

01/21/2015 2:20 PM

NOMINATION OF HISTORIC BUILDING, STRUCTURE, SITE, OR OBJECT

PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

SUBMIT ALL ATTACHED MATERIALS ON PAPER AND IN ELECTRONIC FORM ON CD (MS WORD FORMAT)

1. ADDRESS OF HISTORIC RESOURCE (must comply with an Office of Property Assessment address)

Street address: 246-260 North 4th Street
Postal code: 19106 Councilmanic District: First

2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: None--St. Augustine's fresco program of 1848
Common Name: none

3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Building Structure Site Object Frescoes as Decorative Art

4. PROPERTY INFORMATION

Condition: excellent good fair poor ruins
Occupancy: occupied vacant under construction unknown
Current use: The frescoes are part of the ceiling and walls
in the sanctuary of St. Augustine's Church

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Please attach a plot plan and written description of the boundary.

n/a

6. DESCRIPTION

Please attach a description of the historic resource and supplement with current photographs.

7. SIGNIFICANCE

Please attach the Statement of Significance.

Period of Significance (from year to year): from 1830 to present

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: executed in 1848

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: Nicola Monachesi, artist

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: n/a

Original owner: Augustinian Order/ Community, Villanova, PA

Other significant persons: none

CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION:

The historic resource satisfies the following criteria for designation (check all that apply):

- (a) Has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth or Nation or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past; or,
- (b) Is associated with an event of importance to the history of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
- (c) Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style; or,
- (d) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen; or,
- (e) Is the work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer, or engineer whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
- (f) Contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represent a significant innovation; or,
- (g) Is part of or related to a square, park or other distinctive area which should be preserved according to an historic, cultural or architectural motif; or,
- (h) Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or City; or,
- (i) Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in pre-history or history; or
- (j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

8. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Please attach a bibliography.

Sources cited in footnotes and in attached Appendices A., B., C. and D. for context.

9. NOMINATOR

Name with Title Celeste A. Morello, MS, MA Email none

Organization n/a Date _____

Street Address 1234 S. Sheridan St. Telephone 215.334.6008

City, State, and Postal Code Phila., PA 19147-4820

Nominator is is not the property owner.

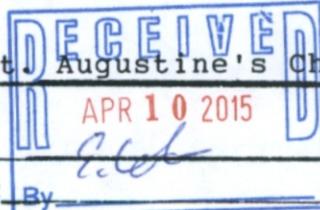
Refer to attached letter by pastor of St. Augustine's Church.

PHC USE ONLY

Date of Receipt: _____

Correct-Complete Incorrect-Incomplete

Date: _____ By: _____



Date of Notice Issuance: _____

Property Owner at Time of Notice

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Postal Code: _____

Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: _____

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: _____

Date of Final Action: _____

Designated Rejected

PUBLIC LEDGER

DAILY TRANSCRIPT.

Friday, September 29, 1848.

BY MAGNETIC TELEGRAPH FOR PUBLIC LEDGER.

Murderous Assault on Board of a Vessel. Advance on Treasury Notes.

New York, Sept. 28. This afternoon Capt. Sawyer, of the ship The Perkins, became involved in a quarrel with one of his crew in relation to a female. Capt. B. became excited during the controversy, drew a pistol and fired at the sailor, but missed him. He then a very severe war was pursued, in which it is a large body of a, very much as a house after the

Embellishment of St. Augustine's Church.—The scaffolding which, during the last five months, have been erected in the new Church of St. Augustine, have been removed, and the beautiful fresco painting, which, during this time, has been executed by Signor Monachesi and assistants, is now exposed. The decorations of the walls, and especially the ceiling, are extremely beautiful. The walls are painted in panel work, the colors being laid on the wet plaster. The centre of the ceiling is occupied by a splendid painting from the designs of Signor Monachesi, representing the Transfiguration of St. Augustine to Heaven. The figures appear as large as life to the observer below, and must be of colossal size. St. Augustine is represented as being translated to Heaven upon a cloud, seated near the Virgin and Child; above and beneath, angels are upon the wing, some bearing the earthly habiliments of the Saint, the mitre, the crozier, bible, &c.; below several Monks are kneeling upon the earth, their faces and arms spread towards heaven, and the figures bearing the impress of rapture, awe, and devotion. This painting must be very large. The other parts of the ceiling are decorated with six circular paintings representing angels bearing the various instruments used in the tortures of the suffering Saviour—the cross—the crown of thorns—the bitter cup—the sponge—the nails—and the sponge—are all delineated. The figures in all these paintings are beautifully drawn—the shading is most soft and delicate, and the colors more vivid in their brilliancy than we have ever seen.

The other panels of the ceiling are filled with small work ornamented with arabesque figures, so exquisitely done that it is impossible from the floor to distinguish the deception and tell it from real carving. The altar is in an arched recess supported by heavy English columns, manufactured by F. Kelly, and ornamented with gilded capitals.

The ceiling of this arch is painted in fresco, with a dove representing the Holy Spirit, the halo proceeding from which is exceedingly bright, and surrounded with figures of angels. Near the top of the arch, in large gilt Roman letters, is the inscription, as well remembered in the old St. Augustine's Church, "The Lord saith." The interior of the church is filled up with neat and comfortable pews; there is a very large gallery, and there is a second gallery for the choir. In an arched recess in the tower will soon be placed a large and magnificent organ. The building will accommodate a vast number of persons, and is certainly the largest church edifice in Philadelphia.

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THE BALTIMORE.—This splendid boat departed yesterday morning about 10 o'clock. A number of gentlemen from this city embarked for the purpose of enjoying the trip to Norfolk, which will undoubtedly be one of much enjoyment. After giving the citizens of Norfolk an opportunity of receiving the Baltimore, Captain Gannell will proceed to Washington, and perhaps visit Baltimore before she takes her place on the old Southern mail route, between Washington and the Fredericksburg Railroad.

DARING HIGHWAY ROBBERY AT St. LOUIS.—Dr. T. G. Brinbee, while going home from the Pastor's House, where he had received \$200, was forcibly seized by two men, put into a carriage, and taken to the outskirts of the city, where the money, a gold watch, and other valuables were taken from him, and he was left in an insensible state.

THE LAST VICKSBURG SLAUGHTER.—The New Orleans Republicans give the following particulars of the rencontre at Vicksburg, which resulted in the death of Mr. Jenkins, editor of the Sentinel, which we announced on Monday last by telegraphic dispatch from New Orleans:—

At a political meeting the previous day, some altercation had taken place between the parties, when

Article identifies Nicola Monachesi as artist of these particular frescoes at St. Augustine's Church, Philadelphia in 1848.

11. It was a sight for the
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congregation, the music
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the preacher, nor a head
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the place to be instructed

In the mean time, forty
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and while some cut the
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cross. The rough wood
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prayers of the congregation and of your humble
correspondent.

A CATHOLIC.

The Catholic Herald.

PHILADELPHIA:

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 5, 1848.

ECCLESIASTICAL CALENDAR.

Oct. 5	Thurs.	Office of M.B. Sac.
" 6	Fri.	St. Bruno, C.
" 7	Sat.	Office of the Concep. of B.V.M.
" 8	Sun.	17th after P. St. Bridget, Wid.
" 9	Mon.	SS. Denys and Comp. M.M.
" 10	Tues.	St. Francis Borgia, C.
" 11	Wed.	Feria.
" 12	Thurs.	Office of the M.B. Sacrament.

"PAPAL OUTRAGE."

It appears that Mr. Leahy, of famous me-
mory, who styles himself (but without any
right, so far as we can learn), "Monk of La
Trappe," it appears, we say, that this cele-
brated character has met with very shabby treat-
ment at Schenectady, N. Y. The particulars
of this sad disaster to the poor man, are related
as follows, (evidently by a friendly pen) in the
columns of a New York paper:

"On Wednesday evening of last week,"
says the Journal of Commerce, "the Rev. Mr.
Leahy, Monk of La Trappe, who some years
ago renounced the Roman Catholic religion,
delivered a lecture on Romanism in the city of
Schenectady. We have before us a certificate,
signed by nine of the most respectable citizens
of that place, stating that they heard the lec-
ture, and that it contained nothing unbecom-
ing, either in matter or manner. Riotous proceed-
ings were however commenced on the occasion,
and were consummated on the following day,
by a most outrageous personal attack upon Mr.
Leahy at his lodgings. The particulars of the
case are thus represented to us:

"On Thursday of last week a Frenchman
named Parmeteer, called on Mr. Leahy, at his
hotel in Schenectady, and made an appointment
with him to meet his father, in order to con-
verse with him in French, on the subject of re-
ligion, as he could not speak English. Mr.
Leahy consented to meet the Frenchman and
his son at three o'clock in the afternoon. They
accordingly came, and the barkeeper called
Mr. Leahy from his room down to the sitting-
room. There he was met by the Frenchman
and his son, and three Irishmen, who beat him
in such a manner as to stain the room with his
blood. On Thursday last, one week after the
assault, we saw him for a few moments, and
the marks of violence were still visible upon
his person, his face being much bruised and dis-
colored. The perpetrators of the outrage were
arrested, and imprisoned to await their trial."

Now, although the occurrence above related
may be quite a serious affair to this *sai-disant*
"Monk," yet in itself considered, it would
scarcely be worthy of our notice, but for the
peculiar bearings which, under the circum-
stances of the case, it may possess, or which,
at least, certain persons are attempting to give
it. As Leahy's lectures were against Catho-
licity, our Protestant friends are concluding that
the assault upon him was perpetrated by Cath-
olics, and hence the account of the affair is
very conspicuously set forth in the columns of
their newspapers under the ominous caption of
a "PAPAL OUTRAGE." We know not whether
the facts of the case be correctly reported in the
account which we have copied above. They
may be or may not be. But assuming that they
are, and assuming that the Frenchman and his
son, and the three Irishmen were nominally

them at all "unbecoming." Hence we argue,
that Leahy's lecture may have been very inde-
cent, and grossly insulting to the feelings of
Catholics; although "nine of the most respect-
able citizens" testified in writing it "contained
nothing unbecoming." But we waive this
point. We do not wish to defend the conduct of
Leahy's assailants, nor indeed to extenuate it
in the smallest degree. That it was an "ou-
trage," we freely admit. We only deny that it
was a "papal" outrage. No matter how inde-
cent nor how insulting this lecture was, the
assault in question was wholly unjustifiable. It
was contrary both to the law of God, and to the
law of man. Religion teaches us not to return
evil for evil, but, on the contrary, to forgive
and pray for those who revile us. And the law
of man, and the good order and well being of
society require that, when injured, we should
seek redress in a legal manner, and not take it
upon ourselves to inflict the punishment upon
the offender. Lynch law is at all times, inex-
pressibly odious and criminal, but never more
so than when it is linked with a pretended zeal
for religion. All good men should frown upon
it and execrate it, whenever and wherever its
evil spirit is exhibited. Religion abhors both it
and its ministers; "*Non tali auxilio*," she ex-
claims, "*non defensoribus istis.*"

CHURCH OF THE ASSUMPTION IN SPRING
GARDEN.—Next Sunday, the Rev. Dr. Ryder,
President of the Georgetown College, will
preach in St. Mary's Church, (Fourth street)
both morning and afternoon. On both occa-
sions, collections will be taken up to aid in the
erection of the new Church of the Assumption,
now being built in Spring Garden. The side
and rear walls of the new edifice are up, and
the workmen are now putting on the timbers
for the roof. As the means in that portion of
the city are very limited, and the demand at
present very urgent, it is hoped there will be a
generous response to this call of charity. This
new building, we are happy to say, promises to
be a very church-like structure, and an orna-
ment to that District. And as it is greatly needed,
it is really an act of charity to contribute to its
funds.

Exhibit 2.

particular in making this correction, because in
such a case it seems most proper to look to the
official organ of the diocese for the requisite in-
formation. One or two other errors of the same
kind occurred which it is not necessary to spe-
cify.

ST. AUGUSTINE'S CHURCH.—We have not
had an opportunity of inspecting for ourselves
this new edifice, but we copy from a city paper
the following interesting description of its inter-
rior finish:

"The scaffolding, which, during the last five
months, have been erected in the new Church
of St. Augustine, have been removed, and the
beautiful fresco painting, which, during that
time, has been executed by Signor Monachesi
and assistants, is now exposed. The decora-
tions of the walls, and especially the ceiling, are
extremely beautiful. The walls are painted in
panel work, the colors being laid on the wet
plaster. The centre of the ceiling is occupied

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"The Public Ledger" of September 29, 1848 (transcribed)
(Reprinted in "The Catholic Herald," October 5, 1848)

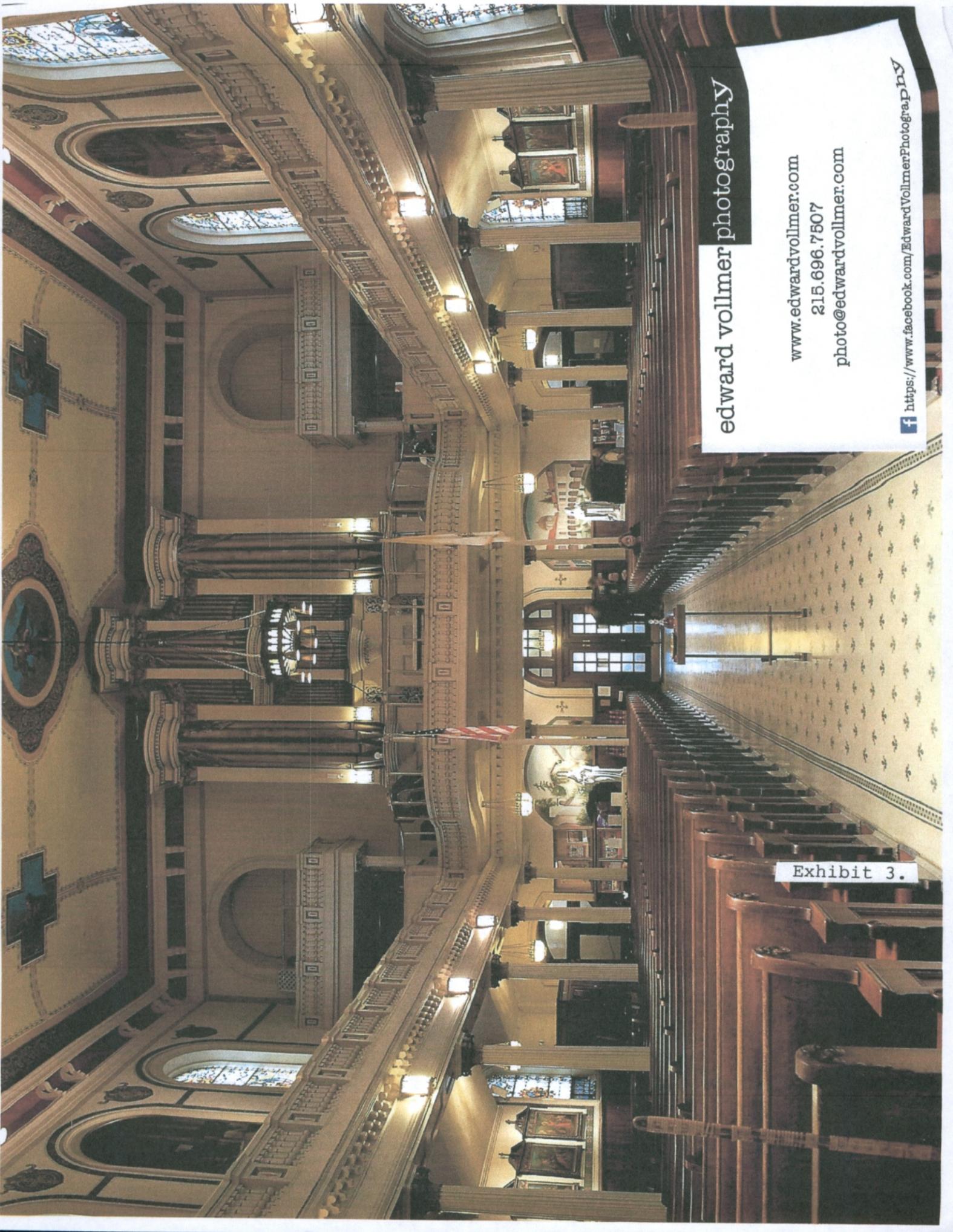
Embellishments of St. Augustine's Church.--

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The decorations of the walls, and especially the ceiling, are extremely beautiful. The walls are painted in panel work, the colors being laid on the wet plaster. The centre of the ceiling is occupied by a splendid painting from the designs of Signor Monachesi, representing the Translation of St. Augustine to Heaven. The figures appear as large as life to the observer below, and must be of colossal size. St. Augustine is represented as having translated to Heaven upon a cloud, scaled near the Virgin and Child; above and beneath, angels are upon the wing, some bearing the earthly habiliments of the Saint, the mitre, the crozier, bible, etc.; below several Monks are kneeling upon the earth, their faces and arms spread towards heaven, and the figures hearing the impress of rapture, awe and devotion. The painting must be very large. The other parts of the ceiling are decorated with six circular paintings representing angels bearing the various instruments used in the torture of the suffering Saviour--the cross--the crown of thorns--the bitter cup--the spear--the nails--and the scourge--are all delineated. The figures in all of these paintings are beautifully drawn--the shading is most soft and delicate, and the colors more vivid in the brilliancy than we have ever seen.

The other panels of the ceiling are filled with scroll work ornamented with arabesque figures, so excellently done that it is impossible from the floor to distinguish the deception and tell it from real carving. The altar is in an arched recess supported by heavy scagliola columns, manufactured by P. Kelly, and ornamented with gilded capitals.

The ceiling of this arch is painted in fresco, with a dove representing the Holy Spirit, the halo proceeding from which is exceedingly bright, and surrounded with figures of angels. Near the top of this arch, in large gilt Roman letters, is the inscription, so well remembered in the old St. Augustine's Church, "The Lord seeth." The interior of the church is fitted up with neat and comfortable pews; there is a very large gallery, and there is a second gallery for the choir. In an arched recess in the tower will soon be placed a large and magnificent organ. The building will accommodate a vast number of persons, and is certainly the largest church edifice in Philadelphia.



edward vollmer photography
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215.696.7507
photo@edwardvollmer.com
https://www.facebook.com/EdwardVollmerPhotography

Exhibit 3.



Exhibit 4.



Exhibit 5.

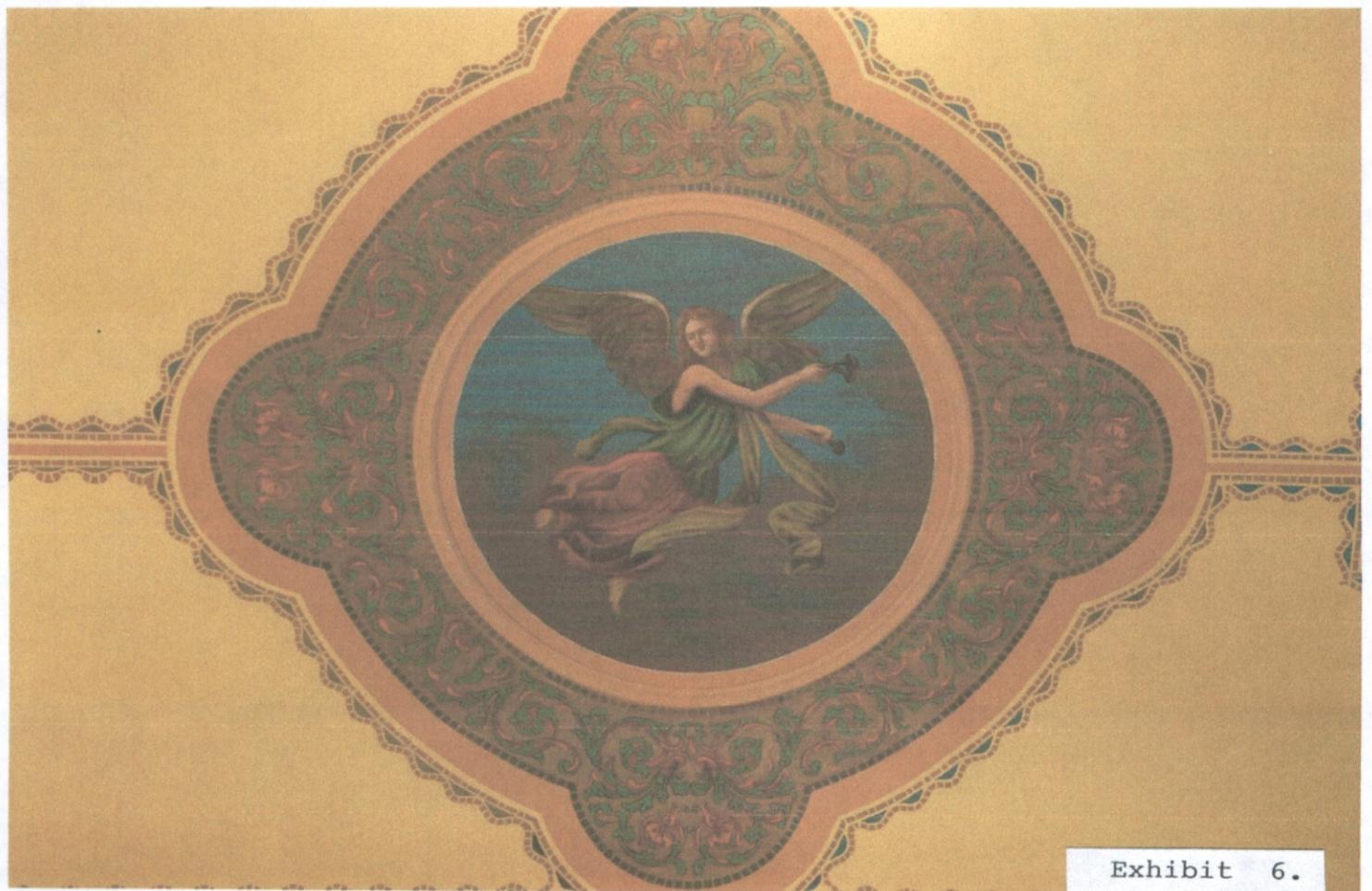


Exhibit 6.

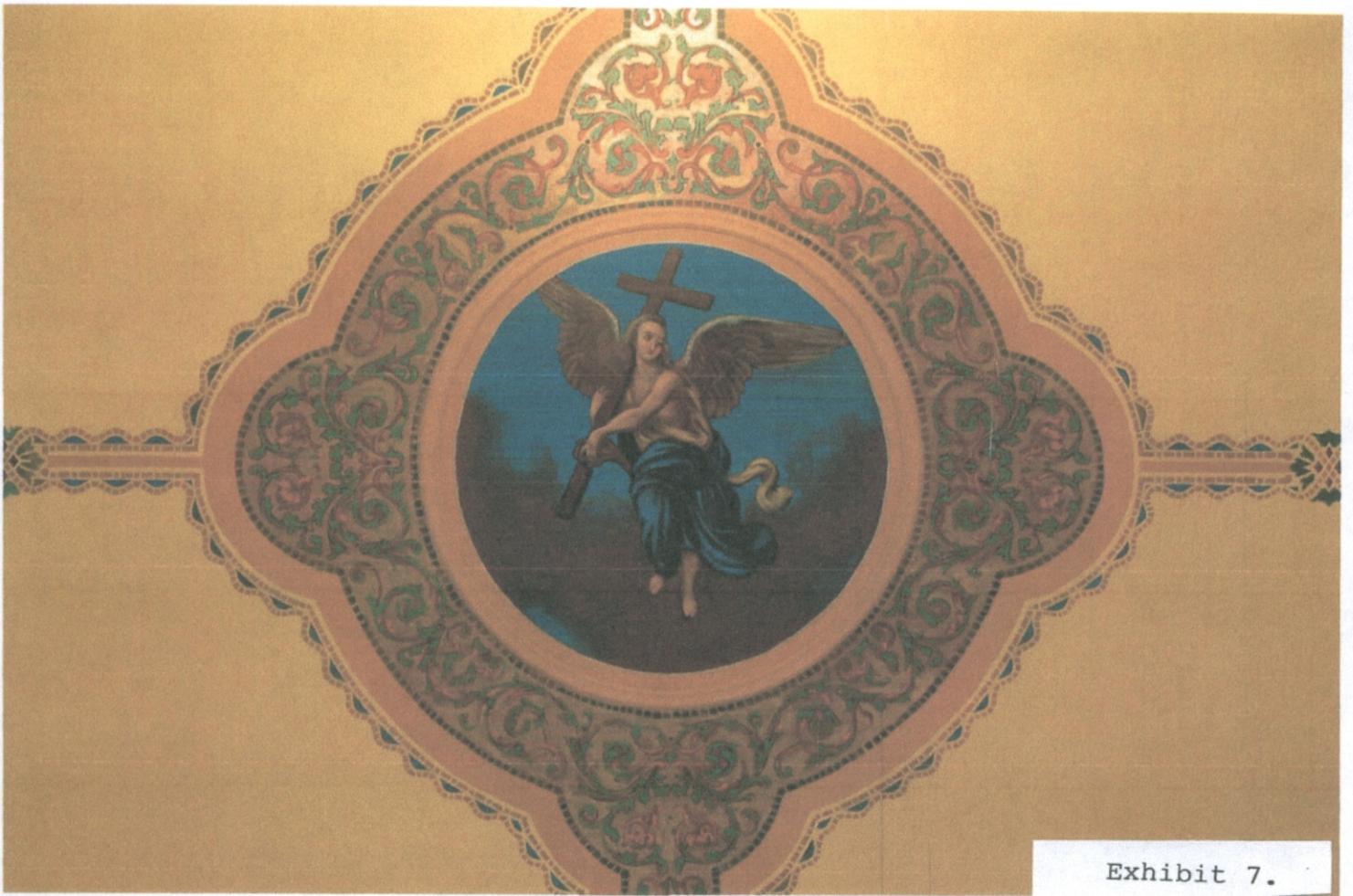


Exhibit 7.



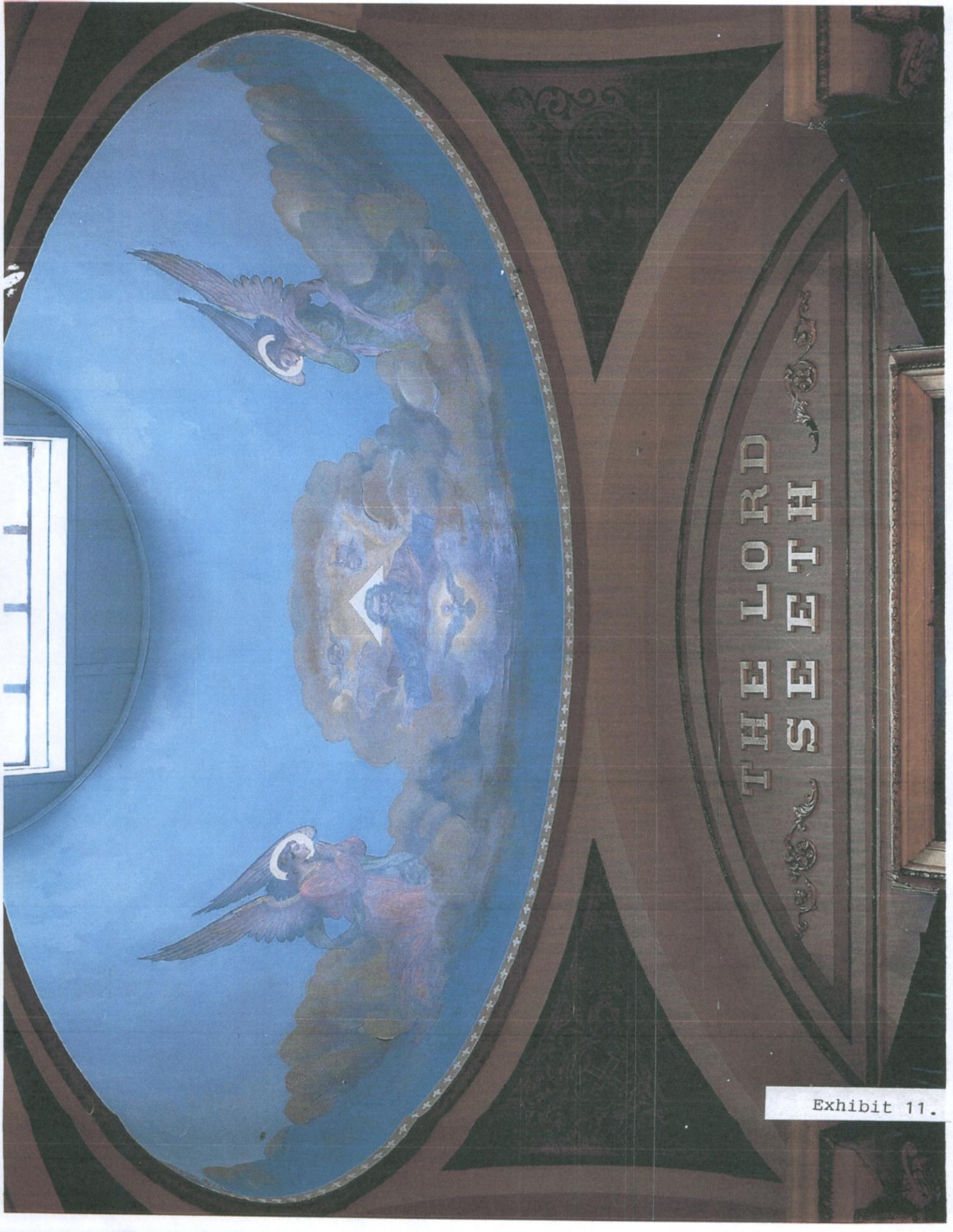
Exhibit 8.



Exhibit 9.



Exhibit 10.



THE LORD SEETH

Exhibit 11.

6. DESCRIPTION

This nomination is for the fresco program executed in 1848 by artist Nicola Monachesi. It was commissioned by the Order of St. Augustine for the interior of the province's church appropriately called, "St. Augustine's Roman Catholic Church." This is the first site of this religious order in the Western Hemisphere, established in the United States in Philadelphia by Augustinian priests from Ireland in 1796. This church is located on North Fourth Street, below Vine Street, just north of the Benjamin Franklin Bridge.

Upon entering the church through the front entrance on the west side of North Fourth, there is a large vestibule and stairs leading to the sanctuary. The instant frescoes are on the ceiling and inside of the dome above where "THE LORD SEETH" is in gold block letters in the sanctuary. All frescoes are polychromed. Consistent with the 1848 news articles at Exhibits 1 and 2 on these particular frescoes, this nomination is solely concerned with:

1) A large central fresco¹ above the nave depicting St. Augustine and some monks at his death as he is "translated" to heaven. This tableau is an example of "history painting" in art. (Exhibit 4);

2) Six (6) circular medallions--three(3) on the ceiling at the end of the nave on the east and west, flanking the central fresco. They are of angels on solid-colored backgrounds carrying attributes alluding to the Passion of Jesus Christ. (Exhibits 5 to 10);

3) A concave fresco on the "dome" above where "THE LORD SEETH" is vertically on the west wall. This fresco is of "God the Father," a dove (representing the "Holy Spirit") and two angels

¹All instant frescoes were photographed by Edward Vollmer in March, 2015.

at the sides. (Exhibit 11); and,

4) The **arabesques** frame around each medallion and the central fresco. They are polychromed florid swirls and designs in intricate and detailed patterns, as if done from stencils.

The 1848 sources described "decorations of the walls," and "especially the ceiling...beautiful..." without specifically stating where. The most likely places of these "walls...painted in panel work, the colors being laid on the wet plaster" would be at the west wall area: the artist Monachesi routinely used the model of Raphael's "School of Athens" fresco from the Vatican and the Renaissance master had arabesques on the borders, corner spaces and sides where decorations such as arabesques provided art to fill in voided areas. (Compare Exhibits 14 and 15 herein.)

The "scroll work" and other "panels" on the ceiling reported in 1848 are also arabesques, interconnecting with the medallions around the central fresco above the nave.

St. Augustine's fresco program is defined as an **object** by the Philadelphia Historical Commission's **Rules and Regulations 2:16** as:

A material thing of functional, aesthetic, cultural, historic or scientific value that may be, by nature or design, moveable yet related to a specific setting or environment.

All of the frescoed areas at St. Augustine's from 1848 are incorporated onto the surfaces of the ceilings and walls, as interior architecture by the manner in which the fresco medium is applied onto the wet plaster to execute these decorations.

Media used by artist Nicola Monachesi at St. Augustine's in 1848:

As noted, fresco was the medium for this decorative program based upon "The Public Ledger" article of 1848. No other medium has since been verified to dispute what Monachesi used,¹ however it is doubtful that the arabesques would have been done in fresco. The separate colors in the bands of arabesques would have been applied like a silk screen process, one-at-a-time, so as not to run into each other in wet plaster. Fresco is a method of painting with pigments on a wet plaster surface so that the colors are incorporated. It is water-based, with the artist working against air temperature and other air-borne elements that affect drying time. Monachesi had been trained in "true" or **buon** fresco in Rome, but no analyses have been done on St. Augustine's frescoes to ascertain if all were consistently in water-based true fresco in the 1848 program as he had learned in Rome.

Recent research of a Monachesi fresco program at The Richard Alsop House in Connecticut revealed that in 1839, that Monachesi

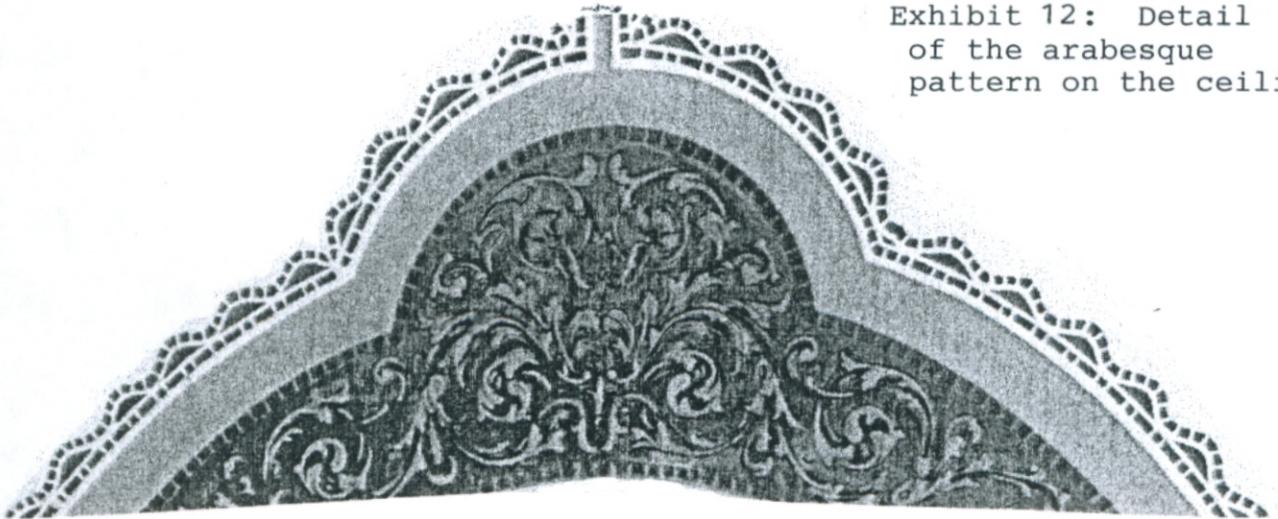
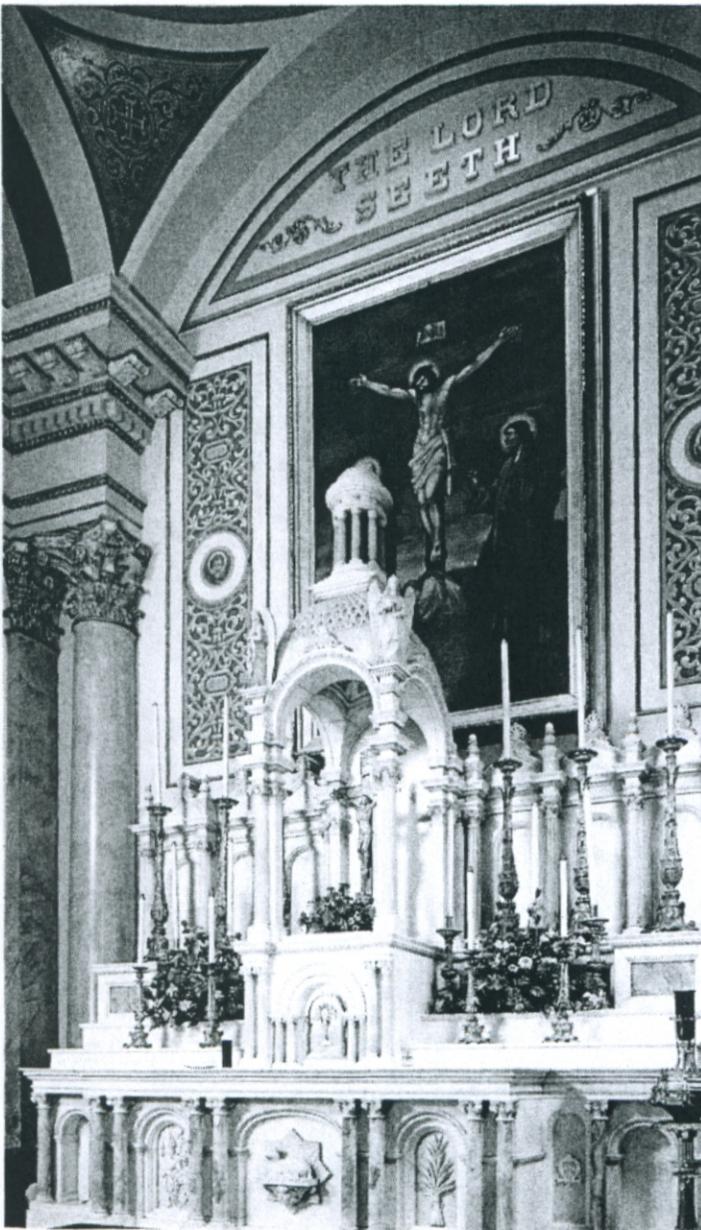


Exhibit 12: Detail of the arabesque pattern on the ceiling.

¹There have been several unreliable accounts on St. Augustine's wide range of decorative and fine art installed at the church since 1848. After Monachesi, Filippo Costaggini (1837-1904) painted oils on canvas and was said to have done the fresco above the nave. Refer to PHC file on St. Augustine's and booklet, "Old St. Augustine's Catholic Church in Philadelphia," (1965), p. 10. The author credited Monachesi with the "four Evangelists" medallions, also in fresco, which again, is not consistent to the 1848 record.

had used "thinly-bound oil paints" on the surfaces of the interior and exterior decorations of the house. (Refer to Appendix C.) It is believed that fresco painters often used oil-based paints atop the dried frescoed surfaces to achieve better shading and details. Until St. Augustine's frescoes have been tested, the only record on the medium used is the 1848 source.



St. Augustine's west wall shown here was the only remaining part of the first church structure from the 1844 Nativist arson.

"THE LORD SEETH" also was from the original church that was dedicated in 1801. Above this is the dome with Monachesi's fresco.

Later arabesques, consistent with the Monachesi ones from 1848 were added before 1900 probably by Lorenzo Scattaglia, the Archdiocesan-appointed decorator-artist.

Photo credit: Tom Crane, for Roger Moss' **Historic Sacred Places in Philadelphia.**

The side panels next to the Crucifixion painting may also be part of the 1848 program.

Exhibit 13.

Measurements or Scale of St. Augustine's Frescoes:

The approximate sizes of the eight(8) Monachesi frescoes at St. Augustine's interior are:

- a) at the dome that measures about 12'w X about 6'h.
- b) Central fresco above nave extends about 20'l X 9'w.
- c) Each medallion is about 4' in diameter.
- d) The arabesque border around each medallion has a width of about 20".

There were no references on the measurements therefore, approximations were made, and at a distance.

Condition of these frescoes:

Obviously in the past there were repaintings and cosmetic changes to alter the quality of Monachesi's work as described in 1848 and from observation of his other frescoes in other sites. (Refer to Exhibits 4 and 11, in comparing painting styles.)

Overall, the frescoes are in fair condition but could be better conserved from future deterioration. Careful attention could hinder further chipping in some areas where a white undercoat or base is evident. There has been noticeable retouching to the frescoes. A 1965 history by Reverend Arthur J. Ennis,

OSA wrote of repainting these frescoes in the "....1890's... or later in the 1920's when another renovation took place."¹ The "1890's" date may refer to a "repainting" over Monachesi's original composition by Filippo Costaggini who the priest stated had signed his name on the fresco above the nave.² The 1848 source is clear that this fresco was Monachesi's work and that fresco was the original medium, despite that Costaggini's repainting may have been in oil.³ There were more "repaintings" done as repairs to these frescoes in the latter twentieth century.



Exhibit 14.

This detail of the west wall at St. Augustine's reflects Monachesi's inspiration from Raphael's plan from 1509 at the Vatican's stanza where "The School of Athens" fresco plays with painted faux architectural decorations and designs.

Here, Monachesi imitated Raphael's sectioning to apportioned spaces.

Next page: "The School of Athens" a fresco by Raphael at the Vatican, which became a "textbook" of reference during Monachesi's career in the U.S.

Note Raphael's models for St. Augustine's arabesques, faux mouldings and geometric shapes for decorations.

¹

See PHC file on St. Augustine's with this information as "Old St. Augustine's Catholic Church in Philadelphia," pp.10-11.

²

Ibid.

³A source published in 1896 stated that "Signor Scattaglia" was responsible for the fresco at the dome and that he had "repainted" the "ceiling..so elegantly decorated eighteen years ago by Costaggini." Rev. F.X. McGowan, OSA (ed.), "Historical Sketch of St. Augustine's Church, Philadelphia, Penna., 1796-1896," Phila., p. 142.



Exhibit 15.

in the same scene At center Aristotle debates with a white-bearded Plato—whom Raphael portrayed with the features of Leonardo da Vinci.