

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

**1. Name of Property**Historic name: Chapel of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin MaryOther names/site number: Church of Mary Immaculate

Name of related multiple property listing:

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

**2. Location**Street & number: Catholic Church RoadCity or town: Williamsburg State: West Virginia County: GreenbrierNot For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☒**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination      request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets      does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

     national      statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A      B X C      D

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

**Signature of certifying official/Title:****Date**West Virginia State Historic Preservation Office, Department of Arts, Culture and History**State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government**In my opinion, the property      meets      does not meet the National Register criteria.**Signature of commenting official:****Date****Title :****State or Federal agency/bureau  
or Tribal Government**

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#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register  
☐ determined eligible for the National Register  
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register  
☐ removed from the National Register  
☐ other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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#### 5. Classification

##### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private:

☒

Public – Local

☐

Public – State

☐

Public – Federal

☐

##### Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

Building(s)

☒

District

☐

Site

☐

Structure

☐

Object

☐

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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

| Contributing                | Noncontributing             |            |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|
| <u>2</u>                    | <u>                    </u> | buildings  |
| <u>1</u>                    | <u>                    </u> | sites      |
| <u>                    </u> | <u>1</u>                    | structures |
| <u>                    </u> | <u>                    </u> | objects    |
| <u>3</u>                    | <u>1</u>                    | Total      |

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register                     

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION/religious facility

FUNERARY/cemetery

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION/religious facility

FUNERARY/cemetery

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

OTHER: central tower façade

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**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Foundation: stone; Walls: weatherboard; Roof:  
metal

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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### Summary Paragraph

Located along a road near Williamsburg, West Virginia, the chapel is in a state of good-to-excellent condition. It is a small, wood frame, front gabled structure with a central tower on the front façade. The building's most distinguished feature is a series of round arched windows with original stained glass. The interior contains a sanctuary, a choir loft, sacristy, chancel and a spare room with a rear exit. Two outbuildings, an outhouse and a non-historic storage shed, sit behind the church. The chapel occupies a remote area, surrounded by vast tracts of farmland and trees. A single, non-historic residence is located immediately to the east. Approximately 275 yards to the southwest is the chapel's cemetery. The chapel has had minimal alterations and thus retains historic integrity.

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## Narrative Description

### *Setting*

The Chapel of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary and its cemetery are located along Catholic Church Road, a little over two miles east of the small unincorporated community of Williamsburg. The surrounding landscape is overwhelmingly rural and remote, consisting of large tracts of farmland, forested hills, and some homes and agricultural facilities spread far apart. The chapel and cemetery are on separate parcels, about 275 yards apart, with pasturage in between. The chapel lies to the northeast of the cemetery. To the immediate east of the chapel, on a separate plot, is a 1980s vernacular residence.

### *Chapel of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Contributing)*

The chapel is a small, wood frame building facing northwest towards Catholic Church Road, on an approximately 0.6-acre plot of land. It is rectangular shaped with a front gable roof, and two smaller gables on the rear (south and northeast) corners, denoting the location of two anterooms. The exterior walls are clad in horizontal weatherboarding painted white. The roof is clad in standing seam metal. Seventeen circular and rounded arched stained-glass windows are visible on the exterior; all or most are shielded with storm windows matching their shape. The chapel is fronted by a square tower, topped by a vented belfry with a pyramidal roof and small cross. A round stained-glass window marks the center of the tower. At its bottom are double doors, accessed by a set of concrete steps and metal handrails. Overtop the doors is a stained-glass fanlight reading "Church of Mary Immaculate." Above that is a non-historic electric light. The building is set on a foundation of rusticated limestone blocks sourced from a local quarry. The bottom third of the foundation has been parged with non-historic cement. A rear exit door with wood stairs is present on the south corner of the building.

The double doors open into a vestibule with a stairway constructed of oak to the right (southwest side), leading to a choir loft. The railing of the choir loft is crafted with significant woodworking detail. It previously served as the altar rail at which the members would kneel to receive Holy Communion. In the modern era, communicants receive the sacrament while standing at the front of the aisle. To the left (north) side of the vestibule is a confessional.

The interior is constructed with original oak wood flooring, painted wood paneling on the walls, and a simple, coffered, barrel-vaulted wood ceiling. The oak wood flooring on the ground level has been refinished, and thus appears a lighter color than the flooring in the loft. As one enters the sanctuary, or nave, a single aisle in its center leads to the chancel and altar. Handcrafted pews sourced from local hardwood line each side of the aisle. The pews are unattached to the floor and are original to the building's construction. Round and rounded arch stained-glass windows are abundant in the chapel. They line the east and west walls and align with images depicting Stations of the Cross. These portray the Passion of Christ, from his condemnation by Pilate to his entombment. Other stained-glass windows which serve to illuminate the sanctuary exist on the

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south wall above the altar, in the sacristy, and at the entrance. Each of these pieces depicts a sacred image. Adjacent to the chancel are two small anterooms. The space to the right side of the chancel is used for altar servers to don a cassock and/or surplice for services. This anteroom also has an exterior door to exit through the rear of the building. The anteroom to the left of the chancel is used as a sacristy. A single metal cable serves to stabilize the structure and stretches across the sanctuary from east to west.

At the time of construction, worship services were conducted with the priest facing the tabernacle. However, in 1964 as a part of liturgical reform and in response to promulgation of Pope Paul VI, a stone table was placed closer to the middle of the sanctuary to allow the priest to face the faithful during the celebration of Mass. In the Catholic faith, the altar is the focus of attention. It was at that time the liturgy came to be expressed in English. Original statues are placed adjacent to the altar depicting St. Joseph the Worker and Christ the Child. A larger statue of Mary Immaculate stands at the rear of the chapel.

The chapel easily conveys its late nineteenth/early twentieth century appearance. Very well-preserved, it displays few major alterations. Inside the building, the only significant changes are the removal of the altar railing and its conversion into railing for the choir loft; and the refinishing of the ground level hardwood floors, giving it a lighter color. On the exterior, alterations include the installation of storm windows over the stained-glass windows; concrete steps and metal handrails at the front entrance; and the application of non-historic cement to the bottom third of the stone foundation. The rear exit may be a latter addition as well. These alterations do not detrimentally impact the chapel to the extent that it fails to have integrity.

*Mary Immaculate Catholic Cemetery (Contributing)*

Mary Immaculate Cemetery is a roughly half acre, rectangular plot of land located along Catholic Church Road approximately 275 yards or 0.16 miles southwest of the chapel. It was created in 1878 with two initial burials and as of 2024 contains 93 graves. The first to be buried here were Patrick McHale on February 9, 1878, and Matthew Corkrean on March 29, 1878. The most recent internment was Frances (Frankie) Musselman on September 23, 2024. The grave markers are predominantly common late nineteenth and twentieth century designs, both flush and upright. Nearly all are intact and legible. Some of the older markers are engraved with traditional religious imagery, such as a hand gripping a cross. The cemetery is surrounded by a wood fence and receives regular maintenance.

The congregation's first two church buildings were located on this property. After the second was destroyed by fire, the third and final building was constructed further up the road.

*Outhouse (Contributing)*

A small, wood frame, single-seat outhouse is located to the immediate rear of the chapel. The outhouse has an overhanging eave roof, horizontal white wood siding matching the chapel, and a

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modern replacement door. It likely dates to the chapel's construction and, despite the non-historic door, is able to convey its historic appearance and function.

*Storage Shed (Non-contributing)*

A small, galvanized metal storage shed is located to the rear of the chapel, near the southeast edge of the property parcel. It is not believed to date within the Period of Significance or contribute to the property's historical significance.

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☒ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years



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**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Social History

Architecture

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**Period of Significance**

1878-1977

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**Significant Dates**

1902

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**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

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**Cultural Affiliation**

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**Architect/Builder**

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Chapel of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places on a local level of significance under *Criterion A: Social History* for its longtime association with Greenbrier County's Roman Catholic community. From its inception in the 1870s until it first closed in 1977, the chapel provided important religious services, including Mass and baptism, to the region's Irish and German Catholics, who constituted a small minority in rural Greenbrier County. The chapel facilitated social interaction among its congregants and became a setting for free exercise of religious and cultural traditions. The circa 1902 chapel, the congregation's third, is also the oldest surviving purpose-built Catholic church in the county. The chapel is also locally significant under *Criterion C: Architecture* for being an important, well-preserved example of late nineteenth and early twentieth century church design in rural West Virginia. It also meets *Criteria Consideration A: Religious Properties* by deriving primary significance from its architectural distinction. The Period of Significance begins in 1878, when the church graveyard was established, and ends in 1977, when the chapel closed before reopening in the 1990s. One significant date is 1902 when the current chapel was constructed, following the destruction of two previous ones at the graveyard property.

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

#### *Background History of Greenbrier County*

The unincorporated town of Williamsburg is named for an early settler, Thomas Williams (1714-1763). A Welsh immigrant, Williams settled in the Greenbrier Valley by the early 1760s. In 1763, he was "brutally slain by Indians who carried away his children as captives." Greenbrier County was created by an act of the Virginia General Assembly in October 1777. It was named in honor of the river that runs through the county. It is the fifth oldest and second largest county in West Virginia. The first county school opened in Lewisburg, the county seat, in 1812. Shortly thereafter, a school opened in Williamsburg.<sup>1</sup>

In 1769, the William McCoy Fort and home were built about a mile east of modern-day Williamsburg. McCoy's Fort was attacked by Native Americans in May 1778. Frontier forts like McCoy's were crucial to the personal safety of westward travelers as well as settlers during Lord Dunmore's War and the American Revolution. "McCoy's Fort was part of an elaborate frontier

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<sup>1</sup> Mike Joyce, "Greenbrier County," e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia, March 8, 2023, accessed October 4, 2024, <https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/articles/2168>; "Williamsburg District," *Hardesty's Encyclopedia*, 1883.

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defense system during the Indian wars.” In 2013, remnants of the McCoy Fort were dismantled for reconstruction.<sup>2</sup>

Greenbrier County loyalties were divided during the American Civil War. The county was the scene of a number of skirmishes and engagements. On November 26, 1862, Major William Powell and 20 cavalymen of the advance guard of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Loyal Virginia Cavalry attacked a Confederate encampment a couple of miles east of Williamsburg. The daring maneuver was executed during a snowstorm as the horsemen descended Cold Knob Mountain, elevation 4,183 feet. Below, the 14<sup>th</sup> Virginia Cavalry were encamped for the winter in a force of about 500. The surprise raid commenced at a time when many Confederate troops did not expect any further action until the New Year. The battle was won without discharge of any weapon. The rebel camp promptly surrendered command, and 111 soldiers were taken prisoner. In 1890, Powell was awarded the Medal of Honor for his leadership in this bloodless encounter. The raid is considered to be one of the most daring, brilliant actions of the American Civil War.<sup>3</sup>

In the years after the war, Greenbrier County remained largely rural, sparsely populated, and focused on agriculture. Logging and coal mining were substantial industries during the twentieth century but have since declined. Attractions such as the Greenbrier Resort in White Sulphur Springs, the West Virginia State Fair, and various limestone caves have historically drawn many tourists.

### *Catholic Immigration to the United States and West Virginia*

The initial significant migration of Roman Catholics into Virginia commenced after restrictions on their religious freedom were abrogated by the 1780 Act Establishing Religious Freedom by the state legislature. Small numbers of these Catholics, mostly Irish and German immigrants, made their way to what is now West Virginia, settling mainly in Wheeling and the Eastern Panhandle. Many more Irish Catholics came in the 1840s as laborers working on construction of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad.

Encouraged by the increase in the number of Catholics settling in western Virginia, as well as the region’s promising future, the bishop of Richmond, Richard V. Whelan, petitioned the Holy See for the creation of a new diocese. Until that time, the Catholics of western Virginia had been under the spiritual care of the Diocese of Richmond, which encompassed the entire state of Virginia. On July 19, 1850, Pope Pius IX established the Diocese of Wheeling, naming Whelan

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<sup>2</sup> Kim and Stephen McBride, McCoy’s Fort, e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia, February 6, 2023, accessed October 4, 2024, <https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/articles/2417>.

<sup>3</sup> John T. Harris, “Chapter XI: How General William H. Powell won the Congressional Medal at Sinking Creek in the Civil War,” in *West Virginia Legislative Hand Book and Manual and Official Register 1928*, (Charleston, WV: Jarrett Printing Company, 1928), accessed October 2, 2024, [https://books.google.com/books?id=pMxLAQAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbg\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=pMxLAQAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbg_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false); Mike Woelfel, “Sinking Creek Surprise,” *Greenbrier Quarterly*, Summer 2013.

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its first ordinary. At the time there were just four churches within its borders and a Catholic population of about five thousand.<sup>4</sup>

Multiple situations abroad prompted mass immigrations of Irish and German Catholics to the United States, and consequently West Virginia, in the mid-nineteenth century. One was a calamitous potato famine that occurred in Ireland. The Great Famine, also known as the Great Hunger, was a period of starvation lasting from 1845 to 1852. It created an unprecedented social crisis in Ireland during which roughly one million people died and more than one million fled the country. Severely affected were the western and southern counties. Families in Mayo, Cavan, Clare and Cork were particularly subjected to dire economic conditions and eviction by English landlords. Irish emigration to North America surged. Young men and women made their way to major American urban centers such as Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore.<sup>5</sup>

Destabilizing conditions in Germany led to mass immigration as well. Between 1845 and 1855, over a million Germans fled to the United States. German Catholics migrated due to religious-based repression, to escape economic hardship, and/or political unrest, including the failed German Revolution in 1848. The arrivals were mostly farmers who sought to acquire productive land. Their extensive farming techniques are well documented.<sup>6</sup>

Gradually, small numbers of these German and Irish Catholics migrated into the Greenbrier Valley. Many who came during the mid to late nineteenth century were hired to build the Virginia Central Railroad. Its path travelled through the town of Ronceverte (French for Greenbrier). Some settled in the valley and brought relatives to join them. Abundant virgin hardwood forests drew immigrants who were offered employment in the booming logging industry or to work lumbering operations on the Greenbrier River. The verdant meadows characteristic of the Greenbrier Valley had, by the commencement of the American Civil War, been mostly acquired by earlier settlers. The more hilly, remote terrain present in the Williamsburg locale was enticing to some of the farmers who later founded the chapel. These parcels of real estate were more modestly priced and more frequently available for purchase.<sup>7</sup>

The minority status of Catholics in Greenbrier County during the mid to late 19th century is well documented. In the U.S. Census records of 1850 and 1860, no presence of the Catholic Church in Greenbrier County appears. In contrast, 39 total churches were identified in the county with seating accommodations for 13,300. The Census of 1880 did not undertake a survey of churches

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<sup>4</sup> Anthony Tighe, "History," Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, accessed October 2, 2024.

<https://dwc.org/diocese/administrative/about-the-diocese/history/>; the Diocese was reorganized into the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston in 1974.

<sup>5</sup> Cecil Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger: Ireland 1845 – 1849*, Haper & Row, 1962.

<sup>6</sup> "German Americans," Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia, September 25, 2024, accessed October 4, 2024, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German\\_Americans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Americans).

<sup>7</sup> "Virginia Central Railroad," Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia, accessed October 15, 2024, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virginia\\_Central\\_Railroad](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virginia_Central_Railroad); David Taylor, "Ronceverte Historic District," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, August 2004, accessed November 12, 2024, <https://mapwv.gov/shpo/docs/PDFs/NationalRegister/05000396.pdf>; U.S. Census Bureau, 1850-1890, Misc. Statistics, accessed October 15, 2024, [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov).

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or congregants. For that matter, no census undertaken during the 19th century asked any citizen to reveal religious affiliation. All data was secured from representatives of various faiths.

In 1870, the entire Diocese of Wheeling was identified by the census as having 35 edifices with seating accommodations for 9,225. In Greenbrier County, the Catholic Church was described in the 1870 census data with “no edifices,” one “organization,” and 500 “sittings.” The overall population of Greenbrier County grew from 12, 211 in 1860 to 18,034 by 1890, according to census records.

Bishop Whelen devoted his tenure to meeting the religious needs of the growing Catholic flock. At the time of his death in 1874, the diocese had grown to 46 churches and seven chapels with an estimated Catholic population of 18,000.

1890 Census documents state, “Embracing immigrants from nearly all countries in Europe, the Roman Catholic is a polyglot church.” The Census also noted the distinction between its “baptized members” and “communicants.” The first term refers to children aged nine or younger who have yet to take the Holy Eucharist. A dramatic period of growth in the Wheeling Diocese occurred under the leadership of Bishop Patrick J. Donahue. Bishop Donahue led West Virginia’s Catholics between 1894 and 1922. The state’s faithful tripled from fewer than 20,000 to more than 62,000. The bishop approved the establishment of nearly 150 churches and missions to serve them.

### *History of Mary Immaculate Church*

By 1870, twelve Catholic families had settled around Williamsburg in Greenbrier County, acquiring land and assimilating into American culture. One descendant, Rose Sullivan Corkrean, was interviewed in May 1982 and recalled, “Our forebearers departed Ireland during the darkest year of the famine (1847). They landed in Boston and later helped build the railroad through Virginia. Here they found the beautiful land that reminded them of Ireland. Owning their own land was every Irishman’s dream.”<sup>8</sup> Founding families professing the Catholic faith included Sullivan (County Cork), Corkrean (County Cavan), Paulin, Stidum, Rincholt, Ervin (hailing from Germany) and the Yates, Goheen, Donovan, McCoy, Harrington, and McHale clans, which had emigrated from the Emerald Isle.<sup>9</sup> They originally totaled some 86 members and worshipped together in local residences. Occasionally, an itinerant cleric would lead these religious services. However, the faithful ordinarily remained isolated in practicing their faith.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Rose Sullivan Corkrean, interview with Woelfel, 1982.

<sup>9</sup> “The Church of Mary Immaculate 1902-2002,” anniversary handbook, 2002; “Story of Mary Immaculate, Williamsburg, West Virginia,” *Mountain Messenger*, April 1999; “Catholic Church in Rural Greenbrier County 100 Years Old,” *Mountain Messenger*, March 2002; Nell Corkrean, “The Sullivan-Corkrean Connection,” May 1968; “Church of Mary Immaculate Catholic Cemetery,” Find a Grave, accessed October 2, 2024, <https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/2401641/church-of-mary-immaculate-catholic-cemetery>.

<sup>10</sup> “The Church of Mary Immaculate 1902-2002,” anniversary handbook, 2002; “Story of Mary Immaculate, Williamsburg, West Virginia,” *Mountain Messenger*, April 1999; “Catholic Church in Rural Greenbrier County 100 Years Old,” *Mountain Messenger*, March 2002.

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The geographic remoteness of Williamsburg is evidenced by the chapel's distance from the nearest incorporated towns e.g. Lewisburg (14 miles south), Rainelle (24 miles west), and Richwood (24 miles north). When Mary Immaculate was founded, the nearest Catholic Church was St. John's Chapel, Sweet Springs, Monroe County, West Virginia, 45 miles distant.

The nearest opportunity to attend an organized Catholic service was in the county seat of Lewisburg. Masses were conducted within the residences of Catholic families on Sunday mornings. The Williamsburg faithful would gather at the Corkrean store at midnight on Saturday. From there, the group would make their way on horseback or carried on horse-pulled wagons more than 15 miles to Lewisburg. The strength of their Catholic faith is further demonstrated by their abstention from food and drink beginning at midnight. They fasted until after acceptance of the Holy Eucharist on the next day.<sup>11</sup>

During 1876, the families pooled their resources and construction of a worship structure commenced near Williamsburg. That same year, they celebrated their first Mass together. St. John of the Cross opened its doors during 1879, establishing the first Catholic Church in Greenbrier County. The building was of log construction and built on a small parcel of land contributed by Michael Harrington. It was located next to a large farm.<sup>12</sup>

A graveyard was established during 1878 adjacent to the original church on the same parcel. As was the religious tradition, all tombstones were set to face the east. This custom existed in the Latin liturgical Catholic tradition and was grounded in scripture- Matthew 24:27. This passage is interpreted that, upon the second coming of Christ, the Savior will rise from Jerusalem on his resurrection.<sup>13</sup> Two of the initial entombments came in 1878. Patrick McHale was buried February 9, 1878, and Matthew Corkrean's internment was on March 29, 1878.<sup>14</sup>

St. John of the Cross was short lived and destroyed by fire. A second church was quickly built on the same spot. Whether it was also called St. John of the Cross or if the Mary Immaculate name was adopted at this time is unclear. This second church also burned, sometime in the late 1890s. Each fire was started by sparks flying from passing steam driven thrashing machines.<sup>15</sup>

Undeterred by misfortune, funds were collected among the Irish and German Catholic farmers and shopkeepers for a third church. This new church was located roughly 275 yards northeast of the original site, on land donated by Michael McHale. It is unclear why the church was built at a different location. It may have been to be further away from the agricultural machines that started the two previous fires. The original site continued to be used and maintained by the congregation for their burial ground. Construction of the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary began during 1899 and concluded in 1902. The cost was \$2,500.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> "The Church of Mary Immaculate 1902-2002," anniversary handbook, 2002.

<sup>13</sup> "Ask the Register," Buried facing East? Catholic Diocese of Lincoln, October 6, 2023, Diocesan News, Southern Nebraska Register.

<sup>14</sup> "Church of Mary Immaculate Catholic Cemetery," Find a Grave.

<sup>15</sup> "The Church of Mary Immaculate 1902-2002," anniversary handbook, 2002.

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Visiting priests known as circuit riders would stay in the homes of one of the founding families.<sup>16</sup>

The Great Depression hit West Virginia and the Greenbrier Valley particularly hard. Accordingly, chapel donations became sparse. An usher, Mark McHale, recalled taking up the Sunday Mass collection and being asked about “change for a nickel.” On another occasion, a visiting priest was “handed the collection money which amounted to 35 cents. He tried to talk the usher into keeping it, saying ‘It’s not worth taking back to Ronceverte.’” Gasoline was priced at 12 cents a gallon.<sup>17</sup>

As time passed, priests would traverse the rough and often muddy roads to the remote chapel. During World War II, priests of German and Italian descent conducted services at the chapel. They had been brought to Greenbrier County to hear confessions of prisoners of war who were internees housed near the Greenbrier Hotel in White Sulphur Springs. During the 1940s, 50s, and 60s, a convenient way to fill the chapel was to hold a “mission.” Missions were conducted by visiting priests and other religious figures. They attracted “Catholics and Protestants alike.” As Father Leo Lydon recalled, “Sisters of St. Joseph and I taught Catechism for children. It was a three-week vacation school.”<sup>18</sup>

Mary Immaculate Chapel assisted in serving spiritual needs of this rural Catholic community until its doors closed in 1977. Descendants of the founding families, for the most part, had moved away from the area to attend college, join the military, or otherwise pursue their ambitions. Not enough local Catholics remained for the chapel to be open on a regular basis. During the mid-1990s, the chapel was returned to service via the annual July 4<sup>th</sup> Mass on the Saturday closest to the holiday. A covered dish lunch followed sponsored by the Knights of Columbus Council 8689.<sup>19</sup>

In 2002, the Bishop of Wheeling-Charleston, Bernard Schmidt, presided over a mass of reconsecration on the chapel’s centennial anniversary.<sup>20</sup> Since then, services have routinely been held in the Mary Immaculate Chapel on the first Saturday of the month – May through October. A luncheon is served picnic style on the lawn of the Chapel. The Mass is preceded by a recitation of the Rosary. A descendant of the Paulin family, Frankie Paulin Musselman and her spouse, Dr.

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<sup>16</sup> “The Church of Mary Immaculate 1902-2002,” anniversary handbook, 2002; Donald E. Angelo, *Family Register of Matthew and Susan Corkrean*, (self-published, 2013).

<sup>17</sup> “The Church of Mary Immaculate 1902-2002,” anniversary handbook, 2002.

<sup>18</sup> “The Church of Mary Immaculate 1902-2002,” anniversary handbook, 2002.

<sup>19</sup> “The Church of Mary Immaculate 1902-2002,” anniversary handbook, 2002; “Story of Mary Immaculate, Williamsburg, West Virginia,” *Mountain Messenger*.

<sup>20</sup> “Special Masses will be Celebrated at Historic Churches in the Greenbrier Valley,” Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, August 6, 2021, accessed October 2, 2024, <https://dwc.org/special-masses-will-be-celebrated-at-historic-churches-in-the-greenbrier-valley/>.



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Larry Musselman, vigilantly and meticulously maintained the Chapel, its cemetery, and the adjacent grounds for more than a quarter century.<sup>21</sup>

On Saturday, May 8, 2010, the Chapel doors opened for the usual first Saturday Rosary, Mass, and luncheon. It was on this day the gathering would enjoy a special event. Madelyn Elizabeth Woelfel received membership into the flock via the Sacrament of Baptism.<sup>22</sup> The infant was accompanied by her godparents and family. The child was descended from the original twelve families. Her ancestry includes the Sullivan, Donovan, Harrington, and Corkrean clans.<sup>23</sup>

On July 12, 2015, the life of a descendant of the founding families was memorialized. Lt. William H. Corkrean, Jr., a frequent childhood attendee of services at Mary Immaculate Chapel, posthumously was honored for his bravery on May 11, 1944. The North House Museum in Lewisburg provided the scene for the naming of an Interstate 64 bridge situated west of Lewisburg honoring Lt. Corkrean. The structure crosses U.S. Route 60 and is the highway bridge most geographically proximate to Mary Immaculate Chapel. Corkrean's life was the subject of West Virginia Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 34, adopted March 12, 2015, which named the structure for the Greenbrier County native.<sup>24</sup>

The text of the resolution records the 21-year-old lieutenant was flying over Belgium. He was piloting a B-17 bomber in the 390 Bomber Group on his 23<sup>rd</sup> mission targeting Germany when "the aircraft was hit by flak." A first-person account was related to Corkrean's father in a letter posted after the war. Crew chief John Hodgson wrote the B-17 had sustained a direct hit under the pilot, "damaging controls and igniting emergency flares stored in the cabin." The chief recalled "clutching Corkrean's shoulder" when the pilot directed all men aboard should bail out while Corkrean steadied the plane. All eight flight crew members immediately located parachutes and "filed out one-by-one." Each airman safely reached the earth but was captured by German soldiers. Hodgson soon learned, while recovering in a prisoner hospital, that the young pilot had kept the plane level while his men jumped, however, Corkrean had perished when the bomber crashed. The crew chief's posting to William H. Corkrean, Sr., contains this passage: "Please be brave and have the courage to go on without your Billy as he had the courage to go to his death for us and his country." North House Museum maintains a collection in a military exhibit in remembrance of the local aviator. It contains the Hodgson letter, service awarded medals, citations, 390 Bomber Group patches, and other memorabilia belonging to Lt. Corkrean.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> "The Church of Mary Immaculate 1902-2002," anniversary handbook, 2002; "Story of Mary Immaculate, Williamsburg, West Virginia," *Mountain Messenger*, April 1999; "Catholic Church in Rural Greenbrier County 100 Years Old," *Mountain Messenger*, March 2002.

<sup>22</sup> Madelyn Elizabeth Baptismal Certificate, St. Charles Borromeo Parish Archives, White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia.

<sup>23</sup> Angelo, *Family Register of Matthew and Susan Corkrean*.

<sup>24</sup> "Lt. William H. Corkrean, Jr.," West Virginia Veterans Memorial, accessed October 2, 2024, <https://archive.wvculture.org/history/wvmemory/vets/corkreanwilliam/corkreanwilliam.html>; "Fallen WWII Pilot Honored," *Register-Herald*, July 11, 2015; West Virginia Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 34, adopted March 12, 2015.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.



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Throughout its history, the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary has never constituted a free-standing parish due to its small membership. Nor has a single priest been posted there. Over the decades, many priests have made their way to the remote chapel from parishes within the county and beyond. The Chapel is now under the care of St. Catherine of Siena parish in Ronceverte, and of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston.

There are two Catholic churches, or parishes, in Greenbrier County. One, St. Charles Borromeo in White Sulphur Springs, was established in 1903 and welcomed its first resident pastor Rt. Rev. Paul Othlong, in 1916. The other is St. Catherine of Siena in Ronceverte, which was established in 1892. Mary Immaculate predates each of them.

*Criterion A: Social History*

The Chapel of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary is significant under *Criterion A: Social History* for its association with Greenbrier County's Roman Catholic minority. As explained more in detail elsewhere, the chapel and its congregants constituted the first Catholic Church in Greenbrier County, built to serve the faith needs of a growing Irish and German Catholic population. The chapel provided the Williamsburg area's Catholics with important religious services that were otherwise not available to them. The chapel also served as an important social center for the local Catholic community, enabling them to gather together and maintain social, familial, and cultural bonds with each other. The chapel's cemetery, in use since 1878, also bears significance for its association with the Catholic community's historic burial practices.

*Criterion C: Architecture*

The Chapel of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary is eligible under *Criterion C: Architecture* as an important representation of ecclesiastical building designs in rural West Virginia around the turn of the twentieth century. Its modest size, design, and building materials are emblematic of the resources available to the community at the time. With only minimal visible alterations, the chapel also still strongly conveys its early twentieth century appearance.

The chapel does not appear to fit within one particular style of architecture. It does display some characteristics of the Carpenter Gothic style, an informal adaptation of the Gothic Revival architecture that was extremely popular in the United States from the nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries. Carpenter Gothic took the designs of large, ostentatious stone and brick churches and modified them for smaller, wood frame constructions. It proved highly suitable for more rural, sparsely populated communities where lumber was plentiful and other building materials harder to obtain. Williamsburg's Irish and German Catholic immigrants embraced this building design commonly utilized throughout the United States, and which also resembled the smaller, rural farming community church structures which had served their worship needs in their respective homelands.

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Gothic Revival and Carpenter Gothic characteristics seen in the chapel's design include its steeply pitched roof, wood trim (especially around the windows), front gable, and the general form and massing of the building. Another major feature is the lofty steeple, which directs the eye upward to the heavens and is punctuated by a simple, thin cross. The steeple may be described as aspirational. The chapel breaks from Gothic Revival design, however, through its use of rounded arch windows. Pointed arched windows are arguably the most defining characteristic of the Gothic Revival and Carpenter Gothic styles in church construction. The chapel lacks the pointed arched windows predominant in those styles, nor does it use simple rectangular windows common in vernacular church buildings. Its rounded arched windows are unusual to the area. Also locally uncommon is the chapel's colorful stained glass, a highly ornamental feature in a region where most churches use clear, transparent glass in their windows.

Only a handful of churches from roughly the same period exist in the Williamsburg vicinity, and none fully match the chapel's architectural distinctiveness. The nearby Andrew Chapel United Methodist Church is another wood frame, front central tower structure, and has pointed arched windows more in line with Gothic Revival buildings. Its integrity is diminished by a substantial side addition. The Wesley Chapel United Methodist Church near Frankford also has a wood frame, front central tower design, but with rectangular windows. It also has a small rear addition. The McMillion Church in Renick is a wood frame, front gable church with excellent integrity, but it differs with its pointed arched windows and lack of a front tower. None of these churches near Mary Immaculate have rounded arched windows or stained-glass windows. The comparative uniqueness of Mary Immaculate's design in Greenbrier County enhances its historic architectural significance.

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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

\_\_\_\_ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested  
\_\_\_\_ previously listed in the National Register  
\_\_\_\_ previously determined eligible by the National Register  
\_\_\_\_ designated a National Historic Landmark  
\_\_\_\_ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

\_\_\_\_ State Historic Preservation Office  
\_\_\_\_ Other State agency  
\_\_\_\_ Federal agency  
\_\_\_\_ Local government  
\_\_\_\_ University  
\_\_\_\_ Other  
Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** 1.10

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

|              |            |
|--------------|------------|
| 1. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

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Or

**UTM References**

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐

NAD 1927

or

☒

NAD 1983

**Chapel Parcel**

- |              |                 |                   |
|--------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1. Zone: 17N | Easting: 548427 | Northing: 4201482 |
| 2. Zone: 17N | Easting: 548470 | Northing: 4201438 |
| 3. Zone: 17N | Easting: 548433 | Northing: 4201416 |
| 4. Zone: 17N | Easting: 548393 | Northing: 4201467 |

**Cemetery Parcel**

- |              |                 |                   |
|--------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1. Zone: 17N | Easting: 548214 | Northing: 4201322 |
| 2. Zone: 17N | Easting: 548237 | Northing: 4201308 |
| 3. Zone: 17N | Easting: 548195 | Northing: 4201245 |
| 4. Zone: 17N | Easting: 548174 | Northing: 4201261 |

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

There are two separate boundaries for this nomination. The chapel is located on a 0.6 acre parcel of land designated in West Virginia tax records as Parcel 13-18-0048-0027-0000, or Parcel 48-27 in the Greenbrier County portion of the West Virginia property tax map. The cemetery is located on a 0.5 acre parcel of land designated as Parcel 13-18-0048-0028-0000 or Parcel 48-28 in the Greenbrier County portion of the West Virginia property tax map. The boundaries are also highlighted in Figure 2.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The selected boundaries fully encompass the chapel and cemetery. Though discontinuous from one another, the cemetery and chapel are a short distance apart and have strong, shared historical associations.

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## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Mike Woelfel; edited by Cody Straley, WV State Historic Preservation Office  
organization: \_\_\_\_\_  
street & number: 801 8<sup>th</sup> Street  
city or town: Huntington state: West Virginia zip code: 25701  
e-mail mikewoelfel3@gmail.com  
telephone: 304-522-6249  
date: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

## Figure Log

Figure 1 of 6: USGS Map

Figure 2 of 6: Boundary Map

Figure 3 of 6: Sketch of Chapel Front Facade

Figure 4 of 6: Interior Floor Plan and Photo Key

Figure 5 of 6: Photo Key for Choir Loft

Figure 6 of 6: Satellite View and Exterior Photo Key



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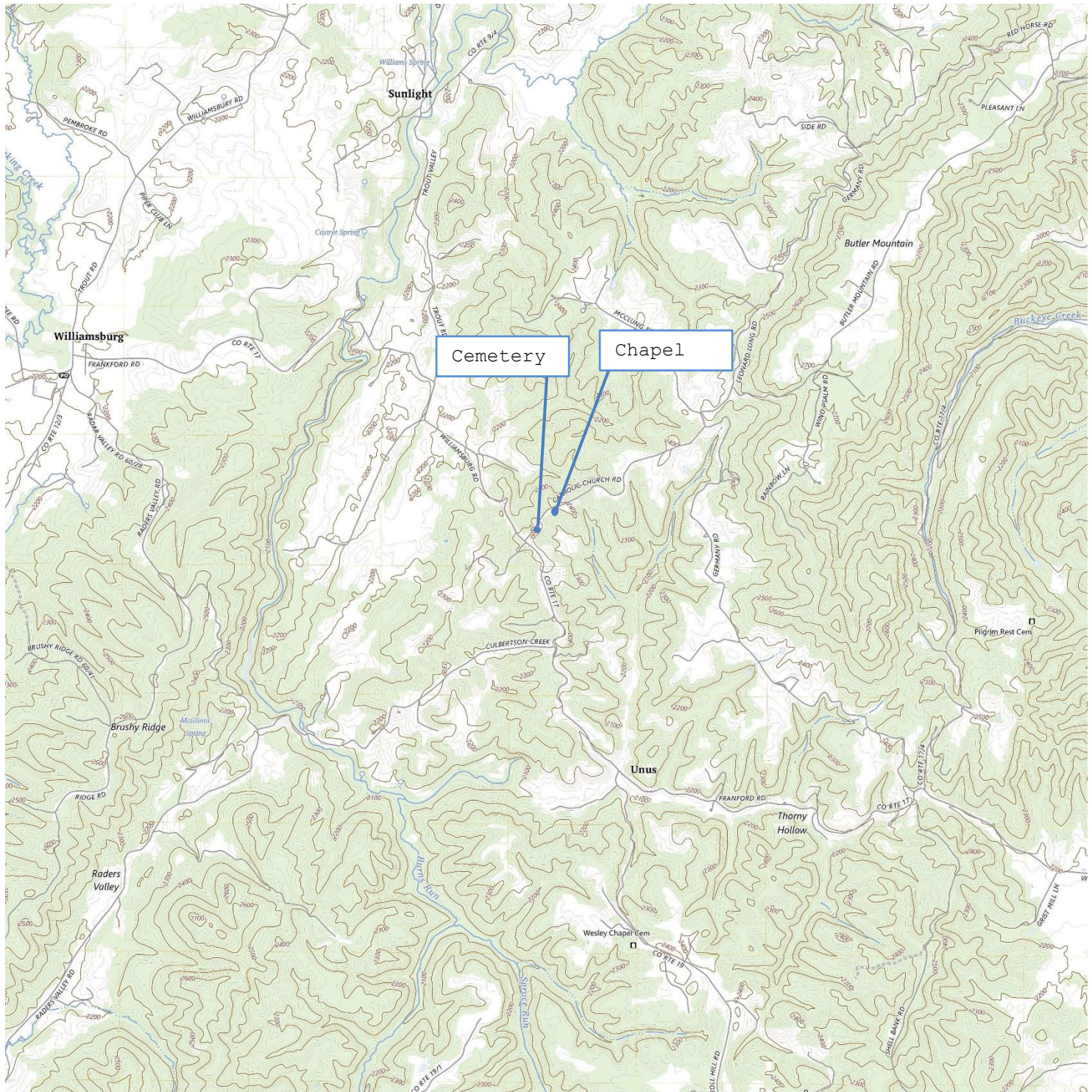


Figure 1 USGS Map - Williamsburg Quadrangle, West Virginia - Greenbrier County, 7.5-Minute Series, 2023



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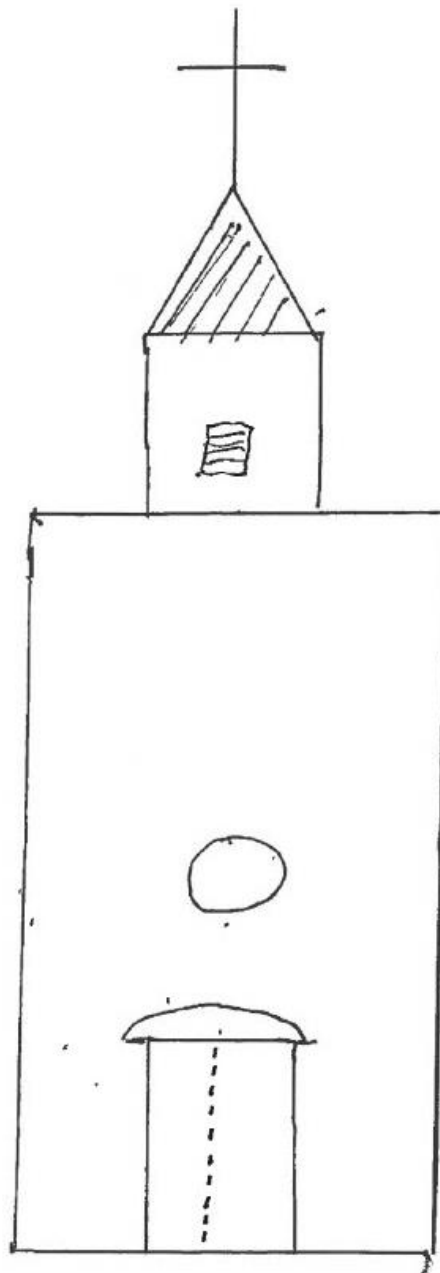
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Figure 2 Boundary Map

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Steeple  
Chapel of the Immaculate Conception of the  
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Figure 3 Sketch of Chapel Front Facade

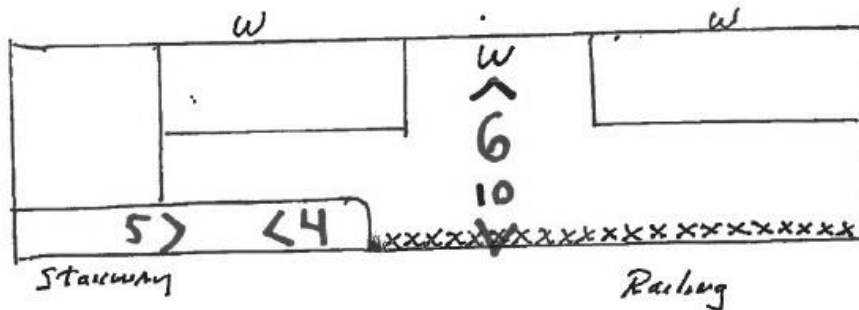




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Choir Loft  
 window = w  
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 to  
 Scale  
 N ↑



Choir loft  
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Figure 5 Photo Key for Choir Loft

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Figure 6 Satellite View and Exterior Photo Key

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## Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

## Photo Log

Name of Property: Chapel of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

City or Vicinity: Williamsburg

County: Greenbrier

State: West Virginia

Photographer: Mike Woelfel

Date Photographed: July 6, 2024

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 15: Interior, altar, south elevation  
WV\_GreenbrierCo\_ChapelOfImmaculateConception\_0001
- 2 of 15: Interior, sanctuary, north elevation  
WV\_GreenbrierCo\_ChapelOfImmaculateConception\_0002
- 3 of 15: Interior, Irvin window, west elevation  
WV\_GreenbrierCo\_ChapelOfImmaculateConception\_0003
- 4 of 15: Interior, stairway from loft, west elevation  
WV\_GreenbrierCo\_ChapelOfImmaculateConception\_0004
- 5 of 15: Interior, stairway to loft, east elevation  
WV\_GreenbrierCo\_ChapelOfImmaculateConception\_0005
- 6 of 15: Interior, Ervin window, north elevation  
WV\_GreenbrierCo\_ChapelOfImmaculateConception\_0006
- 7 of 15: Exterior, east side of structure, northeast elevation  
WV\_GreenbrierCo\_ChapelOfImmaculateConception\_0007

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- 8 of 15: Exterior, rear of structure, north elevation  
WV\_GreenbrierCo\_ChapelOfImmaculateConception\_0008
- 9 of 15: Exterior, west side of structure, east elevation  
WV\_GreenbrierCo\_ChapelOfImmaculateConception\_0009
- 10 of 15: Interior, sanctuary from choir loft, south elevation  
WV\_GreenbrierCo\_ChapelOfImmaculateConception\_0010
- 11 of 15: Exterior, front of structure, southwest elevation  
WV\_GreenbrierCo\_ChapelOfImmaculateConception\_0011
- 12 of 15: Exterior, structure, northwest elevation  
WV\_GreenbrierCo\_ChapelOfImmaculateConception\_0012
- 13 of 15: Cemetery, east elevation  
WV\_GreenbrierCo\_ChapelOfImmaculateConception\_0013
- 14 of 15: Cemetery, east elevation  
WV\_GreenbrierCo\_ChapelOfImmaculateConception\_0014
- 15 of 15: Cemetery, Donovan grave, southwest elevation  
WV\_GreenbrierCo\_ChapelOfImmaculateConception\_0015

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

Tier 1 – 60-100 hours  
Tier 2 – 120 hours  
Tier 3 – 230 hours  
Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.



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Image 1: Interior altar, south elevation

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*Image 2: Interior, sanctuary, north elevation*



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Image 3: Interior, Irvin window, west elevation

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*Image 4: Interior, stairway from loft, west elevation*

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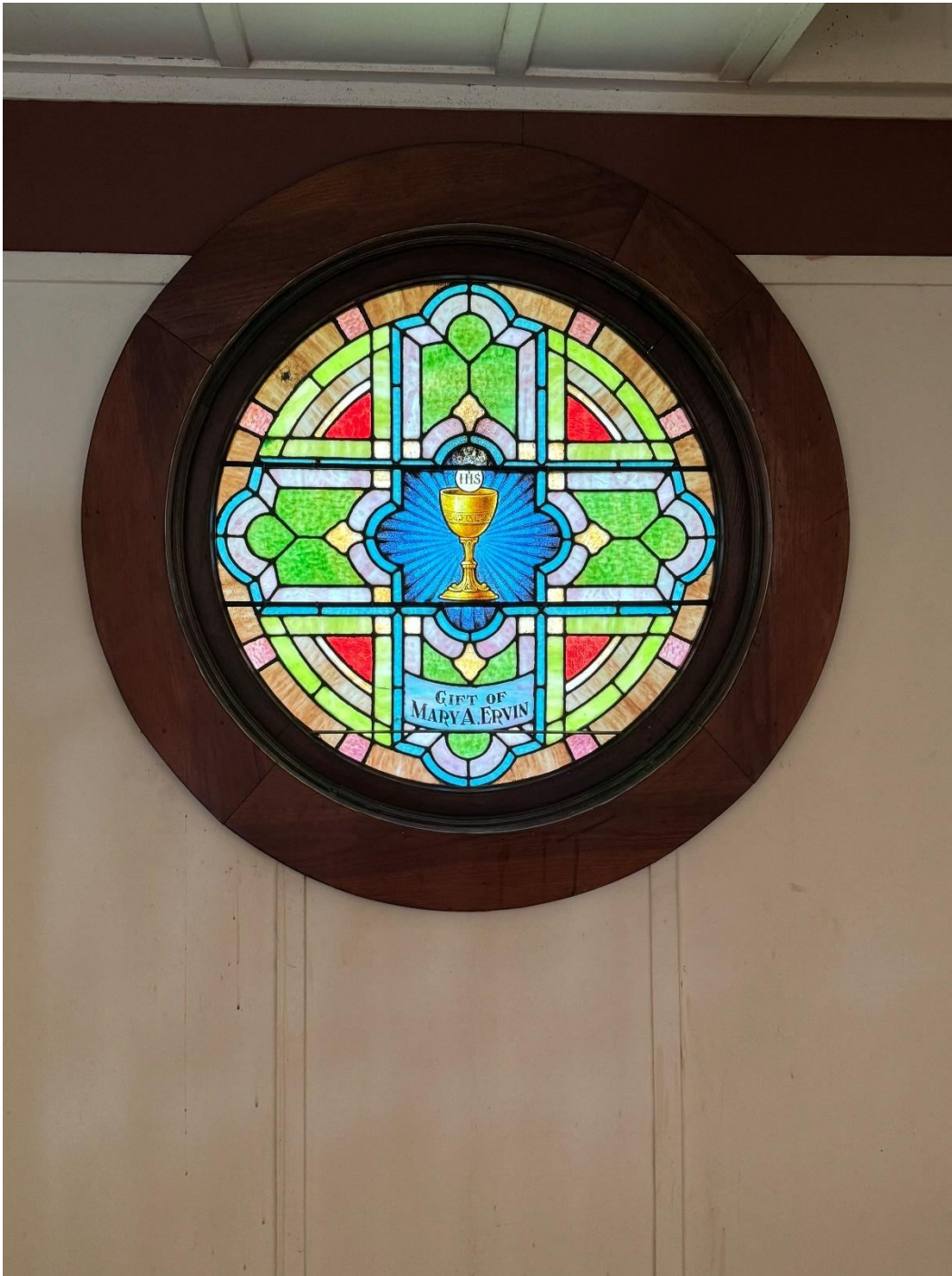


*Image 5: Interior, stairway to loft, east elevation*



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*Image 6: Interior, Ervin window, north elevation*

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*Image 7: Exterior, east side of structure, northeast elevation*



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*Image 8: Exterior, rear of structure, north elevation*



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*Image 9: Exterior, west side of structure, east elevation*

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Image 10: Interior, sanctuary from choir loft, south elevation



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*Image 11: Exterior, front of structure, southwest elevation*



Chapel of the Immaculate Conception of the  
Blessed Virgin Mary  
Name of Property

Greenbrier, West Virginia  
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*Image 12: Exterior, structure, northwest elevation*



Chapel of the Immaculate Conception of the  
Blessed Virgin Mary  
Name of Property

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Image 13: Cemetery, east elevation

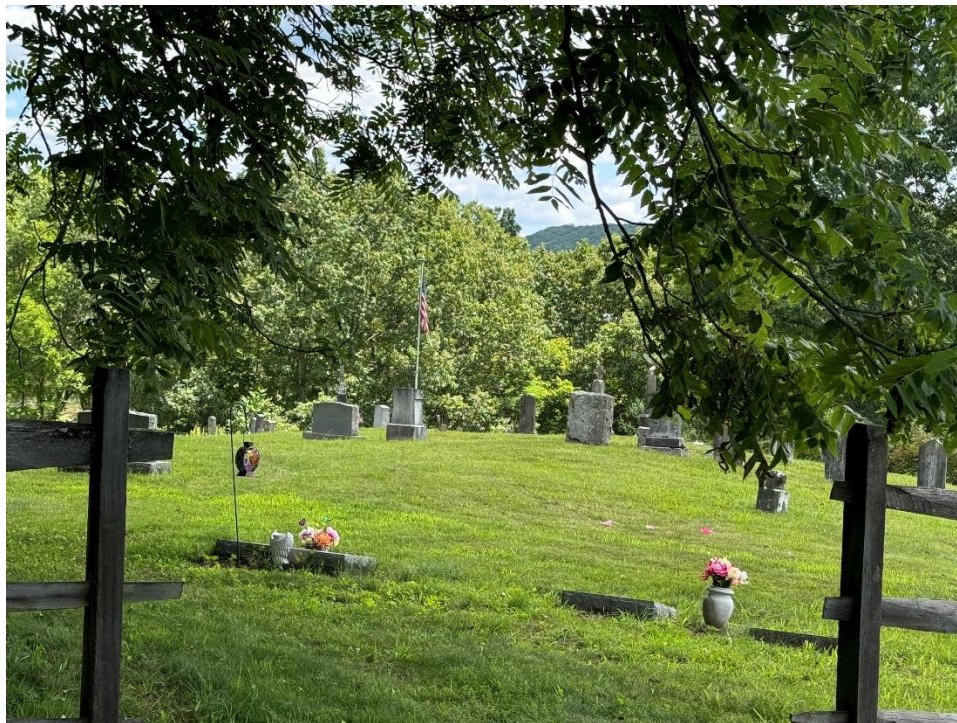


Image 14: Cemetery, east elevation



Chapel of the Immaculate Conception of the  
Blessed Virgin Mary  
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*Image 15: Cemetery, Donovan grave, southwest elevation*