

HISTORIC DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT

ST. MARY'S ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH & RECTORY

(Written, Fall 1989)

I. NAME

Historic: St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church and Rectory

Common: Old St. Mary's Church

II. LOCATION

Street Address: 836-44 North Broadway

Tax Key Number: 392-1336-100

Legal Description: PLAT OF MILWAUKEE IN SECS (28-29-33)-7-22 BLOCK 63 LOTS 11 & 12 SD SUBD & LOT 12 BLK 63 PLAT OF NW ¼ OF NW ¼ SEC 28-7-22 & W 7' VAC ALLEY ADJ

III. CLASSIFICATION

Structure

IV. OWNER

St. Mary's Congregation
836 North Broadway
Milwaukee, WI 53202

V. YEAR BUILT

Church: 1846-47 Remodeled: 1922-23

Rectory: 1922-23

VI. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

St. Mary's Church is located in the heart of Milwaukee's central business district at the southeast corner of North Broadway and East Kilbourn Avenue. The surrounding neighborhood is made up of tall office buildings of various vintages ranging from the 1920s to the 1980s. The church is built at the edge of the sidewalk and fills almost its entire lot. A two-story, twentieth century rectory adjoins the church to the south while a surface parking lot occupies the lot behind the church where the parish school stood until 1978. The parking lot is not included in this designation.

St. Mary's is a rectangular, low hip-roofed, structure that measures 54 by 152 feet. It has limestone foundations, blackened cream brick walls, and limestone trim. The roof is covered in copper colored metal. The façade faces west on to North Broadway. It is composed of a central tower flanked by one-bay-wide pavilions articulated with colossal blind fenestration

surmounting broadly enframed, wood paneled entrances at street level. The projecting central tower contains the hooded main entrance in its base surmounted by two tiers of multi-paned windows set within a massive arched embrasure. The upper stages of the tower contain a square louvered belfry with a bracketed and corbelled cornice above that are the octagonal clock tower and faceted spire. The clock tower has a large round clock face on each of the four major sides and the copper clad spire is capped with a large metal cross.

The north and south side elevations are nearly identical. Four bays of tall, arched, leaded glass windows are separated by pilaster strips supporting a broad brick frieze and cornice in the Greek Revival manner. At the east end are projecting transepts with blind fenestration and segmentally arched pedimented roofs.

The adjacent rectory at 836 N. Broadway is a 36 x 52', two-story, Greek Revival style, brown brick structure with a pedimented gabled front ornamented with pilaster strips designed in 1922. The central entrance is designed in the Federal style with wooden sidelights and a transom. An ocular window lights the gable.

VII. SIGNIFICANCE

Old St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church is architecturally significant as a fine example of a pioneer era church exhibiting Greek Revival and Zopfstil stylistic influences. It is historically important as the home of one of the oldest congregations in the city and for being the oldest church structure remaining in Milwaukee. The rectory contributes to historical significance of the church as an example of a compatibly designed accessory building typical of those found in Roman Catholic church complexes.

VIII. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

St. Mary's is the oldest surviving church structure in the city of Milwaukee and was built for the community's first German-speaking Catholic parish. Subscriptions for the new church began in the fall of 1845 as a result of the efforts of a German Catholic women's society, the St. Anna Frauenverein. In February of 1846 the present site was purchased for \$425. The cornerstone was laid on April 19, 1846, and the church was dedicated on September 12, 1847. Like St. John's Cathedral, St. Mary's is believed to have been designed by Victor Schulte. The rectangular building was built of local cream-colored brick and was two stories in height with the lower level serving as a school. By 1851 there were between 800 to 900 families in the parish. When a separate school building was constructed in 1866, the church was significantly altered under the direction of architect/carpenter Victor Schulte. The auditorium floor was lowered, the east end extended, the west façade completely rebuilt, enlarged, and a spire was added. The elaborate interior decoration was completed in 1878 with the installation of a new main altar and ornamental windows as well as decorative wall painting.

The establishment of a second German language Catholic parish east of the Milwaukee River in 1889, SS. Peter and Paul, significantly reduced the parish population of St. Mary's. Encroaching commercialization at this same time led one faction of the congregation to agitate for relocating the church to the corner of Knapp and Jefferson Streets. But the majority of the congregation voted to remain at their original site and not allow what they perceived to be desecration of consecrated land by commercial activity. The congregation therefore remained at St. Mary's and the church retained a good deal of its German character until 1903 when its first native-born American priest, Rev. Nicholas D. Becker, took over as pastor. Unlike many of the other churches in the central business district, St. Mary's has survived in a remarkably intact state, with a fire in 1893 resulting in the only significant repairs on the structure since

Schulte's remodeling of 1866. At present, the parish consists of mixed ethnic groups including at least 100 Hispanic families. Confessions are heard in English, German, Italian, and Spanish.

IX. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that Old St. Mary's R.C. Church and Rectory, 836-844 North Broadway, be designated as historic structures as a result of their fulfillment of criteria e-1, e-5, e-6, and e-9 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance, Section 308-81 (2)(e).

X. PRESERVATION GUIDELINES

The following preservation guidelines represent the principal concerns of the Historic Preservation Commission regarding this historic designation. However, the Commission reserves the right to make final decisions based upon particular design submissions. Nothing in these guidelines shall be construed to prevent ordinary maintenance or the restoration and/or replacement of documented original elements.

A. Roofs

Retain the original roof shape. Dormers, skylights and solar collector panels may be added to roof surfaces of the rectory if they are not visible from the street. Avoid making changes to the roof shape that would alter the building height, roofline or pitch.

B. Materials

1. Masonry

- a. Unpainted brick, terra cotta or stone should not be painted or covered. This is historically incorrect and could cause irreversible damage if it was decided to remove the paint at a later date.
- b. Repoint defective mortar by duplicating the original in color, style, texture and strength. Avoid using mortar colors and pointing styles that were unavailable or were not used when the building was constructed.
- c. Clean masonry only when necessary to halt deterioration and with the gentlest method possible. Sandblasting brick, terra cotta or stone surfaces is prohibited. This method of cleaning erodes the surface of the material and accelerates deterioration and the accumulation of dirt on the exterior of the building. Avoid the indiscriminate use of chemical products that could have an adverse reaction with the masonry materials, such as the use of acid on limestone. Cleaning the brick on the church is not recommended since it would remove the patina of age that gives the church its distinctive appearance. It is likely to accentuate differences in the brickwork where alterations and repairs have been made over the years.
- d. Repair or replace deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the old as closely as possible. Avoid using new material that is inappropriate or was unavailable when the building was constructed.

2. Wood/Metal

- a. Retain original material, whenever possible. Avoid removing architectural features that are essential to maintaining the building's character and appearance.
- b. Retain or replace deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the appearance of the old as closely as possible. Avoid covering architectural features with new materials that are inappropriate or were unavailable when the building was constructed.

C. Windows and Doors

1. Retain existing window and door openings. Retain the existing configuration of panes, sash, surrounds and sills, except as necessary to restore to the original condition. Avoid making additional openings or changes in existing fenestration by enlarging or reducing window or door openings. Avoid changing the size or configuration of windowpanes or sash.
2. Respect the buildings stylistic period. If the replacement of doors or window sash is necessary, the replacement should duplicate the appearance and design of the original window sash or door. Avoid using inappropriate sash and door replacements. Avoid the filling-in or covering of openings with inappropriate materials such as glass block. Avoid using modern style window units such as horizontal sliding sash in place of double hung sash or the substitution of units with glazing configurations not appropriate to the style of the building. The leaded glass windows in the church should not be altered or removed except for restoration.

D. Trim and Ornamentation

There should be no changes to the existing trim or ornamentation except as necessary to restore the building to its original condition. Replacement features shall match the original member in scale, design and appearance.

E. Additions

All of the elevations of the church are integral to the structure's architectural significance. Additions are not recommended and require the approval of the Commission. Approval shall be based upon the addition's design compatibility with the building in terms of height, roof configuration, fenestration, scale, design and materials, and the degree to which it visually intrudes upon the principal elevations. Additions may be made to the east elevation of the rectory, subject to Commission approval.

F. Signs

The installation of any permanent exterior sign shall require the approval of the Commission. Approval will be based on the compatibility of the proposed sign with the historic and architectural character of the building.

G. Site Features

New plant materials, railing, fencing, paving and lighting fixtures shall be compatible with the historic architectural character of the building.

H. Guidelines for New Construction

It is important that new construction be designed so as to be as sympathetic as possible with the character of the buildings.

1. Siting

New construction must respect the historic siting of the church. It should be accomplished so as to maintain the appearance of the old church from the street as a freestanding structure.

2. Scale

Overall building height and bulk, the expression of major building divisions including foundation, body and roof, and individual building components such as overhangs and fenestration that are in close proximity to the historic building must be compatible to and sympathetic with the design of that structure.

3. Form

The massing of new construction must be compatible with the goal of maintaining the integrity of the old building as a distinct freestanding structure. The profiles of roofs and building elements that project and recede from the main block should express the same continuity established by the historic structure if they are in close proximity to it.

4. Materials

The building materials that are visible from the public right-of-way and in close proximity to the historic buildings should be consistent with the colors, textures, proportions, and combinations of cladding materials used on those structures. The physical composition of the materials may be different from that of the historic materials, but the same appearance should be maintained.