FHR-8-300 (11-78)

B-3691

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

For HCRS use only
received
date entered

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

1. Name

historic: Saint Leo's Church

and/or common: Saint Leo's Church

2. Location

street & number: 221 South Exeter Street — n/a not for publication

city, town: Baltimore — n/a vicinity of — congressional district: Third

state: Maryland — code: 24 — county: independent city — code: 510

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
___ district	___ public	X occupied	___ agriculture	___ museum
X building(s)	X private	___ unoccupied	___ commercial	___ park
___ structure	___ both	___ work in progress	___ educational	___ private residence
___ site	**Public Acquisition**	**Accessible**	___ entertainment	X religious
___ object	___ in process	___ yes: restricted	___ government	___ scientific
	___ being considered	X yes: unrestricted	___ industrial	___ transportation
	X not applicable	___ no	___ military	___ other:

4. Owner of Property

name: Saint Leo's Roman Catholic Congregation, Inc. (Reverend Louis J. Lulli)

street & number: 227 South Exeter Street

city, town: Baltimore — n/a vicinity of — state: Maryland 21202

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc.: Baltimore City Courthouse

street & number: Records Office, Room 601

city, town: Baltimore — state: Maryland 21202

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title: Maryland Historical Trust Historic Sites Inventory — has this property been determined eligible? ___ yes X no

date: April 1983 — ___ federal X state ___ county ___ local

depository for survey records: Maryland Historical Trust, 21 State Circle

city, town: Annapolis — state: Maryland 21401

7. Description

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Condition		Check one	Check one
___ excellent	___ deteriorated	X unaltered	X original site
X good	___ ruins	___ altered	___ moved date _____
___ fair	___ unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION:

Saint Leo's Church is located at the southeast corner of Exeter and Stiles Streets in the Little Italy section of East Baltimore. It is built of brick with stone trim, and has an asphalt shingle roof. It was built in 1880-1881. Stylistically, it combines Italianate, Romanesque, and Classical elements. It is three bays wide and five bays deep. Its features include a high entrance porch, a turret with conical roof on the north wall, a square belltower at the northeast corner, a large rose window in the main facade, and a variety of decorative brickwork. The building has not been substantially altered since its construction, and thus its integrity is undiminished.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

On the main (western) elevation, a large two-story extension protrudes from the center of the facade. At the ground level of this extension there are three segmental arches - the center one containing a door and the other two blind. Above these three segmental arches are three round arches that open onto an entrance porch. The porch is approached by two staircases, one on either side.

Above the porch, on the wall of the church itself, there is a large round window inside a large arch. Above that is a small arched niche with a protruding shelf. Lining the gable of this central portion of the main facade, there is elaborate corbel work and stone coping.

The porch and round window are flanked by two tall arched windows. The wall space above and below these windows is decorated with narrow recessed panels.

The north elevation of the church is five bays wide. In the westernmost bay a turret with a conical roof protrudes from the side wall of the church. It has a pedimented doorway on the ground floor and two rows of arched windows above. The other four bays are marked on the side wall by small windows on the ground floor and tall arched windows in recessed panels above.

Attached to the church at the northeast corner is a tall square tower with a pyramidal roof. Each face of the tower is marked by a large recessed panel topped by corbeling, several small arched windows, and, at the top, a large classical arch flanked by pilasters and filled in with louvers. There is also a dentil cornice beneath the pyramidal roof.

The east end of the church faces an alley. There is a large semicircular apse, the full height of the church, extending from the rear. This is flanked by a one-story pavilion to its south, and the tower to its north.

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET #1

GENERAL DESCRIPTION (Continued)

The south side of the church is unexposed.

The interior is a typical basilica plan, with narthex, nave, side aisles, and apse; but there is no clerestory. There is a barrel vault over the nave that extends into a half-dome over the apse. The bay system is articulated in the vault by ribs.

The nave is separated from each side aisle by an arcade of round arches resting on slender composite - order columns. The ceiling over each aisle is flat.

At the western end of the hall there is a gallery for choir and organ. The organ pipe cabinet is an elaborate array of wood panels, pilasters, pillars and pediments.

The interior wall and ceiling surfaces are decorated with a wide variety of painting - both pictorial and non-pictorial.

Integrity: The building has not been significantly altered since its construction. Both interior and exterior remain intact, and thus the integrity is undiminished.

8. Significance

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

Specific dates Const. 1880–1881 **Builder/Architect** Edwin Brady, builder; E. Francis Baldwin, Architect

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Applicable Criteria: A and C
Applicable Exception: A

SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

Saint Leo's Church is significant both architecturally and for its association with nineteenth century Italian immigration and with the establishment of the Italian community in Baltimore. Saint Leo's is the first church in Maryland, and among the first in the nation, founded and built specifically for Italian immigrants. Besides housing Italian-language religious services, it also sponsored and housed a variety of social, humanitarian, and civic programs aimed at acclimating Italian immigrants to life in America. Its membership has produced several leaders active in the political life of both the Italian-American community and the city and nation at large. Thus it is associated with the broader patterns of immigration of Southern and Eastern European peoples that began in the early nineteenth century and mushroomed in the late 19th century. Architecturally, the building represents an unusual mix of Italianate, Romanesque, and Classical elements, and is a good example of High Victorian eclecticism applied to a church. Designed by E. Francis Baldwin, it represents the work of a major figure in late nineteenth century Baltimore architecture. It also presents an interesting contrast with the bulk of Baldwin's better-known work, which was in commercial and industrial architecture.

HISTORY AND SUPPORT:

Immigrants from Italy began arriving in Baltimore in the early nineteenth century, and continued arriving in a small but steady flow through the 1850's. They settled around President Street very near the area today known as Little Italy. After the Civil War, immigration from Italy burgeoned. While some new arrivals were coming from all parts of Italy, most were artisans and laborers from Naples, Abruzzi, and Sicily. They continued to settle along President Street and its environs to the east, Albemarle, Stiles and Exeter Street. (By 1870, between 1/3 and 1/2 of that area's population was Italian.)

Being, for the most part, devout Catholics they immediately sought out the nearest Catholic church which at that time was St. Vincent de Paul on North Front Street. Beginning in 1874, St. Vincent de Paul sponsored Italian-language services, but it was not adequate to handle such a large influx of non-English speaking congregants, and it was not conveniently located for the Italian community. Therefore, the local Catholic hierarchy decided to establish an Italian church, as it had earlier set up Irish and German churches. Part of the role of these ethnic churches was to acclimate immigrants to life in America and assist in their assimilation.

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET #2

HISTORY AND SUPPORT (Continued)

The lots for St. Leo's were purchased in June 1880 and construction must have begun shortly thereafter; by the time the cornerstone was laid in September 1880, the ground level was already complete to a height of ten feet. (The cornerstone was installed at the base of the main story.) The building was completed and dedicated in September 1881.

As the social and spiritual focus of Baltimore's Italian community, Saint Leo's church was the natural center for a variety of mutual aid societies, citizenship classes, and social service and community action organizations throughout the period of sizable immigration from Italy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Thus, for most Italian immigrants to Baltimore, it was the major institutional entry into American cultural, social, political, and economic life.

A number of political personalities have been members of Saint Leo's. Vincent Palmisano served in the House of Delegates, the City Council, and in 1926 became the first Italian-born member of the U. S. House of Representatives. Thomas J. D'Alesandro, Jr. had a long and illustrious political career, serving in the state legislature, the U. S. House of Representatives, and for three terms as Mayor of Baltimore. Other political figures who have been associated with Saint Leo's include Joe Milano, Nicholas Bruno, and Joseph Cherigo.

The architect of St. Leo's, E. Francis Baldwin, was one of Baltimore's foremost architects in the late nineteenth century. He worked in a wide range of building types and styles, and his early career included a few other church projects, including enlargements of the Basilica of the Assumption and of St. John's Church on East Eager Street. With his early partner Bruce Price he designed the Gothic Revival Christ Church on Chase Street. But he is best known for his commercial and industrial work. His greatest industrial monument, the Mount Clare Roundhouse, is a National Historic Landmark. And later, with partner Josias Pennington, he was part of the most important local architectural firm of the late nineteenth and very early twentieth centuries. Much of Baldwin and Pennington's work was in the popular Richardsonian Romanesque style, including the Mount Royal Station (a National Historic Landmark), the Maryland Club, and the Fidelity Building. St. Leo's Church presents an unusual and interesting example of the early work of a master that contrasts sharply in style and scale with his mature work.

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES:

Olson, Sherry H.; Baltimore: The Building of an American City; Johns Hopkins Press; Baltimore; 1980

Sandler, Gilbert; The Neighborhood: The Story of Baltimore's Little Italy; Bodine & Associates Inc.; Baltimore; 1974

Spivey, David L. et al; The Church of Saint Leo the Great 1881-1981: The Heart of Little Italy; Church of Saint Leo the Great Press; Baltimore; 1981

Contemporary news reports from the Sun and American of various dates

9. Major Bibliographical References

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SEE CONTINUATION SHEET #3

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name Baltimore East, Maryland

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UMT References

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
A	18	361940	4349680	B			
C				D			
E				F			
G				H			

Verbal boundary description and justification On the west, along Exeter Street, fifty-three feet, ten inches. On the north, along Stiles Street, ninety-four feet, ten inches. On the east, fifty-three feet, ten inches. On the south, ninety-four feet, ten inches. The nominated property includes only the city lots upon which the resource stands.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	n/a	code	county	code
state		code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title	Jeffrey Honick, Research Analyst		
organization	Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation	date	April 1983
street & number	601 City Hall	telephone	(301) 396-4866
city or town	Baltimore	state	Maryland 21202

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

___ national ___ state X local

As the designated State Historic Preservation 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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature 6-24-83

title STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER date

For HCRS use only

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

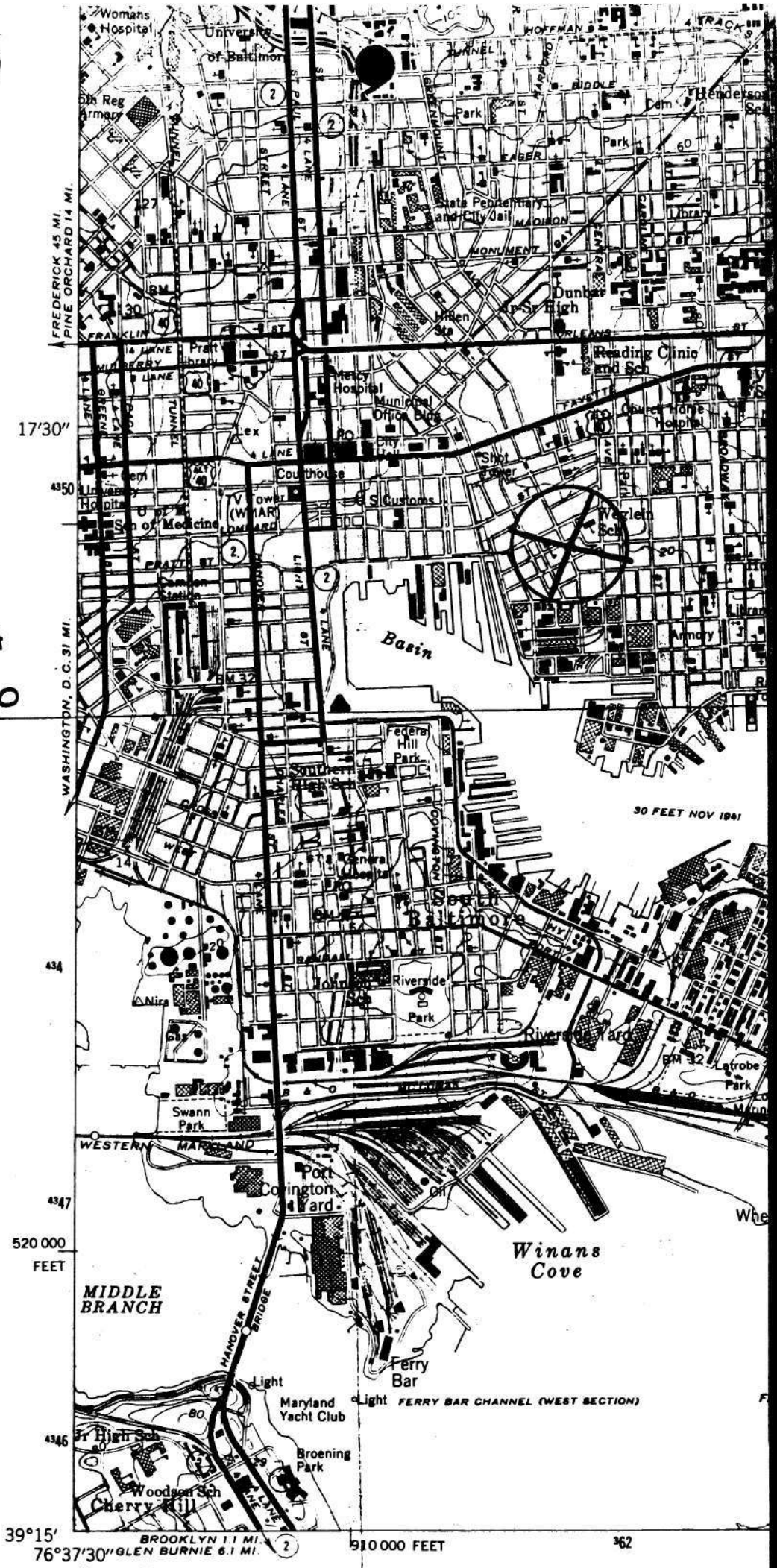
date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest: date

Chief of Registration

BALTIMORE CITY, MD.
B-3691
ST. LEO'S CHURCH
18-361940-4349680



Mapped by the Army Map Service