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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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NATIONAL REGISTER

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 Church of St. Boniface

other names/site number Church of St. Mary

2. Location

street & number 203 S 5th Avenue East  not for publication N/A

city or town Melrose  vicinity N/A

state Minnesota code MN county Stearns code 145 zip code 56352

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.)

Nina Archabal 10/17/93  
Signature of certifying official/Title Nina Archabal Date

State Historic Preservation Officer

State of 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 certifying official/Title \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

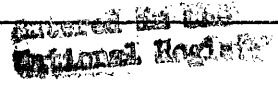
- entered in the National Register.  See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register  See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Delores Byers

11/12/93



Church of St. Boniface  
Name of Property

Stearns, Minnesota  
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	
2	1	buildings
		sites
		structures
	1	objects
2	2	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)

Religion: religious facility

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Late Victorian: Romanesque

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation granite  
walls brick  
granite  
roof slate  
other

**Narrative Description**

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

Church of St. Boniface  
Name of Property

Stearns, Minnesota  
County and State

## 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.)

- 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:

- 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.

### 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 # \_\_\_\_\_

### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Ethnic Heritage: European

Social History

### Period of Significance

1899-1943 for both areas of significance

### Significant Dates

1899

1907

### Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

### Cultural Affiliation

N/A

### Architect/Builder

Bergmann, George, architect

Richmond, E. D., builder

#### Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Church of St. Mary, Melrose

Church of St. Boniface  
Name of Property

Stearns, Minnesota  
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than 1 acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 1 5 3 5 9 2 1 0 5 0 5 9 0 3 0  
Zone Easting Northing  
2

3  
Zone Easting Northing  
4

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Susan Granger and Patricia Murphy

organization Gemini Research date June 1, 1993

street & number 15 E. 9th Street telephone (612) 589-3846

city or town Morris state MN zip code 56267

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Church of St. Mary of Melrose

street & number 203 S. 5th Ave. E. telephone (612) 256-4207

city or town Melrose state MN zip code 56352

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Church of St. Boniface  
Melrose, Stearns, MN

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7. NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

The Church of St. Boniface, built in 1899, is an imposing, Romanesque Revival style building that is the dominant and most architecturally distinguished structure in Melrose, a small town of 2,560 people. In form and detailing, the design of the church recalls the architecture of many of the twin-towered Romanesque churches and cathedrals of medieval Germany and central Europe.

St. Boniface was built of red pressed brick manufactured at Menominee, Wisconsin, laid with white mortar joints. The superstructure sits on a high foundation of massive dark gray St. Cloud granite blocks, with wide, extra-thick white mortar joints. The dimensions of the building are 76 feet wide by 184 feet long by 40 feet tall.

The symmetrical main (eastern) facade is dominated by a pair of square, 130 foot, brick corner towers which are topped by octagonal belfries with metal-covered, onion-domed caps which are in turn topped by cupolas capped with Coptic crosses.

The main facade has three widely spaced entrances, one at the center and one at the base of each tower. Each entrance consists of a double leaf door with narrow rounded arched panes, topped by a rounded arched light, all set within a rounded arch of rockfaced gray granite blocks. At the top of each entrance is a tall gabled pediment of painted pressed metal. The pediment of the central doorway has volutes and a pair of pressed metal gargoyle-like faces at its base. The central doorway also has engaged columns of polished granite which are topped by ornate carved stone capitals with leafy medieval-inspired detailing. Each of the three entrances is approached via a set of stone steps flanked by heavy granite railings which rise from massive round granite pylons. On either side of the central entrance, cut into the foundation, are two smaller single leaf doors which lead directly into the dining hall in the basement of the church.

The exterior surfaces of the building are enlivened by colorful rockfaced gray granite trim which contrasts with the red brickwork, blind arched corbelling at the cornice level. There are narrow rounded arched window openings and a central rose window on the main facade. The foundation is pierced with rectangular basement windows and door openings.

The windows illuminating the nine-bay nave have tall, narrow rounded arched openings filled with leaded and stained glass. The bays are divided brick buttresses topped by ramped caps of gray granite. Along the ridge of the

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gabled roof over the sanctuary are two smaller onion domed wooden octagonal ventilators which are also topped by crosses. There is a cross at the eastern end of the roof ridge at the top of the main facade.

A tall rounded apse topped by a conical cap projects from the western end of the church. Encircling the apse is a shorter, polygonal projecting bay with rounded arched windows which houses the sacristy. Two tall brick chimneys flank the apse. Projecting from the northern and southern facades of the church are small rounded arched tower-like bays which house the confessionals and rectangular flat roofed entrance bays.

The exterior of the church is remarkably intact and in good condition. Minor modifications have been made such as replacing basement level windows with glass block, adding sensitive new brick and stone entrances on the northern and southern facades, and replacing original doors. Historic photographs indicate that the rounded arched openings of the belfries on the two towers originally had multi-paned windows which were later replaced with the present louvers. In addition, photographs indicate that there were originally low wooden balustrades and wooden corner pinnacles at the top of the brick portion of each of the towers.

The interior of the Church of St. Boniface is as elaborate as the exterior. The nave has a central aisle with two side aisles. Nine free standing clustered wooden columns with carved leafy capitals support a soaring crossed rib vaulted plaster ceiling. Oak pews provide seating for 1,000 people. At the western end of the building is a chancel with a high altar, and two side altars. Behind the chancel is a polygonal sacristy which is lighted by rounded arched stained glass windows. At the rear (eastern end) of the nave is a choir loft which is supported by two free standing columns and has a blind arcaded balustrade. The original pipe organ was installed in 1905; it was replaced by a large modern pipe organ in 1974.

The plaster walls of the church's interior were painted in 1912 by Associated Artists of Milwaukee, a well known interior decorating firm. The interior was repainted in 1960 and 1986 with an attempt to preserve much of the original design and color scheme. The nave is currently painted in various shades of cream, pink, and brown. A floral motif edges the ribbed vaulting and there is gold paint edging the column capitals. The central vault which rises above the nave has a blue painted ceiling with pink clouds and 10 painted circular medallions along the sides. Painted on the curved ceiling of the apse are stars and two angels hovering on either side of a decorated circle at the apex above the high altar. A painted band encircles the nave at sill level.

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Melrose, Stearns, MN

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Interior features and furnishings of the church include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Pews. The nave is filled with original oak pews which have rounded arched sides and rounded arched applied detailing, continuing the Romanesque Revival theme of the church's design.
2. Stained glass windows. The interior of the church is illuminated by exceptional stained glass windows. Sixteen large rounded arched windows along the nave feature biblical events and Christian symbols. There are also a number of smaller circular and rounded arched stained glass windows.
3. High altar. At the back of the chancel is the original tall, elaborately carved and painted wooden high altar. It was made in Germany and installed before the dedication of the church in 1899. Within its rounded arched niches are statues of St. Boniface, the Virgin Mary, and St. Patrick. The altar's details are highlighted in gold leaf.
4. Side altars. Flanking the chancel is a pair of ornate painted wooden side alters which were also hand-carved in Germany. The left altar has statues of the Virgin Mary, St. Cecilia, and St. Elizabeth. The right altar has statues of St. Joseph, St. Henry, and St. Aloysius.
5. Stations of the Cross. Along the walls of the nave, attached to the engaged clustered columns which support the ceiling, are ornate wooden stations of the cross which were carved in Germany and installed in 1901. The 34" by 54" sculptures have painted relief carvings within rounded arches which are topped by crosses.
6. Tapestries. Flanking the high altar on the sides are two large tapestries which were installed in 1905. One depicts the Assumption of the Virgin Mary and the other the Ascension of Christ.
7. Confessional doors. On both the north and south walls of the nave are rounded arched entrances leading to small confessionals which are housed within the rounded bays which project from the church's exterior. Set within each rounded arch are small panelled wooden doors topped by elaborately carved wooden screens into which are set circular medallions with a painted biblical scenes.

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Church of St. Boniface  
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8. Light fixtures. Lighting the sanctuary are 20 original octagonal wrought iron and gold glass light fixtures which are suspended from the ceiling by chains.
9. Crucifix and statuary. The sanctuary has a large painted wooden crucifix and a statue of Christ dying in Mary's arms, both dating from the early 20th century.
10. Baptismal font. An ornate baptismal font stands in the chancel.

In the basement of the church is a large dining hall and kitchen. The walls of the dining hall are faced with glazed yellow tile blocks.

South of the church, and separated from it by a paved driveway, is a 2 1/2 story, Queen Anne style brick rectory which was designed by Anthony J. Blix of St. Cloud and completed in 1907. The rectory has a steeply pitched, slate-covered hipped roof with intersecting gables and a hipped roofed dormer on the main (eastern) facade. The house was constructed of red pressed brick with gray granite trim. Its asymmetrical design is dominated by a three story tower at the southeastern corner which is adorned at the attic level with panels of red and cream colored brick forming an "X" pattern. The tower has a polygonal roof topped by a cross. There are modillions and dentils at the cornice level of the roofline. Most windows are segmental arched with 1/1 sash. A large L-shaped porch wraps around the northeastern corner of the main facade. The porch has a hipped roof, classical columns, a pediment over the entrance, and a rockfaced concrete block foundation. At the rear of the southern facade is a rectangular woodframe projecting bay with rounded corners and a leaded glass transom window. The rectory is basically intact and in good condition. A one story flat roofed, red brick, circa 1950 garage has been added to the rear (western) facade. In addition, aluminum combination windows have been installed and the porch has been enclosed.

In the south lawn of the rectory is the Our Lady of Fatima shrine which was constructed in 1950 to commemorate a visit of the statue of Our Lady of Fatima to the Church of St. Boniface in 1950. The shrine is built on a round wall which was constructed of uncut fieldstones set into concrete. Three steps lead to a platform which has a concrete standing statue of Our Lady of Fatima, three smaller statues of kneeling children, and a lamb.

Southwest of the church is a small, shed roofed, woodframe storage shed built circa 1980.



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8. NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Church of St. Boniface, completed in 1899, is historically significant as an institution of outstanding social, cultural, ethnic, and religious importance to the community of Melrose, a town of 2,560 people in central Minnesota's Stearns County. For nearly a century, St. Boniface has both symbolized and embodied the social, religious, cultural, and political activities of the sizable German-American Catholic population of the Melrose area. The church serves as an excellent example of the importance of ethnic parishes to the history of Minnesota's substantial rural German-American immigrant population in the 19th and early 20th centuries. St. Boniface is eligible for the National Register under Criterion A, significance to the broad patterns of our history, in the areas of Ethnic Heritage and Social History. The property is also significant within the statewide historic context entitled Railroads and Agricultural Development, 1870-1940. While religious properties are ordinarily not eligible for the National Register, St. Boniface meets the requirements of Criteria Consideration A because it illustrates the broad impact of the German Catholic Church on the community and because it embodies the importance of the Church in the social and cultural history of the area.

GERMAN-AMERICAN SETTLEMENT

The small community of Melrose in Stearns County is located on the southern bank of the Sauk River in the heart of one of the most heavily German Catholic parts of the U.S. German-speaking peoples, Minnesota's single largest immigrant group during the years 1860-1905, settled in four major concentrations in the state, including Stearns County. Stearns County's German settlers began to arrive in 1855. They were from a variety of home regions including Prussia, Westphalia, Bavaria, Hanover, and, to a lesser extent, Luxembourg, Baden, Wurttemberg, Hesse, Alsace, Switzerland, and Austria (Conzen 1990, 12). During the earliest years of immigration, Stearns County's Germans tended to settle in rural clusters near those of the same home region. Between 1865 and 1900 Germans became the largest Catholic immigrant group to settle in the U.S., surpassing the Irish who were the most numerous Catholic immigrants before 1870 (Barry 1981, 80).

German Catholics, which comprised more than 35 percent of the Germans who immigrated to the U.S. between 1865 and 1900, were attracted to Stearns County through the efforts of Slovenian-born Father Francis X. Pierz. Pierz had been living near the Great Lakes and along the upper Mississippi as a missionary to tribal groups since 1838. In the 1850s, while living in

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northern Minnesota, Pierz made a concerted effort to bring German Catholics to central Minnesota and particularly to the valley of the Sauk River, which runs east and west through Stearns County. In a series of articles Pierz publicized the economic opportunities available to those who would settle on the unbroken farmlands along the Sauk and more specifically beckoned "Germans who live in overpopulated cities and are becoming too anglicized." He hoped that the choicest pieces of land would go to "thrifty Catholics" who would confirm that "Germans prove to be the best farmers and the best Christians in America." Pierz further specified the type of German Catholics he wanted, discouraging "freethinkers, red republicans, atheists or agitators" (Johnson 1981, 167).

German Catholics responded enthusiastically to Pierz's articles, swarming to Stearns and surrounding counties. By the late 1850s there were 1,500 German Catholic settlers in Stearns County. By 1860, 69 percent of the rural households in Stearns County were headed by German-Americans.

German-Americans were particularly concentrated in an 18-township core where 75 percent of households were headed by Germans in 1880. Within this core, 6 of the 18 townships were populated by 99 or 100 percent German-speaking people, and 11 other townships were populated by more than 90 percent German-speaking people in 1880 (Conzen 1990, 11-12).

Pierz was instrumental in bringing Benedictine monks and nuns, most of whom were German, to Stearns County in 1856 and 1857. Beginning in 1856 the Benedictines established numerous Catholic parishes in central Minnesota in addition to staffing the missions Pierz had established. Benedictines also founded St. John's Seminary (later St. John's Abbey and University) in the 1850s, St. Benedict's Academy (later the College of St. Benedict) in the 1870s, and a number of schools, nursing homes, hospitals, orphanages, and other institutions in the region. By the early 20th century, the Benedictines were joined by other religious including a group of Crosier fathers and two separate communities of Franciscan sisters in establishing schools and other institutions in the diocese.

In 1892 Stearns County had the highest density of German-American Catholic parishes of any settlement area in United States (Conzen 1990, 32). By 1916 the county had approximately 45 Catholic parishes, most of which were German-speaking. The oldest of the 45 were 5 parishes established by Father Pierz between 1854 and 1856. Between their arrival in 1856 and the 1880s, the Benedictines established approximately 25 additional parishes, most in Stearns County and most for German-speaking settlers. The Church of St. Boniface was among those parishes. After the Diocese of St. Cloud was established in 1889, secular priests began organizing parishes and, during

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the next few decades, assumed responsibility for many of those which had been founded by the Benedictines.

Stearns County's approximately 45 pre-1917 Catholic parishes, in addition to serving thousands of Catholic farmers, appear to have had a direct impact on the settlement of the county's townsites. Approximately 14 of these parishes were founded before the townsite in which they were located was platted, presumably influencing the establishment of the community. Two other parishes were founded in the same year as the surrounding townsite was platted. Another 11 parishes were located at sites which were never platted, but remained rural crossroads where the church sometimes stood alone and sometimes was accompanied by a commercial building, creamery, or residence. The remaining 18 parishes, like the Church of St. Boniface in Melrose, were founded after the surrounding townsite was platted. With the exception of St. Cloud, which had grown into Minnesota's fifth largest city by 1910, Stearns County's platted settlements remained small agricultural service centers which catered to the surrounding farmers.

## FOUNDING OF MELROSE AND THE CHURCH OF ST. BONIFACE

Melrose, like at least one-third of Stearns County's townsites, was founded by Yankee-Americans who were eventually outnumbered by German immigrants. Yankee-Americans first established farms on the site of Melrose in 1858, speculating that the St. Paul and Pacific Railroad would bring rail service to the site. Thirteen years later, in 1871, speculators platted the townsite, and the following year the St. Paul and Pacific did arrive on its route westward from St. Cloud.

The terminus of the railroad line remained at Melrose for seven years until late 1878, therefore providing employment for large numbers of workers. Railroad jobs attracted the first foreign immigrants to Melrose--large numbers of Irish who worked as brakemen, switchmen, firemen, and laborers. The Irish were an ethnic minority in Stearns County, numbering approximately 1,000 in 1880, compared to 10,500 German-Americans. Most of the county's Irish settled in and around Melrose. In 1895 the Great Northern railroad (successor to the St. Paul and Pacific) moved its division headquarters, roundhouse, and shops from St. Cloud to Melrose, bringing more jobs to the village. Between 1872 and the early 20th century, Irish immigrants held many unskilled and semi-skilled jobs for the railroad and worked as storeclerks in Melrose (while the German-Americans were farmers and business owners). Many Irish left Stearns County shortly after the turn of the century, and more left Melrose in 1923 when the Great Northern shops were moved back to St. Cloud. According to O'Connor and for unspecified reasons, Stearns County's

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extensive granite industry did not attract many Irish workers, and many of Stearns County's Irish eventually moved to St. Paul and other cities to work in factories and for railroads (O'Connor 1992, 5; Hellerman 1992).

Although the Irish were the first major ethnic group in Melrose, German immigrants outnumbered them by the 1880s when they began to arrive in large numbers to establish farms in the townships surrounding the village. Between 1881, when Melrose was incorporated as a village, and 1915, the town's population grew by 400 percent, rising from 611 to 2,500 people. The majority of these newcomers were German immigrants (Yzermans 1972, 47).

Melrose had a mixed economy built upon railroad shops and a few industries such as the Melrose Granite Company (which was founded in 1897 and employed 60 stonecutters in 1908) and the Melrose Brewing Company (which was established in 1911). The town's major underpinning was agriculture, however. A number of mills, elevators, and creameries in Melrose marketed and processed farm produce, and retail stores, lumberyards, implement dealers, and service businesses supplied the area's German-American farmers. As is typical of service communities in agricultural settings, Melrose also became an important retirement community as area farmers began to retire and move into Melrose as early as the 1890s.

Early Melrose was characterized by a mix of religious denominations but was dominated by the German Catholic church after 1878. The village's first church, the Church of St. Patrick, was organized by thirteen Irish Catholic families in 1872, and attended by one of the few Irish Benedictines. A Methodist church was organized in 1876, an Episcopal church in 1879, St. Paul's German Lutheran church in 1890, and a Presbyterian church in 1899. In 1878, six years after St. Patrick's was founded, twelve German-American families separated from the parish to form their own German language Catholic church, the Church of St. Boniface. They organized under the direction of a Benedictine, Father Paul Rittenmaier, who was a German-born priest from nearby St. John's Abbey. Since shortly after its establishment in 1878, St. Boniface has always been the largest congregation in Melrose, serving both townspeople and farmers within about a five mile radius. The Methodist, Episcopal, and Presbyterian churches eventually disbanded, St. Paul's Lutheran remained very small (with a membership which did not exceed 25 families between the years 1890 and 1945), and St. Patrick's remained about one-quarter the size of St. Boniface.

The founders of the new St. Boniface parish built a woodframe church in 1879, and added a combined convent and parochial school in 1882 (razed) and a parsonage in 1889 (razed). As was typical in Stearns County, the St.

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Boniface school was taught by the Sisters of St. Benedict from St. Benedict's Convent in nearby St. Joseph. By 1891 there were 130 families in the parish and 300 children attended the school. The woodframe church was enlarged in 1895.

Construction of the present church began in 1897. The cornerstone was laid in a ceremony on May 1, 1898, which was led by a procession of 5,000 people. The dedication of the completed church on June 7, 1899, was marked by a high mass in both German and English which was officiated by the Bishop of St. Cloud and ten priests. The church cost approximately \$50,000 to build. The granite foundation was constructed by St. Cloud contractor Carl Kropp who hired many members of the parish to work on his crew, including stone masons from the Melrose Granite Company. Building contractor E. D. Richmond of Melrose built the superstructure, with F. A. Panburn of St. Cloud serving as brick mason and the St. Cloud Iron Works supplying the iron.

When it was completed, the Church of St. Boniface was the largest church in the Diocese of St. Cloud, seating 1,000 people in a town with a population of only about 900. The church was the largest and most monumental piece of architecture in Melrose, far outsizing all other structures in the community. It towered above the town, providing an ever-present reminder of the strength of the Church, and was an architectural landmark visible across the flat prairies from many miles away.

St. Boniface was constructed under the direction of Father Bernard J. Richter. In 1894, five years after the Diocese of St. Cloud was established and secular priests began to replace the Benedictines as pastors, Richter became the first diocesan priest to serve St. Boniface, ending 16 years of mission status and succeeding four previous Benedictine priests from St. John's. Born near Muenster, Westphalia, in 1863 and educated at the University of Muenster and at St. Francis Seminary in Milwaukee, Richter was beloved by his parishioners, many of whom were of Westphalian descent. He administered the construction of the present Church of St. Boniface as well as a new rectory (1907, extant), convent (1908, razed), and school (1911, razed). During his tenure the parish of St. Boniface doubled in size. Father Richter continued to serve as pastor until his death in 1921 at the age of 58.

SOCIAL AND ETHNIC SIGNIFICANCE OF ST. BONIFACE

Immigration historians agree that many immigrant groups, including the German-Americans, committed tremendous resources to establishing ethnic churches which stood as the symbolic, inspirational, and organizational

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centers of social and cultural life in each community.

Historian Philip Gleason demonstrates how important it was for German-American Catholics, as a minority culture, to develop strong self-identification. He explains that these immigrants were distinct from mainstream American culture by their foreign birth and language, that they were distinct from the dominant Protestant culture and from Protestant German Lutherans and German Forty-Eighters by their virtue of their Catholicism, and that they were distinct from the Irish-dominated American Catholic church by their Germanness (Gleason 1968, 8). These factors led to intense identification with the German Catholic church on the part of immigrants, a strong parish movement among German Catholic priests, and the formation of conservative German Catholic newspapers and parish benevolent societies (Gleason 1968, 20).

The incentive of German-American Catholics to maintain a distinct identity was no doubt also influenced by the anti-foreign, anti-Catholic Know Nothing movement of the 1850s. Melrose Germans hailing from pre-Minnesota German immigrant communities in Illinois, Indiana, and elsewhere in the Midwest would have experienced this social pressure (Gleason 1968, 19).

Ethnic identification was also influenced by a huge split in the American Catholic church in the late 19th century between the so-called liberals (of which Minnesota's Archbishop John Ireland was a leader) and the conservatives. The liberal school, dominated by Irish Catholics, believed that not appearing foreign and assimilating into American society provided the best chance for the success of Catholicism in America (Gleason 1968, 20-40). The conservatives, which included German-Americans, believed that Catholicism was closely bound to language and culture and resisted assimilation (Gleason 1968, 31). These fundamental differences resulted in battles fought on a number of fronts, many of which were reflected in Melrose. For example, while liberals like Ireland believed it was necessary to blend public and parochial schools, conservatives like Stearns County's German-Americans believed that separate German-speaking parochial schools were essential for the preservation of language and culture and challenged Ireland directly on this issue (Gleason 1968, 36). Liberal Catholics believed that the church's ban on joining American fraternal and secret societies such as the Masons should be lifted to prevent Catholics from being forced to choose between the church and associations which would help immigrants advance socially and economically. Conservatives placed the church first and warned against split allegiances (Gleason 1968, 37). Liberal Catholics joined the temperance movement and promoted total abstinence which was aimed at bringing Catholics into conformance with

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American Protestants. German-American Catholics had deep cultural traditions surrounding beer drinking and opposed temperance (Gleason 1968, 37).

Gleason also describes the extreme importance of churches like St. Boniface as social and cultural centers for the immigrant community. He states,

For the Germans, as for most other Catholic immigrant groups, the national parish was the most important ethnic institution, not only because it met their deepest religious needs but also because it furnished the social nucleus around which many voluntary associations clustered. Some parish societies were devotional sodalities, but the most important of the voluntary associations rooted in the parish were various types of mutual benefit societies. These benevolent societies provided a congenial setting for sociability as well as material assistance in sickness and misfortune (Gleason 1968, 9).

In Melrose, St. Boniface sponsored benevolent societies and service groups which were among the earliest organizations founded in Melrose and which outlived nearly all other fraternal and social groups in the town. This single parish sponsored the St. Joseph's Society (organized in 1887), the Confraternity of Christian Mothers (organized in 1892), St. Bernard's Catholic Aid Association Society (organized in 1905), St. Katherine's Catholic Aid Association Society (organized in 1909), the Knights of Columbus (organized in 1912), the Daughters of Isabella (organized in 1933), the Young Men's Sodality, the Young Ladies' Sodality, the Married Men's Sodality, the Catholic Order of Foresters, the St. Boniface Choir, the St. Boniface Dramatics Society, and the Melrose Catholic Deanery Credit Union (organized in 1939). When the St. Bernard's Catholic Aid Association invited its state organization to hold a statewide convention in Melrose in 1926, 10,000 Catholics descended on the town to form the largest gathering ever held in the community. The state convention was held again in Melrose in 1940 (Yzermans 1972, 255). The Melrose Catholic Deanery Credit Union, established in 1939, grew to become the fourth largest Catholic credit union in the U.S. in 1990 with assets of \$44.8 million. Many of the groups listed above were still in existence in 1972, while the town's only two early secular societies, the Masons and the Templars, had disbanded by the early 20th century.

St. Boniface's large basement dining hall, its school, and its Recreation Hall (built in 1926, razed) were the scene of many church and community events. The Recreation Hall provided space for theatrical productions, social events, and even housed a bowling alley, and is described by one historian as a "social hub of the community" (Yzermans 1972, 334). Many in

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the greater Melrose area literally had daily contact with the church as they attended weekly (and for many, daily) masses, holy day services, weekly confessions, rosaries, first communions, weddings, baptisms, funerals, as well as parochial school, church and school social events, and various group and business meetings.

Historian Kathleen Conzen describes the cultural role played by the Catholic church in German immigrant cultural life. She explains that, particularly to German-American Catholic women whose lives were marked by hard physical labor on farms and constant childbearing, the Catholic church was important as one of few public outlets:

German wives might join their husbands in saloons, at card games, and at dances and festivals. But their only organizations were church-based societies; teaching school was regarded as inappropriate; and township records make it clear that very few women dared vote in the first years that suffrage was open to them (Conzen 1990, 25; see also Gleason and works in Glasrud).

According to Gleason, the church's role in cultural identity grew more important as the American-born children of German immigrants began to outnumber those who could personally remember the homeland. He says,

Consequently, the second generation had to be taught what its identity was . . . . And repeatedly the younger generation was exhorted to hold fast to this heritage--to know it, to cherish it, and to preserve it. . . . The group could survive in the 20th century only to the degree that the loyalty of the second generation of German-American Catholics was won and retained (Gleason 1968, 11).

Conzen adds that the church was important as a source for the second generation to find marriage partners and new farmland in neighboring communities (Conzen 1990, 13).

Conzen also explains that a family's worth was in part measured by its gifts to the Church, including vocations or children who entered the monastery, convent, or priesthood (Conzen 1990, 21). The parishioners of St. Boniface had a respectable standing in the diocese in the area of vocations--between 1878 and 1972, 41 children from St. Boniface parish became priests and Benedictine sisters.

The German Catholic Church's influence was felt in all aspects of secular community life. Conzen points out that



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In the context of the weak governmental reach of the 19th century, the lay-dominated church itself extended its reach into many areas of secular life, coordinating defense during the Indian uprising and relief work during periods of grasshopper plague or epidemics and by the end of the century moving into the provision of bowling alleys, dance halls, and baseball fields to keep the young under its guiding hand" (Conzen 1990, 27).

Conzen continues to describe governmental influence by parish members acting through the church by stating that "The same leaders who sat on the parish boards of trustees tended to dominate township government, with its responsibility for tax assessment, poor relief, [and] road construction" (Conzen 1990, 28). There is ample evidence of this influence in Melrose where the rural and village school boards, the village government, the volunteer fire department, and countless other civic groups were dominated by members of the St. Boniface parish.

In the first decades of the 20th century, after of 30 years of successfully maintaining their ethnic distinctiveness, the German Catholics of St. Boniface began to yield to the powerful forces of assimilation. These forces included the aging of immigrants actually born in Germany, their outnumbering and eventual replacement by their American-born children, and a multitude of economic, educational, and social interactions which drew German-Americans into increasing contact with the dominant culture. Fear of overt ethnic identification sped up the process of assimilation as the loyalty of German-American immigrants was questioned during the sometimes violent period of anti-German sentiment during World War I. One of many responses at St. Boniface was a massive Loyalty Day demonstration on May 18, 1918, at which the state's governor spoke and which was, at the time, the largest public gathering ever held in Melrose.

Like most German Catholic parishes in Stearns County and elsewhere in the state, St. Boniface used German exclusively until 1921, and thereafter slowly moved to English. During the same period, German language newspapers were ceasing to print nationwide, English was replacing German in schools, German ethnic societies were folding, and German-Americans were removing overt references to their ethnic heritage from the names of businesses and societies. The path of assimilation was not smooth, however, and many conservative German-American Catholics resisted the language change and, when change was inevitable, insisted that ethnic distinctiveness must be preserved despite the change (Yzermans 1972, 251; Gleason 1968, 159, 191, 172-178).

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ARCHITECTURE OF ST. BONIFACE

The design of the Church of St. Boniface is typical of German Catholic immigrant architecture. Timothy J. Kloberdanz describes the heritage of monumental German Catholic church buildings which is expressed in Melrose:

Many immigrant Catholics--especially those from peasant backgrounds in Europe--supported the church physically as well as spiritually. Many small agricultural centers in Catholic Europe were noted for their awesome cathedrals and exquisitely built chapels that stood in marked contrast to the humble dwellings of the faithful. To the peasant, nothing was too good for God, the Church, or its clerical servants (Kloberdanz 1981, 91).

The Church of St. Boniface was larger and much more ornate than Melrose's Church of St. Patrick (razed). This is consistent with an 1886 statement by a German-American priest which Kloberdanz quotes:

the Irish 'on account of the oppression and persecution which they suffered for religion's sake in their own land, love simplicity in divine service,' the Germans, on the other hand, 'love the beauty of the church edifice and the pomp of ceremonies, belfries, and bells, organs and sacred music, processions, feast days, sodalities, and the most solemn celebration of First Communion and weddings'" (Kloberdanz 1981, 91).

In an essay on the material culture of German-Americans, LaVern J. Rippley states,

when the Germans thought of erecting edifices in the post-1870 period in Minnesota, they nostalgically conceived German architecture in one of two ways--either in neo-Gothic patterns gone wild like a Disneyland fairy castle, or in the red, gold, and blue hues of south German baroque. Most of the German-inspired Catholic churches in Minnesota reflect this baroque affection, whether they stand in St. Paul or Collegeville, in Winona, New Trier, Melrose, Albany, Adrian, New Ulm, or Fulda (Rippley 1981, 58).

St. Boniface is part of the architectural manifestation of what architectural historian Alan Gowans calls the second wave of German immigration to this country in the late 19th century when churches, breweries, and concert halls were built by and for German communities in the Midwest. Gowans notes that World War I-era anti-German hysteria led many communities to rename

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German-sounding streets, and otherwise disown their German ancestry, yet buildings such as St. Boniface provide important material evidence of our country's German heritage (Gowans 1992, 40-45).

The Church of St. Boniface was designed by an architect who was himself of German descent, George Bergmann (1845-1910). Bergmann worked first in St. Paul, starting at age 18 as a draftsman for prominent early St. Paul architect A. F. Gauger in 1883. Around 1884 he formed a partnership with John F. Fischer, and began practicing on his own in St. Paul in 1888. In St. Paul Bergmann launched his career as a designer of buildings for the German immigrant community. Among his St. Paul works were the Bannholzer Beer Gardens, several commercial buildings and houses, and Dietche Hall at 601-603 N. Western Ave. In the mid-1880s he began his strong association with central Minnesota's German Catholic Church. In 1896 Bergmann moved to St. Cloud where for a short time he worked with St. Cloud architect Allen E. Hussey. After 1897 he apparently worked alone. Bergmann continued to design mostly for clients of German immigrant background, and advertised in Der Nordstern, St. Cloud's German language newspaper.

Bergmann designed a number of Catholic churches in the Stearns-Morrison-Benton county area including St. Martin's in St. Martin (1887), St. Boniface in Melrose (1898), St. Agnes in Roscoe (1898), St. Michael's in Spring Hill (1900), and St. Michael's in Buckman (1902). Other Catholic commissions included a large addition to St. Benedict's Academy in St. Joseph (1898), additions to St. Joseph's Church near Perham (1898) and to St. Joseph's Church in Otter Tail County (1898), and parish houses in Richmond (1898) and Watkins (1898). Bergmann also designed a number of commercial buildings for German merchants in Stearns County including George M. Schaefer in Albany (1899), John Diedrich in Albany (1899), and a mill building for L. Wurst in Richmond (1899). Many buildings designed by George Bergmann were constructed by Carl Kropp, a prominent St. Cloud contractor who was also his good friend. Bergmann retired to Wisconsin in 1901 and died there in 1910.

In 1958, by order of the diocesan bishop, the parishes of St. Boniface and St. Patrick were merged. The newly formed parish was named St. Mary's, with the former Church of St. Boniface as its home. The church's most recent building projects have been a convent and school, built in 1953 and 1965 respectively. The Church of St. Patrick was demolished in 1970.

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundary of the nominated property is shown as the solid black line on the accompanying map entitled "Church of St. Boniface, Melrose, Minnesota."

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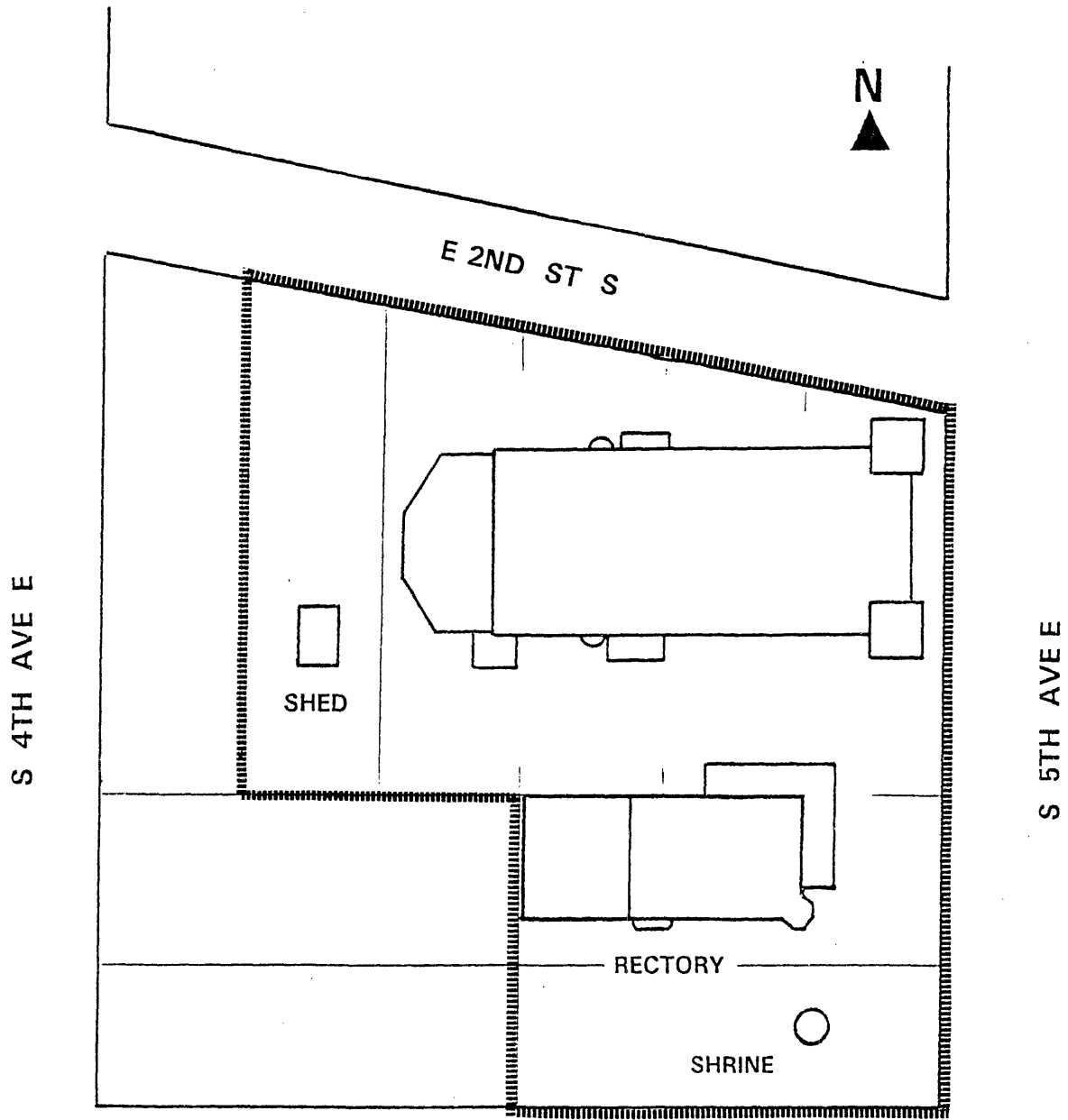
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BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundary of the nominated property includes the parcel of land historically associated with the church and rectory. Excluded from the nominated property are those portions of the block which are not historically associated with these two structures.

CHURCH OF ST. BONIFACE  
MELROSE, MINNESOTA



E 3RD ST S

1" = 41.5'