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WESTMOUNT PARK, UNITED CHURCH

A CHURCH IN THE GOTHIC STYLE

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I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report will be to describe several aspects of the Westmount Park United Church, with the final objective of understanding the movement of which the building is a part, as well as the building itself. Its history and construction will be briefly explained, then the history of the Gothic Revival will be sketched. This will allow the church to be placed in the movement, and permit it to be critically considered according to the principles by which it was designed.

II. THE BUILDING - HISTORY

In 1889 the Cote St. Antoine Congregation of the Methodist Church acquired a piece of land at what is now the corner of Western and Lansdowne Avenues; this was enlarged in 1893, and a small church and Sunday School built there. In 1929 the congregation, then known as the Westmount Park Methodist Church, purchased a third lot, and decided to rebuild the church. The architect chosen was A. Leslie Perry, a recent graduate of the McGill University School of Architecture, and of the firm of Perry and Luke, University Street, Montreal. Mr. Perry designed a Gothic building ("That was the style, then," he has explained), with seating for 700 people. An innovation, in a Protestant church in Montreal, was the emphatic delineation between chancel and nave, with the altar between, facing the people. Accommodations for the pastor were provided beside the chancel, along with the church office.

In the original scheme, the architect had proposed a scheme for the renovation of the adjacent Sunday School; another proposal was made in 1948, but this was not carried out until 1964. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this improvement is the use, after thirty-five years of a "style" identical to that of the church.

III. THE BUILDING - CONSTRUCTION

The church rests on concrete perimeter foundations, which are increased under tower and chancel; the concrete floor of the nave rests directly on fill. Throughout the building, masonry, steel, and concrete construction find mixed application. The walls of the nave are of stone, with authentic stone arches. They are surmounted by concrete plates, upon which the steel frame of the roof rests. This is covered with four-inch Aerocrete slabs, finished on the interior with acoustic plaster, and on the exterior by slate roofing on two-inch wood strips and building felt. The tower is constructed of masonry and reinforced concrete, as is the chancel. The interior is generally finished in plaster, with emphasis created with exposed stonework; carved woodwork has been used extensively. Considerable effort has been made to disguise the steel and concrete structure, and the interior therefore presents a coherent, though largely false, totality.

IV. THE GOTHIC REVIVAL

During the eighteenth century, increasing importance was given the subjective element in thought, a process which resulted in the Romantic Movement. A distinguishing aspect of the movement was the concept of history as a continuum of events in time, and consequently, the realisation of the dynamic nature of human development.[1] Mediaeval scholars, five centuries before, had introduced the idea of the sequential quality of past and future[2], but this had been rejected by the Renaissance because of its origin in an age of barbarity. The humanist philosophers had little idea of history; they believed that their age had been "born into immediate adulthood".[3] Thus, the concept of history was new, and it was to have a profound effect upon architecture.

Historical and archaeological studies became an obsession with the scholars of the time,[4] with two important results. The first of these was a greatly increased knowledge of ancient architecture, in particular Greek architecture, which had been popularized by Stuart and Revett, Leroy and Souffot, about 1760. Second was a growing criticism and distrust of the classical basis of thought. Inevitably, Vitruvius' long-held authority became suspect, and, with the distinguishing of more than one ancient style, a deep un-

certainty of architectural correctness developed.[5] Thus, the unquestioning acceptance of classical design, which had been the most powerful barrier against the acceptance of Gothic, was removed.

The deposition of the Classical first resulted in Rococo, characterized by "cheerful, light and delicate" [6] interior decoration, in various styles (including Gothic) and, more importantly, by a delight in the architectural effects of parallax. These effects were created by means of mirrors, colonnades, and sequences of rooms, and were discovered, extant, in Gothic cathedrals, as by Soufflot when he wrote, "the spectator, as he advances and as he moves away, distinguishes in the distance a thousand objects, at one moment found, at another lost again, offering him delightful spectacles".[7] They were also to be found in ruins, and this contributed, with literary influences, to a popular fondness for old and unused buildings.

Architectural Romanticism originated, in part, in literary Romanticism. ("We accept as almost axiomatic the generalisation that in England a love of literature greatly exceeds... appreciation of the visual arts; and a new current of taste is likely to be first felt in a literary channel."[8]) Literary Romanticism was a product of a world experiencing profound economic, social and political changes; the poets turned from that world to that of a

remote age.[9] The rediscovery of Spenser and Milton, about 1710, resulted in the Gothic exercises of Dryden, Dyer, and Pope; their themes, of the melancholy and the picturesque, persisted and were reinforced by historical and archaeological enthusiasm in Thomas Gray, Thomas Warton, and others.[10] Architectural derivatives of this literary fashion were soon demanded by the Dilettanti; William Kent and Capability Brown instituted the picturesque (as opposed to the formal) garden, and Sanderson Millar built the first artificial ruin at Edgehill in 1746.

But Gothic architecture remained the domain of the wealthy few - the common acceptance which it was to achieve by 1800 was due to another literary figure, Horace Walpole. In his Anecdotes of Painting in England, (1762-1771), he praises Gothic, and, with even greater effect, uses it as the setting for The Castle of Otranto (1764) the first of many novels of "Gothic horror". The influence of his writings was augmented by the remodelling of his villa, Strawberry Hill, with Mediaeval details of papier maché and artificial stone. The fashion was carried to its logical end in the magnificent Fonthill of William Beckford, designed (1796-1807) by James Wyatt. It was dominated by a central tower 276 feet in height and a hall 120 feet high, and provided a perfect setting for the dramatic strivings of its owner; it was a "brilliant advertisement for the Gothic style".[11]

The thirst for accurate knowledge of Mediaeval forms created by this popularisation was partially satisfied by the books of John Britton, (Architectural Antiquities of Great Britain, (1805-1814), and Cathedral Antiquities, 1815-1835), Auguste Charles, Comte de Pugin, (Specimens of Gothic Architecture,) and even by "the wealth of archaeological detail in (Sir Walter) Scott's novels". [12] (Ivanhoe was published in 1819). But popular taste, thereby educated, was disappointed and offended by the 174 churches built in the Gothic style as a result of the Church Building Act of 1818. Few churches had been built in the preceding sixty years, and most of those in Greek; when Gothic was chosen for most of the churches of 1818, it only emphasized the contradiction inherent in the application of Mediaeval ornament (which was definitely Popish) to the Protestant meeting house. Here, perhaps, is the origin of the idea that architecture is an ethical art, [13] and the beginning of "the change from a vaguely romantic mood to a specifically religious mood!" [14]

The incompatibility of Mediaeval (Popish) forms and the protestant liturgy was relieved by the Tractarians in the years following 1833. The Church of England was failing, and it was decided to restore old forms of worship, "to bring back colour and emotion into religion". [15] The restoration depended upon the revival of Gothic architecture, and here religion, or ethics, and architecture become inextricably intertwined. At first, the only demand made upon a

church was that it be suitable for the performance of the service,[16] but with the formation, in 1839, of the Cambridge Camden Society, religious requirements became much more complex. The purpose of the society was to study ecclesiastical architecture, but it was to become the tyrannical dictator of church design, by means of criticisms and articles in the monthly Ecclesiologist. In 1843, they published a translation of William Durandus, a mediaeval expounder of religious symbolism;[17] directly churches had to adhere to such symbolism. The development of Gothic architecture was studied,[18] and the society authoritatively selected the "period of Gothic (that) is the truest and most Christian",[19] (Decorated). It became concerned with the moral standing of craftsmen, and then of society generally, and claimed social virtue to be the very basis of architectural excellence,[20] which, in turn, was a source of religious enthusiasm.

The Roman Catholicism in England, meanwhile, had attained the same architectural destination, from the opposite direction.[21] Emancipation had been achieved in 1829, and the most influential figure in the revival, Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin, accepted the faith in 1834. He had acquired from his father a deep love of Mediaeval art, and came to believe that its resurrection was only possible if the religious spirit and social order of the middle

ages were restored, for the value of a building is dependent upon the moral worth of its creator.[22] From this he derived his "two great rules for design",[23] which have since proved so important: "...first, that there should be no features about a building which are not necessary for convenience, construction, or propriety; second, that all adornment should consist of enrichment of the essential construction of the building."[24]

John Ruskin assimilated the ideas and principles of both Protestants and Catholics, combined them with a complex and deeply personal aesthetic, and popularized them in The Seven Lamps of Architecture (1849), and The Stones of Venice (1851-53). He was the first of the important writers of the Gothic Revival who adhered to no fervent religious belief[25] and was therefore able to remove the taint of Popishness from Gothic, a taint which had originated in seventeenth-century England, found indelible by the Tractarians, and darkened by Pugin. It was for this reason that his assertion of the superiority of "...Northern Gothic of the thirteenth century, as exemplified in England, pre-eminently by the cathedrals of Lincoln and Wells, and in France by those of Paris, Amiens, Chartres...,"[26] and his exhortations to social reform, found many followers, making him perhaps the most influential writer of the Revival. Indeed, it is largely due to him that by 1886,

one could write, "As to the order of architecture (in churches), it is not worth while to throw away time in discussing which shall be adopted; that question has practically been settled in favour of the Gothic."[27]

In the first years of the twentieth century, the principles postulated by the early revivalists still exerted considerable influence on architectural theory. Ralph Adams Cram, in 1899, took a basic premise of A.W. Pugin, "...that art is a result not a product (of an age), and that the conditions we now offer are not such as make it inevitable."[28] And, quoting von Ogden Vogt, who called him "the outstanding protagonist for the Gothic Revival,"[29] appealed passionately "...for a return to the mediaeval age...the argument is far deeper than a love of Gothic principles in structure or Gothic details in design. He (Cram) is a lover of Mediaevalism all along the line: the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, the Guild Organization in industry, and the feudal system in society. Given these premises one must be a Gothicist."[30] Cram was indeed an ardent Gothicist, and it was his fervour that was most responsible for a rekindling of interest in the Gothic Revival, languishing after H.H. Richardson's popularization of the Romanesque.

The Great War was considered by many to mark the beginning of a new age, but what was the character of this age, what form was its architecture to take? The historicist doctrine of art as a manifestation of its epoch was maintained, and von Ogden Vogt, as late as 1921, paraphrased A.W. Pugin: "The spiritual life of a time is depicted with inescapable exactness in its artistry."[31] It was at last realised that Medieval passion was extinct, and that Gothic, as its expression, was unacceptable "as utterly alien to the new age".[32] The theorists of church architecture turned to the act of worship and to the religious experience as a source of form. Vogt, though, having so declared his intention, falls back on the old styles, as did most of his contemporaries, at first pragmatically, ("We are passing through a period characterised by a fresh interest in all these historic styles..."[33] and then dogmatically, ("If this is the beginning of a new age....then the door is open for the revival of any historic style..."[34]

Such interchangeability of style is echoed in a number of books offering instruction to architects and committees: "Leaders in architectural schools of thought are divided as to which of these general types is most to be desired (Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Romanesque, Gothic, or Renaissance).[35] ..."alternate design

showing how plan No. 1500 might be developed in the Gothic type."[36]

But by this time European architects had succeeded in deriving form from principle, instead of withdrawing into the eclecticism of the preceding century. Auguste Perret, in 1922-23, built Notre Dame du Raincy, in which both liturgical reform-it is on the hall-church plan - and rational modern structure - finned vault on tapered columns, of unfinished concrete throughout - were incorporated. In S. Antonius, Basle (1927), Karl Moser emphatically divided nave and sanctuary, in a concrete building which "...marks the full accomplishment of the technical revolution that was begun at Le Raincy."[37] These buildings showed clearly the path architecture was to take; they signify the demise of revival architecture.

V. CONCLUSION

From the history of the Gothic Revival, it is easily seen how a church such as this was able to satisfy popular taste as late as 1929. Popular taste, of course, had been accustomed to the Mediaeval by the literature of two centuries; Gothic architecture had found acceptance among varying parts of society for nearly as long. The picturesque was often synonymous with Gothic, and Gothic with the devoutness of the middle ages. There was, at that time, still no strongly felt belief in the "Modern Movement". There was every reason to choose Gothic for this building, as it was both visually and theoretically acceptable.

Justification can be found in Revivalist writings for nearly all the individual attributes of the building - the single-tower, asymmetrical façade, the low-ceilinged narthex, the rustic masonry - all echo ideas prominent in the Gothic Revival. Nevertheless, some of the most basic principles of the Revival - structural integrity, for instance - have been ignored. Of the changes brought about by the liturgical movement of the preceding decade, and hence of "modern" design, only a single acknowledgement has been made, the rearrangement of altar, chancel, and nave.

The Westmount Park United Church therefore, is found at the intersection of two ages of architecture, denying yet maintaining parts of each. It cannot be called good from either point of view, but that it did fill a need and did so in compliance with popular taste is irrefutable.

VI. REFERENCES

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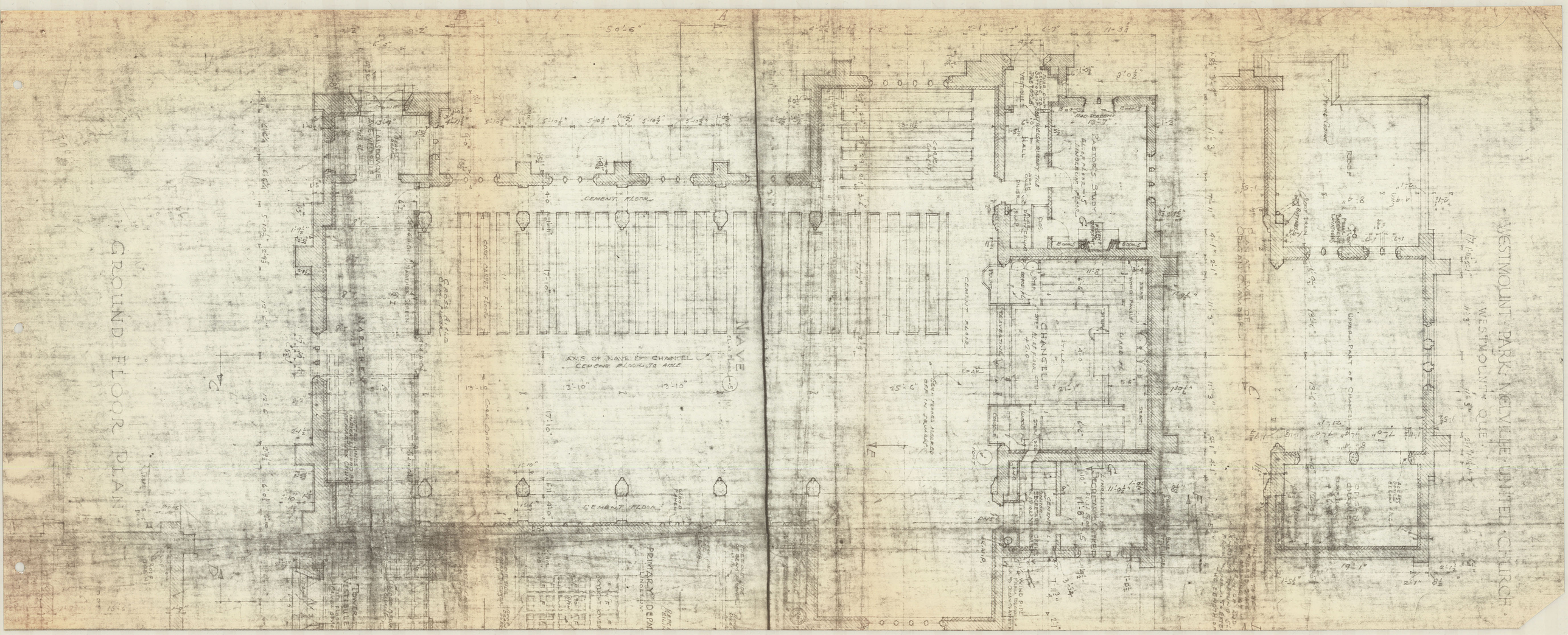
CHRISTIAN EDUCATION CENTRE
WESTMOUNT PARK UNITED CHURCH


WESTMOUNT PARK MELVILLE UNITED CHURCH
WESTMOUNT QUE
GROUND FLOOR PLAN
NAVE
CHANCEL
PASTOR'S STUDY
CEMENT FLOOR
CEMENT BLOCK TO AISLE
AXIS OF NAVE & CHANCEL
TOWER VESTIBULE
PRIMARY DEPARTMENT
SOLE
HALL
VESTIBULE
CHOIR
VESTRY
SECRETARY'S OFFICE
LIBRARY
KITCHEN
UPPER PART OF CHANCEL
BELOW

STONE
STONE
STONE
LOUVRES
STONE
STONE
STONE
COPPER
FLAT DECK WITH ROOF DRAIN
BRICK
PLASTER
25'-0" TO BOTTOM OF TRUSS
STONE
WOOD
24"
PLASTER
COPPER
WOOD
WOOD
NARTHEX CEILING
GLASS
8'-0" CONTINUE SCREEN
WOOD
FILL
PIPE TRENCH
FILL
PIPE TRENCH
FIN. GRADE

WESTMOUNT PARK MELVILLE UNITED CHURCH

WESTMOUNT QUE

4" AEROFLITE SLAB

STONE

WOOD

PLASTER

STONE

PLASTER

STONE

WOOD

ACOUSTO PLASTER

WOOD

COPPER SADDLE

60'-0"

FAN

EXISTING SUNDAY SCHOOL

FILL

NEW BOILER HOUSE FLOOR

WATER PROOFING COURSE
CONTINUOUS CONC. BEAM
3-7/8" ϕ BARS
WATER PROOFING COURSE
BACK OF LOUVRES COVERED WITH COPPER
WOOD LOUVRES
WATER PROOFING COURSE
CONTINUOUS CONC. BEAM
3-7/8" ϕ BARS
WATER PROOFING COURSE
FORM CURB 8" HIGH AROUND HATCH WITH COVER
COPPER FLASHING
5½" SLAB
5½" SLAB
FLOOR OF SUNDAY SCHOOL
WD. BEAMS
PLASTER
FLOOR OF SUNDAY SCHOOL
FIN. NAVE FLOOR
8" SLAB
OPENING FROM FIRE TRENCH
REPEAT
REPEAT
REPEAT
COPPER
7"x18" DUCT IN WALL
18"x18" FRESH AIR REGISTERS
16" DIAM. EXHAUST FAN
FILL
FLOOR OF BASEMENT OF EXISTING BUILDING
EXISTING BOILER RM. FL.
BOILER ROOM
NEW BOILER RM. FLOOR
BRICK CORBELS
ORGAN CHAMBER CEILING
REPEAT TRANSOM WINDOWS SHOWN ON DWG. No. 4
E.O.
ORGAN CHAMBER FL.
CONCRETE
COAL CHUTE
SECRETARY'S OFFICE
13'-0"
9'-0"

BEAMS RESTING ON WALLS

AEROCRETE CEILING SUSPENDED FROM PURLINS

WOOD

ACOUSTIC PLASTER

ACOUSTIC PLASTER ON AEROCRETE

6" x 9"

COMPOSITION

WOOD

ACOUSTIC PLASTER

WOOD

4-5 R

PLASTER

STONE

9'-0"

2'-0"

COMBO

ACCESS DOOR TO ORGAN CHAMBER

CHASE

CHASE WOOD

DOOR

ORGAN CHAMBER FLOOR

WOOD

RIBROD

STONE

CHASE FOR RAD.

FLOOR OF ORGAN CONSOLE 12" BELOW CHANCEL

OPEN

STEEL SASH WINDOWS ON LANSDOWNE AVE AISLE THUS

OPEN

PLASTER REVEALS TO ALL AISLE WINDOWS

OPEN

WOOD

WINDOWS ON AISLE NEXT PRIMARY DEPT THUS

STONE

OPEN

PLASTER

CHASE FOR RAD.

OPEN

TILE

WOOD BEAMS

ACOUSTIC PLASTER ON CEILING

PROVIDE FOR CARRYING RADS. OVER NARTHEX

PIPE TRENCH

SOLID

FILL

FLOOR OF SECRETARY'S OFFICE

SOLID

-2.5

-10.00

23'-9"

6'-8"

16'-9"

9'-0"

37'-0" TO BASE OF ROOF BOARDING

CONTINUE RAFTERS & PURLINS

ACOUSTIC PLASTER ON AEROCRETE

COPPER

PLASTER

WOOD

13"

4"

6¼"

DATUM = TOP OF HYDRANT = 0+00

LONGITUDINAL SECTION

ON LINE C-C

BRICK CORBELS

PATTERN IN LIGHT HEADERS

STONE

WOOD

WOOD MULLIONS

O.E.O.

WD. DOORS

FIN. HANDEL FLOOR

FIN. NAVE FLOOR

CONCRETE

EXISTING GRADE

FIN. GRADE

DATUM = TOP OF HYDRANT 0.00

BRICK CORBELS

REPEAT

REPEAT

STONE

WOOD DOORS

FIN. NAVE FLOOR

APPROX. LEVEL OF SOLID GROUND

ELEVATION ON LANSDOWNE AVENUE

PERRY & LUKE
ARCHITECTS

EXISTING SUNDAY SCHOOL

EXISTING FLOOR

EXISTING FLOOR

EXISTING DOOR TO REMAIN

BASEMENT FLOOR

REMOVE COAL CHUTE

EXISTING BOILER & EQ. FLOOR

NEW BOILER RM. FLOOR EL. +3.5

16" DIAM. FAN

CEILING OF ORGAN CHAMBER

2'-1.0"

ORGAN CHAMBER FLOOR

FIN. NAVE FLOOR

COAL CHUTE

FLOOR OF

3'-0"

2'-6"

3'-0"

2'-6"

WOOD

STONE

FIN. CHANCEL FLOOR EL. + 2.0

STONE BASE MOULD

CONCRETE

BRICK CORBELS

BUTTRESS AGAINST TRANSEPT WALL

STONE

PASTOR'S STUDY FLOOR

2'-6" 3'-7½" 5'-6.0"

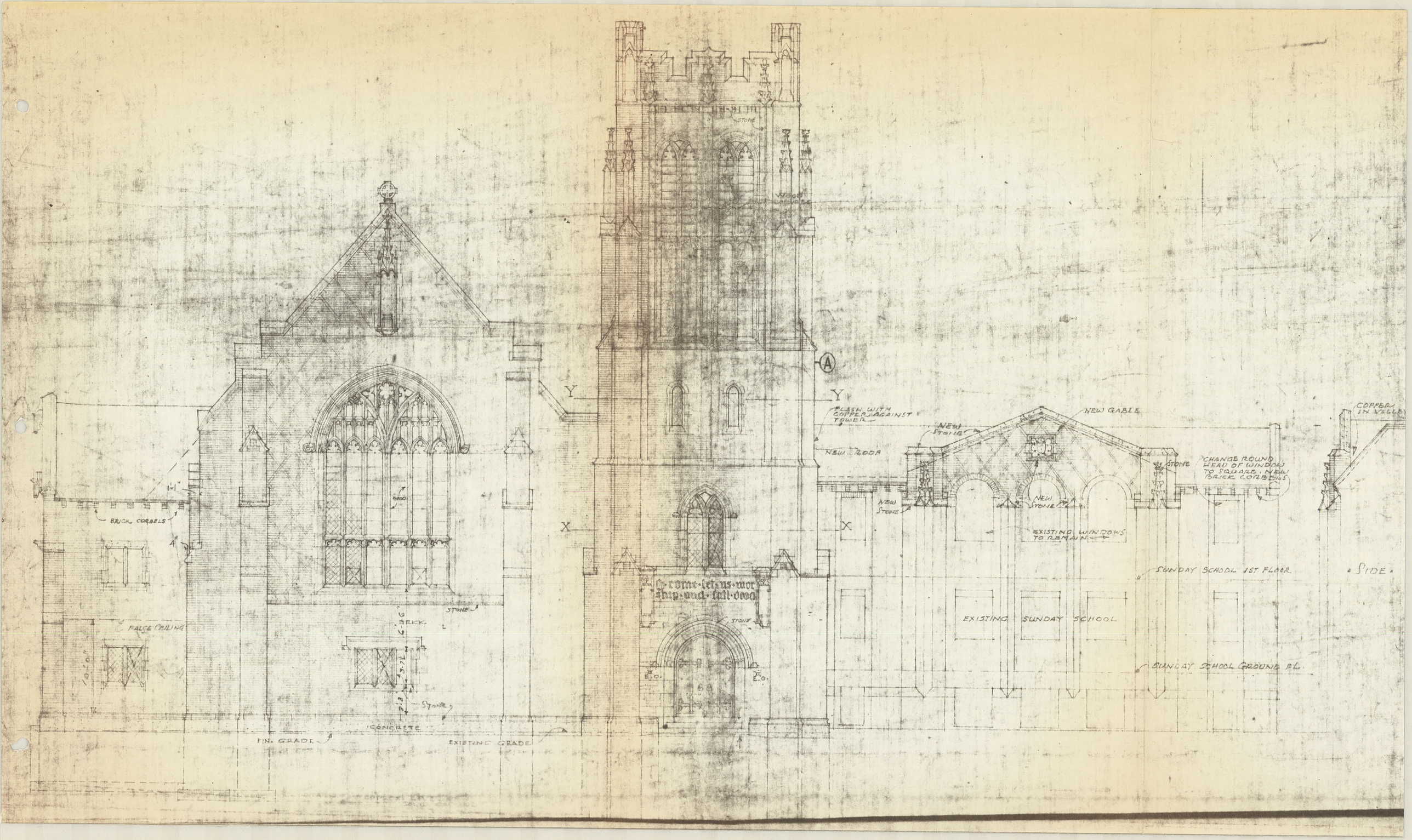
10'-0"

STONE

EL. 0.5

FIN. GRADE

EL. -10.10 FIN. BASEMENT FLOOR


STONE
WOOD
BRICK CORBELS
FALSE CEILING
HOOD
STONE
BRICK
STONE
CONCRETE
FIN. GRADE
EXISTING GRADE
Y
Y
X
X
A
FLASH WITH COPPER AGAINST TOWER
NEW STONE
NEW FLOOR
NEW GABLE
COPPER IN VALLEY
CHANGE ROUND HEAD OF WINDOW TO SQUARE. NEW BRICK CORBELS
NEW STONE
NEW STONE
EXISTING WINDOWS TO REMAIN
STONE
SUNDAY SCHOOL 1ST FLOOR
SIDE
EXISTING SUNDAY SCHOOL
SUNDAY SCHOOL GROUND FL.
O come let us wor ship and fall down
STONE
E.O.
E.O.