

St. Columba's Roman Catholic Church, Church I
Cambria City Neighborhood
917 Chestnut Street
Johnstown
Cambria County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5741-A

HABS
PA,
11-JOTO,
44-A

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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

St. Columba's Roman Catholic Church I
(West End Catholic School)

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Location: 917 Chestnut Street, Cambria City, Johnstown, Cambria County, Pa.

Description: This two-story brick building measures approximately 50' x 112'. Three-bay principal facade, corbeled parapet. Narrow round-headed windows throughout. The plain brickwork of the church is broken by a pattern of stone voussoirs in the arches over the windows and the entrance. The window sash has been replaced by glass block.

History: This was the first church built to serve the English-speaking people of lower Johnstown. The majority of the congregation were Irish immigrants who settled in Cambria City in the mid nineteenth century. Accordingly, the church was named after an Irish saint, St. Columba.

Ground was broken on April 9, 1888, for the foundations of a combination church/school building. The first mass was offered at St. Columba's on November 4, 1888. The new building was one of the minority of buildings in Cambria City to withstand the flood waters of May 31, 1889, and relief workers took advantage of the shelter it provided and used it as a morgue for flood victims.

Father Thomas Davin, the founder and the first pastor of St. Columba's, died on September 24, 1889.

When the new church was built in 1913 the combination church/school building was converted exclusively into classrooms. It is still used today as the West End Catholic School.

Sources:

The Catholic Register, (17 April 1938 and 23 November 1987).

McCullough, David, The Johnstown Flood (New York, 1968), 193.

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.