



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 of eligibility for individual properties or 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 listed in 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 Unitarian Society Church  
other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

2. Location

street & number 1221 Wendell Avenue  not for publication  
city or town Schenectady  vicinity  
state New York code NY county Schenectady code 093 zip code 12308

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I 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.

Russell Purpant DSHPO 12/13/13  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

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 this 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 B. Beall 2-5-4  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

**First Unitarian Society Church**

Name of Property

**Schenectady County, New York**

County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

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

1

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/religious facility

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/religious facility

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Modern

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete

walls concrete

roof concrete

other

**Narrative Description**

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

**First Unitarian Society Church**

Name of Property

**Schenectady County, New York**

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 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.)

Property is:

- 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 or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

architecture  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1961  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1961  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

na  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

na  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Edward Durell Stone, architect; Elwin Stevens, consulting architect; L.A. Swyer, builder  
\_\_\_\_\_

**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):**

- 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:  
\_\_\_\_\_

**First Unitarian Society Church**

Name of Property

**Schenectady County, New York**

County and State

**10. Geographical Data**Acreage of property 2.16 acres**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	18	588117	4741042
	Zone	Easting	Northing
2			

3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing
4			

 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 Kathleen LaFrank, National Register Coordinatororganization New York State Historic Preservation Office date September 2013street & number Peebles Island State Park, Box 189 telephone 518-237-8643 x 3261city or town Waterford state New York zip code 12188**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 the SHPO or FPO.)

name \_\_\_\_\_

street &amp; number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_

**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.

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First Unitarian Society Church  
Schenectady, Schenectady County, New York

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The First Unitarian Society Church is located at 1221 Wendell Avenue, Schenectady, Schenectady County. The church is located within the boundary of the National Register listed G.E. Realty Plot Historic District, a planned neighborhood of early twentieth century single-family homes located east of the Union College campus. When the district was listed on the register in 1980, the church was significantly less than fifty years old and unrelated to the themes recognized in its nomination. At that time the church was evaluated as non-contributing to the district. This nomination recognizes the church, now fifty-two years old, for its individual significance as an outstanding example of modern architecture designed by noted architect Edward Durell Stone. The First Unitarian Society building occupies a two-acre parcel on the west side of the Wendell Street, which runs northwest from its intersection with Union Street, Schenectady's primary artery, through the city's east side residential neighborhoods.

The First Unitarian Society Church is an enormous rectangular building, built on a concrete podium, with its longer sides paralleling Wendell Avenue. The podium is set back from the sidewalk and separated from it by a planting strip defined by concrete curbs and two shallow, rectangular concrete pools, one on either side of the wide concrete walkway that provides access to the main entrance. As the entrance is not located in the center of the façade, these pools are unequal in size. The pools are currently drained and awaiting repair work; however, they were designed with a line of small water jets down their centers. The building is buffered by open land on three sides. The topography slopes steeply away from the church on the north (side) and part of the rear elevation, allowing for fully exposed basements in those areas. The north elevation overlooks a deeply wooded ravine with a stream, which defines the north boundary of the property. A parking lot is located on level land adjacent to the south elevation. The sloping land behind the church is a park-like space characterized by a grassy lawn interspersed with mature trees and a large modern sculpture, "Sanctuary," designed by Robert Blood and installed in 1979. Although compatible with the church, the piece is non-contributing due to age.

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The church building is rectangular in shape, approximately 335 feet long and 97 feet deep. The podium is supported by regularly spaced concrete footings, 10-15 feet square. The building is supported by eighteen oval-shaped, reinforced concrete piers, while its walls are formed from double courses of two-foot square concrete blocks (with an air space for insulation). These blocks, which form both the exterior and interior finishes, were specially designed by the architect to feature an elongated circular design in bas relief. Each form created two half circles and a border, and the blocks were then laid to form continuous circles around and inside the entire building. The roof is also concrete with the exception of the dome, which is of composite roofing materials and has a wood truss support system.

The façade, which is one story tall, presents an unrelieved surface of concrete block, broken only by the aluminum double entrance doors, which are surmounted by a large glass transom. These doors are replacements of the originals, which were heavy glass double doors with no transom. A row of concrete planters, now in storage off site, originally lined the podium. The flat concrete roof has a deep overhang, sheltering the entrance and the platform. The roof is broken by two massive rectangular concrete block chimneys (with the same circular pattern) flanking an enormous dome, sixty feet in diameter, which marks central worship shape.

The south side elevation is concealed by a concrete screen with a pedestrian entrance. The screen was constructed with the same circular pattern as the rest of the building and gives the effect of a transparent wall. Behind the screen is a small open courtyard in front of the south wall of the building, which is composed of full glass walls divided by aluminum mullions and pedestrian doors. The concrete supporting posts are on the exterior.

The north side elevation is characterized by a fully exposed concrete basement, which features small windows and an entrance. The first floor, which has no access to the ground, is defined by a semi-circular glass-walled

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pavilion in the center, flanked by full glass walls similar to those on the south elevation. All sections of glass have either aluminum mullions or pedestrian doors. On this elevation, the roof overhang is especially wide and follows the curve of the central pavilion, sheltering a concrete balcony protected by steel railings that overlooks the ravine and stream.

On the west (rear) elevation, the land in the northwest corner of the building is still high above the ravine, allowing an exposed basement in this corner. This area is marked by a large window with floor-to-ceiling windows, which light the custodian's basement apartment. The window is flanked by concrete retaining walls and cannot be seen from most parts of the rear yard. The rest of the rear elevation is set on the concrete platform just above grade level. The majority of the north wall is of unrelieved circular concrete block; however, there is an area of glass walls and doors near the west end and double aluminum entrance doors near the center. Concrete steps with an aluminum rail provide access to the lawn.

On the interior, the majority of the first floor space is occupied by the "Great Hall," which is slightly off-center, aligned with the main entrance doors. Entrance is into a small lobby, defined only by a glass wall separating it from the main worship space. The great hall itself is a large square open space, 100 foot by 100 foot, that fills the space between the front and rear walls of the building. The interior walls are all constructed of the same material as the exterior; however, they have a soft ivory or eggshell tint (varying with the room). Except for the center space (under the dome) the hall features fairly low concrete ceilings. The great hall also features corridors and doors that lead to other first floor spaces. Doors are marked by floor-to-ceiling walnut panels broken by pedestrian size doors. The rear (north) wall is broken by a 60-foot-wide floor to glass window wall, while the front (south) wall is screened by a glass wall that encloses the worship space and defines the lobby. Each of the side walls features a fireplace set into the concrete wall with a narrow wood mantel shelf, and each fireplace is flanked by original Danish modern couches, end table and lamps. Other original furniture in the

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same style is scattered around the great hall in casual seating groups. The room retains its original deep-pile wall-to-wall red carpeting.

The seating and pulpit occupy a circular space in the center of the great hall. This space is defined by six oval support columns and surmounted by a dome. The dome is sixty feet in diameter and rises forty feet from the floor. It has a plaster finish on the interior and recessed lights. The plaster features inlaid strips of walnut, 2 inches wide but 10 inches deep, arranged in a pattern of petals and diamonds. While this appears decorative, it also forms the truss system that supports the dome. The latter is the only part of the church that does not rely on concrete for its structural support. The central space features six tiers of circular seating and is divided into four sections separated by wide aisles; reflecting lights mark the steps. Three of the sections have curving, cantilevered walnut benches, with seats and backrests of white vinyl. The fourth section contains only the walnut pulpit, which features a floating concave top typical of period furniture design. The pulpit has a cabinet for the speakers behind it and a background of floor to ceiling drapes concealing the glass wall behind. The circular floor is smooth concrete in grey and beige and features a ying yang motif.

The first floor space west of the great hall features a series of rooms on either side of a north-south corridor. Walls on either side of the corridor feature storage spaces. On the inside of the corridor, the utilitarian spaces include rest rooms and a kitchen. On the outside of the corridor, the space along the west wall of the building is a single large open area that can be divided into three smaller spaces by sliding partitions. Walls match all the others, while ceilings are concrete with small square decorative panels (red, brown, gold and black) affixed to them.

The first floor space east of the great hall is devoted to the minister's study, meeting rooms and a "Fireplace Room," which occupies the center space and includes the semi-circular glass pavilion that overlooks the ravine.

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This room retains the same original red carpet and its inside wall features a fireplace identical to those in the great room. The minister's study is a 16 foot x 20 foot space featuring two walls of built-in walnut bookshelves and cabinets.

The basement features an apartment for the caretaker. The only changes to the building are the replacement of the original Stone-designed full-height glass front doors with contemporary ones, the removal of the planters (which survive off site), and the fact that the fountains and reflecting pools are not operable.

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### Summary

The First Unitarian Society Church is significant as an exceptional example of modern architecture in the city of Schenectady designed by nationally known architect Edward Durell Stone. The First Unitarian Society was established in 1901 by a group of General Electric (G.E.) workers from New England who had recently been transferred to the city. The small group met in various spaces before constructing its own church, a Tudor Revival building, between 1908 and 1919. The society grew substantially after World War II, and in 1956 the overcrowded congregation decided to build a new church, acquiring a parcel in the G.E. Reality Plot, a planned residential neighborhood created for G.E. employees in 1899.<sup>1</sup> Two architects who were members of the congregation along with the society's pastor, the Rev. William Gold, pushed the group to hire a nationally known architect to design a signature building for the congregation. The architects, Donald Mochon and Elwin Stevens, were instrumental in securing renowned architect Edward Durell Stone for the commission. Stevens was additionally significant in serving as the onsite consulting architect and construction manager and in designing several of the church's key interior features and furniture. The church was completed in 1961, the same year that construction began on Stone's design for the monumental new uptown campus for the State University of New York at Albany, a commission he learned about from Stevens, then director of planning and development for the State University of New York.

Like the SUNY campus, the church embodies features characteristic of Stone's work in the last phase of his career. Buildings designed between the early 1950s and the architect's death in 1978 are typically low in form, symmetrical in plan, constructed on platforms, feature deep overhangs supported on piers, use textural concrete and concrete grilles, and are graced with planters, pools, fountains, and lush plantings, all features that characterize the church. The church's circular motifs, evident in the patterned concrete and, particularly, the

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<sup>1</sup>The G.E. Plot is listed on the National Register. The church was deemed non-contributing at the time of listing because it was less than fifty years old.

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central meeting space under a forty-foot dome, embody Unitarian beliefs about inclusiveness and interdependence. More important, as an expressive work of art, the design illustrates the evolution of Stone's architectural philosophy over the course of his career. As a young man, Stone was deeply influenced by the International style and was among the first American proponents of the austere and strictly abstracted classical modern aesthetic. Stone designed what is acknowledged as the first International style house on the east coast (Richard Mandel House, 1935, NR listed), followed by a group of exceptionally large residences that exemplified the style. However, beginning in the 1930s and in part due to the influence of Frank Lloyd Wright (a romantic artist, as well as a Unitarian), Stone began to think about architecture more as an expressive art form, and his work became more decorative and individualistic. He experimented with using natural materials and indigenous settings before settling on sculptural concrete, which he relied on for its plasticity, as his preferred medium and embracing a more exuberant decorative pallet, including expressive forms, rich materials and bold colors, as opposed to the "hygienic austerity of current architecture."<sup>2</sup> The Unitarian church, with its circular motifs, decorative concrete and rich interior, embodies this important phase of Stone's oeuvre. The church retains a nearly pristine level of integrity, retaining original finishes, furniture, fixtures, carpets, and fabrics throughout. Several minor changes, such as the removal of exterior concrete planters (which survive off site) and fountains, as well as the replacement of the full-height glass front doors with contemporary storefront doors are the only changes. An excellent example of Stone's work of this period, the First Unitarian Society Church is one of the finest examples of modern architecture in the Albany-Troy-Schenectady area.

### Edward Durell Stone

Edward Durell Stone (1902-1978) was one of American most enigmatic modern architects. After developing a reputation as one of the masters of the "new" European modernism with his pristine International style designs

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<sup>2</sup> Edward Durell Stone, *The Evolution of an Architect* (New York: Horizon, 1962), 149.

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of the 1930s, Stone's ideas about architecture continued to evolve until his mature work was characterized with an almost lush expressiveness at odds with his earliest work.

Edward Durell Stone was born in Fayetteville, Arkansas, an isolated town in the Ozark Mountains. Fayette was also the home of the University of Arkansas, established in the 1870s, which lent the town an intellectual character. Stone's grandfather was of one of Fayetteville's earliest settlers. Successful, wealthy and cultured, Stephen K. Stone sent all five of his sons to top universities. E.D. Stone's father, Benjamin Hicks Stone, a sometime merchant, was more successful as a man of letters and a famed local historian. Stone's mother, Ruth Johnson Stone, was an English teacher. Her family hailed from the east and were descendants of George Mason, a Virginia statesman who wrote the state bill of rights and constitution, which served as models for the Declaration of Independence and the American constitution. An artistic child, Stone was influenced by his older brother, Hicks Stone, who became an architect. In his autobiography, Stone noted his natural love of building things, a mother who gave him a room in which to undertake projects, and his brother, who demonstrated that architecture was a profession, as instrumental in his choice of a career. He also claimed a natural inclination to leadership, which manifest itself in his marshalling groups of childhood friends to undertake larger and more coordinated projects, such as building imaginary roads and towns.<sup>3</sup>

Stone began his education in the arts at the University of Arkansas; however, his mother had died when he was a teenager and his brother Hicks, then practicing at Shepley, Rutan and Coolidge (the firm founded by H.H. Richardson) in Boston, took an interest in him and brought the young man to Boston, first to see its great architecture (and that of New York) and later to work in an architect's office. At night, Stone studied at the Boston Architectural Club, from which he was hired as a draftsman by his first patron, Henry R. Shepley (of the firm now known as Coolidge, Shepley, Bulfinch and Abbot). Stone later won admission to Harvard, where he

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<sup>3</sup> Stone, 19.

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completed two years before transferring to MIT, where he studied another year. From there he won the prestigious Rotch traveling fellowship, which granted him two years of travel and study in Europe. Stone never received a college degree; many years later, when the University of Arkansas invited him to receive an honorary doctorate, he requested a BA instead.

Stone went abroad in 1927 eager to see the emerging European modernism. Among the many works he admired was Mies van der Rohe's 1929 Barcelona Pavilion. He later described its "simple rectangular platform and roof, with walls coming out from the interior to form quadrangles and courts," as "pristine in its beauty" and compared it to the "breaking down of the rectangular box as foreseen by Frank Lloyd Wright." He judged it a "significant modern monument."<sup>4</sup> These early observations hint at the two very significant trajectories of his career: first, his development and mastery of the International style and second, his life-long admiration of Frank Lloyd Wright, whose expressionist modernism proved greatly influential on the development of Stone's mature work.

Stone returned to America in November 1929, just after the stock market crash. During his European stay, his brother Hicks had died, which he described as a great personal blow, but which also severed his ties to Boston. Upon his return he was invited to work with the firm of Schultz and Weaver on the new Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York.<sup>5</sup> In his autobiography, Stone noted the scarcity of modern architecture in New York during the 1930s and lamented the criticism of the design of Rockefeller Center, on which Stone had the privilege of working under several noted modernists, including Wallace K. Harrison and Raymond Hood.<sup>6</sup> Stone's assignment was to implement the interior designs of Radio City Music Hall and the Center Theater. Also during this period, Stone was exposed to the Museum of Modern Art's 1932 exhibit on modern architecture,

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<sup>4</sup> Stone, 24.

<sup>5</sup> Stone, 29.

<sup>6</sup> Stone, 30.

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which marked the introduction of modernism to most Americans, and about which Stone proclaimed: "I know of no single event which so profoundly influenced the architecture of the Twentieth Century."<sup>7</sup> It was also in these years that Stone first met and became friendly with Frank Lloyd Wright, for whom he expressed a deep admiration.

Stone's first important commission was the Richard H. Mandel House in Bedford, Westchester County. Designed and built between 1933 and 1935, the house established Stone's reputation as an architect and was the first in a series of International style residences that he designed in the 1930s. It is also among the earliest residences in the United States to be designed in the International style.<sup>8</sup> The Mandel house was designed in partnership with Donald Desky, who was responsible for the interior and the original furniture. Other important International style houses designed by Stone in the same decade include the Kowalski House, also in Bedford, 1936; a model house for *Colliers Magazine*, published in 1936, which was later built in several variations; a complex for Henry and Clare Booth Luce (Mepkin Plantation) in Mencks Corners, SC, 1936-38 (NR listed); the A. Conger Goodyear Residence, Old Westbury, 1938 (NR listed); and the George Preston Marshall and Connie Griffin Marshall House in Washington DC, 1938.

The Mandel house was large, including more than sixty rooms, and elegantly austere, composed of abstract geometrical forms and characterized by flat roofs, smooth and uniform wall surfaces with no applied ornament, and ribbon windows. In its scale and opulence, the Mandel house epitomized the transition of modernism from its origins in Europe, where it had embodied an idealistic social program that was intended to provide improved housing for the working classes through the use of modern materials and technology, to its embrace by Americans, where it was understood as a stylish and beautiful aesthetic synonymous with individual wealth and

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<sup>7</sup> Stone, 31,

<sup>8</sup> Barbara A. Campagna, Richard H. Mandel House National Register Nomination, 1995.

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where, as it was adapted for the ubiquitous glass skyscrapers of the post-World War II era, it became a symbol of corporate America. This transatlantic reinterpretation was in large part the result of its presentation in Hitchcock and Johnson's show, "Modern Architecture: International Style," at the Museum of Modern Art in 1932 and in their subsequent book, *The International Style*, published the same year. While Hitchcock and Johnson introduced the visual context of modernism to Americans, they portrayed it strictly as a sleek and sophisticated style, leaving its progressive social program behind. Architects such as Stone were among the first to translate the new idiom into elegant homes for wealthy clients, and he quickly became one of the county's leading practitioners. In 1939 Stone designed his first important public building, the new home of the Museum of Modern Art at 11 West 53<sup>rd</sup> Street, with Philip L. Goodwin, a trustee of the museum. The building, striking in its flat, glass facade and ribbon windows, as well as its flexible open interior, was one of the earliest International style buildings in New York City and it enhanced Stone's reputation as a modern architect. Stone continued to design buildings in the International style until after World War II.

In the early 1950s, Stone met and married his second wife, Maria Elena Torchio, who many have credited with inspiring his adoption of a more ornate architecture.<sup>9</sup> While Torchio was an important influence on Stone's work in the 1950s, the architect admitted that he had begun questioning the International style as "too arid and too cold" as early as the 1930s.<sup>10</sup> In addition, Stone's trip to visit Frank Lloyd Wright at his Wisconsin home, Taliesin, in 1940 was clearly a life changing event. Stone observed that "Taliesin was a contrast to my previous concept of residential design [because] the architecture was attuned to the natural beauty of the site, its natural materials, wood and stone indigenous to the countryside."<sup>11</sup> On the same trip Stone visited Taliesin West, Wright's summer home near Phoenix, and was equally impressed with that building's harmony with a totally different landscape. Stone recalled this trip as "the beginning of my repudiation of the international style, and it

<sup>9</sup> Paul Goldberger, "Edward Durell Stone Services Will Be Held Tomorrow," *New York Times*, 8 August 1978.

<sup>10</sup> Stone, 89.

<sup>11</sup> Stone 89.

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led to a period of several years during which I expressed this new respect for natural materials....”<sup>12</sup> This period of Stone’s career (generally, the 1940s) was marked by a series of residences in which he experimented with using natural materials, such as wood, brick, and stone, and in which his designs were more individualist and contextual. His residential designs of this period seemed more akin to Wright’s Usonian houses than to his own earlier International style work. The *Colliers Magazine* “House of Ideas,” for example, constructed on a terrace at Rockefeller Plaza in 1940, featured horizontal redwood siding on both exterior and interior, overhanging eaves with exposed rafters and floor-to-ceiling sliding windows opening onto terraces. Stone later called Wright “the greatest architect in history” and noted that from meeting Wright, the latter had “occupied a dual role as my friend and personal hero until the end of his life.”<sup>13</sup>

It was 1953 when Edward Durell Stone met Maria Elena Torchio, an American of Italian and Brazilian ancestry, on a flight to Paris; they married a year later. Their wedding trip to the east was also an occasion for Stone to make sketches for the United States Embassy in New Delhi, one of the first examples of the more decorative style that would define the latter part of Stone’s career. Completed in 1954, the embassy was a large, rectangular concrete building set upon a podium. Podiums became a characteristic feature of Stone’s later work. He explained that he used one here to create a level platform on irregular terrain.<sup>14</sup> Stone made extensive use of deep overhanging eaves supported by steel columns decorated with gold leaf, concrete grilles, large fountains, reflecting pools and planters. While the modern forms and materials were similar to his earlier works, the lush overlay of rich materials and embellishment were new, as was the overall Beaux Arts symmetry of the site plan. Nearly all of his mature works, undertaken between 1953 and his death in 1978, incorporated

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<sup>12</sup> Stone, 92.

<sup>13</sup> Stone, 90; 91.

<sup>14</sup> Stone, 152.



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some, if not all, of these features. According to Stone, Frank Lloyd Wright praised the embassy as “one of the finest buildings of the last hundred years.”<sup>15</sup>

Beginning with the embassy at New Delhi, Stone began to experiment with the decorative properties of concrete, augmenting smooth geometric surfaces with patterned blocks or forms that were foliate or serpentine and used in a decorative or expressive manor. He developed individualistic geometric-patterned concrete blocks by nailing wooden blocks into the forms and then pouring in the concrete.<sup>16</sup> He became obsessed with decorative grilles, using them both to filter light and privacy and to serve as decorative screening. Most were made of concrete, but some were gold finished aluminum. Stone described the one he designed for the Brussels pavilion [1957] as having a “transparent, light and lacey” character, an effect he used over and over on buildings of this era.<sup>17</sup> He began to express a new appreciation for “elegance” in materials, noting that “more marble floors, gold accents, fountains, lagoons, and courtyard crept into my designs.”<sup>18</sup> Such embellishment was at odds with the disciplined classicism that defined early modernism, and as he allowed his imagination more freedom, he questioned the architectural training of the modernist generation as a kind of “brainwashing,” resulting in an architecture of “endless repetition”<sup>19</sup>

The majority of Stone’s works designed between 1950 and his death 1978 were large institutional buildings. Among the most well known are Huntington Hartford Gallery of Modern Art (2 Columbus Circle), 1958; the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington DC, 1962-71; the State University of New York at Albany campus, 1962; and the General Motors Building, New York, 1964. Stone’s design for the Huntington Hartford Gallery of Modern Art (2 Columbus Circle, Manhattan), constructed in 1958, was perhaps his most

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<sup>15</sup> Stone, 139.

<sup>16</sup> Stone, 140

<sup>17</sup> Stone, 144.

<sup>18</sup> Stone, 142

<sup>19</sup> in Winthrop Sargeant, *New Yorker*, 37.

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radical departure from the austere modernist aesthetic of his early years and it remains one of his most controversial works, with critics still divided in their assessments. Critical debate came to a head in 2008, when a major redesign was carried out that destroyed the architect's design. Though modern in materials, the building was sculptural in form and highly ornamental, and many derided its decoration as excessively fanciful. The twelve-story concrete building was characterized by marble clad walls with a concave façade, round "porthole-like" windows outlining its edges (reminiscent of Stone's classic grilles), a two-story loggia at the top, and an all-glass ground story sheltered by an arcade formed by concrete piers incorporating large circular openings. Some critics have referred to these disdainfully as "lollipops," scorning them for their whimsical quality.<sup>20</sup>

However, Stone's discussion of his design for 2 Columbus Circle proves insightful in understanding his evolution from a rational modernist to a romantic artist. Stone described poured concrete as a plastic material that "doesn't commit an architect to the rectangle," suggesting that the artist's imagination should take precedence over stylistic formula. He also compared the "building at 2 Columbus Circle favorably to the "current hygienic austerity of much of our architecture," suggesting instead that "this building may be considered romantic," another allusion to the supremacy of individual artistic authority, which is the heart of Romanticism. He intended the building to be "a radical departure, with its arches and use of rich materials." Writing in 1962, he asserted that "more ebullient forms are finding favor in a new generation also enamored of the plastic possibilities of concrete [and he believed] that people now yearn[ed] for fine materials and a quality of richness."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The building at 2 Columbus Circle was determined eligible for National Register listing; however, subsequent alterations have destroyed the qualities for which it was determined eligible.

<sup>21</sup> Stone 149.

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By the end of Stone's career, he fully embraced architecture was "an individual, creative expression....a fine art."<sup>22</sup> His comments are strikingly similar to those expressed by Frank Lloyd Wright, perhaps America's most outspoken Romantic artist, who believed that the self was the ultimate artistic authority.

### Schenectady

The opening of the Erie Canal in 1825 and the rapid spread of the railroad in the mid-nineteenth century connected Schenectady to a broad transportation network, making it an attractive location for manufacturing firms. In 1886 Thomas Edison relocated his small Edison Machine Works to Schenectady from New York. Beginning with one hundred employees, G.E. grew to 30,000 in 1910 and, by 1923, had 74,000 employees in forty different cities. The rapid growth of both the electric (GE) and locomotive (American Locomotive) industries – which were associated with the world's largest industrial concerns -- had an enormous impact on the city, sparking tremendous growth in the city. Other related industries, such as the Mica Insulator Company, the city's third largest company, also brought jobs and new citizens to Schenectady. In the last decade of the nineteenth century, Schenectady's population nearly tripled. As the center of the electrical manufacturing and research industry in the first half of the twentieth century, the city was the site of major advancements in engineering and saw the marketing of innovative modern products. At the height of its industrial prowess Schenectady was known as "the city that lights the world"

### Unitarian Church

Unitarianism has its origins during the Renaissance, which authenticated the right of the individual to think for himself.<sup>23</sup> Its tenets, which emphasize religious toleration and freedom of belief, owe much to the rational thinkers of the Enlightenment, while its growth in the northeastern United States was in part a reaction to the

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<sup>22</sup> in Winthrop Sargeant, "Profiles, From Sassafras Branches: Edward D. Stone," *The New Yorker* (3 January 1959): 36

<sup>23</sup> George Willis Cooke, *Unitarianism in America: A History of its Origins and Development* (Boston, 1902)

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Evangelical fervor promoting a return to the strict religious authority of Calvinism that spread across the northeast in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Early congregations holding Unitarian beliefs were scattered throughout New England, the Middle Atlantic and Southern states beginning in the 1780s and 90s; however, the first separate Unitarian congregations did not emerge until the early nineteenth century. The formation of the American Unitarian Association in Boston in 1825 marked the formal establishment of the denomination. The association's stated purpose was "to diffuse the knowledge and promote interests of pure Christianity." As such, it published tracts and books, supported poor churches, sent out missionaries and established new churches. Acting on their shared beliefs, Unitarian congregations spoke out on education and prison reform, ministered to the poor and worked for the abolition of slavery.<sup>24</sup>

Unitarianism is premised on the ultimate goodness of God and the principle of universal salvation. The core belief of Unitarianism is freedom of individual religious belief. The church was founded on an ethical rather than a doctrinal basis, rejecting external religious authorities, creeds and doctrines in favor of a personal relationship with God and a life of morally responsible behavior. Its central tenets are based on belief in the dignity of every person, a respect for justice, compassion and tolerance, a search for truth, a democratic organization rather than a hierarchy, the goal of international peace, liberty and justice, and respect for the interdependent web of existence.

Unitarianism is an anti-Trinitarian religion that holds a more existential and less anthropomorphic idea of God. As such, Jesus is considered a leader who is to be emulated rather than worshipped. Because of its commitment to pluralism, Unitarianism embraces a wide range of religious views and practices. Since the early nineteenth century, Unitarianism's emphasis on religious freedom and an individually responsible life has found expression in the denomination's support of a wide variety of social justice and human rights causes, including

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<sup>24</sup> History of Unitarianism. Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations <http://www.uua.org/beliefs/history>

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abolition, women's rights, prison reform, racial equality, cultural diversity, and lesbian and gay rights, and its members have always placed priority on social services projects in their own communities, as well as abroad.

Many well-known Americans active in liberal causes and social reform were affiliated with the Unitarian church or with the Universalist church, which held similar beliefs. These include John Adams, John Quincy Adams, Clara Barton, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Susan B. Anthony, William Lloyd Garrison, Dorothea Dix, Frank Lloyd Wright, Margaret Fuller, Adlai Stevenson, Eliot Richardson and Whitney Young. In 1961, the Universalist and Unitarian churches merged to form the Unitarian Universalist Association.

### First Unitarian Society of Schenectady

Among the hundreds of engineers, managers and other skilled laborers who moved to the city at the end of the nineteenth century were a group of Unitarians from New England, particularly the Lynn, MA, area. By 1900 a number of these families sought to establish a Unitarian congregation in the city. The Reverend D. W. Morehouse, secretary of the Unitarian Conference of the Middle States and Canada, observed that "in the midst of the rigid Orthodoxy of the existing churches [in Schenectady], the [Unitarian] families find themselves practically unchurched." Morehouse recommended that a Unitarian church be established in Schenectady, believing that a liberal church would be welcomed by the city's mix of scientifically minded individuals. Fifteen people attended an informational meeting on 18 October 1900 at the Schenectady Woman's Club, and Sunday services were held three days later.<sup>25</sup>

The First Unitarian Society of Schenectady was established in February 1901 with eleven charter members and articles of incorporation were filed in March of that year. The society adopted a constitution, approved officers and a board of trustees, and adopted a budget. Almost immediately members formed a women's alliance, the

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<sup>25</sup> The First Unitarian Society of Schenectady, "1901-2001, Our First One Hundred Years," 3.

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Schenectady Branch of the National Alliance of Unitarian and Other Liberal Christian Women, to assist in fundraising. By May of that year, the society was well into planning for a permanent home, purchasing a lot at the corner of Union Street and Wendell Avenue, acquiring an organ and hiring an organist. Although Sunday attendance averaged between twenty-two and twenty-eight, membership grew slowly. This was in part attributable to the society's lack of a church and in part to the rapid turnover of GE employees, who were transferred into and out of Schenectady frequently to meet the growing company's demands.<sup>26</sup> In the years before a church was constructed, services were held variously in a lodge, in the courthouse and in the library, among other places.<sup>27</sup>

By 1906, the land was paid off and the congregation began planning its first church. The latter was constructed in two stages, because the society lacked funds to construct it in one. The first phase, including a chapel, Sunday school room, ladies' parlor, kitchen and recreation room, was completed on 17 January 1908. Between 1808 and 1909, the congregation ranged between fifty-five and sixty-five members, an insufficient number to fund the second stage of construction, and support from the national organization declined. Nevertheless, the society continued its charitable commitments, bible classes, recitals and lectures, and prior to the start of World War I, was active in calling for peace.<sup>28</sup>

In 1917, the congregation, which had grown to 150 members, was too large for the chapel and made plans to complete the building as designed. This included expanding and completing the auditorium and adding the tower. Construction was completed in 1918, but funds ran out before pews could be purchased, leaving members to make do with rented folding seats for many years. Also in 1918 a Sunday school was established

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>27</sup> "Society Had 12 Members in Beginning," *Schenectady Union-Star*, 30 September 1961.

<sup>28</sup> "Our First One Hundred Years," 4-5.

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“on a scientific basis.”<sup>29</sup> According to one member, classes were “light on Bible stories and heavy on science experiments, nature walks, etc.”<sup>30</sup>

In 1919 the Women’s Alliance developed a plan for an Open Forum, a series of public forums on both secular and religious topics. The men’s Layman’s League took over the forum in 1921, sponsoring lively discussions on wide-ranging topics such as socialism, labor and educational reform, and the roles of science and religion. General Electric inventor Charles Steinmetz spoke both at services and at the forum. In the 1940s the series was popular as an annual public lecture series known as the Freedom Forum<sup>31</sup>

During the 1920s, the congregation moved toward a more humanistic theology, that is, one that affirms the responsibility of humans to lead ethical lives over a belief in the supernatural. This, along with several other factors, including the popularity of the Open Forum, sparked a growth in membership. Although many GE workers, including church members, took deep salary cuts during the Great Depression, the congregation remained active in local relief efforts though these years.<sup>32</sup> In 1935, the church’s progressive tenets were apparent in the Rev. Robert Weston’s move to initiate the Birth Control League of Schenectady. Westin served as its president and church members were among the founders. In the same year a consumer’s club was organized.<sup>33</sup> After World War II, the church aided in resettling displaced persons from Hungary, Lithuania, Germany and Russia in Schenectady, assisting them with housing and support. The Rev Robert Hoaglund, who headed the church between 1946 and 1956, was a founder of the Schenectady chapter of the NAACP. Church membership grew substantially with the post-war baby boom until, by the mid-1950s, the old church was

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 5

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 7.

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seriously overcrowded and the society commenced its campaign to purchase land and build the nominated structure, which was completed in 1961.

During the 1960s and 70s, society members were active in many of the movements for social change that marked the era. While some participated in developing the local educational TV channel, others established a revolving bail fund for poor people lacking collateral. The latter led to the establishment of the Law, Order and Justice Center to administer bail funds and provide other services for those involved in the criminal justice system. In 1977 several church members founded RID [remove intoxicated drivers], the first national anti-drunk driving organization in the United States. Soon there were Unitarian-based RID centers in Buffalo, Ithaca, Rochester and Syracuse. These same members also helped to strengthen laws prohibiting driving while intoxicated. The congregation has continually expressed its concern with the nuclear arms race, and in 1986 members convinced the mayor of Schenectady to declare the church a "peace site," a place for the research and discussion of peace issues. Church members created a library of reference materials, sponsored essay contests for young people and held forums on peace. Between 1985 and 1992, the church offered active support for those afflicted with AIDS, and during the 1990s members joined with the Whitney Young Baptist Church to establish the Whitney Young Adopt-A-School Program. Together the two churches adopted the Lincoln Elementary School, holding numerous fundraisers, sponsoring after school programs and volunteering.

### First Unitarian Society Church

By the mid-1950s, the congregation's post-war growth had strained the old church's ability to serve its members.<sup>34</sup> Thus, in October 1955 the congregation voted to buy four acres of land at 1227 Wendell Ave from Delta Chi fraternity for construction of a new church and Sunday school.<sup>35</sup> [The reference to a four-acre parcel

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<sup>34</sup> Much of the information about building the church was obtained from a personal interview with Elwin Stevens, consulting architect, by Kathleen LaFrank, 25 September 2013.

<sup>35</sup> "Society Had 12 Members."



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is possibly an error. The parcel shown in Edward Durell Stone's drawings for the church, clearly marked with property lines, is identical to the two-acre parcel that the church owns today.] The congregation continued to meet in the earlier church while the new building was under construction, but when the new building was completed, the old church was sold to a Seventh Day Adventist congregation.<sup>36</sup>

With a congregation that included a number of GE employees, the church was fortunate that many of its members were progressive and open minded. Although some members of the building committee believed that a local architect should be hired to design the new church, there was no substantial opposition to a church of starkly modern design. Three people played major roles in securing the services of Edward Durell Stone for the commission. The first was the pastor, the Rev William Gold, a gifted preacher and a very popular figure who was widely respected by the congregation. Gold was adamant in his desire for a signature piece of architecture and the congregation followed his lead. The other two were both architects and members of the congregation. Donald Mochon was a graduate of RPI, a professor of architecture at that school, a well-regarded local painter, and a resident of Troy. His friend and next door neighbor was Elwin Stevens, a former professor of architecture at RPI, who was then director of planning and development for the State University of New York. Both Mochon and Stevens were modernists with connections in Stone's office and they proposed consulting Stone about his interest in the commission.<sup>37</sup> Stone agreed to meet with the board, after which members were enthusiastic about his participation. The architect followed up with a design, which he presented to the entire congregation. Most liked it, despite the fact that it was vastly different from the traditional space that they then occupied. Gold also advocated for the design strongly. He was particularly taken with the dome, contrasting it favorably with some of the popular modern church designs of the era that took the triangle as a motif. The latter Gold referred to as "upside down battleships."

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> One apocryphal source holds that Stone agreed to it because his hero – Frank Lloyd Wright – was both a Unitarian and had designed a Unitarian church [in Madison, WI]. It was Stone's first church commission.

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Once the architect and the design for the new church were approved, the budget was only \$800,000, which was substantially less than called for, and although the congregation began raising funds, the building committee found several ways to cut costs. Among the most important was that Elwin Stevens volunteered to serve as consulting architect and on-site construction supervisor, managing the production of materials, such as the patterned concrete blocks, which were made locally.<sup>38</sup> In addition, Mal Horton, an engineer and another church member, designed the planned heating system to use more efficient furnaces and the electrical work, which he oversaw, and introduced state of the art 24-volt lighting control system.<sup>39</sup> Horton was on site almost every day. One additional piece of good luck helped the church to afford the new building. In 1959, Gertrude Waters bequeathed her large home and more than eight acres directly across from the church site (Unitarian House, 1248 Wendell Ave) to be used as a church school.<sup>40</sup> This allowed Stone to eliminate the planned classroom wing off the rear elevation of the church, cutting a substantial amount from the cost. Construction began in April 1960. The church was built by L.A. Swyer and Sons, prominent local builders, while concrete blocks and lumber were supplied by other local firms. The final cost was \$600,000.

In addition to onsite work supervising construction and the production of concrete blocks, Elwin Stevens also designed and built the model for the circular seating, one of the church's most distinctive interior features. Stone had designed the space but left it up to the congregation to decide on the exact nature of the seating. While one member of the congregation argued forcefully for auditorium seating, Stevens went home and designed what he felt to be appropriate seating himself, building a sample five-foot section in his own living room. According to Stevens, the naysayers were "wowed" by his accomplishment, particularly by the comfort afforded by his design, and the matter was decided. The seating plan was complicated by the varying radii of each circle and the cones formed by the seats and back; nevertheless, Stevens recalled that they were able to

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<sup>38</sup> Stevens had extras produced for potential repairs; these were known as "attic stock."

<sup>39</sup> Lois Porter, "Church Marks 50 Years in Its Unique Home." [www.sld.uua.org/pdfs/2011/FUSS\\_aniversarypdf](http://www.sld.uua.org/pdfs/2011/FUSS_aniversarypdf)

<sup>40</sup> Unitarian House is a contributing building in the G.E. Realty Plot Historic District.

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break it down into an exact number of pieces, which were then ordered from a Vermont manufacturer. The ying yang design of the floor under the dome was chosen by the Rev. Gold. Ying yang, which represents the interconnection of opposites, encapsulates Unitarian philosophy. The auditorium seats 300.

Stevens also built several notable pieces of furniture; in particular, the sculptural wood pulpit, the speaker system and its enclosure (which has hidden space left for a pipe organ), and the large round marble table in the fireplace room, which he described as a gift. He also adapted the fireplaces on either side of the great hall to make them more practical. In Stone's design, they were flush with the wall without mantels; however, when they were used, frequently according to Stevens, they blew smoke into the room. Stevens designed the narrow, flat, wood mantels specifically so that screens could be hung from them to contain smoke. One fight that Stevens lost was his campaign for cloth towels in the restrooms. He felt that paper was not a material worthy of the architecture.

Elwin Stevens's involvement was among the principal reasons that a nationally known architect such as Stone came to design a monumental building in the small city of Schenectady, and his direct involvement with its construction both helped to ensure the quality of that design and added to its artistic dimensions. However, Stevens's involvement with Stone during this period had one other consequence that is of immense significance in the region. According to Stevens, one day, while driving Stone back to the airport, Stevens, who was then director of planning and development for the State University of New York, mentioned to the architect that the university was planning to relocate its entire Albany campus to a new location, a former country club, just outside the city. Stevens asked Stone if he might be interested in designing the new campus and drove him to inspect the site. Stone went on to secure the commission, perhaps through his long connection with Nelson Rockefeller, who had recommended him for the MoMA commission in the 1930s.<sup>41</sup> The State University of

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<sup>41</sup>Edward P. Alexander, *The Museum in America: Innovators and Pioneers* (n.p.: AltaMira Press, 2000), 75.

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New York at Albany (NRE), built between 1961 and 1972, is a monumental work that epitomizes Stone's late career style. It is a landmark of modern architecture in the Albany area and it has had a significant impact on education, economy, regional planning, and many other aspects of regional development. An interesting footnote is that Stevens also recalls Stone bringing a small model of the campus to illustrate an informal talk to the Unitarian congregation about the campus.

The First Unitarian Society church was dedicated on 1 October 1961, to much attention. Stone personally rented \$250,000 worth of art to display on the walls.<sup>42</sup> Service were led by Mr. Gold, but the principal speaker was Dr. Marshall Dimock, Bethal, VM, moderator of the UUAsso. There was such local interest that the service was restricted to members. At 8 pm that same evening, Edward Durrell Stone spoke on the planning and significance of the church.

Stone noted in an interview that that the circle's "great advantage is that it gets all the congregation very near the minister and the pulpit, which is highly desirable, especially with this congregation, an exceptionally closely knit group. It is more a family group idea. One could parallel it with people around a campfire at night. It makes for a more intimate gathering."<sup>43</sup> Stone also claimed at one time that the circular design was inspired by Edwin Markam's poem "Outwitted"

He drew a circle that shut me out,  
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.  
But love and I had the wit to win.  
We drew a circle that took him in.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> "Our First One Hundred Years," 8.

<sup>43</sup> "How Choice Was Made; Church-in-the-Round Likened to Campfire." *Schenectady Union-Star*, 30 September 1961.

<sup>44</sup> in "Our First One Hundred Years," 8

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The architect observed that circles could function to keep people out or to draw them in. Certainly the circle is one of the most appropriate metaphors for the central Unitarian tenet of interdependence.

In 1977, a large metal sculpture, "Sanctuary," by congregation member Robert Blood, was purchased and placed in the rear garden. Alterations to the church are few. The most notable is the replacement of the original full-height glass entrance doors with generic contemporary glass doors. The other change to the exterior is the removal of the large circular concrete planters that once graced the façade (which are in storage off site) and the problems with the reflecting pools and fountains that prevents them from operation. The society is in the process of seeking solutions to permit repair of the pools.

The First Unitarian Society Church is a nearly pristine example of Edward Durell Stone's fully developed style, which combined modern materials and technology with lush embellishment and personal expressiveness. It is a significant example of modern architecture in Schenectady and a distinctive modern building in New York's capitol district.

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### Verbal Boundary Description

The nomination boundary is indicated by a heavy line on the enclosed map.

### Boundary Justification

The boundary was drawn to include current two-acre parcel owned by the church. This is the parcel that is shown on the architect's plans and appears to be the original property purchased for its construction.

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Photographer: Kathleen LaFrank  
NYSHPO  
Peebles island State Park  
PO Box 189  
Waterford, NY 12188

Date: 2013

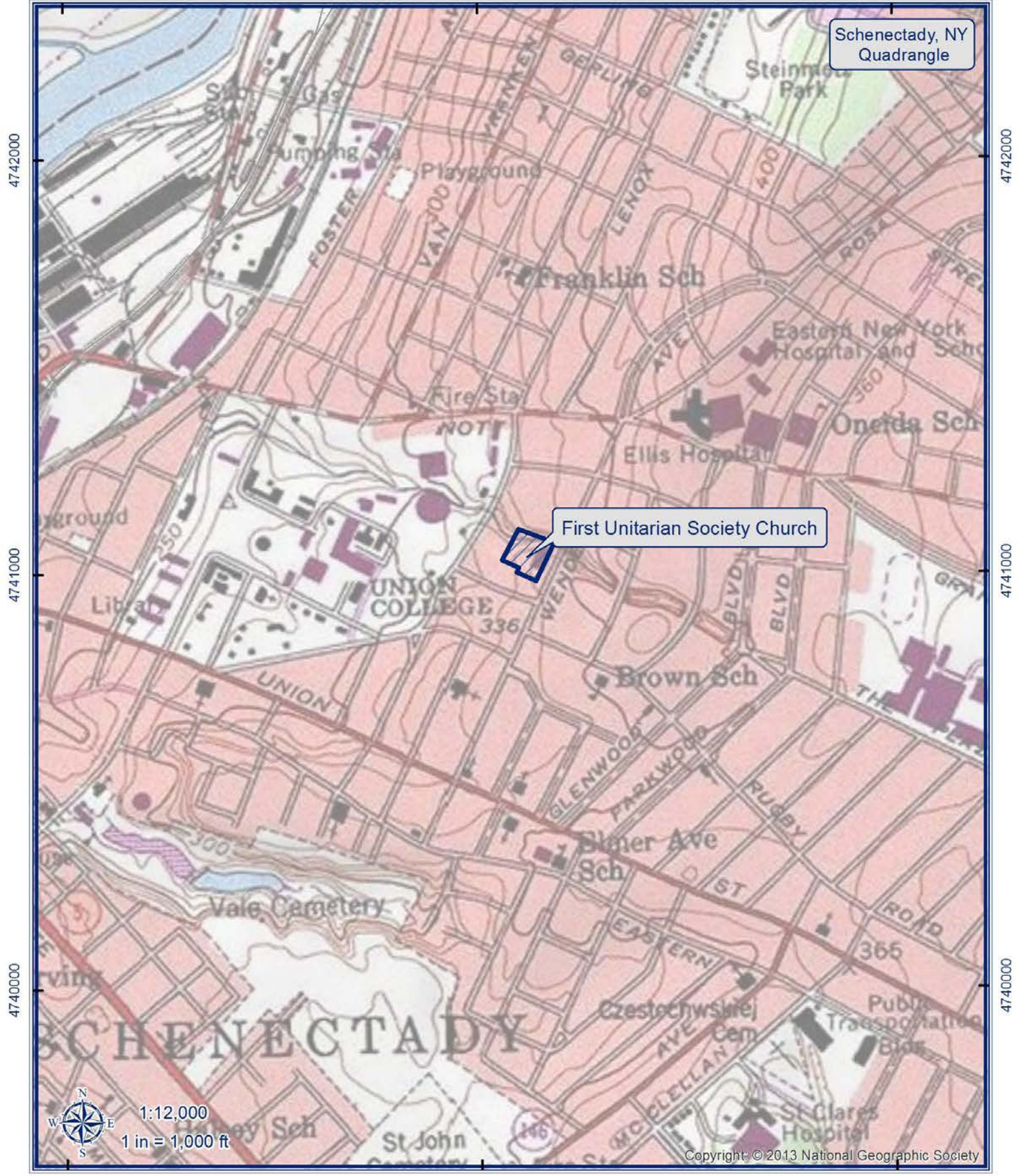
Tiff Files: CD-R of .tiff files on file at  
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Waterford, NY

### Photo List:

- 0001. Façade, looking west
- 0002. Side (south) elevation
- 0003. Rear (west) elevation
- 0004. Side (north) elevation
- 0005. Vestibule
- 0006. Great Hall, Fireplace and Seating Area
- 0007. Worship Space, Pulpit
- 0008. Worship Space, Seating
- 0009. Worship Space, Dome
- 0010. Fireplace Room

See continuation sheet





Schenectady, NY  
Quadrangle

First Unitarian Society Church

1:12,000  
1 in = 1,000 ft

Copyright: © 2013 National Geographic Society

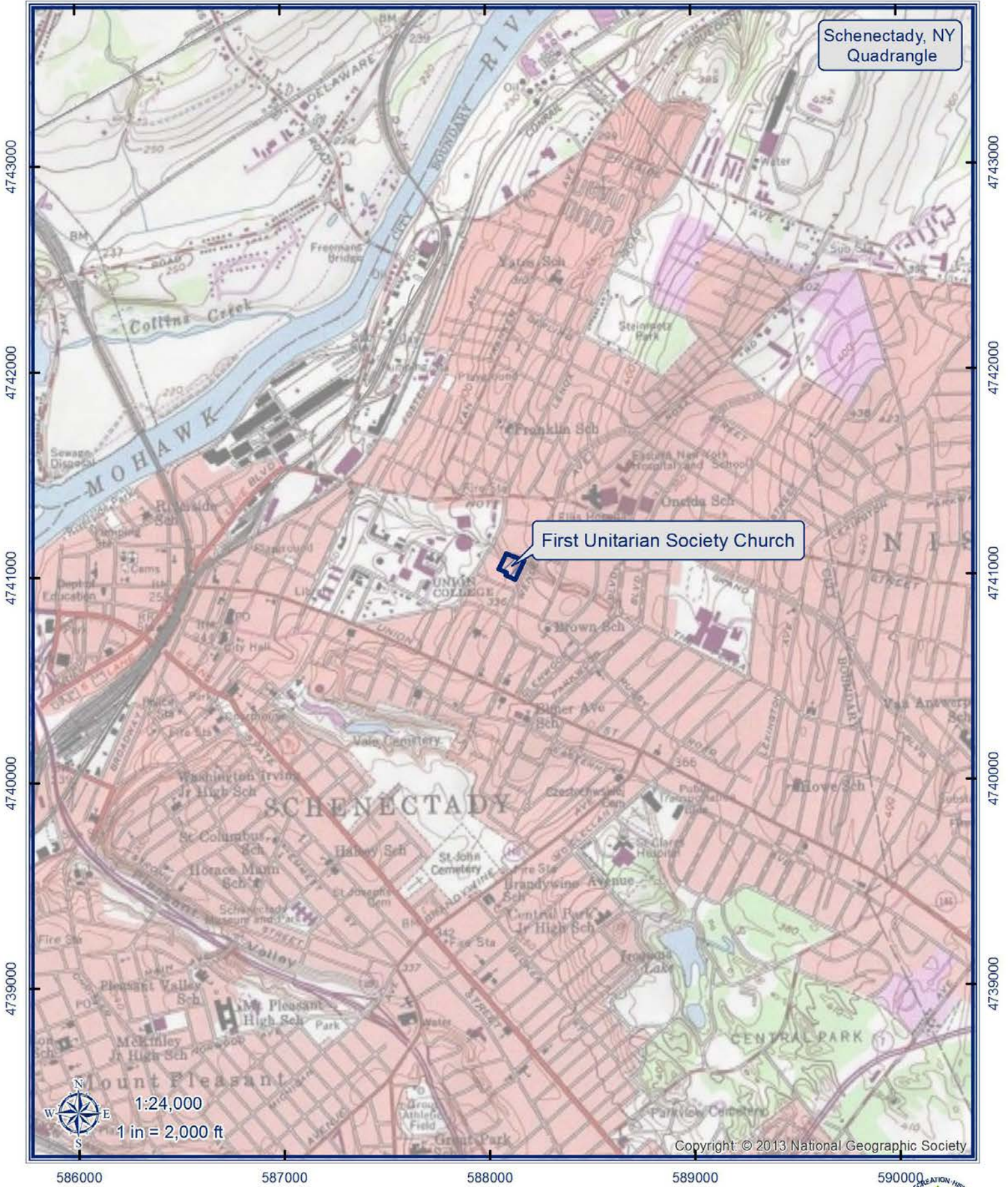
Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N  
Projection: Transverse Mercator  
Datum: North American 1983  
Units: Meter



 Church

Tax Parcel Data:  
Schenectady Co, RPS  
<http://www.simsgis.org>



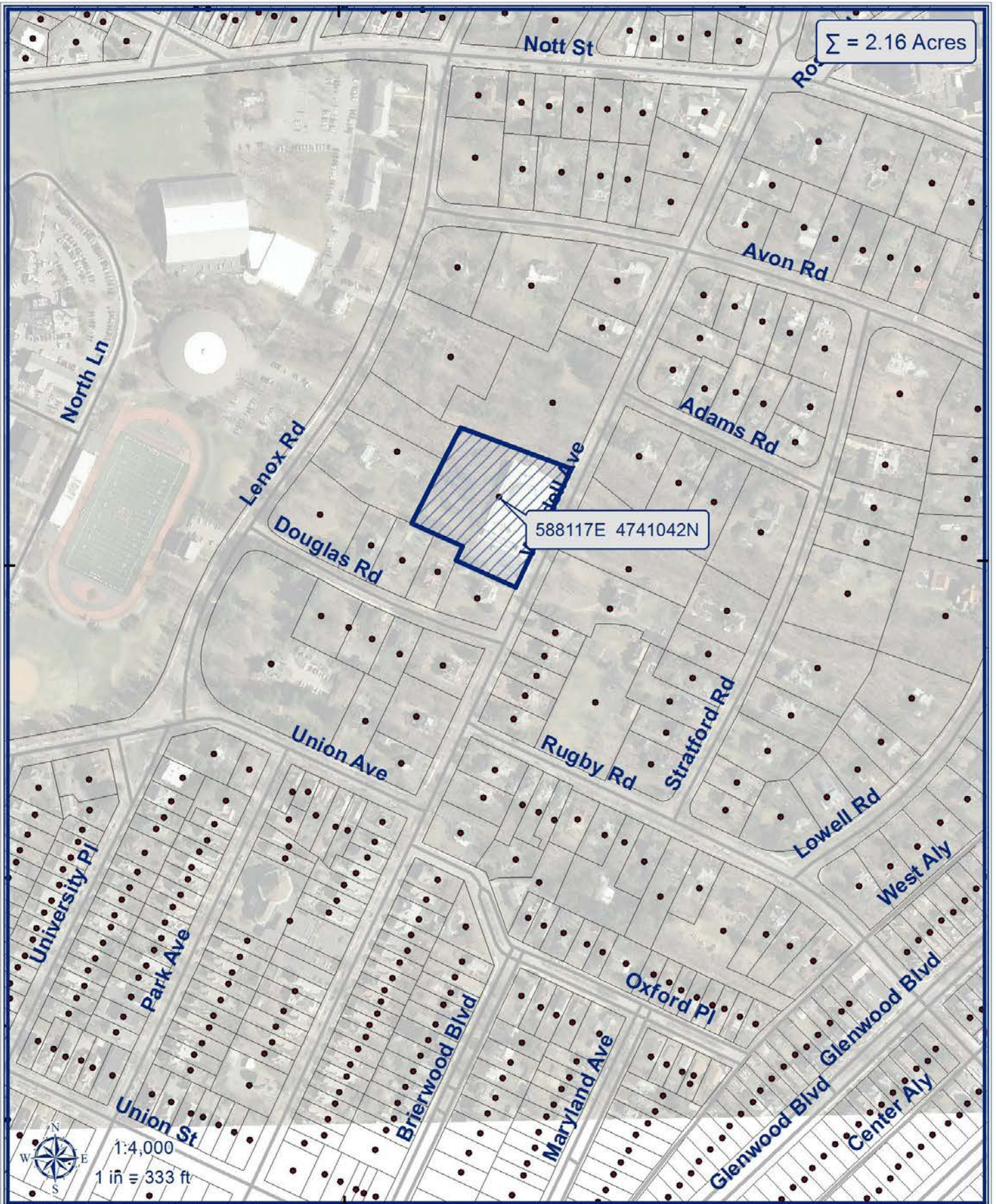


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 Projection: Transverse Mercator  
 Datum: North American 1983  
 Units: Meter



Tax Parcel Data:  
 Schenectady Co, RPS  
<http://www.simsgis.org>





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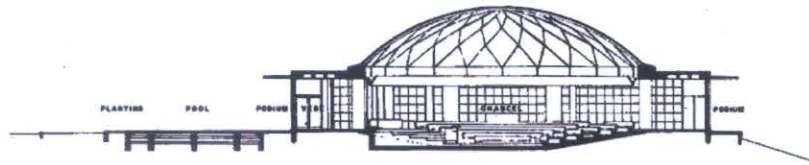
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Units: Meter



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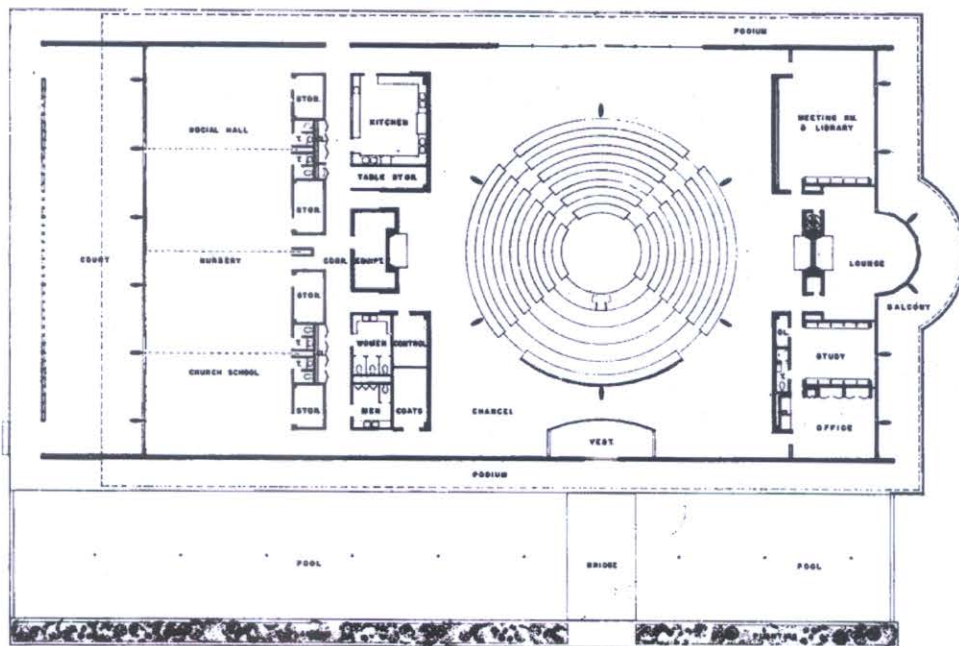




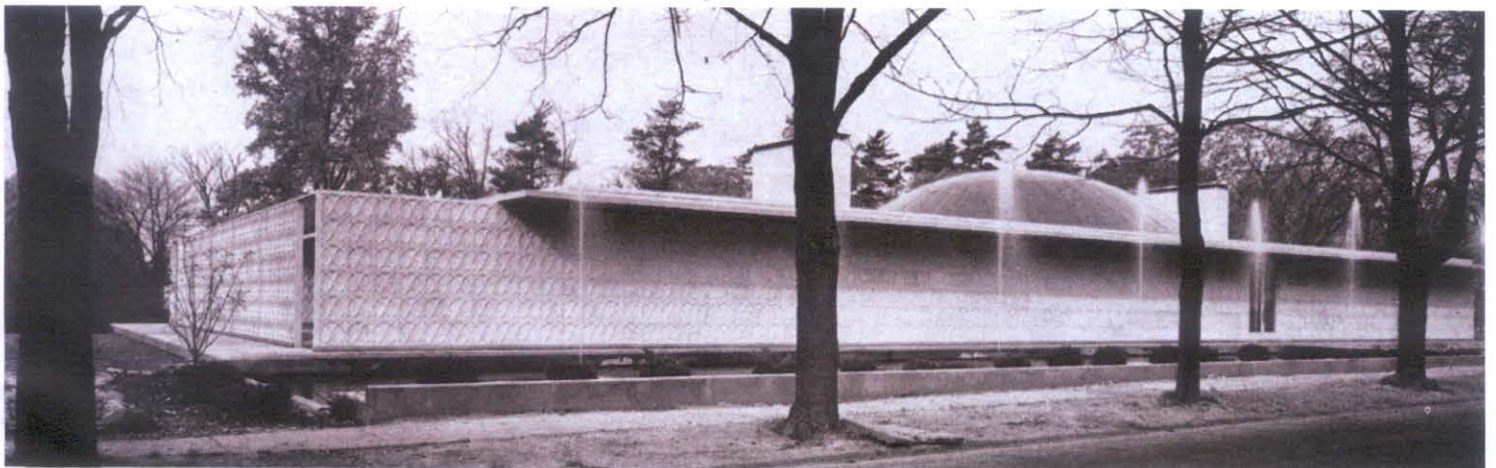
TRANSVERSE SECTION



LONGITUDINAL SECTION



FIRST FLOOR PLAN







NURTURE  
He







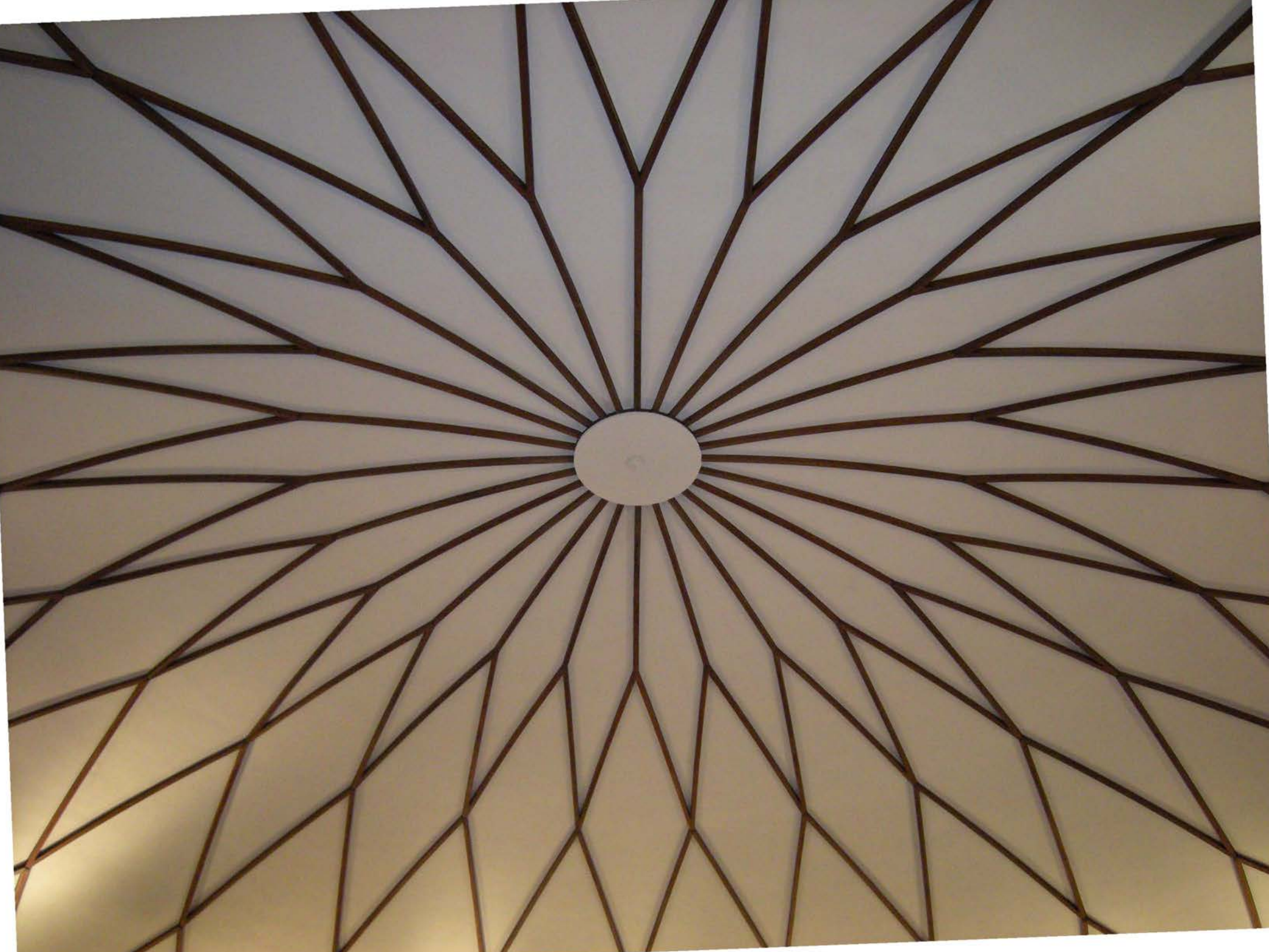














UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY First Unitarian Society Church  
NAME:

MULTIPLE  
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: NEW YORK, Schenectady

DATE RECEIVED: 12/20/13 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 1/21/14  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 2/05/14 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 2/05/14  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 13001157

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: Y SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: Y NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT  RETURN  REJECT 2.5.14 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Entered in  
The National Register  
of  
Historic Places

RECOM./CRITERIA \_\_\_\_\_

REVIEWER \_\_\_\_\_ DISCIPLINE \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.



## New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Division for Historic Preservation  
P.O. Box 189, Waterford, New York 12188-0189  
518-237-8643



Andrew M. Cuomo  
Governor  
Rose Harvey  
Commissioner

16 December 2013

Alexis Abernathy  
National Park Service  
National Register of Historic Places  
1201 Eye St. NW, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Washington, D.C. 20005

Re: National Register Nominations

Dear Ms. Abernathy:

I am pleased to enclose two National Register nominations, both on discs, to be considered for listing by the Keeper of the National Register:

Port Morris Ferry Bridges, Bronx County  
First Unitarian Society Church, Schenectady County

You will note that the Schenectady Historic Preservation Commission, while supporting the nomination, has expressed some concerns about the proposed rehabilitation of the pools in front of the Unitarian church. These changes have not occurred yet, nor have they been approved by the preservation commission. While the NYSHPO does not feel that the changes will compromise the integrity of the church, we have offered to work with the church and/or the CLG if either desires in order to ensure a compatible solution.

Please feel free to call me at 518.237.8643 x 3261 if you have any questions.

Sincerely:

Kathleen LaFrank  
National Register Coordinator  
New York State Historic Preservation Office





**CITY OF SCHENECTADY  
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR**

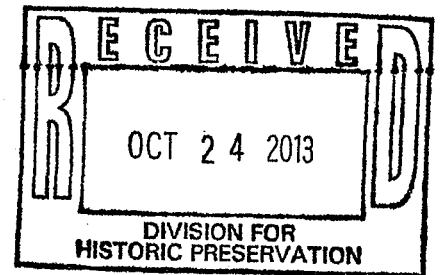
City Hall - Jay Street  
Schenectady, New York 12305

**Gary R. McCarthy**  
Mayor

Office: (518) 382-5000  
Cell: (518) 424-0483  
Email: GMcCarthy@SchenectadyNY.Gov

October 20, 2013

Ms. Ruth L. Pierpont  
Acting Deputy Commissioner for Historic Preservation  
Field Service Bureau / Division for Historic Preservation  
State and National Registers of Historic Places Program  
New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation  
Peebles Island State Park  
P.O. Box 189  
Waterford, New York 12188-0189



Dear Ruth:

The City of Schenectady fully supports the nomination of the First Unitarian Society of Schenectady's (now legally known as the Unitarian Universalist Society of Schenectady) nomination of its historically significant building to the National Register of Historic Places.

This building, already located within the Register's established "GE Realty Plot", would contribute greatly to the completeness of the "GE Realty Plot" and stand as its own testament to the importance of place. The presence of this exemplar piece of modernist architecture, by architect Edward Durell Stone, within the City of Schenectady makes an important contribution to our community as does the congregation of which continues to engage and work toward positive change.

It would be our pleasure to welcome this significant building to the host of historic properties within our city.

Very truly yours,

Gary R. McCarthy

cc: Laura Turney  
First Unitarian Society Church  
1221 Wendell Avenue  
Schenectady, New York 12308





**CITY OF SCHENECTADY**  
**OFFICE OF THE MAYOR**

City Hall - Jay Street  
Schenectady, New York 12305

**Gary R. McCarthy**  
Mayor

Office: (518) 382-5000  
Cell: (518) 424-0483  
Email: [GMcCarthy@SchenectadyNY.Gov](mailto:GMcCarthy@SchenectadyNY.Gov)

November 26, 2013

Ms. Kathleen LaFrank  
Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau  
NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation  
Peebles Island, P.O. Box 189  
Waterford, NY 12188-0189

Re: First Unitarian Society Church, Schenectady, Schenectady County

Dear Ms. LaFrank:

As a Certified Local Government, we are required to participate in the nomination process of properties to the State and National Register of Historic Places. In accordance with these requirements, I have included with this letter the opinion of the Schenectady Historic District Commission with regard to the aforementioned property, and offer my following recommendation.

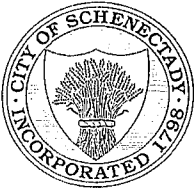
I support the Schenectady Historic District Commission and their findings that the First Unitarian Society Church, in its current condition, meets the criteria under which properties are evaluated for listing to the State and National Register of Historic Places.

If you have any questions regarding this letter or my recommendation, please feel free to call me at (518) 382-5000 or e-mail me at [gmccarthy@schenectadyny.gov](mailto:gmccarthy@schenectadyny.gov).

Very truly yours,

Gary R. McCarthy REP





# DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENT

## City of Schenectady

RICHARD E. PURGA  
Acting Director & Community  
Development Supervisor  
(518) 382-5147 & 382-5149  
E-Mail: rpurga@schenectadyny.gov

STEVEN STRICHMAN  
Zoning & Empire Zone Officer  
(518) 382-5049  
E-Mail:  
sstrichman@schenectadyny.gov

CHRISTINE S. PRIMIANO  
Principal Planner  
(518) 382-5147  
E-Mail: cprimiano@schenectadyny.gov

AHMAD YUSUFI  
Homeownership Coordinator  
(518) 382-5199 Ext. 5340  
E-Mail: ayusufi@schenectadyny.gov

November 20, 2013

Kathleen LaFrank  
Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau  
New York State Office of Parks,  
Recreation and Historic Preservation  
Peebles Island, P.O. Box 189  
Waterford, NY 12188-0189

Re: First Unitarian Society Church  
Schenectady, Schenectady County

Dear Ms. LaFrank,

At its regularly scheduled meeting on November 18, 2013 the Schenectady Historic District Commission reviewed the National Register of Historic Places Nomination Forms for the First Unitarian Society Church located at 1221 Wendell Ave., Schenectady, NY.

The Commission supports the nomination to list the aforementioned property in its current condition to the State and National Registers and believes it meets the criteria under which properties are evaluated for listing.

However, the Commission does feel that the registration form is incomplete. On July 15, 2013, the First Unitarian Society Church met with the Historic District Commission (HDC) to obtain a Certificate of Approval for proposed changes to the fountain, walkways, and landscaping at the front of the property. The Commission noted that these changes were not specified in the National Register application yet they would substantially alter the podium, forecourt and plaza designed by the architect. The HDC conceptually approved the changes to the property which allowed the consulting engineering firm to proceed with drawing up detailed construction documents. These documents will be submitted to the HDC for final approval. The HDC feels that these details should be included in the registration form since the result of these changes will significantly affect the appearance, and perhaps the historic value, of the property.

Attached is information regarding the proposed changes for your consideration. If you have any questions regarding this matter, feel free to contact me at 382-5147, or by e-mail at msmith@schenectadyny.gov.

Sincerely,

Matthew L. Smith  
Staff Liaison to the Schenectady  
Historic District Commission

Enclosure: Reflecting Pool Plaza Concept Renderings