STATE OF CONNECTICUT

CONNETICUT HISTORICAL COMMISSION
5 South Prospect Street, Hartford, Connecticut 06106
(203) 566-3005

STORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY FORM
For Buildings and Structures

IDENTIFICATION

1. BUILDING NAME: Common: St. Johns R.C. Church Historic: same

2. TOWN/CITY: Middletown VILLAGE: ____________ COUNTY: Middlesex

3. STREET & NUMBER (and/or location): 9 St. John's Square

4. OWNER(S): Diocese of Norwich __PUBLIC__ PRIVATE

5. USE: Present: Church Historic: same

6. ACCESSIBILITY TO PUBLIC: Exterior visible from public road: x yes no
Interior accessible: x yes, explain religious services: no

DESCRIPTION

7. STYLE OF BUILDING: Gothic Revival DATE OF CONSTRUCTION: Church: 1852 Spire: 1864

8. MATERIAL(S) (indicate use or location when appropriate):
   --clapboard asbestos siding brick
   --wood shingle asphalt siding fieldstone
   --board & batten stucco cobblestone
   --aluminum siding concrete: type: brownstone cut stone: type: random ashlar
   --other:

9. STRUCTURAL SYSTEM:
   --wood frame; -- post and beam balloon
   --load bearing masonry structural iron or steel
   --other:

0. ROOF: type:
   --gable flat sawtooth
   --gambrel shed other: Spire
   --shed
   --mansard
   --monitor
   --round
   --x slate
   --other:

1. NUMBER OF STORIES: 3 APPROXIMATE DIMENSIONS: 112'x40'(sacristy 30'x40')

2. CONDITION: Structural: excellent x good fair deteriorated
   Exterior: excellent x good fair deteriorated

3. INTEGRITY: Location: x on original site moved, when:
   Alterations: no x yes, explain: Three renovations (See #18)

4. RELATED OUTBUILDINGS OR LANDSCAPE FEATURES:
   --barn shed garage x other landscape features or buildings: Low brownstone
   --carriage house shop garden parapet around entrance grounds; Cemetery
   --x open land woodland residential x scattered buildings visible from site
   --commercial industrial rural x high building density

5. SURROUNDING ENVIRONMENT:

6. INTERRELATIONSHIP OF BUILDING AND SURROUNDINGS: St. John's Church dominates St. John's Square, which, in turn, is the northern terminus of Main Street. The church with its tall spire is flanked by auxiliary buildings that are related to the church in architectural details such as slate roofs, brownstone lintels, and low parapets around the small front lawns. Taken as a whole, these four buildings devoted religious use form an impressive visual boundary for Middletown's chief thoroughfare.
17. OTHER NOTABLE FEATURES OF BUILDING OR SITE (interior and/or exterior):

Tower and spire
Compound Gothic arch doorways
Ornate stained-glass windows in gable end and tower base (from Innsbruck, Austria)
Gabled brick entrance arch to cemetery; connects church to school
Heavy paneled wood entrance doors

SIGNIFICANCE

Architect: 
Builder: 

18. HISTORICAL OR ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE: Middletown had few Roman Catholics until the middle 1830's. Since many of the communicants were Portland quarry workers, a small building there was set up as a Catholic Church. In 1841 two acres of land on the current site were purchased. Barzillai Sage, prominent Middletown builder, built a brick church here, completing it in April, 1843. Almost immediately it was apparent that a larger sanctuary was needed. Portland quarry owners donated the brownstone, and sales of cemetery lots to parishioners added to the building fund. This larger edifice, the current church, was dedicated for worship services in the fall of 1852.

The parish grew fast with the influx of Irish immigrants. The chronology of the building process goes as follows:

1843: first brick church (now sacristy) built
1852: current brownstone church blessed
1864: tower and spire completed; rectory built
1873: convent finished
1888: parochial school dedicated

The complex was essentially completed by 1888. (see continuation sheet)

PHOTOGRAPH

Photographer: Roger Sherman
Date: 10/78 View: South
Negative on file: Roll 43, #2

COMPILED BY:

Name: Roger Sherman Date: 4/78
Organization: Greater Middletown Preservation Trust
Address: 27 Washington St., Middletown, Ct. 06457


20. SUBSEQUENT FIELD EVALUATIONS:

21. THREATS TO BUILDING OR SITE:

X highways* 
none known renewal
vandalism private
developers deterioration
other: zoning

* Vibrations from the heavy rail and road traffic, as well as pollution from these sources, have been an ongoing problem for St. John's.
The present sanctuary is constructed of roughly squared brownstone laid in a random-coursed ashlar pattern. The building is done in the ecclesiastic Gothic Revival style. The 1852 completion date makes it the earliest building of this style in Middletown.

Exterior features include compound Gothic arches over doors and windows, a cut brownstone watertable, and buttresses strengthening the outer walls. A nearly freestanding tower at the southwest corner supports a tall, slate-roofed spire.

Inside, the building plan is simple but commodious — the main auditorium seats one thousand worshipers. There is an aisled nave delineated by molded cast stone pillars supporting lofty groined arches. The interior walls were frescoed in 1864 by William Borgett of Middletown. The paintings were renewed in 1962 during a renovation under the direction of Monsignor Edward J. McKenna, the current pastor. On the west wall the Twelve Stations of the Cross are set off in arched niches containing figurines in low relief. With walls of light tan and ceilings of sky blue, the effect is one of light and airiness embellished by artistic renderings of religious symbols.

The church is the largest and most important of the four buildings in the St. John's complex. With its towering spire and impressive mass, it functions as the focal point of the religious, educational and residential buildings grouped along St. John's Square. Further, the structure serves as a dramatic architectural marker for the north end of Main Street.