

**The Commission for Historical and
Architectural Preservation**

Landmark Designation Staff Report
May 8, 2012



St. Alphonsus Hall

125 West Saratoga Street
Baltimore, MD

Summary

Constructed in 1873, St. Alphonsus Hall is a fine example of a Gothic Revival institutional structure. It is architecturally evocative of St. Alphonsus Church, located across the street. St. Alphonsus Hall was an important site for Baltimore's German and Lithuanian communities throughout its history, serving as a school, parish hall and convent for St. Alphonsus Church. Early immigrant communities maintained very close-knit religious ties, attending separate churches and schools. St. Alphonsus Hall allowed the Germans and Lithuanians to retain their religious and ethnic ties while also helping them assimilate into society at large. Even after the school ceased to serve specific ethnic communities, it was valued by many Baltimoreans of various religious and cultural backgrounds for its quality education.

Building Description

St. Alphonsus Hall, constructed in 1873, is a Gothic Revival school building located on the southern side of W. Saratoga Street, just east of Park Avenue. St. Alphonsus Church is located on the northern side of the same block, at the intersection of Saratoga and Park. St. Alphonsus Hall is a free-standing four and a half story cross-plan brick building, and is architecturally complimentary to St. Alphonsus Church. The street frontage is 66' and the depth is 183'.

The façade of the building is evocative of a church in design, scale, and detail, but the windows located on each of its floors clearly indicate the building is actually an institutional building. The façade is three bays wide, with a slightly projecting central bay. A water table runs across the length of the façade. Above the water table on the right corner of the building is the datestone, on which is carved "OCT^R 10. 1873." The entrance in the central bay has an elaborate buttressed two-story side-gabled brick surround that composes a very small enclosed entrance porch. The traceried double doors are slightly recessed in the entrance. Above the double doors is a large Gothic lancet transom window, which is surrounded by a molded brick Gothic arch. The side-gabled roof of the entrance porch is finished with decorative stone coping. A cross used to sit on the peak of this gable. Two narrow lancet windows flank the gable of the entrance porch on the second floor. A stone banner with the words "St. Alphonsus Halle" runs the width of the central bay between the second and third stories. The third and fourth stories of the central bay feature a large lancet window, above which is an arched niche under the eaves of the side-gabled roof, which used to hold a statue of St. Alphonsus but is now empty. The niche opening features an arched stone hood and a stone pedestal below. The gable end is finished with stone coping.

The right and left bays of the façade are identical. The first and second floors feature two sets of paired narrow 2/2 sash shaped windows, with the top panes of the windows featuring lancet detailing. The windows on the first and second floors have stone bracketed sills and abutting bracketed lintels. The windows on the second floor are slightly smaller than those on the first. The flanking third floor bays both have two lancet

windows, with a molded brick gothic arch surround and stone bracketed sills, while the fourth floor bays have three narrow 2/2 sash arch windows, with molded brick gothic arch surrounds and abutting bracketed stone sills. The cornice of the right and left bays consists of molded brick with corbelled brick modillions. The steep cross-gable roof is has two dormer windows, one in the left and right bay. The front gabled dormers features flared eaves and a lancet window.

Contextual History

St. Alphonsus Church was established in 1842 by the Redemptorists as their headquarters in the United States. The beautiful Gothic Revival church designed by Robert Cary Long Jr. was named St. Alphonsus for the founder of the Redemptorist congregation, St. Alphonsus Liguori. Also called the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, the Redemptorists had great success establishing Catholic communities in German-speaking countries. It was determined that the German community in Baltimore would likely benefit from a Redemptorist presence. After the Church was established, German Catholic attendance surged at St. Alphonsus.¹ In 1847, two years after the completion of St. Alphonsus Church, the Sisters of Notre Dame opened a parochial school called St. Alphonsus Halle, utilizing the German spelling of the word “hall”. The current building is in the same location as the original school.² This school served an important role in the community, as the public school system was rather limited until later in the 19th century.

The Church served the Germans of Baltimore for over seventy years, and has since served the Lithuanians for almost one hundred years. The vast majority of Lithuanians were Catholic, and the church was an important site for the deeply devout Lithuanian community in Baltimore.³ The Lithuanians, like many other immigrant communities in Baltimore at the time, maintained close-knit religious ties, with separate churches, priests, and schools.⁴

The first Lithuanians arrived in Baltimore in 1880, and by 1891, there were approximately 1,000 Lithuanians in the City.⁵ In 1886, the Lithuanian immigrants formed the first Lithuanian organization in Baltimore City. The St. John’s Beneficial Society imitated social institutions in Lithuania, and was accountable for organizing a Lithuanian parish of 500 people in 1888 in the basement of St. Peter’s Church on Poppleton Street.⁶ In 1889, the Society purchased the Lloyd Street Synagogue in Jonestown, establishing it as St. John the Baptist Church.⁷

In 1904, the parish bought a church on Saratoga and Paca Streets that formerly housed the Seventh Baptist Church.⁸ A little more than a decade later, the Lithuanians purchased St. Alphonsus Church from the Redemptorists in 1917, an action that was considered “a symbol of the new immigrant’s ascendancy over the old.” The Lithuanians then sold St. John the Baptist Church to the Italian community.⁹ Since purchasing St. Alphonsus in 1917, the church has retained a large Lithuanian population, still holding some services in Lithuanian even today.

The building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974, as part of the “St. Alphonsus’ Church, Rectory, Convent and Halle” nomination, B-4381. It is also listed on the National Register as a contributing building in the Retail District (Market Center) Historic District.

Building History

The current St. Alphonsus Hall was constructed in 1873, following a fire that devastated central Baltimore. The Clay Street fire consumed one hundred homes, two churches, and other buildings, including St. Alphonsus Hall. St. Alphonsus Church was spared because parishioners and priests risked their lives to douse the building with water.¹⁰ Following the destruction of the school, a significant amount of money was raised for the new building by the ten beneficial societies associated with St. Alphonsus Church, which was then still German and owned by the Redemptorist priests. There were 920 students who attended parochial school at the Hall.¹¹

The new St. Alphonsus Hall was completed less than six months later, “risen from its ashes, a finer building than before the fire.” The Gothic Revival building was noted to be a great improvement to that section of the City.¹² By the end of February 1874, all of the parochial school students moved back into the building from their temporary school quarters.¹³

After the purchase of the church by the Lithuanian community in 1917, the school served Lithuanian students exclusively. In 1921, the Sisters of St. Casimir came to St. Alphonsus to teach and minister at the school.¹⁴ The students were taught in both Lithuanian and English. This dual-language education was an important tool for the assimilation of the Lithuanian children. Language was a barrier for the first generation of Lithuanians in Baltimore, particularly the women, of whom half did not speak English according to a 1910 government survey.¹⁵

In the 1960s, a number of parish schools closed in Baltimore, ushering a greater diversity among the students in the remaining parochial schools. The students at St. Alphonsus Hall were no longer only Lithuanian, but from diverse cultural backgrounds.¹⁶ St. Alphonsus Hall continued to provide students with a high-quality education into the 21st century. In 2001, the school was closed by the Archdiocese of Baltimore because the school needed \$2 million in repairs, which the archdiocese could not afford. The 202 students attended pre-Kindergarten through 8th grade at the school were sent to other Catholic schools in the Baltimore area.¹⁷

The building has served multiple purposes throughout its existence as a school, parish hall, and convent. Originally, the first floor of the building was used as a convent, the second floor was a gymnasium and auditorium, the third and fourth floors were classrooms, and the fifth floor, under the eaves, was used as classrooms and rooms for boarding students.¹⁸ The second-floor auditorium also served as the parish hall, and later also functioned as the school’s cafeteria. A bowling alley was once located in the

basement, and the nuns apparently moved their quarters at some point to the fifth floor, in the attic.¹⁹ The building's flexible interior space allowed it to serve a variety of needs over its existence.

In 2005, the hall was sold to a developer, 125 West Saratoga LLC, and the property was rehabilitated and converted into condominiums. Religious elements of the building were removed in its conversion to housing, specifically two crosses, on the gable peak of the roof and entrance roof, and the statue of St. Alphonsus in the niche.

The property was sold at a foreclosure auction in 2010 to 5900 Erdman Inc, and was sold in December 2011 to Saratoga Lofts, LLC.²⁰ Saratoga Lofts, LLC. shares the same address as Regal Bank & Trust, which foreclosed on the property in 2010. It is now rented as apartments.

Staff Recommendations:

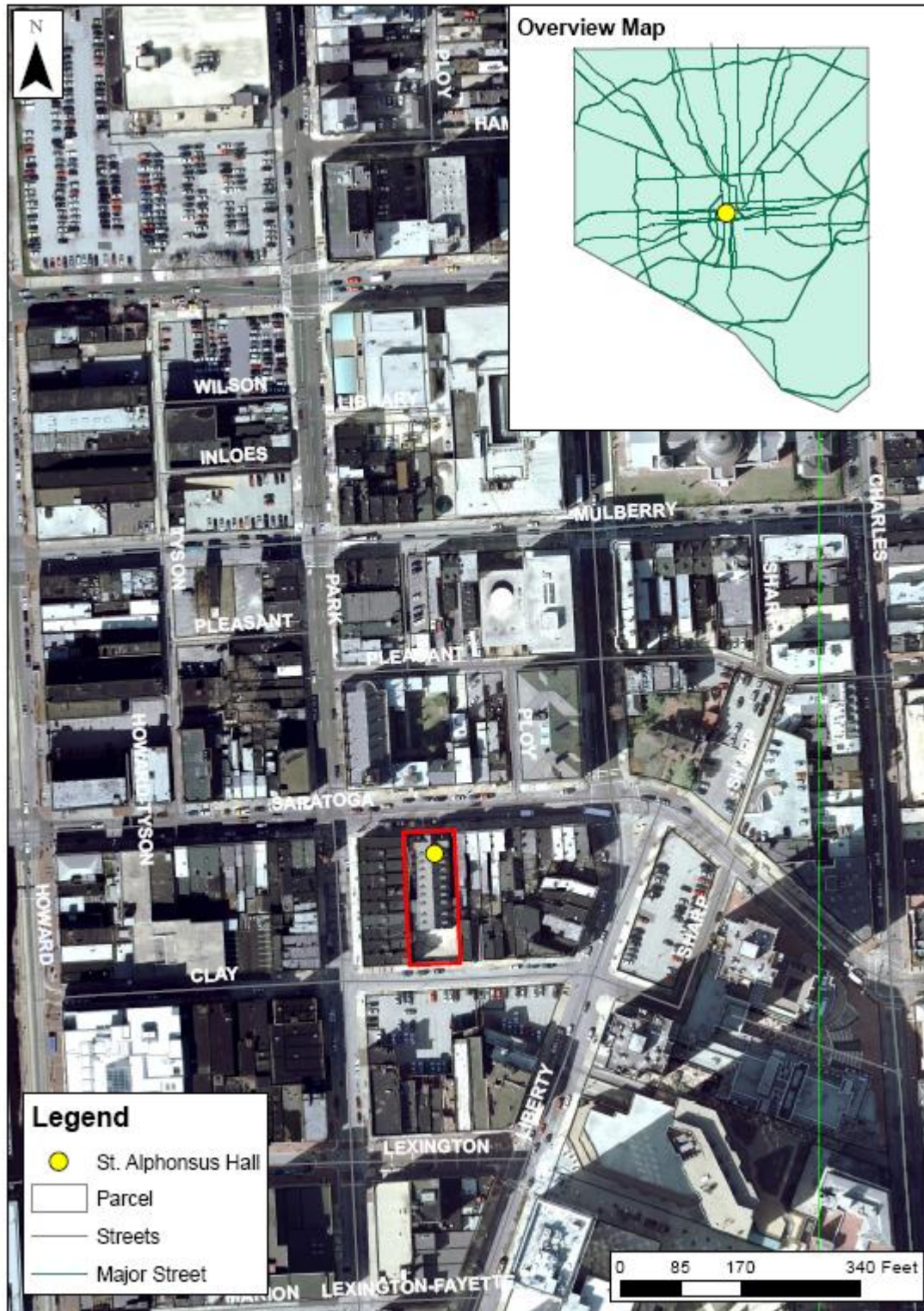
The St. Alphonsus Hall meets CHAP Landmark Designation Standards:

B. A Baltimore City Landmark may be a site, structure, landscape, building (or portion thereof), place, work of art, or other object which:

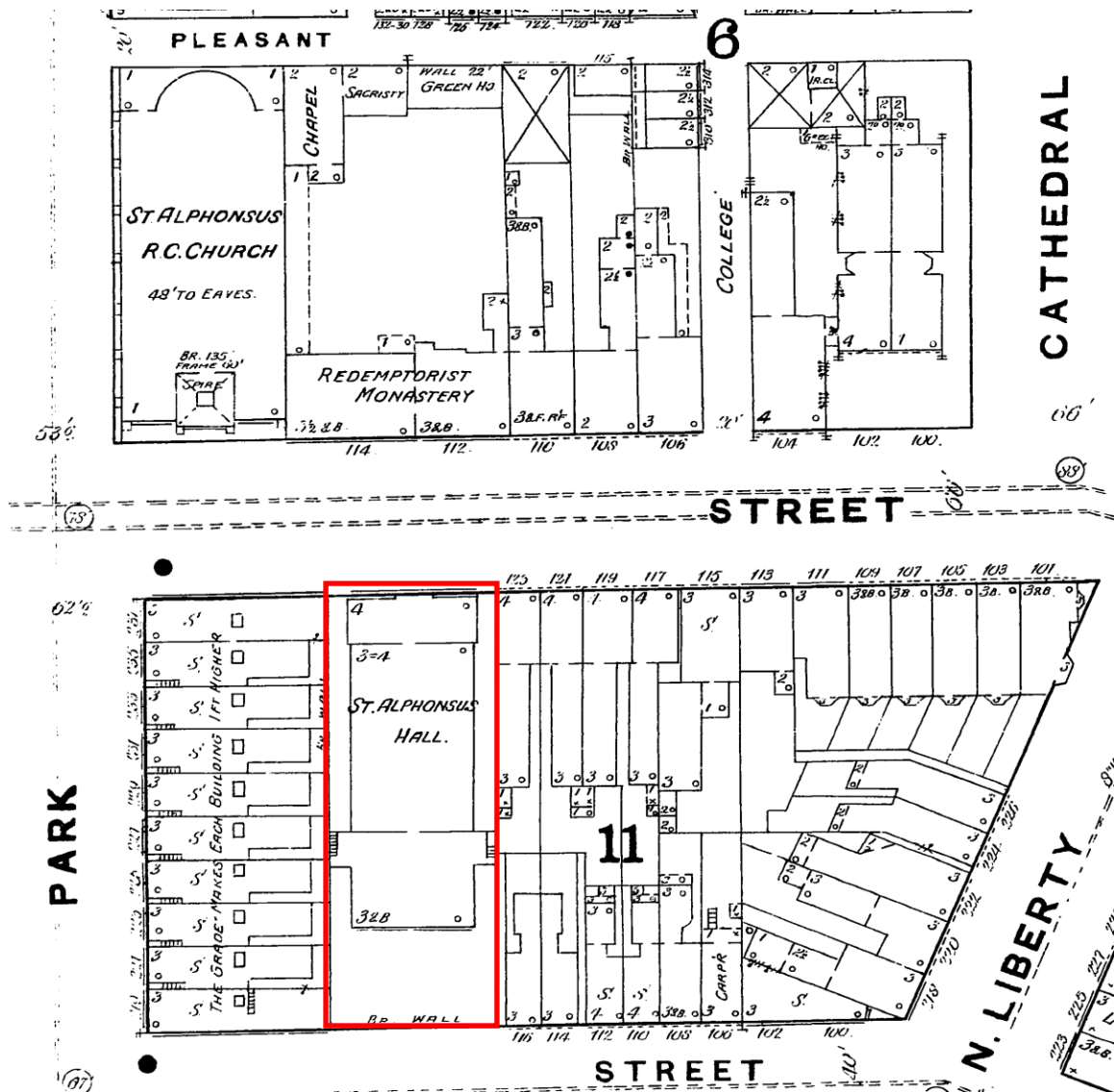
1. Is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of Baltimore history;
3. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represents the work of a master, or that possesses high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.

St. Alphonsus Hall is a fine example of a Gothic Revival institutional structure. It is architecturally evocative of St. Alphonsus Church, located across the street. St. Alphonsus Hall was an important site for Baltimore's German and Lithuanian communities throughout its history, serving as a school, parish hall and convent for St. Alphonsus Church. Early immigrant communities maintained very close-knit religious ties, attending separate churches and schools. St. Alphonsus Hall allowed the Germans and Lithuanians to retain their religious and ethnic ties while also helping them assimilate into society at large. Even after the school ceased to serve specific ethnic communities, it was valued by many Baltimoreans of various religious and cultural backgrounds for its quality education.

Locator Map



Historic Maps



1890 Sanborn Map detail of the building.
(Sanborn maps 1890, Volume 2, p.54b)

Building Photos



National Register Nomination Photo, taken by Diane Shaw, 08/1991

Current Building Photos



View from northwest, across W. Saratoga St.



Detail of cross gable façade.



Datestone on east corner of façade.

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- ¹ Thomas W. Spalding, *The Premier See: A History of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, 1789-1994* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 137.
- ² St. Alphonsus Basilica School, "150th Birthday Celebration" Enoch Pratt Free Library Vertical Files, January 20, 1998.
- ³ Spalding, 275.
- ⁴ Spalding, 296.
- ⁵ Lee McCardell, "Lithuanian Colony Living in Southwest Area Clings to Many Old Customs," *The Evening Sun*, March 15, 1938. Enoch Pratt Free Library, Maryland Room Vertical Files; "The Lithuanian Community in Baltimore," Excerpt from the *Encyclopedia Lituanica*, Simas Sužiedelis, ed., (Boston: Lithuanian Encyclopedia Press, 1970). Enoch Pratt Free Library, Maryland Room Vertical Files.
- ⁶ Spalding, 275.
- ⁷ Spalding, 275.
- ⁸ "St. John the Baptist Congregation The Purchaser"; Thomas W. Spalding, 275.
- ⁹ Spalding, 298.
- ¹⁰ "Disastrous Fire" *The Sun*, July 26, 1873, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986)
- ¹¹ "Local Matters" *The Sun*, September 20, 1873, 5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986)
- ¹² "Local Matters" *The Sun*, February 19, 1874, 4, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986); "Local Matters" *The Sun*, July 25, 1874, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986)
- ¹³ "Local Matters" *The Sun*, February 19, 1874, 4, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986); "Local Matters" *The Sun*, February 25, 1874, 4, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1986)
- ¹⁴ St. Alphonsus Basilica School.
- ¹⁵ Jo Ann E. Arsinger, *Making the Amalgamated* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 50.
- ¹⁶ St. Alphonsus Basilica School
- ¹⁷ Laurie Willis and Michael Scarcella "Catholic School in City to Close; St. Alphonsus Basilica's 19th-century building needs \$2 million in work" *The Baltimore Sun*, October 18, 2001, 3B.
- ¹⁸ "St. Alphonsus Halle School" Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form B-4381, 1991, On file at CHAP, Department of Planning, Baltimore City.
- ¹⁹ Jacques Kelly, "School's Days Dwindle; St. Alphonsus: The doors of the Catholic School witnessed the ethnic march of time in downtown Baltimore" *The Baltimore Sun*, November 4, 2011, 1B.
- ²⁰ Daniel Sernovitz, "Saratoga Street condo conversion to be auctioned before single sale" *The Baltimore Business Journal*, May 19, 2010; State Department of Assessment and Taxation Data, accessed February 14, 2012.