United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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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 Saint Thomas Episcopal Church and Rectory

and or common

2. Location

street & number Putnam Pike   N.A. not for publication

city, town Smithfield   N.A. vicinity of congressional district #1, Hon. Fernand J. St Germain

state Rhode Island   code 44   county Providence   code 007

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
___ district	___ public	X occupied	___ agriculture	___ museum
X building(s)	X private	___ unoccupied	___ commercial	___ park
___ structure	___ both	___ work in progress	___ educational	___ private residence
___ site	**Public Acquisition**	**Accessible**	___ entertainment	X religious
___ object	N.A. in process	X yes: restricted	___ government	___ scientific
	___ being considered	___ yes: unrestricted	___ industrial	___ transportation
		___ no	___ military	___ other:

4. Owner of Property

name Saint Thomas Episcopal Church (Rev. Donald Belt)

street & number Putnam Pike
P.O.

city, town Greenville   N.A. vicinity of   state Rhode Island 02828

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Smithfield Town Hall

street & number 64 Farnum Pike

city, town Smithfield   state Rhode Island

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title See Continuation Sheet #1   has this property been determined eligible? ___ yes ___ no

date   ___ federal ___ state ___ county ___ local

depository for survey records

city, town   state

7. Description

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Saint Thomas Episcopal Church, built in 1851 and altered in 1891, is a handsome Gothic Revival building of coursed rubblestone. It stands in the village of Greenville on a corner lot which also contains a mid-20th-century parish hall and a modest, wood-frame, Queen Anne-style rectory.

The church comprises a tall end-gable-roof nave block, a four-story central foretower, and a rectangular gable-roof chancel. Its masonry has a banded effect created by alternating wide and narrow courses of stone. The foretower has a Gothic-arch entrance at the base, single lancet windows at the second-story level, circular windows at the third-story level, a belfry with louver-filled Gothic arches, and a battlemented parapet with short corner pinnacles. The walls of the nave block are articulated by buttresses, set diagonally at the corners, and contain stained-glass lancet windows.

As originally constructed, the building consisted of the nave and chancel, with a bell gable on the facade. Some stained-glass memorial windows were installed in 1866 and other unspecified improvements were made in 1879 and 1889 (probably including the installation of some new stained glass, judging from the varying artistic styles of the existing windows). In 1891 the bell gable was replaced by the present foretower.

The interior of the church is a simple, unbroken space, finished plainly with the exposed framing of its hammer beam roof its principal decoration. The nave is entered through a plain double-leaf door set in a blind Gothic arch which fills the west end. Above the door is a small shallow gallery (a later addition) and a lancet window opening into the tower. A series of five arches support the roof. Each is composed of an arched brace supported by a hammer beam and a hammer brace which rests on a plain corbel. The wall plate, ridge piece, purlins, rafters and collar beams, all of unfinished wood, are left exposed. The walls and ceiling are finished in plain painted plaster and the floor is made of narrow boards.

Light fixtures are suspended from the hammer braces. Each is composed of five simple globes hung from a metal collar. The church's pews appear to be mid-twentieth-century replacements of earlier furniture.

To the left of the chancel arch is an octagonal wood pulpit and a large Gothic Revival chair; to the right is a hexagonal stone font and the diagonal-boarded door to the sacristy. The sanctuary is separated from the nave by a low altar rail carved into a series of Gothic arches, set two steps above the main floor. The chancel is lit by three lancet windows, the center one the tallest, and is panelled to a height of about 7 feet.

In 1951, a one-story, flat-roofed parish hall was constructed on the west side of Saint Thomas; it is connected to the church by a passageway. The parish house is constructed of concrete blocks of two different sizes,

(See Continuation Sheet #2)

NPS Form 10-900-a
(3-82)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

OMB No. 1024-____ ____
Exp. 10-31-84

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Continuation sheet   1   Item number   6   Page   2

A Report on Historical and Cultural Resources Within the Proposed
Highway Study Corridor for the Reconstruction of U.S. Route 44...from
Route I-295 to Chepachet.

March 1978   State

Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission
Providence, Rhode Island

NPS Form 10-000-a
(3-82)

OMB No. 1024-0018
Exp. 10-31-84

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet   2   Item number   7   Page   2

laid in alternating courses to simulate the texture of the church's masonry. Its main entrance is set in a Gothic-arch recess in a projecting pavilion at the center of the facade. As a structure less than fifty years old, the parish house is not considered architecturally or historically significant, and though it stands within the area encompassed by the nomination, it is included as a non-contributing structure.

A rectory, built in 1889, stands southwest of the church on the same lot. Set on a granite-slab foundation, it is a one-and-one-half-story, gable-roof, clapboard Queen Anne-style dwelling with a shallow, off-center front projection and a rear ell. The front wing has truncated corners at first-floor level, forming a polygonal bay window, and there is a rectangular bay window on the northeast side. Front and rear entrance porches are set into the corners formed by the intersections of the main block with the front and rear wings. The porches' square posts each have deeply cut chamfers that create edges running along what should be the faces of each post (see rectory photo, #). In addition to their stick balustrades (the one on the front porch also ornamented with a band of miniature semicircular and ogee cut-outs) the porches have rows of spindles below the eaves. The house's double-hung, two-over-two windows are flanked by louvered blinds and topped by small shed hoods. The gable ends are trimmed with bargeboards containing incised Eastlake-style decoration and lattice screens at the peaks.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below

Period
___ prehistoric
___ 1400–1499
___ 1500–1599
___ 1600–1699
___ 1700–1799
_X_ 1800–1899
___ 1900–

Areas of Significance—Check and justify below
___ archeology-prehistoric
___ archeology-historic
___ agriculture
_X_ architecture
___ art
___ commerce
___ communications

___ community planning
___ conservation
___ economics
___ education
___ engineering
___ exploration/settlement
___ industry
___ invention

___ landscape architecture
___ law
___ literature
___ military
___ music
___ philosophy
___ politics/government

_X_ religion
___ science
___ sculpture
___ social/humanitarian
___ theater
___ transportation
___ other (specify)

Specific dates 1851   **Builder/Architect** Thomas A. Tefft

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

St. Thomas Church is architecturally significant as one of the best small-scale Gothic Revival ecclesiastical buildings in Rhode Island, notable for its unusual stone construction. The building is part of a design for small country churches in the United States that includes, and was greatly influenced by, the works of Richard Upjohn. The original portion of St. Thomas is important as a surviving example of the work of Thomas A. Tefft (1826-59), one of the most talented architects practicing in Rhode Island in the mid-nineteenth century, and is especially notable as the only Gothic church design by him known to have been constructed. From its inception St. Thomas has been associated with individuals and families prominent in the socio-economic and ecclesiastical history of Rhode Island. The story of the parish's origin and development contribute to a greater understanding of nineteenth-century culture and religious life and the evolution and growth of the Episcopal denomination in the state. With further study, more could probably be learned about patterns of philanthropy and architectural patronage at that time.

The movement that culminated in the founding of St. Thomas parish began in the 1840s, when visiting Episcopal clergymen held occasional services at Greenville. The Reverend James H. Eames (1814-77), then rector of St. Stephens Church, Providence, conducted services here twice in 1849. In October 1850, Eames resigned the rectorate of St. Stephens, reportedly for financial reasons, and became a diocesan missionary. A month later he began to hold regular services in Greenville, first in the Baptist Church and later in a hall. St. Thomas Church received a charter from the Rhode Island General Assembly in January 1851 and the first parish meeting was held 5 February of that year. The construction of a church building was apparently the chief priority. A lot was donated to the congregation by Resolved Waterman (1787-1886) of Providence, a Greenville native descended from the family that had initiated settlement of the village in the 1680s. A well-to-do businessman, Waterman was a communicant and vestryman of St. Stephens, where Eames had been pastor, and was a liberal benefactor of the Episcopal Church. Funds were raised by local subscription and solicitation of friends of the church in Rhode Island and Boston. The Bishop of Rhode Island, the Rt. Rev. John P.K. Henshaw, gave St. Thomas a grant from the legacy of the late Samuel J. Larned, who had left the diocese three bequests with the stipulation that each was to be used to help underwrite the construction of a church in a needy parish. The simple Gothic-style structure of local rubblestone with a rectangular nave, a rectangular chancel, buttressed walls, and a bell gable topping the facade was designed by Providence architect Thomas A. Tefft and completed in 1851 at a cost of $4200. The structure was consecrated by Bishop Henshaw on 9 March 1852.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bayles, Richard M., History of Providence County, Rhode Island (New York: 1891), II, pp. 213-14.

(See Continuation Sheet #6)

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property __less than one acre__

Quadrangle name __North Scituate, R.I.__   Quadrangle scale __1:24,000__

UTM References

A |1,9| |2,8,8,1,0,0| |4,6,3,8,4,0,0| B |__| |__,__,__,__,__| |__,__,__,__,__|
   Zone   Easting   Northing   Zone   Easting   Northing

C |__| |__,__,__,__,__| |__,__,__,__,__| D |__| |__,__,__,__,__| |__,__,__,__,__|

E |__| |__,__,__,__,__| |__,__,__,__,__| F |__| |__,__,__,__,__| |__,__,__,__,__|

G |__| |__,__,__,__,__| |__,__,__,__,__| H |__| |__,__,__,__,__| |__,__,__,__,__|

Verbal boundary description and justification

The nominated property is bounded northeasterly by the southerly curb line of Putnam Pike (U.S. Route 44), southeasterly by the northwesterly
(See Continuation Sheet #7)

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

state	code	county	code
state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title __Robert O. Jones, Senior Historic Preservation Planner__

organization __R.I. Historical Preservation Comm.__   date __April 1986__

street & number __150 Benefit Street__   telephone __401-277-2678__

city or town __Providence__   state __Rhode Island 02903__

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.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title   date

(3-82)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

received

date entered

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

Continuation sheet 3   Item number 8   --   Page 2

St. Thomas, Greenville, bears a strong similarity to a few of the rural Episcopal churches executed by Richard Upjohn between 1847 and 1851. It is nearly identical to Upjohn's Calvary Church (1847-49) in Stonington, Connecticut, which is also a stone structure with a rectangular plan, diagonal corner buttresses, and a bell gable at the front roof peak. The relative proximity of Providence and Stonington (50 miles) makes it very possible that Tefft was aware of Calvary Church when he designed St. Thomas. Tefft was well acquainted with another Upjohn work, Grace Church, Providence (1845-46), a building which he singled out for discussion in an 1851 lecture entitled "The Cultivation of True Taste."

The real significance of St. Thomas, however, lies not in its reflection of Upjohn's work but in its authorship by Tefft, an innovator in his own right, and in its place in Tefft's brief but brilliant career. Thomas A. Tefft (1826-59) is one of the most significant, if less well-known, figures in the history of American architecture. Born in Richmond, Rhode Island, he became a protege of the famous educator Henry Barnard, who encouraged him to enroll at Brown University in Providence. While still an undergraduate, Tefft entered the office of builder/architects James C. Bucklin and William Tallman as a draftsman. Tefft's design for the first Providence Union Station (1847-48, demolished 1897-98), executed when he was only twenty-one, was voted one of the twenty best buildings in the United States in a poll conducted by the American Institute of Architects in 1885, and has been cited by Henry-Russell Hitchcock as "...the finest early [railroad] station in the New World." Tefft was instrumental in the introduction of the Italianate and Romanesque styles to Rhode Island. Carroll Meeks lists him together with Upjohn and James Renwick as one of the pioneers of the Romanesque in America. Though not unique in his position among the architectural avant-garde of the mid-nineteenth century, Tefft is notable for his highly personal interpretation of the styles he helped to popularize.

Tefft's authorship of St. Thomas was unknown until it was discovered during the process of preparing this nomination. This discovery and other new information raises to thirty the number of documented church designs by Tefft, twenty-five of which are represented by drawings in the Brown University archives. Of these only eleven are known to have been constructed, of which seven, including St. Thomas, still exist (one additional existing church is attributed to Tefft but differs considerably from the project drawing in the Brown archives, though it still exhibits stylistic features characteristic of Tefft's work). Prior to this all of the Tefft churches known to have been constructed were in the Romanesque style. A small Gothic Revival church formerly standing at Georgiaville, Rhode Island (built 1851? 1856?, now demolished; illustrated in Hitchcock, Rhode Island Architecture) was once attributed to Tefft, but never documented. One of the heretofore unidentified Gothic Revival church designs among the Tefft drawings now appears to be a study, if not a final design, for St. Thomas, Greenville. As the only known extant Gothic Revival church by Tefft, St. Thomas puts a new perspective on his ecclesiastical work.

NPS Form 10-900-a
(3-82)

OMB No 1024-0018
Exp. 10-31-84

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet ___4___   Item number ___8___   Page ___3___

The choice of Gothic for St. Thomas may have been influenced by the new parish's connection to St. Stephens Church, Providence, though the Reverend Eames and the Waterman family--Resolved Waterman and his son, the Reverend Henry Waterman. The link between the two parishes is illustrated by the fact that St. Stephens gave its old communion service to St. Thomas in April 1852. St. Stephens was one of the earliest Episcopal churches in New England, if not the first, to come under the influence of the Oxford movement. It seems likely that Eames, as a one-time rector of St. Stephens, was attuned to the principles of the Tractarian movement. This may account for the choice of a Gothic Revival design for St. Thomas. Henry Waterman (1813-76) was rector of St. Stephens both before and after Eames's tenure there, and is well known for his High Church attitudes and beliefs. During Waterman's second term at St. Stephens, the parish commissioned Upjohn to build a new Gothic Revival church in 1860-62. Henry Waterman was apparently knowledgeable about and interested in Ecclesiological theories about church architecture, and perhaps he exerted some influence over the planning and construction of St. Thomas . Although Tefft was himself a Baptist, and the majority of his church designs were for evangelical or non-ritualistic denominations (only one other Episcopal church--in the Romanesque style-- besides St. Thomas), he was acquainted with the Tractarian movement. Tefft owned copies of New York Ecclesiologist and pattern books by A.W.N. Pugin. Though at variance with his own religious beliefs, the philosophical and aesthetic dictates of the High Church movement were familiar to Tefft.
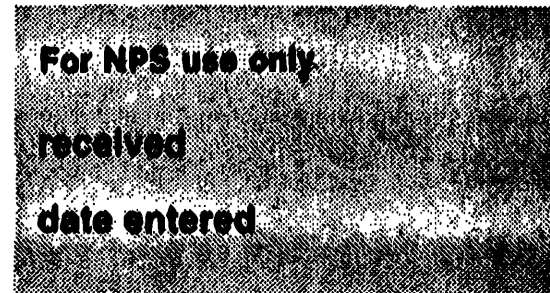
St. Thomas is historically notable as a product of missionary activity implemented by J.P.K. Henshaw (1792-1852), Bishop of Rhode Island from 1843- to 1852. In the annals of the Episcopal Church, Henshaw is famous for his evangelical zeal. Born in Middletown, Connecticut, Henshaw spent his youth in Middlebury, Vermont, and graduated from the college there at the age of sixteen. Before his nineteenth birthday he underwent a dramatic conversion to the Episcopal faith while visiting his birthplace. Thereafter Henshaw devoted himself to church affairs. He helped start several churches in Vermont before moving to Bristol, Rhode Island, to study for the ministry under the Rt. Rev. Alexander V. Griswold, Bishop of the Eastern Diocese and rector of St. Michael's Church. Henshaw was called to serve churches in Marblehead, Massachusetts; Brooklyn, New York; and Baltimore, Maryland-- the first two before taking his final orders in 1816. Henshaw was greatly admired for his industry and efficacy, reviving or expanding his own parishes and helping to found new churches wherever he went.

In 1843 Henshaw returned to Rhode Island as bishop of the diocese and rector of Grace Church, Providence. His missionary labors extended denominational activity into many new areas, especially among the growing mill villages of the state. He was instrumental in establishing at least six permanent parishes in the state during his nine-year episcopate in addition to mission stations. Henshaw's assignment of James Eames to St. Thomas and his allocation of diocesan funds for the construction of the church make him a key figure in the parish's early development.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form
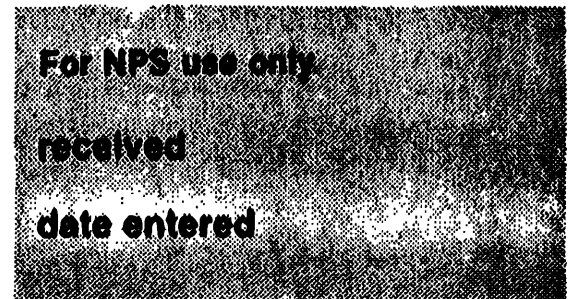
There is little readily available information on the later history of St. Thomas. One secondary source notes that "repairs" to the building were made in 1866, 1879, and 1889, but the specifics of these alterations are unknown. The rectory, built in 1889, is a modest but good example of a vernacular Queen Anne residence. In 1891 the original bell gable of the church was replaced with the present foretower, added as a memorial to the third rector, the Rev. Benjamin H. Chase. No information has been found that identifies the architect or builder of this tower. As it stands, the church's distinctive monumental design and structural character and prominent siting along U.S. Route 44 make it an important landmark in northwestern Rhode Island.

A combination of superior architectural quality with numerous and varied historical associations make St. Thomas Church a significant cultural resource.

NPS Form 10-900-a
(3-82)

OMB No. 1024-0018
Exp. 10-31-84

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet   6   Item number   9   Page   2

Biographical Cyclopedia of Representative Men of Rhode Island (Providence: 1881), pp. 221-22, 385-86, 395.

Catir, Norman Joseph, Jr., St. Stephens Church in Providence (Providence: 1964), pp. 18-23, 26-27.

History of the State of Rhode Island (Philadelphia: 1878), p. 311.

Hitchcock, Henry-Russell, Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (Baltimore:

                    Rhode Island Architecture (Providence: 1939).

Little, Margaret Ruth, "The Architecture of a Late Lamented Genius, Thomas A. Tefft," (unpublished masters' thesis, Brown University, 1971).
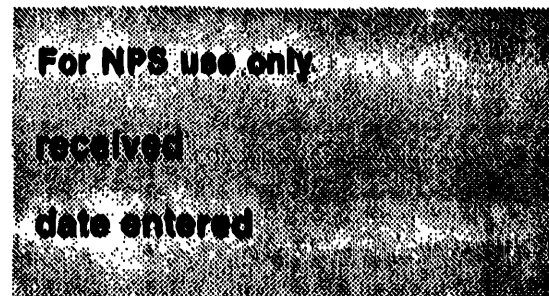
Meeks, Carroll, "Romanesque Before Richardson," Art Bulletin, (March 1953).

"St. Thomas' Church, Greenville," Providence Journal, 26 March 1852.

Upjohn, Everard M., Richard Upjohn: Architect   and Churchman (New York: 1939).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

Verbal Boundary Description

curb line of Smith Avenue (RI Route 116), and southwesterly and north-
westerly by the southwesterly and northwesterly lot lines of lot 171 in
Assessor's Plat 6, as defined by the Town of Smithfield. It is intended
to include within this nomination a granite-post and wrought-iron gate-
way at the head of the path leading to the main entrance of the church
building.

Verbal Boundary Justification

    The nominated property includes all of the elements that constitute
the historical and architectural significance of this cultural resource.