfry; if one exists, it is set back from the facade, straddling the ridge line of the roof. Primary entry is located in the gable end and consists of either one or two centered doors. Fenestration (the arrangement of windows) and architectural detail is symmetrical.

The second most common type of rural vernacular church in Missouri is the **center-steeple** church. The steeple or belfry is centered in the facade and contains the facade entry doors, porch and steps, all of which line up visually. All fenestration and architectural detail is symmetrical.

The **side-steeple** church has a side wall orientation; the steeple or belfry and entrance sit on the same side of the facade. The front gable end is pierced by a window group.

The **steepled-ell** church has a gable ell roofline; the belfry or steeple rises from the intersection of the ell and may include the primary entrance. Both gable ends possess unique window groupings, which are often stained glass. — *Beverly Fleming*

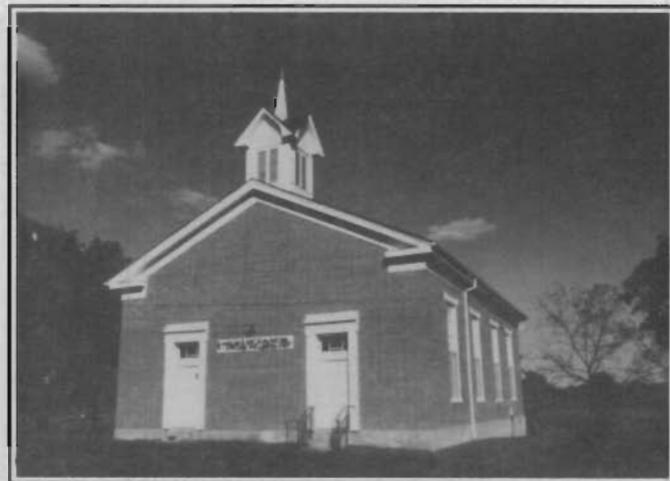
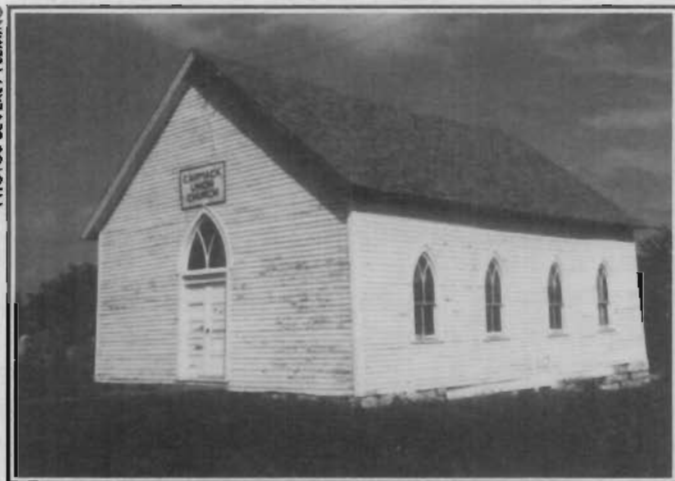


LEFT PHOTO JOHN OTT
RIGHT PHOTO KAREN GRACE

The Mount Nebo Baptist Church, Rocheport, Boone County, before and after its rehabilitation as an Investment Tax Credit project. Note the leaning bell tower in the before photo (left) and the dramatic change in the after photo (right).

Missouri's Rural Vernacular Churches – A Photo Essay

PHOTOS BEVERLY FLEMING



The Carmack Union Church (left), located northwest of Albany in Gentry County, and the New Lebanon Cumberland Presbyterian Church (right) in Cooper County are two very different examples of the gable-end church. Built in 1859-60, the red brick New Lebanon Cumberland Presbyterian Church was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979 due to its Greek Revival architecture. In contrast, the Carmack Union Church's sole architectural embellishment is its Gothic Revival fenestration. Carmack Union Church was built in 1900 as a non-denominational place of worship.

Also featuring Gothic Revival architectural detail, St. Peter's German Evangelical Church is a center-steeple church. Located in Osage County, it was built ca 1880.



PHOTO BEVERLY FLEMING

A side-steeple church, Willow Row Methodist Church was built ca 1891 in Gentry County. The church is the centerpiece of a Methodist church camp.



PHOTO PAM MINER

The Bell Air Methodist Church, a gable end church, was built in 1870; its fenestration is Gothic-inspired and a tower is topped with a balustrade. Located in Cooper County, the church is associated with the Leonard family of nearby "Ravenswood."

PHOTO JUDY SHIELDS



Friends of Sacred Structures

Kansas
City
Regional
Office

In response to the closing of a number of historic churches in Kansas City last year, a new not-for-profit preservation group, called Friends of Sacred Structures (FOSS), has been organized

under the umbrella of the Historic Kansas City Foundation, Inc. The group's mission is to support and promote the preservation and continued use of religious structures significant in our history.

The group will function as a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Historic Kan-

sas City Foundation, Inc., a long-established, Kansas City metro area, not-for-profit preservation group; however, it will maintain its own bylaws, incorporation papers, membership, board of directors, budget, policies, and programming. FOSS will share office space and cooperative programming with the Historic Kansas City Foundation.

But FOSS's activities are not limited to just the Kansas City area or Missouri; the group is actively assisting in the efforts to save Queen of Apostles Roman Catholic Church in St. Joseph (see related article) and is drawing membership from Kansas as well as Missouri. Members are a mix of preservationists and representatives from various religious denominations and congregations who own historic buildings. Newly elected president of the group is the Rev. Bruce D. Rahtjen, vicar of St. Mary's Episcopal Church in downtown Kansas City.

The group plans to sponsor educational programs and publications that increase public awareness regarding the need to preserve historic religious properties, provide guidance on the maintenance and stewardship of historic churches, advocate for the preservation of these buildings, and encourage the new use or expanded use of underutilized churches. To the above ends, the group assembled a slide show on Kansas City's historic religious structures, which debuted during the 1992 National Historic Preservation Week, and is available for presentation upon request.

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MISSOURI

Historic Architecture

Rural Gothic Revival Churches

Gothic Revival I, ca 1840-75; Victorian Gothic, ca 1860-1890; Gothic Revival II, 1885-

Common characteristics:

- Strong sense of verticality in design; the height of the building and most design elements are greater than their width.
- Roofs are steeply gabled and typically gable-fronted to enhance verticality.
- Steeples are tall and usually have a pointed roof or spire with or without pinnacle or cross; some rare examples have a tower with battlements (crenelation) as a secondary vertical element.
- Pointed, Gothic-arched windows, doors, and decorative elements are the most important and obvious defining feature;
- Exterior materials are most frequently wood, either clapboard or board and batten, but brick, stone, and stucco are also seen.
- Interior plan is universally basilican - a long, open rectangular nave.
- Decorations give an impression of fragility, most frequently demonstrated in the interior roof trussing or window tracery.

PHOTO ROGER MASERANG



St. John the Evangelist Church in the vicinity of Bahner, Pettis County, was built in 1881 by the congregation's 40 Missouri-German families. The "parish plant" consists of three other buildings: school, rectory, and convent plus a nearby parish cemetery.

The group has also established a library of technical assistance materials, which is available to owners of historic religious properties, and is exploring the sponsorship of a workshop on historic church maintenance issues targeted towards clergy.

To obtain membership information about FOSS, contact:

Friends of Sacred Structures (FOSS), c/o Historic Kansas City Foundation, Inc., 412 West 8th Street, Kansas City, Missouri 64105, (816) 471-3391. – Beverly Fleming

To Save the Queen . . .

A prominent landmark in the St. Joseph skyline, Queen of Apostles Roman Catholic Church (built in 1908) was abruptly closed by the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph in June. However, it has been given a new lease on life through the efforts of Twin Spires, Inc., a community-based, not-for-profit corporation. Twin Spires, Inc. was formed in June with the sole purpose of preserving the Queen of Apostles Church complex, which includes the Gothic Revival Church, designed by St. Joseph architect E. J. Eckel. It also includes a rectory, convent, and eight-room school building.

In August the diocese agreed to give the complex to Twin Spires, Inc. with the understanding that the complex will be converted to several new uses. Likely new uses will be the conversion of the church itself to a museum on St. Joseph's religious history, performing arts center, and meeting space; leasing of the former rectory and possibly the convent to a bed-and-breakfast facility; and leasing of the school building to a state agency that works with handicapped and disabled adults. A fundraising campaign is just getting off the ground in order to stabilize and repair the church's massive twin spires.

The complex is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Museum Hill Historic District. – *Beverly Fleming*

(CHURCHES, from Page 1)

"light, simplicity, and cheerfulness" for interiors.

Several other design elements recommended by Faulkner are characteristic of St. Louis Christian Science church buildings as well as churches in other cities. Large, geometrically patterned leaded glass windows of pale muted color permit ample entry of natural light. Curved ceilings with long radii, creating relatively flat vaults, enhance acoustics. Inclined auditorium floors with seating arranged bowl-like around the reader's desk produce an optimum line of vision. Simple wall treatment on the interior, with design emphasis in and around the raised reader's platform, focuses attention on the lesson-sermon. Generously sized foyers with multiple stairs leading into the auditorium (sometimes installed in the middle of the seating) facilitate movement of people.

For the design of their churches, St. Louis Christian Scientists drew upon the talents of the city's foremost architects although so far as is known none of the local architects were members of the Christian Science church. Mauran, Russell & Garden received the commission for First Church of Christ, Scientist (1903), listed in the Holy

Corners National Register District as is their 1907 Italian Gothic Second Baptist Church. Plans for both Fourth Church of Christ, Scientist (1909) and Third Church (1911) were drawn up by Albert B. Groves, a prominent designer for several other denominations.

Fortunate for their continued preservation, all of the churches surveyed were in use, but all except one are now occupied by other denominations or, in the case of the former Second Church of Christ, Scientist, adaptively reused as a bank (much of its original 1940 modern classical interior survives intact). The impressive group of churches are prime examples of early 20th-century Christian Science design traditions which enrich St. Louis with a near-complete record of the church's building history. – *Mimi Stiritz*

Mimi Stiritz, a free-lance architectural historian from St. Louis County, has studied and written extensively about Missouri's historic properties and has been responsible for listing hundreds of St. Louis area properties in the National Register of Historic Places. Stiritz recently completed phase three of a Historic Preservation Fund grant-financed survey of St. Louis churches.

Fourth Church of Christ, Scientist, ca 1909, St. Louis, now Solomon's Temple, designed by architect A.B. Groves.



PHOTOS MIMI STIRITZ

Sixth Church of Christ, Scientist, ca 1923, St. Louis, now Fifth Missionary Baptist Church, Wedemeyer & Nelson, Architects.



Historic Properties for Sale

Commercial Hotel, Boonville, was built ca 1820s-1890s, and a steady evolution of architectural styles is evident in its architecture. Listed in the National Register, the hotel served as a tavern and an inn for Santa Fe Trail travelers. Just 25 minutes west of Columbia, this unique 7,400-square-foot property offers a variety of possible uses, such as a bed and breakfast or mixed residential and commercial use. May be eligible for a 20 percent federal tax credit. Protective covenants attached to deed. Price: \$65,000.

James Baptiste Bequette-Ribault House, Ste. Genevieve. One of only four "Poteaux-en-terre," or post-in-ground vertical log structures known to exist in North America, the property has been almost completely restored to its original appearance. Located on St. Mary's Road in the Ste. Genevieve National Landmark Historic District on nearly two acres, the property includes the LaSource-Durand House, a barn, corn crib, and chicken house. One hour south of St. Louis, the site would lend itself to combined museum/retail/artist uses with room to construct a modern home in the rear. Restrictive covenants will ensure the property's preservation. Price: \$43,500.

Contact Revolving Fund Coordinator Jane Beetem, (314) 751-5373 for more information.

preservation issues

Missouri Department of Natural Resources
Historic Preservation Program
P.O. Box 176
Jefferson City, MO 65102

Dates to Remember

Missouri Advisory Council on Historic Preservation Meeting November 13, Jefferson City. Call Margaret Barnes for details at (314) 751-5365.

Route 66 - 66th Birthday Celebration November 14, Springfield. Call Jim Powell for more information at (314) 982-5500.

National Meeting of Society for Historic Archaeology January 6-10, Hyatt Regency, Crown Center, Kansas City. Call Bill Lees (913) 296-2625 for more information.

Eighth Annual Missouri Historic Preservation Conference, Victorian Missouri: A Celebration April 16-18, Carthage. Call Karen Grace (314) 751-7959 for more information.

PHOTO NICK DECKER



Imagine what you could do with 7,400 square feet of commercial space in this charming river town. The Commercial Hotel in Boonville is just \$65,000.

This one-of-a-kind vertical log house includes outbuildings. The quaint James Baptiste Bequette-Ribault House in Ste. Genevieve can be yours for just \$43,500.



PHOTO HARRIS

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