-UKITID STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

IC TONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM



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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help rests atop Pond Creek Mountain overlooking the Arkansas River Valley. This quiet hilltop in western Arkansas is an appropriate setting for one of the state's most interesting and unusual churches.

Reminiscent of Romanesque architecture, this basilica style church is built of hard white sandstone cut from a nearby quarry. These stones are rock-faced with margins and are cut in various rectangular sizes and set in a broken course. The two-foot-thick walls enclose an area measuring 117 feet by 56 feet.

The nave rises a full storey above the one-storey aisles. A gable roof of calvanized steel shingles covers the nave with a shed roof over each aisle. Enclosing the apse on the east elevation is a semi-decagon bay with a conical roof. At the southeast corner of the building a 120-foot bell tower rises a full storey above the nave.

The wide center facade rises one storey above the flanking bays. Three semi-elliptical-arched openings on the projecting center bay give access to the small enclosed porch. The center arch leads directly to the main double door entry to the church. Above the wide stringcourse at the second-storey line, three semi-circular arched windows are set Palladian-style into a wide half-circle arch. The pediment features a round window and a cross above the ridge line.

All the windows around the church are of stained glass set in semi-circular arches. Like the three entry arches, the windows set in stone have small keystones. The ten windows of the tile-sided nave walls are set in simple wooden frames.

The four-storey bell tower has a separate arched entry on the south elevation. Stringcoursing separates the window openings on each storey of the square tower. Slender paired windows on the second storey, round windows on the third storey and triple vented-arches on the fourth storey are interesting features on the tower. On the fourth floor are four melodic bells, together weighing more than three tons.

The interior of St. Mary's Church makes it one of the most beautiful buildings in Arkansas. Corinthian capitaled columns support the arcades which separate the nave from the aisles. Pressed tin in a fleur-de-lis pattern covers the walls of the upper nave, while the ceilings have a clover-like pattern.

Each of the stained glass windows depicts a Biblical character or event and bears a dedicatory script in Cerman. Twelve small murals, each measuring 3¹/₂ by 5 feet, decorate the white plastered walls. Illustrating scenes from the life of Christ, these small murals were painted by a German artist, Fridolin Fuchs, during 1915 and 1916. The German captions painted by Fuchs were replaced with English inscriptions in 1964. Fuchs also painted figures in the extrados above the high altar and large murals set into the arches at the front of each aisle. The domed ceiling above the apse was hand stonciled by Fuchs.

Original to the church is a communion railing of cherry and walnut. Hand-carved by a local parishoner, this railing is made from trees grown in the area. Side



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ITEM NUMBER 7

PAGE one

altars, added in 1918, contain ten different kinds of wood. Another later addition came in 1924 when a pipe organ was installed.

Over the years minor repairs have been made to keep St. Mary's Church in its excellent condition. Though changes in the form of artwork and furnishings have been made, there have been no significant alterations to the structure. Resting on its original site, St. Mary's Church represents an unusual architectural style in Arkansas.

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SPECIFIC DATES Sept. 2, 1902 (dedication) BUILDER/ARCHITECT May 24, 1901 (cornerstone laid)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

One of Arkansas' most architecturally significant churches is the Church of Our of Perpetual Help near Altus, Arkansas. This impressive edifice was constructed atop Pond Creek Mountain overlooking the Arkansas River Valley. Completed in 1902, the church was built to serve the German- and Swiss-Catholics who immigrated to Franklin County in the late nineteenth century.

The records of the congregation begin with the arrival of the first priest in 1879. The Reverend Father Beatus Maria Ziswyler was sent by the Little Rock Diocese to serve the Catholic congregation at Altus. During the first year services were held in the upstairs room of Father Ziswyler's two-storey log cabin, but by 1891 a frame church had been constructed. Father Ziswyler's cabin, the frame church and the later stone church were all built near the same site on a forty-acre tract donated by the Little Rock and Fort Smith Railroad.

The congregation of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, also known as St. Mary's, grew rapidly. By 1883 the parish had forty-five families and operated two missions of its own. Further immigration of German and Swiss families combined with the rapid growth of coal mining in Franklin County to cause a relatively rapid population increase in the 1890's.

This population increase brought a corresponding need for a larger church. On January 28, 1900, the congregation of St. Mary's Church voted to erect a new church building. Architectural plans were partially drawn by a priest in St. Louis, and, though never quite completed, were used to build the church. The actual construction was supervised by Father Placidus Oeschele, the local parish priest, and John Riedt, a stone mason from St. Louis.

In February, 1901, the concerstone of St. Mary's Church was laid. Into the $25" \times 18" \times 27"$ cornerstone was set a copper box containing documents, contemporary newspapers and a few coins. On September 2, 1902, the church was completed, and dedicatory ceremonies, presided over by the Abbot of the nearby Subiaco Academy, were held.

Designed to seat 500 persons, St Mary's Church was built in a basilica style. The choice of this particular style was due in part to the fact that much of the labor on the new church was performed by local parishoners. According to Father Oeschsle, "Our workmen could easily erect such simple construction, and this was one of the important features that guided us." *



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St. Mary's Church is constructed of hard white sandstone cut from a nearby quarry. The basilica style church has the typical features of a center nave rising above the aisle, transcept and projecting altar area. A somewhat unusual feature is the 120-foot bell tower rising from the southeast corner of the church. Original interior features include the numerous stained glass windows, pressed tin ceiling and a communion railing carved from cherry and walnut trees grown on Pond Creek Mountain.

The most significant interior features of the church are the murals painted by Fridolin Fuchs, a German artist employed by Father Oeschsle. From January, 1915, until April, 1916, Fuchs painted on the white plaster twelve "stations," small murals measuring 3¹/₂ feet by 5 feet. Reminiscent of European church murals, these paintings depict various scenes from the life of Christ. Each station was inscribed with a German text, as were the written dedications in each of the stained glass windows. Fuchs, who was paid \$600.00 plus room and board, painted the faces of several individuals involved in St. Mary's Church into his murals. His own likeness and that of Father Oeschsle, who assisted him, appear in the stations on either side of the high altar. Fuchs also stenciled and painted holy figures on the domed ceiling above the altar.

Other unusual features of the church include the massive bells and the pipe organ. On Thanksgiving Day, 1902, four bells, the largest weighing 2,712 pounds, were installed in the top of the four-storey bell tower. These melodic bells added further to the European flavor of the church. In 1924 a pipe organ, still operable with a hand-pumped bellows, was installed in the organ loft at the rear of the church.

Built by German and Swiss immigrants, the Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help was a tangible symbol of the congregation's origins. Religion played a most important part in the lives of these Catholic immigrants, and the church at Altus, reminiscent of old parish churches in Germany and Switzerland, was in part a recreation of the society they had left behind. St. Mary's murals, painted by the German artist Fuchs, give the church an artistic flavor unique in Arkansas.

Significant because of its architecture, artwork and relationship with the German-Swiss immigrants in Franklin County, St. Mary's is one of the most important church buildings in Arkansas.

" Ernie Deane, "A Church That Stands High on a Hill," Arkansas Gazette, December 30, 1962.

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Dean, Er	nie. "A Church 962.	That Stands High	n on a Hill."	Arkansas Gaze	ette, Decem	ber 30,
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CONTINUATION SHEET

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Oeschsle, Placidus. "<u>Historical Sketch of the Congregation of Our Lady of Per-</u> petual Help at Altus, Arkansas. Privately printed, 1930. Archives, Arkansas History Commission. UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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Form No. 10-301a (Rev. 10-74) **UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR** FOR NPS USE ONLY NATIONAL PARK SERVICE RECIEVED NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM DATEENTERED SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- ENCLOSE WITH PHOTOGRAPH NAME HISTORIC Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help AND/OR COMMON Church of St. Mary's LOCATION X_VICINITY OF CITY, TOWN STATE COUNTY Franklin Altus Arkansas PHOTO REFERENCE Dianna Kirk DATE OF PHOTO 1975 PHOTO CREDIT NEGATIVE FILED AT Arkansas Historic Preservation Program **IDENTIFICATION** DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC. IF DISTRICT, GIVE BUILDING NAME & STREET PHOTO NO. South and rear (east) elevations, viewed from the southeast and the second second second GPO 892-454



Form No. 10-301a (Rev. 10-74)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM

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SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- ENCLOSE WITH PHOTOGRAPH

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DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC. IF DISTRICT, GIVE BUILDING NAME & STREET

Interior of the church, viewed from the west choir loft

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM

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Form No. 10-301 IRev. 10-74

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES PROPERTY MAP FORM



SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- ENCLOSE WITH MAP

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