

St. Joseph's Cathedral  
(now parish church)  
Bardstown, Kentucky  
Nelson Co.

HABS No. 20-9  
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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
District No. 20  
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey  
G. M. Grimes, District Officer  
304 Martin Brown Building  
Louisville, Kentucky

Name of structure: St. Joseph's Cathedral (now parish church)

Location: Bardstown, Nelson County, Kentucky

Owner or custodian: Catholic Diocese of Louisville,  
The Rt. Rev. John A. Floersh

Address: 1118 South Third Street, Louisville,  
Kentucky

Date built: 1816-1819  
(approx)

Architect or builder: John Rogers, of Baltimore, Maryland

Present condition: Very good; well cared for

Number of stories: One story, with balcony for choir  
and organ.

Material used in construction: Foundation: Native stone.  
Exterior walls: Brick; pillars: stone.  
Interior partitions: Brick and frame,  
plastered.  
Columns are logs of tall trees  
encased in plaster.  
Floor: Wood construction (terrazzo in  
aisles, recent).  
Roof: Frame construction, covered with  
metal (recent).

Description: The corner stone was laid July 16, 1816,  
architectural by the Rt. Rev. Benedict Joseph Flaget,  
and historical and was dedicated August 9, 1819. This  
was the first Cathedral erected west of  
the Alleghanies.

The materials used in the construction were obtained from the immediate vicinity. The bricks were burned on the place, and the stone quarried from the hills, and the lumber from the surrounding forest.

The interior presents an unusual beauty. The altars, the pews, and the pulpit are the original ones. On the door of the tabernacle of the main, or center, altar is engraved the coat of arms of the Duke of Orleans. There are many valuable paintings hanging in this church.

Quoting from "Sketches of the Early Catholic Missions in Kentucky, from their Commencement to the Jubilee of 1826-27", by M. J. Spalding, D. D., page 245: "The ceiling of the centre aisle is arched, and flanked on each side with a row of four beautiful columns, besides the pilasters of the sanctuary. The ceiling of the side aisles is groined; and it was intended by the architect to have the side walls decorated with pilasters in the same style of architecture, but the limited funds of the church did not permit him to carry out this plan. The steeple is a well proportioned and beautifully tapering spire, nearly one hundred and fifty feet in height, to the summit of the cross with which it is surmounted. It is provided with a large bell procured from France by the present Coadjutor Bishop of the Diocese.

"An organ, and two superb paintings, the one representing the Crucifixion, and the other, the Conversion of William, Duke of Brienne, by St. Bernard, were placed in the church. They had been procured from Belgium by the Venerable M. Nerinckx; and were by him presented to the Bishop of the new Cathedral. To these paintings were subsequently added several others which had been presented to the Bishop by the King of Naples, and the Soverign Pontiff, Leo XII.

"The Cathedral was also provided with rich suits of vestments, golden candlesticks, a golden tabernacle, and other splendid ornaments, presented to the Bishop by the present King and Queen of the French. In a word the Cathedral is a beautiful and well decorated edifice; and it will long remain an evidence of the zeal and liberality of our Bishop and the Catholics of the congregation attached to it, as well as a monument of the ability and exquisite taste of its architect".

In the year of 1808 the Episcopal Sees of Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Bardstown were erected. Rev. Benedict Joseph Flaget was appointed the first bishop of Bardstown and was consecrated in Baltimore by Archbishop Carroll, November 4, 1810, and reached Bardstown June 9, 1811.

From "Sketches of the Early Catholic Missions in Kentucky" (Spalding), page 183, says: "The See of Bardstown embraced the whole northwest territory of the United States, or that which lay north of the 35th degree of north latitude, including the present States of Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee, and about one-half of Arkansas, besides the two territories of Wisconsin and Iowa. The See of Bardstown bears to the west nearly the same

relation as that of Baltimore does to the whole of the United States".

From page 243 (Spalding's Sketches), follows: "During the first eight years of Bishop Flaget's residence in Kentucky he had no Cathedral other than the small log chapel of St. Thomas. His continual occupations made it almost impossible for him to undertake the erection of a church suitable for the purpose. However, the first subscription was found to be from \$12,000 to \$15,000. Bardstown subscribed \$5,000. Many citizens of Bardstown, who were not Catholics subscribed liberally for this purpose". On July 16, 1816, Bishop Flaget laid the corner stone of St. Joseph's Cathedral.

From page 244 (Spalding's Sketches), we quote: "But many unforeseen obstacles arose. The subscriptions were found to be insufficient; and, from one of those sudden pecuniary revulsions common to all commercial countries, and no where more frequent than in the United States, many who had subscribed had become totally unable to pay the amount of their subscription. All our older citizens remember the heavy pecuniary pressure and distress of the years 1819 and following".

However, the work continued to progress and the new Cathedral of St. Joseph's was dedicated on August 8, 1819, by Bishop Flaget.

On August 15, 1819, Rev. J. B. M. David, who had accompanied Bishop Flaget to America in 1792, was consecrated by Bishop Flaget as Coadjutor Bishop of the Diocese of Bardstown.

Shortly after his arrival in Kentucky Bishop Flaget opened a seminary under the direction of Rev. J. B. M. David, who together with the sub-deacon, G. I. Chabrat, and two other laics, accompanied him to his new field.

The first ordination to take place in Kentucky was that of Rev. G. I. Chabrat, on December 25, 1811.

The first ordinations in the new Cathedral was on September 18, 1819, the Rev. Wm. Byrne, and the Rev. G. M. Elder.

The See was transferred to Louisville in 1841.

Several prelates whose names are familiar in the history of the church in American, had been pastors of the Cathedral Church. Prominent among these were the Right Reverend Benedict Joseph Flaget, the first bishop; the Right Reverend John B. M. Davis, the second bishop of Bardstown; Most Reverend Francis P. Kenrick, archbishop of Baltimore;

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the Right Reverend Ignatius Reynolds, bishop of Charleston,  
and the Most Reverend Martin John Spalding, archbishop of  
Baltimore.

The present rectory was built by Bishop Flaget  
more than a century ago. It was at one time an ecclesiastical  
seminary. It probably enjoys the distinction of being the  
oldest seminary building extant in America.

*L. M. G.*  
*S. M. G.*  
Reviewed 1936 by H.C.F.