

VLR-9/19/78 NR-HP-2/1/79

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

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 Somerset: Christian Church (Preferred)

AND/OR COMMON

Christian Church

2 LOCATION

.3 mile NW of southern intersection of State Routes 231 and 20; 1500' S of Rapidan River; S side of state Route 20.

STREET & NUMBER

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Old Somerset

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
Seventh (J. Kenneth Robinson)

STATE

Virginia

CODE

51

COUNTY

Orange

CODE

137

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 checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC ACQUISITION	<input type="checkbox"/> ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input checked="" 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
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME Mrs. Frances Ficklen, Chairman, Board of Trustees

STREET & NUMBER Somerset Christian Church, Box 156, RFD 1

CITY, TOWN

Gordonsville

VICINITY OF

STATE
Virginia 22942

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC Orange County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Orange

STATE
Virginia 22960

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Survey

DATE 1973, 1978

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission, 221 Governor Street

CITY, TOWN

Richmond

STATE
Virginia 23219

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input 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

Somerset Christian Church is picturesquely situated on an open hilltop off Route 20 amidst the farmlands of Orange County. Erected in the 1850s to serve the Somerset community, the church is a provincial interpretation of the Italianate style. The wood-frame church is a rectangular, one-and-one-half-story, gable-roof structure covered with plain weatherboards.

The main (north) elevation is dominated by a one-story porch of four square Tuscan columns supporting a pedimented roof. The pediment is distinguished by an open tympanum and finely executed scroll brackets supporting a raking cornice with gable-end returns. The porch shelters a double doorway with its original paneled doors set in a simple architrave. Above the porch is a semi-circular window covered by louvers. A raking cornice with gable-end returns supported by scroll brackets completes the facade. The cornice is found on all the building's elevations.

The west elevation consists of three bays with 12/12 hung-sash windows. The windows are framed by simple architraves, and louvered shutters flank the windows on the east and west elevations. Otherwise similar in appearance, the east elevation has a smaller side door near the northeast corner.

The rear (south) elevation features a small, one-story apse. A 6/6 hung-sash window is found on the rear, and narrower hung-sash windows are employed on the east and west sides of the ell. A small door is to the right of the rear window, and its steps have been removed.

The plan of the church consists of a single auditorium room with a gallery at the north end. The gallery is reached by an enclosed stair in the northeast corner. The face of the gallery is a Tuscan entablature and is supported on paneled Tuscan piers. A storage room located behind the sanctuary is reached by doors flanking the pulpit. The sanctuary is set within a three-part arched recess centered with a wide elliptical arch and framed by a wooden architrave. Two large wooden consoles on either side of the apse support encased structural beams on an otherwise plain plastered ceiling.

The auditorium is in an excellent state of preservation and contains many 19th-century furnishings. The original pulpit is located within the sanctuary. The scrolled-end pews are still in use, many retaining their original paint and graining. An elaborate cast-iron chandelier, later electrified, dates from the latter part of the 19th century. The reed organ is of the same period.

Boundary Justification

The nominated property consists of one acre, composed of the land upon which the church sits together with a public access.

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 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 type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" 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 checked="" 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 Circa 1850s

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Situated on a small hilltop amidst the farmlands of Orange County, the Somerset Christian Church is a salient example of a small country parish church that has survived in an unaltered state of preservation. Erected in the 1850s, the church is a rare interpretation of the Italianate style in mid-19th-century ecclesiastical architecture and remains a picturesque architectural accent in the scenic Orange County countryside.

Built to serve a small, but active, Christian community outside the town of Gordonsville in rural Somerset, the church was erected within a diminished scale compared with other area churches. As part of this individualism, the church is also a stylistic departure from the more conventional expressions of ecclesiastical architecture of the period. Whereas the Gothic and Greek Revival styles had come to replace the traditional 18th-century Georgian style by the mid-19th century, the builder of the Somerset church chose the less-popular Italianate as the style for his rural church. The choice finds some justification in the architectural philosophy of Andrew Jackson Downing, as stated in the noted author's widely read work Rural Essays of 1853. Downing notes:

And in truth, we would not desire to make the country church other than simple, truthful, and harmonious. We would avoid all pretensions to elaborate architectural ornament; we would depend upon the right proportions, forms, outlines, and the true expression.

The builder of the Somerset church adhered to Downing's philosophy. This is especially evident in the church's interior.

Both the interior and exterior of the church remain unaltered from the 19th century, the interior providing a complete picture of the character of an unpretentious country church of the period. The church pews, many of which retain their original paint and graining, find a precedent in the architectural pattern books of Asher Benjamin, published earlier in the century. Complementing the pews are other furnishings surviving in their original state. Of special interest are the cast-iron chandelier and reed organ, added later in the 19th century, during a period of post-Civil War prosperity.

The church was used regularly throughout the 19th century, but with a decline in local population, services are now held there a minimum of once a year. It is maintained by a small, but dedicated, congregation.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Downing, A.J. "A Short Chapter on Country Churches." In Rural Essays. New York: Da Capo Press, 1974 (reprint).

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1 acre

QUADRANGLE NAME Gordonsville, Virginia

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24000

UTM REFERENCES

A 17 742930 4234340

B

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C

D

E

F

G

H

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION Beginning at a point 1850' W of the intersection of State Routes 20 and 231 and 1250' S of the Rapidan River; thence extending 200' E on the S side of State Route 20; thence extending S 200'; thence extending W 200'; thence extending N 200' to point of origin.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Staff

ORGANIZATION Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

DATE August 1978

STREET & NUMBER 221 Governor Street

TELEPHONE 804-786-3144

CITY OR TOWN Richmond

STATE Virginia 23219

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL STATE x 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 National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE Tucker Hill, Executive Director
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

DATE SEP 19 1978

FOR NPS USE ONLY

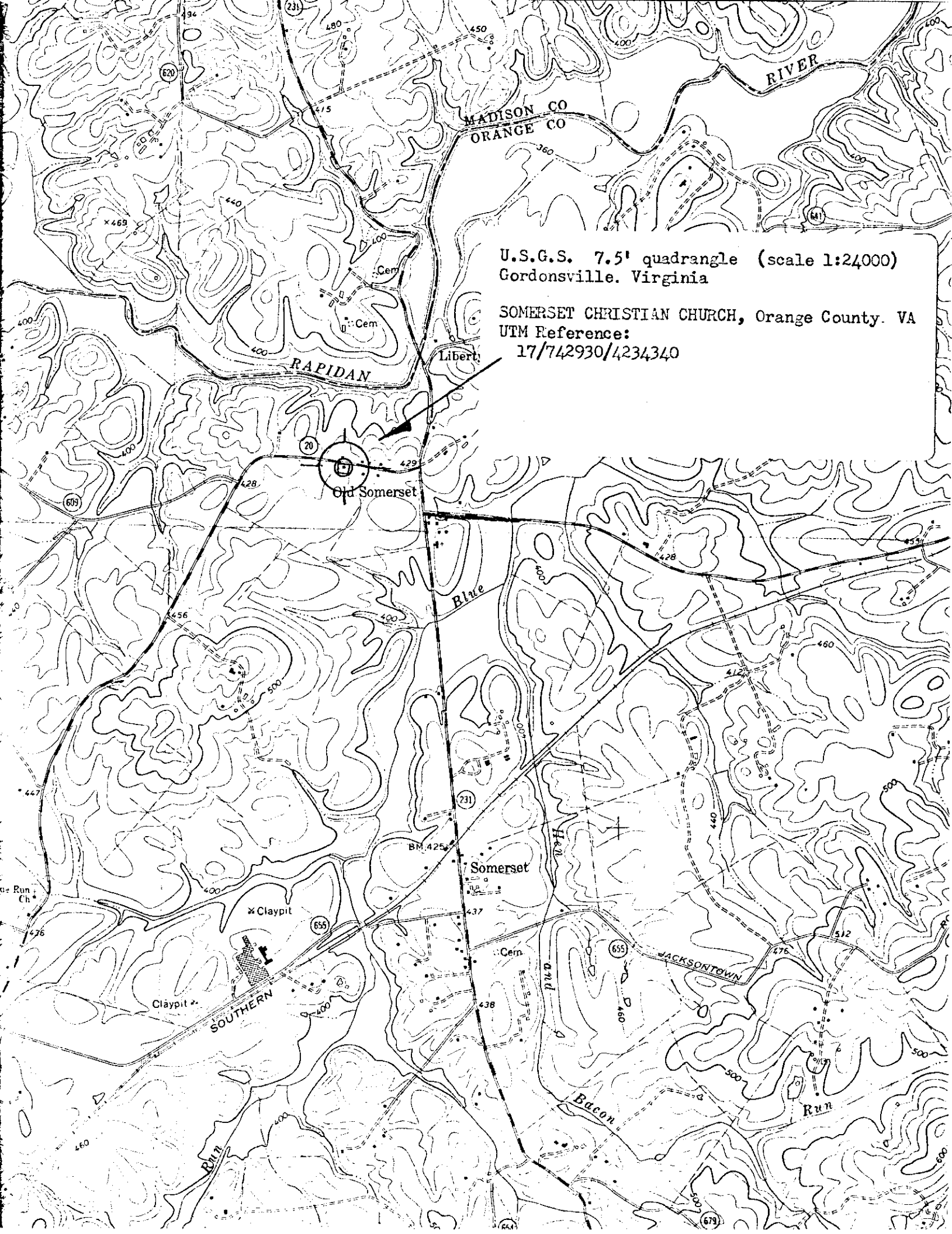
I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

ATTEST: KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION



MADISON CO
ORANGE CO

U.S.G.S. 7.5' quadrangle (scale 1:24,000)
Gordonsville, Virginia

SOMERSET CHRISTIAN CHURCH, Orange County, VA
UTM Reference:
17/742930/4234340

Old Somerset

Blue

Somerset

SOUTHERN

JACKSONTOWN

Bacon

Run