



ANGELS OF THE CITY

A choir of celestial statues keeps watch over center city

Los Angeles is known as the City of Angels, but Scranton has its own flight of celestial beings. Perched on the four corners of each of the twin towers of St. Mary and St. John's Byzantine Catholic Church are eight trumpet-blowing, aluminum angels. From their stations high above the streets they overlook the center of the city.

Julie Esty, a very engaging and knowledgeable historical interpreter who lives in Scranton, recently gave me a tour of the church and a bit of its history. The parish started in 1891 at Hickory Street and South Irving Avenue in South Scranton. In October of 1914 the cornerstone was laid for the current building on the corner of Mifflin Avenue and Linden Street. John Howley was the architect for the Georgian Renaissance-style brick and limestone church, which cost between \$30,000 and \$40,000 to build. The original architect, Edward Langley, had his plans rejected by a new pastor and had to sue to be paid for his work. The church, which at the time seated 700, started holding services in the building in 1915. Construction was finished in 1924.

The interior of the church is lavishly decorated. Beautiful stained glass windows featuring Biblical figures and symbols line the walls. They were created by Munich Studios in Chicago at a cost of \$2,700. A mistake in the form of a misplaced tile of glass was purposely included to illustrate the point that only God is perfect. Faux marble columns topped with stylized waves support the ceiling arches that are

Artistic Impression

This is another installment in our occasional series that looks at the wonderful artistic elements in our community. I'd like to thank Nelson Wood of High Seas Aerial for providing me with wonderful bird's-eye view photos that I used as reference for my illustration.



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Artistic Impression

decorated with relief sculptures of fish, flowers, dragons and cherubic angels. The same type of columns were used in the luxurious Hotel Casey on the other side of the downtown. The ceiling is covered with paintings of Biblical scenes. A motif of wheat and grapes, representing the wine and host that are a staple of Catholic services, is repeated on the railing of the balcony and front steps, as well as between the images on the iconostasis in front of the altar. There also are paintings of the Stations of the Cross along the walls, which is unusual for a Byzantine church, according to my tour guide Julie and the church's priest, the Rev. Leonard A. Martin, S.J.

The crosses on top of the towers were originally covered in gold leafing. In October of 1949, demolition of the old towers and construction of two new steel and fabricated aluminum steeples began at an estimated cost of \$25,000. There's no mention of the angels in articles about the new towers, but they appear in a photo of the finished project taken in October of 1951. An incredible amount of detail was included in the angels, despite the fact that they could only be viewed from a distance too far to appreciate it.

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