

St. Matthew's Catholic Church
Cathedral Street
Saltsburg
Indiana County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5436

HABS
PA,
32 SALT,
20-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ST. MATTHEW'S CATHOLIC CHURCH

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Location: East side of Cathedral Street at Washington Street, just east of the Saltsburg Borough line, Conemaugh Township, Indiana County, Pennsylvania.

Present Owner: Roman Catholic church, Greensburg diocese.

Present Use: Storage.

Significance: Erected in 1847, the mission church of St. Matthew's is one of the oldest meeting houses in Saltsburg, and one of two such facilities built under the auspices of Fr. Wimmer, the founder of St. Vincent Seminary in Latrobe, Pa., who became the first arch-abbot in America.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1847 (according to church history).
2. Original and subsequent owners: Roman Catholic church.
3. Builder, contractor: Saltsburg stone mason John Martin.
4. Original plans and construction: No plans or drawings were located; however, the rectangular, gable-front, one-story mass appears largely unaltered.
5. Alterations and additions: The bell tower has been removed (date unknown). The doorway on the south facade appears to have been reconstructed, and a modern door installed.

B. Historical Context: St. Matthew's is one of the oldest churches in Saltsburg and the land on which it sits was donated by one of the town's well-known citizens, Mathias Rombach. He owned a great deal of land just northeast of the town boundary, which he sold to the Right Reverend Michael O'Connor,

Bishop of Pittsburgh, for the token price of \$1. The building was constructed by stone mason John Martin of Saltsburg, who donated his services to the project for an earlier kindness the church bestowed on his family: when Martin's father had fallen ill with cholera, some Catholic Sisters of Charity nursed him back to health.

The bricks used in the building were made from clay taken from the nearby Chestnut Knoll (located between the church and the present high school) and baked in a kiln Martin erected on site; the foundation stones came from materials left over from the construction of the canal tunnel at Tunnelton (Delfavero, "John Martin").

Martin (born 1820) emigrated in 1834 with his father from Ireland, and settled in Allegheny City, Pennsylvania. His career included work on the Sandy and Beaver Canals, an apprenticeship in the stone-cutting trade with Pagan and Company of Pittsburgh, and bridge construction. He arrived in Saltsburg in the early 1840s and served for six years as a foreman mason on the Northwestern Pennsylvania Railroad. He is buried in the cemetery adjacent to the church.

In Saltsburg Martin was responsible for several notable buildings, including the Soldier's Monument in Edgewood Cemetery, the Western Pennsylvania Railroad Station, and the Academy, as well as this church. He was treasurer of the Saltsburg Bridge Company, vice president of the cemetery organization, and a borough council member. Martin's stone-cutting yard was on Point Street east of the canal (Arms and White, 383, 391).

For additional context, twenty-one reports on other buildings in Saltsburg may be consulted, as well as overview histories of the town of Saltsburg (HABS No. PA-5438) and of canal town development in Pennsylvania (HABS No. PA-5666). See also, Sara Amy Leach, ed., Two Historic Pennsylvania Canal Towns: Alexandria and Saltsburg (Washington, DC: Historica American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record, National Park Service, March 1989).

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Very plain, one-story, gable-front vernacular brick structure, three bays wide and four bays long, with modest Gothic detailing in pointed arch frames within rectangular windows.

2. Condition of fabric: Fair.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 35' x 40'.

2. Foundation: Dressed stone.

3. Walls: Brick laid in five-course American bond.

4. Structural system: Load-bearing brick.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The original door and doorway, centered on the south/front facade has been altered, and may have featured some sort of transom (old undated view), and had paneled wood doors.

b. Windows: The four bays of the east and west sides feature rectangular triple-hung wood sash with narrow sills; the south/front facade features two flanking bays of pointed-arch windows set within a larger rectangular frame. Diamond-shaped lights of stained-glass is extant in these latter two openings--in a purple, blue, and ochre color scheme.

6. Roof:

a. Shape: Gable-front with asphalt shingles.

b. Cornice, eaves: Shallow eaves, plain cornice.

c. Tower: The bell tower that was located at the south end of the roof has been removed.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The interior is a single, large, unadorned open space, currently used for storage.

2. Wall and ceiling finishes: The ceiling is covered with molded tin with a

foliated square pattern.

- D. Site: Located on a flat lot atop a hill overlooking Saltsburg, a cemetery stretches east from the building; otherwise the site is undeveloped.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Old Views and maps:

The collection of the Saltsburg Branch, Historical and Genealogical Society of Indiana County, Stone House Museum, contains numerous historic images.

Beers, F.W. Atlas of Indiana County. New York: F.W. Beers and Co., 1871.

Johnson, George B., and Palmer, Ann. Saltsburg--The Way It Was--An Appreciation. Indiana, Pa.: A.G. Halldin Publishing Co., 1986.

Peelor, David, and Barker, W. "Map of Indiana County, Pennsylvania." North Hector, New York: 1856.

"Saltsburg, Pa." New York: Sanborn Map and Publishing Co. Ltd., February 1886; New York: Sanborn-Perris Map Co. Ltd., October 1891, January 1897, July 1903; New York: Sanborn Map Company, April 1909, February 1927.

B. Primary and unpublished sources:

Indiana County, Pennsylvania, deed books and tax records.

C. Secondary and published sources:

Arms, C.T., and White, E. 1745-1880, History of Indiana County, Pennsylvania. Newark, Ohio: J. A. Caldwell, 1880.

Berringer, Gloria, ed. Canal Days Sesquicentennial: 1838-1988. No publisher, 1988.

Biographical and Historical Cyclopedia of Indiana and Armstrong Counties. Philadelphia: John M. Gresham and Co., 1891; reprinted 1982.

Delfavero, Delia. "John Martin was a Builder," in "1838-1988" (Supplement) Indiana Gazette, 1988.

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Johnson, George. Saltsburg and the Pennsylvania Canal. Historic Saltsburg, 1984.

McCullough, Robert, and Leuba, Walter. The Pennsylvania Main Line Canal. York, Pa.: American Canal and Transportation Center, 1973.

National Register of Historic Places Inventory, "Western Division of the Pennsylvania Canal: Indiana and Westmoreland Counties." 1979/82.

Stewart, J.T. Indiana County, Pennsylvania: Her People, Past and Present. Chicago: F.W. Beers and Co., 1913.

Wallner, Peter A. "Politics and Public Works: A Study of the Pennsylvania Canal System, 1825-1857." Ph.D diss., Pennsylvania State University, June 1973.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was conducted by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record in cooperation with the America's Industrial Heritage Project under the directorship of Randy Cooley; AIHP is an undertaking of the National Park Service, based in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania. Recorded under the direction of Robert J. Kapsch, chief of HABS/HAER, the project was completed during summer 1988 at the HABS field office in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Project leader was Alison K. Hoagland, senior HABS historian; field supervisor was Dorothy Burlingame, University of Vermont; project historian, Kristin Belz, University of Virginia. Large-format photography is by David Ames. Editing of the final report was done by Sara Amy Leach, HABS historian.

This report was completed as part of a larger project documenting two canal towns--Saltsburg, on the Western Division of the Pennsylvania Mainline Canal, and Alexandria, on the Juniata Division--flanking the Allegheny Divide. Twenty-one reports on other buildings in Saltsburg, an overview history of Saltsburg (HABS No. PA-5438), and of canal town development in Pennsylvania (HABS No. PA-5666) are part of the HABS/HAER collection. Twenty-two reports on buildings in Alexandria (Huntingdon County) and an overview history of Alexandria (HABS No. PA-5407) are also available. Results of the project were published as Two Historic Pennsylvania

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Canal Towns: Alexandria and Saltsburg, Sara Amy Leach, editor (Washington, DC:
Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record, National
Park Service, March 1989).