Catholic Charities
Saint Paul Administration Building,
215 Old Sixth Street West, Saint Paul:
An Assessment of Significance

PREPARED BY

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PROJECT BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

Hess, Roise and Company was hired by Catholic Charities of the Twin Cities to evaluate the historical significance of 215 Old South Street West and determine whether the property meets the eligibility criteria for the National Register of Historic Places and/or local landmark designation. Richard Johnson was the point of contact for Catholic Charities with assistance from Ross Stiteley and Jordan Richter of Dominium an Jeff Garetz of Load Bearing, Inc. Charlene Roise managed the project for Hess Roise, and staff historian Rachel Peterson prepared the report with research assistance from staff researcher Katie Goetz.

Ms. Peterson visited the site on September 16, 2016, and reviewed the interior and exterior of the building. The consultant team conducted research in Hess Roise in-house files, the Ramsey County Historical Society, the Saint Paul Public Library, the Minnesota Historical Society, and the Hennepin History Museum.

Aerial with location of 215 Old Sixth Street West highlighted

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

The Catholic Charities Saint Paul Administration Building at 215 Old Sixth Street West sits at the northeast corner of the complex intersection of Old Sixth Street West, Main Street, West Fifth Street, and Smith Avenue North. Originally constructed as a mortuary, it now holds offices. The interchange of Interstates 94 and 35E is northwest of the site. A large portion of the building's block is surface parking lots. A building, also belonging to Catholic charities, is on the east side of the block. A new Catholic Charities building is under construction to the west across Main Street.

Exterior
215 Old Sixth Street West is a two-story rectangular building with a flat roof. Its walls are variegated red and brown brick. The building directly abuts sidewalks on its south and west sides. Surface parking lots are adjacent to the north and east walls.

The building has two similar primary facades, which face Old Sixth Street West (south) and Main Street (west). The first floor of the south facade has a central, main entrance, which has an arched stone surround with carved rosettes. It holds a non-historic door. A carved-stone shield is above the doorway. A pair of storefront windows flank the entrance. Both have stone surrounds and a row of freestanding metal angels along the top. The windows do not appear to be original, but have original metal grilles across the bottom. Large newer awnings shelter each window and the entrance. The second floor has three pairs of arched window openings, which hold original rectangular windows. The arch is filled with decorative brick, which appears to be the original condition. The central pair of windows has a metal Juliet balcony. A stone shield with

The south (left) and east (walls), looking northwest

The west wall, looking east

swags on either side is above the center windows. The roofline has an elevated triangular parapet in the center, which is flanked by a pair of stone scrolls. Alternating squares of brick and stone follow the roofline.

The west facade features many of the same details as the south facade. A storefront window with the same carved-stone surround, metal angels, and metal grille is at the south end of the wall. To the north, five windows on the first floor have rectangular openings, stone sills, and soldier-brick lintels. An ornate secondary entrance is near the north end of the wall. It has a rectangular stone surround with carved rosettes, and a wood divided-light transom and frame are within the opening. A wood beam with carved flutes and rosettes runs between the transom and the non-historic metal security doors. Original ornate sconces are on either side of the door. A small opening north of the secondary entrance has been filled with a solid panel. At the north end of the wall is an arched opening, which now holds wood paneling. It mirrors a second arched opening on the east wall and both were likely vehicle entrances or loading bays. The second-floor window openings are all arched with stone sills, rectangular windows, and decorative brick in the arch. Two of the windows have metal balconies. A narrow rectangular window is midway between the first and second floors near the north end of the wall. A triangular pediment is at the south end of the wall. A carved-stone shield with swags is centered underneath the pediment. The same decorative cornice seen on the main facade continues on this wall.

The north wall is utilitarian and has no decoration or openings. The majority of the wall is light-colored common brick. This section abutted an auto shop demolished in 2004 and was not visible. The top portion of the wall was visible and is the same red brick used on the other walls.

The north wall, looking south; the painted section was originally concealed by an adjacent building

The ornamentation on the east wall is limited to a small return of the decorative cornice at its south end. The single window opening at the south end of the second floor appears to be original; it has the same stone sill as the openings on the south and west walls. The other six window openings on this wall were added sometime after the building's original construction, probably during the 1979 renovation given the type of window installed. An arched opening at the north end of the wall appears to have original transom lights in its arch. The remainder of the opening, which was likely a vehicle bay, holds a non-historic window and concrete block.

Interior
The basement of 215 Old Sixth is divided into a kitchen, storage rooms, bathrooms, and mechanical rooms. Some partition walls are concrete or clay tile and are likely original. Others

are gypsum board and were installed at a later date. Modern vinyl-tile floors are throughout the basement. Most doors and finishes appear to be later additions.

The building's first floor is divided into several spaces. The formal lobby is on the south side. The room has a very tall ceiling, which is decorated with egg-and-dart plaster moldings and multiple original chandeliers. All four walls have panels framed with historic molding. An original fireplace is on the east wall. It has a carved-wood mantle and tile surround. A vestibule,

Set of three historic doors in lobby; looking northwest
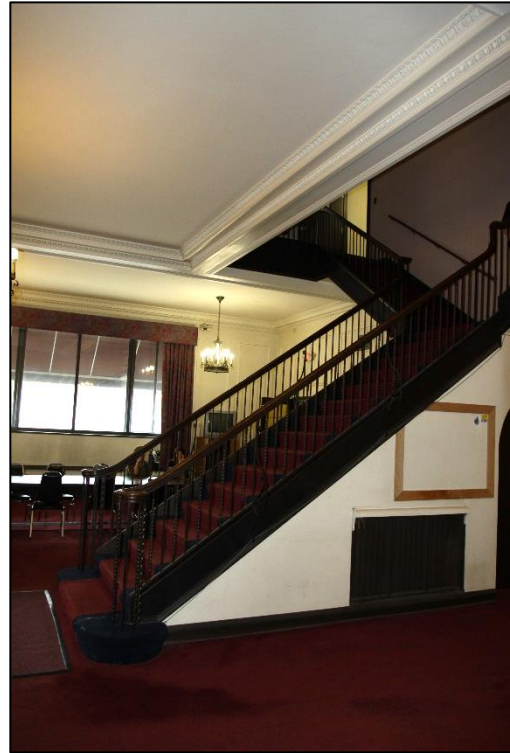
Grand stair in lobby, looking northwest

Non-historic vestibule in lobby, looking southeast

likely installed in the 1979 renovation, surrounds the main entrance on the south wall. It has large glass doors and windows on its north and east sides and a solid west wall. The vestibule does not reach the ceiling and stops below the main door's transom.

A grand staircase in the center of the lobby dominates the room. Midway up, the stair splits into two branches, one heading east and the other going west. It has simple wood handrails and alternating twisted and straight metal balusters. The stairs are covered with newer carpet. Multiple pairs of historic French doors on either side of the grand stair lead into a large open room, now used as a client lounge. This was probably originally two viewing rooms, but the rooms were combined in the past few months when two openings were cut into the wall separating them. A hallway on the east side of the floor leads to the north end of the building where there are offices, a storage room, and elevator and stairs to the basement and second floor.

The landing at the top of the grand stair is the most decorated space on the second floor. The decorative banister encircles the stairwell opening, crown molding runs along the top of the walls, and two original pendant lights hang from the ceiling.

Non-original doors along the landing's south wall lead to a series of offices. The office in the southwest corner appears to be original. It has wood paneled doors and crown molding is visible above the dropped ceiling. It seems that the partition walls dividing the remaining offices were

*Second-floor landing at top of grand stair, looking northeast*

Offices on north half of second floor, looking northwest

added at a later time. A bathroom on the west side of the landing has newer finishes.

The area north of the landing is largely open, with rows of offices on the east and west sides and square columns down the center. A modern acoustic-tile ceiling runs through the entire space. Many of the partition walls do not extend above the dropped ceiling, indicating that they were installed at a later date.

The building has a total of four staircases. Two stairs, one at the north end of the building and one at the south end, run between the basement and the first floor. Both have simple wood handrails and treads covered with texturized rubber. Two additional stairs run between the first and second floors: the grand stair in the main lobby and another stair along the north wall. The north stair appears to have been previously covered with some material, which has been removed leaving adhesive on the stairs. The landing is covered with vinyl tiles. A modern elevator is also at the north end of the building.
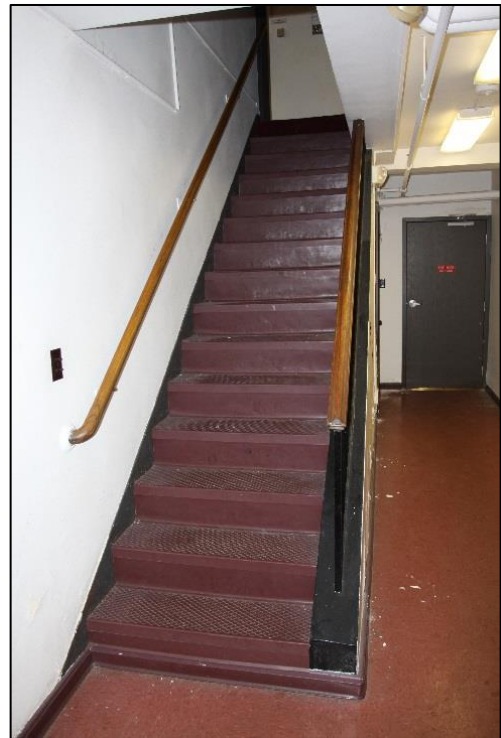
Right: Original stair with rubber-covered treads, leading from basement to first floor, looking north

HISTORY AND CONTEXT

The building at 215 Old Sixth Street West was constructed in 1928 for the O'Halloran and Murphy funeral home. The building served as a mortuary until 1978. At that time, it was purchased by Catholic Charities and became their administration building. It continues to be used by Catholic Charities.

The Business of Dying in Saint Paul
At the end of the nineteenth century, Saint Paul's economy and population began to grow rapidly. Improved transportation brought more people in to the city, encouraging construction and demanding additional services. Saint Paul's early economy was dependent on extractive-resource industries like mining and farming. As the city expanded, however, there was a need for more diverse and specialized industries. As stated in the Minnesota Historic Context for Urban Centers, these new businesses "seem to have [had] a crucial importance in [Saint Paul's] twentieth-century development."[1]

One profession that was necessary for a growing modern city like Saint Paul was undertaking. A 1903 article in the *Saint Paul Globe* estimated that deaths occurred annually at a rate of ten for every 1,000 people. Extrapolated, there were an average of 2,000 funerals in Saint Paul each year, which were coordinated by a small number of morticians.[2]

Dennis O'Halloran founded one of Saint Paul's earliest funeral homes in 1876. He sold religious articles and books out of a storefront on Wabasha Street and operated a mortuary at the rear of the building. O'Halloran and his family lived in the apartment on the second floor. At the time, there were only four undertakers listed in the Saint Paul city directory.[3]

In 1880, Dennis's son Patrick joined the firm and it was renamed O'Halloran and O'Halloran. When William Murphy became a partner six years later after Dennis O'Halloran's death, the company was again renamed, becoming O'Halloran and Murphy. The business continued to be a family affair. Patrick O'Halloran served as the president and treasurer, William Murphy was the vice president, and John O'Halloran, Patrick's son, was the secretary.[4]

In 1888, O'Halloran and Murphy moved to a new location at 18 West Sixth Street. Presumably, this move gave them a larger space, which was often necessary for morticians given the number of services they provided. Funeral homes coordinated all aspects of the funeral process including embalming, casket sales, clothes for the deceased, obituaries, officiants for the funeral, hearse rentals, grave digging, and even "removal ambulances." While funeral parlors handled a wide range of needs, Saint Paul's funeral industry was still relatively small at the end of the 1880s.

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[1] "Minnesota Historic Contexts: Urban Centers, 1870-1940," available at the State Historic Preservation Office, Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul; Carole Zellie and Garnet Peterson, "Saint Paul Historic Context Studies: Downtown Saint Paul, 1849-1975," 2001, available from the Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Commission.
[2] Moira F. Harris and Leo J. Harris, "Good Grief! Said Charlie Brown: The Business of Death in Bygone Saint Paul," *Ramsey County History* 45 (Spring 2010): 19.
[3] "O'Halloran and Murphy," undated clipping available at the George Latimer Central Library, Saint Paul; *Saint Paul City Directory* (Saint Paul: Saint Paul Pioneer Press Company, 1877), 384.
[4] "Our Story," O'Halloran and Murphy Cremation and Funeral Services, accessed September 14, 2016, http://www.ohalloranmurphy.com/home/index.cfm/aboutus/history/fh_id/12984/story/4197; *Polk's Saint Paul (Minnesota) City Directory* (Saint Paul: R. L. Polk, 1930), 1084.

O'Halloran and Murphy were one of only nine funeral parlors listed in the city directory in 1888. The industry grew modestly over the next two decades, and there were twenty funeral homes in Saint Paul that year. While there was theoretically enough business to go around, only five or six establishments did the bulk of the city's undertaking. As a relatively small company, it does not appear that O'Halloran and Murphy were one of the major players in Saint Paul's funeral business.[5]

The funeral industry continued to grow throughout the early decades of the twentieth century and by 1927, there were forty firms in operation. This was partially due to the growth of the city, but also because of increased cultural acceptance of funeral parlors. Death had been a privately handled affair prior to the turn of the twentieth century. Improved medical care, nutrition, and sanitation led to lower mortality rates, meaning that the average American did not encounter death as frequently as earlier generations. Additionally, deaths occurring in the home became outnumbered by deaths occurring in a hospital. These factors estranged people from death and funeral arrangements, giving funeral directors a market to handle the increasingly scientific process of preparing a body for burial.[6]

New Location for a Growing Business
In 1928, O'Halloran and Murphy began constructing a new building at the corner of Sixth Street West and Main Street. Around this time, Saint Paul was experiencing a wave of development in this area. Between 1926 and 1936, several office buildings and government centers were constructed west of Wabasha Street. O'Halloran and Murphy's new building was one of them. It was just down the street from Saint Joseph's Hospital, which was advantageous as hospitals became the primary shepherd between life and death. The two-story building included an ornate lobby with a grand staircase and decorative angels above the storefront windows. These sorts of details, ones that communicated both formality and comfort, were common in funeral homes. The undertaking field cultivated public trust in part through architecture that was equally confident and familiar.[7]

Patrick O'Halloran died in 1935 and William Murphy became the firm's president and treasurer. C. Esther O'Halloran, Patrick's eldest daughter, served as vice president and John O'Halloran continued in his post as secretary. Murphy acted as president for only three years until his death in 1938. After his passing, John and C. Esther O'Halloran split leadership roles. The following year, the two O'Hallorans undertook an interior renovation of the building. No details are known about precisely what work was completed.[8]

John O'Halloran died in 1949. The city directories from that year list his wife, Dolores O'Halloran, as the president and secretary. C. Esther O'Halloran continued as treasurer and vice president. With the appointment of Dolores O'Halloran, the business became entirely female-led.

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[5] Harris and Harris, "Good Grief!," 17-18.

[6] Gary Laderman, *Rest in Peace: A Cultural History of Death and the Funeral Home in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1-4.

[7] Timothy Trent Blade, "Grave Undertakings: The Business of Death in Early Minneapolis," *Hennepin History* 51 (Spring 1992): 8; Building Permit No. 30331 (dated March 21, 1928), available at the Ramsey County Historical Society, Saint Paul; Zellie and Peterson, "Saint Paul Historic Context Studies: Downtown Saint Paul, 1849-1975".

[8] *Polk's Saint Paul (Ramsey County, Minn.) City Directory* (Saint Paul: R. L. Polk, 1935), 894: Permit Index Card for 215 Sixth Street West, available at the Ramsey County Historical Society, Saint Paul.

This continued with the addition of Eileen O'Halloran (Dolores and John's daughter) to the posts of vice president and secretary in 1950.[9]

Catholic Charities
In 1961, O'Halloran and Murphy built a second funeral home, called the Snelling Avenue Chapel, in Saint Paul. A third location, the Roseville Memorial Chapel on Hamline Avenue, was constructed seven years later. It was common during this period for funeral homes to follow the flow of people from downtowns to the suburbs. Many firms in the Twin Cities gave up their downtown locations in the second half of the twentieth century.[10]

O'Halloran and Murphy did steady business out of the storefront at 215 Old Sixth Street, but the company did not rise to significance within Saint Paul's mortuary industry. Available resources do not document any particularly prominent funerals attended to by the firm. They also do not indicate that the business or its leadership held a significant place in the community. By all known accounts, O'Halloran and Murphy was a reliable, but ordinary, Saint Paul funeral home.

In 1978, O'Halloran and Murphy sold 215 Old Sixth Street West to Catholic Charities. No details on the specifics of the sale are available, but there was likely a connection between the O'Halloran and Murphy leadership and Catholic Charities. Many of the non-profit's buildings were purchased from or donated by people involved with the organization.[11]

Catholic Charities undertook a renovation of the building's interior to make it useable as an office. Based on physical evidence, the alterations included installing partition walls on the second floor to frame new offices, replacing flooring on all levels, and adding sprinklers in the basement. At some point, an elevator was installed at the north end of the building. It used an existing penthouse on the roof, which previously held a roof-access stair. A new stair leading from the second floor to the roof was constructed as a replacement.[12]

Catholic Charities initially used the building as an administrative office. It subsequently held adoption and refugee services and was often used as overflow space for other Catholic Charities programs. The building now holds the Listening House, a homeless shelter and community center.

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[9] Death Certificate No. 1949-MN-024724, available at the Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul; *Polk's Saint Paul (Ramsey County, Minn.) City Directory* (Saint Paul: R. L. Polk, 1949), 545; *Polk's Saint Paul (Ramsey County, Minn.) City Directory* (Saint Paul: R. L. Polk, 1950), 565.
[10] "Our Story," O'Halloran & Murphy Cremation and Funeral Services.
[11] Permit Index Card for 215 Sixth Street West; Gerard Lauer, Catholic Charities Senior Program Manager, in conversation with Rachel Peterson, September 16, 2016.
[12] Permit Index Card for 215 Sixth Street West.

EVALUATION OF NATIONAL REGISTER ELIGIBILITY

The National Register of Historic Places provides a standard measure to evaluate the significance of 215 Old Sixth Street. To qualify for the National Register, properties must meet at least one of the following criteria:

- **Association value/Event—Criterion A:** Properties that are associated with events that have contributed to broad patterns of history.
- **Association value/Person—Criterion B:** Properties that are associated with significant persons and illustrate their achievements.
- **Design or Construction value—Criterion C:** Properties with physical characteristics that are distinctive of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.
- **Information value—Criterion D:** Properties that have yielded or are likely to yield important information about prehistory or history.

In addition, a property must be at least fifty years old unless it is of exceptional importance (Criteria Consideration G). Properties must also retain sufficient integrity to convey their significance. The seven aspects of integrity are location, setting, materials, design, workmanship, feeling, and association. Properties can be significant individually or as contributing elements of a historic district. Significance can be local, regional, or national.

The property is most appropriately considered for the National Register under Criterion A in the area of commerce for its role in the funerary industry of Saint Paul. It does not, however, significantly contribute to "events that have made a significant contribution to the broad pattern of our history," as required by Criterion A. Consequently, the building does not appear to be individually eligible. Widespread demolition and new construction throughout the neighborhood negates the possibility of any eligible historic district to which 215 Old Sixth would be a contributing property.

The building was not associated with any individuals of sufficient significance to qualify under Criterion B. While it is a handsome structure, the property is not representative of a significant style of architecture and therefore does not qualify under Criterion C.

EVALUATION OF LOCAL DESIGNATION ELIGIBILITY

The Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Commission has designation criteria that are similar to the National Register, but more inclusive:

(1) The properties' character, interest or value is part of the heritage or cultural characteristics of the city of Saint Paul, State of Minnesota, or the United States.
(2) The properties' location is the site of a significant historic event.
(3) The properties are identifiable with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the culture and development of the City of Saint Paul.
(4) The properties exhibit a distinguished characteristic of an architectural or engineering specimen.
(5) The properties are identifiable as the work of an architect, engineer, or master builder whose individual work has influenced the development of Saint Paul.
(6) The properties embody elements of architectural or engineering design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship which represent a significant architectural or engineering innovations.
(7) The properties' unique location or physical characteristic is established and familiar in the neighborhoods or communities of the City of Saint Paul.

The O'Halloran and Murphy funeral home appears eligible for local designation under Criteria 1 and 7. The building was constructed in 1928 during a period of significant construction on the west side of downtown Saint Paul. O'Halloran and Murphy was one of Saint Paul's earliest funeral parlors. The company's growth paralleled a national trend in the undertaking industry and resulted in the construction of the building at 215 Old Sixth Street West. O'Halloran and Murphy served the community from the location until 1978. 215 Old Sixth is a familiar building in the neighborhood. It is visible from West Fifth Street, a well-traffic street, which is becomes an entrance ramp for Interstate 94. This position is fairly prominent and has likely boosted recognition of the property in the neighborhood. The building retains sufficient integrity to merit local designation.

Period and Area of Significance
A property's period of significance is the time when it was associated with important events, activities, or persons, or attained the characteristics that qualify it for listing in the National Register. Properties must be at least fifty years old to qualify unless they are considered of "exceptional importance."

For 215 Old Sixth, the period of significance begins with its construction in 1928. O'Halloran and Murphy occupied the building through 1978 and continually used it as a funeral home. At this time, there is not sufficient scholarly research to merit extending the period of significance past the standard National Register fifty-year cutoff. Therefore, the period of significance ends in 1966. With time and further study, the end date could be extended.

Integrity
An evaluation of integrity must consider the property's current condition in light of its historical evolution. The following discussion analyzes 215 Old Sixth Street West using the seven aspects of integrity as established by the National Register guidelines.

The building at 215 Old Sixth has integrity of **location**, the "place where the historic property was constructed or the place where the historic event occurred." The building remains in its original location.

Integrity of **design** is defined as "the combination of elements that create the form, plan, space, structure, and style of a property." This property has good integrity of design. The exterior retains its historic massing, and the window and door openings are their original dimension. The new window openings on the east wall do not detract from the overall design of the building. The interior has undergone more substantial alterations. The ornate lobby, grand, stair, and second-floor landing are still intact. Some new window openings and partition walls have been installed, but the building continues to reflect its history as a funeral parlor.

The integrity of **setting**—"the physical environment of a historic property" including its "relationship to surrounding features and open space"—of 215 Old Sixth has been compromised by extensive demolition and new construction in the area. The construction of Interstates 94 and 35E have had an immense impact on the neighborhood, requiring the demolition of many buildings and bringing a much different character. Additionally, several buildings on the same block as 215 Old Sixth have been razed and replaced with surface parking lots. Demolition has also occurred on the surrounding blocks. Immediately west across Main Street, the Labor and Professional Centre was torn down and a new building is under construction on its site.

The exterior integrity of **materials** has been impacted by the removal of the historic doors, storefront windows, and some interior finishes. The characteristic brickwork and carved stone, however, are intact. On the interior the intricate plaster moldings and fireplace in the lobby, and portions of the original millwork have also been retained.

Like the integrity of materials, the building's integrity of **workmanship** has been diminished by removal and replacement. The property, however, retains its historic brick and stone exterior with characteristic detailing that communicated the builders' craft. The interior plasterwork, installed by highly skilled craftsmen, is also intact.

Despite substantial alterations to the building's setting, 215 Old Sixth retains integrity of **feeling** and **association**, which are defined as the "expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular time period," and "the direct link between an important historic event or person and a historic property," respectively. The building retains much of its original exterior character and several significant interior elements. These features continue to communicate the building's history.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This property does not have particular individual significance to merit designation by the National Register. It does, however, contribute to the heritage of Saint Paul and appears eligible for local designation under Criteria 1 and 7. It is a good example of an early funeral home in Saint Paul, of which there are few remaining. The building was constructed for O'Halloran and Murphy, one of Saint Paul's earliest funeral parlors. The building communicates the history of the undertaking industry in the city, which grew in response to increasing acceptance of funeral homes and the rising population of Saint Paul. It retains sufficient integrity to qualify for designation.

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