

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 for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: ST. MARY'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Other names/site number: _____

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 324 EAST MAIN ROAD

City or town: PORTSMOUTH State: RI County: NEWPORT Zip Code: 02871

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

national statewide local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

A B C D

<p>_____</p> <p>Signature of certifying official/Title:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>Date</p>
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<p>In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.</p>	
<p>_____</p> <p>Signature of commenting official:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Title :</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>Date</p> <p>_____</p> <p>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>

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4. 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): _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private:

Public – Local:

Public – State:

Public – Federal:

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

Building(s):

District:

Site:

Structure:

Object:

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>	buildings
<u>1</u>	_____	sites
<u>1</u>	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
<u>4</u>	<u>2</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION: religious facility

RELIGION: church-related residence

FUNERARY: cemetery

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION: religious facility

RELIGION: church-related residence

FUNERARY: cemetery

EDUCATION: school

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MID-19TH CENTURY: Gothic Revival

LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS: Colonial Revival

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property:

Foundations: stone; concrete

Walls: stone; wood shingle

Roof: slate; asphalt

Other: brownstone trim

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

St. Mary's Episcopal Church occupies a nearly 68-acre site at 324 East Main Road in southern Portsmouth, Rhode Island.¹ (*Figure 1*) The property includes four buildings, a cemetery, and some historic landscape features. The most notable building is the Church itself, designed by architect Richard Upjohn in the Gothic Revival style and built 1847-49. Inside this stone edifice are several significant works of art, including a large marble wall monument (completed in 1842) carved by sculptor Horatio Greenough in honor of George and Mary Gibbs, the parents of St. Mary's founder Sarah Gibbs; and six stained glass windows (ca. 1907-14) designed by decorative arts master Frederic Crowninshield. Both artists were major figures in their respective fields and eras. The three other buildings on site are the Colonial Revival style Rectory (1936); Gibbs House (1970; NC), built for administrative offices but now leased to the Sea Rose Montessori School; and the Parish House (2012; NC), containing worship, meeting, classroom, and office spaces. The cemetery contains over 2,000 burials from the late 18th century to the present; it has some significant examples of funerary art, most notably a monument to St. Mary's

¹ St. Mary's Church website lists its address as 324 East Main Road. The Portsmouth Tax Assessor's website does not recognize that address; instead, it lists the Church, Gibbs House, and Parish House on a 4-acre parcel at 300 East Main Road (Assessor's Plat 61, Lot 3/1); the Rectory on a one-acre parcel at 318 East Main Road (AP 61, Lot 3/2); and a 62.9 acre parcel of open space at 0 East Main Road (AP 61, Lot 3). However, the map of Plat 61 (*Figure 1*) shows the entire property as AP 61, Lot 3, containing 67.9 acres.

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founder Sarah Gibbs that was designed by architect Richard Morris Hunt, and another monument likely designed by Richard Upjohn & Son. Historic dry-laid stone walls mark the property boundaries and also stand in several locations within the extensive acreage. St. Mary's Church has good integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.

Narrative Description

Aquidneck Island, situated about 20 miles southeast of Providence, is the largest island in Rhode Island's Narragansett Bay, measuring about 15 miles long and 5 miles across. The Town of Portsmouth encompasses the northern end of Aquidneck Island. Within Portsmouth, East Main Road runs along the town's highest ridge at elevations ranging from about 160 feet to 280 feet above sea level. East Main Road holds a variety of land uses: residential, commercial, civic, institutional, agricultural, and protected open space. Three other Portsmouth properties previously listed on the National Register are also located on East Main Road: Union Church (listed 1974), Portsmouth Friends Meeting House Parsonage (listed 1978), and Borden Farm (listed 2007).

The St. Mary's Episcopal Church property has about 1,400 feet of frontage on the west side of East Main Road and extends westward about half a mile to St. Mary's Pond (a man-made reservoir owned by the City of Newport), encompassing nearly 68 acres. The Church, Rectory, Gibbs House, Parish House, and Cemetery are all clustered near East Main Road (*Figure 2*). Historic dry-laid stone walls line the perimeter of the property and subdivide some of the acreage. A building formerly associated with St. Mary's and now under separate ownership stands directly south of the church property, on a one-acre lot at 278 East Main Road: the Island Child Care Center and Day School, a large 1½-story wood-frame structure that served as St. Mary's Parish House from 1927 to 2012.²

The main entrance drive is about 25 feet wide and leads to the Parish House. Several secondary drives wind through the property, including a semi-circular drive that provides access to the Rectory, a drive that encircles St. Mary's Church, and one that loops through the cemetery. Parking lots, added in 2012, are located in front of the Parish House and behind Gibbs House. All of the driveways and parking lots are paved in asphalt. A tree-lined gravel walkway leads to the west end of the Church (*Photo 4*). Concrete walkways connect the Church to the Parish House, and the Parish House to Gibbs House.

Within the St. Mary's Church property, the topography rises very gradually up from the road (total elevation gain about 20 feet) until it reaches a stone wall that traverses the property from north to south behind Gibbs House and the Parish House. To the west of that wall, the land slopes down some 70 feet toward St. Mary's Pond and contains meadow, woods, and wetlands –

² That one-acre lot, now identified as AP 61, Lot 3A, was subdivided from the larger church property and sold in 2016 (Deed Book 1735/Page 225).

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comprising 47 acres under a conservation easement held by the Aquidneck Land Trust (ALT).³ ALT owns an additional 25-acre parcel that abuts the church property to the northeast, while to the southwest and south are approximately 59 acres of farmland in two separately-owned parcels. The 48-acre privately owned Trinity Cemetery (R.I. Historic Cemetery No. PO043) lies directly across the street from St. Mary's Church, adding to the strong sense of open space in the immediate vicinity (*Figures 1 and 2*).

St. Mary's Episcopal Church (1847-1849; various later alterations).⁴ (*Photos 1-15*)

Architect: Richard Upjohn. Other artisans who had a role in the original construction or later alterations: Horatio Greenough, sculptor; Alexander MacGregor, stone mason; Micah W. Spencer, woodworker; George C. Mason & Son, chimney architects/builders; and Frederic Crowninshield, Heaton Butler & Bayne, and Willet Stained Glass Studio, stained-glass artists.

The Gothic Revival style church is set back about 305 feet west of East Main Road, is oriented east-west, and consists of a nave with a slightly shorter and narrower chancel extending off its east end (*Photo 2*). The steeply pitched, front gable, gray slate roof has brownstone trim along the gable edges, brownstone crosses atop the eastern ends of the nave and chancel, and a stone bell cote above the western end of the nave. Slate roofing was first installed in 1907 to replace the original wood-shingle roof. The fieldstone walls have stone buttresses, set on an angle at the corners. Pointed-arch doorway and window openings are trimmed in brownstone. All windows are stained glass (described further below). Two stone exterior chimneys rise above the roofline on the north elevation (both built in 1890 to replace earlier chimneys). The foundation is also stone.

The principal entry to the church is housed within a one-story, 14-foot wide by 11-foot deep, gable-roofed ell located in the second bay from the west end of the south elevation of the nave (*Photos 1, 2*). Two brownstone steps lead to a tall, pointed-arch opening in the south elevation of the ell containing a set of carved and paneled wood double doors that open to a small vestibule. The doors have hefty wrought iron strap hinges and are topped with a carved wooden panel; they were installed ca. 1908 when the vestibule was renovated. Small rectangular stained-glass windows grace the east and west elevations of the ell; these were designed by Frederic Crowninshield and installed ca. 1907-14. Each of the remaining four bays on the south elevation of the nave contains a pointed-arch window opening.

Centered on the church's east elevation (*Photos, 2, 3, 25*) is a one-story, front-gable-roofed chancel measuring about 20 feet square, featuring a large, pointed-arch window in its east wall and a smaller pointed-arch window in its south wall. Attached to the north side of the chancel is a one-story shed-roofed sacristy, measuring about 12 feet on its eastern side, 19 feet on the north, and 5 feet on the west. The sacristy has an east-facing, deeply recessed exterior doorway; its

³ Town of Portsmouth GIS Map website; USGS map contours.

⁴ Throughout this Narrative Description, setbacks and distances between buildings were measured on Google Maps. The Town of Portsmouth Tax Assessor's website has basic measurements of the buildings' footprints.

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paneled wood door has two stained-glass lights. On the north side of the sacristy are a stone exterior chimney and two deeply recessed rectangular stained-glass windows.

On the north elevation of the nave (*Photo 3*), adjacent to the sacristy and partially below grade, is a small (7 feet square) one-story, brownstone-block projection with a front gable slate roof, built in 1939. Paired wooden pointed-arch board-and-batten doors provide access to the basement and crypt. Near the western end of the nave, a one-story, gable-roofed projection about 16 feet wide and one foot deep rises above the roofline and has a stone exterior chimney; this projection, which houses the Gibbs Memorial, aligns with the ell on the south side of the church. The four bays of pointed arch windows on this north elevation also align with their counterparts on the south.

A buttressed, gable-roofed projection measuring about 15 feet wide and 5 feet deep is centered on the west elevation of the nave and rises above the peak of the main roof ridge, terminating in a bell cote (*Photos 1, 4*). Within this projection, recessed into a tall pointed-arch opening, is a set of carved and paneled wood double doors at grade, beneath a carved wooden panel. Known as the “Bridal Doors” and only opened for special occasions, these doors were donated by a group of parishioners in 1955, replacing the original doors. (*Photos 4, 13; Figure 8-B*) A lancet window is centered above the entrance. The bell hangs within a pointed-arch opening in the bell cote. The north and south bays of the west elevation each have a single lancet window.

Interior Features. The interior plan of the church (*Photos 5, 6*) consists of a nave measuring about 76 feet long and about 33 feet wide, with the chancel and sacristy at the east end. Carved wooden bench pews, which face east toward the altar, are arranged to create a central aisle running east-west, as well as a perpendicular cross-aisle leading from the vestibule to the Gibbs Memorial (see below for further description of the memorial). The pews do not extend all the way to the chancel; rather, three rows of wood chairs, facing north, occupy the southeast corner of the nave while an organ and piano are located in the northeast corner of the nave. (*Photo 12*)

The hardwood flooring in the nave, chancel, and sacristy is covered with wall-to-wall carpeting. Walls and ceilings are lath-and-plaster. The nave ceiling, painted dark blue to represent the sky (symbolizing heaven), has a carved wood, chamfered hammer-beam truss system (painted deep brown). The chancel ceiling features a grid of exposed wood beams, also painted deep brown, with plasterwork painted dark blue with stenciled gold stars. In the nave and chancel, the walls were originally painted a reddish pink (some remnants survive), but soon overpainted in a pale beige color, with faint scoring lines to mimic masonry blocks. The existing paint schemes are seen in historic photos of the late 19th century (*Figure 9*).

In the perimeter walls of the nave, four large pointed-arch openings, stretching up to the ceiling, highlight the locations of the chancel, the entry vestibule, the Gibbs Memorial, and the Bridal Doors (*Photo 13*). On the header above the Bridal Doors, these words are inscribed: “To the Glory of God and in Grateful Remembrance of All United in Holy Matrimony at St. Mary’s Church.” Other notable features in the nave include a set of pointed-arch carved wood double-leaf doors opening from the vestibule; a carved wooden pulpit with steps ascending on its right-

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hand side, situated at the front southeast corner of the nave; and a baptismal font, made of carved limestone with a gilded bowl, standing near the Gibbs Memorial.

The chancel (*Photo 12*) is two steps up from the floor of the nave. A wood-capped wrought iron communion rail extends across the chancel; behind it are two steps up to the altar. On the north side of the chancel is a deep narrow recess containing a paneled wood door leading to the storage of vestments and other items along its south wall, and a kitchen ensemble of countertop, cabinets, and sink along its north wall; all of these are later alterations (dates unknown).

The entry vestibule (*Photo 14*) was renovated in 1908. It has mosaic tile flooring with Christogram design, lath-and-plaster walls and ceilings, wood trim around the doorways and windows, a chair rail, and exposed rafters in the ceiling. The metallic silver wall paint with brown botanical-motif stenciling around the window and door openings and above the chair rails was done in the 1990s, recreating a historic paint scheme.

A small crypt (*Figure 10*) underneath the chancel contains nine burials for members of the Gibbs and Channing families who died between 1813 and 1837. Physical evidence indicates that the stone structure of the crypt was built before 1844, when Sarah Gibbs acquired the land on which the church was built, but no documentation was found to confirm what the purpose of that structure was, or how the remains of nine family members who had died well before 1844 came to be interred here.⁵ A partial basement underneath the nave was dug out in 1939; it remains unfinished.

Stained Glass Windows. (Photos 8-11) The Church contains a total of seventeen stained glass windows, each deeply recessed within its pointed-arch opening: eleven in the nave, two in the chancel, two in the entry vestibule, and two in the sacristy. Three of these windows may be original; fourteen replaced earlier windows and were installed between ca. 1870 and 1973, donated by various parishioners in memory of loved ones (see Section 8 for more information about donors and honorees).⁶

The three windows that appear to be original are the lancet window above the Bridal Doors, and the two sacristy windows. Each features colored glass set in a diamond pattern, similar to that also seen in the exterior door on the east elevation of the sacristy, and in the original western entrance doors (removed ca. 1955) as seen in a historic photo (*Figure 8-B*).

The four windows on the south side of the nave were created between ca. 1870 and 1885. Those depicting images of the Virgin Mary, Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd, and the Madonna and Child, all date to ca. 1870-72; the image of an angel is from 1885.

⁵ A stone mason examined the foundations of the church, including the crypt, in 2021.

⁶ Some historic photos of the Church (*Figures 8 and 9*) show a few of the original windows, including an altar window with stone tracery.

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The large window in the east wall of the chancel above the altar, depicting the Ascension of Christ, has been attributed to the British firm of Heaton, Butler, and Bayne and was installed ca. 1905. A smaller window in the south wall of the chancel, with an image of St. John the Evangelist, is believed to be the work of the same firm and installed around the same time.

Of particular note are the four windows on the north side of the nave and the two vestibule windows: these are the last known works created by American stained glass artist Frederic Crowninshield and installed ca. 1907-1914. Instead of religious iconography:

The four tall, narrow windows have centers of semitransparent glass with fish-scale patterns surrounded by garlands and terminate at the top in curlicues. Two small, rectangular windows...[have] fish-scale patterns surrounded by simple bands of small roundels set in lead ... the central space allows light into the interior and permits the form and color of the trees outside to penetrate the glass, setting up an interesting contrast between art and nature. The nature motifs in the garlands on each side of the windows – oak leaves and acorns, grapes, berries, and flowers – and the curlicues at the top, which have their origins in Renaissance decoration, are held in the strict symmetry of classical design.⁷

Two lancet windows in the west wall of the nave, on either side of the Bridal Doors, were produced by the Willet Stained Glass Studio of Philadelphia and installed in 1973; these depict botanical images -- crocuses, violets, daffodils, roses, and lilacs -- along with a few butterflies.

George and Mary Gibbs Memorial. (Photo 7). Commissioned by Sarah Gibbs in honor of her parents, this large marble wall relief was created by American sculptor Horace Greenough in his studio in Florence, Italy, and completed in 1842. Five years later, Richard Upjohn's design for St. Mary's Church incorporated a place for this memorial:

The George and Mary Gibbs memorial features a horizontally arranged figurative bas relief above a lengthy inscription panel. It is surrounded by a carved marble, classically pedimented architectural framework of moldings and pilasters with heavily carved garlands flanking the central panels. The frame is supported atop a scrolled bracket approximately two feet above the floor level (the two squat engaged supports below each side of the monument do not appear to be part of Greenough's original design). Finally, the ensemble is topped by a profusion of leafy forms in the pediment and ornately capped with a palmate finial. The whole is assembled from elements carved separately and united into a single composition about 9 feet high by 5 feet wide. It is sited prominently on the north wall of the church, in its own slightly recessed niche which was evidently designed for it during the construction of the church. As installed, it is notably

⁷ Wilmers, p. 165; color photos of these four windows are on pp. 166-167. The installation dates cover the period when Ellen Tuckerman first requested to install memorial windows on the north side of the nave, and the death date of the last honoree, Laura Wolcott Tuckerman Lowndes.

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positioned opposite the south facing main doorway and dominates what one sees upon entering. ...

[Greenough] carved three standing figures: a draped female figure on the left, standing before the neoclassical funerary symbol of an urn on a column-like plinth, another male draped to the right, looking back toward the center of the composition and the almost nude central figure, whose wings clearly identify him as an angel. This group is intended to be read as Sarah Gibbs' two parents George and Mary, depicted as classically draped figures to either side of the impressive, idealized form of the angel. George, who predeceased Mary, is already guided by the angel's clasped hand. Both he and the angel look back to Mary who faces the altar-like plinth while the angel beckons to her with the gesturing fingers on the hand of his upraised arm.⁸

An inscription of carved and gilded lettering written by Sarah Gibbs's brother-in-law, the renowned Unitarian theologian William Ellery Channing, reads:

Sacred to the memory of GEORGE GIBBS, born 19, May 1735, O.S., died 11, October, 1803. An eminent Merchant, honored for his public spirit and uprightness, given to hospitality and good works. A faithful and munificent son of the Church, and most tender and beloved in domestic life. Also of MARY CHANNING GIBBS, born 18, October, 1747, O.S., died 26, December, 1824. Her heart overflowed with all kind and holy affections. The graces of her character, the refinement of her mind, the dignity of her manners, her serene and benignant countenance, her tones and deeds of love, no time can erase from the memory of her grateful children.

Since 2017, general repairs to the Church have included replacement in kind of the roof materials (slate, brownstone trim and crosses), as well as installation of new gutters and downspouts, a new HVAC system and dehumidifier, mold remediation, electrical work, and interior painting. In 2022 a decorative wrought iron rood screen (which had been donated to St. Mary's Church and installed in front of the chancel in 1907) was carefully removed and put in protective storage; this action was taken to eliminate a physical and visual barrier between worshippers in the nave and celebrants at the altar, consistent with current Episcopal liturgical practice.

St. Mary's Rectory (1936) (Photos 16-19)

A Colonial Revival style, east-facing, single-family house, set back about 155 feet west of East Main Road and about 200 feet southeast of the Church. The house is 2-1/2 stories tall with a side-gable asphalt roof, center brick chimney at the ridge, wood shingle siding, wood trim, vinyl replacement double hung sash windows with 6/6 internal muntin grids, and a concrete foundation. The five-bay façade has a center entrance with a replacement metal door containing

⁸ Onorato, pp. 3-4, 7, 9.

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four panels and a fanlight, flanked by wood-and-glass sidelights and topped by a shallow fanlight (a replacement element, with internal muntins); the stone front stoop is oriented parallel to the façade, with two steps on each side leading up to a landing with a wrought iron railing along its east side. Plain wood trim surrounds the windows and secondary entrances and runs underneath the eaves. Aluminum shutters frame the windows on the façade. The Rectory has two secondary entrances: on the north elevation, and on the west (rear) elevation. A concrete areaway with metal pipe railing is located at the north end of the building, running along the rear elevation; it provides access to the basement level. The southern two bays of the rear elevation are stepped back, creating space for a one-story, shed-roofed, screened-in porch with a stone floor at the southwest corner of the Rectory. A later alteration, the date of the porch is unknown. (*Photo 17*)⁹

Built as a private residence for the Rector who oversees St. Mary's Parish, the Rectory replaced an earlier parsonage that stood near this same location.

Interior Features. Center hall plan. On the first floor, the main stair hall is surrounded by a large living room on the south side of the house, a dining room on the west side, a kitchen (renovated ca. 2000) and powder room (renovated ca. 2015) in the northwest corner, and a small sitting room in the northeast corner. A secondary, narrow perpendicular hallway extends northward from the main stair hall toward the exterior side door. The screened porch is accessed from the south side of the dining room. On the second floor, two bedrooms on the south side of the house were reconfigured into a master bedroom, master bath and laundry room around 2015; there are three other bedrooms and one additional bathroom on this level.

Historic wood flooring, plaster walls and ceilings survive in many parts of the Rectory's interior. In addition to the center hall plan, other Colonial Revival features include a wood fireplace surround in the living room; a built-in wood-and-glass corner cabinet and chair rails in the dining room; the wood stairway railing and balusters; and wood trim around doorways and window openings.

Gibbs House (1970; altered 2018) (NC) (Photos 20, 21)

Architect: A.M. Tillinghast; architects for 2018 renovations: Cordtsen Design Architecture.¹⁰ Built as an administration building and converted to a school in 2018. Set back about 815 feet west of East Main Road, about 260 feet southwest of the Church and about 52 feet south of the Parish House. Cruciform plan; one story tall; cross-gable asphalt roof, wood shingle siding; simple wood trim; concrete foundation. Most of the exterior materials date from the 2018 renovation. Vinyl replacement single-light casement windows predominate, typically placed in pairs or larger groups; but the eastern portion of the building has a small picture window on its south side, and a pair of casement windows with interior applied muntin grids in an "X" pattern on its north side. The main entrance on the east façade is accessed by three concrete steps with

⁹ Portsmouth Building Inspection Department paper files did not contain a building permit for this porch.

¹⁰ Town of Portsmouth, Building Inspection Department records.

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metal pipe handrails and is sheltered under a hip-roofed hood supported by decorative wood brackets (similar to those used in the ceiling trusses in the Church nave); the single-leaf steel door has a wide metal-framed sidelight with two glass panes. Four additional secondary entryways are situated near the back of the building: one each in the northern and southern portions of the building, featuring wood-and-glass single-leaf doors with X-muntins in the glass panel; and two in the western portion of the building, featuring paneled steel doors.

Interior Features: Several interior partition walls were removed or relocated, and laminate wood flooring as well as sheetrock walls and ceilings were installed when the building was renovated in 2018; some walls retain wood paneling that appears to be original. The interior plan now is mostly open; there is a room on the south side of the building used for the students' coatroom and cubbies, a galley kitchen and bathroom in the middle of the building, and an office on the north side.

Although built during the period of significance, the building has experienced significant exterior and interior alterations and is non-contributing due to loss of integrity.

Parish House (2012) (NC) (Photos 20, 22)

Architects: Northeast Collaborative Architects.¹¹ Set back about 400 feet from East Main Road and 112 feet south of the western end of the Church, the Parish House is built into a small hillside, so it is two stories tall at its eastern end and one story at its western end. It has a side gable asphalt roof; wall materials of stone veneer, wood shingle, and horizontal wood siding; minimal wood trim; and a concrete foundation. Most windows are vinyl 4/2 double hung sash. A fieldstone and concrete retaining wall along the south side of the Parish House embraces a patio area covered with concrete pavers.

The Parish House is oriented east-west, and its massing is divided into three sections. The easternmost section of the Parish House measures about 59 feet wide and 74 feet long, and echoes some of the Gothic Revival elements of the adjacent Church. Its asphalt gable roof has a steep pitch. On its east elevation at the upper level is a floor-to-ceiling pointed-arch window infilled with metal-mullioned plate glass and a large metal cross affixed to metal panels. On the north and south elevations, stone buttresses topped with standing-seam metal caps frame three bays of large plate-glass windows with metal mullions, each set within a shed-roofed wall dormer. The ground-floor level has four bays of metal-framed plate glass secondary entryways sheltered under cantilevered wooden canopies. This section of the building contains a large multi-purpose (worship, community gathering) space on its main level, and classrooms and meeting rooms on the ground floor.

The middle section of the Parish House is about 49 feet wide and 74 feet long; two stories tall on its south side, and one story on the north. It has two principal entrances on the main level, north

¹¹ The firm name changed from Newport Collaborative Architects to Northeast Collaborative Architects around the time the Parish House was built; both names appear in documentation in the Town Building Inspector's files.

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and south sides, as well as a secondary entrance at the ground floor level facing eastward toward the patio. This part of the building houses a lobby, commercial kitchen, and administrative offices on its main level, and classroom/meeting/utility/storage room and storage spaces on the ground floor. The one-story, shed-roofed western section of the building measures 21 feet long and 37 feet wide, and contains office space.

Interior Features. Materials include vinyl flooring (some covered by wall-to-wall carpeting), skim-coated sheetrock walls, and dropped or skim-coated sheetrock ceilings.

The Parish House was built outside the period of significance and is noncontributing due to age.

St. Mary's Church Cemetery (R.I. Historic Cemetery No. PO024) (1846-present)
(Photos 23-29) (Figures 2, 7, and 10)

The Cemetery occupies approximately 20 acres of land within the St. Mary's Church property and contains over 2,000 gravesites marked with a variety of upright and flat headstones executed in slate, marble, sandstone, and granite; there are also some Roman and Celtic crosses, and other larger monuments.¹² The cemetery is laid out in several sections, delineated by narrow asphalt-paved driveways. Scattered around the landscape are a variety of flowering shrubs and specimen trees, including "beech, maple, oak, chestnut, linden, umbrella pine, Kentucky coffee, dogwood, and various evergreens ..."¹³

An undated map of those portions of the cemetery nearest the Church (*Figure 10*) depicts burial plots laid out in neat rows in three sections. Two smaller sections lie to the east and south of the Church and are enclosed within or adjacent to the driveway that loops around that building. The largest section is framed by another driveway that extends northward from the Church almost to the north property line, then eastward to East Main Road. Together, these three sections of the cemetery contain the majority of burials to date, but there are additional sections to the west and northwest (see aerial photos, *Figures 2 and 7*; also *Photo 29*) which provide ample space for present-day and future interments.

The earliest gravestones belong to Mary Lawton Vinson (ca. 1772-1797), wife of James Vinson, and their son George Lawton Vinson (ca. 1794-1816); the Vinson family owned the property that St. Mary's Church now occupies from 1791 to 1819. Located southwest of the principal entrance to the church, these two stones are typical of their era: upright, slim, made of slate, and featuring a rounded top with shoulders. Mary Vinson's stone (*Photos 23, 24*), embellished with a winged death's head, was signed by Henry Bull; his artwork evokes the style of John Stevens III of the

¹² St. Mary's Church website indicates the figures of "20 acres" and "over 2,000 burials." The R.I. Historical Cemeteries database gives the size of the cemetery as 450 feet by 500 feet, or approximately 5 acres (which presumably encompasses only those parts that immediately surround the Church to the north, east, and south), and cites a total of 2,500 burials but identifies only 272 of them. A complete inventory of the cemetery remains a work in progress.

¹³ St. Mary's Church website, "About Our Cemetery."

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famed Stevens Shop of Newport. George Lawton Vinson's stone (*Photo 23*) was unsigned but bears (now, very weathered) carvings attributed to Philip Stevens of the Stevens Shop. The two Vinson stones originally stood in a family burial ground that was situated south of the present Rectory, near the stone wall that marks the southern property boundary; they were moved to their present location sometime after 1892.¹⁴

Sarah Gibbs's grave lies directly east of the Church, below the chancel's altar window. Her carved white granite monument, resembling a small sarcophagus, was designed by architect Richard Morris Hunt (*Photos 2, 25, 26*).¹⁵ The Christian symbols of an intertwined Alpha and Omega (representing God as the beginning and end of all things), and a Chi-Rho (an ancient abbreviation in the Greek alphabet for Jesus Christ's name, resembling a combined "X" and "P"), adorn the monument. It is topped with a Roman cross laid flat, and inscribed around the base in Gothic lettering: "Sarah Gibbs, Founder of this Church A.D. 1845, Died 17 June 1866, aged 84."

Another notable monument, made of red sandstone and also resembling a sarcophagus, here topped with an elaborate Gothic Revival style pediment, stands a short distance east of the Church. (*Photo 25*) Its Gothic lettering commemorates Frederick Wiggins (1821-1869), listed in the 1860 U.S. Census as a wealthy banker living in Newport. This monument may have been designed by the firm of Richard Upjohn & Son: it is similar in some details to other funerary monuments known to be the work of that firm.¹⁶

The first Rector of St. Mary's Church, Rev. Hobart Williams (1815-1884), and his wife Augusta Williams (ca. 1826-1898) were laid to rest just south of the chancel. Their marker (*Photo 2*) is a simple upright pink granite stone featuring a rounded top with stylized Celtic cross.

A short distance north of the Church, just east of the driveway extending toward the north property line, lies a cluster of Gibbs family burials (*Photo 28*), including Sarah's brother George Gibbs III (1776-1833) his wife Laura Wolcott Gibbs (1794-1870), and their six children along with spouses: George Gibbs IV (1815-1873), Elizabeth Wolcott Gibbs Tuckerman (1819-1906) and her husband Lucius Tuckerman (1818-1890), Oliver Wolcott Gibbs (1822-1908) and his

¹⁴ Bull, pp. 9-11 and 17-18. Similarities to the work of John Stevens III and Philip Stevens were noted during a site visit with Professor Emeritus Dr. Ronald J. Onorato of the University of Rhode Island's Art and Art History Department, scholar of architecture, public sculpture, and funerary art. Relocation of the Vinson stones was noted in "The Oldest Stones" on the St. Mary's Church website, <http://www.smcportsmouth.org/cemetery/about-our-cemetery>.

¹⁵ Baker, p. 539 (erroneously placing the location of Sarah Gibbs's monument in Brattleboro, Vt.); also Jordy, p. 507 and Nebiker, p. 34.

¹⁶ Everard M. Upjohn's catalogue of Richard Upjohn's works does not mention any funerary monuments in Portsmouth (or South Portsmouth), R.I., but Dr. Onorato noted similarities between the Wiggins monument and Upjohn & Son's Gothic Revival style Fort Hamilton Parkway Entrance stone gateway at Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn, New York (1876-77; NHL, 2006). Other Upjohn gravesite markers such as the Pierrepont Monument at Green-Wood (ca. 1842) and the Beach Monument at Cedar Hill Cemetery in Hartford, Connecticut (1868) were also executed in the Gothic Revival style.

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wife Josephine Mauran Gibbs (birth date unknown, died 1887), U.S. Army Brigadier General Alfred Gibbs (1823-1868), Laura Wolcott Gibbs D'Oremieulx (1827-1908) and her husband Theophile Marie D'Oremieulx (1815-1881), and Francis Sarason Gibbs (1831-1882) and his wife Eliza Hosmer Gibbs (1836-1883).¹⁷ The Gibbs family grave markers include a mix of light and dark upright stones, some carved with a stylized variant of a Celtic cross; General Alfred Gibbs's marker is a granite table slab, and George Gibbs III's marker is a horizontal piece of polished pink granite with a "hip roof" top, which appears to be a late 19th century installation. Four carved stone posts mark the corners of a former enclosure for the Gibbs family plot; each post has iron rings to which chains were once attached.

Stone Walls (dates unknown) and other Landscape Features
(Photos 20, 29, 30) (Figures 2 and 7)

Historic dry-laid stone walls, approximately 3 feet tall, line the entire street frontage of the St. Mary's property and also delineate its northern and southern lot boundaries; additional walls subdivide some interior areas of the site. While it is difficult to determine a construction date for stone walls that were built using centuries-old techniques, the walls at St. Mary's were probably erected by various farmers who worked this land during the two centuries before Sarah Gibbs acquired it in 1844. Portsmouth was still very much a rural agricultural community in the mid-19th century, and remained so for another century beyond that. Along with the sizeable amount of open space surrounding St. Mary's, the stone walls evoke that earlier land use history, and also contribute to the sense of rural tranquility that St. Mary's still possesses today.

Within the stone wall that extends across the eastern front of the property, the main entrance to St. Mary's from East Main Road is marked by rough-finished square granite pillars, approximately 5 feet tall, standing on either side of a 25-foot-wide opening (widened in 1992). A freestanding wooden signboard (installed 2019) is positioned perpendicular to the street just south of this entrance. Near the northern end of the property is another opening in the stone wall, giving direct access to the cemetery from East Main Road; this opening, which may date to the founding of St. Mary's, is flanked by square dry-laid fieldstone pillars with flat stone caps, approximately 5 feet tall, which support a pair of wrought iron gates.

Other, non-historic landscape features include a labyrinth, as well as a temporary wood-frame shelter for outdoor worship services that was erected in 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic (both located south of the Rectory); a playground enclosed within chain link fencing, a community garden, and a prefabricated storage shed (all located south of Gibbs House). The property also has numerous mature trees and plantings, and several large areas of grass lawn.

¹⁷ Find A Grave, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/5894403/alfred-gibbs>

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property.
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

ART

RELIGION

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Period of Significance

1842-1973

Significant Dates

1842, completion of Gibbs Memorial

1846, first burial in cemetery

1849, construction of St. Mary's Church completed

1936, construction of Rectory

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Richard Upjohn, architect, funerary art

Alexander MacGregor, stone mason

Micah W. Spencer, woodworker

George C. Mason & Son, architect/builder

Horatio Greenough, sculptor

Frederic Crowninshield, stained glass artist

Heaton, Butler & Bayne, stained glass

Willet Stained Glass Company, stained glass

Richard Morris Hunt, funerary art

Henry Bull, funerary art

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

St. Mary's Episcopal Church is eligible for listing in the National Register at the local level. It meets National Register Criterion A in the area of religion and Criterion C in the areas of architecture and art. Under Criterion A, St. Mary's (1847-49) was the second Protestant Episcopal church to be constructed in Portsmouth during a period of rapid expansion of that denomination in Rhode Island. It is the only known example of a religious institution (of any denomination) in Portsmouth that was founded by a woman, Sarah Gibbs (ca.1782-1866), who

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spent the last twenty-three years of her life fulfilling a personal mission to establish and support an Episcopal parish near her country estate in southern Portsmouth, which was known as Oakland Farm. St. Mary's Church served both local residents and seasonal visitors and, together with the other contributing resources on the property – the Rectory (1936), the cemetery (1846 et seq.), and the stone walls – help to tell the story of how this locally significant religious institution was established in agrarian 19th-century Portsmouth.

Under Criterion C, St. Mary's Church is a well-preserved example of a rural Gothic Revival church designed by Richard Upjohn, America's premier mid-19th century practitioner of that style for ecclesiastical architecture. St. Mary's Church is the only example of his work in Portsmouth. The Church also contains several works by significant artists: a carved marble memorial to Sarah Gibbs' parents (1842) by American sculptor Horatio Greenough; and six stained glass windows (ca. 1907-14) by American artist Frederic Crowninshield. The Cemetery contains some notable examples of funerary art, particularly Sarah Gibbs' own grave marker designed by the American architect Richard Morris Hunt, and another marker that was likely designed by the firm of Richard Upjohn & Son.

The period of significance for the property is 1842, when the Gibbs Memorial was completed (prior to construction of the Church), to 1973, when the last two stained glass windows were installed in the Church.

In relation to the National Register Criteria Considerations A and D: although St. Mary's has been owned by a religious organization and used for religious purposes continuously since the Church was constructed, and the property also includes a cemetery, it is eligible for the National Register for its historic and architectural significance, as summarized above and further described in this nomination.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Given the multi-layered history and historical context for St. Mary's Church, this narrative is organized thematically rather than strictly chronologically:

Historical Background: 1638-1840 briefly recaps the early development of the Town of Portsmouth and of the farm where St. Mary's Church was eventually built, as well as the Gibbs family's associations with Portsmouth. It then discusses the evolution of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Rhode Island, the emergence of the Gothic Revival style for ecclesiastical buildings, and the career of architect Richard Upjohn.

"With This Purpose Burning In Her Heart:" Building St. Mary's, 1840-1866 discusses Sarah Gibbs' roles in commissioning the Gibbs Memorial, founding St. Mary's Parish, constructing both of its churches (also including the Church of the Holy Cross in Middletown), and ongoing involvement with St. Mary's during her lifetime.

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“To Carry On the Work So Nobly Begun:” The Legacy of Sarah Gibbs, 1866-1973 discusses how St. Mary’s has evolved since the death of its founder, including later alterations to the Church, land acquisition and disposition, construction of additional buildings, and notable burials in the Cemetery.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: 1638-1840

Portsmouth was the first English settlement on Aquidneck Island in Narragansett Bay. Founded in 1638, it was laid out with a cluster of house lots at the northern end of the island; large tracts of farmland spread southward along a few principal roadways, including what is now East Main Road. Aquidneck Island’s soil and climate were ideally suited to agriculture; Portsmouth farmers grew various crops and raised horses, cows, sheep, and hogs. They erected dry-laid stone walls to delineate ownership of the land, to subdivide it into fields and orchards, and to keep livestock from roaming freely about. Many of these historic stone walls survive in Portsmouth, including several on the St. Mary’s Church property that were likely erected long before the Church was built in 1847-49.

Two other towns later developed on Aquidneck Island. Newport (founded 1639) occupied the southern end of the island: blessed with an excellent natural harbor, it was one of the most important seaports in the American colonies, as well as the commercial capital of Rhode Island, its largest town in terms of population, and home to some of its wealthiest citizens, many of whom had made their fortunes in the African slave trade. Middletown (founded 1743), like Portsmouth, was a sparsely populated rural community.

In the mid-to-late 18th century, some wealthy Newport merchants began to acquire farms in Portsmouth and Middletown to use as country estates, particularly in the summertime. In 1796, brothers-in-law George Gibbs II (1735-1803) and Walter Channing (1757-1827) purchased a 70-acre property that they named “Oakland Farm,” located on the west side of East Main Road in southern Portsmouth, just north of the future site of St. Mary’s Church.¹⁸ The two men, business partners in the worldwide shipping and trading firm of Gibbs & Channing, amassed an enormous fortune from this enterprise. In 1810, as part of an agreement on the division of business assets after the firm dissolved, Walter Channing conveyed his one-half interest in Oakland Farm to the Gibbs heirs.¹⁹

¹⁸ Deed Book 8/Page 5. George Gibbs II’s roots in Newport dated back to ca. 1660, when his grandparents James and Sarah Gibbs emigrated from England. George Gibbs V wrote the family history cited in the bibliography for this nomination. Oakland Farm grew to about 97 acres between 1798 and 1804: DB 8/77: 4-3/4 acres (1798); DB 8/410, 5-1/2 acres (1803); DB 8/454, a three-quarter acre lot with a schoolhouse (1803); DB 9/42 (1804). The schoolhouse referenced in DB 8/454, known as the Southernmost School (1725, NR, 1974, as part of the nomination for Union Church), was relocated several times and now stands at the corner of East Main Road and Union Street, owned by the Portsmouth Historical Society.

¹⁹ Deed Book 11/55 (1810). Carpenter, pp. 96-97, stated that Gibbs & Channing engaged in the slave trade until the firm went out of business in 1807.

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Sarah Gibbs (ca. 1782-1866) (*Figure 11*) was one of ten children born to George Gibbs II and Mary Channing Gibbs (1747-1824). The family lived in Newport and worshipped at Trinity Episcopal Church. Sarah Gibbs was about 14 years old when her father and uncle acquired Oakland Farm. For the next seventy years Sarah (who never married, and lived in Boston for much of her adult life), spent considerable time at Oakland Farm; she eventually became its sole owner, and made it her permanent residence.²⁰ This decades-long association with Oakland Farm directly influenced her late-in-life mission to establish an Episcopal parish in southern Portsmouth.

The future site of St. Mary's Church was known as the "Vinson Farm." That name dated back to 1791, when James Vinson of Newport purchased 50 acres of land on the west side of East Main Road from his wife Mary Lawton's parents. That farm passed to the Vinsons' two sons, who also inherited some adjacent land from their mother's family, bringing their total acreage to about 88 acres. (Mary Lawton Vinson and her son George Lawton Vinson were both interred in a family burial plot on the Vinson farm; their gravestones now stand within the St. Mary's Church cemetery, and are discussed later in this narrative.) A neighbor, Thomas Potter Jr., purchased the Vinsons' farm, which included a dwelling house and other buildings (none of which survive), in 1819; a quarter century later, Potter's heirs sold that farm to Sarah Gibbs.

The Protestant Episcopal Church in Rhode Island

The earliest Church of England parish in present-day Rhode Island was established in Newport in 1698 (prior to that date, itinerant clergy served the few Anglicans who lived in the colony); the congregation erected the first Trinity Church in 1701. That structure was replaced in 1726 by the present wood-frame, Georgian style Trinity Church (NHL, 1965).²¹ By the middle of the 18th century, Trinity Church numbered among its members some of Newport's most affluent and influential citizens, including the Gibbs family, who owned a box pew there.

Over the next two decades, three additional Anglican parishes were founded in Rhode Island: St. Paul's in Narragansett, in 1707; St. Michael's in Bristol, in 1720; and St. John's in Providence, in 1722. St. Paul's, also known as "Old Narragansett Church," was moved from Narragansett to the village of Wickford in North Kingstown in 1800, and is today the oldest surviving church building of any denomination in Rhode Island (NR, 1973). The original church of St. Michael's in Bristol has been replaced several times; the current edifice was built in 1860 (NR, Bristol Waterfront Historic District, 1975). The original church of St. John's Parish in Providence was

²⁰ When Mary Channing Gibbs died in 1824, her two surviving sons, George Gibbs III (1776-1833), a prominent geologist, and William C. Gibbs (1787-1871), then in his third term as Governor of Rhode Island, contested their mother's will. This engendered a deep rift with their surviving sisters, Sarah Gibbs and Ruth Gibbs Channing (1778-1870; wife of Dr. William Ellery Channing, the renowned Unitarian theologian). When the dispute was resolved in 1825-26, the brothers granted Sarah and Ruth a life tenancy at Oakland Farm (Deed Book 11/Page 34). Between 1842 and 1855, Sarah acquired her siblings' shares of Oakland Farm.

²¹ Throughout this nomination, the abbreviation "NHL" refers to National Historic Landmark; "NR" refers to the National Register.

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called King's Church; it was replaced by the present structure in 1810 (NR, College Hill Historic District, 1976).²²

The Revolutionary War took a serious toll on Anglican parishes throughout the thirteen colonies, as the very name "Church of England" evoked America's enemy, and many Anglicans had (or were suspected of having) Loyalist sympathies. In Rhode Island, St. Paul's Church in Narragansett and St. John's in Providence shut down for several years due to discord within their own congregations. St. Michael's Church in Bristol was torched by British troops who mistakenly believed that the local militia had stored gunpowder there. Trinity Church in Newport endured a temporary closure of its own in 1774 when its minister, cleaving to his oath of ordination, refused to eliminate from Sunday services the traditional prayers for the King of England; later, during the British occupation of Newport in 1776-79, many of Trinity's parishioners fled the town, never to return.

The American Protestant Episcopal Church was founded in 1785 to separate the Anglican parishes in the new United States from the Church of England, and reorganize them under the auspices of a new national governing body.²³ Five years after the first General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church met in Philadelphia, the Rhode Island Diocese held its own first annual statewide Convention in 1790. The Diocese grew slowly at first: by the early 19th century, it "probably had no more than two hundred communicants, with, possibly, a thousand attendants out of 60,000 people in the State."²⁴

In 1811, the Dioceses of Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Vermont, and New Hampshire joined forces to form the "Eastern Diocese," and elected as Bishop the Reverend Alexander Viets Griswold (1766-1843), the former Rector of St. Michael's Church in Bristol. During Bishop Griswold's thirty-one-year tenure, he implemented a major expansion of the Protestant Episcopal Church throughout the Eastern Diocese. Dozens of new parishes came into being, while Griswold personally confirmed over 11,000 new congregants and ordained over 200 clergy across the region. In Rhode Island alone, fourteen new parishes were established during Bishop Griswold's episcopacy, including St. Paul's Church in northern Portsmouth in 1833.²⁵ After Bishop Griswold's death, the Rhode Island Episcopal Convention elected the Reverend John Prentiss Kewley Henshaw (1792-1852) to be the new Bishop of Rhode Island. One of Bishop

²² St. Paul's Parish in Wickford constructed another church building in 1847 which remains in active use, but the Episcopal Diocese continues to own and maintain the original 1707 building. St. Michael's in Bristol is still in active use. St. John's in Providence was designated the seat of the Episcopal Diocese of Rhode Island and renamed the Cathedral of St. John in 1929; it is no longer used for regular worship services, but houses offices for the Diocese and several nonprofit organizations.

²³ The name "Protestant Episcopal" distinguished this group from the "Methodist Episcopal" sect of the Church of England in America, which had been organized the previous year.

²⁴ Tyng, p. 8.

²⁵ Tyng, p. 18, states that St. Paul's Parish was "formally organized in 1834." Nebiker, in Portsmouth, p. 33, dated it as 1833. The St. Paul's Episcopal Church website also cites 1833 for both the founding of the parish and the construction of the church building.

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Henshaw's first acts, in 1844, was to incorporate the Rhode Island Diocese.²⁶ He also oversaw the establishment of six more parishes.

It was during Bishop Henshaw's brief ten-year episcopate that Sarah Gibbs conceived her personal mission to establish an Episcopal parish near Oakland Farm, her family's country estate in southern Portsmouth. About a century later, church historian Dudley Tyng wrote: "The two parishes in Portsmouth, St. Paul's and St. Mary's, . . . represent the only successful planting of the Episcopal Church among Rhode Island rural folk."²⁷ All of the other Rhode Island Episcopal parishes were established in city neighborhoods, town centers, and mill villages, reflecting Rhode Island's booming industrial economy and rapidly increasing population in the first half of the 19th century.

This fast-paced growth within the Rhode Island Episcopal Diocese took place against the backdrop of profound social, economic, political, and cultural changes occurring within the United States, Europe, and other parts of the world during a period of rapid industrialization and urbanization, population growth, and advancements in science and technology. Although these changes were embraced in some quarters as signs of progress, they were also deeply unsettling to many people; there was a pervasive sense of declining spiritual and moral standards in an increasingly secular society. One outcome of that disquiet was a widespread effort to defend, strengthen, and promote the Christian faith as a solution for the myriad problems of the modern world. An Evangelical movement within Protestantism began on both sides of the Atlantic. New Protestant sects were established. Religious education – Sunday schools, seminaries, and missions to foreign countries – became important components of Christian ministry across many denominations. Another result of this societal unease was a strong nostalgia for the past, which manifested in several different intellectual and cultural movements in both the ecclesiastical and secular realms.

The Emergence of the Gothic Revival Style for Ecclesiastical Architecture

In the secular realm's response to the many social anxieties of the early Industrial Age, one of the most influential intellectual and cultural movements was Romanticism. In art, music, literature, and architecture, the Romantics rejected rationality, formality, and conformity in favor of the subjective, the imagination, the emotional, the value of individual experience, and the sublimity of nature. Romantics also attributed to bygone eras some of the values believed to be missing from modern life, such as goodness, worth, truth, beauty, morality, and purity. In

²⁶ Tyng, p. 25.

²⁷ Tyng, p. 94. The author makes a similar assertion on p. 18, that St. Paul's and St. Mary's in Portsmouth, together with Holy Cross in Middletown (which was part of St. Mary's parish), represent "the only successful and permanent settlement of the Church in old rural Rhode Island." At least one Episcopal church built after 1850 was also constructed in a rural area, albeit not in the "old rural" context as Tyng defined it: St. Columba's Chapel in Middletown (1882, architect Wilson Eyre, Jr., NR 2022), a stone Gothic Revival structure similar to St. Mary's Church. Tyng barely mentioned St. Columba's: the index to his book lists one reference, on p. 97, in a table of statistics representing the growth of the Episcopal Church in southeastern Rhode Island 1850-1950.

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architecture, this prompted the decline of Neoclassicism and the rise of new eclectic styles inspired by medieval Gothic and Italian Renaissance precedents.

An antiquarian interest in medieval Gothic architecture had already been percolating in Britain for some time: in the mid-to-late 18th century the theatrically decorative “Gothick mode” became a fad for landscape features like summerhouses and follies; it was also used on some residential and public buildings, but considered too frivolous for churches. Serious scholarship on medieval (i.e., Roman Catholic) cathedrals and parish churches began to emerge around 1800, and the next several decades saw a flurry of widely circulated books by authors such as John Britton, Thomas Rickman, George Ayliffe Poole, and others, aimed at both a professional and a general audience, and illustrated not just with sketches but also measured drawings of entire buildings and precise renderings of details. The architect and architectural critic Augustus W.N. Pugin went a step further, arguing in his 1836 book *Contrasts* that the architectural components of medieval churches were imbued with spiritual as well as structural and aesthetic purposes.

As medieval church architecture grew to represent a purer form of Christian religious faith, it became closely identified with efforts to reform the Anglican Church in the 1830s and 1840s:

[England had] hundreds of these churches, some large and richly appointed, others so modest as to be plain, which the 19th century enthusiast of Gothic architecture could study. All contained at least a nave and a chancel, were constructed of local materials, and seemed deliberately and gracefully related to the countryside in which they were set.

To those who wished to restore the Church in England as an institution and to withdraw it from corrupting secular attachments, the return to this traditional English building type and to the ceremonial connected with it seemed not only reasonable but necessary, suggestive of a splendid moment in the national past.²⁸

The Cambridge Camden Society was founded in 1839 at Cambridge University to promote the study of ecclesiastical architecture and antiquities, or “ecclesiology.” Led by students John Mason Neale and Benjamin Webb, the Cambridge Camden Society followed Pugin’s lead in promoting the medieval Gothic parish church as the only appropriate model for new Anglican church buildings because of the religious symbolism they perceived in many of its architectural elements. For example, the pointed arch, the flying buttress, the ribbed vaulted roof, and the spire or tower, all conveying a strong sense of verticality, drew the eye upward toward God in heaven. Large window openings, infilled with Christian imagery in stained glass, brought God’s light to the faithful, and also gave a sense of weightlessness to the stone structure that, together with a roof that appeared to float high above the nave, symbolized the Christian promise of forgiveness and salvation.

²⁸ Stanton, p. xxi.

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In 1841 the Cambridge Camden Society produced two widely disseminated booklets: *A Few Words to Church Builders* and *A Few Words to Church Wardens on Churches and Church Ornaments*, containing detailed design standards for new Gothic Revival style churches. Concurrently, the Society began publishing a journal called *The Ecclesiologist*, which was also distributed overseas as part of its mission to “do what it could to influence the design of churches outside the British Isles,” particularly in America, where “churches in the English manner satisfied the requirements and sentiments of those clergy and laymen of the Protestant Episcopal Church who possessed High Church preferences.”²⁹ The Cambridge Camden Society, which changed its name to the Ecclesiological Society in 1846, remained so influential for the next several decades that “almost every new Anglican church was built and furnished according to their instructions.”³⁰

The Gothic Revival style found a receptive audience in the United States:

Interested Americans were acquainted with all this English literature. The specialized studies of Gothic buildings and details could be found in the library of any well-educated American architect eager to acquire ecclesiastical commissions or to use Gothic in domestic design. *The Ecclesiologist* and the works of Poole, Pugin, and others found their way to America, where they were read by both architects and laymen. It was upon sources such as these that the American Gothic Revival was at first based.³¹

Although the Gothic Revival style did not become widespread in America until the 1840s, there are earlier examples. In Portsmouth, St. Paul’s Episcopal Church (1833), which was designed by one of Rhode Island’s top architects, Russell Warren (1783-1860), features a large, central pointed-arch window flanked by two pointed-arch doors on its façade, as well as a bell tower rising above the front-gable roof.³² This church has been altered but still stands at 2679 East Main Road and remains in active use.

The architect Richard Upjohn (1802-1878) became the standard-bearer for Gothic Revival ecclesiastical architecture in mid-19th century America. Born in Shaftesbury, Dorset, England, Upjohn spent his formative years in a landscape riddled with medieval parish churches and cathedrals, so he undoubtedly was familiar with the typology long before he moved to the U.S. in 1828 with his wife and infant son.³³ Before he left England, Upjohn had worked as a mechanical

²⁹ Stanton, pp. 3-4.

³⁰ Bannerjee (unpaginated).

³¹ Stanton, p. 43.

³² Historic photo ca. 1880 of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church found at <https://www.stpaulsportsmouthri.org/2008/09/a-history-of-saint-pauls.html>.

³³ “Historic Churches in Dorset” (<https://www.britainexpress.com/counties/dorset/churches/index.htm?page=5>) indicates that the oldest church in Upjohn’s hometown of Shaftesbury is St. Peter’s Church, built in the 14th century. The county of Dorset alone has nearly three dozen surviving medieval churches, and the magnificent 13th century Salisbury Cathedral stands about 20 miles from Shaftesbury in the neighboring county of Wiltshire.

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draftsman and fabricator of architectural elements; by 1830 he was living in New Bedford, Massachusetts, where he worked as a draftsman and carpenter, taught classes in drafting, and advertised his services to produce “Architectural Plans and Elevations, Neatly Executed at Short Notice.”³⁴ In 1834 Upjohn moved to Boston to work with the noted local architect Alexander Parrish; while living there, he became a U.S. citizen in 1836. A few years later Upjohn relocated again, to New York City, where he lived for the rest of his life and became a nationally prominent leader in his field. Many buildings that he designed are listed on the National Register; several are National Historic Landmarks. In 1857, Richard Upjohn and a dozen other architects (including his son and business partner, Richard M. Upjohn) co-founded the American Institute of Architects (AIA) with a mission to promote architecture and its practitioners. Richard Upjohn served as AIA’s first president from 1857 to 1876 and led the organization’s efforts to adopt national standards for architectural education, licensing, and professional ethics.

Richard Upjohn’s early career dovetailed with the emergence of eclecticism in architectural design, with new styles such as Italianate and Gothic Revival reflecting the Romantic movement’s nostalgia for the past. Upjohn’s first major residential commission, “Oaklands” (1835; NR, 1973), was a stone Gothic Revival mansion built for real estate developer Robert H. Gardiner in Gardiner, Maine. Subsequently, Upjohn designed one of the earliest summer “cottages” in Newport, Rhode Island, as that town was becoming a popular seasonal resort for the wealthy: a picturesque Gothic Revival wood-frame dwelling dubbed “Kingscote” (1839; NR, 1973; NHL, 1996) that was built for the southern plantation owner George Noble Jones. Another notable Upjohn design in Newport was a stately Italianate style villa built for China Trade merchant Edward King (1845-47; NR, 1970; NHL, 1970). Both Kingscote and the Edward King House inspired the work of another American architect, Andrew Jackson Downing, whose pattern books of Italianate and Gothic Revival style cottages and villas such as *Cottage Residences* (1842) and *The Architecture of Country Houses* (1852) had an enormous influence on American domestic architecture in the mid-19th century.³⁵

While Richard Upjohn mastered a variety of architectural modes over the course of his long and prolific career, the Gothic Revival became his signature style for ecclesiastical buildings. His personal library included several books on English Gothic church architecture, and he also subscribed to *The Ecclesiologist*.³⁶ Upjohn’s first church commission in the U.S. was St. John’s Episcopal Church in Bangor, Maine (1836; burned 1911), which, although not a purely Gothic Revival design, showed the “promise of the change that was to come.”³⁷ In 1839, at the invitation of his friend Dr. Jonathan Mayhew Wainwright, Rector of Trinity Church in New York City, Upjohn began the biggest project of his career to date: designing a new building to replace an existing, deteriorating structure for this “old and venerable parish ... probably the most important Episcopal church in the country.” Displaying “a far more perfect understanding

³⁴ Upjohn, p. 30, quoting from an 1833 newspaper advertisement.

³⁵ Jordy and Monkhouse, p. 236.

³⁶ Upjohn, pp. 36 and 48.

³⁷ Upjohn, p. 45.

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of medieval forms than anything [he], or anyone else, had done in this country up to that time,” the new Trinity Church (1839-46; NHL, 1976) was a stone structure with buttresses, battlements, pointed-arch stained-glass windows with tracery, and a tall, elegant spire. The interior had a high, vaulted ceiling, a long nave with low side aisles allowing a full clerestory, no interior balconies, and a large deep chancel.³⁸ This revolutionary design had an immediate and profound effect on American ecclesiastical architecture:

Trinity set the stamp of ecclesiastical authority, so to speak, on the Gothic style. Hereafter, although Churches might occasionally be built in one of the Classic derivative styles, at least in the Episcopal communion that was far less likely to be the case. ... Trinity Church encouraged the tendency to consider a medieval, and especially a Gothic, style as the only valid form for ecclesiastical work.³⁹

Trinity Church also made Richard Upjohn one of the most sought-after architects in the country. During the 1840s alone, he designed forty Gothic Revival Episcopal churches in New York City and State, Washington, D.C., Delaware, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Maine, Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Illinois, and North Carolina.⁴⁰ He produced designs for thirty-four of those forty churches within a five-year span, 1844-1849, including three in Rhode Island: Grace Church in Providence (1845-46; NR, Downtown Providence Historic District, 1984), which holds the distinction of being the first asymmetrical Gothic Revival style church in America; Church of the Holy Cross in Middletown (1845-46); and St. Mary's Church in Portsmouth (1847-49). In later years, he also designed Emmanuel Church in Newport (1855-56; no longer extant) and St. Stephen's Church in Providence (1860).⁴¹

³⁸ Upjohn, pp. 47 and 52 (referencing both quotes in this paragraph).

³⁹ Upjohn, p. 66.

⁴⁰ Upjohn, pp. 198-217. Within a catalogue of all of the religious, residential, commercial, civic, and other buildings that Richard Upjohn designed throughout his entire career, the author listed a total of 40 Episcopal churches from the 1840s as either “Class A” (most important) or “Class B” (secondary) works. (The denomination “Episcopal” was not specified, but the lists only classified the few churches belonging to other denominations.) Of Upjohn's surviving Episcopal churches of the 1840s, all are Gothic Revival, typically executed in either stone or wood. Many are NR listed; several are NHLs.

⁴¹ In addition to five Episcopal churches, Upjohn also designed seven other residences in Rhode Island besides “Kingscote” and the Edward King House. In Newport: the Col. John H. Powell House (1851-53) and “Oaklawn” for Charles H. Russell (1852-53); neither survives. In Middletown: “Shadow Lawn” for Hamilton Hoppin (1856-57; NR 1996) and the Alexander Van Rensselaer House, now “Restmere” (1856-57; NR, 2018). In Providence: the Seth Adams, Jr. House (1852-54; NR, College Hill Historic District, 1976); the Marshall Woods (now, Woods-Gerry) House (1860-61; NR, College Hill Historic District), and the Amos D. Smith House (1864-65, no longer extant).

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**“WITH THIS PURPOSE BURNING IN HER HEART”:⁴²
 BUILDING ST. MARY’S CHURCH, 1843-1866**

The Gibbs Memorial

A significant artwork within St. Mary’s Church was created more than a decade before the church itself was built.

In 1835 Sarah Gibbs sailed to Europe with her sister Ruth Gibbs Channing and Ruth’s son William Henry Channing. The trio spent a year in company with leading intellectuals, writers, and artists, and visited ateliers, galleries, museums, and historic sites across Europe. In Florence that autumn, Sarah Gibbs encountered the American sculptor Horatio Greenough, whom she commissioned to create a memorial to her parents.⁴³

Horatio Greenough (1805-1852) “was the first American to make sculpture his profession and to gain international recognition thereby.”⁴⁴ Born in Boston, the son of a successful real estate developer, Greenough’s fascination with architectural and sculptural forms began in his youth, when he first learned how to model in clay and cut marble under the tutelage of a local architect and a gravestone carver. He decided to pursue a career as a sculptor, despite the fact that the profession essentially did not exist in America in the early 19th century.

There were no more than a dozen sculptors in the country, about half of them around Washington [D.C.], and all were foreign-born. ... Yet partly because of the recent introduction of stone into [building] construction, and partly because of the call for public monuments in the new nation, a whole generation of American artists was to take up new materials and tools and give their country the reputation of having a peculiar genius for expressing itself in marble. ...

Greenough was the first of his countrymen to enter and pursue exclusively this new profession. ... In excellence of achievement he was one of the three or four best, with [Hiram] Powers, William Rimmer, and William Reinhart. In scope, however, his achievement was by far the broadest: he worked in all the major sculptural modes: portrait and ideal busts and statues, colossi, groups, and reliefs.”⁴⁵

⁴² King, p. 20; quote taken from “Sermon preached by Bishop Perry in St. Mary’s Church, south Portsmouth, on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary, December 17, 1941.”

⁴³ Gibbs, p.107, quoted the reminiscences of a family friend, Mary E. Powell, who mistakenly attributed the Gibbs Memorial to the artist Washington Allston. Onorato, pp. 5 and 7, noted that although Greenough and Allston (a painter, not a sculptor) were “close, longtime friends,” physical and documentary evidence clearly contradicted the “family lore” crediting Allston as the creator of this piece.

⁴⁴ Smithsonian American Art Museum, <https://americanart.si.edu/artist/horatio-greenough-1935>.

⁴⁵ Wright, pp. 24-25. “One of the three or four best” refers to those American sculptors born between 1800 and 1830.

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Greenough yearned to study his art in Italy, but at his parents' insistence he first enrolled at Harvard College, where he took classes in anatomy, the classics, and Italian. He also met the painter Washington Allston, who became his long-time mentor and influenced the development of Greenough's artistic philosophy: "that the greatest art was more an expression of the mind than an imitation of the forms of nature, and that the masterpieces of the past were the best teachers of art."⁴⁶ After graduating in 1825, Greenough went to Rome, and then to Florence (where he lived for most of the rest of his life), to study and make art: setting a trend that many American sculptors would follow. Early in his career, Greenough gained some prominent American clients: he created busts of President John Quincy Adams and former President John Adams (both in 1827-29); the painter Thomas Cole, founder of the Hudson River School movement of landscape painters (1831); telegraph inventor Samuel F.B. Morse (1831); and author James Fennimore Cooper (1831-34).

Greenough aspired to create monumental works befitting the neoclassical tradition of American public buildings, and in 1832, with the help of Washington Allston, he secured a commission from the U.S. Congress to create a monument to George Washington for installation in the Rotunda of the Capitol Building. In 1841 Greenough presented the finished piece: a seated, half-nude figure, ten and a half feet tall and weighing 20 tons. "George Washington" garnered praise from many European and American artists and writers, but amongst the general public, some derided it as "foreign, pagan, and indecent;" the resulting publicity made it "among the most famous statues of the mid-19th century."⁴⁷ This whiff of notoriety did not deter Congress from asking Greenough, in 1837, to create another monument, this time for the east front of the Capitol Building. Called "The Rescue," it had a distinctly American theme that did win public favor at the time: a pioneer defending his wife and child from attack by a Native American. It was installed at the Capitol in 1853, after Greenough's untimely death.⁴⁸

Throughout his career Greenough also wrote extensively about art and architecture, both as a critic and a theorist. Decades before the American architect Louis Sullivan coined the maxim, "form follows function," Horatio Greenough had promoted that concept in his 1843 essay "American Architecture," published in *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review*; this "was the first comprehensive statement of the functional theory of architecture to be made by an American."⁴⁹ Shortly before his death in 1852 he published (under the pseudonym "Horace Bender") a collection of eighteen essays, about half of which discussed art or architecture, called *The Travels, Observations, and Experiences of a Yankee Stonecutter*.

Horatio Greenough's reputation as a sculptor was already well established by 1835, when he met Sarah Gibbs and began working on the Gibbs Memorial. It took several years to finalize the

⁴⁶ Wright, pp. 31-32.

⁴⁷ Quotes from Greenough, p. vii and Larkin, p. 221, respectively.

⁴⁸ "George Washington" was later moved to the Capitol grounds, and now resides in the Smithsonian Institution. "The Rescue" was removed and placed in storage in 1958 (where it remains), due to concerns about its insensitive portrayal of the Native American figure.

⁴⁹ Greenough, p. viii.

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design, which was executed in white marble and Neoclassical motifs: male and female figures swathed in classical drapery (the male figure was apparently modeled upon Gilbert Stuart's portrait of George Gibbs II), a funerary urn atop a column-like plinth, and a nearly nude winged angel.⁵⁰ The piece also included an inscription written by the renowned Unitarian theologian Dr. William Ellery Channing (husband of Sarah's sister Ruth). Greenough began carving the memorial around 1839, and completed it in 1842. (*Photo 7*)

Some documentation suggests that Sarah Gibbs had originally intended to install the Gibbs Memorial at Trinity Church in Newport, where her parents – and she - had been faithful members and generous supporters for their entire lives.⁵¹ However, that plan fell through, and when Horatio Greenough shipped the Gibbs Memorial (in pieces, packaged in several crates) from Italy to Oakland Farm, it was placed in storage. Doubtless neither the artist nor his client envisioned that five years later, the artwork would instead find a home inside a new stone Gothic Revival parish church in rural Portsmouth. As architectural historian Dr. Ronald J. Onorato explains,

Still, what Sarah Gibbs commissioned remains a major neo-classical monument by arguably the most important American sculptor of his generation. As the Gibbs Memorial is cogently summed up by architectural historian William Jordy, 'so the work of an eminent neoclassicist here joins the work of an eminent medievalist' ... One patron and two works in two different fields here reflect the pinnacle of sculpture and architecture in mid-19th century America.⁵²

Founding of St. Mary's Parish (1843); Church of the Holy Cross, Middletown (1845)

Prior to 1833, Episcopalians living in Portsmouth either had to invite a clergyman to conduct a private worship service, or attend church in a neighboring town. The nearest options were five or six miles distant: Trinity Church in Newport, or St. Michael's in Bristol (which also required a ferry crossing). Going to church could consume the better part of a day, even in good weather – a challenging prospect in a farming community, where there was always work to be done, even on Sundays.

When St. Paul's Episcopal Church was built in northern Portsmouth in 1833, it stood only about four miles up the road from Oakland Farm. Yet Sarah Gibbs's long-standing ties to Trinity Church apparently dissuaded her from joining this new Portsmouth parish. She remained a member of Trinity for another decade, and when she was in residence at Oakland Farm, she

⁵⁰ Gibbs, pp. 11 and 25. Gilbert Stuart had painted George Gibbs^{II} and Mary Channing Gibbs individually in 1798, and later also painted George Gibbs^{III} and his wife Laura Wolcott Gibbs. Gilbert Stuart did portraits of many elite Americans, but is probably best known for several images of President George Washington. George Gibbs^{III} acquired one of the Washington portraits; now known as the "Gibbs-Channing-Avery portrait," it hangs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.

⁵¹ Mason, Vol. 2, pp. 56 and 71.

⁵² Onorato, p. 10.

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occasionally invited friends and neighbors to attend a worship service there, conducted by Trinity's Rector, Rev. Dr. Salmon Wheaton. She also often hosted informal gatherings at Oakland "for friendship's sake and for religious instruction."⁵³ Her deep devotion to her faith and "a sense of the spiritual wants of her immediate neighborhood" eventually led her to her late-in-life mission: to establish a new Episcopal parish in the vicinity of Oakland Farm.⁵⁴ This mission was fulfilled in stages over a period of six years, 1843-1849, and resulted in the founding of one parish with two churches, built in close proximity to each other although in separate towns, both designed by Richard Upjohn and funded by Sarah Gibbs: Church of the Holy Cross in Middletown and St. Mary's Church in Portsmouth. While these activities began as a mission under the auspices of Trinity Church in Newport, Sarah Gibbs was the driving factor in bringing it about, and in eventually making St. Mary's an independent parish.

At Sarah Gibbs's request, in November 1843 the Rector of Trinity Church, Rev. Francis Vinton, invited Rev. Hobart Williams from the Diocese of Western New York to come to Rhode Island "for the purpose of organizing a new parish in its [Trinity's] vicinity" and "to organize a Mission of the Church for the benefit of the people there dwelling."⁵⁵ Rev. Williams arrived in Newport on December 13, 1843, moved into accommodations at Oakland Farm the following day, and conducted the first worship service for the new parish with a small handful of congregants on December 17, 1843, presumably also at Oakland Farm. That winter, Sunday services were held in a schoolhouse on Middle Road in Portsmouth, and in the spring of 1844, the growing congregation transferred to another schoolhouse on West Main Road in Middletown.⁵⁶

A year later, it was clear that the new parish needed a permanent home, and so in April 1845, John H. Gilliat, a Senior Warden at Trinity Church, purchased a half-acre site at the corner of West Main Road and Oliphant Lane in Middletown, about two miles from Oakland Farm and just south of the Portsmouth town line. Sarah Gibbs donated about \$2,000 to build a new church, and engaged architect Richard Upjohn to design it.⁵⁷ By 1844, Upjohn's reputation as an ecclesiastical architect and a master of the Gothic Revival style was well known, and he was already working on two projects in Rhode Island: Grace Church in Providence and the Edward King residence in Newport.

⁵³ King, p. 2. Mason, pp. 283-284, noted that Dr. Wheaton served at Trinity Church from 1810-1840, and that he and his wife named their eldest daughter Sarah Gibbs Wheaton (born in 1814, according to Ancestry.com), so Sarah Gibbs evidently had a close personal relationship of long duration with the Rector and his family, and it is likely that Dr. Wheaton visited Oakland Farm many times during his thirty years presiding at Trinity Church.

⁵⁴ Quote taken from the St. Mary's Church One Hundredth Anniversary booklet, p. 1.

⁵⁵ Quotes from the St. Mary's One Hundredth Anniversary booklet, p. 1, and from King, p. 3, respectively.

⁵⁶ No documentation was found to explain why the fledgling parish found a home in Middletown instead of Portsmouth in 1844-45. However, both the Middletown locations were close to the Portsmouth town line, and readily accessible from Sarah Gibbs's home at Oakland Farm as well as to other residents of southern Portsmouth.

⁵⁷ King, pp 4-5. Mason, p. 336, identified John H. Gilliat's role at Trinity Church. Gilliat's purchase of the site of Holy Cross was recorded in Middletown Deed Book 8/Page 297. Note that the Church of the Holy Cross website indicates that Gilliat also put up the initial funding to build the church, although King asserts that Sarah Gibbs paid for the church construction.

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Completed in 1845, the Church of the Holy Cross (*Figure 12*) was Middletown's first Protestant Episcopal church; today it stands at 1439-1443 West Main Road.⁵⁸ Bishop John P.K. Henshaw, addressing the Rhode Island Episcopal Convention in June 1846, recalled:

On Tuesday, October 14, 1845, in Middletown, I consecrated to the worship of Almighty God, according to the rites and ceremonies of the Protestant Episcopal Church, a cheap but beautiful edifice, designed by Mr. Richard Upjohn, by the name of "the Church of the Holy Cross." It is rustic in its exterior, and thus admirably adapted to its isolated position in the country; but so chaste in its interior finish, and so perfect in its proportions, that it is more imposing in its religious impression and far better adapted to its sacred use than many buildings of far greater cost and pretensions.⁵⁹

Architectural historian William Jordy described the Church of the Holy Cross as:

...a delightful country church ... with fish-scale shingling in the rural manner which Upjohn recommended for the most economical churches. ... It is amazing good fortune that two country churches of such outstanding quality as St. Mary's and the Church of the Holy Cross, designed by one of America's leading church architects, should appear within a ten-minute drive of one another.⁶⁰

Bishop Henshaw's "cheap but beautiful" comment, and Jordy's reference to "the most economical churches," both alluded to the fact that Holy Cross was made of wood. Richard Upjohn had by this time developed several prototype designs for wood-frame Gothic Revival churches, intended to be affordable for rural parishes on a tight budget.⁶¹ St. Mary's Parish was not poor, thanks to Sarah Gibbs's generosity, but to her mind Holy Cross was essentially a side project, while St. Mary's Church was to be the main focus of her efforts. Thus Holy Cross was built of wood, while St. Mary's Church was built of stone.

⁵⁸ Town of Middletown land evidence records indicate that in 1849, Rev. Hobart Williams conveyed the land and buildings of Holy Cross Church to Sarah P. Cleveland in trust, and that ownership has continually passed down through a series of trustees since then, most recently in 2007 (Middletown Deed Book 1082/Page 248). An addendum to the St. Mary's Parish "One Hundredth Anniversary" booklet confirmed that Holy Cross remained part of St. Mary's Parish at least through 1947, overseen by its own board of trustees. No records were found confirming if/when Holy Cross officially separated from St. Mary's, but neither church's website indicates a current affiliation with the other.

⁵⁹ King, p. 7.

⁶⁰ Jordy et al, p. 509.

⁶¹ In 1852, Upjohn and several fellow architects published "*Upjohn's rural architecture: Designs, working drawings and specifications for a wooden church, and other rural structures*" (1852), which enabled builders across the country to utilize his inexpensive "Carpenter Gothic" designs.

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St. Mary's Church, Southern Portsmouth, 1844-1849

Sarah Gibbs's vision for St. Mary's Church was to build not just a house of worship, but also a seminary: "a great spiritual education center." Rev. Hobart Williams, John H. Gilliat, and Bishop Henshaw all supported this ambitious plan – and, notably, let Sarah Gibbs take the lead.⁶²

The first step was to secure a site. On April 9, 1844, Sarah Gibbs purchased, for \$5,250, "a certain farm or tract of land situate in Portsmouth ... containing about 88 acres ... together with the buildings thereon standing ..." from the estate of Thomas Potter, Jr.⁶³ This farm lay on the west side of East Main Road, just a short distance south of Oakland Farm. (The existing buildings included a dwelling house that later served as a parsonage, from 1866 until 1936.) Exactly six months later, Sarah Gibbs recorded a Deed of Trust transferring ownership of this land (which parish records subsequently often referred to as "the Church Farm") to three trustees: Bishop John P.K. Henshaw, John Henry Gilliat, and herself. The deed clearly set forth Sarah Gibbs's intentions, both in making this conveyance and in remaining firmly in charge of her dream project:

Whereas I am desirous to and in the furtherance of the Gospel, and in the maintenance of the doctrine of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States, as exhibited in the Book of Common Prayer; and for this object have purchased a tract of land in Portsmouth in the County of Newport ... to furnish sites for a seminary and church ...

Reserving to myself and my assigns, during my natural life, the exclusive use, direction and control of such land and premises, and from and after my decease, said premises shall be held by the survivor of them, the said Hinshaw and Gilliat ... in trust for the purpose of allowing and permitting the erection and placing thereon of a building or buildings to be devoted and used exclusively to and for the purpose of a seminary or church in connection with the said Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States...⁶⁴

Richard Upjohn, having recently completed the Church of the Holy Cross, was engaged to design a new church for St. Mary's Parish on the "Church Farm." Exactly when he began working on the project is unclear and no architectural drawings have been located, but based on project correspondence, it is clear that the design was well underway by the summer of 1847. For example, on July 16, Rev. Hobart Williams wrote a letter to Upjohn requesting a meeting to discuss recent design modifications that Williams feared might be too expensive; he expressed a desire to go back to an earlier design that would keep the building cost under \$4,000. The design still had not been finalized when, on August 29, Bishop John P.K. Henshaw wrote to Upjohn to say that he intended to lay the cornerstone for the new building in four days' time; that ceremony

⁶² King, p. 5.

⁶³ Deed Book 13/Pages 11-12.

⁶⁴ DB 13/13.

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did indeed occur on September 2, 1847. Three days later, St. Mary's new Rector Rev. James Mulcahey contacted Upjohn about a problem with the Gibbs Memorial:

The boxes containing the monument are now open. And by desire of Miss Gibbs I write to request that you will come on if possible without delay. The monument is very large, and may if placed in the chancel as contemplated require some alteration in the plan of the church. At any rate, as no mention of it has been made in any specifications as drawn up, it is proper that you should see it before the contract can be made.⁶⁵

Given that the Gibbs Memorial was apparently not uncrated and reassembled until after St. Mary's cornerstone had been laid, perhaps the idea of mounting the piece inside this new church only belatedly occurred to Sarah Gibbs some months after Upjohn started work. Otherwise, it is a mystery why Upjohn's initial designs apparently did not include a place for the Gibbs Memorial, since its dimensions were readily available to him. In any event, the church was built with a large pointed-arch niche for the Gibbs Memorial on the north wall of the nave, directly opposite the main entrance: a far more visible location than the chancel would have been.

Through the fall of 1847 Upjohn also had to resolve some other issues, as revealed by correspondence from stone mason Alexander MacGregor. A Scottish immigrant who was also an architect, and who had spent eighteen years working in Newport, MacGregor had some impressive projects on his resume, including construction supervisor at Fort Adams (1824-57; NHL, 1970); the Perry Mill on Thames Street (1835; NR, 1972); and a Bellevue Avenue mansion called "Stone Villa" (ca. 1845, demolished 1957). In a letter to Upjohn dated October 10, 1847, MacGregor outlined his contract for services and offered three different price options: one for the specifications Upjohn had provided; a discounted price for a cellar "only under the chancel;" and an upcharge for a larger chancel with a chapel. It appears that Upjohn and Sarah Gibbs chose a modified version of option number two, because the church was built with a small crypt underneath the chancel. The nine burials in the crypt were all relatives of the Gibbs and Channing families who had died before 1844, including Sarah Gibbs's mother Mary Channing Gibbs. A physical analysis of the stonework of the crypt done in 2021 indicated that the stonework predated the church, but no documentation was found indicating that there were existing burials on the site of the proposed church, so it appears that the remains were transferred here from other locations. (*Figure 10*)⁶⁶

⁶⁵ King, pp. 8-9. None of the documentation about the cornerstone identified its exact location, which remains unknown. O'Neill, pp. 13-15 and 53-56 (Figures 4, 5, 6, and 7), cited Upjohn's correspondence in the collection of the New York Public Library. Note that on pp. 16-17, O'Neill mistakenly identified the "monument" under discussion as one for Sarah Gibbs, and concluded that the design of the chancel needed to be altered to accommodate her future burial place; however, the phrase "the boxes containing the monument are now open" in Mulcahey's letter clearly refers to the Gibbs Memorial.

⁶⁶ O'Neill, pp. 15-17 and 58-59 (Figures 9 and 10). Figure 10 in O'Neill's report is a photo of MacGregor's letter; it did not mention the need to build around any existing crypt or tomb on the proposed site of the church building.

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Correspondence with a woodworker named M.W. Spencer of Newport gives further insight into the construction process. This was likely Micah W. Spencer, whom the 1850 U.S. Census for Newport identified as a carpenter, age 42 (born ca. 1808). He was repeatedly listed as a carpenter in censuses as late as 1880, and in the business sections of Newport city directories from 1856-1879.⁶⁷ On October 12, 1847, Spencer wrote to Upjohn confirming his fee for services for St. Mary's Church and listing the various woods to be used for different building components: pine for the principal rafters and purlins, as well as "first quality" pine for the roof shingles; hemlock for the roof boards and under-floor boards; spruce for common rafters, floor joists, and "first quality" spruce for the primary floor boards. Spencer wrote another letter to Upjohn dated October 28, 1847 after a meeting that he and Alexander MacGregor had had with Sarah Gibbs regarding some of the architectural details. (Clearly, she kept a close eye on the project.)

Upjohn's final design for St. Mary's seems to have been inspired by his own experience of living amongst medieval parish churches in England, as well as by the Cambridge Ecclesiologists, and by the first American church building directly modeled on the Ecclesiologists' recommendations: St. James The Less Episcopal Church in Philadelphia (1846-1850; NHL, 1985), which was based on the 13th century St. Michael's Church in Longstanton, Cambridgeshire, England (*Figure 13*).⁶⁸ The Ecclesiologists promoted the use of local stone as a building material; directed the orientation of the building to be toward the east; and noted that instead of a tower, "a bell gable may be made a beautiful ornament, and is very well suited to a small church." The two essential parts of a church were the nave and the chancel; the chancel should be located at the eastern end of the nave, be proportionally smaller in height and breadth, and be raised at least two steps above the nave floor, with the altar raised several steps above the chancel floor. All seating for worshippers should be on open benches or chairs, and confined to the nave; box pews and galleries were forbidden. An open roof with hammerbeam trusses was strongly recommended ("of all wooden roofs, the most elegant and churchlike"); even in small churches, a two-arch truss system would create a trefoil, symbol of the Holy Trinity. The spiritual metaphor of "three" extended to the use of pointed arches, trefoils, and triangles in decorative motifs; to groupings of lancet windows; and to the subdivision of larger window openings with stone tracery. The pulpit, with a winding stair, was to be placed on either the north or south side of the nave arch. A stone baptismal font should be positioned in the nave, near a door, symbolizing the admission of a child into the faith.⁶⁹ St. Mary's Church followed almost all of these principles and retains many of these details (*Photos 1-15*); historic photos (*Figure 9*) reveal that the original altar window had stone tracery dividing it into three parts.

Construction on St. Mary's Church took two years; in the meantime, worship services were held in a temporary wood-frame building constructed on the "Church Farm." On June 17, 1849, after a total expenditure of about \$11,000 (nearly three times the original budget), St. Mary's opened

⁶⁷ O'Neill, pp. 17-18 and 60-62 (Figures 11, 12 and 13). Newport city directories and census data found on Ancestry.com. According to the Find A Grave website, no one named Micah W. Spencer was buried in Rhode Island, so his death date is unknown.

⁶⁸ Pitts, Section 8. Also Jordy, p. 508.

⁶⁹ Cambridge Camden Society, *A Few Words To Church Builders*, pp. 5-23.

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its doors to public worship. Almost three years later, on May 20, 1852, Bishop John P.K. Henshaw officially consecrated St. Mary's Church. In his address to the statewide Episcopal Convention the following month, Henshaw reported:

This substantial and well-proportioned structure, completely furnished with all things necessary to the sacred uses for which it is designed, is one of the best specimens of ecclesiastical architecture, for a rural parish, which Upjohn has produced. Its walls are built of stone quarried in the neighborhood, ornamented with the red free stone of New Jersey. This munificent gift of faith and love, from an intelligent and pious churchwoman, is now set apart as a free House of Prayer for the spiritual benefit of the adjacent Islanders in all coming generations.⁷⁰

Upjohn apparently recycled design components of this "best specimen," perhaps as a time- and cost-saving measure within his own very busy office: at least two other contemporary churches outside of Rhode Island bear a marked resemblance to St. Mary's: St. Andrew's Church in New Berlin, N.Y. (1847-48) and Calvary Church in Stonington, Conn. (1847-49) (*Figure 12*).

Between 1847 and 1855, Rev. Hobart Williams periodically served as Rector of either the Church of the Holy Cross or St. Mary's Church, but he repeatedly stepped away from those duties to focus on trying to help Sarah Gibbs realize her dream of establishing a seminary at St. Mary's. Despite their best efforts, this did not happen. But as of 1850, the parish did have a "Church School" (i.e., Sunday school) for the children of families who worshipped at both churches; that school remained active for at least the next century.⁷¹

In 1854, the Rhode Island Convention elected a new Bishop, Thomas March Clark (1812-1903), who served in that office for the rest of his life. In his first ten years of service, Bishop Clark presided over another major expansion of the Protestant Episcopal Church across Rhode Island: a fifty-percent increase in congregants, a doubling of Sunday school enrollments, and six new parishes.⁷² In the Civil War era, almost all of the growth in the Rhode Island Episcopal Diocese occurred in two of the state's fastest-growing industrial cities, Providence and Pawtucket. Bishop Clark successfully petitioned the 1865 Convention to relieve him of the management of an individual parish (Grace Church in Providence), and to establish an endowment to pay his salary so that he could focus solely on managing the growing Diocese. Through the remainder of Bishop Clark's episcopate, twenty-one additional new parishes were admitted to the Rhode Island Convention, and sixteen new missions were established, nearly all in urban, suburban, and mill village areas. The total number of congregants statewide increased five-fold between 1855 and 1900, and Sunday school enrollment increased four-fold in that same period.⁷³

⁷⁰ King, pp. 10-11. O'Neill, p. 19, reported the final cost of building St. Mary's.

⁷¹ Tyng, p. 97.

⁷² Tyng, p. 32.

⁷³ Tyng, pp. 36-40. Again, Tyng failed to mention rural St Columba's Church in Middletown (1895) among the new crop of Episcopal parishes and missions of the period 1860-1898.

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Meanwhile, in Portsmouth, as of 1855 Rev. Hobart Williams resumed his position as Rector for both St. Mary's Church and the Church of the Holy Cross, a position he held until his death in 1884. In 1857, St. Mary's Parish was admitted into the Rhode Island Episcopal Convention. In 1860, Bishop Clark officially replaced the late Bishop Henshaw as one of the trustees of St. Mary's Church.⁷⁴ Between 1850 and 1875, the size of St. Mary's Parish more than doubled, from 25 to 61 communicants, while enrollment in the Church School increased from 50 to 60 children. These numbers seem quite low for a parish with two churches (although seasonal visitors may not have been counted), but perhaps explain how Rev. Williams could manage both churches by himself.⁷⁵ The population counts in Portsmouth during this period were relatively static: 1,833 residents in 1850, climbed to 2,003 in 1870, but dropped back to 1,979 in 1880.

After Sarah Gibbs died on June 17, 1866, Rev. Hobart Williams offered these remarks on her role as founder and benefactor of St. Mary's:

Miss Gibbs was then [in 1843] nearly sixty years old, and it was remarkable with what activity she engaged in the practical part of founding a church, building a shed near the school-house which was first used for the services, gathering a congregation, taking a class in the Sunday-School, visiting and ministering to the sick and afflicted, and accompanying the clergyman in his evening services in the houses of the neighbors and in a distant school-house in Middletown. She postponed and finally gave up her usual return to Boston, arranged for the sale of her house there, determined to establish her permanent home at Oakland, and bought the farm next but one to it for the purpose of building on it a house of worship, to be supported and endowed, as a thank-offering to God. Accordingly, in the spring of 1844, during a visit to Boston, her lawyer prepared a deed of trust for the Potter farm, recently purchased, to the Bishop of Rhode Island and others, for church and educational uses. Also a will was prepared in case Miss Gibbs's death should occur before the completion of her purpose, in which a sum was set aside for building a church, for keeping it in repair, for the support of a clergyman, the salary of an organist and of a sexton, and another sum which after some temporary changes upon it was to form a fund for the purpose of education. The public services were now transferred to the house on the Church farm, which was enlarged and adapted to that purpose, and as the worship on the West Road was conducted with much success, Miss Gibbs advanced the money, \$2,000, to build a chapel there, as she was accustomed to join in the services and the instruction of the Sunday School.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Deed Book 14/Page 278 (1860).

⁷⁵ Tyng, p. 97. King, pp. 11-12, stated that between 1850 and 1855, the number of parishioners grew "three-fold;" he did not provide actual statistics, but that would have brought the number of parishioners to 75 by 1855, so perhaps the numbers had dropped off by 1875.

⁷⁶ King, pp. 3-5 and p. 20. Hobart's claim that Sarah Gibbs had donated the money to build the Church of the Holy Cross concurred with King's assertion of same.

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St. Mary's Church Cemetery

At the time that Sarah Gibbs bought the "Church Farm" in 1844, an old burial plot for the Vinson family, former owners of the property, lay near the south property line. Two Vinson gravestones were relocated in 1892 to stand near the main entrance to the Church; these are the earliest stones in the St. Mary's Cemetery, although they predate the Cemetery itself.⁷⁷

The oldest gravestone belonged to Mary Lawton Vinson (ca. 1771-1797) (*Photos 23, 24*), and was signed by its maker: Henry Bull (1772-1841), the son of Newport's famed master gravestone carver John Bull (1734-1808). John Bull worked for the renowned John Stevens shop in Newport (founded in 1705; still in business today) until he was in his early sixties, when his eyesight suddenly failed and he could no longer work, forcing 15-year-old Henry Bull to take up his father's trade full-time to support the family. Henry Bull later wrote that "in the Spring of 1795, being then in the 17th year of my age, I commenced the double operation of making gravestones and keeping [a grocery] shop, without any assistance in either business ... occasionally in a day's work hired in the manufacture of gravestones." This indicates that Henry Bull was not a regular employee of the Stevens shop, although he may have worked for them on a per diem basis, and apparently was influenced by their carving styles, given his own personal experience and training.⁷⁸

The other Vinson family stone belonged to George Lawton Vinson (ca. 1794-1816), son of Mary and James Vinson. His gravestone, unsigned but also attributed to the Stevens Shop in Newport,⁷⁹ now stands next to his mother's (*Photo 23*) and is the second-oldest stone in St. Mary's Cemetery.

No documentation was found to confirm when St. Mary's Cemetery was first formally laid out, but there are six burials dating from the period 1846-1849, concurrent with the planning and construction of the Church. The R.I. Historical Cemeteries database reveals that among the several dozen people who were laid to rest in the first few decades after the parish was founded, many came from local families: surnames such as Albro, Almy, Brown, Chase, Coggeshall, Gould, Greene, Lawton, Manchester, Sherman, and Wilcox can be seen on the 1831 and 1850 maps of southern Portsmouth (*Figures 3 and 4*). Parish records also confirm that individuals with some of these same surnames held various church offices such as warden, vestryman, treasurer, and clerk.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ No documentation was found to confirm whether the remains of Mary Lawton Vinson and George Lawton Vinson were moved along with their headstones.

⁷⁸ Bull, pp. 17-21; quote on p.18. Note that the R.I. Historical Cemeteries database for Newport's Island Cemetery indicates that Henry Bull was born in 1778; this date apparently comes from the gravestone for Henry Bull and his wife Mary Fones Holmes Bull. A photo of that gravestone (on the Find A Grave website under Mary's name) shows the weatherworn carvings of Henry's birth and death dates; the birth date does appear to be 1778, but presumably Bull's personal identification of his own birth year as 1772 is reliable.

⁷⁹ Site visit with architectural historian Dr. Ronald J. Onorato.

⁸⁰ King, pp. 28-29.

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Sarah Gibbs was buried in St. Mary's Cemetery, beneath the altar window of the Church's chancel. Long-time family friend Mary E. Powel wrote of Sarah Gibbs's funeral:

That little cemetery of St. Mary's was newly consecrated to those who stood, on one of the first beautiful Sabbaths of a recent summer, by the grave of Sarah Gibbs. The little stone church on the hill, the crowd of well-dressed and sad looking farmers, the troop of children bringing flowers to scatter on the coffin of their benefactress, the vivid and tearful memories that then and there arose in the hearts of the gathered friends, of her uniform goodness, noble nature, and Christian womanhood; the impressive rites of the Church she so loved and labored for, the fresh green of tree and turn, the bright soft solemn day, all made up an experience now hallowed to memory, love and faith.

A remarkably appropriate monument has recently been erected over the remains of this venerated lady, of sarcophagus type, in fine granite, a cross is rounded from the apex in graceful manner, the monograms, Alpha and Omega, are cut in relief at each end. On one side of the inscription, "Sarah Gibbs died June 17, 1866, Aged 84," on the other, "Founded this church 1847." Mr. Richard M. Hunt designed this chaste and original monument.⁸¹

No documentation was found to confirm how or when New York-based architect Richard Morris Hunt (1827-1895) was tapped to design Sarah Gibbs's monument (*Photos 2, 25, 26*), which was made and installed in 1867-68. But Hunt spent a lot of time in Newport: he and his wife Catherine C. Howland owned a second home there, and Hunt also designed several "summer cottages" for wealthy owners. Hunt's body of work also included several private and public monuments, including the August and Caroline (Perry) Belmont sarcophagus and exedra in Newport's Island Cemetery (1891; Common Burial Ground and Island Cemetery, NR, 1974).⁸²

**"TO CARRY ON THE WORK SO NOBLY BEGUN":⁸³
 THE LEGACY OF SARAH GIBBS, 1866-1973**

In the second half of the 19th century, transportation improvements and the growth of the leisure tourism industry facilitated the development of summer resorts in many of Rhode Island's coastal communities. Newport became a fashionable destination for the elite of New York, Boston, and other major American cities. Portsmouth and Middletown also saw their share of seasonal visitors. In southern Portsmouth, the century-old trend of moneyed out-of-town

⁸¹ Gibbs, pp. 105-106.

⁸² Baker, pp. 142 and 539. Baker's list of Hunt's projects on p. 539 mistakenly indicates the location of the "Sarah Gibbs tomb" as Brattleboro, Vt., and also mistakenly attributes the Alexander Van Rensselaer House in Middletown (1867-68) to Hunt when Richard Upjohn actually designed it. Note that August and Caroline Belmont were the parents of Oliver Belmont, whose mansion, "Belcourt," Hunt also designed.

⁸³ King, p. 18.

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businessmen buying large country estates continued, in a new wave of “gentlemen’s farms.” These typically were working farms with impressive mansions where show animals were bred and raised. The advent of “gentlemen’s farms” brought a new population of seasonal parishioners to St. Mary’s Church, several of whom became important benefactors.

After Sarah Gibbs died, her heirs sold Oakland Farm in 1867 to the prominent financier August Belmont of New York City and Newport. Belmont, an avid breeder of racehorses (and founder of the prestigious Belmont Stakes) sold Oakland in 1886 to Cornelius Vanderbilt II, chairman of the New York Central Railroad and owner of The Breakers in Newport.⁸⁴ The Vanderbilt family owned Oakland Farm for sixty years, turning it into “a major horse farm of world renown.”⁸⁵ Several family members developed close ties to St. Mary’s Church. Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt (1877-1915) and his wife Ellen Tuck French Vanderbilt (1879-1948) were major donors, and also hosted several fundraisers at Oakland to benefit St. Mary’s.⁸⁶ William H. Vanderbilt III (1901-1981), who founded the transportation company known today as Bonanza Bus Lines, and also served as a State Senator (1928-1935) and Governor of Rhode Island (1938-1940), lived at Oakland Farm for over two decades. During that time (1922-1947) he served on the board of trustees for St. Mary’s Church.

Growth and Change at St. Mary’s Parish and Church, 1866-1973

Sarah Gibbs’s will could not be produced for probate, so any intention that she may have had to provide a posthumous financial legacy to St. Mary’s Parish went unfulfilled. Other sources of funding needed to be found to carry out future plans for the construction of additional facilities such as a rectory and a parish house. One means of generating income was to lease some of the acreage belonging to St. Mary’s for agricultural production. This practice of “farm lets” continued for at least the next half century; among the lessees in 1909-1911 was Alfred G. Vanderbilt.⁸⁷

Fundraising for big-ticket capital projects proved more challenging. One immediate result of Sarah Gibbs’s death was that the Rector of St. Mary’s became homeless: Rev. Hobart Williams had lived at Oakland Farm as a permanent houseguest ever since his arrival in Portsmouth in late 1843, and when he married Augusta M. Eaton in 1859, “Miss Gibbs insisted that they should make Oakland their home, and this they did until her death.”⁸⁸ After an unsuccessful effort to raise money to construct a parsonage, in 1867 (at his own expense) Rev. Williams remodeled the aged late 18th/early 19th century dwelling house on the St. Mary’s property, which became St.

⁸⁴ *New York Times*, October 5, 1886.

⁸⁵ Garman, *Gentlemen’s Farms*, p. 71.

⁸⁶ *New York Times*, December 3, 1907, July 9, 1908, and July 7, 1910. Alfred and Ellen Vanderbilt divorced in 1908.

⁸⁷ King, p. 13. St. Mary’s records in the University of Rhode Island Library’s Distinctive Collections contain several references to periodic leases for farming purposes.

⁸⁸ King, p. 12.

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Mary's first parsonage. This building was labeled on the 1870 atlas of Portsmouth (*Figure 5*) and its footprint was also depicted on the 1895 atlas (*Figure 6*). In 1871 Rev. Williams and his wife were both granted a life tenancy there, in acknowledgement of his long service to the parish; and after their deaths, both were buried in St. Mary's Cemetery. This parsonage remained in use until 1936, when it was demolished prior to the construction of the present Rectory.⁸⁹

At the January 1868 session of the R.I. General Assembly, the legislature approved the incorporation of St. Mary's Church as a "body corporate, with perpetual succession," consisting of Hobart Williams, Albert Coggeshall, Robert Chase, John B. Gould, William H. Gifford, Christopher Sherman, Noel Coggeshall, Samuel G. Sherman, and Peleg T. Coggeshall, "with the other male communicants ... and their successors." The corporation was permitted to "receive, hold, and enjoy" property not exceeding \$30,000 in value, and to "elect such officers and do all things usual and proper to be done according to the usages of the Protestant Episcopal Church."⁹⁰

St. Mary's Church continued to evolve in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as various donors made gifts that effected physical changes to the church. Around 1870-72, three new stained-glass windows were installed (replacing original window glass) in the south elevation of the nave at St. Mary's Church, all donated by parishioners in memory of loved ones. The window depicting the Virgin Mary (*Photo 8*) was donated in memory of Phebe Lawton (ca. 1813-1870). The window depicting Christ as the Good Shepherd was donated in memory of Thankful Gifford (ca. 1808-1870) and Jeremiah Gifford (ca. 1841-1872), the wife and son of one of St. Mary's former Vestrymen, William Henry Gifford. All of these people were Portsmouth residents and were buried in St. Mary's Cemetery. The window depicting the Madonna and Child honors Howard Carnell Peterson (1872-1872), infant son of T. Howard and Mary Peterson of Philadelphia; the baby's grandfather was Charles J. Peterson, part-owner of the *Saturday Evening Post* and publisher of a women's magazine called *Peterson's*. The Peterson family evidently worshipped at St. Mary's Church in Portsmouth while summer residents of Newport.⁹¹

In 1885, St. Mary's newly appointed Rector Rev. Daniel Odell (ca. 1851-1925) donated a stained-glass window depicting an angel in memory of his twin sister Hannah Odell (ca. 1852-

⁸⁹ King, p. 14. Note that Gibbs, p. 104, quoted the reminiscences of Mary E. Powell, who mistakenly claimed that Sarah Gibbs had built this parsonage around the time of Rev. Williams's marriage in 1869.

⁹⁰ R.I. General Assembly, p. 215; handwritten copy in the St. Mary's Vestry archives at U.R.I. Library. Women parishioners were not invited to be members or officers of the corporation; this remained true into the mid-20th century. The St. Mary's Parish "One Hundredth Anniversary" booklet indicated that as of 1947, women chaired several church organizations such as the Women's Auxiliary and the Holy Cross Guild, and were employed amongst the parish staff as secretaries and organists. The first female Rector, Rev. Pamela Mott, began serving in 2004; she was succeeded by Rev. Jennifer Pedrick in 2014.

⁹¹ O'Neill, p. 21. Records found on Ancestry.com: 1870 U.S. Census for Philadelphia lists T. Howard Peterson, publisher, age 23, as the son of Charles J. and Sarah H. Peterson; baptismal record at All Saints Episcopal Church in Philadelphia for Howard Cannell Peterson, son of T. Howard and Mary Peterson, born February 22, 1872; death record at the same church for the same child, died August 22, 1872, interred at Laurel Hill Cemetery in Philadelphia. T. Howard Peterson accidentally drowned in the ocean off Atlantic City, N.J. at age 31; his obituary on the Find A Grave website indicates that Charles J. Peterson was with his family in Newport when his son's body was discovered.

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1885), also installed in the nave's south elevation. Rev. Odell served only one year as Rector, but both he and his sister were interred in St. Mary's Cemetery.⁹²

In 1890, local architects George C. Mason & Son designed two stone exterior chimneys to replace existing chimneys on the north elevation of St. Mary's Church (*Photo 3*); these features vented a mechanical heating system. George C. Mason & Son of Newport designed many "summer cottages" for wealthy seasonal visitors, including August and Caroline Belmont, as well as some civic structures and churches. Among the firm's ecclesiastical works were St. Matthew's Episcopal Church in Jamestown, R.I. (1880; demolished 1967); and St. George's Episcopal Church in Newport (1885-86; NR, Kay Street-Catherine Street-Old Beach Road Historic District, 1973, 2018). The firm also designed the Belmont Chapel in Newport's Island Cemetery (1888; NR, 1974).

Mary Elizabeth Woodhull Perry (1844-1910) donated a new stained-glass window ca. 1905 in memory of her husband, Gardner Blanchard Perry (1829-1899).⁹³ This window, attributed to the British firm of Heaton, Butler, and Bayne and depicting the Ascension of Christ (*Photo 10*), was installed in the east wall of the chancel above the altar (the original window there, with stone tracery, was removed; *Figure 9*). A smaller window in the south wall of the chancel, with an image of St. John the Evangelist, is believed to be the work of the same firm and installed around the same time. Stained-glass artists Clement Heaton and James Butler formed a partnership in the 1850s, joined in 1862 by Robert Turnill Bayne; the firm was known for using medieval techniques and a wide range of colored glass. Its work can be found in churches all over the United Kingdom, including Westminster Abbey, as well as abroad.⁹⁴ Gardner Blanchard Perry, a native of Groveland, Massachusetts, was a partner in Samuel B. Hale & Co., an exporter of hides and wools from Argentina to the U.S.; the Perrys lived in Buenos Aires and then London for many years, but eventually retired in Rhode Island and purchased the Hamilton Hoppin House in Middletown (1856, designed by Richard Upjohn; NR, 1996), which they renamed "Montpelier." Mrs. Perry's obituary in the *New York Times* referred to her as a "prominent member of Newport's summer colony," noting that she lived in Boston and Middletown. The Perrys were buried in St. Mary's Cemetery; their large granite monument has carvings of laurel leaves, a cross inside a circle, and spiral scrollwork across the top, the word "Perry" on one side, and the couple's names and dates on the other (*Photo 27*).

In 1907, Mrs. Ellen T.F. Vanderbilt donated a wrought iron rood screen decorated with Christian symbols to St. Mary's Church. Designed by the Tilden Thurber Company and produced by Gorham Manufacturing Company, the rood screen was installed between the nave and the

⁹² O'Neill, p. 21; also King, p. 27.

⁹³ Allard's research notes cite a request for permission to install the Perry memorial window in 1905, recorded in Vestry minutes. Shepard, pp. 76-87 and p.122; in addition, inserted between pages 46 and 47 are photographs of the Perrys, of their home in Middletown, and of the altar window at St. Mary's Church (illustrations numbered 9 through 12 and 17). Note that O'Neill, p. 22, dated the altar and chancel windows to ca. 1914 and identified the altar window as a gift of "the Perry family."

⁹⁴ "Heaton, Butler & Bayne," in The Victorian Web website.

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chancel, and remained in place until removed in 2022 to eliminate a physical and visual barrier between the congregation and the celebrant of worship services; it is presently in storage.⁹⁵

Between 1907 and 1911, Edith Abercrombie-Miller Tuckerman (1883-1954), whose husband Walter Rupert Tuckerman (1881-1961) was a great-grandson of George Gibbs III, obtained permission to install four memorial stained-glass windows commemorating various members of the Gibbs and Tuckerman families on the north wall of the Church nave, plus two smaller windows in the recently renovated vestibule. Mrs. Tuckerman donated all six windows to the church, and commissioned New York artist Frederic Crowninshield to design and fabricate them.

Frederic Crowninshield (1845-1918) was a leading figure of the American Renaissance, which grew out of the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876 and flourished against the backdrop of the Gilded Age, an era of enormous fortunes being generated in business, finance, transportation, and manufacturing, and lavish spending by wealthy patrons on art and architecture: private residences, civic buildings and monuments, museums, libraries, and houses of worship. Many artists and architects of the American Renaissance belonged to the same social circles as their patrons, and earned steady work through personal recommendations.

Crowninshield, who grew up in an affluent Boston family, trained as a mural and fresco painter in Italy and France. After returning from Europe, he taught decorative arts at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts School and wrote extensively about the subject, in addition to producing his own artwork. Crowninshield began working in stained glass in 1879 and quickly gained a sophisticated expertise in this medium, using opalescent glass as well as traditional painting techniques on transparent glass, which itself could be colored with metal oxides or powders during the manufacturing process to produce rich shades of green, red, blue, yellow, and other hues.

As a stained-glass designer, Crowninshield's production suggests a meticulous concern throughout his career for both compositional and technical issues. His subjects covered a wide range, from religious and historical to allegorical and literary. As in his work in other media, his stained-glass designs exhibit a clear sense of proportion and lucidity based on his early exposure to Classic and Renaissance art.⁹⁶

In 1883, Crowninshield established a mural and stained-glass design firm in Boston, which relocated to New York City in 1885. Several of his subsequent commissions were for Episcopal churches in New York and New England; among these was a huge, three-lancet window for

⁹⁵ O'Neill, p. 20, indicated that "no documentation was found" identifying the donor of the rood screen, but Allard's research notes reference earlier investigations of parish records done by a Marilyn Curtis, which confirmed that Mrs. Vanderbilt donated the piece. Curtis also noted that "Elsie" Vanderbilt (apparently, a nickname) and her second husband, Paul Fitzsimmons, were both buried in St. Mary's Cemetery; their names are not in the R.I. Historical Cemeteries database, but its list of graves at St. Mary's is incomplete.

⁹⁶ Wilmers, p. 218.

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Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Boston, memorializing his mother, Caroline Crowninshield Arnold. Inspired by John Bunyan's 1698 novel *A Pilgrim's Progress*, it depicts the Christian virtues of Discretion, Piety, Prudence, and Charity showing the Pilgrim the way to "Emmanuel's Land" (heaven), within a finely detailed naturalistic landscape – a hallmark of Crowninshield's work. Upon installation in 1898, the "Emmanuel's Land Window" was instantly hailed as Crowninshield's masterpiece.⁹⁷

In 1906, unhappy with the increasing commercialization of stained glass (which by then could be mass-produced and sold through mail order catalogues) and wishing to focus more on painting and poetry, Crowninshield decided to close his stained-glass studio. His final commission was Edith Tuckerman's order for six windows for St. Mary's Church in Portsmouth (*Photos 9, 15*).

The four memorial windows in the nave honor: George Gibbs III (1776-1833) and his wife Laura Wolcott Gibbs (1794-1870); Lucius Tuckerman (1818-1890) and his wife Elizabeth Wolcott Gibbs (1819-1906, daughter of George III and Laura) – this window bears the signature "F. Crowninshield" (*Photo 9*); Oliver Wolcott Gibbs (1822-1908, son of George III and Laura); and Laura Wolcott Tuckerman, wife of James Lowndes (1850-1914, daughter of Lucius and Elizabeth).⁹⁸ The last window was installed after Laura W.T. Lowndes died in 1914. All of these family members, plus Edith A-M. Tuckerman and Walter R. Tuckerman, are buried in St. Mary's Cemetery.

In April 1927, William H. Vanderbilt III conveyed to the trustees of St. Mary's Church (Bishop James DeWolf Perry, Leroy King, and himself), for ten dollars, a two-acre parcel of land with buildings and improvements on it, located just south of the St. Mary's Church property. The buildings were evidently removed, as parish records indicate that a new Parish House (*Figure 14*) was constructed on this site in 1927: a large, two-story, wood-shingled building with two front-gable roofed wings flanking a recessed front porch. This first Parish House was used for Sunday school classes, study groups, fellowship, and for various parish organizations and programs; several additions were constructed over the next eight decades.⁹⁹ (The building still stands, but is no longer owned by the church; it houses a child care facility.)

About a decade later, in 1936, the old Parsonage was demolished and a new Rectory was built a short distance southeast of the Church, on the south side of the main driveway (*Photos 16-19*). Its first occupants were Rev. Arthur F. Roebuck and his family; Roebuck served as Rector from 1935 to 1947. A 19th century carriage house that had been located on the north side of the main driveway served as the Rectory garage until it was demolished in 2011-12 (*Figure 7*).

⁹⁷ Wilmers, pp. 158-59.

⁹⁸ All family relationships confirmed through the Find A Grave website.

⁹⁹ St. Mary's Parish, "One Hundredth Anniversary" booklet, unpaginated. Also, Deed Book 27/Page 78, Joseph F. Manchester to William R. Harvey, about 12 acres, in 1910; DB 27/223, William R. Harvey to Alfred G. Vanderbilt, about 12 acres, in 1910; DB 33B/192, William H. Vanderbilt III to James DeWolf Perry, Leroy King, and William H. Vanderbilt III, Trustees of St. Mary's Church, 1.9 acres, in 1927; and DB 41/110, William H. Vanderbilt III to James DeWolf Perry and Leroy King, reconfirming DB 33B/192, in 1946.

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The cellar underneath the Church was enlarged, and a small brownstone structure enclosing the entrance to the basement and crypt was constructed on the north side of the church near the sacristy in 1939 (*Photo 3*).

When St. Mary's Parish celebrated its 100th anniversary, a commemorative booklet noted that at its founding in 1843, the parish had had but a handful of communicants; in 1943, there were 272 active communicants, and an average attendance of about 8,000 people per year – a number that surely reflects local parishioners repeatedly attending worship services and programs during the year, but also indicates that the parish had many seasonal members. Furthermore, the booklet stated that in “normal times” – presumably meaning when the U.S. was not in the throes of World War II – “it is estimated that through the doors of our churches and parish houses more than eighteen thousand people find peace and strength, fellowship and recreation.”¹⁰⁰ By 1950, when Portsmouth's population was 6,578 residents, St. Mary's Parish boasted 326 communicants, 105 children at the Church School, and ownership of the Church Farm as well as five buildings: Holy Cross Church and its Guild House in Middletown, and St. Mary's Church, Parish House, and Rectory. St. Mary's had become the largest Episcopal parish in Portsmouth, thanks in part to its proximity to Middletown and Newport.

In 1973 St. Mary's Church received another donation of stained-glass windows, replacing original glass within the two lancet windows on the west front of the Church, flanking the Bridal Doors. These were donated “in loving memory of Edith Tuckerman,” per an inscription on one of them, which is also signed, “Willet Windows” (*Photo 11*). The Willet Stained Glass Studio of Philadelphia was founded in 1898 by William and Annie Lee Willet; by the early 20th century, William Willet was considered one of America's foremost stained-glass artists. In 1919 the Willet Studio won a prestigious international commission to design the Great Sanctuary window in the Cadet Chapel at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York, the first of nearly two hundred additional stained-glass windows that Willet Studio created for the Academy over a 65-year period. In the 1950s, under the leadership of the founders' son Henry Lee Willet, the firm innovated new techniques to produce faceted glass, laminated stained glass, and “sculptured gold” glass. After third-generation owner E. Crosby Willet assumed the reins in 1965, the firm secured commissions at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. and the Cathedral of St. Mary of the Assumption in San Francisco, among many others; it is still in business today.¹⁰¹

St. Mary's Cemetery: Additional Notable Burials

Since the death of Sarah Gibbs, over 2,000 people have been interred at St. Mary's Cemetery, including notable figures in local, state, and U.S. history, such as:

¹⁰⁰ St. Mary's Parish, “One Hundredth Anniversary” booklet, unpaginated.

¹⁰¹ Associated Crafts and Willet-Hauser Architectural Glass website, “About Us/Our History.” Willet Studios became a division of Hauser Art Glass Company of Minnesota in 1977; Willet-Hauser later merged with Associated Crafts in 2014.

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Rhode Island Episcopal Bishop Thomas M. Clark (1812-1903), who served in that office from 1854 until his death and was a trustee of St. Mary's Church;

U.S. Navy Admiral Stephen Bleeker Luce (1827-1917), the founder and first president of the U.S. Naval War College, 1884-1886;

U.S. Army Major General James Parker (1854-1934), a Medal of Honor recipient for his service in the Philippine-American War of 1899, and his son, U.S. Army General Courtlandt Parker (1884-1960), who served in both world wars and received military honors from the United States and France;

U.S. Congressman Clark Burdick (1868-1948), who represented Rhode Island from 1919-1933, having previously held numerous public offices including Mayor of Newport, State Senator, and State Representative.

Mabel Norman Cerio (1876-1949), founder of the Norman Bird Sanctuary, a 325-acre nature preserve in Middletown.

Harold Sterling Vanderbilt (1884-1970), director of the New York Central Railroad, three-time America's Cup winner and inventor of the game of contract bridge.

Epilogue, 1974-present

Although the town of Portsmouth has changed significantly since St. Mary's Parish was founded, growing from a sparsely populated agrarian town to a suburb of nearly 18,000 in 2020, the area around St. Mary's Church retains a strong sense of its rural past, with substantial acreage having been conserved as open space. This includes the portion of the St. Mary's Church property that extends from the westernmost stone wall behind the four buildings and cemetery, to St. Mary's Pond (*Photo 30*), which is under a conservation easement held by the Aquidneck Island Land Trust. Portions of nearby Oakland Farm have been conserved, as well. In 1985, Anita O'Keefe Young and Robert R. Young, who had purchased Oakland Farm in 1946, donated, via their charitable foundation, nearly 25 acres of land to St. Mary's Church for the express purpose of creating a public park or a nature preserve, or for religious or educational purposes. This acreage, which abuts the church property on the north/northeast, was in turn conveyed by St. Mary's Church to the Land Trust in 2015. (The Land Trust already owned about 22 acres of open space on the former Oakland Farm, purchased in 2000.)¹⁰² The remainder of the former Oakland Farm property was developed into a condominium complex beginning in the late 1980s but, due to this buffer of open space, it has no visual impact on St. Mary's Church.

¹⁰² Garman, *Gentlemen's Farms*, pp. 65-90, reported the Youngs' sale of Oakland Farm. Deed Book 108/page 411, Deed of Gift from Robert Young Foundation to Trustees of St. Mary's Parish, 24.73 acres, now identified as Assessor's Plat 61, Lot 18 (1985); several additional deeds related to this same parcel were recorded for the purpose of releasing conditions or making technical corrections (DB 703/41 in 2001; DB 1348/170 and 173 in 2008). DB 1685/72 and 147, St. Mary's Church to Aquidneck Island Land Trust (2015).

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In 2007, St. Mary's Church merged with St. George's Episcopal Church in Newport, and the Newport congregation relocated to Portsmouth. In 2012, when St. Mary's constructed a new Parish House, a large worship and meeting space on its main level was named "St. George's Chapel" in honor of that congregation; stained-glass windows from the Newport church building were mounted on the interior walls of this room.¹⁰³ The new Parish House also allowed St. Mary's to consolidate all of the various administrative, programmatic, and educational functions previously sited in Gibbs House and in the original Parish House. In 2016 St. Mary's sold the earlier Parish House, which since 2017 has been occupied by the Island Child Care Center and Day School (278 East Main Road). In 2018, St. Mary's extensively renovated Gibbs House and since then has leased it to the Sea Rose Montessori School.¹⁰⁴

Conclusion

St. Mary's Episcopal Church clearly meets National Register Criterion A and C. Under Criterion A, St. Mary's represents the rapid growth of the Protestant Episcopal Church across Rhode Island in the mid-19th century. St. Mary's Parish has the further distinction of being the only religious institution in Portsmouth to be founded by a woman: the indomitable Sarah Gibbs, who had the vision, the determination, and the resources to bring St. Mary's to life and to create a legacy that has long outlived her. Under Criterion C, St. Mary's architectural significance lies in the Gothic Revival stone church built in 1847-49 and designed by Richard Upjohn: the only example of his work in Portsmouth. The Church's architectural significance is further enhanced by several works of decorative art – wall sculpture, stained-glass windows, and funerary monuments – produced by some of the most esteemed craftsmen of their day, including sculptor Horatio Greenough, monument designers Richard Upjohn and Richard Morris Hunt, and stained-glass artists Frederic Crowninshield, Heaton, Butler & Bayne, and Willet Studios.

The entire Church property, with its historic stone walls enclosing extensive open fields and a tree-shaded historic cemetery, still looks and feels very much like it did when Portsmouth historian Edward West observed in 1936:

From then [1847] until now, St. Mary's has been one of the beauty spots of the Island. Today, surrounded as it is with the lovely church yard of stately elms and magnificent beeches and many fine spruce and Japanese maple trees, it is by many considered one of the loveliest country parish churches in this part of the country.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ The former St. George's Episcopal Church at 14 Rhode Island Avenue in Newport is now CrossPoint Church, a multicultural Christian church founded in Newport in 1999.

¹⁰⁴ DB 1735/225, Sarah Gibbs Trust to Vanderbilt Parcel LLC, Assessor's Plat 61, Lot 3A (1.01 acres), in 2016; DB 1841/30, Vanderbilt Parcel LLC to AMH Properties, AP 61/3A (1.01 acres), in 2017.

¹⁰⁵ West, unpaginated, under the heading "St. Mary's Parish."

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“Sarah Gibbs and Oakland Farm: Hospitality and Heartache (2018)

<https://portsmouthhistorynotes.com/2018/07/22/sarah-gibbs-and-oakland-farm-hospitality-and-heartache/>

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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
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

ST. MARY'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: 62.9 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- 1. Latitude: 41.551596° Longitude: -71.267642°
- 2. Latitude: 41.555220° Longitude: -71.265849°
- 3. Latitude: 41.549116° Longitude: -71.262153°
- 4. Latitude: 41.548369° Longitude: -71.258859°
- 5. Latitude: 41.545328° Longitude: -71.260883°
- 6. Latitude: 41.546443° Longitude: -71.263442°
- 7. Latitude: 41.547722° Longitude: -71.265165°

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 198

- 1. Zone: _____ Easting: _____ Northing: _____
- 2. Zone: _____ Easting: _____ Northing: _____
- 3. Zone: _____ Easting: _____ Northing: _____
- 4. Zone: _____ Easting: _____ Northing: _____

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary of the nominated property corresponds with the Town of Portsmouth Assessor's Plat 61, Lot 3 and includes St. Mary's Church, the Rectory, Gibbs House, the Parish House, the Cemetery, and numerous historic stone walls.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundaries encompass all of the land area currently owned by St. Mary's Episcopal Church and all resources historically associated with the Church, with the exception of the original Parish House, which now sits on a separate parcel and is under separate ownership.

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11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Kathryn J. Cavanaugh, Historic Preservation Consultant
 organization: _____
 street & number: 82 Larch Street
 city or town: Providence state: Rhode Island zip code: 02906
 e-mail: kathycavanaugh82@gmail.com
 telephone: 401-273-4715
 date: November, 2022

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property:	St. Mary's Episcopal Church
City or Vicinity:	Portsmouth
County:	Newport
State:	Rhode Island
Name of Photographer:	Kathryn J. Cavanaugh (Photos #1-6, 11-30); Ronald J. Onorato (Photo #7); Elizabeth W. Rochefort (Photos #8-10)
Date of Photographs:	October 2022 (Photos #2, 4-6, 12); April 2022 (Photos #1, 3, 11, 13-30); January 2022 (Photo #7); June 2018 (Photos #8-10).

ST. MARY'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Name of Property

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Location of Original Digital Files: Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage
Commission, 150 Benefit Street, Providence, RI 02903

Number of Photographs: 30

Photo #1: St. Mary's Church, west façade and south elevation, looking northeast.

Photo #2: St. Mary's Church, south and east elevations, looking northwest. Note the two funerary monuments: one for St. Mary's founder and benefactor Sarah Gibbs, stands at far right in photo; (see also Photo 26); the other for St. Mary's first and longest-serving Rector, Rev. Hobart Williams and his wife Augusta, stands in mid-foreground.

Photo #3: St. Mary's Church, east and north elevations, looking southwest.

Photo #4: St. Mary's Church, west façade, looking east.

Photo #5: St. Mary's Church, interior, nave, looking east from near the Bridal Doors toward the chancel.

Photo #6: St. Mary's Church, interior, nave, looking west from the chancel.

Photo #7: St. Mary's Church, interior, Gibbs Memorial, mounted on the north wall of the nave. (The baptismal font is partly visible in front of the Memorial.)

Photo #8: St. Mary's Church, interior, nave, south side, Phebe Lawton memorial window, ca. 1870.

Photo #9: St. Mary's Church, interior, nave, north side, Lucius and Elizabeth W. Tuckerman memorial window, ca. 1907-14.

Photo #10: St. Mary's Church, interior, chancel, east side above the altar, Gardner Blanchard Perry memorial window, ca. 1905.

Photo #11: St. Mary's Church, interior, nave, west side, Edith Tuckerman memorial window, 1973.

Photo #12: St. Mary's Church, interior, looking east from the nave.

Photo #13: St. Mary's Church, interior, Bridal Doors at west end of nave, installed 1955.

Photo #14: St. Mary's Church, interior, vestibule, looking south from the nave; exterior doors and mosaic tile flooring installed 1908.

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Photo #15: St. Mary's Church, interior, vestibule, stained glass window in west wall, ca. 1907-14.

Photo #16: St. Mary's Rectory, east façade and north elevation, looking southwest.

Photo #17: St. Mary's Rectory, west (rear) and south elevations, looking northeast.

Photo #18: St. Mary's Rectory, interior, living room on south side of first floor, looking northwest.

Photo #19: St. Mary's Rectory, interior, dining room on west side of first floor, looking northeast.

Photo #20: Gibbs House, at left, and Parish House, at right, looking northwest. Historic stone wall in front of Gibbs House.

Photo #21: Gibbs House, east façade and south elevation, looking northwest.

Photo #22: Parish House, east and south elevations, looking northwest.

Photo #23: St. Mary's Cemetery, section southwest of the Church, gravestones for Mary Lawton Vinson (died 1797), at right, and her son George Lawton Vinson (died 1816), at left. These stand near the south elevation of the Church.

Photo #24: Gravestone for Mary Lawton Vinson, detail showing signature of the carver, Henry Bull.

Photo #25: St. Mary's Cemetery, east of the Church, looking northwest. Red stone Gothic Revival style monument (at right in the photo) commemorates Newport banker Frederick Wiggins (died 1869). Sarah Gibbs's monument stands beneath the altar window in the east wall of the chancel (see also Photo 26).

Photo #26: St. Mary's Cemetery, east of the Church, looking north at Sarah Gibbs's monument (died 1866) beneath the altar window of the chancel.

Photo #27: St. Mary's Cemetery, north of the Church, looking northwest, showing a variety of different headstones and monuments. The Perry Monument is the large granite monument with curved top, at right.

Photo #28: St. Mary's Cemetery, north of the Church, looking northwest, showing the Gibbs family plot.

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Photo #29: St. Mary's Cemetery, northwest of the Church, looking northwest. The historic stone wall marks the western boundary of that part of the property where all buildings and the cemetery are located.

Photo #30: St. Mary's property, looking northwest beyond the historic stone wall that marks the western boundary of that part of the property where all buildings and the cemetery are located.

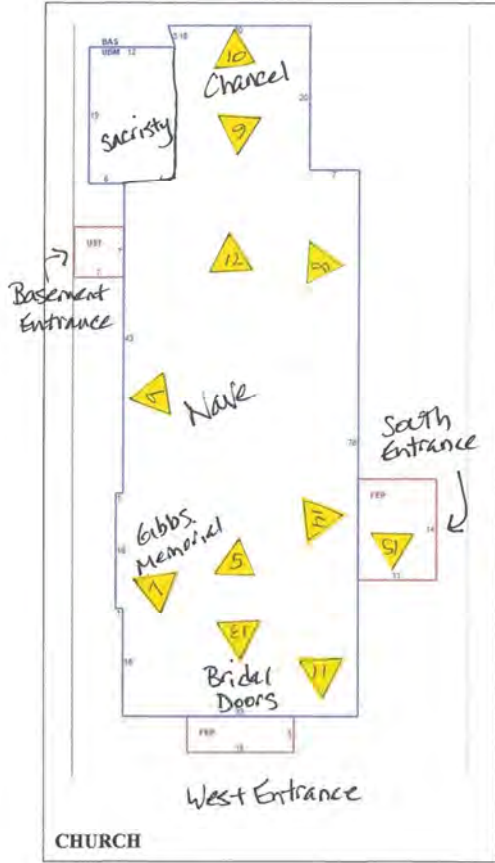
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ST. MARY'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
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INTERIOR PHOTO KEY MAP
National Register Nomination
St. Mary's Church
324 East Main Road, Portsmouth (Newport Co.) R.I.



Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

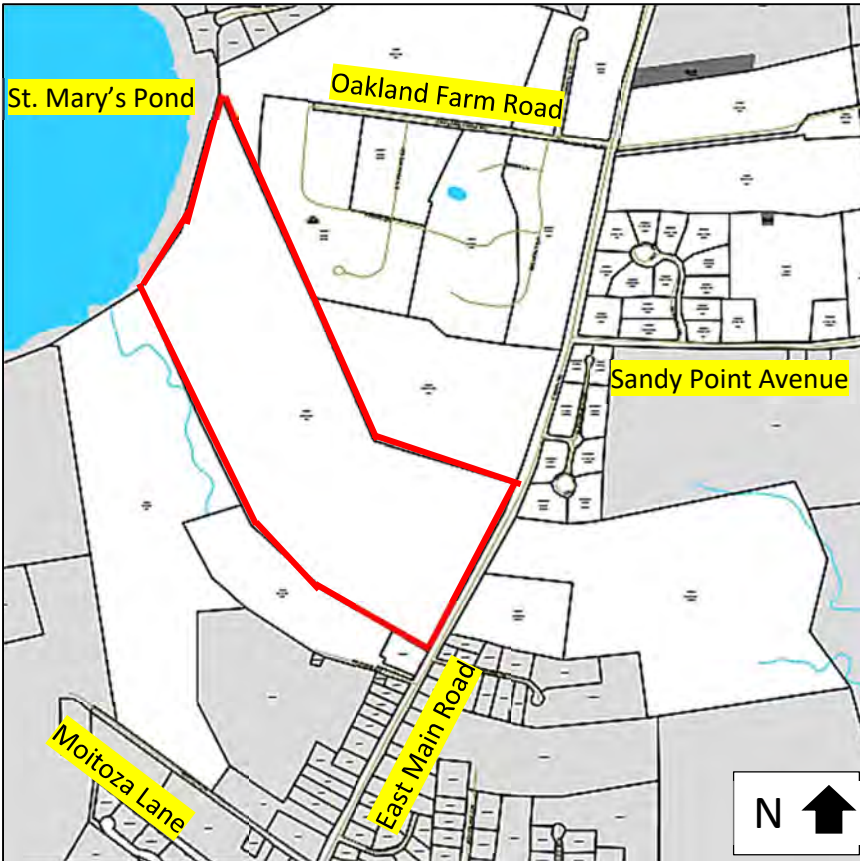
Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

**ST. MARY'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
PORTSMOUTH, RI
NATIONAL REGISTER NOMINATION**

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FIGURE 1

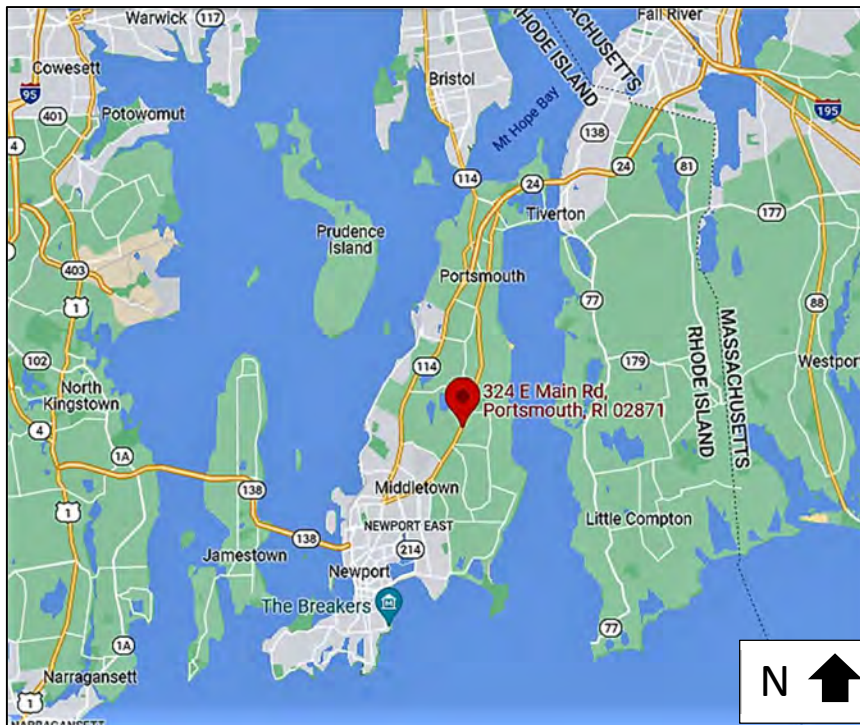


BOUNDARY MAP OF THE NOMINATED PROPERTY

St. Mary's Episcopal Church, 324 East Main Road, Portsmouth, RI

Town of Portsmouth Tax Assessor's Plat 61, Lot 3

Total area: 67.9 acres



ORIENTATION MAP

Source: Google Maps, 2022

FIGURE 2

AERIAL PHOTOS, 2021



St. Mary's Church property is outlined in red. Note the stone walls that line the perimeter and subdivide the site.

The buildings and cemetery are all clustered toward the eastern end of the site (see enlarged photo, below).

Source: R.I. Dept. of Environmental Management.



- CEMETERY
(Burials dating from 1797-present)
- ST. MARY'S CHURCH
(1847-49)
- PARISH HOUSE (2012)
- GIBBS HOUSE (1970),
Now Sea Rose Montessori School
- RECTORY (1936)
- PLAYGROUND,
COMMUNITY GARDEN
- LABYRINTH,
OUTDOOR WORSHIP AREA

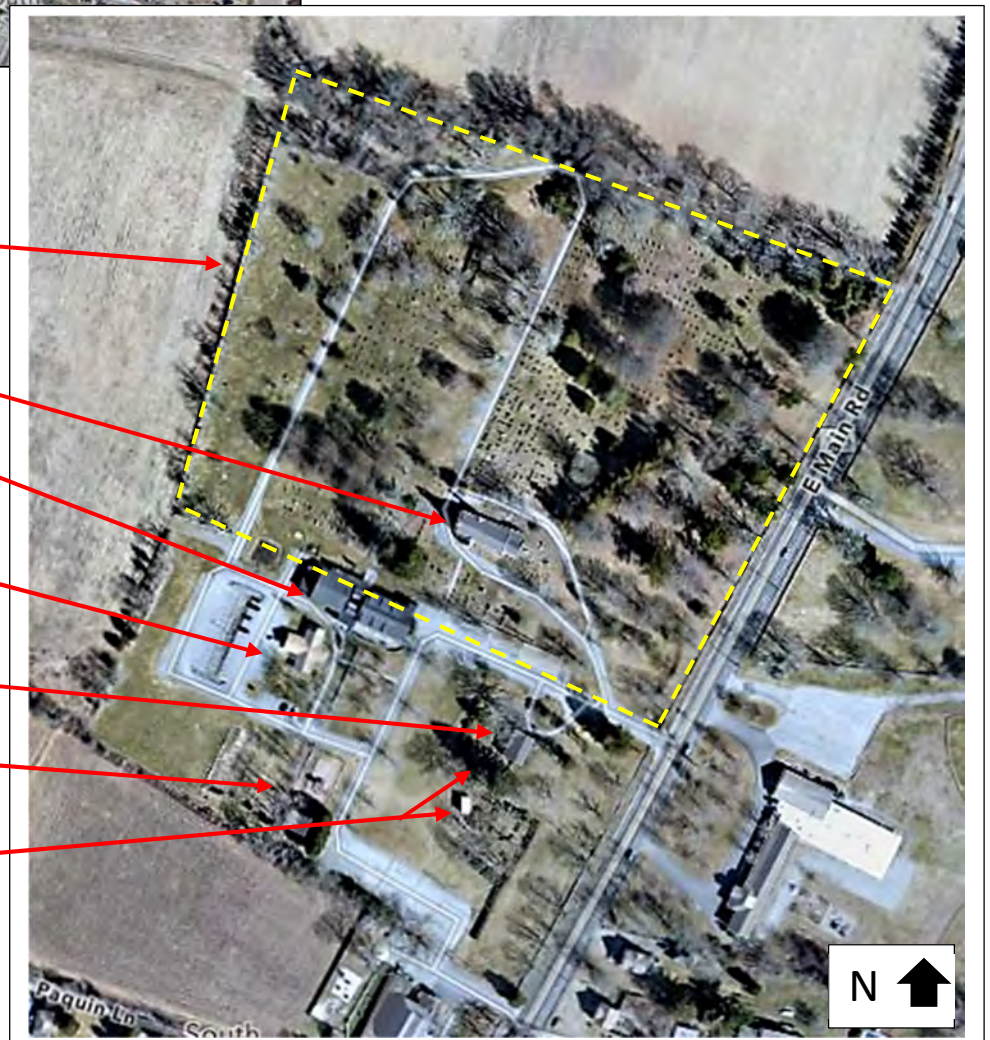
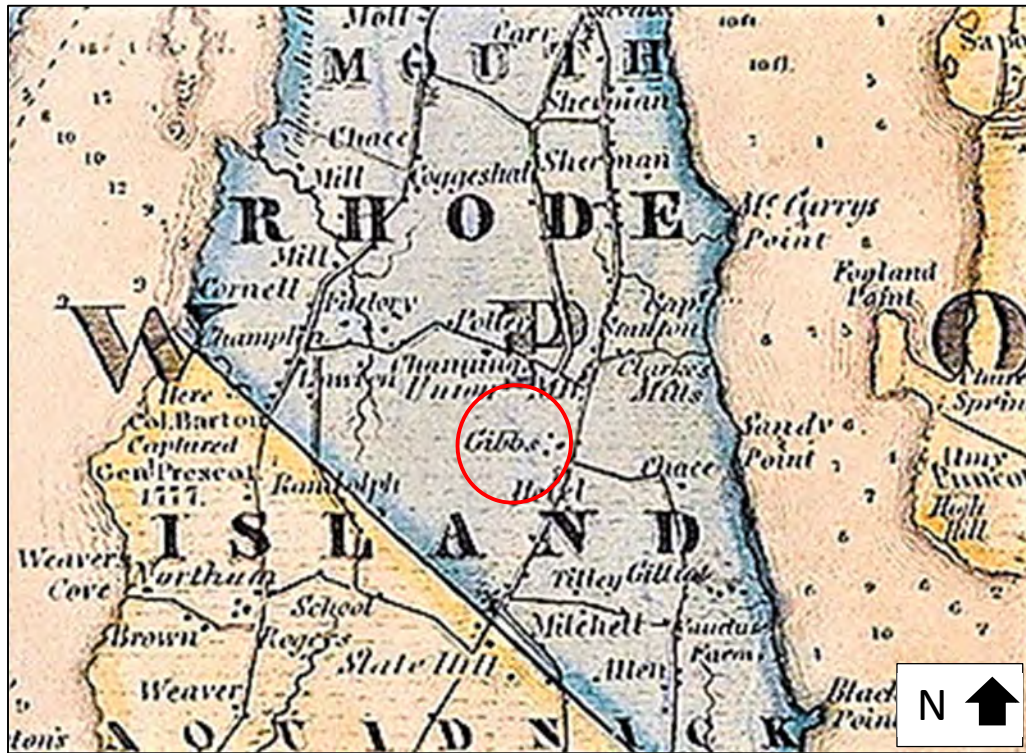


FIGURE 3



STEVENS MAP OF 1831

Shows the home of the Gibbs family at their country estate, Oakland Farm, on the west side of East Main Road in southern Portsmouth. The future site of St. Mary's Church is just south of the name "Gibbs" on this map. The red circle (not to scale) shows the approximate area of both properties.

The Town of Portsmouth is rendered in blue, the Town of Middletown in yellow.

FIGURE 4



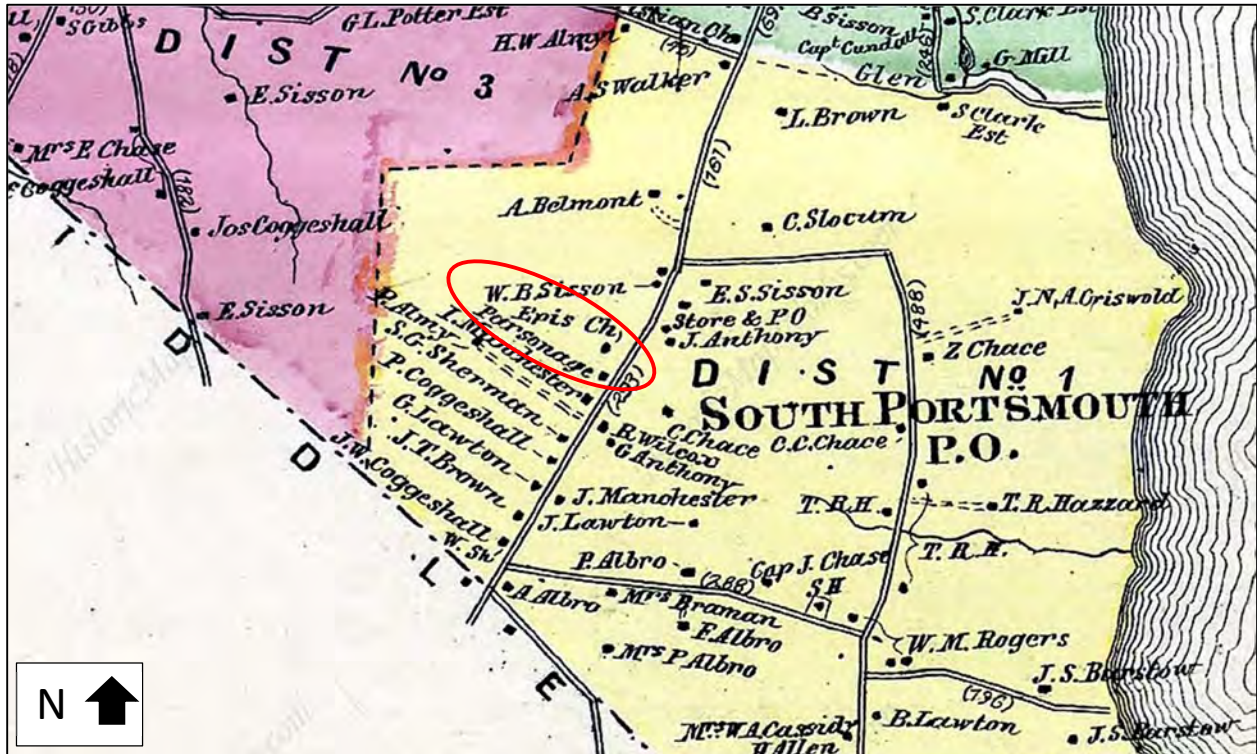
WALLING MAP OF 1850

Shows St. Mary's Church (circled in red), completed the year before this map was published.

The Church is the northernmost of the three buildings clustered close together; the other two were a farmhouse and an outbuilding (neither survives) that were standing when Sarah Gibbs purchased this property in 1844; the farmhouse later became St. Mary's first Parsonage. At this time, Sarah Gibbs owned Oakland Farm to the north of the church, and some additional property south of the church.

The blue circle indicates the site of the Church of the Holy Cross (1845-48) in Middletown, also designed by Richard Upjohn. This was the first Episcopal church that Sarah Gibbs established in the new St. Mary's Parish, just two years before construction began on St. Mary's Church. Holy Cross stands today at 1439-1443 West Main Road in Middletown.

FIGURE 5



BEERS ATLAS OF 1870

Shows St. Mary’s Church and Parsonage (in red circle). The present Rectory (built in 1936) replaced the Parsonage and stands in a similar location.

Sarah Gibbs died in 1866; “A. Belmont” was Augustus Belmont, who purchased Oakland Farm from her heirs.

FIGURE 6



EVERTS & RICHARDS ATLAS OF 1895

Shows the St. Mary's Church property, with the church surrounded by a looping driveway, the parsonage to the south of the driveway, and several outbuildings, all clustered near the East Main Road end of the site.

A man-made reservoir (now, St. Mary's Pond) lay to the west of the church property. To the north, Cornelius Vanderbilt owned Oakland Farm, which he had purchased from Augustus Belmont.

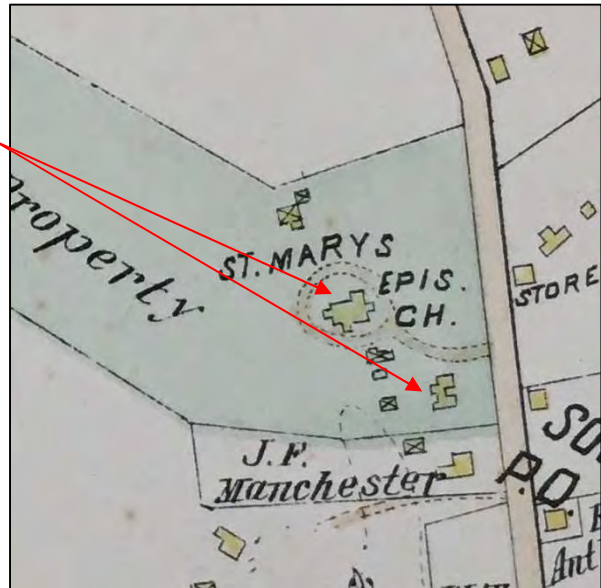


FIGURE 7



AERIAL PHOTO, 2008

Shows the St. Mary's Church property before construction of the Parish House and the parking lot behind Gibbs House in 2012.

The structure encircled in yellow was an outbuilding that had been associated with the 19th century Parsonage, which was demolished in 1936. This outbuilding was demolished as part of the 2012 construction project.

AERIAL PHOTO, 2014

Shows the St. Mary's Church property after construction of the Parish House and the parking lot behind Gibbs House in 2012.



Source for both photos: Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management

FIGURE 8-A
HISTORIC PHOTOS



Above: Postcard, ca. 1906; view looking northwest. Note the original altar window with stone tracery.
Source: <http://sites.rootsweb.com/~rinewpor/postcards/PortsmouthStMarysChurch.jpg>

Below: Postcard, late 19th century; view looking northeast.
Source: <https://portsmouthlibrary.wordpress.com/2009/10/06/churches-camps/>



FIGURE 8-B
HISTORIC PHOTOS



Left: West elevation, ca. 1888-1905; shows original Bridal Doors with stained glass panes.

Below: South elevation, before 1887; shows original board-and-batten entry doors.

Source for both photos: St. Mary's Church Archives

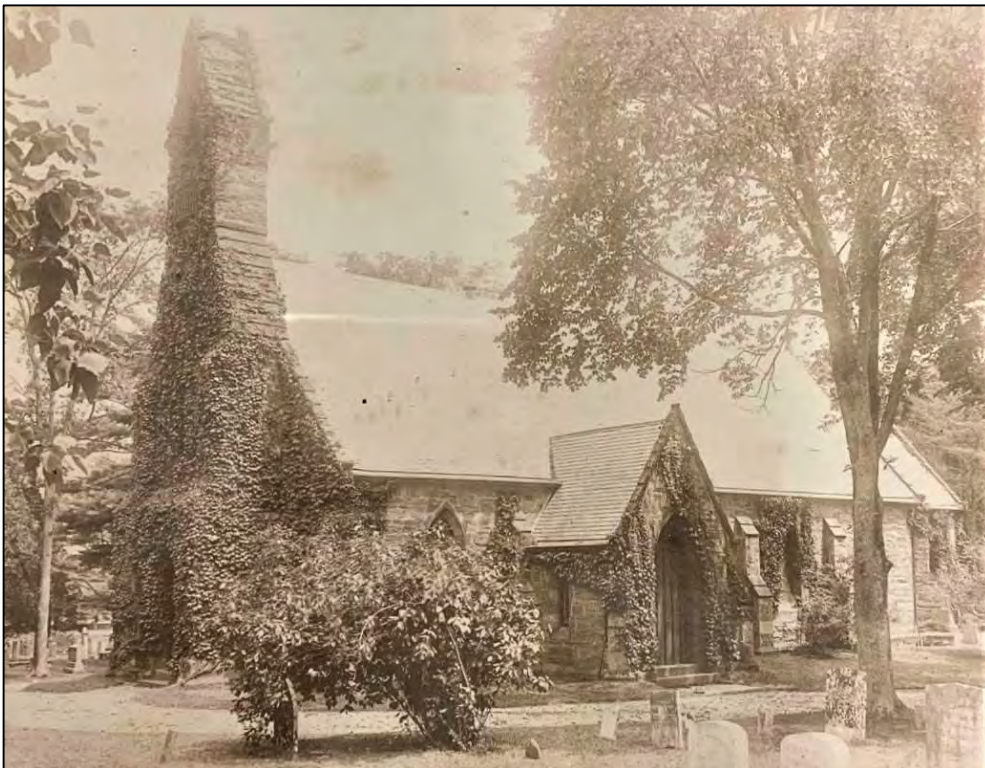
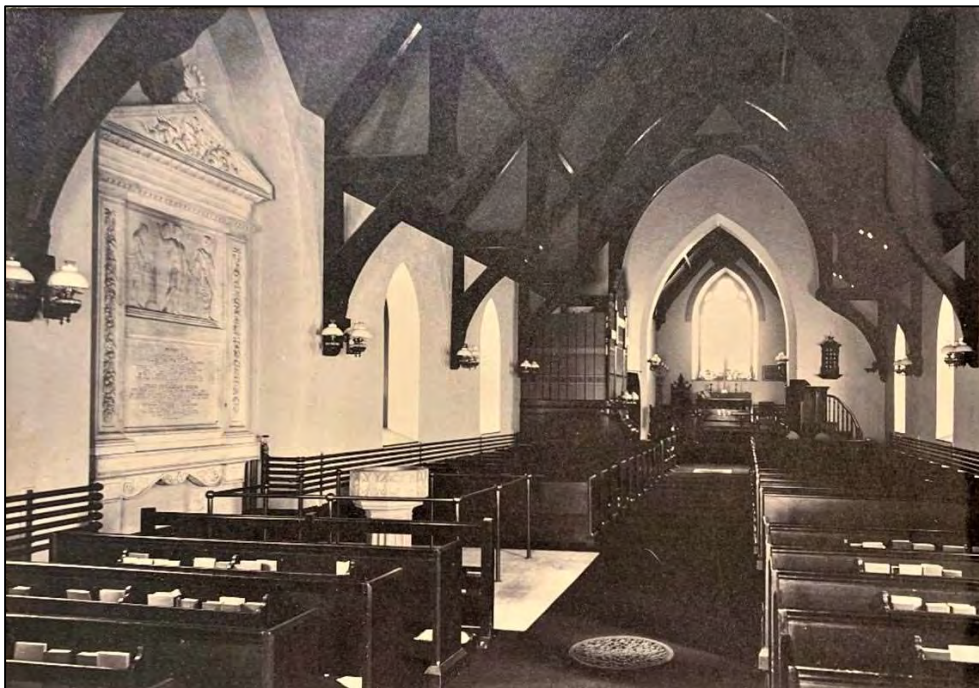


FIGURE 9
HISTORIC PHOTOS



Chancel, undated photo (before 1905); shows the original altar window (replaced ca. 1905). Note the stars painted on a dark background on the chancel ceiling.

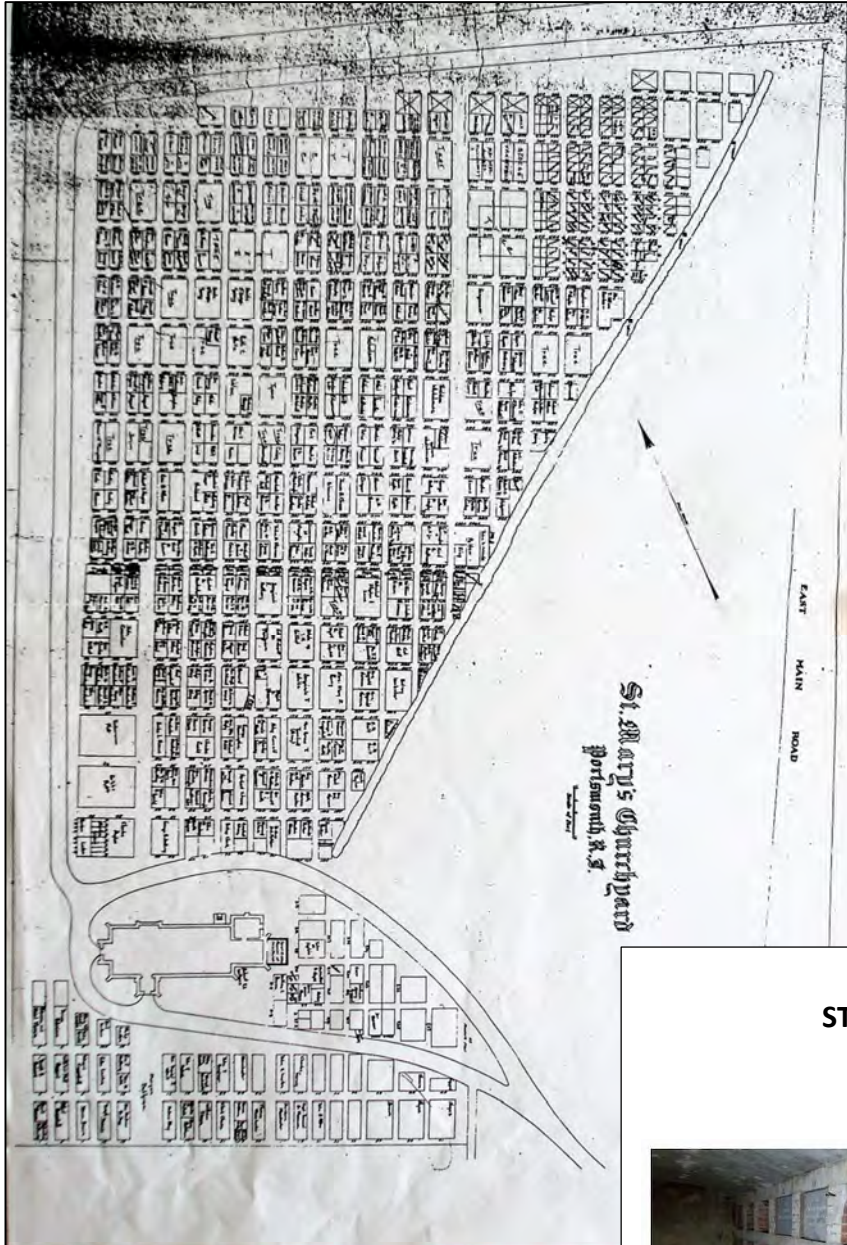
Source: St. Mary's Church Archives



Nave and chancel, undated photo (before 1905). Note the railing (no longer extant) around the baptismal font in front of the Gibbs Memorial. Ceiling is painted a dark color.

Source: St. Mary's Church Archives

FIGURE 10



MAP OF ST. MARY'S CHURCH CEMETERY

This undated map shows the layout of the oldest portions of the cemetery, to the north, east, and south of the Church.

Source: R.I Historical Cemetery Commission, Cemetery No. PO024, copied from original map in St. Mary's Church Archives

CRYPT UNDERNEATH ST. MARY'S CHURCH CHANCEL

Source: St. Mary's Church



FIGURE 11



PORTRAIT OF SARAH GIBBS
date unknown

Source: St. Mary's Church Archives

FIGURE 12 OTHER RICHARD UPJOHN RURAL CHURCHES



Church of the Holy Cross, Middletown, Rhode Island (1845-46). Also part of St. Mary's Parish; construction funded by Sarah Gibbs.

Source: <https://sah-archipedia.org/buildings/RI-01-MI1>

Calvary Church, Stonington, Connecticut (1847-49).
Similar design to St. Mary's Church.

Source: <https://www.calvarychurchstonington.org/>



St. Andrew's Church, New Berlin, New York (1847-48). Similar design to St. Mary's Church.

Source: <https://bigreddoor.org/>

FIGURE 13
INSPIRATIONS FOR THE DESIGN OF ST. MARY'S CHURCH



St. Michael's Church, Longstanton, Cambridgeshire, England (13th c.), the model for St. James the Less in Philadelphia.

Source: <https://www.britainexpress.com/attractions.htm?attraction=4112>



St. James the Less Episcopal Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (1846-48), based on drawings of St. Michaels, Longstanton by G.G. Place, supervising architect John E. Carver.

Source: *Historic American Building Survey, Library of Congress*
<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/pa1153.photos.137987p/resource/>

FIGURE 14



**ST. MARY'S CHURCH
FIRST PARISH HOUSE**
ca. 1943

Built in 1927, the Parish House was sold by St. Mary's Parish in 2016 and is now a child care facility.

Source: "St. Mary's Parish One Hundredth Anniversary" booklet (1943), in the St. Mary's Church collection at University of Rhode Island Library, Special Collections, Kingston, Rhode Island

St. Mary's Episcopal Church

324 East Main Road, Portsmouth, Newport County, Rhode Island

Coordinates:

1. Latitude: 41.551596° Longitude: -71.267642°
2. Latitude: 41.555220° Longitude: -71.265849°
3. Latitude: 41.549116° Longitude: -71.262153°
4. Latitude: 41.548369° Longitude: -71.258859°
5. Latitude: 41.545328° Longitude: -71.260883°
6. Latitude: 41.546443° Longitude: -71.263442°
7. Latitude: 41.547722° Longitude: -71.265165°



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Photo #1: St. Mary's Church, west façade and south elevation, looking northeast.



Photo #2: St. Mary's Church, south and east elevations, looking northwest. Note the two funerary monuments: one for St. Mary's founder and benefactor Sarah Gibbs, stands at far right in photo; (see also Photo 26); the other for St. Mary's first and longest-serving Rector, Rev. Hobart Williams and his wife Augusta, stands in mid-foreground.



Photo #3: St. Mary's Church, east and north elevations, looking southwest.



Photo #4: St. Mary's Church, west façade, looking east.

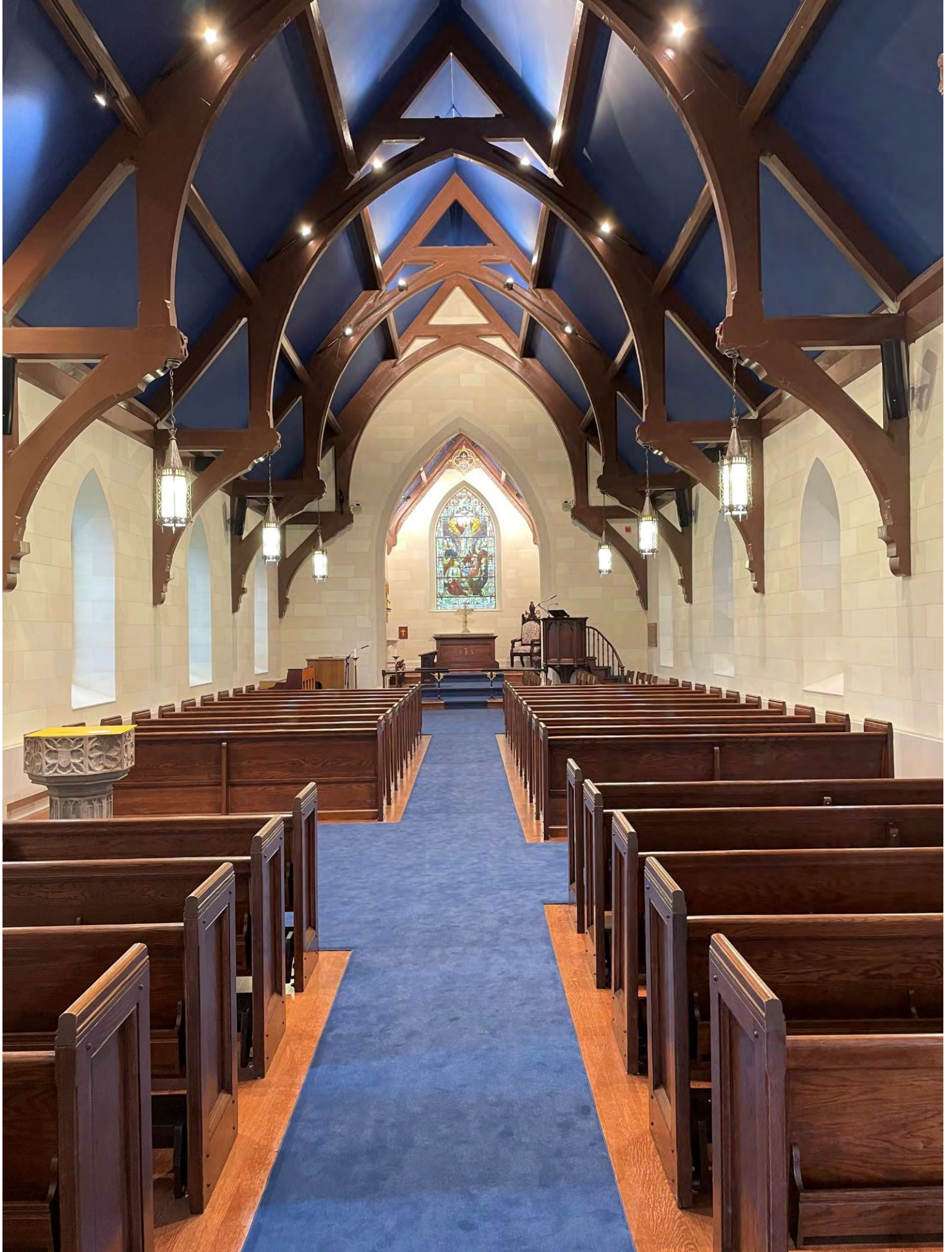


Photo #5: St. Mary's Church, interior, nave, looking east from near the Bridal Doors toward the chancel.

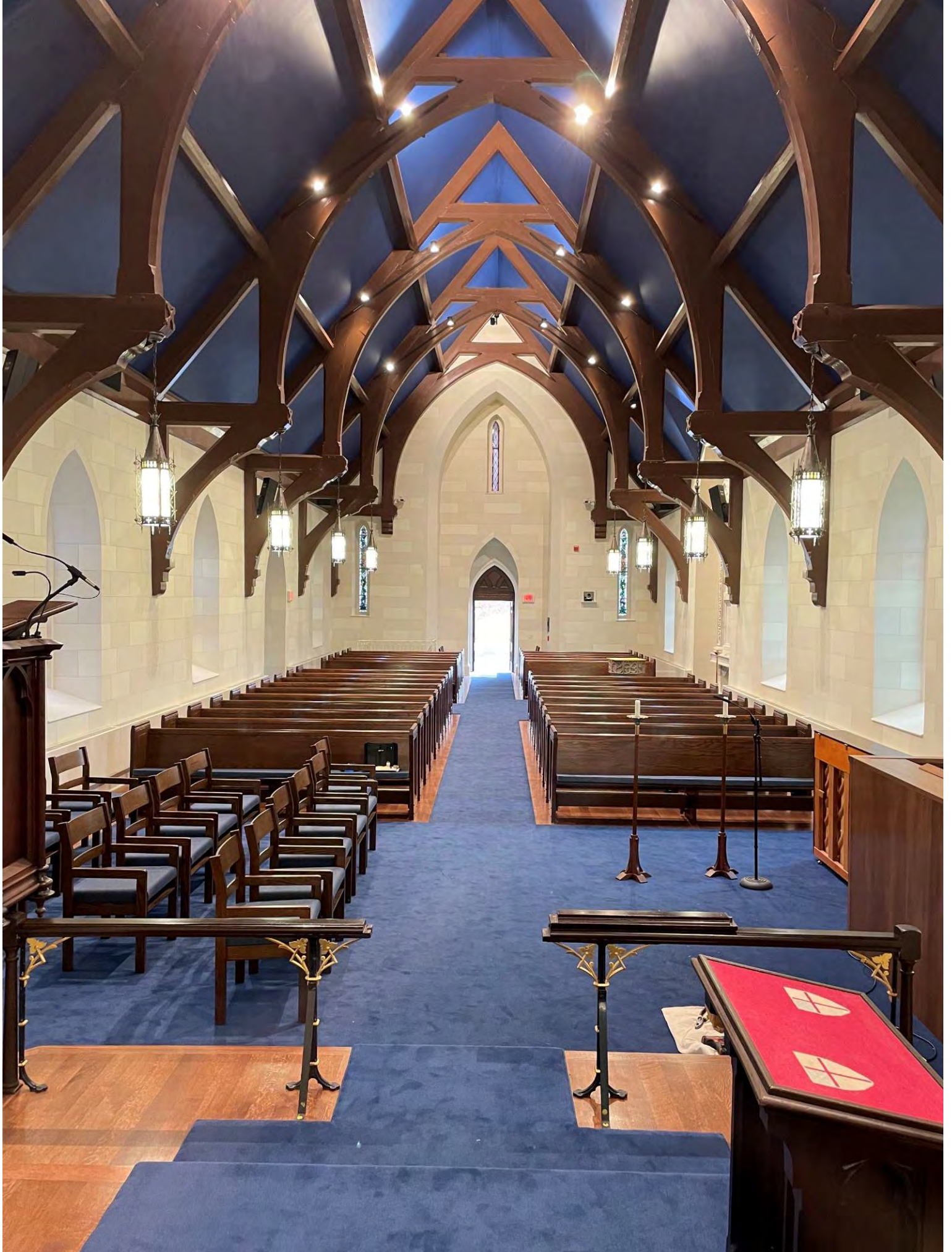


Photo #6: St. Mary's Church, interior, nave, looking west from the chancel.



Photo #7: St. Mary's Church, interior, Gibbs Memorial, mounted on the north wall of the nave. (The baptismal font is partly visible in front of the Memorial.)



Photo #8: St. Mary's Church, interior, nave, south side, Phebe Lawton memorial window, ca. 1870.

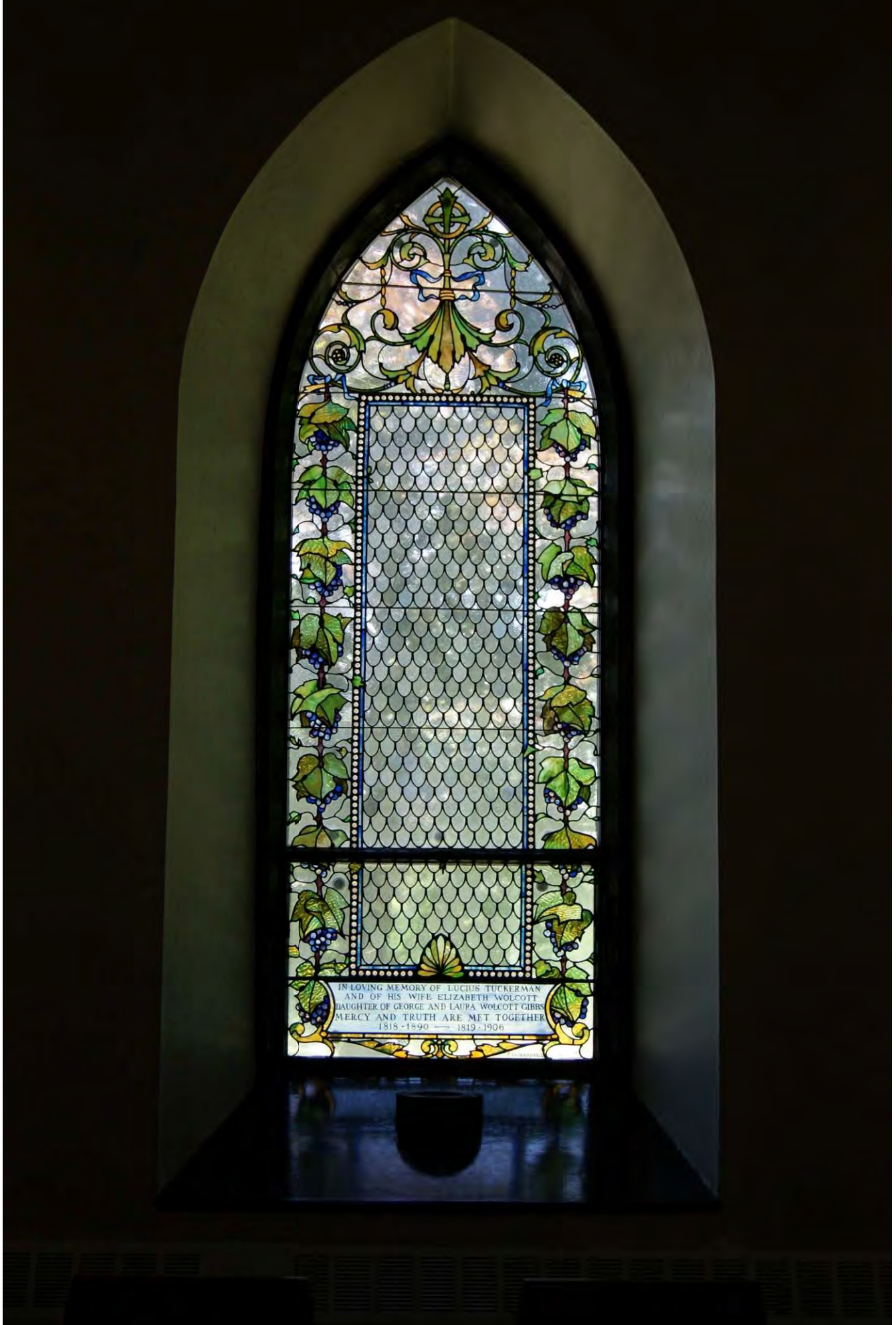


Photo #9: St. Mary's Church, interior, nave, north side, Lucius and Elizabeth W. Tuckerman memorial window, ca. 1907-14.

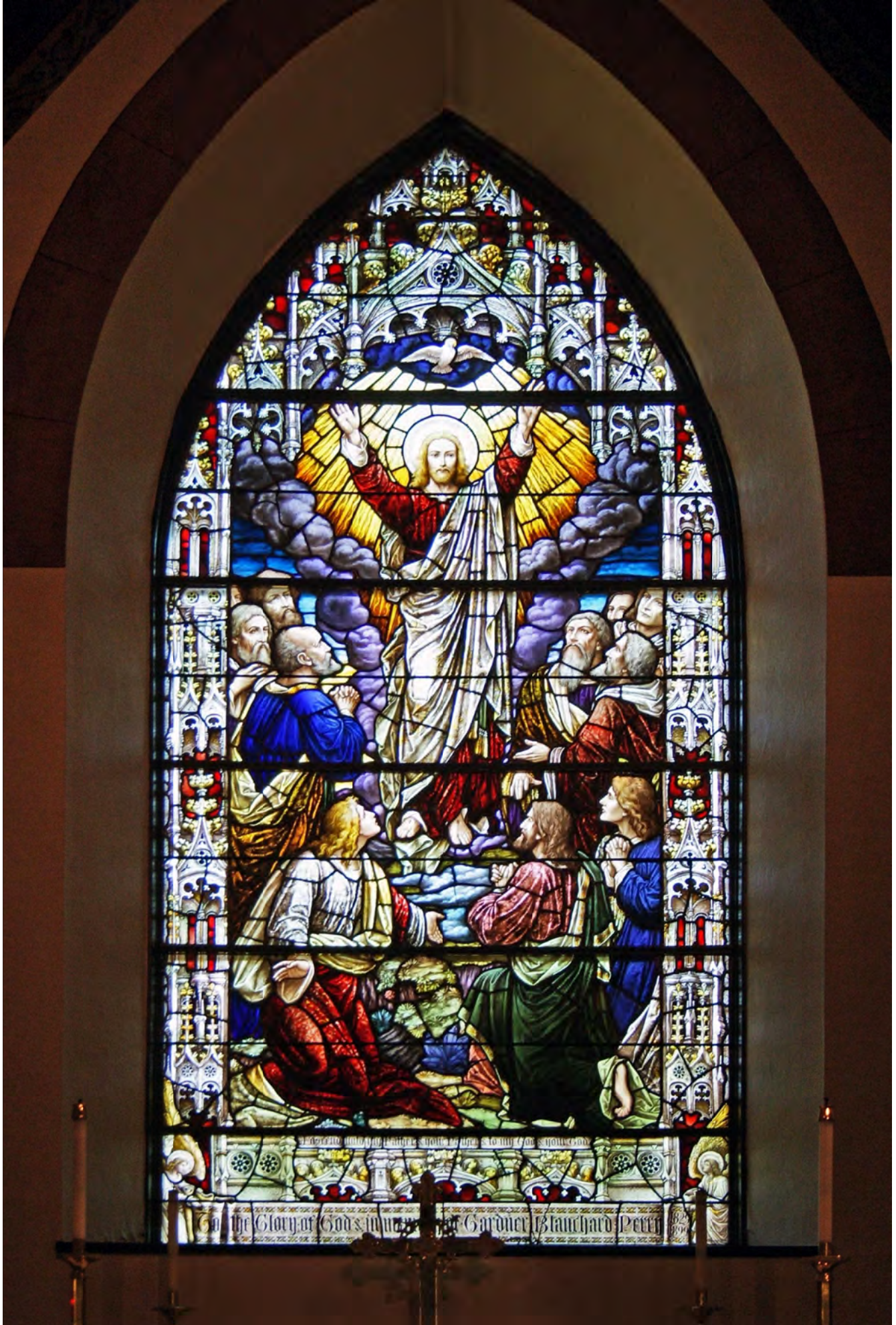


Photo #10: St. Mary's Church, interior, chancel, east side above the altar, Gardner Blanchard Perry memorial window, ca. 1905.



Photo #11: St. Mary's Church, interior, nave, west side, Edith Tuckerman memorial window, 1973.

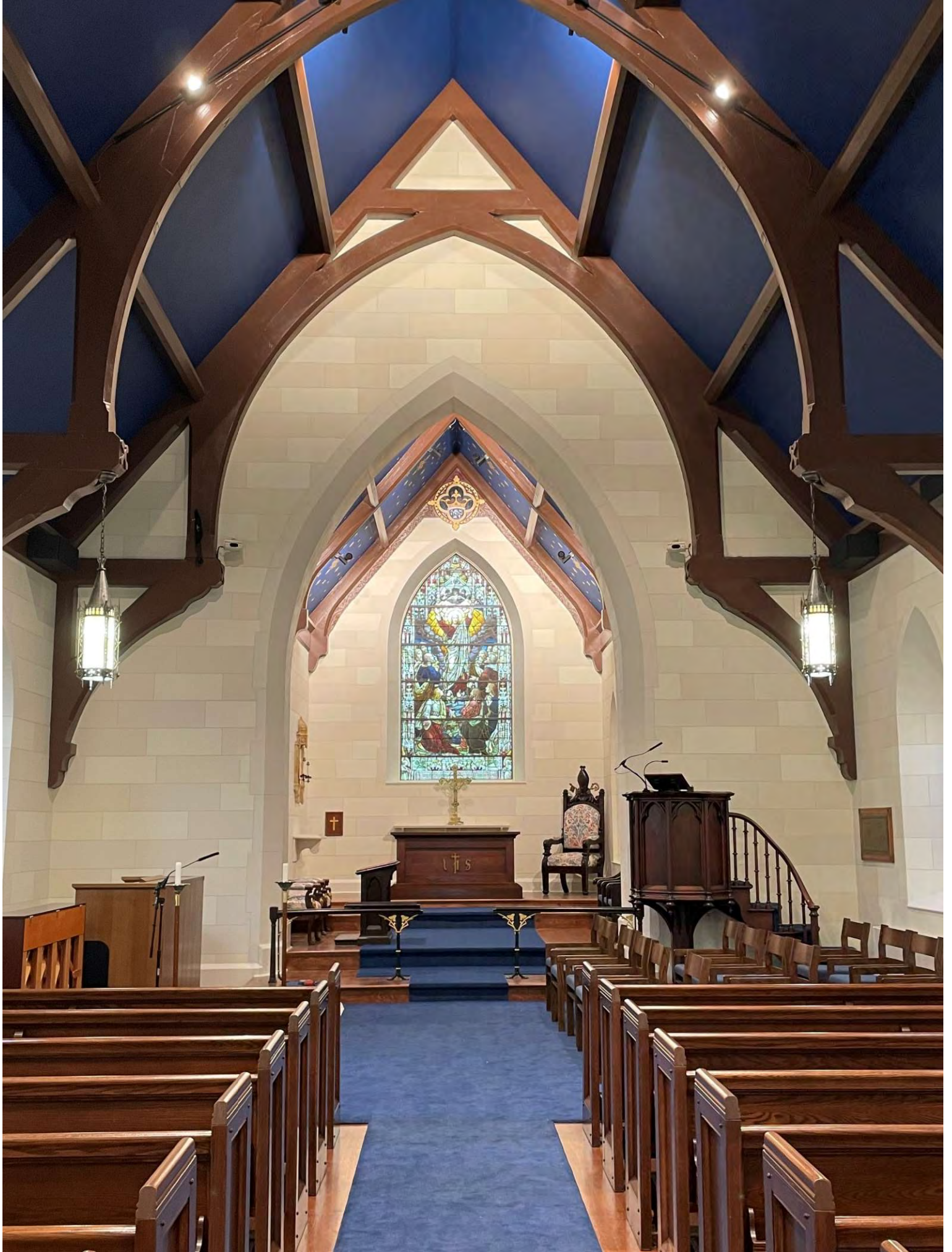


Photo #12: St. Mary's Church, interior, looking east from the nave.



Photo #13: St. Mary's Church, interior, Bridal Doors at west end of nave, installed 1955.



Photo #14: St. Mary's Church, interior, vestibule, looking south from the nave; exterior doors and mosaic tile flooring installed 1908.



Photo #15: St. Mary's Church, interior, vestibule, stained glass window in west wall, ca. 1907-14.



Photo #16: St. Mary's Rectory, east façade and north elevation, looking southwest.



Photo #17: St. Mary's Rectory, west (rear) and south elevations, looking northeast.



Photo #18: St. Mary's Rectory, interior, living room on south side of first floor, looking northwest.



Photo #19: St. Mary's Rectory, interior, dining room on west side of first floor, looking northeast.



Photo #20: Gibbs House, at left, and Parish House, at right, looking northwest. Historic stone wall in front of Gibbs House.



Photo #21: Gibbs House, east façade and south elevation, looking northwest.



Photo #22: Parish House, east and south elevations, looking northwest.



Photo #23: St. Mary's Cemetery, section southwest of the Church, gravestones for Mary Lawton Vinson (died 1797), at right, and her son George Lawton Vinson (died 1816), at left. These stand near the south elevation of the Church.

who died Feb^y 17th 1797.

in the 26th year of her age.

She was in Faith unshaken,
And in Virtue unfeigned.

Henry Bull

Photo #24: Gravestone for Mary Lawton Vinson, detail showing signature of the carver, Henry Bull.



Photo #25: St. Mary's Cemetery, east of the Church, looking northwest. Red stone Gothic Revival style monument (at right in the photo) commemorates Newport banker Frederick Wiggins (died 1869). Sarah Gibbs's monument stands beneath the altar window in the east wall of the chancel (see also Photo 26).



Photo #26: St. Mary's Cemetery, east of the Church, looking north at Sarah Gibbs's monument (died 1866) beneath the altar window of the chancel.



Photo #27: St. Mary's Cemetery, north of the Church, looking northwest, showing a variety of different headstones and monuments. The Perry Monument is the large granite monument with curved top, at right.



Photo #28: St. Mary's Cemetery, north of the Church, looking northwest, showing the Gibbs family plot.



Photo #29: St. Mary's Cemetery, northwest of the Church, looking northwest. The historic stone wall marks the western boundary of that part of the property where all buildings and the cemetery are located.



Photo #30: St. Mary's property, looking northwest beyond the historic stone wall that marks the western boundary of that part of the property where all buildings and the cemetery are located.