

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

St. Ann's Church Complex	Woonsocket	Providence County, RI
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**SIGNIFICANCE**

In the years since St. Ann Church was listed in the National Register, scholarly interest in Guido Nincheri, the artist who carried out the ambitious decoration of the interior, has increased and now suggests that the church should be considered nationally significant. Where the original nomination noted that Saint Ann's interior reflects an "ambitious neo-Renaissance decorative program" carried out by Nincheri and "his as-yet unidentified collaborators," it is now clear that the interior is the product of a single artistic vision and that it documents the work of a significant 20<sup>th</sup>-century North American church decoration studio.

**Guido Nincheri**

Nincheri was born in Prato, Italy, in 1885 and attended the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence where he studied drawing and architecture. He emigrated to Montreal in 1914, worked for a maker of stained glass, and as a muralist. In 1925, Nincheri opened his own studio in Montreal and began work on a commission for the interiors of Chateau Dufresne. His wall paintings and stained glass for this 1915 house solidified his artistic reputation and his connections to the French-speaking communities of eastern Canada.

For the next decade Nincheri and the artists of his studio made a specialty of church interiors, producing frescoes and other wall paintings, stained glass windows, designs for stonework and furniture, all the elements of a complete and consistent design of interior work for Catholic churches. While their production concentrated on painted surfaces and glass, they produced designs for metal work, stone carvings, statuary, wood carving, and the like. Studio workers regularly produced Nincheri's designs for windows, while other craftsmen were contracted as needed. Most of Nincheri's work was in Quebec and Ontario, but the studio also had contracts in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island.

In the mid-1930s, Nincheri worked on the interior of Saint Matthew in Central Falls, R.I., creating the great cycle of frescoes in that remarkable church (National Register, 1979). The commission was his introduction to the Catholic parishes of Rhode Island; in the following decades, over a dozen such parishes engaged the artist and his studio for interior work. Nincheri rented, then later bought, residences in Rhode Island and shuttled between Montreal and southern New England regularly for the next 30 years, creating a substantial body of work in both locations.

Nincheri remained active well into the 1950s. He delegated management of his studio to his son Gabriel in 1946, and the studio maintained a church-work clientele until 1969 when it was closed. Nincheri died in 1973.

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**Nincheri at Saint Ann**

On his arrival at Saint Ann in 1940, Nincheri would have found an impressive, but largely undecorated, church building. Over the next 15 years, he designed and created the rich decorative program seen today. The stained glass windows (produced by Charles Lorin Company of Chartres in the early 1920s) were in place already, but the rest of the Renaissance-inspired interior is Nincheri's work.

The wall paintings (described as murals in the original nomination) are, in fact, true frescoes, painted onto wet plaster. Nincheri painted these himself over the course of eight years. The scale and number of paintings is remarkable—over 175 scenes with 600 characters.

He painted the Way of the Cross, 14 oils on canvas hung along the length of the nave, in his Montreal studio. The trompe l'oeil marble of the columns was painted by artisans from his studio, following his designs and under his supervision.

The furnishings of the sanctuary—altars, screens, communion rail, and pulpit—were carved of Carrera marble by the DelBono Studio in Rome, following Nincheri's drawings. The metal work, including an elaborate sanctuary lamp, and the carved wood celebrants' chairs were made locally, again following Nincheri's designs. His Montreal studio supplied small stained glass windows to fill the openings in the sacristy and the narthex.

The interior of Saint Ann is remarkably well preserved. The liturgical reforms of the 1960s and 70s inspired alteration of many historic Catholic churches; this one, singularly beautiful and unusually consistent, remains intact.

**LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE:** national

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Signature of State Historic Preservation Officer

5/13/2005

Date

# St. Ann's Church Complex

Woonsocket,  
Rhode Island

No Scale





