

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 (CD, EMAIL, FLASH DRIVE)
ELECTRONIC FILES MUST BE WORD OR WORD COMPATIBLE

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

Street address: 917 S. 47th Street

Postal code: 19143

2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: Saint Francis de Sales Church

Current/Common Name: Saint Francis de Sales Church

3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

☒ Building

☐ Structure

☐ Site

☐ Object

4. PROPERTY INFORMATION

Condition: ☐ excellent ☒ good ☐ fair ☐ poor ☐ ruins

Occupancy: ☒ occupied ☐ vacant ☐ under construction ☐ unknown

Current use: church

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Please attach a narrative description and site/plot plan of the resource's boundaries.

6. DESCRIPTION

Please attach a narrative description and photographs of the resource's physical appearance, site, setting, and surroundings.

7. SIGNIFICANCE

Please attach a narrative Statement of Significance citing the Criteria for Designation the resource satisfies.

Period of Significance (from year to year): from 1907 to present

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: constructed 1907-1911; alts. 1952, 1956, 1968

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: Henry D. Dagit, architect

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: Melody & Keating, contractor; D'Ascenzo Studios, stained glass; Rafael Guastavino, dome

Original owner: Archdiocese of Philadelphia

Other significant persons: See Statement of Significance

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.

9. NOMINATOR

Organization _____ Date February 3, 2019

Name with Title Miss Corey Loftus Email cloftusm@gmail.com

Street Address 220 Curwen Road Telephone 610-291-7412

City, State, and Postal Code Bryn Mawr, PA 19010

Nominator ☐ is ☒ is not the property owner.

PHC USE ONLY

Date of Receipt: February 4, 2019

☒ Correct-Complete ☐ Incorrect-Incomplete Date: March 15, 2019

Date of Notice Issuance: March 15, 2019

Property Owner at Time of Notice:

Name: Dennis J Dougherty In Trust

Address: 225 N 18th Street

City: Philadelphia State: PA Postal Code: 19103

Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: September 18, 2019

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: October 11, 2019

Date of Final Action: October 11, 2019

☒ Designated ☐ Rejected

12/7/18

5. Boundary Description

This nomination proposes to designate Saint Francis de Sales Church, one building on a larger parcel at 917 S. 47th Street, Philadelphia, that includes two buildings, being the church and a parish school. The proposed designation includes only the church building. The school is considered non-contributing for the purposes of this designation. The proposed designation also excludes a third building which is part of the church complex, being the rectory to the east, which is on a separate parcel known as 4615-25 Springfield Avenue. The parcel boundary of 917 S. 47th Street is shown below in Figure 1.

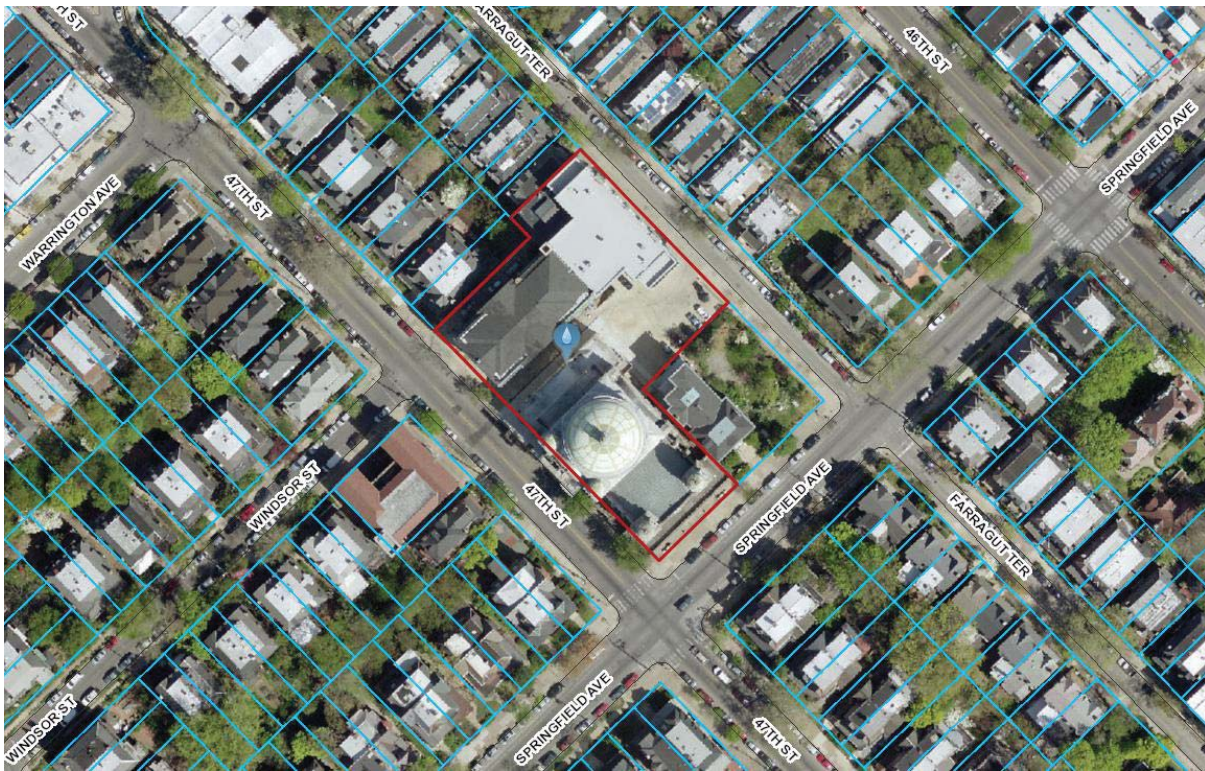


Figure 1. Parcel boundary of 917 S. 47th Street, outlined in red. Source: Philadelphia Water Department.

The boundary of the church building begins at the northeast corner of Springfield Avenue and S. 47th Street, and extends approximately 170 feet north along S. 47th Street, and approximately 105 feet east along Springfield Avenue. The proposed boundary includes the footprint of the church, with a small perimeter buffer, and is shown below in Figure 2.

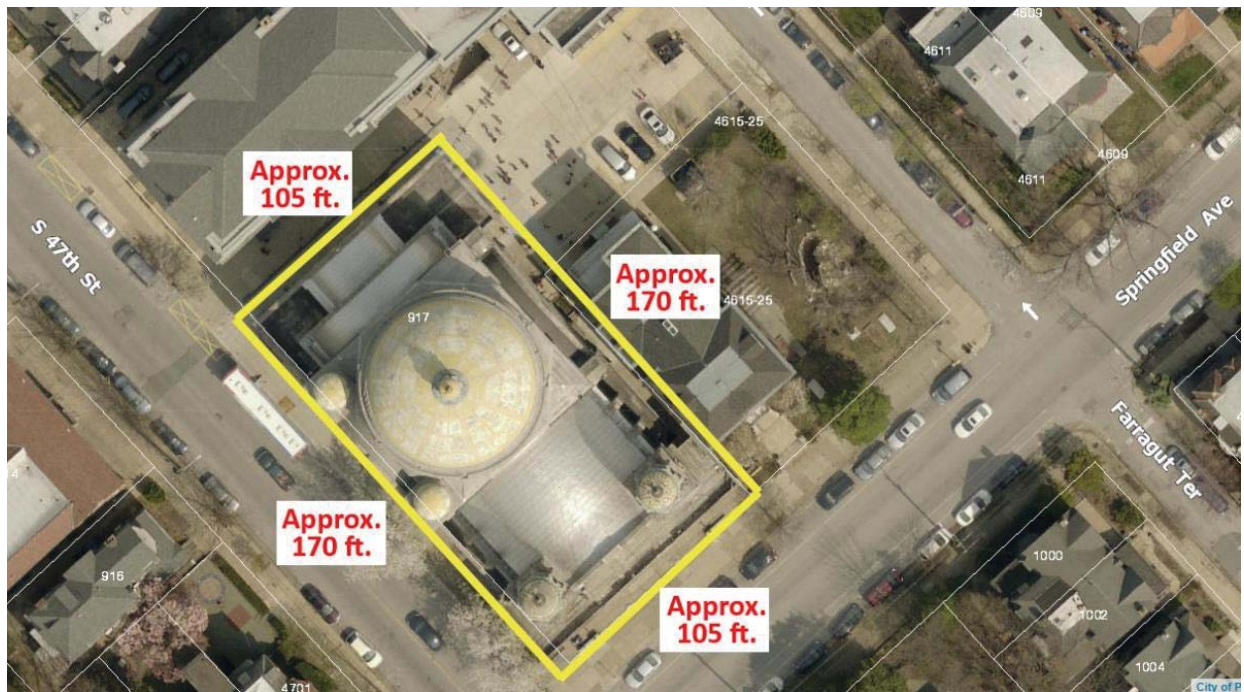


Figure 2. Proposed designation boundary of church building. Base map source: CityAtlas.

6. Architectural Description

Located on the prominent corner on the north side of Springfield Avenue at S. 47th Street, St. Francis de Sales Church is one of three notable buildings comprising the church complex. To the north is the parish school, and to the east is the rectory. Both the parish school and rectory are not included in the historic designation. The grand church was built between 1907 and 1911 by well-established architect, parishioner, and West Philadelphia local, Henry D. Dagit. Crowned with a tiled Guastavino dome, the Victorian-Byzantine Church is an iconic feature in the Southwestern Philadelphia skyline and rises above the height of neighboring Victorian houses. Dagit was inspired by the great dome and design of the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul. His iteration is a unique architectural treasure praised by the *New York Times* as “one of the foremost examples of Romanesque-Byzantine architecture in the East.”¹

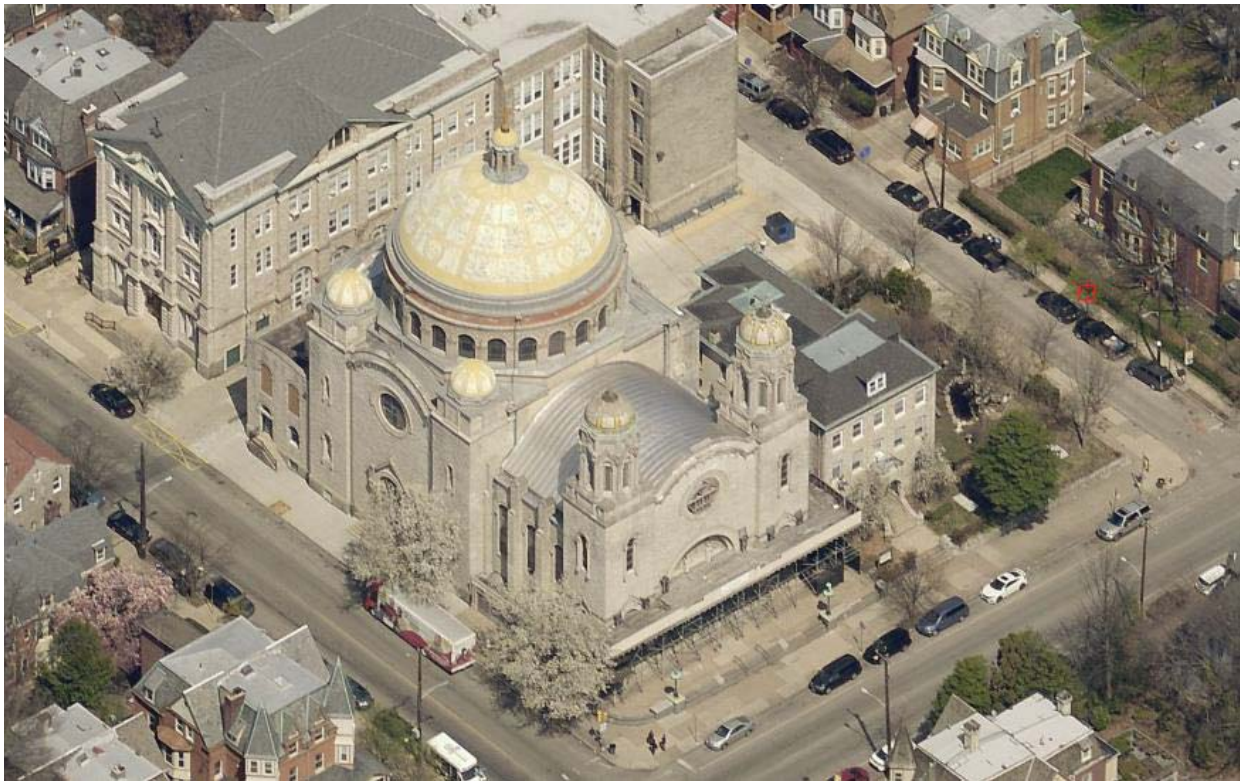


Figure 3. Aerial imagery of St. Francis de Sales Church. Source: Pictometry 2018.

¹ “Henry D. Dagit Sr.,” *The New York Times*, March 29, 1929.



Figure 4. Hagia Sophia, constructed c. 530 AD, Istanbul, Turkey. Source: <http://ayasofyamuzesi.gov.tr/en>.

Similar to the Hagia Sophia (Figure 4), a central dome dominates Dagit's design. However, the large open interior takes the shape of a three-aisle planned basilica with shallow transepts at the east and west and a rectangular chancel at the north. Parishioners enter from the south, where the main entrance follows from Springfield Avenue. Dagit chose a rusticated white marble ashlar for the church exterior. Columns on the door jambs are dressed in polished granite and exterior window frames and sculptures are carved in Indiana limestone. Blueprints show copper, terra cotta, brick, granite, bronze, and wrought iron as additional materials used for decoration and building materials.

The church has a polychromatic interior featuring polished green granite columns, faience sculptured terra cotta arches and tiled Guastavino vaulting. Interior walls are lined with splendid gold-tile mosaics depicting biblical scenes and saints with their attributes. Light enters through stained glass windows by Nicola D'Ascenzo, although the interior is considerably dim. Clerestory windows introduce more light at the base of the dome. These twenty-four round-arched windows are arranged closely together, producing the effect of a floating dome.

Guastavino tile covers the interior dome, much of the ceiling space, and the north chancel. The pink, rectangular tiles are arranged in a herringbone pattern, except on the chancel walls where the tile is arranged in an ikat pattern. Walls to the east and west are painted a pale yellow in the church's current state. Four rose windows adorn the walls in each of the cardinal directions. An undated historic black and white photograph from D'Ascenzo's papers (Figure 5) captures the grand lancet windows on the east side wall with the Stations of the Cross in mosaic below. The borders of the stained glass windows were originally fastened with sockets for light bulbs. Although they are not used, they reveal the architect's desire to experiment with electrical light on the interior. Furthermore, the photograph shows

the stations of the cross on the interior's perimeter, framed under round arches. Note that the interior of the church is not included as part of the designation.



Figure 5. East wall of interior nave at St. Francis de Sales Church, undated. Source: D'Ascenzo Collection, The Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

South Elevation (Springfield Avenue, primary façade, Figure 6)

The primary facade and main entrance features two domed towers at either end. Granite steps, flanked by patinated copper lanterns, lead up to the entrance. Three semi-circular stone-carved tympanum crown three corresponding portal doors that open into the main vestibule. Above the side doors, the semicircular arch is topped with an additional pointed arch. In Dagit's 1907 designs for the church, he imagines a different roofline with a facade that comes to a point (Figure 7). However, in its final construction the roofline is curved, mirroring the curved tympanum above the main door. This early design proposal exhibits the same general plan and window placements as the built version; differences are found in small architectural details and use of materials. The most apparent difference between the early design and built structure is the inclusion of a terracotta paneled sloping roof in the former.

The facade has three windows on the second-story including a large stained-glass rose window below the rounded arch of the roof line and two rounded-arched windows at either end framed with engaged columns and sculptural adornment. The cylindrical front towers rise out of square bases with dome tops that match the style and material of the central dome.



Figure 6. South (primary) elevation of the church fronting Springfield Avenue. Source: Google Street View, October 2018.

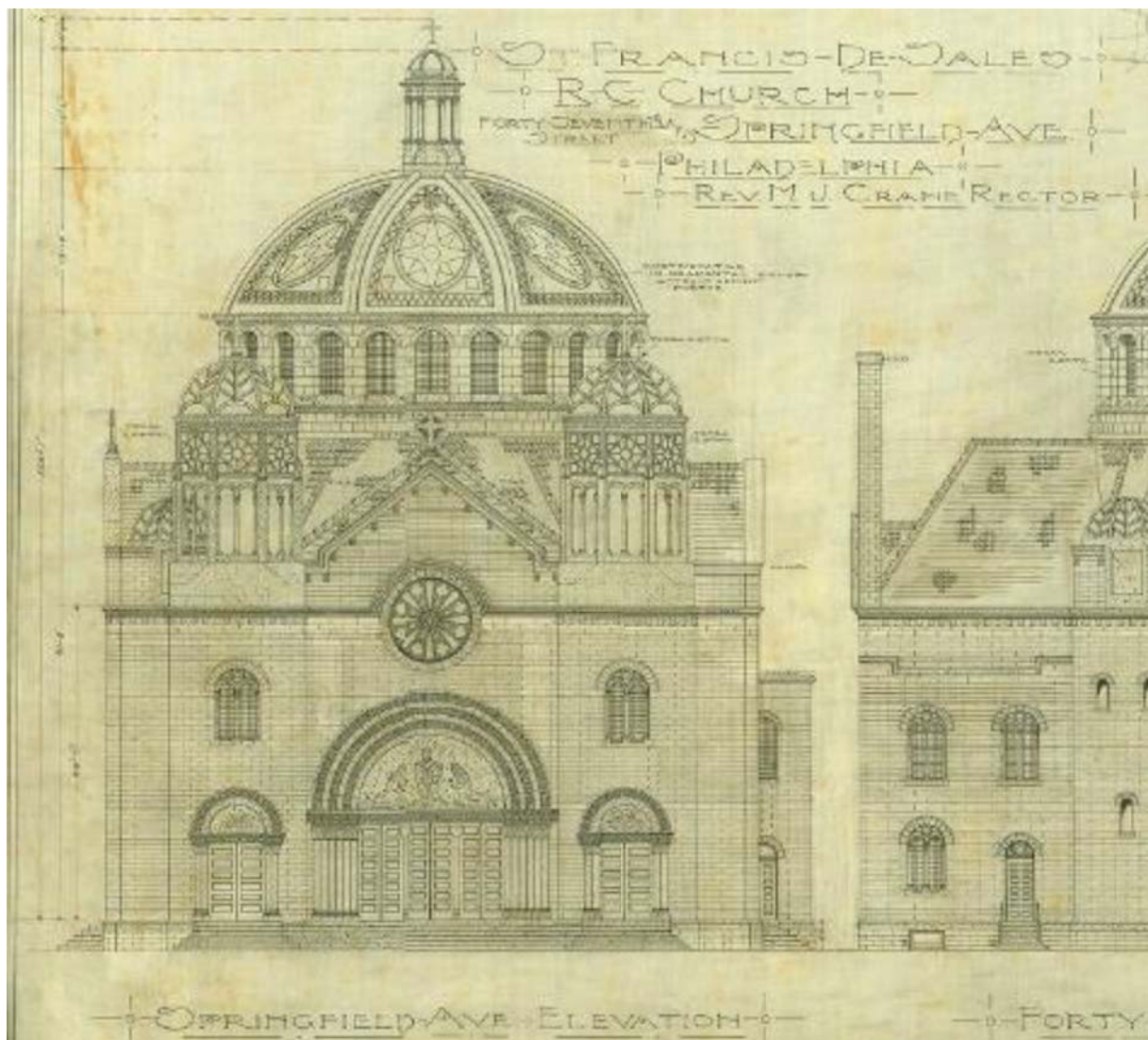


Figure 7. Front elevation drawing by Henry D. Dagit, 1907. Source: Athenaeum of Philadelphia, Dagit Collection.

West Elevation (S. 47th Street, side, Figure 8)

The west elevation of the church along S. 47th Street is the second-most decorated elevation of the church behind the primary facade. Fully visible from the street, the visitor can enjoy sculptural niches nested in the facade. The central door is flanked by marble engaged triple columns with stone-carved tympanum and a crowning rounded arch transcribed within a pointed arch. Two more tiled domes top the towers at either side of the entrance with sculptural elements beneath. From this side, the large central dome over the transept towers above announces its prominence.

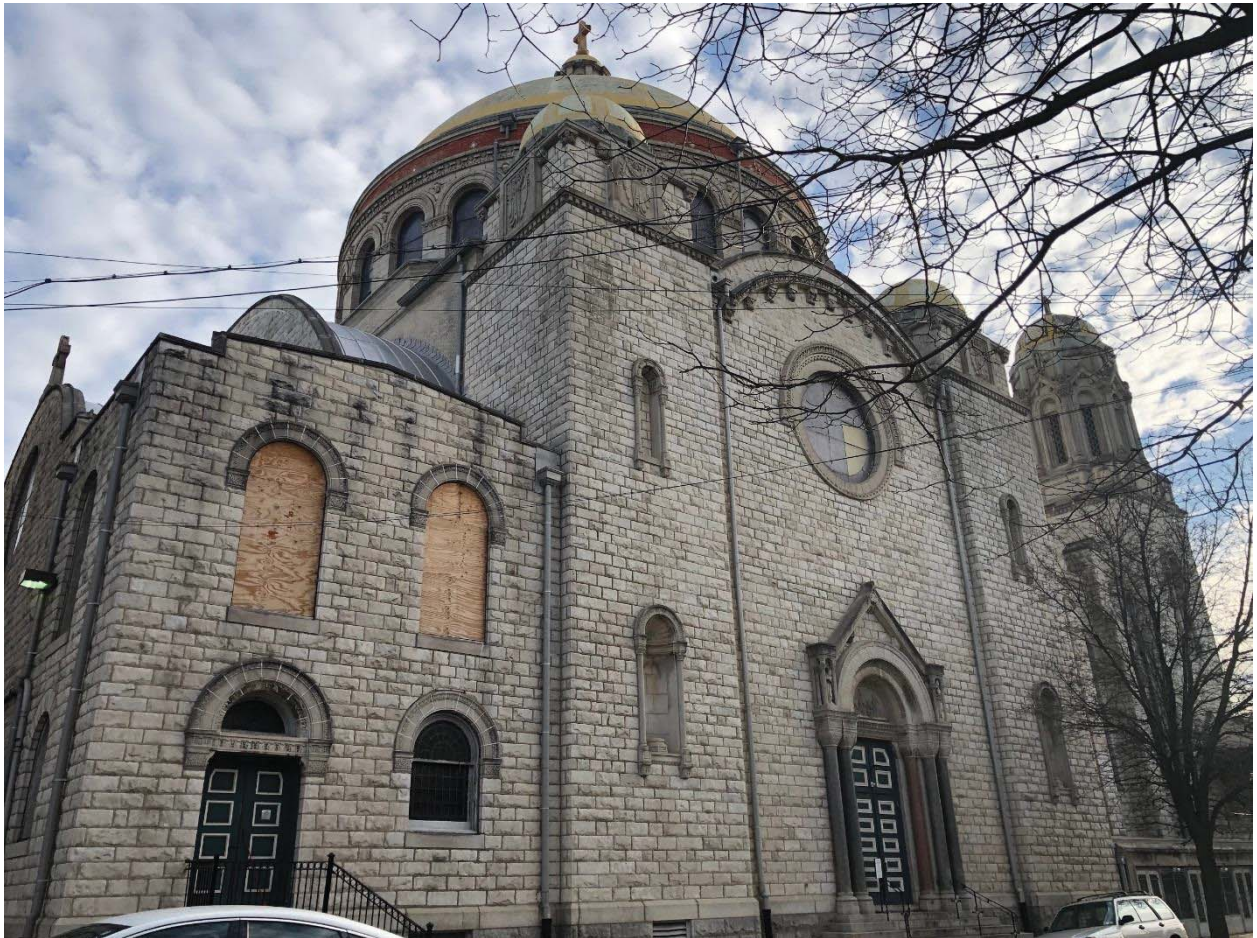


Figure 8. West (side) elevation along S. 47th Street. Source: Corey Loftus.

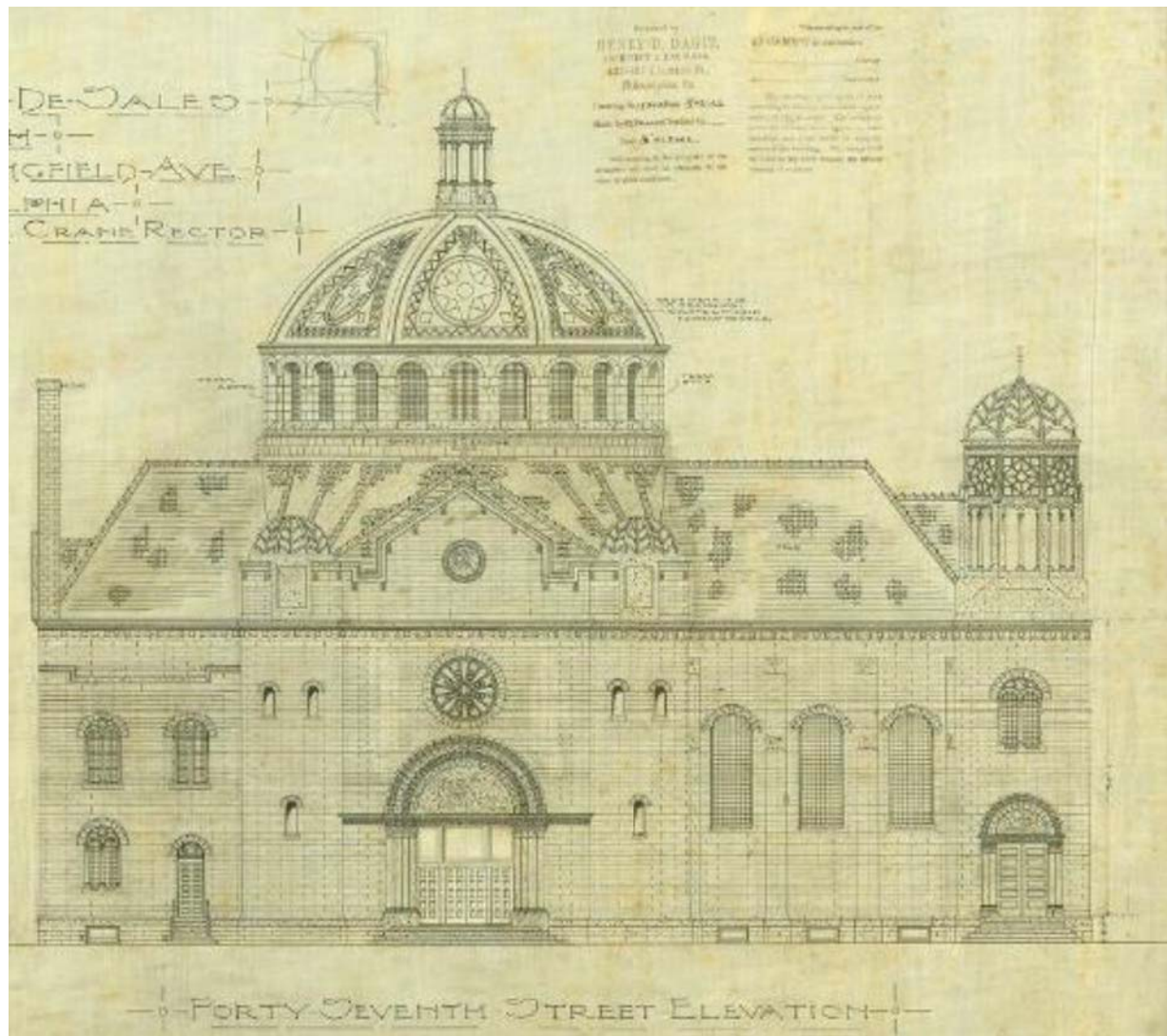


Figure 9. West side elevation drawing by Henry D. Dagitt, 1907. Source: Athenaeum of Philadelphia, Dagitt Collection.

East Elevation (side, Figure 10)

The east elevation of the church faces the Rector's house and a small parking lot for the ministry. In its current state, the side door is crowned with a rounded, unadorned arch with access provided by a ramp. Round-arched windows occupy the first and second stories of the facade on both sides of the east rose window. Most of the east side elevation is obscured by the Rector's house to the east.



Figure 10. Side elevation facing Rector's house. Source: Corey Loftus.

North Elevation (rear, Figure 12)

The north (rear) elevation of the church faces the side of the Saint Francis de Sales School.² Faced with the same rusticated white marble ashlar as the rest of the building, this elevation is the least ornate of the four elevations owing to its obscured visibility from the public right-of-way. A large rose window fits under the semi-circular curve of the roofline. Round-arched windows are placed at both stories. Additional rectangular windows at the level of the sidewalk offer light for the church basement.



Figure 12. Rear elevation. Source: Corey Loftus.

² The school and Rector's house to the east are attributed to architect John Flynn (1859-1914) in the West Philadelphia Streetcar Suburb Historic District nomination.

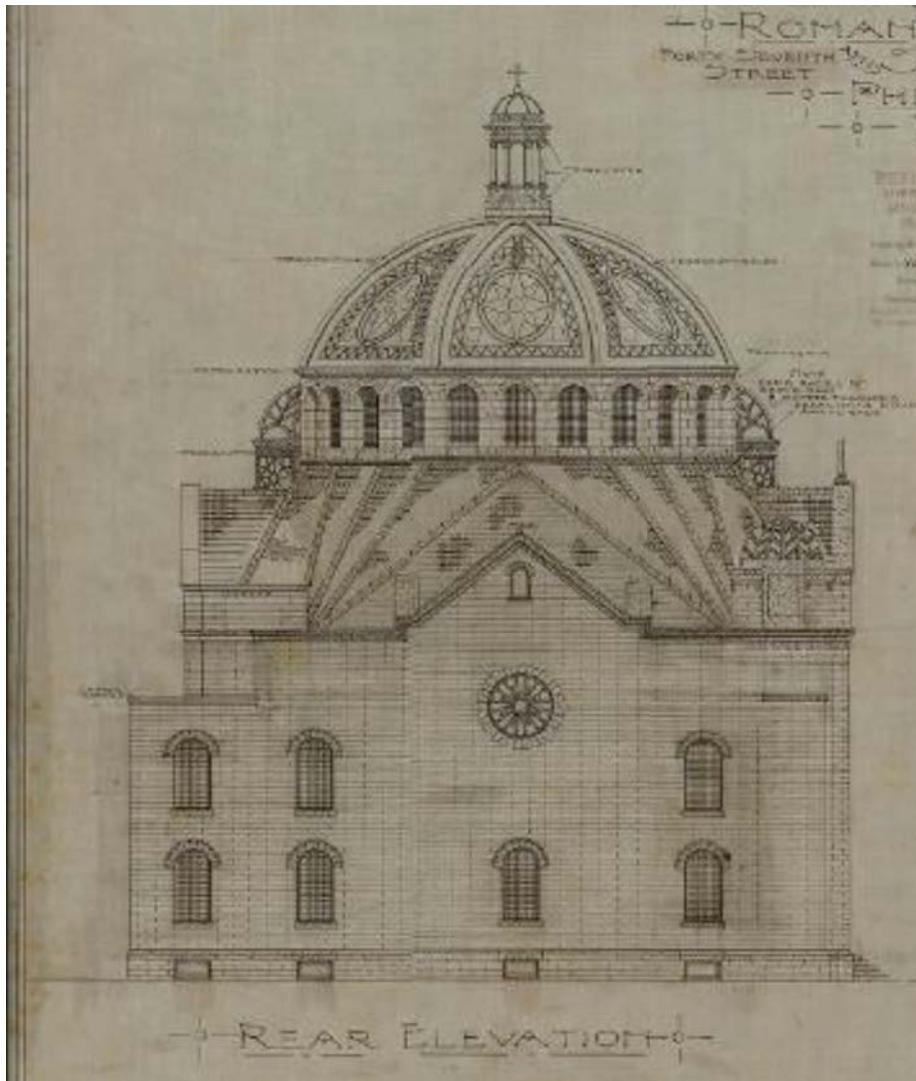


Figure 13. Rear elevation drawing by Henry D. Dagit, 1907. Source: Athenaeum of Philadelphia, Dagit Collection.

Note on Current Conditions

At the time that this nomination was written, the south facade and south rose window were covered by exterior scaffolding. On the west elevation, two windows on the second story are boarded with wood in the place of glass.

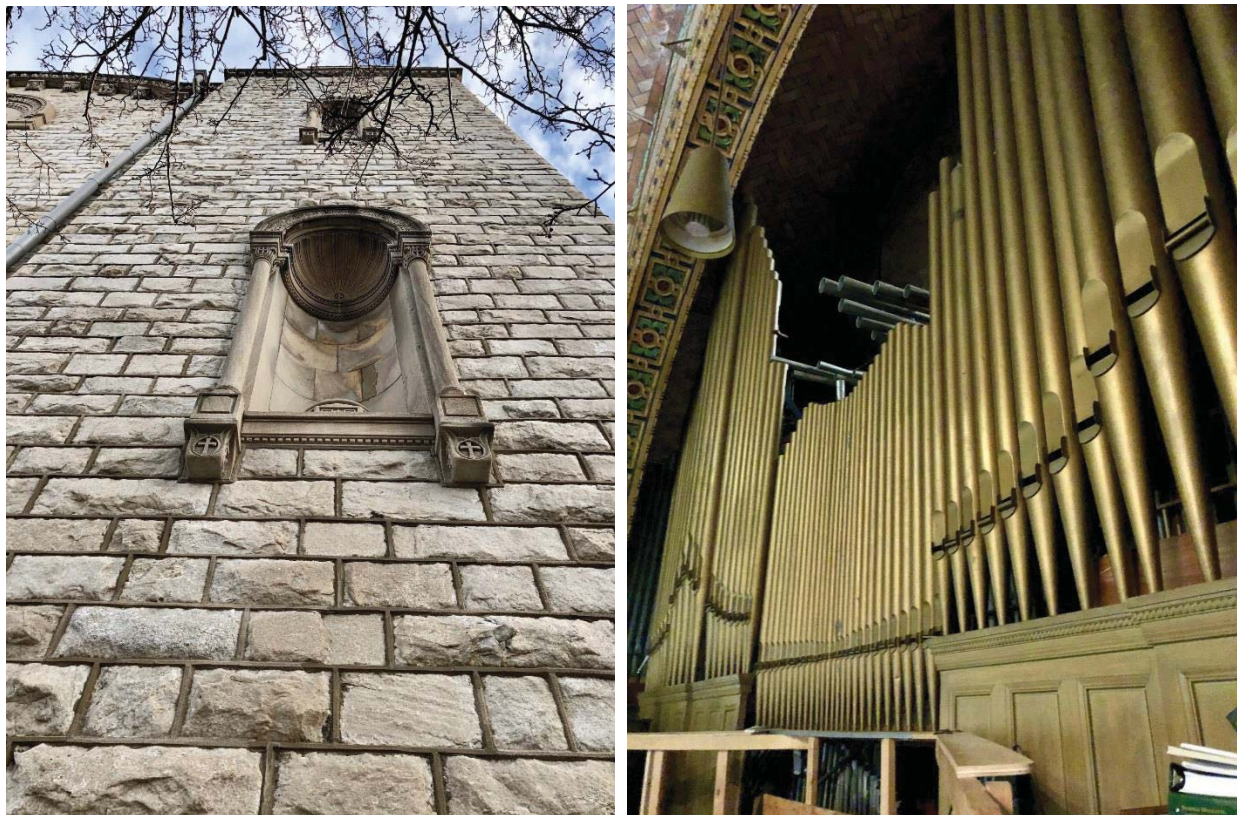
In 1952, Henry D. Dagit & Sons made improvements to the basement and in 1956 made additional renovations to the lower church. Around the same time, the original polychromatic glazed Guastavino tiles on the main dome had delaminated from the underlying layers, and were covered with concrete.³

³ Roger W. Moss, *Historic Sacred Places of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 223.

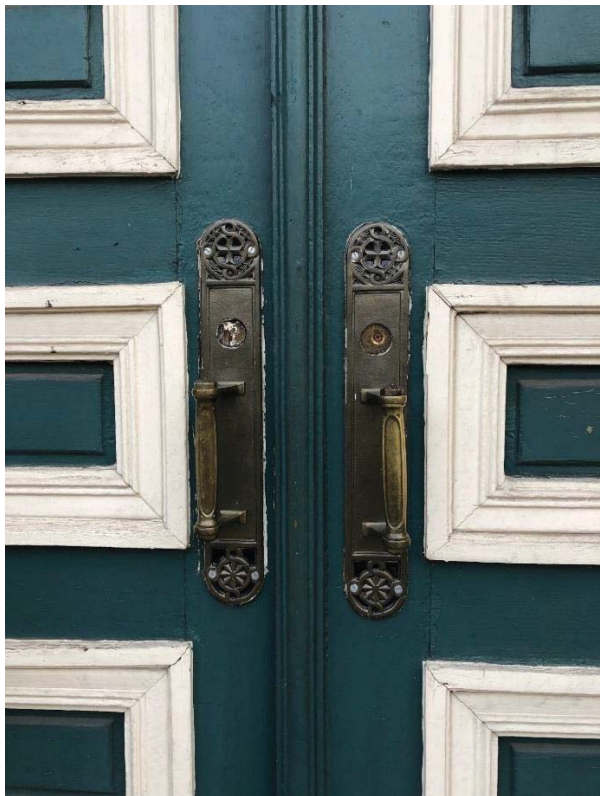
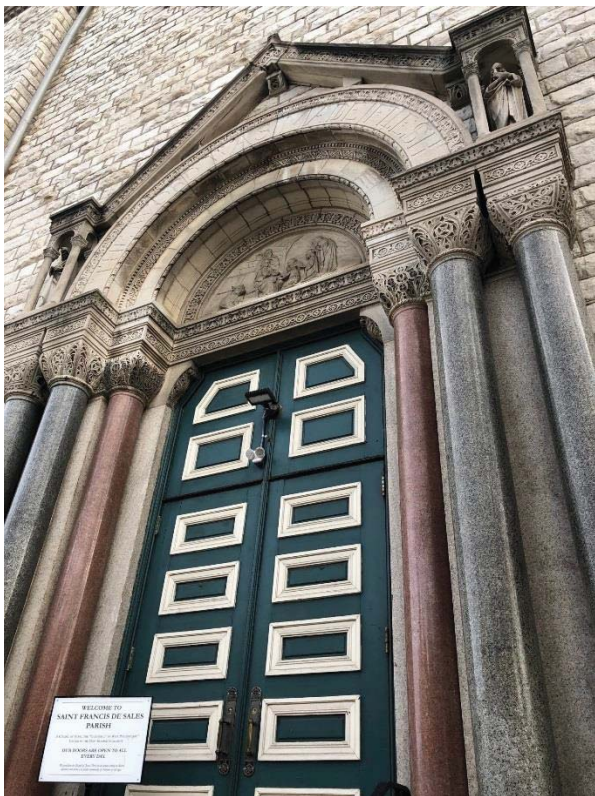
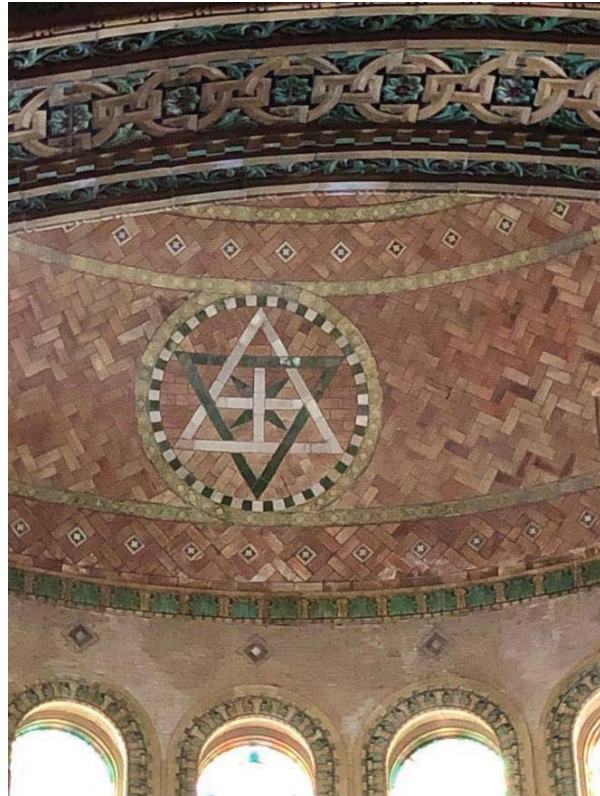
In 1968, prominent architect Robert Venturi was hired to update the interior. He designed an altar, lectern, and chair at the apsidal end; however, these additions were not well-received and have since been removed. The parish keeps the Venturi altar in storage.

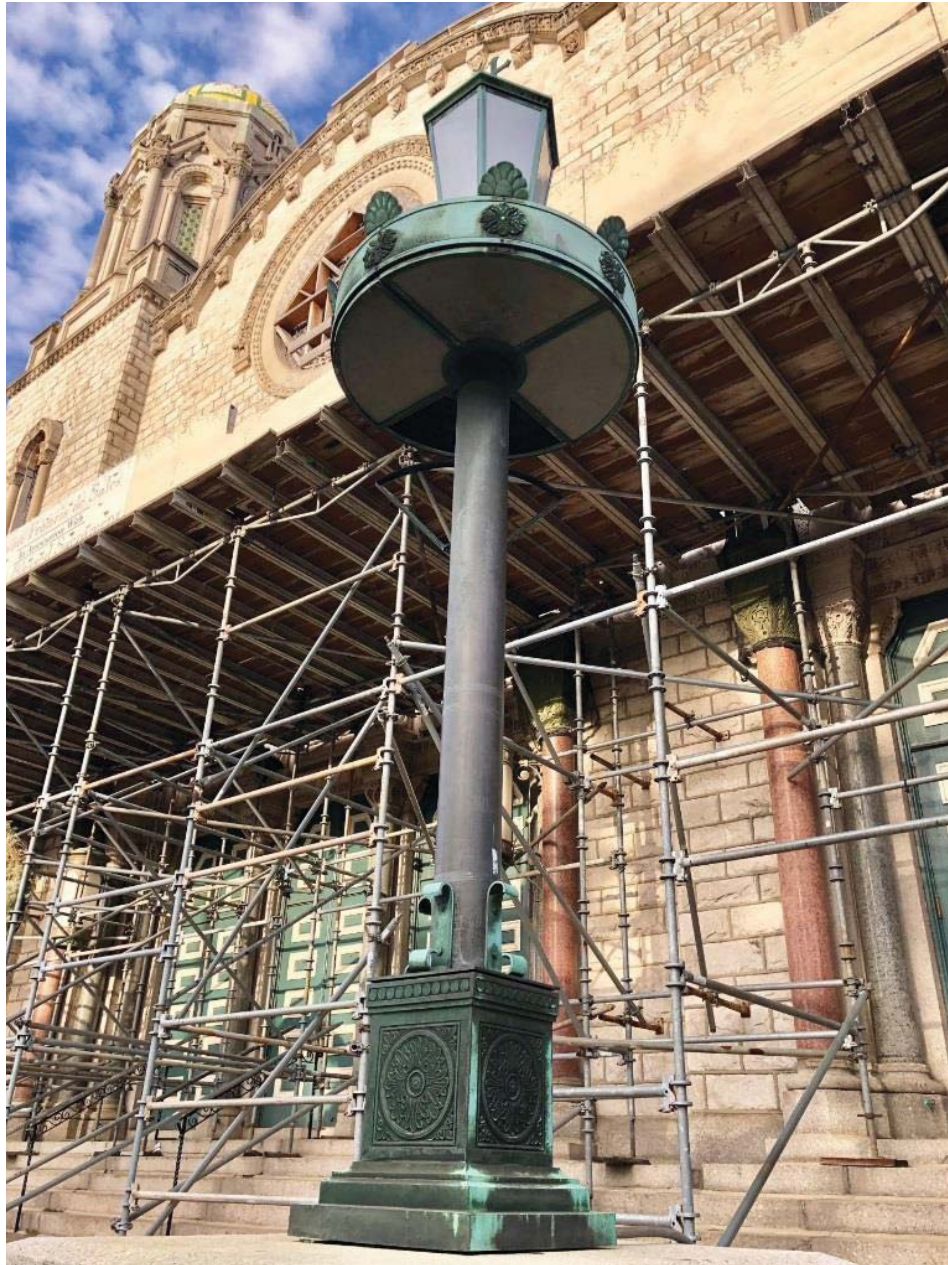
Between 2007 and 2012, the firm Historic Building Architects completed a conservation plan for the church. The work included restoration of four of the six domes, including the main dome. The concrete surface of the domes was painted according to Guastavino's original specifications, owing to the cost associated with a true restoration.⁴

Additional Photographs of Architectural Details (Source for all: Corey Loftus)



⁴ Hidden City Philadelphia, "West Philly Skyline Domes Restored," Nov. 23, 2011.
<https://hiddencityphila.org/2011/11/2-5-million-church-rehab-approaches-completion/>





7. Statement of Significance

St. Francis de Sales Church at 917 S. 47th Street constitutes a significant resource that merits designation by the Philadelphia Historical Commission and inclusion on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The church building satisfies Criteria for Designation A, D, E, F, H, and J as enumerated in Section 14-1004 of the Philadelphia Code.

(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.

There are a number of significant persons associated with the construction, design, and keeping of St. Francis de Sales Church, including its architects, designers, engineers, music directors, and parishioners. Several of these individuals are included under Criterion E. In addition to significant persons associated with the church and its construction, a number of significant community and religious organizations are associated with the parish. The following list, though not exhaustive, recognizes some of the most prominent persons associated with St. Francis de Sales, including its architect, engineer, and designers of domestic and international acclaim. Biographies of Henry Dagit (architect), Nicola D’Ascenzo (stained-glass artist), and Rafael Guastavino (engineer) are contained under Criterion E. All other listed groups and persons are remembered in biographies the Saint Francis de Sales Church History Committee’s blog. See listed:

Persons of significance:

Henry D. Dagit (architect and parishioner)⁵

Nicola D’Ascenzo (stained-glass artist)

Rafael Guastavino (dome engineer)

Charles Theodore Biswanger (interior designer, of the Dagit & Sons Firm)

Robert Venturi and John Rauch (1968 interior alterations)

Adolfo di Nesti (sculptor)⁶

Frederick Dimble Henwood (mosaicist)

Joseph Mark McShea (American prelate of the Roman Catholic Church)⁷

Michael Joseph Crane (American prelate of the Roman Catholic Church)

⁵ “A Woodlands Connection,” SFDS History Mysteries, June 19, 2017, <https://sfdshistory.wordpress.com/2017/06/15/a-woodlands-connection/>.

⁶ “Our Man in Washington,” SFDS History Mysteries, April 18, 2018, <https://sfdshistory.wordpress.com/2018/01/07/our-man-in-washington/>.

⁷ “Where the Heart Is,” SFDS History Mysteries, May 29, 2018, <https://sfdshistory.wordpress.com/2018/05/28/where-the-heart-is/>.

Eleanor Donnelly (Poet Laureate of the Catholic Church, author, poet)⁸
 Wilhelmina (Winnie) Ruane (children's book author)⁹
 Constance O'Hara (Philadelphia playwright and author)¹⁰
 Ann de Forest (journalist, author, poet)
 Albert Dooner (Philadelphia composer)
 Laura Blackburn (parishioner; board member of the Women's Humane Society)¹¹
 Jean Baptiste Revelli (socialite and "pew holder" at St. Francis de Sales)¹²

Affiliated organizations and groups of significance:

The IHM Sisters
 The Assumption of Mary Vietnamese Community¹³
 Knights of Peter Claver¹⁴
 The Assumptive Religious (apostolic order)¹⁵

(D) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen; and (F) Contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represent a significant innovation.

The grand Guastavino dome at St. Francis de Sales Church is as an architectural specimen marked by craftsmanship that represents a significant innovation. The undeniable artistry and genius of Guastavino dome construction has been recognized and studied comprehensively by MIT Professor and structural engineer, John Ochsendorf. Ochsendorf's publication, *Guastavino Vaulting: The Art of Structural Tile* published by Princeton Architectural Press (2013) and the traveling exhibition that followed, *Palaces for the People: Guastavino and America's Great Public Spaces* (2013-2014), recognize the engineered brilliance and merit of the Guastavino family's legacy to the United States.

⁸ "Atlantis Lore and Civil War," SFDS History Mysteries, January 01, 2017, <https://sfdshistory.wordpress.com/2016/07/31/atlantis-lore-and-civil-war/>.

⁹ "Literary Women of De Sales," SFDS History Mysteries, April 02, 2018, <https://sfdshistory.wordpress.com/2018/04/02/literary-women-of-de-sales/>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ "Horse Party," SFDS History Mysteries, November 25, 2017, <https://sfdshistory.wordpress.com/2017/11/25/horse-party/>; "The Lady and the Lamp," SFDS History Mysteries, October 15, 2017, <https://sfdshistory.wordpress.com/2017/10/15/the-lady-and-the-lamp/>.

¹² "Fireworks," SFDS History Mysteries, July 04, 2017, <https://sfdshistory.wordpress.com/2017/07/02/fireworks/>.

¹³ "The Assumption of Mary Vietnamese Community," SFDS History Mysteries, May 23, 2017, <https://sfdshistory.wordpress.com/2017/05/06/the-assumption-of-mary-vietnamese-community/>.

¹⁴ "Knights of Peter Claver," SFDS History Mysteries, January 07, 2017, <https://sfdshistory.wordpress.com/2016/02/16/knights-of-peter-claver/>.

¹⁵ "Big Sisters and Little Sisters," SFDS History Mysteries, January 01, 2017, <https://sfdshistory.wordpress.com/2016/01/30/big-sisters-and-little-sisters/>.



Figure 14. Guastavino dome. Source: Historic American Buildings Survey.

Rafael Guastavino and his son, Rafael Jr. (1872-1950), practiced dome construction in the Old World technique of structural tiling. They produced an estimated 900,000 tiles a year in their studio during the company's peak to supply their projects.¹⁶ Guastavino is credited with more than 1,000 landmark projects in 40 states across the country. During his lifetime, Guastavino and his son gained considerable acclaim for their work. They were granted major ceiling commissions in iconic public and private spaces including New York's Grand Central Terminal, George Vanderbilt's Biltmore Estate, Carnegie Hall, Boston Public Library (Figure 15), and the Elephant House at the Bronx Zoo.

¹⁶ Michael O'Sullivan, "Palaces for the People: Guastavino and America's Great Public Spaces' Review," *The Washington Post*, June 27, 2013.

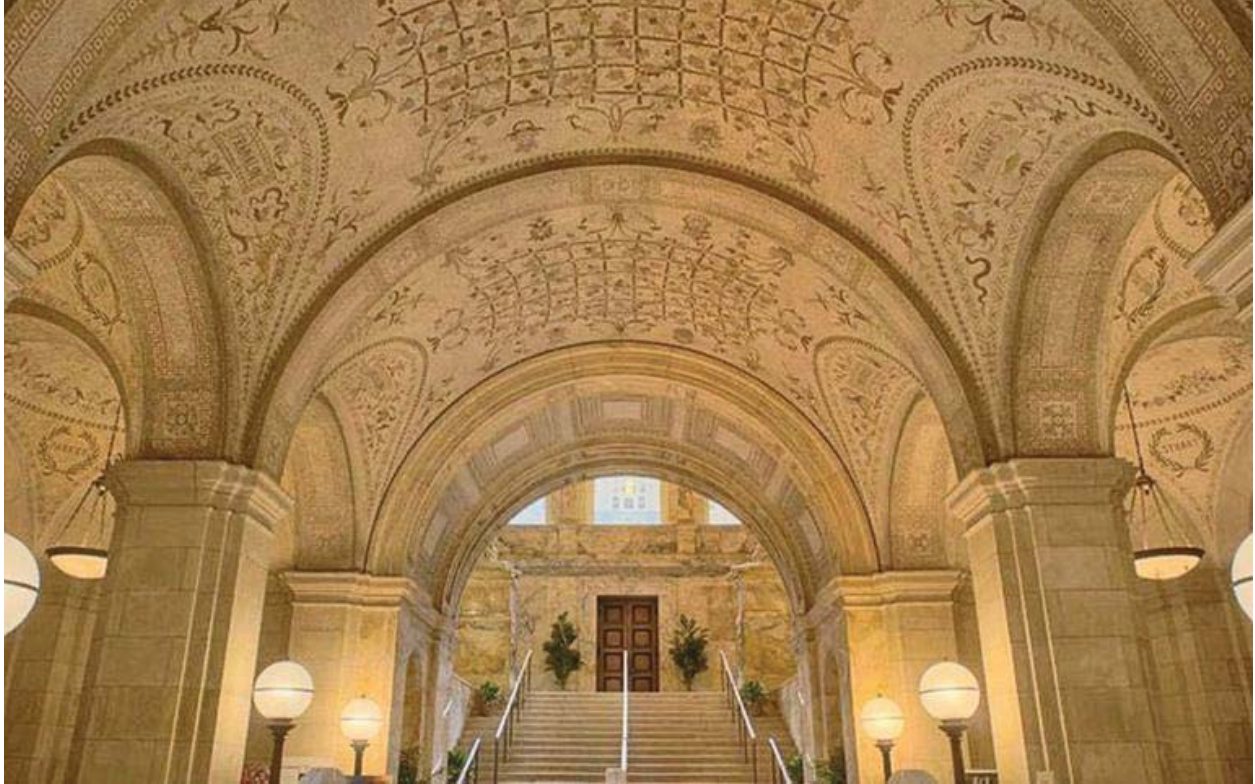


Figure 15. Boston Public Library Interior, McKim Building, Guastavino Vaulting. Source: Boston Public Library, <https://www.wbur.org/news/2013/01/10/guastavino-boston-library>.

Ochsendorf named his exhibit Palaces for the People: Guastavino and America's Great Public Spaces. As the title implies, Guastavino's vaults crowned public halls, stations, auditoriums and school gymnasiums with the same grandeur and beauty of a palace. Ochsendorf's scholarship posits the importance of Guastavino vaulting as works of national heritage and innovation in design and engineering. The Guastavino Fireproof Construction company made 24 patents between 1885-1962 and provided iconic buildings in major American cities with inexpensive, fireproof, and aesthetic vaulted ceilings that we continue to appreciate today.

The Saint Francis de Sales Church itself is the greatest example of Byzantine Revival architecture in the city of Philadelphia, if not the region. In addition to the dome supported by pendentives and internal bracing, the building design embodies distinguishing characteristics of the Byzantine Revival architectural style including its interior mosaics using gold backgrounds like those in the Hagia Sophia (Figure 16) and clerestory windows at the base of the dome that make the dome appear as if it were floating.



Figure 16. Interior of Hagia Sophia, Istanbul. Source: Wikimedia Commons.



Figure 17. Interior, Saint Francis de Sales Church. Source: Corey Loftus.

Rafael Guastavino and his son engineered the dome at Saint Francis de Sales, using their “patented system of interlocking tile and special mortar that did not require internal bracing.” Ochsendorf notes that the dome at St. Francis de Sales is an example of an early example of Guastavino Jr.’s used of the graphical studies method, to “shape his structures in response to load paths” applied in a project.¹⁷ “Since the hemispherical dome would develop tension forces near the base, Guastavino often altered the geometry to ensure that the thrust of the dome would remain in compression throughout.” In the example of St Francis de Sales Church, “the shape of the dome was altered and the buttresses were reinforced in response to the flow of forces.” Guastavino’s legacy is wide and cherished, for his studies in graphic analysis and design studies allowed him to “extend tile vaulting beyond anything previously built in masonry.”¹⁸ It stretches 62 feet in diameter and 90 feet above the nave at its highest point.¹⁹ An engineering marvel deserving of architectural merit, the dome is one of 600 identified Guastavino domes in the United States, praised for being “lightweight, attractive, fireproof, and virtually indestructible.”²⁰

(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.

St. Francis de Sales Church is a result of the work of many design professionals, including Henry D. Dagit (architect), Nicola D’Ascenzo (stained-glass artist), and Rafael Guastavino (tile artist and dome engineer).

Henry D. Dagit (1865-1929), the architect of St. Francis de Sales Church, is remembered as one of Philadelphia’s most eminent architects. He was the first of the well-known family of architects whose firm “successfully challenged the power of E.F. Durang & Son within the tight circle of Catholic Church and Institution architects.”²¹ While Dagit specialized in ecclesiastical buildings, he was also versed in residential and institutional architecture. His hotels, school buildings, houses, warehouses, churches and theaters can be found in New Jersey, Philadelphia, the Philadelphia suburbs, Delaware and Washington D.C.

¹⁷ John Ochsendorf, *Guastavino Vaulting: The Art of Structural Tile* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2013), 162.

¹⁸ Ochsendorf, *Guastavino Vaulting*, 165.

¹⁹ “About,” SFDS History Mysteries, October 17, 2018, <https://sfdshistory.wordpress.com/about/>.

²⁰ “About: Palaces for the People,” Palaces for the People, <https://palacesforthepeople.com/about-the-project/>.

²¹ Sarah L. Tatman, “Henry D. Dagit & Sons (fl. 1922-1959),” Philadelphia Architects and Buildings, https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/22395.

Dagit was born and raised in Philadelphia, where he attended the city's public schools. He was first employed as an architect by Walter Geissinger, before starting his own office with George M. Rowe. In 1898, Dagit was appointed architect of the archdiocese of Trenton for 10 years. At this time, Dagit gained popularity for his work in the area of Catholic institutional architecture. The prominent and established architect expanded his practice in 1922 and renamed it Henry Dagit & Sons to include his sons: Henry and Albert. In 1925, his youngest son Charles also joined the firm. After his death, Dagit's sons continued to work in their father's name.

Dagit was a prolific and accomplished architect. His papers are kept in the Athenaeum of Philadelphia archives and 187 of his building projects are documented online. Villanova University digitally published a monograph of his works that is publicly accessible on the library website. It is impossible to characterize his work by style or type as Dagit produced a wide range of designs and building types. In Philadelphia, some of his building projects include:

- Archbishop's Residence for the Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter & Paul (1701-11 Race Street)
- Callaghan Bar Room, Store, and Warehouse (Chaucery Lane near Coombs Alley)
- Catholic Philopatrian Literary Institute (1411-1413 Arch Street)
- Convent of the Sisters of Mercy School (N Broad Street near Columbia Ave)
- Cronin Hotel (NW corner of N Broad Street and Vine Street)
- Fiumara Store and Warehouse (902-904 S 10th Street)
- Gilmore Theater (S 15th Street, above Chestnut Street)
- Home for Catholic Orphans (N 20th Street near Race Street)
- Hutchinson Bakery (S 11th Street below Bainbridge Street)
- John Lang Mausoleum (West Laurel Hill Cemetery)
- Knickerbocker Ice Co. (30th Street near Montgomery Avenue)
- Marks Apartment House (1707 Green Street)
- McCloskey Store (SW corner of Front Street and Spruce Street)
- McHuch Store (1434 Market Street)
- Mellon Estate Office Building (S 17th Street near Chestnut Street)
- Most Blessed Sacrament Rectory and School (S 56th Street near Chestnut Street)
- Northern Electric Company, Stable (213 Susquehanna Avenue)
- Office buildings on the 600 and 700 block of Walnut Street
- Our Mother of Sorrows School (N 48th Street near Wyalusing Avenue)
- Philadelphia Veterinary Sanitarium (Ludlow Street, west of 34th Street)
- Redemptorist Fathers Lyceum and School (Diamond Street near Mascher Street)
- South Philadelphia National Bank (601-611 Broad Street)
- St. Columbia Church, Rectory, and School (2300-2336 Lehigh Avenue)
- St. Edward Church Rectory, Parish House, and School
- St. Elizabeth School and Parish House

St. Joseph Hospital (N 17th Street near Girard Avenue)
St. Malachy Church and Convent (1429 N 11th Street)
State Fencibles Armory Warehouse (N Broad Street)
The Colonial Apartments (SW corner of 11th street and Spruce Street)
Toomey Hall (S 22nd street near Point Breeze Avenue)
William Mulharin & Sons Warehouse (N Front Street near Master Street)

One of the most notable examples of Dagit's church designs is the church and other buildings (rectory, lyceum, school, convent) of the Immaculate Conception Parish in 1896 in Camden, NJ (Figure 18). He would construct the design for the convent on the same site in 1908. Dagit's proposal was chosen from a competitive pool of architects. Eight thousand people attended the groundbreaking ceremony of June 28, 1896.²² Dagit took the commission two years prior to opening his own private practice in 1888, and three years before he was appointed as architect of the Archdiocese of Trenton. A project of this size and importance would have secured his name as a church architect at an early stage of his career.

St. Francis de Sales Church is considered to be Dagit's most famous work. The cornerstone was laid on October 6, 1907, and the church was dedicated on November 12, 1911.²³



Figure 18. Immaculate Conception Parish, Camden, NJ, 1905. Architect: Henry D. Dagit.
Source: <http://www.dvrbs.com/Camden-religion/CamdenNJ-ImmaculateCon-1905bk.htm>.

²² Phil Cohen, "The Church and Other Buildings of the Immaculate Conception Parish, Camden, NJ," DVRB Local History, <http://www.dvrbs.com/Camden-religion/CamdenNJ-ImmaculateCon-1905bk.htm>.

²³ Roger W. Moss, *Historic Sacred Places of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 225.

Just as notable as his own accomplishments is the family legacy Dagit left behind. Generations later, Dagit's grandson Charles E. Dagit Jr. (1943-) continues the family practice with fervor and zeal. Charles trained with Louis Kahn at his prestigious studio after studying architecture at the University of Pennsylvania. In 1970, he founded Dagit-Saylor Architects and in the years after secured notable building commissions at Beloit College, Cornell University, Haverford College, Lehigh University, Penn State University and Swarthmore College, among others. Charles is also an accomplished author and lecturer. For more than 40 years he taught architecture at Temple and Drexel Universities, lecturing also at the University of Pennsylvania, Cornell University, Carnegie Mellon University, and the University of Syracuse. His publications include *The Groundbreakers: Architects in American History— Their Places and Times* (2015) and *Louis I. Kahn Architect: Remembering the Man and Those Who Surrounded Him* (2013).

Nicola D'Ascenzo, D'Ascenzo Studios (fl. ca. 1905-1954)



Figure 19. Nicola D'Ascenzo. Source: D'Ascenzo Studio Archives, Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

Nicola D'Ascenzo (1871-1954) is remembered as one of America's greatest stained-glass artists. His work and career convey a deep understanding and appreciation for quality craftsmanship with a democratic

application. In his Philadelphia studio, he produced stained-glass windows that decorate churches, institutions, and residences across the country. D'Ascenzo's stained-glass program at St. Francis de Sales is an example of his early work when he first emerged as a stained-glass artist, following the likes of his idols Louis C. Tiffany and John La Farge.

Born in Italy, Nicola was eleven when his family emigrated to Philadelphia, one of the nation's great centers of stained-glass next to Boston. D'Ascenzo studied fine arts and art history at the Pennsylvania Museum School of Industrial Art, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, and the New York School of Design. At 23, he taught mural painting at the Philadelphia College of Art for one year.²⁴ Afterwards he took a two-year trip to Italy with his wife and talented water colorist, Myrtle Goodwin. The couple traveled and studied Italian art and architecture. In Rome, he studied at the School of St. Luca and the Senola Liberra.

Upon his return, D'Ascenzo worked primarily as a portrait painter, and soon after, as an interior designer. From his first studio under the auspices of D'Ascenzo Studios at 1010 Chestnut Street he designed murals, mosaics, and portraits. Historic preservationist Lisa Weilbacker notes that D'Ascenzo was not listed as a stained-glass artist in the city directory until 1912.²⁵ All years previous he had advertised himself as a decorator. Perhaps it was the St. Francis de Sales stained glass commission, completed for the church's opening in 1911, that solidified stained-glass as his principal medium.

In a new, larger studio on Summer Street, D'Ascenzo was equipped to "carry out the full extent of his designs." Weilbacker describes the studio as "a sophisticated, self-sufficient guild of artists and craftsmen in which D'Ascenzo and his business reached the peak of productivity and creativity."²⁶ Here was where D'Ascenzo would have drafted and designed his most famed windows, including the stained-glass programs in Washington D.C. at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C., and the National Cathedral of St. Peter and St. Paul and in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania at the Washington Memorial Chapel.

Not a single detail eluded D'Ascenzo. For St. Paul's Cathedral in Chestnut Hill, D'Ascenzo took an ingenious approach to problem of light. At night, darkness decreases the lighted effect of the window on

²⁴ Weilbacker, Lisa, "A Study of Residential Stained Glass: The Work of Nicola D'Ascenzo Studios from 1896 to 1954" (1990). Theses (Historic Preservation), 29.

²⁵ Ibid, 31.

²⁶ Ibid, 32.

the interior. D'Ascenzo preferred interior unity and devised a plan to gild repousse lead, which is invisible in daylight, with gold leaf so that the artificial light “reflected off the gilded leads and created a golden pattern within the blackened window” after dark.²⁷ His innovation solved a problem and created a magical transition from color to gold facilitated by the changing light of the day.



Figure 20. D'Ascenzo Studio at 1602-04 Summer Street, exterior (left) and reception room (right). Source: D'Ascenzo Studio Archives, Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

Photographs of the Summer Street studio (Figure 20) reveals an antique interior decorated with stained glass and wood carvings that transported any visitor to the medieval past despite its unassuming facade. D'Ascenzo took inspiration from the great twelfth- and thirteenth- century cathedral windows he admired, studied, and wrote about on trips to Europe and England. Weilbacker notes Chartres Cathedral in France and the Santa María de León Cathedral in Spain as two examples that he studied in detail.²⁸ In

²⁷ Weilbacker, Lisa, “A Study of Residential Stained Glass: The Work of Nicola D'Ascenzo Studios from 1896 to 1954” (1990). Theses (Historic Preservation), 62.

²⁸ Ibid, 34-5.

Philadelphia, D'Ascenzo worked with the city's most acclaimed architects including Frank Furness, Paul Cret, George Hewitt, Horace Trumbauer, and Louis Magiziner.²⁹

D'Ascenzo's great legacy to Philadelphia and the nation exceeds his prolificacy in stained-glass. His windows at St. Francis De Sales are fashioned in the antique tradition of the world's greatest Cathedrals and like jewels they imbue the interior of St Francis de Sales with brilliant colored light. Yet they also impart D'Ascenzo's lifelong confidence in the craftsman. D'Ascenzo's studio, practice, and work reflect and indebtedness to the same nineteenth and twentieth century thinkers that championed craft. No surprise, his family in Italy were armor makers and metal workers. Alongside window-production, D'Ascenzo advocated for honesty and training in art-making and believed in art for the sake of humanity.

The University of Pennsylvania and his alma mater, the Pennsylvania Museum School of Industrial Art were among the "26 different colleges and universities" he lectured and exhibited his work "over 70 times" although he gave talks at a local high school and various clubs and community groups as well.³⁰ He exhibited "with over 150 different organizations across the United States over 450 times before 1911 and 1950."³¹ Weilbacker notes that his main objective was to stress the importance of art appreciation. He committed himself to "educating America's youth and the general public on stained glass and the importance of quality in craftsmanship and its survival in the United States."³² Speaking and publishing his ideas, exhibiting his work, and displaying the step-by-step productions process of his craft, D'Ascenzo advocated for his medium and bridged traditionalism and modernism.

D'Ascenzo was recognized for his work with awards and praise. The most prestigious award he received during his lifetime was an honorary membership granted by the American Institute of Architects, although others included a gold medal from the New York Architectural League, and awards granted but the Pennsylvania Museum School of Industrial Art and the Pennsylvania Arts and Sciences Society. He was active in the Philadelphia art scene, serving as president of the DaVinci Alliance in 1933 and a member of the Science and Art Club of Germantown and the Pennsylvania Arts and Sciences Society.

²⁹ Weilbacker, Lisa, "A Study of Residential Stained Glass: The Work of Nicola D'Ascenzo Studios from 1896 to 1954" (1990). Theses (Historic Preservation), 49.

³⁰ Ibid, 44.

³¹ Ibid, 45.

³² Ibid, 44.

Elsewhere he maintained membership in the New York Architectural League and served as president of the Stained Glass Association of America 1929-1930.

D'Ascenzo's prolificacy and fame surely make him and his studio a significant resource to the city and nation. His brilliant stained glass windows in St. Francis de Sales stand as a great example of his work, practice, and presence as a master craftsman in Philadelphia.

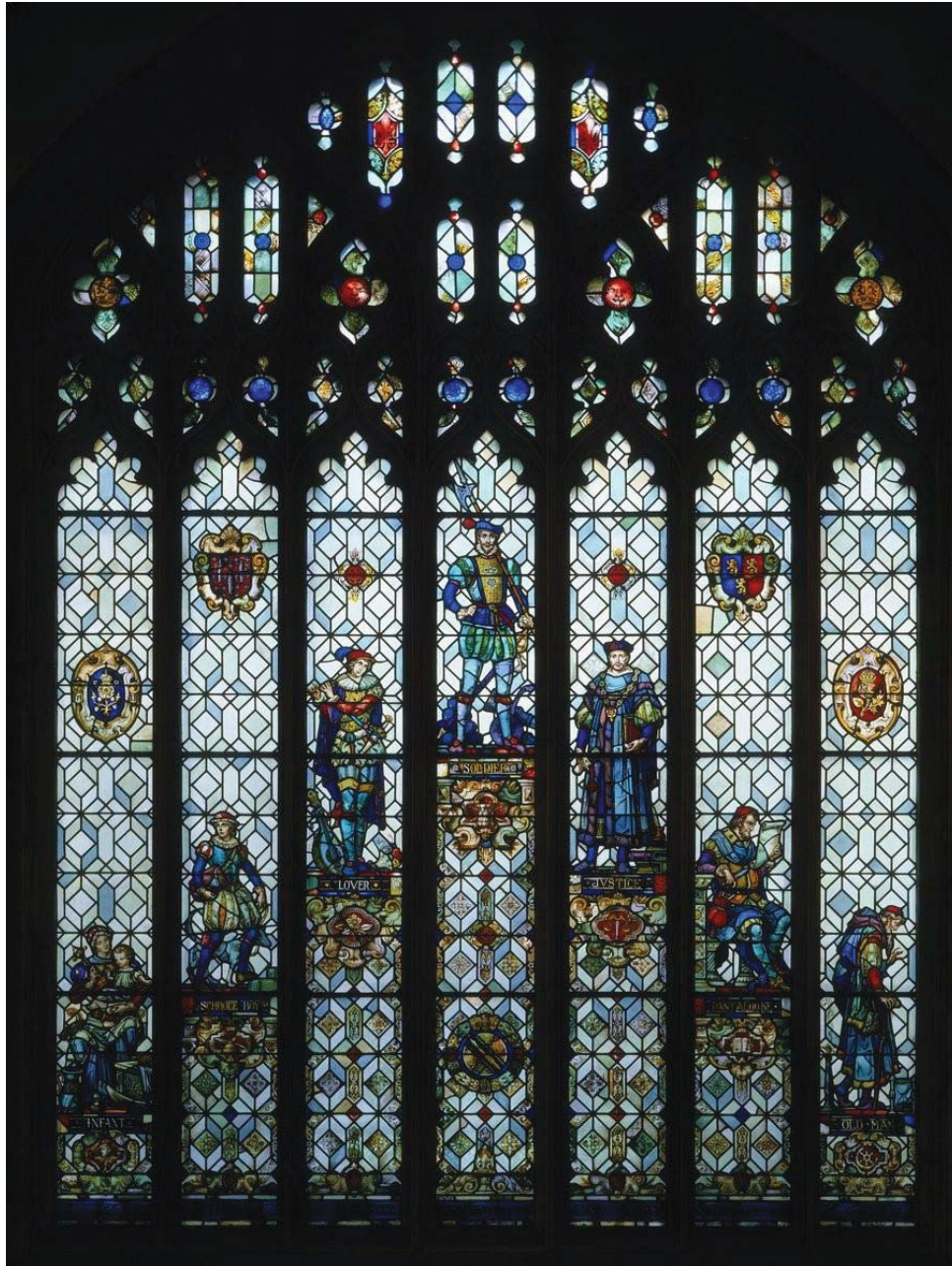


Figure 21. Stained-glass window by Nicola D'Ascenzo, Folger Shakespeare Library. Source: Folger.ed

Rafael Guastavino



Figure 22. Vault Designer, Rafael Guastavino. Source: *Guastavino Vaulting: The Art of Structural Tiling* by John Ochsendorf.

Rafael Guastavino (1842-1908) moved to the United States from Spain with his nine-year-old son Rafael Jr., in 1881. Together, they would go on to provide American buildings with the technological and economic genius of thin Catalan tile vaulting. With the elegance of a seemingly weightless design, Guastavino tiled ceilings, arches, domes, and vaults invite the spirituality and mystery of cathedrals to underground train stations, libraries and hotel lobbies. Despite the prolificacy of Guastavino vaults in more than 41 states—including 233 known projects in Manhattan alone—by the mid-twentieth century the craftsmen behind the domes were largely forgotten. In 1962, George Collins, a professor of art and architectural history at Columbia University rediscovered the Guastavino legacy and facilitated the donation of the remaining papers and drawings of the Guastavino Fireproof Construction Company to the Avery Library at Columbia University.³³ After that, he published an article on the Guastavinos in the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Histories* in 1968 titled, “The Transfer of Thin Masonry Vaulting from Spain to America.”

³³ John Ochsendorf, *Guastavino Vaulting: The Art of Structural Tile* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2013), 11.

Rafael Guastavino was born in Valencia, Spain in 1842. Most of his educational career was spent in Barcelona where he lived with his uncle who worked in the Catalan textile business. There he trained at the Escola Especial de Mestres d'Obres with the same teachers who mentored Antoni Gaudí. Although he gained recognition in his home country, when Guastavino moved to New York City in the late nineteenth century, there was more opportunity and demand for his work. He did not know any English language when he first arrived in 1881. Guastavino specialist and MIT professor in structural engineering, John Ochsendorf, points to the year 1885 as a turning point in Guastavino's career that heralded eventual success. At this time, Guastavino transitioned from the title of architect to vault designer and filed three patents for the construction of fireproof buildings.³⁴ Not long after, he received the prestigious commission to design and build the vaulted ceilings at the Boston Public Library by McKim, Mead and White in 1889. Following suit, Richard Morris Hunt secured Guastavino vaulting for George Vanderbilt's Biltmore Estate in Asheville, North Carolina the following year.



Figure 23. Guastavino tile domes, Pennsylvania Station, New York City. Left (1910), Right (1911). Source: Avery Library and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University, <https://www.citylab.com/design/2014/05/remembering-the-father-son-virtuosos-of-new-yorks-historic-arches-and-vaults/371174/>.

³⁴ John Ochsendorf, *Guastavino Vaulting: The Art of Structural Tile* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2013), 47.

The architectural climate of the United States at the time Rafael and his son arrived at Ellis Island welcomed the Old World knowledge the father and son introduced. In the late nineteenth century, ceramic tile vaulting provided a fireproof solution in an era bent on finding solutions for fire safety and prevention. Furthermore, Ochsendorf notes that Guastavino domes presented a number of advantages—the tiled vaults were inexpensive (as they required no expensive wooden bracing), thinner, lighter, fireproof, and aesthetically pleasing. In this way, “the Guastavino Company serves as a lens for understanding the context of American building practice characterized by both technological advancement and the desire for the preservation of European building traditions.”³⁵

Guastavino’s work has been widely studied and appreciated largely thanks to the work of the previously mentioned MIT professor, John Ochsendorf. In addition to his book *Guastavino Vaulting: The Art of Structural Tiling*, with detailed accounts of the structural, biographical and architectural histories that contextualize Guastavino’s work and significance, Ochsendorf orchestrated a nation-wide search for unidentified Guastavino domes in preparation for the exhibit, *Palaces for the People: Guastavino and America’s Great Public Spaces*. Guastavino’s legacy has also been remembered in a documentary film, *Rafael Guastavino: El Arquitecto de Nueva York* which was screened by the Observatorio de Instituto Cervantes at Harvard University in 2017. Additionally, in 2001 an exhibition on Guastavino vaulting in Spain resulted in a published catalog of eighteen essays, titled *Las bóvedas de Guastavino en América*.

Rafael Guastavino is buried in St. Lawrence Basilica in downtown Asheville, North Carolina. He designed the building’s ceiling although it wasn’t completed until after his death. The building is now included on the National Register of Historic Places.

(H) Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or City.

Saint Francis de Sales Church satisfies Criterion H for designation because its great dome is a beacon in the southwest Philadelphia skyline, and represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood. Given its location south of Baltimore Avenue thoroughfare and shops, its immediate surroundings are Victorian houses and rows. The yellow and white concave bowl, encircled at its exterior base in a rim of patinated copper, crops above the triangular sloped roof lines of its

³⁵ John Ochsendorf, *Guastavino Vaulting: The Art of Structural Tile* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2013), 11.

architectural neighbors. The dome makes St. Francis de Sales Church a point of reference, which one might use to determine their location in southwest Philadelphia.

(J) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

Saint Francis de Sales Church warrants historical designation under Criterion J for the musical heritage associated with the building, its organ, choirs, and music directors. The organ on the south wall is the largest example of a nineteenth-century French organ in the Delaware Valley, second only to the Wanamaker Grand Court Organ in Center City, “arguably the largest musical instrument in the world.”³⁶ In 1980 it attracted the Philadelphia Orchestra. Michael Murray and the Philadelphia Orchestra conducted by Eugene Ormandy traveled to the church to record Saint Saens Symphony No. 3 in C (Figure 24).³⁷ The organ was tuned to a higher pitch for the performance to satisfy Ormandy’s specifications and offer a “brighter” sound.³⁸



Figure 24. Michael Murray and Philadelphia Orchestra at St. Francis de Sales, February 1980 (PAHRC)

³⁶ “A Brief History of St. Francis De Sales – The Great Dome of West Philadelphia (Part 1),” PhillyHistory Blog, May 22, 2018, <https://www.phillyhistory.org/blog/index.php/2016/09/a-brief-history-of-st-francis-de-sales-the-cathedral-of-west-philadelphia-part-1/>.

³⁷ “Philadelphia Orchestra at De Sales,” SFDS History Mysteries, September 03, 2017, <https://sfdshistory.wordpress.com/2017/09/03/philadelphia-orchestra-at-de-sales/>.

³⁸ Ibid.

Another notable performance includes Jane Parker-Smith's recording of Franz Liszt (*Fantasia and Fugue on the Chorale 'Ad Nos, Ad Salutarem Undam'*, Figure 25) and César Franck (*Prière in C Sharp Minor*, Op. 20 and *Choral No. 1 in E*) on the organ at Saint Francis de Sales in 1980. Parker-Smith is internationally recognized for her musicianship. An honorary member of the Guild of Musicians and Singers and a member of the Incorporated Society of Musicians, Parker-Smith has performed with world renowned orchestras including the BBC Symphony and the BBC Concert Orchestras, the London Symphony, the London Philharmonic and Royal Philharmonic Orchestras, the Philharmonia, the City of Birmingham Symphony, the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, the Athens State Orchestra and the Prague Chamber Orchestra. In addition, she has performed and recorded at venues and festivals like the Westminster Cathedral, Westminster Abbey, St Paul's Cathedral, Royal Festival Hall; Royal Albert Hall, London (both solo and concerto performances); Three Choirs Festival, City of London Festival, Bath Festival and Blenheim Palace (Winston Churchill Memorial Concert) in the UK; Jyväskylä Festival, Finland; Stockholm Concert Hall, Sweden; Hong Kong Arts Festival; Roy Thomson Hall, Toronto, Canada; Festival Paris Quartier D'Été, France; Festival Cicio El Organo en la Iglesia, Buenos Aires, Argentina; Festival Internationale di Musica Organistica Magadino, Switzerland; Cube Concert Hall, Shiroishi, Japan; Athens Organ Festival, Greece; Severance Hall, Cleveland, Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco and Walt Disney Concert Hall, Los Angeles, USA; Sejong Cultural Centre, Seoul, Korea; Esplanade Concert Hall, Singapore, Symphony Hall, Birmingham, UK; Mariinsky Concert Hall, St. Petersburg, Russia and ZK Matthews Hall, University of South Africa, Pretoria.³⁹

³⁹ "Biography in English," Jane Parker-Smith, <http://www.janeparkersmith.com/biography/>.



Figure 25. Album cover for world-renowned organist, Jane Parker-Smith's recording of Liszt and Franck in the Church of St. Francis de Sales, Philadelphia. She stands in the church nave with the organ behind and above her, with one of D'Ascenzo's rose windows glowing blue and yellow in the background.

In conclusion, St. Francis de Sales Church at 917 S. 47th Street constitutes a significant resource that merits designation by the Philadelphia Historical Commission and inclusion on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The church building satisfies Criteria for Designation A, D, E, F, H, and J as enumerated in Section 14-1004 of the Philadelphia Code. The building is associated with the lives of numerous persons of historic significance, including its designers, music directors, and parishioners, satisfying Criterion A. The church building embodies distinguishing characteristics of the Byzantine Revival style, satisfying Criterion D, and the grand Guastavino dome contains elements of design, detail, materials and craftsmanship which represents a significant innovation, satisfying Criterion F. The church building is a result of the work of many design professionals whose work has significantly influenced the historical and architectural development of the City, Commonwealth, or Nation, including Henry D. Dagit (architect), Nicola D'Ascenzo (stained-glass artist), and Rafael Guastavino (tile artist and dome engineer), satisfying Criterion E. The great dome represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, satisfying Criterion H. Lastly, the church's musical heritage history associated with its organ, choirs, and music directors exemplifies the social and historical heritage of the community, satisfying Criterion J.

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917 S 47TH ST

Philadelphia, PA 19143-3618

OWNER

DENNIS J DOUGHERTY

IN TRUST

MAILING ADDRESS

225 N 18TH ST
PHILADELPHIA PA
19103

VALUATION HISTORY

Year	Market Value	Taxable Land	Taxable Improvement	Exempt Land	Exempt Improvement
2020	\$3,477,700	\$0	\$0	\$452,100	\$3,025,600
2019	\$3,477,700	\$0	\$0	\$452,100	\$3,025,600
2018	\$3,477,700	\$0	\$0	\$452,101	\$3,025,599
2017	\$3,262,300	\$0	\$0	\$526,800	\$2,735,500
2016	\$3,262,300	\$0	\$0	\$526,800	\$2,735,500
2015	\$3,262,300	\$0	\$0	\$526,800	\$2,735,500
2014	\$3,262,300	\$0	\$0	\$526,800	\$2,735,500

Note: Taxable and exempt land values can represent:

- 1. The contributory value of land in relation to the total market value, or
- 2. Where no structure is present, the value of vacant land

Consistent with International Association of Assessing Officers (IAAO) standards, the value of an improved parcel is separated into the portion of value attributed to the improvement and the portion of value attributed to the land.

SALES DETAILS

SALES PRICE: \$4	SALES DATE: 12/31/1942
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PROPERTY DETAILS

OPA ACCOUNT: 774385000
HOMESTEAD EXEMPTION: No
DESCRIPTION: HSE WORSHIP ALL 3 STY MAS
CONDITION: Average
BEGINNING POINT: NEC 47TH&SPRINGFIELD
LAND AREA (SQFT): 35,119
IMPROVEMENT AREA (SQFT): 64,290
ZONING: RSA-3
Zoning data source: Planning and Development

Addendum - Email of edits/clarifications from
Annabelle Radcliffe-Trenner

From: [Annabelle Radcliffe-Trenner](#)
To: [Kim Chantry](#)
Cc: cloftusm@gmail.com
Subject: SFDS - Comments on Philadelphia Local Register Nomination
Date: Tuesday, April 16, 2019 9:48:18 PM

Dear Corey and Kim

I want to introduce myself. I am a preservation architect and have been working on the restoration of St Francis De Sales for more than 10 years. Overall the nomination presents a wonderful and accurate argument for the architectural and social significance of the church. I very much enjoyed reading your designation request but wondered whether you would be willing to add some additional information and research, as well as, consider making a few minor corrections. I realize the meeting is tomorrow but I feel we have a lot of additional information you might want to consider in this nomination. Could the nomination be deferred to allow this to happen?

I have outlined below a few items of note:

Part 6: The Architectural Description.

There are a handful of small technical inaccuracies, for instance:

- Page 4: Saint Francis de Sales is not laid out on a three-aisled basilica plan, but rather as an aisle-less Latin cross with shallow transepts.
- Page 4: The terracotta should simply be described as glazed terracotta blocks given that faience typically applies to pottery or other small ceramics
- Page 4: the Chancel walls are covered in a pinkish brick, not Guastavino tiles, and the pattern the bricks are arranged in is typically called a “Diaper” pattern. Ikat is a technique used in the production of a similar pattern on textiles.
- Pages 6 & 8: What are labeled as “pointed arches” should simply be described as decorative gables over round arches with carved stone tympanum.
- Page 32: The patinated copper has been largely, if not entirely replaced with lead-coated copper.

In the notes on the current condition (Page 13) there are a few inaccuracies. When the concrete shell was added in the 1950s this was due to the removal of a severely corroded upper tension ring, not because the original glazed tile had been delaminating. Instead, the concrete was added over the Guastavino glazed tiles, which are still on the dome. This shell was then covered with modern “subway” tiles (still visible on the small domes over Springfield Avenue), and it was these tiles that began shedding from the roof in the 90s and early 2000s.

This nomination would also greatly benefit from some of the historic images that we have of the building and some of the older architectural drawings. The nomination currently only has

images of an early scheme prepared by Dagit and none of his drawings of the building as constructed.

I hope this is helpful and please let us know if we can provide you with additional information.

Annabelle

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