Gothic Revival Comes to Memphis: Saint Peter Catholic Church and Patrick Keely

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GOTHIC REVIVAL COMES TO MEMPHIS:
SAINT PETER CATHOLIC CHURCH AND PATRICK KEELY

by

Brooke Suzanne Wagster

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Abstract

St. Peter Catholic Church, built between 1852 and 1858, marks the introduction of the Gothic Revival style to Memphis, Tennessee. This thesis examines this church in relation to the larger body of work attributed to its architect, Patrick Charles Keely. It is clear that St. Peter Catholic Church, with its crenellated octagonal towers joined by a parapet, is an anomaly among Keely-designed churches and has its closest affinities with the Old Louisiana State Capitol Building, completed in 1852. It is suggested that St. Peter may reflect a rare attempt by Keely to create a regionally oriented Gothic Revival style. The research gathered for this thesis was also presented in an exhibition, held at St. Peter Catholic Church from June 16 to July 6, 2019. Six didactic panels combined text and images to highlight Gothic Revival architecture, the career of Patrick Keely, and the distinctive features of St. Peter Catholic Church.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Memphis, Tennessee is home to numerous houses of worship showcasing a variety of architectural styles. The city’s historic church buildings, those constructed in the 1800s and early 1900s, display the revival styles popular of the time. For example, First Congregational Church on South Watkins Avenue, dedicated in 1910, represents the Neoclassical style with its strict symmetrical design and an Ionic-columned façade.\(^1\) The Romanesque Revival style is employed in the design of First Presbyterian Church completed in 1884, which is characterized by its use of rounded arches, a three-portal front, and thick brick walls.\(^2\) First Baptist Church, Lauderdale, located at 682 South Lauderdale Street and dedicated in 1939, presents an example of the American Colonial Revival Style. The church’s two levels, symmetrical front façade with rectangular windows, and triangular pediment above the front doorway are hallmarks of this revivalist style.\(^3\) Churches constructed in these three revival styles are associated primarily with Protestant congregations. For Catholics and High-Church Anglicans in Memphis, however, Gothic Revival was the preferred style.

The list of Gothic Revival churches constructed in Memphis during the second half of the 19\(^{th}\) century and the first half of the 20\(^{th}\) century is extensive. These would include many of the most visible landmarks and certainly the oldest surviving religious structures in the city: St. Mary’s Catholic Church [Fig. 1], completed in 1870; the remodeled Calvary Episcopal Church

\(^1\) National Register of Historic Places Inventory/Nomination: First Congregational Church and Parish House: https://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/GetAsset/NRHP/80003862_text.


\(^3\) Carroll Van West, Tennessee’s New Deal Landscape: A Guidebook (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 145.
of 1881 [Fig. 2]; First United Methodist Church, completed in 1893 (burned in 2006) [Figs. 3-4]; St. Mary’s Episcopal Cathedral of 1926 [Fig. 5]; and Idlewild Presbyterian Church, completed in 1928 [Fig. 6]. Each displays the characteristic features associated with Gothic Revival architecture, ultimately inspired by Medieval Gothic – narrow pointed arches, most often visible in the arcade flanking the nave and in the lancet windows of the apse and side aisles; ribbed vaulting; interior ceilings decorated with tracery work; and ornamental capitals and bases combined with narrow columns creating a light, open interior.

However, the first of the Gothic Revival churches built in Memphis is the still-standing St. Peter Catholic Church, located on the corner of North Third Street and Adams Avenue in downtown Memphis, four blocks east of the Mississippi River [Fig. 7]. The existing 1858 structure was designed by the prominent New York-based architect, Patrick Charles Keely. Keely had already been responsible for the plans of some two dozen Catholic churches in the 1840’s and 1850’s, all in the Gothic Revival style, before being commissioned to design St. Peter. He had thus already established a reputation as the premier architect for the Catholic Church and a prominent proponent of Gothic Revival in religious architecture. In a career that was to last until his death in 1896, Keely is credited for designing over 600 Catholic churches, most if not all in the Gothic Revival style.

It is therefore St. Peter Catholic Church and Patrick Charles Keely that are responsible for introducing the Gothic Revival style to Memphis and initiating an architectural fashion that was to dominate religious architecture in the city until the 1920’s. This thesis appropriately

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focuses its study of Gothic Revival architecture in Memphis St. Peter Catholic Church, in order to understand why, how, and in what form this architectural style initially appeared in the city.

Chapter Two aims to define what is Gothic Revival architecture and what constitutes its distinct features. It examines the historical, intellectual, and religious circumstances behind the origins of the Gothic Revival style in Great Britain and its subsequent adoption in the United States. Ideas associated with Romanticism, together with a reinterpretation of doctrine and liturgy in the Anglican and Catholic churches in Great Britain, set the stage for the acceptance of Gothic Revival as the optimal choice in the design of religious architecture, embodying the purity of thought associated with the Medieval Christian church. It is argued that when a new St Peter Catholic Church was envisioned in the early 1850’s in Memphis, historical circumstances would have established that there could be no other more appropriate style for this church than Gothic Revival.

Chapter Three discusses the events surrounding the building of St. Peter Catholic Church, especially the selection of Patrick Keely as its architect. St Peter is then analyzed in light of other churches designed by Keely. As will be shown, Keely’s plans generally follow a recognizable pattern, whereby pre-established architectural forms (such as the capitals or the windows) and designs (floor plans, facades) are repeated throughout Keely’s body of work and are simply put together in different combinations. This uniqueness of a Keely church lies in this combination of forms, not in the originality of the individual forms. However, St. Peter Catholic Church in Memphis is an anomaly among Keely’s works, displaying a distinctive design with its crenellated parapet and octagonal towers not seen in other Keely churches. Possible models for Keely’s plan of St. Peter Church are proposed, and based on similarities with the Old Louisiana
State Capitol in Baton Rouge, it is suggested that Keely’s work in Memphis is a rare instance where this architect envisioned some semblance of a regional style of architecture.

The research presented in Chapters Two and Three was conducted in order to formulate the didactic material accompanying an exhibit entitled, “Gothic Revival Comes to Memphis: Saint Peter Catholic Church and Patrick Keely.” The nature and content of this show, held at Saint Peter Catholic Church, in the Parish Hall, from June 16 to July 6, 2019, are outlined in Appendix A. The intention of this community-related, educational-oriented project was to take my personal research on Gothic Revival architecture in Memphis, St. Peter Catholic Church, and Patrick Charles Keely and develop a means to disseminate this information to a wider and possibly interested audience.
Chapter Two: Gothic Revival Architecture

Gothic Revival was an architectural movement beginning in the 18th century in which building designs, particularly churches and cathedrals, emulated the style of the Gothic structures of Medieval Europe. This popular style was deeply rooted in a renewed interest in Anglo-Catholicism in England during this period. Drawing inspiration from Medieval Gothic, Gothic Revival architecture is characterized by soaring towers with elaborate spires, decorative vaulted ceilings, and the use of the iconic Gothic pointed arch motif in everything from the windows to the doorways. Gothic Revival architecture ultimately became the official style used for religious architecture in Europe, and eventually, the United States, during the 1800’s.¹

Gothic Revival church architecture is inspired by Gothic architecture, which defined the late Middle Ages. The original Gothic style was born with the construction of the ambulatory of the Basilica of St. Denis [Fig. 8], outside of Paris, beginning in 1144 under the supervision of Suger, the abbot of the church and advisor to the Capetian royal family. During the previous Romanesque period, chapels holding relics were placed behind the altar in separate rooms divided by walls. For the new ambulatory of St. Denis, Suger chose, instead, to open up the space to allow light to enter, conveying the impression that the heaviness of the stone walls would fade in the presence of large stained-glass windows. Suger employed pointed arches combined for the first time with ribbed vaulting so that thick walls would not be needed to cover spaces. Unlike the round arch of Romanesque, whose height could only be increased by widening the distance between its vertical supports, the pointed arch was free of such constraints. Its counterpart, ribbed vaulting, could be supported on thin columns, creating a sense of openness. Suger believed that this construct of an open, airy interior filled with light created a

direct connection with the divine.² Gothic architecture became the means to achieve this concept in architecture. Ultimately, Gothic architecture came to be defined by not only the pointed arch and ribbed vaulting but also by asymmetrical design, flying buttresses, ornate decoration incorporated into the structure, brighter interiors, and gargoyles. One of the most famous examples of Gothic architecture is Notre Dame de Paris, which marks the first appearance of flying buttresses with the Gothic style [Fig. 9]. Gothic flourished in Europe until the 16th century when Renaissance architecture, with its Classical prototypes, became the new defining style.³

Gothic Revival, denoting the reappearance of Gothic features, as an architectural movement began in the middle of the 18th century in England.⁴ Among the earliest structures which can be linked to the beginning of a Gothic style revival is Strawberry Hill House [Fig. 10], the villa built (or more accurately the remodeling of an existing structure) in Twickenham, London, by Horace Walpole beginning in 1749.⁵ Walpole’s use of typical Gothic features, such as pointed arches and narrow lancet windows, combined with crenelated parapets and towers reminiscent of Medieval castles, served as visual links to England’s past, its significant historical figures, and events. This Gothic Revival likewise served to stimulate the imagination and create an intellectual escapism. In the same fashion of Walpole at Strawberry Hill House, Gothic Revival in the context of an English country manor is also seen in the designs of James Wyatt,


first between 1796 and 1813 at Fonthill Abbey in Wiltshire [Fig. 11], and then at Ashridge Park in Hertfordshire, begun in 1802 and completed a year after his death in 1813.⁶ By the early 19th century Gothic Revival was considered highly suitable for church architecture. The Anglican Parish Church of St Luke, Chelsea, designed by James Savage in 1819 and completed in 1825, is thought to be the earliest Gothic Revival church in London, perhaps the earliest to be a completely new design.⁷ The most widely recognized example of Gothic Revival is assuredly the Palace of Westminster (The Houses of Parliament) [Fig. 12], rebuilt by Charles Barry and Augustus Pugin after a disastrous fire destroyed the old buildings in 1834. Much of the design is the work of Pugin, following the forms of a 14th century English Perpendicular Gothic style for both the exterior and the interior.⁸

The main features of Gothic Revival churches that distinguish them from those of Medieval Gothic churches are the result of technological advances developed in the 19th century that affect architectural construction. Due to the use of brick, stucco, and manufactured ironwork in 19th century Gothic Revival buildings instead of stone masonry associated with Medieval construction, buttresses were no longer necessary to support the weight of the vaulted ceilings and roof. Even though steel was available for construction and there was no need for buttresses, they were sometimes added to create the look of an historic Gothic design. Architectural critics

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did not object to the use of steel in the construction of Gothic Revival buildings as long as the steel was not visible and did not affect the building’s Medieval appearance.⁹

This re-emergence or revival of the Gothic style in Europe, especially Britain, during the second half of the 18th century can be linked to Romanticism. Romanticism was the intellectual movement, embodied primarily through literature and art, that emphasized emotion and imagination over reason, idealized the past, and glorified nature.¹⁰ It grew out of a reaction to the emphasis on science and reason emphasized by the Enlightenment. It is not surprising that with this turning away from the rationalism of the Enlightenment and its embodiment in the arts, i.e. classicism, Romanticism revived a Medievalism and its artistic forms. Also fostering the Romantic Movement was the concurrent Industrial Revolution. Beginning in the 1760’s and progressing through the 1840’s, the Industrial Revolution in Europe marked a period characterized by the transformation of Western society from one predominately rural and agricultural to one now urban and industrial. Factories, advanced machinery, and steam power were products of this revolution. An idealized view of a pre-industrial Europe envisioned a Medieval art and architecture that emphasized the beauty of the natural world, the intrinsic value of physical labor, and the purity of natural materials.

In addition to an intellectual and artistic impetus generated by Romanticism, Gothic Revival also rose to prominence as a result of religious events occurring in the early 19th century. This led to the view that the Gothic Revival Style as a religious architecture embodied the pure theological values of early Christianity. It is during this period that the Anglican Church in Great Britain, and subsequently the Episcopal Church in the United States, was influenced by a

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revival of Anglo-Catholicism, the emphasis on the Anglican Church’s Catholic origins. This developed out of the Oxford Movement in the 19th century, which sought a greater separation from the Anglican Church’s evangelical nature and argued that Anglicanism was one of three branches of the universal Catholic Church, together with the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church.\textsuperscript{11} There came about an interest in reinstating traditions from the Anglican Church’s Catholic origins, such as the emphasis on the Eucharist, the use of traditionally Catholic vestments, an interest in visually utilizing Catholic symbolism, and even the establishment of religious orders. This newfound interest would ultimately affect the Episcopal congregations in the United States as well.\textsuperscript{12} This nostalgia for and desire to return to more Catholic, and ultimately more Medieval ideals, paralleled the Romantic Movement in its reaction against changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution.

A leading proponent of the Gothic Revival style in Catholic architecture was Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin (1812-1852).\textsuperscript{13} He is perhaps best known as the designer responsible for the Palace of Westminster, but his greatest contribution to the revival came in his role as critic. In 1836,\textsuperscript{14} Pugin published \textit{Contrasts}, arguing for the revival of the Gothic style together with a return to the faith and the social structures of the Middle Ages. Each plate in the book

\begin{itemize}
  \item Pereiro, 159.
  \item Hill, 484.
\end{itemize}
highlights a specific type of urban building, providing a ca. 1830 example and contrasting it with a 15th century equivalent.\textsuperscript{15}

Pugin, a devout Roman Catholic, considered Gothic Revival architecture as the only true Christian style. Pugin insisted that every detail of a building must serve a purpose. Use of Medieval craftsmanship, honoring the artists from the Middle Ages, was of great importance to him. Pugin believed that the tall spires and delicate craftsmanship of buildings of the Middle Ages in England symbolized a society that valued religion over the utilitarian. He viewed industrial, modern, 19th century England as a place where factories had become more prominent than churches and therefore constituted a sad commentary on contemporary society.\textsuperscript{16} Pugin’s influence eventually made its way from England to the United States, most notably in a series of engravings done by him and his father, Auguste Pugin, published in five volumes between 1821 and 1838, entitled \textit{Gothic Architecture Selected from Various Ancient Edifices in England}.\textsuperscript{17} These became the standard sourcebooks for American architects from which to draw models and inspiration.

Another influential force behind the adoption of the Gothic Revival in architecture, both in Britain and the United States, was the Cambridge Camden Society.\textsuperscript{18} This Society was initiated in 1836 by students at Cambridge University with the purpose of promoting the study of Gothic architecture and advocating its use in contemporary ecclesiastical buildings. Its activities ultimately included the publication of an influential monthly journal, \textit{The Ecclesiologist}, first

\textsuperscript{15} Hill, 553.


\textsuperscript{17} Augustus Pugin, \textit{Gothic Architecture selected from various Ancient Edifices in England} (Cleveland: J. H. Jansen, 1810, published 1836.), 1-32.

\textsuperscript{18} Stanton, 3.
published in November of 1841, which advised architects on the design and construction of
churches, focusing on the Gothic Revival style.\textsuperscript{19} Although a predominantly Anglican group, the
Society sought to influence contemporary architecture as a whole and not just the architecture of
the Church of England. The Cambridge Camden Society believed that the English parish church
was the model that should be used for all other churches.\textsuperscript{20} Although intended to be simple in
their Gothic design, these English parish churches were to be made with the highest quality
materials and expertise. These churches suited the preferences of Anglicans because they
signified the English lineage of the church.

Where Pugin provided the Catholic voice for the Gothic Revival, John Ruskin (1819-
1900) was its Protestant advocate. His collection of essays, \textit{The Seven Lamps of Architecture},
published in 1849,\textsuperscript{21} a mere 13 years after Pugin published his critique on the consequences of
the Industrial Revolution in his book \textit{Contrasts}, describes the seven aspects of architecture that
express how buildings can be designed with integrity.\textsuperscript{22} The titular seven lamps are as follows:
sacrifice, truth, power, beauty, life, memory, and obedience. Ruskin’s studies and resulting
principles have influenced architects from the time the treatise was published to the present day.
“Ruskinian” was used to identify an architectural style with decorative brickwork and
polychromy.\textsuperscript{23} Ruskin rejected the Classical style by writing that Gothic buildings were superior
to any other architectural style.

\textsuperscript{19} Eastlake, 141-142.

\textsuperscript{20} James F White, \textit{The Cambridge Movement: The Ecclesiologists and the Gothic Revival} (Eugene, OR: Wipf &

\textsuperscript{21} Eastlake, 266.

\textsuperscript{22} Eastlake, 149.

\textsuperscript{23} Eastlake, 264.
In *The Stones of Venice* (3 volumes published from 1853 to 1852), Ruskin argued that the Gothic style was directly associated with reverence for God and humility of man.²⁴ To Ruskin, Gothic ornamentation was an expression of the glory of God. Ruskin praised the workers and craftsmen who toiled over their carvings and other works of art, viewing their work as spiritual offerings and praise to God. Ruskin described and evaluated Byzantine, Gothic, and Renaissance architectural expressions in these writings. Regarding Gothic art and architecture, Ruskin viewed both as directly reflecting the artists’ and architects’ reverence for God in their works. Ruskin wrote of his respect for carvers and craftsman of the Middle Ages who toiled with skill and patience over their work using crude tools. He expressed praise for the workers who created intricate, unique decorations and designs that never repeated themselves.²⁵

As historical precedents demonstrate repeatedly, developments in art and architecture formulated in Europe, and especially Great Britain, were quickly adapted in the United States. Such is true for Gothic Revival architecture. However, unlike Great Britain, where the catalyst for Gothic Revival was the country estate and public structures played a prominent role in its continued popularity, Gothic Revival in the United States began as a style for churches and remained primarily a style for churches. Benjamin Latrobe, perhaps the most renowned Neoclassical architect of the era and the architect of the United States Capitol Building, produced in 1805 a proposed design for the Catholic Cathedral of Baltimore in a Gothic Revival style.²⁶ It would certainly suggest that even before the influence of Pugin, the Oxford Movement, and the Cambridge Camden Society, in the United States Gothic Revival from its very beginnings was

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²⁵ Eastlake, 97.

designated the appropriate style for churches. Although Latrobe’s plans for the Baltimore Cathedral were not accepted, his Gothic Revival designs for Christ Church in Washington, D.C. (1808) and St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Alexandria, VA (1817), were finalized. Old St. Patrick’s Roman Catholic Cathedral in New York (1809-1815), designed by Joseph-Francois Mangin, is the earliest cathedral employing Gothic Revival features [Fig. 13]. The church shows a plain, rough-cut stone facade with pointed-arched doorways and a large tracery-ornamented gable window above, consisting of three-lancet windows topped by a rose window. These same styled windows are found along the sides. The interior space was marked by thin-shafted iron columns topped by floral capitals that supported pointed arches and ribbed vaults. Among the earliest Gothic Revival churches is Ithiel Town’s Trinity Episcopal Church [Fig. 14] in New Haven, CT (1817). Some of its Gothic features include a large rose window, eight stained glass windows, ribbed groin vaults with intricate tracery decoration, and a lofty central tower. As Town himself noted, "the Gothic style of architecture has been chosen and adhered to in the erection of this Church, as being in some respects more appropriate, and better suited to the solemn purposes of religious worship.”

The bond in America between Gothic Revival and religious architecture established in 19th century America is epitomized by Washington’s National Cathedral Church of Sts. Peter and Paul, the seat of the Episcopal Church in the United States, whose construction began in 1907. The National Cathedral shows that even in the early 20th century Gothic Revival was still viewed

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28 Loth and Sadler, 34-35.

29 Pierson, 129-134, figs. 88, 89, and 91.

as spiritually inspiring, and so remained the architectural style for religious structures. For its design prominent British architect, George Frederick Bodley (1827-1907), was selected as the primary architect. Throughout his career, Bodley had lead a resurgence of interest in Late Medieval influenced design. With Washington National Cathedral’s enormous size, flying buttresses, ambitious decorative vaulted ceilings, and copious stained-glass windows, Bodley created an icon of Gothic Revival architecture that solidified the style’s lasting presence and popularity in the United States beyond the 19th century [Figs. 15-16].

As also in the case of Europe, Romanticism was to influence American intellectualism and subsequently serve to heighten the position of Gothic Revival in American architecture. American artists, novelists, and architects developed a fascination with Medieval artifacts, literature, and Gothic buildings after traveling to Europe. American architects studied books that detailed the designs of Gothic Revival homes, churches, and public buildings. Most prominent among these would be Pugin’s *Contrasts*. Americans involved in the arts and literature grappled with the notion that the United States did not have a national identity and lacked the Romanticism and mystery of the Old World. As a result, Medieval elements were added to novels, paintings, and architecture in America, much the same as had occurred in England in the late 1700’s.

With the trend toward Gothic Revival architecture firmly established in the United States by the middle of the 1800’s, it is not surprising that the new St. Peter Catholic Church being

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34 Carso, 6.
contemplated in Memphis, Tennessee, would be Gothic inspired. It is also not surprising that an architect whose specialty was Gothic Revival, Patrick Charles Keely, would be commissioned for the design. The only acceptable style of architecture for the congregation of St. Peter was the Gothic Revival style in which Keely was a renowned master.
Chapter Three: St. Peter Catholic Church and Patrick Keely, Architect of American Catholicism

Major changes occurred for the Catholic Church in Memphis as well for the United States as a whole during the early 1800s. What began as an institution that served a minority of citizens became a major religious force in the country. Dioceses built and operated not just churches but also hospitals and schools to serve the Catholic communities, which were largely made up of first and second-generation immigrants. The Irish Potato Famine from 1845 to 1852 resulted in the migration of thousands of Irish Catholics to the United States. As a major commercial and transportation center on the Mississippi River and the only inland cotton market in America, Memphis attracted large numbers of such immigrants seeking employment. Between 1850 and 1860 the population of Memphis nearly tripled, from 8,841 to 22,623 residents; Memphis became the sixth largest city in the South. During the same period, the ethnic Irish population more than doubled.\(^1\) While ethnic Irish comprised 9.9 percent of the population in 1850, by 1860 this had increased to 23.2 percent. The influx of Catholic immigrants requiring the construction of new, larger churches would, in part, lead to Gothic Revival being brought to the city of Memphis with construction beginning on the stately St. Peter in 1852.

St. Peter Catholic Church is located on the corner of North Third Street and Adams Avenue in downtown Memphis, Tennessee, four blocks east of the Mississippi River [Fig. 7]. The front entry to the church faces Adams Avenue and, as one faces the front façade of the church, many features of Gothic Revival architecture are immediately evident. The lofty

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massing of the front elevation and the height of the tall, symmetrical corner towers draw your
gaze upward to the centrally located trefoil tipped cross.

The existing St. Peter Catholic Church is not the first structure on this site. The initial St.
Peter was a small 30 by 70-foot brick structure begun in the summer of 1842 and completed the
following year.² By 1852, however, the growing Catholic population of the city made this
structure too small. The parishioners, seeing that a larger and a more durable structure was
needed, called upon the well-known church architect Patrick Charles Keely to create a new
design, already familiar with his prolific and impressive body of work. The present structure
was commenced in the summer of 1852 and dedicated on January 17, 1858.

Patrick Charles Keely was the clear choice. In the middle of the 19th century Patrick
Charles Keely [Fig. 17] had become the principal architect employed by the Catholic Church and
the primary disseminator of the Gothic Revival style in America. Born on August 9, 1816 in
Thurles, County Tipperary, Ireland, Keely immigrated in 1842 to the United States, where he
settled in Brooklyn, New York, and worked as a carpenter and builder, not as an architect.³

Keely’s life, however, changed after he met a fellow Irish immigrant and Catholic priest, Father
Sylvester Malone. Malone befriended Keely while he was working on a project in Newark, New
Jersey, and was still a carpenter.⁴ When Malone was sent to Williamsburg, Brooklyn to start a
new parish, he called upon his friend, Keely, to collaborate with him and design the building.


³ The following information is drawn from the primary work dealing with Keely’s life and career: Francis W.
Kervick was a practicing architect and Professor of Architecture at the University of Notre Dame from 1909-1956.
He seems to have had access to the records associated with Keely’s initial plan for the Basilica of the Sacred Heart
on campus. Also note: Richard J. Purcell, “P.C. Keely: Builder of Churches in the United States,” *Records of the
American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* 54 no. 4 (December 1943), 208-227; J. Philip McAleer,

⁴ Purcell, 210-212, on the relationship between Malone and Keely.
The Church of Saints Peter and Paul [Fig. 18], completed in May of 1848,\textsuperscript{5} catapulted Patrick Keely’s career and set the stage for the success he would maintain for the rest of his life. This church, seen as a brilliant example of American Catholic architecture, earned Keely praise, and he quickly gained a following within the Catholic Church, which brought about many commissions.

Aside from his ability to design impressive structures, Keely’s Irish ancestry and Catholicism would also have been looked upon favorably and trusted by the Church hierarchy. While in the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century, the Church’s German and French presence in the United States was more prominent, by the middle of the century the Catholic Church saw Irish immigrants as the new major force within the Church. Keely was essentially in the right place at the right time when the Catholic Church in the United States was experiencing a dramatic increase in its membership, creating a need for an expansive building program of cathedrals and parish churches and a search for architects to design them.

Keely’s career continued to rise as Catholic immigrants poured into the cities of the Northeast in large numbers, increasing the demand for churches to be built. Keely mainly produced Catholic churches in industrial cities within New York and New England. The asymmetric variation of a Keely exterior, the strict adherence to Gothic ideals on the outside and the inside of the church, and the grand scale in which Keely frequently worked are all on display with the Cathedral of the Holy Cross in Boston, MA, built in 1875 [Figs. 19-20].\textsuperscript{6} It is said that he completed approximately 600 commissioned churches in the United States (although only 150 or so can be securely documented); regardless of the specific figure, Patrick Keely certainly

\textsuperscript{5} Kervick, 7; Purcell, 210-211.

\textsuperscript{6} Kervick, 15; Purcell, 219.
became the most prolific church builder in American history, whose work included some 20 cathedrals. The vast majority of these commissions were Catholic churches, and he became the leading architect of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States. The Church, in essence, became his employer.

Patrick Keely’s Gothic Revival style draws its features primarily from a phase of Gothic labeled the Perpendicular Style.7 This style belongs chronologically to Late Gothic, originating ca. 1350 and remaining fashionable through the 1540’s, and is specifically associated with England. The name derives from the style’s emphasis on verticality. Such verticality is seen in the tall, proportionately slim columns or piers that support the nave arcade. The triforium is omitted, resulting in greater importance given to the clerestory windows. The overall intention is to convert the interior stories into a unified vertical surface. In general, windows are large and are comprised of combinations of three to four narrow, lancet windows. In contrast to previous phases of Gothic, the mullions are noticeably thin and the tracery work intricate. The vaulting takes on a light, airy appearance, but again adopts an intricate, decorative approach with the introduction of the lierne vault and the fan vault. Among the notable examples of Perpendicular Gothic would be the choir of Gloucester Cathedral (begun ca. 1337-1350) [Fig. 21] and the Lady Chapel of Henry VII in Westminster Abbey (1503-1509) [Fig. 22].

As it would relate specifically to the Irish-born Keely, the Perpendicular Style would be the style of Gothic most prominent in the British Isles, and not surprisingly the style initially propounded by Pugin as the purest form of Gothic and the one most English and most Christian.8

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8 Cameron MacDonell, “The American Pugins: Ralph Adams Cram and Bertram Goodhue,” in Gothic Revival Worldwide: A.W.N. Pugin’s Global Influence, eds. Timothy Brittain-Catlin, Jan De Maeyer, and Martin Bressani (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2016), 94-105, esp. 98-100. Ultimately, Pugin was to settle on 14th century Decorated Gothic but still retained a high amount of Perpendicular features in his designs.
The features associated with Late Gothic and especially the English Perpendicular style of Gothic are subsequently visible in Keely’s St. Peter Catholic Church in Memphis.

The plan of St. Peter follows a classic cruciform-shape. Front towers flank the narthex, which opens into the nave with aisles on each side. The gabled transept branches out at the crossing where the nave meets the apse, and the ambulatory continues to the rear with a large window above the altar. The light, airy openness associated with Late Gothic design is immediately evident throughout the lofty nave. The nave, transept, chancel and ambulatory of St. Peter are painted white, and during the day the area is filled with light from the large windows along each side aisle, each end of the transept, and the end of the ambulatory.

The ceiling of the nave of St. Peter is supported by ribbed columns, which creates a wide central vaulted space flanked by smaller, vaulted side aisles [Fig. 23]. At the point where the ribs of the vault spring upward and outward from the columns, a decorative floral capital covers the transition [Fig. 24]. The boss is located at the intersection of the ribs in the vaulted ceiling [Fig. 25]. The capitals are not as ornate those found in other Gothic churches, but they are still decorated with a repetitive floral design. The most common Gothic Revival element that is easily identifiable in St. Peter is the pointed arch, prominent within the windows and the vaulted ceilings [Fig. 26].

The large window at the end of the ambulatory tends to dominate the interior space. The tall window is subdivided by four lancet windows that are topped with a pointed arch that is the width of all four lancet windows. These windows, as a whole, form a large pointed arch. They, presumably, would have simply let in natural light before the later addition of stained glass [Fig. 27]. The window located above the main entry doorway is subdivided into four panels of lancet windows. The windows around the perimeter of the building carry a similar theme with tall
lancet windows comprising the lower part of the windows with the upper portion of the window resolving the multiple lower windows into one larger pointed arch.

When Patrick Keely drafted the entry elevation (façade) of a church, he routinely selected from one of three pre-formulated designs. The first of these is the entrance flanked by two tall, steepled towers – a type seen on the façade of the Church of the Assumption in Philadelphia, PA [Fig. 28].9 This is a façade that most closely models that of the traditional Early and High Gothic cathedral.10 A second model that Keely chose frequently was a tall central tower. The Basilica of the Sacred Heart on the campus of the University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana, demonstrates this Keely design [Fig. 29].11 Keely’s third and final design choice featured a single tower on either side of the main doorway. This is the design often selected by Keely for churches located at a street corner. A design like this can be found at Holy Name Cathedral in Chicago, IL [Fig. 30].12 These latter two façades are more typical of the smaller English parish church, with a single tower, usually placed in an acentric manner.

With St. Peter Catholic Church, however, an anomaly is found [Fig. 31]. St. Peter’s most striking features are its two crenellated octagonal towers connected by a flat parapet. These features, reminiscent of a Medieval fortified castle and not a church, and otherwise referred to as the “castellated” style,13 are unusual for Keely. In addition, the tall steeples on which Keely normally relies for a sense of increased verticality are also noticeably absent. St. Peter Catholic

9 Purcell, 212.
11 On the authorship of this church, see Kervick, 13.
12 Purcell, 221; Kervick, 13.
Church is, therefore, unique in its design within Keely’s body of work. The structure that shares the closest affinity to St. Peter Catholic Church in Memphis is the Old Louisiana State Capitol Building, located in Baton Rouge [Fig. 32]. Among the most notable features shared by the two buildings are the crenellated octagonal towers, the large central windows above the main entrance, and the horizontal parapet between the towers.

The State House, as it is also called, was designed by James H. Dakin. Construction began in 1848, with the exterior completed by 1849 and the interior by 1852, the same year that St. Peter in Memphis was begun. Dakin was a successful and well-known architect of the Gothic Revival style, working in New York for the firm of Ithiel Town and A.J. Davis. After moving from New York to Louisiana in 1835, Dakin’s interest in mostly secular architecture complemented the construction boom then occurring in New Orleans, the city emerging as the unofficial capital of the West and rivaling New York City as a major center of commerce and culture. Dakin received the commission for the State Capitol in 1847 and supervised its construction until 1850, at which time he took over the commission of the New Orleans Custom House. James Dakin died in 1852 immediately following the completion of the State Capitol.

Construction on St. Peter Catholic Church in Memphis began in 1852, the same year the Old Louisiana State Capitol was completed. The front elevation of St. Peter Church greatly resembles the front elevation of Dakin’s Capitol Building. The crenellated, octagonal towers of St. Peter Catholic Church, the most instantly recognizable and distinctive features of this church, bear a striking resemblance to those of the Old Louisiana State Capitol Building. Each building

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has twin, eight sided towers, although the designs of each building are not identical. The State House’s towers simply divide at the edge of each of the eight surfaces, creating a pure octagon. St. Peter’s octagonal towers are embellished with an added narrow section of stuccoed brick projecting from the tower and dividing the sides. In both structures, we find the architects choosing to create four windows that follow the vertical line of each tower from top to bottom. On Dakin’s chronologically earlier building, again, the windows have a simpler, less elaborate design compared to that of Keely’s building. For one, the windows only appear on the front facing sections of the towers. The rectangular windows of the State House start at the top with a small to large pattern that ends with the bottom two windows being comparable in size. This motif is continued in the body of the building. St. Peter Church resembles the State House’s window design but includes it on each side of the towers. The top and bottom windows of St. Peter are also brought closer in line to Gothic religious architecture with their pointed arches and tracery. The two middle windows are significantly smaller in size than those at the top and bottom. The second window from the top is a simple diamond shape with crisscrossing tracery. The third window from the top is a shallow pointed arch with intersecting tracery. It should be noted that the top window of St. Peter has since become a source of ventilation in exchange for a window, but it keeps the original design, nonetheless.

The battlements on the tops of each tower are reminiscent of Medieval fortress architecture and are the most striking features of both buildings. On the Old Louisiana State Capitol Building, each tower is topped by octagonal parapets with crenellations. St. Peter Catholic Church, notably unlike any other Patrick Keely church, also has towers that are topped by crenellated parapets. While the State House towers have rectangular crenellations. St. Peter’s towers are topped by a more intricate design. Rectangular crenellations are located above the
squared corners, which mark each octagonal surface of the towers. In the gap of each crenellation is a panel ornamented with a design somewhat reminiscent of the cross-section of a church. Each of these panels consists of a triangular shape in the center, pointing skyward, which stands between rectangles on each side. Each of the three sections is decorated with a pointed arch in sunken relief. Unlike the tops of Dakin’s towers, St. Peter’s crenellations extend directly from the towers and do not protrude outward at all.

The final, major similarities between the front elevations of the Old Louisiana State Capitol Building and St. Peter Catholic Church are found in between the towers. Both have a large doorway topped with a pointed arch. Typically, Keely employs a distinctly Gothic pointed arch in his entryways. Dakin and Keely both include a large window over the entry. Dakin’s central window, while not pitched as high as Keely’s, includes a quatrefoil design and large spaces between the traceries. Keely’s window is a distinctly Keely feature. He had used similar imposing central windows over his entryways as far back as his first structure, the Church of Saints Peter and Paul in Brooklyn. On both the State House and St. Peter, a thin division protrudes from the structures, drawing a line between each central window and the doorway. An unusual choice for Keely is the horizontal parapet, which connects the two towers. Dakin’s State House undoubtedly inspired this decision. However, his central parapet is crenellated whereas Keely’s is not.

Aside from possibly the central window, Dakin’s structure is secular in its Medieval inspiration. The State House brings warfare and military defense to mind. Keely takes this image and adapts it to a church. Keely tops his parapet with a cross and includes sunken relief cross designs on either side of his central window.
It is certain that Keely would have been familiar with the well-known Old Louisiana State Capitol Building. Keely’s affection for, and homage to, James Dakin’s iconic Southern structure is evident in his religious reimaging and repurposing of the design in St. Peter Catholic Church. Keely himself did not leave an explanation, so we can only speculate as to his reasons for this unique design for St. Peter Catholic Church. Perhaps Keely was thinking of a correlation between two “frontier” cities of the South located on bluffs overlooking the continent’s major waterway, now visually connected in a regional Gothic Revival style.

What is particularly striking here is the deviation from the normal design characterizing a Patrick Keely Gothic Revival church. Keely’s plans generally follow a repetitive scheme, in which predetermined forms, such as a window, a capital, or the design of the façade, appearing repeatedly throughout Keely’s body of work, are simply put together in different combinations. The overriding design originates from the architect’s interpretation of Gothic models embodying the Perpendicular Style existing in the British Isles. Thus, a Keely church designed for a city in New England will look very similar, and in fact bear many of the same forms, to one built in Charleston, South Carolina or Little Rock, Arkansas. Keely clearly looks at his churches as the embodiment of a unified, national Catholic Church. There is no attention paid to regional architectural differences, no interest in creating a visual image that conveys a distinctive local culture or history.\(^\text{16}\) However, St. Peter Catholic Church in Memphis is an anomaly among Keely’s works, displaying a distinctive design with it crenellated parapet and octagonal towers not seen in other Keely churches and apparently reflecting a more localized, Mississippi River regional flavor. Although such regionalism in American Gothic Revival church architecture is rare, perhaps due to the influence of Pugin, the Oxford Movement, and the Cambridge Camden

Society on the architectural tradition, there are instances where it does occur. One can cite the work of Richard Upjohn in North Carolina and Alabama, where a less ornate, more vernacular and rustic Gothic suitable for a “village” setting was employed.\(^{17}\) In Texas, the introduction of Gothic Revival in the 1840’s and 1850’s was accompanied by a distinctly regional appearance, drawing specifically on French models rather than English, primarily due to the work of French clergy in reorganizing the Catholic Church in Texas after its independence from Mexico in 1835.\(^{18}\)

Following St. Peter Catholic Church, St. Mary’s Catholic Church [Fig. 1], completed in 1870, was the second Gothic Revival church erected in Memphis.\(^{19}\) It was designed by James B. Cook, a local Memphis architect who was also responsible for local projects including the original iteration of the Memphis Pyramid for the Tennessee Centennial in Nashville\(^{20}\) and the Tate County Courthouse in Senatobia. St. Mary’s Catholic Church is characterized by vaulted ceilings, colorful stained-glass windows, and the motif of the pointed arch found in its wooden pews, confessionals, and altars. St. Mary’s follows the more traditional Gothic Revival design with its centrally located tower with a tall spire (spire later removed). Calvary Episcopal Church was originally a simple, rectangular structure with a flat ceiling, completed in 1843. However, its Gothic features are a later addition, belonging to an 1881 remodeling overseen by James B. Cook, the same architect responsible for St. Mary’s Catholic Church [Fig. 2]. First United

\(^{17}\) Stephen McNair, “Richard Upjohn and the Gothic Revival in Antebellum Alabama,” in *Gothic Revival Worldwide: A.W.N. Pugin’s Global Influence*, eds. Timothy Brittain-Catlin, Jan De Maeyer, and Martin Bressani (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2016), 106-117. This is in addition to Upjohn’s promotion of the Carpenter Style.


\(^{19}\) Patrick, 145 and 161.

Methodist Church [Fig. 3], completed in 1893, was Memphis’ first Church with an entirely stone façade. Gothic Revival features that could be found at First United Methodist Church included its windows and doors, which utilized the pointed arch, its tall corner tower and spire, and a circular window reminiscent of the Medieval Gothic rose window design.

The St. Mary’s Episcopal Cathedral [Fig. 5] was completed in 1926. This monumental structure features Gothic Revival characteristics such as repeated use of the pointed arch motif, stained glass lancet, windows, and high vaulted ceilings. Idlewild Presbyterian Church [Fig. 6] was completed in 1928. Having been built at a time when interest in Gothic Revival architecture began to wane and opening a year before the start of the Great Depression, its design marks the end of the era in Memphis’ religious architecture begun by Patrick Keely.

Even though there are several examples of Gothic Revival religious architecture in Memphis, which were built after St. Peter Catholic Church, it is evident that the designer of St. Peter, Patrick Keely, was the master architect. This can be seen in his incorporation of Gothic elements to create a church whose appearance breaks from the traditional design found in Gothic Revival religious architecture. While the other Gothic Revival churches in Memphis were more of a “cookie-cutter” style, one repeated many times both before and after, St. Peter Catholic has a unique, individual design, especially with its exterior. This church’s link to the Old Louisiana State Capitol may suggest to us that Keely, in the rarest of rare moments, attempted to create a structure bearing a distinctly regional style.
Chapter Four: Conclusion

During the first half of the 19th century, Gothic Revival became the fashionable style for religious architecture in America, especially for Catholic and Episcopal churches. This style had developed originally in Great Britain, where its architectural vocabulary based on models drawn from Gothic architecture of the Middle Ages was intended to recall the kingdom’s honored and venerable history. As a means of idealizing a pre-industrial past, Gothic Revival can therefore be seen as the architectural component of Romanticism. Of equal importance in the emerging relationship between Gothic Revival and sacred architecture in the British Isles was the Oxford Movement, which favored reemphasizing the Catholic origins of the Anglican Church in both doctrine and liturgical practices. This return to a more Catholic, and ultimately a more Medieval, pre-Reformation church parallels again the Romantic Movement’s idealization of the past. The specific combining of religion and architecture was then cemented by the views of the Cambridge Camden Society and the writings of Augustus Pugin and John Ruskin; all argued that if the purity of Christian thought and action was to be found in the Middle Ages, then the architectural style of this period – Gothic, now in its modernized form of Gothic Revival – was the most appropriate one for Christian buildings.

It is therefore no coincidence that in the 1850’s when the Catholic community in Memphis found its existing Church of St. Peter too small for its ever-increasing congregation and decided to build a new, larger, and more grand structure in 1852, the individual selected to design the church was Patrick Charles Keely, a prominent New York-based architect, the most prolific Catholic architect of his generation and a strong proponent of the Gothic Revival Style. St. Peter Catholic Church, completed in 1858, represents the first example of Gothic Revival
architecture in the city of Memphis. Ultimately, St. Peter was followed by five more, large-scale Gothic Revival churches in Memphis: St. Mary’s Catholic Church (completed 1870), Calvary Episcopal Church (remodeled 1881), First United Methodist Church (1893, destroyed by fire 2006), St. Mary’s Episcopal Cathedral (completed 1926), and Idlewild Presbyterian (1928).

At the time of his death, in 1896, Patrick Keely was the most prolific church builder in American history. He is linked to approximately 600 commissioned Catholic churches in the United States. The majority of Keely’s work can be found in the northeast region of the United States, particularly the states of New York and Massachusetts, areas populated by large numbers of Irish and therefore Catholic immigrants. However, Keely’s presence is nationwide; Keely-designed cathedrals may be found in Charleston, Little Rock, New Orleans, South Bend (on the campus of Notre Dame), Toledo, Cleveland, Chicago, and Washington DC. All of his churches were designed in the Gothic Revival style.

Keely’s Gothic Revival draws its inspiration primarily from Late Gothic, specifically the Perpendicular Style (ca. 1350-1550). This style, as evident in a Keely design, emphasizes verticality. This verticality is seen in the interior of St. Peter Catholic Church, with the tall, proportionately slim columns supporting the nave arcade lacking a triforium. The result is an airy, light-filled interior space comprising a single, unified vertical surface. While the emphasis is on space and verticality, the design still adopts a highly decorative approach with its thin mullions, intricate tracery work, and fan vaults. It also becomes apparent in a survey of Keely’s work that the architect’s plans generally follow a repetitive scheme. Predetermined forms, such as a window, a capital, or the design of the façade, appear repeatedly throughout Keely’s body of work; what differentiates one Keely church from another Keely church is that these forms have simply been put together in different combinations.
The design of St. Peter Catholic Church, however, differs greatly from what is generally associated with Charles Keely, especially its exterior elevation. St. Peter’s most striking features are its two crenellated octagonal towers connected by a flat parapet found on its facade. These features, reminiscent of a Medieval castle and not a cathedral, and otherwise referred to as the “castellated” style, are unique for Keely. In addition, the tall steeples on which Keely normally relies for a sense of increased verticality are also noticeably absent. St. Peter Catholic Church is, therefore, an isolated occurrence within Keely’s body of work.

The closest parallel to the exterior of St. Peter Catholic Church, in fact, is found in secular architecture – the Old Louisiana State Capitol Building in Baton Rouge, designed by James Dakin and completed in 1852. Its front façade bears the same crenellated octagonal towers and parapet as those appearing on St. Peter Catholic Church. It is certain that Keely would have been familiar with the well-known Old Louisiana State Capitol Building. The nearly identical facades clearly indicate that Keely drew inspiration from Dakin’s design. As Keely himself did not leave an explanation, we can only speculate as to his reasons for this unique design for St. Peter Catholic Church. Perhaps, Keely’s aim was to create a regional style of Gothic Revival, which now visually linked two “frontier” cities of the South located on bluffs overlooking the continent’s major inland waterway. Although rare, such regionalism in Gothic Revival architecture does occur in the 19th century; however, for Keely, St. Peter Catholic Church constitutes a striking deviation from the normal design characterizing a Patrick Keely Gothic Revival church.

The results of my research were then formulated into an exhibition, entitled “Gothic Revival Comes to Memphis: Saint Peter Catholic Church and Patrick Keely,” held in the Parish Hall at St. Peter Catholic Church in Memphis, from June 16 to July 6, 2019. Through text and
images arranged on six didactic panels, my conclusions on Gothic Revival architecture in Memphis, St. Peter Catholic Church, and Patrick Charles Keely were presented to the community.
Appendix A: Exhibition

On June 16, 2019 the didactic panel exhibit I curated entitled, “Gothic Revival Comes to Memphis: Saint Peter Catholic Church and Patrick Keely,” was presented to the public in the Fellowship Hall of St. Peter Catholic Church in Memphis, Tennessee. The presentation included six posters, 30 inches high by 24 inches wide, each supported by an easel [Fig. 33]. A smaller easel was used to display the credits for the exhibit. The displays had been created with InDesign software and included photographs to provide a visual complement to the architectural topics, together with captions to highlight the findings of the thesis. A light, buff brown background color and variations of the Avenir Next font style were selected for the posters to emphasize consistency and enhance coherency throughout the presentation. A font size of 22 was used for the text to allow easy reading from a comfortable viewing distance.

The posters were created by a wide-format color laser printer by a printing company [Fig. 34]. The type of paper selected had a matte sheen in order to prevent glare that might be expected from a glossy paper. The prints were then laminated to a 3/8 inch rigid foam board for strength and durability. For the exhibit, five-foot high presentation easels were acquired. The easels were aluminum Ohuhu brand, with sturdy locking telescoping legs, metal easel seat, and a locking top clamp to hold the 30-inch high posters in place. The variety of easel with a metallic frame was specifically selected so that the color would not clash with that of the display boards.

The exhibit remained on display in St. Peter Catholic Church until July 6, 2019. The show received considerable interest and attention from the church members and other interested parties during this time. An official opening and reception was held on Sunday June 16 from 9:45am to 12:30pm, at which time I was present and available to answer questions.
Approximately 150 people viewed the show on that day. Photographs were taken on this day of the official opening [Figs. 35-36]. The church priest, Father Augustine DeArmond, was very helpful in making arrangements for the exhibit and encouraging the parishioners to view the presentation. He also expressed interest in acquiring copies of the exhibit for the church’s archives. The following is a narrative of each didactic panel and the reason each was included in the presentation.

Didactic Panel One: What is Gothic Revival Architecture? [Fig. 37]

Text:

“The Gothic style that defined European architecture of the Late Middle Ages from the 12th through 16th centuries is characterized by the distinctive combination of pointed arches and ribbed vaults, flying buttresses, ornate exterior decoration featuring gargoyles, and the extensive use of stained glass windows creating bright, sun-lit interiors. Most often associated with cathedrals, this impressive, majestic style symbolized the dominant role of the Catholic Church in Medieval society. The Gothic cathedral, which most readily comes to mind, is, of course, Notre Dame de Paris [Image: Notre Dame de Paris].

Gothic Revival refers to the style originating in the 1740’s in England that looked back to Medieval Gothic for inspiration, especially for its architectural forms and decoration [Image: St. Peter Catholic Church (Memphis)]. The popularity of Gothic Revival architecture in the 18th and 19th centuries owes much to Romanticism, the literary and artistic movement that expressed an idealized memory of the past and developed as a reaction against the social upheavals caused by the Industrial Revolution.
Influential 19th century proponents of Gothic Revival architecture, such as Augustus Pugin, believed that the moral standards of Western culture had degenerated after the 16th century, chronologically coinciding with the decline in Gothic’s popularity. The contemporary Oxford Movement within the Anglican Church emphasized the Catholic heritage of the Church of England and called for a return to Catholic ritual. Thus, coinciding with the religious trends of the time, the revival of a Gothic-inspired architecture came to symbolize a return to religious and moral purity.

American adoption of Gothic Revival began in the 1830’s and 1840’s, stimulated by the travels of artists and architects to Europe, who returned with books detailing the designs of Gothic Revival homes, churches, and public buildings. Horace Walpole’s Strawberry Hill House in England (1776) became a model for Gothic Revival country homes in America, while Gothic Revival remained a definitive style for churches in the United States of all denominations throughout the 20th century.

Reasons:

The initial didactic image confronting the viewer was entitled, “What is Gothic Revival Architecture?” The accompanying text dealt with the origins of Gothic Revival architecture, its links to Gothic architecture of the Middle Ages, and its emergence in the 18th and 19th centuries. This information was chosen as a way to explain to the viewer the inspiration behind and characteristics of Gothic Revival architecture, necessary before discussing the more specific aspects of the exhibit, Charles Keely and St. Peter Catholic Church. The image of Notre Dame de Paris gave the viewer a familiar example of Medieval Gothic architecture. Strawberry Hill House was used as an example of a secular Gothic Revival building, while the Washington
National Cathedral introduced the viewer to the Gothic Revival style in religious architecture that is examined throughout the exhibit.

Didactic Panel Two: Patrick Keely: Architect of American Catholicism [Fig. 38]

Text:

“Patrick Charles Keely [Image: Portrait of Patrick Keely] was born in Thurles, Ireland in 1816 and immigrated to the United States in 1842. He settled in Brooklyn, NY, where he initially worked as a carpenter and builder. Keely’s career as an architect catapulted when he collaborated with Catholic priest and fellow Irish immigrant, Father Sylvester Malone, on the design of the Church of Saints Peter and Paul in Brooklyn, NY.

This church, completed in 1848, was seen as a brilliant example of American Catholic architecture [Image: Church of Sts. Peter and Paul, Brooklyn]. Once Keely had demonstrated that he understood how to build a “true” church in the pure Gothic Revival style, taken together with his own adherence to the faith and Irish ancestry, Keely quickly became a trusted architect for the Catholic Church.

At the time of his death, in 1896, Patrick Keely was the most prolific church builder in American history. He was the architect of record for approximately 600 commissioned Catholic churches in the United States. He worked, almost exclusively, in the Gothic Revival style.

The majority of Keely’s work can be found in the northeast region of the United States, particularly the states of New York and Massachusetts, areas populated by large numbers of Irish and therefore Catholic immigrants. However, Keely’s presence is nationwide; Keely-designed churches may be found in Charleston, Little Rock, Louisville, New Orleans, South Bend (on the campus of Notre Dame), Toledo, Cleveland, Chicago, and Washington DC.
The images of the Cathedral of the Holy Cross in Boston, MA [Images: the interior and exterior of the Cathedral of the Holy Cross, Boston] provide examples of the exterior and interior of one of Keely’s designs. The asymmetric variation of a Keely exterior, the strict adherence to Gothic ideals on the outside and the inside of the church, and the grand scale in which Keely frequently worked are all on display with the Cathedral of the Holy Cross.”

Reasons:

The second didactic panel was entitled, “Patrick Keely: Architect of American Catholicism.” The text covered the beginnings of Patrick Keely’s career and his eventual popularity as an architect within the Catholic Church in the United States during the second half of the 19th century. To contextualize Keely’s success as a Catholic architect, his Irish-American heritage and personal connections within the Catholic Church are discussed. This information helps the viewer to understand why Keely experienced such a prolific career and why he was the ideal architect for designing St. Peter Catholic Church in Memphis.

Didactic Panel Three: St. Peter Catholic Church: The Beauty Within [Fig. 39]

Text:

“St. Peter Catholic Church was completed in January of 1858. The initial St. Peter was a 30 by 70-foot brick structure built in 1842, but the parishioners, seeing that a larger and a more durable structure was needed, called upon well-known church architect Patrick Charles Keely to create a new design, already familiar with his prolific and impressive body of work.

The interior of St. Peter Catholic Church follows a typical Keely interior design, emphasizing: 1.) an open, well-lit and flowing space, characterized by slender columns flanking the nave (central hall); and 2.) delicate ornament, as seen in the floral capitals, intricate tracery
work in the ceiling above the altar, and the tall, slender lancet windows. In fact, many of these forms are identical to those found in earlier and later structures designed by Keely.

Facing the front of the nave, the large window at the end of the ambulatory tends to dominate the view. This tall window is subdivided into four lancet windows. Each lancet window and the larger window itself are topped with a pointed arch. They, presumably, would have simply let in natural light before the later addition of stained glass [Image: the front of the nave of St. Peter]. The light, airy openness associated with Gothic design is immediately evident throughout the lofty nave. The nave, transept, chancel, and ambulatory of St. Peter are painted white, and during the day the area is filled with light from the large windows along the outside of the side aisles, each end of the transept, and the end of the ambulatory. The ceiling of the nave of St. Peter is supported by ribbed columns, creating a wide vaulted space, flanked by smaller vaulted side aisles [Image: back of the nave of St. Peter]. The boss is located at the intersection of the ribs in the vaulted ceiling [Image: an intricate boss]. At the point where the ribs of the vault spring upward and outward from the columns, a decorative, floral capital covers the transition [Image: a column with a decorative capital, vaulted ceilings, and windows]. The most common Gothic Revival element that is easily identifiable in St. Peter is the pointed arch. The pointed arch is found within the windows and the vaulted ceilings [Image: ribbed vaulting and large window above the altar].”

Reasons:

The title of the third didactic panel displayed in the exhibit was “St. Peter Catholic Church: The Beauty Within.” The text within the didactic panel describes the various ways in which Keely applied Gothic Revival features throughout the interior of St. Peter. Each
Didactic Panel Four: Keely’s Three Exterior Designs [Fig. 40]

Text:

“When Patrick Keely drafted the entry elevation (façade) of a church, he routinely selected from one of three designs. The first of these is the entrance flanked by two tall, steepled towers. Examples of this façade include the Church of the Assumption (Philadelphia, PA) [Image: Church of the Assumption, Philadelphia]; Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, Albany, NY; and St. Brigid’s Church, New York City, NY).

A second model that Keely chose frequently was a tall central tower. Examples include: the Basilica of the Sacred Heart (Notre Dame, IN) [Image: Basilica of the Sacred Heart, Notre Dame]; The Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, Brooklyn, NY; and St. Michael’s Cathedral, Springfield, MA.

Keely’s third and final design choice featured a single tower on either side of the main doorway. This is the design often selected by Keely for churches located at a street corner. Examples include: Holy Name Cathedral, Chicago, IL [Image: Holy Name Cathedral Chicago], Cathedral of the Holy Cross, Boston, MA; and St. John the Baptist Church, Manayunk, Philadelphia, PA).

With St. Peter Catholic Church [Image: St. Peter Catholic Church, Memphis], an anomaly is found! St. Peter’s most striking features are its two crenellated octagonal towers connected by a flat parapet. These features, reminiscent of a Medieval fortified castle and not a cathedral, are unusual for Keely. The tall steeples on which Keely normally relies for a sense of
increased verticality are also noticeably absent. St. Peter Catholic Church is unique within Keely’s body of work.”

Reasons:

The next image displayed for the viewer to examine was entitled, “Keely’s Three Exterior Designs.” The information accompanying this didactic panel covered the three most common exterior designs employed by Keely and how St. Peter Church’s exterior is an anomaly within his body of work. Each design is described and accompanied by an image of a church designed by Keely that fits the type. An image of St. Peter is also included. These images as a whole serve to highlight the ways in which St. Peter was a departure for Keely. While previous didactic panels had served to introduce the viewer to the general aspects of the thesis (the Gothic Revival style in architecture, Patrick Keely, and St. Peter Catholic Church), this panel emphasized the results of my research and the contribution made by the exhibit to our understanding of St Peter within Keely’s larger body of work. The point is made that St. Peter is unique; the didactic panel that follows logically provides an explanation for how it came about and why.

Didactic Panel Five: St. Peter Catholic Church: Baton Rouge Inspiration [Fig. 41]

Text:

“The Old Louisiana State Capitol Building, located in Baton Rouge [Image: Old Louisiana State Capitol Building], bears a striking resemblance to St. Peter Catholic Church in Memphis. [Image: St. Peter Catholic Church] Among the features shared by the two buildings are the crenellated octagonal towers [Image: detail, tower of Old Louisiana State Capitol
Building; Image: detail, tower of St. Peter Catholic Church], the horizontal parapet in between
the towers, and the large central windows above the main entrance.

The State House, as it is also called, was designed by American architect James H. Dakin
and completed in the same year that construction began on St. Peter. Dakin was a successful and
well-known architect of the Gothic Revival style. After moving from New York to Louisiana in
1835, during a construction boom in New Orleans, Dakin’s mostly secular architecture
characterized a New Orleans emerging as the unofficial capital of the west and rivaling New
York City as a major center of commerce and culture. Dakin died in 1852 immediately following
the completion of the State House.

The Old Louisiana State Capitol Building was a well-known building with which Patrick
Keely certainly would have been familiar. Keely’s affection for, and homage to, James Dakin’s
iconic southern structure is evident in his religious reimagining and repurposing of the design in St.
Peter Catholic Church. As Keely himself did not leave an explanation, we can only speculate as
to his reasons for this unique design for St. Peter Catholic Church. Perhaps Keely was thinking
of a correlation between two “frontier” cities of the South located on bluffs overlooking the
continent’s major waterway, now visually connected in a regional Gothic Revival style.”

Reasons:

The fifth didactic panel was entitled, “St. Peter Catholic Church: Baton Rouge
Inspiration.” The text examined St. Peter’s connections with the Old Louisiana State Capitol
Building, designed by James Dakin. Important comparisons are made between the two buildings
to demonstrate the influence that Dakin’s design might have had on the design of St. Peter. These
comparisons also highlight the ways in which Keely appears to have taken inspiration from a
contemporary example of Southern architecture.
Text:

“St. Mary’s Catholic Church, completed in 1870, was the second Gothic Revival church erected in Memphis. It was designed by James B. Cook, a Memphis architect who was also responsible for local projects including Grace Episcopal Church (now Mount Nebo Missionary Baptist Church), the renovations to Calvary Episcopal Church, and the reconstruction of the famous Gayoso Hotel. St. Mary’s is characterized by vaulted ceilings, large, colorful stained-glass windows, and the motif of the pointed arch found in its wooden pews, confessionals, and altars. [Image: St. Mary’s Catholic Church]

Calvary Episcopal Church was originally a simple, rectangular structure with a flat ceiling, designed by its rector, the Reverend Philip Alston, and completed in 1844. The Gothic features are a later addition and belong to an 1881 remodeling overseen by James B. Cook, the same architect responsible for St. Mary’s Catholic Church. [Image: Calvary Episcopal Church]

First United Methodist Church, completed in 1893, was Memphis’ first church with an entirely stone façade. Gothic Revival features that could be found at First United Methodist Church included its windows and doors, which utilized the pointed arch, its tall corner tower and spire, and a circular window reminiscent of the Medieval Gothic rose window design. [Image: First United Methodist Church] First United Methodist’s sanctuary was destroyed by a fire in 2006. [Image: First United Methodist Church] The image seen here is taken from a 1911 postcard. First United Methodist Church held their first Sunday worship service in their new sanctuary on August 5, 2018.
The current St. Mary’s Episcopal Cathedral was completed in 1926. The original church of 1871 was also in a Gothic Revival style but built following a more rustic, simpler design known as “Carpenter Gothic.” This monumental structure features Gothic Revival characteristics such as repeated use of the pointed arch motif, stained glass lancet windows, and high vaulted ceilings. [Image: St. Mary’s Episcopal Cathedral]

Idlewild Presbyterian, completed in 1928, marks the end of an era in Memphis religious architecture. Having been built at a time when interest in Gothic Revival architecture began to wane and opening a year before the start of the Great Depression, its design marks the end of an era in Memphis religious architecture. [Image: Idlewild Presbyterian Church]"

Reasons:

The final didactic image on display in the exhibit was entitled “Gothic Revival in Memphis, Tennessee.” The accompanying text dealt with the other five Gothic Revival churches in Memphis, when they were built, and who designed them. There is a photograph of each church as well as a summarized description of their Gothic Revival features. This didactic panel highlights the ways in which the Gothic Revival style, which began with St. Peter Catholic Church, was continued in Memphis in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.
Bibliography


Website

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Architect: James Dakin
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What is Gothic Revival Architecture?

The Gothic style that defined European architecture of the Late Middle Ages from the 12th through 16th centuries is characterized by the distinctive combination of pointed arches and ribbed vaults, flying buttresses, ornate exterior decoration featuring gargoyle heads, and the extensive use of stained glass windows creating bright, sunlit interiors. Most often associated with cathedrals, this impressive, majestic style symbolized the dominant role of the Catholic Church in Medieval society. The Gothic cathedral, which most readily comes to mind is, of course, Notre Dame de Paris [Top, Left].

Gothic Revival refers to the style originating in the 1740’s in England that looked back to Medieval Gothic for inspiration, especially for its architectural forms and decoration [Top, Right]. The popularity of Gothic Revival architecture in the 18th and 19th centuries owes much to Romanticism, the literary and artistic movement that expressed an idealized memory of the past and developed as a reaction against the social upheavals caused by the Industrial Revolution.

Influential 19th century proponents of Gothic Revival architecture, such as Augustus Pugin, believed that the moral standards of Western culture had degenerated after the 16th century, chronologically coinciding with the decline in Gothic’s popularity. The contemporary Oxford Movement within the Anglican Church emphasized the Catholic heritage of the Church of England and called for a return to Catholic ritual. Thus, coinciding with the religious trends of the time, the revival of a Gothic-inspired architecture came to symbolize a return to religious and moral purity.

American adoption of Gothic Revival began in the 1830s and 1840s, stimulated by the travels of artists and architects to Europe, who returned with books detailing the designs of Gothic Revival homes, churches, and public buildings. Horace Walpole’s Strawberry Hill House in England (1775) [Bottom, Right] became a model for Gothic Revival country homes in America, while Gothic Revival remained a definitive style for churches in the United States of all denominations throughout the 20th century [Bottom, Left].
Patrick Keely: Architect of American Catholicism

Patrick Charles Keely (Top, Left) was born in Thurles, Ireland in 1816 and immigrated to the United States in 1842. He settled in Brooklyn, NY, where he initially worked as a carpenter and builder. Keely’s career as an architect was catalyzed when he collaborated with Catholic priest and fellow Irish immigrant, Father Sylvester Malone, on the design of the Church of Saints Peter and Paul in Brooklyn, NY.

This church, completed in 1848, was seen as a brilliant example of American Catholic architecture (Top, Right). Once Keely had demonstrated that he understood how to build a “true” church in the pure Gothic Revival style taken together with his own adherence to the faith and Irish ancestry, Keely quickly became a trusted architect for the Catholic Church.

At the time of his death, in 1896, Patrick Keely was the most prolific church builder in American history. He was the architect of record for approximately 600 commissioned Catholic churches in the United States. He worked, almost exclusively, in the Gothic Revival style.

The majority of Keely’s work can be found in the northeast region of the United States, particularly the states of New York and Massachusetts, areas populated by large numbers of Irish and therefore Catholic immigrants. However, Keely’s presence is nationwide; Keely-designed cathedrals may be found in Charleston, Little Rock, Louisville, New Orleans, South Bend (on the campus of Notre Dame), Toledo, Cleveland, Chicago, and Washington DC.

The images of the Cathedral of the Holy Cross in Boston, MA (Bottom, Left and Right) provide examples of the exterior and interior of one of Keely’s designs. The asymmetric variation of a Keely exterior, the strict adherence to Gothic ideals on the outside and the inside of the church, and the grand scale in which Keely frequently worked are all on display with the Cathedral of the Holy Cross.

Figure 38
Didactic Panel Two: Patrick Keely: Architect of American Catholicism
St. Peter Catholic Church was completed in January of 1858. The initial St. Peter’s was a 300’70 foot brick structure built in 1842, but the parishioners, seeing that a larger and more durable structure was needed, called upon well-known church architect Patrick Charles Keely to create a new design, already familiar with his prolific and impressive body of work.

The interior of St. Peter Catholic Church follows a typical Keely interior design, emphasizing: 1) an open, well-lit and flowing space, characterized by slender columns flanking the nave (central hall); and 2) delicate ornamentation, as seen in the floral capitals, intricate tracery work in the ceiling above the altar, and the tall, slender lancet windows. In fact, many of these forms are identical to those found in earlier and later structures designed by Keely.

Facing the front of the nave, the large window at the end of the ambulatory tends to dominate the view. This tall window is subdivided into four lancet windows. Each lancet window and the larger window itself are topped with a pointed arch. They, presumably, would have simply let in natural light before the later addition of stained glass [Top, Left].

The light, airy openness associated with Gothic design is immediately evident throughout the lofty nave. The nave, transept, chancel, and ambulatory of St. Peter are painted white, and during the day the area is filled with light from the large windows along the outside of the side aisles, each end of the transept, and the end of the ambulatory.

The ceiling of the nave of St. Peter is supported by ribbed columns, creating a wide vaulted space, flanked by smaller vaulted side aisles [Top, Right].

At the point where the rise of the vault springs upward and outward from the columns, a decorative, floral capital covers the transition [Bottom, Left].

The most common Gothic Revival element that is easily identifiable in St. Peter is the pointed arch. This pointed arch is found within the windows and the vaulted ceilings [Bottom, Center].

The bays are located at the intersection of the ribs in the vaulted ceiling [Bottom, Right].
Keely’s Three Exterior Designs

When Patrick Keely drafted the entry elevation (façade) of a church, he routinely selected from one of three designs. The first of these is the entrance flanked by two tall, steeped towers.

Examples of this façade include the Church of the Assumption (Philadelphia, PA) (Top, Left); Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception (Albany, NY); and St. Brigid’s Church (New York City, NY).

A second model that Keely chose frequently was a tall central tower. Examples include: the Basilica of the Sacred Heart (Notre Dame, IN) (Top, Right); The Church of St. Peter and St. Paul (Brooklyn, NY); and St. Michael’s Cathedral (Springfield, MA).

Keely’s third and final design choice featured a single tower on either side of the main doorway. This is the design often selected by Keely for churches located at a street corner.

Examples include: Holy Name Cathedral (Chicago, IL) (Below); Cathedral of the Holy Cross (Boston, MA); and St. John the Baptist Church (Manayunk, Philadelphia, PA).

With St. Peter Catholic Church (Above), an anomaly is found! St. Peter’s most striking features are its two crenellated octagonal towers connected by a flat parapet. These features, reminiscent of a medieval fortified castle and not a cathedral, are unusual for Keely. The tall steeples on which Keely normally relies for a sense of increased verticality are also noticeably absent.

St. Peter Catholic Church is unique within Keely’s body of work.

Figure 40
Didactic Panel Four: Keely’s Three Exterior Designs
The Old Louisiana State Capitol Building, located in Baton Rouge (Top, Left), bears a striking resemblance to St. Peter Catholic Church in Memphis (Top, Right). Among the features shared by the two buildings are the crenellated octagonal towers, the horizontal parapet in between the towers, and the large central windows above the main entrance.

The State House, as it is also called, was designed by American architect James H. Dakin and completed in the same year that construction began on St. Peter. Dakin was a successful and well-known architect of the Gothic Revival style. After moving from New York to Louisiana in 1835, during a construction boom in New Orleans, Dakin’s mostly secular architecture characterized a New Orleans emerging as the unofficial capital of the west and rivaling New York City as a major center of commerce and culture. Dakin died in 1852 immediately following the completion of the State House.

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Figure 41
Didactic Panel Five: St. Peter Catholic Church: Baton Rouge Inspiration
Figure 42
Didactic Panel Six: Gothic Revival in Memphis, Tennessee

Gothic Revival in Memphis, Tennessee

St. Mary's Catholic Church, completed in 1870, was the second Gothic Revival church erected in Memphis. It was designed by James B. Cook, a Memphis architect who was also responsible for local projects including Grace Episcopal Church (now Mount Nebo Missionary Baptist Church), the renovations to Calvary Episcopal Church, and the reconstruction of the famous Cossyco Hotel. St. Mary’s is characterized by vaulted ceilings, large, colorful stained glass windows, and the motif of the pointed arch found in its wooden pews, confessionals, and altars.

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The current St. Mary’s Episcopal Cathedral was completed in 1926. The original church of 1871 was also in a Gothic Revival style but built following a more rustic, simpler design known as “Carpenter Gothic.” This monumental structure features Gothic Revival characteristics such as repeated use of the pointed arch motif, stained glass lancet windows, and high vaulted ceilings.

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First United Methodist Church held their First Sunday worship service in their new sanctuary on August 5, 2018.