VLR: 9-9-69
NRHP: 10-15-66
NHL: 1-20-61

Form 10-300
(July 1969)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY – NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries – complete applicable sections)

STATE:	
Virginia	
COUNTY:	
Richmond (City)	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

1. NAME

COMMON: ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

AND/OR HISTORIC:

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER: East Broad Street at 25th Street

CITY OR TOWN: Richmond

STATE	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
Virginia 23223	51	Richmond (City)	760

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP		STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
☐ District ☒ Building ☐ Site ☐ Structure ☐ Object	☐ Public ☒ Private ☐ Both	Public Acquisition: ☐ In Process ☐ Being Considered	☒ Occupied ☐ Unoccupied ☐ Preservation work in progress	Yes: ☐ Restricted ☒ Unrestricted ☐ No

PRESENT USE *(Check One or More as Appropriate)*

☐ Agricultural	☐ Government	☐ Park	☐ Transportation	☐ Comments
☐ Commercial	☐ Industrial	☐ Private Residence	☐ Other *(Specify)*	
☐ Educational	☐ Military	☒ Religious		
☐ Entertainment	☐ Museum	☐ Scientific		

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME: Congregation of St. John's Episcopal Church

STREET AND NUMBER: East Broad Street at 25th Street

CITY OR TOWN:	STATE:	CODE
Richmond	Virginia 23223	51

STATE: Virginia

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC: City Hall

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:	STATE	CODE
Richmond	Virginia 23219	51

COUNTY: Richmond (City)

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY: HABSI

DATE OF SURVEY: 1957 ☒ Federal ☐ State ☐ County ☐ Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: Library of Congress

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:	STATE:	CODE
Washington	D. C.	11

FOR NPS USE ONLY
ENTRY NUMBER
DATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One) ☒ Excellent ☐ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Deteriorated ☐ Ruins ☐ Unexposed	
	(Check One) ☒ Altered ☐ Unaltered	(Check One) ☐ Moved ☐ Original Site

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (If known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

a. BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

In St. John's Church on March 23, 1775, Patrick Henry delivered the stirring "Liberty or Death" speech which sounded a clarion call for his fellow Virginians. There, in the third great speech of his career, the spellbinding orator of the War for Independence attained a measure of undying fame.

Henry already had been in the public eye for a dozen years, since his brilliant defense of colonial self-government in the "Parson's Cause" of 1763. Two years later, his "Virginia Resolutions" respecting the infamous Stamp Act stirred the colonies and brought him to recognized leadership of the radical party in Virginia. None who heard him was likely to forget the fiery speech which ended with the words: "Caesar had his Brutus--Charles the first, his Cromwell--and George the Third--may profit by their example."

He continued to hold the forefront of action during the next decade of increasing colonial agitation. As a delegate to the First Continental Congress in September 1774, Henry was a strong supporter of radical measures, and his conduct gave evidence of strong nationalist leanings.

Back in Virginia, the royal governor, Lord Dunmore, called a meeting of the General Assembly for late in November, but prorogued the meeting when he learned of the participation of the Virginia leaders in "The Association" to boycott British goods. Members of the prorogued assembly arranged to meet in Richmond on March 20, 1775. For the meeting place they chose the largest building in the community, the "New Church" or the "Church on Richmond Hill," as it was variously known at the time.

When the Convention assembled on the appointed date, its membership included most of the leaders of Virginia politics. With most counties represented by two delegates, the membership of approximately 120 men included George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, George Wythe, Benjamin Harrison, Edmund Pendleton, Robert Carter Nicholas, Carter Braxton, George Mason, Richard Henry Lee, Thomas Nelson, Jr., Richard Bland and Andrew Lewis.

The tone of the Convention at first was conciliatory, but Henry soon offered a series of resolutions to put the colony into a state of defense. Henry's resolutions were defended by Washington, Jefferson and Richard Henry Lee, though the conservative leaders -- including Pendleton, Bland Nicholas, and Harrison -- attacked them as rash and provocative. On March 23, Henry rose to defend the resolutions in a short speech which closed with the stirring words:

> There is no retreat but in submission and slavery! Our chains are forged. Their clanking may be heard on the plains of Boston! The war is inevitable -- and let it come!! I repeat it, sir, let it come!!!

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD *(Check One or More as Appropriate)*

- [ ] Pre-Columbian
- [ ] 15th Century
- [ ] 16th Century
- [ ] 17th Century
- [x] 18th Century
- [ ] 19th Century
- [ ] 20th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) *(If Applicable and Known)*

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE *(Check One or More as Appropriate)*

Aboriginal
- [ ] Prehistoric
- [ ] Historic

- [ ] Agriculture
- [ ] Architecture
- [ ] Art
- [ ] Commerce
- [ ] Communications
- [ ] Conservation
- [ ] Education
- [ ] Engineering
- [ ] Industry
- [ ] Invention
- [ ] Landscape Architecture
- [ ] Literature
- [ ] Military
- [ ] Music
- [ ] Political
- [ ] Religion/Philosophy
- [ ] Science
- [ ] Sculpture
- [ ] Social/Humanitarian
- [ ] Theater
- [ ] Transportation
- [ ] Urban Planning
- [x] Other *(Specify)* War for Independence

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

In St. John's Church on March 23, 1775, Patrick Henry delivered the stirring "Liberty or Death" speech which sounded a clarion call for his fellow Virginians. There, in the third great speech of his career, the spellbinding orator of the War for Independence attained a measure of undying fame. The church has been altered several times since 1772. The church and southern half of the cemetery are owned by the congregation of St. John's Episcopal Church; the northern half of the cemetery by the City of Richmond.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Elizabeth Fields and Dr. J.E. Fields, "The Signers Lived Here," Daughters of the American Revolution Magazine, May 1951, 8

Dictionary of American Biography, Vol. XX, 586-589, Article by Theodore S. Cox.

Julian Parks Boyd, The Murder of George Wythe (Philadelphia, 1949).

Virginia, A Guide to the Old Dominion (American Guide Series)(New York,1947), 293.

Marylou Rhodes, Landmarks of Richmond: Places to Know and See in the Nation's Most Historic City. (Richmond, 1938), 140.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY									OR	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES					
CORNER	LATITUDE			LONGITUDE						LATITUDE			LONGITUDE		
	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds				Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
NW	°	'	"	°	'	"				37°	31'	57"	77°	25'	18"
NE	°	'	"	°	'	"									
SE	°	'	"	°	'	"									
SW	°	'	"	°	'	"									

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: two - acres

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

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: Charles W. Snell, Survey Historian

ORGANIZATION: Division of History, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, National Park Service

DATE: 5/28/71

STREET AND NUMBER: 801 - 19th Street N.W.

CITY OR TOWN: Washington

STATE: D.C.

CODE:

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National ☐ State ☐ Local ☐

Name _____

Title _____

Date _____

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

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

_____
Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date _____

ATTEST:

_____
Keeper of The National Register

Date _____

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

Item 7 cont'd

> It is vain, sir, to extenuate the matter. Gentlemen may cry peace, peace, but there is no peace. The war is actually begun! The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring to our ears the clash of resounding arms! Our brethren are already in the field! Why stand we here idle? What is it that gentlemen wish? What would they have? Is life so dear or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God -- I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!

Henry's speech swept the Convention to his viewpoint, and his resolutions were passed. True to the prophecy of his words, news of the outbreak of fighting at Lexington and Concord came within a short time, and the colonies were at war.

The church in which Henry made his stirring speech was built in 1740-41 on land donated by Col. William Byrd and remained the only Episcopal church in Richmond until 1814. Originally constructed as a simple rectangular building, 25 feet wide and 40 feet long with the long axis running east and west, the church was enlarged in December 1772. At that time, an addition was built onto the north side of the church and the interior was so rearranged that the addition became the nave. A belfry was constructed over the west end of the original church at the same time. This was the church which existed at the time of Henry's famous speech.

The church has been altered several times since 1772. In 1880 the nave was increased in size and the interior of the church was rearranged. In the next few years the original belfry was taken down and replaced by a tower and bell at the north end of the church. A vestry room was added to the south end of the church in 1880, giving it the cross shape it now has. A hurricane blew down the church spire in 1896 and the replacement was similar to the original spire which stood on the church at the time of Henry's speech.

In 1799, the City of Richmond added two lots to the church property, and the church cemetery became a public burying ground. It was the only public cemetery in Richmond until 1826. Among the graves are those of George Wythe and of Elizabeth Arnold Poe, mother of Edgar Allen Poe.

The church is attractively maintained and is one of the most noted of Richmond's historic sites. Despite a lack of adequate parking space, visitation averages about 60,000 persons a year.

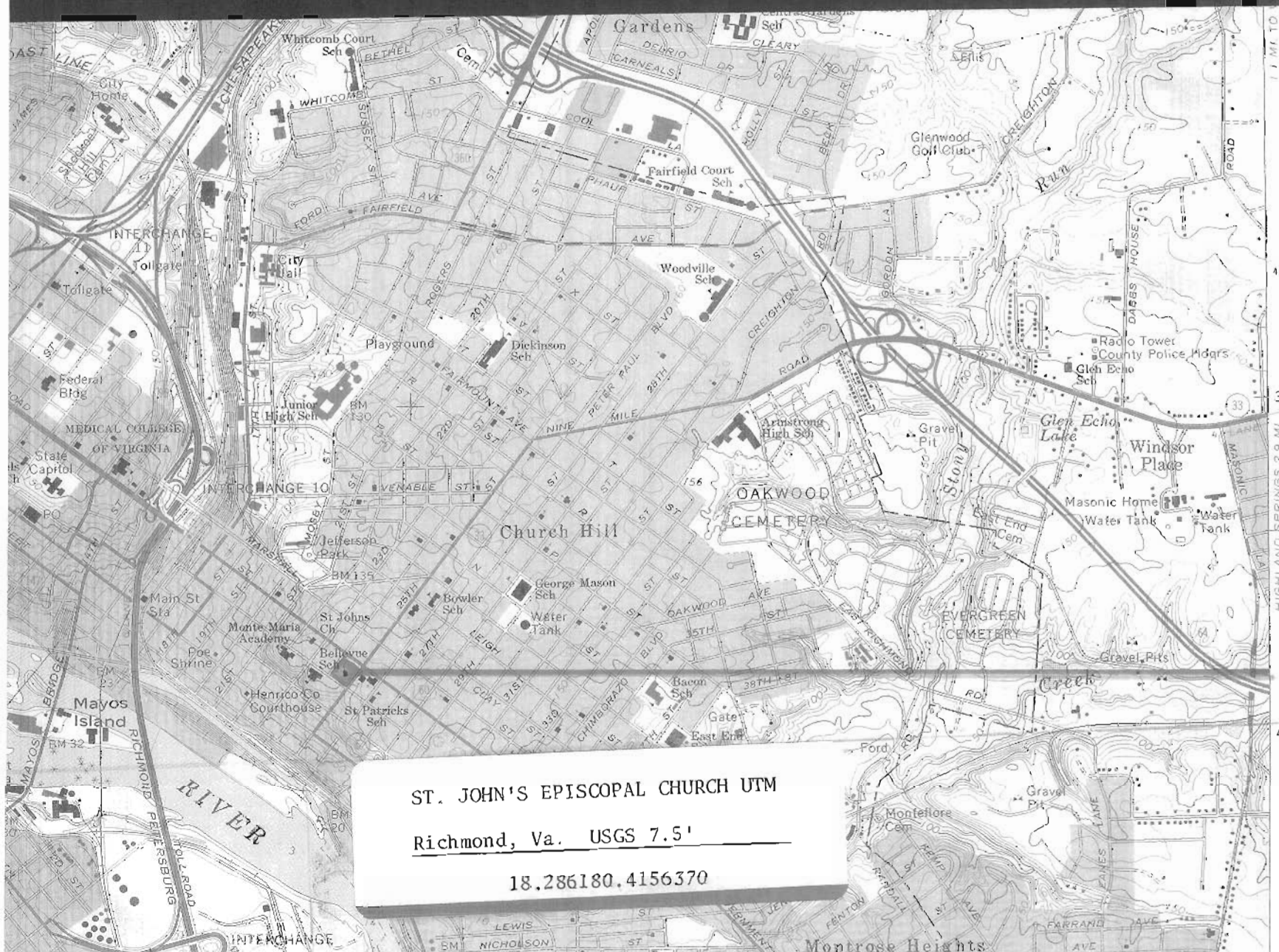
Item 7 cont'd

The area surrounding St. John's Church has been designated as a historic zone and plans for its restoration are being carried out by the Historic Richmond Foundation. In the few square blocks of the historic zone are some 70 ante bellum homes, a number of which already have been restored.

b. BOUNDARY INFORMATION:

St. John's Episcopal Church and St. John's Cemetery share a 2-acre plot of land in Richmond which is bounded by Broad Street (on the northeastern boundary), North 25th Street (on the southeastern boundary), Grace Street (on the southwestern boundary), and North 24th Street (on the northwestern boundary).

127-0013



ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH UTM

Richmond, Va. USGS 7.5'

18.286180.4156370