

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

## SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 05000761

Date of Listing: July 27, 2005

Property Name: First Baptist Church East Nashville

County: Davidson

State: Tennessee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Multiple Name

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This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

*for*   
Signature of the Keeper

July 27, 2005  
Date of Action

Amended Items in Nomination:

Section 8. Statement of Significance

The period of significance is hereby changed to 1928-1959, to more accurately reflect the period in which the property achieved significance.

This change was made in consultation with and approved by the National Register staff of the Tennessee SHPO.

The Tennessee State Historic Preservation Office was notified of this amendment.

**DISTRIBUTION:**

- National Register property file**
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)**

761

(Oct. 1990)

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 an 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 First Baptist Church East Nashville

other names/site number First Baptist Church of East Nashville

### 2. Location

street & number 601 Main Street

NA  not for publication

city or town Nashville

NA  vicinity

state Tennessee code TN county Davidson code 037 zip code 37206

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  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 for in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Herbert L. Harger  
Signature of certifying official/Title

6/14/05  
Date

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Tennessee Historical Commission  
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 certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

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:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

for David J. Vize

7/27/05

First Baptist Church East Nashville  
Name of Property

Davidson County, TN  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in count.)

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

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
1	0	Total

**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**  
0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/religious facility  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/religious facility  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Classical Revival  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone  
walls Brick  
\_\_\_\_\_  
roof Asphalt shingles  
other Wood, glass  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description**

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

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

First Baptist Church East Nashville  
Davidson County, Tennessee

## Narrative Description

The First Baptist Church East Nashville is located at 601 Main Street in Nashville, Davidson County, Tennessee (photos 1-7). The two-story church was begun in 1928 during the Reverend W.S. Ellington's influential pastorate. The red brick building has an irregular T-shaped plan, with the east side of the T larger than the west side (photos 4-5). The roof is covered in asphalt shingles. The building includes a main sanctuary in the front and a large educational wing (sometimes referred to as the Sunday School Building) in the back (photo 5). The church is designed in the Classical Revival style with symmetrically balanced windows and doors in addition to a pedimented gabled roof with a steep pitch. The facade includes a slightly projecting porch with Ionic columns and a pediment. The building conveys a strong, stately appearance from the exterior. The church is in urban East Nashville and is surrounded by both old and new commercial and residential buildings. Main Street is considered a main thoroughfare through East Nashville.

The south facade facing Main Street is dominated by a large projecting entry porch with a pediment supported by four concrete Ionic columns (photo 2). The pediment over the porch includes a round window, or oculus, with stained glass and four keystones on each side. In between each pair of Ionic columns, there are rectangular, double-hung sash stained-glass windows on the second level and three sets of doors on the first level. Additionally, there are two more oculi with keystones on each side of the facade on the second level, and one window under each porthole on the first level. The front porch can be reached by two side-facing stairways with wrought-iron balustrades. There are concrete sills on the front windows and concrete borders around the front doors. "First Baptist Church" is engraved in concrete above the center set of doors. The foundation of the church, seen by the stairway, is uncut stone. The granite cornerstone is on the west side of the front façade (photo 8). The Layman's League Auspices Oriental Lodge No. 285, a local Masonic organization made up of members of the congregation, laid the cornerstone in 1950 when the congregation celebrated its eighty-fourth anniversary.<sup>1</sup> It reads, as follows:

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH  
EAST NASHVILLE  
ORGANIZED 1866  
ERECTED 1931  
REV. R. B. VANDAVALL, FOUNDER  
REV. W. S. ELLINGTON, PASTOR  
CORNERSTONE LAID 1950 BY THE  
LAYMAN'S LEAGUE AUSPICES  
ORIENTAL LODGE NO. 285

The east facade of the church includes two stories of multi-pane, stained-glass rectangular windows and one porthole with keystones on the second story (photos 1, 3, 4). In between each window level there is a

<sup>1</sup> During the same year, a memorial plaque in honor of Reverend Ellington was placed in the vestibule. There were no other changes to the building documented during that year.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2

First Baptist Church East Nashville  
Davidson County, Tennessee

white spandrel with a red brick diamond in the center. The basement level is visible; it is constructed with cut stone and it includes windows directly under the stained glass windows. The two story educational wing extends east from the north end of this façade. This educational wing is also constructed of brick and has a side-facing pedimented gable. It has four one-over-one double-hung wood sash windows on each story. The gabled roof is simple, with a fairly steep pitch and black asphalt shingles.

The west facade looks similar to the east facade in that two stories of multi-pane, stained-glass rectangular windows cover the sanctuary; they are designed and organized in the same manner as the east facade. Except for a simple pediment, the projecting portion of the rectangular education block is completely devoid of architectural ornamentation; there are no windows or doors.

The north section of the church includes a moderately sized parking lot. The foundation, built from cut stone, is visible from this angle. The basement can be entered from the north facade, and includes several windows. The north facade of the building includes twenty-one windows (several have been replaced by doors for fire safety) organized in three stories (including the basement) and horizontal rows, with seven openings per story (photos 5, 6). Metal stairs connecting the third floor to the ground level serve as a fire escape. A brick chimney is located on the west half of the educational wing. A second brick chimney is on the east end of the gable peak. This portion of the church is used as an education department and a day-care center.

Construction of the Sunday School Building began in 1928 and the sanctuary was completed in 1931. In 1934, the church was plastered and concrete steps on the front of the church were added. A Sanborn map shows that the structure has not changed its shape since 1947, but previous Sanborn maps, from 1897 and 1914, obviously document a different building that used to occupy the lot. During the 1960s, the front entrance of the church was slightly altered in order to accommodate the widening of Main Street. A photograph of the church from a May 1950 publication shows that the changes have been minimal; originally, front-facing concrete steps that were as wide as the projecting porch faced Main Street.

The interior of the main section of the church includes a small vestibule that leads to the sanctuary (photos 18, 19), which seats 600 worshippers. The sanctuary includes simple, wooden pews, carpet, and an elevated level for the pastor, his assistants, and the choir. There are three sections of pews: one center and two side sections, with aisles in between. A pipe organ was installed in 1936 (the organ was expanded in the 1960s when large pipes were added). During the 1940s, interior decorations were added such as the lights in the main auditorium, chimes for the organ, a large lamp in the Baptistry along with a large mirror and drapes, as well as a light on the pulpit, the clock on the balcony, and carpeting (photos 9-17). Between the baptistry and the organ pipes there is a 1940s working neon sign that reads, "God is Love." The sanctuary was carpeted in 1942. The original wood floor remains under the carpet. All of these changes were made during Reverend Ellington's pastorate, a time of great popularity and growth for the church. The communion table was added during the late 1950s. There are two levels of memorial stained glass windows with the first level of windows having more details than the upper windows. The altar is raised with the pulpit, choir loft, and baptistry. Sometime since the 1980s, upholstery was added to the pews and the seating in the choir loft was upgraded to individual, theater-type seating.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> It is not known if these pews are original to the building; however, photographs from the 1950s show these pews.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 3

First Baptist Church East Nashville  
Davidson County, Tennessee

There are three landscape paintings on the walls enclosing the baptistery behind the choir by local African-American artist Frances E. Thompson (photo 12). The baptismal pool for baptizing church members by immersion is located behind the choir. The large framed murals by Thompson are thought to be painted in the late 1950s or early 1960s; a current church member recalled "it took her a long time."<sup>3</sup> The murals were painted on-site and are integrated into the wall of the baptistery. They are framed by wood molding. Thompson was a well-known artist who served as Chairman of the Art Department at Tennessee A & I State College (Tennessee State University) for thirty-eight years of her forty-seven year employment as a faculty member at the college. Measuring eight feet by four feet, Thompson's center painting is a landscape image with a prominent waterfall to depict the natural setting of outdoor baptisms. The background includes mountains, rocky cliffs, and trees; the artist selected cool colors such as blues and greens that reflect the teal-colored woodwork. Two paintings adorn each side of the central canvas and measure two feet by four feet. Each one is painted in similar colors, and includes rocky cliffs, a lake, and distant mountains. With the exception of the clouds in the center painting, the paintings lack perspective resulting in an artistic technique that presents the rocks, water, greenery, and mountains as distinct entities that lack depth and appear almost naive. In terms of religious symbolism, these paintings represent how baptism portrayed by the flowing water is fundamental to earthly Christian beliefs and salvation. The flowing water represents the River Jordan where John the Baptist performed the earliest baptisms as described in the New Testament of the Bible.

Four engaged columns surrounding an open arch that leads to the baptismal pool frame this area. There are large organ pipes that dominate the second level, immediately above the baptismal area; a large organ screen originally covered these pipes, but it was removed shortly after Rev. Ellington left in the early 1950s.

The stained-glass windows in the sanctuary on the first level are original, and include the names of significant members of the church, beginning with Rev. Vandavall, church founder, himself (photos 14, 15). They are executed in the Art Deco style, and are primarily yellow and green. The windows on the first floor are original, but during the tornado of 1998, the windows on the second floor were damaged and replaced. The current windows on the second story are simpler, and include stained glass panes that are tinted a bluish, yellow hue. The rear of the sanctuary, toward the south side of the building, includes a balcony-level seating area. The balcony is accessed by two sets of stairs on the east and west side of the vestibule (photos 18-21). The balcony has exposed wood floors and simple wood pews that have not been upholstered. There are pressed-metal ceilings in the vestibule area and sanctuary. Below the sanctuary and on the ground floor there is a kitchen and fellowship hall with dining and meeting areas (photo 24). The interior portion of the rear educational block, or Sunday school building, includes many classrooms, in addition to a large assembly room, a Bible classroom, and the pastor's study (photos 22-25). The staircases between the floors are original.

There is no significant landscaping or plantings on the property. The west and south side of the church have a sidewalk fronting Sixth and Main Streets and the east side has a fenced-in playground and

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Ryal, conversation with Gwyneth Anne Thayer, Nashville, Tennessee, 22 October 2001.

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 4

First Baptist Church East Nashville  
Davidson County, Tennessee

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grass. There is also an asphalt parking lot behind the building. The property has not been assessed for any archaeological potential. Next door to the church on the east side at 605 Main Street and outside the nominated property is a 1920s Craftsman-style bungalow that pre-dates the church. A current church member donated this house to the church in the 1990s (photo 1). Although it has a sign that reads "First Baptist Church Annex," it is currently not in use by the church nor included in the boundaries of this nomination because it was acquired outside the period of significance. There are plans to renovate the structure, but there are no available funds.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Christine McCord, conversation with Thayer, Nashville, Tennessee, 22 October 2001.

### 8. Statement of Significance

#### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

#### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** moved from its original location.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

#### Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

### 9. Major Bibliographical References

#### Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

#### Previous documentation on file (NPS): NA

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- Previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

#### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Ethnic Heritage: Black  
Social History  
Architecture  
Art

#### Period of Significance

1928-1970

#### Significant Dates

1928, 1931

#### Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

#### Cultural Affiliation

N/A

#### Architect/Builder

Unknown

#### Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Center for Historic Preservation, Middle Tennessee State University



# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 5

First Baptist Church East Nashville,  
Davidson County, Tennessee

## Statement of Significance

The First Baptist Church East Nashville is eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A because of its local significance in ethnic heritage as it relates to black social history. It is a landmark building that symbolizes the growth and development of the African-American community in East Nashville over the course of the twentieth century including the Civil Rights movement in Nashville. The building is also eligible under National Register Criterion C for its significance in architecture and art. The church is a good and intact example of a Classical Revival-style church built during the late 1920s and early 1930s. The church's prominent pedimented portico supported by round columns with Ionic capitals, symmetry, and oculi indicate the continued prominence of the classical style for church buildings. Begun in 1928 and completed in 1931, this building with its intact materials, detailing, and plan retains a high level of integrity. In terms of art, the building is significant for the intact baptistery murals painted by locally renowned artist Frances E. Thompson. These murals are good examples of Thompson's spiritually inspired art that symbolize the Christian ceremony of baptism through depicting flowing water.

Because the First Baptist Church East Nashville is a religious property, the National Register Criteria Consideration A must be met. This property achieves its significance from its historical significance in ethnic heritage, and social history in addition to religion. Its religious significance relates to the essential role that African-American churches, such as First Baptist East Nashville, played in the struggle for Civil Rights during the twentieth century. The church is also significant under National Register Criterion C for its architecture and the art of Nashville artist Frances E. Thompson. This nomination meets National Register Criteria Consideration G because the church has achieved historical significance less than fifty years ago. Its historical association with the Civil Rights movement qualifies it for meeting the exceptional significance test as the First Baptist East Nashville provides a strong illustration of the important role of the church in the fight for Civil Rights within the African-American community. The church served as a meeting place for organizations, hosted nationally recognized speakers, and welcomed activist-minded leaders and members, all of which played a central role in the Civil Rights movement in Nashville. Historians have long established the "extraordinary pivotal importance of the Civil Rights Movement in the South."<sup>5</sup> The National Park Service itself has developed a theme study on school desegregation in the United States that recognizes a period of significance through 1974.

The building that currently stands on 601 Main Street was built in the late 1920s and early 1930s; however, the congregation was founded in 1866 by Randall B. Vandavall (1832-1898), a former slave. He lived in Edgefield, which was at the time of the church's founding a separate municipality with both black and white residents.<sup>6</sup> The church contributed to the spiritual, educational, and community growth of the

<sup>5</sup> Carroll Van West, "The Civil Rights Movement in Birmingham, Alabama, 1933-1979" Multiple Property Listing, 2002, On file at the Center for Historic Preservation, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee, p. 94.

<sup>6</sup> Historically, Edgefield was a separate municipality from Nashville with both black and white residents. It was larger than what is recognized as Historic Edgefield today. During the Civil War, Edgefield became one of three Nashville Contraband Camps with over 2,000 former slaves living there by 1863. According to historian Bobby Lovett, following the war the area developed as one of five African American neighborhoods. Approximately one-third African American, Edgefield was the home of many early black leaders. Nashville annexed this area in 1880 and the heart of it developed as an elite white neighborhood with the portions to the north and south being African American. Today, the whole area is known as East Nashville and includes a mix of residential, commercial, and industrial sections. Making up only a portion of the original municipality, Edgefield today is now a distinct

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 6

First Baptist Church East Nashville,  
Davidson County, Tennessee

African-American people of Nashville from the founding of the congregation until today. As the congregation's permanent house of worship, the church is and has been associated with significant trends in Nashville's social history. Many distinguished preachers were associated with the First Baptist Church of East Nashville from the time it was founded in 1866 and chartered in 1882 to the present.<sup>7</sup> This First Baptist Church East Nashville building symbolizes the historical significance of the congregation to the strong African-American and religious heritage of Nashville throughout the twentieth century and in particular the 1950s and 1960s Civil Rights movement.

Like other African-American churches in the South, the First Baptist Church East Nashville played an important role in the fight for Civil Rights in Nashville and Middle Tennessee. The church leaders and members participated in local organizations, planned and hosted Civil Rights meetings, activities, and celebration, hosted nationally prominent Civil Rights activists and speakers, and even filed lawsuits to achieve equality. Through the individual and collective actions of the church members, First Baptist East Nashville played a significant role as a centerpiece for political, social, and religious activism in Nashville. Because of the congregation's long-lasting importance in Nashville and especially in the Civil Rights movement, the period of significance begins in 1928 with its construction of the present building until 1970, marking the end of the Civil Rights period and Reverend Jonathan Rucker's pastorate. First Baptist Church East Nashville's history and significance underscores scholars C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya observation that the "Black Church has no challenger as the cultural womb of the black community."<sup>8</sup>

In terms of its architecture, the classical style of architecture became increasingly popular for use in public buildings after the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, which featured the "White City," made up of classically styled buildings that housed the exhibits. The use of classical elements in public buildings continued through the mid-20th century. As reflected in the First Baptist Church East Nashville, the classical elements became more understated after the 1910s, as seen in its simple ornamentation. This more straight forward style can in part be attributed to the higher cost of building and the lessening of available funds prior to and during the Depression, as well as to the beginning of the rise of modern architecture which favored function over form and a lack of stylistic elements.

The intact architectural features on the interior, such as the plan and design of the sanctuary and educational annex, the high ceilings, stained-glass windows, 1940s light fixtures, neon sign, and organ chimes, the balcony, pressed-metal ceilings, and staircases enhance the architectural significance of the church. Like other community landmark types of buildings, the church is freestanding and, when built, was modern with its sanctuary, fellowship hall, and educational block and reflected the architectural trends of the period. As a centerpiece for public gatherings, this church building provides a sense of place and cohesiveness for the congregation and the surrounding neighborhood and symbolizes the permanence,

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neighborhood bounded by 5<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, Waverland, and Shelby. Bobby Lovett, *The African-American History of Nashville, Tennessee, 1780-1930* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1999), 55, 76, 88, and 91.

<sup>7</sup> According to "A History of the First Baptist Church of East Nashville," the signers were Reverend Vandavall, Henry Gassoway, Austin Roberts, Granville Batts, Heseiah Harding, and George W. Newsom. "A History of the First Baptist Church of East Nashville" is an unpublished history of the church written by a church member in 1986 for the church's 120-year anniversary. It is similar to another unpublished pamphlet, "A Brief History of First Baptist Church East Nashville, 1866-present," that was written in May 1983. These are both located in the archived files of Christine McCord and a copy is on file at the Center for Historic Preservation, Middle Tennessee State University.

<sup>8</sup> C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya. *The Black Church in the African American Experience*. Duke University Press, 1990.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 7

First Baptist Church East Nashville,  
Davidson County, Tennessee

stability, and strength of the community, as well as the congregation's strong belief in religion as the foundation for spiritual, economic, and personal betterment.

The First Baptist Church East Nashville is significant in art for the murals painted by Nashville artist Frances Euphemia Thompson (1896-1992).<sup>9</sup> Her work at the church dates to the late 1950s and early 1960s and is representative of twentieth-century African-American art that incorporates nature to depict religious themes. The series of three paintings surround the baptistery of the church to create a mural containing a waterfall, mountains, rocks, a lake, and greenery. The center painting measures four feet high and eight feet wide. The two side paintings measure four feet high and two feet wide. These paintings are intact and good examples of her religious work as seen in other Tennessee churches, such as Fredonia Baptist Church in Haywood County and First Baptist Church in Gallatin that also recreate the outdoor baptism with flowing water and natural landscapes. The flowing water or river represents the River Jordan as described in the New Testament of the Bible in Matthew 3:6 and Mark 1:5 where John the Baptist performed the baptism rites in the wilderness and preached repentance for the forgiveness of sins through Christianity. Thompson designed the murals specifically for First Baptist Church East Nashville and painted them onsite. Thompson's more secular work included portraits of prominent African Americans, mixed medium compilations, sculpture, mosaics, and scenes of nature.

## Early Developmental History of First Baptist Church East Nashville

Founded by Randall B. Vandavall in 1866, First Baptist East Nashville is a Reconstruction Era congregation that fits the pattern of African Americans forming their own separate institutions following emancipation. Vandavall was born in 1832 as a slave near the Cumberland River and began preaching at the age of sixteen.<sup>10</sup> Once he became a freeman, Vandavall became a major leader of the black community in East Nashville. The First Baptist Church East Nashville was officially chartered in 1882. Early on the congregation worshipped in Vandavall's home and then moved to the old Union Army barracks on the corner of Mark and Steward streets. Just before the turn of the century, a new brick church building was erected on "the hill" on Mark and Stewart Streets. No church documents list the date of completed construction, but church records indicate that at the "cornerstone laying of the new church, Reverend Vandavall contracted a cold from which he never recovered. He died December 31, 1898."<sup>11</sup> This site served the congregation until the early 1920s, when members decided that they preferred a more central location for their church. Work on the Sunday school building of the present First Baptist Church East Nashville began in 1928 and the sanctuary was completed in 1931 (photos 26, 27).

A number of distinguished preachers followed Vandavall during the first fifty years of the church's founding. These included the early radical author Sutton Elbert Griggs (1872-1933), J.D. Bushell (known for

<sup>9</sup> The exact year that Frances Thompson was born is not known. The published obituaries, newspaper articles on her life and work, online biographies, and finding aids for her papers at Tennessee State University and Harvard University have differing years ranging from 1896 to 1906. The program for her funeral and the TSU website use the date 1896. Frances E. Thompson collection, Tennessee State University, Nashville, Tennessee.

<sup>10</sup> "A Brief History of First Baptist Church East Nashville 1866-Present," 2.

<sup>11</sup> First Baptist Church East Nashville, archived files held by Christine McCord, Nashville, Tennessee.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 8

First Baptist Church East Nashville,  
Davidson County, Tennessee

his musical arrangements, some of which were published) and W.S. Ellington. It was under Ellington's tenure (1915-1949) that the present-day First Baptist Church East Nashville building was constructed.

## Reverend W.S. Ellington (1865-1949)

The Reverend W. S. Ellington became prominent during his years as pastor of the First Baptist Church East Nashville from 1915 to 1949. During his tenure he worked hard to better his church and community; for instance, he was employed as an editor at the National Baptist Publishing Board, and later as editor of the *Abdemelech and Debbora* Magazine for the Sunday School Publishing Board. For eight years he was a member of the International Sunday School's Lessons Committee and helped to prepare the lessons for the evangelical denominations of America. He was born on March 18, 1865, of slave parents in Macon, Georgia, and was graduated from Fisk University in 1894. While serving as a District Missionary in West Tennessee, he began preaching his "Prodigal Son Sermon," and continued this tradition at First Baptist East Nashville.<sup>12</sup> Ellington was the first preacher in Tennessee to hold a revival at the state prison. Newspaper accounts hold that he was responsible for more than three hundred conversions at the revival.<sup>13</sup> During this revival, "Strong men were made to weep and the hardest criminals made a complete surrender and confessed a faith in Christ".<sup>14</sup> The "Prodigal Son" sermon became a Nashville tradition that Ellington preached annually for 45 years, drawing thousands to the Ryman Auditorium (NHL 1/3/01) and War Memorial Building.

Ellington's extraordinary popularity between 1915 and 1921 probably led to the decision to build a new, larger church which continues to serve the congregation. When the idea surfaced in 1921, a church member, R. H. Tabor, Sr., offered a fifty-foot lot at the corner of Main and Sixth Streets. The lot was expanded when the David Patton family donated thirty-five feet of their adjoining property, allowing for an eighty-five foot space for the new church. The Tabor-Patton Building Club (headed by Alice Odie) assisted in the fund-raising effort for the new building. A photograph from August 26, 1928, shows the ground-breaking ceremony that took place on this lot; Reverend Ellington is shown holding the shovel in the center of the picture (photo 28). Construction took several years, but worship commenced in the education unit in the back of the building even when the main sanctuary was not yet completed. The sanctuary was completed in 1931.<sup>15</sup>

In 1938 at the War Memorial Building, 3,000 blacks and at least 300 whites attended his then famous "Prodigal Son" sermon, which made the front page of the *Nashville Banner*. One prominent local radio station, WSM, broadcast this sermon for a number of years. Also in 1938, during Christmas, his sermon was broadcast (together with his choir) worldwide through an affiliate of WSM, the National Broadcasting System. His popularity is evidenced by the fact that 600 members were associated with First Baptist Church during the 1940s, according to the Tennessee Historical Records Survey Project at the Work Projects

<sup>12</sup> "Story of Prodigal Son's Pride and Repentance Told," *Nashville Banner*, 25 March 1929.

<sup>13</sup> *Globe* (13 December 1913), 1.

<sup>14</sup> *Globe* (7 November 1913), 6.

<sup>15</sup> "History of the First Baptist Church of East Nashville."

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 9

First Baptist Church East Nashville,  
Davidson County, Tennessee

Administration.<sup>16</sup> Although the building was just over a decade old, the congregation made improvements to the church during the 1940s that included the addition of light fixtures, the neon “God is Love” light, the clock on the balcony, and carpeting. The 1940s also marked a period in which the church expanded its education and outreach programs. This was in part due to the hiring of Reverend Charles L. Dinkins as assistant pastor in 1944. Dinkins focused much of his work on improving religious education for both the youth and adults.

Reverend Ellington died on October 6, 1949, and his funeral services were held in the sanctuary of the church on October 10, 1949. Then assistant pastor Dinkins served as interim pastor until he was chosen as the full-time pastor in 1950. On March 26, 1950, Dinkins oversaw the placing of a bronze plaque in the vestibule during a memorial service honoring Ellington and his service to the church. The date of the service coincided with the fourth Sunday on which Ellington would have preached his “prodigal son” sermon.

## The Civil Rights Era (1949-1970)

The pastors who followed Ellington, such as Charles L. Dinkins, Sr. (served 1950-1956), Jonathan Rucker (served 1959-1970), and James A. Campbell (served 1970-1994), continued to be integrally involved in the surrounding community, striving to be a positive influence in religious, educational, social, and political arenas. Reverend Charles L. Dinkins, Sr. (1920-1996) was born in Selma, Alabama where he attended high school. He left the South to attend Oberlin College in Ohio, where he graduated and then entered the Oberlin Graduate School of Theology to fulfill his calling to ministry. In 1943, he came to Nashville with his wife Ann Wyatt Dinkins to become Secretary of the Department of Christian Education of the Sunday School Publishing Board of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A. At this time, he became a member of the First Baptist Church East Nashville. Following the death of Reverend Ellington, Dinkins became the interim pastor until he was formally called to serve as Pastor in 1950. During his pastorate, he worked to improve the religious education program [he published *A Manual for Sunday Schools* (1948)] and resurrected the famous Prodigal Son sermons. As Pastor, he worked with members of the congregation to reorganize the General Missionary Society and to organize the Circles Y. W. A., Sunshine Band, Men’s Layman League, and Youth Fellowship, and to sponsor the first Woman’s Day program in 1954. Active in the Civil Rights movement throughout the 1950s, Dinkins served as president of the local branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In December 1956, Dinkins resigned from the church to work fulltime at Sunday School Publishing Board as Director of Education and Assistant Secretary. In 1960 Dinkins left Nashville for Memphis where he accepted the presidency of Owen College, which became LeMoyne-Owen College when the two colleges merged. He was involved in numerous community, social, religious, and political activities throughout his life. His affiliation with First Baptist East Nashville marked the beginning of a long successful career helping to improve the lives of others through promoting equality, spirituality, and education.

Reverend Dinkins was followed by the young Reverend Otis Pickett who remained pastor until early 1959. Pickett was a student at American Baptist College at the time he became pastor. Although this was

<sup>16</sup> *Directory of Churches, Missions, and Religious Institutions of Tennessee*. Davidson County, Nashville. Published by the Tennessee Historical Records Survey Project at the Work Projects Administration, May 1940.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 10

First Baptist Church East Nashville,  
Davidson County, Tennessee

his first experience as a pastor, he continued to support the church's tradition of education, outreach, and activism.<sup>17</sup>

In September of 1958, Daisy Bates, a Civil Rights leader in Little Rock, Arkansas during the integration of Central High School, spoke at First Baptist East Nashville as a part of Woman's Day celebration. Bates gave the address to women from all over the city of Nashville on the topic of "Women: Accepting Challenges in Times of Crises."<sup>18</sup> Congregation member Miss Harriet H. Davidson chaired the Woman's Day event which also served as a rally for affirming women's involvement in the Civil Rights movement.

Civil Rights activity continued under the pastorate of Dr. Jonathan Nathaniel Rucker, who became pastor in 1959. On Sunday, April 12, 1959, First Baptist East Nashville was the location for the Nashville Branch National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) membership campaign kickoff program, which lasted the entire month of April. Because two of the local chapter presidents (Dinkins then A. Z. Kelley) were closely associated with the church, it made sense that First Baptist East Nashville hosted the initial event of the month-long membership drive. The Alabama Civil Rights lawyer, Arthur D. Shores, was the speaker for the First Baptist East Nashville event. Shores was admitted to the Alabama Bar in 1937 and the U.S. Supreme Court Bar in 1943. He was the chief counsel in *Autherine Lucy vs. University of Alabama*. He represented Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., et al in the Montgomery Bus Boycott prosecutions and the NAACP when State of Alabama sued the NAACP.<sup>19</sup> Shores' speech at First Baptist East Nashville was designed to energize the audience and get them involved. Speaking honestly about the realities of segregation, he told that audience that the "white south sought to 'brainwash' the nation on the race question."<sup>20</sup> Churches in Nashville and across the South promoted NAACP involvement. It was the collective effort of these churches that provided the foundation for the Civil Rights Movement.

A prominent religious and civic leader and a deacon, choir member, and religion committee chair of the First Baptist East Nashville, A. Z. Kelley (1913-1994) was elected to be the president of the local Nashville Chapter of the NAACP in 1959.<sup>21</sup> Kelley, who operated Kelley's Barber Shop, lived with his wife Robbie L. and children at 543 Ramsey Street. In 1959 the East Nashville Community Club, Inc. honored Kelley for his "broad and unselfish contributions to this community as a church, civic and religious leader." A member of Prince Hall Masonic Lodge, Mt. Nebo; J.A. Henry Consistory; and the Shriners' Hella Temple, Mr. Kelley is better known for filing a lawsuit in 1955 to desegregate East High School (NR 01/25/02) on behalf of his son Robert and twenty-one other children. Kelley's significance to the church as a member and spiritual leader was evidenced in the honorific title of reverend that the church bestowed upon him.<sup>22</sup>

As president of the Nashville NAACP, Kelley hosted the Wednesday night meetings of the NAACP at First Baptist East Nashville. He used his position in the church to recruit members from the congregation to the NAACP and encouraged activism among both the youth and adults. According to church historian Christine McCord, Brother Kelley would not let you leave without joining the NAACP or registering to vote.

<sup>17</sup> Christine McCloud, Conversation with Leslie Sharp, 1 March 2005.

<sup>18</sup> *Globe* (26 September 1958): 1.

<sup>19</sup> *Globe* (3 April 1959), 1.

<sup>20</sup> *Globe* (17 April 1959), 1.

<sup>21</sup> *Globe* (24 April 1959), 5.

<sup>22</sup> *Tennessean* (February 1994); "Kelly v. Board of Education," *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, 499, 500.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 11

First Baptist Church East Nashville,  
Davidson County, Tennessee

At the church services and functions, Kelley would update the members on recent happenings in the movement, promoted involvement, and raised funds. For example, when it was decided that the African-American community would not patronize downtown businesses until their racist policies of segregation ceased, Kelley announced the economic boycott at the church. In other words, the church served as a significant gathering place, communication center, and recruitment site for the local NAACP under the leadership of Dinkins, Kelley, and Dr. Rucker.

Doctor J. N. Rucker, who served as preacher from 1959-1970, supported various community efforts in the East Nashville. He received his professional training at Meharry Medical College and practiced medicine before his years as pastor. He served churches in Natchez, Mississippi and in Gallatin, Tennessee, before becoming pastor at First Baptist East Nashville in December of 1959. As pastor of First Baptist East Nashville, he acquired the first church parsonage and the land on which the present parking lot is located. In 1960, Rucker was named the chair of the new Urban Renewal Citizens Committee of the East Nashville Community Club, which he helped to organize and which sometimes met at the church. The purpose of the committee was to aid the community in the fight against displacement of housing and businesses by the seven-year renewal program begun in 1959.<sup>23</sup> At the time, the East Nashville Urban Renewal project was one of the largest urban renewal projects ever to be attempted.<sup>24</sup> The actions of the Citizens Committee may have mitigated some of the adverse impacts of Urban Renewal to the citizens of East Nashville. Rucker's involvement in the public process and as a leader of the Citizen Committee continued the long tradition of activism by leaders of the church.

After the death of Civil Rights Leader Martin Luther King, Jr. and under the leadership of Dr. Rucker, First Baptist East Nashville established a new tradition when the church was selected as the meeting point for East Nashvillians who wanted to celebrate and march in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr. After congregating at the church, the celebrants would cross the bridge connecting Main Street into downtown Nashville. After passing several important sites, such as Fisk University (NR 02/09/1978), they would end the march at Tennessee State University.<sup>25</sup> This celebration continues to the present to honor King and remember the fight for Civil Rights.

The period of significance ends with the passing of Rucker's pastorate, which was marked by a continued effort to improve the life of not just the congregation but also the surrounding neighborhood. His community involvement, like the other pastors and church members before him, represents the importance of the church within the black community from Reconstruction through the Civil Rights era. Throughout Rucker's tenure, the church continued to support celebrations of Martin Luther King, Jr., sit-ins, voting drives, improved education, and a strong spiritual commitment.

<sup>23</sup> *Globe* (5 February 1960).

<sup>24</sup> "Big things shape up for 1964," *Tennessean* (23 November 1958); "Urban Renewal" files, Metropolitan Historical Commission, Nashville, Tennessee; Bob Howard, Metropolitan Development and Housing Agency, interview by Leslie Sharp, 15 November 1990, Nashville, Tennessee; It was a comprehensive plan designed to clear the blighted area, improve the housing stock, better the sewer and drainage lines, develop new roads and replace sidewalks. The plan's estimated cost was \$32,629,254. By 1969 the project was ninety percent complete. 1,734 structures had been removed and 1,595 had been built. According to the Housing Authority, the project was a success. However, many people were displaced, many late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century buildings were destroyed, and East Nashville was separated from downtown as a result of the project.

<sup>25</sup> Christine McCord, conversation with Thayer, 11 December 2001.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 12

First Baptist Church East Nashville,  
Davidson County, Tennessee

## The Modern Period (1970-2004)

The next preacher was James A. Campbell, who was as a biology professor at Tennessee State University. He served First Baptist East Nashville from 1970 to 1994. Campbell established a number of outreach ministries, such as juvenile help, prison work, health care, and elderly care. He was also quite involved in the initiation of an inter-Christian ministry, known as the Edgefield Council of Churches; Campbell has served as president of this organization, which includes 37 churches. The church remains an integral part of civic life in Nashville. In September 1985 a group of citizens formed the Nashville Center for Black Family Life. The purpose of the group is to “enhance the lives of African American children and their families.”<sup>26</sup> One of their programs, the Supplemental Education program (SEP) met in the basement of First Baptist Church East Nashville the first year it was implemented in 1987. The church has sponsored cultural events such as the Afro-American Culture and History Conference and continues to play an important role in civil rights, serving as one of several meeting places for events such as the annual citywide march and convocation commemorating Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday.

Floyd E. Lacey is the current preacher at First Baptist East Nashville; he has been working for the church for more than five years. The traditions established by Vandavall and continued by Griggs and Ellington remains in place today. One present church member, Christine McCord, stated, “we really dwell on the history of the church.”<sup>27</sup> She has been a member since 1949, and she estimates that First Baptist East Nashville currently has around 225 members.<sup>28</sup> The congregation celebrated its 135th anniversary in October 2001. Although the congregation has not always worshipped at 601 Main Street, they have connected their history with the fabric of the building. For instance, the stained-glass windows located on the first floor of the building include the names of important leaders in the congregation’s history. Too, in recent years, when several members suggested that the congregation should relocate to another part of Nashville in order to distance themselves from the new football stadium, the majority of members rejected this idea because they wanted to remain at a site of historical significance to them.<sup>29</sup>

## Biography of Frances E. Thompson (1896-1992)

Thompson was born in Spring Hill, Tennessee around the turn of the century, but moved to Nashville with her family when she was a young girl. She graduated from Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial Normal School (now Tennessee State University [N.R. listed 6/14/96]). With the encouragement and sponsorship of Olive Giovanna Taliaferro, her art teacher at Tennessee A&I, Thompson enrolled at the Massachusetts College of Art. She received her art degree in 1923, graduating with honors. After leaving the Massachusetts College of Art, Thompson returned to Nashville to begin her career at Tennessee A&I where she spent the next five decades creating art and promoting art education. She served as the art department director, a professor of art beginning in 1944, and professor emeritus beginning in 1974. Her work for the college began as early as 1922 when she designed the school seal whose motto reads “think,

<sup>26</sup> *Tennessee Tribune* (22 August 1995), 17.

<sup>27</sup> Christine McCord, conversation with Thayer, Nashville, Tennessee, 11 December 2001.

<sup>28</sup> Christine McCord, conversation with Thayer, Nashville, Tennessee, 22 October 2001.

<sup>29</sup> Christine McCord, conversation with Thayer, Nashville, Tennessee, 11 December 2001.



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 13

First Baptist Church East Nashville,  
Davidson County, Tennessee

work, and serve.” The seal is still used today by TSU. Throughout her career, Thompson would continue her training. In the 1930s with an increasing interest in art as an educational tool, Thompson returned to the Massachusetts College of Art to study. In 1936, she was graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Art Education. She received a Rosenwald to continue her studies in art and art education in Czechoslovakia during the late 1930s and then in 1945 she earned a Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) in education and fine arts in 1945 from Radcliff College.

She would spend the rest of her career at Tennessee A&I, directing the art department and teaching. In 1943 the Tennessee State Department of Education published her book entitled *Art in the Elementary Schools, A Manual for Teachers*. In addition to her heavy teaching load, Thompson helped organize and participated in the “Faculty Breakfast Group,” an intercollegiate group made up of faculty members from Tennessee A&I and the other historically black colleges in Nashville—Meharry Medical College and Fisk University (N.R. listed 2/9/78). The cooperative organization held discussions and lectures on a variety of topics related to higher education and scholarly fields. Thompson was also a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha, the Gaiete de Coeur Art Club, and the National Art Education Association. Throughout her life, she remained an active club member, church member of First Baptist Capitol Hill, artist, teacher, speaker, and writer. Her speeches and writings combined her philosophy on art, religion, and education.

Thompson took private commissions for paintings and sculpture working in a variety of media, including oils, polymers, water colors, German pastels, Gesso, gold, silver, enamels, wood, bone, and plastics. She painted murals, portraits, and landscape scenes. She exhibited her work at TSU, the Van Vechten Gallery at Fisk (N.R. listed 2/9/78), the Parthenon (N.R. listed 2/23/72) in Nashville, the Massachusetts College of Art, and Harvard University. In addition to her paintings at First Baptist Church East Nashville, Thompson did wall decorations and baptisteries for other churches including the Progressive Baptist Church in Nashville, the First Baptist Church in Gallatin, the Ramsey Street Church of Christ in Nashville, her own First Baptist Church Capitol Hill, the Indianapolis Metropolitan Baptist Church, the Fairfield Baptist Church in Nashville, and the Antioch Baptist Church in Nashville. She also illustrated church literature for over fifty years for the Baptist School Publishing Board.

Her commissions came from many prominent people in Tennessee and outside the South. Some of her portraits included attorney J. C. Napier, Meharry Medical College Doctor C.W. Johnson and his staff, Dr. and Mrs. William Crump from Washington, DC, Dr. and Mrs. Charles Nobles from Baton Rouge, and Dr. Elsie Lewis Makel of New York City. She also designed two-dimensional sculptures on the facades of four Tennessee State University buildings—Memorial Library, Educational Agriculture, and Health, and Physical Education—for the Nashville architectural firm of McKissack and McKissack. Her other work with the firm for the college included mosaic floor designs for the library and physical education buildings.

Thompson was a contemporary and friend of the prominent Harlem Renaissance painter Aaron Douglas (1898-1979). From New York, Douglas came to Nashville in 1940 to start an art department at Fisk University, where he taught for almost thirty years. Both Thompson and Douglas represent the increasing stature of African-American visual artists within the art community. Whereas Douglas has received national recognition for his paintings and his role in providing blacks with art educational opportunities, Thompson’s work is relatively unknown as an artist and art educator. However, in 1979 her alma mater Massachusetts

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 14

First Baptist Church East Nashville,  
Davidson County, Tennessee

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College of Art Alumnae Association named one the college's art galleries and a minority scholarship after her. Unfortunately when the school moved the gallery in 1986, her name was not retained. At the request of Radcliff College, Thompson gave her papers to the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America (Harvard University). In addition, Thompson, along with Douglas, was featured in *Visions of My People* by George Ridley, Jr. as "two of the greatest influences on Tennessee African American visual artists."<sup>30</sup>

Thompson's religious work integrated natural scenes with the stories of the bible and reflected her personal commitment to Christianity. The paintings at First Baptist East Nashville are typical of her church designs that combine nature and spirituality. The use of flowing water to symbolize the ceremony of baptism is a common theme in religious art in general and Thompson's work in particular (murals at Fredonia Baptist Church and Gallatin First Baptist Church). Her more secular work represents a wide variety of themes and mediums and included architectural features, paintings, sculptures, and mosaics.

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<sup>30</sup> George Ridley, Jr. *Contemporaria Magazine* (31 January 1998): 12.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number NA Page 1

First Baptist Church East Nashville  
Davidson County, Tennessee

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October 18, 1955:

"In accordance to our previous discussion you are commissioned by the First Baptist Church of East Nashville to paint a mural of the Baptistry Scene, including two side panels, above the baptizing pool of the church in accordance to dimensions previously agreed upon. Very truly yours, J. Yeargin, Chairman of the Layman's League Rev. C. Dinkins, Pastor"

Oct 3, 1956 letter to FET from Rev. Dinkins: Miss Thompson: Enclosed is check from the church for the painting. So sorry for the inconvenience caused you by our delay I getting the check. It is made out to our Layman's League, but has been endorsed over to you. We are receiving many compliments on the painting. We would like to plan a dedication program soon. You will be hearing from us." Rev. Dinkins

From Frances E. Thompson's papers in Cambridge MA.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 15

First Baptist Church East Nashville  
Davidson County, Tennessee

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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 16

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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 17

First Baptist Church East Nashville  
Davidson County, Tennessee

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First Baptist Church East Nashville  
Name of Property

Davidson County, TN  
County and State

## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** Less than one acre Nashville West 308 NE

### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>16</u> Zone	<u>521334</u> Easting	<u>4003278</u> Northing	3	<u>          </u> Zone	<u>          </u> Easting	<u>          </u> Northing
2	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	4	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>

See continuation sheet

### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Contact: Leslie N. Sharp; Original draft: Gwyneth Anne Thayer; Further Research: Katherine Haskel  
organization Center for Historic Preservation; MTSU Date February 2005  
street & number Box 80 telephone (615) 898-2947  
city or town Nashville/Murfreesboro state TN zip code 37130

### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

#### Continuation Sheets

#### Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

#### Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

### Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

## Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Christine McCord, c/o First Baptist Church East Nashville  
street & number 601 Main Street telephone (615) 254-6268  
city or town Nashville state TN zip code 37206

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listing. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P. O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 10 Page 18

First Baptist Church East Nashville  
Davidson County, Tennessee

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## Verbal Boundary Description and Justification

### Verbal Boundary Description

First Baptist Church East Nashville, located at 601 Main Street in Nashville, Davidson County, Tennessee. The boundary includes the .39 acres (parcel 08215015000) owned by the First Baptist Church East Nashville, found at Lot 150 of the Metropolitan Nashville Tax Map number 08215.

### Boundary Justification

The boundaries for the nominated property include the main building located on 601 Main Street in Nashville, Davidson County, Tennessee. This represents the historic legal boundaries associated with the church building at this location. The adjacent lot containing the Educational Annex, a 1920s Craftsman-style bungalow, has been excluded from the nominated boundaries since the church has only owned the property since the 1990s.

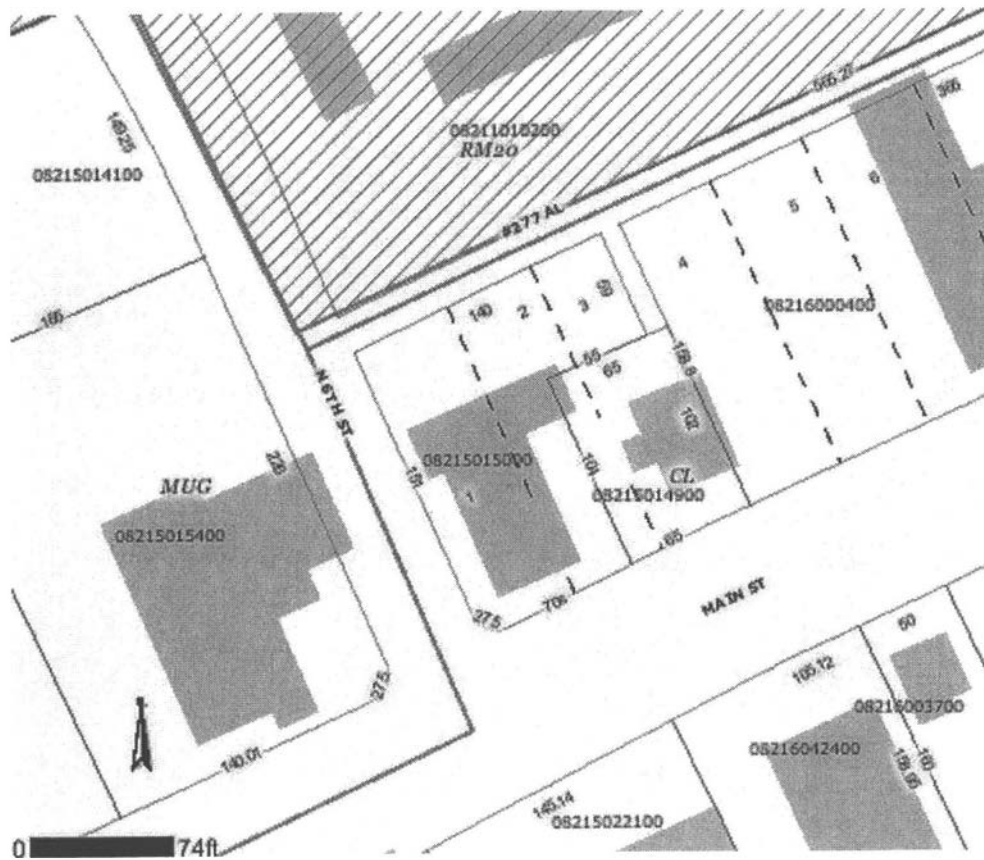


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 10 Page 19

First Baptist Church East Nashville  
Davidson County, Tennessee



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number photos Page 20

First Baptist Church East Nashville  
Davidson County, Tennessee

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**Name of Property:** First Baptist Church East Nashville  
**City or Vicinity:** Nashville  
**County:** Davidson  
**State:** Tennessee  
**Photographer:** Dr. Carroll Van West  
**Negative Filed:** Tennessee Historical Commission  
**Date Photographed:** February 25, 2004

## Description of Photograph(s):

- 1 of 27: First Baptist Church East Nashville and First Baptist Church Annex (adjacent to nominated property); photographer facing northwest.
- 2 of 27: First Baptist Church East Nashville, south façade; photographer facing north.
- 3 of 27: East façade; photographer facing northwest.
- 4 of 27: Rear portion of east façade; photographer facing west.
- 5 of 27: North façade; photographer facing south.
- 6 of 27: North and west facades; photographer facing southeast.
- 7 of 27: West façade; photographer facing east.
- 8 of 27: Detailing of cornerstone on south façade; photographer facing north.
- 9 of 27: First Baptist Church East Nashville interior, sanctuary facing pulpit; photographer facing north.
- 10 of 27: Detail of neon light sign, reading "God is Love" above pulpit; photographer facing north.
- 11 of 27: Detail of choir seating behind pulpit; photographer facing northeast.
- 12 of 27: Baptistry with paintings by Nashville artist Frances Thompson; photographer facing north.
- 13 of 27: Sanctuary looking toward balcony from pulpit; photographer facing south.
- 14 of 27: Detail of stained-glass windows; photographer facing west.

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

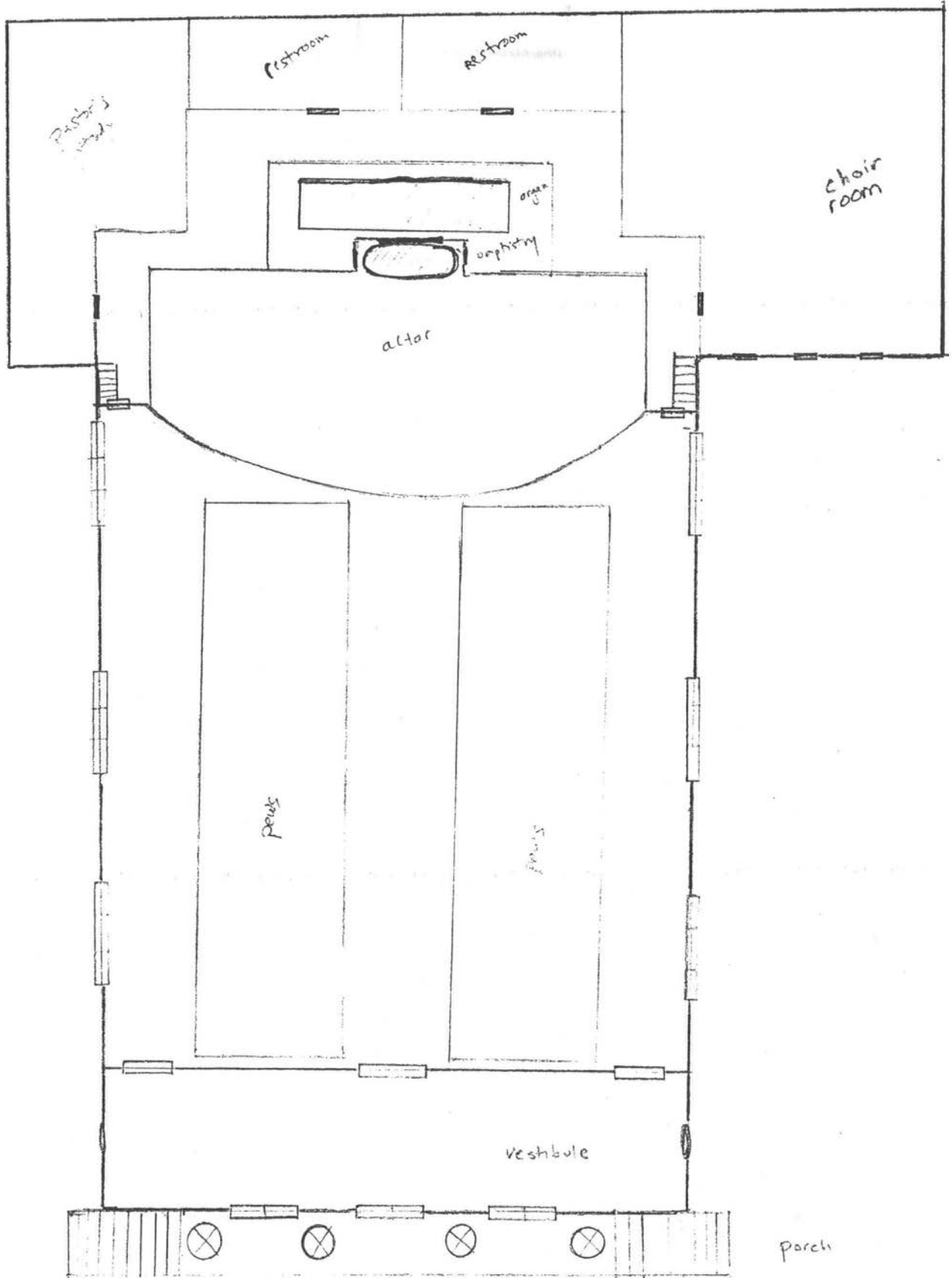
# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number photos Page 21

First Baptist Church East Nashville  
Davidson County, Tennessee

- 
- 15 of 27: Detail of stained-glass windows; photographer facing west.
- 16 of 27: Sanctuary looking toward balcony; photographer facing south.
- 17 of 27: Sanctuary underneath balcony with pressed-metal ceiling; photographer facing east.
- 18 of 27: Vestibule looking at staircase to balcony (east staircase) with pressed-metal ceiling and wood stairs, balustrade, and newel posts; photographer facing east.
- 19 of 27: Detail of staircase to balcony (west staircase); photographer facing west.
- 20 of 27: Balcony with pews, oculus, and windows; photographer facing east.
- 21 of 27: Sanctuary looking toward pulpit from balcony; photographer facing north.
- 22 of 27: Hallway in Sunday School Building, main floor.
- 23 of 27: Wooden staircase in Sunday School Building, main floor; photographer facing northwest.
- 24 of 27: Ground floor showing fellowship hall; photographer facing northeast.
- 25 of 27: Sunday School Building hallway, ground floor; photographer facing west.
- 26 of 27: Historic photograph of First Baptist Church East Nashville groundbreaking, August 26, 1928, Reverend W.S. Ellington in middle of photograph holding shovel.
- 27 of 27: Historic photograph of congregation in sanctuary, looking toward balcony.

rear (North)



front (South)

First Baptist Church,  
EAST NASHVILLE  
RAVENSCLAW CO. TN

















FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH  
EAST NASHVILLE

ORGANIZED 1866  
ERECTED 1931

REV. R. B. VANDAVALL, FOUNDER  
REV. W. S. ELLINGTON, PASTOR  
CORNERSTONE LAID 1950 BY THE  
LAYMAN'S LEAGUE, AUSPICES  
ORIENTAL LODGE NO. 285





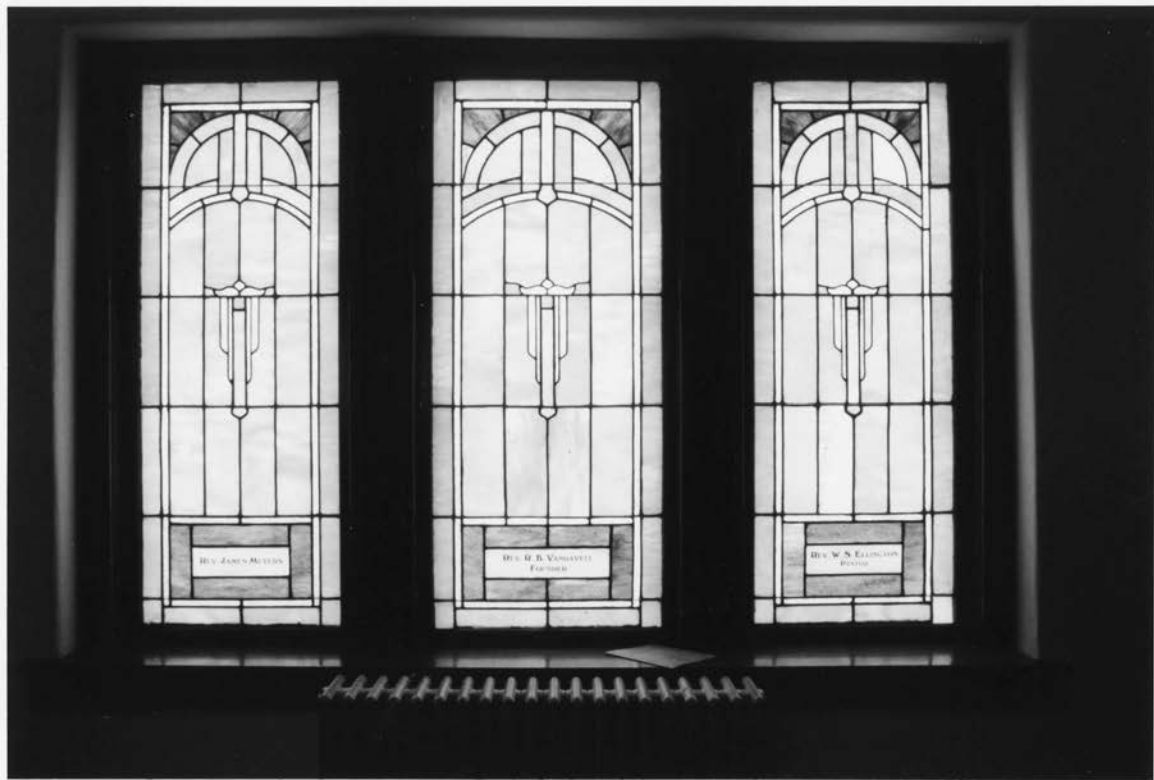












REV. JAMES M. ALLEN

REV. R. B. VANDAVAIL  
FURNISH

REV. W. S. ELLINGTON  
FURNISH



















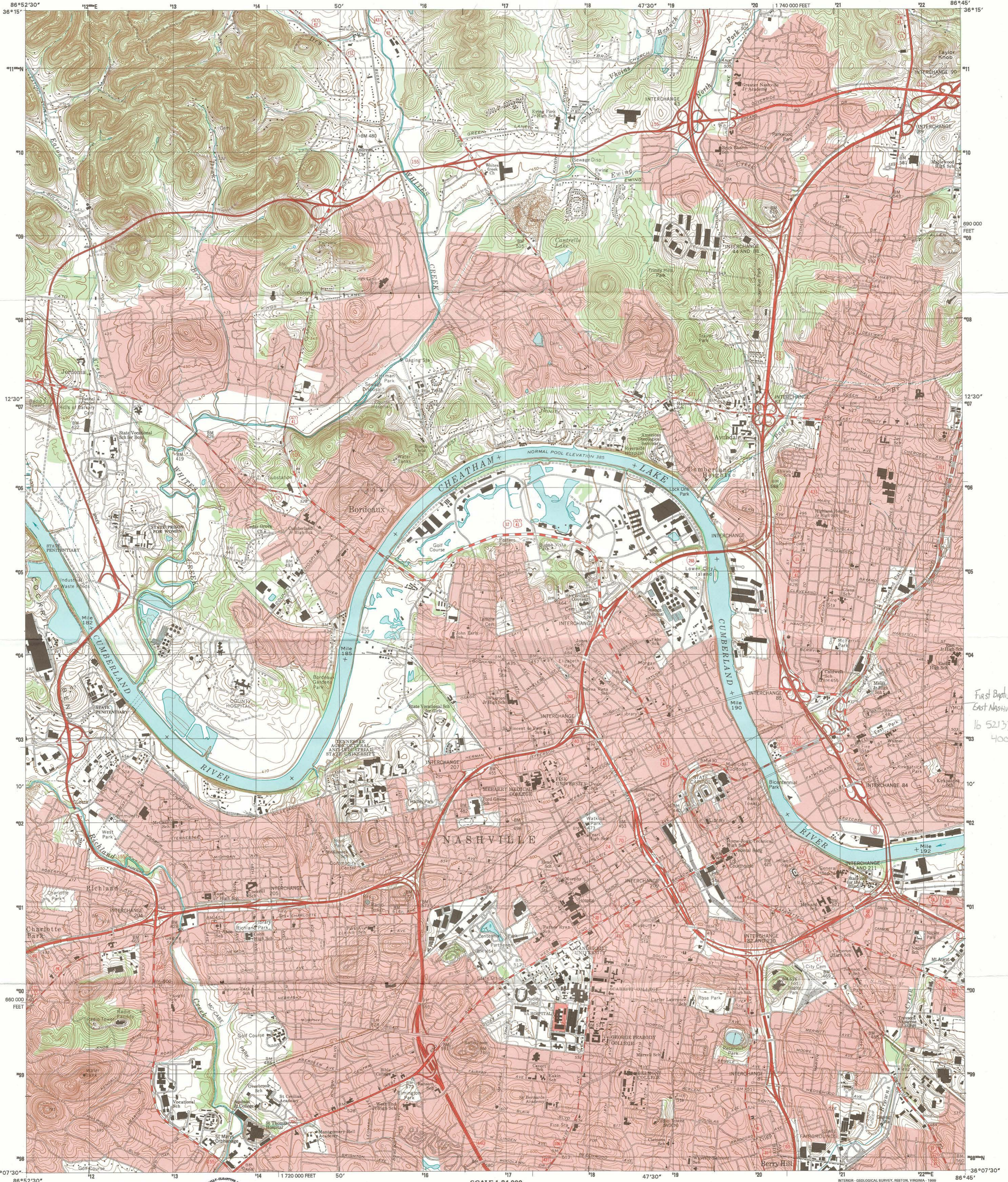






FIRST BAPTIST EAST NASHVILLE  
BREAKING GROUND  
FOR THEIR  
WOODEN CHURCH BUILDING  
JULY 24 1928  
REV. W. S. BATHGORN PASTOR



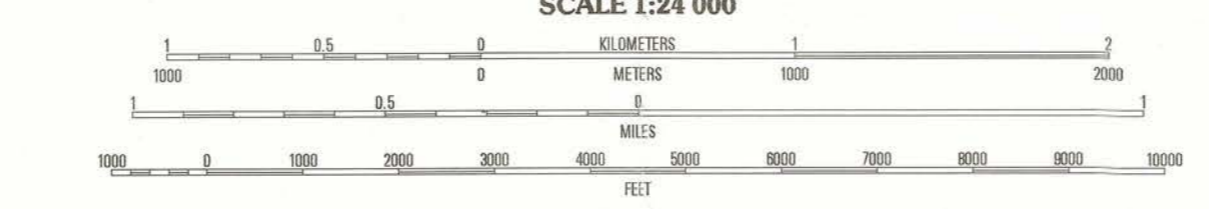


First Baptist  
 East Nashville  
 16 521334  
 4003278

Produced by the United States Geological Survey  
 Topography compiled 1951. Planimetry derived from imagery taken 1977 and other sources. Survey control current as of 1968 North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83). Projection and 1000-meter grid: Universal Transverse Mercator, zone 16 1000-foot ticks: Tennessee Coordinate System of 1983 North American Datum of 1927 (NAD 27) is shown by dashed corner ticks. The values of the shift between NAD 83 and NAD 27 for 7.5-minute intersections are obtainable from National Geodetic Survey NADCON software  
 There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of the National or State reservations shown on this map  
 Landmark buildings verified 1968  
 Entire area lies within the Nashville-Davidson County Metropolitan Government

**MAP SALES AND SERVICES**  
 1100 Johnson Rd.  
 Box 242, 238B  
 Nashville, TN 37210

UTM GRID AND 1999 MAGNETIC NORTH DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET



CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET  
 NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929  
 TO CONVERT FROM FEET TO METERS, MULTIPLY BY 0.3048

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
 FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, P.O. BOX 25286, DENVER, COLORADO 80225  
 AND TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION, DIVISION OF GEOLOGY,  
 NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37243  
 A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

**ROAD CLASSIFICATION**

Primary highway hard surface	Light-duty road, hard or improved surface
Secondary highway hard surface	Unimproved road

Interstate Route U.S. Route State Route

ADJOINING 7.5' QUADRANGLE NAMES

1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	

**NASHVILLE WEST, TN**  
 1997  
 NIMA 3656 III NE-SERIES V841





UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY First Baptist Church East Nashville  
NAME:

MULTIPLE  
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: TENNESSEE, Davidson

DATE RECEIVED: 6/15/05 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 7/12/05  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 7/27/05 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 7/29/05  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 05000761

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: Y  
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: Y SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT  RETURN  REJECT \_\_\_\_\_ DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

The First Baptist Church East Nashville is locally significant under Criterion A as an example of an African-American church that played an important role in the Civil Rights movement and under Criterion C for its Classical Revival styling. Completed in 1931, the church reflects the central role that religion played in African-American communities throughout the South. In the 1950s, under the leadership of pastors Charles L. Dinkins, Sr., and Jonathan Rucker, the congregation assumed a leading role in the Civil Rights movement in central Tennessee. Perhaps the most important example of its activism occurred in April 1959, when the church hosted the kickoff meeting for a membership campaign for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Today, the property reflects the role of the church in African-American life and retains integrity from its period of significance.

RECOM./CRITERIA

Accept A & C

REVIEWER

Daniel Vivian

DISCIPLINE

Historian

TELEPHONE

(202) 354-2252

DATE

7/27/05

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR  Y  N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.

**CERTIFIED LOCAL GOVERNMENT NATIONAL REGISTER REVIEW**

**CLG:** Nashville  
**PROPERTY:** First Baptist Church East Nashville  
**ADDRESS:** 601 Main Street

**HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION EVALUATION**

**NAME OF COMMISSION:** Metropolitan Historical Commission

**DATE OF MEETING:** 5/16/05

**HOW WAS THE PUBLIC NOTIFIED OF THE MEETING?** Printed notice

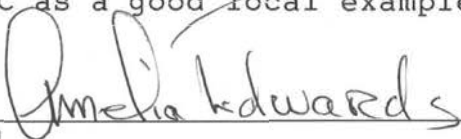
- ELIGIBLE FOR THE NATIONAL REGISTER**
- NOT ELIGIBLE FOR THE NATIONAL REGISTER**

**REASONS FOR ELIGIBILITY OR NON-ELIGIBILITY:**

First Baptist Church East Nashville is eligible for the National Register under Criterion A for its significance to the growth and development of East Nashville's African-American community and for its role in local Civil Rights activities. It is further eligible under Criterion C as a good local example of Classical Revival style.

**SIGNATURE:**

**TITLE:** Vice Chair



**DATE:** 5/16/05

**THC STAFF EVALUATION**

- ELIGIBLE FOR THE NATIONAL REGISTER**
- NOT ELIGIBLE FOR THE NATIONAL REGISTER**

**REASONS FOR ELIGIBILITY OR NON-ELIGIBILITY:**

First Baptist Church East Nashville is eligible under Criterion A for ethnic heritage: black, social history and religion. It symbolizes the growth and development of the African-American community in East Nashville during the twentieth century, and was a significant institution in the Civil Rights movement in Nashville. It is also eligible for criterion C for its significance in architecture and art. The building is a good example of a Classical Revival style building built in the late 1920's and early 1930s.

**SIGNATURE:**

**TITLE:** Historic Preservation Specialist

**DATE:** April 26, 2005

**PLEASE COMPLETE THIS FORM AND RETURN BEFORE: May 24, 2005**

**RETURN FORM TO:**

**BRIAN BEADLES  
TENNESSEE HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
2941 LEBANON ROAD  
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37243-0442**

**CERTIFIED LOCAL GOVERNMENT NATIONAL REGISTER REVIEW**

**CLG:** Nashville  
**PROPERTY:** First Baptist Church East Nashville  
**ADDRESS:** 601 Main Street

**CHIEF ELECTED OFFICIAL EVALUATION**

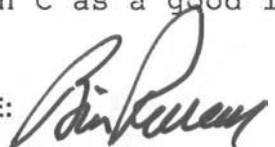
**NAME OF OFFICIAL:** Bill Purcell  
**TITLE:** Mayor  
 **ELIGIBLE FOR THE NATIONAL REGISTER**  
 **NOT ELIGIBLE FOR THE NATIONAL REGISTER**

**REASONS FOR ELIGIBILITY OR NON-ELIGIBILITY:**

First Baptist Church East Nashville is eligible for the National Register under Criterion A for its significance to the growth and development of East Nashville's African-American community and for its role in local Civil Rights activities. It is further eligible under Criterion C as a good local example of Classical Revival style.

**SIGNATURE:**

**TITLE:** Mayor



**DATE:** 5/18/05

**THC STAFF EVALUATION**

**ELIGIBLE FOR THE NATIONAL REGISTER**  
 **NOT ELIGIBLE FOR THE NATIONAL REGISTER**

**REASONS FOR ELIGIBILITY OR NON-ELIGIBILITY:**

First Baptist Church East Nashville is eligible under Criterion A for ethnic heritage: black, social history and religion. It symbolizes the growth and development of the African-American community in East Nashville during the twentieth century, and was a significant institution in the Civil Rights movement in Nashville. It is also eligible for criterion C for its significance in architecture and art. The building is a good example of a Classical Revival style building built in the late 1920's and early 1930s.

**SIGNATURE:**

**TITLE:** Historic Preservation Specialist

**DATE:** April 26, 2005

**PLEASE COMPLETE THIS FORM AND RETURN BEFORE: May 24, 2005**

**RETURN FORM TO:**

**BRIAN BEADLES  
TENNESSEE HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
2941 LEBANON ROAD  
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37243-0442**



**TENNESSEE HISTORICAL COMMISSION**  
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND CONSERVATION  
2941 LEBANON ROAD  
NASHVILLE, TN 37243-0442  
(615) 532-1550



June 13, 2005

Janet Matthews  
Keeper of the National Register  
National Park Service  
National Register Branch  
1201 Eye Street NW  
8<sup>th</sup> floor  
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Ms. Matthews:

Enclosed please find the documentation to nominate *First Baptist Church East Nashville* to the National Register of Historic Places. Since the period of significance extends to 1970 we are asking for a **substantive review**.

If you have any questions or if more information is needed, contact Brian Beadles at 615/532-1550, extension 125 or [Brian.Beadles@state.tn.us](mailto:Brian.Beadles@state.tn.us).

Sincerely,

Herbert L. Harper  
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

HLH:cs

Enclosures

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number NA Page 1

First Baptist Church East Nashville  
Davidson County, Tennessee

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October 18, 1955:

"In accordance to our previous discussion you are commissioned by the First Baptist Church of East Nashville to paint a mural of the Baptistry Scene, including two side panels, above the baptizing pool of the church in accordance to dimensions previously agreed upon. Very truly yours, J. Yeargin, Chairman of the Layman's League Rev. C. Dinkins, Pastor"

Oct 3, 1956 letter to FET from Rev. Dinkins: Miss Thompson: Enclosed is check from the church for the painting. So sorry for the inconvenience caused you by our delay I getting the check. It is made out to our Layman's League, but has been endorsed over to you. We are receiving many compliments on the painting. We would like to plan a dedication program soon. You will be hearing from us." Rev. Dinkins

From Frances E. Thompson's papers in Cambridge MA.