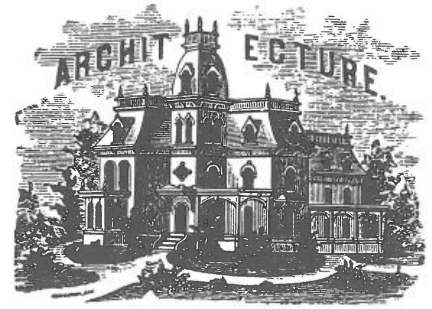


A Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine



James Renwick, Jr.
1818-1895

Calais, Maine, in the 1850s was undergoing a major period of development based primarily on the lumber industry. Concurrent with this prosperity was the construction of several large churches by various denominations. Among these were the Episcopalians who, with the assistance of their Church of England bretheran across the river in New Brunswick, erected a building in 1853-54 (Figures 1 and 2). Plans for the structure were "generously given by the distinguished architect, J. Renwick of New York". Thus, there occurred in Calais, a border town far from major urban centers, the construction of the only design in Maine by one of America's most important nineteenth century architects.¹

By 1853 James Renwick had achieved a considerable reputation as the architect of Grace Church

in New York City of 1843-46 and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington of 1847-51. Grace Church was his first major design and an important early example of the Gothic Revival. This project launched his career as a church architect, which culminated in the construction of St. Patrick's Cathedral between 1858 and 1879. The Smithsonian Institution, a Romanesque style structure, was one of the great public buildings erected in the nation's capitol before the Civil War. In addition to his professional standing, Renwick was independently wealthy, which may have given the wardens in Calais reason to hope that their plea for design assistance would be answered.²

In September, 1850, Bishop George Burgess sent the Reverend George W. Durrell to the St. Croix River Valley to investigate whether a mission could be established in that region. This trip resulted in the founding of the Parish of St. Anne's on September 16, 1852, with Reverend Durrell as rector. The Reverend Jerome Alley of St. Stephen, New Brunswick, laid the cornerstone of the new church on June 10, 1853. The assistance of representatives of the Church of England in Canada was acknowledged at the time as important in the erection of the church. Dedication of the completed building took place on May 11, 1854.³

With no surviving plans or specifications, the extent of Renwick's contribution will probably never be known. The contractor was John Panter (1815-1891) of Calais, a Scottish-born architect-builder who is known to have designed two churches in the area.⁴ Panter may have made his own modifications to the design. However, St. Anne's Episcopal Church is unlike any other church in the region in many important respects, and it can safely be assumed to be essentially the work of James Renwick.

The choice of Gothic Revival for St. Anne's is not surprising, both because of the architect's own demonstrated expertise in that style and the Anglican connections between the new Parish of St. Anne's and New Brunswick, where English in-



Figure 1. St. Anne's Episcopal Church, Calais, 1856 view,
(Courtesy of Old Sturbridge Village).

fluence ensured the dominance of Gothic architecture. Wooden board and batten Gothic churches had been erected in the Calais area previous to St. Anne's. These included the Congregational Church in Milltown, New Brunswick, of 1849 designed by Samuel C. Bugbee. This building, like earlier churches of the 1840s in Brunswick by Richard Upjohn and in Bath by Arthur Gilman, had a central tower with board and batten siding capped by a traditional spire.⁵ With the design for St. Anne's, the board and batten siding has less presence because the exterior is dominated by a large square corner tower with flush boarded buttressing and no spire. These features convey more of the feeling of an English country church. The tower is balanced on the other side of the facade by a smaller tower in the form of a bell cote. The gable end between the two towers has a false stepped gable which gives the main body of the building the illusion of more height. Originally, there was also a railing above the cornice along both sides of the nave. The original paint scheme called for a dark brown sandstone color on all of the elements most suggestive of stone: the buttresses, pinacles, coping, window and door trim, and belt courses. The main body of the building was a light sand color. This polychromatic scheme contrasts with the other examples of this period in Maine, which were evidently monolithic in color.

The interior of the church underwent a major remodeling in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century.⁶ However, the basic wooden framing, with two side aisles, octagonal columns, and pointed arches, is intact. Exposed trusses, as in Upjohn's First Parish Church in Brunswick and Gilman's Central Congregational Church in Bath, are not present. Thus the interior, like the exterior, originally conveyed more of the feeling of a masonry church.

St. Anne's still stands as a major architectural monument for its region of the state. The congregation has recently restored the exterior to its original paint colors as part of an overall program of repairs for the church.

Roger G. Reed



Figure 2. St. Anne's Episcopal Church, 1985 view, (MHPC).



Figure 3. Calais with St. Anne's tower visible in background, circa 1880 view (MHPC).

NOTES

- ¹ Few historical records for this church have been uncovered. The reference to James Renwick, and most of the early history, is in the following: *Frontier Journal*, Calais, June 14, 1853; *Report of the Thirty-Fourth Convention of the Diocese of Maine*, Portland, 1853, pp. 24-25; "A Brief History of the Parish of St. Anne's Episcopal Church, Calais, Maine", in parish records.
- ² "Renwick, James", by Selma Rattner, *The MacMillan Encyclopedia of Architects*, Vol. 3, New York, 1982, pp. 541-548.
- ³ See Note 1, above. These accounts mention the encouragement provided by Canadians across the border. As late as November, 1911, the building is labeled on the Sanborn Insurance Map as the "English Church".
- ⁴ John Panter was born in Edinburgh, Scotland and eventually settled in Brookline, Massachusetts. He designed the Universalist Church in St. Stephen, New Brunswick and the Baptist Church in Calais. The former was Gothic Revival and the latter Italianate. Both were fairly traditional essays in those styles.
- ⁵ The spires on Upjohn's First Parish Church, Brunswick and Gilman's Central Congregational Church, Bath were destroyed in the nineteenth century and consequently are not commonly associated with either building.
- ⁶ This probably occurred when the first small parish house was built sometime between 1889-1895, or when its replacement was built sometime between 1906-1911. The latter structure is a small board and batten building which is compatible with the design of the church. Construction dates of these two structures are derived from Sanborn Insurance Maps.

LIST OF KNOWN COMMISSIONS IN MAINE BY JAMES RENWICK, JR.

St. Anne's Episcopal Church, Calais, 1852-53, Extant.

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