

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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DATE ENTERED	

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

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

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Christ Church

AND/OR COMMON

Christ Church

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

Garden Street

\_\_\_ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Cambridge

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

8th

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

Massachusetts

CODE  
25

COUNTY  
Middlesex

CODE  
017

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
___DISTRICT	___PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	___AGRICULTURE    ___MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	___UNOCCUPIED	___COMMERCIAL    ___PARK
___STRUCTURE	___BOTH	___WORK IN PROGRESS	___EDUCATIONAL    ___PRIVATE RESIDENCE
___SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	___ENTERTAINMENT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
___OBJECT	___IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	___GOVERNMENT    ___SCIENTIFIC
	___BEING CONSIDERED	___YES: UNRESTRICTED	___INDUSTRIAL    ___TRANSPORTATION
		___NO	___MILITARY    ___OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Christ Episcopal Church

STREET & NUMBER

Garden Street

CITY, TOWN

Cambridge

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

Massachusetts

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Middlesex Registry of Deeds-South

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Cambridge

STATE

Massachusetts

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Historic American Buildings Survey (8 sheets, 4 photos, 1934)

DATE

1934

FEDERAL    \_\_\_STATE    \_\_\_COUNTY    \_\_\_LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR

SURVEY RECORDS

Library of Congress/Annex Division of Prints and Photographs

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

## 7 DESCRIPTION

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

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### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Christ Church, built largely of oak, presents a pleasantly different exterior among colonial churches. The walls are constructed of wide horizontal planking originally met to be roughcast. There is a simple square three-story tower in front, topped by a smaller cruciform belfry with lunette windows in the front and sides. The low side walls are treated with a row of seven arched windows connected by continuous archivolt and impost moldings. A heavy Doric cornice surrounds the main body of the church while the tower is topped by a light modillioned molding below the belfry stage.

These exterior details may have derived from plates in Gibb's Rules for Drawing (1738) but the overall design came from no single prototype, demonstrating conclusively Harrison's power to combine elements and details taken from folios into a vital plan of his own.

The interior continues the theme of simplicity, but is designed with such refined delicate elegance that it contrasts with the plainness of the exterior. When the church was opened in 1761 the columns rose straight from the floor and were topped by simple Doric capitals. The pulpit probably stood in the center aisle of the church and the altar might have been a simple table or chest. The organ loft at the rear of the church and its decorative carving date from its construction, although the first organ was a casualty of the Revolution.

In the mid-1820's when the church was repaired under the direction of architect Isaiah Rogers, the columns were redesigned and the Ionic capitals and entablature blocks were carved, as well as the complementary decorative pilasters on the walls. Today six single unfluted Ionic columns are raised on pedestals in a stately row on each side of the center aisle. The ceiling over the nave is coved to a flat panel, set off from the aisle ceilings, which are flat. Ionic pilasters between the windows along the wall visually support the modillioned cornice which surrounds the room. There is a small balcony over the entrance doors supported by smaller Ionic columns and a deep semicircular chancel lighted by a Palladian window at the opposite end. The windows have heavy two-piece slatted shutters on the inside. When folded back they partly cover the pilasters between the window. The windows, of plain glass, are heavily muntioned in the early Georgian manner. The absence of a gallery gives an unusual sense of space, heightened by the rhythm of the free standing columns. The decorative carving, although relatively simple, possesses a jewel like quality in the purity of its form, illuminated by the light from the large clear windows.

In 1853, using much of the original wood, the high box pews were replaced by slip pews and four years later the church was lengthened by the insertion of two bays between the chancel and the nave. A stained glass window was placed over the altar, gas lighting was provided, and a new organ was acquired in 1860. In 1876 the organ was removed from the loft to the floor and in the 1880's a new organ and pulpit were installed. The interior of the church was also completely redecorated with "rich colors."

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

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

SPECIFIC DATES 1757-61

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Peter Harrison

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Christ Church, Cambridge, designed by Peter Harrison, colonial America's most skilled gentleman-amateur architect, was constructed between 1757-61. The design reflects Harrison's increasing freedom from his dependence upon English design books, perhaps augmented in this case by the need for original solutions placed upon the architect by financial restrictions of the project. The simple exterior, with planked walls and plain wooden belfry belies the refined elegance of the interior. Christ Church is one of the surviving landmarks of colonial Cambridge Common, retaining the quiet charm of its original environment within the busy area of Harvard University.

### History

In the spring of 1759, while Peter Harrison was working on plans for the Jewish Synagogue in Newport, a group of wealthy merchants living in Cambridge pledged funding for a church in that town. They felt they could not spend more than 500 pounds sterling, so stipulated that the building be of wood with only one tier of windows and no galleries except an organ loft.

Most of the committee worshipped at King's Chapel and several knew Peter Harrison, considering him one of the few in New England who understood "modern" taste. As quoted by Carl Bridenbaugh in Peter Harrison, American Architect, the committee directed:

"that a Letter be wrote to Mr. Harrison of Newport, requesting a Plan and Elevation of the Outside and Inside, and of the Pulpit and Vestry, of the Church; and that, if Mr. Harrison approves of it, there be no steeple, only a Tower with a Belfry; and that he be informed of the dimensions of a Picture designed for the Chancel (now at Mr. Merritt's at Providence) when the Committee are informed of its size."

Substituting a belfry for a steeple was most likely another effort to curb the expenditure for the construction of the church.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Bridenbaugh, Carl, Peter Harrison, First American Architect, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1949.

Morrison, Hugh, Early American Architecture, New York, 1952.

Pierson, William H. Jr., American Buildings and Their Architects: The Colonial and Neo-Classical Styles, Garden City, New York, 1970.

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY .5 acre

UTM REFERENCES

A	1, 9	3, 2, 5, 3, 6, 0	4, 6, 9, 3, 4, 1, 0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

## VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Christ Church is bounded on the north by the southern curb of Garden Street, on the east by the west edge of Cambridge Burying Ground, on the south by the north end of Farwell Place, and on the west by the west edge of the path that divides the Rectory, #1 Garden Street, from the church, as shown in the sketch map. The later additions to the church do not contribute to the national significance of the landmark.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE Patricia Heintzelman, Architectural Historian, Landmark Review Project  
original form prepared by Charles Snell, 1967

ORGANIZATION	DATE
<u>Historic Sites Survey</u>	<u>10/10/75</u>
STREET & NUMBER	TELEPHONE
<u>1100 L Street</u>	<u>523-5464</u>
CITY OR TOWN	STATE
<u>Washington</u>	<u>D.C.</u>

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL      STATE      LOCAL     

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

Designated      dated according to the      date Oct 9, 1968

Boundary Certified:  
George J. Emery  
 DATE June 7, 1978

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION      DATE 4/24/78

ATTEST:      DATE     

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER     

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 2

The present altar, choir stalls and reading desk date from a renovation of the 1940's. Modern restoration has been very conscientious, and later interior features are now in keeping with the period of the church's original construction.

The building is suffering some serious construction problems, resulting from the enlargement of 1853, but this is currently being corrected.

There is a frame addition of a parish house from the early 20th century and a post World War II brick addition on the west. A vestry room and sacristy are located in a little shed addition on the south.

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PAGE

2

The committee sent four letters to Harrison between October and December, receiving five in reply. During the fall and winter of 1759-60, Harrison completed the plans, producing what was to be the first of his designs. The plans were delivered in March 1760, and so pleased the committee although the plans were donated, they voted to pay Harrison 45 pounds in gratitude for his efforts.

The church was sufficiently completed by October 1761, that services could be held. Although the committee had been instructed to spend no more than 500 pounds sterling the actual cost was closer to 1,300 pounds. This extra expense probably explains the failure to rough-cast the exterior and to carve the pillars and capitals.

During the Revolution the congregation, predominantly British loyalist, was dispersed. At the evacuation of Boston, nearly all of the parishioners followed the British army. In 1775, after the battle of Lexington, the unused church was seized to shelter troops. For many years after the Revolution, the parish remained limited. Not until 1829 was it able to procure a permanent Rector who helped begin the recovery of the Parish. Between 1839 and 1861, the membership grew dramatically. In 1853 the original box pews were rebuilt in modern style and four years later the building was lengthened from its original sixty feet to eighty-three feet. Between 1879-91, the interior of the church was painted in multi-colors and textures in keeping with the taste of the day. The chancel was extended to make room for a choir, moved from the gallery, and a new organ, pulpit and brass eagle lectern were installed. In 1910, the vestry room and connecting hall were added to the sacristy.

The church has been painted at regular intervals and no longer retains its polychrome of the late 19th century. Crystal chandeliers were donated by a parishioner and a wooden lectern replaced the brass eagle.