

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

SAINT PETER'S PARISH CHURCH

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United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Saint Peter's Parish Church

Other Name/Site Number: Saint Peter's Episcopal Church

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 8400 Saint Peter's Lane

Not for publication: ___

City/Town: Talleyville/Tunstall

Vicinity: ___

State: VA County: New Kent Code: 127

Zip Code: 23124

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: X

Public-Local: ___

Public-State: ___

Public-Federal: ___

Object: ___

Category of Property

Building(s): X

District: ___

Site: X

Structure: ___

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

1

1

2

Noncontributing

1 buildings

___ sites

1 structures

___ objects

2 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 1

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: N/A

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4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ____ nomination ____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

- Entered in the National Register
- Determined eligible for the National Register
- Determined not eligible for the National Register
- Removed from the National Register
- Other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: Religious

Sub: Religious Structure/Facility

Current: Religious

Sub: Religious Structure/Facility

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: Transitional—Colonial: Postmedieval; Jacobean; Georgian

MATERIALS:

Foundation: brick

Walls: brick

Roof: slate

Other: wood cornices on roof; cement finials on tower; glass windows

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Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.SUMMARY

The distinctive architectural features of St. Peter's support its nominations as an exceptional architectural specimen for the early Colonial period. The church is significant as it represents the transition from "artisan mannerism" of the 17th century, to the "neat and plain" neoclassical style characteristic of the 18th century and found in later Colonial era churches.¹ Specifically, the church was constructed of exceptionally large bricks, laid partially in the English bond typical of regional building traditions in the 17th century, and partially in Flemish bond popular in the 18th century. Initially constructed in 1701-03, the church was enlarged with a tower in 1740-1741. This tower, the work of an important early master builder William Walker, is supported on an open porch and ornamented with molded brick water tables and decorative pilasters capped with stuccoed ball-shaped finials.

Description

As described in 1963, "St. Peter's Parish Church...stands in a magnificent setting, almost completely surrounded by forests."² Over forty-five years later, this statement still accurately describes the rural, commercially undisturbed environment in which the church is situated. Located in New Kent County, Virginia, the structure is accessible by taking route 64 to Old Church Road towards Talleyville/Tunstall. A winding route 642 (St. Peter's Lane) then leads to the church driveway. The *New York Times* asserted in 1999 that the "approach to the church and churchyard are the most magnificent in Virginia."³ The secluded and pastoral nature of a country parish's church is preserved, along with the actual building itself.

As one approaches the church via the gravel driveway from the southwest, the two-story tower dominates the west façade. The driveway curves toward the left, where the parish house sits on the adjacent property. It forks at the end, with a gravel parking lot in front of the parish house on the left and a few gravel spaces nearer to the church on the right. The parish house is a one story brick structure located west of the church, while the drive and parking lot are paved with small aggregate pea stone gravel. Neither lot significantly impacts the historic integrity of the setting of the church. The cemetery comes into view to the right of St. Peter's, comprised of the graves of parishioners from throughout the church's history, including almost twenty dating from before the Revolutionary War.⁴ The graves number about 275 in all. At one time, a brick wall (built in 1719) surrounded the church; the dimensions of this wall exist in the Vestry Book, but it has not been rebuilt.⁵ This is probably because, the wall having been destroyed for some time now, the cemetery has since expanded toward the road and rebuilding would either disturb the present configuration or not adhere to the original plan.

St. Peter's dimensions coincide with those documented in the Parish Vestry Book (64'4" x 28'4") for the body of the church, as do the dimensions of the large bricks that make up the almost two-foot thick walls. While the specifications call for bricks 9 ¾ inches long, 4 ¾ inches wide, by 4 ½ inches tall, the actual dimensions (9 ¼ by 4 ¼ by 3 ¾) are close. The exceptional size of these bricks reflects the variations inherent in the nature of locally made brick in this period. In this instance, local landowner Thomas Jackson supplied one hundred

¹ The term "artisan mannerism" was coined by British architectural historian John Summerson and refers to vernacular interpretations of high style 17th century architecture. The phrase "neat and plain" was commonly employed in 18th century contract documents to describe limited use of ornamental treatments. For a fuller explanation, see Carl Lounsbury, "Anglican Church Design in the Chesapeake", *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, Vol. IX. (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2005) 34-35.

² James Scott Rawlings, *Virginia's Colonial Churches: An Architectural Guide* (Richmond: Garrett & Massie 1963), 41.

³ Richard Ruda, "In Praise of Country Churches," *The New York Times*, September 26, 1999.

⁴ Richard Guy Wilson, ed., *Buildings of Virginia: Tidewater and Piedmont* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 354.

⁵ Historic American Buildings Survey 1936, 1, 6.

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thousand bricks to the Parish.⁶ Originally, the structure was only a one-story rectangle with entrances in the gable end and on one side elevation, as was typical of seventeenth century Anglican country churches. The tower, added in 1740-1741 and which houses the vestry room on the second level, was an element not often seen on churches in the Tidewater and Piedmont areas of Virginia.⁷ Like St. Luke's in Isle of Wight, it is open and arched on the three sides facing away from the church.⁸ It "incorporates an amazing variety of elements: molded brick, cornices, massive corner pilasters, recessed panels, windows, and stuccoed urns, one of which serves as a chimney."⁹ The wooden drain spouts above the windows in the tower are original, and an example of one of the idiosyncratic features of St. Peter's' design.¹⁰ This is also the case with the stuccoed brick urns, the northwest of which conceals the chimney for the fireplace in the vestry room. The brickwork is a combination of English and Flemish bonds. The body of the church is English bond (except for a band of three courses below the windows), while the tower provides a more clear demarcation. The lower portion of the tower is English bond, possibly to visually match the body of the church. Above the molded brick belt course, a more stylish Flemish bond was used for the tower. The windows are leaded glass replications installed in the original openings, which had been reduced for smaller sash in the nineteenth century. The wood doors are also not original.

As a result of the disestablishment of the Anglican Church in 1789, St. Peter's, like many other rural churches, fell into a prolonged period of neglect. According to the reports of the Episcopal Diocese, the church "was destitute of regular church services for fifty years, until October of 1843". In 1844-45 "extensive repairs" were made to the church, and this probably included the removal of the late eighteenth century wing. St. Peter's Parish had appointed a rector, Edwin A Dalrymple, who also tended St. Paul's Parish in Hanover County.¹¹

The majority of the damage to the structure occurred while Federal troops occupied the building during the Civil War; at this point, it is believed that only the wainscoting remained on the interior after this occupation. The gables and tower dormers had already been removed, and the leaded glass casement windows had been replaced by sash. A short-lived eighteenth century wing, believed to have been put in place after 1758 and used as a school room during the Presbyterians' use of the building from 1820-1843, had also been removed by this time. "Unmistakable evidence" for this addition, a north wing, was found "in the ground and in the building's brickwork...the same width as the main building and extending twenty-four feet from its north wall, about ten feet off center toward its east end." Because the wing had already been demolished in Civil War-era photographs, it is most probable that its removal took place in 1844, around the time that the Episcopalians made repairs to the building.¹²

It was not until after the war the efforts were made to repair the church. General Robert E. Lee provided a substantial portion of the funds for its initial reconstruction, stating in a letter dated October 23, 1869: "St. Peter's is the church where General Washington was married and attended in early life. It would be a shame to

⁶ Carl Lounsbury has documented the highly unusual size of the bricks in the context of 17th and 18th century masonry in the Chesapeake Region. He kindly provided two unpublished manuscripts, "Brickwork", a chapter from an unpublished book on Colonial churches, and an account on the design and history of St. Peter's Church that is an appendix to the same publication.

⁷ *Ibid.* At one point, entry to the vestry room was possible from the exterior of the church, as can be seen in the background of a nineteenth century photograph. This probably provided access to house slaves who were allowed to attend services once a month.

⁸ Vernon Perdue Davis, and James Scott Rawlings, *The Colonial Churches of Virginia, Maryland, and North Carolina, Their Interiors and Worship* (Richmond: The Dietz Press, 1985), 84.

⁹ Wilson, 354.

¹⁰ Dell Upton, *Holy Things and Profane: Anglican Parish Churches in Colonial Virginia* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1997), 203.

¹¹ *Journal of the...annual council of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the diocese of Virginia* (Richmond, 1844 p.55; 1845 p.45; 1846 p.80. Thanks to Carl Lounsbury for calling the document to our attention.

¹² Carneal & Johnston restoration report, dated August 9, 1948. This report is in the form of a typed twenty-two page letter from J. Ambler Johnston to the St. Peter's restoration committee (St. Peter's Church Archives) 6.

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America if allowed to go to destruction.”¹³ While the location of George Washington’s wedding in this church is still debated, it is this sentiment that has protected the interests of the church since the initial reconstruction in the late nineteenth century, as well as the 20th century restoration

These repairs to the church around 1872 restored it to working order with a new wood floor and various other interior modifications, but there does not appear to have been any particular interest in maintaining faithfulness to St. Peter’s as originally conceived. Its appearance at this point in the late nineteenth and into the early twentieth century is documented by an Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) from 1936.

The HABS photographic record consists of six exterior photographs and elevation drawings, as well as one interior measured floor plan and detail sheets that document the late nineteenth century finishes. This documentation establishes the conditions of the church prior to any twentieth century restoration work. There were two main restorations in the middle of the twentieth century, beginning several years after the founding of St. Peter’s Church Restoration Association in 1922. The first restoration was conceived as early as 1930 with plans made by the important Richmond architectural firm, Carneal and Johnston, though there is not any evidence that work was actually being done at this point. The earliest phases of physical restoration work included George Carrington Mason (historiographer of the Southern Diocese of Virginia) serving as consultant from about 1945 to 1953 and Harden de Valsen Pratt as restoration architect from 1951 until 1962.¹⁴ Pratt, a Boston architect educated at Harvard, had also acted as the restoration architect at the nearby Criss Cross house, which likely dates from the early eighteenth century.¹⁵

The second restoration was taken over in 1962 by well-known architect James Scott Rawlings and his firm, Rawlings and Wilson. Rawlings, upon hearing of the opportunity at St. Peter’s, wrote several letters to the church, asking that he be given the honor of working on restoring the structure. Vernon Perdue Davis then served as a consultant, and the team accomplished a great deal over the next two years. Correspondence occurred almost daily between themselves, the construction firm of Taylor and Parrish, and a long list of experts and craftsmen, both in the United States and abroad. Davis and Rawlings later collaborated on two books on colonial churches in Virginia and in the mid-Atlantic more generally; these have become crucial contributions at the core of scholarship on this subject.

The timeline of the last phases of the restoration process is one that can be gathered from the surviving annual reports of St. Peter’s Restoration Association, as well as the reports of Carneal and Johnston. These twentieth century changes are almost completely responsible for the appearance of the church today, inside and out. As mentioned, the project itself lasted over ten years (at least 1952-1964) and involved Pratt as lead architect, with help from Carneal and Johnston’s firm—though it seems their expertise was used early on almost solely for research purposes. Pratt was supplanted by James Scott Rawlings in 1962, and it appears that Rawlings saw the project through to the end in the mid-1960s. There are a few logical explanations for these changes in authority. One is that the nature of the work on the church itself changed from the more pressing issues (i.e. structural weaknesses, exterior repairs) to those that could be considered of a more cosmetic nature (i.e. interior work, the addition of objects of interest). Pratt’s apparent absence from the project in the 1960s may have been due to ill health as he died in 1964. One thing that remains clear is that the lengthy period over which the restoration took place was a result of limited financial resources and not because of a lack of interest in restoring the church to its former colonial state. In addition, the restoration probably would have been completed in less time had the restoration association and affiliated consultants and architects not been committed to what they believed to be the highest degree of excellence and verisimilitude to the original design.

¹³ Robert E. Lee, Letter dated: Lexington, Va., October 23, 1869 (St. Peter’s Church Archives).

¹⁴ Carneal & Johnston report; August 9, 1948.

¹⁵ The National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form, January 1973, gives the date as late 17th century.

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The *Annual Report of the Restoration of St. Peter's Church* as presented to the Restoration Association on September 21, 1952, sheds a good deal of light on details concerning the early portion of the restoration, which had previously been somewhat shrouded in mystery. Prepared by George Carrington Mason (with an introduction by Pratt), it serves as a description and explanation of the work that had been completed by that time. Mason—a prominent colonial church historian and the author of *Colonial Churches of Tidewater Virginia* (1945)—states: “for the first time we are confronted with visible evidence that our ancient St. Peter’s Church is really being restored.”¹⁶ The conspicuous changes he is referring to are the restoration of the tower and shaped gables.¹⁷ What follows is a detailed account of what had been restored and, more importantly, why each decision had been made. Mason makes a point of saying that “nothing in [the] whole restoration is...a product of the imagination, for every assumption made...as to the design of the original structure has been amply confirmed by actual archaeological exploration.”¹⁸

The replacement of the windows with “diamond-paned, leaded-glass casement windows” was supported by Pratt’s finding lead and glass remnants of the previous windows around the church.¹⁹ The reinforcement of the tower, as well as the rebuilding of the dormers in the steeple, were both done “in accordance with research and specifications.”²⁰ At this point in the project, Johnston had already been used as a designer for the replacement supports in the main roof.²¹

A significant discovery concerning the gables made by Pratt during the restoration elucidated a fascinating aspect of the design of the church. Having detected a “rudimentary brick projection above the western end of the ridgepole” and “the curving line of cement flashing...slanting down along each side of the tower’s rear wall,” he concluded that they were “the traces of an ornate Dutch parapet gable and its central pediment”.²² After researching the matter, Pratt came across a photographic plate that presented a nearly exact example of St. Peter’s corbelled and parapet gables on Pine Ends cottage near St. Peter’s Church in Kent, England.²³ Built around 1690, the cottage presents a contemporary illustration of the taste for Flemish (or Jacobean) architecture following the accession of William of Orange.²⁴ The curved gable ends, however, were more likely derived from contemporary structures in Virginia. Bacon’s Castle in Surry County, c. 1665, and the now-destroyed first Bruton Parish Church in Williamsburg, 1678-1679, featured similar gables.²⁵ This adds additional credibility to the notion that the gables were original to Will Hughes’ design as completed in 1703. This metamorphosis at the beginning of the eighteenth century will be discussed in the next section in order to place St. Peter’s in the context of colonial church building.

Several other early sources confirm that the most recent renovation has been faithful to the original plan. One such source is the surviving vestry book from 1700, which dictates that a church should be built “neer [sic] Thomas Jackson’s” (the adjoining Marl Hill plantation, which is individually listed on the National Register) with the dimensions of sixty feet by twenty four feet with a fourteen foot height (term “pitched” in the parlance of 18th century specifications) and a gallery sixteen feet long.²⁶ The vestry book served as an integral part in the

¹⁶ George Carrington Mason, “St. Peter’s Episcopal Church, New Kent, *Annual Report of St. Peter’s Restoration Association*, 1952, 11.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 22-24.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

²² *Ibid.*, 15-16.

²³ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁵ Mills Lane, *Architecture of the Old South: Virginia* (Savannah: Beehive Press, 1987), 17-19.

²⁶ C. G. Chamberlayne, ed., *The Vestry Book and Register of St. Peter’s Parish, New Kent and James City Counties, 1706-1786*,

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restoration process, as it describes at length specifications concerning original measurements, materials, and overall appearance. The addition of the tower in 1740 is documented (and confirmed by various receipts that survive), and was built by “William Walker, ‘Builder’ of Stafford County.”²⁷ There is also an illustration of the church dating from 1837 on an early plat of the nearby plantation, Marl Hill, in which one can see the principal features of the structure and the tower’s weathervane.

A nineteenth-century woodcut confirms that “the basic pattern [of the church] is correct, and the double-light transom window frames are partly original.”²⁸ Visitors can still see the line that “clearly demarcates the original frame at the top from the restored frame at the bottom” as well as “the carpenter’s mark, made by two chisels, in the upper corner.”²⁹ As explained, the Flemish gables are reconstructions, and were built using “ghosts” on the tower of the original curvilinear forms, and the historical prototypes. The originals were destroyed before the Civil War.³⁰

When first built, the roof of the church was cypress shingles, but those have since been replaced (around the year 1900) with slate, as it may better withstand the elements and the restorers could not “recommend genuine wood shingles.” Documentation shows that there are scissors trusses that support the roof.³¹ The dates of several of the other additions, such as the dormers (1741), can also be verified by the vestry book.³²

Interior

While there were undocumented changes to the interior in the 1840s, the church suffered the most damage during the Civil War. According to a report that appeared in the *Richmond Dispatch* of February 6, 1871, “the Church itself was broken and battered, and rendered wholly unfit to use. The old massive stone font, in which the children of two centuries had been baptized, was broken and scattered in fragments over the floor. The chancel was torn down, the pulpit and desk broken and defaced, and not a sash was left in the windows.”³³ What evidence remained of the eighteenth century interior was replaced with new finishings in 1872.

Entering St. Peter’s from the west entrance (through the tower), one passes through a door modeled after that at the nearby 18th century plantation Criss Cross. Within the walls of the church, much of the original layout—as described in the Vestry Book—is preserved. Though the original setup of the interior was demolished by the mid-nineteenth century and can only be speculated upon, the latest restoration effort took great pains to consult with experts in order to create a historically appropriate appearance. These changes were first overseen by the aforementioned J. Ambler Johnston and Harden de Valsen Pratt, architects who specialized in Colonial restoration work³⁴ It was when the project was taken over by James Rawlings, however, that the majority of the interior details were brought to the degree of finish that is seen today. This included new chancel and gallery rails and font, designed in 1963 by Rawlings.³⁵

Virginia (Richmond: Virginia State Library and Archives, 1989).

²⁷ Upton (1997), 34.

²⁸ Ibid., 64.

²⁹ Ibid., 65.

³⁰ Ibid., 64.

³¹ Davis & Rawlings report, dated August 9, 1948, 161.

³² Upton (1997), 203.

³³ Cited in Carneal & Johnson report, p.6.

³⁴ Wilson (2002), 354.

³⁵ James Scott Rawlings, “Report on St. Peter’s Parish Church”, March 20, 1963, p.11-12 (typed manuscript in St. Peter’s Church Archives). This report documents the rationale for Rawlings’ restoration work on the church.

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The earlier restoration headed by Pratt and Mason in the 1950s, though mainly concerned with structural issues and the exterior work, saw a handful of interior changes as well. One of these was the enlargement of the vestry room fireplace to its original size (now covered but still apparent); they also replaced the beams and original arched plaster ceiling in the room and restored “appropriate” Jacobean woodwork, along with a door and latch.³⁶ The vestry room is now reached by an inconspicuous interior staircase.

It was this restoration, which ascertained that the “present building is unquestionably the original one,” that reestablished door and window openings to their original placement, with plain plaster reveals.³⁷ The Carneal and Johnston restoration also replaced “modern” (i.e., 1872) elements—like the hardwood floor—with a more appropriate material. In the case of the floors, they chose flagstone brick. These changes (along with others) were addressed at the end of the 1952 Annual Report as the next steps in the restoration process, to undertake once funding was sufficient.³⁸

On the interior north and south walls of the church hang two of the nation’s thirteen colonial wall monuments. One of them, dated 1737, is dedicated to William Chamberlayne and, signed by the sculptor, is the earliest example of a signed wall monument in the United States.³⁹

On the east wall is a single “great window”; upon being restored, it was discovered that the interior arch was slightly higher than on the exterior, thus revealing a crescent of historic plaster. The original fenestration as a whole is clearly an interpretation of the slightly earlier style found at St. Luke’s Church in Isle of Wight County; though much of the Gothic appearance is retained, particularly the large lancet arch window that had been replaced by two smaller rectangular windows.⁴⁰

The vestry book spares few details concerning the specifications for the ordering of various items, such as the benches installed in 1735 “made of saw’d white Oak Plank 2 Inches thick, with good mawld Blocks to support them, pinnd down...the Benches to be 11 Inches wide.”⁴¹ Following the destruction of the interior during the Civil War, and subsequent late nineteenth century alterations recorded in the HABS drawings, the interior presents what was believed to be an accurate reconstruction of the interior, thanks to both the detailed and contemporaneous descriptions in the vestry book as well as archaeological artifacts around the site.⁴²

Objects within the church were also a point of interest during the restoration process, and the church has procured a Baptismal font dating from the seventeenth century as well as a 1715 pulpit Bible.⁴³ Other attempts at authenticity include parcel-gilt pricket candlesticks modeled after seventeenth century examples and an hourglass stand and psalm-board, both recreated after eighteenth century artifacts.⁴⁴ On the north wall is a scripture sentence made to resemble one in a 1711 English church in Hawkshead, Lancashire. The flag of England, Royal Arms of Queen Anne (reproduced by the College of Arms, London), and catechetical tablets on display add to the historically accurate ambience, as does the 1693 credence chest.⁴⁵

³⁶ Mason, 23.

³⁷ Carneal & Johnston report, August 9, 1948.

³⁸ Mason, 25-26.

³⁹ Rawlings, “Report”, 60-61.

⁴⁰ Upton, 64.

⁴¹ Upton, 176.

⁴² Carneal & Johnston report, August 9, 1948.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Rawlings “Report”, 175, 178, 183.

⁴⁵ Carneal & Johnston report August 9, 1948.

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As far as remade objects are concerned, every measure was taken by the restorers to ensure high quality: the chandelier and wall sconces were “fashioned by a renowned craftsman who was decorated by Queen Elizabeth II for his work at St. Paul’s Cathedral, London.”⁴⁶ Although the chancel screen has been removed and an altar rail has been added, the wainscoting itself in the chancel is thought to date from the 1730s, as it is documented as being ordered in 1732.⁴⁷ The gallery door has also survived and dates from 1872.⁴⁸ The altar itself and the chairs within the chancel are reproductions of seventeenth century types.⁴⁹

Required reconstruction is not uncommon for early colonial period churches, and the high degree of care taken in recreating an authentic version of St. Peter’s colonial appearance places it among the best documented. For example, St. Luke’s, Isle of Wight County, the only surviving 17th century parish church in Virginia, underwent an earlier and more extensive restoration: in 1887 the roof collapsed along with most of the east wall. Therefore, the windows, doors and interior finishes there date from an 1894-97 restoration, which in turn was almost entirely replaced in the 1950s. In this context, the twentieth century restoration is important for the faithful recordation of what was done, as well as for providing the rationale for many of the decisions that were made.

Parish House (non-contributing building)

This one-story brick building was constructed in 1963. It is T-shaped with a hip and gable roof. It is designed in a traditional Colonial Revival style with no ornamentation.

Walled Garden (non-contributing structure)

Constructed in 2009, this consists of semi-circular brick walls located behind (east) the church. Within the walls is a single bench at the end of a walkway.

⁴⁶ Corneal & Johnston report August 9, 1948.

⁴⁷ Ibid.; Wilson, 354.

⁴⁸ Wilson, 354.

⁴⁹ Corneal & Johnston report August 9, 1948.

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State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

St. Peter's Parish Church, located in New Kent County, Virginia, demonstrates national significance under Criterion 4 as a property that embodies "the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen exceptionally valuable for a study of a period, style, or method of construction." Notably, St. Peter's pre-dates all Virginian churches already designated as National Historic Landmarks, with the exception of St. Luke's Church (NHL). The distinctive architectural features of St. Peter's support its nominations as an exceptional architectural specimen for the early Colonial period. The church is significant as it represents the transition from "artisan mannerism" of the 17th century, to the "neat and plain" neoclassical style characteristic of the 18th century and found in later Colonial era churches. Specifically, the church was constructed of exceptionally large bricks, laid partially in the English bond typical of regional building traditions in the 17th century, and partially in Flemish bond popular in the 18th century. Initially constructed in 1701-03, the church was enlarged with a tower in 1740-1741. This tower, the work of an important early master builder William Walker, is supported on an open porch and ornamented with molded brick water tables and decorative pilasters capped with stuccoed ball-shaped finials. The addition provides a stylistic link to St. Luke's, the earliest surviving church in the Chesapeake region, and further distinguishes St. Peter's from later 18th century examples with their simple Georgian style treatments.

The establishment of St. Peter's Parish was confirmed on April 29, 1679; the present church was built to replace the apparently dilapidated "Broken-Back'd" Church, which had been constructed in about 1685 (though not on the same site).⁵⁰ Planned in 1700, the newly built church for St. Peter's Parish—that which we see today—was in use by 1703 and is thus the oldest in the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia. As such, it is the second oldest church in the Commonwealth of Virginia—only the NHL-listed St. Luke's (built c.1682) is older.

The historical significance of St. Peter's, built in 1701-1703, relates to several notable Colonial Virginia families. As is well known, Martha Custis was a member of the parish throughout her life, hence its 1960 designation by the Virginia General Assembly as the "First Church of the First First-Lady."⁵¹ It was in St. Peter's that "she was baptized, confirmed and married to her first husband Daniel Parke Custis," with whom she resided at "White House" for eight years—only three miles from the church.⁵² It was the union with Custis that entitled her, upon his death, to what would become the great Washington fortune. She was later married by the Reverend David Mossom, rector of St. Peter's, to George Washington in January, 1759.⁵³ The confluence of significant figures in and around St. Peter's throughout its three hundred-year existence is one of the numerous characteristics that lend it its historical gravitas. John Dandridge, Martha Washington's father, served as a vestryman and churchwarden for a number of years.⁵⁴ General Robert E. Lee's wife, Mary Ann Randolph Custis, was also Martha Washington's great granddaughter. The future wife of President John Tyler, Letitia Christian, was baptized there in 1790.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Rawlings "Report", 42.

⁵¹ St. Peter's Parish Church website, January 2009 <http://www.stpetersnewkent.org>.

⁵² George Carrington Mason, *St. Peter's Episcopal Church, New Kent*, Annual Report of St. Peter's Restoration Association, 1952, 7.

⁵³ Speculation has persisted that George and Martha Washington were married in this church, but no conclusive documentation has come to light.

⁵⁴ C.G. Chamberlayne, ed., *The Vestry Book and Register of St. Peter's Parish, New Kent and James City Counties, 1706-1786, Virginia* (Richmond: Virginia State Library and Archives, 1989).

⁵⁵ St. Peter's Parish Church Archives.

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As an architectural precedent, St. Peter's Parish Church represents Americans' developing taste for particular styles and motifs, as well as the burgeoning role of form as a complement to function in colonial architecture.⁵⁶ This is illustrated by the use of the carpenter Will Hughes for a design in addition to the actual building process. Hughes' "draught" for St. Peter's does not survive, but the vestry book dating from the year 1700 confirms his he was hired to prepare a plan for the new church, and apparently served as the principal contractor, with Cornelius Hall as mason.⁵⁷ Architectural plans from this period rarely survive, but in this case church records document how builders provided rudimentary design services. Because Hughes conformed to the traditional church form (in terms of floor plan) and orientation, it is not clear what his role was in terms of design details.

While there are obviously other factors contributing to national importance, it is the age of St. Peter's that supports the argument for national architectural significance as a rare early example of ecclesiastical architecture from the Colonial period. Only one church in Virginia is older: the aforementioned NHL-listed St. Luke's, built c.1683. Outside Virginia on the Atlantic seaboard, only Holy Trinity (Old Swedes) Church in Wilmington (1698-99) (NHL, 1961) and Old Swedes in Philadelphia (1697-1700) are older.

The wall monuments inside—both are marble reliefs—are two of only thirteen of their kind in the United States; one of them, inscribed "*M. Sidnell Bristol Fecit*" in memory of a parishioner by the name of Chamberlayne, is the oldest signed example of such a work in the country.⁵⁸ A *New York Times* article described it as "fully in equality to similar monuments in English Churches."⁵⁹ Michael Sidnell, a sculptor and architect, had made a similar monument for Bredon, St. Giles in Worcestershire, as well as one for St. James's Priory in his hometown of Bristol, England.⁶⁰ The wall tablets at St. Peter's are, even taken by themselves, rare and valuable relics of America's colonial history.

The Vestry records record that master builder William Walker was engaged to build a "Vestry Room and Steeple and making good other Deficiencies of that Church"⁶¹ Walker's design for St. Peter's tower is significant as he was an important early 18th century master builder who provided designs and supervised work on major public buildings and country homes in tidewater Virginia. William Walker and his brother Robert, a joiner, were both Scottish immigrants who moved to Virginia by 1730 and 1743, respectively. The connections between the Walker brothers and the most affluent families in the state meant their influence on subsequent architecture and furniture would be significant. Their rapid rise in stature has been described as "nearly unprecedented" and continued for the better part of five decades. The Carter family, whose members were among "the greatest patrons of architecture in colonial Virginia," was a regular patron of the brothers.⁶² William Walker's first great success came through work on Stratford, Thomas Lee's great house in 1739-1740. While there is no documentation that he was the designer of this important house, the job brought him valuable social contacts among wealthy Virginians. In 1739 he secured the contract to build a brick glebe house (i.e., parsonage) for St. Paul's Parish in Hanover County. Other documented work included several wooden bridges and two wood prisons. In 1747 he completed "Cleve", a brick house on the Rappahannock River for Landon Carter's brother Charles, and another brick house for John Mercer in Marlborough (neither still standing). The contract to rebuild the burned Capitol in Williamsburg, awarded in March 1749, is recognition of his

⁵⁶ Brownell, and Loth, eds., *The Making of Virginia Architecture* op. cit., 135.

⁵⁷ Chamberlayne, *Vestry Book*, op. cit., 68.

⁵⁸ Vernon Perdue Davis, and James Scott Rawlings, *The Colonial Churches of Virginia, Maryland, and North Carolina, Their Interiors and Worship* (Richmond: The Dietz Press, 1985), 60-61.

⁵⁹ Richard Ruda, "In Praise of Country Churches," *The New York Times*, September 26, 1999.

⁶⁰ Alan Brooks and Nikolaus Pevsner, *Worcestershire: The Buildings of England*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007, 165; Andrew Foyle, *Pevsner Architectural Guides: Bristol*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004, 98.

⁶¹ Chamberlayne, *Vestry Book*, op. cit., 68, .261.

⁶² Robert A. Leath, "Robert and William Walker and the 'Ne Plus Ultra': Scottish Design and Colonial Virginia Furniture, 1730-1775," *American Furniture* (2006), 56, 64.

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importance. Unfortunately, Walker died in February 1750. The tower and vestry room addition to St. Peter's is the only surviving documented work by William Walker.⁶³

The "Vestry Room and Steeple" commission of Walker in 1740 is unusual. Vestry rooms were typically located in separate structures rather than a tower.⁶⁴ Walker was also commissioned to make good "other Deficiencies" of the church, but these were not specified.⁶⁵ William Walker's tower for St. Peter's is not only the church's defining characteristic, but the first in a series of public building projects completed by a man whose architectural prolificacy associates him with some of the young nation's foremost families.⁶⁶ His dominance was not accidental or serendipitous, as architecture "was a large and highly organized business" as well as "a well-staffed one."⁶⁷

The semi-rural location also makes the church unusual. Unlike urban Churches or New England village churches, the Virginia parish churches typically were located to serve scattered plantations and farms, such as the neighboring plantation of Marl Hill (NR). Thus the site, located in Tidewater, Virginia near Williamsburg, is an important aspect of the building's integrity. Unfortunately, the brick wall built in 1719 around the cemetery, a very characteristic feature of these churches, is no longer extant. One important component of the significance of St. Peter's relates to the integrity of its site. Its location, while pastoral, remains out of the way three hundred years after its construction. While contributing to the preservation and authenticity of the building, its remote location has made it less well known among Virginia's colonial landmarks.

ST. PETER'S IN CONTEXT: COMPARISONS

St. Luke's Church in Isle of Wight County is a National Historic Landmark and dates from the second half of the seventeenth century; it is the only surviving Anglican Church that pre-dates Saint Peter's. Architecturally, it "represents the transfer of some elements of English medieval church design to the New World."⁶⁸ These include, but are not limited to, lancet windows, rectilinear or "crow-step" gables, and buttresses, while the Flemish bond brick construction suggests more advanced architectural trends.⁶⁹ As the oldest Anglican church in Virginia, St. Luke's presents an important example of the American translation of European artisan mannerist style; however, it is the interpretation of these designs within the context of a structure such as St. Peter's that illustrates a more varied dialogue between continent and colony. Moreover, St. Luke's also suffered extensive deterioration in the late nineteenth century. As noted, in 1887, after long years of disuse, the roof fell in and part of the walls collapsed. Reconstruction work, including the stained glass windows, was completed in 1897, at which point Gothic arches were constructed for the windows. They were returned to their original round arched configuration in with the restoration undertaken in 1950-57.

Another surviving seventeenth century church is "Old Swedes" Church in Wilmington, Delaware (NHL). Although built in 1698-1699, this church also underwent numerous changes. The north porches date from the 1740s, while the south porch was added in 1762 and the tower in 1802. With extensive interior changes as well, only the west gable end wall retains its seventeenth century appearance.

⁶³ Carl R. Lounsbury, *The Courthouses of Early Virginia An Architectural History* (Charlottesville and London: The University of Virginia Press, 2005), 210-215.

⁶⁴ Upton 203.

⁶⁵ Chamberlayne, *Vestry Book*, op.cit., 261.

⁶⁶ Dell Upton, *Holy Things and Profane: Anglican Parish Churches in Colonial Virginia* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1997). 24; Leath (2006), 58.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁶⁸ Richard Guy Wilson, ed., *Buildings of Virginia: Tidewater and Piedmont* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). (2002), 471. St. Luke's has been dated through dendrochronology to post 1677.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

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An important contemporary to St. Peter's Church is Yeocomico Church (Cople Parish) in Westmorland County. Built in 1706, this parish church, as originally built, was similar in size to St. Peter's without the tower. Enlarged with a north wing in 1730, Yeocomico has an unusual T-shaped plan. Abandoned in the early nineteenth century, the interior has also been extensively "restored".⁷⁰ Yeocomico is another important variation of artisan mannerist brickwork with combinations of English and Flemish bonds. Perhaps its most distinctive feature is the entrance portico with its gauged brick arches. Yeocomico also retains much of its rural setting with its brick churchyard wall. Dell Upton compares St. Peter's with Yeocomico Church, in Westmoreland County, stating: "Here, in a church begun while St. Peter's was being built, the process of change is already visible" in the lack of exterior ornamentation.⁷¹ Upton notes, "Beginning early in the eighteenth century, the massive appearance and decorative features of the exterior of the early churches were stripped down."⁷²

Historian Carl Lounsbury has documented the evolution of the brick masonry construction during the 17th and 18th centuries in the Chesapeake region in which the bold use of brick ornamental details that characterized the artisan mannerist style gave way to a more restrained Georgian style. "Brick bonding became more regular and mortar joints ranging from 3/8- to 1/2 inch thickness became standard. English bond remained the most common method of laying interior face bricks and retained a degree of acceptance for plinths through the end of the eighteenth century. However, it went out of fashion as a finish bond for the principal facades. As in England and other American colonies, Flemish bond became the predominant pattern for exterior walls, foundations, and chimneys by the early eighteenth century."⁷³

Perhaps the most intact early eighteenth century church is Christ Church, Lancaster, built c.1728-1732 (NHL). This building features a cruciform plan with a steep pavilion roof and tall round arch windows. The walls are Flemish bond with glazed headers, while the central entrance is framed by pilasters supporting a segmental arch pediment. Christ Church was financed by the prominent Carter family and its design is a major early example of the Georgian style that followed the construction of St. Peter's and Yeocomico churches.

Other surviving 18th century churches in the Tidewater and Piedmont region that post-date St. Peter's and illustrate this change include Merchant's Hope Episcopal Church of 1743, located in Prince George County, and St. John's Episcopal Church in Richmond, dating from 1741.⁷⁴ Merchant's Hope features minimal decoration and round-arched windows with glazed headers. St. John's is similarly sparse in terms of detail, and its tower has less imposing proportions than St. Peter's in relation to the main structure. This marked shift to a more austere style of building is an interesting one, and St. Peter's rests precisely on the cusp of this change. Because it was built from 1701-1703, the main body of the church was constructed before stylistic fashions reflecting the ornamental brickwork commonly associated with Georgian architecture, were prevalent. Once this occurred, pared-down architecture, thus stripped of Dutch, Italian, and French elements, became popular in the United Kingdom. The colonists were not far behind in embracing this trend, and the evolution of the Virginia church reflects it with almost striking clarity. As St. Peter's was built in two phases, it exists as a kind of time capsule of architectural styles that happened to vary greatly over the period of its construction.

⁷⁰ Historic American Building Survey (HABS) Project Number Va-268; Richard Guy Wilson, *Buildings of Virginia Tidewater and Piedmont* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2002), 334-335.

⁷¹ Dell Upton, *Holy Things and Profane: Anglican Parish Churches in Colonial Virginia* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1997), 65, 69.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 65.

⁷³ Carl Lounsbury, "Brickwork," (unpublished chapter of book manuscript) provided to NPS 2.15.2011, 18.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 467, 478.

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In term of the interior plans, Virginia Anglican churches in the late seventeenth and into the early eighteenth century represent a unique aspect of religious architecture in the colonies. While the category of “colonial church architecture” tends to imply that development was relatively uniform over time (at least in general areas referred to as “the Chesapeake,” “the South,” or “the mid-Atlantic”), this was not the case at all, at least not when considering Virginia.

Virginia, as the oldest colony, also had the most longstanding and established Anglican presence, whose “heritage grew out of an earlier period when the Church of England’s architectural and liturgical ideas were shaped by an attempt to reconcile Protestant theology with buildings erected for pre-Reformed worship.”⁷⁵ From the second half of the seventeenth century, churches had been built continuously in small, rural parishes. These churches adhered to a plan that suited their size and their purposes, and “favored an Anglican church form that had developed in England by the first decades of the seventeenth century” and lasted “from first settlement through the end of the colonial period.”⁷⁶ By contrast, the Anglican Church was not established in Maryland until the 1690s, after the Act of Assembly.⁷⁷ By then, cosmopolitan architectural forms and planning had changed in London; this was reflected in the popular building forms seen in Maryland shortly thereafter.

Virginia was by no means static in its stylistic development, but the basic plan did not change: the long nave could be lengthened to accommodate larger congregations, or wings might even be added to the sides, but these essentially narrow dimensions with the symbolic separation of nave and chancel would not deviate significantly from their seventeenth century precedent.⁷⁸ However, as seen in St. Peter’s, the main entrance was moved from the south wall to the west façade in Virginia, and chancel screens were mostly removed by 1720.⁷⁹ In addition, decorative changes were made, as can be seen in the brick glazing patterns on St. Peter’s, as well as in the relatively elaborate gables. These variations represent the way in which Virginians were willing to adapt their designs to be “consonant with the status and ambitions of its chief parishioners,” but their “inherent conservatism” kept them from straying from the plan that continued to suit their purposes very well⁸⁰.

This was not the case in the other colonies, where proportions approached that of a large, square meetinghouse; this boxier plan was popular in Maryland, Massachusetts, North and South Carolina, and Pennsylvania.⁸¹ Larger congregations necessitated more space and sometimes even a three-entrance plan.⁸² Obviously, there existed a metaphorical shift as well towards a more democratic church, and it was Christopher Wren who, with his “auditory” or “room” church, advocated “little or no spatial division between body or nave and chancel or altar place” to promote high visibility and greater ability to hear the sermon.⁸³

St. Peter’s is an excellent example of the singular nature of Virginia churches in the colonies: with features like its long, narrow nave, main entrance on the west façade, separate spaces for preaching and sacraments, and shaped gables, it is an ideal specimen of eighteenth-century building in Virginia, and thus unique to the United States.

⁷⁵ Carl Lounsbury, “Anglican Church Design in the Chesapeake,” *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, Vol. IX. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2005, 23.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 23, 32.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 28.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 32.

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Nine Virginia churches (Colonial and otherwise) have become National Historic Landmarks early in the program (Appendix A). Lee Chapel Washington and Lee University (Lexington) (NHL, 1960), St. Luke's Church (Isle of Wight County), Christ Church (Lancaster County), and St. John's Church (Richmond) became NHLs in 1960-1961, while Yeocomico Church (Westmoreland County), Bruton Parish Church (Williamsburg), and Monumental Church (Richmond) (NHL, 1971) attained NHL status in 1970-1971. Since that time, in the last thirty-eight years, only one church in Virginia—Aquia Church in Stafford County (NHL, 1991)—has become a National Historic Landmark.

St. Peter's thus presents a rare juxtaposition of various stylistic elements at a pivotal time in early Colonial American church architecture. As a result of its remarkable features, it has been characterized as "late Gothic, transitional to classical, Jacobean, and baroque." The tower and gables do display some characteristics of Dutch Baroque architecture, but with a more rigid geometry that foreshadow a stricter version of European grandeur. Calder Loth, Senior Architectural Historian at the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, remarks:

I find St. Peter's distinctive because of its Baroque influences. Though very countrified, the tower with its massive corner pilasters, molded cornice and stringcourse, and pedestals with urns, is a provincial interpretation of Baroque design. Moreover, the curvilinear gables (albeit reconstructed) are specifically Baroque and can be traced to Italian precedents.

Similarly, Richard Guy Wilson describes St. Peter's as "one of the most celebrated and interpreted churches in Virginia," and as giving "a sense of the opulence Virginia's colonial elite strove to attain." As the foregoing descriptions suggests, St. Peter's is open to various interpretations for stylistic sources, and this reflects its unusual transitional design that support the fact that it is a wholly unique surviving fixture in the firmament of American colonial architecture.

As a reflection of colonial America's nascent desires for unique architectural forms as well as their aspiration to emulate the styles of their aristocratic contemporaries abroad, St. Peter's possesses a virtually unseen combination of attributes that dictate its place in the foundations of the canon of American architecture. In addition, it reveals the transient quality of early eighteenth century British and colonial American architecture at a time when tastes were changing in both England and America. One could argue that no other single, standing building in the United States more aptly serves as visual testimony to this ephemeral era. It therefore can be strongly suggested that a site and structure so tightly woven into the fabric of our nation's history merits the honor of being designated a National Historic Landmark.

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APPENDIX A*

Virginia Colonial Churches:

St. Luke's Church, Isle of Wight County, c1682	NHL 1960
Christ Church, Lancaster County, 1732-1735	NHL 1961
St. John's Episcopal Church, Richmond, 1741, enlarged 1772	NHL 1961
Yeocomico Church, Westmoreland County, 1706, 1730	NHL 1970
Bruton Parish Church, Williamsburg, 1713-1715, enlarged 1752, tower 1769	NHL 1971
Aquia Church, Stafford County, 1751-57	NHL 1991
Christ Church, Alexandria, 1767-73, 1785, 1818	NHL 1970
Merchant's Hope, Prince George, 1743	NR 1969
Pohick Church, Fairfax County, 1769-1770	NR 1969
St. John's, Chuckatuck, 1755, 1826, 1888	NR 1973

Other Colonial Churches:

Pompion Hill Chapel, Berkeley County, South Carolina, 1763-65	NHL 1970
St. James Church, Goose Creek, South Carolina, 1711-1717	NHL 1970
Holy Trinity (Old Swedes) Church, Wilmington, Delaware, 1698-99	NHL 1961
'Gloria Dei' (Old Swedes), Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1697-1700	NR 1966
Christ Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1727-1734, 1739-1744, tower added 1751-1754	NHL 1970
St. Michael's Episcopal Church, Charleston, South Carolina, 1752-1761	NHL 1960
St. Andrew's Church, Ashley River, South Carolina, 1706, enlarged 1723	NR 1973

* It should be noted here, as far as available records indicate, the churches above that are not National Historic Landmarks *have never applied for NHL status.*

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

Previously Listed in the National Register.

Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.

Designated a National Historic Landmark.

Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: # HABS VA-127

Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State Agency

Federal Agency

Local Government

University

Other (Specify Repository): Archives at St. Peter's Episcopal Church, New Kent

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: Approximately seven and a half (7.5) acres

UTM References: **Zone** **Easting** **Northing**
 18 318290 4156600

Verbal Boundary Description:

The parcel of land owned by St. Peter's Church is rectilinear but not uniform in shape; it extends from St. Peter's Lane in a northeast direction behind the church, and then east towards the parish house. To the south, the boundary runs along St. Peter's Lane itself for a number of yards before squaring off the property at the most westward point.

Boundary Justification:

Originally one acre bought from Thomas Jackson in 1703, the property was expanded in 1738 with the purchase of additional land purchased from Thomas Jackson's grandson.

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11. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: The Cimbalo Firm, PC (Jasmine Beatty)

Address: 1306 West Main Street
Richmond, VA 23220

Telephone: (804) 313-6266

Date: December 2010

Edited by: Roger Reed
National Park Service
National Historic Landmarks Program
1849 C St., NW (2280)
Washington, DC 20240

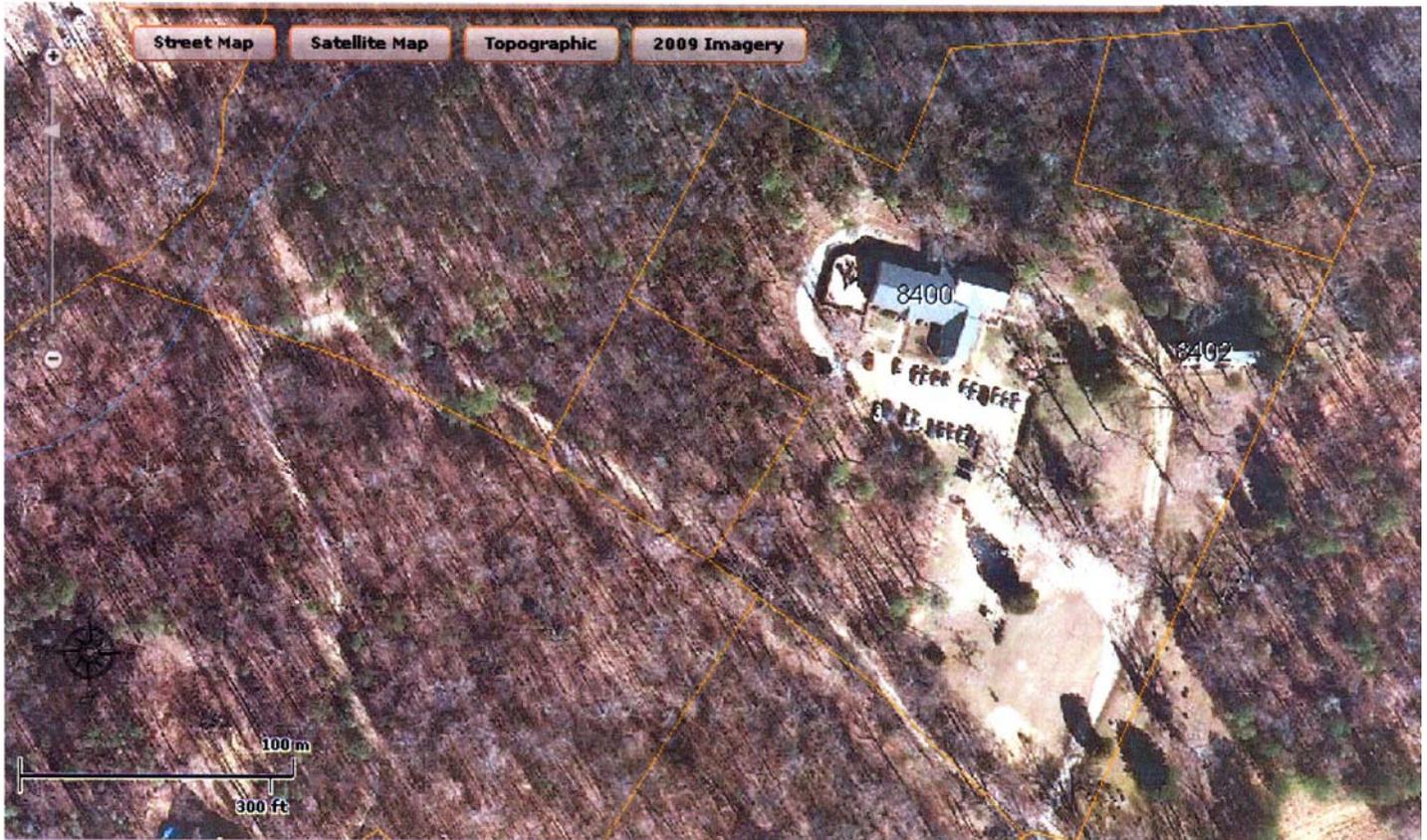
Telephone: (202) 354-2278

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS PROGRAM

March 23, 2011

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St. Peter's Church Site Plan

Parish House on left, church on right at end of drive.

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View from southwest.



South façade.

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Detail, tower from south.



North façade.

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East façade.



Interior toward east window.

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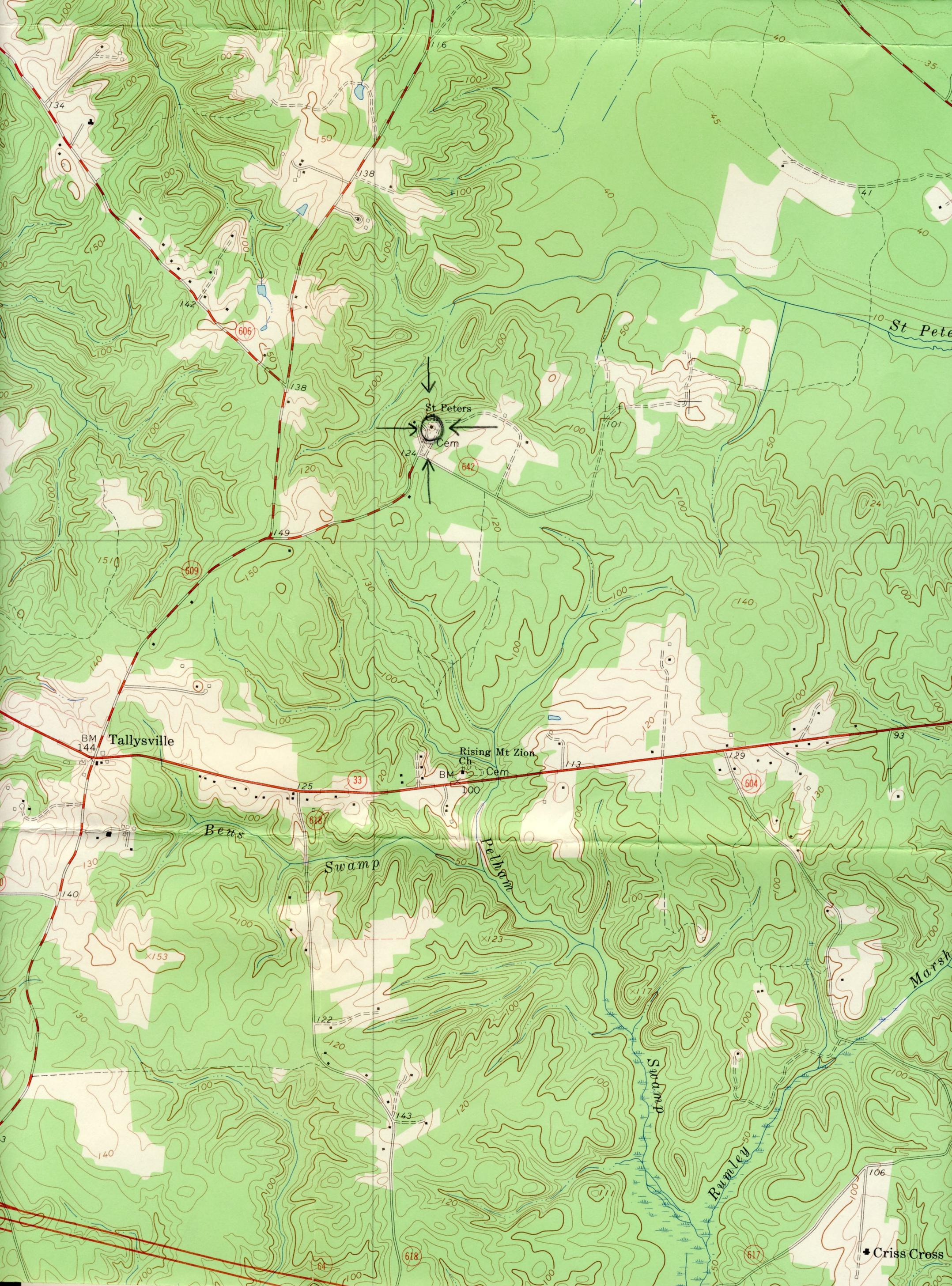
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View toward Parish House from church porch.



Garden area behind church.



Tallysville

St. Peter's
Cem

Rising Mt Zion
Ch
Cem

Beus
Swamp

Pelham
Swamp

Ramley
Swamp

Marsh

Criss Cross

St Peter