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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: Norfolk (in cit.)	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

1. NAME

COMMON:  
Christ Church

AND/OR HISTORIC:  
Christ Church.

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:  
421 E. Freemason St.

CITY OR TOWN:  
Norfolk

STATE Virginia	CODE 51	COUNTY: (in cit.)	CODE 710
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3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered <input type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) Vacant

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:  
Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority

STREET AND NUMBER:  
United Virginia Bank Building

CITY OR TOWN: Norfolk	STATE: Virginia	CODE 51
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5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:  
City Hall

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN: Norfolk	STATE Virginia	CODE 51
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6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:  
Historic American Buildings Survey Inventory

DATE OF SURVEY: 1958  Federal  State  County  Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:  
Library of Congress

STREET AND NUMBER:

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

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7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unaltered		<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site	

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

An 1828 description of Christ Church appearing in the American Beacon aptly conveyed the visual effect of the building when it stated: "It is modelled according to the chastest style of Grecian architecture, and in all its proportions there is an admirable correspondence; combining at the same time all the essentials of strength and beauty." The stuccoed church is temple-form and is fronted by a diastyle portico in antis. The two unfluted Greek Doric columns of the portico are given added emphasis by the red, white and blue color scheme chosen by the last occupants of the building. Directly above the portico is a broad rectangular base for the cupola. The cupola is divided into two portions: a lower square section that formerly housed a clock, and an upper octagonal section or belfry enclosed with louverd shutters. All three elements of this roof structure are topped by simple molded cornices.

Measuring approximately 64 feet by 96 feet, the church is three bays deep. The tall, semi-circular topped windows of these bays, as well as those on either side of the portico are subdivided into arched sections topped by roundels. Most of the windows retain their stained glass memorials.

The main architectural features of the church's interior are preserved but changes appear to have been made in the choir and sanctuary since the present arrangement does not conform to the 1828 description. The altar is currently located in a semi-circular rib-vaulted apse that projects from the main body of the building. This apse is framed on the interior by a semi-circular entablature supported at either end by somewhat stumpy pairs of Greek Corinthian pilasters. The original rear gallery supported on slender metal columns is intact, as is the flat ribbed ceiling. All the pews have been removed.

While the church is being preserved, it stands in only fair structural condition and in a poor state of repair.

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INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	
Virginia	
COUNTY	
Norfolk (in cit.)	
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(Number all entries)

8. in the city, which is still active today, leaving the Christ Church building vacant. It was bought by the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority in 1960 which is seeking a buyer for the building on the condition that it will be restored.

Christ Church survives as one of the very few ante bellum buildings in this venerable but much changing city, and as an important element in what is being developed as a complex of historic buildings and museums in the heart of the city. The church is also an important example of sophisticated Greek Revival architecture produced by local talents. Christ Church is historically important for the deep-seated roots of its first congregation and for its associations with various other elements of Norfolk's social structure.

9. American Beacon, November 12, 1828.  
Bagnall, H. B., "Christ Church, Norfolk, Bell and Clock," with sequel by Robert M. Hughes. 2W(2) 114-118.  
Burton, H. W., The History of Norfolk, Virginia. Norfolk: Norfolk Virginian Job Print, 1877.  
"Christ Church," The Port Advocate, November 1966, p. 3.  
Christ Church Chronicle, Vol. III, No. 1 (October 1, 1914), p. 13.  
Forrest, William S., Norfolk Directory, 1851-1852. Norfolk: 1851.  
Meade, Bishop, Old Churches, Ministers and Families of Virginia. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1900. Vol. I, p. 277.  
Newspaper files, Sargeant Memorial Room, Kirn Memorial Library, Norfolk, Virginia.  
Newsweek, Vol. 55 (February 15, 1960), p. 32.  
Stewart, William H., History of Norfolk County, Virginia, and Representative Citizens. Chicago: Biographical Publishing Company, 1902.  
Tucker, George H., "Elizabeth River Parish Churches," Virginian-Pilot, March 26, 1950 (Section V, p. 1).  
Tucker, George H., "History Praises Church," Virginian-Pilot, December 27, 1965.

6. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Columbian |  16th Century |  18th Century |  20th Century  
 15th Century |  17th Century |  19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known)

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |                                                  |                                                 |                                                         |                                                |
|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal              | <input type="checkbox"/> Education              | <input type="checkbox"/> Political                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric             | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic                | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry               | <input type="checkbox"/> Science                        | _____                                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture             | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention              | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture                      | _____                                          |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian            | _____                                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature             | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater                        | _____                                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce                | <input type="checkbox"/> Military               | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation                 | _____                                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications          | <input type="checkbox"/> Music                  |                                                         |                                                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation            |                                                 |                                                         |                                                |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The antecedents of Christ Church can be traced back to 1637, to the first church of Elizabeth River Parish, Norfolk County, built at Sewell's point in that year. In 1739 the congregation of this parish erected a larger building, known for almost a century as the Borough Church, and now known as St. Paul's Episcopal Church. In 1798 the congregation of Borough Church split into two factions over two rival ministers, and the larger group removed itself and built the first Christ Church on Church Street. This church was destroyed by fire in 1827 and the present church on Freemason Street was built to replace it the next year. In the meantime, the Borough Church was taken over by the Baptists and later by the Negro Baptists and finally fell into disuse. Not until 1832, when the congregation of Christ Church grew too large, did the Borough Church come back into use by an Episcopalian congregation which renamed it St. Paul's. A great rivalry between the two congregations existed for many years as to which church was the real descendant from the Elizabeth River Parish.

The design of Christ Church has been credited to two people: a local builder, Levi Swain, and Thomas Williamson, a member of the congregation. The American Beacon for November 12, 1928 said of the church: "This beautiful building was erected by Mr. Levi Swain, architect; under the direction of the Building Committee. . ." Williamson, the cashier of the Virginia Bank and an amateur architect is said to have drawn the plans for the building that were then used as a guide for Levi Swain.

On May 1, 1879, Robert E. Lee attended services at Christ Church. This was one of Lee's last public appearances for he died less than six months later.

Christ Church was used by the Episcopalians until 1910 when they merged their congregation with St. Luke's, another downtown church, and built Christ and St. Luke's Church at Olney Road and Stockley Gardens. The Greek Orthodox congregation rented the building on Freemason Street from 1911 to 1918 when they purchased it for \$27,000. They occupied the building until 1955 when they moved into their new church on Granby Street. Between 1955 and 1960 the church building was used by the House of Prayer for All People, thus becoming one of the 350 "heavens" or disciple churches of Sweet Daddy Grace, the famed Negro revivalist who between 1921 and his death in 1960 amassed an estimated three million followers and an estate valued at \$25 million. On a July 4, 1951, visit to Norfolk, Daddy Grace baptized 2300 people. It was estimated that his Norfolk following numbered 10,000 people. In 1960 his congregation merged with an older congregation

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
PROPERTY MAP FORM

(Type all entries - attach to or enclose with map)

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FOR NPS USE ONLY	
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AND/OR HISTORIC: Christ Church			
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STREET AND NUMBER: 421 E. Freemason St.			
CITY OR TOWN: Norfolk			
STATE: Virginia	CODE 51	COUNTY: (in cit.)	CODE 710
3. MAP REFERENCE			
SOURCE: U.S.G.S. 7½', quadrangle Norfolk South, Va.			
SCALE: 1:24000			
DATE: 1955			
4. REQUIREMENTS			
TO BE INCLUDED ON ALL MAPS			
1. Property boundaries where required.			
2. North arrow.			
3. Latitude and longitude reference.			

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM

(Type all entries - attach to or enclose with photograph)

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STREET AND NUMBER: 421 E. Freemason St.			
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3. PHOTO REFERENCE			
PHOTO CREDIT: V. U. Photos			
DATE OF PHOTO: 1964			
NEGATIVE FILED AT: V. U. Photos 5500 Tidewater Drive; Norfolk, Virginia			
4. IDENTIFICATION			
DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC.			
View from the southwest.			

U.S.G.S. 7 1/2' quadrangle (Scale: 1:24000)  
Norfolk South, Va. 1955

Christ Church

Latitude  
36° 51' 00"

Longitude  
76° 17' 10"

