

VLR-2/20/90 NRHP-1/24/91

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Massaponax Baptist Church

other names/site number Massaponax Church

2. Location

street & number US Route 1 and County Route 608

N/A not for publication

city, town Massaponax

X vicinity

state Virginia

code VA

county Spotsylvania

code 177

zip code 22401

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- X private
public-local
public-State
public-Federal

Category of Property

- X building(s)
district
site
structure
object

Number of Resources within Property

Table with 2 columns: Contributing, Noncontributing. Rows for buildings, sites, structures, objects, Total.

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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. See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official

Date

Director, Department of Historic Resources

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register. See continuation sheet.
determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.
determined not eligible for the National Register.
removed from the National Register.
other, (explain):

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Religious structure: church
Funerary: cemetery

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Religious structure: church
Funerary: cemetery

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Mid-19th Century: Classical Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick
walls Brick
roof Metal
other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

Massaponax Baptist Church, built in 1859, is located on approximately 3 1/2 acres in rural Spotsylvania County, Virginia. The property includes the mid-nineteenth-century church and its twentieth-century additions. It is a well-preserved representative of the use of the Classical Revival style in antebellum churches. The church itself is a simple, rectangular brick structure that measures 49' 6" x 40'. The main, or south, elevation has a pedimented gable end, three bays in width. The additions are also brick, rectangular structures with gable roofs, and both have two stories set on raised basements. There is one noncontributing site, a late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century graveyard that occupies a corner of the property, and one noncontributing structure, a modern metal toolshed located behind the church.

ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

Massaponax Church, a simple, Classical Revival-style, brick structure in rural Spotsylvania County, has changed little since it was finished in 1859. It has two large additions to its rear facade that do not affect the integrity of the church itself. The main elevation, which faces south, is three bays in width, with the entrance in the central bay. Two sixteen-over-sixteen, double-hung sash windows flank the entrance. Two steps lead to the double, four-panel doors, which are framed by simple architrave molding. There is an unornamented lintel above the door frame. A horizontal panel above the door reads "Massaponax Baptist Church." The gable end is defined by a pediment, which is supported by an incomplete Tuscan entablature. A half-round window in the pediment has been filled in and painted with the words "Founded 1788." The west, south, and east facades are all laid in stretcher bond, and the north facade, which is distinguished by an exterior end chimney, is laid in common bond. The roof is clad in standing-seam metal.

Both side elevations have three sixteen-over-sixteen, double-hung sash windows with simple, painted lintels and sills. At their southern corners, both facades have an entrance. The door from the

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)

ARCHITECTURE

ART: Photography

MILITARY

Period of Significance

1859-1864

Significant Dates

1864

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

Timothy O'Sullivan

Architect/Builder

N/A

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

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Massaponax Baptist Church, which is located in Spotsylvania County, was constructed in 1859. It was the second church building to be occupied by a congregation that was founded in 1788. On 21 May 1864 the church was the scene of a council of war held by Gen. Ulysses S. Grant and his commanders during their maneuvering toward Richmond after the Battle of Spotsylvania Court House. The conference was recorded on a series of wet-plate negatives exposed by one of the country's finest photographers, Timothy O'Sullivan. The photographs represent almost the only known instance of candid close-up photography during the war. Although conferences such as this occurred frequently, they were seldom witnessed by photographers. These images preserve an important part of the day-to-day functioning of the military during the war. O'Sullivan's achievement is the more remarkable considering the equipment and technology of his time. The church retains much of its integrity, including the pews occupied by the Union officers during the conference.

JUSTIFICATION OF CRITERIA

Massaponax Baptist Church is eligible for placement on the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A, B, and C. It is eligible under Criterion A because of its association with the Civil War and the evolution of the photographic process in the United States. Timothy O'Sullivan's presence at a council of war at Massaponax Church is an outstanding example of his tremendous contribution to documentary photography during the Civil War, justifying the church's eligibility under Criterion B. Under Criterion C the church is eligible because it is a well-preserved example of a mid-nineteenth-century rural church constructed in the Classical Revival style. It retains much of its integrity of place as well as of architecture.

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

Dunaway, Thomas Samford. An Historical Sketch of Massaponax Baptist Church of Spotsylvania County, Virginia. n.p., 1938.

Frassanito, William A. Grant and Lee: The Virginia Campaigns. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1983.

Morris, Howard. Personal interview. 3 October 1988.

Scott, Robert N. War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies. Series I. vol. XXXVI. part III correspondence, etc. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1891.

See continuation sheet

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 # _____

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
Richmond, VA 23219

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of property approximately three and one half acres

UTM References

A 18 28,011,70 4,230,03,0
 Zone Easting Northing

C

B
 Zone Easting Northing

D

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

"The following tract or parcel of land, commencing at two stumps north of Minor's Road and west of Minor's Road as pointer to the center of said road and corner to Alonzo White while thence N. 32 W 28 poles to Taylor's cor. thence S. [illegible] W. 18 2/5 poles to a stake corner to Anderson Ellis and in Taylor's line

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundaries have been drawn to include the church and graveyard on land historically associated with the Massaponax Church.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Bradley M. McDonald date 3/21/89
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 city or town York

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east elevation leads into the vestibule and that from the west leads into the sanctuary. Both doors have four panels and are surmounted by rectangular, three-light transoms.

The pews, which are painted except for the trim and the seats, are arranged in three sections that are separated by two aisles. Photographs taken at Massaponax Church during the Civil War indicate that these are the original pews. A balcony supported by Tuscan columns extends around the rear and sides of the nave. A paneled parapet around the balcony rests on an unornamented, two-step frieze. The ceiling is flat and is covered with stippled stucco. A rostrum leads to the recessed, barrel-vaulted apse, which contains three pews. Set within the apse is a baptism chamber, behind which is a painting of a view down a river. A bookcase wraps around the left corner of the altar, and a door at the right side leads to one of the later additions.

The two additions were built in the twentieth century, but they are not identical. The ridge lines of their roofs run perpendicular to that of the church, which is connected to the side of the larger, or east, addition. Both are rectangular structures of concrete block with brick veneer, and both have double entrance doors at their far gable ends. The smaller addition is one story on a raised basement with casement windows. The roof is more steeply pitched and lower than that of the other addition, to which it is connected. Both roofs are clad in composition shingle. The larger addition is two stories with double-hung windows, a more prominent cornice, and a metal fire escape. Both additions have central passage plans, with classrooms and offices to either side of their halls.

A noncontributing, modern metal toolshed stands behind the church. On the northwest corner of the property is a small, noncontributing graveyard with five late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century burials. Several large oak trees planted in the nineteenth century remain around the churchyard. Most of the lot is grassy and wooded except for two parking lots located on the southwest and southeast corners of the property.

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Massaponax Baptist Church was constructed in 1859 as the second church to be occupied by a congregation founded in 1788. The first church probably was a log structure located on the banks of Massaponax Creek, about three miles southeast of the present church.

The church constructed in 1859 is a well-preserved example of the Classical Revival style that was popular in antebellum rural churches. It retains many of its original features, including its pews. The church may be more important, however, for its association with the Civil War, and in particular with the use of a twenty-five-year-old invention--photography--during that war.

Documentary photography began to come of age in the United States during the Civil War. Although some photographs exist of American troops in the Mexican War (1846-1848), the Civil War was the first conflict on the continent in which the cumbersome camera, which was far better suited to making portraits, landscapes, and still lifes, was used to convey the sense of combat action to the American public. To accomplish that task the photograph produced by the camera offered a double illusion--an image of reality with the appearance of immediacy--that was not possible with other visual media such as engraving and painting.

In fact, the "action" almost always was posed and the "event" usually occurred hours, days, or weeks before the photographer exposed his film. Furthermore, the photograph usually was seen as an engraving in Harper's Weekly or some other newspaper or magazine. The photographer himself was limited in what he could produce by the size and awkwardness of the camera and other paraphernalia, as well as by the slow responsiveness of the wet plates that captured the scenes before him.

Despite the technical problems they confronted, however, the photographers of the Civil War produced a remarkable visual record of that struggle. They wrung the most they could from the technology available to them and overcame many of the constraints imposed by their equipment. One of the most impressive examples of their achievements are a series of photographs taken at Massaponax Baptist Church on 21 May 1864.

The photographer, Timothy O'Sullivan, is one of the outstanding photographers of the mid- to late nineteenth century, not only for his record of the Civil War but for his subsequent images of the American West. In May 1864 he was in the employ of Alexander Gardner, another excellent photographer of the period.

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On 21 May 1864 Grant halted his army at Massaponax Baptist Church for a council of war with General George Gordon Meade, the victor at Gettysburg in 1863. Soldiers carried pews from the church and arranged them in a circle in the churchyard. The generals and their staffs met in the pews, where they conferred, studied maps and newspapers, and wrote dispatches. O'Sullivan photographed the church and its yard twice, then hauled his heavy equipment inside the building and climbed the stairs to the balcony. He set up his camera in a window overlooking the churchyard and exposed three plates after he focused on the scene below.

Although the exact sequence of exposure is not clear, O'Sullivan's photographs show Grant sitting and thinking, leaning over a staff officer's shoulder to study a map, and scribbling an order. The only order in Grant's handwriting to be found in the Civil War records for that day is datelined "Massaponax Church" and directed to Maj. Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside. This order probably is what Grant was writing when O'Sullivan photographed him.

Besides Grant, O'Sullivan's photographs include images of Meade and Assistant Secretary of War Charles A. Dana, who had just returned to the army that morning from a quick visit to Washington. Dana's presence in the field, his role as liaison between Grant and the national government, and the fact that he is seated next to Grant in one of the photographs, are striking reminders of the tight political control that President Abraham Lincoln exercised over his generals.

Grant, Meade, Dana, and their staffs left no tangible evidence of their conference in the churchyard other than O'Sullivan's photographs. Several of the private soldiers who either were there that day or were treated at the church when it served as a hospital were not as reticent, however. They scribbled their names, and sometimes their units and opinions, on the walls inside the church. Both physically and in images, then, Massaponax Baptist Church serves as a reminder of the warriors who once stood on its grounds.

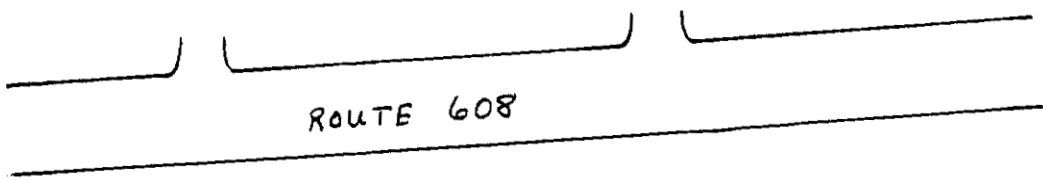
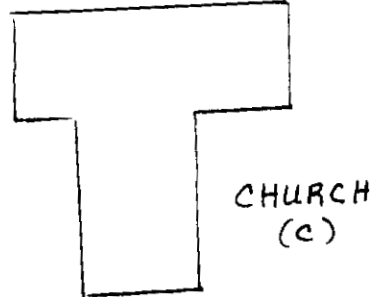
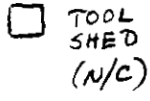
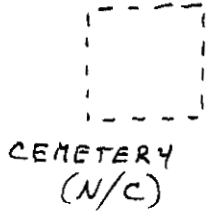
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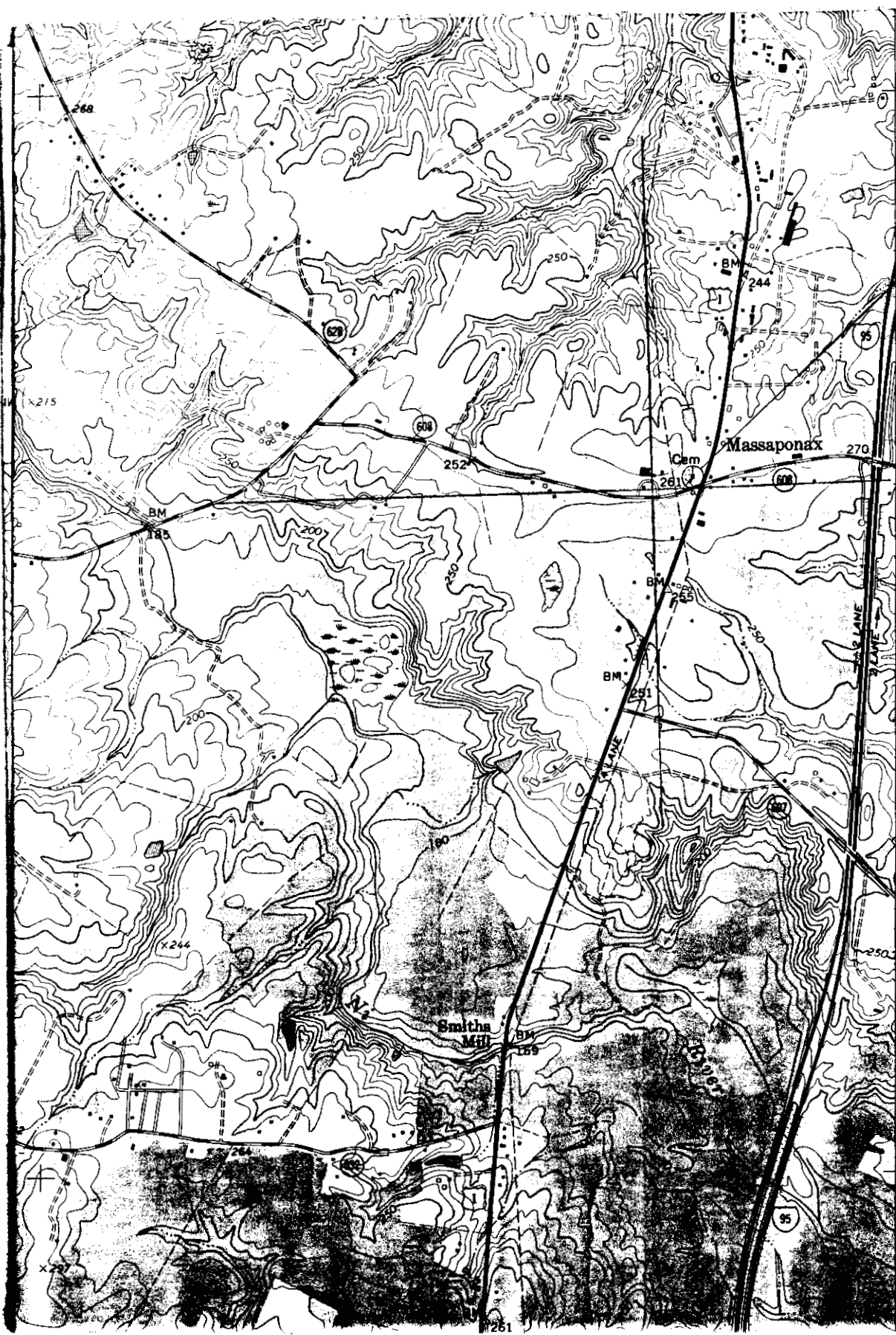
thence around the southern side of the [illegible] with Anderson Ellis' line to an oak west of Minor's road cor. to said road to the [illegible]- containing $3\frac{1}{2}$ (three and one half acres)."

As recorded in Spotsylvania County Deed Book AC, page 371.



SITE PLAN — NOT TO SCALE

MASSAPONAX CHURCH
SPOTSYLVANIA CO., VA



FEET

12'30"

6 MI. TO U.S. 17

(GUINEA) 5560 III NW

10'

Massaponax Baptist Church
SPOTSYLVANIA Co
VIRGINIA