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DATA SHEET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	ENTERTAINMENT	
_OBJECT	IN PROCESS	X_YES: RESTRICTED	GOVERNMENT	SCIENTIFIC
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X_EXCELLENT

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CONDITION

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CHECK ONE

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__UNALTERED X_ORIGINAL SITE

X_ALTERED __MOVED (renovated)

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Church of St. Lawrence, designed largely by the Catalonian architect Rafael Guastavino, is a monumental building executed in a Beaux-Arts interpretation of the Spanish Baroque. The church, elliptical in plan with rectangular narthex and sacristy, is three stories high. It is built of brick laid in Flemish bond with an elaborately corbeled water table, molded brick base, and foundation of rough random laid ashlar. Gypsum, rather than the more popular portland cement, is used for the brick mortar, its primary advantage being its quick drying properties. The levels of elevations are delineated by corbeled string courses.

The main (southeast) facade is five bays wide. The three center bays project from the body of the church and are divided vertically by brick pilasters at the first and second levels and by unfluted Corinthian columns at the third level. A string course horizontally separates the first and second stories, while the second and third levels are capped with a corbeled brick cornice. In the center of the first level is a wooden double door, decoratively flat-paneled in the form of Latin crosses surrounded by squares and rectangles outlined by billet-head trim. The entrance is flanked by round arched windows. A polychromed terra cotta bas-relief of Christ healing the sick appears in the tympanum beneath a bold stone scrolled keystone. Flanking the tympanum are roundel windows with robustly shaped molded brick surrounds. The center bay of the third level has an identically treated window of colossal size and is flanked by smaller, similar windows of elongated proportions.

Capping the center bay is a broad pediment carrying statues of two canonized deacons, St. Stephen (to the left) and St. Aloysius Gonzaga (to the right). The apex of the pediment is crowned by a stone statue of St. Lawrence (for whom the church was named), Spanish martyr and patron saint of the Reverend Lawrence P. O'Conell, one of the two missionary priests who built the first Catholic church in Asheville.

Flanking this pavilion are the bases of the corner twin towers. The bases rise a full three stories, while the towers rise two additional stories and are pierced at their upper levels by round-arched openings. Each tower is capped with a parapeted wall enclosing a brick drum on which rests a bulbous dome; each dome is sheathed with pink, green, brown, and white tiles and stretched up at the center into an attenuated, arcaded cupola surmounted by a cross.

Behind the facade, to the northwest, is the elliptical church nave, covered by a huge segmental saucer dome which visually rests on the straight brick walls which enclose the nave. The walls, two stories high, are articulated by a one-and-one-half story blind arcade, surmounted in each bay by a flat-paneled frieze and a parapet ornamented with Greek crosses. The dome itself is rimmed by another parapet wall which is underlined by a handsome corbel table. The dome is self-supporting, with a clear span of fifty-eight feet by eighty-two feet. It is constructed of structural tiles bonded with a gypsum base mortar, a technique employed by Guastavino which he termed "cohesive construction." The dome was originally sheathed with slate shingles but is now covered by copper sheeting. An oval skylight pierces the center.

A copper faced dome carrying a domed cupola with a cross is situated at both rear corners, providing additional height in the interiors of the two side chapels which flank the main sanctuary. The apse of the sanctuary is covered by a segmental-arched pendentive.

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The church is entered through a rectangular narthex containing a marble baptistry with a cast-iron grate. The vestibule, with a rib-vaulted ceiling covered with brown, tan, grey, and cream colored glazed tiles, is separated from the elliptical church nave by narthex screens of embossed leather and stained glass. Similar screens with wooden frames form the confessional in the eastern corner of the nave. The southeastern end of the church contains an expansive organ gallery directly above the narthex.

The nave walls are faced with regularly bonded grey pressed brick and bays are defined by brick pilasters reaching to the clerestory. From the pilaster caps across the entire dome ceiling, runs a striking abstract pattern of polychromed tiles: chevron bands cover most of the ceiling but are broken by a tile frieze just above the clerestory level and by rectilinear bands in the form of longitudinal and transverse ridgeribs which meet along the edges of the ribbed center skylight.

The elliptically shaped nave is five bays long. Rectangular stained glass windows, two stories tall, pierce the third bay on each side. The second and fourth bays contain stone statues, executed by the Daprato Statuary Company of Italy, of Sts. Peter, Patrick, Cecilia, and Rose of Lima; each statue stands in a round-arched niche. Flat-paneled brick aprons appear beneath the window and statuary bays. Lunette clerestory windows of stained glass pierce the second through fifth bays; the fifth bays have round-arched entrances to the side chapels.

Curving rows of oak pews, divided into two blocks by the broad center aisle, lead up to the marble altar rail which separates the nave from the apse and the two rib-vaulted side chapels.

The principal sanctuary, located in the apse at the northwestern end of the church, contains a marble altar with a polychromed terra cotta center panel, facing the nave, which is a replica of Leonardo's Milanese fresco, The Last Supper. Two square panels frame the scene: the one to the right bears a large Alpha, and, to the left, a large Omega. This altar was moved forward ten feet from the rear wall of the apse to the middle of the sanctuary and topped with an 1,800 pound slab of Tennessee marble six inches thick during the 1968 renovation under architect Lawrence Traber.

To the rear of the altar the apse wall carries a retable with vibrantly polychromed terra cotta figures, each seven feet high, of Sts. Michael and Raphael the Archangels, and the Four Evangelists. Each half of the retable measures eleven feet high and eighteen feet wide.

Centered between the two retables is a marble tabernacle. Above, the focal point of the interior, is a dramatic polychromed carved walnut crucifix which rises to a height of about twenty feet. It is thought to date from the mid-seventeenth century and was brought to St. Lawrence's from a Catholic church in northern Spain. The crucifix is framed by a broken pediment supported by exaggeratedly curvilinear posts with elaborate capitals.

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Southwest of the main altar is the Lady Chapel, thought to have been built with funds donated by the elder Guastavino's close friend, Stanford White. Just within the chapel, in its southern corner, is the crypt of the architect, Guastavino Senior, who died before completion of the church. The round-arched door to the crypt is of green and blue lustre glazed tiles, ornamented with a Latin cross and framed in bronze. It was designed by Rafael Guastavino the younger, who supervised construction of the church after the death of his father in 1909.

The pilasters, pendentives, and domed ceiling of the Lady Chapel are sheathed with bright blue tiles, offset by the white of the mortar joints, the grey of the brick walls, and the gold of the trim. Framing the small apse of the chapel is a transverse elliptical arch, its archivolt adorned with seven doves, symbolic of the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit. The southwest wall of the chapel is pierced by two stained glass windows. A large door in the northeastern wall, with an intricately carved panel of the Good Shepherd directly above the lock rail, leads to the sacristy to the rear of the main sanctuary.

The highlight of the chapel is the tableau of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. At the feet of the Virgin kneel two praying angels. Below Mary is a terra cotta panel of the Crucifixion, attributed to the Italian pottery of Capo di Monte, which is flanked by onyx tiles.

Beneath this is the tabernacle, brilliantly designed in faience with pearly cream glazes of vitrious colors. Flanking the tabernacle are small high-relief figures of eight female saints arranged in a miniature colonnade: to the right are Sts. Barbara, Agnes, Agatha, and Rose of Lima; to the left are Sts. Margaret, Lucia, Cecilia, and Catherine of Alexandria. The base of the altar features a Nativity panel in bas-relief. Statues of Sts. Rufia and Justa, patronesses of Sevilia, flank the center panel.

Northeast of the main altar is St. Joseph's Chapel, which is entered through the round arch of the fifth bay on that side of the church. The upper reaches of the chapel walls are covered with a mosaic of small, irregularly laid tiles. The mosaic was executed by Fathers Peter and Patrick Marion, who, along with the younger Guastavino, helped in both the supervision and the actual construction of the church after the death of the architect. The northeastern wall of the chapel contains two stained glass windows. The larger round-arched one depicts the Death of St. Joseph and the smaller window, a roundel, depicts St. Lawrence. Both windows were taken from the first church on the site, which was an unpretentious wooden building erected in 1887.

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The rectory is a two-story (three-story on the garden) red brick structure with a red tile roof and cream terra cotta and limestone trim. It is joined to the church by an open passageway with a Tuscan-colonnaded roof. The front elevation is the most elaborate, containing a central, two-story pedimented frontispiece, and on the first level a blind arcade of Roman arches with window inserts. The gable ends are corbelled and have a quatrefoil rose window. A panelled chimney ornaments the west elevation.

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW					
PREHISTORIC	ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	_COMMUNITY PLANNING	_LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	X_RELIGION		
_1400-1499	ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	CONSERVATION	_LAW	SCIENCE		
_1500-1599	AGRICULTURE	_ECONOMICS	LITERATURE	SCULPTURE		
1600-1699	XARCHITECTURE	EDUCATION	MILITARY	_SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN		
_1700-1799	ART	X.ENGINEERING	MUSIC	THEATER		
1800-1899	COMMERCE	_EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	PHILOSOPHY	_TRANSPORTATION		
X.1900-	COMMUNICATIONS	INDUSTRY	POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	_OTHER (SPECIFY)		
		_INVENTION				

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT 1905-1909/renovated in 1968

/Raphael Guastavino, Sr. & Jr.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Church of St. Lawrence is a monumental brick building designed by Spanish architect Raphael Guastavino and built under his supervision and that of his son. Construction was completed in 1909. The massive and richly finished church, executed in a Beaux-Arts interpretation of the Spanish Baroque expressive of Guastavino's Spanish origins, is also significant as a dramatic example of his original method of "cohesive construction" in its vast self-supporting dome of tile and mortar.

While visiting Asheville in 1868, the Right Reverend James Gibbons, then Vicar-Apostolic of North Carolina (and later James Cardinal Gibbons) is said to have become interested in a large town lot which attracted his attention. It was soon his hope to see established on this lot Asheville's first Roman Catholic church. One year later Gibbons purchased the 7 3/4-acre tract "for the use of the Catholic Church" for the modest price of \$387.50. Soon afterward, "a commodious brick building" is said to have been erected on the site and dedicated by Gibbons under the invocation of St. Lawrence. This structure stood for many years on a hill known locally as "Catholic Hill."

The first Church of St. Lawrence was without a resident pastor until 1887, when Father John B. White was named to that position. White is said to have recognized immediately that the church's location was too inaccessible and to have been instrumental in obtaining the church's present site. In March, 1889, the Vicar-Apostolic of North Carolina purchased a lot on the corner of Haywood and Flint streets for \$6,000. A "modest wooden structure" was soon erected on this site and a small house already existing nearby was fitted up for use as a vestry. This building was still in use when, in 1905, it was visited for Sunday Mass by Raphael Guastavino, who made his summer home at nearby Black Mountain.

Guastavino was born in Valencia, Spain, in 1842. At the age of seventeen he became a student of Valencia's Royal Inspector of Public Works. He then went to Barcelona, took a university course, and later entered the School of Architecture there. He was employed by the architectural firm of Granell & Robert until 1862 and in 1866 obtained his first important order in architectural competition.

Guastavino spent his early years erecting mills and factories. Because he was both an architect and builder (a practice then customary in Spain), he was able to experiment freely with building materials and to familiarize himself with their properties. He is said to have become enthusiastic about "cohesive construction" from the very beginning of his career. This is described as an ancient method of building first practiced by the Byzantines and Persians in which a structure is given a dome-shaped roof the configuration and composition of which effectively disperses all gravitational (downward)

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forces evenly across its surface to its spherical (or sometimes elliptical) base, thus eliminating the need for any interior roof supports. The dome shape directs much of the vertical gravitational force horizontally across the surface of the dome, concentrating most of it at the fully-supported base. The viability of this system of freestanding, dome-shaped roofs is "dependent upon the cohesive strength of the material set between two solids, being thus an imitation of the work of Nature in forming conglomerates." Guastavino soon found, however, that he was limited in the use of this method by the relatively inferior quality of Spanish cement. "It was only because Mr. Guastavino found when he visited the United States that it was a market for the best grades of Portland cement that he decided to change his residence and make this the field of his future operations."

Relocating in the United States in 1881, Guastavino spent the next five years studying American building methods and materials. His first work in the United States was a private house in New York City designed and built in 1886. Soon after this he is said to have begun devoting his total energies to construction rather than to design.

During the next decade Guastavino utilized his cohesive construction methods in erecting many structures in the large cities of the northeast. Among these were city halls in Binghamton, New York, and Paterson, New Jersey; the Grace Universalist Church in Lowell, Massachusetts; the East Boston High School and the Boston Public Library; the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City; and that city's subway system. His employment of cohesive construction techniques in the New York City Subway apparently earned for him a reputation as the "inventor" of the "Guastavino Arch." (In reality, of course, he was merely reviving ancient construction techniques; the arched subway roof was merely a practical application of these methods.)

Guastavino is said to have come to North Carolina to assist in the construction of the Biltmore House and Gardens near Asheville. He is thought to have been favorably impressed by the climate of the North Carolina mountains as an ideal environment for a summer residence. He purchased his first tract of land near Black Mountain, Buncombe County, in August, 1894, and later acquired additional tracts totaling nearly one thousand acres. He later designed and built his summer home known as Spanish Castle, where he apparently resided during the summer months. (Near the mansion was a kiln, where Guastavino produced his own bricks.) It was during a summer stay at Spanish Castle that Guastavino attended Mass at the small wooden structure which then served as the Church of St. Lawrence.

According to local tradition, the church was unusually crowded with summer tourists on the day of Guastavino's visit, resulting in a shortage of seating space for the Mass. When Guastavino was later assured by the priest that plenty of seats would be available at the close of the tourist season, he is said to have countered that Catholic churches should always be kept large enough to minister to strangers; and he thereupon offered to construct a new and larger church edifice.

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In spite of a general shortage of funds, the work on the proposed structure commenced within a short time. The new church's prototype was Our Lady of the Forsaken Catholic Church in Valencia, Spain, where Guastavino had worshipped in his youth. He was intrigued by this church's architecture, which also included an elliptical dome.

Local tradition also has it that Guastavino and architect Stanford White were close friends. When White learned of Guastavino's plans to erect the magnificent church, so the story goes, he volunteered a personal contribution—resulting, it is said, in the imposing Chapel of the Lady.

The building is believed to be constructed exclusively of brick, tile, and stone; no iron or wood is said to have been used. The glazed tile and ceramic material used in the dome was produced in Guastavino's tile factory in Woburn, Massachusetts (and probably also at his summer home in Black Mountain). Timely financial assistance by Catholics and Protestants alike (as well as a great deal of free labor donated by parishioners) helped to keep the construction work under way.

After having planned and supervised the early stages of construction on the elliptical dome, Raphael Guastavino died on February 2, 1908, at his summer home in Black Mountain. Work on the church was carried on by Raphael Guastavino, Jr., who completed the structure in accordance with his father's plans. (The son also built St. Mary's Catholic Church, Wilmington, North Carolina, after his father's design—in 1909—1912.)

The new Church of St. Lawrence was dedicated October 17, 1909, and was consecrated October 13, 1920. The latter ceremony was "the first consecration service ever conducted at a Catholic church in North Carolina. . . ." It was attended by a group of high Catholic officials led by James Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore, who returned to Asheville in honor of the occasion. One newspaper reported that "the services were attended by crowds of people who stood in the streets after the church had filled. It was the most impressive ceremony ever conducted in Asheville." The success of the church's resident priest, Father Patrick Marion, in raising the funds required to construct the building and to pay off its debts, was recognized by Pope Benedict XV, who conferred upon Father Marion the title of Monsignor, or Papal Chaplain, at a ceremony held in the church on April 13, 1921. The church is still in active use.

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FOOTNOTES

- ¹Buncombe County Deed Books, Buncombe County Courthouse, Asheville, Deed Book 29: 335-336. (Gibbons purchased this tract from Mr. and Mrs. W. D. Rankin of Asheville, not from an "N. A. Woodfin" as stated in O'Connell's Catholicity in the Carolinas.)
- ²Jeremiah Joseph O'Connell, <u>Catholicity in the Carolinas and Georgia: Leaves of Its History</u> (New York and Montreal: D. & J. Sadlier & Co., 1879), 453-454.
- ³A Guide to the History, Art and Architecture of The Church of St. Lawrence, Asheville, North Carolina (Asheville: n.p., 1923), 12, hereinafter cited as <u>History</u> of The Church of St. Lawrence.
- ⁴Peter B. Wight, "The Works of Rafael Guastavine," Part I, The Brickbuilders

 /now Architectural Forum/, X, No. 4 (April, 1901), 79, hereinafter cited as Wight, "Works of Rafael Guastavino."
- ⁵Wight, "Works of Rafael Guastivino," Part 1, <u>The Brickbuilders</u>, X, No. 4 (April, 1901), 80.
 - 6"The Dome of St. Lawrence," The State, XXIX, No. 8 (September 16, 1961), 8.
- ⁷Wight, "Works of Rafael Guastavino," Part II, <u>The Brickbuilder</u>, X, No. 5 (May, 1901), 101.
- Many of these works are pictured in Peter B. Wight's four-part article in Vol. X (1901) of The Brickbuilder, in No. 4 (April), 79-81; No. 5 (May), 100-102; No. 9 (September), 184-188; and No. 10 (October), 211-214; "Dome of St. Lawrence," The State, XXIX, No. 8 (September 16, 1961), 8.
 - Obituary of Raphael Guastavino, Charlotte Daily Observer, February 18, 1908, p. 7.
 - 10 History of the Church of St. Lawrence, 16.
- 11 John C. Dills, "Elliptical Dome Stamps St. Lawrence Church Unique," Asheville Citizen-Times, February 28, 1960, section D, p. 1. (Dills notes that at least one local architect questions this belief on the grounds that an iron hoop would be necessary to prevent the dome from spreading at the bottom.)
- 12"CARDINAL GIBBONS ON A VISIT TO ASHEVILLE," <u>Greensboro Daily News</u>, October 14, 1920, p. 3.

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The rectory was erected in 1929 using the designs of a Father Michael, a priest "who ha/d taken to architecture." It replaced a frame rectory that pre-dated the church. Originally the building served as the residence of the Bishop, the Pastor and the Assistant Pastor and provided rooms for instruction and sewing. The rectory is of a Neo-Tuscan Renaissance design that is both attractive and complementary to the church that it serves.

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The Asheville Times, March 31, 1929, Section B, pages 1, 4, "\$2,250,000 Projects Near Completion."

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Asheville Citizen-Times. "St. Lawrence Church Here Noted For Its Architecture," March 9, 1952. Buncombe County Records, Buncombe County Courthouse, Asheville, North Carolina (Subgroups: Deeds). Buncombe County Records, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina (Subgroups: Deeds). TOGEOGRAPHICAL DATA ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Approx. 1 acre UTM REFERENCES 13|519|01010| NORTHING ZONE ZONE VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES STATE CODE CODE COUNTY CODE STATE CODE COUNTY FORM PREPARED BY Research by Robert Topkins, survey specialist; architectural description by Mary Alice Hinson, consultant ORGANIZATION DATE 5 April 1976 Division of Archives and History TELEPHONE STREET & NUMBER 109 East Jones Street 919/829-7862 CITY OR TOWN Raleigh North Carolina STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS: STATE_X LOCAL NATIONAL ____ As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE DATE 5 April 1976 TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer FOR NPS USE ONLY I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER DATE KEERER OF THE DATE ATTEST:

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Charlotte Daily Observer. Obituary of Raphael Guastavino, February 18, 1908; "TO DEDICATE NEW CHURCH," October 14, 1909.

DEDICATE NEW CHURCH," October 14, 1909.

Charlotte Observer. "ASHEVILLE PLANS BIG WELCOME FOR SPEAKERS," October 13, 1920.

Dills, John C. "Elliptical Dome Stamps St. Lawrence Church Unique," Asheville Citizen-Times, February 28, 1960.

Greensboro Daily News. "CARDINAL GIBBONS ON A VISIT TO ASHEVILLE," October 14, 1920. Guide to the History, Art and Architecture of The Church of St. Lawrence, Asheville, North Carolina. Asheville: n.p., 1923.

Maxwell, Sarah A. "Spanish Castle in Carolina," <u>The News and Observer</u> (Raleigh), March 17, 1929, Society and Amusements Section.

News and Observer (Raleigh). "PROMINENT ARCHITECT DEAD," February 4, 1908.

O'Connell, Jeremiah Joseph. Catholicity in the Carolinas and Georgia: Leaves of Its History. New York and Montreal: D. & J. Sadlier & Co., 1879.

State. "The Dome of St. Lawrence," September 16, 1961.

Wight, Peter B. "The Works of Rafael Guastavino," The Brickbuilder /now Architectural Forum/, 1901.



