

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

SWEDENBORGIAN CHURCH

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United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Swedenborgian Church

Other Name/Site Number: Church of the New Jerusalem, Lyon Street Church

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 3200 Washington Street

Not for publication: __

City/Town: San Francisco

Vicinity: __

State: California County: San Francisco Code: 075 Zip Code: 94115

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: x
Public-Local:
Public-State:
Public-Federal:

Category of Property

Building(s): x
District:
Site:
Structure:
Object:

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

3
0
0
0
3

Noncontributing

0 buildings
0 sites
0 structures
0 objects
0 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 0

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: N/A

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4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ____ 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 ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

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

Signature of Commenting or Other Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ____ 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):

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: Religion

Sub: Religious Facility

Current: Religion

Sub: Religious Facility

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: Late 19th & Early 20th Century American Movements:
Bungalow/Craftsman

Materials:

Foundation: concrete

Walls: brick/stucco

Roof: red-clay Spanish and Mission tiles

Other:

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Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

The Swedenborgian Church complex, consisting of the church, two residential buildings, a retaining wall and two distinct gardens, was constructed between 1894 and 1900. The massive retaining wall that elevates the complex, the large garden in the southeast corner of the lot, and the smaller garden in the northwest section were all part of the original design. In 1959 a porch on the east side of the parish house was enclosed and a stairway was added to the Washington Street façade. Aside from these additions, there have been only minor exterior alterations to the complex. The location of the buildings and gardens, and the use of the property as a church, have remained constant since their construction. The complex has a remarkably high degree of integrity from the period of significance.

The complex is located at the northwest corner of Washington and Lyon Streets in San Francisco, California. The grouping is situated on an "L"-shaped lot, and despite their placement on a steep hill in the Pacific Heights neighborhood, portions of the complex occupy a relatively flat site. The level lot is made possible by fill and a large stuccoed retaining wall that elevates the grounds and church building well above Washington Street. The main access to the complex is through a one-story portico on the Lyon Street hill, which opens into a lush garden. The focus of the complex is the sanctuary located on the north side of the garden with an ell (a small perpendicular wing) of the building wrapping around the northwest corner. On the west side of the garden, stairs lead into the rooms of the parish house. A smaller garden is nestled in the northwest corner of the property and is accessible from the parish house and the church. The residence at 2121 Lyon Street (the parsonage) is the only building in the group that does not currently open onto the garden; the house sits on a long, narrow lot facing Lyon Street north of the portico and church. The complex has a high degree of integrity, is in good condition, has had few alterations and retains not only its exterior features but also interior finishes and furnishings.

The one-story entrance portico facing Lyon Street functions as the main entrance to the church complex. The gently sloping shed roof of the portico is covered with tapered Mission clay tiles. Three semi-circular arched openings edged with red brick puncture the pebble-dash stucco wall of the east façade. Iron grillwork, displaying a cross and scallop motif, fills the openings of the first and third arches. The center entrance arch extends to the ground and is fitted with iron gates detailed to match the grills and an elongated cross on the shutting stile. A metal Swedenborgian Church sign, which was created in the early 1980s by local architect Jennifer Clements, hangs between the first arch and entrance. The steel sign repeats the cross and scallop design of the grillwork in cutouts along its top and bottom edges. Above the shed roof of the portico, the gable end and bell tower of the sanctuary are visible; the shed-roofed portico and taller gable-roofed sanctuary together form the Lyon Street façade.

Once inside the portico, the dark wood ceiling, pebble-dashed stucco walls and red-brick pavers laid in a herringbone pattern are in a marked contrast to the bright sunlight visible through the arched openings. Additional light is provided by a bare bulb, which hangs from a simple fixture in the ceiling. The northern end of the portico is enclosed to form a small vestry with doors opening into both the portico and the interior of the sanctuary. The floors of the vestry are wood, the walls are rough cast-stucco, and the ceilings are dark redwood with exposed beams. A small copper and mica shade, attributed to craftsman Dirk van Erp (1860-1933), hangs in the center of the room. Both the doorway from the vestry to the portico and the opening that leads from the portico to the main garden are arched.

The church is composed of five rooms: the sanctuary, entrance vestibule, bride's room, toilet room, and vestry. The walls of the building are massive, self-supporting, seventeen-inch thick, brick masonry. The outer wythe (partition) is sand-cast red brick interspersed with dark clinker brick laid in a Flemish bond. According to the

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original building specifications, the bricks, “are to be of the various colors of dark blue, purple, brown, etc. [. . .] Preference will be given to the rougher and darker shades.”¹ The mortar joints have a weathered profile, which creates a strong shadow line and reinforces the building’s horizontal emphasis. Three crosses made from projecting bricks are irregularly spaced along the west wall of the ell. The low-pitched gabled roof of the sanctuary is supported by a system of heavy timbers, which are visible on the interior. The tiles on this section of the building were originally tapered Mission clay tiles, like those on the portico and bride’s room roof, but were replaced with Spanish clay tiles (“S” shaped with a flat bottom) in the 1970s. Rounded metal gutters attached to the south eaves of the ell and portico appears to be original. Exposed rafters and purlins ornament the eaves.

Three evenly spaced openings divided by brick piers punctuate the south wall of the sanctuary. Each opening is fitted with three, three-by-four multi-light leaded-sash windows, which resemble industrial sash. According to historic photographs, soon after the building was constructed painted iron trellises were installed below these windows, and vines quickly grew to cover them. The east wall of the ell has two clerestory openings, each fitted with three windows. A three-by-two window framed by thick wood mullions is flanked by two-by-two windows on either side. The window frames and muntins are wood. Two stained-glass windows light the sanctuary (description follows); on the east façade of the room, above the portico, there is a stained-glass oculus window, and behind the center window of the south sanctuary wall, there is a second stained-glass window. The north and west façades of the building are without windows.

The main sanctuary entrance to the church is through an arch in the east wall of the ell. Historically, the entrance was sheltered only by the building’s main roof but in 1984 a small sympathetically-designed porch roof supported by knee braces was added over the doorway. The roof is slightly arched and is accented by exposed rafters along the eaves. Like the front entry sign, the porch was designed by architect Jennifer Clements. A pair of doors, arched to match the entrance shape, fills the doorway. The main entrance doors hang from large hammered iron hinges.² With the exception of those in the sanctuary, the doors in the building are constructed of dark-fumed, tongue-and-groove oak boards. The boards that form the doors are oriented vertically on the outside of the door and horizontally on the inside. Many of the doors are arched. The sanctuary doors are similar to the others but are Douglas Fir on the interior. A second doorway is centered underneath the southern clerestory window of this façade.

A bell tower projects through the eaves on the south elevation facing the garden. Like the church, the bell tower is made of both red and dark brick laid in Flemish bond. Spanish clay tiles cover the pitched tower cap, and the eaves are corbelled. Above the roofline of the sanctuary, a round arch with two smaller inset arches punctures the tower. A Corinthian column of Italian Carrara marble sits in the center of the arch and supports a horizontal beam, apparently intended to hold bells that were never installed. Just below the arch, a long narrow window with milky medieval leaded glass is set slightly off center.

The sanctuary is the focus of the building, and its exposed structural system is one of its strongest character-defining features. The frame consists of long lengths of unpeeled madrone trunks cut from the Santa Cruz Mountains. Vertical posts rise from footings to the top of the walls. Diagonal trusses are let into the posts approximately half way up and rise to meet the rafters above. The trusses are secured at both ends with iron “U” brackets and lag bolts.³ A second set of beams continues from the trusses and is joined along the underside

¹ A. Page Brown, Architect, “Specifications for the Swedenborgian Church at Lyon and Washington Streets” (Swedenborgian Church files, San Francisco), 20.

² *Ibid.*, 22.

³ “A Quaint Church Edifice,” *San Francisco Call*, 3 April 1895 (Swedenborgian Church files, San Francisco), n.p.

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of the ridgepole. The trunks along the north wall rest on rectangular wood blocks, which were inserted in the 1940s to replace water damaged sections. The purlins and beams (which are let into the purlins) are supported by the rafters. The ceiling is composed of diagonal, tongue-and groove redwood boards. The rafters, purlins, beams and headers appear to have been mill-cut, and finished with an adze for a rustic appearance.⁴

The lower portion of the sanctuary walls is clad in Oregon pine (now called Douglas Fir) board-and-batten wainscoting. The wainscoting is fitted to the profile of the unpeeled madrone columns. The walls above the wainscoting are clad in textured hand-worked lime plaster. The interior surfaces of the wood window sash are stained and coated with a clear finish. Wood mullions are inset in the wood frame and applied horizontal wood muntins are visually interesting, but do not actually hold the glass. The flooring is Oregon pine, tongue-and-groove boards, stained a light color and coated with a clear varnish. What appears to be a modern grill covers a furnace, which is located under the floor between the front row of chairs, and the pulpit. To the west of this, there is a second, smaller metal grill.

The main axis of the otherwise symmetrical sanctuary is shifted by the off-center placement of the fireplace, pulpit, and chandelier. At the west end of the church, the large masonry hearth sits north of center. It is made of sand-cast red brick, and like the building exterior, the chimney is of a Flemish bond. The hearth is laid in a herringbone pattern. The iron cross-shaped andirons in the firebox appear in early photographs, indicating they are original features. The pulpit is located in the front of the church, south of the center aisle. A pedestal, originally used for communion, sits on the north side of the church. In contrast to the otherwise simple furnishings, the pulpit and table are ornate. The pedestal is cast painted plaster, and the pulpit is a dark-fumed intricately carved oak. The two pieces are attributed to Mary Curtis Richardson (1848-1931), a painter, designer, church member, and friend of the Reverend Joseph Worcester (1836-1913). They were placed in the sanctuary around the turn-of-the-century.⁵ Behind the pulpit, a large hammered wrought-iron chandelier hangs from a heavy chain. The fixture is composed of six arms, which hold four candles each. Close to the table, a large half-shell rests in a wrought-iron stand. The shell is a baptismal font and came from another church where it was reputedly used for the baptism of Robert Frost.⁶ A plain altar made of light wood was added to the sanctuary several decades ago. Early photographs indicate that the altar, which is raised on a wooden platform, was added close to the time of construction.

South of the platform, there are three, freestanding stepped choir benches made of salvaged old-growth Douglas Fir. The benches were designed by Debey Zito, a San Francisco designer, and were installed in the church in 1997. Soon after the completion of the benches, Zito designed a second set of benches of the same material, which were placed along the south wall of the sanctuary. In 1998 a third set of benches were designed by Chris Wright of Jaap Romijn and Friends, custom furniture makers. These were constructed of walnut with a natural or "live" edge detail and were installed along the north wall of the sanctuary. The church commissioned the same firm to design cabinetry of California walnut for the vestry, which was installed in 1999.⁷ Early records indicate that screens made of a "course brown stuff" (most likely burlap or monk's cloth) shielded the vestry door from view. These were replaced with the current wood screens sometime during Worcester's tenure.⁸

⁴ The joists are two-by-twelve inches, the rafters are eight-by-twelve inches, and the purlins are six-by-eight inches (Brown, "Specifications," 16-17).

⁵ Brown, "Specifications for the Swedenborgian Church," 16-17.

⁶ Ibid., 16-17.

⁷ Ross Fish, Notes on Swedenborgian Church (15 August 2001), n.p.

⁸ Ibid.

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The small ell, which extends from the southwest corner of the sanctuary, contains the entrance hall, bride's room and a toilet room. The main doorway to the building leads into the small entrance vestibule. Brick flooring in this room is laid in a herringbone pattern to match the exterior walk and chimney hearth. The walls are a rough plaster similar to those in the sanctuary. A historic metal and glass light fixture hangs from the ceiling. The south entrance hall door leads into a room currently called the bride's room. In this small narrow space, the walls are painted plaster composed of "lath, hair mortar and finished with pure cement and sand" and the ceiling is dark stained wood with exposed beams.⁹ Two modern sconces hang on the west wall. There is a small toilet room located at the south end of the bride's room. The flooring in these rooms is currently covered with carpeting. The trim is dark-stained fir, and the decking and ceiling beams are also stained a dark color.

The church building, its interior furnishings, artwork and decorative features were created as a comprehensive design. The stained glass, paintings, and much of the furniture were designed specifically for the church and are an integral part of the building's architectural expression. Four canvases by the nineteenth century California landscape painter William Keith (1838-1911) fill the spaces between the wood posts along the north wall of the sanctuary. In scale and placement, the three easternmost paintings are similar to the windows along the south wall and intentionally break up the wall surface, as there are no windows present. In theme, placement and size, these paintings were specifically created for the church. The fourth painting was added in 1896 and is of slightly different dimensions. Iron wall sconces, which hold three taper candles in each, are located beneath the three windows in the south wall and the four paintings on the north wall. Historic photos show that several of these sconces were located on either side of the fireplace and were moved to their current positions early in the building's history.

Bruce Porter, stained-glass artist and designer, created the two opalescent stained-glass windows in the sanctuary. In the east wall an ocular window, which depicts a dove resting on a fountain surrounded by apple blossoms, gently lights the wall above the pulpit in hues of green. Centered in the south windows, in vivid panes of blues, is a second stained-glass window portraying the New Testament scene of Saint Christopher carrying the Christ Child over a swelling river. The sanctuary's south wall also features a small narrow window made of medieval glass fragments from Westminster Cathedral.¹⁰

According to Leslie Mandelson Freudenheim and Elisabeth Sussman, authors of *Building with Nature: Roots of the San Francisco First Bay Tradition*, the simple maple rush-seated sanctuary chairs (made from tule reeds from the Sacramento Delta) were designed specifically for the space.¹¹ Although the designer's identity is not clear, early pictures show that wood benches and bookcases along the back wall of the sanctuary, flanking the fireplace, were also part of the original design. The comprehensive design of the church: art, furnishings and windows, was an approach advocated by the English and American Arts and Crafts movements and adopted by proponents of the Bay Area Tradition.

The gardens are also an essential part of the complex; for instance, the entrance portico leads into the main garden not the sanctuary. The garden functions as the primary circulation and meeting space; a herringbone brick path lines two sides of the garden and leads to the entrance vestibule of the church and the parish house. The elevated position of the gardens and buildings is made possible by a massive concrete and stucco retaining

⁹ Fish, Notes on Swedenborgian Church.

¹⁰ "Swedenborgian Church: Built and Dedicated in 1895," Pamphlet, (San Francisco, CA: The Swedenborgian Church, 1994) n.p.

¹¹ Leslie Mandelson Freudenheim, and Elisabeth Sussman, *Building with Nature: Roots of the San Francisco First Bay Tradition* (Santa Barbara and Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, Inc., 1974), 30.

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wall, which raises the complex above street level, creating a quiet and secluded site. Although there is no evidence the plantings of the garden were designed by a landscape architect, the diverse plants were selected to represent international and universal truths and include: Irish yew, cedars of Lebanon, an olive tree from the Holy Land, a Japanese maple, a California redwood, a Siberian crabapple, and a New England elm. According to Swedenborgian teachings, each plant, tree and shrub was a spiritual symbol.¹² The boundary between nature and the church was further blurred by the use of boughs of leaves and natural objects as decoration inside the sanctuary, a practice that continues today.¹³

In addition to plantings, the garden features several significant design components. A small basin, or birdbath, located at the northwest corner of the garden was finished soon after the building. In the southeast corner of the garden, there is a simple iron cross, which was taken from Mission San Miguel and given to Joseph Worcester for the church. A bronze locomotive bell used to call worshippers to service was also a gift: it was given to Othmar Tobisch, pastor of the church from 1929 to 1970, by the Western Pacific Railroad.¹⁴ Ten small brass and stained glass lanterns, selected by interior designer Ross Fish, were added to the garden in 2000. The fixtures are modern but in the Craftsman style.¹⁵

The main garden is connected to the rear garden by a door located between the sanctuary and the bride's room at the northwest corner of the property. The rear garden is of a more intimate scale but like the larger garden, it has red brick paths and a picturesque planting pattern. Doorways from the parish house and entrance vestibule of the church open onto this smaller garden.

Unlike the other buildings in the church complex, the residence at 2121 Lyon Street (originally intended to be the parsonage) is accessible from Lyon Street but not from the gardens. Although it is just two-and-a-half stories in height, it sits above the church because of the steeply sloping site. The building and site are long and narrow with the narrow end oriented toward Lyon Street. An exterior staircase leads along the south side of the building to the entrance, which is located in the south façade. The walls of the building are composed of brick on the first floor and stucco on the upper stories. The center section of the building is two-and-a-half stories; the height steps down to two stories on the east and west ends. All three building sections have low-pitched hipped roofs covered with mineral composition shingles and exposed rafters along the eaves. The east (street) façade is symmetrical; on the first floor, there are three segmentally-arched windows, and on the second floor there is a single window; all windows are metal casements. Pilasters ornament the corners of the second floor. The house interior has a high degree of integrity; it retains its original redwood finishes and trim, fixtures (including a Dirk van Erp chandelier), and pre-World War I kitchen.¹⁶

The residence has architectural features typical of the Prairie School style, which chronologically overlaps with and shares many elements in common with the First Bay Tradition including: natural materials, stucco walls, low hipped roofs, overhanging eaves, and an overall horizontal emphasis. In style and materials the building is very similar to the parish house and is complementary to the church.

¹² Kevin Starr, "Articles by Kevin Starr on Emanuel Swedenborg and San Francisco's Swedenborgian Church" (Published by the San Francisco Examiner. Reprinted by The Church of the New Jerusalem, 1982), 2.

¹³ Ruth Hendricks and Carol Green Wilson, *Sacred Places of San Francisco* (San Francisco, CA: Presidio Press, 1985), 71.

¹⁴ James F. Lawrence, D. Minister, Notes on Swedenborgian Church (9 August 2001), n.p.

¹⁵ Fish, Notes on Swedenborgian Church.

¹⁶ Lawrence, Notes on Swedenborgian Church.

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Located south of the sanctuary, the stucco-clad parish house faces both the interior garden and Washington Street. Because of the steeply sloping site and retaining wall that creates the garden, three stories of the residence are visible on the Washington Street side, and only two stories are visible from the garden. A one-story service wing extends from the north façade of the building. The roof is a combination of hipped and gabled forms; all are covered with mineral composition shingles. On the first floor of the Washington Street façade, there is an arched entranceway, an elliptically arched doorway and two small wood double-hung windows. A solid balustrade covered with stucco screens a stairway. The second floor has three double-hung wood windows with continuous lintels and sills. The windows of the shed-roofed wall dormer on the third floor are the same configuration. A porch on the side of the building facing the main garden was enclosed and an exterior stairway with a solid, stuccoed balustrade was added to the south façade in the 1950s.

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

Nationally: X Statewide: Locally:

Applicable National

Register Criteria: A B C X D

Criteria Considerations

(Exceptions): A X B C D E F G

NHL Criteria: 4

NHL Criteria Exception: 1

NHL Theme(s): III. Expressing Cultural Values

5. architecture, landscape architecture, and urban design

Areas of Significance: Architecture/Art

Period(s) of Significance: 1894-1913

Significant Dates: 1895

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: A. Page Brown
A.C. Schweinfurth
Bernard MaybeckHistoric Context: XVI. Architecture
R. Craftsman

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State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

The inspiration of minister Joseph Worcester, the Swedenborgian Church complex design fused his architectural ideas and the naturalist beliefs of the Swedenborgian religion. Worcester, the son of a Swedenborgian minister, was educated at the Boston and Harvard Scientific School. Combining his theological training, artistic and architectural interests, Worcester developed ideas about architecture based on his strong belief that the natural world was the representation of God, and man's construction should harmonize with the natural manifestations of God. "With its close association of fine art and building craft, wrapped in the spiritual and intellectual mantle of Joseph Worcester's Swedenborgianism, the Swedenborgian Church is, both in the process of its creation and in physical fact, a paradigm of what the Arts and Crafts movement was striving to be. High thinking and simple living (or in this case, worshiping) were brought together in a structure full of lofty spirit inspired by nature."¹⁷ "Through his efforts (A.C. Schweinfurth, the church's architect) on the Swedenborgian Church and with the stimulus offered by Joseph Worcester, he had created one of the earliest manifestations of the Arts and Crafts movement on the West Coast and, indeed, in the United States."¹⁸

The Swedenborgian Church ecclesiastical complex is an ensemble of buildings that is exceptionally valuable to our understanding of the development of a style of architecture we now call the First Bay Tradition, the harbinger of the Arts and Crafts Movement in the western United States. Natural materials, domestic scale and appearance, traditional and earthy structural forms, and site-specific designs define the First Bay Tradition. The visionary Swedenborgian minister Joseph Worcester brought together leading architects of the First Bay Tradition, A. Page Brown, A.C. Schweinfurth, and Bernard Maybeck, as well as the contemporary painter William Keith, stained-glass artist Bruce Porter, artist Mary Curtis Richardson and other designers and craftsmen to create an integrated complex of buildings. Two competing theories exist regarding who filled the role of lead designer on the project; one suggests Schweinfurth, and the other points to Brown with assistance from Maybeck. Regardless, the importance of the work lies in the collaboration of the designers and craftsmen under the direction of Worcester. Like the closely-allied Arts and Crafts Movement, the First Bay Tradition developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and stressed a comprehensive design approach: from architecture to interior furnishings, from fixtures to artwork. The church is one of the earliest, most influential and best surviving examples of this important national and regional building tradition.

Professor Richard Longstreth of George Washington University has observed that the Swedenborgian Chapel resembles a club or fraternal hall.

The allusion to an artists' club may well have been intentional. Worcester's parish served as an important, albeit unofficial, meeting ground for local artists and intellectuals, most of whom had little interest in Swedenborgian doctrine. The pastor's gospel of simplicity and harmony between art and nature, combined with his magnetic presence, were the generating forces. The church itself was a cooperative venture to which William Keith, Bruce Porter, and Bernard Maybeck all contributed their services. More than any other building, it became a center for the region's young creative figures. The design was also a pivotal work in Schweinfurth's career, integrating his interest in regional expression with a taste for primitive rusticity inspired by Worcester. The experience had a pronounced effect on his pursuit of a distinctively Californian architecture.¹⁹

¹⁷ Edward Bosley, "A.C. Schweinfurth," in *Toward A Simpler Way of Life: The Arts & Crafts Architects of California*, ed. Robert Winter (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 19.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁹ Richard Longstreth, *On the Edge of the World: Four Architects in San Francisco at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), 275.

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“In 1888 a group of English theorists, artists, and architects established the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society—thereby labeling a movement that sought to unite social reform, architecture, art, and the decorative arts.”²⁰

The Arts and Crafts movement was primarily a British phenomenon which originated in the 1860s in the philosophies of John Ruskin and William Morris. Both men were concerned with what they considered to be the ill effects of the Industrial Revolution on the human condition. They felt that the increased division of labor and the reliance on machinery which resulted from industrialization separated the worker from his craft, stopped his creativity and freedom, and robbed him of a sense of accomplishment and pleasure. In addition, they held the machine age responsible for replacing the traditional standards of beauty with those of economy and profit. In response, they advocated a return to the values of the medieval world when craftsmanship was at its height and the standards of beauty were upheld. They proposed a production system based on cooperation rather than on competition, citing the guilds of the Middle Ages as examples. In addition, they advocated fine craftsmanship, the simplification of design, and the honest use of materials. With these general ideas behind it, the Arts and Crafts movement was formed in England and popularized through art guilds, exhibitions, magazines and journals, and the works of craftsmen throughout Europe. The movement spread to the United States in the 1890s largely through the efforts of English architect C.R. Ashbee, who traveled extensively throughout the country lecturing on the ideals of the movement.²¹

“As distinctive as their exteriors were, the hallmark of Arts and Crafts buildings was their open plans and their straightforward yet beautifully finished and furnished interiors...architects sought out the most skillful landscape designers, the finest artisans, and the best fabricators of furniture, stained and leaded glass, metalwork, lamps, textiles, and tiles; and they worked closely with these craftspeople to achieve the wished-for unity of design.”²²

The foundations of the Swedenborgian religion originate in the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), an eighteenth century scientist turned mystic who used meditation to explore the unconscious. Swedenborg spent the final thirty years of his life in theological study and spiritual exploration. A prolific writer, he produced thirty volumes of writings on his interpretations of scriptural symbolism. One of his central teachings was that the beauty and order of nature reflect divine principles; every object in nature manifests a distinct aspect of Divine knowledge.²³ Although Swedenborg never officially founded a church or denomination (he intended his ideas to be a supplement to Christian religions) a group of his followers formally established a church in London in 1787. Shortly thereafter, in 1795, a church was established in the United States. Swedenborg's writings influenced Transcendentalist thinkers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry James Sr., and Bronson Alcott.

Joseph Worcester moved to California where he developed his religious career and put his architectural ideas into practice. In 1867 Worcester founded the second Swedenborgian Church in San Francisco. There was an established congregation with a lay minister, but Worcester was the first trained minister of the Church of the New Jerusalem (the name changed in the 1960s to The Swedenborgian Church) in San Francisco. In 1876 he

²⁰ James Massey and Shirley Maxwell, *Arts & Crafts Design in America: A State-by-State Guide* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1998), 7.

²¹ John F. Harwood, “Gustav Stickley House National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination Form” (Washington, DC: National Park Service, National Register, History and Education files, 1984) Section 8.

²² Massey and Maxwell, *Arts and Craft Design in America*, 13.

²³ James F. Lawrence, D. Minister, “Joseph Worcester's Fusion of Theology and Aesthetics,” (Address to the San Francisco Historical Society at the San Francisco Swedenborgian Church, 29 January 1996), 6.

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designed his home across the Bay in the Piedmont hills to reflect his ideas regarding simple living in harmony with nature. In contrast to the painted and stuccoed residences in the surrounding neighborhoods, Worcester's residence was unfinished redwood.²⁴ The small residence with low massing, wide eaves and a view of the bay is believed to be the first unpainted shingle home in the Bay Area.²⁵ Although some have considered the unpainted shingle houses of California as an adaptation of the East Coast Shingle style, Worcester's first cottage was built several years before many of the earliest East Coast "shingle-style" houses were finished.²⁶ Unlike the Shingle style residences made popular in the East by contemporary architectural firms such as McKim, Mead, and White, Worcester used untreated wood on the exterior *and* interior of his home. In addition, Worcester's house was much smaller in size and scale and had limited decorative ornamentation. Worcester moved across the Bay to San Francisco in 1877, and that same year he convinced one of his parishioners, Emilie Price Marshall, to build three shingled houses on Russian Hill.²⁷ Worcester aided in the design of these buildings and from 1888 to 1890 he designed his own house adjacent to these. All of the residences were small, covered with unpainted wood shingles, and had little ornamentation.

Artists and intellectuals were drawn to Worcester and his ideas about philosophy, nature, art and architecture. He promoted simple living that embraced and respected nature, and he was greatly inspired by the works of William Morris, John Ruskin, and Elbert Hubbard. His friends and followers included the naturalist John Muir, writer Jack London, California landscape painter William Keith, poet Charles Keeler, designer Bruce Porter and architect Bernard Maybeck. After ten years of meeting in the Druid's Hall on Sutter Street in downtown San Francisco, and consideration of a Nob Hill site, in the early 1890s Worcester began to plan for a new Swedenborgian Church to be located near the peak of Pacific Heights at the intersection of Washington and Lyon Streets. For the church design he drew on the talents of his friends and followers as well as his own strong ideas about architecture as guided by Swedenborgian theology.

Worcester retained the office of A. Page Brown to design the church. Brown was the architect of record and some evidence indicates he was primarily responsible for the design. Other accounts point to A.C. Schweinfurth (1864-1900), a firm employee, as the main designer.²⁸ Throughout his career Schweinfurth was committed to designing buildings in the First Bay Tradition idiom or the related Mission Revival style. Several of his projects in the Bay Area include Phoebe Hearst's Hacienda del Pozo de Verona, the Moody House, and the Unitarian Church.²⁹ Bernard Maybeck, who was a draftsman in Brown's San Francisco office in the early

²⁴ The house was moved to 575 Blair Avenue in Piedmont and has been completely remodeled. (Jean Dickenson, "The Worcester Legacy," *San Francisco Sunday Examiner and Chronicle*, 12 December 1976, from the Swedenborgian Church files, San Francisco, n.p.).

²⁵ Jacomena Maybeck, *Maybeck: The Family View* (Berkeley: Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association, 1980), 6.

²⁶ The Stoughton House in Cambridge Massachusetts by H.H. Richardson was completed in 1883, the Isaac Bell, Jr. House in Newport, Rhode Island by McKim, Mead, & White was built in 1882, and the W.G. Low House in Bristol, Rhode Island, also by McKim, Mead, & White, was finished in 1887. (Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London, England: Penguin Books, 1969). And Vincent Joseph Scully, *The Shingle Style and the Stick Style: Architectural Theory and Design from Richardson to the Origins of Wright* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971).

²⁷ In 1996 two of the four houses on Vallejo Street on Russian Hill were still standing (James F. Lawrence, D. Minister, "Joseph Worcester's Fusion of Theology and Aesthetics," (Address to the San Francisco Historical Society at the San Francisco Swedenborgian Church, 29 January 1996, 7).

²⁸ Robert Winter, ed., *Toward A Simpler Way of Life: The Arts & Crafts Architects of California* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press), 1.

²⁹ A.C. Schweinfurth began his career working for one of Boston's leading architectural firms, Peabody & Sterns along with two of his brothers. Schweinfurth left the firm to join A. Page Brown in New York.

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1890s, may have contributed to the design.³⁰ Maybeck would later become a nationally renowned architect and leading proponent of the First Bay Tradition. Involvement in the church design was not Maybeck's first introduction to Worcester's architectural aesthetic. In the East Bay, Maybeck, "found a cottage in Piedmont in the hills back of Oakland, and next door to him the Reverend Joseph Worcester had a little summer retreat. Looking into Mr. Worcester's windows, he saw the interior of the cottage was all of unpainted redwood boards. It was a revelation."³¹ Bernard Maybeck reputedly drew the plans (his name is printed on the back of a preliminary sketch for the church, which resembles the final design).³² If Maybeck was inspired by Worcester's house in the hills of Piedmont, then in turn, Worcester was "delighted in the young draftsman who felt so keen an interest in the work."³³

Worcester's design aesthetic is boldly displayed at the Swedenborgian Church, "He had his notion that the way to the door should lead through the garden in which the grass should be ever green, in which the first roses should bloom, in which the birds should gather to bath[e] at a fountain, in which the vines should start on their clinging course holding fast to the bricks of the church, as the men and women should hold fast to the Bible. He pictured a church interior in which there should be no pretense, no plaster, no paint."³⁴ The use of unfinished madrone trunks for posts and trusses was also inspired by Worcester. The minister personally selected the madrone trees from the Santa Cruz Mountains, which were to support the nave. Worcester probably decided the asymmetrical placement of the fireplace, altar and wrought iron chandelier: a decision which created a more organic rather than classical composition.³⁵

In addition to influencing the architectural design, Worcester adopted a comprehensive approach to the building's furnishing and ornamentation and brought together an impressive ensemble of California talent. Although the designer has not been concretely identified, according to Adrienne Kopa, A. Page Brown designed the rush-seated chairs for the sanctuary, which were then made by the craftsman A.J. Forbes.³⁶ William Keith, the well-known California landscape painter and close friend of Worcester, created and donated the four paintings that hang on the north wall of the sanctuary. The fourth in the series was added after the building was completed as a memorial to A. Page Brown who died January 21, 1896. The paintings represent "Seed Time," "After Rain," "Harvest," and "A Forest Interior," which are interpreted by some art historians to portray the seasons of California.³⁷ Designer Bruce Porter created the two stained-glass windows in the sanctuary and is credited with inspiring the design of the bell tower by sharing his sketch of an Italian church in Verona. A copper and mica shade on a pendant light fixture credited to Dirk van Erp, the well-known Arts and Crafts coppersmith, was hung in the vestry.³⁸ The portrait painter Mary Curtis Richardson designed the pulpit and

³⁰ Leslie Mandelson Freudenheim, and Elisabeth Sussman, *Building with Nature: Roots of the San Francisco First Bay Tradition* (Santa Barbara and Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, Inc., 1974), 21.

³¹ Charles Keeler, *Friends Bearing Torches* (Charles Keeler Family Papers, University of California, Berkeley), 226.

³² Robert Winter, ed., *Toward A Simpler Way of Life: The Arts & Crafts Architects of California* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press), 12.

³³ Mrs. John E. Back, letter, *The Gazette* (5 November 1964, Swedenborgian Church files, San Francisco), n.p.

³⁴ "A House That Teaches," (Unpublished essay, 30 September 1895, Swedenborgian Church files), n.p.

³⁵ Kenneth R. Trapp, *The Arts and Crafts Movement in California: Living the Good Life* (New York: The Oakland Museum and Abbeville Press, 1993), 28.

³⁶ Adrienne Kopa, "The Garden Church of San Francisco" (Unpublished essay, n.d. Swedenborgian Church files, San Francisco), 6.

³⁷ Brother Cornelius, F.S.C. M.A., *Keith: Old Master of California*. vol. 1 (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1942), 364 and 367.

³⁸ The lamp was probably added after the construction. There is no evidence that copper and mica lamps, such as the one

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communion table. Several of the artists and craftspersons who executed work for the church, including Keith, Porter, and Richardson, were active members of the congregation.

Construction on the church began in 1894, and the building was dedicated the following year at a total cost of \$4,500.³⁹ Like the First Bay Tradition and American Arts and Crafts Movement, the church was a blend of architectural traditions and ideas. It combined elements of Mediterranean architectural traditions (clay tiles, rustic brick, corbelled bell tower and Corinthian column and capital), California's Missions (rough stucco walls, arcades, exterior circulation paths and Spanish tiled roofs), and local vernacular construction (barns, miner's shanties and industrial framing methods).⁴⁰ In terms of style, materials and collaborative approach the church strongly represented Craftsman ideals.

The residence at 2121 Lyon Street was designed in 1894 by A. Page Brown's office and constructed shortly before the church. The designer of the residence may have been A.C. Schweinfurth. The house was built at the behest of Gertrude Bowers but was intended to be used as a parsonage for the church, a function it never performed.⁴¹ In March 1900 William Keith purchased the Lyon Street residence and the lot on which the parish house now stands from Bowers. Keith wanted the lot, so that he could dictate what would be built, and thereby ensure a compatible structure bordered the church on its south and west sides. Owning the parsonage provided added insurance against visual intrusion from structures north of the church.⁴²

The parish house (3204 Washington Street) was designed by G.W. Percy and Willis Polk and was completed on the lot just southwest of the church in 1900.⁴³ City directories indicate that neither Keith, Worcester, nor Bowers ever lived in either house. Keith sold the parsonage to Isabel Baldwin in 1910. A few months later, he sold the parish house to Worcester for "\$10 and other consideration,"⁴⁴ and Worcester transferred title to the Swedenborgian Church. Isabel Baldwin, sold the 2121 Lyon Street residence to the Eloesser family in 1921. The church relied on the rental income from the parish house, and as a result, the residence was not dedicated to church use until October 19, 1947. Historic photographs show that shortly after the residence was constructed, a porch was added to the garden side of the house. The eastern porch was modified and enclosed and an exterior stairway was added to the southeast corner of the building in 1959 through 1960.⁴⁵ The house now contains the

located in the vestry, were made by the Van Erp studio before 1910 (Dorothy Lamoureaux, "The Arts & Crafts Studio of Dirk Van Erp," San Francisco: San Francisco Craft and Folk Art Museum, 1989, 17). It is also likely that the building was not wired with electricity at the time of its construction.

³⁹ Richard Longstreth, *On the Edge of the World: Four Architects in San Francisco at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), 440.

⁴⁰ Leslie Mandelson Freudenheim, and Elisabeth Sussman, *Building with Nature: Roots of the San Francisco First Bay Tradition* (Santa Barbara and Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, Inc., 1974), 2-3.

⁴¹ Edward Bosley, "A.C. Schweinfurth," in *Toward A Simpler Way of Life: The Arts & Crafts Architects of California*, ed. Robert Winter (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 18, and Church, Collection of Photographs (Swedenborgian Church files, San Francisco).

⁴² "Building of a Church: A Brief History of the San Francisco Swedenborgian Church and Its Founders," (Swedenborgian Church files, San Francisco), 3.

⁴³ Richard Longstreth, *On the Edge of the World: Four Architects in San Francisco at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), 440.

⁴⁴ "Purchase of the San Francisco Parsonage: A Proposal," (San Francisco Society of the New Jerusalem, November, 1985), n.p.

⁴⁵ "Building of a Church: A Brief History of the San Francisco Swedenborgian Church and Its Founders," (Swedenborgian Church files, San Francisco), 3.

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church offices, meeting rooms, and other public rooms. The residence at 2121 Lyon Street is owned jointly by the church and the Eloesser family.

Northern California's architectural tradition has often been described as evolving in three phases: the First Bay Tradition, the Second Bay Tradition and the Third Bay Tradition. The earliest tradition reflects the influence of the Craftsman and Arts and Crafts styles, modified specifically by architects such as A. Page Brown, Bernard Maybeck, A.C. Schweinfurth, and Ernest Coxhead to a regional architecture utilizing the natural resources available in California. The Second Bay Tradition also employed natural materials, but the use of these materials was merged with modern technology. California architects, including Joseph Esherick, Gardner Daily, and William Wurster, attempted during the late 1930s and early 1940s to merge modern design with traditional, vernacular buildings using natural materials to shape innovative house plans. The Third Bay Tradition was codified in the 1970s and 1980s in the designs of Charles Moore, William Turnbull, and Donlyn Lyndon in projects such as Sea Ranch, which turned the horizontality of the California Ranch house on end, giving it a verticality that reflected simple vernacular farm buildings. Although regional movements, all three phases of the Bay Tradition reflected and had considerable influence on national architectural trends.

Early in the development of the First Bay Tradition, the architects and artists Joseph Worcester brought together to design the Swedenborgian church were A. Page Brown, Bernard Maybeck, and A.C. Schweinfurth; together they played a central role in the development of this style. This First Tradition employed the ideas of the English and American Arts and Crafts movements and used local materials and adapted their designs to harmonize with the California landscape. The church and Worcester's advocacy of simple forms, natural materials, and harmonious relationship with nature would have a lasting influence on the region's architecture.

The spirit of the [church], with all its quiet restfulness, its homelike charm, its naïve grace, has sunk deep in the lives of a small but earnest group of men . . . The message of its builder has reached his mark, and here and there through city and town, homes have been reared in the same simple fashion—plain, straightforward, genuine homes, covered with unpainted shingles, or built of rough brick, with much natural redwood inside, in broad unvarnished panels . . . To find this spirit, which would have been a delight to William Morris, so strongly rooted as to assume almost the aspect of a cult, is I take it, one of the most remarkable features of a civilization so new as that of modern San Francisco.⁴⁶

A. Page Brown, the architect of record for the project, was one of the first East Coast architects with professional training to work in San Francisco. While in the area he received a remarkable number of commissions including the Crocker Old People's Home, the Crocker Building and the Ferry Building. Unfortunately, a carriage accident cut Brown's life short in 1896 only a year after the completion of the church. The simple chairs in the church were the first to be given the label Mission style, a name that would be used to designate a style closely allied to the Arts and Crafts movement. After leaving Brown's firm, Maybeck and Schweinfurth placed identical chairs in several of their buildings: Maybeck in Wynton Castle for Phoebe Apperson Hearst and the William P. Rieger house and Schweinfurth in the Volney C. Moody house.⁴⁷ Bernard Maybeck would become one of the most famous architects of the First Bay style, and many features of the church such as: exposed framing, soaring spaces, untreated wood interiors, and handcrafted furnishings would become basic to his residential and ecclesiastical designs.⁴⁸ The First Bay Tradition would later evolve to suit

⁴⁶ Charles Keeler, *San Francisco and Thereabout* (San Francisco: California Promotion Committee, 1903), 41-42.

⁴⁷ Edward Bosley, "A.C. Schweinfurth," in *Toward A Simpler Way of Life: The Arts & Crafts Architects of California*, ed. Robert Winter (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 19.

⁴⁸ Leslie Mandelson Freudenheim, and Elisabeth Sussman, *Building with Nature: Roots of the San Francisco First Bay Tradition* (Santa Barbara and Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, Inc., 1974), 27. Also designed by Maybeck, the First Church of Christ, Scientist in Berkeley, California was designated an NHL in 1977 and Principia College Historic District in Principia, Illinois was

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contemporary issues in the Second and Third Phases of the First Bay Tradition. Worcester's ideas as embodied in the church also influenced the architects Ernest Coxhead and Willis Polk, artist William Keith, and poet Charles Keeler.⁴⁹ Keith, in particular shared a close personal and professional relationship with Worcester; during his thirty years as a leading California landscape painter, William Keith would continue to turn to his friend Joseph Worcester for advice on his paintings.⁵⁰

Worcester died in 1913; the loss of their spiritual leader was difficult for the congregation. Faced with a diminishing number of congregants, on January 31, 1932 the three Swedenborgian societies in the First Bay Tradition, the O'Farrell, Lyon Street, and Berkeley, merged to become the San Francisco Society of the New Jerusalem with two parishes, one in San Francisco, at the Lyon Street church, and the other in Berkeley.⁵¹ The congregation remains small but flourishes. Almost from the time of construction, the church was a favorite place for weddings of all denominations and continues this tradition today.⁵²

The Swedenborgian ecclesiastical complex possesses a high degree of integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. The church, parish house and parsonage remain in their historic locations and retain their relationship to each other and the gardens. Of the three buildings, only the parish house has had a significant addition, and all of the buildings clearly communicate their original design. In particular, the church's exterior and interior are well preserved. Similarly, the complex's setting remains as it was in 1895; the building is elevated above the street by a massive retaining wall that surrounds the property. Inside the complex, historic brick paths lead through the gardens, which are planted with trees, shrubs, grass, and flowers as originally designed. At the turn of the twentieth century, the church was surrounded by a residential neighborhood consisting of Victorian, Classical, Shingle style and First Bay Tradition houses, and the character of the area remains the same. Most notably, nearby on the 3200 block of Pacific Avenue, a group of eight First Bay Tradition residences step down the hill. The homes are a harmonious group of buildings designed by the architects, Willis Polk, Ernest Coxhead, Bernard Maybeck, and William F. Knowles.

The building materials of the complex are largely original. Even the alterations, such as the porch and stair addition to the parish house and the porch roof over the entrance of the church, have been constructed out of materials similar to those of the original buildings. In addition, the few changes that have been made are additive rather than subtractive in nature and could be removed. Because the First Bay Tradition stressed craftsmanship and collaboration between architects, artists and craftsmen, the workmanship of the complex is a very important consideration, and it has been retained to a remarkable degree; architectural features, finishes, furnishings and artwork are all intact and in their original locations. Since its dedication in 1895, the complex has always been used by the Swedenborgian Church. The consistency of use and preservation of design features and setting has maintained the historic feeling and association of the complex; a visitor to the church today would find the quiet verdant garden, natural materials, simple structures, handcrafted wood furnishings, and artwork strikingly similar to the complex envisioned by Joseph Worcester and created by a group of talented architects, artists and craftsmen over a hundred years ago. "This still-active Pacific Heights

designated an NHL in 1993.

⁴⁹ Richard Longstreth, *On the Edge of the World: Four Architects in San Francisco at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1983), 339.

⁵⁰ Alfred C. Harrison Jr., *William Keith: The Saint Mary's College Collection*, ed. Ann Harlow (Saint Mary's College of California, 1988), 1. Numerous letters from Keith to Worcester are located in the Swedenborgian Church files.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵² Louise Weick, "Do You Know Your San Francisco? The Swedenborgian Church," *The San Francisco Examiner* (4 December 1910, Swedenborgian Church files, San Francisco), n.p.

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church...has been called California's earliest pure Arts and Crafts building...The harmonious design affirms the collaborative ideal of the Arts and Crafts movement..."⁵³

⁵³ Massey and Maxwell, *Arts & Crafts Design in America*, 71 and 73.

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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: #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other (Specify Repository): Swedenborgian Church Archives

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: less than one acre

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing
	10	548860	4182490

Verbal Boundary Description:

The Swedenborgian Church complex is located on the northwest corner of the intersection of Washington and Lyon Streets. The complex's boundary extends 127.25 feet north on Lyon Street, runs west (perpendicular to Lyon Street) 136.5 feet, then south 25 feet, then east for 50 feet, then south again for 102.8 feet, and then east for 86.5 feet to the beginning point.

Boundary Justification:

The boundary includes the church, parish house at 3204 Washington Street, parsonage at 2121 Lyon Street and the related gardens, which were historically built as part of the Swedenborgian Church complex and which retain integrity.

SWEDENBORGIAN CHURCH

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

11. FORM PREPARED BY

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(202) 354-2216DESIGNATED A NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK
August 18, 2004