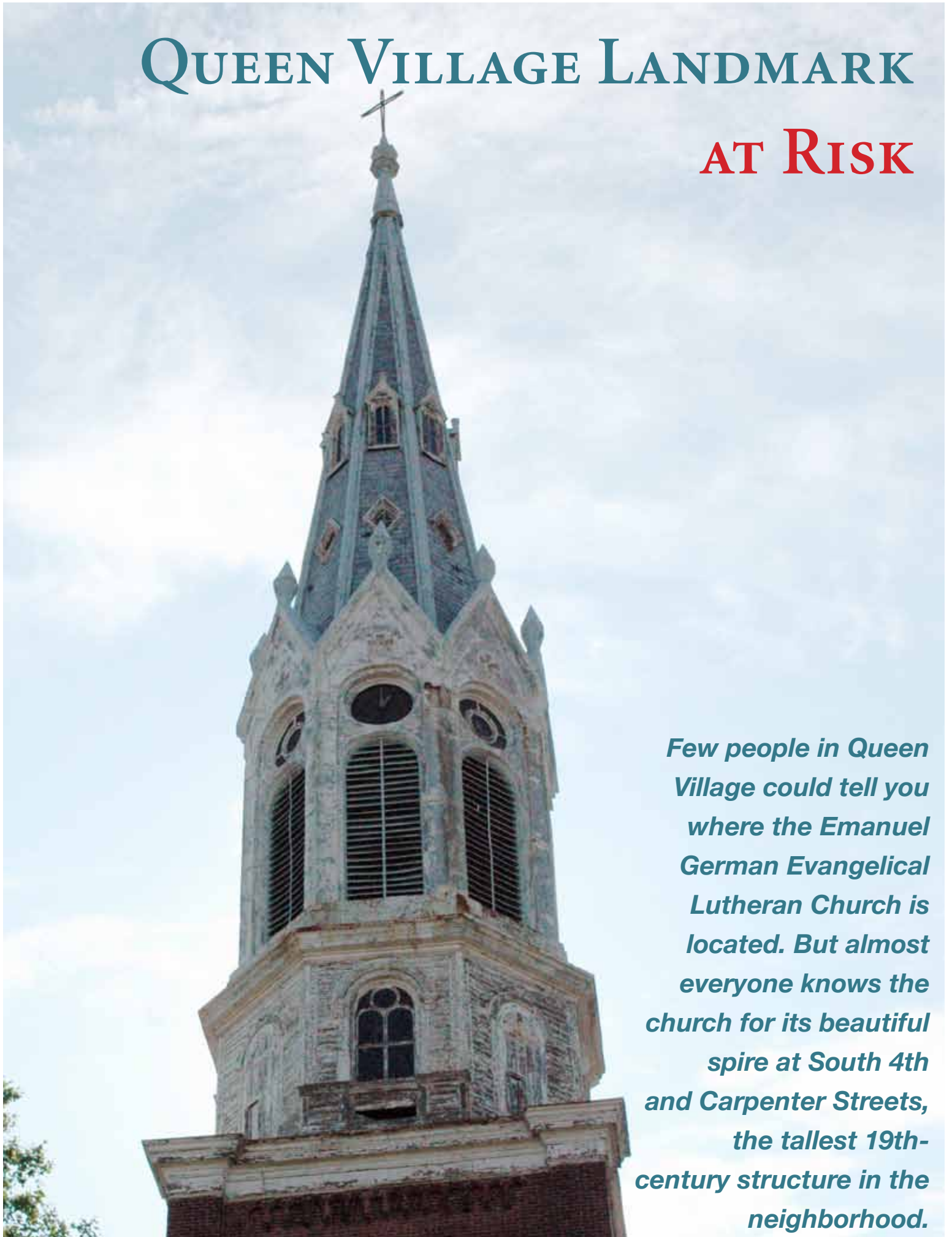


# QUEEN VILLAGE LANDMARK

**AT RISK**



*Few people in Queen Village could tell you where the Emanuel German Evangelical Lutheran Church is located. But almost everyone knows the church for its beautiful spire at South 4th and Carpenter Streets, the tallest 19th-century structure in the neighborhood.*

## BELOVED NEIGHBORHOOD LANDMARK

When Emanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church opened at South 4th and Carpenter Streets in 1869, its graceful 187-foot-tall steeple became an instant and enduring landmark in Philadelphia. It guided ships coming up the Delaware River, and the bells of its clock tolled time for area residents.

In 1997, Michael Stern, then director of the historic religious properties program at the Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia, described Emanuel as “an extraordinarily beautiful place, a work of art in its own right.” Today, the 140-year-old building is shuttered and vacant, a victim of a declining congregation, dwindling funds to sustain the institution, and changing demographics in the neighborhood. The property’s fate is in the hands of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America or its Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod.

Ideally, the historic property would be preserved for its unique architectural place in Philadelphia, and dedicated to a sustainable, nonprofit purpose that continues Emanuel’s tradition of serving the community.

Practically, the property will likely be put on the market and developed as a condominium, a mixed-use residential-commercial building, or another commercial project.

## FOUNDING

The German community in Philadelphia dates back to the late 1600s. They worshipped at Swedish churches until their community grew large enough to establish its own church at North 5th and Cherry Streets in 1748. Greater numbers of German emigrants began arriving at the turn of the 19th century, and many settled in what is now South Philadelphia.

The Emanuel German Evangelical Lutheran Church was founded to serve German and German-speaking congregants in Queen Village, which was then part of the Southwark district. The church grew out of a parochial school founded in 1864 at South 6th and Montrose Streets (site of the former Robert Rilkes School), which boasted 25 teachers and 365 students. Religious services were also held at the school, the first being conducted on January 14, 1866.



The Lutheran Church decided to establish a church in Southwark in 1866, provided it could sell a graveyard on 8th Street above Race. The city approved the sale in 1868 and a plot of land at 4th and Carpenter Streets was bought for \$14,000.

Emanuel’s cornerstone was laid on July 29, 1868, and the church was consecrated on July 4, 1869. The cost to build the church was \$97,859.28—\$1.6 million in current dollars.



The steeple’s clocks were made by the Von Christian Möllinger firm, Berlin, at a cost of \$1,160. The Möllinger firm, founded by Jacob Möllinger (1695-1763), was renowned for their craft—its clients included the kings of Prussia, and its clockworks are in churches, museums, and private collections across Europe.

The steeple’s three bells were cast locally by Joseph Bernhard at his foundry on North 6th Street. They weighed 600, 1100, and 1600 pounds, and cost \$1,686. Bernhard’s foundry was one of two that claim to have drilled out the crack in the Liberty Bell.

The architectural style of the church is modern Roman. The base of the church is constructed of brown stone, and the edifice of brick. The church is topped by a graceful wooden steeple.

The ground floor of the building housed a lecture hall, vestry room, and three classrooms, separated by sliding glass panels. The double-height sanctuary on the first floor is surrounded on three sides by a gallery. Together they can hold an estimated 2,500 people.







## GROWTH AND DECLINE

Emanuel's congregation grew and prospered for 40 years. By 1906, more than half of its German congregants had moved to west and north Philadelphia, and to the suburbs. They were replaced by African American, Polish, Irish, Italian, and other newcomers to Queen Village.

In 1940, Emanuel adapted to the changing demographics of its community. It offered its first English-language church services and organized social programs and charities to benefit the poor of its Southwark neighborhood—widows and orphans, children and old folks, the working poor and middle class.

But the congregation continued to dwindle in the post-war years, numbering fewer than 200 by the mid-1950s, half of whom lived outside the neighborhood. The church fell into disrepair; its steeple clock stopped, and its bells were silenced. In 1959, the city announced plans to build Southwark Plaza, a low-income housing development, on the four blocks surrounding the church. Emanuel's parsonage and 419 row houses, many of which were the homes of congregants, would be razed.

By 1959, the church was at a crossroads—whether to follow the exodus of its congregants to the suburbs or remain in Queen Village and rebuild its congregation. Emanuel chose to stay and renewed its commitment to active participation in the community as an urban ministry under the leadership of Reverend Carl A. Werner, a former welfare case worker.

In the early 1960s, Emanuel launched a \$90,000 renovation project that would restore the church for an expanded role in community leadership. The sanctuary was rebuilt, part of the ground floor was reconfigured as a small chapel, copper louvers were installed in the steeple, and the interior and exterior were repainted and repaired. The pipe organ was restored by the church organist, who also brought the steeple clock back to life.

The new building was rededicated on May 2, 1965.



## COMMUNITY SERVICE

Emanuel recognized the many different needs within the changing community, and resolved to meet them. With support from the Lutheran Board of American Missions and Lutheran Children and Family Services, Emanuel established a wide range of social programs and community services.

Since the late 1960s, Emanuel's many contributions to the betterment of the Queen Village community have included a community center, settlement house, hospitality kitchen, school and kindergarten, after-school care for middle-school students, a family and community life center, sport and recreation programs, summer camps, social support and advisory offices, and meeting spaces for neighborhood organizations. It also continued the charity programs for the poor that were established at its founding in 1868.

Emanuel also provided support and leadership to the community's effort to stop the construction of I-95 through the heart of Queen Village along Front Street. And it joined other Queen Village churches and activists to establish Queen Village, Inc., a nonprofit group dedicated to restoring abandoned homes as low-cost housing for single families.



## DEMISE

In the late 1980s, government and Lutheran Church funding for Emanuel's community services was cut back to the point that many programs were discontinued. As the congregation withered to fewer than 50 members in the last decade, Emanuel found it difficult to remain open for religious services, much less to maintain the large—and largely vacant—building or even a few social services.

The congregation shuttered Emanuel in fall 2008, and has merged with St. John the Evangelist Church at 1332 South 3rd Street.

The fate of the now vacant property will be decided by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America or its Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod.

