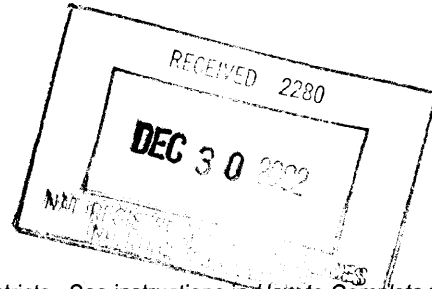


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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.

17

1. Name of Property

historic name St. John Catholic Church

other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

2. Location

street & number St. John Road N/A not for publication

city or town St. John Plantation N/A vicinity

state Maine code ME county Aroostook code 003 zip code 04743

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.)

E. S. Fitzgerald 12/26/02  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Maine Historic Preservation Commission  
State or Federal agency and bureau

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 this 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): \_\_\_\_\_

Edgar A. Beall 2/12/03  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

ST. JOHN CATHOLIC CHURCH  
Name of Property

AROOSTOOK CO., MAINE  
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  
  
1                                  0                  buildings  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
1                                  0                  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**  
NONE

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)  
RELIGION / Religious Facility  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)  
VACANT/ NOT IN USE  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)  
LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS /  
Colonial Revival  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)  
foundation CEMENT  
walls VINYL  
\_\_\_\_\_  
roof ASPHALT  
other LEAD (on belfry)  
\_\_\_\_\_

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

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National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

ST. JOHN CATHOLIC CHURCH

AROOSTOOK CO., MAINE

Section number 7 Page 2

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## DESCRIPTION

The St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church in Saint John Plantation was erected to serve the growing Catholic community along the western frontier of the St. John River in the northernmost corner of Maine. Constructed between 1909 and 1911 by local carpenters this wood framed church is impressive both in its scale and detailing. The church is located on the north side of St. John Road, near the center of town. The cemetery is positioned to the western rear of the structure, the former rectory is adjacent to it on the west, and across the street is the former convent. The church is an impressive structure on this now sparsely populated landscape, and along with the town hall and a few residences, forms the center of town.

Facing south, the two and a half story rectilinear structure is fronted by a three story steeple that continues to ground level. Victorian double doors sheltered by an arched entry hood are situated at the base of the steeple just underneath a two story, fifteen-paned window topped with a fan light. Above the peak of the gable roof, a overhanging bracketed cornice forms the base of the square belfry. Four pairs of arched, louvered openings surround the bell house; this in turn is capped by another broad cornice and an eight-sided gambrel cap of lead. A simple gold cross adorns the apex of this construction. To either side of the projecting entry and steeple are smaller, eight light windows topped with fan lights. Both the west and east elevation of the building contain four more of these windows, symmetrically placed along the side walls. The structure sits on a painted brick foundation, into which cellar lights are placed directly below the side windows. Centered on the northern side of the main mass of the structure is a five-sided apse with a hipped roof. Two windows, and two modern doors give light and access to this part of the structure. Although vinyl siding replaced the asbestos shingles by 1980, the decorative brackets under the cornice were not removed, nor any other decorative elements destroyed.

The interior of the church consists of one large, rectangular sanctuary and the adjoining apse. However, through the use of a three sided gallery and barrel vault the interior space mimics the cruciform shape of gothic cathedrals. Two rows of wooden, bead board pews line either side of the central aisle, and extend three quarters of the length of the sanctuary. The pews adjacent to the exterior walls are shorter than those lining the main aisle, and the aisles between these sets of pews are punctuated by three square columns, which in turn support a three-sided gallery on the second level. The gallery ceilings are flat, but the ceiling over the center aisle reaches yet another story in height and is a barrel vault pierced with ribs that extend from the second story columns. At the far southern end of the sanctuary a third story gallery is tucked under the arched ceiling, and reached by a small stairwell located in the projecting steeple front.

Because the gallery and pews stop short of the northern end of the main mass of the building the open space before the apse is perceived as a transept. Statues and altars to the Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph face the congregation from the rear walls of this transept like space. The lecterns are

United States Department of the Interior  
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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

ST. JOHN CATHOLIC CHURCH

AROOSTOOK CO., MAINE

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placed at the corners where the apse meets the sanctuary. The apse is directly on axis with the center aisle, and is joined to the body of the building through the barrel vault, which continues to the north end of the apse before terminating in a five ribbed hemisphere. The altar, high altar and reredo occupy a series of platforms at the front of the apse, with the sacraments and robes stored in the vestry behind the reredo.

The interior of the Church is highly ornamental. Each of the gallery support columns, on both levels, are situated on square pedestal bases and topped with Corinthian columns. The front of the gallery frieze is decorated with gold swags and a composite cornice molding. Between the top of the second story columns and the base of the barrel vault is another frieze of swags, (double swags), surmounted by bands of dentils, modillions and more composite molding. Each of these elaborate, painted details, (along with the ribs and the ceiling) are made entirely from pressed tin. The walls finished with painted fiber-board, and the trim around the windows feature an unusual deeply-grooved planed surface. In pointed contrast to the elaborate tin features and traditional orientation of the church, the wooden pews and balcony rails are reminiscent of Gothic cottage details. The pews are constructed of simple, painted bead board, and the rails feature narrow oval and teardrop slits in a broad retaining rail. However disparate these details seem in isolation, in combination they convey a sense of grandeur and awe within the sanctified space.

**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 a 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)

ARCHITECTURE

**Period of Significance**

1909-1911

**Significant Dates**

1909-1911

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Aimee Pelletier, Carpenter

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

ST. JOHN CATHOLIC CHURCH

AROOSTOOK CO., MAINE

Section number 8 Page 2

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## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Saint John the Evangelist Catholic Church is a beautiful religious structure built between 1909 and 1911 in the small town of St. John Plantation, in northern Aroostook County. Located on the north side of the only road in town, the church is sandwiched between the road and the St. John River; directly across the river is New Brunswick, Canada. As a modern cathedral, this building combines a traditional floor plan with interior decorative elements that draw from Colonial Revival. It is a building that reflects both the ancestry of the French Canadian Catholics in St. John, the economic status of the residents, and a growing use of modern materials to mimic the more expensive hand-crafted decorative features of the past. The St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C in recognition of how it expresses its community's architectural heritage through use of modern materials.

The religious architecture of the St. John Valley is prominent on the landscape. Inasmuch as most of the settlements, villages and towns line the banks of the river, and the primary roads parallel the waterway, views through the valley continually include one or more large churches perched on a ridge, and usually facing the river. Tall belfries, and steeples either in pairs or alone are surmounted by statuary or gold domes. Wood, stone, and brick form clerestories and aisles, apses, baptistries and naves while stained glass and large windows admit light into the interiors. Some of the buildings are moderate in size, while others are large, but without exception there is a grandeur and piousness built into each one. At first glance, an exterior survey of the this landscape inevitably ranks St. John on the restrained side of the ideology; its tower is strong, the belfry is decorative and the windows are large, but there are no statues, buttresses, or niches on its exterior. But a close examination reveals that the exterior of the building is extremely similar to the Old St. David's Church in Madawaska. Built in 1872, this wood-framed building with projecting front steeple, belfry and high gable roof shares the same overall massing and exterior design as the St. John Church, although the later structure replaced the Gothic pointed-arch windows with more Colonial Revival fan-arched windows. Located near the site of the earliest Acadian settlements in Madawaska, that parish is among the oldest in the area, and a center for the French Canadian community. Ironically, at the same time St. John was constructed as a copy of this building, the earlier church was being replaced by a larger, brick church with that drew on Renaissance and Baroque Italian architecture. Although the two congregations are separated by almost 35 miles, it is possible that the rural community at St. John was inherently more conservative than the St. David parishioners, and chose for their place of worship a form that was more closely associated with their Acadian and French Canadian heritage.

The early decades of the twentieth century were a period of extreme growth in the St. John Valley. Whereas most rural communities in Maine experienced a continuation of the population decline that started in the 1880s, Aroostook County grew at a rapid rate. Between 1880 and 1920 the population almost doubled from 41,700 to 81,728 people, and in St. John Plantation, a high birthrate propelled the small community from 166 to 549 residents over the same period. Most of the residents were farmers or woods workers; it was not a rich town. The town's Catholic community had previously traveled to Fort Kent or St. Francis for their religious observances, but it became obvious that the population had matured to the

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## National Register of Historic Places

### Continuation Sheet

ST. JOHN CATHOLIC CHURCH

AROOSTOOK CO., MAINE

Section number 8 Page 3

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point that they required their own church. Thus, in 1909 St. John the Evangelist was made a mission of St. Charles parish, and construction began on the new building. Similar population pressures resulted in a spate of new church construction throughout the Valley, including the ornate Acadian church in Lille, Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Catholic Church. (NR:)

While the exterior of the St. John church may have looked towards the past, the interior of the church shares many features and designs with the Church at Lille. Although the details are different the same aesthetic prevails. Both churches contain a barrel vaulted ceiling and hemispheric apse punctuated by ribs. The ceiling of the Lille Church is located in a high clerestory, with single story aisles at either side. Although the St. John Church does not have a clerestory, by constructing a second story gallery on three sides of the nave a similar interior space was developed. In both churches Corinthian columns run the length of the nave, but in St. John these columns support the gallery rather than form an arched colonnade under the clerestory as in Lille. Both buildings are detailed with composite cornices, Corinthian capitals, and statuary, and both locate their altars in a polygonal apse. However, there are important differences. The church in Lille was designed by a French architect, Theophile Daoust and perhaps due to this, it more aptly references French Gothic architecture in its details and forms. According to tradition, the St. John Catholic Church was designed and built by a local carpenter, Aimee Pelletier, with help from parish members. While the form of the St. John Church draws on the inspiration expressed in Lille (and earlier in Madawaska), many of the interior details are Colonial Revival in style.

This may be better understood by examining the materials found in the St. John Church. While in Lille all of the mouldings are of wood, in St. John the cornices, girder covers (ribs), Corinthian capitals and decorative swags on the balcony frieze are made of pressed, painted tin, as is the ceiling of the barrel vault. The use of pressed tin became popular after the Civil War for ceilings and walls, and over time the industry also marketed mouldings and cornices. Tin was fireproof and inexpensive, relatively easy to install, and widely available through catalogs. It made economic sense to install tin rather than to undertake the expense of carving wooden details. It is quite possible however, that the choice of tin designs from which the congregants could choose were heavily weighted towards the Colonial Revival rather than the French Gothic more representative of their culture. Similarly, while the walls and ceilings at Lille were finished in decorative tin panels, the parishioner in St. John chose another inexpensive material: composite fiber wall board. This material, often found under the trade name of BeaverBoard, had made its debut in 1903 and was made of wood pulp. While the ceiling and wall panels in St. John may not have been BeaverBoard per say, there was no shortage of pulp mills in the St. John Valley that could have manufactured this material at a low cost. It is possible that a local mill also produced the wainscot and trim, both of which are made from wood that has been deeply, but finely, grooved by a special planer knife.

The Catholic church in St. John Plantation is a remarkable structure for the manner in which it expresses the French Canadian background of its members. At the same time it makes use of modern, inexpensive, and readily available materials, in a manner that did not compromise the grace and grandeur of this religious space.

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

ST. JOHN CATHOLIC CHURCH

AROOSTOOK CO., MAINE

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## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Connors-Carlson, Shirlee. Landings, Logging, and Lumbermen, 1901-2001. (St. John Plantation, Maine: Shirlee Connors - Carlson), 2001.

Lucey, William Leo, S.J. The Catholic Church in Maine. (Francestown, N.H.: Marshall Jones Company), 1957.



ST. JOHN CATHOLIC CHURCH  
Name of Property

AROOSTOOK CO., MAINE  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of Property 1.1 acre

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 1 9 5 1 3 7 1 3 5 2 2 7 7 6 4  
Zone Easting Northing

3 1 9  
Zone Easting Northing

2 1 9  
Zone Easting Northing

4 1 9  
Zone Easting Northing

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 CHRISTI A. MITCHELL, ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIAN

organization MAINE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION date 18 October 2002

street & number 55 CAPITOL STREET, STATION 65 telephone (207) 287-2132

city or town AUGUSTA state ME zip code 04333 -0065

**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 \_\_\_\_\_

street & number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_

**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 Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

ST. JOHN CATHOLIC CHURCH

AROOSTOOK CO., MAINE

Section number 10 Page 2

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## VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundaries of the St. John Catholic Church are fully described by the Town of St. John Plantation tax map number 17, lot 14.

## BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The nominated property encompasses all of that land which was sold to the Diocese of Portland for the erection of a Catholic Church in St. John Plantation in 1911, and has been historically associated with the church ever since.

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

# National Register of Historic Places

## Continuation Sheet

ST. JOHN CATHOLIC CHURCH

AROOSTOOK CO., MAINE

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

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### PHOTOGRAPHS

Photograph 1 of 4  
Christi A. Mitchell  
Maine Historic Preservation Commission  
September 11, 2002  
South facade; facing north.

Photograph 2 of 4  
Christi A. Mitchell  
Maine Historic Preservation Commission  
September 11, 2002  
North elevation; facing south.

Photograph 3 of 4  
Christi A. Mitchell  
Maine Historic Preservation Commission  
September 11, 2002  
Interior, facing north.

Photograph 4 of 4  
Christi A. Mitchell  
Maine Historic Preservation Commission  
September 11, 2002  
Interior, facing south.