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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

St. George's Episcopal Church (Harry T. Burleigh)

AND/OR COMMON

St. George's Episcopal Church

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

3rd Avenue & East 16th Streets (Styvesant Square)

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

New York

VICINITY OF

18

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

New York

36

New York

061

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

COMMERCIAL

EDUCATIONAL

ENTERTAINMENT

GOVERNMENT

INDUSTRIAL

MILITARY

MUSEUM

PARK

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

RELIGIOUS

SCIENTIFIC

TRANSPORTATION

OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Corporation of the Church Parish of Calvary Holy Communion of St. George's

STREET & NUMBER

3rd Avenue & East 16th Streets (Styvesant Square)

CITY, TOWN

New York

VICINITY OF

STATE

New York

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Registry of Deeds, New York City Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

City Hall, 31 Chambers Street

CITY, TOWN

New York

STATE

New York

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

New York Landmark Commission

DATE

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

New York Landmark Commission

CITY, TOWN

New York

STATE

New York

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

CHECK ONE

CHECK ONE

EXCELLENT

DETERIORATED

UNALTERED

ORIGINAL SITE

GOOD

RUINS

ALTERED

MOVED DATE _____

FAIR

UNEXPOSED

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

St. George's Episcopal Church, Rutherford Place at 16th Street, Borough of Manhattan, was begun in 1846 and was completed in 1856. The church sits on the northern side of East 16th Street between Rutherford Place and 3rd Avenue facing on the perimeter of Stuyvesant Square and now comprises the church, a chapel and parsonage.

Many buildings in New York are difficult to encompass fully because they are so often located in blocks facing on narrow streets. In the case of St. George's Church however, beautifully located on a corner site facing a public square, it is possible to get an uninterrupted view of two sides with no intervening obstructions. This massive exterior radiates solidity and creates an impression of permanence on the west side of Stuyvesant Square.

Designed by the architects Blesch and Edlitz, the main edifice of the church is a splendid example of Romanesque Architecture. A fine rose window is a conspicuous feature of the heavily decorated end gable of the nave. The color of the smooth sandstone (brownstone) facing is handsome, as are the two Romanesque towers flanking the three arched entrances with arcade above. Although the towers once had spires, they nonetheless appear satisfactorily complete without them. The high sturdy buttresses along the south decorative arches (corbelling) along the edge of the roof are consistently in character with the details of the impressive front.

The cornerstone of St. George's Church was laid in 1846; the Church opened for services in 1848, and the building was completed in 1856. The edifice was built on land donated by Peter Stuyvesant and is adjacent to the park which was named for that benefactor. At the time the Church was built, according to a diarist of 1848, this area was "a howling wilderness." In 1865 the Church was partly destroyed by a fire, rebuilt according to its original plan and reopened in 1867. Originally, beautiful spires, displaying handsome open stone work, adorned the church, but they were declared unsafe in 1888 and removed the following year. In 1964 parts of the exterior and all of the interior surfaces were renovated and restored.

On the north side of the church facing Stuyvesant Square is the chapel. It was restored in the mid-sixties. The Church complex is maintained in very good condition. In recent years, however, the congregation has dwindled and economic reverses have created cause for concern.

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 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input 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 type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
	<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

Afro-American History

SPECIFIC DATES **Harry T. Burleigh (1866-1949)** BUILDER/ARCHITECT **Blesch and Edlitz**
1908-1948 at St. George's

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Harry Thacker Burleigh's contributions to the cultural heritage of the country's music has been called both "unique" and "unsurpassed." Coming from a background of poverty, Burleigh rose during his lifetime to an esteemed position in the international music world as composer, arranger and artist. It was through the direct artistic endeavors of Burleigh, that the "Negro Spiritual" was brought to the attention and acceptability of the classical musical artists of the day.

Burleigh's greatest musical contribution can be found in his "Deep River" which is said to captivate the yearnings of a people. Perhaps Burleigh's greatest significance comes by way of aiding to bridge the gap between the races. For more than 40 years Burleigh maintained the coveted position of soloist at St. George's Episcopal Church in New York.

BIOGRAPHY

Harry Thacker Burleigh, was born in Erie, Pennsylvania, December 2, 1866. Burleigh's opportunities for other than a menial life seemed meager; but he had talent, dedication and the determination to achieve. Though the record of his early years is fragmentary at best, it is clear that his grandfather and his mother were the shaping influences in his development. The former, Hamilton Waters, had been a slave in Somerset County, Maryland. However, when blindness and age rendered him useless to his master, he was given his freedom. Though his intention had been to settle in Canada, he ended his journey at Erie, Pennsylvania where he lived out his days.

At a early age, Harry was enlisted by the family to accompany his grandfather, who had become a lamp lighter, on his lamp-lighting rounds. It was while they were about these duties that Hamilton Waters introduced his grandson to the plantation melodies of his own young manhood. They were a legacy beyond price, perhaps the only possession of the old days in which Waters took pride. What he could not have foreseen was that his grandson was to establish them beyond question as a "priceless contribution" of his race to the "vast musical product of the United States."

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

The Afro-American, 1 June 1935.

Chase, Gilbert. America's Music. rev. 2nd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966.

Erie Daily Times, 13 October 1949.

(PARTIAL LISTING)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Less than ten acres

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,8	5,8,5	6,6,0	4,5,0,9	5,4,0	B					
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING				ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		
C						D					

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

St. George's Episcopal Church is located on Styvesant Square at Rutherford Place, Manhattan, New York. The church is a complex of buildings built at different times and encompasses Lots 44, 47, 50, 53 and 60 of Block 897. The dimension of the lot are 104' 0" at the rear (toward 3rd Avenue) and 96' 0" at the front (facing Rutherford Place). The lot runs a distance of 175' 0' along East 16th Street. The boundary runs coterminous with the exterior line of the property lot.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Lynne Gomez-Graves, Historical Projects Director

ORGANIZATION

Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation

STREET & NUMBER

1420 N Street, Northwest

CITY OR TOWN

Washington

DATE

TELEPHONE

(202) 462-2519

STATE

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

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION
ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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CONTINUATION SHEET (Harry T. Burleigh) ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE Two

The opportunity to do so was not so readily won. It called for the best that was in the boy together with the encouragement and the determination of his mother, Elizabeth Waters Burleigh. Elizabeth Burleigh had prepared herself to be a teacher, however, the prejudice against her race permitted her to be no more than a janitress in the very school in which she had hoped to teach. With her husband dead and five children to support, she took the position, and as she went about her duties at Number One Public School, she was assisted, by various of her children, including young Harry. As they worked they sang the songs old Hamilton Waters had taught them.

To supplement monies earned in this fashion, Elizabeth Burleigh found employment as a part-time maid in the home of Mrs. Elizabeth Russell. To entertain her friends, this wealthy music lover invited prominent artists from the concert stage to her home. Hoping to hear the performances, young Harry stood outside, on occasion in the dead of winter. However, when Mrs. Russell learned of these chilling vigils, she found employment for him within and, of course, he listened as her guests performed. Among their number was a Mrs. Frances Knapp MacDowell, who in time was to play a crucial role in forwarding Harry Burleigh's own musical career.

For he had discovered he had a voice and though he was busy at a variety of part-time jobs during his school years, he found time to sing. First performing in the old Himrod Sunday School Mission choir and later as a soloist at St. Paul's Church, the Park Presbyterian Church, the First Presbyterian Church and at Erie's Jewish Temple. It was a beginning, but on his graduation from high school in 1887, singing, for Harry, represented little more than an avocational career. To support himself and his family he learned stenography, working until age twenty-six, when he learned of a tuition-free four year scholarship offered by the National Conservatory of Music in New York.

This institution, founded by Mrs. Jeannette Thurber in 1885, boasted not only a truly brilliant faculty but also a comprehensive curriculum whereby talented and deserving students could obtain every type of musical training. From Burleigh's point of view its greatest attraction was, no doubt, the scholarship auditions of 1892. Borrowing twenty-five dollars, he departed for New York City on January 20, 1892 to sing before the Conservatory's committee of judges. The latter apparently evinced some reservations at his audition. Burleigh, in the meantime, had sought out the school's registrar to present a letter of recommendation from Mrs. Russell, his Erie benefactress. The registrar was none other than Mrs. MacDowell, a former guest in Mrs. Russell's Erie home. Intervening on Harry's behalf, she gained for him a second audition. In its wake the coveted scholarship was his.

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CONTINUATION SHEET (Harry T. Burleigh) ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE Three

Though Harry had been the recipient of a purse raised on his behalf by Charles Allis, of Erie's Second National Bank, the monies were sufficient only for his most immediate needs. Again, Mrs. MacDowell proved his friend by arranging for him to work in her office. With his bodily needs thus provided for, Burleigh entered upon four of the happiest and fulfilling years of his life, studying voice with Christian Fritsch, harmony with Ruben Goldmark, and counterpoint with John White and Max Speer. He played double bass and later the timpani in the school's orchestra.

During Harry's student years, Antonin Dvorak was the Conservatory's head and was particularly drawn to Burleigh, listening for hours at a time to his black pupil sing the spirituals Hamilton Waters had taught him in his youth. In such songs Dvorak found all that he felt was needed for, "a great and noble school of music," and he was in part responsible for his student's emerging conviction that spirituals were meant not just for his own race but for all manner of people. Further, Dvorak paid Burleigh the compliment of drawing on black folk themes in the second theme first of his "New World Symphony."²

Caught up in the life and contacts of the school as he was, Harry Burleigh made the time to sing on Sunday's in the choir of St. Philip's Colored Episcopal Church. Then opportunity beckoned in 1894 when Burleigh learned of an opening for a baritone soloist in St. George's Protestant Episcopal Church. Located on Styvesant Square, St. George's was one of the city's wealthiest and most prestigious institutions. The position was a desirable one as evidenced by the sixty applicants who auditioned for it. Among their number, Burleigh was the lone black, and when it appeared that he was a serious contender, "division, consternation, confusion, and protest reigned."³ The deciding vote for Harry was cast by the church's senior warden, J. P. Morgan, Sr. In the making was an association which was to last for fifty-two years, one which neither the church nor Burleigh was ever to regret.

The exposure gained as a soloist at St. George's led to a twenty-five year position at New York's Temple Emanu-El (1900-1925) and to a busy career on the concert stage. To prepare himself, Harry mastered not only Hebrew but also Italian, French, and German. What at first distinguished his recitals from his contemporaries' was a decision to include a selection of "plantation songs" in his programs. And he was encouraged in this direction by George W. Kemmer, St. George's choir director and organist. At the latter's urging, Burleigh began arranging for choral and solo voice the songs he had first heard his grandfather sing. In the offing was a second career, and as Harry Burleigh pursued it, he won a lasting place for himself in the history of American music.

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CONTINUATION SHEET (Harry T. Burleigh) ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE Four

Ellsworth Janifer's essay "Harry Burleigh: Ten Years Later" makes the point that though Burleigh's best-known works were his arrangements of spirituals. . . "they neither give an accurate picture of his total output nor his place in the musical life of his period . . ."4 Janifer goes on to note that his subject was "chiefly" a composer of songs " . . . and it was in this role that he first attracted the attention of noted American critics and performers . . ."5 Following Janifer's lead, it seems appropriate to give more than passing attention to Burleigh as a composer of sentimental ballads and art songs, for his output in these genres, no less than his impressive arrangements of the songs of his people, led to his being taken seriously in a day when the black musician was all but ignored by the established musical culture.

Burleigh's approach to the ballad and the art song was pragmatic in the extreme. He wanted to make his music known and songs, as he discovered, " . . . are the only things it pays publishers to issue. A chamber music piece may get played once and forgotten. You can't get it published. You get a little discouraged and you go back to writing songs . . ."6 Two of his ballads, among the many that found favor with performers and their audiences, were "Jean" (1903) and "Little Mother of Mine" (1912).

Harry Burleigh's art songs, though not necessarily as popular nor as widely known as his ballads, demonstrate he merited the attention and respect of his contemporaries. Often set to poems by Walt Whitman and Langston Hughes, they reveal Burleigh's decided ability to understand the essence of his text and to blend it and his musical setting into an aesthetically satisfying whole. By way of illustrating his ability to sustain the emotional mood of a poem in music, outstanding examples include "The Young Warrior" (1914), "Ethiopia Saluting the Colors" (1915), "Lovely Dark and Lonely One" (1935). These songs display a dramatic intensity, a vitality and strength and a classic beauty that fully justify their inclusion in the repertoires of artists from McCormick to Ernestine Schumann-Heink.

Yet in acknowledging their excellence or in calling attention to his miscellany of sacred and secular part songs as well as religious and choral music, we are brought back to the matter of Burleigh's reputation. As Janifer acknowledges, Burleigh's recognition was closely tied to his arrangements of black spirituals -- for him, as for his grandfather, they were the only legacy of slavery days in which his race could take pride: "Into their making was poured the aspiration of a race in bondage, whose religion, intensely felt, was their whole hope and comfort. They rank with the great folk music of the world and are among the loveliest of chanted prayers."7

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CONTINUATION SHEET (Harry T. Burleigh) ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE Five

Of course, Burleigh was not the first black musician to evince an interest in the prayer and praise songs of his race. In the 1870s, for instance, the Fisk Jubilee Singers made plantation music known throughout the world, and Burleigh was capitalizing on a genre they, among others, had popularized when in 1901 he transcribed a group of plantation melodies for violin and orchestra or when in 1910 he brought out an edition of Negro minstrel melodies. Modest chordal settings, they are only an intimation of those highly sensitive spiritual arrangements, which began in 1916 with "Deep River," today Burleigh's best known compositional effort.

To appreciate something of his achievement in works like "Deep River," it may be necessary to point out, as did Burleigh, that spirituals were, in the old forms, just simple tunes: "Only the Negroes could sing them because they understood, instinctively, the rhythms They had no accompaniments. There was nothing to guide the singers. No one else could understand them."⁸ In bringing them to the world, Burleigh made spirituals intelligible by providing for them authoritative solo arrangements with piano accompaniment whose deceptive artlessness, concealing the most meticulous craftsmanship, yet maintained the dignity and the pathos of their origins.

Because Burleigh enlisted the service of the culturally elite, it is scarcely surprising to learn that it was the white baritone, Oscar Seagle, who first brought them to the attention of a large metropolitan audience. Further, Seagle initiated the custom among white concert arts of including a selection of spirituals in a vocal recital and as his peers followed suit, Burleigh's music received the hearing it merited in its own right. Now recognized as the possessor of an extraordinary talent, Burleigh was the recipient of the Spingarn Medal in 1917 and of a Master of Arts degree from Atlanta University in 1918 and a Doctor of Music from Howard University in 1920.

Hard knocks had indeed been followed by triumphant days and none appreciated his talents and accomplishments more than his fellow choir members at St. George's who supported him year after year in a special vesper program of spirituals, at once in recognition of the beauty and worth of the music itself and out of love for a man and musician whose personality and talent had bridged barriers of class and race. It was an annual opportunity for Burleigh the vocal soloist to join with Burleigh the composer in an experience that touched thousands.

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In paying tribute to the artist as composer, St. George's rector, Dr. Karl Reiland, signaled out his compositions as a tribute to his race and a gift to the world. The Afro-American's reporter, who covered the event, closed his commentary by observing that for all his varied interests Burleigh's "chief connection" was with St. George's and certainly, as the years passed, the bonds of the association were strengthened. They were never more in evidence than in 1942 when he sang, for the 48th consecutive year, Faure's "The Palms." A news account sets the scene.

Toward the end of the morning service, the short, gray-haired man, who was the grandson of a Maryland slave, stepped briskly down from his place at the rear of the scarlet-clad choir and sang the anthem in a way that brought tears to the eyes of many in the congregation.⁹

In the congratulations that followed the service, Burleigh spoke of wanting to retire and give more time to composing but, in his words, "the church won't let me." However, four years later at the age of 80, he sang "The Palms," his voice clear and resonant, for the final time. A career in song had all but closed and though there was ample opportunity for tributes to be paid him and for his name to be carved upon a buttress in St. George's choir room, there were precious few hours for the work he had planned for himself. Illness intervened and he was forced to enter a private hospital in Stamford, Connecticut, where he died September 12, 1949. The press, seized the occasion to rehearse the details of his rise from an obscure childhood in Erie, Pennsylvania, to a position of eminence in the world of music and offered little in the way of meaningful judgement.

Interpretation of Burleigh's significance to American music waited until musical historians like Ellsworth Janifer and Eileen Southern analysed his life's work and contributions. The former summed up his appraisal by calling Burleigh one of the outstanding song writers of the early twentieth century, whose work in the standard art forms warrants our highest respect by virtue of its sheer merit.¹⁰ Harry T. Burleigh made an indelible contribution to America's cultural heritage and his impact shall be felt as long as music exist.

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CONTINUATION SHEET St. George's Church ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE

Reference Notes

1

Quoted from "Eminent Musician Assails Misuse of Sprituals in Dance Tunes," New York News, November 18, 1922.

2

Victor Hurbert in a letter to Carl Engle, Chief of the Musical Division Library of Congress, quoted in Clair L. Purdy, Victor Hurbert, American Music-Master, p. 115, confirmed that burleigh gave Dvorak some of the thematic material for the symphony in question: "Naturally, I knew a good deal about this symphony, as I saw the Dr. two or three times a week, and knew he was at work on it."

3

Harry T. Burleigh, Famous Negro Singer," Erie Daily Times, October 13, 1949.

4

Ellsworth Janifer, "H.T. Burleigh: Ten Years Later," Pylon [The Atlanta University Review of Race and Culture] , (Second Quarter, 1960) p. 144.

5

Ibid.

6

A. Walter Kramer, "New York Church Pays Tribute to Burleigh," Musical America, April 12, 1924, p 27.

7

New York News, November 18, 1922, p. 7.

8

"New York Church Pays Tribute to Burleigh," Musical America, April 12, 1924, p. 21.

9

Miscellaneous clipping dated March 30, 1942 in the files of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

10

Janifer, op. cit. p. 154.

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CONTINUATION SHEET (Harry T. Burleigh) ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE Two

Erie Dispatch-Herald, 11 March 1928, 1 April 1934.

Janifer, Ellsworth. "H. T. Burleigh Ten Years Later." Pylon, 2nd Quarter, 1960.

Murray, Charlotte W. "The Story of Harry T. Burleigh," The Hymn, 17. 1966.

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Southern, Eileen. The Music of Black Americans. New York: Norton, 1971.