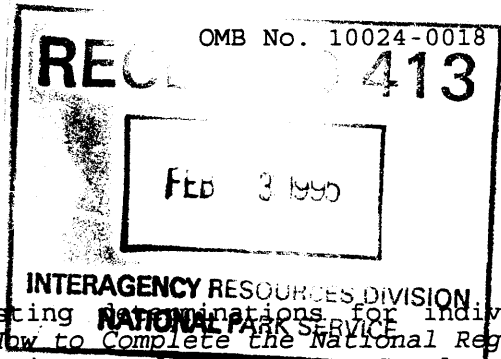


United States Department of Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form



This form is for use in nominating or requesting 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 Methodist Church

other names/site number N/A

**2. Location**

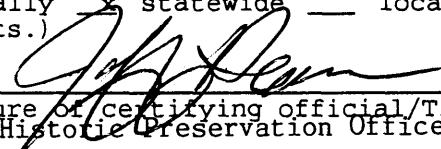
street & number 502 North Main Street N/A not for publication

city or town City of Oshkosh N/A vicinity

state Wisconsin code WI county Winnebago code 139 zip code 54901

**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 forth 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.)

 2/7/95  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date  
State Historic Preservation Officer-WI

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

First Methodist Church  
Name of Property

Winnebago County, Wisconsin  
County and State

**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.  
    — See continuation sheet.  
 removed from the National Register.  
 other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper: Edson A. Beall Date of Action: 3.17.95  
Entered in the National Register

**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 listed resources within the count)	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-state	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> structures
<input type="checkbox"/> public-federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> objects
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> 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)	Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)
<u>RELIGION: Religious facility</u>	<u>SOCIAL: Civic</u>
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)	Materials (Enter categories from instructions)
<u>Classical Revival</u>	foundation <u>BRICK</u>
<u>Italianate</u>	walls <u>BRICK</u>
_____	_____
_____	roof <u>ASPHALT</u>
_____	other <u>WOOD</u>
_____	_____

**Narrative Description**

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

First Methodist Church  
Name of Property

Winnebago County, Wisconsin  
County and State

**8. Statement of Significance**

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

- A owned by a religious institution or  
used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or  
structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age 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 Bibliographic References**

**Bibliography**

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

Areas of Significance  
(Enter categories from  
instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1924-1925

Significant Dates

1924-1925

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is  
marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Auler and Jensen, architects

First Methodist Church  
Name of Property

Winnebago County, Wisconsin  
County and State

Previous Documentation on File (NPS):  
 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 # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary location of additional data:  
 State Historic Preservation Office  
 Other State Agency  
 Federal Agency  
 Local government  
 University  
 Other  
Name of repository:  
WI Inventory of Historic Places

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of Property less than one

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>1/6</u>	<u>3/7/6/8/2/0</u>	<u>4/8/7/5/0/1/5</u>	3	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing								
2	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing								
															<u>see continuation sheet</u>

**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 Elizabeth L. Miller, Consultant (608-233-5942) for  
organization Oshkosh Volunteers for Preservation date 9-30-1993  
street & number P.O. Box 2034 telephone 414-233-0476  
city or town Oshkosh state WI zip code 54903-2034

**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)

First Methodist Church  
Name of Property

Winnebago County, Wisconsin  
County and State

**Property Owner**

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

name The Place 2 B Limited

street & number 502 North Main Street telephone (414)233-1414

city or town Oshkosh state WI zip code 54901

**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 listings. 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 20503.

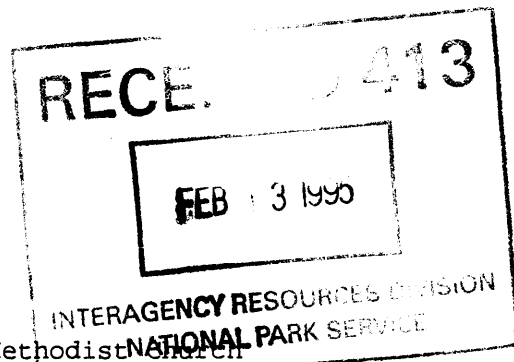
NPS Form 10-900-a  
(Rev. 8-86)  
Wisconsin Word Processing Format  
(Approved 3/87)

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section 7 Page 1

First Methodist Church  
Oshkosh, Winnebago County, WI



Introduction

The First Methodist Church (Church) is located on the northeast corner of North Main Street and Merritt Avenue in Oshkosh's central business district. The Church is a three story load-bearing brick structure. Although the shell of this building was erected in 1874-75, its present appearance is almost entirely the result of a 1924-25 remodeling. It is NeoClassical Revival in style, yet retains some of the Italianate features of the 1874-75 building. The latter design was probably the work of prominent Oshkosh architect William Waters. Another local firm, (Henry) Auler and (James) Jensen, created the 1924-25 NeoClassical Revival redesign. The Church is set on a brick foundation. It has a hip-with-a-deck roof, which retains its original tin cladding, although it has been covered with asphalt. The interior spaces, which date from the 1924-25 remodeling, consist of a large room at the east end along the north wall, with smaller rooms south and west of it, both in the basement and on the first floor; and a two story auditorium in the west three-quarters, and several small rooms in the east one-quarter, on each of the second and third floors (see floor plans attached). The Church is in good condition. Except for a reconfiguration of the main entrance in 1956, post-1925 alterations are minimal.

Description

The Church structure was built in 1874-75.<sup>1</sup> It was Italianate in style and was probably designed by William Waters.<sup>2</sup> Its current appearance is the result of the 1924-25 remodeling by Auler and Jensen. The three-story building is rectangular in plan and measures 60 feet north-south (along North Main Street) and 120 feet east-west (along Merritt Avenue). The Church is of load-bearing brick construction in common bond with a brick basement. On the south (Merritt Avenue) and west (North Main Street) facades, there is wire-cut salmon-colored face brick on the first two stories, and

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<sup>1</sup>Oshkosh Weekly Northwestern (OWN), January 7, 1875.

<sup>2</sup>Intensive Survey Form for Wagner Opera House/First Methodist Church, Oshkosh Intensive Historic Resource Survey, 1981.

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Section 7 Page 2

First Methodist Church  
Oshkosh, Winnebago County, WI

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wire-cut face brick of a darker red on the third story and the parapet. On the north and east facades, there is common cream brick up to the parapet. The presence of two different types of brick is a result of the 1924-25 remodeling.<sup>3</sup> At that time, the original face brick was stripped off the south and west facades, and replaced, duplicating much of the original ornament. At the same time, the original bracketed cornice and tower with convex-side Mansard roof were removed, and a parapet built up on all four sides of the building.<sup>4</sup> The difference in color of the face brick on the street facades may be the result of a sand-blasting of the first and second stories. Ornamental brickwork forms an entablature at the top of each story. At the third floor, a pressed metal cornice with a dentil molding, carried over onto the rear facade, hides the seam between the original roofline and the 1924-25 parapet. This parapet has recessed brick panels, is framed with similarly paneled brick pilasters, and capped with a stone coping. The walls on the street facades are enriched with limestone beltcourses between the first and second, and second and third floors. The latter forms a continuous sill for the third story windows on these facades.

Brick pilasters divide the west (front) facade on North Main Street into three bays. The main entrance, which dates from 1956,<sup>5</sup> is in the central bay. It is composed of a short, wide opening, veneered with smooth, buff-colored Bedford limestone ashlar, and sheltered with a flat metal canopy. There is a pair of post-1956 metal doors deeply recessed within the opening. Originally, the main entrance rose the full height of the first floor and consisted of a pair of monumental wood doors, together forming a segmental arch, surmounted by a round-arched transom, and set in a brick arch 20 feet wide. This configuration was altered in 1924. Above the existing canopy, the upper half of the pair of wide, rusticated

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<sup>3</sup>Oshkosh Daily Northwestern, (ODN), May 10, 1924; June 5, 1924; October 23, 1924; and November 10, 1924.

<sup>4</sup>Auler and Jensen, remodeling plans, June, 1924.

<sup>5</sup>Auler, Dreger, Wiley and Wertsch, remodeling plans, May, 1956.

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**National Register of Historic Places  
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Section 7 Page 3

First Methodist Church  
Oshkosh, Winnebago County, WI

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brick pilasters which originally framed the main entrance remain. Each of these wide pilasters supports a pair of pilasters above, which are joined at the base, split as they rise, and are finished with a continuous stone cap. This pattern is duplicated at the third floor. In the upper half of the first story and at the second story, the central bay is dominated by a large, segmental-arched window with a brick hood mold, keystone and limestone sill. The lower half of this multipaned fixed window is boarded, while the upper half contains clear glass. This window opening was originally the same height as the other windows at the second floor, and like them, was fitted with leaded glass in 1912.<sup>6</sup> It was shortened in the 1924-25 remodeling, and lengthened to its current size in 1956.

At the third floor, there is a pair of round-arched window openings with shouldered brick surrounds. The surrounds are trimmed with limestone impost blocks and keystones. Each holds a three-light leaded glass window; the bottom light is an operable hopper unit. At the top of the central bay, the parapet has a flat brick cap, framed with brick posts and stone consoles. Originally, there was a 30-foot tower with a convex-sided Mansard roof and cresting centered on the west slope of the roof. This was removed in the 1924-25 remodeling.

Each of the flanking bays has a storefront at the first floor, three round-arched windows at the second floor, and three segmental-arched windows at the third floor. The north storefront has a large display window on a marble base (now painted), and a recessed narrow metal-framed glass door with a transom. The south (corner) storefront has a display window on a marble base on each street facade. The entrance is canted and recessed between the display windows, behind a free-standing brick pier which supports the corner of the building. Originally, elongated cast iron columns divided each storefront into three bays. The door was in the south bay, and there were multipane display windows on a cast iron base in the other bays.

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<sup>6</sup>"A Century of Service: 1840-1940," unpublished history of the First Methodist Church, 1940, no page numbers.



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Section 7 Page 4

First Methodist Church  
Oshkosh, Winnebago County, WI

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The second floor windows are framed with brick pilasters and hood molds, which are accented with impost blocks, keystones and slip sills of limestone. There is a recessed brick panel beneath each window. The third floor windows have shouldered brick surrounds with stone impost blocks and keystones. The configuration of the ornamentation and surrounds are original, but the windows were wood four-over-four double hung sash. Currently, all the upper story windows have three-light leaded glass, with a bottom operable hopper unit.

The appearance of the south (Merritt Avenue) facade dates from the 1924-25 remodeling, and has a predominantly horizontal orientation. This effect, created by the limestone beltcourses, is enhanced by the presence of a projecting brick watertable. On the first floor, there are three storefronts on the west end, and a side entrance flanked by grouped windows on the east end. The corner (westernmost) storefront is described as part of the west facade (above). East of this are two small storefronts. Each has an off-center entrance (boarded), a two-light display window on a marble base (painted), and a transom blocked with a pebbledash panel. The side entrance is a slightly recessed pair of steel doors. An outline above the doors marks where there was a galvanized metal cornice. On either side of the entrance is a group of three one-over-one double hung sash windows with a continuous limestone sill and segmental-arched brick hood molds with corbel stops. Originally, there was a narrow display glass window on the corner storefront, a single double hung sash window east of the storefront, and an arcade with carriage drive on the east end of the building. The carriage drive, a large rectangular opening approximately where the side entrance is now, was flanked on either side by a round-arched doorway, all giving access to the church's administrative and community spaces, and to one store. Above the first floor, there was a molding of recessed brick crosses. In the 1924-25 remodeling, this was replaced with a course of brick soldiers, which is carried onto the front facade. The fenestration pattern at the second and third floors was originally a series of regularly distributed wood double hung sash windows in a four-over-four configuration. Each had a limestone sill, and a segmental-arched brick hood mold with corbel stops. The current fenestration pattern is irregular. In the west end, three tall round-arched windows with dark wood tracery and clear glass light the

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First Methodist Church  
Oshkosh, Winnebago County, WI

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auditorium. At the bottom of each window are two operable hopper units. Each window has a limestone sill and keystone, and a slightly projecting shaped brick surround. The third floor limestone belt-course forms the spring line of the arch of each surround. East of these windows are three bays of one-over-one double hung sash windows, with segmental-arched brick hood molds, and corbel stops, and limestone sills. In the easternmost bay, these windows are paired.

On the east (rear) facade, there are six bays of windows at each of the second, third and attic floors. Most are one-over-one double hung sash. The attic windows, which light semi-finished storage space, are missing, and their openings boarded. There is a single steel and glass door in what was probably originally a window opening toward the north end of the first floor. On either side of the door is a double hung sash window. To the south is a louvered vent. All the openings have limestone sills. On the first three floors, each opening (except for the first floor vent) has a segmentally arched brick hood mold with corbel stops. Except for the pressed metal cornice above the third floor, there is little ornament on this facade. The wall appears to have been sandblasted; the bricks are pitted.

The north facade is very plain. There are two single and one paired window (boarded) on this facade. The parapet is unornamented, and capped with a tile coping.

The interior of the Church was completely gutted in the 1924-25 remodeling. The plan (see attached), which is little altered since that time, is similar to the 1874 layout. There is a large room at the east end of the building along the north wall, with smaller rooms south and west of it, both in the basement and on the first floor. There is a two story auditorium in the west three-quarters, and several small rooms in the east one-quarter, on the second and third floors. The 1874 floor plan was different in that there were only two storefronts (the ones on North Main Street), and there was an apartment (for the janitor) in the east end on the first floor. In the 1924-25 remodeling, the interior was fitted with a steel frame structure, concrete floors and structural clay tile walls. There are several staircases. At the west end of the building, a double dog-leg concrete stair rises from the vestibule to the

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First Methodist Church  
Oshkosh, Winnebago County, WI

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auditorium, and up to the balcony. Just inside the south (side) entrance is a dog-leg concrete stair that rises from the basement to the attic (prior to 1924, there was an elevator in this area). There is a narrower dog-leg concrete stair between the second and third floors just north of the chancel. There is a straight concrete stair from the first floor to the basement in each of the two Merritt Avenue storefronts. In the Church, floor finishes include terrazzo (in the front and side vestibules, restrooms, and on the stairs up to the second floor), asphalt tile (in the dining room and kitchen, and several of the small rooms east of the auditorium), painted concrete (stairs above the first floor, most of the basement) and carpet (everywhere else). Most of the walls are finished with lath and plaster, although the exterior walls in the basement are exposed brick (painted). There are a few plasterboard partition walls in the building, installed since 1970 to accommodate the change in use from church to Boys' Club. The ceilings are finished with plaster. Most spaces have been fitted with acoustical tile drop ceilings, with either hanging or inset fluorescent lights. The plaster ceilings can still be seen in several of the rooms and hallways east of the auditorium. In each of these rooms, there is a hanging incandescent light. Throughout the building, the interior woodwork is dark. There are simple, classical door and window surrounds. Most of the 1924-25 doors remain. They are two-panel wood, with metal knobs and rectangular plates.

Most of the rooms in the Church are plain. The kitchen and the auditorium merit further description. In the kitchen, located in the southeast corner on the first floor, there is a long stainless steel countertop with built-in wooden drawers, and a stainless steel double sink. At the west end of the auditorium is the concrete balcony. The balcony wall is finished with plaster enriched with panels, and has a metal guardrail. At the east end is the deeply recessed chancel, with a raised floor and paneled plasterwork. The auditorium itself has a curved plaster ceiling, currently obscured by acoustical tile. There is a tall wood baseboard and a low wood chair rail all the way around the room. The walls are plaster both above and below the chair rail. On all but the west side, the walls are enriched with a series of monumental Doric pilasters supporting a tall entablature enriched with modillion blocks. The pilasters and entablature frame

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smaller, elongated Doric pilasters, a molding with a circular motif, and raised panels.

While very little of the 1874-75 appearance remain, the 1924-25 appearance of the Church retains a high degree of integrity. The exterior alterations are limited to the 1956 reconfiguration of the front entrance. The interior dates entirely from the 1924-25 remodeling, and is little changed since then.

The Church is located on the northeast corner of the intersection of North Main Street and Merritt Avenue, toward the north end of the historic section of Oshkosh's central business district. On each of the other three corners of this intersection, there is a late nineteenth century brick commercial building of similar scale and massing. There are one story commercial buildings north of the Church. To the east (rear) is an empty lot. The Boys' Club purchased it in the 1970s, and used the lot for sports activities.

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Section 8 Page 1

First Methodist Church  
Oshkosh, Winnebago County, WI

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Summary

The First Methodist Church (Church) is architecturally significant at the state level under National Register criterion C. It is a rare example of an urban multi-use church and commercial structure, with excellent integrity.

Historical Context

Although the fur trade brought a handful of pioneers of European descent to Winnebago County as early as 1818, it was not until the Treaty of the Cedars was signed that the area that is present day Oshkosh was truly opened up for settlement. With this treaty, the Menominee ceded to the United States government all the land north of Lake Butte des Morts and the Fox River between the Wolf River and Lake Winnebago. Settlers were quick to arrive and begin farming. Within 15 years all traces of the fur traders disappeared.<sup>7</sup>

Oshkosh grew slowly during the late 1830s and early 1840s. In 1846, settlers began arriving in earnest to take advantage of Oshkosh's location on the navigable Fox River and near the pine forests to the north and west. In 1847, two steam lumber mills were established, and the industry that would spur Oshkosh's phenomenal growth was born. In early 1849, the population of the village reached 500. By 1850, Oshkosh had become the county seat, and its population had nearly tripled, standing at 1,392. In 1853, Oshkosh incorporated as a city.<sup>8</sup>

The city grew rapidly during the 1850s, but it was not until the arrival of the railroad in 1859, vastly improving the transportation network for delivering lumber products, that Oshkosh

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<sup>7</sup>James I. Metz, ed., Prairie, Pines and People: Winnebago County, A New Perspective, Oshkosh: Oshkosh Northwestern Company, 1976, pp. 131-135.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.; and Howard, Needles, Tammen and Bergendoff, (HNTB), Final Report of the Intensive Historic Resource Survey for the City of Oshkosh, Wisconsin, September, 1981, pp. 4-6.

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Section 8 Page 2

First Methodist Church  
Oshkosh, Winnebago County, WI

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really began to expand. As a result of improved transportation and an increased need for lumber products brought about by the Civil War, Oshkosh boomed during the 1860s. In 1860, the city's population was 6,086. By 1870, the population had more than doubled, reaching 12,663. Despite a nationwide recession, Oshkosh continued to boom during the 1870s. In 1875, the population was 17,000.<sup>9</sup>

By the end of the 1870s, the growth of the lumber industry in Oshkosh began to slow. The clearing of the forests closest to the City meant that raw materials were further and further away from the mills in Oshkosh. The sawmill industry followed. As the importance of the lumber industry declined in Oshkosh, other industries began to appear. For example, the Paine Lumber Company became the city's largest employer and the world's largest sash and door factory. As Oshkosh's industrial base changed, the demographics of the population changed as well. The early settlers were primarily Yankees. Following the Civil War, German and Irish immigrants arrived to work in the city's factories. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, many Poles, Scandinavians and ethnic Germans from the Volga River region of Russia settled in Oshkosh. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Oshkosh was second only to Milwaukee in population in the state.<sup>10</sup>

Methodists were the first to hold Christian services in Oshkosh. The first such meeting took place in the summer of 1839 at the home of pioneer Webster Stanley. In 1840, the Methodists established a congregation, and by 1843, were served by a circuit-riding minister. In 1851, the Methodists became the first to build a church in Oshkosh. The original First Methodist Church stood on the northwest corner of the intersection of Church and Division Streets. After enlarging this building twice, the Methodists sold it to the Presbyterians in 1874. On November 26, 1874, the

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<sup>9</sup>HNTB, pp. 4-6 and 16.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

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First Methodist Church  
Oshkosh, Winnebago County, WI

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Methodists bought the Wagner Opera House at 502 North Main Street.<sup>11</sup>

The Wagner Opera House was built for Captain William Wagner. Wagner had settled in Oshkosh as early as 1857; he is listed as a grocer in the city directory for that year. In 1868, Wagner is listed as a saloonkeeper. The 1869 directory marks the first appearance of his opera house, called Wagner's Hall, on the northeast corner of Main and Merritt. During the 1870s, Oshkosh's downtown suffered several major fires. One of these occurred on May 9, 1874. Wagner's Hall burned down. Wagner had partially rebuilt the structure up to the second story when another fire, on July 14, 1874, badly damaged the structure. He began to rebuild again, but due to financial difficulties was forced to sell the building.<sup>12</sup>

The 1868 opera house was quite different from the 1874 design. The 1868 building was two stories and quite simple, with a series of round-arched openings on both the first and second floors of the North Main Street facade.<sup>13</sup> A detailed description in the Oshkosh Weekly Northwestern of how the 1874 opera house would look when finished illustrates how much more ornate the new opera house was.<sup>14</sup> Prominent Oshkosh architect William Waters probably designed the 1874 opera house. It is not known whether he designed

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<sup>11</sup>Clinton F. Karstaedt, editor, Oshkosh, One Hundred Years a City, 1853-1953, (Oshkosh: Oshkosh Centennial, Incorporated, 1953), pp. 137-38; HNTB, pp. 69-70; and OWN, November 26, 1874, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup>Richard J. Harney, Oshkosh City Directory and Rebuilt Oshkosh Illustrated, (Oshkosh: Allen and Hicks, 1876), p. 77; Charles Kohlmann, compiler, Oshkosh City Directory for the Year 1857, (Oshkosh: Charles Kohlmann and Brother, and F.C. Messinger, 1857); and James M. Thomas, compiler, Oshkosh City Directory and Business Advertiser for 1868 and 1869, (Oshkosh: Daily Northwestern Book and Job Printing House, 1868).

<sup>13</sup>Karstaedt, engraving reproduced on p. 204.

<sup>14</sup>OWN, November 5, 1874.

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the 1868 opera house, or planned the 1875 church conversion.<sup>15</sup>

The Methodists purchased the Wagner Opera House for \$20,000. They spent an additional \$12,375 to complete and furnish the building. The building was dedicated as the First Methodist Church on April 4, 1875. The Church was changed little over the next 50 years. In 1912, stained glass windows and electric lights were installed, and the janitor's apartment, at the east end on the first floor, was remodeled into a dining room and kitchen for the parishioners. By 1923, the Church no longer served the congregation adequately. New facilities were needed, and the old building was thought to be a fire hazard. The Methodists began a fund-raising campaign and debated whether to build a new church, or remodel the old. In May, 1924 it was estimated that it would cost \$140,000 to raze the old building and erect another, whereas the old one could be remodeled for about \$78,000. The congregation decided in favor of remodeling. The Oshkosh architectural firm of (Henry) Auler and (James P.) Jensen was selected to prepare the plans. Remodeling began in July, 1924 and was completed in March, 1925. The interior was completely gutted, and rebuilt in concrete and steel with a floor plan similar to the original. On the exterior, the first floor storefronts and entrances were reconfigured, three tall round-arched windows were installed on the south facade to light the auditorium, and the brick veneer on the south and west facades were replaced. At the roofline, the cornice and the tower were removed, and a brick parapet built. The church was rededicated on March 29, 1925. The actual cost of the remodeling totaled \$120,000. Because much of the more than \$100,000 in pledges was never paid, the congregation struggled with a large mortgage, and lost the Church to foreclosure in 1937. With great difficulty, the congregation was able to repurchase the building at Sheriff's auction in 1938. The last structural alteration to the Church took place in 1956, when the main entrance was remodeled by architects

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<sup>15</sup>Wagner Opera House/First Methodist Church Intensive Survey Form, *ibid.*



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Auler, Dreger, Wiley and Wertsch.<sup>16</sup>

In 1970, a new First United Methodist Church was completed at 700 West Linwood Avenue, and the old building was leased to the Boys' Club of Oshkosh, Incorporated (Boys' Club). The Boys' Club purchased the building in 1974. The Boys' Club built a new building at 501 East Parkway Avenue in 1993. The Church was vacant briefly in 1993.<sup>17</sup> In November, 1993, the Place 2 B Limited, a non-profit corporation, purchased the property. It is now operated as a homeless shelter and for other humanitarian purposes.

Architectural Significance

The First Methodist Church is architecturally significant at the state level under Criterion C, as a rare example of an urban multi-use church and commercial structure. The integrity of its 1924-25 redesign and remodeling is excellent.

The document, Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin (Wyatt) does not discuss urban multi-use church and commercial structures.<sup>18</sup> Only one other such building has been identified in the state. The Court Street Methodist Church in Janesville (NRHP) is strikingly similar to the First Methodist Church, both in architectural detail and in plan. Built in 1868, the Court Street Church is a three-story brick structure, with Italianate ornamentation and a French Second Empire mansard roof. There are stores on the first floor; and on the second and third floors, a two-story auditorium and several classrooms. The Minutes of the

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<sup>16</sup>Harney, p. 9; "A Century of Service: 1840-1940," no page numbers; ODN, March 8, 1924; March 25, 1924 and May 10, 1924; Auler and Jensen, plans; Karstaedt, p. 137; and Auler, Dreger, Wiley and Wertsch, plans.

<sup>17</sup>Annual Report of the Boys' Club of Oshkosh, 1984, p. 3; ODN, July 7, 1980; and ODN, June 12, 1993.

<sup>18</sup>Barbara L. Wyatt, ed., Cultural Resource Management In Wisconsin, (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1986), 2:2-6 and 2-11.

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Wisconsin Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, from its meeting held in the Court Street Church in October, 1870, describe the building at length. The presence of shops on the first floor is mentioned without comment.<sup>19</sup> This suggests that having commercial space in a church building was not seen as unusual. In The Architectural Expression of Methodism, author George Dolbey notes that from the founding of the sect in England in 1728, Methodists typically built or converted buildings for multiple uses, often combining worship, social and educational facilities.<sup>20</sup> Dolbey does not describe any churches which incorporated commercial use, although there may have been some. It is not known why the congregation of the Court Street Church planned a commercial/church mixed use building, although it seems likely to have been for economic reasons.<sup>21</sup> In its early 20th century publication, Building the Seven-Day-A-Week Church, the Bureau of Architecture of the Methodist Church acknowledges that they received many inquiries regarding planning an income-producing church building and that, in some cases, it might not be possible "to maintain a building exclusively for church work in the city's center without commercial features."<sup>22</sup> The publication discourages commercial/church buildings, but cites the Chicago Temple and Central Church (Detroit) as successful examples.<sup>23</sup> It appears that in Wisconsin, the Court Street and First Methodist Churches were the only two of this type.

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<sup>19</sup>Reverend P.S. Bennett, History of Methodism in Wisconsin, (Cincinnati: Cranston and Stowe, 1890), p. 237.

<sup>20</sup>George W. Dolbey, The Architectural Expression of Methodism, (London: The Epworth Press, 1964), p. 50.

<sup>21</sup>Carol Cartwright, "South Main Street Historic District," National Register Nomination, Janesville, Wisconsin, July, 1989, p. 7-6.

<sup>22</sup>Bureau of Architecture of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Building the Seven-Day-A-Week Church, (Philadelphia: N.p., C.1920), p. 30.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

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First Methodist Church  
Oshkosh, Winnebago County, WI

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The First Methodist Church, therefore, is architecturally significant at a statewide level as a rare and unusual example of an architecturally distinctive property type. The building embodies a distinct arrangement of spaces to accommodate an unusual mixture of religious and retail activities. Its urban, commercial location, arrangement of commercial spaces on the first floor and auditorium on the second, and the segregation of entrances, is a distinctive architectural form which appears to be quite rare in Wisconsin. The building contributes greatly to understanding the variety and complexity of ecclesiastical design in the state.

Criteria Considerations

Ordinarily, properties owned by religious institutions or used for religious purposes are not eligible for the National Register. Although the Church was historically a church, it is significant for its architecture, not its religious affiliation. Therefore, the Church is not disqualified from listing in the National Register.

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Map of the City of Oshkosh, Winnebago County. Pittsburgh: George Harrison, 1858.

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Verbal Boundary Description

Lot 1, Block 1, Merritt's Addition to the City of Oshkosh,  
Winnebago County, Wisconsin.

Verbal Boundary Justification

This property includes the entire parcel that is historically  
associated with the First Methodist Church.

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Photo 1 of 10  
First Methodist Church  
Oshkosh, Winnebago County, WI  
Photo by Elizabeth L. Miller, September 1993  
Negative on file at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin  
North and west (front) facades

The information is the same as the above for the following photos,  
except as noted:

Photo 2 of 10  
West (front) facade

Photo 3 of 10  
West and south facades

Photo 4 of 10  
South facade

Photo 5 of 10  
East (rear) facade

Photo 6 of 10  
North and east (rear) facades


Photo 7 of 10  
Interior of Merritt Avenue storefront, looking south

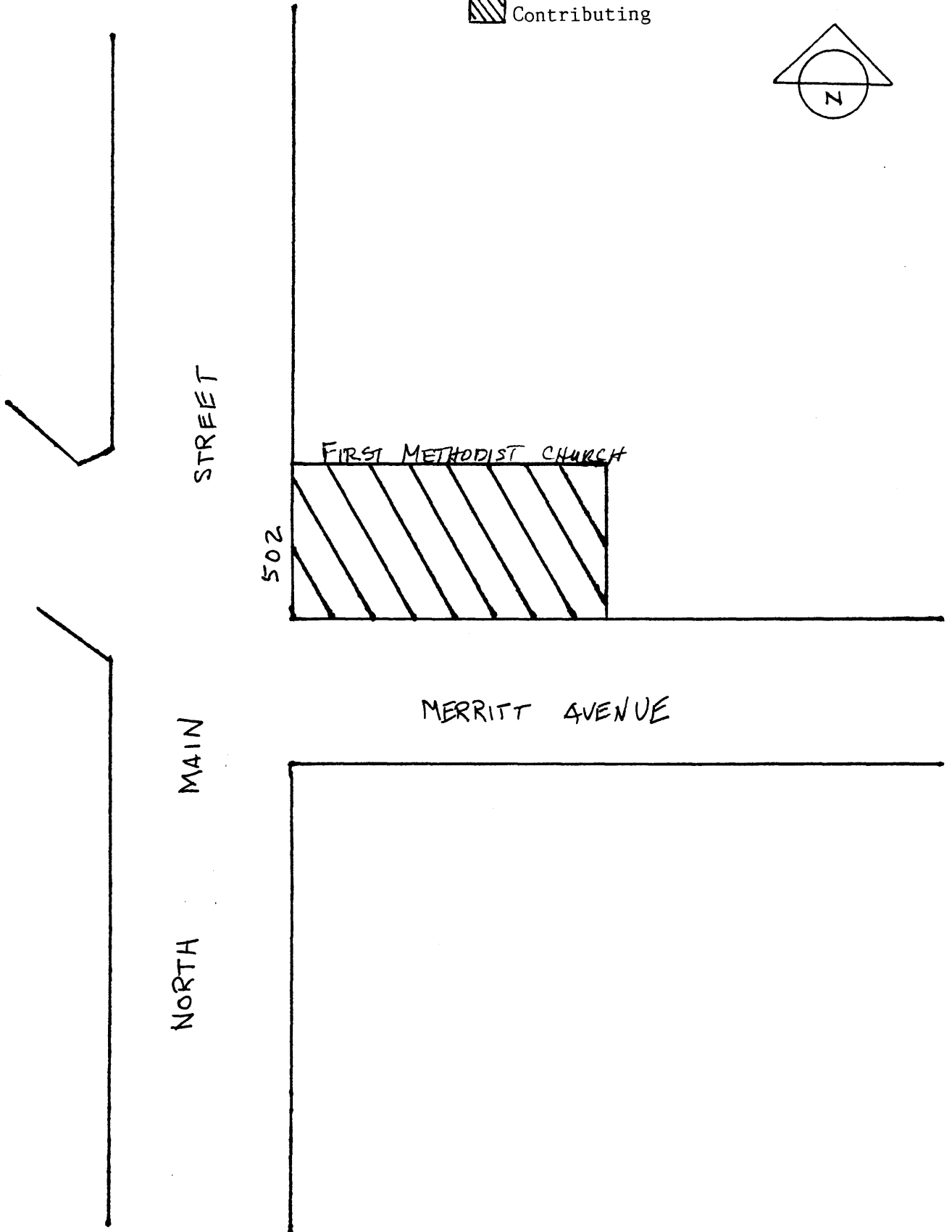
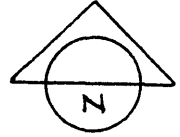
Photo 8 of 10  
Auditorium, looking east

Photo 9 of 10  
Auditorium, looking southwest

Photo 10 of 10  
Auditorium, looking northeast

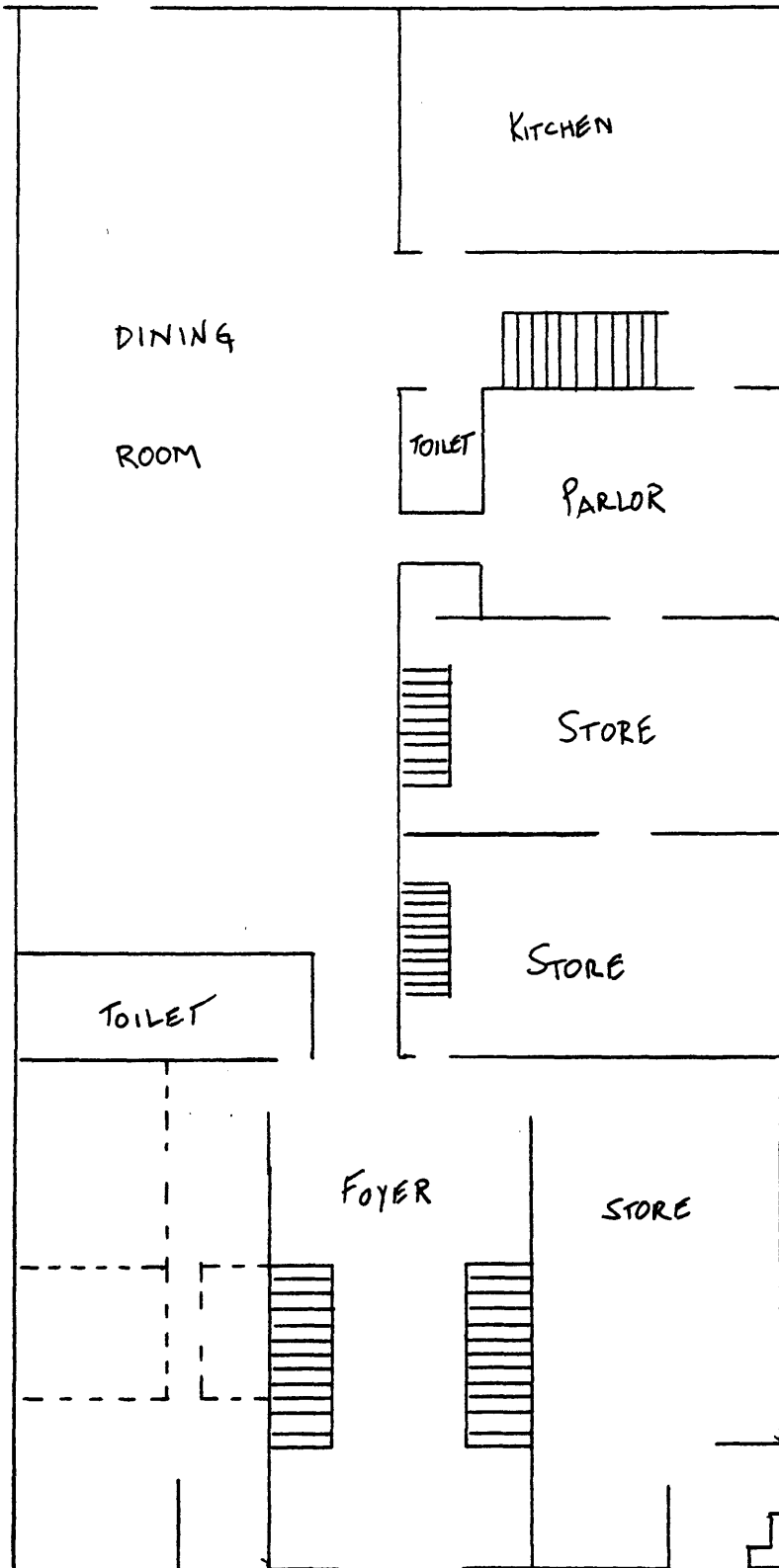
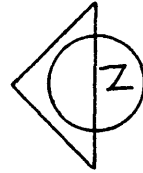
First Methodist Church  
502 North Main Street  
Oshkosh, Winnebago County, WI  
Scale: 1" = 50'

 Contributing



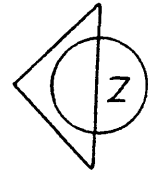
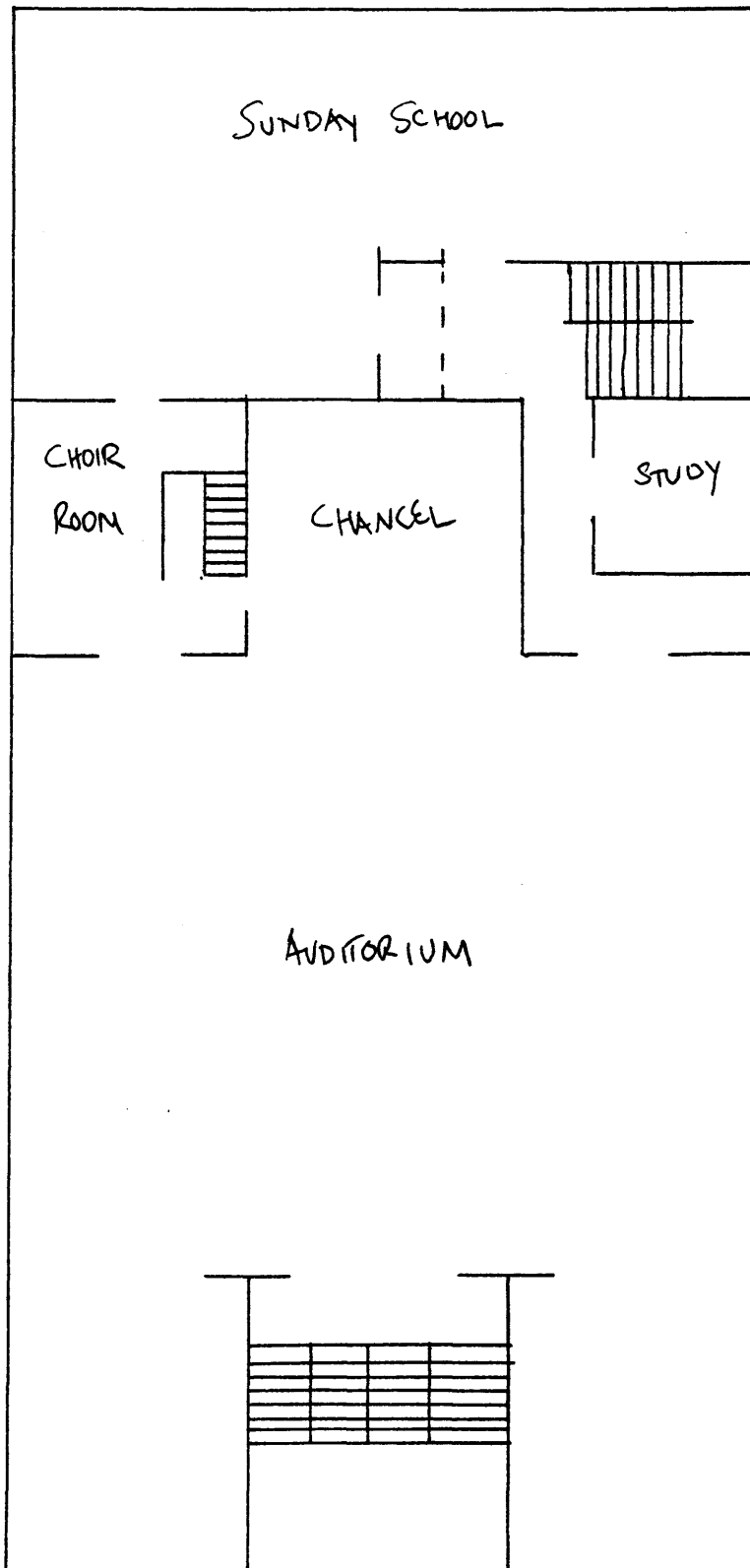


First Methodist Church  
502 North Main Street  
Oshkosh, Winnebago County, WI  
Scale: 1" = 16'  
- - - Post-1950 partition wall



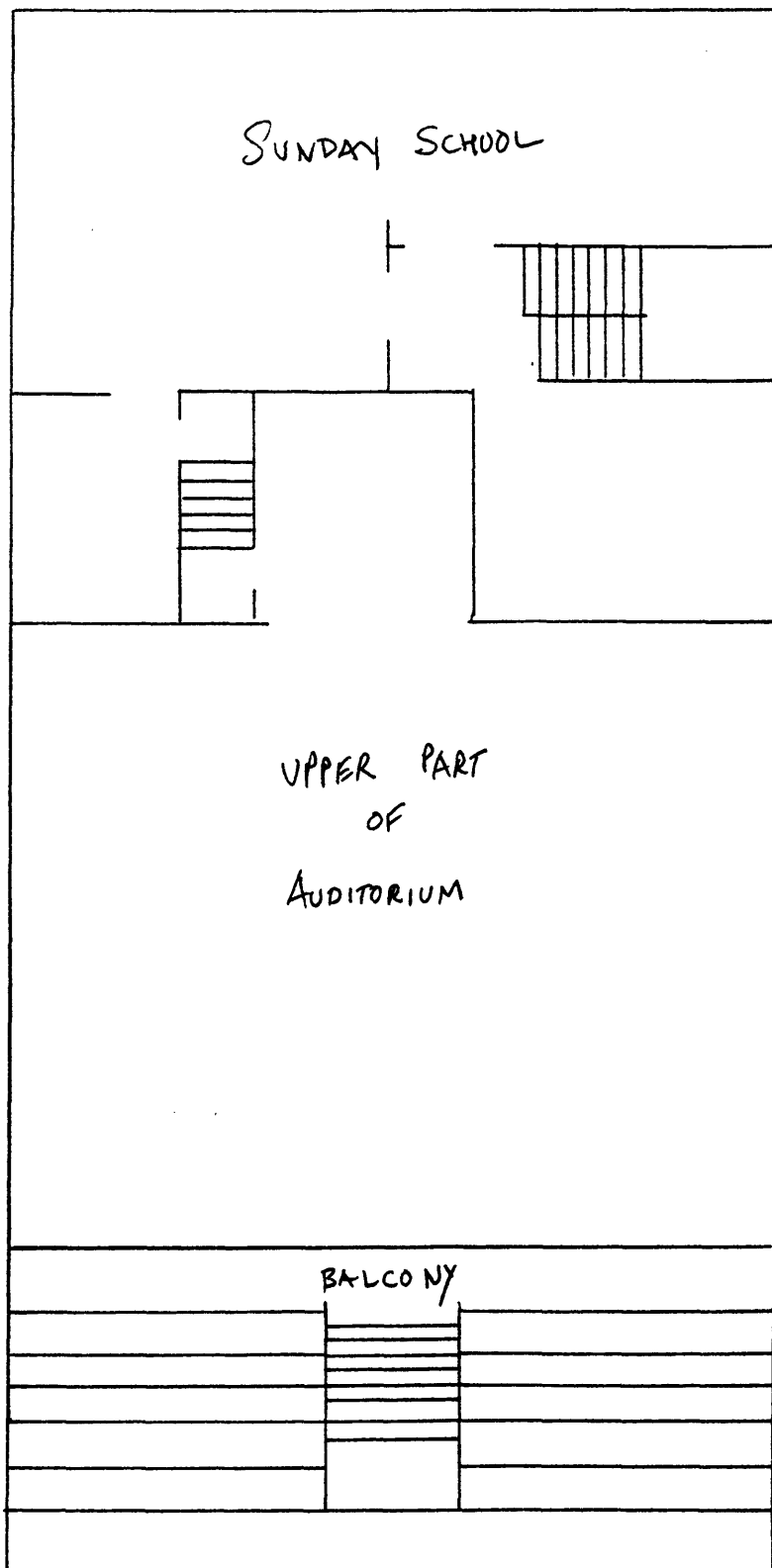
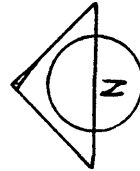
FIRST FLOOR

First Methodist Church  
502 North Main Street  
Oshkosh, Winnebago County, WI  
Scale: 1" = 16'  
----- Post-1950 partition wall



SECOND FLOOR

First Methodist Church  
502 North Main Street  
Oshkosh, Winnebago County, WI  
Scale: 1" = 16'



THIRD FLOOR