

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	AUG 6 1979
DATE ENTERED	OCT 10 1979

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

1 NAME

HISTORIC *and Buildings*
St. Peter's Church ~~Complex~~

AND/OR COMMON

LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER Corner Main Street and DeVoe Avenue

___ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN Spotswood

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

___ VICINITY OF

4th

STATE

New Jersey

CODE

34

COUNTY

Middlesex

CODE

023

CLASSIFICATION

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

OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME Rector, Wardens and Vestry of St. Peter's Church

STREET & NUMBER

Main St. and DeVoe Avenue

CITY, TOWN

Spotswood

___ VICINITY OF

STATE

New Jersey

LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, Middlesex County Administration Building
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

STREET & NUMBER

John F. Kennedy Square

CITY, TOWN

New Brunswick

STATE

New Jersey

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE Middlesex County Inventory of Historic and Architectural Resources

DATE

1979

___ FEDERAL ___ STATE COUNTY ___ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission

CITY, TOWN

841 Georges Road, North Brunswick

STATE

New Jersey

7 DESCRIPTION

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

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

"The site of their ancient church is among the most beautiful in the diocese." Bishop Doane's 1847 observation remains apt today. St. Peter's Church occupies 2 1/2 acres near the center of the Borough of Spotswood at the intersection of Main Street and DeVoe Avenue. The land undulates gently and is bounded on the South by Manalapan Brook, the site of early milling activity. The church, which occupies a small rise on the wooded lot, is surrounded on the north and west by the 18th century cemetery, and commands a view of Main Street through the lych gate which gives access to the property from the northwest. To the northeast stands the parish house and rectory. A brick wall follows the Main Street and DeVoe Avenue boundaries.

Church

St. Peter's Church is a board and batten building 3 bays long with a gabled roof. The facade is composed of the broad gable end with attached tower, square in section. The centers of both the tower and gable-end section contain double-leaf wooden doors set in Gothic-arched frames. Three tall, narrow lancet windows, evenly spaced, occupy the upper two thirds of the gable. The battens terminate in pointed arches which form an arcaded frieze below a quatrefoil cornice. A wooden water table, drip molds and string courses serve to further articulate the wall surface. The entire facade composition is framed by three buttresses; each side of each buttress is made up of one narrow and two wider vertical boards. The buttress opposite the tower terminates in a pinnacle with carved crockets. This element, the tower with its soaring pyramidal roof, and the three tall lancets, are evidence of Wills' fondness for vertical expression.

The two rear corners of the church are treated with identical pinnacles, and the long sides each have three lancet windows separated by buttresses. Chancel and vestry wings attached to the rear were added in 1896 and 1908. They are designed with understanding of Wills' principles, even to repetition of the crocketed pinnacles. The result is an intricately massed composition punctuated with thrusting vertical members. It in no way wars with the more monumental main elevation. Both original and later sections are built over brick foundations. Only the chancel has a cellar.

Although one 19th century source mentions a brightly-colored interior, the walls are now plastered, with no decoration. The ceiling is supported by an exposed wooden truss system. Two octagonal columns mark the juncture of sanctuary and chancel. The sanctuary itself is one undivided space with no suggestion of nave or aisles. The stained glass windows are memorial gifts dating mostly from the 1920s and 30s.

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Description (continued)

Rectory

The chief Gothic emblem of the rectory is an arrangement of three steeply-pitched gables which set the division of the facade into three bays with a door at the center. The slate-covered roof has been maintained in good condition. The original board and batten fabric is covered with aluminum siding, and the shutters are aluminum replacements. Despite these compromises with architectural integrity, the overall configuration of the house remains clear and strong. The interior has a traditional center hall plan and no features of particular interest.

Parish House

The original section of the parish house is a rectangular structure three bays long and one bay wide. The entrance, set under a bracketed overdoor, is found in the gable end, which faces the street. The original board and batten fabric is in good condition, and some of the original window glass (frosted, with a star and octagon pattern) still exists. An addition attached longitudinally more than doubles the size of the building, making it eight bays long. The principal entrance has been changed to the center of the long side through a Gothic-arched porch. The new section repeats the board and batten siding of the old, as well as the same balanced fenestration, although the new windows are trabeated rather than arched.

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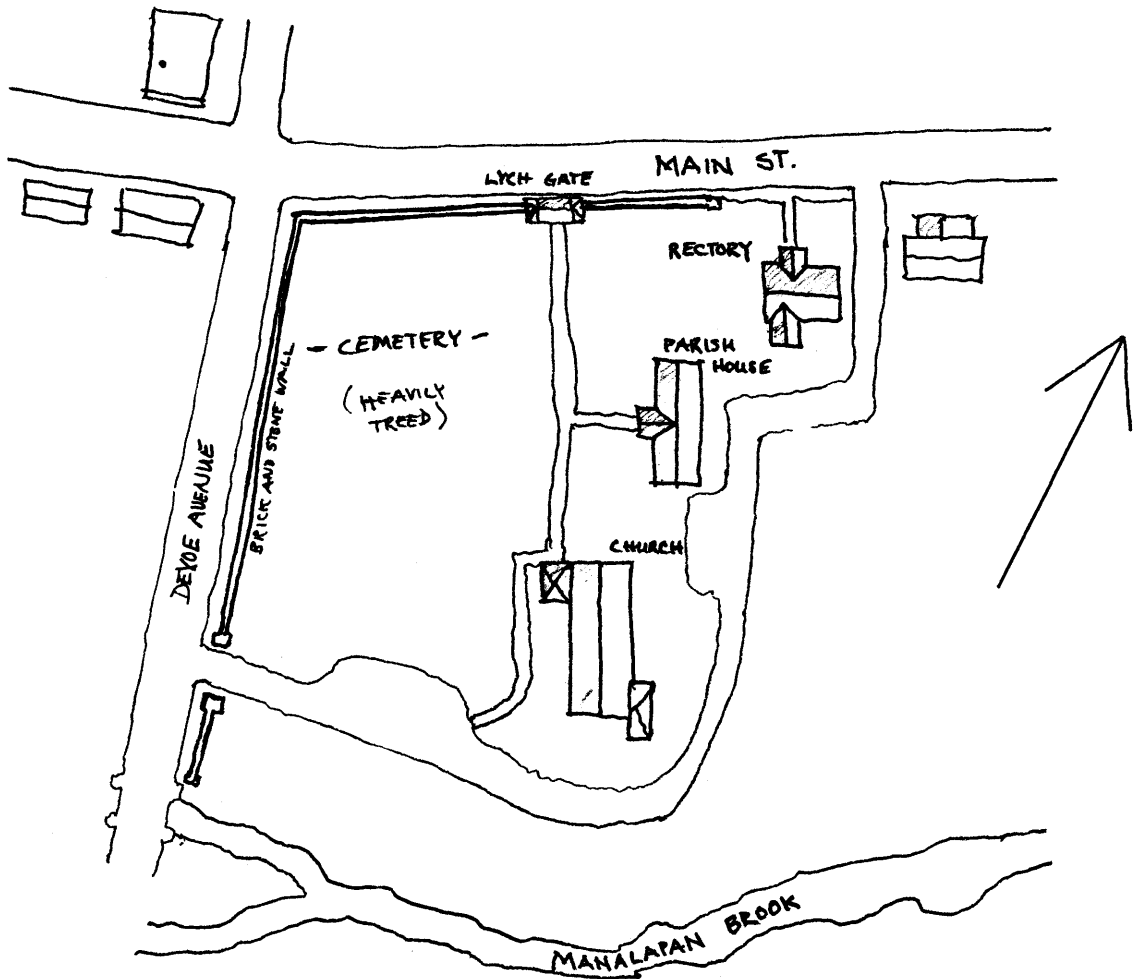
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CONTINUATION SHEET St. Peter's Church ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 3



8 SIGNIFICANCE

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

SPECIFIC DATES 1854 BUILDER/ARCHITECT Frank Wills

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE
 The St. Peter's Church complex reflects the continuing influence of English religious theory on American Episcopalians and, in particular its impact on architectural design. Its architect, Frank Wills, was one of the chief proponents, in the United States, of the tenets of the Ecclesiological movement, which were largely responsible for the development of the archeologically "correct" phase of the mid-nineteenth century Gothic Revival. The present church building is a fine example of Will's successful adaptation of English church design to wood for his American clientele.

The history of Episcopalianism in the United States has been colored by two English developments: the effort, beginning in the 18th century, to transplant the Anglican faith to the New World, and the 19th century application of theological doctrine to architecture. Also originating in England, it influenced more than a century of Gothic Episcopal building.

Evidence of the first movement is discovered in the early association of St. Peter's parish with the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (S.P.G.), organized in England in 1701. The first Episcopal service recorded in Spotswood took place in 1727. It was held by the Reverend William Skinner, a missionary assigned by the S.P.G. to Perth Amboy, then the seat of colonial government in Middlesex County. It is likely that services were held much earlier, however, since the Reverend John Talbot, another S.P.G. missionary, wrote in a letter dated 1705, "I have gone the rounds several times from Burlington to Amboy."

Reverend Skinner served the Spotswood congregation for thirty years, but not until 1756 did thirty families join together to formally organize a parish. By that date their numbers had increased sufficiently so that preaching in private homes was no longer convenient. Plans for a church had been discussed for several years, and in 1758, Reverend Robert McKean was able to describe, in a report to the Society for the propagation of the Gospel, "... a handsome wooden church in a small village called Spotswood." No description of the first building has been found,

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See continuation sheets.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 3+

QUADRANGLE NAME New Brunswick

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24,000

UTM REFERENCES

A 18 551770 4471160

B

C

D

E

F

G

H

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION Beginning at the Northwest corner of Main Street and DeVoe Avenue, the property runs along Main Street to the eastern edge of the driveway immediately east of the rectory; thence south to Manalapan Brook to Devoe Avenue, and north to the beginning point. Block 108, Lot 20.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE Robert Guter, Associate Director

ORGANIZATION

Heritage Studies, Inc.

DATE

February, 1979

STREET & NUMBER

RD #4, Box 864, Mapleton Rd.

TELEPHONE

609-452-1754

CITY OR TOWN

Princeton

STATE

New Jersey 08540

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE X

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.

Deputy

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

F. J. Wilson

7-21-79

TITLE

Acting

Deputy Commissioner, Department of Environmental Protection

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

10-10-79

ATTEST:

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

DATE

10-10-79

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Significance (continued)

although in 1761 a gallery with seats was added, because, again in McKean's words "Spotswood is more flourishing than ever." Beatrice Grace, historian of St. Peter's, observes that congregations were large because even Dissenters attended, "... so eager were the people to hear the word." It is in the same year that the first entry in the vestry minutes is recorded. Perhaps in recognition of the congregation's growth, the S.P.G. in 1768 donated two books which the parish still owns -- a Bible, published in 1767 and a Book of Common Prayer, published in 1764.

In 1773 King George III, through his Royal Governor William Franklin, granted a charter to St. Peter's. The document, preserved in the Diocesan House in Trenton, demands that the parish shall pay annually "...one pepper corn, if the same be legally demanded" on the feast of St. Peter the Apostle. The document names thirteen freeholders and inhabitants, most prominent of whom was David Carnegie, Lord Rosehill, son of the sixth Earl of Northesk of Scotland.

During the Revolutionary War, little physical damage was inflicted on the village. Partly because of strong religious, and cultural ties to the mother country, however, Spotswood and surrounding areas harbored a large number of Tory sympathizers. Foremost among them was the pastor of St. Peter's, the Reverend Mr. Ayers, whose conduct grew so incendiary -- "He insisted on praying for the Royal Family, for which he had often been reviled with the most opprobrious language," -- that St. Peter's Church was closed for the duration of the war years.

Reverend Ayers' ill-fortune seems to have begun an era of intermittent hard times for the parish. In the words of Beatrice Grace, "Spotswood had suffered from the effects of the war and inflation, but by the turn of the century it was showing signs of recovering and becoming once more a thriving little village." Nonetheless, from 1811 until 1823 St. Peter's had no permanent pastor, presumably from lack of funds. In 1835 the parish again lost a pastor through its inability to raise the necessary salary, the back payments for which were not made good until 1844.

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Significance (continued)

During these years, age and lack of maintenance brought about by the congregation financial troubles had contributed to the deterioration of the church, then nearly one hundred years old, prompting Bishop George Washington Doane to remark in his annual address to the convention in 1847: "There is here a small and poor, but steadfast people, sprung from an old church root. The site of their ancient church is among the most beautiful in the diocese. But it is very old; and must be rebuilt. This done, the old root would speedily bud and blossom, and bring forth abundantly."

By 1848 the building was too derelict to accommodate services, and in August 1849 plans drawn by Frank Wills for a new building were approved. How a congregation of such limited means acquired the services of such a prominent architect is uncertain, although the Spotswood plans may have been one of the "poor" commissions subsidized by the New York Ecclesiological Society, for which Wills was the first official architect. It is also possible that Doane had a hand in the connection, since he mentions Wills by name. In his 1850 address to the corner stone of St. Peter's church, Spotswood... The new structure is from a beautiful plan, by Mr. Frank Wills." The new church was designed to occupy the site of the first building, on a small rise in the midst of the 18th century burying ground. The eccentric and controversial bishop would certainly have recognized Wills' talent. He had already gained a reputation for being among the architectural avant garde. His "... profound interest in architecture led him to promote the first church buildings in America in which an attempt was made to conform to Ecclesiological standards."²

Doane's obvious pleasure at being able to officiate at the laying of the cornerstone did not solve the continuing financial distress of the congregation. Work could proceed only as funds were raised, and subscriptions were so slow that consecration of the new building was delayed until October 21, 1854, more than five years after construction had begun.

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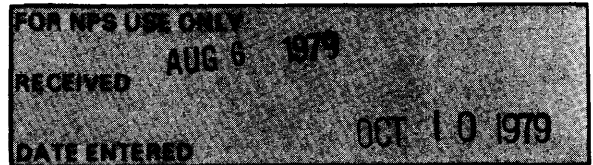
Significance (continued)

Whatever the vicissitudes surrounding its construction, St. Peter's church is clearly a representative work of Wills' brief (1848-1856) but influential American career. In The Gothic Revival and American Church Architecture, a study of the years 1840 to 1856, Phoebe B. Stanton describes Wills as a Theorist after Pugin's model, who wrought originality from eclecticism by scholarly imitation of a great historical style and respect for the integrity of materials. "Wills possessed a personal style which influences American church building in two ways ..." ³ -- specific commissions from his private practice, and "poor" commissions for the New York Ecclesiological Society. Certain of the architect's favorite devices, identified by Stanton, are found in St. Peter's Church, including applied ornament, slender, tall shapes, and massed lancets.

"Wills united the best of English mid-19th century thought on Gothic with American practicality," ⁴ claims Stanton. The accuracy of that assertion can be read in St. Peter's, where both plan and ornament are doctrinally "correct" but simplified in response to the circumstances of the congregation. Although the Spotswood church is built of wood, it should not be categorized among the "Carpenters' Gothic" churches designed by Upjohn and others, where Gothic ornament is often employed in a decidedly fanciful manner to produce buildings which are distanced from their historical models. St. Peter's, by contract, is a church which happens to be built of wood, but one which expresses a dignity and solidity foreign to the vernacularized kind of church one might expect in such a provincial setting.

The other buildings and structures which comprise the church property are more ordinary in architectural quality, but provide an appropriate setting for Wills' church. In 1872 a rectory was built by one Samuel Jernee. Its chief Gothic elements are three steeply pitched gables, one large and two small, which dominate the facade. A parish house was added in 1888 by architect C.K. Pursell. The style is standard board-and-batten Gothic, similar to buildings designed forty years before. In 1928 the churchyard was enclosed on two sides by a brick wall entered by a wooden lych gate.

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Significance (continued)

The history of St. Peter's congregation illustrates the trials of a missionary parish and gives fresh understanding to the varieties of Episcopal experience in the United States, which is often mistakenly thought of as an exclusively upper-class phenomenon. The church building itself is similarly atypical, and furnished a look as the first year of the American career of an architect who has "Only recently received...the credit he deserves for improving the quality of mid-nineteenth-century ecclesiastical design."⁵ Like Wills' Chapel of the Cross in Madison County, Mississippi, St. Peter's Church illustrates "...that good design based on sound Ecclesiological principles may be found even in so remote a spot..."⁶

1

Beatrice L. Grace. History of St. Peter's Church. All of the following quotations and observations which relate directly to the history of the church itself are derived from this source.

2

Calder Loth and Julius Trousdale Sadler, Jr., The Only Proper Style: Gothic Architecture in America. Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1975, p. 61.

3

Phoebe B. Stanton, The Gothic Revival and American Church Architecture: An Episode in Taste 1840-1856. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1968, p. 287.

4

Stanton, p. 192.

5 Loth and Sadler, p. 62.

6

Loth and Sadler, p. 63._