

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Church of St. James-the-Less

and/or common \*ST. JAMES-THE-LESS EPISCOPAL CHURCH

2. Location

street & number Hunting Park Avenue at Clearfield Street not for publication

city, town Philadelphia vicinity of

state Pennsylvania code 42 county Philadelphia code 021

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Church of St. James-the-Less

street & number Hunting Park Avenue at Clearfield Street

city, town Philadelphia vicinity of state Pennsylvania 19132

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. City of Philadelphia, Recorder of Deed Office

street & number City Hall

city, town Philadelphia state Pennsylvania

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Historical Commission has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date federal state X county X local

depository for survey records Historical Commission

city, town Philadelphia state Pennsylvania

## 7. Description

### Condition

excellent  
 good  
 fair

deteriorated  
 ruins  
 unexposed

### Check one

unaltered  
 altered

### Check one

original site  
 moved      date \_\_\_\_\_

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

One of the most "English" churches in America, St. James-the-Less is constructed of random Granite ashlar, the nave and aisles being 30 feet 4 inches wide by 61 feet 6 inches long with a one-story rear vestry. The one story building carries a sloping gable roof, pointed-arch windows, open belfry at the west end, and a rectangular chancel. The walls are 2 1/2 feet thick. A 1983 guide describes the building thus:<sup>1</sup>

The heavy arches supporting the interior walls are carried on short pillars alternately round and octagonal, 18 inches in diameter, and only 11 feet apart. The long sloping roof, borne on massive oak beams and supported over the Nave by a seven-sided truss of an ancient pattern, rises into a dimly lighted peak. There are no clerestory windows here to illuminate the Nave, as one might expect in a town church, St. James the Less being a true replica of a 13th century rural English parish church.

The fabric of the church remains essentially unchanged from the original church as consecrated in 1850. The original floor of Minton tiles, though taken up in 1913 to permit the installation of a central heating system and a concrete sub-floor to reduce dampness, was relaid as closely as possible to the original pattern.

The pews of richly carved oak are original and reflect the influence of the Instruments Ecclesiastica, A Series of Working Designs for the Furniture, Fittings, and Decorations of Churches and their Precincts, prepared by William Butterfield for the Cambridge Camden Society in 1847.

The windows in the church have undergone the greatest change. Originally they were glazed with diamond-shaped clear glass panes, cast in a floral pattern, and set in lead. Over the years, one by one the windows were filled with the stained glass we see today. Only one of the tiny double-lancet aisle windows of the Early English style retains the original glazing. West of the North Door, hidden behind the ranks of organ pipes, and only visible from outside the church, is the last remaining bit of the original glass supplied by Powel's White Friars Glassworks, London, c. 1847.

The lighting in the Nave, Art Nouveau in style, is from the middle period of St. James the Less, 1901-1950, having been installed in 1913 when the heating and lighting of the church were "modernized." In 1869, it was suggested that gas illumination be installed, but there is no indication that the church was ever lighted by gas. In 1885, oil lamps were installed, hung on brackets and in the same position as the electric fixtures of today. The red streaking at the base of the arches over the capital gives mute testimony to the routine striking of the sulfur matches used in lighting them. Originally, the Nave was illuminated by two or three Gothic-style chandeliers, each of which held twelve candles.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
..... prehistoric	..... archeology-prehistoric	..... community planning	..... landscape architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religion
..... 1400-1499	..... archeology-historic	..... conservation	..... law	..... science
..... 1500-1599	..... agriculture	..... economics	..... literature	..... sculpture
..... 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	..... education	..... military	..... social/ humanitarian
..... 1700-1799	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> art	..... engineering	..... music	..... theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	..... commerce	..... exploration/settlement	..... philosophy	..... transportation
..... 1900-	..... communications	..... industry	..... politics/government	..... other (specify)
		..... invention		

**Specific dates** 1846-1850      **Builder/Architect** G. G. Place, Architect  
John E. Carver, Builder

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

St. James-the-Less is the first pure example of an English Parish church in America. It is also the first example of a building constructed according to plans provided by the English Ecclesiological Society to an American Anglican congregation. Its influence on American architecture was profound.

Roughly contemporary with Richard Upjohn's New Saint Mary's, Burlington, New Jersey, St James-the-Less was more "archaeologically" correct, according to the Cambridge Camden Society (the Ecclesiologists) who provided the plans for the new building patterned after the country church, St. Michaels, Longstanton in Cambridgeshire (ca. 1230 A.D.).

The idea for this country church was Robert Ralston's, a landowner along the Ridge Road and a founder of the parish that would become St James. Samuel Jarvis, founder of the General Theological Seminary in New York, was a friend of Ralstons. While in England, Jarvis became familiar with the Cambridge Camden Society, a group dedicated to the preservation of the Gothic Church in England and the building of the English country parish church in the New World.

The site is a high bluff above the Schuylkill River adjacent to Laurel Hill Cemetery in what was once a quiet, rural area. Today it is a crowded innercity neighborhood.

William Pierson writes as follows of St. Michael's, Longstanton:<sup>2</sup>

This beautiful little medieval church was greatly admired by the Ecclesiologists, and was one of three selected by them as appropriate in size and character for use in the "colonies." Its primary architectural ingredients were those which have been seen in Pugin's St. Oswald's, Liverpool. They are a one-story nave with a high, steeply sloping roof, a smaller but similarly shaped attached chancel, and a south porch. Unlike St. Oswald's St. Michael's does not have a frontal tower and spire. Instead, in accordance with its smaller size, it has a bell gable, or bell cote, rising directly in the plane of the west wall. Instead, this form typifies a special group of very small English parish churches, and because of its size it was popular with the Revivalists for small rural parishes. Two characteristic examples were shown by Pugin in his Present State (St. Anne's, Keighley and St. Mary's Southport).

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property \_\_\_\_\_

Quadrangle name \_\_\_\_\_

Quadrangle scale \_\_\_\_\_

UTM References

A 

1	8	4	8	4	3	7	0	4	4	2	7	9	8	0
Zone			Easting					Northing						

B 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

C 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

D 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

E 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

F 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

G 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

H 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

Verbal boundary description and justification

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

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 Carolyn Pitts, Architectural Historian

organization National Park Service date August 10, 1984

street & number 1100 L Street, NW telephone (202) 343-8166

city or town Washington state DC 20240

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

\_\_\_ national \_\_\_ state \_\_\_ local

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

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title date

For NPS use only

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

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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The stained glass is American, English and some magnificent French glass designed by Henri Gerente, probably the foremost stained glass artist of his day. Gerente had gained his reputation from his work at Ste. Chapelle, Saint Denis and Canterbury and Ely Cathedrals.

The Altar has been enriched over the years with carving and a cross and candlesticks. There are a number of other embellishments on the interior chapels and an organ of modern design (1927).

The interior walls are left unpainted and unplastered so as to faithfully reproduce the English parish church. In 1878, the chancel roof was decorated with a Pre-Raphaelite design of lillies, palms, and angels.

The Rood Screen (1878) is made of copper, brass, and iron and set with semi-precious stones.

The present Sacristy replaces the original stone Vestry which had a shed roof. St. Michael's Long Stanton, the prototype for St. James-the-Less, had no vestry. The tranquility of the site is due in large part to the quiet English graveyard that clusters near the small church. In addition, the Wanamaker Memorial Tower stands nearby with its bells and chiming clock. There is also a Sexton's house, Rectory, Parish House and horse sheds all positioned along the western end of the property.

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The adoption of St. Michael's as the model for St. James-the-Less was fortunate because the church was exactly right in size and character for the particular situation it was built to serve. More than that, it provided the most suitable prototype yet to appear in America for the countless suburban and rural Episcopal parishes which were coming into being as the country expanded. The cruciform plan, although eminently appropriate for the more ambitious churches such as St. Mary's Burlington, still had hovering over it the shadow of the great cathedrals. The simple nave church, on the other hand, spoke with uncomplicated eloquence of both the aspirations and the limited means of the average small parish. Yet, in the strictest sense of the phrase, St. James-the-Less was not an American Gothic Revival church; it was rather a transplantation of an English parish church. The degree to which it was inspired and directed from England made this inevitable. Moreover, many of the incidental items in the church were made in England, including the tiles for the chancel and some of the stained glass. Even the designs for the lych gate and tombstones in the churchyard were taken from an English publication provided by Butterfield. Finally, no prominent architect then practicing in America is known to have been connected with either the design or the construction of the building. Work was directed by Robert Ralston, and construction attributed to the contractor, John E. Carver.

"St. James-the-Less" is a pure and exquisitely beautiful Gothic church, unmatched for quality and authenticity by any other American church of its time. To achieve canonical and stylistic correctness, meticulous attention was given to the accurate rendition of the English drawings; to assure the highest order of artistry and craftsmanship, no expense was spared. Indeed the cost, initially estimated at \$5,000, ended up at \$30,000, a dramatic increase which seems to have been cheerfully borne by the vestry. As the church stands today on its hilltop, cloistered behind high stone walls in an expansive rustic churchyard, and surrounded by a forest of nineteenth-century gravestones, it presents the image of an ancient building in an ancient setting, as far removed from the colonial and neoclassical conventions of the traditional American church as it could possibly be.

.... St. James-the-Less was the model for future small Gothic churches in America. Of all the American Gothic churches of the nineteenth century, St. James-the-Less is the purest and most coherent in style."<sup>3</sup> This church had the most profound influence on the major architects of the Gothic Revival in the United States.

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Footnotes

- 1 A Brief History and Guide to the Church of Saint James-the-Less.  
February 1983, p. 5.
- 2 Pierson, William H., Jr. American Buildings and their Architects.  
Anchor Books. New York. 1980. p. 186.
- 3 Ibid, p. 187.

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Loth, Calder and Sadler, Julius The Only Proper Style, Gothic Architecture in America New York Graphic Society, Boston 1975.

Pierson, William H., Jr. American Buildings and their Architects. Anchor Books, New York, 1980.

Stanton, Phoebe B., The Gothic Revival and American Church Architecture: An Episode in Taste, 1840-56. John Hopkins Press. Baltimore, 1968.

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VERBAL BOUNDARY

Beginning at a point at the northwest corner of North 32nd Street and West Clearfield Street, west along West Clearfield Street 395 feet to a point at the northeast corner of West 33rd Street and 167 feet to a point at the corner of North 33rd Street and West Lippincott Street, then east along West Lippincott Street, 393 feet to a point at the southwest corner of north 32nd Street and West Lippincott Street, then south along North 32nd Street 195 feet back to the point of origin at the northwest corner of North 32nd Street and West Clearfield Street.

33 R.D.

80

2 LINDENWOOD

12.

ST

CLEARFIELD

LAMB

TAVERN

160-11 3/4

91-6 1/4

396-7 3/4

335-4 3/8

961-6 2

60

9: 00

76.

4

334

345

122-0 7/8

76 1/2

75

SEE 38N.

