

Four Middlesex County sites in line for more than \$1M in state historic-preservation grants

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TRENTON - Three area churches and a former tree nursery stand to receive six-figure state grants toward preserving their historic sites, state officials announced Wednesday.

The Dutch Reformed Church and the Christ Episcopal Church, both in New Brunswick, along with the Trinity Episcopal Church as well as the former site of Princeton Nurseries in the Kingston section of South Brunswick, are among 60 sites in New Jersey that have been recommended for the funds from the New Jersey Historic Trust.

Respectively, they are slated to receive \$487,797; \$412,408; \$253,540; and \$290,000.

The more than \$15.5 million in proposed grants — including the more than \$1 million in grants in Middlesex County — were announced Wednesday by Joseph Doria, commissioner of the state Department of Community Affairs, whose department is affiliated with the historic trust and administers the funds. The recommendations will go before the Garden State Preservation Trust on March 11 for ratification and then to the Legislature for approval.

"We're ecstatic. We're a site of considerable historic importance," Debra Meister, rector of the Christ Episcopal Church, said of being named to the list. She later added, "We're a church that really tries to reach out to the community."

She said the Paterson Street church is the nearest surviving building to the location of the third reading of the Declaration of Independence, which took place in 1776 in New Brunswick. The church's tower dates back to 1742, while the remainder was built between the 1850s and the 1920s, she said.

The site, meanwhile, includes a graveyard where "significant leaders" from the American Revolution and the Civil War are buried, Meister said.

The historic preservation funds will be used for work such as drainage improvements, replacing 150-year-old roofs and laying new bricks, she said.

The roughly 250-member parish is active on several fronts, helping the poor through their shelter and food pantry, while also holding some 40 concerts a year.

Officials from the other three sites in Middlesex County could not immediately be reached by press time.

Until the business left in 1995, Princeton Nurseries cultivated some 1,500 acres of land in the Kingston section of South Brunswick, according to Friends of Princeton Nursery Land, a nonprofit preservation group.

Roots of the Trinity Episcopal Church, on Rahway Avenue in Woodbridge, date back to 1698, when an English missionary settled in Perth Amboy and began to conduct services in Woodbridge, according to the parish Web site.

Additional Facts

On the Web

For more information about the New Jersey Historic Trust, call 609-984-0473 or go to www.njht.org.

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