

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received MAR 12 1984
date entered

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

1. Name

historic First Methodist Episcopal Church

and/or common First United Methodist Church

2. Location

street & number 10th & Pleasant sts, _____ not for publication

city, town Des Moines _____ vicinity of

state Iowa code 019 county Polk code 153

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	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name First United Methodist Church

street & number 10th & Pleasant

city, town Des Moines _____ vicinity of state Iowa 50309

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. County Clerk's Office

street & number Polk County Courthouse

city, town Des Moines, _____ state Iowa 50309

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title N/A has this property been determined eligible? _____ yes _____ no

date _____ federal _____ state _____ county _____ local

depository for survey records

city, town _____ state

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

The First Methodist Episcopal Church building faithfully represents the Neo-Classical style which was popular during the years 1900-20 by virtue of its basic symmetry, its monumental proportions, its colossal pedimented portico, its plain exterior stone surfaces, and its Roman glass and copper dome.

Symbolically the church combines the square and the sphere in its design scheme, and its proportions are said to match those of the Roman Pantheon. Originally the main building was square on plan (106' on a side) with a shallow centered west side wing which was rectangular on plan (36' by 94'). The westward thrust of the overall plan was made visually dominant by the 1954 "Youth Addition," also rectangular on plan (62' by 88') which will be discussed below.

Based upon concrete footings, brick load-bearing walls, faced with buff colored Bedford Indiana limestone rise nearly fifty feet to the cornice line, and encompass a partly exposed basement, main floor and balcony levels. Four corner stair towers with three foot thick walls, and load-bearing side walls, and an internal support system hold up the building. The latter system consists of eight composite steel I-beam columns based upon individual spread footing pad foundations which are set in an octagonal pattern. Measuring from the first floor level, these columns are built up with wood to form three quarters engaged columns with scagliolia exteriors and ionic capitals. Twenty-eight foot long girders connect these columns and support the dome, its base, and a forty-foot wide circular skylight of opalescent glass which is below the dome itself. Eight steel trusses actually support the dome. Below the massive skylight, a seventy foot square auditorium is provided for a basilica plan (without apses) sanctuary. Narrow rectangular balconies on the second floor level encircle the auditorium on all but the north side, and are unique in that they do not project over the first floor but cap a surround of corridors and side rooms on the main level. A main floor diagonally placed choir stall (non-extant) occupied the northeast corner. The original side addition housed the Sunday school operation, being based on the "Akron Plan" which emphasized the use of a central assembly space with a surrounding series of classrooms, in this instance the latter were pie-shaped. A smaller second floor series of rooms were combined with a semi-circular balcony, and sliding doors permitted the Sunday school area to be combined functionally with the auditorium to the east.

The main facade (south face) is dominated by a colossal pedimented portico with four stone ionic columns (spaced respectively 9'10", 13'4", and 9'10"). The plain pediment tympanum includes an unscribed double tablet (symbolic of the Ten Commandments). Inscribed along the frieze, between two inscribed spheres, are the words "THE FIRST METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH." Squared pilasters with simplified Corinthian capitals anchor the inside corners of the portico to the wall mass.

A splayed three-section staircase with mid-point and upper landings leads from the streetside to a balustraded retaining wall, with matching side staircases. The latter have a mid-point landing and a 90 degree turn. The portico itself has an additional front staircase leading up from the piazza. The overall visual effect of the grand staircase is a

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/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1905–08

Builder/Architect Proudfoot & Bird, Des Moines.

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The First Methodist Episcopal Church (1905–08), designed by the noted Iowa architectural firm Proudfoot and Bird, is a notable example of the Neo-Classical style. The building is well preserved and interior and exterior alterations have been designed so as to not compromise the original plan.

The First Methodist Episcopal Church traces its history to 1845, and presently occupies its fourth building (others non-extant). The current building reflects its success and growth over this period. By 1906 the church boasted a thousand members. By that time it had founded eleven Methodist churches in the city from its ranks. The merger of Centenary and First churches in 1880 marked the end of a twelve year period during which there briefly existed two downtown Methodist churches. Otherwise, First Church was and has always been the downtown church.

In order to house its membership, a new and ambitious church plan was commissioned from the noted Des Moines architectural firm of Proudfoot and Bird (the building was #174). This firm dominated the state's architectural profession for thirty years between 1900 and 1930, capitalizing on its Republican contacts. In Des Moines, the firm received the lion's share of the major commissions during the boom period of construction in the early Twentieth century. The highly symbolic ground breaking on June 22, 1905 was accomplished using a horse plow and teams consisting of church members. Doctor E. T. Hagerman, First Church minister and the source of leadership and inspiration for the construction of this building, was ploughman. The cornerstone dedication took place on July 23, 1906, and the final dedication on June 14, 1908. The lengthy construction period attests to the enormity of the task. The Fred Andrus Company of Milwaukee had the stonework contract, and John Bailey supervised the brickwork.

The building occupied a site at the head of 10th Street on a prominent elevation. The site was largely graded down to street level for construction. According to a contemporary newspaper "It is considered an ideal location and as an artistic site will be without an equal in Des Moines...The church will be in full view from any point on Tenth Street and will also be visible from the contiguous residence district. It will be one block from a car line and in the radius of other downtown churches."

With an initial estimated cost of \$100,000, the original building plans were to cost considerably more (\$175,000) despite efforts to cut costs by eliminating some of the original decorative features. Exterior quoins and surface rustication were not executed (except on the steps which must have been already in place). Planned art glass windows within each corner tower as well as bull's eye windows below were also dropped. Inscribed panels above the front door and on the main facade were left bare (including the incision of two year dates, 1844 and 1905 planned for the front frieze corners). The basement interior was left unfinished. Despite increased costs, the church would celebrate a mortgage burning in early 1920.

This fine building and its strong congregation would play a central role in their regional church affairs. The 1908 Annual Conference of the Methodist Church agreed with the statement that "First Church, Des Moines, is pronounced by competent critics to be the

9. Major Bibliographical References

Refer to Continuation Sheet 9-2

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 2.4 acres

Quadrangle name Des Moines Southwest

Quadrangle scale 1/24,000

UTM References

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Verbal boundary description and justification All of Lots 2 through 7 (except the north 20'), all of Lots 8-10, Methodist Plat No. 1, City of Des Moines. This area is bounded by 10th St. on the east, Chestnut St. on the north, vacated Pleasant St. on the west, and Pleasant St. on the south. Includes entirety of church and no other buildings.

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

state N/A code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title James E. Jacobsen, National Register Coordinator

organization Iowa SHPO date 2 March 1984

street & number Historical Building telephone 515-281-4137
E. 12th & Grand Ave.

city or town Des Moines state Iowa 50319

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 National Park Service

State Historic Preservation Officer signature *William A. Anderson*

title Executive Director Iowa State Historical Department date 3/5/84

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

for Melores Byers Entered in the National Register date 4/12/84
Keeper of the National Register

Attest: Chief of Registration date

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Continuation sheet Physical Description

Item number 7

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combination of both invitation and the presentation of an indirect approach to the church.

The main facade mass is divided vertically by basement and balcony level horizontal string courses (the latter is interrupted by the corner tower pilasters), the balcony level combination of single-light sash (art glass) and plain panels, a projecting molded cornice line, and a plain attic parapet wall with coping. Main level fenestration is contained within the portico itself. Plain panels and blank wall masses flank the portico. The stonework is executed in a plain fashion, without the tower quoins and the severe rustication called for in the original plan. Only the staircase appears to have followed through with this surface treatment.

The original sidewalls both featured centered pilastered pavilions, and corner or stair tower pilasters with a corniceline which reflected those varied wall massings. Second floor fenestration also consisted of single light sash, while main floor windows were large 6/6 sash. The west facade, with its slightly narrower wing, had a central entrance. The rear or north wall mass had only the flanking stair tower effect, and a plain wall mass between. Fenestration fairly filled this wall, and was completed by the addition of a six-foot wide rose window in 1940. A covered entryway occupies the first floor level of the northwest corner on this facade.

The roof plan is naturally dominated by the copper and glass dome with its centered Latin cross and cap. The dome is based upon an octagonal housing (actually taking the form of an octagon with the walls on the four compass points being thrust slightly forward in pavilion-fashion). Rectangular skylights are placed along each of these faces (except on the north), and large circular vents are centered on the other faces of the dome base. Four bull's eye windows pierce the dome base in line with the three skylights.

The 1954 "Youth Addition" as noted has a rectangular plan, with an entrance stair tower on the south face. Like the side wing, fenestration reflects the presence of two functioning stories (including a second floor gymnasium) within as well as a raised basement. Basement level windows are made possible by the use of exterior retaining walls and consist of 6/6 sash. First floor windows are the same, and are closely spaced on all sides of the addition. First floor windows are vertically aligned with plain square panels which mark the base of the second floor. Second floor windows are triple sash (6/3/3), and match the first floor window scheme on the north and south sides (being absent on the west wall). The addition exterior was executed in matching stone veneer and corner pilasters, but has a very plain attic parapet wall.

The original setting for the church was on what became known as "Methodist Hill" because of the proximity of many church-related buildings. This area was originally residential in nature, but was close to the downtown commercial area. Today the church is engulfed in high-rise commercial development, especially on the south and west sides. The original visual prominence of the site has been lost. The original lot and landscaping remains generally unchanged except for the loss of a line of streetside trees to the widening of Pleasant Street, and the recent vacation of Pleasant Street to the west due

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to hospital expansion towards the church. Naturally the 1954 addition greatly altered the overall balance of the landscaping scheme. A frame two story house on the northwest corner of the lot served as church parsonage during construction and up until 1917.

Exterior alterations have been restricted to the major addition and a series of covered entryways on the northwest corner (1940, 1969). Exterior cleaning and tuckpointing work was done in 1983. Architects have consistently been commissioned to oversee these various improvements, evidencing a sensitivity to the original commission. Inside, the original Sunday school wing was totally rearranged, eliminating the balcony above. The original sanctuary plan survives, although a rearranged central chancel, with new side choir stalls, a new organ, and the building in of organ pipes has changed that part of the original arrangement (changed 1940, 1963, and 1969). The original diagonally placed choir stall was removed as noted.

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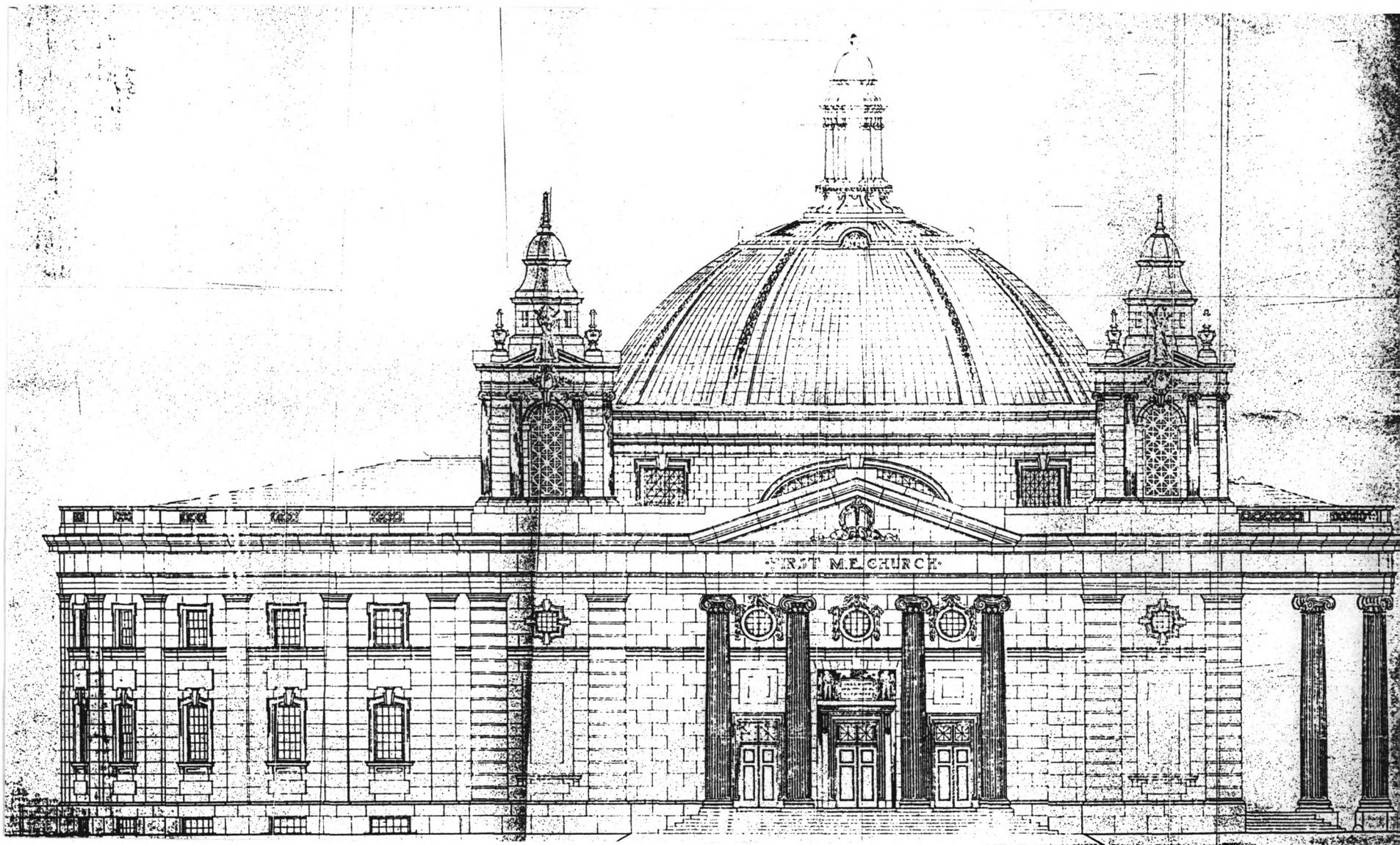
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date entered

Continuation sheet Physical Description

Item number 7

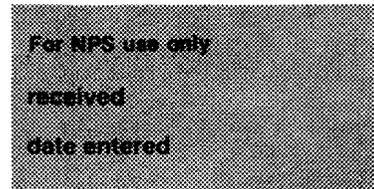
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"Sketch of First M. E. Church, Des Moines, Iowa." Undated early version of plan by architects Proudfoot and Bird. The final plans eliminated the porte cochere, spires, dome cupola, and semi-circular west addition. The basic plan as envisioned here was however retained.

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Continuation sheet *Historical Significance* Item number 8 Page 2

most complete, beautiful, and perfectly appointed church edifice in the Mississippi Valley" The commodious auditorium seating up to 1,300 persons, was noted for its almost perfect accoustical quality. The church hosted Methodist Annual Conferences in 1943 and 1955.

The complete interior refurbishing or rebuilding during the years 1939-40 led to a rededication ceremony in September, 1940. Major interior additions included a chapel, new chancel, marble altar, rose window, choir stalls and organ. Expenditures totalled some \$60,000. Membership then totalled 2,010.

The church prospered along with the adjacent church institutions. Iowa Methodist Hospital to the west, founded in 1901, expanded in all directions, closing off both Pleasant and 12th Streets. United Methodist Iowa Area Headquarters, constructed in 1965, stands north of the church, and Hawthorn Hall, constructed in 1923, first housed the Iowa National Bible Training School, then functioned as a home for working girls. After 1978 the building housed church community programs including a family violence center, programs for the elderly, shelter house, and meeting place for Asian-born residents.

The church changed its name in 1939 to "First Methodist Church" following the union of the northern and southern Methodist Episcopal Churches. In 1968 it again changed its title to "First United Methodist Church" following the merging of the Methodist and United Evangelical Bretheren Churches.

In 1977 the church dedicated a new Library-Memory room which reflected the congregation's interest in its history and archives.