

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

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HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE

018 No. 10024-0018  
RECEIVED 2280  
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
2003

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name St. John's Church Complex  
other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

2. Location

street & number 154-158 West High Street  not for publication  
city or town Somerville Borough  vicinity  
state NJ code 034 county Somerset code 035 zip code 08876

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)  
[Signature] 1/30/03  
Signature of certifying official/Title Assistant Commissioner, Natural & Historic Resources, DSHPO  
State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting official/Title Date  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:  
 entered in the National Register.  See continuation sheet.  
 determined eligible for the National Register  See continuation sheet.  
 determined not eligible for the National Register.  
 removed from the National Register.  
 other, (explain:)  
[Signature] Edson H. Beall 9.15.03  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

St. John's Church Complex  
Name of Property

Somerset County, NJ  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
3	1	buildings
		sites
1		structures
2		objects
6	1	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple-property listing.)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/religious facility, church-  
related residence

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/religious facility, church-  
related residence

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY

REVIVALS/Late Gothic Revival

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone

walls stone (sandstone)  
concrete, stucco

roof slate

other limestone trim, stained  
glass, decorative ironwork

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See continuation sheets

St. John's Church Complex  
Name of Property

Somerset County, NJ  
County and State

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**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 # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE; SOCIAL HISTORY

**Period of Significance**

1895-1924

**Significant Dates**

1895-96, 1909, 1924

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Horace Trumbauer

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

St. John's Church Complex  
Name of Property

Somerset County, NJ  
County and State

### 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property 1.65 +/-

#### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 

1	8	5	3	2	3	8	0	4	4	9	0	3	3	0
Zone	Easting			Northing										

3 

Zone	Easting			Northing										

4 

Zone	Easting			Northing										

See continuation sheet

#### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

#### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

### 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Constance M. Greiff, Director

organization Heritage Studies date January 28, 2002

street & number 60 Princeton Avenue telephone 609-924-3235

city or town Rocky Hill state NJ zip code 08553

#### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

#### Continuation Sheets

#### Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

#### Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

#### Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

#### Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Wardens and Vestry of St. John's Church

street & number 154-158 West High Street telephone 908-722-1250

city or town Somerville state NJ zip code 08876

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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The St. John's Church (P. E.), complex consists of three buildings: church, rectory, and parish hall (contributing buildings) and an ornamental gateway (contributing structure). The most important of the buildings, the church, dominates the site both by its size and height and by its placement at the center of the group and forward of the other two. The rectory is to its east and the parish hall to the west. The church and rectory are both constructed of quarry-faced Stockton sandstone, laid as coursed ashlar with limestone trim and gabled slate roofs. The parish hall also has a slate roof and sandstone facade, but the sides and back are stucco, probably over concrete block. The gateway, linking the church and rectory, also is constructed of Stockton sandstone. All are versions of the Late Gothic Style of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Although there are other institutional buildings in the neighborhood, including the First Baptist Church and the Middle School Complex, the immediate surroundings are predominantly residential. Because of its location on an east-west street and the shape of its original lot, the church is not oriented as most Episcopal churches are, but faces south.

Originally the lawn in front of the complex was at approximately the same grade as the street. However, the street was regraded in 1930, depressing it approximately two feet. At that time three sets of concrete steps were installed, leading to bluestone paths that had been laid when the church and rectory were constructed.<sup>1</sup> All the buildings are fronted by lawn and landscaped with shrubbery. An asphalt driveway at the western end of the lot leads to a parking area at the rear. This is hard-surfaced, but there is a landscaped area immediately behind the rectory. Another driveway on the east side leads to a modern garage (non-contributing building). Other site features include a granite hitching post (contributing object) adjacent to the eastern driveway. At the curb directly in front of the rectory is a granite mounting block (contributing object). At its center it has been carved to leave the word "RECTORY" in raised letters.

### St. John's Church

The church, long and low, is in the Early English Gothic style. (Figure 1 and Photo 1) It is faced with quarry-faced Stockton sandstone, laid as coursed ashlar. Window sills, buttress caps, steps, and a belt course on the tower are limestone. A steeply pitched roof, punctuated by gabled dormers covers the nave. The dormers have slate cheeks, wood-shingled apices, and projecting cornices carried on brackets. The roof of the chancel, although lower, also is steeply pitched. Openings, with the exception of the dormers, are in the form of drop arches

<sup>1</sup> Vestry minutes, 12, Dec. 1930.

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rather than lancets, which adds to the building's impression of horizontality. A large, rather squat, central tower dominates the façade.

The tower has a flat roof behind a battlemented parapet. A belt course at the level of the roof is emphasized by boldly projecting gargoyles at three of the four corners. At the fourth corner, an octagonal tower, also battlemented, rises above the height of the tower. Although it is one of the more decorative elements of the church, it serves the mundane function of a chimney. Stepped buttresses also mark the corners of the main tower and west side of the octagon. In one of the paired buttresses on the west side of the doorway, a tooled cornerstone is inscribed "Sept. 4. A.D. 1895." A large arched doorway dominates the first stage of the tower. The batten door is hung on elaborate wrought iron hinges and its latch plate is pierced with decorative designs. The single openings in the first stage of the east and west facades are filled by coupled cusped lancets with stained glass windows. These are not original to the construction period of St. John's, but were manufactured by the Payne-Spiers Studios and installed in 1952. At the second stage all three faces of the tower are fenestrated by a single, comparatively small, rectangular window. The third stage has two louvered, arched windows on the front and one on each side.

The long nave is divided into six bays by stepped buttresses; the divisions also are marked by gabled dormers. The east side is straightforward, but the west is more complicated. Immediately behind the octagonal tower is a small porch with a steep gabled roof. Like the main entrance at the front of the tower, this has an arched doorway with batten door and elaborate hardware. The corners are buttressed and there are small stained glass windows in the north and south walls. A deep wooden bargeboard, with cyma recta moldings marking the positions of the purlins, provides some shelter to the doorway. There is an ornamental iron cross at its apex and an iron lantern suspended over the doorway. Like the front entrance, it has a batten door with elaborate wrought iron hardware. Originally a carriage entrance, this has assumed other functions, first as a baptistery in 1925 and then as a chapel, now known as the Chapel of Reconciliation.

Four bays to the north, a battlemented, one-story, rectangular projection encloses the vestry and choir room. A concrete-parged double chimney rises at its junction with the nave.<sup>2</sup> Approached by a bluestone path, this section of the building has an arched doorway under a gabled hood. The windows on both its north and south facades have been replaced by modern units.

<sup>2</sup> A post card view, made before 1907, suggests that one chimney is original and the other has been added.

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The chancel is narrower and lower than the nave with a gable roof of the same pitch. There are single pointed-arched windows in the east and west walls. A large Decorated Style window with tracery featuring cusped lancets marks the north wall. Projecting, tapered bargeboards have returns suggesting a pediment. They are ornamented with cyma recta moldings in the same fashion as the on the west porch.

The interior of the church is in harmony with the simplicity of the exterior, although the present appearance is to a large extent the result of a 1971 refurbishment and redecoration carried out under the direction of a local architect, Richard J. Stacey.<sup>3</sup> The walls of narthex, nave, chancel, and chapel are plaster, painted a creamy white. A chair rail remains over what originally was a matchboard wainscot, similar to the ceiling, now covered by plywood. The pews and communion rail also date to the 1971 work.

An arched doorway leads from the narthex to the nave. The arrangement of the pews creates a center aisle and two side aisles. (Photo 2) The chief ornamental features of the nave are the stained glass windows on the side walls. The window on the south end of the nave on the west side, painted glass window of a memorial cross, is by D'Ascenzo Studios of Philadelphia, and postdates World War I. The next window to the north also is by D'Ascenzo and represents the Annunciation. To its north is a signed window by Tiffany Studios, depicting Christ among the lilies. On the east side, the northernmost window, usually referred to as the St. John window, is by Payne Studios of Paterson, and was installed in 1932. The window directly to its south is another Tiffany window of "Suffer the Little Children." The middle window on this side also is by Tiffany Studios. The remaining two windows on this wall show Christ with his disciples and the Crucifixion, and are by Payne-Spiers Studio. Other windows from this studio were installed in the narthex and chapel in the 1950s. High on the rear wall of the nave is an oculus with a quatrefoil filled with stained glass, installed in 1897.<sup>4</sup>

The wooden floor and carpeting were replaced in 1971. The pendent lights above the side pews also date to 1971, but the Gothic-style lanterns above the center aisle came from The Anderson Craftsmen in 1932.<sup>5</sup> (Figure 3) The original fixtures in the church could be

<sup>3</sup> In a pamphlet entitled "Memories of St. John's Episcopal Church" Libby Dodge Smith recalled that the renovations had just been completed at the time of her wedding in November 1971. The extent of the renovations is described in "Program, A Service of Thanksgiving, June 25, 1972."

<sup>4</sup> Information on the windows comes from a report prepared by Femenella & Associates for a Preservation Plan prepared by Historic Building Architects in 2002 and from entries in the vestry minutes and correspondence in the church records.

<sup>5</sup> Correspondence, The Anderson Craftsmen, Nov. 1931-Feb. 1932.

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illuminated by both electricity and gas.<sup>6</sup> This was a common solution at the turn of the century when it was feared that electricity was somewhat unreliable.

The open hammer beam ceiling remains in its original condition, except that the varnish has been renewed. The roof is lined with matchboard, run vertically in the nave and horizontally in the chancel. Between each set of beams in the nave are the dormers, their cheeks also lined with varnished matchboard. They are glazed with yellow and green opalescent glass in the form of Tudor arches. In 1903, long ropes were fitted to the windows to make them operable in order to provide ventilation.<sup>7</sup> These have since been removed. The stained glass had been removed from the north and south windows on both sides of the building and replaced by louvered ventilators.

A wide Gothic arch separates the nave from the chancel. It and the two blind arches in the wall to either side are more pointed than the window openings in the nave. The blind arch on the east side is occupied by organ pipes. A pointed-arched door leading to the sacristy is within the western blind arch. Its upper panel is cusped. A similar door at the north end of the west wall of the nave leads to the robing room. There also are blind arches in the side walls of the choir. (Photo 4) The one on the east side again contains organ pipes, while there is a pointed-arched door leading into the sacristy on the west. North of the blind arches are pointed-arched windows with double lancets filled with stained glass by D'Ascenzo Studios.

The choir rises two steps above the floor of the nave. The area where the altar is now placed is elevated three steps above the level of the choir. The altar's former location under the reredos on the north wall is raised still further. The floor in the entire area is laid with mosaic tile in an elaborate pattern, although the floor in the choir was carpeted in the 1971 redecoration. At the same time, the altar was moved forward and the floor under its original location filled in with travertine tiles. At the rear of the chancel, the carved reredos remains in its original position. Above it is a triple lancet window with Tiffany opalescent glass, representing the Resurrection. The rood screen was installed in 1932. It takes the form of an arcade, with five cusped Gothic arches, of which the central is the widest. These are supported by slender columns, which in turn rest on square pedestals. During the 1971 refurbishment, it was moved back from its original position at the front of the choir. At the same time the pulpit and furnishings in the area around the altar, which are original, were modified and refinished. Stands for candles and flower vases were also installed.

<sup>6</sup> Vestry minutes, 12 Feb. 1896.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 9 July 1903.



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The sacristy has modern finishes, but the robing room retains its varnished wooden cabinets. The remainder of the spaces within the one-story ell, while part of the original construction of the church, now function as part of the guild hall/parish house and will be discussed under the description of that building.

The undercroft was finished in 1988 with designs provided by Short and Ford, Architects. The major space towards its southern end is a chapel in modern style with plain round columns and wall with plain square panels in blond wood. (Photo 5) Other spaces, all with simple finishes include, the rector's office, a meeting room, workshop, robing room, and rest rooms.

### The Rectory

Although constructed in stone, the rectory exhibits the clear geometry and strong sense of volume characteristic of the Shingle Style. (Photo 6) At the same time, the steep gables and many windows with diamond-paned upper sash, relate to the Gothic Revival style of the church. The flared bargeboards also are treated in the same manner as those on the church. The rectory also harmonizes with the older building because it is constructed of the same materials—quarry-faced Stockton sandstone laid as regular ashlar, limestone trim, and slate roofs.

The basic simplicity of the rectory's plan is belied by the complexity of its elevations. Essentially its footprint is a rectangle with a small projection at the rear. But this is disguised by the steeply sloped interlocking roofs, which cover the eastern two-thirds of the building with a gable with a ridge running north-south and the west side with an intersecting gable, the ridge of which runs east-west. The latter extends to the east as a gabled wall dormer. Bargeboards at the gable ends taper in a manner similar to those on the chancel and side entry porch of the church. The eaves also exhibit exposed rafter tails shaped as brackets. Prominent stone chimneys, to which terra cotta pots have been added, mark the center of each ridge.

The composition is tied together at the base by a terrace with a quarry-faced sandstone parapet with limestone coping. The terrace is paved with brick in a herringbone pattern and approached by steps to the front entry and at its west side. It runs across the building's front and wraps around a polygonal projection on the east side. Originally this was an open pavilion. The vestry deferred enclosing it in 1930 because of the cost.<sup>8</sup> However, it was

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 2 April 1930.

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made into a porch by fitting it with screens sometime subsequently. Balancing this on the west wide, and running between the rectory and the church, is a battlemented stone gateway with a wrought iron gate.

The two seemingly separate sections of the building also are connected at the front by a pent roof, which covers an ample bay window on the west side of the south wall, and then extends over the central entrance door, where it is supported on paired brackets. Fenestration on the east side of this façade is provided by four grouped windows on the first floor. Paired and grouped triple windows are asymmetrically placed on the second floor, while a smaller paired window occupies the gable apex. Grouped triple sash in a shed dormer provide light to the second floor on the west side.

The east facade has two large gabled wall dormers, with a small shed dormer on the roof between them. (Photo 7) Each of the wall dormers has a double window, while the shed dormer has paired diamond-paned casements. There are grouped triple windows below each of the wall dormers and a paired window below the shed dormer. At the southeast corner, the projecting porch extends across the south end of this façade. There are grouped quadruple sash at the north end. The first floor windows are slightly larger than those of the second floor.

The west face is simpler, dominated by the sweep of the gable roof. There is a paired window in the gable apex and grouped triple windows on the second and third floor.

At the rear, a projecting feature again connects the two sections. This is a shed-roofed stone vestibule, which is extended by a simple wooden porch. There are grouped triple windows on its west side and two windows on the east. The fenestration on the east side of the main block repeats that of the front, with the addition of a triple window marking the main stair landing and a single window on the landing between the second and third floors. On the west side a single large sash lights the first floor and a gabled dormer with paired sash the second.

The floors on the first floor are all narrow oak strip with parquet borders of double strips of darker wood. All woodwork, except as noted below is varnished quartered oak, including the high baseboards and simple architrave moldings around openings. Doors have five horizontal sunk panels. Detailing is in general Federal Revival, although the use of the oak gives it something of a Craftsman quality.

The entry is not divided from the living room, which lies to its east. (Photo 8) The ceiling over this area has open beams. The living room has a Federal Revival mantel with a shelf supported on carved brackets and a swag in the center block. The facing of the fireplace, as

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is common in this period, is brick. The hearth is also brick laid in a herringbone pattern. The fireplace is opposite the quadruple grouped windows in the south wall. Double oak doors, with glazed diamond-paned upper panels give access to the porch from the room's east end.

The library is west of the entry through a double width opening. (Photo 9) Dutchmen in the jambs indicate that this originally was fitted with doors. Plentiful light is provided by the bay window in the south wall and the grouped triple windows in the east wall. Built-in oak bookcases flank the fireplace and also line part of the east and west walls. Its mantel is similar to that in the living room, but the shelf is supported by attached columns.

The north end of the entry, a double width opening separates that space from the stair hall. (Photo 10) The closed-string stair also is quartered oak with a carved newel post. (Photo 11) The arrangement of the balusters alternates two plain, almost square balusters with a wider one curved at top and bottom.

The dining room is entered from the east side of the stair hall. The woodwork here has been painted. The mantel is also Federal Revival in style, in this case with reeding, delicate swags in the center block of the frieze and a dentil molding below the molded shelf. ((Photo 12) A swinging door in the northwest corner gives access to a butler's pantry, which is located behind the staircase. (Photo 13) This is fitted with paneled cabinets and shelves with glass doors. These rest on curved brackets. These features retain original hardware, but have been painted. At the other end of the pantry is the kitchen, which has been modernized.

The rear projection is taken up by a vestibule and half bath. The latter probably originally was a pantry for cold storage.

The plan of the second story includes four bedrooms and a bath, while the third floor has three bedrooms and a bath under the eaves. These have no detailing other than simple moldings around the door and windows. The second floor hallway has doorways with molded architraves and five-panel doors in quartered oak, like those on the first floor. (Photo 14) Otherwise, trim on the upper floors has been painted.

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The Guild Hall/Parish Hall<sup>9</sup>

This is a one-story building over a high basement. The 1924 section at the front is L-shaped, with a gabled former entrance vestibule, now serving as a small kitchen on its west side. (Photo 1) To some extent the vestibule balances the vestry/choir room extension of the church to the east of this addition. The front of the building is related to the rest of the complex by the use of similar stone, grouped windows, and gabled roofs with tapered raking cornices. The west wall, however is not stone, but roughly textured stucco, probably over cement block. A stone chimney rises on the ridge of the roof at the rear of this section

Four grouped windows with diamond-paned transoms are centered on the front. The gable apex is stuccoed and ornamented with faux half-timbering and decorative projecting purlin tails. Four grouped windows are set in the west wall, while the vestibule is illuminated by paired window on either side. These windows were replaced with new ones replicating the originals in 1971.

With the vestibule on the west side, the main entrance to this building is through the sacristy/robing room section of the church. The arched exterior doorway leads to a small vestibule, which opens into an ample hallway. The door to the sacristy is on the east side of this space. It is an oak batten door with an oculus of yellow pebble glass. On the south side, a doorway leads into a small office. An oak staircase extends to the basement and undercroft along the east end of the north wall. A large opening at the north wall's west end gives access to the parish hall. A short oak staircase leads west from this hallway into the Thompson Guild Room. (Photo 15) Exposed raised chord oak trusses contrast with the plaster walls, as does the high oak chair rail. Applied oak strips under the chair rail simulate wainscot. A Tudor-arched fireplace with partially exposed chimney is against the north wall. The medieval feeling is enhanced by wrought-iron sconces and bell-shaped chandeliers.

The 1959 addition to the building is constructed of concrete block, covered with smooth-textured stucco. It extends back for six bays under a continuation of the Guild Hall's gable roof. A flat-roofed extension runs along its east side. The interior is divided into a nave and side-aisles arrangement by a series of square posts. (Photo 16) The ceiling of the higher central section is supported on exposed raised-chord trusses. The western aisle can be divided by movable partitions into smaller spaces for meeting rooms and classrooms. There is a rear entrance and catering kitchen in the flat-roofed section.

<sup>9</sup> The 1924 section was built as a parish hall, but now is referred to as the guild hall.

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The basement runs under both sections. It houses classrooms, rest rooms, the choir room, offices, robing rooms, and rest rooms. Finishes are plain and utilitarian.

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The St. John's Church complex is significant under Criterion C as the work of a major American architect, Horace Trumbauer, best known for the mansions he designed for the affluent and as the architect of Duke University. His ecclesiastical commissions are comparatively rare. St. John's also is significant under Criterion A as a reflection of the growing wealth of Somerville in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

St. John's Protestant Episcopal Church was founded in 1850; its original wooden building was constructed in 1850-52.<sup>1</sup> By the closing months of 1892, the old building needed extensive repairs, and the vestry voted to construct a new one of stone at a cost of \$15,000.<sup>2</sup> No action followed, however, probably because the following year ushered in a severe recession, begun by the Panic of 1893. By the summer of 1894, optimism had returned. The vestry resolved to canvass the parish to see if money could be raised for a new building. Their inquiries among the parishioners must have been satisfactory. At the end of September they resolved to raise money by subscription; by mid-November they had \$11,000.00 in hand.<sup>3</sup>

The primary donor to the building fund for the new St. John's Church building was J. Harper Smith, whose \$5,000.00 gift represented over a third of the cost of construction. Smith was the proprietor of textile mills, who moved to the Somerville area from Newark after the Civil War. He first settled in Raritan, where he became affiliated with the Raritan Woolen Mills, which later became the Somerset Manufacturing Company. This was a successful enterprise. By the time Smith retired it employed 1300 hands.<sup>4</sup> In the late 1870s, he bought land in Somerville, on which, in 1880, he began construction of the house at 228 Altamont Place. He added to his residence in 1885, 1891, and 1898. The designer of this last addition was Horace Trumbauer of Philadelphia, who had already, in 1894, designed two houses on the opposite side of Altamont Place. Smith was the client for one of these, which is believed to have been occupied by one of Smith's executives.<sup>5</sup> Given this connection, it is probable that Smith was influential in the choice of Trumbauer as the architect for St. John's.

<sup>1</sup> "St John's History, prepared for the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration on September 30/October 1, 2000," 2, vestry records.

<sup>2</sup> Vestry minutes 25 Nov. and 20 Dec. 1892.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 3 July, 27 Sept., 16 Nov. 1894.

<sup>4</sup> Francis Bazley Lee, *Genealogical and Memorial History of the State of New Jersey* (New York, 1910), 4:127.

<sup>5</sup> Jessie Havens, "The story of the richest man in town," *Somerset Messenger-Gazette*, 30 Mar., 1989; Ursula Brecknell, "J. Harper Smith Mansion," National Register registration form, 1998. The houses across the street from the mansion are the dwellings listed in the Trumbauer Ledgers, 1:29, Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

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How Smith came to select Trumbauer as his architect is unknown. Over a decade later, Trumbauer's work would appear in the Somerville area again, when, in 1909, he began to design buildings for the estate of tobacco magnate James B. Duke. These included greenhouses, cottages for upper servants, and a design for a new main house, which was never built because of the onset of World War I. Except that both were patrons for commissions in Somerville, however, there is no known connection between Smith and Duke; Trumbauer is believed to have been brought to Duke's attention by P. A. B. Widener, for whom he had designed Lynnewood Hall, a mansion in the suburbs of Philadelphia. Widener had been associated with Duke in formation of the American Tobacco Company. But this was after the completion of St. John's Church.

Smith retained Trumbauer early in the architect's career. Never receiving an academic architectural education, Trumbauer trained in the Philadelphia office of G. W. and W. D. Hewitt. He opened his own practice in 1890 at the age of twenty-one. His first commissions were for suburban houses for developers appealing to the well-to-do middle class. In 1893, however, he was given the opportunity of designing a mansion, Grey Towers in Glenside, Pennsylvania. Two years later, he received a commission that would set the direction of his career. This was for Willow Grove, an amusement park probably sponsored by Widener and his partner William L. Elkins, transportation barons, one of whose streetcar lines terminated at the site. They must have been pleased by what they saw. Within two years, Trumbauer had designed country houses for both men. These works established him as an architect of mansions for the newly rich. Perhaps his best-known work in this vein is The Elms in Newport, Rhode Island, 1899-1902, a "cottage" for another Widener associate, Edward J. Berwind. Trumbauer's wealthy patrons also chose him for institutional buildings that were the results of their largesse: the Harry Elkins Widener Memorial Library at Harvard University, 1912-4, and the twin campuses of Duke University, 1925-27.<sup>6</sup> Other major Trumbauer buildings include the Philadelphia Free Library and the Philadelphia Museum of Art (with Zantzinger and Borie).<sup>7</sup> Churches were not a major part of Trumbauer's oeuvre, but he did design approximately a dozen, including, in New Jersey, St. Catherine's Roman Catholic Church in Spring Lake (1900-1902) and Christ Church (Episcopal) in Ridgewood (1897-99).<sup>8</sup> One of his earliest ecclesiastical commissions, St. John's is fairly typical of most of

<sup>6</sup> For information on Trumbauer's life, see Frederick Platt, "Horace Trumbauer: A Life," *PMHB*, 125, 4 (Oct. 2001): 315-350.

<sup>7</sup> Henry Hope Reed, "Horace Trumbauer," *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects*, Adolf K. Placzek, ed. (New York, 1982), 4: 230.

<sup>8</sup> Frederick Platt to Constance M. Greiff, 15 Nov. 2001.

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Trumbauer's Episcopal churches, which were based on English country parish churches and tended to be long and low, seeming to hug the ground.

With the contribution from Smith assured and the remainder of the necessary funds obtainable as a mortgage, the vestry determined to proceed. They appointed the rector and the secretary of the vestry to secure competition plans for a church to seat at least 450 people. The plans were to be in by December 21. Eight firms submitted plans, which were quickly narrowed down to five. The day after New Year's Day 1895, the vestry met to review the submissions and discuss their needs. They then chose Trumbauer.<sup>9</sup> Given that the secretary of the vestry, who had served on the committee to solicit architects for plans, was Harry Atwater Smith, this probably was not a surprising choice. Harry Smith was the son of the major donor to the building fund, J. Harper Smith, who already had employed Trumbauer for a private commission and would employ him again.

By the middle of the month, Trumbauer had submitted plans and specifications for review by a committee of the vestry. The committee made several recommendations. First, they wanted to extend the cellar under the whole building. They also wanted stone foundations rather than brick, and stone sills on all the windows. The nave was to have a double floor of southern yellow heart pine, as well as yellow pine or oak wainscoting. Finally, they requested a window in the rear of the nave opening into the tower.<sup>10</sup>

This wish list undoubtedly added to the cost and when the bids were received they were all too high. Trumbauer evidently did not want to lose the commission. By May, he had managed to obtain a bid of \$13,868 from F. L. Hoover and Son of Philadelphia, exclusive of dormers, furniture, and gas fixtures, using stone from the Stockton quarries. The vestry accepted this bid on condition that the amount include dormers and that the window sills were all to be stone.<sup>11</sup> To this construction cost Trumbauer added his usual fee of 5%.<sup>12</sup> Work began on June 6, 1895 and the cornerstone was laid on September 4, 1895. In it were deposited copies of local and religious newspapers; a prayer book and hymnal; the names of the rector, members of the vestry, architect, contractors, and members of the church; and some small coins.<sup>13</sup> On January 22, 1896, the church opened its doors to the public with an organ recital. The acoustic properties were found

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 23 Nov. and 21 Dec. 1894; 2 Jan. 1895.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 15 Jan. and 22 Feb. 1895.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 25 Feb. and 2 May, 1895.

<sup>12</sup> Trumbauer Ledgers, A: 44.

<sup>13</sup> *The Unionist-Gazette* (Somerville), Sept. 5, 1895.



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admirable.<sup>14</sup> The first service was held on January 25, when it was dedicated by the Rev. John Scarborough, Bishop of the Diocese.<sup>15</sup>

The walls still were undecorated, probably in order to give the plaster time to cure. Over the summer, a young local artist, Orville Lance, painted the decorations, which he had designed.<sup>16</sup> Although the walls were plain when the church opened, it had already been fitted with some stained glass windows. Most were by the firm of J. & R Lamb, whose bill was received by the vestry in December 1895, but the large window in the chancel depicting the Resurrection, the gift of Mr. and Mrs. J. Harper Smith, was by Tiffany Studios.<sup>17</sup> Another Tiffany window, representing "Suffer the Little Children," and given by Mrs. H. B. Potts, also was in place.<sup>18</sup> Two more Tiffany windows were added in the first decade of the twentieth century. By 1897, the quatrefoil stained glass window was inserted between the tower and the rear of the nave. Other windows, dating to the era of World War I are by D'Ascenzo Studios of Philadelphia. The St. John window, installed in 1932, the two windows in the side porch, and the Baptism and Consecration in the narthex, installed in 1952, were the work of The Payne Studios (later The Payne-Spiers Studios) of Paterson, New Jersey.<sup>19</sup>

Thus not only is St. John's a good example of Trumbauer's ecclesiastical works, but it also contains examples of some of the best craftsmanship of the first half of the twentieth century. This is the case not only of the stained glass, but also of the elaborate ironwork on the front and side doors. The hinges and intricately designed latch plates are in the best tradition of Philadelphia wrought iron and prefigure the work of Samuel Yellin, the twentieth-century master of the craft.

The Rectory

In 1905, St. John's sold its old rectory. Its location on a different property from the church made it inconvenient and it also was deemed an unsuitable dwelling for the rector's needs because of its age. Purchase of a new house was discussed, but nothing

<sup>14</sup> *The Somerset Messenger*, 22 Jan. 1896.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 29 Jan. 1896; *The Unionist-Gazette*, Jan. 30, 1896.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 Sept., 1896.

<sup>17</sup> Vestry minutes, 17 Dec. 1895; *The Unionist-Gazette*, Jan. 30, 1896; "Jeweled Windows Ring St. John's", *Somerset Messenger-Gazette*, July 25, 1963.

<sup>18</sup> *The Somerset Messenger*, 29 Jan., 1896; *The Unionist-Gazette*, Jan. 30, 1896

<sup>19</sup> Correspondence, Jan.-Feb. 1932; 18 June, 21 and 26 Sept. 1952, vestry records.

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was done.<sup>20</sup> Then in 1909 St. John's became the beneficiary of a tragedy. Harry Smith died suddenly of pneumonia in 1907 at the age of forty-one, a few weeks after his marriage. His father decided to give a rectory to St. John's as a memorial to his son. He purchased the lot immediately to the south of the church and engaged Trumbauer for the building's design. The members of the vestry were invited to examine the plans on July 3, 1909, but it was obvious that these were a *fait accompli*. Smith's influence in the choice of an architect for the church may have been strong, but the vestry had had a voice in that choice and had reviewed and requested changes in the design. Here they had none. Trumbauer's ledger names Smith, not St. John's, as the client. It lists his fee for architectural services, \$577.40 for the building, plus \$10.00 for the gate between it and the church.<sup>21</sup> According to other sources, the cost of the land was \$8,250 and of construction \$18,000.<sup>22</sup>

Trumbauer clearly designed the rectory to harmonize with the church. Its exterior is composed of the same materials: quarry-faced sandstone laid as regular ashlar with limestone trim. A number of design elements relate to the Early English Gothic style, including the steeply pitched rooflines, the grouped windows, and the diamond-paned sash. At the same time, the massing relates to the comfortable suburban houses Trumbauer had designed in the preceding decade.

#### The Guild Hall/Parish Hall

Once the vestry arrived at the decision to build the new church in 1895, they also determined to move the old church back on the lot and refurbish it to serve as a parish hall and Sunday School.<sup>23</sup> However successful this may have been, it obviously could not be as satisfactory as a purpose-built structure.

Again St. John's was to benefit from the generosity of the Smith family. In 1920, Trumbauer's office prepared two drawings, presumably preliminaries, for what was then known as the Smith Memorial Parish House, funded by Mrs. Smith in her husband's memory. Whether Trumbauer's design failed to appeal or it was too expensive is not known. In any event, his ledger noted a payment of \$1,000 "in case abandoned," which

<sup>20</sup> Vestry minutes, 12 Dec. 1905 and 13 Nov. 1906.

<sup>21</sup> Trumbauer, Ledger C, 153.

<sup>22</sup> "St. John's History," 4.

<sup>23</sup> Vestry minutes, 29 Apr. 1895.

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proved to be the outcome.<sup>24</sup> When the project was reinstated in 1924, the commission went to a New York firm, Holmes and Von Schmidt. The building was consecrated in September.<sup>25</sup> It completes the complex, balancing the rectory to create an almost symmetrical composition. It harmonizes with the older buildings through similarity in materials and the repetition of such design elements as a steep gable roof and grouped windows. Nevertheless, this building, now generally known as the Guild Hall, is not of equal quality. The pitch of its roof is less dramatic and the half timbering in the gable is thin and weak. By the time it was built, costs had escalated. The bill for its construction was almost twice as much as that for the church, \$33,067.02.<sup>26</sup> There must have been some complaints. Four years later the architects wrote to disclaim responsibility for inferior work.<sup>27</sup>

During the twentieth century the congregation continued to grow. To accommodate its needs, an addition was made to the rear of the Guild Hall. In 1959, the architects, Mountford and Micklewright of Trenton, produced a plain and utilitarian addition, referred to as the parish hall, that more than doubled the size of the building. Then, in the 1980s, Short and Ford, architects, planned the finishing of the undercroft as an office for the rector, meeting rooms, and a large chapel.

The construction of the St. John's Church complex expresses the optimism of what has been described as Somerville's "Golden Age," the fifty years from 1874 to 1924. These years were:

... the climax of a century of progress begun back in 1784 when it was decided to establish the Somerset County Court House alongside a crossroads tavern on the old Raritan road. After the railroad arrived in 1842, Somerville grew into a substantial town, the commercial center of a rich farming region. And then, late in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the shops and banks and hotels of that county market town began attracting a different clientele: affluent New York business men were discovering Somerville, only an hour by train from the city, was a good place to build homes and raise their families.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Trumbauer, Ledger G: 229 and C: 153.

<sup>25</sup> "St. John's History," 4.

<sup>26</sup> Adams-Faber Co., Requisition # 10, 10 Aug. 1924, vestry records.

<sup>27</sup> Vestry minutes, 11 Apr. 1928.

<sup>28</sup> Jessie L. Havens, ed., *Illustrated Somerville, 1907: Business Souvenir Supplement to the Unionist-Gazette*, reprint, Belle Mead, NJ, 1977.

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As the county seat, Somerville was not only the governmental, but also the commercial center of a large hinterland. By the end of the nineteenth century, there were three banks, a public library, three hotels, and numerous stores and other commercial enterprise.<sup>29</sup> there was a city water system and the streets were lighted with both gas and electricity.<sup>30</sup> Little industry developed within the boundaries of Somerville, with the exception of the Somerville Woolen Mill, which by the turn of the century employed 400 hands.<sup>31</sup> The nearby town of Raritan, however, was home to several factories.

The prosperity that these developments engendered is reflected in the desire of the congregations of St. John's and other churches for larger and more substantial buildings. It is of note that just at the same time St. John's was under construction, the two other most prosperous congregations in Somerville—the First and Second Reformed Dutch Churches—also were replacing their earlier churches on Main Street with larger, stone buildings. The earlier of these, built just before St. John's, is the Second Reformed Church (now the Union Reformed Church), designed by Oscar Teal.<sup>32</sup> The year that St. John's was consecrated witnessed the laying of the cornerstone of the First Reformed Church (now the Somerset County jury waiting room), designed by William A. Potter.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> James P. Snell, *History of Hunterdon and Somerset Counties, New Jersey* (1881), reprint (Flemington, NJ, 1976), 2: 661

<sup>30</sup> A. Van Doren Honeyman, *Northwestern New Jersey* (New York, 1927), 1: 212; *Somerset Messenger Gazette*, 19 Dec. 1885.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 Apr. 1883.

<sup>32</sup> Somerville Historical Advisory Committee, *Somerville* (Dover, NH, 1998), 55.

<sup>33</sup> John Bodine Thompson, *Address at the cornerstone laying of the First Reformed Church, Somerville, N.J., July 25, 1896.*

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The boundaries of the nominated property are the boundaries of Block 133, Lot 15, City of Somerville.

This includes the original lot in which the first church was built in 1852 and the lot donated in 1909 by J. Harper Smith. These have now been merged into one lot and constitute the property owned by the Warden and Vestry of St. John's Church.

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1. St John's Church Complex  
 Somerville, Somerset County, NJ  
 Exterior, church and parish hall  
 Name of Photographer: Constance M. Greiff  
 Date of Photograph: January 12, 2002  
 Location of negative: New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office  
 Direction of view: From southwest
  
2. St John's Church Complex  
 Somerville, Somerset County, NJ  
 Interior, church, nave  
 Name of Photographer: Richard D. Smith  
 Date of Photograph: January 12, 2002  
 Location of negative: New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office  
 Direction of view: From south
  
3. St John's Church Complex  
 Somerville, Somerset County, NJ  
 Interior, church, ceiling  
 Name of Photographer: Richard D. Smith  
 Date of Photograph: January 12, 2002  
 Location of negative: New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office  
 Direction of view: From southeast
  
4. St John's Church Complex  
 Somerville, Somerset County, NJ  
 Interior, church, chancel, from south  
 Name of Photographer: Richard D. Smith  
 Date of Photograph: January 12, 2002  
 Location of negative: New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office  
 Direction of view: From south
  
5. St John's Church Complex  
 Somerville, Somerset County, NJ  
 Interior, church, chapel in undercroft  
 Name of Photographer: Richard D. Smith  
 Date of Photograph: January 12, 2002  
 Location of negative: New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office  
 Direction of view: From north

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6. St John's Church Complex  
Somerville, Somerset County, NJ  
Exterior, rectory  
Name of Photographer: Constance M. Greiff  
Date of Photograph: January 12, 2002  
Location of negative: New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office  
Direction of view: From south
7. St John's Church Complex  
Somerville, Somerset County, NJ  
Exterior, rectory  
Name of Photographer: Constance M. Greiff  
Date of Photograph: January 12, 2002  
Location of negative: New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office  
Direction of view: From northeast
8. St John's Church Complex  
Somerville, Somerset County, NJ  
Living room, rectory  
Name of Photographer: Richard D. Smith  
Date of Photograph: January 12, 2002  
Location of negative: New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office  
Direction of view: From southwest
9. St John's Church Complex  
Somerville, Somerset County, NJ  
Library, rectory  
Name of Photographer: Richard D. Smith  
Date of Photograph: January 12, 2002  
Location of negative: New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office  
Direction of view: From southeast
10. St John's Church Complex  
Somerville, Somerset County, NJ  
Hallway, first floor, rectory  
Name of Photographer: Richard D. Smith  
Date of Photograph: January 12, 2002  
Location of negative: New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office  
Direction of view: From south



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11. St John's Church Complex  
Somerville, Somerset County, NJ  
Staircase, rectory  
Name of Photographer:  
Date of Photograph: January 12, 2002  
Location of negative: New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office  
Direction of view: From west
  
12. St John's Church Complex  
Somerville, Somerset County, NJ  
Dining room, rectory  
Name of Photographer: Richard D. Smith  
Date of Photograph: January 12, 2002  
Location of negative: New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office  
Direction of view: From northwest
  
13. St John's Church Complex  
Somerville, Somerset County, NJ  
Butler's pantry, rectory  
Name of Photographer: Richard D. Smith  
Date of Photograph: January 12, 2002  
Location of negative: New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office  
Direction of view: From west
  
14. St John's Church Complex  
Somerville, Somerset County, NJ  
Second floor hallway, rectory  
Name of Photographer:  
Date of Photograph: January 12, 2002  
Location of negative: New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office  
Direction of view: north
  
15. St John's Church Complex  
Somerville, Somerset County, NJ  
Thompson Guild Room  
Name of Photographer: Richard D. Smith

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Date of Photograph: January 12, 2002

Location of negative: New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office

Direction of view: From southeast

16. St John's Church Complex

Somerville, Somerset County, NJ

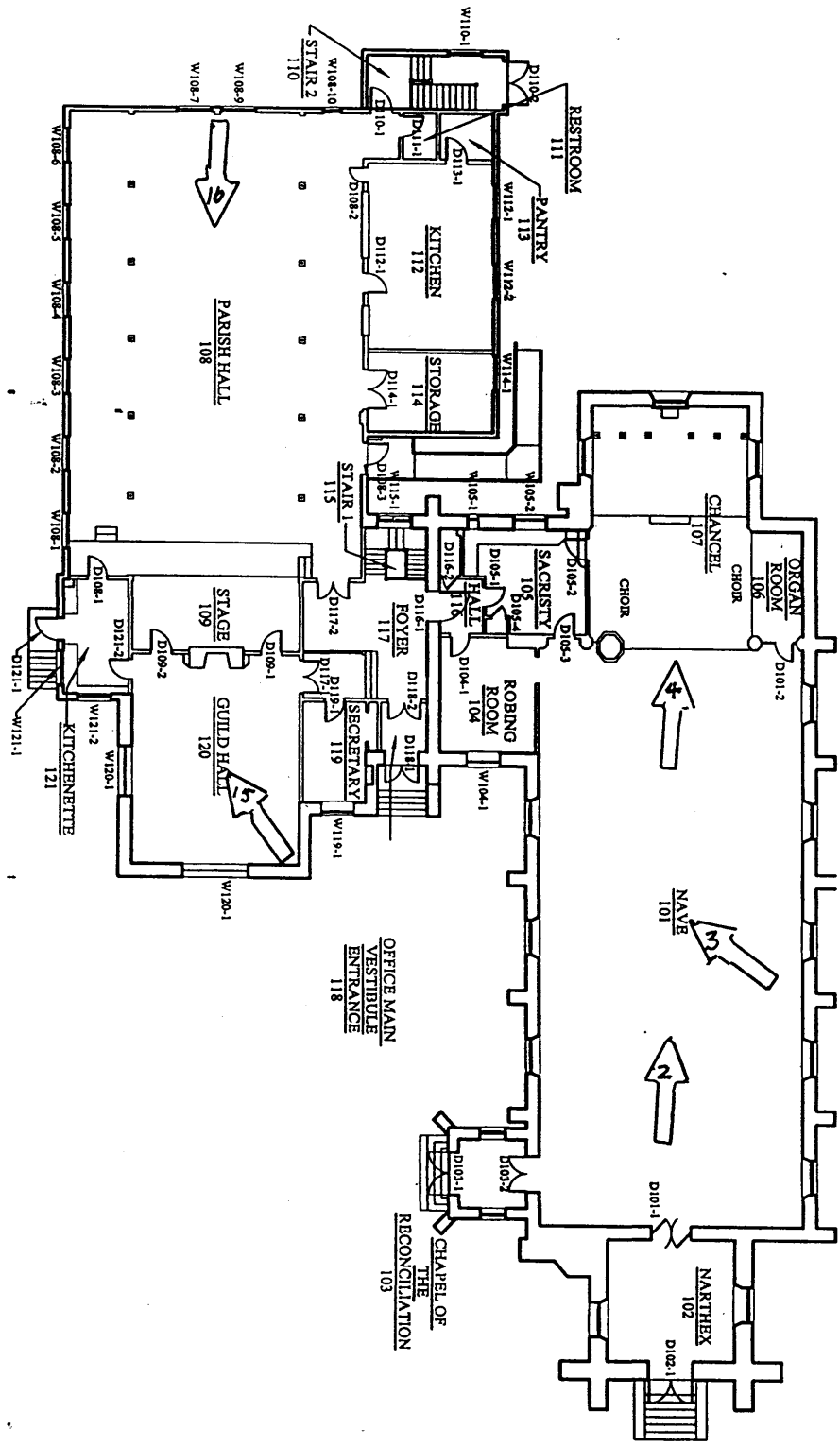
Parish Hall

Name of Photographer: Richard D. Smith

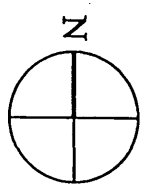
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Location of negative: New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office

Direction of view: From north

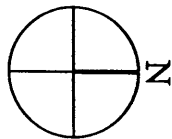
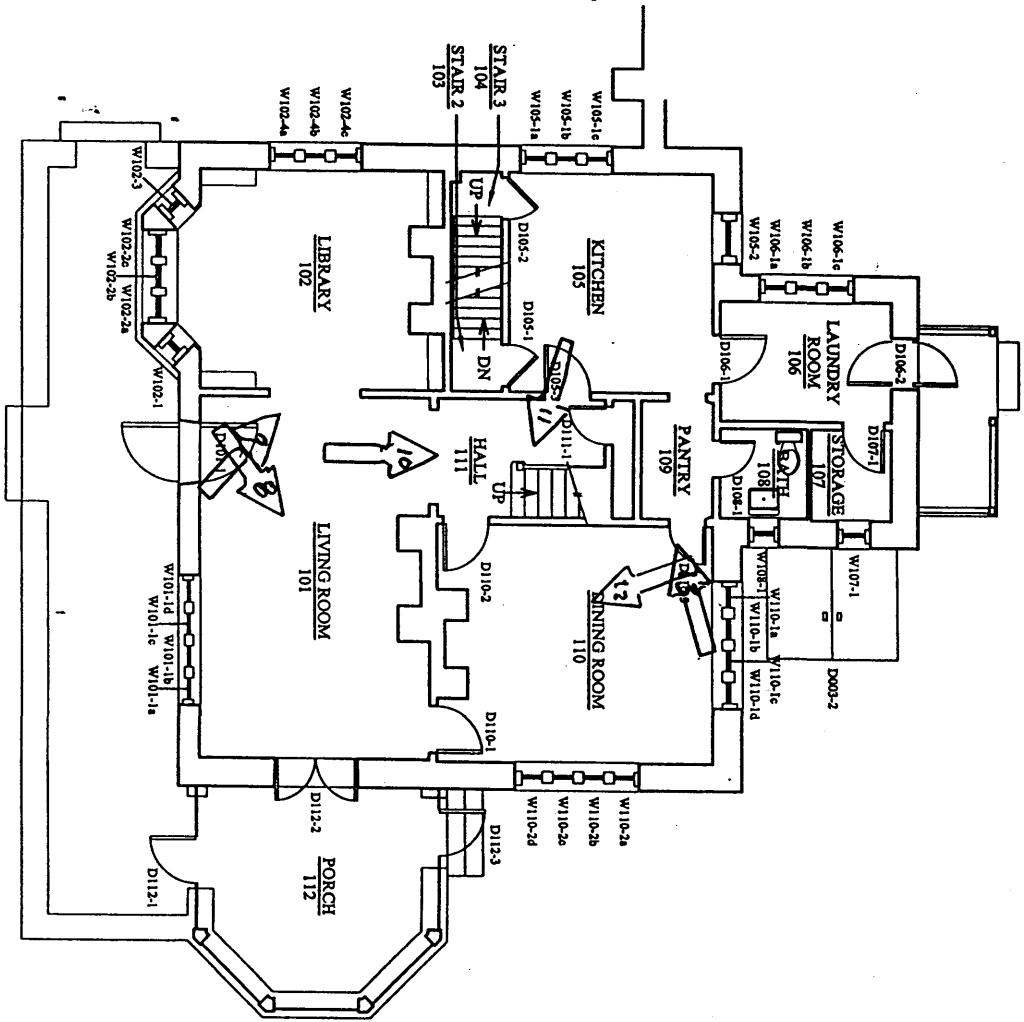


CHURCH AND PARISH HALL/GUILD HALL  
 Direction of Photographs



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Date: 01/2002	Drawn by: SN	Scale: 1/16" = 1'-0"	Schematic Design Phase St. John's Episcopal church 154-158 West High Street Somerville, New Jersey	
First Floor Plan			A-1.1	

1  
AR-1.2  
FIRST FLOOR PLAN  
SCALE: 1/8"=1'-0"



RECTORY  
Direction of Photographs  
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Schematic Design Phase  
St. John's Episcopal Church  
154-158 West High Street  
Somerville, New Jersey

Revisions & Submissions	Date

Date:  
1/2002

Drawn by:  
MH

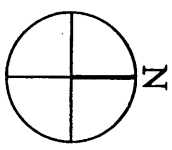
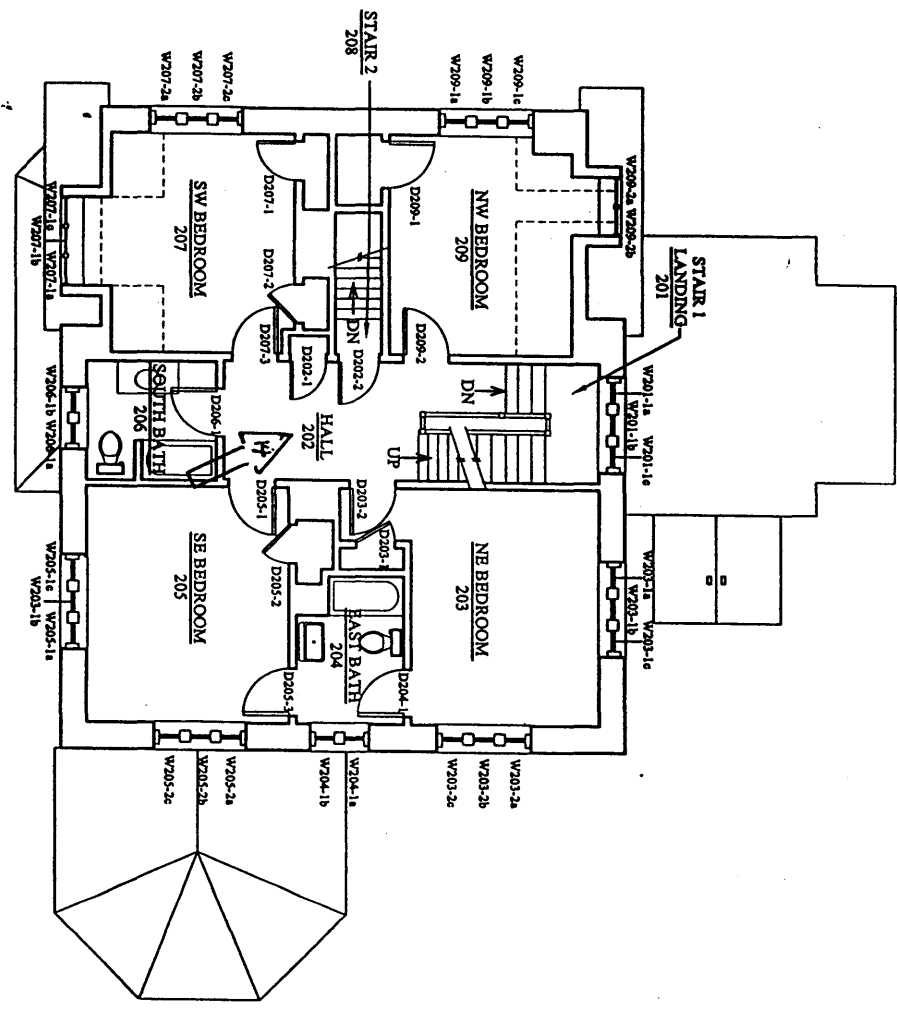
Scale:  
1/8"=1'-0"

APPARABLE SUDCLIFFE-ROBERTS, P.A. HAS AN AIA  
MICHAEL CHANG, P.A. HAS AN AIA

Rectory First Floor Plan

AR-1.2

1 SECOND FLOOR PLAN  
 AR-1.3 SCALE: 1/8"=1'-0"



RECTORY  
 Direction of Photographs →

**Historic Building Architects, uc**  
 312 West State St. Trenton, NJ 08616 TEL 609 393 3979 FAX 609 373 4333  
 Certificate of Authorization # AC 245 Expires 01/31/2002

Schematic Design Phase  
 St. John's Episcopal Church  
 154-158 West High Street  
 Somerville, New Jersey

Revisions & Submissions	Date

Date: 1/2002

Drawn by: MH

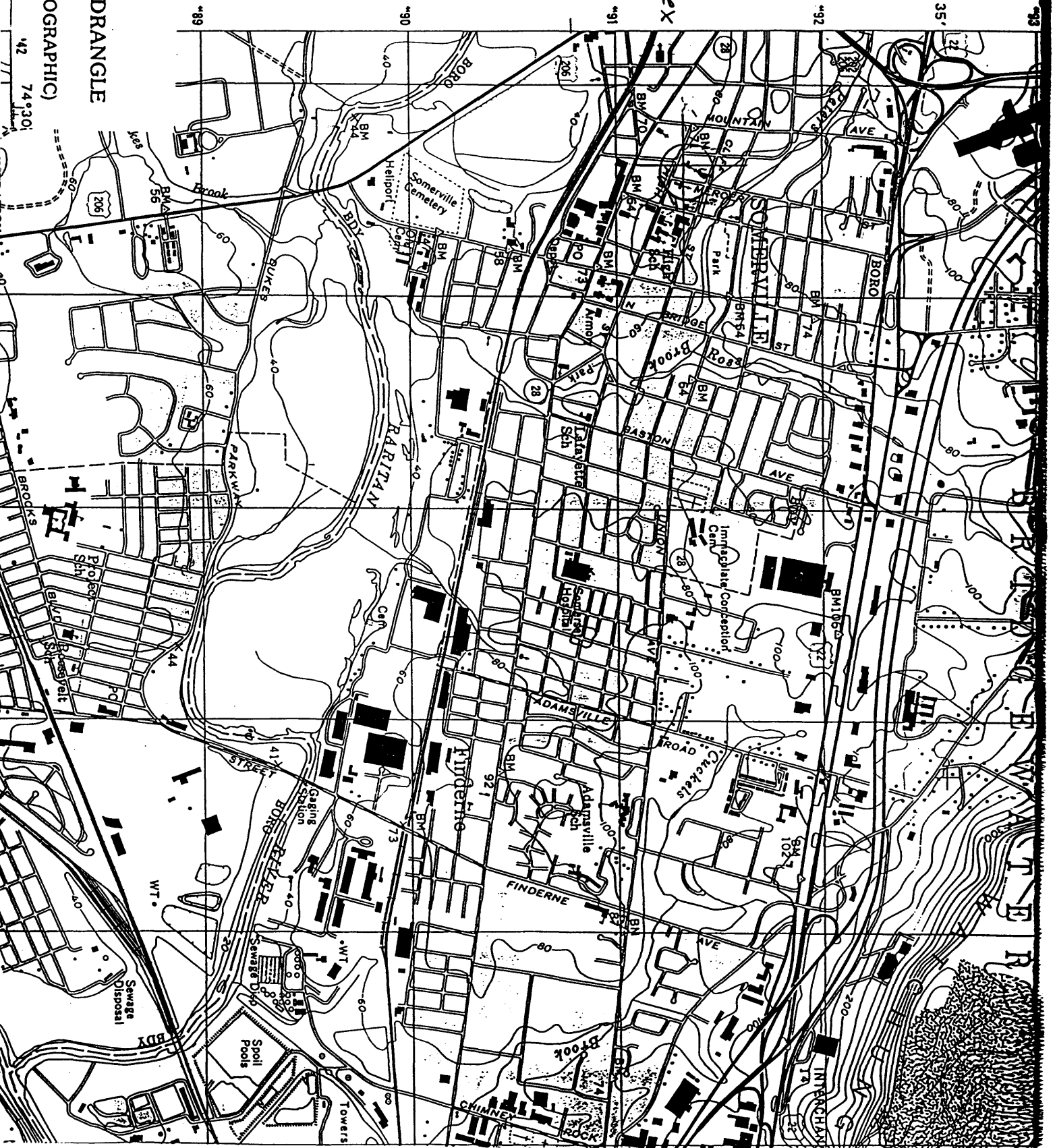
Scale: 1/8"=1'-0"

APPROPRIABLE 6400/PERFORMERS, S.A. MAY 19 1978  
 MORRIS CHAMBER S.A. MAY 19 1978

Rectory Second Floor

AR-1.3

St. John's  
Church Complex  
Somerset  
County, NJ



BOUND BROOK QUADRANGLE

NEW JERSEY

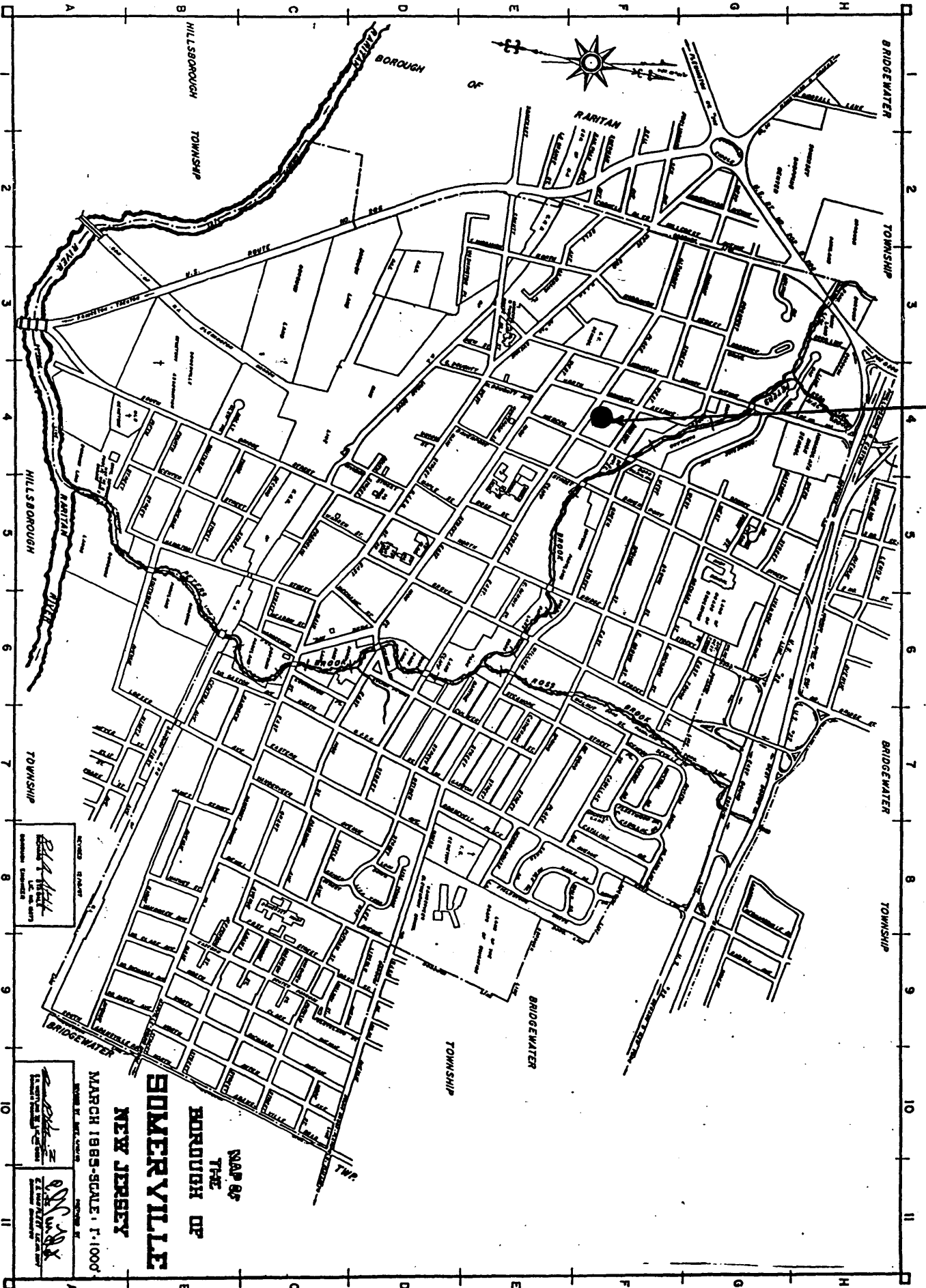
7.5-MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

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St. John's

St. John's Church Complex  
Somerset County, NJ



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MAP OF  
THE  
BOROUGH OF  
**SOMERVILLE**  
NEW JERSEY  
MARCH 1885-SCALE, 1"=1000'

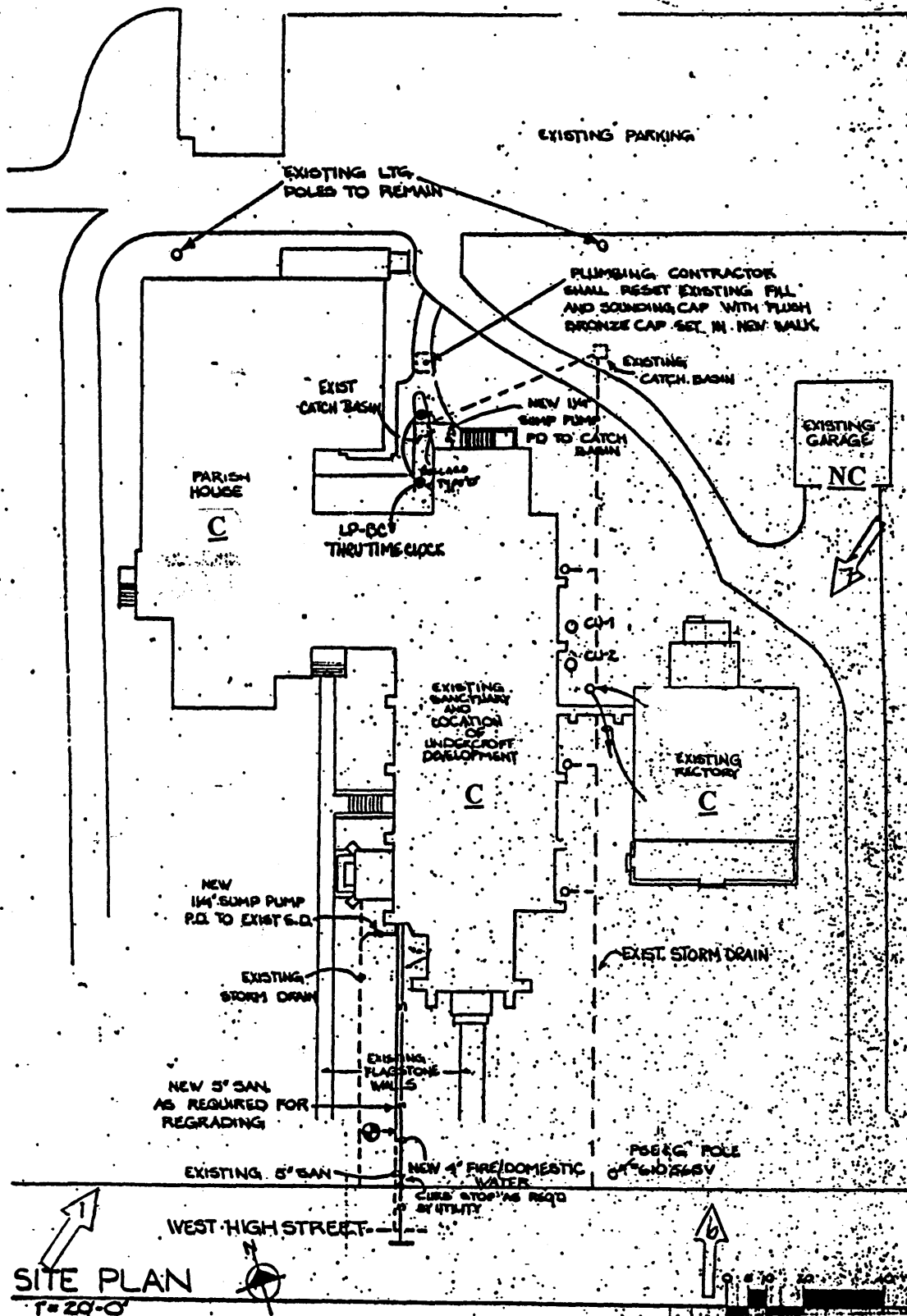
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Somerville, Somerset County, NJ

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