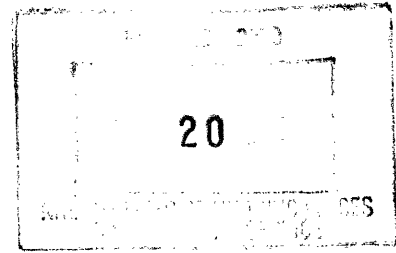


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

401



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If 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. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Christ Episcopal Church and Tashua Burial Ground

other names/site number Episcopal Society of Christ Church in Trumbull

2. Location


street & number 5170 Madison Avenue not for publication

city or town Trumbull vicinity \_\_\_\_\_

state Connecticut code CT county Fairfield code 001 zip code 06611

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. (  See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

 March 12, 2001  
Signature of certifying official Date  
John W. Shannahan, Director, Connecticut Historical Commission  
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

Christ Episcopal Church and Tashua Burial Ground  
Name of Property

Fairfield, CT  
County and State

**4. National Park Service Certification**

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

Signature of the Keeper  
Edson H. Beall

Date of Action  
4/25/01

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)  
count.)

private  
 public-local  
 public-State  
 public-Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

building(s)  
 district  
 site  
 structure  
 object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	_____ buildings
<u>1</u>	_____ sites
___	_____ structures
___	_____ objects
<u>2</u>	_____ Total

**Name of related multiple property listing listed**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)  
N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously in the National Register**  
0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)  
RELIGION/religious facility  
FUNERARY/cemetery  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)  
RELIGION/religious facility  
FUNERARY/cemetery  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)  
MID-19th CENTURY/Gothic Revival  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)  
foundation stone  
walls wood  
\_\_\_\_\_  
roof asphalt shingle  
other \_\_\_\_\_

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

Christ Episcopal Church and Tashua Burial Ground  
Name of Property

Fairfield. CT  
County and State

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

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

**A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

**B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

**C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

**D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

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

Property is:

**A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

**B** removed from its original location.

**C** a birthplace or grave.

**D** a cemetery.

**E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

**F** a commemorative property.

**G** Less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

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

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

RELIGION

**Period of Significance**

1766-ca. 1860

**Significant Dates**

1766; 1846; ca. 1860

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Hotchkiss Clark and Company (builder)

Christ Episcopal Church and Tashua Burial Ground  
Name of Property

Fairfield, CT  
County and State

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

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**Bibliography**

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

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing  
(36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary Location of Additional Data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Christ Episcopal Church, Trumbull, CT

Christ Episcopal Church and Tashua Burial Ground  
Name of Property

Fairfield, CT  
County and State

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**10. Geographical Data**

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**Acreage of Property** 1.7

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	<u>18</u>	<u>645660</u>	<u>4571825</u>	3	_____	_____	_____
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	__	_____	_____	4	_____	_____	_____
						See continuation sheet.	

**Verbal Boundary Description**

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

**Boundary Justification**

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

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**11. Form Prepared By** Reviewed by John Herzan, National Register Coordinator

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name/title Dawn Maddox, Preservation Programs Supervisor/Architectural Historian

organization Connecticut Historical Commission

date October 1, 2000

street & number 59 South Prospect Street

telephone 860-566-3005

city or town Hartford state CT zip code 06106

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**Additional Documentation**

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Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

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

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

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items**

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

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**Property Owner**

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

name Christ Episcopal Church

street & number 5170 Madison Avenue

telephone 203-268-5566

city or town Trumbull state CT zip code 06611

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

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

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National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Christ Episcopal Church and Tashua Burial Ground, Trumbull, Fairfield County, Connecticut**

Section 7 Page 1

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**Description**

Christ Episcopal Church, an active house of worship built in the Carpenter Gothic style in 1846, is the centerpiece of Tashua village in the northwest sector of the town of Trumbull, Connecticut. Trumbull belongs to the southernmost tier of towns in the Western Uplands geographic region of Connecticut, separated from Long Island Sound by the city of Bridgeport and the town of Stratford. A 33-town area, the Western Uplands is one of six historic contexts, or cultural/landscape environments, into which the state is divided by the Connecticut Historical Commission/State Historic Preservation Office for preservation planning purposes.<sup>1</sup> In Tashua the housing mix spans the mid-eighteenth-century origins of the neighborhood to the present. The 17.6-acre Tashua Knolls municipal golf course east of Christ Episcopal Church enhances an open-space ambiance which nonetheless is increasingly impacted by suburban development. The nominated property - Christ Church and the adjacent burial ground and parking area - comprises the historic 1.7-acre church parcel at the southeast corner of the intersection of Madison Avenue and Tashua Road (Exhibit A). The church faces southwest on the avenue (Photograph #1). Not included in the nomination nor in the historic church parcel is the 1909 aluminum-sided two-story rectory on a one-acre lot at 5160 Madison Avenue, southeast of the parking area. The rectory was purchased by Christ Church in 1965 and enlarged and remodeled extensively in the 1970s and 1980s.

Utilizing post-and-beam framing and measuring 50 by 34 feet, Christ Church rests upon a high stone basement (Photograph #2). The front-gable roof, now asphalt-shingled, was originally covered with 18-inch split pine shingles. Below the roof runs a frieze surrounding the building and composed of regularly spaced projecting wooden blocks terminating at the bottom in points, rather like, as historian Charles W. Brilvitch has noted, Gothicized triglyphs<sup>2</sup> (Photograph #3). Emphasizing the Gothic motif are buttresses at the four corners of the building, all topped by pinnacles. The exterior of the church is sheathed in clapboards, now painted white but originally fawn-colored with contrasting brown trim. Fenestration on each side elevation consists of four lancet-arch windows set with clear diamond-pane sash (Photograph #3). Four corresponding rectangular openings in the basement level accommodate windows or doors. On the rear (northeast) elevation, the projection of the gable-roofed chancel and its flanking secondary spaces (sacristy, stairhall) is centered with a lancet-arch stained-glass window.

The focus of the church exterior is the steeple, centered on the facade and extending four feet (of the steeple's total depth of 10 feet) beyond the main mass of the building (Photograph #4). The wood-shingled octagonal spire of the steeple rises 80 feet above ground and rests upon a square belfry which contains the bell from the congregation's second church

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**Christ Episcopal Church and Tashua Burial Ground, Trumbull, Fairfield County, Connecticut**

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(consecrated 1795). All four elevations of the belfry are pierced with paired trefoil-arch openings containing louvers, and the angles of the belfry are formed by buttresses topped by pinnacles. Marking the division between the belfry and the tower portion of the steeple is a band of interconnected wooden quatrefoils. The facade buttresses of the belfry terminate at the base of the tower in two-stage weatherings which flank paneled, double-leaf entrance doors filling a Tudor-arch opening (Photograph #5). Aligned above the entrance but exceeding it in relative height is a lancet-arch window with triple internal arches and intersecting tracery lighted by clear diamond-paned glass. A small diamond-shaped window is above the large arched window, and high on each side elevation of the tower is an even smaller rectangular window; all three small windows are set within deep reveals. At each side of the entrance doors are single blind lancet-arch windows whose verticality is emphasized by inset double panels of chevron-shaped slats; headings of the windows are enriched with blind trefoil arches. Ascending to the church entrance are a half-dozen quarried stone steps (each a single massive slab) flanked by iron railings and stone sidewalls, and leading to the steps from Madison Avenue is a brick walkway crossing the front lawn between towering maples (Photograph #6).

In the church interior, within the narthex, is a wooden spindle-back pew, or deacon's bench, used in the congregation's second (1795) building. Against the narthex's southwest wall are a pair of quarter-turn staircases flanking the entrance and accessing the gallery. The lowermost segment of the beaded-board balustrade of each staircase is hinged to swing back during funerals and allow coffins to negotiate entering and exiting the nave at otherwise too-tight cornerings. Currently the opening in the south staircase balustrade is secured against use, but the north staircase opening remains operable. The gallery surrounds the nave on the northwest, southwest, and southeast walls, supported by slender, octagonal wooden columns with carved Egyptian capitals of lotus flowers and leaves (Photograph #7). The paneled breastwork or arcature of the gallery is a repetitive range of molded lancet arches finished at top and bottom with wide horizontal boards displaying projecting shelf-like moldings. The inner face of the breastwork (viewable from the gallery pews rather than from the floor of the nave) is a raised-panel wainscot of perhaps eighteenth-century origin, now grained, which the congregation believes to have come from the 1795 church. Cynosure of the gallery, ornamentally and literally (midpoint in the southwest wall), is a Boston-built 1849 Simmons and McIntyre organ obtained ca. 1860 from the former Van Polenam-Campbell Unitarian Church (Campbell Unitarian Mission) in Bridgeport. Enclosed in an elaborate Gothic-style case of New England white pine grained to simulate rosewood (Photograph #8), the organ, largely of black walnut, has a single manual (keyboard) and no pedal. Its display pipes are half-rounds of gilded wood and the speaking pipes are metal and wood. Restored to its original condition in 1970, the instrument has only two modern installations: plastic slider seals to prevent air leaks in the pipes (and thus keep them from speaking out of turn), and an electric blower

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**Christ Episcopal Church and Tashua Burial Ground, Trumbull, Fairfield County, Connecticut**

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which replaced the "bellows boy" of earlier eras. Also nearby in the gallery is a smaller cottage or parlor pump organ of the type popular for domestic use in the nineteenth century.

The roof space of the church is not currently accessible for inspection. Characteristics seen from the nave suggest that the roof structure is some form of scissors truss, or a modification thereof. The gabled ceiling is plastered, painted light blue, and transversely spanned by three wooden ribs which appear to be part of the roof truss system. Each rib is accented by three carved pendants suspended one each on the gable slopes and one at the gable apex (Photograph #8). Brackets embellish junctures of ribs and walls; the latter are plaster in shades of brown and gold and scored in imitation of ashlar masonry. On side elevations of the nave, walls feature a dado of vertically applied matched boards rising to pew-back height. Although the pews are true slips, their nearly perpendicular backs are reminiscent of earlier box pews. Ends of the pews have trefoil-arch moldings, and overall pew graining is in apparent imitation of maple, cherry (or mahogany), and ebony. Seating within the nave, separated by two aisles leading from doors in the narthex, is organized into a partitioned central block flanked by undivided smaller blocks.

At the rear of the nave on the southeast elevation are a small grand piano and, above and behind it, a wooden and glass showcase containing artifacts from the founding years of the parish: the original folio bible (1750) and the prayer book (1760) received in 1762 from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, London, England, and early communion vessels (pewter bowls, cup, and tankard)<sup>3</sup> (Photograph #9). On the rear northwest elevation of the nave are a wooden prayer desk (*prie-dieu*), a stone baptismal font, and an 1887 brass cross upon a section of wooden retable, or shelf for cross, candles, and flowers (the retable was formerly in its traditional location against the chancel rear wall, behind the altar). Furnishings at the liturgical, or northeast, end of the nave (Photograph #10) include a brass lectern (1889) and a hymn tablet and a bishop's chair (both 1895). The sexagonal pulpit nearby is enriched with paneling and molded trefoil arches and quatrefoils. The railing separating the nave from the chancel has carved balusters forming interstices which constitute a series of trefoil-arch openings. The pulpit, the railing, and the prayer desk are said by parish tradition to have been made of wood from the congregation's first (1760) church.<sup>4</sup>

The chancel, contained within a lancet-arch space on the northeast elevation, was brilliantly embellished in 1985. An exhortation on the adjacent nave wall is painted in red lettering against a light blue band which follows the complete curve of the arch. *Trompe l'oeil* incorporates illusionary features such as colonnettes with flared molded capitals at the four springings of the arch; archivolt and cornice comprised of multiple profiles; and ceiling of gilt stars in a royal blue sky (Photograph #s 10, 11). When the chancel was enlarged in the 1860s, a plaster fragment from 1846 was preserved in



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**Christ Episcopal Church and Tashua Burial Ground, Trumbull, Fairfield County, Connecticut**

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parish archives, showing that the wall color of the original space was pale peach. Centered within the chancel is the free-standing altar, dedicated/consecrated in 1986 as new to Christ Church, although dating probably from 1901 and presented as a gift from Saint John's Episcopal Church in the town of Bristol.<sup>5</sup> Behind the altar, against the wall and filling the shelf-like role of retable, is a lengthwise half of an earlier Christ Church altar. The finishes of both the 1901 altar and the converted retable have been handsomely restored. The rear wall of the chancel is lighted by a lancet-arch stained-glass window dedicated to the Reverend David G. Tomlinson, rector from 1837 to 1843; the only other stained-glass window in the church, a memorial to the Seeley family, is on the southeast elevation near the pulpit. Adjoining the chancel's north side is the sacristy, a small room for storage of liturgical accouterments. Originally on the corresponding south side was the vestry or robing room for clergy and choristers, a space now occupied by a stairhall leading from the nave to both the basement and to a 1971 addition constructed at the rear corner of the church's southeast elevation (Photograph #12). The basement, largely unfinished as originally excavated, was renovated in the early 1970s as an undercroft to provide parish hall, nursery, kitchen, and updated mechanical space. The addition, an 1106-square-foot ell housing parish office, rector's study, and restrooms, also now accommodates the robing function of the former vestry. Opening into the stairhall from outside the church is a white-painted wooden accessibility ramp constructed in 1994 on the rear (northeast) elevation; its switchback levels are railed by square-sawn balusters.

On the north and east sides of the church property, abutting Tashua Road and comprising  $\frac{3}{4}$  acre, is the burial ground; its oldest grave dates from 1766 (Eleanor Morrow). Several gravesites marked by fieldstones in the western end of the burial ground have traditionally been thought to be those of Native Americans who once farmed the surrounding hills. Nearby is the 1785 headstone of Lieutenant Colonel Nathan Hubbel, a local Tory who during the Revolutionary War led raids against colonial forces in Connecticut from his Long Island headquarters; following the war, he became an American citizen. The majority of gravestones in the closely spaced rows are upright granite or marble tablets with either flat or segmental (or otherwise curvilinear) tops, popular designs in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; approximately a dozen obelisks are also in place (Photograph #13). The burial ground is now closed to interments, with the exception of a landscaped ash garden reserved for cremation burials. A white picket fence protects the burial ground along Tashua Road and, at the intersection with Madison Avenue, extends south to border front and side lawns of the property. The fence has four gates (two pedestrian and two vehicular) flanked by posts surmounted by pinnacles like those on the church. A continuation of the brick walkway noted earlier on the front lawn extends around the south corner of the church and along the southeast elevation to a side door of the 1971 addition. Fieldstone walls on the south perimeters of the church and the burial ground further set them apart from the adjoining parking area.

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**Christ Episcopal Church and Tashua Burial Ground, Trumbull, Fairfield County, Connecticut**

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**Statement of Significance**

Christ Episcopal Church in the village of Tashua in Trumbull, Connecticut, is the third and current house of worship of a 250-year-old congregation with Anglican or Church of England roots in colonial America. The post-Revolutionary War history of the congregation continues to the present as Trumbull's oldest Episcopal parish. The parish and its church recall not only their own historical transition from Church of England status to Episcopalianism, but also Connecticut's transition from maintaining a state church (Congregational) to recognizing religious equality of all Christian sects, as embodied in the Connecticut Constitution of 1818. Tashua Burial Ground, adjoining the church, is intrinsic to the history of the parish, being contemporaneous with it and containing burials and markers from 1766 to the present (Criterion A). In terms of its architecture, the 1846 Christ Episcopal Church, oldest extant house of worship in Trumbull, is a remarkably intact example of the Carpenter Gothic style and a survivor of rare integrity from the opening years of the Victorian era. The building incorporates advanced design practices of its period, despite being located in a modest rural parish; indeed, the latter circumstance may have helped preserve original detail that could have been lost over time to greater prosperity (Criterion C).

**Historical Significance**

Chronologically, official founding of the Anglican parish in Tashua ca. 1760 falls halfway between the introduction of Anglicanism in Connecticut in 1702 and creation of the State Constitution of 1818. The latter decreed equality for all Christian denominations in Connecticut and disestablishment of special status for the Congregational Church. However, in the eighteenth century up to the time of the Revolutionary War, Anglicanism had found relatively little favor among Connecticut's colonists, although by mid-century the denomination did become active to an extent in over 20 towns, chiefly in the western coastal region. Also at that time, individualistic fervor and conflicting ideologies of the Great Awakening, which divided the established Congregational Church between traditional and more progressive factions, helped trigger the birth of additional Anglican parishes (and subsequently Baptist and Separatist churches as well). Reflective of movement toward increased tolerance was the 1750 revision of the law codes of Connecticut by which all religious persecution acts were deleted.

It was also in 1750 that Anglicans in Tashua first wished to initiate religious services. By then they had nearly a half-century of missionary activity in Connecticut by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (S.P.G.), London, England, from which to benefit. Tashua Anglicans successfully petitioned the S.P.G. to fund monthly services

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**Christ Episcopal Church and Tashua Burial Ground, Trumbull, Fairfield County, Connecticut**

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conducted for them by the Reverend Christopher Newton, missionary rector at the Anglican church of Saint Paul's (founded 1746) in Ripton (now the village of Huntington in the town of Shelton). As a parish, the Tashua congregation ca. 1760 erected its first church, a utilitarian 36-foot by 26-foot structure, near what is now the north pedestrian gate of the burial ground. The latter was also established by the 1760s, receiving its first interments during that decade. In the years prior to the Revolution, Puritan clergy maintained opposition to an Anglican episcopacy in America, and during the war itself, Anglican priests faced persecution in New England. The Tashua church was closed for a brief period, but after the war ended, the Reverend Mr. Newton continued to serve until ca. 1785, by which time America's Church of England communicants had been transformed into Episcopalians. In 1788 what had been founded as the North Stratford<sup>6</sup> Anglican Parish in Tashua was renamed Trinity Episcopal Church (the future Christ Episcopal Church), and its second building was consecrated in 1795 by the Right Reverend Samuel Seabury, America's first Episcopal bishop.<sup>7</sup> The structure was across Tashua Road from the current church and immediately west of the David Mallett, Jr., House.<sup>8</sup> Measuring 50 by 35 feet with 24 arched windows of plain glass, it also featured, after 1823, a steeple.

Episcopalianism in Connecticut expanded rapidly in the early nineteenth century, particularly after the War of 1812 and decline of popular suspicion of the denomination's Loyalist leanings. During the 1817-1818 battle for a Connecticut constitution guaranteeing separation of church and state, Episcopalians joined the successful overthrow of the so-called Standing Order, an almost-hereditary elite of a dozen or so families who controlled the political fortunes of first the colony and then the newly formed state. A second major achievement of Connecticut's Episcopalians during this period was in taking part with other denominations in the state to found Washington (later Trinity) College in 1823 in Hartford.<sup>9</sup> Tashua's Trinity (subsequently Christ) Church specifically invested in Episcopalianism's expansion by establishing in 1839 a chapel in the Long Hill community of Trumbull to accommodate that area's growing population of communicants. As Grace Episcopal Church, the former chapel was designated independent of its founder in 1846 and, after over a century and a half, continues to serve Long Hill in its third structure, dedicated in 1965.

The second (1795) church of the Episcopal congregation in Tashua was replaced in 1846 by the subject of this study, erected south of the burial ground on land given by Lucy Mallett (Trumbull Land Records, Volume 8, pages 304 and 626). The new edifice was consecrated on May 28, 1847, by Thomas Church Brownell, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut, and again there was a renaming: Christ Episcopal Church. The first history of the parish, published in 1896 for the 50th anniversary of the third church building, was compiled by the Reverend R. Bancroft Whipple, rector from 1895 to 1905. By the twentieth century, with growth in Trumbull concentrating at town center, Tashua remained, as it had been since the eighteenth century, an outlying rural enclave. Membership at Christ Church had waxed and

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**Christ Episcopal Church and Tashua Burial Ground, Trumbull, Fairfield County, Connecticut**

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waned over the years, once diminishing to as few as 10 families. Decreased revenues presumably helped ensure that the church underwent almost no structural changes. In the present century, the church's environs encompass suburban infill, including upscale housing on formerly agrarian holdings. Current membership supports the range of services (pastoral, educational, and outreach) intrinsic to an active parish, reinforcing the historic continuum of spiritual vitality first exhibited 250 years ago.

**Architectural Significance**

Christ Episcopal Church is stylistically notable not only within Trumbull but also Connecticut for two reasons: (1) its cohesive design ensemble derived from the impact of England's Ecclesiological movement on American Gothic Revival architecture<sup>10</sup> and (2) its remarkable physical integrity, respected and maintained throughout a century and a half of parish use.

The phase of the Gothic Revival of which Christ Church is an example was the third which developed in England, the earlier two being Rococo Gothic (mid-eighteenth century) and Picturesque Gothic (early nineteenth century). The third or Ecclesiological stage, following closely after the second phase and promoted by Anglican adherents (architects as well as clerics) of the English Ecclesiological Society (originally the Cambridge Camden Society), emphasized archaeological and liturgical correctness for religious structures. Reacting to classicism in Georgian and Greek Revival church architecture and to perceived laxity in ideology, the English Ecclesiologists championed a return to medieval plan (particularly well-developed chancel separate from nave) and ornament. The favored models of the Ecclesiological movement, especially adaptable to rural districts such as Tashua in Trumbull, were England's thirteenth-century parish churches in the Decorated Gothic style. During the 1830s and 1840s, the tenets of Ecclesiology, including the preferred Decorated Gothic mode, traveled to America. One striking result was Christ Episcopal Church, erected in the stylistic adaptation known as Carpenter Gothic which exploited contemporary woodworking inventions such as the scroll saw or jigsaw. A frame Gothic Revival Christ Church was not, of course, archaeologically accurate in terms of medieval England's stone architecture, but wood was a widely accepted compromise for America's small parishes (Christ Church's seating capacity is approximately 200). Where Christ Church did not compromise was in subordinating pulpit to chancel to achieve a setting for the sacramental, as opposed to the preaching, form of worship, although the church did lack the transepts of its Gothic predecessors and, instead of nave-flanking colonnaded aisles, did incorporate the galleries of its Neo-Classical predecessors.

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**Christ Episcopal Church and Tashua Burial Ground, Trumbull, Fairfield County, Connecticut**

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The frame exterior of Christ Church simulates stone construction in traceried arched openings and in tower, buttresses, and pinnacles. Conformance to the Gothic is even more striking on the interior, where the style's dominant motif, the pointed or lancet arch, is expressed to what must have been the fullest capacity of parish revenues in the 1840s. The single-minded design approach is executed in furnishings, ceiling treatment, scored plaster walls, and wood finish, especially standing trim such as door and window casings, chancel railing, and gallery breastwork. Although the Decorated style's signature clustered piers are lacking, octagonal columns are a simple yet evocative substitute. Most compelling of the visual references is the chancel within its soaring arch, illuminated by a stained-glass version of the Decorated style's triple window with geometric tracery (Photograph #14). The 1860s enlargement of the chancel attests to the pervasive influence of Ecclesiological principles beyond construction date of the church. *Trompe l'oeil* concepts and colors for the 1985 treatment of the chancel, as well as hues of the original chancel window, are simultaneously rich and subdued, as is the entire church interior, again befitting Ecclesiological focus on deflected light and medieval symbolism as consonant with meditation and worship. Furnishings are stylistically at one with interior architecture: clerical and congregational seating, pulpit, altar, font, and organ case, as well as smaller fittings such as hymn tablet, form a Gothic Revival assemblage of striking consistency.

Survival of Christ Church's architectural integrity, both interior and exterior, has been influenced by the small congregation's limited resources over time, as well as by members' conscious decisions to respect the building's historic character, as parish records substantiate. The church is virtually a time capsule of early Victorian ecclesiastical taste, and refurbishment/repair over the past 150 years has acknowledged that distinction. As noted, enlargement of the chancel in the 1860s, far from detracting from original design philosophy, actually enhanced Ecclesiological correctness. The next recorded change, describing the church as repaired, redecorated, and reopened, took place in 1874. Major refurbishment of the interior in 1938 again carefully respected the Victorian-era decor, as when electrified candle-shape sconces were installed. Modern convenience, however, did at the time banish two wood-burning stoves which had heated the nave and which, when the church was built, represented technology's leading edge; a furnace replaced them. The early 1970s excavation/remodeling of the basement into undercroft was a typical post-World War II solution for small Episcopal churches of the period and genre of Christ Church. Often faced with increased membership reflecting a surging baby boomer population, parishes elected at times to improve existing auxiliary space at minimal cost and disturbance to a building's fabric and configuration. On the other hand, the 1971 addition to Christ Church was unconflicting to both the footprint and the Gothicism of the primary structure, but it was executed relatively unobtrusively in scale and design, particularly when seen from the church's signature façade view. Work in the early 1980s included not only cosmetic

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repairs and repainting, but also restoration of the steeple: facade buttresses were rebuilt and the spire was reinforced with steel.

Fittingly, the traditional visual image of Christ Church and its setting continues to prevail: a building of exceptionally picturesque architecture and its adjoining burial ground, both protected by fieldstone walls and a white picket fence which have been carefully conserved through the years. In acknowledgement of its age and beauty, the burial ground is maintained by the Trumbull Parks Commission.

... arrangements have been made for the erection of a new Gothic Church edifice in the district of Tashua. The requisite funds have been very promptly contributed, and a contract is now made for the completion of the Church during the ensuing autumn or winter.

... *Proceedings of the ... Diocese of Connecticut ... 1846*<sup>11</sup>

Since the last annual report, a new church edifice has been erected, which was consecrated by the Bishop on the 28th day of May last....In point of neatness, the structure will bear comparison with any of our rural churches in the Diocese.

... *Proceedings of the ... Diocese of Connecticut ... 1847*<sup>12</sup>

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**Special Considerations**

Although ordinarily, properties owned by religious institutions or used for religious purposes are not considered eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, Christ Episcopal Church and Tashua Burial Ground have historical importance as a combined resource representative of a 250-year-old parish role, first in the Anglican communion of the Colony of Connecticut and subsequently in the Episcopal Church of the post-Revolutionary War State of Connecticut. Christ Episcopal Church is extremely significant as well as an example of Gothic Revival architecture: its "Carpenter Gothic" stylistic integrity is impressive. In short, the church and the burial ground fall within the category of properties "deriving primary significance from architectural or artistic distinction or historical importance."

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**Endnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> Geoffrey L. Rossano, *Western Uplands: Historical and Architectural Overview and Management Guide, Historic Preservation in Connecticut, Volume IV* (Hartford, Connecticut: Connecticut Historical Commission, 1996), pp. xiv, xv, 7.
- <sup>2</sup> Connecticut Historical Commission, National Register of Historic Places Pre-selection Application for Christ Episcopal Church, Tashua in Trumbull, Connecticut (Hartford, Connecticut: Charles W. Brilvitch, March 1984).
- <sup>3</sup> The communion vessels reputedly were buried on the church property for safekeeping during the Revolutionary War and recovered in peacetime. The tankard bears the maker's mark of Francis Bassett. Two well-known pewterers of that name (uncle and nephew) were active in New York City during the period: Francis Bassett (1690-1758) and Francis Bassett, II (1729-1800). Which of the two artisans was responsible for Christ Church's tankard is not known, since use of maker's marks, or touches, was not consistent within the family.
- <sup>4</sup> The wood may have been recycled as timber from the first (1760) church into the second (1795), and then salvaged again for furnishings when the second structure was replaced. Parish records confirm that wood, glass, and hardware were thriftily reused in such fashion whenever possible.
- <sup>5</sup> In the closing third of the twentieth century, expanding liberalism in society resulted in many religious denominations increasing the liturgical participation of their congregations. Symbolizing the new inclusiveness at Christ Church (as also at other religious institutions) was movement of the altar forward within the chancel from its traditional position against the retable, an innovation which in turn necessitated shifting the chancel railing nearer the congregation. The changed position of the altar allowed officiants to stand behind it and face communicants during services, rather than turning their backs and facing the altar, retable, and rear wall of the chancel. For Christ Church, the 1986 dedication/consecration of its altar marked the inauguration of regularly celebrating communion while facing the congregation.



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<sup>6</sup> North Stratford was originally part of the town of Stratford, which it continued to be until incorporated as the town of Trumbull in 1797.

<sup>7</sup> In 1784 Seabury (1729-1796), a native of Groton, Connecticut, and former chaplain of a Loyalist regiment in the Revolutionary War, was consecrated in Aberdeen, Scotland, as head of the Protestant Episcopal Church in America. He had been refused consecration by English bishops.

<sup>8</sup> In 1985 preservation consultant Jan Cunningham compiled a National Register of Historic Places nomination for the 1760 David Mallett, Jr., House, 420 Tashua Road (listed February 20, 1986). The nomination references local tradition that the existing kitchen wing (a one-and-one-half-story, 18 by 16-foot addition) on the west elevation of the dwelling was originally a Sabbath Day House (commonly pronounced Sabbaday House) associated with the 1760 Tashua church. The purpose of such buildings was to provide shelter for parishioners who lived too distant to travel home and back between church services on Sundays. In the early nineteenth century the clapboarded Tashua example was supposedly moved across the road to the Mallett dwelling from its location near the burial ground. It now rests on a cut-granite base which matches the foundation of the house.

<sup>9</sup> Although chartered as nondenominational and never a religious institution of higher learning, Trinity College in its early decades did have informal ties with the Episcopal Church. The first president (1824-1831) was the Right Reverend Thomas Church Brownell, D.D., L.L.D. (1779-1865), serving Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut, and faculty of the college throughout the nineteenth century were often Episcopal clergy.

<sup>10</sup> An architect for Christ Church has not been identified. A building committee consisting of members Ephraim S. Mallet and John C. Mallet was appointed at a meeting of the congregation on May 5, 1846, at which erection of a new church was approved. The two-man committee was charged "to contract for building said church, to determine upon the form and plan of the building and to superintend construction of the same" (Parish Archives, Tashua Christ Church Records, May 5, 1846, p. 116). Presumably the charge to the building committee to determine form and plan referred to selecting, and not generating, those concepts. In the early 1980s, when the National Register of Historic Places study for this property was first proposed, it was thought that the church design was possibly adapted from drawings by

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Alexander Jackson Davis (1803-1892) which were identified by him as being for a church built in Trumbull. A leading American architect of the mid-nineteenth century, Davis was responsible for major commissions throughout the Northeast in romantic and picturesque styles such as Greek Revival, Gothic Revival, and Italianate. Current investigation indicates that the Davis drawings were the design source not for Christ Church but for the no-longer-extant first building of Trinity Episcopal Church (which took that name after Christ Church relinquished it), erected in the Carpenter Gothic style in 1848 in the Trumbull village of Nichols. Trinity's front-facing gable, battlemented portico, and unmatched towers at façade corners were features emphasized in the Davis drawings. In 1942, due to completion of the Merritt Parkway, the 1848 Trinity Church was moved from its original location to a second site in Nichols. There it was damaged by fire in 1969, demolished, and replaced on that location in 1970 by the current Trinity Church in the Colonial Revival style. Communications with the five principal repositories of Alexander Jackson Davis' papers (four in New York City – Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University; Metropolitan Museum of Art; New-York Historical Society; and New York Public Library – and the Henry Francis Du Pont Winterthur Museum in Winterthur, Delaware) failed to yield evidence of a Davis connection with Christ Church. A second possible candidate for the Christ Church design seemed on the face of it to be Richard Upjohn (1802-1878), America's premier exponent of mid-nineteenth-century Gothic Revival churches, both large urban and small rural examples. During the 1840s Upjohn had routinely supplied church plans to congregations wanting inexpensive yet liturgically correct models, but there is no known record of his having done so for Christ Church. In 1852, in response to obvious need which he had observed in the 1840s, Upjohn included a generically Ecclesiastical church plan in his published patternbook, *Rural Architecture*. However, neither that source nor the comprehensive "Corpus of Works" listed in the 1939 biography *Richard Upjohn: Architect and Churchman* by the subject's great-grandson, Everard M. Upjohn, reveals any connection to Trumbull's Christ Church. Prolific New Haven architect Henry Austin (1804-1891), plausibly a prospect as Christ Church's designer, appears to have been as uninvolved in the project as Davis or Upjohn. Austin maintained an office in New Haven for over half a century, beginning in 1837, although his commissions reached other Connecticut and New England locales, producing public buildings, homes, and churches chiefly in classically inspired modes such as Italianate. Christ Church and its Gothicism make no appearance in the extensive Austin papers maintained by Yale University's Sterling Memorial Library Manuscript Collections. The church's own

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parish archives; the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut archives; and the Connecticut State Library collections, while all retaining extensive material on Christ Church, all fail to identify its architect, and the Connecticut Historical Society has no material of any description on the church. A query was made to the Bridgeport Public Library since its Historical Collections Division was known to contain material relating to Christ Church; however, no information on design sources or architect surfaced. A search of the Internet under various category locators, including church and architect names, proved equally fruitless in establishing a design-designer link. Whatever the origin of the design, it was left to the builder, Hotchkiss Clark and Company, a firm of carpenters and joiners in the village of Birmingham in the nearby town of Derby, to execute it. The commission is confirmed by construction documents in the Christ Church archives: the contract and the specifications, the latter referring to now-missing plan, drawings, and detail drawings. In hope that Hotchkiss Clark and Company in its own records might have named Christ Church's architect, or in some way have shed more light on the missing construction plan and drawings, inquiries were directed to the Derby Historical Society and the Derby Public Library. Both sources agreed that no records of the nonextant company were known to survive locally, nor were any company records found at the four major repositories named above (Christ Church, Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut, Connecticut State Library, and Connecticut Historical Society). There remains the chance, of questionable likelihood but a possibility nonetheless, that Hotchkiss Clark and Company's craftsmen produced the Christ Church design – that is, the firm's own plans and drawings were referenced in the construction documents. Given the widespread popularity in America of Gothic Revival church construction in the 1840s, the resulting technical skill acquired by builders and contractors may indeed have rendered Hotchkiss Clark and Company's Christ Church role as exclusive as existing records imply. Scholars of the Gothic Revival such as Kenneth Clark and Phoebe B. Stanton attribute to contractors in even country districts the ability to carry out architectural plans and drawings of some sophistication. Did certain builders on occasion design those commissions as well?

<sup>11</sup> Diocese of Connecticut. *Journal of the Proceedings of the Sixty-Second Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Connecticut, Held in Trinity Church, New Haven, June 9th and 10th, 1846* (Hartford: William Faxon, Calendar Press, 1846), p. 29.

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<sup>12</sup> Diocese of Connecticut. *Journal of the Proceedings of the Sixty-Third Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Connecticut, Held in Christ Church, Hartford, June 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, 1847* (Hartford: Calendar Press, 1847), p. 39.

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**Geographical Data**

**Verbal Boundary Description:**

The nominated property is described in the Trumbull Land Records in Volume 8, Page 304, and Volume 8, Page 626, being the same parcel identified on the Trumbull Assessor's Map B2 as Parcel 92, Lot 53.

**Boundary Justification:**

The boundary, which follows the present property lines of Lot 53 noted above, encompasses the original parcel historically associated with Christ Episcopal Church during its period of significance: historic burial ground and 1846 church, with adjacent open (now parking) space.



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**List of Figures**

1. Exhibit A: Trumbull Assessor's Map B2, Parcel 92, Lot 53, Showing Historic Church Parcel (Including Tashua Burial Ground) and Footprint Sketch of Christ Episcopal Church, Trumbull, Fairfield County, Connecticut

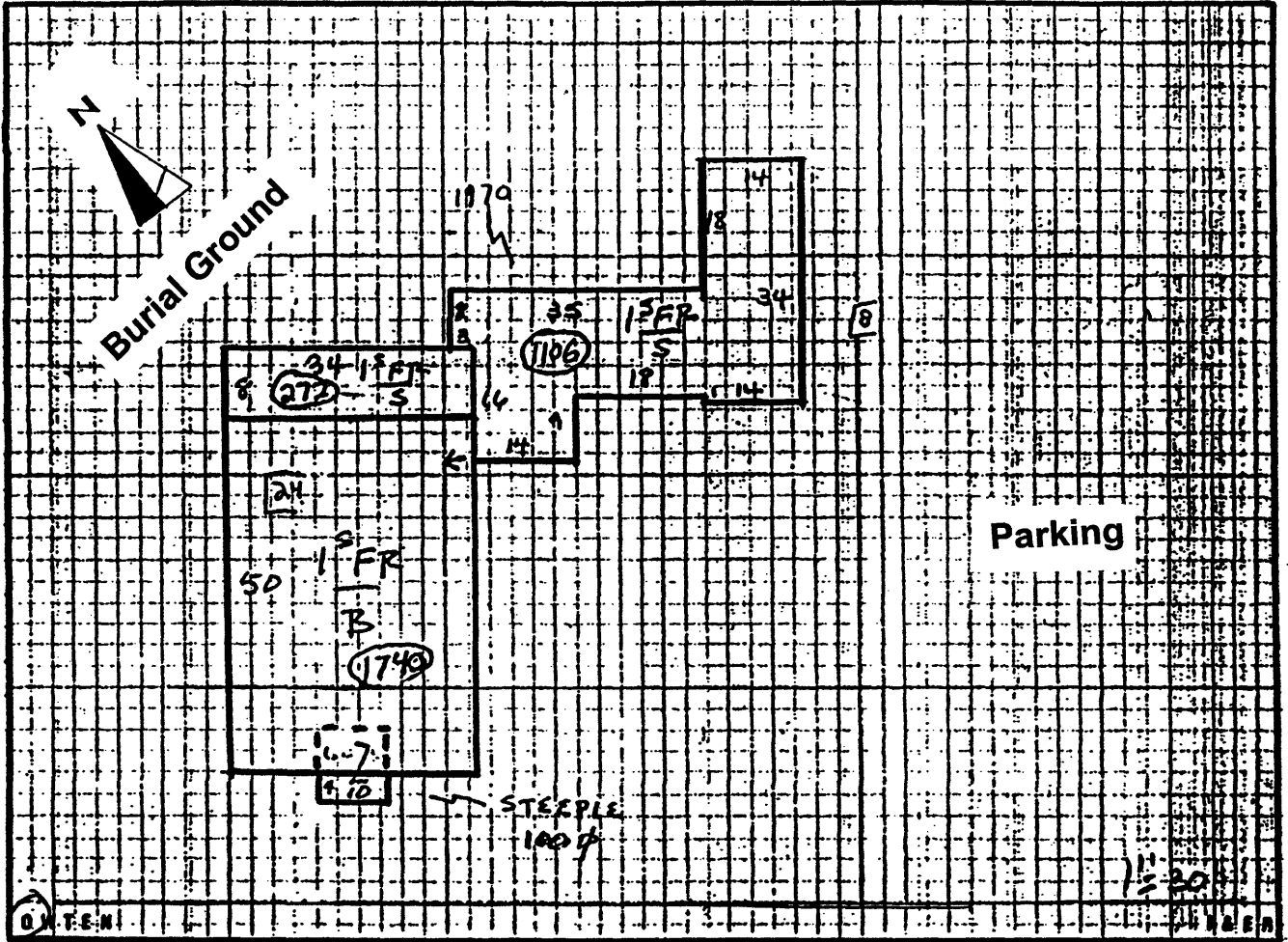


Exhibit A:

Trumbull Assessor's Map B2, Parcel 92, Lot 53  
 Showing Historic Church Parcel (Including Tashua Burial Ground) and Footprint Sketch of  
 Christ Episcopal Church, Trumbull, Fairfield County, Connecticut

Scale 1" = 30'

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Photographers: (unless otherwise noted):

Dawn Maddox, Preservation Programs Supervisor, Connecticut Historical Commission  
David Ransom, National Register Consultant

Dates: September 26, 1999, and January 23, 2000

Negatives on file: Connecticut Historical Commission

**List of Photographs**

1. Facade (southwest elevation) and northwest elevation, ca.1900, camera facing east (Courtesy Christ Episcopal Church, Trumbull, Connecticut)
2. Southeast elevation, camera facing northwest
3. Southeast elevation detail, frieze and window, camera facing northwest
4. Southeast elevation and facade (southwest elevation) detail, upper steeple, camera facing north
5. Facade (southwest elevation) detail, lower steeple with parishioners at front entrance, 1900, camera facing northeast (Courtesy Christ Episcopal Church, Trumbull, Connecticut)
6. Facade (southwest elevation), camera facing northeast
7. Nave (toward narthex), camera facing southwest
8. Gallery detail, organ, scored plaster wall, transverse ceiling rib, camera facing south
9. Nave detail, showcase with bible, prayer book, pewter vessels, camera facing south
10. Nave (toward chancel), camera facing north
11. Chancel arch detail, *trompe l'oeil* with column, archivolt, cornice; and gallery breastwork detail with arcaded paneling, camera facing east
12. Southeast elevation with 1971 addition, camera facing west
13. Rear (northeast elevation) and burial ground, camera facing west
14. Chancel detail, stained-glass window, camera facing northeast