

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

4702

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any 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.



1. Name of Property

Historic name: Third Presbyterian Church
Other names/site number: NA
Name of related multiple property listing: NA

2. Location

Street & number: 420 E. 9th Street
City or town: Chester State: PA County: Delaware
Not for Publication: NA Vicinity: NA

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 at the following level(s) of significance:
_national ___statewide local Applicable National Register Criteria: A B C D

Andrea L. MacDonald 10/10/2019
Signature of certifying official Date
Andrea L. MacDonald/Deputy SHPO/Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission
Title/State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.
Signature of commenting official Date
Title/State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. 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: _____

[Signature] 11/20/19
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

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5. Classification

Ownership of Property

Private:

Public – Local

Public – State

Public – Federal

Category of Property

Building(s)

District

Site

Structure

Object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions: RELIGION: Religious facility

Current Functions: VACANT/NOT IN USE

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

Late Victorian; Late 19th and 20th Century Revivals (Late Gothic Revival; Neo-Medieval)

Materials

Principal exterior materials of the property: Marble, limestone, terra cotta, slate, copper

Narrative Description

Summary Paragraph

The Third Presbyterian Church is located in northwest Chester, in a primarily residential area that has seen significant losses to its building fabric since the 1970s, and is the largest building in its immediate surroundings. The striking church faces one of the principal arteries of this part of the city, East 9th Street. The random ashlar marble-clad, complexly-roofed church with limestone trim reflects two major campaigns of construction and is organized in three principal volumes. The 1895-96 church, designed by Isaac Pursell, forms the main part of the building and consists of two volumes: a large street-facing Sanctuary and a rear two-story Sabbath School. The Sabbath School has a narrower addition to the rear designed by George M. Ewing and constructed in 1922. The Sanctuary features the distinctive characteristics of auditorium-plan churches of its period, and retains its historic woodwork, many of its stained glass windows, and organ and screen. The Akron-plan Sabbath School retains such key details as the remarkable pebble glass retractable partitions that lower into the basement and its radiating classroom layout. The 1922 addition includes many historic details, including its first floor basketball court. Overall, the Third Presbyterian Church is in fair condition, with some damage from water infiltration and the loss of window sash in a number of locations. The property does, however, retain important integrity aspects of design, workmanship, and materials, and is immediately recognizable as a prominent local religious building, and thus easily retains the ability to convey its significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture.

Narrative Description

Setting

The Third Presbyterian Church is set back approximately 40 feet from the northwest side of East Ninth Street (known historically as Broad Street) in the northwest section of the City of Chester, which developed as a residential area after the middle of the nineteenth century. At the time of the construction of the main portion of the church in 1895-1896, its surroundings consisted primarily of residential buildings, with some factories and other churches within a few blocks. The residential fabric consisted of a combination of groups of two- and three-story brick rowhouses, brick and frame double houses, and freestanding brick and frame dwellings. Today,

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following dozens of demolitions after 1971, substantial areas of the church's surroundings are open land. The church is the largest building in its immediate surroundings.

The building is slightly raised above the grade of East Ninth Street so that it is approached by two sets of steps leading to two entrances to the main sanctuary (photo 1). The steps are flanked by lawn areas with shrubs fronting the building. A driveway leads from the street on the southwest of the building to a rear parking lot. Formerly, the church's manse was located immediately east of the building, on a corner lot at East Ninth and Potter Streets. The manse was demolished in the late 1950s-early 1960s, and the lot is now vacant (mowed, overgrown) and is no longer part of the same tax parcel. Because nothing on the lot contributes to the church's architectural significance, the lot is excluded from the nominated boundary.

Exterior

The Third Presbyterian Church has an irregular-plan, masonry construction and a prominent tile roof. The building is organized in three principal volumes corresponding to the original period of construction with a rear, complementary addition dating to 1922. The main, octagonal- and auditorium-plan, pyramidally roofed church sanctuary volume (photos 1, 2), designed and built between 1895 and 1896, is the southeasternmost portion of the building, fronting Ninth Street. To its northwest is located a connected, hip-roofed, Sabbath School volume (photos 3-5), which was also built as part of the 1890s project. The 1922, two-story Sabbath School addition projects to the northwest from the north corner of the Sabbath School volume (photo 6). The 1895-96 sanctuary and the southeast face of the main roof of the Sabbath School volume are clad in historic terra cotta tile, the remainder of the roofs of the Sabbath School are clad in historic slate. Both materials appear to date to the period of construction. The 1922 addition has a flat roof. The northwest slope of the main portion of the Sabbath School roof includes a covered former skylight. The building is clad throughout in irregularly coursed, quarry-faced, rectangular marble ashlar quarried in Avondale, Pennsylvania, with Indiana limestone trim.

The openings in the sanctuary volume are ogive-arched with the exception of the first-floor windows, which are nearly square. The first floor openings of the 1890s Sabbath School volume are segmental-arched on the first floor and rectilinear on the second. The windows in the 1922 addition are also rectilinear throughout. The window sash has been removed in a number of locations within approximately the last decade, in part due to vandalism. These openings are filled in with plywood.

The main sanctuary volume is fronted on the southeast by a one-story, shed-roofed, narthex-like "cloister" entrance volume that includes the two main entrances in one-story gabled volumes from which the window sash have been removed and openings filled in with plywood, and a second, one-story, shed-roofed cloister volume is located on the southwest elevation, terminating on the southeast in a faceted bay (photos 1, 2). A one-story, cross gable-roofed, buttressed porte-cochere projects to the southwest at the point where the main sanctuary and Sabbath School volumes meet. The entrance from the porte-cochere is fronted by stone steps, is located in a segmental-arch opening, and includes historic, double-leaf doors on the northeast and a single

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door on the northwest (photo 7). Three prominent wall gables flanked by large, conical pinnacles are located on the northeast, southeast, and southwest elevations. The wall gables are lit by tracery windows with stained glass. The main entrance openings are ornamented with smaller pinnacles with crockets and finials, are flanked by corner buttresses and include historic doors below stained glass transoms with Gothic tracery. The northeastern doorway retains historic strap hinges. The main, octagonal-plan roof is topped by an elaborate copper pinnacle. A large, stone-clad chimney rises from the rear slope of the main sanctuary roof (photo 8); a brick chimney is located on the rear (northwest) slope of the secondary roof of the Sabbath School volume; an exterior stone chimney is located at the point where the northwest elevation of the Sabbath School meets the southwest elevation of the 1922 addition (photo 4).

The Sabbath School volume is organized in two hip-roofed blocks. The larger, southeastern block corresponds to the main, Akron-plan Sabbath School classroom spaces and atrium. The lower block in the rear, northwestern portion of this volume, projects to the southwest from the higher block, and contains an intact social space historically called the “ladies’ parlor” on the first floor in the northwest corner of the building. A double-leaf door (photo 5) provides the main access to the Sabbath School from the exterior in this lower volume. The rear portion includes a slightly projecting pavilion on the northwest elevation with a tertiary hipped roof over the space that housed the youngest students (“infant room”) on the first floor (photo 4). A projecting stair tower and entrance pavilion that includes a battlemented top is located immediately to the northwest of the porte-cochere (photo 3).

The T-plan 1922 addition is entered by way of a one-story, gabled porch on heavy chamfered posts on the southwest elevation that gives access to the addition’s main circulation stair in the projecting pavilion of the T (photo 6). Leaded glass, casement window sash survive in a number of locations on the southwest elevation. Other openings include two-over-two replacement sash and some have missing windows. The exterior of the addition includes small buttresses on the first floor, a water table, and a slightly projecting limestone belt course at the window lintel level on the second floor of the projecting, circulation pavilion.

Interior

The octagon- and auditorium-plan, open-span main sanctuary occupies the vast majority of the space of the southeasternmost volume and is reached through one of three vestibules corresponding to the two main entrances on the southeast elevation and the entrance from the porte-cochere. Each vestibule is separated from the main sanctuary space by historic, varnished wood doors and partitions with pebble glass lights divided by Gothic Revival tracery (photo 9), and swinging, double-leaf doors that access the one-story areas between the entrances (photo 10). Historic tile floors survive in the vestibules (photo 11).

The main sanctuary (photos 9-15) features the distinctive characteristics of auditorium-plan, theater-like churches of the period: its sloping floor, arch-plan, concentrically-arranged pews, virtually uninterrupted open space, and stage-like, pulpit platform. The surviving, historic, high-quality features and finishes of this main space include varnished pews and pulpit furniture

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produced by the National Church Furniture Company of Richmond, Indiana, varnished, paneled wainscot and tent-like wood ceiling, stained glass windows created by New York artist Edward Colgate, and organ with varnished organ screen and choir mezzanine. All of these varnished wood features appear to retain their original finish. The floor is clad in replacement carpeting. The walls are white-painted plaster with the motto in gold lettering “be still, and know that I am God.” over the pulpit platform. To the northwest of the organ, a Gothic-arched opening with a historic paneled door leads to a small pastor’s study (photo 14) with an exterior door (photo 15) that formerly gave access from the manse (demolished between 1958 and 1963), built after the church, was located to the east of it.

The Sabbath School volume is accessed from the outside both from the northwestern vestibule at the porte-cochere and the double door in the Sabbath School volume (photo 5) to its northwest. The entrance vestibule from the porte-cochere is lit by the large stained glass window in the stair volume (photo 3) and retains such historic details as varnished wood stairs to the upper level and basement (photos 17, 18).

The main, Akron-plan Sabbath School space (photos 19-24) retains such key details as the remarkable pebble glass retractable partitions that lower in the manner of oversized window sash into the basement and allowed for this to become an overflow space for the main sanctuary and for the Sabbath School students to hear the service. All five historic sash survive in place. The School also retains its radiating classroom spaces on two levels, its historic circulation system of several stairs accessing both levels to allow for the efficient movement of Sunday School attendees through the school and upper floor balcony, and historic Gothic Revival lay light. The balcony rail was removed by the church’s former owners within the last decade in advance of the church’s then-planned demolition. Historic operable classroom dividers survive in a number of locations (photo 24). The Sabbath School volume includes the former Ladies’ Parlor at its northwest corner, which retains historic details such as its paneled wood doors and fireplace (photo 25), below a meeting room originally used for the Young People’s Society of Christian Endeavor group.

The main basement of the building is located under the 1894-1896 portion of the building. The floor beams of the main sanctuary (photo 26) are arranged in a concentric, arched pattern on brick piers to support the open space of the floor above and the segmental arch-plan pews. The basement also contains the former large kitchen and meeting spaces (photo 27).

The 1922 addition is organized on the interior in a single-loaded corridor plan (photo 28), with larger classrooms on the northeast side of the building on the second floor (photo 29) and full-width rooms at the northwestern end of the building. The main stair retains its historic railing (photo 30). The first floor is primarily occupied by a basketball court.

Integrity

Overall, the Third Presbyterian Church is in fair condition, with varying degrees of damage from water infiltration evident in various locations, and the loss of window sash in a number of

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locations and of Sabbath School balcony railing due to neglect under the last years of its ownership by the Presbyterian Church. Despite this deterioration, the property retains a remarkable amount of its historic, character-defining features. On the exterior, key details survive such as the historic stone envelope with its tracery details, the largest and most prominent of its stained glass windows, its historic tile and slate roof, and its historic openings. The interior also retains most character-defining features, including its historic pews, varnished wood paneling, stairs, organ case, and historic partitions, as well the configuration and details of the Akron-plan Sabbath Day School.

The property retains integrity of location, design, workmanship, and materials, including its interior decoration and furnishings. It readily conveys its significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture, and is a notable design of prominent architect Isaac Pursell. The 1920s Sabbath School addition is complementary of the style and exterior palette of the Pursell portions of the property, and does not detract from the original building's design. The loss of the historic manse formerly located on an adjacent lot is unfortunate, but does not affect the Criterion C integrity of the church itself, since the manse was not part of the design of the church and was built at a different time from plans by a different architectural firm.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

- 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

- 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 old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance: Architecture

Period of Significance: 1895-1922

Significant Dates: 1895

Significant Person: NA

Cultural Affiliation: NA

Architect/Builder: Pursell, Isaac (main building, William Provost Jr., builder); Ewing, George M. (1922 addition); Edward Colgate (stained glass); National Church Furniture Company (interior furniture)

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

The Third Presbyterian Church of Chester possesses local significance under Criterion C in the Area of Architecture. The church is an outstanding example of sophisticated design in the City of Chester of in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and embodies the distinctive characteristics of theatrically-inspired Protestant churches in the late nineteenth century, with its neo-medieval style detailing, complex massing, and auditorium plan both in its main worship space and Sunday School. The Third Presbyterian Church is an important work of the master church architect Isaac Pursell, who was prominent in the design of Protestant churches in general and Presbyterian churches more particularly, across the United States. The period of significance, 1895-1922, corresponds to the start of construction and extends to include the 1922 rear classroom addition.

Narrative Statement of Significance

History of the Property and Overall Context

Chester City, located to the southwest of Philadelphia and fronting on the Delaware River, was one of the earliest European settlements on the river, and grew from an “agricultural hamlet” in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries to become, like Philadelphia, an important center of industrial production in the nineteenth.¹ As in Philadelphia, heavy industry grew substantially in Chester between the Civil War and the 1920s, leading to increasing residential development and expansion and a population in 1920 of nearly 60,000. Thus, the Third Presbyterian Church, completed in the mid-1890s and expanded in the early 1920s, marks the period of growth and ascendancy and accumulating wealth within the city. Historic maps published in the 1890s and period accounts of Chester indicate that this building for the Third Presbyterian Church congregation was one of the largest, most ambitious, and most sophisticated designs of the period in Chester, rivalled only by Edwin Forrest Durang’s complex for St. Michael’s Roman Catholic Church congregation at Edgmont Avenue and 7th Street, completed before 1892, and the First Baptist Church, also designed by Isaac Pursell, and built 1893-94 (Figures 8 and 9).²

Presbyterianism came to Chester City relatively late relative to the overall history of the city: the First Presbyterian Church was not founded until the mid-nineteenth century.³ The Third Presbyterian Church congregation arose as a mission of the First church to the northern part of Chester in 1870 as the city grew after the Civil War, and a building for the new congregation was complete at Twelfth and Upland Streets in 1872.⁴ Those that joined the new congregation were

¹ Henry Valentine Smith, *Chester and Vicinity* (Chester, PA: H.V. Smith, 1914), p. 3.

² See Sanborn maps for 1885, 1891, and 1898; also W. S. Miller, St. J. Ogier, W. S. McDonald and Forsey Breou, *Farm Line and Borough Atlas of Delaware Co., Penna.* (Philadelphia: E. W. Smith and A. H. Mueller, 1892) and Smith, *Chester and Vicinity*, pp. 76-79; *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders’ Guide*, 9, no. 4 (1/24/1894).

³ Henry Graham Ashmead, *History of Delaware County, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: L. H. Everts & Co., 1884), pp. 346-47.

⁴ M. J. McLeod, *Souvenir of the Third Presbyterian Church of Chester, PA, 1872-1896* (Chester, 1896), n.p. See also Ashmead, *History of Delaware County*, p. 347.

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so numerous that the building was enlarged significantly the following year. By 1893, when the congregation decided to move to a new location “for the well-being of the church,” it had grown to 411 members, and in 1894 purchased the current church lot.⁵

The Sanborn map of Chester published in 1891 indicates that a two-story, L-plan, brick residence stood on the lot at this date, and was presumably removed for the construction of the new building.⁶ The Miller, Ogier, McDonald and Breou map of Delaware County of the following year indicates that the rectangular-plan property spanned the depth of the block from 9th Street to 10th Street and included a carriage house (Figure 10). The lot at the northwest corner of 9th Street and Potter Street, later acquired by the church, was a separate parcel occupied with a frame dwelling.⁷ Isaac Pursell was selected as the architect for the new building in 1894, and ground-breaking and cornerstone ceremonies were held in May and July of 1895, respectively.⁸ Announcements regarding the commission published in the *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* indicate that plans were put out for bid and the contract awarded for construction in May.⁹

A *Souvenir* of the congregation published on the occasion of the opening of the new building recorded the details of the craftsmen and suppliers for the project, noting that the exterior stone consisted of marble from the Avondale, Pennsylvania, quarries, with Indiana limestone details. The contractor for the project was William Provost, Jr. The roof of Conosera terra cotta tile, manufactured by the Celadon Terra Cotta Co., was installed by James Garrett & Co. The pews were supplied by the National Church Furniture Company of Richmond, Indiana. The stained-glass windows were created by New York artist Edward Colgate. The project included the “Sturtevant system of steam heating,” a forced hot air system that used steam-engine driven fan. The building was designed to accommodate 600 in the main sanctuary, with the ability to seat an additional 200 in the cloisters; the Sabbath School held “874 scholars,” thus putting the total capacity of the Pursell-designed building at approximately 1,700.¹⁰

The Sanborn-Perris atlas of 1898 indicates that at the time of its completion, the Third Presbyterian Church was one of, if not the largest church in the city. Further, it was probably the only auditorium plan church there, with the possible exception of the First Baptist Church at Seventh and Fulton Streets (see Figure 9), which was also designed by Pursell. The street plans published in the Sanborn strongly suggest that the remainder of the churches in the city were smaller, and built on the Lateran (cross-form) Plan. The church remained important enough within its local context to be featured first, and on a single page, among the city’s other featured

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Sanborn-Perris Map Co., Ltd., *Chester and South Chester, Pennsylvania* (New York: Sanborn-Perris Map Co., Ltd., 1891), Sheet 4.

⁷ Miller, Ogier, McDonald, and Breou, *Farm Line and Borough Atlas of Delaware Co.*, Plate 14.

⁸ McLeod.

⁹ *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* 10, no. 18 (5/1/1895), p. 111; *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* 10, no 19 (5/8/1895), p. 245.

¹⁰ Ibid.

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churches figured in Henry Valentine Smith's boosterish, book-length description of the subject of *Chester and Vicinity*.¹¹

By 1904, the congregation had grown to around 645 members and continued to expand rapidly as Chester itself continued to expand, leading to the decision to erect a new manse building for the pastor. That year, the congregation purchased the adjacent property to the east on Ninth Street that had been occupied by a frame dwelling, and in 1911, the important firm of Price and McLanahan were selected from a group of architects who competed for the project. Historic aerial photographs indicate that the manse was demolished between 1958 and 1963, and this lot is no longer associated with the church parcel. The only remnants of the former manse on site are the remaining street-front fence.

Further growth in the Sabbath School under the direction of pastor Dr. Abraham L. Lathem (known for his achievements in the Vacation Bible School movement) led to the construction of the last portion of the church as it exists today. The Sabbath School addition was designed in 1920 by Philadelphia architect George M. Ewing (b. 1888), with Robert H. Scroggins as general contractor, and completed in 1922.¹² The number of students at this date was a remarkable 1,150.¹³

Since the completion of the Sabbath School addition, the church has had no major campaigns of addition or alteration. The congregation was closed in 1986 as Chester's economic downturn reached its nadir following the loss of its industrial base and population. The Presbytery of Philadelphia removed a number of interior features of the building such as the Sabbath School railing (taken for salvage because it was brass) in advance of planned demolition, which was forestalled when the Chester Historical Preservation Committee purchased the property in 2015. As of 2019, the building remains vacant and awaiting a planned rehabilitation.

Significance

The significance of the Third Presbyterian Church can be understood through its relationship to the national trends in massing and plan configuration, architectural style, and interior detailing, and of the prominence of its architect, within the context of the design of Presbyterian churches specifically and Protestant churches more generally.

Theatrically-inspired Protestant Churches of the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries

In her study *When Churches Became Theatre: The Transformation of Evangelical Architecture and Worship in Nineteenth-Century America*, Jeanne Halgren Kilde tracks several key trends in church design and use in the 1880s and 1890s that are directly relevant to the form of Third Presbyterian, including the important role of the Akron-plan Sunday School (conventionally called Sabbath School by Presbyterians in the nineteenth century) both to theatrical form and in these schools' key role within Protestant denominations.

¹¹ Smith, *Chester and Vicinity*, p. 75.

¹² *Fiftieth Anniversary of the Third Presbyterian Church, Chester, Pennsylvania, 1872-1922* (Chester, 1922), p.11.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

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Specifically, Kilde sketches a picture of linked sociological and liturgical forces that led to the widespread adoption among Protestant denominations of: 1) the auditorium plan sanctuary (of which a pulpit dais and a sloping, theater-like floor were key characteristics), the Akron-plan Sunday School, and the “diagonal plan” linking these two as overflow space; 3) rich stained glass and interior decoration; 4) stone construction; and 5) neo-medieval style exteriors, which featured “multiple masses.”¹⁴ With regard to the adoption of the auditorium plan and the rich details of church construction in the period, the main driving factors were a transformation of evangelical liturgical practice toward the theatrical-like performance of the sermon as the main component of worship service and the Gilded Age accommodation of middle-class taste for extensive decoration and comfort. The masonry, neo-medieval styles of churches conveyed several messages both to and about congregations. The stylistic details conveyed continuity with the fundamentals of Christian church tradition. “Massiveness and monumentality” effectively presented the church as both a bastion of faith amid the complexities and rapid changes of contemporary urban life, and as an organization of strength and vitality.¹⁵ In this vein, it is notable that Isaac Pursell remarked in the 1896 *Souvenir* that the stonework was “laid on a flat bed, giving the building an appearance of strength and solidity.” The importance and standardization of Sunday School teaching as the means to meet the evangelical purpose of perpetuating and growing Protestant congregations and denominations grew steadily in the nineteenth century, and the large, Akron-plan school constitutes one of the key manifestations of the role that Sunday Schools played in American churches in the 1880s and 1890s.¹⁶

The Third Presbyterian church embodies all the distinctive characteristics of American Protestant churches of this period as defined by Kilde and reified in many examples of the period, as she documents. Specifically, the church possesses an auditorium plan sanctuary, together with its theater-like pulpit dais and sloping floor, and the linked, Akron-plan Sunday School with its radiating classrooms, central, theater-stage like space, and moveable partitions to connect this space with the main sanctuary. In this, the relationship between the sanctuary and Sabbath School is an example of the “diagonal plan,” which was documented in the period as the 1882 development of ecclesiastical architect Warren H. Hayes.¹⁷ Its interior features a notable collection of stained-glass windows. The wooden ceiling and interior woodwork include rich Gothic Revival details, as does the exterior, which features such elements as ogive arches, buttresses, pinnacles, and crockets and finials. The Third Presbyterian church was considered a sufficiently important example to be published in the Boston-based, prominent professional periodical, *The Brickbuilder*, in the year of its construction, and it was also selected as one of the

¹⁴ Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *When Churches Became Theatre: The Transformation of Evangelical Architecture and Worship in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 104.

¹⁵ With respect to the exterior and interiors of churches, see Kilde, chaps. 4, 5 and 6.

¹⁶ See Kilde, chapter 7.

¹⁷ “Hayes, Warren Howard,” *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography* 6 (New York: James T. White & Company, 1896), p. 120.

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handful of designs that were featured in the national Presbyterian Church's Board of Church
Erection's *Annual Report* of 1897.¹⁸

Isaac Pursell

The fact that the church was featured in this 1897 *Annual Report* bears directly on the place held by Isaac Pursell as a master architect, since the appearance of this project in this important national Presbyterian publication was hardly unique for Pursell. Pursell (1853-1910) was a Trenton, New Jersey native who began his career as an apprentice in the office of the prominent architect Samuel Sloan, and left Sloan's employ and established his own office in Philadelphia in 1878. Pursell would go on to complete churches not only in Philadelphia and Chester, but throughout the eastern portion of the United States. Many of these have been individually listed in the National Register, including the Tygarts Valley Church in Huttonsville, West Virginia and the St. John's Episcopal Church in Charleston, West Virginia, and the Makemie Memorial Presbyterian Church in Snow Hill, Maryland, as well as the Memorial Presbyterian Church in Wenonah, New Jersey.¹⁹ Many of these are less ornate than the Third Presbyterian Church, which is a particularly rich and embellished example of Pursell's work.

In contrast to other, arguably better-known architects who were based in Philadelphia during the same period and who have been lauded for their leadership in stylistic innovations and taste-making in twentieth-century scholarship, Pursell has been under-recognized in Pennsylvania, where he was based. Pursell's significance resides in the success of his ecclesiastical commissions as exemplars in the period, and particularly in connection with Presbyterian churches, with which he was particularly involved. This success is embodied in the sheer number of his many commissions throughout the country and in the respect he was accorded by his peers.

This respect is most clearly seen in the memorial tribute that was accorded to him in a resolution passed by the Philadelphia Chapter of the American Institute of Architects in 1910, which placed "on the record our appreciation of his character and his ability as an architect as demonstrated in the large number of churches and similar buildings in a practice extending over thirty years..."²⁰

Despite many historic documents that testify to Pursell's importance in the period in which he practiced, his work as a whole and his biography have yet to be studied in depth. Among the missing pieces of important information are a complete list of his works, which, as noted, spans multiple states. Thus, while there are many indications that Pursell was both prominent and prolific in his career, the total number of commissions is as yet unknown.

¹⁸ *The Brickbuilder* 5, no. 7 (July 1896): 136. The design of the church was characterized as "an agreeable treatment of a modern problem in church building." *Twenty-Seventh Annual Report of the Board of Church Erection Fund of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (1897): 88-90.

¹⁹ For a partial list of Pursell's commissions across the country, see Nora A. Taylor, National Register Nomination for Memorial Presbyterian Church, Wenonah, New Jersey, 2013, <https://www.nps.gov/nr/feature/places/pdfs/13000585.pdf>, accessed 15 January 2018.

²⁰ *Quarterly Bulletin of the American Institute of Architects* 11, no. 3 (October 1910): 197.

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The main modern biographical source is the brief summary written by architectural historian Sandra Tatman, who contrasts Pursell to his contemporary ecclesiastical specialist Charles Bolton (1855-1942). In contrast to Bolton, who outlived Pursell by over thirty years, Pursell was not as accomplished in self-promotion and never issued a publication of his own work. Thus, when Tatman characterizes Bolton as “more prolific and more adaptable” than Pursell, she fails to acknowledge the latter’s significance within the (briefer) time span of his work, as well as the differences in the length of their practice and dissemination of information about the same.²¹ Tatman does register, however, that Pursell was described in the 1889 New York publication *Illustrated Philadelphia: its Wealth and Industries* as “prominent among the leading architects of this city who have made a special study of this ennobling art,” and as “a thoroughly qualified and able architect who has evinced great skill and ability in the practice of his profession, designing and superintending the construction of many prominent buildings not only in Philadelphia but all over the United States.” His “specialty” in “building of schools and churches, of which he has constructed many” was also noted.²²

Tatman notes that although Pursell completed churches for many Protestant denominations, he particularly specialized in work for Presbyterians.²³ The publications of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States are especially revealing with respect to his national reach within the denomination. The Board of Church Erection raised money to aid in the construction of new Presbyterian buildings in order to further the evangelical spread of the denomination. As part of this effort, and beginning in the 1870s, this body increasingly was called upon to provide advice on how to construct new church buildings, and did so in their *Annual Reports* and through the dissemination of model church plans. The board noted in the 1875 *Report* that “for years past there has been an increasing demand for something to assist those inexperienced in church building in forming plans and estimates of such structures as may meet their wants and fall within their means.”²⁴

In order to meet this end, the board had sought the assistance of their counterparts in the Episcopal Church, and more specifically, made arrangements with the prominent Philadelphia architect Samuel Sloan, to “supply designs and estimates” as well as a discussion of “ventilation” (i.e., heating).²⁵ The publication of Sloan’s designs included plans, perspectives, and detailed construction costs. This initial publication of plans only spurred demands for more, and still more of Sloan’s designs were issued in next year’s *Report*.

²¹ See Tatman, “Bolton, Charles Webber (1855-1942),”

https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/24058 and “Pursell, Isaac (1853-1910),” https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/85792, accessed 11 January 2018.

²² “Isaac Pursell,” *Illustrated Philadelphia: Its Wealth and Industries* (New York: American Publishing & Engraving Co., 1889), p. 129.

²³ See project list associated with Tatman, “Pursell, Isaac.” (link above)

²⁴ *Annual Report of the Board of Church Erection Fund of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (New York: Published by the Board of Church Erection, 1875), p. 10.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

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Continuing demand led to publication of the work of other architects by the Board. In 1878, the work of Warren H. Hayes, based in Minneapolis, New York architect W. S. Purdy, and Chicagoan Henry L. Gay appeared in addition to Sloan's. In the following years, other architects' work appeared, including that of New Yorkers J. W. Marshall, Lawrence Valk, and Clarence W. Smith and Augustus Howe.

In 1881, three years after he left his apprenticeship in Samuel Sloan's office to establish his own practice, the Presbyterian Board of Church Erection published three of Pursell's designs for the first time in the company of more established practitioners.²⁶ It is a matter of speculation whether the connection between Samuel Sloan and the Board led to the publication of Pursell's work. The Board went on to publish multiple Pursell designs in 1882, and in the report of that year, Pursell was referred to as "our architect."²⁷ Groups of Pursell designs were also published in 1883 (five) and 1884 (three).²⁸ The board generally published fewer plans by other architects. Between 1885 and 1890, when Pursell's designs were again published by the Board, fewer new designs were published in the *Annual Reports* in general. In 1890, when Pursell's designs again appear in the *Annual Reports*, there was more of an emphasis on built work as exemplary, rather than on more generic, speculative designs. Thus, Pursell's Harper Memorial Church in Philadelphia is featured in 1890, Osage City Church in Kansas in 1891, the United Presbyterian Church of Oxford, PA in 1893, the Beadle Memorial Church in Cape May Point, New Jersey in 1896.²⁹ The Third Presbyterian Church was presented to the national Presbyterian audience in 1897 as one of the exemplars of the denomination.³⁰ The design for the Third Presbyterian Church thus stands out both from Pursell's other commissions, and from the work of his contemporaries in its significance as a design of Presbyterian churches.

Gothic Revival Style in Chester City

At the time that the Third Presbyterian Church was commissioned, ecclesiastical design in the Philadelphia region was at a high point. A number of styles were popular, but the Late Gothic Revival, or, more properly, as Kilde terms it, neo-medieval - was particularly prevalent, not least because of its historical associations with Christianity. For example, of approximately 170 church designed in the city of Philadelphia between 1886 and 1900, roughly 100 of these were built in the Gothic Revival style.³¹ The specific plan form that the churches took varies in this important period of church construction, but, as the discussion above indicates, one of the most significant was the auditorium plan. Among the other characteristics of the late Gothic Revival of the 1890s is the complexity and richness of its details. The Third Presbyterian Church embodies this trend in its richly ornate towers, its complex massing and roof forms, the

²⁶ *Annual Report* (1881), p. 26 ff.

²⁷ *Annual Report* (1882), p. 18.

²⁸ *Annual Report* (1883), p. 28 ff.; *Annual Report* (1884), p. 24 ff.

²⁹ *Annual Report* (1890), pp. 80-81; *Annual Report* (1891), p. 79; *Annual Report* (1893), pp. 90-91; *Annual Report* (1896), p. 87.

³⁰ *Annual Report* (1897), p. 88-90.

³¹ See Emily T. Cooperman, National Register Nomination for McDowell Memorial Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, PA, listed 2013.

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elaboration of tracery in its prominent stained glass windows of the front elevation, and its rooftop spire.

As noted above, the significance and prominence of the Third Presbyterian Church as an ecclesiastical design in Chester City is evident in comparing the other churches featured in Henry Smith Valentine's *Chester and Vicinity* of 1914. Valentine notes that "there are in the neighborhood of fifty churches or places of worship in the district comprising Chester," and that "many of the edifices are beautiful and costly in exterior and interior architecture."

Although Valentine documented some fifty houses of worship in the Chester area, which included adjacent communities outside the city, he singled out a very small number to illustrate his publication. Most of these are in various forms of Gothic Revival style that arose from the mid-nineteenth century on (see Figures 8-10). Notably, the Third Presbyterian Church appears as the first to be illustrated in his publication (Figure 11), thus registering the relative importance the church was understood to possess in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Visual comparison with the other buildings illustrated make it clear that Pursell's design was substantially more sophisticated than its contemporaries in Chester, both in the complex sculptural quality of its massing, and in the richness of its Gothic Revival detail, than other churches in Chester in the period.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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Anon. *Fiftieth Anniversary of the Third Presbyterian Church, Chester, Pennsylvania, 1872-1922*. Chester, 1922.

_____. "Isaac Pursell, AIA." *Quarterly Bulletin of the American Institute of Architects* 11, no. 3 (October 1910): 197.

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_____. *History of Delaware County, Pennsylvania*. Philadelphia: L. H. Everts & Co., 1884.

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Kilde, Jeanne Halgren. *When Churches Became Theatre: The Transformation of Evangelical Architecture and Worship in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Martin, John Hill. *Chester (and its Vicinity,) Delaware County, in Pennsylvania*. Philadelphia: Printed by Wm. H. Pile and Sons, 1877.

McLeod, M. J. *Souvenir of the Third Presbyterian Church of Chester, PA, 1872-1896*. Printed by John Spencer, Chester, 1896.

Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide 10, no. 18 (5/1/1895), p. 111.

Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide 10, no. 19 (5/8/1895), p. 245.

Records of the Third Presbyterian Church. Collection the Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, PA.

Sanborn-Perris Map Co., Ltd. *Chester and South Chester, Pennsylvania*. New York: Sanborn-Perris Map Co., Ltd., 1891.

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_____. *Insurance Maps of Chester, Pennsylvania*. New York: Sanborn-Perris Map Co., Ltd., 1898.

Smith, Henry Valentine. *Chester and Vicinity*. Chester, PA: H. V. Smith, 1914.

Wiley, Samuel T. *Biographical and Historical Cyclopedia of Delaware County, Pennsylvania*. Revised and edited by Winfield Scott Garner. Richmond, IN and New York: Gresham Publishing Company, 1894.

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 # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other/Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): NA

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: less than one (0.8)

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)

Datum if other than WGS84: NA

Latitude: 39.854617

Longitude: -75.356497

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary corresponds to Delaware County Tax Parcel # PARID 49050024000 (indicated on parcel maps as 49-10-464-009) and is depicted in Figure 4. The parcel overall is rectangular but consists of three parts, one of which (consisting of a parking lot) extends to the west from the main

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part. Beginning at a point on the northwest side of East 9th Street approximately 96 feet from the northwest corner of the intersection of East 9th Street and Potter Street, continuing counter-clockwise along the easterly edge of Delaware County parcel 49050024000 approximately 112 feet to a point, then continuing at a right angle approximately 10 feet southwest, then turning again at a right angle and continuing approximately 155 feet to the northwest, thence southwest approximately 38 feet, thence northwest approximately 15 feet, thence southwest approximately 40 feet, thence southeast approximately 15 feet, thence southwest approximately 38 feet, thence southeast approximately 30 feet, thence southwest approximately 80 feet, thence southeast approximately 90 feet, thence northeast approximately 78 feet, thence southeast approximately 150 feet to the northwest side of East 9th Street, thence northeast to the place of beginning.

Boundary Justification

The boundary nominated matches the historic boundary of the church parcel. No known associated resources have been excluded from the boundary. The manse formerly associated with the church on an adjacent parcel has been demolished. The former site of the manse does not enhance the church's significance under Criterion C, and so that parcel is not included within the boundary.

Form Prepared By

Name & Title: Emily T. Cooperman, M.S., Ph.D., Senior Architectural Historian
 Organization: Paulus, Sokolowski & Sartor LLC (PS&S)
 Address: 1909 NJ-70 #307; Cherry Hill NJ 08003
 Email: ecooperman@psands.com; Phone: 732-482-9049 Date: 6/2018

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Property: Third Presbyterian Church, Delaware County

Photographer: Emily T. Cooperman Date: December 2017

Photo #	Description of view	Camera facing
1	Third Presbyterian Church, southeast elevation, from 9th St.	N
2	Southwest elevation, with sanctuary at center	NE
3	Southwest elevation, Sabbath School	E
4	Northwest elevation, Sabbath School, addition at left	SE
5	Sabbath School entrance	N
6	Southwest elevation, 1920s addition	NE
7	Porte-cochere doors	NE

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8	Pastor study chimney	W
9	Main Sanctuary, from pulpit dais	SW
10	East entrance, main sanctuary, cloister at right	E
11	Detail, west vestibule floor	S
12	Main Sanctuary	NE
13	Pulpit dais	N
14	Main Sanctuary ceiling	NE
15	Organ and door to pastor's study	SE
16	Northeast elevation door to pastor's study area	NE
17	Sabbath School entry door and vestibule at porte-cochere	SW
18	Southern stair from porte-cochere to upper level of Sabbath School	NE
19	Sabbath School main space from upper floor	SE
20	Sabbath School main space from lower floor	SW
21	Sabbath School partitions to Main Sanctuary	NE
22	Northern Sabbath School stair	SW
23	Sabbath School lay light oculus	SW
24	Second floor Sabbath School roll-up partition	NW
25	Ladies' Parlor fireplace	NE
26	Basement under Main Sanctuary	E
27	Basement meeting space and former kitchen	NW
28	Sabbath School addition 2nd floor corridor	NW
29	Sabbath School addition classroom detail	S
30	Sabbath School stair, 2nd floor	NW

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Long. -75.356579
Lat. -39.854693

Detail, USGS Bridgeport Quadrangle, New Jersey—Pennsylvania, 7.5 Minute Series, 2016, North American Datum of 1983

Figure 1: USGS map excerpt.

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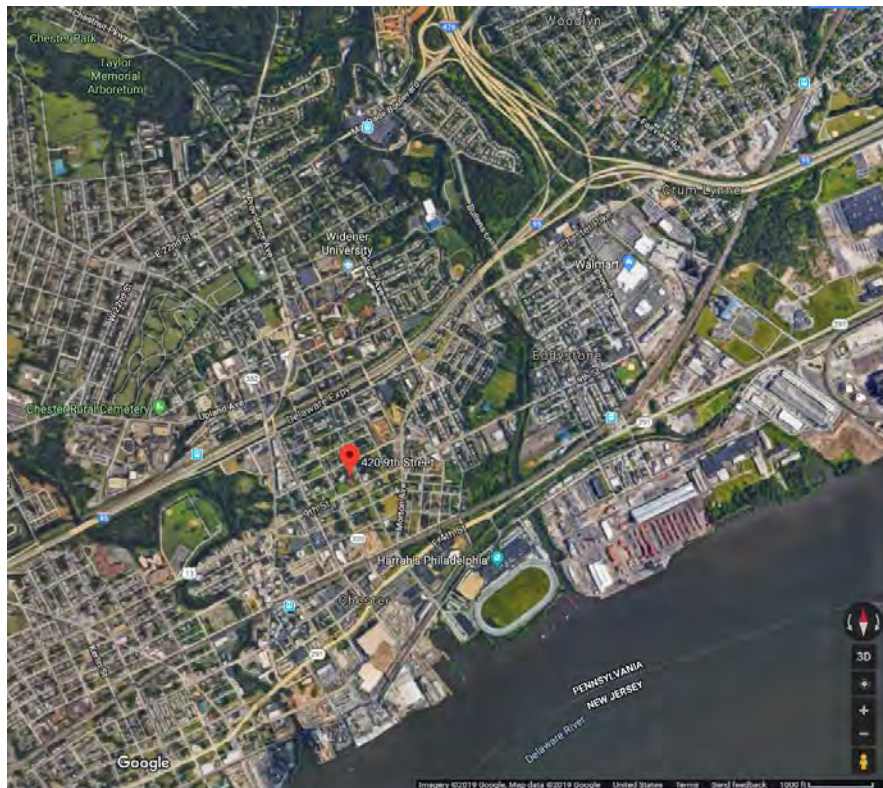
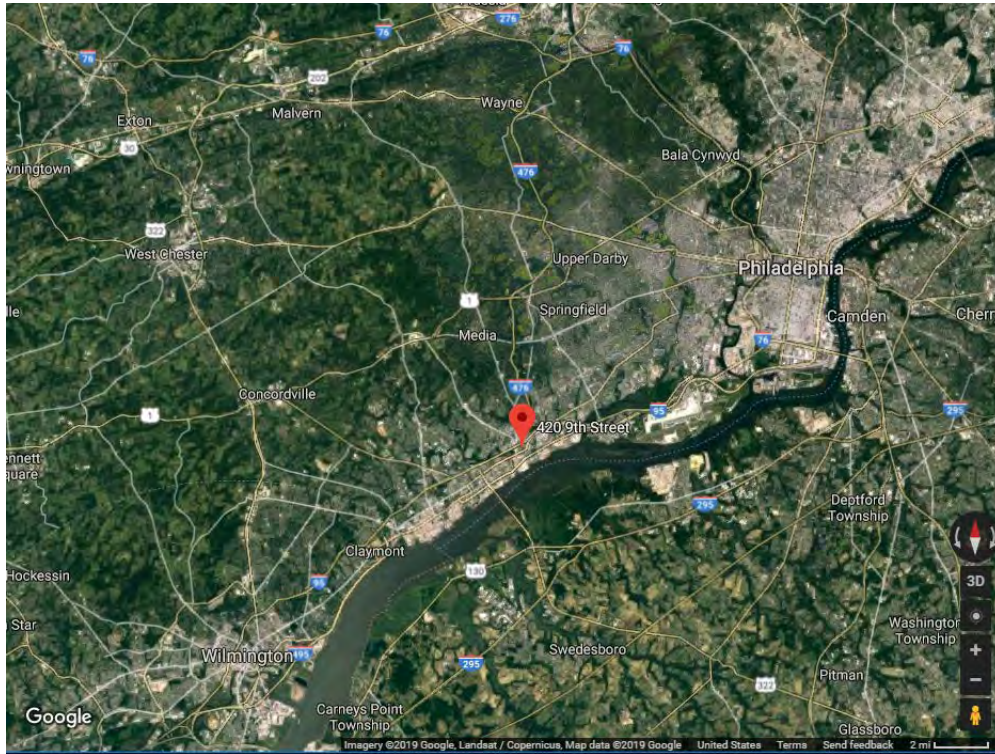


Figure 2: General aerial views of the Chester area; red pin indicates property location.

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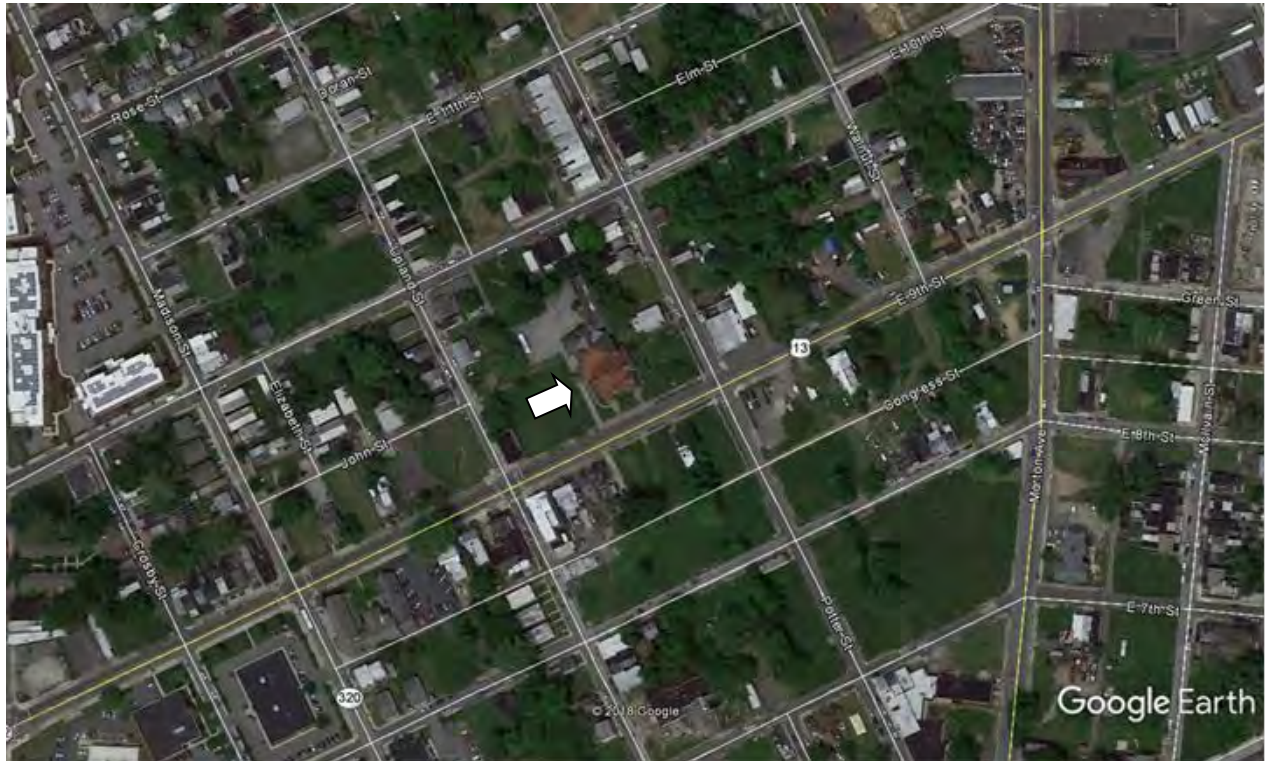


Figure 3: Recent aerial views of the property, indicated in top image with arrow. Bottom image shows *approximate* property boundary outline as red dashed line.

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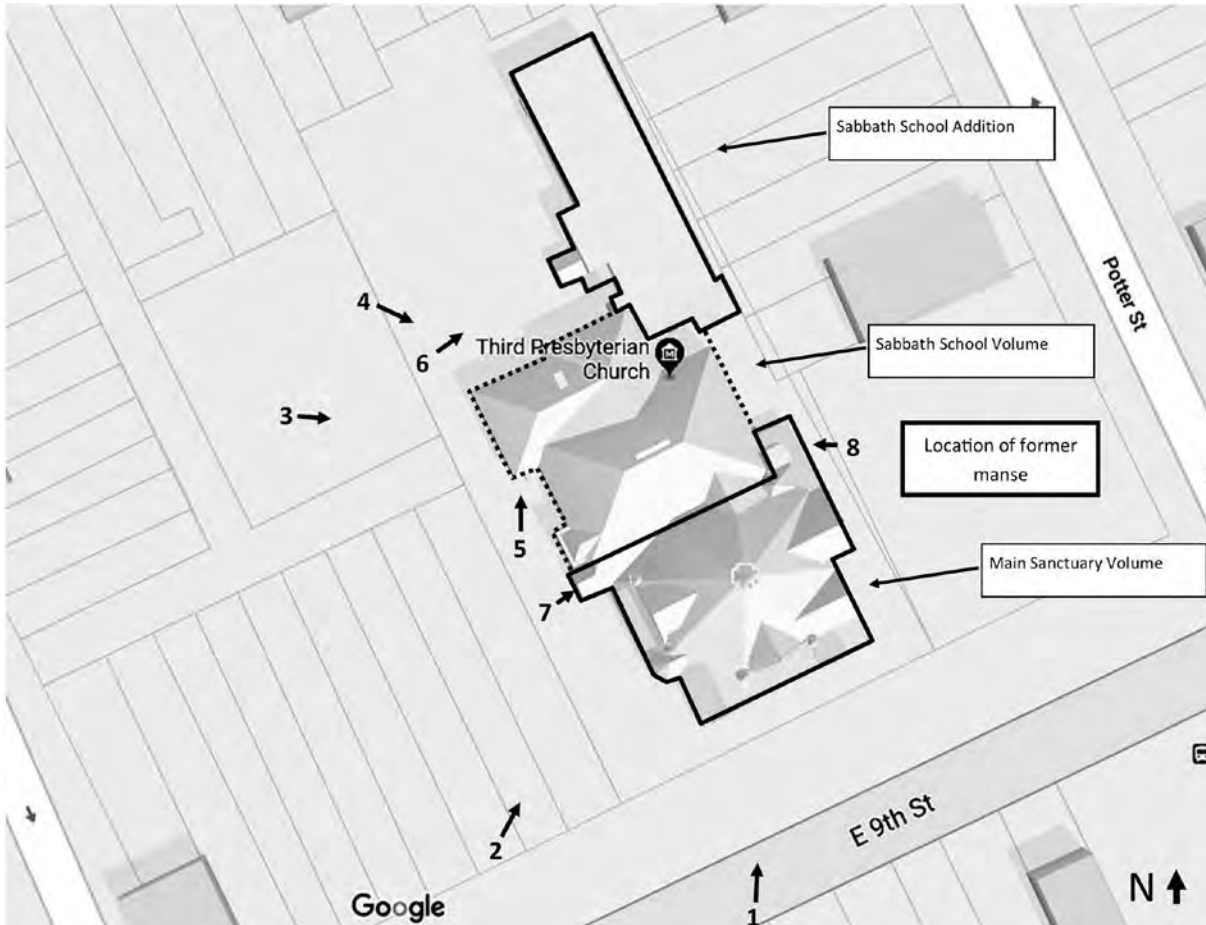


Figure 5: Exterior Photo Key

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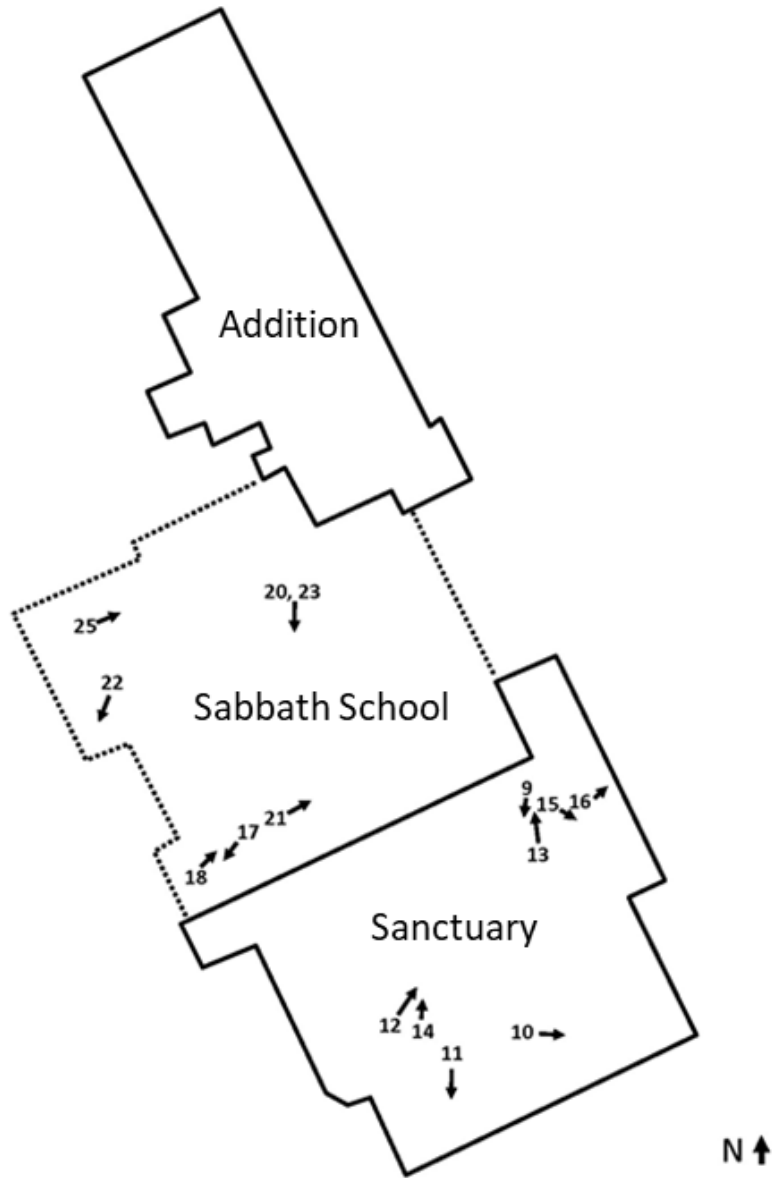


Figure 6: Interior Photo Key, First Floor

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Figure 7: Interior Photo Keys, second floor (left) and basement (right).

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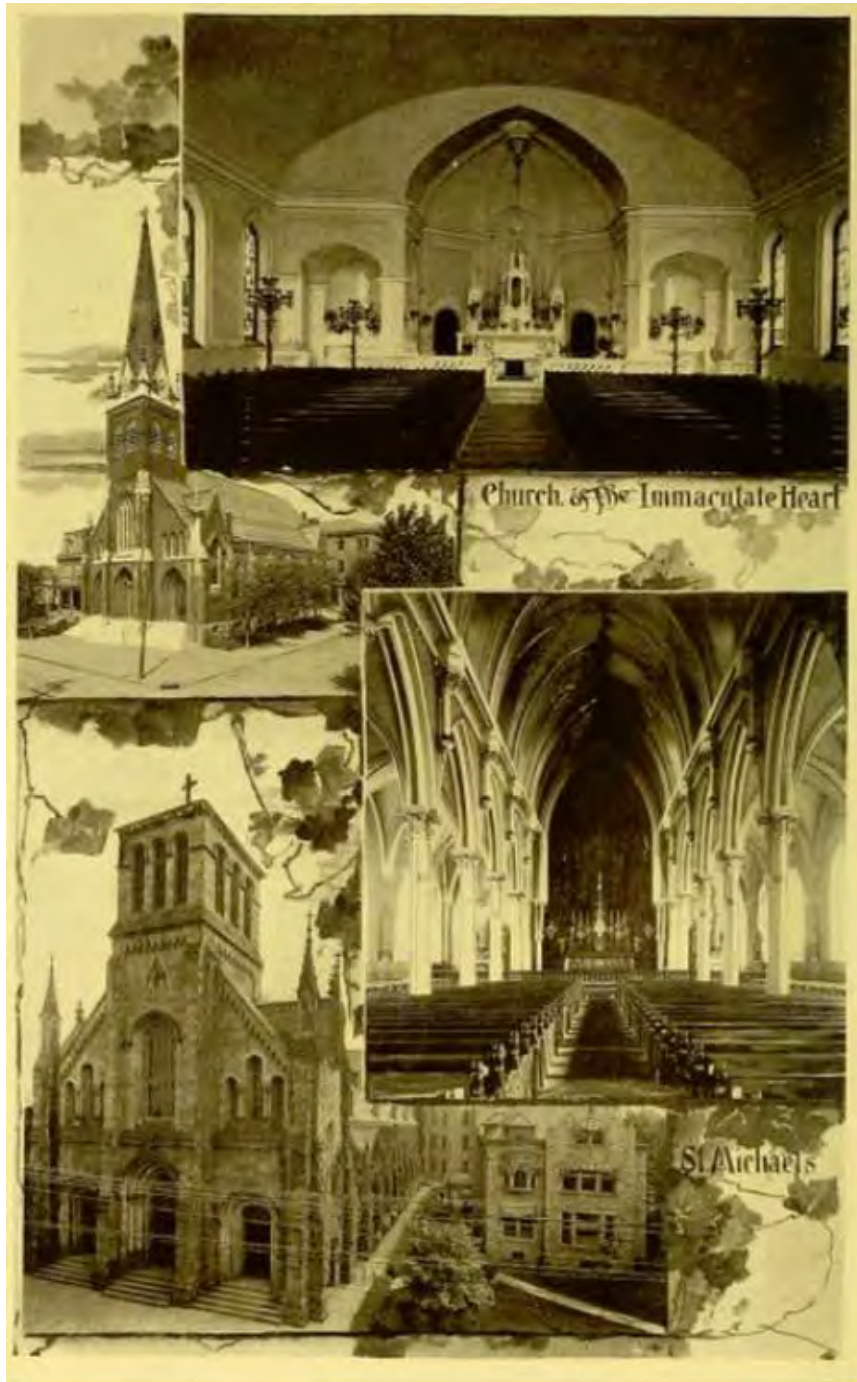


Figure 8: Chester Churches, c.1914. Source: Henry Valentine Smith, *Chester and Vicinity* (St. Michael's Roman Catholic Church designed by E. F. Durang, lower left)

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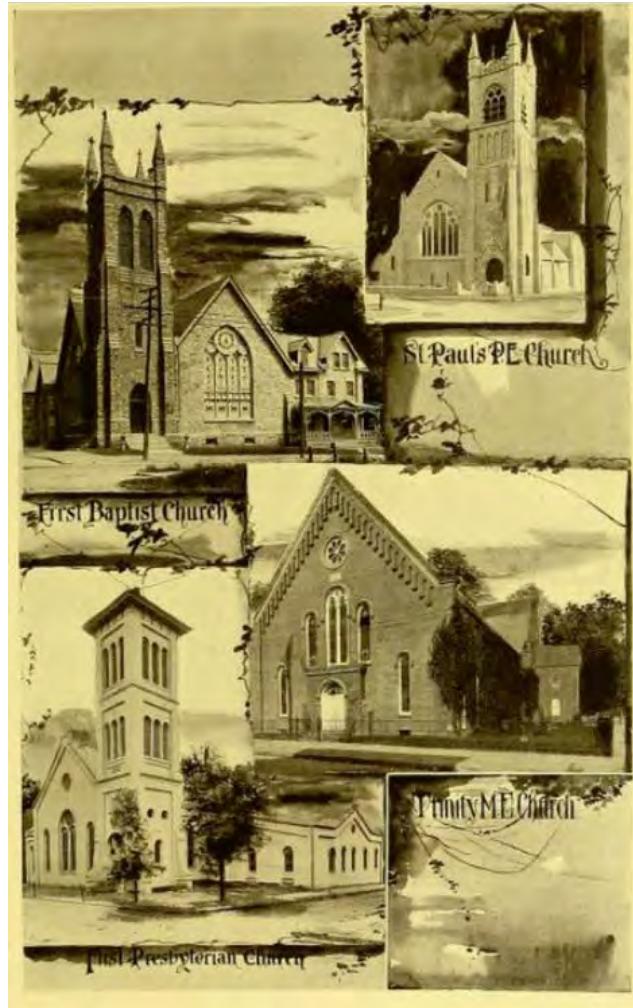


Figure 9: Chester Churches, c.1914. Source: Henry Valentine Smith, *Chester and Vicinity* (Pursell's First Baptist Church, upper left in top image)

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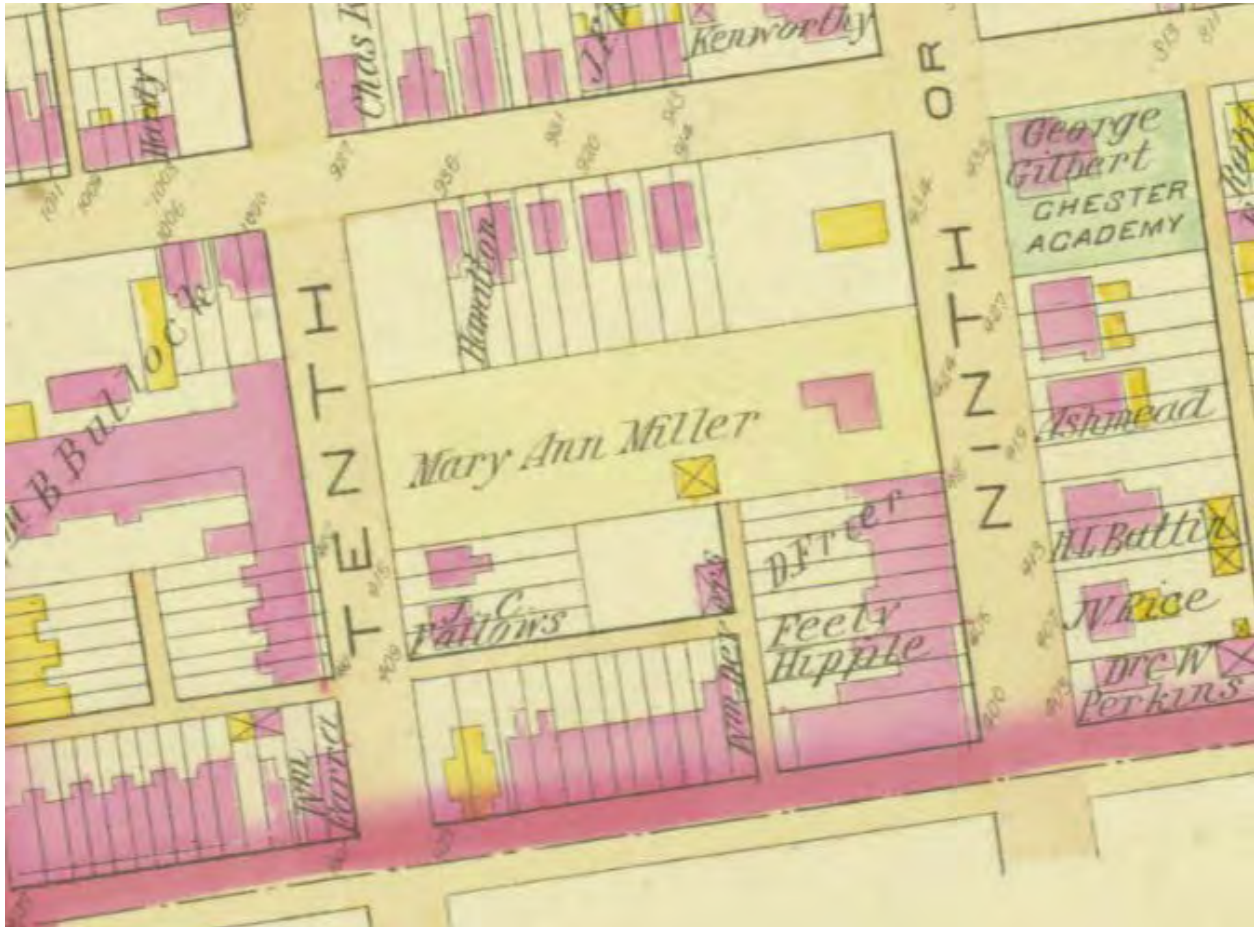


Figure 10: Detail, Miller, Ogier, McDonald, and Breou, *Farm Line and Borough Atlas of Delaware Co.*, 1892, Plate 14, showing property (“Mary Ann Miller”) purchased for construction of the Third Presbyterian Church.

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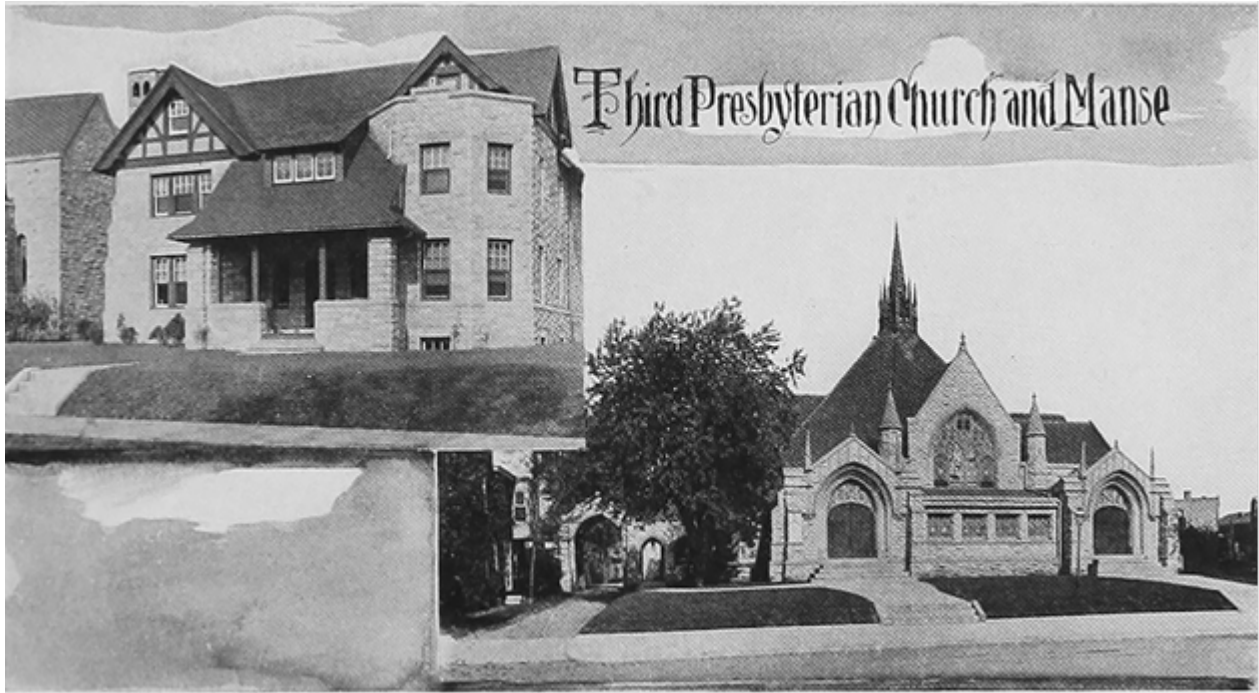


Figure 11: Nominated church, and former manse, c.1914. Source: Henry Valentine Smith, *Chester and Vicinity*

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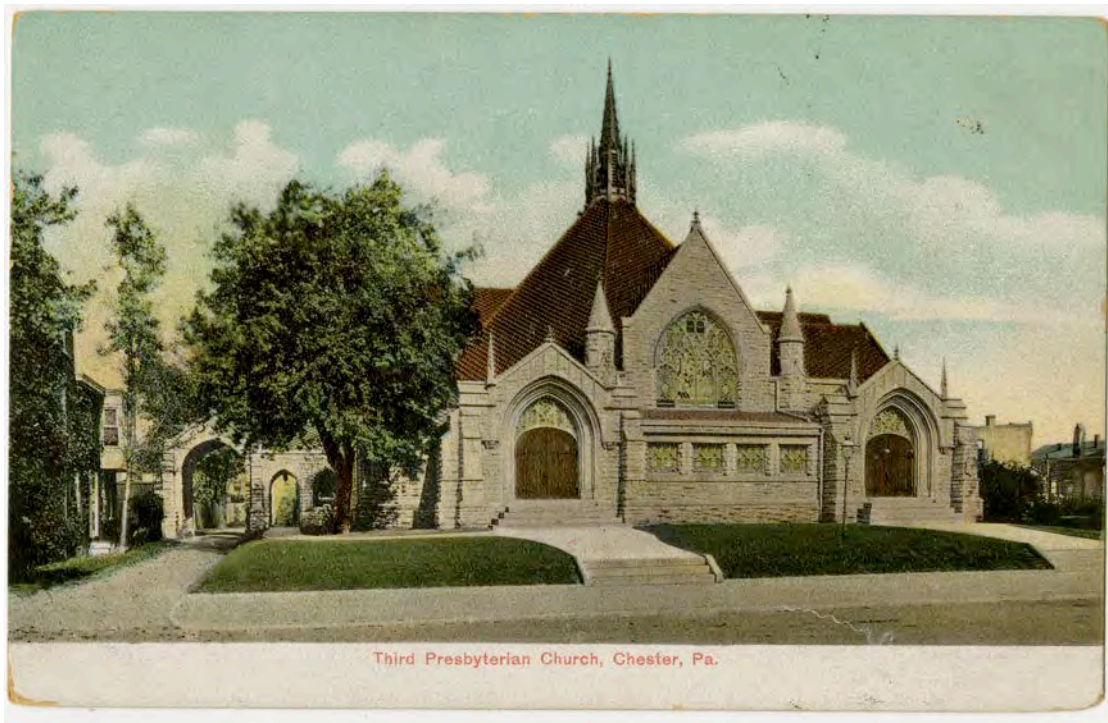
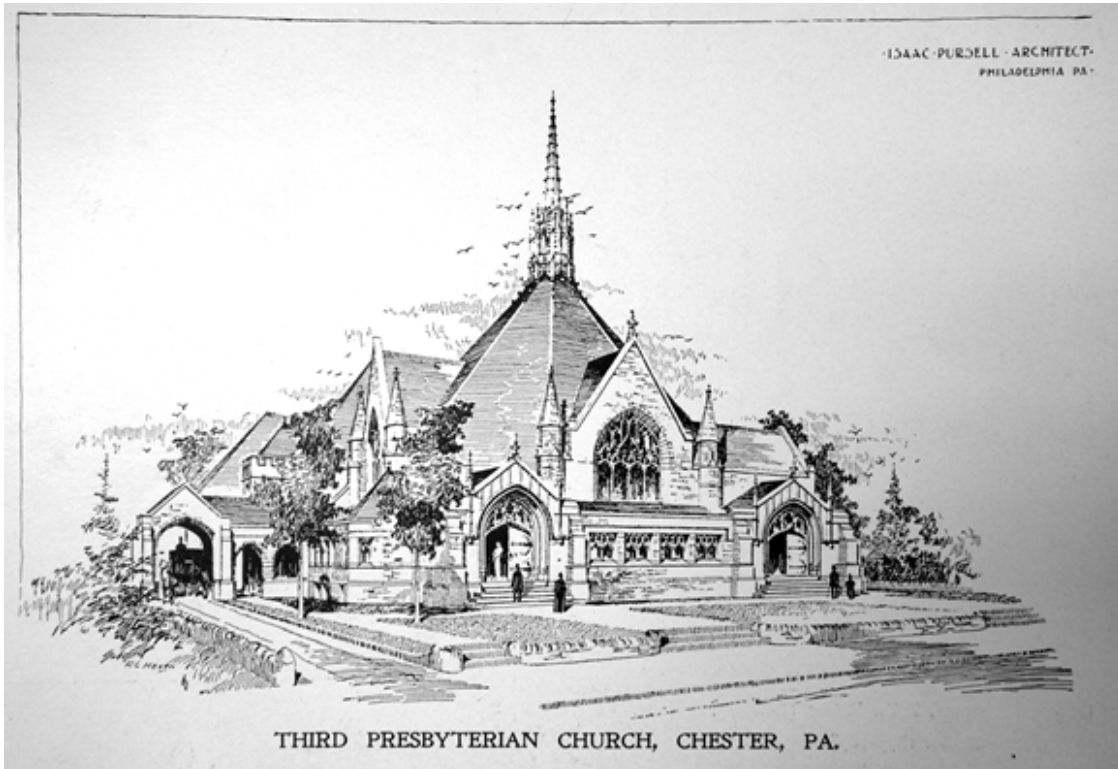
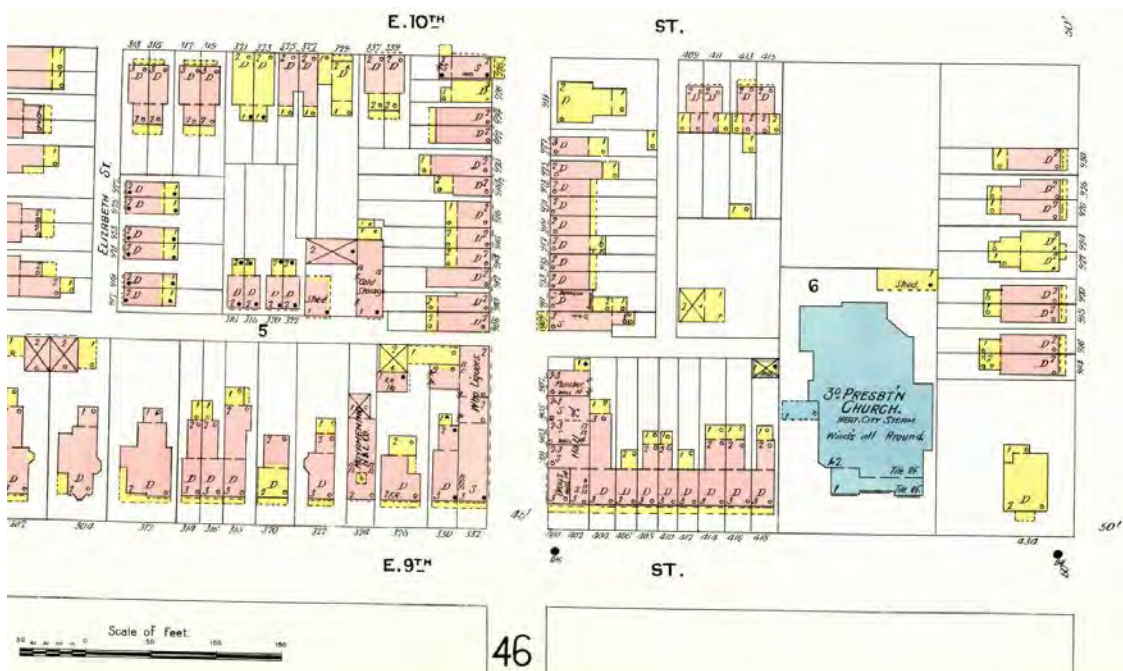


Figure 12: Top: Perspective published in 1896 *Souvenir of the Third Presbyterian Church of Chester*; below: historic postcard of church, n.d.

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1898 Sanborn Map Excerpt (from Sheet 42).



1917 Sanborn Map Excerpts (pieced together from Sheets 23 and 52)

Figure 13: Sanborn Map Excerpts, 1898 and 1917

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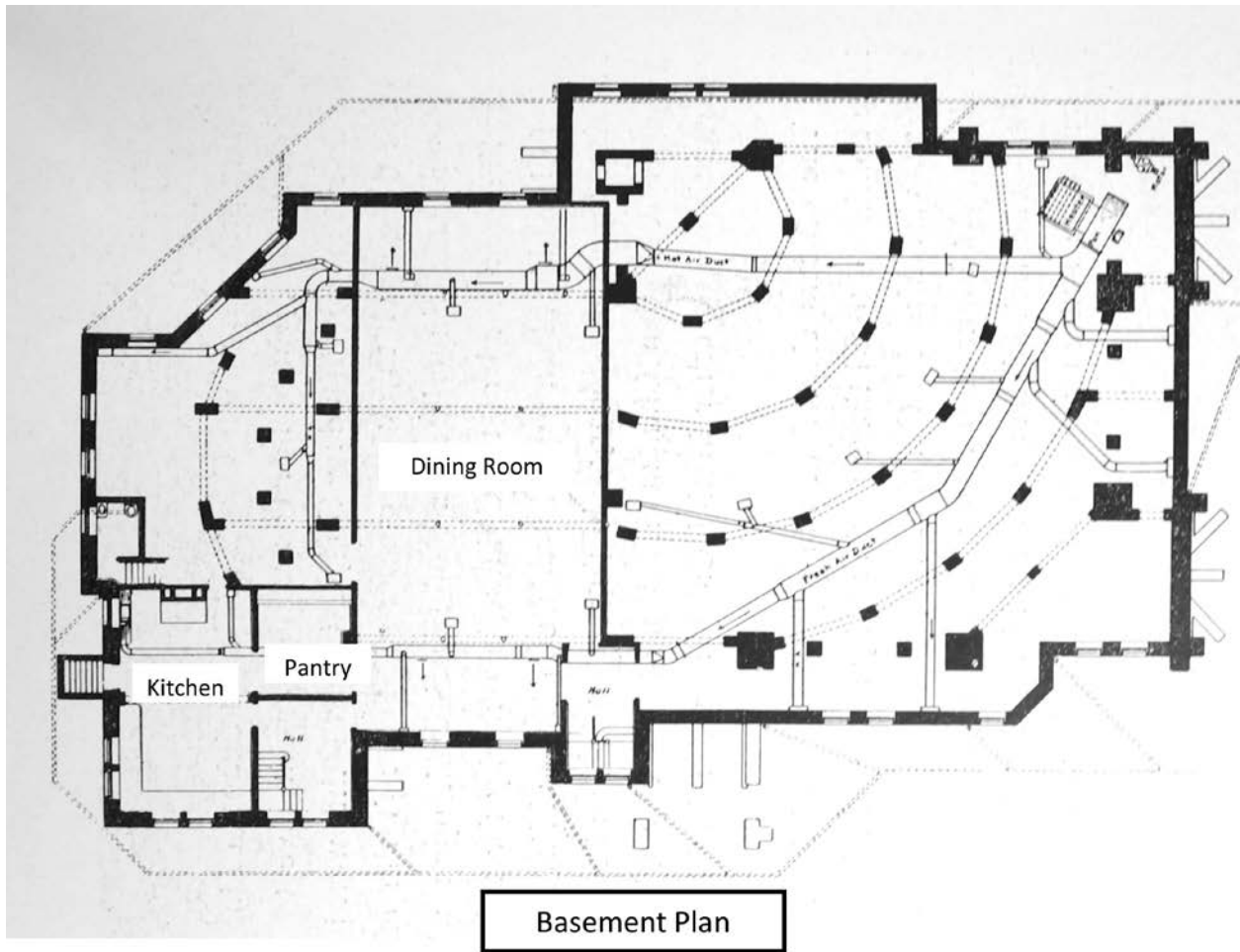


Figure 14: Basement Plan, published in 1896 *Souvenir of the Third Presbyterian Church of Chester*

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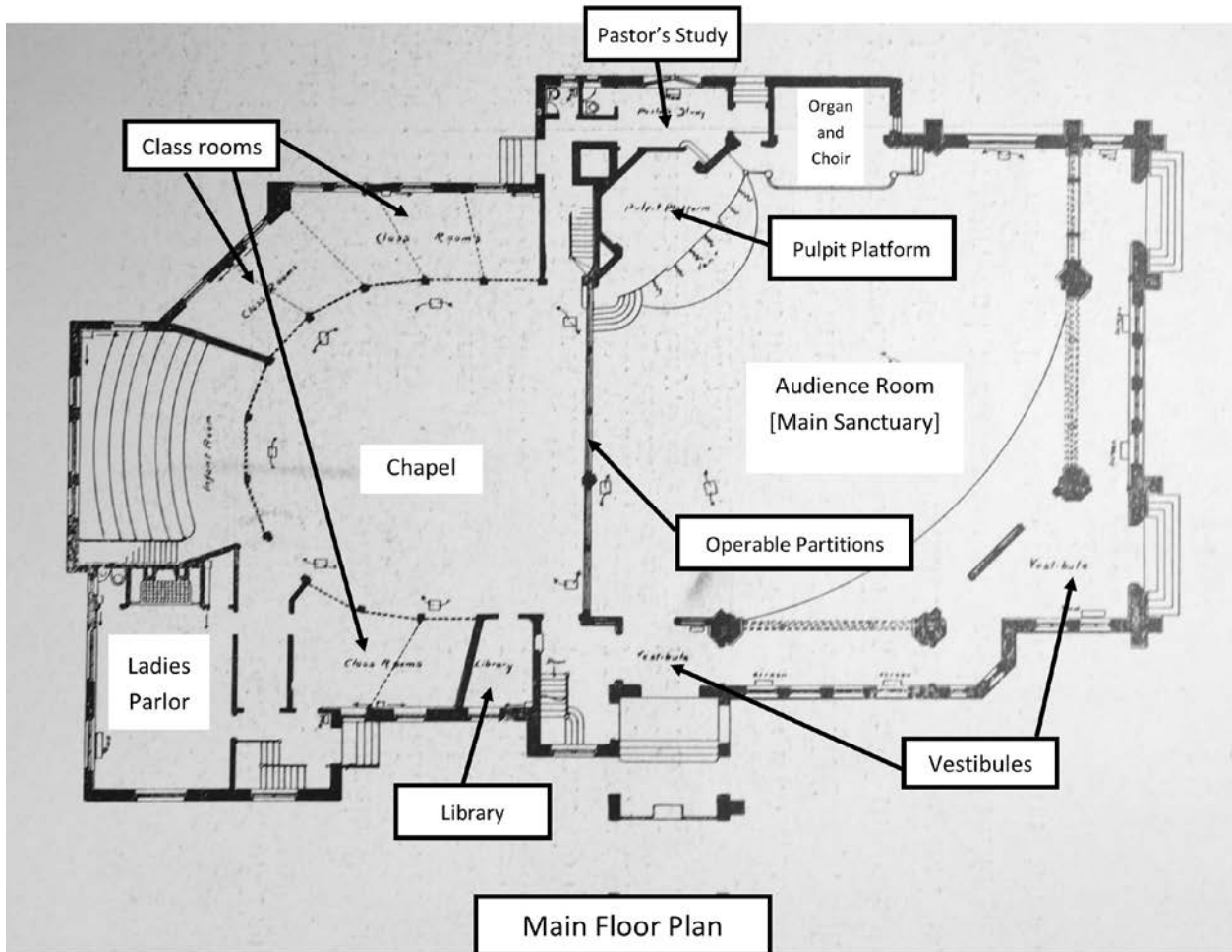


Figure 15: Main Floor Plan published in 1896 *Souvenir of the Third Presbyterian Church of Chester*

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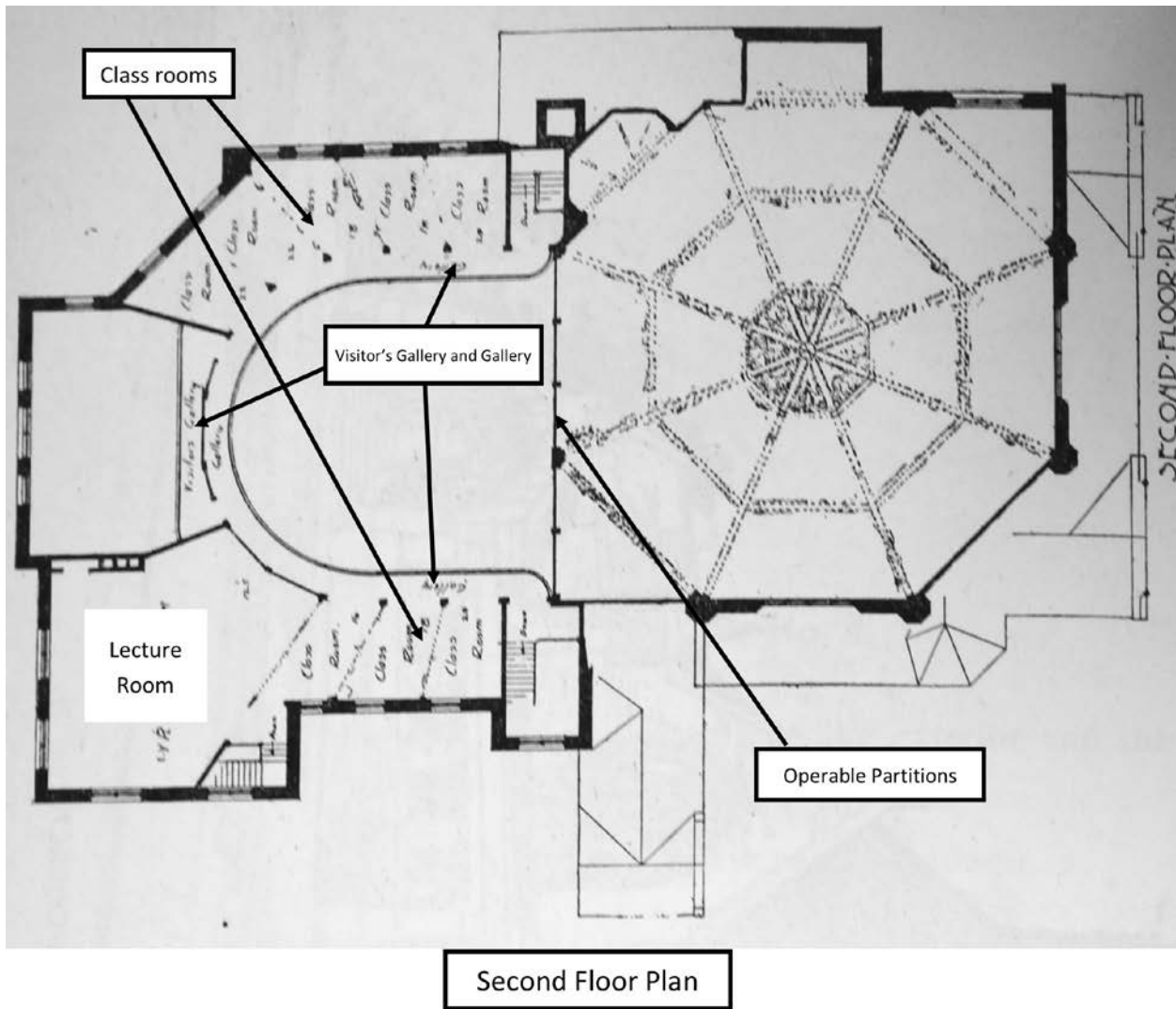


Figure 16: Second Floor Plan published in 1896 *Souvenir of the Third Presbyterian Church of Chester*









NO
PARKING





NO
SPACED



GOYA

PLATE

PLATE









030 P2
30:4

ANF



"BE STILL, AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD"





BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD

































UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action: Nomination
Property Name: Third Presbyterian Church
Multiple Name:
State & County: PENNSYLVANIA, Delaware

Date Received: 10/16/2019 Date of Pending List: 11/12/2019 Date of 16th Day: 11/27/2019 Date of 45th Day: 12/2/2019 Date of Weekly List:

Reference number: SG100004702

Nominator: SHPO

Reason For Review:

X Accept Return Reject 11/26/2019 Date

Abstract/Summary NR Criterion C.
Comments:

Recommendation/ Criteria AOS: Architecture; POS: 1895-1922; LOS: local Isaac Pursell, architect.

Reviewer Lisa Deline Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2239 Date 11/26/19

DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments : No see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.

**9TH SENATORIAL DISTRICT
STATE SENATOR
TOM KILLION**

SENATE BOX 203009
HARRISBURG, PA 17120-3009
717-787-4712
FAX 717-783-7490
TOLL FREE 1-888-9TH-DIST

4110 EDMONT AVENUE
BROOKHAVEN, PA 19015
610-447-3163
FAX 610-447-5848

780 E. MARKET STREET, SUITE 140
WEST CHESTER, PA 19380
610-438-3320
FAX 610-438-8983



Senate of Pennsylvania

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CONSUMER PROTECTION &
PROFESSIONAL LICENSURE
URBAN AFFAIRS & HOUSING
MAJORITY POLICY

senatorkillion.com
tkillion@pasen.gov

June 3rd, 2019

Andrea MacDonald, Director, State Historic Preservation Office
400 North Street
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Re: Third Presbyterian Church, 420 E 9th Street, Chester PA

Dear Members of the Historic Preservation Board:

On behalf of the people of the 9th Senatorial District, I am pleased to write in support of the nomination of the Third Presbyterian Church to the National Register and ask for your favorable consideration of the nomination.

Dating to the late nineteenth century, the Third Presbyterian Church is a symbol of the rich history of Pennsylvania and of Chester, in particular. A monumental piece of architecture when it was first completed, the church has withstood the test of time as an icon of the Philadelphia area's neo-classical and Renaissance-inspired design. Therefore, in order to ensure its continued preservation into the future, the community has come together to seek the church's recognition from the National Register of Historic Places.

This is an important piece of history to the residents and families of Chester, and I want you to be aware of my full support of the church's nomination. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can provide you with any additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Killion". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

TOM KILLION
SENATOR, 9th DISTRICT



Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office

PENNSYLVANIA HISTORICAL AND MUSEUM COMMISSION



October 15, 2019

Joy Beasley, Keeper
National Register of Historic Places
National Park Service, US Department of Interior
1849 C Street, NW, Mail Stop 7228
Washington DC 20240

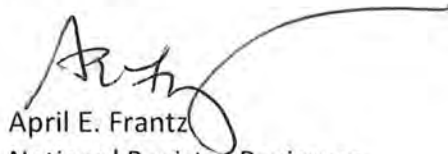
Re: Sykes Brothers Yarn Mill, Philadelphia
Third Presbyterian Church, Delaware County
Wharton Street Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church and Sunday School, Philadelphia

Dear Ms. Beasley:

Enclosed please find the National Register of Historic Places nominations for the above properties. Included is the signed first page of each nomination, CDs containing the true and correct copies of the nominations and letters of support, and CDs with tif images. The proposed action for the properties is listing in the National Register. Our Historic Preservation Board members support the nominations.

If you have any questions regarding the nominations or our request for action, please contact me at 717-783-9922 or afrantz@pa.gov. Thank you for your consideration of this submission.

Sincerely,



April E. Frantz
National Register Reviewer

enc.