United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form   VLR-12/6/00   NRHP- 2/16/01

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name __Old Presbyterian Meeting House__

other names/site number ___First Presbyterian Church of Alexandria   DHR File No. 100-98__

2. Location

street & number ___321 S. Fairfax St.___   ☐ not for publication   N/A

city or town ___Alexandria___   ☐ vicinity   N/A

state ___Virginia___ code ___VA___ county ___Alexandria___ code _510_ zip code _22314_
(Independent City)

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☐ 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 ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

H. Alexander Wise, Jr.   12/29/00
Signature of certifying official/Title   Date

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HISTORIC RESOURCES
State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

_____   _____
Signature of certifying official/Title   Date

_____
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is: Signature of the Keeper   Date of Action

☐ 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:) _____

_____

_____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

☒ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
2	1	buildings
1	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
3	1	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

3

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Religion/religious facility
Funerary/cemetery

Religion/church-related residence

Recreation & Culture/monument/
marker

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Religion/religious facility
Funerary/cemetery

Recreation & Culture/monument/marker

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Early Republic

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation ___Stone, brick___

walls ___Brick___

roof ___Metal___

other ___Porch: stone/granite, metal___
___Porch: wood___

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations
(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

☒ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

☐ **B** removed from its original location.

☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.

☐ **D** a cemetery.

☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

☐ **F** a commemorative property.

☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture
Exploration/Settlement

Period of Significance
1775-1946

Significant Dates
1775, 1787, 1835, 1836

Significant Person
(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)
N/A

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Architect/Builder
Not known

Narrative Statement of Significance
(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibilography
(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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 # __VA 231__
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:
☒ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other
Name of repository:

Alexandria Public Library, Lloyd House
Virginia State Archives, Richmond, VA

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property _____.5 acre_____

UTM References
(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 |1|7| |3| 2|2| 5| 1|6| |4|2| 9| |6| 5|2|0|
　Zone　　Easting　　　　　　Northing

2 |_|_| |_|_|_|_|_|_| |_|_|_|_|_|_|

3 |_|_| |_|_|_|_|_|_| |_|_|_|_|_|_|
　Zone　　Easting　　　　　　Northing

4 |_|_| |_|_|_|_|_|_| |_|_|_|_|_|_|

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description
(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification
(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title __Shirley Maxwell and James C. Massey, historic preservation consultants__

organization __Massey Maxwell Associates__　　　date __December 18, 1996__

street & number __P.O. Box 263__　　　　　telephone __540-465-4566__

city or town __Strasburg__　　　state __VA__　　zip code __22657__

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

　　A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

　　A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

　　Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items
(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name __Old Presbyterian Meeting House__

street & number __316 S. Royal St.__　　　telephone __703-549-6670__

city or town __Alexandria__　　　state __VA__　　zip code __22314__

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7. Summary Description:

The Old Presbyterian Meeting House, 321 South Fairfax
Street, in the heart of the Alexandria Historic District,
Alexandria, Virginia, is a rectangular, two-story brick church
with a front-facing, pedimented gable and a five-stage bell tower
of brick and wood centered on the rear elevation. The handsome,
Federal-style building, four bays wide and five bays deep, was
constructed in 1836-37 on the site, and at least in part on the
bluestone foundations, of an earlier (1775), somewhat smaller,
hip-roofed building that burned after being struck by lightning
on July 26, 1835. Not only is the site symbolically important as
the cradle of Scottish Presbyterianism in Alexandria, a city
heavily settled by Scots, but the Meeting House also provides a
relatively unaltered example of ecclesiastical design of the
second quarter of the nineteenth century. Despite remodelings in
the Victorian period to modernize the building and in the
twentieth century to "colonialize" it, the Meeting House retains
much of the architectural flavor of its construction era, in the
form if not the finishes of the interior as well as in the well-
proportioned, subtly ornamented facade. In addition to the
Meeting House, the church lot contains a contributing
historically significant church graveyard, in use primarily ca.
1772-ca. 1810, with a number of original stone markers, as well
as the tomb of an Unknown Soldier of the American Revolution,
dedicated in 1929; a contributing, fine, half-gabled brick
"flounder house" (1787) on Royal Street, originally the manse and
now the church office and library; and a non-contributing but
architecturally compatible brick education building constructed
in 1956-57. The brick-walled lot itself contributes an
historical presence as a contemplative oasis in a closely built
urban residential setting. Running westward from Fairfax Street
to Royal Street through the center of the block bounded on the
north by Duke Street and on the south by Wolfe Street, it retains
its 1773 dimensions.

Narrative Description:

There is a strong tradition, dating at least to the 1920s,
that the walls of the present-day Meeting House contain all or
most of the walls of the 1775 Meeting House. The advisory
architect for the 1920s restoration, Clarence L. Harding, of

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Washington, D.C., espoused this view.[1] Nineteenth-century
newspaper accounts and a report prepared by the Meeting House
pastor, Dr. Elias Harrison, the day after the 1835 fire do
clearly state that the walls and some "part" of the windows
survived.[2] However, no written or printed evidence has been
located to indicate whether any of the surviving walls were
reused in the new construction. Of three known sketches
purporting to depict the first Meeting House, two were drawn by
persons who knew the building only as children, and all were made
long after the 1835 fire. All differ from the existing
structure.[3] References in the church minutes and the Alexandria

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[1]Harding wrote: "I have examined [the walls] with a view to
ascertaining if they correspond in construction detail to that of
the older buildings about the city of Alexandria. . . every
comparison shows that the side walls and the rear or west wall of
the present structure to be of the same general period as the older
Alexandria buildings. The present front wall, facing on Fairfax
Street, and the steeple are, however, of a later period.
Apparently the front wall and the steeple were added as part of the
rebuilding operations, after the fire. . ." (Partially reprinted
in McGroarty, The Old Presbyterian Meeting House, 1774-1874, pp.68-
70.) Harding was a Washington architect who designed a number of
early twentieth-century hotels and commercial buildings (among
them, the Woodward and Lothrop Department Store and the YMCA
Building in Washington, the Hendrik Hudson Hotel in Troy, New York,
and the George Washington Hotel in Winchester, Virginia), and
reportedly had "made quite a study of early day construction in
Virginia, Maryland, and New England." (Letter, John B. Gordon,
Chairman of the Old Presbyterian Meeting House Restoration
Committee, to Mrs. Gardner L. Boothe II, June 14, 1929).

[2]Report on the fire prepared by Dr. Elias Harrison, July 27,
1835, printed in full in William Buckner McGroarty, The Old
Presbyterian Meeting House at Alexandria, Virginia, 1774-1874, pp.
34-37.

[3]One drawing (date unknown) is by Mary Stewart, who was six
years old when the Meeting House burned; another accompanied an
1880 article by William F. Carne in Harper's New Monthly Magazine;
and the third appeared in a 1913 book on Alexandria by Mary Gregory
Powell. The drawings differ from each other as well as from the
existing building, and two show the original entrance to the church

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Gazette consistently speak of building a new church rather than reconstructing the old one. Physical evidence is also ambiguous. According to a 1993 examination of the crawl space beneath the church, large portions of the original bluestone foundation are visible there. However, the earlier foundation in some places lies inside the line of a later one, and the existing brick walls are built on top of the newer foundation rather than the older one.[4] At any rate, the building as it appears today unquestionably belongs to the 1836-37 period.

The dimensions of the present church are 50'8" wide by 73'1-3/4" deep. Its exterior walls are 2'0" thick.[5] The front wall is of hard, dark-red face brick laid in Flemish bond with pencil-thin joints. The present sheet-metal roof, added in 1988, replaced a slate roof of the 1950s. The original 1836-37 tin

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facing south rather than east.

[4]In 1993, N. Burkey Musselman concluded, after examining the remnants of the Meeting House foundation visible from within the crawl space beneath the church (no longer accessible), was that portions of the foundation but not the walls were reused. ("Comments on the Meeting House Structure (From What I Saw Down Below)." March 22, 1993.) This is somewhat at variance with J. L. Sibley Jennings' 1988 report, which was based on written documents and above-ground examination of the walls: "[A]side from being nearly square, hip-roofed and with a central belfry, relatively little can be said of the original appearance of the church. If two out of the three [extant contemporary] illustrations are correct, then the present church could not possibly be even on the foundations of the original building, for that building's long axis was at right angles to the building now existing. . . The preponderance of the evidence . . . indicates that the Old Presbyterian Meeting House now existing is an all new structure dating from 1836." (Jennings & Murray, pp. 7-10) An April 1996 examination of the Meeting House structure by James C. Massey also found no above-ground evidence of remains of the 1775 walls.

[5]Jennings and Murray, architectural drawings in files of Old Presbyterian Meeting House.

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roof was replaced in 1846 with wood shingles[6], which in turn were apparently replaced again with tin.[7]

The exterior ornament of the Meeting House is restrained and sober. Aside from the subtle pattern formed by the Flemish-bond brickwork of the front wall, the decorations consist of sandstone keystones in the flat-arch brick lintels above the doorways and windows; three courses of corbeled brick defining the broad front pediment and forming the cornice around the building; a louvered oculus window at the attic level in the front gable; and an old stone plaque (apparently contemporaneous with the 1836-37 building) recessed into the wall between the first and second floors.[8] A modern lantern supported by a pair of ornamental curved, wrought-iron brackets extends from the building between the two pairs of entrance doors.

On the front (east) elevation, a Greek-Revival-style entrance platform on a granite-block base, added in 1853, extends

[6]Minutes of the Committee of the Church, in J. L. Sibley Jennings, History and Proposed Budget for the Old Presbyterian Meeting House, Alexandria, Virginia (Washington, D.C.: Jennings & Murray, Architects, July 7, 1988), p. 12.

[7]"Graves of Revolution Heroes in Alexandria Sadly Neglected," Washington Star, April 25, 1926 (newspaper clipping in Old Presbyterian Meeting House vertical files, Lloyd House, Alexandria Public Library).

[8]The plaque is lettered: "The First Presbyterian Church of Alexandria/Founded in A.D. 1772/House of Worship Erected A.D. 1774, Destroyed by Fire July 26, A.D. 1835/Rebuilt on the Same Lot 1836." Dr. Harold Vedeler, historian of the present-day Presbyterian Meeting House, has raised several questions about the accuracy of the plaque. He points out that the name "First Presbyterian Church" was not used until after the split in the congregation in 1817 and the formation of the Second Presbyterian Church. Thus the church founded in 1772 was not called the First Presbyterian Church. Furthermore, since John Carlyle and William Ramsey advertised in a Maryland newspaper in 1775 for a contractor to build it, the house of worship could not have been erected before 1775. Lastly, the church was rebuilt in 1836-37, primarily 1837. (Statement of Dr. Harold Vedeler, November 1996)

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across the two central bays of the building.[9] Two outwardly
curving sets of seven granite steps with a slim, graceful
wrought-iron railing in a delicate vining pattern lead to a pair
of double, four-panel modern entrance doors with five-light
rectangular transoms. The pattern of the modern entrance doors
matches the flared, paneled jambs, which appear to be original.
Entrance thresholds are of sandstone. A decorative wrought-iron
grille (probably originally a coal chute) fills a small opening
in front of the granite base below the platform.

The building rests on a high basement of red brick with a
brick watertable. A stone foundation is below grade and not
visible. Windows on the front elevation are double-hung 16/16-
light twentieth-century wood sash with stone sills, flat-arch
brick lintels with brick voussoirs and sandstone keystones.

Walls on the side (north and south) and rear (west)
elevations are of common brick laid in four-course common bond
and are 2'0" thick. The front bay on each side is marked by a
shallow, recessed blind window. The windows on these elevations
contain modern 16/16-light, double-hung wood sash and have
sandstone sills and plain flat-arched lintels without keystones.
A basement hatchway entry with a wooden cover is under the south
blind window. At the rear of the north side is a modern doorway
to the sanctuary with a brick ramp with wrought-iron railing for
people with disabilities.

A 65'-6"-high five-stage, one-bay, nearly square (15'10-3/4"
wide x 13'9-3/4" deep) bell tower of brick with a square wooden
bell chamber, constructed in 1843,[10] rises at the center of the
rear (west) wall of the main block. The bell was hung in the
year of the tower's construction.[11] The frame holding the bell
has been reinforced with modern structural steel. On the north
and south sides of the tower are unroofed wooden entrance porches

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[9]Ibid., p. 11.

[10]Jennings & Murray, op. cit., pp. 11-12, citing Minutes of the
Committee of the Church. The work was completed at a cost of
$422.05. The bell was hung in the same year.

[11]Ibid., p. 12. The inscription on the bell reads, "T. W. and
R. C. Smith, Alexandria, D. C., 1843."

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and steps. The single, four-panel doors are surmounted by three-light rectangular transoms. Access to the upper stages of the tower is by a vertical ladder on the interior. Nine-over-six-light windows are in each of the three exterior walls of the tower at the second and third floors. The wooden walls of the bell chamber are pierced on all sides by large, round-arched openings with wooden keystones. An open gallery with wood railing in a horizontal diamond pattern runs around the tower. The wooden top of the bell tower is ornamented by corner pilasters, a simple flat cornice at the top, and a projecting cornice below the gallery. A small ground-level door to the crawl space is on the west side of the bell tower.

Landscaping:

The front church yard is paved in brick laid in a herringbone pattern to a concrete sidewalk. Along the north and south sides of the church lot, a high, stepped wall of red brick with stone coping and brick pillars defines narrow side yards handsomely planted with flowers and shrubbery. A wooden sign inscribed, "Old Presbyterian Meeting House. Founded 1772," hangs from a scrolled bracket atop an old cast-iron post in the south yard. At each side of the church front, fine old cast-iron gates and railings curve outward from the corner of the church, echoing the curve of the steps of the entrance platform.

Brick walkways lead to the historical church grave yard, dating from the late-eighteenth century (earliest known interment: 1772). It is shaded by mature shrubbery and trees, including a large magnolia. A bronze plaque on the north wall of the yard bears a bas-relief representation of the Houdoun portrait of George Washington. It is inscribed: "1732-1932/In this church yard rest the remains of the comrades in arms, intimate friends, and fellow Masons of George Washington. Among them sleeps an unknown soldier of the Revolutionary Army. To them, as a memorial, the wall around this sacred enclosure was erected with funds subscribed by members of the Society of the Sons of the Revolution throughout the nation under the direction of a special committee from the Society of the Daughters of the Confederacy."

A network of modern brick-and-concrete-aggregate walks links the church to the original manse, at 316 South Royal Street. The

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half-gabled, or shed-roofed, 2-1/2-story brick manse, constructed ca. 1787, is called the Flounder House because of its half-house form, a distinctive architectural form used by some Alexandria builders in the late-eighteenth century. The building now contains the church offices and library. South of the Flounder House, at 318 S. Royal Street, is the red-brick Education Building, constructed in 1957.

Meeting House Interior

   Vestibule. Inside the double front doors to the Meeting House, a 10'-deep vestibule extends the full width of the church, with stairs at each end to the upper galleries and to the basement. Two sets of double, eight-panel wood doors lead out to the exterior platform and steps. The doors have large, reproduction iron box locks, iron hinges, and modern vertical iron bolts. Over the door sets are five-light transoms, with simple molding around plain flat boards. One 16/16 double-hung wood-sash window with narrow-profile muntins flanks the two sets of front doors. Three sets of wood double doors with raised panels open to the sanctuary, one to each of the three aisles. The plastered brick wall between the vestibule and the sanctuary is 12" thick, as opposed to the 24" thickness of the exterior walls. Two sets of two-leg L-shaped modern stairs in the eighteenth-century style (probably from the 1925-29 restoration but reusing some old newels and balusters) lead upward to the gallery at the north and south ends of the vestibule. Under these stairs, a second set leads downward to the basement. Walls and ceiling are of painted plaster, and floors are in medium-width (approximately 6") boards.

   A large, hanging brass lantern with glass bowl hangs in the center of the vestibule ceiling within a simple, circular medallion comprised of three concentric rings of molding, probably installed in the 1925-29 restoration. Four brass sconces of simple design, two at each side of the center door, complete the lighting.

   Sanctuary. The large, open sanctuary occupies the majority of the building. There are three aisles, one in the center and one along each of the side walls, and galleries extend along three sides of the sanctuary. The walls and ceiling are in white

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painted plaster, while woodwork is painted a light blue-gray.[12]
A simple 3"-wide wood chair rail is on the east wall only.

The floors of the sanctuary are in boards 6"-9" wide, with
narrow boards on the pew platforms. Runners of plain and
patterned red carpeting cover the aisles. The sanctuary is fully
occupied by boxed pews, which rest on raised wood floors that
rise gently toward the rear of the sanctuary. Two sets of
fifteen pews in the center and two sets of sixteen pews on each
side have paneled doors to the aisles, now painted white with
mahogany caps, but originally oak-grained.[13]   The pews are
separated by high partitions of beaded board.

Ten slender wooden Tuscan columns resting on plain square
plinths support galleries on three sides, while ten more rise
from the galleries to the undecorated ceiling, which has a very
low barrel vault running from front to back over the central
portion of the sanctuary. The ceiling above the galleries is
flat. The entire ceiling was replastered in 1951.[14]   Above the
ceiling is an unused attic, with the roof supported by wooden
trusses. HVAC outlets are in a boxed paneled soffit below the
gallery.

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[12]The color scheme followed one suggested by paint samples
taken in the 1950s by Worth Bailey, then Curator of Mount Vernon,
and Helen Duprey Bullock, of the National Council for Historic
Sites and Buildings (now the National Trust for Historic
Preservation). In 1988 a more comprehensive analysis was conducted
by Matthew John Mosca.

[13]Matthew John Mosca, The Old Presbyterian Meeting House,
Alexandria, Virginia--Historic Paint Research Report, Interior
Surfaces (Baltimore, Md.: December 21, 1988), p. 6. According to
this report, the interior of the pews was finished in a reddish
stain and tinted varnish.

[14]"The Old Presbyterian Meeting House, 1774-1951, Step by
Step," p. 11.

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At the west end of the sanctuary, the paneled, three-sided pulpit, installed in 1940[15], projects from a raised dais within a semicircular apse that is part of the bell tower. The apse is framed by pilasters set on a raised base, with matching wood trim around the arch, and has a semi-domed ceiling. It is approached from either side by outwardly curving stairs consisting of five steps, which are painted white with dark wood trim, delicate banisters, and slim, shaped newels. The apse was once elaborately painted with *trompe-l'oeil* columns, but the decoration was replastered and painted over in the 1920s restoration.[16] In the center of the curved wall behind the pulpit, a narrow single six-panel door surmounted by a triangular pediment and plain frieze leads to the rear vestibule. On the sanctuary floor in front of the pulpit is a small communion table, paneled front and sides in white painted wood with a dark, slightly sloping top.

Four shallow, arched alcoves, formerly containing stoves, are located between the windows on the north and south walls. On the north wall a six-panel wood door, now used as a handicapped accessible entrance, was inserted into one of the alcoves.

Large windows provide ample natural light to the sanctuary. Four modern 16/16 double-hung wood-sash windows are on the north and south walls of the first floor, plus one on each side of the pulpit niche on the west wall. The plaster window reveals are deep and flaring. Two-panel, folding wood interior louvered shutters in two sections, top and bottom, appear to be old but not original. The shutters are painted a light, grayish blue-green.

On the east (front) wall are three sets of wooden three-panel double doors set in paneled returns. Although the trim may

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[15]Harold G. Vedeler, "A History of the Old Presbyterian Meeting House" (Alexandria, VA: Presbyterian Meeting House, June 1996), p. 7. The pulpit, a gift of the Alexandria Association, is said to be "restored according to the original one."

[16]The restoration that took place between 1925-29 was the first attempt to colonialize the building. Clarence L. Harding, a Washington, D.C., architect, served as advisory architect to the restoration.

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be original, the doors are probably late-nineteenth or twentieth-century replacements for flat baize-covered doors mentioned in church records of the 1840s.

The sanctuary is lit by a large, sixteen-arm pewter chandelier in the center of the ceiling, eleven hanging brass lanterns with glass bowls suspended on brass chains on the first floor, and ten more brass fixtures hanging in the gallery. These fixtures are modern. On the gallery railing are mounted a series of turned, wooden posts, installed 1853-54, which originally supported gas fixtures, no longer extant. Gas was piped upward to lamps on top of posts at the gallery level and downward to fixtures illuminating the first floor. Old photographs (ca. 1900) show the hanging fixtures. Two modern plain brass sconces are on the rear wall of the pulpit apse. The original lighting was by sperm oil lamps installed in 1840.[17]

Mounted on the paneled railing of the gallery at the east end of the sanctuary is a large, plain, circular clock, believed to have been rescued from the 1775 church. On the north wall of the sanctuary is a large, old, stone plaque commemorating the Reverend James Muir, who was pastor of the church from 1789 until his death in 1820. It was originally mounted on the wall of the 1775 church to mark Muir's burial place beneath the pulpit. On the south wall, a Gothic-arch plaque commemorates the Reverend Elias Harrison, pastor of the Meeting House from 1820 to 1863, and Robert Bell.

Gallery. On the gallery level, ten wooden Tuscan columns resting on plain square plinths support the ceiling. Four 16/16 double-hung windows with wood sash repeat the pattern of the first floor. They are fitted with modern inside shutters. The 1849 Erben organ, originally located on the first floor in the apse behind the pulpit, is now located between arcaded screens extending across the east wall. A raised platform for the choir surrounds the organ's console. Two tiers of pews and benches are ranged along the north and south sides. The floor is laid in narrow, modern boards. The stairs leading to the first-floor vestibule have a slender, plain, curving rail of dark-finished

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[17]Jennings, op. cit., p. 12, citing Minutes of the Committee of the Church.

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wood, slim, shaped, wood newels, and plain rectangular balusters painted white.

Basement. The basement was first excavated in 1854 for installation of a furnace.[18] It was extended in 1950 for a forced-air furnace and other facilities.[19] Later, a further small excavation added space for the present HVAC system. At present the basement includes restrooms, kitchen facilities, and HVAC equipment. Along the east wall, stairs with a wood balustrade and handrail lead from the north end of the vestibule to the women's restroom, which contains a mirrored wall above a modern cabinet/counter. At each side of the room are closets with modern doors. Walls are of exposed brick, and the floor is paved with brick. Exposed metal heating ducts are on the ceiling. The center section of the basement is a kitchen with a modern metal sink on the exterior wall. A four-light swing window is on the wall directly above the sink. Stairs at the south end of the vestibule lead to a brick-floored area containing storage and the men's restroom. A vertical-board double hatch door opens to the exterior. Only a crawl space exists under the sanctuary and bell tower.

The Flounder House

In the northwest corner of the church lot, immediately south of St. Mary's Catholic Church and west of the cemetery, is the former manse (316 South Royal Street),built in 1787 and restored in 1951 by architects Frank Cole and E. Townsley Jenkinson of Alexandria.[20] The two-story, half-gabled or shed-roofed brick house, which has been remodeled for church office use, is known to the congregation as the Flounder House, because of its traditional Alexandria "flounder" or half-house shape, a distinctive architectural form used in eighteenth-century Alexandria. The short, half-gabled end of the house faces west toward Royal Street, while the longer side containing the front door faces south, toward what was a lawn, now the location of the Education Building constructed in 1956-57. The walls of the

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[18]Jennings and Murray, op. cit., p. 14.

[19]"The Old Presbyterian Meeting House, 1774-1951," p. 9.

[20]Ibid., p. 13.

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Flounder House are laid in four-course common bond. At the east
end is a two-story, three-bay, gable-roofed brick wing, erected
in 1951 (Alexandria architects Cole & Jenkinson) to replace an
earlier, somewhat smaller, two-and-one-half-story wing. The
windows have 6/6 double-hung wood sash with storm windows. Two
windows are on the west street side and one on the east side
facing the church on each floor. On the south (front) are nine
windows on the second floor and seven on the first floor. Near
the west end is the original entrance door with transom and a
small, old entrance porch. At the left side of the doorway is a
cellar entrance. Between the west end of the Flounder House and
the Royal Street wall is a small structure attached to the
Flounder House, with a large circular opening to the yard and two
skylighted windows to the north. It is used for storage of
playground equipment. At the east end of the 1950s three-bay
addition is a large door with transom and sidelight at the left
side only. The roof is in slate, and there is a single large
chimney on the north side. A plain box cornice is enriched with
a small molding at the bottom. On the interior, a center hall
opens to offices on the east side and to a large meeting room on
the west. A curving stair with mahogany rail leads to the second
floor.

Education Building

The two-story Education Building, designed by Jenkinson and
Cole and constructed 1956-57, occupies the former front yard of
the Flounder House, at the southwest corner of the church
property. The Royal Street (west) elevation closely echoes the
design of the Fairfax Street elevation of the meeting house,
except that the windows have 12/8 double-hung wood sash. The
walls are of brick, laid in five-course common bond. At the main
entrance on Royal Street, curved stairs rise to a raised brick
platform. Underneath the platform is a ground-level entrance to
the cellar. On the north side, facing the Flounder House, is an
entrance porch similar to that of the Flounder House, but with
curved stairs to the platform and stairs down to a ground-level
entrance.

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Constructed in 1836-37, the Old Presbyterian Meeting House
(the First Presbyterian Church), at 321 South Fairfax Street, is
located in the Alexandria Historic District National Historic
Landmark, Alexandria, Virginia. With its associated manse and
cemetery, it is significant under National Register Criteria A
and C. It is historically significant as the early home of
Alexandria's second-oldest, and first non-Anglican, religious
congregation. Architecturally, it is an impressive, intact
example of conservative ecclesiastical building design of its era
and denomination. The well-proportioned two-story brick
building, of late-Federal design with some Greek Revival details,
was erected on the site, and at least partially on the
foundations, of the first Presbyterian Meeting House (1775),
which burned after being struck by lightning on July 26, 1835.
As the first non-Anglican church of the Scottish merchants and
sea captains who settled the port city of Alexandria, the Old
Presbyterian Meeting House is inextricably linked to the early
history of its community. George Washington's funeral eulogy was
delivered here in December 1799. The churchyard cemetery, in use
primarily from 1772 to ca. 1810, contains monuments marking the
graves of many prominent early Alexandrians, including numerous
associates of George Washington. Among these are Washington's
physician, Dr. James Craik, John Carlyle, master of Alexandria's
Carlyle House, the Reverend James Muir, pastor of the Meeting
House and Trustee of the Alexandria Academy, and William Hunter,
founder of the St. Andrew's Society of Alexandria. Closed in
1886, the Meeting House was reopened in 1929 after a nationwide
fundraising campaign for its restoration, to became the second of
Alexandria's historic buildings opened to the public as a museum
and historical shrine. The tomb of an unknown soldier of the
Revolution was memorialized here in 1929 by the Society of the
Children of the Revolution. In 1949 the Old Presbyterian Meeting
House was returned to service as a church. The nominated
property consists of two contributing buildings, one non-
contributing building, and one contributing site.

Historical Background:

Established in 1749 by an act of Virginia's House of
Burgesses, the Potomac River town of Alexandria was settled
largely by Scotch-Irish and Scottish agents, merchants, and sea
captains, many of whom were of Presbyterian backgrounds. Since,

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in the British colonies, the only officially recognized religious
institution was the Church of England, Presbyterians and other
dissenters in Alexandria and elsewhere worshipped publicly at
Anglican churches and chapels, while conducting non-Anglican
services in private homes. From 1760 to 1772, a series of
gradually liberalized religious toleration acts allowed licensed
ministers of dissenting religious groups to preach, under limited
conditions, in designated places, but not in churches.
Consequently, Alexandria's Society of Presbyterians, formed in
1760 , met periodically in the Town House, or town hall, to hear
their own preachers. Finally, encouraged by the relatively freer
terms of the Religious Toleration Act of 1772, 32 members of the
Presbyterian Society petitioned the Donegal (Ireland) Presbytery
for recognition as an organized church, engaged a young
Philadelphia-trained minister, William Thom, and began planning
for the erection of their own "meeting house".[21] Richard and
Eleanor Arrell donated a plot of land to William Thom, for the
construction of a manse to house Thom and succeeding pastors of
the meeting house. The donated property was comprised of half
portions of each of Alexandria lots 90 and 91, bounded on the
east by Fairfax Street and on the west by Royal Street and lying
roughly in the middle of the block between Duke and Wolfe
Streets. The lot was 88'wide by 247' deep, large enough to
contain the meeting house, manse, and cemetery, with space left
over for a large yard in the southwest corner. Thom died in
1773, probably of yellow fever, leaving a bequest of £60 to be
used toward the building of the meeting house. His legacy was
augmented by other donations, and, in 1775, two prominent
Alexandrians, John Carlyle and William Ramsey, advertised in a
Maryland newspaper for a contractor to build the church.
Carlyle, a Scottish Presbyterian himself, oversaw construction of
the brick Meeting House, which would be the first non-Anglican
religious structure built in Alexandria.[22] Meanwhile, with the

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[21]The act was far from liberal enough to satisfy the
Presbyterians, however, as it confined services to designated
places, forbade night services, and required that the church doors
remain open at all times no matter how foul the weather. [William
Randolph Sengel, Can These Bones Live? n.p., 1973.]

[22]The previous year, Carlyle had taken over the task of
supervising the completion of Christ (Episcopal) Church when the
contractor failed to finish the work.

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outbreak of the Revolution, construction of the proposed manse
was delayed until 1787. However, the churchyard cemetery was put
to nearly immediate use. The remains of an infant were interred
there in 1772, and both William Thom and his mother, who died in
the same year as her son and was presumably also a victim of the
same yellow fever outbreak, were buried there in August 1773.[23]

According to contemporary accounts, the Presbyterian Meeting
House erected in 1775 was constructed of brick and measured 60'
wide x 50' deep, with the entrance on the south side and a tall
steeple and bell tower in the center of the wood-shingled hipped
roof. The bell, the only one in Alexandria, quickly became a
prominent feature of Alexandria's civic as well as its religious
life and was highly regarded for the sweetness of its tone.

As the American Revolution neared, there was no question on
which side Alexandria Presbyterians would come down. An English
visitor to the city, Nicholas Cresswell, attended Presbyterian
services on November 6, 1774, and wrote in his journal:

> "Went to a Presbyterian meeting. They are a set of
> rebellious scoundrels, nothing but political discourses
> instead of religious lectures."[24]

In October 1775 Cresswell grumbled that "the rascally
Presbyterian clergy" were fomenting "this ungodly revolution."
When the Revolution did begin, many Presbyterian elders enlisted
in the Continental Army, and at least four temporary supply
pastors to the Meeting House left to serve as chaplains with the
rebel forces. Among the graves in the Meeting House cemetery, at
least 22 are reported to be of men who fought in the
Revolution.[25]   Other illustrious occupants of the cemetery
include James Craik, George Washington's physician, and James
Muir, pastor of the Meeting House from 1789 to 1820, who was
initially buried beneath the pulpit of the Meeting House.

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[23]

[24]William Randolph Sengel, <u>Can These Bones Live?</u>, p. 21.

[25]

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The manse envisioned by the philanthropic Arrells was constructed sometime after July 1787, when a contract was let to Robert Brockett "to prepare a house of certain dimensions" on Royal Street in the northwest corner of the meeting house lot at a cost of £268.[26] This dwelling, which would become known to Meeting House congregants of the twentieth century as the Flounder House, was a two-story brick house with a steep shed, or half-gabled, roof, a distinctive local building form popular with Alexandria builders in the eighteenth century.

Following the Revolution, with the English church in general disfavor among the former colonists, the Presbyterian Meeting House prospered fitfully under the long leadership of the Reverend James Muir, pastor from 1789 to 1820. Muir was active in many areas of Alexandria's social and civic life and had many ties to George Washington. He served as a chaplain in the Masonic Lodge and as president of the Alexandria Library Company. As a trustee of the Alexandria Academy, Muir wrote to Washington, a generous supporter of the academy, apologizing for not having informed him of how his earlier donations had been used and promising that future gifts would be followed by a full explanation of their use. As Chaplain of Masonic Lodge 22, Muir led the Masonic services at Mount Vernon upon Washington's death in 1799. Then, because bad weather on December 29 precluded walking to Washington's own Christ Church, Muir preached a memorial sermon at the Presbyterian Meeting House.[27] In 1800, on the anniversary of Washington's birth, a Charity Sermon preached at the Meeting House inaugurated what would become a nationwide annual celebration of Washington's birthday.

In 1817, disagreements among Meeting House members about church doctrines and day-to-day issues of the Meeting House operation came to a head over the choice of an assistant

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[26] Ethelyn Cox, Historic Alexandria, Virginia, Street by Street (Alexandria, VA: Historic Alexandria Foundation, 1976), p. 156.

[27] The Alexandria Times for December 28, 1799, reported, "The walking being bad to the Episcopal Church, the funeral Sermon of George Washington will be preached at the Presbyterian Meeting House tomorrow at 11:00 o'clock. (Sengel, Can These Bones Live, p. 45.)

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minister.   Thirty-nine members of the congregation broke away to
form the Second Presbyterian Church of Alexandria, acquiring a
building on Duke Street belonging to St. Paul's Episcopal Church,
which, in turn, was preparing to move to a new building at 220
South Pitt Street.[28]   The Presbyterian Meeting House was
renamed the First Presbyterian Church and retained its
affiliation with the Baltimore Presbytery, while the Second
Presbyterian Church affiliated with the Winchester Presbytery.

Muir died in 1820, and was buried near the pulpit underneath
the meeting house. A commemorative tablet on the north wall
indicated the location of his tomb.[29]   Elias Harrison, the
assistant pastor whose selection had precipitated the departure
of the Second Presbyterian Church contingent, succeeded Muir.
Harrison, a mild and self-effacing man, was apparently well loved
by the congregants who remained in the Meeting House, for he
continued to serve them until his death in 1863.

On July 26, 1835, while Harrison was preaching at a church
in Georgetown, "severe and Awful calamity" befell his own
building. A lightning bolt struck the tower of the Meeting
House, causing a fire that spread rapidly throughout the
building. "A period of two hours had not elapsed from the
commencement of the conflagration," reported Harrison of the
scene that greeted him on his return to Alexandria, "before the
whole edifice except the walls was involved in one shapeless mass
of smoking ruin . . . Our holy and beautiful house . . . was thus
burned up with fire; and all our pleasant things laid waste."[30]

Not quite all was lost, however. In addition to the walls,
the fire had spared "the lamps, a venerable clock in front of the

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[28]St. Paul's was also a break-away congregation, having split
off from Christ Church in 1809. (Karen G. Harvey and Ross
Stansfield, Alexandria: A Pictorial History Norfolk, Va.: Donning
Co./Publishers, 19--, p. 77.)

[29]After the Meeting House burned in 1835, Muir's remains were
moved to the churchyard. The commemorative plaque survived the
fire, supporting twentieth-century speculation that the wall on
which it was installed also survived, either in part or in whole.

[30] Quoted in Seaport in Virginia, p. 142.

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Gallery opposite, the pulpit, the books and cushions, a part of
the windows, the Stoves, a large proportion of the pipes of a
Splendid Organ which was split open with an axe for that purpose,
and some of the planks broken from the pews."

Although the church had once owned two insurance policies on
the building, one of the policies had lapsed not long before the
fire, so that only $2,500 was available from insurance funds to
pay for rebuilding the meeting house. Rather than beginning
immediately to rebuild, the Meeting House congregation accepted
an offer from the Second Presbyterian Church of temporary
shelter. Despite their differences, the two congregations shared
their services for more than a year. In the fall of 1836,
however, the Meeting House congregation determined to construct a
new building on the site of the old one. The second meeting
house, completed in 1837 at a cost of $3,982, was also
constructed of brick, but it appears to have differed in several
respects from its predecessor. The new building was somewhat
larger than the old one, the roof was gabled rather than hipped,
and the entrance faced east, toward Fairfax Street, rather than
south as the old one had.[31] The new meeting house at first had
no bell tower, but in July 1843 a brick tower (or perhaps only a
steeple on an earlier brick base) was constructed on the rear
wall of the church at a cost of $422.05.[32] A bell was hung in
that year.[33] Inside the meeting house, a new organ
"manufactured by Erben of New York," an "exceedingly powerful but

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[31]The only known pictorial documentation of the 1775 Meeting
House consists of three amateur sketches drawn from the artists'
childhood memories of the building. Since all the drawings were
made many years after the fire, their architectural accuracy is
uncertain.

[32]Jennings & Murray, p. 12.

[33]Ibid. The Minutes of the Committee of the Church, January
1842, express appreciation to the young ladies of the church for
their efforts to raise money for a bell and request permission to
order it. The bell is inscribed: "T. W. and R.C. Smith,
Alexandria, D. C., 1843."

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sweet toned instrument" was installed in 1849.[34] In 1851, the
Committee of the Church agreed to accept a gift from the Prince
William Stone Quarry of sufficient stone for a platform and steps
to the church, replacing a wooden porch built in 1845.[35]

In the decades before the Civil War, relationships between
Old School Presbyterians, including those of the Meeting House
congregation, and those of the New School became increasingly
strained. When the Presbyterian General Assembly called for
church members to support the Union, the issues became even more
inflammatory. During and after the War, the congregation of the
First Presbyterian Church (the Meeting House) cast its lot with
the Union by choosing to remain with the Baltimore Presbytery.
The Second Presbyterian Church, allied itself with the Winchester
Presbytery, which, like most Alexandrians, shared Southern
sympathies. Consequently, a number of dissident members left the
Meeting House to join the Second Presbyterians. Never
financially robust, the First Presbyterian Church declined
steadily in numbers and prosperity during the war years, and
membership fell from 220 names when the war began to only 65 when
it ended.

Under Union control, Alexandria became a hospital center for
both Union soldiers and Confederate prisoners during the war, and
most of the city's churches were taken over for hospital use.
However, the First Presbyterian Church, along with Christ Church
and Trinity Methodist Church, was allowed to continue its
religious functions. Nevertheless, its pastor and many of its
members were Southern sympathizers. Dr. Harrison, in fact,
refused to take an oath of allegiance to the Union and was
therefore prevented from performing marriages or baptisms in his
church during the year preceding his death in 1863.

The activities of the First Presbyterian Church in the years
immediately after the war are unclear. In 1874-75, a former
pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church, Dr. J. J. Bullock, took
over the ministry of the First Presbyterian Church, bringing with
him a group of dissidents from his old church, and apparently

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[34]Jennings & Murray, p. 15. Alexandria Gazette, December 28,
1849. Henry Erben was a well-known organ builder. Vedeler, p. 3.

[35]Ibid., p. 11.

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establishing a new one. The Union Presbyterian Church, as it was now called, disbanded a few years later.

Modern paint research indicates that the interior of the meeting house was redecorated in the Victorian taste during this period.[36]

Members continued to drift away in the bitter aftermath of the war, and the last minister was called to the meeting house in 1885. The First Presbyterian Church closed its doors in 1889, and for a number of years thereafter the building house was used intermittently for Sunday School and church services while other local church buildings were undergoing repair. In 1899, the property was formally transferred to Second Church by the Presbytery, with the understanding that the new owners would keep the building in repair and "use it for religious purposes in accordance with the doctrines and form of worship of the Presbyterian Church." From 1907 through 1911, it was leased to the Bethany Independent Methodist Protestant Church. Thereafter it was used only sporadically, for religious and other public occasions. The former manse served from 1901 until 1949 as a home for indigent Presbyterian women.[37]

By the 1920s, the Meeting House structure and the cemetery were in poor condition, suffering from decades of deferred maintenance and vandalism. City officials urged demolition of the building to prevent public endangerment. The call for demolition focused public attention on the plight of the Meeting House, and in 1925 preservation advocates launched a national fundraising campaign to restore the building and cemetery. The Second Presbyterian Church set up the Presbyterian Meeting House Committee, with John B. Gordon as chairman, to oversee its restoration. For fundraising purposes, the Restoration Committee adopted for the meeting house the name, "The Old Presbyterian Meeting House." Local fundraising efforts were joined by civic, fraternal, and patriotic organizations which included the American Legion, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the

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[36]Mosca, p. 2, citing the Alexandria Gazette of September 3, 1880..

[37]Yvonne Powell, Draft National Register Nomination, "Old Presbyterian Meeting House," 1989.

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United Daughters of the Confederacy, the National Society of the Children of the American Revolution, the Order of the Eastern Star, and the Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks. Included in the restoration efforts of the Meeting House were repairs to the exterior of the building, a new roof, and renovation of wall and ceiling plaster and floors.[38] Individuals such as Andrew Mellon and Elihu Root financed specific projects, including the purchase and installation of reproduction whale oil lamps in the sanctuary. The tomb of an unknown soldier of the American Revolution, discovered on Meeting House property during the construction of the first chapel of St. Mary's Catholic Church (ca. 1827) and reburied against the wall next to the Catholic Church, was memorialized in 1929 with a marker paid for by the Children of American Revolution. A brick wall around the cemetery was donated by patriotic societies including the National Society of the Sons of the Revolution and the Colonial Dames.

A memorial tablet was installed on the face of the building in 1938, and a pulpit designed by architect Ward Brown, "giving the appearance of the original" was presented to the Meeting House in 1940 by the Alexandria Association.[39]

With the onset of World War II, the population of Alexandria and its churches mushroomed. After the war, it became apparent that there were too few churches to serve the city's Presbyterians. The Second Presbyterian Church had become so overcrowded that even double services could not provide for the number of potential congregants who were applying to the church and Sunday School. Consequently, the Old Presbyterian Meeting House, which had once again fallen into disuse and disrepair after its brief renewal, promised at least a partial solution to the overcrowding. On June 12, 1949, 128 members of the Second Presbyterian Church withdrew to become charter members of a new

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[39]"Old Alexandria Church Given Colonial Pulpit," Washington Post, Oct. 27, 1940.

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church to be officially called the Presbyterian Meeting House.[40]

The Meeting House adopted a twelve-step program to rehabilitate and restore the church as funds became available, planning to accomplish the work between 1951 and 1956. Their restoration efforts were aided by preservation professionals such as the prominent restoration architect, Walter Macomber, Resident Architect of Mount Vernon; Worth Bailey, Curator of Mount Vernon; Frederick Rath, director of the National Council for Historic Sites and Buildings (precursor of the National Trust for Historic Preservation); and Helen Duprey Bullock, of the National Council for Historic Sites and Buildings. A modern furnace was installed, replacing cast-iron stoves that were still in use for heating the sanctuary during services. The plaster in the sanctuary was removed and replaced and a vapor seal was added between the ceiling and roof to prevent mildew damage. Painting of the sanctuary was undertaken using colors believed to be historically correct.[41]

The Flounder House was also rehabilitated and was put to use as the church offices.[42] A two-story brick wing was added at the east end of the house, replacing a smaller wing. In the church yard and cemetery, a plan designed by landscape architect Rose Creeley was only partly realized with the addition of brick and concrete walks and the restoration of broken and displaced tombstones. A large brick education building echoing the design of the Meeting House was constructed on Royal Street in 1956-1957 to house kindergarten classes and other church functions.

The next forty years saw a pattern of continuous growth in size and prosperity, accompanied by an unflagging commitment by the congregation to the maintenance of the historic structures.

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[40]In referring to the historic church property, however, they followed the growing resumption of the term, the Old Presbyterian Meeting House. Reunion Minutes, p. 5; Vedeler, pp. 7-9.

[41]The color scheme was suggested by Worth Bailey with the assistance of Helen Duprey Bullock, after study of samples scraped from the woodwork.

[42]Architects for the rehabilitation were Frank Coles and E. Townsley Jenkinson, of Alexandria.

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By 1996 membership had risen to approximately 1,000 persons,[43]
as the Old Presbyterian Meeting House plays a vital and
expanding role in modern Alexandria.

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ALEXANDRIA, VA

10. Geographical Information:

Verbal Boundary Description:

The lot on which the church is located is indicated on
Alexandria, VA, City Assessment Sheet 74.04, Block 6, Lots 20 and
29, found in the Office of the Alexandria Tax Assessor,
Alexandria, VA.

Boundary Justification:

The boundaries of the Old Presbyterian Meeting House are the two
lots occupied by the meeting house and/or its associated cemetery
and manse since 1772.

OLD PRESBYTERIAN MEETING HOUSE

321 S. FAIRFAX ST. ALEXANDRIA. VA,

PLOT PLAN

NORTH →

ROYAL STREET

EDUCATION
BUILDING
(NC)
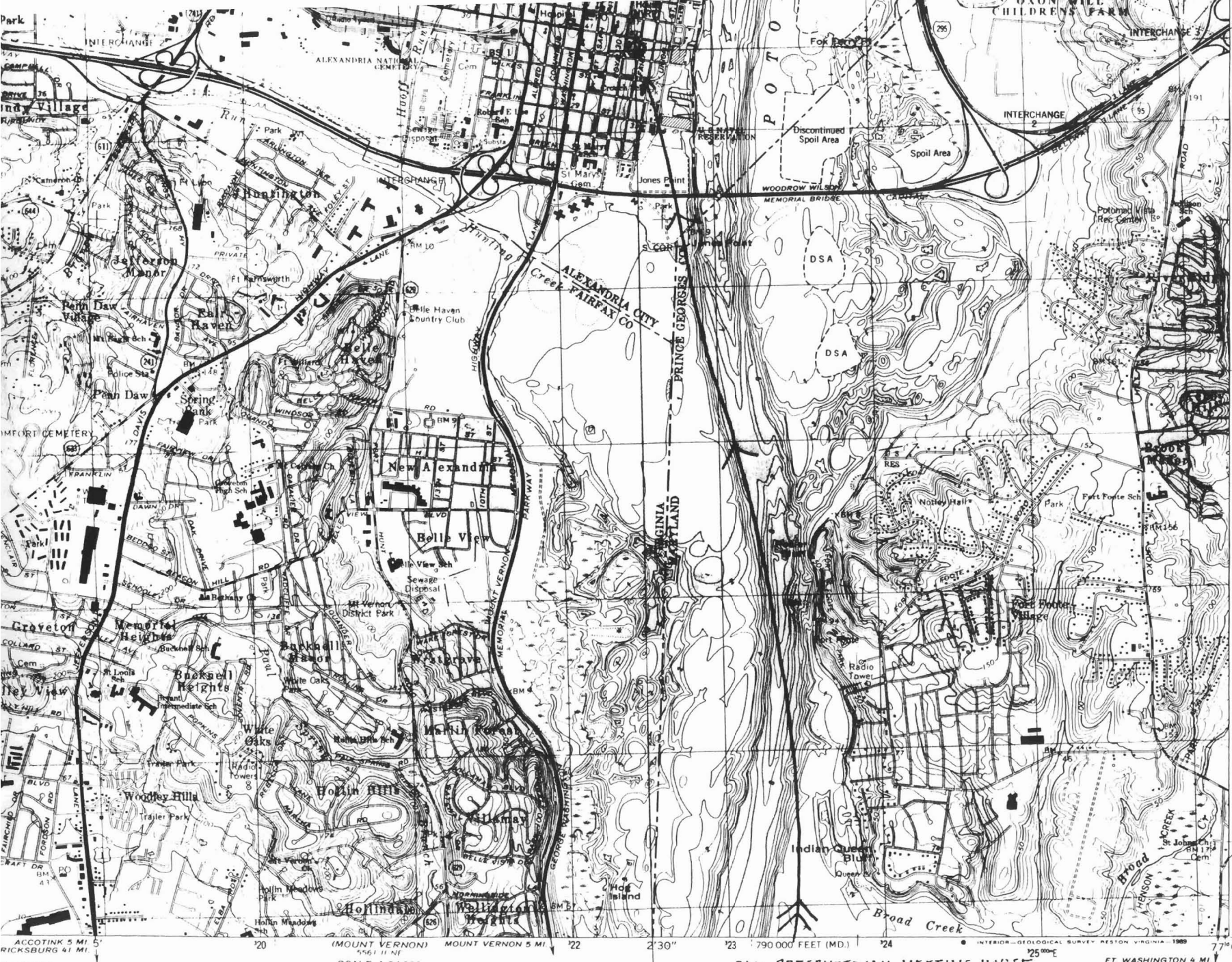
FLOUNDER
(CHURCH
OFFICE)
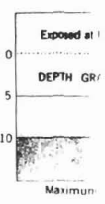(C.)

GRAVEYARD (C)

MEETING HOUSE
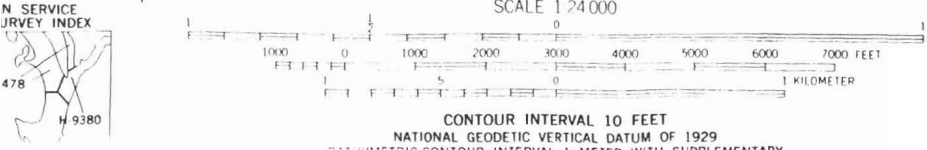(C)

FAIRFAX STREET

SCALE & 1"=40'

J.C. MASSEY 10/96

OLD PRESBYTERIAN MEETING HOUSE
ALEXANDRIA, VA.

UTM Reference:
18/322510/4296520

ALEXANDRIA
USGS

SCALE 1:24 000

CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET
NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929

ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Heavy-duty
Medium-duty
Light-duty
Unimproved dirt

Interstate Route   U. S. Route   State Route