

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC  
King's Chapel  
AND/OR COMMON  
King's Chapel

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER  
Tremont and School Streets  
CITY, TOWN  
Boston  
STATE  
Massachusetts

VICINITY OF  
8th  
COUNTY  
Suffolk  
CODE  
25  
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT  
8th  
CODE  
025

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
			<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
			<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
			<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME  
King's Chapel Society  
STREET & NUMBER  
64 Beacon Street  
CITY, TOWN  
Boston  
STATE  
Massachusetts

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC  
Suffolk County Courthouse  
STREET & NUMBER  
Somerset Street  
CITY, TOWN  
Boston  
STATE  
Massachusetts

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE  
None  
DATE  
\_\_\_\_\_  
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS  
CITY, TOWN  
STATE

\_\_\_\_ FEDERAL \_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_ COUNTY \_\_\_\_ LOCAL

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The letter requesting Harrison to design King's Chapel contained the following instruction, as quoted by Bridenbargh's Peter Harrison, First American Architect: "The Length of the Church from West to East, including the Steeple, is to be 120 feet, besides which there will be 10 feet allowed for a Chancel. The breadth is to be 65 feet 8 inches. The Ground has a Declivity of about 5 feet from West to East....The Building is to be of rough Stone."

Bearing in mind the committee's injunction that symmetry and proportion rather than expensive ornament ought to govern his work, he provided an exceedingly plain exterior for the body of the church, using rough local rather than finished Portland stone. To insure proper lighting for the galleries he gave the north south flanks of the church two tiers of windows, suggested no doubt by Plate 24 in Gibb's A Book of Architecture, while on the east end he used a Palladian window. Harrison planned a front porch of stone Ionic columns, 25 feet in height, to be crowned by an elaborate balustrade. These details were not added until 1785-87 and were done in wood rather than stone by Thomas Clement, who followed Harrison's design except for the balustrade. The balustrade, four feet two inches, was needed by Harrison to create the impression of a very elaborate building to support the large steeple originally planned for the building. The projecting stone tower of King's Chapel, 26 feet square and with walls four feet thick, was intended to carry the lofty stone spire, more elaborate than any in London, but this spire was never built. The plans for the spire were particularly ambitious. Since the tower was to be twenty-six feet square "from out to out," and its walls four feet thick at the base, it is evident that a masonry spire of considerable height and weight was contemplated. A contemporary observer wrote that "according to the original design of the architect," which was in existence as late as 1784, he intended to erect upon the block type cornice which crowned the tower "an elegant and lofty steeple of two square stories and an octagonal spire. The first story is to be of the Ionic order, with 16 fluted coupled columns and pilasters, 19 inches in diameter. The second story, of the Corinthian order, formed of 8 fluted single columns, 14 inches in diameter. The spire rising above, to be finished in the richest manner. The columns with their entablature, which projects from the body of the steeple, to support highly finished and ornamental urns."

Four windows with carved stone frames were planned for the steeple, as well as thirty-two stone urns or vases to go on the balustrade.

Most of the details of the interior orders come from the Rules for Drawing by James Gibbs. On one plan can be found models for the Ionic and Corinthian colonnades, while the balustrade for the altar-rail appears in the upper right-hand corner of another. From two plates in Batty Langley's Treasury of Designs Harrison apparently drew his inspiration for the altar-piece, but the solution was that of the designer, not the copyist. The successful combining of all

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES 1749-54

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Peter Harrison

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Designed by perhaps the greatest American architect of the Colonial period, Peter Harrison, and erected in 1749-54, King's Chapel is one of the finest examples of his skill and sophistication as a designer in Palladian forms. The existing chapel was the first important building in British America to be constructed of cut stone and is also the first recorded use of Quincy granite. The interior, with large Corinthian columns, is without question one of the most elegantly refined examples of Georgian Palladian design and one of Harrison's masterpieces.

## HISTORY

King's Chapel was the first important Anglican congregation in New England. When first founded in 1686, services were held, by order of Governor Andros in the Old South Meeting House, the foundation for the first chapel was laid in 1688. In 1710 this was enlarged to twice its former size to take care of the growing congregation which represented a large part of the wealth of Boston.

By 1741 the enlarged chapel was again too small and a committee, with Peter Faneuil as Treasurer, was appointed to raise the necessary funds for a new church. On April 5, 1749, Peter Harrison received a letter from Reverend Henry Caner of King's Chapel advising him that the committee for building a new church had asked him "To acquaint you that they would esteem it a Favor if you would oblige them with a Draught of a handsome Church agreeable to the Limits herinafter assigned." (Bridenbaugh, page 54)

Peter Harrison was no stranger among Boston Anglicans. He was acquainted with at least two of the committee, Charles Apthorp and Dr. Silvester Gardiner, while its clerk, Barlow Trecothick, was a personal friend and business connection. Trecothick's London partner, John Thomlinson, who had contributed heavily to the undertaking, was managing the drive for funds in England. It is more than likely these two gentlemen recommended Harrison to the building committee.

Harrison worked on the plans throughout the spring and summer and work on the church began early in 1750. The expense of erecting the building exceeded the committee's expectations, so the fine steeple designed by Harrison was never undertaken.

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Bridenbaugh, Carl, Peter Harrison, First American Architect, Chapel Hill, 1949.  
 Morrison, Hugh, Early American Architecture, New York, 1952.  
 Metcalf, Pricilla, "Boston Before Bulfinch: Harrison's King's Chapel," JSAH, Vol. XIII, No. 1, March, 1954.

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY .1

UTM REFERENCES

A	1 9	3 3 0 3 0 0	4 6 9 1 3 4 0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

King's Chapel is bounded by Tremont Street on the west, School Street on the south, the western property line of the Old City Hall on the east and the northern edge of the city cemetery on the north.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE Patricia Heintzelman, Architectural Historian, Landmark Review Project,  
 original for prepared by Charles Snell, 1967.

ORGANIZATION \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

Historic Sites Survey

STREET & NUMBER \_\_\_\_\_ TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_

1100 L Street NW 523-5464

CITY OR TOWN \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_

Washington D.C.

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ LOCAL \_\_\_\_\_

As the designated State Historic Preservation 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 determined according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

TITLE \_\_\_\_\_

**Landmark**  
 Designated: Oct. 9, 1966  
 date  
**Boundary Certified:**  
 DATE George T. ...  
Jan 11, 1979 date

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE 9/8/83

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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these elements and the strict attention paid to the measurements and proportions of the orders produced one of the most elegantly-designed church interiors in colonial America.

In the interior Harrison demonstrates an easy mastery of space composition, a sophisticated handling of fine carved details of the Georgian vocabulary, and, particularly, a sure sense of true grandeur of scale.

A great unity of effect is achieved on the interior by the use of giant Corinthian columns, projecting in front of the gallery fronts. Their arrangement in pairs gives a more varied and powerful rhythm than the uniform spacing of single columns used in every other major Georgian church in the colonies. The order is fully displayed: molded bases, fluted shafts, opulent capitals, and fully membered blocks of entablature over each pair of columns forms a complete and logical structural statement, brought up into full view by the square pedestals below pew level. Gallery fronts are beautifully paneled, and a fine Palladian window floods the sanctuary with light. The raised pulpit, saved from the earlier wooden church, dates from 1717. Around 1930 the governor's pew was reinstalled in the side aisle, after existing precise drawings of the original.

King's Chapel has undergone little modification or alteration. The present stone floor was laid over the original wooden one in the present century, and a sprinkler system has been installed in the attic and basement. An iron catwalk provides access to the copper roof at the eaves to facilitate removal of ice.

During 1972-73 the building was cleaned and the north wall was carefully pointed. The niches flanking the portico tower were relined with terracotta and blue stone bases were installed. Concrete bases were installed for the wooden columns of the porch and the woodwork was repainted to blend with the newly cleaned surface.

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The portico and balustrade were finally executed according to his plans in 1787 but entirely of wood instead of stone.

Almost five years passed until the building was sufficiently near completion to be opened for services on August 21, 1754. Although over 7405 pounds sterling had been expended by 1758, King's Chapel was far from completed and in fact never was.

King's Chapel remained loyal during the Revolution and suffered no damage during the British occupancy of Boston. When the British left, the rector, Dr. Caner, fled with them, taking records, vestments, and silver; the latter a gift of three sovereigns has never been recovered.

When the Continental troops occupied the town, the church was closed. In 1777, an invitation was extended to the congregaton of Old South Church, whose building was used as a stable by troops, to worship in the chapel. After the war an attempt was made to return to the Anglican faith but there were few to fill the church. James Freeman, a lay reader of the church began to build a following. He was interested in proposed reforms of the Church in England which involved the examination of the Trinity of the Godhead. Freeman proposed that King's Chapel alter the liturgy to conform with these views and when the Episcopal Council in America refused, King's Chapel seceeded from the Episcopal Church and James Freeman was ordained as the first Unitarian minister of the first Unitarian congregation.

This change of faith was accomplished in a unique manner. The congregation and clergyman did not by any means renounce the Prayer Book, and the old form of worship. they simply decided to omit all those portions which did not accord with the doctrine they had agreed to adopt. Thus the old Prayer Books given the church were kept and used for many years, but references to the Trinity, the Holy Ghost, and such prayers or portions of prayers as they chose henceforth to omit, were carefully crossed out in red ink. This slightly changed ritual of the Episcopal Church--amended once more in later years--is still used by King's Chapel congregation.

The pulpit in King's Chapel dates from 1717. It stood then against the north wall, with the Governor's pew opposite as it now stands, beautifully restored, in its original location.