

Immaculate Conception Church of the
Blessed Virgin
Cambria City Neighborhood
308 Broad Street
Johnstown
Cambria County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5738

HABS
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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

Immaculate Conception Church of the Blessed Virgin

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Location: 308 Broad Street, Cambria City, Johnstown, Cambria County, Pa.

Description: The Immaculate Conception Church faces southwest on a corner lot, with the church rectory to the west. The church is cruciform or cross-shaped, approximately 42' x 120'. It has masonry walls faced with semi-glazed buff brick and brownstone. It is three bays wide by six bays deep, with a cross-gable roof covered with asphalt shingles and a foundation of cut stone. A 130' belltower, 16' x 16', with three bells, rises out of the northeast corner of the church. Five pointed-arch windows of various sizes are on the front facade; six larger gothic-head, triple-hung, stained-glass windows are on each side of the building. A triple entryway has three sets of double doors, divided by paired columns. An icon of the Blessed Virgin is above the entryway. The original wooden steeple was struck by lightning in 1986 and replaced with a steel steeple.

The interior of the church has no interior columns and no side aisles. The apse is polygonal, with groined vaulting and an elaborate altarpiece. The ceiling is plaster over a steel frame with groined or ribbed vaulting, decorated with corbels and cluster columns. The altar rail is constructed of brass and marble. A gallery with a Stein organ of 1,000 to 2,000 pipes is in the rear of the church. The interior was severely damaged by fire in 1983. Restoration involved the replacement of the confessionals with side altars, replacement and refinishing of the wainscoting behind the altarpiece, and the relocation of several icons.

History: Originally called St. Mary's, the Immaculate Conception parish is the oldest in Cambria City, established by Germans on December 8, 1859. A brick church building was constructed on this site in 1859-60. The parish established the first parochial school in Cambria City in 1862. The congregation outgrew the original church building and Father Edward Trautwein began construction of a new church nearby in 1889. The Johnstown Flood destroyed the almost-completed foundation and killed 160 parish members. The construction of the second church was begun again and completed in 1891. It was a two-story building, with five classrooms and a hall on the first floor and the church on the second floor. An 1891 city directory noted that the school had four teachers and 200 students. St. Stephen's Slovak Catholic congregation utilized the first church for several years until the building was torn down.

Father John N. Bausch led the effort to build the third, present church. The architect was William P. Ginther of Akron, Ohio. The cornerstone was laid in 1906 and the church was dedicated in 1908, by which time the congregation was using the present name. The church school and the convent were located directly across from the church on the opposite side of Broad Street; these buildings were torn down in the early 1960s. The 1936 and 1977 floods, and fires in 1983 and 1986 caused hundreds of thousands of dollars of damage to the church. In each instance, a major restoration project erased the damage. Currently, the parish numbers about 120 families.

Sources:

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Johnstown City Directory, 1891.

Kory, William, "The Churches of Johnstown, Pennsylvania, Population Survey," (University of Pittsburgh, Johnstown, Summer, 1972).

"Lightning Hits Church," Johnstown Tribune-Democrat, February 8, 1986.

"Parishoners Keep Heart," Johnstown Tribune-Democrat, November 26, 1984.

Project Information: This report was part of a larger project to document the city of Johnstown, Pennsylvania. The project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), Robert Kapsch, chief, at the request of America's Industrial Heritage Project (AIHP). An overview of history of the city (HABS No. PA-5669) and an overview of the neighborhoods of Cambria City and Minersville (HABS No. PA-5672) provide context for these buildings as well as a comprehensive list of sources. See also additional HABS reports on buildings in the downtown and other neighborhoods.

This report was prepared by Jeffrey Hickey in August 1988 under the direction of Alison K. Hoagland, HABS historian, and Kim E. Wallace, the supervisory historian of the project. Hickey's and other project historians' work was published as The Character of a Steel Mill City: Four Historic Neighborhoods of Johnstown, Pennsylvania (Washington, D.C.: HABS/HAER, National Park Service, 1989), edited by Kim E. Wallace. Illustrations in the publication include large format photographs taken by HAER photographer Jet Lowe and 35 mm photographs taken by the project historians.