

P 1400 220 47

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

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE:  
COUNTY:  
FOR NPS USE ONLY  
ENTRY DATE  
**JAN 24 1974**

**1. NAME**

COMMON:  
St. Matthew's Cathedral and Rectory  
AND/OR HISTORIC:  
St. Matthew's Catholic Church and Rectory

**2. LOCATION**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
1725-39 Rhode Island Avenue, N.W.  
CITY OR TOWN:  
Washington  
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT: Congressman  
Walter E. Fauntroy, D.C.  
STATE: District of Columbia CODE: 11 COUNTY: District of Columbia CODE: 001

**3. CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building S <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	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress
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:  
St. Matthew's Cathedral  
STREET AND NUMBER:  
1725 Rhode Island Avenue, N.W.  
CITY OR TOWN:  
Washington  
STATE:  
District of Columbia  
CODE:  
11

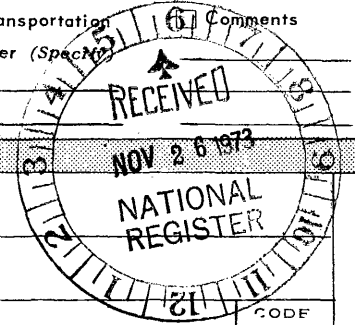
**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:  
Recorder of Deeds  
STREET AND NUMBER:  
6th and D Streets, N.W.  
CITY OR TOWN:  
Washington  
STATE:  
District of Columbia  
CODE:  
11

**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE OF SURVEY: Proposed District of Columbia Additions to the National Register of Historic Places recommended by the Joint Committee on Landmarks  
DATE OF SURVEY: March 7, 1968  Federal  State  County  Local  
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:  
National Capital Planning Commission  
STREET AND NUMBER:  
1325 G Street, N.W.  
CITY OR TOWN:  
Washington  
STATE:  
District of Columbia  
CODE:  
11

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



STATE:  
COUNTY:  
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DATE

**JAN 24 1974**

7. DESCRIPTION

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

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

St. Matthew's Cathedral is located on the north side of Rhode Island Avenue, N.W., just east of the crossing of M Street and Connecticut Avenue. An 18 foot alley at the west separates the church from the 11-story Longfellow Building designed by William Lescaze and built in 1940-41. East of the church and its rectory are rowhouses. A highrise office building is located south of the church across Rhode Island Avenue. Behind the church at the north is an alley and a row of carriage houses. The church is set back from the sidewalk about twenty feet, and its grassy yard slopes upward so that it is approximately 6 feet above the sidewalk.

St. Matthew's is the visual focal point of its section of the city. Its green copper dome, rising to a height of 190 feet, can be seen for a considerable distance outlined against the sky. The red brick church designed in 1893 by C. Grant LaFarge shows a North Italian influence. Its eclectic design has a mixture of features borrowed from Byzantine, Romanesque, and Renaissance architecture. The exterior is relatively unadorned and its main effect comes from its geometric massing and from the materials used. In contrast, the interior has sumptuous ornamentation. The interior space with high tunnel-vaulted nave, transepts and chancel, with large round arches opening on to chapels, and with the high dome at the crossing has a spaciousness and coherency which caused the New York Architectural League to say in the 1890's that it was "one of the most beautiful church interiors of modern times."

The structure of the church consists of brick bearing walls resting on a concrete foundation. Piers at the corners buttress the nave, transepts, and chancel walls. The dome is carried on a drum supported by four large masonry piers, by four large arches, and by 70 foot iron beams. Steel beams support the concrete floor and the roof. The barrel vaults are plaster.

The geometric massing of St. Matthew's is one of its notable exterior features. The nave, transepts and chancel form a Latin cross approximately 155 feet by 136 feet. Each arm is 54 feet wide and the walls are 54 feet high. It is approximately 88 feet from the sidewalk to the ridgepole of the steep gable roofs. Over the crossing an octagonal drum raises the ribbed copper dome high above the roof of the body of the church. The squinches which bridge the corners of the square at the crossing and carry the drum are clearly visible on the exterior. The dome carries a copper columniated lantern with its own dome. The Latin cross on the top of the lantern is 200 feet above the sidewalk.

The wings around the main body of the church help create a piling up effect which finds its climax in the main dome. Low roofed chapels with walls the height of two-story buildings occupy the space between the arms of the Latin cross and visually appear to buttress the high walls of the main body of the building. These chapels cause the church to have an almost rectangular overall plan with some projections due to niches and wings. In 1939-40 a one-story, 31 foot high stone wing was added in front of the southeast chapel.

(Continued on Form 10-300a)

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**8. SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian	<input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century	<input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 20th Century
<input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century	<input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 19th Century	

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) church: 1893-1913, 1939-40, 1967-68; Rectory 1910

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

The Joint Committee on Landmarks has designated St. Matthew's Cathedral and Rectory at 1725-39 Rhode Island Avenue, N.W., a Category II Landmark of importance which contributes significantly to the cultural heritage and visual beauty of the District of Columbia. The red brick church designed by C. Grant La Farge in 1893 has eclectic features inspired by Italian churches. The simplicity of its exterior contrasts with the rich decorations of the interior. Its imposing copper ribbed dome is one of the visual focal points of the Washington skyline. The cathedral, the principal church of the archdiocese of Washington since 1939, has been the site of a number of important services most notably the funeral of President Kennedy on November 25, 1963. The rectory which was designed by La Farge and erected in 1910 is a handsome Renaissance Revival brick townhouse.

The Roman Catholic parish of St. Matthew's was established in 1839 to relieve overcrowding at St. Patrick's Church. St. Matthew's first church, at 15th and H Street was built in 1838-40 and designed by Mattias Duffey of Georgetown. By the late 19th century the parish had outgrown this Greek Revival building, and soon after Thomas Sim Lee began his parochial duties in 1891 property was purchased for a new edifice. In December 1892, Lee accompanied by an architect went to Europe to determine the design of the new church building. By August 1893, the plans of C. Grant La Farge of the firm of La Farge and Heins were accepted.

La Farge (1862-1939) was the son of John La Farge, a well known painter and stained glass designer. After studying at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and in the office of Henry H. Richardson, he began practicing architecture in New York City in 1884. With his partner, George L. Heins, La Farge won the competition for the design of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City. The cornerstone of this church was laid on December 27, 1892, so when La Farge designed St. Matthew's he was at a significant point in his career.

In September 1893 ground was broken for St. Matthew's on Rhode Island Avenue just east of Connecticut Avenue. The building permit valued the construction at \$80,000 and only covered part of planned building. On Thanksgiving Day, November 30, 1893, the cornerstone was laid at the corner of the east transept. By the spring of 1895 the transepts and crossing were complete, and on June 2, 1895, the first mass was celebrated in the partially completed building. The main altar was located near the rear of the west transept.

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Architectural League of New York. Catalogue of Exhibition. 1895. Illus. p.46.

Assessments, Atlas, Directories, Newspaper Clippings, and Photographs. Washingtoniana Collection. D.C. Public Library.

D.C. Building Permits. National Archives Records Center, Record Group # 351, Accession # 65A490, permit # 601, October 14, 1893; # 2388, November 11, 1910.

Kuhn, John G. "St. Matthew's Cathedral, Washington, D.C." 1971. Pamphlet.

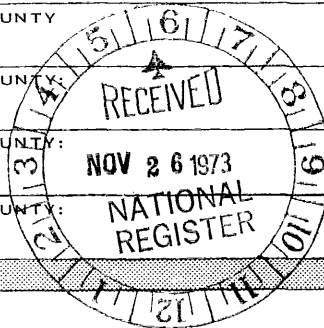
**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY				OR	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
NW	°	'	"	°	'	"	38	54	23
NE	°	'	"	°	'	"	77	02	25
SE	°	'	"	°	'	"			
SW	°	'	"	°	'	"			

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 31,787 square feet ; .729 acre

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

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE



**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE:  
T. Robins Brown, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION: National Capital Planning Commission

DATE: May 11, 1973

STREET AND NUMBER:  
1325 G Street, N.W.

CITY OR TOWN: Washington

STATE: District of Columbia

CODE: 11

**12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION**

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: James H. Banks

Title: Assistant to the Mayor for Housing Programs

Date: NOV 19 1973

**NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

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

AR Winter  
Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

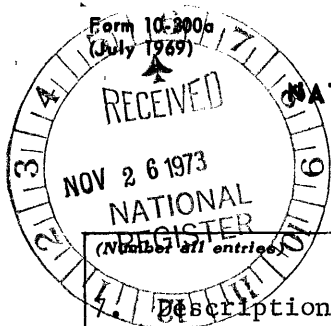
Date: 1/7/74

ATTEST:

George Emery  
Keeper of The National Register

Date: Jan. 2-1, 1974

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INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

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STATE	
COUNTY	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE
	JAN 24 1974

Description - St. Matthew's Cathedral

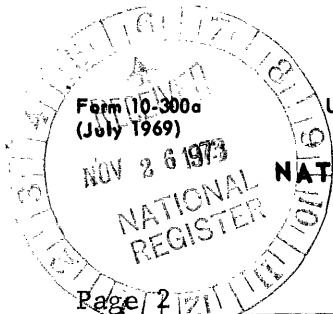
This wing contains a passage from the nave and the semi-octagonal chapel of St. Francis of Assisi. The chapel has a pyramidal roof surmounted by a Latin cross. In 1967-68 a similar stone wing was added in front of the southwest chapel. This wing designed by Johnson and Boutin contains the semi-octagonal baptistry and a passage leading to it from the nave. Attached at the northeast corner of the church is a tall, three-stage, octagonal smoke stack. East of the east transept is a one-story, rectangular, gable roofed wing containing the sacristy. A one-story, frame and glass passage probably added between 1924 and 1948 connects the sacristy with the rectangular, three-story brick rectory.

A limited number of materials are employed on the exterior of the church and their colors are an important design element. All walls are a richly colored red brick laid in common bond except the octagonal wings, which have brown sandstone walls, and the frame and glass passage to the rectory. Trim is brown with several important exceptions. The copper which covers the dome and its lantern has developed a green patina, and the roofs of the stone wings are covered with a gray colored metal. Most eaves have copper copings.

Interesting features of the exterior include the pairs of Romanesque Revival design terra cotta columns between the bays of the drum. The gable end of the nave has a terra cotta modillion cornice which returns. A plain terra cotta cornice connects the returns to form the pediment. The rest of the nave, the transepts, and the chancel have copper modillion cornices. The sacristy has a plain box copper cornice. Chapels and niches have brick cornices, except the stone wings which have stone cornices surmounted by stone parapets. The main entrance in the nave's gable end (south facade) consists of three bronze doors with brownstone trim flanked by pairs of brownstone columns supporting a full brownstone entablature. Broad flights of gray granite and brick steps lead to the entrance. In the tympanum over the central door is a mosaic with red background of St. Matthew designed by John de Rosen and added in 1970. The south corners of the nave have rusticated ashlar brown sandstone facing to the level of the cornice of the entrance porch. Above, the corners have smooth ashlar brownstone facing. The corner piers buttressing the transepts and chancel have rusticated brownstone quoining and bands. These corner piers terminate at the clerestory level, and at the corners of the nave and west transept volutes are used to visually soften a slight step in. The one-bay, entrance porch to the west transept is rock faced ashlar, brownstone (and has a gable roof). Brownstone bands define the clerestory levels. The stone wings have rock faced ashlar foundations, a bold stone watertable, and smooth ashlar walls with quoining at the corners.

The church has relatively few windows. Its windows generally have round arches and rock faced brownstone sills. There is a clerestory but the gable ends of the transepts have false arcading at the clerestory level while the gable end

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7. Description (Continued)

of the nave has four false openings at the clerestory level. The chancel's gable end has no real or false openings. The south chapels attached to the transepts and nave have three openings each on their south facades at their clerestory level. The west and east gable ends have three large openings between the clerestory level and the entrance level. Most light enters the church through the windows in the drum of the dome. Each of the eight sides of the drum has three windows.

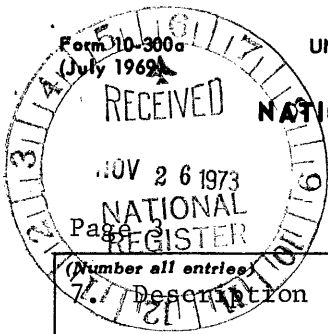
The fenestration of the stone wings differs and is the major assymmetrical feature of the main (south) facade of the entire building. The east wing has an arcade of openings with round arches lighting the passage and a grouping of three arched openings in an arched panel on the south side of the chapel. The west wing has four rectangular openings on the passage and three arched openings on the south side of the baptistry.

The interior of St. Matthew's is very impressive. The church seems almost to have a central plan as the nave is not much longer than the transepts and the space of the chapels between the arms of the Latin cross seem to merge with that of the main body of the church because of the large openings. This linking of the main body of the church and the chapels, the great height of the barrel vaults of the nave, transepts, and chancel, and the greater height of the dome at the crossing give the interior space a loftiness and airiness. Rich materials cover wall surfaces and most ceiling and floors are elaborately decorated. However, the church is rather dark. Most light enters through the stained glass windows in the drum of the Dome. Most other windows have translucent alabaster, onyx or serpentine panels which create a softly modulated light.

Three round arches supported by red Verona marble columns with composite capitals separate the Chapel of St. Anthony of Padua at the east from the nave. A similar arcade separates the nave from the Chapel of the Blessed Virgin at the west. Large openings lead from these chapels to the transepts. One large round arch supported on Breccia marble columns links the east transept with St. Joseph's Chapel at the northeast. A round arched opening at the west connects the chapel with the chancel. The chapel of the Holy Angels is located east of St. Joseph's Chapel on the mezzanine level. A large round arch supported on 24 foot marble columns links the Blessed Sacrament Chapel (formerly the Chapel of the Sacred Heart) at the northwest with the west transept. An arched opening partially filled with the organ balcony connects this chapel with the chancel. The baptistry is separated at the southwest from the nave by a narrow barrel vaulted passage and the chapel of St. Francis of Assisi at the southeast has a similar barrel vaulted passage. The sacristy, a rectangular room with exposed timber ceiling, is reached from a door at the east of the east transept.

Interior decorative features are too numerous to be fully described and no attempt will be made to explain their iconography. Walls are faced with panels

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7. Description

of different colored marbles. The main body of the church has an elaborate moulded plaster cornice. Floors of the chancel and chapels are different colored marbles laid in geometric designs. The plaster barrel vaults of the nave, transepts, and chancel have coffering and rosettes and are painted and gilded. The eight rib dome has elaborate decoration painted predominantly blue and white. Ceilings of chapels vary from the groin vaulting of the Chapel of St. Francis of Assisi to the three shallow elliptical vaults of the Chapel of the Blessed Virgin. Mosaics by Edwin H. Blashfield (1848-1936) are on the niche behind the main altar, on the lunette of the altar wall, and on the pendentives carrying the dome. Thomas LaFarge designed three frescoes in the Chapel of St. Francis of Assisi and six mosaics in the Chapel of the Blessed Virgin. The chapel of St. Anthony of Padua with colonnades of white Carrara marble was loosely modeled on the chapel with the tomb of St. Anthony in Padua, Italy. Mosaics were added in this chapel in 1963. Large murals are in the lunettes of the end walls of the nave and transepts and over the transept entrances to the Chapel of the Blessed Virgin and the Chapel of St. Anthony of Padua. Mosaics by John de Rosen are in the baptistry and the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament. Most altars are elaborate and particularly noteworthy is the main altar. Its front is white marble with inlaid multicolored floral designs done by Indian craftsman. It was a gift of the Archbishop of Agra, India.

The rectory is a Renaissance Revival, free standing house with a very cubic appearance. Its walls are red brick laid in common bond in Flemish variation. The main (south) facade is three bays wide and has a very symmetrical arrangement. The windows of the main facade and the corner bays of the side facades have elaborate brownstone trim. The central, brownstone, frontispiece entrance of the main facade has Doric columns, an arched doorway with a keystone with a carved angle's head, and a metal balcony. The first story is separated by a brownstone cornice with an acanthus leaf moulding. At the corners brick quoining is channeled to simulate stone. The first story windows have round arches and brownstone keystones. The second story trabeated windows have cartouches. The largest cartouche is over the central windows. The third-story's trabeated windows break the rinceau frieze. The eaves of the copper covered low hip roof overhang.

8. Significance

On June 14, 1898 the altar in the chapel of St. Anthony of Padua was blessed. Construction proceeded slowly and in 1903 the building had an almost U-shaped plan as the nave had not been built. The "U" was missing its northwest corner as the chapel there had not been built.

The old church at 15th and H Streets, N.W., continued to be used until 1909 when it was sold for \$500,000. The Southern Building, a Category III Landmark was erected on this site in 1912.

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8. Significance - Continued

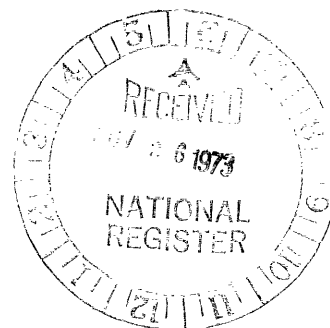
The money from the sale of the old church enabled St. Matthew's to undertake a major building program in 1910. La Farge, now with the firm of La Farge and Morris, continued to be the church's architect. By 1913 the nave, the north-west chapel, the dome, and the rectory had been constructed. On April 1, 1913, the church was dedicated by Cardinal Gibbons.

Construction did not end in 1913 and later additions include the sacristy and passage to the rectory added between 1924 and 1948, the Chapel of St. Francis of Assisi added in 1939-40, and the baptistry added in 1967-68 designed by Johnson and Boutin.

Decoration and redecoration of the interior have continued to the present time. The date of dedication of a chapel or the date of the consecration of its altar indicates the date of the basic completion of the chapel's decoration, but does not mean that later decorations have not been added. As stated earlier the altar of the Chapel of St. Anthony of Padua was consecrated on July 14, 1898. Mosaics, a new altar and crucifix were added to this chapel in the 1960's. The main altar was consecrated on April 1, 1913, but was reconsecrated in 1960 after being enlarged. The altar in the Chapel of St. Joseph was consecrated May 10, 1916. This chapel was remodeled in 1962. The Chapel of the Sacred Heart was completed in 1928 but was remodeled and dedicated as the Blessed Sacrement Chapel on March 22, 1970. On November 29, 1936, the Chapel of the Blessed Virgin, also known as the Chapel of Our Lady, was dedicated. The Chapel of St. Francis of Assisi was consecrated on April 12, 1940. The Chapel of the Holy Angles dates from the 1960's. On July 28, 1968, the Baptistry was dedicated.

On July 22, 1939, Pope Pius XII announced that the archdiocese of Washington was established and that St. Matthew's was its cathedral. At that time one archbishop served both the dioceses of Washington and of Baltimore. On November 15, 1947, Washington was made an independent archdiocese and St. Matthew's continues to be its cathedral.

A number of important services have taken place in St. Matthew's due to its being the Roman Catholic cathedral in the nation's capital. The most memorable was the funeral of President John F. Kennedy which was held there on November 25, 1963. Today a memorial marks the location of Kennedy's casket during this service.





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9. Bibliography

National Capital Planning Commission. Landmarks File.

National Encyclopedia of American Biography. XXVIII. New York: James T. White, 1940, pp. 54-55.

Philibert, Helene, et al. Saint Matthew's of Washington, 1840-1940. Baltimore: A. Hoen, 1940.

Proctor, John C. "Original St. Matthew's," Evening Star, 5 May 1940.

Withey, H.F. and E.R. Withey. Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased). Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, 1970, pp. 276-277, 357-358.

