

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**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. Paul's Catholic Church

and/or common St. Paul's Cathedral

**2. Location**

street & number 2120 3rd Avenue North N/A not for publication

city, town Birmingham N/A vicinity of congressional district 6

state Alabama code 01 county Jefferson code 073

**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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	<u>N/A</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name Diocese of Birmingham in Alabama

street & number P. O. Box 2086

city, town Birmingham N/A vicinity of state Alabama

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Jefferson County Courthouse

street & number 716 North 21st Street

city, town Birmingham state Alabama

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

Jefferson County Historic Sites Survey; Downtown Birmingham Historic Sites Survey  
title has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1972, 1976; 1977  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Jefferson Co. Historical Commission; Birmingham Historical Society

city, town Birmingham state Alabama

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## 7. Description

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<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered exterior	<input type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered interior	moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

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### **Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance**

This Roman Catholic Church of red pressed brick with limestone accents exemplifies the Victorian Gothic style, interpreting the traditional Gothic vocabulary boldly, with highly active complex forms and contrasting colors and materials. Set close to the property line, the imposing cathedral dominates its site. The main facade is developed as an elaborate screen with a strong vertical emphasis; it is slightly wider than the nave and aisles that extend behind it. A broad base of steps leads up to three recessed portals set in compounded pointed arches, the central one also marked by granite colonnettes. Statues in the niches on the main facade are St. Paul to the left, the Sacred Heart over the center doors, and St. Joseph to the right.

The strongest elements of the facade are two large towers with spires that are visible throughout downtown. Flanking the central portal, they are supported by heavy buttresses with rock-faced and smooth limestone moldings. The proportions and ornament of the towers become more refined as they rise to spires of polychromed slate crowned with copper crosses that pierce the skyline. The large towers are repeated in smaller paired towers at the east and west ends of the facade, a successful contrast of scales characteristic of the Victorian Gothic style.

A large gable over the central portal is repeated above, between the two main towers, and also in narrower proportions over the secondary portals and between the smaller towers at either end of the facade. The play of graduated scales is also carried through in windows, doors, moldings, and brick relief work.

The east and west facades echo the motifs of the main facade in a more subdued manner. The walls are supported by simple buttresses capped with rock-faced limestone. Corbelled brickwork runs below the aisle roof, which ascends to the base of the clerestory windows which are articulated with Gothic tracery and set into the main roof as dormers. The polychromatic slate roof is crowned at the north and south gable ends with copper crosses. A one-story extension at the rear, which now houses a daily chapel, uses the same materials, patterns, and colors.

There have been few significant alterations to the exterior of the building. Perhaps the most noticeable is the substitution of glass doors for the original wooden doors. In 1955 the exterior brick was steam cleaned. In 1972 the brick was sandblasted and then waterproofed.

On the interior, the church is divided into a central nave with side aisles. Polished granite columns with foliated capitals, standing on raised limestone bases, support the vaulted ceiling. Hanging lanterns also appear to be original. Most of the stained glass windows are original. A prominent exception is the large window in the central gable of the main facade, which is of colored glass in a contemporary design; it was installed in 1972 to replace a window damaged by a windstorm. The interior of the church was remodeled in 1955 and again in 1972, in response to liturgical changes set forth in the directives of Vatican II. At this time ornate decorative painting and the ornamental altar furnishings were removed.

Immediately to the west of the cathedral is St. Paul's Rectory, a two-story red brick and limestone building designed by Birmingham architect Harry Wheelock and constructed in 1922. Just as the cathedral interpreted a Victorian Gothic Revival Style popular at the time of its construction, the rectory draws on the related Tudor Revival style

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popular in the 1920s. It thus uses flatter Tudor arches for openings, rather than the pointed arches of the cathedral. In addition to its Tudor Revival details, the rectory is distinguished by its brickwork, which adds textured patterns and arches to the facade, and by the use of a tinted mortar that helps unify the facade. Exterior light fixtures appear to be original. An iron fence separates the grass lawn of the rectory from the sidewalk. On the first floor of the interior, original woodwork, some light fixtures, and a fireplace remain. Otherwise, it has been remodeled for use as offices.

Behind the cathedral facing 22nd Street stands St. Paul's Convent, which houses the Benedictine Sisters who run St. Paul Cathedral School. This restrained two-story red-brick building dates from 1935. Its forms and entry echo the basic Gothic vocabulary of the complex. A brick wall screens much of the building from the street.

Next the convent, facing 4th Avenue, is St. Paul Cathedral School, a three-story red brick building officially opened in 1925. It has a projecting central pavilion enriched with niches, Gothic tracery, and other limestone trim which is dominated by a broad four-centered arch marking the main entrance. In the parapet of the building the bricks are laid to form a subtle diamond pattern. All structures are considered to contribute.

## 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** 1893 **Builder/Architect** Druding Company, Chicago, IL

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

St. Paul's Cathedral is the most highly developed example of the Victorian Gothic style in Birmingham, and surely one of the most highly developed in the South. The complexity and boldness of its composition and successful interpretation of Gothic forms in brick according to Victorian taste is clearly evidenced on the main facade. For example, note the effectiveness with which the array of steeply pitched spires and gables, articulated with different colors and materials and supported by limestone-capped buttresses, express active verticality, contrasting scale and color, and three-dimensional modeling.

\* \* \* \* \*

St. Paul's is one of Birmingham's pioneer churches, the first Roman Catholic Church in Jefferson County, and the mother church of Roman Catholicism in northern Alabama. It was established as a mission from St. John's Church, Tuscaloosa, shortly after the founding of the city and dedicated its original sanctuary, a frame structure, in 1872.

The present cathedral was built during the city's first major period of expansion, which was touched off by the ironmaking and real estate boom of the late 1880s. In addition to its importance as an individual structure, it is an important remnant of the city's first major public square, the heart of which was the Jefferson County Courthouse (1889-1930), which stood on the western half of the cathedral block. The spires of the cathedral and the bell tower of the nearby First Presbyterian Church (1888) contribute to a distinctive urban skyline that was formerly dominated by the central tower of the Richardsonian Romanesque courthouse.

Although most of the Gothic ornamental painting and altar furnishings have been removed and other alterations made, the cathedral interior retains its significance as an expression of Gothic space and structure. Elements of note are the original stained glass windows, the polished granite columns with foliated capitals, and the hanging lanterns.

Beyond the individual significance of the cathedral, the cathedral complex, including the rectory, convent, and school, is significant for its age and importance in the religious life of the city and for the overall design relationships and quality.

St. Paul's Parish began as a mission from St. John's Church Tuscaloosa. The first church building, a frame structure, was formally dedicated to St. Paul the Apostle in 1872. The first resident pastor came in 1880. A building permit for the present cathedral was issued October 1, 1888, and the cornerstone was laid June 11, 1890. The church was designed by Druding Company of Chicago; the contractor was Lawrence Scully of Meridian, Mississippi. The new church was dedicated on Thanksgiving Day, November 30, 1893.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 1.38

Quadrangle name Birmingham North

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A 16 518100 31701851010  
Zone Easting Northing

B           
Zone Easting Northing

C         

D         

E         

F         

G         

H         

Verbal boundary description and justification

New BL (42) P(1) 200'.5 x 3005'.

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

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Alice M. Bowsher (Kidd, Wheeler & Plosser) & Ellen Mertins, National Register Coord.

organization Alabama Historical Commission date July 15, 1982

street & number 725 Monroe Street telephone (205) 832-6621

city or town Montgomery state Alabama

# 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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature *[Signature]*

title State Historic Preservation Officer date 11/15/82

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register	
<u><i>[Signature]</i></u> Keeper of the National Register	Entered in the National Register date <u>12/27/82</u>
Attest:	date
Chief of Registration	

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In 1913 the church was elevated to the status of permanent parish. In 1954 St. Paul's Church became the Co-Cathedral of the Diocese of Mobile-Birmingham. It was elevated to the full status of cathedral in 1969 when the Diocese of Birmingham was created.

In 1880 St. Paul's started a school, called Holy Angels Academy, in two rooms in a rented house. For the first four years the teachers were Sisters of Loretto from Louisville, Kentucky. A school building was erected in 1882. In 1886 Benedictine Sisters from Kentucky and a convent in Tuscumbia came to run the school. Around the turn of the century the name was changed to St. Paul's School. In 1913 plans for a new school were drawn by Washington, D. C., architect A. O. von Herbulis, but it was not built. The present building was constructed in the mid-1920s. It served both elementary and high school students until the construction of John Carroll High School in 1947.

The Convent was erected to house the Benedictine Sisters in 1935. It stands on the site of the 1882 Holy Angels Academy and Convent building.

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Vertical files, St. Paul's Cathedral, Birmingham, AL;

William Michael King, "A History of St. Paul's Parish, Birmingham, Alabama, 1872-1904."

Unpublished Master's thesis, Notre Dame Seminary, New Orleans, LA, 1966

Mrs. P. J. Lovetts, St. Paul's Cathedral Parish Centennial Celebration, Birmingham:  
St. Paul's Cathedral, 1972

One Voice, Vol. 2, No. 39, Sept. 22, 1972, Birmingham, AL: Birmingham Catholic Press,  
Inc.

Marjorie Longenecker White, Downtown Birmingham, p. 120

Carolyn Green Satterfield, Historic Sites of Jefferson County, AL, 1976, p. 14;  
Historic Site Survey, Jefferson County, AL, 1972, p. 133.

St. Paul Cathedral School 100th Anniversary, Birmingham, AL, 1980-81