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MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
80 BOYLSTON STREET
BOSTON, MA 02116

AREA	FORM NO.
	7

Town Swansea, Mass. MRA
SWANSEA

Address Baptist Street

Historic Name First Baptist Church and

Society/First Baptist Cemetery

Use: Present Church services and
activities

Original Church services

DESCRIPTION

Date 1731 (cemetery);
1848/1849 (church)

Source Thatcher, Hist. Sketch
300th Anniversary Yearbook

Style Greek Revival

Architect unknown

Exterior Wall Fabric Wooden clapboard

Outbuildings None

Major Alterations (with dates) _____

Addition - educational wing 1963

Condition good (church);

fair (cemetery)

Moved No Date --

Acreage approximately one acre (total)

Setting Now at the apex of a busy inter-

section, this church is not easily noticed

because of its poor access on a now access
street. Located in front across the street
is the original cemetery.

Recorded by K. Valente/V. Frost

Organization H. Pierce '78 / K. Broomer
Swansea Historical Commission

Date April 1986 / October 1989

Photo (3"x3" or 3"x5", black and white) Indicate address of property on back of photo. Staple to left side of form.

Sketch Map: Draw map showing property's location in relation to nearest cross streets and/or geographical features. Indicate all buildings between inventoried property and nearest intersection(s).
Indicate north

(See attached map)

UTM REFERENCE 19 311390 4626630

USGS QUADRANGLE East Providence, RI-MA 1971-79

SCALE 1:24000

NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA STATEMENT (if applicable)

The First Baptist Church possesses integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship and feeling. It is significant under criterion A in its association with the First Baptist Church in Massachusetts (1664) and the fourth in America. It represents an intact example of a Greek Revival church evocative of the size and means of a rural congregation in the mid-19th century, therefore meeting criterion C. The property also meets Criteria Considerations A and D, by virtue of the church, an architecturally distinctive religious property in Swansea, and the cemetery, the only extant evidence of the Baptist Church's relocation to present-day Swansea in the early 18th century.

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE Describe important architectural features and evaluate in terms of other buildings within the community.

The First Baptist Church of Swansea, Massachusetts is a rectangular, 3 x 2 bay Greek Revival frame structure measuring 36'6" x 44'6". One tall story in height on a full basement, the structure has a gable roof terminating at the northeast end in a full pediment. The roof, now covered with modern asphalt shingles, is surmounted by a square bell tower with low hipped roof centered above the entrance. A large, two-story educational wing has been added to the rear section of the southeast side wall (1968) sensitively designed so as not to intrude.

The square bell tower has a full cornice at all four sides, consisting of a cyma-recta crown mold on a quirked ovolo over a flat fascia. The upper part of the wall surfaces is enriched with a flat architrave panel that rests on the paneled corner pilasters with oversized plinth blocks. Each wall has a battered (trapezoid) louvered opening, framed with an ancon architrave with molded cap and lug sill. The walls are sheathed with clapboard, 4" exposure. The bell tower rests on a low, square base, now covered with later horizontal sheathing.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE Explain the role owners played in local or state history and how the building relates to the development of the community.

This simple New England Church building was dedicated in 1849. However, it houses the First Baptist Church in Massachusetts and the fourth in America, founded in 1664 by the Reverend John Myles exiled from Swansea Wales. To him and others in 1667, the Court at Plymouth granted all the land between the Providence and Taunton Rivers from Rehoboth and Taunton south to Narragansett Bay to form a new town which they called Swansea. The site of the first Church building was in the present town of Barrington, R.I. After its destruction in King Phillip's War, another was built and moved to North Swansea in 1700. This was replaced by another in 1717, said to be the oldest Baptist House in America and used until the present one was constructed.

Baptist churches had been kept out of every New England colony except Rhode Island. An attempt was made and defeated to form one in 1639 in Weymouth. The history of this church relates to the religious and secular interests of Massachusetts and Rhode Island for more than two and a half centuries. It is connected to the important liberal and free thinking in the colonies. Several of the present contiguous towns, including Warren and Barrington in Rhode Island and Somerset in Massachusetts formed a part of Swansea. John Myles and Captain Thomas Willet, who later became the first English mayor of New York on its cessation from the Dutch, were among the most active in the organization.

This particular religious group was the reorganization of an exiled church driven from Swansea, Wales where John Myles began his ministry in 1645. "The Act of Uniformity", which was meant to

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

Fall River Registry of Deeds, Book 359, pp. 458-459.

Wright, O.O., History of Swansea 1667-1917, Swansea, MA, 1917, pp. 101-107.

Architectural Significance prepared by Russel Wright of Warren, R.I. in or around 1985.

Thatcher, Rev. J. J. Historical Sketch of the First Baptist Church, Swansea, 1663-1863.

Fall River: Wm. S. Robertson, 1863.

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
Office of the Secretary, Boston

Community: SWANSEA, MA.	Form No: 7
Property Name: First Baptist Church and Society	

Indicate each item on inventory form which is being continued below.

Architectural Significance (continued)

The main roof has a full entablature consisting of a cornice of a quirked ovolo crown mold on flat frieze with a Grecian echinus bed mold, over a wide architrave with flat fillet at the upper edge and a quirked ovolo separating the panel into two horizontal fascias. The cornice section of the entablature, but not the architrave returns across the northeast end wall to create the full pediment. The raking cornice at both end walls consists of a Grecian echinus crown on a quirked ovolo and flat frieze, with a second echinus repeated as the bed mold, resting on a fillet and flat frieze panel. The exterior corners of the structure are defined by full height pilasters (two recessed panels at each face) with deeply undercut quirked ovolo capitals and triple fascia necking. The entire structure is surrounded with a flat sill board.

The pedimented northeast end wall is separated into three bays by the addition of two pilaster strips, with paired 12/12 double hung sash flanking the central entrance. The windows have a continuous molded cap, echinus ovolo, flat casings and lug sills. The double entrance door is later, but the solid transom may be original, with paired recessed panels trimmed with flattened ogee sticking. The doors are surrounded by the same casings and cap used at the paired windows, and are served by a short run of later flagstone steps, with later wrought iron railings. The pedimented gable is blind. All of the exterior walls are sheathed with clapboards, 4" exposure.

The southwest and northwest side elevations repeat the paired window units, with two at each wall. The rear end wall has a 6/6 double hung window in the gable area (which is not pedimented). The window is partially obscured by a later brick exterior chimney. The remainder of this wall is blind.

The entire structure sits on a high brick foundation, stuccoed and scored to simulate ashlar. The southeast wall has three 6/6 double hung windows, the rear wall two, while the northwest basement wall has two three light tilting casements.

The interior of the auditorium plan church has a full width vestibule opening directly to the exterior, with three doors serving the nave and chancel. A full width choir loft over the vestibule is supported by the cross partition that separates the two areas of the first floor -- this wall and the choir loft may not be original, and appear to be of late 19th century construction.

The vestibule has plastered walls and ceiling, with the ceiling partially obscuring the solid transom with its ogee trimmed panels. The later doors are cased with ogee on echinus architraves, the architrave details repeated on the side walls (to the choir loft in the southeast wall, to a closet in the northwest wall) and at the three communicating doors in the cross partition leading to the nave. All interior doors are of a four vertical recessed panel design with ogee on echinus sticking, and are hung on two part iron butts, with brown porcelain knob mortise locks. The paired windows flanking the entrance are cased with flat architraves, and a molded cap visible in the choir loft. A wood base mold has an ogee on echinus cap. The floor is vinyl asbestos tile (1956).

The nave is the epitome of restrained Greek Revival church design, with a plaster ceiling divided into four full width coffered recessed panels. The bays are defined by deep plaster cornices consisting of a cavetto crown molding on a flat fascia. This cornice is repeated at the full entablature that surrounds the interior of the one-room plan church, supplemented by a frieze of a cyma-reversa on bead crown and an undercut fascia, and a wide architrave

Staple to Inventory form at bottom

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and Society

Indicate each item on inventory form which is being continued below.

Architectural Significance (continued)

consisting of an echinus on echinus bed mold to the frieze over a flat fillet, and a quirked ogee on bead horizontal band that divides the architrave into two parts, the lower section a stepped fascia. The interior corners of the church are provided with plat pilaster strips, with the entablature at the ceiling swelling to serve as capitals. The rear wall of the sanctuary or chancel has two additional pilasters, dividing it into three bays. The secondary pilasters have round headed recessed vertical panels and capitals that terminate at the lower edge of the ceiling entablature consisting of a fillet over a quirked cyma-recta with bead and a flat fascia. The necking at these two pilasters has an undercut Grecian echinus over a smaller echinus and a flat fascia. The entire rear wall of the chancel has a 30" tall wood wainscot, with torus cap.

Doors in the cross partition supporting the leading edge of the choir loft are cased with the same architrave as used at the vestibule side, but the inner edges are finished with a bead. The paired windows have ogee on bead caps and flat casings. The walls are plaster on lath, the floor random width pine, painted.

There are two banks of eight rows each of box pews in the nave, served by side and center aisles. The banks are divided by a partition, creating a total of 32 individual pews, which are probably original. The chancel or sanctuary has a raised central platform (earlier used for the organ) with a paneled low wall at the front edge, flanked by two lower platforms for the choir. The entire area is set off from the nave with later (1956) rails with turned newels and balusters.

The outer face of the wall of the choir loft is divided into five horizontal panels, with ogee and fascia moldings, and is capped with a Grecian echinus rail. The interior of the loft itself is undecorated except for the ceiling entablature and the upper sections of the corner pilasters. There is a trap door in the ceiling of the loft area serving the bell tower. The bell, inscribed, G. H. Holbrook, Medway, Mass., 1837, was donated to the church in April, 1896. Access to the choir loft is provided by a ten riser turning stair in the northeast corner of the vestibule. The skirt is a simple beaded panel. A similar stair to the cellar chases this stair at the first floor. The cellar has been refinished (mid 20th century) to serve as a meeting room. There is nothing of architectural value.

Staple to Inventory form at bottom

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Historical Significance (cont'd)

conform religions to the Church of England, was passed in 1662 and John Myles was ejected from his post. The first documentation of him in this country was in 1663 when the "First Baptist Church in Swansea" was organized. It was constituted at Rehoboth, Bristol County, in the house of John Butterworth and the constituent members were John Myles, Pastor, James Brown, Nicholas Tanner, Joseph Carpenter, John Butterworth, Eldad Kingsley, and Benjamin Alby. This group was advised to desist so that they would not prejudice any other church. After this order Mr. Myles and his church relocated to New Meadow Neck south of Rehoboth, now Barrington, Rhode Island. They appear to have erected a house for worship soon after their removal beyond the bounds of Rehoboth. This house appears to have been located about 2½ miles west of the present church. In 1667 the Plymouth Court, being more tolerant than the Mass. Colony, granted to this church a grant of the town to be called Swansea.

The interests and size of the congregation fluctuated through the 18th and early 19th centuries. Worship continued in the 1717 meetinghouse in North Swansea, a structure of oak timbers, 41½' by 33' wide, which remained unplastered with beams exposed on the interior until a remodelling in 1802. This meetinghouse included three galleries. The present structure was built under the direction of the Rev. J. J. Thatcher, pastor of the church from 1846 to 1854. There were 25 members of the church at the end of Thatcher's pastorate, increasing to 87 members by 1863.

The old Baptist Cemetery (MHC #833), also included in the nomination, is defined by a rubblestone wall and contains approximately 37 stones from the period between 1731 and 1819. The setting of both church and cemetery has been threatened in recent years by development oriented toward the intersection of Routes 6 and 136 to the southeast.

Staple to Inventory form at bottom

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number _____ Page _____

Swansea MRA
Bristol County, MASSACHUSETTS

Date Listed

11. First Baptist Church and Society

Entered in the
National Register

for Keeper Melvin Byers 2/16/90

Attest _____

12. Gardner, Francis L., House

Entered in the
National Register

for Keeper Melvin Byers 2/16/90

Attest _____

13. Gardner, Joseph, House

Entered in the
National Register

for Keeper Melvin Byers 2/16/90

Attest _____

14. Gardner, Preserved, House

Entered in the
National Register

for Keeper Melvin Byers 2/16/90

Attest _____

15. Gardner, Samuel, House

Entered in the
National Register

for Keeper Melvin Byers 2/16/90

Attest _____

16. Hooper House

~~Substantive Review~~

for Keeper Beth J. Sarge 8/9/90

Attest _____

17. Hortonville Historic District

Entered in the
National Register

for Keeper Melvin Byers 2/16/90

Attest _____

18. Johnson, J. V., House

~~Substantive Review~~

for Keeper Beth J. Sarge 8/9/90

Attest _____

19. Luther House

~~Substantive Review~~

for Keeper Beth J. Sarge 8/9/90

Attest _____

20. Luther's Corner

Entered in the
National Register

for Keeper Melvin Byers 2/16/90

Attest _____

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY First Baptist Church and Society
NAME:

MULTIPLE Swansea MRA
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: MASSACHUSETTS, Bristol

DATE RECEIVED: 1/02/90 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 1/10/90
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 2/01/90 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 2/16/90
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 90000060

NOMINATOR: STATE

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: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT RETURN REJECT 2/10/90 DATE Entered in the
National Register

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

RECOM./CRITERIA _____
REVIEWER _____
DISCIPLINE _____
DATE _____

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

CLASSIFICATION

count resource type

STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

FUNCTION

historic current

DESCRIPTION

architectural classification
 materials
 descriptive text

SIGNIFICANCE

Period Areas of Significance--Check and justify below

Specific dates Builder/Architect
Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

summary paragraph
 completeness
 clarity
 applicable criteria
 justification of areas checked
 relating significance to the resource
 context
 relationship of integrity to significance
 justification of exception
 other

BIBLIOGRAPHY

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

acreage verbal boundary description
 UTM's boundary justification

ACCOMPANYING DOCUMENTATION/PRESENTATION

sketch maps USGS maps photographs presentation

OTHER COMMENTS

Questions concerning this nomination may be directed to

_____ Phone _____

Signed _____ Date _____



First Baptist church
Baptist St. ^{Swausea} MA.

First Baptist Church (MHC #7)
Baptist St. at GAR Highway
Swausea, Mass. MRA

1986

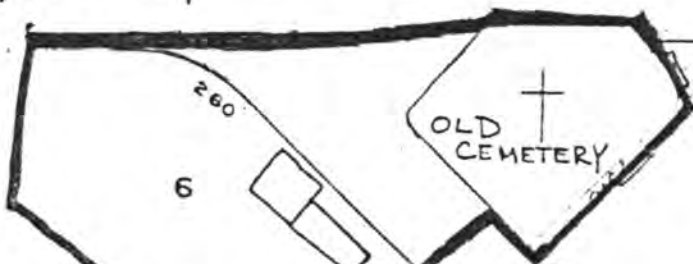
View W

MHC # 7

BAPTIST ST. -
FIRST BAPTIST
CHURCH AND
CEMETERY



G.A.R. HIGHWAY



1961
REVISED
10/82

PROPERTY MAP
TOWN OF SWANSEA
BRISTOL COUNTY, MASSACHUSETTS

JAMES W. SEWALL COMPANY
SCALE 1 INCH = 100 ± FEET

OLD TOWN, MAINE
FOR ASSESSING PURPOSES ONLY

Please refer to the map in the
Multiple Property Cover Sheet
for this property

Multiple Property Cover Sheet Reference Number: _____ 64000296