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MONTANA HISTORICAL/ARCHITECTURAL INVENTORY #11

HISTORIC NAME: First Presbyterian Church
ADDRESS: 26 W. Babcock, Bozeman
LEGAL BOUNDARY: Alderson's Blk A,
north $\frac{1}{2}$ of lots 17-20

OWNER'S NAME: First Presbyterian Church
OWNER ADDRESS: 26 W. Babcock, Bozeman, MT
SPECIFIC DATE: 1908-1910
ARCHITECT: Turnbull and Jongs
BUILDER: Frank Vreeland
ORIGINAL OWNER: Presbyterian Church
ORIGINAL USE: church
PRESENT USE: church
UTM REFERENCE: 12/497050/5058070
ACREAGE: less than one
U.S.G.S. QUAD: Bozeman, 1953



STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

Applicable Criteria: A and C

Areas of Significance: social history, architecture

Number of Contributing Properties: 1

The Bozeman First Presbyterian Church is an excellent example of the early 20th century Gothic Revival style, which was common for institutional architecture. It is also an excellent example of standardized, early 20th century Presbyterian church design. This church was built to house the second Presbyterian church to be organized in Montana, and the oldest remaining today. The building is also a physical remnant of the economic depression known as the Panic of 1893. Planning for the structure began in the early 1890's but was delayed due to the economic conditions. Had construction proceeded as originally intended, the church might have been designed in the Queen Anne style rather than the early 20th century Gothic style.

On orders from the Presbyterian General Assembly, Reverend Sheldon Jackson, superintendent for missions in the Northwest, met in 1872 with ministers from Colorado, Wyoming, and Utah for the purpose of organizing the establishment of new churches throughout Montana. This they did, and in 1872, seven new churches were established in sixteen days. In order, those were Gallatin City, Bozeman, Hamilton, Virginia City, Deer Lodge, Missoula, and Helena. Reverend William S. Frackleton was assigned to eastern Montana, with his headquarters in Bozeman.

The church met in the Methodist and Episcopal churches until 1880, when the young Presbyterian congregation erected a small, wood frame, High Victorian Gothic style church on the corner diagonally opposite the present church. Officers from nearby Fort Ellis contributed to its construction.

In the year of the Panic of 1893, planning began for a newer, larger church, to be built on land donated by General and Mrs. Lester S. Willson. Because of the depression that had just descended upon the city, the church was barely able to meet their operating expenses, and instead invested in 190 shares of Building and Loan stock. When this investment matured in April 1908, Bozeman was entering an active period of economic growth which

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lasted into the 1930's. Over 50% of the historic buildings in Bozeman were built during this period of growth, which resulted in part from the growth of Montana State College (today Montana State University), and in part from the Bozeman's emerging role as the economic hub of the Gallatin Valley.

The matured stocks amounted to \$1900, which became the foundation for the building fund. Construction began immediately, the corner stone being laid in 1908. The Willson's small house which originally stood on the site was demolished to make room for the new church. The house and lot, which was the boyhood home of local architect Fred F. Willson, was donated to the church when the Willsons built their impressive house on S. Willson Ave. in 1886, which is located within the Bon Ton Historic District. The church used the early Willson House for Sunday school rooms and other functions until 1908.

Architects Turnbull and Jones of Elgin, Illinois, who were connected with the Presbyterian Board, submitted the plans for the church, while local contractor Frank Vreeland supervised construction. Volunteers hauled foundation stone from a quarry in Bridger Canyon. The completed church was dedicated on February 20, 1910, and featured an impressive auditorium with exposed hammer beams, and a dining room floor built upon an ashen base. In 1910, the Macedonian Society of the church donated a pipe organ to the church, which was the first in the city.

Changes to the building have included the installation of Carillon Bells, manufactured by Schulmerick Electronics, Inc. of Sellersville, Pennsylvania, in 1949. In 1954, a Sunday School addition designed by Fred F. Willson was completed to the rear (east) end of the building. This one-story addition is highly compatible with the original church building in use of materials, design, and set back.

The church remains today one of the city's major architectural landmarks.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

This detached church of the Gothic style has a cross axial plan with a square entry-bell tower at the corner, which has a flat roof and a crenelated parapet. The six-bay facade is asymmetrical and consists of two offset front entrances, one set within a cut sandstone Gothic arched entry and the other at the south end. Above the south entrance are fixed stained glass windows, set in wood tracery under equilateral or lancet arches. The enormous stained glass windows of the primary facade are also set in heavy, wooden tracery of lancet arches. Plexiglass storm windows cover all of the stained glass windows, which detracts slightly from the historic appearance of the building due to the plexiglass' high reflectivity. The brick bearing wall construction rests on a high sandstone foundation. The gable roof is covered with red clay tile and is perpendicular to the street.

A small one-story, flat roofed brick addition has been built to the rear (east) of the church. This addition of modern materials is compatible in scale and design with the original portion of the building and does not detract significantly from the overall high level of historic architectural integrity.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- First Presbyterian Church, Bozeman, MT, Centennial Edition, June 1872 - June 1972,
Published by the church, 1972.
- Seventy-Fifth Anniversary: First Presbyterian Church, Bozeman, MT, June 1872-1947,
Published by the church, 1947.

Quarter Centennial: 1872-1897; First Presbyterian Church, Bozeman, MT, Published by the church, 1897.

Bozeman Daily Chronicle, Centennial Edition, March 31, 1983, p. 5.

HABS Worksheet, in the Bozeman Vertical File, State Historic Preservation Office

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