

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

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: Massachusetts	
COUNTY: Suffolk	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

**1. NAME**

COMMON: Trinity Church

AND/OR HISTORIC: Trinity Episcopal Church

**2. LOCATION**

STREET AND NUMBER: Boylston Street, at Copley Square

CITY OR TOWN: Boston

STATE: Massachusetts CODE:   COUNTY: Suffolk CODE:  

**3. CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress	Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ _____ _____

**4. OWNER OF PROPERTY**

OWNER'S NAME: Reverend Theodore Park Ferris, Rector, Trinity Episcopal Church

STREET AND NUMBER: Copley Square

CITY OR TOWN: Boston STATE: Massachusetts CODE:  

**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.: Registry of Deeds, Suffolk County

STREET AND NUMBER: Pemberston Square

CITY OR TOWN: Boston STATE: Massachusetts CODE:  

**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE OF SURVEY:  

DATE OF SURVEY:  Federal  State  County  Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:  

STREET AND NUMBER:  

CITY OR TOWN:   STATE:   CODE:  

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

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## 7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered		<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site	

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Designed in the Romanesque style and achieving a monumental effect, Trinity Church has a compact and cruciform plan with all its limbs nearly equal-apse, nave, transepts, and chancel - forming the base of the tower obelisk. The massive square central tower, with a two-story body flanked by turrets at the angles and crowned with four gables and an octagonal roof, rises to a height of 150 feet and is the dominant feature of the design. The composition as a whole is a romantic and picturesque mass studied for its effectiveness from all angles.

The walls of the church are of yellowish gray Milford granite laid up in quarry-faced random ashlar and the profuse trim is in reddish-brown Long-meadow brownstone. A "color church," cut-stone, in alternating patterns of light and dark, decorate some of the walls. The church measures 121 feet outside from end to end (north-south) of the transept walls and 161 feet from apse (east) wall to the west (front) facade. The four arms of the cruciform church are each about 50 feet wide inside.

The lower roofs are of plain slates, the roofs and louvre-boards of the tower of semi-glazed red tiles, and the crockets of red terra-cotta. A vestibule stretches across the west entrance front and is prolonged to a breadth of some 93 feet, forming the lower story of the two flanking western towers, which thus rise free of the west end of the nave. The present west porch and the top story and roof of each of the two west towers were designed and built in 1894-97.

Inside, the main ceilings are about 63 feet high and the flat ceiling of the central tower 103 feet. The tower is supported by four piers - each a pyramid of solid granite 35 feet square at the base, 17 feet high, and seven feet square at the top, set near the angles of the crossing. The crossings measure about 36 feet to the springing of the arches and are then connected by clear spans of 46 1/2 feet.

Narrow aisles, used only as passageways add 9 feet 4 inches to the width of each side of the nave in the west arm, and its clerestory is borne by an arcade of two arches. Within this arcade, above the aisles, is a narrow triforium-like passageway connecting the galleries which are built across the ends of three of the limbs. The chancel proper is very short, but the apse is very large (giving the east arm a length of 57 feet), semi-circular, and pierced by a range of tall round-headed windows set well up under the cornice.

The ceilings of the auditorium are of light furring and plaster in the form of a large barrel-vault of trefoil section, a butting against the great arches of the crossing, which are furred down to a similar shape, with wooden tie-beams casing iron rods carried across on a level with the cusps of the arches. The four great granite piers which sustain the weight of the tower are encased with furring and plastering, finished in the shape of grouped shafts with grouped capitals and bases. The whole apparent construction is thus a mask of the actual construction.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |                                       |  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century            | <input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century  | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 19th Century |                                       |

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known)

1873-77

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |                                      |  |  |
|--|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal              | <input type="checkbox"/> Education   | <input type="checkbox"/> Political           | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric             | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic                | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry    | <input type="checkbox"/> Science             | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture             | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention   | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture           | _____  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape   | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature  | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater             | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce                | <input type="checkbox"/> Military    | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation      | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications          | <input type="checkbox"/> Music       |  | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation            |                                      |  | _____  |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Designed by the noted architect Henry Hobson Richardson and constructed by Norcross Brothers in 1872-77, Trinity Church is Richardson's masterpiece of church architecture and the prototype of what became immediately known as the "Richardsonian Romanesque" architectural style. By 1880 this great church had fully established its 42-year old designer's reputation as the new leader among architects in the United States. Even before Trinity Church was completed other American architects were producing imitations, and over the next 20 years many prominent churches in the United States, particularly in the Middle west, followed in some degree the model that Trinity Church established.

Trinity Church, - a mighty stone pile of heavy porches, arches, and buttresses building up to a massive central tower, sprayed with pinnacles and turrets, and presenting a rich complex of ever-shifting shapes and unexpected sequences of pattern in color and texture - embodied a fuller and more mature realization of the visual and intellectual implications that had already been present in the earlier 19th century High Victorian picturesque architectural style. In designing Trinity Church Richardson freely rendered and personalized his impressions of such great 11th Century French Romanesque Churches as Saint-Gilles-du-Gard at Auvergne and Saint Trophime at Arles; Trinity's great central tower was inspired by that of the Old Cathedral in Salamanca, Spain.

History

In December 1870 the Proprietors of Trinity Church decided to obtain a new location and erect a new church. On January 1, 1872, for \$105,000, they purchased a rectangular lot located on the east side of Copley Square. The site was situated in Boston's Back Bay area, a newly developed residential area that was comprised of filled-in land. In March 1872, the Building Committee of the church invited six architectural firms to submit designs for the new Trinity Church. Its letter to the architects specified that the church seat 1,000 persons on the main floor and 350 in the galleries, and that it have a robing room and organ on either side of the chancel. "Also in rear of the Church a Parish Building containing a Lecture Room capable of seating 500 persons, a Sunday School over the Lecture Room, and an Infant School Room, and three or four small rooms..."

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Architecture, Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries  
(Baltimore, 1963), 222-23

Henry-Russell Hitchcock, The Architecture of H.H. Richardson and His Times  
(2nd ed., Hamden, Conn., 1961), 136-144.

M. G. Van Rensselaer, Henry Hobson Richardson and His Works (Boston and  
New York, 1888), 20, 21, 31, 35, 56, 59-66, 67, 70,  
103, 111, 115, 118, 121, 134, 143-145.

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY				OR	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES				
CORNER	LATITUDE		LONGITUDE		LATITUDE		LONGITUDE		
	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
NW	°	'	"	°	'	"	42°	21'	00"
NE	°	'	"	°	'	"	71°	04'	32"
SE	°	'	"	°	'	"			
SW	°	'	"	°	'	"			

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 45,647 square feet (1 acre)

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

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE: Charles W. Snell, Survey Historian

ORGANIZATION Division of History, Office of Archeology and DATE 6/15/70  
Historic Preservation, National Park Service

STREET AND NUMBER: 801- 19th Street, N.W.

CITY OR TOWN: Washington STATE D. C. CODE  

**12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION**

**NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National  State  Local

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Title \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation*

Date \_\_\_\_\_

ATTEST: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Keeper of The National Register*

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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7. Description: (1)

The Interior of the church was brightly decorated by John La Farge. The dominant color of the interior walls is red, the great piers a dark bronze green with gilded capitals and bases. The painting on the walls of the tower, above the arches, over the windows, and in the nave were done directly on the walls. As Richardson emphasized the tower as the dominating architectural feature of the interior, so La Farge also lavished upon it a wealth of painting and decoration, even in hidden places. The decorations of the nave were restored to their original brilliance in 1957. The stained glass windows in the apse of the Chancel (the east arm) are by Clayton and Bell of London. The magnificent and beautiful three-lancet window over the west gallery was designed and made by John La Farge. The stained glass in the north transept windows are by the English artists William Morris and Sir Edward Burne Jones.

The present ciborium and pulpit were designed by Sheply, Rutan, and Coolidge and **were erected in 1916.** The present altar and decorations in the chancel were done by Charles D. Maginnis in 1938 and the nave and chancel organs date from 1963.

The parish house, with its large mullioned windows and attached cloister colonnade that connects it to the northeast corner of the church, is built of the same material as the church. In its final (1874) form the parish house certainly ranks as one of Richardson's finest achievements. Viewed from Copley Square, the west elevation of the parish house continues the motif of the open facade of the church, and culminates in the rising cloistered stairway that leads to the chapel. The building's four dormers, with their round lights, echo those high in the massive church tower. The pyramidal massing of the parish house also reflects that of the church itself. It makes a third important volume in the whole; from either the southwest or northwest, one sees the great central tower balanced on **one side by the** western towers, and on the other by the parish house, lower and further away. The interior of the parish house was rebuilt in 1959-60.

The church and parish house are both in excellent condition. Trinity Church is an active church and the building is also open to visitors.

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8. Significance (1)

Each architect was to furnish by May 1, 1872 a ground plan, three elevations, longitudinal and cross sections, and a prespective drawing, as well as "an approximate estimate including foundation not to exceed \$200,000 dollars." Each architect was to receive \$300 for his designs.

On June 1, 1872, the Committee awarded the commission to Henry Hobson Richardson, a 34-year old architect from New York City. Richardson came to Boston and urged the Committee to acquire an available triangle of land that adjoined the church property to the north. On June 14, the Committee purchased this triangle for \$74,000 and the new addition almost doubled the original building site in size. Richardson completely reworked his prize-winning drawings and early in April, 1873, presented his matured plans, now based on the larger lot, to the Committee. The great 50-foot tower used in both plans, however, aroused the concern of engineers employed by the Committee, and the architect received instructions to reduce the weight of the tower so that the feature could be safely erected on filled-in land. Richardson spent the spring of 1873 in making adjustments to his plans, reducing the original weight of the tower from 18,601,401 pounds to 14,244,359 pounds, and its height by about one-third, only to have the third set rejected on June 29.

A new committee now took up the problem and the architect's fourth set of plans was accepted. Bids were opened on September 9, 1873 and James Anson Norcross and Orlando Whitney Norcross, Builders, of Worcester, Massachusetts, were low bidders with a figure of \$355,000. As this amount far exceeded what the committee had in mind, Richardson made a fifth revision in his plans and the Norcross Brothers then reduced their bid to \$290,000. A contract for this amount was signed with the builders on October 10, 1873 and called for the completion of the Parish house by November, 1874 and the church by September 1, 1876. Richardson received a grand total of \$7,218.90, including expenses, for his work on the Trinity Church plans. There were to be no further payments to the architect, though the project continued to occupy a great deal of his time for the next three years.

During the spring and summer of 1873 some 4500 wooden piles were sunk in the filled-in land, at a cost of \$65,000, to **support the weight of the church and Parish House.**

On April 5, 1874 Norcross Brothers accepted the architect's final drawings and set to work. At this point, however, the committee, acting on the recommendations of its new consulting engineer, intervened and directed Richardson to completely redesign the central tower to further lighten its weight and thereby eliminate all questions regarding its safety.

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8. Significance (2)

The architect spent the spring and summer of 1874 completely reworking the plan. **The tall octagonal tower which had been retained from the beginning was abandoned.** In its place he evolved the existing tower, inspired by the tower of the Old Cathedral at Salamanca, Spain. Richardson selected this church from photographs of a number of Spanish churches that were sent to him at this time by John La Farge. Work on the parish house began on March 26, 1874 and the structure was completed by November 29 of that year. Progress was also made on the foundations of the church during the summer of 1874.

The sixth and final set of drawings for the church were completed in March, 1875. A new contract for the church was signed with Norcross Brothers on April 1, 1875, giving them an additional \$11,500 and the completion date was changed from September 1, 1876 to December 1, 1876. Work on the church in 1875 began on March 26, the cornerstone was laid on May 20, and by July 26, the arches and vault were **completed.** **The following season, work commenced on April 13,** with the putting on of masonry and plaster. The committee wished to leave the interior bare, but Richardson persuaded them to employ John La Farge to paint and decorate. La Farge's offer to do this work for \$8,000 was accepted on September 15, 1876 and the project was completed by January 31, 1877. In September 1876 B. Wentworth received a \$4,218 contract to construct the 228 low pews for the church and O.W. Penny of New York a \$2,000 contract for the great central chandelier and the eight smaller ones. Trinity Church was dedicated on February 9, 1877. Cost of construction, including the piling and interior work, was about \$456,000; total cost of the project, with land acquisition included, was about \$635,000.

The church was executed substantially as it appears in Richardson's final drawings of March, 1875, except for the exterior sculpture and the two towers on the west (front) elevation. Exterior areas of projecting rough freestone that were intended to be carved into figures were left rough in 1877 and remain that way today; an upper story was also omitted from each of the west towers. The items, which would have added another estimated \$40,000 to the cost of construction, were eliminated for reasons of economy. Instead, the west towers were capped in 1877 in a manner much like that planned by Richardson prior to his plans of September, 1873-April, 1874. These 1877 cappings were later removed at sometime between 1878 and 1886.

Richardson's successors, Shepley, Rutan, and Coolidge, completed Trinity Church in 1894-97. The existing porch and two towers on the west (front) elevation were designed by Hugh Shepley in a style that partially **reflects** Richardson's unexecuted plans, prepared in 1883-85. The towers are **of the scale** desired by Richardson, though in form busier and more archeological than he planned. The porch, modelled after St. Trophime's, is also close to Richardson's except that the frieze of carved figures **is** much heavier, and a good deal of the original grace has been lost.

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8. Significance: (3)

Shepley's porch and towers of 1894-97, in brief, are more Romanesque, more cluttered, and more deliberately historical than anything Richardson had ever intended.



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Trinity Church, Boston  
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STATE	
Massachusetts	
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9. Major Bibliographical References

- Thomas E. Tallmadge, The Story of Architecture in America (London, 1928), 173-75.
- Lewis Mumford, The Brown Decades (Boston, 1955), 116.
- Talbot F. Hamlin, The American Spirit in Architecture (New Haven, 1926), 173.
- Wayne Andrews, Architecture, Ambition, and Americans (New York, 1955), 159-60.
- James M. Fitch, American Building, The Forces That Shape It (Boston, 1948), 192-94.
- John Burchard and Albert Bush-Brown, The Architecture of America, A Social and Cultural History (Boston and Toronto, 1961), 179, 185, 188, 280, 284.
- Christopher Tunnard and Henry H. Reed, American Skyline (Boston, 1955), 116.
- Alan Gowans, Images of American Living (Philadelphia and New York, 1964), 350, 351, 362, 369, 370.
- Massachusetts, A Guide to Its Places and People (American Guide Series) (Boston, 1937), 145-46. ✓
- Walter H. Kilham, Boston After Bulfinch, An Account of Its Architecture, 1800-1900 (Cambridge, 1946), 80-82.
- Majorie Drake Ross, The Book of Boston, The Victorian Period (New York, 1964), 128-29.
- Wendell D. Garrett, Paul F. Norton, Alan Gowans, Joseph T. Butler, The Arts in America, The 19th Century (New York, 1969), 123, 127.
- Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., "Richardson and Trinity Church: The Evolution of a Building," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Vol. XXVII, No. 4 (December, 1968), 281-298.
- Edgar D. Romig, The Story of Trinity City of the City of Boston (Boston, 1952).
- Arthur H. Chester, Trinity Church in the City of Boston (Cambridge, 1888).
- "Seven Churches," Architectural Record (New York), December, 1956.
- Phillip Brooks, "Trinity Church, Boston," The New England Magazine, Vol. VIII, No. 2 (April, 1893).