

VLR-4/17/73 NRHP-5/14/73

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: Portsmouth (in city)	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

1. NAME

COMMON:  
Trinity Episcopal Church

AND/OR HISTORIC:

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:  
South West corner of High Street and Court Street

CITY OR TOWN:  
Portsmouth

STATE: Virginia      CODE: 51      COUNTY: (in city)      CODE: 740

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress
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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Comments _____

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:  
C/O The Reverend C. Charles Vache

STREET AND NUMBER:  
Trinity Episcopal Church, Box 664

CITY OR TOWN: Portsmouth      STATE: Virginia      CODE: 51

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:  
City Hall

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN: Portsmouth      STATE: Virginia      CODE: 51

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:  
Historic American Buildings Survey Inventory

DATE OF SURVEY: 1969       Federal     State     County     Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:  
Library of Congress

STREET AND NUMBER:  
Washington

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

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

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7. DESCRIPTION

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

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (If known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The original church was erected circa 1762, with the dimensions being 30' x 60'. It was described by M. Moreau de Saint Mery in his book American Journeys (1789-1794): "On the left side of this street [High] going up from the Market, is the brick Anglican Church, neat and well kept. It has a rood loft and benches throughout its entire length. Next to the door on both sides are two benches painted black. These are for blacks who are not allowed to mix with the white." It is thought that St.-Mery's reference to a rood loft must have meant that the pulpit and reading desk were joined to a rood screen. Stephen P. Dorsey in Early English Churches in America, 1607-1807 mentions the Anglican church in Portsmouth having a rood screen. Originally the pulpit was on the north wall of the church on the nave side of the rood screen near the north door which, strangely enough, was the main entrance. During the period when the church was abandoned by its congregation (roughly 1809-1820) the rood screen was removed and the pulpit and reading desk moved to the center of the east wall. Originally the church had had square, high-backed pews, but in April, 1822, half of the old double pews were cut down and "made single, in the modern style." Subsequently, the other half were cut down.

In 1828 it was planned to enlarge the body of the church by adding ten feet to its width. However, after erecting the new wall "when we came to join this new work to the old, the latter was found so injured by cracks and decay the whole had to be taken down and built new, like the additions; and so the entire building was made new, using for the same only a very small portion of the old materials." During the 1961 remodeling, portions of the floor were taken up to clear the debris under the building. At that time the workmen discovered the outer walls of the original structure, laid in Flemish bond. However, they found that instead of the ten feet being added to the width of the church in 1828 as stated by Dr. Wingfield, that approximately 6' were added to the south, 5'8" to the north, and 6'4" to the west. The west wall remains are under the present chancel steps. The 1828-29 rebuilding of the church was done with materials salvaged from the old Fort Nelson, and the walls stuccoed over to hide this somewhat coarse texture.

Rev. Wingfield's description of the church interior continues:

This building had, at first, but one gallery for the organ and choir. The chancel was changed from the east to the west of the church, and the entrance was put where formerly stood the pulpit and reading-desk - that is, when I took charge [1821]. Originally, these stood on the north side, close to the door, which was the main entrance to the building, with a cross aisle to a door opposite leading to the grave-yard. There was one other

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outdoor also in this west end of the church, making in all three entrances to the church.

The new church was consecrated on Sunday, January 10, 1830. The steeple or cupola and bell were added in 1830.

In 1840 Mr. W. Butler erected side galleries. In 1842 Mr. William Forbes contracted to alter the pews and doors leading in- to the church. The Vestry Room was added to the rear (west end) of the church, and a new organ was purchased from Henry Erben of New York.

In 1845 unknown changes were made in the chancel and a new pulpit was installed. In 1858 the exterior blinds were removed from the windows and screening put in their place. In 1859 the pews were remodeled and stained glass windows by Henry Sharp of New York, were installed. That same year, "the outer walls of the Church and Vestry room and all the woodwork including door and window frames and sash on the outside to be painted red sandstone colour including the steeple and belfry (the ball to be gilded, the 'Franklin rod' to be black and pencilled red)." The interior was painted in fresco.

A newspaper article of September 6, 1884, tells of improvements to the church done at that time:

The gallery fronts, stairways, organ, pews and the wood- work in the vestibule have been colored walnut and varnished. The gas fixtures have been bronzed and the arch at the chancel has been painted white. A beautiful and costly Brussels carpet covers the floor of the church. The pews are uniformly cushioned in red damask. The chancel chairs have been newly upholstered in red plush and a red cloth cover, handsomely embroidered, has been placed upon the communion table. . . . Carpets have been laid on the floor of the organ loft and side galleries, and some new furniture has been purchased for the vestryroom.

The cornerstone of the "Chapel" or Parish House was laid on June 14, 1887; it was designed by Cassell & Cassell of Baltimore.

In 1893 the church was enlarged under the direction of W. P. Wentworth of Boston "who had built St. Luke's Church, Norfolk, and restored St. Paul's, Norfolk." E. J. N. Stent of New York was the interior decorator. "As originally painted after the enlargement, there was a fresco on the sanctuary wall, and much stenciling around the woodwork and wainscoating. The colors, which became visible in several places during the 1961 remodeling, included bright yellow walls in the nave with orange stenciling

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around the windows and doors, gold and maroon-red on the interior of the Chancel arches, etc." The annex and tower were added to the church in 1893 and the quaint old belfry destroyed.

A new "Tracker Action" organ with 23 stops powered by a water motor was installed in 1899. This caused problems due to freezing, poor water pressure, and plugged drains, and the organ was changed to an electric one in 1938.

In 1905 the church was completely redecorated by J. & R. Lamb, Inc., for \$705. The parish house was enlarged by a two-story addition in 1908. In 1913 the carpets were removed from the church, and the ceramic tile floor which is now in the aisles and chancel area was laid. In 1919 flat wall paint was applied to the interior. However, the next year "the flat paint was covered for a cost of \$2950.00 by a Baltimore firm, H. Chamber. This was the last time that elaborate stencilling and mural decoration was employed."

A new reredoes was dedicated in December, 1932. It was of Italian marble, made in Italy, designed by Seibel Studios of New York in the Romanesque style. During the 1930's the front pews were removed in the nave to increase the aisle space for those receiving Communion. Marble wainscoating was installed around the sanctuary wall, replacing the wood, during World War II.

The Parish House was renovated in 1941, but a new parish house was erected in 1954 by the architectural firm of Williams, Coile and Blanchard; construction was by J. B. Denny of Norfolk. The cornerstone of the parish house was laid March 13, 1955.

At this time it was decided to paint the church stucco yellow to match the new parish house - for many years the church had been painted battleship gray. Also, the west end arches of the Annex were enclosed to provide additional sacristy space; the pews were painted off-white and the woodwork painted to blend with the walls. In 1960, a new organ from Austin Organ Company of Hartford, Connecticut was installed.

The church was remodeled in 1961. The rubble was removed from beneath the church; the front North-South aisle and chancel steps were rebuilt, the gallery was removed; a new pulpit, choir railing and console enclosure were installed; the interior was repainted, all under the direction of Bradford Tazewell of Williams and Tazewell, Architects.

The communion table was the tombstone of Mrs. McFarland. The 1893 addition to the building covered the space in which her grave was located, and it was preserved in this way. The Italian

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marble font is an angel holding a shell.

KTR

8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |                                       |  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 18th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century  | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 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/Phi- | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic                | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry    | losophy   | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture             | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention   | <input type="checkbox"/> Science                  | _____                                    |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape   | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture                | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                     | Architecture                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Human-            | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce                | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature  | itarian   | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications          | <input type="checkbox"/> Military    | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater                  | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation            | <input type="checkbox"/> Music       | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation           | _____                                    |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Portsmouth's historic Trinity Church was erected between 1828 and 1830 on the site of the original colonial structure dating from 1762. Located at the main crossroads of the city, the simple but elegant building has come to symbolize this port town's deep-seated connections with the past.

The history of Trinity Church's parish begins in 1761 when the Elizabeth River Parish was divided into three parts, with the area west of the Southern Branch of the river being created as Portsmouth Parish. The following year a brick church was erected on spot where the present church stands, this being the first Established Church erected in this area - Anglicans formerly had to cross the river to Norfolk to attend services. This first church building apparently was not well built: a description appearing in the Virginia Gazette, December 11, 1766, stated that "A church there, [Portsmouth] built within these three years is now ready to tumble down! which has obliged the Church Wardens to advertise it for repairs."

From 1809 to 1821 there were no services held in the church as the congregation dwindled in size and became scattered - some members joining other churches. The building, which was being used as a schoolhouse and a Presbyterian meeting house, fell into decay. In 1821 the church, then consisting of only ten communicants, received the Rev. John H. Wingfield as their minister, a position he held for fifty years. The church was repaired in 1823, and in 1825 it received the name "Trinity Church." In an 1828 enlargement it was found that the original fabric was so decayed that it was pulled down and the present building erected.

During the War between the States, the building was converted into a hospital, with boards being nailed to the tops of the pews to serve as beds. The church was repaired after the war, and on Easter Sunday, 1868, a new memorial window appeared in the church. Given by Rev. Wingfield, the window was dedicated to nine Portsmouth men "Who Died During the Civil War Between the Years 1861 & 1865 in Defence of Their Native State Virginia, Against the Invasion of the U. S. Forces." As Portsmouth was then part of a military district, this window offended the Federal

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forces, and an order from the Secretary of the Navy ordered the window removed; failure to comply would result in the closing of the Navy Yard. The window was removed in May, 1868, and was restored to its place in January, 1954.

Trinity churchyard was for years the only burial ground in the town of Portsmouth, and thus contains many old tombstones, the oldest extant stone dating from 1763.

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Funsten, Rev. J. B., "Historical Sermon on Trinity Church, Portsmouth, Virginia, 1762-1894," in Some Fugitive Items of Portsmouth & Norfolk County History, comp. by John C. Emmerson, Jr., Portsmouth, Va., 1948 (typescript).  
 Holladay, Mildred M., "History of Portsmouth," in Some Fugitive Items of Portsmouth & Norfolk County History, comp. by John C. Emmerson, Jr., Portsmouth, Va., 1948 (typescript).  
 Vache, Rev. C. Charles, A History of Trinity Church, Portsmouth Parish, Portsmouth, Virginia, 1761-62 to 1961-62. 1962.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	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	° ' "	° ' "		36° 50' 05"	76° 18' 06"	
NE	° ' "	° ' "				
SE	° ' "	° ' "				
SW	° ' "	° ' "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: Less than ten 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:  
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Staff

ORGANIZATION: Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission DATE: March, 1973

STREET AND NUMBER:  
Room 1116 Ninth Street State Office Building

CITY OR TOWN: Richmond STATE: Virginia CODE: 51

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

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 \_\_\_\_\_

Junius R. Fishburne, Jr., Director  
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

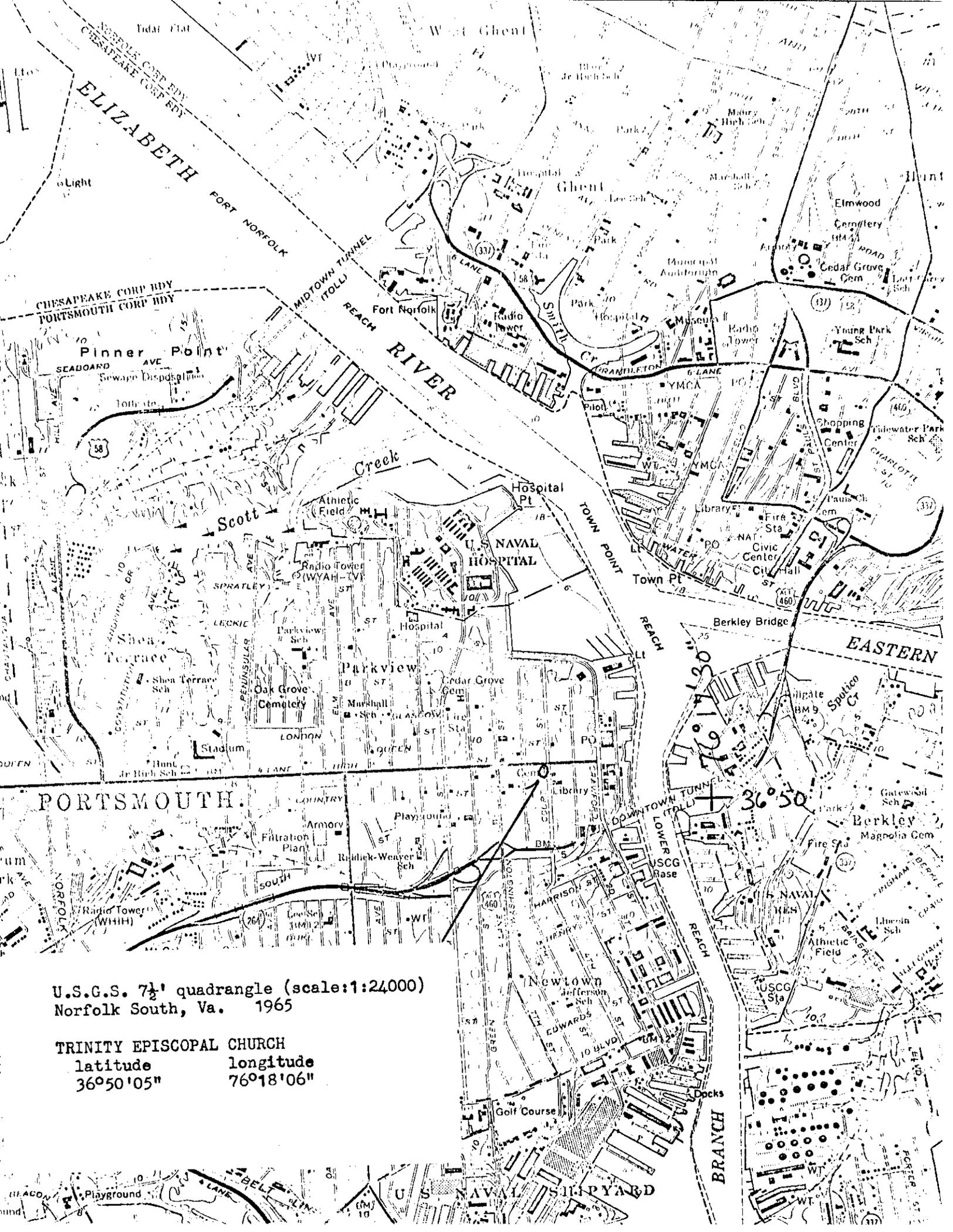
Date \_\_\_\_\_

ATTEST:

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Keeper of The National Register

Date \_\_\_\_\_

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



U.S.G.S. 7½' quadrangle (scale:1:24000)  
 Norfolk South, Va. 1965

TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
 latitude 36°50'05"  
 longitude 76°18'06"