

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: Pennsylvania	
COUNTY: Chester	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

1. NAME

COMMON:  
First Presbyterian Church of West Chester

AND/OR HISTORIC:

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:  
130 West Miner Street

CITY OR TOWN:  
West Chester

STATE Pennsylvania	CODE 42	COUNTY: Chester	CODE 029
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3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <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 (Specify) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Comments: One unit in a series of Walter buildings in town.

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:  
First Presbyterian Church

STREET AND NUMBER:  
130 West Miner Street

CITY OR TOWN:  
West Chester

STATE: Pennsylvania	CODE: 42
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5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:  
Chester County Court House

STREET AND NUMBER:  
High and Market Streets

CITY OR TOWN:  
West Chester

STATE: Pennsylvania	CODE: 42
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6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:  
Pennsylvania Register of Historic Sites and Landmarks

DATE OF SURVEY: 1970  
 Federal  State  County  Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:  
William Penn Memorial Museum

STREET AND NUMBER:  
Box 1026

CITY OR TOWN:  
Harrisburg

STATE: Pennsylvania	CODE: 42
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SEE INSTRUCTIONS

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ENTRY NUMBER	DATE
FOR NPS USE ONLY	

## 7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered		<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site	

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The First Presbyterian Church of West Chester was the first building designed by the noted architect, Thomas U. Walter, in the borough, when streets began to be laid out to the southwest. The church lot was one of the first to be issued for use on the tract bought for speculation by William Everhart in 1829. The church may well have been Walter's first commission.

The building committee, in a published address, described the proposed church in the following manner (July, 1832):

"WE have assembled to lay the corner stone of a Presbyterian Church. The plan of the house we propose to erect has been furnished by a competent architect who will superintend its execution, and whose efforts thus far, have inspired general confidence. The building is to be of stone, rough cast, 75 feet long by 45 feet wide, and 23 feet in height. It is calculated to seat 500 people on the ground floor; and galleries can hereafter be erected, to accommodate 300 more, if occasion should require. The foundation will be a few feet above the pavement; and a sufficient excavation has been made to admit of the construction of a basement story. The architecture is Grecian, in good taste, and there is to be a cupola, if our funds will admit, 73 feet in height from the ground."

There was no competitive bidding here, as with most commissions in Philadelphia buildings. No records are available to show how much Walter charged. It is unknown if plans of his work are still intact. It has been established that the cost of the building exceeded the estimate of \$5,000 and that the 73-foot cupola planned by the architect was never added. It is also known, from contemporary news items and from Reverend Washington Laird's History, that the church opened with an unfinished gallery, temporary steps, and unpainted pews.

The interior window enframements with their "squinched in" eared architraves, small friezes, and heavy cornices could be original. The outside proportions fit an early picture used in Laird's History. The windows were, and are, two squares in length (This shape was changed in the fourth quarter of the nineteenth century, when stained glass was installed).

In the ceiling are two iron rosettes set in a foliated design which meets in the center in a 6-pointed star. It is not known what type of chandeliers first hung from the ornaments, nor is it known what fuel was used.

The church is part of an urban, nineteenth-century setting. Its neighbors are brick houses which run the gamut from large

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(Continuation Sheet) #1

STATE	Pennsylvania	
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ENTRY NUMBER	DATE	

(Number all entries)

7. Description (continued)

townhouses with landscaped yards to row houses with small plots of grass. These buildings were constructed from the 1830's to about 1900. Two blocks from the church, on the same street, is a row of Greek Revival porticoed houses built by William Taylor in 1848. This group compares favorably with Philadelphia's Spruce Street Portico Row, although a different order is stressed.

In this neighborhood, with its emphasis on brick, the church stands out because of its stuccoed finish. The starkness of the stucco, and the solidity of the large but simplified classic features are further emphasized by the sparseness of trees and the wide expanse of new (1960's) cement sidewalk.

The entrance door is about 12 feet high, its verticality accentuated by its perpendicular division into two parts. The door and its enframements are in the Greek Revival tradition.

The pews of today, installed during the 1960's, replace locally made walnut pews which were installed in 1874. The new pews favor Georgian taste, as does the chancel area.

The south side of the sanctuary has seen changes at least three times. The gallery of the church was finished before 1850 and enlarged in 1871.

Four organs have been used in 140 years. The pipes of the last two have been important elements of design in the south section.

The facade of the church is an interesting version of five-part composition. A recessed porch of approximately one-half the width of the front is flanked by two projections handled simply on the front and sides with antae (pilasters).

Although Walter used very little trim in the facade, he did express a great sense of the power of light and shade in his composition. In the play of solids and void, with the void again broken by two solids (unfluted Ionic columns) there is a handsome rhythm of shadows. Crowning the whole facade is a low pediment with an inclined cornice larger than the horizontal.

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(Continuation Sheet) #2

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(Number all entries)

8. Statement of Significance (continued)

seems impossible that the Carmine Street building was sufficiently complete in time for Walter to have seen it and taken the idea to West Chester by 5 June 1832...

...In the Carmine Street building, the famous "Town Truss," or lattice truss, was used for the suspension of the ceiling. In West Chester, the ceiling of the church is supported by the more simple king post truss principle. Walter was an accomplished engineer as well as an architect, and faced with the problem of supporting a great flat ceiling above a large rectangular auditorium...it is remarkable that if he copied the Town and Davis plan, he did not also incorporate the lattice truss into the building.

...The use of the columnated-in-antis, recessed portico or loggia was, of course, nothing new in American architecture. However, this particular design had not been seen before in a church plan, and apparently the Carmine Street and West Chester churches were its first appearance in any American ecclesiastical architecture."

8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Columbian;       16th Century       18th Century       20th Century  
 15th Century       17th Century       19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1832

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |   |   |  |
|--|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal              | <input type="checkbox"/> Education              | <input type="checkbox"/> Political                      | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric             | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify)           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic                | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry               | <input type="checkbox"/> Science                        | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture             | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention              | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture                      | _____  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian            | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature             | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater                        | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce                | <input type="checkbox"/> Military               | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation                 | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications          | <input type="checkbox"/> Music                  |   |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation            |   |   |  |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The First Presbyterian Church of West Chester overall has a quiet dignity which speaks of an edifice built by Presbyterians in a Quaker town. Even with its additions and changes there is still a character about the church which reveals the time when it was erected. The 1832 building is not only the focal point of its own complex--which includes 1860 and 1955 additions--but it is also the inspiration of its neighborhood. Its further significance lies in the fact that it may have been Walter's first commission and also that it gave rise to a great Greek Revival spurt in the plans of West Chester.

G. Carroll Lindsay, in his 1955 Master's thesis, Athens on High Street, stresses further national significance:

"The plan for the building represents an innovation in American church design and its exact date is extremely important...The striking feature of the church was its recessed porch with two Ionic columns in antis, all placed between an enclosed area on either side...It has been supposed that the first use of this unique five-part composition (which was so much copied as to become a standard Greek Revival church facade) occurred in the West Presbyterian Church on Carmine Street, New York, designed by Town and Davis in 1831.

It would be easy to conclude that Walter merely copied the Town and Davis plan for his West Chester church. This theory would be entirely satisfactory were it not for the fact that the two churches were under construction at almost exactly the same time. Whether Walter copied the Town and Davis plan or discovered it independently cannot be decided without further research. If the West Chester church is but one of the countless copies of the Carmine Street building it certainly is the second such church plan in America. However, since the West Chester example is so closely contemporary to the New York church, it

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

In the files of the Chester County Historical Society:

letter of William Dillingham to David Townsend  
 newspaper clippings, under "First Presbyterian Church"  
 newspaper clippings, under "Miner Street"

Futhey, J. Smith, and Gilbert Cope, History of Chester County, Pennsylvania. Philadelphia: Louis Everts, 1881, p. 255.

(continued)

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	° ' "	° ' "		39 ° 57 ' 26 "	75 ° 36 ' 25 "	
NE	° ' "	° ' "				
SE	° ' "	° ' "				
SW	° ' "	° ' "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 85' x 175'

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

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE:  
 Pennsylvania Register of Historic Sites and Landmarks

ORGANIZATION: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission DATE: July, 1971

STREET AND NUMBER:  
 Box 1026

CITY OR TOWN: Harrisburg STATE: Pennsylvania CODE: 42

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National  State  Local

Name: William D. [Signature]  
 State Liaison Officer

Deputy Executive Director, Pa.  
 Historical and Museum Commission

Date: 5/18/72

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

[Signature]  
 Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

ATTEST: \_\_\_\_\_

[Signature]  
 Keeper of The National Register

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

SEE INSTRUCTIONS