

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only
received JAN 26 1984
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Church of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

and/or common O'Connor Church Complex (GY00-1)

2. Location

street & number NA off NE 56 NA not for publication

city, town O'Connor X vicinity of

state Nebraska code 031 county Greeley code 077

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 type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial <input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	NA in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial <input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military <input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Board of Trustees, Church of the Visitation

street & number c/o Tom Harvey and Michael Costello

city, town Greeley NA vicinity of state Nebraska

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. County Clerk

street & number Greeley County Courthouse

city, town Greeley state Nebraska

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date On-going federal state county local

depository for survey records Nebraska State Historical Society

city, town Lincoln state Nebraska

7. Description

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

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The parish complex of the Church of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, O'Connor, encompasses the Romanesque Revival church (1904-05), the rectory (1929-30), the parish hall (1954-55) and the cemetery, complete with appropriate fences, windbreaks, and trees around the buildings and cemetery. The church complex is located in a rural environment, but it was established as a town parish in the long-abandoned community of O'Connor. The change (in the 19th century) from a town to rural environment explains two unusual features of the complex: the distance of the cemetery from the church (typical of town parishes) and the placement of the parish buildings off the county road. The property nominated is all owned by the church Board of Trustees and has been associated with the church since the purchase of the land for the colony in 1879. Part of the land is used for farm or pastureland, but is church owned. The integrity of the site and buildings is excellent.

The church and adjacent buildings are located on a knoll, the highest point on the southern boundary of Section 21, about 500 feet north of the county road (section line). The cemetery is located about 2100 feet east of the parish hall, at the corner of the section, on ground almost as high as the church site. The surrounding land is all farm or pastureland.

A wide windbreak of cedar trees grows to the west and north of the church with an outer boundary of deciduous trees. A low wall topped with an iron fence separates the church and rectory from the road (see photos #3 and #4). The cemetery is surrounded by a wire fence and a row of trees with the tombstones placed in the usual north-south rows.

The following descriptions of the buildings use the Historic American Building Survey formula:

Church of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, brick wall material with extended single centered tower, narthex, and apse flanked by side rooms, 50 x 120 feet, gabled roof with pyramidal tower spire, round arched window and door openings with keystones, 1904-05, Romanesque Revival, James H. Craddock, architect.

There are a number of noteworthy features of the interior. The barrel or Roman vaulted nave is perhaps the most impressive (see photo #6). The stencilling in the semi-circular arches and on the side walls remains intact. Since the church is closed as a functioning parish, the changes required by Vatican II have not taken place. The original altars, communion rail and statues remain in their original arrangement. All the windows including narthex and staircase windows have stained-glass. At the rear, there is a large balcony with a rose window and the original confessionals (see photo #7).

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 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify) Ethnic: Irish
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1879 to the present **Builder/Architect** J. H. Craddock, architect of church

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The parish church complexes at O'Connor and Spalding, Greeley County, are the spiritual and architectural symbols of the work of the Irish Catholic Colonization Association of the U.S. to settle the Irish of eastern cities on farms in the Great Plains. These two parishes are the only ones established by the colonization association in Nebraska: O'Connor was the first settlement and the unofficial headquarters, and the Spalding complex is discussed in the concurrently nominated St. Michael's Catholic Church Complex nomination. Architecturally and visually, the churches and associated buildings are landmarks for their height, material, scale, and style in a local and county-wide context. The Church of the Visitation at O'Connor assumes state-wide historical significance for its representation as the first of two parishes of the Association, for Irish settlement in Nebraska, and for the early settlement of Greeley County.

The Irish Catholic Colonization Association of the U.S. was organized in Chicago on St. Patrick's Day, 1879, with delegates from Iowa, Dakota, Kansas, Minnesota, and Nebraska, under the leadership of Bishop John Ireland of St. Paul and Bishop James J. O'Connor of Omaha. One goal of the association was to aid the social, economic, and religious conditions of the Irish-American urban poor by assisting their relocation from eastern cities to farms in Minnesota and Nebraska. Bishop O'Connor also expressed an important goal of populating his diocese with strong centers of Catholicity (Burbach, p. 58).

Association secretary William J. Onahan, a Chicago businessman, also saw the association as a business venture. The Association organized a stock company with \$100,000 a month later and sought investors from wealthy Catholic businessmen. The Association planned to purchase railroad lands in Nebraska and re-sell them to settlers on easy terms. Funds were raised, but the Association never achieved the dreams of Onahan, either in the amount raised nor for the return on investment.

Bishop O'Connor and Michael Sullivan traveled over the county for two weeks in July, 1879, and chose 25,695.9 acres to purchase from the Burlington and Missouri Railroad. The land was opened for sale in February, 1880. The two townsites of O'Connor and Spalding were chosen and platted, and named for two bishops who were instrumental in the work of the Association. The first pastor, the Reverend J. M. Smyth, was appointed to O'Connor parish the same month to insure that the religious needs of the community were met. He also became the local agent for the Association. The O'Connor parish was placed under the patronage of the Blessed Virgin Mary, under the title of the Visitation. The title was chosen in honor of the first visit of Bishop O'Connor to the settlement on July 2nd, the Feast of the Visitation, in 1879 (The True Voice, November 3, 1905, p. 1). The new parish also served Howard, Valley, Loup, Garfield, Wheeler, and Boone counties.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 109.67 acres

Quadrangle name Spalding SW, 7.5 Minute Series

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References See continuation sheet

A

Zone	Easting							Northing	

B

Zone	Easting							Northing	

C

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

D

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

E

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

F

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

G

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

H

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Verbal boundary description and justification

See continuation sheet

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state NA code county code

state NA code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Penny Chatfield Sodhi, Preservation Historian

organization Nebraska State Historical Society date September, 1983

street & number 1500 R Street telephone 402/471-3270

city or town Lincoln state Nebraska

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

Marvin D. Knecht 1/18/84

title Director, Nebraska State Historical Society

date

For NPS use only

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

Entered in the
National Register

date

2/23/84

[Signature]
Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET Description ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 2

Rectory, brick, rectangular, one story with full second floor in dormers, gabled roof with long shed-roofed dormers across front and rear, prominent extended gabled entrance with second floor balcony and full door, six over six windows, banked basement-level one-car garage on the east wall, 1929-30, period revival features.

Parish hall, original asbestos siding, rectangular shape with vestibule on the south (front) and kitchen extension on the north (rear), 40 x 80 feet with 12 x 24 vestibule and 20 x 32 kitchen, bellcast gambrel roof, stepped gable false front, 1954-55.

Although the parish hall does not meet the fifty year criterion, it is an integral feature of the life of the former parish. Constructed for the 75th anniversary celebration of the parish by the parishioners, it replaced an earlier hall. Designed for dinners, wedding dances, receptions, and various celebrations, it continues to serve those functions today, as the former parishioners seek to maintain the buildings for weddings, christenings, etc. The parish hall is needed to provide these services.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET Significance ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

The backbone of the early O'Connor settlement were the Irish Catholics who had come to the area in 1877-78 under the leadership of General John O'Neill. O'Neill had discussed his settlement plans with Bishop O'Connor and received the Bishop's endorsement, but O'Neill's work in Greeley County was cut short by his death in 1879. Colonists, both farmers and business people, began arriving in the first summer on 1880. By the end of 1881 O'Connor challenged the older town of Scotia for the county seat. O'Connor won a majority, but not the two-thirds needed to change the county seat location.

The town and parish of O'Connor continued to grow until the Association failed to meet the demands of the Burlington and Missouri Railroad for a rail line through O'Connor. Competition was then created when Thomas Fox purchased land for the nearby town site of Greeley Center and immediately signed an agreement with the Burlington & Missouri for a rail line. This new town was dedicated in 1887, and it sealed the fate of O'Connor as a town. Within a few years all the businesses left O'Connor for Greeley. Today all that remains of the town is the church complex with its unusual location away from the county road.

The parish of the Church of the Visitation at O'Connor continued to grow in spite of the agricultural and climatic hardships experienced by the settlers which were unlike their Irish and eastern U.S. backgrounds. The Irish Catholics attracted to the area in the early years of settlement are still the dominant group in the parish and the area today.

A church building and a pastor were provided at the formation of the parish. A prefabricated church from John Ayer of Chicago was erected and a year later was destroyed by high winds. A second church of frame construction stood until 1904 when it was destroyed by fire. Construction of the present church began June 6, 1904, and the dedication was held on October 24, 1905.

Catholic schooling was a major concern of the Association and the early settlers. The Sisters of Mercy of Omaha came in 1888 and opened St. Joseph Academy the following year. This was the first convent and Catholic school in the county. The school existed until 1951. The school building was then used as a public school until 1977. The building was razed the following year.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET Significance ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 3

The other two extant buildings appear to have been designed by the priest at the time. The Reverend Thomas J. Byrne designed the rectory. He visited and studied several rectories to arrive at the most useful plan. The rectory was dedicated June 17, 1930. The Rev. Andrew J. Gonda designed the new parish hall in 1954 as a quonset type of structure. The men of the parish did most of the construction work, and the new hall was ready for the 75th anniversary of the parish in 1955.

As the loss of the railroad to the nearby town of Greeley spelled the doom of the town of O'Connor, a similar competition awaited the parishes in the two towns. A parish was created at Greeley which also had a strong Irish influence from the people who moved from O'Connor and others who came later. O'Connor became a country parish, only a few miles away from the town parish. The strength and determination of the O'Connor parishioners is shown in the fine buildings constructed and maintained over the years.

The physical nearness of the two parishes eventually worked to the detriment of O'Connor. Declining enrollment caused the school to be closed. The parish was made a mission of Greeley's Sacred Heart in 1978, and it was closed in 1980. The former parishioners are committed to maintaining and preserving the buildings. The church is used for weddings and other functions. The parish hall hosts wedding dances and receptions of various kinds. The rectory is rented to provide some income. The centennial of the parish was celebrated in 1980 with the publication of a history book and appropriate festivities. A Board of Trustees manages the property, and local support remains strong.

The architectural significance of the complex lies in the quality of the design and workmanship of the church in the Romanesque Revival style and in the prominence of its scale and material in the local and county context. An equally significant feature is the parish unit of church, rectory, parish hall, fences, trees, and cemetery remains intact, with the exception of the school.

The Gothic Revival was the most common architectural style for religious structures in early 20th century Nebraska. However the Romanesque Revival design elements are occasionally found. The recently listed St. Bonaventure Catholic Church Complex, Boone County, was the first Romanesque Revival church from Nebraska to be listed in the National Register. A major indication of the Romanesque in the O'Connor church is the use of round or Roman arches in all window and door openings and in the arcades and roof

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET Significance ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 4

of the interior (see photos #6 and #7). There are Gothic influences in the single centered steeple, rose window, and slender columns of the interior arcade, but the emphasis on the round arches clearly mark a Romanesque influence. The barrel vaulted nave roof in a highly unusual feature in Nebraska churches, even for those employing other Romanesque details. The Italian Renaissance style of the windows (see photo #8) is another non-Gothic feature of Italian derivation. The architect described the style as "Roman architecture."

The architect, James H. Craddock (1856-1932), was of Irish descent, his father immigrated from County Tipperary in 1848. Craddock was born and educated in Mystic, Connecticut, and came to Nebraska in 1885 to begin work as an architect. He designed a number of Nebraska public schools and state institutions. Active in politics, he served as a state representative in 1917. A member of the Catholic church, he also designed the churches of the other two Irish-Catholic parishes in Greeley County - St. Michael's and Sacred Heart.

The history of the Church of the Visitation at O'Connor is an important part of the story of Irish Catholic colonization activities in Nebraska and the Great Plains. The work of Bishop James O'Connor is shown not only in the name of the place but in the importance of the parish. The colonization activities of the Association brought many Irish to Greeley County and the effect remains today in the number of Irish surnames and associations. The Irish Catholic Colonization Association did not aid as many Irish-Americans as expected nor did it prove to be a great business venture, but it did bring many Irish to Greeley County, which was important to the local history, and to the history of Irish settlement of the state. Bishop O'Connor wished to establish strong centers of Catholicity in Nebraska, and judging by the size and prominence of the parish buildings in O'Connor this was successful.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET Bibliography ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 2

Burbach, Gerald J. "An Irish Colony in Nebraska," M.A. Thesis, St. Paul, Minnesota, 1960.

Centennial of the Church of the Visitation at O'Connor, Nebraska, 1880-1980.

Diamond Jubilee of the Church of the Visitation at O'Connor, Nebraska, 1880-1955. July 4, 1955.

McDermott, Edith Swain. The Pioneer History of Greeley County, Nebraska. Greeley, Nebraska: Citizen Printing Co., 1939.

Nebraska Historic Sites Survey Form: Church of the Visitation. Prepared by Michael L. Costello, Vice-Chairman, O'Connor Trustees, November 2, 1980.

Omaha World-Herald, March 17, 1932, James Craddock obituary.

The True Voice, November 3, 1905, p. 1, "Splendid Church Dedicated."

Wakeley, Arthur C. Omaha: The Gate City and Douglas County, Nebraska. Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1917, p. 254.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

Verbal Boundary Description

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 10 PAGE 2

Beginning at the southeast corner of section 21, Township 18 North, Range 10 West, in Greeley County, Nebraska, proceed north 906.18 feet, proceed west 1991.88 feet, proceed north 482.82 feet, proceed west 2320 feet, proceed south 1389 feet to the southern boundary of section 21, and proceed east along said section line to the point of beginning. All of this property was part of the land purchased by the Irish Catholic Colonization Association from the Burlington Railroad in 1880. The title to this property was transferred by Bishop Richard Scannell to the Church of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in 1905; the ownership has remained unchanged since that time.

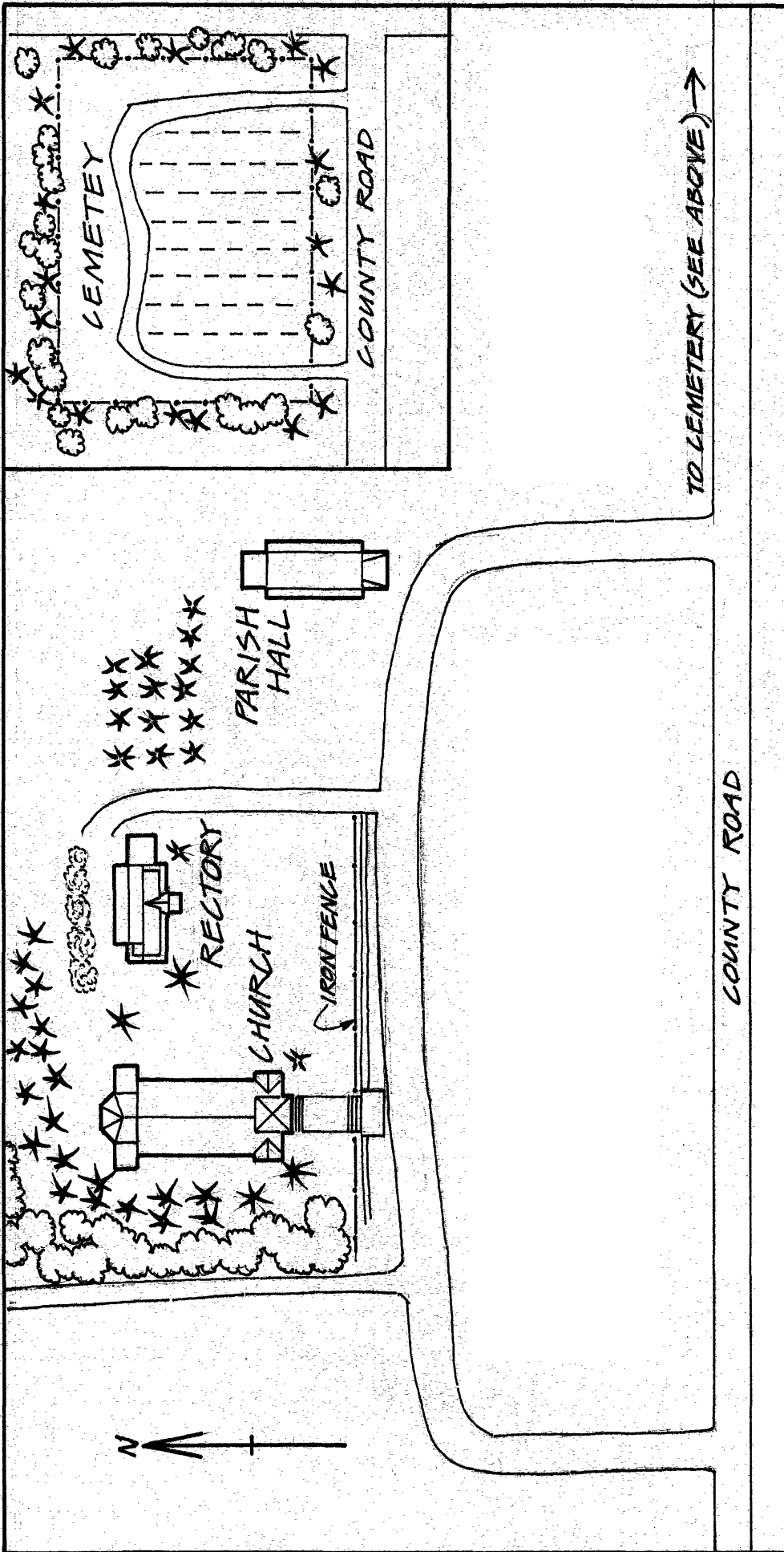
A. 41° 30' 42"
98° 27' 48"

B. 41° 30' 34"
98° 27' 48"

C. 41° 30' 34"
98° 28' 44"

D. 41° 30' 48"
98° 28' 44"

E. 41° 30' 48"
98° 27' 48"



NO SCALE

MAP DRAWN BY STEVE RYAN
 FROM FIELD NOTES BY PENNY
 CHATFIELD-SODHI AND FROM
 AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE
 GREELEY COUNTY ASSESSOR'S OFFICE.
 NEBRASKA STATE HISTORICAL
 SOCIETY, DECEMBER, 1983.

CHURCH OF THE VISITATION
 OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN
 MARY COMPLEX (GY00-1)
 O'CONNOR, GREELEY
 COUNTY, NEBRASKA