

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

prop # 095906

Final

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ONE

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name St. Brigid's Church

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 2151 Van Ness Avenue not for publication

city or town San Francisco vicinity

state California code CA county San Francisco code 075 zip code _____

3. 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 nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature]

August 29, 1995

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

California Office of Historic Preservation

State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register
 See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:)

10/5/95

St. Brigid's Church
Name of Property

San Francisco County, CA
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

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

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/religious facility

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Vacant/not in use

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Romanesque

Other: Late Romanesque Revival

Late 19th & 20th Century Revival: Other: Romanesque

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Granite

walls Granite

roof Slate

other Terra cotta

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C 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.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A

- 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 # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Ethnic Heritage: Other: Irish

Period of Significance

1902-04

1930

Significant Dates

1930

1902-1904

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Minton, Henry A.

Shea (Frank T.) and Shea (Will D.)

Primary location of additional data: N/A

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

St. Brigid's Church
Name of Property

San Francisco County, CA
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 0.5 acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1

1	0	5	5	0	8	2	0	4	1	8	3	0	6	0
Zone	Easting				Northing									

3

Zone	Easting				Northing									

4

Zone	Easting				Northing									

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Anne Bloomfield, consultant
St. Brigid's Engineering Committee (Prot. N. 24924/94CA) c/o John Herrera,
organization James Peterson, Robert Tokarski, P.E. date 16 May 1995
street & number 2229 Webster Street telephone 415-922-1063
city or town San Francisco state CA zip code 94115

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name St. Brigid's Church
c/o St. Brigid's Church
street & number 445 Church Street telephone 415-565-3600
city or town San Francisco state CA zip code 94114

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. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 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 Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Information Systems, Paperwork Reduction Project (4004-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section Number 7 Page 1

St. Brigid's Church San Francisco, CA

Narrative Description:

St. Brigid's Church is a large, cross-plan church building, one tall story with mezzanine, basement and cross-gabled roof, in what might be termed Late Romanesque Revival style. Clad in rock-faced granite, it features a five-story corner tower, three wheel (or rose) windows in gables, and much intricate Irish-inspired terra cotta ornament. This ornament is concentrated at the three facade doorways, at selected windows, a mezzanine arcade, and the roofline. With zero setback except alongside the nave between tower and transept, the building is located in San Francisco on the north face of a hill, at the northwest corner of two multi-lane streets: Van Ness Avenue (U.S. Route 101) and Broadway. It is roughly at the northern and western termini, respectively, of these streets' commercial strips; around them is a dense residential area. The main sanctuary inside is a tall, columned space with lower side aisles, a great deal of attached sculpture, and a semi-circular apse. The basement, a gymnasium for the associated school, is near ground level on the Broadway (north) elevation but absorbed into the hillside at the south elevation. The church has had several periods of construction: the foundation and basement in 1896-1897, the superstructure including two stubby towers in 1902-1904, the facade and four-story corner tower in 1930, low sacristies added to the apse and new stained glass in the 1940s, and the top story and roof of the tower, along with apse remodeling, in 1965. The building is in very good condition, but it may need some seismic reinforcement in the near future. The changed stained glass and added sacristies occurred nearly 50 years ago, and the 1896 design showed a tower even taller than the five stories completed in 1965; a priests' house south of the building, where parking lot is now, was demolished at about the same time; otherwise the building is intact as to location, design, setting, workmanship, feeling, and association.

The basic granite is long rectangular blocks 14 inches high, about 5 inches thick, and of varying widths up to 80 inches. In several grey shades and irregular quantities of black specks, it had originally been San Francisco curbstones. Perhaps 90% of the building's cladding is these recycled curbstones, rock-faced (except for the center of the tower) and laid in level courses. The 10% of the facade that is terra cotta matches the granite color as nearly as possible; it is matte finish with speckles.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section Number 7 Page 2

St. Brigid's Church San Francisco, CA

Narrative Description (continued):

The terra cotta ornament of the main, central portal (on the east elevation along Van Ness Avenue) consists of five concentric arches modeled on French or Irish Romanesque churches. Each arch is decorated differently. The outer one is divided into double blocks patterned with an interlace derived from Celtic manuscripts, alternating with single blocks representing animal symbols. The next arch, of volute blocks, rests on lozenge-patterned columns with dove capitals. The third arch is narrow rosettes. The fourth arch is wide again, with a chevron pattern and Corinthian capitals. The innermost arch, like the first, has no columns but a combination of symbols and Celtic interlace on each block. The tympanum represents Christ enthroned, surrounded by Celtic interlace entwining the four winged gospel symbols (lion, ox, eagle, and man). The outer arch is set off from the main body of the building by simple moldings, and at the top is a cross-in-circle between a pair of almost Pre-Raphaelite-styled angel figures holding books inscribed in Latin.

Similar angels, holding tablets of the law, support the tympani of the flanking arched entrances in the tower faces. These tympani have a cross in a large interlaced circle upheld by more angels kneeling on a lintel decorated like the outer arch of the main doorway. The arches on these flanking doorways are composed of a plain granite surround lined with an elaborated rope molding of terra cotta.

A mezzanine arcade extends along the slightly recessed narthex facade between the towers. It is composed of a row of Deco style statues in arched niches, fronted by crocket-capitaled columns. The row has a border of moldings with Celtic interlace. The statues carry symbols of the 12 apostles, but their faces are said to represent executed leaders of Ireland's Easter Rising in 1916. Taller than the rest, the center niche has the statue of a woman holding a building, and its own interlace border and finial.

Above this arcade the gable is recessed further. Its wheel or rose window is a hub and a single ring of 12 spokes or petals, encircled by voussoir-shaped granite blocks. The cornice, raking on the gable and flat on the towers, is a "Lombard band": a series

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section Number 7 Page 3

St. Brigid's Church San Francisco, CA

Narrative Description (continued):

of narrow arches hanging from a molding and supported by "carved" corbels. On the stubby south tower this band is continuous with the raking band of the gable; on the tall corner tower, it tops the fourth of the five stories.

Each tower street elevation has, at mezzanine level, a pair of narrow arched windows with a central column, symbol-and-interlace spandrel, and simple sill of two winged animals flanking an open book. Single narrow arched windows, with granite block voussoirs, flank the main entrance and define two stories of the corner tower.

The north elevation, along Broadway, has almost no terra cotta. Its wheel window is similar to the facade one, but smaller. Instead of the Lombard band, the transept gable at mezzanine level has a recess about seven granite courses tall, stepped, with a column supporting each step and a small and narrow arch above the top pair of columns. Along the nave four tall, rather narrow arched windows are set in a double arch of granite voussoirs. One similar window is located between the transept and the apse's curve. The nave clerestory is set back the depth of the aisles within, and its windows are arched with a single course of voussoirs.

The south elevation, built to be partly concealed by the priests' house, has a wheel window but no terra cotta ornament. The nave windows and the granite match those on the street elevations. A wall of matching granite shields the parking area south of the building from view along the Van Ness Avenue side.

The 1940s sacristy addition at the west end is lower, with a band of three small arched windows and a flat roof, but it is clad in matching granite. The 1965 addition to the corner tower is clad in somewhat darker granite. It is inset slightly from the Lombard band, has triple windows on each face and a steep pyramid roof. These additions harmonize with the main fabric. However the apse roof appears to have been raised in 1965 and given a skylight roof to light oculus windows inside the chancel dome. The stucco-clad wall and skylight roof of this addition are a minimal disturbance to the integrity of the building because they lie on the least visible elevation, the west.

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Section Number 7 Page 4

St. Brigid's Church San Francisco, CA

Narrative Description (continued):

The building's interior is arranged in traditional church fashion: narthex; nave with lower side aisles, transepts and rear choir gallery; chancel, sacristy, and other function spaces at the west end. The sanctuary level approximates grade at the south end of the lot; therefore flights of steps give access to the narthex and nave, while a full basement lies below, nearly at ground level on the north side. The narthex is paneled in dark wood. Stilted-arch arcades separate nave from side aisles. The columns are round, with Romanesque capitals, and clad in spirally striped marble of cream to brown tones. The ceiling is a shallow arch. A stringcourse of angels and heads wraps around the main space between the arcade and the clerestory, continuing around the chancel. In place of continuing columns, the clerestory has ten-foot-high statues, sculpted by John A. McQuarrie, of angels with outspread wings, alike but in different poses representing the opening sentences of the mass. Between aisle windows, other sculptures represent the stations of the cross. The chancel is rounded, with a half-dome ceiling. Stained glass is intense blues, reds and greens. The wainscot appears to be lincrusta. Pews are oak with carved ends. Silver-colored pipes announce the rear gallery/organ loft.

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Section Number 8 Page 5

St. Brigid's Church San Francisco, CA

Narrative Statement of Significance:

St. Brigid's church appears eligible for the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance, under Criterion C, architecture, in the context of San Francisco's Romanesque Revival buildings. It is the city's only example of this style also to embody the characteristics of Late Romanesque Revival, that is Medieval historicism applied in a 20th century building. The church is significant for its Irish heritage because the ornamentation uses Irish motifs and celebrates Ireland's independence, and the building material is like grey Irish granite. Also the congregation were mostly of Irish descent during the period of significance, they were served by Irish priests, and the building committee and stained glass donors had Irish surnames. The building is a religious property deriving its primary significance from architecture. The periods and dates of significance are the same: 1930 for the Late Romanesque Revival facade and tower by H.A. Minton, and 1902-1904 for the Richardsonian Romanesque remainder by Shea and Shea. In spite of apse alterations and new stained glass in the 1940s and 1965, and an additional tower story in 1965, the design of the period of significance remains intact as to location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

The context of Romanesque Revival buildings in San Francisco, 1885-1935, includes mainly churches. The architectural firm most noted for this style, that of George Washington Percy and Frederick F. Hamilton, worked as the supervising architects for the Stanford Quadrangle designed by H.H. Richardson's successor firm, Shepley Rutan and Coolidge. Percy and Hamilton's Richardsonian Romanesque churches in San Francisco include First Unitarian, Trinity Presbyterian, Howard Street Presbyterian, and California Street Methodist; they also used the style on the Sharon Building in Golden Gate Park. Other church architects used round arches, for instance at St. Joseph's, but none of theirs beside St. Brigid's and St. Paul's (also by Shea and Shea) repeated rock-faced cladding. St. Paul's and the Percy and Hamilton churches do not have the extensive and fine-grained ornament typical of 20th century Medieval revivals. Two other churches in San Francisco do have 20th century historicist ornament: St. Dominic's and Grace Cathedral, but their period of reference is Gothic. These three are the city's best examples of 20th century Medieval revivals, two Gothic and St. Brigid's Romanesque.

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St. Brigid's Church San Francisco, CA

Narrative Statement of Significance (continued):

The Late Romanesque Revival aspect of St. Brigid's was given it in the 1930 remodeling to enlarge the seating. Up to that time the design by Frank T. Shea (1859-1929) and Will D. Shea (1866-1931) had been Richardsonian Romanesque, as still seen on the north and south elevations. On the earlier facade a deeply incised porch seemed weighted down by the stone wall above it, nearly as tall as its three round arches. Further horizontality came from the flat mezzanine colonnade which continued the twin towers' mezzanine-level stepped colonnades (now surviving only on the north transept). Shea and Shea's lack of typical Richardsonian Romanesque polychromy, probably motivated by cost, became a positive factor in adapting the building to the canon of 20th century Revival styles. Their 1896 rendering shows Lombard bands and a seven-story corner tower, which were adapted in the 1930 and 1965 building programs.

In 1930 Henry A. Minton (d. 1948), who had worked in Will Shea's office after the 1906 earthquake and was buried from St. Brigid's, moved the narthex wall closer to the street, repositioned the wheel window, raised the tower, and designed all the finely detailed terra cotta ornament (which was executed by Gladding McBean, who probably still have the molds). Instead of Shea and Shea's stepped and columned recesses, Minton created the mezzanine arcade and the Lombard bands. He changed the entrances completely and gave the facade more windows. In the late 1920s this was up-to-date Medievalism, a Revival style analogous to Collegiate Gothic. It was Minton's only known essay in this style, although he is known for Catholic church work and many Bank of America buildings.

Minton was also architect of record for some remodeling for which a building permit was taken out in 1942. The congregation's centennial history gives 1947 as the date of sacristy additions and new stained glass in the windows, but no building permit has been found between 1942 and 1953. Perhaps the 1942 work was held up because of World War II and only finished in 1947. The stained glass and rug ordered from Ireland would hardly have been shipped across the Atlantic in wartime.

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St. Brigid's Church San Francisco, CA

Narrative Statement of Significance (continued):

The foundations and basement were originally constructed in 1896-1897, as attested by a construction notice in *California Architect and Building News* in August 1896 and by a newspaper story on 23 March 1896, which identifies Shea and Shea as the architects and reproduces their drawing with the seven-story corner tower. Frank Shea's firm is known to have done a great deal of work for San Francisco's Roman Catholic Archdiocese, such as St. Paul's and St. Vincent de Paul. After a hiatus the super-structure was completed under Shea and Shea in 1902-1904.

The parish of St. Brigid's had been founded in 1863, and its first building, a modest wooden structure, opened in 1864 at the same site as the present church building. Choice of the name--St. Brigid (450-525) was an Irish woman, a friend of St. Patrick and the patroness of Ireland--seems to indicate that an Irish congregation was expected. From 1863 to 1989, St. Brigid's pastors were all Irish or of Irish descent: Fathers Aerden, O'Neill, Doogan, Callaghan, Birmingham, Cottle, Cantwell, O'Connor, McDonald, and Hayburn. The lay building committee in 1902 consisted of men named Burnett, Kilduff, McNamara, Shirley, J. Sullivan, Gibbon, McCarthy, Queen, F. Sullivan, and Welch. Donors of the 1940s stained glass included McGinnis, Kiernan, O'Brien, Doherty, Sullivan, DeLaveaga, Collum, Ryan, Cowley, O'Connor, Murphy, Harney, Casey, and Lynch. By that time a few Italians had crept in to the list of donors (Balanesi, Vincenti, and Privigni), as well as other not-so-Irish names (Bliss, Krosner, Wallace).

The "Irishness" of the architecture lies mainly in the decorative program. The intensely ornamented concentric arches of the main portal recall ones in Irish Romanesque churches such as Clonfert Cathedral in County Galway (late 12th century), the Nuns' Church at Clonmacnoise in County Offaly (possibly 1180), or Cormac's Chapel in County Tipperary (c.1134). The cross-in-circle is a motif traceable to Irish pillarstones dating to around the year 700. There are Celtic crosses (circle around crossing) on top of the main gable, on the transom of the doors between narthex and nave, and on the altar. Designs patterned after Celtic interlace, as in the *Book of Kells*, occur frequently. Chevrons and animal ornament were favored in Irish Romanesque architecture too.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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St. Brigid's Church San Francisco, CA

Narrative Statement of Significance (continued):

Twelve statues on the facade's mezzanine arcade are said to depict leaders of the Easter Rising of 1916, which resulted in independence for southern Ireland in 1922. The images of the mosaic tablets of the law and the severity of the granite recall the harshness and uncompromising nature of Irish life.

It is worth noting that the features from Irish architecture date to that country's period before the English domination. Minton may have used them out of deference to the ethnic identity of the St. Brigid's congregation. But he must also have chosen these periods because they would harmonize with the Richardsonian Romanesque character of the existing building he was remodeling. Many of Minton's ecclesiastical works employ historicism, and several use round arches; St. Brigid's is his only known work in a thoroughly Romanesque style.

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Section Number 9 Page 9

St. Brigid's Church San Francisco, CA

Major Bibliographical References:

California Architect and Building News, xvii (August 1896), 96/2.

"Catholic Mass preface told in Statuary," *San Francisco Call*, 21 February 1904, magazine, 13.

Curtis, Richard J. "Recent Work of H.A. Minton, Architect," *Architect and Engineer*, 111/3 (December 1932), 10-24.

"Father Cottle and St. Briget's [sic]," *San Francisco Call*, 23 March 1896, 8/1.

"Handsome Stained Glass Window for New St. Brigid's Church," *San Francisco Call-Bulletin*, 17 February 1906, 6/6.

Herbison, Peter, Homan Potterton and Jeanne Sheehy. *Irish Art and Architecture from prehistory to the present* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978).

Langley, Henry G. "St. Brigid's Church," *San Francisco Directory* (San Francisco, 1869), 821.

Minton, H.A. Plans, St. Brigid's Church Remodeling, 1930.

"New Building Operations," *San Francisco Examiner*, 5 October 1902, 48/1.

"New Church of St. Brigid's," *San Francisco Call-Bulletin*, 17 February 1903, 16/1.

O'Connor, Ulick. *The Troubles: Ireland 1912-1922* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1975).

St. Brigid's Church Centennial, 1863-1963 (San Francisco, 1963).

"St. Brigid's Church Will Be Completed," *San Francisco Examiner*, 23 April 1902, 8/1.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section Number 9, 10 Page 10

St. Brigid's Church San Francisco, CA

Major Bibliographical References (continued):

"St. Brigid's Dedicated," *San Francisco Daily Morning Call*, 19 December 1904, 12/3.

"St. Brigid's Reopened with Solemn Ceremony," *San Francisco Examiner*, 17
December 1906, 3/2 and 9/4.

Sanborn Map Company. *Insurance maps of San Francisco*, 1886, 50; 1899, 262;
1905, 262; 1950, 229; 1988, 229.

San Francisco Department of Public Works. Building Permit Applications, 1930, 1942,
1953, 1960, 1981, 1984, and 1991.

"Stained Glass Windows in St. Brigid's Church, San Francisco, California," (Naas,
Eire: Leinster Leader Limited, n.d. [c.1947]).

Verbal Boundary Description:

Lot 15 in Assessor's Block 575.

Boundary Justification:

The boundary includes the whole city parcel occupied by the church and its small parking lot.

