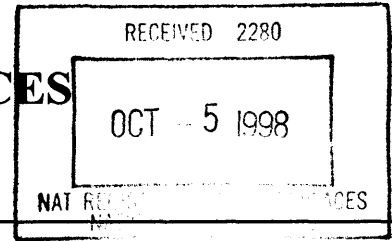


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

1339

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM



1. Name of Property

historic name: ST. JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC MISSION CHURCH

other name/site number: Canton Church

2. Location

street & number: 3497 Highway 284


not for publication: na
vicinity: X

city/town: Townsend

state: Montana code: MT county: Broadwater code: 007 zip code: 59624

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this 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 meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally.

 9-29-98

 Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Montana State Historic Preservation Office
 State or Federal agency or bureau (_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

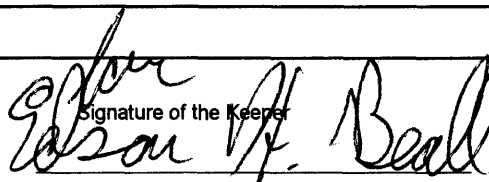
 Signature of commenting or other official Date

 State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
 see continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the National Register
 see continuation sheet
- determined not eligible for the National Register
 see continuation sheet
- removed from the National Register
 see continuation sheet
- other (explain): _____

 _____
 Signature of the Keeper Date of Action 11-5-98

5. Classification

Ownership of Property: Private

Number of Resources within Property

Category of Property: Building

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u> 1 </u>	<u> </u> building(s)
<u> </u>	<u> </u> sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u> structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u> objects

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: N/A

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

 1 TOTAL

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions:

RELIGION/Religious Facility

Current Functions:

RECREATION & CULTURE/Museum

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

EARLY REPUBLIC/Colonial

Materials:

foundation: Concrete
walls: Weather Boarding
roof: Wood Shingle
other:

Narrative Description

The scattered settlers in the Missouri River Valley, southeast of Helena, constructed St. Joseph's Catholic Mission Church in 1876. The Missouri River passed to the west of the building's original rural site. The church faced west toward the Elkhorn Mountains; the Big Belt Mountains provided the backdrop for the church to the east. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation moved the church 2.5 miles due east in 1952 to make room for the expanded Canyon Ferry Reservoir. The new site is identical to its historic setting, and the building's orientation is identical.

St. Joseph's Colonial Style design is similar to those churches found in Pennsylvania, New York, and New England. This may reflect the origins of the church's founders, many of whom were from Canton, New York. It is a rectangular, wood frame building imposing in its simplicity. Before the addition of the belfry and steeple in 1902, Colonial design features lay primarily in the well-proportioned fenestration of the facade.

Originally placed on a stone foundation, the church now rests on a concrete foundation. Six inch wide weather boarding (not beveled) laid with a 5-inch exposure covers the building's unsheathed frame. The siding butts into corner boards and fascia boards on the sides, and rake moldings in the gable ends. The gable roof system is of a unique framing and bracing method; the ties alternating from the peak of one rafter to the tail of the next. A fascia and soffit enclose the projecting rafter tails. The church is roofed with cedar shingles dating to the building's 1926 golden anniversary.

A shed roofed sacristy projects from the rear wall of the church. It is original to the church and has matching wall and roof materials. A vestibule, belfry, and steeple were added to the facade in 1902. The two story vestibule is detailed similar to the original church except the wood siding which is beveled and placed over wood sheathing. A square belfry, with round arched openings, rises above the vestibule roof. Surmounting the belfry are four gables from which rise a four-sided steeple. A stylized wood bas relief cross is within each of the gables; crosses mounted at each peak are now gone. The steeple terminates with a large a large cross.

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Broadwater County, Montana

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Windows in the church take two forms: arched on the front (west) and rectangular on the sides (north and south). They are Colonial Style nine-over-six, double-hung sash (except the second floor vestibule which is a nine-light fixed sash). The clear glazing was replaced with amber and red textured lights in 1926. The plain window heads are topped with decorative moldings. The vestibule now covers the original oversized four-panel double doors. Above the doors is a fan light with radiating muntins. The exterior door into the vestibule is on the south side; it is a four-panel wood door.

The sacristy windows are six-over-six, double-hung sash: two on the east side and one on the south side. A four-panel wood door accesses the sacristy on the south. A narrow, shed roofed porch covers the entrance. The porch roof is supported by 4x4 posts. The original chamfered posts and curved brackets are gone.

The interior is of simple design and decor. A rectangular floor plan accommodates a dais currently covered with carpeting. The dais is fronted with a balustraded communion rail and holds an ornate altar. These two items came from the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary Catholic Church in Helena, which had a new church under construction concurrent with construction of St. Joseph's. There are 15 original pine pews that have a "faux bois" grain finish. The original lath and plaster walls were covered with sheet rock after they moved the building. When hanging the drywall, the carpenters removed a picture rail which supported the original Stations of the Cross. Windows and doors have 1x6 (actual dimension) trim. The floor, including the altar dais, is comprised vertical grain, tongue and groove, fir boards.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria: C

Areas of Significance: ARCHITECTURE

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): A and B

Period(s) of Significance: 1875-1948

Significant Person(s): N/A

Significant Dates: 1875-76; 1902

Cultural Affiliation: EUROPEAN-AMERICAN

Architect/Builder: UNKNOWN/THOMAS
HOWELL

Narrative Statement of Significance

Statement of Significance

St. Joseph's Catholic Mission Church at Canton is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under criterion C. The building, constructed in 1875-76, is the oldest extant example of secular Roman Catholic church architecture in Montana. It is also a rare example of Colonial Style architecture. The addition of a belfry and steeple in 1902 somewhat altered the church's Colonial appearance, but still carried forward its earlier design features. This later addition reflects important changes in the evolution of ecclesiastical design in Montana.

Historic Significance

Canton Settlement History

Settlement of the Missouri River Valley in Broadwater County generally reflected frontier development elsewhere in western Montana. In the mid-1860s, the discovery of gold in the Elkhorn and Big Belt mountains, forming the northern, western, and eastern boundaries of the county, brought the typical influx of miners, businessmen, and camp hangers-on. Initial settlement in the valleys, however, was typically limited to stopping places for stage and freight lines.

During the 1870s, many well-established Montana investors sought fortunes in livestock. In Broadwater County, as elsewhere, these investors sought control of extensive acreage by obtaining title to large frontages along rivers and streams. The ranches resulted in a permanent, albeit highly-scattered rural settlement in the Missouri River Valley. They controlled the wide bottom lands of the valley using it primarily for wild hay production. Small acreage of wheat and other small grains were marketed to the mining camps and in Helena. The small villages of Bedford, Centerville, Springville, and Canton provided basic services to the ranch population.

By 1872, Canton, named after Canton, New York where most of the early settlers were from, consisted of a mercantile and post office, saloon and dance hall, doctor, and a hotel. The valley's earliest school and later its first church, St. Joseph's Catholic Mission Church, added to the identity of the village.

Canton residents had high hopes in the early 1880s that the Northern Pacific Railroad would go through Canton adding to their prosperity. Instead, the railroad company chose to cross the Missouri River several miles south of Canton. It laid out its own town of Townsend, which soon eclipsed the small village. Canton's post office was discontinued in 1935 and the mercantile closed in 1954.

St. Joseph's Catholic Mission Church

As the Missouri River Valley's population grew, the residents wanted a community building in which they could hold religious services and social functions. Until that time, itinerant priests from the Indian missions celebrated Catholic services in private homes. In 1875, Mike Driscoll and Ahart Hash each donated two acres from their farms south of Canton for the church site. Local residents gathered donations for building materials, and Pat Gurnett led a small party to Helena to purchase the materials. Thomas Howell, a carpenter, oversaw both Catholic and non-Catholic volunteers in the construction of the church. They had hoped to have the building finished by Christmas of 1875, but were delayed until the summer of 1876.

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Helena's Catholic community completed a new church concurrently with construction of St. Joseph's. Father Paladino donated an altar and communion rail from the old Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary church to Canton. On October 22, 1876, Father Menetrey of Helena, conducted Catholic dedication services in the church. The *Rocky Mountain Husbandman* reported that nearly everyone in the valley attended the service. On June 17, 1877, forty-seven members were confirmed at the church by Father James O'Connor of Omaha, Nebraska, following the pattern of itinerant mission priests providing services for the residents.

The settlers' church at Canton continued to be a focal point for the valley farmers and ranchers. The growth of the valley's population led to the addition of a vestibule and steeple with five crosses in 1902. Local carpenters, Edward and Dan McRae did the work. The next year, Catholics in Townsend constructed their own church, but residents in and around Canton continued to use the valley church.

On October 24, 1926, in celebrating the 50th anniversary of the St. Joseph's, Father Stephen Sullivan, a great student of history, gave his celebratory sermon on the early missionaries and their importance to the opening of this area to settlement. The list of names of the laity who built and supported the church, which numbered 90, can be found in the October 7, 1926 edition of the *Townsend Star*. In preparation for this celebration, the Catholic women's group held dances and dinners to pay for a new roof, a new floor, new glazing for the windows, replastering the interior, and repainting the church.

Canyon Ferry Reservoir

After World War II, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, along with the Montana Power Company, began to upgrade existing hydroelectric power plants on the Missouri River. Their goal was threefold: 1) to control flooding on the lower Missouri; 2) to increase electric power output; and 3) to enlarge reservoir storage for irrigation. Canyon Ferry Dam was one of the existing dams that filled the bill. By moving the dam downstream into a rocky gorge, the dam's height could be raised, flooding an additional 4,000 farm acres. That included all of Canton. A local historian described the destruction of Canton and its surrounding farms as an event "Likened to an earthquake that had opened the earth and swallowed this picturesque setting, so it is now swallowed and covered by a large and deep lake."

When Canyon Ferry Reservoir filled in 1953-54, it displaced forty-four families from their homes and farms. Even though, the Bureau of Reclamation compensated them for their land and many had their homes moved to higher ground or into Townsend, the collective loss was a bitter pill. Families gathered to watch one or another of the remaining buildings burned to the ground to clear the land for the incoming water. Children and women wept, men became so agitated they could not function. One man died of a heart attack because of the stress, leaving a wife and four children.

The Canton Church became the focal point of their grief and hope and remains today as the story of those families that were displaced when the reservoir inundated their land. After some discussion, the Bureau of Reclamation agreed to relocate the church 2.5 miles east on diocese-owned property near St. Joseph's Cemetery. According to the Bureau of Reclamation's Annual Project History for 1952, W.H. Sigety of Helena, Montana received Contract Number 14-06-604-23 to move the church. On October 29, 1952, they constructed the foundation. The main part of the church was moved on November 14 with the sacristy and the steeple being moved on November 18. The contract was completed on November 19, 1952 at a cost of \$1,943. The church was now within a half mile of the St. Joseph's Cemetery where many of those who contributed or helped with the construction, such as Michael Driscoll and Pat Gurnett, are buried.

After the move, attendance patterns at the church changed. Canton parishioners increasingly began attending services at Holy Cross Church in Townsend. What had begun as an every other Sunday mass at St. Joseph's turned into a once a year celebration on the third Sunday in June. However, other religious and service groups enjoyed the beauty of the new site by holding sunrise services. True to its original function, St. Joseph's continued to host such community activities. According to the diary of Earl Webb of Radersburg, 4-H Rural Life Sunday was held on the first Sunday in June. The Broadwater County 4-H club did yard and building maintenance. They would then hold a picnic near the church. In the years since the move, some pioneer families took it upon themselves in keeping up the grounds and the building despite repeated vandalism. They included Sewell and Alma Marks, Fred and Joye Meyer, Phil and Joyce Whaley, Arnold and Lorraine Woodring along with their families.

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The last religious services held at St. Joseph's were baptisms on June 23, 1985 for the Kirscher and LaGolia families, and a mass in July 1993 performed by Father Joseph Byrne for the Woodring Family reunion.

Though the religious functions of the building faded after its move, since 1960, the stately white church had made its mark against the beautiful backdrop of Mt. Baldy and the Big Belt Mountains as a picturesque landmark that continues to be photographed, painted, and crafted. Without notice or fanfare, artists, photographers, and tourists began to visit the site. Reproductions of its pioneer beauty have hung in many a home and public building in Broadwater County, and who knows how many places around our country. It has also become a focus of historical studies from grade school to graduate work with its valuable treasure of recorded family histories. As a site of local interest it has taken on a life of its own.

By 1996, the parish moved toward abandoning St. Joseph's. In November 1996, a group of interested persons gathered to research the possibilities of restoring and maintaining the church. Known locally as the Canton Church Project, the group organized itself, with help of the Catholic Diocese of Helena, into a trusteeship that is responsible for the restoration and maintenance of St. Joseph's. It is interesting to note that the makeup of this group is similar to the original pioneers who built the church. Many names of early settlers are found among the members of the group with their descendants playing important roles in the restoration. The group is nondenominational and focused on what is best for the community and the building.

Architectural Significance

St. Joseph's Catholic Mission Church is significant as the earliest extant example of secular (nonreligious order) Roman Catholic church architecture in Montana and as a rare example of the Colonial Style. In order of construction, St. Joseph's was the ninth Roman Catholic church built in the state (two of the nine replaced earlier churches). The first three Catholic Churches, at Hellgate (1863), Frenchtown (1864), and Silver Creek (1865), were small log buildings. The Virginia City (1865) church occupied a building built for another purpose. The first frame Catholic Church appeared in Helena (1866); the first brick church replaced it (1876). Deer Lodge had a church (1866) of unknown materials, which was replaced by the first stone church (1873). None of these buildings stand today.

St. Joseph's Catholic Mission Church, as originally designed, was void of those ecclesiastical features currently associated with church architecture. It was a simple, gable-front without a steeple. A tall wooden cross placed at the front of the ridge line identified its function. The building's design lies in the Colonial Style. The simple rectangular building, deriving its architectural style primarily from its fenestration, represented a traditional ecclesiastical form on the East coast. Perhaps the Canton area settlers, without the assistance of an architect, constructed a building from a photograph or memory of some Eastern church. Alternately, the design may have come from the Diocese. The building is similar to other early Montana Catholic churches, all of which had a tripartite gable-front design. When steeples and bell towers appeared on some of the early churches, they were placed back on the roof so as not to interrupt the gable front.

St. Joseph's gains eloquence in the very simplicity of its design, a characteristic common to Colonial Style churches. At the time of its construction, it was the most impressive building in the Upper Missouri River Valley. The building's primary design interest evolves from its well-proportioned fenestration. The central, pair of wood doors with a fanlight is accentuated by its slightly higher reach than the flanking round-arched windows. The front openings are embellished with decorative crowns. The windows on each side have square heads with flat, corniced entablatures. The double-hung sash have Colonial Style nine-over-six sash.

The addition of the belfry and steeple represents the evolution of church design. By the 1890s, towers and steeples had become almost obligatory features of all Montana ecclesiastical buildings. The new addition's design carried forward the church's colonial details with a twelve-over-six round-arched window at the first floor and a 6-light round-arched window at the second level. The round arch is again reflected in the belfry openings.

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Criteria Consideration A for Religious Properties

St. Joseph's Catholic Mission Church is the oldest extant example of secular Roman Catholic church architecture in Montana. The building retains the simple Colonial Style architectural features from the time of its construction in 1876. The addition of the belfry and steeple in 1902 reflect important changes in the appearance of ecclesiastical buildings in Montana when these features became requisite features defining their function.

Criteria Consideration B for Moved Buildings

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation moved St. Joseph's Catholic Mission Church in 1954 to save it from demolition. The church meets Criteria Consideration B for moved buildings eligible for architectural values. The church retains integrity of design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Except for the foundation, two brick chimneys and the lath and plaster, the building appears today exactly as it did after completion of the steeple in 1902. Additionally, the church's current orientation, setting, and environment are identical to its original location. The church is in a rural agricultural setting and continues to face west to the Elkhorn Mountains.

St. Joseph's Catholic Mission Church
Name of Property

Broadwater County, Montana
County and State

9. Major Bibliographic References

See continuation sheet

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 # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: Less than one

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing
	12	465520	5139370

Legal Location (Township, Range & Section(s)): Section 35, T8N, R2E, MPM

Verbal Boundary Description

Starting at the West 1/4 corner of Section 35, thence N. 0°02'E. along the West line of Section 35, being also Montana Highway No. 284 Right-of-Way, a distance of 1435.3 feet to a point marked with a steel spike; thence S. 47°25'E. a distance of 452.5 feet to a point marked with a rebar and plastic cap; thence S 28°18' E. a distance of 191.1 feet to a point marked with a rebar and plastic cap; thence N 89°22' E. a distance 125.0 feet to a point marked with a rebar and plastic cap; thence N 0°38' E. a distance of 15.0 feet to the point of true beginning; thence from said point of true beginning N 0°38' E. a distance 85.0 feet to a point marked with rebar and plastic cap; thence S 89°22' W. a distance of 160.8 feet to a point; thence S 28°18' E. a distance of 96.0 feet to a point; thence 89°22' E. a distance of 115.9 feet to the point of beginning, said tract of land containing 0.2697 acres, more or less.

Boundary Justification

The boundary is the legally recorded boundary for the property held in trust by the St. Joseph's Mission Church-Canton Historic Preservation Trust.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Jim Holland		
organization: St. Joseph's Mission Church-Canton Historic Preservation Trust	date: June 1998	
street & number: 3597 Highway 284	telephone: 406-266-3710	
city or town: Townsend	state: MT	zip code: 59644

Property Owner

name/title: Roman Catholic Diocese of Helena		
street & number: 515 North Ewing	telephone: 406-442-5820	
city or town: Helena	state: MT	zip code: 59601

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