

# Auraria's Landmark CHURCHES

In the 1850s, gold fever hit Colorado. Miners William Greene Russell and his brothers had panned out seven ounces of gold in July of 1858, at the mouth of Dry Creek on the South Platte. Inflated news of this modest strike sparked the Pikes Peak Gold Rush, a barrage of some 35,000 fortune-seekers.

The Russells founded the pioneer settlement of Auraria on November 1, 1858, naming it after their home town in Georgia. *Auraria* is a Latin word for gold.

As the tiny frontier town prospered, an intense rivalry soon developed with an equally prosperous neighbor across Cherry Creek—Denver. Although Auraria boasted the first school, public house and library, the first stagecoach arrived in Denver circa 1859, thus establishing Denver's supremacy. On the chilly, moonlit night of April 6, 1860, a ceremony on the Larimer Street Bridge united the two towns. Auraria then became west Denver, thriving for decades with attractive homes and flourishing businesses.

This early economic success allowed Auraria to support three Catholic churches within a six-block radius, and an Episcopalian chapel that later became a Jewish synagogue. As Auraria slowly changed from a middle class, residential neighborhood to a heavy industry district, the needs of the people changed. By the time the Auraria Campus was constructed in the early 1970s, only two of the Catholic churches and the synagogue were still standing. St. Cajetan's, St. Elizabeth's and Emmanuel still remain as an integral part of the campus, and a reminder that Auraria was the place where Denver began.

Photo by Michael Gamer.  
Photo manipulation by Nancy H. Karnes.





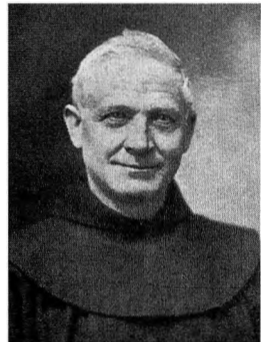
# St. Elizabeth's

The building of the railroads brought a new immigrant population into Denver. A number of these newcomers were German Catholics: at least twelve families settled on the west bank of Cherry Creek in the 1860s. They built their own church and parish school in 1868. They also pleaded with Bishop Joseph Machebeuf for a German priest. In August of 1879, the foundation of St. Elizabeth's church was laid and construction began.

By the middle of September, the church was partly completed and Mass was being celebrated inside. In 1880, a parish school opened in the small brick house once used as the parish rectory.

The original plan for St. Elizabeth's had been to make it the national parish for the Germans, but soon Irish immigrants began to move into the neighborhood. The Germans felt they had built the church, paid for its construction, and that it belonged to them. The Irish petitioned for their own church, and one year later construction began on Saint Leo the Great Catholic Church.

The Franciscan order took charge of St. Elizabeth's in 1887. Three years later, the original St. Elizabeth's church was torn down, two lots on 11th Street purchased, and fundraising began for a new church and school. Two brick buildings at 10th and Champa streets were purchased and quickly converted, the larger serving as St. Clara's convent and the other as St. Clara's Orphanage, which later moved to the outskirts of Denver. The old orphanage buildings were eventually converted to the St. Rose Residence for Women.

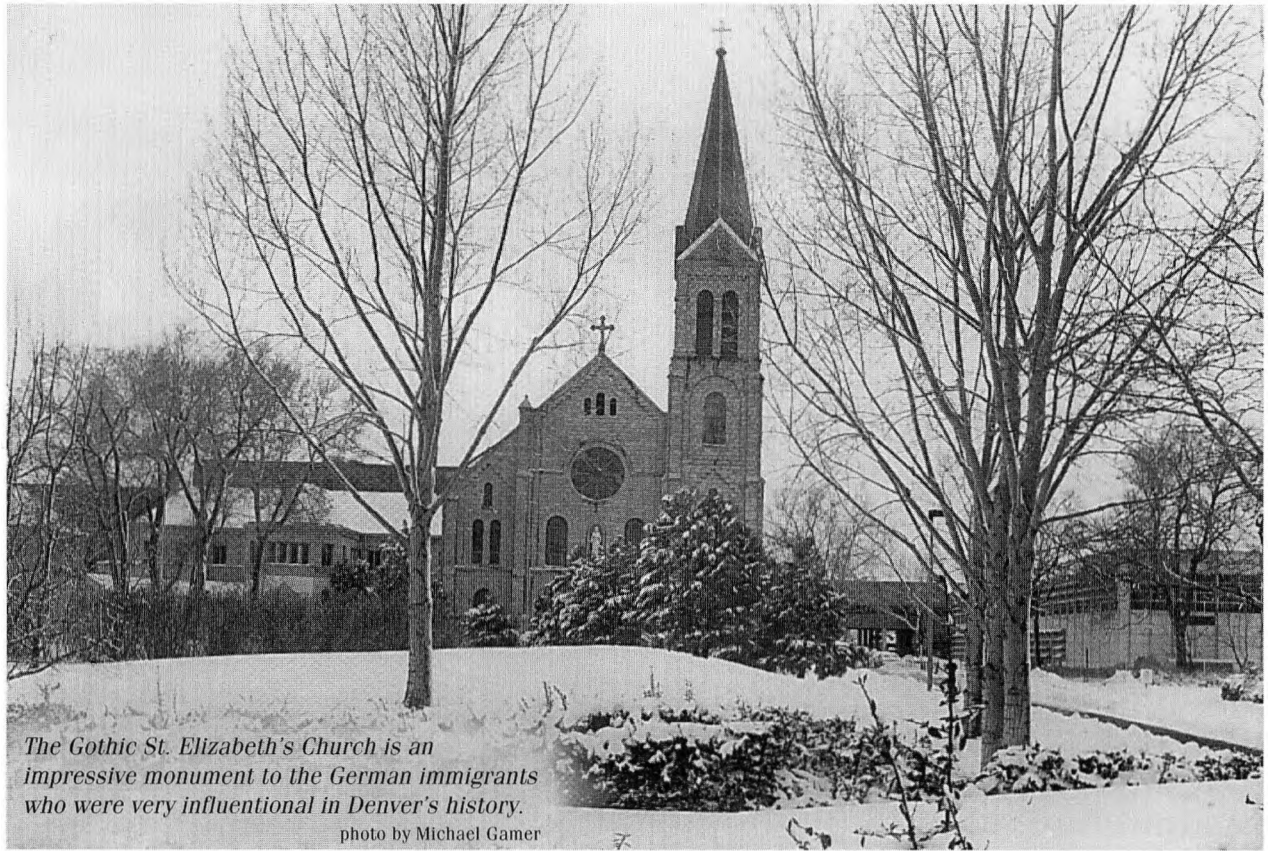


Father Francis Koch, St. Elizabeth's first Franciscan pastor.

All of these projects were remarkable considering the economic conditions in Denver after the Silver Crash of 1893. Undeterred by financial difficulties, the creative pastor, Father Francis Koch, found unemployed laborers who were glad to work for low wages.

The design for the new St. Elizabeth's was based on the cathedral structures of Europe. While the church was

nearing completion, Father Koch commissioned a St. Louis company to cast in bronze three large bells for the belfry. Two of the bells had been paid for, but the third still awaited a donor. Father Koch went to the wealthy German brewer, Philip Zang, who owned the largest brewery in the Rockies, and asked Zang to donate the money needed to buy the third bell. Father Koch assured him that his donation was strictly business. The priest also promised that "Every time that great bell rings it will advertise your brewery, it will cry your name far and wide. Zang! Zang! Zang!" Since St. Elizabeth's was just two blocks from the competing Milwaukee (Tivoli) Brewery, Zang agreed.



The Gothic St. Elizabeth's Church is an impressive monument to the German immigrants who were very influential in Denver's history.

photo by Michael Gamer

On January 23, 1898, construction was completed on the new church. That spring, the Bishop formally dedicated St. Elizabeth's, which measured 132 feet by 69 feet with its spire reaching 162 feet high. The church was constructed of rusticated rhyolite (lava stone) quarried at Castle Rock, its architecture predominately Gothic with a few Romanesque touches. The interior of the church featured statues and woodwork carved in Germany.

Thanks to the polished pleas of the Franciscans and the generosity of Colorado's German Catholic community, St. Elizabeth's was completely debt free by 1902, the first church in the diocese to retire its debt.

In the autumn of 1907, the ill-fated Father Leo Heinrichs became Superior. On Sunday, February 23, 1908, Father Heinrichs celebrated six o'clock morning Mass. At Communion no one paid much attention to Giuseppe Alia, who knelt at the altar rail to receive the host. Alia jumped to his feet and pulled a revolver out of his coat. Joseph Hines, an altar boy assisting the priest, cried out a warning, but it came too late. As Father Heinrichs turned in the boy's direction, Alia placed the gun against the priest's chest and fired. Moments later Father Heinrichs died. He was only forty years old.



A clergy member tends to a garden along side St. Elizabeth's while a canine companion frolics.

Gradually, the neighborhood began to decline from middle-class homes to low income dwellings, warehouses, and small industrial plants. Nonetheless, St. Elizabeth's remained a vital, growing parish.

The interior of St. Elizabeth's was remodeled in 1968. Stained glass windows were imported from Paris, a modern Venetian glass tile mosaic was hung behind the altar, and a 12-foot rose-colored window was set in place in the choir loft. Plaques were installed on either side of the altar, and new chandeliers and confessionals were added, plus stations of the cross in the old German tradition. Twelve brass crosses and candle holders were included, as well a bank of organ pipes in the choir loft. The cost was \$250,000,

paid from the estate of May Bonfils Stanton, who died in 1962.

The year 1968 also marked an end and a new beginning for St. Elizabeth's. Three years earlier St. Leo's had closed, making St. Elizabeth's the territorial parish. One year later, the church was declared a Denver Landmark. In 1969, it was nominated and accepted for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. In the 1970s, however, the parish faced its greatest challenge as the prospect of urban renewal and the creation of the Auraria Campus became a reality.

The parish adjusted to the campus by providing a place where students could gather and relax. This was the St. Francis Center, which was built using funds from the Bonfils Foundation.

To build the center, the school, the St. Rose Residence and the convent were razed. As they were being torn down, a bit of Denver's past was uncovered. When the cornerstone of the old school building was removed, workmen found plans for the school and three 1890 newspapers: *The Colorado Journal* (in German), *The Daily News* and the *The Rocky Mountain News*. The St. Francis Center officially opened on October 2, 1979.

In 1983, the Franciscans turned over St. Elizabeth's to the Capuchin order, which had been in Denver since 1970, bringing an end to almost 100 years of Franciscan involvement and guidance in the parish. The St. Francis Conference Center is now the property of the Auraria Foundation, housing some campus offices and serving as a meeting space and reception hall for the campus and community.

An off-duty police officer, Daniel Cronin, captured Alia before he made it out of the church. Alia was found guilty and executed July 15, 1908.

Although the shooting attracted national attention as rumors of a socialist plot spread, it is far more likely that the murderer was mentally ill. Today, a plaque on the wall marks the spot where the assassination took place.

Shortly after Father Heinrichs' death, Bishop Matz reconsecrated the church. The years following the horrifying murder of its pastor provided quiet growth and change for St. Elizabeth's.



The murder of Father Leo Heinrichs gained national attention, spreading rumors of a socialist plot.

courtesy of Denver Public Library Western History Department



# St. Cajetan's

In the early 1920s, Spanish-speaking people began arriving in the predominately Irish and German neighborhoods of Auraria. A majority of these newcomers to attended St. Leo's, the Catholic Church built for the Irish in the 1890s. When conflict developed between Hispanic and Irish parishioners, Father William O'Ryan, pastor of St. Leo's, asked the Theatine Fathers to minister to the needs of the Spanish-speaking Catholics in the parish.

A petition was sent to Bishop Henry Tihen requesting a separate parish and church and the involvement of the Theatine Fathers, who had been active in the American Southwest for centuries. The Theatines were founded in 1524 by St. Cajetan of Vicenza, who came from a family of bankers and is credited with creating the first credit union.

In 1922, Father Bartolomew Caldentey began saying Mass for the Hispanics in the basement of St. Leo's, and immediately

began to raise funds for a new church. In September, Father Caldentey was recalled to Rome to become the Superior General of the Theatine order. Before he left, however, he went to see John Kernan Mullen, a poor, uneducated Catholic Irishman who had become a millionaire flour miller.

Born in Ireland, Mullen came to the U.S. when he was fourteen. He bought his first mill in 1875, the Star Flour Mills in North Denver, and within four years owned three more. In 1885, he created the Colorado Milling and Elevator Company, which by 1911 had spread into four other states. Mullen never forgot his beginnings in the Auraria neighborhood. He was one of the key figures in the founding of St. Leo's, helping the parish out of its financial crisis in 1898. At the time, Mullen still owned his old home on Ninth and Lawrence streets, even though he had built a mansion in the Capitol Hill area.

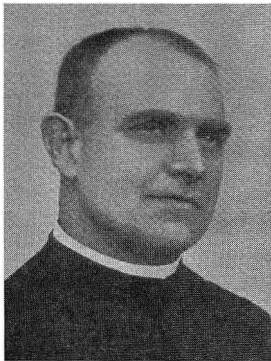
Mullen agreed to give the land on Ninth and Lawrence to the proposed parish on one condition: the parishioners were required to show their good faith by raising \$5,000. Put to the challenge, the parishioners managed to raise over \$4,000. Unfortunately, the bank in which they had deposited their money folded and they lost everything. Mullen was satisfied by their show of faith, however, and donated the land and a small house to serve as a rectory. He also contributed money to begin the construction of the new church.

Theatines and the Hispanic parishioners moved out of St. Leo's basement and into a small house on the Mullen property. Masses, classes and church meetings were held there. The parish borrowed \$15,000 for the construction of the new church and broke ground on October 1, 1924. By January 1925, the basement of the church was finished, the borrowed money was exhausted and the parish was in debt. The council decided to hold services in the basement until the bills could be paid.

Mullen's wife, Catherine, had been a strong supporter of the new church. With her death in March 1925, Mullen felt compelled to provide support to the parish in his wife's memory. Mullen donated \$65,708 of the needed \$89,000 to finish the church. The cornerstone was laid on June 11, 1925.

Before construction was completed, Mullen expressed his desire to see St. Cajetan's consecrated. He agreed to retire the church's remaining construction debts. St. Cajetan's was completed and consecrated March 21, 1926, and dedicated as a memorial to Catherine Mullen.

Many of the parishioners had helped build the church, donating labor for carpentry, masonry and woodcarving. The church itself was built of brick and stucco and had two belfry towers in the front. The interior was trimmed in pine and oak with plaster



Father Bartolomew Caldentey.



John K. Mullen and his wife, Catherine.

courtesy of Denver Public Library Western History Department



poor people living in the South Platte River bottoms. The flood of 1965 washed away the mission, and it was never rebuilt.



June 11, 1925: the cornerstone is laid for St. Cajetan's Church.



When Auraria was built, St. Cajetan's survived to become a meeting space and performing arts center for the campus. The Lawrence Street viaduct was torn down in 1988, and the street became an attractive pedestrian mall. St. Cajetan's plaza now serves as a focal point for the campus.

walls. Lines to simulate marble wainscoting were drawn on the walls. The main altar was ornate, with carved, painted white wood, and included niches for statues and the crucifix.

Robert Willison, who designed the Denver Municipal Auditorium and St. Dominic's Catholic Church, was the architect.

The 1920s and 30s saw the addition of the St. Cajetan Clinic. During 1934, the clinic was renamed the Ave Maria Clinic, and served as an outpatient department for Denver's three Catholic hospitals. The clinic, partly funded through the United Way, was roughly the equivalent of today's modern medical centers; it continued to operate until 1969, when it was closed by the archdiocese. The sick were then steered to the updated outpatient facilities in the three Catholic hospitals and to the neighborhood clinics established in the 1960s by Denver's Department of Health and Hospitals.

In 1935, the parish built a school and convent designed by the famous Denver architect T.H. Buell. When the school opened, tuition was \$20 for each family, regardless of size.

In an attempt to reach out and help more people, St. Cajetan's established Our Lady of Victory Mission in 1937. This tiny chapel was set up at West Twelfth Avenue and Umatilla Street to help the

To help Hispanic families buy cars and homes, and meet life's occasional emergencies, the St. Cajetan's Credit Union opened on January 10, 1939.



For nearly 50 years, St. Cajetan's was a religious and cultural center for the Hispanic community.

This credit union served the parish for 31 years and had 1,350 members. By the 1940s, the St. Cajetan complex included the church, the convent, the parochial school, the Ave Maria Clinic and the Credit Union, which was housed in the rectory located next to the church.

In November 1953, the church was robbed. The story lead in the *Rocky Mountain News* read: "Two armed thugs invaded a Denver church Wednesday and stole \$255. . ." The money had been taken from the church credit union. The incident was so unusual that the investigating officer said that, "it was the only armed robbery of a church he could remember in six years of investigating stickups in Denver."

This marked the beginning of St. Cajetan's troubles. The unprecedented robbery soon became the norm. In April of 1958, a second armed robbery occurred. The credit union was robbed twice more, once in September 1961 for \$800, and the last time in July of 1967 for \$195. Only the final robbery resulted in arrests.

In June of 1964, it was discovered that the bookkeeper for the credit union had been embezzling funds amounting to more than \$14,000. According to the auditors, interest income accounts were short from 1959 to June of 1964 by approximately \$150 to \$180 a month. She had also written up several fictitious loans from which she embezzled \$7,000. The bookkeeper confessed she had been going to the dog tracks and attending church bingo games held in the basement of St. Cajetan's.

After the last robbery was solved and the embezzler revealed, St. Cajetan's experienced a new terror: arson. In March 1968, two fires were started in the church that caused damage to a confessional booth and an altar curtain. No arrests were ever made in connection with the fires.



When rumors swept through the Auraria neighborhood in the late 1960s that the Denver Urban Renewal Authority was going to demolish the area to make way for the 127-acre Auraria campus, panicked neighbors met in the basement of St. Cajetan's. Some prayed, some decided to fight the project and others resigned themselves to the end of an era. In 1967, the neighborhood was officially declared the future location for the Auraria Higher Education Center, and in 1969 the city called a special bond election to secure funds for the project. Even though some residents organized and campaigned against the bond issue, it was approved by the voters. Fortunately, residents of the community were given funds for relocation, even if they were renters.

After the bond issue passed, there was no reason for the residents to stay in Auraria. Soon St. Cajetan's school and playgrounds, the Ave Maria Clinic, and the convent were demolished.

In June 1975, the congregation moved to a new, Aztec-style St. Cajetan's in southwest Denver, taking with them the church bell, some statuary, and the exquisite stained glass bull's eye windows above the front doors. The old St. Cajetan's was remodeled as a campus auditorium, and the basement used for classroom space.

In 1991, a major restoration began which replaced the building's windows and window frames, repaired the roof and exchanged the crumbling stucco for a more durable synthetic, which is resistant to cracking. St. Cajetan's was also restored to its original colors, with gray trim, apricot walls and forest green window shutters. Completing the project, a \$40,000 grant from the Colorado State Historical Fund made possible recreation of the church's historic front doors and beautiful stained glass windows.

Today St. Cajetan's is a focal point on the Auraria Campus, which serves roughly 35,000 students in the Denver metropolitan area. The 73-year-old landmark is a monument to the city's Hispanic heritage, and, along with other historic campus buildings, a reminder that Auraria is the place where Denver began.



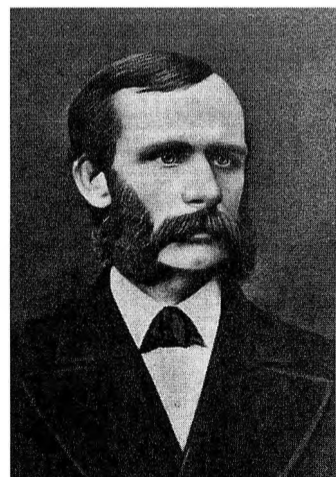
Complete exterior restoration of St. Cajetan's in 1991 included a return to its original colors.  
Photo by Michael Gamer

# Auraria's Landmark CHURCHES

## Emmanuel Chapel

Built in 1876, the Emmanuel Chapel is the city's oldest church structure. On November 3, 1859, Colonel Lewis N. Tappan opened the city's first Sunday School on the site, conducted by Professor Owen J. Goldrick, Denver's first schoolteacher. The city later elected Goldrick the first superintendent of schools and named an elementary school in his honor.

In 1874, the site for Emmanuel was purchased by Bishop John F. Spaulding for an Episcopalian chapel. It was the first place of worship erected in the Auraria quarter of old Denver, and for years was the only church in a ward with more than 2,000 people.



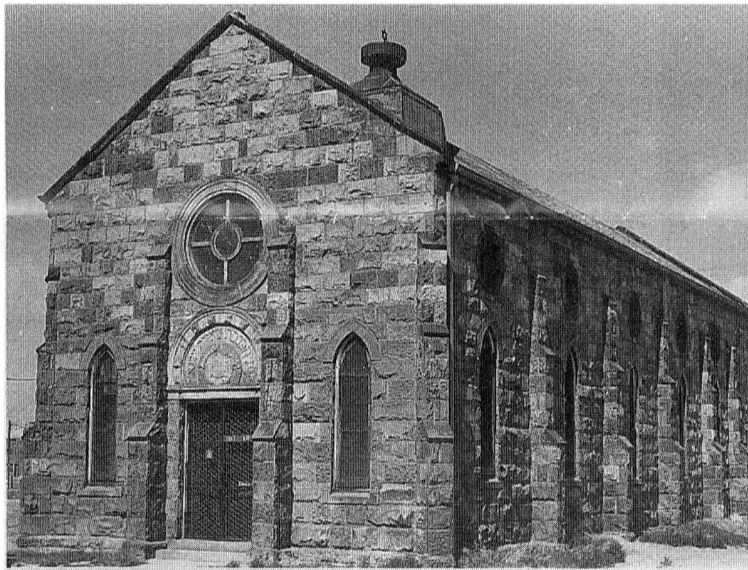
O. J. Goldrick,  
courtesy of Denver Public Library  
Western History Department

The building was constructed of stone with twelve-foot by eighteen-foot wall buttresses, a mixture of Romanesque and Gothic architectural styles. Emmanuel measures 24' by 66', with a wall construction of stone pilasters. The windows in the front and along the

sides are Gothic style. Front and back walls were originally enhanced by rose-stained glass windows.

From 1874 to 1893, the chapel remained part of the Episcopal diocese. After the congregation moved to a new building at Twelfth and Lipan streets, the Cathedral chapter of the Brotherhood of Saint Andrew held services in the building, which they renamed Saint Andrew's Mission. From 1893 until 1903, a Sunday School, a sewing school and a mothers' meeting were conducted by laymen and clergy within the chapel.

At the same time, commerce and industry flourished in the neighborhood. More immigrants were attracted to the area, including settlers from Colorado's unsuccessful Jewish Atwood Agriculture Colony (near present-day Sterling, Colorado), and those from the Cotopaxi colony in Southern Colorado. As Russian Jewish immigrants streamed into Auraria to try their hands at becoming merchants,



In the 1960s, Emmanuel was used as an artist's studio. Today it serves as an art gallery for the three Auraria schools.

small store owners, peddlers and junk dealers, the need for a Jewish synagogue arose.

There had been a small Jewish congregation, Shmona Amunoh, in existence since the late 1860s, on Fourteenth and Blake streets. Their synagogue was destroyed by the 1880 Cherry Creek flood. The congregation was forced to move three more times for a variety of reasons. Finally, in 1903, the members of this old congregation and the new immigrants purchased the Emmanuel Chapel from Bishop Spaulding with a \$2,000 loan. The two groups then formed the congregation Shearith Israel or Remnant of Israel.

The interior of the chapel was remodeled in the image of a traditional Orthodox Synagogue. The ceiling corners were replastered and rounded in the Orthodox style. Downstairs, the synagogue could seat 150 people. A balcony was also added, where the Jewish women sat. As in all synagogues, the seats and altar faced east toward Jerusalem.

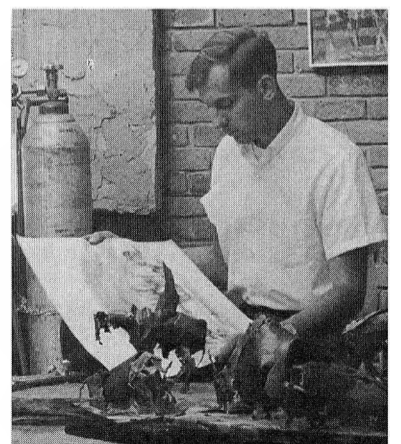
The first years for the synagogue were financially lean, but the membership continued to grow. By 1911, the small congregation boasted 65 members. As several other small synagogues sprang up in west

Denver, Shearith Israel began to dwindle. When World War II ended, the congregation had only fifteen members. Finally, regular services ceased in 1958, when the remaining congregation was unable to gather the required ten men for Saturday and holiday services. In late 1958, the synagogue was sold to Wolfgang Pogzeba, an artist, for \$10,000.

Pogzeba was the son of influential art curator and restorer John Pogzeba. For fifteen years he lived and worked in the old structure, which would eventually become an innovative part of Auraria's art world. His innovative drawings, oils, prints and sculpture made him popular in the Denver community, where his work encompassed a variety of subjects and styles from western to figurative art. A few years after his studio became a campus art gallery, Wolf died tragically along with his wife and six-month-old child in a New Mexico plane crash.

From 1958 to 1973, Pogzeba used the building as an art studio. He updated the electrical and plumbing systems and, except for replacing the original wooden doors with bronze, he made few changes. In 1969, Emmanuel Chapel was approved for listing on the National Register of Historical Places. As a registered United States landmark, no federal funds, such as urban renewal or federal highway funds, could be spent in any manner that might jeopardize its historical integrity.

Four years later, in 1973, Emmanuel became part of the Auraria Campus. Currently the Emmanuel Gallery is used by the Community College of Denver, the Metropolitan State College of Denver and the University of Colorado at Denver as a shared art gallery.



Wolf Pogzeba made inroads in Western art with animals and other figures sculpted in steel.

photo by Rodger Ewy



The interior of Emmanuel as a Jewish synagogue.

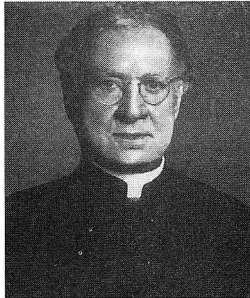
Courtesy of the Rocky Mountain Jewish Historical Society & Beck Archives, Center for Judaic Studies and Penrose Library, University of Denver.



And then there was . . .

## St. Leo the Great

Auraria's Irish-American Catholics originally attended services with the German's at St. Elizabeth's. At first the two ethnic groups shared the church. But the language and cultural barriers eventually forced the parish to split, with separate priests and Mass times for each. When that arrangement proved unsatisfactory, the Irish contingent petitioned for a separate church. Denver miller John K. Mullen donated his land at Tenth Street and West Colfax for the future parish. In 1888, construction began on St. Leo the Great, which would be completed by 1890.



Father William F. O'Ryan, first pastor of St. Leo's.

courtesy of Denver Public Library Western History Department

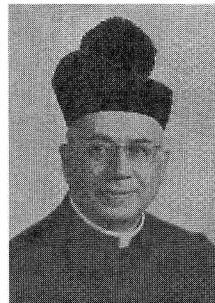
Initially, St. Leo's was one of the more successful Catholic parishes in Denver, thanks to its pastor, Father William F. O'Ryan. Under his leadership, St. Leo's had as many as 2500 people attending the four Masses on Sundays. Nevertheless, the congregation had financial problems. In 1898 a U.S. marshal appeared before Father O'Ryan and ordered him to appear in the U.S. District Court. District Judge Moses Halett signed foreclosure papers on St. Leo's, ordering Father O'Ryan to raise \$11,200 in nine months or turn the church over to its creditors. The pastor immediately went to work asking for donations. Within nine months he had collected enough money to pay the debt, thanks to an \$11,000 lump sum gift from four friends of the congregation, \$10,000 of which was donated by John K. Mullen.

By the 1920s, many of the Irish who had been instrumental in the building of St. Leo's, and whose families had attended and financially supported the church, moved out of the neighborhood as they made their fortunes. At the same time, a number of immigrants from Mexico and other Spanish-speaking Americans moved into Auraria. A majority of these newcomers turned to St. Leo's for spiritual support and guidance. Once again, cultural differences forced a confrontation between two ethnic groups using the same church.

Father Martorell began holding services for the Hispanics in the basement of St. Leo's in 1923. Two years later, John K. Mullen helped finance the construction of St. Cajetan's Church for the Hispanics. Ironically, the churches were only two blocks



St. Leo's was demolished in 1965, just a few years before preservation efforts associated with construction of the Auraria Campus might have saved it.



Father O. Martorell

apart. While the immediate problem was solved with the construction of St. Cajetan's, St. Leo's was never able to count on the support of the neighborhood's Hispanic population. As the congregation at St. Cajetan's would grow yearly, St. Leo's declined.

In 1940 Monsignor O'Ryan died. At the time of his death, the church was kept alive only because of the \$150 per month received from the estates of the late Verner Z. Reed and John K. Mullen.

On February 28, 1965, Father Robert A. Banigan, the parish's last priest, announced the closure of St. Leo's. Catholic officials stated that the dwindling number of parishioners had caused the archbishop to close the church. Those families who continued to seek service at the downtown church were asked to go to Mass at either St. Elizabeth's or St. Cajetan's.

Father Banigan writes, "I told the parish members this morning that it was better to shut down now instead of letting the elements, dust, wind and snow damage it further. Old age just caught up with St. Leo's." Perhaps it was doomed from the beginning because it was "built on a foundation of prejudice." The Auraria Campus Technology Building now occupies the site of the old church.

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William Greene Russell, one of Auraria's founders.

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