

## Vine Street- Saint Catherine of Sienna R C Church Complex (ca. 1887-1910)

From Boston Landmark Commission's Charlestown Historic Resources Study 1981 (E. W. Gordon, Consultant)\*:



Saint Catherine of Sienna R C Church

2015

The Saint Catherine of Siena Roman Catholic Church complex includes:

The church-a Romanesque Revival building with a basilica format, built of faced brick with freestone trimmings, and a granite basement. The building is 156' long and 90' wide. The main auditorium is 90' x 70'. The tower, with a tall pyramidal roof cap, stands 112 feet high.

The church has a symmetrical, tripartite main façade. The central nave segment is flanked by the tower and the aisle segments. Above the main entrance is a center rose window flanked by ocular windows. The central nave segment is surmounted by a broad pedimented attic with a modified Palladian window at the center. A broad flight of stone steps leads to the main entrance, which, like all openings to the building, is set within round arches.



St. Catherine of Siena Parochial Residence, 1987 Photo



Parochial Residence

2016

The parochial residence has elements of Queen Anne and Romanesque revival, with an essentially square plan. The tripartite main façade has a one bay central entrance pavilion with a great Romanesque entrance arch flanked by two-bay wings. The building is faced with red brick, and has brownstone trimmings; it has a corbelled cornice and a hip roof. There are tall chimneys at the Tufts Street wall.

The convent is a well-designed Renaissance Revival building with the main façade facing a courtyard off Tufts street. Particularly noteworthy is the main entrance's stone Renaissance Revival enframements with a Della Robbia-like bust.



St. Catherine of Sienna Convent, 1987 Photo



St. Catherine of Sienna Convent, entry, 1987 Photo

St. Catherine's Grammar School is a Renaissance Revival School.



St Catherine of Siena Grammar School, 1987 Photo

Architect: Church and rectory-Charles J Bateman; convent-Charles R Greco; grammar school-Charles R Greco (?)

Builder: (excavation) Patrick Kane

Original owner: Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston

Further research is needed on this architecturally distinguished Roman Catholic Church complex. Built between 1887 and circa 1920, this four building complex encompasses St. Catherine of Siena RC Church (1887-1894), a parochial residence (circa early 1890s), a well-designed convent (circa 1910) and a grammar school (circa 1910).

St. Catherine's parish in Charlestown was a branch of St. Francis DeSales Parish. The cornerstone of the St. Catherine of

Sienna Church was laid July 31, 1887 by vicar General Byrne. The church is the work of Charles J Bateman, an important late 19th century Boston area Catholic church-related buildings architect. He was born in Cambridge Massachusetts on March 4, 1851. He was educated in the public schools and at MIT, and he initially studied architecture, for seven years, in the offices of Faulkner and Clarke. He established his own architectural practice in Boston in 1876. He was appointed Boston's city architect in 1883 and again in 1888. Mr. Bateman's parochial buildings included St. Francis DeSales Parochial Residence, 1881, St. Francis de Sales Convent, 1901, and St. Francis de Sales School, 1894, all in Charlestown. He was also the architect of St. Celia Church, in Boston's Back Bay, and Sacred Heart School, in East Boston. Among larger buildings designed by Mr. Bateman are: Carney Hospital, in South Boston; Boston College, Home for the Aged, in Roxbury, Hotel Miller, etc. (see form on St Francis DeSales convent, Charlestown, for more information on Mr. Bateman).

The work of building St. Catherine of Sienna RC church began in the spring of 1887. The excavation was performed by Patrick Kane, of Elm Street. The estimated cost of the building was \$75,000. The church lot, including the parochial residence and convent sites was purchased in April 1885 at a cost of \$15,000. It was designed in the Romanesque revival or Basilica style. A *Charlestown Enterprise* article dated July 30, 1887 stated that the church "will be distinguished by the simplicity of its outline and design. It will be built of faced brick with freestone trimmings, granite being employed for basement trimmings. The building will be 156 feet long and 98 feet wide and the main auditorium will be 90 x 70'. The tower at the corner of Vine and Corey streets will be 112 feet high." The vestibule, according to James S Sullivan, measured 35 x 18' and the sanctuary measured 38 x 20'. To the right of the sanctuary

was (is?) A library measuring 24 x 27' and on the left is a sacristy measuring 42 x 27'. In 1895, the congregation consisted of 5000 souls. The church seating capacity is 1000. Mass was said for the first time in the basement of this church at Christmas, 1887.

St. Catherine of Sienna Church was extensively renovated in 1919. During the early part of 1919 the roofs of both the church and the convent were "repaired and renewed." In addition, a modern and up-to-date system of electric wiring and fixtures replaced the antiquated gas illumination. Other improvements included a complete renewal of the basement, and a new organ was installed. It was noted in the *Charlestown Enterprise*, that "new stained-glass windows will soon add to the beauty of the walls and ceiling."

St. Catherine of Siena Convent and Rectory were built circa 1910. The convent is a well-executed example of early 20th century Italian Renaissance Revival institutional architecture. It was noted in a *Charlestown Enterprise* article dated March 5, 1910 that "the interior of the building (convent) will be simple and dignified, somewhat after the Italian style, while the exterior is of red brick with terra-cotta trimmings, in places relieved by faience. The building will be three stories high and will be surmounted by a beautiful open-air garden on the roof, which is of original design. The first floor will contain the house service rooms and public portion and reception rooms with the predominant feature, the community room. This portion will take up the entire central portion of this floor and will overlook the sisters' private garden. The second and third floors will contain the sleeping, toilet, and living rooms as well as a large chapel and infirmary. The crowning feature of the beauty of this building lies in the handsome loggia, which opens from the third floor in front and extends to the rooftop.

St. Catherine of Sienna's Convent was designed by prolific early-mid-20th century architect Charles R Greco of Cambridge, Massachusetts. (See Jamaica Plain survey, Blessed Sacrament church complex, Center Street)

Further research is needed on St. Catherine of Sienna R C Grammar School. In 1875 this school site was part of a larger vacant lot owned by Ebenezer Vose. By 1892 the school's land was owned by Charles M Cox's heirs. By 1901 two groups of five brick row houses were located on the school's lot. The narrow opening between these two groups of row houses led to an oval green space (the convent site was occupied by wood frame dwellings). These brick row houses were known as the Bunker Hill Terraces. This enclave received acclaim as a "model" workers housing complex. St. Catherine's Grammar School appears for the first time on the 1911 Charlestown Atlas.

#### Bibliography:

Atlases-18968, 1875, 1885, 1892, 1901, 1911, 1922  
*Charlestown Enterprise*, April 2, 1887, July 30, 1887, March 29, 1919  
*Catholic Church of New England*, James S Sullivan, M.D., 1895, page 126

\*Digitized and edited, without change in content, from the scanned record in the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System, with the addition of current photographs. In the case of houses that have been altered since the survey, these photographs may not entirely correspond to the architectural description. If earlier photographs of suitable quality are available, these have been included.

R Dinsmore