

2008

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

### 1. Name of Property

historic name Most Precious Blood Roman Catholic Church, Rectory, Parochial School  
other names/site number N/A

### 2. Location

street & number 2800-18 Diamond Street N/A not for publication  
city, town Philadelphia N/A vicinity  
state Pennsylvania code PA county Philadelphia code 101 zip code 19121

### 3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<u>3</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>    </u>	<u>    </u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>    </u>	<u>    </u> structures
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>    </u>	<u>    </u> objects
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>3</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:  
N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

### 4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

Brent D. Glass Brent D. Glass 12/10/91  
Signature of certifying official Date  
Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

### 5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register.  See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:)

*Entered in the National Register*

Shelene Byers 1/22/92  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION: religious structure  
church school  
church-related residence

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION: religious structure  
church-related residence

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

SPANISH COLONIAL REVIVAL

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone  
walls brick, limestone

roof ceramic tile

other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Most Precious Blood of Our Lord Roman Catholic Parish consists of three buildings, a parochial school, rectory, and a dramatically sited church at apex of the triangular site of the complex. United by the yellow-tan palette of brick and accented by color tile and limestone trim calculated to recall the origins of Christianity in the architecture of Early Christian Rome, the buildings form one of the principal architectural and social landmarks of their region.

The property acquired by the congregation occupies a truncated triangular site where the diagonal of Sedgley Street intersects the urban grid at 28th and Diamond streets. This site had remained vacant during the turn of the century residential development that followed the trolley lines north. Site development was planned at the outset by Ballinger and Perrot, the Architects, so as to reserve the prominent corner location for the church while the parish school was placed so that its south-facing windows would light the classrooms. Space on the north or Diamond Street front was to be the site for the rectory and for a convent.

First to be constructed in the spring and summer of 1908 was the building which became the parish school (Photo 2). It was initially erected as a one story and basement structure, containing an assembly hall and Sunday School in the basement and a chapel on the first floor, but with the intention of adding two additional stories when money was available, to serve as the parish school. This higher use was reflected in the elaborate entrance portico, carried on short columns and accented with brightly colored tiles that is the principal feature of the school facade (Photo 3). An early photograph (Photo 1), shows leaded glass windows in the four openings on either side of the entrance. The completion of this phase permitted the church to abandon its temporary facilities in a converted garage at 28th and Susquehanna Avenue. The color scheme of tan brick with limestone accents was contemporary in spirit while permitting the architects to explore the architectural forms of North Italy, evident in the colored tile accents, the cubic capitals and stumpy proportions of the columns framing the entrance. The plan and construction, on the other hand

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Description: (continued)

were simple and modern, reflecting the interests of the architects who were then well known for their work in industry.

Four years after the first portion of the building was completed, a second phase was undertaken in which two additional stories were added to the basement and first floor, bringing the building to its full height of three stories. The plan takes the form of a "H" with its legs paralleling the street, containing the classrooms and the central wing containing circulation and toilets. By recessing the center, the architects could assure light and air on all sides. That plan was derived from the older Pennsylvania system with coatrooms as anterooms to the classrooms, and both opening off the central hall. With six classrooms on the second floor, an auditorium on the third floor and the chapel and Sunday school uses remaining in the first floor and basement, the building housed all of the parish activities.

The construction system adapted the modern industrial material of reinforced concrete to institutional use. A flat plate, column and beam system was used with no ornamental plaster to conceal the pattern of the formwork. This is particularly apparent in the reinforced concrete stair, in the spanning bridges of the stair tower and in the upper levels of the classrooms (Photo 4). The cast iron newels and wrought iron railing are the sole relieving features of an otherwise spartan interior (Photo 5). A year after the school was completed, the parish of St. Joachim's in Frankford gave the school its half century-old bell to call the children. A campanile was erected on the west side of the school that projects through the roof and gives the school yard an old world feel. The school survives in essentially original condition save for the first floor which was altered in the 1960s at a time when the second chapel was superfluous and the changing character of the neighborhood made a school cafeteria more useful. At that time many of the windows were replaced with aluminum sash, mimicking a pattern of change occurring in the public schools of the region.

With the completion of the school and chapel, the parish met its next greatest needs with the construction of a rectory as a home and office for priests. The placement of the building had been previously determined by Ballinger and Perrot; in 1914 they were commissioned to design the rectory which they did using the yellow-tan brick and limestone trim of the school, but modified away from the industrial

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Description: (continued)

scale of the school towards the domestic in a modified Spanish Colonial style, reflecting the growing American awareness of California (Photos 6, 7, & 8). Broad overhanging eaves, sheathed in copper on the underside and broken by round headed parapets enliven the silhouette of upper levels. The roof is of cast terra-cotta shingles weathered to a purplish-red tone. The lower levels are articulated with limestone water table and sills and brick soldier courses that denote each story (Photo 8). Windows are paired to establish the broad rhythm of the facade, with nine paned sash above single pane sash typical. On the rear, towards the central yard, an arcade, carried on limestone columns, screens the south wall of the rectory (Photo 7). Its abrupt termination suggests that in the original Ballinger scheme, it was intended to link the rectory to the future church; that option was not taken when the church was constructed a decade later.

As befitted its residential purpose, the interior of the rectory is trimmed in dark varnished oak. A central hall opens through a portal that is a simplified version of that of the school; it however continues the basket capitals of north Italy as the principal accent. The front door opens into a tile trimmed vestibule, through an oak screen into a central hall flanked by two rooms on the north and one on the south (since converted into offices) on the first floor and chambers above. Although the rectory has been modernized with dropped ceilings, the fundamental character of the building survives intact.

The last building of the group to be constructed was the church which was built a decade later on the site reserved for it at the apex of the property, giving it visibility from all of the streets that approach the corner of 28th and Diamond streets (Photos 9, 10, & 11). Instead of using Ballinger and Perrot, the parish hired George Lovatt (1872-1958). Lovatt typically followed a more archaeologically exact mode which he applied to this church. The tan brick and limestone trim of the existing buildings made it appropriate to essay the early Christian architectural styles as exemplified by such Roman churches as Sta. Sabina (5th Century A.D.) and Sta. Maria in Cosmedin (10th century A.D.). Those buildings are of tan brick accented with stone trim and shaped into simple masses that denoted the aisles and nave, with a tall cylindrical apse flanked by pastophoria (the diaconicon and prothesis), (Photo 11). Lovatt's design closely followed the prototype with simple brick walls lighted by large round-headed windows infilled at the bottom by cast stone grills (Photo 10). Blue and

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Continuation Sheet**

Most Precious Blood Roman Catholic Church, Rectory, Parochial School

Section number 7 Page 4Description: (continued)

yellow tile accents the walls, recalling the color scheme first announced by the tile in the entrance to the school of nearly twenty years earlier, while the conventional animal symbols of the early church - the owl for wisdom, the pelican for supposedly feeding its own flesh to its young are used in the terra cotta capitals of the exterior. The pelican reappears in a mosaic above the entrance where it was emblematic of the name of the Church, Most Precious Blood (Photo 9).

The interior of the church is based on the simple wood trussed roofed halls of Early Christian churches. An arcade of cast stone columns carrying massive cast cubic basket capitals supports the upper walls of the nave and separates the aisles and short transepts on either side. Leaded glass windows dimly light the interior and emphasize the rich coloration of the rough stucco walls, Mercer tile floors and vari-colored marble. The floor of the sanctuary is of travertine inset with yellow and blue marbles recalling the exterior trim colors; the alter is of a richly grained deep purple toned marble. Although the interior plan has been altered by moving the pulpit forward, and by the insertion of a modern choir deck, representing the modern liturgy, the church retains its original early twentieth century golden oak pews (perhaps dating from the original Ballinger chapel of 1908) as well as the confessionals, and other church furniture. The entire complex retains a high degree of integrity.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally     statewide     locally

Applicable National Register Criteria     A     B     C     D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)     A     B     C     D     E     F     G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)  
Architecture  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance  
1908-1927  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Dates  
1908  
1914  
1927

Cultural Affiliation  
N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person  
N/A

Architect/Builder  
Ballinger & Perrot Architects, W. McShane  
Builder, Lovatt, George I., Architect

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The buildings of the Most Precious Blood Roman Catholic parish constitute one of the chief architectural landmarks that denote the maturation of the turn of the century neighborhood of North Philadelphia. That region was developed as middle class housing, connected to center city jobs by trolleys and railroads at the end of the nineteenth century and was served by modest, frequently temporary institutional buildings. In the early twentieth century, the area underwent a second round of church building that included several important landmarks including Baily and Truscott's English Renaissance St. John Chrysostom P.E. (1900) at 28th and Susquehanna streets; its great dome above its small base is prominent in the region; it is rivaled by the larger dome of B'nai Jeshuron synagogue (now Cornerstone Baptist Church) on 33rd Street above Diamond Street by New Yorker's Sugarman, Hess and Berger (1923).<sup>1</sup> The Most Precious Blood complex was the work of two of Philadelphia's premier architectural firms of the early twentieth century, Ballinger and Perrot who undertook the site planning and the first two buildings, and George I. Lovatt, who designed the church which completes the group. These are linked by the tan color and tile accents that recall Mediterranean architecture. Together,<sup>2</sup> they stand out from the sea of red-brick and brownstone houses.

Ballinger and Perrot who undertook the initial site plan and designed the school and rectory, are generally remembered for industrial architecture and for their development of a number of features of factory design including the super-span truss and the saw toothed roof that brought even illumination into mill spaces. The firm had begun as the office of Walter B. Geissinger, later Geissinger and Hales (1878-1894), changing to Hales and Ballinger with the retirement of Geissinger and the rise of Walter Ballinger to partnership. That partnership continued until 1902 when Hales retired and Emil Perrot was elevated to form the firm of Ballinger and Perrot which in 1920 became

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Significance: (continued)

the Ballinger Company.<sup>3</sup> The changing partnerships provide insight into the origins of many of the firm's commissions. With its reputation in industrial design well established, that branch of work would remain a mainstay of the company, but Ballinger brought a cluster of Methodist Church commissions (the most famous being the Methodist Home for the Aged of 1898 in Belmont, and the Mount Airy Methodist Church of 1906). Emil Perrot's association resulted in a group of Roman Catholic buildings including St. Hedwig's Church at 23rd and Wood streets (1907) the Villa Maria Academy at Frazer, PA, and Girl's Catholic High School at 19th and Wood streets (1911). Presumably because many of their clients were mill-owners in North Philadelphia, many of their churches were located in that region as well.

These commissions provide an opportunity to see the interests of the architects when they were not constrained by industrial requirements. As the Most Precious Blood School demonstrates, they remained more interested in issues of construction - broad span halls, and new construction materials than in historical design. It is those issues that are central to the character of the school building. That this was part of the intention of the school is evident in the initial reports on the building which noted that it was the "only fireproof building in the diocese."<sup>4</sup> That same point was brought up in several pieces of literature including the "History of our Parish" chapter of the 1916 publication on the Rectory campaign which described the building as "a splendid school, the only one of its kind in the diocese. Absolutely fireproof; nothing entering into the construction but brick and reinforced concrete. The latest improvements in heating and ventilation."<sup>5</sup> This was indeed an important step for until this time, parochial schools had lagged behind the public schools both in planning and in fireproof construction. Henceforth, fireproof construction would be the standard with Ballinger and Perrot designing many of the buildings. The style of the school marked another carry over from their industrial careers, for, instead of being closely based on historical forms, it showed the broad facade treatment and colorful accents of their factory work.<sup>6</sup> This is most apparent in the brick trim of the upper portion of the school facade and in the stone capped piers which evoked the Atlantic City Architecture of William Price.

George I. Lovatt, is not remembered as an innovative engineer but primarily as a church stylist whose best designs were based on histo-

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Significance: (continued)

ry. Among his early buildings of note are the Roman Baroque-style church of St. Rita's of Cascia on South Broad Street, Philadelphia, with its facade dominated by great consoles flanking the central nave in the fashion of Vignola (1907); the spectacularly sited, Roman-styled and domed Blessed Sacrament Cathedral in Altoona (1924) and the great English medieval inspired church of the Holy Christ Child on North Broad Street, Philadelphia (1929) for which he was awarded the gold Medal of the Philadelphia Chapter of the American Institute of Architects in 1930.<sup>7</sup> Lovatt had already however received international honors for the design of the Most Precious Blood Church in 1926 at the International Exhibition in Barcelona (now remembered for Mies's Barcelona Pavilion).<sup>8</sup> By comparison with such larger projects and the Altoona Cathedral and Holy Child, Most Precious Blood is modest in scale but exquisitely detailed, providing evidence of Lovatt's success in providing buildings that delighted the eye. This is apparent around the entire church; the calla lily iron grills of the apse, the brilliant color of the tile in the exterior walls, and the monumental entrance. Still, the art deco color accents, and the ornament developed out of modern cast stone suggest that Lovatt was more than just a revivalist with a clear understanding of how to reflect the present with the past. Despite its obscure location, this is one of the best examples of the work of an architect who was held in high esteem by his profession.

As an architecturally important complex of buildings that are the works of important Philadelphia architects Ballinger and Perrot and George I. Lovatt, the Most Precious Blood Catholic Church meets Criterion C for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.



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Notes:

(1)The churches of the region are covered in Clio Group, Inc., "North Philadelphia Survey" prepared for the Pennsylvania Bureau of Historic Preservation, 1985.

(2)The developmental history of the region is covered in George E. Thomas, "West Diamond Street Historic District" National Register Nomination, February, 1990.

(3)The Ballinger Company are one of the nation's most important industrial firms and remain active to the present; a brief history of their accomplishments is included in Sandra Tatman and Roger Moss, *Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1985), pp. 30-44.

(4)Rev. Joseph Kirlin, *Catholicity in Philadelphia: From the earliest missionaries down to the present time* (Philadelphia: Joseph McVey, 1909), pp. 509-510, contains the earliest mention of the parish which was Fr. Kirlin's own foundation. The parish was established in September of 1907 and began operations the following spring,

(5)*Souvenir Record of the \$20,000 Rectory Campaign, Church of the Most Precious Blood* (Philadelphia, PA, 1916), p. 27.

(6)Ballinger and Perrot were listed as the architects of the school, rectory and church of the new Most Precious Blood Parish in the *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* 22, no. 43 (23 October 1908); the rectory was reported *PRER&BG*, 29, no. 19 (13 May 1914). After the dissolution Ballinger and Perrot, Perrot evidently continued his association with the parish for he was listed as the architect of a new church, *PRER&BG* 37, no. 43 (25 October 1922). It was to be of stone with a slate roof.

(7)Lovatt's career is treated in Tatman and Moss, pp. 489-492. The *Exhibition Catalogue of the T-Square Club* (Philadelphia, 1930), includes photographs of the Holy Child Church and the citation of their award. The church was announced in the *PRER&BG* 42, no. 27, (27 June 1927).

(8)Tatman and Moss, p. 489.

9. Major Bibliographical Reference

Published Sources:

Connelly, James F., ed. The History of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Philadelphia: The Archdiocese of Philadelphia, 1976.

Donogh, Thomas. Philadelphia's Finest. A History of Education in the Catholic Archdiocese 1692-1970. Philadelphia: American Catholic Historical Society, 1972.

Exhibition Catalogue of the T-Square Club. Philadelphia, 1930.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
previously listed in the National Register
previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
Other

Specify repository:

Clio Group, Inc.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 1/2 acre

UTM References

UTM grid coordinates for Zone, Easting, and Northing.

UTM grid coordinates for Zone, Easting, and Northing.

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The Most Precious Blood Parish begins at a point 200 feet east of the west side of the intersection of 28th and Diamond streets; it continues along the south side of Diamond Street to the corner of 28th Street, then continues south along 28th Street to the intersection of

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

This is the entire site of the Most Precious Blood Roman Catholic Church, Rectory, and Parochial School.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title George E. Thomas, Ph.D.
organization Clio Group, Inc.
street & number 3512 Lancaster Avenue
city or town Philadelphia
date September 5, 1991
telephone (215) 386-6276
state PA zip code 19104

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Bibliography: (continued)

Kirlin, Rev. Joseph. *Catholicity in Philadelphia: From the earliest missionaries down to the present time.* Philadelphia: Joseph McVey, 1909.

*Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* 22, no. 43 (October 23, 1908), 29, no. 19 (May 13, 1914), 37, no. 43 (October 25, 1922), 42, no. 27 (June 27, 1927).

*Souvenir Record of the \$20,000 Rectory Campaign, Church of the Most Precious Blood.* Philadelphia, 1916.

Tatman, Sandra L. and Roger W. Moss. *Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects: 1700-1930.* Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1985.

Unpublished Sources:

Clio Group, Inc. "North Philadelphia Survey." Prepared for the Pennsylvania Bureau for Historic Preservation, Harrisburg, 1985.

Philadelphia Recorder of Deeds Office, City Hall, Broad and Market Streets, Philadelphia, PA. Deed 28 N 10 85, 86.

Piperno, Anthony. "A History of the Church of the Most Precious Blood of Our Lord, founded September 1, 1907." Typescript, May 15, 1971. St. Charles Seminary RG 102.141.2.

Thomas, George E. "West Diamond Street Historic District." National Register Nomination, February, 1990.

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Verbal Boundary: (continued)

Sedgley Street; it continues along the north side of Sedgley Street 186 feet to a point then continues north west 80 feet to a point then west 19 feet 10.5 inches to a point then continues north 214 feet 10.5 inches north to the beginning, being lots 85 and 86, plat 28 N 10 in the Philadelphia Register of Deeds office, being the entire site of the parish buildings.

Most Precious Blood Roman  
Catholic Church, Rectory,  
Parochial School  
Philadelphia Court  
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E4846 00 N4426 20

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