

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form



983

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

1. Name

historic St. Joseph's School
and/or common

2. Location

street & number Birch Street N/A Not for publication
city, town Biddeford N/A vicinity of congressional district
state Maine code 23 county York code 031

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input 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	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: <u>None</u>

4. Owner of Property

name Diocese of Portland
street & number 510 Ocean Avenue
city, town Portland, N/A vicinity of state Maine 04103

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. York County Registry of Deeds
street & number
city, town Alfred, state Maine

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title N/A has this property been determined eligible? N/A yes no
date federal state county local
depository for survey records
city, town state

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 checked="" 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. Joseph's School in Biddeford, Maine, is a rectangular three-story red brick building with a full fourth story contained beneath a steeply-pitched mansard roof. There is a one-story brick shed-roofed exterior projection, rectangular in plan, appended to the southwest corner of the building. A four-story rectangular brick stair tower, added in 1916, is attached at the north end of the building. The structure is set on a cut granite foundation and is characterized by sparse Romanesque detailing - segmentally-arched window heads and wall dormers with gables ending in flat parapets. The main entrance is adorned with a porte-cochère. The visually prominent dormers enclose groupings of three windows, the lateral openings having quarter-circle heads and flanking the center, round-headed window. The building is organized in a formal plan; the dormers are grouped in three elements on the facade (E Elv), with four in the rear (W Elv) and two on the north and south ends. The central facade dormer is enlarged and contains a single large lunette window, now blocked, but which originally contained an intricate pattern of radiating muntins. The steeply-pitched lower roof slope is surmounted by a pronounced curb; the upper roof slope is a low-pitched deck and not discernable.

The principal facade of the school has windows organized under the three dormers. There are three bays on either side and four in the center, the latter having the center two windows paired above the double doorway and articulated with a five-light rectangular transom window in the first story. The rear elevation is similarly treated, with three window bays set beneath each of the four dormers; however, those under the center two are widely-spaced, while those under the lateral dormers are grouped, sharing common sills. On both main elevations, the lateral bay-groupings are separated from those in the center by chimneys projected four inches from the wall and continuing up through the roof, where they are panelled. Moreover, the center section of the facade is distinguished by its shallow entry pavilion, which projects one foot from the wall plane and continues through the roof. Details of this elevation include the unique window grouping and the previously noted oversized dormer and lunette window. The ends of the building are similarly composed, but bear two dormers each, surmounting five bays spaced in a one-three-one pattern. There is a door on the first floor at either end of the main hall, expressing the double-loaded, central corridor plan.

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" 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 checked="" 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 1887 **Builder/Architect** Dr. Joseph Bernier

Statement of Significance (In one paragraph)

St. Joseph's School is an impressive surviving example of the first series of large masonry school buildings constructed in Maine, and, more importantly, is one of the principal monuments of the French-Canadian immigration to the state, and in particular, to the City of Biddeford.

In the post-Civil War era, and following upon large scale industrialization of the Northeast (particularly in textile manufacturing), commerce flourished in coastal cities which had abundant sources of water power. Biddeford, whose burgeoning mills required labor to operate hundreds of spindles and looms, and which rapidly exceeded the supply of local workers available from farms and outlying villages, became an attractive destination for immigrants. The city became the principal concentration point in Maine for French Canadians emigrating to the state. As a percentage of Biddeford's population, Francos increased from .004% in 1850 (28 out of 6,095) to 59.7% in 1900 (9,650 out of 16,145). In 1970, 61.4% of the Biddeford population considered French their mother tongue. The town retained the largest Franco population in the state until surpassed by Lewiston in 1895.

While sizable migrations from Quebec took place in the 1840s and 1850s to fill jobs in the newly built Laconia and Pepperell textile mills, the great migration began at the time of the Civil War. The Franch, having initially worshipped with the Irish in St. Mary's Church, were prepared, by 1870, to found their own national parish. They purchased a former Methodist Church, and three years later began building the present St. Joseph's Church.

Of equal importance to local parishioners was the institution of a Catholic School with which to bolster 'la survivance' (i.e., literally, survivorship) and preserve the language, culture and faith of the French-Canadian community. The common belief that "'Qui perd sa langue perd sa foi' (he who loses his language loses his faith)," reminding parishioners that their French and Catholic heritage were inseparably linked, provided the ethnic and religious impetus for the founding of the school.

Classes were begun in 1875 in the basement of the newly-erected St. Joseph's Church. In 1882, teaching was taken over by six nuns of the Good Shepherd Sisters of Quebec, who emigrated specifically for that purpose. In 1885, the Sisters moved into a building on Adams Street, an event which later determined the location of the school. In March 1883, plans for a new school building were drawn up by Dr. Ferdinand Bernier, a parishioner, physician and entrepreneur of patent medicines.

Classes moved into the new St. Joseph's School during May 13-23, 1888, and the building was dedicated by Bishop James A. Healey on September 7, 1888.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Guignard, Michael. "Ethnic Survival in a New England Mill Town". Compiled January 12, 1973 from newspaper articles. Available McArthur Library; Biddeford, Maine.

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 1

Quadrangle name Biddeford

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A

1	9	3	8	2	0	5	5	4	8	1	6	0	7	0
Zone				Easting				Northing						

B

Zone				Easting				Northing					

C

Zone				Easting				Northing					

D

Zone				Easting				Northing					

E

Zone				Easting				Northing					

F

Zone				Easting				Northing					

G

Zone				Easting				Northing					

H

Zone				Easting				Northing					

Verbal boundary description and justification

Assessor's Map 38, Lot 296-2

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 Frank A. Beard, Historian

organization Me. Historic Preservation Comm. date October, 1983

street & number 55 Capitol Street telephone 207/289-2132

city or town Augusta, state Maine 04333

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 Evelyn S. Feltre

title S.H.P.O. date 11/18/83

For NPS use only

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

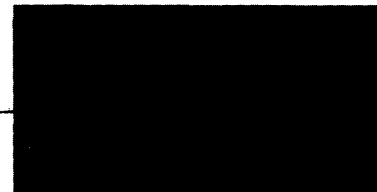
[Signature] Entered in the National Register date 12/29/83
Keeper of the National Register

Attest: _____ date _____

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior
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ST. JOSEPH'S SCHOOL
Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 2

Bishop Healey was the first black American Roman Catholic Bishop and actively supported French-Canadian efforts to preserve their culture and language. Eight-hundred-and-sixty students were enrolled the first year; by 1900, the number had grown to thirteen-hundred. St. Joseph's served, with various ancillary structures, as the high school until St. Louis High School was built across the school yard in 1929.

St. Joseph's School is a monument to the great French-Canadian immigration into northern New England which influenced Biddeford principally from the time of the American Civil War to the early twentieth century. It was an ethnic identity so strong that, according to Michael Guignard, even in the 1930s "O Canada" was sometimes sung at graduation exercises, and as late as the 1960s, half of the day's instruction was conducted in French.

In terms of composition, the exterior design of St. Joseph's School is most impressive. As one of the early large school buildings in Maine, its massive walls provided a challenge to the designer to articulate what was, in essence, a large rectangular box. The building is a notable and well-preserved example of the best currents of large school design in the late nineteenth century, and thereby surprising for a small Maine city in the 1880s.

St. Joseph's School is historically important for representing the cultural aspirations of the mass of French-Canadian immigrants who came from Quebec farms to work in the textile mills of Biddeford (in particular the Pepperell Manufacturing Company) in the latter half of the nineteenth century. As an institution intimately linked to the Catholic religion of the French-Canadians of St. Joseph's Parish, the school of the same name has helped them to preserve their ethnic identity for nearly a century. The school was financed by a remarkably successful series of bazaars and other events put on by parishioners and planned by Dr. Ferdinand Bernier, whose patent medicine advertisements (for "Great Canadian Specific" and the "Laborer's Friend") clearly evoke the community he served. Today, St. Joseph's School building remains a monument to the industry of Franco-American immigrants and the tenacity of their cultural ethnicity.