

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

PH0684074

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	SEP 11 1978
DATE ENTERED	DEC 22 1978

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

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

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

St. Francis Xavier Church

AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

532 Market Street

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Parkersburg

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

First

STATE

West Virginia

CODE

54

COUNTY

Wood

CODE

017

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
			<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
			<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:
			<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
			<input type="checkbox"/> PARK

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston ✓

STREET & NUMBER

1300 Byron Street

CITY, TOWN

Wheeling

VICINITY OF

STATE

West Virginia

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

26003

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Wood County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

Court Square

CITY, TOWN

Parkersburg

STATE

West Virginia

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

DATE

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

## 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		

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

Visible from all major approaches to downtown Parkersburg, West Virginia, is the domical belfry and tower of St. Francis Xavier Church. The church is on the opposite side of the street and only several hundred feet north of another prominent downtown landmark, the Parkersburg City Hall. Immediately north of St. Francis Xavier on Market Street is the trestle approach of the over one-hundred year old B & O railroad bridge that crosses the Ohio River from Wood County to Washington County, Ohio.

Although St. Francis Xavier Church was built in 1869-70, little of the building's physical fabric has changed over the years resulting in a high degree of preservation of the original architecture. Significant in this regard as well is the excellent condition of murals embellishing the church's apse, side altars, and side aisles. These paintings comprise a series of religious scenes that are regarded among the most significant works of ecclesiastical art in West Virginia.

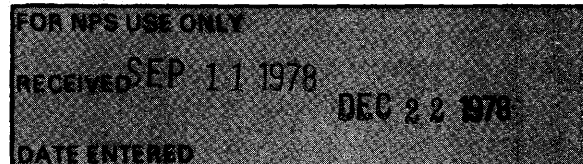
Church chroniclers have traditionally described the edifice as a "pure" example of French Gothic architecture. To be sure, elements of the Gothic are present in the building. However, these are subordinate to the dominant Romanesque order of the design. During the 1850s and 1860s the popularity of Romanesque revival style churches and public buildings in the United States exceeded the public fancy for the Gothic.

A generally heavy, monumental quality is present in the building, as opposed to the delicate, vertical elements of the Gothic. The predominance of round-arched window and door openings, echoed in the loggias separating the aisles from the nave, and the presence of medieval elements such as the main portal's round compound arch, all figure in the Romanesque design of the building.

The church is planned in a simple three-part composition. A central entrance bell tower, truncated, and surmounted with a later metal-roofed domical belfry, is followed from west to east by a gable-roofed sanctuary, and then by a multi-sided apse containing skylights that illuminate the stained glass half-domical light above the main altar. Transepts are absent from the building's plan.

Engaged brick buttresses define each of the seven bays of the church's side elevations. The window heads are dressed in smooth sandstone voussoirs. Noteworthy in the front elevation details are the window and door surrounds of sandstone voussoirs that complement, in a picturesque fashion, the wooden modillion brackets of the eaves and raking eaves. Below the small shingled pent roof separating the third and fourth levels of the entrance tower, is an arcaded, wooden corbel table. Coupled arches with wooden mullions fill the arched

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openings at the second and fourth levels of the tower. An empty statuary niche with ornate millwork is seen in the third level of the tower's front elevation.

The compound arch of the principal entrance is detailed with an enriched wooden tympanum, a motif duplicated in the transoms of the interior floor-length windows in the apse behind the main altar.

Several structural elements of the church are worthy of note. The construction of the building above the sandstone foundation is of two-foot thick brick masonry loadbearing walls. The tower, of similar construction, has intermediate levels built of heavy timber and deck.

The barrel vault of the nave is spanned by bolted heavy timber scissor-type trusses. The side segmental vaults are spanned with triangular trusses. These heavy trusses are supported on interior wood columns (styled as piers) spaced at approximately 15' 6" on center at each side of the barrel vault and at the brick bearing walls at the exterior. The vaulted ceilings are plaster and wood lath which are supported by ceiling joists spanning in most cases directly to the trusses. The ceiling of the nave and vaults of the aisles are painted to simulate the ribs and other masonry features of medieval vaulting.

The three-dimensional, architectonic quality of this decoration is reflected in the seven paintings of scenes in the life of Christ adorning the entire apse and panels above the side altars. Also artistically significant in the church is the wooden Gothic main altar, carved by Mr. M. Darious and dedicated with the new church in 1870.

Minor alterations of the building include the replacement in 1895 of the original stained glass windows destroyed by an explosion of nitroglycerine on the nearby Little Kanawha River. The new glass was installed soon after the disaster by the G. C. Riordan Company of Cincinnati, Ohio. In 1915 a belfry-cupola was erected on the tower to replace the formerly used enclosed belfry. Three bells were acquired, the largest, the St. Catherine bell, was hung in place in 1915; the two smaller bells, the St. Patrick bell, and the St. Bridget bell, were purchased and hung in 1917. The original oak pews were replaced with nearly exact copies in 1977. A plain railing

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separating the nave from the altar was replaced with one of Gothic styling sometime after 1907.

A program of restoration is now (1978) underway at St. Francis Xavier Church. In response to recent changes in Church liturgy, planning for the revision of the Church sanctuary respecting its historic and significant architectural elements is in progress.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input checked="" 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 1869-70

BUILDER/ARCHITECT P. C. Keeley, architect  
Lysander Dudley, builder

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Saint Francis Xavier Church, a landmark on Market Street in downtown Parkersburg, Wood County, West Virginia, is significant for its well preserved architecture and for its mural paintings that are regarded in West Virginia as highly important works of art. The high quality of the exterior proportion and detail, the design and balance of the sanctuary with its ornate Gothic altar, and the artistic quality and craftsmanship of the interior, are all factors of note in determination of the building's significance.

Catholic families had settled in the Parkersburg area as early as 1800. These settlers were attended by priests who came down the Ohio from Wheeling. In 1850 the Diocese of Wheeling was established by Pope Pius IX. The Bishop of Richmond, Virginia, Richard V. Whelan, was made head of the Diocese. On a missionary journey to the Parkersburg area in 1847, Bishop Whelan purchased lot no. 95 for a sum of \$306.00 upon which the present St. Francis Xavier Church now stands. A brick church was erected on the site in the period 1849-51.

With the discovery of oil at the neighboring Wood and Wirt County Communities of Volcano, Petroleum, and Burning Springs, and the coming of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, the population of Parkersburg expanded considerably, and more Catholic families settled in the area. By 1867 the parish had grown to such a degree that it was deemed advisable to build a large church.

Accordingly, under the guidance of the first official pastor, Very Reverend Henry F. Parke, plans were made for the erection of a more capacious structure. The old church was torn down, apparently early in 1869, and the cornerstone of the new church was laid on Sunday afternoon, May 9, 1869 - an imposing ceremony which included an hour-long discourse by Bishop Whelan before three or four thousand people. The cornerstone containing a copper box sealed with local memorabilia was placed in the foundation at the southeast corner of the building.

Architect of the new church was Mr. P. C. Keeley, and the contractor was Mr. Lysander Dudley of Parkersburg. The architecture was an adaptive Romanesque design with Gothic influences. Total cost of the project was \$85,000, a huge sum for those times.

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Brossman, P. D. ed. Centennial History of St. Francis Xavier Church. Parkersburg, West Virginia, 1970, n.p.

Parkersburg, 1907. Parkersburg, West Virginia: W. M. Barnes Directory Co. p. 40.

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 3/4 acre

QUADRANGLE NAME Parkersburg

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24,000

UTM REFERENCES

A 17 | 451730 | 4346220

B    |    |   

C    |    |   

D    |    |   

E    |    |   

F    |    |   

G    |    |   

H    |    |   

### VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The property is located on a city lot bound to the north by the rectory and the trestle of the B & O Railroad and Sixth Street, to the west by Market Street, to the east by an alley, and to the south by property owned

by the Parkersburg National Bank.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Rodney S. Collins, Research Assistant

ORGANIZATION

West Virginia Department of Culture and History

DATE

July 3, 1978

STREET & NUMBER

The Cultural Center, Capitol Complex

TELEPHONE

304 248-0244

CITY OR TOWN

Charleston

STATE

West Virginia

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL   

STATE X

LOCAL X

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

Clarence Moran

September 6, 1978

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE 12-22-78

ATTEST:

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

DATE Dec 22, 1978

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The building was dedicated in October 1870. From the time of razing the small first church to this date, services were said to have been held in a building on Seventh Street which had formerly been used as a government hospital.

In recent decades an increasing interest has been focused on the magnificent mural paintings in the church. They were painted by a German artist named Daniel Mueller and commissioned by the third pastor, Very Reverend John McBride. Many visitors, including artists from this country and abroad, have visited Parkersburg for the purpose of viewing these paintings, and noting the three-dimensional, bas-relief style. There are seven paintings: the ones on the sanctuary walls depict the Annunciation, the Nativity, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection and Ascension. Over the altar to St. Mary is a scene depicting Her presence in heaven. Over the altar to Joseph is a representation of the death of St. Francis Xavier on the Island of Sancha in the Japanese Sea. Paintings in a similar style, believed to be at least in part by the same artist, are in the Rotunda of the National Capitol in Washington, D. C. Records in the Art and Reference Division of the Architect of the Capitol do not indicate the names of assistants of Messrs. Brumidi and Castaggini, though acquisition of the names of decorative painters who are supposed to have worked for these artists has been ongoing in recent years. Research on this interesting association with the U. S. Capitol may be documented in future studies.

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Architect of St. Francis Xavier Church in Parkersburg, Wood County, West Virginia, was Patrick C. (Charles) Keely (1816-96) of New York City. The Centennial History of St. Francis Xavier (1970) records the name of the architect as "P. C. Keeley", an erroneous spelling.

Patrick C. Keely was born in Ireland, the son of an architect. He moved to the United States, settling in Brooklyn, New York c. 1841-42. Keely's career burgeoned and he became one of the nation's busiest architects. Keely's office specialized in church design, and during the life of the architect some 600 or more Roman Catholic churches were built in the United States from his plans. Among Keely's noted buildings were: Jesuit Church, Sixteenth Street, New York City; Saints Peter and Paul, Williamsburg, N.Y.; cathedrals in Albany and Buffalo, N.Y.; and the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, Charleston, S.C.

Sources: Ravenel. Architects of Charleston.

The American Architect and Building News, vol. 53, no. 1078, August 22, 1896.

St. Francis Xavier Church Wall Paintings,  
Parkersburg, Wood County, West Virginia

In a report submitted to the West Virginia Department of Culture and History, April 25, 1980, Dr. Margaret Tavenner Rajam, Professor of Art, West Virginia University, presented research data and conclusions regarding the dates of the church and paintings; a detailed description of the paintings; relationship of the paintings to the Capitol Building, Washington, D.C.; prototypes; information on the artist, Daniel Muller; and medium of the paintings.

Dr. Rajam found that "the paintings were executed at the time the Church was built, around 1870." She also indicated that "there is probably no direct connection with paintings in the U.S. Capitol"; the Parkersburg paintings predate the monochrome frieze in the Rotunda.

Dr. Rajam describes general characteristics of the paintings in the following:

"Five scenes occupy the walls of the apse--the Annunciation, the Nativity of Christ, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, and the Ascension. The apse is segmented so that each painting fills the upper part of a flat, arched wall surface, framed by engaged columns at each angle. The Coronation of the Blessed Virgin Mary is located over the altar at the head of the left aisle, and the Death of St. Francis Xavier over the altar in the right aisle. In the spandrels of the nave arcade are roundels containing bust representations of the Apostles."

"All figures and foreground objects are painted in a creamy white, and all backgrounds are pale blue. The light which appears to illuminate objects



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in the five paintings in the apse is made to emanate from the angle between the Crucifixion and Resurrection; thus shadows fall to our left in the Annunciation, Nativity and Crucifixion, and to our right in the Resurrection and Ascension. The Coronation and the Death of St. Francis are illuminated as if from the windows in the exterior walls, and the Apostles in the nave as if from the direction of the main altar."

"The style of the paintings is deliberately rhetorical and non-naturalistic, in accurate representation of sculptured models rather than living ones. The figures and some of the foreground objects are made to appear carved in very deep relief, as if legs or arms (e.g., the legs of the soldiers in the Resurrection, Fig. 10) are carved free from the background. They seem to be brightly illuminated from several sources, as if from more than one light of a chandelier; one can see "layers" of shadow surrounding some of these "free-carved" details (e.g., the vase of lilies of the Annunciation or the St. John Evangelist of the Crucifixion, (Figs. 2, 7), The blue background is made to seem a different system of relief; it is separated by its color, and it is a very shallow relief. Shadows cast by the high-relief foreground figures fall upon the background even where it may represent a distant space (as the shadow of St. John on the city of Jerusalem behind the Cross of the Crucifixion)."

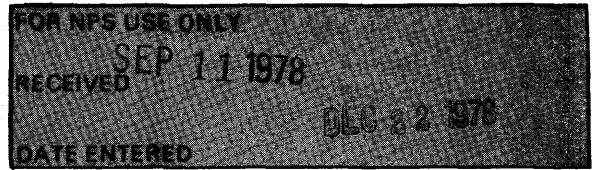
In an overall assessment of the work of Daniel Muller, Dr. Rajam stated:

"One may speculate, on the basis of the paintings in the Church of St. Francis Xavier, that Daniel Muller had a classical workshop training in both painting and sculpture and that he had a first-hand knowledge of the great works of art of the Italian Renaissance. He was not a great artist, but he was more than competent. The quality of this group of paintings can stand comparison with most such public commissions, including the paintings in the Capitol Building in Washington."

Determination of the medium of the St. Francis Xavier paintings was made by Dr. Rajam in consultation with Mr. David Sellin, curator of paintings in the office of the Architect of the U.S. Capitol. It is "suggested that the medium of the paintings might be stereochromy (a process of wall painting which uses water glass--sodium silicate or potassium silicate--as a fixative, either mixed with pigment or applied over the finished painting)."

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St. Francis Xavier Church: A Preservation Study. Ann Arbor, Michigan:  
Preservation Urban Design Incorporated, Nov. 1977.