Cassius Emlen Urban

On February 20, 1863 in the Conestoga Township of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Cassius Emlen Urban was born. He was the son of a long line of country carpenters. In 1873, the Urban family moved to Lancaster city to open a planning mill located on South Prince Street; their they produced “window sashes, doors, and millwork”. In 1880, Urban graduated from Lancaster Boys School. After his graduation he served as an apprentice to Scranton architect E.L. Walter for eighteen months. Later in his life he became a member of the American Institute of Architects. He married a woman named Jennie Olivia McMichael, with whom he had two children. On May 21, 1939, in Lancaster, after only two years of retirement Urban died.

Urban is most well known for the buildings he designed in Lancaster. Of the fifty-seven buildings he designed in Lancaster forty-seven are still standing today. Three of his fifty-seven buildings have been demolished and seven have been substantially altered, but they do technically still stand. Urban’s style of architecture is described as a combination of Queen Anne, French Renaissance, Colonial Revival, Gothic Revival, and Beaux Art style. Urban also designed Milton Hershey’s home, as well as a few other Hershey buildings, after they became friends through their memberships with the Hamilton Club. Urban was hired by Milton Hershey to design all of the main building in the Hershey community between 1903 and 1926. The numerous buildings include the Hershey Chocolate Company offices and factory, 1903, the Hershey Trust Company, 1914, the Community Building, and the Hershey Theater, 1915, and the Convention Hall, 1915.

In 1888 his first major commission was to build the Southern Market at 100 South Queen Street in Lancaster. He was only twenty-five years old at the time; he was chosen to build the Market because of his father’s close relationship with Henry Burger. Burger was a head member of the Market Building Committee and an old business partner of Amos Urban, Cassius’ father. Urban designed the Market as a three story, Queen Anne Style building. The Southern Market is no longer in use, but, fortunately, the building still stands. Urban also designed the Watt & Shand Department Store, 1898, as well as the family’s homes, the Greist Building, 1924, and the homes and department stores for the Hager family. Urban’s office was located in the Woolworth building on North Queen Street; he also designed this building in 1899 “for Frank Woolworth as a memorial for his first store.”

3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 City of Lancaster, 2.
6 Ibid, 3.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid, 53.
10 Ibid, 43-44, 45-50.
11 Benowitz.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 City of Lancaster, 2, 4.
16 Ibid, 4.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Benowitz.
20 Ibid.
In Elizabethtown, Urban was contracted to build the Moose Lodge, and the theater by director D.C. Kreider. The theater opened in 1924, and the Moose Lodge opened in 1928. The Moose is one of the main building to define Elizabethtown’s landscape.

Urban’s unique architectural style was very modern for the time, and showed his ability to convey his forward thinking through his architecture. When he spoke at the dedication for his alma mater, the Lancaster Boy’s School, he told about the importance of using “high-end materials and workmanship, to ‘build strong and substantial’ architecture to ensure the buildings will last.

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21 Ibid.  
22 Ibid.  
23 Ibid.  
24 Ibid.  
25 Ibid.