

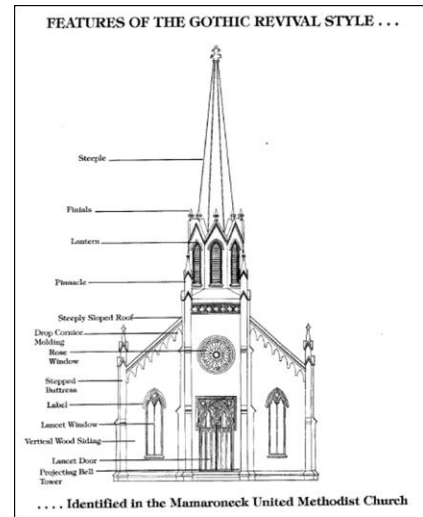
GOTHIC REVIVAL ARCHITECTURE

Gothic architecture, arising in 12th Century Europe, was the first distinctly “Christian” ecclesiastical style. Unlike other architectural forms which seemed bound to the ground, Gothic soared. Upward, ever upward, it reached, pointing its spires and towers and ornamentation toward the heavens. As one overlooked the western European landscape, the Gothic Cathedral rose above the villages and dominated the skyscape of the cities.

In the Middle Ages, the cathedral was so-called the “Bible of the poor” because in its carvings and windows and ornamentation were told the great stories of the Bible; God’s promises to man as well as his commandments; and interpretation of the Christian life, as well as its rewards and punishments in the afterlife. Medieval Gothic church architecture bore witness to the glory of God and to the power and wealth of the temporal church; offered sanctuary for the suffering; inspired the earthly; and taught the unschooled.

Beginning in the 17th century and continuing through the 19th, there was a re-appreciation of Gothic style architecture. This revival was expressed initially by the wealthy and privileged in the design of their private houses – born of an idealization of a past way of life and a desire to add importance to themselves by establishing a “romanticized” connection with ages past. It was not until the 1830’s that Gothic Revival found its expression in Church building.

A leading exponent of Gothic Revival was the English writer and architect, **Augustus Pugin** (1812-1852) who was convinced of its structural truth and purity. He viewed Gothic as “good” and of the “true faith” as opposed to the “pagan” Greek style which was also experiencing a revival at that time. Parenthetically, it might be mentioned that the **Mamaroneck Methodists’** 1845 church on Prospect Avenue was of Greek Revival design – the style then in vogue. Pugin’s import was given greater weight and exposure through the Ecclesiological Movement, which arose in England in the 1840’s and spread to



the United States, supported by Episcopal bishops who viewed Gothic Revival as appropriate for Anglican liturgy.

The leading Gothic Revival architect of the time in the United States was **Richard Upjohn**, a self-schooled New England cabinetmaker become draftsman-architect who designed and had built the present Trinity Church, Wall Street, New York City – recognized as one of the best examples of Gothic Revival church architecture in the United States. **Upjohn's** work is also represented in Trinity Church of New Rochelle.

The demand for Gothic Revival church designs exceeded his possible services, which he rendered only, it appears, to Episcopal congregations. He created “high” churches – urban churches. However, he recognized how very appropriate the Gothic Revival style was for “country” churches, springing up, as was ours, in the mid-19th century, as congregations grew in the environs of large cities. In response to the demand, he created and published a plan book, “Rural Architecture” (1852) which contained plans for wood frame churches of simple construction of modest churches and appropriate for “low church” denominations such as Congregationalists, Methodists and Baptists.

John Correja, a New York City architect, designed our church building – one of two Gothic Revival churches known to have been built according to his plans. The second, which bore a striking resemblance to ours – the Brighton Heights (Dutch) Reform Church on Staten Island (1854) – was destroyed by fire in the summer of 1996.

Although Gothic Revival churches, like ours, were built of wood – an available and less expensive material than stone – the intent was to mimic the stone construction of the early Gothic. The tight vertical wood siding gave mass to the exterior of the building, while the interior scored plaster walls, faux-painted to resemble sandstone, carried the image to the inside.

Also contributing to the choice of wood as a building material for the Mamaroneck church may have been the presence of master shipbuilders in the area and within the congregation. Our church is very distinctive among Carpenter Gothic Revival churches of its day in that it did not have battens – little half-rounds of wood placed over the joinings of the vertical exterior boards. Additionally, the boards are narrower than those generally used to side Carpenter Gothic buildings and are, in fact, the width used in the construction of ships. Our builders knew how to build water-tight wooden boats and applied tongue and groove fitted boards on the exterior. They knew how to work with timber – and the massiveness of the structural elements of this building and their joinery is witness not only to the

mastery of the builders, but to the sheer strength, inventiveness and will of those who raised the timbers without benefit of powered machines. **Solomon Gedney**, in whose memory his great-granddaughter, **Muriel Gedney Flood**, supported the Restoration, was the builder; a member of a family of shipbuilders originally from Salem, Massachusetts.

With the exception of the atypical vertical siding, our church is treated as any wooden Gothic Revival building of the day. On the inside, the plan is for a rectangular nave with side aisles and a centrally located steeple at the main entrance. Features most commonly associated with Gothic Revival architecture – the lancet windows of tall proportion which come to a pointed arch and the window tracery – distinguish our building. Stepped buttresses, the spire, pinnacles and finials are emblematic Gothic Revival features that enhance the grace and upward sweep of the building. Other decorative features applied by carpenters to wooden buildings of the period, from which comes the familiar term “Carpenter Gothic”, are to be found in the church. Look at the exterior for the drip cornice molding and the frieze band uniting the tower’s buttresses rendered in a quatrefoil motif. Within the sanctuary, the quatrefoil and trefoil are repeated as a recurrent and unifying decoration.

Now restored to its original condition and appearance, the Mamaroneck United Methodist Church stands at the heart of the Village – a fine example of Gothic Revival architecture. Like the European Gothic cathedrals of old, still today, the spire of our church rises above any other building in town and is visible when anyone looks up, whether from the surrounding streets or from the waters of the harbor or Sound.

The pulpit and altar are both central in this church and the pews are so arranged that the congregants are focused on the preacher and/or the celebrant—the one who shares the Word of God and the one who prepares the holy meal. In our sanctuary is found the balance between the significance of the Word and the centrality of the sacraments.

Framing the altar behind the pulpit is the apse, a graceful curved columned area, which to many looks like the contour of a ship's hull with its ribbing terminating in a bowsprit of a decorative motif. Within this apse are found symbols introduced into the Church's decoration in the 1950's restoration, modified and replaced in 1996.

All Tours:

- ❖ TOUR OF APOSTLES SYMBOLS
- ❖ TOUR OF SIGNPOSTS ALONG THE WAY
- ❖ TOUR SYMBOLS OF THE GODHEAD
- ❖ TOUR OF ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN
- ❖ HISTORY OF GOTHIC ARCHITECTURE

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