

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name St. Joseph Catholic Church

other names/site number WA0877

2. Location

street & number 110 E. Henri de Tonti Blvd.

not for publication

city or town Tontitown

vicinity

state Arkansas code AR county Washington code 143 zip code 72770

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination
request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic
Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set for in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets
does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant

nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Cathie Mackey

12/16/05

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

Arkansas Historic Preservation Program

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See Continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

entered in the National Register.

See continuation sheet

determined eligible for the
National Register.

See continuation sheet

determined not eligible for the
National Register.

removed from the National
Register.

other, (explain:)

St. Joseph Catholic Church
Name of Property

Washington County, Arkansas
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
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1	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
1	_____	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/religious facility

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS/Gothic Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE
walls WOOD

roof ASBESTOS
other _____

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

St. Joseph Catholic Church
Name of Property

Washington County, Arkansas
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B.** removed from its original location.
- C.** birthplace or grave of a historical figure of outstanding importance.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Levels of Significance (local, state, national)

Local

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT

ETHNIC HERITAGE/EUROPEAN

Period of Significance

1939-1956

Significant Dates

1939

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked)

Cultural Affiliation (Complete if Criterion D is marked)

Architect/Builder

Members of the Community (See Narrative Description)

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- Previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: _____

St. Joseph Catholic Church
Name of Property

Washington County, Arkansas
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 5.12 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>15</u>	<u>388942</u>	<u>4004274</u>	3	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	4	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Elizabeth A. James
organization Arkansas Historic Preservation Program date December 8, 2005
street & number 323 Center Street, 1500 Tower Building telephone 501-324-9789
city or town Little Rock state AR zip code 72205

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location
- A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Catholic Church c/o Catholic Diocese of Little Rock
street & number Box 7239 telephone 501-664-0340
city or town Forest Park Station Little Rock state AR zip code 72217

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listing. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P. O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

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SUMMARY

The St. Joseph Catholic Church, located at 110 E. Henri de Tonti Boulevard, Tontitown, Washington County, Arkansas, was built from 1939-1944. The Gothic Revival structure features a steeply pitched gable roof, a bell tower, buttresses, and pointed arch windows. The church was constructed of large concrete blocks hand molded by workers on site. It has an asbestos tile roof. The building was a community driven effort with evidence of that throughout the building. Originally the structure housed stained glass windows that memorialized the names of families who donated money for the construction of the church. The windows have since been removed and returned to the families. However, the church still represents the sacrifices and efforts of the early settlers in Tontitown to create a place of worship representative of their strong beliefs.

ELABORATION

The St. Joseph Catholic Church, which is located on a main thoroughfare in Northwest Arkansas, has weathered well over the years considering its close proximity to U.S. Highway 412. This highway is known as Henri de Tonti Boulevard as it passes through Tontitown, between Tulsa, Oklahoma, eastward to Springdale, Arkansas. This church is the center of the Italian Catholics who have made this area their home for over 100 years. The church members commenced building in 1939 after a destructive tornado demolished its predecessor. James DeWitt was the architect for the church and Albano Maestri was the only paid worker and served as Supervisor/Foreman.

South/Front Façade

The front façade of the St. Joseph Catholic Church is defined by its gable end shape. This end of the building is a flat pentagonal surface. The walls at each corner are anchored by thick buttresses which clearly define the edges of the façade. The gable acts as a parapet wall with the actual roofline slightly lower than the front wall height, but following the same profile and fully visible from the sides. The main entrance to the building is in the center of this south façade. The entrance is defined by a smooth stuccoed surround that projects out from the building and offers shelter above the door. It has two large square columns connect by a shallow pointed arch centered above the doorway. The design of the columns is reminiscent of the buttresses along the east and west facades. The front entrance is flanked by a window on each side. The window openings each contain two fixed panes of glass divided vertically in the center. The openings are defined by a stuccoed lintel and sill. Fenestration on the second floor includes three windows. A large pointed arch window is centered above the front entrance. It is flanked by a smaller pointed arch window on each side. The three windows have corresponding pointed arches patterned in the stonework above them. They are accented with smooth stone, rather than the rough stone used on most of the façade.

West/Side Façade

The west façade of St. Joseph Catholic Church is characterized by a string of windows running most of the length of the façade. A small gabled section projects toward the west at the northwest corner of the building. There are seven windows providing the fenestration between the gabled section and the southwest corner of the building. These windows are all pointed arch openings with a corresponding pointed arch articulated in the

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stonework above the opening. There is a rectilinear buttress centered between each window. The buttresses have a smooth stucco covering to distinguish them from the rough surface of the wall. There are three pointed arch vent openings in the roof. The projecting gabled section has a single window opening in the center of its west facing wall. The window is divided into two vertically oriented fixed pane glass windows. The south facing wall of the projection has a single door in the center of the wall. There is a set of four poured concrete steps leading to the door. The north side of the projection lies flush with the rear wall of the building described below.

North/Rear Façade

The rear of the St. Joseph Catholic Church is dominated by the gable profile of the roofline. There are no windows along this wall. There is a north reaching rectangular projection in the center of the wall. This projection has a semi-pyramidal roof. Only half of roof exists because it leans into the rear wall of the building. This projection has pointed arch windows on its east and west facing walls. These windows match the pointed arch windows used throughout the building. There is a stuccoed chimney placed at the southwest corner of the rectangular projection.

East/Side Façade

The east side of the building is similar in appearance to the west side. It has a line of six pointed arch windows interspersed with buttresses identical to the west side of the building. There pointed arch vents in the roofline matching those on the west side. However, in place of the projection described on the west side of the building, the east side offers a three tiered steeple at its north end. The steeple is square at the base. Its first tier reaches to the height of the wall of the building where it meets the roof. It has three visible sides. The north and east facing walls each have window openings with two vertically oriented rectangular panes of glass. The south facing side has a single door reached by a set of poured concrete steps. The second tier is narrower than the first and has four visible sides. It has a rectangular louvered vent on all four sides. The final tier has a smooth stucco surface. It is narrower than the second tier. It has four square columns supporting a flat roof. It is open on all four sides between the columns. A cross sits atop the steeple.

INTEGRITY

Through the years the St. Joseph Catholic Church has retained a great deal of architectural integrity. The building plan and materials are nearly exactly as built. The building has unfortunately lost its beautiful stained glass windows. The windows were returned to the families who were responsible for donating the money for the construction of the church. The replacement windows are the same size and in the same location as those that were lost, having a minimal impact the overall appearance of the building.

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SUMMARY

The St. Joseph Catholic Church at Tontitown, Washington County, Arkansas, was founded in 1898 and has always been the center of the lives of the Italian colony in Northwest Arkansas. The church is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places with **local** significance under **Criterion A** for its associations with the settlement/exploration of Italian immigrants and religious life in Tontitown. The church must be reviewed under **Criterion Consideration A: owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes**, because it is presently owned by the Catholic Diocese of Little Rock.

ELABORATION

The history of Tontitown commands respect for a group of hardworking individuals who made an honest living and instill a sense of pride in their community. Tontitown is located "where Arkansas merges into what is now Oklahoma, Tontitown centers at a prairie crossroads six miles west of the busy little city of Springdale in Washington County."

The original settlers of Tontitown first arrived in New York City upon reaching the United States from their native land of Italy. They had little success in New York as many of them had to give up their skilled trades to become street laborers. Austin Corbin, philanthropist and millionaire, was the first to interfere with the settlement of these Italians. Seeking a solution for New York's congestion, he bought a big plantation, Sunnyside, beside the Mississippi River in Arkansas. Corbin persuaded a large number of families to move to Sunnyside to grow cotton. The swamps of the area proved to be a breeding ground of disease for many of the Italians. The threat of disease instilled fear in the settlers.

Pietro Bandini founded the St. Joseph Society in New York to care for arriving immigrants. He took special interest in Sunnyside. Bandini found that of one hundred families, 125 members had died of malaria in a year. Some families had been wiped out. In others, the young children were left orphaned. Bandini had worked quickly to find a new home for them. He looked for a place that would be sanitary, pleasant, and they would like. He also tried to find a place where they could be independent and where they could farm as they had in Italy. Bandini made a deal with the owner of a farm on the prairie west of Springdale. The farm was about to be abandoned. Bandini agreed to pay off the debt owed. The Italians of Sunnyside arrived a short time later. In all there were forty families. They were nearly penniless and in immediate need of work. The American owner, seeing that he had them upon the hip, raised the price of his land from \$8 to \$15 an acre.

Meanwhile, Bandini had established himself as the community leader by right of his priestly authority and also by right of his wisdom, sincerity, and fitness for the place. He adopted the name of Tontitown after the first Italian to explore Arkansas, Henry de Tonti. Bandini also took possession of an old crossroads schoolhouse where he conducted church and day school. He was Tontitown's first official Mayor when the town was incorporated in 1909.

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There were ten total acres comprising the original settlement. They began to set out vines and plant vineyards for future extensions. They secured and planted strawberries, fruit trees, and vegetables. The early days of this settlement were consumed with breaking in new land or working for the richer American neighbors. The nearby Americans sought means to harass their Italian neighbors in attempts to drive them away. They went so far as to burn the schoolhouse that the Italians used for school and church services. The school was later rebuilt and across the street they built a church. They began to build houses surrounding the church and school as prosperity gradually arrived to Tontitown. Strawberries and vegetables paid during the first years of cultivation. As the settlement grew older the apple and peach trees came into bearing and added to the wealth of the community. Later the grape vines, which had been planted each year an acre at a time, began to bear bountifully. The grapes could be turned into wine with Italian skill; so that before the colony was six years old there were single acres producing as much as \$300 a year in cash return. When everything seemed to be going well for the citizens of Tontitown, a devastating tornado hit the area on June 18, 1934.

The tornado destroyed the church that the community had built after their school burned. In 1939 the community began rebuilding the church. It was dedicated October 26, 1944. Construction of this church was a community effort. Albano Maestri was the only paid worker. Each family of the community donated one day of work each week to the building the church. Joe Pianalto, Sr. hauled gravel and chat from the Illinois River for the blocks. Water was hauled in barrels from Elm Springs Creek by team wagons. Men used forms to mold the twenty-two by eight inch blocks by mixing fine sand and chat with cement and water to make a smooth block. The A-frame rafters were made in twin sets by Joe Lazarri. They had an upper A-frame for the roof and a lower one for the ceiling. Pietro Pianalto squared the oak logs for the rafters with a broad ax. The workers then used a blow torch to give the rafters a rustic look. Mr. Lazarri created an arch over the altar out of finely matched and fitted cedar with the color changing from dark to light and back to dark. Hugo Pozza and Virgil Rose made altar rails, and John Granata donated the wood floor. The original church windows were made of stained glass and framed with nine cement blocks. Each window was donated by the family of the parish and their names are inscribed in the lower pane. Families also purchased pews where they would eventually sit for Mass. These windows were later removed and given back to the families. The bell in the tower on the east side was relocated to the new church that has been in use for over ten years now. Leo Pianalto declared that the House of God was to be white, thus the church was painted white (as it remains today). A time capsule was inserted into the east side of the church by Gene Ardemagni.

Change is inevitable as time moves on in the town that is known for its industry and accessibility to U.S. Highway 412 between Springdale and Oklahoma. In 1994 a new church was built to accommodate the growing community. This new church is in use today and is located east of the original St. Joseph Catholic Church. The bell from the belfry was relocated to the new church as well. The old church is not in use today and continues to be a work in progress for the Tontitown Museum Board to preserve their rich history.

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The St. Joseph Catholic Church at Tontitown, Washington County, Arkansas, was founded in 1898 and has always been the center of the lives of the Italian colony in Northwest Arkansas. The church is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places with **local** significance under **Criterion A** for its associations with the settlement/exploration of Italian immigrants and religious life in Tontitown. The church must be reviewed under **Criterion Consideration A: owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes**, because it is presently owned by the Catholic Diocese of Little Rock.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Tontitown Historical Museum documentation of the ceremony removing a time capsule, March 10, 1995
- St. Joseph's Through the Ages*, by Charlotte Piazza, James & Rosie Finn, Harry & Dorothy Sbanotto, Gile & Ester Pianalto, Gildo & Eileen Mantegani, John Pozza, Gabriel Pianalto and Freddie Taldo.
- Records of the Washington County Assessor.
- Records of the Washington County Circuit Clerk.
- Records of the U.S. Geological Survey, Microsoft Corporation 2004.
- Everybody's Magazine*, John L. Mathews, January 1909.
- A Safe Way to Get on the Soil*, Anita Moore, reprinted from *World's Work* 24, June 1912 pages 215-219
- The Springdale News*, Thursday, October 26, 1944.
- The Story of Tontitown, Arkansas*, Washington County Historical Society August 1963
- Washington County, Arkansas Plat Book, 1908.

St..Joseph Catholic Church

Name of Property

Washington County, Arkansas

County and State

United States Department of the Interior

National Park Service

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Verbal Boundary Description

Blocks 1,2,3,4,5, Original Town of Tontitown.

Boundary Justification

This boundary includes land historically associated with the St. Joseph Catholic Church in Tontitown.

ST JOSEPH CATHOLIC CHURCH
TONTITOWN
WINSINGTON CN
AR
M REFERENCE:
15/388942/4004274

T. 18 N.
T. 17 N.

670 000
FEET













