

Cassius Emlen Urban

On February 20, 1863 in the Conestoga Township of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Cassius Emlen Urban was born.¹ He was the son of a long line of country carpenters.² 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”.³ In 1880, Urban graduated from Lancaster Boys School.⁴ After his graduation he served as an apprentice to Scranton architect E.L. Walter for eighteen months.⁵ Later in his life he became a member of the American Institute of Architects.⁶ He married a woman named Jennie Olivia McMichael, with whom he had two children.⁷ On May 21, 1939, in Lancaster, after only two years of retirement Urban died.⁸

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.⁹ Three of his fifty-seven buildings have been demolished and seven have been substantially altered, but they do technically still stand.¹⁰ Urban’s style of architecture is described as a combination of Queen Anne, French Renaissance, Colonial Revival, Gothic Revival, and Beaux Art style.¹¹ 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.¹² Urban was hired by Milton Hershey to design al of the main building in the Hershey community between 1903 and 1926.¹³ 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, 1915.¹⁴

In 1888 his first major commission was to build the Southern Market at 100 South Queen Street in Lancaster.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ Burger was a head member of the Market Building Committee and an old business partner of Amos Urban, Cassius’ father.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ 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.”²⁰

¹ City of Lancaster. To Build and Substantial: The Career of Architect C. Emlen Urban. (Lancaster: The Demuth Museum, 2009), 2.

² Jean-Paul Benowitz. Cassius Emlen Urban (1863-1939) Was Elizabethtown’s Architect.

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.²¹ The theater opened in 1924, and the Moose Lodge opened in 1928.²² The Moose is one of the main buildings to define Elizabethtown's landscape.²³

Urban's unique architectural style was very modern for the time, and showed his ability to convey his forward thinking through his architecture.²⁴ 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."²⁵

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.