

**CHEYENNE CATHEDRAL
1867-1973 (NRHP)
[Date of Survey 1967 (1973 revised)]**

**Source
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY
NOMINATION FORM
Form 10-3000 (Rev. 6-72)
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**

**St. Mary's Catholic Cathedral
2107 Capitol Avenue
Cheyenne, Wyoming**

**Latitude of the center of the building
41 Degrees 08' Minutes 15' Seconds
Longitude of the center of the building
104 Degrees 49' Minutes 04' Seconds**

**Representation in Existing Surveys
Wyoming Recreation Comm.,
Survey of Historic Markers, Sites & Monuments
Date of Survey 1967 (1973 revised)**

**Form Prepared by
Mark Junge, Historian
June, 1974
Wyoming Recreation Comm.
604 East 25th Street
Cheyenne, Wyoming**

**Accepted for National Register Verification
July 16, 1974
[Signed] Paul H. Westedt
Wyoming SHPO**

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

[Physical Appearance – 1]

St. Mary's is a lofty, English Gothic cathedral in the heart of Cheyenne, Wyoming. Two blocks north of the cathedral is the impressive Wyoming State Capitol Building, and opposite the capitol and three quarters of a mile south is another impressive structure, the Union Pacific Depot. Between the red sandstone, Richardsonian Romanesque depot and the grey sandstone, French Renaissance Capitol Building is Capitol Avenue. Along that axis is situated St. Mary's, a white sandstone structure and one of the most distinctive pieces of historic architecture in the city.

The Cathedral takes up the south-central portion of a city block bounded on the north by 22nd Street, on the south by 21st Street, on the east by Central Avenue, and on the west by Capitol Avenue. Across an alley and north of the cathedral is a parking lot, once the site of the city's Carnegie Library, and immediately east and southeast of the building is more parking area. Fifteen feet south of the cathedral's apse is a two and one-half story, white brick and sandstone rectory providing a residence and office space for the parish priest. West of the rectory and south of the cathedral are flower beds, shrubbery, pine trees and a wide lawn forming perhaps the most attractive corner of the parish property. The cathedral itself is a massive, ashlar structure whose basic design is in the shape of a cross. The original dimensions of the cathedral were approximately 70 by 135 feet; however, its shape has changed slightly, the length increasing to about 210 feet when an addition was made to the east end of the building in 1962. The \$200,000 addition is a substantial material addition to the cathedral and consists of a one and a half story, white brick and stone extension containing rooms designed to serve parish functions, and includes a two-car garage. Because the extension is generally the same type and color of construction material as the original cathedral, it does not distract significantly from the overall structure.

Both the exterior and interior of the cathedral generally reflect the particular style of architecture known as English Gothic. According to Marcus Whiffen, in his book, *American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles*, the English style of the cathedral falls within the American archetype called Early Gothic Revival. According to Whiffen, "In the Early Gothic Revival the medieval prototypes are nearly always English." Although this style reached its zenith in America during the period 1820-1860, the utilization of the English Gothic style is probably not out of place for an early, twentieth century cathedral. Indeed, there are certain characteristics of the Gothic style in general which seem to be universal, regardless of time and place. One prominent characteristic is the arch, especially the pointed arch; another is the steeply-gabled roof and a third is the stained-glass window. Together, along with others, these characteristics form a relationship between structure and appearance designed to effect the unique, "aspiring" character of the Gothic Style. This character is particularly effective in religious buildings such as St. Mary's Cathedral. For the Christian worshipper the Gothic cathedral evokes religious feeling, while at the same time serves as a worthy manifestation of his faith.

[Physical Appearance – 2]

The Gothic style, interestingly, is not only aesthetic but is functional to its environment. The prevalence of winds and rain in England and the presence of those elements in Wyoming, including hail, sleet, and heavy snow, justifies a steeply-gabled roof. Thus is the steep, slate-covered roof of St. Mary's designed to throw off the weight of those elements. The dullness of the English climate is one reason for the development of large windows in the Gothic style; however, the Wyoming climate is generally sunny and bright. Numerous and large stained-glass windows are nevertheless necessary to effect the reverent, or inspired attitude sought by the Gothic architect. Minor Gothic features such as roof parapets are practical to contemporary man as they were to medieval man. The point was recently made clear to the writer when he observed a worker using these projections to support and stabilize himself during roof repair work. Finally, monochrome, ashlar structures such as St. Mary's are seen in both England and the state of Wyoming because both areas possess fine granite and sandstone. But it is a hard variety which does not readily admit elaborate ornamentation, and this factor is evident in St. Mary's Cathedral. The architectural result is a sober, dignified structure compared to more elaborate, European Gothic styles.

The particular construction of St. Mary's Cathedral is in the style of a thirteenth century phase of the English Gothic known as Early English. The building displays a host of exterior and interior characteristics which do not fit strictly within that style but its major, and many of its minor, features are more or less traceable to Early English. For example, the building's transepts, which have very little projection and no secondary additions, are more representative of the French Gothic than the English Gothic. The position of the cathedral's main entrance, opening as it does to the west, also does not conform to Early English Gothic. But it is the result of a local condition. By facing Capitol Avenue, St. Mary's becomes a part of a main city axis, a boulevard which once was more aesthetically pleasing than it is today. The sometimes harsh Wyoming weather which often comes from the west or northwest is mitigated by the presence of a narthex, or vestibule, located between the main entranceway and the main body or nave of the cathedral. The pointed-arch style of the entranceway does reflect certain Early English characteristics, and is utilized in other cathedral openings such as the large, stained-glass windows. Further, these windows are enhanced by a modest amount of tracery common to Early English. Buttressing is plain and consists of unadorned piers or pilasters characteristic of an eleventh and twelfth century style known as Norman, but the ashlar walls of the cathedral are typically Early English in both construction and in the fine proportion between openings and pilasters. The massive, square, 106-foot high tower on the southwest corner of the main building is Early English and is similar to that of St. Mary's in Winchester, England. The roof of the cathedral is steep and, within, the oak ribs of the ceiling vaults are left [Physical Appearance – 3] exposed, both of which are Early English features although their origin is in the earlier, Norman phase of English Gothic. Examples of minor features in the Norman phase are six crosses mounted upon the roof gables.

Although there are two sets of double doors providing south entrances to narthex and nave, perhaps it would be best to begin a description of the cathedral interior at the main, or west entrance. From the broad steps of the cathedral's western portal a set of heavy steel doors provide

entrance to the narthex or vestibule. It is a narrow room with a low ceiling divided into four, groined vaults from which hang pendant-type light fixtures. The south end of the narthex opens into the lower section of the tower and a stairway in the latter leads to the choir above the narthex.

From the narthex two sets of oak doors open into the nave, or main body of the cathedral. Beginning at the west end of the nave the floor, covered by blue-green carpet, inclines slightly toward the apse or sanctuary where the ceremony of the mass is performed. Early English Gothic tradition calls for a comparatively low-vaulted nave, a characteristic which in medieval times eliminated the necessity for heavy and complex, exterior buttressing. But the ceiling of the nave in St. Mary's arches to a height of about 70 feet, and has little exterior buttressing to support it. Perhaps this feature is made possible by the modern development of steel reinforcement. Typically Early English, however, is the use of oak wood for ribs in the vaulting, and oak is used in St. Mary's in a type of vaulting known as "rib and panel". One of the most obvious characteristics of the nave are its many stained-glass windows. Set within each of the north and south walls, to the point where the transepts intersect the main body of the building are four, large, stained-glass windows flanked by fourteen stations of the cross. Each window, like each station of the cross, is not only an object of reflection and prayer, but also a teaching device, describing for the worshipper Biblical events. The windows of the south wall describe events in the lives of Mary and her child Jesus, while those of the north wall describe events in the life of Christ. Halfway down the main aisle, which bisects the nave and separates the central body of worshippers into equal sections of twenty-five pews, the visitor can turn on his heels and, looking upward, obtain a good view of the largest cathedral window, one which contains a representation of the Sistine Madonna. The multi-hued glass in this high, arching window, located above and behind the pipe organ in the choir loft, provides further evidence for the aesthetic proposition that the Gothic cathedral was intended to be a visible symbol of invisible, spiritual concepts.

Posted along each side of the nave are tall, slender columns which separate arches and appear to support seven ceiling vaults. They are of the pilaster type, however, except for one column in the round located where nave meets transept. All of the columns are surmounted by capitals decorated in the [Physical Appearance – 4] Early English style. The nave's lower arches are topped by a cornice from which spring seven smaller arches within the seven, larger ceiling vaults. These light blue ceiling vaults contain crosshatching formed by the intersection of three transverse oak ribs, and each vault is separated by thicker oak ribs extending from the center of the ceiling to meet and intersect the cornice. Below the cornice, on the end of each divider rib, is an ornate pendant or corbel with scrollwork in the Early English style. The color of the vault crosshatching, like the walls of the nave, is soft white or beige.

Extending north and south from the east end of the nave are abbreviated transepts forming the arms of the cathedral's cross pattern. Each arm contains two decorative stained-glass windows located in the triforium, above an oak-furnished choir. Below each choir, on the main floor, are oak confessionals. Adjacent to the north set of confessionals is a building opening, a single-door exit leading to an alley. Between each transept and the sanctuary, at the end of each of the two

side aisles of the nave, is a doorway leading to rooms designed for members of the laity with small children. Within the south room is a third set of oak confessionals.

The nave is terminated by a hexagonal sanctuary or apse. Separating the two are a wall and an elevated floor. The wall consists mainly of a very high, broad arch, and the base is of shining marble, slightly elevated and extending out from the sanctuary toward the nave. Additional separation between sanctuary and nave is achieved by two white marble railings. The walls of the sanctuary are faced with pink travertine marble to a point approximately fifteen feet from the floor, and above the marble facing is a plaster wall the same color as that of the nave. From the sanctuary wall spring seven vaults, similar in both design and number to the pattern of the vaults along each side of the nave. To the rear of the sanctuary, above the elevated, white marble back altar is suspended a figure of Christ crucified, and above the latter is a gold-painted, metal canopy or baldachin. A similar, but smaller baldachin is affixed to the north wall of the sanctuary area above the elevated, ornate Bishop's chair. Opposite the Bishop's chair is a plain, elevated chair for the parish priest, and between the two is the elevated main altar, simply designed and constructed of oak. It is here that function of the mass—The Eucharist—takes place. Along the flanking walls of the sanctuary and facing the nave are marble altars. Above the south altar is a life-size, marble figure of Joseph holding Jesus, and above the north altar is another of Mary with arms outstretched. In front of the former is an oak pulpit and in front of the latter is an oak lectern. Horizontal windows set within each of the north and south sides of the sanctuary separate the sanctuary area from the cry rooms previously mentioned. The windows of these rooms may be closed off from [Physical Appearance – 5] the sanctuary by a gold-colored, metal curtain if need dictates. From the sanctuary interior openings to the rear of the church are provided by separate doorways, one on each side of the back altar.

This rear portion of the church is the addition previously described, containing parish rooms and a two-car garage. Ventilation for the church is provided by two small openings at the base of each stained-glass window in the nave, and by two large vents located high within the wall which separates sanctuary from nave. Heating is central, provided by a furnace located in the unfinished church basement. Pipes from the furnace lead to narrow radiators located along the side aisles of the cathedral's nave.

In summary, both major and minor details of St. Mary's Cathedral eminently display the Gothic style. It is obvious in major, exterior features such as the arched building openings, gabled roof, and prominent bell tower, and in such minor features as the crosses and finials which cap the roof gables. Within, the Gothic style is evident in major features such as the high-arched, vaulted ceilings of nave and apse, and in the many stained-glass windows; in minor features the style appears in such details as the carved capitals of the pilasters and the decorative oak trim. The cathedral's stained glass is particularly impressive both from within and without, but for different reasons. On the exterior the perpendicular style and pleasing tracery of the windows is most apparent, while from within the mullions of the window panels are absorbed by the strong colors of the glass itself and by the religious themes portrayed. The Gothic interior of the cathedral is thus complementary to its exterior, and is apparent not only in large, obvious features but also in small details. The pattern of the cusps in the exterior window soffits, for example, is repeated in the stonework of the building's west face, in the wood trim of the interior balcony, above the two

sets of west, interior doors, and in the metalwork of the baldachins of the sanctuary. Finally, perhaps one could even say that the white stone of the cathedral's exterior against a blue Wyoming sky is matched by the predominantly soft white or beige interior capped by sky-blue ceiling vaults.

Because of the lack of architectural plans it is difficult to compare precisely the original interior plan and furnishings of the cathedral to those of the present. However, except for a description of the extensive addition to the east end of the building mentioned earlier, a comparison of the original to the present exterior would probably not be significant. A few examples of interior changes may be mentioned, however. Lights which once were suspended from the nave are now recessed within the ceiling. Modern radiators flanking the walls of the nave have probably long since replaced the original ones. A large, ornate wooden altar at the rear of the sanctuary was once the focal point of the mass, but a change in both the cathedral and the ceremony of the [Physical Appearance – 6] Roman Catholic Mass in the 1960s resulted in that altar being replaced by one of plain, white marble which serves mainly as a repository for The Eucharist. Originally the windows of the church were plain, not stained glass, and white oak has replaced plain oak in pews and certain other pieces of interior furniture. Overall, however, interior changes appear to have been ornamental and minor, and not structural in nature.

Cheyenne Cathedral 1969 TEXT STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

[Statement of Significance – 1] Trading posts such as Fort Laramie and Fort Bridger were the earliest permanent white settlements in what is today Wyoming. But with the construction of the Union Pacific Railroad across what is today southern Wyoming in 1867-68 came the basis for permanent population and future growth. Towns sprang up along the railroad tracks from one end of the state to the other, and one of the earliest of them was Cheyenne, located at the eastern edge of the Rocky Mountains. Cheyenne was selected by Grenville Dodge as a railroad division point between Omaha, Nebraska, and Ogden, Utah. It was also selected by the United States Army as the site of a large quartermaster's depot known as Camp Carlin. Camp Carlin and nearby Fort D.A. Russell, later named Fort F.E. Warren and today known as Warren Air Force Base, provided another economic base for the settlement at Cheyenne.

Among the earliest emigrants to the sprawling community of tents and wooden shacks which was Cheyenne, a population which could euphemistically be described as cosmopolitan, were not only transients but those with long-range plans. And within that stable element of the new community were those who intended to preach and spread the gospel of Christianity. One of the earliest of the various Christian sects to establish themselves in Cheyenne was that of the Roman Catholic. Wyoming, or Dakota Territory as it was known at that time, had not been neglected as a missionary area by the Catholics prior to 1867, however. With the creation of the Diocese of St. Louis in 1827 the area which is now Wyoming came under the authority of that see. In 1851 it was included within the Vicariate of Indian Territory, which extended from the southern boundary of Kansas north to Canada, and from the Missouri River west to the crest of the Rockies. From the Vicariate of Indian Territory in 1857 was carved the Vicariate of Nebraska, an area which included Wyoming and was administered from Omaha. However, not until August 9, 1887, twenty years after the establishment of the town of Cheyenne, was a separate Diocese of

Cheyenne created, embracing all of the territory of Wyoming and with headquarters at Cheyenne, the territorial capitol.

The history of the Catholic Church in the city of Cheyenne, at least from 1887 to the present, should be distinguished somewhat from the history of [Statement of Significance – 2] the Diocese of Cheyenne, which includes all of the parishes in Wyoming. And yet as Bishop McGovern writes in his book, *History of the Diocese of Cheyenne*, “The history of the Church in Cheyenne in its early years is practically a history of the diocese.” That is because the first, organized Catholic parish established in Wyoming was, of course, where the Union Pacific entered the southeast portion of the state and where permanent settlement was begun. [Note. The first mass celebrated in Wyoming is credited to Reverend Peter John De Smet, S. J., in July, 1840 at a fur trappers’ rendezvous near the Green River. However, Bishop McGovern suggests that since De Smet himself wrote that he offered mass regularly, the pioneer missionary could easily have celebrated the first mass in Wyoming further east at a place along the Oregon Trail known as Fort Laramie.] In the fall of 1867 Bishop O’Gorman of Omaha sent Reverend William Kelly to the tent-town of Cheyenne to assume spiritual care of all Catholics in an east-to-west area stretching from Sidney, Nebraska to Wasatch Canyon, Utah, and a north-to-south area from Cheyenne to Fort Laramie. For the first six months after his arrival, in addition to holding services at Cheyenne, Father Kelly performed missionary work at every camp along the line of the railroad. The year following the establishment of Cheyenne Father Kelly dedicated a frame church-parochial residence in the town under the patronage of St. John the Baptist. The \$4,000, portable frame church was erected at the northeast corner of 21st and O’Neil Streets, on lots donated by the Union Pacific Railroad Company. On July 11 of the following year Bishop O’Gorman, accompanied by Fathers Ryan and Millany, administered the sacrament of confirmation to twenty children and adults at Cheyenne. [Note. On July 12, 1869 the Bishop, along with Frs. Ryan, Millany and Kelly, administered confirmation in Laramie, another railroad settlement fifty miles west of Cheyenne. They also laid the cornerstone of a church which was dedicated in the early 1870s under the patronage of St. Laurence O’Toole.] Most of the congregation at that time is reported to have come from the army supply depot, Camp Carlin. Under the administration of Reverend John McGoldrick, the fourth pastor at St. John’s and a man who served the parish until late in 1877, two lots were secured at the northeast corner of 19th and Carey Avenue for the site of a new catholic church. At that site McGoldrick’s successor, Reverend John Jennette, laid the foundation for the brick church, a substantial structure built to seat 300 souls. Like its frame predecessor, this church was named St. John the Baptist and served the needs of a Catholic congregation which by that time numbered 50 to 75 families. The new church was formally dedicated in May, 1879 during the tenure of Reverend John Hayes. Meanwhile, Reverend Francis Nugent began a parochial [Statement of Significance – 3] school which came under the direction of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus and was held in the older, frame church. Further signs of growth were manifested at that time by the construction of a brick parochial residence adjoining the church, and by the acquisition of property east of what is today the Wyoming State Capitol Building, land which was to serve as the location of a Catholic academy.

In 1887 the Diocese of Cheyenne was created and St. John’s was given the new name of St. Mary’s. But it was not until 1902, with the arrival of the third bishop of the Diocese of Cheyenne, James J. Keane, that progress was made toward the erection of a cathedral in the city

which had become the state capital in 1890. Since the congregation had outgrown the modest brick church at 19th and Carey, Bishop Keane set himself to the task of erecting a suitable cathedral and bishop's residence. [Note. Today nothing remains of either the first or the second Catholic church.] The site chosen for the new cathedral was just south of the Carnegie Library and Central High School on Capitol Avenue. That Bishop Keane was aware of the potential civic significance of the building and its site is revealed by the following statement by the bishop taken from a December 9, 1906 article in the "Cheyenne Daily Leader":

"We realize that we have a very commanding site. The central school and the library both recede so as to give a view of the architectural features of the church from any and every point on Capitol avenue. (sic)

"To do justice to the very beautiful plans, and to bring out the beauties of design, the church should be built of stone, and we hope we may be able to use stone.

"We should like to symbolize the beauties of religion in a sanctuary of exceeding beauty and to give Cheyenne, the city of our love, a civic monument of which its citizens might well be proud.

"The cathedral, of whatsoever it may be built, will bear witness for long years to the faith and sacrifices of a loyal and good people."

Assisted by parish priest Father James Duffy, Bishop Keane now called upon the congregation to build the cathedral, while he himself worked to secure funds from the diocese for the construction of an episcopal residence. [Note. The buildings involved an expenditure of \$80,000 for the cathedral and \$23,000 for the bishop's residence. Although the architect of the buildings has not yet been discovered, it is known that the contractor was Moses Patrick Keefe, a prominent Cheyenne builder. Several of Keefe's works may still be seen in Cheyenne and at nearby Warren Air Force Base. From Keefe's sandstone quarries at Iron Mountain north of Cheyenne, blocks were quarried and hauled to the cathedral construction site where they were cut by stonemasons.]

[Statement of Significance – 4] On July 7, 1907 amid a throng of 5000 people, the cornerstone of the cathedral building was laid. Upon gathering at the site of the old church a number of people formed a procession and, extending several blocks in length, the group marched to the site of the cathedral. Speaking at the ceremony were Governor Bryant B. Brooks, Attorney General W.E. Mullen, Cheyenne Mayor P.S. Cook and Bishop James J. Keane. In addition to Keane were a host of prelates including Bishop Richard Scannell of Omaha, Bishop Lawrence Scanlon of Salt Lake, Monseigneur Hugh Cumiskey of Laramie, and priests from Omaha, Nebraska; Denver and Grand Junction, Colorado; and Casper, Wheatland and Lander, Wyoming. The altar and cornerstone were blessed by Bishop Scannell and the cornerstone was laid by Bishop Keane. Within the cornerstone, in a metal box, were deposited a parchment relating to the laying of the stone and the erection of the building, copies of the two Cheyenne papers and the "Inter-Mountain Catholic," and a number of medals.

About a year and a half later, on January 31, 1909 in a ceremony attended by the most impressive gathering of Catholic ecclesiastics held in Wyoming, St. Mary's Cathedral was dedicated. Exercises began outside the church followed by a procession to the building's interior where pontifical high mass was celebrated by Bishop Maurice Burke of St. Joseph, Missouri. Bishop Burke was assisted by Bishop John P. Carroll of Helena, Montana who delivered the sermon. Also in attendance were Bishops Matz, Garrigan, Lenihan, Keane and a large number of priests. In the evening Bishop Lenihan conducted evening vespers, and Bishop Garrigan spoke from the pulpit. "Thus," remarked Author McGovern, "closed the auspicious day to which Bishop Keane had looked forward from the time he assumed charge of the diocese; for it was the crowning glory of his zealous and fruitful career in Cheyenne."

In 1911 Bishop Patrick A. McGovern took charge of the cathedral until May 1, 1915 when Reverend James Hartmann was appointed rector. Under Hartmann, who served the parish for 44 years, the remaining debt on the cathedral was liquidated, the interior of the building redecorated, and additional property purchased adjacent to, and east of the church. During Hartmann's administration also, a cathedral hall was built opposite the church and across Capitol Avenue to the west. Other accomplishments under Hartmann were a convent and high school-elementary school plant built east of the Capitol Building. In 1940, when a new episcopal residence was completed at Carey Avenue and Pershing Boulevard the two and a half story, brick and stone building just south of the cathedral was purchased by the parish and is presently being used as a rectory.

Through the years other property has been purchased for parish and diocesan functions. On the east side of Warren Avenue, between 24th and 25th Streets and opposite the high school-grade school is St. Mary's high school gymnasium. [Statement of Significance – 5] Just south of the gymnasium is a two-story home which has been converted into diocesan offices. Led by Bishop Hubert M. Newell, the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Cheyenne today has a total population of 45,000. The diocese has 39 parishes, 70 priests, and over 2000 elementary and high school students. In the city of Cheyenne itself are three parishes serving the needs of the Catholic community: St. Mary's, St. Joseph's and Holy Trinity.

Since its construction in 1907-09, St. Mary's cathedral has experienced both interior remodeling and the construction of an exterior addition. Beginning in October, 1960 extensive improvements to the building were begun and contracts awarded to local contractors amounting to \$200,000. In 1962, and following this, the latest stage of cathedral construction, the rededication of the cathedral was held, marking the 75th anniversary of the diocese.

Presently, there are plans calling for the construction of another addition to the cathedral, including a new, two-story rectory. If these plans are effected the total cost of the project will be about a third-of-a-million dollars. It is not uncommon for Gothic cathedrals to reflect a diversified history of construction, and St. Mary's, even at the young age of 65 years, is no exception. However, if the planned construction takes place it will be done in a style which is in conformity with that of the rest of the building.

In 1968 a celebration was held to mark the centennial anniversary of the cathedral parish. During that 100 years from 1868 to 1968 the parish has owned and occupied three, separate buildings, and for the last of the three, the present magnificent Gothic cathedral, church authorities have expressed the wish that it may stand for many years to come.

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