

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORMSEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

St. John's Church

AND/OR COMMON

St. John's Church (Episcopal)

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

16th and "H" Streets, Lafayette Square

___ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Washington

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

District of Columbia

___ VICINITY OF

CODE

11

COUNTY

CODE

011

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

___ DISTRICT

 BUILDING(S)

___ STRUCTURE

___ SITE

___ OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

___ PUBLIC

 PRIVATE

___ BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

___ IN PROCESS

___ BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

 OCCUPIED

___ UNOCCUPIED

___ WORK IN PROGRESS

 ACCESSIBLE

___ YES: RESTRICTED

___ YES: UNRESTRICTED

___ NO

PRESENT USE

___ AGRICULTURE

___ MUSEUM

___ COMMERCIAL

___ PARK

___ EDUCATIONAL

___ PRIVATE RESIDENCE

___ ENTERTAINMENT

 RELIGIOUS

___ GOVERNMENT

___ SCIENTIFIC

___ INDUSTRIAL

___ TRANSPORTATION

___ MILITARY

___ OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

St. John's Episcopal Parish

STREET & NUMBER

16th and "H" Streets

CITY, TOWN

Washington

___ VICINITY OF

STATE

District of Columbia

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTIONCOURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Recorder of Deeds

STREET & NUMBER

6th and "D" Streets, N. W.

CITY, TOWN

Washington,

STATE

District of Columbia

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Historic American Buildings Survey (DC-19)

DATE

1937-39; 1961-62

 FEDERAL ___ STATE ___ COUNTY ___ LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Division of Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress

CITY, TOWN

Washington,

STATE

District of Columbia

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

EXCELLENT DETERIORATED
 GOOD RUINS
 FAIR UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

UNALTERED
 ALTERED

CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE
 MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The distinguished architect Benjamin H. Latrobe designed St. John's, constructed in 1815-16 in the form of a Greek cross. A lantern cupola sitting above a flat dome dominated the gabled roofline, which towered above the high sidewalls. At the intersections of the transepts were four massive pillars. Surrounding the interior was a graceful circular gallery, which had a railing and was supported by columns. The aisles were of brick and the pews high-backed. Within the chancel was a communion table, above which was a movable wine-glass pulpit, reached by a spiral staircase.

Four years after the completion of the church, workmen erected a major addition on the west side, fronted by a Doric-columned portico which became the new main entrance, and above which rose a high steeple. New flat-roofed vestibules, just behind and lower than the portico, created the form of a Latin instead of a Greek cross. In 1842 church officials replaced the old pews and subsequently made other minor modifications, but over the course of the years restored many original features.

St. John's Church, in fine condition today, is still an active parish church. The basic structure, much the same as at the time of the original construction and subsequent major enlargement, is of brick and yellow stucco with white trim. Twenty-seven handsome memorial windows adorn the building. Many of the Presidents have autographed an 18th-century prayerbook, placed in the President's pew. A silver chalice donated by John Tayloe, builder of Octagon House, and a solid gold communion chalice, encrusted with jewels, are among the many notable treasures of the church.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

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

SPECIFIC DATES 1816 (completion) BUILDER/ARCHITECT Benjamin H. Latrobe; James Renwick; McKim, Mead and White

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

St. John's Episcopal Church, Lafayette Square, long known as "the Church of the Presidents" has served virtually as the chapel to the White House for nearly two centuries.

As far back as 1816, records show that at that time a committee was formed to "wait on the President of the United States (James Madison) and offer him a pew in the church without his being obliged to purchase same." Madison chose pew 54, but insisted on paying the customary annual rental. The next five Presidents in succession - Monroe, Adams, Jackson, Van Buren, and Harrison--occupied this pew during their terms of office, and since then, by tradition, pew 54 has been set aside for Presidents of the United States. Every Chief Executive since Madison has attended some service there and many have been members. Franklin D. Roosevelt paid homage to the tradition by spending a few minutes in prayer here on his two inauguration days. The church is connected with the Presidents in other ways. James Madison's wife, Dolly, was baptized and confirmed there. President Harrison and Taylor were buried from it.

In the architecture of Washington, St. John's Church also holds a distinguished place. It was designed by Benjamin Latrobe, and in spite of changes today as a notable example of late Federal architecture. Along with the Blair House and the Decatur House, St. John's Church, which was completed in 1816, stands as one of the few remaining original structures that are left around Lafayette Park today.

St. John's Church dates back to 1809. Its construction was delayed by the War of 1812, when the British entered Washington and burned parts of the city. Benjamin Henry Latrobe, the important early American architect, volunteered his services to design a fitting church to be located just across the meadow from the President's mansion. The cornerstone for St. John's was laid September 4, 1815, while Latrobe was overseeing repairs at the White House. He supervised both projects and the church was completed in 1816.

Latrobe planned St. John's in the form of a Greek cross, with a flat dome and lantern cupola. He conceived of his churches as meeting houses, with open preaching space unencumbered by peers and columns, and a central pulpit. As a result, directly in front of the communion table in the center of the chancel arch of St. John's, he set the pulpit, entirely visible by all the congregation.

(Continued)

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Maddex, Diane, Historic Buildings of Washington, D.C. (Pittsburgh, 1973).
 Schwartz, Nancy B., editor Historic American Buildings Survey; District of Columbia Catalog (Charlottesville, Va., 1974).
Washington City and Capitol, American Guide Series (Washington, D.C. 1932).

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY approximately 1/2 acre.

UTM REFERENCES

A	1 8	3 2 3 4 0 0	4 3 0 7 4 8 0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

(See continuation sheet).

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Blanche Higgins Schroer, and Carol Kolb, Landmark Review Project; Robert F. Ferrton, 1959.

ORGANIZATION

DATE

Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

1100 "L" Street, N. W.

(202) 523-5464

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Washington,

D.C.

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

DATE

11/26/80

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

11-26-80

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

((NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS))

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St. John's size, however, soon proved inadequate to meet the needs of a growing congregation, and in July 1820, pew holders decided it was expedient to enlarge the church. The 1820-1822 remodeling added forty-two pews and the nave was extended westward to the building line on 16th Street. A Doric portico, capped by a three-stage Georgian tower, was added on that front, and a bell cast in the foundry of Paul Revere's son, Joseph, was installed in the tower. A gallery was extended over the addition, but this is contrary to the Latrobe plan. (He is not responsible for the design of these additions as he died of yellow fever in 1820; the architect of these alterations is unknown). Originally the gallery was circular, repeating the line of the dome above, and filling the nave, transepts and one-half of the chancel and extending to the east wall on either side of the communion table.

During the period 1836-1869, other major changes took place. The south transept door was closed and replaced by a central window; the interior was embellished with stencil and stained glass, and the chancel was enlarged. The box pews were removed in 1842.

In 1883, James Renwick, the ecclesiastical architect, made radical alterations. Under his plans, the addition of the chantry to the rear and the installation of numerous stained glass windows were accomplished. In extending the chancel, Palladian windows were incorporated over the alter. Under the direction of the firm of McKim, Mead and White, (in 1919-1920) the chancel was refurnished with marble and marble columns and the interior of the dome was redecorated. During the period 1950-1951, structural repairs were made and some of the Victorian elements were removed.

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St. John's Church is located within the Lafayette Square National Historic Landmark District and is also actually connected by a one-story addition to its parish house (Ashburton House), which is a separate national historic landmark. The boundary of the church itself is the boundary of the church plot at the northeast corner of 16th and H Streets. The landscaping around the church is limited, as the downtown lot is surrounded on the east and north by other structures.

Beginning at the northeast corner of the intersection of 16th and H Streets, the boundary follows the east curb of 16th Street northerly; thence easterly along the north property line; thence south along the east wall of the church to H Street; thence westerly along the north curb of H Street to the beginning point.