



7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (If known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Belmont Abbey Cathedral is a large Gothic Revival church built of brick laid in one-to-five common bond and ornamented with granite trim. The long cruciform building is covered by a steep gable roof running perpendicular to the main (west) facade. This facade is dominated by two towers, one at either end, of similar design but unequal size--that on the south being considerably larger.

The central part of the facade is covered at the first level by a projecting narthex of brick, added in 1965. At the second level is a large pointed-arched window filled with trefoil-headed tracery and set like most of the windows in a brick arch accented by a granite keystone. The pedimented gable is framed by a molded cornice with a lower band of indented circles. In the tympanum is a triple window: three tall, narrow windows, the central one being the tallest, rest on a common rusticated granite sill. Each contains a trefoil-headed window. The apex of the gable is topped by a Celtic cross, and the ridge is crowned by a cresting of standing circles.

The outer corners of the large south tower, which is square in section, are defined by pairs of stepped buttresses whose offsets are capped by rusticated granite. These offsets divide the base of the tower into four stages. At the first level is an entrance in the front face, with a larger tracery trefoil in the pointed-arched tympanum. A single lancet occurs on the sides and rear, divided by tracery into two long pointed arches beneath a single trefoil. At the second level are two lancet windows similarly treated. The second and third levels are separated by a granite belt course connecting the buttress offsets. The third level features a triple window like that in the pediment. At the fourth level, above another similar belt course, on all four faces of the tower is a clock with Roman numerals on a plain square face. The fourth level terminates in a band of stone incised with trefoils, a course of rusticated granite connecting the buttress offsets, and a molded cornice like that of the pediment. At each corner a pinnacle rests atop the buttress. It is square in section, with a trefoil-headed arch beneath a triangular arch on each face, and topped by a crocketed spire with an ornate finial. Springing from the base of each pinnacle are two small flying buttresses that support a brick belfry octagonal in section, with a pointed-arched opening on each face. These are filled with tracery and scalloped louvers. The belfry is crowned by a tall spire, also octagonal in section, with gablets at the base on alternate faces. The spire, covered with shingles, culminates in a Celtic cross.

The smaller north tower is of similar design, but has only three stages in the base; a pair of lancet windows occurs at the third level under a common granite lintel.

The nave is four bays long to the crossing, with the bays, separated by buttresses, containing tall pointed-arched windows with Decorated tracery. Each transept, with buttressed corners, has similar windows front and back, and at the ends a round window with tracery outlining a six-pointed star. The chancel extends two more bays, treated like the nave. The steep gable roof is punctuated by small louvered dormers, one placed above each bay of nave and chancel. At the east end of the chancel a small one-story addition

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	
North Carolina	
COUNTY	
Gaston	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

(Number all entries)

7.

has been constructed to serve as a sacristy.

The interior of Belmont Abbey Cathedral was thoroughly remodeled in 1965 in an unadorned "modern" style. The handsome stained glass, the plaster stations of the cross hung beneath the nave windows, and the small wooden statue of the Virgin high on the east wall are all that remain of the original ornament. The brick walls and random flagstone floor covering are left bare. The marble altar at the crossing and the altars in the transepts, along with the lectern and pews, are all of modern design.

8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Columbian |  16th Century |  18th Century |  20th Century  
 15th Century |  17th Century |  19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known)

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |                                      |  |  |
|--|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal              | <input type="checkbox"/> Education   | <input type="checkbox"/> Political                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric             | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Religion/Phi.<br>losophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic                | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry    | <input type="checkbox"/> Science                             | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture             | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention   | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture                           | _____                                    |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape   | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Human-<br>itarian            | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature  | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater                             | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce                | <input type="checkbox"/> Military    | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation                      | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications          | <input type="checkbox"/> Music       |  | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation            |                                      |  | _____                                    |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Belmont Abbey Cathedral is an impressive late Gothic Revival structure, whose large mass and soaring spires provide a dominant landmark in Gaston County. One of thirty abbeys in the United States, the Benedictine abbey was a religious and educational pioneer in the western part of the state and is of considerable importance to the history of Catholicism in North Carolina.

The first Catholic church in Gaston County was St. Joseph's, located near Mount Holly. Built in 1842, it served as a parish church for several years until the local Catholic population dwindled so that the parish was discontinued. In 1872 Jeremiah O'Connell, a Catholic priest, offered to the abbot of St. Vincent's Archabbey in Pennsylvania (the first Benedictine monastery in the United States) a large North Carolina plantation which O'Connell had acquired immediately after the Civil War. The abbot accepted the offer and soon sent a group of Benedictines to establish a monastery on the "Old Caldwell Plantation," as it was called. Leading the group was Father Herman Wolfe, O. S. B., from St. Vincent's who began preparations for opening a school. According to a local history,

The small Community--the Priest, five lay brothers and four students--lived in a log house on the plantation until the autumn of 1876, when work was begun on a frame building. The following year a small frame chapel was built and was dedicated to the Mother of God, under her title, Mary, Help of Christians. In time, by common usage, this was shortened to "Maryhelp."

Soon afterwards a small brick building was erected and thus was begun the first Catholic college in the Middle South for the education of boys.

In 1884 the Southern Benedictine Mission, as it was called, was made independent, receiving the title Maryhelp Abbey. Additional priests and clerics from St. Vincent's moved to Maryhelp, and Father Leo Haid, O. S. B. became the first abbot. The growth of the institution after this was quite rapid. A college building was erected in 1886 and expanded in 1889. On Saint Benedict's Day, March 21, 1892, ground was broken for the new abbey church. In 1894 "it was solemnly dedicated by Cardinal Gibbons in the presence of many Bishops, Abbots, and Priests from every section of the Union." An outstanding part of the new building was the stained glass windows, said to have "received first prize at the World's Fair held at Chicago in 1893."

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	
North Carolina	
COUNTY	
Gaston	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

(Number all entries)

8.

In 1910 a "modification was made in the Vicariate of North Carolina," when Pope Pius X formed an "'Abbey Nullius' from the counties of Gaston, Lincoln, Cleveland, Rutherford, Polk, Burke, McDowell and Catawba, . . . [to] form a diocese over which rule[d] the Abbot of Maryhelp Abbey (now called Belmont Abbey)."

During the first half of the twentieth century, Belmont Abbey extended its educational influence throughout the southeast, establishing or supporting schools, churches, and charitable institutions in several states. Over the years changes were made in the arrangements of the diocesan administration of western North Carolina. In 1943 the abbey's territory was reduced to include only Gaston County, and finally, "by decree of the Sacred Consistorial Congregation, dated March 26, 1960, . . . the diocesan territory of the Abbatia Nussius (which formerly comprised Gaston County) was restricted to the grounds of Belmont Abbey Monastery, consists of one parish, and is governed by Common Law. . . ." The students of Belmont Abbey College now constitute the parish of Belmont Abbey Cathedral.

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Research by Catherine Cockshutt and Charles Blume, survey specialists; architectural description by Ruth Little, survey specialist.  
 Briggs, Reverend Anselm G., O. S. B. The Benedictine Life, Belmont, North Carolina: Belmont Abbey Press, 1969.  
 Gaston County Records, Gaston County Courthouse, Gastonia, North Carolina, Office of the Register of Deeds (Subgroups: Deeds, Wills).  
 Gaston County Records, State Department of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina (Subgroups: Deeds, Wills).  
 Separk, Joseph H. Gastonia and Gaston County, Kingsport, Tennessee: Kingsport Press, Inc., 1936.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	LATITUDE		LONGITUDE
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
NW	0' 0" 0"	0' 0" 0"	35°	15'	43"
NE	0' 0" 0"	0' 0" 0"	81°	02'	36"
SE	0' 0" 0"	0' 0" 0"			
SW	0' 0" 0"	0' 0" 0"			

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 9 acres

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE:

Survey and Planning Unit Staff

ORGANIZATION

State Department of Archives and History

DATE

18 October 1972

STREET AND NUMBER:

109 East Jones Street

CITY OR TOWN:

Raleigh

STATE

North Carolina

CODE

37

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National  State  Local

Name

H. G. Jones

Title Administrator, Office of Archives and History

Date 18 October 1972

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date

ATTEST:

Keeper of The National Register

Date

SEE INSTRUCTIONS