

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

PHO 688 452

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED NOV 27 1978

DATE ENTERED JAN 19 1979

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME** St. Mary's Cathedral,  
HISTORIC Chapel, and  
Diocesan House

AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION** 700, Poplar Avenue (Cathedral)  
STREET & NUMBER 714, Poplar Avenue (Chapel) and  
692 Poplar Avenue (Diocesan House)

— NOT FOR PUBLICATION  
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

CITY, TOWN

Memphis

VICINITY OF

Eighth

STATE

Tennessee

CODE  
47COUNTY  
ShelbyCODE  
157**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       |
|   |   | <input type="checkbox"/> NO                         | <input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY      | <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:               |

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY** The Bishop, Dean, and Chapter of St. Mary's Cathedral  
NAME of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Tennessee (Cathedral and  
Chapel); the Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of  
Tennessee (Diocesan House)

STREET &amp; NUMBER

692 Poplar

CITY, TOWN

Memphis

VICINITY OF

STATE

Tennessee

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Office of the Shelby County Registrar

STREET &amp; NUMBER

160 North Main

CITY, TOWN

Memphis

STATE

Tennessee

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Tennessee Historical and Architectural Survey

DATE

July 1977

— FEDERAL  STATE — COUNTY — LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Tennessee Historical Commission

CITY, TOWN

Nashville

STATE

Tennessee

# 7 DESCRIPTION

| CONDITION                                     |                                       | CHECK ONE  | CHECK ONE   |
|---|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT | <input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED        | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> GOOD                 | <input type="checkbox"/> RUINS        | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED (chapel) | <input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> FAIR                 | <input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED    |  |   |

## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

**Cathedral:** The present Late Gothic Revival Cathedral replaced the first, a board and batten structure built on the site in 1856. Original drawings for the new Cathedral were by W. Halsey Wood who died in 1897 while work on the final drawings was in hand. L. M. Weathers, Memphis, carried on with working plans from 1898. The first cornerstone was laid May 5, 1898. The foundations and crypt were completed that same year, roofed, and used for worship for seven years. The second stage of construction took place in 1906. Completed were the porch and central portion of the west facade, steel fabrication of the roof, columns, and floor of the nave. A temporary raised seam tin roof and temporary wooden walls were in place until 1925 when work was resumed under Bayard Cairns, Memphis, who worked on plans from 1922 for construction of the side aisles and clerestory, transepts, the tower, and reworking of the apse. A second cornerstone marking completion is dated January 1926.

The plan is that of a Latin cross with an emphasis on the longitudinal axis, the transepts having a shallow extension. Construction is of rusticated ashlar stone in broken course and range set in random bond with beaded joint with green tile roof. The character of the building is Early English, the windows characteristically lacking tracery, though the nine sided apse with a low semicircular ambulatory is atypical. The general aspect is of the massing of substantial elements. The square tower of smooth dressed stone rises to a height of 117 feet. On the west, the central portal is emphasized by a porch having entrances on three sides and enriched with molded battlement. Above the porch a pair of windows are flanked by niches with boldly projecting base and gabled canopy. The round window in the central gable and those in the gables over the entrances on north and south at the west corner open into a loft area and are not seen within the nave. Otherwise, the west front reflects the interior with doors marking the side aisles.

The length of the interior is 124 $\frac{1}{2}$  feet and height at the crossing is 55- $\frac{1}{3}$  feet. The arched vault is pointed and enriched with ribs springing from the capitals of five nave columns, the western most engaged in the west wall and the eastern engaged at the junction of the eastern wall of the transept and the chancel. All columns are cylindrical excepting the four nave piers at the crossing which are quatrefoil in plan and support the crossing vault. Capitals are simple with a single foliate element as ornament. The general effect is quiet with little embellishment. In day light hours the stained glass windows afford a rich brilliance to the interior.

The clerestory with five windows is supported by an arcade with six arches. The timbered roof of the side aisles is supported by masonry supporting arches springing from the capitals of the aisle arcade and from the wall between each of four windows along the north and south nave walls. The roof is mitered at the transept where the aisle turns to extend along the west side of the transept to doorways, the south one giving on the parish hall, the north transept door opening to a porch. A window is on either side in the west wall of the transept. There is a door at the west end of the side aisles with a pair of small windows above each.

In the transepts, niches, empty of figurework, under each of two lancet windows have trifoliate headings. These two windows and a round window high in both north and south walls

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Cathedral, cont.: of the transept are framed in simple molding. An arcade of three low arches forms the east walls of the transept. The centermost arches give on to short choir aisles connecting by a circular ambulatory, the organ console being in the south choir aisle. In the south transept the other two arches are blind, in the north they open into an area housing the font. An arcade at the second level of the east transept walls and continuing in the choir houses organ chambers.

The nine sided chancel has seven lancet windows high in the sanctuary. Between each window, vaulting ribs which meet at a foliate boss, spring from the capitals of single, slender, five-sided, attached, columnar shafts which (in the sanctuary) rise from an architrave running below the window line. The altar is of white stone enriched with pink marble and gilt with three front panels of lilies carved in high relief. It was designed by Henry Congdon and executed by Ellis and Kitson of New York in 1879. The reredos, 1926, was carved in Italy for Gorham & Co. to the design of Cairns. Oak pews and choir stalls have arched pew ends carrying carved fleurs-de-lis. The canopy of the oak cathedra has pinnacles at the sides and a carved miter at the center of a crocketed gable. Pulpit and lectern are of brass. The chancel rail is of marble with a series of blind ogee arches enriched with pink marble columns. The altar rail is of stone with an arcade of trifoliate headed arches.

Chapel: The Chapel, a High Victorian Gothic structure of brick built in 1887 by an unknown architect, was given by Col. R. B. Snowden for the use of the Sisters of St. Mary. In 1931, the structure, which the Chapter had voted to demolish, instead, was repaired and faced in stone matching that of the Cathedral by Bayard Cairns. The frame clerestory and raised seam tin roof are unaltered. At that time an entrance was cut in the west facade, the former main entrance giving on the Sisters' quarters having been in the east, and a tiny narthex added. Three stained glass windows of the Victorian period are above the west portal. Other windows are of colored glass set in lead in a diamond pattern. Six pairs of clerestory windows are carried above the arches of an arcade forming the side aisles. Columns having Corinthian capitals, archivolt, window framing, and woodwork are of gum and pine. Windows in the north and south walls are set in threes in each of five bays. A sixth eastern most bay has a door set at an angle at the east end of each side aisle. The north door gives on a compact sacristy, the south being the former main entrance. The steep pitched roof is of double framed hammer beam construction. The prominent hammer beams and the vertical struts end in turned balls. The space between the molded trusses is boarded under the common rafters. Slender straight braces cross and are framed into the intersection of a central purlin and the main truss. Long wall pieces terminate in a molding running along the bottom of the clerestory windows.

Diocesan House: The Diocesan House, architect not presently known, was built in 1902 as a dwelling for the Bishop of Tennessee. It replaced a two-story structure on the same site which since 1860 had been the bishop's home. The building, of smoothly dressed

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Diocesan House, cont.: stone, has a cellar and three floors. The asymmetrical entry facade rises to a stepped gable, a crested roof ridge running from front to back. The elevations project above the roof which is slate. An entrance porch has Tudor arches on two sides, one giving on a tiled, balustraded terrace. Buttressing reaching to the second level is at either corner of the facade and at the corner of the porch. Above the porch on the second level is an oriel window. On a side elevation is a dormer with three small windows. Just below, a pair of stained glass windows rise through the second level, marking the stair landing within. Windows are double hung single pane sash headed by a stepped weather mold. Within, rooms are large with substantial woodwork. The hall over mantel has English Renaissance motifs. The stairway rises from a Tudor arch. The stair rail has shaped slat balusters and finials on newel posts are carved in a lantern shape. Usage as a Diocesan House and Cathedral office dates from 1937 with very little interior alteration.

# 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION   | <input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY               | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ART          | <input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING            | <input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)     |
|   |  | <input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION              |   | record repository                                       |

1887-chapel

|                |  |                   |   |
|----------------|--|-------------------|---|
| SPECIFIC DATES | 1898-1926-cathedral<br>1902-diocesan house | BUILDER/ARCHITECT | cathedral-W. Halsey Wood, L. M. Weathers, & Bavard Cairns |
|----------------|--|-------------------|---|

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

**Architecture:** The original architect of the Cathedral and the person responsible for its design concept, W. Halsey Wood, was a well-known eastern architect who sought to reform the architecture of the Episcopal Church. The architects who followed were prominent in the mid-south. The Late Gothic Revival style in the Early English mode is the outstanding example of its kind in this area of the nation. The Chapel is an excellent example of the High Victorian Gothic style with an interesting timber roof of hammer beam construction.

**Art:** The window program of the Cathedral typifies the best of modern practice in the art of stained glass. Len R. Howard, Kent, Connecticut, designed, executed, and installed the forty-one windows from 1926 to 1955. His style reflects both the Western Medieval heritage and the revitalizing arts and crafts movement. Both artist and craftsman, Howard was trained in England and America. The windows, rich in symbolism, are master works in the conception of their design and coloration as well as in their craftsmanship.

**Education:** The site is significant as the former location of St. Mary's School for Girls which opened in November 1873 in the Bishop's House (present site of the Diocesan House). The Order of St. Mary sent sisters from New York at the request of the second Bishop of Tennessee, Quintard, to establish a school for girls at the Cathedral and operate the nearby Church Home for Orphans. The Sisters built a three-story brick school building and a Sisters House to the east of the Cathedral (both buildings destroyed in 1930). The surviving Chapel was added in 1887 and daily services held there for the school girls. The school was moved elsewhere in 1923 and flourishes still. The high educational standards set by the Sisters at this early location left a definite imprint on the educational and intellectual community in Memphis.

**Music:** The Cathedral has long been a leader in establishing a high level in the quality of church music. The organ is an outstanding example of the "American classic organ" i.e., one which by incorporating the best of the romantic and baroque schools of organ design is suited to the performance of nineteenth and twentieth century organ literature as well as the compositions of the earlier masters such as Bach and Buxtehude. The organ is composed of six divisions of 3173 pipes controlled from three manuals of sixty-one notes and a pedal board of thirty-two notes. Parts of the organ are in open installation lending brilliance, clarity, and power. The Trompette-en-chamade is unique to Memphis and is one of the few in the southeast. The choir has a large repertoire and in addition to singing for scheduled services is often heard in recital. Instrumentalists commonly supplement the choir and organ on festive occasions. The acoustics of the Cathedral make it a much sought location for musical performances and recording.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Davis, John Henry. St. Mary's Cathedral: 1858-1958. Jackson, TN.: McCowat-Mercer Press, Inc., 1958.
- "Two Martyrs of the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1878." The West Tennessee Historical Society Papers, Vol. 26 (1972).
- Gailor, Thomas Frank. Some Memories. Kingsport: Southern Publishers, 1937.
- Keating, J. M. The Yellow Fever Epidemic. Memphis: Howard Association, 1879.
- Noll, Arthur, ed. History of the Church in the Diocese of Tennessee. New York: James Pott 1900.

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 2

QUADRANGLE NAME Northwest Memphis, TN-ARK

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24000

UTM REFERENCES

A 15 770000 3893110  
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B           
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C         

D         

E         

F         

G         

H         

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION The property nominated is a triangular lot which measures approximately 600' by 300' by 600' and is bounded as follows: beginning at the intersection of Alabama Street and Poplar Avenue; thence northwest along the centerline of Alabama St. approximately 600'; thence southwest approximately 300' to the centerline of

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

Poplar Avenue; thence southeast along the centerline of Poplar Avenue approximately 600' to the beginning.

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Bette Ray Callow, Archivist

ORGANIZATION

St. Mary's Cathedral

DATE

June 1977

STREET & NUMBER

692 Poplar

TELEPHONE

(901) 527-3361

CITY OR TOWN

Memphis

STATE

Tennessee

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL   

STATE   

LOCAL X

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

*Herbert L. Hays*

TITLE

Executive Director, Tennessee Historical Commission

DATE

11/17/78

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST:

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

DATE

1/17/79

DATE

1/10/79

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Religion: St. Mary's was begun under the direction of James Hervey Otey, first Bishop of Tennessee, as a church in which pews would be free and open to all and was built at the eastern edge of the city on a lot which was donated in 1856. Parish organization with the election of a vestry took place in the next year with consecration of the Church on Ascension Day, May 13, 1858. St. Mary's became the Cathedral church January 1 1871 and has served as the episcopal seat of the Bishop of Tennessee since that date. It is the oldest Episcopal Cathedral in the South and one of the oldest in the United States. The Cathedral was the first church in the South to have women choir members and was the first Episcopal Church in Tennessee to place flowers and candles on the altar, vest the choir, use chanting, and change the altar hangings with the seasons of the church calendar.

The Diocesan House was built as a residence and given to the Bishop in 1902, replacing a house on the same site which had been the Bishop's home since 1860. The building has continued as a center of religious activity through usage for Diocesan and Cathedral offices since 1937. In it are hung oil portraits of the Bishops of Tennessee.

The Chapel, given by Col. Robert B. Snowden in 1887 as a memorial to his and Sister Hughetta's mother, Mrs. John Bayard Snowden, was for the Sisters own use and connected with their quarters. It served also as the chapel for their school for girls. Though the Sisters cared for the altar and sanctuary of the Cathedral, the Chapel was focal point for the many activities of the Sisters who labored in Memphis from 1873 to about 1910. The Sisters left Memphis for Sewanee where they continue to exert a religious influence in the Diocese.

Social/Humanitarian: The Cathedral has been deeply involved in crises in the city. During the Yellow Fever epidemics of the 1870s the Cathedral, under Dean Harris, was referred to as "the religious center of the city" for the doors remained open to all and the sacraments were available while most Protestant churches closed. Four of the Sisters of St. Mary working at the Cathedral died in September-October 1878 when they remained in the city to care for the poor and nurse the sick. Two priests on the Cathedral staff also died and they along with the Sisters are numbered among the Martyrs of Memphis. The altar in the Cathedral was given as memorial to the Sisters and installed in 1879. There is also a memorial window given for the Sisters who labored in the Diocese. The Cathedral has been a voice in the community which, for over one hundred years, has spoken out on issues confronting the city and country. During the famous Scopes trial of 1926 the Dean of the Cathedral, through his radio sermons (the first in the city) spoke out clearly in support of the liberal view of evolution and was a center of controversy with leading fundamentalists of the city and nation. Again during the Sanitation Strike and civil rights disturbances of the 1960s the Cathedral was again the center of attention as the religious community struggled with the issues. Meetings were held at the Cathedral with city, labor, and

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Social/Humanitarian, cont.: religious leaders. The march of ministers to the mayor's office started at the Cathedral steps and was led down Poplar by the Dean carrying a processional cross from the Cathedral. The memorial service for Dr. Martin Luther King, held unannounced at the Cathedral the morning after his murder, was a large gathering of all races and denominations.

Cathedral facilities are used by a large number of civic, social, and religious groups in a tradition dating back to the 1880s when the Cathedral operated a mission to the poor, a soup kitchen, library, free dispensary, St. Mary's Cottage Hospital, and a free day school for neighborhood children.

Other/Record Repository: The Cathedral is a repository of Diocesan records dating back to the 1830s which are housed in a vault in the crypt of the Cathedral. In addition there are the separate archives of St. Mary's containing parish records, correspondence, photographs, and many items of historical significance.