

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

St. Margaret Catholic Church (1910) is a frame Gothic Revival building located in the rural hamlet of Hungarian Settlement, which is just south of Albany and Interstate 12. Although there have been some alterations, including the installation of aluminum siding, the church retains its overall historic appearance.

St. Margaret's has a basilican plan with a central entrance tower surmounted by a belfry and a broach spire. The belfry is enlivened by sharply pointed gables set on each of its four sides. Most of the windows take the form of single center arch lancets with the upper glazing bars worked into a very simple tracery pattern. The one exception is the gallery window, which features an elliptically arched top. It, too, has upper glazing bars worked into a tracery pattern. Louvered openings in the belfry echo the shape of the lancet windows.

The simple flushboard nave culminates in a round arch apse containing the altar. The inscription above the altar reads "Dicsőseg Mennyben az Istennek" ("Glory to God in Heaven" in Hungarian). Small rooms are set either side of the apse. The nave is surmounted by a wooden pointed vault which springs from a heavy molded cornice. At the back of the nave is a small gallery featuring a plain balustrade.

Alterations

Within the past fifty years the church has sustained the following changes. For the record, no noteworthy changes occurred before that time.

1. The exterior has been completely sheathed in aluminum siding. It should be noted that the gauge of the substitute siding is the same as the original siding, and the siding is textured in a manner resembling wood. In addition, the window and door surrounds are separately sheathed so that they retain their visual identity.
2. A small wing has been added at the rear.
3. The tower base has been fitted with a small single bay entrance porch with a handicap access ramp.
4. Historic photographs reveal that the windows were originally clear glass. Today they are colored glass.

Assessment of Integrity

Although the aforementioned alterations are not inconsiderable, it should be emphasized that anyone from the historic period would instantly recognize the church today, which is the litmus test for National Register eligibility for historically significant properties.

Contributing/Non-contributing Elements

Also located within the nominated area is one non-contributing element: a modern educational building. There is a 1920s meeting hall which is being listed as a contributing element. As noted in Item 8, the hall and its Presbyterian counterpart served as civic centers, so-to-speak, for Hungarian Settlement. Although aluminum sided, it retains enough of its historic appearance to be recognized by someone from the historic period. (A historic photograph of the hall provided the necessary comparison.)

Significant dates 1910-1941
Architect/Builder unknown
Criterion A

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

St. Margaret's Catholic Church is locally significant in the area of ethnic history because it and the Hungarian Presbyterian Church survive to best represent the ethnic heritage of Hungarian Settlement. The year 1941 was chosen to end the period of significance because Hungarian Settlement continued to be an ethnic community up to and past the fifty year cutoff.

Hungarian immigrants from the North were first attracted to the area around 1896. The stimulus was the Charles Brakenridge Lumber Company, which advertised in Hungarian newspapers for workers' promising employment as well as the opportunity to buy land. The three original settlers were Julius Bruskey, Tivador Zboray and Adam Mocsary. They in turn wrote to friends and relatives in both America and Hungary, and Bruskey and Zboray visited Hungarian communities in the North to spread the word. Also, the Illinois Central Railroad paid to advertise the area in an Hungarian newspaper in Cleveland, Ohio. By 1900, seventeen Hungarian families had moved to the sawmill community. They called their settlement Arpadhon, or "place of Arpad," in honor of a legendary Hungarian hero. The earliest building (besides the mill complex) was the Immigration House, a large two story building built by Brakenridge Lumber to serve various needs. It provided temporary lodging for settlers and helped meet the immediate religious, educational and social needs of the fledging colony. By 1910, the population of Arpadhon had grown to sixty-five families (291 people). Presbyterians built their permanent place of worship in 1908 and the larger Catholic population built St. Margaret's in 1910. Named for a patron saint of Hungary, the church was consecrated in 1912.

Despite the mill's closing in 1916, Arpadhon continued to grow in the 1920s as more and more Hungarians made it their home. Now the economic foundation was agriculture, with strawberries as the dominant crop. From the very beginning, one of the chief inducements to immigrate to the area had been the opportunity to buy cutover land (in twenty acre parcels) from the lumber company. In the early years, settlers combined farming with a long day's work in the mill. After the mill closed, they turned completely to farming, capitalizing on the strawberry boom occurring in the area. By 1935, Arpadhon had reached its peak population of about 200 families (1500 individuals). Up until the post World War II era, it was a strong self-contained ethnic community where English was seldom heard and Hungarian married Hungarian. In later years the name Arpadhon faded from use, as more and more people simply referred to the community as Hungarian Settlement, the name it is known by today.

Today there is little left standing to represent the once thriving Hungarian colony of Arpadhon. Historically, it was a rural hamlet of scattered farms. Early farmhouses, as shown in photographs, were board and batten buildings with single porches across the front and rear. Population figures demonstrate that at its peak, there must have been about 900 farmsteads in the settlement. Today, the farmsteads may still be there, but the old family home has been replaced with a brick ranch house. Only about a half dozen older houses survive, in varying stages of integrity. None of these are the type of board and batten farmhouses that represent the earliest housing stock. Perhaps the most significant building in Arpadhon, the Immigration House, is long gone. Fortunately, a photo survives. The community also had its own Hungarian newspaper, but the building where it was published is also gone, as are the farmer's association meeting hall and the buildings housing St. Margaret's Parochial School and the Hungarian Settlement Public Grammar

School. The latter was built in about 1920 and burned during the 1927-28 school year. A frame school building moved to Arpadhon after the fire from nearby Springfield survives in deteriorated condition.

Historically, life in Arpadhon revolved around the two churches, St. Margaret's and the Hungarian Presbyterian Church. In addition to providing a place to worship, they were the focus of community activities. Various events were held on the grounds, and a hall on each property served, in effect, as a community center where plays were performed, lectures given, etc. Fortunately, both of the original church buildings are still there. The Community Hall on the grounds of the Presbyterian Church is gone, while the hall at St. Margaret's survives.

Of the few buildings that remain in Hungarian Settlement, the two churches are clearly the most representative of the community's ethnic heritage. They date from the early years of settlement and were used by the community at large. While the few residences and the moved in school could be from anywhere, St. Margaret Catholic Church, named for a patron saint of Hungary and proclaiming "Glory to God in Heaven" in Hungarian above the altar, is a strong visual reminder of the community's ethnic heritage. It should also be noted that the two churches were and are regarded as preservers of Hungarian culture and traditions. This is perhaps best summarized in a statement from the Arpadhon Hungarian Settlement Cultural Association. "Words alone can in no way describe the emotional attachment and the cultural importance that the Hungarian descendants hold for St. Margaret's Catholic Church and the Hungarian Presbyterian Church. These two structures equally share the privilege of being the cornerstones of the entire cultural heritage of this community."

Major Bibliographical References

Mocsary, Victoria Ann. Arpadhon: The Largest Rural Hungarian Settlement in the United States. Hammond, Louisiana: Center for Regional Studies, Southeastern Louisiana University, Folklife in the Florida Parishes Series, Vol. IV, 1990.

Historic photographs of Hungarian Settlement. On display at St. Margaret's Catholic Church.