

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received JUL 10 1984  
date entered AUG 23 1984

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*

Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic St. Colman's Roman Catholic Church and Cemetery

and/or common "The Little Catholic Church on Irish Mountain"

2. Location

street & number ~~W. Va. Secondary Route 26~~ <sup>WV</sup> N/A not for publication

city, town Sandstone <sup>vic.</sup>  vicinity of

state West Virginia code 54 county Raleigh code 081

3. Classification

| Category  | Ownership                                      | Status  | Present Use                                   |
|---|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> district               | <input type="checkbox"/> public                | <input type="checkbox"/> occupied                   | <input type="checkbox"/> agriculture          |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private    | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied      | <input type="checkbox"/> commercial           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> structure              | <input type="checkbox"/> both                  | <input type="checkbox"/> work in progress           | <input type="checkbox"/> educational          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> site                   | <b>Public Acquisition</b>                      | <b>Accessible</b>                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> entertainment        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> object                 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> in process | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted | <input type="checkbox"/> government           |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> being considered      | <input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted          | <input type="checkbox"/> industrial           |
|   |  | <input type="checkbox"/> no                         | <input type="checkbox"/> military             |
|   |  |   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> museum    |
|   |  |   | <input type="checkbox"/> park                 |
|   |  |   | <input type="checkbox"/> private residence    |
|   |  |   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious |
|   |  |   | <input type="checkbox"/> scientific           |
|   |  |   | <input type="checkbox"/> transportation       |
|   |  |   | <input type="checkbox"/> other:               |

4. Owner of Property

name Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston

street & number 1300 Byron Street

city, town Wheeling  vicinity of state West Virginia 26003

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Raleigh County Courthouse

street & number Main Street

city, town Beckley state West Virginia 25801

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Cultural Resource Project  
New River Gorge National River has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date December 21, 1981  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records New River National River Office, Drawer V

city, town Oak Hill state West Virginia 25901

## 7. Description

|  |                                       |   |   |          |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|---|----------|
| <b>Condition</b>                         |                                       | <b>Check one</b>                            | <b>Check one</b>                                  |          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> excellent       | <input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated | <input type="checkbox"/> unaltered          | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site |          |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good | <input type="checkbox"/> ruins        | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered | <input type="checkbox"/> moved                    | date N/A |
| <input type="checkbox"/> fair            | <input type="checkbox"/> unexposed    |   |   |          |

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

St. Colman's Roman Catholic Church and Cemetery is located atop Sullivan's Knob on Irish Mountain, off West Virginia Secondary Route 26, in Richmond District, in a remote and isolated rural area of Raleigh County.

When St. Colman's was originally constructed in 1877-78, it was a hewn log structure. This is still evident in the hand hewn sills and joists that rest on large foundation stones. The log structure was covered in c. 1928 by long clapboard wood siding that was, and is, painted white. The church building is a simple rectangular one story structure surmounted by a standing seam gable metal roof. A large, unadorned wooden cross rises above the roof level at the front gable end. Large double doors, each containing five recessed panels, that open into the church are original features. There are six windows, three that are double hung with six over six lights.

On the interior, there are twelve benches that are used by occasional worshippers. The altar is painted white, though the front of the altar contains two identical panels that have an encircled cross in their centers. A wood burning stove still provides heat. The altar and some of the benches were constructed in 1904 by Father J. J. Swint, who was a carpenter as well as priest, and later became Bishop of Wheeling.

The church occupies the front portion of the original one acre plot deeded to the diocese in 1876. The rear portion is occupied by the St. Colman's Cemetery, containing several dozen graves of Irish Mountain parishioners. Most graves are marked by upright grave stones of granite and marble (though some of sandstone) that contain inscriptions and epitaphs.

St. Colman's Church and Cemetery stand in a rural and isolate environment in which they clearly stand out as a local landmark of significance to southern West Virginia.

## 8. Significance

| Period  | Areas of Significance—Check and justify below                                |  |   |   |
|---|--|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric          | <input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric                              | <input type="checkbox"/> community planning                | <input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> religion                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499            | <input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> conservation                      | <input type="checkbox"/> law                    | <input type="checkbox"/> science                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599            | <input type="checkbox"/> agriculture   | <input type="checkbox"/> economics                         | <input type="checkbox"/> literature             | <input type="checkbox"/> sculpture                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699            | <input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement | <input type="checkbox"/> philosophy             | <input type="checkbox"/> theater                    |
| <input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify) |
|   |  |  |   | Local History                                       |
| <b>Specific dates</b>                         | 1877-78, c. 1928 <b>Builder/Architect</b> Irish Mountain Community, Builders |  |   |   |

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

St. Colman's Roman Catholic Church and Cemetery on Irish Mountain is significant as the sole surviving remains of a once thriving self-sufficient Irish immigrant population in the southern coalfields of West Virginia<sup>1</sup>. It is also significant as the principal burying ground for the Irish immigrant community and as a prominent local landmark<sup>2</sup>.

### Explanatory Notes

1. Irish immigrants from the eastern United States began arriving in southern West Virginia in the early 1850's, coming to an area that was then a virtual wilderness. The first settler on Irish Mountain was Maurice Sullivan, who purchased 435 acres of land from the Gwinn family in 1855. By 1856 Sullivan had been joined by the Quinlan family, and in the decades that followed they were joined by McCarthy's, Dillions, Nee's, Carsons, and other Irish families. Located in an extremely isolated area, this community of Irish farmers became virtually self-sufficient and formed a distinctive ethnic group. The one aspect of their lives, however, in which they did not feel self-sufficient was their lack of a place of spiritual solace. The closest Roman Catholic church was St. Patrick Catholic Church in Hinton, founded in 1872, which was nearly fifteen miles away over torturous mountains and through rugged terrain. From 1872 on, the priest of St. Patrick's would journey to Irish Mountain once a month to hold services, but this was not adequate to the needs of the community.

By 1876, when the cemetery atop Irish Mountain had been consecrated and received the remains of John Quinlan, the movement to establish their own mission had become strong enough to receive the support of Bishop Joseph J. Kain, Bishop of the Wheeling Diocese. Bishop Kain was deeded, by Maurice Sullivan, one acre of land for the Irish Mountain Community in 1876, for the purpose of building a mission church and establishing a cemetery. Construction on the hewn log building began the following year and was named for a popular Gaelic-Irish Saint. By this time, some of the Irish Mountain farming community had left to work on the construction of the C & O Railroad, which reached Hinton in 1873.

The community at Irish Mountain continued to thrive on into the 20th century, with an average of fifteen to twenty families occupying the area. St. Colman's Church and Cemetery continued to be the focal point of the community. The church of St. Colman's never received its own priest, but continued to rely upon the Hinton parish for such services. About 1928 the old log structure was covered over by clapboard siding and painted white, giving the building the distinctive appearance that it retains today.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Marshall, Paul D., ed., A Cultural Research Project, New River Gorge National River, West Virginia, Charleston, W. Va., December, 1981.  
McLean, Lois C., St. Colman's Roman Catholic Church and Cemetery, Register of Raleigh County Historic Places Inventory Form, Sept., 1983.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property One acre

Quadrangle name Meadow Creek

Quadrangle scale 1,24,000

### UTM References

A 

|      |   |   |         |   |   |   |   |          |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|------|---|---|---------|---|---|---|---|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1    | 7 | 5 | 0       | 6 | 9 | 5 | 0 | 4        | 1 | 7 | 9 | 6 | 0 | 0 |
| Zone |   |   | Easting |   |   |   |   | Northing |   |   |   |   |   |   |

B 

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C 

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| Zone |  |  | Easting |  |  |  |  | Northing |  |  |  |  |  |  |

H 

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|      |  |  |         |  |  |  |  |          |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Zone |  |  | Easting |  |  |  |  | Northing |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**Verbal boundary description and justification** "Beginning at a marked stone near the Public Road (Secondary Route 26) leading from Richman's (Sic) Ferry to Raleigh County Courthouse (Beckley) on the north side of said road and bounded on the West side by a lane leading to the house of William Dillon so as to contain one Acre..."-Raleigh Co. Deed Book A, p. 348

### 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 Michael J. Pauley, Historian  
Historic Preservation Unit

organization W. Va. Dept. of Culture & History date June 29, 1984

street & number Cultural Center  
Capitol Complex telephone (304)-348-0240

city or town Charleston state West Virginia

## 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

title State Historic Preservation Unit date June 29, 1984

For NPS use only

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

date 8/23/1984

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

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St. Colman's Roman Catholic Church and Cemetery,  
Continuation sheet Raleigh Co., W. Va. Item number

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2. The St. Colman's Cemetery, to the rear of the church, became the principal burial ground for the Irish Mountain Community. The cemetery grew to contain rows of neat tombstones bearing such community names as McCarthy, O'Conner, Sullivan, Fitzpatrick, Gwinn, and so on. Many of the stones bear such revealing information as "Born, County Kerry, Ireland", and some contain interesting epitaphs. An example of these epitaphs, so reflective of the cultural values and religious beliefs of the Irish community, is carved on one gravestone of an early settler:

"Remember kind friends as you pass by,  
As you are now, so once was I.  
As I am now, so you must be.  
Prepare for death, and follow me."

St. Colman's Cemetery has another interesting feature; a "Lost Corner", located in a rear corner of the cemetery. This small "Lost Corner" is un-consecrated ground and here are the graves of those infants or other individuals who died without benefit of baptism.

St. Colman's Church and Cemetery is today practically the only visible remains of the once thriving ethnic farming community on Irish Mountain. Sitting atop Sullivan's Knob, its prominence is unequaled by any other natural or built feature for many miles. Its significance was recognized locally when it was officially designated a Raleigh County Historical Landmark in September of 1983.

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Ripley, Opal, "Irish Mountain Founded by Hardy Sons of Old Sod",  
Raleigh Register, Beckeley, W. Va., June 16, 1963.

#10 Geographical Data

Verbal boundary description and justification: (Cont'd)

Beginning at the eastern point where Secondary Route 26 intersects with an unimproved road that leads North to Sullivan Knob, thence East along the North side of Secondary Route 26 200 feet, thence North 200 feet, thence West 200 feet to the Eastern side of the unimproved road, thence 200 feet South along the East side of the unimproved road to the point of beginning.