

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	JAN 20 1976
DATE ENTERED	JUL 12 1976

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

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

### 1 NAME

HISTORIC  St. Thomas Roman Catholic Church and Howard-Flaget House  
AND/OR COMMON   
Bishop's Chapel and House

### 2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER <sup>U.S.</sup> Off Route 31 E, three miles south of Bardstown  
CITY, TOWN Bardstown <sup>mic</sup> VICINITY OF 02  
STATE Kentucky CODE 021 COUNTY Nelson CODE 179

### 3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED (Church)	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED (House)	<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	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC ACQUISITION	<input type="checkbox"/> ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS (Church)
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER: <sup>Vacant</sup> house

### 4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME Archdiocese of Louisville  
STREET & NUMBER 212 East College Street, P. O. Box 1073  
CITY, TOWN Louisville VICINITY OF STATE Kentucky

### 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Nelson County Courthouse  
STREET & NUMBER  
CITY, TOWN Bardstown STATE Kentucky

### 6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE Survey of Historic Sites in Kentucky (Supplement)  
DATE Church, 1975; House, 1971  
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS Kentucky Heritage Commission  
CITY, TOWN Frankfort STATE Kentucky

## 7 DESCRIPTION

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

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

The St. Thomas complex is located in the midst of St. Thomas farm, a 340-acre tract that has remained intact since the days before Kentucky was admitted in the Union in 1792. The farm lies approximately three miles south of Bardstown, the county seat of Nelson County, off route 31E, the old road from Louisville south past Nashville, which has provided access to the other early Catholic settlements of Gethsemani, Holy Cross, and possibly Loretto nearby. The only approach to St. Thomas leads eastward off 31E for a mile, then jogs left past a tenant house (built in 1839) and the old cemetery and continues eastward to the Church complex.

The church complex is located on a plateau between the gently rolling farmlands that once supported it and the fields that descended steeply to the broad protective bend (known as Poplar Neck) of the Beech Fork River, a branch of the Salt River that first drew Father Charles Whelan and Edward Howard to the site. Located beneath a bluff near the old church is a cave known as the "Hermit's Cave" from the fact that at one time a hermit had lived there and made rosaries, whereby he obtained food and clothing. Other facilities on the farm include the site of the first convent of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth before they moved to their present location north of Bardstown (see photo 6), a spring which supplies drinking water for the residences and the school, a lake that supplies water to the school for other purposes than for drinking.

The present complex at the heart of St. Thomas farm consists of the church; adjacent Howard-Flaget house; a small 1913 convent parallel to the church and perpendicular to the Howard house thus forming a small court to the left of the church, the rectory built between 1909 and 1913 on earlier foundations to the right; and two larger modern housing buildings--the present grade school which is set off some distance (see photos 1 & 3). (Only the Church and Howard-Flaget House are included in the nomination.)

Although still, as in the early 19th-century, apparently remote in atmosphere in an area of rocky gorges (ironically, carved by the streams whose limestone-impregnated waters are the basis for the location of several of Kentucky's most prominent whiskey distilleries nearby). St. Thomas shares the tradition of fine brickwork for which nearby Bardstown is noted.

The Church itself is shaped like a narrow shoe-box 35 feet wide by 70 feet long, with an elongated cylindrical apse to which lower sacristies seem to have been added at a fairly early date on either side. The building is oriented "properly," with the facade facing west and the apse to the east. Within the 30-foot span of the main body of the Church are contained not only the nave but also very narrow aisles divided by colonnades.

(continued)

# 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 checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input 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 Church: 1816  
House: 1795-1800

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Maximilien Godefroy

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

St. Thomas Church, constructed in 1816, today stands as the oldest brick Roman Catholic Church in the diocese of Bardstown and in the English-speaking settlements of the Alleghenies. Architecturally, St. Thomas Church is significant as proof of the remarkably rapid transmission of architectural, along with religious, ideas to what was then thought of as the West. St. Mary's Seminary Chapel in Baltimore, obviously the model for St. Thomas, is often considered the first Gothic Revival building in America. Designed by the noted French emigree architect Maximilien Godefroy and built in 1806-1808, the design of the false front for St. Mary's imitated at St. Thomas' was probably influenced by Latrobe's 1805 Gothic alternative design for the Baltimore Cathedral.

Certainly, St. Thomas, in turn, is the first Gothic Revival structure in Kentucky and probably west of the Alleghenies. It is yet, however, only one of the most conspicuous and identifiable links of an as-yet-unexplored chain of connections between Roman Catholic architectural monuments in Baltimore and central Kentucky. It seems likely that aside from its Wren (or Gibbs)-like tower, John Rodgers' St. Joseph Cathedral in nearby Bardstown of 1816 construction, with its recessed round arches around the windows, panels above, and interior barrel vaults, is an architectural tribute to Latrobe's Baltimore Cathedral as executed in Roman style. Moreover, the smaller Holy Cross Church in nearby Marion County, built in 1824, has similar recessed arches and panels combined with an implied centralized plan recalling on miniature scale that of Latrobe's vast Cathedral. These features, so far observed nowhere else in early 19th-century Kentucky, suggest a conscious attempt on the part of Roman Catholic architects and builders to identify with the architecturally distinctive monuments associated with their increasingly accepted establishment on the Eastern seaboard.

It is particularly in contrast to other early Protestant churches in Kentucky that the strikingly innovative--even, perhaps, defiant--quality of St. Thomas' design can be seen. The typical early Kentucky meeting house--whether constructed of log, like the Cane Run Meeting House near Paris in Bourbon County, the Old Mulkey Meeting House in Monroe County (both of which have a slight suggestion of cross axial planning), and the reconstructed Red River Meeting House in Logan County; of stone, like the Providence Stone Church near Boonesborough in Clark County; of brick, like the Big Spring Church in Versailles, Woodford County, McCormack's Christian Church, Lincoln County, or the

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Howlett, W. J. Old St. Thomas at Poplar Neck, Bardstown, Kentucky. Cleveland, Ohio: Dillon/Liederbach Inc., 1906.

Kervick, Francis W. Architects in America of Catholic Tradition. Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Co. Publishers, 1962.

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# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 2 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,6	63,30,1,2	4,118,010,7,9	B			
	560	820					
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Peter J. Zemelka, Research Assistant; Walter E. Langsam, Architectural Historian GM

ORGANIZATION

Kentucky Heritage Commission

DATE

October 8, 1975

STREET & NUMBER

104 Bridge Street

TELEPHONE

(502) 564-3471

CITY OR TOWN

Frankfort

STATE

Kentucky

# 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

*Eldred W. Melton*

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

1/13/76

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE

9/12/76

ATTEST

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

5.25.76

RBR for WJM 7/8/76

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The location of these aisles is not clearly reflected on the facade, although the pointed arches around the central door and the flanking niches do suggest a tripartite division. Rather, the facade appears to be a square, with the sides emphasized by flat pilaster bands (probably originally unpainted and less emphatic than they are now, painted white) and the striking "tribune" or parapet across the top. This upper portion of the facade recalls the gallery of the Kings abstract geometric square that also brings to mind Godefroy's almost obsessively cubic First Unitarian Church in Baltimore, which in turn closely reflects the concepts of the so-called "French Revolutionary" architects from whom Godefroy derived.

The tribune or parapet has a central roundel suggesting a miniature rose window flanked by five blind arches lined in white plaster on either side (see photos 1 & 3). The parapet is divided from the facade below by a slender belt course on concave details. A brick band across the top is surmounted by a rectangular panel which masks the gable end. This has on its surface a raised triangle (no doubt meant to symbolize the Trinity, but suggestive of a masonic symbol). Set on a small stepped pyramid is a cross. Whether all this is original is unsure, and whether pinnacles were intended to top the side pilasters, for instance, cannot be known. But it seems unlikely that towers were ever intended for this elaborate (if somewhat awkwardly executed) composition. Over the raised niches on either side of the entrance are white marble plaques with appropriate inscriptions. Between the shallow pointed-arched central recess and the round-arched door is another plaque.

The double door is typically Federal in style, recessed with a semicircular fanlight. Its exquisite woodwork and elongated panelling, like those of the original outside doors that lead off the apse and aisles, suggest a relapse by local craftsmen from the novel incipient Gothic Revival back into the style to which they were accustomed. (It is possible that the existing pilasters flanking the door are later additions.)

The facade is in Flemish bond with queen closers, the sides and apse in common. The numerous pointed arches have carefully laid flat radiating voussoirs. The foundations consist of a thin layer of local stone. The cornices of the nave and apse are rather heavy but conventional for the early 19th century in Kentucky.

The interior has recently been stripped of nearly all its original features and furnishings, including the small pulpit, said to have been intact until about 1950. The basic form remains, however. In contrast to the pointed features of the precocious Gothic Revival

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facade, the interior has a rounded barrel vault extending into the rounded termination of the apse. The four arches opening into the "aisles" (really only narrow passages to the nave) on either side have very low pointed arches outlined by the only remaining detail work, a band of tiny concave modillions repeating at smaller scale those on the facade. The smooth stuccoed columns have square capitals with superimposed moldings but octagonal wooden pedestals. There is a shallow wooden gallery (perhaps originally for slaves) over the main entrance. Pointed doors at the east end of the aisles and on either side of the apse originally led directly outdoors, but now to the square sacrisites that extend somewhat on either side of the nave. As mentioned above, these doors, like the main entrance, have deeply reeded Federal frames.

The peculiarities of the design of the facade of St. Thomas can only be explained in terms of conscious imitation of St. Mary's in Baltimore, (see photo 3 and comparative photo 3a), although inevitably slight changes occurred. The frames of the entrance and the pilasters of St. Mary's consist of elongated colonnettes that, in spite of the pointed arches, suggest the fluting of classical columns. At St. Thomas these are reduced to flat bands of brick. The most striking departure is the placement of a conventional round-arched Federal doorway within the pointed recess of the entrance of St. Thomas, instead of the full-scale "Gothick" doorway of St. Mary, with its traceried panels and trefoil within the arch.

There are other minor differences, such as a solid rather than an artificial parapet at St. Thomas, which also has ten rather than twelve inches in the blind arcade of the parapet, and the presence of three plaques rather than above the arch recess. The proportions are also somewhat different: the rose window and entrance arch of St. Thomas seem wider and are not confined within a slightly raised vertical panel.

The interior surfaces now are plastered over and painted white. There is no indication of any early painting or other trim, but in its present condition it probably has an appearance of artificial simplicity, although the basic form does stand revealed. There is a certain nobility to the forms of vaults arches and columns, combined with a pinched look derived from the diminutive scale (said to be one-third that of St. Mary's in Baltimore).

The interiors cannot now be compared, but St. Thomas' is obviously simpler than the "Gothick" interior of St. Mary's. Nevertheless, St. Thomas as a whole is a convincing and in its own way an impressive tribute to its sophisticated model.

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The building formerly the residence of the Howard family and for a short period Bishop Flaget's and Father David's is located to the left as one faces the front of St. Thomas Church. It is connected at right angles by a wooden porch to the adjacent convent. The walls, constructed of extremely large logs, are eleven inches thick. Some logs contain two perpendicular notches. The logs are laid so tightly that virtually no chinking is necessary. The weatherboarding on the lower southeast corner of the house has fallen to the ground, revealing the log walls, and much of the structure is deteriorating, although possibly about to undergo restoration.

The first floor of the building contains three rooms, the largest of which has served as a schoolroom and refectory. The second floor has two rooms, and the loft is five feet high in the highest point. All the floors in the house are of pine and other native woods.

In the 19th century, there was an additional group of buildings located to the west or right of the St. Thomas Church which housed seminarians and other seminary personnel (see photo 2). Various related structures have been added and removed, but throughout these vicissitudes St. Thomas Church has held its own as the focal point of the complex, with the adjacent upboarded log house as a foil and reminder of the settlement's origins.

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Long Run Church near Jefferson County; or of frame construction, like the Old Mud Meeting House in Harrodsburg, Mercer County--is a boxlike auditorium, usually with the original sanctuary opposite the door in the middle of the long side (later often moved to one end, with two separate doors then placed at the opposite end), and the plainest possible interior and exterior treatment. St. Thomas' elaborate facade, longitudinal plan flanked by token aisles, barrel-vaulted ceiling, and separate elongated rounded apse, are all unprecedented as far as is known, and with the conscious symbolism of the medievalizing details, radically differentiate the Catholic house of worship from its Protestant predecessors and contemporaries.

Although the presence of Catholic settlers in Kentucky dates to 1775, the date of the founding of the first settlement in that region, it was not until 1785 that there was any considerable emigration. It was in that year that a large group of Catholics from Maryland came into Kentucky, settling chiefly on Pottinger's Creek, ten to fifteen miles distant from Bardstown.

By 1787 the number of Catholics had grown so large that Bishop John Carroll of Baltimore appointed the first pastor to Kentucky. In April 1808 with the approval of Pope Pius VII, four American Sees (each the center of authority for a bishop) were created: Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Bardstown, which is in the central part of Kentucky approximately equal distance from Louisville at the Falls of the Ohio River and Lexington, at the heart of the Bluegrass. Aiding in the administration of the church in the West was the subdivision in 1808 of the diocese of Baltimore with jurisdiction over the entire country into four additional diocese: New York, Philadelphia, Boston and Bardstown. The jurisdiction of the Bardstown diocese included the states of Kentucky, Tennessee, and Ohio, as well as the three territories of Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan.

The first bishop to be appointed to the Bardstown diocese was the Right Reverend Dr. Benedict Joseph Flaget, consecrated in that office in Baltimore in 1810. It was in this same year that Thomas Howard, a farmer, and his wife Ann Gough, willed their 340-acre farm to Bishop Flaget. Howard was the son of Edward Howard, a leader of one of the emigrant groups that came to Kentucky in 1787 to the Pottinger Creek area. The farm was named St. Thomas for the patron saint of Thomas Howard.

In 1811, under the Bishop's orders, a seminary was founded at St. Thomas--the first in the West. The Thomas farm complex was also the founding site of St. Joseph's College, the old Bethlehem Academy, the Sister of Charity of Nazareth, and St. Thomas Orphanage. In 1816 the Seminarians erected St. Thomas Church as a convenience for the growing

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number of Catholic families in the immediate area. (This was the second brick Roman Catholic church ever built in Kentucky; a small brick church at Danville preceded it, but that structure ceased to be used as a church many years ago and has since been drastically altered as a residence.) However, while the Seminary was operating on the grounds, St. Thomas was considered a seminary first and a parish secondly. The church building, also known as Bishop's Chapel, still stands today and serves as the St. Thomas parish.

After the Church was completed in 1816, Bishop Flaget moved to the seminary for a short period. The cabin which he inhabited and that had also been the home of Thomas and Ann Howard remains. After the death of her husband, Ann Howard arranged with Bishop Flaget for the construction of a small log house on the grounds to serve as her living quarters. Mrs. Howard died c. 1830.

In 1819 Bishop Flaget left St. Thomas to move <sup>to</sup> his See at Bardstown and took with him his co-adjutor elect, Father David and the theology students. A little over twenty years later, in 1841, the See was moved to the more populous and accessible Louisville. During the following years the Seminary passed through various periods of rise and decline, though never again reaching its former heights. All the institutions founded at St. Thomas were later moved and many of the buildings were either torn down, deteriorated or were destroyed by fire. Nevertheless, the church and the primitive house survive in their remarkable unspoiled setting, revealing the daring yet sophisticated aspirations of the Catholic pioneers.

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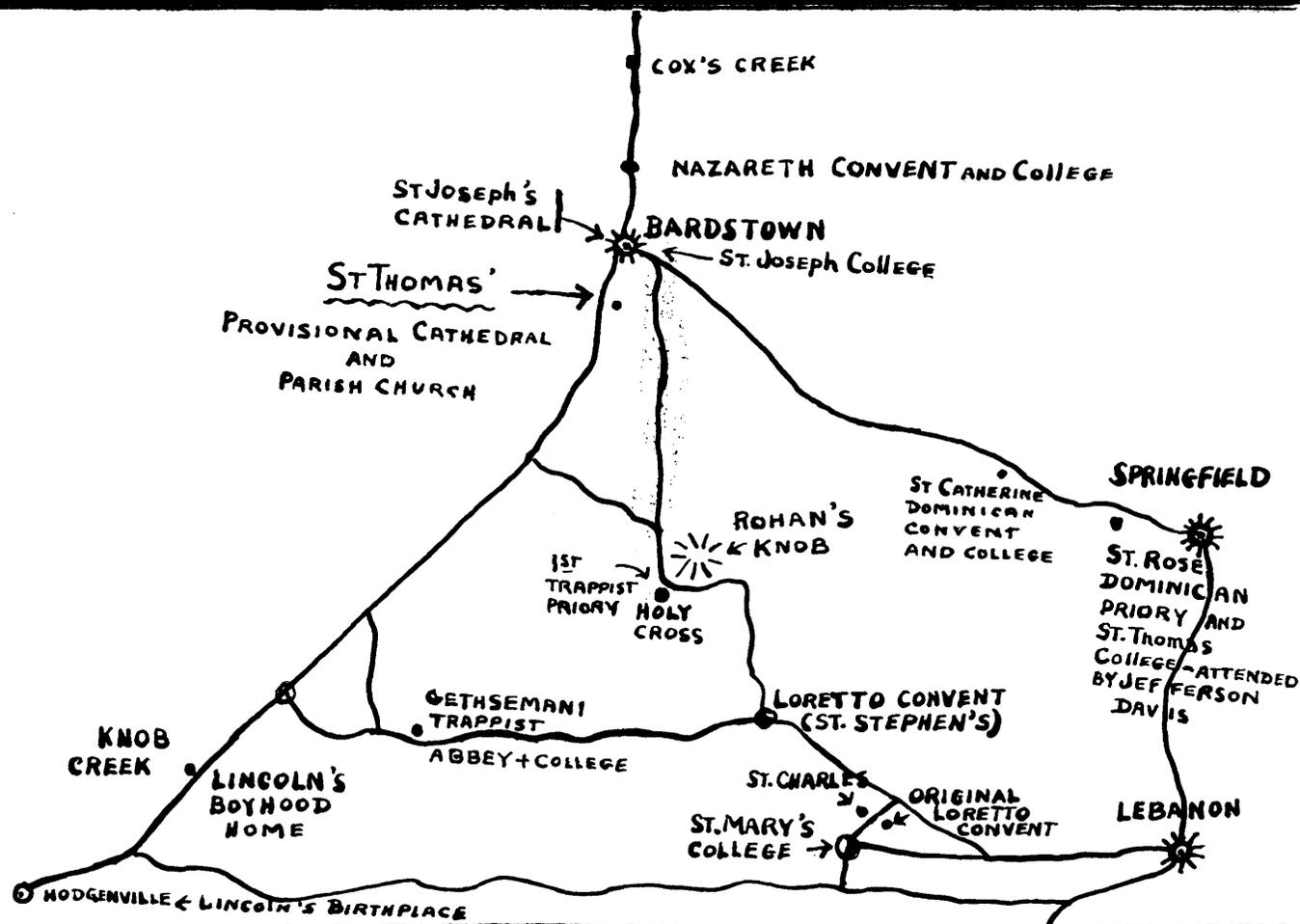
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St. Thomas Farm, Church  
and Locations of Other Buildings



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