

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 Presbyterian Church

other names/site number NA

2. Location

street & number 166 Poplar Avenue

not for publication N/A

city or town Memphis

vicinity N/A

state Tennessee code TN county Shelby code 157 zip code 38104

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. Gayle
Signature of certifying official/Title

1/31/05
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:)

Edson H. Beall
Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

3/15/05

First Presbyterian Church
Name of Property

Shelby Co., Tennessee
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)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> public-local | <input type="checkbox"/> district |
| <input type="checkbox"/> public-State | <input type="checkbox"/> site |
| <input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal | <input type="checkbox"/> structure |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> object |

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

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

Historic Religious Resources of Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/religious facility

RELIGION/religious facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

Romanesque Revival

foundation BRICK
walls BRICK
roof ASPHALT/asphalt shingles
other GLASS/stained glass windows
TERRA COTTA

Narrative Description

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

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 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 year 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): N/A

- 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)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1884 - 1955

Significant Dates

N/A

Significant Person

(complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Jones, Edward Culliat (1822-1902)

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository:

Tennessee Historical Commission

First Presbyterian Church
Name of Property

Shelby Co., Tennessee
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property Less than one acre NW Memphis TN-AK 404 NE

UTM References

(place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>15</u> Zone	<u>768856</u> Easting	<u>3893656</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 John Linn Hopkins
organization Hopkins & Associates date May, 2004
street & number 974 Philadelphia Street telephone (901) 278-5186
city or town Memphis state TN zip code 38104

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 First Presbyterian Church, c/o Pastor C.V. Scarborough
street & number 166 Poplar Avenue telephone (901) 525-5619
city or town Memphis state TN zip code 38103

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.

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First Presbyterian Church
Shelby County, Tennessee

VII. Architectural Description

First Presbyterian Church is the third Presbyterian church to occupy this site at the northwestern corner of Poplar Avenue and North Third Street in downtown Memphis since 1834. The existing church sanctuary dates from 1884, having been built to replace the original church destroyed by fire in the previous year. The existing church was designed as a load-bearing brick masonry building in the Romanesque Revival style by Edward Culliett Jones (1822-1902), and while the general style and massing of the building harkens back to Romanesque Revival churches and public buildings designed before the Civil War by the likes of Pugin, Butterfield, and Renwick, Jones updated the style by introducing Aesthetic-styled unglazed terra cotta elements to key locations of the façade. As was often the case with urban churches of the 19th century, the sanctuary of the church is located on a second level, raised above an area developed for the Sunday School rooms and fellowship hall on the first level. Additions and alterations to the building were carried out in 1928 and 1955 to create the existing church complex as it appears today.

The church occupies an urban site at the intersection of Poplar Avenue and North Third Street, two of the busiest major streets in downtown Memphis. The church and its additions are separated from the sidewalks at the streets by setbacks ranging from 0' to 10', which permits only minimal landscaping along the street frontages. To the west, the church complex is separated from its neighbor, First Methodist Church (204 North Second Street, NR 3/19/1976) by the width of a 10' alley. To the north, the church has developed a parking area for its use on the half block stretching to Market Street.

The basic form of the church is contained under a gable roof with its axis aligned perpendicular to Poplar Avenue, with a smaller gable-front narthex offset at one corner to allow the church's tower to rise at the street corner with North Third Street. The organization and the massing of First Presbyterian Church are quite similar to that of St. Wilfred's Church at Hulme, Manchester, designed by A. W. N. Pugin in 1839-1842.

The front (south) façade of the building is four bays in width across the main block of the church sanctuary; three of these bays are made up of the narthex, and one additional bay is allowed for the tower. The narthex projects forward of the main block of the church by the equivalent of one bay in depth; the tower is set back from the front building line of the narthex by a half-bay. The coping of the gable end is corbelled with simple bands. The façade of the narthex, like all of the facades of the 1884 sanctuary, is divided between each bay by engaged buttresses. On the narthex alone, the buttresses extend through the line of the gable end and are capped with octagonal

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pinnacles of stone. The façade of the narthex is divided horizontally by three corbelled belt courses, each made up of two bands of blackened brick laid as stretchers above and below a band of unburned brick laid as a soldier course. On the second level of the narthex is a triptych composed of three windows topped with corbelled Romanesque arches; the center and largest arch features a terra cotta keystone decorated with a sunflower motif, while the spring lines of each arch are decorated with a foliated terra cotta medallion. The windows contain upper ocular sashes above arched lower sashes. This motif is repeated in the sashes of the larger windows that flank the entrance on the lower story. The entrance is set in a Romanesque-arched reveal with a sunflower-motif keystone; the entrance contains a ca. 1928 replacement wood paneled double-door beneath a semi-circular arched half-wheel transom with robustly turned muntins. The small exposed area of the front (south) façade of main block of the church is recessed behind the narthex and features a stepped corbelled cornice and a small ocular cast iron vent.

The church's square tower rises in five stages from the southeast corner of the building to a height that is just above that of the peak of the main roof. The lowest three stages of the tower are the only ones remaining from the extraordinary tower and steeple Edward Culliat Jones designed for the church in 1884. The upper two stages, including its belfry, were built to replace the original when the building was renovated in 1928. The lower stages of the tower continue the design treatment and lines of the building as seen on the narthex of the front façade. A side (east) entrance is provided through the base of the tower from North Third Street; its semi-circular arched design with wheel-like transom and paneled double doors mimics the principal entrance on the front façade in reduced scale; its radiating brick arch also contains a terra cotta keystone with a sunflower motif. On the south flanking side of the tower is a semi-circular arched window with the ocular top sash and arched lower sash, again, following the design of the windows of the narthex in reduced scale. Above this window and the entrance doors are ocular windows with the spoke-like turned muntins of the same design as the transoms of the front and side doors. On the (front) and east (side) face of the third level of the tower are a series of three Romanesque arches set within a recessed panel, each with a radiating brick arched reveal containing a single sash stained glass light. A corbelled modillion-like cornice stretches across the panel above the window groups.

The two 1928 stages of the tower rise above the remaining portions of the base built in 1884. The first stage has three simple blind rectangular panels on each face. The belfry is the final stage of the existing tower. The open belfry is composed of an arcade of three stone Romanesque Revival arches, with thin columns with Tuscan shafts and Romanesque cushion capitals. Above the

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arcades are a cornice of stone belt courses and brick spandrels, topped with an arched stone Romanesque cornice and coping.

The side (east) façade of the 1884 church extends six bays to the north of the tower, and it has more of the semi-circular arched Romanesque windows on the first and second levels, treated in the same way as the windows of the front façade. The polychrome brick belt courses continue to define the horizontal divisions of the façade, while engaged buttresses define the vertical divisions between bays.



The opposite façade (west) of the church is a mirror image of the east side, but without the appendage of the tower. The west façade of the narthex features a single, tall semi-circular arched window, which provides light to the stair of the narthex.

Additions were made to the church in 1928 and again in 1955. Appended to the rear (north) façade of the church is the two-story 1928 Sunday School wing, which extends ten bays beneath a gable roof on axis perpendicular with the

line of North Third Street. The portion of the addition facing North Third Street was very sensitively designed to blend with the character of the original structure by employing semi-circular arched window reveals with radiating brick arches that contain 1/1 double-hung sash lights. The horizontal lines of the stories are marked with corbelled belt courses designed to mimic, but not copy those of the original building by using plain red brick laid in stretcher courses above and below a soldier course. The north side of the addition has pairs of 1/1 double-hung sashes set in plain rectangular reveals. A rear entrance to the addition is offset on the length of the façade, directly in line with the axis of the main church. The entrance contains a metal-frame double door covered with a deep gable-roofed porte-cochere supported by brick piers, added ca. 1985.



The second addition made in 1955 was built on to the west end of the 1928 addition, thereby extending its northern façade by two bays. The newer addition is aligned on an axis parallel to the

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main church and extending ten bays towards Poplar Avenue, thus completing the U-shaped plan of the complex in evidence today. The 1955 addition was also sensitively designed to fit in with the character of the original building by employing a Romanesque Revival treatment of the façade rendered with restrained Modernist influences. The five-bay wide façade has a center section which projects slightly in front of one-bay wide flat roofed "wings"; the center section has a false gabled parapet that projects above the flat roof line. The parapet has a corbelled stone cornice with running arched modillions. At center in the façade is a two-story semi-circular blind arch; set within the blind arch is another semi-circular blind arch on the first level, and above it, an ocular window with a superimposed stone cross. Semi-circular arched windows flank the center blind arch panel on both the first and second story levels. The side and rear facades of the addition are simply detailed and have rectangular window reveals containing either single or paired double-hung sashes.

The interior of First Presbyterian Church retains much of its original 1884 fabric and design, though some alterations were made when the 1928 renovation program was carried out. The first story of the narthex has a stair leading to the sanctuary on the west end, and at the opposite end is an elevator core that was unobtrusively added to the space for access to the upper sanctuary. The ceiling of the room is finished with a grid system of oak beams, which were installed in the 1928 renovation.

Beyond the elevator core and through an archway is a groin-vaulted vestibule for the side entrance of the church in the corner tower. The interior finish of the vestibule is notable for its original struck plaster finish, which offers the appearance of stone blocks. Opposite the entrance from Poplar Avenue is a doorway leading to the fellowship hall of the church. The door has an oak back-banded Greek Revival entablature installed in 1928 around the original semi-circular arched doorway.

The fellowship hall occupies about half of the space on the first floor beneath the sanctuary; the remaining space was taken up by a hall and two rooms originally used for Sunday School rooms and now used for the pastor's office and other purposes. The fellowship hall has a small dais set against the west wall, and an oak-beamed ceiling supported by paneled oak piers. The fellowship hall was converted for use as a chapel following the construction of a larger facility in the 1955 addition to the church.

Back in the narthex, the stair leading to the sanctuary on the second level is superbly crafted and detailed with turnings, carved fans and other Aesthetic motifs. As one ascends the stair, architect

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Jones provided the visitor with a surprise, as the low ceiling of the first floor gives way to the sweeping view of the huge volume of the second, where the ceiling extends to the gabled peak of the roof of the narthex some 20 or 25 feet above the floor. The ceiling is finished with exposed sheathing and purlins, all stained a dark walnut brown, "supported" by a two-lobed hammer beam truss system exposed on the surface of the front and interior masonry walls, in contrast with the light color of the plaster walls. The entrances to the sanctuary have oak back-banded Greek Revival entablatures like those installed in 1928 on the floor below. The outline of the original semi-circular arched openings can be seen in the plaster above each opening; the openings are still expressed on the interior side of the sanctuary.

Unlike the second floor of the narthex, though, the ceiling of the sanctuary is much lower in height and is covered with plaster, giving the space an intimate feel. A decorative grid of beams is applied to the surface, and areas of the grid have square or lozenge-shaped beamed panels set into them. The light fixtures suspended from the beams appear to date from the 1928 renovation of the building. The walls of the sanctuary are finished with plaster above a bead board wainscot. The pews are original to the building and are detailed with the fan motif and others also used in the decoration of the stair in the narthex. The dais and pulpit are largely original to the building. The short stair to the dais and choir is finished with bead board, and its newels have ball finials. The solid altar rail, originally finished with bead board, was covered on the side facing the congregation with paneling of red gum. This alteration appears consistent with the rest of the work on the church completed in 1928.

The interior of the 1928 addition was designed to contain a dozens or more small classroom spaces, church offices, bathrooms, and storage spaces on two floors, spread out along a single-loaded corridor; the stair connecting the floors also provides a rear access to the sanctuary next to the dais.

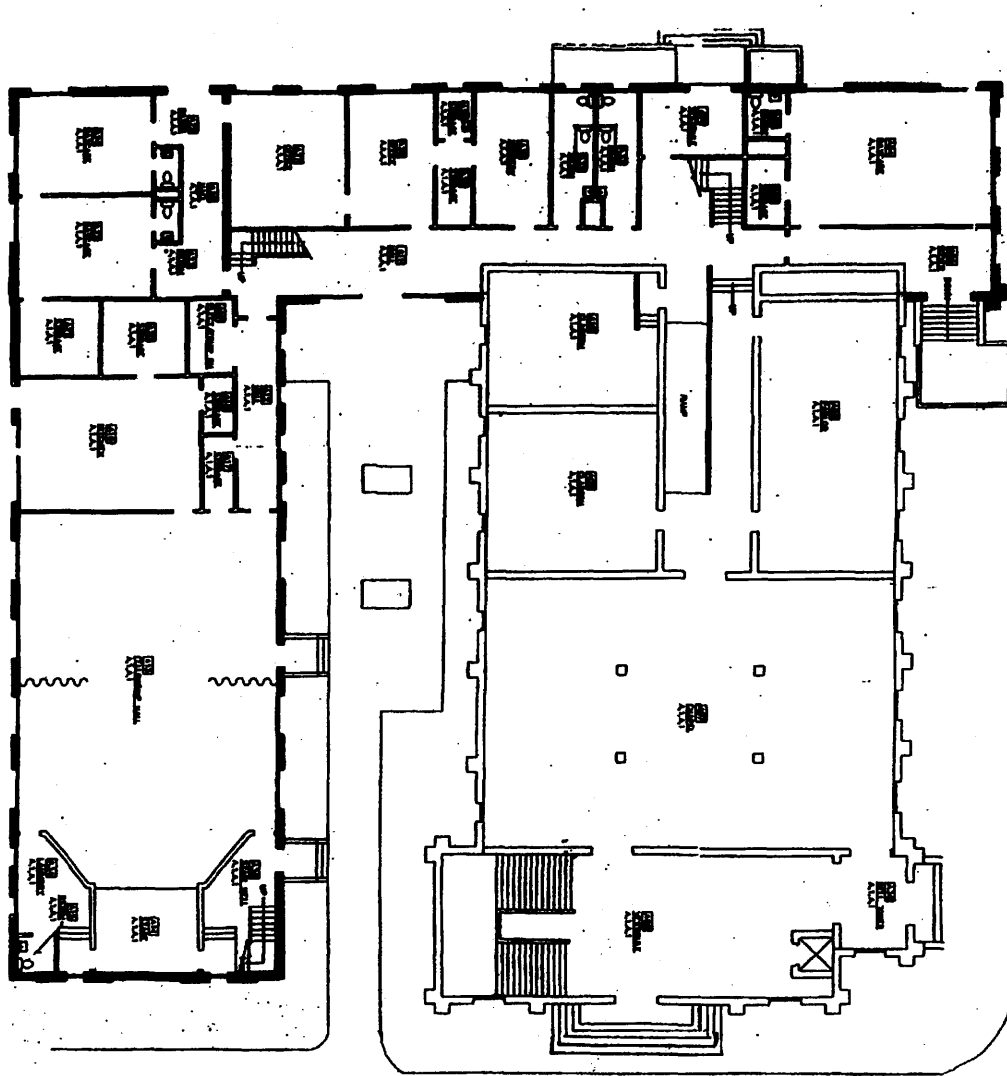
The interior of this addition was designed for additional classroom, bathroom and storage uses accessible by a double-loaded corridor; however, the first floor also contains a large auditorium-like space and kitchen, originally used for the church's fellowship hall but now given over for use as a day care facility.

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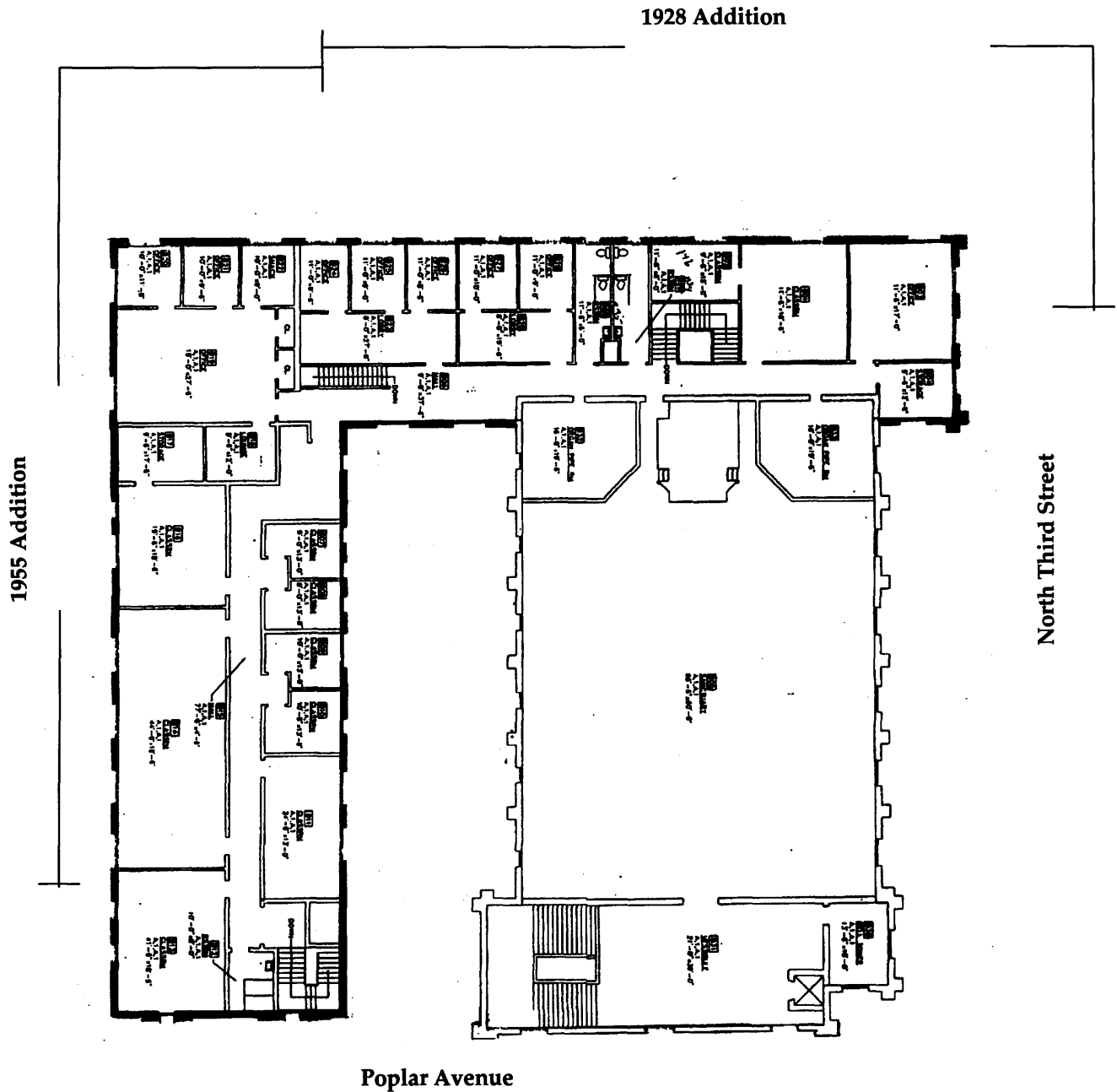
Plan of the ground (first) floor of First Presbyterian Church.

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Plan of the second floor level of First Presbyterian Church.

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VIII. Statement of Significance

First Presbyterian Church is nominated under criterion C in the area of architecture as a significant example of the Romanesque Revival style as applied to a church building. Constructed in 1883-1884 to the plans of Edward Culliat Jones (1822-1902), one of Memphis' most notable 19th century architects, the building's Romanesque Revival design was detailed with elements of the Aesthetic Movement just beginning in America, which is a decorative trend most closely associated with Charles Eastlake and the publication of his *Hints on Household Taste*, published in England in the same year as the opening of First Presbyterian Church. First Presbyterian Church remains as one of only two public or large-scale buildings extant in the city today that possess significant elements of the Aesthetic Movement phase of the Romanesque Revival style. The nomination of this property is consistent with the registration requirements and standards for architectural integrity set forward in the Multiple Property Submission "Historic Residential Resources of Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee".

The origins of First Presbyterian Church can be traced to June of 1828, when a small group of Presbyterians organized a congregation under the leadership of the Rev. W. C. Blair. The congregation first met in private homes, moving a year or so later to the community "Meeting House" in Court Square, a building also used as a schoolhouse and as a public meeting hall for the community. In 1832, the Mayor and Aldermen deeded a former cemetery lot at the corner of Poplar and Third streets to the Presbyterians for the construction of their church. The congregation's first church building was ready for occupancy in 1834.

The church grew rapidly with the influx of new residents, some migrating from traditionally strong Presbyterian areas of the country like the Piedmont region of Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina, the Cumberland Plateau, and mountains of East Tennessee. The pace of growth was sufficient enough to cause First Presbyterian Church to establish its first mission by organizing Second Presbyterian Church in 1844 in the independent city of South Memphis (Second Presbyterian Church [Clayborn Temple] NR 9/4/1979). A second mission would follow in 1856 with the organization of Third Presbyterian Church on Chelsea Avenue (part Greenlaw Addition Historic District NR 8/16/1984).

The congregation of First Presbyterian Church had begun to outgrow its original building by the early 1850s, and a new, larger church was completed in 1854, described as a "beautiful Gothic building" that was built at a cost of \$33,000 (*Commercial-Appeal* January 1, 1940). Unfortunately, no illustrations or photographs of this building are known to exist. A detailed description of the

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building is quoted in a publication by First Presbyterian Church at the time of its 150th anniversary celebration in 1978 (Anonymous 1978:n.p.)

The history of the existing church building began on January 15, 1883, when the earlier building caught fire and burned. All accounts of the fire suggest that the building was "destroyed" by the conflagration. The church retained the services of the noted architect Edward Culliatt Jones (1822 - 1902) to design the new building, and its construction was completed within twelve months of the 1883 fire. Jones was a noted architect in Charleston before moving to Memphis immediately after the Civil War, and he quickly became an architect in high demand once his practice was established in Memphis. While Jones was responsible for a number of major commissions in Memphis during his career, both as an independent architect as well as in partnership with Mathias Harvey Baldwin (1827-1891), very few of the buildings remain extant today. The surviving buildings associated with Jones' career include the John S. Toof House (1875, 246 Adams Avenue, NR 3/27/1982), the Mette-Blount House (1872, 253 Adams Avenue, part Adams Avenue Historic District NR 11/25/1980), the Dr. D. T. Porter Building (1894, 10 North Main Street, NR 4/18/1979), the central wing of the Potter-Leath Home (1875, 850 Manassas Street, NR 5/8/1979), the Woodruff-Fontaine House (1870-1871, 680 Adams Avenue, part Victorian Village Historic District NR 12/11/1972), the renovations to the Goyer-Lee House (1871-1873, 690 Adams Avenue, part Victorian Village Historic District NR 12/11/1972), the First Baptist Church, Beale Street (1867-1881, 379 Beale Street, NR 2/11/1971), and his collaboration with Franklin B. Long and Frederick Kees of Minneapolis in the construction of Second Presbyterian Church (1891-1892, 280 Hernando Street, a.k.a. Clayborn Temple), the only other late-nineteenth century Romanesque Revival church extant in the city today.

Jones' choice of the Romanesque Revival for the design of First Presbyterian Church was not surprising, given that Henry Hobson Richardson had already begun to receive public attention for the radically different approach to the style he had begun to pioneer in the 1870s. While Jones' design followed more of the Romanesque organization and styling of earlier buildings designed by James Renwick in America and Richard Norman Shaw and William Butterfield in England, the flatter surfaces and more restrained decoration of First Presbyterian shows some of the evolution towards Richardson's preferences for the expression of materials over decoration in the design of a building. In the case of First Presbyterian, Jones' selected a high-fired brick that possessed a subtle range of color and surface glazing to raise an otherwise plain surface to a new role in the overall design of the building. He also introduced details from the emerging Aesthetic movement into the decoration of the building, which can be seen in the sunflower motifs found in the keystones and

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bosses of the exterior, and the fan motifs on the stair of the narthex and on the ends of the pews in the sanctuary. As best as can be determined, First Presbyterian Church is at least the earliest surviving building in the city that reflects the growth of the Aesthetic movement in the late-19th century.

The relative speed for completing the design and construction of the new church for First Presbyterian is surprising under the best of circumstances, and relatively astonishing given that the city was still reeling from the effects of Yellow Fever in 1878 and 1879 and the loss in population that accompanied it. The numbers of skilled craftsmen in the community had been severely depleted during the epidemics, and yet, the city was in the midst of something of a building boom by 1883-1884. Apart from the construction of First Presbyterian Church, also under construction were the Exchange Building (1883-1885, Madison Avenue at Second Street, Mathias Henry Baldwin, architect), the new Temple Israel across the street from First Presbyterian (1883-1884, James B. Cook, architect), the B. Lowenstein and Brother Warehouse at Jefferson Avenue and Main Street (1882 to 1885, Mathias Henry Baldwin, architect, part Court Square Historic District NR 4/15/1982), and the narthex and tower addition to Central Baptist Church (1883-1885, 398 South Second Street, Edward Culliatt Jones, architect), and perhaps a dozen other major projects. Of these buildings, only the Lowenstein and Brother Warehouse is extant.

Jones' work on Central Baptist Church may offer some clue as to how it was possible for the construction of First Presbyterian Church to be rebuilt with such incredible speed. In the case of Central Baptist, Jones took a quite simple, two-story church completed in 1868, and completely transformed the design of the building into one of the greatest High Victorian Gothic structures in the city by adding a new narthex and grand tower to the façade. In the case of First Presbyterian, though, the project was a bit more ambitious. There is physical evidence visible in the structure that suggests that at least portions of the shell of the 1854 structure damaged by fire were saved and incorporated into the existing building. The physical evidence can be seen in the second story level of the tower, where the brick of the 1884 tower is clearly "toothed" as a repair into a different colored brick at the corner of the sanctuary wall. If so, this would explain the quite radical difference in appearance between the extraordinary design of the sweeping space of the narthex, as opposed to the lower, more restrained space of the sanctuary. The exterior masonry of the church would have had to have been entirely refaced to cover fire damage, unify the new and old construction, and alter the architectural design of the building from "Gothic" to Romanesque Revival. (A detailed investigation of historical records and the physical fabric of attic and other spaces to prove this hypothesis was simply not possible given the constraints of this project.)

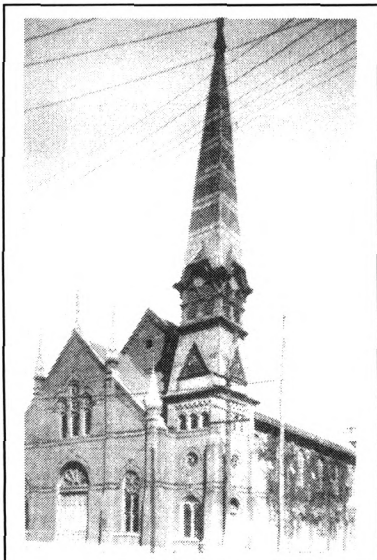
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Whether Jones was able to incorporate significant portions of the original church structure into the new building or not, a key element of the 1884 design was lost when the building was renovated in 1928 and its original spire replaced. The renovation coincided with the 100th anniversary of the founding of Presbyterian denomination in Memphis, perhaps fueled by the general loss in favor of Victorian design that accompanied the rise of Modernism in America. Jones' grand spire for First Presbyterian Church was less spectacular than the tower and spire for Central Baptist Church at the opposite end of the city, but it was still a bold statement of High Victorian Gothic Revival design. The spire rose from the third stage in the existing tower to the equivalent height of six stories by all appearances. The transition from masonry to frame construction was first made with a sloping Mansard-like roof with each facing having a large, triangular louvered gablet. The next stage above was a highly-decorated with pairs of Romanesque Revival arches set beneath an angular Gothic hood; the arches were filled with louvered panels and the space above the intersection of the arches was filled with a circular panel, as though this part of the steeple was intended for the installation of bells and a clock mechanism. Finally, the tall, gently tapered square spire extended upward to a tall finial, with its roof faces covered in distinct bands of polychrome slates. (See photo below.) The steeple was the most noticeable landmark of the skyline in the northern end of the downtown area, until it was rivaled by the spire of First Methodist Church, completed next door in 1893 (First Methodist Church NR 3/19/1976). When this spire was removed in 1928, other outward changes that occurred at this time included the removal of the original tall, High Victorian Gothic Revival pinnacles from the gable end of the narthex, and their replacement with the shorter ones in evidence today.



There may have been other reasons that motivated the church to "modernize" and expand its building with a new Sunday School wing in 1928. Five years earlier in 1923, Idlewild Presbyterian Church had formally proposed the merger of the two churches and to pool their resources to build a grand new church in "East Memphis", as it was called then, but known today as "Midtown" Memphis. Idlewild was already preparing the plan and the budget to support the building project (1926-1927, 1750 Union Avenue, George Awsumb, architect) and with the announcement earlier that year that the Presbyterian-affiliated Southwestern at Memphis College (now Rhodes College, NR 7/20/1978) would be relocating to Memphis and building a new campus on North

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Parkway, Idelwild's proposal may have been intended to create Midtown as the center for Presbyterianism in the city. No matter what the intent, Idlewild's proposal was turned down and First Presbyterian set about the development of its own building program, perhaps to insure that the spectacular church rising in Midtown would not drain congregants away from its church.

If First Presbyterian Church was concerned about losing congregants to Idlewild, its fears proved unfounded. The church continued to flourish, especially after Grace Convent Presbyterian (former Alabama Street Presbyterian Church) merged with it in 1935. The continued growth of the church following the merger led to the construction of the new Sunday School and fellowship hall wing in 1955. Unfortunately, the identities of the architects associated with the additions of 1928 and 1955 are not known.

In spite of the success of the church in surviving a loss of membership during the entire first half of the 20th century as the city expanded eastward, the rapid decline of the downtown area following the assassination of D. Martin Luther King, Jr. in April of 1968 was far less resistible in maintaining the congregation. By the mid-1970s, concerns were being expressed that First Presbyterian Church might be facing closure, as was a similar concern being faced by a number of other church congregations. First Presbyterian was able to weather the out-migration. Its merger with the congregations of Emmanuel Presbyterian Church and the Frayser Trinity Presbyterian Church in 1994 and 1996, respectively, bolstered the numbers of the church congregation, as did the contributions from the steady growth of a new population of downtown residents beginning in the mid-1980s. The church celebrated its 175th anniversary in 2003 with a growing congregation that is supporting a growing mission in its community.

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IX. Major Bibliographic References

Anonymous

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X. Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

The property in nomination occupies the eastern half of Block 163, lots 378 and 379 (2C and 5C) on the original town plan for the City of Memphis, as shown on the portions of the attached Shelby County Tax Maps F-7A and E-7C.

Boundary Justification

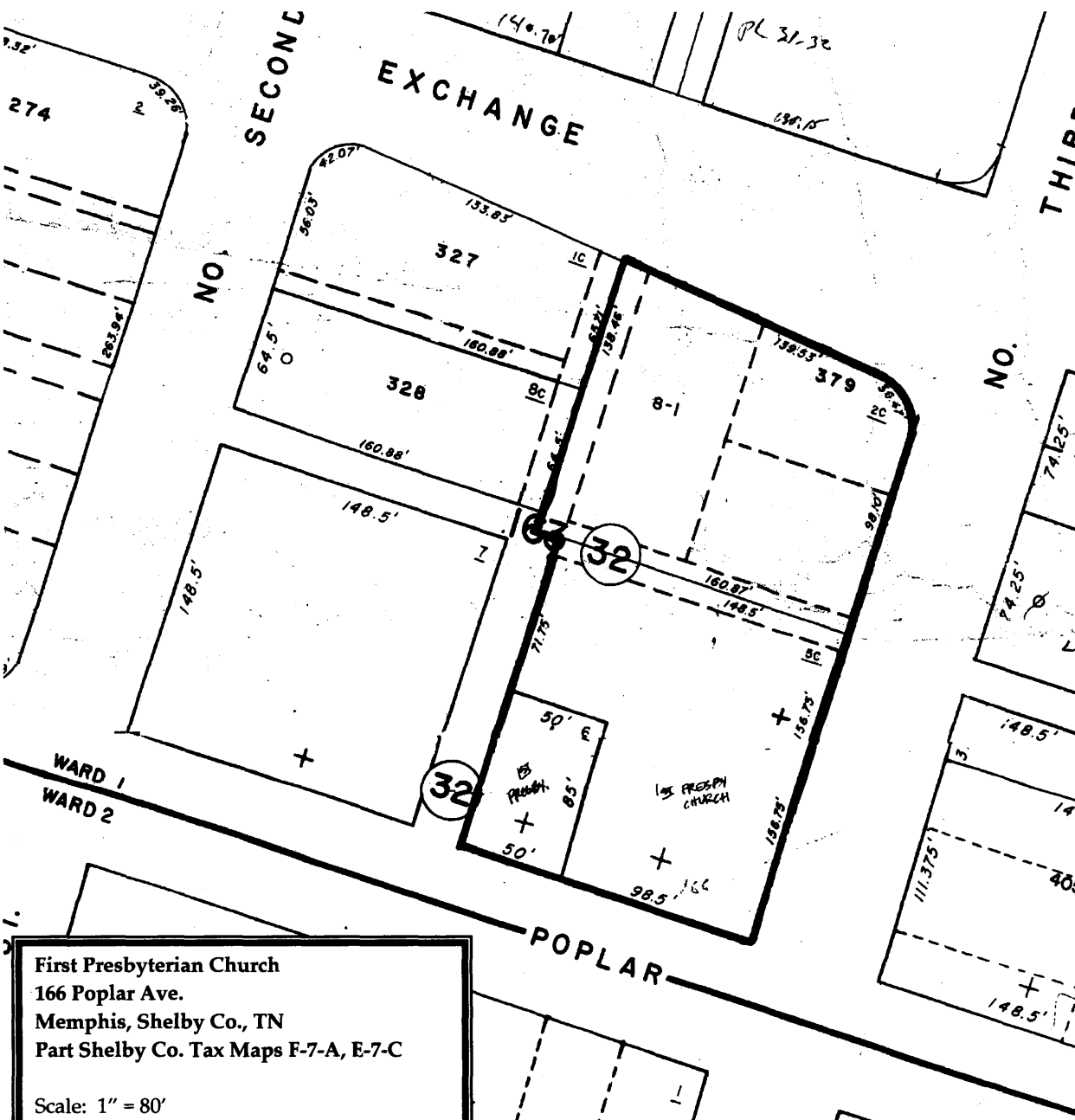
The property in nomination contains all property associated with the development of First Presbyterian Church during its period of significance of 1884 to 1955.

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First Presbyterian Church
 166 Poplar Ave.
 Memphis, Shelby Co., TN
 Part Shelby Co. Tax Maps F-7-A, E-7-C

Scale: 1" = 80'

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First Presbyterian Church
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Photographs

First Presbyterian Church
166 Poplar Avenue
Memphis, Tennessee

Photographs by: Robert Dye
Date: May 2004
Negatives: Tennessee Historical Commission

Photo 1 of 11

View of the front (south) façade of First Presbyterian Church at right, and its 1955 Sunday School building addition at left, looking generally northeast.

Photo 2 of 11

View of the front (south) façade of First Presbyterian Church and the side (east) façade along North Third Street, with the projecting end of the 1928 Sunday School addition visible at far right, looking generally northwest.

Photo 3 of 11

View of the side (east) façade and rear (north) façade of First Presbyterian Church, with the 1928 Sunday School addition at right, looking generally southwest.

Photo 4 of 11

View of the first floor of the narthex, looking east to the 1950 elevator addition at right, and the archway to the North Third Street entrance to the left of the elevator. The room visible through the door at left is the old fellowship hall of the church now used as a chapel.

Photo 5 of 11

View of the former fellowship hall on the first floor of the church, looking north.

Photo 6 of 11

View of the doorway leading from the former fellowship hall into the rear of the first floor area; the stair core and north entrance through the 1928 addition are visible in the far ground.

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Photo 7 of 11

View of the stair leading from the first floor of the narthex. The entrance to the former fellowship hall is at right.

Photo 8 of 11

View from the middle landing of the stair to the second level of the narthex, showing the beamed ceiling, trusses and triple window of the front façade. The front entrance to the first floor of the narthex is visible beneath the raking line of the stair run.

Photo 9 of 11

Reverse view of the second level of the narthex, looking back towards the stair.

Photo 10 of 11

View of the sanctuary, looking toward the pulpit from the entrance.

Photo 11 of 11

View of the sanctuary from the pulpit, looking towards the entrances at the rear.