

**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 St. George's Episcopal Church  
other names/site number

**2. Location**

street & number 156 Main Street N/A not for publication  
city or town Austin N/A vicinity  
state Nevada code NV county Lander code 015 zip code 89310

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant \_\_\_ nationally \_\_\_ statewide X locally. ( \_\_\_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Ronald Jones SHPO 6-26-03  
Signature of certifying official/Title 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 commenting or other official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that this property is: Signature of the Keeper Date of Action  
\_\_\_ 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): \_\_\_\_\_

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

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

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- X building(s)
district
site
structure
object

Number of Resources within Property

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

Table with columns: Contributing, Noncontributing, buildings, sites, structures, objects, Total. Values: 1, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 1, 0.

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

1

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Category

Subcategory

RELIGION

religious facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Category

Subcategory

RELIGION

religious facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Gothic Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

- foundation Stone
walls Brick
roof Metal
other Wood

Narrative Description

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

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CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 1

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## **St. George's Episcopal Church, Austin, Lander County, Nevada**

### **Section 7 Description**

#### **Summary**

St. George's Episcopal Church is located at 156 Main Street in Austin, Lander County, Nevada. Austin is situated at an elevation of approximately 6,600 feet above sea level in Pony Canyon near the northern end of the Toiyabe Range and near the geographic center of the state. The town lies in the watershed of the Reese River, a tributary of the Humboldt River, and it is served by US Highway 50. The northeast-facing Gothic Revival-style church was built in 1877-78 on a terrace at the foot of the south wall of Pony Canyon. The American-bond tan brick building is one-story in height and has a metal-sheathed front-gable roof with a two-story bell tower at the east front corner. A granite foundation and a bracketed entry stoop are other exterior features, and door, window, and belfry openings have lancet arches (unless otherwise noted). The nave-plan interior has exposed trusses on hammer beams, redwood roof boards, an original Mills organ, and other decorative features and finishes. The church was rehabilitated in 1982. It is adjoined on the west by a modern cafe and on the east by an unpaved parking area. Several deciduous and evergreen trees shade the property. A nineteenth century photograph shows several saplings planted out front.

#### **Exterior**

The corner bell tower is St. George's most visible feature. The first-story corners of the tower are defined by buttresses with corbelled tops and quarry-faced granite blocks at their bases. (Similar buttresses ornament the building's side elevations.) The first story has two lancet-arched openings containing paired two-over-two windows. The windows are separated by turned mullion-like elements, and there are quatrefoil recesses above them. The tower's second story has louvered belfry openings, two on the southeast side and one on the northeast side. The wide cornice has novelty weatherboard sheathing, alternating large and small carved brackets (an Italianate-style detail), and triglyph-like elements in a frieze at the base (the latter elements may be modern replacements). Under the cornice is a band of alternating smooth and dogtooth brickwork with corbelled courses above and below. The spire has a cross finial and its flared base has gabled vents with louvered trefoil openings (these vents may have been modified in the early 1980s). Belt courses extend across the tower at the springing line of the window and belfry opening arches, a treatment that also occurs in conjunction with the windows on the two side elevations of the building.

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## **St. George's Episcopal Church, Austin, Lander County, Nevada**

### **Section 7 Description, continued**

The front entry is centered on the northeast gable end and contains a double-leaf door with decorative matchboard panels and chamfered rails and stiles. In front of the entry are a concrete landing and steps with modern metal railings. The ghost of a former balustrade newel can be discerned to the right of the entry. The entry is sheltered by a gabled stoop supported on chamfered struts. The stoop has chamfered cross-bracing in the gable, faceted bosses on its face, a sawn finial, and a turned pendant. Above the stoop is a bricked-up window with a squat lancet form (a 1978 photograph shows it covered by a white-painted panel). Above this opening runs a band of the corbelled and dogtooth brick that ornaments the tower. The gable has molded raking cornices and chamfered cross-bracing with a turned finial and turned pendant at the ends of the stanchion and decorative brackets (one a replacement) under the ends of the horizontal member. The rear gable has a bricked-up window like that in the front gable.

The main roof is flared at the eaves like the tower roof and it has a cornice with multiple small brackets interrupted above the windows by gablets with trefoil-form rakeboards. The roof was originally covered with wood shingles and had multiple gablets with trefoil vents; the wood shingles were replaced with slate in the 1950s and the gablets removed; and the present metal roofing was installed in the 1990s. The side elevation windows have four-over-four sash and granite sills. One window on the southeast elevation was made into a doorway in the early 1980s but the lancet-arched top was retained as a transom. The church was built with tall corbelled flues near the front north and rear west corners but only the rear flue survives. The front concrete steps join to granite steps and descend through a granite retaining wall built in 1878. The wall's capstones are fastened together with wrought iron staples, some of them decoratively twisted.

### **Interior**

Typical interior features include plaster walls above vertical beaded board wainscots, molded door and window surrounds, four-panel doors with porcelain knobs, and red carpet and tile floor coverings. The plaster on the outer walls is applied to lath because salt in the brick did not allow the plaster to adhere. The roof structure consists of modified scissor trusses with chamfering and decorative iron strapwork. The undersides of the bottom chords of the trusses have scalloped tracery-like treatments with carved finials. At the bottom ends of the king posts are turned pendants, and turned finials ornament the ends of the hammer beams that support the trusses. Resting on the top chords of the trusses are purlins that in turn support redwood roof boards.

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## **St. George's Episcopal Church, Austin, Lander County, Nevada**

### **Section 7 Description, continued**

The south, altar end of the nave features a chancel screen consisting of three large lancet-arched openings with vertical beaded board infill in the spandrels and in the right-hand sacristy archway. The arches rest on pilasters with molded plinths and caps and, on top of the caps, fleur-de-lis-shaped ornaments with quatrefoil cutouts. The larger center archway frames the altar and altar dais. The altar is constructed of walnut and features trefoil arches and inscriptions in lighter wood. The walnut altar rail has chamfered upper and lower rails, turned cross-bracing, and turned bosses. To the left of the altar is the 296-pipe Mills organ. The organ keyboard is supported by brackets and has a paneled surround, and the organ mechanism, accessed by a narrow door to the left of the keyboard, has numerous carved and penciled graffiti. To the right of the altar is a sacristy entered through a doorway that was apparently modified at some point.

In front of the altar area is a vertical beaded board railing behind which are the pews, with shaped ends and shield ornaments. At the back of the nave is an early but not original partition constructed of decorative boards with a peaked cresting and cove molding. Plywood doors lead into a transverse room--the former back part of the nave--from which doors lead into a small 1960s kitchen and water closet at the base of the tower, an original office in the north front corner with a dark-stained beaded vertical board wainscot, and the vestibule in the center. The lancet-arched transom panel over the double-leaf doors to the vestibule has vibrant yellow pine graining with the cracks in the painted knotholes portrayed as small crosses.

### **Integrity Statement**

St. George's Episcopal Church possesses very good architectural integrity. The exterior retains its overall form and finishes and many of its original decorative features. The roof has been modified--the original wood shingles and gablet vents and the later 1950s slate shingles have been replaced with metal roofing--but other original roof features have been preserved and the modern roof material is not intrusive. Likewise, the interior is little altered from the original construction, with the exception of the partition at the back of the nave. The building's immediate setting preserves original features such as the stone retaining wall across the front. Some nearby parcels have modern buildings in place of historic ones, but in general the end of Main Street on which the church is located retains its historic character.

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Section 8 Page 4

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## **St. George's Episcopal Church, Austin, Lander County, Nevada**

### **Section 8 Statement of Significance**

#### **Summary**

St. George's Episcopal Church is one of Austin, Nevada's most stylish nineteenth century buildings. The sophisticated Gothic Revival church was built in 1877-78 during the pastorate of the Rev. S. C. Blackiston according to a design by an unidentified San Francisco architect. A corner bell tower dominates the exterior of the nave-form brick building. Interior features of note include a hammer-beam-scissor truss roof, redwood roof boards, yellow pine graining, and an original 296-pipe Mills organ. A local builder, Michael Finnegan, served as the general and carpentry contractor for the building, and prolific central Nevada mason John C. Wholey was also involved in the project. Today, St. George's is a well-known architectural landmark and the only historic Austin church to remain in use by the denomination that built it.

#### **Applicable Criteria**

St. George's Episcopal Church meets Criterion C and is eligible in the architecture area of significance for the refinement of its Gothic Revival architecture in the local context of Austin. The period of significance encompasses the years during which construction occurred, 1877 and 1878. St. George's is eligible at the local level of significance. The building is located in the Austin Historic District, listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1971. Information in support of eligibility appears throughout this section.

#### **Acknowledgments**

A number of organizations and individuals assisted in the preparation of this report. The nomination was sponsored by Lander County and the Austin Historical Society with Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding from the Nevada Commission of Economic Development, and it is one of ten nominations prepared for prominent historic landmarks in Austin in 2003. The project was assisted by the owner of the property, St. George's Episcopal Church, represented by the Rev. Estelle Shanks. Others who provided assistance included Allen D. Gibson, Deputy District Attorney, Lander County; Christy Caronongan, Administrative Assistant, Lander County Executive Director's Office; Ray H. Williams Jr., Ray and Irene Salisbury, Phillip "Poncho" and Joan Williams, and Joy Brandt with the Austin Historical Society; Ray "Ramey" Williams III, Austin; Dee Helming and Herbert Wallace "Wally" Trapnell, The Greater Austin

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**St. George's Episcopal Church, Austin, Lander County, Nevada**

**Section 8 Statement of Significance, continued**

Chamber of Commerce; and Mella Rothwell Harmon, Architectural Historian/National Register Coordinator, Nevada State Historic Preservation Office.

**Historic Context**

Silver was discovered in Pony Canyon in May 1862 and within a year the population of the nascent community of Austin and its immediate vicinity stood at nearly 1,000. The Comstock Lode boomtown of Virginia City provided a staging area for the settlement of Austin and in many respects served as a template for Austin's economic, demographic, and architectural development. Austin was made the seat of Lander County on September 2, 1863, and in November 1864 the town's population was reliably estimated at approximately 6,000, briefly making Austin the state's second largest community. Austin rapidly passed through the three incipient developmental stages identified by the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office as characteristic of the state's mining towns: the settlement stage (provisional architecture and haphazard organization), the camp phase (more permanent frame buildings and town platting), and the town phase (masonry construction, public buildings, established infrastructure, and stylistic sophistication).<sup>1</sup>

By the end of 1866 Austin boasted two substantial brick churches (Austin Methodist and St. Augustine's Catholic), several banking houses, the *Daily Reese River Reveille* newspaper, the International Hotel (moved from Virginia City), and hundreds of brick, stone, wood, and adobe mining structures, commercial buildings, and dwellings. American-born whites constituted the majority of the population; Chinese, English/Welsh, Irish, and "civilized Indians" were important groups as well. Austin also experienced, to a degree, a fourth phase of Nevada mining town development: partial abandonment, as the silver played out and the town's economy and population contracted at the end of the nineteenth century. Austin's status as a trade center for central Nevada

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<sup>1</sup> Neu, "Austin Historic District;" Abbe, *Austin*, 56; Hulse, *Silver State*, 79; and Harmon, "How to Prepare Nominations," 8-9. One authority claims a peak Austin population of 10,000 in the summer of 1863 (Nevada State Historical Society, *Nevada*, 259). Another suggests a peak population of approximately 8,000 (Smith, "Austin, Nevada," 7).

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**St. George's Episcopal Church, Austin, Lander County, Nevada**

**Section 8 Statement of Significance, continued**

prevented it from becoming a ghost town, but the town's population declined to 702 by 1900 and stands at about 300 today.<sup>2</sup>

Episcopal Bishop Joseph Cruickshank Talbot preached in Austin in 1863 and three years later a layman, D. M. Goodwin, formed a congregation. The Episcopalians met first in the town's old courthouse and afterward in the courtroom of the 1871-72 Lander County Courthouse. St. George's Parish was officially organized in 1873 by Father Christopher Stevenson (a short lived mission known as St. George's preceded the parish in 1868-69). The establishment of the parish roughly coincided with increased population in the ethnic groups from which the parish membership was drawn. Between 1870 and 1880 Lander County's English/Welsh population increased from 83 to 434. Canadians and Scots, other ethnicities represented in St. George's congregation, also grew in population, although their numbers were smaller. The rise of the Manhattan Silver Mining Company, which by the early 1870s controlled Austin's principal silver mines, was associated with the increases in these ethnic groups.<sup>3</sup>

Fr. Stevenson was succeeded by the Rev. S. C. Blackiston who in the March 1877 issue of the *Parish Guide*, the newsletter of the Diocese of Nevada, announced plans to erect a church. Over \$300 were collected for the project at Easter and on April 13 it was announced that Allen A. Curtis, Superintendent of the Manhattan Silver Mining Company and one of Austin's wealthiest citizens, had offered to pay for "the frame of the building," that is, the carpentry and finish woodwork. J. S. Porteus joined Curtis with an offer to purchase an organ for the church. Another offer was more unorthodox. A local citizen proposed, "to furnish a telephone for the steeple [by which means] the sounds of the chimes of Trinity Church, New York, or of the strokes of the big clock on St. Paul's Cathedral . . . can be made to emerge from the steeple at the will of the sexton." The telephone was cutting-edge technology in 1877, having been patented the year before.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Neu, "Austin Historic District;" Abbe, *Austin*, 58-59; and Harmon, "How to Prepare Nominations," 9.

<sup>3</sup> Townley, "From the Vault;" Abbe, *Austin*, 58, 75; and Estelle Shanks personal communication.

<sup>4</sup> Townley, "From the Vault;" *Reese River Reveille*, April 2, 13, and 17, 1877.



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## St. George's Episcopal Church, Austin, Lander County, Nevada

### Section 8 Statement of Significance, continued

The church site was selected by the end of April and the decision to build in brick rather than frame as originally contemplated was made early the following month. In August the *Reese River Reveille* was shown plans prepared by a San Francisco architect whom, unfortunately, the paper failed to name. With characteristic pride the *Reveille* proclaimed: "If these plans are carried out in detail, the building will be the handsomest church structure in Nevada, exterior and interior." The general and carpentry contract was let to "the well-known contractor and builder" Michael Finnegan, a city alderman and member of the local chapter of the Irish American Benevolent Association. Mike Finnegan presumably had some connection to another Austin "contractor and builder," James T. Finnegan, a native of Maryland who moved to Lander County in 1870. The source of St. George's granite foundation stones was the foundation of the dismantled Pioneer Mill located below Austin. The stone was donated and delivered to the church by John Frost, one of Austin's earliest settlers.<sup>5</sup>

By November 10 contractors Brennan & Wholey had the brick walls ready for the placement of the roof trusses, and a week later Finnegan had the building under roof. The *Reveille* misspelled the Wholey of Brennan & Wholey as "Hooley," which is how the name is pronounced, but there is no doubt that this was the prolific central Nevada mason John C. Wholey (1848-1925). According to Nevada chronicler and acquaintance Herman Albert, the Irish-born Wholey was "a latter-day Leonardo da Vinci." Albert attributed "scores of stone buildings, rock foundations, pillars, arches, culverts, and tall brick chimneys" to Wholey. Wholey family tradition confirms that John Wholey worked on St. George's.<sup>6</sup>

On November 22 the 900-pound bell arrived. Cast by the McNeely Bell Company of West Troy, New York, the bell was donated by Austin merchants Gage & Paxton. A Thanksgiving Day service was held in the nave but the Christmas service was prevented by "unforeseen [*sic*] difficulties and obstacles." One of these was reported by the *Reveille*:

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<sup>5</sup> *Reese River Reveille*, March 11, April 25, May 5, August 27, and September 11, 1877, and February 20, 1878; Angel, *History of the State of Nevada*, 670.

<sup>6</sup> *Reese River Reveille*, September 6, November 10 and 22; Albert, *Odyssey of a Desert Prospector*, 117-118; and Marvin Wholey personal communication. Little is known about Wholey's partner, Brennan.

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**St. George's Episcopal Church, Austin, Lander County, Nevada**

**Section 8 Statement of Significance, continued**

The [interior] walls are now being lathed preparatory to plastering. It was the intention to lay the plaster next to the brick wall but this was prevented by a somewhat queer circumstance. In making the bricks of which the church walls are composed, tailings from the Manhattan mill were used as part of the material, and when the walls were built, the salt contained in the tailings began to seep through. This seepage would discolor the plaster and it was therefore found necessary to put laths on the walls.

Despite the drawbacks, the contractor was able to mount the bell in the tower and Austin was treated to its "clear sweet sound" on Christmas morning.<sup>7</sup>

The furniture and organ arrived in January. The organ, made by Alexander Mills of New York, cost \$1,000, and it was the second Mills organ known to have been delivered to Nevada; one was installed in Virginia City's Episcopal Church in 1876. In mid-February "the little gem of [a] building" was opened for viewing by the townspeople. The *Reveille* took the occasion to print a detailed description of the completed church:

The dimensions of the building are: Exterior--61x31-6. Interior 46-6x27-6 in the clear. Seating capacity, 200 persons. The building is on the Gothic order of architecture, in what is called the Lombard style, and while the utmost simplicity is observed in both exterior and interior, there is that about the detail and ornamentation which, small as it is, gives to the entire building an air of quiet grandeur. The ceiling of the church is of California redwood, oiled and polished, resting on massive rafters of polished pine, stayed by elaborately carved braces of the same material. The furnishing of the body of the church is of California redwood, and the altar and chancel furniture of black walnut, manufactured to order in New York.

The finishing touches came in March and May. On March 5 it was reported, "the steeple on the new Episcopal Church building has been covered with California red wood shingles, and with its white painted cross at the apex, presents a very neat appearance." The stone retaining wall in front of the

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<sup>7</sup> *Reese River Reveille*, November 22 and December 8, 13 and 26, 1877; Gleason, "Episcopal Church from Reese River Reveille" (marginal note).

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## St. George's Episcopal Church, Austin, Lander County, Nevada

### Section 8 Statement of Significance, continued

church was completed by masons Harney & Kirlew in early May and the *Reveille* pronounced it "the best and most substantially built wall of its kind ever erected in Austin."<sup>8</sup>

Everything was in place for St. George's consecration on June 16, 1878, Trinity Sunday, with the participation of the Rt. Rev. Bishop Ozi Whitaker of the Episcopal Church and Episcopal minister Rev. S. P. Kelly, who was also State Superintendent of Public Instruction. St. George's led a peaceful existence for the remainder of the nineteenth century and through the twentieth century. In 1982 the church was awarded a \$5,350 National Park Service rehabilitation grant administered by the State Historic Preservation Office and matched by local and diocesan monies. The bell tower was stabilized among other repairs. Today, St. George's is the only one among Austin's three nineteenth century churches to remain in use by the denomination that built it.<sup>9</sup>

### Architectural Analysis

St. George's Episcopal Church is solidly Gothic Revival in style but with the incongruous Italianate detail of the carved brackets in the tower cornice. The *Reveille* classification of the building is interesting: "The building is on the Gothic order of architecture, in what is called the Lombard style." Perhaps this was how the unidentified San Francisco architect described the building, or maybe it was an invention of someone else involved, the Rev. Blackiston or even the editor of the *Reveille*. Whatever was meant by "Lombard style," it is technically incorrect in the modern sense of the term. Lombard architecture predated the Gothic style by several hundred years, and one of its characteristic features is the round arch, not the lancet arch that is so much in evidence at St. George's.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Reese River Reveille*, January 12, February 10, 18, and 20, March 5, and May 9, 1878; Ochse, *History of the Organ in the United States*, 313.

<sup>9</sup> *Reese River Reveille*, February 14 and June 13 and 17, 1878; "St. George's Episcopal Church," report in the Survey Files of the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office; and Mella Harmon personal communication.

<sup>10</sup> *Reese River Reveille*, February 20, 1878. It may be the term "Lombard style" referred to the combination of Gothic and Italianate features, but this seems doubtful.

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**St. George's Episcopal Church, Austin, Lander County, Nevada**

**Section 8 Statement of Significance, continued**

In addition to the Gothic and Italianate aspects of the church is the cross-bracing of the front gable and stoop, a detail from the Queen Anne style (or the closely related "Stick" style). Also of note is the interior's vivid graining, with its distinctive painted pine knot crosses. The same detail is seen in the second-generation graining at St. Augustine's Catholic Church (1866) and is probably a diagnostic signature of the painter. Overall, St. George's Episcopal Church is a sophisticated building, more sophisticated than the Catholic and Methodist churches that preceded it in the 1860s. The church's architectural distinction commended it for inclusion in the Oxford University Press guide, *Buildings of Nevada* (2000).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Pezzoni, "St. Augustine's Catholic Church;" Pezzoni, "Austin Methodist Church;" and Nicoletta, *Buildings of Nevada*, 172-173.

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**St. George's Episcopal Church, Austin, Lander County, Nevada**

**Section 9 Bibliography, continued**

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**St. George's Episcopal Church, Austin, Lander County, Nevada**

**Section 9 Bibliography, continued**

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**Section 10 Geographical Data**

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The nominated area corresponds to Lander County tax parcel 01-104-04.

**Boundary Justification**

The boundaries of the nominated area correspond to the present boundaries of the parcel on which the church stands.

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**St. George's Episcopal Church, Austin, Lander County, Nevada**

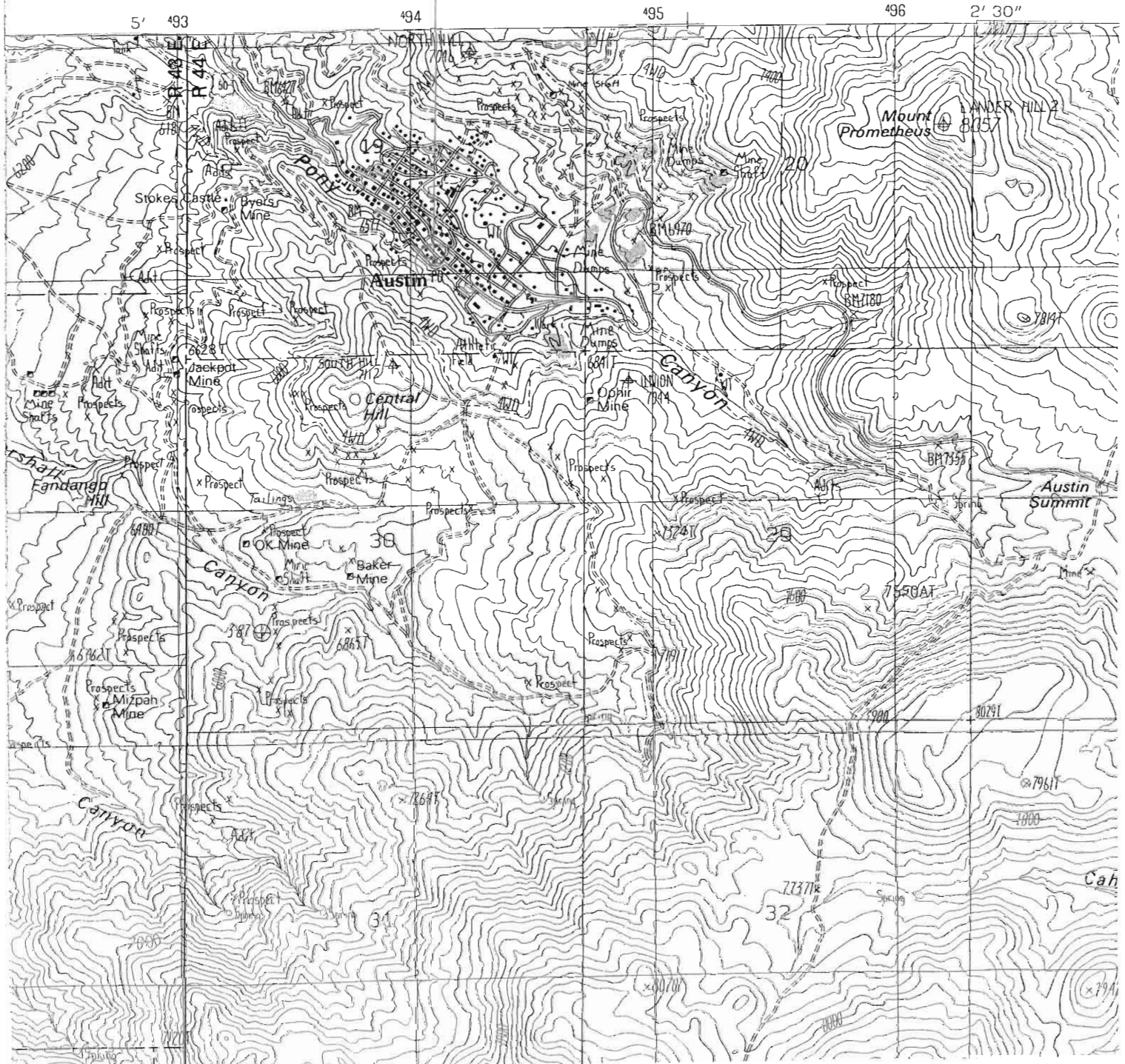
**PHOTOGRAPHS**

1.     1. Subject: St. George's Episcopal Church (same for all photos)  
       2. Location: Lander Co., Nv. (same for all photos)  
       3. Photographer: J. Daniel Pezzoni (same for all photos)  
       4. Photo date: March 2003 (same for all photos)  
       5. Original negative archived at the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office,  
          Carson City, Nv. (same for all photos)  
       6. Description of view: Front (northeast) elevation. View looking southwest.  
       7. Photograph number appears at beginning of entry (same for all photos)
2.     6. Southeast elevation. View looking northwest.
3.     6. Northwest and southwest elevations. View looking east.
4.     6. Nave with organ on left, altar at center, and sacristy on right.
5.     6. Roof trusses.

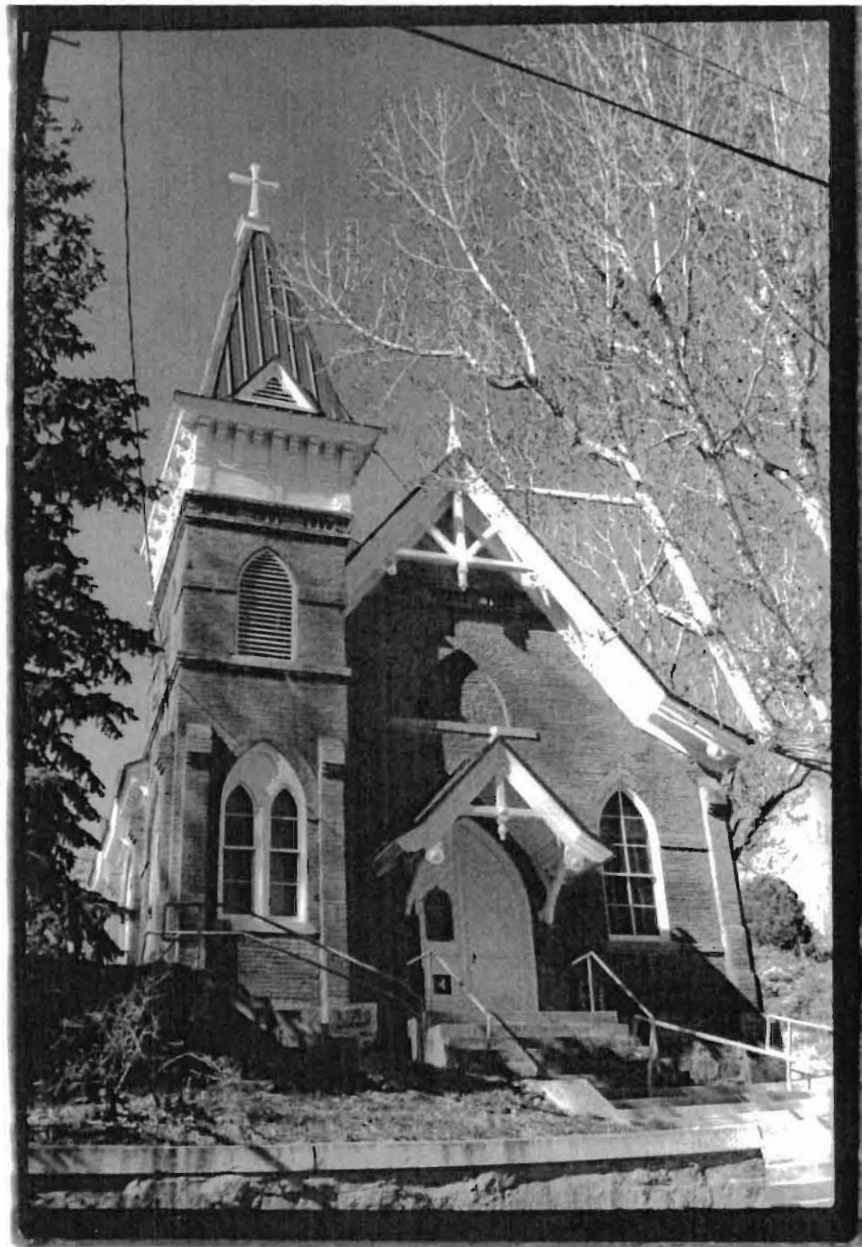
U.S.G.S. 7.5-minute Quadrangle  
Austin, Nevada  
Provisional Edition 1988



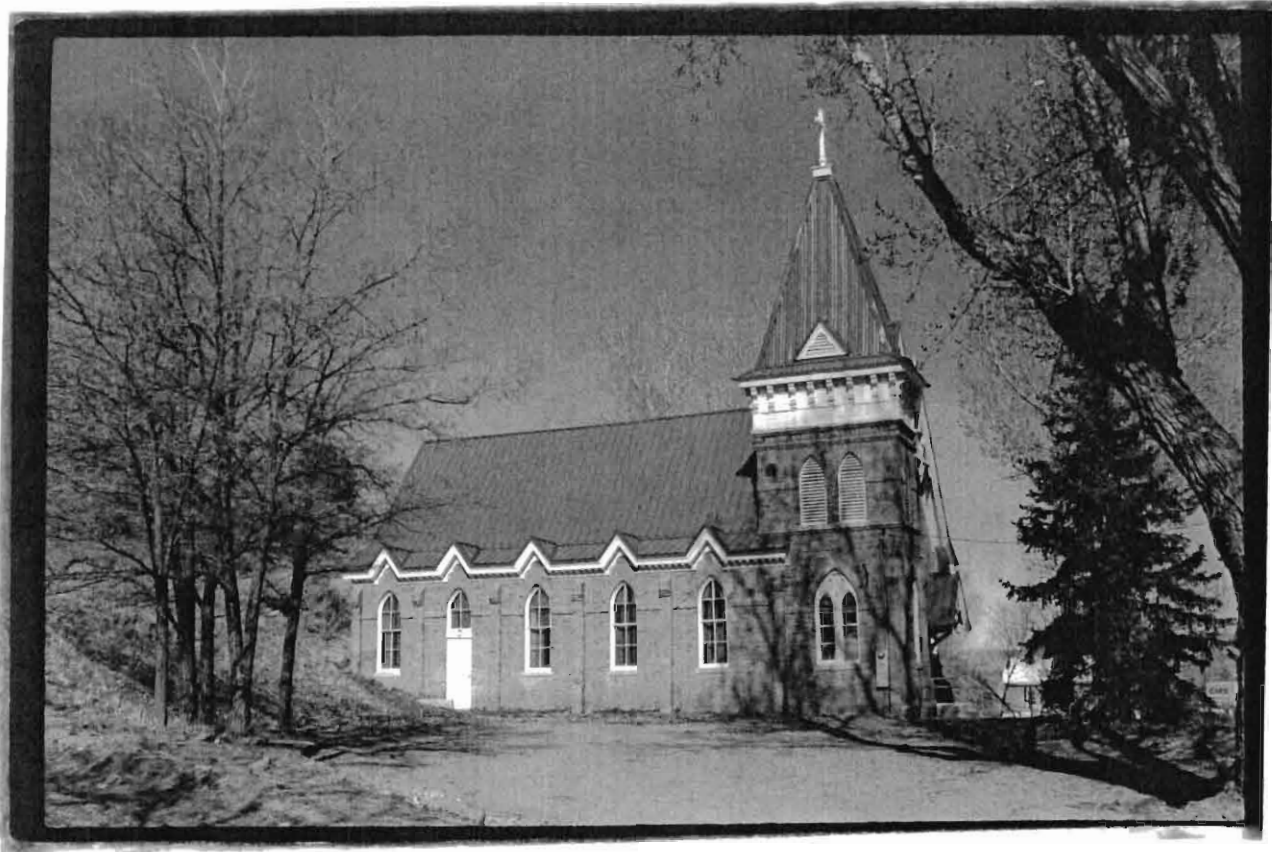
St. George's Episcopal Church







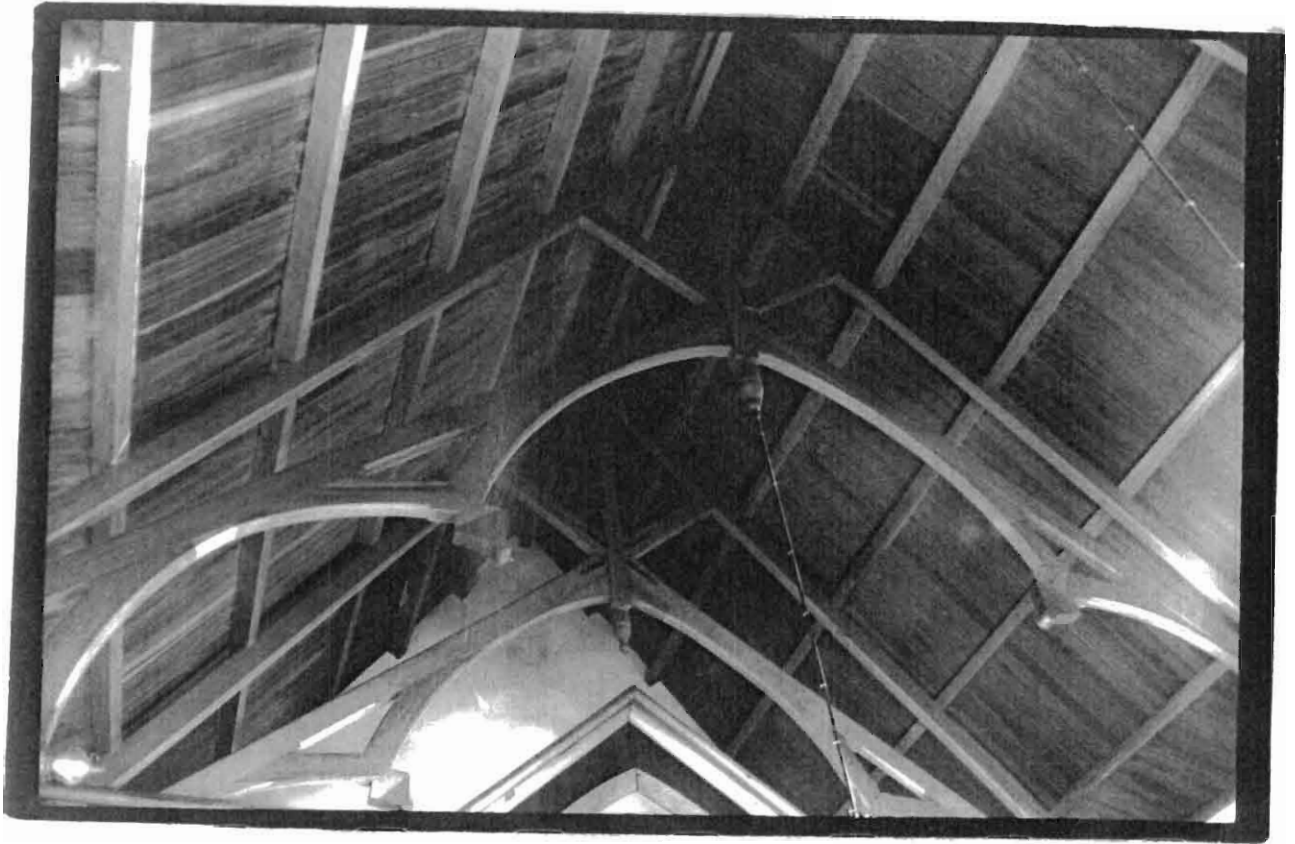
St. George's Episcopal Church, Austin, Lander County



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