

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only
received
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic ST. MICHAEL'S PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH, PARISH HOUSE AND RECTORY

and/or common ST. MICHAEL'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

2. Location

street & number Corner of Mill and Church Streets N/A not for publication

city, town Birdsboro N/A vicinity of congressional district 6

state Pennsylvania code 42 county Berks code 011

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	n/a in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	n/a being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name The Vestry of St. Michael's Church

street & number Mill and Church Streets

city, town Birdsboro N/A vicinity of state Pennsylvania 19508

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Office of the Recorder - The Berks County Courthouse

street & number Sixth and Court Streets

city, town Reading state Pennsylvania 19602

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Pennsylvania Inventory has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 5/28/81 federal state county local

depository for survey records Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission

city, town Harrisburg state Pennsylvania

7. Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

Check one

unaltered
 altered

Check one

original site
 moved date N/A

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

St. Michael's is the result of a complex series of building programs, that began in 1853 with the erection of a simple rectangular, brownstone gabled church. That building had a bell cote at the north entrance end, while narrow lancet windows added to the gothic character. In 1878, a gothic parish house was added, in the same rich brownstone, with a tall gable above the entrance, and again with slender lancet windows completing the gothic facade. This building sits at a 90° angle to the church, with its entrance facing the street, and creating a picturesque counter axis to the main building. At about the same time, a brownstone rectory was added next to the parish house. That house was also of the local brownstone, though in a random, crazy-quilt stone pattern that sets the church off as being more monumental.

In 1885, the church was extensively remodelled by architects Furness and Evans of Philadelphia. They added the east and west transepts, extended the chancel, and constructed the tall tower, belfry, and spire, in the corner between the organ transept and the gable. The result was a cruciform church in the high Episcopal style, with lancet windows along the nave, and clustered in triplets in the transept, as well as a major gothic window in the chancel. Massive corner buttresses add plasticity to the exterior, while smoothly cut copings mark major gable ends.

At the same time, Furness added a large wood "porte cochere," against the west transept, making that the principal entrance. Deep knee braces and shingled textures in the gable end gave this great character, and is reminiscent of the work which Furness was doing at the same time for the porte cochere of his father's church, the First Unitarian Church, in Philadelphia. Signed drawings for this work exist in the church archives. Similarly exuberant carpentry can be seen on the belfry, which is embellished by deeply cusped cross braces.

The interior of the church was completely reworked at the same time. New wood trusses were constructed spanning the nave in the middle of the nave bays. At the crossing, created by the new transept, the roof trusses were expressed and crisscross the center, before revealing the chancel, which returns to the narrow width of the nave.

The glory of the church is its original color scheme, which anticipated the work at the Unitarian Church in Philadelphia. The walls are wainscotted in vertically grooved wood. Above, bands of brown and silver lead to red rising wall surfaces. The bands of brown are ornamented with raised stenciling, and with passages of decoration made of thorns and sponge, in remembrance of the instruments of Christ's passion.

The trusses follow the same color scheme with red surfaces and gold borders. The ceiling is a brilliant blue with gold detail raised on the surface as on the lower walls. Original leaded glass by some of the major glassmakers of the day are also in place and intact.

The brownstone parish house of 1878 survives as constructed on the exterior, with its gothic portal, and handsome Victorian doors, intact. It was probably built by George Brooke the architect of the first church building. The interior has been updated, and serves as a major community room.

The brownstone rectory was remodeled by Furness in 1880s, presumably renovating an 1870s house. His work consisted of adding bays across the front, and an entrance bay with bathrooms above. He added a "palisade" cornice and wall dormers with deep knee braced brackets carrying the overhanging roofs. The interior details are stock with the exception of a handsome bookcase in the main front room which clearly shows the hand of Furness.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1853; 1885

Builder/Architect

1853 - George Brooke

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

1885 - Furness and Evans

The parish buildings of St. Michael's Episcopal Church of Birdsboro form an important group of buildings by one of the most important architects of the high Victorian era in Pennsylvania - Frank Furness. Unlike his other major ecclesiastical commissions, this is essentially intact with Rectory, Parish House, and Church, complete even down to the original decoration in the church. The exterior is important as a major church composition with countering axis, projecting masses, and picturesque skyline, enlivened by Furness original ornament, especially in the infilled X-braces of the belfry, the striking wood cornice and brackets of the rectory and the incised detail of the doors. They pale before the brilliance of the surviving color scheme of the church interior which is the only complete, original color scheme from his career. It is important both because it carries Ruskinian color into the 1880s, and for recalling his father's admonition to the American Institute of Architects, in 1872, when he argued that the church architect should make a building that would keep a parishioner awake, if the sermon was dull. That he nobly accomplished.

Equally important is the decorative scheme, in which Furness literally used the real sponge and thorns of the passion. In so doing, he literally interprets Ruskinian architectural theory, that called for the use of real materials, rather than fictive representations.

The church represents a major complex of buildings by Furness at the height of his career, when he was moving toward direct expression of material and construction as the constituent elements of his designs. It thus parallels the First Unitarian Church, and the major small railroad stations - including the building which he designed in Birdsboro, and which probably first brought him to the community. It is noteworthy that no elements of Richardson's work appear indicating that this is from Furness' most original years, as is attested by the brilliance of the interior color scheme, and the decoration. Despite the fact that Furness added to and redesigned the existing church buildings, in its current appearance St. Michael's can be regarded as his work.

Of the earlier architect, George Brooke, little is known, apart from his obvious connection to the Brooke family of Birdsboro. That family donated the original church building, and provided many of the memorial windows, and supported the church for much of its history. They are of additional note as owners of the Birdsboro Iron Foundry, which remains the principal industry of the community. That also accounts for the innovative use of iron railroad tracks to carry the spanning joists of the parish house. The church, therefore, represents the connection between the railroads, the iron industry, and the generating urban centers of architectural ideas in Pennsylvania.

9. Major Bibliographical References

1. Daniel K. Miller, The History of St. Michael's P. E. Church, 1851-1951, Birdsboro, 1951.
2. James F. O'Gorman, George E. Thomas, Hyman Miller, The Architecture of Frank Furness, Philadelphia, 1973.
3. Drawings, in church files
4. "St. Michael's Parish Profile," Birdsboro, 1981

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 3/4 Acre

Quadrangle name Birdsboro

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UMT References

A

1	1	8
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4	3	1	3	5	0
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4	1	4	5	1	7	2	1	8	1	0
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B

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Zone Easting Northing

C

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D

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E

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F

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G

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H

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Verbal boundary description and justification

See continuation sheet

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

11. Form Prepared By

name/title George E. Thomas, Ph.D.

organization CLIO Group, Inc.

date April 8, 1982

street & number 3961 Baltimore Avenue

telephone (215)-386-6276

city or town Philadelphia

state Pennsylvania 19104

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title Larry E. Tise, State Historic Preservation Officer

date

For NPS use only

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

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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1. Daniel K. Miller, The History of St. Michael's P. E. Church, 1851-1951, Birdsboro, 1951.
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A	<u>118</u>	<u>431131510</u>	<u>41451721810</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing
C			
E			
G			

B			
	Zone	Easting	Northing
D			
F			
H			

Verbal boundary description and justification

See continuation sheet

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	<u>N/A</u>	code	<u>N/A</u>	county	<u>N/A</u>	code	<u>N/A</u>
state	<u>N/A</u>	code	<u>N/A</u>	county	<u>N/A</u>	code	<u>N/A</u>

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State Historic Preservation Officer signature

Larry E. Tise

title Larry E. Tise, State Historic Preservation Officer

date 10/29/02

For NPS use only

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

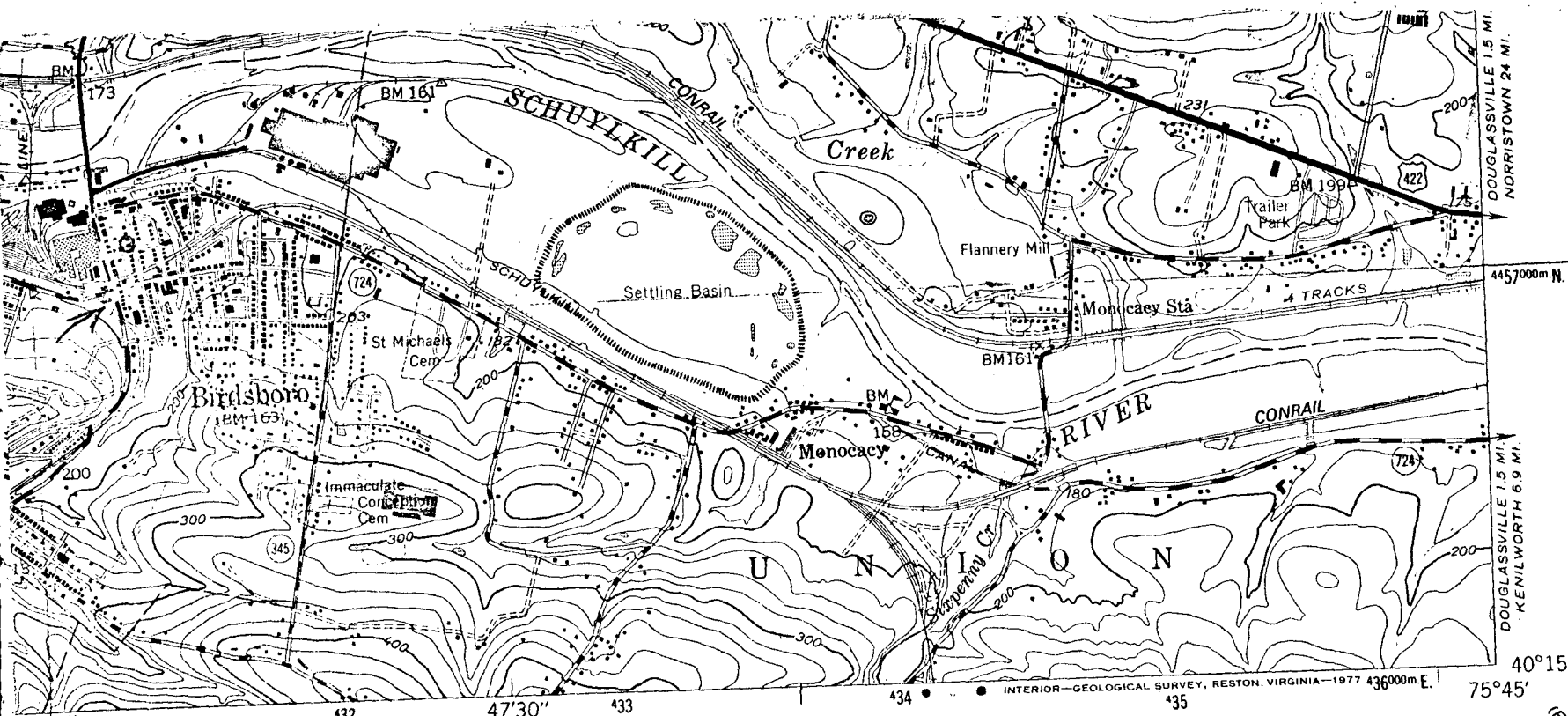
date

Keeper of the National Register

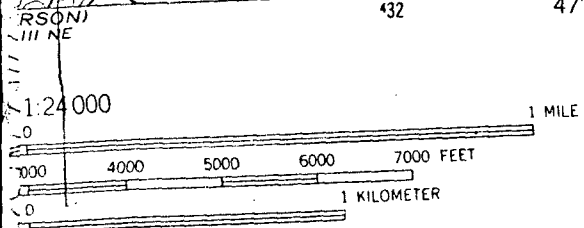
date

Attest:

Chief of Registration

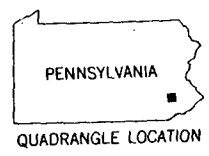


at
Birdsboro
260



VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929

NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
SURVEY, RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092
AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST



ROAD CLASSIFICATION

HARD-SURFACE ALL WEATHER ROADS		DRY WEATHER ROADS	
Heavy-duty	4 LANE 16 LANE	Improved dirt	=====
Medium-duty	4 LANE 16 LANE	Unimproved dirt	-----
Loose-surface, graded, or narrow hard-surface - - -			
U. S. Route		State Route	

BIRDSBORO, PA.

N4015-W7545/7.5

**ST. MICHAEL'S
CHURCH & MILL STREETS
BIRDSBORO, PA. 19508**

1947
PHOTOREVISED 1968 AND 1974
AMS 5864 IV SE-SERIES V831

(POTTSTOWN)
5864 I NW