

Nomination Synopsis: St. Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic Church (Historic Name)
New Calvary Baptist Church (Current Name)
610 South Heald Street – Wilmington, DE

The building housing the New Calvary Baptist Church congregation has functioned as a house of worship for more than 110 years. Its architectural significance is associated with its construction as the St. Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic Church in 1909. This nomination represents the collaborative efforts of preservation partners including congregational members and the University of Delaware’s Center for Historic Architecture and Design. Funding was provided by the National Park Service through a Historic Preservation Fund Grant Sub-grant awarded to the City of Wilmington, a Certified Local Government, and managed by the Delaware State Historic Preservation Office. Wilmington’s Design Review and Historic Preservation Commission officially approved this nomination on September 16, 2020 and a review by the Delaware State Review Board for Historic Preservation is scheduled for October 21, 2020.

The Center’s architectural analysis and development of historic contexts complement the congregational and oral histories compiled by church’s research committee. Their comprehensive documentation justifies the building’s local level of significance, period of significance 1909-1970, as well as the National Register Criteria A, C, and Criteria Consideration A.

Glossary: Source:

Certified Government (CLG): a local government officially certified to carry out some of the purposes of the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended.

- Criteria: general standards by which the significance of a historic property is judged.
- Criteria A: significance associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
 - Criteria C: significance embodying the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or that represent the work of a master or possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.
 - Criteria Consideration A: a religious property deriving primary significance from architectural or artistic distinction or historical importance.

Integrity: the authenticity of a property’s identity, evidenced by the survival of physical characteristics that existed during the property’s historic period of significance and evaluated by the qualities of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

Local Significance: the importance of a property to the history of its community, such as a town or county.

Page 2

Glossary (cont.)

Period of Significance: the span of time in which a property attained the significance for which it meets the National Register criteria.

<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/upload/NRB16A-Complete.pdf>

Summary Paragraph - Narrative Description (Section 7):

St. Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic Church, now New Calvary Baptist Church, is in the Southbridge/South Wilmington neighborhood of Wilmington, Delaware on an 80'x100' city lot at the corner of South Heald and Pearl Streets. The one-story, rectangular building with a raised, finished, full basement measures approximately 31' x 71' and was constructed of rusticated cement blocks in 1909. The church's stepped brick front gable—altered in the middle of the 20th century from an arch resembling the central dome of a Byzantine church—faces northwest onto South Heald Street and contains a central oculus window. The façade features engaged brick pilasters, a corbeled cornice line, and arched windows. A centered cupola and a small one to either side, each topped by faceted Byzantine-style domes, rise from the vestibule's roof. The building has been in almost continuous use as a religious facility since its construction in 1909. It was built by Ukrainian immigrants of the Greek or Ukrainian Catholic faith and sold to the New Calvary Baptist congregation in May of 1969. The church has undergone several adaptations over the years but retains a large degree of integrity of material, design, and setting, in addition to location and association. Upkeep, accessibility, and the evolving needs of the New Calvary congregation account for changes in the fifty years between 1970 and 2020.

Statement of Integrity:

St. Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic Church retains a high level of integrity with respect to location, setting, workmanship, feeling, and association. Changes in the design of the building's exterior in 1917 and again in the 1940s took place within the period of significance, as did Baptist-era alterations made just after the transition in 1969. Even with subsequent alterations to the windows, the building retains much integrity of design. Despite significant alterations to the building within and following the period of significance, it features many original materials. Overall, alterations to the building undertaken within the period of significance represent the denominational shift from Ukrainian Catholic to Baptist, maintenance and repair decisions, changes in tastes, styles, and modern conveniences, and parishioners' responses to changing circumstances within their communities. Most of these enhance, rather than detract from, the building's historic integrity.

Location: The St. Nicholas church building, now home to the New Calvary Baptist congregation, has maintained its original location at the corner of South Heald and Pearl Streets in South Wilmington since its construction in 1909.

Page 3

Statement of Integrity (cont.):

Setting: St. Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic Church maintains a high level of integrity with respect to its setting. The surrounding neighborhood remains working class. Many early 20th century buildings—most of brick—remain on the block to give a sense of the neighborhood as it appeared when the church was built. A Ukrainian corner store remains on the block, although no longer in business. Most notably, the former home of Saints Peter and Paul Ukrainian Orthodox Church, with its emphatic onion domes, still stands across the street on the same block. These remnants of Ukrainian culture reveal the original immigrant character of this neighborhood. In addition, while the amount and type of traffic along South Heald Street has changed since 1909, it remains a major thoroughfare through this section of Wilmington.

Design: Design shifts on the exterior—including that from a relatively plain, concrete block building to one incorporating a vestibule with decorative façade with an arched and then stepped pediment—were undertaken during the period of significance, with the addition of the vestibule and eastern-style domed cupolas in 1917, and the change to stepped pediment in the 1940s. The shift in gable shape from arched to stepped was probably a deliberate decision, perhaps undertaken as part of necessary repair work. The change achieved a more Romanesque look from one with greater affinities to Byzantine styling. A change in window design from Romanesque-style to much plainer windows was undertaken in 1987-1988. The alteration reflects the need to carry out repairs and updates in the most cost-effective way possible.

Materials: Much of the original or early fabric is intact and remains visible on the exterior of the building. This includes the rockface cement blocks of the original section of the church, the bricks of the vestibule, the structure of the cupolas and the metal sheathing of their domes, and many of the original wood windows, albeit containing replacement glazing. Replacement windows on the facade are not in-kind, but likely reflect economical maintenance measures. The recent replacement of relatively steep concrete steps, possibly original, at the northeast elevation with a set of steps including a landing between short flights has improved safety for those accessing the building. The interior has undergone redecoration both within and after the period of significance, reflecting the denominational shift from Ukrainian Catholic to Baptist and changing tastes. Much of the original and early fabric remains intact on the interior, however, including the decorative pressed metal ceilings, the central chandelier, the window trim in the sanctuary, and, most probably, the wainscoting now obscured behind wood paneling.

Workmanship: The original workmanship is on display in the well-laid concrete blocks of the main section of the church, placed by the first congregants themselves. The brickwork and decorative details of the vestibule suggest that its builder was an experienced brick layer.

Page 4

Statement of Integrity (cont.):

Feeling: Although the denomination of its congregation has changed, the church building's domed cupolas and unusual pediment still evokes the feeling of an Eastern Rite Christian church.

Association: The building has been in almost continuous use as a Christian house of worship since its construction in 1909 and remains easily identified as such.

Summaries of Significance (Section 8):

St. Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic Church, now home to the New Calvary Baptist Church, is locally significant under **Criterion A** for its ability to tell the story of Ukrainian immigration to and settlement within Wilmington, Delaware at the turn of the 20th century. As Wilmington's first purpose-built Greek Catholic Church, it is also significant as the focal point of the Ukrainian community in Wilmington and as the locus of community struggles to establish doctrinal unity, reconcile competing nationalistic sentiments, and gain legitimacy and prosperity in America. The building further illustrates the experience of an African American congregation in Wilmington following the failures of the city's urban renewal program, the protracted National Guard occupation in the city in 1968, and general demographic transitions in South Wilmington, also called the Southbridge neighborhood, over the course of the 20th century.

Although built and in continued use as a Christian church, the property meets **Criteria Consideration A** for religious properties because of its significance under Criterion A in demonstrating settlement patterns in South Wilmington over the course of the 20th century and historical trends shaping the city of Wilmington at mid-century; and under Criterion C for its significance as an example of vernacular Ukrainian church architecture in the city later adapted for its use by a Baptist congregation. It is also significant under Criterion C as an example of early 20th century construction practices.

St. Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic Church, the present home of New Calvary Baptist Church, is significant under **Criterion C** at the local level as an excellent example of early 20th century vernacular Ukrainian religious architecture in Wilmington, Delaware. It is noteworthy as an example of an unadorned building that was later adapted to better reflect the ethnic and religious identities of the East Slavic immigrant community who built and modified it. The Baptists, too, have left their mark on the building, particularly with adaptations on the interior to facilitate rituals and practices distinctive to their denomination. Later modifications by the New Calvary Baptist congregation extend its vernacular character, adding yet another layer to the building's unique—and uniquely American—history. The church is also significant under Criterion C for its construction with imitative materials, especially ornamental concrete block and pressed metal ceilings—both distinctive to the early-20th century and often chosen for their affordability. Overall, the architecture of the former St. Nicholas demonstrates some of the ways a group of Ukrainian newcomers adapted traditional forms of architecture and materials to suit their

Page 5

circumstances in America and, in small but meaningful ways, reflects the denominational shift from Ukrainian Catholic to Baptist.

Correlation with the 2018 – 2022 State Historic Preservation Plan titled “Partners in Preservation: Planning for the Future”:

Goal 1: Strengthen/Expand Delaware’s Core Federal/State Historic Preservation Program.

Strategy 7: Address gaps and biases in the state’s inventory of historic properties.

Actions 7a: Prioritize cultural resource survey and National Register nominations to address underrepresented communities or property types [African American Cultural Resources]

DE SHPO 9/22/2020