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# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

## 1 NAME

HISTORIC

AND/OR COMMON

St. Mary's Church (and Cemetery)

## 2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

Church Street

CITY, TOWN

Crompton - Vicinity of West Warwick

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

VICINITY OF

District 2 - Edward Beard

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

Rhode Island

44

Kent

003

## 3 CLASSIFICATION

### CATEGORY

DISTRICT

BUILDING(S)

STRUCTURE

SITE

OBJECT

### OWNERSHIP

PUBLIC

PRIVATE

BOTH

### PUBLIC ACQUISITION

IN PROCESS

BEING CONSIDERED

### STATUS

OCCUPIED

UNOCCUPIED

WORK IN PROGRESS

### ACCESSIBLE

YES: RESTRICTED

YES: UNRESTRICTED

NO

### PRESENT USE

AGRICULTURE

COMMERCIAL

EDUCATIONAL

ENTERTAINMENT

GOVERNMENT

INDUSTRIAL

MILITARY

MUSEUM

PARK

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

RELIGIOUS

SCIENTIFIC

TRANSPORTATION

OTHER:

## 4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

St. Mary's Parish

STREET & NUMBER

1599 Main Street

CITY, TOWN

West Warwick

VICINITY OF

STATE

Rhode Island 02893

## 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

West Warwick Town Hall

STREET & NUMBER

1170 Main Street

CITY, TOWN

West Warwick

STATE

Rhode Island 02893

## 6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Not so represented

DATE

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

St. Mary's Catholic Church stands on a hilltop site above the commercial area of the central Rhode Island mill village of Crompton, overlooking, to the west, the Pawtuxet River and Valley. The original and main portion of the church was completed in 1845, making it the oldest Catholic church building in the state.

The church is a wood-framed, gable-roofed, one-story structure, with wall cover of white-painted shingles, set on a foundation of rough mortared fieldstone and granite boulders, now covered with smooth concrete. One slender brick chimney rises within its southwest corner. Placed fairly high above and close to Church Street, a narrow residential roadway, the church has a stone retaining wall in front with a break allowing for a series of steps leading up to the entrance. As the building's post-1845 extensions run back into the hillside, there is also a retaining wall there. North of the church, what must once have been a sloping lawn has been carved out to provide a sizeable sunken asphalt parking area. By the south side of the building a drive passes up to the extensive parish cemetery behind, Rhode Island Historical Cemetery, West Warwick Number 8.

While, today, the church has, in plan, the form of a Roman cross because transepts, sanctuary, and tower were added after 1845, in its initial form it was a plain oblong, thirty by fifty feet, with a central front (west) entrance and four window and/or door bays along each side. Doubtless constructed by artisan members of its first congregation, with necessary economy, the building must have been rather barn-like in appearance when it was first completed. This section still makes up the main body or nave of the church and is very simple, with flat-headed windows of conventional proportion which were probably originally double-hung and glazed with common glass but which now contain stained glass.

In 1856, a chancel extension, lighted by small Gothic windows, was added at the east end, and northern and southern gable-roofed transept projections were also made. In 1859, a square, forty-five-foot-high frame tower containing a vestibule, an enlargement of the choir-loft, and a belfry, was placed in front of the original entrance. This tower combines elements of the Italianate bracketed style--its nearly-flat, widely overhanging bracketed roof surmounted by a low, plain balustrade and its silhouette--with such Gothic elements as its pointed-arched portal, windows (filled with clear glass in diaper-pattern astraglas), and louvered belfry openings. The plain structure of 1844-1845 was, thus, made a picturesque if somewhat awkward building by the 1859 addition of the tower. It should be noted that the church suffered severe damage in 1926 when its roof burned and the interior was partially gutted. Repairs completed by 1930 included

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repainting, replacement of window glass and sash, and some simplification of interior ornament.

The floor plan, apparently unaltered since 1859, provides a narthex in the bottom level of the western tower, from which a run of five steps leads to a door of two leaves, each partially filled with stained glass, which, in turn, opens into the nave. This long space contains two rows of twenty-two pews each, served by central and side aisles. At its east end are the two lateral transept projections and, beyond a high segmental-arched proscenium, is the chancel, raised one step above the main floor and backed by a shallow sacristy room.

At the west end of the building a choir loft supported on slim Tuscan columns projects into the auditorium for about one quarter of its length. This balcony has a central semicircular outward bow in its low, horizontally-panelled front, and at its rear it gains additional space and light through a round-arched opening into an area directly above the vestibule and below the belfry in the tower. Access to the choir loft is by an enclosed stair in the north-west corner of the nave.

Similar enclosed stairs (with cupboards under their landings) in the northeast and southeast corners lead to galleries with sloping floors in the transepts. Each of these galleries is supported by Tuscan columns, has a straight, panelled rail, and formerly contained four long pews whose marks can still be seen on one of their end walls. Both transepts have, at lower level, flat-topped doors leading out to small side vestibules.

The rectangular chancel receives light from two narrow lateral stained-glass windows of Gothic form, and two doorways of pointed-arch shape lead through its rear wall into the sacristy, which is lit by similar windows.

Interior trim is simple. Doors--mostly old, four-panelled ones--and windows have plain architrave surrounds. Walls (except in the chancel, where they are sky blue) and ceiling are of plain cream-colored plaster; there is presently no ceiling cornice, although a plain dado board runs around the walls and at the auditorium's

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western end, only, has narrow vertical boarding below it. The windows of the nave and transepts contain stained glass, of the same basic design for each, in muted green, yellow and amber tones; these appear to date from the 1930s and the post-fire repairs. From this same time also would seem to date the proscenium woodwork of the chancel, which comprises fluted Tuscan pilasters on plinths, ostensibly supporting the thinly-moulded edging of its segmental arch (the design used throughout the stained-glass windows is somewhat akin to this). Flooring is of hardwood, mostly covered now by rubber tiling in a quiet marbled design of grey-green with white and tan veining, except in the chancel, where carpeting of a blue matching its walls is used. New confessional stalls of oak-stained wood and conservative design have recently been installed beneath each of the transept galleries

The furniture which embellishes this fairly austere interior includes two long rows of pews with panelled ends whose cappings are of downward-sloping "S" form. The panels themselves are painted white and the rest of the wood trim black. Small urn finials top the panelled screen before the first row of pews. In the sanctuary and transept areas, statues of religious figures stand on white-painted, panelled, and carved wooden pedestals of the Victorian era. Illumination is by several modern dull-finish brass chandeliers of a sort of "Williamsburg reproduction" design. Along the side walls of the church are placed modern, slightly-tinted carved wooden plaques, the Stations of the Cross. In keeping with changes in liturgical practice, the chancel has been rearranged and refurbished, and the altar, lectern, baptismal font, bishop's chair, and other seat furniture now are all of blond woods and of functional Scandinavian-type design.

Extending up and beyond the slope (east) behind the church for a considerable space is the parish cemetery (Rhode Island Historical Cemetery, West Warwick Number 8). It contains numerous weathered stone markers of tall, thin nineteenth-century type, many of white marble, as well as more robust polished ones of later date. The cemetery has served the parish since the beginning and holds the burials of the first members of St. Mary's Church including that of Mary Doran, a prime mover in establishing the church in Crompton. While tree groupings have understandably not been desirable in the cemetery, there yet remain some pleasing ones beside and in front of the church.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1845-1846, 1856, 1859 BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

St. Mary's Church is deserving of attention for two primary reasons: first, for its picturesque if slightly awkward embodiment of mid-nineteenth century Gothic and Italianate architectural stylistic ideals, and second, and more importantly, for the fact that it is the oldest extant structure in Rhode Island built specifically to house the functions of the Catholic church, a purpose it has served without interruption since its dedication in 1845. Rhode Island today is an overwhelmingly Catholic and immigrant state. St. Mary's Church testifies to the early origins and lasting impact of both of these major social forces.

St. Mary's as a piece of provincial architecture, picturesque in silhouette and siting, has a value all its own. In its 1844-1845 configuration, it is an interesting example of the plain sturdily built church raised by local manpower; in its 1850s additions, it is a unique exemplar of the "builder's guide" wooden Gothic-and-Italianate style in vogue at mid-century. St. Mary's siting, high above the bustling and now rather time-worn village of Crompton, with shade trees on either side and the old tranquil parish cemetery at the rear, lends it additional visual impact and presence.

Organized Catholicism did not exist in Rhode Island until after the Revolutionary War. Then, various developments--including unrest in the West Indies and internal difficulties in France--led to a gradual increase in the number of immigrants, at first mostly French and many of them Catholic, who came to Rhode Island. The strongest influence on early nineteenth century immigration to Rhode Island was the development and rapid expansion of water-powered manufacturing throughout the state which created a demand for labor so far exceeding the native supply that a labor vacuum resulted. Immigrants in ever-increasing numbers were drawn by employment opportunities in manufacturing as well as by those in construction projects such as the Fort Adams, the Blackstone Canal, and the Providence and Stonington Railroad. The accelerating influx of Irish immigrants, which began in the mid 1820's and continued through the 1850s, as a result of these forces and of famine and political unrest in Ireland, provided the foundation for organized Catholicism in the state.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Patrick Conley and Matthew Smith, Catholicism in Rhode Island ... p.21.

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In the nineteenth century, Rhode Island Catholics were generally dependent for worship upon visiting missionary priests who performed Mass and other functions in rented or offered quarters, often private residences, on an intermittent basis. The construction of the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul in Providence in 1838 and the construction of other church buildings\* in Newport and Pawtucket about the same time were important steps for the growing Catholic community. To Sts. Peter and Paul traveled worshippers from many parts of Rhode Island, including Catholics at Crompton.

The first textile mill at Crompton was a stone cotton mill built in 1807 by the Providence Manufacturing Company. In 1823, the business was purchased by Seth Wheaton, Edward Carrington, and Benjamin Cozzens who renamed it the Crompton Company. The operation soon expanded and by the mid 1830s it was attracting a significant number of Catholic Irish workers. Among the immigrants was Mary Doran, wife of Paul Doran, a calico printer at Crompton Print Works. Mary Doran was instrumental in founding the church at Crompton and lies buried in the parish cemetery behind it. It was she who donated the one-acre lot, a fine hilltop piece of land overlooking village and valley on which St. Mary's was built. Ground-breaking was October 15, 1844; the church was completed and equipped by January 4, 1845; and July 20th of that year the church was formally dedicated by Bishop Tyler of the Diocese of Hartford to "Our Lady of Mount Carmel." According to local tradition, it was so dedicated because of its lofty site; but it soon became known as St. Mary's.

Until 1850, St. Mary's had no resident priest. That year Father Daniel Kelly was named pastor. Nine months later he was succeeded by Reverend James Gibson, a Yankee convert. He remained as pastor until he died in 1892, and much was accomplished under his long aegis: the church property was increased by seven-and-one-half acres and the sanctuary, transepts, and bell tower added to the original church structure; a parsonage was constructed; the cemetery was improved; two branch churches were established; a parish hall was built; and a brass band for the young and a temperance society for their elders were formed. By 1875 St. Mary's Parish had become so large that it included four other churches beside the mother church: S.S. Peter and Paul in Phenix, St. John the Baptist, St. Joseph's in Crompton, and St. Catherine's in Apponaug.

\*All demolished

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After Father Gibson's death there were no more such advances for fifty years until Reverend Barton Daggett was appointed pastor in 1942; his successors have carried on after him in keeping the parish a focal point in, and a lively contributor to, its community.

Over the long period since 1844 the parishioners of St. Mary's Church have made their individual contributions, too. Probably the husband of Mary Doran and fellow mill-workers put themselves to the construction of the original building and others, later, to its enlargement and adornment. Many fixtures and furnishings, including the stained-glass windows, have been presented by various generations of the congregation, which in time became not so heavily Irish as Italians, French Canadians and Middle Europeans also came to work in Crompton in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century. Although the textile industry has left the village, this ethnic variety of families remains and gives pride, devotion, time, and effort to St. Mary's Parish and its numerous activities and needs, not the least of which is careful attention to the place in which they worship.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Conley, Patrick T. and Smith, Matthew J. Catholicism in Rhode Island, The Formative Era. Diocese of Providence, 1976.  
 "History of the Parish." Four-page typescript assembled by St. Mary's Parish, 1977.

(see continuation sheet #5)

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY about 9-1/2 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,9	29,0	5,8,0	4,6	1,7	9,0,0	B	1,9	29,0	4,0,0	4,6	1,7	7,4,0
	ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING			ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING			
C	1,9	29,0	2,2,0	4,6	1,7	7,4,0	D	1,9	29,0	2,2,0	4,6	1,7	9,2,0
	ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING			ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

St. Mary's Church: plat 13, lot 86  
 Cemetery: plat 13, lots 20 and 98

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE Ancelin V. Lynch, National Register Coordinator  
 Richard B. Harrington, Consultant

ORGANIZATION

Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

DATE

April, 1978

STREET & NUMBER

150 Benefit Street

TELEPHONE

401-277-2678

CITY OR TOWN

Providence

STATE

Rhode Island 02903

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL  STATE  LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

*Richard B. Harrington*

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE June 21, 1978

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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"St. Mary's Church, Crompton Landmark," Official Directory and  
Information Guide for the Diocese of Providence. The Providence  
Visitor, Providence, R.I., 1973..

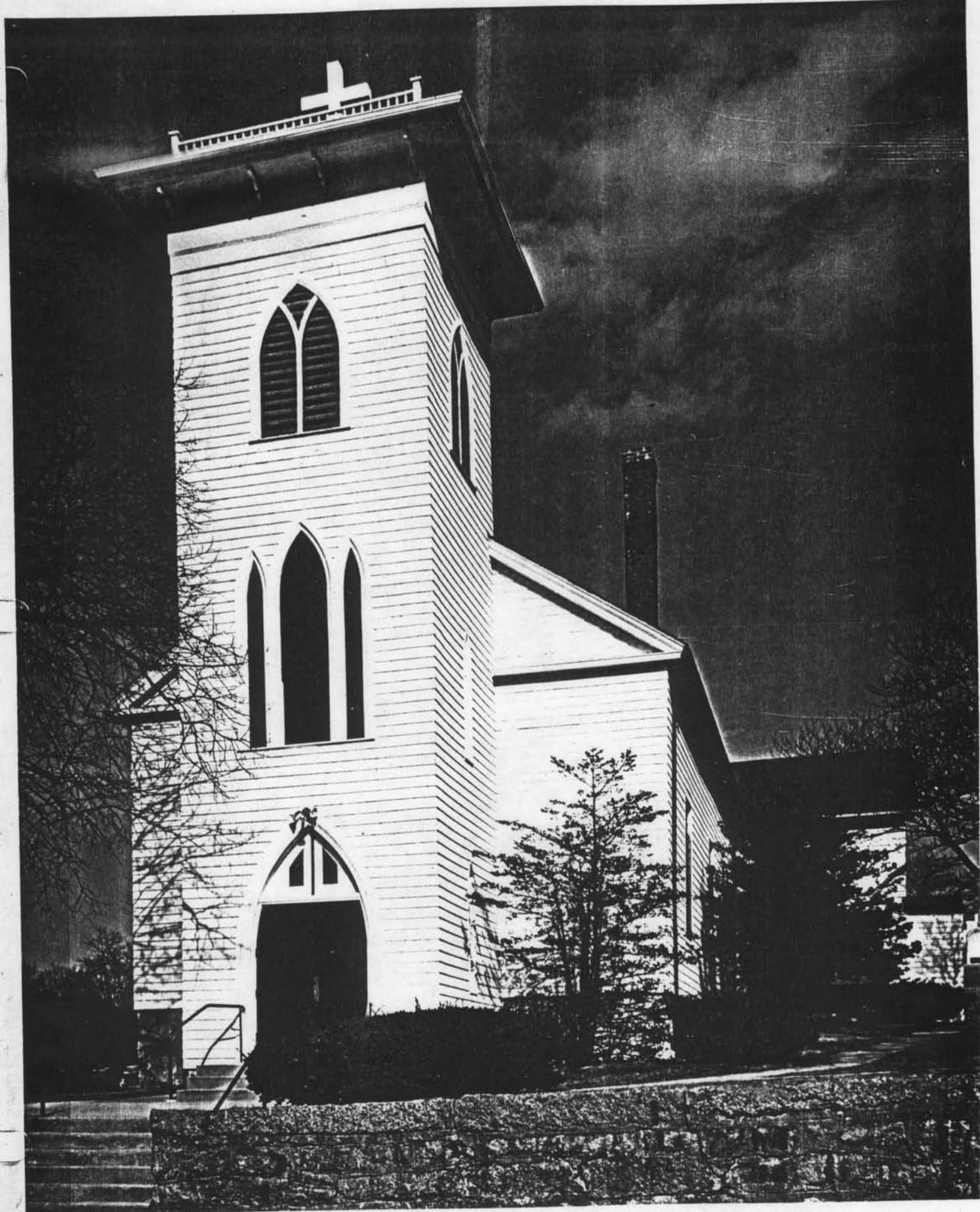


St. Mary's Church  
Crompton, West Warwick, Rhode Island

Warren Jagger, Photographer      April, 1977  
Negative: Rhode Island Historical Preservation  
Commission

Church from the north.

Photo 2



Received  
- 2/11/11  
Report  
B.W.  
4/87

St. Mary's Church  
Crompton, West Warwick, Rhode Island

Warren Jagger, Photographer      April, 1977  
Negative: Rhode Island Historical Preservation  
Commission

View of the Church from the west, southwest.

Photo 1



JAMES DOLAN

BORN  
DIED  
NATIVE OF  
ERECTED BY  
MAY  
DIED JUNE  
DIED IN

**DOLAN.**

St. Mary's Church  
Crompton, West Warwick, Rhode Island

Warren Jagger, Photographer April, 1977  
Negative: Rhode Island Historical Preservation  
Commission

St. Mary's Cemetery, looking southeast.

Photo 4



St. Mary's Church  
Crompton, West Warwick, Rhode Island

Warren Jagger, Photographer                      April, 1977  
Negative: Rhode Island Historical Preservation  
Commission

Interior from the west.

Photo 3



St. Mary's Church (and Cemetery)  
Crompton, West Warwick, R.I.

A	19	290580	4617900
B	19	290400	4617740
C	19	290220	4617740
D	19	290220	4617920

