

St. Anne's Church
1824-25

Building History

Built in what was still then East Chelmsford, St. Anne's Church (and adjacent rectory) are the oldest surviving mill corporation buildings in Lowell, having been constructed by the Merrimack Manufacturing Company to provide public worship for its workers. This early Gothic Revival church was Lowell's most architecturally progressive building in its day and stood in stark contrast to the neighboring red brick mill, company housing, and other buildings. In addition, many church leaders contributed to the development of the community including St. Anne's first pastor, Theodore Edson, who was a strong advocate of public education in the city.

The Gothic Revival design of the church is attributed to Kirk Boott, agent of the Merrimack Company, and represents an early departure from the Federal style of all of the other corporation buildings at the time. Boott was inspired by St. Michael's Church in Derby, England and King's Chapel in Boston. The first stone was laid on May 20, 1824 and the church was finished and consecrated on March 16, 1825. The rubblestone or mica-slate for the church's construction came from either the adjacent Merrimack Canal or the bed of the Merrimack River. The original church was 54 feet by 70 feet and only two bays long with a tower. It was heated by a wood stove and had two side aisles but no center aisle and a large choir gallery.

The first alteration to the church occurred in 1845 when a thirty foot addition, that had been part of Boott's original design, was added to the rear. In 1857 a gallery and center aisle were installed and in 1868, a chapel was built. A choir and sacristy were constructed in 1873 to connect the chapel with the church and in 1884, the present sanctuary and chancel area were added along with the choir loft being reduced to its present size. Finally, the church originally had only clear glass windows but in 1872, the first stained glass was installed. Many of the windows are by Tiffany of New York and C.J. Connick of Boston.

Beginning in the 1980s, the church undertook an intense program to restore its stained glass windows. Other restoration efforts have included the replication of the four missing original tower pinnacles that were lost in the early 20th century.



View of St. Anne's Church and Rectory at dates to the late 19th century. (Photo – Illustrated History of Lowell and Vicinity, 1897)