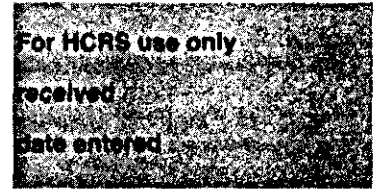


United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

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 First Denbigh Parish Church Archaeological Site

and/or common Same

2. Location

street & number 18 Walters Road not for publication

city, town Newport News, N/A vicinity of congressional district Paul Trible, 1st

state Virginia code 51 county N/A code 700

3. Classification

| Category | Ownership | Status | Present Use |
|--|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> district | <input type="checkbox"/> public | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied | <input type="checkbox"/> agriculture <input type="checkbox"/> museum |
| <input type="checkbox"/> building(s) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private | <input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied | <input type="checkbox"/> commercial <input type="checkbox"/> park |
| <input type="checkbox"/> structure | <input type="checkbox"/> both | <input type="checkbox"/> work in progress | <input type="checkbox"/> educational <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> site | Public Acquisition | Accessible | <input type="checkbox"/> entertainment <input type="checkbox"/> religious |
| <input type="checkbox"/> object | <input type="checkbox"/> in process | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted | <input type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> scientific |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> being considered | <input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted | <input type="checkbox"/> industrial <input type="checkbox"/> transportation |
| | N/A | <input type="checkbox"/> no | <input type="checkbox"/> military <input type="checkbox"/> other: |

4. Owner of Property

name Mr. and Mrs. J. Donald Shenk

street & number 18 Walters Road

city, town Newport News, N/A vicinity of state VA 23602

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Newport News Court House

street & number 2400 Washington Avenue

city, town Newport News, state VA

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Virginia Research Center for Archaeology
title Site Survey Inventory Form 44NN43 has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date July, 1981 federal state county local

depository for survey records Virginia Research Center for Archaeology

city, town Wren Kitchen, College of William and Mary, Wmsbg., state VA 23186

7. Description

| | | | | |
|---|---|------------------------------------|---|------------|
| Condition | | Check one | Check one | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent | <input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated | <input type="checkbox"/> unaltered | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site | N/A |
| <input type="checkbox"/> good | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ruins | <input type="checkbox"/> altered | <input type="checkbox"/> moved | date _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> fair | <input type="checkbox"/> unexposed | | | |

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The First Denbigh Parish Church Archaeological Site is located beneath the lawn of the private residence of Mr. and Mrs. J. Donald Shenk at 18 Walters Drive, a residential section of the City of Newport, News, Virginia (Photo 1). This church site is situated on the edge of a high bluff overlooking the Warwick River, southeast of its junction with a salt-marsh tidal estuary traditionally known as Church Creek. The acreage nominated includes only that portion of the Shenks' lot which is known to contain archaeological deposits. A rip-rap constructed by the Shenks along the Warwick River shoreline has stabilized the western boundary of their property, preventing future erosive damage to the church site.

The remains of the first Denbigh Parish Church were initially reported by Mr. and Mrs. George C. Henkel in September 1947, when they discovered a stone foundation in densely wooded property they used as a summer camping site. This foundation was identified as the site of Denbigh Parish's first church through the documentary research of George Carrington Mason in 1948. James C. Harrington of the National Park Service visited the site that same year and confirmed Mason's conclusion that the site was an early 17th century ecclesiastical structure.

Mason, in a 1949 issue of the Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, reported that the exterior dimensions of the church's nearly intact stone foundation were 50 feet by 24 feet. The foundation walls were one foot thick and were aligned along an east-west axis. Mason hypothesized that the church was of frame construction, due to the narrow width of its foundation walls. The stone used in the construction of the foundation was identified as quartzite sandstone.

The church's interior dimensions of 48 feet by 22 feet were defined by in situ brick flooring tiles set in a thick bed of shell mortar, resembling the flooring of the original chancel pavement in the pre-1676 church at Jamestown. Although the church's brick floor was intact in 1949, erosion had claimed a portion of the southwest corner of the church's foundation. Mason dated the church architecturally to the early 17th century because the entire interior flooring of the church was covered with brick tile, whereas later churches had only their aisles paved and utilized raised plank flooring beneath their pews and chancel.

In July 1981 the VRCA conducted an archaeological survey of the nominated area and designated the church site as 44NN43 in the state's official inventory of archaeological sites. Handwrought nails, plastered shell mortar and fragments of brick tile were found on the surface of the site.

Archaeological testing at 44NN43 revealed charred timber and square brick flooring tiles measuring 7 inches by 7 inches by $\frac{1}{2}$ inch, in situ beneath the surface of the Shenks' lawn. Mason's description of the church's dimensions and directional orientation was verified by field testing, as was his conclusion that the church was of frame construction.

See Continuation Sheet #1

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> religion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499 | <input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699 | <input type="checkbox"/> architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> education | <input type="checkbox"/> military | <input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian |
| <input 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 before 1635

Builder/Architect

Unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The site of the first Denbigh Parish Church in Newport News, Virginia, is the earliest dated identifiable ecclesiastical site within ancient Warwick County, now incorporated as the city of Newport News. Constructed prior to 1635 and taking its name from nearby Denbigh Plantation, the early 17th century home of Captain Samuel Matthews, the first Denbigh Parish Church served the inhabitants of what was the upper portion of Elizabeth City Corporation in the earliest days of the colony. As an officially established parish church, it played an integral role in the social and religious life of early Warwick County. The 24-foot by 50-foot church foundation included in the area nominated, is one of the few surviving 17th century archaeological sites within a rapidly urbanizing area. Therefore, it warrants inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

Background

The earliest dated documentary reference to the existence of the first Denbigh Parish Church occurs in the 1635 patent of the Reverend Thomas Butler, who was "Clark and Pastor of Denbigh."¹ Anthony Yonge of London, who made his will on February 20, 1636, bequeathed 500 pounds of tobacco to Denbigh Church. At that time Denbigh was one of three parishes in Warwick County, a political jurisdiction which was established by law in 1634. As Warwick County's other parishes, Stanley Hundred (on Mulberry Island) and Nutmeg Quarter (to the south near the plantation of Daniel Gookins, "Newports News") are known to have been established by 1626/27, Denbigh Parish may also have been in existence during the 1620's.

In March 1642/43 the General Assembly established distinct bounds between Nutmeg Quarter and Denbigh Parish, noting that Nutmeg Quarter "shall be a distinct parish of themselves and enjoy all the privileges of a parish without any dependence or relation to the parish of Denbigh."² During the 1640's disputes arose over the boundary line between Stanley Hundred and Denbigh Parishes, with the result that a 1647 Act of Assembly declared the Warwick River to be the dividing line between them, exclusive of the valuable mill land at the head of the river, which was assigned to Stanley Hundred. Documentary research on early Warwick County indicates that the dispute over parish boundaries stemmed from the parishes' competition for taxable inhabitants to support their financial needs. The 1647 act noted that Denbigh Parish extended southeast to the border of Nutmeg Quarter Parish.

In 1656 Nutmeg Quarter Parish was joined with Denbigh Parish at the request of the former's parishioners, who "intimated their desire by reason of their small number not longer to continue a parish...but to be united to the parish of Denbigh."³ The Nutmeg Quarter Church became a chapel of ease for Denbigh Parish, a reference point in later land patents.

See Continuation Sheet #2

9. Major Bibliographical References

W.W. Hening, Statutes At Large (Richmond, 1897).

A.A. Humphreys, "Map No. 1, Yorktown to Williamsburg," 1862.

See Continuation Sheet #3

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 75 feet by 75 feet

Quadrangle name Mulberry Island

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UMT References

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Verbal boundary description and justification Bound by the banks of the Warwick River on the west, extending along the meanders of Church Creek on the north to an arbitrary point 75 feet from the Warwick River, then due south 75 feet to the edge of the woods, then 75 feet due west to the Warwick River.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

| | | | | | |
|-------|-----|------|--------|-----|------|
| state | N/A | code | county | N/A | code |
| state | N/A | code | county | N/A | code |

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Staff

organization Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission date July, 1981

street & number 221 Governor Street telephone (804) 786-3143

city or town Richmond state VA 23219

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 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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature H. Bryan Mitchell
 H. Bryan Mitchell, Executive Director
 title Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

date MAY 10 1982

| | |
|--|------|
| For HCERS use only | |
| I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register | date |
| Keeper of the National Register | date |
| Attest: | date |
| Chief of Registration | |

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INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

CONTINUATION SHEET 1

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 1

A test square within the walls of the church revealed fill dirt extending to a depth of 11 inches and containing handwrought nails and window glass (Photo 2). No other artifacts were found, further supporting the conclusion that the site was a church. Although approximately 15 feet of the church's original 50 feet were lost to erosion before the river bank was stabilized by the construction of a rip-rap, the site is now protected against further damage.

Local informants claim that grave sites were once present at the river bank, but no traces of human bone were found during the 1981 survey. The archaeological features at 44NN43 are essentially intact.

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INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

CONTINUATION SHEET 2 ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 1

A new Denbigh Parish Church was built by 1686 near Deep Creek's northern branch, replacing the earlier church on the banks of the Warwick River. The presence of charred timbers at 44NN43 suggests that the first church may have been destroyed by fire, necessitating the construction of a new building. Although the second Denbigh Parish Church was no larger than its predecessor, its location further inland probably reflects a shift in population density.

During the 18th century a third Denbigh Church was built near the site of the second church. It was called the Lower Warwick Parish Church. The second church site and third church building, which is still standing, were visited by Bishop William Meade in 1854.

The site of the first Denbigh Parish Church, however, was abandoned permanently. Eighteenth and nineteenth century cartographers depicted the area as undeveloped woods and farmland, a condition in which it remained until the 1970's when the Shenks constructed their residence near the church site.

The First Denbigh Church Archaeological Site is a significant representative of religious life in early Warwick County. Documentary evidence indicates that the Stanley Hundred Church was located within an area used as a bombing range at the Fort Eustis Military Reservation, whereas Nutmeg Quarter Church lay within what is now a heavily urbanized section of Newport News. Therefore the sites of the Stanley Hundred and Nutmeg Quarter Parish Churches are thought to be destroyed.

The first Denbigh Parish Church, as an example of early 17th-century ecclesiastical architecture, is predated by only nine churches in the colony, including the four Jamestown churches and the two churches at Hampton. As the focal point of religious life in one of the earliest settled areas in the United States, the Denbigh Church site offers unique research potential. Scientific excavation of the church site could yield new data on ecclesiastical architecture and the excavation of burial sites, expected to be present in the nominated area, could yield new osteological information on Warwick County's first inhabitants.

MWM

1. Nell Nugent, Cavaliers and Pioneers (Baltimore, 1969), I, 26.
2. W.W. Hening, The Statutes At Large (Richmond, 1897), I, 278.
3. Ibid., I, 425.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

3

ITEM NUMBER

9

PAGE

1

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George C. Mason, Colonial Churches of Tidewater Virginia (Richmond, 1945).

H.R. McIlwaine, Minutes of Council and the General Court (Richmond, 1925).

Bishop William Meade, Old Churches and Families of Virginia (Richmond, 1857).

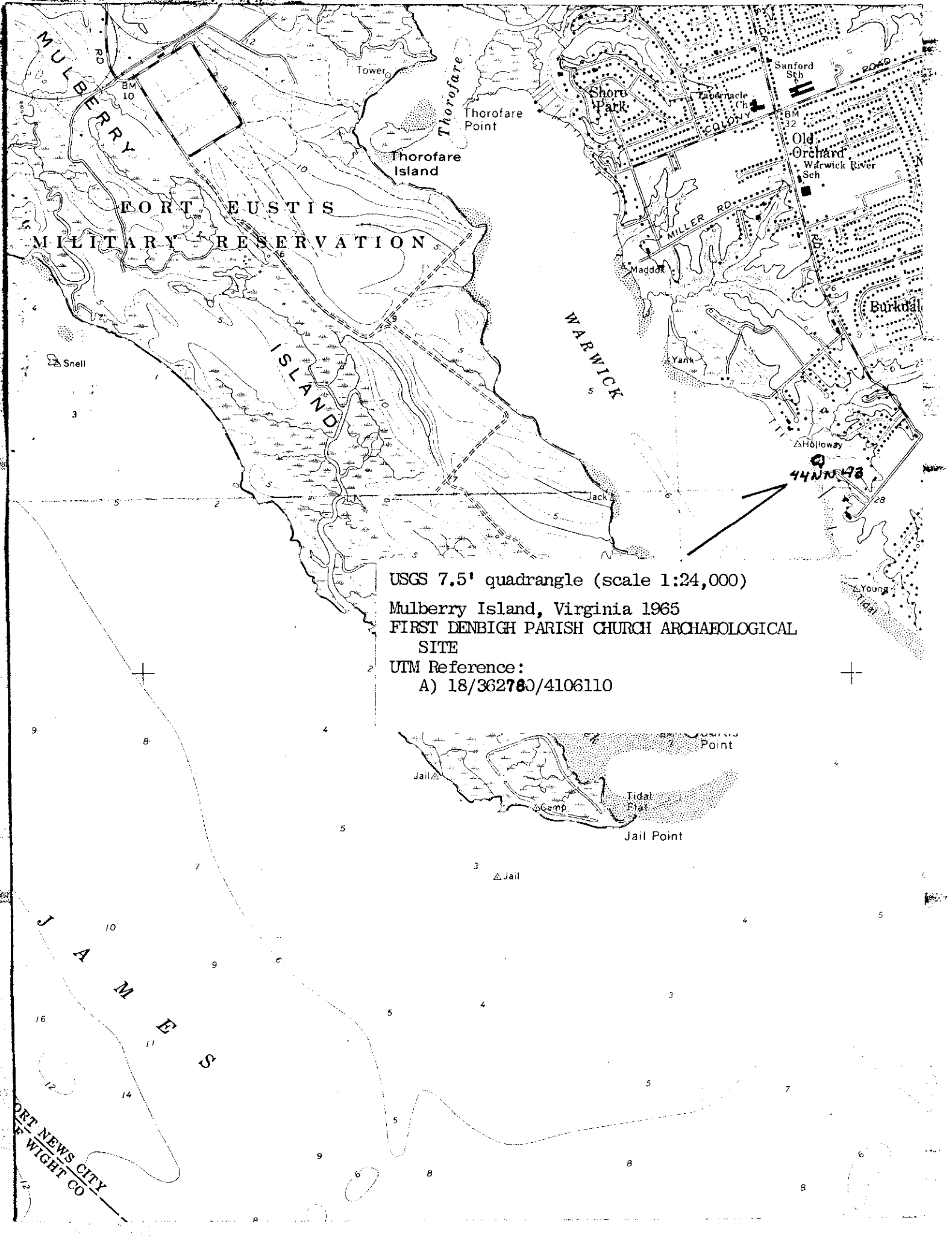
Nell M. Nugent, Cavaliers and Pioneers, Volume I, (Baltimore, 1969).

Unknown, "A Map of the East End of the Peninsula Whereon is Hampton," 1782.

Virginia Magazine of History and Biography (Richmond, 1949).

A. and D. Volertsen, Who Was Who in Warwick County, 1782-1880 (Ft. Eustis, 1977).

Roger D. Whichard, History of Lower Tidewater, Virginia (n.p. 1938).



MULBERRY RD

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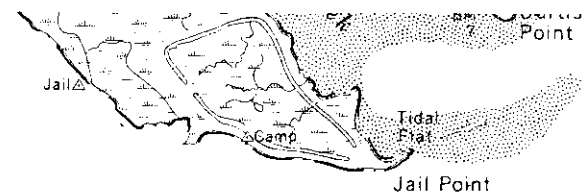
MULBERRY ISLAND

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USGS 7.5' quadrangle (scale 1:24,000)
Mulberry Island, Virginia 1965
FIRST DENBIGH PARISH CHURCH ARCHAEOLOGICAL
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