

CHURCH OF THE HOLY TRINITY NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

PRESERVATION ACTION PLAN



January 2010

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Prepared for Father Bill Dennler

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**A Public Service Project of the
Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area
Middle Tennessee State University
Murfreesboro, Tennessee 37132**



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Introduction

The Church of the Holy Trinity is an outstanding example of Gothic revival style in Davidson County. Modeled after an English parish church, its design is attributed to the New York architectural firm of Dudley and Wills. The congregation began as a mission that was established in July 1849 by Rev. Charles Tomes. Less than three years later, the first Episcopal Bishop of Tennessee, James H. Otey, laid the cornerstone, and the nave was completed by the end of 1853. Work on the tower had reached height of the ridgepole of the church in 1861, but would not be finished until 1887.

Soon after the fall of Fort Donelson in early 1862, the Union army occupied Nashville. Federal ordnance officers appropriated Holy Trinity's stone building for use as a powder magazine and for quartering teamsters. The interior and furnishings of the church were destroyed during this time, but an inventory of the damages was taken and after the war the U.S. government reimbursed the parish for \$1,200 in damages and \$125 for rent.

The Church of the Holy Trinity played a significant role during the Civil War and remains as a valuable resource within the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area. The Heritage Area is committed to protecting and interpreting this historic church building and other similar properties in order to help to tell the whole story of America's greatest challenge. The following report is intended to help guide the preservation and restoration of this important piece of Tennessee history.

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When caring for an historic property, the most important duty is to protect the building from the elements and agents of harm. Water is the most common and most deadly threat to the existence of any structure. Although fire is much more dramatic and quick, every part of a building can be affected negatively by uncontrolled moisture. Wood doesn't rot if it's kept wet all the time, or dry all the time, but it will deteriorate rapidly if it repeatedly goes through wet and dry cycles. Plaster and drywall will fail also if they are repeatedly exposed to moisture. It is extremely important to protect the wood, paper, and other fragile elements of a building from dampness; otherwise, deterioration is inevitable.

Another threat comes from animals, birds, and vermin. These creatures pose considerable danger to the building and its inhabitants when they occupy any part of it. Besides accelerating the physical deterioration of the building, the varmints can pass on a number of serious diseases to humans who share the same space. The uncontrolled access of birds poses an immediate and serious health issue. After a thorough cleaning of the affected areas, the entire building must be made bird-proof to prevent re-infestation. This work should be made a top priority.

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1. As noted above, erecting barriers to prevent birds from entering the church and the removal of their waste is the top preservation priority. It should be done before any other work is begun in order to afford the greatest protection to the parishioners and other workmen. Care should be taken to minimize any changes to the appearance of the historic church.

2. The most important parts of any building are its roof and the foundation. No matter what material is used, the roof must shed water at every point and must be impervious to wind-blown rain. The roof on the Church of the Holy Trinity will need replacement soon for practical and historical reasons. The present composition shingles are beginning to show wear and nails in the wood sheathing beneath them have begun to pop up. Also, it does not appear that any of the metal flashing at the roof junctions, extremities, and projections was replaced at the time the shingles were installed.



These are the very locations that need the most protection and new material should have been installed at the same time as the shingles. All flashing should be removed and replaced, preferably with sheet copper, when the next roof is installed. All chimneys and flues should have a metal cap with drip edges and a bird screen.

3. According to a Historic American Buildings Survey report written in 1970 by Roy C. Pledger, the original roof of the Church of the Holy Trinity “appears to have been covered by a seamed tin roof.” This opinion is consistent with a sketch in W.W. Clayton’s *History of Davidson County, Tennessee*, published in 1880 that depicts a similar type of roof. There is a possibility that this original metal roof still may exist

under several layers of composition roofing. When the roof is replaced, the use of standing seam metal would be economically competitive and historically accurate.

4. Closely associated with the roof are the gutters. It is important that the area around the foundation be kept dry. A damp foundation will raise the humidity level in the building, creating opportunity for mold to form. Water collected by the roof should be channeled down and away from the building with an integrated gutter, downspout, and leader system. At present, this system is not functioning properly. Some of the leaders are clogged and some of the downspouts may be. Fasteners have come loose causing some sections to sag, overflow, and not drain properly.



The ends of the leaders are crushed and inhibit proper water flow.



Some of the lower gutter sections have more water coming in from other roof surfaces above them. This extra volume of rainwater causes the gutters to overflow and damage the walls below.



As a result, moss and mold is growing on some of the wall surfaces because of the uncontrolled runoff water.



The water also spills onto the ground and splashes up onto the lower wall surfaces, causing deterioration. In addition, the splattering action displaces soil around the perimeter of the church, leaving the building in the middle of a shallow depression whenever it rains.



Much of this water finds its way underneath the building via voids in the mortar or through the walls themselves during periods of wet weather.



To correct this situation, topsoil should be brought in, spread evenly around the perimeter of the church (using hand tools close to the building), and sloped away using at least a 1:12 pitch to encourage positive drainage. The best time to do this is in the spring or fall, so that the exposed soil can be seeded and then covered with straw.

5. The solution to controlling the rainwater is to either install a new gutter system or refurbish the old one so that it functions properly again. As a first step in rehabilitating the present system, the gutters and other components should be scraped of rust and repainted. Care should be taken to assure that each horizontal section is pitched from a high point in the middle of the span to the low points at the head of the downspouts. A collection box should be installed in places where two roof surfaces drain into one downspout that is large enough to handle the volume of water produced. The vertical downspouts should be fixed firmly to the walls and be attached securely to the components at both ends. The bottom of the downspouts should hook up to horizontal plastic leaders installed below the surface of the ground that drain the water away from the building. All components of the gutter system must be inspected on a regular basis to prevent clogging.