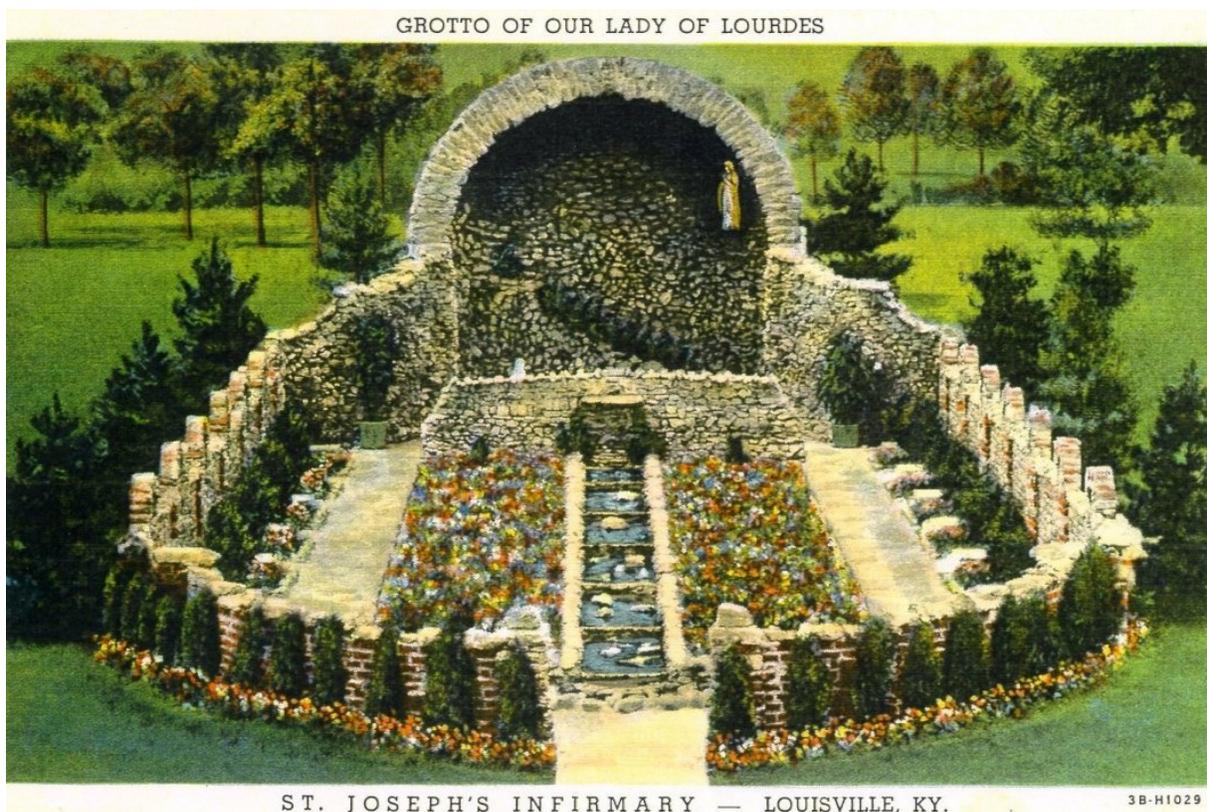


Final
Designation Report
April 4, 2001
Revised April 5, 2001

The Grotto and Garden Of Our Lady of Lourdes At the Old St. Joseph's Infirmary Site



Prepared
By
Joanne Weeter
Historic Preservation Officer

Location

The small, triangular-shaped neighborhood of St. Joseph's, named for the now-demolished St. Joseph's Infirmary, is where the Grotto and Garden of Our Lady of Lourdes are located. The Grotto and Garden comprise a rustic designed historic landscape feature that is located on the former site of the St. Joseph's Infirmary Complex. The site, near Eastern Parkway and Bradley Avenue, is tucked between James Guthrie Court, James Pirtle Court, and President's Boulevard, that were later constructed to serve the 224-unit University Park Apartments (see site map).

History

Around 1910, Eastern Parkway was laid out by Olmsted Brothers on the site of Samuel Churchill's rural farm. Easy access lead to development, and the area was soon subdivided for residential and commercial uses. The Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, needing additional space and seeking to move from bustling Fourth Street to a more tranquil setting, purchased one of the unimproved lots. By 1926, the Sisters had constructed a state-of-the art, 325-bed hospital, which was constructed and a nursing student dormitory and all-purpose gymnasium-auditorium complex was added. The Infirmary's Grotto and Garden were designed as part of this complex to be a secluded place of quiet contemplation for the hospital's staff, patients, and visitors. The new infirmary improved healthcare in the city and spurred further development in the area.

Description

The spiritual inspiration for the St. Joseph's Infirmary Grotto is the Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes in southern France. The French grotto, a rugged, naturally formed cave located on the side of a hill, was site of the young Bernadette's apparitions of the Virgin Mary, who spoke on 18 separate occasions between February 11 and July 16, 1858. Bernadette, who later joined the Religious habit of the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of Nevers, was later beatified and canonized by the Roman Catholic Church. Religious pilgrims have visited the Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes ever since, finding healing power from drinking and washing in the naturally flowing water at the cave site. Reportedly, the Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes has the second highest number of visitors in France, after Paris.

The Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes at the St. Joseph's Infirmary site was, according to hospital records, "...as nearly like the famous shrine in France as could be made, and is built into the side of a little knoll..."...For a more detailed description please see the attached text from the "St. Joseph's Infirmary Annals".

The St. Joseph's Grotto is designed historic landscape feature that is defined by its walled enclosure and the rows of evergreens flanking either side. It is formal in the symmetry of its plan, yet rustic in the use of brick, stone, and rubble building materials. The Garden forms a rectangular, roofless "naïve" enclosed by masonry walls with semi-circular paved areas at its terminating ends. Fourteen regularly spaced masonry piers buttress the enclosure wall and feature inset arched niches (now filled in) for the Stations of the cross. A stream of water once flowed from the high stone back of a bench facing the Grotto to a goldfish pool (now planting beds) on the central axis of the

Garden. Pathways lined by flowerbeds complete the Garden enclosure. The pedestrian entrance at one end of the Garden is aligned with the two-story, half-domed apse forming the Grotto, in which statues of the Virgin and Bernadette were originally placed around a hidden “spring” flowing to a pool of water. The Grotto consists of a reinforced concrete shell with stone and rubble facing on the inside.

Architect

Verification of the architect of the St. Joseph’s Grotto is provided by 2 architect’s drawings dating from 1927. The tile block indicates that D.X. Murphy and Brothers, Architects, were the architects of record. D. X. Murphy (1853-1933) formed the firm in partnership with his brothers James C. Murphy (1865-1935) and Peter J. Murphy (1869-1955). They succeeded the firm of Henry Whitestone. D.X. Murphy and his brothers were Roman Catholics who designed numerous catholic schools, churches, and rectories in Louisville and around the region. Among their noted works they designed were Engelhard School (on Kentucky Street near Brook), the US Custom House and Post Office (demolished in the 1940s), Presentation Academy (1893), the Churchill Downs Grandstand and twin spires (1895). They also designed the Louisville General Hospital (1914), which was referred to as the “Million Dollar Hospital”, as a reference to the expense of building a comparable facility for African Americans on the same site.

Historic and Architectural Significance

It is believed that the St. Joseph’s Grotto is a unique local example of a grotto religious shrine. No other examples of grottos of this scale and high-style design are believed to exist in the City of Louisville or Jefferson County. It is closely linked to the grotto on the grounds of the Nazarene Mother House in Nelson County, Kentucky.

Recent History

In 1970, the Sister of Charity sold their hospital building to the local hospital chain, Humana, Inc. Humana operated their hospital in the old Infirmary Building for 10 years. When Humana vacated the site and relocated to Poplar Level Road (in what is now known as Humana Hospital Audubon). Humana demolished the Infirmary’s main building and donated the site to the University of Louisville. Meanwhile, the hospital’s old nursing dormitory was renovated by the City of Louisville Housing Authority into Lourdes Hall, a senior citizen’s residence. The old St. Joseph’s multi-purpose building was renovated into a recreation center. UL later released a portion of the old hospital site to Brown-Noltemeyer, who developed the 224-unit University Park Apartments.

Sources Consulted*

Encyclopedia of Louisville

University of Louisville Archives (Inside UL, November, 3, 1986 issue)

University of Louisville Photographic Archives

University of Louisville Medical Archives

SCN Archival Center, Nazareth, KY.

St. Joseph’s Neighborhood Association

Louisville Survey: Central and South by Carl Kramer

*To be finalized in the near future

1927.

BEAUTIFUL GROTTO OF OUR LADY OF LOURDES AT ST. JOSEPH INF.

Blessed May 26, 1927-Services by Father Eugene.

The beautiful grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes which has recently been built is now complete with the exception of the fourteen Stations of the Cross which will line the approach of the grotto, seven on each side. These are to be of mosaic and it is expected they will be finished and set within another month.

The grotto itself is as nearly like the famous shrine in France as could be made, and is built into the side of a little knoll on the west side and facing the north end of the Infirmary building. The exterior finish is of smooth cement and in the sunlight gleams like the half of a white dome. This will be some day covered with ivy. The interior of the graceful arch is beautiful in its simplicity. It is constructed of rocks, left in their natural rugged state. To the upper right hand stands a statue of Our Lady in a niche. On the cement floor in front and to the left kneels little Bernadette gazing up at Our lady. High among the rocks to the left, water drips from rock to rock, as if from a hidden spring; already moss and lichen have taken hold in the crevices, and as the time goes on, Nature will enrich the beauty of the shrine.

Red brick and stone, in the rough wall in a line, forms the garden that leads to the grotto. Fourteen arches in the top of the wall mark the place where the stations will be set. Through the center of the garden, from the high back a long stone seat which faces the grotto, a thin stream from a fountain trickles down into a gold-fish pool at the entrance. Bright colored flowers line the paths, and here and there an evergreen adds an artistic touch to the picturesque setting. Altogether the grotto is a lovely copy of the original and a graceful reminder of the love with which Our Blessed Mother favors those of her children who seek her aid.

G: Urban Design/Landmarks/St. Joe's Grotto/Final LL Report