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St. Paul’s Episcopal Cathedral complex in San Diego was designed by Philip Hubert Frohman (1887-1972), one of America’s significant twentieth century Gothic architects. Frohman was an authority on Gothic and Romanesque architecture, stained glass, acoustics, and the design and voicing of organs. His more than fifty commissions include: Trinity Church and Parish House in Santa Barbara; St. Mark’s, Altadena; Trinity Church, Orange; St. Stephen’s and St. Thomas’s, both in Hollywood; the Church of the Holy Faith, Inglewood; and the (unbuilt) first Roman Catholic Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels, Los Angeles. His best-known structure, however, is the fourteenth-century English Gothic style Cathedral Church of St. Peter and St. Paul in Washington, DC, also known as the “National Cathedral,” for which he began consulting in 1919 and where he was the Cathedral Architect from 1921 to 1971.

The parish congregation for whom he designed a new campus on Bankers Hill in the 1920s has also not been unimportant in the history of San Diego. The first Protestant congregation to be assembled in New Town (1868), built a new church building at Eighth and C Streets in 1887. The parish fostered a number of other congregations around the city and county, started the city’s earliest public hospital, opened a shelter and provided employment for transients during the Panic of 1893, and cooperated with Fr. Antonio Ubach in working for the welfare of local Indians. Some of San Diego’s leading citizens were members of the parish.

In 1908 the parish commissioned a new rectory, designed by William S. Frohman. Courtesy of Washington National Cathedral Archives.

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Hebbard, at Fourth and Nutmeg Streets on Bankers Hill, and converted the old rectory into a parish house. As early as 1910, as the central business district began to encroach on its site, the Vestry began debating the question of whether the church should remain where it was or move to a new location. Absent consensus either as to financial feasibility or location, they opted to remain downtown and to enlarge the seating capacity of the building temporarily. But the old rectory was increasingly inadequate as a parish house, and the soaring costs of downtown property following World War I prevented the Vestry from buying the adjacent lot for further expansion.3

**Phase 1: Designing and Building a Parish House**

After surveying a number of locations on Bankers Hill, in September 1919, on motion of Vestryman Charles G. Haines, the Vestry unanimously agreed to purchase five lots on Block 306, Horton’s Addition, opposite Balboa Park at Nutmeg Street, three of them (Lots D, E and F) fronting on Fifth and two (Lots G and H) on Sixth, for $25,500. They also voted to engage an architect to design a harmonious group of buildings for the new site. In April 1923 the Vestry authorized the Rector to approach Philip Frohman with a formal request “for ideas and suggestions with respect to a Church and Parish House on the New Church Site.”4

St. Paul’s Rector, Rev. Charles L. Barnes, undoubtedly had seen Frohman’s earlier work; he certainly had heard about it from other clergy in the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles, among whom Frohman had many friends. In the spring of 1920 Frohman visited Barnes in San Diego. By that time, Barnes must have already made informal overtures, since, accompanied by the Rector, Frohman examined...
and photographed the new site. It is clear from the record that, at least as early as 1911, the Rector and Vestry had envisioned the eventual division of the Los Angeles diocese, with San Diego becoming the see city and the future St. Paul’s Church its cathedral.⁵ That challenge energized both the Vestry and Frohman, though St. Paul’s was not to attain cathedral status until 1985.

Initially the Vestry wanted Frohman to design both a general scheme and a three-level, reinforced concrete Parish House with granite facing. The basement was to contain a kitchen and dining room, and the main floor would be a hall seating around 500 people, with a stage for lectures and “entertainments.” The Vestry originally wanted Frohman to design a future third level for offices, classrooms and Guild rooms, and estimated the construction costs for the first phase as $25,000 to $30,000. Frohman cautioned that such a structure could probably not be done for that amount; he was currently designing a similar parish house for an eastern church, estimated to cost $80,000. He advised placing the offices and meeting rooms in a wing, perhaps to be built later, eliminating expensive supports for a third story and a roof that would eventually need to be replaced. The Vestry took the point.⁶ This was, however, to be only the first in a long series of negotiated (and increasingly expensive) changes.

Frohman’s first sketches for the complex, done on vacation in Michigan, were lost when a zealous chambermaid on a Great Lakes cruise ship threw them out with the newspapers. Frohman met with the Rector and Vestry in March 1924 and, showing them his preliminary sketches, convinced his clients of the wisdom of designing the Parish House and the proposed church simultaneously, possibly in part because he offered to do the whole complex for a lower commission. Frohman’s initial plot plan, dated February 1924, however, shows a very cramped campus.⁷

Frohman thought a church with the impressiveness of a cathedral could be designed even on the limited space available, pointing out that the new structure, when completed, would be slightly larger than Oxford Cathedral. For Frohman, the planned cathedral in San Diego presented “a problem which is more interesting and inspiring than that of the planning of any parish church.” In the summer of 1924, however, Frohman moved his office from Boston to the grounds of the Washington Cathedral, which created some delays in preparing working drawings. Robb and Little took primary responsibility for the firm’s commissions in the Northeast, and Frohman for those in the Washington area and California. Frohman thus retained overall charge of the St. Paul’s project.⁸
In April 1925 the Vestry was considering purchasing the next lot north on Fifth Avenue (Lot C), with its additional fifty-foot frontage, and asked Frohman to sketch out what possibilities such a purchase would have for the complex. Frohman replied that by widening the church twenty feet, he could raise its seating capacity from the originally planned 600 people to 800. Adding a south aisle to the parish house to match that on the north could increase seating in the auditorium from 550 to 600 and providing more space for Sunday School rooms. The purchase would also permit lengthening the office and Guild room wing, or “ell,” and enlarge what Frohman termed the “cloister garth.”

In May the Vestry purchased Lot C for $7,000. After rejecting some unrealistic changes submitted by the Vestry, Frohman sent them a revised site plan in July 1926, showing the parish house re-centered on the new lot (its present site) and an enlarged church and “garth” (the present Queen’s Patio).

At a special meeting on 15 November 1926 the Vestry examined and accepted the preliminary plans and authorized the Rector to request “complete plans and specifications and working drawings for the [now enlarged] Parish House, including the Ell.” Frohman replied that, because the exterior of the Parish House should be subordinated to that of the church, he would first need to determine certain details of the church entrance and cloister, but hoped to begin working drawings in January. This was the Vestry’s first real exposure to Frohman’s perfectionism, which once led him to make a change of one-eighth of an inch in the molding of Washington Cathedral’s central tower to modify the effect of the shadow. His former Pasadena partner, Harold Martin, was asked to supervise construction in San Diego. Since Frohman did not yet have an adequate staff in Washington, the working drawings were to be done in Boston under the supervision of his associate, Donald Robb. When Robb came to San Diego in January to confer with the Rector, he discovered that the Vestry now wanted to increase the height of the tower above the parish house stage, along with other changes.\footnote{In April Robb who, like Bertram Goodhue, thought the Spanish Renaissance style more suitable for a southern California building, produced preliminary prints of an alternative design, incorporating the stage house tower and other details wanted by the Vestry, but adding a Mission-style belfry on the west front. The Vestry and Frohman accepted the tower, but the Vestry rejected the belfry and Frohman, a stricter Gothicist than Robb, was not pleased. Nor was Frohman pleased with the Vestry’s request to build the Parish House initially without its buttresses: “To stick the buttresses on later as ornamental features would be a violation of one of the fundamental principals [sic] of Gothic architecture.” When the Vestry subsequently asked the architects to come up with a less expensive design, Frohman’s response was to suggest changes that “would effect some saving in cost and which would make the structure more Gothic and less Spanish Renaissance in character.”\footnote{In November 1926 the Vestry hired a campaign director and authorized a capital campaign. That campaign, conducted in January and February 1927, fell short of its $75,000 goal by about $10,000. Furthermore, its completion created a new and restless constituency, the donors. In December, Barnes reported, “We are being somewhat adversely criticized for not having sooner undertaken the work of building.” John L. Bacon, the Senior Warden and head of the San Diego
The construction firm of Bacon and Writer, was given the major construction contract. In September Robb estimated that construction costs for the 312,000 cubic foot Parish House, if built in Boston, would cost $109,000, though he hoped that San Diego’s lower building costs would hold it to “within $100,000.” After Robb sent the completed working drawings in November 1927, however, Bacon estimated that the building would cost $110,000.

Understandably, such estimates shook the Vestry. After conferring with Martin in December, they requested yet another redesign that would reduce costs by making the walls thinner, using wood instead of reinforced concrete for internal supports, eliminating the granite facing, and deferring the stained glass windows. Even so, in July 1928 they had to take out a three-year, $30,000 mortgage loan with the Bank of Italy (later the Bank of America). Ground for the new parish house was broken on January 3, 1928 and the building was dedicated the following December. Excluding the cost of the lot, the total bill for the building, after about $15,000 worth of late cuts, came to $80,001.12

Although the firm of Frohman, Robb and Little had been formally dissolved as of January 1, 1928, the three had continued to work on certain continuing projects as “Associated Architects.” Since Frohman no longer held a California license, Martin became the “Associated Architect” for his California commissions.
A Gothic Architect in San Diego

Frohman continued, however, to revise the details of Robb’s working drawings for the St. Paul’s Parish House. Frohman’s major interest, however, continued to be the church and the overall design, writing the Rector a long letter from England in August 1928 on stained glass windows.13

Both Frohman and St. Paul’s anticipated early construction of the new church after the loan was paid off in 1931. The joyous dedication service on December 30, 1928 was marred by no presentiment that, ten months later, the stock market would crash, ushering in the Great Depression that Canon Rankin Barnes, the parish historian, later wrote “hit St. Paul’s and its members with violent force.” By August 1930 only a little under $60,000 of the pledged amounts had been collected. In October, the Vestry formally recognized delinquent pledges as a problem, and during the spring of 1931 began drawing up lists of delinquents and sending out statements either to them or to the executors of their estates. They also applied for (and received) an extension of the Bank of Italy loan. Some of the pledges were never collected, and parish income dropped thirty per cent between 1930 and 1935. The construction loan for the Parish House was not formally discharged until December 1934.14

There could of course be no question of completing the complex during the Depression or the subsequent wartime years of labor and building material shortages. In July 1943 the Vestry established a “Jubilee Fund” for future construction, which they hoped would attract donations both from parishioners and from wealthy San Diegans by the time the parish observed its 75th anniversary in 1944. The Fund was tied to the latest War Bond drive, and the Vestry hoped to raise $75,000 by inducing donors to purchase “Series F” war bonds and donate them to the church, gaining a tax deduction as well as demonstrating their patriotism. But this inventive technique raised only $30,000.

Phase 2: Designing and Building the New St. Paul’s Church

In the early postwar period, property values in downtown San Diego again began to rise. In May 1947 the Vestry elected a young and energetic rector, Rev. Harold B. Robinson, then St. Paul’s curate. Following meetings with church leaders and parishioners, the Vestry sold the 8th and C site for $205,710, reserving the right to remain for another year before removing the buildings. And on July 19, 1947 the Clerk of the Vestry wrote Frohman reestablishing contact, asking what he had done so far on preliminary drawings for the church, and requesting an estimate of the cost of building a crypt, in which services could be held pending the construction of the superstructure.15

Frohman offered to send copies of his preliminary drawings for the church, estimated a six to ten month period for making working drawings, and requested that Martin again serve as associated architect and superintendent of construction. Frohman and Martin met with the Vestry and with parish representatives for two days in November, after which the Vestry voted to contract with Frohman to design a crypt as, in Frohman’s words, “a dignified and beautiful place of worship,” and as much of the infrastructure as was necessary to support future construction over it. Frohman’s rough estimate of the cost was $225,000. In early February 1948, however, the Vestry appropriated up to $5,000 to remodel the Parish House auditorium (now the Great Hall) for worship, until the crypt was completed.
and probably afterwards, as a number of parishioners had expressed their dislike for the idea of using the crypt for services.\textsuperscript{16}

During the spring of 1948 the Vestry and architect ran into problems with city regulations adopted since Frohman’s original designs had been approved in the 1920s. In 1931 the San Diego City Council had passed an ordinance requiring that new construction along Sixth Avenue be no closer to the property line than the average setback of existing buildings on the block. For the proposed church, this would mean a setback of 14 ½ feet on Sixth Avenue, making the church too short for the planned cruciform pattern, reducing its seating capacity, and involving drastic changes in the design process. The attorneys on the Vestry drew up a petition for a waiver from the City Planning Commission and collected signatures from property owners on and adjacent to the block. Though the owners of the house on Lots I and J, immediately to the north of the Sixth Avenue church lots, refused to sign unless the Vestry bought their property, the Planning Commission agreed to the variance. Frohman’s original footprint for the church, which had extended to the property line, was thus preserved.\textsuperscript{17}

About the same time, the Vestry learned that the City Planning Commission had instituted a height limit on buildings in or near the approach to the city’s airport. At the corner of Fifth and Nutmeg, that limit was 154 feet, with a probable six foot increase at Sixth and Nutmeg, and a maximum possibility of a ten or twenty foot waiver. Yet Frohman’s plans for a tower had included a spire rising 195 feet above the nave. Accordingly Frohman had to rethink the tower, opting first for a dome modeled on several Spanish cathedrals, but ultimately rejecting it as “too \[Spanish\] Renaissance in character” and too similar to the dome of the California Building in Balboa Park. Vestryman Haines, since 1928 a Superior Court judge, argued that it was too early to eliminate the spire, since the airport was soon expected to relocate, so Frohman retained the spire while concentrating on alternative designs for the crypt.\textsuperscript{18}

Frohman produced and explained his drawings for the new church and crypt at the May 1948 Vestry meeting. His preferred design for the crypt was an elaborate Norman Gothic structure, which would seat 422 in the nave and 722 in the entire space. He discussed other alternatives as well, including a simple basement and a nave seating 600, with a temporary wooden chancel, choir, and roof. Frohman was asked to draw alternative plans reflecting the discussion to be costed out. Although delayed by the need to let and supervise the contract for the Washington Cathedral’s South Transept, in September Frohman sent the Vestry preliminary drawings and plans for the main floor and clerestory, two schemes for the crypt, and four elevations of the church.\textsuperscript{19}

Although the Vestry had previously authorized the plans, some Vestrymen began questioning “the cost of the monumental edifice Mr. Frohman is designing.” In September the Vestry rejected Frohman’s preferred plan for a Norman crypt and requested him to design a simplified, utilitarian basement that could eventually be turned into office and other work spaces. In a follow-up telephone call the Rector expressed the Vestry’s satisfaction with the church design and explained that the simpler and cheaper the basement, the more quickly they would move on the church. Frohman agreed, saying that he hoped “to make St. Paul’s the most beautiful Parish Church I’ve designed yet.” Late in November he sent working drawings for basement and foundations.\textsuperscript{20}
In the meantime the Building Fund had been depleted by the unexpected costs of $60,000 for moving and re-siting the old church structure from downtown, both as a center for campus ministry and as the locus of a new congregation, St. Dunstan’s. At the time the Vestry had about $150,000 on hand in the Building Fund, and hoped to raise an additional $100,000 to $150,000. Judge Haines, now chairing the Building Committee, wrote Frohman in March 1949 that the Vestry had voted to proceed with the basement only, and to downplay in the campaign literature any target dates for the main structure. In an address at the April “Loyalty Dinner,” the Judge assured those present that eventually there would be a “fully developed Gothic type” church in a complex “of monumental design” that would “be worthy of the site and of the city.” The result would be equal in design, even if smaller in size, opined the Judge, to anything that had been built or was being built “in the larger cities of the Old World or on this continent.” The ensuing campaign brought gifts and pledges of $110,000, which after campaign costs added $100,000 to the Building Fund.  

By late August 1949, however, the Vestry was in a quandary. The latest city variance was to run out November 1, and a proposed new parking ordinance, requiring one parking space for every ten church seats, was under consideration by City Council. The initial contractors’ bids for the simplified crypt/basement had run higher than predicted, and money on hand would at best pay only for the foundations, a skeleton basement, and a temporary roof. At a meeting with Martin, the Vestry debated eliminating the basement entirely, and even whether they should sever the contract with Frohman and hire a local architect who might do a cheaper building. In the end, the Vestry invited Frohman to return to San Diego in October to rethink the project with them and, ultimately, to eliminate the full basement and erect a permanent nave and temporary chancel with seating capacity for 600 people, at a maximum cost of $250,000. They continued to insist, however, that the ultimate seating capacity of the completed structure be “not less that 1000.”

At this point Frohman was understandably taken aback. He had originally designed a stone church, intended for ultimate use as a cathedral that, in the 1920s, would have cost approximately $600,000. In November 1947 he had advised the Vestry that, at current costs, the church as designed would cost between $1,200,000 and $1,250,000. The Vestry had given its consent to his preliminary plans. As Frohman recalled, “it was not desired that we should reduce the beauty nor the monumental character of the church for the purpose of saving present expense.” Now he found that newer members of the Vestry were using his perfectionism, his association with the National Cathedral, and his initial cost estimates to label him as a grandiose, high-priced architect. Furthermore, he was now being asked for yet another redesign, this time in poured concrete with cast stone trim, with none of the High Gothic features of the original.

In an impassioned letter to the Rector, Frohman defended his reputation for being able to design buildings to meet parish budget constraints, reminding him that the Vestry had accepted all of his previous cost estimates and had asked him to proceed on that basis. “As originally presented to me,” he wrote, “St. Paul’s was a problem in architectural design but not in architectural economics.” He then valiantly set to work rethinking the design and coming up with yet another set of plans. These, he wrote Judge Haines, would resemble an earlier style of
church architecture, “based on a transition between a combination of Norman and Spanish Romanesque and early Gothic.” In a subsequent discussion with the Building Committee, Frohman agreed to bring the costs down by eliminating the central tower, and promised new designs along those lines.\(^{23}\)

During the early months of 1950 a discouraged Frohman was working out in his mind a simpler design for a church of reinforced concrete that would not be “ugly and depressing.” Meanwhile, the Rector and Vestry were feeling pressured by their primary constituency, the congregation. The Building Fund amounted to only $248,000, and $72,000 of that was still in the form of unpaid pledges, which were coming in more slowly than expected from parishioners vocally dissatisfied with the delays. The Vestry’s plan to avoid borrowing by postponing the start of construction was in tatters, and the outbreak of the Korean War in late June boded ill for construction costs, materials, and labor. Accordingly, the Vestry began pressuring Frohman to give St. Paul’s priority status and to proceed with designs for what was essentially a new and quite different building. By rising early and working late, the architect provided what he called “semi-working drawings” in early June.

In April 1950 the Vestry had reluctantly concluded that it was necessary to borrow against future pledge payments, reasoning that an early start would accelerate pledges as well as solve its local and internal political issues. The proposed new parking ordinance was still a threat. In mid-August the Vestry asked the architect to proceed with detailed drawings and specifications for the nave, now reduced in height and to be built temporarily only to the clerestory level, and a temporary chancel, at a maximum cost of $230,000. In September Edward Guy Holliday (1891-1961), a local architect who was also a parishioner, was made construction supervisor.\(^{24}\)

Tensions between the client and the architect continued through the remainder of the year. Frohman, for whom neither time nor cost weighed heavily against the goal of getting something exactly right, continued to tinker with the final designs and the specifics of construction plans, attempting to preserve the monumental quality of the original design while adapting to the Vestry’s constantly shifting requests. The Vestry now demanded plans for a complete nave, with clerestory and permanent roof, but still for under its $230,000 cost limit. However, construction wages were rising as a result of the Korean War and it looked as though a shortage of building materials was imminent. The Vestry was therefore enormously frustrated by Frohman’s inability to send blueprints and specifications to San Diego so that they could let contracts and begin what Judge Haines called “work actually in progress on the ground.” The Vestry’s experience serves as a “case in point” for architectural historian and Frohman scholar Christopher Row’s assertion that “one of the primary causes of his patrons’ angst was the amount of time Frohman took to execute working drawings.”

Plans and specifications gradually arrived during November, well behind the promised schedule. The Vestry then solicited bids, awarding the contract to the Nielsen Construction Company for $207,225, an action ratified at a special meeting of the congregation on December 5, 1950. The next day, the City Planning Commission postponed action on the long-proposed parking ordinance for another two months, saving the parish from having to create an on-site parking lot equal to the floor area of the church itself. By mid-December the contractor’s steam
shovel had begun excavating and, in Judge Haines’ words, “is beginning to make the dirt fly.”

The Vestry had also narrowly escaped new wartime restrictions on civilian construction. As construction proceeded, the Vestry contracted with Judson Studios of Pasadena to design and produce the stained glass windows. They also began considering designs for pews, lighting fixtures, the altar, and other appointments, while the Building Committee and Frohman continued to squabble about details and schedules. In March the Vestry negotiated a loan for $70,000 at four per cent, and set an April date for laying the cornerstone.

Frohman visited San Diego in August 1951 to observe the work under construction. He was both distressed by the “cold grey color of the concrete” and miffed to find a number of departures from his detail drawings. He was especially disturbed by the projecting cast stone window sills, “which would not be approved by any architect who was capable of designing a Gothic church and which look crude on the exterior and ridiculous on the interior.” Before leaving for Washington, he spent time in Pasadena with his partner Martin and visited both Judson Studios and the studio of Howard Atwood, whose firm was designing the furnishings. After discussion and a few suggestions, Frohman pronounced himself satisfied with both.

The Vestry’s new strategy of beginning construction worked to bring in both old pledges and new gifts. On November 27 the building fund was just $93 short of its goal, with another $150 due in a few days and another $400 pledged for a later date. The first service in the new church was held on Sunday, December 2, 1951. Six days later the building was consecrated, free of debt, by the Bishop of Los Angeles, Francis Bloy.
Phase 3: The Additions: Chapel, South Transept, and Arcade

So matters stood for the next couple of years, with the Vestry caught between an architect several of them no longer wanted and a growing congregation needing more program space. By November 1956 the problem of Sunday School crowding had become acute. After Judge Haines committed $4500 toward underwriting the fees, the Rector wrote Frohman asking him to design a permanent crypt east of the temporary chancel to be used initially for Sunday School classrooms. This, however, required Frohman to redesign the east end of the building to conform to the changes previously made to the nave as built. Mindful of Frohman’s repeated inability to get working drawings done on schedules he himself had set, and the implications for letting contracts, the Vestry insisted that Frohman associate himself once again with Edward Holliday, Martin having died in the interim. Holliday, who thus became the new “Associated Architect” with responsibility for the working drawings, was described to Frohman as “devoted to Gothic architecture.” Frohman replied in December accepting the new commission and expressing his pleasure at the restarting of the project, which “increases my hope that I may live to see the superstructure of St. Paul’s Church completed.”

Frohman met with the Vestry on July 2, 1957 at a special meeting that seems to have been somewhat contentious. The question of whether the parish had a contractual obligation to continue with Frohman was openly raised. Frohman responded with what dignity he could muster that “if his services were no longer desired, he would not wish to continue the work,” and that if the relationship were terminated, he would not require any further payment beyond the fees already due him. The Vestry then authorized Frohman to prepare new designs for the east end, including the crypt, sacristies and a chapel, but made it clear that Holliday was to prepare the working drawings and specifications for contractors. The Vestry then prepared to launch a capital campaign to pay off the mortgage on recently acquired property (Lots K and L) at Sixth and Olive Streets, to refinish the parish house walls, to build a chapel and crypt and at least a portion of a south transept, and to construct an arcade between the church and the parish house, with a patio behind it.

Frohman sent the blueprints and revised preliminary design drawings for the new extensions in early October 1957 but, ironically, Holliday was now experiencing a prolonged period of ill health, delaying the working drawings for several months. In June 1958 the Vestry established a new building committee under Judge Haines’ chairmanship, and the following January Haines became Senior Warden. These developments brought both experience and speed to the much-delayed project. In February 1959 the Vestry approved Holliday’s working drawings for the chapel and transept. In June an unexpected bequest of $20,000 made it possible to have Frohman design the arcade.

In May, the Vestry had voted to borrow $130,000 for two years. Excavations for the addition began in July, and the Chapel of the Holy Family, the south transept, and the arcade were completed by early April 1960. The first service in the new chapel was held on April 3, though the bankruptcy of the furnishings contractor delayed the completion of interior fittings, so that the new additions were not consecrated until March 18, 1962.

In July 1961 Frohman was in La Jolla during a California vacation and paid a surprise visit to the church. He was taken around to see the new work and, though
he expressed reservations about the ribbing and the stained glass window in the
new South Transept, he seemed generally satisfied, calling the chapel windows
“marvelous.” His guide reported to the Rector that Frohman said he was “anxious
to finish building while he and Judge Haines are still alive,” a satisfaction that was
to be denied them both.\(^\text{31}\)

From 1960 onward, plans for the completion of the church were once again in
abeyance as the Vestry struggled with financial problems, including delinquencies
in Expansion Fund pledges. They were also involved in the twin tasks of launching
St. Paul's Manor, a retirement home, and purchasing the Park Chateau Apartments
at Fifth and Olive (Lots A and B) to complete the parish's ownership of the block
and to prevent any new owner from building on the site. In January 1962 Rector
Robinson resigned in order to become Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, Buffalo, New
York. By that time the Expansion Fund loan had been fully repaid, but more than
$25,000 worth of additional Expansion Fund pledges had to be written off as
uncollectible.\(^\text{32}\)

**Phase 4: The Problem of Completing the Church**

In January 1963 the Vestry elected a new Rector, Rev. Lester L. Jones, Canon
Pastor of St. Paul's Cathedral, Los Angeles. Fr. Jones appointed a new Long Range
Planning Committee in April with a dual mandate: to study the possibility of
expanding the church building, and to determine when a division of the diocese
might be anticipated, a decision that would put the new St. Paul's church back into
play as the probable cathedral for a new diocese of San Diego.\(^\text{33}\) In pursuit of these
objectives, Judge Haines wrote Frohman in June, informing him of the creation of the new Long Range Planning Committee and its recommendation for “a new campaign for the completion of the church.”

Frohman promised to come to San Diego in September, expressing his belief that his 1957 and 1959 designs could be easily converted into working drawings, and wrote Judge Haines of his hope “that you and I may live to have the satisfaction of seeing St. Paul’s Church completed.” The Committee again had to hire a local architect to work with Frohman on the project, preferably one who was an experienced Gothicist. But, they reported, “a survey of the field does not indicate anyone is available here with such experience,” though they had identified unnamed “able local architects” willing to work under Frohman’s direction. The Committee also wanted to get Bishop Bloy to set a target date for the separation, as it would necessarily affect parish building plans. In this they were to be unsuccessful, as the Bishop would not consent to any division during his Episcopate.34

In September 1963 Judge Haines and the Building Committee met with Frohman and Samuel W. Hamill (1903-1989), the local architect chosen to work with him. In the 1930s Hamill had been co-architect (with Louis Gill, Richard Requa and William Templeton Johnson) of San Diego’s County Administration Building. Judge Haines drafted and the Building Committee recommended a contract with Frohman and Hamill for working drawings of the east end of the church and a fleche (to be designed by Frohman) in lieu of a tower over the crossing, at a total cost of $12,000. The Vestry approved only a preliminary contract with Hamill for $1,000 to produce a plot plan of the entire block, “with particular attention to the plan as proposed by architect Frohman,” to incorporate recent city regulations on set-backs, coverage and off-site parking. The survey turned up problems unanticipated by either the architects or the Vestry, but at the following meeting the Vestry agreed to approve the draft contract with Frohman and Hamill “to provide working drawings for the completion of this church,” and also voted to apply for a new zoning variance regarding parking, setback, and site coverage.35

The final contract was not to take effect until the variance request won City Council approval and the Vestry raised the necessary funds. By the time the two architects met with the Vestry in September, Hamill had done the spadework for restarting the project, including projected compliance with new city regulations. He also assembled previous structural and seismic engineering surveys. He estimated the cost of completing the building would be $550,000. By November, however, there were further delays in the variance application, and the Vestry, once again shocked by cost estimates, began exploring alternate possibilities. In the end, they accepted Hamill’s suggestion that they proceed with Frohman on new design drawings, using the $12,000 on hand, but to defer the working and engineering drawings, to be done later by Hamill’s firm.36

As before, plans to complete the church according to Frohman’s designs foundered owing to the financial condition of the parish. As negotiations involving the city, the church and the architects proceeded through the spring of 1964, even the ever-optimistic Judge Haines admitted that there might not be enough resources to do anything further in the short term. In addition, internal problems beset the Vestry on all sides. One was the expansion of St. Paul’s Manor, the nearby parish-sponsored retirement home. Some members of the congregation were
not fulfilling their annual pledges, and the Vestry faced a significant operating deficit by the end of the year. Distant heirs had used an obscure California law to challenge a large bequest, tying up energy and funds in a suit the church ultimately lost. Conflicts had arisen between the Vestry and the Rector, himself increasingly doubtful of his clerical vocation. Early in May 1965 Rector Jones resigned, and the Vestry began a search for a replacement. By mid-October the new Rector, John A. Sanford, formerly Rector of Trinity Church, Los Angeles, was on board, and on October 28 announced a reactivated Long Range Planning Committee with a dual mandate. It was to examine the long-range uses of parish property (which now included two old houses, one used as an office, and an apartment complex, all needing extensive repairs), and to get the Vestry to the point where it could “continue, if necessary, without the assistance of the principal architect, Mr. Frohman.”

At the December 1965 Vestry meeting, the new Committee reported that it had in hand “sufficient preliminary drawings to permit a new architect to carry on without the assistance of Mr. Frohman, if necessary, in the completion of the church building.” It was a realistic appraisal in view of the architect’s age (78) and the Committee’s realization that “financing the completion of the church building would be a long-range project” that would require more than one campaign. Remedying the “dilapidated” state of the Parish House and meeting the need to provide additional program space would, however, take priority. Judge Haines,
now 86 years old, gently protested the decision not to include steps toward the completion of the church in the new capital campaign to begin in 1967. The Vestry reiterated its “great desire to see the Church building completed in accordance with the existing plan,” and assured the Judge that it still had “as its goal completion as soon as reasonably possible.”

In a sermon launching the new capital fund drive, the Rector stated “we need adequate facilities for every phase of our church program except worship.” Using the services of a local architect, George C. Hatch, the Vestry replaced the old house used as office space with a modern office building that included some Gothic design elements, renovated and expanded the Parish House to provide classrooms and other program space, and remodeled the chancel to install a new Aeolian-Skinner organ. Because the city refused to permit the Irving Gill-designed C. L. Gorham house (1910) at Sixth and Olive to be used for purposes involving public access (including Sunday School classrooms), a decision that subjected the building to property taxes, the structure was torn down and its two lots used for on-site parking. Except for some further interior remodeling, Frohman’s church has remained incomplete since 1960.

Frohman had one final contribution to make to St. Paul’s. Edward Holliday, the second “Associated Architect,” had died in August 1961. In April 1962 Father Robinson had written Frohman at the request of the family seeking a design for a credence table in Holliday’s memory. Frohman completed a preliminary design in March 1963 and mailed it to Judge Haines in May; Father Jones had accepted it in July. Frohman finished the detail drawings in May 1964 and sent them on to the F. B. Phelps Stone Company the following month. Because Phelps had no one competent to do more than simple cutting and molding, Frohman had the model made and the actual carving done in Indiana limestone by “the best of our stone carvers at the [Washington] Cathedral” before sending the pieces back to Phelps for shipment to San Diego. But through some oversight, the pieces had remained in Phelps’ stone yard in Washington, crated and ready to be shipped, until February 1966, and the parish received it the following month. Hamill designed the memorial inscription and, after approval by Frohman and Mrs. Holliday, the San Diego contractor hired to set the table in its place in the chapel carved the lettering.

Frohman was struck by a car while walking to the Washington Cathedral on August 7, 1972, and died in hospital of his injuries on October 30, just short of his eighty-fifth birthday. By special dispensation, Frohman, a Roman Catholic, was buried in his beloved cathedral’s Chapel of St. Joseph of Arimathea. No mention of his passing occurs in the St. Paul’s Vestry minutes. Judge Haines, who had been closely involved in the planning and construction of the church complex since 1919, died on September 4, 1974, age 93. In March 1967 the Vestry had negotiated a settlement with Hamill in which he agreed not to bill them “until such time as the Parish should proceed with the completion of the church building.” Presumably anticipating the Vestry would authorize him to produce working drawings once the other projects were completed, Hamill retained custody of Frohman’s design drawings and related material.
Frohman’s Legacy

In many ways, Frohman, an architect of the 1920s, had outlived his time. Goodhue, who had designed such notable Gothic structures as the great reredos of St. Thomas’s Church, New York City, and the chapels at West Point and the University of Chicago, had died in 1924, before the modern Gothic movement had begun to wane. By the time construction had begun on the new St. Paul’s Church in 1951, that movement was largely over. As early as the 1930s, critics had begun to condemn the movement as “a pathetic attempt to restore and recreate a dead art.” In 1952, architectural historian Walter Taylor wrote that the Gothic was “an architectural style completely anachronistic and anomalous in the United States” that was only then losing “its parasitical hold on the architecture of American Protestant churches.” Even the Washington Cathedral came under fire as a “colossal anachronism.” Some viewed Gothic architecture as a device to give elites the opportunity “to proclaim to their peers how well educated they were, how polished their manners, how adroit their savoir faire.”

A few critics, however, admitted that the early twentieth-century Gothic movement in American church architecture was often “based on deep conviction, truth to structure, and exquisite detail,” and “at times produced monuments of superb quality.” John Burchard and Albert Bush-Brown noted in 1961 that Gothic churches “were designed by men who insisted upon excellent detail, workmanlike construction, and colorful decoration executed by skillful artists.” They concluded that the American Gothicists “may not have created much that was new,” but “what they did, they did well.” Their buildings, “gracefully proportioned and solidly constructed, retain an enduring dignity even as many of the more experimental essays of this century begin to look depressingly dated.” Their assessment is useful in evaluating both Frohman’s National Cathedral and his St. Paul’s Church, San Diego.

British architectural historian Paul Johnson has written “the building of a cathedral is a story without an end.” So it is with St. Paul’s. The Cathedral’s renovation of the exteriors of the Frohman and Hatch buildings in 2001 won an “orchids” award in the annual San Diego “Orchids and Onions” appraisal. A new Master Plan Committee began moving toward a large-scale campus development project looking toward completion of the cathedral structure. The additions will be modern, but their outward appearance will conform to the spirit and sensibility of Frohman’s designs.

Gothic Revival architecture remains a historically important, if seldom recognized, architectural style in San Diego. Far more attention is paid to Mission Revival, Spanish Renaissance, and modernist Irving Gill structures than to Gothic Revival buildings. Architectural treasures as Our Lady of the Angels in Sherman Heights are little known outside their neighborhoods or constituencies. St. Paul’s Cathedral has been ignored despite the fact that a nationally recognized master craftsman designed it. It is to be hoped that future architectural historians will take on the challenge of chronicling the history of San Diego’s churches, synagogues, mosques and other present and former houses of worship. At the very least, they might provide a comprehensive inventory and guide that will include these structures in the larger context both of San Diego’s built environment and of the social fabric of this diverse city.
NOTES


6. C. L. Barnes to P. H. Frohman, June 7, 1923, August 4, 1923; P. H. Frohman to C. L. Barnes, July 9, 1923, “Parish House, Building of, 1923-1924.”


11. E. D. Robb to C. L. Barnes, April 21, June 27, July 8, 1927, April 3, 1928; C. L. Barnes to E. D. Robb, July 6, 1927, December 6, 1927; P. H. Frohman to C. L. Barnes, August 29, 1927, March 30, 1928, “Parish House, Building of, Correspondence, 1927” and “Parish House, Building of, Correspondence, 1928” folders, Rev. C. L. Barnes, Office Files.

12. E. D. Robb to C. L. Barnes, September 16, November 29, 1927; E. D. Robb to J. L. Bacon, December 21, 1927; E. D. Robb to A. S. Hill, January 24, 1928, “Parish House, Building of, Correspondence, 1927” and “Parish House, Building of, Correspondence, 1928” folders; VM 5 (1922-1938), 134.


18. E. K. Doolittle to P. H. Frohman, March 9, April, 8, April 20, 1948; P. H. Frohman to E. K. Doolittle, March 5, March 22, April 13, April 27, 1948, “Architects Correspondence, January-June 1948.”


22. VM 6 (1938-1951); August 24, October 10, October 12, October 24, 1949; C. C. Haines to P. H. Frohman, August 26, October 11, 1949; P. H. Frohman to C. C. Haines, September 1, October 19, 1949, “Architects Correspondence, July-December, 1949” folder, H. B. Robinson, Office Files; C. C. Haines, ms. report of the Building Committee on meeting with Frohman, dated November 30, 1949, bound with VM for that date.


27. VM 7 (1951-1960); Barnes, Parish of St. Paul, 41.

28. VM 7 (1951-1960); November 28, 1956; C. G. Haines to Vestry, November 28, 1956 (bound with VM of that date); H. B. Robinson to P. H. Frohman, November 28, 1956; P. H. Frohman to H. B. Robinson, December 5, 1956, “Architects Correspondence, July-December 1956” folder, H. B. Robinson, Office Files.

29. VM 7 (1951-1960); July 2, July 18, September 19, October 12, 1957; H. B. Robinson to P. H. Frohman,


32. St. Paul's, VM 8 (1961-1965). Dean Robinson subsequently became Bishop Coadjutor, then Bishop, of Western New York.


