

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

JAN 29 2001

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This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Methodist Episcopal Church of Isle La Motte

other names/site number United Methodist Church of Isle La Motte

2. Location

street & number 67 Church Street  Not for publication

city or town Isle La Motte  vicinity

state Vermont code VT county Grand Isle code 013 zip code 05463

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Elsa Gilbert NR Specialist 1/24/2001  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Vermont State Historic Preservation Office  
State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting official/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

- I hereby certify that the property is:
- entered in the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register  
 See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

Edson H. Beall  
Signature of the Keeper

3/2/01  
Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property  
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1		Total

Name of related multiple property listing  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)  
Religious Buildings, Sites, and  
Structures of Vermont

Number of contributing resources previously listed  
in the National Register  
0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions  
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/Religious facility

EDUCATION/School

GOVERNMENT/City hall

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Current Functions  
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/Religious facility

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

7. Description

Architectural Classification  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Greek Revival

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Materials  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone

walls Limestone

Wood

roof Slate

other Wood

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Methodist Episcopal Church of Isle La Motte  
Isle La Motte, Grand Isle County, Vermont

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**Description**

Located just east of the Four Corners intersection at Vermont Route 129, on the north side of Church Street in the town of Isle La Motte, The United Methodist Church of Isle La Motte is a Greek Revival style church of solid masonry construction and symmetrical plan, erected in 1843 by Scottish stonemason James Ritchie. The massing of the main block has remained unchanged since construction except for a kitchen ell and shed extension, and a belfry. The property is .5 acres in size and includes a fenced park to the east of the building. Until 1930, this was the site of the horse sheds used to shelter horses and carriages while parishioners attended service. An archaeological study would identify possible remains of the horse sheds. To the west of the church is a white Queen Anne style parsonage, erected in 1874, and a water pump, used to supply water to the church until plumbing was installed in 1974. This exceptional and well-preserved property retains its integrity of design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

The original two story, load-bearing stone mass is a two-by-three bay, south facing gable front structure that measures 44 feet long by 32 feet wide and 25 feet high. The height of the upper floor sanctuary walls is greater than that of the lower level, basement walls. The stone used in the walls comes from the Fisk Quarry on Isle La Motte. Often referred to as unpolished black marble, the stone is actually a Lower Ordovician Chazy Limestone. It contains fossilized organic elements, as do the majority of the island's geological deposits. The stone is light gray in color and bears a slight polish. The individual masonry units that make up the walls are of medium size and square cut, set in regular coursing, and joined with good quality, pale colored lime mortar.

There are fourteen window openings distributed among the south, east, and west walls. The east and west upper story side walls each have three evenly spaced, stained glass windows, and the south, or front, upper wall has two of the same. Viewed from the exterior, the window colors appear muted, in tones of blue-gray. Geometric shapes form the principal design motif: an elongated arch inscribing a mostly lozenge pattern with some diamonds is in turn inscribed within a rectangular frame surrounded by a diamond patterned border. Uniform in size, the stained glass windows are approximately one-third larger in size than the lower story, six over six, double hung sash, clear paned windows.

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The latter total six, three each on the east and west facades. Windows at both levels have painted white wood frames and casings, and heavy, single slab, straight edged stone lintels.

The slate covered gable roof has a low pitch, so that the wall dominates the facade. The roof trim is classical in type, with wide band return box cornice and frieze on the gable front. A single interior stone chimney rises from the north end of the roof. At the south end is a two stage, painted white clapboard belfry, installed in 1877. The first stage is crowned by a full entablature supporting the second stage. The latter is also crowned by a full entablature which, in turn, supports a roof of four pedimented gables, originally open on all four sides and now enclosed by louvers.

The main entry is placed in the center of the south facing facade and consists of a recessed, double leaf door with four-paneled reveals. In the upper quarter of each leaf is a set of eight small clear pane glass. The remainder of the door is divided into three panels of similar width but varying height. The doors and the frame are painted white wood.

Attached to the north facade of the main block is a kitchen ell and shed. The ell is a one-story, painted white clapboard structure with a steeply pitched, asphalt shingled gable roof. At the south end of the latter is a slender brick chimney. Three contiguous, six over six, double hung sash windows light the east and west walls. There is no fenestration in the north and south gable walls, as these are where the ell meets the shed and church walls, respectively. The shed is a two-story, two bay, gable front structure with medium pitched gable roof. Clad in painted white clapboard, the shed eaves side attaches to the ell's north wall. The shed's only fenestration is on the east facing gable end. It is a narrow, double hung sash window located in the center of the upper story. To its lower left is a double-width, sliding batten barn door.

The interior main entry vestibule walls have oak wainscotting. Stairs lead from the vestibule to a first floor room, used for church social functions. The room features a pressed metal ceiling and two dark wood columns with smooth finish. It is lighted by three windows on each of the east and west lower side walls. From this space, two wood doors open into the kitchen ell, lighted by three windows on each side wall. Stairs lead from the ell up to an enclosed restroom and, to its right, the unfinished storage shed area.

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Also leading from the vestibule are stairs to the main level sanctuary. A circa 1885 photograph of the sanctuary shows a view of the north wall behind the altar. The wall was papered with a floral border print, which served as a background to a decorative classical frame, made of wood, with fluted pilasters and simple entablature. This frame, along with the birch wainscoting that covers the lower portion of all four sanctuary walls, appear in the photograph to be painted white. Today, they display their natural wood finish and the paper wall covering has since been removed. In 1996, insulation was installed between the outer stone wall and the interior sheetrock, and the walls subsequently painted in a muted rose-beige hue. Principal lighting in the sanctuary is from the stained glass windows, which reveal their bright red and yellow coloring, when viewed from this interior space. The sanctuary floor is carpeted. The ceiling is covered with narrow, painted white boards that show no signs of stress or previous repair. It is identical to the ceiling that appears in the aforementioned 1885 photograph.

The altar faces south, toward the congregation. The dark wood altar rail is about three feet high, and its delicate, simply carved balusters end in an urn shaped newel post with smooth round cap at each of its four corners. To the east of the altar is an Estey organ, owned and used by the church since 1869. The manufacture of Estey organs began in Brattleboro, Vermont in 1846.

Facing north, toward the altar, are six ranges of pews in each of the sanctuary's side sections and eight ranges in the center section. At the south end of the sanctuary is a slightly elevated loge containing three additional ranges of pews. The sides of each pew have a delicate scroll carving on the ends of each arm rest; the benches are covered with dark red velvet cushions.

Like the exterior, the building's interior condition is excellent and continues to serve the Isle La Motte Methodist community with all of its significant historic architectural features intact.

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Social History

**Period of Significance**

1843 - 1947

**Significant Dates**

1843

1856

1892

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

**Architect/Builder**

Ritchie, James

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**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

Name of repository:

\_\_\_\_\_

Methodist Episcopal Church of Isle La Motte

Grand Isle County, Vermont

Name of Property

County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property .5 acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 18 631270 49704000
Zone Easting Northing

3
Zone Easting Northing

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Diane Dolbashian
University of Vermont
organization Graduate Historic Preservation Program date April 29, 1997
street & number Wheeler House, 442 Main Street telephone 1-802-656-3180
city or town Burlington state VT. zip code 05405

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Trustees of the United Methodist Church of Isle La Motte
street & number 67 Church Street telephone 1-802-928-3331
city or town Isle La Motte state Vermont zip code 05463

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Methodist Episcopal Church of Isle La Motte  
Isle La Motte, Grand Isle County, Vermont

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**Statement of Significance**

The United Methodist Church of Isle La Motte, in Isle La Motte, Vermont, is significant under National Register Criterion C as a distinctive example of a Greek Revival church and as the work of Scottish immigrant and stone mason James Ritchie, who constructed the church in 1843. His work is representative of an earlier generation of building, and in particular, stone masonry. Ritchie's work has proven to be consistently enduring, and the United Methodist Church is one of the best examples of his craftsmanship. In this building and others he erected on the island between his arrival circa 1822 and his death in 1850, he used as principal building material the prized Isle La Motte limestone and made it a defining feature of his work. The church also meets National Register Criterion A as a material symbol of the nation's early period of religious development and, more specifically, the history of American Methodism in the Champlain Valley. The architectural merit and long standing civic associations of the United Methodist Church of Isle La Motte assure its eligibility under Criterion Consideration A. The church is also being nominated under the multiple property submission, "Religious Buildings, Sites, and Structures of Vermont," and clearly meets the registration requirements for the property type "Church."

Located just below the Canadian border in Grand Isle County, in the extreme northwest corner of Vermont, Isle La Motte is surrounded by the waters of Lake Champlain. Its recorded history begins with a reference in Samuel de Champlain's diary to the four beautiful islands he discovered in 1609 when he sailed up Quebec's Richelieu River into the lake now bearing his name.

Isle La Motte is named after the French regiment captain, Pierre de St. Paul, Sieur de La Motte-Lussiere, who in 1666 established Fort St. Anne, Vermont's first white settlement, on the island's northwest shore, which was a common meeting place for the Algonquin and Iroquois tribes as late as 1646. From this period, for more than one hundred years, the ownership of Isle La Motte and pieces of its land was claimed at various times by France, England, Canada, and the Colony of New York. The town charter, granted in 1779 by Governor Thomas Chittenden, became the final, legally binding document for Isle La Motte land titles.



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Settlers came to the island slowly and with only modest financial means. The fifteen families recorded by the 1791 Census made improvements to the town at their own expense and with their own labor, as there was no town organization or taxation system to support such endeavors. March 24, 1791 marked the occasion of the first town meeting. By 1810, two school districts had been established in each of the north and south parts of the island and a subsequent third, or middle, district in 1842. Designated as School District No. 2, the latter carried out its educational mission in the south end of the basement of the Methodist Episcopal Church, constructed in 1843. In the north end of the building's basement was a town meeting space; the M.E. Society conducted religious meetings on the upper floor.

Prior to the construction of the church building, the Methodist Episcopal Society of Isle La Motte, the first Methodist group to form on the island, met in the home of Elihu Hall, head of one of the town's first fifteen families. As the number of Society members grew, so also the need for a church building. In 1830, prominent land owner and Society leader Ira Hill offered to give land for a construction site, provided an adequate sum could be raised for materials and labor. This campaign failed, however, for lack of subscriptions. It wasn't until 1843 that the Methodist Society's building committee contracted with James Ritchie to build a "suitable House for Public Worship, a District School, and Town House," as stipulated in Ira Hill's deed for the lot of land.

James Ritchie presented to the members of the building committee an account for payment due for his work on the meeting house. Dated October 14, 1843, it listed the dimensions of the building as 25 feet, one inch in height, 44 feet in length, and 32 feet in width. Ritchie received payment for 485 perches at the contractual rate of \$.80 for each perch of wall, or the sum of \$388. Additional costs, including \$12 for "two men at Fisk Quarry dressing cut stone," and \$20 for "not getting the stone to cut in the winter," brought the payment to a total of \$434.

While Ritchie had built the basement and erected the stone walls, and some sort of chapel flooring served as a temporary roof for the basement, the funds necessary to complete the building were lacking. In 1847, Rev. Henry B. Taylor was appointed to the still unfinished church which also had a debt of \$400. He raised the money to complete construction and pay the debt, and in January 1848, the church was dedicated.

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Twelve years later, in January 1856, chimney soot caused a fire in the church, destroying all but the stone walls. The Board of Stewards then contacted with Henry Gordon and Calvin Hill to repair and refinish the building at a cost of \$1550. At the March town meeting, members voted to allocate \$400 of public money to repair the basement, while the church congregation would assume the cost of repairs to the upper floor. The rebuilt church was rededicated in the early fall of that same year.

The remainder of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw several amendments to the building's interior and exterior as well as a major change in ownership. In 1869, an Estey organ, still in use, was purchased for \$200. A Victorian style parsonage was erected in 1874 on the church property. In 1877, a two-stage, clapboard belfry surmounted by four pedimented gables was added to house the church bell. In 1885, carpeting was installed at the cost of \$65, and the pew cushions purchased that same year for \$105. And finally, in 1892, the shared use of the building ended when Nelson Fisk purchased the rights held by the town and generously deeded the whole without cost to the church trustees.

Ira Hill, Carmi Hall, and Ezra Pike, Jr., three of the seven member church building committee that hired Scottish trained stone mason James Ritchie, knew first hand the quality of Ritchie's work. In 1822, Ritchie built the Ira Hill House (Vermont Historic Sites and Structures Survey 0703-13, #9), used as personal residence, hotel, and, for a time, post office; and in 1840, he built a second dwelling for the Hill family, which is now the Village Library (0703-13, #2). At age fourteen, Carmi Hall assisted Ritchie in constructing a house for his grandfather. The Hall House (0702-22) was built in 1828 for Enoch Hall, who had come to Isle La Motte in 1788. And in 1829, Ritchie built the Ezra Pike House (0703-06) for Ezra Pike, Jr., whose father Ezra had come from Hoosac, New York, to settle early on Isle La Motte.

The United Methodist Church is probably the finest example of James Ritchie's work on the island town where his buildings remain in good condition despite the harsh challenges of winter. Designed in the Greek Revival architectural style, the church building reflects the classicism of a simple, ordered architectural plan. The well balanced spatial relationships - the walls to the roof, the openings to the walls, the walls to each other - immediately establish a visual harmony and a sense of structural symmetry. The parallel walls comfortably enclose the open plan of the interior space of worship which can be wholly experienced from any vantage point.

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Methodist Episcopal Church of Isle La Motte  
Isle La Motte, Grand Isle County, Vermont

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The building's content and appearance relate directly to James Ritchie's skill and talent as a builder in addition to the technical and aesthetic choices he made in designing this church. First, Ritchie's solid masonry construction, his use of traditionally worked, hand-cut stone as the true material of construction, and not just as decorative veneer, signifies that durability and strength were of paramount importance to his work. Structurally, the stone supports the weight of the church floor and the slate roof. Aesthetically, Ritchie made use of the stone's sculptural quality to express classical forms in a modern, simplified design. Other choices - the treatment of the stones' surface, their dimension and spacing, how they are joined and their limits clarified as individual building units - likewise contribute to the building's character and are described below. His choices suggest a monumentality associated with religious architecture combined with a modesty of scale in proper proportion to the surrounding space of the church's property.

The stone Ritchie used to build the United Methodist Church is commonly called Isle La Motte unpolished black marble, from the Fisk Quarry, located in the southwest corner of the island. In actuality, the stone is a Lower Ordovician Chazy Limestone, a light gray limestone that will bear a slight polish. One can speculate that Ritchie had worked with granite while an apprentice stonemason in Scotland, where that stone is abundant, and that this might explain his facility for working with the softer limestone. Ritchie worked the stone manually, fashioning each piece to fit into the predetermined masonry configuration. Ritchie cut squared stones, which he set in regular coursing and joined with a good quality, pale-colored lime mortar probably derived from the same limestone. Twelve window openings, each having a heavy single slab, straight edged stone lintel and sill, cut into the east and west parallel walls, attest to the strength of Ritchie's masonry.

As a religious organization, the United Methodist Church of Isle La Motte originated from the Methodist Episcopal Church, the oldest and largest of the American Methodist denominations. The evolution of the Isle La Motte church reflects the development of early American Methodism.

Brought to pre-Revolutionary America from England by John and Charles Wesley, American Methodism was embodied by the Methodist Episcopal Church, formed at the Christmas Conference in Baltimore in 1784, with a strong agenda of social activism. As early as 1788, the General Conference instructed the Reverend Freeborn Garrettson to

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“push north” the Church’s evangelical mission. The Conference also expected Samuel Wigton to form circuits in the Lake Champlain region, although no societies actually existed there at the time.

By the first decade or so of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some of the more notable names in American Methodist history visited various Vermont localities. Noted theologian, preacher, and author Lorenzo Dow attended two society meetings in Grand Isle County. The Reverend Laban Clark, a founder of Wesleyan University, preached in the Burlington district. Francis Asbury, one of the first preachers John Wesley sent to the American colonies and one of the most influential figures in the Methodist movement, worked for some time in the Middlebury, Charlotte and Vergennes areas.

In 1802, the New York (state) Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church appointed William Anson as preacher to the new Grand Isle circuit. It was Anson who brought Methodism to Isle La Motte and who organized the Methodist Episcopal Church there in 1816. The number of Methodist members gradually increased everywhere. By 1825, the Methodist Episcopal Church reported a membership of 341,000 in the young American republic. When the larger New York (state) Conference reorganized into regions, Grand Isle County was assigned to the Troy (New York) Conference in 1832.

The circuit preacher - the itinerant minister - continued his evangelical mission through this period. The Reverend Henry B. Taylor was one of these. He raised \$400 to complete construction on the Isle La Motte Methodist Episcopal Church, a sum considerably exceeding his own annual salary of about \$100. He also risked his life when, returning from Corbeau, New York, with pine boards for the church pews, his open scow capsized in the lake’s cold December waters.

The present century has been a time of major change in Methodist church organization. The Methodist Church formed as a new entity when the original Methodist Episcopal Church and two other independent denominations combined in 1939. In 1968, the union of the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church created the United Methodist Church, dedicated to a broad ecumenical mission.

The United Methodist Church of Isle La Motte has changed accordingly. Still active, it continues to serve a small year-round island town population that swells in summer

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months with the advent of vacationers. In the last quarter century, the church has made significant improvements to the life of its building. Plumbing was installed in the church building for the first time in 1974 and the kitchen subsequently equipped with running hot and cold water, new sink, counter, and cupboards. Church socials no longer require fetching water from the outside pump. In 1981, an electric heating system replaced the oil furnace, and the ceilings of both the sanctuary and basement were insulated. New carpeting was installed in 1982. In 1996, the sanctuary walls were insulated and repainted.

Thanks to the legacy of James Ritchie's fine work and the sustained efforts of its members to ensure the building's overall viability, the United Methodist Church of Isle La Motte will no doubt endure yet another century, architecturally significant for the historic building tradition it exemplifies, and socially significant for its association with one of this country's important religious movements.

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### Verbal Boundary Description

The boundaries of the United Methodist Church of Isle La Motte are defined by the .5 acre rectangle beginning on the north side of Church Street, 198 feet to the east of the Four Corners on Route 129; then running 132 feet in the direction north, at a right angle to Church Street; then 165 feet in the direction east, parallel to Church Street; then 132 feet in the direction south, at a right angle to Church Street; then 165 feet in the direction west to the beginning point.

### Boundary Justification

The boundaries of the United Methodist Church of Isle La Motte are recorded in both the original land deed of July 24, 1843 and the quit claim deed of November 27, 1847 in Volume 3 of the Isle La Motte land records, on pages 316 and 339 respectively. The historic boundaries, as outlined in the Verbal Boundary Description and documented in said land records, have remained unaltered to the present time.