

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form



1982

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

1. Name

historic St. Joseph's Church Complex

and/or common

2. Location

street & number 1303-1317 Mendon Road

N.A. not for publication

city, town Cumberland

N.A. vicinity of

#1 - Rep. Fernand J. St Germain  
congressional district

state Rhode Island

code 44

county Providence

code 007

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	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	N.A.	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name St. Joseph's Church Corporation

street & number 1303 Mendon Road

city, town Cumberland

N.A. vicinity of

state Rhode Island 02864

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Town Clerk, Cumberland Town Hall

street & number 45 Broad Street

city, town Cumberland

state Rhode Island 02864

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title See Continuation Sheet 1.

has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date See Continuation Sheet 1.

federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

city, town Providence

state Rhode Island 02903

## 7. Description

**Condition**

excellent  
 good  
 fair

deteriorated  
 ruins  
 unexposed

**Check one**

unaltered  
 altered

**Check one**

original site  
 moved date \_\_\_\_\_

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

The St. Joseph's Church Complex comprises three late nineteenth-century, clapboard-sheathed, wood-frame structures arranged in a row along the east side of Mendon Road (State Route 122) on uplands rising above the Blackstone River. The group is dominated by a handsome, asymmetrical, twin-spired Gothic Revival church whose lofty site makes it visible from many points in this part of the Blackstone Valley. This imposing landmark is set obliquely at a bend in the road with its angled mass terminating the axis of one leg of the highway. To the right (southeast) of the church, set back from the street with a lawn, a large copper beech tree, and a few paved parking spaces in front, is a two-and-one-half-story, cross-gable-roof rectory with bracketed trim and a large veranda. To the left (northwest) of the church is a one-and-one-half-story, end-gable-roof parish hall with a one-story, hip-roof addition across the front. Driveways run back between the church and the parish hall and southeast of the rectory to a paved parking area behind the buildings, and there is an early twentieth-century concrete-block garage behind the rectory. The church and rectory have recently been repaired and refurbished and are in excellent condition. The parish hall has severe structural problems and is in very poor condition.

The church, facing southwest, is a tall, end-gable-roof rectangular mass with a polygonal, hip-roof apse at the northeast end and one-story, shed-roof side aisles which continue around the apse as an ambulatory to connect with a projecting, rectangular chapel. Towers of unequal height are set at each corner of the facade. The shorter one, to the south, is three stories tall, with paired lancet windows at second-story level, a battlemented stringcourse between the second and third story, and louver-filled gothic arches with drip molds at third-story level. This tower is topped by a broach spire with steeply pitched gabled dormers around the base containing quatrefoil windows. The taller tower, to the north, is four stories tall and is surmounted by an octagonal belfry and spire. It has large traceried gothic windows at fourth-story level, a paneled parapet around the top of the square-plan base, louver-filled gothic arches with drip molds in the belfry, and steeply pitched gabled dormers in the spire containing gothic windows. Both towers have front entrances at the base with modern aluminum-frame plate-glass doors and transoms set within a larger gothic-arch frame with blind tracery filling the pointed upper section. The towers also have corner buttresses topped by pinnacles with overscaled fleur-de-lys finials. The shorter tower is set off slightly from the nave so that one corner of the nave also has this buttress-and-pinnacle detailing. The nave facade between the towers contains a central entrance identical to those in the towers, set in a slight projection with a steep gable roof. This

(See Continuation Sheet #2 ).

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Continuation sheet 1

Item number 6

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Preliminary Survey Report--Town of Cumberland (Rhode Island Historical  
Preservation Commission) March 1977.

Phase I Cultural Resources Reconnaissance  
Survey for the Reconstruction of Mendon Road,  
Route 122, Cumberland, R.I. (Rhode Island Historical Preservation  
Commission) July 1981.

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entrance gable is flanked on both sides by triads of small gothic windows and is surmounted by a large rose window. There are gothic windows to the sides and rear lighting the aisles and clerestory.

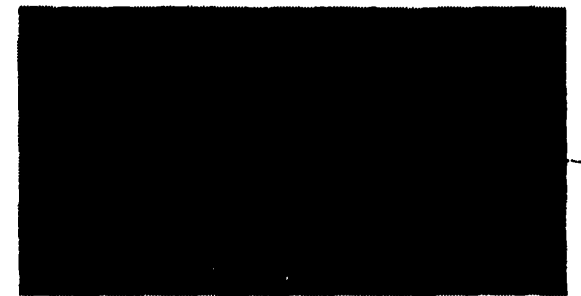
The church interior is basilican in plan. A narrow vestibule across the front extends into the bases of the towers and contains an enclosed staircase in the north tower leading up to the organ loft. Six pairs of clustered columns with elaborately carved capitals support gothic arcades separating the clerestoried nave from the side aisles. The nave has sexpartite vaulting carried by clustered colonettes on corbels in the spandrels of the arcade, while the aisles have quadripartite vaulting springing from the arcade columns and corbels on the outer walls. An organ loft with a paneled gothic-arch-motif railing runs across the southwest (front) end of the nave and aisles, with small confessionals under each end. A polygonal chancel opens off the opposite end of the nave through a gothic arch, and has a heavily molded stringcourse supporting banded, clustered colonettes from which the chancel vaulting springs. There are three clerestory windows in the chancel, taller than those in the nave.

The furnishings and decorations of the church are varied in age and character. The reredos, altar, and lecterns are modern, in keeping with the movement to update Roman Catholic liturgical practices, and some modern down lights have been installed in the vaulting. The remaining appointments are either original or in keeping with the original character of the church. They include gothic-style pews; an elaborate carved granite baptismal font with a crown-like brass cover; molded-plaster Stations of the Cross with polychrome relief figures set in projecting, niche-like tracery enframements; mural portraits of apostles and martyrs in molded quatrefoil frames with reversed cusps, set between the nave arcading and clerestory windows; and early twentieth-century gothic-style electric fixtures.

Doors from the chancel and the southern aisle open into the ambulatory spaces. Centered behind the chancel is a small chapel lately used as a sacristy but recently outfitted for religious services with modern furnishings. The portion of the ambulatory to the south of the chancel contains a large storage closet and a rear entrance hall, while the portion north of the chancel is a sacristy with its own entranceway.

From the exterior, St. Joseph's Rectory is a well preserved example of Bracketed style domestic architecture. It is built on a modified cruciform plan, with the corner between the rear (northeast) and southeast

(See Continuation Sheet #3 ).

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wings partly filled by a one-story vestibule and the corner between the rear and northwest wings completely filled by a two-story bay. The northwest wing is a full three stories tall and its gable roof forms a hip where it intersects the cross-gable roof covering the rest of the two-and-one-half-story house mass. A small one-story, gable-roof ell with a truncated end and a recessed entrance porch runs off the northwesterly corner of the house. Added in 1981, it has been carefully designed to be compatible with the original structure. The most conspicuous exterior feature of the rectory is a handsome veranda running around the three sides of the front (southwest) wing. It has flat, pilaster-like posts with voids cut out of their centers; a balustrade with turned balusters; elaborate scrollwork jigsaw braces connecting the veranda posts to the fascia above, and paired cornice brackets over the posts. The veranda shelters a side-hall entrance in the front wing. This entrance and all of the windows are surmounted by shelf-like molded hoods carried on small brackets. Other exterior embellishments include corner boards, wide overhanging eaves and gable returns ornamented with paired brackets, and arched windows in the gable ends with their semicircular upper sections now filled with solid panels. Cornice brackets have been applied to the modern northwesterly ell to help relate it to the original structure.

The interior of the rectory has been remodeled and redecorated during the past year (1981). On the first floor, the side-hall entrance and stair hall is flanked by a small front parlor or reception room, now used as a conference room, and a larger back parlor, now used as a combination living and dining room. The entrance-stair hall runs back to a kitchen at the rear. The original large kitchen, with space for both meal preparation and dining, was subdivided during the renovations into a galley kitchen and a separate informal dining area. There is a small office in the space behind the staircase and a laundry room behind the office, the latter opening off the kitchen dining area. The office and laundry room both open into the new ell, which contains offices and meeting rooms for parish functions. The second floor of the rectory contains a bedroom-sitting room-study alcove-bathroom suite for the pastor, a bedroom and bathroom for the part-time assistant priest, and a guest room with a private bathroom. Wall and floor coverings, hardware, and cabinetry throughout the rectory are all modern, but the staircase balustrade, interior doors, and molded door and window architraves are all original, and the fireplace mantels in the front parlor, living-dining room, and pastor's second-floor sitting room are sympathetic early additions, if not original features.

The parish hall, in addition to its rather dilapidated condition, is rather nondescript in comparison to the church and rectory. The only

(See Continuation Sheet #4).

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exterior decorative features besides the plain corner and cornice boards and deep eaves and gable returns are its segmental-arch windows with molded caps, vaguely Italianate in character, and the central front entrance with pilaster trim and a projecting gable pediment. On the interior, the front section--apparently a later addition--contains a central entrance lobby flanked by cloakrooms and toilet rooms. The remainder of building is taken up by a large open hall with a stage at the rear (northeast end). There is a kitchen beneath the stage with a pass-through cut into the front of the stage platform to facilitate food service. The hall has been subdivided with temporary low, fiberboard partitions into four classrooms. There is no notable interior finish. Current plans call for demolition of the present parish hall after construction of a new parish hall well to the rear of the older structure.

# 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 checked="" 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** ca 1872, 1888-90 **Builder/Architect** F.E. Page

## Statement of Significance (In one paragraph)

The St. Joseph's Church Complex is noteworthy for the superior architectural quality of the church and the rectory and for the parish's important role in the social and religious history of the area. Designed by F.E. Page of Woonsocket, the present church is one of the finest wooden Late Victorian ecclesiastical edifices in Rhode Island.

St. Joseph's Parish was established in 1872 as a mission of St. Mary's Church, Pawtucket, and a church, a rectory, and a "school house" (the current parish hall) were erected soon thereafter on the present Mendon Road site by the first pastor, the Reverend James A. Fitzsimons. At the time, this was the only Roman Catholic church between Valley Falls and Woonsocket, and though built primarily to serve the mill laborers at nearby Ashton and Berkeley (at first almost exclusively Irish, later joined by French Canadian and Italian immigrants), St. Joseph's drew communicants from throughout central and northern Cumberland and parts of nearby Lincoln. By 1888 the parish's growth necessitated the construction of a new church. According to contemporary sources, the old church was dismantled and its materials used for part of the new building, which was dedicated in April 1890. Parish tradition maintains that the rectory was built at the same time as the second church but an 1878 view of the parish buildings from the south clearly shows the parish hall, with a smaller vestibule, and the rectory. It thus seems likely that the rectory and parish hall are survivors of the original parish building campaign of the 1870s, the latter with a later front addition and the former possibly with additions to the northeast or northwest, perhaps dating from the 1888-1890 period. As with other Rhode Island parishes, St. Joseph's not only provided sacraments to the faithful but served as an important social center for the inhabitants of the relatively remote mill villages and farms of the region. A number of church-sponsored organizations such as the Sons of St. Joseph, the Altar Society, and the Children of Mary fulfilled the social as well as religious needs of local Catholics. More secular activities such as church suppers and bazaars could be attended by all and in fact drew many non-Catholics. St. Joseph's has served the varied needs of a broad constituency from its landmark buildings for over a hundred years. The parish is one of the Blackstone Valley's chief cultural resources.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Bayles, Richard M., History of Providence County, R.I. (New York: 1891), II, 248.

Hoag, Wade & Company, History of the State of Rhode Island (Philadelphia: 1878), p. 118.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property about 1.32 acres

Quadrangle name Pawtucket

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

### UMT References

A 

1	9	2	9	8	7	2	0	4	6	4	5	1	0	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** The nominated property is coextensive with lots 5 and 82 in assessor's plat 39 as defined by the Town of Cumberland. The boundaries selected encompass the church, rectory, and parish hall of St. Joseph's parish and their immediate surroundings, measuring approximately 57,579 square feet.

**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 Robert O. Jones, Senior Historical Preservation Planner

organization Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

date March 1982

street & number 150 Benefit Street

telephone 401-277-2678

city or town Providence

state Rhode Island 02903

## 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

*Frederick C. Williamson*

title

date

7/9/82

