

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel
Other name/site number: Sacred Heart Chapel
Name of related multiple property listing: NA

2. Location

Street & number: 411 S.W. 24th Street
City or town: San Antonio State: Texas County: Bexar
Not for publication: [ ] Vicinity: [ ]

1. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this
[ ] nomination [ ] request for determination of eligibility) meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National
Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the
property [ ] meets [ ] does not meet) the National Register criteria.

I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following levels of significance:
[ ] national [ ] statewide [ ] local

Applicable National Register Criteria: [ ] A [ ] B [ ] C [ ] D

Signature of certifying official / Title: Mark Wolfe, State Historic Preservation Officer
Date: 6/14/21
Texas Historical Commission
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property [ ] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria.
Signature of commenting or other official
Date
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:
[ ] entered in the National Register
[ ] determined eligible for the National Register
[ ] determined not eligible for the National Register.
[ ] removed from the National Register
[ ] other, explain: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Private
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Federal

**Category of Property**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

**Number of Resources within Property**

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: NA

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions:** RELIGION/ Religious facility = Church

**Current Functions:** RELIGION/ Religious facility = Church

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification:** LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS/ Late Gothic Revival

**Principal Exterior Materials:** Concrete, Metal: Steel, Copper; Brick, Stone: Limestone, Terra Cotta, Glass

**Narrative Description** (see continuation sheets 7-6 through 7-13)

Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

	<b>A</b>	Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
	<b>B</b>	Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
X	<b>C</b>	Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
	<b>D</b>	Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations:** A (Religious Properties)

**Areas of Significance:** Architecture

**Period of Significance:** 1921-1936

**Significant Dates:** 1921

**Significant Person:** (only if criterion b is marked): NA

**Cultural Affiliation:** (only if criterion d is marked): NA

**Architect/Builder:** Dielmann, Leo M. J. (architect); Fuessel, August (contractor)

**Narrative Statement of Significance:** (see continuation sheets 8-14 through 8-19)

**9. Major Bibliographic References**

**Bibliography** (see continuation sheet 9-20 )

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State historic preservation office (*Texas Historical Commission, Austin*)
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository:

**Historic Resources Survey Number** (if assigned): NA

Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property:** 1.12 acres

### Coordinates

#### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: NA

1. Latitude: 29.425619° Longitude: -98.543954°

**Verbal Boundary Description:** The nominated boundary is the Chapel's footprint and the ground upon which it stands, an area of approximately 50,000-square feet on the campus of Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio, Texas. east boundary out to the street to include the landscaping

**Boundary Justification:** The boundary includes all property historically associated with the building and is drawn to exclude adjacent buildings. The 1923 chapel's original design included corridors that internally connect it to the OLLU Main Building (1895) and Sisters of Divine Providence Convent (1908). These buildings and others on campus would contribute to a potential district but are excluded from the boundary of this nomination for an individually significant building.

## 11. Form Prepared By

Name/title: Italia A. Garduño, Foundation Relations Officer with assistance from THC staff.

Organization: Our Lady of the Lake University

Street & number: 411 S.W. 24<sup>th</sup> Street

City or Town: San Antonio State: TX Zip Code: 78207

Email: [iagarduno@ollusa.edu](mailto:iagarduno@ollusa.edu)

Telephone: (210) 431-5594

Date: July 31, 2020

## Additional Documentation

**Maps** (see continuation sheets MAP-21 through MAP-22)

**Additional items** (see continuation sheets FIGURE-23 through FIGURE-42)

**Photographs** (see continuation sheets PHOTO-43 through PHOTO-57)

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

---

**Photograph Log**

Property: Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, Our Lady of the Lake University  
Location: San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas  
Photographer: Italia A. Garduño  
Date: February 24, 2021

Photo 1: Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel with OLLU Main Building (left) and Sisters of Divine Providence Convent (right). East elevation, looking west.

Photo 2: Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel. East (front) elevation, looking west.

Photo 3: Chapel entrance detail, looking west.

Photo 4: Pediment detail, view west.

Photo 5: North corridor between Chapel and Main Building. View west.

Photo 6: The open walkway atop the north corridor. View south.

Photo 7: The south corridor's 2<sup>nd</sup> floor addition enclosed the rooftop walkway from the Convent. View: Southwest.

Photo 8: South elevation, looking northeast.

Photo 9: Rear (west) elevation of south corridor showing 1995 elevator addition.

Photo 10: Tower spire with slate tiles, stamped panels, and cast stone cornice details. Looking northeast.

Photo 11: Rear (west) elevation, looking east.

Photo 12: North elevation, looking south.

Photo 13: Stair exit on east elevation of north transept. Looking west.

Photo 14: Entrance to chapel nave from narthex (entry vestibule). Looking west.

Photo 16: View from nave entrance looking west to the sanctuary.

Photo 17: View southwest from nave aisle. Chevrons and molding accentuate ribbed vaulting.

Photo 18: Apse. Looking west.

Photo 19: West wall of north transept.

Photo 20: Emil Frei Art Glass Co. designed and produced all stained glass at Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel.

Photo 21: View of nave from sanctuary. Looking east.

Photo 22: Emil Frei, Jr. produced the sacristy windows in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

Photo 23: Ground floor auditorium. Looking west.

Photo 24: Ground level of south corridor looking south to convent entrance.

Photo 25: Enclosed 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of south corridor looking north to, what was once, an exterior door to Chapel.

Photo 26: Ground level of north corridor looking south to chapel building entrance.

Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

---

### **Narrative Description**

Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, completed in 1923, is a three-story Late Gothic Revival ecclesiastical building with a cruciform plan, hipped roof, and 193-foot-tall central tower. Designed by architect Leo M.J. Dielmann for the Sisters of Divine Providence, the Chapel is on the campus of Our Lady of the Lake University (OLLU) on the west-central side of San Antonio, Texas. Original corridors on the Chapel's north and south elevations connect it to two older structures, the 1893 Main Building and 1909 convent. Historic-age buildings on campus would contribute to a potential district, but they are excluded from the boundary of this nomination for an individually significant building. Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel has a structural frame of reinforced concrete, buff-brick walls accentuated by cast stone, and a Carthage limestone base. Its Late Gothic Revival style reflects English and German Gothic traditions in the broad perpendicular arches, central tower and spire, and a nave that terminates with a polygonal apse. Exterior buttresses, lancet windows, salient tower gables, and crocketed pinnacles are additional elements that distinguish the Chapel as having Late Gothic Revival style. The chapel interior has clerestory windows, intricate ribbed vaulting supported by broad arches, marble altars and sculpture, murals, and features leaded art glass stained windows designed by St. Louis-based Emil Frei. A ground-floor auditorium is open-plan with a stage at the west end. The period of significance, 1921-1936, represents the years of building construction (1921-1923) and the period during which interior renovations produced the chapel murals, gold leaf apse ceiling, and stained glass window installation. The nearly 100-year-old Chapel shows excellent integrity to communicate its architectural and historical significance.

---

### **Setting**

San Antonio, the seat of Bexar County, has a long history stretching back to Spanish exploration and conquest, which led to the founding of Mission San Antonio de Valero in 1718, known today as the Alamo (Bredeson, 1996). Originally named San Antonio de Béxar, Bexar County was first created in 1731, when 55 Canary Islanders settled near the San Antonio River's missions, as the first Spanish civil government established in the Texas province. Today, San Antonio is the nation's seventh-largest city and the second in Texas, while the County is the nation's seventeenth and state's fourth most populous. Since their beginnings, San Antonio and Bexar County have seen a confluence of Native American tribes and German, French, Anglo, Spanish, and Mexican settlers, and eventually immigrants from all backgrounds the world over, each of them contributing to the area's history, culture, and present landscape.

Our Lady of the Lake University (OLLU) is on San Antonio's West Side. In 1895, the Sisters of Divine Providence purchased 18 acres of unimproved land next to a small lake, Lake Elmendorf, that gives the now-urban campus its picturesque, pastoral quality. There, Mother Florence Walter with Texas architect James Wahrenberger constructed what would become the beginnings of a university: a Victorian Gothic main building (Steely, 1984). As the Congregation and their school grew, the community's architecture continued in a complementary style, including the Chapel, constructed in 1923. OLLU celebrated its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2020, and the modern campus extends across 24<sup>th</sup> Street with more than 35 buildings modern and historic-age buildings.

Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel sits on a little more than an acre, at the junction of OLLU and the Convent and associated buildings belonging to the Sisters of the Congregation of Divine Providence (CDP). The Chapel is connected to both properties by two corridors, each 100 feet long, stretching out in either direction, north towards the university (connecting it to Main Building, initially built in 1897 and expanded over the next two decades in a Chateausque Revival style) and south towards the Convent. Its front doors face east and open to meet the intersection of 24<sup>th</sup> Street (running north to south) and César E. Chávez Boulevard. A service road behind the Chapel opens onto a small park used by both the CDP and OLLU. To the northwest is the University's St. Ann's Hall, which connects to the aforementioned Main Building, creating St. Ann's Courtyard. Across 24<sup>th</sup> Street are additional University buildings, facilities, and parking lots, including the library, residence halls, classrooms, and softball field.

Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

---

## Exterior

### *General Characteristics*

Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel is a three-story Late Gothic Revival style ecclesiastical building constructed between 1921 and 1923. The two-story Chapel is raised above a ground-floor auditorium. The building measures approximately 200 feet (east to west) and 115 feet across its transept. Each measuring 100 feet in length, glass-enclosed corridors connect the Chapel's north and south elevations to two earlier campus buildings: the 1895 OLLU Main Building and the 1908 convent. Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel's concrete structural frame and a Carthage stone base support buff brick exterior curtain walls. The hipped roof (originally clad in dark slate tiles) covers the building's cruciform plan with gable parapet walls that match the window rhythm on the north, south, and east elevations. The Chapel's 193-foot central tower spire and pinnacles have steeply pitched pyramidal roofs, and a polygonal-shaped hipped roof covers the rear apse. Emil Frei Art Glass, Co. designed, produced, and installed all of the Chapel's stained glass windows, most of which depict scenes from the New Testament and figures of saints. Many ground-level windows, however, are tri-partite with four and six-light transoms. San Antonio architect Leo M.J. Dielmann's Gothic design is an eclectic mix of English traditions—seen in the general plan, exterior decoration, and perpendicular arches—with a German-influenced tower and polygonal apse. Exterior Gothic details, produced in cast stone and brick, include engaged buttresses, tracery, foils, lancet windows, decorative crockets, pinnacles with finials, perpendicular and pointed arches, and turrets. These pointed stone details accentuate the Chapel's verticality and symbolize spiritual uplift.

### *East (Front) Elevation (Photo 2-3; Figure 21)*

Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel faces the intersection of S.W. 24th Street and W. César E. Chávez Boulevard. Its east façade is five symmetrical bays with corridors (described separately) that stretch from the north and south elevations. The Chapel's front elevation is symmetrical with an ABCBA arrangement (Fig. X); a stone water table across the façade delineates the first-floor auditorium. The center bay (C) is the tower, which holds the Chapel's main entrance at the top of a grand staircase. Historically, patrons accessed the ground-floor auditorium through arched doors on the north and south elevations of the stairs, but those entrances were infilled with glass in 1995. Four-sided stone lantern posts are perched at the opening of the 20-foot-wide Carthage stone staircase. The stairs lead to the entry portal's nine by 20-foot white hex-tile landing inlaid with black hex-tiles that spell "1923." Brick walls topped with a cast stone cap border the stairwell. Engaged masonry buttresses with cast stone gablets frame the chapel entrance and extend to lancet windows above the pediment. Geometric tracery decorates the arched oak double-doors, which is under a series of receding stone archivolts. Above, an elaborate triangular portal gable is centered against the pediment that is framed by pointed stone posts. A finial decorates the gable peak and a niche holding a statue of Jesus is below it. In a spiraled star shape, the pediment's topmost band of flamboyant blind tracery extends to cornice lines on the tower's reentrant corner masses, outermost wall plane, and the corridors. Triple lancet windows with stone mullions, brick spandrels, and tabbed stone surrounds are above the pediment. A four-sided lanterned belfry surmounts the tower with eight-sided corner turrets and balustrades. The belfry's north, south, and east elevations each have paired lancet louvered windows and a clock.<sup>1</sup> Crockets and finials decorate the copper-sheathed tower spire and turret pinnacles that rise above.

The tower's reentrant corner masses, which hold interior staircases, are bays "B" on the east elevation. Profiles of engaged buttresses topped by gablets and gabled stone posts mirror those that frame the portal's pediment. Behind them are three-sided, flat-roof towers with overlapping buff brick coursing that articulate corners. Its cornice is marked by the band of blind flamboyant tracery repeated from the tower pediment. Above, small projections are recessed from the three-sided towers. These projections each feature an arched window with lancet tracery and tabbed stone surrounds. An elaborate cornice line with cast stone Gothic floral blind tracery is below each projection's half-pyramid slate tile roof.

---

<sup>1</sup> The west (rear) elevation does not have a clock but does have louvered windows.

Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

---

Bay "A" has triple 1/1 wood sash windows at ground level. Large, shallow-arched windows pierce the second-floor façade and mirror the tower entry portal's proportions. Its cornice line shows the tracery band below its hipped roof. An engaged buttress topped with pinnacles extends above the roofline.

*South Elevation (Photo 8, Figure 22)*

The south elevation demonstrates the building's complex massing and fenestration. When observed with its structural features and ornament—the water table, roofline, and bay-defining engaged buttresses with pinnacles—the façade communicates the Chapel's internal arrangement of narthex/tower, nave, transept, sacristy, and apse.

The nave (where parishioners sit at service) is three-bays-wide. Gable parapets define each bay in which the narrow, third-floor pointed-arched 16'6" x 7' clerestory windows are above the Chapel's broad-arched 12'4 x 10' stained glass windows. At ground-level, the nave's eastern and center bay each has a set of three historic 1/1 wood sash windows with single light transoms. In contrast, the third bay's first-floor façade has the historic double-door entrance to the auditorium below the transept's stair exit below grade. The nine-light doors with sidelights have lancet-shaped glass openings and transoms.

Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel's **south transept** is also three-bays-wide on its southern façade (**Photo 8**). A gabled parapet accentuates the center bay that prominently features a 28'x14' stained glass window over triple pointed arched windows with four 1/1 historic windows at ground level. Brick buttresses frame the bay and terminate with cast stone pointed posts topped by finials on either side of the parapet gable. Bays on either side are mostly unfenestrated, except on the first floor, where pairs of 1/1 windows light the interior auditorium classrooms. The south transept's east elevation is fenestrated with one 16'6" x 7' stained glass window above the second-floor stair exit with solid oak double doors with lancet-shaped lights a stained glass transom. A reentrant corner mass between the transept and sacristy is a three-sided projection that provides interior coves for chapel shrines (**Photo 19**).

The south elevation's westernmost end, a rectangular section shorter than the south transept, holds an interior stairwell that accesses a ground-floor kitchen, working sacristy, and a balcony level room. The façade's fenestration—paired 1/1 windows on the first and second floors and arched paired windows on the third floor—light this interior staircase. The Chapel's hipped roof and apse rise above this section.

*West (Rear) Elevation (Photos 11, Figure 23)*

The west elevation features Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel's polygonal apse framed by three-story rectangular sections that house the interior sacristies. As the back of the building, it is less ornamented. Engaged buttresses and arched windows with hood molds, however, continue the building's Gothic style. The central five-sided apse rises above and recessed from a broad five-sided ambulatory with a landing that gives exterior access between the sacristies. Five 16'6 x 7'0 stained glass pointed arch windows pierce the walls of the Chapel's apse. The ambulatory has stained glass casement windows on three walls of the second floor. At the ground level, pairs of 1/1 auditorium windows are on opposite walls planes with a simple, non-historic solid door entrance to the auditorium's stage. The southern section of the west façade is fenestrated on three floors. The second and third floors have three 1/1 windows, and the first floor has two sets of paired 1/1 windows. The northern section of the west façade (which holds the priest's sacristy) has one set of paired windows per floor.

*North Elevation (Photo 12, Figure 24)*

The northern façade faces St. Ann's Courtyard, named for Congregation's patroness, and it is almost identical to the south elevation. Differences are limited to the rear sacristy portion of the building where Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel nearly abuts St. Ann's Hall, a three-story building constructed in 1907. This elevation just lacks the paired ground floor window.



Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

---

*North and South Corridors*

Originally, the north and south corridors were identical, one-story hallways with symmetrical east and west elevations. The **north corridor (Photo 5)**, which largely retains its historic appearance, has five bays defined by simple engaged brick piers that extend above the parapet and are topped by cast stone caps. The cast stone tracery band, broken at each pier, extends across the façade. Below, brick corbeling mimic Gothic hood molding around each bay's window or door opening. From left to right, non-historic lighted metal doors under three fixed transom windows fenestrate Bay 2. All other bays have sets of three narrow 4/4 wood sash windows under four-light transoms. These are the original windows. A walkway on the corridor's roof allows access between the Chapel and Main Building (Photo 6). Safety glass, almost invisible, is installed between each pier, and square stones line the roof.

The **south corridor's** east elevation retains its historic appearance on the first floor. It is nearly identical, except for the paint color of its window muntins, to the north corridor. In 1995-6, the second-floor walkway was enclosed with a stone veneer façade. Its fenestration mimics the first floor with tri-partite fixed pane windows slightly recessed under dentilled stone corbels. Stone piers that begin where the first floor's brick piers were shortened to retain the façade's historic rhythm. Non-historic additions altered the south corridor's west (rear) elevation (**Photo 9**). Although the first floor has one set of original windows (**Photo 24**), the west façade's first floor is almost entirely blocked by the addition, and the enclosed second floor is a brick veneer.

**Interior**

Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel is a three-story building with a cruciform plan that expresses the historic interior liturgical arrangement. An auditorium, approximately the nave size above it, is ground level with a two-story-tall chapel on the second floor. The tower and rear sacristies include stairways for vertical circulation. As previously stated, the north and south corridors are interior entrances to the nominated Chapel from the Convent and OLLU Main Building. Particularly for the Convent's aging inhabitants, improving access motivated much of the building's non-historic alterations in the 1990s. This work includes ADA-compliant ramps at entrances, staircases, and the addition of an elevator on the west (rear) elevation of the south corridor. Overall, the interior retains excellent integrity of historic finishes and design. Original hex tile floors, oak doors, moldings, plaster walls, pendant light fixtures, art glass, stenciling, and murals are common historical materials throughout the building.

*First Floor (Figure 27)*

The building's original design provided entrances to the ground level (raised basement) via north and south doors under the exterior stairway. The openings are sealed because the newly-constructed Constantineau Chapel is in the historic first-floor entrance portal. An aluminum frame glass storefront infills the transition from the Constantineau Chapel to the vestibule. Interior plaster walls are ivory with light yellow chair and crown molding; the ceiling is flat. Hex tile floors are white with black, overlapping diamonds decoratively bordered by a pattern of red chains. Open thresholds are between the vestibule and side corridors. A set of historic-age 8-light double doors with 10-light transoms in the north and south vestibules (**Photo 24**) lead to the auditorium. The auditorium is a large open room with a stage at its west end and partially lined by glass-enclosed classrooms on the north and south elevations. Six chamfered piers support the flat ceiling, now covered by an acoustical tile ceiling with fluorescent lighting that replaced pendant lights and ceiling fans (**Figure 24**). The floors appear to be green asbestolith tile, a soundproof material installed at the time of construction. Although the room now lacks its historic auditorium seating (for 800 individuals), historic woodwork and decoration are intact. Classroom partition walls and doors, painted white, have decorative paneling and lights with frosted transoms. Original classical-style engaged orders frame the rounded stage proscenium. The floor's west end includes a mechanical room (behind the stage), kitchen, and storage room.

Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

---

*Second Floor (Figures 25-26)*

The building's main entrance leads to the second-floor narthex within the central tower, which has original hex tile floors in a grey and white checkerboard pattern, ivory walls, white moldings, and pendant light fixtures. Arched thresholds, vaulted ceilings with supporting corbels, and oak doors with art glass and tracery characterizes the narthex and communicate the building's Gothic style (**Photo 15**). Worshippers enter the Chapel through three sets of arched wooden doors inset under a single perpendicular arch (**Photo 14**). The doors and transoms are decorated with carved panels and art glass fill lancet-shaped lights. Above, a historic-age stenciled banderole says, "*Ego Sum Via, Veritas et Via*" ("I am the way, and the truth, and the life.") The narthex also holds entrance doors for the nave's aisles and arched openings (infilled with non-historic single doorways) to the tower's stairs.

The Chapel's interior features an expansive, two-story vaulted roof with a U-shaped balcony on the east side and stained glass produced by Emil Frei in St. Louis and Munich. Reinforced concrete piers support the balcony, ceiling and delineate the nave's side aisles under broad arches (**Figure 6/Photo 17**). Corbeled projections provide additional ceiling support in the transept. Moldings applied to the piers make each look like clusters of rounded shafts from which the ceiling's ribs organically spring. Accents of black, green, and white chevron patterns along each rib amplify the ceiling's visual depth. Dielmann's design for the nave reinterpreted the Gothic triforium as decorative insets along the balcony walls above the arcaded aisles and below stained glass clerestory windows.

Finishes and artistic elements enhance a sense of processional movement in which worshippers' spiritual experience goes from the mundane (narthex) to the divine (sanctuary). Walls in the nave and transept are ivory with white trim, similar to its original appearance in 1923. The nave's original wood flooring is intact, and historic-age oak pews are on either side of the central aisle of grey and white hex tiles in diamond patterns. The Chapel's original pendant lamps hang from the balcony's vaulted underside and over aisles throughout the nave. Modern can lights, likely installed in the 1990s, were installed in the nave's ceiling.

The western end has fine finishes and beautiful iconography that terminates with the apse. A chandelier hangs from the crossing's peak, decorated with a geometric mosaic star. Massive stained glass windows (described in greater detail below) dominate the transept's south and north walls. The transept's west walls have murals above inset vaulted shrines with Carrera marble altars enframed by perpendicular arch molding. The shrines have original marble wainscot, gold geometric wallpaper, and gold leaf pendentives. In 1997, Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel's altar was brought forward into the nave, from which a single step and golden yellow carpet visually separate it. The Chapel culminates with the five-sided apse.

Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel's interior culminates at the apse. The Carrera marble, used for both the altar and communion rail, was purchased through the Ecclesiastical Marble Company in St. Louis and crafted and installed by T.G. Schrader Sons of St. Louis, Missouri. The altar's front panel depicts in carved relief of Da Vinci's Last Supper. On either side of the main altar are two smaller altars, the southern one dedicated to St. Ann, the Congregation's patroness, and the southern to Blessed John Martin Moye, CDP founder. This second statue was placed in the Chapel in 1954 when the founder was officially declared Blessed. The original statue of St. Therese of Liseux was moved to the south side foyer of the Chapel's auditorium. The ceiling's vaulted ribs are pronounced against the apse's gold-leaf ceiling. Below, the windows above the main altar depict the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary in sequential order from left to right (Annunciation, Visitation, Nativity, Presentation in the Temple, and Finding in the Temple). Stone tracery decorates entrances to the sacristies are on the north and south elevations. These ceiling-height elaborations mimic the nave arcade, triforium, and clerestory in its composition. Sacristies on either side of the apse are large, open rooms with tall ceilings that feature historic tile floors, moldings, and fixtures similar to the first-floor vestibule.

Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

---

*Third Floor (Figure 26)*

The nominated building's third floor is comprised of the nave balcony and open rooms above the sacristies. The balcony retains its original wood floor and Gothic arched openings on its east walls. It contains the Chapel's organ, organ loft and served as an area for the choir (**Figure 13**).

*Stained Glass* (see inventory on page 13)

Emil Frei Art Glass, Co. designed, produced, and installed all of the Chapel's windows that depict scenes from the New Testament and figures of saints.<sup>2</sup> The windows (except in the ambulatory connecting both sacristies) are done in the Munich Pictorial style, a devotional style of sacred art that depicts the lives of the saints, critical events in Jesus' life, and Marian dogma. This highly labor-intensive style's unifying characteristics include:

- Concentration and execution of the human form and nature – nearly lifelike portraiture figures bordered by architectural columns and spires that echo those of the church
- Beautiful and detailed backgrounds – temple interiors, natural landscapes
- Rich colors

An internal OLLU survey categorized the windows: **Type A** are 14'6" x 9'4" are in the narthex. **Type B** are 12'4 x 10' and **Type C** 16'6" x 7' are in the nave. **Type D** are in the apse and measure 16'6 x 7'0. The two **Type E** windows are in either transept and the largest in the Chapel at 28' x 14'. Type F are above the sacristy entrances and measure 9'5" x 10'8".

**Alterations and Restoration**

In 1977, in compliance with guidance released during the Second Vatican Council, a small altar facing the Congregation was installed. The original altar remained in place.

From 1979 to 1980, the Chapel's foundation and bell tower were stabilized. During the 1980s, the stained glass windows were recaulked, and a sump pump and French drain were installed.

In 1991, the Chapel's roof was replaced and, in 1994, plans begin for the Chapel's restoration and preservation, with the campaign officially launching in 1995.

The 1995 restoration was the most complex and significant to date. The effort included:

- Electrical system renovation. Some lighting fixtures were changed, and the original brass lighting fixtures were cleaned and polished.
- The removal of confessionals in both transepts to accommodate ductwork necessary to update the Chapel's air conditioning.
- Re-stencilling with gold-leaf using the original stencils. Volunteers, including students, helped with the repainting efforts.
- Replacing the wooden frames around the bell tower's clock faces.
- Moving the altar railings from in front of the sanctuary to the side altars to accommodate the expansion of the first step to house the altar, ambo, and processional cross.
- Reorienting the transept pews to face the altar's new location and removing some of them to accommodate the piano and choir.
- Installation of an elevator in the southern corridor connecting the Convent to the Chapel.

---

<sup>2</sup> Emil Frei and Associates, <https://www.emilfrei.com>.

Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

---

- Installation of ramps in the vestibule to be handicap accessible.

Jack Duffin served as the project's architect, and Guido Brothers were responsible for the construction. The Chapel reopened on January 5, 1997.

In the mid-2000s, a small air conditioning unit was installed in the bell tower's clock room to maintain a more constant temperature, helping the clock better keep time.

### **Integrity**

Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel retains integrity to express its significance as an excellent local example of Late Gothic Revival ecclesiastical architectural style. Built for the Sisters of Divine Providence at Our Lady of the Lake University, the Chapel is at its original location and retains its historic setting on a college campus in a primarily residential area of West San Antonio. The historic physical connection between the Chapel, Convent, and OLLU Main Building reflects the buildings' importance as the ideological and spiritual foundation of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century institution. Notably, the Chapel retains essential physical features—in its design, materials, and workmanship—that characterize the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Late Gothic Revival style. The cruciform plan, exterior Gothic elements, and sky-piercing spire undoubtedly express its religious function and the historic interior liturgical arrangement. San Antonio architect Leo M.J. Dielmann's design mixed English and German Gothic traditions that local builders and nationally recognized artists produced using D'Hanis brick, cast stone, wood, tile, and art glass. These materials are intact throughout the nominated building. Exterior buttresses, tracery on windows, doors, and walls; vertical emphasis; and pointed and perpendicular arched openings all communicate the once-popular Gothic Revival style. The eclectic interpretation and concrete structural form, both intact, display the era's theoretical approach to architectural design that embraced historical continuity with modern technology and contemporary lifeways. Fine workmanship and design are evident throughout the nominated building, but it is best exemplified in the Chapel's vaulted ceiling and art glass windows. Non-historic alterations adversely impacted historic-age materials, but overall, Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel retains a preponderance of high integrity of design, workmanship, and materials. Thus, the nominated building retains its association and feeling as a Late Gothic Revival style Christian house of worship and communicates its architectural significance as such.

Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

**Stained Glass Inventory**

<b>Window Name/Subject</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Location</b>
Jesus in the Garden	A	East Elevation, north side of entrance
Good Shephard	A	East Elevation, south side of entrance
"You to John and He Gave Me Testimony"	B	Nave, 1 <sup>st</sup> floor, south wall
"Mary Hath Chosen the Better Part"	B	Nave, 1 <sup>st</sup> floor, south wall
Sacred Heart of Jesus	B	Nave, 1 <sup>st</sup> floor, south wall
Immaculate Conception	B	Nave, 1 <sup>st</sup> floor, north wall
"I was Exhalted Like a Cedar in Lebanus"	B	Nave, 1 <sup>st</sup> floor, north wall
"And I Will Go to the Altar of God"	B	Nave, 1 <sup>st</sup> floor, north wall
St. Cecilia	C	Nave, 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor, south wall
St. Agnes	C	Nave, 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor, south wall
St. Theresa	C	Nave, 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor, south wall
St. Aloysius	C	Nave, 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor, north wall
St. Anthony	C	Nave, 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor, north wall
Venerable John Martin Moye	C	Nave, 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor, north wall
Crowning of Mary	C	South Transept, 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor, east wall
Suffer the Children	E	South Transept, south wall
Crucifixion	C	North Transept, 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor, east wall
Coronation	E	North Transept, north wall
Angels	F	Sacristy Entrance, south wall
Anunciation	D	Apse
Visitation	D	Apse
Nativity	D	Apse
Presentation in the Temple	D	Apse
Finding in the Temple	D	Apse
Angels	F	Sacristy Entrance, north wall

Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

---

### Statement of Significance

Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel is an outstanding example of a Late Gothic Revival ecclesiastical building designed by noted San Antonio architect Leo M.J. Dielmann. In 1895, the Sisters of Divine Providence established their motherhouse and Our Lady of the Lake Academy on an 18-acre lakeside site in West San Antonio. As the institution evolved into a college, the physical plant grew to include beautiful architect-designed edifices. When the Congregation hired Dielmann to design Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel in 1921, he was at the height of this almost 50-year career. It is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C in the area of Architecture at the local level of significance. The nominated building exhibits the style's character-defining features: dominant central tower, elaborate cast stone tracery, buttresses, arches, and turrets. Its design also demonstrates twentieth-century preference and promotion of Gothic-influenced ecclesiastical architecture made popular by Bertram Goodhue and Ralph Adams Cram. Completed in 1923 for the Sisters of Divine Providence, the Chapel's architectural refinement, craftsmanship, location, and the scale reflected the Congregation's dedication to community service and education. Dielmann was a prolific and influential San Antonio architect whose career spanned five decades. The architect's work produced residences, public and institutional buildings but is most recognized as one of the era's foremost church architects. Dielmann considered the nominated Chapel his best work. Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel meets Criteria Consideration A (Religious Properties) because it derives its primary significance for its architectural distinction. The period of significance is 1921-1936, representing the years during which the Chapel was built (1921-1923) and interior decoration completed (1923-1936).

---

### Sisters of Divine Providence and Our Lady of the Lake University

The Congregation of Divine Providence was founded in 1762 in Alsace, France, by Blessed John Martin Moye, then a young parish priest in Metz. He was passionate about educating children in basic skills and catechism. Along with the virtues of Simplicity, Poverty, and Charity, the Sisters were to abandon themselves to Divine Providence, trusting that God alone would provide whatever was necessary to accomplish their mission. Over the next century, the Congregation expanded such that, in 1866, Bishop Claude Dubuis of Texas requested that some of the Sisters leave their motherhouse in St. Jean de Bassel to establish schools throughout the state. By December 2 of that year, Mother St. Andrew Felton and Sister Alphonse Boegler arrived in Austin.

While the Sisters had planned to establish a school in Austin, the bishop soon sent them to Castrovilla in 1868 after the state established its school. In Castrovilla, approximately 30 miles west of San Antonio, the Sisters' schools attracted pupils and many young women who wanted to join the Congregation. At the request of pastors, these women would eventually venture to Louisiana and Oklahoma to establish more schools in underserved communities. After two decades, the Congregation had found 24 schools throughout Castrovilla and its surrounding areas. However, after the railroad was constructed by-passed, the ever-pragmatic Congregation decided to move: "like other pioneers, the Sisters did what they needed to do to accomplish their mission."<sup>3</sup> Under the direction of Mother Florence Walters, the Congregation relocated to San Antonio's west side in 1895. Mayor Henry Elmendorff deeded 18 acres on the southside of Lake Elmendorff in the city's new Lakeside Addition to the Sisters for five dollars. Conditions of the conveyance were establishing a girl's academy and making \$75,000 in improvements to the property within ten years. Thus, in 1895, Texas architect James Wahrenberger, designed and oversaw the construction of what would eventually become Our Lady of the Lake University's present-day Main Building. While their academy was under construction, the Sisters continued teaching at St. Joseph's Parish school, which sat next to St. Joseph's church on Commerce Street.

Less than five years later, both academy and Congregation had grown to such an extent that Wahrenberger was contracted once again to add a Gothic wing on either side of the original construction of Old Main. The area's thriving parish schools demanded a need for more CDS teachers, which led them to develop a full-fledged college. In 1911, Texas approved the

---

<sup>3</sup> Morkovsky, 16

## Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

---

CDS charter for Our Lady of the Lake College, a two-year degree program for women. Eight years later, the institution offered its first four-year degree.

Growing demand for teachers and subsequently expanded curriculum spurred on college's growth. Moye Hall, constructed in 1919, prepared Sisters and other women for roles in the classroom. Since the accrediting organizations required fixtures and accommodations that could not all be housed in one building, the Congregation's Superior General, Mother Philothea Thiry, began strategically planning for the institution's necessary capital expansions. In 1907, while she was still "Sister" under Mother Florence, Philothea planned the college's layout. She left an open space between two campus buildings that remained empty until 1921, which would eventually accommodate Mother Florence's dream: a Gothic chapel.

The idea for a large chapel sprang forth not from a dream of grandeur, although it would undoubtedly be a project dedicated to the grandeur of God, but out of necessity. At the time, the academy had its own small Chapel in Moye Hall, one in the Convent, and a third in Main Building for students.<sup>4</sup> This dilution of temples meant the institution lacked a spiritual center to could accommodate CDP Sisters, OLLU students, and faculty. They considered it a considerable problem for an institution whose mission was founded on community and communal worship. Furthermore, the Congregation's population had swelled, not only in the number of Sisters but also those formally-trained educators. The latter annually returned to OLLU for spiritual retreat and college summer courses. Therefore, constructing a chapel that could accommodate over 800 Sisters became a paramount need.

### Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel

Sacred Heart Chapel began as an individual's vision for a community that ultimately came to fruition through the Sisters' collective efforts and generous giving from the communities they served. The Chapel is not the display of a patron's wealth and status; instead, it is a symbol of community, sacrifice, and a desire to build a spiritual home for religious and laity alike.

According to the Congregation's tradition, in 1895, Mother Florence Walter, Superior General of the Sisters of Divine Providence (1886-1925), looked towards a piece of land on Prospect Hill which San Antonio mayor, Henry Elmendorf, had promised to the Sisters if they built upon it a girls academy. She envisioned, "Someday, upon that hill, rising above the lake will stand a beautiful Gothic chapel with spires pointing up to the blue skies of Texas," similar to that of the Congregation's Chapel at St. Jean de Bassel Convent in Lorraine, France (Figure 3).<sup>5</sup> Despite other building priorities, Mother Florence maintained her vision and, on August 23, 1911, began a chapel fund with needlework presented to her by the Sisters in honor of her silver jubilee. The academy's advertisements, published weekly in San Antonio newspapers, included a drawing that showed the proposed church with two towers.

A total of 78 of the Congregation's communities raised \$42,934.70 from July 14, 1921, to January 2, 1922. Each Sister carried a dime book that they donated to the project when it filled up. Barring an injury to health, Sisters skipped desserts and other "luxuries," such as milk and butter, to channel all savings towards the building fund. They also made candy and did extra needlework to sell. Members of the Congregation's families could buy a "gold brick" in support. Funds were also raised by raffling off and selling various non-cash donations that were given to Congregation by supporters throughout the community. Donations were made in memory of donors' family members and friends and came from across the United States. By 1921, the Sisters had raised \$200,000, enough to begin signing out construction contracts. The total cost was \$268,000, not including furnishings.

While the Chapel's Gothic style and some of its elements, such as the marble and stained glass, are decidedly foreign to San Antonio, the Sisters envisioned a space that would be approachable and familiar within the context of their new

---

<sup>4</sup> Callahan, 70.

<sup>5</sup> From an account by Sr. Generosa, *OLLU Alumni Magazine* 4, no. 1 (March/April, 1977).

Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

---

Texan home. Thus, whenever possible, the Congregation chose to employ whatever resources were locally available, including building materials and craftsmen. The Congregation's dedication to social justice and community service also motivated its decision to keep the project as local as possible.<sup>6</sup> According to the Congregation's Council April 11, 1921 meeting minutes, "The first steps towards the erection of a new chapel were taken, that is, the style of architecture was suggested, and it was decided that Mr. Leo Dielmann of our city be chosen architect." Dielmann was, by that time, a well-regarded architect who "evidently enjoyed an excellent rapport with the chancery office in San Antonio, where church projects in Texas were initiated."<sup>7</sup> However, the Congregation contracted his services because he was a stellar example of the talent already present within San Antonio.

Dielmann's final architectural drawings differed from his original chapel proposal, which showed more elaborate Gothic details throughout the façade (Figure 14). The simplified final version featured a chapel raised over a ground-level auditorium and a 190-foot tower, "a perpetual exclamation over the splendor of God."<sup>8</sup> Chapel construction commenced in October 1921 under German-born contractor August Fuessel. Like "Old World guildsmen on their Gothic churches," local craftsmen completed the structural, masonry, and architectural decoration from Dielmann's detailed drawings.<sup>9</sup> In June 1922, construction briefly paused when the Congregation blessed the building's cornerstone and spire crosses (Figure 9). Stylistically, Sacred Heart Conventual differed from its Victorian-era neighbors, James Wahrenberger's 1895 Main Building and San Antonio architect Fred B. Gaenslen's 1908 convent. The new Chapel's buff brick, manufactured in nearby D'Hanis, and Carthage stone, visually tied the trio together.

Although technically complete in 1923, there were critical interior details yet to be finished. Dielmann and Emil Frei, Sr. corresponded about stained glass windows he commissioned for Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel throughout the construction process. In the meantime, storm glass filled the Chapel's openings until Frei's St. Louis and Munich-based art glass company installed more than 25 windows between 1923 and 1928. Conventual Chapel installed tower bells in 1924 and 1931. Reverend Mother St. Andrew, the Congregation's first Superior General, purchased "Ave Maria," the largest bell in 1883 and shipped it from Europe. Its other bells are from French firms Louis Bollee, Fils at Orleans, and H.G. Lassault Freres. In the late 1930s, the Congregation hired Dr. H. Oidtmann Studios, Inc. to decorate the Conventual Chapel and Chapel of Perpetual Adoration in St. Joseph's Hall.<sup>10</sup> The then 77-year-old New York interior design company advertised itself as "prominent creators of ecclesiastical art productions" and "purveyors to His Holiness Pope Pius XI."<sup>11</sup> Studio artists produced polychromatic stenciling, gold leaf finishing, and installed original murals above each side altar.

Once the Chapel was built, college and Convent had their spiritual bridge: a place that could genuinely be both institutions' beating heart:

On the circling western lands of San Antonio now lifts an exclamation mark in stone. True Gothic it is—towered, pinnacled, vaulted. Aloof on its hill, fronted by park and lake and arroyo, it stands between morning and sunset skies. So points its steeple upward, in perpetual exclamation over the splendor of God.<sup>12</sup>

The Convent retained its separate, smaller Chapel for use by older and infirm Sisters, and the Main Building Chapel became an extensive library and boarders' rooms. After the Congregation paid off the outstanding debt for its construction, they consecrated Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel on July 26, 1928. The same day, Mother Florence celebrated her golden jubilee that recognized 50 years of consecrated life. Her gift was to see "Our Lady of the Lake with the Gothic

---

<sup>6</sup> Morkovsky.

<sup>7</sup> Robinson, 33.

<sup>8</sup> Robinson, 41; *Daily Light*, 1923.

<sup>9</sup> Robinson, 41.

<sup>10</sup> "Church Art Studio," *Boston Tablet*, August 4, 1934.

<sup>11</sup> "Church Art Studio," *Boston Tablet*, August 4, 1934.

<sup>12</sup> "A Gothic Chapel Set Upon a Hill," *San Antonio Express*, December 9, 1923, p. 33.



Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

---

chapel towering high above the motherhouse and the line of educational buildings – all of cream and white brick and stone."<sup>13</sup>

### Significance in the Area of Architecture

*Leo M. J. Dielmann, AIA (1889-1969)*

One of six children, he was born Leo Maria Joseph Dielmann on August 14, 1881, in San Antonio to John C. Dielmann (1849-1923) of Hellenhan, Germany and Maria Gros Dielmann, a daughter of German immigrants. The family attended St. Michael's Catholic Church, a mostly Polish community, in San Antonio, and Leo attended St. Mary's College. The school chapel and many parishes that surrounded young Dielmann were Gothic in style. Like his early exposure to his father's construction business, it must have made an impression upon him and helped to influence his designs. Eventually, Dielmann apprenticed to his father as a stonemason. Recognizing his son's artistic aptitude, John eventually sent Leo to Germany for formal architectural training.<sup>14</sup>

He studied architecture and architectural engineering from 1899 to 1901 at the Technische Baukunstschule, Idstein i/Taunus. During this period, he also traveled to Paris for the International Exhibition in 1900, thereby furthering his exposure to European architecture. After returning to Texas, Dielmann served for several years as president of the family business, Dielmann Construction and eventually became a city building inspector (1909-1912). He left construction to devote himself to architecture fully.<sup>15</sup>

While Dielmann was very civically and professionally active, including membership in the Texas Society of Architects, he was involved in various Catholic societies, which doubtless reaffirmed his ties to church architecture. Although Dielmann frequently used the Italian Romanesque and Gothic styles in Roman Catholic churches, the Gothic style continued to have deeply rooted spiritual and cultural associations. Despite the backlash of suspicion attached to the German American community and all things German in the wake of World War I, which somewhat decreased Gothic Revival's popularity, Dielmann's reputation and portfolio of designs insulated him. He continued to use the style, primarily because it allowed for countless design variations, enabling Dielmann to create an individual character for each project.<sup>16</sup> His close ties with the Catholic Church allowed him to develop and maintain a close relationship with the chancery office in San Antonio, which initiated church building projects in Texas. Thus, Dielmann eventually enjoyed renown as one of the Southwest's foremost architects of Catholic churches.<sup>17</sup>

Until his retirement in 1957, Dielmann's architectural career spanned various projects across Texas, reaching as far as McAllen, Marshall, and Amarillo. His portfolio of work includes Catholic and Protestant churches, rectories, sectarian institutions, public buildings, public and parochial schools, warehouses, hotels, factories, private residences, and business houses. The 1905 St. Joseph's Chapel in Schertz, Comal County, is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.<sup>18</sup> Within San Antonio alone, Dielmann was commissioned to restore San Juan Capistrano's Spanish mission and modify another, San Francisco de la Espada. He also built the rectory for the city's 17<sup>th</sup>-century cathedral, San Fernando.<sup>19</sup> After a career spanning over 50 years, in December of 1969, Dielmann died, and his Requiem Mass was celebrated in what he considered to be his proudest and finest achievement, the Sacred Heart Chapel.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Callahan, 239.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Robinson, 40.

<sup>16</sup> Newlan, 1988; Robinson, 1991.

<sup>17</sup> Robinson, 42.

<sup>18</sup> National Register of Historic Places, Saint Joseph's Chapel, Schertz, Comal County, Texas. National Register #14000472.

<sup>19</sup> Newlan, 1988; Robinson, 1991.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

---

*Emil Frei, Sr. (1869-1942)*

The stained glass windows of the Sacred Heart Chapel were accomplished under the tutelage of Emil Frei, Sr., with almost certain assistance from his son, Emil Frei, Jr. Emil Frei, Sr. was schooled at the Munich School of Fine Art in Bavaria, Germany, which significantly advanced the technical abilities of incredible painting on glass. Since Frei immigrated to the United States in the 1890s, the Emil Frei Studio in St. Louis, Missouri, has operated for over 120 years and spanned six consecutive generations.

*Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel: "True Gothic It Is—Towered, Pinnacled, Vaulted"<sup>21</sup>*

The late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Late Gothic Revival ecclesiastical style, like earlier Gothic revivals, celebrated the Middle Ages as a high period of Christian, specifically Catholic, devotion and architecture. Gothic monuments of past centuries "possessed an attribute of the eternal" with soaring interior and exterior vertical proportions that communicated the church's significance and authority.<sup>22</sup> The early Gothic churches were also notable for possessing a straightforward expression of structure and function. Nave columns and flying buttresses were the structural frameworks that supported ribbed vaulting and gave an uninterrupted view of the altar. Proponents of the style's revival believed the experiential quality of Gothic churches could bring renewed devotion, emotional richness, and religious ceremony to society.<sup>23</sup>

Twentieth-century Gothic churches differed from earlier revivals that emphasized historical accuracy and the picturesque. Instead, the prevailing viewpoint encouraged individual interpretation of historical styles yet stressed contemporary architectural principles of good design. Ralph Adams Cram and Bertram Goodhue were among the most influential American architects whose work, like St. Thomas Church (1906-1913), tastefully combined qualities of French and English Gothic traditions. For Cram, "good" modern Gothic architecture had a "kinship with the past," while bad examples showed "bad construction and dead archaism."<sup>24</sup> Although the style was widely interpreted, there are numerous universal elements that Late Gothic Revival buildings share. These include pointed arches, tracery, stained glass, engaged buttresses, dramatic rooflines, and intricate fenestration patterns. Finer examples had towers, turrets, pinnacles, and highly elaborate tracery.

Architects of the Late Gothic Revival viewed formality, symmetry, proportion, craftsmanship, and structural honesty as core tenants of good design. Catholic examples are typically cruciform or basilican plans with longitudinal naves, central towers, and a rear polygonal apse. In Texas, many rural German Catholic churches had simplified hall plans. At the time, Catholic churches mandated six primary spaces to functionally meet ecclesiological requirements: the narthex, nave, choir, sanctuary, baptistry, and sacristy. The Chapel's elements provide a transition from the mundane to the divine, allowing visitors to be enveloped in a "spacial progression leading to worship."<sup>25</sup> The era's Protestant and Catholic churches were often multi-purpose buildings that suited educational and community ministry activities. The interpretative freedom inherent to eclectic Gothic churches produced modern, multi-purpose ecclesiastical buildings that reflected continuity with the past.

The 1923 Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel embodies Late Gothic Revival ecclesiastical characteristics, referencing English and German Gothic traditions in its plan and architectural features. The local paper summarized it best, "True Gothic it is—towered, pinnacled, vaulted."<sup>26</sup> Dielmann's three-story cruciform design features a massive, 190-foot tower, which historian Ralph Newlan identified as German-influenced. Turrets frame the lanterned belfry that encloses Sacred Heart's historic bells. Below and behind the tower, the longitudinal arched nave is lit by clerestories and terminates with a

---

<sup>21</sup> "A Gothic Chapel Set Upon a Hill," *San Antonio Express*, December 9, 1923, p. 33.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. quoting Christopher Wren (1632-1723) English architect of St. Paul's Cathedral.

<sup>23</sup> Gelernter, 143-145

<sup>24</sup> Ralph Adams Cram, "Good and Bad Modern Architecture," *Architectural Review* I, January to December, 1899.

<sup>25</sup> Robinson, 21.

<sup>26</sup> "A Gothic Chapel Set Upon a Hill," *San Antonio Express*, December 9, 1923, p. 33.

Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

---

polygonal apse. Engaged buttresses define structural bays while gables and corner pinnacles across the exterior enhance the Chapel's verticality. Pointed and perpendicular arched openings characterize the interior and exterior. Tracery and lancet windows decorate exterior walls and oak doors. The Chapel's breathtaking interior, bathed in the glow of Emil Frei's stained glass windows, continues the Gothic treatment with a sweeping vaulted nave ceiling supported by English pointed arches.

According to historian Willard Robinson, Dielmann's religious buildings have several layers of significance. In addition to their beauty, Dielmann's designs "succinctly exemplify certain national tendencies of the ecclesiastical architectural design of the first half of the twentieth century;...they admirably embody...the ecclesiastical requirements for the worship of their time. Finally, they represent a high level of achievement that obtains when a talented artist with Christian dedication makes a firm commitment to his religious work."<sup>27</sup> In short, Dielmann's intimate knowledge of Catholic practices gave him the insight necessary to create ecclesial designs that were resplendent in form and met functional needs.

### Conclusion

Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel is significant under Criterion C in the area of Architecture as an excellent example of ecclesiastical Late Gothic Revival style designed by noted architect Leo M.J. Dielmann. The nominated building exhibits the style's character-defining features: a dominant central tower, elaborate cast stone tracery, buttresses, arches, and turrets. Its design also demonstrates 20<sup>th</sup>-century preference and promotion of Gothic-influenced ecclesiastical architecture made popular by Bertram Goodhue and Ralph Adams Cram. Completed in 1923 for the Sisters of Divine Providence at Our Lady of the Lake University's campus on San Antonio's west side, the Chapel's architectural refinement, craftsmanship, location, and scale reflected the Congregation's dedication to community service and education. Dielmann was a prolific and influential San Antonio architect whose career spanned five decades, and he completed Sacred Heart Chapel in the middle of his professional life. The architect's work produced residences, public and institutional buildings but is most recognized as one of the era's foremost church architects. Dielmann considered the nominated Chapel his best work. Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion C for Architecture. It satisfactorily meets Criterion Consideration A (Religious Properties) because the Chapel derives its primary significance for its architectural distinction. The period of significance is 1921-1936, the years during which it was built, and significant interior finishes installed.

---

<sup>27</sup> Robinson, 27.

Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

---

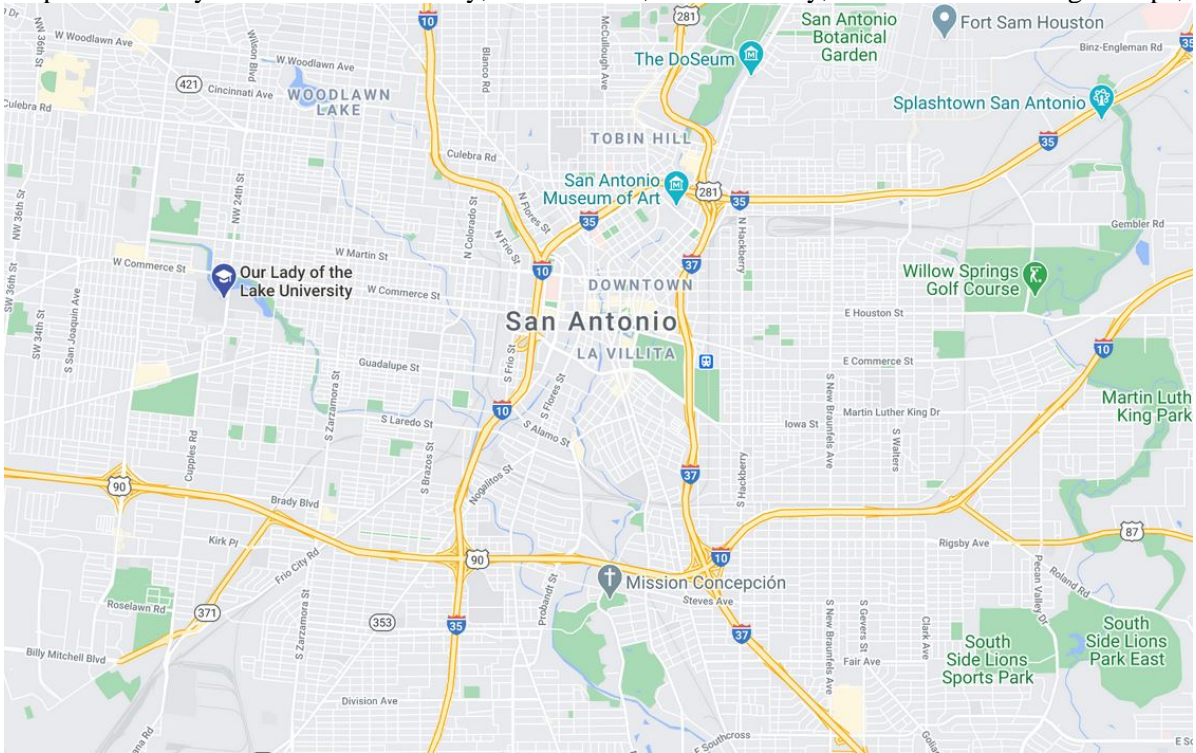
**Bibliography**

- Bredeson, C. *The Battle of the Alamo: The Fight for Texas Territory*. Lerner Publishing Group, 1996.
- Callahan, M. G. *The History of the Sisters of Divine Providence San Antonio, Texas*. Milwaukee, WI: Bruce Press, 1955.
- Cleary, Richard. "Texas Gothic, French Accent: The Architecture of the Roman Catholic Church in Antebellum Texas." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 66, no. 1 (March 1, 2007): 60–83..
- Dielmann, Leo M. J., Papers, Drawings, and Photographs, 1847-1961, Col. 883, Daughters of the Republic of Texas Library, San Antonio, Texas.
- Dielmann, Leo M. J., Papers, Drawings, and Photographs, Additions, 1847-1961, Col. 7607, Daughters of the Republic of Texas Library, San Antonio, Texas.
- Henry, Jay C. *Architecture in Texas: 1895-1945*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993.
- History of Bexar County. (n.d.). Bexar County. Retrieved August 8, 2020, from <https://www.bexar.org/2985/History-of-Bexar-County>
- Morkovsky, M. C. *Living in God's Providence: History of the Congregation of Divine Providence of San Antonio, Texas 1943-2000*. Xlibris, 2009.
- Newlan, Ralph Edward. "Leo M. J. Dielmann: Ecclesiology and the Continuation of a German Gothic Architectural Tradition in Twentieth Century Texas." MA Thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1988.
- Robinson, Willard B. "To the Glory of God: Texas Churches Designed by Leo M. J. Dielmann." *The Journal of Texas Catholic History and Culture* 2 (March 1991): 16-53.
- Robinson, Willard B. and Robinson, J. M. *Reflections of Faith: Houses of Worship in the Lone Star State*. Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 1994.
- Steely, Jim. (1984). Our Lady of the Lake. *Texas Highways* 31, no.1: 1-6.
- Walter, R., Foote, N., Cordoba, H., & Sparks, C. (2017). *Historic Roots of Modern Residential Segregation in a Southwestern Metropolis: San Antonio, Texas in 1910 and 2010*. *Urban Science*, 1(2), 19. MDPI AG. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/urbansci1020019>.
- Whiffen, Marcus. *American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1969.

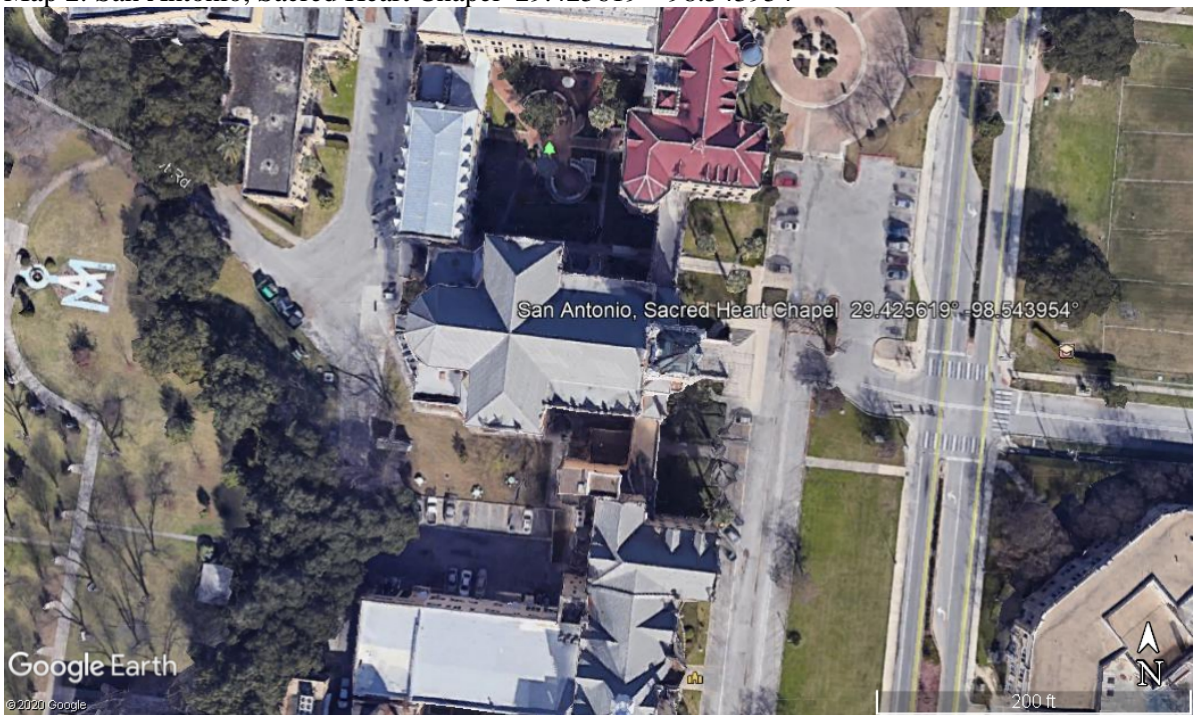
Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

Maps

Map 1: Our Lady of the Lake University, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas. Source: Google Maps, accessed 11/25/20.

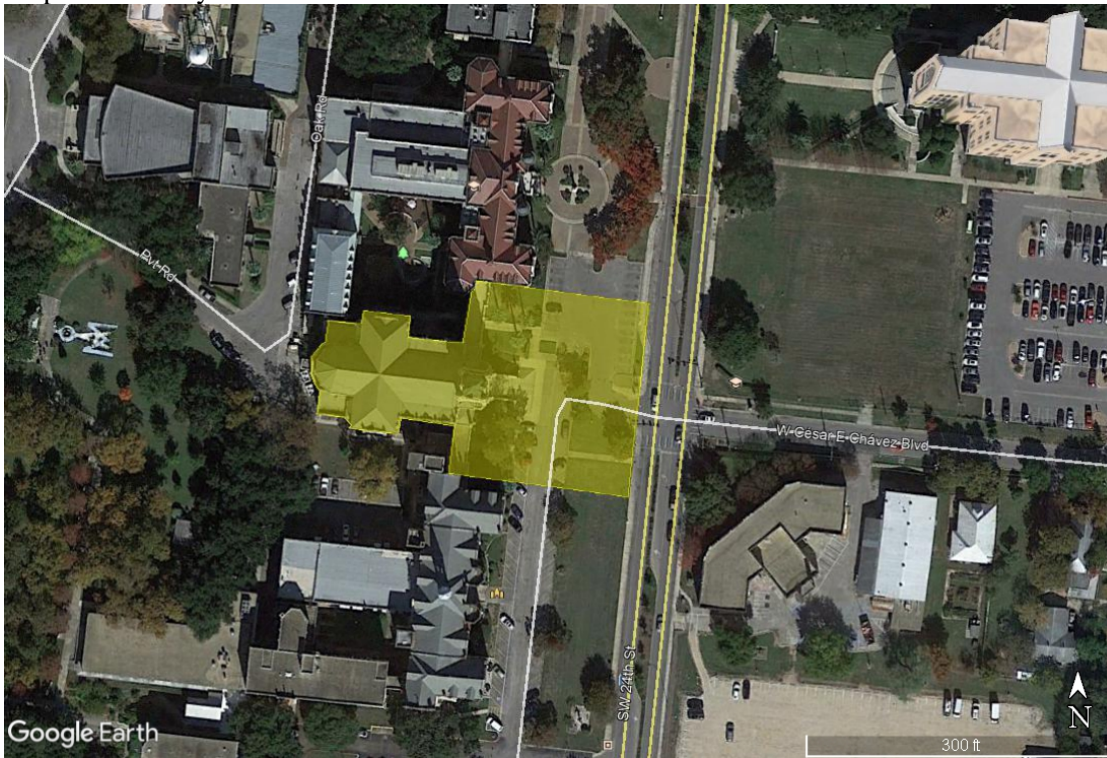


Map 2: San Antonio, Sacred Heart Chapel 29.425619° -98.543954°

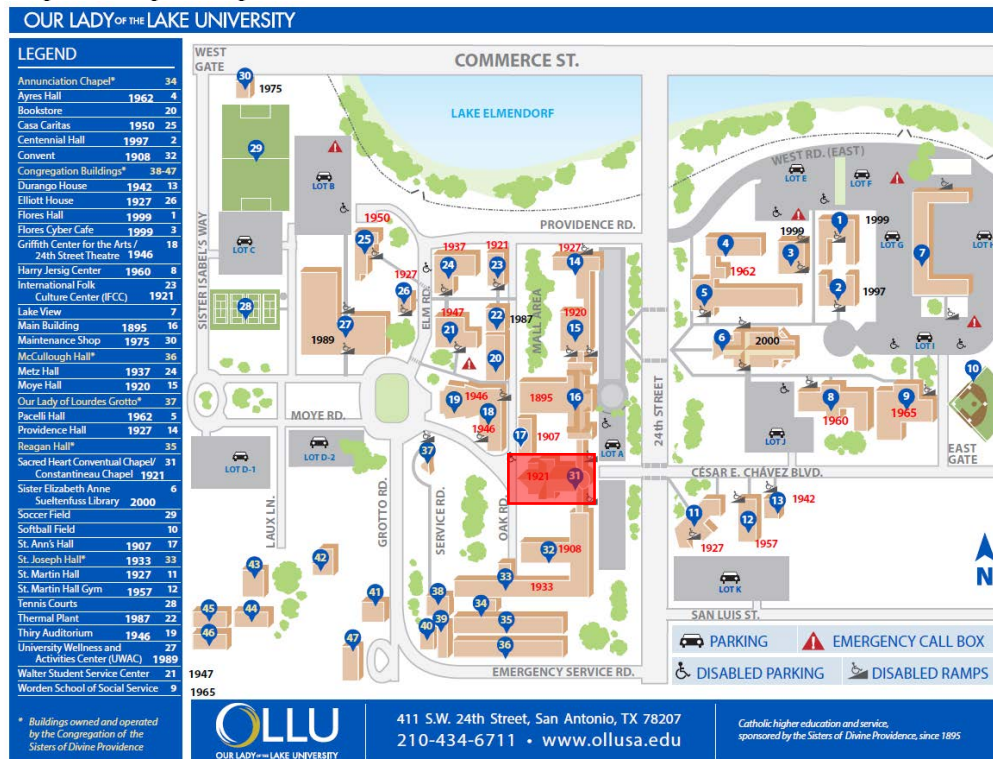


Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

Map 3: Boundary



Map 4: Campus Map



Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

Figures

Figure 1: The Chapel was built between (and connected to) the Convent (1908) and Main Building (1895). Source: Sanborn Map San Antonio 1911-Mar. 1951 vol. 4, 1912-Mar. 1951, Sheet 434. ProQuest Digital Sanborn Maps.

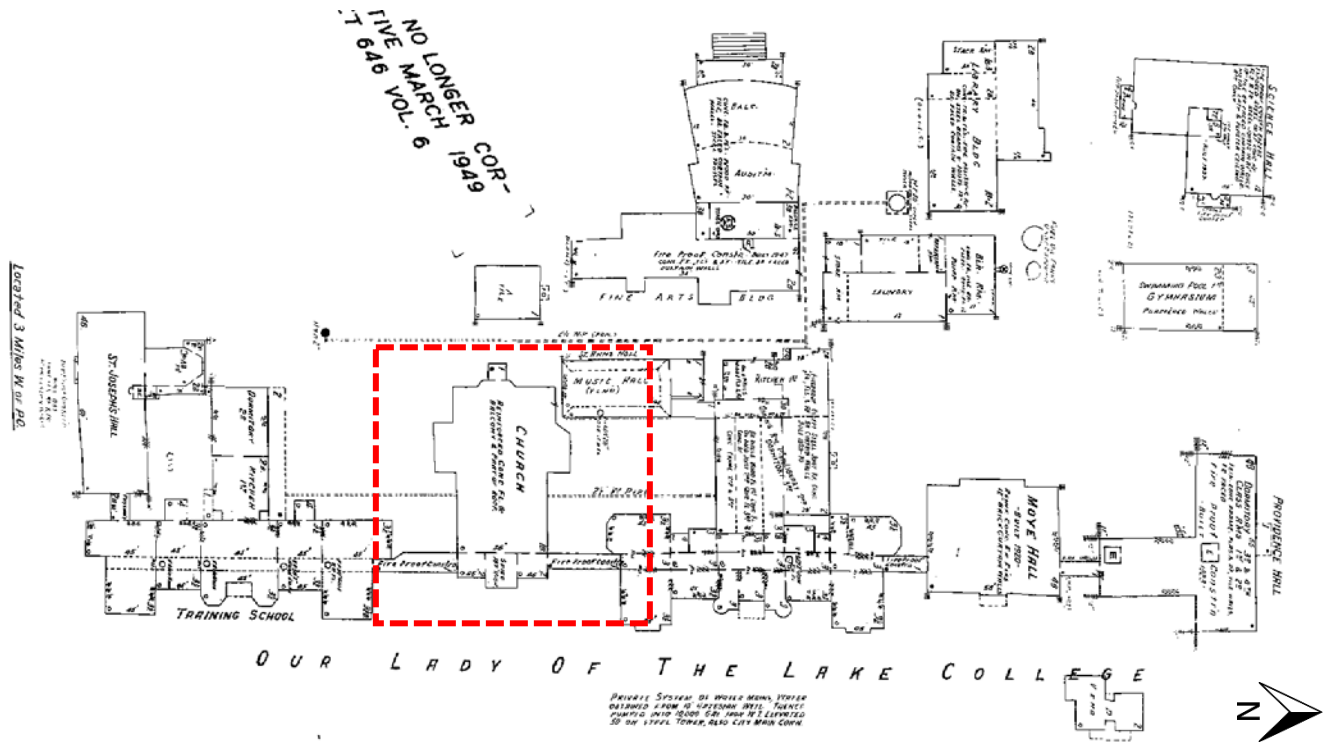
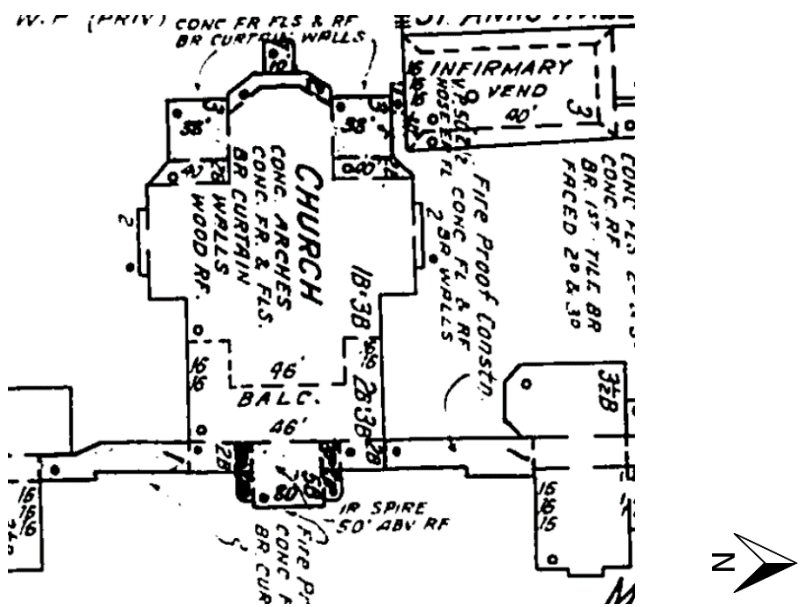


Figure 2: Detail Sacred Heart Chapel. Source: San Antonio 1911 Mar 1951 vol 6 1924 to June 1960 Sheet 646. ProQuest Digital Sanborn Maps.



Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

Figure 3: OLLU ad showing conceptual rendering of the nominated chapel with French Gothic influences. Source: *San Antonio Light*, May 8, 1910.

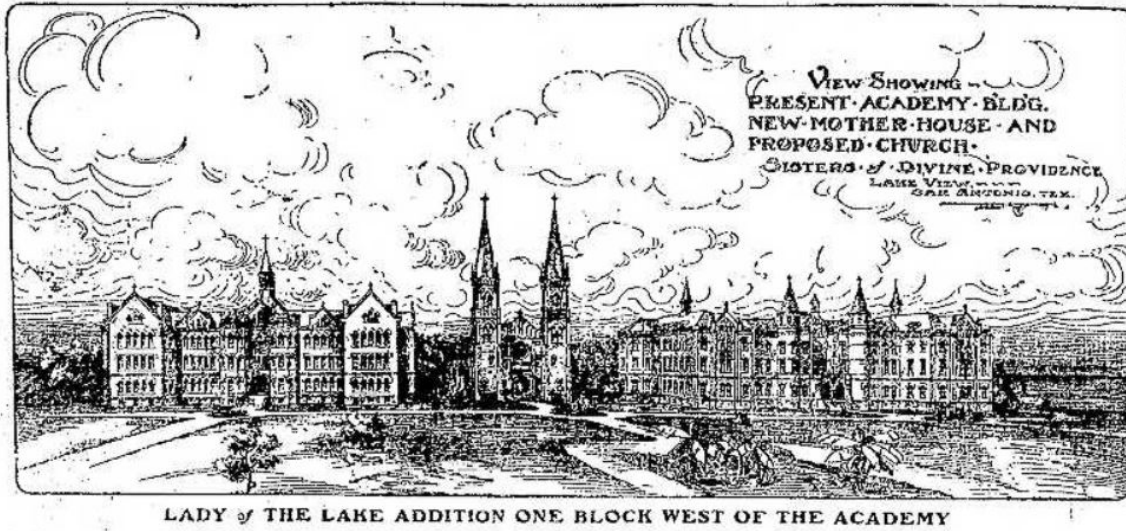


Figure 4: Watercolor conceptual drawing. Source: "Business and Professional Material." Leo M. J. Dielmann Papers, Drawings, and Photographs, 1847-1961, Col 883, Daughters of the Republic of Texas Library, San Antonio, Texas. (Hereafter, "Dielmann Papers.")<sup>28</sup>



<sup>28</sup> Architectural drawings are in a related collection and will be referred to as "Dielmann Papers, Col. 7607): Leo M. J. Dielmann Papers, Drawings, and Photographs, Additions, 1847-1961, Col. 7607, Daughters of the Republic of Texas Library, San Antonio, Texas.



Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

---

Figure 5: West (rear) elevation during construction. Source: Dielmann Papers, Col. 883.



Figure 6: Interior of Chapel during construction (view east). Source: Dielmann Papers, Col. 883.



Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

---

Figure 7: Spire and tower frame. View West. Source: Dielmann Papers, Col. 883.



Figure 8: Some of the individuals responsible for building the Chapel. Source: Dielmann Papers, Col. 883.



Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

---

Figure 9: Steeple cross blessing, circa 1922. Source: OLLU University Archives.

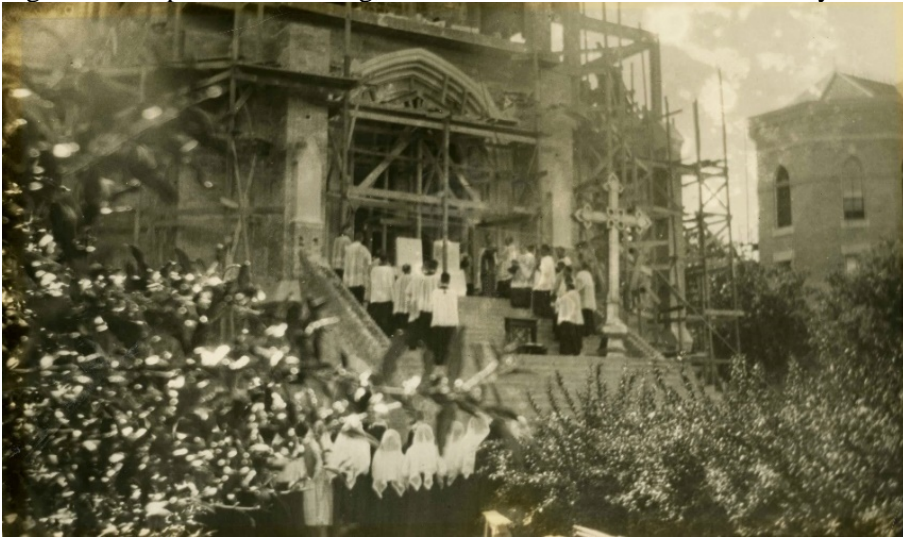
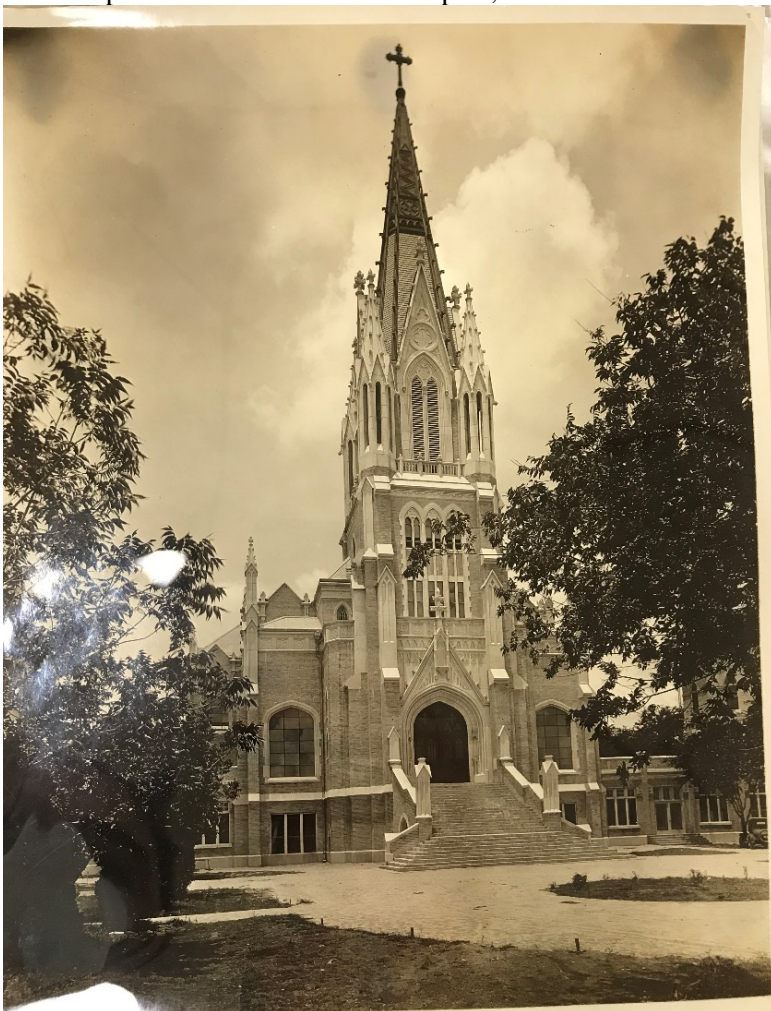


Figure 10: Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, 1923. The Chapel had temporary windows installed until the stained glass was completed. Source: Dielmann Papers, Col. 883.



Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

Figure 11: Our Lady of the Lake College, c. 1925. Source: Dielmann Papers, Col 883.



Figure 12: Chapel interior, c. 1920. View west. Source: Dielmann Papers, Col. 883.



Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

---

Figure 13: Singers in choir loft, c. 1925. Source: Dielmann Papers, Col. 883.



Figure 14: Interior auditorium, c. 1925. View west. Source: Dielmann Papers, Col. 883.



Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

---

Figure 15: Leo M. J. Dielmann (1889-1969). Source: *Dielmann's Review*.



LEO M. J. DIELMANN  
ARCHITECT

Figure 16: Dielmann's St. Michael's Catholic Church, Weimar, Texas. Source: Texas Historical Commission.



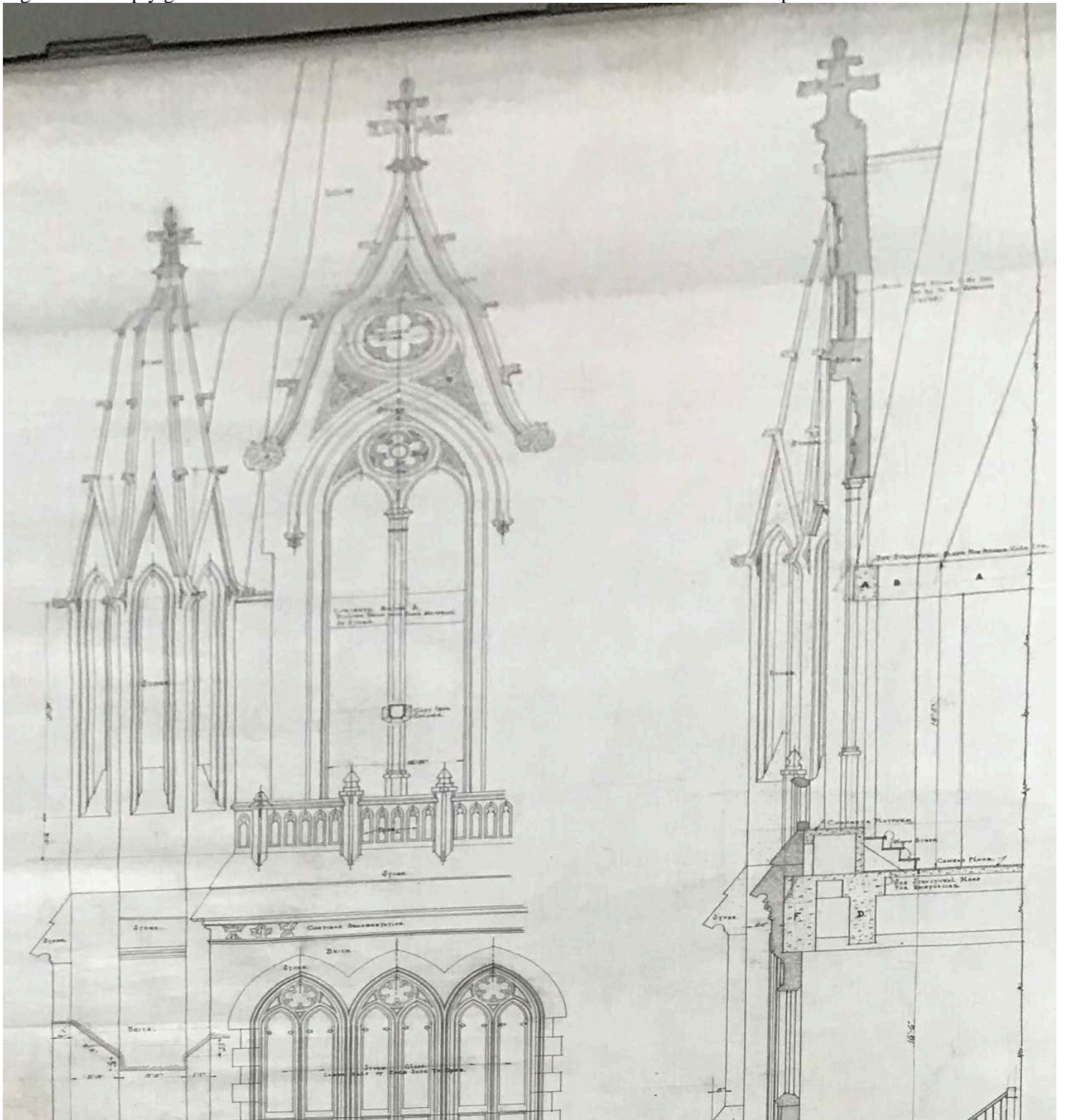
Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

Figure 17: Due to the large size of Dielmann's original east elevation drawing (approx. 4-feet-long), only portions of it are shown here. Source: Dielmann Papers, Col. 7607.



Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

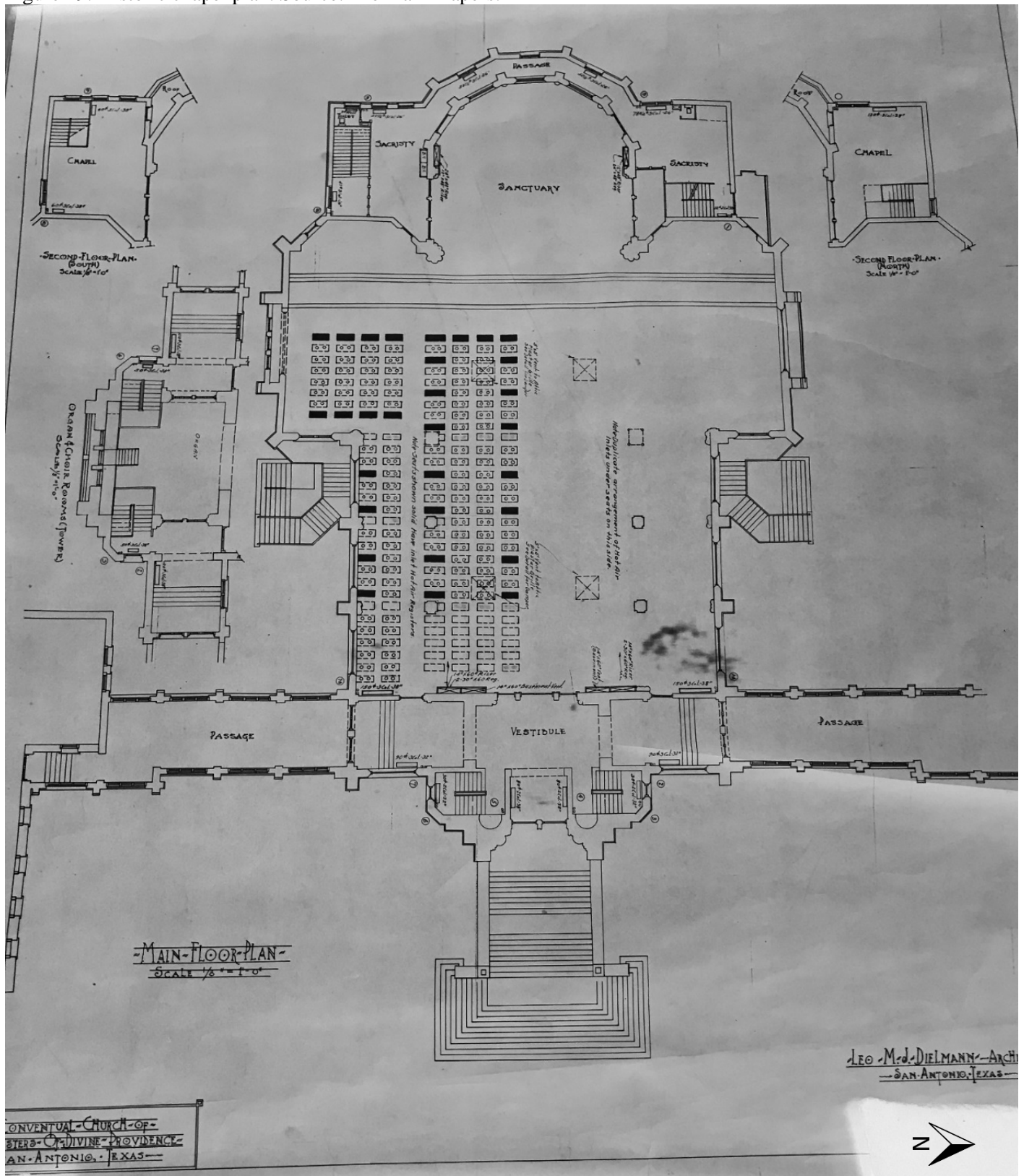
Figure 18: Steeply gabled tower roofs are a German Gothic tradition. Source: Dielmann's Papers.





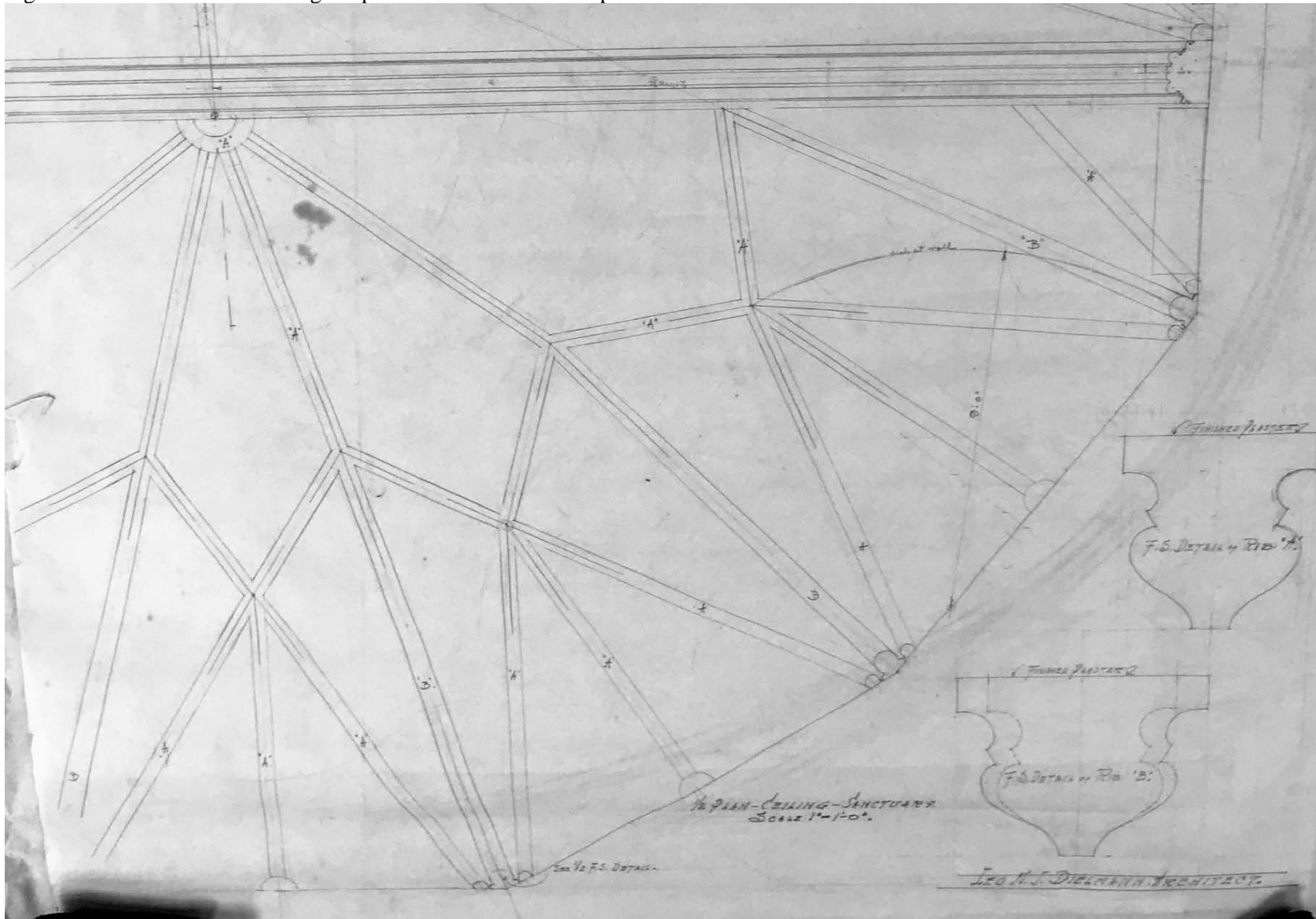
Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

Figure 19: Historic chapel plan. Source: Dielmann Papers.



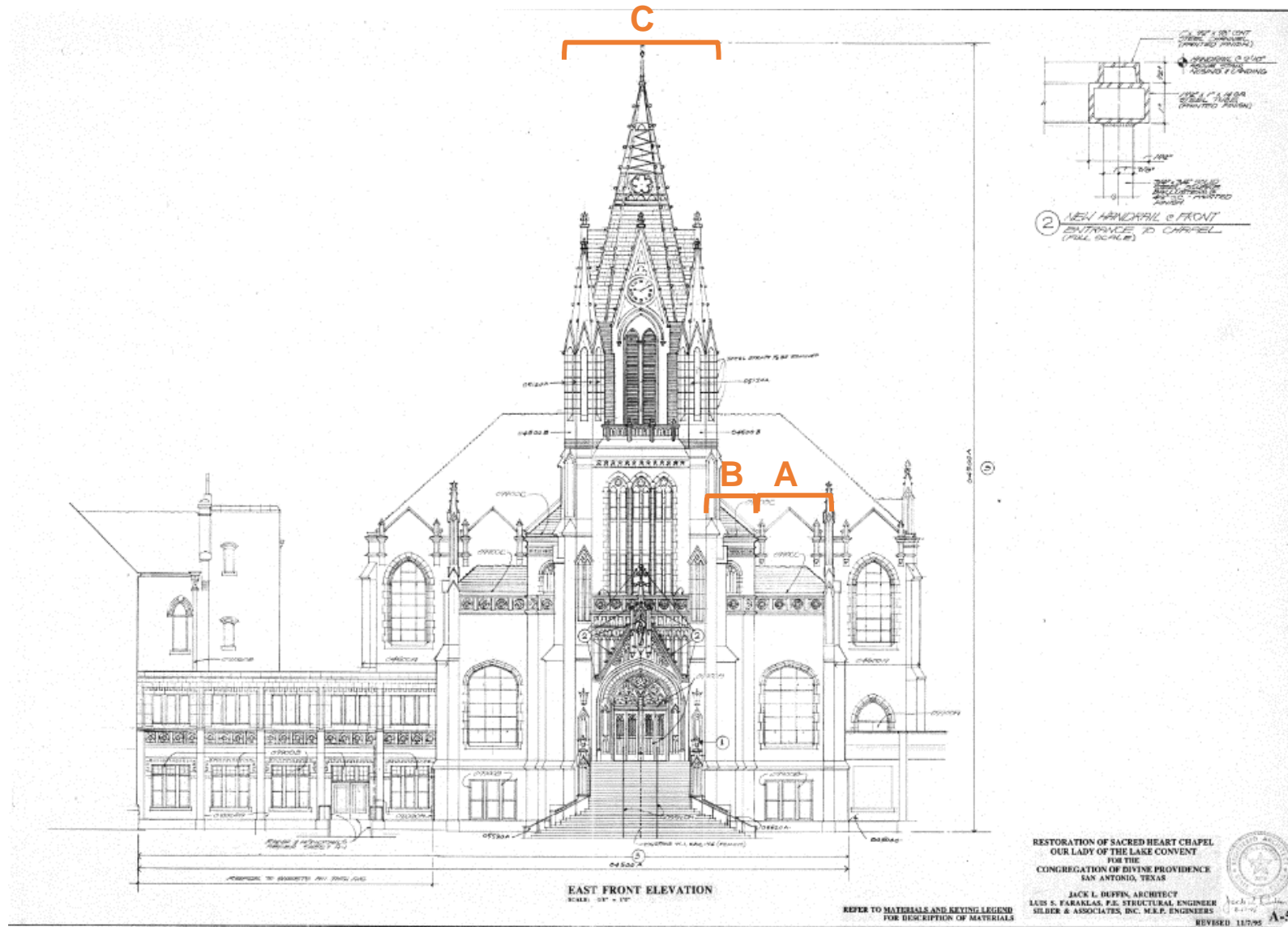
Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

Figure 20: Plans for ribbed ceiling in apse. Source: Dielmann Papers.



Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

Figure 21: Current Plans, East (Front) Elevation showing bays described in Section 7.



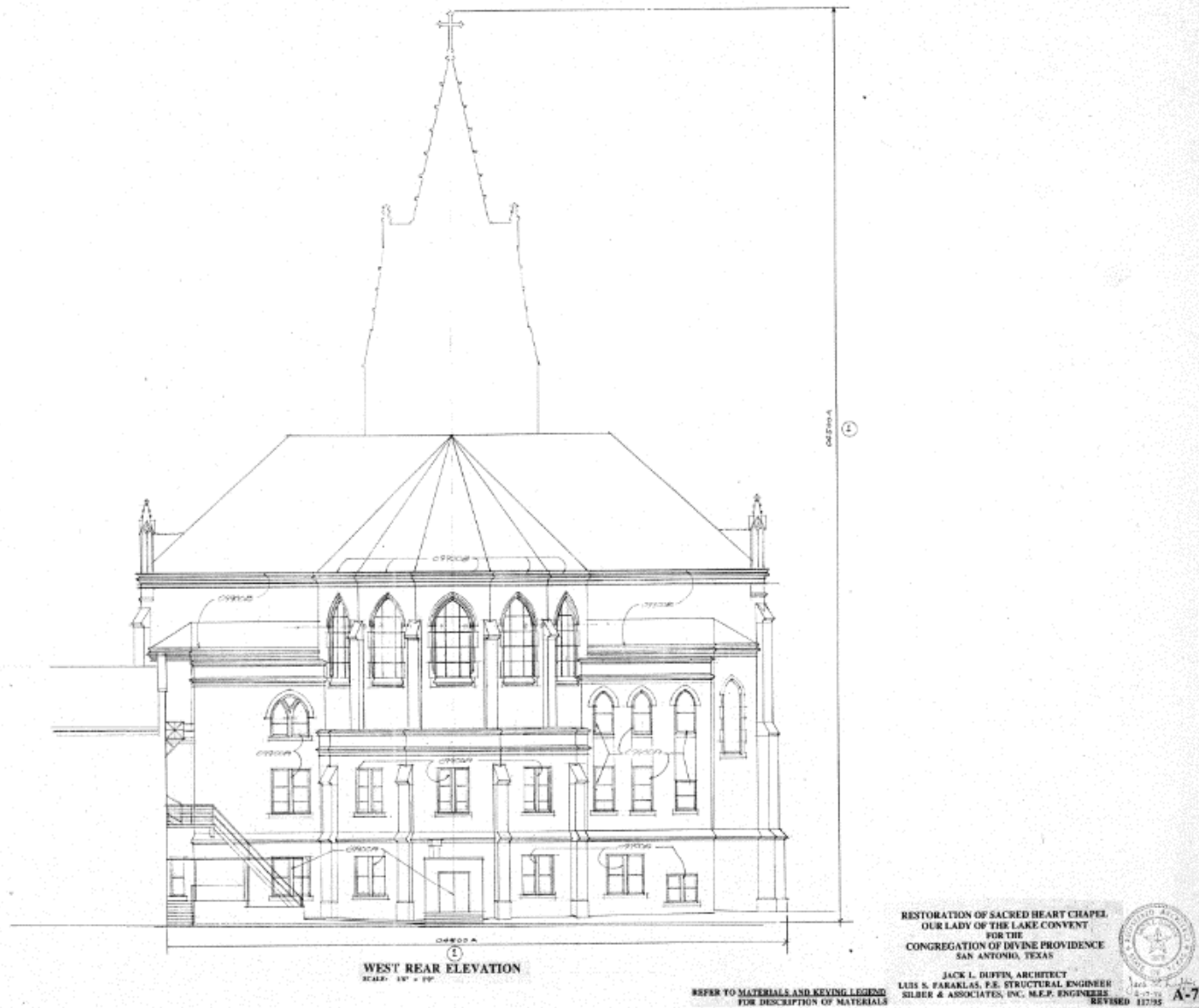
Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

Figure 22: Current Plans, South Elevation.



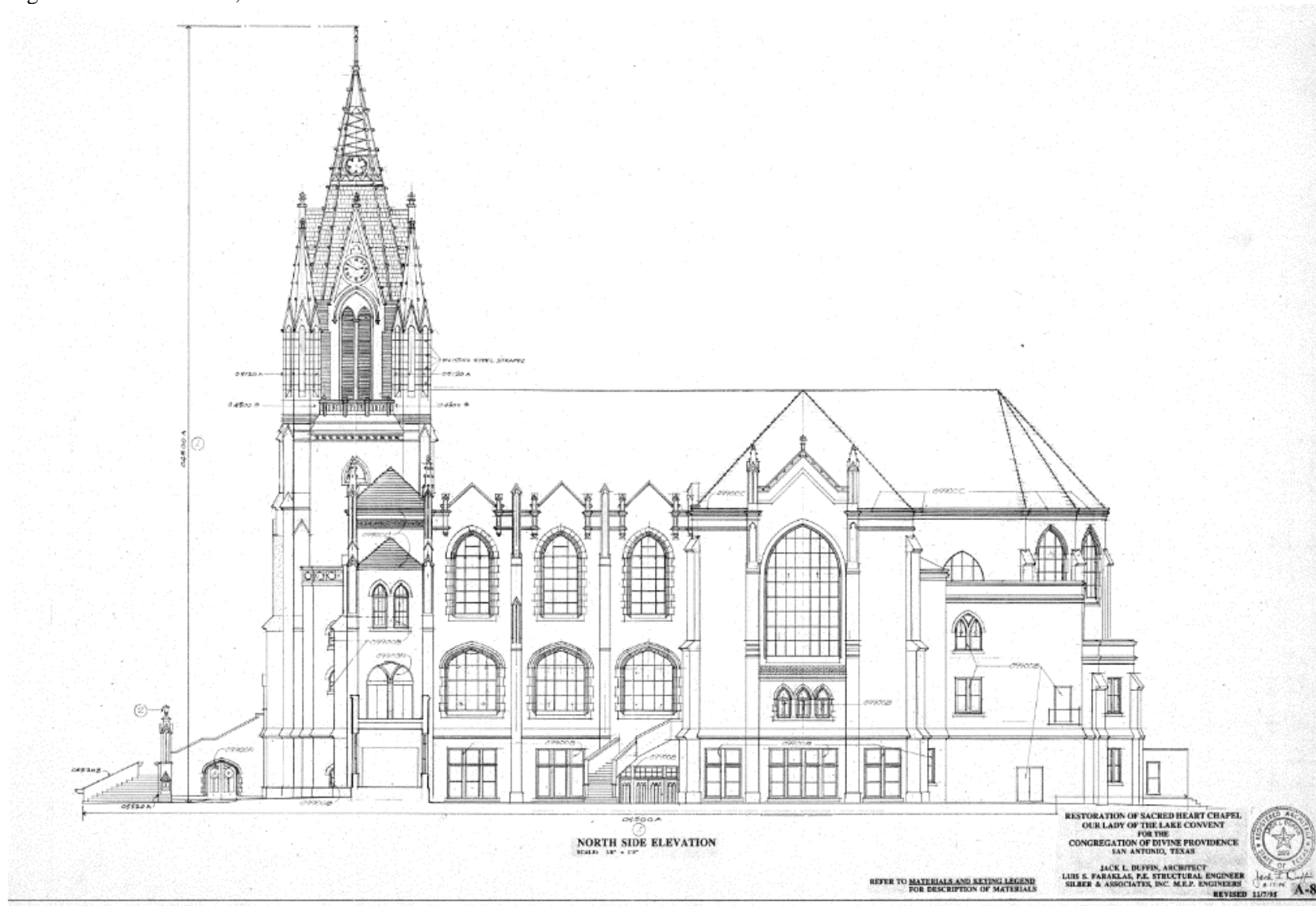
Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

Figure 23: Current Plans, West (Rear) Elevation



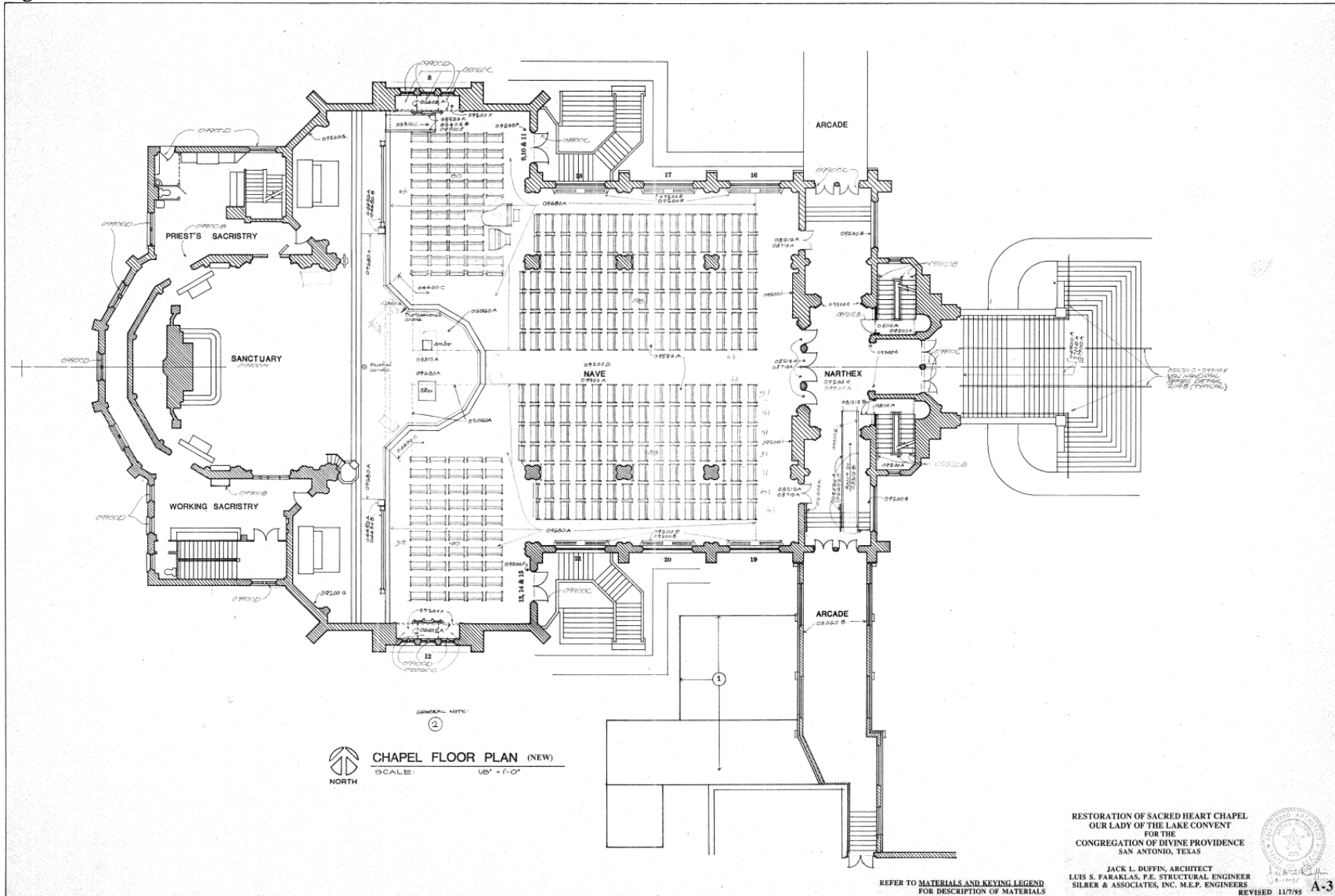
Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

Figure 24: Current Plans, North Elevation



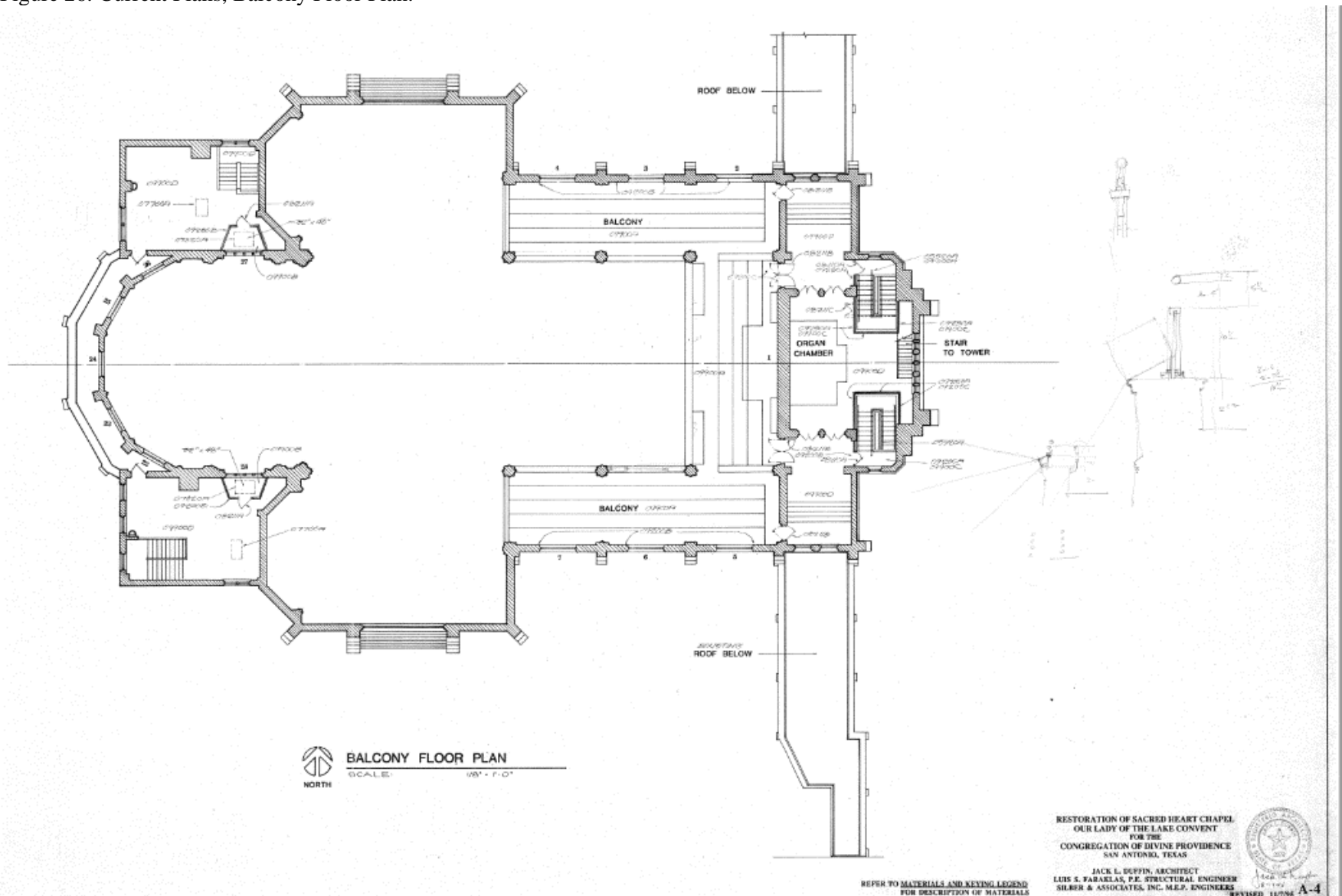
Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

Figure 25: Current Plans.



Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

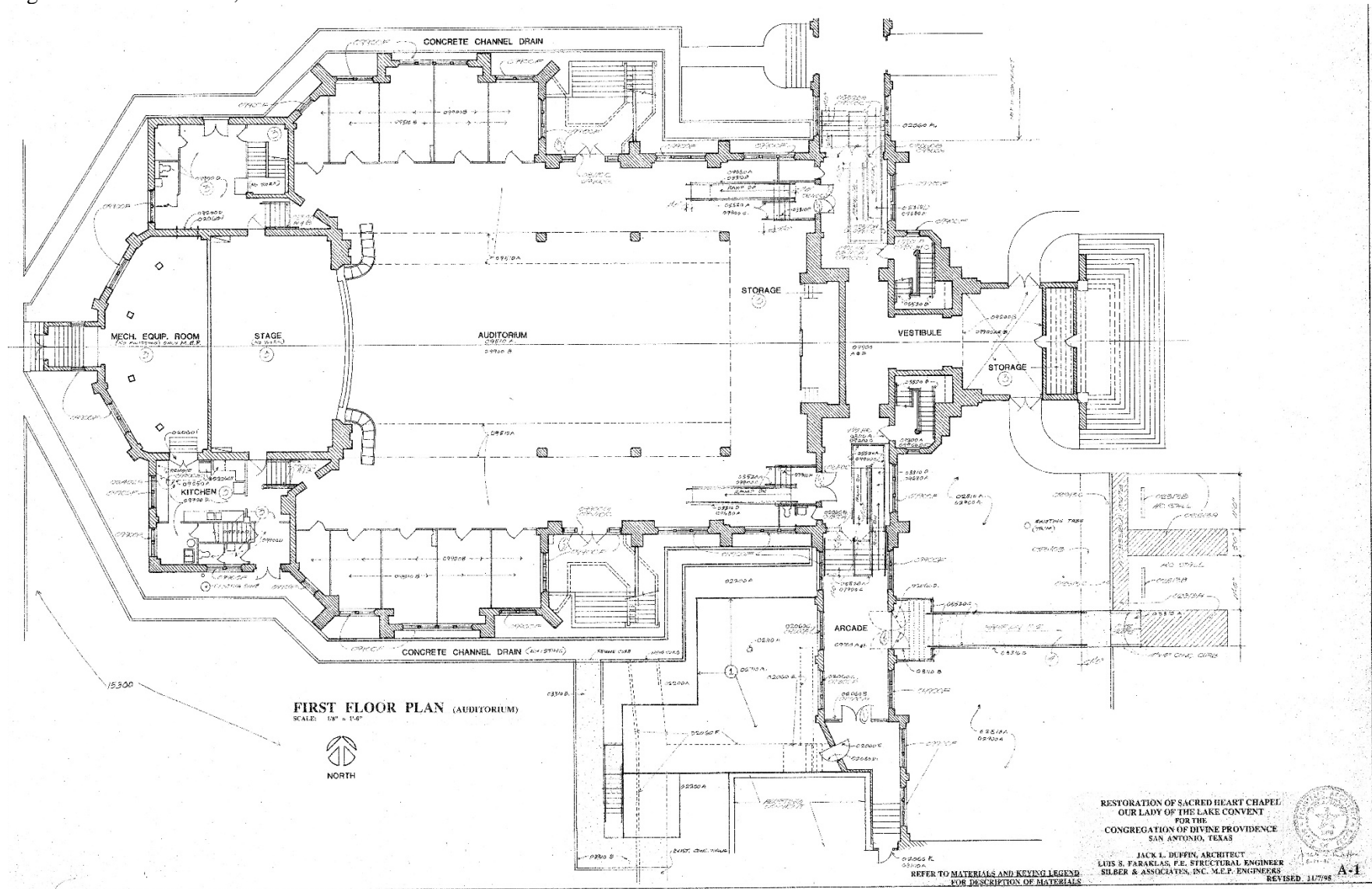
Figure 26: Current Plans, Balcony Floor Plan.





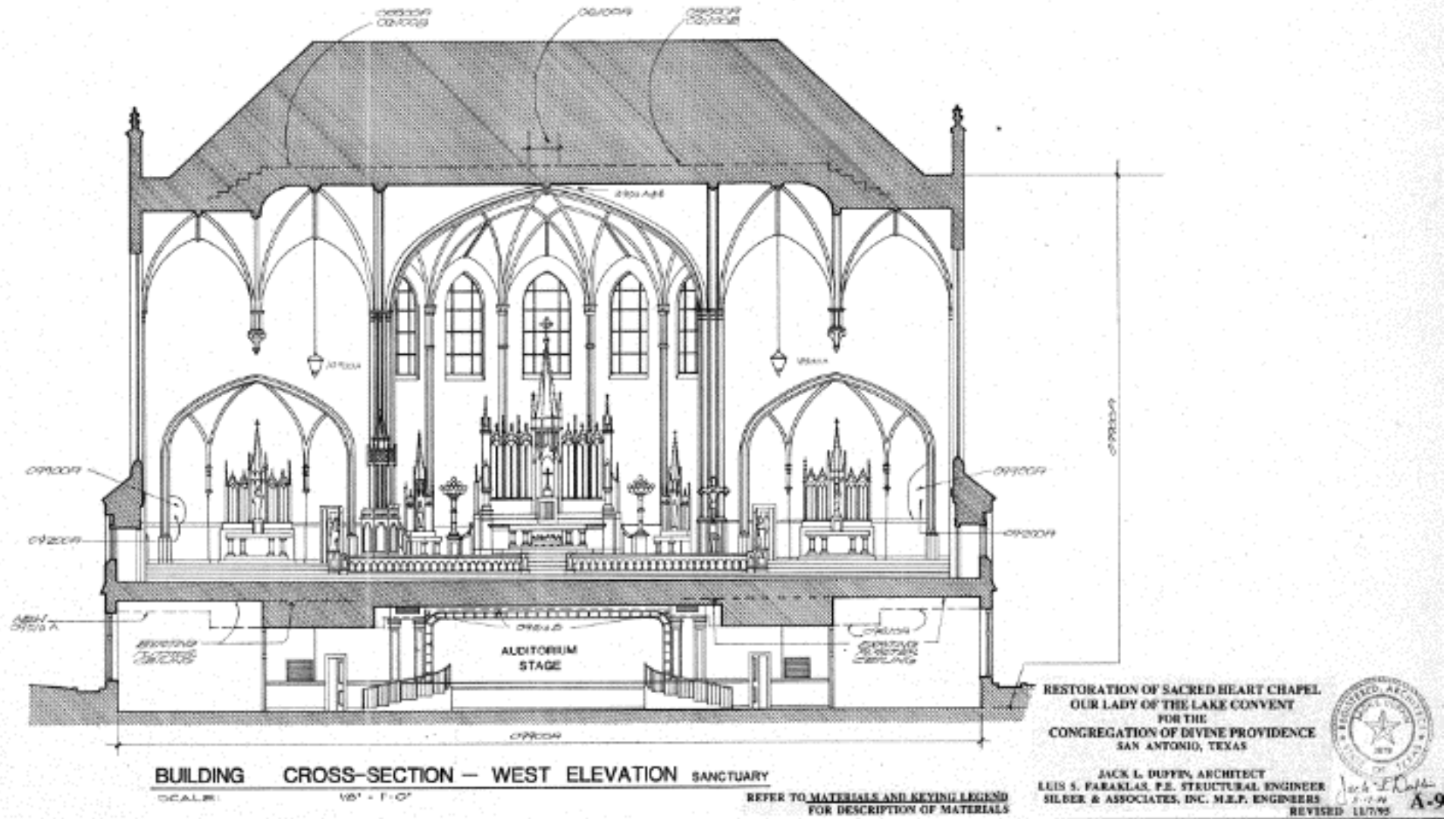
Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

Figure 27: Current Plans, Auditorium/Ground-Floor.



Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

Figure 28: Current Plans, West Elevation Cross Section.



Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

---

**Photographs**

Property: Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel  
Location: San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas  
Photographer: Italia Guardano  
Date: February 24, 2021

Photo 1: Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel with OLLU Main Building (left) and Sisters of Divine Providence Convent (right). East elevation, looking west.



Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

---

Photo 2: Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel. East (front) elevation, looking west.



Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

---

Photo 3: Chapel entrance detail, looking west.



Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

---

Photo 4: Pediment detail, view west.



Photo 5: North corridor between Chapel and Main Building. View west.



Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

---

Photo 6: The open walkway atop the north corridor. View south.



Photo 7: The south corridor's 2<sup>nd</sup> floor addition enclosed the rooftop walkway from the Convent. View: Southwest.



Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

---

Photo 8: South elevation, looking northeast.



Photo 9: Rear (west) elevation of south corridor showing 1995 elevator addition.





Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

---

Photo 10: Tower spire with slate tiles, stamped panels, and cast stone cornice details. Looking northeast.



Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

---

Photo 11: Rear (west) elevation, looking east.



Photo 12: North elevation, looking south.



Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

---

Photo 13: Stair exit on east elevation of north transept. Looking west.



Photo 14: Entrance to chapel nave from narthex (entry vestibule). Looking west.



Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

---

Photo 15: Ribbed vaulting in the nartex and original light fixtures. Looking south to 2<sup>nd</sup> floor corridor entrance.



Photo 16: View from nave entrance looking west to sanctuary.



Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

---

Photo 17: View southwest from nave aisle. Chevrons and molding accentuate ribbed vaulting.



Photo 18: Apse. Looking west.



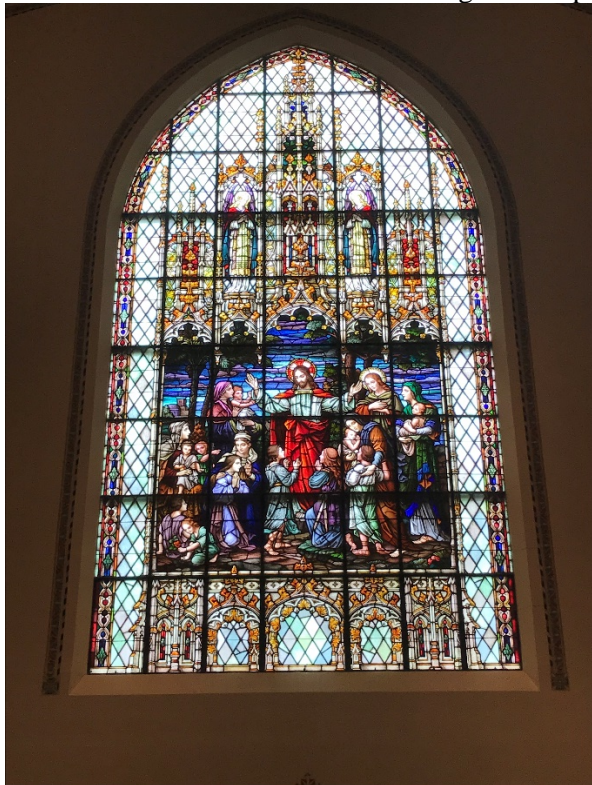
Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

---

Photo 19: West wall of north transept.



Photo 20: Emil Frei Art Glass Co. designed and produced all stained glass at Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel.



Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

---

Photo 21: View of nave from sanctuary. Looking east.



Photo 22: Emil Frei, Jr. produced the sacristy windows in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.



Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

---

Photo 23: Ground floor auditorium. Looking west.



Photo 24: Ground level of south corridor looking south to convent entrance. Double doors (right) open to the auditorium.





Sacred Heart Conventual Chapel, San Antonio, Bexar, Texas

---

Photo 25: Enclosed 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of south corridor looking north to, what was once, an exterior door to Chapel.



Photo 26: Ground level of north corridor looking south to chapel building entrance.

