

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

DATA SHEET

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	MAY 10 1977
DATE ENTERED	JAN 31 1978

**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

First Baptist Church

AND/OR COMMON

LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

353 Congress Street

__ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Portland

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Maine

__ VICINITY OF
CODE

23

1st-Hon. David Emery

COUNTY

Cumberland

CODE

005

CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

- BOTH
- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

PRESENT USE

- AGRICULTURE
- COMMERCIAL
- EDUCATIONAL
- ENTERTAINMENT
- GOVERNMENT
- INDUSTRIAL
- MILITARY
- MUSEUM
- PARK
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- RELIGIOUS
- SCIENTIFIC
- TRANSPORTATION
- OTHER:

OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

First Baptist Church Membership

STREET & NUMBER

353 Congress Street

CITY, TOWN

Portland

__ VICINITY OF

STATE

Maine

LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Cumberland County Registry of Deeds

STREET & NUMBER

142 Federal Street

CITY, TOWN

Portland

STATE

Maine

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

__ FEDERAL __ STATE __ COUNTY __ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" 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 First Baptist Church on the corner of Congress and Wilmont Streets was designed by Levi Newcomb in 1867 in the early Romanesque Revival Style. This style was also referred to as Norman Gothic by contemporaries.

The structure is two and a half stories with a vestibule at street level leading to classrooms and vestry below and to the church level above. A steeply pitched roof covers the nave, with flanking bays housing the side aisles.

Rear and side walls are brick, with rubble brownstone (also referred to as Connecticut freestone) and Albert stone applied to the facade. Side walls were originally painted to resemble stone but none of this paint remains. An arched corbel table of brick headers runs below the roof cornice along the side walls. The side walls are load bearing. Further structural support is obtained by the post and beam construction, with granite underpinings. Cast iron columns are visible at the lower vestry level. On the church level, large supporting columns are encased in plaster.

The building's facade faces Congress Street and is dominated by the square towers which flank the central tripartite doorway. The towers are square with three levels, the uppermost demarcated by triple, arched window openings, the others by stringcourses. Battlements decorate the tower tops which are copper covered. Originally, the tower at Congress and Wilmont Streets was 82 feet and the other 62 feet high. The extra 20 feet was removed from the taller tower about 1965 as a safety precaution.

The main entrance to the church consists of three arched doorways surrounded with geometric decorative moulding and swirled columns of Albert stone. On the wall surface above the doorway is a stained glass window arrangement consisting of a central rosette window above several tall, narrow, arched panes. From the inside, the window fills the entire wall of the end gallery.

The side walls are six bays long with six-over-six leaded casement windows at the lower level. At clerestory level, the windows are paired alternating lancet or round arched windows with stained glass emblems in the spandrel of each pair.

The vestibule at street level leads up to an entry area at the Church level through side stairways, or down to the lower level with classrooms and vestry.

Tower rooms are accessible from the vestibule and from the upper end gallery within the main church. The rooms are used as classrooms and for storage.

Two side doors open into the church proper from the entry area. To the side of each door, a small paneled stairway leads to the upper galleries. The church is rectangular in plan, with a central nave, side aisles, galleries and

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a semi-circular sanctuary. Rows of columns support the upper galleries and separate the nave and side aisles. The columns are clusters of four plaster colonettes with ornately molded capitals. The ceiling height is 46 feet, and vaulted with wood. Pews occupy the center of the nave and the side aisles.

The sanctuary area is raised on a semi-circular dais within the apse. A choir loft (added about 1951) protrudes slightly over the speaking area. The pulpet and heavy black walnut chairs are original to the building. Dark paneled doors below the choir loft slide open to reveal a modern, sunken, baptismal font which was added about 1966. Above the font, is a wall painting of a Holy Land landscape. Small changing rooms surround the rear of the sanctuary.

The large, concave wall surface of the sanctuary is punctured by a circular window bearing the figure of a flying dove. Presently it is stenciled with a simplified, geometric design.

Gallery walls are off-white. The spandrels connecting supporting columns which run the length of the gallery are cream-colored with a hint of pink. Side aisle walls are off-white with textured plaster over panelled wainscoting, imitating walnut. Pews and columns are painted dark brown. Carpeting is red, as are pew cushions. Gallery railings and sanctuary paneling appears to be original walnut. Originally, organ pipes rose on either side of the sanctuary. These have been removed and the original organ replaced by an electric one to the right of the sanctuary.

Lighting is indirect or recessed, except for the gallery ceiling where lantern-like lights are suspended on chains.

The vestry below can be reached through the street vestibule, or at the apse end of the church through fire escape corridors. This lower area has received much partitioning and remodeling into classrooms, offices and changing rooms. Twelve foot columns support the floor above.

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 type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1867 BUILDER/ARCHITECT Levi Newcomb

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The First Baptist Church on Congress Street was designed in 1867 by Levi Newcomb. Newcomb was born in Scituate, Massachusetts in 1822 and was the son of a master mariner. He, too, went to sea, but returned to learn the trade of mason. Eventually, he began an architectural practice in Boston, where he designed several churches and residences, along with dormitories for Tufts, Harvard and Dartmouth.

Upon this reputation he was hired to come to Portland to design the Portland Savings Bank Block, 1866-67, on Exchange Street, The First Baptist Church, 1867, and the Noyes Block on 57 & 59 Deering Street, 1868-69. He later formed an influential practice with his son Edgar Allen Poe Newcomb.

The exterior features of the church are well adapted forms characteristic of early Romanesque Revival style. This is especially evident in the arched doorway of the main entrance, the flanking towers, and stonework of the facade.

The building's interior has undergone several alterations, the most recent taking place in the 1960's. At this time, floors were recarpeted, rooms were partitioned, ceilings were lowered, and walls and ceilings repainted. The interior of the church itself, although refurnished with new pews, sanctuary and organ, still maintains its original atmosphere created by the contrasts of white walls against dark woodwork.

Aside from its interior and exterior merits, the site of the First Baptist contributes greatly to its significance as an architectural landmark. The structure is located in Portland's business and governmental district, near the County Courthouse and Portland City Hall. Lincoln Park occupies the area across the street from the church, affording an undisturbed view of its facade from numerous locations. In addition to its excellent condition and site, it is within walking distance from the city's oldest church, First Parish, the Chestnut St. Church designed in Gothic Revival style, and the Historic Old Port Exchange area.

