

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received JUN 18 1986
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Holy Family Church NeHBS No. D009:0130-004
and/or common N/A

2. Location

street & number 915 North 18th Street N/A not for publication
city, town Omaha N/A vicinity of
state Nebraska code 031 county Douglas code 055

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	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	NA in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" 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 Holy Family Parish
street & number 915 North 18th Street
city, town Omaha N/A vicinity of state Nebraska

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Register of Deeds, Omaha/Douglas Civic Center
street & number 1819 Farnam Street
city, town Omaha state Nebraska

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title 1984 Omaha/Douglas County Historic Building Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes no
date 1984 - on-going federal state county local
depository for survey records Omaha City Planning Department & Nebraska State Historical Society
city, town Omaha/Lincoln state Nebraska

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input 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 <u>N/A</u>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Constructed in 1883, Holy Family Church was designed for combined use as a parish church, school and rectory. Rectangular in plan, the two-story brick structure is supported by interior and exterior masonry walls reinforced by masonry buttressing. A hammer-beam system of wood rafters and timber trusses bears the gabled roof. Stylistically a Victorian hybrid, the structure incorporates primarily Gothic Revival aspects. Situated in a commercial and industrial tract, the building has been subject to both interior and exterior renovation. The removal of the original belfry and entrance porch as well as interior modifications have diminished the church's architectural and historical integrity.

Occupying a quarter block site bounded by Izard and 18th Streets, Holy Family Church is aligned along the southern perimeter of the church property, oriented toward 18th Street on the west. An alley abuts the structure on the south; trees and an expanse of lawn buffer the structure from the street on the north. The church building and grounds pose a contrast to the primarily industrial and commercial character of the area. Built in 1883 to plans by Omaha architects August and Charles Cleves, the two-story brick building was intended to accommodate in a single structure the parish's need for a church, school facility and a residence for priests. Measuring 122 x 50 feet as originally designed, the building's rectangular plan featured six classrooms on the ground floor with the church proper occupying the space directly above on the main floor. The priests' residence is situated at the back of the structure behind the church. The rectory's two floors are elevated a half-story above those of the church and school, allowing for a basement under this section of the building. In 1927, a two-story brick addition measuring 11 x 30 feet expanded the rectory to the north. The raised addition's first floor consists of an open porch with enclosed rooms on the second floor and a garage at ground level.

At the building's front, two ground-floor doors flank a raised central entrance and supply access to the school area. Although original drawings no longer exist and the floor plan has been subject to modification, it appears that the six similarly-sized classrooms were aligned with the ground-floor entrances in two rows of three each. Doors on the south and north side of the building are linked by an interior hallway and provide cross circulation. In addition, the rectory is serviced by a side door on the north and by a basement-level door at the rear.

Access to the main floor church is gained through a centrally-positioned raised entrance cut into the west facade. Concrete steps sided by low brick walls now lead to the entrance's double doors. Photographs dating from 1898, 1913 and 1938 chronicle several structural alterations at the church's entrance. In the earliest photograph a three-sided stairway leads to the entrance; markings on the brick above the doors give evidence of a removed gabled porch. A 1913 photograph shows what appears to be a wooden staircase covered by an enclosed frame porch. The porch, a front-gabled structure, is estimated to have measured about 15 x 15 feet. Approximately 30 feet in height, the porch contained rectangular windows in its side walls and a large round-arched window surmounting its double doors. It is not known when the porch was removed, but it is absent in the photograph dating from 1938.

Inside the central entrance, lateral staircases connect a small foyer with the rear of the church one floor up. Structured above the stairwell, a choir/organ loft supported on wood posts projects over the floor at the back of the nave. Two doors in the apse at the east end of the church open to rooms intended for use by the clergy. The rooms are joined by a hallway where stairs lead to the upper level of the rectory. Interior stairs also connect the rectory with the classrooms on the first floor level.

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A steeply-pitched gabled roof shelters the church/school section of the structure; a hipped roof covers the rectory. Topped by a hexagonal spire, a square bell tower straddles the roof ridge several feet behind the facade's gable end. Finished with metal coping, the walls of the tower extend up in a gable-like configuration. A pair of pointed-arched windows with louvers are set into each wall. Asphalt shingles cover the tower, spire and all roof surfaces. Comparing the tower's current appearance with the 1913 photograph reveals alterations which simplified and scaled down what is assumed to be the tower's original structure. Though the original framing and bell remain, the belfry's paired lancet openings were originally surmounted by gablets. Eight ornately detailed forms — loosely resembling flying buttresses with pinnacled buttress piers — extended from the belfry to the base of the spire. The specific date of the tower modification is not known; according to available photographs it occurred between 1913 and 1938.

The gable end of the roof forms the church's corner-buttressed principal facade. The gable end carries beyond the roof line and is finished with a pressed-metal coping. In addition to the doors, two windows openings pierce the facade; a large rose window with wood tracery and, set above, a glazed oculus. Exterior side walls are segmented into eight bays delineated by buttresses which extend the entire height of the wall. Comprising each bay on the ground level are coupled segmentally-arched windows paired with twin leaded-glass lancet windows at the second story. The building's secondary entrances are positioned in the fifth bay on both north and south elevations.

Projecting brickwork punctuates the flat broad plane of the facade and enriches side and rear elevations. Projecting brick string courses travel around the entire structure; a band of obliquely-set bricks marks the first story. The band is currently painted red to contrast with the grey paint which covers all other brick surfaces. Raised brickwork also frames the rose window with pilaster-like strips joining a corbel table to support a pedimented window head. The small circular window above is centered in the pediment's tympanum. A dressed limestone water-table encircles the building, a transition between the brickwork above and coursed rough-cut limestone footings below. Finished stone is also used for buttress coping and window sills.

Technically, a system of interior and exterior load-bearing solid masonry walls supports the structure. Buttresses reinforce exterior walls. A hammer-beam system comprised of heavy timber structures the roof. At a height of approximately 25 feet, a plaster and pressed-metal ceiling is suspended from the collar-beam of the roof structure. Timbers remain rough-cut above the collar and are encased with finished wood below the ceiling level. Molded box-like pendants embellish collar-brace ends and cap hammer-beam ends.

Requiring only the exterior bearing walls for support, the hammer-beam roof allows for an open nave plan free of columns and side aisles. The nave terminates in a half-dome apse, which before interior renovation contained a central altar. Two recessed side niches defined by pointed arches also held altars. An altar rail divided the nave from the chancel. A series of extensive interior renovations beginning in the 1970's removed the altars and altar rail, covered over the side niches and changed the nave's central aisle configuration. As a result of the renovations, movable pews and liturgical furniture are now easily rearranged within the unstructured space of the nave and apse. Due to these changes, however, considerable historical integrity has been lost.

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In terms of style, Holy Family Church is a Victorian hybrid primarily exhibiting features associated with the 19th century Gothic Revival. Evidence of the style is apparent in the steeply-pitched end gables, lancet windows and traceried rose window. An additional Gothic Revival feature is seen in the quatrafoils composing the rose window tracery. The forms also embellished the original belfry. On the interior, quatrafoil and multi-foil shapes appear as cut-outs in panels above and below the hammer-beams. The hammer-beam roof itself imparts a medieval attitude which is also reflected in the church's pressed metal ceiling. Ribs and floral patterned bosses are stamped into ceiling panels made to resemble the interior structure and surface decoration of a Gothic vaulted roof. Transformed into a rectangular grid pattern by the church's flat ceiling, the ribs and bosses, however, tend to loose their intended effect.

It is the original bell tower, however, that most emphatically expressed the church's Victorian Gothic character. Alterations which stripped the tower of its decorative elements, have compromised the stylistic coherence of the building's original design.

Notable examples of Eastlake decorative detail also occur on both the interior and exterior. At the eaves are positioned curvilinear wooden brackets with double roundels. Inside, heavy turned wood posts supporting the choir/organ loft also feature a roundel design.

Though altered in appearance, Holy Family Church still serves its original purpose as a Roman Catholic house of worship. With the closing of the school in 1961, classrooms on the ground level have been converted for use as office and meeting space. The family of the congregation's ministerial staff now occupies the rectory. The building's structural condition is fair. Of immediate concern, the walls of the church proper may require reinforcement and there is some exfoliation of exterior face brick.

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/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1883; 1927 Addition **Builder/Architect** Cleves Brothers

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Built in 1883 to serve Irish railroad workers and their families, Holy Family Church is significant locally as an example of an ecclesiastical building designed for combined use as a church, school and rectory. Rectangular in plan with classrooms in the basement, the church proper on the main floor and residential quarters for the clergy at the rear of the structure, variations of this building type were frequently employed by architects and builders to serve the needs of Roman Catholic parishes in Omaha in the latter 19th century. Holy Family is the earliest and least altered of two known remaining structures of this type in the City. Designed by Charles and August Cleves of Omaha, the church is also the earliest known commission produced by the architect brothers who contributed designs for a number of the city's important commercial and ecclesiastical buildings in the early 1880's through 1909.

PARISH HISTORY:

Organized by Bishop Michael O'Connor in 1876, Holy Family was the third parish established in Omaha by the Roman Catholic vicariate of Nebraska. Omaha's first parish, which initially encompassed the entire city, was served by St. Mary's Church consecrated in 1856. To accommodate a rapidly increasing Catholic population, St. Philomena's Cathedral was erected 11 years later at 9th and Harney Streets replacing St. Mary's Church. As the city grew westward, its numbers increased by European immigration, German nationals formed a second parish, St. Mary Magdalene, and located their first church at Douglas and 16th Street in 1868. (Martin, pp. 100 - 101)

As early as 1868 Bishop James O'Gorman recognized the need for a third parish to serve Catholic families who had located in the northern district of the city, and he directed the purchase of land at 17th and Cuming Streets for a building site. Beginning in the 1860's, the Union Pacific Railroad attracted large numbers of Irish immigrants to Omaha to work in the railroad's shops and yards stretching along the 16th Street bluff line north of Cass Street. Many of the Irish laborers settled near their work in cottages on the west and northwest edge of the shops, especially along 16th and 17th Streets north of Izard. (Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission. "Patterns," pp. 18 - 19) Because of the settlement's distance from St. Philomena's Cathedral and the vicariate's desire to establish a school in the area, newly appointed Bishop Michael O'Connor initiated the organization of the parish in 1876.

Geographic boundaries of the new parish extended from the Missouri River on the east to the city limits on the north. A frame school house which stood on Cathedral property at 8th and Howard was moved to 17th and Cuming to function as Holy Family's first church. Dedicated in December of 1876, the building served about seventy families. In three years the parish nearly doubled in size and outgrew the renovated school-house. Construction of a new building was begun one block to the east at 17th and Izard. Services were moved to the second building in 1880, but due to problems in the design and construction of the structure, the church was never completed above the basement level. (Casper, pp. 192 - 195)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(See Continuation Sheet)

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property Less than an acre

Quadrangle name Omaha - North

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A

1	5	2	6	3	8	2	0	4	5	7	2	5	6	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B

Zone			Easting				Northing							

C

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D

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H

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Verbal boundary description and justification

Lots 1, 2, 3 and 4, and 10' of vacated street adjacent on north, Block 202½, Original City of Omaha, Douglas County, Nebraska, which includes all historically related property.

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

state N/A code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Lynn Bjorkman, City Planner

organization Omaha City Planning Department, Suite 1110 date April, 1986

street & number 1819 Farnam Street telephone (402) 444-4927

city or town Omaha state Nebraska 68183

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 James A. Benson

title Director, Nebraska State Historical Society date June 10, 1986

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Entered in the National Register

date 7-17-86

Allores Byers
Keeper of the National Register

Attest: _____ date _____

Chief of Registration

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Of initial importance in forming the parish had been the vicariate's desire to open a parochial school for boys on the City's north side. Girls in the area could attend St. Catherine's Academy, but elementary education for boys was available only outside the neighborhood at St. Philomena's Catholic School. Financial considerations deferred plans for the school until 1881 when the frame schoolhouse which had served as the congregation's temporary sanctuary was returned to classroom use. By the end of the school's first year, two additions could not satisfactorily accommodate the more than 150 students enrolled by the Sisters of Mercy who had taken charge of the school. (Casper, pp. 158 - 159)

In addition to overcrowded school facilities, uncomfortable and unsafe conditions in the basement church led to the construction of the parish's third and current structure in 1883. Father Roman Shaffel, a Jesuit who also served as the first superior of Creighton College, directed the building program.

Holy Family's new structure combined the church proper with school facilities and a parish house. Cleves Brothers of Omaha produced plans for the two-story brick building and, according to Jesuit archives, construction was completed in six months — from April to October, 1883 — at a cost of \$17,000. A statement removed from the building's cornerstone in 1983 lists various subcontractors and the cost of their work, including: \$3,750 to Joseph Diess for brickwork, \$1,450 to Benjamin Melquist for stonework; and \$837 to Henry Lehmann for painting and plastering. Building materials salvaged from the abandoned first building project were reused in the new construction.

By 1890, Holy Family parish had grown to 450 Catholic families. During the next decade the vicariate established two new parishes, reducing the boundaries of Holy Family on the north and west. Sacred Heart was assigned the territory north of Grace Street in 1890. To the west, the Jesuits who had been installed at Holy Family since 1881 were given control of St. John's parish organized around Creighton College. With the Jesuits now centered at St. John's church, the vicariate resumed responsibility for the administration of Holy Family. (Casper, pp. 205 - 206)

While districts surrounding the parish had been greatly altered by the city's building boom of the 1880's, neighborhoods within the parish also continued to experience change. As the early Irish immigrants assimilated and prospered, they moved out to more desirable residential areas. Germans, Hungarians and particularly Italian immigrants replaced the Irish in the railroad's shops and in the Holy Family congregation. When Rev. J. J. Faso, an Italian-born priest, succeeded Rev. Patrick Cooney in 1937, the church became firmly fixed as the center of religious and social life for Italians on the city's north side. The Italian presence remained a primary influence in the parish until the early 1960's.

Proximity to the city's industry had initially contributed to the growth of Holy Family Church, but an increasing spread of commercial and industrial development over the years progressively reduced the number of parishioners living in the district. In 1961, the school was closed and the congregation dropped to about 200 persons. Subsequently, the church shifted the focus of its ministry. In the late 1960's Holy Family became a center for new forms of worship and social activism. Since that time the church has maintained a similar mission and has expanded its ministry to the poor. About 200 families from parishes throughout Omaha and surrounding communities now compose the church's membership.

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SIGNIFICANCE:

Holy Family Church is significant architecturally as a surviving example of a 19th century ecclesiastical structure designed for combined use as a church and school. Rectangular in plan with classrooms in the basement and the church proper on the main floor, this building type was frequently employed in the 1880's and 1890's by local architects and builders to serve the varied needs of Roman Catholic parishes. In his book on the history of the Catholic Church in Nebraska, Henry Casper, S. J. notes the popularity of the type when he describes St. Peter's Church, built about 1886, as "a combination church and school, so much the custom of that time." (Casper, p. 209)

Of about a dozen Omaha parishes founded during the 1880's and 1890's, at least five in addition to Holy Family and St. Peter's are known to have built combined church and school structures. With the exception of St. Agnes Church (1889), located at 2211 "Q" Street, all of the structures are non-extant, including St. Patrick's (1882), St. Joseph's (1886), Immaculate Conception (1896) and St. Francis (1898). Among this group, variations occur in building materials used — frame or brick — and in the presence of residential quarters for the clergy incorporated within the plan (as in Holy Family, Immaculate Conception, St. Joseph's and St. Francis).

Compared with St. Agnes church which has undergone extensive interior and exterior renovation, Holy Family exhibits a higher degree of its original architectural and historical integrity. The building survives as the oldest representative of the combined church and school type in the city and holds further significance as the only extant example of the late 19th century Roman Catholic church type which includes a rectory.

Designed by Charles and August Cleves of Omaha, Holy Family Church also derives significance as the earliest known commission produced by the architect brothers who contributed designs for a number of the city's important commercial and ecclesiastical buildings from the early 1880's through 1909.

Architects Charles and August Cleves opened their Omaha offices in 1883, presumably making Holy Family their first major commission in the city. Their listing in the 1883-84 city directory describes their services as: "Architect's designs for public building, etc. patent office drawings executed." The brothers continued their joint practice until 1896. In addition to Holy Family Church, two buildings are known to remain from the partnership: St. Wenceslaus Church (1886) and the Kosters Building (1891).

From 1895 until 1909, city directories show that Charles Cleves continued the practice without his brother. During this 14 year period, the architect produced designs for a number of commercial buildings, several of which, along with the earlier Kosters Building, are located within the Old Market Historic District (NRHP, 1979). They include the P. E. Iler Block (1901); the Mercer Block (1905); and the Gahm Block renovation (1900).

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Charles Cleves designed at least two commercial buildings for John Creighton, one of the period's leading businessmen and philanthropists. The eight-story Bryne & Hammer building at 9th and Howard ranked among the largest structures of its kind in the city when constructed in 1905, and in the same year Creighton put up another brick warehouse at 10th and Jones to plans by Cleves. The association between Cleves and Creighton may have begun with Holy Family Church, in that members of the Creighton family were major patrons of the church. John Creighton and his wife Sarah donated the altars, confessional and bell. The pews were a gift of John's brother, Joseph, and their sister Mrs. Thomas McShane provided the altar rail. In 1903 when Creighton built a new monastery for the Poor Clare Sisters at 29th and Hamilton, Cleves drew the plans. (Casper, p. 196)

Although Charles and August Cleves produced a number of notable buildings in the city for important clients, little information about the brothers and their work survives. As one of the partnership's first major commissions, Holy Family serves as a basis for studying the development of the architect's larger body of work, especially their church buildings. On the whole, their work appears to have adopted the themes and characteristics of prevailing architectural styles with progressive sophistication and success. The Gothic Revival idiom of Holy Family and St. Wenceslaus is followed by Charles Cleves' more refined version of the style in St. Mary Magdalene Church (1903). In the same year the architect designed the Poor Clare monastery in an equally sensitive Renaissance Revival style.

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