



**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/religious struture

FUNERARY/cemetery

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

FUNERARY/cemetery

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

N/A

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation N/A

walls N/A

roof N/A

other N/A

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

**SUMMARY DESCRIPTION**

Court records for the 1/2-acre site are extant which refer to the construction of a meetinghouse between 1766 and 1770 and its rebuilding in 1785 which, with subsequent modifications, stood until 1902. Archaeological test excavations have revealed intact foundations and other subsurface cultural features related to architectural changes and use of the meetinghouse. Grave markers and several ground depressions also provide evidence of mortuary remains. For the purposes of this nomination, the church foundations and related cemetery are considered as one contributing site. Archaeological deposits associated with the site are in an excellent state of preservation.

**BACKGROUND**

Commonly known as the Old Stone Church due to the use of field stone in its construction, the Methodist meetinghouse which formerly stood on this site was the first ecclesiastical structure [REDACTED] and provided a place of worship for the Methodist community of Loudoun County from the last quarter of the 18th century to the beginning of the 20th century. Located on the western half of the 100 block of Cornwall Street, the 1/2-acre site is presently maintained by the Virginia Conference Historical Society of the United Methodist Church (Photo 1).

Surface indications of the church site include an exposed brickway on the east side that leads to double entrances (Photo 2). [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Former corners of the meetinghouse are delineated by stone markers, placed after their discovery by archaeological test excavations in 1965. To the immediate north of the site are approximately thirty gravestones, the earliest dated to 1777. At least two stone markers, located to the immediate south of the meetinghouse site, are believed to identify interment ; it is probable that the site contains additional unmarked burials.

At least two different structures occupied the site from about 1770 to 1902 as further documented in Section 8. The lot was first conveyed to

### 8. Statement of Significance

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

nationally  statewide  locally

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D

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

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)  
ARCHAEOLOGY: Historic - non-aboriginal

Period of Significance  
1766-1902

Significant Dates  
1785

RELIGION

Cultural Affiliation  
Historic Euro-American

Significant Person  
N/A

Architect/Builder  
N/A

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

#### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Old Stone Church Archaeological Site (44LD376) is the earliest historic archaeological site yet identified within the historic boundaries of Loudoun County. Together with other colonial period places of worship, it is an important legacy of Virginia's colonial civilization. The Old Stone Church, constructed between 1766 and 1770, is the oldest site associated with Methodist worship in Virginia, and one of the first in the nation. Its deed, recorded on 11 May 1766, represents the first acquisition of property for a Methodist Church in the United States.

The surviving assemblage of colonial ecclesiastical architecture in Virginia primarily consists of Anglican churches, with only a handful representative of dissenting Quaker, Presbyterian, and Lutheran congregations. The disestablishment of the Anglican Church was preceded by the rise of other religious denominations employing a range of architectural idioms. Archaeological excavations at the Old Stone Church Archaeological Site would yield additional architectural and artifactual data helpful in understanding the early life of a dissident community during a critical period of social change. Moreover, the site was continuously used as a place for worship from about 1766 to 1902, and contains archaeological data to further our understanding of adaptive changes made by the community over time.



#### JUSTIFICATION OF CRITERIA

The Old Stone Church Archaeological Site, in Leesburg, is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and

See continuation sheet

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67)  
has been requested  
 previously listed in the National Register  
 previously determined eligible by the National Register  
 designated a National Historic Landmark  
 recorded by Historic American Buildings  
Survey # \_\_\_\_\_  
 recorded by Historic American Engineering  
Record # \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

State historic preservation office  
 Other State agency  
 Federal agency  
 Local government  
 University  
 Other

Specify repository:

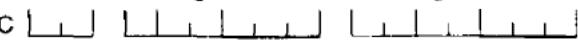
VA Division of Historic Landmarks  
221 Governor Street

## 10. Geographical Data

Richmond, VA 23219

Acreage of property approximately 1/2 acre

UTM References

A   
Zone \_\_\_\_\_ Easting \_\_\_\_\_ Northing \_\_\_\_\_  
C   
Zone \_\_\_\_\_ Easting \_\_\_\_\_ Northing \_\_\_\_\_

B   
Zone \_\_\_\_\_ Easting \_\_\_\_\_ Northing \_\_\_\_\_  
D   
Zone \_\_\_\_\_ Easting \_\_\_\_\_ Northing \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

### Verbal Boundary Description

The property nominated is the west 100 feet of the 100 block of Cornwall Street, bounded by North Street to the north, an iron fence to the east, Cornwall Street to the south, and Liberty Street to the west.

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### Boundary Justification

The boundaries for the property nominated are restricted to the parcel that has been historically associated with the property and within which archaeological remains have been identified.

See continuation sheet

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title herbert G. Fisher, Archaeologist; John Salmon, Historian  
organization VA Division of Historic Landmarks date March 1988  
street & number 221 Governor Street telephone (804)786-3143  
city or town Richmond state VA zip code 23219

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Robert Hamilton, a Methodist convert, according to a deed recorded on 11 May 1766. This deed specified that the land could be used only for a church or meetinghouse and graveyard. Two other documents, one dated 1768 and the other 1774, suggest that the first meetinghouse already had been erected. Between 1785 and 1790, a second church was constructed on the site of the original meetinghouse. This building, of which two photographs exist, had its south wall extended approximately 2' about 1802. The church was later modified with the addition of a pulpit recess along the west wall.

A photograph of the church taken about 1892 depicts a two-story stone structure within which is one stone inscribed with the date 1785. The east facade contains two single door entrances, one in each corner and separated by a sash window. Three additional windows are seen on the second story on the east side, while the south facade had five window bays on both stories. The interior of the church was described as "bare and unadorned, with the pulpit towering above the plain benches on which the congregation sat."<sup>1</sup> These benches were later replaced by pews to accommodate families. The pulpit, the only part of the church constructed of brick, was contained in a recess on the west side.

Archaeological test excavations were conducted at the site by B. Bruce Powell in 1965 to find the exact placement of the two former meetinghouses.<sup>2</sup> One test, placed within the southwest quadrant of the site located two rubble filled foundations running east-west, side by side and 1.2' apart. Powell interpreted the innermost foundation at the southwest corner as the remains of the pre-1785 church and the outermost corner as being that of the post-1785 church.

Further archaeological testing located additional foundation corners of the first meetinghouse. The original structure was 47' x 31.5' wide. The foundation footing uncovered was 2' in thickness suggesting a two story structure with stone walls about 1.5' thick. Also revealed were the measurements of the post-1785 church, being 55.5' long x 36.5' wide. An appendage to the west wall, 7' x 16' in size and believed to have been the remains of the pulpit, also was identified. The north and east foundation walls are believed to have been common to both structures.

A total of nine test trenches were excavated, uncovering an estimated fifteen percent of the structural remains of the meetinghouse (Figure 1). Testing determined that the original grade during the late 18th century was 1.4' below the present surface (Figure 2). The pattern of fill indicates that the meetinghouse was situated on a more prominent knoll than is apparent today.

Archaeological testing near the surface uncovered brick pavement and two doorstones associated with the two separate east side entrances. These

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features are believed to date from the 1785 construction. They have been covered and are incorporated into a modern brick walkway which surrounds the meetinghouse foundations and forms part of the visual interpretation of the site.

Further archaeological testing is expected to yield additional information concerning the architecture and use of the Old Stone Church which was not answered by Powell's 1965 test excavations. The rear pulpit feature was only minimally explored and no date for its construction was established archaeologically. No chimney or fireplace remains were discovered. In addition, the quantity of cut nails discovered suggests the former presence of other dependencies within the meetinghouse yard; however, none have yet been found.

There are over fifty grave markers and depressions suggesting burials within the 1/2-acre yard. Curiously, the placement of these interments do not fall into planned rows but rather appear to be randomly placed. Burials are found to the south, west, and north of the meetinghouse site. The majority appear to cluster very closely to the north side of the church even though there is more open available space further north within the yard (Photo 3). Such open space may mark the location of additional structures associated with the Old Stone Church. Although this area has not been investigated archaeologically, it is likely to be of significance for studies on religious beliefs as related to mortuary practices as well as landscape use in an ecclesiastical setting.

The artifact assemblages recovered in the 1965 test excavations consist primarily of post-1800 building hardware and structural-related material including nails, window glass, and mortar fragments. Of significance is the presence of artifacts traditionally associated with domestic occupation. This includes animal bone, oyster shell, a variety of ceramic vessels ranging from porcelain to redware, wine bottle glass, sherds from a wine goblet, a glass marble, and a tobacco tin lid.

Currently, the Old Stone Church Archaeological Site occupies a well-groomed yard open for public visitation and protected by the Methodist Church. The original doorstone sills and the brick pathway leading to them are exposed. The foundations uncovered during the 1965 test excavations have been reburied and covered with sod. They are surrounded by a modern brick walk. Limited site disturbance occurred during the 1930s when some of the remaining building stones were removed to build a nearby wall. Other than the 1965 test excavations, no further disturbances of the site have taken place. As documented by these excavations, the site is in an excellent state of preservation.

HGF

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**ENDNOTES**

1. Arthur S. Jenkins, History of Methodism in Leesburg (Leesburg Methodist Church, 1952), 1.
2. B. Bruce Powell, Archeology of the Old Stone Church, Leesburg, Virginia, October 4-8, 1965 (Unpublished manuscript, 1965).

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D. It is eligible under Criterion A because of its association with the establishment and development of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States. Under Criterion D the site is eligible because it is likely to yield significant archaeological data concerning church architecture and lifeways in colonial and antebellum Virginia.

BACKGROUND

During the mid-18th century the Virginia Piedmont experienced a rapid influx of settlers, fed both by the western movement of the younger sons of Tidewater planters and the southern movement of Germans and Ulster Scots from Pennsylvania. Because of this dual migration into central and western Virginia, a social pattern of ethnic and religious diversity emerged that set the western regions apart from the Tidewater.

Leesburg began as a crossroads settlement and stopping place in the western section of Fairfax County during this early phase of trans-piedmont movement. In 1758, Leesburg (then called Georgetown) was chartered within newly formed Loudoun County. The county became a haven for religious dissenters, including Quakers, New Lights, Presbyterians, and Anabaptists; over half of Leesburg's first lot owners were dissenters. In 1749 the Reverend Charles Green, Rector of Truro Parish, which then included both Fairfax and Loudoun counties, noted the large number of dissenters within the western reaches of his parish.<sup>1</sup> On 11 May 1766 Colonel Nicholas Minor, on whose property Leesburg had been built, conveyed lot 50 at West and Cornwall streets to Robert Hamilton. The deed provided that "he the said Robert Hamilton, his heirs and assigns shall and will dispose of the lot, to no other use but for a church or meeting house and grave Yard."<sup>2</sup> On 28 September 1768 the deed was examined and delivered to members of the Methodist Society. A road petition to the county court dated 3 September 1768<sup>3</sup> asked that a road be laid out "running past the Methodist Meeting House," thereby indicating that a place of worship had been built by then.

The oldest headstone still standing in the graveyard is dated 1777. It marks the burial site of Wright Brickell, one of the first Methodist book stewards in America--the forerunner of the modern Methodist publishing empire. The Sixth American Conference of Methodists (the first in Virginia) met at the church site on 19 May 1778.<sup>4</sup> A photograph taken of the east entrance to the church about 1892 shows a two-story stone structure with a date stone inscribed "1785."<sup>5</sup> In 1883 the church building was described by Hardesty:

The first house of worship owned by the Methodist society of Leesburg was a small stone church, built prior to 1780, and for a number of years, the only place of worship in the town. The

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substantial stone building which they now own and occupy was built in 1790, and its foundations enclose those of the first church, which being small and constructed out of soft stone was taken down. The location of the pulpit remains unchanged; in the interior of the building some slight changes have taken place, but no addition has been made enlarging it, excepting the pulpit recess.

In 1851 Joseph Hilliard, an early member of the congregation, described a church building constructed in 1802

on part of the foundation of the Old Church, and I think covers the whole of the old foundation. It is a larger building than the old one, and [I] had many a time for years been at meeting in the old church before it was pulled down.

One possible explanation for the inconsistency in the date of construction for the second church is that the enlarging of the brick pulpit recess that formerly stood on the western side of the church may have occurred about 1802, making Hilliard believe that it represented a new building. Also, Hilliard was still a child in 1802 and in 1851 was relying on his memory of events that had taken place half a century earlier.

In the 1840s the bitter and divisive national argument over the issue of slavery was exemplified by the division that occurred within the Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1844, at a general conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in New York City, the delegates from the slaveholding states seceded from the main body and formed the Methodist Episcopal Church South. Each group agreed not to raid the other's congregations. Those churches in Virginia that continued in the Methodist Episcopal Church remained a part of the Baltimore Conference, while those that joined the Methodist Episcopal Church South became part of the Virginia Conference. The Old Stone Church congregation remained with the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Baltimore Conference.

Shortly after the conference, however, some members of the Old Stone Church seceded from the congregation and adhered to the Methodist Episcopal Church South. In October 1849 they filed a suit in the Superior Court of Law and Chancery to obtain custody of the old church. The court issued a temporary ruling that, until the issue could be settled, the two groups must use the building alternately, and appointed trustees to carry out its order. During its spring session in 1852, however, the court handed down a final decree awarding sole use of the

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church to the Methodist Episcopal Church congregation because it had original custody of the structure. The old trustees resigned, new ones were appointed, and the court continued the alternate use scheme until 1 September 1852, probably to allow the seceding members enough time to find other quarters.

By 5 January 1854 a new church had been built, on Market Street for the members of the Methodist Episcopal Church South. The members of the Methodist Episcopal Church continued to worship in the Old Stone Church.

Worship services were not always the staid occasions that old photographs and engravings might lead one to suppose. In 1843 the General Assembly of Virginia received a petition from various churchgoing inhabitants of Loudoun County complaining about disturbances created during their church services.

by hucksters trading in Cider, Beer, Cakes, Candy, etc. . . . So long as their traffic is permitted near places of worship . . . it is impossible to prevent the sale of ardent spirits at Meetings for worship, for it is secretly retailed under the cover of those other articles of traffic.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the plea of the churchgoers for a law against such practices, the General Assembly evidently decided in favor of free trade by rejecting the petition.

After the Civil War membership in the old church declined. Around the turn of the century a black congregation of Methodists sought to use the church. A suit was filed against the white trustees of the old church in chancery court to force a sale of the property. Although the court issued a decree in the plaintiff's favor on 24 October 1902 and ordered the church lot to be sold, it was with the following proviso: "that there shall not be erected therein any building to be used by colored people as a place of public worship."<sup>11</sup> The property soon was sold and the church was torn down. The proceeds from the sale, including salvaged building materials, were divided between the two congregations.<sup>12</sup>

The continuing phases of construction and expansion of the Old Stone Church from the mid-18th century through the 19th century mirrors the social changes taking place in the development of Methodism in America. Initially, Methodism was a reform movement within the established Anglican Church. While use was made of lay preachers, and chapels were constructed for meetings, reliance was still placed on clergymen ordained by an English bishop. Between 1785 and 1790 the American Methodist Church was formed in Philadelphia, establishing the church as a separate entity from the Anglican Church of England.

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The Old Stone Church site is a physical manifestation of this process of separation and establishment of a new religious movement. At first a simple meetinghouse was built, expressing a desire for reform but lacking any obvious ecclesiastical adornment that would represent a challenge to established religious authority. As the movement became formally separate from the Anglican Church, a new meetinghouse was constructed that reflected the establishment of the new faith. The church structure, however, remained humble in outward appearance, lacking spires, ornamental windows, and central entrance. By the first quarter of the 19th century, the church structure was enlarged in response to the growth of the congregation, and a pulpit and church pews were added as the congregation became more permanent. Separate entrances for men and women, however, were still maintained. The division of the congregation that occurred in the 1850s was the precursor of the more serious division that took place at the turn of the next century--a split between the white and black races that resulted in the church's destruction.

Despite the later, unhappy history of the Old Stone Church, its first years were significant ones for the establishment of Methodism in the United States. As a church historian pointed out,

It was here that the first deeded property was purchased by the Methodists: here the sixth American Conference (the first in Virginia) was held on May 19, 1778; here Captain Wright Brickell, one of the eight original Book Stewards of 1775 died and was buried; and it was to Leesburg that the first native-born Methodist Local Preacher, Richard Owings, came. Here he died on October 8, 1786,<sup>13</sup> and was buried in the Old Stone Church Cemetery.

Archaeological research on ecclesiastical sites in Virginia has been extremely limited, particularly in terms of defining through material culture and architectural remains distinctions existing between different religious communities and how such distinctions change over time. Key areas of particular significance for supplementing existing historical research include archaeological investigations on church architecture, ecclesiastical use of landscape, cultural lifeways as reflected at church sites, mortuary customs, and use of skeletal material from well-defined religious communities for studies in physical anthropology.

Archaeological test excavations have confirmed the presence of intact buried deposits relating to the construction of the first meetinghouse between 1766 and 1770, the second meetinghouse, built in 1785, and its subsequent expansion in 1802. Such testing, while clearly documenting

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the site's research potential, has been limited to only a minor portion of surviving foundation remains. Further archaeological research is expected to reveal additional architectural evidence on the evolution of this ecclesiastical structure over more than a century of use.

Enhancing the property's significance further is the excellent state of condition of the original lot on which Old Stone Church Archaeological Site is situated. Further archaeological examination of locations with open space, possibly containing the remains of additional structures, and graves in relation to identified church foundations should prove valuable for studies of ecclesiastical use of landscape within a developing town. Both structural and artifactual data gleaned from more intensive excavations at the site also should provide additional insight into the lifeways of this early religious dissenter group and changes occurring over time. Of particular significance is the use of such data for comparative studies with other religious communities in this region during the 18th and 19th centuries.

Finally, while no archaeological excavations of extant graves are planned, they nevertheless are a significant archaeological resource possessing research potential. Excavations elsewhere in Virginia from comparably dated sites have shown that the graves at the Old Stone Church site with their associated skeletons and funerary items are likely to be sufficiently well preserved to provide significant comparative cultural and biological data for studies on mortuary practices, demography, and paleopathology.

JSS/HGF

**ENDNOTES**

1. Harrison Williams, Legends of Loudoun: An Account of the History and Houses of a Border County of Virginia's Northern Neck (Richmond: Garrett and Massie, 1938), 1.
2. Loudoun County, Deed Book L, 1775-1778, pp. 451-453, recorded 10 June 1776, in Loudoun County Courthouse, Leesburg, Va.
3. Loose Papers, Case 3, in Loudoun County Courthouse, Leesburg, Va.
4. Harold H. Hughes, "First Virginia Conference--A Turning Point," in Virginia United Methodist Heritage (1978), vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 5-9.
5. Hardesty's Historical and Geographical Encyclopedia, Illustrated. . . Special Virginia Edition (New York, Richmond, et al.: H. H. Hardesty and Co., 1884), 277-278.
6. James Penn Pilkington, The Methodist Publishing House: A History (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968), 37-40.

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7. Loudoun County, Ended Chancery Cases, Head vs. Hough (M2069), 1852, deposition of Joseph Hilliard, 8 October 1851, in Loudoun County Courthouse, Leesburg, Va.
8. Ibid.
9. Mutual Assurance Society, reel 7, vol. 59, declaration 581A, in archives of DHL, Richmond, Va.
10. General Assembly, Records, Legislative Petitions, Loudoun County, 3 January 1843 (B1898-1899), in Archives Branch, Virginia State Library and Archives, Richmond, Va.
11. Loudoun County, Ended Chancery Cases, Norwood vs. Gaver (M4531), Final Decree, in Loudoun County Courthouse, Leesburg, Va.
12. Loudoun County, Deed Book 8C, p. 415, in Loudoun County Courthouse, Leesburg, Va.
13. Melvin L. Steadman, Jr., "Leesburg and Early Methodism," in Virginia United Methodist Heritage (1973), vol. 1, no. 1, p. 10.

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