

St. Francis Xavier Church (Roman Catholic)
"Old Bohemia"
Church Road
Warwick Vicinity
Cecil County
Maryland

HABS No. MD-241

HABS
MD
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1-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ST. FRANCIS XAVIER CHURCH ("OLD BOHEMIA")
(ROMAN CATHOLIC)

HABS No. MD-241

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Location: At the end of Church Road, 2.4 miles north of State Route 282, Warwick vicinity, Cecil County, Maryland (longitude: W75° 48' 17"; latitude: N39° 26' 12")

Present Owner: Roman Catholic Diocese of Wilmington

Present Use: Summer religious services

Statement of Significance: St. Francis Xavier Church, founded in 1704 as a Society of Jesus mission, is the site of the oldest Roman Catholic institution on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. Jesuits of the mission founded other churches in Philadelphia and New York. Bohemia Academy, established at the church circa 1745, was the predecessor of Georgetown University. The existing Bohemia complex includes the church, the rectory, and the burial ground with a separate walled enclosure for the priest's burial plot.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: The original owner was Thomas Mansell, S. J., the founder of the mission; and the title passed to individual priests until the Revolutionary War. The property remained in the possession of the Society of Jesus until 1898, when the mission was transferred to the Diocese of Wilmington. The surrounding land of the mission plantation, except the 3.8 acre church lot, was sold in 1931.
2. Date of erection: The present red brick church structure was built in 1792-97. Prior to 1825 the adjacent academy building was demolished and the brick were used to construct the adjoining rectory.
3. Architect: Unknown
4. Construction information: The church was built under the direction of Francis Beeston, S. J., and Ambrose Marechal, S. J., resident priests.
5. Alterations and additions: After the demolition of the academy building, the rectory structure was constructed adjoining the church with its later chimney additions. the tower was

constructed in 1856 at the west entrance of the church which was seriously damaged by fire in 1912. The fire destroyed the interior of the church and the roof structure which had trusses with segmentally arched bottom members. The roof was rebuilt with scissor trusses altering the "vaulting" of the ceiling, sheathed with pressed sheet metal. All the interior trim was replaced with woodwork of Georgian Revival character including the Ionic altar reredos, flanking niches, dentiled cornice, balustraded communion rail, pews, and balcony. At the same time, the wooden structure of the steeple, with the arcaded, octagonal belfry, was rebuilt. The architectural firm of Pope, Kruse and McCune of Wilmington, Delaware, has been retained by the Old Bohemia Historical Society as restoration consultants.

- B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure: Father Thomas Mansell, S. J., who came to Maryland from England in 1700, was selected by his superiors in southern Maryland to establish a mission on the upper Eastern Shore. The land records indicate that Mansell patented 458 acres of vacant land between the two upper branches of the Bohemia River in Cecil County. A survey map for the tract, named "St. Xaverius" by Mansell, is dated August 29, 1704. The warrant for the tract is dated July 10, 1706. Permanent structures at St. Xaverius were not erected, however, until after Mansell's death in 1724.

The early missionaries maintained a plantation to provide for their own substance and to support the religious activities of the widely scattered congregation. By 1795 the plantation was a self-supporting enterprise which consisted of 1185 acres and was complete with barns, a blacksmith shop, a saw mill, a kiln for brick making, and slave quarters.

The most far reaching effect of the Bohemia Mission resulted from the academy, the immediate Jesuit predecessor of Georgetown University in Washington, D. C. Entries in the Jesuit's record books indicate that the academy was founded by Thomas Poulton, S. J., and was in operation as early as 1745. Among the school's first students was John Carroll, who established Georgetown University and later was the first Catholic Bishop (August 15, 1790) before becoming the Archbishop of Baltimore.

Father Joseph Greaton, S. J., who in 1733 founded Philadelphia's Old St. Joseph's Church on Willing's Alley, died on duty at Bohemia in 1753. Father John Lewis, S. J., at Bohemia from 1753 to 1764, was later Vicar General during the Revolutionary War

until Monsignor John Carroll was appointed Apostolic Administrator. Father Matthias Manners (Sittensberger), S. J., established the first Catholic church in Delaware in 1772. Father Charles Whelan, O. S. F., who aided in the founding of Old St. Peter's on Barclay Street in New York City is buried at Bohemia.

- C. Sources of Information: In addition to the booklet, "Historic St. Francis Xavier or Old Bohemia Restoration, Warwick, Maryland," March 1959, research reports are in the possession of the Old Bohemia Historical Society, Inc., P. O. Box 61, Warwick, Maryland, a group organized to preserve and restore the buildings at Bohemia.

PREPARED BY:

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