

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

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

|                         |      |
|-------------------------|------|
| STATE:<br>Massachusetts |      |
| COUNTY:<br>Suffolk      |      |
| FOR NPS USE ONLY        |      |
| ENTRY NUMBER            | DATE |
|                         |      |

**1. NAME**

COMMON:  
Old West Church

AND/OR HISTORIC:  
West End Church, Old West Church, (United Methodist)

**2. LOCATION**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
131 Cambridge Street

CITY OR TOWN:  
Boston

STATE: Massachusetts      CODE:      COUNTY: Suffolk      CODE:     

**3. CLASSIFICATION**

| CATEGORY<br>(Check One)   | OWNERSHIP  | STATUS  | ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC  |
|---|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> District <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building<br><input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure<br><input type="checkbox"/> Object | <input type="checkbox"/> Public<br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private<br><input type="checkbox"/> Both                                    | Public Acquisition:<br><input type="checkbox"/> In Process<br><input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied<br><input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied<br><input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress |
| PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)  |  |   |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural<br><input type="checkbox"/> Commercial<br><input type="checkbox"/> Educational<br><input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Government<br><input type="checkbox"/> Industrial<br><input type="checkbox"/> Military<br><input type="checkbox"/> Museum | <input type="checkbox"/> Park<br><input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence<br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Religious<br><input type="checkbox"/> Scientific | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation<br><input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____<br><input type="checkbox"/> Comments _____          |

**4. OWNER OF PROPERTY**

OWNER'S NAME:  
Dr. William E. Alberts, Old West Church, (United Methodist)

STREET AND NUMBER:  
131 Cambridge Street

CITY OR TOWN: Boston      STATE: Massachusetts      CODE:     

**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

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

STREET AND NUMBER:  
Pemberton Square

CITY OR TOWN: Boston      STATE: Massachusetts      CODE:     

**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE OF SURVEY:  
Historic American Buildings Survey (13 photos, 4 copies of old photos)

DATE OF SURVEY: 1940       Federal       State       County       Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:  
Division of Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN: Washington      STATE: D. C.      CODE:     

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE:  
COUNTY:  
ENTRY NUMBER  
DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

**7. DESCRIPTION**

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

**DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (If known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE**

Old West Church is a large, square, two-story brick structure with stepped gables, and a three-and-one-half story projecting porch that is topped by a square tower with a cupola and dome. Constructed of brick laid in Flemish bond, the main building is about 75 feet square and the porch, or vestibule, located on the south (front) elevation, projects another 20 feet and is 46 feet wide. Windows of the main building are arranged in two tiers and all have flat lintel and sills of stone. Upper tier windows of the east and west side walls are set in one-story high arcades that spring from the stone belt course that marks the second-story floor level.

The dominating feature of the exterior design is the 3 1/2 story porch, which, with the tower and cupola included, rises to a height of 96 feet. The porch is divided into three bays vertically. The bays of the first two stories are separated by giant recessed panels of brick which convey the effect of pilasters. Each bay is comprised of an entranceway, with a white swag panel located at the second story floor level, and a large rectangular window above. The second-story cornice of the porch is Grecian Doric and this is carried completely around the building, forming its main cornice. The very elaborately decorated third story of the porch has three round-headed windows which are framed by pairs of wooden Doric Pilasters and a heavy Doric cornice. The ornamentation of the third story is further emphasized by the plainness of the brick stepped-parapet gables of the main roof, which are located behind the porch. The attic or half-story, also divided into three bays, has a round clock in the center, and two flanking small rectangular windows. Above the clock is festoon drapery and a central wooden pediment. The brick porch is surmounted by a square-shaped wooden cupola with a gilded dome and weathervane. The cupola or belfry has an arched opening with louvers in each of its four faces and these openings are framed by paired columns done in the Ionic order.

In the vestibule stairways, located against the side walls, lead up to the galleries, and three doors also open into the audience room. Highly ornamented galleries, supported by columns in the Composite order, extend around the east, south, and west sides of the auditorium. The galleries and columns are original. The ceiling has a central dome, 42 feet in diameter and 6 feet in height. The level corner areas of the ceiling are ornamented with sunken panels. The existing rectangular-shaped apse was probably added about the middle of the 19th century to the north (rear) side of the structure; four of the nine windows in the north wall were closed at that time. The main floor originally contained 112 pews. The existing pulpit and pews were constructed as part of the 1963 restoration project.

In excellent condition, Old West Church is again being used for religious purposes and is also open to visitors.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**4. SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

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

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1806

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

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

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Designed by the Noted Boston architect Asher Benjamin and built in 1806, Old West Church is an early and highly successful example of a monumentally-scaled church constructed in the then-new Federal-Adamseque style. Widely copied throughout New England, Old West Church is still considered to be one of the finest of Benjamin's churches. The structure has been little-altered on the exterior, but its interior was considerably changed during the 19th century and has required extensive restoration to return it to its original appearance.

History

Old West Church was designed by Asher Benjamin, builder and architect, in 1806 for use as a Congregational meetinghouse. The last church service was held in the building on April 18, 1892. The structure was then remodelled on the interior, reopened as a Branch Public Library on February 3, 1896, and served this purpose until 1960. An order of General Court of Massachusetts made the closed library building available to the Methodist Conference in 1962. In 1963 the interior of the old church was restored to its early 19th century appearance and the structure was reopened on May 10, 1964 as a United Methodist Church.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Architecture, Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries  
(Baltimore, 1963), 78, 84, 85.

Talbot F. Hamlin, Greek Revival Architecture in America (New York, 1944), 96,  
161.

Massachusetts, A Guide to its Places and People (American Guide Series)  
(Boston, 1937), 152.

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

| LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES<br>DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY |                         |                         | O<br>R | LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES<br>DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY<br>OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES |                         |  |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------|---|-------------------------|--|
| CORNER   | LATITUDE                | LONGITUDE               |        | LATITUDE  | LONGITUDE               |  |
|  | Degrees Minutes Seconds | Degrees Minutes Seconds |        | Degrees Minutes Seconds   | Degrees Minutes Seconds |  |
| NW   | ° ' "                   | ° ' "                   |        | 42 ° 21 ' 41 "  | 71 ° 03 ' 55 "          |  |
| NE   | ° ' "                   | ° ' "                   |        |   |                         |  |
| SE   | ° ' "                   | ° ' "                   |        |   |                         |  |
| SW   | ° ' "                   | ° ' "                   |        |   |                         |  |

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 1 acre

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

| STATE: | CODE | COUNTY | CODE |
|--------|------|--------|------|
|        |      |        |      |
|        |      |        |      |
|        |      |        |      |
|        |      |        |      |

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE:  
Charles W. Snell, Survey Historian

ORGANIZATION Division of History, Office of Archeology and  
Historic Preservation, National Park Service DATE 6/9/70

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

CITY OR TOWN: Washington STATE D. C. CODE

**12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION**

**NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

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

National  State  Local

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_

ATTEST:

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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(Continuation Sheet)

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(Number all entries)

9. Major Bibliographical Reference for Old West Church, Boston:
- Wayne Andrews, Architecture, Ambition, and Americans (New York, 1955), 100.
- George F. Marlowe, Churches of Old New England (New York, 1947), 51.
- Henry-Russell Hitchcock, A Guide to Boston Architecture, 1637-1954 (New York, 1954), 4.
- Walter H. Kilham, Boston After Bulfinch, An Account of Its Architecture, 1800-1900 (Cambridge, 1948), 14.
- Florence T. Howe, "More about Asher Benjamin," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Vol. XIII, No. 3 (October, 1954), 16-10
- Alan Gowans, Images of American Living (Philadelphia and New York, 1964), 270.
- Edmund W. Sinnott, Meeting House & Church in Early New England (New York, Toronto, and London, 1963), 115.
- Asher Benjamin, The American Builder's Companion (Sixth Edition of 1827 with 70 Plates) (Reprinted by Dover Publications, New York, 1969), 106, Plate LVII.