

# NOMINATION OF HISTORIC BUILDING, STRUCTURE, SITE, OR OBJECT

## PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

### PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

SUBMIT ALL ATTACHED MATERIALS ON PAPER AND IN ELECTRONIC FORM (CD, EMAIL, FLASH DRIVE)  
ELECTRONIC FILES MUST BE WORD OR WORD COMPATIBLE

#### 1. ADDRESS OF HISTORIC RESOURCE *(must comply with an Office of Property Assessment address)*

Street address: 4412 E. Thompson St.

Postal code: 19137

#### 2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: St. John Cantius Roman Catholic Church

Current/Common Name: St. John Cantius Roman Catholic Church

#### 3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

☒ Building

☐ Structure

☐ Site

☐ Object

#### 4. PROPERTY INFORMATION

Condition: ☐ excellent ☐ good ☒ fair ☐ poor ☐ ruins

Occupancy: ☒ occupied ☐ vacant ☐ under construction ☐ unknown

Current use: Church

#### 5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

*Please attach a narrative description and site/plot plan of the resource's boundaries.*

#### 6. DESCRIPTION

*Please attach a narrative description and photographs of the resource's physical appearance, site, setting, and surroundings.*

#### 7. SIGNIFICANCE

*Please attach a narrative Statement of Significance citing the Criteria for Designation the resource satisfies.*

Period of Significance (from year to year): from 1898 to present

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: 1898 – 1899 (dedication)

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: Louis (Ludwik) H. Giele, architect

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: Wilson Milnor, contractor

Original owner: Archdiocese of Philadelphia

Other significant persons: \_\_\_\_\_

**CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION:**

The historic resource satisfies the following criteria for designation (check all that apply):

- ☐ (a) Has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth or Nation or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past; or,
- ☐ (b) Is associated with an event of importance to the history of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
- ☐ (c) Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style; or,
- ☒ (d) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen; or,
- ☐ (e) Is the work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer, or engineer whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
- ☐ (f) Contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represent a significant innovation; or,
- ☐ (g) Is part of or related to a square, park or other distinctive area which should be preserved according to an historic, cultural or architectural motif; or,
- ☐ (h) Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or City; or,
- ☐ (i) Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in pre-history or history; or
- ☒ (j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

**8. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

*Please attach a bibliography.*

**9. NOMINATOR**

Organization \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name with Title Celeste A. Morello Email N/A

Street Address 1234 S. Sheridan Street Telephone 215-334-6008

City, State, and Postal Code Philadelphia, PA 19147

Nominator ☐ is ☒ is not the property owner.

**PHC USE ONLY**

Date of Receipt: July 23, 2020

☒ Correct-Complete ☐ Incorrect-Incomplete Date: December 17, 2020

Date of Notice Issuance: December 18, 2020

Property Owner at Time of Notice:

Name: Archdiocese of Philadelphia

Address: 222 N. 17<sup>th</sup> St.

City: Philadelphia State: PA Postal Code: 19103

Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: January 20, 2021

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: February 12, 2021

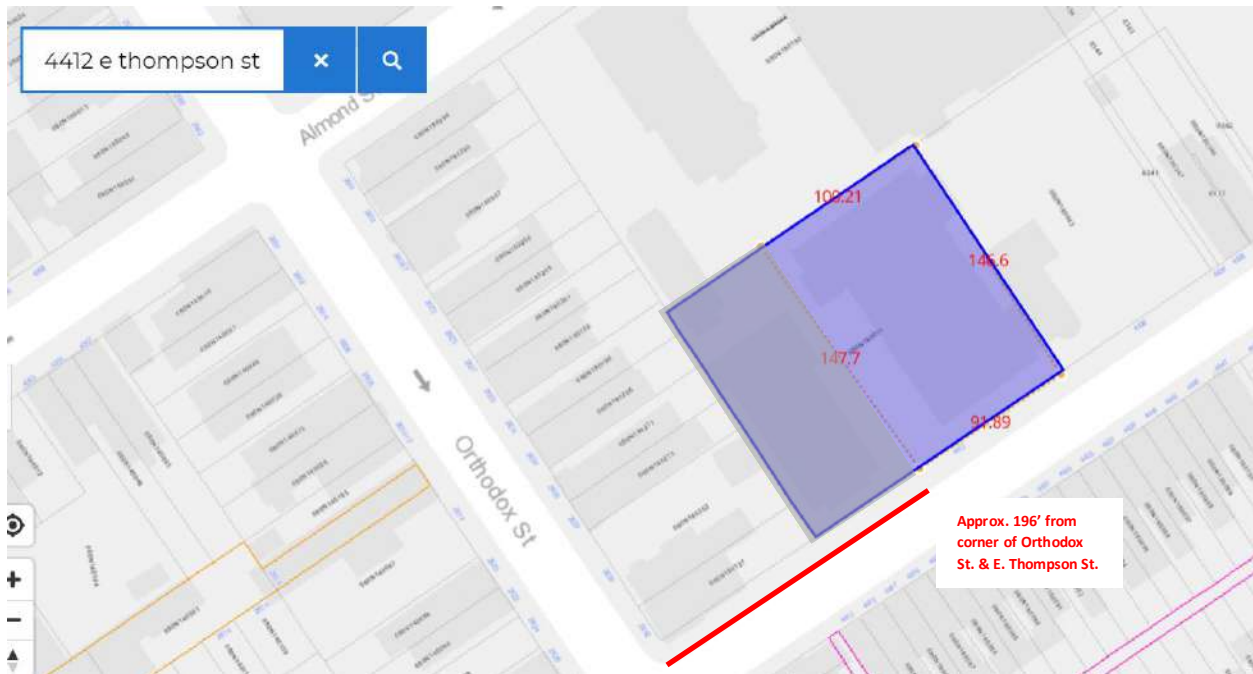
Date of Final Action: February 12, 2021

☒ Designated ☐ Rejected

12/7/18

## 5. Boundary Description

This nomination proposes to designate St. John Cantius Roman Catholic Church, one of two buildings located at 4412 E. Thompson Street. The boundary of the church building begins at approximately 196 feet from the northeast corner of the intersection of Orthodox Street and E. Thompson Street. The proposed boundary includes the footprint of the church, with a proposed perimeter buffer. There is a second building on the parcel located to the west of the church building which is proposed as non-contributing.



Contributing

Non-contributing

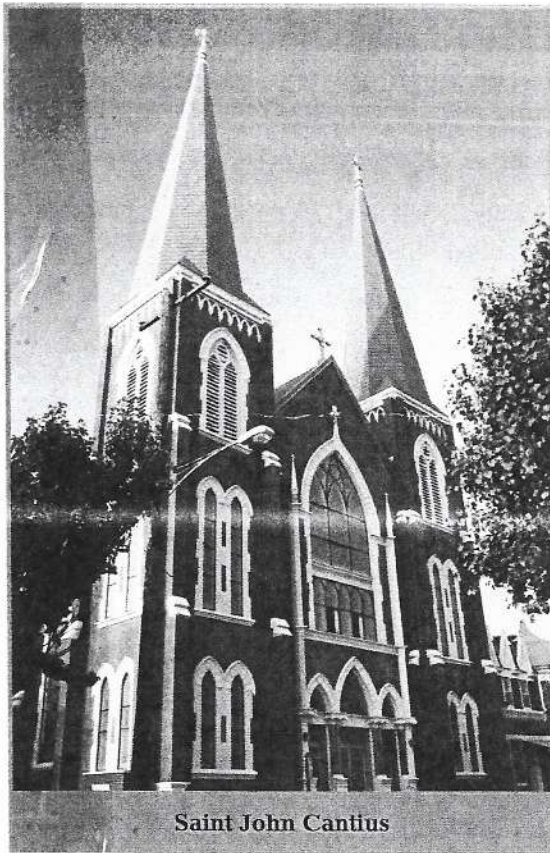
DESCRIPTION:

Situated in the center of the 4400 block of Thompson Street in Bridesburg, St. John Cantius Roman Catholic Church is a Gothic brick and limestone basilican plan with a single-story pentagonal apse at the west. The cornerstone at the southwest corner (left at the facade view) has an "A.D. 1898" inscription. The building measures 60 feet across the facade in the east by 120 feet deep with steeples atop the towers rising to 150 feet topped with crosses. At the north wall of the church is an attached "parish building" dating from the time of the church's construction in 1898: This is not a contributing property in this nomination.

The church's construction materials include two colors of brick (red and cream) and pale limestone which cleverly outlines the Gothic arches of the windows and portals. The steeples are not original. (See image on page 7.) The Gothic facade is tripartite with the bays separated by shallow buttresses. Towers are in three stages, each different but with the Gothic arches. The facade's center bay has the entry of three doors, all modern metal and glass reached from the ground/street level by seven granite steps to a platform, then to another step to the doors leading inside to the vestibule. The large Gothic arched window at the middle of the facade is also different from the original. All of the church's windows appeared frosted from exterior view, covering tracery seen in early images. There is a red granite base at the facade measuring about 5 feet high which does not wrap around to the sides where a base (which may be limestone?) continues. Limestone surrounds are atop the basement windows, all with wire screens over glass. An entry at the south tower (Orthodox Street) leads to the vestibule. The pentagonal apse has extensions at the north and south, all in the same red brick. This is a well-maintained building with no visible construction defects.

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<sup>1</sup> "Catholic Standard and Times," June 4, 1898.

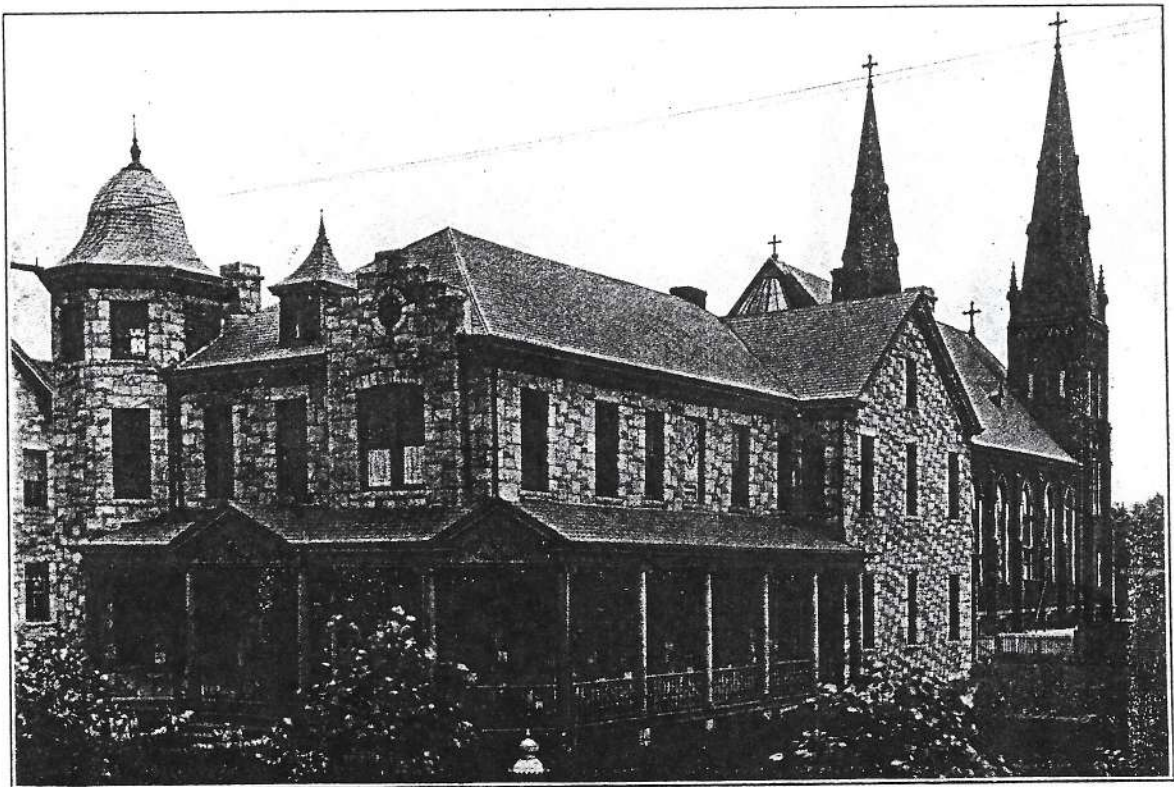


Saint John Cantius

Archdiocesan photograph (left) of St. John Cantius' Church in c.2007 has some modifications to its design by architect Louis H. Giele. (Compare to next page's image.)

St. John Cantius' parish's buildings are on a single block, but only the church fronts on the 4400 block of Thompson Street while the former school, convent and rectory (below) are on the 4400 block of Almond Street.

The rectory is occupied by Polish-speaking clergy who provide weekly services in that language and accommodate the Polish in Bridesburg who still communicate in that language.

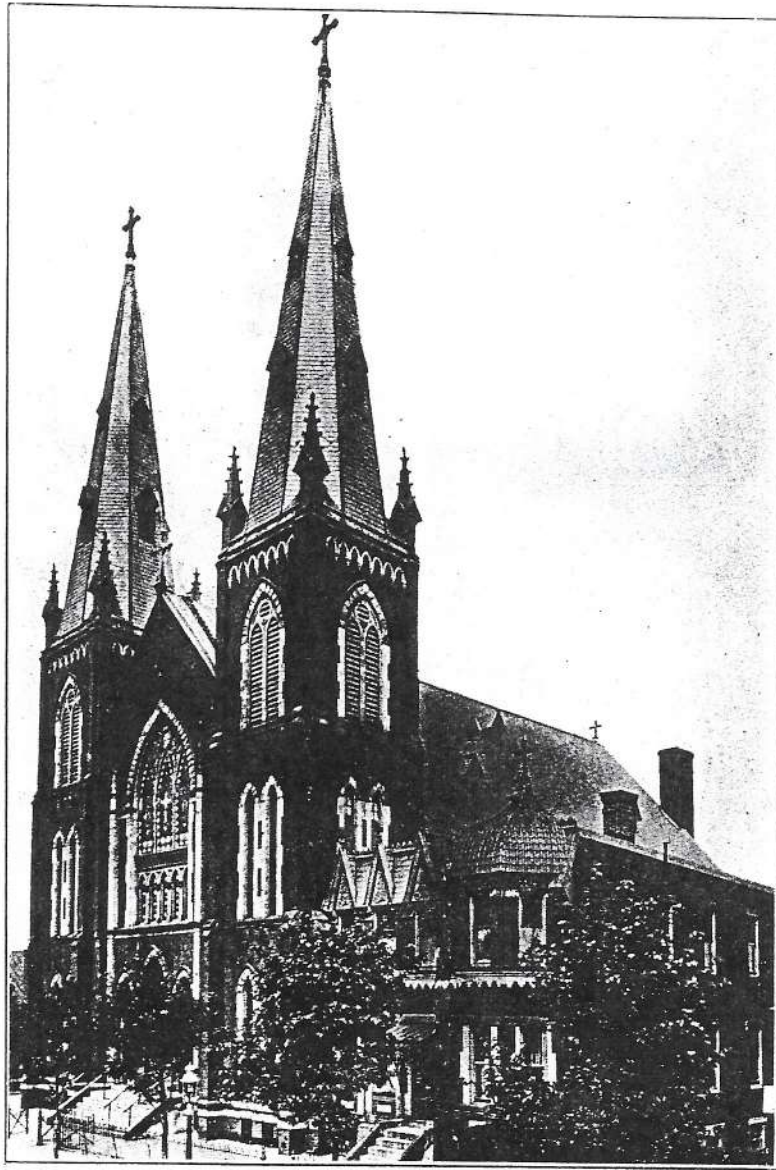


ST. JOHN CANTIUS RECTORY



Giele's original design had finials on the towers' four corners and octagonal steeples with apertures under pitched projections, adding more textures to the steeples.

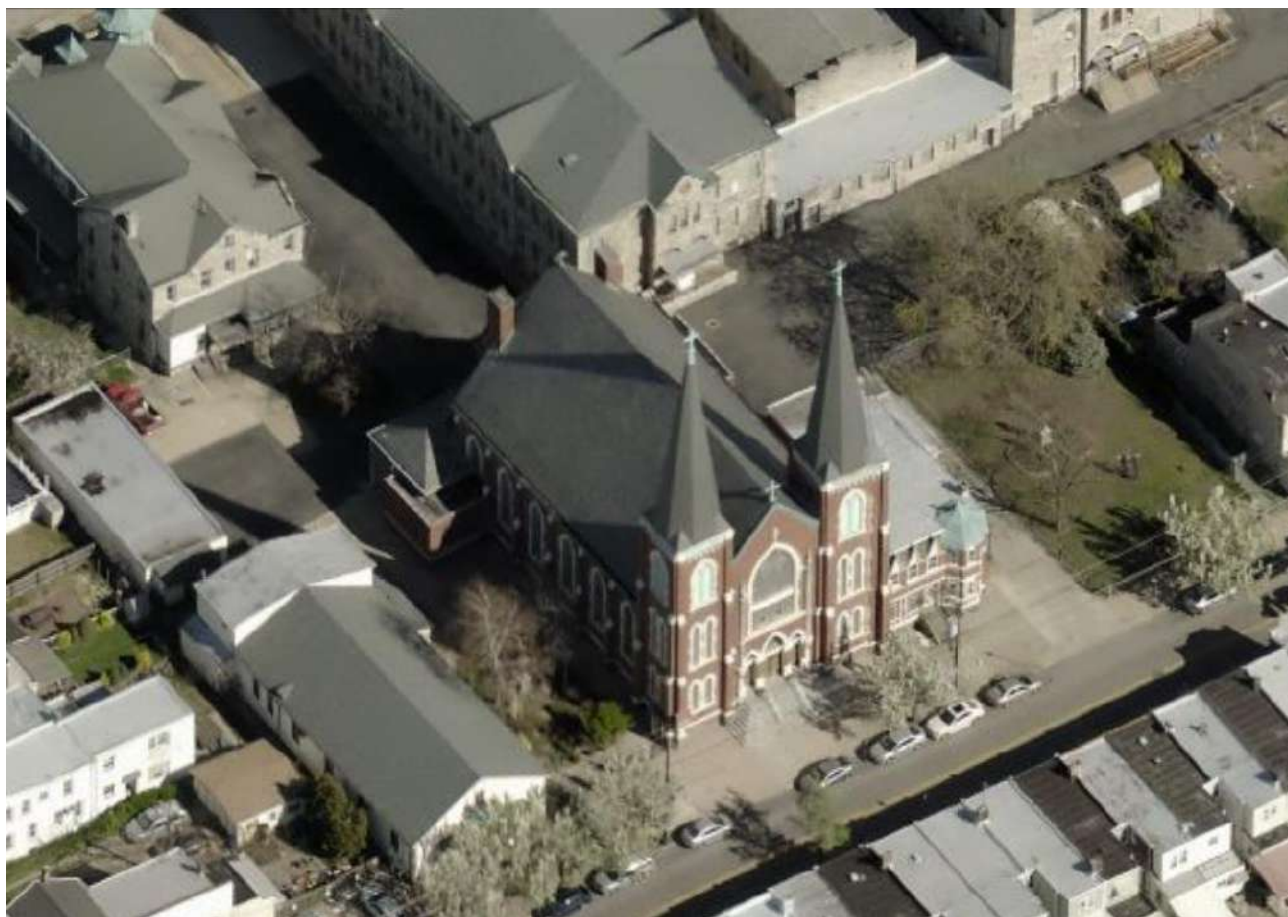
The center window in the facade also appears different.



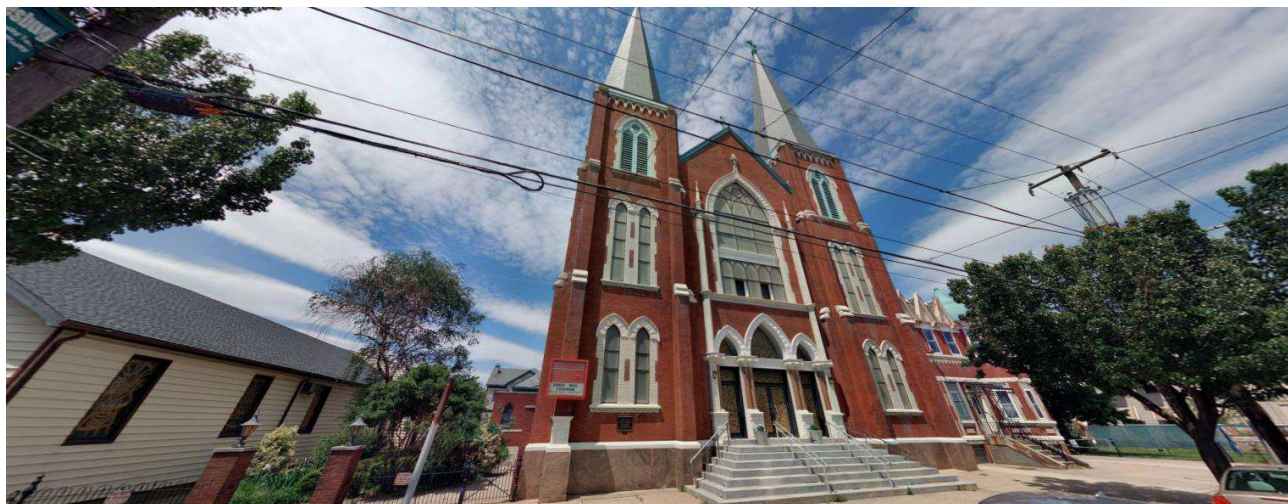
ST. JOHN CANTIUS CHURCH  
Dedicated May 30, 1899

Source: "Polish Catholic Historical Book of Philadelphia. Issued in commemoration of the 25th Anniversary of the Founding of St. John Cantius Polish R.C. Church. Bridesburg, Philadelphia. 1892." (pub. 1917.)

## Staff-Supplemented Photographs



*Aerial photograph of church, April 2020. Source: Pictometry*



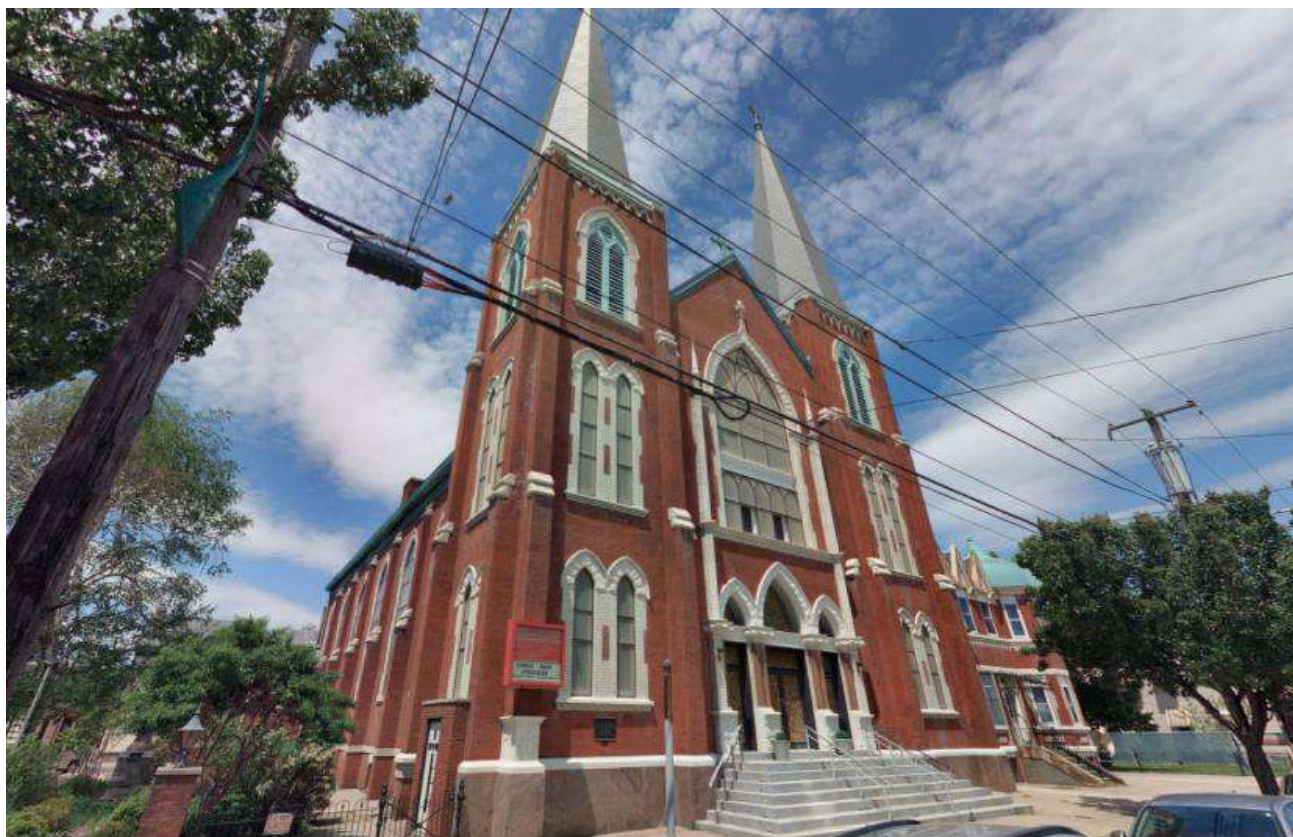
*Front elevation, May 2020. Source: CycloMedia*



## Staff-Supplemented Photographs



*Front elevation with attached building on separate parcel (not included in proposed designation), May 2020. Source: CycloMedia*



*Front and side elevations, May 2020. Source: CycloMedia*



STATEMENT of SIGNIFICANCE:

St. John Cantius Roman Catholic Church is alone as far as interest in historical designations for the Bridesburg section of Philadelphia. This church building is a landmark in this isolated workingclass area which is heavily Roman Catholic from the settlements of German Catholics in the 1840s-1850s to the Poles in the 1880s who worked and lived alongside in their respective national parishes. Presently, St. John Cantius is the only Roman Catholic church here, begun as a Polish national church and absorbing members from All Saints R.C. Church, the German national which was sold to a developer.

St. John Cantius' church building is nominated based upon its "distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style" criterion (d), and in how it maintains the historical heritage of the community under criterion (j). The church building bears a design first seen at the Norman Romanesque church of St.-Etienne (1068 AD) which was "decisive"<sup>2</sup> in its influence on later Gothic architecture. St.-Etienne introduced the tripartite facade, with squared towers rising high to even higher steeples. The plan is still basilican, but the emphasis is on the facade and entry. The design has been determined by art historians to be important in the transition from the Romanesque to the Gothic.<sup>3</sup> There are a few of these designs in Philadelphia which the Commission approved on architectural grounds: Edwin F. Durang's Our Mother of Sorrows church (1867) and his St. Laurentius (1890),<sup>4</sup> the first Polish national church which was the apparent model for the St. John Cantius Church, by architect Louis (Ludvik) H. Giele.<sup>5</sup>

St. John Cantius' church's stature is a focal point in Bridesburg: its historical value cannot be ignored in how migrating

<sup>2</sup> Zarnecki, Geo., Art of the Medieval World. NY: Abrams, 1976, p. 293.

<sup>3</sup> Janson, H.W., History of Art. NY: Abrams, 1977, pp. 265-267.

<sup>4</sup> Tatman, S. & Moss, R., Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects. Boston: Hall, 1985, pp. 230-231.

<sup>5</sup> "Polish Catholic Historical Book." St. John Cantius parish history. 1892-1917. (unpaginated.) Catholic Historical Research Center.

Poles from southern Poland, the German and Austrian Polish groups, settled near the Germans in this area where the Delaware River, railroad and the industries aided by these forms of transportation gave reasons for families to stay in the city. When Russian Poles later migrated here, St. John Cantius' parish increased and the traditions and customs of Poland were renewed and would continue to be revived with developments in Poland through Communism, the Solidarity movement and independence to join NATO. As far as the local impact, residents of Bridesburg are mostly Catholic and are part of many Philadelphia institutions, such as the Mummers, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, "Polonia" and "Polish American"<sup>6</sup> groups, and live in a 1950s-style family-friendly community away from the problems experienced closer to City Hall or in depressed areas.

There are many contemporary churches to compare with St. John Cantius which have already been designated, and they have served communities in the past, now gone. At Bridesburg, the nominated church is in the middle of this "village" where homes and activities revolve around it and include it. St. John Cantius Roman Catholic Polish national church has long deserved to attain recognition by the Historical Commission.

Celeste A. Morello, MS, MA

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<sup>6</sup> There is an impressive list of Polish organizations, "Polish" businesses (including Polonia Bank), The Polish American Museum and many others just in Philadelphia which are active and thriving.

St. John Cantius' church building...

- (d) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style--the Gothic.

One's initial response to St. John Cantius' design is that it is unmistakably "Gothic" but not all Gothic churches have these sturdy, stacked towers at the facade holding very high hexagonal steeples--two of them symmetrically set. The Gothic Style has a written record of its origins to the Abbey Church of St.-Denis<sup>7</sup> outside of Paris, France. The "author" and architect of this record is the infamous Abbott Suger who bent a rounded arch used in the Romanesque to form a pointed arch, forcing any weight downward. Suger applied this type of arch at the choir of St.-Denis while the abbey's exterior retained its Romanesque design. (Refer to page 12) St.-Denis dated from c. 1135 A.D. and closely resembles the Abbey church of St.-Etienne (1068 A.D.) a Norman Romanesque design. (Refer to next page.) (Art historian HW Janson asserted the notion that Suger had an architect "of Norman background as the chief architect" of St.-Denis, transferring the Norman tradition southward to St.-Denis.)<sup>8</sup> Norman architecture "became one of the most impressive and inventive of Romanesque styles," wrote Zarnecki, adding that its "influence on Gothic architecture was decisive."<sup>9</sup>

This grand style of architecture was also very "Roman Catholic." In the 1000s, the Normans were the papacy's loyal military, invading England, southern Italy and Sicily--all areas that were threatened by the spread of non-Christian (pagan and Muslim) religions. Wherever the Normans enforced Roman Catholicism, they built these churches in their style of architecture, from which the Gothic adapted in the organization of the structure, in engineering feats and in large-scale with height--all to "speak" for the Church.

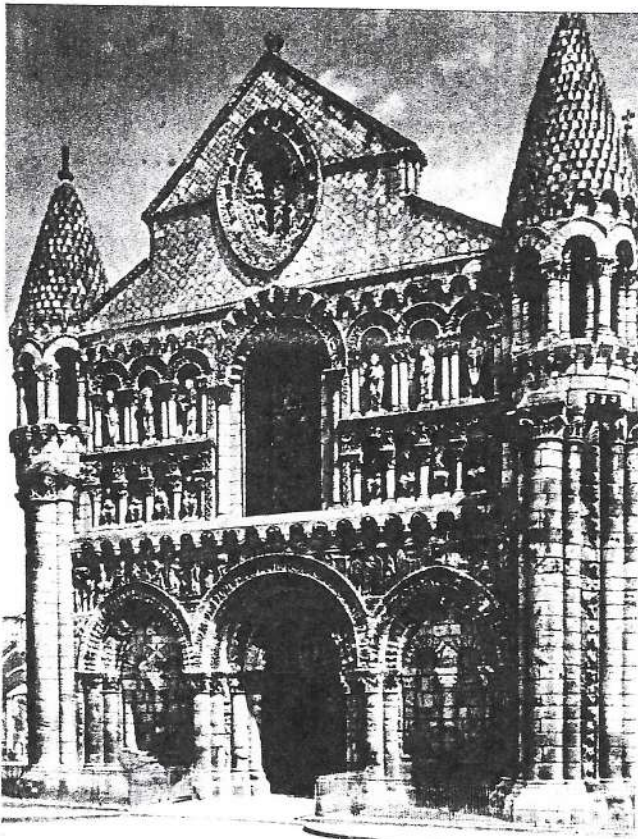
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<sup>7</sup>Zarnecki cited Panofsky, (Ed. and Trans.), Abbot Suger: On the Abbey Church of St. Denis and Its Art Treasures. Princeton, 1946.

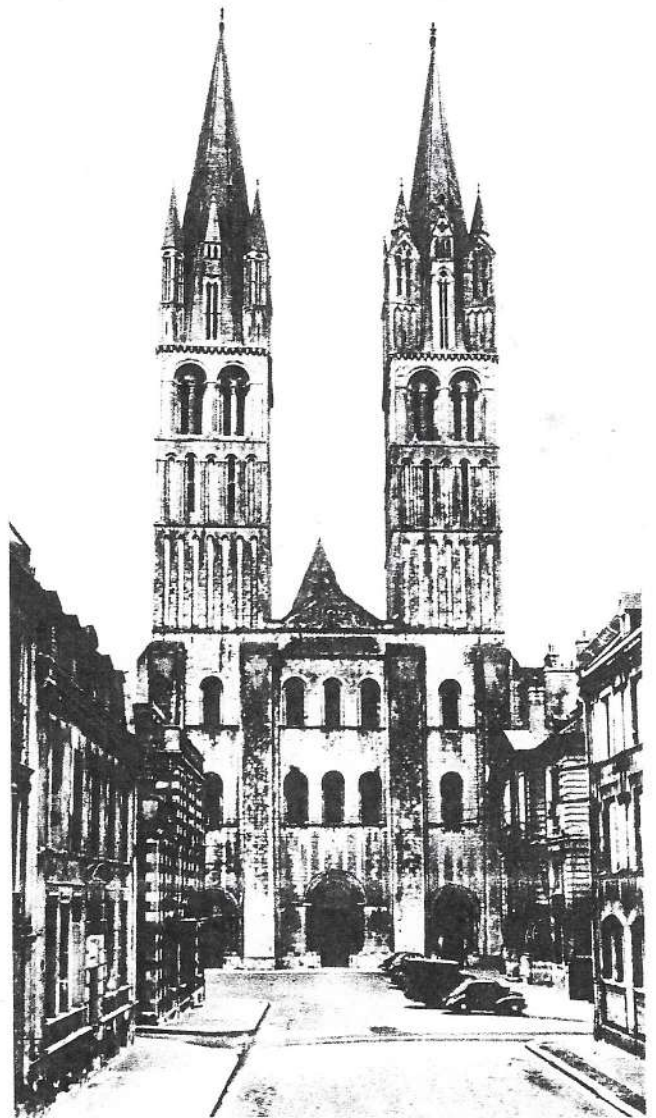
<sup>8</sup>Janson, op.cit., p. 286.

<sup>9</sup>Zarnecki, 293.

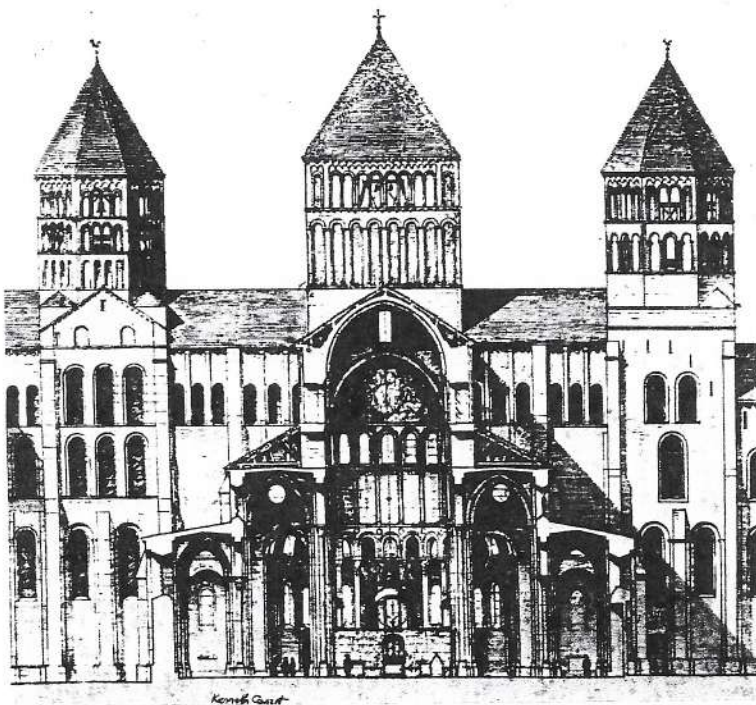




353. West Façade, Notre-Dame-la-Grande, Poitiers.  
Early 12th century



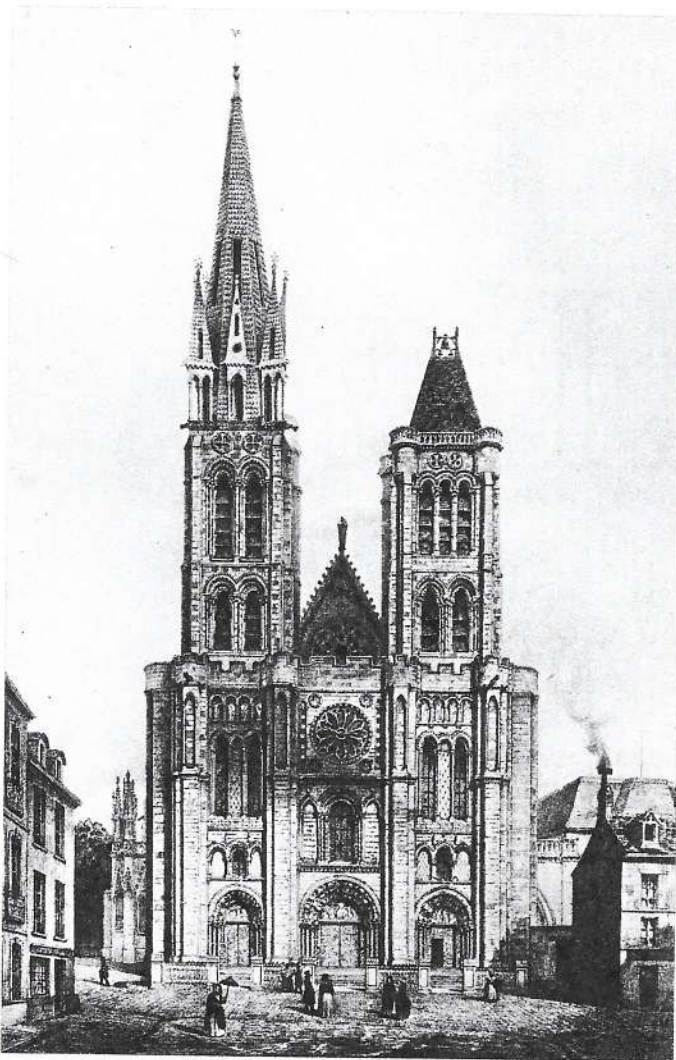
354. West Façade, St.-Etienne, Caen. Begun c. 1068



Regional variations of the  
Romanesque in France:  
(top left) in Brittany;  
(left) Cluny III in Burgundy.  
(top): Normandy.

The great height and organiza-  
tion of design at St.-Etienne  
demonstrates why it was adapted  
in part with the Gothic.

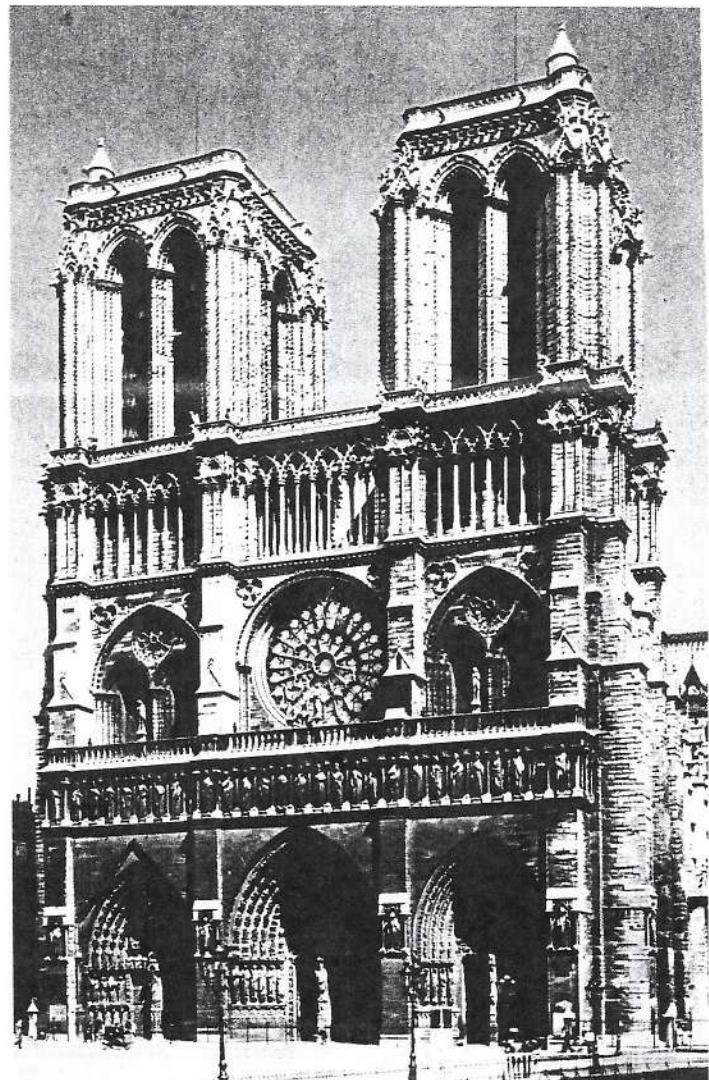




At left is St.-Denis (1135), Norman Romanesque on the exterior, but with the origins of the Gothic inside with the pointed arch at the choir tried by Abbott Suger.

The Gothic Style began here, with other new decorative elements, such as stained glass for a celestial experience within the intimidating sanctuary.

Notre Dame de Paris (right) is one of the best known Gothic Cathedrals. Constructed not long after St.-Denis, the pointed arches are everywhere in the structured facade and elsewhere. The Gothic elements that are basic, are also at St. John Cantius church in Bridesburg.



ARCHDIOCESAN EXAMPLES of ST.-ETIENNE'S DESIGN:

Generally, when the Gothic Revival emerged in the 19th century, not all "Catholic" architectural conventions were used when both Protestant, then the Catholics re-adapted this style. Architectural historians refer to a rejected Gothic design for the Catholic cathedral in Baltimore in 1805 over a Neoclassical. The Protestant church of the Trinity (1839-1846) in New York City by Richard Upjohn led the nation's architects to re-think the Gothic for churches of all denominations. Philadelphia's Catholics had simple Gothics, like St. Paul's on Christian Street, a "Sloan-like" plan from 1843, by John Carver, and the two Society Hill churches, Old St. Mary's and Old St. Joseph's.<sup>10</sup> But, Edwin F. Durang experimented more with traditional Roman Catholic architectural styles (i.e., the Romanesque, Gothic and Baroque) when he worked under Archbishop Patrick Ryan from the 1880s to the next century. Durang employed the double steeple rising from the facade as seen at St.-Etienne at Our Mother of Sorrows(1867) then at the Church of St. Thomas of Villanova, on the university's campus(1883). (Refer to next page.)

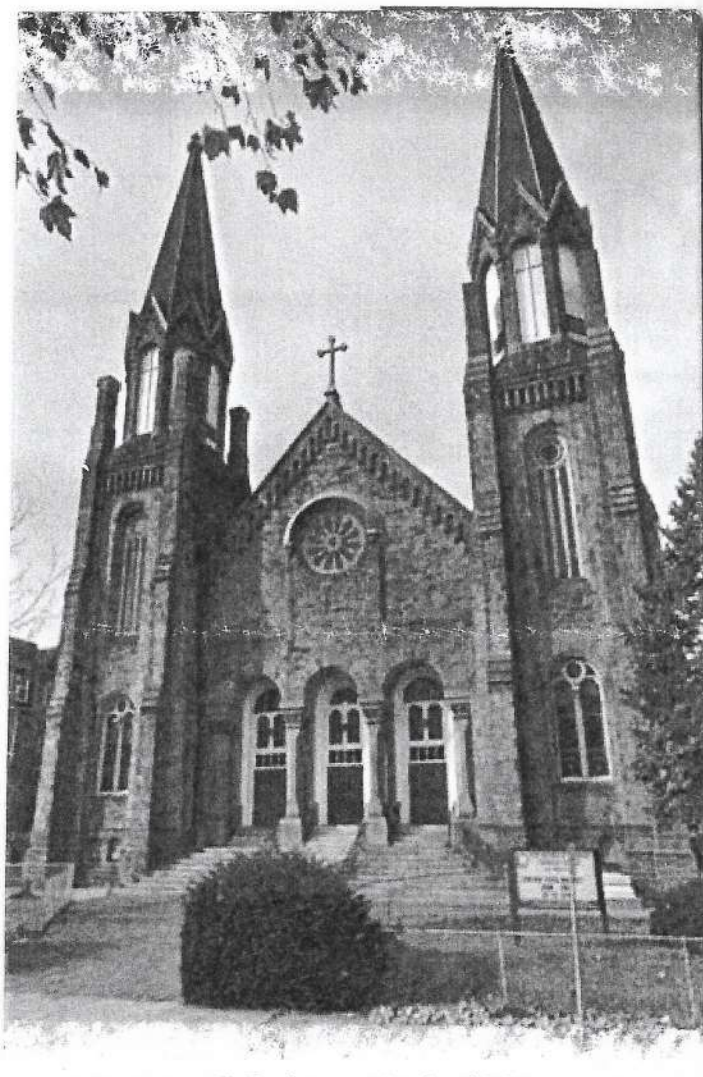
Durang's design for the city's first Polish national parish, St. Laurentius (St. Lawrence) in Fishtown is a well-thought plan reminding the Polish of their homeland's reliance on the German culture. Supposedly begun in "1890," St. Laurentius' design would be duplicated by Polish American architect Louis (Ludvik) H. Giele of New York in his two Polish national churches of St. John Cantius (c.1897 plan) and St. Adalbert's in Port Richmond (c.1904).<sup>11</sup> In fact, Giele's churches seem like outlines of Durang's St. Laurentius church, in a uniform, unified design--all Gothic.

<sup>10</sup> A "rare old lithograph by Kennedy and Lucas from a drawing by W. L. Breton" dated "ca. 1830" from the American Catholic Historical Society shows a Gothic facade at Old St. Mary's. See Kurjack, Dennis, "St. Joseph's and St. Mary's Churches," in *Historic Philadelphia*, Vol.43, Part 1, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, 1953, page 207. Old St. Joseph's dates from late 1830s.

<sup>11</sup> Giele was identified as the architect in the "Polish Catholic Historical Book" for both churches.



Ecclesiastical architect Edwin F. Durang brought his interpretations of the symmetrical towers-with-steeples begun at St.-Etienne first with the West Philadelphia Church of Our Mother of Sorrows (below) and then with St. Thomas of Villanova (1883) in Villanova on the campus. His next use of this style was at St. Laurentius in Fishtown in 1890, establishing the first of three Polish national churches of this design in Philadelphia. (The last was St. Adalbert's Church by LH Giele, St. John Cantius' architect.)



Our Mother of Sorrows  
(1867)

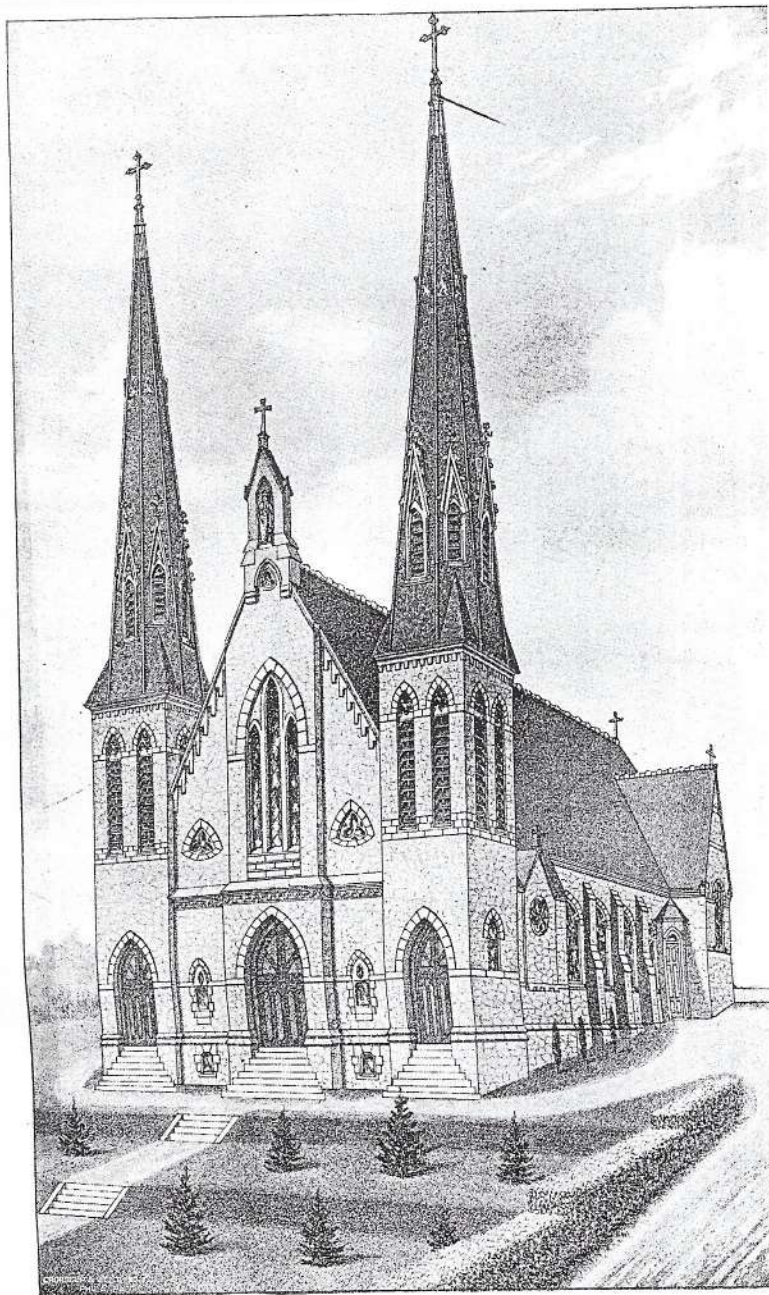


PLATE XIII.-CHURCH OF ST. THOMAS OF VILLANOVA, from the south.

# THE POLISH CULTURAL RELIANCE UPON GERMAN-BASED ARCHITECTURE:

Architect Durang seemed aware of Polish history and Polish architectural adaptations from German influences. It suited the Bridesburg Poles from the southwestern part of present-day Poland who were distinguished as "German Poles" and "Austrian Poles," in the "Polish Catholic Historical Book." This fact would qualify St. John Cantius church under criterion (j): "Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community."

The history of Poland began with its conversion to Roman Catholicism in 966 AD, a rather late time and one in which the people apparently had not been affected by the Eastern Church's differences which would cause a schism in the next century. Holy Roman Emperor Otto (reigned 936-973) extended the Empire for the pope and spread of Roman Catholicism eastward, to include Poland.<sup>12</sup> Churches then, would be constructed under German architects familiar with "Catholic" architectural standards. Art historian Janson noted that the Gothic style which abounded in the mid-12th century in Europe, had reached and was accepted in Germany "more slowly."<sup>13</sup> Holy Roman Emperor Otto is credited for the style described as "Ottonian" (10th to 12th century.) It is Romanesque--using red brick, basilican plan and the rounded arch in function and ornamentation.<sup>14</sup>

Zarnecki had identified German Romanesque or "Ottonian" buildings in Poland from the "12th century,"<sup>15</sup> which provides a basis for subsequent German architectural prototypes to use in Poland. These buildings are able to track the cultural development of the Roman Catholic Church among the Poles.

<sup>12</sup> Otto the Great (912-973) was descended from the Teutonic or Saxon line of rulers in Germany. The pope crowned him "Holy Roman Emperor" in 962. Otto influenced art and architectural styles, thus, the "Ottonian" Art and Architect category.

<sup>13</sup> Janson, op.cit., pp. 302-303.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 269; Zarnecki, pp. 176; 326-327.

<sup>15</sup> Zarnecki, p.176; 326.



The German architectural trends in the late Middle Ages continued to be seen in the parts of (present-day) Poland closest to the German states. As the Romanesque or "Ottonian" phased out to the Gothic, with additional "Gothic" conventions arising, the Germans would further the impact of more "continental" architecture in Poland. Thus, the eastward spread of tracery, first seen in the French cathedrals in Rheims (1211-1260) and Ste.-Chapelle (1243-1248) would carry to Germany's Strasbourg Cathedral by about 1277.<sup>16</sup> St. John Cantius church originally had tracery in its facade to reflect this architectural adaptation from Germany.

The Bridesburg church also has a floor plan from German origins. An aerial view of St. John Cantius shows a rectangular shape with pentagonal apse which seemed as if an afterthought--easily able to be dismantled from the main church. With that in mind, the 14th century German Gothic "Hallenkirche" (hall church) is recalled. It is a rectangular plan with neither transepts nor clerestories, but a plain, uncomplicated hall-like place to convene. The Hallenkirche "type was adopted throughout central and eastern Europe"<sup>17</sup> and through St. John Cantius and St. Adalbert churches, architect Giele had brought his version to this city.

In style, St. John Cantius church is Gothic, with influences of German Gothic, which art historian Zarnecki placed in the "Late" Gothic era, just as peer Janson concurred with the style and Hallenkirche as "14th century German."<sup>18</sup> These architectural characteristics are evident in St. John Cantius church, as part of the cultural tradition of the parish's first immigrant Poles.

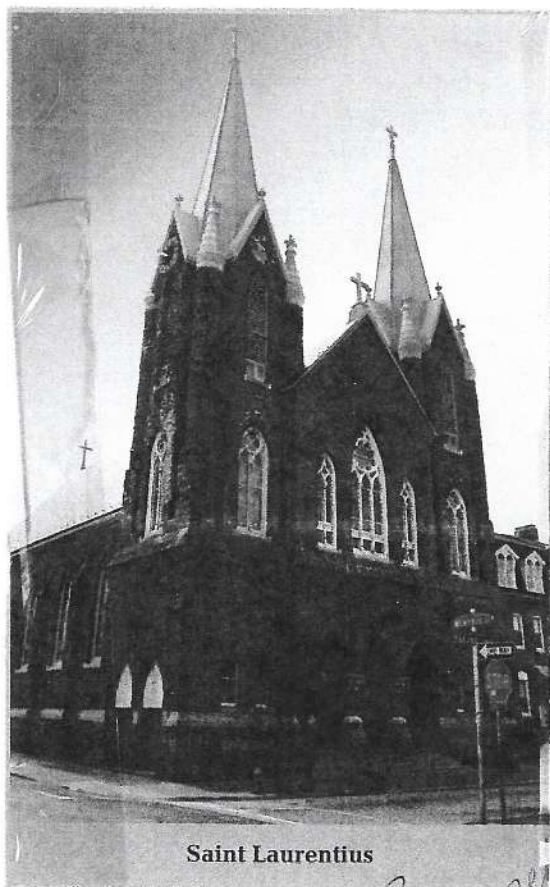
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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 389.

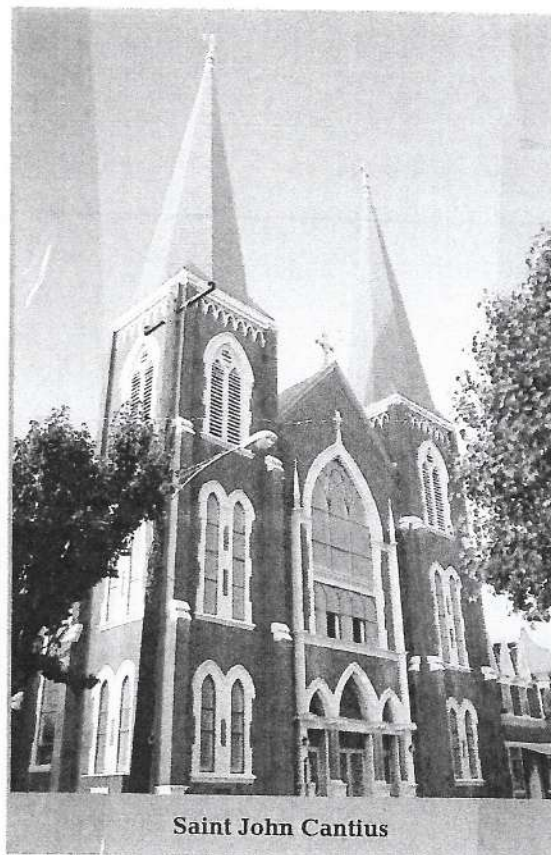
<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 418-419; Janson, p. 303.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.





Saint Laurentius



Saint John Cantius

Above are two Archdiocesan photographs, seen side-by-side, to compare architect Edwin F. Durang's St. Laurentius church (1890) to Louis H. Giele's St. John Cantius church (c.1897).

These two Polish national churches have an "outline" of their facades and plan later applied in the Polish national church of St. Adalbert in Port Richmond, dating c. 1904-1905.

## ST. JOHN CANTIUS', 1893.

LATE in the year 1893, the Polish Catholic colony in Bridesburg had become strong enough to support a church of their own, for which they were willing to make great sacrifices, St. Laurentius' being entirely too far away from them. A suitable lot having been secured at Orthodox and Thompson Streets, a frame chapel for merely temporary use was erected there, and was dedicated by Archbishop Ryan on Sunday morning, December 17, 1894. Previous to the dedication service there had been a parade of the societies attached to the various Polish congregations throughout the city, and immediately after it solemn Mass was sung by Rev. Father Januskiewicz, of St. Mary's, Reading. The sermon of the day was preached by the pastor of the new parish, Rev. Marianus Kopitkiewicz, a brother of the rector of St. Stanislaus', in this city. Several other priests were present.

A pastoral residence was also secured convenient to the church.

Archdiocesan sources provide more insights in the development of Bridesburg, such as the 1895 listing (left) and then Kirlin's 1909 mention of what drew workers to this part of the city on the Delaware River.

These sources were not reviewed by the few scholarly studies noting the Poles in Philadelphia. Clearly, St. John Cantius contributed to growth.

St. John  
Cantius's,  
1893

As the industrial works of Frankford and Bridesburg had attracted a large settlement of Polish Catholics, who were at a great distance from St. Laurentius's Church, Archbishop Ryan, in 1893, appointed the Rev. Marianus Kopytkiewicz to organize the parish. A large lot was secured at Orthodox and Thompson Streets, and a temporary frame-chapel, with a seating capacity of 400 persons, was erected, and was blessed on 17 December, 1893. Connected with it was another frame-structure, which was used as a parish school. Within five years the congregation had increased from one



St. John Cantius' church's building...

(j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

St. John Cantius' church's architectural style was discussed previously within the context of how it brought a medieval-based Germany-to-Poland tradition in building design to Philadelphia. The church's style had also indicated the geographical area where St. John Cantius' first parishioners, the German Poles and Austrian Poles, lived in Czystochowa and Cracow--in the south and west of present-day Poland. Thus, St. John Cantius' design was influenced by German cultural elements in architecture. This architecture, moreover, was because of the introduction of Roman Catholicism to Poland in the 10th century which initiated church building.

In this discussion, St. John Cantius' church's history furthers in how the Polish Bridesburg community was settled and has since hosted cyclical waves of Poles since the 1880s. Within and around this church, Polish culture is maintained. In fact, the history of St. John Cantius parish would dismiss a noted scholarly study of Philadelphia's Poles because no Archdiocesan records had been reviewed.<sup>19</sup>

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St. John Cantius Parish in Philadelphia has been a thriving community, now mainly consisting of those of Polish ancestry. It is an example of a "national parish," a concept which began in Philadelphia then adapted throughout the United States since about 1786. At that time, German-speaking Roman Catholics at (Old) St. Mary's (the Society Hill church), asked for and were denied clergy who were fluent in German. Petitioning Bishop John Carroll, St. Mary's Germans were able to found Holy Trinity parish and engage German priests in a corporation-parish, with laymen in control. German customs and traditions were retained; German was spoken.

<sup>19</sup> Golab, Caroline, "The Immigrant and the City: Poles, Italians, and Jews in Philadelphia, 1870-1920," in Davis and Haller (Eds.) The Peoples of Philadelphia.... Temple Univ. Press, 1973.

The "national parish" concept was based on language, not on political nationality or country of origin. In the 18th century, with successive wars erasing and creating new boundaries in countries, language was the unifier. Likewise, when Holy Trinity was established, German-speaking Austrians and German-speakers from other nations joined the parish and were accepted to the fold. It was also wise to designate the parishes under one language when in large countries such as Germany, variations in customs existed.

The history of Polish settlement in Philadelphia is a confusing and frustrating search of groups from a "Poland" whose boundaries fluctuated from Otto's reign in the late 900s to the late 1700s when there no longer was a "Poland." From about 1795 to 1919, no immigration or civil record lists "Poland" so the first "Poles" to come to the city--or anywhere--do not have "Poland" on their forms. This would hinder study, but for the Roman Catholic archives which have information on "Polish national parishes." Throughout Pennsylvania's Roman Catholic dioceses, (as well as in Wisconsin, Illinois and other states), Polish national parishes fill a much-needed search on Polish migration not found in civil records.

The Archdiocese of Philadelphia's "Chronology of Parish Formations" first named the Polish parish of St. Stanislaus in Lansdale, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania from "1876."<sup>20</sup> This indicates a stable group with incomes to grow a parish since the 1870s there. In Philadelphia, an unnamed "Polish Church" was reported in the 1884 History of Philadelphia as existing from at least 1882. These parishes were founded upon a common language, yet their ancestral reliance upon the Germans would show that the Philadelphia Polish Catholics gravitated near German national parishes not only in Fishtown (near St. Peter's and St. Boniface's), but in Manayunk (St. Josaphat to St. Mary's) and in Port Richmond (St. Adalbert's to Our Lady Help of Christians.)

<sup>20</sup>Records, Catholic Historical Research Center and Catholic Directory for Archdiocese of Philadelphia.



Thus, circumstantially, the city's 19th century "Poles" from Czystochowa and Cracow near the German-Austrian border would retain a linguistic tie in the city, more than a cultural one. Poles in Bridesburg from "that part of Poland under German rule" and "Galicia" a province in southern Poland, would be employed by German-born business owners or those of German ancestry in that community, such as Charles Lennig Chemical Company, which would later become Rohm and Haas, the pioneering chemical firm; "R.H. Foederer's Leather Works"; or "Fittler's Cordage Works."<sup>21</sup> The incomes earned from the Bridesburg Poles at these and other sites would pay for the land and construction of St. John Cantius church.

Strict reliance upon the Archdiocesan records would limit the study to Philadelphia's Polish Roman Catholic communities, but the scholarly writings on the subject are poorly done and inconsistent. Golab's researches for her papers were narrow and omitted the rather significant Polish national parishes in the city. Golab's thesis was that "the Polish migrant avoided Philadelphia because there was little room for him." She continued to describe the typical Polish worker as "unskilled" and unable to find work because others, including African Americans, had first obtained the jobs.<sup>22</sup> Polish repatriation was an issue in Wyman (1993),<sup>23</sup> but he referred to the American Roman Catholic and Polish Roman Catholic records--which Golab did not do. Of importance and utter relevance are the seven (7) Polish national parishes within the city of Philadelphia. The Archdiocese would not have authorized the founding of these parishes without proofs of stability and willingness to fund parish buildings, clergy and nuns' salaries and accommodations and then, schools. Archdiocesan records verified not only working parishioners, but the ability to support the Church AND a family.

<sup>21</sup> Unpaginated. "Polish Catholic Historical Book." CHRC.

<sup>22</sup> Golab, op.cit., pp.203, 219, 226.

<sup>23</sup> Wyman, Mark, Round-Trip to America. NY: Cornell Univ. Press, p.97.

The ability to sustain a parish was contingent upon a parish to be approved by the Archdiocese. But, many historians noted the positive influence of any church in a community. Warner (1996) had noted that "For all ethnic groups, churches provided an important social organization"<sup>24</sup> and national parishes in concept, had enhanced the "social" element by common communication. In the case of Bridesburg's Polish settlement, Warner drifted from Golab's and Archdiocesan sources and would find that "German workers (in Bridesburg) began benefit(sic) associations and building and loan societies, and the newly arrived Poles imitated the Germans in this respect."<sup>25</sup> Omitted from Warner's statement was that the "Poles" were Roman Catholics from St. John Cantius parish. Furthermore, if one researched Archdiocesan and Catholic histories of the foundings of parishes, labor and employment are frequently cited as the reasons for the groupings of certain foreigners who would eventually want a national parish and ably support one. (These would have been additional sources for Golab, plus the Archdiocesan newspaper.)

The Bridesburg neighborhood of majority Roman Catholics is now comparable to what was intended by the late 19th century. At St. John Cantius parish, steady employment led to the growth of families who would need a larger church, more clergy, and then nuns to teach at an elementary school. A large convent and expansive school would be erected from 1907-1908, denoting prosperity among the Poles. The 1917 parish history stated that the parish experienced "renewed emigration from that part of Poland under Russian rule," which increased after Poland became a nation in 1919. Indeed, more Polish national parishes were established within the city by that time, with industrialization rising. As Golab's editors would assert: Philadelphia was a dynamic and powerful industrial metropolis in the period from 1890 to 1940..."<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Warner, Sam Bass, *The Private City*. Univ. of Penna. Press, 1996, page 180.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Davis, A., et al. (Eds.) *Still Philadelphia*. Temple Univ. Press, 1983, p. xv, a tribute to the city's factories, products and growth from immigration.



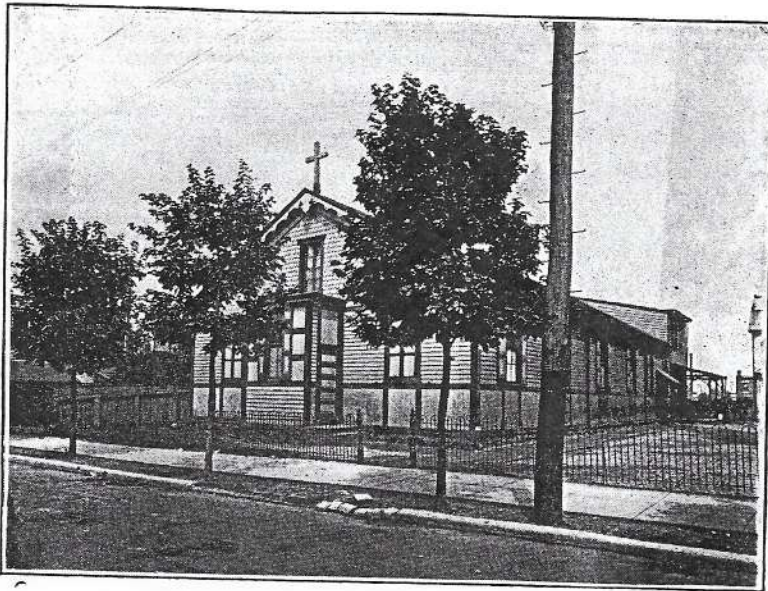
The Polish culture, somewhat more unified linguistically for the multi-ethnic Polish groups, was maintained by the Polish-speaking clergy as well as the nuns. St. Laurentius School was the first archdiocesan site where the Felician Sisters of the Order of St. Francis were stationed since 1889. Founded in Cracow, Poland in 1850, the nuns first had gone to Wisconsin, then to this archdiocese. Their work concerned Polish immigrants and educating them in their language in the United States, according to Mahoney. He added that the other Polish nuns were the Sisters of Nazareth of Ladeslas, who came to work at St. Stanislaus School in South Philadelphia by 1892.<sup>27</sup> Priests from Poland were also recruited to minister in Philadelphia's parishes. It is a fact from Archdiocesan sources that nine(9) Polish national parishes arose AFTER St. John Cantius within the archdiocese as proof that the Polish immigrants did stay and had found employment for families to subsidize parishes.

Employment in Bridesburg ensured population growth, or in the case of St. John Cantius parish, opportunities for the unskilled. Warner supports his conclusion that "By 1930 Philadelphia's Northeast had grown to enormous proportions" with findings on the development of factories, transportation and housing construction. Of how vast the Northeast is and how Bridesburg factors into this broad study, Warner looked to how that area developed and when. The location on the Delaware River -- between Frankford and Tacony to the north-- was attractive for residents and commerce.<sup>28</sup> Settled primarily and mainly by Germans since the 1850s, Bridesburg would be the likely German-Polish community and where Poles could stay and work. The Roman Catholicism within Bridesburg was a profound reason for more Poles to move or to migrate there.

<sup>27</sup> Mahoney, D., Historical Sketches of the Catholic Churches...in Philadelphia. 1895, p. 210.

<sup>28</sup> Warner, op.cit., p.178.

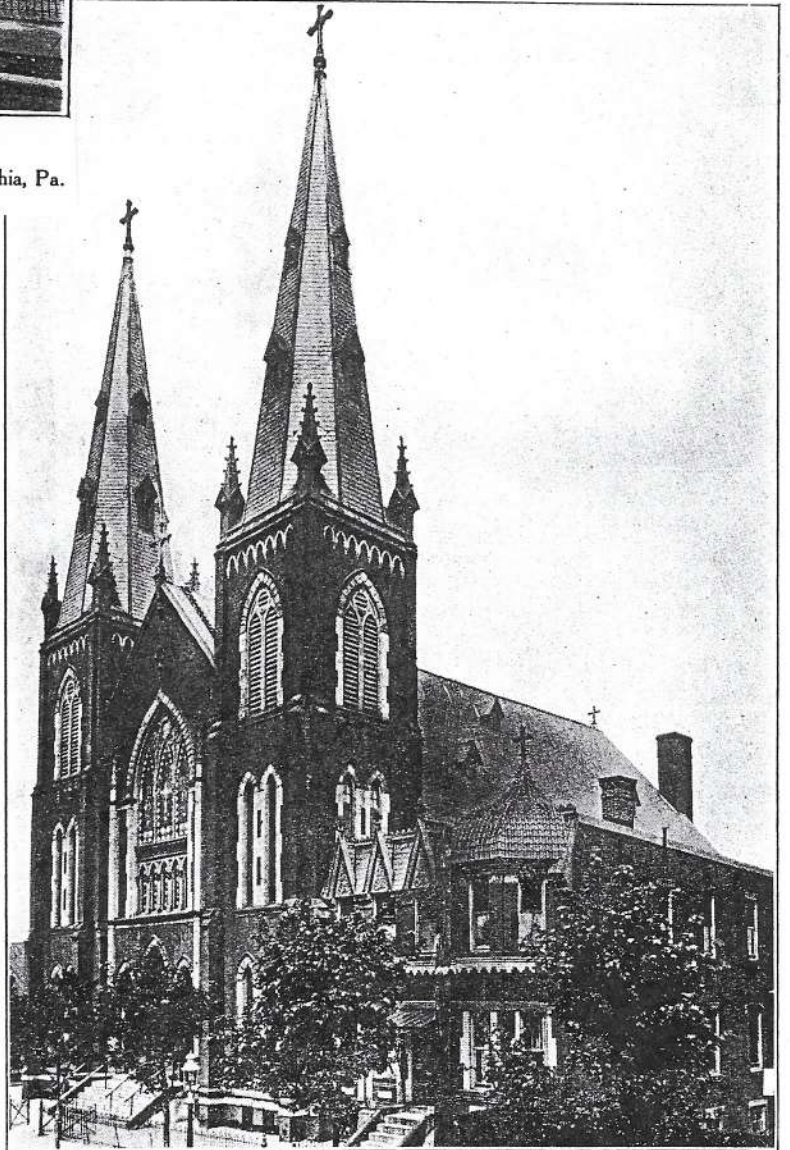
BRIDESBURG'S POLISH CATHOLIC COMMUNITY'S GROWTH THROUGH THE  
CONSTRUCTIONS of the 1st and 2nd ST. JOHN CANTIUS CHURCHES:



FRAME CHURCH OF ST. JOHN CANTIUS PARISH  
Dedicated December 17, 1893, by Patrick John Ryan, Archbishop of Philadelphia, Pa.

The first St. John Cantius church (above) still exists-- it is in excellent condition and was renamed after Our Lady of Czestochowa, the "Polish Madonna" from the southern Polish province of same name. It too functions for the Bridesburg community's use.

These photographs, with dating (from St. John Cantius' parish history of 1917), proves how Bridesburg's Polish community increased from 1893 to 1899 for residents to fund the purchase of ground, then construction of the two churches, plus "parish house" built in 1898-1899.



ST. JOHN CANTIUS CHURCH  
Dedicated May 30, 1899



## JOHN CANTIUS, ST.

Theologian; b. Kanti near Oswiecim, Poland, June 23, 1390; d. Cracow, Poland, Dec. 24, 1473. He enrolled at the University of CRACOW in 1413 and received the master's degree in liberal arts in 1417. From 1421 to 1429 he was rector of the school of the TEMPLARS at Miechów. After returning to the university, he taught in the school of philosophy, of which he was dean in 1432 and again 1437-38. In 1443 he obtained the degree of master in theology. He made a pilgrimage to JERUSALEM and journeyed several times to Rome. As the 16 extant manuscript volumes of his lectures show, he was a devoted and conscientious professor, but he became noted more for his sanctity than for the brilliance and originality of his teaching. A man of great mortification, he was also very considerate of the destitute. His biographies, mostly popular, abound with examples of his holiness and miracles, actual and legendary. Beatified in 1690, he was declared patron of Poland and Lithuania in 1737 by CLEMENT XII and canonized in 1767. He was buried in the church of St. Anne at Cracow.

Feast: Dec. 23 (formerly Oct. 20).

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[L. SIEKANIEC]

The majority of Poles who settled in Bridesburg to found St. John Cantius parish were from Galicia, southern Poland, where Krakow is located. St. John Cantius (Polish: Su. Jana Kantego) was from the same area.

He is the patron saint of Poland and Lithuania, which gives the nominated church greater importance.

(Source: New Catholic Encyclopedia, 2nd Edition, Vol.7. Published for the Catholic University of America. Farmington Hills: The Gale Group, Inc., 2003, p.943.)

The Polish culture has been symbiotic with Roman Catholicism for a long time, despite how Jews there were among the first victims of the Nazis during World War II. Church historian Hitchcock traced Polish "ethnic identity" with Catholicism to the late 1700s when Poles "resisted German Protestantism and Russian Orthodoxy" before the country was "dismembered" by foreign, neighboring countries.<sup>29</sup> Some restlessness apparently occurred by the mid-19th century when the two Orders of Catholic nuns were founded; most of Europe was in a "revolutionary" state, overthrowing monarchies. Still, as Wyman wrote, "Neither Prussia, nor Russia, nor Austria-Hungary showed concern for treatment of Poles abroad" or Poles in the European homeland which Poles fled.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, Hitchcock wrote that Polish Catholics were persecuted in the eastern part of "Poland" by "Russian rulers" while the German Poles and Austrian Poles in the west and south had arisen against the Austrian-Hungarians in order to regain a country of their own.<sup>31</sup> Economics coupled with religion, and many Poles knew to seek out Roman Catholic parishes in the United States. Wyman cited the comments of a "Polish politician" in the United States in 1921 and how "The church...saved Poles in America from assimilation; it retained their Polish consciousness" with "hundreds of Roman Catholic parishes and organizations."<sup>32</sup> St. John Cantius parish is today, one of seven(7) Polish national parishes in Philadelphia which continues the Polish heritage through its social activities, Masses said in Polish each Sunday and Holy Day, and in organizations that are a modern version of 19th century "beneficial" or "mutual aid" societies. Polish culture has been continued at St. John Cantius throughout the 20th century because of developments in Poland, from the inception of an independent nation with "religious freedom from Germany" by 1919 to "a dominantly Catholic country...in its laws and its char-

<sup>29</sup> Hitchcock, p. 303.

<sup>30</sup> Wyman, p. 97.

<sup>31</sup> Hitchcock, pp. 350;370.

<sup>32</sup> Wyman, p. 97.

itable and educational systems." This was not to last. Two million Catholic Poles were killed by the Nazis during World War II (1939-1945). "Over 160 priests perished in Auschwitz"<sup>33</sup> concentration camp. Many Catholic Poles were later canonized for martyrdom. Then after the war, the Communist Soviet Union seized all of Catholic Poland. These two wars caused considerable migrations to the United States--mainly because of Roman Catholicism. And while Poland was held by the Communists, deaths and persecutions became regular governmental actions for the next forty years. "...the Catholic faith (was) so deeply ingrained in the people" of Poland through the 1950s under Communism, then into the Solidarity movement and fall of Communism in the 1980s.<sup>34</sup> News of whatever occurred in Poland certainly affected many at St. John Cantius as the Poles knew they would be welcomed, if they chose to migrate to Philadelphia. (St. Adalbert parish also accommodated the Polish at the Port Richmond neighborhood.)

For St. John Cantius, the ethnic and religious characteristics in the Polish culture are one at the church, the focal point of Bridesburg: The church building is the landmark for that neighborhood, seen on Interstate 95 or on the Delaware River. The building is widely beloved to the Bridesburg community, especially where the first St. John Cantius church building had not been razed but maintained as "Our Lady of Czestochowa Chapel." Poland's history is in the church's architecture, its founding parishioners' ancestral origins in influencing the church's design and in how the Polish culture depends upon Roman Catholicism. Thus, St. John Cantius' church building holds a rich heritage and merits historical certification by this Commission.

Celeste A. Morello, MS, MA  
Executed in May, 2020 during quarantine.

<sup>33</sup> Hitchcock, p. 384. Auschwitz is in Poland.  
<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 513.



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