

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED JUN 21 1979
DATE ENTERED AUG 15 1979

**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 Union Baptist Church (St. Thomas's Church)

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER 1913
1921 Main Street, including Parsonage at 1913 Main Street
CITY, TOWN Hartford CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT 1st - William R. Cotter
STATE Connecticut CODE 09 COUNTY Hartford CODE 003

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME Union Baptist Church of Hartford

STREET & NUMBER 1921 Main Street

CITY, TOWN Hartford STATE CT
VICINITY OF

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Hartford City Clerk

STREET & NUMBER 550 Main Street

CITY, TOWN Hartford STATE CT

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE State Register of Historic Places

DATE 1979 FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS Connecticut Historical Commission

CITY, TOWN Hartford STATE CT

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

EXCELLENT
 GOOD
 FAIR

DETERIORATED
 RUINS
 UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

UNALTERED
 ALTERED

CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE
 MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Union Baptist Church, originally known as the Memorial Church of Saint Thomas (Episcopal), is a small stone church built in 1871 in the Early English Gothic style. Located on Main Street in Hartford's North End, a busy area mostly of multi-family dwellings, the church shares its lot at the northeast corner of Old North Cemetery with the parish hall and the parsonage. The hall is a one-story frame structure connected to the rear of the church, and the parsonage next door to the south is a 2½-story brick house with a hipped roof, dormers, and projecting gabled bay in front. The hall was added in 1884 and the parsonage in 1894.

The plan of the church includes a nave, side aisles, short transepts and an apse. There is a small projection, probably the sacristy, off the north transept. The church is oriented toward the east, and the entrance is on the south side, near the rear, where there is a small porch. The walls are a coursed ashlar of rough-surfaced grey Westerly granite, with gables and buttresses coped with a similar but lighter and smoother stone. The main part of the church is divided by buttresses into three bays of 16' each; it was planned to add another two bays, so the west wall was considered temporary and was made of brick. This plan was never realized. The slate-shingled gable roof has a very steep pitch which breaks somewhat over the aisles. The most serious alteration to the exterior was the destruction in the 1938 hurricane of the bell-cote. This was a buttressed extension of the wall at the east end of the nave to form a steep gable which was pierced by two openings for bells (never hung); only the very lowest part of the bell-cote remains. Some cresting was also blown off the roof of the apse.

The windows are for the most part simple lancets grouped in twos and threes. The east wall of the apse has a plate-tracery arrangement of two lancets and a quatrefoil light above, the whole surrounded by a pointed arch done in the stonework. The brick west wall has a large wheel window above four simply traceried openings. In the south wall of the south transept is a smaller wheel. The nave is also lighted by dormers, three on the north side and two on the south (where apparently one was removed). The small entrance porch is mostly of frame construction on a stone base. An intricate system of hammerbeam bracing in the gable does not appear in an early engraving and may indicate some rebuilding of the porch.

The interior of the church is very light and open. Octagonal columns with foliated capitals support both the simple chancel arch and a series of arches between the nave and each aisle; the spandrels in these arcades are filled with a circular trefoil bracing. Similar arches support the aisle roofs, and within the apse is a simple vault of wooden ribs, but the ceiling of the nave is plain and plastered so that the roof timbers do not show. Because of the change in denomination, the chancel furnishings have been considerably modified, and now include a baptismal pool and a central pulpit.

The stained glass windows appear to have come from at least three different manufacturers, but all are typically Victorian, with realistically drawn figures and objects, historically-detailed clothing, and generally static compositions. Some pieces have been replaced because of storm damage, but most of the glass is intact. The west wheel shows the Adoration of the Magi, and the lower west windows have as their themes the Good Samaritan, Christ's Baptism, the Holy Family, and Jesus and the Little Children; the circles in the windows have the signs of the Evangelists. In the south transept is Christ Walking on the Water, and in the wheel, a harp as a memorial to Hartford poet Lydia Sigourney. In the south aisle is a pair of lancets depicting Christ as the Good Shepherd. Only in the apse, where there is the life

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Hartford, CT

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Surveys:

Survey of the Architectural & Historical Resources of Hartford
1975-78 Local Hartford Architectural Conservancy
Hartford, CT

Inventory and maps with Connecticut Historical Commission
Hartford, CT

Complete material with Stowe-Day Foundation
Hartford, CT

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of Christ (Crucifixion, Burial, Resurrection and Ascension) is there a scheme to the glazing. The remainder of the windows have grisaille glass with floral decorations, colored borders, and medallions, of which the north transept group is the most outstanding. In some cases, the plainer glass was installed where more pictorial windows were expected. For example, the northernmost two windows in the apse were to be the Annunciation and the Birth of Jesus, but apparently donors were not forthcoming.

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 checked="" 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 checked="" 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 1871 - built BUILDER/ARCHITECT Henry M. Congdon, architect

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Union Baptist Church is both historically and architecturally significant. For more than 50 years, the building has been home to an active and influential congregation that has been an important part of Hartford's black community. As an organization, and through its leaders and individual members, Union Baptist Church has made critical contributions to the early civil rights movement on both the local and state levels (Criterion A). In addition, the building is important as an example of Gothic Revival architecture (Criterion C). Because of this dual significance, both the present name and the original - St. Thomas's Church - are meaningful historic names.

Leading Union Baptist's struggle in the cause of civil rights was the Reverend John C. Jackson (1866-1953), who began his ministry in 1922, shortly before the congregation purchased this building. Dr. Jackson worked tirelessly to open up employment opportunities for blacks, especially for public school teachers and social workers. One of his first accomplishments was the hiring of the first black teacher in Hartford schools, C. Edythe Taylor, a member of the church. Other members of Dr. Jackson's flock served as the city's first black school board member, welfare board member, and policeman. Under his leadership, the church purchased a lifetime membership in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Dr. Jackson was also influential in the founding of the Inter-Racial Commission, a state agency formed in 1943 to report on racial injustice, recommend remedial laws, and later, enforce the Fair Employment Practices Act. Dr. Jackson was an original member of that body, now called the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities. The local Urban League was also set up through the efforts of church members, particularly Rachel Milton.

These early victories may seem small now, compared with the enormity of the barriers still faced by many of Hartford's black citizens. Nevertheless, these "firsts" were important in establishing the principle of equal opportunity. Similarly, the Inter-Racial Commission was important because it was an affirmation of the state's responsibility to eliminate discrimination, a principle by no means taken for granted in 1943.

Places owned and used by religious bodies are ordinarily excluded from the National Register, as are those whose significance has been achieved in the past 50 years. Against the first objection must be weighed the historic role that black churches played in the civil rights movement, serving as a source of leadership and as a medium for organization. While infused with a strong religious faith, the actions of the churches went beyond religion to address the temporal social condition. To the second objection, it is not too early to answer that the civil rights movement was one of the most important developments of the past 50 years, not only affecting blacks, but serving as a model for other groups in their struggle for their rights. Since "civil rights" is an abstraction, there are only a few places that commemorate the countless individual actions that make up a movement. Union Baptist Church is one of these. In memorializing John C. Jackson's efforts of the 1920's,

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Cohens, Bennett, et al. Union Baptist Church. Hartford: priv. pr., 1972.

"Dr. Jackson Dies; Pastor for 30 Years," (Hartford) Courant, January 3, 1953.

Geer's Hartford City Directory, 1873, p. 294. Includes engraving.

Miller, Franklin H. "St. Thomas's Church 45 Years Old Today," Courant, July 18, 1915, pt. 3, p. 8.

(Continued)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1

QUADRANGLE NAME Hartford North

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24 000

UTM REFERENCES

A 18 693060 4627870

B

C

D

E

F

G

H

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated property includes Parcels 22 and 23 (church and parsonage) as shown on Hartford's Assessor's Map 621, Block 001.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE Bruce Clouette, Consultant

ORGANIZATION Connecticut Historical Commission

DATE February 8, 1979

STREET & NUMBER 59 South Prospect Street

TELEPHONE (203) 566-3005

CITY OR TOWN Hartford

STATE CT

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE x

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE 

TITLE Director, Connecticut Historical Commission

DATE June 15, 1979

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER


KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE 8-15-79

ATTEST: 
CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

DATE 8/14/79

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'30's and '40's, this historic site testifies to the continuity of the struggle for equal rights, as well as showing that the history of that movement took place not only in the South, Washington, D.C. and big cities, but also in small cities like Hartford.

Apart from its historic associations, the building is of interest to architectural historians as a Gothic Revival church built on Ecclesiological principles. St. Thomas's was intended as a memorial to Thomas Brownell, former Episcopal bishop of Connecticut, and to the family of Mrs. William Mather, who donated the land. The original Episcopal congregation was very small, so many economies were resorted to in 1871 when the church was built, such as the dormers instead of a clerestory, the uncompleted windows, and the temporary west end. The architect was Henry Martyn Congdon (1834-1922) of Brooklyn, New York. Masonry and carpentry were done by local contractors. The sources for the stained glass are as yet unknown, but the themes were selected by the architect.

The style of the building is thoroughly Early English, and quite accurately done. Of the three periods of English Gothic, Early English was the most favored by American Ecclesiologists, especially for small parishes like St. Thomas's. The inspiration for the church is Long Stanton St. Michael's, Cambridgeshire (c. 1230), a design found throughout the ecclesiologists' patternbooks and executed in this country and Canada. The key features are small proportions, rough masonry, simple lancet windows, side porch entrance, steep roof, and a bell-cote at the east end. St. Thomas's has all of these, but departs somewhat with its apse and stubby transepts. Even though its bell-cote was blown off, the church retains a medieval, almost rustic appearance, and still reflects the original goals of the design. The stained glass is typically Victorian and in no way was considered as a reproduction; at once representational and sentimental, it accurately shows the taste of its time.

Ecclesiology began in England and had spread to New York by the late 1840's. The members of the English Camden Society and their American counterparts sought to recapture the intensity of Medieval faith, and believed that architecture was the key to that end. The role of the architect was a critical one: through his study of English Gothic examples, he was to recreate the appearance and atmosphere of a medieval church. Such a setting, they thought, would itself engender feelings of mystery, piety, and devotion in the faithful. Ecclesiology was a major influence in the building of Episcopal churches in the 19th century. Like most of the architects involved, Henry M. Congdon himself was an Episcopalian. Throughout his long career, he built almost nothing but churches and church-related buildings. He was a member of the New York Ecclesiological Society and later, an active Fellow of the American Institute of Architects. He received his training under John Priest of Newburgh, New York.

Hartford has a number of outstanding examples of Gothic Revival architecture:

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early work by Town and Davis, such as the Wadsworth Atheneum and Christ Church Cathedral; collegiate Gothic at Trinity College; and High Victorian exuberance in the Church of the Good Shepherd and the Connecticut State Capitol. As a typical example of a small church built by an Ecclesiologist, St. Thomas's is a worthy addition to the catalog of Gothic architecture in Hartford.

The boundary of the site was chosen to include both the parish hall and the parsonage. The hall, a very plain and somewhat deteriorated structure, was a temporary chapel used by the original congregation when they were dispossessed of the church by a builder's lien in 1875. It was moved from its original location near Mahl Avenue to the rear of the church in 1884, when the congregation regained the building. Although the present congregation's plans for the hall are uncertain, and may include its replacement, it was included in the nominated property because it is physically attached to the church and because of its historical association with the first church.

The parsonage was included because of its proximity, separated from the church only by a narrow drive, and because it functioned as an integral part of the church. Although its architectural significance is not outstanding, it is a well-built house typical of its period. It was built as and used as a parsonage by the original congregation, but has served as church offices for the second.

NOTE

¹Mrs. Mather and her husband were early proponents of establishing an Episcopal parish in the northern part of the city, as was Bishop Brownell. To aid in this effort, the Mathers offered part of their farmland for the church. The plan could not be accomplished, however, before the deaths of Mr. Mather and his son, within a month of each other, nor before Bishop Brownell died shortly thereafter. Mrs. Mather then placed the land in the hand of trustees, in honor of her husband and son, and stipulated that the church should be a memorial to Bishop Brownell.

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Bibliography (cont.):

St. Thomas's Church Records, State Library, Hartford, 4 vols.