HISTORIC LANDMARK COMMISSION
AUGUST 26, 2019
1711 E. OLTORF STREET—PRINCE OF PEACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

ARCHITECTURE

Rectangular-plan religious building constructed in the Mid-century Modern style. The building is capped by an A-frame roof with deep eaves, clad in brick, and features a patterned stained glass window in the front gable end and bands of stained glass casement windows on the side walls. A one-story entry vestibule is enclosed in sandblasted glass and capped by a flat roof that extends to the parking lot. A one-story building connects to the west side of the church. It is capped with a flat roof, clad in tile with brick piers, and features double and triple banks of casement multi-lite aluminum-sash windows.

RESEARCH

Staff note: Thanks to Jason John Paul Haskins for extensive research. See the Background Significance document for additional context, historical newspaper articles, and photographs.

Prince of Peace Lutheran congregation

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church formed in 1954, the second Swedish Lutheran congregation in Austin. (The first, Gethsemane Lutheran, was formed in 1868.) The church initially met in the Travis High School cafeteria, another new building in South Austin that opened in 1953. The young church had limited funds, and sought a new building that would not be prohibitively expensive.

The church was one of the first buildings constructed after I-35 was built. Along with Travis High School constructed in 1953 just west of I-35, Prince of Peace anticipated postwar Austin: a newer, more suburban community that extended well beyond historic neighborhoods, was oriented to automobiles, and required services and community institutions nearby.



Aerial photograph, 1940. As shown, the area is rural, with scattered buildings. Established residential neighborhoods in South Austin are located to the northeast (top left).



Aerial photograph, 1958. The property is circled in gold. By this time, I-35 had been constructed and Travis High School built. Residential development is still limited to the established neighborhoods of South Austin.



Aerial photograph, 1965. The property is circled in gold. This photograph shows new residential neighborhoods to the north, as well as a subdivision being developed directly south of the property. Commercial development has begun to spring up along I-35.



Aerial photograph, 1976. The property is circled in gold; an expanded parking lot is visible. This photograph shows a growing residential area to the north, south, and east, as well as west of I-35. Commercial development along I-35 has expanded from 1965.



Aerial photograph, 1997. The property is circled in gold. This photograph shows an area that is largely built out with intensive residential and commercial development.

J. Eugene Wukasch

J. Eugene Wukasch was a prominent Austin architect who studied at the University of Texas in the 1940s and established a private practice in 1954. Prince of Peace Lutheran Church was one of his first independent commissions. A 1956 *Austin Statesman* article recounts that the congregation initially had asked Wukasch for a Colonial Revival church, but that Wukasch had demurred. The resulting building, said the reporter, was "an old-time religion… expressed in the idiom of modern art and contemporary architecture."

Wukasch went on to design more than 70 religious buildings around Texas in the 1950s and 1960s, mostly but not exclusively for Lutheran congregations. His designs incorporated historical themes into a modern style. The *Austin American* noted his "statewide reputation in church design" and "sensitive blending of the traditional with warm simplicity." Wukasch himself spoke about the need to "build something modern but keep alive the spirit of our heritage."

He incorporated historical forms into contemporary design and materials for congregations such as Prince of Peace Lutheran, which was awarded honorable mention in a national ecclesiastical design competition in 1957 and featured in *Texas Architect* and *Architectural Record*; Windsor Park Presbyterian (now Austin Mennonite), heralded as "one of the most attractive and uniquely designed Presbyterian churches in Austin"; First Presbyterian Church; and many more in Austin and around the state. Wukasch also participated in a national conversation about churches' changing needs: he served on the board of the American Society for Church Architecture, attended conferences and seminars on religious design, and wrote about church design for religious periodicals.

Though best known for ecclesiastical design, especially in the 1960s, Wukasch's firm grew to design a range of buildings across Texas: public buildings, fire stations, schools, and master plans, such as for Concordia College. The firm completed some residential additions and renovations, along with "pre-letting" inspections of nearly completed homes as the owner's representative. In the 1960s, Wukasch became more involved in design for aging, including nursing homes, and served as chairman of the Austin Adult Services Council. His design for the Westminister [or Westminster] Manor retirement home was hailed as "a whole new look in retirement living" by *The Austin American*.

A historic preservation advocate, Wukasch was deeply committed to the Travis County Historical Commission. He and Raymond McClure planned Waterloo Park in 1975, a project that included moving the historic Hardeman House into the park and restoring it. Wukasch also planned Symphony Square in the 1970s, including the adaptive reuse of the Jeremiah Hamilton Building as a concert venue. Wukasch led the restoration of the Hannig Building (206 E. 6th Street), Daniel H. Caswell House (1404 West Avenue), and Morley Building (209 E. 6th Street) and advocated for the preservation of the Nueces County Courthouse.

Wukasch died in Austin in 2001.



Prince of Peace Lutheran Church (1955)
Photos: Jason John Paul Haskins, via Flickr



Windsor Park Presbyterian Church (1960)
Photos: Jason John Paul Haskins, via Flickr



Immanuel Lutheran Church, Giddings (1960-61)
Photos: Jeremy Clifton, lonestarbackroads.com



Gethsemane Lutheran Church (ca. 1963)
Photos: Jason John Paul Haskins, via Flickr

Octavio Medellín

Octavio Medellín was a Mexican American artist who moved to San Antonio in his early teens. He studied art in Chicago and Mexico, then moved back to Texas, where he taught and made art: stained glass, ceramics, mosaics, and bronze casting. Haskins notes that Medellín

"made a significant contribution to the history of modern art in [Texas], especially influence of indigenous Mexican/regionalism in American modern art." His sculptures were featured in an exhibition at New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in 1942.

At the time Prince of Peace was designed, Medellín was living in Dallas. He was friends with J. Eugene Wukasch, who knew of his interest in religious work and invited him to create the glass art for the building. The etched plate glass windows in the vestibule are his work, and were lauded as "a billboard… And what a billboard!" in *The Austin Statesman* when completed.

Building Technology
The building is an early example of pre-fabricated timber frames, or glulam. A trained structural engineer, Wukasch often served as both architect and engineer on projects. At Prince of Peace Lutheran, he used glulam to create a high-pitched, lofty ceiling while keeping costs low. Haskins points to a trade publication by Unit Structures that featured Prince of Peace Lutheran as an innovative use of glulam in churches.

STANDARDS FOR REVIEW

The property appears to meet the standards for designation as a historic landmark.

Designation Criteria—Historic Landmark
1) The building is more than 50 years old, having been built in 1955-56.
2) The building retains a high degree of integrity. A wood-frame fellowship hall was constructed to the west of the original sanctuary and education building in 1961, within the historic period. A 1985 rear addition to the fellowship hall does not adversely impact the historic character of the property.
3) Properties must meet two historic designation criteria for landmark designation (City of Austin Land Development Code (Section 25-2-352). The property appears to meet at least two criteria.
   a. **Architecture.** The building is a strong example of a Mid-century Modern church, particularly the A-frame form popularized after World War II, and demonstrates an early use of glulam frames in construction. The building was designed by J. Eugene Wukasch, a prominent mid-century church architect in Texas, and features sandblasted art glass by Octavio Medellín. In 1957-58, the building was recognized by the Central Texas chapter of the American Institute of Architects, *Texas Architect* magazine, and *Architectural Record*. It appears to be architecturally significant.
   b. **Historical association**. The building is associated with Austin's postwar growth, as one of the first buildings constructed along the then-new I-35. There appear to be significant historical associations.
   c. **Archaeology**. The property was not evaluated for its potential to yield significant data concerning the human history or prehistory of the region.
   d. **Community value**. The property may possess a unique location, physical characteristic, or significant feature that contributes to the character, image, or cultural identity of the community, Austin, or Texas as a whole.
   e. **Landscape feature**. The property is not a significant natural or designed landscape with artistic, aesthetic, cultural, or historical value to the city.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Recommend historic zoning.

PROPERTY INFORMATION

Photos



East elevation and primary (north) façade of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church.



Primary façade.



Detail view of vestibule entrance.



North (primary) facades of education building (left) and Fellowship Hall (right).



Detail view of hyphen between education building and Fellowship Hall.



Primary (north) façades and west elevations of sanctuary, education building, and Fellowship Hall.

Building Permits

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church ~~1035 E Live Oak St.~~ 1711 E. Oltorf St.
136 E245'X220' of Nettie P Steiner

Church Bld.

61679 9-12-55 25000.00

A. H. Edburg 8

Building permit issued to Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, 9/12/1955.

136

WATER SERVICE PERMIT E Nº 4550

Austin, Texas

Received of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church Date 9-17-55

Address ~~1035 E Live Oak~~ 1711 East Oltorf St.

Amount $30.00

Plumber Cook Sprew Size of Tap 1"

Date of Connection 9-30-55
Size of Tap Made 1"
Size Service Made 1"
Size Main Tapped 2" BALK
From Front Prop. Line to Curb Cock 7.5'
From E— Prop. Line to Curb Cock 54'
Location of Meter N. side R.B.
Type of Box Low
Depth of Main in St. 4.5'
Depth of Service Line 2.5'
From Curb Cock to Tap on Main 6'
Checked by Engr. Dept. 10/27/55 HTB

No. Fittings	Size
Curb Cock	
Elbow	
St. Elbow	
Bushing	
Reducer	
8 Pipe	1" Copper
Lead/Comp.	Dismantling Joint
Nipples	
Union	
Plug	2" x 1" Bush. Change
Tee	1" x 1" x 1" Copper
Stop	1" Ball
Box	1" Locke
Lid	"
Valves	
Job No.	W-323-502
Req. No.	3 Tons

Water tap permit issued to Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, 9?/17/1955

1711 E. Oltorf St.

Prince of Peace Lutheran Ch. ~~1635 E. Live Oak St.~~

136 NE 244.52 x 227.9 -

Augusta Howell Tract

Frame Addition to Church Bldg.

81359 9-21-61 28,190.00

E. L. Morriss 6

w On lot s Septic Tank

EDUCATIONAL BUILDING Mechanical Room to be enclosed by 2 hr. fire wall. Paved off-street Parking provided on 20 x 60. Paved parking strip.

NOTE: Health dept. says Septic tank OK. Phone 9-20-1961.

Building permit issued to Prince of Peace Lutheran Church for a wood-frame addition, 9/21/1961.

Sign Permit:

OWNER Prince of Peace ADDRESS 1711 E. Oltorf

PLAT 136 LOT B BLK.

SUBDIVISION Prince of Pearce Luthern Ch. Site

OCCUPANCY Sign

BLDG. PERMIT # 196067 DATE 5-14-80 OWNERS ESTIMATE

CONTRACTOR Duplex NO. OF FIXTURES

WATER TAP REC# SEWER TAP REC#

Building permit issued to Prince of Peace for a sign, 5/14/1980.

Building permits indicate that an addition to the Fellowship Hall was constructed in 1985.