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# National Register Nomination for St. James the Greater Catholic Mission

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National Register Nomination for
St. James the Greater Catholic Mission

By

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# Abstract

St. James the Greater Catholic Mission constitutes a rare and possibly unique site on the American landscape. Comprising a church, a schoolhouse, and a cemetery, the mission parish serves the rural black community south of Walterboro, South Carolina. Black Catholics in rural America are a rarity unto themselves, but the St. James blacks are particularly extraordinary. Parishioners today trace their roots to ancestors who were slaves of Irish Catholic planters in the 1820s and 1830s. Originally biracial, the parish evolved into a predominantly black congregation by the middle of the nineteenth century. The early white heritage exists quietly on today in the parish cemetery: the sarcophagus of James McKain, born in Derry, Ireland and deceased in Colleton County, South Carolina in 1835, stands surrounded by nineteenth-century African-American graves.

St. James School introduced Catholic parochial education to South Carolina's rural blacks. The two-story schoolhouse that stands today served for many years as a lone "bright spot in the darkness" for black Catholic education

in the state.[1] Constructed with donations from the Catholic nun and philanthropist Katharine Drexel, the school operated from 1901 to 1960, when integration brought about the consolidation and closing of black schools across the South.

St. James Church lies east of the schoolhouse and completes this exceptional, compact little Catholic campus. A northern white couple, Mr. and Mrs. Edwin H. Denby, funded the building of the church in 1935. The shingled, Gothic-styled edifice is emblematic of the style of the distinguished architect who designed it, Catholic priest Michael McInerney. Together, the schoolhouse and church give material expression to the black St. James community, as well as to the whites who, acting out of a sense of Catholic fellowship, gave generously to the poor African-American parish of whom they knew little but that they shared the same faith. This white philanthropy supplemented the remarkable steadfastness and perseverance of the St. James blacks, helping the mission to survive and thrive for over a century.

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[1] Commission for the Catholic Missions among the Colored People and the Indians, "Charleston," *Mission Work among the Negroes and Indians*, 1892, folder 11, St. James the Greater Parish File Box, Diocese of Charleston Archives, Charleston, SC.

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# Chapter 1

# Introduction

**1.1 A Nomination for the National Register of Historic Places**

I have composed this thesis concurrently with a nomination for the National

Register of Historic Places (NRHP), which is a project still in progress. The

NRHP nomination is a federal government form that requires technical

descriptions and specific kinds of formatting. In converting the nomination

content into a traditionally-styled thesis, I have divided the material into

chapters that I believe will best retain the technical information as well as present

a logically sequenced narrative.

The written portion of the NRHP form contains two main sections: section

seven, the narrative description, and section eight, the statement of significance.

The narrative description is the more technical part of the document, consisting

of thorough architectural descriptions of all buildings, structures, sites, and

objects. The narrative description from the nomination constitutes chapter two of

this thesis. Chapter two includes four subtitles. Three of these correspond to the

three resources on the site that contribute as historically significant to the

National Register. The fourth subtitle of chapter two describes the remaining

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four resources on the property that are, in National Register terminology, "noncontributing."

The statement of significance in the NRHP form demonstrates the "thesis" of the nomination. This section explains why the property is historically significant at the local, state, or national level, and in which areas of historical study it is significant. I argue that St. James is significant for the NRHP under two criteria—as representative of a broad pattern of history (Criteria "A"), and architecturally (Criteria "C"). Chapter three covers St. James' significance under broad patterns of history, and is subdivided into the three areas in which the property merits recognition: Religion, Black Ethnic Heritage, and Education. Chapter four explains the architectural significance of St. James. I have subdivided chapter four into two sections, the first explaining the architectural significance of St. James Church, and the second the architectural significance of St. James School.

Finally, I have incorporated some of the historic photographs that accompany the NRHP nomination form and help to demonstrate the property's historic and architectural importance. I have also taken the liberty of adding to this thesis images of people, maps, and drawings that I am not inserting into the NRHP form, which is primarily concerned with photographs and maps that illustrate the physical appearance and location of buildings, structures, and sites.

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Most of these images I have placed at the end of chapters where I believe they are most relevant and best illustrate the text. The remainder are organized for the reader's reference in Appendices A (Images) and B (Maps) at the end.

## 1.2 A Black Catholic Parish in the Lowcountry

In 1831, Irish Catholics near Ritter, South Carolina organized one of the first Catholic parishes in the state. Two years later, in 1833, they built a church and established a cemetery, and dedicated the parish to St. James the Greater. St. James soon became a black majority, with slaves outnumbering their white masters. When the first church burned in 1856, the white population dispersed and celebrated mass and sacraments at the Catholic church in nearby Walterboro or in their own homes. The Civil War caused further scattering and dissolution of St. James' white parish core. However, the African Americans of St. James clung to the original site of their faith during and after the war, building their homes and grounding their community around the sandy cemetery that was home to the graves of their parents, grandparents, and former masters.

The Diocese of Charleston lost sight of St. James after the first church burned down and the initial dispersal of the parish occurred. In 1892, missionary priest Fr. Daniel Berberich arrived and re-established the parish in the Diocese. Under Berberich's direction, the blacks of St. James erected a second church and began a school. The two-story schoolhouse that stands today is one of the oldest

extant African-American schools in South Carolina. Under Berberich's pastoral tenure, St. James the Greater Mission flourished, annually sending up to eighty students through the school, and bursting the seams of their small chapel.

In 1935, in the midst of the Great Depression, St. James parishioners replaced their diminutive, weather-beaten chapel with their third church, a Gothic Revival-styled building designed by the most prominent Catholic architect in the South during the first half of the twentieth century, Fr. Michael McInerney of Belmont Abbey College in North Carolina. Flanked on the west by the schoolhouse and on the north by the original parish cemetery, St. James the Greater Church remains testament today to the perseverance and ingenuity of a band of rurally isolated, financially straitened, and socially marginalized Americans. The site of St. James the Greater Mission speaks to the unique power that a place can hold—as architecture or as land—in sustaining a sense of identity and culture.

## Chapter 2

## Architectural Descriptions

St. James the Greater Mission is located at 3087 Ritter Road, in an unincorporated area called "Catholic Hill," twelve miles south of the city of Walterboro. The mission property comprises a church building, a schoolhouse, and a cemetery, all adjoining on a single parcel less than an acre in size. The property is situated on a lowland island that stretches one-and-a-half miles at its longest dimension. The irregular shape of this island resembles a downwards "V" that sits at a slightly higher elevation than the surrounding swampland (Figure 2.1). [2] The church property rests at one of the high points of this swamp island, which may be the logic behind the appellation "Catholic Hill," which evolved from the earlier name "Catholic Crossroads."[3]

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[2] United States Army Corp of Engineers, *Geological Survey: Walterboro Quadrangle*, 1917-1918, reprinted 1942; map, University of South Carolina Digital Collections: Topographical Maps of South Carolina 1888-1975 (accessed online January 2015).

[3] The name Catholic Hill is the most recent in a series of appellations for the settlement around St. James that has included Collin's Crossroads and Thompson's Crossroads (used interchangeably during the antebellum period), and Catholic Crossroads (used from about 1890 to the 1930s). Between the late 1850s and the late 1880s, there is sparse allusion to the St. James blacks, and those occasions that do occur use the names of nearby villages such as Ritter or Green Pond to identify the community.

Pine and cedar trees surround the perimeter of the property, and the interior contains live oak and magnolia trees, most of which stand in the cemetery. Florida anise shrubs line the side elevations of the church, as well as front some of the property on Ritter Road. The soil of this Lowcountry swamp island is typically sandy and shallow, and not very amenable to profitable agriculture. Historically, rice was a staple crop for much of Colleton County and supported the plantations of St. James' first white parishioners. Today, rice cultivation is rare among the local agricultural operations. Farmers in the region grow cotton, soybeans, and corn. The richest natural and economical resource in the vicinity of Catholic Hill and Walterboro is lumber, produced from the abundant forests of pine and cedar trees.

The three resources that contribute to the National Register are St. James Church, School, and Cemetery (Figure 2.2). St. James Church, built in 1935, is a vernacular building that most closely adheres to the Gothic Revival style. Facing south onto Ritter Road, the church is of wooden-frame construction and rests on a brick foundation. It is sided in wooden shingles and contains a central steeple with an open bell tower and a louvered lantern. The church is one story tall, three bays wide, and six bays deep. It possesses an original rear wing extending off of the west elevation, which houses the sacristy and an office. Parishioners

added a front porch and a handicap ramp in 1999, but the basic floorplan and massing of the church are unchanged since its original construction.

The contributing schoolhouse is located west of the church and also faces south. Built in 1901, the historic portion of the schoolhouse is a vernacular, wooden-frame I-house constructed with weatherboard siding. There is an original enclosed front porch covering the entryway, as well as a modern wing added in 2011 to the north (rear) elevation. Despite the partial removal of the north wall of the schoolhouse for the purpose of attaching the 2011 wing, the form and footprint of the original schoolhouse remain otherwise intact and visible. Other alterations such as the replacement roof and doors have been made in sympathy with the era and style of the building. Finally, interior changes to the schoolhouse, including a removed staircase, the addition of wall partitions, and replacement floors were likewise sensitive to the historic materials and do not detract from the integrity of the building.

The parish cemetery covers the north and west portions of the property. The cemetery contains burial sites from 1835 through the twenty-first century, and is still in active use. Gravestones mark the burial sites of some of Catholic Hill's first white Irish settlers, as well as African Americans who were born into slavery. The church, schoolhouse, and cemetery are all still in use by St. James the Greater Parish.

In addition to these three contributing resources, there are four noncontributing resources (that is, considered not historically significant for the National Register) located on the property. Two utility sheds and one restroom facility building stand east of the church along Catholic Hill Road.[4] A brick patio shrine lies near the center of the property between the schoolhouse and the church.

## 2.1 St. James the Greater Church (1935)

St. James the Greater Church is a wooden frame, wooden shingled, vernacular Gothic Revival building. It stands one story tall, six bays deep, and three bays wide, with a west wing attached to the west elevation at the north end of the building (Figures 2.3 and 2.4). The church rests on a solid brick foundation and faces south onto Ritter Road. Originally, the foundation consisted of brick piers filled in with brick latticework. The overall footprint of the building is an L-shape, with the rear wing extending out from the main block at the northwest corner. The rear west wing is three bays wide and two bays deep, and contains a small porch entrance on the north elevation. The north elevation of the wing does not align flush with the north elevation of the main block, lying about four feet shallow. The church is front-gabled with a central steeple and an elevated front porch entrance covered with a gabled roof. The original squared-butted,

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[4] Catholic Hill Road alternately goes by the name "Clover Hill Road" as well as its technical state designation, "S-15-436."

cedar shake shingles cover all elevations of the building. Originally brown-stained, they have been painted red since the late 1950s. The windows are symmetrically arranged on the façade and on each side elevation. The north (rear) elevation of the main block is gabled and contains no windows. The roof, originally constructed of red-stained cedar shingles overlying a sheathing of yellow pine, is now black asphalt shingle. An iron fence borders the triangular-shaped church property along its southern perimeter on Ritter Road and along the northeast perimeter on Catholic Hill Road.

The Gothic Revival elements of the church include its pointed arch entryway, as well as the rectangular, central steeple that nods to the multistage Gothic tower form with its vertical trim courses and flared wall. The steeple features a louvered lantern and an open belfry. A galvanized iron cross, of dimension roughly two feet wide by three-and-a-half feet tall, stands at the peak of the four-sided spire. The steeple protrudes slightly out from the façade, forming the front vestibule. The front steps of the building were expanded in number and size in 1999, and are constructed of concrete and brick. The front porch connects to a brick and concrete handicap ramp that runs partway along the east elevation of the building. There is an iron balustrade installed on both sides of the ramp and on both sides of the front steps. A gabled roof of asphalt shingles, supported by two square wooden posts, covers the front porch. The

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parish most likely added the porch addition at the same time as the modern stair and ramp, in 1999. A cross stands at the peak of the gabled porch roof. The porch roof is an extension of the original gabled roof that framed the front doors and extended only about two feet out from the wall. The wooden beadboard ceiling of the porch forms a pointed Gothic arch that frames the shape of the original transom over the front doors. The transom consists of four yellow frosted window panels that together form the pointed arch. The paired front doors, which are not original, are three-by-five paneled wood. The original doors were white pine, paneled two-by-two, and contained window panes across the top to match the transom. The front doors open into the church vestibule.

Though the windows themselves are replacements, all of the original window openings on the church are present and remain unaltered in size and shape. Originally, the two glass windows on the façade were rectangular casement windows covered in galvanized wire protectors fastened to the frames. Today, these two windows contain replacement glass and feature Gothic-arched wooden panels that are painted white and ornamented with a cut-out cross in the center. The panels are mounted on decorative ironwork frames, which suspend the wooden panels out from the wall a space of about two inches. The window panels are not original, and date from after 1970. The windows on the east and west elevations of the church are non-original, rectangular, and double-

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sash, each sash containing two vertically-aligned panels of frosted glass. The windows contain metal strip muntins and retain their original pine sills and lintels. The two windows on the west elevation of the rear west wing are of a slightly shorter and wider dimension than all of the other windows on the building. There are no windows on the north elevation of the main block.

In addition to the main front entrance, there are three doors located on the west wing. Concrete steps with an iron balustrade lead to the recessed, Gothic-arched doorway on the south elevation of the west wing (Figure 2.5). The door, which grants access to the sacristy, is wooden, five-paneled, and has a three-paneled, rectangular transom window overhead. Three concrete steps provide access to a rear porch entry on the north elevation of the west wing. The door at this north porch entry is also five-paneled, wooden, and painted white, and contains no transom. It opens into the priest's room, located adjacent to the sacristy on the west side. Situated perpendicularly to this door on the same porch, the third door on the west annex provides access to the historic (and still operative) privy. Originally, there was most likely no plumbing installed at the church, though electricity has always been present in the building.[5] The privy door is also five-paneled, but is narrower, only about two-thirds the width of the other two west wing doors. These two rear doors both open outwards onto the

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[5] The architect's original drawings of St. James Church include a "chemical closet" attached to the privy, indicating an alternative method for disposing waste and odors.

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rear porch, which is sheltered under the extended roof of the wing and supported by a pillar. A wooden balustrade runs along the north side of the porch (Figure 2.6).

The church has two chimneys, both capped and both on the west wing, one located at the juncture with the main block, and one exterior chimney located on the west elevation of the wing.  The original copper flashing is still in place, supplemented by a putty applied to seal exposed areas where the flashing is failing.  The soffit and all the trim on the building are painted white, in keeping with their historic color. There were originally gutters and downspouts installed around the church building, and though the metal gutter hangers remain attached under the eaves of the side and rear elevations, gutters and downspouts are no longer present.

The interior floor plan of the church is unchanged since its construction in 1935. The small front vestibule opens into the nave through the original swinging doors, which are wood-paneled with a stained glass square covering the top third of each door. The nave consists of a rectangular, basilica-style plan with the central aisle flanked by two rows of pews oriented towards the apse situated at the north end.  Originally designed to accommodate 150 persons in twenty-six pews, the church today has twenty-three pews, each ten-and-a-half feet long. Exposed scissor timber trusses secured with cast iron bolts support the ceiling

(Figure 2.7). The beams measure six-by-eight feet and are stained brown with chamfered edges painted gold. The walls are the original coarse sand-finished plaster, and on each side of the nave there are five unadorned windows with frosted glass set in recessed yellow pine frames. Wooden panel paintings depicting the fourteen Stations of the Cross rest in shallow niches along the west and east walls, interspersed among the windows. Below each station hangs a small wooden cross with gold paint indicating the station number in roman numerals (Figure 2.8). There are two windows located in the apse, one on the west wall and one on the east wall, both containing a pair of functional louvered shutters.  In the back of the church, at the south end, two Gothic-arched niches flank the vestibule doors. One niche houses a statue, and the other a kneeler, a piano, and other miscellaneous items. A third niche of the same size and shape is located on the west wall near the front of the nave, and contains the baptismal font. This niche occupies the space that originally was enclosed and housed the building's furnace. Two smaller niches flank the apse, each containing a statue. A large, Gothic-arched partition demarcates the apse from the nave. The floor of the apse is tiered, rising towards the north apse wall. The first (lowest) tier contains the pulpit, the second tier the altar and the episcopal chair, and the third tier the tabernacle.  On the wall behind the tabernacle hangs an altarpiece (8'5"

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by 7′ 6 ½″) depicting St. Peter Claver ministering to African slaves in Cartagena, signed by the Czech painter Emanuel Dite in 1894.

The one major alteration in the appearance of the nave is the addition of carpeting. Carpet covers the central aisle; the tiered floor of the apse; most of the baseboard around the interior; the east and west walls in Gothic-arched cutouts in the baptismal font niche (west) and behind the choir piano (east); and the south (rear) wall in both niches. The carpet dates to the 1970s and is evidence of modernizing post-Vatican II influences upon church designs and furnishing.[6] The original yellow pine wood floors are still visible beneath the wooden pews and kneelers, which are also yellow pine (Figure 2.9).

A five-paneled wooden door on the west side of the apse grants access to the west wing, which contains the sacristy and the office or "priest's room." The walls and ceilings of both rooms are the original plaster with a coarse sand finish. The sacristy includes a modern sink and a window on the north wall. A five-paneled wooden door provides exterior access on the south side. The sacristy originally contained a closet that housed the original furnace, which was

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[6] In its *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*), The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) encouraged ecclesiastical architecture and design that would encourage lay participation and make the liturgy more accessible and more communal in character. Though the document established no explicit guidelines for designing churches, many Catholics interpreted it as accommodating to more modern design principles, such as open circular spaces, abstracted forms and ornament, and popular contemporary materials like carpet and vinyl. For more on this, see Denis McNamara, *Catholic Church Architecture and the Spirit of the Liturgy* (Chicago: Hillenbrand Books, 2009).

probably a wood-burning heater. Underground ducts and wall vents facilitated forced air circulation. Today, the heater closet is no longer intact, and a recessed niche on the west wall of the nave has taken its place. An open doorway leads directly from the sacristy into the western-most room of the building, which is the priest's room. Used now as office space and for confessions, the priest's room originally accommodated travelling missionary priests during their overnight visits to St. James.[7] The west wall of the room contains a brick fireplace with a decorative brass hearth and a simple, unadorned wooden mantel. The fireplace provided separate heating from the central furnace system warming the rest of the building. Two windows on the west wall flank the fireplace. A five-paneled wooden door on the north wall of the priest's room provides access to the outside. Antique furnishings, mostly of wood and brass, decorate both the sacristy and office rooms. Both rooms are carpeted and have baseboard heating. A memorial plaque mounted on the brick fireplace header notes that the priest's room underwent refurbishing in 1976.

The few major changes made to St. James Church since its construction in 1935 consist of the east handicap ramp, the asphalt shingle roof, and the raised front porch entrance and extended porch roof. These additions are unobtrusive

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[7] "History of St. James," St. Mary's Church, Aiken, 1976, folder 9 "Files Re History of St. James the Greater Mission from Archives at St. Elizabeth's Convent, Cornwells Heights, Pa." St. James the Greater Parish File Box, Diocese of Charleston Archives.

to the building's original form and composition. The church still retains its distinctive cedar shake siding and vernacular Gothic style, reflecting church architectural trends of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly as expressed in the rural South.

**2.2 St. James the Greater Schoolhouse (1901)**

St. James the Greater Schoolhouse sits directly west of the church and also faces south onto Ritter Road (Figure 2.10). The original portion of the building is an I-house, five bays wide and two bays deep. A wing added in 2011 extends at a perpendicular angle from the rear (north) elevation of the historic I-house. The house is side-gabled with a metal seam roof. The siding on the building is the original weatherboard, which was originally painted white but since the late 1950s has been painted red. The foundation was originally masonry piers, and was filled in with concrete after the 1950s. There was originally one chimney located on the rear wall of the I-house. At an unknown point in the building's history, the fireplace was bricked over, and the chimney was removed.

Windows are the original six-over-six sash and are symmetrically arranged on all elevations. There are four windows on each side elevation, two on each story; nine windows on the façade, five on the second story and four on the first story; and two windows on the rear (north) elevation of the historic block, both on the second story. The I-house originally possessed five windows

on the rear elevation, as well as paired six-paneled wooden doors. After the 1950s, an iron fire escape stairway provided outdoor access at the rear of the building from the second story central bay, where a door replaced the original window opening. The addition of the 2011 wing resulted in the removal of the second story fire escape door and the first story windows and doors (Figure 2.11). The front entryway to the schoolhouse is an enclosed porch with a front-gabled, metal seam roof. A three-step concrete stair provides access to the porch entry.  For a brief period of time, an additional entrance to the building was located at the south corner of the west elevation. Probably inserted in the mid-1950s, this side door and its concrete stair were removed and replaced with weatherboard siding just a few years later.

When constructed in 1901, the schoolhouse contained a wooden shingled roof. The original main roofline featured a central clipped gable with a rectangular gable vent (Figure 2.12). Remodeling in the 1950s resulted in a new metal sheet roof that required the removal of the central clipped gable. The main façade roofline became newly uninterrupted, as it remains today (Figure 2.13). Roof replacements have occurred at least twice since the installment of the 1950s metal sheet; once with a composite shingle, and most recently in 2011 with the current metal seam roof. Circa 1960, the parish installed metal awnings over all of the windows on the façade and side elevations.

The rear 2011 wing is a rectangular, front-gabled form, consciously matching the north elevation of St. James Church to the east. There are two shorter wings attached on either side, each with its own shed roof. The wing is five bays deep and three bays wide, but nearly covers the full (five-bay) width of the historic I-house portion. The modern wing has weatherboard siding and metal seam roofs to match the materials of the historic block.

The interior of St. James School has been altered with the 2011 addition, but the shape and volume remain essentially the same. There are two full floors in the building, and originally each floor consisted of one undivided room. Floors are replacement wood, and the ceiling and walls are a mix of original and replacement pine wood. The original front entrance vestibule is located on the first floor, facing south. The vestibule is an enclosed, rectangular space that protrudes outwards from the south wall. Square wooden columns support the ceilings on each floor.

In the 1970s, wooden paneling was applied over the beadboard on the first floor interior walls. Around this time, metal supports were installed to reinforce the wooden columns on the second floor, and linoleum tiles were laid over the wooden floors.

During the 2011 alterations, the 1970s-era additions—wooden wall paneling, linoleum tiles, and metal supports—were removed. The original

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wooden floors were replaced in-kind, and the beadboard walls were largely preserved, replaced in locations where the historic wood was failing. The 2011 project also removed the original stairway located on the far west side of the building to allow for more space on the first and second floors (a staircase in the new rear addition now grants access between the floors) (Figure 2.14). The original ceilings remain intact and unchanged, except where new beadboard fills in the original stair opening. In-kind square wooden support columns have replaced several of the historic support columns (Figure 2.15). Wall partitions now divide the upper floor into three rooms and a hallway (Figure 2.16).

## 2.3 St. James the Greater Cemetery (1835)

St. James the Greater Cemetery lies on the north and west portions of the property, abutting the schoolhouse on the west and north sides of the building and the church on its north side. A wire fence borders the cemetery on the north and west edges. St. James Cemetery covers approximately half an acre of the property grounds. Burial plots lie in long rows that join near the property's northwest corner to form an ell-shape. Grave markers in the north arm of the ell constitute the majority of cemetery plots and face south, towards the buildings (Figure 2.17). The remaining grave markers are located on the far west side of the property, and face east, also towards the buildings. Vertical rectangular and cross-shaped headstones mark the majority of grave sites in the cemetery and

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bear inscribed names, dates, and epitaphs. Horizontal slabs of stone or brick also mark many of the graves, identifying the deceased with either a stone inscription or with metal plates. There are several family plots bordered by low brick or concrete walls (Figure 2.18). Nothing in the arrangement or design of gravestones specifically denotes African-American burial customs, which could indicate either the historic adaptation of Anglo-Catholic practices or simply that such signs have been lost to time and nature.

However, like many other African Americans in the South Carolina Lowcountry during the nineteenth century (and earlier), the St. James blacks may have particularly appreciated the wet, lush quality of their graveyard grounds. Spiritual traditions that originated with West African slaves arriving on Carolina shores in the eighteenth and nineteenth century held that bodies of water were especially communicative of the spirit world and afterlife.[8] Close to bay inlets, surrounded by swamp area, and shrouded by oaks, magnolias, cedars, Spanish moss, and brush, St. James Cemetery would have seemed to black parishioners a spiritually potent place to lay loved ones to rest (Figure 2.19).

Though like most African-American cemeteries in its association with a church community, many of which were established independently of whites after the Civil War, St. James Cemetery is unusual among black church

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[8] Roberta Hughes Wright and Wilbur B. Hughes III, *Lay Down Body: Living History in African American Cemeteries* (Detroit: Visible Ink Press, 1996).

graveyards in the South for its Catholic identity and biracial composition. Burial plots on Catholic Hill represent a mixture of white and African-American deceased parishioners of St. James the Greater Mission. The oldest gravestone standing in St. James Cemetery belongs to James McKain, a founding Irish-American member of St. James parish who was born in Ireland and died in Colleton County, South Carolina in 1835. McKain's grave lies in the lone stone sarcophagus in the cemetery, a tomb approximately three feet high, five feet long, and two feet wide (Figure 2.20). The sarcophagus lies outside the main cemetery perimeter, and directly adjacent to the west wall of the schoolhouse. Parish tradition holds that during the nineteenth century, the blacks of St. James built their homes and, in 1901, their schoolhouse, over some of the early parish graves. The location of McKain's grave site supports this account. The oldest African-American grave in the cemetery belongs to Diana Bolen, who was born into slavery in 1806, and died a free woman in 1899 (Figure 2.21). With the exception of McKain, whose sarcophagus is situated at the southwest corner of the schoolhouse, the oldest graves of the cemetery lie in the northeastern segment of the property, and face southward. Twenty-first century and late-twentieth-century graves lie on the western half of the property and face east. The cemetery remains in active use today.

## 2.4 Noncontributing Resources

The noncontributing utility shed 1 is located east of the church, at the edge of the property that lies along Catholic Hill Road (State Rd S-15-436). The shed is a rectangular form with a front-gabled roof. The exterior is cinderblock and the roof is composite shingle. Dimensions are approximately ten feet high by eight feet wide and eight feet deep. There is a door on the west elevation of the building.  Utility shed 1 dates to post-1960.

The noncontributing utility shed 2 is located north of the church and adjacent to the outhouse building on the north side, at the edge of the property that lies along Catholic Hill Road. It is a rectangular form with a front-gabled roof.  The exterior and the roof are corrugated metal. Dimensions are approximately twelve feet high by eight feet wide and twelve feet deep. There are paired metal doors on the south elevation. There is a one-over-one sash window on both side elevations. Utility shed 2 dates to post-1960.

The noncontributing outhouse is located north of the church and adjacent to utility shed 2 on the south side, at the edge of the property that lies along Catholic Hill Road. It is a rectangular form with a side-gabled roof. The exterior is cinderblock and the roof is composite shingle. Dimensions are approximately twelve feet high by twelve feet wide and eight feet deep. The building contains two restrooms accessed by separate doors both located on the south elevation.

The doors are wood-paneled and covered by iron grates. Plumbing is installed, and there is a water fountain standing at the north corner of the building. There is no specific construction date documented for the outhouse, but it may date to as early as the late 1950s or 1960.

The noncontributing shrine patio is located southwest of the church and east of the schoolhouse, and faces south onto Ritter Road. The structure is a square brick patio approximately ten feet wide by ten feet long. At the center of the patio stands a square brick pedestal, on which stands a statue of the Virgin Mary. Mounted on the pedestal is a plaque entitled "1826-1976: 150 Years of Faith at St. James Church." An iron fence encircles the brick patio, with an entrance gate located on the south side. The Marian patio shrine was constructed in 1976.

**2.5 Conclusion**

Of the seven resources situated on the St. James the Greater Mission property, three contribute to the National Register as historically significant: the church, the schoolhouse, and the cemetery. These two buildings and one site are the oldest extant resources on the property, and are essentially intact in design and structure. Together, they give authentic material expression to the 180-plus year history of a unique South Carolina community.

Figure 2.1 Geological map of Catholic Hill in 1918, showing its relative elevation above the surrounding swampland. (Photo courtesy of University of South Carolina Digital Map Collections.)
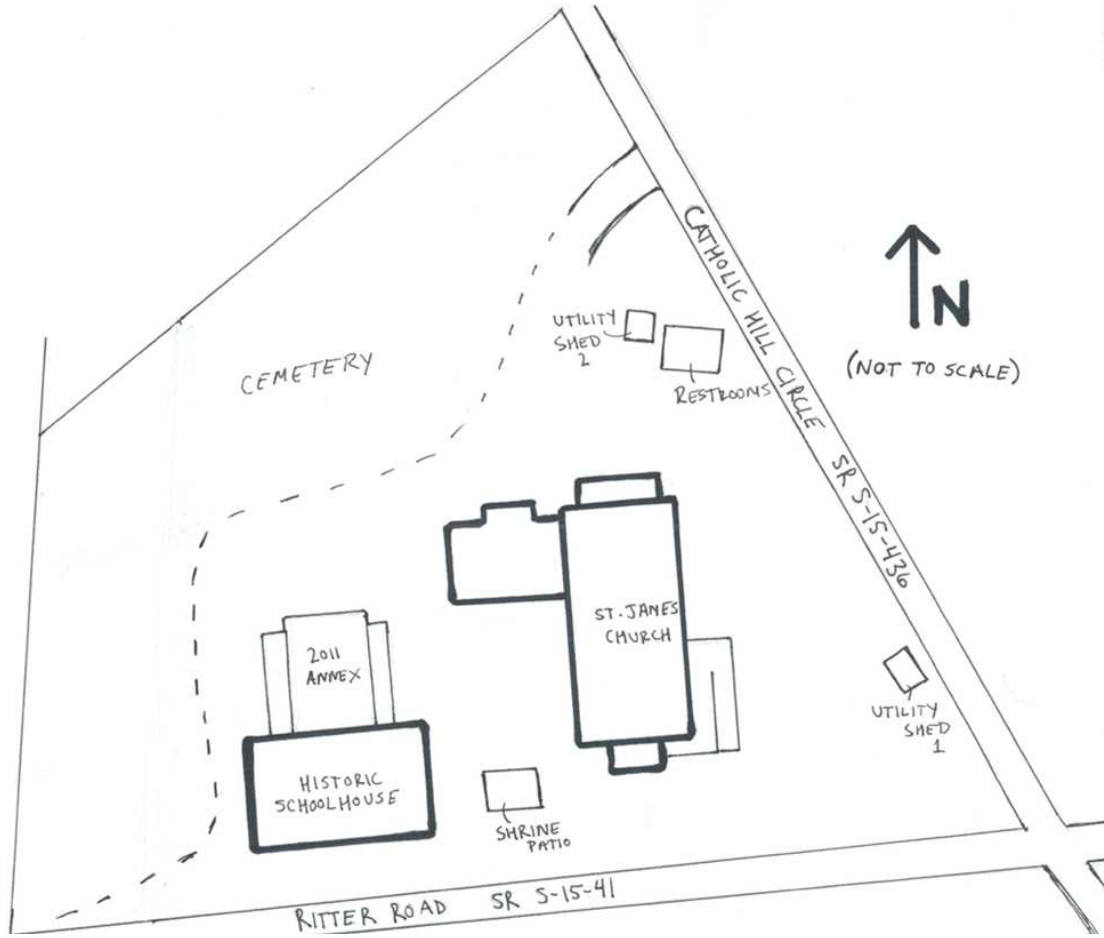
Figure 2.2 Sketch map of St. James the Greater, Colleton County, South Carolina. Drawn by the author.

Figure 2.3 (left) Façade of St. James the Greater Church. Figure 2.4 (right) West elevation of St. James Church, showing rear west wing. (Photos by the author.)





Figure 2.5 (left) Recessed Gothic doorway on south elevation of the west wing of St. James Church. Figure 2.6 (right) North (rear) elevation of St. James Church. (Photos by the author.)

Figure 2.7 Church interior, view north towards the apse. (Photo by the author.)
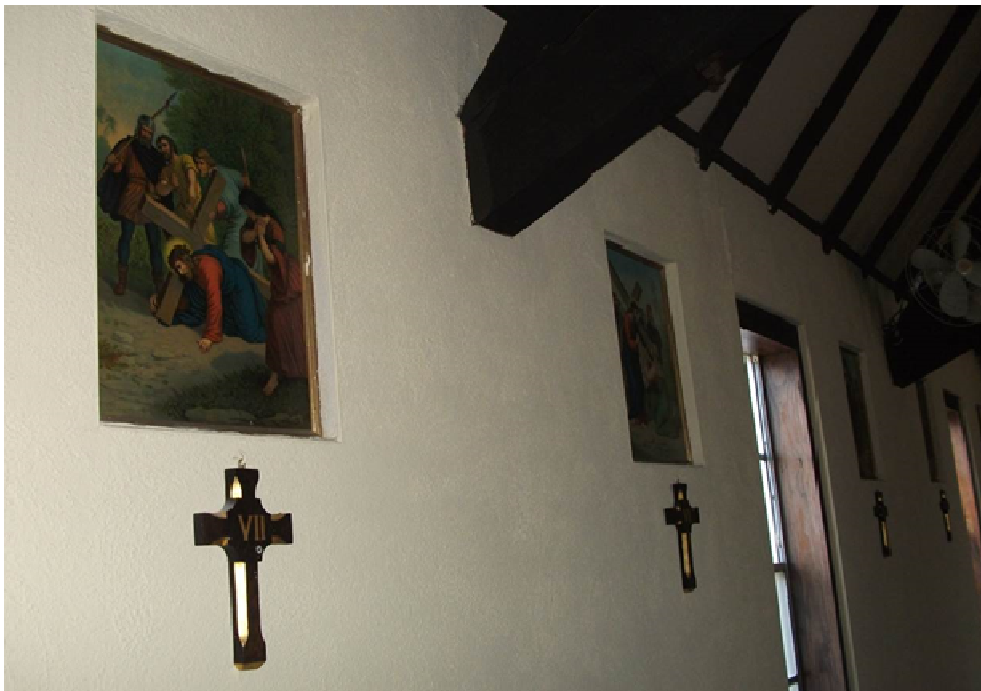


Figure 2.8 Stations of the Cross interspersed with rectangular windows in original recessed openings. (Photo by the author.)

Figure 2.9 Original yellow pine pews and floors. (Photo by author.)



Figure 2.10 St. James Schoolhouse, southwest oblique. (Photo by the author.)

Figure 2.11 North (rear) elevation of St. James Schoolhouse c. 2011, before the 2011 addition was built. Most of this back wall was removed with the new addition. (Photo courtesy of St. James the Greater Parish.)



Figure 2.12 St. James School in 1942, with its original clipped front gable and wooden shingled roof. The earliest grave in the cemetery, a rectangular stone sepulcher, is visible on the far left. (Photo courtesy of Diocese of Charleston Archives.)

Figure 2.13 St. James School in 1956, with a new metal roof and side door, and the clipped gable removed. (Photo courtesy of Diocese of Charleston Archives.)



Figure 2.14 St. James School, c. 1970s-1980s, first floor, facing towards the rear (north) entry. The original stair is visible on the west side of the room (left), as well as the original ceiling and wooden columns. The walls were at this point covered in wood paneling. (Photo courtesy of Diocese of Charleston Archives).

Figure 2.15 St. James School today, first floor looking southwest, toward the original location of the stair. The front vestibule entrance is on the far left. (Photo by the author.)



Figure 2.16 East room on the second floor of St. James School today, looking south. Ceiling and windows are historic. (Photo by the author.)

Figure 2.17 St. James Cemetery, view east. Most of the graves are situated behind (north of) the buildings and face south. (Photo by the author.)



Figure 2.18 St. James Cemetery, view north. Typical horizontal stone slabs, headstones, and a walled family plot. (Photo by the author.)

Figure 2.19 St. James the Greater Cemetery, circa 1950, view west. (Photo courtesy of St. James Parish.)
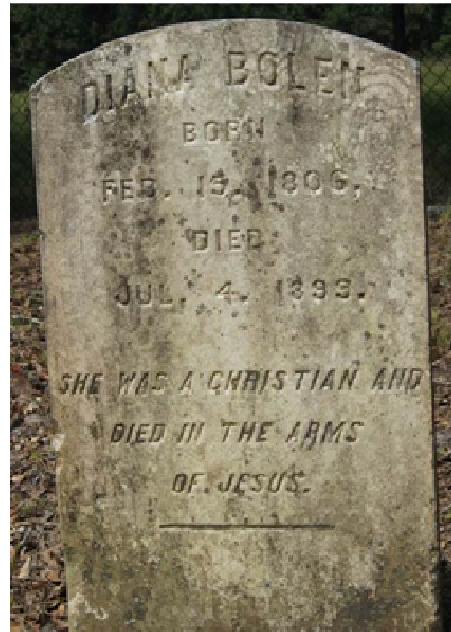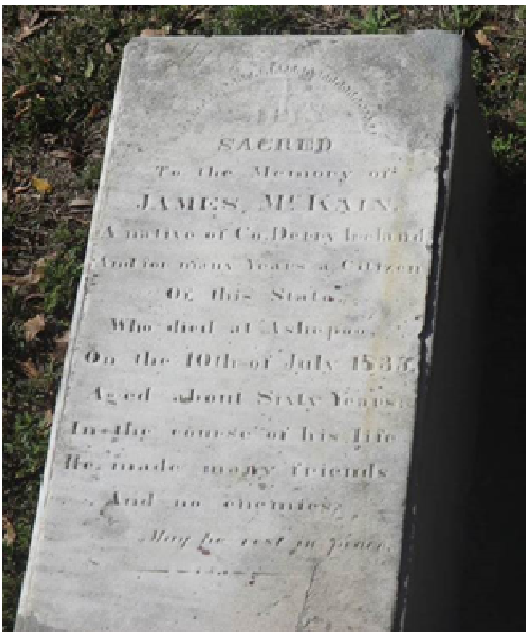


Figure 2.20 (left) Sarcophagus of James McKain, born in Derry, Ireland, and died at Ashepoo on July 10, 1835, "aged about sixty years." Figure 2.21 (right) Gravestone of African American Diana Bolen born in 1806 and died July 4, 1899. (Photos by the author.)

Chapter 3

Statement of Significance: Broad Patterns of History

Though religious properties are not usually eligible for the National

Register, St. James the Greater Mission is eligible because its significance derives

primarily from its cultural contribution to African-American education and

heritage, as well as from its architecture.[9] The three contributing resources of St.

James the Greater Mission constitute an uncommon example of a rural, southern,

African-American Roman Catholic parish, in continuous existence from its

antebellum origins to today. The site is remarkable for possessing a complete and

intact campus with a church, a school, and a cemetery.  The church, St. James'

third, is situated on the same site that served the previous two churches built in

1833 and 1894, and it accordingly embodies the parish's continuity with its

earliest roots. St. James Parish established the school in the late nineteenth

century, and the current building constructed in 1901 provided private Catholic

education for hundreds of local black pupils, regardless of their religious

[9] The term "Mission" in this context identifies St. James the Greater as a parish that has never—even today—had a resident pastor. Because of its small size and rural location, St. James has always been attended by a priest whose primary assignment belonged to a larger parish in the vicinity. Priests who have tended St. James have come from St. Peter's (African American) Church in Charleston; St. Peter's in Beaufort, and today, St. Anthony's in Walterboro.

affiliation, for sixty years. The teachers were African-American women from South Carolina, some themselves graduates of St. James School. In terms of the National Register, the period of significance for St. James the Greater Mission is from 1835 to 1960. The year 1835 marks the earliest extant and decipherable gravestone in the cemetery, and 1960 was the last year that St. James School operated as a Catholic school for African Americans. After 1960, the parish lost a degree of historic autonomy and self-sufficiency as the education of its youth merged with other local schools. Both buildings and the cemetery are eligible under Criterion A, "events or broad patterns of history," for their roles in shaping, expressing, and sustaining black Catholic religion, education, and ethnic heritage.

## 3.1 Religion: Catholicism in the South Carolina Lowcountry

The Catholic Church officially established itself in South Carolina in 1820 with the formation of the Diocese of Charleston under the auspices of Bishop John England. Initially serving all Catholics in Georgia and the Carolinas, the Diocese of Charleston gradually reduced its domain to encompass just the state of South Carolina. Though the first Catholic parish in the state, St. Mary of the Annunciation on Hasell Street in Charleston, was founded in 1789, Catholicism in the state led a tenuous existence throughout the eighteenth and much of the

nineteenth centuries.[10] Associated with immigrants—in the South, primarily Irish—Catholic churches and schools were particular targets for violence and hostility by groups such as the Nativists and Know-Nothings and later, the Ku Klux Klan. Bishop England persevered in establishing two Catholic religious orders for women in Charleston, the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy and the Ladies of the Ursuline Community. England also founded a school for free African-American children in Charleston in the 1830s. The school operated briefly before closing in response to opposition from pro-slavery Charlestonians.[11] Ill will towards Roman Catholics in Charleston drove Irish Catholics to move out of the city and establish themselves in less populous areas of the state. One such group moved south of Charleston to Colleton District in the rural Lowcountry surrounding Walterboro.

Irish Catholic planters established St. James the Greater Mission south of Walterboro in 1831. In 1833, they finished building their first church, a simple wooden chapel (Figure 3.1). The parish grew with the conversion of local members of the large (previously Episcopalian) Bellinger-Pinkney clan, who additionally baptized their slaves in the Church. Considering the prevalent stigmas attached to Catholicism during this time, it is particularly remarkable

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[10] "History," Diocese of Charleston website, accessed online November 2014.
[11] James Lowell Underwood and W. Lewis Burke, eds., *The Dawn of Religious Freedom in South Carolina* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), p. 59.

that well-established and prosperous Episcopalians who ran plantations outside of Walterboro chose to spurn their secure social and religious standing and convert to the Catholic faith. The Bellingers and other white families of St. James reportedly taught their slaves to read and write, which violated state law at the time, but ensured the black members of the parish an intellectual advantage at the time of their emancipation several decades later.[12] Literacy would likewise have been instrumental in helping the first St. James blacks to communicate their Catholic faith to successive generations.

St. James the Greater Parish became a predominantly black parish possibly as early as 1835, just a few years after the parish was established officially in the Diocese of Charleston.[13] There were two main groups of parishioners who made up St. James' white community in these early decades: the Irish-Americans—Magees, McKains, Maloneys, Purcels, Foxes and Ryans— and the extensive Bellinger-Pinckney family.[14] The Bellingers and Pinckneys held the largest plantations and commanded the largest number of slaves. By the late 1840s, the two intermarried families were holding mass slave baptisms—one

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[12] Daniel Berberich to Andrew Walter, February 4, 1895, folder 7 "Newspaper Clippings 1831-2003," St. James the Greater Parish File Box, Diocese of Charleston Archives.

[13] "South Carolina: District of St. James the Greater," *United States Catholic Miscellany* (Charleston, SC), January 29, 1831.

[14] Mary Pinckney Powell, "Over Home—the Heritage of Pinckney Colony, Blufton, South Carolina," n.d., folder 10 "Files Re History of St. James the Greater Mission from the Archives at St. Elizabeth's Convent, Cornwells Heights, Pa," St. James the Greater Parish File Box, Diocese of Charleston Archives.

time reportedly baptizing sixty slaves in a single ceremony.[15] These massive

baptisms quickly resulted in a parish whose majority was black. That fact may

have been the impetus for the establishment in 1845 of St. Philip's Catholic

Church in Walterboro, just thirteen or fourteen miles north of Thompson's

Crossroads (now Catholic Hill).[16] St. Philip's, which later evolved into St.

Anthony's parish, was historically white.

Not all of the whites abandoned St. James for St. Philip's, however. Those

family members who held winter homes along the Ashepoo River, the "seat of

the Bellinger barony," continued to worship alongside their slaves at St. James at

least through the 1840s.[17] Mission priests tended to small country parishes like

St. James and St. Philip's two or three times a month, usually travelling from

Charleston or Beaufort. This long-distance pastoral care was typical for mission

parishes whose numbers were small and locations rural. Though remote, the

parish was then still very much in the pastoral fold of the Diocese, and in 1848,

Bishop Ignatius Reynolds took the two hour stage coach trip from Charleston to

Thompson's Crossroads to celebrate mass and visit with parishioners. A Catholic

from Walterboro wrote an account of the visit for the *United States Catholic*

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[15] Mary Claire Pinckney Jones, "The Pinckneys of Ashepoo: Their Story," 1988, folder 5 "Publications 1956-2001," St. James the Greater Parish File Box, Diocese of Charleston Archives.

[16] "History of St. James," St. Mary's Church, Aiken, SC.

[17] Alice Beckett, "St. James Church is One of Oldest in State," *The Press and Standard* (Walterboro, SC), 1926, folder 7 "Newspaper Clippings 1831-2003," St. James the Greater Parish File Box, Diocese of Charleston Archives.

*Miscellany*, the antebellum newspaper of the Diocese of Charleston. She noted that Catholics from Walterboro travelled fourteen miles to St. James to join a congregation which was "intelligent and quite large, considering the thin population of the area."[18]  If the two parishes of St. James and St. Philip's were heavily divided along racial lines, their members nonetheless maintained ties of familial and neighborly affinity.

The Irish who founded St. James were more transitory of a presence than the Bellinger and Pinckney planters, and in the 1840s they began to disperse and disappear as a result of relocation and death. Reverend J. J. O'Connell noted that by the end of the 1840s, the church had become significantly dilapidated, and he undertook repairs. However, just a few years later, in 1856, an out-of-control field fire consumed the small frame church, burning it to the ground. The few remaining whites who had been worshipping at St. James when it burned retreated either to their homes or to St. Philip's in Walterboro to hold baptisms, weddings, and other religious ceremonies.[19]

The community of St. James during the next thirty-four years proved itself exceptional among Catholic blacks in the state. Parish tradition states that the blacks, over the course of the next three decades, settled their homes and stores

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[18] "Episcopal Visitation," *United States Catholic Miscellany*, January 29, 1848.
[19] "History of St. James," St. Mary's Church, Aiken, SC.

on and around the site of the burnt church and the cemetery.[20] The Josephites, an

American branch of the English missionary order the Mill Hill, devoted

themselves to tending Catholic African-American communities throughout the

South, beginning in the 1870s. One of their most ambitious stations was

Charleston, which served as a central base for missions extending throughout the

Lowcountry. Remarkable for reaching secluded and difficult-to-reach enclaves of

blacks who proved receptive to Catholic evangelization, the Josephites

nonetheless never directly stumbled upon or engaged with the community at

Catholic Crossroads. Letters and diaries of these missionaries reveal their

frequent and surprising proximity to the St. James blacks, as well as an

occasional, vague awareness of their existence. They also provide a rough

illustration of the region's black Catholic settlements which, though possessing

highway and railroad access, clerical attendance, and imposed organization, did

not survive into the twentieth century as intact parishes. Lying within just fifteen

or twenty miles of Catholic Crossroads, Josephite mission posts such as those at

Bennett's Point, Jacksonboro, and Hutchison's Island all either dissolved,

dispersed, or consolidated with larger nearby churches. However, the African

Americans of St. James—devoid of chapel, priest, railway proximity (until 1887),

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[20] Commission for the Catholic Missions among the Colored People and the Indians, "Charleston," *Mission Work Among the Negroes and Indians*, 1890, folder 11, St. James the Greater Parish File Box, Diocese of Charleston Archives; multiple uncited sources and transcribed oral histories also attest to this tradition of the former slaves and their descendants establishing themselves on top of the original parish site.

or diocesan funding—succeeded in sustaining their faith, their community, their sense of identity as St. James the Greater Parish, and their traditional place of spirituality.[21]

## 3.2 Black Ethnic Heritage: Afro-Catholics in Rural South Carolina

Though it was Irish and Anglo-Americans who initially founded the church at Catholic Crossroads (then Thompson's or Collin's Crossroads) and "unanimously" elected St. James the Greater to be the parish patron, it is apparent that the African-American parishioners were profoundly attached as well to the identification of their community as St. James the Greater.[22] This devotion to St. James' patronage—expressed in their choice to retain that parochial identity nearly half a century after the departure of the whites—could have been rooted in a sense of historic identity, culture, religion, or a combination of all three. The former slaves, whose parents and grandparents had come with their owners from Charleston some twenty or thirty years prior, may have possessed African-Catholic traditions that predated conversion under their masters. These Afro-Catholic roots would have traveled to Charleston and the South Carolina Lowcountry following the arrival of Catholic slaves of Kongolese and Santo Domingan descent during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

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[21] J.D. Lewis, editor, "Green Pond, Walterboro, and Branchville Railroad," *South Carolina Railroads*, 2012 (accessed online October 2014).
[22] "South Carolina. Charleston," *United States Catholic Miscellany*, January 23, 1831.

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Thousands of slaves with West African origins flooded into the South during these centuries, carrying with them distinct Afro-Catholic cultural customs and beliefs that dated to the 1400s.[23] One notable such custom was the special affinity Kongolese Catholics held for St. James the Greater (also known as St. James Major). St. James was traditionally the patron saint of Kongo, and his feast day, July 25, was Kongo's national holiday. Likewise, St. James still holds a place of special veneration in Haiti and the Dominican Republic (both formerly constituting the island of Santo Domingo), where Catholic West African slaves arrived in vast numbers during the colonial period.[24] Several names on the gravestones in St. James' cemetery that postdate the presence of white parishioners indicate French or Spanish origin, despite the Anglo heritage of the founding whites.  Such names as would have existed in Haiti and Santo Domingo include Thadious Jahnrette, born in 1899, and Louise Bartholoneau, who died in 1992.[25]

Another significance of the possible Catholic West African origins of the St. James blacks lies in the African spiritual traditions that value the natural

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[23] For more on this, see John Thornton and Linda Heywood, "A Forgotten African Catholic Kingdom," The Root, Aug. 12, 2011 (accessed online October 2014); and Michael Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

[24] Mark Smith, "Remembering Mary, Shaping Revolt: Reconsidering the Stono Rebellion," *Journal of Southern History*, 67 (August 2001), pp. 522-26; Thornton and Heywood, "A Forgotten African Catholic Kingdom."

[25] "St. James Catholic Cemetery," survey conducted May 1997, folder 9, St. James the Greater Parish File Box, Diocese of Charleston Archives.

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landscape as space elemental to daily spirituality. West Africans commonly

believed that nature—especially, forests and bodies of water—hosted the spirits

of their deceased ancestors, who played an active and powerful role in the lives

of their living descendants. Land served as a continued habitation for the dead

who were really not "dead" in the traditional European sense of the word, but

rather were alive and participating in the lives and wellbeing of their

descendants.[26] Catholic Hill during the nineteenth century could hardly have

been a more ideal landscape for this tradition, surrounded by dense woods and

swampland as it was.[27] These traditional African beliefs could explain the

outstanding tenacity of the St. James blacks in holding to their parish roots,

despite the long absence of any church buildings or clerical guidance. The rural

seclusion of the parish would have insulated these African customs from outside

influences, until Daniel Berberich arrived in 1892.

     Unfortunately, there is scant written documentation regarding the black

Catholic community of St. James from the 1850s through 1890. Parish tradition

holds fast to a few names of black or mixed race men and women who

reportedly held the community together and sustained its Catholic character.

One family in particular stands out in collective memory—the Davises. Like

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[26] Ras Michael Brown, *The African-Atlantic Cultures and the South Carolina Lowcountry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 30.

[27] United States Army Corp of Engineers, *Geological Survey: Walterboro Quadrangle*.

nearly all the St. James blacks after the Civil War, the Davis family farmed. In the years immediately following the Civil War, Sarah Davis was the family matriarch, heading a household of seven children ranging in age from nine to nineteen, and possibly not all her own. Sarah, for whom no spouse is listed in the United States Census, is identified as "mulatto," as are her children. Among her children were Vincent, Isabelle, Lewis, and Emeline.[28] These four men and women were stalwarts of St. James Parish during the years when there was no attendant priest or diocesan oversight. Vincent, sometimes referred to in parish records as Vincent "de Paul" Davis—a name recalling the Catholic saint Vincent de Paul, renowned for teaching and serving the indigent—seems to have been particularly revered as a teacher and father-like figure to the poor, isolated parish. Born in 1860, Vincent was still a young man when the Diocese re-entered the scene in 1890. Years later, St. James' missionary priest Daniel Berberich recounted in a series of letters the decline in health of his "principle man, Mr. Davis."[29] In 1907, Vincent Davis died. Berberich remembered him in subsequent letters as "the soul of Catholicity of that place [St. James]."[30] Other former slaves—Jacksons, Washingtons, and Browns, to name a few—were likewise instrumental in preserving St. James Parish during the nineteenth century.

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[28] United States Census, 1860-1900, FamilySearch database (accessed online February 2015).

[29] Daniel Berberich to Katharine Drexel, March 4, 1905, folder 10 "Correspondence," St. James the Greater Parish File Box, Diocese of Charleston Archives.

[30] Daniel Berberich to Katharine Drexel, October 16, 1907, folder 10 "Correspondence," St. James the Greater Parish File Box, Diocese of Charleston Archives.

Vincent's sister Isabelle married John Joseph Brown, and the two taught catechism and held parish gatherings in their home (Figure 3.2).

Various accounts exist regarding the rediscovery of St. James by the Diocese of Charleston. In 1890, either a priest, or a group of priests, or some Charleston Catholics picnicking in the countryside happened upon the Catholic Crossroads settlement. The encounter seems, in any case, to have been a source of mutual excitement.[31] In 1891, the Diocese remarked that Catholic Crossroads was "a promising community of Catholics . . . this is the only encouraging spot in the whole state, a nucleus for a congregation away from city influence."[32] Mission priests began trekking out to the St. James blacks once or twice a month, administering sacraments and celebrating mass. In 1892, the bishop appointed Father Daniel Berberich, a thirty-six-year-old German-American missionary priest attached to the Pallotines or the Pious Society of Missions Order, to attend St. James along with other nearby missions (Figure 3.3). The Pallotines were an international Catholic missionary order contemporary with the Josephites. Unlike the Josephites, Pallotine missionaries included a combination of priests, nuns, and lay people. Founded in Italy in 1835, they arrived to the United States

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[31] Berberich to Walter, February 4, 1895; "Resurrection in Carolina," *The Carolina Oratorian*, Vol 2, No. 1, 1945, Rock Hill, SC, folder 9, St. James the Greater Parish File Box, Diocese of Charleston Archives; "History of St. James," St. Mary's Church in Aiken.

[32] Commission for the Catholic Missions among the Colored People and the Indians, "Charleston," *Mission Work among the Negroes and Indians*, 1891, folder 11, St. James the Greater Parish File Box, Diocese of Charleston Archives.

in the 1880s, and sent missionizing teams into rural areas throughout the Midwest and the South.[33] The Diocese of Charleston, who during the 1880s held jurisdiction over both Carolinas and the Bahama Islands, relied heavily upon these kinds of independent mission orders and communities of nuns to establish and care for church communities.[34]

Though there is little material documenting the life of Pallotine missionary Daniel Berberich, the letters he wrote during his mission tenure at St. James depict a man who was extraordinarily energetic, financially savvy, and personally charismatic. Berberich, who was born and lived most of his life in Germany, evidently valued architecture as an essential form in which to ground education and religion at the mission.[35] The mission priest wrote regularly and persuasively to Katharine Drexel and to the Diocese, towing a masterful balance of gratitude, desperation, and good news. Buildings—the schoolhouse and church—were a constant and central theme in Berberich's letters.[36] His commitment not only to their initial construction, but to their continued maintenance and aesthetic qualities, was fundamental to the development of St. James as a site of lasting architectural value.

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[33] "About St. Vincent Pallotti," The Pallotines: Society of the Catholic Apostolate (accessed online February 2015).
[34] "History," Diocese of Charleston website.
[35] "About St. Vincent Pallotti," The Pallotines: Society of the Catholic Apostolate.
[36] Daniel Berberich, collection of letters to Katharine Drexel, 1900 to 1910, folder 10 "Correspondence," St. James the Greater Parish File Box, Diocese of Charleston Archives.

In 1894, Berberich directed construction of the second church on the site. Parishioners reportedly felled trees in the surrounding woods, hewed them into boards and shingles, and assembled a wooden frame, side-steepled church (Figure 3.4).[37] Though Berberich and Diocesan officials referred to this black Catholic parish almost exclusively as "Catholic Crossroads" from the earliest date of discovery well into the 1930s, the parish promptly dedicated their second church in 1894 as "St. James"—an indication of the collective black memory and attachment to their historic and religious roots.[38] Berberich remained the attendant priest at St. James until 1910. Under his tenure and in the space of the 1894 church, complete with an organ loft, the parishioners established a successful choir capable of performing Catholic Latin hymns.[39]

In addition to building the church, Berberich immediately commenced the operation of a school as well, initially holding classes in the one-room building already on site.[40] Reflecting back on the year 1899, Bishop Henry Northrop reported on the status of Charleston and Lowcountry black Catholic missions, "I was present at the [St. James] school closing there, very primitive but very

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[37] Emaline Bing quoted in "Resurrection in Carolina," *The Carolina Oratorian*.

[38] Berberich to Walter, February 4, 1895.

[39] Daniel Berberich to Katharine Drexel, March 22, 1905, folder 10 "Correspondence," St. James the Greater Parish File Box, Diocese of Charleston Archives.

[40] Commission for the Catholic Missions among the Colored People and the Indians, "Charleston," *Mission Work among the Negroes and Indians*, 1899, folder 11, St. James the Greater Parish File Box, Diocese of Charleston Archives.

encouraging. The Crossroads is certainly the garden spot of this mission."[41]

When the parish erected the current schoolhouse a year later, they were able to do so largely by the charity of Mother Katharine Drexel and her Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament in Bensalem, Pennsylvania, near Philadelphia. Drexel had founded her convent with the aim of supporting Catholic missions among African and Native Americans throughout the United States. Her financial aid was crucial not only for building St. James School, but also in providing funds for the teachers' salaries, structural maintenance and improvements, and school and worship materials.  St. James was just one of dozens of poor, rural communities across the United States that benefited from the support of Drexel and her Sisters during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Her generosity to these minority Americans propelled Drexel into sainthood in the year 2000, making her only the second American-born saint to be canonized in the Roman Catholic Church.[42] For six decades, the schoolhouse assembled with Drexel's aid served African-American pupils from the surrounding rural area (Figure 3.5). Several graduates of St. James School went on to attend normal school and universities and returned to teach at Catholic Crossroads.

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[41] Bureau of Catholic and Indian Missions, "Charleston," *Mission Work among the Negroes and the Indians*, 1900, folder "Marquette University Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, 1890-1974," Black Catholics Reference Collection, 1834-2003, Diocese of Charleston Archives..

[42] "Katharine Drexel," Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament and National Shrine of Katharine Drexel, (accessed online November 2014); the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament were founded in 1892—the same year Berberich arrived at St. James—and Drexel was sidelined by poor health in 1935—the year in which the third and current St. James church was built.

The vibrancy of St. James School was a major factor driving the growth of the parish. By 1935, the congregation had outgrown its small chapel, which had also recently withstood a tornado, and was wilting under the damage.[43] Mission pastor Father Alfred F. Kamler organized funding and logistics for the construction of St. James' third church, which is the building that stands today. In addition to its expanded size, the church included a west wing designed to accommodate the traveling missionary priest, who previously had resided on the second floor of the schoolhouse. Elements in the current church that signified the black Catholicism of the congregation were the 1892 altarpiece depicting St. Peter Claver with African slaves in Cartagena (Figure 3.6) and the statue of St. Martin Porres, a Peruvian Dominican monk who lived from 1579 to 1639, whose father was a Spanish soldier and whose mother was a freed black slave.[44] Where and when the painting of Peter Claver arrived at St. James remains a mystery, but it was certainly present in the second church as well. A conservator who examined the work in the 1970s proposed that Emmanuel Dite painted it in Europe; perhaps it made its way to Charleston by the late nineteenth century and, its African subject perceived as especially fitting for a black parish, was

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[43] Bureau of Catholic and Indian Missions, "Charleston," *Mission Work among the Negroes and the Indians*, 1935, folder "Marquette University Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, 1890-1974," Black Catholics Reference Collection, 1834-2003, Diocese of Charleston Archives.

[44] St. Martin is considered the patron saint of African Americans and mixed race peoples, and is frequently invoked as the patron of black Catholic parishes in the U.S., one local example being St. Martin Porres Church in Columbia, SC.

transported—maybe by Berberich himself—to the Diocese's reportedly most vibrant black mission parish.[45] For years, the statue of St. Martin Porres occupied a side niche adjacent to St. Peter and the Africans hanging behind the main altar. Today, the statue stands on a pedestal mounted over the rear sanctuary doors, centrally and highly placed (Figure 3.7). The altarpiece and the statue remain central artistic components in St. James Church.

The construction of the third St. James Church was a model of white northern philanthropy, as inspired specifically by a sense of Catholic obligation to brothers and sisters in the faith. Kamler, from Olean, New York, drew upon the generosity of friends and family from his home state to procure the money necessary to build a new church. A placard in the church vestibule thanks benefactors including "northern parochial school children, the Extension Society, the Negro Mission Fund," as well as a list of twenty-four donors, "all of Olean, New York"—one of them A.F. Kamler himself.[46] The most significant donor to the church building project was Mrs. Edwin H. Denby, who contributed $3,000. Denby's husband was a New York-based architect who designed churches,

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[45] Louis Murphy, "Some Brief Notes on the Painting of St. Peter Claver Which Hangs behind the Main Altar at St. James Cath. Hill," n.d., folder 9 "Files Re the History of St. James the Greater Mission from the Archives at St. Elizabeth's Convent, Cornwells Heights, Pa," St. James the Greater Parish File Box, Diocese of Charleston Archives; John L. Petty to Louis Murphy, February 13, 1976, folder 9 "Files Re the History of St. James the Greater Mission from the Archives at St. Elizabeth's Convent, Cornwells Heights, Pa," St. James the Greater Parish File Box, Diocese of Charleston Archives.

[46] "Pray for These Benefactors," plaque in St. James the Greater Church vestibule, n.d., Walterboro, SC.

schools, and houses in the Northeast.[47] Kamler and his fellow New Yorkers continued the benevolent legacy of Drexel and her Sisters before them, allowing the black St. James community to survive in physical, architectural form. The buildings funded by Drexel and other northern whites were, in fact, fundamental to the continued life of the parish.

St. James remained through the middle of the twentieth century the vanguard of black Catholicism in the rural Lowcountry.  Between the construction of the current church in 1935 and the end date of the National Register period of significance, 1960, the African-American parish underwent no significant transformation and enjoyed steady attendance at the school and church. Despite the disadvantages engendered by a profoundly rural, swampy location, the relative isolation likely served this double-minority parish as a protective buffer against the racism and religious bigotry that surged across the South during the eras of Reconstruction and Jim Crow.  The Ku Klux Klan as well as smaller, localized hate groups terrorized both Catholics and African Americans during the period when the black community of St. James was developing and flourishing. It was rather the era of desegregation and Civil Rights that ushered in major changes for the black parish. In 1955, the establishment of St. Joseph's Catholic Church for African Americans in

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[47] For more on Edwin Denby, see "Edwin Denby, Architect," Rare Books and Special Collections, Firestone Library: Graphic Arts Collection, Princeton University (accessed online December 2014).

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Walterboro, followed shortly by the creation of the affiliated St. Joseph's School in 1956, provided the town blacks with a nearer place to attend mass and school and resulted in consolidation and the closing of St. James School.

### 3.3 Education: Segregated Parochial Education in South Carolina

The origins of institutional Catholic education for African Americans in South Carolina reach back to 1835, when Bishop John England opened a school for free blacks in Charleston. Manned by two nuns and two seminarians, the institution enrolled eighty pupils and operated for three months before meeting with overwhelming antagonism from white Charlestonians. These pro-slavery forces threatened to destroy the school and lynch Bishop England if he would not close it down. After a two-day standoff, England yielded to the opposition, promising that he would reopen the school when conditions were less hostile.[48] True to his word, England established a school for free black female children in January of 1841, located on Queen Street in Charleston. The bishop also planned at this time for a similar school for free black males.[49] What became of these schools—how long they operated and how many students they served—is uncertain. They may have merged with the subsequently established St. Peter's School, or they may have met a fate similar to their short-lived predecessors.

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[48] John England quoted in Peter Guilday, *The Life and Times of John England, First Bishop of Charleston (1786-1842)* (New York: The America Press, 1927; reprinted 1969), p. 152.
[49] "School for Colored Children," *United States Catholic Miscellany*, January 2, 1841.

At any rate, the major watershed for Catholic African Americans in South Carolina came with the founding of the first parish devoted exclusively to them. In 1866, Bishop Patrick Lynch bought a former Jewish synagogue on Wentworth Street, and dedicated it as St. Peter's Catholic Church for the city's black Catholics. Typifying the approach of the Church's mission to African Americans in the South, the pastor of St. Peter's immediately established an affiliated parochial school for the youth of the parish.  Several decades later, in 1903, Immaculate Conception School opened for African Americans. Immaculate Conception was originally located at the corner of Coming and Sheppard Streets. Both Immaculate Conception and St. Peter's operated under the joint direction of the Diocese and orders of sisters—first, the Sisters of Mercy, a white order with Baltimore roots, and then the Oblate Sisters of Divine Providence, an African-American order also founded in Baltimore, in 1828.[50] These two orders of nuns were especially effective in running South Carolina's diocesan schools during the first half of the twentieth century. As trusted icons of religious and social stability, their presence in Catholic schools helped ease mid-century racial tensions and smooth the way into the era of integrated education.

For most of its existence, St. James the Greater School was an exception to this model of nun-staffed schools. Lay teachers alone staffed St. James School

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[50] "History of St. Patrick Church," St. Patrick Catholic Church website (accessed at online December 2014).

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from the time of its inception in 1894 until 1956, when the Sisters of Mercy arrived and joined the lay instructors for the remaining four years of the school's operation.  Bishop Henry Northrop of Charleston reported to the Bureau of Catholic Indian and Colored Missions (known also as the Commission for Missions among Catholic Indian and Colored People) in January of 1905 that the Diocese had two stations in South Carolina for its black missions: St. Peter's in Charleston, and "the Catholic Crossroads Church."[51] In addition to noting the establishment of a new school (Immaculate Conception) in the north part of Charleston and complimenting the performance of St. Peter's School, Bishop Northrop praised the school at Catholic Crossroads, and its "energetic principal, Miss Eugenia Gatewood."[52] Average attendance at this time was sixty students out of eighty registered children in the parish. The primary incentive for black families to send their children to St. James was the school's Catholic curriculum: families in the predominantly Catholic area surrounding the Crossroads wanted their children to receive a Catholic education from other parishioners and priests (and eventually, nuns). However, the capacious, well-built schoolhouse also attracted local non-Catholics, whose public school options were typically very modest, even impoverished.  From its opening in 1894, St. James School accepted

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[51] Bureau of Catholic and Indian Missions, "Charleston," *Mission Work among the Negroes and the Indians*, 1905, folder "Marquette University Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, 1890-1974," Black Catholics Reference Collection, 1834-2003, Diocese of Charleston Archives.
[52] Bureau of Catholic and Indian Missions, "Charleston," *Mission Work*, 1905.

non-Catholic African Americans as well as Catholic; this inclusionary stance was in fact the Diocese's most potent instrument of conversion.[53] In 1941, pressed with financial and personnel shortages, Bishop Emmet Walsh wrote that "Negroes…are especially interested in schools, and their interest is our opportunity. Schools are expensive to build and maintain, but they give us an opportunity to get into the heart of Negro life."[54]

Indeed, St. James the Greater School set a precedent for the establishment of African-American mission communities throughout the state, and by 1957, the Diocese had established twelve parochial schools for black children in Rock Hill, Spartanburg, Greenville, Aiken, Orangeburg, Sumter, Georgetown, Florence, Anderson, Walterboro, Charleston and Ritter (Catholic Crossroads).[55] The schools were attached to churches, and teachers were nuns, seminarians and priests, and very frequently, local African-American women who had attended the normal school conducted by the black Oblate Sisters of Divine Providence.

One of the first teachers of St. James the Greater was Eugenia Gatewood, whom Berberich frequently and enthusiastically praised as competent,

[53] In 1925, St. James schoolteacher Ethel Brown wrote that only non-Catholic students were required to pay the five dollar annual tuition, as well as purchase their own books; see Ethel Brown to Henry Northrop, November 1925, folder 2 "Administrative 1914-1978," St. James the Greater Parish File Box, Diocese of Charleston Archives.

[54] Bureau of Catholic and Indian Missions, "Charleston," *Mission Work among the Negroes and the Indians*, 1941, folder "Marquette University Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, 1890-1974," Black Catholics Reference Collection, 1834-2003, Diocese of Charleston Archives.

[55] Bureau of Catholic and Indian Missions, "Charleston," *Mission Work among the Negroes and the Indians*, 1957, folder "Marquette University Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, 1890-1974," Black Catholics Reference Collection, 1834-2003, Diocese of Charleston Archives.

intelligent, and compassionate. Gatewood was African American, and came to St. James from St. Peter's parish in Charleston, where she lived with her mother, aunt, and uncle. Born in 1872, Gatewood was about thirty years old when she came to St. James.[56] She possessed a college degree, a fact Berberich emphasized in his regular supplications to Katharine Drexel and the Bishop—the two pillars of financial support for St. James School—for a steady (or, sometimes, an increased) teacher's salary. Briefly, from 1901 to 1903, another African-American woman, Ethel Bush, joined Gatewood at St. James. After 1903, the school operated with just one lay teacher and Berberich. On average, enrollment at the school during the first three decades (1890s to 1920s) hovered around fifty, dropping as low as twenty-nine some years, and cresting to as many as eighty. Students ranged in age roughly from five or six years old to fourteen or fifteen. In order to manage the large number of students and their varied ages, teachers usually broke the day into two sessions, with one age group attending the morning session, and the other age group an afternoon session. The school operated on the standard nine-month public school schedule.[57]

Despite energetic priests and competent teachers, St. James School was in a constant state of financial crisis and uncertainty. Ethel Brown, an alum of St.

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[56] United States Census, 1900, FamilySearch database (accessed online February 2015).
[57] Anonymous author, "St. James Parochial School," May 3, 1978, folder 2 "Administrative 1914-1978," St. James the Greater Parish File Box, Diocese of Charleston Archives; John Hughes, "Report of Mission at Catholic Crossroads," July 1, 1914, folder 2 "Administrative 1914-1978," St. James the Greater Parish File Box, Diocese of Charleston Archives.

James and a graduate of the Oblates' normal school, took over instruction of St. James School at a particularly critical juncture in 1925. She wrote several reports to the Diocese over the course of the 1925-1926 school years, describing the desperate circumstances of the operation she had taken over. She explained that when she assumed control on October 5, she encountered total disorganization, with no semblance of grade classification or daily lesson structure. The building itself was filthy and in disrepair, and books, desks, and blackboards were all but absent. Brown reported that she and the students undertook cleaning the grounds and facilities; the priest arranged for the restoration of the dilapidated schoolhouse; and Brown ordered books, administered placement exams, and established new rules and school schedules. The Diocese was quick to respond to Brown's appeal, providing money for books, building rehabilitation, vaccinations, and the teacher's salary. At the end of the school year, Brown wrote to Charleston expressing deep gratitude for the Diocese's aid and assuring them that "despite the adverse circumstances that confronted us at the beginning of the year, the term ended successfully."[58] Brown apparently did an able job of reorganizing St. James School and producing a presentable ensemble of students, as indicated in the numerous photographs, articles, and letters celebrating the Bishop's visit to the country parish in April 1926 (Figures 3.8-3.9). Bishop Russell

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[58] Ethel Brown to H.F. Wolfe, May 1926, folder 2 "Administrative 1914-1978," St. James the Greater Parish File Box, Diocese of Charleston Archives.

and Father Harry F. Wolfe confirmed a class of St. James students into the

Church, as well as led a commemoration of the parish's centennial.[59]

Beginning in the 1930s, St. James School employed two lay teachers, who

annually instructed anywhere between thirty-seven and eighty-three students

(Figures 3.10-3.11). Numbers vacillated so greatly in part because of the

socioeconomic instability of parishioners, most of whom were farmers and relied

upon their children to work in the fields full time in difficult seasons and during

harvest time.[60]  Despite the occasional influx or decline in enrollment, however,

attendance at St. James from the 1930s through the 1950s averaged around sixty

students.

During the 1950s, the social and racial dynamic of schools throughout the

South began gradually to change, and diocesan schools in South Carolina were

no exception. Annual diocesan reports noted the rising racial discord emerging

in schools and communities during the 1950s. One location of particular concern

for the Diocese of Charleston was the parochial school in Rock Hill; founded

initially in 1940 for blacks, the school was integrated at least by 1956, and

possibly earlier. Interestingly, the Bishop did not begin reporting problematic

tensions—namely, hostility and financial stinginess from certain white

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[59] Though St. James the Greater was not officially established in the Diocese until 1831, Catholics
of Colleton County had begun meeting unofficially as early as 1826; this latter date was therefore
pervasive in the community's institutional memory as being the founding date of St. James
Parish.
[60] United States Census, 1870-1940, FamilySearch database (accessed online February 2015).

parishioners—until 1958, indicating that the heated racial climate of the wider

regional political scene was increasingly informing local dynamics.[61] The Diocese

continued to open black parochial schools into the late 1950s, including St.

Joseph's School in Walterboro in 1956. Truly a missionary project, St. Joseph's

was established in several dilapidated, rented buildings located on Gruber Street,

in the poor, black section of the city. According to the Sisters of Mercy and

Trinitarian order priests running the new establishment, there was not a single

black Catholic in the town of Walterboro in 1955, when they opened the church.[62]

The sisters and priests also served the nearby St. James School, contributing one

or two nuns to aid lay teacher Leonie Williams and longtime principal Ernestine

Washington (Figure 3.12-3.13). The average enrollment of St. James School from

1955 to 1960 remained consistent at sixty students.

Located in such close proximity and facing the perpetual challenge of

impoverished parishioners and limited staff and diocesan funding, St. James and

St. Joseph schools together proved too much to sustain for very long. The year

1960 was the last time that St. James the Greater School functioned as an

independent parochial school, and in 1961, St. Joseph School in Walterboro

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[61] Bureau of Catholic and Indian Missions, "Charleston," *Mission Work among the Negroes and the Indians*, 1958, folder "Marquette University Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, 1890-1974," Black Catholics Reference Collection, 1834-2003, Diocese of Charleston Archives.

[62] Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity, "The Missionary Servant," October 1956, Silver Spring, MD, folder 5 "Publications 1956-2001," St. James the Greater Parish File Box, Diocese of Charleston Archives.

incorporated the student population of Catholic Hill.  St. James Schoolhouse

subsequently became the St. James Catechetical Center, staffed by Sisters of

Mercy. Bishop Paul Hallinan officially announced in spring of 1961 that the

Diocese of Charleston would begin actively admitting students of all races into

parochial schools. He maintained, nonetheless, that missions to African-

American Catholics would continue to support schools for these black

communities, intending to "reach and teach the Negro, not to segregate him."[63]

Black Catholics from St. James the Greater attended school at St. Joseph's in

Walterboro until the 1970s, when St. Joseph Parish consolidated with

Walterboro's white Catholic parish, St. Anthony's, and St. Joseph School became

St. Anthony School.[64]

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[63] Paul Hallinan, Pastoral Letter Lent 1961, folder 4 "Education/Integration," Black Catholics Reference Collection, St. James the Greater Parish File Box, Diocese of Charleston Archives.
[64] "St. Joseph School (Colored) Walterboro," folder 1 "Administrative, no date," Walterboro St. Anthony Parish File Box, Diocese of Charleston Archives.

Figure 3.1 The 1833 St. James the Greater Church probably looked very similar to St. Andrew's Catholic Church in Barnwell, SC, pictured above. The Diocese erected both churches in December of 1833. Despite the modern south addition and front porch on St. Andrew, the original form of the building is still evident. (Photo courtesy of the Diocese of Charleston.)



Figure 3.2 A 1945 publication by the Rock Hill-based Catholic Order the Oratorians provides this grainy photo of Isabelle and John Brown's home on Catholic Hill, "the Old Home where Catholics gathered."[65] (Image courtesy of Colleton County Memorial Library.)

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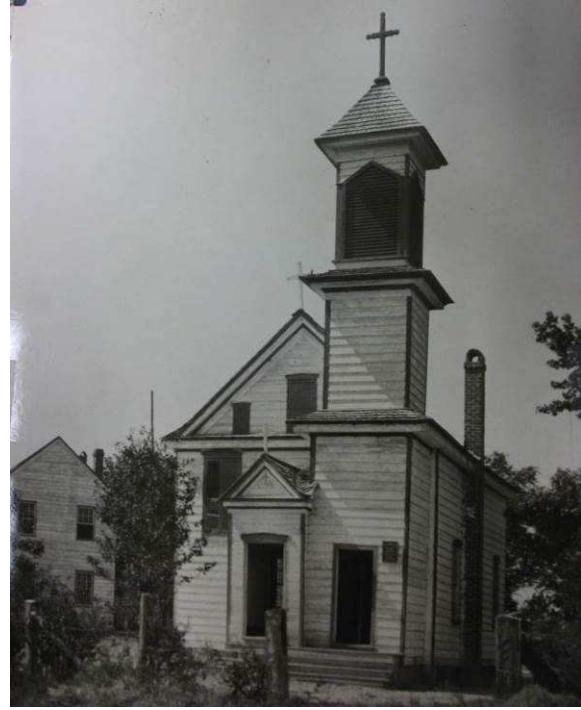[65] "Resurrection in Carolina," *The Carolina Oratorian*.

Figure 3.3 (left) Reverend Daniel Berberich, 1856-1916. (Photo courtesy of St. James the Greater Church.) Figure 3.4 (right) The second St. James Church, circa 1920s, built by Berberich and parishioners in 1894.



Figure 3.5 St. James Schoolhouse, circa 1920s. (Photo courtesy of Diocese of Charleston Archives.)

Figure 3.6 (left) The altarpiece depicting St. Peter Claver with slaves in Cartagena has been in St. James Church since the 1890s. Figure 3.7 (right) The St. Martin de Porres statue is a prominent marker of African-American devotion in the church. The statue's presence here probably dates to the 1940s or 1950s. (Photos by the author.)



Figure 3.8 Visitation of Bishop William Russell to St. James the Greater Church and School on April 26, 1926. (Photo courtesy of Diocese of Charleston Archives.)

Figure 3.9 Ethel Brown's confirmation class, April 1926, standing in front of the schoolhouse. (Photo courtesy of Diocese of Charleston Archives.)
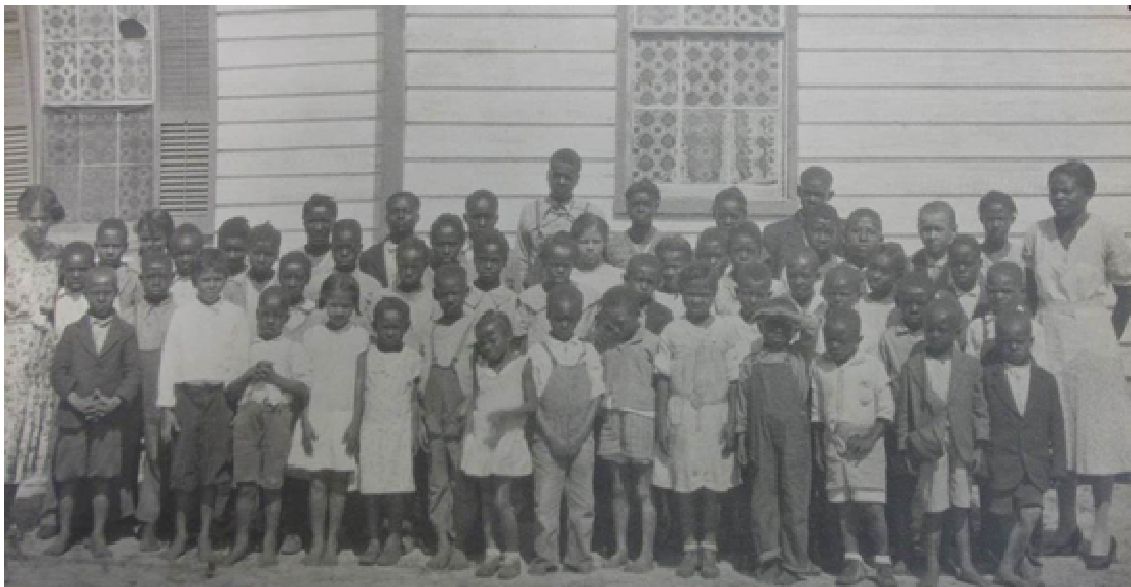


Figure 3.10 St. James students and two lay teachers, in the 1930s. (Photo courtesy of Diocese of Charleston Archives.)

Figure 3.11 Two unidentified lay teachers of St. James School in the 1930s.
(Photo courtesy of the Diocese of Charleston Archives.)

Figure 3.12 (left) Leonie Williams and Sister of Mercy Mary Julia, c. 1956. Figure 3.13 (right) Principal Ernestine Washington with "Fr. John." (Photos courtesy of Diocese of Charleston Archives.)

# Chapter 4

## Statement of Significance: Architecture

St. James Church qualifies under National Register Criterion "C" for architecture as an intact and essentially unaltered example of a Catholic vernacular church containing elements of the late Gothic Revival style. It is clad entirely with wooden shingles, an unusual choice of siding for a church in the southeast region of the United States. The church is one of the earliest rural Catholic churches still extant in the state of South Carolina. The schoolhouse is also a largely intact and rare example of a turn-of-the-twentieth-century I-house built specifically as a school building for African-American students in South Carolina during the era of segregation.

### 4.1 Architectural Significance of St. James Church

The founding members of St. James the Greater Parish constructed the first church building on the plot of land today known as "Catholic Hill."[66] The original building, a small frame structure "fifty feet in length, twenty-eight feet

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[66] "South Carolina, Colleton District," *United States Catholic Miscellany*, December 14, 1833.

in breadth, with a simple altar and benches," burned down in 1856.[67]  Over the

next thirty-four years, the African Americans belonging to St. James Parish

established their homes and community on the site of the cemetery and the

original church. In 1890, the Diocese of Charleston became aware again of the

existence of this black community still practicing the Catholic faith without

buildings or clerical guidance. In 1892, the Bishop assigned Father Berberich to

the parish, and Berberich at once began the construction of the second church. [68]

Though no longer standing, the second (1894) church established an immediate

architectural precedent for the current church building (1935), as well as re-

rooted the parish in architectural form and permanent location.

Alongside the cemetery, the present church building therefore represents

the continuity of the Catholic religion practiced at this specific site beginning in

1833, and it carries on a nearly 150-year-old tradition of the church building

serving the parish as the chief locus for practicing the faith. Even aside from its

antebellum roots that predate the building itself by over a century, St. James is

the oldest extant historically black Catholic church in the Diocese of Charleston

(which encompasses the entire state of South Carolina), with the exception of St.

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[67] "Dedication of St. James Church," *United States Catholic Miscellany*, December 10, 1833; "St. James Church, Colleton District," *United States Catholic Miscellany*, April 26, 1856.
[68] Bureau of Catholic and Indian Missions, "Charleston," *Mission Work,* 1890; Berberich to Walter, February 4, 1895.

Patrick's Catholic Church in Charleston (completed in 1888).[69]  St. James

additionally stands among the oldest Catholic churches, white or black, that are

still extant in rural South Carolina (Figures 4.2-4.3).[70]

The original 1935 design for St. James Church has undergone no

significant alterations. The most notable changes have been the replacement of

the wooden shingled roof with asphalt shingles and the addition of the front

porch and handicap-accessible ramp along the façade and east elevation of the

building. Both changes have been sensitive to the architectural style and massing

of the building, and do not detract from its historic appearance or architectural

distinctiveness. The replacement windows and front doors are likewise discreet,

featuring the same dimensions and shape as the originals.

In 1935, the Diocese and St. James pastor Fr. Kamler hired Benedictine

priest-architect Father Michael McInerney of Belmont Abbey College in Belmont,

North Carolina to design the third and current church on Catholic Hill (Figure

4.1). The choice of McInerney provided a mark of distinction for the parish, as

the Benedictine priest was the most successful and prolific architect of Catholic

buildings in the South during the 1900s through the 1950s. McInerney designed

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[69] "Historically Black Catholic Schools and Parishes," Diocese of Charleston website (accessed online September-December 2014); Our Lady of Mercy is additionally listed as an historically black parish in Charleston and was established in 1928 in a building originally erected for Methodists, not Catholics, in 1912. The parish's website notes that the demographic of OLM only became a black majority beginning in the 1950s.

[70] "Parish Listings," Diocese of Charleston website (accessed online September-December 2014); one rural church whose construction predates that of St. James is St. Francis of Assisi in Walhalla.

approximately 200 Catholic churches—ranging from high style cathedrals to rural vernacular structures such as St. James—as well as twenty-seven hospitals, eighteen convents or monasteries, and ten gymnasia, in Maryland, Washington D.C., Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia.[71] The priest also designed many of the buildings located in the Belmont Abbey Historic District in Gaston County, North Carolina, listed on the National Register in 1993.  His style is characterized as "American Benedictine," expressive of Gothic and Romanesque elements with linear simplicity and verticality.[72] Many of McInerney's distinctive American Benedictine edifices still stand in cities across the South—Our Lady of Nazareth Orphanage in Raleigh, North Carolina; St. Benedict's Church in Richmond, Virginia; St. Michael's Church in Wheeling, West Virginia;  Sacred Heart Cathedral in Charlotte, North Carolina; and St. Monica's School for African Americans in Raleigh (closed in 1967); to name just a few.[73]

McInerney's work in urban centers and among more financially endowed clients is fairly well documented—such as St. Benedict's Church in Baltimore, Maryland, St. Joseph's Church in Columbia, South Carolina, or Belmont Abbey

[71] Paschal Baumstein, "McInerney, Michael (1877-1963)," *North Carolina Architects and Builders: A Biographical Dictionary*, online database (accessed October 2014-February 2015).
[72] Paschal Baumstein, "Belmont Abbey Historic District, Gaston County, NC," National Register Nomination, 1993 (accessed online November 2014).
[73] M. Ruth Little, "(Former) St. Monica's School Historic Landmark Designation Report, Prepared for the Raleigh Historic Districts Commission," Longleaf Historic Resources, November 2000, revised November 2007; Baumstein, "Michael McInerney (1877-1963)."

College. However, the priest-architect also designed buildings for Catholics

worshipping in far-flung corners of the rural South, and many of these projects

have been superseded or replaced by larger, more modern edifices.[74] Some of the

few documented examples of McInerney's smaller projects like St. James include

St. Helen's Church (1914), a black Catholic church in Spencer Mountain, North

Carolina; St. Andrew's (Catholic) Mission Church (1932) near Blufton, South

Carolina; and, in all likelihood, St. Louis Catholic Church in Dillon, South

Carolina (Figure 4.4-4.5). These modest buildings hold in common their small

scale, simple but vertically-accentuated rooflines, and their shingled or

weatherboard siding. McInerney encouraged the use of local materials in his

designs, especially in small communities like Catholic Hill, which were relatively

isolated and financially straitened. As many of these smaller and simpler

churches and schools have succumbed to demolition or replacement spurred by

changing tides of local populations,  St. James Church remains one of a

dwindling number of McInerney's vernacular, Gothic-styled buildings that still

dot the southern landscape.

St. James Church possesses distinct Gothic Revival elements, characteristic

of McInerney's style, both on its interior and exterior. Most immediately

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[74] Two examples are Holy Trinity Church in Kinston, North Carolina, no longer used by that
Catholic community, and St. Ann's Catholic Church in Smithfield, North Carolina, built in 1935
for a couple dozen Catholics in Smithfield, which congregation later consolidated with other
Catholics in the county into a single parish in nearby Clayton.

noticeable on the exterior is the general verticality of the building, spearheaded by the central, rectilinear tower with a four-sided spire, set against a relatively narrow, three bay-wide facade.  Gothic arches frame the main front door and the south door to the west wing.  The open belfry possesses a Gothic-inspired arch on all four sides. Non-original wooden window coverings over the two front windows of the church also nod to a Gothic form. The interior of St. James Church is also Gothic in design. Interior Gothic features include the pointed arches framing the central apse and the side statue niches, as well as the exposed timber ceiling beams suspended over the nave of the church.  The exposed ceiling trusses of St. James are a trademark McInerney design, visible in most of his churches, rural and urban, located across the South.[75] Additionally, McInerney often marked his buildings with a "long-stemmed cross, sometimes in bold relief, other times subtly inscribed."[76]  In the case of St. James, McInerney's "signature" cross stands in the form of a long-shafted, galvanized iron statue situated atop of the tower spire, as well as in a more Celtic-shaped iron cross mounted on the roof of the front porch. Originally, a third cross statue, identical to the one on the spire, was fastened to the roof ridge at the north (rear) end of the building. Probably, the installation of the current asphalt shingled roof necessitated the removal of this cross, which is no longer present. The three

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[75] For some examples, see the building list in Baumstein, "McInerney, Michael (1877-1963)."
[76] Baumstein, "McInerney, Michael (1877-1963)."

crosses together conveyed Trinitarian significance, a common theological gesture in Benedictine and Gothic architecture.

The form of St. James Church, with its tall central steeple, shingled exterior, and Gothic pointed arches, is unusual among Catholic churches built in South Carolina during the 1930s. Most Catholic mission churches built in the state during the Depression era were front-gabled, rectangular structures, sans steeple and constructed in local brick or weatherboard.[77] The Gothic style of St. James—expressed in the vertical emphasis and exterior archways, as well as in the interior details and basilica plan—specifically signifies a western, Roman Catholic architectural tradition that is seldom seen in the rural South. The ecclesiastical Gothic style is European and Roman Catholic in origin, and universal in occurrence. St. James the Greater mission church adapts this medieval architectural tradition to the materials and environment of the rural American South. Though Gothic Revival is a common ecclesiastical architectural type in all regions of the United States, in the South, the style predominantly characterizes churches affiliated with the Episcopalian (Anglican), Methodist, and occasionally, Baptist, denominations. Often founded by Irish immigrants, who were generally less prosperous than their Anglo-American neighbors, Catholic churches in rural South Carolina were simple in design and minimal in

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[77] "St. Peter's Church, Rectory, and Mission Chapels," photographs, folder 7, Beaufort St. Peter Parish File Box 3, Diocese of Charleston Archives.

ornamentation. References to the wider, Roman Catholic architectural tradition—

such as Gothic or Romanesque-styled windows, doors, and towers—were scant

by necessity. Examples of these types of simple Catholic chapels built in the

South Carolina countryside during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries

include St. Andrew's Catholic Church in Barnwell (built in 1831, the oldest extant

Catholic church in South Carolina; see figure 3.1); Our Lady of Peace in Bonneau

(1923); and Good Shepherd Catholic Church in McCormick (1926).[78] These three

churches are but a few of the many Catholic churches that are simply designed as

front-gabled, brick or weatherboard-sided, and featuring rectangular windows

and doorways (Figure 4.6). More Gothic-style churches began to appear in the

late 1940s and the 1950s, such as Our Lady of the Valley in Gloverville (1954) and

St. Boniface in Joanna (1949) (Figure 4.7). These mid-century churches are distinct

from the Gothic style of St. James in their building material, which is usually

stone, in their larger size, and in the incorporation of modernist design features.

They represent a new era of relative prosperity for South Carolina Catholics, as

well as the later professional style of McInerney, who continued to design

Catholic churches in South Carolina well into the 1950s.[79]

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[78] "Church History," Good Shepherd Catholic Church, (accessed online January 2015); "Our Lady of Peace Mission," St. Philip Benizi Catholic Church, (accessed online January 2015) "Historic Barnwell," City of Barnwell, SC (accessed online January 2015).
[79] "Parish Listings," Diocese of Charleston website.

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St. James is also unusual among other Protestant churches in the region. Most ecclesiastical buildings in the area around St. James are built with brick or weatherboard siding, and occasionally have shingled details, such as the flared wall of a bell tower, but few other churches have wooden shingled walls.  The Episcopal Church of Atonement, at 207 Chaplain Street in Walterboro, was built in 1896 for Episcopalian African Americans (Figure 4.8). It contains elements of Gothic and Colonial Revival styles, with wooden siding and fish scale shingles decorating a portion of the steeple beneath the belfry. Another local example is St. Peter's African Methodist Episcopal church, listed on the National Register as a property in the Walterboro Historic District. Built circa 1870, the form of the church, with its central steeple and symmetry, is similar to that of St. James; however, it is much more typically clad in white weatherboard (Figure 4.9).

Southeastern Construction Company in Charlotte, North Carolina executed McInerney's Gothic-inspired design for St. James Church. Though their proximity to McInerney at Belmont Abbey likely encouraged the choice of Southeastern (and in fact, they did work with McInerney to build multiple churches for the Diocese of Charleston) another contributing factor may have been the family who ran the company. Earle Whitton was president of Southeastern in 1935, and his son Beaumert worked as a field engineer for the company. Beaumert had graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of

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Technology (MIT), and supported the recruitment of African-American students for the engineering program at MIT. Much of Beaumert's philanthropy was devoted towards the expansion and betterment of African-American education during the era of segregation.[80] It was therefore logical that Southeastern, with its personal record of assisting marginalized African Americans, would carry out McInerney's detailed plans for St. James Church.

Together, Michael McInerney and Southeastern Construction Company combined personal dedication and professional expertise that resulted in a church building that was distinctive, functional, durable, and attractive. These qualities were particularly outstanding considering that by 1935, most of the nation had halted nonessential building projects until the financial situation recovered. The construction of St. James Church in the midst of the Great Depression demonstrated not only the skill and generosity of McInerney and Southeastern, but also the self-sacrifice displayed by the St. James blacks in service to their historic parish and faith. Importantly, the African Americans of Catholic Hill recognized that architecture was a potent means by which to sustain their cultural and spiritual roots.

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[80] "Beaumert Whitton Papers, Part 1," J. Murrey Atkins Library Special Collections, UNC Charlotte (accessed online November 2014).

## 4.2 Architectural Significance of St. James Schoolhouse

Daniel Berberich established a school in 1894 in a one-room building already standing on the site and located near to the church.[81] However, the small size and the lack of furnishings—"neither blackboards, nor desks, only boards nailed across blocks for seats"—necessitated the construction of a much larger, two-story I-house schoolhouse in 1901 (Figure 4.10). [82] This is the school building that stands today. St. James Schoolhouse is among the earliest African-American school buildings still standing in South Carolina. The original portion of the schoolhouse is still intact. The most striking external changes in appearance today are the 1950s-era metal awnings and red paint. Otherwise, all elevations except for the rear (north) elevation are nearly exact in appearance to the original house as it stood newly built in 1901.

The design of St. James School is conspicuously different from the majority of historic African-American schools that exist throughout the state. Most African-American schools from the pre-Civil Rights era that still stand today in South Carolina are products of the Rosenwald Fund, established in 1917 by owner of Sears, Roebuck, and Company Julius Rosenwald. The Rosenwald fund generated the construction of black schools throughout South Carolina

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[81] Anonymous author, "History of St. James."
[82] Bureau of Catholic and Indian Missions, "Charleston," *Mission Work*, 1900; Bureau of Catholic and Indian Missions, "Charleston," *Mission Work*, 1901, folder "Marquette University Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, 1890-1974," Black Catholics Reference Collection, 1834-2003, Diocese of Charleston Archives.

from 1917 through 1932. Rosenwald schools usually adhered to a formulaic style that gave them a similar appearance across states. They were frequently one or one-and-a-half story rectangular buildings constructed with white weatherboard. They featured banks of tall and narrow sash windows, front gables, and often wide and deeply recessed front entrances. The architecture of the Rosenwald buildings was largely standardized, and specifically denoted an educational purpose.[83] On the contrary, the style of St. James School, predating the earliest Rosenwalds by over fifteen years, was decidedly domestic on the exterior, expressed in the form of a vernacular I-house. The interior, however, was not domestic. It consisted originally of one large room on each floor, designed distinctly and consciously to serve an educational function.

It is remarkable that a group of poor, uneducated, and rural African Americans wished—and were apparently able—to construct a domestic type of architecture that, while familiar to them, most likely did not reflect the style of their own homes, which were almost certainly much smaller, one-story, frame buildings, similar to the home of John and Isabelle Brown (see Figure 3.2). The parishioners and their priest—who tradition maintains built the schoolhouse themselves—evidently made a very purposeful choice to produce the largest and

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[83] Lindsay C.M. Weathers, "The Rosenwald School Building Program in South Carolina, 1917-1932," Multiple Property Documentation, National Register Nomination, 2008 (accessed online January 2015); Rosenwald Fund Card File Database, Fisk University (accessed online November 2014-January 2015).

most sophisticated building they could with the funds and expertise available.

Cotton farmers, carpenters, and railroad workers by trade, the blacks of St. James

built what they knew.  The two-story I-house type was not unprecedented for a

schoolhouse by any stretch—one example contemporary with St. James School is

Goodwill Parochial School in Sumter County, South Carolina. Goodwill

Presbyterian Church in Mayesville (about ninety miles north of Catholic

Crossroads) erected Goodwill School for African Americans circa 1900. Like St.

James, Goodwill is wooden frame, two stories, and side-gabled with a central

clipped front gable (Figure 4.11).[84] Nonetheless, a more predictable building type

for a small, rural school would have been a building such as Hopkins Graded

School, located in Richland County, South Carolina. Built for whites c. 1900,

Hopkins School is a slightly elaborated form of the local domestic architecture

(such as characterized much of historic rural South Carolina)—a one-and-a-half

story, L-shaped building with cross gables and clad with white weatherboard

(Figure 4.12). A square belfry marks the building as a school.[85] Though domestic

in style, the I-house built by the St. James blacks and Daniel Berberich matched

neither the higher-style homes located in and near to Walterboro, nor the much

humbler abodes—likely even simpler in style and smaller in size than Hopkins

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[84] Ruby Jean C. Boyd, "Goodwill Parochial School," National Register Nomination, 1995, (accessed online January 2015).

[85] Andrew Chandler et al., Individual Property Form for Hopkins Graded School in "Lower Richland County Multiple Resource Area," National Register Nomination, March 1986 (accessed online January 2015).

School—at Catholic Crossroads. Instead they produced a dignified, capacious building that stood out on the landscape of the Crossroads, neither ostentatious nor self-effacing.  Additionally, the St. James builders were careful to construct an interior that would best support an educational environment. Though the usual design of a domestic I-house includes a central hall flanked by a room on either side, St. James Schoolhouse was originally un-partitioned on both floors to allow for large blackboards, rows of desks, and maximized light and ventilation. By the 1930s, walls were added to partition space on the second floor, but the first floor has remained a single, undivided space since its original construction.

Though there is no evidence to suggest that the sources of funding for the construction of St. James School had any concrete or direct influence on the architecture of the building, it is worth noting that the two most direct influences upon the construction of the school—Sister Katherine Drexel's Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, and Daniel Berberich—had distinctly non-Southern roots. Drexel and her sisters resided at a convent in Bensalem, Pennsylvania, outside of Philadelphia. Berberich had come quite recently to the Lowcountry from Germany by way of New York State.[86] Northern ties were an element that persisted throughout the architectural history of St. James. Michael McInerney

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[86] Daniel Berberich to Katharine Drexel, June 30, 1904, folder 10 "Correspondence," St. James the Greater Parish File Box, Diocese of Charleston Archives.

was born, educated, and professionally trained in Pennsylvania.[87] Fr. Kamler was

from New York, and the Denbys and other private donors who paid for the

construction of the third church were friends or family from his hometown,

Olean.[88] This North-South, black-white dialogue was integral to the architectural

development of St. James, as well as to the religious, social, economic, and

cultural sustenance of this geographically remote and financially strapped

Mission.

St. James the Greater Church and Schoolhouse are architecturally distinct

in South Carolina and in the larger region of the South. Not only are their

particular styles unusual among extant school buildings and churches across the

state, but the amount of thought, skill, and sustained care that went into their

construction and maintenance is noteworthy, especially considering the poor

black constituency whom they historically served.  That the two buildings are

conjoined in history and in space lends an additional layer of architectural

richness to the property of St. James Mission. As an historic architectural unit, St.

James School and Church are unique on the landscape of South Carolina.

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[87] Baumstein, "McInerney, Michael (1877-1963)."
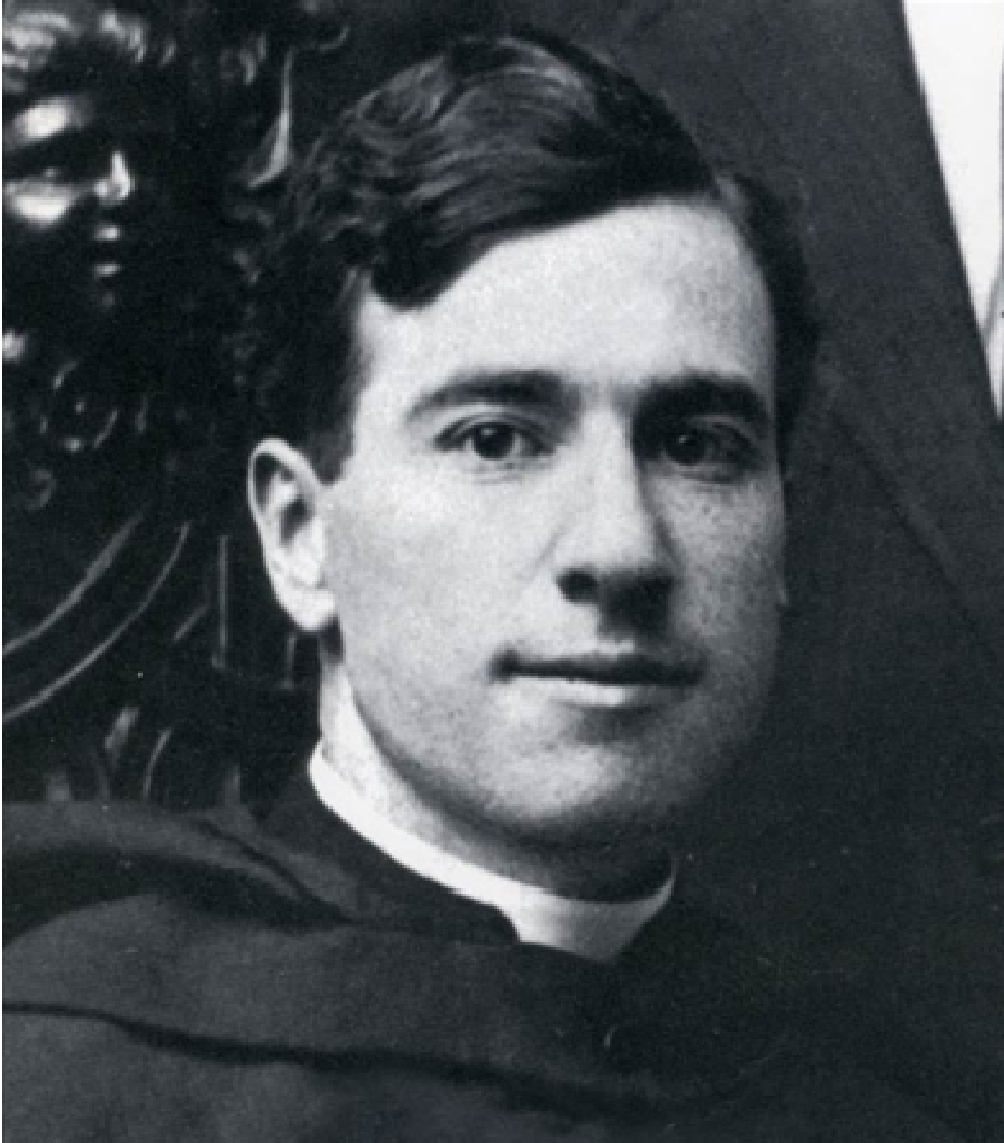[88] "Pray for These Benefactors," plaque in St. James the Greater Church vestibule.

Figure 4.1 Reverend Michael McInerney, O.S.B. (Photo courtesy of St. Benedict Church, Baltimore, MD.)

Figure 4.2 St. James Church, c. 1940s. (Photo courtesy of St. James the Greater Parish.)

Figure 4.3 St. James Church, 1942. (Photo courtesy of Diocese of Charleston Archives.)



Figure 4.4 (left) St. Louis in Dillon, SC. Figure 4.5 (right) St. Andrew's Chapel in Blufton, SC. (Photo courtesy of St. Gregory the Great Catholic Church.) Both buildings, along with St. James, exemplify McInerney's style for rural Catholic churches in South Carolina.

Figure 4.6 (left) Our Lady of Peace in Bonneau, SC, 1923. Figure 4.7 (right) St. Boniface in Joanna, SC, 1949. (Photos courtesy of Diocese of Charleston.)
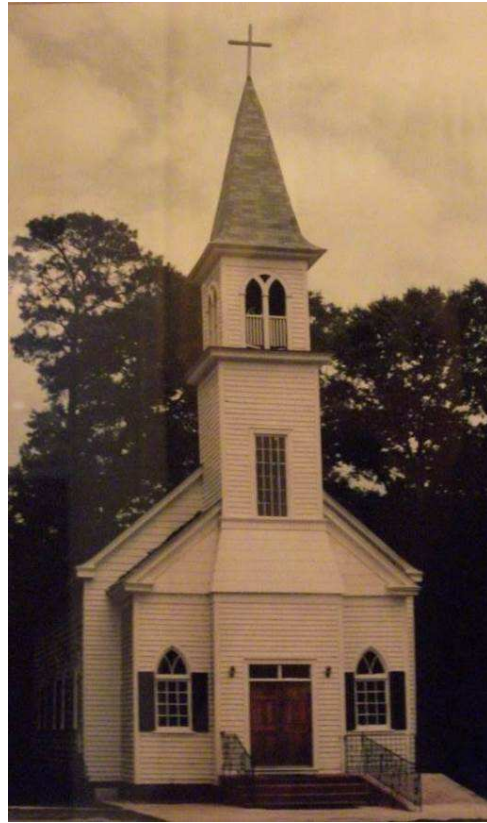




Figure 4.8 (left) Church of the Atonement in Walterboro, 1896. (Photo courtesy of South Carolina State Historic Preservation Office.) Figure 4.9 (right) St. Peter's AME Church in Walterboro, c. 1870 (Photo courtesy of Colleton County Museum.)
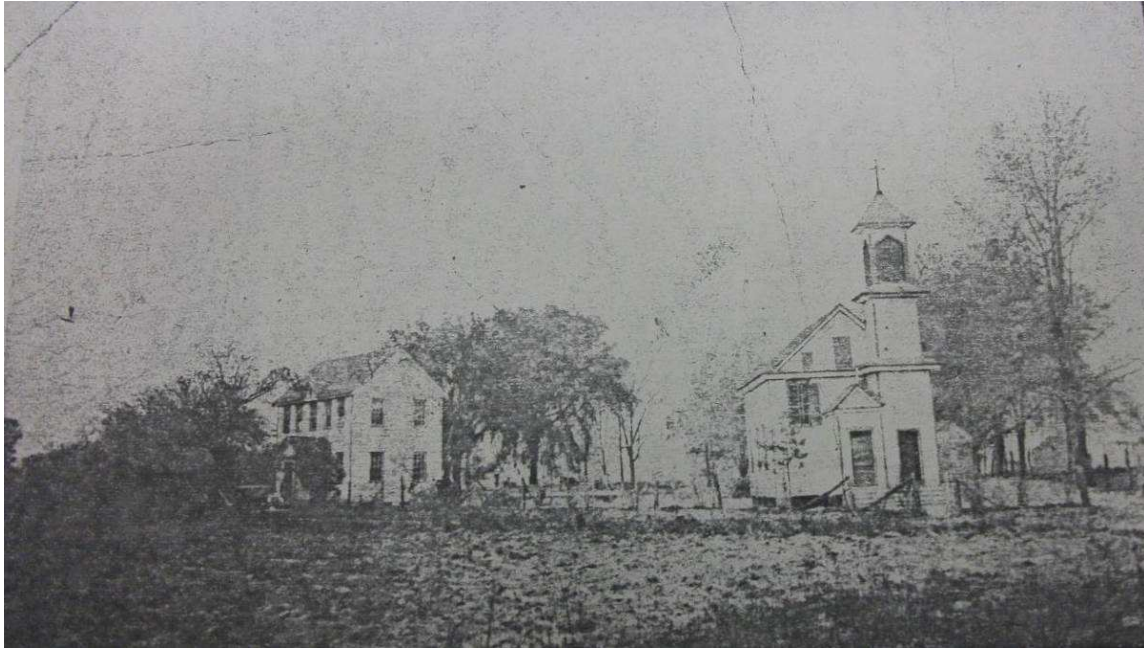
Figure 4.10 St. James Church and Schoolhouse, c. 1920s. Note that the direction of the third (current) church was altered slightly—about 45 degrees—so that its façade aligns with that of the schoolhouse. (Photo courtesy of Diocese of Charleston Archives.)



Figure 4.11 (left) Goodwill Parochial School in Mayesville, SC, c.1890s. Figure 4.12 (right) Hopkins Graded School in Hopkins, SC, c. 1900. (Photos courtesy of the South Carolina State Historic Preservation Office.)

Chapter 5

Conclusion

St. James the Greater Mission is, in South Carolina—and very possibly in the entire United States—unique. Furthermore, it has been unique—unparalleled by a combination of demographic, architecture, and age—since the 1840s or 1850s, when the Catholic parish first began evolving into a black Catholic parish. The survival of this black Catholic community is remarkable in itself; the fixed nature of the community's worship, centered on the original parish cemetery on Catholic Hill, is nothing short of astonishing.

The lifeblood of the Crossroads community was (and is) ultimately the deeply-rooted and unyielding character of its African-American congregation. The enigma of St. James' history is how exactly these blacks—initially still slaves—managed for over three decades to maintain a functioning, cohesive, and stationary congregation without a priest, without organizational funding, and without that structure which embodies a parish—a church. The answer may lie at least partly in their African cultural roots. For the African Americans of St. James, the remoteness of their historic parish site was crucial to its sacred

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character. The rural and swampy isolation was also crucial to the very survival of the St. James community as a parish of black Catholics, in a manner insulating them during some of the most bitterly discriminatory and violent years of Southern history, in which both blacks and Catholics were specific targets for hate groups.

The whites of various northern and European origins were also critical to the continued existence of St. James the Greater parish. They valued buildings, were talented at building, and had the resources to build. The arrival of Daniel Berberich in 1892 and the subsequent inflow of white northern money and influence over the next several decades had the potential to precipitate a cultural clash of black-versus-white, northerners-versus-southerners, urban-versus-rural. Instead, the prolonged encounter that took place in the midst of Reconstruction and Jim Crow was remarkably peaceable, productive, and transformative. It resulted not in the domination of one cultural entity over another, but rather in a Catholic parish that willingly evolved, expanding its worldview to recognize the sacred capacity of both the natural environment and the man-made building. St. James, still resting at swamp's edge with its church, schoolhouse, and cemetery, is at once a living, modern parish, and an historic cultural artifact.

St. James' church, schoolhouse, and cemetery are essential to the continued existence of this historically vibrant parish. For parishioners, the buildings and the cemetery are the very real, tangible presence of their past. As such, they serve as a form of continuity, identity, and pride for the people of Catholic Hill today. Listing the three resources on the National Register is a step towards ensuring their preservation, as well as the preservation of the community whom they have so long served.

In encouraging the preservation of the property, listing on the National Register additionally provides a springboard for continued research into the buildings and the graveyard of St. James. While I have conducted extensive archival research on the mission site, much work remains to accomplish a thorough investigation into the history and architecture of St. James the Greater Parish. Architectural documentation, cemetery survey work, and archaeology are a few avenues that have rich potential for recording and elucidating the history of Catholic Hill. Additionally, little has been written about the architect of the current St. James church, Fr. Michael McInerney, and a complete inventory of his prodigious work is far from complete. This latter documentation is especially crucial as so many of his churches, schools, and religious institutions have fallen victim to demolition in recent decades, consequent of growing and shifting

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communities who choose to replace their outgrown, historic buildings with larger modern facilities.

My hope is that listing St. James the Greater Mission on the National Register will reward the parish with a measure of the official and national recognition that it has long deserved. I hope, too, that this recognition will give continued inspiration to the people of Catholic Hill to hold fast to their black Catholic roots, as well as spur further research into this and similar communities of whom much has already been irrevocably lost in the haze of time.

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# Appendix A—Images



Figure A.1 Aerial Photo of St. James the Greater c. 1960. (Photo courtesy of St. James the Greater Parish.)

Figure A.2 St. James Schoolhouse and Church, view north, c. 1980.
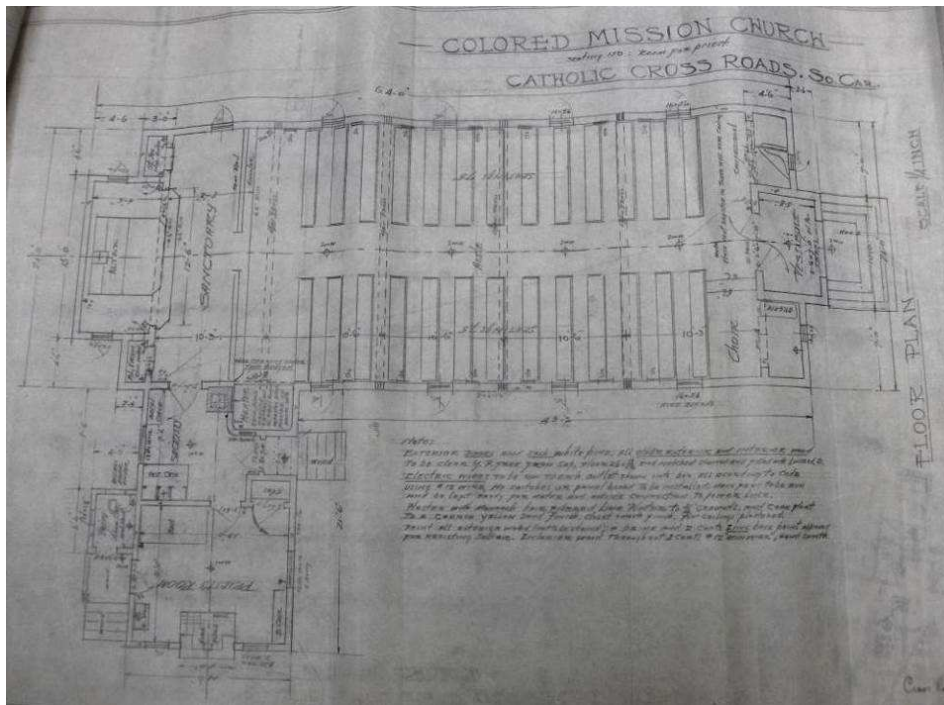(Photo courtesy of Diocese of the Charleston Archives.)



Figure A.3 Floorplan for St. James Church, copy of the original by Michael
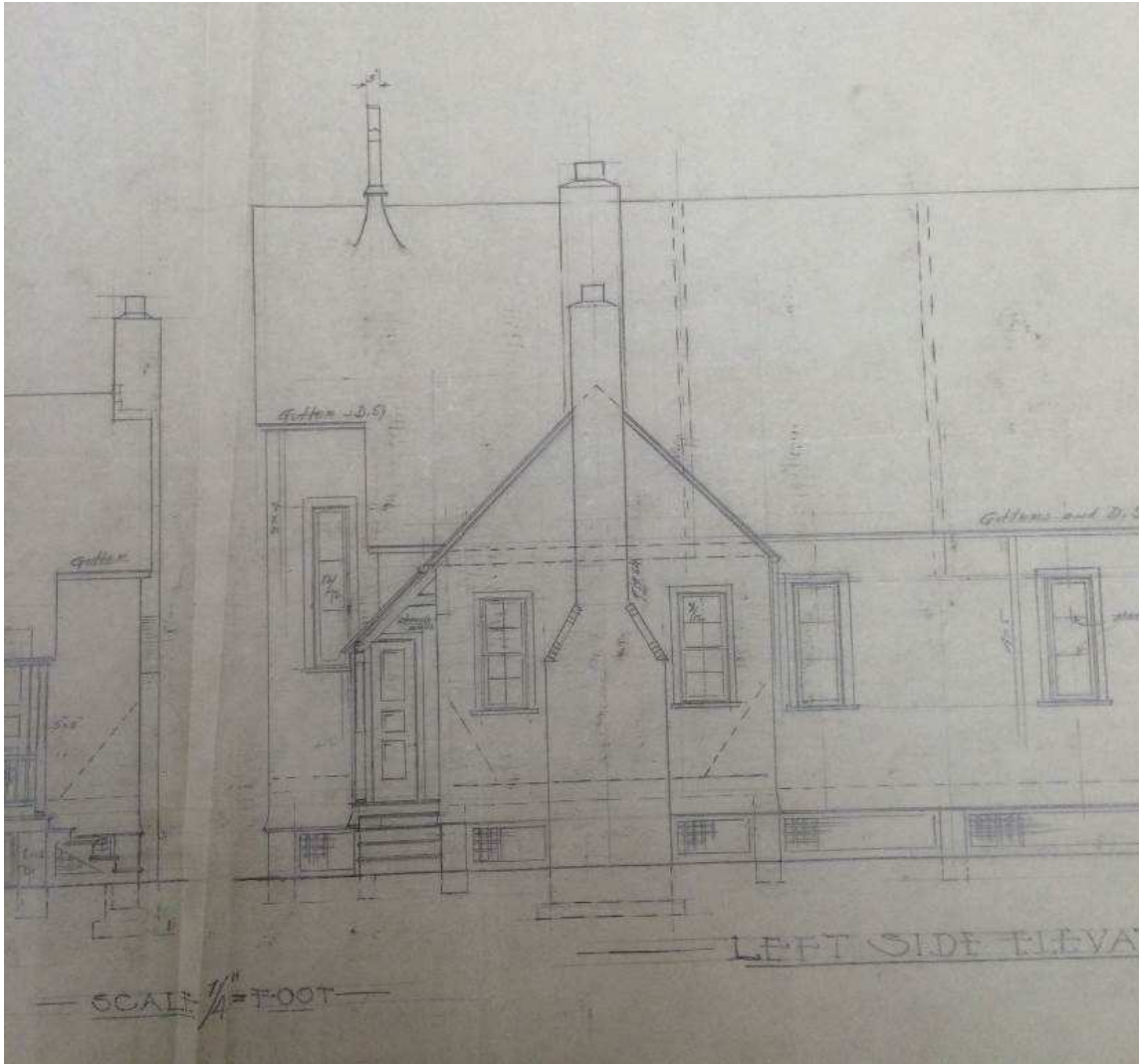McInerney, 1935. (Image courtesy of the Diocese of Charleston Archives.)

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Figure A.4 Architectural drawing of the façade of St. James Church, copy of the original by Michael McInerney, 1935. (Image courtesy of the Diocese of Charleston Archives.)

Figure A.5 Architectural drawing of the north (rear) portion of the west elevation of St. James Church, copy of the original by Michael McInerney, 1935. (Image courtesy of the Diocese of Charleston Archives.)
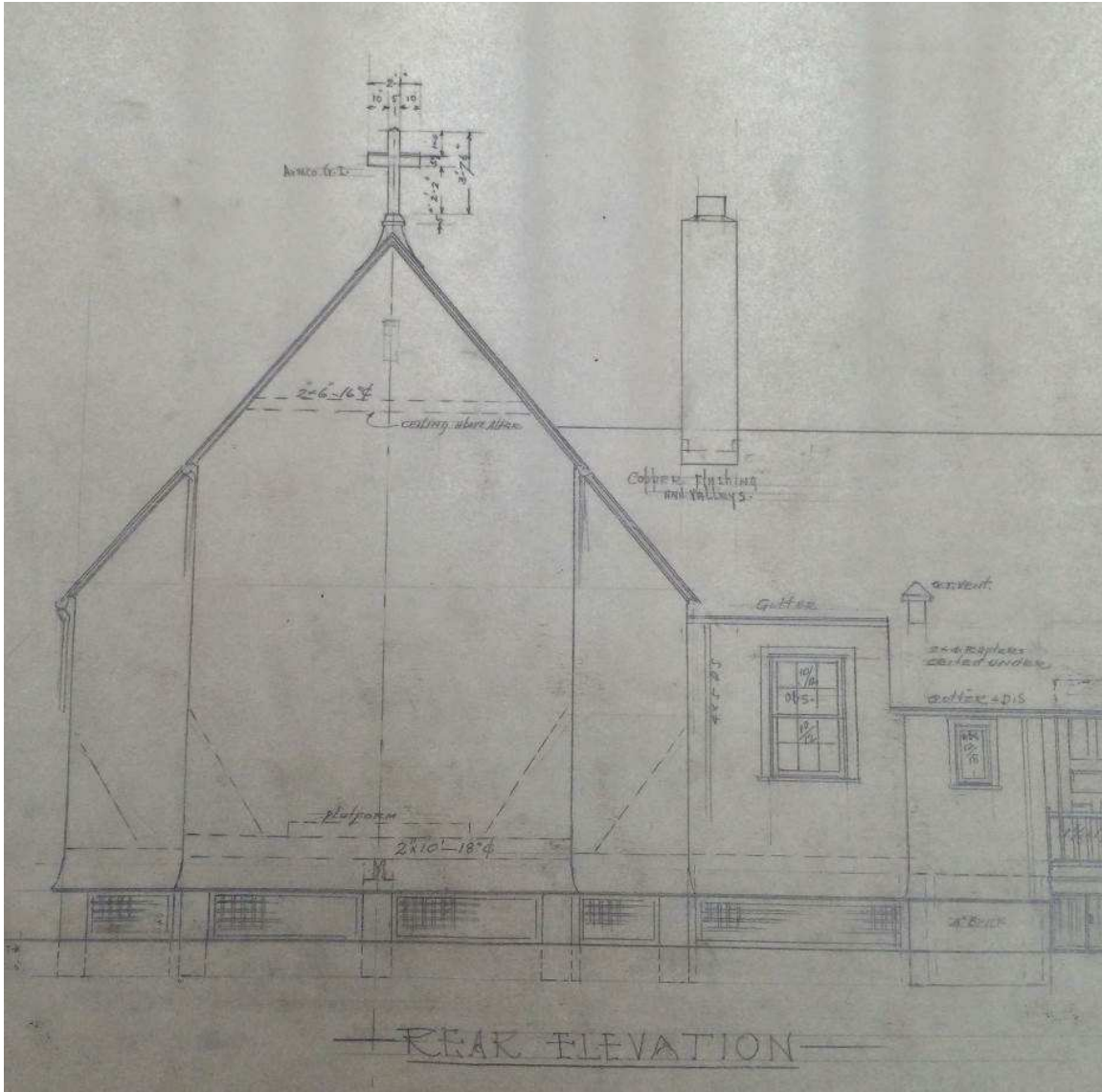
Figure A.6 Architectural drawing of north (rear) elevation of St. James Church, copy of original by Michael McInerney, 1935. (Image courtesy of the Diocese of Charleston Archives.)
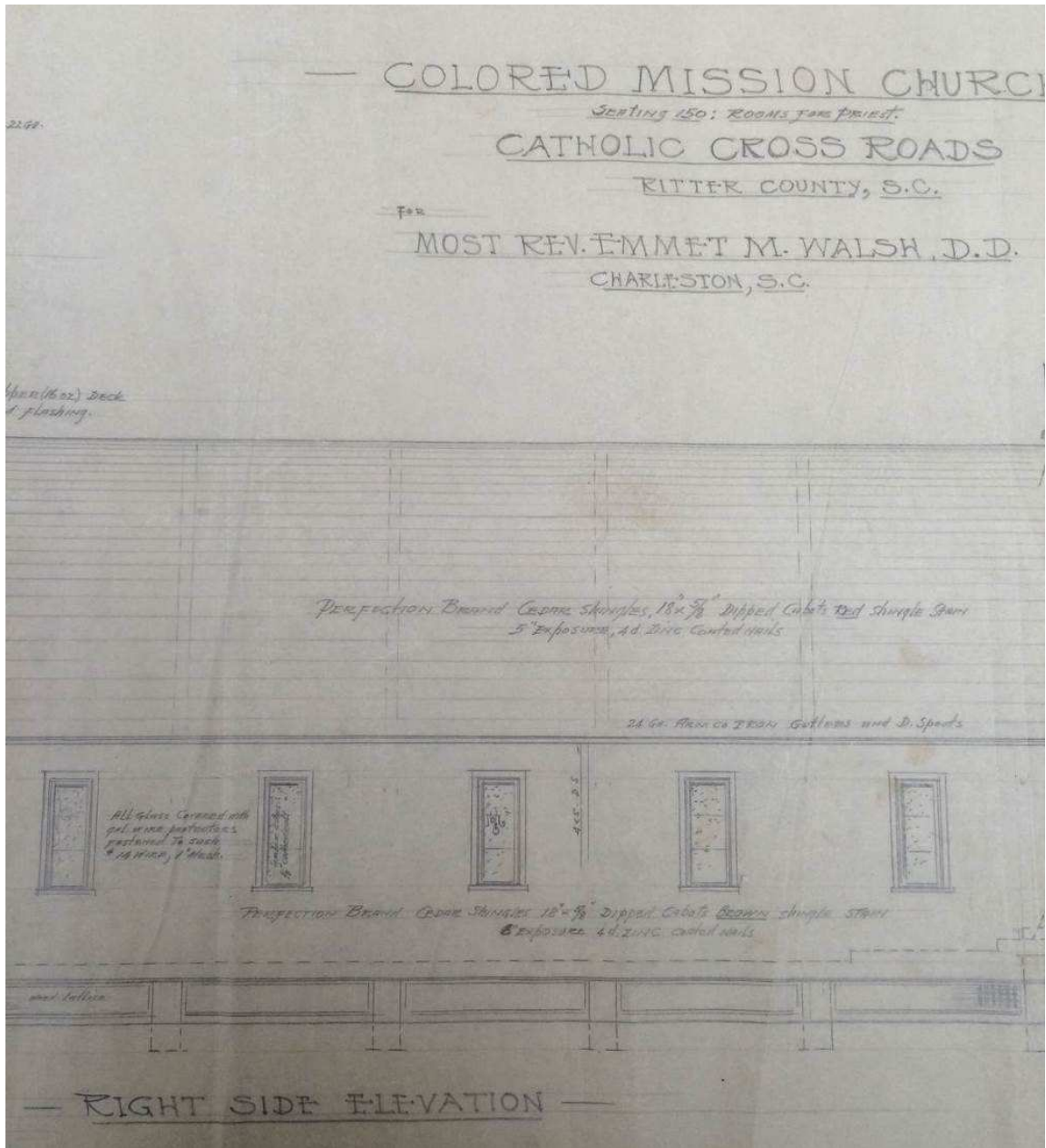
Figure A.7 Architectural drawing of the east elevation of St. James Church, copy of the original by Michael McInerney, 1935. (Image courtesy of the Diocese of Charleston Archives.)
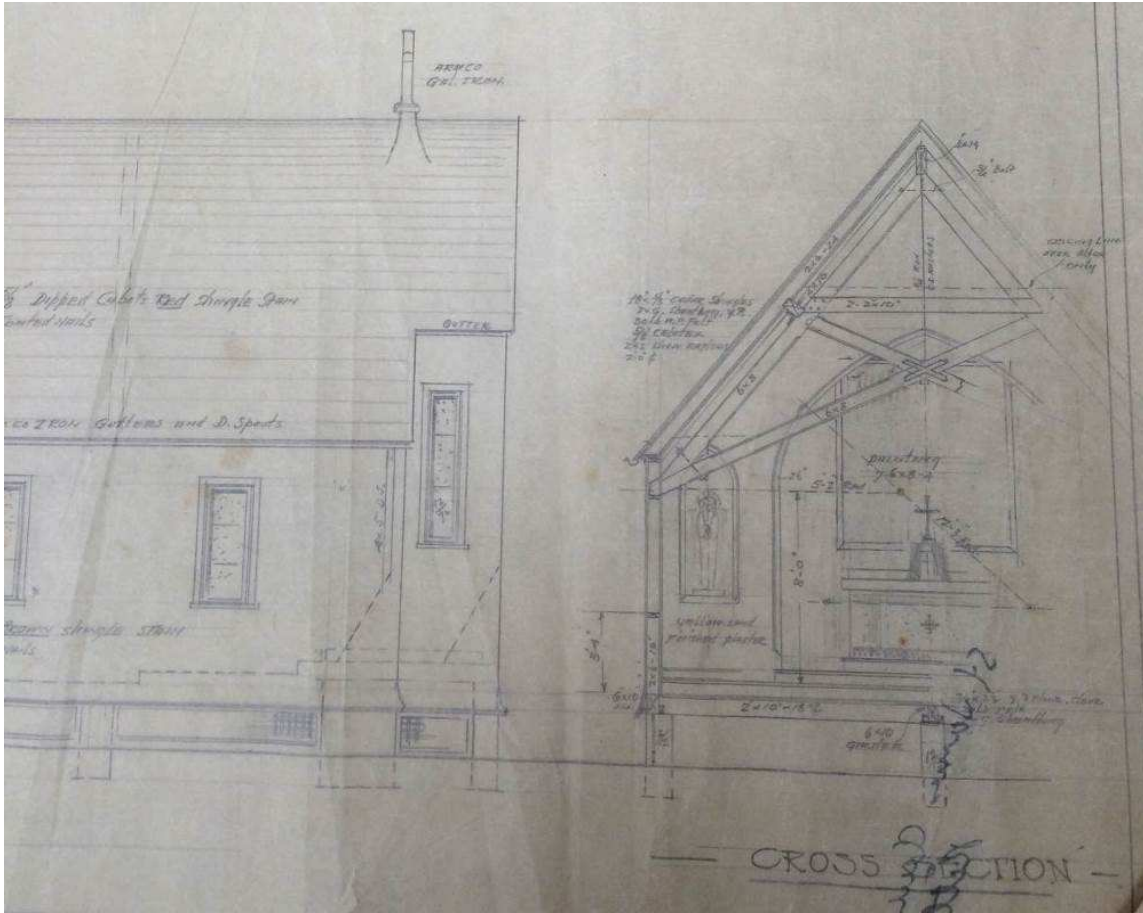
Figure A.8 Architectural drawing of the northeast corner of St. James Church and of an interior cross section of the nave, view north. Copy of the original by Michael McInerney, 1935. (Image courtesy of the Diocese of Charleston Archives.)

# Appendix B—Maps



Figure B.1 Map of Colleton County, drawn by Beulah Glover, 1935.

Figure B.2 Colleton County GIS Map, satellite image, indicating the location and acreage (.9) of the property of St. James the Greater Mission.
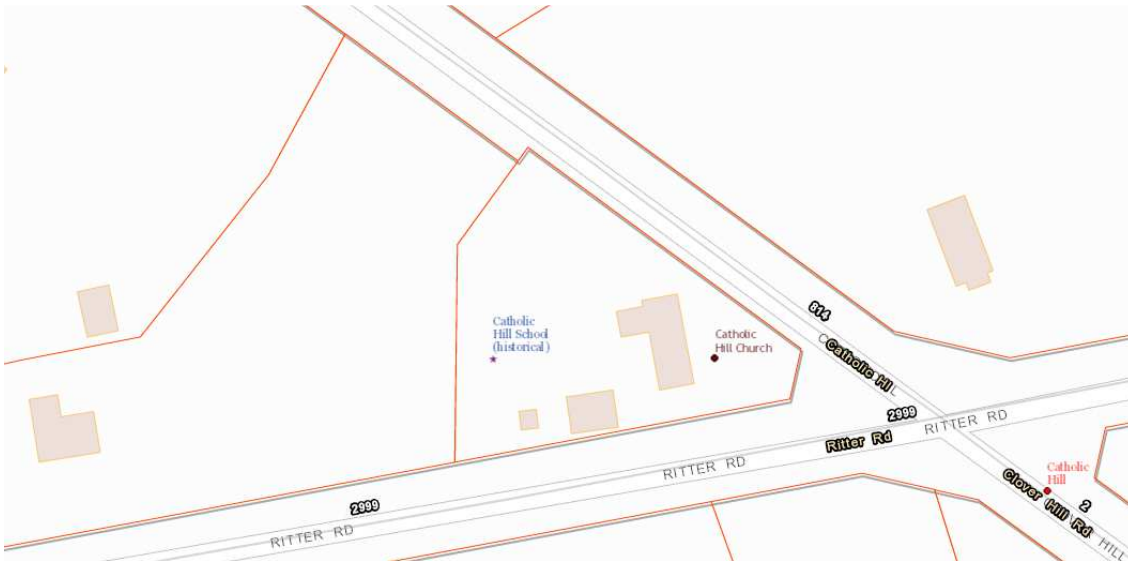


Figure B.3 Colleton County GIS Map, topographic, showing Catholic Hill property and surrounding  location.

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