

**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 How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. 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. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Freewill Baptist Church, Peoples Baptist Church, New Hope Church

other names/site number The Pearl of Portsmouth, The Pearl Street Church (preferred)

2. Location

street & number 45 Pearl Street NA not for publication

city or town Portsmouth NA vicinity

state New Hampshire code NH county Rockingham code 015 zip code 03801

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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 nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title State Historic Preservation Officer Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional Comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title _____ Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

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

Signature of the Keeper _____

Date of Action _____

The Pearl Street Church

Rockingham Co., New Hampshire

Name of Property

County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

(Check only one box)

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

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	building
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION: religious facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: multiple dwelling

COMMERCE/TRADE: business

RELIGION: religious facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

MID-19TH CENTURY: Italianate

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE

walls WOOD

roof ASPHALT

other CEMENT BLOCK

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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Name of Property

County and State

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.)

Property is:

A owned by 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 of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ETHNIC HERITAGE: BLACK

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

A: 1915-1953

C: 1868

Significant Dates

1857

1868

1915

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Tarleton, Nathan

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

Primary location of additional data:

- preliminary determination of individual listing (see 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 # _____

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

 Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail Office

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Name of Property

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10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property _____ less than one _____

UTM References See continuation sheet.

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1. 19	356430	4770485	3.		
Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
2.			4.		
Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing

____ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title _____ Timothy T. Orwig _____

organization _____ Boston University _____ date _____ 1 May 2003 _____

street & number _____ 421A Grafton Street _____ telephone _____ 508-890-1020; cel 617-817-4732 _____

city or town _____ Worcester _____ state _____ MA _____ zip code _____ 01604 _____

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A **sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

name Margaret Britton

street & number 45 Pearl Street telephone 603-433-0260

city or town Portsmouth state NH zip code 03801

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. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the 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 Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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The Pearl Street Church
Rockingham Co., New Hampshire

7. Narrative Description

The Pearl Street Church, 45 Pearl Street, occupies a small corner lot immediately southeast of the intersection of Pearl Street and Hanover Street in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. The nominated property includes a single contributing resource, a church built in 1857 and enlarged in 1868. This building occupies nearly the entire lot, and its primary landscape features are concrete sidewalks along the two streets, a narrow wedge of shrubbery between the sidewalk and building on the Hanover street side, and a narrow driveway immediately adjacent to the south side of the building. The property is located between North Mill Pond and Islington Street (a major thoroughfare) in Portsmouth's West End, a densely developed nineteenth-century neighborhood of commercial and manufacturing buildings scattered amidst single- and multiple-family dwellings.

Exterior

The Pearl Street Church is a two-story wood-frame building that reflects two major building campaigns. The original church building, constructed in 1857, was approximately 40 ft. wide by 50 ft. long. A decade later, the church was extended westward by ten feet on the Pearl Street end (front). The resulting building is a uniform rectangle 40 ft., 6 ins. wide by 60 ft. long. The 1868 extension also provided the framework to support the base of a large steeple, which topped the addition. The interior reflects these two building campaigns, as the addition provided for a large double staircase to the second-story auditorium and its galleries. The Pearl Street Church today appears largely as it did in 1868, despite its conversion to a restaurant/function hall in 1984. The property is currently in moderate to good condition and retains much of its historic fabric. Since the grid of streets and lots does not match cardinal directions and the eastern chancel end of the church actually faces northeast, directions in this nomination have been simplified slightly to match ecclesiastical directions.

The Pearl Street Church is a rectangular timber-framed structure, its exterior walls covered with clapboards. It sits close to the ground on a dry-laid rubble-stone foundation; only a few inches of the foundation is visible on the exterior. The eave height is 28 feet, while the gable peak on the ends is 45 feet high. The western (front) facade faces Pearl Street and has three regular window bays in a symmetrical arrangement. The east end facade has an irregular arrangement of windows. The building reads as two stories on the north and south sides: a short ground story and a much taller second story. These side facades also have three regularly spaced window bays, offset slightly to the east; the ten-foot western extension of 1868 is windowless on the north and south sides.

The most prominent windows are the tall Italianate sanctuary windows on the second floor, three each on the north, south, and west facades. Each window opening holds a pair of round-arched clear-glass windows, each pair topped with a third round arch, a fixed single lozenge of stained glass filling out this overarching element. An oversized round-arched hood molding brackets this opening, incorporating a raised-panel keystone and terminating just below the base of the lower paired window arches in turned acorn drops. Other facade openings share the same window surround motif, including the central door on the ground floor of the western facade and the two windows flanking it, the single attic gable window on the western facade, and a pair of attic windows in the eastern facade gable. The

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middle second-story window on the western façade is raised slightly above the level of its flanking pair, adding to the verticality of the front façade. The earliest extant sash is the round-arched window in the front attic gable, its delicate repeating pattern of lozenges yielding a 10 over 8-light window with a three-pane fixed lozenge in the arch. The second story window sashes follow this pattern in a slightly simplified manner, the 7 over 6-light paired double-hung clear windows topped by the fixed stained-glass lozenge. High in the rear eastern gable, two single-arched windows, designed to light the attic, are currently filled with plywood. Flat-headed nineteenth-century windows light the first floor of the building directly below the sanctuary windows on the north and south sides; the south façade contains three simple double-hung sash windows (8 over 8 sash), while the north façade contains two windows (the easternmost window of the three now gone) of similar design. Beneath the two nineteenth-century attic windows in the east gable, two contemporary sash windows and a central horizontal sliding window, all placed high in the second story, provide light for the third story loft.

Three small exterior doors—one each inserted near the rear (eastern end) in the north and south façades and a third in the eastern rear façade—provide access to the ground floor units. The north side door is a metal hollow core door; the east (rear) a wood door with a small center light, the south a wood door with a larger single light. The front door is a single paneled wooden door with a central inset light; the door is flanked on each side with three sidelights and topped with a fanlight. A square gray cinder-block chimney rises between the middle and eastern window bays of the south wall, cutting through the overhanging eave of the roof. The four doors and chimney appear to date from the 1984 or 1990s alteration campaigns.

The Pearl Street Church has a moderately steep gable roof and wide, plain, overhanging eaves on the north and south sides. The west (front) façade gable has plain gable end returns approximately 8 ft. in length, while the gable end returns on the east façade gable are much shorter. Three layers of asphalt shingles cover the roof. At the western end of the roof, a large square two-stage belfry rests atop the entry bay added in 1868, surmounted by a short steeple. Occupying a tall plinth with simple pilasters, the second stage belfry walls each rise to a center ogee point. This second stage belfry has round-arched openings on all four sides, each opening topped with ornamental hood moldings similar to those of the sanctuary windows below, including the distinctive raised-panel keystones and turned acorn drops. Plywood sheets currently fill these belfry openings. The present spire is a stubby octagonal cone topped with a ball finial.

Exterior Changes and Alterations

The 1868 westward extension of the church building added ten feet to the overall length of the church and housed the support posts for the addition of the three-part steeple. Structural evidence as to the height of the building in 1857 is inconclusive; it is possible that the original 50-foot-long building had an unfinished space eight feet high beneath the 20-foot posts of the main block, although physical evidence suggests that a whole new lower story may have been inserted beneath the decade-old building in 1868. In overall structure, the 1857 Pearl Street Church building may have resembled the Gothic Revival style Hanover Street Chapel in Portsmouth (also built in 1857, but destroyed in the

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1960s), which had a low ground floor with center entrance and twin exterior staircases rising up to a second-story sanctuary. The original 1857 western façade windows appear to have been reused on the new 1868 addition. It is likely that during this renovation, the paired sanctuary windows (and ground floor front façade windows) were extended upward into their current configuration, to update the building's stylistic form from Greek Revival to Italianate. Originally these windows were flat-headed; the old window tops were removed and replaced by the current round arch. Examination of the outsized hood moldings with raised-panel keystones and turned acorn drops shows that they were applied directly over the top of the remnants of the existing moldings of the previous flat-headed windows. This building configuration, with the characteristic hood moldings, is evident in a c. 1900 photograph of the church building.

Post-1868 exterior alterations are relatively minor. The present stubby octagonal spire replaced a 45-foot spire lost, it is thought, either in the hurricane of 1938 or by fire. A short remnant of the top of that original spire survives in the belfry. The second stage of the belfry once had corner pinnacles topped by ball finials. The c. 1900 photograph shows the (currently) boarded-up windows on the sides of the belfry open to the elements on all sides; in the twentieth century these openings were fitted with dark-green wooden slat louvers.

During the 1984 renovation, the previous owners removed and discarded four 28-foot tall wooden buttress-like rectangular structures, on the south and north sidewalls, their locations corresponding to the corners of the original 1857 building. These were part of an odd nineteenth-century ventilation system, evidence of which still exists in the attic and cellar. Other changes during the 1984 renovation included removal of artificial brick siding added in the twentieth century, replacement of some clapboards, and replacement of the Greek Revival corner pilasters with simple corner boards. The last two decades of the twentieth century also saw the installation of the modern cinder-block chimney, two of the three single ground-floor doors, and the single current paneled front door, a replacement for two former double-leaf arched front doors. A photograph c. 1900 shows a north-façade door directly east of the eastern-most ground floor window. Presumably the 1984 renovations included the removal of this door and window and their replacement with an asymmetrically placed door. The belfry openings were also boarded up sometime after 1984.

Interior

The current interior has an unfinished crawl space beneath the building, accessed from a door in the front lobby. The first floor is divided into an entrance lobby, two apartments and a rear studio. The west door provides access to the lobby, the north door a hallway shared by the apartments, the east door the studio, and the south door a landing shared by the studio and rear staircase. On the second floor a double-height auditorium, designed as the worship space, has open corner balcony galleries on the west end, while the eastern end has been enclosed and compartmentalized into a loft apartment above with a kitchen, restrooms, and storage closets below. Twin winding staircases in the northwest and southwest corners of the building rise from the ground floor to the auditorium and on up to the galleries. A straight-flight back staircase, inserted at a later date, leads from the exterior doorway on

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the eastern end of the south façade westward to the current southeastern corner of the auditorium. A wooden ladder rises from the northwest gallery through a trapdoor in the ceiling for access into the attic and belfry. The structural system of the roof, visible in the attic, includes four queen-post trusses.

Inside the western front door is an entry lobby ten feet deep which extends the width of the building, with winding staircases (to the second floor auditorium) at both north and south ends, heavy turned newel posts, balusters, and matched bead board wainscoting. A solid dado runs across the first and second floor lobbies, except where the front windows and front door break the line. Four huge round posts that support the belfry break the flat wall surface of the lobby. These belfry support posts are exposed in the second story auditorium, where they double as giant columns terminating in a decorative capital. These posts rise to the coved ceiling and currently frame the openings into the auditorium from the two stairways. The posts also help support the rear galleries which project into the open volume of the sanctuary hall from both western corners, each further supported by a single turned column added in the twentieth century. A recessed central bay gallery, only a single walkway wide, links the two quarter-circle side galleries. The galleries have a wooden rail supported by widely spaced convex cast iron lyre-like decorative balusters.

The second-floor auditorium is now roughly square, as the eastern third has been enclosed to provide space for other uses. The walls of the auditorium are lined by a simple paneled dado topped by a rail with plaster walls above, the dado rising slightly higher than the north and south windowsills. The western wall, galleries, windows, and trim around the auditorium all appear to date from the nineteenth century, while much of the wooden wainscoting is twentieth-century. At the northeast corner of the current auditorium, a hallway leads to restrooms and storage in the northeast corner of the building. At the southeast corner of the auditorium, doors lead to a kitchen and the rear staircase and exit. In the center of this eastern partition wall, two contemporary flights of stairs rise from the floor of the auditorium to a single central open landing, from which a wide center staircase rises to the door of the apartment unit situated above the kitchens and restrooms. The large 1868 sanctuary windows are intact on the interior, the western two pairs on either side lighting the sanctuary, and the easternmost windows lighting the hallway (on the north) and staircase (on the south). The pressed-steel coved ceiling dating to 1915 has been retained throughout the auditorium and the upper-level apartment.

Interior Changes and Alterations

Little is known of the original 1857 configuration of the interior apart from a brief newspaper description. The 1857 sanctuary had a singer's gallery over the west front entrance, a pulpit opposite, and 56 pews that held 350 people. While the attic remained unfinished, there were plans for a vestry or Sunday school within its space. The building also had an unfinished basement, eight feet high. Much of the nineteenth-century interior fabric that remains seems to date from the 1868 reconstruction.

The previous owner made a number of alterations to the building in 1984, converting the auditorium from a church into a supper club. The original ground floor meeting room space beneath the auditorium (formerly a large Sunday school room, kitchen and bathrooms) was gutted and converted

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into apartments. Originally, paneled doors led from the center of the front lobby directly into the Sunday school room; the previous owner replaced this opening with a solid wall.

On the second floor, the previous owner also removed the pulpit and demolished the baptismal tank in the eastern end of the auditorium, enclosing the eastern third for the large serving kitchen and public restrooms. Some original finish from the walls of the auditorium appears to remain intact behind this compartmentalization. The previous owner also built the double staircase from the floor of the auditorium to the upper level platform; this platform functioned briefly as a loft piano bar. The two flights of stairs to this eastern loft are faced with a combination of new elements and finish salvaged from other nineteenth-century buildings. When the current owner converted this loft into an apartment in the 1990s, she enclosed the platform with walls. She recessed the central doorway to this apartment slightly to mirror the recess between the western galleries across the auditorium.

Fewer changes were made to the western end of the auditorium. Most prominent among the changes, the previous owner removed the convex cast iron lyre-like decorative balusters that supported the wooden rails in the galleries and sold them. The current owner was able to recover some of these balusters and has reinstalled them, although in a more widely spaced configuration than originally. The previous owner also altered the wall configuration under the galleries, making center openings into the auditorium in the short walls running east to west between the belfry pillars. He then closed the former auditorium doorways in the walls running north to south (between the eastern belfry pillars and the north and south sidewalls, respectively). These walls formerly had arched doorway openings, fitted with large single round-arched paneled doors. He covered these walls with a paneled wainscoting and a dado rail below and mirrors above (on the auditorium side).

Remainder of the Property

The c. 1900 view of the Pearl Street Church shows that the remainder of this small lot has changed to the same degree as its neighbors. Roadway improvements led to the paving of the dirt streets and the replacement of the small plot of grass surrounding the building with sidewalks and a narrow driveway. The sidewalk displaced the only plantings, two large street trees; currently, single-story shrubs are planted directly adjacent to the building.

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8. Narrative Statement of Significance

The Pearl Street Church is eligible for the National Register under Criterion A as a building of statewide significance to the Black Ethnic Heritage of New Hampshire. The period of significance for the building under Criterion A extends from its acquisition by Peoples Baptist Church in 1915 until 1953, fifty years from the present date. During this period of significance, it housed Peoples Baptist Church and was the first African-American-owned church building in New Hampshire. The second African-American-owned church in New Hampshire, AME Zion Church in Portsmouth, did not acquire its own building until 1946, and that building no longer stands. Built by a European-American congregation as Freewill Baptist Church, Pearl Street Church is also eligible for the National Register as a locally significant resource under Criterion C: Architecture, as an uncommon surviving example of nineteenth-century Italianate design. Although constructed in 1857, the building's period of significance for architecture is 1868, the year that the Freewill Baptist Church undertook the expansion and major renovation that gave the church its current form. Only one other Italianate church of the 1850s and 1860s, North Church, survives today in Portsmouth. The Pearl Street Church meets Criteria Consideration A as a religious property that derives its primary significance from its historical importance and architectural distinction.

The Pearl Street Church retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, and workmanship of the periods of its significance. The exterior and much of the interior maintains its general appearance as expanded in 1868. The church especially retains its feeling and association with the Portsmouth African-American community, maintaining many of the physical alterations made to the interior by the Peoples Baptist Church when it acquired the property in 1915.

Criterion A: Black Ethnic Heritage

The Pearl Street Church was the first and, until 1946, the only church in New Hampshire owned by an African-American congregation. It is one of a handful of historic Black churches surviving in northern New England. Purchased in 1915 from the Freewill Baptists, the Pearl Street Church served Portsmouth's first African-American congregation and the larger seacoast black community until around 1984, when the congregation reorganized, built a new church building, and sold this building.

Built in 1857 and expanded in 1868, Freewill Baptist Church was one of several churches begun in the 1850s in the West End of Portsmouth, and it reflects the rapid development of the former Rock Pasture for mills, foundries, machine shops, and a gas works.¹ Around these new industries grew up a dense working-class neighborhood of houses, boarding houses and tenements for mostly English and Scottish workers, followed by churches and other community buildings. These immigrants defined the neighborhood and sustained the church for its first half century. By early in the twentieth century, membership had declined. When in 1915 the minister of Freewill Baptist Church on Pearl Street was

¹ Richard M. Candee, *Building Portsmouth: The Neighborhoods and Architecture of New Hampshire's Oldest City* (Portsmouth: Portsmouth Advocates, 1992), 146.

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about to leave, the nearby Middle Street Baptist Church invited the Freewill congregation to join them, either as a religious body or individually. On March 25, 1915, the *Portsmouth Herald* reported that the two churches would unite on April 11 and discontinue services in the Pearl Street church. Two weeks later, the newspaper noted, "The People's Baptist church have made arrangements to purchase the Pearl Street Baptist church with its furniture and equipment for \$1200."²

An auxiliary branch of the Middle Street Baptist Church, the People's Mission at the South Ward Room formed in 1890, an outgrowth of a multi-denominational Bible-study class that previously had met in Brother James. F. Slaughter's parlor. In 1893 the People's Mission reorganized as the Peoples Baptist Church, with fourteen members and the Rev. James Randolph as its first pastor. It was reported in 1895 that this branch church was "doing good work; not only among their own people, but among the white people" of the South End neighborhood. In 1900 its pastor, the Rev. Robert L. Harris, was baptized and in 1908 his African-American congregation requested, and the Middle Street Baptist congregation voted to support, that Peoples Baptist would become a "distinct Colored Baptist Church." Seven years later the congregation bought the recently closed Freewill Baptist Church for its first permanent home.

The congregation and its then pastor, the Rev. John L. Davis, moved in after the contractor had finished repairs and repainted the old church. Peoples Baptist Church dedicated its new home on June 6, 1915, having raised in one month all but ten dollars of the cost of purchase and repairs. On July 15, 1915, a deed from the General Conference of Free Baptists conveyed the land and building to the Peoples Baptist Church. The congregation later acquired an adjacent house at 40 Parker Street for a parsonage.

In January 1916 a multi-racial New Year's service was held at the Pearl Street Church to honor the memory of the Emancipation Proclamation. This Emancipation Day celebration remained an annual tradition in Portsmouth for almost a century. First held in the South Ward Room in 1882, it was supported by an 1878 bequest to the City of Portsmouth from Unitarian minister Daniel Austin of Portsmouth and Kittery, Maine. By 1923 the annual celebration's location had moved from the Peoples Baptist Church to another site, but it was again celebrated at the Peoples Baptist Church in 1932. The holiday's continuing importance to the African-American community was evident in 1958, when the local chapter of the National Association of Colored People (NAACP) received its charter at that year's Emancipation Day celebration. During the 1970s, priorities changed and the Portsmouth African-American community ceased its Emancipation Day celebrations. Recently, the tradition has been revived in a different form, as Portsmouth celebrations of Juneteenth, the African-American observance of the ending of slavery (celebrated nationwide each June 19th), are held at the Pearl Street Church.

² *Portsmouth Herald* 10 April 1915; see also Rockingham Deeds 696:408.

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By 1926, the Peoples Baptist Church congregation had 200 members. Over the next fifty years the church welcomed pulpit exchanges with neighboring churches, Baha'i speakers, and occasionally seminarians. One guest preacher in 1952 was the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., then a doctoral student at Boston University, whose sermon was entitled "Going Forward by Going Backward." The guest choir, from Malden, Massachusetts, included Miss Coretta Scott, who offered the solo "City Called Heaven." King and Scott married the following year. The post-war Pearl Street congregation was multi-denominational and hosted many African-American charitable, social, and political activities. In the 1970s, some of the congregation reorganized as New Hope Church. They continued to occupy this building until the early 1980s, when they built a new church and sold the old one.

The second African-American-owned church in New Hampshire, the African Methodist Episcopal (AME)-affiliated Zion Church, formed in Portsmouth in the 1940s. In 1946 it acquired the former Advent Christian Church (built in 1853) on Hanover Street. This building, however, was destroyed in the 1960s by urban renewal.

The New Hampshire legislature designated the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr., as a state holiday in 1999, and in January of 2000 the New Hampshire NAACP celebrated the state's first Martin Luther King Day at the Pearl Street Church. Along with the Juneteenth celebration, this is another way that the New Hampshire African-American community has expressed renewed interest in the historical importance of this structure. Moreover, the Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail has designated the structure as one of two-dozen buildings and sites of special interest in Portsmouth, notable for its association with the African-American heritage of the city and state.

Criterion C: Architecture

The Pearl Street Baptist Church is an excellent example of Portsmouth Italianate architecture, showing elements characteristic of its style, most particularly in its round-headed windows with prominent hood moldings. It is most closely related to the only other Italianate-style church of the 1850s and 1860s surviving today in Portsmouth, North Church on Market Square. Unlike that brick building, however, the Pearl Street Baptist Church is a frame structure. Most significantly, no other Italianate building in Portsmouth shares the distinctive hood moldings, with their paneled keystones and turned acorn drops, which grace the Pearl Street Church.

The lot at the corner of Pearl and Hanover Streets on which the church was built was owned originally by the Portsmouth Steam Mill and subject to a restriction from the company against building industrial or commercial buildings.³ In 1857 two neighbors, J. N. Drown and Isaiah Wilson, owned the land. Wilson, who also held a mortgage on the land the first year (Rockingham Deeds 380: 20), may have provided the plan; he was a carpenter who became a builder-architect in Portsmouth over the next decade. Wilson drew the plan for the South Ward Hall (1864) and plans for remodeling older buildings

³ Rockingham Deed 19:19.

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like James Rundlett's store in Market Square (1863). Whether or not Wilson provided a plan, the “master workman” in charge of the construction of the Freewill Baptist Church was Nathan Tarlton, according to the Portsmouth *Daily Morning Chronicle*.⁴ Tarlton was listed as a carpenter in the 1857 city directory, and would run a gristmill, saw and planing mill a decade later. No other buildings in Portsmouth have been attributed to Tarlton. Known as Freewill Baptist Church, the building was “40 by 50 feet with 20 foot posts,—without steeple.”⁵ Its exterior was probably flat-boarded and scored, as it was described as painted in imitation of sandstone.

The extensive 1868 improvements, for which no architect is known, gave the Pearl Street Baptist Church’s exterior a new Italianate appearance and much of its current architectural significance. The *New Hampshire Gazette* noted that the church “has recently been considerably enlarged, and much improved, outside and in—at an expense of \$2000 or \$3000.”⁶ This included the construction of a whole new ten-foot deep bay across the front facade, moving the original windows forward and adding the ground-level entry and stairs. This bay included large round columns, necessary to support the steeple and its spire, which also help support the galleries and frame the sanctuary entrance. A c. 1900 photograph shows that the front exterior corners were marked by large Greek revival corner pilasters, possibly reused from the 1857 building or added to visually balance the buttresses. The Pearl Street Church’s interior has elements of rococo revival, popular in the 1860s, especially the ornate cast-iron gallery balusters.

According to the *Daily Morning Chronicle*, D.W. Libbey of Pittsfield, Maine, raised a 42-foot tall steeple in 1868 that was “built on the floor and painted, and with vane and all was hoisted to its place by fifteen men in three hours time.”⁷ In August of that same year, Elisha Tripp gilded this spire as a “spontaneous donation.” The total height of the steeple was now 115 feet and the Pearl Street church became “one of the neatest and most ornamental buildings in that section of the city.”⁸

The oversize round-arch window and door moldings applied in 1868, with their paneled keystones and acorn drops, defy exact comparison in Portsmouth. A single somewhat similar arched window appears in upper gable end facade of the 1860 Cabot Street School, a wooden Italianate public building of similar scale. The ultimate local source of the round arched window treatment might be seen in the arched terra cotta window caps of the 1854 North Church designed by Towle and Foster of Boston, who introduced this style to Portsmouth.

When the Pearl Street Church changed hands in 1915, its new African-American congregation hired a contractor to make repairs including a “new steel ceiling,” as well as adding a handsome mahogany pulpit and a new baptistery (both removed in 1984), electric lights and repainting. Added to the 1868

⁴ *Portsmouth Daily Morning Chronicle* 23 December 1857.

⁵ *Portsmouth Daily Morning Chronicle* 12 February 1858.

⁶ *New Hampshire Gazette* 8 February 1868.

⁷ *Portsmouth Daily Morning Chronicle* 3 June 1868.

⁸ *Portsmouth Daily Morning Chronicle* 5 December 1868, “The Freewill Baptist Fair.”

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improvements—the entry bay, the supports for the projecting galleries and belfry, and the arched windows—the coved ceiling covered with decorative metal panels is one of the structure's most significant character-defining features. No other surviving Portsmouth church has pressed metal ceilings. Loss of the steeple's spire (perhaps in the 1938 hurricane), subsequent deterioration of the belfry, and the sheathing of the exterior with imitation brick-patterned siding in the mid 1940s began a pattern of deferred maintenance that eventually led to the building being sold.

Exterior remodelings undertaken by the previous owner in 1984 and the present owner in the 1990s included removal of the brick-patterned asphalt siding as well as the buttresses and corner boards. On the interior, the conversion of the space below the auditorium to apartments changed the plan and removed any former finish. In the auditorium, the insertion of the kitchen space at the pulpit bay was the major alteration, and though the space above has since been walled, the metal ceiling continues above it without damage. Two round-headed doors that formerly led to the sanctuary from each side of the upper lobby were reused in the ground floor apartments. These interior changes provide the income to maintain the building, presently known by its business name as The Pearl of Portsmouth. But the first floor entry bay and the large volume of open space in the auditorium give feeling and association with the historic African-American church as recalled by many of its former congregation. In the public spaces, the auditorium retains more than 3/4 of its historic surface and finish materials, while the two-story 1868 lobby bay retains almost all of its interior wood and plaster finishes.

Criteria Consideration A

Pearl Street Church meets Criteria Consideration A as a religious property that derives its primary significance from its historical importance and architectural distinction. It is not currently owned by a religious institution, nor is it used primarily for religious purposes.

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9. Bibliography

Primary Sources:

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10. Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

The present property boundaries are reflected in the Portsmouth property tax map, U-26, lot #30.

Boundary Justification

The present urban property boundaries match those deeded to the Freewill Baptist Church in 1857 and the People's Baptist Church in 1915, excluding modern city sidewalks, and are reflected in the Portsmouth property tax map, U-26, lot #30.