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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any 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 certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

historic name THE USCO CHURCH

other names/site number CHURCH OF THE TABERNACLE; GARNERVILLE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

2. Location

street & number 21 CHURCH STREET

city or town GARNERVILLE

state NEW YORK code NY county ROCKLAND code 087 zip code 10923

not for publication

vicinity

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

X national statewide local

Ruth A. Rupert DSHPO 3/11/16
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official Date

Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

P entered in the National Register determined eligible for the National Register
determined not eligible for the National Register removed from the National Register
other (explain):

Robert A. Roberts 5/3/16
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

THE USCO CHURCH

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5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	private
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	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**

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION: religious facility

RECREATION & CULTURE: auditorium

DOMESTIC

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

VACANT

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE VICTORIAN: Gothic, Second Empire

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: BRICK

walls: ASBESTOS SHINGLE

roof: ASBESTOS SHINGLE, METAL

other: WOOD, GLASS

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Narrative Description

Summary Paragraph

Overview

The USCO Church—a name that reflects a later and culturally significant period in this former ecclesiastical building's history—is a wood-frame religious edifice erected 1872-73 for use by a local Methodist Episcopal congregation in Garnerville, Rockland County, New York. This commodious single-story edifice is three bays wide on its front and rear elevations by four bays deep on its flanks, its principal north-facing elevation distinguished by an engaged bell-tower. The building, unoccupied in recent years and now suffering the effects of deferred maintenance, occupies an elevated position immediately adjacent to Church Street, which it fronts on. The building served as a religious facility until its congregation relocated to a new facility on Wall Street in 1958. During the latter 1960s it was occupied by USCO—an acronym for the collective “US Company” or “Company of Us”—whose influential and pioneering multimedia work in that era was conceived and constructed there. Although the general spatial characteristics of the building from the ecclesiastical period remain discernible, the former worship space and other areas of the building nevertheless portray the USCO period, during which time it served a range of functions for USCO members, who lived communally and worked as a collective. It was there that USCO's installation, The Tabernacle, was constructed and opened to visitors in 1966, at which time the building was known as The Church of the Tabernacle—and by locals and neighbors somewhat colorfully as “The Hippy Church.” The building's exterior maintains much of the character of the 1870s construct, with large Gothic windows and many decorative features remaining in place; exceptions include the truncation of the original multi-stage bell tower, which was damaged in Hurricane Sandy, and the installation of asbestos cement shingling on both the roof and walls. The latter treatments reflect the building's appearance in the 1960s, as captured in period photographs. The interior retains aspects of its nineteenth century spatial disposition, at which time the ground floor was largely given over to a vestibule opening into the larger volume of the auditorium; stairs from the lobby accessed a gallery above the vestibule, this upper area functioning as additional work and living space during the USCO period. The most serious issue on the interior is the partial collapse of the auditorium ceiling, which has left the roof framing partially exposed to view. Presently the interior presents a composite of both original and USCO-era features and finishes, the latter now being more prevalent.

Narrative Description

Setting & Location

The nominated building is located in Garnerville, an unincorporated hamlet in the Town of Haverstraw, Rockland County, New York. It is located on the south side of Church Street, south of West Railroad Avenue, east of Main Street (Route 33), west of Bridge Street, and a few blocks north of U.S. Route 202. The NRHP-listed Rockland Print Works, known today as the Garnerville Arts Center (“GAGA”), is located a short distance to the east. The church is oriented to face north, its entrance via the principal elevation being raised well above grade of adjacent Church Street. To the immediate west is a frame dwelling of Picturesque conception, built on a T-plan; to the east, beyond the church property, are densely clustered houses aligning both sides of Church Street, which terminates in that direction at Bridge Street. Across Church Street, to the north, is the Minisceongo Creek. A scattering of deciduous trees are present in front of the church and partially screen it from view from Church Street when the foliage is leafed out; the immediate perimeter around the building is aligned with grass, with a small area for vehicular parking being present on the east side.

Exterior

The building was erected on a rectangular plan above an unexcavated basement and brick foundation; it is a single-story wood frame construct with steeply pitched gable roof and an engaged bell tower on its north-facing façade. Both the east and west side elevations were similarly conceived, with four large evenly spaced Gothic windows. These have wood surrounds inclusive of a peaked hood moulding and are separated by wood mullions into two narrow lancets and a lozenge. Walls are sheathed with asbestos shingling and give way

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to a moulded wood cornice sustained by widely spaced paired brackets, a decorative device employed on all but the rear (south elevation), which has no fenestration, save for a human door with associated pent hood, located near the southeast corner. An exterior brick chimney is present near the southwest corner; it rises upwards and pierces the roof soffit before terminating in a terra cotta chimney pot.

The façade is all but symmetrically composed into three bays with a central entrance corresponding with the engaged tower. At first-story level on the tower is a broad Gothic arched opening that accommodates double-leaf paneled doors; a steeply pitched gabled hood shields this entrance and the associated concrete threshold before it. This hood is sustained by turned columns and features expressed rafters and a decorative truss of simplified conception. To one side (the east) of this entrance extends a pent-roofed hood, which shields a second smaller entrance corresponding with the tower; it employs the same rafter and turned column treatment of the main entrance hood. The door in that location is of a glazed and paneled type. To either side of this central entrance are windows matching those on the side elevations. Above the entrance and corresponding with the gallery level inside is a broad tripartite window, in essence a modified Palladian motif cast in Gothic terms. As with the main windows, each of the three units comprising it is subdivided into paired lancets with a lozenge head, the whole composition spanned by an arched hood mould. The tower rises slightly above the level of the roof ridge, and there the lower stage is terminated by a moulded wood cornice. Above this rises a broached base for what was, before Hurricane Sandy, a tall mansard-form upper stage, octagonal in plan, which was punctuated by lancet windows with corresponding gablets. The removal of this feature represents the only major alteration made to the building relative to its appearance in the 1960s.

The original 1870s plan is still in some measure discernible, though it was modified in a few ways during the USCO period, the space becoming more compartmentalized with the creation of new rooms that were required for the building to function as a work and living environment for USCO. Entrance is still by means of the principal elevation, which leads into the vestibule, where the mass of the tower is partially expressed. The partitioning of newer spaces is nevertheless evident, such as against the west wall, where doors leading into a bathroom and bedroom are apparent, adjacent to the box stair that leads upwards to the gallery. Walls have beaded board wainscot with plaster above, and the ceiling is beaded board; this, and the flooring, represents original material. The east side of the vestibule was reworked to create a kitchen, adjacent to a dining and meeting area. As for the auditorium, it retains its basic spatial volume, and was finished with wood and plaster surfaces and provided with ample natural lighting by means of the large flank windows. A portion of the ceiling has since collapsed, exposing the roof trusses to view, and significant mold issues have developed in recent years, requiring mitigation. As for the upper areas, the gallery and tower contain additional work and studio spaces, as noted below.

Physical Integrity to USCO Period

The exterior of the nominated building, as noted, largely conveys the building's appearance as captured in 1966 photographs; the only significant deviation was the loss of the uppermost stage of the steeple as a result of Hurricane Sandy. The arrangement of fenestration, exterior sheathing materials and finishes, and general massing all remain largely intact to the USCO period. During this time frame, the first floor interior was largely given over to the main studio and assembly areas, in addition to a number of secondary spaces. Dedicated areas included a dining/meeting room; a kitchen; a bathroom; several closets; bedrooms; an office; and the Tabernacle environment. At second floor level, corresponding with the gallery, were two bedrooms in addition to a space for a silk screen studio and a theatrical lighting. Two additional sleeping spaces occupied a position within the tower, above gallery level. While aspects of the USCO plan remain, some changes have nevertheless occurred, particularly since a number of other artists and residents occupied the building following the USCO years.

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The Intermedia Foundation has in the past year invested in both steeple and roof repairs and engaged a company to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the roof's condition; contracts have since been let for the installation of a new roofing system. The building is not presently occupied and will not be until renovation of the auditorium ceiling, mold remediation, and rehabilitation of the upper living spaces are undertaken. Funds are currently being raised to undertake these renovations.

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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 old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ART

SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance

1964- ca. 1968

Significant Dates

1966

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

N/A

Period of Significance (justification)

The period of significance, 1964 - ca. 1968, corresponds with what is defined as the USCO period.

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

N/A

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

Synopsis

The USCO Church in Garnerville, New York, is significant for its association with the Company of US or US Company ("USCO"), a group of like-minded artists which formed a collective and communal work and living environment in this former nineteenth-century religious edifice in Rockland County during the mid to later 1960s. USCO's significance, in the cultural and artistic context of the 1960s, was as pioneers and innovators in the production of what art historian Michel Oren termed "immersive multimedia events."¹ The group's multimedia installations, developed, constructed and sometimes exhibited at the church, were featured at exhibition venues in New York City and San Francisco, and additionally on a variety of college campuses nation-wide. Of two of their installations from the mid-1960s Jonas Mekas, the noted filmmaker and artist, wrote "There are moments, at the Dom, and at the Riverside Museum, when I feel I am witnessing the beginnings of new religions, [in which] the symbolism of lights and colors are being discovered and explored..."² A concise synopsis of the group's intermedia endeavors was provided by Oren: "In the 1964-66 period of its most intense activity, the group projected slide and film collages, produced paintings that flashed and kinetic sculptures whose parts turned and scintillated or thrust up jets of water—all in an attempt to open audiences to nonlinear and even mystical experience..." While the group's collective efforts received some critical acclaim at the time, it is only in more recent times, with the benefit of time and critical perspective, that the nature and depth of their contributions to American art and culture in the 1960s is being more fully comprehended. In 2015 the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota opened a major show, "Hippie Modernism—The Struggle Toward Utopia," which includes four major USCO works, and the group's work is also being featured in a major exhibition at Seton Hall University Gallery in Orange, New Jersey; additionally, a large cache of USCO archival material was recently acquired by Stanford University, further evidence of contemporary academic interest in their activities and influence. Within the larger context of the period, USCO represents one aspect of the counterculture of the 1960s, in which artists, musicians, and writers used their respective mediums to express artistic critiques of existing society and/or used new means of expression to expand consciousness, alter perception, and suggest alternative realities in the interest of fomenting major social change. The USCO Church in Garnerville is being nominated for listing on the NRHP in the areas of Art and Social History, with a narrow period of significance defined as 1964- ca. 1968, which is reflective of the vital years of USCO occupancy. It is being nominated at the national significance level, given the broad influence of the endeavors undertaken there and their impact on period art and culture. The nominated building was central to this group's work during this period, it serving at once as both studio and domestic space for USCO contributors. Significance is not being claimed for this building's earlier history as a religious edifice, as it no longer retains sufficient integrity to portray this function. Instead, it more accurately portrays the period of USCO occupancy in the mid to later 1960s.

Narrative Statement of Significance

Pre-USCO Period Overview

The hamlet of Garnerville, located in the Town of Haverstraw, Rockland County, was an important seat of manufacturing in the nineteenth century, defined in large by the sprawling facility of the Rockland Print Works (NRHP listed). Lands there were originally contained within the Cheescock Patent, which was granted by the British Crown in 1707, thereby making it one of Rockland County's earliest land patents.³ Starting in the eighteenth century, the Minisceongo Creek, which bisected the hamlet, was harnessed for hydraulic power for various mill and industrial pursuits, among them paper, rolling, and grist mills, nail and textile factories, and

¹ Michel Oren, "USCO: 'Getting Out of Your Mind to Use Your Head,'" *Art Journal*, Winter 2010, 77.

² Ibid; as quoted.

³ "Map of Rockland County Showing Original Land Grants," *History of Rockland County, New York, with Biographical Sketches of Its Prominent Men*, ed. David Cole, D.D. (New York: J.B. Beers & Company, 1884).

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forges.⁴ Among the earliest of these was a grist mill operated by Cornelius Osborn, established as early as ca. 1760. Around 1830 John Glass established a calico print works, about the time steam-powered technology was overtaking hydraulic power for industrial operations. In 1838 James and Thomas Garner, along with Charles Wells, acquired Glass's former holdings. The Rockland Print Works was shortly thereafter established by Garner & Company, which between 1837 and 1909 dominated the textile industry in the United States with its vast holdings throughout New York and in Pennsylvania for production and finishing. The core area of the hamlet of Garnerville is physically dominated by the former print works and associated worker housing.

The nominated building was built in the early 1870s to serve the worship needs of the Methodist Episcopal Church at Garnerville. The origins of this faith in Rockland County date to the turn of the nineteenth century, as the first Methodist society was formed in Haverstraw in 1799; its message was subsequently taken into new quarters by means of the proselytizing "circuit rider." Of the Garnerville church the historian Frank Bertangué Green offered the following brief overview:

This society was organized at a meeting held in the school house at Mead's Corners, June 10th, 1872. The corner stone of the church edifice was laid September 8th, 1872, and the completed structure was dedicated June 27th, 1873. It is the only church building now [1886] standing in Garnerville, and is but a short distance from the site of the first building north of the mountain.⁵

Architecturally the building as built was of a characteristic self-contained meetinghouse type, bound to the longstanding Wren-Gibbs formula rooted in eighteenth-century precedents, combining as it did a self-contained gable-roofed block with an engaged, central tower. In this instance the aesthetics of the building featured an eclectic mix of both Gothic and Second Empire design motives. Fenestration was Gothic-arched while the tower was terminated by a prominent mansard-type roof, the upper portion of which was destroyed during Hurricane Sandy, leaving only the broached lower section. Garnerville's Methodists continued to use the nominated building until 1958, at which time a new church building, largely built with volunteer labor donated by members, was dedicated.⁶

USCO Period: Background & Context

The USCO period at the Garnerville church, which spans the period between 1964 and ca. 1968, coincides with the tumultuous years of the mid to later 1960s in American history. During this time frame American involvement in the military conflict in Vietnam escalated considerably, and Civil Rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr., Senator Robert Kennedy, and human rights advocate Malcolm X were all assassinated, as President John F. Kennedy had been in Dallas in November 1963. American college campuses emerged as hotbeds of political activity and social unrest, initiated in some measure with the 1964 protests staged by students at the University of California at Berkeley; dissatisfaction with the increasingly costly war in Vietnam and the draft fueled this discontent and illuminated strong contrasts between America's youth and the established order. Demonstrations were also mounted at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in the summer of 1968, joining the various disruptions that were occurring on college campuses, and the violent riots staged by African Americans in various inner cities. Within this distinctive climate of upheaval and change a youth counterculture movement emerged, one in which both rock music and recreational drug usage were central; "let it all hang out" offered itself as a contemporary mantra. The multi-day music festival at Bethel, New York in August 1969, known as Woodstock, framed this period of change and upheaval in American life and culture. This was the national climate and backdrop against which USCO's cultural contributions should be viewed.

⁴ Cole, *Rockland County*, 165-166.

⁵ Frank B. Green, *The History of Rockland County* (New York: A.S. Barnes & Co., 1886), 260.

⁶ "To Dedicate Church," *Orangetown Telegram*, 3 April 1958.

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USCO was formed by a group of artists of varying backgrounds and talents who came together to work towards a common artistic goal, and who did so as a collective, eschewing individual credit for anonymity. As such, an analysis of their contribution to contemporary creative endeavor requires a brief exploration of the prevailing trends in American art at that time. At the beginning of the 1960s, Pop art, a movement in which Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein proved central figures, was a central theme in American art. This artistic genre challenged traditional art in a number of ways, particularly in its use of commonplace objects, which were borrowed from their original context and sometimes combined with others. The term dates to the “Symposium on Pop Art,” 1962, organized by the Museum of Modern Art. While Warhol and Lichtenstein are among the figures most commonly associated with this mode of design, the foundations of this distinctive art form were laid by others, among them Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns. As noted by Robert Hughes in *American Visions*, during the 1960s American museums began to look increasingly at contemporary art, initiating what he termed “the institutionalization of the American avant-garde, and the loss of its oppositional character. Once the tensions between new art and its public were diffused, ‘advanced art’ could become popular and chic—which it forthright did.”⁷ Pop art emerged as a vital creative force in contemporary culture, and, to again borrow from the words of Hughes, it “caught on fast... There were no problems about difficult art anymore, and no lag between appearance and acceptance.”

The instant success was much resented, but resentment couldn’t stop the wagon. Pop art was the first accessible style of international modernism; it was art about consumption that sat up and begged to be consumed.⁸

As noted at one time by Michael Callahan, “I think Pop was part of Gerd [Stern’s] and Steve [Durkee’s] attraction to each other.”⁹ Durkee gained note as a Pop artist of some merit in the immediate pre-USCO period, and both he and Stern were friends with Pop artist Robert Indiana. During the late 1950s, influenced by friends in the Pop art movement such as Indiana, Stern became increasingly interested in the poetic potential of combining iconic word images out of the American street and print worlds.

Principal among the USCO group were three figures: the poet and artist Gerd Stern, the painter Steve Durkee, and electronics innovator Michael Callahan. Along with the photographer and weaver Judi Stern and photographer Barbara Durkee—the spouses of Gerd Stern and Steve Durkee—they represented the core of the USCO collaborative group and what Michel Oren termed its “emotional” core.¹⁰ It was Steve and Barbara Durkee who acquired the nominated building in 1964 as a studio space; they were joined by the Sterns and Callahan shortly thereafter, all of whom relocated to Garnerville from Woodstock, New York. Thus were the beginnings of a group artistic endeavor that in a brief period of time made a significant imprint in the development of multimedia installations. USCO continued to function under that name until ca. 1968. The Durkees left for New Mexico in 1966, and their departure was followed by that of Gerd Stern and Callahan for Cambridge, Massachusetts. Stern had at that time become a Harvard Fellow and the two men formed Intermedia Systems Corporation, a continuation of the technology developed during the USCO years, in cooperation with a group from Harvard Business School.¹¹ During the 1970s Intermedia Systems Corporation produced multimedia art internationally and consulted and produced projects for the Venezuelan government under presidents Raphael Caldera and Carlos Andres Perez, for the United States Government, as well as for the National Endowment for the Arts and others.

⁷ Robert Hughes, *American Visions: The Epic History of Art in America* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1997), 524.

⁸ Ibid, 525.

⁹ Oren, “USCO,” 83-84.

¹⁰ Ibid, 77. Other contributors to USCO included Jud Yalkut, Stewart Brand, Dion Wright, Bob Darcey, and Paul Williams.

¹¹ Personal correspondence, Stern to Krattinger, 17 May 2015.

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The following 1966 passage by Jonas Mekas, a portion of which was quoted in the synopsis statement at the beginning of this section, will serve as a prelude to the exploration of USCO's significance in the context of 1960s American art and culture:

The USCO show (at the Riverside Museum)... sums up everything USCO has done till now, and one of the shows I ask you not to miss... Whereas in the case of [the Exploding] Plastic Inevitable [at the Dom] the desire for the mystical experience is unconscious, the USCO is going after it in a more conscious way. They have arrived somewhere, and gained a certain peace, certain insights, and now they are beginning to meditate... There are moments, at the Dom, and at the Riverside Museum, when I feel I am witnessing the beginning of new religions, [in which] the symbolism of lights and colors are being discovered and explored... Something is happening and is happening fast—and it has something to do with light, it has everything to do with light—and everybody feels it and is waiting—often, desperately.¹²

As noted by Michel Oren, USCO—which the author described as “a countercultural effusion”—“has been considered a key link in the development, variously, of ‘expanded cinema’ and ‘visual music,’ total environmental surrounds, and the internet.”¹³ The challenge in assessing the group's legacy, as Oren concedes, has come with assessing their historical record in relation to the ephemeral nature of their productions; “The work is ephemeral because of the nature of light projections, because of its uneven photographic documentation, because its effect on audiences is hard to reconstruct imaginatively in today's media-saturated environment, and because it reportedly produced in some audience members phenomenologically peak experiences that tend to be leveled in a historical and sociological account.”¹⁴

Gerd Stern (1928-) proved a central figure in the development of the USCO narrative. A native of the border area between Germany and France, he was raised in New York City and arrived in San Francisco in the late 1940s, corresponding with the emergence of the so-called Beat scene.¹⁵ Shortly after his arrival in the Bay Area, he was residing on a house boat in Sausalito, “in the middle of an alternative bohemian culture of poetry and art.” By 1953, Stern's poetry had been published and he subsequently wrote travel pieces for *Playboy* magazine. His first volume of poetry, *First Poems and Others*, was published in 1952, which he followed in 1966 with *Afterimage*. In 1963 he collaborated with photographer Stewart Brand and Ivan Majdrakoff on a multimedia presentation at the San Francisco Museum of Art, entitled “? Who R U and What's Happening,” for which they assembled a collection of words which were projected, as a triptych of images, across a screen. “The three-word lines, phrases, conjunctions, combinations,” Stern recollected, “were an analogue of the glued paper word poem collages I had begun to assemble at the time.”¹⁶ The 1963 exhibition was also the first time Stern collaborated with Michael Callahan (1944-), whom he would join at the Garnerville church in 1965 after he had returned to the East Coast. At that time Callahan, a native of San Francisco, was working as the technical director of the San Francisco Tape Music Center, and he would become a vital contributor to the group, given his considerable electronics expertise. As noted in *From Beat Scene Poet to Psychedelic Multimedia Artist in San Francisco and Beyond, 1948-1978*, “by the late 1960s, Stern had emerged as a counterculture artist producing innovative kinetic art that involved light shows and surround sound, and as a founder of the artistic company USCO... His avant-garde style, which was representative of the late sixties and early seventies

¹²Oren, “USCO,” 77.

¹³Ibid

¹⁴Ibid

¹⁵Gerd Stern, *From Beat Scene Poet to Psychedelic Multimedia Artist in San Francisco and Beyond, 1948-1978*, an oral history conducted in 1996 by Victoria Morris Byerly, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2001.

¹⁶Recollections of Stern as published in an accompanying brochure for an USCO retrospective at Anthology Film Archives, New York, March 2005.

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psychedelic art, was taken seriously by both Harvard University and the University of California at Santa Cruz where he held lectureships. His artwork drew national attention in both *Newsweek* and *Life* magazines.”¹⁷

As for Steve Durkee (1938-), who with his wife, Barbara, purchased the Garnerville building and as such became central figures in USCO, at this time he was enjoying success as an artist working in New York City, first in a Pop art vein but later in more abstract terms. Critic Gene Swenson included Durkee in a 1962 *Art News* story entitled “The New American Sign Painters” with the likes of Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol, Jim Dine, and Durkee and Stern’s friend, Robert Indiana.¹⁸ At this time Gerd and Judi Stern were residing in Woodstock, and Callahan was living with them; they were already collaborating with the Durkees, commuting between Woodstock and Garnerville. In August 1964 the Sterns and Callahan moved into the church, which the Durkees had bought as a studio space after leaving Manhattan, and it was there that Callahan began developing the necessary technology—from discarded IBM computer parts—that became central to the USCO multimedia installation. No less important were the female figures of the core group. Barbara Durkee served as an administrator of sorts who oversaw “feeding, clothing, and transporting the group and its visitors while taking care of a baby and teaching school,” while Judi Stern managed to raise funds by means of a silk-screen business.¹⁹ Monies were also through other “cottage industry” endeavors, including the construction of set pieces for theater productions and the construction of a Christmas light environment for the Manhattan-based department store Henri Bendel.²⁰ Both women were also very capable artists; Judi Stern, educated at Cooper Union, was a skilled photographer and weaver; Barbara Durkee was a sculptor and photographer.

An overview of three prominent USCO installations will serve to illustrate the particular nature of the multimedia experience they endeavored to create; these were their installation at the Riverside Museum, Manhattan, the Tabernacle installation at the nominated building, and their work at The World Discotheque in Garden City, New York. All date to 1966, at which time the group’s activities were closely associated with the Garnerville church, which served at once as studio and communal living space. A review of the equipment they used to create their distinctive experiences is also necessary in order to understand the nature of their product. These installations were dependent on the existing technology of the time, which was far less sophisticated in nature than it is today. Central to the installations were slide projectors, and, for the most part, the Kodak Carousel projector. These were controlled by an electro-magnetic unit constructed in 1965 from components found in an IBM surplus emporium in Kingston, New York; the unit provided automation for the timing pace of projected imagery and allowed for pulse control over lamp intensity. Sixteen mm projectors were also employed, such as that built by Mead & Howell. Slides were shot with standard 35mm cameras, sometimes, but not always, by photographers affiliated with USCO. Sound was played back on Ampex tape machines, which were also used for the production of performance tapes; as noted by Stern “in addition to being heavy, the tape recorders were expensive, which imposed a defacto limit on the number of channels we employed. Our basic production technique was to prepare for separate single channel collage mix tapes, and then to transfer them to two track stereo tapes for performance.” Amplification consisted of a Dynakit Stereo 70 and a 15 watt Heathkit unit.²¹ These were the technological ingredients used to create the multimedia USCO experience, which, in their total, were meant to induce sensory overload analogous to the effects of psychedelic drugs. One USCO member described the experience:

¹⁷Stern, *From Beat Scene Poet*.

¹⁸Oren, “USCO,” 85.

¹⁹Ibid, 86.

²⁰Paige Rozanski, “USCO: A Meditation on Technology and Mysticism.”

²¹Stern, “A Note on USCO Technology” in Anthology Film Archives Brochure.

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...Really beautiful sound and terrible sound and traffic sound and exalted sound and visually also... there were babies crying and angels and flowers, the insides of flowers and there were skies with clouds coming through and airplanes and country shots. There were usually two to five screens going all the time, with these images falling in and out as we got more sophisticated... There was enough of that kind of thing that goes deep in, those kind of key places where new people can be touched in their hearts, you know, opened... After about an hour and a half then it would slowly slow down, and then at the end of it there would be this long OM and the oscilloscope would beat down to one place.²²

The following passage, drawn from Michel Oren, clarifies the group's aims in these installations:

The attempt to use media to create an unmediated effect is another paradox generated by the group... USCO aspired to raise consciousness, but its more immediate target was the unconscious. If one follows Walter Benjamin's reading of Freud, the function of consciousness is to protect against excessive stimuli, such as is provided by contemporary life, which USCO performance tried to heighten but which by itself "would sterilize [any] incident for poetic experience." Overload might shock viewers in a preparatory way so that they might then be lulled to allow the experience to bypass consciousness and trickle into deeper levels of unconscious memory.²³

Stern's recollections, excerpted from *From Beat Scene Poet to Psychedelic Multimedia Artist in San Francisco and Beyond, 1948-1978*, recounts the USCO endeavor for The World Discotheque at Garden City, New York—located in an old hangar at Roosevelt Field—which made the cover of *LIFE* magazine:

The place was at first called "Murray the K's World." Murray the K was a well-known macho disc jockey out of New York, and he was a very powerful personality, and he didn't get along too well with Mr. Meyerberg so "Murray the K's World" became "The World."

It was a great scene for us because, number one, it allowed us to work with some technologies and programming that we hadn't worked with before. Michael was able to build a very large-scale programmer for all of these thirty slide machines. They were in pairs because they dissolved, and we had to make them match with the music, so there were all kinds of little effects that we could do with them. We actually programmed the slides to go with certain tunes. I remember one of the popular tunes of that time was Nancy Sinatra's "Boots are Made for Walking"; we had these great boot shots all over the screens, and when they dissolved into each other it looked like they were walkin'.

There were fairly well-known groups that played there: The Rascals, the Isley Brothers, and so forth and so on... The groups alternated with the recorded music, and the recorded music is what we had programmed the slides to, because we had decided ahead of time what music would be played... It made the cover of *Life* and the inside of *Life*. We had two *Life* stories within that year. The reason we were so excited about making the money from "The World," which was not something we were particularly into—making money—was because we had been offered a very large space at the Riverside Museum in New York to do a show of our work, an installation of environmentally installed pieces.²⁴

It bears noting that USCO had won the commission for The World project over Andy Warhol's Exploding Plastic Inevitable and Ken Dewey, both of whom declined offers made by USCO to collaborate on the installation.²⁵

²²Recollections of Barbara Durkee (now known as Asha Greer) in Oren, "USCO," 78-79.

²³Oren, "USCO," 79.

²⁴Ibid

²⁵Ibid, 86.

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The USCO show at the Riverside Museum in Manhattan was more conventional in nature, consisting as it did of gallery installations which visitors passed or otherwise engaged with as they moved through six rooms. This small gallery, which typically received a small number of daily visitors, was suddenly teeming with visitors who had come to imbibe in the USCO installation. The exhibition was considered such a success that it garnered national media attention by, among others, NBC News and *The New York Times*, and was featured on the cover of *LIFE* magazine in September of that year. Visitors entered underneath a large painting of a tiger with the word “en/trance” before passing a large painted serpent, “an array of Buddhas, mandalas, and silk-screened American Indians serving as tutelary guardians; then a room of painted Shiva and Shakti figures or concentric Op-art designs studded with pulsing and flashing xenon, ultraviolet, and strobe lights.”²⁶ In an adjacent room were flowers made of lights which could be engaged by visitors by means of floor switches, and in another a revolving central couch, the walls of this room being upholstered in tie-dyed fabrics. Next, a room with a variety of optical machines, among them an oscilloscope which visitors could use to produce visual images and analogous tones, and “a box containing sparkly diffraction gratings spiral-mounted on an illuminated wheel whirling behind a perforated disk, which could be manipulated... to produce a variety of dazzling effects.” Another box flashed, in alternation, “NO,” “OW,” and “NOW,” abbreviations for the group’s mantra “Take the No out of Now, then take the Ow out of Now, then take the Then out of Now.”²⁷

The Tabernacle installation at the church followed the success of the Riverside Museum show. The painted electrified panels that had been used there were moved to Garnerville in September 1966 as part of a new construct, The Tabernacle, described by Oren as “a hexagonal shrine around a spurting fountain topped by a parachute.”²⁸ It was constructed within the former worship space of the building, by that time devoid of pews. The successful Riverside Museum event inspired much interest in the immersive USCO multimedia experience, and many traveled to Garnerville to see this newest creation first-hand. “Swarms of visitors overran the church, and some moved in and were given tasks; at this point the group might have become a commune. Two busloads of artists, including Warhol, came to visit.”²⁹ The visit in which Warhol took part in September 1966 was from the New York Film Festival and traveled to Garnerville from Lincoln Center in Manhattan; they additionally visited filmmaker Stan Vanderbeek’s studio in Stony Point. Panels from this installation survive, including the *Shiva* panel exhibited at the Whitney Museum of Art in 2007.

Fragmentation of the USCO Collective

The cited period of significance, 1964- ca. 1968, reflects the somewhat brief time frame in which USCO mounted its most successful artistic and intermedia installations, the church serving as the focal point and base of these operations. By 1966 stresses were becoming apparent and these would soon be manifested in the splintering of the core group. In October 1966 Steve the Durkees traveled to New Mexico with, among other objectives, the goal of establishing a western USCO outpost; the couple did not return to Garnerville, and instead remained in the Southwest. Shortly thereafter Gerd Stern accepted a faculty position at Harvard University and thus moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts, joined by Callahan, where they established Intermedia Systems Corporation. Work continued to be produced under the USCO name until 1968, the terminal year of the period of significance.

In the years that followed the USCO period, which is the focus of this nomination and significance narrative, the nominated building continued to accommodate artists and exhibitions and performances were at times mounted. In 1975 an exhibition of kinetic light art was made possible by a grant from the New York State

²⁶Ibid, 83.

²⁷Ibid

²⁸Ibid, 88.

²⁹Ibid

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Council on the Arts (“NYSCA”); this included several light art installations and the performance of plays by poet Kenneth Koch, including one written specifically for Dermot Harvey’s Aurora Liquid Projection. Also that year there was a well-attended outdoor performance by Stan Vanderbeek and Harvey, in which projections were made on water, the latter having been supplied by a fire company at that time located on Church Street; this production was also funded through grants from NYSCA.³⁰

Conclusion

During a brief span of years in the mid to later 1960s, USCO succeeded as a collaborative effort where many similar groups had failed. The group secured some measure of critical claim in its day—though today their place and influence is being more clearly defined—and succeeded in creating a collective identity by means of its art, which transcended the individual contributors. Anonymity was always an integral theme to their efforts. Naomi Feigelson, in *The Underground Revolution: Hippies, Yippies and Others*, provided a fitting summation of why USCO succeed where other groups failed:

There are good reasons why USCO, which represented many of the significant trends in the cultural revolution, made it as a commercial family, while so many other groups with similar pretensions failed. For one thing, USCO started out as a group of artists and ended up a family, not the other way around. When they broke up, they remained artists. For another, the work they did demands certain skills used in combination—in metal work, electronics, electricity, and kinetics. The nature of the mix requires that a group produce it. Finally, while they had as little patience with the hypocrisies of straight society as any other hippie group, they also had an artistic point of view, a critical, philosophical approach to life, and a goal beyond today. They were a group of individuals and artists, each disciplined in his own craft, and all together they were on a work trip.³¹

The USCO Church at Garnerville remains as the central architectural feature of the USCO group; deteriorated but nevertheless largely intact to their period of occupancy in the mid to later 1960s, it remains an irreplaceable artifact of the USCO experience, the staging area where their ground-breaking multimedia work was conceived and implemented.

Developmental history/additional historic context information (if appropriate)

N/A

³⁰Information courtesy of Emily Harvey, January 2016.

³¹Naomi Feigelson, *The Underground Revolution: Hippies, Yippies and Others* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1970).

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Name of Property

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9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

Cole, David, ed. *History of Rockland County, New York, with Biographical Sketches of Its Prominent Men*. New York: J.B. Beers & Company, 1884.

Feigelson, Naomi. *The Underground Revolution: Hippies, Yippies and Others*. New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1970.

Green, Frank B. *The History of Rockland County*. New York: A.S. Barnes & Co., 1886.

Hughes, Robert. *American Visions: The Epic History of Art in America*. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1997.

Oren, Michael. "USCO: 'Getting Out of Your Mind to Use Your Head,'" *Art Journal*, Winter 2010.

Rozanski, Paige. "USCO: A Meditation on Technology and Mysticism." 2007, unpublished paper, Columbia University.

Stern, Gerd. *From Beat Scene Poet to Psychedelic Multimedia Artist in San Francisco and Beyond, 1948-1978*. An oral history conducted in 1996 by Victoria Morris Byerly, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

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 # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

☐ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other
Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property .30 acres

(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>18</u> Zone	<u>584256</u> Easting	<u>4562190</u> Northing	3	<u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> Northing
2	<u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> Northing	4	<u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> Northing

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary for this NRHP nomination is shown on the enclosed mapping; the maps, drawn at a scale of 1:24,000, 1:12,000 and 1:3,000, are all entitled "The USCO Church, Garnerville, Rockland Co., NY."

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary corresponds with the parcel as defined in 1872, at which time construction of the church was commenced.

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11. Form Prepared By

name/title William E. Krattinger

Organization NYS Division for Historic Preservation

date November 2015

street & number PO Box 189

telephone (518) 268-2167

city or town Waterford

state NY

zip code 12188

e-mail William.Krattinger@parks.ny.gov

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **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. Key all photographs to this map.

- **Continuation Sheets**

- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs:

Photographs by William E. Krattinger, TIFF file format, October 2011 and December 2014; digital files maintained at NYS Division for Historic Preservation, Waterford, New York.

- 0001 EXTERIOR, view looking south towards the building's principal elevation; this 2011 view predates the loss of the upper stage of the steeple.
- 0002 EXTERIOR, perspective view looking to southwest towards east flank elevation
- 0003 EXTERIOR, view looking to northeast showing east and south elevations
- 0004 EXTERIOR, view looking west showing intact Late Victorian-era porch and vestibule
- 0005 EXTERIOR, view looking to northeast, December 2014, showing loss of upper stage of steeple and portions of the west and east elevations
- 0006 INTERIOR, vestibule, view looking west showing gallery stair in corner and drywall partition built to create domestic space; note original ca. 1870s bead-board wall and ceiling finish.
- 0007 INTERIOR, view looking towards northeast corner of auditorium; apparent is water damage and the partial failure of the original 1870s plaster on lath ceiling
- 0008 INTERIOR, view looking north in auditorium showing enclosed gallery area
- 0009 INTERIOR, view depicting partial ceiling failure in auditorium
- 0010 INTERIOR, view in upper gallery showing workspace with sink

Property Owner:

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

name Intermedia Foundation c/o Gerd Stern

street & number _____

telephone _____

city or town _____

state _____

zip code _____

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.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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ABOVE, USCO and friends at the Garnerville Church, April 1966

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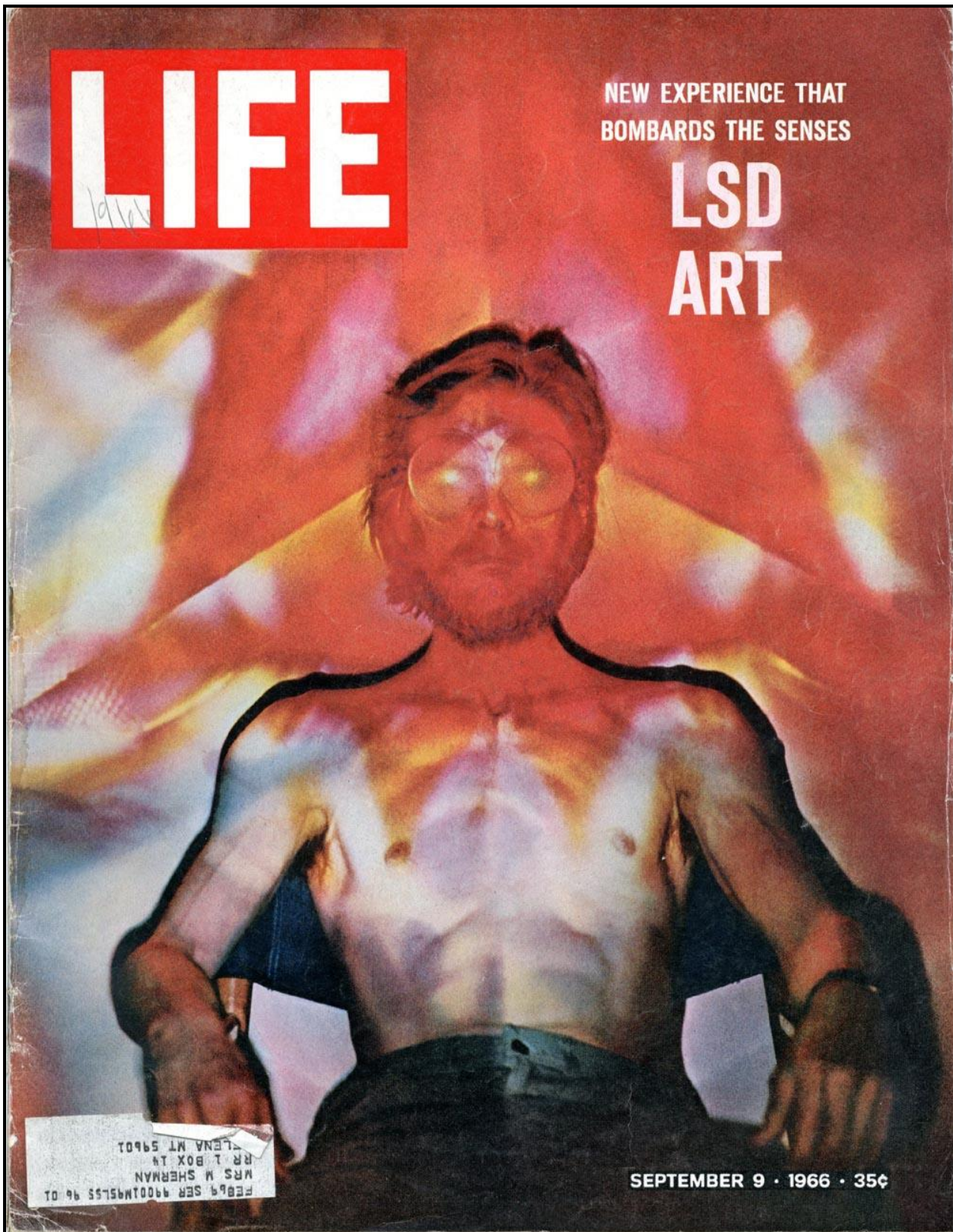
LIFE, May 1966; USCO installation at The World discotheque, Garden City, New York.

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LIFE, September 1966; USCO installation at the Riverside Museum, Manhattan

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ABOVE, Gerd Stern, ca. 1966; BELOW, Gerd Stern and neighbor Emily Harvey, Garnerville 2011



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ABOVE, Michael Callahan ca. 1960s; BELOW, left to right, Callahan, Stern and Durkee at the USCO church, 1998



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ABOVE, visitors engage with The Tabernacle at the Garnerville church; BELOW, *Shiva* panel from exhibition

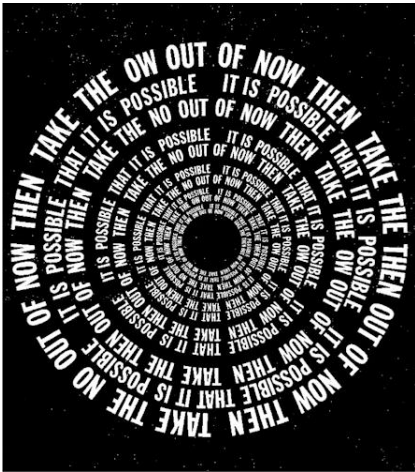


THE USCO CHURCH

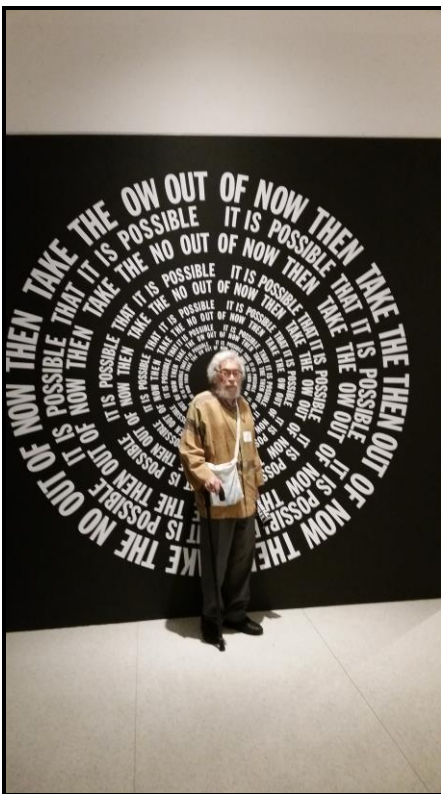
Name of Property

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ABOVE & BELOW, Gerd Stern double mantra poem; work such as this was silkscreened, at the church, as posters which were sold along with other USCO posters at exhibitions and performances.



4565000

4564000

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4562000

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Haverstraw, NY
Quadrangle

The USCO Church

THIELLS
Quad

HAVERSTRAW
Quad

4564000

4563000

4562000

4561000

4560000



1:24,000
1 in = 2,000 ft

Copyright © 2013 National Geographic Society

582000

583000

584000

585000

586000

Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: North American 1983
Units: Meter

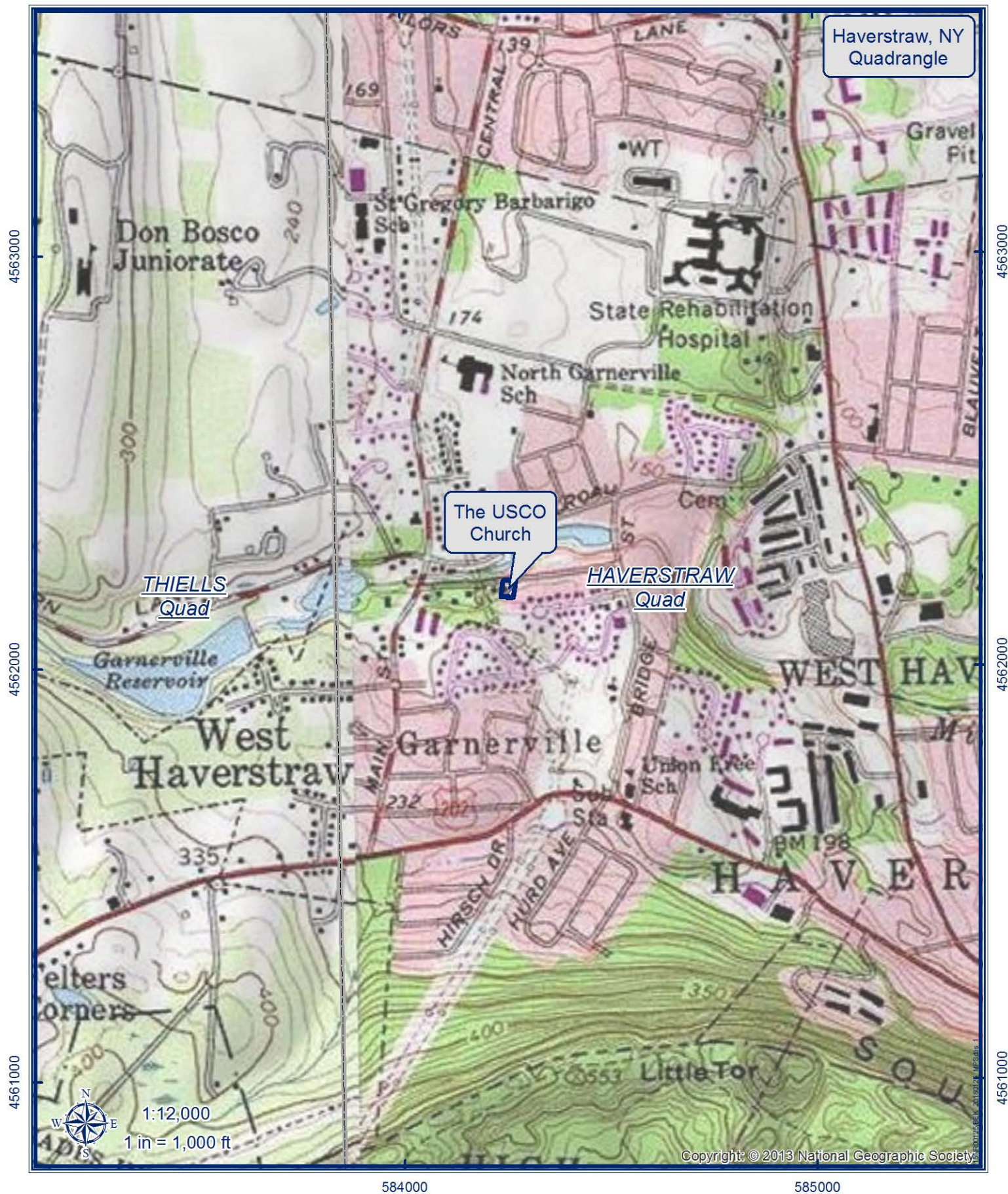
0 650 1,300 2,600 Feet



USCO Church



Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation





584000

Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: North American 1983
Units: Meter

0 80 160 320 Feet



USCO Church



Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation

Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Ikonos, USDA, USGS, AEX, Getmapping, Aerogrid, IGN, IGP, swisstopo, and the GIS User Community





















&a20CUNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
&a30CNATIONAL PARK SERVICE

&a22CNATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
&a29CEVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY USCO Church, The
NAME:

MULTIPLE
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: NEW YORK, Rockland

DATE RECEIVED: 3/18/16 &pW DATE OF PENDING LIST: 4/15/16
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 4/30/16 &pW DATE OF 45TH DAY: 5/03/16
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 16000225

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

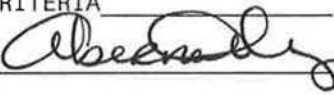
COMMENT WAIVER: N

X ACCEPT RETURN REJECT 5/3/16 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

&a4L

RECOM./CRITERIA

REVIEWER  DISCIPLINE

TELEPHONE DATE

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.



**Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation**

ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

ROSE HARVEY
Commissioner



14 March 2016

Alexis Abernathy
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places
1201 Eye St. NW, 8th Floor
Washington, D.C. 20005

Re: National Register Nominations

Dear Ms. Abernathy:

I am pleased to submit the following three nominations, all on disc, to be considered for listing by the Keeper of the National Register:

Potsdam Civic Center, St. Lawrence County
Essex County Municipal Complex, Essex County
USCO Church, Rockland County

Please feel free to call me at 518.268.2165 if you have any questions.

Sincerely:

Kathleen LaFrank
National Register Coordinator
New York State Historic Preservation Office