

Church of the Assumption (Roman Catholic)
51 West Ninth Street, opposite Auditorium Street
St. Paul
Ramsey County
Minnesota

HABS No. MINN-45

HABS
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62-SAIPA
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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

CHURCH OF THE ASSUMPTION (ROMAN CATHOLIC)

HABS
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62-SAIPA

Address: 51 West Ninth Street, opposite Auditorium Street,
St. Paul, Ramsey County, Minnesota 7-

Present Owner: The Assumption Parish Corporation

Present Occupant: Assumption Parish

Present Use: Church

Statement of Significance: The Church of the Assumption was designed by Joseph Reidl (Reidel), Court Architect of the Bavarian ruling family, the Wittelsbachs. One of the most dominant landmarks in the City of St. Paul, the structure is a simplified and somewhat severe version of the German Romanesque Revival, and is reported to have been patterned after the famous Ludwigskirche (1829-40) in Munich, designed by Friedrich von Gaertner (1792-1847). A view of this Revival Church can be seen in Henry Russell Hitchcock's Architecture, Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, Inc., 1958), Plate 10B.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Built and maintained to the present time by the Assumption Parish.
2. Date of erection: 1870-74.
3. Architect: Joseph Reidl, Court Architect of the Bavarian ruling family, the Wittelsbachs.
4. Builder, suppliers: Stone supplied by M. Breen; masonry work by Frank Schlick, of Schlick, Erd and Company; wood-work (interior) by T. Reardon; plaster work by Mr. Lister; pews and confessionals manufactured and installed by Joseph Hänggi.
5. Notes on original plan and construction: Architect Joseph Reidl submitted his plans for the new church building in May of 1869. The parish voted its approval and the site was cleared. In June of 1870, the foundations were laid and the next year work on the superstructure was begun. The Lake Superior stone was quarried

and supplied by M. Breen at a cost of \$34,750. Schlick, Erd and Company received the contract for stone dressing with a low bid of \$30,300. Schlick, Erd and Bahnholzer received the contract for the masonry work with a low bid of \$37,000 (the high bid was \$68,300). The blessing of the corner stone took place on June 4, 1871, and the walls and roof construction were completed in July 1873. In the fall, the roof was covered with slate, the towers were finished, and the work on the interior was begun. The building was consecrated on October 18, 1874, and the church was officially opened for divine services on December 8.

The original plan of the building, only slightly altered, was rectangular with an elongated nave, flanking side aisles, and a semicircular apse.

6. Notes on known alterations and additions:

1883 - installation of new organ built by Odenbrett and Abler Company, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
Cost - \$4,300.

1887 - church decorated by Liebig and Loffler, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

1891 - church further decorated with paintings by George F. Satory. Cost - \$4,000.

1902 - electricity installed.

1911 - Repointing of the stonework by Lauer Brothers.

1914-1915 - church redecorated and generally improved - Emanuel L. Masqueray, Architect, St. Paul, and Wilfred Lalonde, Contractor. Cost - \$3,890.
old sanctuary floor and steps replaced;
cement floor laid in basement auditorium;
new outside vestibules and steps to basement installed on west side; steps at main entrance (south side) replaced by larger ones.

1927 - new slate roof installed. Cost - \$6,505.

1929 - basement auditorium redecorated for use as a church.

1931 - church refurbished and redecorated by Conrad Schmitt Studios, Milwaukee, Wisconsin; sanctuary painting by Felix J. Falkenbach of Munich.

1932 - present - minor interior alterations.

B. Historical Events and Persons Associated with Building:

The congregation of the first distinctive German Catholic Church of St. Paul was organized in 1854. Plans for a new church were formulated and the corner stone was laid on August 15, 1855. The Fathers of the Order of St. Benedict came to the Church of the Assumption in 1858 and remained there until 1912. The congregation grew rapidly, and plans

for the present church were begun. Completed in 1874, the building is operated by the Assumption Parish Corporation (incorporated in 1906).

C. Sources of Information:

Andrews, General C. C. History of St. Paul, Minnesota.
Syracuse, New York: D. Mason and Son, 1890. pp. 484-85.

A History of the Assumption Parish, St. Paul, Minnesota.
Published on the occasion of the Diamond Jubilee.
St. Paul: October 18, 1931.

Koeper, H. F. Historic St. Paul Buildings. A report of
the Historic Sites Committee, a special citizens' group named
by the St. Paul City Planning Board. St. Paul: 1964.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

- A. Condition of Fabric: Generally good with some spalling of the exterior limestone. The interior finishes have been carefully maintained.
- B. Detailed Description of the Exterior:
1. Layout, number of bays, over-all dimensions: The building is rectangular in plan (on the north-south axis) with two large square towers (210' high) flanking the narthex, an elongated nave with clerestory and side aisles, and semicircular apse. The structure is 185' (8 bays) long and 85' (3 bays) wide; the apse radius is approximately 30'.
 2. Foundations: Rubble limestone, faced on the exterior with quarry-faced coursed ashlar, 5' thick for the side walls and 4'-6" thick for the apse. The foundations for the piers of the nave are 5'-6" square, and the foundation for the tabernacle is rectangular (5' x 11').
 3. Wall construction, finish, and color: Coursed ashlar of local limestone, light gray in color, weathering darkly at the joints and recesses. A projecting cut limestone base course is continuous around the building, and the bays are defined by cut limestone pilasters and corbel tables.
 4. Structural system, framing: Masonry bearing walls and piers with timber floor, vault, and roof framing. The main floor structure is divided into four bays (1 bay

for each side aisle, and 2 bays for the nave) by double timber beams running north-south (each timber is 6" x 26") - the center beam is supported by fluted cast-iron columns set on plinth blocks, and the flanking beams are supported by the massive stone pier foundations. The 2-1/2" x 18" wood joists span east-west. The clerestory walls are supported by the six bay arcades. The rib vaults in the nave and the aisles spring from the piers of the arcade and are framed with spliced 1" x 10" boards, thoroughly cross braced and finished with wood lath and plaster. The ribs are finished with built-up molded plaster. The roof of the nave is constructed of modified timber Howe trusses (9" x 9" bottom chord; 8" x 8" upper chords; 12" x 8" king posts; 6" x 6" diagonal web members; 1-1/4" steel bar vertical web members; all joined with mortise and tenon joints, secured with bolted metal plates). The 6" x 10" purlins span between the trusses and support the 2" x 10" common rafters and rough tongue and groove sheathing above. The roofs over the side aisles have traditional lean-to framing. The towers are constructed with massive masonry bearing walls topped with frame eight-panel spirea (flared at the base).

5. Porches, stoopa: Main entrance located on the south (front) elevation--the original single-run stair was replaced in 1914 by the present 15-step stair, flared at the base, with a landing at mid-point and enclosed by low rusticated limestone retaining walls. There are three secondary entrances on the west (side) elevation--one at the center providing access to the main floor of the side aisle (twin-run stair with common landing and simple iron railing); two low shed vestibules, one at each end of the side elevation, with simple straight-run stairs providing access to the basement auditorium.
6. Chimney: Large octagonal brick chimney (for modern heating system) located at the northeast corner of the building.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance located in the center bay of the south (front) elevation has a large round arched opening with a slightly projecting rusticated limestone surround (pilaster trim with stepped limestone pediment). The doorway has a deep reveal with compound moldings and wide chevron trim. A molded and bracketed stone lintel separates the arched stained glass window and the

large double doors (modern replacements). The secondary entrance at the center of the west (side) elevation is of similar character but smaller and less detailed. The doors are paneled (octagonal recessed panels) painted gray.

- b. Windows: The windows in the main block of the church (nave clerestory, side aisles, and south elevation, including the lower two sections of the towers) are arranged one per bay and have round arched openings with plain cut limestone surrounds and splayed reveals. The wood sash is recessed, generally with three lights (double arch with fixed transom). Two small arched windows flank the main entrance and a large circular window is located in the gable directly above the entrance.

The upper parts of the towers are divided into three square tiers and are fenestrated on all four faces as follows: the first tier has a double arched opening with limestone surround, center colonnette, and louvered vents in lieu of sash; the second tier has a large circular opening (boarded over) set in a square limestone frame; the third tier has a triple arched opening with limestone surrounds, center colonnettes and there is a small circular opening over each part of the triple opening (both the arched and circular openings have louvered vents in lieu of sash). The upper part of the semicircular apse is divided into five bays, each with a double arched opening with cut limestone surrounds and splayed reveals, and single light with stained glass.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Gable roof over the nave; lean-to roofs over the side aisles; conical roof with short ridge over the semicircular apse; peaked eight-panel spires, flared at the base to adapt to the square towers; all timber framed and alate covered.
- b. Cornice, eaves: The bays are completed at the eave line by plain or denticulated corbel tables, topped with projecting cove cornices.
- c. Dormers, towers: Three simple gabled ventilator dormers are located on both slopes of the nave roof. The twin towers are 210' high and are constructed of massive masonry bearing walls and are divided

into three tiers above the main mass of the building. Each tier is stepped back slightly, and articulated by a corbel table and projecting cove cornice. Both towers are topped with an eight-panel spire flared at the base.

C. Detailed Description of the Interior:

1. Floor plans: The building is rectangular in plan (on the north-south axis) with two large square towers flanking the narthex, an elongated nave with clerestory and side aisles, and semicircular apse. The floor or the sanctuary is raised six steps above the floor of the nave. The basement auditorium corresponds in plan to the nave and side aisle section of the church, with the addition of a center row of fluted cast-iron columns. The heating plant and general utility room are located under the sanctuary and a secondary utility and storage room is located under the narthex. There is a balcony, incorporating the organ, at the rear of the nave, with access by a modern concrete stair located in the west tower.
2. Flooring: The main floor of the church is covered with brown, red, and yellow checkered resilient tile; the floor of the apse is also finished with modern resilient tile, and the steps are covered with red carpeting.
3. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls and piers are generally surfaced with rough cast plaster; the walls in the side aisles have 42" wainscoting (narrow vertical beaded boards). The clerestory walls and the arcade spandrels are decorated with murals using floral and liturgical motifs. The lower portion of the apse is covered with large yellow-green terra cotta tiles, and the upper portion is decorated with a large mural. The nave vaults are painted a blue-green color forming the background for widely spaced white stars. The plaster ribs are painted white with red detailing and the bosses are painted yellow and green. [The aisle vaults have a linear foliated pattern on a dark wine-red background.]
4. Doorways and doors: Utility doorway located on each side of the choir; the one on the west provides access to the sacristy, and the one on the east provides access to the basement. They have round arched openings with compound moldings and paneled doors.
5. Decorative features and trim: The brightly colored ribbed vaults, the decorative liturgical murals and

floral detailing, and the elaborately carved and paneled main altar, side altars, pulpit, and confessionals are the dominant features of the interior of the church. The wooden pulpit is octagonal in plan with richly paneled sides (arched panels), all supported by a large cylindrical drum and slender colonettes (Corinthian capitols).

6. Lighting: A large hexagonal bronze electrical fixture hangs from the center of each of the arches in the arcades. The apse has indirect fluorescent cove lighting.
7. Heating: Modern central heating. The boilers are located in the chamber under the apse.

D. Site:

1. Orientation and general setting: Situated at the center of the St. Paul business district, the church building faces south on West Ninth Street, at the head of Auditorium Street.
2. Outbuildings: A two-and-a-half story parish house is located to the west of the church.
3. Landscaping: The church fronts directly on West Ninth Street, with a paved parking lot to the north (rear), an alley and rectangular two-story commercial structure on the east side, and the parish house and fenced-in lawn on the west side.

Prepared by John D. Milner
Architect
National Park Service
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