

# HISTORY COLORADO

## COLORADO STATE REGISTER OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES NOMINATION FORM

### SECTION I

#### Name of Property

Historic Name Sacred Heart Church

Other Names St. Malachy's Church

#### Address of Property

[ ] address not for publication

Street Address 503 E Aspen

City Fruita County Mesa Zip 81521

#### Present Owner of Property

(for multiple ownership, list the names and addresses of each owner on one or more continuation sheets)

Name Steven Phillips and Tila Duhaime

Address 2201 4th Street Phone 917-903-2318, 917-545-3093

City Boulder State CO Zip 80302

#### Owner Consent to Nomination

(attach signed consent from each owner of property - see attached form)

#### Preparer of Nomination

Name Tila Duhaime Date May 2019

Organization \_\_\_\_\_

Address 2201 4th Street Phone 917-903-2318

City Boulder State CO Zip 80302

#### FOR OFFICIAL USE:

Site Number 5ME.4524

5/13/2019 Nomination Received

9/20/2019 Review Board Recommendation  
X Approval Denial

9/25/2019 HC Board State Register Listing  
X Approved Denied

Listing Criteria A B X C D E

Philly K. Norton Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer HISTORY COLORADO  
Date 9/30/19

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**SECTION II**

**Local Historic Designation**

Has the property received local historic designation?

no

yes ---  individually designated  designated as part of a historic district

Date designated \_\_\_\_\_

Designated by \_\_\_\_\_ (Name of municipality or county)

**Use of Property**

Historic Catholic Church

Current Private residence

**Original Owner** Bishop of Pueblo

Source of Information Mesa County Recorder & Clerks office

**Year of Construction** 1921-22

Source of Information Church archives (Records of cornerstone laying ceremony); newspaper articles

**Architect, Builder, Engineer, Artist or Designer**     

Architect Robert Willison Stonemason/Builder Nunzio Grasso

Source of Information Archives of Sacred Heart Church of Fruita; History Colorado "Architects of Colorado: Biographical Series" re Robert Willison; National Register of Historic Places nomination for Stranges Grocery (naming Nunzio Grasso as Sacred Heart stonemason)

**Locational Status**

Original location of resource(s)

Resource(s) moved to current location

Date of move \_\_\_\_\_

**For Office Use Only**

Property Type:  building(s)  district  site  structure  object  area

Architectural Style/Engineering Type: Romanesque Revival

Period of Significance: 1922

Level of Significance:  Local  State  National

Multiple Property Submission: n/a

Acreage less than one

P.M. UTE Township 1N Range 2W Section 17 Quarter Sections SW NW SW NE

UTM Reference: Zone 12 Easting 696238 Northing 4336978 NAD27

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## SECTION III

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### DESCRIPTION AND ALTERATIONS

(describe the current and original appearance of the property followed by a discussion of all alterations)

Sacred Heart Church, originally planned as St. Malachy's Church, was built in 1921-22, and was dedicated on August 27, 1922, at which time it was renamed Sacred Heart Church. Church archives indicate the cornerstone was laid on Aug. 7, 1921, and then reset a year later at the dedication and renaming ceremony. It is a two-story church built in the Romanesque Revival style from rusticated sandstone blocks from the nearby historic Little Book Cliff quarry. It was designed by notable architect Robert Willison and built by master stonemason Nunzio Grasso. The church building stands on the northeast corner of the intersection of Maple and Aspen streets in downtown Fruita, at the edge of a residential neighborhood and on the eastern edge of Fruita's civic center.

#### *Exterior*

Like many Catholic churches, the building's overall layout is cruciform, with an approximately 82' x 36' central nave on the north-south axis and 20'-deep side transepts making the widest part of the church approximately 43'. The square bell tower is 15' on each side, and rises above the main entrance of the church at the south, with a peaked roof at about 45' above the street; the surmounting cross has been removed as the building no longer serves as a church. Alternating projecting blocks create a course of dentition immediately below the bell tower roof line; originally, the parapet of the bell tower was capped by alternating blocks projecting above this line of dentition and above the inset pyramid roof (Photos H3 and H6) but those blocks appear to have been removed when the roof was replaced (see below; Photo H7) with the current painted corrugated metal roof. The central nave roof is gabled asphalt shingle with a peak running north to south at about 35' high; cross gables cap the side transepts at around 30' feet in height. The cross gable parapets extend above the roof line, whereas the main roof and bell tower roof form slight eaves over the side walls. The massive stone block walls are built in uniform courses, interrupted by semicircular arches above each window in the bell tower and upper level. The windows of the basement level are partially above grade, rectangular, and capped with a raised stone lintel that forms a continuous stringcourse around the exterior of the building. Four large rose windows are centered on the nave and transept cross gables, each encircled with stone voussoirs. Square, low-profile buttresses support the walls at regular intervals between the main windows, are doubled at each corner, and capped with a pyramidal stone block at the level the window arches begin. A chimney of blond brick, which vented the original coal-fired boiler and furnace (Photo H4), penetrates the otherwise symmetrical gable roof near the northwest corner of the church. The building includes several sets of three small wood-slatted venting windows just under the roof line on the north façade, in the transept gable faces, and the east, west, and south face of the bell tower.

The main church entry to the south sweeps the entire width of the bell tower, accessed by nine concrete steps approximately 12' wide flanked by massive low stone walls to a 6'-wide double door entry capped with arched plate glass. The original doors were apparently wood with inset glass panels; these were replaced sometime between 1956 and 1967 with solid wood doors. The plate glass over the entry door replaced the original stained glass window (which featured the name "St. Malachy's Church") when the Sacred Heart congregation moved to its new building on 17 1/2 Road in Fruita in 2016.

At the northeast corner of the church, two modest sets of stone and concrete steps lead to rear entry doors; five steps down into the basement level and eight up into a side room flanking the sacristy where the priest would store his vestments and other liturgical articles and prepare for Mass.

#### *Windows*

Striking stained-glass windows, original to the church, are dominant design elements of the central nave and transepts and nearly all of these major windows remain intact and in good to very good condition (certain

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smaller windows appear to have been removed/replaced at an unknown time to allow installation of ventilation equipment). Specifically, all four original cardinal rose windows (5' and 6' in diameter) and at least twenty-one more of the original arched stained-glass windows remain on the upper level of the church and choir loft (the largest being six windows approximately 4' x 12' each and four windows approximately 3.5' x 7' each). These windows are of exceptionally fine artistic design and workmanship, though a studio could not be identified as their maker.

Each side of the central nave features three tall arched windows, approximately 12'-high x 4'-wide, of identical design including stylized temples and pillars, a central section with diamond patterning, and three forms at the bottom suggesting human figures holding a banner (Photo 5). The smaller stained-glass windows throughout the church repeat these motifs. The east- and west-facing transepts contain pairs of arched windows, with very similar design to the taller central nave windows, but are smaller, approximately 7'-tall x 3.5'-wide. These are centered under 6'-diameter round rose windows (Photo 6). Two additional rose windows are set into the north and south facades: one 6'-diameter centered in the choir loft above the south entrance and one 5'-diameter centered above the sacristy in the north wall of the church (Photo 8). The choir loft also contains two pairs of arched stained-glass sash windows of similar design on the east and west walls (Photo 9). Archival photographs indicate that the lower 2' of all of the tall arched windows in the central nave may have been operable hopper windows, which have since been made inoperable to ensure stability. At this time, only the northernmost window on each of the transepts retains an operable lower hopper. Aside from minor repairs of individual segments of glass, all but two of the original large arched windows and rose windows in the central nave and choir loft remain essentially intact and as built. Archival photos suggest that there were at one time a pair of arched stained-glass windows in the south wall of the main nave, flanking the choir loft, but at least as early as 1989 these openings were repurposed for HVAC equipment. Two alcoves at the southern end of the central nave contained pairs of simple arched windows with similar but less intricate stained glass (Photo 7); three are intact and the fourth is largely intact but in need of repair after being punctured to provide ventilation for a powder room.

### ALTERATIONS

In approximately 1985, the original pyramid-shaped belltower roof was replaced by a simple gabled roof with eaves (Photos H7 and H8) to address persistent water drainage and leaking issues. Sometime shortly after the bell tower roof alteration, a gable-roof porch shelter of wood and asphalt shingle was installed over the front door and top step of the church, and painted metal handrails were installed on the steps (Photo H9).

Nearly all of the windows of the church were covered with rigid protective plastic at an unknown time (apparently decades ago). Over time, these protective sheets have yellowed, clouded, and degraded, making the original windows difficult to view from the exterior. The window photos included in this nomination have been taken from the interior of the building to show details, and the current owners are in the process of evaluating and installing replacement covers for the original windows, which are necessary to provide sufficient protection and insulation from the elements. The new protective covers will be as transparent as possible to restore the stained glass windows to public view from outside the building, as they would have been seen when the building was first erected.

### INTEGRITY

Minor modifications to the exterior have been made over time to address drainage, heating/cooling, and ventilation, but none of these changes greatly impact the overall integrity of the exterior design. There have been no major additions.

The church underwent significant interior renovations in about 1956, and again in about 1985-1989. Although certain original interior materials and finishes remain, including wood floors and plaster walls in the central nave, it appears that the interior of the building has not retained significant historic integrity.

As noted above, when the bell tower roof was replaced in the 1980s, the stone blocks projecting above the

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parapet of the bell tower were apparently removed to provide a flat surface for the new gable roof to be mounted; the result slightly impacts the Romanesque Revival style of the bell tower and overall church building as compared to the original form, but the overall style remains. Likewise, the installation of the gable-roof shelter protecting the front (south) entrance represents a change from the original design, but the impact on the building as a whole is minimal.

## SECTION IV

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### Significance of Property

#### Nomination Criteria

- A** - property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to history
- B** - property is connected with persons significant in history
- C** - property has distinctive characteristics of a type, period, method of construction or artisan
- D** - property is of geographic importance
- E** - property contains the possibility of important discoveries related to prehistory or history

#### Areas of Significance

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Economics                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape               |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Education                        | Architecture                                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Archaeology –<br>prehistoric             | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Law                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Archaeology –<br>historic                | <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment/<br>Recreation     | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Ethnic Heritage                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Military                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Exploration/<br>Settlement       | <input type="checkbox"/> Performing Arts         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Geography/<br>Community Identity | <input type="checkbox"/> Politics/<br>Government |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community<br>Planning and<br>Development | <input type="checkbox"/> Health/Medicine                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Science                 |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Social History          |
|   |   | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation          |

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### SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENT

(Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, areas of significance, and justification for the period of significance.)

Sacred Heart Church in Fruita is locally significant under Criterion C for Architecture as a well-preserved example of the work of notable architect Robert Willison and stone artisan Nunzio Grasso, and as a good example of the Romanesque Revival style. Character-defining features of the style as found on the church include the rock-faced stone, square bell tower, and semicircular masonry arches. The original artistic stained-glass windows further complement the fine design and stonework of the building. Indeed, Father Meunich, one of the priests who first conceived of the project, stated that he was planning to "build the prettiest church in the valley."<sup>1</sup> Conceived as a testament to the Roman Catholic Church's growing influence and reach in the Lower Grand Valley around the turn of the twentieth century, Sacred Heart Church survives as one of the few Romanesque Revival buildings in the area erected by the leading artisans of their time. The period of significance is 1922, the year the building was completed and dedicated.

Sacred Heart Church is a significant and well-preserved example of noted architect Robert Willison's work, who is credited with the design for at least a dozen buildings throughout Colorado listed in the National, State, and local registers. Willison's body of work includes many ecclesiastical designs in Denver and southern Colorado, as well as civic buildings in Denver. He is best known for his design of the Denver Municipal Auditorium.

Sacred Heart is also notable as the work of Italian-born stonemason Nunzio Grasso, who was a pivotal figure in the nascent Grand Junction Italian-American community and who also crafted the Stranges Grocery in Grand Junction (National Register listed 2013, 5ME.4147). Like that building, Sacred Heart Church is made from hand-dressed blocks of blond sandstone quarried from the nearby Little Book Cliff quarry, a material that Grasso frequently worked in.

### DEVELOPMENTAL HISTORY / ADDITIONAL HISTORIC CONTEXT INFORMATION

This building is sometimes referred to as St. Malachy's Church in historic records, because it was planned and erected to house the growing St. Malachy's congregation based in the now defunct town of Cleveland, Colorado.<sup>2</sup> The church was named Sacred Heart Church upon its completion and dedication in 1922.

It is believed that the original St. Malachy's Church first ministered to the religious needs of primarily Irish Catholic immigrants in the area when it was established in 1890. (St. Malachy was the first native Irish saint.) A number of the early parishioner families in St. Malachy's and later Sacred Heart's records have surnames of Irish descent. But by the time Sacred Heart's construction began in 1921, the parish had expanded and included several families with German, Mexican, Spanish, and Italian heritage, and it is possible that the change of name from St. Malachy's to Sacred Heart was intended to include this broader diversity of parishioners. In any event, the name change happened at the last minute, upon the suggestion by Bishop Tihen, then the bishop of Denver, on the eve of the dedication ceremony. The reason he gave, according to contemporary accounts, was that the church should be "given the name of a patron known and venerated by the congregation," implying that St. Malachy was insufficiently familiar to the Fruita congregation at large.<sup>3</sup> Father Hickey's book relates an oral account by Cyrus Padia of Loma, discussing the growth of the Spanish-speaking population in the region, specifically Mexican families, from the early 1900s to the 1920s, with "babies' names recorded in the Baptismal Book, names like

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. Thomas J. Hickey, *Catholics on the Western Slope*, Mid-Cal Publishers, 1978; p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> According to the Mesa County Libraries website, Cleveland was a twin city to Fruita, with its own post office and laws, and is now part of Fruita. St. Malachy Catholic Church's original building stood at 735 E. Harrison Avenue. <https://mesacountylibraries.org/2019/09/local-history-thursday-fruitvale-riverside-cleveland-and-the-towns-within-our-mesa-county-towns/>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, pp. 50-51.

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Marez, Romero, Maestas, Sena, Abeyta, Sandoval and Velasquez.”<sup>4</sup> The name Sacred Heart was intended to refer to the heart of Jesus, and after the dedication and renaming ceremony, Nunzio Grasso was asked to replace the original cornerstone carved with the name “St. Malachy’s” with one reading “Sacred Heart” instead. The stained-glass window over the main entrance, however, remained in place despite bearing the wrong name. Although the rectory for the original St. Malachy’s church was moved to the new location (and survives today next door to Sacred Heart Church), the former church building at 735 E. Harrison Avenue in Cleveland was demolished.

### *Robert Willison*

Scottish-born architect Robert Willison fostered a distinguished career throughout Colorado, particularly in Denver, where he arrived in 1890. First working as a draftsman for Robert S. Roeschlaub and John J. Huddart, Willison then joined Frank E. Edbrooke’s firm as an architect in 1896. Willison was appointed by Mayor Robert Speer as the city’s building inspector and architect, which he served as from 1904-10, during which time he designed the 1908 Denver Municipal Auditorium (5DV.521, National Register listed 1991). He then teamed with architect Montana S. Fallis, with whom he designed several notable buildings including the 1912 Joslin Dry Goods Company Building (5DV.1913, National Register listed 1997), and the 1912 Oxford Hotel Annex (5DV.47.9 contributing building within Lower Downtown Denver Historic District, certified National Register eligible 1989).

Sacred Heart Church in Fruita is among several key ecclesiastical edifices Willison designed, a number of them listed in the State and National Registers, including 1913 Sacred Heart Church in Pueblo (with Fallis, 5PE.1125, National Register listed 1989), the 1926 St. Dominic’s Catholic Church (5DV.606, National Register listed 1996) and St. Catejan’s Church (5DV.702, local landmark) of Denver, and the 1926 Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Alamosa (5AL.262, National Register listed 1998). Willison also executed numerous historically important civic buildings in and around Denver, among them the Denver Municipal Auditorium and the 1914 Robert W. Steele Gymnasium (5DV.4629, State Register listed 1994). Willison’s buildings were admired for their beauty and impressive scale, and were studied by later architectural students as exemplars of fine design. Sacred Heart Church in Fruita was described, even before its completion, as “one of the finest edifices on the western slope.”<sup>5</sup> His architectural contributions to Colorado townships emerging around the turn of the twentieth century helped establish them as centers of commerce and industry.

### *Nunzio Grasso*

Born in 1873, Nunzio Grasso learned to dress stone from his father in Lecce, Italy before permanently immigrating to the United States in 1901. Shortly after arriving in Grand Junction, he began building a series of stone buildings, bridges, and highway projects that garnered him some local fame as a skilled stonemason. He designed and built the Stranges Grocery, the only extant building in what was once Grand Junction’s Little Italy neighborhood. Other projects built by Grasso included the Redlands Women’s Club (5ME.7370, State Register listed 1995), retaining walls for the Million Dollar highway (segment of what is now US Highway 550 between Ouray and Silverton), and cemetery gates for different sections of the Orchard Mesa Cemetery.

Grasso’s projects typically were made of hand-dressed blocks of blond sandstone quarried from the Little Book Cliff quarry. New railway lines between the mining town of Carpenter, which lay at the foot of Little Book Cliff, and Grand Junction (1892), and between Fruita and Grand Junction (1909), allowed better movement of people and materials throughout the region and enabled the construction of grand projects like the Sacred Heart Church, which would have previously been impossible for such a small and relatively poor parish. Grasso built his own stone home on the route of the Little Book Cliff railroad in Grand Junction, a reflection of the importance of stone from that quarry for the family’s business and prosperity. The stone for his projects was brought to the Grasso home on rail cars, unloaded and dressed in a field near the house, then delivered by the Grassos to the relevant

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, pp. 57-58.

<sup>5</sup> “Catholic Church in Fruita to be Dedicated August 27, 1922,” *Grand Junction Sentinel*, August 1922 (as quoted in Hickey, pp. 48-50.)

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job site.<sup>6</sup>

Nunzio's cousin recalled that upon learning about the plans to erect a new Catholic church in Fruita, Nunzio approached one of the church fathers and touted his skills as a stonemason, and his desire to work to feed his family, which earned him the commission.<sup>7</sup> Sacred Heart Church, like a number of Grasso's projects, was built using the blond sandstone from the local quarry, dressed by hand at the Grasso worksite, and delivered block by block to the site of the church. It stands today as a testament to the quality of Grasso's workmanship, and the intensity of the labor involved in its construction, which would be nearly inconceivable today. One of the pastors for Sacred Heart Church, Reverend Hickey, wrote very eloquently on this last point:

To this day, the exterior stonework of the Fruita church excites the admiration of all who behold the edifice, and although it is dedicated to the worship of God, it will always evoke the memory of Nunzio Grasso and the faithful workers who assisted in the erection of this church.<sup>8</sup>

### *Current Use*

Following the congregation's move to a new building in 2016, the Sacred Heart Church building was sold to the current owners in 2018, who have converted it into a private residence, modifying the interior slightly but leaving the exterior intact.

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<sup>6</sup> Kathy Jordan, "Italian mason was an Artist with local stone"

<http://www.historic7thstreet.org/remembering/decpdfs/littleitaly2.pdf> (accessed 2/25/19). The Grasso home apparently stood at 924 N. First Street in Grand Junction and has been demolished.

<sup>7</sup> Hickey, p. 45.

<sup>8</sup> Hickey, p. 54.



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### BIBLIOGRAPHY

(cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form)

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Places nomination, May 2012. On file with History Colorado Office of Archaeology and Historic  
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"Sacred Heart Parish Fruita," *Catholic Crosswinds*. January 14, 1983; correction (with photo) published Jan 28,  
1983

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## SECTION V

### GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

#### Verbal Boundary Description of Nominated Property (describe the boundaries of the nominated property)

The nominated area comprises Block 1, Lot 17 of the Austin and Horning First Addition to the Town of Fruita in 1910 and is the historic lot associated with the church. The lot is 60' by 125' located on the northeast corner of the intersection of Aspen Avenue and Maple Street in the town of Fruita, Colorado.

#### Official Map (show location of property on map)

Nominated area shown inside dashed rectangle.



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## SECTION VI

### PHOTOGRAPH LOG

The following information pertains to photographs numbers 1-7, except as noted:

Name of Property: Sacred Heart Church

Location: Fruita, CO

Photographer: Steven Phillips

Date of Photographs: September/October 2018 (Photos 2, 5, 6), February 2019 (Photos 3,4,7) and June 2019 (Photo 1)

Photo No.	Description of View and Direction of Camera	
1	Front (south) facade	N
2	West facade	E
3	East and north facades	SSW
4	East façade (wide angle)	W
5	Detail of typ. large window, central nave	E
6	Detail of east transept windows and rose window	E
7	Detail of typ. alcove window	S
8	Rose window, one of four	S
9	Choir window	E

### HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS & FIGURES

(Insert available digital images of historic photographs and figures illustrating the property over time. Include captions with source information.)

*All historic photos from archives of Sacred Heart Church, Fruita. Photographers unknown; dates approximate. Handwritten years written on certain photos may be inaccurate.*

#### Photo No.

- H1 Sacred Heart Church as seen from SE corner of building; ca. 1922.
- H2 Photo of cornerstone laying ceremony, Aug 7 1921.
- H3 Sacred Heart Church viewed from SE corner, ca. 1940.
- H4 Coal-fired furnace and boiler located in basement, at base of chimney, ca. 1951.
- H5 Interior of Sacred Heart Church, restoration of wood floor, ca. 1951 to 1956.
- H6 Sacred Heart Church viewed from SW corner, ca. 1963.
- H7 Replacement of bell tower roof, ca. 1985 (original roof structure in left foreground).
- H8 Sacred Heart Church, new bell tower roof, ca. 1988.
- H9 Sacred Heart Church, ca. 1989, new gabled front entrance and metal handrails.



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Photo H1. Sacred Heart Church as seen from SE corner of building, ca. 1922



Photo H2. Photo of cornerstone laying ceremony, Aug 7 1921.

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Photo H3. Sacred Heart Church viewed from SE corner, ca. 1940.



Photo H4. Photo of coal-fired furnace and boiler located in basement, at base of chimney, ca. 1951.



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Photo H5. Interior of Sacred Heart Church, restoration of wood floor, ca. 1951 to 1956.



Photo H6. Sacred Heart Church viewed from SW corner, ca. 1963. Shows stair railings, original roof and entry area, new solid wood doors.

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Photo H7. Replacement of bell tower roof, ca. 1985. Original roof structure in left foreground.

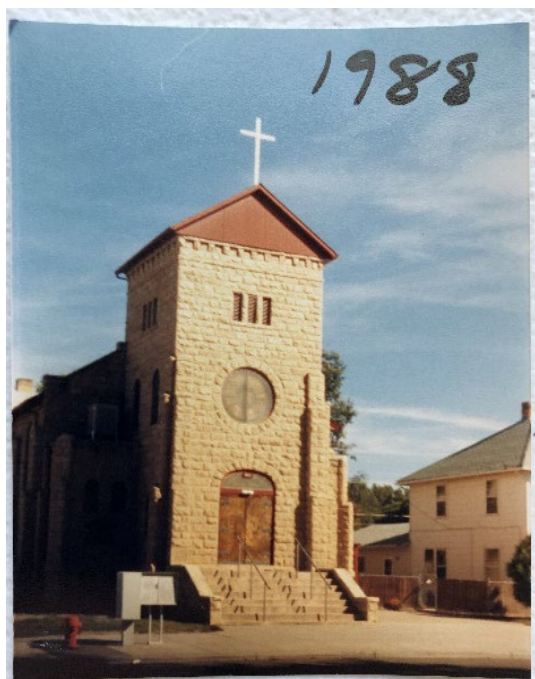


Photo H8. Sacred Heart Church, new bell tower roof, ca. 1988.



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Photo H9. Sacred Heart Church, ca. 1989. Shows gabled front entrance and additional handrails.



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**SECTION VII**

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**ADDITIONAL MATERIALS TO ACCOMPANY NOMINATION**

**Sketch Map(s)**

**Digital Images (separate files)**

**PDF of Current photos (see check-off list)**

**Owner Consent Form (Section VIII)**

**Use of Nomination Materials**

Upon submission to the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, all nomination forms and supporting materials become public records pursuant to CRS Title 24, and may be accessed, copied, and used for personal or commercial purposes in accordance with state law unless otherwise specifically exempted. History Colorado may reproduce, publish, display, perform, prepare derivative works or otherwise use the nomination materials for History Colorado and/or State Register purposes.