



1219

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number North Ash Street at Second Avenue not for publication N/A

city or town Crookston vicinity

state Minnesota code MN county Polk code 119 zip code 56716

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Ian R. Stewart 8/27/98
Signature of certifying official/Title Ian R. Stewart Date
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer
State or Federal agency and bureau Minnesota Historical Society

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register. See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain): _____

Edson H. Beall 10-1-98
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Name of Property

Polk County, MN
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION: Religious Facility

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

VACANT: NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19th & 20th CENTURY REVIVALS/
Late Gothic Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete
walls Brick
roof Asphalt shingles
other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

see continuation sheets

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- [x] A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
[] B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
[] C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
[] D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- [x] A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
[] B removed from its original location.
[] C a birthplace or grave.
[] D a cemetery.
[] E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
[] F a commemorative property.
[] G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Religion

Period of Significance

1912 - 1948

Significant Dates

1912

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Keck, Bert (Architect)

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- [] preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
[] previously listed in the National Register
[] previously determined eligible by the National Register
[] designated a National Historic Landmark
[] recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
[] recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary location of additional data:

- [x] State Historic Preservation Office
[] Other State agency
[] Federal agency
[] Local government
[] University
[] Other

Name of repository:

Archives, Diocese of Crookston

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7. NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

The Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, built in 1912, is an imposing, Gothic Revival style building located in Crookston, Minnesota, adjacent to the main commercial district and the Carnegie Library (1909), both listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The church faces west to North Ash Street. To the east, the land slopes down through a public park to the Red Lake River.

The Cathedral was originally flanked on the north by the bishop's home, torn down in 1953, and the Cathedral High School, demolished in 1969. Two nearby buildings, related to the Cathedral, are located next to the property but are not included in this nomination: the rectory (built in 1953) and St. Joseph's Home (built in 1933). Christ Episcopal Church and its rectory were located to the immediate south, although both were razed in recent years.

Exterior Features

The Cathedral is laid in a general east-west orientation, measuring approximately 122 feet by 79 feet in a cruciform ground plan. A five-sided, conical capped apse projects from the eastern end of the church with vestries extending off the north and south from the chancel. The south vestry measures approximately 26 feet by 14 feet while the north vestry measures 26 feet by 29 feet. The transepts extend approximately nine feet from the main wall of the church to form the cross pattern.

The Cathedral's triple spires are its most distinguishing architectural characteristic. Visible from the surrounding area, they provide an integral part of the city skyline. The central spire rises 123 feet while the two flanking spires are 98 feet high. The towers are square until the bell opening and then are octagonal. There are four louvered openings in each belfry. Each spire is topped by a gold-leaf cross. The spires and belfry are decorated with galvanized metal ornamentation and sheathing.

The exterior is faced with reddish-brown pressed brick with a concrete foundation. There is no basement, although there is a crawl space around the piers. The roof is of asphalt shingles with a steeply-pitched slope, excepting the vestries, which have flat roofs covered with pitch and stone.

The main facade, facing Ash Street, has three entrances, one at the base of each spire, with double-leaved doors approached by stone steps. At the top of each entrance is a tall gabled pediment, capped by a gold-leaf cross. The architect, Bert Keck, specified a rose window under

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the main spire although this was changed before construction. There are two additional single-entry doors: one off the north transept and a second off the north vestry. These would have provided access to the bishop's residence before its demolition.

The north and south facades have five bays each, broken by buttresses. Windows use a gothic arch form with a quatrefoil tracery excepting the main transept windows, which use a trefoil pattern. Although the stained glass has been removed, the casements remain, preserving the visual integrity of the exterior. Window sills are granite.

The exterior of the church is generally intact and in good condition. The doors on the main entrances are not original.

Interior Features

The ground plan of the church, a nave flanked by two aisles with a semi-circular apse at the east end, suggest the early Romanesque floor plan. The nave measures approximately 107 feet by 50 feet. Ten free standing wooden columns with carved, elaborately painted, Corinthian capitals support a soaring crossed rib vaulted plaster ceiling.

The most striking element of the main are two semi-circular, antiphonal balconies at the transept. Stairways lead from the main floor to each side balcony.

A chancel and two side altars are located on the east end. Four marble steps lead to the chancel which is laid with ceramic tile in a mosaic design. Much of this tiling has been covered over during remodeling although it appears to be intact. Two vestry rooms are located off the chancel.

The church is entered through a vestibule with staircases to the left and right leading to a balcony used by the choir. Originally, this balcony held a pipe organ.

The interior of the Cathedral has been greatly altered. In 1960, the church completed interior renovations which included the installation of new light fixtures. The walls were painted at that time, covering the portraits of the saints and scenes of the Passion.

Following closure of the Cathedral in 1990, the Diocese gave the building to Care and Share, Inc. to use for social service programs. Pews, all church furniture, and the stained glass windows were sold, altering the interior ambiance. The church was sold to the Skyline Preservation Foundation, Inc. in 1996. At present, the structure is vacant and has no heat, electricity, or air-conditioning. The oak flooring shows evidence of severe buckling from temperature fluctuations. Although it has lost much of the interior ornamentation and all sacramental furnishings, the Cathedral maintains its historic physical integrity on the exterior.

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Church of the Immaculate Conception is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A as a property associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of history. The property represents the administrative and religious presence of the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Crookston, serving the Catholic community in fourteen counties. As an important administrative unit, the Diocese had responsibility for the management of educational institutions, hospitals, churches, and related social services. As the "Bishop's church," the Cathedral was recognized as the pre-eminent church for Catholics in northwest Minnesota.

The property also relates to the statewide historic context entitled "Railroads and Agricultural Development, 1870-1940."

Founding and Growth of Crookston, Minnesota

Northwest Minnesota was settled in the years after the Civil War, following the cession of Chippewa lands in 1863. The region's economy was based primarily on agriculture and lumbering but the construction of rail lines paced settlement. Incorporated in 1879, Crookston quickly became a central city along the St. Paul, Minneapolis, & Manitoba Railroad and the Red Lake River. When the Northern Pacific Railroad opened its east-west line in 1896, the city grew into an important transportation hub. A third line ran from Crookston to the Moorhead/Fargo area. In 1905 the Great Northern Railroad established administrative headquarters for its northern division in Crookston.

Crookston and the surrounding Red River Valley experienced a period of dramatic growth in the decade between 1905 and 1915. The establishment of the University of Minnesota Experimental Station at Crookston, in 1905, further consolidated the city's economic importance. Within a decade, a new city hall, an armory, two public schools, a county courthouse, a post office, and a Carnegie Library were constructed, as well as a substantial commercial district.¹

¹ Return Holcombe, *Compendium of History and Biography of Polk County* (Minneapolis: W. H. Bynum, 1916); Dorothy McCulle and Cathy Wright, *Footprints of Yesterday: Centennial, 1879-1979, Crookston, Minnesota* (Crookston: 1979).

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The Catholic Church in Northern Minnesota

In the first decade of the century, the Catholic Church in northwest Minnesota was governed within the Diocese of Duluth. A diocese is an administrative division of the Church, typically following governmental boundaries in the United States. Within these management units, a bishop governs the infrastructure of the church: parish churches, missions, hospitals, and schools. The bishop is the primary spiritual leader as well. In 1909 there were four dioceses in Minnesota: Duluth, Winona, and Saint Cloud, as well as the Metropolitan Saint Paul Archdiocese. The Diocese of New Ulm was not created until 1957.

The Catholic Church found its strength in the Minnesota Red River Valley among the French-Canadian population and the tribal reservations at Red Lake and White Earth. Benedictine Sisters opened hospitals in East Grand Forks (1897), Bemidji (1898) and Crookston (1902). They established schools in East Grand Forks (1900), Argyle (1902), and Red Lake Falls (1902). New settlers, however, were a diverse blend of ethnic and religious backgrounds. In fact, the Catholic Church reported a drop in membership in the Red River Valley between 1906 and 1908.²

James McGolrick, the Bishop of the Duluth diocese, hoped to secure the Catholic presence in the region. McGolrick was a friend of Archbishop John Ireland, the influential leader of the Saint Paul Archdiocese. In the 1870s, Ireland had formed the Catholic Colonization Bureau of Minnesota to induce immigrants to settle on farmlands in the state. McGolrick worked with Ireland during those years. Following his elevation to the Bishopric of Duluth, he sought to employ the same successful techniques in the northwest corner of the state. In 1895, for example, McGolrick secured a large tract of land in Kittson County with the hopes of establishing a colony. He embarked on an ambitious plan in 1909, creating the Minnesota Catholic Colonization Society to negotiate a contract with the D. S. B. Johnson Land Company of Saint Paul, to establish colonies in Otter Tail, Mille Lacs, Becker, Hubbard and Marshall Counties.

Under the agreement, the Johnson Land Company set aside 170,000 acres for the colonists. The Society promised to deliver settlers who would have \$800 in cash to buy land and farm machinery. In turn, the Land Company agreed to furnish families with \$500 worth of lumber, payable in annual installments. They guaranteed each settler help to clear ten acres of land and gave a bonus if six cows were on the land within one year. When enough families had settled

² Gerald Foley, "Diocese of Crookston," in *Catholic Heritage in Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota*, edited by Patrick Ahern (Saint Paul: Diocese of St. Paul, 1964), 109.

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in a district, the Land Company promised to build a church, a school, and a home for the priest. McGolrick was enthusiastic, writing, "I am in the midst of a great work to keep me going for a few years." Predictions stated that up to 25,000 people, "now living in the cities" would now "enjoy health and happiness in Northern Minnesota."³

The project started tentatively. A few newspaper reports mention the arrival of immigrants in 1910, notably in Becker County. McGolrick successfully recruited the Crosier Brothers of Holland to form colonies near Onamia, with additional settlements around the Detroit Lakes area. However, by 1911, the Johnsons requested the termination of the contract. The Johnson brothers, who were not Catholic, found insufficient profit in the bargain. All told, the Society was a failure and proved to be the last major Catholic colonization organization in Minnesota.⁴

Establishment of the Diocese of Crookston, Minnesota

In response to the growth of Crookston and the Red River Valley, and the anticipated success of McGolrick's colonization plan (which would have more than doubled the Catholic population), the Bishops of the Province of Saint Paul sent a recommendation to the apostolic delegate in August, 1909, to create a new diocese for the northwest corner of Minnesota. Pope Pius X established the new Diocese of Crookston on December 31, 1909 by proclamation. A church historian noted that some questioned whether the city "could either support or grace the Episcopal dignity."⁵

The Diocese of Crookston covers an area of 17,210 miles, comprising the counties of Becker, Beltrami, Clay, Clearwater, Hubbard, Kittson, Lake of the Woods, Marshall, Mahanomen, Norman, Pennington, Polk, Red Lake, and Roseau. At its inception, the diocese comprised twenty-nine churches with resident pastors, twenty missions with churches, twenty-one stations and seven chapels. It included Catholic hospitals in East Grand Forks, Bemidji and

³ Gerald Foley, *Our Northland Diocese: History of the Diocese of Crookston*, (St. Paul: Province of St. Paul, 1965); *Detroit Record*, September 3, 17, 1909; *Duluth News Tribune*, September 3, 1909; *Saint Paul Dispatch*, December 10, 1909; for a more complete discussion of the earlier Colonization Bureau, see James Shannon, *Catholic Colonization on the Western Frontier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957). Shannon, however, ignores this later plan.

⁴ For the most complete discussion, see Jerome Rausch, *The Crosier Story* (Onamia: Crosier Press, 1959); *Duluth Herald*, January 24 1918. Onamia is located outside the Crookston diocese.

⁵ Gerald Foley, "Diocese of Crookston," in *Catholic Heritage: Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota*, edited by Patrick Ahern (St. Paul: St. Paul Archdiocese, 1964), p. 110.

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Crookston, girls' academies in Argyle and Crookston, Indian industrial schools at the Red Lake and White Earth Reservations, and parish parochial schools in Moorhead, Barnesville, and Red Lake Falls.⁶

According to the 1923 directory, the Catholic population was 19,567, including 3,267 Native Americans — approximately eleven percent of the total population. The bishop described the population as “very cosmopolitan, consisting of French, Irish, Germans, Bohemians, and Poles. The French population forms the majority.”⁷

The Catholic Church selected an unusually well qualified priest as its first bishop. Reverend Timothy Corbett served for fifteen years as chancellor of the Duluth Diocese and was well acquainted with the northwest quarter of the state. Corbett was a protégé of Bishop McGolrick and favored by Archbishop John Ireland for his work with the Total Abstinence League. The *Duluth Evening Herald* stated, “Father Corbett is distinctly an organizer, and the new diocese will take shape, coherence and orderly form very quickly under his direction.”

Corbett assumed his position on May 19, 1910 in a dramatic ceremony, presided over by Archbishop John Ireland, installing six new bishops (known as the Sixfold Consecration). A grand parade, led by civic leaders and a thousand members of the Knights of Columbus, welcomed Corbett to Crookston. The new bishop advised friends, “Keep your eye on budding Crookston.” He was less sanguine when he arrived in his diocese and later wrote that he “found nothing in sight but the sunshine and rolling prairie.”⁸

Crookston's civic leaders applauded the decision, trumpeting the recognition of the city's importance to the burgeoning Red River Valley. The *Crookston Daily Times* noted,

Corbett's arrival in Crookston means greatly added importance to Crookston as a religious center, and will result in the construction of a suitable cathedral, a bishop's residence, and the establishment here of a school which will bring hundreds to Crookston eventually.⁹

⁶ Lake of the Woods County, now within the diocese, was not established until 1922.

⁷ *A History of the Diocese of Crookston, from the beginning of the Church in this district to January, 1923* (Typescript in Diocese Archives), p. 9; The ratio of Catholics to the general population remained fairly constant through the 1960s.

⁸ *Duluth Evening Herald*, May 23, 1910.

⁹ *Crookston Daily Times*, April 16, 1910.

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The link between civic boosterism and the new diocese was explicitly made in a promotional flier, widely distributed by the *Crookston Daily Times* in 1915,

The selection of Crookston as the See City, with its potential advantages, means the dawn of a new era in its development along the lines of new empire building, not only in the Master's vineyard, but commercial, industrial and farm-home building, on a scale almost impossible to realize. A See City is recognized the world over as an important city, one that holds high rank. Few people seem to realize the true meaning and importance of a See City to the territory comprising it, in new population, new wealth, new farm-home buildings, new commercial houses, and new industrial plants.¹⁰

Construction of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception

Under Catholic ecclesiology, the Pope creates a diocese and selects the presiding bishop. The bishop, in turn, chooses the location of his cathedral. In the first years of the diocese, Corbett designated Saint Mary's Church, a small English-speaking church, as his Cathedral. He embarked on an ambitious construction campaign, beginning with the Cathedral High School, opened in the fall of 1911. Corbett wrote,

The Pro-Cathedral parish numbers 100 families. The present church is both small and poor, a Cathedral being an immediate necessity, but we must await the proper means. Three months ago I purchased some fine central property in Crookston, sufficient for a Cathedral and school, including three houses.

Corbett became known to local wags as "the begging Bishop," with his aggressive, and highly successful, fund-raising techniques.

With the completion of the school, Corbett turned his efforts toward the new Cathedral. The diocese hired Bert Keck as architect. Keck, called "the leading architect in Polk county," designed the Carnegie Library, two public school buildings, the armory, the First Presbyterian Church, and several commercial structures including the First National Bank and the Morris Jewelry Store. Keck grew up in Illinois and opened an office in Crookston in 1902. He

¹⁰ "Potential Advantages of Crookston: The Metropolis of the Red River Valley," *Crookston Daily Times*, March 1915.

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practiced in town until 1917 when he moved to Grand Forks.¹¹

The Bishop laid the cornerstone on Sunday, June 16, 1912 and blessed its dedication on February 2, 1913. Local newspaper coverage of the dedication emphasized that the Cathedral now placed Crookston as the "Central City of the Red River Valley: the music "rendered the grandest sacred music ever heard in Crookston," and the structure "is the most beautiful and complete in the Northwest, nothing in the larger cities surpassing it." Another reporter boasted that it was "the finest house of worship in Northern Minnesota or the entire Red River Valley. The press touted the final cost of \$125,000.¹²

It appears that the interior was not finished until 1915-16. A diocesan history, written in the early 1920s, described the interior:

It seats one thousand. Inside it has a large choir loft, one front and two side balconies. The sanctuary and vestibule floors are of ceramic tiling. Oil paintings representing the life and passion of our Lord together with portraits of the Saints relieve the stenciled and blended coloring of the high walls and arched ceiling.¹³

Following the completion of the Cathedral, Corbett turned toward institutional development of the Diocese, directing the construction of Saint Joseph's Academy and an expansion of Saint Vincent's Hospital. He wrote a well-regarded volume of diocesan statutes in 1921.

The Significance of a Cathedral

A cathedral is a church in which a bishop's chair [*cathedra*] is located. As the "bishop's Church," it is recognized as the spiritual center of the diocese. The *Catholic Encyclopedia*, a standard reference contemporary with the construction of the Cathedral, noted:

¹¹ "Bert Keck," in R. Holcombe, *Compendium of History and Biography of Polk County*, p. 252; "Bert Keck Opens Office in this City," *Grand Forks Herald*, July 2, 1917.

¹² "A Record of Achievement in Less than Three Years," *Crookston Daily Times*, February 6, 1913; *Crookston Press*, February 6, 1913.

¹³ "A History of the Diocese of Crookston from the beginning of the Church in this district to January 1923." Typescript, Archives, Diocese of Crookston.

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[The cathedral is] the chief church of a diocese, in which the bishop has his throne [*cathedra*]. It is properly speaking, the bishop's church wherein he presides, teaches, and conducts worship for the whole Christian community.¹⁴

The importance of a cathedral does not depend on the form or dimensions or magnificence of the structure. Theologically, it symbolizes "the highest material expression of the faith of its people." One historian noted,

It is to the Mother Church that a new Ordinary comes to be officially installed; within its walls are held a diocese's most solemn liturgies; from its sanctuary come forth the ...first blessings of newly ordained priests.¹⁵

Apart from the ecclesiastical importance of the cathedral, it served three social functions.

- First, it served the local parish as a place of worship. The Cathedral Church maintained its own pastor, Father Joseph Wurm, and sponsored several social organizations such as the League of the Sacred Heart, the Holy Angels Sodality, and the Crusaders' Club for boys.
- Second, the cathedral stood as an example to all parishes within the diocese. As one ecclesiologist wrote, "The cathedral is pre-eminent among all the other churches of the diocese."
- Third, the diocese focused its attention on the Cathedral on special holy days, especially during Holy Week. On the Thursday before Easter, priests would gather from all the diocesan parishes for the *Missa Chrismalis* — a blessing by the bishop of the holy oil used throughout the diocese for the coming year.¹⁶

¹⁴ A. Boudinham, "Cathedral," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, edited by Charles G. Herbermann, et al (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908), Vol. 3, pp. 438-441. Also see *The Ceremonial of Bishops #42*, quoted in "The Dedication of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception" (Crookston: Diocese of Crookston, 1990.)

¹⁵ Eric Hanson, *The Cathedral of Saint Paul: An Architectural Biography* (Saint Paul: Cathedral of Saint Paul, 1990), p.1.

¹⁶ A. Boudinham, "Cathedral," pp. 438-441; Sister Christine Johnson, Interview, November 4, 1997.

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There are three Cathedrals in Minnesota that represent the presence of the church in the early twentieth century — the Sacred Heart Cathedral in Duluth (NR 1986), the Saint Paul Cathedral (NR 1974), and Crookston's Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. Although the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in New Ulm dates from the nineteenth century, it was not designated as a cathedral until 1957.

In 1953 the diocese moved its administrative offices to its current building, located elsewhere in Crookston. The bishop's residence was torn down. In 1990 the designation as Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception was transferred to a new church. The Diocese closed the older church, and turned the property over to the Care and Share Center, a church related social service agency. It proved ill-suited for their programs, so in 1996, the Skyline Preservation Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization, acquired the building.

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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES.

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA.

Verbal Boundary Description.

The nominated property occupies the parcel of land described as Lot One of Auditor's Subdivision No. 1 in Government Lot Three (3), Section Thirty-one (31).

Boundary Justification.

The boundary includes the parcel of land historically associated with the Cathedral.