

St. Casimir's Roman Catholic Church, Church
Cambria City Neighborhood
500 Power Street
Johnstown
Cambria County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5743-A

HABS
PA,
11-JOTO,
41-A-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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Location: 500 Power Street, Cambria City, Johnstown, Cambria County, Pa.

Description: St. Casimir's is a large and imposing Romanesque style building situated on the south bank of the Connemaugh River. Two stories over a basement, rectangular plan, 58' x 140'. The principal facade, facing north, is heavily decorated, with a deep molded cornice articulating each story and rising to form a pediment over the central and side entrances. Above the main entrance and under the roof cornice there is blind arcading. The central entrance set above a flight of ten steps has a large rose window overhead. There is a statue of St. Casimir at the base of the rose window. Three-story belfry towers flank the entrance bay. The church has brick load-bearing walls with a stone exterior finish.

Inside the church there is an entrance vestibule flanked by the belfry towers which also accommodate the stairs to the gallery. The nave is wide and spacious, taking up almost the full width of the church. It is separated from the narrow side aisles by an arcade of five round-headed arches. The church is lit by two-light round-arched windows on the ground floor, and groups of three round-arched clerestory windows above the arcade. The large stained-glass windows present colorful images of saints, particularly the patron saints of steelworkers and of fire-fighters. The sanctuary is set in a semi-circular apse. Over the crossing is an octagonal dome. The interior is very ornate, with richly decorated surfaces on the walls and ceiling.

History: In the late nineteenth century, newly arrived Polish immigrants used the Slovak church of St. Stephen's, as there was no Polish parish available in Johnstown. In 1892 the Poles organized Saint Casimir's Lodge and shortly afterwards this organization formulated plans for the establishment of a parish for the Polish-speaking people. Late in 1901 the Archbishop of the Diocese of Altoona granted permission to establish a parish. Much of the building fund was donated by St. Casimir Lodge and St. Martin Society, whose members were assessed. St. Martin Society had been organized to assist St. Casimir Lodge with the foundation of the parish.

On November 22, 1901, two lots were purchased from John Meegan, on which site the present church and former rectory are located. On May 20 of that year Father Bronislaus Dembinski arrived and the books were handed over to him. In July the parish suffered a setback. Forty-one men of the congregation were victims of the disastrous Rolling Mill Mine explosion. The parish felt the loss as two societies connected with the church, St. Casimir Lodge and St. Martin Society, were wiped out by the disaster. Plans went ahead, however, and the laying of the cornerstone for the basement of the church took place on September 4, 1902. The dedication of the basement church took place on December 21, 1902.

In 1906, work on the completion of the church structure was renewed. According to tradition, the Cambria Steel Company donated the steel and bricks necessary for the construction. On August 8, 1907, the church was dedicated by Bishop Eugene A. Garvey.

St. Casimir's Church was designed by a prominent local architect, Walter Myton (1872-1929). The contractor was C.C. Hornick.

The upkeep of the church was partly financed by money deducted from the paychecks of the Polish

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employees of Cambria Iron Company, in exchange for the priest's aid in securing laborers for the Company. (Morawska, 118)

In 1972 a study of "The Churches of Johnstown" by William Kory found that St. Casimir's served 396 families, nearly all of Polish descent. Of the 1,584 persons in the parish, only 30% still lived in Cambria City. Half of the parishioners lived in other parts of the city, while 20% resided outside the city limits.

Sources:

Golden Anniversary pamphlet, St. Casimir's Church, 1952.

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

Morawska, Eva. For Bread with Butter : The Life Worlds of East Central Europeans in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, 1890-1940. Cambridge University Press, 1985.

"Walter Myton--Biographical Information," unpublished ms., Johnstown Flood Museum.

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 Bernadette Goslin in August 1988 under the direction of Alison K. Hoagland, HABS historian, and Kim E. Wallace, the supervisory historian of the project. Goslin'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.