

“FOR LOVE OF GOD AND LOVE OF ARCHITECTURE” A Brief History of Architectural Ultramontanism at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish Church¹

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Architectural style during the nineteenth century was a fraught territory. After the fashion for Gothic Revival in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, classicising elements were becoming important again for Roman Catholic ecclesiastical patrons, either for liturgical or theological reasons. It was for the last reason that the Archbishop of Toronto, the Irish-born John Joseph Lynch D.D. [1816-1888], built several classicising churches, including the parish church Our Lady of Lourdes at Sherbourne Street above Wellesley Street (1886) (fig. 1). The parish church was built to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of Lynch's installment as Bishop of Toronto.

The heritage value of Our Lady of Lourdes church lies in its unique status as a Renaissance Revival church at a time when the prevailing fashion in Toronto was for the Gothic Revival. The church was modelled on Santa Maria del Popolo in Rome (1472-1477) (fig. 2) along with references to St. Peter's Basilica (1506-1626).

As a memorial church, the original layout followed a chapel-like design with short transepts and a vaulted apse, but with a small footprint which lacked side aisles (fig. 3). All of this was surmounted by a Renaissance-inspired dome supported by an octagonal drum, which is significant because it made Our Lady of Lourdes the first domed church built in Toronto. The interior featured a coffered ceiling and massed columns, which would have led the eye to a tabernacle and an indoor grotto representing Our Lady of Lourdes (the latter is extant in the church). Despite the uniqueness of the church, it



FIG. 1. OUR LADY OF LOURDES PARISH CHURCH, TORONTO, ON. | EVAN MCMURTRY.