

HISTORIC DESIGNATION REPORT

**St. Mark's Church
3500 Montgomery Road
Cincinnati, Ohio 45209**

**Submitted to:
Cincinnati Historic Conservation Office**

**By:
Cincinnati Preservation Association
430 Reading Road #300
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202**

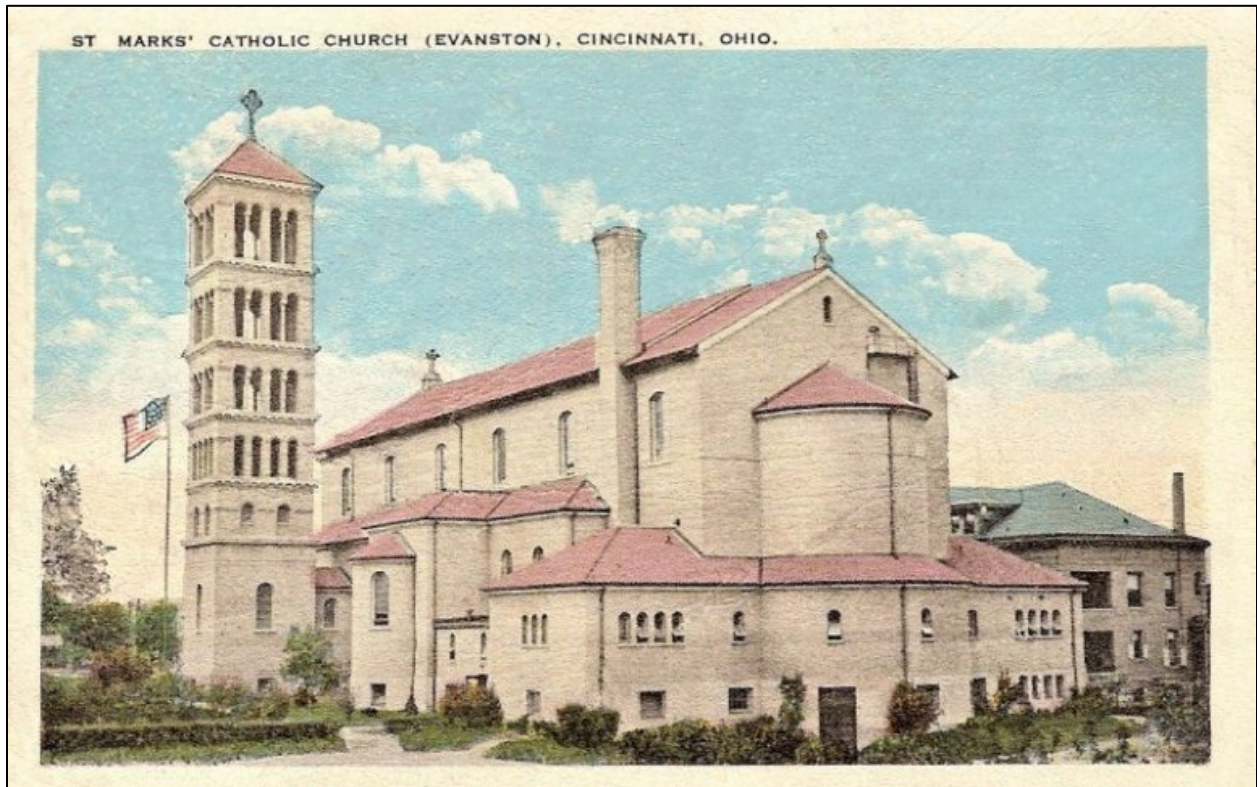


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Introduction

This report represents the finding and recommendation for local historic landmark designation of the former St. Mark's Church in Evanston. The Cincinnati Preservation Association prepared this report.

Background

The Evanston Community Council has an interest in the preservation of the St. Mark's church building. Closed since 2010, it is vacant and deteriorating. It is the wish of the Community Council to acquire the building and repurpose it as a multi-purpose arts, community and event center.

Research

Research was conducted using the resources of the Cincinnati Preservation Association. Resources include various newspaper articles, the Federal Writers Project's *Cincinnati: A Guide to the Queen City and Its Neighbors* (1943), the Cincinnati Historic Inventory, and Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of Cincinnati.

Statement of Significance

St. Mark's is a locally rare and significant example of the Italian Renaissance Revival style applied to a church building. Its design reflects the influence of Classicism as applied to a house of worship in the early 20th century. The church is largely unaltered on the exterior, looking much as it did as when constructed in 1916. Although some sacred artifacts, as well as the pews, were removed from the interior when the church closed, the building retains its original stained glass windows and decorative finishes. St. Mark's is the only known Cincinnati work by Chicago ecclesiastical architect Henry Schlacks. Associate architects Joseph Steinkamp and Brother, who designed numerous significant properties in Cincinnati, also contributed to its design. St. Mark's building received a rating of Excellent by a citywide inventory of historic properties undertaken in 1977. The church is currently being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places by the Evanston Community Council.

Description of Property

Structure. St. Mark's church building occupies a 2.3 acre site on Montgomery Road just south of Interstate 71. Parcel ID 058-0001-0002-00. It is a large, basilica-plan church with transept and semicircular apse. The walls are covered with light brown brick and

terra cotta. The main façade features three doorways, brick pilasters with stone capitals, and a broken pediment topped by a cross. It is sheltered by an arcaded porch with circular medallions, carried by four columns with pronounced entasis. A large rose window bears images of angels playing musical instruments. The front-gabled roof is covered with imported Roman orange tile. To the right of the church stands a freestanding six-story, 130-foot campanile.

Inside, the nave features a barrel-vaulted, coffered ceiling with arcaded side aisles. The space is illuminated by two tiers of stained glass windows crafted by Zettler of Munich, Germany, most of which are still in place. The larger windows depict episodes in the life of Christ, while the smaller ones feature abstract, geometrical designs. The main and side altars and the pews been removed from the sanctuary.

The chancel walls, as well as bands crossing the ceiling of the nave, are covered with stylized floral stenciling. Sheltering the chancel is a baldachin of Breccia marble with star-sprinkled mosaic dome and pierced marble carvings, supported by pairs of richly carved marble composite columns. Encircling the chancel is a mural depicting angels and apostles.

At either side of the sanctuary, where the side altars formerly were located, are surviving mosaics dedicated to the Christ Child, the Virgin Mary and St. Joseph. A mural, painted by Leo Mirabile, represents the Lamb of God. Black and white marble tiles cover the chancel floor.

The church building's lower level formerly housed parish recreational and social activities and, later, social service programs. The utilitarian spaces feature modern finishes including concrete floors, dropped ceilings and fluorescent lights as well as 1950s-era knotty pine paneling.

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Flanking the main altar are side altars featuring mosaics dedicated to the Christ Child, the Virgin Mary and St. Joseph. A mural, painted by Leo Mirabile, represents the Lamb of God. Black and white marble tiles cover the chancel floor.

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Site. St. Mark's parish buildings are located on the east side of Montgomery Road between Duck Creek Road and Interstate 71. The church faces Montgomery Road at an angle with a grassy lawn to the north and a small parking area to the south. The former parish school is located at the south side of the lot, facing Duck Creek Road. At the rear of the property is a paved parking lot.

Setting. St. Mark's is located in Evanston, a former suburb later absorbed by Cincinnati. To the north, past I-71, is the Evanston business district. To the east is a row of six American Foursquare residences on Stacey Avenue. To the south, across Duck Creek Road, are three adjoining cemeteries: Walnut Hills, United Jewish and Catholic Calvary. To the west, across Montgomery Road, is a row of four brick and frame residences and an apartment building.

Boundary

This property consists of Parcel 058-0001-0002-00 of the Hamilton County Auditor's records. The parcel is bounded on the north by Interstate 71, on the east by Stacey Avenue, on the south by Duck Creek Road, and on the west by Montgomery Road (US 22-Ohio Route 3).



Justification of Boundary

The above-described boundary constitutes the entire parcel.

Findings

Compatibility With Plan Cincinnati

Sustain Goal 2b: "Preserve Our Built History. Preserve our built history with new development incentives and regulatory measures. Cincinnati's rich history is best exemplified through our historic buildings and by the built-environment that helps define a neighborhood's character...." Landmark designation allows for preservation of a highly significant structure in danger of destruction. It will further allow for state historic rehabilitation tax incentives to be used to renovate the church building, thereby preserving this true Cincinnati landmark for future generations to appreciate and enjoy.

Planning Considerations

Summary of 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 that the attributes of a district, site, or structure that 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 – pre-history.’

St. Mark’s Church has historical significance according to Chapter 1435 of the Cincinnati municipal code. The church building meets Criterion 3 for architectural significance as a significant and well-preserved example of the Italian Renaissance Revival style. This style developed at the end of the Victorian period of architecture. Like the earlier Italianate style, the Italianate Renaissance Revival was modeled on the buildings of the 16th century Italian Renaissance. However, Italian Renaissance Revival buildings are much closer stylistically to the original Renaissance forms than their Italianate predecessors. Imposing scale and formal design, incorporating classical details such as columns and round arches and balustrades, are the most dominant features of this style.

The Italian Renaissance Revival style was first popularized on the East Coast by architects such as McKim, Mead & White as early as the 1880s. This elegant style is seen mostly in grandly scaled, architect-designed structures, such as mansions or public buildings.

References

Cincinnati: A Guide to the Queen City and Its Neighbors, American Guide Series (Cincinnati, Ohio: The Wiesen-Hart Press), 1943.

“Evanston Community Seeks to Transform Historic St. Mark Church Into a Cultural Center,” *CityBeat*, November 12, 2019.

<https://www.wcpo.com/news/local-news/hamilton-county/cincinnati/evanston-community-council-wants-to-turn-the-vacant-st-marks-catholic-church-into-a-community-center>

<https://local12.com/news/local/evanston-hopes-to-save-landmark-church-turn-it-into-community-arts-center>

<https://www.wlwt.com/article/wlwt-community-save-the-mark-initiative-fights-for-historic-church-in-evanston/32459042>

St. Mark Church Historical Overview

“Erected at a cost of \$150,000, [St. Mark] seats 850, exclusive of the choir gallery and two votive chapels accommodating 150. The exterior is of brick with terra cotta facing, colored to match Roman Travertine stone, with Verona façade and free-standing campanile tower. The roofing is of imported Roman tile. Imposing marble altars and bas-relief statues are in the interior” (*Cincinnati: A Guide to the Queen City and Its Neighbors, American Guide Series* [Cincinnati, Ohio: The Wiesen-Hart Press, 1943], p. 317).

During the early 20th century, Cincinnati’s growing population expanded along arterial streets to the north, east and west, such as Montgomery Road, Harrison Avenue and Madison Road. In these expanding suburban neighborhoods, new business districts, churches and schools were established to serve the growing populations annexed by Cincinnati.

One of the neighborhoods that benefited from this expansion was the east side community of Evanston, which was annexed by Cincinnati in 1911. The *Cincinnati Guide* describes Evanston as “a pleasant suburb, with a small factory district along the tracks and middle-class suburban homes to the east” (ibid., p. 316).

A major landmark of the new community was St. Mark Catholic Church, at the intersection of Montgomery and Duck Creek roads. The congregation was founded in 1905 and staffed by the Missionaries of the Precious Blood order. The Archdiocese of Cincinnati purchased land for a church in 1906 and the original church building, a modest frame structure that also housed a school, was built soon afterward (date not confirmed). The cornerstone for the present St. Mark’s Church was laid in 1914 and the completed church building was dedicated in 1916.

Decline and Renewal. At its apex in the mid-20th century, 1,200 families worshiped at St. Mark. Over time, as the neighborhood’s demographics changed, St. Mark became a predominantly African American parish: one of several in the city. As years passed, the neighborhood was adversely impacted by urban sprawl. Many longtime members moved to new suburbs, and Evanston’s social and economic vitality slowly declined. Another blow to the neighborhood was the construction in 1972 of Interstate 71 nearby. Hundreds of homes were demolished for the highway, thereby draining vitality from the neighborhood and starving the church of its congregation.

In 2010, the Archdiocese of Cincinnati merged St. Mark's with three other predominantly African-American parishes: St. Agnes in Bond Hill, St. Martin de Porres in Lincoln Heights, and St. Andrew in Avondale. Housed in the St. Agnes building, the new parish church was renamed the Church of the Resurrection.

In the late 20th century, the growing popularity of the Latin Mass among traditionalist Catholics led the Archdiocese to consider the now-vacated St. Mark as a new location for traditional Latin liturgy. However, the plan failed to materialize.

Now vacant for ten years, St. Mark's is in urgent need of repairs. The building suffers from serious water infiltration, plaster damage and mold infestation and is a target for vandals.

The Evanston Community Council sees the revitalization of St. Mark's as a primary goal for their community. The Council is leading the effort to save and repurpose the historic church as a community, arts and event center. In addition to being nominated as a City landmark, St. Mark's also is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places.

Architectural Context. The popularity of classically inspired church buildings increased dramatically in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as America became enamored of grand Classical architecture based on Renaissance precedents. The Classical architecture of ancient Greece and Rome, along with its reinterpretations in Italy, France, England, and Germany during the 15th through 19th centuries, became the basis for several inter-related revivalist architectural styles, including the Renaissance Revival, that were important in the United States in general during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Buildings such as the brownstone row house complex for Henry Villard (1882-1885) on New York's Madison Avenue, the Boston Public Library (1888-1895), and Judson Memorial Church on New York's Washington Square (1888-1893), all by prominent New York architects McKim, Mead, & White, were early expressions of this change in architectural taste. In addition, the elaborate Classical style of the World's Columbian Exposition was a watershed event in American architecture and generated great and widespread enthusiasm for Classical architectural styles throughout the United States.

The Renaissance Revival style was particularly important in the design of early 20th - century church buildings. Both church hierarchies and architects increasingly saw Classical architecture as an appropriate style for churches and related religious buildings. Christianity's early history, rooted in the Classical culture of ancient Rome, and the great Christian churches of the 5th and 6th centuries that were the earliest

grand architectural expressions of this religious faith, made Classicism seem both rationally and emotionally appropriate for modern church buildings. Classicism's rebirth as the architectural style of choice for 15th-century Italian Renaissance church buildings and its subsequent importance for church architecture during the next four centuries solidified these important associations with Christianity. The "American Renaissance" of the late 19th and early 20th centuries saw the construction of impressive classically inspired buildings for American government agencies, libraries, museums, and churches through the 1920s.

Architect Henry J. Schlacks. Henry John Schlacks (1867-1938) was one of Chicago's most prominent church architects in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a period of tremendous growth for the city's neighborhoods and the construction of churches. Born to German parents in Chicago, Schlacks attended St. Peter School before working as a draftsman for the noted architectural firm of Adler & Sullivan. He then received two years of architectural education at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, America's premier architectural school in the late 19th century, followed by extensive travel in Europe. While touring the continent, he observed historic buildings first-hand, including churches, that would inspire his later practice. Upon his return to Chicago, Schlacks entered into a partnership with fellow architect Henry Ottenheimer, another former Adler & Sullivan draftsman, in 1891. Four years later, in 1895, Schlacks began solo practice. Although Schlacks designed a variety of building types during his career, he soon became known as a specialist in ecclesiastical architecture. In *To Build the Catholic City*, author Edward R. Kantowicz called Schlacks "the master of Catholic church architecture in Chicago."

Joseph G. Steinkamp and Brother, architects. Joseph G. Steinkamp began his career working in the architectural office of his father, Joseph B. Steinkamp. He later worked on his own account until he was joined by his younger brother, Bernard F. Steinkamp, as Joseph G. Steinkamp & Brother, around 1900. The two worked together and on their own for about half a century.

The Steinkamp brothers went on to design and construct numerous apartment buildings for the Emery family in the downtown core and in the inner suburbs, usually located on streetcar lines. These include The Waldo apartment building at Eighth and Elm streets (a contributing building in the Ninth Street Historic District), the Roanoke Apartments in the Clifton gaslight district, and Haddon Hall in Avondale (National Register, 1982). The brothers' early 20th-century works include the Young Men's Mercantile Library Building (1902) on Walnut Street. Other notable works of the firm included the Tudor Revival buildings of the Xavier University campus in Evanston; the Robertson Building at Seventh and Race streets, a reinforced concrete office building with unusual Celtic

interlace cladding of "Lawson's Composite Cut Stone"; and the Art Deco-style American Building at Central Parkway and Walnut Street.

Italian Renaissance Revival context.

“The Italian Renaissance Revival style was first popularized on the East Coast by architects such as McKim, Mead & White as early as the 1880s. The most predominant feature of this style is its imposing scale and formal design incorporating classical details such as columns and round arches and balustrades. This style can take several distinction forms, but all variations are almost always of masonry (usually stone) construction. One version of the style features a large rectangular building, usually three or more stories in height, topped by a flat roof with a crowning balustrade. Another common feature for this flat roof version...is a rusticated stone first floor with upper floors having a smooth finish. Porch arcades and porticos are often seen in this version as well. The other most common form of this style features a hipped roof, often of clay tile, with broadly overhanging, bracketed eaves.

“This elegant style is seen mostly in up-scale, architect-designed buildings, such as mansions or public buildings” (Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, “Pennsylvania Architectural Field Guide, Italian Renaissance Revival Style, 1890-1930” (available online at <http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/>).

Identifiable features of Italian Renaissance buildings include

1. Low-pitched hipped or flat roof
2. Symmetrical façade
3. Masonry construction
4. Impressive size and scale
5. Round arch entrance and windows
6. Classical details: columns, pilasters
7. Roof line parapet or balustrade
8. Arcaded and rusticated ground level

Representative Italian Renaissance Revival buildings in Cincinnati

Residential:

Herschede Mansion, 3886 Reading Road (Samuel S. Godley, architect, c. 1908): Outstanding example of Italian Renaissance executed in limestone with decorative window treatment, hipped tile roof.

May Mansion, 3723 Washington Avenue (McMiller & Taft, architects, built 1911). Imposing stone mansion with two levels of stone steps leading to an open veranda spanning the front of the house. The three doorways are framed by Tuscan columns with plain capitals. Above is a heavy architrave with dentils and a projecting belt course. Listed in National Register, 1996.

Public:

Cincinnati Gymnasium & Athletic Club (John Scudder Adkins, architect, 1902): Located in downtown Cincinnati, this imposing brick building is trimmed with stone and metal elements including rusticated stone courses, molded balustrade and trimmed windows. National Register, 1983.

Mt. Echo Park Pavilion (Rendigs, Panzer & Martin, architects, 1928). "The handsome shelterhouse, 825 feet above sea level, has a pavilion with columns that support a series of arches. These arches provide an artistic frame of a vast panoramic view that can be had from the pavilion" (*The Cincinnati Guide*, op.cit., p. 464).

Ault Park Pavilion (Fechheimer & Ihorst, architects, 1930). The pavilion is faced with tile and supported by a quintuple arch. It is built into the side of a hill with a double flight of steps and a cascading backlit water fountain.

Madisonville Public Library (c. 1920). One-story, stucco-clad building, low and rectangular in form, under a hipped Spanish tile roof. A triple arch and delicate iron balustrade span the recessed porch.