

St. Katherine's Episcopal Chapel  
4650 Meridian Road  
Williamston Twp.  
Ingham County  
Michigan

HABS No. MI-232

HABS  
MICH,  
33-WILTO,  
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS  
WRITTEN DESCRIPTIVE AND HISTORICAL DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

HABS No. MI-232

ST. KATHERINE'S EPISCOPAL CHAPEL

HABS  
MICH,  
33-WILTO  
1-

LOCATION

4650 Meridian Road

Williamston, Ingham County, Michigan

Latitude: 42° 43' 07"

Longitude: 84° 21' 43"

PRESENT OWNERS

St. Katherine's Parish

PRESENT USE

Special services and weddings

STATEMENT OF  
SIGNIFICANCE

This pleasant chapel was built in 1887 and is reminiscent of Medieval, English, country architecture. Although simple in design and workmanship it remains almost entirely in its original state.

PART I HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Legal description of property:

Parcel D

Certain parcel of land situated on and a part of Spring Brook Farm in section twenty (20) Township No. Four (4) north of Range 1 East in the county of Ingham, state of Michigan, particularly bounded and described as follows: Beginning at the Meridian line six hundred and sixty feet (660) north of the corner of sections 20 and 29 in said township: thence east at right angles to said Meridian line one hundred and seven feet (107) and thence north parallel with said Meridian line one hundred and seven (107) feet, thence west 107 feet to the Meridian line, thence south one hundred and seven (107) feet to the place of beginning.

(The above described premises comprise the chapel and church yard of St. Katherine's Mission as erected by the late John H. Forster). (In the S.W. 1/4 of the S.W. 1/4 of Sec. 20 T4N, R1E)

2. Date of erection: about 1887
3. Architect: Not known
4. Additions and alterations: Only minor alterations have effected the original structure. At an unknown date the sacristy was added to the east end of the chapel

B. Historical Events and Persons Associated with the Building:

John Harris Forster was a pioneer, explorer, miner, and engineer in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Early in his career he was employed by the government as a surveyor on the Great Lakes and the Mexican borders. In 1860 he became superintendent of the important Pewabic and Franklin copper mines in Houghton County. Forster, in 1864-65, represented the entire Upper Peninsula in the Michigan Senate. He returned to the Upper Peninsula to become an agent for the Sheldon and Columbian Copper Company and represented the Douglas Mine. About 1870 he was appointed chief engineer for the Portage Lake-Lake Superior Ship Canal then being built to bisect to Keweenaw Peninsula. In 1874 Forster retired to his dairy farm christened "Springbrook" near Williamston. In 1891-92 he was president of the Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society. Forster died in 1894. A photographic copy of the following letter from Forster to the Protestant Episcopal Diocese of Michigan hangs in St. Katherine's Chapel.

John H. Forster  
Spring - Brook Farm  
Jersey Cattle and Dairy

Williamston, Mich., April 3<sup>d</sup> 1888

Whereas I, John Harris Forster, acting in the fear and under the protection of Almighty God, have erected a House of Worship at Spring-brook Farm, in the Township of Williamston [sic], in the County of Ingham, and State of Michigan, and whereas it is my wish and purpose to devote the same to the service of religion, according to the rites and usages of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United State of America, & in the Diocese of Michigan:

now therefore, I do humbly request the Right Reverend Samuel S. Harris, D.D.L.L.D. Bishop of Michigan, to take the said House of Workshop under his Spiritual Jurisdiction as Bishop aforesaid, and that of his Successors in office, and to consecrate it to the Service of Almighty God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, under the name of St. Katherine's Chapel, and thereby to separate it from all unhallowed, worldly & common uses, and dedicate it to the holy purposes above mentioned, according to the form and manner provided by the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. In testimony whereof I have herewith set my hand this third day of April, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and eighty eight.

[signed] John Harris Forster

C. Sources of Information:

1. Primary and unpublished:

Letter written by John H. Forster donating his chapel to the Protestant Episcopal Diocese of Michigan

2. Secondary and published:

Autobiographical sketch of John H. Forster, Michigan Pioneer Collections, XXI (1892).

John Harris Forster, "Early Settlement of the Copper Region of Lake Superior", Michigan Pioneer Collections, VII (1884)

PART II ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural interest and merit: A pleasant country chapel of 1887, in its original state, with clearly discernable minor additions.
2. Condition of fabric: Good on the exterior, like new on the interior.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions, layout, and shape: Wood frame, one story, rectangular plan with vestibule projecting from the south west end and a sacristy attached to east end. 21' - 3 1/2" x 36' - 2 1/2", with a vestibule 8' - 4" by 7' - 9", and a sacristy addition 8' - 1" x 12' - 2". The orientation is traditional the altar being at the east end. Three bays by one bay.
2. Foundations: Foundation walls, of rubble topped by a few inches of concrete, are low. At some later time they were faced with cement stucco, with simulated vertical joints to imitate blocks. The exterior boarding, which projects slightly beyond the face of the foundation walls, extends to a level midway between the floor line and grade.
3. Wall construction: Walls are covered on the exterior with 1" x 12" vertical boards, joints being covered by 2 1/4"-wide moulded battens. These extend into the east gables. South and west gables are faced with wood shingles, exposed 6"; the butts are shaped polygonally (3 straight edges) to give virtually an

imbricated pattern. Walls and trim are painted white.

4. Entrance porch: On the south elevation, at the west end, is a projecting gabled vestibule with the entrance door centered on its south side.

Over the doorway is a hood consisting of an open gable supported on triangular brackets--one at each side. In the gable, a tie connects the ends of the brackets, supporting a Latin Cross at the center.

The door is double, each leaf being 2' 0" x 9' - 0" x 2". In the lower part are twin vertical panels, above which, opposite the knob, is a single horizontal panel; above this is a single tall panel with trefoil-arched head, on the exterior (rectangular on the interior face). Exterior panels are plain, except for chamfering; on the inside they are moulded and have raised fields. At the head of the door is a glazed triangular panel which fills the gable of the hood.

The doorway opening has plain trim.

In front of the door is a rectangular concrete stoop four steps high, with the steps on three sides. This concrete work appears original, and bears the date 1887.

At the southwest corner of the stoop is a simple flat iron or steel rail, 1/2" x 1 5/8" in section, supported at each end by a vertical pipe, 1 5/8" outside diameter, its lower end embedded in the concrete.

This may be original in part; holes in the concrete show that there was once a rail at the southeast corner, and at the middle of the south steps. On the left side of the doorway is a bent-pipe rail, apparently an addition; it is welded to a bracket which is bolted to the wall, and the pipe is embedded in the ground at the lower end. At either side of the doorway the batten has been cut; on the right side this is 1'-2 3/4" above the stoop, and on the left 1'-3 3/4" above.

5. Openings: doors

The entrance has been described above.

On the south side of the sacristy is a secondary doorway. It has five moulded panels with raised fields: two vertical at the bottom, a horizontal panel above them, and two tall panels in the upper half. Trim is plain.

6. Openings: windows

There is a large bay window on the west end, one small triple window on each long side, and an octagonal window in the east gable, high above the altar. A double-hung window, two lights over two lights, is centered on the east wall of the sacristy. It has plain trim.

The windows on the north and south sides are similar; each has plain trim, which continues below a slightly-projecting sill as well. The whole opening is rectangular; within this are three divisions having trefoil-arched heads. A small lower portion of each

window is operative, sliding vertically. The central division is filled with yellow glass, the others with blue. On the north side of the upper blue pane has been replaced with clear glass.

On the west end, the window forms the basis of a striking facade treatment. The opening has a triangular head, its pitch conforming to that of the roof. Plain trim 7" wide projects 6" from the wall, terminating at the bottom where it intersects the sloping sill. Below the sill is a projecting bay whose main face is battered and covered with patterned shingles similar to those in the gable above. The rectangular part of the window has four divisions with trefoil-arched heads; glass in the outer ones is blue and in the inner divisions yellow and red, respectively. Above a thin moulded transom bar are a central lozenge and two triangles.

At the "spring line" of the window opening is a heavy bracket at each side, serving to support the lower ends of a free standing pointed (two-centered) timber arch. This arch has its crown a short distance below the apex of the gable, at which point is a collar. From the apex of the window, supported on a small wooden corbel, rises a vertical member, which is continued by a Latin Cross extending above the ridge. The cross has simple three-part finials, conventionally foliated.

7. Roof:

Each part (main, vestibule, sacristy) is covered with

a gable roof. Recently split cedar shakes have been installed replacing the asphalt composition shingles.

8. Cornice:

A board at an angle of about 45 degrees gives the effect of a cove; above it are an ovolo, a fascia and a crowning ovolo. At the gables the "cove" member is flush with the wall, along the rake; above it are a soffit and the fascia with crowning ovolo.

9. Vents:

There are two modern sheet-metal vents, one on the ridge near the west end, and the other above the sacristy.

C. Description of Interior

1. Floor plan:

The main portion of the building forms the chapel proper; it is rectangular, with pews on either side of a central aisle. At the east end the floor is elevated two steps; there is a chancel rail. A modern altar is placed against the east wall. A door at the south end of the east wall leads into the sacristy. A double doorway at the west end of the south wall leads into the vestibule.

2. Flooring:

Floor boards are yellow pine, 5 1/4" wide, laid across the short dimension of the chapel. Finish is natural.

3. Wall and ceiling finish:

Walls are of natural finish yellow pine matched and

beaded boards 3 1/4" wide, laid vertically. At

the top of the walls is a cornice band consisting of a thick board with a black torus planted on the middle. The ceiling, which is formed by the under side of the roof, is finished with similar boards laid lengthwise. In each corner is a black ovolo extending from floor to cornice.

4. Doorways and doors:

Each leaf of the double door to the vestibule is 1'-11 3/4" x 7'-5 1/2" x 1 3/4". There are two vertical panels below, a horizontal panel, and two tall panels above; they are molded and have raised fields. The sacristy door is of similar design, but 2'-6" wide. Trim around the openings consists of a plain band 4" wide with a cyma reversa on the inner edge and a black ovolo at the outer edge (in the angle between trim and wall). Window trim is similar

5. Interior finish, special:

Pews are made of yellow pine. The ends are shaped in silhouette, the backs are of vertical matched and beaded boards, and the seats of similar boards. The top of the backrest and the arms at the ends are coped with rounded oak members.

The chancel rail is divided; each half is supported on four "balusters" shaped by sawing a 2" plank. The top (and only) rail resembles a coping; it has a cavetto at the bottom, a fascia with a wash, and a torus on the top at the center of the rail. The steps at the railing have no nosing.

6. Roof trusses:

Two roof trusses divide the ceiling into three bays. They appear to be scissors trusses covered with vertical matched and beaded boards. At the center of each is a turned pendant; there are three more similar pendants on each side, the lower edge of the truss being stepped to accommodate them. Near the top of each truss is a thin turned collar. Under each end of the trusses is a plain corbel shaped like an upright console. The soffit of the truss is ornamented with rectangular bosses.

In very recent years steel tie rods with turn-buckles have been inserted at the bottom of the trusses.

7. Modern interior finish:

About 1945 a reredos with three oak arches was placed at the center of the east wall, and an oak altar with three quatrefoil panels on the fact set against it. A lectern also appears to date from the same time as these additions. These elements, although readily distinguished from the original work in the chapel, are of compatible design, only more pretentious.

8. Hardware:

Each door is hung on three butts of ornamental design. The exterior door retains upper and lower bolts of similar design, but the interior vestibule door does not. The exterior door retains a composition knob and small ornamental escutcheons. The interior vestibule door has an original cast-iron thumb latch. Windows never appear to have had any hardware.

9. Mechanical equipment;

There are no indications of any original lighting or heating fixtures. There is a modern oil heating unit in the sacristy, and modern semi-concealed electric lighting fixtures.

D. Description of Site

This site originally formed a part of farm land owned by the Mullett and Forster families for whom the chapel was built. The ground is nearly level. The chapel is located on the east side of Meridian Road (which divides the State of Michigan into east and west halves) and is near the road. There is a small family cemetery just south of the chapel.

Northeast of the chapel is a modern parish building. Southeast of the chapel is a church built in 1962; there is a driveway, with turn-around circle, between them. The church (St. Katherine's Episcopal Church) occupies the site of the John H. Forster House, which was demolished to make way for it. Although not historic, the whole group makes a most attractive composition in the setting of widely-spaced trees.

Prepared by: Harley J. McKee, Architect, N.P.S., July  
15, 1965

Harry J. Hunderman, Michigan History Division  
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