

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received MAY 10 1988

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*

Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic German Lutheran Church of Middleton

and/or common First Lutheran Church (preferred)

2. Location

street & number Pleasant View Road at Old Sauk Road n.a. not for publication

city, town Town of Middleton n.a. vicinity of

state Wisconsin 53562 code WI county Dane code 025

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input 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 type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	n.a.	<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 Trustees of First Lutheran Church, c/o Ms. Beatrice Green Erslund

street & number 2020 Bristol Street

city, town Middleton n.a. vicinity of state WI 53562

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Dane County Register of Deeds

street & number 210 Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.

city, town Madison state WI 53709

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Wisconsin Inventory of Historic Places has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1976  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Historic Preservation Division  
State Historical Society of Wisconsin

city, town Madison state WI 53706

## 7. Description

### Condition

excellent  
 good  
 fair

deteriorated  
 ruins  
 unexposed

### Check one

unaltered  
 altered

### Check one

original site  
 moved date \_\_\_\_\_

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

The First Lutheran Church sits on a high point of land at a rural crossroads, overlooking the rolling farmlands of the Town of Middleton. The surrounding land is farmland, but two small rural subdivisions and a future office park are located near-by.

#### Exterior

The church is a simple frame structure with a rectangular plan, 32 feet wide and 90 feet long. Built in 1866 with an addition in 1885, its massing and proportions are Greek Revival in style, while its decorative details are Gothic Revival. It has a gable roof of moderate pitch, slightly steeper than the standard Greek Revival form, but within the limits of the idiom. The gable end faces the street and its trimmed with returned eaves. The roof was originally cedar shingles, but is now covered with asphalt shingles.

Over the main entrance (on the west) is a graceful steeple, square in plan with a tall, octagonal spire. At the pinnacle is a simple weather vane. The spire is shaped like a witch's cap and shelters the belfry which is pierced on each of its four sides by a pointed arched opening. Tall, traceried Gothic arch appliques flank each opening. Above are Italianate brackets with bands of quatrefoil designs between them. A pent roof flares out from the base of the belfry to cover the steeple's base, which is trimmed on each of its four sides with four carved Gothic arches applied in a band under the pent roof. Applied spindles trim each corner of the base. The spire and pent roof were originally covered in cedar shingles but are now asphalt shingled. The bell, which was hung in the steeple in 1885, is still being used.

The front facade has a central doorway inset in a pointed arched reveal. The double doors are Victorian in design, with a large glass window trimmed with a colonial skirt under the sill and three molded panels below, the bottom two vertical and the top one horizontal. Door hardware and a letter slot are cast with Victorian floral designs. A denticulated cornice separates the door from the tympanum inserted in which is a panel with black, old-style letters: "Erste Lutheran Kirche - 1852," which is the German wording for "First Lutheran Church - 1852," the current name and date of the founding of the congregation. Solid cheek walls of siding enclose the seven wide steps that lead up to the entrance. To each side of the door is a tall, lancet window, composed of double-hung six-over-six sash with a fixed, pointed arched sash above, trimmed with curved muntins that create a spare Gothic tracery pattern. The double-hung sash are recent replacements matching the original; the fixed portions are original. Under the left-hand window is a simple wooden bulkhead that leads to the basement. In the center of the pediment, a small bull's-eye window is decorated with a Gothic trefoil applique. The siding on the church is drop siding with narrow corner boards.

The two long sides of the church are nearly identical. Each side is pierced by tall lancets of the same type as on the front. The windows are almost evenly spaced, except that between the second and third windows from the front the space

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is a little wider and the siding is broken by a vertical board. This indicates the extent of the original church, which was lengthened two bays to the west (40 feet) in 1885. On the north side are six windows, two bulkheads covering stairs to the basement, and a large oil drum on legs. On the south side, the easternmost bay is a pointed arched entrance with five-panel doubled doors and a denticulated cornice under the tympanum trimmed with molding in a double arch design.<sup>1</sup> A three-step concrete stoop leads to this doorway. On this side are five windows and one more bulkhead door.

The east end of the church has two, evenly spaced lancets of the same type as the rest and returned eaves.

Two plain, cream brick chimneys rise from the roof on the north side and one is located on the south side. The foundation is fieldstone covered with a thin layer of concrete.

Interior

Inside the front door is a narrow vestibule extending across the front of the building. The wide floor boards are painted red. Two four-panel doors with Bennington knobs lead to the nave which, because of the large windows and white painted walls, seems to be flooded with light. Four steps mark the juncture of the original church and its addition, which was constructed to allow headroom for a basement Sunday School room. Two side aisles separate three banks of pews, which are simple pine seats hand-grained to look like oak. The original 1866 pews have slightly more molding on the ends and a center divider to separate the ladies from the gentlemen.

The floor is pine. Vertical beaded boards create a simple wainscot along each side. Near the front on each side is a metal stove. Neither stove is in working order at this time. The ceiling is flat, but curves downward at the sides to meet the walls.

The altar and pulpit date to the 1885 remodelling.<sup>2</sup> They are wood, painted white with gold trim. The organ, at the left, was added in 1907 and is enclosed in a tall, panelled box with three Gothic arched openings exposing the pipes. Above are tall pointed finials and parapets with trefoil crockets and carved tracery.

The organ was built by the firm of William Schuelke of Milwaukee. It is of the tubular pneumatic type with a hand-operated winding system. The copper pneumatic tubes have disintegrated and the winding system has come apart, making the organ unplayable at this time. Almost all of the pipes are intact and are painted with faded gold stencilled designs.

The altarpiece is also tripartite with similar decoration to the organ and a large cross at the top. A polychrome statue of Jesus stands on a central pedestal above the altar table. The panelled altar screen is embellished with carved trim applied to the center of each panel. To the right is the polygonal pulpit supported on

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a carved center post with decorative brackets.

A large chandelier hangs near the altar. An elaborate Victorian fixture, it holds five glass kerosene lamps, which remain intact but are no longer used. A mate hangs near the back of the church. Five 1950s vintage electric lights also hang from the ceiling. Another large chandelier with stained glass panes sits in storage, having been smashed by vandals.

Setting

The cemetery surrounds three sides of the church and is enclosed by an old wire fence. The cemetery was recently restored; fallen markers were raised and set in fresh concrete and brush was cut down. None of the markers in the cemetery possess unusual artistic qualities. Nevertheless, its history is an integral part of the history of the church and it provides an appropriate visual setting for the church; it is therefore considered to be a contributing resource.

An old shed-roofed, vertical board outhouse sits at the northwest corner of the property, screened by ancient lilacs. The outhouse is considered non-contributing because it is in very poor condition and because old photographs show it to be of relatively recent construction.

Integrity

Old photographs show that the church has been altered very little in the past 100 years. The steeple on the original, 1866 church was a short, boxy structure and was not reused in the 1885 remodeling. Working shutters once covered some windows.

In 1902 a windstorm took down the tower, but it was immediately restored to its original appearance. On the inside, the pulpit has been lowered two or three feet. Some simple stencilled designs once trimmed the colored walls. The stoves once sat further from the altar with long stove pipes connecting to the existing chimneys. Other than these minor changes, the church remains remarkably intact, both inside and out.

This nomination is being prepared as part of a community effort to help protect the church from a proposed road widening, which could have a significant adverse affect on the church, the front steps of which are located within the right-of-way for Pleasant View Road.

<sup>1</sup>These doors were recently damaged by vandals but will be restored.

<sup>2</sup>Rev. Ernst F. Scherbel, History of the First German Lutheran Congregation in the Town of Middleton, 1902.

Number of resources: one contributing building (the church); one non-contributing building (the outhouse), and one contributing site (the cemetery).

## 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/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
				ethnic heritage:
<b>Specific dates</b>	1866; 1885 <sup>1</sup>	<b>Builder/Architect</b>	unknown	European

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Period of Significance: 1866 - 1915<sup>2</sup>

The First Lutheran Church is eligible for the National Register on the local level of significance under Criterion A, as the last non-residential structure known to remain that is connected with the German heritage of the Town of Middleton. It is also eligible under criterion C, as an architecturally significant example of a remarkably intact frame Victorian church building. Because of these areas of significance, the church meets the special requirements for eligibility of religious structures. Because the cemetery is an integral part of the church and contributes to an understanding of its history, it also meets the special requirements for eligibility of cemeteries (criteria considerations A and C).\*

### Historical Background

The first Germans to immigrate to the Town of Middleton came in 1846 to become stock-raisers and farmers of the area's rich, fertile soil. Many came from the region of Mecklenberg in Northern Germany. Settling at first on Section 16, the school section, they soon spread throughout most of the town, intermingling with the Yankees and families from England. In 1852, fourteen German immigrant families founded the German Lutheran Church of Middleton. At first they met in the homes of Gustav Polkow and Heinrich Frederich Niebuhr, but in 1855 they built a log church and school building on Section 15 on land purchased from the Niebuhrs. The church was officially incorporated in 1859. By 1866 the congregation had outgrown the tiny log structure. For ten dollars the church bought from the Polkows land on a rise about one-third mile south of the log building. There, in 1866, the 31 families of the congregation erected a new frame church, 32 feet wide and 50 feet long.

By this time the Germans had become the predominant ethnic group in the Town of Middleton, a position they have held to the present.<sup>3</sup> It was a prosperous farming community -- in the 1870s more wheat was shipped from the Middleton depot than any other station in a five state region except Milwaukee and Prairie du Chien. In the late 1870s the tiny village of Middleton had six men engaged in stock buying.<sup>4</sup> At this time, other churches were built by Germans in the township, including St. John's Lutheran on Section 5, which shared its pastor with First Lutheran. In 1885 First Lutheran again felt the need to expand. The ninety-eight families of the congregation each chipped in \$82.00 and transportation of building materials from Madison to add forty feet to the front of the church.

Membership in the church reached its highest peak between 1890 and 1915. But the growth of the near-by village of Middleton and the age of the automobile spelled the beginning of the end for the pioneer congregation.

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In 1894 a group of Lutherans living in and around the village of Middleton asked the minister of First German if he would help them form a church in the village. St. Luke's, which would become the largest congregation in the Middleton area, was organized on October 20, 1894. Rev. E. F. Scherbel served as pastor for St. Luke's as well as for St. John's and the mother church, First Lutheran, until 1920. As the older members of St. John's and First Lutheran passed away, their children joined St. Luke's which was soon easily accessible by car.<sup>5</sup> After World War I, membership at First Lutheran declined. By 1947 there were only about 25 parishioners left. In that year the congregation voted to close the church and attend St. Luke's instead. Trustees of the old church resolved to maintain it in perpetuity -- a testament to its historical importance to the community. Today, it is used now and again for weddings and once a year for memorial services.

Ethnic Heritage/European

The Cultural Resources Management plan for Wisconsin states:

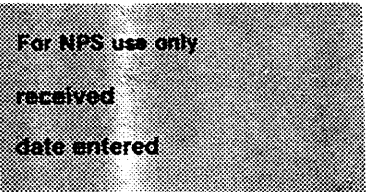
Resources representing identifiable German building traditions or that are directly associated with individuals, groups or activities that played significant roles in the perpetuation of German ethnic traditions should be given greater priority than those sites or structures with only general association to German culture in the state. Those properties with only general association to German settlement should retain a high degree of architectural integrity and/or be shown to be one of the only remaining sites or structures associated with the Germans in a particular locality.<sup>6</sup>

Although the association of First Lutheran to German culture is of a general nature, it, indeed retains a high degree of architectural integrity, as will be discussed in the "architecture" section, and it is the only remaining public building associated with the Town of Middleton's German heritage. The Town of Middleton is a rural agricultural area. The buildings associated with the residents' German heritage were its churches, dotted across the countryside. Early settlers to Middleton built churches in Sections 1, 5, 11, 12, 15, 20, 22 and 27. With the exception of First Lutheran in Section 15, all of these historic structures have been demolished, destroyed by fire or altered beyond recognition into residences.

One memoir of German life in and around Middleton in the last half of the 19th century states that the social life in this community of farmers consisted of the church, the school and gatherings in the homes.<sup>7</sup> Settlers in the Town of Middleton established eleven schools, eight of which are gone and three of which have been substantially altered. Thus, except for farmhouses, First Lutheran represents that last social center of the German settlers remaining intact in the Town. Old photographs of reunions and picnics held at the church -- showing

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hundreds of people attending these popular celebrations -- confirm the importance of First Lutheran as a social center.

According to the Cultural Resources Management in Wisconsin manual, "increasing urbanization and suburbanization threaten ethnic associated resources in rural areas...."<sup>8</sup> In the case of the First Lutheran Church, urbanization caused the dissolution of the parish in 1947. Suburbanization of encroaching Madison, in the form of proposed street widenings and development of adjacent farmland, presents a renewed threat to the church and its surroundings.

Architecture

The First Lutheran Church is one of the finest frame 19th century churches remaining in Dane County. There are ten frame rural Dane County churches on the Wisconsin Inventory of Historic Places. Of these, four have been substantially altered, two are very simple in design and four are good examples of their type. The First Lutheran is one of these. The other three are purely Gothic Revival in style, while the First Lutheran is a blend of Greek Revival massing and shapes with Gothic Revival details.<sup>9</sup> This element of classicism is typical of Germanic architecture of the 1850s and 1860s. The Victorian Gothic exterior and interior details added in the 1885 remodeling add a further dimension to the architectural significance both as representations of the typically modest architectural elaborations of small rural churches and due to their high degree of integrity.

The organ deserves special note. It was built in 1907 by the William Schuelke firm of Milwaukee, one of four pipe organ manufacturers in Wisconsin's history and a regionally significant company. Schuelke organs were noted for their excellent sound, a light, clear sound that was distinctly Germanic. Although the voices of First Lutheran's pipes have not been heard for over 30 years, the organ is completely intact and restorable. Of the several hundred organs built by the Schuelke firm over its approximately 35 year history (ca.<sup>10</sup> 1890 to 1925), only 20 or 30 remain intact, only three of which are in Wisconsin.

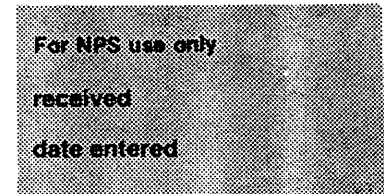
In addition to the organ, the interior decoration -- the altar, the pulpit, the kerosene lamp chandeliers, the stoves and the hand-grained pews -- convey the sense of a 19th century rural house of worship better than almost any other building remaining in Dane County. Its simple but well-executed ornamentation is a concrete illustration of the local pride of its rural Town of Middleton congregation and its desire to enhance the community's self-image and express the importance of its church as a social focus of the community.

<sup>1</sup>Rev. Ernst F. Scherbel, History of the First German Lutheran Church Congregation in the Town of Middleton, 1902.

<sup>2</sup>The period of significance starts from the date of construction of the church and ends when the size of the congregation began to decline. This is also the time when, according to the Middleton Centennial Book (p. 73), the strong Germanic character of the Town of Middleton eroded considerably with the onset of World War

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I. The name "First Lutheran Church" is preferred because the church has been known by that name since 1933.

<sup>3</sup> History of Dane County, Chicago: Western Historical Co., 1880, pp. 1207-1217; and plat maps for Dane County in the possession of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin and Dane County Land Regulation and Records Dept., Dane County Courthouse.

<sup>4</sup> Middleton Centennial Book, Middleton: Middleton Centennial, Inc., 1956, p. 73.

<sup>5</sup> The current St. Luke's edifice dates to 1923-1924.

<sup>6</sup> Barbara Wyatt, project director, Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin, Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1986, v. I, p. 2-12.

<sup>7</sup> Martha Engel Stone, Mutti Came to Middleton, privately printed, 1978.

<sup>8</sup> Wyatt, v. I, p. 1-3.

<sup>9</sup> There are two other Greek Revival churches remaining in the county. Both have been significantly altered in recent years by the addition of large wings.

<sup>10</sup> The organ has a dated nameplate. Information on the historical importance of the Schuelke firm came from an interview with Theodore Reinke, member of the Organ Historical Society, Feb. 21, 1988. Because it is not playable at this time and because a well-known major work of the Schuelke firm is in playable condition at St. Francis Roman Catholic Church in Milwaukee, the First Lutheran organ is not considered to be of sufficient merit at this time to warrant a separate area of significance.

\* The cemetery is considered to be a contributing element of the First Lutheran Church. The cemetery is both physically and historically linked to the church. The cemetery contains the bodies of earliest members of the First Lutheran congregation and its development was contemporaneous and parallel to the development of the church itself. The cemetery retains headstones recording the personal histories of the churches members and contributes to both the Ethnic and Architectural significance of the property.



## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Please see continuation sheet.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property one half acre

Quadrangle name Middleton, Wisconsin

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

### UTM References

A 

1	6	2	9	3	5	0	0	4	7	7	2	0	8	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

E 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

**Verbal boundary description and justification** Part of the northeast quarter of the southwest quarter, Section 15, Town 7 North, Range 8 East; beginning at a point 326.5 feet north from the center of the southwest quarter, then north 132 feet, then east 165 feet, then south 132 feet, then west 165 feet to the point of beginning. (continued)

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

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Robert J. Anders and Katherine H. Rankin

organization for the owners date February 21, 1988

street & number 2818 Ridge Road telephone 608-231-1618

city or town Madison state WI 53705

## 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 [Signature]

title State Historic Preservation Officer WI date 4/20/88

### For NPS use only

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

[Signature] Beth Boland date 6/16/88  
Keeper of the National Register

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

Chief of Registration

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Item #9: Major Bibliographical References

"Constitution of the First German Lutheran Church in the Town of Middleton," Jan. 4, 1888, manuscript in possession of Beatrice Ermland.

"Churches Door Is Opened Only One Day a Year," Milwaukee Journal, April 1, 1956.

Daniels, Eileen and Tom, History of Middleton, Middleton: Middleton Times-Tribune, 1948, pp. 68-69.

Deeds, church book and mortgages, Dane County Register of Deeds, Dane County Courthouse.

Drury, John, This Is Dane County, Wisconsin, Milwaukee: Inland Photo Co., 1958.

Engel, Martha Stone, Mutti Came to Middleton, privately printed, 1978.

"Financial Records of the First German Lutheran Church in the Town of Middleton," 1885-1932 and 1958-1965, manuscript in the possession of Beatrice Ermland.

"First Lutheran Church Holds Memorial Service," Middleton Times-Tribune, Aug. 26, 1965.

History of Dane County, Chicago: Western Historical Co., 1880, pp. 899-910; 1207-1217.

"History of the First Lutheran Church of Middleton," Middleton: Trustees of First Lutheran Church, 1965.

Madison, Dane County and Surrounding Towns, Madison: William J. Park & Co., 1877.

Middleton Centennial Book, Middleton: Middleton Centennial, Inc., 1956, pp. 73-75.

"Minute Book of the First Lutheran Congregation,: Feb. 8, 1942 to Feb., 1947; and miscellaneous minutes, letters and records, 1947-1987.

Plat and survey maps, 1861 to the present, Dane County Land Regulation and Records Dept., Dane County Courthouse.

Plat books for Dane County, 1861, 1873, 1890, 1899, 1904, 1911, in the possession of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

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Reinke, Theodore, member Organ Historical Society, interview with Katherine Rankin, Feb. 21, 1988.

Scherbel, Rev. Ernst F., History of the First German Lutheran Church Congregation in the Town of Middleton, 1902, (no publisher).

Supervisors' records, Town of Middleton, Middleton Town Hall.

Wyatt, Barbara, project director, Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin, Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1986, v. I.

Item #10: Verbal boundary description and justification, continued:

The boundaries include the lot on which the church sits and its small, adjoining cemetery on the north, east and south sides of the church.

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Photo #1: View of front (west) and side (north) facades, view from northwest.

Photo #2: View of side (north) and rear (east) facades, view from northeast.

Photo #3: View of interior from rear (west end) of church.

All photographs taken in April, 1987 by Harry Healy. Negatives in possession of the photographer.