Form 10-300

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

1. NAME
   COMMON: Trinity Lutheran Church
   AND/OR HISTORICAL: St. John's Episcopal Church

2. LOCATION
   STREET AND NUMBER: 702 North Main Street
   CITY OR TOWN: Rutherfordton (Eleventh Congressional District, The Hon. Roy Taylor)
   STATE: North Carolina
   CODE: 37
   COUNTY: Rutherford
   CODE: 161

3. CLASSIFICATION
   CATEGORY (Check One)
   - District
   - Site
   - Structure
   - Object
   - Building

   OWNERSHIP
   - Public
   - Private
   - Both

   PUBLIC ACQUISITION
   - In Process
   - Being Considered

   STATUS
   - Occupied
   - Unoccupied
   - Preservation work in progress

   ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
   - Yes: Restricted
   - Unrestricted
   - No

   PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)
   - Agricultural
   - Commercial
   - Educational
   - Entertainment
   - Government
   - Industrial
   - Military
   - Museum
   - Park
   - Private Residence
   - Religious
   - Other (Specify)
   - Transportation
   - Comments

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY
   OWNER'S NAME: Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church
   STREET AND NUMBER: 702 North Main Street
   CITY OR TOWN: Rutherfordton
   STATE: North Carolina
   CODE: 37

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION
   COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:
   Rutherford County Courthouse
   STREET AND NUMBER: Main Street
   CITY OR TOWN: Rutherfordton
   STATE: North Carolina
   CODE: 37

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS
   TITLE OF SURVEY:
   DATE OF SURVEY:
   - Federal
   - State
   - County
   - Local
   DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:
   STREET AND NUMBER:
   CITY OR TOWN:
   STATE:
   CODE
Trinity Lutheran Church is a tiny rectangular frame structure, three bays wide and two bays deep, covered with plain lapped siding and situated on a steep hillside. To compensate for the terrain, the front of the church, which is at the top of the slope, rests on a low brick foundation while the rear is supported on thirteen-foot brick piers. The pedimented main facade has a central entrance containing a flat-paneled double door surmounted by a lancet arch filled with geometric tracery. This arch, a later addition, is the only exterior feature of the church which is not of pure Greek Revival design. Both the doorway and the large flanking windows are bordered by heavy symmetrically molded architraves with roundel corner blocks. All the windows on the front and the sides contain twelve-over-twelve sash. Each side of the building is framed by molded pilaster corner posts which terminate in unacademic caps below the wide entablature. The entablature, adorned only with a heavy molding under the deep overhang of the cornice, continues around the church. The rear of the church is not pedimented and has a small twentieth century shed addition which houses the chancel.

Above the flush-sided tympanum of the main facade on the front of the roof is the square belfry. Resting on a low wooden plinth, the belfry features a small rectangular louvered vent on each face surrounded by a molded architrave with plain corner blocks. Pilaster corner posts support an entablature similar to that of the main block. Surmounting the belfry's low pyramidal roof is a simple wooden cross.

Almost all the original interiors remain, including curved-back pews and molded architraves with roundel corner blocks similar to those which surround the windows outside.
From its earliest days as a missionary station, St. John's Episcopal Church struggled for its survival. Rutherford County, located in a mountainous region, had long been dominated by Baptists and Methodists; further, the Protestant Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina was hard pressed in the middle and late nineteenth century to provide clergymen to serve the more remote regions of the state.

The first mention of the Episcopal congregation at Rutherfordton is the report of Bishop Silliman Ives to the 1842 diocesan convention of his having preached there. In the following year, a missionary served the small congregation occasionally, and the bishop remarked that "the friends of the church here are few but deserve encouragement." The turnover of missionaries was quite rapid; in 1844 a new one, serving a wide area including Rutherford County, pointed out that the congregations in the region were small "and likely to continue so, till time and a better knowledge of our institutions shall have worn away something of the prejudice which here . . . has been found to exist against them." In 1846 still another missionary reported that "the little Church organised here during the last year will prosper, if it can but be favored with the Services of the Church." In the same year the members of the vestry wrote directly to the bishop, "setting forth the peculiar advantage of effort there in behalf of the Church, at the present time." The efforts of the small but apparently energetic congregation were successful, for yet another missionary, Jarvis Buxton, reported in 1848 that though services previously had been held in the courthouse and the female academy, the congregation had "organized itself for union with the present Convention [and] have contracted for a Church building, to be finished, it is hoped, in time for consecration at the Bishop's next visitation." In the following year Mr. Buxton triumphantly reported that "the Church is ready for consecration." He related that "the colored people of the village assemble at the Church on Saturday night for worship and familiar instruction." Things went well for a time: the congregation was presented with a silver communion service from "friends in South Carolina," and church attendance was increasing. But in 1852 Buxton left the parish, and again the church was served by a series of missionaries who provided only occasional services. It was on April 23, 1856, that the land where the church had stood for several years was finally officially deeded to the trustees of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of North Carolina, by the heirs of John Bettings. In the same year, however, the newly ordained Bishop Atkinson reported that he "found this parish vacant,
and consequently languishing." In 1859 the parish was described as "very much reduced by deaths and removals but undiminished in zeal."

Reports are lacking for the Civil War years, and "from 1864 to 1873 no regular services were held and the parish was cut off from its diocesan standing." In 1873 the regional missionary came on the fifth Sunday of the month, when that occurred. Yet the hardy congregation persisted, and in 1875 the parish was readmitted to diocesan standing. Missionaries came and went. One of them, leaving the area in 1881, said

There is perhaps no finer field in the Diocese for missionary work than in Rutherford County. It is occupied by a fine community of intelligent and thrifty farmers, many of whom have no connection with other religious bodies. But the Church is almost entirely unknown in the large and prosperous county.

A long period with very infrequent services continued until 1892, when a new missionary, Mr. Phelps, took charge of the region, remarking that the parish was "in a deplorably run-down condition." Under his leadership the church was refurbished by "repainting, whitening, and varnishing doors and walls and chancel railings, and refitting and repairing lamps, and putting up the fence about the church." In 1894, "through the enterprise and zeal of the ladies of the church here," a new roof was put on. In 1896, in line with long-discussed plans, the western part of the state, including Rutherford County, was placed in what was to be called the Missionary Jurisdiction of Asheville.

Among the members of the growing congregation was Franklin Coxe, a wealthy businessman. By 1898 construction had begun on a new Episcopal church financed by a donation from Mr. Coxe. The new church, much larger than St. John's, was built of stone in the Gothic style. Consecrated on Ascension Day, 1900, it was named after St. Francis in memory of Franklin Coxe's late father, Francis. In the following year, the trustees of the Episcopal Church in the Missionary District of Asheville sold to Franklin Coxe for $10 the lot where the old St. John's Church stands. During the first third of the twentieth century, the little church was owned by members of Coxe's family and was used at intervals for various church purposes, including a Sunday school. In 1935 Coxe's daughter, Mauda, deeded three tracts of land, including the lot where St. John's stands to the officials of St. Francis's parish, for the nominal fee of one dollar. On November 12, 1936, the parish officials sold the old church on its small lot to the Mission Board of the English District of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and other states. Since then the building has been known as Trinity Lutheran Church.
This small church, one of the earliest remaining in the county and the second oldest Episcopal church building in the Diocese of Western North Carolina, is a reminder of the struggles of the early Episcopal congregation which, served only by occasional missionaries, persisted despite continuous difficulties. The well-executed simplicity of its design which is in perfect proportion to the small scale of the building, together with the fine quality of its detail, make this church an especially appealing example of the Greek Revival style.
## 10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

### LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES

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<th>CORNER</th>
<th>LATITUDE</th>
<th>LONGITUDE</th>
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<tr>
<td>NW</td>
<td>Degrees Minutes Seconds</td>
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<tr>
<td>NE</td>
<td>35° 22' 21&quot;</td>
<td>81° 57' 19&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>35° 22' 21&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>SW</td>
<td>35° 22' 21&quot;</td>
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### APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY:

\( \frac{1}{2} \) Acre

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

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### 12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

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

- National [ ]
- State [ ]
- Local [X]

Name: H. G. Jones
Title: Director, State Department of Archives and History
Date: 26 November 1971

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

Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

ATTEST:

Keeper of The National Register

Date
9.
