

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

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: Rhode Island	
COUNTY: Providence	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE
	JUL 15 1974

**1. NAME**

COMMON:  
St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church.

AND/OR HISTORIC:

**2. LOCATION**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
86 Hope Street

CITY OR TOWN:  
Providence

STATE: Rhode Island, 02906      CODE: 44      COUNTY: Providence      CODE: 007

**3. CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <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 (Specify)

**4. OWNER OF PROPERTY**

OWNER'S NAME:  
Roman Catholic Diocese of Providence

STREET AND NUMBER:  
Cathedral Square

CITY OR TOWN: Providence      STATE: Rhode Island, 02903      CODE: 44

**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:  
Providence City Hall

STREET AND NUMBER:  
Dorrance Street at Washington Street

CITY OR TOWN: Providence      STATE: Rhode Island, 02903      CODE: 44

**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

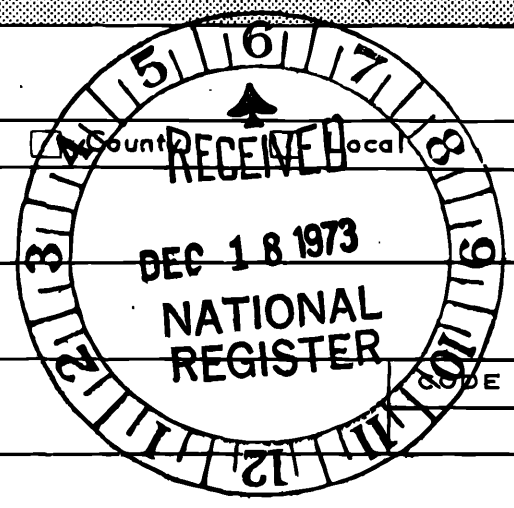
TITLE OF SURVEY:  
Not so represented

DATE OF SURVEY:       Federal       State       County       Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:      STATE:



STATE:

COUNTY:

ENTRY NUMBER: JUL 15 1974

DATE:

FOR NPS USE ONLY

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unaltered		<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site	

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Dating from the mid-XIX Century, St. Joseph's parish church is in the Victorian Gothic style almost universally considered essential at that time for a religious edifice. Begun in 1851 from the designs of Patrick C. Keeley, it was completed in 1853 and has since then presented us with a sizeable and pleasing, if somewhat externally austere, adaptation of English "Pointed Gothic" design.

The building is basically a long, high, gable-roofed rectangle with a tall, square tower (without spire) protruded from centre front and with an altar sanctuary flanked by low vestries pushed out at the rear; there are no transepts. Exterior facing is of tawny native stone laid in random ashlar, roughly-dressed, and trim is of smoothly-dressed dark brown sandstone. At all exterior angles and along the side elevations are stepped buttresses on pedestals, their sloped steps covered and trimmed by sandstone. The long roof is covered by slate. The interior, behind a vestibule or narthex, is laid out in simple basilican form, and this dictates the three entrances across the entrance (east) front; the central portal pierces the base of the tower and is recessed beneath a series of rounded mouldings in its pointed archway; those in the flanking bays of this façade are smaller but similar. Pointed and traceried windows are used above the portals and between them, there being an especially large one halfway up the front of the tower; above this big window is a small quatrefoil one and then paired, pointed, louvred openings at the belfry stage. The tower's top is finished with tall pinnacles having cone-like terminations at its corners; between these runs crenellation interrupted by smaller pinnacles. The sides of this church are plain, simply showing the progression of six bays between buttresses, the five western of these bays being occupied by tall, traceried, stained-glass windows. A large window of stained glass is a major interior adornment of the chancel or sanctuary and is the chief external adornment of the church's generally-unseen rear.

The interior remains very much as Keeley originally planned it, though it now displays more surface embellishment than it had in the 1850's. (As the parish was at first by no means a rich one, simply erecting a church building of this size must have been a formidable undertaking, without allowing for applied interior elegancies; at the beginning the church must have been as severe inside as it remains outside.) Entrance to the church is through a one-storey vestibule, above which is the organ and choir-loft, across the east end, and here are enclosed corner stairs to the balconies of the church proper and three doors opening to its aisles. This auditorium, which is sizeable, high and open, is of basilican plan, six bays in length, and it is covered by a gable roof without clerestorey or other upper openings which is partially supported by rows of piers, on either side of the central seating space, which are encased in plaster and painted stone-colour to give the effect of clustered columns. The east-west spaces between

(See Continuation Sheet 1.)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Columbian |  16th Century |  18th Century |  20th Century  
 15th Century |  17th Century |  19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1851

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |   |   |  |
|--|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal              | <input type="checkbox"/> Education              | <input type="checkbox"/> Political                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric             | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic                | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry               | <input type="checkbox"/> Science                        | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture             | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention              | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture                      | _____                                    |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian            | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature             | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater                        | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce                | <input type="checkbox"/> Military               | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation                 | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications          | <input type="checkbox"/> Music                  |   |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation            |   |   |  |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church is a good example--and an early one in Rhode Island, along with the Episcopalian Grace and St. Stephen's Churches--of the prevalent mid-XIX-Century practise of studiously adapting designs for ecclesiastical structures in this country from early ("Pointed") English Gothic examples. So, the building shows its careful derivation outside and inside from the straightforward patterns of the larger parish churches in England's provincial sections. Its architect, Patrick C. Keeley (1816-1896), had grown up in the United Kingdom, was scarcely an untrained person, and he knew what he was about when embarking upon this Providence commission.

Born in Kilkenny, Ireland, Keeley was the son of an architect; he worked with his father and probably had some opportunities to travel and observe old buildings. At the age of twenty-five he came to this country, settling eventually in Brooklyn, New York, and thereafter carrying on a quite successful independent practise of architecture, almost entirely devoted to church work, in the northern East Coast and in nearby Canada. St. Joseph's Church dates fairly early in his long career, which later included the Roman Catholic cathedrals in Boston, Massachusetts, Portland, Maine, and (in 1893) Providence.

The financially-dictated austerity of his initial, simple yet handsome, design has over many years been lessened by the ornaments given by members of the parish or added by successive rectors, among whom Monsignor Peter E. Blessing--incumbent from 1916 to 1936--can be given special credit for taste and discretion. All of these additions to the fabric are part of the history of the building and its parish as well as the single most distinguished extant monument in Providence embodying Catholic tastes in architecture and the liturgical arts from the middle of the XIX Century to the middle of the succeeding one.

The first Roman Catholic mass in Providence was celebrated in 1789 by the French Abbé de la Poterie, and after that the local congregations for years met in private houses or small hired halls. By the 1830's, however, Catholics became more numerous here, many being Irish construction workers on the Providence-Worcester Railroad who stayed on at this end of their work and settled in Fox Point, as the area where St. Joseph's Church stands is called. By 1851 this section had been

(See Continuation Sheet 2.)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Cady, John Hutchins: The Civic and Architectural Development of Providence, 1636-1950 (Providence, Rhode Island, 1957), pp. 129, 152.  
1851-1951. Souvenir Booklet ... One Hundredth Anniversary Of ... St. Joseph's Parish ... (Providence, Rhode Island, 1951).  
 Withey, Henry F., and Withey, Elsie Rathburn: Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased) (Los Angeles, California, 1970), p. 333.

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

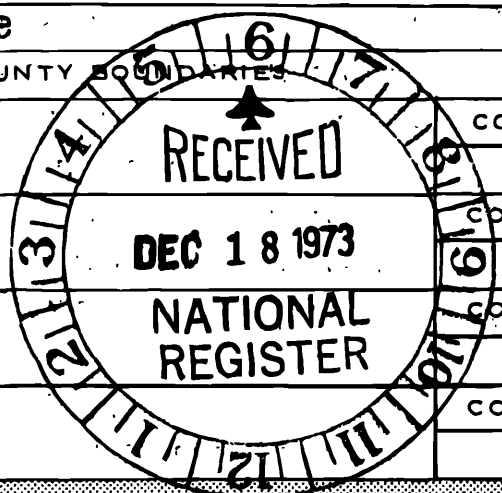
LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	° ' "	° ' "		41° 49' 16.81"N	71° 23' 50.06"W	
NE	° ' "	° ' "				
SE	° ' "	° ' "				
SW	° ' "	° ' "				

U7M  
 19/3009  
 463250  
 20

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: Less than one acre

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

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE



SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE:  
Richard B. Harrington, Consultant

ORGANIZATION: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission DATE: April 4, 1973

STREET AND NUMBER:  
John Brown House, 52 Power Street

CITY OR TOWN: Providence STATE: Rhode Island, 02906 CODE: 44

**12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National  State  Local

Name: Frederick C. Williams

Title: State Historic Preservation Officer

Date: December 13, 1973

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

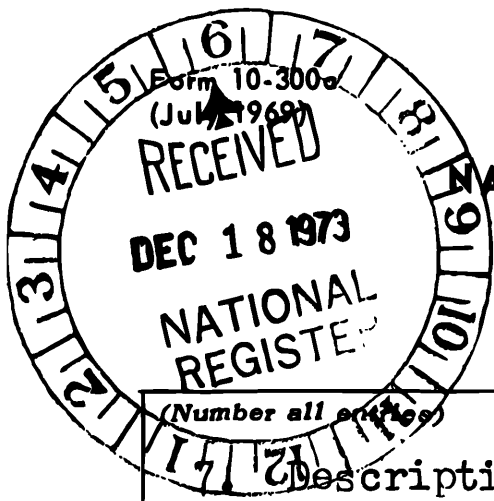
A. B. [Signature]  
 Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date: 7/15/74

ATTEST:

Ronald M. Guerberg  
 Keeper of The National Register

Date: 7/12/74



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet) -1

STATE Rhode Island	
COUNTY Providence	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE
	JUL 15 1974

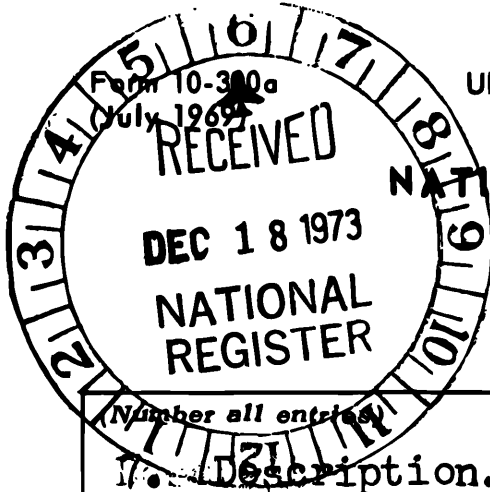
Description.

these piers or columns are handled as pointed arches, finished with a number of rounded plaster mouldings and not reaching fully up to the roof but with plastered spaces above them. Bracketted-out on consoles above each column-capital are transverse timber trusses which appear to aid in support of the roof and which intentionally give a vaulted or pointed-arch appearance to the long, main nave area. Similar trussing is employed along the lower, side areas. Down the north and south sides of the auditorium run galleries having flat frontals with applied wooden, Gothic, cusped arcading. Woodwork, including pews with panelled ends curved and carved at the top and with curving arm-rests, is of darkened oak. Plaster walls are of buff colour and probably always have been: they are adorned with stencilled borders in red, gold and green, and a similar stencil treatment is used on the ceiling of the auditorium, between trusses, giving it a panelled effect. At the west end the rectangular chancel area, much of which shows later embellishment, actually does have a pointed-arch ceiling vault, this of plaster with applied wooden ribbing

Features giving interest to the church interior (and some now, like the stencilling in the church proper and the mural paintings of angels high in the chancel, in need of restoration) are the various ornamentations and accessories given the building by parishioners over a one-hundred-year period. Around 1890 it was decided to install two side-altars flanking the sanctuary, and the provision of space for these caused removal of sections of gallery in the sixth or westernmost bays of the church. At about the same time, a chime of bells for the tower was received as a gift. Later, in 1900, the large window behind the altar was provided with stained glass from the Mazer studio in Munich--again the gift of a parishioner, and this attracted further gifts from the parish, eventually filling all the side windows with fine stained glass, too. Another gift, in 1905, was a redesigned sanctuary and a new altar and reredos in white marble with coloured inserts, designed by the eminent firm of Heins & Lafarge. In the 1910-1920 period the incumbent rector, Monsignor Blessing, undertook with taste further improvements: marble wainscoting of simple recessed panels was installed; new exterior doors were hung; the vestibule and organ-loft areas were given fumed-oak panelling; pews were refinished; the organ-loft was opened up so that a new stained-glass memorial window in the eastern tower could be seen from within. Also in this era there was added an altar rail of marble and travertine stone, of pierced, foliate carving, beautifully executed; subsequently the altar area was floored in travertine and wainscoted in marble and travertine. Bronze hanging lanterns, a marble pulpit and mosaics on the reredos are installations by a rector of the 1940's-1950's.

In 1973, after more than 120 years of use, the building stands in need of repair and refurbishment internally, while exterior repairs have already been put in work. Above the marble wainscot the interior is grimy and peeling, and the present rector has to decide whether to preserve

(See Continuation Sheet 2.)



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet) -2

STATE Rhode Island	
COUNTY Providence	
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ENTRY NUMBER	DATE
	JUL 15 1974

Number all entries

7. Description.

(for example, stencilling etc., the angel figures on the chancel walls) or to paint over: preservation is of course preferable. Certain small and understandable alterations are at present taking place due to the revised Roman Catholic liturgy: The altar rail has been split and moved closer to the sides of the auditorium so that the platform of the sanctuary can be advanced more into the body of the church. In turn, the marble altar will be detached from its rear-wall reredos and well advanced, to provide for the modern sacraments "in the round." These changes will not affect the inherent architectural quality of the church interior.

8. Significance.

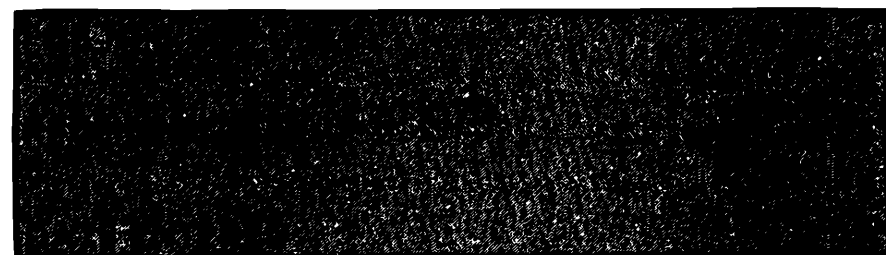
declared St. Joseph's Parish, and thoughts were given towards providing it with a permanent and substantial home church. Bishop O'Reilly, of the Hartford Diocese which then included Providence, agreed, and Keeley was engaged as architect. He produced what is now the oldest standing Roman Catholic church structure in Rhode Island--its predecessors having been hired halls, temporary structures or hand-me-down buildings minimally altered for their new purpose. While the parish was ambitious, it was also materially poor, and much of the preliminary work of clearing the church-site, breaking and hauling stone etc. was done by its own men after their ordinary day's work. Its cornerstone blessed in August, 1851, the church was completed and open for services in December of 1853, and it was formally dedicated in July, 1855.

As years passed, the section in which the church is located became an even stronger and much more prosperous Irish Catholic enclave. More parish projects (a school, a convent, a sympathetically-designed rectory and sacristy in the 1880's) were undertaken, and the interior of the church itself, as mentioned, received more attention. These efforts we see to-day, and rectors and parishioners have had reason to be proud of past achievements and to cherish their church building.

After nearly one hundred and twenty-five years, however, the building needs exterior repair--which it is undergoing--and also stands in need of some interior refurbishment, which one hopes will amount mainly to cleaning, patching, repainting and restoration rather than change of décor. A necessary exception to strict restoration, nevertheless, will be the alteration of the front part of the sanctuary and forward placement of the altar to accord with new ways of celebrating the mass; this work seems already to have been planned with particular tactfulness, and it is hoped that any future inside work will show an equal respect for the church's handsome interior.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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



CONTINUATION SHEET 3 . ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

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St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church, 84 Hope Street,  
Providence

More detailed research on the history of Catholicism in Rhode Island (see especially Patrick Conley and Matthew Smith, Catholicism in Rhode Island, The Formative Era, 1976) has revealed that St. Mary's Church in Crompton, West Warwick, is the oldest Catholic church building in the state. The original section of St. Mary's was completed in 1845. St. Joseph's, built from 1851 to 1853, must take at least second place to St. Mary's in the "oldest" category. This ranking, however, does little to detract from the Church's value in either historic or architectural terms: St. Joseph's Church is still important to an understanding of the development of Catholicism in Rhode Island; and its significance as an essentially intact example of mid-nineteenth-century Gothic Revival design remains undiminished.

March, 1979