

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

For NPS use only
received SEP 30 1982
date entered

1. Name

historic Griffith's Chapel

and/or common Williamsville Methodist Church

2. Location

Set of SR 442 and 443

street & number Apex of intersection between Kent Cty Roads #442 & #443 NA not for publication

AND Kings Hywy (384)

city, town Williamsville vicinity of ~~Congressional district~~

state Delaware code 10 county Kent code 001

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <u>NA</u> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Peninsula General Conference - United Methodist Church

street & number 139 N. State Street

city, town Dover vicinity of state Delaware

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Kent County Recorder of Deeds

street & number Kent County Building

city, town Dover state DE

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Delaware Cultural Resource Survey K-4072 has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1982 federal state county local

depository for survey records Bureau of Archaeology & Historic Preservation

city, town Dover state Delaware

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Griffith's Chapel is a neat, plain, one-story frame building, measuring 24X30 feet in its principal dimensions; it is clapboard-sheathed, and corner-framed. The building faces west on a triangular plot formed by the intersection of county roads 442 and 443. Its surroundings are open lawn to the west and south, and a cemetery, with stones dating to the mid-nineteenth century, on the north and east. At the time the nomination was prepared, the original white paint with green trim was almost completely weathered away. However, repainting the siding was an immediate priority within an ongoing restoration. Other minor changes from the original exterior appearance are asbestos shingling of the roof; replaced double entrance doors; a concrete stoop; and stucco over brick foundation. Otherwise, the church maintains very good integrity of exterior mass, fabric, and detail. Interior integrity is excellent.

Griffith's Chapel is rectangular in plan, except for a small (three by six foot) rectangular apse at the east end. This projecting bay is itself gable roofed, and is lighted by narrow one-over-one sashes in its side walls. The side walls of the main body of the church are each broken by two widely spaced two-over-two sashes. Entrance is through double doors, with a plain frame and a simple, heavy lintel, centered in the west wall. A pair of narrow one-over-one sashes is centered in the gable end over the doorway, providing illumination for the interior gallery. The plain ceiled undersurface of the roof is exposed behind narrow vergeboards in the gable ends, and extended over exposed, lobed rafters on the sides.

The interior is a single open space, with a plain planked floor and a ceiling which opens up to a shallow crawl space under the ridgebeam. A small upper rear gallery is supported by two short flights of stair in the northwest corner. The balustres are plain squared sticks. The windows, tall on the exterior, have unadorned frames; the walls are encircled with plain grooved wainscoting. The woodwork framing the apse-like bay is embellished only by simple beading of the outer edges. The altar rail is supported on turned balustres. The movable pews, like the wainscoting, are thought to date from a turn-of-the-century remodeling. Their simple lines reflect the Arts and Crafts aesthetic, and they are hand-grained in a lighter shade than that used on woodwork. Sections of a stenciled border, which ran along the top of the walls and above the wainscoting, have been uncovered in several places. (This stenciling is barely visible at the extreme right end of the gallery in photograph #5 of the accompanying documentation.) The pattern has been reconstructed from these fragments, and the frieze will be reproduced in the restoration, along with the original interior colors.

(SEE CONTINUATION SHEET)

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1850 **Builder/Architect** NA

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Griffith's Chapel is architecturally and historically significant as an extremely evocative and well-preserved example of a small mid-19th century rural Methodist meeting house with a fine, unusual interior gallery. In its immediate locality, it is unexcelled as an icon not only of its functional type but of early community life. In the small, sparsely built crossroads community of Williamsville, only a few other 19th century buildings still stand; they are residences, and do not approach the church either in level of physical integrity or in institutional force. Seen in the larger context of southern Kent and Sussex counties, the church holds its own among surviving county churches, both in integrity and in architectural and historical significance. While the comprehensive survey data for southern Kent County has not yet been systematically evaluated, initial review has uncovered no better examples of mid-19th century churches which are equally well-preserved and equally elaborate at this very unassuming scale. In Sussex County, immediately to the south, a recently-submitted nomination for Cool Spring Presbyterian Church emphasized an intact interior gallery as an unusual feature in the surviving early architecture of southern Delaware. Historically, Griffith's Chapel is particularly illustrative seen in connection with nearby Barratt's Chapel (N.R. 1972). This large and ambitious structure, built in brick in the late 18th century, has been called "The Gradle of Methodism" because it housed early meetings leading to the establishment of Methodism as a separate denomination. If Barratt's Chapel represents the cradle stage, then Griffith's Chapel represents the rural adolescence of American Methodism. Its simple, functional but affectionately decorated frame provided the necessary setting for circuit riders and lay preachers to a country congregation. For such congregations such churches succeeded the tent meetings and borrowed rooms of the early period; they preceded the building boom in Methodist churches that followed the Civil War. On the basis of its architectural interest and integrity and of these illustrative qualities, Griffith's Chapel is nominated to the National Register on the basis of Criteria C and A: it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, and it is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.*

From the time of the visit of John and Charles Wesley to Georgia in 1736-37 to the time of the Revolution, the efforts of Methodist missionaries had met with

* The building, while still nominally owned by the Peninsula Conference of the Methodist Church, has been on inactive status for many years, and efforts are being made to transfer title to the Williamsville Historical Society, the local group which has undertaken its restoration. In any case, it is nominated to the National Register on the basis of its unusual architectural and historical merit, and thus in exception to the formal disqualification of structures owned or used by religious groups.

9. Major Bibliographical References

J. Thomas Scharf History of Delaware. Volume II, Philadelphia: 1888
Frank R. Zebley The Churches of Delaware, Wilmington: the author 1947

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of nominated property .8936 ac ±

Quadrangle name Harrington

Quadrangle scale 7.5 minute

UMT References

A

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

B

Zone		Easting				Northng								

C

Zone		Easting				Northng								

D

Zone		Easting				Northng								

E

Zone		Easting				Northng								

F

Zone		Easting				Northng								

G

Zone		Easting				Northng								

H

Zone		Easting				Northng								

Verbal boundary description and justification The boundaries of the nominated property correspond to the boundaries of the approximately .8936 acre lot on which Griffith's Chapel stands. These boundaries extend 306'5" northeast along the inner public R.O.W. of county road 443, and 322'9" southeast along the inner public R.O.W. of county road 442, from the intersection

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries See Continuation Sheet

state NA code county code

state NA code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Calvin Vinyard Hollis III/edited by Patricia Wright

organization Williamsville Historical Society/B/A&HP date 1980/1982

street & number Old State House, the Green telephone 736-5685

city or town Houston/Dover state Delaware

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 evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer signature *Kevin R. Griffith*

title Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer date Sept 28, 1982

For NPS use only
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register
Entered in the National Register
Keeper of the National Register *John Adams Byrum* date 10/29/82
Attest: Chief of Registration date

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The 20th century heating and lighting systems which had been introduced into the building have been removed as part of the current restoration. Two modern brick side chimneys were demolished; evidence in the attic crawl space of an earlier central stovepipe (and fire) led to the installation of a cast iron wood stove of Pennsylvania manufacture, dating from within a few years of the 1850 construction date of the church. The building has also been de-electrified. Candlelight is the sole source of illumination for the occasional evening meetings now held there. Nineteenth century holders have been installed for this purpose.

JUSTIFICATION OF BOUNDARIES

The boundaries of the nominated property correspond to those of the triangular parcel on which Griffith's Chapel stands. These boundaries provide appropriate visual access to the building from the two county roads which intersect at the apex of the triangle. They also enclose an historic resource in addition to that represented by the building itself: the 19th century graveyard in which early members of the congregation are buried. The parcel has historic integrity, too, in corresponding to the 19th century gift of W.T. Griffith. These factors made the boundaries of the legal parcel the logical boundaries of the nominated resource.

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resistance from conservative adherents of the Church of England. In Delaware, however, the itinerant preachers met with considerable success. As noted above, that receptiveness was reflected in the building of Barratt's Chapel in 1780. In an era of difficult travel, however, congregations were necessarily local; smaller country meetings played an important role in nurturing Methodism on its way to becoming by far the largest denomination on the peninsula. Prior to 1850, Methodists in the southwestern part of Milford Hundred worshipped in the District 47 schoolhouse. The land for the first permanent Methodist Church in the area--a triangular lot, symbolic of the Methodist belief in the Trinity--was donated in that year by W. T. Griffith. The trustees named the church in his honor.

Level of Significance

The level of significance checked in item 10 is local. In the opinion of Bureau staff and the State Review Board for Historic Preservation, Griffith's Chapel is an unusually, possibly uniquely, well-preserved example of a small, rural Methodist meeting house in Delaware. It could certainly be profitably considered in the context of 19th century Methodist churches statewide, and might well emerge in that context as possessed of statewide significance. However, the comprehensive comparative data which would make such a consideration possible is not yet available. For the present, at least, the significance of Griffith's Chapel is best understood and demonstrated in the context of Milford Hundred, Southern Kent and Northern Sussex counties.

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ONE NATIONAL ARCHIVE
EXP. 10/1/71

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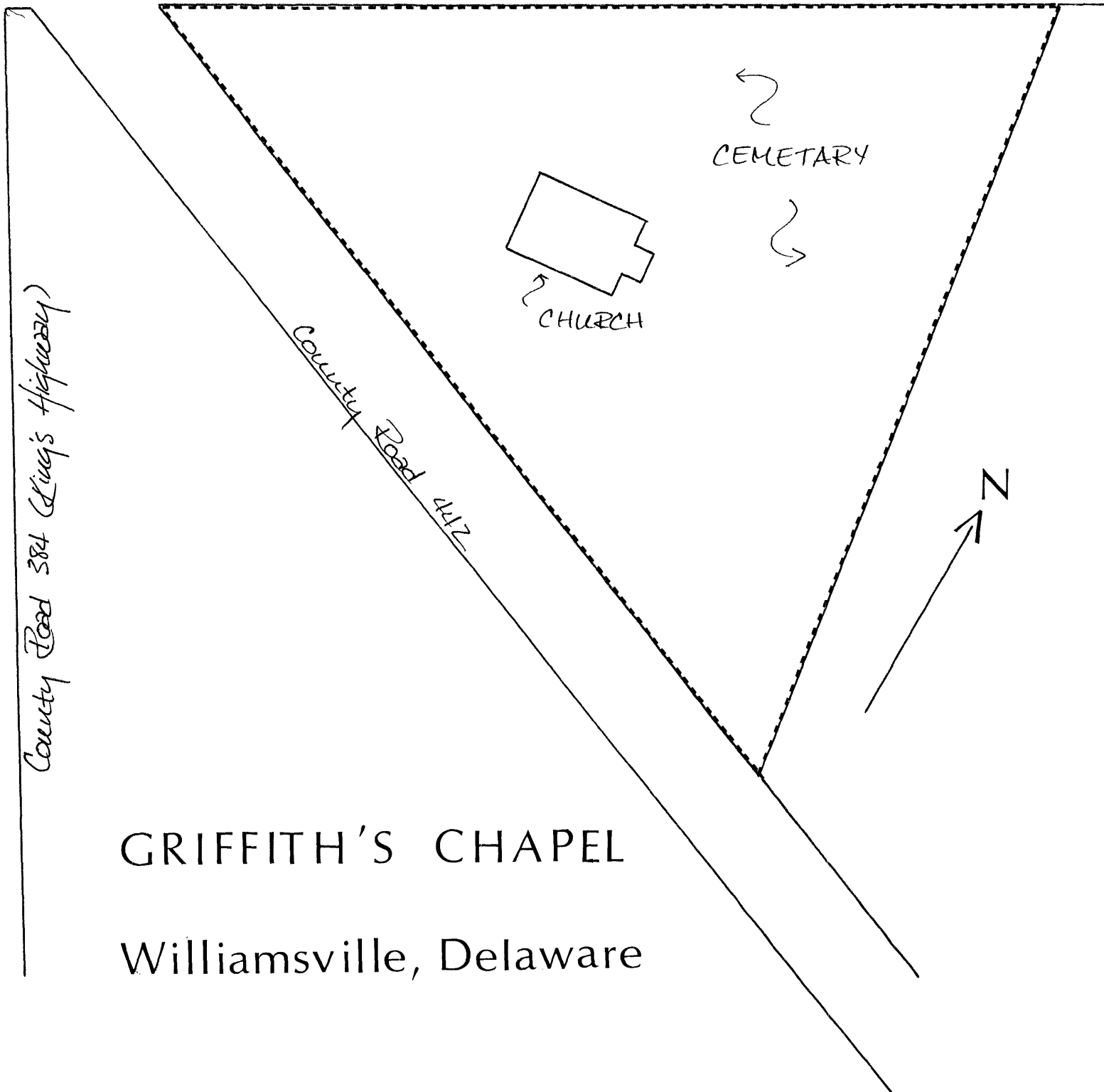
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of these two roads. The eastern boundary is a straight line drawn between the extreme northeast and southeast points of these two lines.

County Road 443



GRIFFITH'S CHAPEL
Williamsville, Delaware

— not to scale —