

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

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received AUG 8 1984  
date entered DEC 10 1984

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic Thematic Nomination: Historic Churches of Puerto Rico

and/or common N/A

**2. Location**

street & number See individual nominations. not for publication

city, town vicinity of

state code county code

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name Catholic Church

street & number see individual nominations.

city, town vicinity of state

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. see individual nominations

street & number

city, town state

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

Inventory of the Historic Churches  
title in Puerto Rico has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1984  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records State Historic Preservation Office

city, town San Juan state Puerto Rico 00901

## 7. Description

See individual nominations.

Condition		Check one	Check one	
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> original site	
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved	date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed			

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Among the older churches of Puerto Rico, 31 have been chosen for their architectural and historical importance to be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places. These churches have a series of common characteristics that clearly groups them together for a thematic nomination. These churches are:

- San Carlos Borromeo of Aguadilla
- San José of Aibonito
- Cathedral San Felipe Apóstol of Arecibo
- Santa Cruz of Bayamón
- San Fernando of Carolina
- Nuestra Señora de la Asunción of Cayey
- San Blás de Illescas of Coamo
- Hermitage de la Valvanera of Coamo
- San Antonio de Padua of Dorado
- Santiago Apóstol of Fajardo
- Inmaculada Concepción of Guayanilla
- San José of Gurabo
- Nuestra Señora del Carmen of Hatillo
- Dulce Nombre de Jesús of Humacao
- San Ramón Nonato of Juana Díaz
- Inmaculada Concepción of Juncos
- San José of Lares
- Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria of Manatí
- Cathedral Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria of Mayaguez
- San Juan Bautista of Maricao
- Nuestra Señora de Monserrate of Moca
- Nuestra Señora del Rosario of Naguabo
- Cathedral Nuestra Señora de la Guadalupe of Ponce
- San Isidro Labrador y Santa María de la Cabeza of Sabana Grande
- San Germán de Auxerre of San Germán
- San Sebastián Mártir of San Sebastián
- San Mateo de Cangrejos of Santurce
- San Fernando of Toa Alta
- San Miguel Arcángel of Utuado
- Inmaculada Concepción of Vega Alta
- Santa María del Rosario of Vega Baja

The towns of Puerto Rico were planned according to the Laws of the Indies, straight streets forming rectangular blocks, one of which was selected the town plaza. On the streets surrounding the plaza the most important buildings were placed: the church, the city hall and the market. This basic layout was used throughout Latin America while under Spanish rule. The churches were built above the level of the plaza and apart from other buildings as the Laws recommended, but sometimes they were built within the plaza acquiring even more importance. The orientation of the churches generally followed the traditional east-west axis, the entrance facing west.

The earliest churches, most of which have disappeared were made of straw and wood. They were usually replaced, on the same site, by a permanent structure. Brick and rubble masonry was used in the construction of support elements such as the walls, columns and arches, and also in the domes and vaults. Even though masonry was preferred

(see continuation sheet)

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for its durability, the majority of the churches had a flat roof formed by wood beams and layers of bricks due to economical reasons. Other types of wooden roof structures were used, usually triangular trusses seen as gabled roofs from the exterior. Many of these have been replaced in modern times by flat reinforced concrete slabs.

Architects and engineers were able to achieve designs of considerable architectural merits. According to architect Tom Marvel and Art Historian Maria Luisa Moreno, who have been doing research on the architecture of the parish churches of Puerto Rico, there appear to be no plans imported directly from Spain, as occurred in other Latin American countries, nor was there an official model arrangement of one nave flanked by two aisles. The first space one enters is the vestibule or sotocoro with a small room on each side, one used as baptistery and the other houses a stairway leading to the choir loft on the second level. The next series of bays comprise the main public space. Open arcades divide the side aisles from the nave. In many cases the roof over the side aisles is placed at a lower level than that of the main nave permitting the placement of a clerestory. The plan usually culminates in a square apse covered with a dome. The sacristies are placed on each side of the presbitery. This spatial organization was established during the early centuries of christianity and used until the 1960's when liturgical changes resulting from the Second Vatican Council encouraged the circular or poligonal plan with a more centrally-located altar. Other floor plans used consisted of a single nave usually covered with a brick vault. Still another more complex type of arrangement was used, a cruciform plan having a nave and two aisles, intercepted by a transept where a dome covers the crossing and the semicircular apse is covered with a half dome.

The design of the facade of the church received special attention due to its symbolic and physical importance. The townspeople made great efforts to have an elegant facade built. The facades of the churches have changed greatly through history. The earliest churches display simple rectangular facades with a single door flanked by pilasters and crowned by a triangular pediment. An espadaña holding the bells gave height and importance to the facade. Often the facade was divided into three parts, reflecting the main nave and two side aisles of the interior. From mid 19th century on, facades were built both with one or two towers. When the towers were built in different shapes, due to natural disasters or lack of funds, they might result in different styles and heights. Prosperous towns built twin towers on their churches, being more costly than single tower projects. A central tower became popular, often added at a later date in order to give greater importance to a simple facade. This tower was not always successfully integrated to the existing structure. Nineteenth century eclecticism is reflected on the towers by the variety of styles they represent.

Many of the architects and engineers working on the construction of the churches were Spanish immigrants. Due to the limited educational opportunities in Puerto Rico during the 19th century the professional training of architects and engineers was acquired in Europe. Neoclassical

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styles were in fashion and architects reproduced and adapted them to many buildign designs.

# 8. Significance

See individual nominations.

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates

Builder/Architect

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The historic churches of Puerto Rico, built between the 17th and 19th centuries are outstanding in historic and architectural significance. No other building has been witness to so many important events. In a traditional Catholic society, in addition to filling religious needs, these structures signified dignity and culture. It was not until the beginning of the 20th century that other religious faiths were introduced to the Island. For this reason, the oldest and most important churches are all Catholic. In spite of the passage of time, the church and town plaza are still the center of life for small towns.

The churches are usually one of the oldest and most distinguished buildings still standing, together with the City Hall and a few houses of the wealthy townspeople. The founding of towns go together with the founding of the parishes and the construction of the church, often a wooden non-permanent structure that would eventually be substituted with permanent masonry construction.

Due to Puerto Rico's strategic location in the Caribbean, Spain invested great efforts in the construction of forts and other military defenses. This is one of the main reasons why only a few permanent churches were built during that time. According to Art Historian Maria Luisa Moreno, only six parishes were established during the first two centuries of Spanish rule: San Juan (1502), San Germán (1512), Coamo (1579), Arecibo (1616), Aguada (1665) and Ponce (1695). At the beginning of the 18th century, the catholic church faced a critical situation, but by 1750, conditions improved as new towns and parishes flourished: Añasco, Rio Piedras, Loiza, Rincón, Guaynabo, Manatí, Utuado, Toa Alta and Toa Baja. Even with an increase in the construction of public buildings during the 19th century, lack of construction funds penalized the completion of many monumental projects. Most of the churches included in the nominations have been in constant use ever since their founding. Hurricanes and earthquakes have in many towns damaged the structures. These are very significant facts and, at the same time, the cause of necessary repairs and alterations. In recent times another type of alteration has occurred, substitution of timber roofs with concrete or steel, doors and windows have been replaced, and floors refinished. In most cases modern parish houses have been attached to the original church. However, these buildings retain most of their original construction and design elements. Thick brick and rubble masonry walls, domes and vaults, and, in some cases, original timber and brick roof structures have been preserved. These are examples of construction methods no longer in use and evidence of lost artisan craftsmanship.

The overpowering presence of the church played an integral part in the planning of towns. As is traditional in Puerto Rico, the plaza, church and city hall are closely interrelated in the center of every town. This historic relationship between these three urban elements has been maintained and is a living example of town planning characteristic of the Spanish colonial times.

The historic churches are one of Puerto Rico's most valued cultural treasures and should be paid their due respect as monuments to be preserved for the enjoyment of future generations.





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Multiple Resource Area  
Thematic Group

Name Historic Churches of Puerto Rico Thematic Resources  
State Aguadilla and other counties, Puerto Rico

Nomination/Type of Review

Date/Signature

11. Church San Sebastian Martir of San Sebastian  
~~Substantive Review~~

Keeper Accept - Conkie 9/18/84  
Attest \_\_\_\_\_

12. Church Santa Cruz of Bayamon  
~~Substantive Review~~

Keeper Accept - Conkie 9/18/84  
Attest \_\_\_\_\_

13. Church Santa Maria del Rosario of Veg Baja  
~~Substantive Review~~

Keeper Accept - Conkie 9/18/84  
Attest \_\_\_\_\_

14. Church Santiago Apostol of Fajardo  
~~Substantive Review~~

Keeper Accept - Conkie 9/18/84  
Attest \_\_\_\_\_

15. Cathedral Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe of Ponce  
~~Substantive Review~~

Keeper accept Patrick Andrews 12/10/84  
Attest \_\_\_\_\_

16. Church Immaculada Concepcion of Guayanilla  
~~Substantive Review~~

Keeper Return PWA 12/10/84  
Attest \_\_\_\_\_

17. Church Nuestra Senora de la Asuncion of Cayey  
~~Substantive Review~~

Keeper accept Patrick Andrews 12/10/84  
Attest \_\_\_\_\_

18. Church Nuestra Senora del Carmen of Hatillo  
~~Substantive Review~~

Keeper accept Patrick Andrews 12/10/84  
Attest \_\_\_\_\_

19. Church Nuestra Senora del Rosario of Naguabo  
~~Substantive Review~~

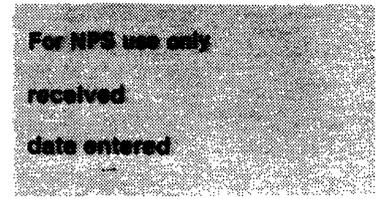
Keeper accept Patrick Andrews 12/10/84  
Attest \_\_\_\_\_

20. Church San Blas de Illescas of Coamo  
~~Substantive Review~~

Keeper Patrick Andrews - Accept - 12/10/84  
Attest \_\_\_\_\_

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Multiple Resource Area  
Thematic Group

Name Historic Churches of Puerto Rico Thematic Resources  
State Puerto Rico

Nomination/Type of Review

Date/Signature

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| 21. Church San German Auxerre of San German                                     | <del>Substantive Review</del> <i>for</i> Keeper | <i>accept Patrick Andrews 12/10/84</i> |
|   | Attest  | _____                                  |
| 22. Church of San Isidro Labrador and Santa Maria de la Cabeza of Sabana Grande | <del>Substantive Review</del> <i>for</i> Keeper | <i>accept Patrick Andrews 12/10/84</i> |
|   | Attest  | _____                                  |
| 23. Church San Jose of Aibonito   | <del>Substantive Review</del> <i>for</i> Keeper | <i>accept Patrick Andrews 12/10/84</i> |
|   | Attest  | _____                                  |
| 24. Church San Juan Bautista y San Ramon Nonato of Juana Diaz                   | <del>Substantive Review</del> <i>for</i> Keeper | <i>accept Patrick Andrews 12/10/84</i> |
|   | Attest  | _____                                  |
| 25. Church San Miguel Arcangel of Utuado  | <del>Substantive Review</del> <i>for</i> Keeper | <i>accept Patrick Andrews 12/10/84</i> |
|   | Attest  | _____                                  |
| 26.   | Keeper  | _____                                  |
|   | Attest  | _____                                  |
| 27.   | Keeper  | _____                                  |
|   | Attest  | _____                                  |
| 28.   | Keeper  | _____                                  |
|   | Attest  | _____                                  |
| 29.   | Keeper  | _____                                  |
|   | Attest  | _____                                  |
| 30.   | Keeper  | _____                                  |
|   | Attest  | _____                                  |