

# FORM B – BUILDING

Assessor's Number USGS Quad Area(s) Form Number

16-77

Marion

N,  
AB

MRN.21

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING  
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD  
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

**Town/City:** MARION

**Place:** (*neighborhood or village*): Marion Village

## Photograph



**Address:** 30 South Street

**Historic Name:** St. Gabriel's Episcopal Church

**Uses:** Present: Church

Original: Church

**Date of Construction:** 1847, remodeled 1874

**Source:** Somers, *Three Centuries of Marion Houses*

**Style/Form:** Gothic Revival

**Architect/Builder:** Unknown

**Exterior Material:**

Foundation: Granite

Wall/Trim: Wood shingles/ Wood

Roof: Asphalt shingles

**Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:**

None

**Major Alterations** (*with dates*)\*:

Bell cast in 1838 placed in new bell tower topped by new weather vane added in ca. 1990.

\*Based on Property Card and/or observation

**Condition:** Good

**Moved:** no  yes  **Date:**

**Acreage:** 0.77 acres

**Setting:** This parcel fronts on both South and Front Streets. The complex of church buildings encircle the parcel, with access to an interior courtyard off South Street. The surrounding area is densely-built with many historic houses, most set fairly close to the street on small parcels.

## Locus Map



Aerial Imagery, 2021

**Recorded by:** Eric Dray, Preservation Consultant

**Organization:** Sippican Historical Society

**Date** (*month / year*):

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Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

*If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.*

*Use as much space as necessary to complete the following entries, allowing text to flow onto additional continuation sheets.*

## ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

*Describe architectural features. Evaluate the characteristics of this building in terms of other buildings within the community.*

*(edited and expanded from 1998 version of this Form B)*

St. Gabriel's Episcopal Church was adapted to its current appearance in 1874. What is now a sprawling campus that encircles the parcel began as the modest church near the corner of South and Front Streets. This church building, like most 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings in Marion Village, rests on a rough-cut granite block foundation. The elevations are clad in wood shingles with very narrow, unpainted corner boards. The steeply-pitched gable roof is clad in red asphalt shingles (likely wood shingles originally). The roof has deeply-projecting open eaves with saw-cut rafter tails capped with fascia boards. An open, framed belfry rises from the roof ridge, capped by a flared shed roof.

St. Gabriel's Episcopal Church is the only example of a Carpenter Gothic ecclesiastical building in Marion. Other churches in the town overwhelmingly reflect the impact of Classicism, in most cases the Greek Revival style. The rustic appearance and diminutive 1½-story scale of the chapel here belie its origins as the Sippican Academy, a substantial Greek Revival-style school building erected on this site in 1847. Rising to a height of two stories and enclosed by a cupola-topped, pedimented attic, the old academy was drastically altered in 1873-1874, resulting in the present wood shingle-clad, three-bay by four-bay church. The only intact component of the former school is the church's projecting and enclosed entrance porch which is surmounted by a pedimented gable, and the paneled double doors.

Fenestration consists primarily of stained glass windows with shallow-pitched, pointed arches. The two exceptions are the large three-part tracery window in the apse on the south side of the building, and a fixed, stained glass rectangular window over the front entrance that replaced a 6/6 wood sash window. The current fixed window depicts a dove enframed by a circular form.

The Gothic Revival style, among other attributes, was known to emphasize verticality, and borrow from Gothic design. Here, the very steep roof pitch and the pointed arch-shaped stained glass windows are the two primary features which allow this building to be considered Gothic Revival in style.

Starting in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the church was greatly expanded. In 1940, a gabled parish hall was added to the south end of the site facing east toward Front Street. This large, simply massed element under an asymmetrical gable is sited perpendicular to the main church building and lit by a large, east-facing Gothic window. During the mid-1950s, a modern school complex affectionately nicknamed "St. Gabriel's Motel" was added to the church, and an addition facing north toward South Street was added in 1967, creating an open court in the center of the site.

## HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

*Discuss the history of the building. Explain its associations with local (or state) history. Include uses of the building, and the role(s) the owners/occupants played within the community.*

While there had been some economic activity and residential development in Sippican Village prior to the Revolution, maritime-related development accelerated into the early-1800s, as happened in so many coastal Massachusetts towns, with boat building, coastal schooner trade, and the salt industry driving the economy. The construction of the First Congregational Meeting House in 1799 (now Marion General Store, 140 Front Street, MRN.22), also helped make Sippican Village the center for spiritual and civic life. Residential development was initially concentrated along Main Street, and the harbor became the site for maritime-related utilitarian buildings and wharfs. By the time the 1855 Walling Map was prepared, Main Street from the harbor west to Pleasant Street was the most densely developed street in the village, but there was also substantial residential development along the eastern block of South Street. The western block of South Street, however, was labelled as "(contemplated)" on the 1879 Plymouth

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County Atlas with some development near the intersections with Front and Pleasant Streets, including this Episcopal church (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup>

*(Reprinted from 1998 version of this Form B, edited)*

Constructed in 1847, the Sippican Seminary, also known as the "Dames School" because its student body included many daughters of Marion sea captains, began as a "select private school." Offering instruction in the "higher branches, with particular reference to music," the school was not a success. In 1855, the seminary proprietors voted to rent the building to the town as a public school. The name Sippican Academy probably dates from this transition. By 1860, the second floor of the old academy housed the town library which had been located in Dr. Ellis' house at 141 Front Street (MRN.237), now the Sippican Historical Society.

In 1874, the two-story, cupola-topped Greek Revival-style academy building was transformed on its lot at the southwestern corner of Front and South streets, into a chapel-scale, Carpenter Gothic ecclesiastical building. During the 1880s, "gifts of a hand-made stained glass, altar and eagle lectern" provided physical evidence of the commitment of a steadily growing congregation. On May 4, 1899, a celebrity wedding at St. Gabriel's gained national press attention. Journalist, author and playwright Richard Harding Davis married the talented artist Cecil Clark in a ceremony attended by best man and renowned illustrator Charles Dana Gibson and bride's maid and acclaimed actress Ethel Barrymore.

From 1886 until 1900, year-round services were conducted by neighboring clergy, students from the Episcopal Theological School, and lay readers. On June 23, 1900, St. Gabriel's was consecrated by Bishop William Lawrence. Henceforth, the Episcopal Diocese provided part-time pastoral leadership, indicating that the church had a larger "year round" membership. By 1927, steps had been taken to secure a resident rector. The Reverend Albert Hill divided his time between teaching at Tabor Academy and preaching at St. Gabriel's. From 1930 until 1951, "St. Gabriel's was blessed with an incredible group of professors who assisted and served as ministers-in-charge, among them the Reverends Angus Dunn, Norman Nash, Joseph Fletcher, William Wolf, Massey Shepherd, Charles Taylor, Richard Emrich, and Charles Buck, Jr."

On June 3, 1951, the Reverend John Albert gave his first sermon as St. Gabriel's first full-time rector. The church's membership was increasingly drawn from year round retirees, Providence and New Bedford-based employees of new businesses and engineering firms, and the local cranberry industry. On March 16, 1952, Warden Donald Hood reported diocesan approval of St. Gabriel's request to become a parish.

In that year, the "Hornblowers", "a vigorous and enthusiastic group" was organized to support the parish through antique shows, the production of plays, and other fellowship activities. The first newsletter was published, and property south of the church was purchased for future growth. During the late 1950s, "this dynamic group took on permanent form as the Marion Art Center."

During the mid-1950s, under the leadership of Reverend Donald Gardener, a modern school complex affectionately nicknamed "St. Gabriel's Motel" was added to the church. The classes of this church school sponsored a child in India, participated in community food ministries, gave parties for the local half-way house, and sponsored youth fellowships and forums. The 1960s were marked by a rise in church membership and participation, the commissioning of two lay readers, the opening of interfaith dialogues and projects and the dedication of a new Moller pipe organ. During the 1960s, Reverend Gardner courageously marched for integration in Selma, AL and Betty Sawyer was the first woman elected to the parish vestry. The early-1960s renovation of the 1940 parish hall led in 1966 "to a plan for the enlargement of the church, based on a broader sense of stewardship and a deeper lay understanding of the work and purpose of the church. In a 1966 parish meeting, a far-reaching change in thinking introduced the idea of both building a new church and keeping the present church just as it was."

Ground breaking for the new facilities that would connect the 1874 chapel and 1950s classrooms with the new church and parish hall, occurred on May 16, 1967. By that time, Reverend Ernest W. Cockrell had assumed leadership of the church. Completed in 1968, the new church was fitted up with curved, pre-Civil War pews salvaged from an old church in Whitman. The parishioners had despaired of being able to afford contemporary curved seating but the donated nineteenth century pews "fit as if custom made."

<sup>1</sup> Marion was first settled in 1679 as Sippican, a district of Rochester, and was not incorporated as a separate town until 1852. The name Sippican Village continues to be used interchangeably with Marion Village.

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During the 1970s, St. Gabriel's parishioners were challenged by social change, dealing with "the struggle over new liturgies and music," the Vietnam War, sex education programs and the women's movement. During the 1970s, the Women of St. Gabriel's grew into the most dynamic of the fellowship and mission groups of the parish. This group raised funds for a children's clinic, meals for the sick, and the beautification of the sanctuary through needlepoint projects. Proceeds from the publication of a popular cook book, fairs, and rummage sales helped this group to realize their charitable goals.

Long known for its exceptional music program, skilled organists, well-trained adult and youth choirs and, since 1981, a hand bell choir have flourished at St. Gabriel's. Reportedly, the production of Benjamin Britten's *Noye Fludde* in 1974 was an enormous success involving over 100 people in the community and a small orchestra. In 1990, money was raised to construct a new bell tower which houses a bell donated in 1971 by the First Congregational Church (MRN.39) in honor of St. Gabriel's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Cast in 1838, the bell had been given to the First Congregational Church by Marianne Channing, but the church was not in need of a bell so it was donated to St. Gabriel's. The bell tower was designed by the Reverend Allen Knight who is both a carpenter and a priest. The new bell tower's weather vane depicting Gabriel blowing his horn was donated by the Hood family of Marion.

St. Gabriel's Episcopal Church continues to play a vital role in the spiritual life of Marion and southeastern Massachusetts. Since the 1970s, the church has been known for its ecumenical spirit, sponsoring union services for Roman Catholic neighbors as well as members of various Protestant denominations.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

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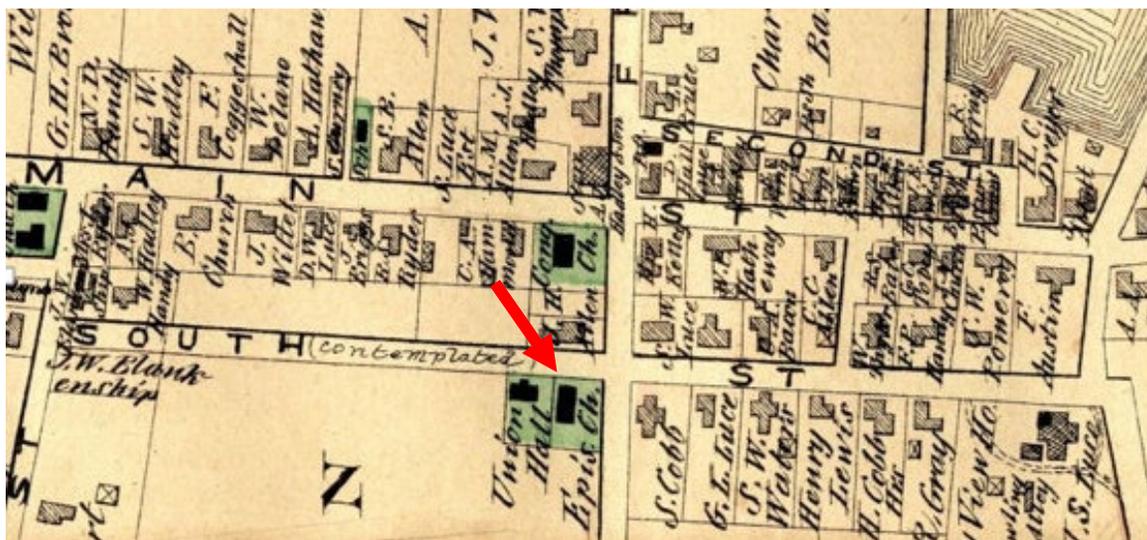


Figure 1. Detail of 1879 Plymouth County Atlas (arrow added).



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**National Register of Historic Places Criteria Statement Form**

Check all that apply:

- Individually eligible       Eligible **only** in a historic district
- Contributing to a potential historic district       Potential historic district

Criteria:     **A**     **B**     **C**     **D**

Criteria Considerations:     **A**     **B**     **C**     **D**     **E**     **F**     **G**

Statement of Significance by Eric Dray, Preservation Consultant for Sippican Historical Society  
*The criteria that are checked in the above sections must be justified here.*

This property is a contributing resource in the combined Areas of Wharf Village-Sippican Village (MRN.N) and Water Street (MRN.L), hereinafter referred to as Marion Village.\*

Marion Village is recommended as eligible for listing at the local level under Criterion A in the area of Maritime History. Marion Village contains the great majority of buildings connected to Marion's historical maritime development beginning in the late-18<sup>th</sup> century. With the rise of salting, shipyards, and whaling, maritime activity increased dramatically into the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, as did residential development in Marion Village. In addition to the houses built by those in the maritime industry, Marion Village contains numerous buildings and structures associated with maritime industrial activity, including a chandlery, sail loft, cooperage, and wharves. As Marion Village's prosperity became linked to Sippican Harbor, Marion Village also became the commercial, political and institutional center of the town.

Marion Village is also recommended as eligible for listing at the local level under Criterion A in the area of Entertainment/Recreation. Starting in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, maritime activity declined significantly. The decline in maritime activity was eventually replaced by the rise in the 1870s of a summer colony as Marion Village emerged as an elite summer resort. This was facilitated by the arrival of train service in the 1854. Summer visitors, including artists and writers, were drawn Sippican Harbor's beauty and tranquility. A large hotel, the Sippican Hotel, was located at the corner of South and Water Streets, and a few houses were converted to inns. While the hotel was town down in 1929, a large livery complex built by the Hiller Brothers at 147 Front Street (MRN.216) is extant. They provided horse-drawn vehicles to summer visitors registered at the Sippican Hotel, and ferried guests back and forth between the hotel and the train depot. In Marion Village, ownership (or occupancy through rental) of many houses began to shift from local maritime families to seasonal residents, including nationally-noteworthy politicians, businessm

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