

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	JUN 25 1979
DATE ENTERED	AUG 21 1979

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

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC SOUTH PARISH  
AND/OR COMMON SOUTH UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER 292 State Street  
CITY, TOWN Portsmouth VICINITY OF First  
STATE New Hampshire CODE 33 COUNTY Rockingham CODE 015  
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME Corporate Membership of the South Unitarian Universalist Church  
STREET & NUMBER 292 State Street  
CITY, TOWN Portsmouth VICINITY OF New Hampshire STATE 03801

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Rockingham County Registry of Deeds  
STREET & NUMBER Rockingham County Courthouse  
Hampton Road  
CITY, TOWN Exeter STATE New Hampshire 03833

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE None  
DATE  
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS  
CITY, TOWN STATE

\_FEDERAL \_STATE \_COUNTY \_LOCAL

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The South Unitarian Church was built between 1824 and 1826. It is constructed of Rockport granite laid as quarry-faced ashlar except in the basement portion of the walls, which consist of three courses of hammered granite. According to an article written at the time of the building's dedication (Portsmouth Journal, February 18, 1826), the structure measures "92 by 66 feet, and 26 feet in height from the basement to the coveing; with a Portico projecting 17 feet and supported by four granite columns 29 inches in diameter at the base."

The portico is narrower than the facade of the main building and is supported by four Tuscan columns and four simple pilasters set onto the front wall of the church. Beneath the portico are three doorways recessed into arched niches with elaborately cut voussoirs. The portico is surrounded on three sides by continuous granite steps.

The sides of the building have five arched windows which rise nearly to the angular stone cornice of the structure. The voussoirs of each window opening are cut at an angle in order to bond with the stone courses of the walls. The four original windows of each side have 36 lights in the lower sash, while the upper sash have 36 rectangular lights and an additional 15 curved lights. The rear windows on each side, added in 1858, have 30 lights in the lower sash, and 30 rectangular and 9 curved lights in the upper sash. All windows were covered with louvered blinds until recently.

A granite belfry crowned by a low hipped roof rises above the ridge of the body of the church. This belfry is supported by walls of masonry that rise through the interior of the building from the basement, and necessitate the division of the entry or vestibule into three areas. The belfry is pierced by four arched openings fitted with louvers. The interior of the belfry is plastered, and the plaster is scored to resemble ashlar masonry. The bell, cast in 1828 by the Boston Copper Company (the firm that succeeded Paul Revere and Son), weighs 2540 pounds. An anonymous writer in the Portsmouth Journal at the time of the building's dedication objected to the tower, stating that the building's "only defect is the tower or belfry, which was added in obedience to popular prejudice, and which alone prevents us from calling this church a perfect model of classic architecture."

Except for a gallery at the front of the auditorium, the interior of the church is a single large room with no supports for the roof other than the building's walls. The striking span of the auditorium ceiling is achieved through a series of massive roof trusses. Each is a scissors truss, with a king-post descending from the apex of the roof to the juncture of the two crossed struts, and thence down a few feet more to support the center of the vaulted auditorium ceiling.

There are no known renderings of the original interior. It was described in the Portsmouth Journal of February 18, 1826, as:

(See Continuation Sheet #1)

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CONTINUATION SHEET

1

ITEM NUMBER

7

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DESCRIPTION (Continued)

in perfect keeping with its exterior; we are at once impressed on entering it with its simplicity, the admirable adaptation of its parts, and its elegant workmanship; its area is very extensive, containing one hundred pews; there is but one gallery, which extends across the northern extremity opposite the pulpit, for the purpose of containing the organ, and free pews for the use of the poor. There are also sixteen free pews on the floor.

The interior of the church has been renovated several times, beginning in 1842, when it was repainted in the same colors as were used in Alexander Parris' St. Paul's Church in Boston. In 1852 new furnaces were installed together with a system of ventilation which is still in use. At the same time gas was introduced into the building and the rococo wall brackets and chandelier of that era, now electrified, remain in the building.

After repeated problems with the inadequate size of the auditorium, an addition of seventeen feet was built at the back of the structure in 1858. The original rear wall, bearing a stone incised with the date "1824" was dismantled and re-erected on the Court Street property line. The new sections of the side walls, which nearly match the original stone in color, contain arched windows which closely match the details of the original openings but are narrower. According to Lawrence Craig, the historian of the church, the addition provided for:

anterooms, space for an organ, and allowed added depth to the auditorium.... The interior was newly plastered and ornamented, a new organ was installed, and the old pews were replaced with new ones of a more elegant style, and there were new furnishings. The changes... (resulted in) the complete transformation of a rather plain interior into the present highly ornate and splendid auditorium.

The present interior, apparently dating essentially from the remodelling of 1858, is richly ornamented in the baroque style. The focal point of the room is a deeply recessed niche flanked by monumental Corinthian pilasters

FHR-8-300A  
(11/78)

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HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

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DESCRIPTION (Continued)

and surmounted by a broken ogee pediment. Pairs of similar pilasters, standing on tall pedestals, are placed in the piers between the windows and support a full entablature with modillioned cornice. The vaulted ceiling is ornamented with deeply-recessed plaster coffers.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

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

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Architecture: The South Church is a significant early example of the classical style, built at a time when that style was hardly known in New England. The building is one of a small group of pioneering structures which introduced such major elements of classical architecture as the monumental portico into New England. Mostly built in or near Boston, these structures signalled the end of the delicate classicism of the Federal style and inspired the introduction of more robust forms derived directly from antiquity. Although the South Church is more Roman than Greek in inspiration, it served as the precursor of several later Greek Revival buildings in Portsmouth, notably the Episcopal Chapel (1832) and the Court House (1836).

The South Church is also significant as an early example of granite architecture. Until the early nineteenth century, granite-cutting technology was in its infancy in New England. A few designs for granite buildings by Charles Bulfinch in Boston, followed by others such as Alexander Parris and Solomon Willard, inspired the opening of quarries in Chelmsford, Quincy and Rockport, Mass., and the development of new machines for working and transporting stone. The South Church, built of Rockport granite, was one of the first monumental stone buildings in northern New England.

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Garvin, James. Historic Portsmouth. Somersworth, New Hampshire: New Hampshire Publishing Company, 1974.

Portsmouth Journal. Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Saturday, February 18, 1826 issue.

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1/4 acre

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,9	3,5,6,8,8,0	4,7,7,0,4,8,0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The South Church sits in a rectangular block fronting on State Street. The boundary is 106.9' on State Street, 150.0' on Church Street, 106.9' on Court Street, and 149.8' on Court Place.

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

Susan Werner Thoresen, Principal

ORGANIZATION

The Thoresen Group

DATE

February 10, 1978

STREET & NUMBER

10 Daniel Street

TELEPHONE

603-431-4027

CITY OR TOWN

Portsmouth

STATE

New Hampshire 03801

## 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 Commissioner, Dept. of Resources & Economic Development  
NH State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

5-23-79

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

*Charles Stull*  
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE

8-21-79

ATTEST:

*Thomas W. Dwyer*  
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

8/20/79