

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

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

| | |
|------------------------|-------------|
| STATE: Rhode Island | |
| COUNTY: Providence | |
| FOR NPS USE ONLY | |
| ENTRY NUMBER | DATE |
| | JAN 13 1972 |

1. NAME

COMMON:
Beneficent Congregational Church

AND/OR HISTORIC:

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:
300 Weybosset Street

CITY OR TOWN:
Providence

| | | | |
|------------------------------|------------|-----------------------|-------------|
| STATE Rhode Island, 02903 | CODE 44 | COUNTY: Providence | CODE 007 |
|------------------------------|------------|-----------------------|-------------|

3. CLASSIFICATION

| CATEGORY (Check One) | OWNERSHIP | STATUS | ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC |
|---|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure | <input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered | Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate) | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment | <input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <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 (Specify) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Comments |

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:
Beneficent Congregational Church

STREET AND NUMBER:
300 Weybosset Street

CITY OR TOWN:
Providence

STATE:
Rhode Island

CODE:
44

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:
City Hall

STREET AND NUMBER:
Dorrance and Washington Streets

CITY OR TOWN:
Providence

STATE:
Rhode Island

CODE:
44

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:
Historic American Buildings Survey

DATE OF SURVEY: 1956, 1962 Federal State County Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:
Library of Congress

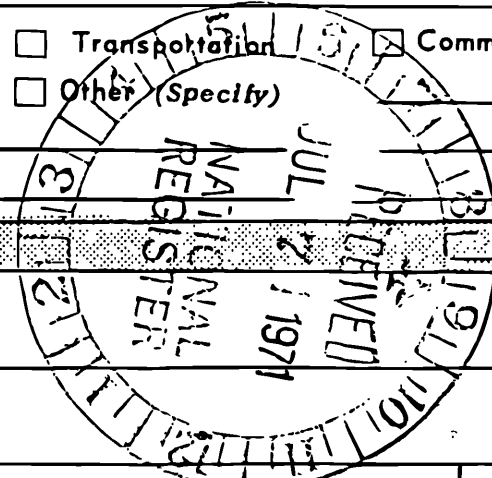
STREET AND NUMBER:
Independence Avenue and 1st Street, S. E.,

CITY OR TOWN:
Washington

STATE:
District of Columbia

CODE:
11

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



STATE:
COUNTY:
ENTRY NUMBER: 49
DATE: JAN 13 1972
FOR NPS USE ONLY

7. DESCRIPTION

| | | | | | | |
|-----------|---|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| CONDITION | (Check One) | | | | | |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Excellent | <input type="checkbox"/> Good | <input type="checkbox"/> Fair | <input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated | <input type="checkbox"/> Ruins | <input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed |
| | (Check One) | | | (Check One) | | |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered | <input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered | <input type="checkbox"/> Moved | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site | | |

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (If known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Erected in 1809, the Beneficent Congregational Church received an extensive Greek-Revival remodelling in 1836 by James Bucklin, eminent Providence architect. While the plans for the original building were drawn up by Barnard Eddy and John Newman (the latter supervising construction), legend has it that the pastor of the time, James Wilson (who had been apprenticed to a Dublin cabinetmaker in his youth) had his hand in the design.

The structure is basically a two-story, rectangular box set on a high basement, with a hipped roof supporting a central dome (now gilded). foundation of stone laid in random ashlar, the walls, also of stone, are faced with brick laid with narrow mortar joints and are slightly recessed above the basement story. While most of the brick is English, the brick at the rear of the west façade is of local manufacture and was laid where it originally would be least conspicuous. The straight, vertical division is still visible.

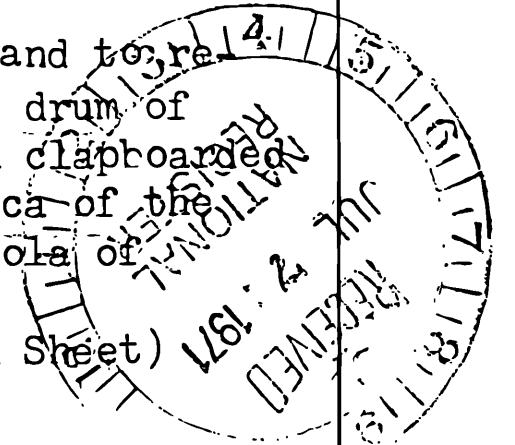
According to an old drawing of the structure, before Bucklin's remodelling, the wall surfaces above the basement level were pierced by two tiers of twelve-over-twelve-sash windows of uniform size, with five bays across the front and the same along each side. Triple, central front entrances were protected by a projecting flat portico of colossal order, supported by four tall, slender columns. The structure was crowned by a balustrade of turned posts. A central dome, set on a high, clapboarded, decorated and fenestrated octagonal base, capped the hipped roof and carried a cupola of tall proportions. It has been suggested that Pastor Wilson was inspired by Dublin architecture for the design of this dome, but the design is actually much more similar in style and proportion to that of Bulfinch's State House which had only recently been erected in Boston.

Though the basic 1809 structure remains, James Bucklin's design for the 1836 renovation is responsible for the present exterior appearance. On the front, Bucklin removed the earlier attenuated porch and added a heavy tetrastyle Doric portico of colossal order, with fluted wooden columns supporting a fully-developed Doric entablature and pediment. The triple entrances were retained, but the central doorway was made slightly taller than the others and capped by a rectangular lintel. This doorway has since been remodelled. The high base of the portico, with broad steps flowing down on three sides, has recently been restored.

To reduce the visual verticality of the original church and to reinforce the effect of the simple volumes, Bucklin enlarged the drum of the dome into a solid, austere, stuccoed octagon (the original clapboarded drum is still intact beneath the present one). A wooden replica of the Choragic Monument of Lysicrates in Athens replaced the old cupola of

(See Continuation Sheet)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet) - 1

| | |
|------------------|--------------|
| STATE | Rhode Island |
| COUNTY | Providence |
| FOR NPS USE ONLY | |
| ENTRY NUMBER | DATE |
| | JAN 13 1972 |

(Number all entries)

7. Description.

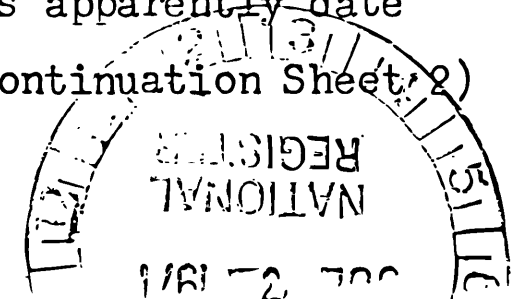
similar dimensions. The new wooden dome was adorned with gold leaf in 1857, and it and its drum have since been protected by metal sheathing. A closed, panelled balustrade replaces the original opened one, thus emphasizing the building's cubical form. A large-scale Greek-key motif decorates the balustrade where it rises above the portico and is also used in the slightly peaked, central panels above each side façade.

Bucklin's ingenious remodelling of the original windows adds significantly to the monumentality of the church. The twelve-light sashes were replaced by new ones of six lights, and to the top of each of the first-story windows a third, blind sash was added. Thus, while the windows retain their original dimensions on the interior, the lower windows of the exterior have been made visually taller. As an alternative to Greek Revival motifs, Bucklin applied battered and crossetted architraves of Egyptian inspiration over the original simple stone window trim. To emphasize further the box-like mass of the building, the walls were white-washed. In recent years this has been removed, exposing the original brickwork.

Originally tall in proportion and delicate in detail, the church now seems low and massive as a result of the Bucklin renovation. Little-changed on the exterior since 1836, the church maintains a commanding presence on its site atop Weybosset Hill.

Unlike the exterior, the interior retains its original plan and much of the feeling of its 1809 appearance, despite many alterations in detail. At each end of the shallow, full-width entrance vestibule on the north front a triple run of stairs rises to the gallery. Entrance to the main auditorium is gained through three doorways at the top of a short flight of steps within this vestibule. The doors are of recent date but are framed by moulded, crossetted architraves. The side aisles of the main auditorium are separated from the center portion by four tall, fluted Ionic columns on either side. These columns, which rise through, and support, the terraced gallery curving around three sides of the church, also support the Greek Revival entablature of the shallow plaster barrel-vault of the ceiling. Because of their slender proportions, it is probable that these columns are original and that Bucklin's 1836 remodelling enclosed them in new fluted encasements and provided them with new Ionic capitals. Bucklin is also responsible for enclosing the gallery balustrade and for remodelling the pilasters, entablature and cornice of the altar wall in simple Greek Revival style. The wainscot, the panelled window reveals containing louvred shutters, and the box-pews apparently date

(See Continuation Sheet 2)



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet) - 2

| | |
|------------------|--------------|
| STATE | Rhode Island |
| COUNTY | Providence |
| FOR NPS USE ONLY | |
| ENTRY NUMBER | JAN 13 1962 |
| | TE |

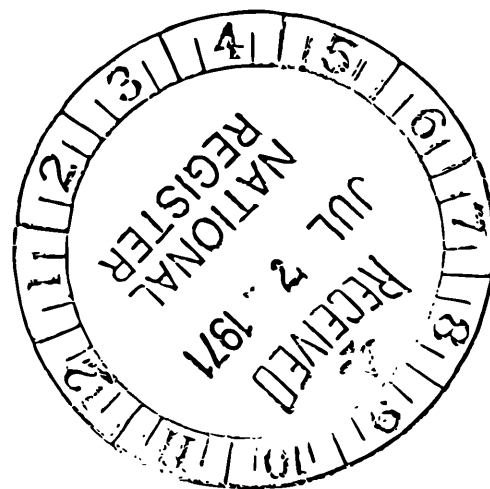
(Number all entries)

7. Description.

from 1809, although the pew backs have since been slanted for comfort. The south end of the church has been extensively remodelled. The raised and recessed choir and pulpit area was built out in 1857 over a low, one-story chapel which was extended to the rear in 1833. At this time, gold leaf was used to decorate the entablature and the balcony balustrades and has never been renewed. The central chandelier of Austrian crystal dates from 1890. In 1923 the present organ was installed; William Aldrich, Boston architect, designed its magnificent carved wooden case. For structural support, concealed steel beams have been installed to reinforce the old timber framing.

9. Major Bibliographical References.

Beneficent Congregational Church, Providence, Rhode Island: Original building contracts preserved in the church.



B. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 19th Century | |

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1809, 1836

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|--|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal | <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Political | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Industry ^{STRUBLE} _{9/15} | <input type="checkbox"/> Science | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture | _____ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Military | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Music | | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation | | | _____ |

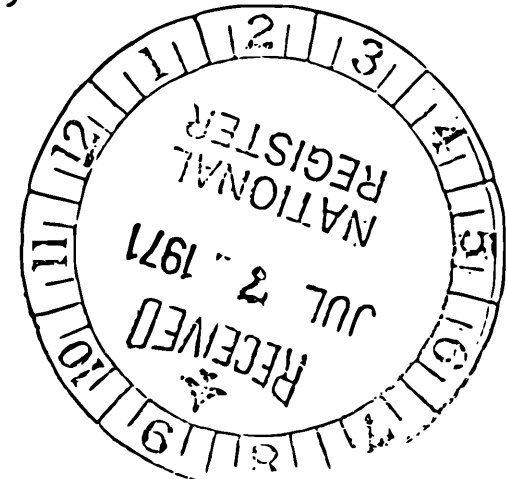
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Both historically and architecturally, the Beneficent Congregational Church is a monument of much local significance. The church, erected in 1809 and dedicated on January 1, 1810, was the second meeting-house of the second Congregational church organized in Providence. It is the oldest church in the city on the west side of the Providence River, both in organization and in age of structure, and its presence was highly influential in developing the surrounding Weybosset Hill area into the most important commercial and residential section of Providence in the early nineteenth century.

The pastor of the church at that time, James Wilson, was an early voice in supporting the development of mill industries in Rhode Island and was influential in spreading confidence in this new economy of textile and other manufacture. Indeed, the erection of the church in 1809 coincided with the beginning of a new age of prosperity and of civic pride not only locally, but throughout all New England.

Though the church is architecturally significant for its early use of the classical dome, following Bulfinch's example in Boston, its greater distinction is as an outstanding example of Greek Revival architecture, and it notably displays the great capacities of James Bucklin as an architect. Bucklin's solution to the problem of remodelling an older structure, tall in proportion and delicate in detail, into the then-fashionable Greek Revival style in 1836 was ingenious. By adding the heavy portico, rebuilding the drum of the dome, the lantern and the balustrade, and remodelling the windows, he achieved an imposing Greek Revival design through broad geometry of forms, planes and volumes. Though today standing in the midst of a rather chaotic urban scene, this handsome structure maintains a permanent, monumental and dominating presence on Weybosset Hill.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Cady, John Hutchins: The Civic and Architectural Development of Providence, 1636-1950 (Providence, Rhode Island, 1957).
 Downing, Antoinette F.: Early Homes of Rhode Island (Richmond, Virginia, 1937).
 Hamlin, Talbot F.: Greek Revival Architecture in America (New York, 1944).
Rhode Island History, Summer and Fall, 1970 (Providence, R. I., Rhode Island Historical Society).
 Wilson, Arthur E.: Paddy Wilson's Meeting House in Providence Plantations, 1791-1839 (Boston, 1950).

(See Continuation Sheet 2)

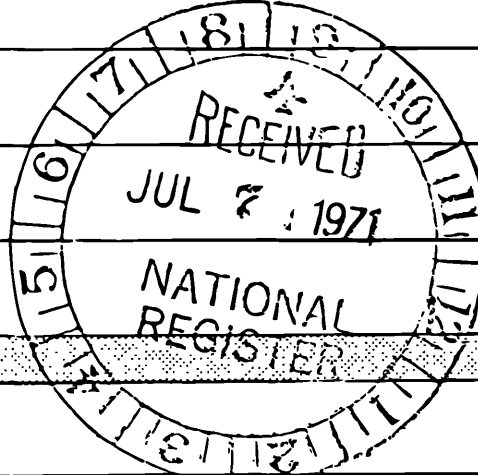
10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

| LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY | | | O R | LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES | | |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------|---|-------------------------|--|
| CORNER | LATITUDE | LONGITUDE | | LATITUDE | LONGITUDE | |
| | Degrees Minutes Seconds | Degrees Minutes Seconds | | Degrees Minutes Seconds | Degrees Minutes Seconds | |
| NW | ° ' " | ° ' " | | 41° 49' 12" N | 71° 24' 52" W | |
| NE | ° ' " | ° ' " | | | | |
| SE | ° ' " | ° ' " | | | | |
| SW | ° ' " | ° ' " | | | | |

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: Less than one acre

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

| STATE: | CODE | COUNTY | CODE |
|--------|------|--------|------|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |



11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE:
 Clifford M. Renshaw, III, Consultant

ORGANIZATION: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission DATE: March 28, 1971

STREET AND NUMBER:
 State House, 90 Smith Street

CITY OR TOWN: Providence STATE: Rhode Island, 02903 CODE: RI

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National State Local

Name Frederick C. Williamson

Title State Liaison Officer

Date July 1, 1971

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

Ernest A. Conrady
 Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date JAN 13 1972

ATTEST:
William J. Mumford
 Keeper of The National Register

Date JAN 8 1972

19/299420/4532220
 DTM 257
 12-11-75 01 m
 SEE INSTRUCTIONS