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system began to diffuse the initial chill. A pair of longtime elders from the 700-member congregation, Ralph Schwartz and Bill Lauterbach, told visitors about the origins of the church's founding congregation, German immigrants who didn't conduct services in English until Easter Sunday, 1908.

"The population of Rochester in 1870 was 62,386," said Ralph Schwartz. "This church was built in 1873. By 1875, the population was 81,722. There were 79 families on the charter list of members. They had the vision to build this church, the faith in their religion and in the city of Rochester."

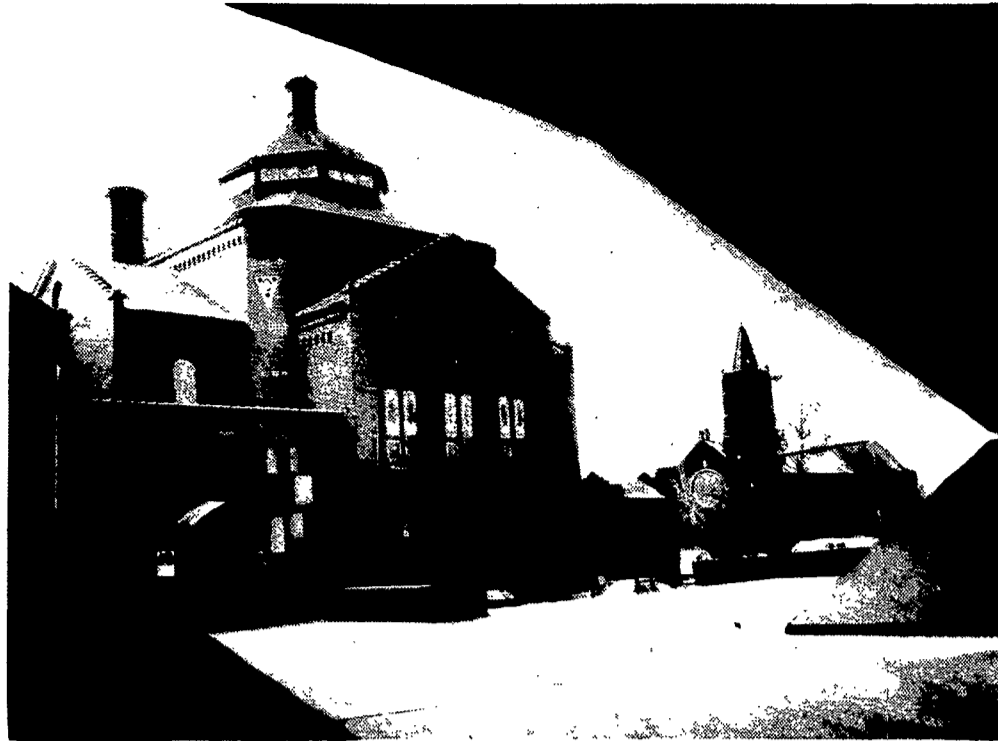
Rounded Romanesque arches, doorways, windows, and ceiling medallions form the dominant motif in Salem's interior. A ribbed ceiling and a carved and painted altar and pulpit are complemented by art glass memorial windows painted in Germany by Bohn Reister Glass Company. A triple window depicting the Good Shepherd faces west into the setting sun.

Cast-iron piers supporting the balcony are painted a surprisingly subtle shade of vermillion, and double windows surrounding the upper tier illustrate various biblical scenes: Jacob's Dream, Jesus in Gethsemane, the Ascension, the Bread of Life, the Risen Christ. Holy Week is especially well-represented. "Thank God the windows have never been vandalized," said Brother Schwartz reverently, "if a bit solemnly."

Mrs. Dortha DeZafra greets visitors in the cruciform sanctuary of Claude Bragdon's best-known surviving structure, the First Universalist Church. Mrs. DeZafra tells eloquent stories of "two men of genius," Bragdon and Robert Hope-Jones, the eccentric British musical prodigy who designed and built the church's gorgeously reedy 1908 pipe organ, an instrument whose mellow, rich tonalities were as different as they could possibly be from the resounding sonority of Downtown Presbyterian's newer Fisk organ. Bragdon, Mrs. DeZafra told us, defined architecture as "frozen music," an elegant conceit, but hardly descriptive of the organ's compelling tones. Still, the image does have its basis in a favorite Bragdon architectural device used liberally in this particular edifice: the triangle. "If you think of the basic musical chord — tonic, third and fifth —" our guide observed, "then this (structure) is an equilateral triangle."

"Simplicity, a sensitive design, a unified concept, harmony in color and proportion, and the individualistic details provided by its architect have combined to make the First Universalist Church one of the most aesthetically enduring church buildings of the early 20th century," reads the tour booklet. The Lombardy Romanesque structure evinces a strong Byzantine influence, designed as it is in the form of a Greek cross. The pulpit furniture was also created by Bragdon: rostrum, flower stands.

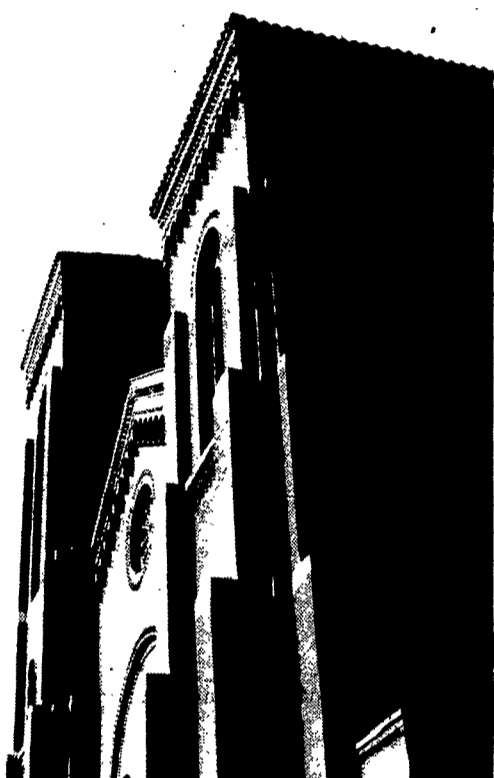
Continued on Page 17



This view of Claude Bragdon's First Universalist Church is seen through the base of Xerox Square across the street. The contrast between architectural styles is striking.



A vertical look at St. Luke's highlights a quadruple cluster of marble pillars.



The exterior of Salem United Church of Christ is a study in decorative brickwork.



The Romanesque arches that enclose the stained glass windows of First Universalist Church are decorative as well as structural elements of the building's design.



An overview of the sanctuary of Downtown United Presbyterian Church reveals the symmetrical sweep of the balcony rail, as well as the barrel vault ceiling, broken into panels by a series of ribs that seem to spring from pilasters between each gallery window. This view highlights the chancel's centerpiece, the magnificent Fisk organ built in 1982.

Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal