

CONCURRENT SESSIONS: 9:30

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Sacred Architecture of the Western Reserve, 1820–1920

Richard Klein

The recent re-emergence of traditional cultural and religious values in America has prompted many people to reconsider the importance of local sacred structures and to take definitive steps to protect and revitalize these landmarks. No where is this community spirit more evident than in the Western Reserve of Ohio where great strides have been made to save significant religious structures. The growing appreciation of sacred architecture is a logical outgrowth of this renewed interest. It can be traced through the evolution of religious architectural design in the Western Reserve from 1820 to 1920.

In an overview of building plans and construction materials, it is noted that interior plans often determined the overall exterior dimensions of the structure. However, certain exterior design elements seemed to transcend individual congregational needs and religious affiliation. These special design elements lend a religious quality to these buildings. Specific architectural designs equated with sacred structures over this one-hundred year period. Seven distinctive styles are presented in chronological order. Each style is analyzed by its individual architectural components using Western Reserve sacred buildings as examples.

Economic and social considerations were responsible for specific design choices. Design selections were dictated by religious affiliation, ethnic background, and historic traditions. Other factors influencing design included: architectural taste, financial considerations, and the skill of the local architect or builder. The fact that these structures are still appreciated for their aesthetic value today illustrates the commitment these individual congregations had to quality.