

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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RECEIVED  
DATE ENTERED  
MAR 23 1977  
AUG 22 1977

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

\*\*

Church of the Assumption

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

1227 Seventh Avenue North

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Nashville

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

VICINITY OF

Fifth

STATE

Tennessee

CODE

47

COUNTY

Davidson

CODE

37

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

OWNERSHIP

STATUS

PRESENT USE

DISTRICT

PUBLIC

OCCUPIED

AGRICULTURE

MUSEUM

BUILDING(S)

PRIVATE

UNOCCUPIED

COMMERCIAL

PARK

STRUCTURE

BOTH

WORK IN PROGRESS

EDUCATIONAL

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

SITE

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

ACCESSIBLE

ENTERTAINMENT

RELIGIOUS

OBJECT

IN PROCESS

YES: RESTRICTED

GOVERNMENT

SCIENTIFIC

BEING CONSIDERED

YES: UNRESTRICTED

INDUSTRIAL

TRANSPORTATION

NO

MILITARY

OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Catholic Diocese of Nashville

STREET & NUMBER

Catholic Center, 2400 Twenty-first Avenue South

CITY, TOWN

Nashville

VICINITY OF

STATE

Tennessee

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Metropolitan Nashville-Davidson County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

Public Square

CITY, TOWN

Nashville

STATE

Tennessee

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Historical and Architectural Survey

DATE

February 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 type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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

The Church of the Assumption was initially planned by Jacob Geiger, a German immigrant and master builder. The actual construction took place under the guidance of Father Vogel in 1859. Dedicated August 14, 1859, the Church of the Assumption was an impressive building for this new North Nashville neighborhood. Built on a bare lot west of the Buddeke House at the corner of Monroe and Vine streets, the sturdy, rectangular shape, three by six bay, plain, Romanesque style building had masonry foundation walls and brick bearing walls eighteen inches thick. From early records it is noted the church had a wide gable roof and square shape belfry tower with a low pointed roof, located above the entrance. The facade was punctuated with Norman style, semi-circular arch headed apertures. A low, one-story brick wing extended out from the back behind the sanctuary area. The tall ceiling was constructed of groined vaults supported across five columns at each side of the central vault and aisles. Many of the church furnishings were removed during the Civil War occupation when the building was used by Union soldiers.

The Romanesque design was changed to the Gothic style in 1882-1887. When these changes were made, the present windows were added with Gothic tracery and heads. The present tower and spire were added and the wide transept wing was built to extend the sanctuary area. The new construction began where the communion rail is presently located. The new addition has a workroom with large built-in cabinets and shelves behind the sanctuary, and there are sacristy rooms at either side of the sanctuary. The priest's door in the side wall was bricked over. There is a basement under the addition which houses the heating plant for the church and school building. The first of the present memorial windows were added in 1882. The Gothic style vaulted ceiling was framed out over the original groin vaults, and the Gothic furnishings, murals and altars were added by 1903. The Gothic style changed the former building to suit the architectural vogue of the later period.

Many lots in the North Nashville neighborhood have been cleared of significant buildings, making the remaining frame and brick Victorian type buildings more prominent. The church school building on the south side and rectory on the left side are fronted by the wide, herringbone pattern brick sidewalks which grace the streetscape.

The Buddeke House is owned by the church. The church also owns the rectory and the old school building. The rectory which is included in this nomination, is occupied by a caretaker. Some of the church furnishings have been stored there while they are being restored. The school building is leased to a Community Action group. The school interior is in good condition and the old schoolrooms have the original slate blackboards. The three buildings are constructed of brick. The rectory and school were built by 1874 and 1879 respectively. The original congregation met at the Buddeke House which predates the church and which is presently leased by a graphics company.

Built in 1873-1874, the Church of the Assumption Rectory is a narrow-fronted, tall, two-story brick building designed in the late Victorian style. Once common to this area, there are few buildings of this quality left standing today. The building was designed to fit the narrow lot, and the principal mass is deeper than the width at the front. Distinguishing features are the decorative bracketed cornice and heavily

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carved hood moldings over the arched facade windows and doors. The plan consists of a side hall entrance with the parlor and dining room and rear kitchen wing running through from front to back. The tall staircase in the entry hall leads to an upstairs hall and two adjoining bedrooms. The tiny fireplaces have cast iron fixtures and the carved mantles, woodwork, floors and staircase are all original and in excellent condition.

Some type of restoration work was done on the church in the early 1920s. The present restoration is based on photographic documentation and actual physical remains of earlier materials. The restoration began with the brick facade walls which were sandblasted and tuckpointed. The roof was sealed and protective storm glass was installed over the stained glass windows. The front doors were refinished and the antique hardware was repaired by the Geist Machine Shop, which had fashioned the wrought iron gates joining the church, school and rectory buildings added decades before. The interior plaster walls were restored and painted a light beige color. Original ceiling fixtures were rewired and restored and new flood lamps were installed to light the altars. The large canvas panel wall murals attached above the altars are being restored. It is believed that these were added in 1902; the artist remains unknown. The style is that of the Spanish Renaissance, depicting the Assumption of the Virgin to Heaven on the corresponding side of the altar, and there are two smaller paintings flanking the side altars depicting angels with large wings holding incense burners on long chains. Early photographs show additional murals (frescos) and geometric designs and tracery decorating the archvolts and walls above the main altar.

# 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 type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input 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 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 1858 - 1874

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Jacob Geiger, builder

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Located six blocks from the Tennessee State Capitol, the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary is an early landmark in the north district of the inner city area. Erected in 1858 and dedicated in 1859, the newly restored church is the second oldest Catholic Church in Nashville, the second Catholic parish in Nashville, the third in Davidson County, and the eleventh parish church in the Diocese.

Assumption Church traces its origin back to the earliest days of catholicity in Nashville. In 1858 some of the brick used for construction came from Holy Rosary Church, the first Catholic Church to be built in Nashville, which stood on the hill now occupied by the state capitol. For the first 100 years, it was in the hands of diocesan priests, for a quarter of a century the Precious Blood Fathers were in charge; the Franciscan Fathers ministered here for five years, and in between times there was a Benedictine priest and a Dominican. Few churches in the United States can match its record of giving to the clergy an Archbishop and a Cardinal. In this church were baptized the late John A. Floersch, Archbishop of Louisville, and Samuel Cardinal Stritch, the first American ever to be appointed to the Roman Curia. The colorful history of the Church of the Assumption is a reflection of the religious and social history of the community it serves. There are literally thousands today who claim lineal descent from the early parishioners. The Church of the Assumption became the social center for the German Catholic families who came to Nashville as early as the 1830s.

As the Catholic population grew, the numerous German-speaking Catholics desired a church service of their own with a priest who could hear their confessions and preach to them in their native language. The second parish began under the supervision of Richard Pius Miles, O. P., the first Bishop of Nashville. The Bishop arranged for some of his priests to come to the North Nashville area where this part of his congregation met for Mass in the old Buddeke House at the corner of Vine and Monroe streets. Bishop Miles appealed to the Leopoldine Association in Austria, an organization established in 1829 to aid the Catholic missions in America. The association promised financial aid to Bishop Miles in his efforts to erect a German parish. The Bishop eventually brought the Rev. Ivo Schacht, a Flemish priest who spoke German. Father Schacht held special services in German at a given hour on Sundays in the Cathedral (Saint Mary's Church). Rev. Schacht was instrumental in getting Dr. David T. McGavock, a wealthy land holder, to donate the land for the Church. Dr. McGavock's father, one of the earliest settlers on the Cumberland and the first man to map the area, owned some 2,200 acres on both sides of the Cumberland River. Dr. McGavock inherited 960 acres of this land and was selling some lots in North Nashville. Knowing the value of a Catholic parish to the development of the area, he made a deed gift to Bishop Miles, provided the latter would erect a Catholic church on the lot. This deed stated

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Flanigen, The Right Reverend George J. The Church of the Assumption, An Historical Sketch from 1859-1959. Nashville: Assumption Parish, 1959.
- Graham, Eleanor, ed. Nashville. Historical Commission of Metropolitan Nashville-Davidson County, TN, 1974.
- Pursell, Julie. "Aging Gothic Church of the Assumption Undergoing Painstaking Restoration Inside" Nashville Banner, February 2, 1977.
- Huddleston, Ed. "Big Wheels and Little Wagons" Nashville Banner, 1959.

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than 1 acre RBF 5-20-77 (see phone sheet)

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,6	5,1,8,7,4,0	4,0,0,3,2,2,0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

## VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The property nominated is a rectangular lot 275' by 153', bounded on the northeast by Seventh Avenue and on the northwest by Monroe Street.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Gail Hammerquist, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

Tennessee Historical Commission

DATE

February 1977

STREET & NUMBER

170 Second Avenue North

TELEPHONE

(615) 741-2371

CITY OR TOWN

Nashville

STATE

Tennessee

# 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

*Herbert L. Higer*

TITLE

Executive Director, Tennessee Historical Commission

DATE

3/18/77

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

DIRECTOR OFFICE OF ARCHITECTURE AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST: *Charles Blount*  
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

8/22/77

MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

8.12.77

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that the building should be erected within eighteen months, "a neat Roman Catholic church or chapel, to be used forever as such church or chapel." The site was located ten blocks north of the new Capitol and Saint Mary's Church. As early as 1853, Father Schacht and Bishop Miles collaborated with John Geiger, a master builder, to plan the church building. Schacht left the diocese before enough money was raised for the church. A young German seminarian, John Vogel, was ordained in Saint Mary's Church in 1858, and he began instructing the German speaking Catholic families. He became the pastor of the proposed parish and was put in charge of construction. He became the architect, contractor, and superintendent for the new church.

Two months before the deadline wet up in McGavock's deed, the church was almost completed and it was decided to have the dedication on the Vigil of the Feast of the Assumption, August 14, 1859. Bishop Miles performed the ceremonies of dedication, assisted by the Rev. Messrs. Hoste, C'Arco and Vogel. At that time the Church of the Assumption was a neat, substantial brick building designed in the Romanesque Revival style. At the time of the dedication it was surmounted by a small belfry tower. The high groined arches of the ceiling were supported by five tall columns, one at each side of the central vault.

As the church was built, many problems developed. There was a debt outstanding of approximately \$7,000, and the building had been constructed in such a way that it extended across ten feet of the adjoining lot, not owned by the parish. Tanksley and Cook, and other craftsmen who had helped build the church, had entered a suit to collect the amount due them for their work. The debt remained unpaid and a notice was posted that the church building would be sold at auction. At this juncture, George H. Wessell, a member of the predominately German congregation, paid off the debt. The lot to the north side was bought by John H. Buddeke and George Wessell from Dr. McGavock, and donated to the Bishop of the Diocese.

During the Battle of Nashville (December 1864) the Church of the Assumption was commandeered by the Union Army. The soldiers pillaged the church taking the sacred vessels, vestments, statues, and interior decorations. Among the debris found after the War was a small silver plate inscribed as follows: "Presented to the German Catholic Church by G. H. and J. F. Wessel and A. Roth, 1860." This plate had been on a chalice given to the church by these three young men, and it is presently attached to a new chalice which is still in use. During the year 1863, Father Emmeren Bliemel, the parish priest was charged with being correspondent in Nashville of Freeman's Journal, a New York Catholic weekly sympathetic to the southern cause. He was released by the Bishop and crossed Union lines to join the Tennessee regiment of the Confederate Army fighting in Georgia. The priest was killed at the Battle of Jonesboro (Georgia) while administering the sacraments to a dying soldier.

For the first thirteen years no priest had remained longer than three years. In 1872 Bishop Freehan decided to entrust the parish to an order of Fathers of the Precious

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Blood from Carthagena, Ohio. Serving twenty-six years, this order established a convent, school and a two-story brick priest's house next to the church. The church was enlarged and the steeple was added. New Gothic design altars were a gift of the G. H. Ratterman family and memorial windows of stained and colored glass were added to the new Gothic style interior. By 1880 there were over fifty families in the congregation with 200 communicants, and this figure more than doubled by 1895. The church was cleared of all debts by that time and it became the most prosperous time for the community.

Assumption Church rectory was begun in 1873 and dedicated in May 1874. Built as a priest's home, the rectory stands on the 45' by 152' lot next to the church. With the exception of a few additions for modern convenience, the building has scarcely been changed for over one hundred years of continuous use.

The first attempt to organize a school in the parish occurred in 1860 when two Dominican sisters from Germany came to open a school with funds they hoped to receive from King Louis of Bavaria. Sister Maria Benedicta Bauer and Sister Thomasina Ginker left the following year when funds for the school did not materialize as planned. The Catholic Directory of 1860 notes a school for children of the German congregation attached to the Church of the Assumption. According to Catholicity in Tennessee "there was a school in a room in the rear of the church from the very early times." Catholic directories of the 1870s tell of a "parish school attached to almost every parish" in Nashville. It is likely the church school was a makeshift arrangement taught by whatever layman happened to be available under the supervision of the pastor.

Assumption was to wait until 1874 to get the first school taught by sisters. Assumption School was organized in 1874 when Sisters of the Precious Blood came to Nashville. The Sisters purchased the house and convent at 707 Monroe Street; school opened in September 1874. By 1879 the enrollment had grown so large Bishop Freehan bought the lot adjoining the church on the south. Jacob Geiger, a master builder who had helped plan the church, drew plans for the two-story brick school building which began in 1879. The school was taught by three sisters and had an enrollment of 110. In 1899 the Precious Blood Sisters relinquished the parish school. The Dominican Sisters at Saint Cecilia Academy took charge of the 150 pupils enrolled in the eight grades. In 1916, the school, with an increased enrollment, moved across the street to the old Buddeke House. Three years later the old school was renovated and classes were resumed there until it closed in 1959.

Reminiscences of Assumption school's most famous pupil, the future Cardinal Stritch, have been recorded by the Precious Blood Sisters who taught there during the 1890s. When the Fathers of the order left the parish in 1898, the teaching sisters were reduced to three who remained until the Sisters from Saint Cecilia Academy resumed

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their duties. The old Buddeke House is still standing across the street from the Assumption school building, church and priest's house. The Buddeke House was bought by the church in 1915 and renovated that year for the newly formed Catholic Club.

In the 1950s the parish experienced changes when the population moved further out into the suburbs. At this time a new north parish was established with the Saint Pius X Church and school. Today services are held on Sunday for approximately 100 persons, and during the Christmas and Easter seasons many of the descendants of the original families return to the church.

Anxious about the decaying structure and general state of disrepair, restoration work has been generated and financed by families whose ancestors were parishioners. In 1973 the first meetings were held to discuss the restoration of the church. Friends of the Assumption Church was formed in 1974 and funds were provided for the first phase of the exterior restoration. A second fund raising drive provided money for new storm sashes of protective glass to cover the precious stained glass windows, and the exterior was completely restored and waterproofed. The interior restoration began in 1976. Scaffolding was erected to aid in chipping away the rotted plaster and the interior walls and ceiling were replastered and painted; the building was rewired and banks of flood lamps were installed to illuminate the three altars. A fine restoration craftsman was hired to restore the beautiful hand-painted murals above the altars. Volunteers are presently restoring the polychrome sculptures and furnishings.