CHURCH OF THE SACRED HEART
IN JERSEY CITY, NEW JERSEY

A HISTORY AND ANALYSIS OF RALPH ADAMS CRAM'S
SEMINAL SPANISH GOTHIC MASTERWORK

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Church of the Sacred Heart in Jersey City, New Jersey:
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Seminal Spanish Gothic Masterwork

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Questions: Is Sacred Heart Church in Jersey City, New Jersey a significant work in the architectural canon of Ralph Adams Cram? What specific elements make it a seminal Spanish Gothic edifice? What historical factors figure into the design of the church? What preservation issues are affecting the now-closed church? Should an attempt be made to save this monument—and why?

Summary: The Church of the Sacred Heart, located in the Greenville section of Jersey City, New Jersey, was designed and constructed from 1921-1924 under the supervision of Ralph Adams Cram, who had been hired by the Dominican Order of Preachers to create a monastic monument for both the order and the Catholic congregants of Greenville. The commission came to Cram mid-career when he was in his late 50s and in search of a new architectural motive. Spain, to which he traveled in 1921-1922, provided him with the inspiration he needed. The church is adorned throughout with richly carved and polychromed wood statuary, beaded open timber tie-beam ceilings, murals, arabesque wall stencils, and medieval revival stained-glass windows crafted over a thirty year period by some of the country’s finest artisans, including Wright Goodhue, William Haley, Jacob Renner and Simon Berasaluce. Sacred Heart served the neighborhood from 1924 to 2005. It has fallen victim to vandalism, deterioration and development threats and has prompted preservationists to call for its preservation.