

## NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

## SAINT PETER'S PARISH CHURCH

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United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

**1. NAME OF PROPERTY**

Historic Name: Saint Peter's Parish Church

Other Name/Site Number: Saint Peter's Episcopal Church

**2. LOCATION**

Street &amp; Number: 8400 Saint Peter's Lane

Not for publication: \_\_\_

City/Town: Talleyville/Tunstall

Vicinity: \_\_\_

State: VA

County: New Kent

Code: 127

Zip Code: 23124

**3. CLASSIFICATION**

## Ownership of Property

Private: X

Public-Local: \_\_\_

Public-State: \_\_\_

Public-Federal: \_\_\_

Object: \_\_\_

## Category of Property

Building(s): X

District: \_\_\_

Site: X

Structure: \_\_\_

## Number of Resources within Property

## Contributing

11

\_\_\_

\_\_\_

2

## Noncontributing

1 buildings

\_\_\_ sites

1 structures

\_\_\_ objects

2 TotalNumber of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 1

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: N/A

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**4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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.

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Signature of Certifying Official

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Date

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State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_\_ meets \_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

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Signature of Commenting or Other Official

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Date

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State or Federal Agency and Bureau

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**5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION**

I hereby certify that this property is:

- \_\_\_\_ Entered in the National Register  
\_\_\_\_ Determined eligible for the National Register  
\_\_\_\_ Determined not eligible for the National Register  
\_\_\_\_ Removed from the National Register  
\_\_\_\_ Other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature of Keeper

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Date of Action

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**6. FUNCTION OR USE**

Historic: Religious

Sub: Religious Structure/Facility

Current: Religious

Sub: Religious Structure/Facility

**7. DESCRIPTION**

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: Transitional—Colonial; Postmedieval; Jacobean; Georgian

**MATERIALS:**

Foundation: brick

Walls: brick

Roof: slate

Other: wood cornices on roof; cement finials on tower; glass windows

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**Summary**

The distinctive architectural features of St. Peter's support its nomination as an exceptional architectural specimen for the early colonial period. The church is significant as it represents the transition from "artisan mannerism" of the seventeenth century, to the "neat and plain" neoclassical style characteristic of the eighteenth century found in later colonial-era churches.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, the church was constructed of exceptionally large bricks, laid partially in the English bond typical of regional building traditions in the seventeenth century, and partially in Flemish bond popular in the eighteenth century. Rubbed and gauged brick provides trim details. Initially constructed in 1701-03, the church was enlarged with a tower in 1740-1741. This tower, the work of an important early master builder, William Walker, is supported on an open porch and ornamented with molded brick water tables and decorative pilasters capped with stucco ball-shaped finials. With the addition of the tower, the structure as completed in 1741 has been called "Baroque" in its unusual design. St. Peter's represents an extraordinary rare example of ecclesiastical architecture built prior to the period when the neoclassical Georgian style dominated the architecture of the American colonies.

**Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.**

The seven and one-half acre parcel circumscribed by the NHL boundary comprises a distinctive landscape that largely preserves the historic character of the setting and greatly enhances understanding of the church and its immediate environment. Representing the extent of the property purchased from the Jacksons in 1703 and expanded in 1738, the entire parcel is counted as a contributing site.

As described in 1963, "St. Peter's Parish Church...stands in a magnificent setting, almost completely surrounded by forests."<sup>2</sup> Over forty-five years later, this statement still accurately describes the rural, commercially-undisturbed environment in which the church is situated. Located in New Kent County, Virginia, the structure is accessible by taking route 64 to Old Church Road towards Talleyville/Tunstall. A winding route 642 (St. Peter's Lane) then leads to the church driveway. The *New York Times* asserted in 1999 that the "approach to the church and churchyard are the most magnificent in Virginia."<sup>3</sup> The secluded and pastoral nature of a country parish's church is preserved, along with the actual building itself.

As one approaches the church via the gravel driveway from the southwest, the two-story tower dominates the west façade. The driveway curves toward the left, where the parish house sits on the adjacent property. It forks at the end, with a gravel parking lot in front of the parish house on the left and a few gravel spaces nearer to the church on the right. The parish house is a one-story brick structure located west of the church, while the drive and parking lot are paved with small aggregate pea stone gravel. Neither lot significantly impacts the historic integrity of the church setting. The cemetery comes into view to the right of St. Peter's, comprised of the graves of parishioners from throughout the church's history, including almost twenty dating from before the Revolutionary War.<sup>4</sup> The graves number about 275 in all. At one time, a brick wall (built in 1719) surrounded the church; the dimensions of this wall exist in the Vestry Book, but it has not been rebuilt.<sup>5</sup> This is probably because, the wall having been destroyed for some time now, the cemetery has since expanded toward the road and rebuilding would either disturb the present configuration or deviate from the original plan.

<sup>1</sup> The term "artisan mannerism" was coined by British architectural historian John Summerson and refers to vernacular interpretations of high style seventeenth-century architecture. The phrase "neat and plain" was commonly employed in eighteenth-century contract documents to describe limited use of ornamental treatments. For a fuller explanation, see Carl Lounsbury, "Anglican Church Design in the Chesapeake," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, vol. 9 (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2005), 34-35.

<sup>2</sup> James Scott Rawlings, *Virginia's Colonial Churches: An Architectural Guide* (Richmond: Garrett & Massie, 1963), 41.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Ruda, "In Praise of Country Churches," *The New York Times*, September 26, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Guy Wilson, ed., *Buildings of Virginia: Tidewater and Piedmont* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 354.

<sup>5</sup> Historic American Buildings Survey, "St. Peter's Church," VA-127, October 1936, 1, 6.

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St. Peter's dimensions coincide with those documented in the Parish Vestry Book (64'4" x 28'4") for the body of the church, as do the dimensions of the large bricks that make up the almost two-foot thick walls. While the specifications call for bricks 9 ¾ inches long, 4 ¾ inches wide, by 4 ½ inches tall, the actual dimensions (9 ¼ x 4 ¼ x 3 ¾) are close. The exceptional size of these bricks reflects the variations inherent in the nature of locally made brick in this period. In this instance, local landowner Thomas Jackson supplied one hundred thousand bricks to the Parish.<sup>6</sup> Originally, the structure was only a one-story rectangle with entrances in the gable end and on one side elevation, as was typical of seventeenth-century Anglican country churches. The tower, added in 1740-1741 and which houses the vestry room on the second level, was an element not often seen on churches in the Tidewater and Piedmont areas of Virginia.<sup>7</sup> Like St. Luke's in Isle of Wight, it is open and arched on the three sides facing away from the church.<sup>8</sup> It "incorporates an amazing variety of elements: molded brick, cornices, massive corner pilasters, recessed panels, windows, and stuccoed urns, one of which serves as a chimney."<sup>9</sup> The wooden drain spouts above the windows in the tower are original, and an example of one of the idiosyncratic features of St. Peter's' design.<sup>10</sup> This is also the case with the stuccoed brick urns, the northwest of which conceals the chimney for the fireplace in the vestry room. The brickwork is a combination of English and Flemish bonds. The body of the church is English bond (except for a band of three courses below the windows), while the tower provides a more clear demarcation. The lower portion of the tower is English bond, possibly to visually match the body of the church. Above the molded brick belt course, a more stylish Flemish bond was used for the tower. The windows are leaded glass replications installed in the original openings, which had been reduced for smaller sash in the nineteenth century. The wood doors are also not original.

As a result of the disestablishment of the Anglican Church in 1789, St. Peter's, like many other rural churches, fell into a prolonged period of neglect. According to the reports of the Episcopal Diocese, the church "was destitute of regular church services for fifty years, until October of 1843." In 1844-45 "extensive repairs" were made to the church, and this probably included the removal of the late eighteenth-century wing. St. Peter's Parish had appointed a rector, Edwin A. Dalrymple, who also tended St. Paul's Parish in Hanover County.<sup>11</sup>

The majority of the damage to the structure occurred while federal troops occupied the building during the Civil War; at this point, it is believed that only the wainscoting remained on the interior after this occupation. The gables and tower dormers had already been removed, and the leaded glass casement windows had been replaced by sash. A short-lived eighteenth-century wing, believed to have been put in place after 1758 and used as a school room during the Presbyterians' use of the building from 1820-1843, had also been removed by this time. "Unmistakable evidence" for this addition, a north wing, was found "in the ground and in the building's brickwork...the same width as the main building and extending twenty-four feet from its north wall, about ten feet off center toward its east end." Because the wing had already been demolished in Civil War-era

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<sup>6</sup> Carl Lounsbury has documented the highly unusual size of the bricks in the context of seventeenth and eighteenth century masonry in the Chesapeake region. He kindly provided two unpublished manuscripts, "Brickwork," a chapter from an unpublished book on colonial churches, and an account on the design and history of St. Peter's Church that is an appendix to the same publication.

<sup>7</sup> At one point, entry to the vestry room was possible from the exterior of the church, as can be seen in the background of a nineteenth-century photograph. This probably provided access to house slaves who were allowed to attend services once a month.

<sup>8</sup> Vernon Perdue Davis and James Scott Rawlings, *The Colonial Churches of Virginia, Maryland, and North Carolina, Their Interiors and Worship* (Richmond: Dietz, 1985), 84.

<sup>9</sup> Wilson, *Buildings of Virginia*, 354.

<sup>10</sup> Dell Upton, *Holy Things and Profane: Anglican Parish Churches in Colonial Virginia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 203.

<sup>11</sup> *Journal of the Annual Council of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Virginia*, Richmond, 1844, 55; 1845, 45; and 1846, 80. Thank you to Carl Lounsbury for calling the document to our attention.

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photographs, it is most probable that its removal took place in 1844, around the time that the Episcopalians made repairs to the building.<sup>12</sup>

It was not until after the war that efforts were made to repair the church. General Robert E. Lee provided a substantial portion of the funds for its initial reconstruction, stating in a letter dated October 23, 1869: "St. Peter's is the church where General Washington was married and attended in early life. It would be a shame to America if allowed to go to destruction."<sup>13</sup> While the location of George Washington's wedding in this church is still debated, it is this sentiment that has protected the interests of the church since the initial reconstruction in the late nineteenth century, as well as the twentieth century restoration

The ca. 1872 repairs to the church restored it to working order with a new wood floor and various other interior modifications, but there does not appear to have been any particular interest in maintaining faithfulness to St. Peter's as originally conceived. Its appearance at this point in the late nineteenth and into the early twentieth century is documented by a Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) from 1936.

The HABS photographic record consists of six exterior photographs and elevation drawings, as well as one interior measured floor plan and detail sheets that document the late nineteenth-century finishes. This documentation establishes the conditions of the church prior to any twentieth century restoration work. There were two main restorations in the middle of the twentieth century, beginning several years after the founding of St. Peter's Church Restoration Association in 1922. The first restoration was conceived as early as 1930 with plans made by the important Richmond architectural firm, Carneal and Johnston, though there is not any evidence that work was actually being done at this point. The earliest phases of physical restoration work included George Carrington Mason (historiographer of the Southern Diocese of Virginia) serving as consultant from about 1945 to 1953 and Harden de Valsen Pratt as restoration architect from 1951 until 1962.<sup>14</sup> Pratt, a Boston architect educated at Harvard, had also acted as the restoration architect at the nearby Criss Cross house, which likely dates from the early eighteenth century.<sup>15</sup>

The second restoration was taken over in 1962 by well-known architect James Scott Rawlings and his firm, Rawlings and Wilson. Rawlings, upon hearing of the opportunity at St. Peter's, wrote several letters to the church, asking that he be given the honor of working on restoring the structure. Vernon Perdue Davis then served as a consultant, and the team accomplished a great deal over the next two years. Correspondence occurred almost daily between themselves, the construction firm of Taylor and Parrish, and a long list of experts and craftsmen, both in the United States and abroad. Davis and Rawlings later collaborated on two books on colonial churches in Virginia and in the mid-Atlantic more generally; these have become crucial contributions to the core scholarship on this subject.

The timeline of the last phases of the restoration process is one that can be gathered from the surviving annual reports of St. Peter's Restoration Association, as well as the reports of Carneal and Johnston. These twentieth-century changes are almost completely responsible for the restoration of the church today, inside and out, as little survives from the repairs made following the Civil War. As mentioned, the project itself lasted over ten years (at least 1952-1964) and involved Pratt as lead architect, with help from Carneal and Johnston's firm—though it seems their expertise was used early on almost solely for research purposes. Pratt was supplanted by James Scott Rawlings in 1962, and it appears that Rawlings saw the project through to the end in the mid-

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<sup>12</sup> Carneal and Johnston, restoration report, August 9, 1948. This report is in the form of a typed twenty-two page letter from J. Ambler Johnston to the St. Peter's restoration committee. St. Peter's Church Archives, 6.

<sup>13</sup> Robert E. Lee, letter, October 23, 1869, Lexington, VA (St. Peter's Church Archives).

<sup>14</sup> Carneal and Johnston, report.

<sup>15</sup> The National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination Form, January 1973, gives the date as late seventeenth century.

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1960s. There are a few logical explanations for these changes in authority. One is that the nature of the work on the church itself changed from the more pressing issues (i.e. structural weaknesses, exterior repairs) to those that could be considered of a more cosmetic nature (i.e. interior work, the addition of objects of interest). Pratt's apparent absence from the project in the 1960s may have been due to ill health as he died in 1964. One thing that remains clear is that the lengthy period over which the restoration took place was a result of limited financial resources and not because of a lack of interest in restoring the church to its former colonial state. In addition, the restoration probably would have been completed in less time had the restoration association and affiliated consultants and architects not been committed to what they believed to be the highest degree of excellence and verisimilitude to the original design.

The *Annual Report of the Restoration of St. Peter's Church* as presented to the Restoration Association on September 21, 1952, sheds a good deal of light on details concerning the early portion of the restoration, which had previously been somewhat shrouded in mystery. Prepared by George Carrington Mason (with an introduction by Pratt), it serves as a description and explanation of the work that had been completed by that time. Mason—a prominent colonial church historian and the author of *Colonial Churches of Tidewater Virginia* (1945)—states: “for the first time we are confronted with visible evidence that our ancient St. Peter's Church is really being restored.”<sup>16</sup> The conspicuous changes he is referring to are the restoration of the tower and shaped gables.<sup>17</sup> What follows is a detailed account of what had been restored and, more importantly, why each decision had been made. Mason makes a point of saying that “nothing in [the] whole restoration is...a product of the imagination, for every assumption made...as to the design of the original structure has been amply confirmed by actual archaeological exploration.”<sup>18</sup>

The replacement of the windows with “diamond-paned, leaded-glass casement windows” was supported by Pratt finding lead and glass remnants of the previous windows around the church.<sup>19</sup> The reinforcement of the tower, as well as the rebuilding of the dormers in the steeple, were both done “in accordance with research and specifications.”<sup>20</sup> At this point in the project, Johnston had already been used as a designer for the replacement supports in the main roof.<sup>21</sup>

A significant discovery concerning the gables made by Pratt during the restoration elucidated a fascinating aspect of the design of the church. Having detected a “rudimentary brick projection above the western end of the ridgepole” and “the curving line of cement flashing...slanting down along each side of the tower's rear wall,” he concluded that they were “the traces of an ornate Dutch parapet gable and its central pediment”.<sup>22</sup> After researching the matter, Pratt came across a photographic plate that presented a nearly exact example of St. Peter's corbelled and parapet gables on Pine Ends cottage near St. Peter's Church in Kent, England.<sup>23</sup> Built around 1690, the cottage presents a contemporary illustration of the taste for Flemish (or Jacobean) architecture following the accession of William of Orange.<sup>24</sup> The curved gable ends, however, were more likely derived from contemporary structures in Virginia. Bacon's Castle in Surry County (ca. 1665; NHL, 1960), and the now-destroyed first Bruton Parish Church in Williamsburg, completed ca. 1683, featured similar gables.<sup>25</sup> This

<sup>16</sup> George Carrington Mason, “St. Peter's Episcopal Church, New Kent,” *Annual Report of St. Peter's Restoration Association*, 1952, 11.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 22-24.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>25</sup> Mills Lane, *Architecture of the Old South: Virginia* (Savannah: Beehive, 1987), 17-19.

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adds additional credibility to the notion that the gables were original to Will Hughes' design as completed in 1703. This metamorphosis at the beginning of the eighteenth century will be discussed in the next section in order to place St. Peter's in the context of colonial church building.

Several other early sources confirm that the most recent renovation has been faithful to the original plan. One such source is the surviving vestry book from 1700, which dictates that a church should be built "neer [*sic*] Thomas Jackson's" (the adjoining Marl Hill plantation, which is individually listed on the National Register) with the dimensions of 60' x 24' with a 14' height (term "pitched" in the parlance of eighteenth century specifications) and a gallery sixteen feet long.<sup>26</sup> The vestry book served as an integral part in the restoration process, as it describes at length specifications concerning original measurements, materials, and overall appearance. The addition of the tower in 1740 is documented (and confirmed by various receipts that survive), and was built by "William Walker, 'Builder' of Stafford County."<sup>27</sup> There is also an illustration of the church dating from 1837 on an early plat of the nearby plantation, Marl Hill, in which one can see the principal features of the structure and the tower's weathervane.

A nineteenth-century woodcut confirms that "the basic pattern [of the church] is correct, and the double-light transom window frames are partly original."<sup>28</sup> Visitors can still see the line that "clearly demarcates the original frame at the top from the restored frame at the bottom" as well as "the carpenter's mark, made by two chisels, in the upper corner."<sup>29</sup> As explained, the Flemish gables are reconstructions, and were built using "ghosts" on the tower of the original curvilinear forms, and the historical prototypes. The originals were destroyed before the Civil War.<sup>30</sup>

When first built, the roof of the church was cypress shingles, but those have since been replaced (around the year 1900) with slate, as it may better withstand the elements and the restorers could not "recommend genuine wood shingles." Documentation shows that there are scissors trusses that support the roof.<sup>31</sup> The dates of several of the other additions, such as the dormers (1741), can also be verified by the vestry book.<sup>32</sup>

## Interior

While there were undocumented changes to the interior in the 1840s, the church suffered the most damage during the Civil War. According to a report that appeared in the *Richmond Dispatch* of February 6, 1871, "the Church itself was broken and battered, and rendered wholly unfit to use. The old massive stone font, in which the children of two centuries had been baptized, was broken and scattered in fragments over the floor. The chancel was torn down, the pulpit and desk broken and defaced, and not a sash was left in the windows."<sup>33</sup> What evidence remained of the eighteenth-century interior was replaced with new finishings in 1872.

Entering St. Peter's from the west entrance (through the tower), one passes through a door modeled after that at the nearby eighteenth-century plantation Criss Cross. Within the walls of the church, much of the original layout—as described in the Vestry Book—is preserved. Though the original setup of the interior was demolished by the mid-nineteenth century and can only be speculated upon, the latest restoration effort took great pains to consult with experts in order to create a historically appropriate appearance. These changes were

<sup>26</sup> C. G. Chamberlayne, ed., *The Vestry Book and Register of St. Peter's Parish, New Kent and James City Counties, 1706-1786, Virginia* (Richmond: Virginia State Library and Archives, 1989).

<sup>27</sup> Upton, *Holy Things and Profane*, 34.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>31</sup> Davis & Rawlings report, August 9, 1948, 161.

<sup>32</sup> Upton, *Holy Things and Profane*, 203.

<sup>33</sup> Cited in Carneal and Johnston, report, 6.



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first overseen by the aforementioned J. Ambler Johnston and Harden de Valsen Pratt, architects who specialized in colonial restoration work.<sup>34</sup> It was when the project was taken over by James Rawlings, however, that the majority of the interior details were brought to the degree of finish that is seen today. This included new chancel and gallery rails and font, designed in 1963 by Rawlings.<sup>35</sup>

The earlier restoration headed by Pratt and Mason in the 1950s, though mainly concerned with structural issues and the exterior work, saw a handful of interior changes as well. One of these was the enlargement of the vestry room fireplace to its original size (now covered but still apparent); they also replaced the beams and original arched plaster ceiling in the room and restored “appropriate” Jacobean woodwork, along with a door and latch.<sup>36</sup> The vestry room is now reached by an inconspicuous interior staircase.

It was this restoration, which ascertained that the “present building is unquestionably the original one,” that reestablished door and window openings to their original placement, with plain plaster reveals.<sup>37</sup> The Carneal and Johnston restoration also replaced “modern” (i.e., 1872) elements—like the hardwood floor—with a more appropriate material. In the case of the floors, they chose flagstone brick. These changes (along with others) were addressed at the end of the 1952 Annual Report as the next steps in the restoration process, to undertake once funding was sufficient.<sup>38</sup>

On the interior north and south walls of the church hang two of the nation’s thirteen colonial wall monuments. One of them, dated 1737, is dedicated to William Chamberlayne and, signed by the sculptor, is the earliest example of a signed wall monument in the United States.<sup>39</sup>

On the east wall is a single “great window;” upon being restored, it was discovered that the interior arch was slightly higher than on the exterior, thus revealing a crescent of historic plaster. The original fenestration as a whole is clearly an interpretation of the slightly earlier style found at St. Luke’s Church in Isle of Wight County; though much of the Gothic appearance is retained, particularly the large lancet arch window that had been replaced by two smaller rectangular windows.<sup>40</sup>

The vestry book spares few details concerning the specifications for the ordering of various items, such as the benches installed in 1735 “made of saw’d white Oak Plank 2 Inches thick, with good mawld Blocks to support them, pinnd down...the Benches to be 11 Inches wide.”<sup>41</sup> Following the destruction of the interior during the Civil War, and subsequent late nineteenth-century alterations recorded in the HABS drawings, the interior presents what was believed to be an accurate reconstruction of the interior, thanks to both the detailed and contemporaneous descriptions in the vestry book as well as archaeological artifacts around the site.<sup>42</sup>

Objects within the church were also a point of interest during the restoration process, and the church has procured a Baptismal font dating from the seventeenth century as well as a 1715 pulpit Bible.<sup>43</sup> Other attempts at authenticity include parcel-gilt pricket candlesticks modeled after seventeenth-century examples and an

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<sup>34</sup> Wilson, *Buildings of Virginia*, 354.

<sup>35</sup> James Scott Rawlings, “Report on St. Peter’s Parish Church”, March 20, 1963, 11-12 (typed manuscript in St. Peter’s Church Archives). This report documents the rationale for Rawlings’ restoration work on the church.

<sup>36</sup> Mason, *St. Peter’s Episcopal Church, New Kent*, 23.

<sup>37</sup> Carneal and Johnston, report.

<sup>38</sup> Mason, *St. Peter’s Episcopal Church, New Kent*, 25-26.

<sup>39</sup> Rawlings, “Report”, 60-61.

<sup>40</sup> Upton, *Holy Things and Profane*, 64.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>42</sup> Carneal and Johnston, report.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

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hourglass stand and psalm-board, both recreated after eighteenth-century artifacts.<sup>44</sup> On the north wall is a scripture sentence made to resemble one in a 1711 English church in Hawkshead, Lancashire. The flag of England, Royal Arms of Queen Anne (reproduced by the College of Arms, London), and catechetical tablets on display add to the historically accurate ambience, as does the 1693 credence chest.<sup>45</sup>

As far as remade objects are concerned, every measure was taken by the restorers to ensure high quality: the chandelier and wall sconces were “fashioned by a renowned craftsman who was decorated by Queen Elizabeth II for his work at St. Paul’s Cathedral, London.”<sup>46</sup> Although the chancel screen has been removed and an altar rail has been added, the wainscoting itself in the chancel is thought to date from the 1730s, as it is documented as being ordered in 1732.<sup>47</sup> The gallery door has also survived and dates from 1872.<sup>48</sup> The altar itself and the chairs within the chancel are reproductions of seventeenth century types.<sup>49</sup>

Required reconstruction is not uncommon for early colonial period churches, and the high degree of care taken in recreating an authentic version of St. Peter’s colonial appearance places it among the best documented. For example, St. Luke’s, Isle of Wight County, the only surviving seventeenth-century parish church in Virginia, underwent an earlier and more extensive restoration: in 1887 the roof collapsed along with most of the east wall. Therefore, the windows, doors and interior finishes there date from an 1894-97 restoration, which in turn was almost entirely replaced in the 1950s. In this context, the twentieth-century restoration is important for the faithful recordation of what was done, as well as for providing the rationale for many of the decisions that were made.

**Parish House** (noncontributing building)

This one-story brick building was constructed in 1963. It is T-shaped with a hip and gable roof. It is designed in a traditional Colonial Revival style with no ornamentation.

**Walled Garden** (noncontributing structure)

Constructed in 2009, this consists of semi-circular brick walls located behind (east) the church. Within the walls is a single bench at the end of a walkway.

**Summary of Integrity**

The period of significance for this nomination ends in 1741, the date of the construction of the tower and vestry addition. The existing church reflects the dimensions of the structure at that time. Although a late-eighteenth century wing was added, it was gone by the 1850s and there is no documentation of its appearance. St. Peter’s, like many isolated rural churches built prior to the Revolution, began its long period of decline after the disestablishment of the Anglican Church in Virginia. From ca. 1790 until the 1840s the St. Peters Episcopal congregation survived only by sharing this church with a Presbyterian congregation. Extensive repairs were made at that time, such as the replacement of the leaded glass windows with nineteenth-century sash. The eighteenth-century wing and shaped brick gables that were removed were gone by the middle of the nineteenth century.

The relatively brief renewal of St. Peters ended during the Civil War when the church was occupied by federal

<sup>44</sup> Rawlings, “Report”, 175, 178, 183.

<sup>45</sup> Carneal and Johnston, report.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.; Wilson, *Buildings of Virginia*, 354.

<sup>48</sup> Wilson, *Buildings of Virginia*, 354.

<sup>49</sup> Carneal and Johnston, report.

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soldiers. Various written accounts indicate the interior was largely gutted, with only the marble tablets surviving by having been removed from the building. The destruction appears to have been mostly on the interior as two Civil War-era photographs appear to document the exterior intact in its ca. 1850 appearance during the occupation. In 1872, St. Peter's was again repaired and brought back into service. As no further work is known to have been done, the 1872 repairs appear to have survived when the church was documented by HABS photographs and drawings in 1936. While not by any means a complete documentation of the interior, these drawings (there are no interior photographs) confirm that if any eighteenth-century woodwork survived the Civil War it had been replaced by that date.

The restoration that was undertaken in the 1950s and 1960s sought to return the exterior to its 1741 appearance, while creating an interior more historically appropriate than that which existed in 1872. Indeed, the removal of the nineteenth-century interior aided in the interpretation of the exterior restoration. The exterior of the building and its tower with its extraordinary brickwork survived all these changes. The windows, dormers, and doors had to be recreated based upon the available documentation. Also reconstructed were the shaped gable ends. No record survived of the late eighteenth-century north wing and there was no attempt to recreate it. Only the exterior survived with sufficient architectural integrity for a reasonably accurate restoration to the 1741 period. The interior reconstruction, while based upon the original vestry specifications, is conjectural and was completed in the 1960s.

The St. Peter's standalone, semi-rural location was typical of parish churches in Virginia and throughout much of the Chesapeake and Lowcountry during the colonial period. This siting contrasted with churches in the Mid-Atlantic and New England, whose colonies tended to have somewhat more concentrated populations and were more likely to locate churches in towns and villages, or at rural crossroad communities. Three-hundred years after its construction, St. Peter's pastoral Tidewater location remains intact and contributes to its integrity, although its remote location has also made it less well known among the nation's nationally significant colonial buildings.

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**8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

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

Nationally: X Statewide:    Locally:   

Applicable National

Register Criteria: A X B    C X D   

Criteria Considerations

(Exceptions): A X B    C    D    E    F    G

NHL Criteria: 4

NHL Exception: 1

NHL Theme(s): III. Expressing Cultural Values

5. Architecture, landscape architecture, and urban design

Areas of Significance: Architecture, Social History

Period(s) of Significance: 1701-41

Significant Dates: 1701-03; 1739-41

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: William Hughes (original carpenter), Cornelius Hall (original mason), William Walker (tower)

Historic Contexts: XVI. Architecture  
A. Colonial

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**State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.****Introduction**

St. Peter's Parish Church, located in New Kent County, Virginia, demonstrates national significance under Criterion 4 as a property that embodies "the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen exceptionally valuable for a study of a period, style, or method of construction." The distinctive architectural features of St. Peter's support its nomination as an exceptional architectural specimen from early in the colonial period. The church is significant as it represents the transition from "artisan mannerism" of the seventeenth century, to the "neat and plain" neoclassical style characteristic of the eighteenth century and found in later colonial-era churches. Specifically, the church was constructed of exceptionally large bricks, laid partially in the English bond typical of regional building traditions in the seventeenth century, and partially in Flemish bond popular in the eighteenth century.

Initially constructed in 1701-03, featuring the shaped parapet gables that were stock features of artisan mannerism, the church was enlarged with an ambitious tower in 1740-41. This tower, the work of an important early master builder William Walker, is supported on an open porch and ornamented with molded brick water tables and decorative pilasters capped with stuccoed ball-shaped finials. The tower addition provides a stylistic link to St. Luke's, the earliest surviving church in the Chesapeake region, and further distinguishes St. Peter's from later eighteenth century examples with their simple Georgian treatments. Calder Loth, Senior Architectural Historian at the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, has remarked about the church's distinctive architecture:

I find St. Peter's distinctive because of its Baroque influences. Though very countrified, the tower with its massive corner pilasters, molded cornice and stringcourse, and pedestals with urns, is a provincial interpretation of Baroque design. Moreover, the curvilinear gables (albeit reconstructed) are specifically Baroque and can be traced to Italian precedents.

Together, the body and tower of St. Peter's church offer a rare juxtaposition of distinctive stylistic impulses that evoke a time when colonists in America began thinking about their buildings, and identity, in more sophisticated terms.

**St. Peter's Parish**

The establishment of St. Peter's Parish was confirmed on April 29, 1679. The present church was built as a replacement for the dilapidated "Broken-Back'd" Church, which had been constructed in about 1685 (though not on the same site).<sup>50</sup> Planned in 1700 and in use by 1703, St. Peter's Parish Church is the oldest functioning within the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia and the second oldest extant church building in Virginia after the Newport Parish Church (St. Luke's Smithfield, ca. 1682; NHL, 1960). Several prominent colonial families were associated with the church during the eighteenth century. Martha Custis was a member of the parish throughout her life, hence its 1960 designation by the Virginia General Assembly as the "First Church of the First First-Lady."<sup>51</sup> It was in St. Peter's that "she was baptized, confirmed and married to her first husband Daniel Parke Custis."<sup>52</sup> This union entitled her, upon his death, to what became the great Washington fortune. She was later married by the Reverend David Mossom, rector of St. Peter's, to George Washington in January 1759.<sup>53</sup> The confluence of significant figures in and around St. Peter's throughout its three hundred-year

<sup>50</sup> Rawlings "Report", 42.

<sup>51</sup> St. Peter's Parish Church, accessed January 2009, <http://www.stpetersnewkent.org>.

<sup>52</sup> Mason, *St. Peter's Episcopal Church, New Kent*, 7.

<sup>53</sup> Speculation has persisted that George and Martha Washington were married in this church, but no conclusive documentation has come to light.

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existence contributes to a rich history. John Dandridge, Martha Washington's father, served as a vestryman and churchwarden for a number of years.<sup>54</sup> The future wife of President John Tyler, Letitia Christian, was baptized there in 1790.<sup>55</sup>

The parish's august beginnings disintegrated with the disestablishment of the Anglican Church after the Revolution when the church fell into disuse and disrepair. The frequently vacant building was utilized by Presbyterians from 1820 until 1843 at which time the Episcopal Diocese repaired the building and assigned a part-time rector to the congregation. This period of new activity at St. Peter's was short lived as a result of the Civil War, during which the building was occupied by federal troops and its interior heavily damaged. After the war, it was rehabilitated, and remains an active parish in the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia. The church's age and its association with George Washington has sustained broader interest in its architecture and history through the twentieth century until the present, although it has been comparatively understudied and underappreciated in part due to its semi-rural location.

**A Significant Colonial Building Constructed in Two Phases**

St. Peter's Parish Church is a significant example of colonial architecture at a time when colonists began expressing architectural objectives consistent with the more settled character of the colonies and their growing confidence and resources. It is part of a significant trend whereby Americans began to develop taste and opinions about styles and motifs, and to comprehend and embrace the idea that a building's architecture could address things above and beyond function.<sup>56</sup> Although the eye-catching tower more obviously reflects this benchmark in the development of America, the ambition of St. Peter's Parish was evident even with the original construction of the church at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The vestry book confirms that Will Hughes, a carpenter, was hired to prepare a plan for the new church.<sup>57</sup> Hughes's "draught" of the planned church does not survive, but the fact that one was requested at all indicates that the building they were considering was at a scale beyond typical construction and complex enough to make the drawing useful to both Hughes and the vestry. The draught seems to have met with approval as Hughes was hired along with Cornelius Hall, a mason, to construct the church, which was in use by St. Peter's Parish by 1703. The building's curved parapet gables, restored in the twentieth century based on physical evidence, tied the building to the artisan mannerism employed in prominent Chesapeake buildings during the seventeenth century, most notably at Bacon's Castle (ca. 1665; NHL, 1960).

While the interior has been subject to various periods of damage, reconstruction, and restoration, two significant original features, wall monuments in marble relief, are among a group of only thirteen of their kind in the United States. One of them, dated 1737, is inscribed "*M. Sidnell Bristol Fecit*" in memory of a parishioner by the name of Chamberlayne, is the oldest signed example of such a work in the country.<sup>58</sup> A *New York Times* article described it as "fully in equality to similar monuments in English Churches."<sup>59</sup> Michael Sidnell, a sculptor and architect, had made a similar monument for Bredon, St. Giles in Worcestershire, as well as one for St. James's Priory in his hometown of Bristol, England.<sup>60</sup> The wall tablets at St. Peter's are, taken by themselves, rare and valuable relics of America's colonial history.

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<sup>54</sup> C. G. Chamberlayne, ed., *The Vestry Book and Register of St. Peter's Parish, New Kent and James City Counties, 1706-1786, Virginia* (Richmond: Virginia State Library and Archives, 1989).

<sup>55</sup> St. Peter's Parish Church Archives.

<sup>56</sup> Charles E. Brownell, and Calder Loth, eds., *The Making of Virginia Architecture* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 135.

<sup>57</sup> Chamberlayne, *Vestry Book*, 68.

<sup>58</sup> Davis and Rawlings, *Colonial Churches*, 60-61.

<sup>59</sup> Richard Ruda, "In Praise of Country Churches," *New York Times*, September 26, 1999.

<sup>60</sup> Alan Brooks and Nikolaus Pevsner, *Worcestershire: The Buildings of England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 165; Andrew Foyle, *Pevsner Architectural Guides: Bristol* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 98.

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Forty years later, St. Peter's Parish again showed considerable ambition with the construction of a "Vestry Room and Steeple." The popular conception of a historic church inevitably involves a tower; however, they were uncommon features in the colonial landscape and most often found only on important buildings in America's cities and large towns. While perhaps not so radical to be called audacious, the decision to add a tower, and an elegantly designed one at that, to rural St. Peter's Parish Church shows sustained motivation by the vestry to make an architectural statement beyond functional needs. Colonial Virginians had a penchant for church towers. The fourth church constructed at Jamestown, started after 1639, included a tower. While the church was entirely abandoned in the middle of the eighteenth century, the tower remains extant, adjacent to an early-twentieth century church building, and it is one of the oldest English structures in the United States. The first Bruton Parish Church in Williamsburg (ca. 1683) also featured a tower. The design and construction of Newport Parish Church (St. Luke's Smithfield) in Isle of Wight County, Virginia (ca. 1682) notably involved a tower from the outset, which has been described by architectural historian Carl Lounsbury as "an exceptional extravagance that seldom appeared in later rural parish churches."<sup>61</sup> Despite the "extravagance," or perhaps because of it, the vestry and congregants at St. Peter's decided to add a tower to their church in 1740.

The vestry records record that master builder William Walker was engaged to build a "Vestry Room and Steeple and making good other Deficiencies of that Church"<sup>62</sup> Walker's design for St. Peter's tower is significant as he was an important early-eighteenth century master builder who provided designs and supervised work on major public buildings and country homes in Tidewater Virginia. William Walker and his brother Robert, a joiner, were both Scottish immigrants who moved to Virginia by 1730 and 1743, respectively. The connections between the Walker brothers and the most affluent families in the state meant their influence on subsequent architecture and furniture would be significant. Their rapid rise in stature has been described as "nearly unprecedented" and continued for the better part of five decades. The Carter family, whose members were among "the greatest patrons of architecture in colonial Virginia," was a regular patron of the brothers.<sup>63</sup> William Walker's first great success came through work on Stratford, Thomas Lee's great house in 1739-40. While there is no documentation that he was the designer of this important house, the job brought him valuable social contacts among wealthy Virginians. In 1739, he secured the contract to build a brick glebe house (parsonage) for St. Paul's Parish in Hanover County. Other documented work included several wooden bridges and two wood prisons. In 1747, he completed "Cleve," a brick house on the Rappahannock River for Landon Carter's brother Charles, and another brick house for John Mercer in Marlborough (neither still standing). The contract to rebuild the burned capitol in Williamsburg, awarded in March 1749, underscored his importance. Unfortunately, Walker died in February 1750. The tower and vestry room addition to St. Peter's is the only surviving documented work by William Walker.<sup>64</sup>

The "Vestry Room and Steeple" commission of Walker in 1740 is unusual. Vestry rooms were typically located in separate structures rather than a tower.<sup>65</sup> Walker was also commissioned to make good "other Deficiencies" of the church, but these were not specified.<sup>66</sup> His tower for St. Peter's is not only the church's defining characteristic, but the first in a series of public building projects completed by a man whose

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<sup>61</sup> Carl Lounsbury, "Anglican Church Design in the Chesapeake," *Constructing Image, Identity, and Place: Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, vol. 9 (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2005), 25.

<sup>62</sup> Chamberlayne, *Vestry Book*, 68, 261.

<sup>63</sup> Robert A. Leath, "Robert and William Walker and the 'Ne Plus Ultra': Scottish Design and Colonial Virginia Furniture, 1730-1775," *American Furniture* (2006): 56, 64.

<sup>64</sup> Carl R. Lounsbury, *The Courthouses of Early Virginia: An Architectural History* (Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 2005), 210-215.

<sup>65</sup> Upton, *Holy Things and Profane*, 203.

<sup>66</sup> Chamberlayne, *Vestry Book*, 261.

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architectural prolificacy associates him with some of the young nation's foremost families.<sup>67</sup> His dominance was not accidental or serendipitous, as architecture "was a large and highly organized business" as well as "a well-staffed one."<sup>68</sup> As completed in 1741, St. Peter's Parish Church, with a tower that has been described as "Baroque," was an exceptional building in the American landscape, and remains an important touchstone to understanding the development and flowering of architecture in colonial America.

**St. Peter's in Context: Comparisons with Colonial Churches**

St. Peter's Parish Church is a nationally significant example of colonial church architecture. Extant buildings of the documented age of St. Peter's Parish Church are so few in number that its survival alone is exceptional and worthy of consideration; however, its contributions to understanding the nation's history run deeper than age. It stands conspicuously in a literal and figurative landscape by demonstrating, in form and detail, the increasing architectural ambitions and sophistication of colonial Americans. The artisan mannerist characteristics present in the 1701-03 portion of the church and the features of the "Baroque" tower indicate a desire to imbue the building with meaning beyond functional needs. The general form of St. Peter's with its appended tower places the church within a group composed mainly of large and prosperous Anglican churches of colonial port towns and cities, many of which also had their towers added later. Still, the earlier and architecturally transitional rural parish church and its ambitious tower cannot be usefully compared except in passing to these much larger Georgian churches, and their urban contexts, including such NHLs as: Bruton Parish Church, Williamsburg, Virginia (1713-15; enlarged 1752; tower 1769; NHL, 1971); Old North Church, Boston, Massachusetts (1723; NHL, 1961); Trinity Church, Newport, Rhode Island (1725-26; enlarged in 1762-63; tower enlarged in 1767-68; NHL, 1968); Christ Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (1727-34, 1739-44; tower 1751-54; NHL, 1970); King's Chapel, Boston, Massachusetts (1749-54; portico 1785-87; tower never completed); St. Michael's Episcopal Church, Charleston, South Carolina (1752-61; NHL, 1960); and St. Paul's Chapel, New York, New York (1764-66; tower 1794-96; NHL, 1960).

The church's longitudinal emphasis is also distinctive as a large number of American colonists were Protestant dissenters of varying types who built churches and meeting houses having more boxy and centralized "auditory plans," which functionally favored the sermon and preaching over the liturgy and ceremony. Notable examples of early colonial religious buildings having auditory or non-liturgical plans include: the Old Ship Meetinghouse, Hingham, Massachusetts (1681; NHL, 1960); Third Haven Friends Meeting House, Talbot County, Maryland, 1681-84; and Merion Friends Meeting House (ca. 1695-1714; NHL, 1999). Many Anglican churches also showed the transatlantic impact of Christopher Wren's post-1666 "auditory" or "room" churches having "little or no spatial division between body or nave and chancel or altar place" to promote high visibility and greater ability to hear the sermon.<sup>69</sup>

Like the Chesapeake, the South Carolina Lowcountry has a rich history of rural parish churches and chapels of ease serving large geographic districts once home to massive plantations. A number of these have been designated as NHLs. While St. Peter's and St. James Goose Creek in Berkeley, South Carolina (1713-19; NHL, 1970) are stylistically distinct, the latter being one of America's earliest Georgian churches, their size, rural location, and effort at making an architectural statement are similar. Two later examples, St. James Santee Parish Church, Charleston (1768; NHL, 1970) and St. Stephen's Church in Berkeley (1767-69), have similar historical contexts and scales, however like St. James Goose Creek, both are unambiguously Georgian designs, although the latter does have dominant-shaped "Jacobean" gables that recall the one at St. Peter's.

<sup>67</sup> Upton, *Holy Things and Profane*, 24; Leath, "Robert and William Walker and the 'Ne Plus Ultra'," 58.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>69</sup> Lounsbury, "Anglican Church Design in the Chesapeake," 32.



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Outside Anglo traditions and settlement in America there are two other churches of comparable age worth noting as comparisons, while also generally acknowledging the survival of Spanish mission churches dating from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in the Southwest. Although constructed after the colony of New Sweden had been politically absorbed first into New Netherland (1655) and then into the English colonies (1664), the churches of Gloria Dei in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (1697-1700), and Holy Trinity in Wilmington, Delaware (1698-99; NHL, 1961) attest to the survival of Swedish culture in the area. Both buildings have an array of stock Georgian details and their most interesting characteristics are their overall forms, which feature rather steep and somewhat complex rooflines taking in a variety of extensions, porches, and bays.

St. Peter's Church stands out among a variety of colonial survivors, some of which also warrant closer attention and comparison to better understand its significance within eighteenth-century church design and the overall development of high-style architecture in colonial America.

The Newport Parish Church (St. Luke's Smithfield) in Isle of Wight County, Virginia (ca. 1682; NHL, 1960) is St. Peter's nearest comparative in form, although the interpretation of its form as a carryover of medieval traditions is somewhat distinct from St. Peter's. St. Luke's "represents the transfer of some elements of English medieval church design to the New World."<sup>70</sup> These include, but are not limited to, lancet windows, rectilinear or "crow-step" gables, and buttresses, while the Flemish bond brick construction suggests more advanced architectural trends.<sup>71</sup> St. Luke's presents an important example of the American translation of European artisan mannerist style; however, it is the interpretation of these designs within the context of a structure such as St. Peter's that illustrates a more varied dialogue between continent and colony. St. Luke's also suffered extensive deterioration in the late nineteenth century. As noted, in 1887, after long years of disuse, the roof fell in and part of the walls collapsed. Reconstruction work, including the stained glass windows, was completed in 1897, at which point Gothic arches were constructed for the windows. They were returned to their original round arched configuration during the restoration in 1950-57.

An important contemporary to St. Peter's Church is Yeocomico Church (Cople Parish) in Westmorland County, Virginia (1706; NHL, 1970). This parish church, as originally completed in 1706, was similar in size to St. Peter's before the tower. Enlarged with a north wing in 1730, Yeocomico has an unusual T-shaped plan. As at St. Peter's, the interior has also been extensively "restored."<sup>72</sup> Yeocomico is another important variation of artisan mannerist brickwork with combinations of English and Flemish bonds. Perhaps its most distinctive feature is the entrance portico with its gauged brick arches. Yeocomico also retains much of its rural setting with its brick churchyard wall. Dell Upton compares St. Peter's with Yeocomico Church, in Westmoreland County, stating: "Here, in a church begun while St. Peter's was being built, the process of change is already visible" in the lack of exterior ornamentation.<sup>73</sup> Upton notes, "Beginning early in the eighteenth century, the massive appearance and decorative features of the exterior of the early churches were stripped down."<sup>74</sup>

Historian Carl Lounsbury has documented the evolution of the brick masonry construction during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the Chesapeake region in which the bold use of brick ornamental details that characterized the artisan mannerist style gave way to a more restrained Georgian style. "Brick bonding became more regular and mortar joints ranging from 3/8- to 1/2 inch thickness became standard. English bond remained the most common method of laying interior face bricks and retained a degree of acceptance for plinths

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<sup>70</sup> Wilson, *Buildings of Virginia*, 471. St. Luke's has been dated through dendrochronology to post-1677.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Historic American Building Survey (HABS) Project Number VA-268; Wilson, *Buildings of Virginia*, 334-335.

<sup>73</sup> Upton, *Holy Things and Profane*, 65, 69.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 65.

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through the end of the eighteenth century. However, it went out of fashion as a finish bond for the principal facades. As in England and other American colonies, Flemish bond became the predominant pattern for exterior walls, foundations, and chimneys by the early eighteenth century.”<sup>75</sup>

Christ Church, Lancaster County, Virginia, is arguably the most intact early-eighteenth century church in the Chesapeake and is an exemplar of the “neat and plain” design typical of many Georgian churches following St. Peter’s and Yeocomico. This building features a cruciform plan with a steep pavilion roof and tall round arch windows. The walls are Flemish bond with glazed headers, while the central entrance is framed by pilasters supporting a segmental arch pediment. Christ Church was financed by the prominent and extremely wealthy Carter family, conditions that allowed the quick design and construction of an elegantly restrained Georgian building whose scale, rather than ornamentation or tower, creates its dominant presence in the rural landscape.

Other surviving eighteenth-century churches in the Tidewater and Piedmont region that post-date St. Peter’s and illustrate this change include Merchant’s Hope Episcopal Church of 1743, located in Prince George County, and St. John’s Episcopal Church in Richmond, dating from 1741.<sup>76</sup> Merchant’s Hope features minimal decoration and round-arched windows with glazed headers. St. John’s is similarly sparse in terms of detail, and its tower has less imposing proportions than St. Peter’s in relation to the main structure. This marked shift to a more austere style of building is an interesting one, and St. Peter’s rests precisely on the cusp of this change. Because it was built from 1701-1703, the main body of the church was constructed before stylistic fashions reflecting the ornamental brickwork, commonly associated with Georgian architecture, were prevalent. Once this occurred, pared-down architecture, thus stripped of Dutch, Italian, and French elements, became popular in the United Kingdom. The colonists were not far behind in embracing this trend, and the evolution of the Virginia church reflects it with almost striking clarity. As St. Peter’s was built in two phases, it exists as a kind of time capsule of architectural styles that happened to vary greatly over the period of its construction.

In terms of the interior plans, Virginia Anglican churches in the late seventeenth and into the early eighteenth century represent a unique aspect of religious architecture in the colonies. While the category of “colonial church architecture” tends to imply that development was relatively uniform over time (at least in general areas referred to as “the Chesapeake,” “the South,” or “the mid-Atlantic”), this was not the case at all, at least not when considering Virginia.

Virginia, as the oldest colony, also had the most longstanding and established Anglican presence, whose “heritage grew out of an earlier period when the Church of England’s architectural and liturgical ideas were shaped by an attempt to reconcile Protestant theology with buildings erected for pre-Reformed worship.”<sup>77</sup> From the second half of the seventeenth century, churches had been built continuously in small, rural parishes. These churches adhered to a plan that suited their size and their purposes, and “favored an Anglican church form that had developed in England by the first decades of the seventeenth century” and lasted “from first settlement through the end of the colonial period.”<sup>78</sup> By contrast, the Anglican Church was not established in Maryland until the 1690s, after the Act of Assembly.<sup>79</sup> By then, cosmopolitan architectural forms and planning had changed in London; this was reflected in the popular building forms seen in Maryland shortly thereafter.

Virginia was by no means static in its stylistic development, but the basic plan did not change: the long nave could be lengthened to accommodate larger congregations, or wings might even be added to the sides, but these

<sup>75</sup> Carl Lounsbury, “Brickwork,” (unpublished chapter of book manuscript) provided to NPS February 15, 2011, 18.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 467, 478.

<sup>77</sup> Lounsbury, “Anglican Church Design in the Chesapeake,” 23.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

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essentially narrow dimensions with the symbolic separation of nave and chancel would not deviate significantly from their seventeenth century precedent.<sup>80</sup> However, as seen in St. Peter's, the main entrance was moved from the south wall to the west façade in Virginia, and chancel screens were mostly removed by 1720.<sup>81</sup> In addition, decorative changes were made, as can be seen in the brick glazing patterns on St. Peter's, as well as in the relatively elaborate gables. These variations represent the way in which Virginians were willing to adapt their designs to be "consonant with the status and ambitions of its chief parishioners," but their "inherent conservatism" kept them from straying from the plan that continued to suit their purposes very well.<sup>82</sup>

**Conclusion**

St. Peter's thus presents a rare juxtaposition of various stylistic elements at a pivotal time in early colonial American church architecture. As a result of its remarkable features, it has been characterized as "late Gothic, transitional to classical, Jacobean, and baroque." The tower and gables do display some characteristics of Dutch Baroque architecture, but with a more rigid geometry that foreshadows a stricter version of European grandeur. Richard Guy Wilson describes St. Peter's as "one of the most celebrated and interpreted churches in Virginia," and as giving "a sense of the opulence Virginia's colonial elite strove to attain." As the foregoing descriptions suggest, St. Peter's is open to various interpretations for stylistic sources, and this reflects its unusual transitional design that supports the fact that it is a wholly unique surviving fixture in the firmament of American colonial architecture.

As a reflection of colonial America's nascent desires for unique architectural forms as well as their aspiration to emulate the styles of their aristocratic contemporaries abroad, St. Peter's possesses a virtually unseen combination of attributes that dictate its place in the foundations of the canon of American architecture. In addition, it reveals the transient quality of early eighteenth century British and colonial American architecture at a time when tastes were changing in both England and America. One could argue that no other single, standing building in the United States more aptly serves as visual testimony to this ephemeral era. It therefore can be strongly suggested that a site and structure so tightly woven into the fabric of our nation's history merits the honor of being designated a National Historic Landmark.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 23, 32.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☐ Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

☒ Previously Listed in the National Register. NR# 69000263, Listed 10/01/69

☐ Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.

☐ Designated a National Historic Landmark.

☒ Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: # HABS VA-127

☐ 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): Archives at St. Peter's Episcopal Church, New Kent

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

Acreage of Property: Approximately 7.5 acres

UTM References:      **Zone   Easting   Northing**  
                             18      318290   4156600

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**Verbal Boundary Description:**

The parcel of land owned by St. Peter's Church is rectilinear but not uniform in shape; it extends from St. Peter's Lane in a northeast direction behind the church, and then east towards the parish house. To the south, the boundary runs along St. Peter's Lane itself before squaring off the property at the most westward point. The earliest recorded deed reference dates to July 1886 and includes scale drawings in Book 4, pages 103-105, New Kent County.

**Boundary Justification:**

Originally one acre bought from Thomas Jackson in 1703, the property was expanded in 1738 with the purchase of additional land from Thomas Jackson's grandson. The nominated property consists of this historic church parcel with the church buildings and its woodland setting.

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**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

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DESIGNATED A NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK  
March 2, 2012