

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

For NPS use only  
received MAY 9 1983  
date entered

1. Name

historic Churches <sup>in Texas</sup> with Decorative Interior Painting, Thematic Nomination

and/or common

2. Location

street & number Multiple locations, see continuation sheets N/A not for publication

city, town N/A vicinity of

state Texas code 048 county see continuation sheets see cont. code sheet

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	N/A in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Multiple ownership, see continuation sheets

street & number

city, town N/A vicinity of state Texas

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Multiple, see continuation sheets

street & number

city, town state

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Historic Sites Inventory has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date January 1981  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Texas Historical Commission

city, town Austin state Texas

# 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date <u>N/A</u>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

**Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance**

Fifteen churches comprise the thematic nomination to the National Register entitled "Churches in Texas with Decorative Interior Painting." This group represents a variety of religious buildings throughout the state, related by their painted interior ornamentation. Their significance is architectural, historic, and artistic.

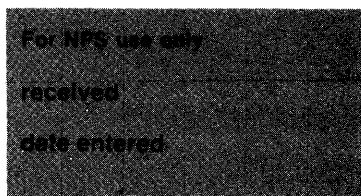
Most of these churches are from German and Czech towns in central Texas, and reflect their Central European background. Five decorative techniques were used in these paintings: stenciling, freehand work, infill, graining, and marbling. Religious symbolism is common, especially in the case of the Catholic churches. Purely decorative painting, however, is also found, particularly in the Protestant examples, and is equally interesting. The architecture of the buildings is likewise noteworthy in most cases. The Gothic Revival style is frequent, and vernacular Carpenter Gothic also occurs. There are two outstanding examples of Romanesque Revival influence among the churches. Since the interior paintings of the 15 structures nominater herein are important survivals, in themselves, the churches which shelter them are thus also of great historic and artistic significance.

Painting as a form of interior decoration has been identified in a number of middle 19th- to early 20th-century Texas buildings including churches, residences, and commercial buildings of varying degrees of architectural sophistication. Because tradition plays such an important role in religion, early decoration is more likely to be found, of course, in churches than in commercial buildings and residences. The latter are more subject to changing fashions in decorative schemes, with their concomitant alterations and repaintings. The 15 churches nominated herein provide valuable surviving representations of this craft-work, which ranges from naive vernacular art to a sophisticated treatment of high styles. Great diversity can be seen in the intent of the painters. Some were concerned with purely trompe l'oeil effects in their employment both of materials and spatial elements. Others mainly did religious iconography, and purely decorative treatments.

Efforts to identify and locate those churches in the state with decorative painting began with a review of information which had been previously gathered by the Texas Historical Commission. Its statewide inventory of historic sites and the files of the Winedale Institute for Historic Preservation, University of Texas, were very useful. Inquiry was made of scholars familiar with Texas' architecture, history, and the decorative arts for possible sites. Also, requests for information about such structures were sent to each chairman of the state's county historical commissions. Some of the material gotten in these ways was then published in two monthlies: The Medallion of the Texas Historical Commission, and Texas Highways. In addition, the active support and assistance of Buie Harwood of North Texas State University were essential for the successful compilation of this nomination. She consulted with the staff of the Texas Historical Commission several times, and her publications on decorative painting were quite useful. In particular, Buie Harwood's article, "Fancy the Ornament (1980)," provided a helpful basis for this research. The archives of several religious denominations were also consulted. Finally, after a number of potential

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sites were tentatively selected, telephone calls and site visits were made to determine which churches would likely merit consideration for the thematic nomination. Final selection was limited to those in which the interior painting contributed substantially to the structure's significance, which is based in part on its history and architecture. The state's survey of historic resources is a continuing endeavor, and if other churches with significant decorative painting come to light in the future, they can be added to the present list.

Five processes for applying painted decoration are reported by Buie Harwood in her research on historic interiors (1980: 38-41): stencil, freehand, infill, marbling, and graining. Each type is present among these 15 churches. Stenciling is characterized by small-scale, repeated patterns of flat color, frequently forming geometric or stylized plant motifs. Borders are a common use of the technique. Examples of stenciling are found in St. John the Baptist Church (Ammansville), St. Mary's Church (Fredericksburg), Ascension Church (Moravia), and Guardian Angel Church (Wallis).

Freehand painting portrays individual designs, usually interpretations which are representational in character. Samples include the angels and descending dove portrayed on the apse ceiling of St. Mary's Church (St. Mary's), the angels on the apse spandrel of St. Mary's Church (High Hill), the figures on the apse spandrel in Queen of Peace Church (Sweet Home), and the ceiling panels in Guardian Angel Church (Wallis).

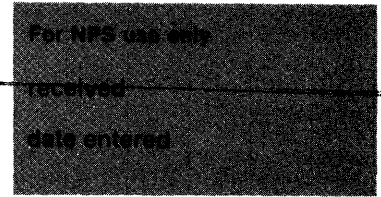
Large repeating patterns indicate infill painting, in which the preliminary outline of a design is transferred to a surface to be painted, and the outlined areas are then filled in. Shading is more commonly seen in infill than in stencil painting. Examples of this technique are found in the ceiling motifs at St. John the Baptist Church (Ammansville), in the medallions of Ascension Church (Moravia), and at the Wesley Brethren Church (Wesley).

The two remaining types of painting are both trompe l'oeil ("fool the eye") techniques. Graining is an attempt to portray various kinds of high-quality wood finishes. Such effects were commonly produced where the availability of fine materials was limited by constraints of transportation and/or cost. For example, furniture and doors of pine or cedar, which are native woods, might be painted to resemble mahogany or rosewood. The pews of St. Joseph's Church (Galveston) are the only example of graining found among the 15 churches.

Marbling, in a similar manner, imitates the surface of actual marble by mottled and striated painting. Wooden columns are frequently embellished with this technique; examples are found at St. Mary's Church (High Hill), St. Mary's Church (Praha), Church of the Blessed Virgin (Sweet Home), and Guardian Angel Church (Wallis). Marbling was used on the walls of Ascension Church (Moravia) in a different manner, to imitate dressed blocks of stone.

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Architecturally, many of the 15 churches exhibit common design characteristics. Basilican plans are most common, and central bell towers and Gothic Revival elements provide additional similar features. Three of the Gothic Revival churches--those in Wallis, High Hill, and Fredericksburg--were designed by the same architect, Leo M.J. Dielmann of San Antonio. And the churches at Shiner and Sweet Home were built by the same contractors, V. Falbo and M. Deodati. Other architectural styles which can be discerned are the Romanesque and Byzantine influences in St. Peter's Church (Lindsay), and Classicism in the First Methodist Church (Paris). Classical elements in the painted decoration are found in both the Wesley Brethren Church (Wesley) and Ascension Church (Moravia). Saints Cyril and Methodius Church (Shiner) provides an interesting blend of a basic Gothic Revival framework (central tower, buttresses, and steeply pitched roof) enhanced by details of the Romanesque Revival (semicircular vaulting and corbel tables).

In addition to exhibiting common external traits, similarities are also apparent in the interior plans of the churches. An interior layout consisting of nave with side aisles is found in most of the Catholic churches of the group, and ranges from simple versions such as St. Mary's Church (St. Mary's) to the elaborate, unusual wooden groin vaults of St. Mary's Church (Praha), and the cruciform plan with transepts found at St. Peter's Church (Lindsay).

A wide variety of subject matter is apparent in the painting, despite the common religious function of the 15 structures. Examples of purely decorative (i. e., secular) ornament are found in the churches of Ammansville, Amarillo, Paris, and High Hill. Nature motifs, i. e., plants, appear in the structures at Moravia, Praha, Ammansville, and High Hill. Considerable similarity is seen in the painted palms and leaf garlands at Moravia and Praha, though they were executed by different individuals. As would be expected, religious iconography is portrayed in several of the churches. Angels are a common subject of the freehand painting, and include examples in the churches of the Guardian Angel (Wallis), St. Mary's (at Praha, St. Mary's, and Umbarger), and Ss. Curil and Methodius (Shiner). St. Mary's Church at High Hill exhibits elaborate freehand portrayals of religious symbols such as the star of David, cross with crown, and grapes with wheat sheaves. Added to these symbolic elements is a sophisticated, foliated curvilinear pattern reminiscent of William Morris designs.

Along with the execution of decorative and religious motifs, Texas churches provide samples of painting done to transform a simple interior space into a more elaborate one. This is accomplished by the use of painted architectural elements such as moldings, masonry patterns, and columns. Techniques vary, and may include both freehand treatment and stenciling. The ceiling medallion at Ascension (Moravia) provides a representation of decorative plasterwork, skillfully designed to give a three-dimensional effect. St.

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Peter's Church (Lindsay), with its tremendous variety of masonry and mosaic patterns in Byzantine and Italian Gothic character, has unique examples of such attempts. The Wesley Brethren Church (Wesley) has similar brick masonry patterns, and the column and beam arrangement gives a primitive illusion of side aisles. Both the churches at Praha and High Hill exhibit painting which simulates ribbed vaulting.

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** see cont. sheets      **Builder/Architect** see continuation sheets

## Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The 15 churches with decorative painting in their interiors are examples of a rare art form in Texas. Their use of freehand work, stenciling, infill, graining, and marbling are historically and artistically important. Many of these churches are located in southcentral Texas in small agricultural communities, where evidence of local Czech and German heritage is reflected in town names such as St. Mary's, Moravia, Wesley, and Praha. The North Texas town of Lindsay and the Panhandle town of Umbarger, which both contain decorated churches, share a German heritage with the southcentral part of the state. A few churches of the more dominant Protestant denominations are also included in the nomination, and their use of painted decoration is likewise rare.

Many of the 15 nominated churches not only reflect uncommon survivals of high-style and vernacular painted interiors, but help to document the history of immigration in the state. They especially aid in illustrating the social and religious lives and practices of the Bohemian, Moravian, and German settlers who were seeking relief from economic difficulties and oppression in central Europe.

Decoratively painted interiors can be traced through centuries of development, from the most basic prehistoric cave dwellings adorned with pictographs, through high Renaissance villas with extensive wall frescoes, to the supergraphics of the 1980s. When interpreted, they help create an understanding of the times during which they were painted, and of the people involved, both artisans and patrons. In Texas, a number of structures contain this painted craftwork, which was mainly applied to walls and ceilings, and sometimes the older ones are found intact. Interior painting contains significant information that is separate from that provided by furnishings, which tend to change rapidly through the years. Interior painting reflects the wealth and status of the owner(s) at the time of decoration, and makes possible an identification of materials and major stylistic wealth influences then current. The present 15 documented churches with decoratively painted interiors stand out as a group, and constitute several unique examples of certain treatments. Though concentrated in Central Texas, the churches span the state, and cover the time period between 1866 and 1930. They represent a variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds, levels of sophistication, and familiarity with major styles. Common characteristics do emerge, however, allowing the churches to be grouped and regrouped under different categories for contrast and comparison.



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Cason, Karen. "They Say 'Buhsnami' at Wesley," Texas Highways,  
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Czichos, Carolyn. Research on history of St. Mary's Church, High Hill,  
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"The Methodists Complete Merger." Newspaper article from files of United  
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Oral Interviews, 1981, with:

Arthur Fatjo  
Rev. Marcus Valenta (Praha, Texas)  
Buie Harwood (Austin, Texas)  
Thadious T. Polasek (Schulenburg, Texas)  
Robert J. Wagner, M.D. (Shiner, Texas)  
Rev. Michael F. Krol (Wallis, Texas)  
Rev. Benton A. Thurmond (Moravia, Texas)  
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Oppe, Hubert Wilhelm. "Umbarger--Its History and People." June 1964.  
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Polasek, Thadious T. Research on history of Ascension Church, Moravia. On  
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"Praha Community from 1855 to 1974." Unpublished monograph, on file at St. Mary's  
of the Assumption Church.

"St. Mary's Parish, Umbarger, Texas 1930-1980, Pastor-Fr. Sonderman."  
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"Salute to St. Mary's Diamond Jubilee." Files of Catholic Archives.  
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Walbe, Rev. John, O.S.B. Diamond Jubilee of St. Peter's Parish 1892-1967,  
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Multiple Resource Area  
Thematic Group

dnr-11

Name Churches with Decorative Interior Painting Thematic Resources  
State Texas

Nomination/Type of Review

Date/Signature

1. Ascension of Our Lord Catholic Church  
Entered in the National Register *for* Keeper Delores Byers 6/21/83  
Attest \_\_\_\_\_
2. Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Queen of Peace  
Entered in the National Register *for* Keeper Delores Byers 6/21/83  
Attest \_\_\_\_\_
3. Church of the Guardian Angel  
Entered in the National Register *for* Keeper Delores Byers 6/21/83  
Attest \_\_\_\_\_
4. Church of the Immaculate Conception of Blessed Virgin Mary  
Entered in the National Register *for* Keeper Delores Byers 6/21/83  
Attest \_\_\_\_\_
5. First Baptist Church  
Entered in the National Register *for* Keeper Delores Byers 6/21/83  
Attest \_\_\_\_\_
6. First United Methodist Church  
Substantive Review Keeper Beth Grosvenor 6/21/83  
Attest \_\_\_\_\_
7. Nativity of Mary, Blessed Virgin Catholic Church  
Entered in the National Register *for* Keeper Delores Byers 6/21/83  
Attest \_\_\_\_\_
8. Sts. Cyril and Methodius Church  
Entered in the National Register *for* Keeper Delores Byers 6/21/83  
Attest \_\_\_\_\_
9. St. John the Baptist Catholic Church  
Entered in the National Register *for* Keeper Delores Byers 6/21/83  
Attest \_\_\_\_\_
10. St. Joseph's Catholic Church  
Entered in the National Register *for* Keeper Delores Byers 6/21/83  
Attest \_\_\_\_\_

*4/6/83  
See also  
District 12/11/76*

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Thematic Group

Name Churches with Decorative Interior Painting Thematic Resources  
State Texas

Nomination/Type of Review

Date/Signature

11. St. Mary's Catholic Church  
(306 W. San Antonio,  
Gillespie County)

Entered in the  
National Register

for  
Keeper

Arlene Byers 6/21/83

Attest

12. St. Mary's Catholic Church  
(Umbarger, Randall County)

Entered in the  
National Register

for  
Keeper

Arlene Byers 6/21/83

Attest

13. St. Mary's Church of the  
Assumption

Entered in the  
National Register

for  
Keeper

Arlene Byers 6/21/83

Attest

14. Wesley Brethren Church

Entered in the  
National Register

for  
Keeper

Arlene Byers 6/21/83

Attest

15. St. Peter's Catholic Church  
(Previously listed 5/25/79)

Keeper

Attest

16.

Keeper

Attest

17.

Keeper

Attest

18.

Keeper

Attest

19.

Keeper

Attest

20.

Keeper

Attest

54  
7/18/83 Previous  
listing 1/18/79