

DATA SHEET

PH 0699403

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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RECEIVED FEB 13 1979

DATE ENTERED

MAR 30 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. Ambrose Cathedral & Rectory

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

607 High Street

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Des Moines

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Fourth

STATE

Iowa

VICINITY OF
CODE

COUNTY

Polk

CODE

153

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

DISTRICT

BUILDING(S)

STRUCTURE

SITE

OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

PUBLIC

PRIVATE

BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

IN PROCESS

BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

OCCUPIED

UNOCCUPIED

WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

YES: RESTRICTED

YES: UNRESTRICTED

NO

PRESENT USE

AGRICULTURE

COMMERCIAL

EDUCATIONAL

ENTERTAINMENT

GOVERNMENT

INDUSTRIAL

MILITARY

MUSEUM

PARK

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

RELIGIOUS

SCIENTIFIC

TRANSPORTATION

OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

St. Ambrose Cathedral Corp.

STREET & NUMBER

607 High Street

CITY, TOWN

Des Moines

VICINITY OF

STATE

Iowa 50309

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE.

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Polk County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

Court St.

CITY, TOWN

Des Moines

STATE

Iowa

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Des Moines¹ Heritage: A Survey of Significant Architecture

DATE

1976

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Plan and Zoning Department, Des Moines

CITY, TOWN

STATE

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

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

St. Ambrose Cathedral (1890-91) is an example of Romanesque Revival architecture, constructed out of Bedford limestone with high-pitched slate gable roof, and a facade presenting an asymmetrical composition of forms. The front (south) facade is composed of a central entranceway consisting of a centered arch set below a triangular pediment. A tall belltower rises on the east side of the main entrance, divided into five sections marked by changes in stonework and capped with a slender pyramidal roof. Flanking the entrance on the west side is a smaller section, 2/3 the height of the main structure and articulated by a semicircular projection with a conical roof which houses a staircase. The entire section culminates in an intersecting gable roof. Opposing the main entrance on the north elevation is the semicircular projection of the apse. The curvilinear form of the apse is in contrast to the asymmetrical rectilinear gable-roofed wings that jut out on each side of the apsidal area. Before the addition on the east side, the masses were balanced and provided a coherent silhouette.

The 185' x 102' plan is divided on the east and west elevations by alternating fenestration of single and double arched stained glass windows creating seven bay areas. Each section is further accented by the presence of buttressing, more ornamental than structural.

The interior of the cathedral is dominated by the 50-foot barrel vaulted ceiling. Articulated into rectangles by the arched ribs, each section is ornamented with an alternating pattern of gold liturgical emblems. A blind clerestory presents an integrated application of arches and fluted pilasters.

The rectory, 85' x 60' (1927) is a two-story stone and brick structure constructed in a style compatible to that of the cathedral. A slate gable roof, running parallel to the roof of the church, caps the building. Fenestration is primarily rectilinear, in contrast to the arched windows of the church. The center of focus of the rectory is a band of 8 arched windows extending across the front of the second story. The pair of windows directly above the grilled entrance portal is framed with a round arch supported on engaged columns and joined to the frame of the entrance below to create a large entrance motif. Of interest is the semicircular staircase on the east end of the south elevation. An L-shaped arcade connects the rectory to the cathedral on the northwest side of the latter.

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 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 1890-91; 1927

BUILDER/ARCHITECT James Egan, Chicago

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

St. Ambrose is, if a somewhat undistinguished expression of the Richardsonian Romanesque, a physically imposing ecclesiastical edifice, significant in that it acts as a monumental counterpoint to the rather bleak functionalism of the surrounding modern commercial and office buildings of downtown Des Moines. It is prominently sited, and remains a focus of visual attention, holding its own against the changes in scale and proportion of the buildings which have grown up around it over the past 80 years. The church is somewhat stiff, and not the best work of Chicago architect James Egan, who made a specialty of churches. However, St. Ambrose is of some interest in its exploration of the concept of interior space unhampered by columns: a feature which Egan reportedly made a personal hallmark. The six stained glass windows, three on each side of the nave, are noteworthy. Iconographically, they are unusual in a Roman Catholic church, as they depart from the traditional biblical themes. The six windows portray scenes of the arrival of Catholicism in the U.S. and in Iowa.

The present structure is the third for what is historically the first Catholic church in Des Moines. It is located several blocks north of the site of the original and second churches of St. Ambrose parish. Roman Catholic missionary activity began in central Iowa in the early 1850's, under the direction of Mathias Loras, Bishop of the Dubuque diocese. Among the earliest priests associated with this area were Fr. Alexander Hattenberger and Fr. Timothy Mullen, the latter instrumental in the founding of St. Patrick's church and the associated Irish settlement in Madison County, slightly southwest of Des Moines. St. Ambrose parish was formally established in 1856, and a small frame church erected. A more substantial stone church, reflecting the Gothic tradition, was built in 1865. In 1881, a second Iowa diocese, at Davenport, took jurisdiction over all parishes in southern Iowa, including St. Ambrose. The Des Moines diocese was created in 1911, to cover southwest Iowa.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Souvenir of the Dedication of St. Ambrose Cathedral, 1891.
 Western World, October 20, 1910; May 2, 1912.
 "Golden Jubilee, 1890-1940" (booklet about the stained glass windows)
 Catholic Messenger, souvenir edition on St. Ambrose Cathedral, Dec. 7, 1956.
 Catholic Messenger, June 15, 1962.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY approx. 1 1/4 acres

QUADRANGLE NAME Des Moines SW, Iowa

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24,000

UTM REFERENCES

A 1, 5 | 4, 4, 7, 8, 7, 0 | 4, 6, 0, 4, 0, 8, 0

B | |

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C | |

D | |

E | |

F | |

G | |

H | |

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Except for the north 132 feet, Lot One, Block H, Grimmel's Addition to Des Moines

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

Muffy Mitchell, Architectural Historian/ M.H. Bowers, Historian

ORGANIZATION

Division of Historic Preservation

DATE

January 1979

STREET & NUMBER

26 East Market Street

TELEPHONE

319/353-6949

CITY OR TOWN

Iowa City

STATE

Iowa 52240

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL X

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

Adrian D. Anderson

TITLE Director, Division of Historic Preservation

DATE 2/8/79

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

for Charles Otter

DATE 2-30-79

ATTEST: William H. Brashear
 CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

DATE 3-28-79