

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED MAR 18 1977  
DATE ENTERED NOV 17 1977

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. Theresa Roman Catholic Church

AND/OR COMMON

Same

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

3 miles northwest of Rhodelia on State Highway 144

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Rhodelia

X VICINITY OF

2

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Kentucky

CODE

021

COUNTY

Meade

CODE

163

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

OWNERSHIP

STATUS

PRESENT USE

DISTRICT

X BUILDING(S)

STRUCTURE

SITE

OBJECT

PUBLIC

X PRIVATE

BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

IN PROCESS

BEING CONSIDERED

X OCCUPIED

UNOCCUPIED

WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

X YES: RESTRICTED

YES: UNRESTRICTED

NO

AGRICULTURE

COMMERCIAL

EDUCATIONAL

ENTERTAINMENT

GOVERNMENT

INDUSTRIAL

MILITARY

MUSEUM

PARK

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

X RELIGIOUS

SCIENTIFIC

TRANSPORTATION

OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

The Reverend Henry J. Soenneker, Bishop of the Owensboro Diocese

see accompanying letter below 5.77

STREET & NUMBER

P. O. Box 364

CITY, TOWN

Owensboro

VICINITY OF

STATE

Kentucky

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Meade County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Brandenburg

STATE

Kentucky

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Kentucky Heritage Commission

DATE

1971

FEDERAL X STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

104 Bridge Street

CITY, TOWN

Frankfort

STATE Kentucky

40601

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<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
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		DATE _____

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

St. Theresa Church in Meade County, Kentucky, is located off Kentucky Highway 144, about 20 miles west of Brandenburg, the county seat of Meade County. The site lies near the center of a rich agricultural plateau in a wide bend of the Ohio. The church complex is several miles from the crossing that marks the community of Rhodelia. The setting of the church itself consists of woods to the north and open fields on all other sides. The complex lies at a bend in the road. Within a hundred yards of it are a rectory, a large school-gymnasium, and other modern buildings, as well as ample parking lots. Such a support complex is, of course, necessary, and the church itself remains dominant among them.

The "west" facade (which faces approximately north) is divided into three bays, suggesting the implied division of the interior. The bays are separated by brick buttresses, those at the corners turned diagonally outward. At about the level of the tops of the doors and windows there are two sets of double shoulders. The two center buttresses "die" into the wall surface just above the large center window. The double middle door is not only larger, but seems to have a slightly more pointed arch than the single doors in the outer bays. The windows above have considerably more pointed openings, but the gable has a low slope, and contains a square louvered opening set on the diagonal. The outer buttresses and the gable peak are marked by the bases of pinnacles, which have apparently been replaced by crosses. One wonders whether this facade was not planned as temporary, allowing for a central unexecuted tower like that of the Cathedral of the Assumption in Louisville (see National Register form approved at the State level on June 5, 1973) only on a more modest scale.

The sides of the rather boxlike nave are divided by similar buttresses between the tall, narrow lancet windows. Here, as on the west facade, there is a cornice of corbelled brick brackets. The foundations throughout are of stone.

The interior does not have the aisles usual in larger 19th-century Gothic Revival Catholic churches, but it seems to have undergone a major alteration, perhaps around the turn of the century. It appears that the roof was lowered, or at least flattened internally and laid on longitudinal beams. The present pressed tin ceiling slopes slightly downward from these beams to the outer walls. There are remnants of the linear ribbing characteristic of Keely's other work in Kentucky, however, on the east and west walls, partially submerged in the present ceiling. These spring from small corbels and have dainty bosses at the apices. It is impossible at present to tell whether these formed part of a more elaborate system of tracery or even vaults, and it is tempting to speculate on the possibility of pendants implying the division between nave and aisles. In any case, though, the surviving details indicate a much more superficial decorative treatment than Keely's other Kentucky works, lacking colonettes or piers applied to the walls.

The three altars at the east end and the niches on the walls flanking the main altar and east window within the shallow, flat recess of the chancel, are all of outstanding delicacy, with both tracery and exquisite open filigree work framing the niches for statues.

The truncated tower in the southeast corner of the church is of modern construction.

# 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/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input 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 1855-1861

BUILDER/ARCHITECT William Keely, Architect

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

St. Theresa Roman Catholic Church, located in the extreme northwestern part of Meade County near the village of Rhodelia, is the center of one of the oldest Catholic settlements in Kentucky. Although the parish was not formally established until 1818 when the first church was constructed, a few families were holding services in private residences as early as 1805. The present Gothic Revival Church, built between 1855-1861, is attributed to the architect William Keely, the designer of the Cathedral of the Assumption in Louisville, Kentucky.

The first group of Catholics to arrive in Kentucky came from Maryland and settled near Bardstown, Nelson County in 1785. By 1787 the number of Catholics had grown so large that Bishop John Carroll of Baltimore appointed Reverend Mr. Whelan to be the first pastor of Kentucky. In April 1808, with the approval of Pope Pius VII, four American Sees (each the center of authority for a bishop) were created: Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Bardstown. Father Benedict Joseph Flaget was placed in charge of the See at Bardstown, becoming the first Catholic prelate in the Western section of the country. (See St. Joseph Cathedral and College Historic District, listed on the National Register June 3, 1976.)

According to Webb in his book The Centenary of Catholicity in Kentucky (p. 419), there were very few Catholics in what was to become Meade County prior to 1820. There were a few Catholic families, however, who settled in the 1790s on Flint Island, which is located in the Ohio River, two miles north of St. Theresa's. In 1805, Reverend Stephen T. Badin, a priest stationed at Bardstown, established several missions in Western Kentucky, including the families at Flint Island. During this time the Catholics in the area met at the house of William Elder, one of the first Catholic settlers. Services were held in this manner until the arrival of numerous other Catholic families from Nelson, Marion, Washington, and Scott Counties, necessitated construction of a place of worship.

In 1818 Elder donated land from his farm for the site of a church. Members of the congregation cut timbers and built a log church. It was located in Chenault, Breckinridge County, a small town on the Ohio River, five miles southwest of Rhodelia. The church was built under the supervision of Reverend Robert A. Abell, a native of Marion County, who was the priest in charge of the missions in Western Kentucky during this time. The structure was dedicated to St. Theresa (1515-1582), a Carmelite nun.

(continued)

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Collins, Richard. History of Kentucky, Volumes I and II. Covington: By author, 1874.  
 Colman, J. Winston, Jr. "Historic Kentucky: St. Theresa Church, Meade County,"  
Lexington Herald-Leader (Lexington). March 12, 1961.  
 Lyons, Reverend John A. Historical Sketches of Old St. Theresa's in Meade County,  
Kentucky, 1950.  
 Webb, Benjamin J. The Centenary of Catholicity in Kentucky. Louisville: Charles A. Rogers, 1884.

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1 acre

UTM REFERENCES

A 16 549250 4209100  
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING  
 C                  

B                    
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING  
 D                  

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Walter E. Langsam, Architectural Historian

Mary Cronan Oppel, Historian

ORGANIZATION

Kentucky Heritage Commission

DATE

11-30-76

STREET & NUMBER

104 Bridge Street

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN

Frankfort,

STATE

Kentucky 40601

# 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

*Eileen W. Miller*

TITLE

State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE 3/15/77

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

*Robert B. Rettig*

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE

11/17/77

ATTEST:

*Charles [Signature]*

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

11/18/77

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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St. Theresa Roman Catholic Church

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7

PAGE 2

Although Keeley worked on a number of large commissions in the state, St. Theresa is the only known parish church designed by him. Most of the other church structures attributed to Keeley, with the exception of the Cathedral of the Assumption, in Louisville, Jefferson County, are associated with religious orders. Because St. Theresa Church is of considerable size and is set upon a commanding rise in a remote area, it is very conspicuous, which is appropriate, since it is the focal point of the community's religious life, as well.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

By 1826 it became necessary for the congregation to abandon the first church and build a second log structure in a more central location. A few acres of land near the present site of the church near Rhodelia in Meade county was selected. A church was built and land was cleared around it for use as a cemetery. Five years later the congregation bought 259 acres surrounding the church to operate as a working farm in order to pay for church expenses. Shortly afterwards the congregation built a one-room log rectory and welcomed their first resident priest, Reverend Charles Ignatius Coomes (1805-1887), a native of Nelson County.

In 1839 Reverend Mr. Coomes had to relinquish his position because of illness and St. Theresa became a mission once again, until 1846 when Reverend Joseph Adams was assigned to the parish. Under Reverend Mr. Adams' guidance the first Catholic school in the parish was established. Unfortunately the school was short lived, but a more successful academy was opened in 1867 and remains in operation as a day school at the present time.

Reverend Patrick McNicholas acted as pastor of the parish from 1850-1870, and it was under his supervision that a new brick church was built and the school reopened. By 1854 the continued growth of the congregation made it necessary to construct a larger church. Construction on the present Gothic Revival Church began in 1855 and was completed in 1861. William Keely, the designer of the Cathedral of the Assumption in Louisville, is believed to have been hired as architect, and the labor was volunteered by the members of the church.

Rock for the foundation was hauled from a nearby quarry and bricks were made near the site of the church. John B. Manning, a local skilled carpenter, did the woodwork, and George Egart, a cabinet maker, built the three front alters and did the finishing work. Egart had been working on the construction of the Abby Church of Gethsemani in Nelson County, when he was asked by Keely, the architect, to assist in the completion of St. Theresa. After the church was finished Egart and his family settled in Rhodelia and became members of the parish.

The congregation began using the new church in 1857 before it was completed. During the summer, a man took his life by hanging himself from the rafters of the log church, and because of this desecration of the structure, services were no longer held there. The church fell into decay and was eventually torn down. A cross marks the site of the church which is located a few hundred yards west of the present structure.

Many retreats and missions have been held at St. Theresa over the years, which have renewed the faith of the congregation and increased the number of the members of the parish.

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In 1937 Pope Pius XI elevated the Diocese of Louisville to an archdiocese and established the Diocese of Owensboro. The line between the newly erected diocese and the archdiocese runs between Breckinridge and Meade Counties, dividing the St. Theresa parish in two.

In 1950 a new school building was erected to replace the large frame structure built in 1867 for the academy. The church and school continue to thrive as an important part of the religious and social community.

As mentioned before, St. Theresa is supposed to be another work by the prolific Roman Catholic architect, William Keely, whose works in Kentucky in the 1850s are gradually being recognized and gaining for him an artistic identity. There are conflicting accounts of Keely's background, biography, dates, and even name, and little documentation for these attributions. But it seems likely that eventually some definite information will emerge to form a context into which these varied Kentucky works can be placed. St. Theresa has been considerably altered and few traits of Keely's style survive, but it does seem to represent him working on a fairly modest commission, if of large scale.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 4

St. Theresa Church is the only known work of Keeley in the state that is a simple parish church, rather than church structure which is part of a complex associated with a religious order.

Although Keeley worked on a number of large commissions in the state, St. Theresa, is the only known parrish church designed by him. The other church structures attributed to Keeley, such as St. Rose Priory, Washington County, and Gethsemani Abbey, Nelson County, are associated with religious orders. Because St. Theresa Church is of considerable size and is set upon a commanding rise, it is very conspicuous. The size of the church and its location combine to form a most impressive structure.