

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

PH0675733

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED APR 25 1979  
DATE ENTERED MAY 31 1979

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

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

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC *St.*  
Saint Benedict's Catholic Church

AND/OR COMMON  
Painted Church

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER  
None

CITY, TOWN  
Honaunau

--- NOT FOR PUBLICATION  
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT  
2

STATE  
Hawaii

--- VICINITY OF  
CODE  
15

COUNTY  
Hawaii

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 type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME  
Roman Catholic Diocese of Honolulu

STREET & NUMBER  
1184 Bishop Street

CITY, TOWN  
Honolulu

--- VICINITY OF

STATE  
Hawaii

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.  
Bureau of Conveyances

STREET & NUMBER  
403 Queen Street

CITY, TOWN  
Honolulu

STATE  
Hawaii 96813

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE  
Hawaii Register of Historic Places # 10-47-7230

DATE  
July 1973

--- FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS  
State of Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources

CITY, TOWN  
Honolulu

STATE  
Hawaii 96809

# 7 DESCRIPTION

## CONDITION

EXCELLENT  
 GOOD  
 FAIR

DETERIORATED  
 RUINS  
 UNEXPOSED

## CHECK ONE

UNALTERED  
 ALTERED

## CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE  
 MOVED DATE \_\_\_\_\_

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

Saint Benedict's Church was built between 1899 and 1902 by a Belgian Priest Father John Berchmans Velghe who had come from the Marquesas by way of Tahiti. It is a small rectangular structure with a vaulted interior ceiling.

The columns within the structure are the trunks of painted coconut palm trees, and the altar wall, with carefully illusionistic perspective, transfers the soaring reaches of the Burgos Cathedral in Europe to Honaunau. The structure is "a little masterpiece of imaginative functionalism, of unity between structure, adornment, and architectural purpose."

The front of the church faces west and concrete steps lead up to an enclosed porch area. Lattice opening articulate this structure which is embellished with ornamental woodwork in the form of pointed arches and tracery decoration.

At the entrance end of the gabled roof is a gothic inspired steeple. Lancet windows have been applied to the sides of the building to add to the gothic like feeling of this small wooden church. A choir loft is located over the entrance end of the building and may be reached via a steep narrow staircase.

The building is particularly interesting because of its famous painted interior of scenes from the Scriptures--one of a few examples of this type of church decoration in Hawaii. The artwork serves as an extension of the architecture.

### Detailed Description of the Exterior:

A small rectangular structure accented by a gothic inspired steeple. The steeple, which juts out from a rectangular base, is articulated by a string of dormer-like window openings that surround the circular form. The articulated steeple was the only decorative feature on the church's exterior until a later addition added a Gothic revival facade to the front of the building.

Floor Plan: See Sketch

Foundation: Wood post on rock  
Wood joints and beams

# 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 type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

One of the things that make up the foundation of America is the folk art that exists throughout this country. Here in Honaunau is an historically significant structure, Saint Benedict's Church, where one has taken that folk art and made it blend in with, and set it in harmony with the architecture. The artwork and the architecture are really one.

The church, located in the hill country that overlooks the vast Pacific Ocean, reflects the creativity and devotion of the architect-builder-artist-priest, Father John Berchmans Velghe who raised and painted the building between 1899 and 1904. Too few today are aware of this major monument to folk art in America.

Father John was born in Courtrai, Belgium, July 14, 1857. His baptismal name was Joseph Velghe. He attended the academy at Sarzeau in Brittany and became a novice at Miranda de Ebro in Spain. He studied at the Sacred Hearts' Scholasticate in Louvain, where on June 29, 1888, he was ordained a priest. At the ordination Joseph Velghe took the name of Father Jean Berchmans Velghe after a sixteenth century Belgian who had been canonized a Saint.

Father John was sent to the Marquesas and remained there until a tropical fever forced him to leave in 1899. He proceeded to Tahiti where he spent six months and painted a church or two that are gone today. Nothing also remains of Father John's painted churches in the Marquesas, for only stone and stucco against the Marquesan climate can stand for any length of time.

Father John was then instructed to go to South America, but that was not in God's plans. A yellow fever epidemic blocked the sea lanes and he was assigned to the district of South Kona on the Island of Hawaii, where he was put in charge of the Catholic Churches and parishes of Honaunau Kealia, Hookena, Honokua and Hoopuloa.

Then he began the task of building a new church at Honaunau. Father John was not a professionally trained artist in an academic sense and perhaps this was fortunate for Saint Benedict's Church. Although the structure he built does not present anything innovative architecturally, its interior space is both artistically and architecturally important, for the artwork serves as an extension of the architecture.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Frankenstein, Alfred, Angels Over the Altar, Christian Folk Art in Hawaii and the South Seas, 1961

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 5.67

UTM REFERENCES

A 05 196260 2151860  
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B           
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C           
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

D           
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

This site occupies tax map parcel number 8-4-6:6.

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

STATE	NONE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE		CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Jerry Y. Shimoda, Superintendent

ORGANIZATION

City of Refuge National Historical

DATE

12/5/74

STREET & NUMBER

P.O. Box 128

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN

Honaunau

STATE

Hawaii 96726

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL   

STATE X

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

TITLE

*Jane L. Silverman*

DATE

*April 12, 1979*

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

*Charles H. ...*

DATE

*5-31-79*

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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Architectural Appearance

Wall Construction: Wood, 1" x 6" planks

Structural System: Wood frame, single wall, truss roof

Porches and Stoops: Entrance end has lattice work and Gothic revival details which were later additions. Open porch now enclosed  
Steps

Openings: Doors: Pair of wooden doors  
five cross panels

Windows: Double hung, three sash, 10 x 12 lights,  
1" x 6" wood trim with pointed arch over

Roof: Shape and Covering: Corrugated iron  
Gable roof with 40° pitch

Detailed Description of Interior:

The power or expression of this small structure is the interior planning. The interior is colorfully painted with scenes from the Bible as well as illusionistic structure. The main body of the church has a dual theme--One painted illusion is intended to depict the expansive space outdoors (The false ceiling is vaulted and is painted to represent the sky, complete with stars, clouds, and birds. The illusion of being outdoor is enhanced by the palm trees that sprout from the supporting columns.) The second theme revolves around the painted scenes from the Bible. Each bay is decorated with a painted Biblical scene. The altar end of the church as well as the space above each painted bay is painted to give the illusion of architectural space. The altar end completes the illusion of being outdoors by showing the viewer the entrance and interior of a cathedral. At the altar, exterior space becomes interior space. The symbolic intention is represented artistically. The illusion of architecture is also evident in the bay areas. Each rectangular space is painted to represent an arched area. The painted columns and lace tracery are meant to be

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**Architectural Appearance**

read as supportive members. In one of these lunettes, figures are painted. This treatment is similar to the sculptures figures placed in architectural niches on the facades of Gothic churches.

Father John continues the illusion by articulating the rectangular space above each arched window. The pattern of a curved surface superimposed on a rectilinear one alternates between window area and wall area.

The Painted Church by Father John is a tour de force of artistic planning that presents the totality of a structure by its telling relationship of painting and architecture and the clarity of the entire concept which is seldom seen in churches in Hawaii.

Stairway: steep, wood, winding stair to choir loft

Flooring: wood plank, 1" x 6"

Wall & Ceiling Finish: Wood walls, wood plank arched vault in ceiling, decorative railings on balcony and altar, painted scenes on walls, ceiling, and columns.

Decorative Features and Trim: painted decoration and oil paintings painted on walls and altars depicting Scriptures and stories.

Lighting: modern electric, incandescent light bulbs

Additions and Alteration: enclosed front entrance porch

Sites and Surroundings:

Orientation: East and West perpendicular to slope entrance at West end

Other Structures: 1 story wood residence adjacent to church

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Architectural Appearance

Landscaping: informal with old trees, shrubs lawn cemetery  
adjacent to church

Walks, Drives, Walls: cement and asphalt walks-old stone steps  
and walls, asphalt drive, part of which  
was laid in 1973

Miscellaneous; two iron bells: #20 Montgomery Ward & Co., Chicago,  
Ill.  
#24 same company

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Statement of Significance

Alfred Frankenstein in his book, Angels Over the Altar describes the church more eloquently than anyone else.

The main body of the church is an oblong space divided into a nave and two side aisles. A long, high vault, shaped in cross section like a pointed arch, covers and defines the nave and is supported on each side by three columns. The two side aisles have comparatively low, flat, ceilings. In each side wall, up to the edge of the choir gallery, where the partition probably stood, are three windows, each of them likewise in the shape of a pointed arch, and between them are panels painted at eye level with pictures of religious import. Above each of the pictures is a painted Gothic lunette. On the wall behind the altar are three painted views of a Gothic church. The large one in the middle continues the line of the vaulted nave into deep space, while the two smaller ones seem to branch off from the side aisles. This, then, is the plan for the main body of Saint Benedict's Church at Honaunau: three windows, three painted panels, and three columns on each side; three aisles, and three more painted pictures on the altar wall. It is like the threefold Kyrie eleison, threefold Christe eleison, and threefold Kyrie eleison with which the Ordinary of the Mass begins. However limited language may be in explaining the mysteries of the Church, the doctrine of the Trinity was clear enough in this architectural setting.

To build a vaulted Gothic nave inside a little gable-roofed box was a daring idea which would never have occurred to a trained architect, nor is a trained architect likely to have conceived Father John's solution to the problem of the apse and transepts which the existence of the nave immediately posed. To build these appendages was, clearly, outside the range of possibility at that place and time; Father John therefore painted them on the wall behind the altar, joining them, in illusionistically rendered perspective, to the "real" vault ends and the illusion begins.

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Statement of Significance

Illusionistic perspective is used, however, primarily as a means of dramatizing light. The painter has been very specific about his richly ribbed vaulting, his fluted piers his arched colonnades, and so on, but his drawing becomes less and less particularized as it ascends toward the illumination at its highest and farthest point. This light, rendered all the more radiant through its contrast with the dark, heavy, shadowed mass of the ribbed vaulting immediately before it, is the focal point for the architectural and pictorial design of the entire church. It carries the eye and the spirit upward toward infinity, as it does in the famous building which served Father John as a model. For here, on the altar wall of the little wooden church at Honaunau, we gaze into the celebrated cimborio, or light-dome (what in architectural parlance is called a lantern) of the Cathedral of Burgos, in Spain. Until now it has been assumed that in painting the Gothic reaches on his altar wall Father John had drawn upon memories of some church in Belgium, or had simply invented a Gothic church, but this is not the case. The octagonal cimborio of Burgos, with its unique, unmistakable pendentives adorned with fan-shaped ribbing, is here reproduced in detail, as well as the fluted piers which support that dome, their crown-like capitals and their sculpture in niches, and the colonnaded arches that pierce the walls below the stained glass windows nearby. This is the legacy of Father John's two years at Miranda de Ebro, some thirty-five miles from Burgos. No doubt he had sketched the cathedral during his novitiate, and one wonders how many representations of it are or were to be found in remote valleys of the Marquesas and Tahiti as well as Honaunau.

. . . nothing in Saint Benedict's Church is in the slightest degree disproportionate, and everything in it works. Its logical and harmonious ordering of shapes, colors, and relationships has been somewhat disturbed by alteration at its west end--the choir gallery and the area

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Statement of Significance

below it are clearly not as they were in Father John's time, and there is evidence to suggest that the space below the choirgallery was originally partitioned off to form a vestibule--but very little has been changed in the main body of the church.

No one has been able to determine how many churches he built and painted in the Marquesas and French Polynesia, or whether his examples led other Catholic missionaries there to do some of the same on their own, as happened in Hawaii.

Where else in the state can one find building columns that flower into palm trees, Biblical scenes that graphically illustrate the Bible, an altar wall, which, with carefully illusionistic perspective, transfers the soaring heights of a Gothic cathedral from Europe to Hawaii? Saint Benedict's is a masterpiece of imaginative functionalism, of the unity of imaginative functionalism, of unity between structure, adornment, and architectural purpose. The Church may be tiny in terms of physical size, compared with the prototypes which Father John remembered, but its conceptual scale looms large.

Father John was a true folk artist, one of those creatively motivated individuals who create in order to fulfill a felt need, regardless of the magnitude of the undertaking and entirely without concern for what a more sophisticated point of view would regard as the essential degree of technical knowledge and facility required for its solution. The richness of the results negates the artist's need for technical training and makes the church a true cathedral of folk art.

Father John went back to Belgium in 1904, to the scholasticate in his place of birth, Courtrai, for two years. Then he lived for short periods in the monasteries of the Sacred Hearts, residing in a number of their establishments in the Low Countries.

Even throughout his last years he continued to paint. A few of his works are still preserved in Europe--such as his "Seven Sorrows of Mary", copied from the like-named series of pictures by the noted Belgian painter Joseph Janssens, in the Church of Saint Anthony in Louvain.

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Statement of Significance

As a teacher, while teaching at the Sacred Hearts' Apostolic School at Aarschot, Belgium, in 1923 or 1924, he met the young student Matthias Gielen, who was to become Father Evarist of Hawaii, the artist who did the churches at Mountain View and Kalapana on the island of Hawaii.

With advancing age, and unable to care for himself, Father John was placed in a Sanitarium at Lierre, Belgium in 1935 and there he died, on January 20, 1939, at the age of eighty-one.

The concluding statements in the entry on Father John in the annals of the Congregation of the Sacred Hears at Rome says--

He gladly gave all the service which his poor health permitted him to give, always remaining faithful to the art of painting. . . In our Mother House we have his portrait of the Very Reverend Flavien Prat, which exhibits his special manner: He was given to exaggerating the importance and number of decorative details.

He held the brush almost to the end of his life, until the day when his poor eyes refused their service. When he realized that, even with the strongest glasses, he could no longer command the brush as he wished, he understood that God demanded of him a huge sacrifice which he dreaded.

His was a faithful soul capable of responding to the invitations of his divine crucified Master. His last three years were particularly miserable because of the special care which had to be take of him.

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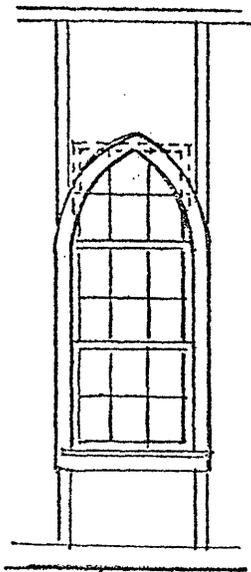
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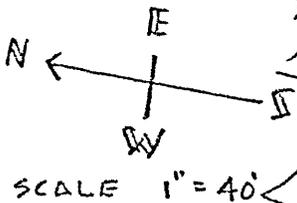
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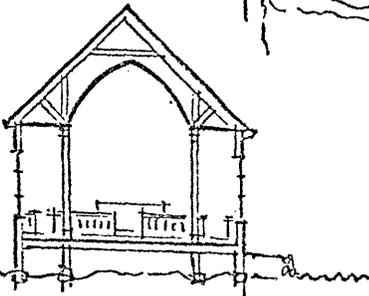
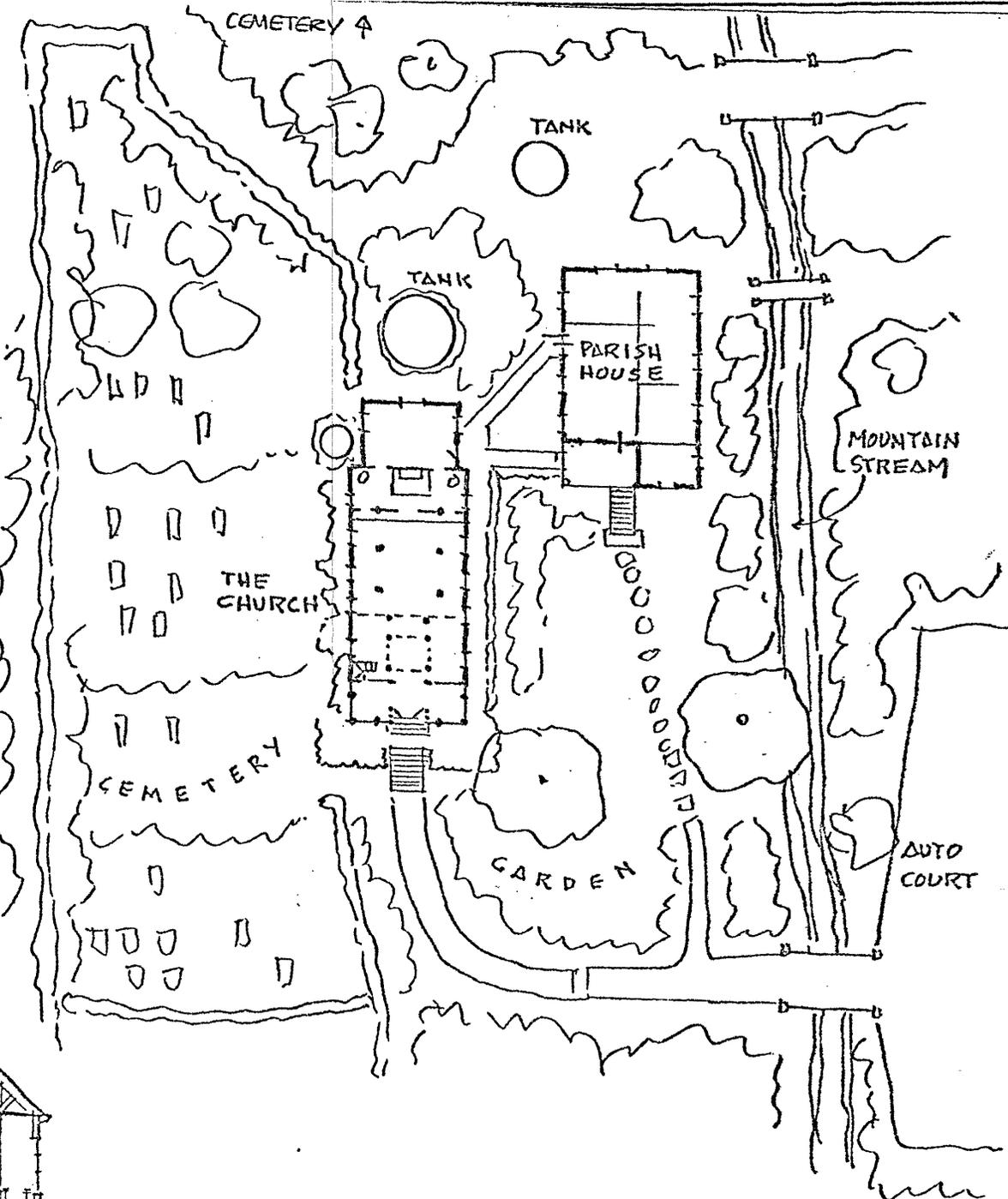
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TYPICAL SASH  
1/4" SCALE



SCALE 1" = 40'



SECTION AT NAVE  
1" = 20'

• SAINT BENEDICT'S •  
THE PAINTED CHURCH  
AT HONAUNAU • HAWAII