

VLR-10/16/90 NRHP-12/6/90

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 18). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Main Street Methodist Episcopal Church South
other names/site number Main Street United Methodist Church DHR File No. 108-63

2. Location

street & number 767 Main Street N/A not for publication
city, town Danville N/A vicinity
state Virginia code VA county City of Danville code 590 zip code 24541

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: [x] private, [] public-local, [] public-State, [] public-Federal
Category of Property: [x] building(s), [] district, [] site, [] structure, [] object
Number of Resources within Property: Contributing (1), Noncontributing (0 buildings, 0 sites, 0 structures, 0 objects, 0 Total)
Name of related multiple property listing: N/A
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: N/A

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this [x] 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 [x] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria. [] See continuation sheet.
Signature of certifying official: [Signature] Date: 29 Oct 90
Director, Virginia Department of Historic Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria. [] See continuation sheet.
Signature of commenting or other official
Date
State or Federal agency and bureau

5. 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

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Religion/Religious Structure

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Religion: Religious Structure

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Romanesque Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick

walls Brick

roof Composition Shingle

other Terra cotta

Brownstone

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

Main Street Methodist Episcopal Church South (now Main Street United Methodist Church), located at 767 Main Street in Danville, stands just within the northern edge of the Danville Historic District which borders the downtown business district. A prominent local landmark visible from virtually anywhere downtown, and many points beyond, the massive eighty-seven-foot tall corner bell tower of the church stands out amid the more slender steeples nearby that punctuate Danville's skyline. Main Street United Methodist Church is the city's purest example of the Romanesque Revival style; the church was modeled in the style at the zenith of the town's late nineteenth century tobacco boom, a time when congregations of neighboring churches were also erecting handsome new edifices, mostly of Victorian Gothic inspiration. The original building was begun in 1865 and completed by 1873 as a simple Renaissance Revival-style structure of scored stucco over brick with tall round-headed windows flanking the sanctuary. It was topped with a spired tower which was later replaced with a cupola. The present Romanesque Revival facade with elaborate corner bell tower dates from an 1890-91 church enlargement and remodeling. A large flanking educational building erected in the 1920s echoes the earlier building's Romanesque detailing.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)
Architecture

Period of Significance

1865-1923

Significant Dates

1865-1873

1890-1891

1923

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Exall, Henry - Builder

Pleasants, J. R. - Builder

Head, J. Bryant - Architect

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

A striking, eighty-seven-foot-high, turreted tower makes Main Street Methodist Episcopal Church South (now Main Street United Methodist Church) one of Danville's premier landmarks. The Church is the city's purest example of Romanesque Revival architecture, with its brick detailing, monumental massing, and incorporation of other materials all emphasizing the style. This architectural idiom continues on the interior, especially in the sanctuary where Romanesque-style arches are repeated in the wainscoting, communion and gallery rails, within the pilasters, and as wide openings behind and on either side of the chancel. Inside and out, the richness of the structure, which assumed its present form in 1890-91, reflects the prosperity of its members and their role as leaders of the late nineteenth-century community. Known locally as the "Mother Church of Methodism in Danville," Main Street Church has the longest record of continuous use by a congregation of any church in the city. The foundation for the present sanctuary was begun in 1865. Services were first held in the completed ground floor in 1868, the official founding date of the church. The sanctuary was completed in 1873, and the church was remodeled to its present style in 1890-91. The educational building, added in 1923, doubled the size of the church. Without copying the 1891 facade, local architect J. Bryant Head, also a member of the church, repeated details that harmonize both structures.

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

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

Specify repository:
Virginia Department of Historic Resources
2221 Governor Street, Richmond, VA 23219

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property Approximately two acres.

UTM References

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Zone Easting Northing

B

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Zone Easting Northing

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D

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property occupies the lot at 767 Main Street and is roughly 180' X 140' in size.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

Nominated property includes all the land that is historically associated with building site.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By Louise R. Roediger and Donald R. Evans, Architect

name/title Louise R. Roediger

organization _____

date August 24, 1990

street & number 404 Sutherlin Place

telephone (804) 792-3948

city or town Danville

state Virginia zip code 24541

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National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 1ANALYTICAL DESCRIPTIONEXTERIOR

The asymmetrical facade of Main Street United Methodist Church faces northwest toward Main Street and is the most important elevation of the structure. Dominated by a castellated bell tower to the west, this elevation features five arched windows above the main entrances. A brownstone belt course, continuous across the front, provides the lintels necessary for the recessed entrances; the lintels are relieved of some of the weight by brick arches directly above the belt course. Arches are prominent in the design as can be seen in the windows and brick recesses. There is further use of arches in the corbeled brick patterns above the five major windows of this elevation. Overall the church is especially noteworthy for its masonry ornament, outstanding in a city noted for highly crafted brickwork. Patterned brickwork above the windows is laid in header bond, with alternating bricks having a moulded and protruding form which adds shadow and depth to the wall. The elevation is punctuated with brick and stone belt courses, recessed panels, slotted vents with louvres, and cylindrical turrets which complement and enhance the overall Romanesque style. The gable-end parapet of brick is capped with a moulded metal coping which slopes down the rake and is joined by a horizontal terra cotta parapet with quatrefoil designs. The articulation of the intricate brickwork is most evident in the tower, which also features moulded metal bands that encompass the perimeter and expand at the bottom of the turrets to form a semi-spherical design. Atop the slate roof of the tower is a cast-iron weathervane bearing the date 1890. Near the ground level are battered pilasters which make the base larger than the upper part of the tower.

The northeast facade retains part of the original structure; a stuccoed brick wall with tall arch-headed windows. A feature of this elevation is an apsidal end of the narthex which terminates with an open colonnaded balcony supporting a conical-shaped metal roof. To the east is a large stained glass wheel (or rose) window which is part of the 1890 renovation. The southwest facade also exhibits part of the original stuccoed brick wall with tall arch-headed windows. This elevation is viewed from the courtyard created when the adjoining educational building was completed in 1923. The tower rises at the west side of this elevation and contains an entrance at its base that was used for access to the gallery in the nave.

EDUCATIONAL BUILDING

The front facade of the 1923 education building echoes detailing of the 1890-91 facade by its use of brick belt courses, arched openings, and corbeled brickwork at the parapeted front gable. The entrance is accented by a protruding vestibule with arched doorway and gabled parapet. The other elevations of this 1923 addition are simple. The bricks are laid in regular running bond, without the interest of patterned brick or belt courses. Windows are six-over-six double-hung

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sash with clear glazing.

INTERIOR

NARTHEX

Heavy wooden doors with metal ornamentation provide access from the exterior into the narthex. The floor is paved with earth-toned encaustic tile in simple geometric patterns. A dark-stained wood raised-panel wainscot surrounds the narthex to a height of four feet, with plaster walls and ceiling above. At the northeast end of the narthex a wooden stairway curves upward to the gallery and chapel on the second floor.

CHAPEL

The Chapel, directly above the narthex and in disuse because of water damage from tower and roof leaks, is bordered on the northwest with four of the five windows of the front facade. Wood floors, wainscoting, and plaster walls provide a simple design to complement the stained glass windows.

SANCTUARY

The Sanctuary is composed of three major elements: the nave, the chancel, and the gallery.

Nave

The plan of the nave retains the basic rectangular form of the original 1873 church. Based on property maps showing outlines of the original building, it appears that the early narthex was razed to make way for the present one and a rear section was razed for expansion of the chancel area. Raised-paneled wainscoting, like that in the narthex, surrounds this area and is capped by a chair rail which also serves as a window sill. The walls are plastered up to the sloped ceiling below the gallery.

The walls above the gallery have pilasters that rise from the gallery floor and extend upward to the springline of the window arches and beyond to a moulded, plastered, longitudinal ceiling beam.

The ceiling is flat, but is given character and weight by the introduction of longitudinal and cross beams that form a repeating rectangular pattern and join with the arched wall pilasters to define the interior in the Romanesque Revival style.

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The seating is symmetrical about a center aisle with slightly curved wooden pews terminating on the sides forming two side aisles. The pews are late Victorian in style with the ends carved in Gothic motif.

The interior of the nave has dark-stained and varnished woodwork complemented with soft yellow walls that are highlighted with off-white painted plaster mouldings. The ceiling is painted a pastel blue. All of this gives the interior a well-defined appearance. The windows are glazed with late nineteenth-century art glass.

Gallery

The gallery, which extends around three sides of an upper level of the nave, is fronted with an open wood balustrade consisting of square balusters with semi-circular arches between each one. The balustrade is topped with a heavy wooden cap rail and is accented with newels that have heavy protruding bases and caps. The newels surround long suspension bolts which rise into the roof structure. The newels above these bolts are covered with moulded sheet metal to form slender columns. This suspension system eliminates the need for lower-level columns, which increases the seating capacity of the nave. The gallery was part of the original 1873 building, but is believed to have been refitted with a more appropriate Romanesque Revival railing in the 1890-91 renovations. Wainscoting in this area consists of vertical tongue-and-groove beaded boards with a chair rail and base.

Chancel

The Chancel area was added to the original building in the 1890-91 renovations and begins at what was the rear wall of the original building. Large pilasters were left on each side of the nave at this point; they rise and form quarter circles and terminate into moulded drop brackets at the cross ceiling beam. In 1926 the communion rail was moved forward to provide choir space to the rear of the pulpit. The communion rail, one riser above the floor, is curved outward toward the nave and is an open wood rail similar in its Romanesque Revival design to the gallery rail. The pulpit is raised three risers above the communion area and is in front of the choir loft, separated by a solid wood rail with a recessed paneled motif reflecting the communion and gallery rails. On the rear wall are two flanking stained glass windows and a large arch through which the mural entitled The Transfiguration is seen above a high wainscoting similar to the rail in the choir area. Small stained glass windows inside the arch provide a soft raking light across the wainscoting and mural.

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In addition to the arched opening behind the chancel, two matching arched openings flank each side of the chancel. Each has ornamental plaster mouldings, bas-relief circular designs, and pilaster with acanthus leaf applications.

On the east, the arch surrounds a shallow recess, the rear wall of which contains the wheel window. On the west side the arch contains the church organ fronted by pipes of the original organ. The pipes are surrounded by wood grillwork consisting of wood slatting of very thin material. Around the perimeter of this grille are inserts of wood circles with spokes radiating from the center and smaller circles inserted to complete the design. The grillwork serves as the organ grille for the present organ. Until 1926 the opening on the west side was used as the choir and organ area.

LOWER LEVEL

On the lower or basement level of the church building is the Peatross Bible Classroom. This room is the space originally used for worship by the congregation when the basement was completed in 1868. The wooden floor is covered with asphalt tile. Concrete-filled cast-iron columns, simply fluted and capped, support the nave floor. At the rear of the classroom is the communion rail that was used in this room by the congregation prior to the completion of the 1873 sanctuary above. The communion rail is semi-circular in plan, and is raised one step from the classroom floor. The base of the rail is moulded wood with turned balusters evenly spaced along its length and one large turned newel placed at either end. The entire unit is capped with a two-piece moulded rail with an extension on the rear for communion glasses.

Changes dating from the 1950s include a cative wood-paneled wainscot around the room and full wall panels and pilasters behind the dais.

EDUCATIONAL BUILDING

The interior of the 1923 educational building expresses a more functional and severe application of design and ornament. The building contains classrooms, the church office, a church parlor, a large assembly room, a kitchen, and a small gymnasium. The highlight of the interior is a two-story vestibule with double staircases that meet at a landing near the entrance doors and then ascend as a single flight of stairs to the second floor. The educational building was designed by the late J. Bryant Heard, local architect and member of the church. His original design has been virtually unchanged since its completion in 1923.

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Main Street Methodist Episcopal Church South was the earliest descendant of Danville's original Methodist congregation, the Wilson Street Methodist Episcopal Church South, which was founded in 1834 at the corner of Wilson and Lynn streets. This area was then the town's fashionable residential district. In 1858 William T. Sutherlin, a leading citizen and Methodist, moved from Wilson Street to a new Italian Villa-style mansion located eight blocks west on Main Street. This was the beginning of a general move by the local population to the western part of town.

In 1865 a large segment of the Wilson Street Church congregation followed the lead of Major Sutherlin who purchased a lot of approximately two acres on Main Street for a new church. Construction began before the end of the year and by the spring of 1868 services were held in the basement. The original sanctuary, reputedly a simple Renaissance Revival structure of brick covered with scored stucco and topped with a small spire, was completed by the contractor Henry Exall in 1873. Following the destruction of the spire in a "not very hard March wind,"¹ the tower was capped instead with a cupola. The oldest portion of this structure has the longest record of use by a congregation of any denomination in the city. The first churches of both the Presbyterian and Baptist denominations, founded in 1826 and 1832 respectively, predate the Methodist church; however, their present sanctuaries were built some years after Main Street Methodist's original building.

The 1868 basement, where services were first held, is known as the Peatross Bible Classroom. Named for Judge R. W. Peatross, first attorney for the Riverside Cotton Mills (Dan River Inc.) and beloved teacher for fifty years of the class that bears his name, the Peatross Bible Classroom now houses the adult Sunday school.

Church records indicate that the gallery, which extended above and around the sides and rear of the 1873 sanctuary, was originally reserved for black members. This practice was discontinued with the emergence of separate black congregations, such as the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) church, in the decades after the Civil War.

At the 1868 session of the Virginia Annual Conference of the Methodist Church, Rev. C. C. Pearson was appointed the first pastor and the Board of Stewards set 1868 as the official date of the founding of Main Street Methodist Episcopal Church South. As the first of fifteen local Methodist congregations that were established from the original Wilson Street Church, Main Street Church became known locally as the "Mother Church of Methodism in Danville."

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For some years following the Civil War many prominent residents of the city constructed opulent residences in Danville's West End, especially along fashionable Main Street. Here, too, they built several handsome new churches: Presbyterian in 1879; Episcopal in 1879-81; Baptist in 1882-84; and Mt. Vernon Methodist in 1884-85. Members of the increasingly prosperous Main Street Methodist Episcopal Church South followed suit in 1890 with an extensive remodeling that transformed their simple 1873 sanctuary into an elaborate and richly-detailed Romanesque Revival structure of imposing character. The family names of these early church members are still represented on the membership roll of Main Street Church today: Ayres, Hickey, Catlin, Jordan, Bethell, Penn, Cosby, Peatross, Croxton, Paylor, Bagby, Evans, Schoolfield, and Wyllie.

The remodeled church, with its new facade, narthex, tower, and chancel, is believed to have been erected by local contractor J. R. Pleasants. It was rededicated for services in October 1891. In 1908 the church authorized the W. Moses Company, which specialized in church interiors, to commission an Italian artist, G. Lecchi, to paint a mural, The Transfiguration, behind the chancel. This mural received much critical acclaim, and in 1942 it was cleaned and restored by J. R. Lamb Studios of New York as the focus of the church decorative scheme. In 1909 a carillon was installed in the tower as a memorial to prominent tobacconist and church member James G. Penn. The eleven bells, cast by Menerly & Co. of West Troy, N. Y., weigh 9,200 pounds (13,000 pounds including frame and mounting).

The church was doubled in size with the completion in 1923 of the adjoining educational building, which was built on the site of the former parsonage. This building as well as the sanctuary is used for many purposes including music concerts; a reading center; music school for voice, organ, and piano; arts and crafts classes; sports activities in the gymnasium; and other community programs. The opening exercises in this building, designed by architect J. Bryant Heard, a member of the church, were held on June 17, 1923.

In 1927 an organ was purchased from the Hall Organ Co. of West Haven, Connecticut, at a price of \$18,000. A new organ console was added in 1967 and in 1971 the Austin Company added an echo organ and rebuilt the original instrument, which is still in use today.

The church is in the midst of a program to repair and restore its most striking feature, the 1891 tower, which has suffered severe water damage.

¹Diary of Jacob Davis, March 9, 1874

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

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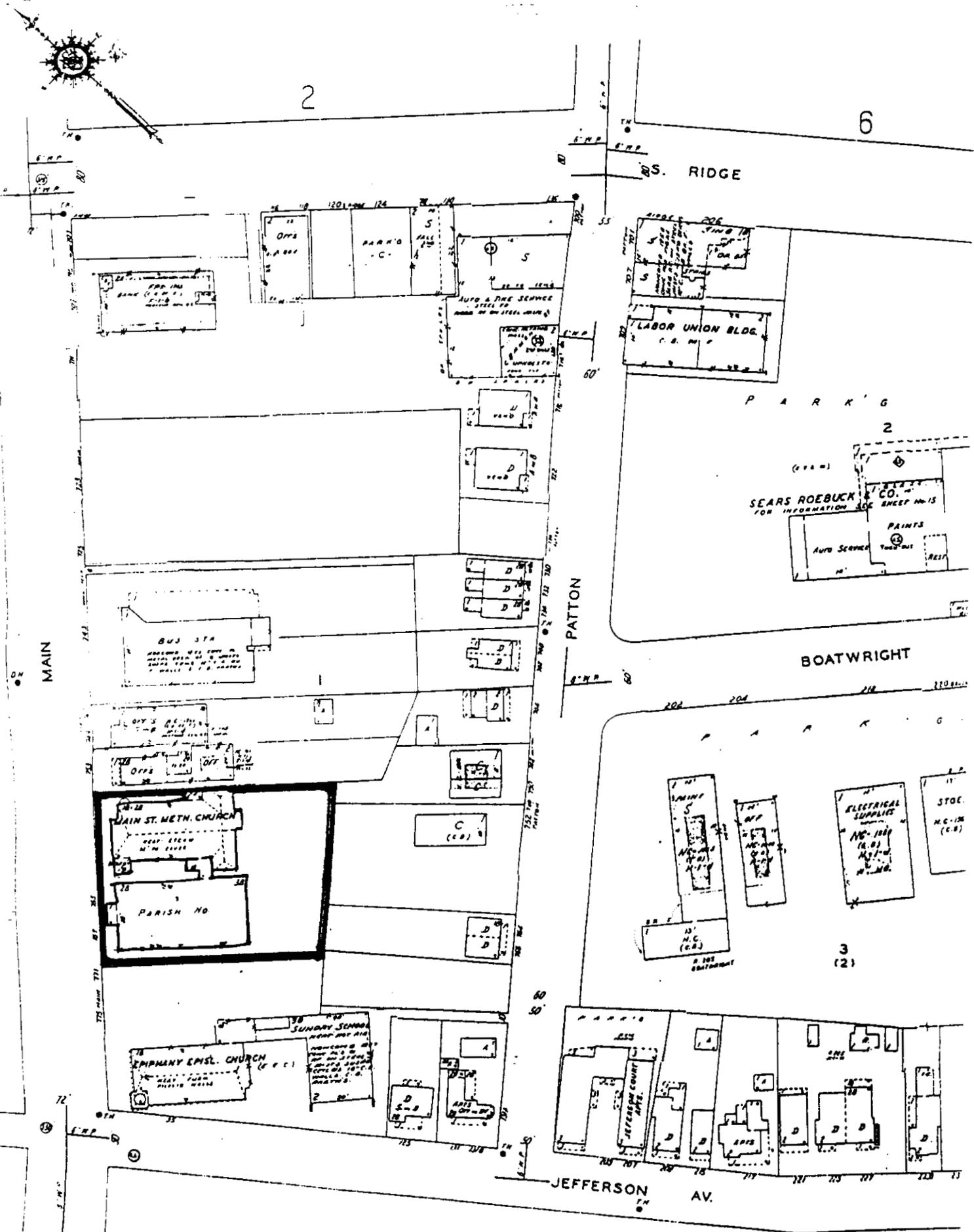
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Sanborn Insurance Map
 SCALE: 1" = 100'

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Main Street United Methodist Church
Danville, Virginia

View of Main Street Northwest elevation
Joseph Winston, Photographer
August 1990
Photo 1 of 15

View of Northwest elevation
Joseph Winston, Photographer
August 1990
Photo 2 of 15

View of Northeast elevation, looking west
Joseph Winston, Photographer
August 1990
Photo 3 of 15

View of Educational Building, Northwest elevation
Joseph Winston, Photographer
August 1990
Photo 4 of 15

View of Education Building Entrance, Northwest elevation
Joseph Winston, Photographer
August 1990
Photo 5 of 15

View of Educational Building, Southwest elevation
Joseph Winston, Photographer
August 1990
Photo 6 of 15

View of Courtyard between buildings, looking west
Joseph Winston, Photographer
August 1990
Photo 7 of 15

View of Courtyard between buildings, looking east
Joseph Winston, Photographer
August 1990
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View of Courtyard showing side windows of original sanctuary
Joseph Winston, Photographer
August 1990
Photo 9 of 15

View of Sanctuary, from rear
Joseph Winston, Photographer
August 1990
Photo 10 of 15

View of Sanctuary, from front
Joseph Winston, Photographer
August 1990
Photo 11 of 15

View of arched recess, with original organ pipes
Joseph Winston, Photographer
August 1990
Photo 12 of 15

View of arched recess, with rose window
Joseph Winston, Photographer
August 1990
Photo 13 of 15

View of Peatross Class, original 1868 basement area
Joseph Winston, Photographer
August 1990
Photo 14 of 15

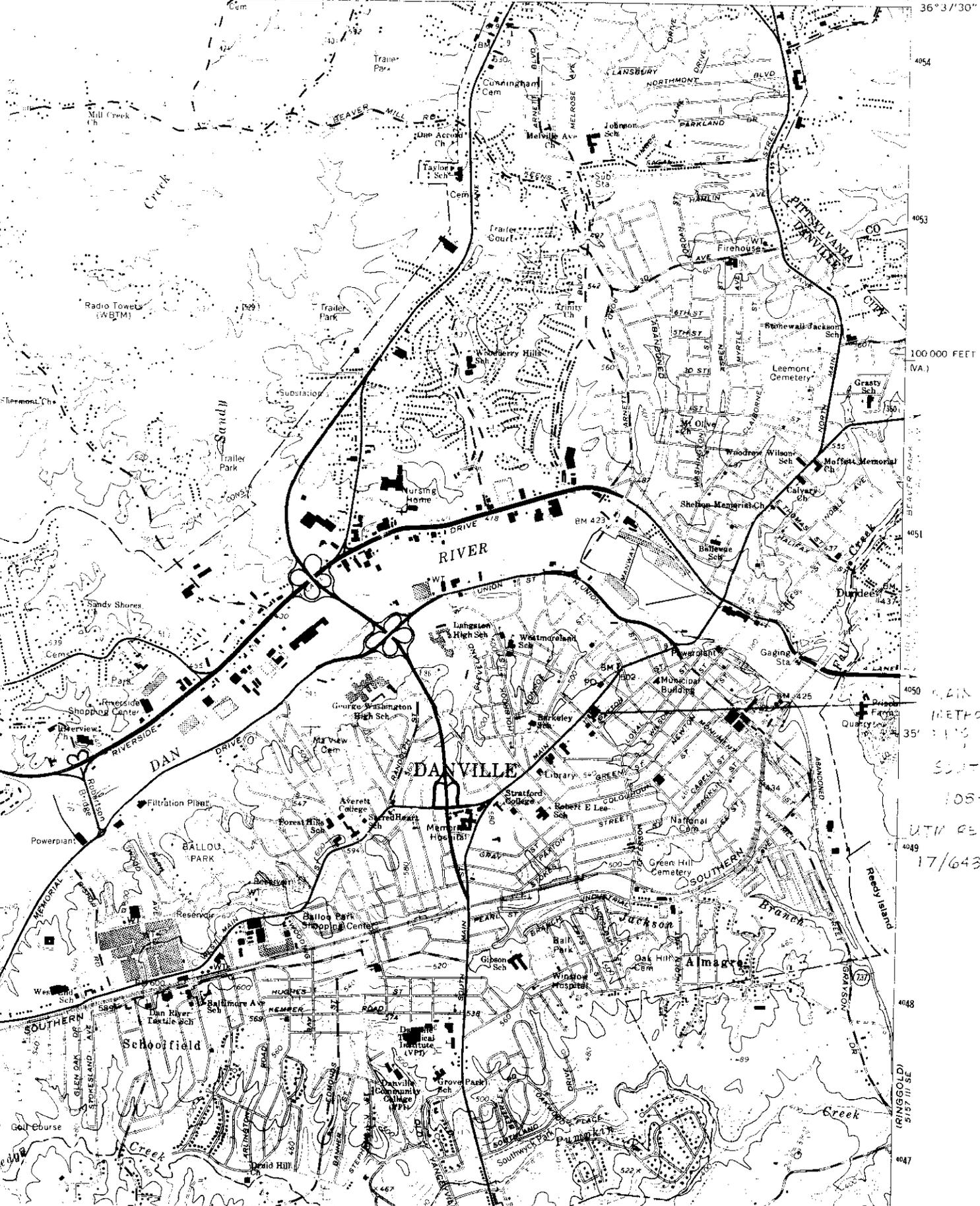
View of Communion Rail, original 1868 basement area
Joseph Winston, Photographer
August 1990
Photo 15 of 15

Note: Negatives are in the State Library.

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