

WASHINGTON HERITAGE REGISTER

A) Identification

Historic Name: **Trinity Lutheran Church**
Common Name: Trinity Community Lutheran Church
Address: 1880 APA Road
City: Point Roberts County: Whatcom

B) Site Access (describe site access, restrictions, etc.)

The building is on the north side of APA Road between Mallard Drive and Deer Lane in the community of Point Roberts.

C) Property owner(s), Address and Zip

Name: Trinity Congregation
Address: PO Box 437
City: Point Roberts State: WA Zip: 98281

D) Legal boundary description and boundary justification

Tax No./Parcel: Property ID 153220 Parcel # 4053021040090000
Boundary Justification: The nominated resource includes the entire parcel containing Trinity Community Lutheran Church.

FORM PREPARED BY

Name: Andrew Mar
Address: 2003 APA Road
City / State / Zip: Point Roberts, WA 98281
Email: Benni8@whidbey.com
Phone: 360-945-0793
Nomination Date: February 2024

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E) Category of Property (Choose One)

- ☒ building ☐ structure (irrigation system, bridge, etc.) ☐ district
☐ object (statue, grave marker, vessel, etc.) ☐ cemetery/burial site
☐ historic site (site of an important event) ☐ archaeological site
☐ traditional cultural property (spiritual or creation site, etc.)
☐ cultural landscape (habitation, agricultural, industrial, recreational, etc.)

F) Area of Significance – Check as many as apply

- ☒ The property belongs to the early settlement, commercial development, or original native occupation of a community or region.
- ☒ The property is directly connected to a movement, organization, institution, religion, or club which served as a focal point for a community or group.
- ☒ The property is directly connected to specific activities or events which had a lasting impact on the community or region.
- ☐ The property is associated with legends, spiritual or religious practices, or life ways which are uniquely related to a piece of land or to a natural feature.
- ☐ The property displays strong patterns of land use or alterations of the environment which occurred during the historic period (cultivation, landscaping, industry, mining, irrigation, recreation).
- ☐ The property is directly associated with an individual who made an important contribution to a community or to a group of people.
- ☐ The property has strong artistic, architectural or engineering qualities, or displays unusual materials or craftwork belonging to a historic era.
- ☐ The property was designed or built by an influential architect, or reflects the work of an important artisan.
- ☐ Archaeological investigation of the property has or will increase our understanding of past cultures or life ways.

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G) Property Description

Trinity Lutheran Church in Point Roberts is situated on a one-half acre plot in a clearing which slopes upward towards the north. The grounds are surrounded on three sides by large Douglas fir and western red cedar trees as well as several memorial deciduous trees. Reportedly only one tree was removed for the construction of the building. The exposed ground is mostly covered in grass while a variety of native plants surround the perimeter foundation of the sanctuary. The building faces directly south. Parking on site is limited to a single driveway which transitions from asphalt to a concrete pad and then a Hollywood-styled paved lane.

The building is composed of two portions forming a "T-shaped plan"; the main original sanctuary (completed in 1921), and a rear addition (completed in 1999). Due to the slope of the site, the main sanctuary sits on a raised foundation. Exposed at the south end of the building, the foundation is clad with vertical T & G. The building has a front facing gable roof with enclosed eaves and is clad with asphalt shingles. A small steeple was added to the ridgeline c.1988. This houses a bell from the old schoolhouse which was demolished in the 1930s and reinstalled on the nominated building.

The sanctuary and addition have simple drop shiplap wood siding. Decorative detailing is limited to the street facing gable end which boasts a transitional stringcourse and diagonal trim boards simulating a roof-truss system. Other architectural detailing is found in the series of arch-topped windows which are evenly spaced around three sides of the main sanctuary space and rear addition. These wood windows have a fixed two-pane upper sash topped with a fanlight, and an operable, two-pane lower sash. All have simple surrounds.

Main entry to the building is via a set of double wooden doors (later replacements). The entry is protected by a gable covered stoop which matches the slope of the main roof of the sanctuary. This covered stoop is not original to the building and was added c.1976. The entry stoop and stair are poured concrete which replaced the original wooden staircase c.1948. At that time the approach to the main entry was changed from a single set of stairs which projected from the front of the building, to two sets of stairs facing east and west and parallels the façade.

Attached to the rear of the sanctuary and sitting perpendicular to it is a parish hall. It was designed by Douglas Landsem Architects of Bellingham to mimic the detailing of the original building. This included matching the roof slope, utilizing new drop wood siding, and installing similar windows (although finished in vinyl).

The main sanctuary is a building 30'x 46' space. The front 8th is utilized by three equally sized 10'x10' rooms. At the center is a narthex which is flanked on either side by small rooms, originally used for classrooms. The west room is now divided into two smaller spaces,

originally containing a set of stairs leading to the crawlspace. In the mid-1970s the room was divided into a bathroom space and area for a small sacristy. Entry to the sanctuary is through a set of additional double wood doors. Parishioners are greeted with a full barrel vault roof, now covered in acoustical tile installed in 1959 by Jonas Thorstenson and Arni Thorsteinson. All of the walls are lath & plaster and are highlighted by an unpainted beadboard wainscoting. Reportedly the upper walls and ceiling were originally painted in decorative style by noted local artist Ásta Kristín Árnadóttir (Asta Norman). These features have been lost and/or covered up except for the marbling surrounding the alterpiece.

Rows of pews (purchased used from a church in Bellingham) are set at an angle and have a center and side aisles. The chancel space is defined by a raised platform at the front of the sanctuary. This platform, with arched front, is protected by a baluster railing, hand-turned by parishioner Steini Simundson using a specially built steam powered lathe. Simundson, a cabinet maker, also produced all the woodwork in the building including the alter and pulpit. The original pulpit is located on the east side, while a modern piano is found on the west side.

Defining the space, on the far north wall is a large alter portrait of Jesus. It was commissioned by noted ecclesiastical artist August Klagstad at a cost of \$55.00. The painting is set within a wooden frame with arched top. The frame is stained and is painted with gold filagree and golden crosses. Flooring throughout the original building is straight-grain Douglas fir. All woodwork is unpainted and stained a dark color. Light is provided by several glass pendants hanging from the barrel-arched ceiling. These were installed in the 1930s after electricity was brought to the Point.

On the far back wall, a pipe organ was installed c.1988 by Heustis Pipe Organ Services of Ladner, B.C. Reportedly the organ was originally built in the 1950s by the Schlicker Organ Company of Buffalo, New York, for the chapel at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. It was acquired and restored by the Rauh family of Richland, Washington. After many years of use by their two sons, it was purchased by the church and transported to Point Roberts by members of the congregation. The console is located to the west of the chancel platform and sets level with the congregational pews. This organ replaced an older one. The pipes attached to the back wall are none functional and are a hold-over from the early organ.

The newer fellowship hall, completed in 1999, contains a large reception room with fireplace, kitchen, office, music room, nursery, private study, and washrooms as well as a pastor's study on the second floor. A small porch connects the two buildings. On the west side of the reception room, there is a south-facing deck accessed by a single half-lite metal door. Daylight to the second floor is provided by two south-facing gable dormers.

The original church is in fair condition. Steel reinforcement plates were added to the outside top of east and west walls, and are bound together with 7 steel cables drawn through the sanctuary space. Installed in 2021, these were added to preserve the structural integrity of the building and to prevent the outside walls from bowing outward.

H) Significance

Trinity Lutheran Church is historically significant for its direct connection to serving the spiritual needs and aspirations of the Point Roberts community. The congregation was formed by Icelandic pioneers who settled in Point Roberts in the late 19th century. The church was designed and constructed solely by members of the congregation in 1921, and the building has been adapted over the years to serve the needs of several congregations.

Point Roberts, part of Whatcom County, is a 4.9-square-mile unincorporated American exclave located in the southern part of Canada's Tsawwassen Peninsula. Although Point Roberts is part of the United States, it is not physically connected to the United States. Reaching it requires a 14-mile trip from the Canadian border crossing at Blaine.

The Point was a favored fishing spot for a variety of Native American bands and tribes for thousands of years before the first European explorers spied the land in 1791. At the site they set up seasonal summer camps when the salmon were running. However, due to the exposure of the site geographically, few lived there year-round.

European settlement began with the Fraser River Gold Rush in 1858 when the Point became a jumping-off place for prospectors bound for the lower mainland of British Columbia. A little village sprang up on the western shore of the peninsula, but quickly withered away within a year when the gold rush ended. However, later that same year, in September 1859, the United States established a military reserve at Point Roberts as they sought to establish the exact northern border of the United States. Military development of the site never occurred and instead development of the Point froze for the next three decades.

Finally, in 1892 the U.S. government vacated the reserve, clearing the way for real estate investment. Eventually a town formed in the western part, and in its earliest years attracted a significant number of people of Icelandic descent. Many of these families had been living in Victoria, B.C., before coming to Point Roberts, who were in search of better economic opportunities. Some farmed, but most worked for the canneries. By 1904 there were 93 residents of Icelandic descent living in Point Roberts, representing about half of the town's population.

Most immigrants worked in one of the two canneries on the point; the Alaska Packers Association (APA) on the southeastern shore (established in 1893), and the George & Barker Packing Company on the west shore (established in 1900). For those who didn't work in the processing plants, they caught fish in traps in the waters offshore, or from a small fleet of fishing vessels.

By the late 1910s the annual salmon runs in the waters around Point Roberts were becoming depleted and the economy began to shift. The APA closed its cannery in 1917, and George & Barker closed its cannery in 1929. Then in 1934 fish traps were outlawed in Washington state, sounding the death knell for the fishing industry at Point Roberts. Some efforts were made at farming the land, but due to the poor quality of the soil, these were not successful, and by the 1950s most of the farms had disappeared. This economy was replaced in the past half-century with vacation and recreation development. The community still has a strong Canadian influence.

It was during the initial development phase of Point Roberts that the first Icelandic settlers arrived. Though few in number, their resilient spirits fueled a steadily growing population which founded a lasting heritage in this tiny enclave of the U.S. At the time, Canada was enduring a depression, but many settlers had heard that new canneries were being built at the Point and needed workers. Word spread and families and extended relatives followed each other to the small community.

The community worked hard and worked together, building homes and barns, buying fishing nets, tilling the land, and harvesting the seas that surrounded them. And they loved the land. The forests rose at their backs and the rocky beaches reminded them of their home in Vik i Myrdal, Iceland. And they loved the quiet over the noise of the city of Victoria. In summer evenings, families gathered to enjoy Point Roberts' first beach parties. They formed a literary society and soon they had a library.

Hearing of this enclave, and their desire to form a spiritual community, the Icelandic Lutheran Synod - Canadian Division in Winnipeg sent the Reverend Hjortur Leo to Point Roberts in 1913. Reportedly he held the first church service on the Point on January 19, 1913. Eager to become a formal congregation, shortly thereafter Trinity Lutheran Church was formed with 22 confirmed members and 23 young people and children. The first officers were Paul Thorsteinson (president), Ingvar Goodman (Secretary) and Paul Thorsteinson (Treasurer).

As a mission congregation, membership quickly grew to over 35 adults, and their children. Services were first held in the local schoolhouse, and Sunday school was held in homes of parishioners. All services and the Sunday School were conducted in Icelandic and this continued until 1937 (with an occasional Icelandic service thereafter). Rev. Leo served as temporary pastor until arrangements could be made for resident pastors in Blaine, and later Lutheran pastors from Vancouver, B.C., to preach to the Point Roberts congregation. Early pastors serving the congregation included Rev. Sigurdur Olafson, Rev. V.J. Eylands, Rev. Earling Olafson, Rev. K.K. Olafson, Rev. J.S. Neff, Rev. H. Sigmar, Rev. Arthur Hanson, Rev. G.P. Johnson, and Rev. Kolbein Simundson.

Shortly after their formation, fundraising for the construction of their own sanctuary began. However, funds were slow coming. Among donations, and gifts, one of the main fundraising efforts was an annual Bazaar, which raised \$71 for the building fund in 1914. The bazaar soon became an annual event.

In 1916 attention shifted to a potential building site. With much joy, at the annual congregational meeting in November of that year, John B. Solomon offered to donate a ½ acre plot for a church site. Within a year the property was cleared and leveled by volunteer labor in anticipation of the construction of a dedicated sanctuary.

In 1920, after many meetings and much discussion, it was decided to build a 30' x 46' church structure on the donated site. Rough lumber was ordered from the local mill, Largaud's Mill, and Mr. Largaud also donated some finished materials. Reportedly plans for the building were drawn by Gunnlauger Johannson, who was a local carpenter, and Helgi Thorsteinson. There were based on memories of church buildings where the two had grown up. Johannson served as lead carpenter with S.P. Scheving, J.S. Johannson, S. Myrdal, and Jacob Jackson all skilled carpenters assisting. Wiring was done by Steini Thorsteinson.

The building was completed in 1921 at a cost of \$2,291, and was formally dedicated on January 12, 1922, by the Rev K.K. Olafson. Music was provided by a pump organ purchased

for \$137. Unfinished, but still functional, due to lack of funds the church was painted inside and out for the first time in 1923. Pews were purchased used from an undisclosed congregation in Bellingham.

Since its inception, the church was led mainly by part-time ministers who had congregations at other locations. A variety of visiting pastors would also call on the congregation over the course of a year. While formal services were held twice a month, the building continued to be used for worship, community gatherings, potlucks, baptisms, weddings, funerals, and other occasions of celebration and of mourning into the late 1960s.

However, as the demographics of Point Roberts changed, the congregation membership dwindled. The last confirmation group was confirmed in 1988. Membership reached an all-time low in 1970 and the Lutheran Church of America (the main church body) began to feel that the congregation was no longer viable. However, a small group of members, mostly relatives of charter members, wanted to see the church space still utilized. They formed an independent association in 1972 for the purpose of maintaining the church and to continue limited ministries in the building. The old congregation officially deeded the building and land to the new association. At that time the name was changed to Trinity Community Church, with all faiths welcomed to hold services in the building. Under their ownership the building continued to be used for Baptisms, weddings, and funerals. Weekly services were held for two months during the summers.

In 1978 new signs of life for the potential of an active congregation came about after the 65th anniversary year of the congregation. To more clearly define the theological position and worship style of the congregation, in 1983 the name was changed to Trinity Community Lutheran Church. Then in 1985 they became affiliated once again with the Lutheran Church of America.

Today Trinity Community Lutheran Church remains an active and growing congregation. They completed a full rehabilitation of the 1921 sanctuary and added a large educational wing to the rear of the original building in 1995. Now affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, ministry is provided by a group of monthly rotating pastors.

The building remains a testament to Icelandic faith and to the tenacity of the local people. It is the oldest landmark in Point Roberts and represents a direct link to the early history of the community, helping them sustain and unify their lives on this isolated part of the continental United States.

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I) Documentation

Xerox and attach any information or evidence that supports the property's significance.

Written Sources (books, articles, newspapers):

Árnadóttir, Ásta Kristín – Artist – Wikipedia - bio posted June 20, 2019

https://is.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%81sta_Krist%C3%ADn_%C3%81rnad%C3%B3ttir

"BBQ Planned" The Vancouver Sun, July 21, 1960.

Gram, Karen "Pleasures of the Point" The Vancouver Sun, Sept 4, 1999.

"History of the Church," by Runa Thordarson, founding member and sacristan until about 1980, Ocean Star, October 1976, p. 5.

Klagstad, August – Alter Artist – Schoolcraft County Historical Society - bio posted July 26, 2016

<https://schs.cityofmanistique.org/august-klagstad-altar-artist/>

McMartin, Pete "Gift of Thanks brightens a Christmas" The Vancouver Sun, Dec 23, 1985.

"Point Roberts – Rev K.K. Olson, of Winnipeg..." The Bellingham Herald, Dec 1, 1928.

"Point Roberts – The Convention of the Icelandic Synod..." The Bellingham Herald, July 22, 1956.

"Point Roberts wants Loggers to Abide by Terms of Permits..." The Bellingham Herald, June 30, 1997.

"Pt. Roberts Church Plans Program for Fortieth Anniversary Sunday" The Bellingham Herald, July 19, 1953.

Swenson, Mark. (2019) Point Roberts Backstory: Tales, Trails and Trivia of an American Exclave.

Thordarson, Runa. (1976) Echoes of the Past. Self-published memoir of a founding church member.

Oral History/Interviews:

June Griffiths, summer resident in Point Roberts from 1920, until her death in 2010.

Sylvia Schonberg, neighbor, whose parents were founding members of Trinity Community Lutheran Church. 1998 Waters Road, Point Roberts, WA. 98281 360-934-3277.

Joan Linde, member since 1931, also provider of many of the photographs, 2046 APA Road, PR 98281, (360) 945-1934.

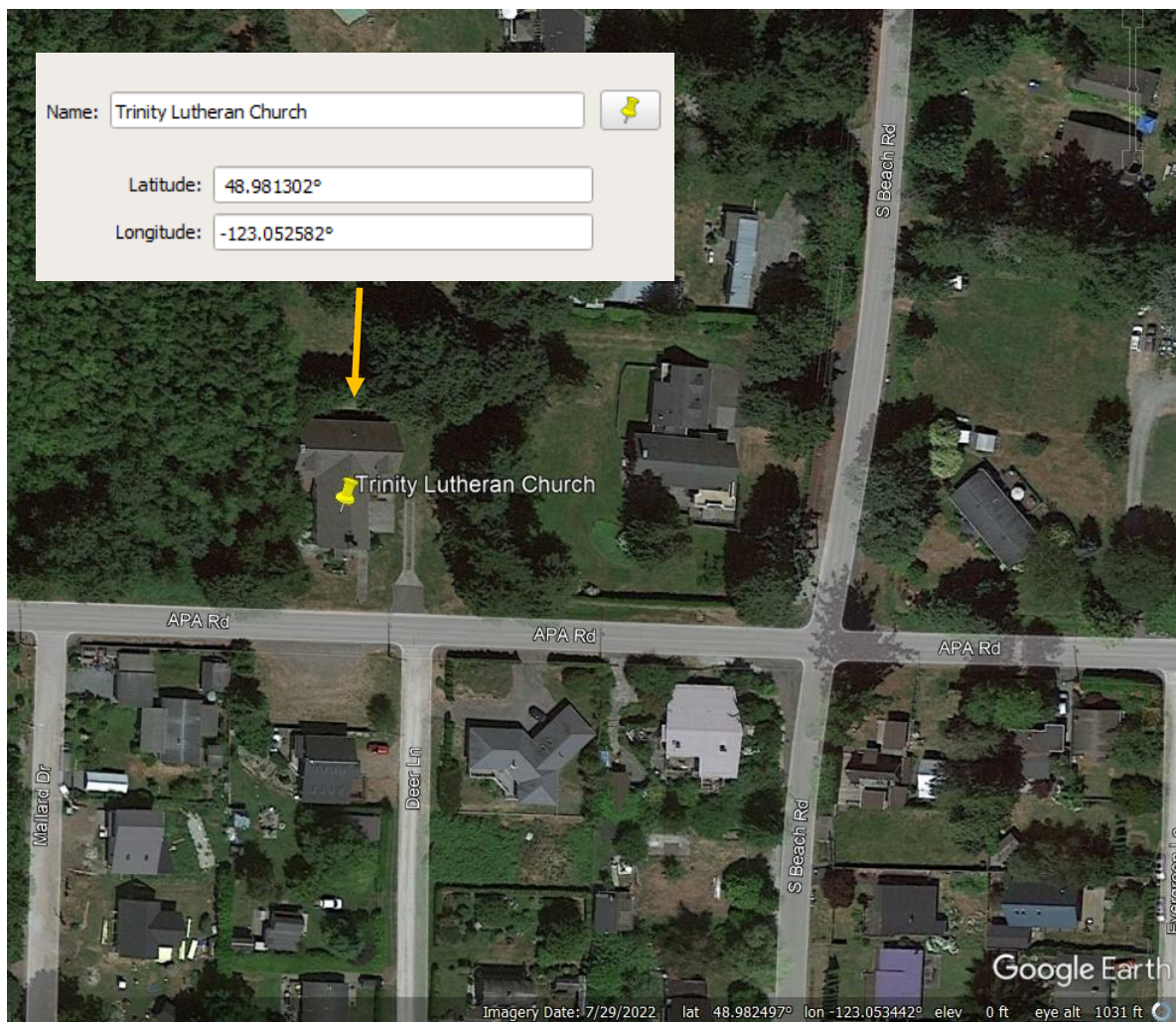
Pauline DeHaan, member PR Historical Society, pauline@pointroberts.net.

Point Roberts Historical Society. Archives. Director: Jessica McVey, 1347 Gulf Road, Point Roberts WA. 98281. 360-945-7747 www.pointrobortshistoricalsociety.com

Bob Culbert, member, key organizer of sacristy conversion, pipe organ #1 installation, parish hall addition, etc., mister.bob@live.com.

J) Map and Photographs

Attach copies of historic maps or photos if available, and current photos (min 5 x 7 digital images, 300 DPI). Include a current map – appropriate Google Earth/U.S.G.S. map and parcel map – with the location of the property and its boundaries clearly marked. (see instructions)



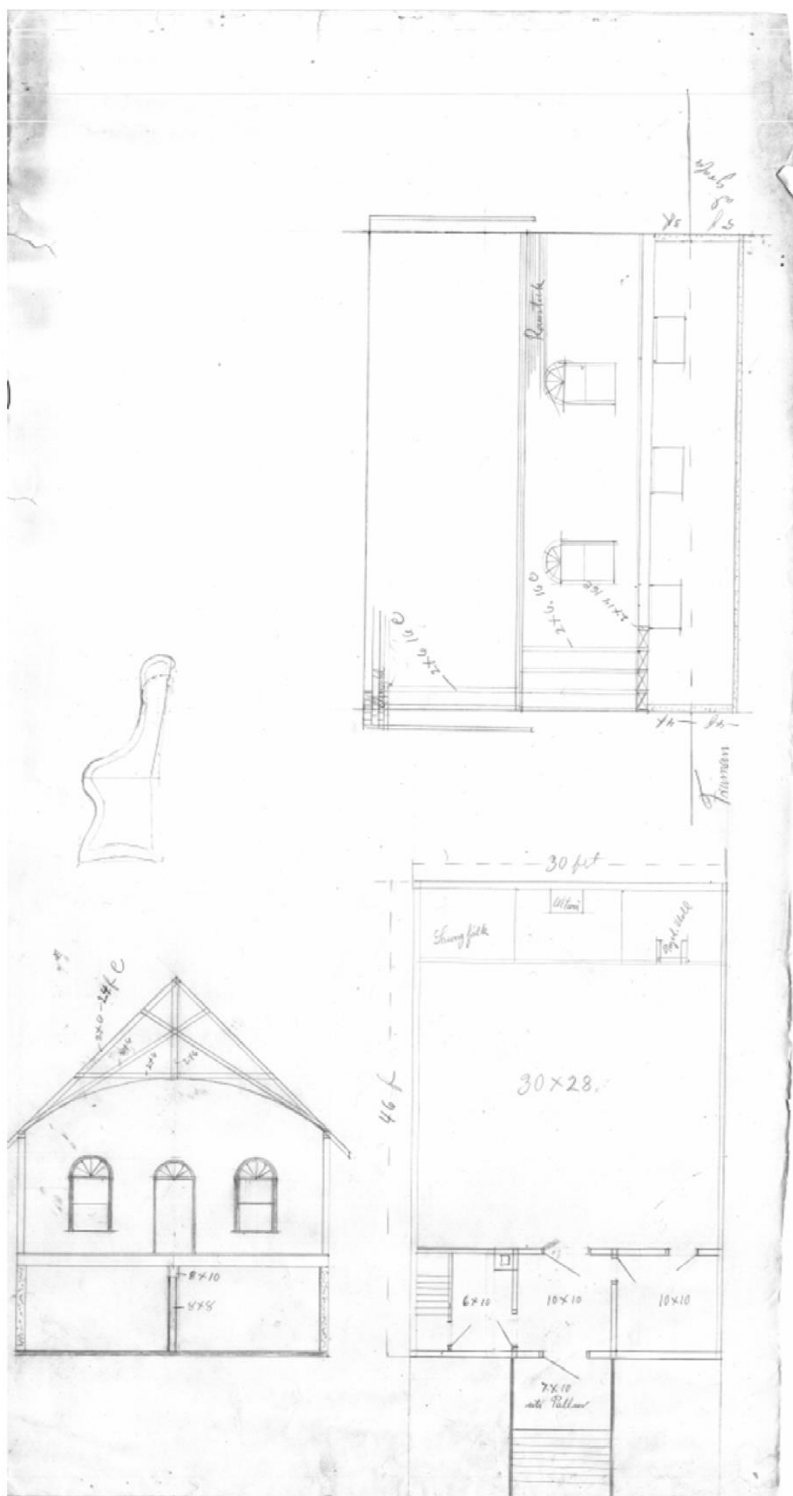
Trinity Lutheran Church
Point Roberts

Google Earth Map



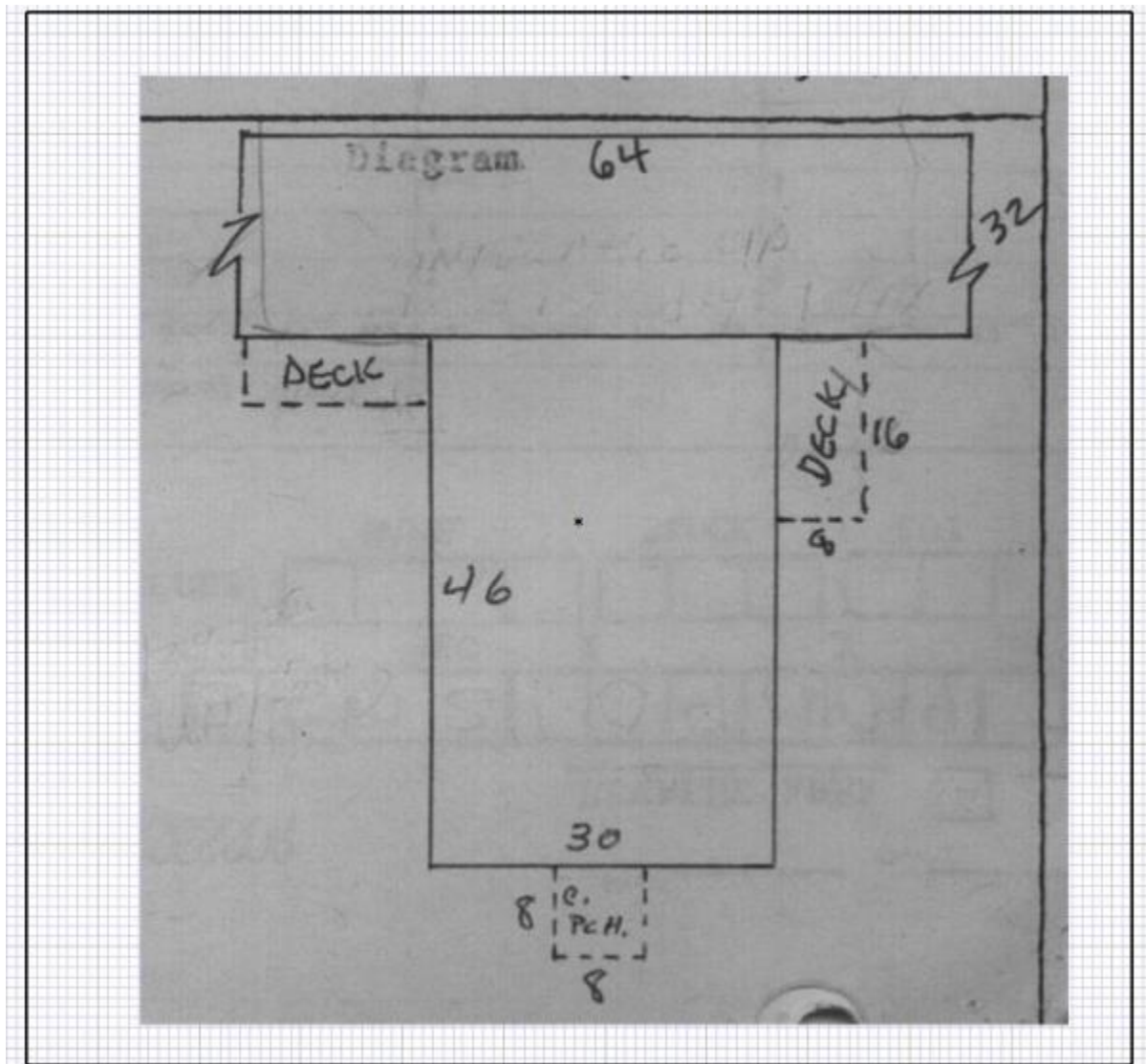
Trinity Lutheran Church Point Roberts

Assessor Map
Whatcom County Tax Parcel Viewer



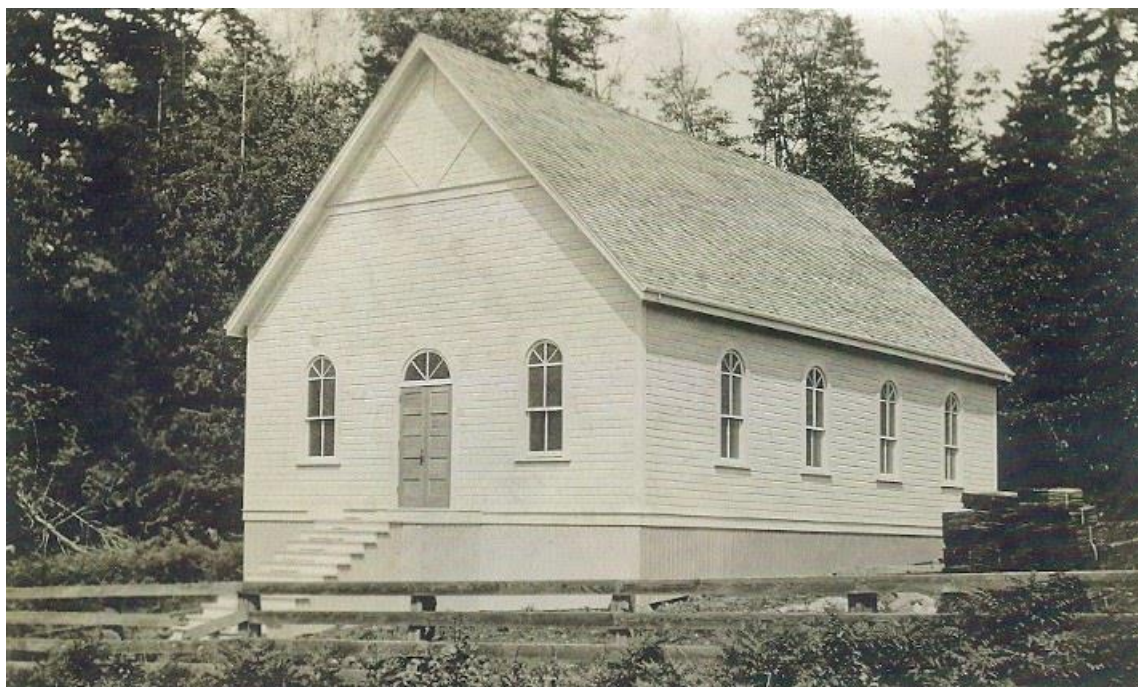
Trinity Lutheran Church
Point Roberts

Original Floor Plan and Elevation



Trinity Lutheran Church
Point Roberts

Floor Plan
Not to Scale



Trinity Lutheran Church shortly after construction. c. 1924.



Congregational photo on front step of church – 1927.



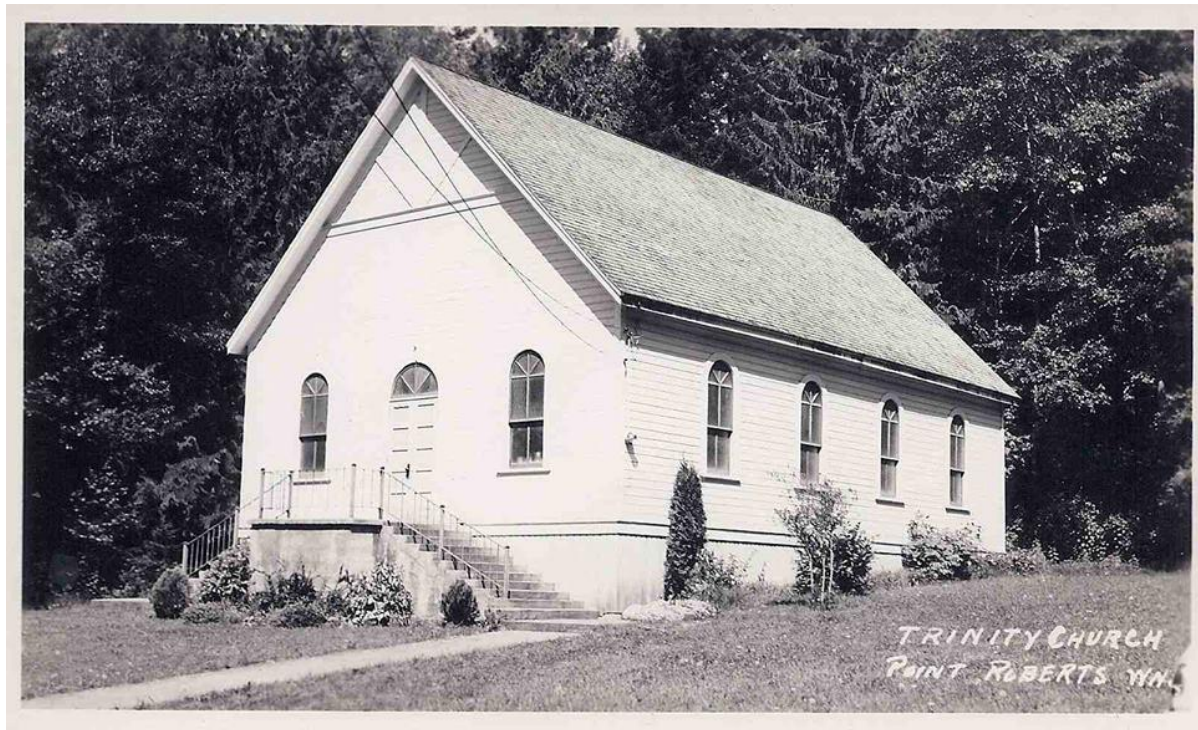
Interior of Trinity Lutheran Church – Thorstenson-Olson Wedding – Nov 1928.



Sunday school class (all cousins) – 1938.



Sunday school class – 1941.



Postcard of Trinity Church – c.1953 – *Note concrete entry stoop.*



Roy Scholberg & Sylvia Thorstenson Wedding - 1952



Bob & Joanie ___ Wedding - 1954



Sylvia Thorstenson playing organ and Joannie ___ singing, c. 1949.

Current Images – Trinity Lutheran Church



View of southeast corner of sanctuary showing rear addition.



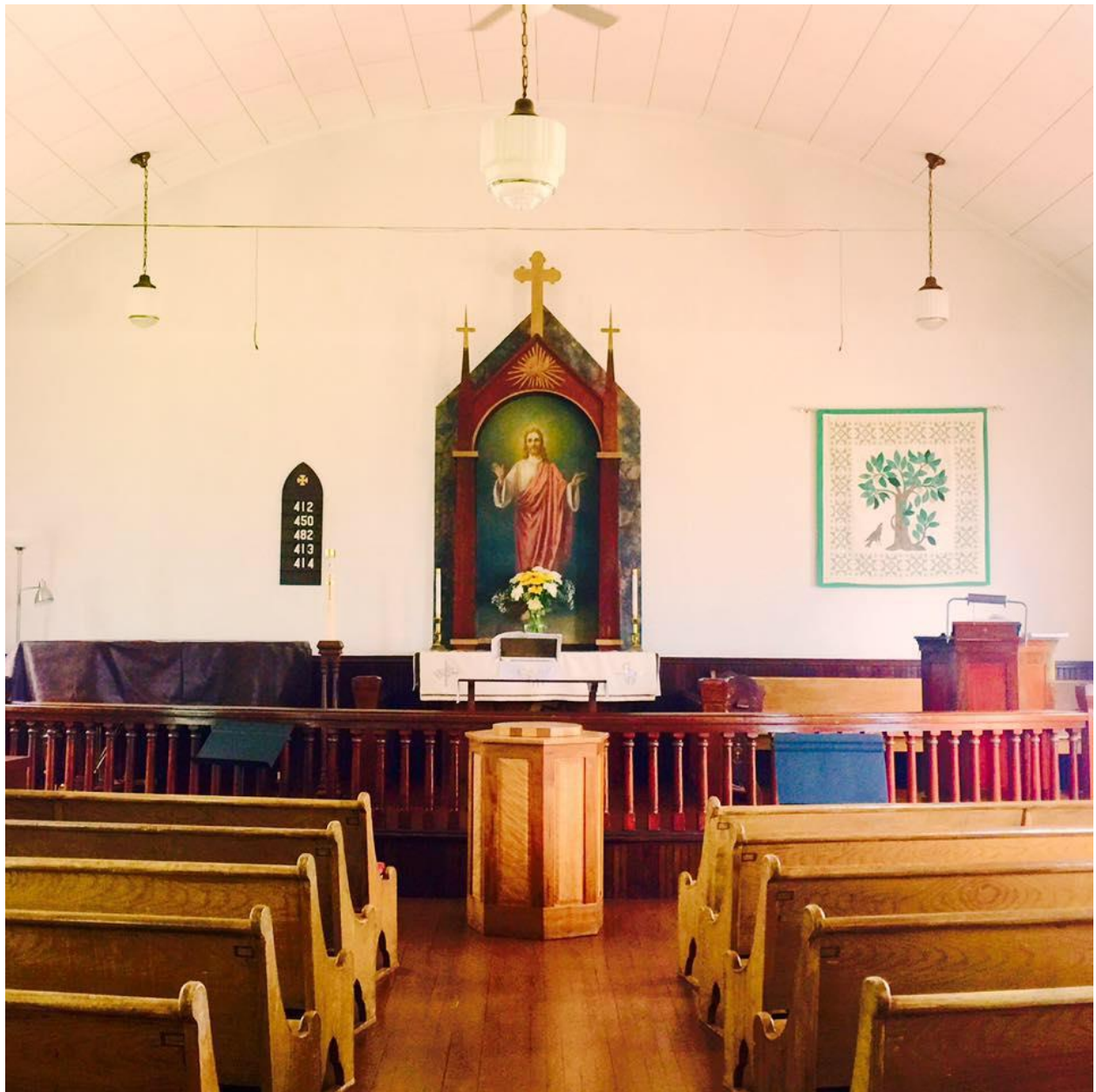
View of front façade of original sanctuary.



Southwest corner of sanctuary and fellowship hall showing outside deck.



North/Rear elevation.



Interior of sanctuary showing chancel and altar painting.



Interior of sanctuary showing rear wall with organ pipes. Organ console in foreground.



View of interior of sanctuary from Narthex.



View of from Narthex looking east towards former classroom area.



View of from Narthex looking west towards former classroom area.



Detail of Sacristy.



View of rear Fellowship Hall.



View of rear Fellowship Hall showing office area and stairs to second floor.