

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT



MONASTERY OF THE HOLY CROSS (FORMERLY IMMACULATE CONCEPTION PARISH CHURCH) 3101-3111 S. ABERDEEN STREET

**Final Landmark Recommendation Adopted by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks,
on August 5, 2021**



**CITY OF CHICAGO
Lori E. Lightfoot, Mayor**

**Department of Planning and Development
Maurice D. Cox, Commissioner**

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**MONASTERY OF THE HOLY CROSS
(FORMERLY IMMACULATE CONCEPTION PARISH
CHURCH)
3101-3111 S. ABERDEEN STREET**

DATE OF CONSTRUCTION: RECTORY 1901; CHURCH 1908-1909
ARCHITECT: HERMANN J. GAUL
ARCHITECTURAL STYLE: GERMAN GOTHIC REVIVAL

The Monastery of the Holy Cross, formerly Immaculate Conception Parish Church, is a fine quality example of the high German Gothic Revival style and possesses a strong and historic connection to Chicago's Bridgeport neighborhood and its development during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

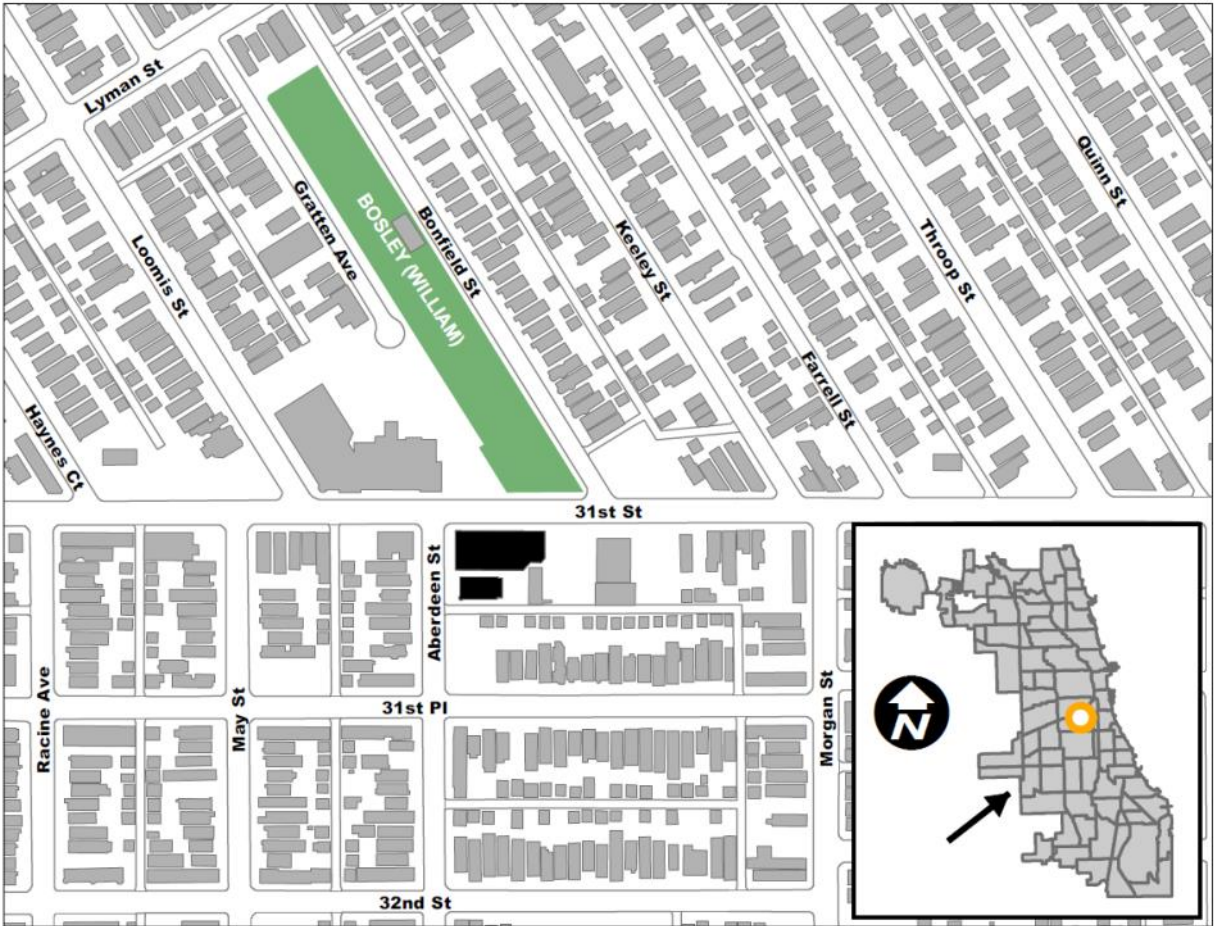
Immaculate Conception was originally a German "national parish" which later served a diverse community of immigrants from 1908 to 1990. The church is largely intact and has undergone few interior changes to the original sanctuary with the exception of the addition of a monastic choir in the nave. Since 1991, it has operated as the Monastery of the Holy Cross, a Roman Catholic Benedictine Monastery of the Subiaco Cassinese Congregation. The complex includes a church building and adjoining rectory. Both were designed by architect Hermann J. Gaul. An adjacent school building once located to the east of the church is no longer extant. An additional two-story brick flat building is also part of the complex but is not part of the landmark designation. The rectory predates the main church building, and both structures are fine examples of Chicago's ecclesiastical architecture.

The Monastery of the Holy Cross is located at 3101-3111 South Aberdeen Street in Chicago's Bridgeport Community Area. The church building and rectory are color-coded Orange in the Chicago Historic Resources Survey (CHRS), which preliminarily identifies it as significant to its surrounding neighborhood.

THE BRIDGEPORT COMMUNITY AREA

Bridgeport, Chicago's Community Area 60, is situated three miles southwest of Chicago's Loop business district, although it did not officially become part of the City of Chicago until 1863.

Inheriting the area near the South Branch of the Chicago River occupied by a settlement known as Hardscrabble, Bridgeport was platted in 1836 by the Illinois and Michigan Canal Commissioners, twelve years before the completion of the adjacent Illinois and Michigan



The Monastery of the Holy Cross is located at 3101-3111 S. Aberdeen Street in Chicago's Bridgeport Community Area. The Complex includes the church and adjoining rectory building as outlined on the above map.



Reopening of the Illinois and Michigan Canal at Bridgeport, 1871, after the channel had been deepened. (Artist: Unknown. Source: Chicago Historical Society (IChi-05836))

Canal which let travelers of the Erie Canal and the Great Lakes reach the Mississippi River. The commissioners named the area Bridgeport because of the bridge constructed over the canal lock.

By 1863, the Bridgeport area was annexed by the City of Chicago. Irish immigrants moved into Bridgeport as early as the 1830s, in addition to Italian- and Lithuanian-Americans. In the many years after, waves of German and Polish immigration followed, eventually succeeded by Mexican and Chinese immigrants in the 20th century. In 2008, the Chicago Sun-Times stated that Bridgeport had become one of the four most ethnically diverse neighborhoods in Chicago.

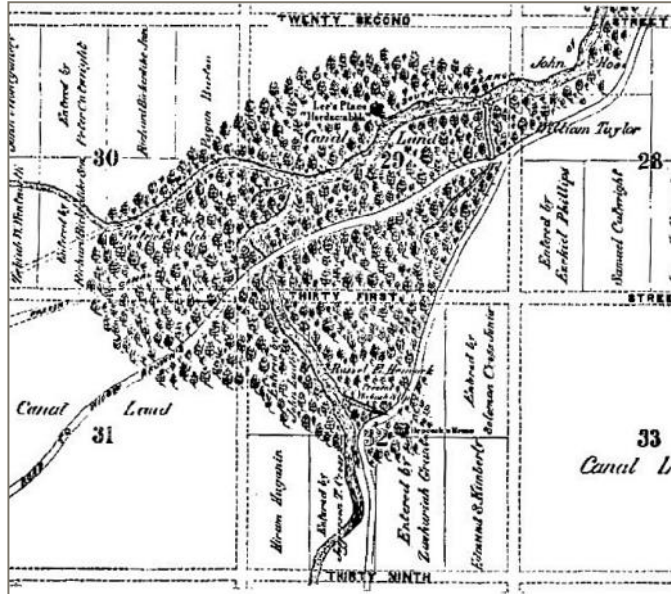
Early German immigration to Bridgeport was spurred on by the need for workers to man the nearby canal. A German neighborhood called Dashiell formed north of 31st Street and east of Halsted Street during this time, as well as a "Little Dalmatia" along Wentworth. These German immigrants began the congregations which eventuated in the First Lutheran Church of the Trinity (1863), Holy Cross Lutheran Church (1886), St. Anthony Catholic Church (1873), and Immaculate Conception Catholic Church (1883). These immigrants lived in housing stock made up of frame and brick cottages and two-flats with small backyards. The neighborhood also

consisted of small stores, fraternal halls, schools, and saloons.

Bridgeport's immigrant population fluctuated considerably throughout the 20th century and by 1960, when the Immaculate Conception parish was still in full operation, Bridgeport's foreign-born citizens constituted 12.9% of its population.

In 1990, when the parish's use of the church ceased prior to its reuse by the Monastery of the Holy Cross, 23.8% of Bridgeport's population was foreign-born—a sizable increase.

In 2000, the number of foreign-born residents in Bridgeport had increased to 32.2% of the neighborhood's population. Asian-born immigrants were living in Bridgeport in significant numbers by 2000, as were Hispanic residents.



Hardscrabble. Retrospective Map of the Southern Fork Portage area, circa 1830.
(Source: A. T. Andreas, *History of Chicago*, vol. I (Chicago: A.T. Andreas, 1884), pp. 112ff.)



This building served as Immaculate Conception Church from 1883 to 1891. It was located on Bonfield Avenue between Archer and Lyman. It is still extant but has been relocated to Morgan Street.

PARISH HISTORY OF IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Early Parish History

On June 1, 1869, Peter Fischer, pastor of Chicago's Saint Peter Church, purchased land for a new German Roman Catholic parish on Bonfield Avenue between Archer Avenue and Lyman Street. A frame building was erected on this land which soon came to serve as Immaculate Conception Church, founded on May 7, 1883.

In 1891, Immaculate Conception's third resident pastor, Father Peter L.

Biermann, obtained the finances for the construction of a combination church, school, and convent at 1045 West 31st Street. The original frame building on Bonfield Avenue was moved to 33rd Street and Auburn (now Lituanica) Avenue where it became the first church of Saint George Lithuanian parish. Father Biermann's successor, Reverend Peter Faber, oversaw the church's design and construction from 1897 to its completion in 1909.



This Page: Immaculate Conception in process of construction

Opposite Top: Archbishop James Edward Quigley, blessing the cornerstone on August 2, 1908

Opposite Middle: Cornerstone of Immaculate Conception

(Source: Immaculate Conception Parish Seventy-fifth Anniversary book)

Construction of the Church

The church's rectory at 3111 South Mospratt (now Aberdeen) Street was constructed first in 1901, while the former parish residence at 1047 West 31st Street was remodeled as a convent. Additional funding provided by parishioners and Father Faber further financed the construction of the church itself.

The Chicago Daily Tribune reported on July 10, 1907, that plans had "been completed for a church edifice, 60 [by] 155 feet, to be built for the Church of the Immaculate Conception, at Thirty-first and Mospratt streets." The newspaper reported that the church building was to "have a tower 170 feet high" with the exterior to be "constructed of brick and stone." The building was to cost \$60,000, a fair amount for the time. The building's design was undertaken by German-born architect Hermann J. Gaul, who soon built a career out of commissions from Catholic German clients.



The cornerstone was laid on August 2, 1908 and blessed by James Edward Quigley, Archbishop of Chicago. The church was completed in time for Mass on Christmas Day in 1909 and was formally dedicated on June 19, 1910.

Later History

In the years after the construction of Gaul's church, the parish continued to grow, soon encompassing as many as 700 families with a membership consisting of clans of German, Polish, Irish, Italian, and Lithuanian descent. In the 1930s, the church established scouting programs and other activities for parish youth while the school's student body attendance stayed robust.



The church's generous and dedicated congregation also ensured completion of Gaul's original design. On December 7, 1958, Archbishop Albert G. Meyer presided at a special Mass which marked the Bridgeport parish's diamond jubilee. In connection with this event, *The New World* noted the following: "The original plans for the church were finally carried out in their entirety this year [...] The remaining six stained-glass windows were installed, as were the three marble altars, altar-railing, hand-carved statues, and many other ecclesiastical furnishings."

The Immaculate Conception parish served as a way station for Bridgeport's earliest immigrants. As noted Chicago-based cleric Martin E. Marty has observed:

The parishes [were] way stations between ethnic and immigrant phases to Americanized status. This did not mean that there was one-way traffic at

whose exit they became ex-Catholic. The archdiocese would not have stood for Americanization on such terms. Instead, they were given tools for bringing together their past and present, their old ways and new, Old World and New, old faith and new circumstance.” The story of parishes such as Immaculate Conception is the story of “one important...way by which immigrants of old ‘made it’.”

By 1978, the church’s school attendance had slipped, and only 113 children were in attendance. The pastor, principal, and School Board of Immaculate Conception parish joined with the staff of nearby St. Bridget parish and engaged in a year of evaluation by a joint committee. The committee decided to combine the two grammar school programs. The newer Immaculate Conception school facilities at 1045 West 31st Street were to be used by the combined parish schools and, in September of 1979, operation of the parish schools as a single institution began under the name Immaculate Conception-St. Bridget School.



Early historic interior photograph of Former Immaculate Conception Church

At the same time, Bridgeport began to experience an influx of Mexican-Americans residents while the church worked with priests from neighboring Catholic parishes in promoting programs for the Bridgeport community. Among active parish organizations were the School Board, Men’s Club, and Women’s Club.

Monastery of the Holy Cross

The Archdiocese of Chicago would eventually shutter Immaculate Conception in 1990, leading to a new chapter for the church. For two years, the site was used as a storage warehouse until it was purchased by the Monastery of the Holy Cross, a Roman Catholic Benedictine monastic community that adheres to the centuries-old tradition of living by the Rule of St. Benedict.

Benedictine monks, known for centuries as the hoteliers of Europe, are revered for their hospitality, a fact demonstrated by their reuse of a portion of the church as B&B rental space.

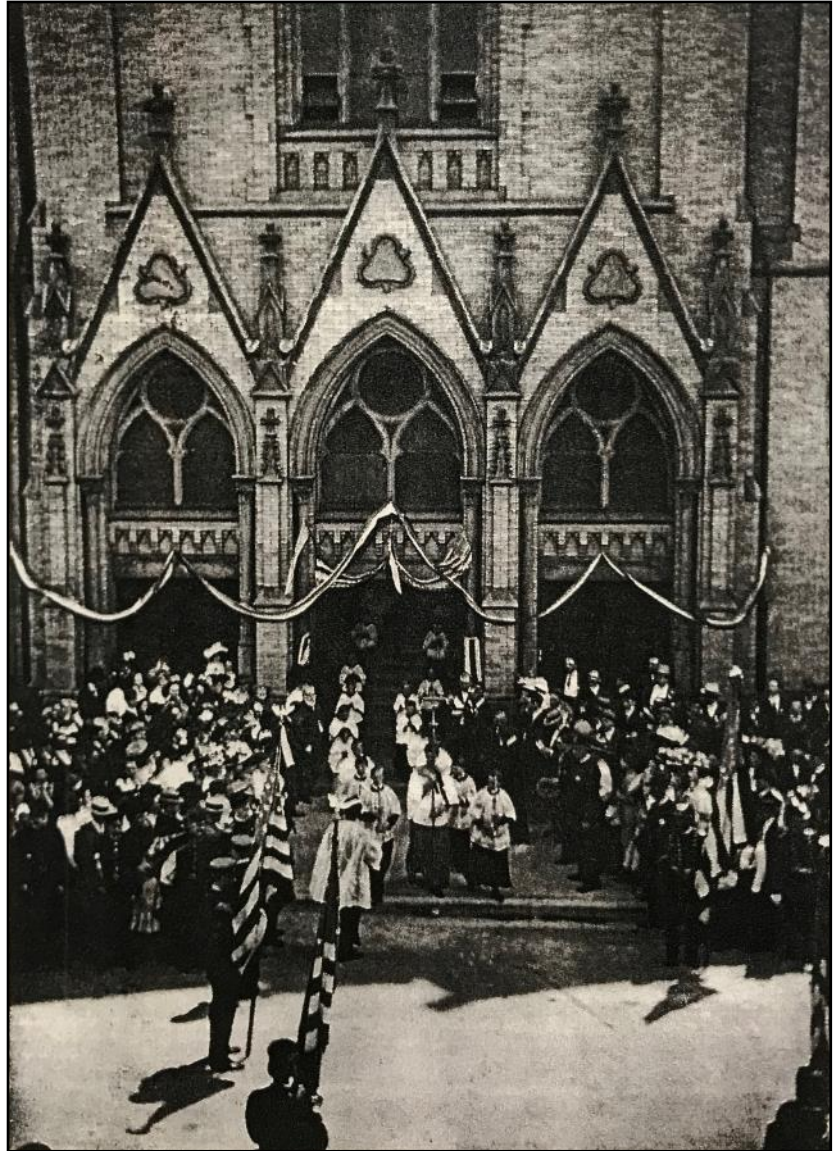
After their acquisition of the church, they “restor[ed] it to vibrancy [...] including the commissioning of icons and statuary, as well as the installation of a new high altar” and a loft space for guests. The community today numbers between 8 and 10 monks who engage in the study and scholarship of Gregorian chant, a practice bolstered by the church’s “magnificent acoustics.”

Building Architecture

The Immaculate Conception Church was built in the Gothic Revival style and was inspired by Germany’s Cologne Cathedral, the most significant religious structure in the hometown of the church’s architect, Hermann J. Gaul.

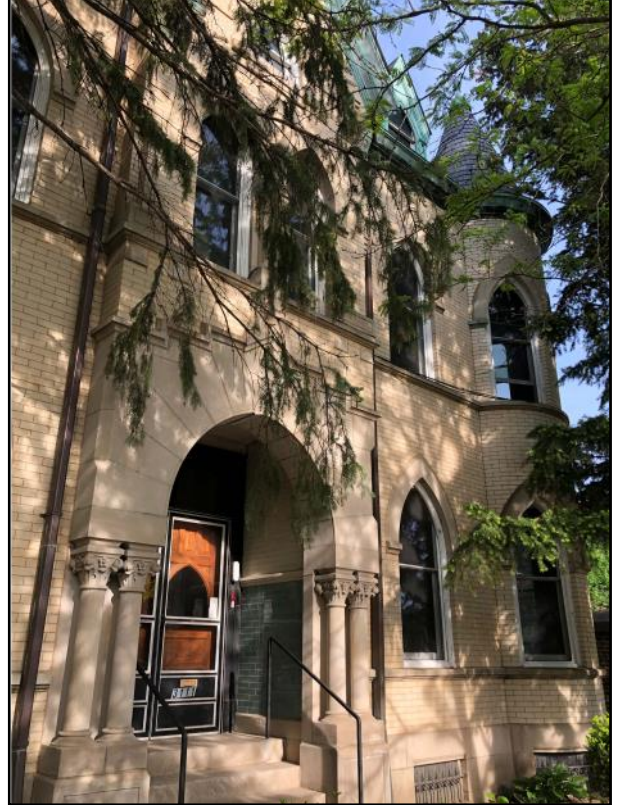
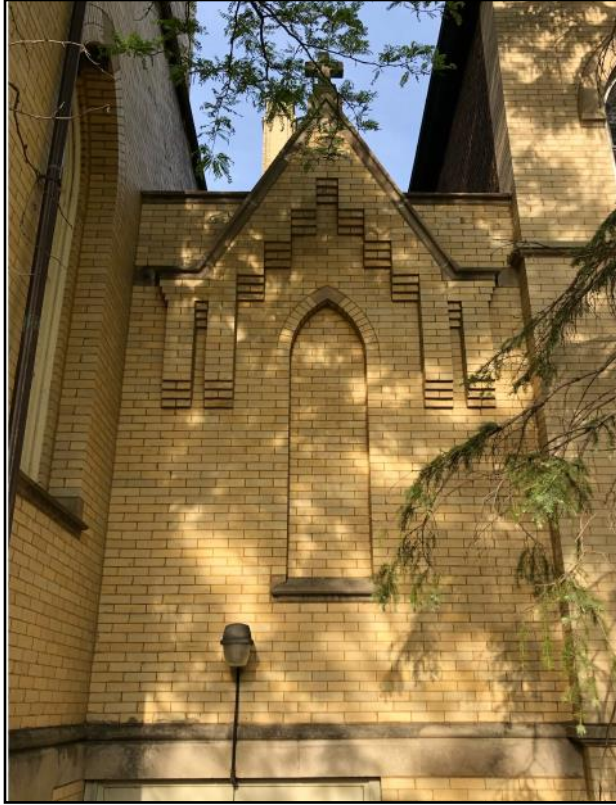
As is common for Gothic Revival churches, the Immaculate Conception Church is a masonry building with structural elements, such as tall, narrow windows and a slender tower, that accentuate its vertical proportions. Carved stone statuary and brick ornamentation with fine decorative detail used throughout provided an opportunity for Gaul to offer the neighborhood a high-style church while also matching the material of surrounding brick cottages and two-flats.

The main entrance on the church’s eastern elevation consists of three pointed archways crowned with finial-topped gables and sculptural trefoils; above, a pointed-arch stained-glass window inset in ornate tracery. This same elevation’s uppermost gable is adorned with pointed Lombard bands and a statue of Mary, the church’s patron. The church’s bell tower is capped by a tall steeple and is surrounded by four additional smaller steeples at the bases of which are four winged gargoyles. Lancet windows and similarly-shaped recesses appear on all sides of the tower.



Recessional after the Dedication Mass (Immaculate Conception Parish Seventy-fifth Anniversary book)



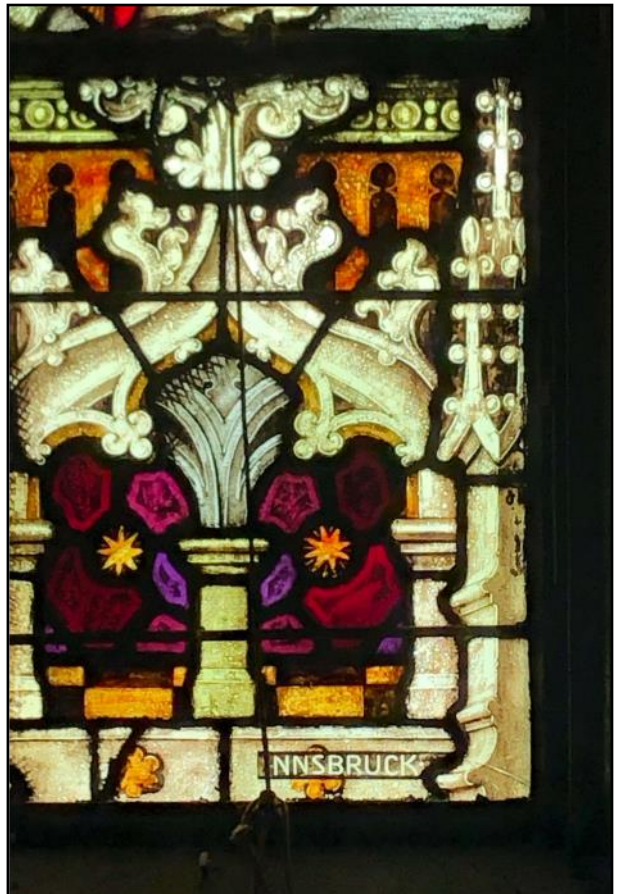


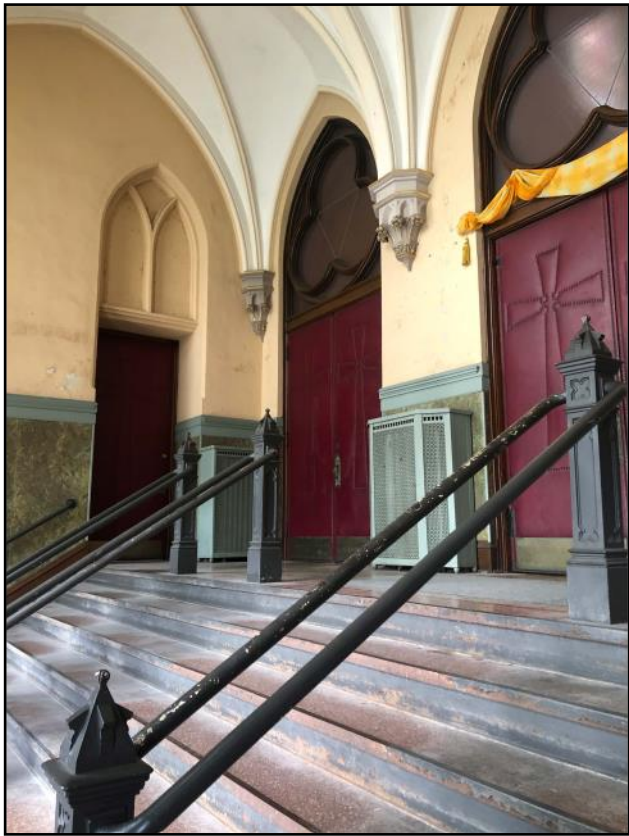
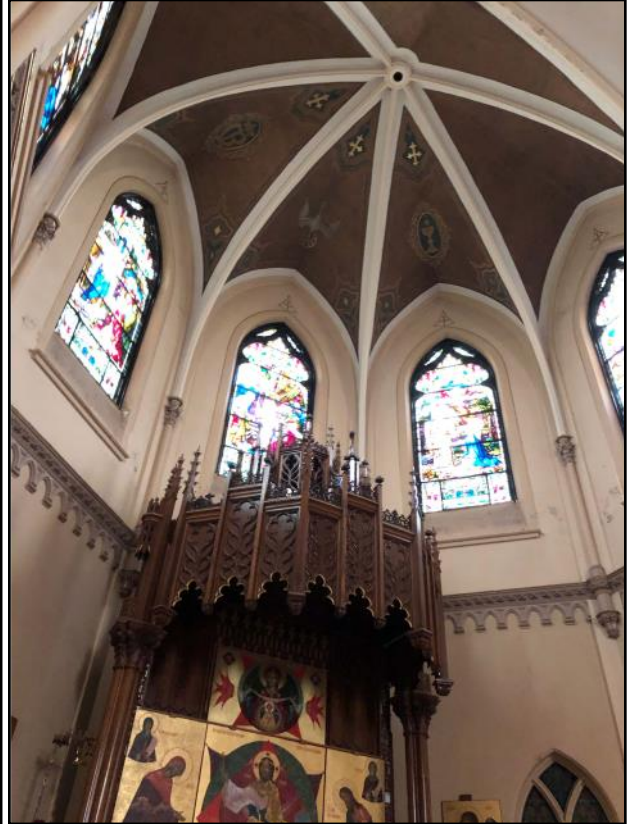
Above: Bridge between church and rectory

Above right: Rectory front elevation

Right: Detail of Innsbruck stained glass in choir loft

(Photo Credit: Max Chavez)





Above Left: Northern side of transept

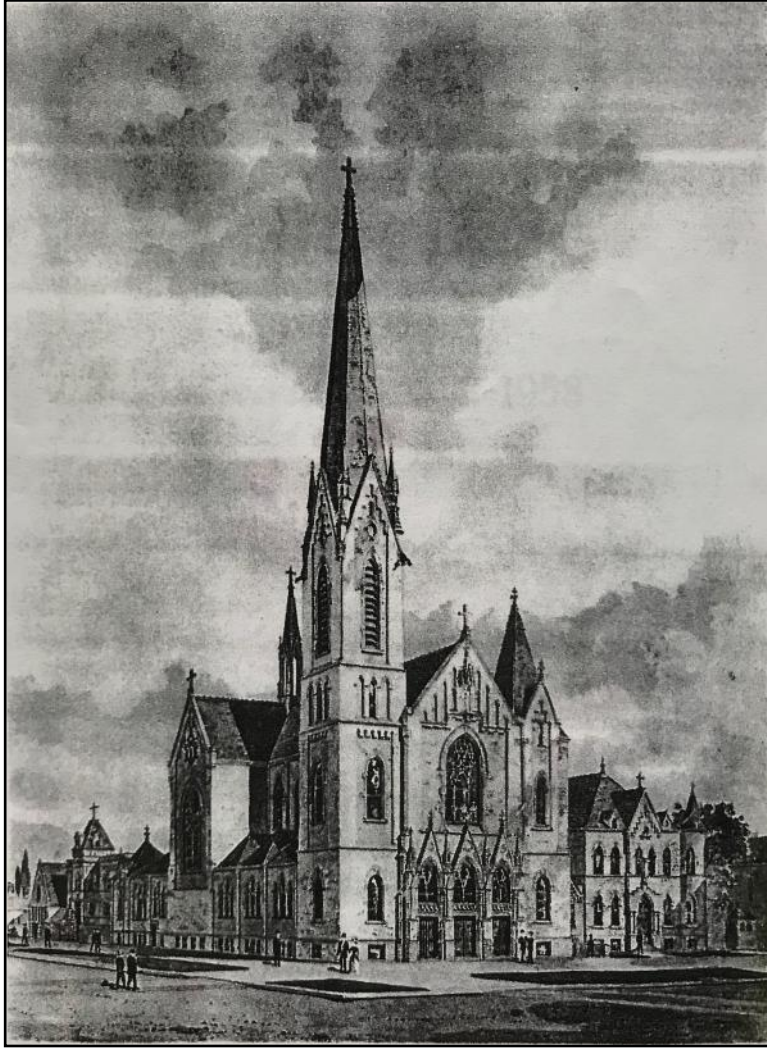
Above: Apse and Innsbruck stained glass windows

Left: Narthex

**Opposite Page:
View of nave and apse from choir loft**

(Photo Credit: Max Chavez)





**Rendering of Immaculate Conception.
(Immaculate Conception Parish Seventy-fifth Anniversary
book)**

The exteriors of the church's nave and apse feature stained-glass windows inside of ogee arches; the transept's northern elevation features a statue of St. Joseph at its apex as well as large stained-glass windows, here framed by detailed tracery.

The church's narthex consists of a large set of stairs leading up to three sets of double, leather-covered doors topped by wooden trefoils.

Beyond, the nave with its two side aisles sit underneath impressive rib vaulting while the nave's clerestory is adorned with stained-glass windows depicting Biblical scenes. This grand nave is separated from its side aisles by vibrant green marble columns.

The church's cruciform floorplan is completed by the transept which features multiple focal points such as four handsome frescoes and eight painted depictions of green-winged angels. The apse, transept, and choir loft contain stained glass windows believed to be by the Tyrolese Art Glass Company from Innsbruck, Austria; the stained glass windows in the nave have a different quality and luminance

suggesting these are of a different manufacturer.

The Magnificat window in the choir loft (at the rear of the nave) is of particular importance as it is the only stained-glass window in the church with an "Innsbruck" marking. The monastic community who now worship in the church have written that in connection with Vespers beginning at 5:15 p.m., "a particularly beautiful time of day in our church," they (and other observers) especially note "the setting sun streaming through the golden Magnificat window in the choir loft."

The adjacent rectory is a more modest building, but no less significant. The structure, which predates the main church building, features an arched entrance with thick voussoirs supported by small columns. All of the front elevation's windows are sharply arched in the traditional Gothic Revival style and capped with stone lintels. A two-story tower with a conical roof constitutes the rectory's southern corner. The façade's center bay gable has a handsome green cornice, a feature echoed similarly in the two dormers on either side of the gable.



**Interior view of Monastery of the Holy Cross (former Immaculate Conception Church)
Photo Credit: Carl Klein**

The Gothic Revival Style

Gothicism as an architectural language began in 12th century France and further developed the then-prevailing characteristics of Romanesque design. The style's original form is best exemplified by the High Gothic beauty of Europe's 12th to 14th century churches which used structural grandeur as an expression of religious faith. Paris's Notre-Dame and Germany's Cologne Cathedral are some of the most internationally-renowned examples of this early version of Gothic architecture. Gothicism proliferated in Europe for four centuries until it was replaced by Renaissance-era classicism.

Eighteenth-century Europe saw a revival of Gothicism which eventually spread to the United States in the following century. The 1840s and 1850s saw an explosion of Gothic Revival churches, beginning along the East Coast and soon spreading nationwide, that lasted well into the middle of the 20th century, although the style had begun to wane decades prior. Gothicism's original use in Christian buildings resulted in it becoming an in-demand style for the country's grandest churches and cathedrals during the height of its popularity.

Gothic Revival in the United States is easily identifiable by the presence of several architectural characteristics including: an emphasis on verticality, flying buttresses, ribbed vaults, pointed-arch windows with tracery, and the use of decorative elements such as trefoils, quatrefoils, and



Historic photograph (dating from 1917) of the construction of St. Benedict Church on Irving Park Road. The gentleman in the rear seat closest to the photographer is Hermann J. Gaul, architect. Source unknown.

finials. Gothic Revival architecture can be seen across Chicago, appearing in numerous city landmarks, such as Tribune Tower and the University of Chicago's earliest campus buildings (a version of Gothicism known as Collegiate Gothic). Other variations of Gothic Revival can be found in Chicago, such as Venetian Gothic, which informs the design of Henry Ives Cobb's Chicago Athletic Association and Walter W. Ahlschlager's Uptown Broadway Building.

ARCHITECT OF IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Herrmann J. Gaul

Herrmann J. Gaul was born in 1869 in Cologne (Köln), Germany. In his youth, Gaul was an admirer of the Cologne Cathedral which would soon come to inspire many of his works, including Immaculate Conception. After coming to the United States as the nineteenth century drew to a close, he settled in Chicago in 1897 and apprenticed for a time with famed Chicago architect Louis Sullivan. By 1898, Gaul was a member of the Illinois Society of Architects. After working under Sullivan, Gaul opened his own architectural practice in Chicago in 1902.



St. Mathias Church
2324 W. Ainslie Street, 1910s



St. Benedict Church
2201 W. Irving Park Road, 1917



St. Philomena
4116 W. Cortland Street, 1922



St. Francis Xavier
3035 N. Francisco Avenue, 1926



Historic photograph (1990) of Immaculate Conception school facilities (left) and Northern elevation of church (Preservation Chicago Archives)

His work was mostly focused on the design and construction of distinguished buildings for German Roman Catholic clients, although Gaul did occasionally execute secular designs for clients of German descent.

Much of Gaul's work emulated Gothic and Romanesque Revivalism. Historian Edward R. Kantowicz observed that "German Catholics chose Gothic almost two-thirds of the time as their native style, hearkening back to the days before [Martin] Luther when German Christianity was still united." Gothicism was still in the large vocabulary of architectural forms which was available to local architects who had begun to work in the 1890s.

Gaul was a member of what Kantowicz called the German "ethnic league" and designed four Gothic and two Romanesque churches in Chicago, in the vein of a tradition carried on by many of Gaul's contemporaries including Henry Schlacks, Egan & Prindville, and Worthmann & Steinbach who all designed numerous Gothic and Romanesque churches throughout the city. Gaul also designed schools, hospital wings, and orphanage buildings for German ethnic institutions.

One of Gaul's most spectacular Chicago area designs is the Athenaeum at 2936 North Southport Avenue. The theater was commissioned by the adjacent German-speaking St. Alphonsus congregation as a venue for parish youth to put on theatrical productions; the building also contained multiple libraries and reading rooms, a gymnasium, a bowling alley,



Exterior views of Monastery of Holy Cross (formerly Immaculate Conception Church). Top: North elevation fronting 31st Street. Bottom Left: Rear elevation. Bottom Right: Principal elevation. Photo Credit — Joanne Yasus, Preservation Chicago Archives.

billiard rooms, and large event halls. Chicago's oldest continuously operating off-Loop theatre, the auditorium of the German-inspired Athenaeum opened on November 18, 1911, and contains an impressively cantilevered upper balcony and excellent acoustics, much like his design at Immaculate Conception. The structure suffered fire damage in 1939, but remains still as a popular venue and high-quality example of Gaul's talent for catering to German-American clients.

Gaul's other works in Chicago include such noted churches as St. Benedict Church and St. Philomena Church. He also contributed to the extensive exterior remodeling in 1913 of the original 1873 St. Michael Church in Old Town. Outside of Chicago, Gaul's works in Illinois include St. Peter and Paul Church in Naperville, St. Nicholas Church in Evanston, Divine Word Monastery and the Chapel of the Holy Spirit in Techny, and St. Joseph School and the former Mallinckrodt College in Wilmette. The German Gothic-style St. Nicholas Church in Evanston was Gaul's first major commission.



**Rectory tower and church steeples as viewed from the south.
Photo Credit: Max Chavez**

Gaul's work obtained distinction in Wisconsin and Indiana, as well. Some of these buildings have been placed on the National Register of Historic Places, including Holy Hill National Shrine of Mary, Help of Christians, in Erin, Wisconsin, and the Gothic Revival St. Mary Church and Academy in Indianapolis, Indiana. Other notable Gaul designs outside of Illinois include St. John the Baptist Church and St. Mary Church in Hammond and Decatur, Indiana, respectively.

Gaul's son, Michael F. Gaul, joined his father's firm whereupon they assumed the title of Hermann J. Gaul and Son. Hermann J. Gaul retired in 1948 and passed soon after in 1949. Michael F. Gaul carried on the firm's architectural practice until his passing in 1996. In that time, the firm designed buildings including Quigley South High School, now St. Rita, and Maria High School, both located in Chicago.

CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION

According to the Municipal Code of Chicago (Section 2-120-690), the Commission on Chicago Landmarks has the authority to make a final recommendation of Landmark designation for an area, district, place, building, structure, work of art or other object within the City of Chicago if the Commission determines it meets two or more of the stated “criteria for designation” as well as possess sufficient historic design integrity to convey its significance. The following should be considered by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in determining whether to recommend that the Monastery of Holy Cross (formerly Immaculate Conception Church and consisting of the church building and attached rectory, hereinafter, the “Building”) be designated as a Chicago Landmark.

Criterion 1: Example of City, State, or National Heritage

Its value as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the heritage of the City of Chicago, the State of Illinois, or the United States.

- The church was designed for a national parish to serve the German-speaking residents of Bridgeport. It is currently the last remaining example of a German national parish in this neighborhood.
- This church was a social and religious hub for Chicago’s thriving German-American communities in the early 20th century. Ethnic churches allowed for integration and assimilation into American society while harkening back to the architecture and culture of their homeland.
- Bridgeport was and is a popular neighborhood for immigrants new to the United States. Immaculate Conception Church served many of Bridgeport’s immigrant communities, both well-established and burgeoning, throughout its over century-long existence.

Criterion 4: Exemplary Architecture

Its exemplification of an architectural type or style distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship.

- The Building exemplifies many high-Gothic Revival design elements, demonstrating faithfulness to a popular construction style of the time.
- The Building is a significant early work of Hermann J. Gaul, a renowned Chicago-based ecclesial architect of the early 20th century.
- The Building is noted for its impressive acoustics, a quality common among churches designed by architect Hermann J. Gaul.
- Gaul’s use of Gothic Revival characteristics, like those seen at the Building, greatly contributed to the overall appearance of the built environment in early 20th century Chicago.

Criterion 5: Important Architect

Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.

- Gaul catered to Chicago’s large German-American population, designing an array of buildings throughout the city and beyond that exuded the finest characteristics of German and Gothic Revival architecture.

- Some of Gaul’s designs outside of Illinois have been listed in the National Register of Historic Places including Holy Hill National Shrine of Mary in Erin, Wisconsin, and St. Mary Church and Academy in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Integrity Criteria

The integrity of the proposed landmark must be preserved in light of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and ability to express its historic community, architectural or aesthetic interest or value.

The Building possesses good physical integrity, displayed through its siting, scale, overall design, and historic relationship to the surrounding area. It retains its historic overall exterior form and a majority of all exterior materials, features and detailing.

The Building exhibits a high degree of architectural integrity. Since the Building was completed in 1908-1909, no major additions or alterations have been made to the Building. Most historic features, finishes, overall form, footprint, and location of entrances and arrangement of fenestration are intact.

SIGNIFICANT HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES

Whenever an area, district, place, building, structure, work of art or other object is under consideration for Landmark designation, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks is required to identify the “significant historical and architectural features” of the property. This is done to enable the owners and the public to understand which elements are considered most important to preserve the historical and architectural character of the proposed landmark.

Based upon evaluation of the Building (consisting of the former Immaculate Conception church and attached rectory) the Commission staff recommends that the significant features be identified as:

- All exterior elevations, including rooflines of the Building; and,
- The two-story flat building south of the church’s apse and masonry wall parallel to the east-west alley directly south of West 31st Street are both excluded from the significant features.

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CITY OF CHICAGO

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Historian Ellen Skerrett contributed a great deal to this piece on behalf of the former Immaculate Conception Church (now Monastery of the Holy Cross Church) which was designed by noted church architect Hermann J. Gaul and built for the Archdiocese of Chicago by 1908 in Chicago's Bridgeport community. Ellen Skerrett is the author of *Born in Chicago: A History of Chicago's Jesuit University* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008); *At the Crossroads: Old Saint Patrick's and the Chicago Irish* (Wild Onion Books, 1997); and *Nineteenth Century Chicago Irish* (Loyola University of Chicago Center for Urban Policy, 1980). With Francis O' Neill and Mary Lesch, she edited Chief O'Neill's *Sketchy Recollections of an Eventful Life in Chicago* (Northwestern University Press, 2008). Along with O'Neill and Lesch, Skerrett edited a memoir of immigration and assimilation by Francis O'Neill who left Ireland in 1865, traveled the world as a sailor for five years, and then settled in Chicago shortly before the Great Fire of 1871. O'Neill's memoir affords a view of urban life in Chicago in the late 1800s. With Dominic A. Pacyga, Skerrett also wrote *Chicago, City of Neighborhoods: Histories and Tours* (Wild Onion Books, 1986). The next year she wrote *The Irish in Chicago* with Lawrence J. McCaffrey, Michael F. Funchion, and Charles Fanning. With Jeffrey M. Burns and Joseph White she produced *Keeping Faith: European and Asian Catholic Immigrants* (Orbis Books, 2000).

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This Landmark Designation Report is subject to possible revision and amendment during the designation process. Only language contained within a designation ordinance adopted by the City Council should be regarded as final.



Photo Credit: Daniel Klaiber

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