

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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DATE ENTERED

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

St. Francis Xavier Church

AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

532 Market Street

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Parkersburg

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

First

STATE

West Virginia

CODE

54

COUNTY

Wood

CODE

017

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

**CATEGORY**

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

**OWNERSHIP**

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH
- PUBLIC ACQUISITION**
- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

**STATUS**

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE**
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

**PRESENT USE**

- AGRICULTURE
- MUSEUM
- COMMERCIAL
- PARK
- EDUCATIONAL
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- ENTERTAINMENT
- RELIGIOUS
- GOVERNMENT
- SCIENTIFIC
- INDUSTRIAL
- TRANSPORTATION
- MILITARY
- OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston

STREET & NUMBER

1300 Byron Street

CITY, TOWN

Wheeling

VICINITY OF

STATE

West Virginia

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

26003

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Wood County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

Court Square

CITY, TOWN

Parkersburg

STATE

West Virginia

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

DATE

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Visible from all major approaches to downtown Parkersburg, West Virginia, is the domical belfry and tower of St. Francis Xavier Church. The church is on the opposite side of the street and only several hundred feet north of another prominent downtown landmark, the Parkersburg City Hall. Immediately north of St. Francis Xavier on Market Street is the trestle approach of the over one-hundred year old B & O railroad bridge that crosses the Ohio River from Wood County to Washington County, Ohio.

Although St. Francis Xavier Church was built in 1869-70, little of the building's physical fabric has changed over the years resulting in a high degree of preservation of the original architecture. Significant in this regard as well is the excellent condition of murals embellishing the church's apse, side altars, and side aisles. These paintings comprise a series of religious scenes that are regarded among the most significant works of ecclesiastical art in West Virginia.

Church chroniclers have traditionally described the edifice as a "pure" example of French Gothic architecture. To be sure, elements of the Gothic are present in the building. However, these are subordinate to the dominant Romanesque order of the design. During the 1850s and 1860s the popularity of Romanesque revival style churches and public buildings in the United States exceeded the public fancy for the Gothic.

A generally heavy, monumental quality is present in the building, as opposed to the delicate, vertical elements of the Gothic. The predominance of round-arched window and door openings, echoed in the loggias separating the aisles from the nave, and the presence of medieval elements such as the main portal's round compound arch, all figure in the Romanesque design of the building.

The church is planned in a simple three-part composition. A central entrance bell tower, truncated, and surmounted with a later metal-roofed domical belfry, is followed from west to east by a gable-roofed sanctuary, and then by a multi-sided apse containing skylights that illuminate the stained glass half-domical light above the main altar. Transepts are absent from the building's plan.

Engaged brick buttresses define each of the seven bays of the church's side elevations. The window heads are dressed in smooth sandstone voussoirs. Noteworthy in the front elevation details are the window and door surrounds of sandstone voussoirs that complement, in a picturesque fashion, the wooden modillion brackets of the eaves and raking eaves. Below the small shingled pent roof separating the third and fourth levels of the entrance tower, is an arcaded, wooden corbel table. Coupled arches with wooden mullions fill the arched

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openings at the second and fourth levels of the tower. An empty statuary niche with ornate millwork is seen in the third level of the tower's front elevation.

The compound arch of the principal entrance is detailed with an enriched wooden tympanum, a motif duplicated in the transoms of the interior floor-length windows in the apse behind the main altar.

Several structural elements of the church are worthy of note. The construction of the building above the sandstone foundation is of two-foot thick brick masonry loadbearing walls. The tower, of similar construction, has intermediate levels built of heavy timber and deck.

The barrel vault of the nave is spanned by bolted heavy timber scissor-type trusses. The side segmental vaults are spanned with triangular trusses. These heavy trusses are supported on interior wood columns (styled as piers) spaced at approximately 15' 6" on center at each side of the barrel vault and at the brick bearing walls at the exterior. The vaulted ceilings are plaster and wood lath which are supported by ceiling joists spanning in most cases directly to the trusses. The ceiling of the nave and vaults of the aisles are painted to simulate the ribs and other masonry features of medieval vaulting.

The three-dimensional, architectonic quality of this decoration is reflected in the seven paintings of scenes in the life of Christ adorning the entire apse and panels above the side altars. Also artistically significant in the church is the wooden Gothic main altar, carved by Mr. M. Darious and dedicated with the new church in 1870.

Minor alterations of the building include the replacement in 1895 of the original stained glass windows destroyed by an explosion of nitroglycerine on the nearby Little Kanawha River. The new glass was installed soon after the disaster by the G. C. Riordan Company of Cincinnati, Ohio. In 1915 a belfry-cupola was erected on the tower to replace the formerly used enclosed belfry. Three bells were acquired, the largest, the St. Catherine bell, was hung in place in 1915; the two smaller bells, the St. Patrick bell, and the St. Bridget bell, were purchased and hung in 1917. The original oak pews were replaced with nearly exact copies in 1977. A plain railing

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separating the nave from the altar was replaced with one of Gothic styling sometime after 1907.

A program of restoration is now (1978) underway at St. Francis Xavier Church. In response to recent changes in Church liturgy, planning for the revision of the Church sanctuary respecting its historic and significant architectural elements is in progress.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
1499-1500	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
1700-1799	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
1900	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
	<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

OR KEELEY

SPECIFIC DATES 1869-70

BUILDER/ARCHITECT P. C. Keeley, architect  
Lysander Dudley, builder

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Saint Francis Xavier Church, a landmark on Market Street in downtown Parkersburg, Wood County, West Virginia, is significant for its well preserved architecture and for its mural paintings that are regarded in West Virginia as highly important works of art. The high quality of the exterior proportion and detail, the design and balance of the sanctuary with its ornate Gothic altar, and the artistic quality and craftsmanship of the interior, are all factors of note in determination of the building's significance.

Catholic families had settled in the Parkersburg area as early as 1800. These settlers were attended by priests who came down the Ohio from Wheeling. In 1850 the Diocese of Wheeling was established by Pope Pius IX. The Bishop of Richmond, Virginia, Richard V. Whelan, was made head of the Diocese. On a missionary journey to the Parkersburg area in 1847, Bishop Whelan purchased lot no. 95 for a sum of \$306.00 upon which the present St. Francis Xavier Church now stands. A brick church was erected on the site in the period 1849-51.

With the discovery of oil at the neighboring Wood and Wirt County Communities of Volcano, Petroleum, and Burning Springs, and the coming of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, the population of Parkersburg expanded considerably, and more Catholic families settled in the area. By 1867 the parish had grown to such a degree that it was deemed advisable to build a large church.

Accordingly, under the guidance of the first official pastor, Very Reverend Henry F. Parke, plans were made for the erection of a more capacious structure. The old church was torn down, apparently early in 1869, and the cornerstone of the new church was laid on Sunday afternoon, May 9, 1869 - an imposing ceremony which included an hour-long discourse by Bishop Whelan before three or four thousand people. The cornerstone containing a copper box sealed with local memorabilia was placed in the foundation at the southeast corner of the building.

Architect of the new church was Mr. P. C. Keeley, and the contractor was Mr. Lysander Dudley of Parkersburg. The architecture was an adaptive Romanesque design with Gothic influences. Total cost of the project was \$85,000, a huge sum for those times.

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The building was dedicated in October 1870. From the time of razing the small first church to this date, services were said to have been held in a building on Seventh Street which had formerly been used as a government hospital.

In recent decades an increasing interest has been focused on the magnificent mural paintings in the church. They were painted by a German artist named Daniel Mueller and commissioned by the third pastor, Very Reverend John McBride. Many visitors, including artists from this country and abroad, have visited Parkersburg for the purpose of viewing these paintings, and noting the three-dimensional, bas-relief style. There are seven paintings: the ones on the sanctuary walls depict the Annunciation, the Natvity, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection and Ascension. Over the altar to St. Mary is a scene depicting Her presence in heaven. Over the altar to Joseph is a representation of the death of St. Francis Xavier on the Island of Sancha in the Japanese Sea. Paintings in a similar style, believed to be at least in part by the same artist, are in the Rotunda of the National Capitol in Washington, D. C. Records in the Art and Reference Division of the Architect of the Capitol do not indicate the names of assistants of Messrs. Brumidi and Castagagni, though acquisition of the names of decorative painters who are supposed to have worked for these artists has been ongoing in recent years. Research on this interesting association with the U. S. Capitol may be documented in future studies.

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Brossman, P. D. ed. Centennial History of St. Francis Xavier Church.  
Parkersburg, West Virginia, 1970, n.p.

Parkersburg, 1907. Parkersburg, West Virginia: W. M. Barnes Directory Co.  
p. 40.

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 3/4 acre

QUADRANGLE NAME Parkersburg

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24,000

UTM REFERENCES

A 17 451730 4346220

B         

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C         

D         

E         

F         

G         

H         

### VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The property is located on a city lot bound to the north by the rectory and the trestle of the B & O Railroad and Sixth Street, to the west by Market Street, to the east by an alley, and to the south by property owned

by the Parkersburg National Bank.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE CODE COUNTY CODE

STATE CODE COUNTY CODE

## FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Rodney S. Collins, Research Assistant

ORGANIZATION

West Virginia Department of Culture and History

DATE

July 3, 1978

STREET & NUMBER

The Cultural Center, Capitol Complex

TELEPHONE

304 248-0244

CITY OR TOWN

Charleston

STATE

West Virginia

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL   

STATE X

LOCAL X

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

*Clarence Moran*

September 6, 1978

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

EST:

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

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St. Francis Xavier Church: A Preservation Study. Ann Arbor, Michigan:  
Preservation Urban Design Incorporated, Nov. 1977.













