

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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DATE ENTERED

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC Niskayuna Reformed Church

AND/OR COMMON

OFFICE COPY

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER  
3041 Troy-Schenectady Road

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Schenectady

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

028

VICINITY OF

STATE  
New York

CODE  
036

COUNTY  
Schenectady

CODE  
093

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
			<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
			<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
			<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
			<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME  
Niskayuna Reformed Church

STREET & NUMBER

3041 Troy-Schenectady Road

CITY, TOWN

Niskayuna

VICINITY OF

STATE

New York

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Schenectady County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

State Street

CITY, TOWN

Schenectady

STATE

New York

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE  
Statewide Survey of Historic Resources

DATE

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS NYS Parks and Rec., Div. for Historic Preservation

CITY, TOWN

Albany

STATE  
New York

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Niskayuna Reformed Church is located in the hamlet of Niskayuna on a busy highway, State Route 7, which connects Schenectady and Troy. The church property also contains auxiliary buildings used for church purposes which are lacking in historical significance.

Only the church proper and the old cemetery as indicated on the attached map are included in this nomination. The area is now a suburb of Schenectady and is built up with a mixture of residences both old and new. The church itself is set back from the road on landscaped grounds.

A handsome example of the Greek Revival style executed in brick, the gable-roofed church has brick pilasters supporting a brick frieze around the entire building. The facade has a pediment with a fanlight. A two-stage central tower surmounts the roof at the front of the building. The first enclosed stage of the tower is square with corner pilasters and an entablature of the Tuscan order. The second stage is an open hexagonal belfry supported by fluted Doric columns. The entablature has a crenelated parapet. The 1860 bell was manufactured by the Meneely foundry in Watervliet. The church windows are tall narrow rectangles with limestone lintels and sills. The stained glass consists of naturalistic patterns and diaper work without representations of figures, as befits the reformed church philosophy. There is a datestone (1852) over the central entrance. As is stated in Part 8, the church design resembles New England models.

On the interior, the church is as unadorned as on the exterior. A vestibule contains flanking curved staircases leading to a horseshoe-shaped gallery supported by cast-iron columns. Facing the entrance is the communion table and the pulpit. An alcove behind the communion table contains the organ which is screened from view.

The church records contain numerous references to repairs and changes. The church horse sheds were removed in 1942, while the trolley car waiting room was removed in 1933. Around 1928, the old pews were replaced. A major change was the rebuilding of the three-sided gallery to a horseshoe shape in 1888. Revisions to the pulpit area took place during several periods of activity.

The cemetery contains the graves of early settlers; many of the burials date from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD		AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY) Settlement		
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION				

SPECIFIC DATES

1852

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Niskayuna Reformed Church, established in the middle of the eighteenth century to provide a cultural center for Dutch settlers in the area between Albany and Schenectady, still serves a vital function in the community today. The present church structure, built in 1852 on the site of a previous church presents a picture of a typical Greek Revival period Protestant church derived from New England models. An old cemetery located behind the church contains pre-Revolutionary War burials.

Histories tell little about the early settlement period in the area which is now the town of Niskayuna, possibly because the area in general consisted of poor sand and clay farmland, except for the Mohawk River Flats, and also lacked the water power to encourage mills. This area at the confluence of the Mohawk and Hudson Rivers was also isolated by the difficulty of river navigation between Schenectady and Cohoes, where the great Cohoes Falls created a major obstacle to water travel. Indeed, the settlement at Schenectady remained the "gateway to the west," with all goods destined west being transported overland from Albany until well after the building of the Erie Canal.

We can see, then, that geography mitigated against the development of the area of the town of Niskayuna as a population center. However, there were some fertile flats along the Mohawk River between Schenectady and Cohoes and, as elsewhere in the valley, these were taken up by Dutch settlers reaching out from Albany at a very early date. Probably the area had had trappers and traders soon after the first settlement at Albany. Land records show that by 1669, Jan Verbeck, Phillip Peter Schuyler and Peter Van Olinde had purchased land at Niskayuna on the south side of the river. Other early settlers were the Clutes, Vedders, Van Vrankens, Groots, Tymesens and Pearses, names which still appear on the 1866 map.

The hamlet of Conistagaione, later called Niskayuna, is marked on a 1756 map as a small cluster of houses adjacent to the river. This map shows a road pattern derived from early Indian trails which persists to this day. On it, the settlements at Albany and Schenectady are linked by a road which later became the Albany-Schenectady Turnpike.

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Schenectady County

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8

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Another road, later the Troy-Schenectady Turnpike, runs easterly from Schenectady along the river as far as Niskayuna hamlet. Here it changes direction, veering southwards to Albany. Just east of the hamlet, a ferry took traffic northwards from 1724 on. Thus, the little community of Niskayuna was connected to its neighboring settlements by roads very early.

An 1822 map shows this river road extended eastwards to meet the Hudson at Cohoes. Canistaigione was by then called Nestiguina. By 1866, Niskayuna was the only hamlet in a town of widely-spaced farms. The road became known as the Troy-Schenectady Turnpike. The Troy-Schenectady Railroad of 1845 passed through the hamlet as well.

Because of the distance from the settlements at Albany and Schenectady, the first Dutch settlers at Niskayuna soon established a church of their own. Early records are lost, but services were probably held at Niskayuna hamlet soon after the turn of the eighteenth century. A condensed history of the Niskayuna church which was placed inside the cornerstone of the present church building when it was laid in 1852 reads as follows:

The first building devoted to the services of God in this neighborhood, tradition says, was called a "Gabat House" or "prayer house".... This building gave way to a meeting house at an early date, which was an old building in the year 1790... and stood until 1828, when a new house was erected on the present site.... The house, commenced in 1828 was of frame fifty feet by sixty-five.... It was taken down in the first part of the present month and the Lord willing it is to be replaced by a new brick edifice, the corner of which is now being laid.

The Niskayuna Reformed Church was organized under the auspices of the church at Albany, and in its turn spawned congregations at Bougt, Amity and Lishas Kill. The Lishas Kill church, built in 1854, closely resembles the Niskayuna Church.

Although the Dutch church in New York commenced the preaching of sermons in English as early as 1763, the Niskayuna church continued to hold services in Dutch until 1813. This fact illustrates the importance of the church as a focal center for Dutch culture and is amply confirmed by reading the church records which survive from 1790 on.

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Especially in the period preceding the Civil War, the church kept careful watch over the behavior of the closely-knit congregation. For the early settlers, the Niskayuna church embodied a cohesive social order and provided a frame of reference throughout a hundred years of war and turmoil. It is not surprising to discover in the church records, numerous occasions when members strayed from the path of virtue, were reprimanded, suspended or reinstated if properly penitent. After the Civil War, references to the spiritual condition of the parishoners gradually gave way to discussion of more practical matters.

The religious convictions of the Reformed Church are well illustrated in the simplicity of architecture and decoration of the present church, for which the Greek Revival style was an appropriately severe vehicle. There are echoes of Asher Benjamin in the octagonal belfry and the fanlight in the pediment. New England influence upon upstate New York vernacular had become all pervasive in the early nineteenth century. Furthermore, the spare New England church style had evolved from the same Calvinistic principles. So it is not surprising to find the Reformed Dutch Congregation of Niskayuna building a church which so closely resembled New England models. The Niskayuna church may have been copied from the United Methodist Church in Lansingburgh which was built in 1848. The resemblance is startling; the towers, in particular, appear to be almost identical.

On the exterior, the Niskayuna Reformed Church appears unchanged except for the addition of stained glass. Interior changes to the balcony, pulpit, and pews were made in the spirit of the original and do not detract unduly. Still anchored in the past, the church serves an active congregation which includes descendents of Niskayuna's early Dutch settlers.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See Continuation Sheet

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY approx. 3 1/2 acres

QUADRANGLE NAME Niskayuna

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24,000

UTM REFERENCES

A	18	5	95	5,400	47	3,64,00
ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING				
C						
E						
G						

B						
ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING				
D						
F						
H						

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

See Attached Map

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Doris Manley, Program Analyst

10/10/78

ORGANIZATION

NYS Parks and Rec., Div. for Historic Preservation

DATE

STREET & NUMBER

Agency Bldg. #1, Empire State Plaza

TELEPHONE

(518)474-0479

CITY OR TOWN

Albany

STATE

New York

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL   

STATE   

LOCAL XXX

As the designated State Historic Preservation 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.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE

Deputy Commissioner for Historic Preservation

DATE

10/13/78

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST:

DATE

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

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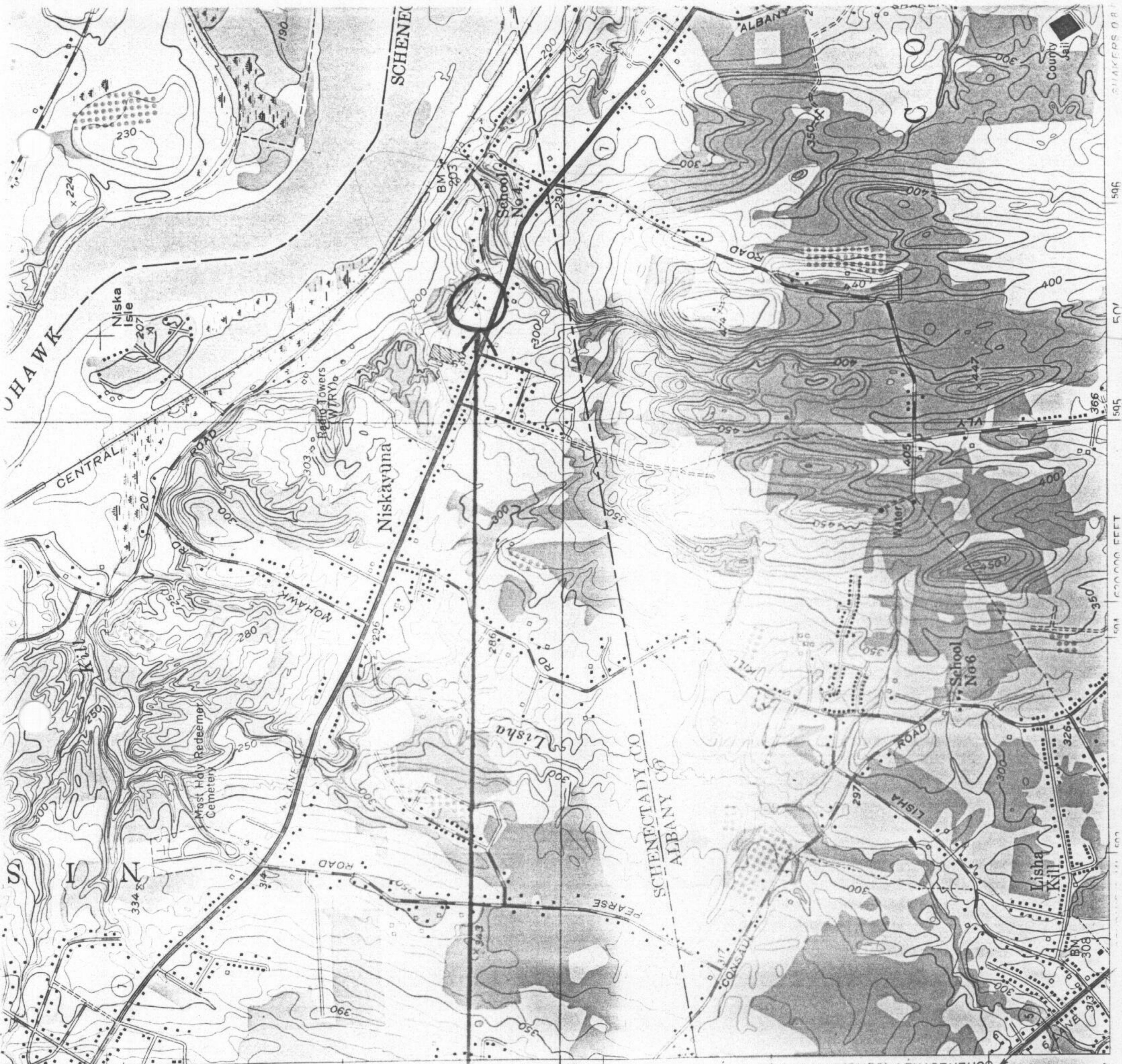
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Niskayuna Road  
 Niskayuna Reformed Church  
 Schenectady vicinity  
 Schenectady county  
 Zone 18  
 EASTING 5195/540  
 NORTHING 4736/400



47°30' 4738

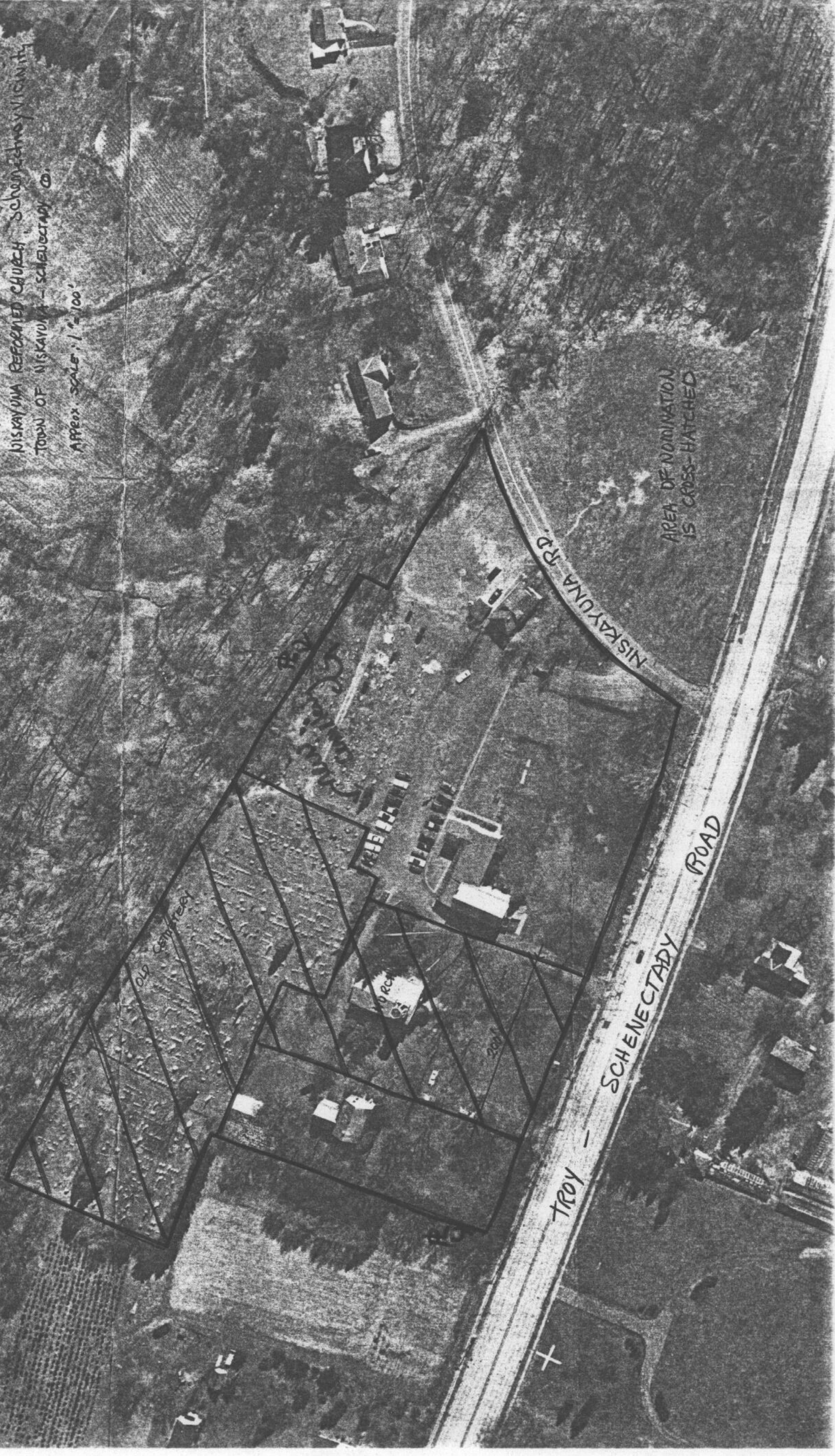
4736 1:101,000 FEET

SCOTIA 6.4 MI. SCHENECTADY (JUN. N.Y. 1961)


42°45'



PHOTOMAP  
LANDS OF THE  
NISKAYUNA REFORMED CHURCH, SCHENECTADY VICINITY,  
TOWN OF NISKAYUNA - SCHENECTADY CO.  
APPROX. SCALE: 1" = 100'



AREA OF NOMINATION  
IS CROSS-HATCHED

 = nomination

NOTE: original in research file