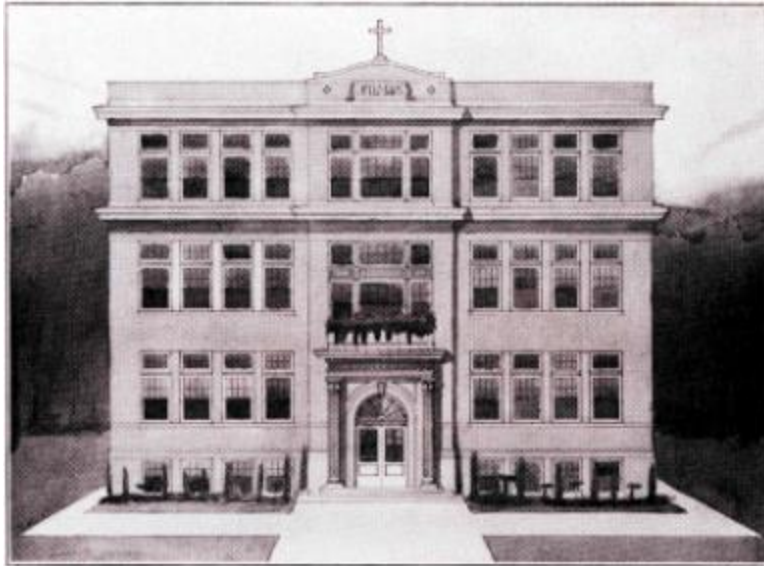


# Historic Designation Report



## St. Leo The Great School Building

2569 St. Leo Place  
Cincinnati, OH 45225

Report Submitted to:

Cincinnati Historic Conservation Office

Report prepared by:

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## **Summary Statement**

This report represents the findings for a local Historic Landmark Designation of the St. Leo the Great School Building, located at 2569 St. Leo Place in the North Fairmount neighborhood of Cincinnati. The purpose of this designation report is to establish the building's significance as an individual landmark.

This report was prepared by Tony Beck of Beck Engineering, LLC at the request of the owner, 2569 St. Leo LLC.

## **Boundary Description**

The property boundary is conveyed in Book 14914, Page 2029 as follows: Situated in the City of Cincinnati, Hamilton County, Ohio and being more particularly described as follows:

- Commencing at a set cross notch at the Southwest intersection of St. Leo Place and Baltimore Avenue, thence along the Westerly line of St. Leo Place, South 39d40'00" West 220.18 feet to a set mag nail and the point of beginning;  
Thence along said St. Leo Place, South 39d40'00" West, 105.93 feet to a set iron pin;  
Thence leaving said St. Leo Place, along a new division line the following three (3) courses:
- 1) North 50d20'00" West, 128.22 feet to a set iron pin;
  - 2) North 28d35'43" East, 107.94 feet to a set iron pin;
  - 3) South 50d20'00" East, 148.95 feet to the point of beginning.

## **Boundary Justification**

The above description is that which is the legally recorded boundary line for the property for which the designation is being requested. The building occupies the entire parcel and not other structures are present. It excludes the adjacent Rectory and Church building of St. Leo the Great Catholic Church, as these are under separate ownership.

## Boundary Map



## Statement of Significance

The St. Leo School Building is a 3-story building that is located in the Cincinnati suburb of North Fairmount. The school sits behind St. Leo the Great Catholic Church off of Baltimore Avenue. The school was built in 1927 by the Archdiocese of Cincinnati and was constructed with a masonry structural frame with load bearing exterior walls and interior walls. The most striking features of this building are main entrance and the overall scale of the building compared to the surrounding area. While the School sits adjacent to the Church, the surrounding properties are mostly 1 and 2-story single family houses and multi-family units. The school was designed

by J.C. (John Clifford) Grunkemeyer. Grunkemeyer also designed several Catholic Churches in the Cincinnati area, including St. Martin of Tours in Cheviot and St. Stephen in the East End.

## **Historic and Architectural Overview**

Catholicism has always had a large congregation in the Cincinnati area. In the late 1800's and early 1900's, the Church's growth in Cincinnati was having a "coming of age" moment. St. Leo the Great Parish began in 1886. In that year, several German Catholic families petitioned the Archbishop (Elder) to build a church in North Fairmount. These families were attending Sunday Mass at St. Bonaventure on Queen City Avenue or Sacred Heart Church on Marshall Avenue. The distance to these Churches was considerable and quite inconvenient at that time. The formation of the new Church occurred at a time when the City of Cincinnati was experiencing an outward growth of population and also the Catholic Church. More and more families were moving away from the city center into the surrounding hills. North Fairmount was also experiencing this outward growth and the numbers of Catholic families were increasing to the point where they were able to sustain their own parish. The church was built to better accommodate the growing number of catholic citizens in the area.

The first parish building was completed in the Spring of 1888. The church was on the upper floor and the school rooms and pastor's quarters on the lower floor. By 1899 the school had grown so crowded that the parish built a separate rectory at 2573 Trade Street and turned the pastor's former quarters into additional classrooms. This building is still the Rectory for the Church today. In 1901, St. Leo's Pastor, Father Joseph Schmidt, began fundraising for a separate, permanent church. In 1911, Archbishop Moeller dedicated the new church. The new church was a grand Romanesque, basilica-style church with a bell tower reaching 104 feet. The church sat 800 parishioners.

In March of 1926, ground was broken for a new school, as attendance at St. Leo's School continued to grow. The school that was built in 1927 was the third school for this parish. On May 15, 1927, Archbishop dedicated the new school. That same year, St. Leo's Pastor petitioned the City to rename Trade Street to St. Leo Place, "in recognition of the parish's influence and hard work."

As the community grew, towards the end of World War II, English Woods was established close by. This parish was the primary parish for these new residents and established a chapel within the development to evangelize these new residents. In the 1960's, the social make-up of the surrounding neighborhood of North Fairmount changed significantly. This led to a change in the ministerial focus of the church and led to more community involvement, an increase in street evangelization in the English Woods community, Fay Apartments complex, and Shelton Gardens complex, and other efforts to help the needy families of the neighborhood. Today, the parish is primarily serving the Hispanic community with Spanish Masses, English as a Second Language classes, and more.

The school was closed in 1979 due to declining enrollment. The school building was then leased to the North Fairmount Community Center for use as a daycare, a senior citizens center, a

GED classroom, Health clinic, food co-op, and other focuses for the community. The building was last used in 2022 when the North Fairmount Community Center left. The building has been vacant since.

## **Architecture**

The school building was designed in the Italian Renaissance Revival style. The Italian Renaissance Revival style is typically seen with a rectangular plan with symmetrical facades, masonry/stone exterior walls, highlighted with cast stone or terra cotta detailing. Exterior facades also include strong divisions of floors with elaborate string courses that define the sills of the windows. Many Italian Renaissance Revival style buildings have low or flat roofs hidden by cornices, parapet walls, or balustrades.

The school was designed by J.C. (John Clifford) Grunkemeyer. Grunkemeyer's architecture firm began in 1915 and was renamed Grunkemeyer & Sullivan with the addition of C. W. (Charles) Sullivan in 1920. Grunkemeyer & Sullivan also designed several Catholic Churches in the Cincinnati area, including St. Martin of Tours in Cheviot and St. Stephen in the East End, the Busse & Borgman Funeral Home (now Manifest Drawing Center) on Central Parkway, and the Maketewah Country Club in Reading.

The school building is architecturally significant as a commercial example of the Italian Renaissance Revival that is prevalent throughout Cincinnati. The building has a brick façade, cast stone entablature over Roman Doric columns at the front entrance, and a cast stone tablet at the top of the South façade. The cast stone beneath the rows of windows defines each floor with terra cotta detailing highlighting the third floor. The terra cotta and cast stone delineations continue on the sides of the building. On the rear façade, the brick is continued. Where the terra cotta detailing was stopped, a double soldier course of brick continues along the same plane.

On the rear of the building, an elevator shaft was added, along with exterior stairs from the first floor. The shaft is finished with a stucco and concrete veneer and stands out among the large amount of brick.

Inside, the building sits on a rectangular floor plate with symmetrical layout of classrooms on either side of a wide, central corridor of glazed brick. At the ends of the corridor are two curved stairways with glazed brick. A wall was put up at the north end of the corridors to separate the hallway from the elevator. The flooring and ceilings in the hallway of the first, second, and third floors have been replaced with modern vinyl flooring, and acoustic ceilings. The flooring within the stairways has been replaced with a modern, vinyl composite tile.

## **Findings**

According to Chapter 1435 of the Cincinnati Zoning Code (Historic Preservation), certain findings must be made before a historic structure can be designated by City Council. The structure must be found to have historic significance. Historic significance means that the

attributes of a district, site or structure possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and:

1. That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
2. That are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
3. That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
4. That has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in history or prehistory.

The St. Leo the Great School Building has historic significance according to Chapter 1435 as defined under Criterion 1. The school is an example of the outward spread of German Catholics in Cincinnati in the late 1800's-early 1900's. The school not only taught hundreds of children, but it also aided the surrounding neighborhood when its usefulness as a school started to go away in the late 1970's.

The School also meets Criterion 3 as a significant example of the Italian Renaissance Revival, located in a mainly residential area, and designed by a Cincinnati architect who had his hand in many Catholic schools and Churches in the region.

The designation of the St. Leo the Great School Building meets the requirements of Chapter 1435 (Historic Preservation) of the Cincinnati Zoning Code. The documents in this designation report provides conclusive evidence that all required findings may be made for the proposed designation.

## References

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Pictures

