

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections



**1. Name**

historic First M. E. Church South

and/or common First United Methodist Church

**2. Location**

street & number SW corner 6th Avenue & 19th Street North N/A not for publication

city, town Birmingham N/A vicinity of congressional district 6

state Alabama code 01 county Jefferson code 073

**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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	<u>N/A</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name North Alabam Conference of the United Methodist Church, c/o Bishop Frank Roberts

street & number Suite 301, 6 Office Park Circle

city, town Birmingham N/A vicinity of state Alabama

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Jefferson County Courthouse

street & number 716 North 21st Street

city, town Birmingham state Alabama

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

Jefferson County Historic Sites Survey; Downtown Birmingham Historic Sites Survey  
title has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1972, 1976; 1977  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Jefferson Co. Historical Commission; Birmingham Historical Society

city, town Birmingham state Alabama

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered exter.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered inter.	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The First United Methodist Church is built in the Richardsonian Romanesque style of Ohio brownstone. Characteristic round-headed arches supported by truncated colonnettes with foliated capitals punctuate the surface, framing twin entrances and a large stained glass window that is the central decorative feature. Beneath the window, on the ground floor, is a series of arched windows. At the northeast corner of the building, a prominent square bell tower topped by a pyramidal roof gives the church a presence in the city skyline. The bell chamber is enclosed by an open grid topped by narrow arches and bordered by clustered colonnettes. The bell is dated 1882.

The front elevation articulates four primary uses: the arched entry to the south (repeated in the north bell tower); the auditorium for worship, marked by the stained glass window; a room for official meetings (now used by the choir), marked by the arched windows below the stained glass window; and the bell tower, which marks the presence within the city. The exterior is essentially unaltered .

The interior of the church was renovated in 1973. At that time the Sunday school auditorium and classrooms were converted into a foyer, the light fixtures in the sanctuary replaced, and new flooring placed in the sanctuary.

In addition to the church itself, the church complex, linked by an arcade and covered walkways, consists of the Office/Chapel Building (1950) facing 19th Street, a three-story red-brick structure whose squat columns with foliated capitals and blind-arched entry echo details of the 1891 church, and the Education Building or Christian Learning Center (1964; Edwin McGowin, Architect), a red-brick two-story structure to the rear of the church beyond a landscaped courtyard. Neither of the two additions is considered to contribute to the complex.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

**Specific dates** 1891 **Builder/Architect** Weary & Kramer, Akron, Ohio

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

This is the finest Richardsonian Romanesque style structure standing in downtown Birmingham and surely one of the notable examples of the style in the Southeast. It is distinguished by the clarity of its formal expression, which is enriched by the use of the textured brownstone surface and arched opening to suggest enclosed volume as well as massiveness. The rhythm of arches repeated in different sizes, the deep voussoirs supported by truncated columns, and the pattered surfaces set into the main gable and entry arches add subtle vitality to the general restraint typical of the style. The quality of the craftsmanship is notable for having been done by a local company in a city just 20 years old. (Gilreath-Decker Construction Company).

\* \* \* \* \*

First United Methodist Church was erected by one of the city's pioneer congregations, organized as First Methodist Church of Birmingham in February 1872, two months after the town of Birmingham was incorporated. This building, the third sanctuary constructed, marked both the maturity of the church and the city's first major period of expansion, touched off by the ironmaking and real estate boom of the late 1880s. Originally it stood in the heart of the city's residential district. More than 50 neighborhood churches have grown from this central church congregation.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

The Southern Architect; 1890: May, p. 93; Aug., p. 137; Sept., pp. 153, 163. 1891: Jan., p. 38; Apr., p. 87; June, p. 133; Aug., pp. 189-90.  
 Clark, Sara Dominick, "Condensed History of First Methodist Church, Birmingham, Alabama." Birmingham: First Methodist Church, 1963.

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property .72  
 Quadrangle name Birmingham North Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A	<u>16</u>	<u>518000</u>	<u>3708580</u>	B			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C				D			
E				F			
G				H			

Verbal boundary description and justification

Downtown Birmingham. Block 58. Parcels 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 140' x 225"

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	<u>N/A</u>	code	<u>N/A</u>	county	<u>N/A</u>	code	<u>N/A</u>
state	<u>N/A</u>	code	<u>N/A</u>	county	<u>N/A</u>	code	<u>N/A</u>

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Alice M. Bowsher, Kidd, Wheeler & Plosser Architects & Ellen Mertins  
 organization Alabama Historical Commission date July 15, 1982  
 street & number 725 Monroe Street telephone (205) 832-6621  
 city or town Montgomery state Alabama

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:  
 national  state  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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature [Signature]  
 title State Historic Preservation Officer date 11-15-82

For HCRS use only	
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register	
<u>[Signature]</u> Keeper of the National Register	Entered in the National Register date <u>12/27/82</u>
Attest:	date
Chief of Registration	

