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National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form

Ala. Historical Commission

This form is for use in documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Type all entries.

A. Name of Multiple Property Listing

Historic Roman Catholic Properties in Mobile, Alabama, 1848-1928

B. Associated Historic Contexts

The Roman Catholic Church in Mobile, Alabama, 1848-1928

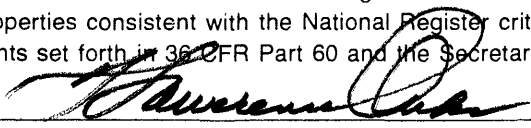
C. Geographical Data

Boundaries of the City of Mobile, Mobile County, Alabama

See continuation sheet

D. Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Planning and Evaluation.



Signature of certifying official

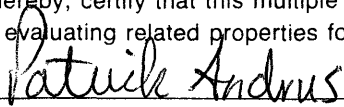
5-21-91

Date

Alabama Historical Commission (State Historic Preservation Office)

State or Federal agency and bureau

I, hereby, certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.



Signature of the Keeper of the National Register

Date

7/3/91



E. Statement of Historic Contexts

Discuss each historic context listed in Section B.

The first Catholic contact with the Gulf Coast long predates Mobile's founding. A mass was offered in the vicinity during the Pineda Expedition of 1519. Catholic priests accompanied De Soto (1540) and de Luna (1560), though missionary efforts were sporadic and of limited effectiveness. Catholicism returned with the French in 1699. Mobile was founded in 1702, moved downriver to its present location in 1711 and remained under French control until 1763. During the years of French rule the Jesuits dominated the struggling colony's spiritual life. Their primary duties included ministering to the few colonists and attempting to convert the indians.

Mobile languished under British authority (1763-1780) and fared little better under Spanish rule (1780-1813). With American rule many of the older French and Spanish families moved to New Orleans, fearing intolerance from Protestant backwoodsmen unfamiliar with Catholic custom and ritual. Nevertheless, the sprawling area from Mobile to St. Augustine, Florida contained some 6,000 Catholics. In 1829 the Diocese of Mobile was created, encompassing West Florida and all of Alabama. Michael Portier, a native of France, was appointed Bishop and established his residence in Mobile.

Portier faced a daunting task in knitting together his Diocese. He had few clergy, no schools and an inadequate frame church at his disposal. Bishop Portier's energy and ability did much to firmly root Catholicism in Mobile and over his thirty year tenure, the Church became well established. Among the most pressing concerns was the lack of an adequate church building. The Bishop's nephew, Claude Beroujon, was an architect of some talent and submitted a design for a Cathedral. The cornerstone of this substantial brick and stone building was laid in 1836. Construction extended over a period of ten years.

Also of concern to Portier was the lack of good Catholic educational institutions in the Diocese. To correct this deficiency, Portier founded Spring Hill College in 1830. It was hoped that the new college would produce clerics for the Diocese. The college was chartered by the State Legislature in 1836 and was run by the Jesuits from 1847 onward. After a fire in 1869, the college was rebuilt from a design by New Orleans architect James Freret. Freret's college quadrangle survives, and like the Cathedral, is independently listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In 1833 Portier invited the Visitation Sisters to Mobile to establish a convent and academy for young girls. Four nuns came down and by the end of Portier's tenure, the Convent and Academy of Visitation was well established with over a hundred students. In 1841 the Daughters of Charity located in Mobile to care for orphans. Their duties came to include administration of a local hospital. Though briefly out of favor during a demonstration of nativism in the 1850s, the Daughters of Charity performed their duties selflessly. Several of these nuns died during fever epidemics and these were some of the first to be buried in the Catholic Cemetery platted in 1848.

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The cemetery represented a step in maturity for the Diocese, since the Catholic Church prefers its own consecrated burial ground. By the 1840s Mobile's Catholic population was large enough (due to the influx of Irish) to support an exclusive burial ground.

With the expansion of the city, new parishes were established. The city's second oldest, St. Vincent de Paul, was founded in 1847 and served an Irish constituency. In 1857 St. Joseph's Parish was founded and was predominantly German. Other parishes would follow, including St. Francis Xavier (1868) in Toulminville and St. Matthew's (1900) in Oakdale. Many of these parishes ran schools and orphanages, now all long gone. One of the most significant of these was the Convent of Mercy with its school. Organized after the Civil War by the Sisters of Mercy, this Convent and school was attached to St. Joseph's Parish. An impressive building was constructed in 1908, and expanded in 1928 with the addition of a building on the lot.

On the eve of Portier's death in 1859, the Diocese consisted of eight thousand Catholics, twelve churches, fourteen schools and eight secular priests. Portier was succeeded by John Quinlan as Bishop. Secession and Civil War were disastrous for Catholic life, as for all other pursuits in the South. Two local Catholics achieved fame in the war (and are buried in the Catholic Cemetery), Raphael Semmes as a privateer and Father Abram Ryan as the celebrated poet-priest of the Confederacy.

After the war the Catholic Church resumed steady growth. As previously noted, Spring Hill College was reconstructed in 1869 and several other parishes were founded as the city grew. By 1883 the Catholic population stood at eighteen thousand. The Mobile Cathedral underwent substantial improvements with the addition of a classical portico in 1887 and towers in 1895. The impressive Richardsonian Romanesque Chapel at the Visitation Convent was constructed in 1896 from a design by New Orleans architects Harrod and Andry. The work on the Cathedral and Chapel continued the local tradition of high style Catholic buildings designed by skilled architects. Buildings in the hinterland of the Diocese were generally simple frame structures.

By the 1920s there were one hundred and twenty eight priests and one hundred and nine churches in the Diocese. Mobile remained the headquarters and the most important city of the Diocese, with most of the administrative staff and the most impressive churches and monuments. The Cathedral was made a minor basilica in 1962. All of Mobile's historic Roman Catholic properties remain in use, many of them as originally intended.

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ASSOCIATED PROPERTY TYPES

1. Name of Property Type: Churches
2. Description

When Michael Portier began his duties as Bishop of Mobile in 1829, there was only a single frame church in the entire city for his use. This small building was badly deteriorated and wholly inadequate. The construction of a suitable church was one of Portier's first and highest priorities. He was mindful of the importance of an imposing church as a symbol of Catholic influence and staying power.

The cornerstone for a new Cathedral was laid in 1836 and construction lasted until 1845. The new edifice was a suitably imposing brick and stone structure designed by the Bishop's nephew Claude Beroujon. This Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception was the spiritual anchor and hub of the Diocese. It was fully the equal of the magnificent Greek Revival Protestant churches in town. The Cathedral was further embellished by a classical portico in 1887 and twin towers in 1895. These latter additions were by Mobile architects James Henry Hutchisson and James Flandin Hutchisson II. This would be typical of Catholic building projects in the city. Most of their structures would be architect designed in high style modes.

As Mobile's Catholic population grew, a second parish was established in 1847. Known as St. Vincent de Paul, this parish was constituted of mostly Irish workers. An early frame church was replaced in 1874 by a brick Gothic Revival building designed by James Henry Hutchisson. This impressive new church featured a centered tower, lancet windows and some of the finest brick work in the city. The interior included vaulted ceilings and fleur-de-lis finials on the pews. This church rivaled the Gothic Revival Trinity Episcopal Church built in 1854.

One of Mobile's most impressive churches, Catholic or Protestant, is the Chapel at the Convent of the Visitation. Portier helped establish the Convent in 1833 and by the turn of the century the complex had been through several building phases. An older frame chapel was replaced by the present one in 1894. This new chapel was designed by New Orleans architects B.M. Harrod and Paul Andry. It is an impressive example of the Richardsonian Romanesque. It's plan is a classic one with nave, transepts and apse, though the

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public entrance is in the south transept since the nave abuts the quadrangle. The building is constructed of stone and includes a slate roof, ceramic cresting and gargoyles. The interior includes paneled wainscoting and impressive frescoes, as well as a round stained glass skylight.

The remainder of Mobile's historic Roman Catholic Churches date from the early 20th century, though in at least one case the church replaces an older frame building. Indeed, St. Joseph's Catholic Church, built in 1907, serves a parish founded in 1857. St. Joseph's is a monumental example of the Second Gothic Revival, with a central tower, classic medieval details and impressive brick corbeling. The interior includes marble wainscoting and arched ceilings.

St. Matthew's Catholic Church was constructed in 1913 shortly after the founding of the parish in the south part of the city. St. Matthew's is architecturally somewhat unusual among Mobile's Catholic Churches in that Northern European building elements are eschewed in favor of the Mediterranean Revival. St. Mary's Church on Old Shell Road, built in 1926, utilizes a Mediterranean style as well, though more Spanish in feel. St. Matthew's interior is suitably high style with a marble chancery rail and stenciled ceilings.

The farther a parish was from the downtown the less imposing the church. Mobile's Toulminville community is an old suburb. Its parish dates from 1868. After the original church was destroyed by a hurricane in 1916, a frame replacement was constructed. St. Francis Xavier, as it is called, has the appearance of a typical frame vernacular church, with few high style elements. This is more the norm for churches removed from the heart of the Diocese. Yet the interior is notable for its barrel vaulted ceiling and Corinthian columns with gilded capitals.

Other historic Roman Catholic Churches in Mobile include St. Joan of Arc, a 1925 Craftsman influenced design and Most Pure Heart of Mary, a turn of the century frame church, now clad in aluminum siding. The attached appendix provides a complete enumeration of the historic Roman Catholic Churches in Mobile.

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3. Significance

Mobile's Historic Roman Catholic Churches are significant under National Register Criteria C as important high style examples of religious architecture. They are further significant for their associations with a variety of local and out of town architects, including James Henry Hutchisson of Mobile and B.M. Harrod, Paul Andry as well as Diboll and Owen of New Orleans. These churches served and serve as the focal points of their respective parishes and are frequently the best designed buildings, religious or secular, in their neighborhoods.

4. Registration Requirements

Of Mobile's surviving historic Roman Catholic Churches, the Cathedral, St. Joan of Arc and St. Mary's are already listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Most Pure Heart of Mary is ineligible due to being aluminum sided. Of the others, their high degree of interior and exterior integrity greatly enhances their eligibility. Even St. Francis Xavier, more vernacular than the others, is important in the perspective it provides for historic churches in the city of Mobile. Even though these are religious properties, National Register Criteria Consideration A applies because of their outstanding architectural merit.

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Appendix I: Historic Roman Catholic Churches in Mobile

1. Churches included in the Multiple Properties Nomination of Historic Roman Catholic Properties in Mobile, Alabama, 1848-1928
 - St. Vincent de Paul
 - Chapel, Convent of the Visitation
 - St. Joseph's
 - St. Matthew's
 - St. Francis Xavier

2. Churches in the Lower Dauphin Street Commercial Historic District
 - Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception

3. Churches in the Oakleigh Garden District
 - St. Joan of Arc

4. Churches in the Old Dauphin Way Historic District
 - St. Mary's

5. Ineligible Churches
 - Most Pure Heart of Mary (aluminum sided)

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1. Name of Property Type: Church Related Residences

2. Description

Mobile's historic Roman Catholic properties include not only churches, but schools, convents and rectories. The business of the Diocese was conducted by the local Bishop and priests, as well as nuns and visiting clerics. With several dozen priests and nuns in the city, their housing needs were of pressing importance. Until these clerics were settled, they could not devote full attention to their religious duties.

In 1829, when Portier began his tenure as Bishop, the City of Mobile consisted of a few thousand inhabitants amid squalid dwellings. The local Catholic Church was rotting on its foundations and there was no local Catholic priesthood to draw from. Among the many needs of the Diocese, not the least was a residence for the Bishop. Claude Beroujon, the immensely talented seminarian architect who would design the new Cathedral, built a frame house on Conti Street in 1834 for his uncle, Portier.

The house was well within the Gulf Coast building tradition, being a Creole Cottage with a gable roof to the sides and recessed galerie across the facade. The French influence is evident, not only in the form, but in the use of casement windows. Yet there are Federal elements in the house as well, particularly at the entrance, on the dormers and in the interior appointments. The Portier House still stands and serves as a Catholic museum.

Beginning in 1906 the Mobile Bishop's address was transferred to 400 Government Street, an impressive Italianate mansion constructed in 1860. This building is distinguished by a three story central block and elegant ironwork porch. This house and adjacent buildings serves not only as the rectory for the Cathedral but as the nerve center of the Diocese. Both this house and the old Portier House are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Every Catholic Church in Mobile had a rectory to house the parish priest or priests. Many of these rectories have been replaced over the years by unremarkable frame buildings, and these are now sided with aluminum or asbestos. One of the most intact surviving rectories is that of St. Joseph Jesuit Church on Springhill Avenue. Situated immediately behind the church, this rectory dates from 1907 and is stylistically consistent with the church. It is a two story brick structure,

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5x5 bays with a slate hip roof. The corbeling and window treatments match that of the church. This structure originally housed four Jesuit priests and features a spare interior of highly polished hardwood floors and plaster walls.

Equally impressive is the Priest's House at the Convent of the Visitation, built in 1899. This unusual structure mixes Romanesque and Gothic elements. It's brick and stone construction matches well with the massive Romanesque chapel adjacent. Built to house visiting clerics, the interior has a central hall plan with tall doors with transoms and cove ceilings. Walls are plastered and the fireplaces feature a fleur-de-lis motif, emphasizing Mobile's French Catholic heritage.

Mobile's two historic convents, the Visitation and Mercy, each served as school, church and rectory all together. In the case of the Visitation, many of the nuns were cloistered, and require special residential consideration. When the first Visitation Nuns arrived in 1833, they were put up in a five room frame house. They soon acquired a suitable set of buildings to conduct their girl's school and regimen. This and a subsequent complex were destroyed. By 1854 a new quadrangle was erected, part of which survives today. This earliest quadrangle was composed of two story brick buildings with hip roofs. An arcaded cloister provided space for peaceful contemplation. This basic form underwent several additions over the years. Yet the day to day lives of the nuns continued and continue to unfold in the quadrangle. The southeast building, a fine three story French Renaissance structure served as the nuns interface with the outside world. The sisters received visitors and goods through this building. On the first floor are a series of screened meeting rooms. Access into the convent is provided by a tall door with eared architrave surround. This leads into the south courtyard. The nun's actual rooms are simple spaces off of the halls in the quadrangle buildings, with only a curtain for a door. The first floor of the northeast corner of the quadrangle contains the dining area, long tables with chairs and simple china settings. Since the loss of the school building in 1953 (west building of the quadrangle) the nun's have conducted spiritual retreats for men and women. These visitors stay in the south building, with the iron balconies. The candy making operation takes place in the north building.

The Convent of Mercy is less complex, consisting of only two buildings, one constructed in 1908 and one in 1928. Of these the latter served solely as classrooms. The former served as the school and convent up to 1928. This large three and one half story structure is an unusual mixture of classical and baroque elements yet fits as a

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unified whole. Before its abandonment, this building served essentially as a dormitory for the sisters and students.

The variety of the Catholic clergy's housing needs challenged builders and architects to provide adequate living space stylistically compatible with adjoining buildings. Yet within this category they were able to achieve independent architectural expressions.

3. Significance

Mobile's historic Roman Catholic Church Related Residences are significant under National Register Criteria C as important high style examples of religious architecture. They are either important buildings in their own right, or well designed ancillary buildings intended to fit into an integrated religious complex. They are further significant for their associations with well known builders and architects.

4. Registration Requirements

For a church related residence to qualify for this nomination it must be a pre 1936 structure and maintain its integrity of location, style and design. Any structure which served as residential property for members of the Catholic clergy, whether the building be a convent or rectory, qualifies for consideration as a church related residence. Even though these are religious properties, National Register Criteria A applies because of their outstanding architectural merit.

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Appendix II Historic Roman Catholic Church Related Residences in
Mobile

1. Church Related Residences Included in the Multiple Properties
Nomination
of Historic Roman Catholic Properties in Mobile, Alabama, 1848-1928

- Convent of the Visitation
- Convent of Mercy
- St. Joseph's Jesuit Church Rectory
- Priest's House, Convent of the Visitation

2. Church Related Residences in the Church Street East Historic
District

- Portier House
- Ketchum House (Cathedral Rectory)

3. Not Eligible

- St. Matthew's Rectory (aluminum sided)
- St. Francis Xavier Rectory (non-historic)
- St. Vincent de Paul Rectory (non-historic)

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1. Name of Property Type: Cemetery

2. Description

Two historic cemeteries are in this nomination. One of them, the Old Catholic Cemetery on Stone Street, is being nominated on its own merits, while the other, the nun's cemetery at the Convent of the Visitation, is part of a larger complex. Each of these cemeteries tells a great deal about Catholic life in Mobile.

During colonial days Mobile's Catholics were buried in an ill defined graveyard downtown. After American control began in 1813, Mobile's population gained an increasing number of Protestants. As such there was no exclusively Catholic cemetery until 1848 when Bishop Portier acquired land in Toulminville for that purpose. The first cemetery was laid out in a highly unusual circular plan, with the Daughters of Charity plot in the center. This was in keeping with Canon Law, which states, "The graves of priests and clerics should if possible be apart from those of the laity and in a place more suited to their state; and where it can be conveniently be done separate places should be assigned to priests and clerics of lower grades." As the circular burial ground filled up a larger cemetery developed adjacent on a more usual grid pattern. These primarily late 19th century graves feature a good variety of funerary sculpture and there are two mausolea. Amid the family plots are several plots with priest and orders of nuns, including the Sisters of Mercy, Sisters of St. Joseph, Little Sisters of the Poor, Josephite Fathers and Brothers of the Sacred Heart. Individual markers in these plots are simple white crosses. In 1948 a new Catholic burial ground was opened immediately to the north.

Old Catholic Cemetery demonstrates the cosmopolitan nature of Mobile's Catholic population through the use of foreign inscriptions and Irish symbols. The circular portion could only be found in a Catholic Cemetery (Protestant graves being east-west aligned) and the later 19th century grid portion is typical of urban cemeteries.

The nun's plot at the Convent of the Visitation is at the inside northeast corner of the surrounding wall. Like the clerical plots in Old Catholic, the markers are simple white crosses. Though a small part of the complex, the nun's plot represents a final resting place, still within the confines of the wall where these women lived most of their lives.

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3. Significance

Old Catholic Cemetery and the nun's plot at the Convent of the Visitation are important historic burial grounds. Old Catholic Cemetery is highly significant for its unusual circular plan, and funerary sculpture associated with a variety of local and out of town craftsmen.

The nun's plot at the Convent of the Visitation is significant as an integral part of a religious complex which includes a chapel and dormitories.

4. Registration Requirements

For a cemetery to qualify for this nomination, it must either display a high degree of funerary sculpture, feature an unusual plan or be part of a larger religious complex. Though the nun's plot at the Convent of the Visitation is unremarkable, its exclusion would create an unbalanced picture of the Convent. Even though these are religious properties, National Register Consideration A applies because of their important design and because of the balanced view they provide of Catholic culture in Mobile.

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1. Name of Property Type: Church School

2. Description

Education was an important facet of Catholic life in Mobile. Virtually every parish had its own school, conducted by one or another order of priests or nuns. Over the years many of the smaller schools consolidated or merged with larger schools. Few historic Catholic school buildings remain.

Bishop Portier was greatly concerned about the lack of Catholic educational opportunity in antebellum Mobile. Among his earliest accomplishments were the founding of Spring Hill College and the Convent and Academy of the Visitation during the 1830s. Spring Hill College was meant to provide a pool of clerics for the growing Diocese. The college went through several building phases. The quadrangle constructed in 1869 has been placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Founded in 1833, the Visitation Convent and Academy provided for girl's education. The students were housed and taught in the Convent quadrangle, first built shortly after the founding. In 1900 a three story building was constructed on the west side of the Convent and this served as classrooms and dormitory for the girls. Due to declining enrollment, the high school closed in 1948 and the grammar school in 1952. Shortly thereafter the three story school building was demolished.

Among the many parish schools, only one is historic, the Convent of Mercy School. The Sisters of Mercy founded a girl's school in St. Joseph's Parish in 1895. By 1908 New Orleans architect A.H. Downey had built the 3½ story classical/baroque structure that would serve as both school and Convent. In 1928 a new building was erected on the lot to serve as classrooms. This three story brick building is of a standard commercial design, though the estucheon over the door distinguishes it as a Catholic property. The school was closed in 1948.

3. Significance

The Convent of the Visitation and Convent of Mercy are significant for their associations with Roman Catholic education in Mobile. They are rare surviving historic Catholic educational structures

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and are architect designed. They are significant under Criteria C.

4. Registration Requirements

For a Catholic Church School to qualify for this nomination, it must be at least fifty years old and retain its integrity of location, style and design. Even though these are religious properties, National Register Criteria Consideration A applies because of their outstanding architectural merit.

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Appendix III Historic Roman Catholic Church Schools in Mobile

1. Church Schools Included in the Multiple Properties Nomination
of Historic Roman Catholic Properties in Mobile, Alabama, 1848-1928
 - Convent of the Visitation
 - Convent of Mercy

2. Church Schools in the Old Dauphinway Historic District
 - McGill-Toolen High School
 - St. Mary's Elementary School

3. Not Eligible
 - St. Matthew's (non-historic)
 - St. Vincent de Paul (significantly altered)
 - Most Pure Heart of Mary (altered)

G. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

Discuss the methods used in developing the multiple property listing.

See continuation sheet.

See continuation sheet

H. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet.

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional documentation:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> State historic preservation office | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Local government |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other State agency | <input type="checkbox"/> University |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Federal agency | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |

Specify repository: Mobile Historic Development Commission

I. Form Prepared By

name/title	<u>John Sledge/Architectural Historian; Steven Kay/AHC Reviewer</u>				
organization	<u>Mobile Historic Development Comm.</u>	date	<u>October 1, 1990</u>		
street & number	<u>P.O. Box 1827</u>	telephone	<u>(205) 438-7281</u>		
city or town	<u>Mobile</u>	state	<u>Alabama</u>	zip code	<u>36633</u>

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G. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

This Roman Catholic Properties Nomination is a direct outgrowth of the Mobile Historic Building Survey. This survey was conducted during 1988 by John Sledge, Architectural Historian with the Mobile Historic Development Commission. During the course of the survey, every structure over fifty years of age in the city limits was recorded. From this data base (which includes over 2500 buildings) National Register priorities were determined by the Mobile Historic Development Commission office. National Register nominations completed in 1989 included expansion of the Oakleigh Garden District and a Multiple Properties Nomination of buildings designed by a local family of architects through four generations. After completion of these projects, phase two National Register priorities were initiated for 1990. Among this second tier of nominations is the multiple group of historic Roman Catholic properties.

Mobile was a Catholic city throughout its colonial history and Catholic influence has been significant throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. The Church's local architectural efforts were invariably high style expressions designed by recognized architects and craftsmen. These historic properties, including churches, convents and cemeteries, all demonstrate a high degree of design and workmanship. Maintenance over the years has been superb and many of these buildings are in near original condition. Because of the design quality of these properties, and the importance of Catholicism to Mobile's history, the Mobile Historic Development Commission elected to nominate them to the National Register of Historic Places.

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H. Major Bibliographical References

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