Sacred Spaces

Tacoma's Historic Sacred Places

Historic Tacoma
Sacred Spaces

Preserving Tacoma's Historic Sacred Places Project

Tacoma is home to a number of architecturally and culturally significant sacred places, each one a powerful presence and anchor in its neighborhood. In early 2007, Historic Tacoma initiated discussions with local congregations, all stewards of architecturally significant structures, which face challenges of declining membership and decreased revenues. For a year and a half, the group worked to craft an ecumenical approach to the preservation and rehabilitation of these buildings. In 2008, Historic Tacoma initiated a project, Preserving Tacoma's Historic Sacred Places, to identify, publicize and deliver public programs to celebrate the City's rich trove of religious architecture. The project has involved:

- A comprehensive citywide inventory of all pre-1970 religious structures, conducted by Kingstree Studios under the direction of architectural historian Caroline T. Swope, Ph.D. Inventory data has been supplied to the City of Tacoma and the Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation.
- Tacoma's Historic Sacred Places: Past, Present and Future, a lecture featuring Gerald Eysman, architect; Caroline T. Swope, Ph.D.; and Pastor Dennis Anderson, Board Member, Partners for Sacred Places, on May 28, 2009.
- An open house and tours of fifteen religious structures dating from 1873-1968 on October 25, 2009. The event celebrates Tacoma’s diverse collection of religious architecture, as well as the contributions each congregation has made to the development and vitality of the City.

Acknowledgements

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Project management by Sharon Winters, Historic Tacoma
Research conducted by: Caroline Swope, Kingstree Studios, Kelly Smith and Miles King, Historic Tacoma research interns.
Assistance provided by Kris Akres, Doris Allmer, Julie Yeager Arthur, Marilyn Beale, Jennifer Dean, Kathleen Figurski, Deb Friedman, Jess Gissell, Phyllis Gill, Tim Green, Stephanie Levine, Marshall McClintock, Karen Passe, Celene Russell, Darlene Smith, Lisa Sobeck, Pamela Sundell, Sandra Whelan, and Aaron Winston

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ARCHITECT BIOGRAPHIES
Fredrick Henry Heath
Silas E. Nelsen

Historic Tacoma is a private not-for-profit grassroots organization dedicated to preserving Tacoma's architectural legacy through education and advocacy. Historic Tacoma advocates for the thoughtful preservation and rehabilitation of historic structures, sites, and neighborhoods, while urging policy makers, developers and citizens to consider the value and unique qualities of historic structures. www.historictacoma.net

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Tacoma’s churches and temples are an amazing architectural assortment, representing a tremendous outpouring of faith, and resources in our city’s neighborhoods. From the petite and vintage St. Peter’s in Old Town, to the sprawling modern St. Charles Borromeo in the West End, Tacoma’s churches have mirrored neighborhood development, worshiping trends, and architectural styles.

Many of our religious structures no longer occupy their original sites. Expanding land values and growing congregations led to development away from the downtown business district by 1888. One notable exception to this trend was Urban Grace (First Baptist Church), which held mission driven to minister to the downtown area from its earliest existence. In 1908 the city had 120 houses of worship, with more than 20,000 members. While many of Tacoma’s original ethnic congregations have merged and changed forms over the years, their buildings have retained use by a new generation of congregations in the Hill Top neighborhood. Building designs were often based on national trends and some religious denominations even circulated pattern books with pre-drawn plans for new congregations to choose from. A number of the older congregations grew larger and expanded, following the city’s development into new neighborhoods in North and South Tacoma. By 1912 city newspapers proudly gave tremendous photo coverage to the city’s new churches, including St. Patrick’s, First Congregational, and Sure House (Swedish Mission). Each one of these buildings represented a substantial sharing of resources, both material and spiritual in the city’s neighborhoods. The buildings offered not only places for spiritual solstice, but a place for childcare, community meals, space for fairs and outreach organizations, concerts, and social events.

The building boom continued and the newspaper proudly announced that the “City’s Progress (is) Reflected in Church Construction”. Photos of new churches under construction continued to dominate the newspapers and new congregations kept pace with the city’s expansion. 6th Avenue Baptist and Epworth LeSourd Methodist were built in what was then the West End, Bethany Presbyterian and Mason Methodist in the North End, the Greek Orthodox, First Presbyterian and First Lutheran close to the downtown core. A number of our largest and most elaborate churches in the city were built during those years. Tacoma followed national trends, and the majority of these structures were Gothic Revival, with their spires reaching up towards the silver sky. Others reflected strong regional tastes, like the Center for Spiritual Living (Park Universalist Church). And a few were designed to be truly unique in the city, like Immanuel Presbyterian.

World War II brought special material and spiritual challenges to religious congregations. Youth groups had fewer men active as troops went off to war. At the same time, troops on leave from local bases needed places for social activities. The rationing of gas and shortage of tires impacted people’s ability to reach their congregations. And yet the religious centers thrived, meeting the challenges head-on. And during the post-war years, as neighborhoods expanded to the east, south, and west, new congregations required larger buildings. Many churches also left the downtown core during this time, creating challenges for congregations that remained in their historic locations. Tacoma embraced the promise of Modernism with its clean lines, undecorated surface and expressive shapes. New Jerusalem Church (Central Baptist), First Christian Church, Temple Beth El and St. Charles Borromeo are all reflective of these trends.

Tacoma’s religious buildings represent a substantial investment by the community. It can sometimes be difficult to equate numbers from a hundred years ago to current value, particularly since real estate prices have changed so much. However, if historic prices are calculated with a GDP (Gross Domestic Product) indicator to adjust for inflation and availability of labor and building supplies, the true value and investment becomes clear. The nearly $550,000 that was spent to construct First Presbyterian in 1924, would be worth more than 83 million dollars in today’s currency.

The promise of the post-war era with new development, growing family sizes, and the supreme reign of the automobile ebbed by the 1990s and many religious institutions felt a squeeze as membership numbers fell. At the national level, mainline protestant churches have had a 22% decline since 1968. At the same time needs for food and clothing banks, pre-schools, after school daycare and neighborhood meeting spaces have continued. Our religious institutions continued to shoulder the needs and at the same time have become more creative in community outreach. Some have formed parishes to share pastors and programming, and others are considering consolidations. Through all these changes, celebrations and tribulations, our sacred places have remained celebrations of the spirit.
Gothic Revival

Gothic Revival is one of a number of historical revival styles that became popular in the 19th century, both abroad and in the United States. It was a very popular style for church construction in Tacoma until the end of the 1920s. The original Gothic style developed in the late 1100s in the region surrounding Paris, France. The style, while used for a number of building types, became associated with ecclesiastical architecture, in part due to the numerous new cathedrals built during this time, and soon spread to other countries. The style, which emphasized vertical massing, masonry construction, heavily sculpted façades, and prominent use of stained glass (in ecclesiastical forms), eventually lost favor to the newly emerging Italian Renaissance style by 1500.

Interest in Gothic forms revived during the late 18th century, and continued through the late 19th century. There are a number of reasons for the style’s revival. In an era of nation building, many European countries were searching for an architectural style they could claim as their own, a native style not Roman or Italian influenced. The newly formed nation of Germany, and the much older countries of France, and England all claimed Gothic as a native architectural style. Additionally, there was a substantial aesthetic movement in Britain, started by the Pre-Raphaelites, that longed to return to the simpler and more religious lives believed to have been typical during the Gothic era. This group of artists and designers focused on the rich colors, heavily patterned forms, and abundant detail found in earlier art. Architectural critics and designers associated with the movement were uncomfortable with Neo-Classicism’s pagan origins and also rejected the mechanization and standardization of contemporary society. Gothic forms were praised for their focus on nature, the guild societies which traditionally created them, and the relationship between the workers and God. In the early 19th century Gothic Revival began to transform with grander, more detailed examples, and was increasingly used for collegiate and ecclesiastical construction. This was due in part to the significance some placed on Gothic architecture as a perfect melding between religious and creative values.
Old St. Peter's Church  
(St. Peter's Episcopal Church)  
2910 North Starr Street  
1873 Reverend Charles Bonnell, architect  
National Register of Historic Places  
Washington Heritage Register  
Tacoma Register of Historic Places

Built in Old Town, before current downtown Tacoma existed, Old St. Peter's Church is Tacoma's oldest ecclesiastical structure. The petite building with its tree-trunk bell tower was commonly known as "The Little Stump Church at Old Town." Tacoma advertised the church far and wide as having the "oldest bell tower" in the United States.

St. Peter's was established in 1873 by the Reverend B. W. Morris, bishop of Oregon and Washington Territory. By the time the first regular priest arrived in 1878, the congregation was too large for the structure and moved downtown to a rented hall until St. Luke's Episcopal was built in 1883.

Old St. Peter's adhered to the canon law of the local Episcopal diocese until 1907, although the majority of the congregation's governing board was not Episcopalian. St. Peter's became a community church after World War I. In 1977 the legal status of the church was clarified and the Episcopal Diocese ceded any legal interest in the building. The congregation maintains ties with the Anglican community and uses the 1928 Book of Common Prayer.

The building represents a sub-style of Gothic architecture classified as Carpenter Gothic which was popular from the 1840s through the 1880s. Carpenter Gothic houses and small churches were common during the 19th century. Often made from wood, these structures utilized Gothic design features such as pointed (lancet) arches, steep gabled rooflines and towers. While some Carpenter Gothic buildings sport elaborate gingerbreading, most are simple with little decoration. One of the most common design elements is board and batten siding, which Old St. Peter's showcases, along with the prominent lancet arch window in its entry.

In 1908 a concerted effort was made to preserve the building, which had been decaying for some time. During 1956 a second campaign was launched to restore the structure. Volunteer efforts have always been an integral part of this building's history and charm.

St. Luke's Memorial Episcopal Church  
3615 North Gove Street  
1883 Joseph Sherwin, architect  
Tacoma Register of Historic Places

In 1874 Charles Wright, a railroad magnate involved with the Northern Pacific Railroad donated the downtown property for the church, which was then located at 602 Broadway. Wright also provided $30,000 for construction of the church. Wright is a familiar name to Tacoma residents. He is responsible for substantial donations to some of the city's best known landmarks, including Annie Wright School, Charles Wright Academy, Christ Episcopal Church, the University of Puget Sound, and Wright Park. Wright's youngest daughter, Annie selected the Gothic Revival style architecture of the church.

St. Luke's served as the pro-Cathedral for the region until 1891, when St. Mark's in Seattle was given the honor. Although the Episcopal population of Tacoma was strong, St. Luke's struggled with low attendance during the 1910s and 20s. Demographic shifts caused by a rapidly expanding downtown eventually leave the church under utilized and underfunded. The building was abandoned and sits decaying during the late 1920s and early 1930s. By 1934 plans are finally made to demolish the structure and use the site for new homes.

The potential demolition of the well-known landmark galvanizedTacomans into what was perhaps the city's first preservation effort, saving St. Luke's. The Tacoma Society of Architects appealed for a halt to the demolition. The "For the Honor of Tacoma" campaign begins to raise funds to move and rebuild the church. During 1934 the building stones were carefully marked and the church was moved, one block at a time. A new building lot was located in the North End and the church was reconstructed and re-consecrated by 1947. The church was enlarged during the rebuilding, the transept removed from the original design was added and the chancel was lengthened by 18 feet.

Portland, Oregon Architect, Joseph Sherwin is responsible for the church's design. Sherwin was responsible for designing the first Pierce County Courthouse in Tacoma (1882) and the original Central School (1883). St. Luke's is modeled after an English country church. Its elaborate detailing, lancet arched windows, brackets, engaged buttresses and combination of smooth and textured stone which might seem overwhelming on a larger structure create a visually rich presence for the petite building. Wilkeson sandstone was used for the exterior.
Church of St. Patrick

1123 North J Street
1906   Frederick Heath, architect

In 1891 St. Patrick’s was established to serve the growing Catholic population of North Tacoma. The first church, a wood framed building, was located at North Starr and Tacoma Avenue. In 1905 a fire destroyed the building, requiring a new church. The congregation already owned a larger site and plans for the new building were completed a week after the wooden church burned down. Construction on the current building started in 1906. The church solicited bids for a number of different building materials (stone, concrete, and brick) before selecting Wilkeson Sandstone.

The cornerstone was laid on March 4, 1906 with great ceremony. In addition to Bishop O’Dea, a number of Catholic organizations participated in a parade to the new building site. The Ancient Order of Hibernians, Knights of Columbus, Catholic Order of Foresters, the St. Joseph, St. Aloysius, Slavonian, Austrian and Italian societies were all represented. The church was completed the following year with construction costs estimated at $52,646. The first services in the new church were held on Christmas Day of 1906. Period newspaper accounts marveled at the quick decision and speed in which the new church was built, writing, “It is easier to do a big thing than a little one.”

The church was designed to seat 800 in the sanctuary, with the auditorium serving 1,000. The pews are quarter-sawn oak, manufactured and finished by John T. Hickey, a devoted parishioner. Stained glass windows were manufactured from English crystal cut glass. The altar and Stations of the Cross are marble. Several period newspaper articles marveled that this addition to Tacoma’s ecclesiastical architecture was second only to Seattle’s cathedral in its interior furnishing. The church underwent a major $1.8 million restoration project in 2005, which included a full immersion baptismal font, new wood oak flooring, rewiring, and seismic upgrades.

For the week in January of 1923 the church launched a radio broadcasting station, KFDD. The station operated from 8-9:15 in the evening for a full week, transmitting mission services to non-Catholics. The project was operated by two Paulist missionaries. This missionary broadcast was made possible by First Presbyterian Church giving up its usual radio broadcasting time on its station, KFBG.

First Congregational Church

209 South J Street
1907   George Wesley Ballard, architect

In 1873 Congregational members first held tent gatherings in Old Town. The church was organized in 1874 when Tacoma was a camp in the wilderness. Encouraged by the support of Frederick Billings, president of Northern Pacific Railroad, the congregation constructed a church on St. Helens Avenue in 1882. Membership quickly grew, and by 1906 the church was making plans for a larger structure. Early newspaper illustrations show a building with far more ornate Gothic detailing than the structure that was actually built. These plans showcased not one, but two towers, each with a steeple. It is likely that the 1907 economic recession impacted design plans, for construction on the building stopped for a period of time. The church was finally dedicated in 1909. The stained glass windows are unusual for their construction era, since they show only floral and abstract designs, and no human figures.

In 1924 the church published plans for a large addition to the south; one that would accommodate a new sanctuary. Plans for this addition were listed as simply a possibility, and never materialized. However, a growing number of youth in the church did prompt the need for a large educational addition, which was constructed in 1928. The addition housed a gymnasium and multiple stages.

Like many churches in Tacoma, First Congregational played a major role in supporting American troops during World War II. The church routinely provided 100 cots for soldiers on leave, housing more troops than any other church in the city. This was part of a larger program to entertain, keep and feed soldiers on leave. The church received a meritorious service award by the USO (United Services Organization) in 1947 for its work on behalf of American servicemen and women.
Kalevaria United Methodist Church
(Trinity Methodist Church)

601 East 35th Street
1915  Heath & Gove, architects

Trinity Methodist Church grew out of a merger between the Fowler
Methodist Church (originally at 201 East 30th) and the McKinley Park
Church (3556 East G Street). Fowler Church was organized in 1889
under Reverend B.F. Brooks. McKinley Church was a "daughter" church
of Fowler that started as a mission Sunday school and later organized as
a church.

The architectural firm of Heath & Gove drew the plans for the
building. Heath is known for designing a number of Tacoma's churches,
and often used a Gothic Revival style. While this building has the
crenellated parapet and stone accents commonly associated with
Gothic designs, the double-pitched roof and half timbering are more
English Tudor in their styling. The interior showcases a vaulted ceiling
with natural stained fir woodwork. Two memorial windows were
installed from the old Fowler Church building.

Trinity Methodist Church and the McKinley Hill Improvement Club
jointly opened the McKinley Hill Community Building at the rear of
the church in 1923. The building housed a gym with adjoining shower and
locker rooms and several spacious clubrooms.

McKinley Hill began to develop after 1904 when the Northern
Pacific Beneficiary Association Hospital was built and when streetcar
transportation was extended to southeast Tacoma. Further
development was stimulated by the Tacoma and Eastern Railroad depot
and freight facility at South 64th Street and McKinley Avenue. The line
was the major rail route to Mt. Rainier before popular use of the auto.

The Trinity congregation disbanded in late 2007. The structure
became the responsibility of the United Methodist Judicatory/Pacific
NW Conference, which worked to rehabilitate the church for
a growing Samoan congregation. Through a significant commitment
of time and labor on the part of the congregation and financial support
from the conference, rehabilitation was completed in early spring 2009.
The church was re-consecrated and dedicated as Kalevaria United
Methodist Church on March 28, 2009.

St. Joseph's Catholic Church

602 South 34th Street
1911  C. Frank Mahon, architect

The first Slovakian immigrants arrived in Tacoma in 1888.
Their numbers grew quickly to more than fifty families and in 1906 they
petitioned the local Catholic Bishop for a church where services could
be held in their native tongue. The congregation excavated the basement
and laid the foundation themselves, with many parishioners working on
the building after their regular daily duties were completed. Although
construction costs for the structure are uncertain (accounts list costs
varying from $10,000 to $25,000) the solidly built church would have
represented a substantial investment by its parishioners. On May 19,
1912 the church was officially dedicated with a number of festivities,
including a parade to the new building. Period newspaper accounts
describe the Gothic styled church as "strictly modern," with an
auditorium large enough to seat 500. The stained glass windows
were purchased in 1935 for the church's Silver Jubilee.

St. Joseph's is an excellent example of the Gothic Revival style.
The petite structure carefully utilizes the most essential elements
of the style to convey solidity, respectability, and tradition. The lancet
arched windows and doors, brick corbelling, set-back steeple and
crenellations are all trademark Gothic details. The building is carefully
proportioned with minimal detailing that might overwhelm the structure.

The church continued to hold services in Slovak through the 1930s
and was one of only a handful of Catholic Churches in the United States
to do so. Even when services were no longer regularly held in the Slovak
language, the diocese accommodated the ethnic origins of the
congregation when possible. In 1970, native Czechoslovakian Reverend
Michael Lucas was installed as priest for the congregation. Lucas had
taught school and served as a chaplain in the army before escaping his
homeland when it fell to Communist rule. He arrived in the United
States in 1951 and served as an assistant at St James Cathedral in
Seattle before transferring to St Joseph's. He remained at St Joseph's
until 1983.
Holy Rosary Catholic Church
512 South 30th Street
1920 Lundberg & Mahon, architects
Tacoma Register of Historic Places

Holy Rosary was formed in 1891 by German Catholics. Building lots were purchased at the current site and a small wood church was used for services. A parochial school was started in 1892. In 1912, congregational growth necessitated a new church. The old wooden church was closed and services were held for nine years in the school auditorium. The current church was dedicated in 1921.

The stained glass windows are thought to have been made in Belgium. But contemporary newspapers were far less interested in the furnishings of the church than in the heating system. Reporters wrote prolifically about the unusual choice of electric heat for the new sanctuary. The church was the largest building in Tacoma heated by electricity at this time and several reports indicated that this was the first time a church on the West coast had used electricity for heat.

Holy Rosary dominates the skyline of Tacoma and is a landmark structure that can easily be seen from the interstate highway. The tower is more than 200 feet high and was originally topped by a gold leaf and glass cross. The cross, lost in the 1965 earthquake, was replaced by a large aluminum one manufactured by students at Tacoma Vocational and Technical Institute in 1966.

Urban Grace
(First Baptist Church)
902 Market Street
1923 Heath, Gove & Bell, architects

First Baptist Church incorporated with ten members on March 28, 1883. The Tacoma Land Company donated the original two lots to the congregation. A year later, on March 16, 1884, the first building was dedicated on the current site. The young congregation grew quickly, and by 1891 made plans for a greatly enlarged church. Construction on the “new” building began in 1892.

By 1921 First Baptist had again outgrown their building. The congregation started a capital fundraising campaign for a newer, larger home. The architectural firm of Heath, Gove, and Bell was contracted to design the structure. While original newspaper images show a large, ornate Greek Revival building, the finalized design was a subdued Gothic Revival styled structure. The original edifice was designed with glazed terracotta facing, a more inexpensive building material than the cut stone typically used for Gothic Revival structures. However, early in the construction process Robert Walker, owner of the Walker Cut Stone Company, made arrangements for the purchase of cut stone below market rates.

The current structure has an auditorium which seats 1,250 and a banquet hall with a stage. The building was never intended to serve only as a religious space; it was designed to accommodate a variety of activities to better serve the community. One of the main differences between First Baptist Church and a traditional church is the seating in the sanctuary, which has Opera chairs and not pews.

The question of whether or not First Baptist would remain in downtown Tacoma has been addressed several times in the church’s history. Before construction of the current building, questions arose regarding relocation to a residential area that would be more convenient for the congregation’s members. The decision was made to build in their current location because the outreach mission of the church was considered equally important as internal congregational needs. The most recent manifestation of this calling occurred on April 3, 2005 when the congregation of First Baptist voted to allow a new congregation to form, Urban Grace. This was not merely a name change, but a heroic effort to continue their mission of 122 years by becoming an interdenominational church. The new congregation firmly states that the building is a “community landmark, where people of all backgrounds and traditions are welcome...where the community comes together to celebrate as well as to address common challenges..."
Sixth Avenue Baptist Church

2520 Sixth Avenue
1925  Heath, Gove & Bell, architects

The Sixth Avenue Baptist congregation built their first church at this site in 1902. The congregation’s growing numbers necessitated a new structure and by the early 1920s plans were being made for a new, larger church, on the same site. The church moved its original wood framed building to the rear of the lot for use as a community center in the “West End” as this neighborhood was once known. The church considered this site an “ideal” location, in the heart of a newly growing business district.

Plans for the new church were drawn up by Heath, Gove, & Bell, the Tacoma architectural firm known for many of the Gothic Revival buildings in town. Robert Walker, a member of the church, and president of the Walker Cut Stone Company donated Wilkeson sandstone for the exterior. In 1928 a survey of Tacoma buildings conducted by the American Institute of Architects gave the building an honorable mention for design. Plans were drawn up for a Sunday school wing at this time, but the addition wasn’t built until the 1960s. By then architectural fashions had changed considerably, and the education wing is modern in its styling. The tall vertical stone piers are a concession to the materials and the massing of the older Gothic Revival structure, blending the new and the old styles.

The church launched a popular “Phone-a-Lift” Program in 1956. Through this program people could dial an automatic answering service that gave a one-minute inspirational message. The program ran 24 hours a day, with a new message recorded by the church’s pastor each evening. The program was a huge success, and on one day alone more than 6,000 phone calls were made to the church. The church installed a second phone system to keep up with the demand.

The congregation placed the building on the market in January of 2009. Historic Tacoma and the 6th Avenue Merchant’s Association are currently working to find a preservation-minded buyer.

Epworth-LeSourd United Methodist Church

710 Anderson Street
1926  George Wesley Bullard, architect

The first Epworth Methodist Church (named after Epworth, England, birthplace of Methodist founder John Wesley) was a wood framed building, located at 1104-06 South Pine Street. Built in 1889, the church was started by the Epworth League for First United Methodist. In 1902 the congregation moved to its current site, and constructed a wooden building designed by the architectural firm of Proctor & Ferrell. The congregation quickly outgrew this building, and in 1925 plans were made for a new church at the same site.

The cornerstone was laid in May of 1925, with a time capsule containing church records and daily newspapers. The new building covered half the block and included a sanctuary that seated 450, classrooms, a gymnasium and a number of social rooms. The interior has oak detailing and several large stained glass windows manufactured by the famed Povey Brothers Art and Stained Glassworks of Portland, Oregon that illuminate the interior. During the 1980s an all-volunteer effort was started to restore the original windows, which illuminate the sanctuary with their amber glow. The congregation, unable to raise the $50,000 needed for professional window restoration, worked until 1993, painstakingly removing each window, cleaning it, and making the necessary repairs.

Only the first phase of the building was constructed. The second phase included a church school that was never built. Newspaper accounts vary widely in how much the current church cost (between $60,000 and $150,000) but it appears that the church, as built, cost about $90,000, which included interior furnishings. Almost 10% of the budget covered the cost of the organ. Most of the cost was paid for with cash, but the church did take out a mortgage of about $25,000. The mortgage was paid off in 1945, an impressive feat for the congregation which faithfully raised funds through the Great Depression and then the war years.

The church’s current name, Epworth-LeSourd United Methodist stems from the merging of Epworth Methodist with the LeSourd congregation in 1970. The LeSourd congregation (named in honor of Reverend LeSourd, founding pastor of the Epworth Church) was a satellite church founded by members of Epworth in 1907.
First Evangelical Lutheran Church

534 South 1 Street
1926 Heath, Gove & Bell, architects

First Lutheran was organized in 1882 by Pastor Peter Carlson. Pastor Carson was sent from the Augustana Synod in Minnesota with the express purpose of establishing Swedish congregations on the west coast. The Tacoma Land Company donated the original lots for the first church (located on Tacoma Avenue, near South 1st Street) and 1882 construction started on the wood church. By 1889 the congregation had grown beyond the capacity of their original building. With land values downtown rapidly rising, the decision was made to sell their original lots and build a larger church on the corner of South 8th and 1 streets. The new church accommodated 500 worshipers.

In 1924 a fire destroyed the second church and the congregation decided once again to move. While published reports don’t list a precise reason for the move, it is likely that rising land values near the downtown core were a factor. Work on the new building started and in 1927 the basement was finished. Services were held in the basement until the sanctuary was complete in 1929. The church attracted a crowd of 1,200 people the day it was dedicated. Several hundred people were turned away because the sanctuary couldn’t hold them all. Governor Roland H. Hatley and Tacoma Mayor M. G. Tennent gave addresses. Continued membership growth resulted in the construction of the educational wing in 1954. The addition was designed by the architectural firm of Lea, Passon & Richards.

First Lutheran started with 16 original members, 11 Swedes and 5 Norwegians. The Norwegians withdrew and organized the Norwegian Lutheran Church within a few years. By 1904 there were more than 10,000 Scandinavians living in Tacoma. First Lutheran was the first congregation of Swedish speaking people, as well as the oldest Lutheran congregation in the state. The congregation continued to expand during the early 20th century and its membership became more diversified. By 1912 half of its services were in English. One of the last vestiges of Swedish heritage was the Högmaasa Gudstjänst, the annual Swedish service. The last was held in 1979. The church continues to honor its Swedish roots with a Lucia festival in mid-December of each year.

Frederick Heath was responsible for a number of significant buildings in Tacoma at the start of the twentieth century, completing more than 600 projects. His design work was far reaching and varied from private residences, commercial buildings, and fraternal lodges, to churches, hospitals and school buildings.

Frederick Henry Heath was born April 15, 1861, in LaCrosse, Wisconsin. As a child his family moved to Caledonia, Minnesota. After high school Heath moved to Minneapolis and worked for a newspaper. Unhappy with his choice of professions, Heath decided to work in the construction industry instead. He eventually secured a position with Warren H. Hayes, a local architect. Heath spent twelve years in Hayes’ employment, ten of which he served as chief draftsman. Heath moved to Tacoma in the late 1890s, searching for a climate more suitable for his wife’s health. By 1896 he opened his own architectural office and in 1901 he became principal in the firm of Spaulding, Russell & Heath. After the departure of Spaulding in 1901, the firm became Russell & Heath, but by 1903 Heath had decided to work on his own again. During this time Heath was appointed as architect for the Tacoma School District. While Heath worked individually for most of his later career, he did form the short-lived firm of Heath & Twichell from 1908 to 1910.

Luder Twichell was a former colleague who had worked with Heath under Warren Hayes in Minneapolis. Heath formed partnerships with George Gove from 1902 until the 1920s. Heath & Gove hired Tacoma native Herbert Bell to work with them, creating the firm of Heath, Gove & Bell in the mid-1920s. Heath continued to work until the time of his death in 1953, at the age of 91 years.

Frederick Heath Designed Churches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church Name</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St. Patrick’s Catholic Church</td>
<td>1123 North J Street</td>
<td>1906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish Mission Tabernacle</td>
<td>922-24 South I Street</td>
<td>1909</td>
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<td>Mason Methodist Church</td>
<td>4008 North 28th Street</td>
<td>1910</td>
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<td>First Church of Christ, Scientist</td>
<td>902 Division Avenue</td>
<td>1911</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trinity Methodist Church</td>
<td>601 East 35th Street</td>
<td>1915</td>
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<td>Bethany PresbyterianChurch</td>
<td>4420 North 41st Street</td>
<td>1924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Ann’s Catholic Church</td>
<td>7047 South Park Avenue</td>
<td>1924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Baptist Church</td>
<td>902 Market Street</td>
<td>1925</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sixth Avenue Baptist Church</td>
<td>2520 Sixth Avenue</td>
<td>1925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Evangelical Lutheran Church</td>
<td>524 South 1 Street</td>
<td>1926</td>
</tr>
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The term vernacular is a Latin derivative meaning “native, indigenous.” It is often used to describe speech patterns and dialects, but architectural historians use it to describe common building forms, or folk architecture as well. Many vernacular buildings are those built by pattern books that were passed from builder to builder. These structures, often feature simple forms. Some may have distinct architectural styles, but are still considered “folk” architecture. There is no real time period for the vernacular style. It is among the earliest architectural forms, pre-dates architects, and is still being constructed today. Many vernacular buildings have heavy influence from the congregation that built them. Some denominations had stock pattern books that congregations were able to view and purchase plans from. In Tacoma, the majority of vernacular churches were constructed from wood, and many have since been sided. A number of them may have even had their original windows replaced. This can make them more difficult to spot, but nonetheless, their presence in the individual neighborhoods that define Tacoma is unmistakable.

Some vernacular buildings combine folk traditions with common architectural styles. St. Rita of Cascia is an example of this use where memories of Mediterranean architecture were mixed with common building forms in the United States. Other forms of vernacular style, particularly for churches, are very simple wooden churches, with few design details to indicate style. Buildings that showcase this were often small neighborhood structures, and when used by churches often followed a base-level plan; small rectangular plan, steeply pitched front gable, slender bell tower with a steeple either centered or to one side of the entrance. The windows might have lancet arches, reminiscent of the Gothic style, but sometimes windows were simple rectangular units, common stock for builders at that time. Peace Lutheran, while it has a few faint Craftsman influences with its knee brackets under the front eaves, has an unusual and likely custom steeple combined with simple stained glass windows. The combination of these features makes this building a vernacular, or “folk” structure. The Tacoma Buddhist Church also defies typical building styles, yet has elements of native Japanese culture visible in its upturned tile roof.
St. Paul’s Methodist Church

1201 South 43rd Street
1905 Architect Unknown

St. Paul’s was organized in 1890 as a tent church at South 40th and L streets, at the site near the current Whitman School. The congregation was well received in an area that was witnessing rapid growth. Once the school board purchased the Whitman site and began clearing it, there was concern that one of the large evergreen trees might fall on the tent. The school board agreed and ordered that clearing work should continue at a safe distance from the church. However, the distances were underestimated and a tree was felled quite close to the church. Fortunately, it glanced off another tree on the way down, and there were no injuries. This scare convinced the congregation that they needed a more permanent structure, and in 1891 a vernacular wood church was built at the current location. This building served the congregation well until membership expanded beyond the building’s capacity. The present church, also vernacular in most of its forms, was built in 1905. Period newspapers described it as a “substantial modern” structure. In 1964 an education wing replaced the previous parsonage.

In 1938 the church started an interior remodeling project called “Toward the Temple Beautiful.” This project helped refurbish the then 33 year old structure with more modern amenities and stained glass windows. The three main windows were stock design. These reproductions by well-known artists included William Holman Hunt’s 1851 image “Light of the World;” Heinrich Hoffmann’s 1887 image “Come Unto Me;” and Bernard Plockhorst’s (mid-1800s) “The Good Shepherd.” These images were well known religious works in the late 19th and early 20th century and were prized additions to the neighborhood church.

St. Paul Lutheran Church

2553 Tacoma Avenue South
1910 Paul Bergfeld, architect

Although the current building was constructed in 1910, the congregation’s origins date to 1884. Originally known by the name of “Evangelische Luthersche St. Paulus Kirche,” St. Paul served the city’s German population, which was heavily involved with Tacoma’s brewery district. Many of the church’s members worked for the Columbia Brewing Company or the Pacific Brewing and Malting Company. The Columbia Brewing Company was established by German immigrant Emil Kleise in 1900. The company produced alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, including a local favorite, Alt Heidelberg Ginger Ale. In 1949 the company changed its name to the Heidelberg Brewing Company. The company’s original building complex, located at 2120 South C Street, was constructed in 1900, and designed by well-known Tacoma architect, Charles Darmer, also of German origin.

An older frame building, which housed the first church, was removed to make room for the current structure. Contemporary newspapers struggled to give the new church a stylistic tag, with some calling the structure “Romanesque,” and others referring to it as “Roman.” The tower crenellations are Gothic in styling, while the rounded windows are indeed more Romanesque. However, the exposed brackets on the eaves and the front door entry (a later addition) are Craftsmen in their styling. The church, with its simple gabled roof, centered tower, and minimal, yet eclectic, historical detailing, is a form that is typical of American churches, and called Ecclesiastical Eclectic by some. Interestingly, the base form of the front gabled building, rose window, and centered tower, is identical to the congregation’s prior wooden church. Other than building material, the main stylistic differences between the first church and the current building are the rectangular windows and steeple topped tower of the original structure. Some forms are timeless.

The interior of the church is particularly noteworthy for its vintage altar and its Povey stained glass windows. The ivory-hued, Gothic styled altar is believed to predate the building. Its exact origin is unknown, but church lore suggests it may be from St. Martin’s Lutheran Church of Winona, Minnesota. The oak pulpit was purchased in 1910 from West End Manufacturing Company in Tacoma. True to Lutheran worship philosophy, which historically has placed more emphasis on sermons rather than ritual, the pulpit was shortened so the congregation could more easily view the pastor.
Peace Lutheran Church
2102 South Cushman Avenue
1918  Architect Unknown

Peace Lutheran Church erected the current building in 1918, replacing an earlier building. The structure showcases the most basic ecclesiastical lines with a few period touches. The knee brackets on the front under the verge board and the exposed rafter tails are Craftsman details. The tower steeple has an unusual zigzag form that is unique in Tacoma. Period newspapers reported construction costs at $6,000 for this structure. Using the relative share of the GDP to calculate in current costs, this structure would cost about $1,140,000 to construct today, clearly a sizeable community investment.

The original members of Peace Evangelical immigrated to the United States from Russia. Many of them had ancestral roots in Germany, and were invited to move from Germany to Russia by Empress Katherine I specifically to cultivate lands along the Volga. They settled in Russia in colonies or villages granted by the crown and retained their language and traditions. Around sixty families from this ethnic and religious heritage formed Peace congregation in 1909 and acquired a church previously owned by German Lutherans.

St. Peter & Paul Catholic Church
3402 Portland Avenue
1923  M. J. McMillan, architect

In 1892, the first Polish parish in Washington State was organized in Tacoma. In the early 1920s, Tacoma saw the building of two Polish Catholic churches, St. Peter and Paul at 3402 Portland Avenue, and St. Mary’s, next door at 3422 Portland Avenue. St. Peter and Paul was the “official” Roman Catholic Church. St. Mary’s (Polish Independent Church) was built at the same time by a dissident group of Roman Catholics who were protesting that Polish Catholics at that time were not allowed to become bishops or archbishops. The dispute between the two congregations was resolved in a few years and the two churches merged. The steeple of St. Mary’s was removed and the building became the Parish Hall for the new St. Peter & Paul. Originally called St. Stanislaus, the congregation is the oldest Polish Catholic church in Washington State. It was the only church in Washington with regular Polish service until St. Margaret’s (in Seattle) began offering Polish services.

This church is located in what was once a flourishing Polish neighborhood. Located near the port and the railroad, new immigrants sought familiar sounds, sights and smells at the Polish establishments in the area. A Polish lodge was originally located at 1648 South 30th Street. The Suaski Bakery was at 3010 Portland Avenue. While most outward signs of this heritage are gone, a wave of Polish immigrants to the United States in the early 1990s brought renewed vigor to the congregation. The church no longer functions as a neighborhood church, since many of its parishioners live outside of Tacoma. It serves as a center of Polish culture and tradition by maintaining a school for children.
St. Rita of Cascia Catholic Church
1401 Ainsworth Avenue
1924  Architect Unknown

During the early 1900s Tacoma's Italian population grew rapidly. Many of the immigrants were natives of Calabria, a region of southern Italy devastated by an earthquake in 1905. The immigrants settled in the area between South 14th and South 19th streets, between South Sprague and South K streets. The men found work as laborers at the shipyards and sawmills. They became grocers, butchers, shoemakers, and barbers. Many of them attended St. Leo's Catholic church, but like the Slovakian and Polish communities, the Italians wished to worship in their native tongue and keep their cultural traditions alive. In 1912 the Italian population of Tacoma formally requested a national church from the Catholic diocese. The new church was named in honor of St. Rita, a new saint canonized in 1900. Her affiliation with improbable causes was likely a strong link for an immigrant congregation struggling to find their way in a new land.

The current site was purchased in 1922 and by the end of the following year work had started on the new church. Members donated their labor and made the communal railing, pulpit and statue pedestals. One of the members even sold his family cow to purchase the church's bell. No drawings for the church have been located, but the first priest, Father Bruno, is thought to have a strong influence on the design.

A church that he built in Ontario, Canada reportedly has similar details to St. Rita's. The church is an interesting blend of architectural features from the popular Craftsman style of the early 20th century and ethnic touches from the Italian parishioners' homeland. The broadly gabled roof with extending barge board and supporting brackets is clearly a nod to the Craftsman style so popular in Tacoma, and can be seen as a design detail in many of the period homes in the neighborhood. The stucco wall treatment, round arched windows and three-part door, complete with a tympanum mural, is Mediterranean in its origins.

In 1979 St. Rita's transitioned from a National Church, where mass was held in Italian, to a standard parish church with geographical boundaries. Since the early 1990s an increasing number of Vietnamese immigrants have worshiped at the building. Many attend because it is close to their homes, and they enjoy in intimate nature of the sanctuary.

Tacoma Hongwanji Buddhist Church
1717 South Fawcett
1930  George Wesley Bullard, architect
Tacoma Register of Historic Places

Like many of Tacoma's vernacular churches, the Hongwanji Buddhist Church was formed by immigrants seeking refuge in their native religion and native tongue. Japanese immigrants arrived in Tacoma around 1888. By 1910 the Japanese population of the Tacoma-Pierce County region had increased to almost 2,000 and dozens of Japanese businesses were flourishing in Tacoma. In 1910 occasional Buddhist services were conducted by Seattle-based Reverend Hoshin Juiji. By 1915 congregants were numerous enough to rent a space at the Hiroshima Hotel on 15th and Market streets. While the membership continued to grow plans were made to construct their own building.

By 1930 more than 300 members had raised the almost $40,000 needed for the structure. The ground floor has an assembly room while the main floor has an auditorium, library and study hall. Almost half of the building funds were spent on an imported Japanese altar, which was described in great detail by period newspaper accounts. The simply styled building faintly hints at its Asian roots with the pitch of the tile roof and Japanese styled lanterns flanking either side of the front door.

In 1936 Tacoma Sunya Pratt became a priestess of the Buddhist faith. A convert to Buddhism in her teens, Ms. Pratt was the first ordained Buddhist priestess in the United States. Her ability to relate to both Japanese speaking and English speaking practitioners made her a valuable member of the church.

During World War II the church's doors closed as members were sent to relocation camps across the west. At the end of the war the church provided temporary housing until congregational members were able to acquire housing.
Between 1880 and 1940 American architecture utilized a wide variety of historical styles. Trained architects had extensive schooling in historical styles and used them freely. Gothic was one of the most commonly used revival styles, so it has been given its own section in this publication. However, there are a number of other revival styles that may only have one or two representative examples in Tacoma.

**Neo-Classical and Colonial** revivals both focused on Greco-Roman design elements. Classical columns, decorative entablatures, triangular pediments, and Palladian windows are some of the most typical design elements for these related styles. Tacoma has very few examples of these styles, some of the best articulated are Sure House/Swedish Mission Tabernacle (Neo-Classical), First Church of Christ, Scientist (Neo-Classical/Greek Revival) and the Church of Latter Day Saints, Tacoma Ward (Colonial Revival).

**Tudor Revival** was in many cases an off-shoot of the popular Gothic Revival for ecclesiastical buildings. It is characterized by steeply pitched rooflines and often has half-timbering. Other common elements are the Tudor arch (a squashed arch with a slight peak) and crenellations. The closest example of this style would be Kalaveria/Trinity United Methodist, which showcases the steeply pitched (and in this case double ridged) roof, half-timbering, and crenellations.

**The Mission Revival** style was particularly popular in California and the southwest, where it harkened back to days of Spanish rule. Use of stucco and an undulating parapet are the two major features of this style. Immanuel Presbyterian is Tacoma’s only example of Mission Revival architecture.

**Romanesque Revival** was based on some of the earliest forms of Christian architecture, which predated Gothic. They can take a number of forms from simple to complex. Common design elements are basilica plan, either one single tower to the side or no towers, masonry construction, rounded arches (frequently paired), and a single rose window. Occasionally this style transitions into the Byzantine revival, which showcases more color, and specific and elaborate sculptural imagery. First Presbyterian is a superb example of this style with some added Byzantine design elements.

**The Craftsman style** isn’t a revival, but an early 20th century form which focused on horizontal buildings, broad roof brackets, and verge boards, exposed rafter details and (in the Pacific Northwest) the use of wood shingles. The style was a reaction against the eclectic and overly ornate Victorian forms of the previous century and had strong associations with social reform. Two examples of this style are the Center for Spiritual Living and Manitou Park Presbyterian.
Immanuel Presbyterian Church

901 North J Street
1908. Russell & Babcock, architects
Contributing Building in the North Slope Historic District

Immanuel Presbyterian Church was organized as a mission in Old Town in 1888. At that time it was called Second Presbyterian Church and services were held in the old Lowell Elementary School. In 1889 the church purchased the current site at the corner of north 9th and J Streets. The congregation built a wooden church in 1890 and changed their name to Immanuel Presbyterian. During the early 1900s a larger church was needed and the architectural firm of Russell & Babcock was hired to design a new building. The structure cost $20,500 to build. The Tacoma News Tribune reported in 1909 that the main auditorium is “the most beautiful of any church in Tacoma.”

The current church is Mission Revival in style, and is the only ecclesiastical example of this architectural style in Tacoma. The building is also unusual because the tower is located at the rear of the structure. This design modification was to accommodate the site’s sloped lot. Another unusual feature is the sloped ramp to the narthex, instead of the more typical stairs. This feature is also due to the lot’s steep incline.

The sanctuary was designed to seat 400. The exposed dark-stained wood trussing is part of the original design and has been maintained. The original straight grain fir flooring is still visible. The stained glass windows along the nave are original. Interior modifications are minimal. In the 1950s the chancel and choir loft areas were remodeled and the cerulean blue stained glass window was installed. The window was manufactured by the Philadelphia studio of D’Ascenzo.

In 1927 the church decided to construct a new educational wing. Period images show a Mission styled structure to the left of the church, attached by an open loggia. The building was originally designed to front J Street, in keeping with the main church. However, the finished structure sits to the back of the lot. Stanly T. Shaw served as architect for the addition.

Center for Spiritual Living
(Park Universalist Church)

206 North J Street
1909. Woodroohe & Constable, architects
Tacoma Register of Historic Places

Built in 1909, the Park Universalist Church is a rare example of Craftsman styled ecclesiastical architecture in Tacoma. The congregation was organized in 1892 on its first site at the corner of I and Division streets and land donated by Charles B. Wright, head of the Northern Pacific Railroad. In 1908 the congregation purchased the current site. The original building plans were somewhat ambitious, and called for a larger building than the current structure. The present building was described as “one of the most unique... church structures in Tacoma.”

The craftsman style, while quite commonly used for residential architecture, is unusual in religious structures. Architects for the building, Woodroohe & Constable, were strong supporters of the craftsman style (sometimes referred to as a bungalow). Woodroohe wrote a magazine article in 1911 entitled “Most Happiness in the Bungalow,” which addressed the cozy nature of the style. Though painted white and purple, the bungalow’s exterior and interior walls are clear and show the dark stained woodwork so common for the craftsman style. The shingled structure harmonizes well within the North Slope Historic District.

The Craftsman style is known for its associations with the Arts & Crafts Movement, and the social movement that promoted housing reform through the small, affordable, working-class houses. Craftsman ideals were simplicity, honesty in material and a naturalness that was in stark contrast to the more artificial compositions favored by the Victorians. The egalitarian nature of the design movement was well documented, and likely would have been known by the congregation that selected the building’s design.

This church has sheltered several of Tacoma’s liberal congregations. Park Universalist Church hired Reverend Abbie Ellsworth Danforth in 1903. She served as Tacoma’s first female minister. The Universalist Church represented the open individualism of the American West that was supportive to free thinkers. Rejecting the Calvinist philosophy followed by Presbyterian and Baptist congregations of their day. Universalist congregations embraced transcendentalism and a liberal social interpretation of the Bible by the turn of the century.

The congregation was later served by Reverend Henry Morgan. Morgan, a well-known author and charismatic speaker, moved the congregation away from the Universalist denomination to the Church of the Healing Christ. He led the church from 1912 until 1952.
First Church of Christ, Scientist
902 Division Avenue
1911 Frederick Heath, architect

In 1889, Christian Science was introduced to this region. The first congregation formed in 1894 and met in a rented hall on South Tacoma Avenue until 1901. At this time a wooden structure was built at the current location. The church grew substantially in membership and within a few years it was necessary to construct a larger building. The construction garnered public interest, as it was the first building with hollow tile walls in the city. The near circular sanctuary can accommodate nearly nine hundred people and the first services were held on December 31, 1911. The denomination grew not only at this congregation, but across Tacoma, and by 1922 there were three other congregations in Tacoma.

The congregation took an active interest in providing relief to both soldiers and civilians during World War I. Joining with members of other local Christian Science churches they created a Dried Fruit League. Thousands of pounds of donated fruit were processed, pressed, and dried. An off-site location was donated for the cause and the West Coast Grocery loaned a fruit presser. More than 16,000 pounds of dried fruit were shipped overseas as a result of this humanitarian work.

The current building is Greek Revival in style and has been rightfully described as “one of Tacoma’s finest showplaces.” The ivory colored church with its formal entry dominates the corner of Division and I streets by counterbalancing Wright Park’s expansive informal greenery. The Christian Science church has a history of constructing interesting and revolutionary ecclesiastical designs, and this structure is no exception. The building is designed to engage people, by enticing them up a gradually narrowing staircase. Although a large set of wooden doors greets the viewer, the eye is drawn up by the colossal order of columns and the blue-green color of the porch ceiling. This color is echoed in the oxidized copper dome. The repeated use of the circle and the patina coloration give a softness and encompassing grace to a building that otherwise might seem overbearing based on its size. Additional humanizing elements are the slender Ionic columns and the delicate ornaments (called acroterions) that grace the porch roof and the pediment corner.

Northwest Baptist Seminary
(Haddaway Hall)
4301 North Stevens Street
1923 residence, 1959 chapel and education center
Frank B. Meade and James Hamilton, architects for residence,
El L. Mills & Associates, architects for education center
National Register of Historic Places (residence only)
Washington Heritage Register (residence only)
Tacoma Register of Historic Places (residence only)

Currently housing the Northwest Baptist Seminary, the Haddaway Hall estate has a complex and interesting history. The property was originally home to Allen C. Mason, who built a large mansion on the site in 1892. Mason lost his home in the financial panic of 1893 and the house and grounds were next used by Whitworth College before they moved to Spokane in 1913. In 1920 John P. and Anna Weyerhaeuser purchased the property and had the house razed so they could construct a new residence. Many in Tacoma recognize the iconic Tudor Mansion, constructed in 1923, which dominates the site. The elaborate Tudor revival estate, complete with greenhouse and a large separate garage, is sited for spectacular views from the back of the property, overlooking the sound with views of Mt. Rainer and the Cascades. Cleveland, Ohio architects Frank B. Meade and James Hamilton designed the house. The Olmstead Brothers were responsible for the landscape plan.

Although built as a private residence, the site has been used for religious training for more than fifty years. The property was transferred several times after Weyerhaeuser’s death and in 1942 it was acquired by the Dominican Sisters of Marymount, and became the Tacoma Catholic College, a junior college for women. The two-story chapel and a dormitory (the current Education Center) were added during 1959. Its simple brick form was designed to harmonize with the estate. The chapel originally had amber paneled glass in the windows, requiring worshipers to focus internally instead of on the external views from the property. Most of these windows were recently replaced with clear glass and provide views of the water and the mountains.

In the late 1960s the property was leased to the University of Puget Sound who used it briefly for their language immersion program. The Northwest Baptist Seminary purchased the Haddaway Hall site in 1974, and moved from Southern California (where it had operated under the name Los Angeles Baptist Theological Seminary). The estate has been in use by the seminary since that time and serves as a ministry graduate school.
First Presbyterian Church

20 Tacoma Avenue South
1924 Cram & Ferguson with Sutton, Whitney & Dugan, architects
Tacoma Register of Historic Places

First Presbyterian was organized in the 1870s. Its first church was at 955 Broadway. By 1890 the congregation needed a larger building and purchased property at 101 South G Street for its second structure. By 1921 the congregation was the largest in the city, with a membership of more than 1,700. The church continued to grow and by 1927 more than 2,000 members were enrolled, making it one of the largest Presbyterian congregations in the United States.

In 1921 the church announced plans for a new building. Local newspapers carried stories for months about the church’s ability, or inability, to raise the anticipated $200,000 in expenses. The story was reported on with bated breath in an almost soap-opera undertone whether the church would meet the challenge. The announcement that the church had indeed raised sufficient funds was trumpeted with great fanfare. Tacoma would indeed have a church that matched, or surpassed, any in the country. Once funding was secured the next issue that dominated the press was one of style; what form would the new church take?

The earliest reports indicate that the building committee was evenly split between Colonial Revival and Gothic Revival styles. A 1921 sketch showed plans for a Gothic styled building. The congregation appeared to be at a loss as to what direction the new building would follow, and in 1922 the noted Boston architectural firm of Cram & Ferguson were retained to work with the local architectural firm of Sutton, Whitney & Dugan. Cram & Ferguson designed more than three dozen ecclesiastical buildings during their career, including the chapel at Princeton University and the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York. While Cram was a noted proponent of Gothic Revival, First Presbyterian was designed in a Romanesque style, breaking the deadlock between the Gothic and Colonial Revival styles. Repeated reports in the news emphasized the importance of the church selecting the Romanesque style, as it was considered “closer” to Christian roots than either the popular Gothic or Colonial/Neo-Classical revivals at the time.

The elaborate building has numerous iconographical symbols, making the façade a rich tapestry of color, texture and form. Over the main entrance a pair of peacocks sits on a fountain. The peacock was a symbol of eternal life. This association stemmed from the ancient belief that peacock flesh would not decay. Water is a symbol of purification and is the major sacrament of baptism. The combined image would have told all who passed below that they were promised eternal life through baptism. The large rose window directly above the door has images of the four major gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The authors are represented by their symbols, developed during the middle ages. Matthew’s sign is a winged man, or an angel. Mark’s is a winged lion. Luke is represented by a winged bull, while John’s symbol is an eagle.

Manitou Park Presbyterian Church

6613 South Cheyenne Street
1929 Architect Unknown

Presbyterian Sunday School Missionary, Reverend Frank Mixall, heard children singing one afternoon and followed the sound until he found a group of children with a lady under a fir tree. Mrs. George Shumake was teaching her five children and some of their friends Bible stories and hymnal songs. Preaching services soon followed in a small tent in the woods, the area that is now Manitou Park. The first Manitou Park Presbyterian Church was located at South 66th and Verde Streets. By the 1920s the congregation outgrew its original building, called the “Little Brown Church” due to its stain color.

The Manitou neighborhood grew during the late 1910s, particularly east of Manitou Park. Church membership grew as well and soon there was interest in a new, larger building. The church trustee purchased the current site and cleared the lot in January of 1927. The current church was dedicated on June 16, 1929.

The two-story educational wing has fourteen rooms and was added in 1953 for a cost of $15,000. The Reader’s Digest Foundation contributed a sizable portion of the funds for the fireplace and parlor’s furnishings in honor of Reverend Acheson. Reverend T. Davis Acheson came as a supply pastor during the late 1920s and stayed until his death in 1932. His daughter, Lila Bell Acheson, was the wife of DeWitt Wallace. Lila and DeWitt founded Reader’s Digest in 1921.
The post-World War II era brought a tension in church design between traditionalists who favored historical styles of the past, and the stability they implied, and modernists who wanted license to create buildings that mirrored contemporary aesthetics and needs.

Many architects in Tacoma focused on the International Style, which tried to break with the past by rejecting all historical ornament, and often historical forms as well. The International Style was named after an exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art in 1931. This exhibit showcased works by well-known European architects Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, and Walter Gropius. The style was praised for its ability to move beyond slavishly copying previous architectural forms, and instead “emulating the great styles of the past in their essence without imitating their surface.” The design details that increasingly surfaced with this style were flat roofs and glass or brick walls without ornament. The style though, was not always popular with congregations. Many considered it cold and machine like, and the lack of ornamentation didn’t allow for religious symbolism that had so traditionally been used for houses of worship.

Another modern style that architects favored was Formalist. This style was particularly favored by congregations because it was thought to better address the emotional and spiritual expression of religion better than the International Style. Leaders of the Formalist movement were Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier. Curving and sweeping forms, abstracted and sometimes a nod to more traditional religious building designs are hallmarks of this style.

The most uncommon modern style for religious buildings is Brutalism. Brutalism is named after the aggressive and roughly finished forms utilized with its primary material, concrete (called beton brut in French). This short-lived style (1950-1970) typically features repetitive angles, and showcases the texture of wooden concrete forms. While Brutalist buildings often appear overwhelming and dictorial from the outside, many have visually striking contrasts of wood verses concrete and personal verses public space on the inside. The use of light and additional furnishings becomes paramount for the Brutalist form to work well in an ecclesiastical setting.
New Jerusalem Church of God
(Central Baptist Church)

1623 South 11th Street
1950 Silas E. Nelson, architect

Central Baptist was one of the oldest congregations in Tacoma, and was organized in January of 1893. Its original location was downtown at 1312 South 1 Street. Like so many of Tacoma’s early churches, the congregation made the decision to move further away from the downtown core. This move gave the church more space to accommodate a growing congregation, and sited the building closer to the residential neighborhoods where its members lived.

Drawings for the original building show a brick and stone structure, topped by a steepled tower. Early newspaper reports called the distinctly modern design a “modified” colonial. The design either cost too much or was considered perhaps too ambitious for the congregation, and the initial drawings do not match the more contemporary structure that was built. By the end of the project the steepled tower was removed and a flat brick wall, extending from the front façade on the church, showcases a large cross. While the location and shape of the brick extension is similar to that of a traditional Romanesque bell tower, the shallowness of the form and its display of a large cross (designed to easily be seen from an automobile) are clear indications of the modern style.

By the 1970s Central Baptist had outgrown the building and relocated to University Place. In 1973 the building was purchased by the New Jerusalem Church of God in Christ. The acquisition of the building by a new church was supported by the neighborhood, and many of the new congregation’s members lived in the Hilltop neighborhood.

Asbury United Methodist Church

5601 South Puget Sound
1953 Architect Unknown

In 1880 Methodist missionary Hoarace Williston was sent to evaluate which communities in Tacoma needed new churches. He selected Edison (now called South Tacoma) as an area with potential, in part due to the growing number of workers for the Northern Pacific Railroad. The new congregation met in a feed store until they were able to construct their own building in 1891. Originally located at 56th and Warner Street, a block away from its current location, the building was moved to its current address in 1898. The church was named Asbury after Francis Asbury, an early leader of American Methodists.

The church had early ties to the railroad, and even provided the dinner for the formal opening of the railroad shops on New Year’s Eve of 1892. The congregation grew steadily and by the 1940s plans were being made for a new building. A newspaper illustration in 1941 showed a large complex of buildings, designed in a high-style version of Gothic Revival, complete with a tall steeple in the center. Raising sufficient funds for a new building took more than a decade. The building campaign’s motto was “Don’t give till it hurts. Give till it feels good.” The campaign was successful and the current church was constructed in 1953. The education wing was added in 1964.

Although initial estimates for the new building indicated a price of $40,000, the final total was closer to $125,000. The church proudly paid off their construction debts in two years. The mounting cost of construction, combined with tight budgets during the war years may have influenced the final design for the church. The finished building differs dramatically from the Gothic styled structure depicted in a newspaper a decade earlier. While the basic massing of the church with its long basilica plan and bell tower are traditional, the steep pitch of the roof and the abstracted tower are very modern. The tower’s location towards the rear of the structure, combined with the exaggerated steeple is an uncommon yet strong design feature. The bricks used for construction are a type of pumice and concrete mixture, manufactured in Tacoma.
Central Lutheran Church
409 Tacoma Avenue North
1957  Lea Pearson & Richards, architects

The Central Lutheran congregation was organized in 1925 as a mission church under the Norwegian Lutheran Church. The church's first home was the ornate 1889 wooden church originally built for First Presbyterian. The demise of the prior Victorian structure, at 1001 G Street, marked a turning point for many of Tacoma's original urban churches. As downtown property values grew higher, and Victorian era churches increasingly needed expensive maintenance, many congregations made the decision to leave the commercial core and move towards residential neighborhoods. Central Lutheran was one of the first churches to do so, and in the spring of 1957 the 1,200 member congregation moved to their current site. They hired the architectural firm of Lea, Pearson and Richards to create a building that was traditional in plan, yet crisp and modern in its external finishes. The firm was responsible for other churches in the area, including Trinity Lutheran (1958) in Parkland and Kilworth Chapel (1966) at the University of Puget Sound. The twenty-five foot tall steel cross revolves and can be lit with spotlights. It was designed to be a city landmark, replacing a lit cross at their prior G Street location, which was visible to sailors approaching Tacoma.

The layout of the building is fairly traditional, following one of the oldest church designs, a basilica plan with a detached bell tower. Stained glass was salvaged from the G Street building and reused at the current site. The historic organ, which dates from 1874, was rebuilt and installed in the new church.

First Christian Church
602 North Orchard Street
1961  Silas E. Nelson, architect

First Christian Church's original building was a sandstone structure located downtown at 523 South K Street. The church was the first of Tacoma's large Protestant congregations to move out of the downtown area and into the rapidly developing West End post-World War II. The current ten-acre site was purchased in 1953 and in 1959 the congregation retained local architect Silas Nelson to produce designs for a new sanctuary and auxiliary buildings.

The building has a number of modern era features that made it popular with both aging and young parishioners—no basements, and no stairs. The two story educational building is banked into the hillside, thus providing stair-free access from two levels. The multiple units on the campus are connected by covered walkways. A gymnasium, an unusual feature, has a rectangular basketball court, which can be converted into an assembly room. Another interesting feature is the outdoor-indoor fireplace. All buildings face a common court, which was designed to have a sixty-foot bell tower. Also part of the original plans were future tennis courts, baseball fields, and possibly a swimming pool.

Particularly discussed by the press was the generous parking allotments, with more than 150 parking spaces providing ease of commute to the new location.
Temple Beth El

5975 South 12th Street  
1968  Robert Billsbrough Price, architect

Pierce County’s permanent Jewish community began in 1888 with the formation of a burial society. The first synagogue, Temple Beth Israel, was dedicated on South 10th and “I” Streets in 1893. After an influx of eastern European immigrants in the 1890s and early 1900s, a second more Orthodox congregation, Talmud Torah, was incorporated in 1908. As Tacoma’s population grew and neighborhoods expanded, both congregations built new buildings in the north end during the 1920s. In 1960 the two congregations merged, forming the current Temple Beth El.

The current location of Beth El, in the West Slope neighborhood, is due to this neighborhood’s rapid growth post World War II and the golden age of the automobile. Unlike religious structures from pre-automobile eras, this building sits on a massive four acre site, indicative of low land prices in the new suburbs. The building is clearly oriented towards the automobile, with a major entry point off the parking lot.

Designed by noted Tacoma architect Robert Billsbrough Price, the sloping roofline was to emulate tents, the Jews’ first dwelling place and their home in the desert during the Exodus. The stained glass in the tower is reminiscent of the pillar of fire that led them. A timeline of Jewish history is along the exterior wall, under the covered walkway and continues into the building. As the building was constructed in 1968, the timeline begins with the re-unification of Jerusalem in 1967.

The congregation selected art that would teach about Judaism. The three sets of carved doors carry the message of the Temple name. The exterior of the North doors have an inscription from Genesis 28:17, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God and this is the gate to heaven.” Jacob says these words after he awakens from dreaming about the ladder connecting heaven and earth. Aved by his experience, he names the place where he slept “Beth El.”

Central in the lobby is a memorial for the six million Jews who died in the Holocaust. The symbols of the 12 tribes of Israel, created in a set of wall hangings by Analee Reutlinger also decorate the lobby. A Biblical Garden, designed by landscape architect Marty Lyon is another special feature.

Christ Episcopal Church

310 North K Street  
1969  Paul Thiry, architect
Contributing Building in the North Slope Historic District  
(fellowship hall only)

Christ Episcopal Church was founded by the Reverend Lemuel Wells, as a daughter congregation of St. Luke’s Memorial Church, then in downtown Tacoma. The new church, a Gothic building which seated 300, was named Trinity Chapel and was built for $8,000. The first services were held on December 8, 1889.

In 1926 financial difficulties forced the two congregations to merge on the Trinity site and the new parish became Christ Church. (During the 1930s a different Episcopal congregation bought the Old St. Luke’s Church building and moved it to its present location.) The parish hall was built in 1927 and named Wells Hall in honor of the reverend Wells. In 1957 the connection building between the parish hall and the church was added and named Trinity House in commemoration of the two Episcopal parishes. By 1960 the old church building was declared unsafe, leading the way for the congregation to plan and build the current church, which opened in 1969. Designed by Paul Thiry, the new building stands in stark contrast to the brick parish hall and the old Gothic church it replaced.

Thiry, a progenitor of International Modern design in the Pacific Northwest was given the prestigious American Institute of Architects’ award in 1974 for the building. The materials and the design of the building are intended to focus on the people and the liturgical movement as the most important elements in the space. The warmth of the wood ceiling, the huge light ring, the stained glass windows, liturgical banners, the enameled Stations of the Cross and the John Brombaugh organ enliven the interior. The placement of windows throughout the building provides natural light and reflection that changes throughout the day and the seasons of the year. The immense curved wall behind the altar replicates the ancient form of the basilica and appears to embrace all who enter the sanctuary.

The huge concrete cross in the courtyard stands as a symbol of those who have worshiped on this holy ground. The inscription at the base of the cross, “Except the Lord build the house;” from Psalm 127, commits the congregation in this place to love and serve in the name of the Gospel.
St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church

7112 South 12th Street
1969  Nelsen, Krona & Ziegler, architects

This modern church, with neo-expressionist details was built in 1969. The parish is one of the largest in the Archdiocese of Seattle. Established in 1956 it grew quickly, representing the rapid development in Tacoma’s West End post World War II. A number of large sanctuaries and schools were built in this area to accommodate large housing tracts and returning GIs and their growing families. Services for St. Charles were held in Geiger elementary school until the church was completed. The building site was selected by archbishop Thomas A. Connolly and has a view of both Mt. Rainer and the Olympics. The sanctuary is flooded with light from the glass cone sited above the altar. Materials for the interior were carefully selected to enhance the parishioners experience of the space. Birch and cedar paneling, Italian marble and mosaics, and glass windows imported from France were all used.

It was part of a larger building campaign for the church, which included a new Catholic school, rectory, and convent that were built in 1958. The original plans called for the church to be sited to the west, but the actual location was moved considerably to the east to accommodate a larger sanctuary. A new parish hall was added during the early 1990s.

The church is named in honor of St. Charles Borromeo. Borromeo served as Archbishop of Milan and was active in the Counter Reformation. He was canonized in 1610.

REPRESENTATIVE ARCHITECT

Silas E. Nelsen

Silas E. Nelsen, a native of Wisconsin, moved to Washington State in 1900 with his parents. He started his career as a naval architect but eventually moved into residential and civic architecture. He moved to the Puget Sound as an adult and worked with the architectural firm Heath, Grove, & Bell for four years. He then started his own practice and designed more than 150 homes, 15 churches, and numerous buildings at the University of Puget Sound. His own Colonial Revival house at 405 South Sheridan Avenue was selected as one of the ten most beautiful homes in Tacoma by the Tacoma Society of Architects in 1931. Nelsen’s designs caught the attention of “Better Homes & Gardens,” which showcased a number of his petite Colonial designs in both 1936 and 1937. The periodical also named him one of eight leading residential architects in America.

In addition to his residential work, Nelsen worked on a number of civic, commercial and religious commissions. He designed the original main branch addition of the Tacoma Public Library, Anna Lemon Wheelock Library (1927), Tacoma Mountaineers Building (1956), Johnson Candy Company (1949), Mueller-Harkins Motor Company (1948), and several fraternity houses at the University of Puget Sound.

Silas Nelsen Designed Churches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church Name</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Year</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church</td>
<td>1523 Yakima Avenue South</td>
<td>1925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethesda Baptist Church</td>
<td>4340 South L Street</td>
<td>1926</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pentecostal Tabernacle</td>
<td>1121 South Altherme Street</td>
<td>1926</td>
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<tr>
<td>Temple Baptist Church</td>
<td>245 St. Helens Avenue</td>
<td>1949</td>
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<tr>
<td>Central Baptist Church</td>
<td>1623 South 11th Street</td>
<td>1950</td>
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<tr>
<td>First Evangelical United Brethren Church</td>
<td>4501 Sixth Avenue</td>
<td>1950</td>
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<tr>
<td>Central Seventh Day Adventist Church</td>
<td>615 North Sprague Avenue</td>
<td>1952</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skyline Christian Church</td>
<td>626 North Skyline Drive</td>
<td>1954</td>
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<td>Calvary Baptist Church</td>
<td>6511 South C Street</td>
<td>1957</td>
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<tr>
<td>First Christian Church</td>
<td>602 North Orchard Street</td>
<td>1961</td>
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