

GLENCAIRN
1001 Cathedral Road
Bryn Athyn
Montgomery County
Pennsylvania

HABS NO. PA-6036

HABS
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46-BRYAT,
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, DC 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

GLENCAIRN

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Location: 1001 Papermill Road, Bryn Athyn, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania.

Significance: Glencairn, constructed in the Romanesque style, reflects the religious, civic, business, and family ideas of Raymond Pitcairn and his interest in the medieval arts and crafts. It was the second architectural structure that Raymond designed without a formal course in architecture and by a building process unfamiliar to modern times.

Description: Located near the Bryn Athyn Cathedral, Glencairn is late Romanesque in style and asymmetrical in plan. The house is made up of seven floors, a full basement with an attached chapel, and tower room. The structure is designed on two axis; one starting on the north porch of the Great Hall and ending at the southend apse of the living room, the other at the west wall of the cloister to the apse in the east side of the chapel. The two are balanced by the Norman tower with definite obscurities found in line and proportion throughout the structure.

The exterior features include carved doorways, pillars and wall insets. The main entrance has an elaborately carved archway with a carved inset over the doorway showing a tree and two sheep to symbolize the Pitcairns. Underneath this inset are sheep depicting each child of the Pitcairn's. The door handles were custom made for the house and were molded in the shape of stylized lions.

The interior is a showcase of religious icons and celtic patterns, starting with the main entrance hallway which is lined with mosaics depicting the Creation Story. Early Medieval stained glass windows and statues collected by Raymond Pitcairn embellish the great hall. Other examples of elaborate details are the handcarved teak stairway and ornamental metalwork. The third floor stair hall is a showcase of friezes and beams that are set in concrete reliefs of varying Celtic patterns.

History: Raymond Pitcairn was the eldest son of John Pitcairn, founder of the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company. After designing and supervising the construction of Bryn Athyn, he turned his craftsmen toward the building of his home, Glencairn (named by joining his wife's maiden and his last names). Glencairn was built between 1929 and 1942 with Harry Bowen as the mastercarpenter and superintendent in charge of the construction. After a slow building process using craft techniques of the eleventh century, the main part of Glencairn was finally dedicated in 1938.

Once a Philadelphia lawyer, Raymond gave up the profession to dedicate his time to the building of the cathedral. He developed Glencairn out of his interest in incorporating his Romanesque/Early Gothic art collection into an architectural structure. The Great Room became the room where he housed most of his Medieval art collection, but everywhere around the house was an aura of Pitcairn's religious faith. Though he lacked formal architectural training, he was able to express his ideas through three dimensional models.

He took great care in choosing his craftsmen and made sure they were knowledgeable on medieval crafts. The symbolic and ornamental carvings found throughout the house were executed largely by three mastercraftsmen who had acquired skills in their homelands--Attilio Marchiori and Pietro Menghi from Italy, and Benjamin Tweedale from England.

Much detail also went into the choosing materials for Glencairn. The ornamentation metalwork is of monel, a natural alloy of nickel and copper mined in Canada. Doors, stairways, and some ceilings are of teakwood shipped from India and Java and fashioned by hand on the site. Raymond Pitcairn found the grain and texture of stone just as important as the color and so he searched many areas for suitably ones.

Sources: E. Bruce Glenn, Glencairn: The Story of a Home, Bryn Athyn: Academy of the New Church, 1990.

Glenn, Dean E. Bruce, Rev. Martin Pryke and Susan M. Zacher. "National Register nomination: Glencairn, 1979." The nomination is located in the History Division, National Park Service.

Historian: Terra K. Klugh, HABS Historian, 1996.

ADDENDUM TO:
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