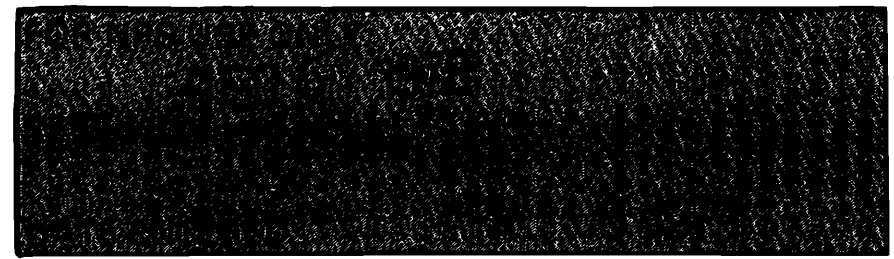


UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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



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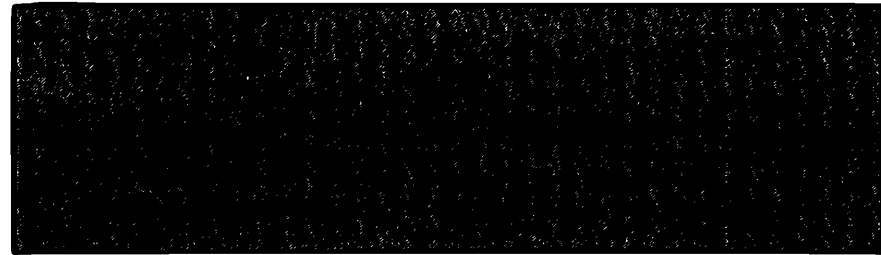
1. Name: Saint Matthew's Church 030
2. Location: Dexter and West Hunt Streets
Central Falls, RI
3. Owner: Corporation of the Church of St. Matthew's
1030 Dexter Street
Central Falls, RI
4. Description: Saint Matthew's is a large stone Gothic church, set on a small triangular site, atop a knoll at the junction of Dexter and West Hunt streets and Lonsdale Avenue. The church, completed in 1929 and designed by Walter F. Fontaine, is an imposing structure modeled on French Gothic churches, built of Weymouth granite and trimmed with limestone. The church is basilican in plan, its nave covered by a high, wide gable roof separated from the shed roofs of the aisles by a series of arched clerestory windows. The church walls are constructed of granite ashlar of mellow browns and reds, buttressed at the corners and between the bays. The main and eastern facade is dominated by a great traceried window, set under a shallow pointed arch and consisting of a large circular window set over three central lancet windows and flanked by two taller lancets; a similar window fills the western chancel end of the church. The primary entrance into the church is located under the window; the main doors of traceried oak, are placed under a sharply pointed arch and are flanked on each side by subsidiary doors. A square, five-level tower rises from the southeast corner; it is lit by various size lancet windows and topped by pinnacles decorated with crockets.

On the interior of St. Matthew's, the nave is separated from the north and south aisles by colonnades of pointed arches and is lit by the arched windows of the main level and a series of smaller, arched clerestory windows. The ceiling is vaulted, its ribs meeting at the roof ridge. The chancel is framed by a broad pointed arch (whose shape is repeated by the chancel window over the high altar) and is flanked by side altars enclosed under smaller versions of the colonnade arches; the chancel is separated from the nave by three steps and a marble altar rail. An octagonal pulpit is set at the southeast corner of the chancel. Four rows of pews occupy the nave; there is no seating in the narrow aisles.

Though the plan of the interior of St. Matthew's is not unusual, its decoration is extraordinary. The church is richly figured and lavishly decorated. Fine marbles are used throughout the church -- the dado is made

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of marble, as are the lower edge of the clerestory wall, the colonettes framing the aisle arches, the pedestals of the columns, and the molding around the chancel arch. All of the windows, which were produced by Mommejean de Paris, are of stained glass with granite tracery and depict various saints and scenes from the life of Christ. The painting of the interior was executed by Guido Nincheri; scenes from the life of Christ fill the spandrels of colonnade arches and the spaces over the entrances to the side altars; the interstices between the ribs of the ceiling are painted to resemble stone building blocks, as are the spaces over the vestry doors flanking the altar and the marble reredos.

5. Date: 1929
6. Significance: Though St. Matthew's is a church-owned property and would thus ordinarily be excluded from the National Register, its primary significance is derived from its architectural merit. Both within and without, this is a beautiful building. A major landmark of western Central Falls, it is rare in the city for its monumentality and its magnificent interior.

The church has its origins in a parish formed in 1906, when the French-Canadian population of the city had expanded to the city's western section. The church building is itself largely the product of the vision of Monseigneur Joseph Laliberte, a noted French-Canadian cleric who led the parish for its first forty-six years. Laliberte had earlier served as the vicar of St. Ann's in Woonsocket and, when in the mid-1920s, the parish began planning for its church, he chose as its architect Walter F. Fontaine (1871-1938). Fontaine had prepared the designs for St. Ann's in 1914, and was by the 1920s a noted and prolific church architect. Among his other extant churches are St. Lawrence's Church (1907) in North Providence and St. Joseph's (1938) in Woonsocket. Fontaine had designed the earliest of St. Matthew's parish buildings in 1907 -- a 2-story, yellow brick chapel-school; his work was familiar to St. Matthew's pastor and parishioners not only from their own school, but from the school he had designed in 1909 for the earlier French parish in Central Falls, Notre Dame.

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By the mid-1920s, many of St. Matthew's parishioners had entered the entrepreneurial and professional classes and, while most of the congregation were still largely employees of the textile and machine industries, the parish was relatively affluent; St. Matthew's Church is testimony to that affluence (it cost \$600,00 to build) and to economic achievements of the French community.

7. Acreage: less than 1 acre
8. That portion of Plat 7, lot 18 which is occupied by Saint Matthew's Church.
9. UTM Reference: 19.300710 4640060

See Photos # 14 - 18.