

COLORADO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

COLORADO STATE REGISTER OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES NOMINATION FORM

SECTION I

Name of Property

Historic Name St. Agnes Mission Church

Other Names _____

Address of Property

[] address not for publication

Street Address 505 Gunnison Street [Mailing Address: 781 Warden Street, Center, CO 81125]

City Saguache County Saguache Zip 81149

Present Owner of Property

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

Name Arthur N. Tafoya, Bishop, Diocese of Pueblo

Address 1001 North Grand Avenue Phone 719-544-9861

City Pueblo State Colorado Zip 81003

Owner Consent for Nomination

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

Preparer of Nomination

Name Sherab Kloppenburg and OAHP staff Date 29 May 2003

Organization student, University of Colorado, Denver

Address 518½ East Louisiana Avenue Phone 303-521-1376

City Denver State Colorado Zip 80210

FOR OFFICIAL USE:

Site Number 5SH.1658

_____ Nomination Received

Senate # 5

House # 45

8/15/2003 Review Board Recommendation

9/10/2003

CHS Board State Register Listing

X Approval _____ Denial

X Approved _____ Denied

Certification of Listing: President, Colorado Historical Society

Date

COLORADO STATE REGISTER OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES

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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 Religion: religious facility

Current Religion: religious facility

Original Owner St. Joseph Parish

Source of Information warranty deed

Year of Construction 1947

Source of Information newspaper article (Southern Colorado Register, October 1947)

Architect, Builder, Engineer, Artist or Designer designer: Father Joseph Ruensa

(although oral history credits the construction and design to Librado Mondragon

Source of Information newspaper article

Locational Status

Original location of structure(s)

Structure(s) moved to current location

Date of move _____

SECTION III

Description and Alterations

(describe the current and original appearance of the property and any alterations on one or more continuation sheets)

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SECTION IV

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 | <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Archaeology –
prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Law |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Archaeology –
historic | <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment/
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/
Settlement | <input type="checkbox"/> Performing Arts |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Geography/
Community Identity | <input type="checkbox"/> Politics/
Government |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community
Planning and
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 |

Significance Statement

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

Bibliography

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

SECTION V

Locational Information

Lot(s) 4,5,6 Block 18 Addition Jones

USGS Topographic Quad Map Saguache

Verbal Boundary Description of Nominated Property

(describe the boundaries of the nominated property on a continuation sheet)

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SECTION VI

Photograph Log for Black and White Photographs

(prepare a photograph log on one or more continuation sheets)

SECTION VII

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS TO ACCOMPANY NOMINATION

Owner Consent Form

Black and White Photographs

Color Slides

Sketch Map(s)

Photocopy of USGS Map Section

Optional Materials

For Office Use Only

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

Architectural Style/Engineering Type: Art Deco (Peublo Deco)

Period of Significance: 1947

Level of Significance: Local State National

Acreage less than one

P.M. NM Township 44 N Range 8 E Section 6 Quarter Sections SW SE SW SW

UTM Reference: Zone 13 Easting 400170 Northing 4216040

Site Elevation: 7700 feet

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DESCRIPTION and ALTERATIONS

St. Agnes Mission Church is easily seen from U.S. Highway 285 as it goes through Saguache. Facing the highway, the church sits on the west half of the block between 5th and 6th Streets. Large cottonwood trees and an old irrigation ditch separate the church from the highway. Landscaping of grassy expanses with areas of pea gravel surrounds the church. There are a few scattered small evergreen trees, and several juniper bushes follow the east wall. A large dirt parking lot is west of the church. A series of concrete sidewalks break up the lawn providing access to the main entry, the sacristy, and the parking lot.

The L-shaped building has a concrete foundation, white stuccoed walls with tan trim, and a red metal roof. A small extension that serves as the sacristy and a 50-foot bell tower project out from the southeast corner, modifying the elongated rectangular plan of the church. The main portion of the church has a gabled roof, hidden on the north facade by a corbiestep (stepped parapet wall). The sacristy extension has a shed roof, and the tower has a pyramidal roof surmounted by a thin cross. The roofs over the church and sacristy have overhanging eaves with exposed rafters behind a fascia board and triangular knee braces under the open rake. The pyramidal tower roof has overhanging eaves with exposed rafters. The walls of the church are adobe brick, thickest at the bottom. Concrete masonry units (CMUs) were used to create the parapet, pilasters, window lugsills, and the bas relief surrounds of the door and windows on the facade. The tower is wood frame construction. Stained glass fills all the windows. Ornamentation is minimal, confined to the top of the tower with its corbelled cutouts, and to the facade with its stepped parapet, shallow corner pilasters, and bas-relief door and window surrounds. The simple geometric forms appear to be inspired by southwest Indian motifs. These decorative elements, along with the facade's vertical emphasis and linear composition characterize the building as Pueblo Deco.

The church faces north where sidewalks converge at the centrally located, double leaf entrance. A wide, flat band projects out from the smooth wall surface around the wooden doors and forms a surround that extends upward, incorporating the *choro* (choir loft window) and creating a large variation of a Latin cross below the corbiestep. Flanking the central doorway are two tall rectangular windows with wide band surrounds. Two shallow pilasters frame this facade with additional pilasters at the corners creating a buttressing effect.

Five windows punctuate the elongated west side. Four of these windows illuminate the nave with a pilaster separating one window from the other three. A smaller window toward the rear provides light to the chancel.

The east side has four windows illuminating the nave before the sacristy projects outward from the wall. This single-room extension has a wooden door on the north side, a square, stained glass window on the east, and merges with the bell tower on the south.

The tower occupies the southeast corner. A series of wooden steps lead to a single leaf wooden door on the east side of the tower. The tower rises up in a smooth square column broken only by the four rectangular openings on each side near the belfry. The stepped- or corbel-arched openings at each corner, appear to make the pyramidal roof float above the tower. Without the roof, the tops of these tower walls would mimic the stepped parapet of the facade.

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The rear (south end) of the church contains two widely spaced narrow windows, which illuminate the chancel. Between these two windows are what appear to be two windowsills without any window openings. According to oral histories, there never were any window openings above these sill-like projections.

The double-door entrance on the north side leads to a vestibule and a second set of double doors. These glazed and paneled wooden doors open into the nave with its maple floor. The choir loft, which contains an organ and a bench, is directly above the vestibule and extends the width of the church. Adjacent the vestibule is a confessional and the stairs leading to the loft. Two rows of wooden pews flank the carpeted central main aisle and allow for narrower side aisles. A stringcourse of ceramic glazed tiles encircles the nave, and frames all the doorways. The elevated platform that forms the chancel is also carpeted. The unusual ceiling, covered with acoustical tile, mimics the stepped parapet with its three heights, each level running longitudinally

Alterations

In 1994, metal ProPanel replaced the wood shingle roof, which was leaking. That same year, a local artisan, Ray Gallegos, installed the tile work that encircles the nave. Changes were made to the chancel, specifically the altar, in the 1960s to conform to Vatican II. The exterior has undergone some paint color changes with the façade bas-relief painted a deep crimson in 1987. The building returned to a paint scheme closer to the original in 1997.

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Section III**

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[church plan]

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SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENT

St. Agnes Mission Church meets State Register criterion C for its architectural significance. The building is an unusual vernacular expression of Pueblo Deco, a melding of Art Deco with Southwest Indian designs. The church possesses the distinctive characteristics of this style as evident in its angular composition, vertical emphasis, stepped parapet, corbelled cut-outs, and geometric designs.

Carla Breeze in her book *Pueblo Deco* provides background on the development of the style. By the end of the 19th century, Fred Harvey was marketing the Southwest by providing hotels for travelers along the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad lines. The Fred Harvey Company and designer Mary Colter collaborated on the first experiment in packaging the Indian and Spanish cultures of the Southwest—the 1902 Alvarado Hotel at Albuquerque’s train station. The Indian Room at the hotel was the most popular feature. It was filled with Navajo rugs, Zuni and Acoma pottery, Apache baskets, silver and turquoise jewelry, and other saleable curios that would appeal to tourists. The experiment was so successful that the company, often in conjunction with the Santa Fe Railroad, embarked on an extensive building campaign that created the Union Station in Los Angeles, El Tovar at the Grand Canyon, and El Navajo Hotel in Gallup. The 1923 opening of the El Navajo created a sensation that was reported in east coast papers, prompting an appetite for anything and everything Indian. “Designers, in the Southwest, and eventually in other regions, were influenced by the arts and architecture so flamboyantly marketed by the Fred Harvey Company” (Breeze).

As a result of the 1925 Exposition in Paris, the Art Deco movement was gaining momentum at the same time. Art Deco architecture, popular in this country between 1925 and 1940, is “characterized by linear, hard edge or angular compositions often with a vertical emphasis and highlighted with stylized decoration” (Blumenson). Hard-edged low relief ornamentation, often executed in the same material as the building, is found around door and window openings, and along the roof edges or parapet. Inspired by Art Deco’s emphasis on ethnic and geometric ornament, Pueblo Deco takes the cubist forms of pueblo architecture juxtaposed with geometric decoration inspired by Pueblo and other Native American motifs (Breeze).

The unusual designs on the façade are interpreted in a variety of ways. Some describe the façade motifs as a stylized cross forming around and above the door that is flanked by stained glass windows with surrounds reminiscent of chalices (Noel). National Park Service architectural historian Rodd Wheaton also sees a very large cross extending from the central doorway and incorporating the *choro* (choir loft window). “The form of the cross suggests almost a zia [the sun symbol, much like the one used on the New Mexico state flag] but is elongated into a Latin cross.” The trim around the flanking windows suggests a silhouette of altar candelabra. “The whole composition forms an altar with a central crucifix flanked by candelabra.” He notes that the façade is further emphasized by the use of shallow corner pilasters and a stepped gable parapet. Wheaton concludes that these features, while somewhat incorporating art deco ideas, are so simple that they just compliment the other façade elements. He classifies the façade as “a vernacular example of streamline or even early modernism.”

It is possible that the shape of the parapet and the tower cut-outs was inspired by another source. The stepped corbel or small terrace design, which represents rain clouds and often signifies good prospects, is a prominent motif used in Southwestern Indian rugs, pottery, jewelry, and basketry. The design can readily be seen in Navajo rug design, notably in Two Gray Hills, Chinle, and Ganado tapestries. The latter two rug designs originate in Arizona, while Two Gray Hills is from New Mexico. Is it possible that the designer of this building was familiar with Navajo weavings?

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Historical Background

Saguache, the county seat, is a Ute word meaning blue earth. Gold first attracted U. S. citizens to the region in 1866, but ranching and grain milling would keep the area prosperous after the mining boom died and the railroads failed to pass through Saguache, preferring the more direct route down the middle of the San Luis Valley. John Lawrence, often considered one of the founders of the town, began homesteading in 1867. Accompanying him were the Moran, Machego, Leroux, and Garcia families who would become his renters, along with other Hispano families from Taos, New Mexico. Lawrence would help the new arrivals to file a homestead and then promptly purchase it from them, thereby accumulating enough land to establish his cattle ranch. For Hispanos coming from New Mexico this arrangement was nothing new as it was similar to the arrangement worked out with the *patrones*. Hispanos were woven into the fabric of the community from the very beginning, although it left them with few options other than to remain laborers (Lecompte 1978).

The Ute presence was a source of fear to the area's residents. The Spanish settlers of the region, troubled by the natives, believed that a church might invoke the blessing of God. The first church was erected in about 1867 and was called St. Joseph's. The Jesuit priests from Conejos serviced it only once a year on the Feast of St. Joseph. Later, a new church was erected and given the title St. Ignatius. (The specific construction dates and location for these churches is not known.) By this time the Jesuits had made Del Norte the home for the resident priest. Previously Del Norte had also been served mainly from the mission in Conejos. With Jesuits living in Del Norte, masses were celebrated more frequently in Saguache.

According to public records, E. J. Jones gave the land on which St. Agnes sits to the Catholic parish in two installments—lots 1-5 in 1916 and lot 6 in 1937. These lots were located in the Jones Addition to the original town site of Saguache. The land initially remained vacant until sometime in the 1920s, when two small buildings (one from Villa Grove and the other from Cotton Creek) were relocated to Saguache and joined together to serve as a place of worship. Although it was poorly heated and too small for the congregation, this building, which is now the nearby parish hall, was used for services until the 1947 completion of the church. Regular services were held once a month by a series of priests, which included Father Ruensa, Father Quevales, Father Domingo and Father Quinn, all of whom came from Del Norte. While the idea was always to build a larger church, it would take many years for the plan to be realized. The delay was no doubt due to the lack of a full-time priest who could have helped organize fund raising and work groups.

Adobe was chosen as the building material because it had several advantages. Adobe was an energy efficient material that would be more comfortable and cheaper to maintain in the cold winters and hot summers. In addition, it was readily available. The biggest expense of adobe construction is the labor, which was to be negated by the donated labor of the parishioners.

Construction began in 1940, and the walls were completed in 1943. Oral history offers several examples of how the building of the church was an integral part of the community. The local baseball team spent part of their spring training making adobe bricks and handing them up the scaffolding to the men. All of the material—dirt, straw, timbers—were donated and then combined by the *maestro* (master craftsman) Librado Mondragon. The women supported these efforts by holding bake sales and raffles to raise money, as well as keeping the workers well fed. The stained glass windows were donated, with the donors identified at the bottom of each image. There was a pause in construction as the Second World War put a strain on the work force. The bell tower was completed in 1947. A congregation in Greeley that had recently built a bigger church donated the bell. To this day, the *majordomo* is

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responsible for ringing the bell for mass and funerals—one ring for every year the person lived.

The church was dedicated in October 1947 and the event was noted on the front page of *The Southern Colorado Register*, the official Catholic newspaper of the Diocese of Pueblo. The article called the church “a memorial tribute to seven years’ [sic] hard work on the part of the Catholics of this community” and provided the following glowing description.

The light cream-colored church building measures 29 feet by 65 feet and is constructed of adobe bricks, with stucco facing and light maple flooring. There is a 50-foot tower in the rear of the church and the front is decorated in blending colors of cream and tan. The building is a monument to the love and devotion of the people of Saguache, most of whom are of Spanish-speaking background. The people of the district did most of the labor themselves on plans designed by the Very Rev. Joseph Ruensa.... Approximately 50 men from the parish took part in the active construction of the church at various times. Because of the great amount of donated labor, the cost of the building was limited to an estimated \$15,000. Many delays in construction were experienced owing to the building conditions brought on by the war, as well as to long periods of harvest and planting when the construction workers were occupied in these tasks... With its 30,000 adobe bricks covered with stucco, St. Agnes’ church, seating 250 persons, is the outstanding church building in Saguache.

The article further noted that the Catholic Church Extension Society of Chicago gave \$2,500 for the erection of the church and the remaining money for the project “was raised in great part by the Catholic women of the community, who banded together under the name of the Catholic Social club and stage money-raising activities over a long period of years.” The dedication ceremonies included a sermon delivered in English and Spanish after the mass, which outlined the long history of the building project. During the sermon, it was announced that because of the new church, mass would be celebrated in Saguache twice a month instead of once a month as in the past.

The article explained that building was started in 1940 under the direction of Rev. Dominic Morera, the walls were completed in 1943, but that the interior finishing and roofing were not completed until 1947. The newspaper article also indicated that a Mr. Chacon headed the building committee, assisted by Librado Mondragon and Felix Lobato, and that the design was the work of Father Joseph Ruensa, who had been pastor of the Saguache parish for almost 25 years. But oral history consistently gives the credit of the building and its design to Librado Mondragon. Documentation that can shed light on this discrepancy has not been found.

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GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Lots 4-6, Block 18, Jones Addition to Town of Saguache

[site plan]

Property Name St. Agnes Mission Church

PHOTOGRAPH LOG

The following information pertains to all photographs:

Name of property: St. Agnes Mission Church

Location: Saguache, Saguache County

Photographer: Sherab Kloppenburg

Photograph Date: 27 March 2003

Location of Negative: Sherab Kloppenburg, 518-1/2 E. Louisiana Ave., Denver, CO

<u>Photo #</u>	<u>Description</u>
#1	North façade; facing S
#2	North face and east side; facing SW
#3	Southeast corner with bell tower and sacristy; facing NW
#4	South end (rear) with bell tower and sacristy; facing NW
#5	Southwest corner; facing NE
#6	West side; facing E
#7	Pilasters at corner of façade; facing W
#8	Bell tower detail; facing S
#9	Northwest corner detail; facing SW
#10	View of vestibule from nave; note tile surround; facing N
#11	View of nave, chancel and stepped ceiling; facing S
#12	West wall with stained glass window and tile stringcourse; facing SW
#13	Doors to sacristy with tile surrounds; facing E
#14	Tile work with crucifix behind altar; facing S

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Section VII**

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USGS TOPOGRAPHIC MAP
Saguache Quadrangle, Colorado
7.5 Minute Series