

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received DEC 19 1983

date entered

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

1. Name

historic The Church of the Ascension

and/or common The Church of the Ascension and St. Agnes

2. Location

street & number 1215 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W. N.A. not for publication

city, town Washington N.A. vicinity of Walter E. Fauntroy  
congressional district Delegate

state District of Columbia code 11 county District of Columbia code 001

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	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
	<u>N.A.</u> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Vestry of Ascension and St. Agnes Parish of the Protestant Episcopal Diocese of Washington

street & number 1217 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.

city, town Washington N.A. vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ state D.C. 20005

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Recorder of Deeds

street & number 6th and D Streets, N.W.

city, town Washington state District of Columbia

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title District of Columbia's Inventory of Historic Sites has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date August 11, 1977  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Historic Preservation Division  
Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs

city, town Washington state District of Columbia

# 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<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

The Church of the Ascension and St. Agnes, designed by noted Baltimore architects Thomas Dixon and Charles Carson, stands on the northwest corner of Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., and 12th Street, N.W. It was built in 1874-1875 of white Maryland marble and pink and orange Ohio sandstone. The church is basically rectangular in shape but has a variety of projections for porches, the sacristy, and a chapel. The spire, which soars almost to 190 feet at the southeast corner of the church, is one of the tallest in downtown Washington.

The church is an excellent example of the High Victorian Gothic style, which saw its heyday in the United States during the 1870's. It exhibits the major elements of that style--from the polychromy and variety of materials, to the solidity of its form, to the contrast of scale of the elements within the design--and it remains remarkably intact. Indeed, even the roof cresting remains. The Church of the Ascension and St. Agnes is a strong presence on Massachusetts Avenue, N.W. and it is a visual landmark in its neighborhood.

The facade of the Church of the Ascension and St. Agnes is comprised on multiple forms and planes. The front consists of three planes receding from the southeast corner. Multiple horizontal divisions occur in all three planes, predominantly at window sill levels. The most prominent feature of the church is the bell tower at the southeast corner of the structure. This 90-foot great tower is topped by a 97-foot spire. The spire is capped by a 6-foot Latin-style copper cross. Gothic arched windows of a variety of sizes and placements pierce the tower. The most prominent of these occurs at the third level, where the large arch contains paired lancets and a circular opening around a quatrafoil. At the base of the spire, louvered dormers pierce each plane of the roof. A smaller octagonal tower at the southwest corner of the church is capped with a steep spire with a finial.

The main double-arched Gothic doorway is in the center of the middle plane of the facade. It is surrounded by an arch of pink missalon stone. A finely carved cross over the entrance is embossed with the monogram IHS. Above the entrance four lancet windows and a small rose window are enclosed within a painted arch. At the peak of the roof above another decorative window, stands a decorated cross. Behind that cross, the fanciful cresting on the slate roof runs along the 135'6" depth of the building.

The side elevations are generally divided into six bays, each with double laucet windows with pointed arches. Buttresses separate the bays and, on the east side of the church, porches leading to the bell tower and the sacristy flank the bays. The nave of the church rises higher than the side aisles, and the chancel rises to a height midway between the two. A small chapel is attached to the west side of the church.

The following description of the interior of the church and the windows is taken from the application for designation of the Church of the Ascension and St. Agnes as an Historic Landmark submitted to the Joint Committee on Landmarks dated April 14, 1977:

The interior of the Church shows an arch of pink and gray stone which spans the chancel and reaches 48 feet at the apex. Within it is an inner arch of plaster.

(Continued on NPS Form 10-900-a)

# 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 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 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** 1874-1875      **Builder/Architect** Thomas Dixon and Charles Carson (architects)

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

The Joint Committee on Landmarks has designated the Church of the Ascension and St. Agnes a Category II Landmark of Importance which contributes significantly to the cultural heritage and visual beauty of the District of Columbia. It is a fine example of High Victorian Gothic church design with notable architectural presence in that area of Massachusetts Avenue at the midpoint between Thomas Circle and Mount Vernon Square which is emphasized by two small triangular parks--Reservations 68 and 69. It continues today in its original use as the church of Ascension Parish. It served as the procathedral for Bishop Henry Yates Satterlee, first bishop of Washington, from 1902-1908, continuing as procathedral for Satterlee's successor until completion of the Bethlehem Chapel of the National Cathedral on Mount St. Alban in 1912. Architecturally its exterior is substantially unchanged.

Sited at the northwest corner of 12th Street and Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., the church, with its lofty spired corner tower, visually unifies its small neighborhood of late nineteenth, early twentieth century townhouses, relating them to the park diagonally opposite in Reservation 68 and to Massachusetts Avenue. It is the work of Thomas Dixon and Charles Carson, prominent nineteenth century Baltimore architects, who also designed that city's Mount Vernon Place Methodist Church (1870-72), listed in the National Register of Historic Places. It is notably constructed of Maryland white marble and light pink and orange Ohio sandstone, a choice of materials unusual in Washington in 1874. The acoustical qualities of the lofty, open timber-vaulted nave are usually fine. Music critic Paul Hume has compared the interior to that of a cello. Excellant musical programs are held in the church throughout the year. The week-long Ascensientide Annual Spring Bach Festivals are particularly noteworthy. Sponsors for these programs have included the Daivd Lloyd Kreeger Foundation.

Ascension Parish, organized in 1845, was first located in a two-story brick building on the south side of H Street, N.W., between 9th and 10th Streets on land donated by the Van Ness family. At the out break of the Civil War the recotr and congregation openly sympathized with the Confederacy, and in 1862, Federal troops commandeered the church building for use as an army hospital. The congregation then worshiped temporarily in another building, also on H Street, lent to them by W.W. Corcoran.

The cornerstone of the present building was laid in 1874, on land donated by W.W. Corcoran, then a member of the vestry. When it was completed the following year the church was valued at \$100,000.

In 1901, Bishop Henry Yates Satterlee granted the petition of the wardens and vestry of Ascension Parish and moved his cathedral from St. Mark's Church on Capitol Hill, where it had been since shortly after the creation of the Diocese of Washington in 1895, to Ascension. Ascension served as the procathedral for the diocese from 1902 to 1912, while construction was begun on the National Cathedral.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See attached sheet.

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property .26 acres  
Quadrangle name Washington West, D.C.-MD-VA

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

### UMT References

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Zone Easting Northing

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### Verbal boundary description and justification

See attached list.

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N.A. code county code

state code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Tanya E. Beauchamp and Anne H. Adams, Architectural Historians

organization Historic Preservation Division  
Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs date June 1983

street & number 1133 North Capitol Street, N.E. telephone (202) 535-1282

city or town Washington state District of Columbia 20002

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

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 Carol B. Thompson  
title Director date 7/19/83  
Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs

For NPS use only  
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register  
Aloua Byers Entered in the National Register date 1/19/84  
Keeper of the National Register  
Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_  
Chief of Registration

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The original five-lancet chancel window visible from the outside is concealed by a handsome mural 14 feet wide and 20 feet high, the creation of John de Rosen in 1956. The mural proclaims the Ascension of Our Lord and His second Advent in power and great glory in the midst of His Saints. It is executed directly on plaster in wax colors and tempura with silver leaf and gold leaf in three shades. The figure of the ascending Christ robed in white is dominant as one enters the Church. Its flame-colored background stands out brilliantly against the deep blue sky tinted with green and broken by clouds of silver leaf. The nimbus behind His head is gold, with a cross of deep blue. Directly below our Lord stands His mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary. Her title of Mother of God, or Godbearer, is indicated by the Greek letters within Her halo. Her garments are of salmon and pale blue. St. Athanasius and St. Alban flanking Her to the left and to the right represent age and youth, contemplation and action, and the Eastern and Western churches. Althanasius is vested in a purplish-brown chasuble with a stole with red crosses. St. Alban wears armor of silver and a red kerchief about his neck. St. Agnes and St. Margaret of Scotland next to left and right again contrast youth with age. Agnes is dressed in rich garments with her hair caught up in a golden net and the border of her garment ornamented with an early Coptic design in yellow and red. St. Margaret's simple gold coronet and plain green kirtle reflect the relative poverty of the Scottish court. St. Thomas of Canterbury is last on the left wearing full pontificals; a deep red chasuble over dalmatic and tunicle and around his shoulders his archbishop's pallium of wool; and on his head a mitre in the low form of the 12th century. Finally, on the right stands the youthful St. Vincent. His dalmatic of linen with purple strips is copied from one found in a fourth century tomb. The silver censer which he holds by its short chain is copied from a seventh century Coptic censer and reminds us that he served at the altar and therefore is a patron of acolytes.

Partly closed arches of stone on either side of the chancel frame the approach to the Lady Chapel on the west and St. Agnes Chapel on the east. The interior walls of the Church are plastered and the roof is of open woodwork under which are Gothic arches of Florida pine supported by slight iron columns ornamented with fine scroll work. Located at the south front of the nave is a choir loft of hard wood, Gothic in style. A completely rebuilt Baroque pipe organ has been created in the choir gallery.

The brass angel lecturn and the handsome pulpit of brass craftsmanship of the Victorian age contribute significantly to the beauty and dignity of the main nave of the Church.

Between 1965 and 1975 all windows in the nave were replaced with faceted glass set in epoxy. The Great South Facade Window above the organ gallery was also created in this decade, together with the small lancets in the clerestory, which are of 13th century-style leaded stained glass.

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At the south front of the Church are the organ gallery quatrefoil window, rose medallions, and the four evangelists window. At the top is a quatrefoil tracery. Here Christ is enthroned on the rainbow as described in the fourth chapter of the Book of Revelation of St. John the Divine. He is crowned a King and holds the cross-topped orb, symbol of His universal sovereignty of love over His creation. His right hand is raised in benediction. Behind Him are seven stars. Next below are two small circular Rose Medallions. They each contain a single symbol encircled in conventional ornament. The ornamental forms are derived from natural shapes, leaves, flowers, and the tenuous stems of vines. The symbol in one of the circles is that of the descending dove of the Holy Spirit. This is reminiscent of the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, recalling that the Gospel describes the descent of the Holy Spirit as the appearance as a dove descending out of heaven at the Lord's Baptism. The symbol in the other circular window is of grapes and wheat, bringing to mind the bread and the wine, the elements of the Sacrament of Holy Communion in the Eucharist.

The four great lancets which comprise the greater part of the fenestration above the organ gallery contain likenesses of the four Evangelists: St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John, each at work upon his respective Gospel. At the bottom of the lancets are their traditional symbols, the beasts that laud the Lord Christ enthroned in glory. These are also derived from the fourth chapter of the Book of Revelation. St. Matthew's Gospel describes the human nature of Jesus, so his symbol is that of a winged man. St. Mark's Gospel opens with the voice of one crying in the wilderness, and he is therefore given the symbol of the lion. The ox is St. Luke's symbol because he treats of the sacrificial nature of Christ. These three Evangelists are referred to as the authors of the synoptic Gospels because they all convey similar versions of the Life of the Lord. St. John's Gospel is considered the most inspirational. His symbol is appropriately that of the eagle who soars high into the heavens on great powerful wings.

The St. Agnes window at the St. Agnes altar at the northeast end of the Church depicts the story of the patron saint of the Parish, St. Agnes, as recalled by some of her symbols. The lamb is both a play on her name and a reference to her innocence and purity. It appears both as the Lamb of God seated on a book and pierced by the sword of martyrdom. The lily is also a symbol of purity. The crown and palms are the rewards of all martyrs. As she refused earthly marriage to a pagan choosing to espouse Christ instead, the dove of the Holy Spirit brings her a wedding ring. Her reward, the funeral pyre, burns beneath. Above is the book and sword.

The other nine double lancet memorial windows which adorn the nave are The Baptismal Window, The St. Athanasius and St. Vincent Window, The Canterbury and St. Margaret Window, The Blessed Virgin Mary Window, The Gardens of Creation and Resurrection Window, The Archangel's Window, Healing and Music Window, The St. David Window, and The St. Alban Martyr and Elijah the Prophet Window.

The nave clerestory stained glass lancet windows were created and installed in the magnificent style of the late middle ages. The theme for the complete clerestory is the Te Deum.

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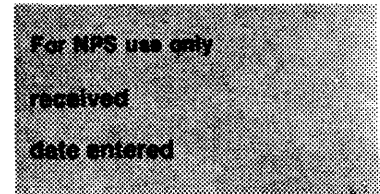
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Other handsome windows installed between 1965 and 1975 were the Tower Stair Angel Window, The Sacristy Rose Window, the Chancel Clerestory Windows, and The Two Lancet Faceted Glass Window in the Nave at the Lady Chapel. All of the recent fenestration in the nave and clerestory of the Church represents the artistry of the Henry Lee Willet Studios of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where they were created.

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Church of the Ascension and St. Agnes Library. Vestry Meeting Notes and personal communication with the Rector, The Reverend Father Frederic Howard Meisel.

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Nelms, J. Henning. The Church of the Ascension. Lawrence Publishing Company, Washington, D.C. 70 pp. 1910. The Church of the Ascension and St. Agnes Library.

Shinn, Reverend George W. King's Handbook of Notable Episcopal Churches in the United States. 1889. Moses King Corporation, Boston, Massachusetts, pp. 157-160. Rector's Library, Church of the Epiphany.

Application and Case Record for Landmark Case No. 77-4 before the Joint Committee on Landmarks.



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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:

The Church of Ascension and St. Agnes stands on lot 800 in Square 282 in the northwest quadrant of the District of Columbia. The irregularly-shaped lot has a 124.84' frontage on Massachusetts Avenue and a 142.83' frontage on 12th Street, N.W. The area of the lot is 8290 square feet.