

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only  
received JUL 18 1985  
date entered AUG 15 1985

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

**1. Name**

historic Church of St. Francis Xavier

and/or common Church of St. Francis

**2. Location**

street & number 13th Street N. and Montana Avenue N/A not for publication

city, town Benson N/A vicinity of ~~Congressional district~~

state Minnesota code 22 county Swift code 151

**3. Classification**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>
<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"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name Church of St. Francis

street & number 13th Street N. and Montana Avenue

city, town Benson N/A vicinity of state Minnesota

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Swift County Courthouse

street & number 14th Street N. and Idaho Avenue

city, town Benson state Minnesota

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Minnesota Statewide Historic Sites Survey has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1983-1984  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records State Historic Preservation Office, Fort Snelling History Center

city, town St. Paul state Minnesota

## 7. Description

**Condition**

excellent  
 good  
 fair

deteriorated  
 ruins  
 unexposed

**Check one**

unaltered  
 altered

**Check one**

original site  
 moved date           N/A          

**Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance**

The Church of St. Francis Xavier is located at the southeast corner of 13th Street N. and Montana Avenue in a residential neighborhood on Benson's north side. The church shares a large site with a 1900 woodframe Colonial Revival style rectory, a parking lot, and a 1953 brick school. Across the street to the west of the church is a 1900 Shingle style house which has been converted for use as a convent.

The Church of St. Francis, completed in 1917, was designed by accomplished Beaux Arts architect Emmanuel L. Masqueray and built by contractors Fallis and Engstrom. The church has a sophisticated Renaissance-inspired design and is intact and in good condition. It was constructed of stretcher bonded tan Hebron brick and gray Bedford limestone, in a Latin cross plan. The main facade of the church, which faces west, has a projecting narthex with a Classically-inspired portico approached by wide concrete steps and a square, two story Italian Renaissance-inspired tower rising from the gabled roof. The three bay limestone portico consists of four engaged Tuscan columns with entasis supporting an unadorned stone entablature topped by a solid balustrade. Above the portico is a stained glass bullseye window recessed within a semi-circular brick arch with brick keystone. Within the portico are three entrances consisting of double leaf doors topped by rectangular multi-paned transoms. The central entrance is marked by a rounded arched multi-paned window with a keystone which is placed above an entablature. Blind bullseye windows are situated above the other two entrances.

The tower above the main facade has three narrow rounded arched openings separated by small Tuscan columns on each side of the first level. Corner pilasters at this level support an entablature which in turn supports four corner pedestals topped by stone urns and joined by a balustrade. Above this balustrade rises the upper level of the tower which has two narrow rounded arched openings on each side and corner pilasters supporting an entablature. The tower is capped by a polygonal metal-covered dome resting on an octagonal base and surmounted by an ornate metal cross.

The narthex, three bay nave, and short transepts of the church are lighted by large rounded arched stained glass windows which are recessed into larger brick rounded arches. The nave is divided into bays by brick piers. Both the main facade and the transepts of the building have gabled parapet walls with simple decorative brickwork. The building has a stone watertable and stone sills. The exterior of the building is intact, with the exception of a new asphalt shingle roof.

The interior of the Church of St. Francis has a Renaissance-inspired design with white plaster walls and dark oak woodwork. The nave is lined with rounded arched stained glass windows in dark oak frames which are recessed and enframed with rounded arches and large pilasters in a design which reflects the recessions within the bays on the exterior walls of the nave. The ceiling has large rectangular recessions defined by plaster beams with architrave moldings. At the rear of the nave is a choir loft consisting of an entablature supported by heavy brackets, topped by a curved railing with urn-shaped balusters. Windows and doors in the church have dark oak frames with architrave moldings. The church, which was designed to seat five hundred people, retains its original oak pews with square architrave moldings and an oak confessional. The interior was decorated in 1932 by Gaytee Studios of Minneapolis, which also decorated the interior of Emmanuel Masqueray's Basilica of St. Mary in Minneapolis. The firm designed stained glass windows, crystal light fixtures, an altar, lamps, and other furnishings for the church. St. Francis was redecorated again in 1958 when the present marble altar was installed. Other alterations to the church interior have included raising the floor of the sanctuary slightly and installing a plaster relief sculpture at the east end, behind the altar.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input 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 type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input 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 type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

**Specific dates** 1917 **Builder/Architect** Emmanuel L. Masqueray, architect

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

Fallis and Engstrom, builder

The Church of St. Francis Xavier, located in Benson, Minnesota, and built in 1917, is architecturally significant as a successful Renaissance-inspired church designed by accomplished St. Paul architect Emmanuel L. Masqueray, and as one of the most architecturally sophisticated churches standing in west central Minnesota. Historically the church is significant as the home of a Catholic parish which was founded in 1881 and which served a portion Swift County's substantial Irish and European Catholic immigrant population.

Catholic settlers to Swift County began to arrive in large numbers during the spring of 1876, six years after the town of Benson was platted. The impetus behind this movement derived from the work of St. Paul Archbishop John Ireland who, in an effort resettle Catholic families from Ireland, Europe, and East Coast cities, established the Catholic Colonization Bureau in St. Paul in January of 1876. Ireland encouraged Catholics to establish farms on railroad-owned land in Swift County which was under his control and to populate the towns of DeGraff and Clontarf, which flanked Benson on the St. Paul and Pacific Railroad line. Ireland organized Catholic churches in the DeGraff and Clontarf in 1876 and 1877. Although Ireland did not work directly to settle Benson, the town grew as a result of the two colonies flanking it and gained a substantial Catholic population.

Catholic services were first held in Benson in 1876. The Benson parish was served by the DeGraff priest from 1876-78 and by the Clontarf priest from 1878-1898. The Church of St. Francis was organized as an independent parish in December of 1881 and incorporated in 1882. The first church building, a woodframe structure, was built in 1882. In 1898 the parish received its first resident priest, Father Patrick Shea, who served Benson until 1947. A woodframe Colonial Revival style rectory was built in 1900.

The present Church of St. Francis was designed by Emmanuel L. Masqueray (1861-1917) and built in 1917. Masqueray was a Beaux Arts architect of national reputation who became a specialist in ecclesiastical architecture. He was born in France and trained at L'Ecole de Beaux Arts in Paris, before establishing offices in New York City and St. Paul. He was a friend of Archbishop John Ireland, who may have assisted Masqueray in winning commissions for several Catholic churches in the state. Masqueray's most well known Minnesota designs are the Cathedral of St. Paul (in St. Paul) and the Basilica of St. Mary in Minneapolis. Masqueray was well versed in the Renaissance tradition and designed several churches in this style. The Church of St. Francis in Benson is one of his most successful designs for a church of moderate scale. Masqueray designed the church late in his career. It is one of about two dozen Catholic parish churches he is known to have designed during the years 1908-1917. He received a fee of \$1,072 for designing the church. Unfortunately, Masqueray died on May 26, 1917, before the Benson church was completed.

The Church of St. Francis was constructed by Benson contractors Wilber Fallis and John Engstrom at an estimated cost of \$40,000. The cornerstone was laid June 3, 1917 and the building was dedicated September 3, 1918. Decoration of the interior of the church was delayed until 1932 when stained glass, an altar, light fixtures, and other furnishings designed by Gaytee Studios of Minneapolis were installed. The church was again redecorated in 1958. Today the church stands on a site it shares with the 1900 woodframe (See continuation sheet)

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

"He Lives, St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church, Benson, Minnesota, 1882-1982." Centennial brochure, 1982.  
 Lathrop, Alan K. "Emmanuel L. Masqueray, 1861-1917." Minnesota History, v. 47, n. 2 (Summer, 1980), pp. 43-56.  
 Swift County Monitor, Aug. 30, 1918, Sept. 6, 1918, and Nov. 18, 1932.

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than 1 acre

Quadrangle name Benson Quad.

Quadrangle scale 7.5

**UMT References**

A 

1	5
---	---

2	9	6	4	0	0
---	---	---	---	---	---

5	0	2	1	3	8	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

  
 Zone Easting Northing

B 

--	--

--	--	--	--

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

  
 Zone Easting Northing

C 

--	--

--	--	--	--

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

D 

--	--

--	--	--	--

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

E 

--	--

--	--	--	--

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

F 

--	--

--	--	--	--

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

G 

--	--

--	--	--	--

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

H 

--	--

--	--	--	--

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

**Verbal boundary description and justification**

Lot 6, Block 1, Second Railway Addition.

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

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Susan Granger/Field Assistant  
State Historic Preservation Office

organization Minnesota Historical Society date March 1984

street & number Fort Snelling History Center telephone (612) 726-1171

city or town St. Paul state Minnesota 55111

# 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

*Russell W. Fridley*

title Russell W. Fridley  
State Historic Preservation Officer

date 6/27/85

For NPS use only

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

Entered in the  
 National Register

date 8/15/85

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**



Continuation sheet Church of St. Francis

Item number 8

Page 1

- 
8. rectory and a 1953 brick parochial school. St. Francis was identified during a historic sites survey of west central Minnesota (conducted under the auspices of the State Historic Preservation Office as part of a statewide survey process, 1983-84) as being one of the largest and most architecturally sophisticated churches standing in the seven county area included in the survey.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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

---

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

for Keeper Melvin Lyman  
1/19/89

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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

---

**Note: These changes apply to  
Church of St. Francis Xavier in  
Swift County, Minnesota.**

**REFERENCE NUMBER:** 85001753

**STATE:** MINNESOTA

**COUNTY:** Swift

**RESOURCE NAME (HISTORIC):** Church of St. Francis Xavier (Catholic)

**CITY:**

**VICINITY OF:**

**ADDRESS:**

**CERTIFICATION DATE:**

**REMOVED DATE:**

**COMMENTS:**

*Nina M. Archabal*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Nina M. Archabal  
State Historic Preservation Officer

JUN 17 1988

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date