

NEWTON LOCAL LANDMARK REPORT

St. Bernard's Church and Rectory

***1515 and 1529 Washington Street,
West Newton***

**Prepared for:
Newton Historical
Commission
October 2005**

St. Bernard's Church and Rectory, 1515 and 1529 Washington Street

1. Name of Property

- a. *Historic Name:* St. Bernard's Church and Rectory
- b. *Common Name:* None

2. Location

- a. *Street Address:* 1515 and 1529 Washington Street
- b. *Zip Code:* West Newton, 02459
- c. *Assessor's #:* 33-004-0005 (1515 Washington Street)
33-003-0011 (1529 Washington Street)

3. Classification

- a. *Ownership of Properties:* private
- b. *Type of Properties:* religious
- National Register Status:* MHC determination of NR eligibility as part of a St. Bernard's Catholic Church National Register Historic District including all of the parish properties.

4. Function or Use

- a. *Historic Functions:* Construction began in 1874 on the first St. Bernard's Church. Originally, the West Newton church served as a mission church of the Waltham parish. By 1876, the Catholic population had grown to the point where West Newton became a separate parish of its own, and St. Bernard's served as the parish church. A fire destroyed the original structure in 1889, and in 1890, the current church was constructed in the Gothic Revival style. Most Reverend John Williams, the first Archbishop of Boston, presided over the dedication ceremonies.

In 1887, St. Bernard's Parish purchased the house and the corner lot at 1529 Washington Street, directly adjacent to the church across what is now Prospect Street. Initially, an existing house on the site was renovated for use as the parish rectory, and serving in this capacity for 35 years. In conjunction with other construction projects taking place at St. Bernard's, the existing structure was erected in 1922 and designed specifically to be a rectory. The current rectory is of simple Neo-classical design, and nicely complements the parochial school architect Maurice P. Mead built on site in the same year.

b. *Current Functions:* By 1965, St. Bernard's parish complex had grown to include not only the church and the rectory, but a parish center, a parochial school, and a convent. Subsequent decreases in attendance and demographic shifts since then, however, have made it infeasible for the church to sustain and operate each of these parish services. At present, an independent school leases the former parish center, convent and parochial school in order to run their educational program serving special needs students. In contrast, the church and the rectory continue to operate in the capacity for which they were constructed: mass continues to be held in the church, and St. Bernard's pastor or administrator still resides in the rectory.

5. Zoning

The Zoning District for the church is Single Residence 3. When applied to buildings used for religious and/or nonprofit educational purposes, a 10,000 square foot lot is required for single-use institutions. The Zoning District for the rectory is Single Residence 2, which mandates a 15,000 square foot lot for single-institution uses. Multi-use institutions and dormitories can be constructed by right on each parcel, but may require lots with increased square footage depending upon the intended use.

6. Description

a. *Neighborhood Description:* St. Bernard's Church and Rectory are located in West Newton on the northern corner of the intersection created by Washington and Prospect Streets. Washington Street is a major access road running in an east-west direction through Newton, roughly paralleling the Massachusetts Turnpike as it crosses the city. Before the early 1800s, the village of West Newton was primarily agricultural, with settlement clustered around Washington Street. Even at this early stage, however, West Newton was considered a religious center: Newton's second church, West Parish Congregational, was built here in 1764. However, it was not until the 1800s that the village witnessed significant growth. Strategically situated along Washington Street (then known as the Natick Road), West Newton became a stopover between Boston and communities further to the west. In 1834, the Boston & Worcester Railroad came to West Newton. The ability of individuals to easily commute into Boston led to West Newton's development throughout the nineteenth century into a commuter suburb with large house lots and generous greenery.

By 1866, settlement was most densely located just north of the railroad line in the West Newton village center. As population growth driven by immigration and the desire to move out of Boston's urban core continued, former large farms were increasingly divided into residential subdivisions. A.J. Allen owned a large tract of land south of the tracks. In 1846, perhaps anticipating Newton's shift to a commuter suburb of Boston, Chester Judson acquired a

corridor of land originally belonging to Allen that crossed Washington Street just south of the railroad line. Judson's intention was to subdivide the area as a residential development, and he laid out what is now Prospect Street as a private way, selling off individual house lots on both the north and south sides of Washington Street. A Plan of Land filed with the Middlesex County Registry of Deeds shows this tract subdivided into forty-four (44) numbered lots south of Washington Street, and four (4) unnumbered lots north of Washington. Subdivisions such as the one laid out by Judson were typical of those that helped to give Newton a residential, suburban feel outside of its village centers.

After a series of owners, the lot currently occupied by St. Bernard's Church was purchased in 1869 in the name of John J. Williams, Bishop of the Boston Diocese. Reverend Bernard Flood would be the pastor at the new church, the cornerstone of which was laid in 1871. By choosing West Newton as the site for St. Bernard's, Flood further established the village's reputation as a place of religious growth. Indeed, by 1876, two years after the completion of the church, St. Bernard's was promoted from a mission church of the Waltham parish and designated as a distinct parish itself.

By this time, the majority of the house lots from Chester Judson's subdivision plan had been sold, and many had been improved with houses and ancillary buildings erected thereon. With its Washington Street address, St. Bernard's was situated along one of Newton's main transportation corridors, adjacent to Lincoln Park and with immediate access to the Boston and Worcester Railroad line.

b. Architectural Description:

| <i>(1) Materials:</i> | <i>Church</i> | <i>Rectory</i> |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|---|
| <i>Foundation:</i> | Cement | Cement |
| <i>Walls:</i> | Brick | Brick |
| <i>Roof:</i> | Gable roof | Hip roof |
| <i>Windows:</i> | A series of 7 lancet windows | Primarily six-over-six double hung sash, paired in the upper story and central bay of the front façade; smaller six-over-six double hung sash above the entryway, in dormers, and on side façade. |

Ornamentation: The exterior of the Gothic Revival church does not possess a high degree of ornamentation, leading to a more austere interpretation of the style. The most prominent feature is the steeple rising above the center entryway, culminating in a metal sheathed spire. Aside from brick piers buttressing the steeple, no other adornments are present. Two large pointed arch windows project separately from each side elevation, and the gable dormer of each is topped with a short but robust finial. A double brick stringcourse encircles the church just above the basement level windows, and may serve the additional function of acting as water tables.

The rectory is similarly modest in appearance, with the main ornament being a masonry keystone embedded in the brick lintel of the first floor windows. Additionally, a brick soldier course defines the upper and lower floors. Both structures are brick and employ slate shingles on the roof.

Vegetation: Both sites have been well maintained and landscaped with a mixture of mature trees, bushes, foundation plantings and flowers. Approaching the church, the entryway is flanked by large trees, and a small brick retaining wall off the sidewalk provides areas on either side of the walkway for small plantings. On Prospect Street along the west elevation of the church, a small stone wall creates another landscaped area with mature trees, shrubbery and flowers. The rear of the church contains a grassy section with a group of young trees, before giving way to a parking lot serving the independent school located on the site. The rectory is significantly set back from the road and a circular driveway with access from both Washington and Prospect Streets leads directly to the front porch. The driveway creates a significant, grassy island with a cluster of mature trees that partially shield the rectory from the main street. The remainder of the front yard and side yards contain well-groomed lawns, with a variety of shrubbery and plantings along the foundation.

(2) Verbal Description:

Historical appearance: In 1889, a fire consumed the first Saint Bernard's Church. Its replacement was finished in 1890, and is similar to the form proscribed for several church construction projects in the Archdiocese of Boston around this time period. The Gothic Revival structure is Basilican in form, and the brick building's nave and two shallow side aisles lead to a polygonal apse opposite the main entry. Narrow transepts extend only slightly from the main block of the church, attaining a height that falls below the eaves of the gable roof. The effect is that the level of the eaves are consistent from the front of the structure to the apse, broken only at the two points along each side elevation where the gabled dormers house stained glass windows. The roof is covered in slate shingles squared at the corners. A centered front entry tower capped with a metal-sheathed belfry and spire is the focus of the design. Buttresses emphasize

the corners, and two subordinate entrances flank the projecting tower. The base of the belfry contains paired pointed arch vents with heavy slats on three of the four tower faces. Two narrow lancet windows coupled under a single pointed arch are present on each face of the tower above these vents and just below the base of the spire. A series of seven pointed arch stained glass windows, varying in size and inserted in masonry frames, are placed along the side aisles and illuminate the sanctuary. Located in the gable ends of the transepts are clear glass panes embedded in tracery frames of masonry construction. Other windows situated along the basement level of the church, the projecting wings of the transepts, and within the apse are nine-over-nine double-hung sash. Several of these appear to be replacement windows, but there are enough original windows remaining to make the case for nine-over-nine being the originally intended configuration. The interior is divided by a series of three molded, pointed arches separating the side aisles from the nave. An exposed truss system supports the gable roof over the nave. Pairs of ornately carved angels brandishing shields adorn the base of each truss.

In 1922, William Dwyer became the Pastor of Saint Bernard's, and soon thereafter began the construction of new buildings on land owned by the church. In addition to building a parochial school, Dwyer directed that a new rectory be constructed at 1529 Washington Street, replacing the old rectory located in a converted residence on the site since 1887. Architect Maurice P. Mead designed both the parochial school and the new rectory.

The parish rectory is of simple Neo-classical design with some Craftsman influence, consisting of two stories and three bays, the central section of which is recessed. It features a slate hipped roof replicated in the dormers and the projecting corner pavilions. The classical porch with columns and pediment fronts the center entry and a soldier course defines the upper and lower floors throughout this brick building. On the west façade there is a side porch with columns mirroring those of the entry. The porch provides access to the rectory from the back yard and was not intended as a public thoroughway. Directly opposite this on the east façade is an additional point of entry. Designed to be more available to the public this entryway is covered with a smaller version of the front porch, and faces the church across the street. A one-room deep ell carries the full height of the building beyond the eastern portion of the main block. The windows are six-over-one double hung sash, and are paired in the central bay as well as on the upper floor of the flanking bays. Brick lintels with granite keystones cap each first floor window. While storm windows have been added, it appears that the existing windows are original to the construction of the rectory.

Current appearance: St. Bernard's Church has seen relatively few changes over the years, and is very similar in appearance to its time of construction. The most notable changes deal with accessibility to the church, such as sloped paths and walkways allowing for wheelchair access. Records do not indicate that any repairs or replacement of the slate shingles has occurred, although it seems unlikely that the same shingles have weathered 115 years of use without incident. The steeple is in fine condition, and the belfry vents and windows have no

damaged or missing components. Structurally, the building appears to be in fine shape, and the brick is in good condition overall. The original stained glass windows donated by parishioners are intact and, though some need general cleaning, appear to be well maintained. The masonry slabs articulated on the piers of the central tower have kept their shape, and continue to provide textural demarcations along the ascending tower. As previously noted, several of the exterior windows serving the basement and anterior portions of the church are replacements of the originals.

The rectory has also witnessed very little exterior alteration since its date of construction. As with the church, there is no indication in the building records that the slate shingles were ever replaced. Given the later date of construction for the rectory, however, it seems more plausible in this case than for that of the church that the roofing material could be original. An original roof would still be over 80 years old. The wrought iron handrail and balustrade present on the front entry porch may have been added later for safety reasons, as there is no evidence of the material used elsewhere on the rectory. Nor is there wrought iron present on the exterior of the school, a building that can be used for comparative purposes as it was designed concurrently by Maurice P. Mead, and the two are stylistically in dialogue. The baluster and latticework located on the porch of the west façade leading to the rear yard of the rectory may also later additions. The only major alteration to the structure occurred in 1937. At that time, a portion of the basement was converted into a two-car garage accessed from the rear of the rectory.

7. *History of Property*

a. Deed History: All deed information for these properties is located at the Middlesex County (South) Registry of Deeds.

Tracing the ownership deeds for St. Bernard's Parish required several subsidiary searches, as the parish grew significantly over time. The parcel of land originally acquired for the purposes of erecting a church was directly on the northeast corner of the intersection of Prospect and Washington Streets, and contained approximately 26,125 square feet. Over time, the holdings of the Roman Catholic Archbishop at the parish of St. Bernard's grew to include multiple parcels on both sides of Prospect and Washington and, along with a church, included a rectory, a convent, a parochial school and the Newton Catholic Club. Fortunately, by tracing each individual parcel, it was uncovered that all of this land originally belonged to one landowner.

A.J. Allen was a large landowner in West Newton, with property concentrated around the Boston & Worcester Railroad at the intersection of Washington Street. At some time in the first half of the 19th century, he conveyed a large parcel of land, running along what is now Prospect Street as it intersects with Washington Street, to Alexander S. Jackson. Jackson's sale of the property to

Chester Judson in 1846 is one of the first deeds available for the lots and illustrates the gradual development of West Newton during this period into residential subdivisions.

Book 496, Page 191 records Alexander S. Jackson as conveying a parcel of land to Chester Judson on 28 October 1846 for the amount of \$8,800. This transaction was contingent upon a mortgage Judson took with Jackson for \$5,705 payable over ten years with 6% interest assessed annually. Judson's plan was to subdivide the land into house lots situated along a new street running north-south and crossing Washington Street. This street eventually became Prospect Street.

Chester Judson had a Plan of House Lots drawn up by L.H. Bradford sometime after his acquisition of the land from Jackson. The Plan notes that the lots were to be sold at public auction on Thursday, August 12 at 4:00pm but does not specify a year. The plan included 44 numbered house lots, varying in size, located along either side of Prospect Street south of Washington Street. Additionally, four lots of comparable size were laid out (but not numbered) north of Washington and east of Prospect. It is this parcel of land where St. Bernard's chapel and several parish buildings now stand.

Chester Judson sold off lots individually and in groups, thus making it necessary to follow separately those parcels eventually owned by the Roman Catholic Archbishop (RCA).

1515 Washington Street – St. Bernard's Church

Several years after subdividing the land purchased from A. Jackson, Chester Judson sold his first parcel north of Washington Street. This parcel was the future home of St. Bernard's Church.

Book 734, Page 269 records a land sale made on 10 February 1856 by Charles Judson to the Ellenville Glass Co., bounded and described as follows:

“Commencing at a point on Washington St. at line of land now or formerly J.H. Wight and running in a Westerly direction by Washington St. 100 feet to a private way; then turning and running in a Northerly direction by the line of said way, 250 feet until it comes to land now or formerly owned by said Chester Judson; then turning and running in an Easterly direction, 109 feet, to land now or formerly owned by J.H. Wight; then turning and running in a Southerly direction by said land of Wight 250 feet to Washington St. the place of beginning; and containing 26,125 feet more or less.”

Book 985, Page 306 shows that ten years later on 1 August 1866 Judson paid the Ellenville Glass Co. \$500 to reacquire the same parcel.

Judson held onto the parcel for several years before selling it once again. Book 1083, Page 36 indicates that James D. Judge paid \$1567.50 for the lot on 11 May

1869. The same Book and Page states that Judge subsequently sold the lot on 17 May 1869 for the exact same price to the Right Reverend John J. Williams. Rev. Williams had been ordained the fourth Bishop of Boston on 11 March 1866. As Bishop, land transactions for the Diocese were made in Williams' name. On 12 February 1875, he was named the first Archbishop of Boston. The first church on the site was a wooden structure completed by 1874. This burned down in 1889, and the current church was built in 1890.

1529 Washington Street – St. Bernard's Rectory

The lot on which the rectory is currently located was part of the land acquisition made by Chester Judson from Alexander Jackson in 1846. Despite this, the plot in consideration was not one of the numbered lots, nor was it entirely surveyed on the undated plan of house lots L.H. Bradford drew up for Judson. It may be that this lot was not planned as one of the lots to be auctioned, as suggested by Bradford's plan. Judson did have title to the property, which he sold, apparently for the first time, five years after acquiring it.

Book 619, Page 534 lists Nathan Craft as the buyer of the lot, recorded on 4 December 1851. The price was \$945, and the boundaries were:

“on the northerly side of Washington Street and bounded as follows viz southerly by Washington Street westerly by land of W. Parks northerly on land of Andrew J. Allen and easterly by my own land (or by the line of a road laid out through my land from Washington Street northerly to Andrew J. Allen's line) containing 2 acres and one quarter and eighteen rods more or less.”

No house was described as being present at this time.

Book 727, Page 149 records that on 1 December 1855 Nathan Craft sells the parcel to Frederick A. Cutter. The price was \$1000, and the land remained unimproved with respect to any buildings on the premises.

Book 774, Page 30 notes that two and a half years later, on 15 June 1857, Frederick Cutter took a mortgage from the Charles River Mutual Loan & Fund Association in the amount of \$815. The mortgage was to be repaid at \$14.08 monthly, with 6% interest assigned annually, until the principal and interest were paid in full. The description of the land in this entry notes the presence of buildings. Given this, Cutter may have taken the mortgage to help cover the expenses of construction.

Book 888, Page 304 lists the Charles River Mutual Loan & Fund Association as conveying the land at the corner of Prospect and Washington Streets to Harvey S. Brown. The deed describes foreclosure of Frederick Cutter's property by the Charles River Association for failure to repay a mortgage. On 1 August 1860, Brown purchased the land at public auction for \$1098.43. Despite this, the transaction was not recorded with the Middlesex County Registry of Deeds until 14 July 1862. It is not known why this discrepancy in timing exists.

Book 888, Page 305 notes that Harvey Brown sells the parcel back to the Charles River Mutual Loan & Fund Association for \$775. Page 306 of the same Book shows immediate transfer by the Charles River Association to John H. Stephenson in consideration of the same amount: \$775. Both of these transactions are recorded on 14 July 1862.

Book 953, Page 544 records that on 30 May 1865, John Stephenson sells the entire parcel to John Ayres for \$500. In the same year, Ayres was appointed as a Trustee of Stephenson's Estate.

Book 978, Page 553 shows that John Ayres, acting as a Trustee for Stephenson, sold the land to James Reagan for \$1,000 on 6 June 1866. On Page 554 of the same Book, Reagan is granted a mortgage by Stephenson in the amount of \$700, payable over six years with 6% interest annually. Despite prior acknowledgement of buildings on the site, the description of the land makes no mention of a house. This may simply be an oversight, but may also be the result of the house being destroyed or moved.

Book 1012, Page 302 indicates that just over one year later on 29 June 1867 Reagan sold the property to John C. Stanton for \$2110. In addition to the purchase price, Stanton assumed the remainder of the outstanding mortgage (\$610) Reagan had been carrying with Stephenson. The jump in sales price by over 100% in just over a year indicates that improvements had been made to the land, and the description in the deed notes that along with the property the transaction included "the buildings thereon." This suggests that the house erected by Reagan was the house converted for use as a rectory when the Boston Archdiocese gained title to the property.

Book 1082, Page 239 records that almost two years after acquiring the house and property, Stanton sold it to Nicholson Broughton for \$15,000 on 12 May 1869. The land with its buildings was described as such:

"Beginning on the northerly side of Washington Street; thence running northerly on a curved line of a radius of about 550 feet and lying on the westerly side of a chord bearing north 60 degrees west being 309.5 feet in length, the length of the curve being 252 feet of the easterly portion of the same; thence northwesterly 116 feet to a stake and stones; thence more easterly 116 feet to a proprietor's way; thence easterly on said proprietor's way 297 feet to Washington Street; thence southwesterly on said street 97 feet to the place of beginning. Also a lot of land adjoining the above, bounded on southwest by Washington Street; westerly by a new fence on land of others unknown northerly by a fence on land of others unknown and easterly by said land as above described."

Book 1202, Page 649 indicates that Broughton took a mortgage from Charles Lyman in the amount of \$8,000 payable over three years at 8% interest assigned semi-annually. This agreement was recorded on 1 April 1872 and included a

clause giving Lyman authority to sell the land at public auction in the event Broughton failed to pay his mortgage.

Book 1239, Page 175 shows that Nicholson Broughton took two mortgages with Samuel Hooper on 9 December 1872. The first was in the amount of \$1000, and the second was for a total of \$2,500.

Book 1285, Page 241 lists that on 6 November 1873, almost a year after granting two mortgages to Broughton, Samuel Hooper releases Broughton from those mortgages. The very same Book and Page records Broughton subsequently selling the property to Henry E. Waite for \$15,000. Along with the land, Waite also assumed responsibility for the outstanding mortgage Broughton had with Charles Lyman. Book 1285, Page 243, again, on the same day, notes that Henry Waite immediately conveys ownership of the property to Samuel Hooper in consideration of \$4,000, while also transferring responsibility for the remaining payments on the mortgage with Lyman. The agreement acts as a mortgage in that if Waite repays the \$4,000 principal within one year at 8% interest, he retains rights to the property. This portion of the agreement, however, makes no mention of the Lyman mortgage.

It is reasonable to assume that Samuel Hooper's role was important in enabling this series of transactions to occur. Although the extent of Hooper's role is unclear, one possible scenario is that releasing Broughton from the two outstanding mortgages owed Hooper allowed the subsequent transaction between Broughton and Waite to take place. Samuel Hooper's death in 1875 further complicates matters surrounding the property on the northwest corner of Washington and Prospect Streets. The result is that the executors of Hooper's Estate must handle his outstanding accounts.

Book 1445, Page 254 lists transference of the property from Henry Waite's Estate to Vernon E. Carpenter. Waite failed to pay \$190.40 in taxes owed on the land, thus prompting Edward J. Collins, Collector of Taxes for Newton in 1877, to foreclose on the property and hold a public auction. On 17 July 1877 Vernon Carpenter is recorded as being the highest bidder, paying \$211.13 for the parcel. Recorded that same day in Book 1445, Page 255 is the following transaction, whereby Carpenter conveys the land for \$216.93 to Lemuel Shaw, Edward W. Hooper, et.al., the acting executors of Samuel Hooper's Estate. It is unknown whether Waite's default on his taxes was due to his death, or to some other circumstance. The interest on the part of Samuel Hooper's Executors to reclaim the property may in part be due to the interest they held via several mortgages that remained unpaid at the time of foreclosure.

Book 1804, Page 183 records the executors of Samuel Hooper's Estate, now represented by William P. Dexter and Edward N. Hooper, et. al., as selling the parcel to Lawrence O'Toole for \$8,000 on 27 June 1887. O'Toole was clearly operating on behalf of the Boston Archdiocese, as Page 187 of the same Book shows O'Toole transferring the parcel to John J. Williams on the same day for the

same price. By this time, Williams was the Archbishop of the Boston Archdiocese. The land conveyed to Williams is described as such:

“Beginning at a point on the northwesterly side of Washington Street about 44 feet west southwesterly from a large pine tree and adjoining land now or late of Martha F. Porter; thence running north northwesterly 160 feet 9 inches by said land now or late of said Porter; thence running west northwesterly 144 feet more or less by said land now or late of said Porter to a point intersecting said land now or late of Porter, land now or late of Bailey, land now or late of Patrick Shea and the premises conveyed by the deed; thence northeasterly 169 feet more or less by said land now or late of Shea; thence east northeasterly 95 feet more or less by said Shea’s land to a proprietor’s way now known as Prospect Street; thence south southeasterly on said Prospect Street 297 feet to said Washington Street; thence southwesterly on said Washington Street 137 feet to the point of beginning and containing 47,606 square feet of land more or less.”

From the time the Archdiocese acquired ownership of the land, the buildings situated on the site have been used as the parish rectory.

b. Development History: The land comprising what is now the St. Bernard’s Parish Complex at one point belonged to A.J. Allen, a large landowner in West Newton. Allen’s property was concentrated around the Boston & Worcester Railroad at the intersection of Washington Street, although his ownership predated the existence of the railroad at that location. At some time in the first half of the 19th century, Alexander S. Jackson became owner of a large parcel of land running along what is now Prospect Street as it intersects with Washington Street. By 1846, land speculator Chester Judson, an employee at the Custom House in Boston, purchased this parcel from Jackson with the intent of subdividing the land into house lots suitable for individual development. A document filed with the Middlesex County Register of Deeds and entitled “A Plan of House Lots in West Newton belonging to Chester Judson” illustrates the manner in which the lots would be subdivided, complete with new streets to be laid out for access. Surveyor L.H. Bradford drew the plans with a total of 44 numbered lots south of Washington Street, and an additional four defined lots north of Washington. Lot sizes varied, with the smallest lots measuring 100’ by 225’ for a total of 25,000 square feet. The largest lots were to be situated around a small park planned for a center island encircled by a new street, and were 150’ at their widest by approximately 500’, totaling 75,000 square feet in all. The Plan stated that lots were to be sold by public auction on August 12 at 4:00pm, although no year was specified on the document. It is believed to be between October of 1846 (the time Judson acquired the tract of land) and 1856, a known date of early conveyance for one of the parcels.

City Atlases show that by 1874, Judson did not own any of the parcels he had laid out along Prospect Street. In some instances, a single individual purchased several contiguous lots, constructing a single house thereon. This created a sort of suburban estate that would come to typify a significant portion of the housing

stock in Newton, as those who could afford it fled the perceived physical and social ills of Boston. While landowners seeking to carve out a rural niche for themselves through the purchase of several lots were present, they were side by side with other property holders building houses according to patterns of development pre-existing in West Newton: small houses situated just off the street on long, narrow lots.

1874 is the date on record for the completion of the first St. Bernard's Church, so it stands to reason that the structure first appears at the corner of Washington and Prospect Streets on the 1874 City atlases. Despite this date of completion, the cornerstone had been laid on November 12, 1871 and the land had been acquired for the purpose of erecting a Catholic Church two years prior to that. On May 11, 1869 James D. Judge, acting on behalf of John J. Williams, acquired the parcel of land from Chester Judson. At the time, Williams was the Bishop of the Boston Diocese, and all church real estate transactions up to this point were conducted in his name. As Williams essentially acquired the parcel of land directly from Judson, and given Judson's role as the initial developer of Prospect Street, the assumption is that the church was the first structure erected on the site. This may not be the case. In 1856, Chester Judson sold the parcel on which St. Bernard's now sits to the Ellenville Glass Co. of New Jersey, only to reacquire the land for himself ten years later in 1866. There is no record of a prior structure on the site, and it may be that the Ellenville Glass Co. held the land for equity, or had engaged in some arrangement with Judson. Nevertheless, it cannot be definitively said that St. Bernard's church was the first building at that location.

1874 was also the year the Diocese of Boston became the Archdiocese of Boston, with Williams serving as the first Archbishop. The increase in the Catholic population throughout the Boston area was seen in Newton as well, and in 1876, St. Bernard's gained status as a distinct parish in West Newton, ceasing to be a mission church under the auspices of the Waltham Parish. Mirroring the general population growth of the area, St. Bernard's population also grew and as its needs expanded, so did their accumulation of land. The first acquisition made as a means of accommodating this growth took place in 1887, when the lot and house at 1529 Washington Street, across Prospect Street from the church, was purchased.

It is unclear whether the house the Archdiocese purchased was the first building on the site. A title search on the property notes a structure as early as 1857, but later deeds fail to mention its existence, suggesting that the house was moved or demolished. It is not until 1867 that a structure on the site is again specifically noted in the deed history, and this building is believed to be the house that underwent renovations to serve as Saint Bernard's Rectory. Although the land on which this house sat was owned by Chester Judson, it was not one of the numbered or defined parcels laid out by surveyor L.H. Bradford as part of Judson's subdivision plan. While Judson's reasons for excluding this parcel from the overall plan are unknown, they did not prevent him from selling the property just five years after his initial acquisition from Alexander Jackson. However, the

parish did eventually demolish this house. When William Dwyer became Reverend of Saint Bernard's in 1922, he immediately embarked on new construction projects for the parish and his first project was a new rectory. Thus, the converted house at 1529 Washington Street, which had served for 35 years as the rectory, was replaced in 1923 by a structure specifically designed as a rectory by architect Maurice P. Mead.

The parcel abutting the church directly to the north was acquired in 1899 from William Pettigrew. Over the course of several transactions, Pettigrew had acquired close to two acres of land directly north of the church, subdividing the parcel into 10 discrete lots. The parcel fronting Prospect Street and abutting the church property was then conveyed to the Roman Catholic Archbishop for \$1 and "other valuable considerations." In 1965, the cornerstone for St. Bernard's Convent was laid at this site.

As the parish continued to expand, St. Bernard's acquired additional land. By 1907 the parish had purchased a 25,000 square foot lot with a house thereon formerly owned by Mary L. Bacon, which abutted the church on the east. With the overall population increase in Newton, a need for schools arose. In addition to the construction of several public schools across the City, three parochial schools were erected on the north side of Newton. Construction began on Saint Bernard's Parochial School in 1922, in conjunction with the arrival of Reverend William Dwyer. As with the rectory, architect Maurice Mead, under the direction of Dwyer, designed the school. The doors opened in 1924 at the location previously occupied by Mary Bacon's house, immediately next to the church.

St. Bernard's purchased yet another parcel containing a residential building, located diagonally across Washington Street from the church. In contrast to the land on which the converted rectory stood, this parcel was part of Chester Judson's planned subdivision. Indeed, in 1847, Judson sold nearly three acres of land, comprising this parcel and others, to Moses Nichols. After changing ownership several times, the lot and house were conveyed to the Roman Catholic Church for \$1 in 1912 and subsequently converted for use as the parish center. The parish center eventually became known as the Newton Catholic Club. The acquisition of this parcel established St. Bernard's as the largest landowner in the area surrounding the intersection of Prospect and Washington Streets.

Upon completion of the convent in the late 1960s, St. Bernard's parish complex included the church, a rectory, convent, parochial school, and the Newton Catholic Club. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, however, a decline in vocations and drop in school enrollment required St. Bernard's to close the convent and school. Currently, the convent, school buildings, and former Newton Catholic Club are leased to Learning Prep Academy - a private, independent institution that serves special needs students. The church and rectory remain in use for their original purposes.

8. *Significance of Property*

a. *Period of Significance:* The period of significance for St. Bernard' Church and Rectory is 1871 through 1965. The period encompasses the growth and development of the Catholic Church in West Newton, as well as the design and construction of the two structures as part of the development of the St. Bernard's Parish Complex. The period of significance ends with the completion of the convent on the site, as the last phase of construction for the complex.

b. *Historical Significance:* Historically, these buildings represent the establishment and continued evolution of West Newton as a center of religious activity for not only the Catholic Church, but a variety of denominations. More specifically, they illustrate the common growth pattern of Catholic parishes as they expand their mission and scope of services from a single house of worship to a fully realized parish complex. The church and rectory constitute the first two parcels of land acquired from a list now totaling twelve. As such, they represent the underpinnings upon which the complex developed and symbolize the degree to which St. Bernard's has been an anchor in a community witnessing ongoing changes throughout the years.

c. *Architectural Significance:* Architecturally, the church and rectory are significant as good examples of ecclesiastical architecture for their respective dates of construction. The Gothic Revival style employed in the church reflects contemporary notions regarding appropriate massing, proportion and form for Catholic churches constructed in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The rectory is important as an example of architecture used to visually tie together buildings serving different functions throughout a parish complex. Both the church and the rectory have retained their original lot configuration and defining architectural style and features with few significant alterations over time.

d. *Landmark Designation Criteria:* St. Bernard's Church and Rectory meets the criteria for landmark designation as set forth in Section 22-93 of Newton's Ordinance T-288. The properties are:

- Eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places as contributing elements of a potential St. Bernard's Catholic Church National Register Historic District based on the Massachusetts Historical Commission's recommendation.
- Architecturally significant as an example of the Gothic Revival style of church architecture and as concerns the rectory, the development of parish complexes and ancillary buildings in the first half of the twentieth century.
- Associated with the development of West Newton Village as a religious center of the City, and with the development of the area surrounding the Washington and Prospect Street intersection from a rural agricultural community to a residential suburb offering railroad connection to Boston.

- Historically significant for their association with the creation of St. Bernard's as a distinct parish in West Newton, and their affiliation with John J. Williams, the first Archbishop of the Boston Archdiocese.
- Historic location and setting has been retained and is compatible with future preservation and use.
- Representative of the original design retaining their original siting, fabric and features.

9. *Recommendations*

a. *Preservation Recommendations:* The properties have been well maintained with few exterior changes. Those repairs and alterations which have been made are appropriate to the buildings and were completed with compatible materials. No additions have been added to either structure. Changes made to increase accessibility to both structures have been made in such a way that they do not substantially impact the streetscape. The buildings have retained the style and appearance of their period of historic significance.

b. *Important Features:* St. Bernard's Church is an austere example of Gothic Revival style architecture with a very limited use of architectural detailing and ornament. The most significant features of structure are its tall steeple and metal sheathed spire, center entrance and general size, scale, massing and central relationship to the surrounding parish buildings. St. Bernard's was designed as a modest, Colonial Revival style support structure and its most important features are its size, scale, massing and secondary relationship to the adjacent church. The building shares its slate roof and red brick exterior with the church but its architectural ornament is limited to a masonry keystone embedded in the brick lintel of the first floor windows.

10. *Standards for Design Review*

a. *General Standards* All projects affecting the properties should be evaluated by considering the effect that proposed changes would have on the general design, arrangement, texture, material and color of the features involved and the relationship of such features to the surrounding area. In the case of additions, the appropriateness of size, shape and location of the additions is of critical concern. The Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation should provide a baseline for the review of changes to the landmark properties.

b. *Specific Standards* Specific design standards have been addressed in the current maintenance of the property with regard to alterations, height, proportion of windows and doors, scale and architectural detail. The same principles should be applied in developing designs for changes and in reviewing proposed changes,

such that the key features retain their prominence and that the structures themselves retain their identity as excellent examples of late nineteenth century/early twentieth century Roman Catholic parish structures. Thus the following specific design standards refer to potential changes to the existing structures:

Exterior Walls

- Brick walls should be retained and repointed if necessary using a mortar which duplicates the original mortar in strength, composition, color and texture.
- Cleaning of the existing masonry, when necessary, should be done using the gentlest methods possible so as to avoid permanently damaging or eroding the surface of the brick. The use of sandblasting, high-pressure water, or strong chemical solvents is not recommended.
- No new openings should be allowed on the front or side façades or those sides visible from Washington or Prospect Streets.
- No existing openings should be filled in on the front or side façades or those sides visible from Washington or Prospect Streets.

Windows

- Surviving historic windows should be retained and repaired where possible.
- If replacement is absolutely necessary, the replacements should match as closely as possible the original window in materials, size, style, and design.

Entrances/Doors

- The original front entrance design, style, size and arrangement should be retained.
- Replacement doors or front entrance features should be fabricated to match the style and materials of the originals.

Roof

- The slate roofs of both the church and rectory are original to the structures and integral to their architectural design. Every effort should be made to see that these roofs are retained.

- If repair or replacement of the existing slate shingle roofing is necessary, slate shingles matching the color of the existing slates should be used if at all possible.

Additions

- New additions, when necessary, should be designed to be compatible with the historic character of the buildings in terms of size, scale design, materials, color, and texture.
- New additions should be designed so that the changes minimally impact the streetscape and such that the key features of each building retain their prominence.
- New mechanical systems should be installed inside of the building envelope whenever possible. If installation outside of the building envelope is absolutely required, new systems should be located at the rear of the building in a location which is not visible from the public way. Examples of these systems include, but are not limited to, air conditioning units, electrical meters, gas meters, etc.

11. *Notification*

The following properties are considered abutters for the purposes of notification. Owners of these properties should receive notice when this property is considered for landmark designation and for any future under the Landmark Ordinance.

| <u>ADDRESS</u> | <u>S/B/L</u> |
|--------------------------------|--------------|
| 3 Auburn Street | 33 003 0015 |
| Auburn Street OFF | 33 003 0016 |
| Duncan Road | 33 003 0021 |
| 7 Perkins Street, Unit 2 | 32 012 0029A |
| 15-29 Prospect Street, Unit 27 | 33 003 0010F |
| 15-29 Prospect Street, Unit 15 | 33 003 0010 |
| 15-29 Prospect Street, Unit 17 | 33 003 0010A |
| 15-29 Prospect Street, Unit 19 | 33 003 0010B |
| 15-29 Prospect Street, Unit 25 | 33 003 0010E |
| 15-29 Prospect Street, Unit 29 | 33 003 0010G |
| 15-29 Prospect Street, Unit 23 | 33 003 0010D |
| 21 Prospect Street, Unit 21 | 33 003 0010C |
| 15 Simms Court | 33 005 0005 |
| 19 Simms Court | 33 005 0006 |
| Washington Street | 32 012 0025 |

| | |
|--|--------------|
| Washington Street | 33 003 0014 |
| Washington Street | 32 012 0026 |
| Washington Street | 33 003 0012 |
| 1479 Washington Street | 33 005 0004 |
| 1482 Washington Street, Unit1 | 32 012 0029 |
| 1488-1492 Washington Street, Unit 1488 | 32 012 0028 |
| 1488-1492 Washington Street, Unit 1492 | 32 012 0028A |
| 1496 Washington Street | 32 012 0027 |
| 1505 Washington Street | 33 004 0004 |
| 1515 Washington Street | 33 004 0005Z |
| 1515 Washington Street | 33 004 0005 |
| 1516 Washington Street | 32 012 0024 |
| 1522 Washington Street | 32 017 0001 |
| 1529 Washington Street | 33 003 0011 |

NEWTON LOCAL LANDMARK REPORT

St. Bernard's Church and Rectory

***1515 and 1529 Washington Street,
West Newton***

**Prepared for:
Newton Historical
Commission
October 2005**

DATE: **October 24, 2005**

TO: **Planning and Development Board**

FROM: **Lara Kritzer, Preservation Planner**

SUBJECT: **Proposed Historic Landmark Designation Review**

Enclosed for your review is the local landmark report completed for the Newton Historical Commission as part of their landmark review process for 1515 and 1529 Washington Street, St. Bernard's Church and Rectory. The Newton Historical Commission plans to schedule a public hearing on this item for either their November or December 2005 meeting and is requesting the Planning and Development Board's consideration and recommendation of this proposed landmark at your next meeting on November 7, 2005.

Thank you for your consideration of this document. If there is any additional information which I can provide on these properties or the landmarking process in general, please let me know.



1529 Washington Street – St. Bernard’s Rectory from Prospect Street



1529 Washington Street – St. Bernard’s Rectory from Washington Street





St. Bernard's – Atlas Descriptions

1874 Beers: Illustrates the plot on the corner of Wash. and Prospect Sts. as belonging to the 'R.C. CH.' The structure appears to be the original wood frame church first erected on site. Abutters include: Mrs. M. Bacon to the east; C. Needham to the north, Henry E. Waite to the south, and G.F. Fuller, A.S. Woodworth, and H.A. Barker across Wash. St. to the south.

1886 Beers: St. Bernard's occupies the same plot, and the footprint of the church building remains the same. The abutters are the same as those in 1874 with the exception of immediately north – C. Needham's lands have been subdivided into 10 lots, with lot #1 showing a building with the notation W. Pettigrew Carp Sh (shop, school?). Also, C.F. Guild now owns the land formerly of A.S. Woodworth directly south and across Wash. St.

1895 Bromley: This atlas shows the new brick church erected c. 1890 to replace the old structure which had burned. John J. Williams now owns land to the west formerly of Henry Waite.

1907 Bromley: This atlas shows the new brick church and denotes the Roman Catholic Archbishop as the owner of each parcel immediately abutting the church, including lands as of the 1895 Bromley Atlas belonging to John J. Williams, Mary L. Bacon, and Wm. Pettigrew. The 1907 Bromley indicates that the building directly north of the church and formerly labeled 'Sh.' has been demolished, and in its place sits an empty lot.

1917 Bromley: Same as the 1907 Bromley, except that the parcel of land on the corner situated diagonally across from the church at 1522 Wash. St. is now listed as the Newton Catholic Club, and owned by the R.C. Archbishop, as well as the lots at 1502 and 1492 Wash. St. Several of the abutters have changed.

1929 Barnes and Beal: Indicates that the R.C. Archbishop now owns all the lots fronting Wash. St. between Prospect St. and Allen Pl., and all the facing lots on the south side of Wash. St. save the corner lot at 1516 Wash., owned by R.J. Monaghan. A hall was added to the Catholic Club sometime between 1907 and 1929.

1931 Sanborn: The maps printed from the 1931 Sanborn show the complex with the school and newly built sisters residence to the east, and the rectory across Prospect St. to the west. Also illustrated is the Catholic Club clubhouse and hall.

1874 Beers

1886 Beers

1895 Bromley

1907 Bromley

1917 Bromley

1929 Barnes and Beal

1931 Sanborn – Church

1931 Sanborn – Rectory