

RECEIVED

1553

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A". NATIONAL PARK SERVICE FORMS, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name First Congregational Church

other names/site number United Church of Christ

2. Location

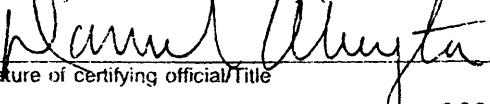
street & number 165 East Mill Street NA not for publication

city or town Porterville NA vicinity

state California code CA county Tulare code 107 zip code 93257

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination
 request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of
Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set 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.)

11-18-98
Signature of certifying official>Title

State Historic Preservation Officer
State of 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 commenting official>Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

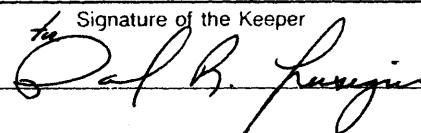
4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the
National Register
 See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the
National Register.
- removed from the National
Register.
- other, (explain): _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action



1/5/99

Porterville First Congregational Church

Name of Property

Tulare County, California

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
1

Noncontributing

buildings

sites

structures

objects

1 0 Total

Name of related multiple property listing

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

religious facility

social: meeting hall

education: school

recreation & culture: theater (silent movies)
auditorium

music facility

sports facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

religion: religious facility

education: education related

social: meeting hall

recreation & culture: auditorium
theater

music facility

7. Description**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

19th century Late Gothic Revival

Shingle Style

other: Bay Area Tradition

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Cement, stone

walls Stone

Wood

roof Wood Shingles, Composition Shingles

other Granite

Narrative Description

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

8. Statement of Significance**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all 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.)

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 # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Social History**Architeture****Period of Significance**

1908 - 1936

Significant Dates

1909

X 1936

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/BuilderMeeker, George C. Reed, Francis W.
San Francisco Bay Area Architects**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University

X Other Historic & Cultural Resources Inventory
Name of repository: for City of PortervilleState of California, Resources Agency
Department of Parks and Recreation

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property .38

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 [1,1] [3,1,8,8,2,0] [3,9,9,3,2,2,5]
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 Eleanor Foerster, church member; John Slaven, architect; Joan Stewart, editor

organization N/A

date August 31, 1998

Foerster

Church

street & number P.O. Box 8548

telephone (209) 784-2200 (209) 784-5340

city or town Porterville

state CA

zip code 93258-8548

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name First Congregation Church

street & number 165 East Mill Street telephone (209) 784-5340

city or town Porterville state California zip code 93257

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.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

OCT 28 1998

Section number 7 Page 1 Porterville First Congregational Church, Tulare County,

California

SECTION 7: ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION

Written in consultation with John Slaven, Architect

Summary

The First Congregational Church in Porterville, California, constructed in 1908, is a two story, rectangular, Shingle/Bay Area Traditional design wooden frame structure in late 19th century Gothic Revival architectural style. Only this single building, 60 feet by 130 feet, sits on three city lots (an area 106 feet by 152 feet) at the intersection of Mill and Fourth Streets. These three lots were designated by Mr. Porter Putnam as a church site when he surveyed 40 acres and laid out his town, "Porterville", in 1864. There are no other contributing or noncontributing buildings, structures, or objects on these three lots. The north-facing second-story auditorium is set back from Mill Street about 20 feet and is entered by steps from a 20 foot wide front sidewalk. Two square towers frame stone steps and a covered entry porch. A flat facade rises above the porch to a tall gable and central chimney. The integrity of workmanship is especially evident in the carefully designed interiors of the auditorium and the downstairs Fireplace Room which are paneled with dark stained clear pine. Windows of the sunken basement meeting room are aligned with taller uniquely crafted stained glass windows in the auditorium above. On the west, along a tree-lined street, the church is landscaped with shrubs, a sidewalk, and an eight to ten foot strip of lawn. A single palm tree planted in the 1880's provides a dramatic focal point to the front northwest corner of the church. On the east side of the building are shrubs and a sidewalk. To the south is an enclosed patio/barbecue area. Further south is a classroom structure with an enclosed play area built in 1961 over the tennis courts that were part of the original 1908 "Institutional Facility". Between the church and Main Street, two blocks to the west, are downtown stores and office buildings. East of the church, and looking toward the Sierra Nevada mountains, are one- and two-story wooden residences built in the 1880's by Porterville's founders. The building is in excellent condition and both the interior and exterior look as they did 90 years ago.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 2 Porterville First Congregational Church, Tulare County,

California

Description

The cornerstone of the church is engraved "1891-1908". The current wood frame structure was built from plans dated August, 1908, by George C. Meeker and Francis W. Reed, San Francisco Bay Area architects. The architects' blueprints, framed and on display in the church today, show a concept for churches that was distinctive for that era—an Institutional Church. An Institutional Church was designed to function in a community not only for the ordinary services of the Sabbath for members, but also for the physical, literary, and social culture of the entire community. The north portion of the 1908 building was a large sunken meeting room and an upstairs auditorium. The south portion was a sunken "swimming tank" and a second-story gymnasium.

Exterior treatments feature walls of locally quarried stone laid in a random pattern around the base of the corner towers, the front porch, and steps. Rough hewn granite blocks accent both sides of the steps. Above the stone work, the sides are finished with smooth-sawn cedar shingles. Fenestration consists primarily of double hung sashed windows arranged in groups of three, and arched louvered vents. The larger windows at the nave level feature stained glass designs and stylized pointed arches with lintels. The steeply pitched (12:12) cruciform roof is covered with silver-gray composition shingles (cover the original cedar shingles) and overhangs the side walls by 24 inches at the eaves and 12 inches at the rake. Measuring from the top of the curb (eight inches above the street) the main roof is 45.41 feet high; the Gothic spire is 90.34 feet high, and the top of the weather vane is 93.75 feet high.

The front (north) facade consists of a central broad (12 feet) stairway rising to a covered porch flanked by large, square towers on each side corner. Each tower is fronted by a small, gabled roof covering a single door entrance into the stone base. Above the base level, shingle walls begin with a slight skirt and extend vertically to wood-trimmed, castellated parapets. The western tower rises above the eastern tower to accommodate a bell enclosure and an octagonal spire topped with a weather vane. "W.T. GARRATT & CO. SF CAL 1870" is cast around the top of a 18 inch high, 24 inch diameter bell, which is still rung by hand for celebrations such as the church's centennial in 1991. This bell is from the earlier 1873 church on this site. The old bell tower, which had been deemed unsafe, was completely rebuilt with a new foundation and new wooden tower in 1892. The 1873 church was torn down and construction of the present church, finished in 1908, began at this bell tower corner.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 3 Porterville First Congregational Church, Tulare County,
California

From the front porch, two sets of opposing double entrance doors lead through east and west narthexes into an alcove that adjoins the nave to the south. The grand space, 54 feet by 74 feet, is flanked on both sides by an arched colonnade and narrow aisles. The altar stands on a raised, recessed chancel between two arched openings filled with organ pipes, all beneath wood cased gothic archways. Stained douglas fir wood paneling defines both the choir loft and organ console to the right of the chancel and the pulpit to the left. The floor is tongue and groove vertical grain douglas fir. All woodwork throughout this auditorium displays elegant craftsmanship.

The vaulted ceiling is finished with dark wood paneling and a boxwood of cased beams. Two large wrought-iron pendant chandeliers, each with 8 stained glass panels and 8 candle light bulbs, supplement daylight from the tall stained glass windows lining the side aisles. Smaller, 6 sided replicas of these central fixtures are hung in the east and west auditorium aisles and in the west vestibule. Similar wrought-iron fixtures are attached directly to the ceiling (not suspended) in 5 other locations around the auditorium. Fifteen double hung sashed stained glass windows in groups of three along both outer aisles exhibit the elaborate tracing and drip molding commonly utilized during that era. East coast traditional design heritage was combined with images reflecting the area's citrus economy by placing three oranges with leaves in the bottom panels of the stained glass windows.

The lower level of the building contains meeting rooms, and utility, kitchen and office areas. The large meeting area (Fireplace Room) beneath the auditorium can be divided into four smaller areas by an ingenious system of three wooden roll-up panels and six sliding wooden pocket doors that match interior walls. Centered in the north wall of this meeting area is a 9 foot wide brick fireplace flanked by twin craftsman style inglenooks. Stairs from two side vestibules lead up to the single doors in the tower bases. A small elevator was installed (1978) in the west side vestibule to allow wheel chair access entrance to the upstairs auditorium from the Mill Street sidewalk.

Much of the early economy of this foothill area between flat valley farmland and roadless mountains had depended upon cutting and milling wood from mixed conifer forests since the late 1850's. Ox , horse, or mule teams were used for bringing supplies to Porterville and hauling lumber away. The arrival of a railway (in 1888) made it possible to transport both milled and unmilled timber between logging towns and the San Francisco Bay area. Wood was easily available and in these early days the most commonly used material for building. Early records suggest , that at least some of the douglas fir, pine, red oak, and cedar used in building the Congregational

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 4 Porterville First Congregational Church, Tulare County,

Church was shipped from San Francisco. It is likely, however, that all the cedar shingles and much of the pine came from this area. Certainly the use of wood was integral to the design and architecture of many local homes, many of which in older sections of town also conform to mid-west and eastern U.S. architectural style in exterior design. Lavish use of elegantly crafted wood in interiors also reflects the New England heritage of early families. California

Blacksmiths were essential in a community that depended on horses; design and production of wrought-iron articles was a highly competitive trade. Local craftsmen were available to provide church ornaments such as the light fixtures.

Some of the older homes and many of the downtown business buildings were built from locally produced bricks. The large fireplace for which the Fireplace Room is named was made with some of these same bricks. Several local rock quarries provided roughly cut blocks and slabs such as were used on the front face, and for the foundation and steps of the church. The cornerstone itself was hauled from a nearby hillside.

Components for the pipe organ are installed in the north balcony as well as in an adjacent room in the west tower. Other components are in a room to the left, above and behind the pulpit, and to the right of the altar in a room behind the choir loft. In 1963 the organ console was moved from the choir loft onto the auditorium floor. A description and history of this pipe organ is separately attached.

On October 26, 1936, fire destroyed the southern wall of the sanctuary, a portion of the altar and recessed chancel, part of the organ and the entire gymnasium south of the auditorium. The restoration, by R. Hodgson and Sons, Porterville contractors, from plans prepared by Fred Swartz, a Fresno architect, took nearly a year. The exterior and the interior of the church were restored exactly as they had been before the fire, except for the second story gymnasium that had been built over the original swimming pool. Because of limited funds the "Institutional" gymnasium was not rebuilt so the south end of the building today is one story high. A social hall with a raised stage was built over the swimming pool, which was covered over by a 2 1/4" tongue and groove red oak floor. Adventuresome persons today can climb down the ladder under the social hall and walk from the deep to the shallow end of the old "swimming tank".

The two tower rooms, used for classrooms, became storage rooms for the pipe organ and elaborate Christmas decorations after 1961 when the new classroom complex was built south of the 1908 structure. Clear glass casement windows in the east and west tower classrooms were covered with shingles in 1976. The casement windows are still visible inside these east and west tower rooms.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7, 8 Page 5 California
Porterville First Congregational Church, Tulare County,

In 1864 this site was dramatically framed by 10,000 foot high snow -capped peaks that today still provide a backdrop for the church's towers. Whatever Porter Putnam's reasons for designating these 3 lots for a church building, the site remains close to the center of town activities. Because the surrounding agricultural area is predominately orchards the sky is as bright today as when settlers first came to this part of California. Main Street remains a vital business thoroughfare. Many of the old residences surrounding the church retain their charm of an era past, with healthy large 100 year old trees shading the streets and buildings.

SECTION 8: STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Summary

The Porterville First Congregational Church, as it was built in 1908, meets National Register Criteria A as a property associated with events from 1908 to 1936 that have made a significant contribution to the development of Porterville's and southern Tulare County's social, cultural and educational history. Since 1908 this 'Institutional Church' has been the place where church members and non-members of Porter Putnam's "planned city" can gather for worship, recreation, community meetings, musical concerts, recitals, and education. The building also meets Criteria C as a property that embodies distinctive characteristics of a type and period of architectural design. The building, in excellent condition, is the only example of Shingle/Bay Area Traditional design and Gothic Revival architectural style on this scale to be found in California's San Joaquin Valley.

Historical Significance

Located along the Tule River in the southern San Joaquin Valley (Tulare County) midway between San Francisco and Los Angeles, Porterville began in 1859 as a station for changing horses on the overland stage-line. In 1864 Royal Porter Putnam, caretaker of the stage horses, surveyed forty acres along the Tule River. In his effort to plan a community, he designated the three lots at the southeast corner of Mill and Fourth streets as a church site. Detailed and faithfully kept church records since 1891

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

California

Section number 8 Page 6 Porterville First Congregational Church, Tulare County,

describe the careful financial planning and many decisions made by an increasing group of new citizens to build an edifice that would have multiple uses for the entire community. There was an urgent desire to civilize this rough, cowboy saloon/brothel area with culture, education, 'proper' recreation, and respectable entertainment. To meet this need the First Congregational Church built an "Institutional Church" in 1908. This was a place where young people "received a healthy outlook on life through development of body, mind, and spirit by an emphasis on physical fitness, mental training, religious ideals, citizenship, and service". It was the only auditorium in the area where 250 people could gather comfortably for social and cultural events.

With construction complete in 1908, the building quickly became a community institution. The first daily kindergarten began in 1908 with a paid teacher from Oakland. Parents paid 50 cents per week for each child four to seven years old. The church kindergarten lasted at least six years. Being a large rural, agricultural area with a sparse, scattered population, public school district formation was slow and conservative. Tulare County Schools History (1852-1970) records that private schools were the forerunners of public schools and that the first public kindergarten for Tulare County opened in Porterville in 1914 across the street from the church building on Mill Street.

The indoor swimming pool and second story gymnasium, completed in 1908 south of the auditorium, were the only pool and gymnasium in this southern part of Tulare County. Two additional lots south of the building, bought in 1915 by the church, were used for the first community tennis courts.

Swimming lessons and recreational swimming took place at the "swimming tank" until the early 1930's. Because of the very hot summers, the nearby irrigation ditches, and the Tule river, swimming was both a cooling off recreation and a life saving skill. A private citizen, Mr. Weed, built a large swimming pool in 1918 for paid public use. A municipal pool (1953) and high school swimming pools (1976) were built only much later.

The gymnasium was used for team sports, physical fitness, and a meeting hall for the Boy Scouts until it was destroyed by the 1936 fire. A comprehensive public high school had been built in 1923. The following year the first public school gymnasium and tennis courts were built. In this southern part of Tulare County, therefore, church-owned recreational facilities preceded similar public facilities by more than 15 years for a gymnasium and tennis courts, and 10 years for a swimming pool.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 7 California
Porterville First Congregational Church, Tulare County,

In 1908 the church rented a small portable organ for fifty cents a month so music could accompany worship services and silent movies. Movies were shown weekly in the auditorium until 1928. Elsewhere in town an opera house, which burned in 1914, and movie theaters built after 1916, offered vaudeville-type entertainment which was not considered uplifting and proper by the anti-saloon citizens. Thus, "to promote a higher level of welfare for society", literary recitations, 'character lectures' by teachers and community leaders, dramas, high school choral concerts, vocal, piano and instrumental lessons and recitals were scheduled in the church building from 1908 until 1923 when the auditorium at the new (1923) high school became available.

Architectural Significance

The completion of the First Congregational Church in 1908 gave this community an excellent architectural example of Shingle/Bay Tradition design and Gothic Revival style. It is the only representative of this architectural style ever built anywhere in the southern San Joaquin Valley. Throughout the area earlier (1870-1916) wooden structures had burned down, so later church construction (1909 to 1923) used mostly granite, brick, or cement block. The elegant edifice of the Congregational Church building reflects the desires of settlers from the mid western and eastern United States to replicate what they had left behind. It is an excellent example of building design and construction that served human needs of a new frontier settlement.

The design of the stained glass windows are artistically unique. The bottom panels depict three oranges and citrus leaves, reflecting the citrus industry begun in 1896 and well established by 1908 when the church was completed.

The use of wood, both on the interior and the exterior of the building, reflects its availability from logging in this area in the early 1900's. The carefully crafted finishing of the wooden interior represents the fine craftsmanship of that day. The use of stone and granite slabs on the exterior foundation anchors the building to the indigenous resources available in local quarries. Bricks were fired in local kilns. Ornamental wrought-iron objects were crafted by local blacksmiths

The three lot site and building at Fourth and Mill Streets have served Porterville and surrounding communities since 1908 as a venue for meetings, recreation, entertainment, culture, and education. Since the 1936 fire and restoration, the building has undergone very few changes. It has been well-preserved and lovingly maintained. The setting, similarly unchanged, remains between an old residential area with tree lined streets and the downtown business area on Main Street. The high rising profile of the west spire, the shingle-clad exterior, and interior Gothic arches, all continue to offer inspirational space to a still evolving region of California.

This building is an historically and architecturally significant land mark.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

California
Section number 8 Page 8 Porterville First Congregational Church, Tulare County,

PORTEVILLE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH PIPE ORGAN HISTORY

This pipe organ is believed to be the oldest functioning Wurlitzer in California. The original pipe organ was a 1916, Style 3, seven rank Wurlitzer built for the Deluxe Theater in Los Angeles. The console had two manuals and was the first Wurlitzer to be installed in Los Angeles. San Francisco had the only other Wurlitzer in the state at that time.

In the late 1920's, when "talkies" arrived in theaters, the pipe organ that accompanied silent movies became worthless. Because it was "improper" for a church to buy an organ that had been used for entertainment in a theater, these worthless theater organs were stripped of their drums, whistles, horns and other "toy ranks." The remaining ranks were renamed to sound more ecclesiastical; consoles were sanded and stained darker to make them look more ecclesiastical. These theater Wurlitzers were then called "Robert Hope Jones Concert Organs" and bogus stories were made up to make them "acceptable" and saleable to our conservative valley churches. The most common story, according to Tom Delay of Fresno, who has renovated our organ, was that "a large mid-western church was in financial difficulty and needed to get rid of a highly valued pipe organ quickly at a bargain price!" The organists from the theaters became the church organists. They played the old theater organs and recognized the same sounds, only under a different name!

On March 2, 1931 the current organ was dedicated. It was brought to Porterville from the Deluxe Theater in Los Angeles and was installed by Charles Herschmann from San Francisco. The church was told that it had come from "a large church in Chicago!" The dedication organist was Harold A. Cole, who had been a member of our church since 1913. He was also a piano teacher and composer. Today at least four church members confess to taking piano lessons from Mr. Cole, including Marjorie Wright Richardson, Bill Rodgers, Carol Blackman Leesch and Eleanor Moore Foerster.

Bill Rodgers remembers playing the piano offertory on Sundays in the 1920's. His mother, Grace Redfield Rodgers, was the church organist and played on the old pump organ. Harold Cole and other organists served until 1942, when Elizabeth Neufeld became our loyal, dedicated organist; she is still our organist in 1993.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**Section number 8 Page 9 Porterville First Congregational Church, Tulare County,

California

On October 25, 1936 a fire partially destroyed the church and damaged the pipe organ. The Crome Organ Company of Los Angeles repaired and rebuilt the organ in 1937, and recognized it as the old Wurlitzer from the Los Angeles Deluxe Theater. (The Crome Organ Company still builds pipe organs in Reno, Nevada.) While the Crome Company was in Porterville repairing the organ, Richard Villeman found a two note pipe organ tuba chest on the road while walking home from playing the pipe organ at the Monache Theater. The name "Wurlitzer" was stamped on the wooden chest. He knew that the organ at the church was being repaired, so he took it there. It had fallen off the truck and the Crome Company could not find it; the tuba chest is still in use in the organ today.

Richard Villeman was a key person in keeping ciphers out of the organ; he tuned and maintained the organ from 1937 until his death October 10, 1987. His tender love for this organ made it easier to restore in 1993.

In 1963, the relay system and combination action for this antique Wurlitzer were moved east of the church secretary's office (behind the key closet). At that time the original Wurlitzer was expanded and modified by Richard Villeman to become a "swell organ." This swell organ and the carillon (purchases from donations in memory of Richard Moore in 1955), with reserved space for a future solo organ division, are located behind the choir loft. Also in 1963, the organ was expanded from seven ranks to twenty-four ranks by special gifts from church families. A four manual Moeller console with a full AGO pedal board was purchased from Pomona College's Little Bridges Hall of Music in Claremont, California by Paul and Marguerite Moore and was given to the church. This console was dedicated in 1964 in memory of State Senator J. Howard Williams who had served as our church Moderator for 16 years.

Five new organ divisions, the Great, Choir and Pedal (all located behind the ministers pulpit), the Antiphonal (exposed on the balcony in the back of the church) and the echo (enclosed left off the balcony) were also donated by Paul and Marguerite Moore and installed by Richard Villeman in 1965. In 1966 new viola and violin pipes were added as gifts from church families. New grills, shutters and false pipes were added to the sanctuary behind the choir loft and in back of the ministers' pulpit, the wood work done by Paul Moore. The grills on both sides of the balcony were added for architectural symmetry by woodcraftsman, Ray Neufeld. The choir loft and choir railing were remodeled in 1963 by Paul Moore.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8. 9 Page 10 Porterville First Congregational Church, Tulare County,

California

Major repair and renovation were started to upgrade the organ's functioning in preparation for the church's one hundred year celebration in November, 1991. The Moeller and Robert Morten swell shades were rebuilt.

Under the leadership of Joe Faure, Church Moderator, 1991 and 1992, over \$45,000 was raised from 75 church families and several church auxiliary groups to upgrade and modernize the organ. The money raised also enabled a substantial endowment fund to be established to provide for future repairs and maintenance. The setter action power pneumatics were replaced with solid state relay units. The pull stops on the console were AGO standardized and special pipes were repaired or added. A transposer was added to enable the automatic "changing of keys" to accommodate soloists, allowing the organist to play the music in the original key. An electronic memory was added to allow up to four organists to preset their own stops and hold them "in memory" until they are needed by that organist. The organ now contains twenty-four ranks and has been prepared to expand to thirty eight ranks.

SECTION 9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

First Congregational Church Historian scrapbooks: 1878 - Present.

Business Directory-Porterville: 1880 (before railroads came in 1888), p. 193.

First Congregational Church Meeting Minutes: 1891-1998.

School Directories of Tulare County: 1911-12, 1914-15.

Porterville, California, An Appreciation of the Past: Volumes One and Two
Ina H. Stiner, 1956, self -published, pp. 333-336.

First Congregational Church 75th Anniversary booklet: 1966

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9, 10 Page 11 Porterville First Congregational Church, Tulare County,

California

History of the Organization and Administration of Public Schools in Tulare

County: 1852-1970 Waverly Dean Hall, Dissertation, University of Southern California, 1972. pp. 3,4,20,21,63,64,229,232,233.

The Pioneer Communities of Porterville, Vandalia and Plano, Volume One
Rodney Homer, 1982, self published, pp. 263,264.

City of Porterville Historic and Cultural Resources Inventory: Final Report July, 1986. Prepared by Terry Winkler, Wendell Vaughn Jr. and Porterville Planning Staff.

First Congregational Church 100 Year History: 1891-1991.

100th Anniversary Porterville High School: 1896-1996.

Oral interviews with long time area residents and church members: Veda Herbage (93 years), Edna Smith (94 years), Esta Mae Hinton (88 years), Elma Lentine (84 years), Bill Rogers (88 years), Jeff Edwards, Joe Faure, Joyce Smith and others.

Porterville Recorder newspaper files: various dates.

Verbal Boundary Description

The property is a rectangular parcel measuring 109 feet by 150 feet encompassing Lots One (1), Two (2), and Three (3), in the West half of Block 20 of the City of Porterville, in the City of Porterville, County of Tulare, State of California, as per Map recorded in Book 3, Page 18 of Maps in the office of the Tulare County Recorder. Lots Four (4) and Five (5), owned by the church have been excluded because the tennis courts were covered over with a separate building in 1961.

Verbal Boundary Justification

The nominated property includes the three lots historically associated with the church that Porter Putnam designated in his survey of 1864.

First Congregational Church
Porterville, Tulare County, CA
by Eleanor Foerster
August 31, 1998

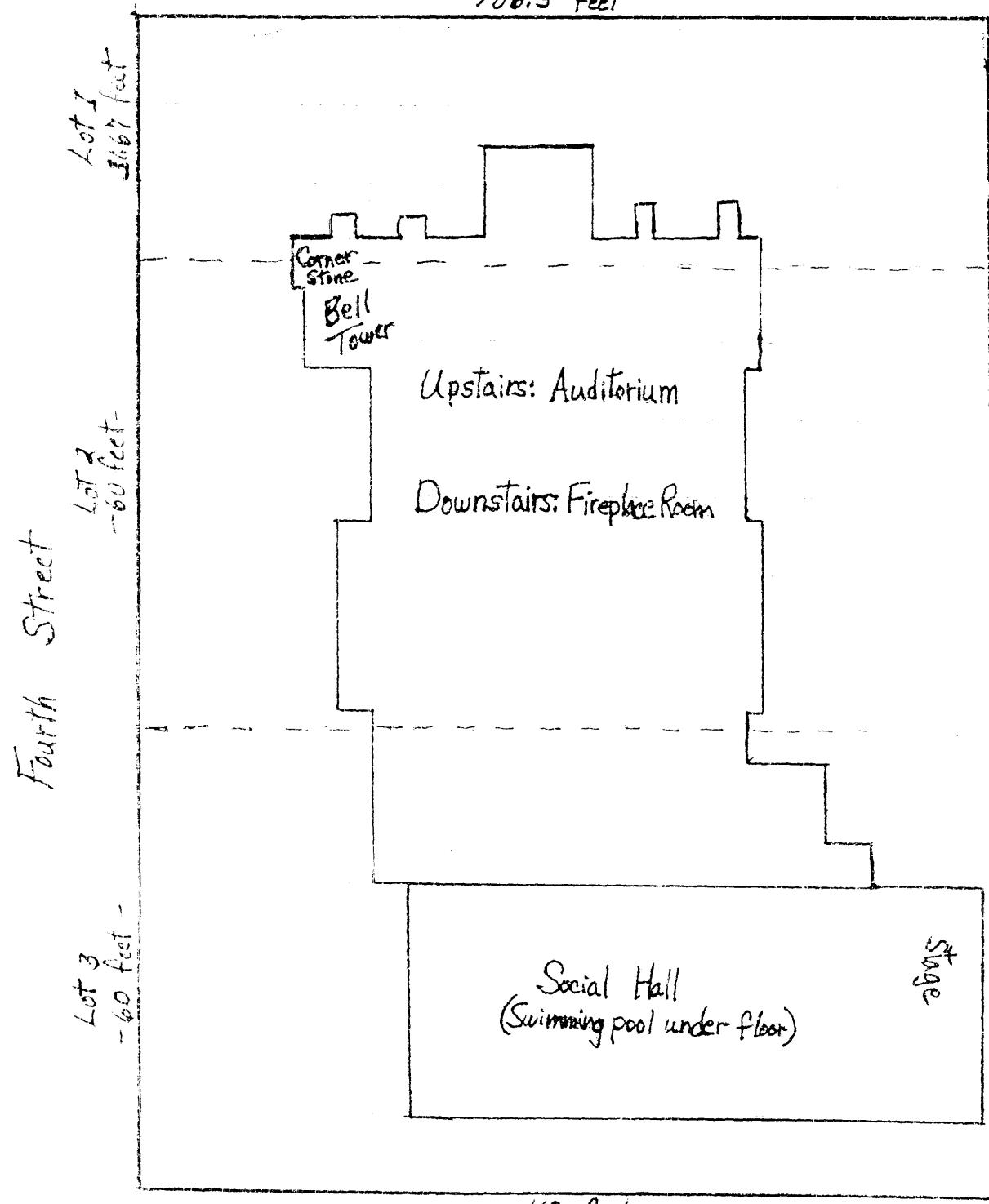
Sketch Map: $\frac{1}{2}$ inch = 10 feet

Footprint on 3 lot boundary



Mill Street

106.5 feet



Lawn, patio, barbecue

Lot 1