Form No. 10-300 (Rev. 10-74)

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DATA SHEET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

St. Therese Church and Rectory are located at the irregular intersection of Kentucky and Schiller Streets east of the flat downtown area of Louisville. Just east of the Church lies Beargrass Creek, beyond which the area aptly called the Highlands begins. The intersection, at the junction of what is (or was) known as Paristown and Germantown, creates a prominent but challenging polygonal site, to which the architect, Fred T. Erhart, brilliantly responded.

Soon after the first Church - School was erected a wooden bridge across Beargrass Creek linked Germantown and the Paristown neighborhood and enlarged the Parish. (The present concrete bridge replaced its predecessor in 1914.)

In an article by Arline Russman in <u>The Louisville Herald Post</u>, the present exterior of the Church and its original interior were described a week prior to its dedication on June 30, 1929.

The new church is built of buff brick with ornamental stone Perma Stone trimming and red Spanish tile roof. Its diagonal design lends itself well to the position of the building on the church lot, the front entrance facing, diagonally, the southwest corner of the two streets. A sweeping stone-step approach leads up to triple entrance doors opening into an open loggia and an inside vestibule. The base of the east tower provides space for the stairway to the choir loft. Each tower is surmounted by a copper-gilt cross resting on a sphere. The cupola over the dome and its roof are made with heavy zinc. Surmounting the cupola is a beautiful twelve foot cross designed especially for St. Therese Church. It is wrought iron in the Spanish Renaissance style. (Russman, <u>Herald Post</u>, June 30, 1929)

Although in elevation the composition is dominated by the great octagon that forms the nave, the Church is actually fitted into an approximate rectangle in plan. The loggia, narthex, and towers at the front northeast are balanced by the original sanctuary flanked by the sacristies and the passages linking them behind the altar. The octagon vessel rises above these appurtenances, however, except for the towers, and retains its identity. Strictly speaking, the front elevation does not reveal the octagon, but in fact the church is seldom viewed straight on, but looms over the mostly one-story houses of its neighborhood.

The architect has artfully contrasted the lavish ornament, possible with the new material, Permastone, against the bare buff brick wall surfaces. The octagon and towers have clear forms and sharp, straight edges. Even the elaborate pilastered cubic and cylindrical upper stages of the towers, being of brick, are relatively free of ornament and clearly articulated, in spite of a sense of overlapping planes, particularly at the

8 SIGNIFICANCE

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SPECIFIC DATES 1928-29; interior remodelled 1968-69 Fred T. Erhart

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

St. Therese Parish, today, is the product of German settlers whose lives have shaped the physical characteristics of the surrounding neighborhood, just east of downtown Louisville. This neighborhood around St. Therese, whose earlier boundaries comprised Goss Avenue, Beargrass Creek and Breckenridge and Shelby Streets, is known as Germantown. The community came about in an attempt to help the early German immigrants in the transition to the American way of life, and is characterized today by many two-story 19th century houses of the type locally called "shot-guns," usually also with "camel backs" at the rear. Even some of the most modest houses feature Italianate cornice brackets, Renaissance Revival window heads or colored glass transoms; these features give variety to the otherwise regular and still usually tidy streetscape.

Amid blocks of these low and narrow dwellings rises St. Therese, an extraordinary evocation of the Mexican-Spanish Baroque executed in buff brick, the newly exploited decorative material Permastone, and red tile. Its polygonal forms echo the inangular street pattern formed by the junction of several of the main streets of Germantown with Beargrass Creek, which once created a barrier dividing the Germans from an area known as "Paris" across the stream. Although fairly recent in date, the church building and adjacent rectory are not only fine examples of a long outmoded architectural Revival style, but also the romantic summation of the aspirations and pride of the neighborhood around them which remains (as it has always been) a predominantly workingclass area. Thus, the church and its institutions have become a symbol of the community continuity which it is increasingly difficult to preserve.

The story of St. Therese begins sometime around 1906 when a young priest, Father Peter Berresheim, an immigrant from Andernach, a little town on the Rhine River,

was sent by Bishop William George McClosky to establish a parish in an area today roughly bounded by Kentucky and Schiller Streets. At this time there were only about 100 families in the area, and school classes were first held at a parishoner's residence.

Soon a parish school was constructed. The first floor of the presently existing structure was used as the church; the second floor for the school; the basement, for social activities. Dedicated February 6, 1908, the combination church and school was named in honor of the Holy Trinity and became known as Holy Trinity Church and School. Two cottages on the south side of Kentucky Street at Schiller were obtained for the Ursuline Sisters. Because school enrollment at Holy Trinity continued to grow, the school facilities eventually became

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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Claire Toutan, ed.,	"Louisville's Germa	antown, Yesterday, Tod	ay, Tommorrow''
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corners. (It might be said that in the towers a synthesis of the contrasted features below is achieved.)

The facade is basically a series of screens between the shafts of the towers, which rise uninterrupted from the ground (except for a slender water table) to the belfry stages above the level of the octagon. The front wall of the one-story loggia projects slightly forward of the towers. It is pierced by the three round arched openings, whose concave frames are interrupted only by shell motifs in lieu of keystones. The vivaciously curved parapet frames a quatrefoil plaque of the Dove of the Holy Spirit and two Greek Crosses inscribed in circles between the arches. Flanking the entrances on the base of the towers are small barred windows with curvaceous frames. Above them are large round arched windows with sills at the level of the loggia parapet. These windows have emphatic hoodmolds with curious conical "keystones."

Above and behind the loggia is the screenwall of the nave, set forward of the octagon. Its parapet elaborates on that of the loggia, with rich ornament at the apex against the sky. This responds to the great 'west' window, which pulls together all the elements around it. The wide frame, embossed with plastic arabesques, is round-arched but for the rectangular corners that break the curve in the Spanish (perhaps ultimately Moorish) manner. Smoother shell and floral volutes crown this virtuoso display of the possibilities of Permastone.

Like the other windows in the main body of the church, this one is not stained or pointed, but consists of a streaky combination of gold and white translucent glass, probably intended to evoke the alabaster of early Christian basilical windows. It provides an attractive golden glow without glare inside the church.

The octagon is adorned with only the eight Spanish quatrefoil clerestory windows and a band of inset tiles below the compact eaves. The handsome roof is capped with a closed lantern repeating on smaller scale the character of the upper stages of the towers.

The auditorium is large, seating 1000 persons, and has no pillars except the ten placed near the side walls to support the immense dome. The pillars, 19 feet from base to top of capitals, are what is known as Scagliola, made of Keen English cement, in perfect imitation of Fleur de Peche marble. They are topped with capitals in Spanish Renaissance design. Pews and confessionals are of white oak in chestnut finish. Confessionals are constructed of sound-proof walls. Window

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St. Therese	Roman Catholic	Church,	School,	and Rectory	
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sashes are of steel, fitted with storm glass and dividers to hold stained-glass windows to be installed later on the inside. Stained glass windows have already been placed in the eight round clerestory windows and are framed with a Spanish ornamental four-leaf clover design. The entire balustrade of the choir loft is of ornamental plaster, decorated in colors by a young man of the parish. Iron grille doors in bronze-verde open into the baptistery.

Unusual and beautiful are the holy water fronts. There are four of them recessed into the walls, between and at the side of the entrance doors. They are made in the Spanish style, the facade surrounding the cone being of colored tile, the design at the bottom showing a cross in green. Above each one is a pedestal base topped with a figure in half relief, one depicting death, one judgement, heaven and hell. The doors between the fronts swing out into the inner vestibule, in which is placed, at the east wall, a statue of St. Anne. To the west a door leads to the choir loft with steps of terrazze tread and with iron balustrade. In the outer vestibule the floor is of red Spanish tile. In the niche on each side will be placed a statue of an angel. This loggia is highly decorated with ornamental stone and plaster.

The three altars are of Kale stone with marble mensa and candle steps. The high altar is 29 feet high. The marble table board is $2' \times 10'$ resting on stone columns. Below the mensa is a copy in relief of DaVinci's <u>Last Supper</u>. Placed above the high altar is a beautiful statuary group of the Shower of Roses, copied from the group used in Rome on the occasion of the canonization of St. Therese.

The exposition tabernacle is particularly lovely. The top is lined entirely with gold mosaic and rests on seven columns of bronze-trimmed onyx. When the sanctuary is illuminated with the flood lights concealed on the side the effect will be one of unusual beauty. Tabernacles on the side altars are of bronze gilt, that of the main altar is of steel with bronze gilt doors.

Gold is used freely in the beautiful mosaic inlaid designs decorating the altars. On the gospel side of the high altar the design shows fishes in a mosaic background; on the epistle side, the basket with the five loaves. On each side, between the columns are clusters of grapes and wheat in bronze. Also on the gospel side of the altar, in the reredos, is placed a statuary group.

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Placed high in the sanctuary walls are four large medallions in semi-relief and in colors, representing the Sacrifice of Cain and Abel, Noah, Abraham, and Passover. At the base of the splayed or wide arch framing the sanctuary are two niches-Sacred Heart and St. Anthony. Doors leading from the sacristy are of baroque design. (Ibid.)

The photograph of the interior before the recent renovation in essentially its original condition shows the remarkably light and open feeling Erhart achieved. The clerestory of the octagon almost bounces from column to column on coffered arches. The polished scagliola of the columns makes them seem to dissolve into light. The canopy over the altar and the lavishly diapered walls of the sanctuary and flanking altar niches evoke the vision of the heavenly city in a late medieval illuminated manuscript. Rhythmic variety is created by the spacing arches, from the great sweep of the channel arch and its mate over the narthex through the four medium arches of the sides, the narrower altar niches, and finally to the attenuated openings in the far corners. The various round-arched niches and doors still further repeat their motif.

In 1968-69, in conformity with the liturgical requirements of Vatican II and in a concordant effort to create a sense inside the church of its role in the community outside, Louisville architect Lawrence Melillo was commissioned to remodel the interior (only). His most dramatic and significant concept was to bring the main altar forward onto an octagonal platform within the main octagon of the nave, providing an almost centralized orientation not quite under the center of the dome. Although the original architect had managed to combine the centralized auditorium dictated by the site with the traditional longitudinal emphasis on a recessed altar at the "east" end, Melillo's conception is in many respects more appropriate to the spatial composition of the interior. The seating now slopes down from seven directions toward the altar, virtually surrounding it with worshippers. The original chancel was converted into a devotional chapel through the ingenious adaption of the motif of iron grills used for the original baptistery gates. A delicate and ornamental double curved screen now seperates the main altar and tabernacle from the chapel beyond. The seats in the chapel can still be used to open up the priests' sanctuary and a small chapel for private devotions formed out of the original boys' sacristy. By this means all the functions of the church have become visibly interrelated.

During the remodeling, the clerestory windows, which had been sealed with plaster to prevent water leakage, were reopened to increase the light over the central altar. The

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walls of the church were painted a neutral tone and extraneous statuary was removed to lessen the distractions and firmly place all focus at the altar. Other minor changes have been made to implement the main conception and provide additional convenience. It cannot be overemphasized, however, that Melillo has respected the essential architectural and symbolic character of the interior, and in some respects has even provided a fuller realization of what might well have been Erhart's original intentions.

The structure of the church is basically in sound condition, although the exterior has not yet received the attention given the interior during the recent renovation. The towers in particular have settled, producing cracks and other structural problems. It is hoped, however, that these can be corrected during the current campaign for physical restoration of the exterior.

The Rectory of St. Therese, located to the south of the church on Schiller Avenue, is a plain rectangular block with low hipped tile roof, repeating the materials used in the church building. The facade of the rectory is given interest, however, by the roundarched frames of the first-story windows, with decorative Permastone trim within the arches (garlands and shells that suggest Adam Brothers more than Mexican-Spanish Baroque) and by the balusters of the implied balconies below the windows. There are the original metal-framed windows throughout. Several of them, as well as some interior transoms, are of opalescent glass of a geometricized Art Nouveau character or evoke alabaster like those of the church. The plan of the rectory, in spite of its apparent simplicity is quite complex and still functional. The building provides a handsome transition from the massive church to the more modest structures around them.

St. Therese School is the oldest building of the complex, having been constructed as a combination church and school building in 1906–1908. The architect is unknown. It is a plain red-brick building with a raised first floor.

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too small and some of the rooms in the Sisters' residence were used as classrooms.

The parish throve, and the social and cultural organizations associated with the church made it the focal point of community activity. These included the St. Joseph's Society for married men, the St. John Berchman's society for young men, a mens' choir (characteristically German); St. Monica Society for married women and the St. Therese Society for young ladies were also formed at this time. A sewing circle was organized to help in the upkeep of the sanctuary linens.

Plans for the building of a new and permanent church were begun and completed by Father Andrew Zoeller, a newly appointed pastor of the parish. Fred Erhart, the architect, drew up the plans for a Mexican church in the Spanish Baroque style requested by Father Zoeller, who had just completed a trip to the Holy Land. The church would be built at the site of the sisters' residence.

The church was completed on June 29, 1930, and dedicated by the late Archbishop Floersh on the following day. Because at the time there were two Holy Trinity Churches in the vicinity of Louisville, the other being in the St. Matthews area, Father Zoeller was instrumental in changing the name of the parish from Holy Trinity to St. Therese.

Today, 45 years later, St. Therese Church, a landmark in Germantown, is confronted with preserving its church towers. Built of Permastone, the towers through the years "absorbed water like a sponge and caused the deterioration of the beams that support the bell platforms and tower structures above," says architect Don Glass.

Approached from any direction, the St. Therese Church towers are important visually and psychologically because they provide a feeling of security of neighborhood. According to the present pastors of St. Therese, the Reverend Father Eifler and the Reverend Father Batcheldor, people have grown up with them. Their disappearance would create a terrible void.

The architect of the church and rectory was Fred T. Erhart, one of the more prolific designers of structures for the Roman Catholic Church in Louisville and vicinity during the first half of the 20th century. His career has remained virtually unexplored by students of Louisville architecture, although members of his family still live in the area. Only a bare outline of his accomplishments can as yet be compiled, but the known works have sufficient character to justify the attribution of others and to suggest a distinct and talented architectural personality.

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St.	Therese Roma	n Catholic Church,	School and	Rectory
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Several works by Erhart were listed and illustrated in the <u>Catalogue of the First</u> (and only) <u>Exhibition</u>, <u>Louisville Chapter</u>, <u>American Institute of Architects</u> (1912); these included a fine photograph of monks praying in the new Gothic Revival Cloister of Gethsemani Abbey near Bardstown, Kentucky (probably drastically altered in recent renovations.) Erhart also designed the companion parish church to St. Therese, in an adjacent section of Germantown, St. Elizabeth's. This handsome edifice (the attribution is based on the cornerstone of the church) is a red-brick structure with stone trim in a restrained Italian Baroque manner based on Palladio.

A cast-iron plaque also identified Erhart as the designer of a two-story castiron facade applied to an earlier commercial front on a block of Market Street in Louisville recently demolished to make way for the Convention Center now under construction. The facade featured a tall oriel with attenuated swan's neck pediment evoking the exaggerations of Hepplewhite or Sheraton furniture. Similar features appear on the white glazed brick facade of the F. S. Scardein & Sons Plumbing & Heating Company building at 129 South Sixth Street in Louisville. The Rectory of St. Therese also has similar features.

Although each of these structures has a somewhat different historical reference, ranging from late 18th-century English through Italian Baroque and Spanish or Colonial Mexican inspired Baroque to Gothic Revival, all of them share a certain freedom in the handling of eclectic motifs and an extreme use of attenuation and contrast of bareness and linear ornamentation. Among these known designs, St. Therese is certainly the masterpiece, its urbanistic role, handling of novel material and detail, and above all in the manipulation of interior lighting and space.

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The facade of St. Therese School facing Schiller Avenue, in Photo Number B, remains unaltered since it originally was built in 1907. The overall flavor of the design is Italianate or at least Mediterranean although executed with an Arts and Crafts sensibility. The structure has Roman brick walls, stone foundations, and a red tile roof.

When looking at the front of St. Therese School, a three-part composition is apparent with a frontal projecting three-story tower (the loggia at the top is now enclosed). Elongated paired brackets support fairly wide eaves. One is attracted to looking up toward the cross on the roof. A possible reason contributing to this aspect are the linked windows of the central stairtower which emphasize the vertical in contrast to the horizontals of the long stone foundations and the cornices below the overhanging roof.

Instead of being centered on the available wall areas flanking the tower, the windows seem crowded toward it, leaving plain vertical surfaces only at the outer edges of the main block and the tower. The lower series of windows on either side of the tower are framed by stone labels with stylized stone fleur-de-lys (evoking Tudor style).

The architect is assumed to be Fred Erhart.

