

# ***Saint Joseph's at Providence Creek***

Documentation Prepared for Application

## ***The National Register of Historical Places***

### **BACKGROUND ON NATIONAL REGISTER**

The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of the Nation's historic places worthy of preservation. Authorized under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, it is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect our historic and archeological resources. The National Register is administered by the National Park Service under the Secretary of the Interior.

Properties listed in the National Register include districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that are significant in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture. The National Register includes:

- all historic areas in the National Park System;
- National Historic Landmarks that have been designated by the Secretary of the Interior for their significance to all Americans; and
- properties significant to the Nation, State or community which have been nominated
- by State historic preservation offices, Federal agencies, and Tribal preservation offices, and have been approved by the National Park Service.

America's historic places embody our unique spirit, character and identity, representing important historical trends and events, reflecting the lives of significant persons, illustrating distinctive architectural engineering, and artistic design achievement, and imparting information about America's past, historic places tell compelling stories of the nation, and of the states and communities throughout the country. The National Register of Historic Places helps preserve these significant historic places by recognizing this irreplaceable heritage. Its primary goals are to foster a national preservation ethic; promote a greater appreciation of America's heritage; and increase and broaden the public's understanding and appreciation of historic places.

The National Register encourages citizens, public agencies, and private organizations to recognize and use the places of our past to create livable and viable communities for the future.

### **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

St. Joseph's Industrial School, located on Duck Creek Road near Clayton, Kent County, Delaware is being listed on the National Register of Historic Places

under criteria A and C, for its historical importance as an educational institution for young African American men during the time of segregation, and for the architectural significance of the Chapel, a sophisticated example of an Italianate style, basilica-form church, expressed in wood and built in 1896. Founded by the St. Joseph Society of the Sacred Heart of Catholic Church, the St. Joseph's Industrial School provided an opportunity for "worthy" African American boys with up to five years of industrial training, and secular and religious education beyond elementary school.

The Josephite Order of the Sacred Heart was founded with the mission of evangelizing to the African American population through education and social service. In Delaware, the Josephite Fathers, through the leadership of Father John DeRuyter, established a mission presence with a complex in Wilmington with the St. Joseph's Church (NR pending), rectory, convent and orphanage (last three non-extant), located on French Street. Beyond evangelization, these priests were concerned with the welfare of the African American community in America, and they employed strategies used by others to successfully bring their disadvantaged student population into society as self sufficient and productive members.

## **Background**

### **The St. Joseph's Society of the Sacred Heart**

A community of priests was founded in Mill Hill, England in 1866 called the St. Joseph's Society of the Sacred Heart. Their mission was to evangelize to areas outside of Europe, specifically the continent of Africa and the United States of America.<sup>1</sup> In 1871, four priests from the Mill Hill seminary came to the United States to do missionary work in the South, focusing on the Black population of former slaves. These four priests were put in charge of St. Francis Xavier's Church, in Baltimore, Maryland. Other missions focusing on evangelization to African Americans were started in Louisville, Charleston, Washington, Richmond, and Norfolk.<sup>2</sup> Founded as a society with a specific mission, the work of the Josephite Fathers progressed independently of the existing parish and diocese structure of the Catholic Church already existing in the communities where this new missionary work focusing on African Americans was being undertaken. Under the leadership of Father John R. Slattery, the American mission separated in 1892 from the English Society and established their headquarters in Baltimore as an ordered society of the Catholic Church whose member priests were entitled to use the letters S.S.J. after their names<sup>3</sup>.

The needs of the African American community were great. Many social service

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<sup>1</sup> Josephite Fathers Records. Notre Dame Archives Index.

<sup>2</sup> Ott, Michael. *St. Joseph's Society for Colored Missions*. [The Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume VIII](#). New York: Appleton Publishing Company. 1910. On-line Edition: Kevin Knight. 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Ochs, Stephen J. *Desegregating the Altar, The Josephites and the Struggle for Black Priests 1871-1960*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press. 1993, p. 84

programs previously available for the newly freed slaves ended with Radical Reconstruction and the presidency of Rutherford B. Hayes in 1877.<sup>4</sup> Direction was set for the evangelization of Blacks by the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore held in December 1884. The bishops recommended separate churches for African Americans whenever possible because of the prejudice against them in white churches. Special collections were mandated to be held every year to support the Negro and Indian Missions. A commission for Catholic Missions Among the Colored People and Indians was set up and presided over by the Archbishop of Baltimore. The establishment of churches and schools were seen as the best way to evangelize in the African American community. One other recommendation by the Third Plenary Council proved to be more controversial. It was recommended that Blacks be trained to evangelize in the African American community.

The Josephite Society was moving further than the Council in that direction. The ordination of Black priests was an early goal of the Society and seen as the best way to effect conversion in the African American community. A seminary was established in Baltimore for the ordination of priests interested in the Josephite mission, with the expectation that seminarians would include African Americans. Although Blacks were ordained, they were very few in numbers and were mostly placed in northern churches. The Josephites area of service was to be the southern United States which placed an even greater hardship on prospective Black Josephite priests. Unfortunately, the ordination of Black priests did not occur as the founding Josephite fathers foresaw. Reflecting the predominant prejudiced feelings of the time, the Catholic Hierarchy would not support Black men as seminary candidates for the priesthood.<sup>5</sup> The integration of the Catholic priesthood in general continued to be a controversial issue in the church into the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century and was part of the general African American struggle for civil rights.<sup>6</sup>

The response of the Josephite Order was to foster an educated laity, increasing the participation of African Americans in the administration of the church at the local level. Although the priests of the order are predominately white, a large contingent of seminary-educated Brothers to work among the African American population.

### **The Josephites in Delaware**

The Josephite presence in Delaware began in 1888 when the Bishop of Wilmington, Most Reverend Alfred A. Curtis, invited the Society of St. Joseph to open a mission in the city of Wilmington to evangelize to the African American population there.<sup>7</sup> Rev. John A. DeRuyter, S.S.J. (Society of St. Joseph) arrived in Wilmington in 1889 as the first pastor. The mission was set up in the

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p 51.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, pp. 89-114

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pp. 446-453.

<sup>7</sup> 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary St. Joseph's Industrial School, Clayton, Delaware. Pamphlet. 1971.

basement of St. Mary's Church at 6<sup>th</sup> and Pine Streets in the city. The needs were very great. Father DeRuyter was quoted in the April 1890 issue of St. Joseph's Advocate, a Society magazine:

A school in Wilmington is badly needed; for even the colored public schools cannot accommodate all the colored children here.

The first building constructed on their own site on French Street was a school. A convent, rectory, clinic, and orphanage followed with the church construction beginning in 1890. The orphanage drew its population from the Baltimore, Philadelphia and Washington metropolitan areas and was one of the first for African American children in the country, regardless of religious affiliation.<sup>8</sup>

Father DeRuyter also wanted to build a Catholic industrial school.<sup>9</sup> He saw the need to find constructive activity for the older boys from the orphanage who needed a structured environment as they developed into men. Around the same time, Booker T. Washington was traveling and promoting his ideas of developing a better society, healing race relations and teaching life skills, all through industrial education for African American students, as practiced at the Tuskegee Normal Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama where he was the Principal:

The chief value of industrial education is to give to the students habits of industry, thrift, economy and an idea of the dignity of labor. But in addition to this, in the present economic condition of the colored people, it is most important that a very large proportion of those trained in such institutions as this, actually spend their time at industrial occupations.<sup>10</sup>

Industrial development, coupled with religious and mental development, will bring a change in the civil and political status of the South. . . . So long as my race is submerged in poverty and ignorance, so long as with hooks of steel, will we drag down and retard the upward growth of the white man in the South. If the Negro's degradation tempts one to steal his ballot, remember that it is the one who commits the theft that is permanently injured. You owe it, not less to yourselves than to your white brethren in the South, that this load be lifted from their shoulders. Industrial training will help to do it. Strike a common interest in the affairs of life, and prejudice melts away.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ochs, Stephen J. Desegregating the Altar, The Josephites and the Struggle for Black Priests 1871-1960. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press. 1993, p. 87.

<sup>10</sup> Washington, Booker T. Nineteenth Annual Report Of The Principal Of The Tuskegee Normal And Industrial Institute, Tuskegee, Alabama. For The Year Ending May 31, 1900. Tuskegee Institute Steam Print, Tuskegee, Ala. 1900. From the Library of Congress, American Memory Project. African American Perspectives: Pamphlets from the Daniel A.P. Murray Collection, 1818-1907. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/ammemhome.html>, May 29, 2002

<sup>11</sup> An address by Booker T. Washington, prin., Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, Tuskegee, Alabama : delivered under the auspices of the Armstrong Association, Lincoln Day exercises, at the Madison Square Garden Concert Hall, New York, N.Y., February 12, 1898. From the Library of Congress, American Memory Project. African American Perspectives: Pamphlets from the Daniel A.P. Murray Collection, 1818-1907. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/ammemhome.html>, May 29, 2002

## St. Joseph's Industrial School

Father DeRuyter began promoting the idea of establishing an industrial school to his superiors, stating "We must have another institution that will make our boys, men, that will teach them the dignity of labor and create in them a spirit of industry. . . Our idea is to teach the boys a trade, to let them support or at least help to support themselves, and when they are twenty-one years of age, they can go forth among their own people and make good Christian workmen."<sup>12</sup>. The lobbying effort proved a success and the St. Joseph's Society for Colored Missions of Wilmington began acquiring the land for the St. Joseph's Industrial School in 1895. Deed records show a "Declaration of Trust" was recorded in August 1896 that noted that the "described premises were purchased with moneys belonging to and advanced by Katherine M. Drexel<sup>13</sup> for the purpose of establishing an Industrial School for Colored Children.<sup>14</sup>" According to this Declaration of Trust, this training in the "practical trades for their future livelihood and a secondary grade of schooling" was to include such subjects as the following: arithmetic, penmanship, letter writing, forms of making bills, simple forms of account, the Fifth Reader, geography, history of the United States and Constitution, Bible history, Catechism, and English Literature.<sup>15</sup>

The school opened with twenty-five students with ages ranging from 14-17, all from the St. Joseph Orphanage in Wilmington. The students were involved the creation of the physical aspects of the property. They helped build new buildings and re-established a working farm under the direction of an experienced local farmer. The existing farm house was remodeled to serve the needs of the school, first housing all functions under its roof as the complex was fleshed out, and then as a classroom building. Father DeRuyter lived long enough to set his vision for the school in motion. He died in 1896 and is buried in the cemetery outside the boundary of the nominated property.

Eventually, nine of the 400 acres of the campus were occupied by the complex of buildings associated with the educational and religious life at the campus, all laid out in a horseshoe shape around the chapel. The industrial complex was composed of a large u-shaped building with its own water tower and pump station (all non-extant). It was placed approximately 500 feet southwest of the church. A swampy area was drained and a pond created that was used by the boys for recreation. The rest of the property was developed for livestock and field crops. The farm provided the work for the majority of the students.

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<sup>12</sup> *St. Joseph's Industrial School, Clayton, Delaware. The Colored Harvest, 1898. Vol#3, P 45-46*

<sup>13</sup> Saint Katherine Drexel was a Philadelphia heiress who, in her desire to use her fortune to benefit others and to heed the calling to religious life she felt, founded the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament. Through guidance of her mentors in the religious life, she focused the efforts of her order to working with Native Americans and African Americans through the building of schools, the funding of Catholic missions for Indians in the American southwest and for the African American population in the East and South. She was made a saint of the Catholic Church in October 2000.

<sup>14</sup> Declaration of Trust, August 1, 1896. Kent County Deed Book W-7-235. Title Conveyance of lands,T-7-444.

<sup>15</sup> Excerpt from the Declaration of Trust, August 1, 1896. Kent County Deed Book W-7-235.

One of the first industries to be established on the property was a printing department. Their main product was the Society of St. Joseph's publications, *The Colored Harvest* and *St. Anthony's Monthly*. Religious statues and rosary beads were made on site by students. Traditional trades such as carpentry, painting, and plumbing were also taught.

The student population at St. Joseph's Industrial School grew quickly, from the initial class of 25 in 1895, to 70 pupils in 1902. Students came from underprivileged backgrounds in the Mid-Atlantic region, but the school was focused on providing opportunity for children with promise. Student population peaked in 1937 when there were 117 students at the school. Although predominately Catholic, non-Catholics were also admitted. The average yearly attendance throughout the school's 77 year history was 71 students annually.

Classes were taught by lay teachers as well as nuns and brothers. The Sisters of St. Francis provided the four or five nuns that lived on the campus annually. Other instructors were found in the nearby community for craft instruction and other hired help at the school.

Fire plagued the St. Joseph's Industrial School and several buildings were lost to it over time. The first rectory was burned to the ground in 1945, killing one resident priest. The education complex suffered a fire in the early 1970s that finally closed the school for good.

### **Other Functions of the Industrial School**

The first steps at establishing a Catholic church in the Smyrna/Clayton area began in the 1860s with worship in private homes conducted by a priest from New Castle. By the 1880s, the priest from Dover came to offer services twice a month at the Oddfellow's Hall. With his assistance, the former Presbyterian Church in Smyrna was purchased and it was dedicated as a Catholic Church in 1883. By the early 1920s the lack of a strong Catholic parish and a lack of priests to serve them, caused the local presiding bishop to order the church building sold to a fledgling African American congregation, Centennial Methodist Episcopal Church. At the same time, bishop ordered the priests at St. Joseph's Industrial School to serve the parish and designated St. Joseph's Chapel as the community church. The chapel served the larger community in this way until 1968 when a new St. Polycarp's Catholic Church was built.

The St. Joseph's Society used the facility in Clayton in many ways. It was a place to assign priests for short stays "In Residence." These transfers typically ranged from a couple of months to a year. St. Joseph's was used as a retirement home for elderly priests. This function is reflected in the new Administration Building and Rectory (1951) built by Gadreau and Gadreau, an architectural firm in Baltimore. While the school only had two or three priests

involved in running the school, there are simple dormitory facilities for several times that number in this building.

In 1943, several members of the staff from Clayton were transferred to the Epiphany Apostolic College in Newburgh, New York, the new training center for those becoming Josephite Brothers. The first step for the new postulants was an assignment to St. Joseph's Industrial School in Clayton, Delaware to try out the religious life. Most of these postulants went on to the college in New York but some left the society all together. In 1960 St. Michael's Hall was completed with simple dormitory style rooms for approximately 30 residents. A major part of the new St. Michael's Hall was the private chapel space. This small but complete chapel was highly detailed with stained glass windows depicting St. Joseph and St. Michael. The paneled interior included a confessional, a dais for the altar and a small balcony.

### **Closing of the Industrial School**

Enrollment in the school began to decline in the 1940s but increased again into the 1950s and 1960s. As the society began to racially integrate, more educational opportunities were available to the potential student pool of applicants. The school was closed by the Josephite Society in 1972 who then established the St. Joseph Center for Prayer at the facility in 1973. The complex was open to community groups into the late 1990s when a community group was formed to purchase the complex from the Josephite Society, rehabilitate the existing buildings, including the school complex, to house a new school. The St. Joseph's Project Foundation succeeded in purchasing the property from the Josephite Society in March 2002 and has secured a charter school to rehabilitate and occupy the school buildings. St. Joseph's Industrial School is taking on a new life.

### **Architectural Significance of the Chapel**

The chapel at the St. Joseph's Industrial School is architecturally significant at the state level. Its sophisticated basilica form Italianate design compares with the finest, most elaborate expressions of church architecture in the state. The insular nature of the Industrial School and the vision of European-born Father John DeRuyter combined to create an unexpectedly distinctive and elaborate architectural work in rural Clayton, Delaware. Although further research in the archival collections of the Josephite Fathers will undoubtedly uncover the designer of this highly detailed yet small in scale church, the architect is not known at this time. Church histories of the property indicate it was built under the direction of Father John DeRuyter with the first students at the school assisting with its construction.

In comparison to other church architecture in Delaware, this building is particularly striking. In general, vernacular architecture defines the Delaware

architectural patrimony. Church buildings are generally no exception to that rule. Delaware was one of the first footholds for Methodism in the United States. Barrett's Chapel (NR 1972) in Frederica, Kent County, Delaware was built in the 1780s and is one of the earliest Methodist Church buildings still standing in the country. The rural landscape is dotted with small, vernacular Methodist chapels donated and maintained by individual families. Usually constructed in wood, but sometimes in brick, typical examples of this building type are Todd's Chapel (NR 1998) in Mispillion Hundred in Kent County and Thomas' Chapel (NR 1994) in West Dover Hundred, also in Kent County. Church buildings in towns tend to be somewhat more elaborate and larger in scale than the rural chapels. The 1899 restrained Gothic Revival style Woodside Methodist Episcopal Church (NR 1996) in Kent County is a typical example of this type.

Historically, Wilmington was the center of Catholicism in Delaware being home to the large immigrant populations that came to the area in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Large and impressive churches were built for parishes that served specific ethnic communities. These churches are architecturally impressive with direct European precedents for their designs. Some of these include: St. Anthony's Roman Catholic Church (NR1986), St. Hedwig's Roman Catholic Church (NR 1982), and St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception Church (NR 1976).