

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

JUN 13 1989

NATIONAL  
REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name SOUTH CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH  
other names/site number South Church; South Congregational - First Baptist Church

2. Location

street & number 90 Main Street N/A  not for publication  
city, town New Britain N/A  vicinity  
state Connecticut code 09 county Hartford code 003 zip code

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	2	1 buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	1	sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	3	structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object		objects
			1 Total

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A  
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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.  See continuation sheet.  
Signature of certifying official *[Signature]* Date 6/7/89  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.  
Signature of commenting or other official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

5. 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:)

*[Signature]* 4/6/90 Entered in the National Register 7/28/89  
*[Signature]* Determined Eligible  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

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**6. Function or Use**

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Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)  
RELIGION:religious structure

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Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)  
RELIGION:religious structure

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**7. Description**

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Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)

Gothic Revival

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Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Sandstone

walls Sandstone

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roof Slate

other Glass

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**Describe present and historic physical appearance.**

New Britain's South Congregational Church building, also known as South Church and South Congregational - First Baptist Church,(1) is a large Gothic Revival brownstone structure dominating one of the city's major intersections, where Main, Chestnut, Arch, and Walnut streets converge. There are three interconnected buildings on the site: the 1865 church (Photographs 1 and 2), a similarly detailed parish house built to the east in 1889 (Photograph 11), and Fellowship House (Photograph 3), a 1964 two-story brick, concrete, and glass structure at the south side or rear of the property (noncontributing). The area is a mostly commercial one, dominated by large business blocks, interspersed with a number of other churches. South Church is sited close to the sidewalk, though there is a small lawn to the east, a narrow green strip separating the church from Arch Street on the west, and a garden or courtyard at the rear of the church where the three buildings join. The church property is enclosed by a wrought-iron fence with cast-iron end posts (contributing structure, Photograph 6).

The church follows the basilica plan, with a tall tower on the right, a long, gable-roofed apse at the rear, and a smaller, secondary tower at the southeast rear corner. There is a clerestory between the steep main roof and the more sloping side-aisle shed roofs. The main roof's slates are gray with bands of red, and along the ridge runs a delicate cast-iron cresting. The walls are a random ashlar of rough-surfaced Portland brownstone, with stepped buttresses at the corners and between the side-elevation bays of small lancet windows (Photograph 5). Window heads and sills are of smooth stone, and there is smooth stone coping on the gables. The sides of window openings and all corners are outlined by quoins of rusticated stone with vermiculated centers. Windows have simple tracery and stained glass in intricate pictorial designs, the earliest of which date from 1928; most were installed in the 1960s.

The principal elevation faces north. The main entrance (Photograph 4) with paneled double doors is at the base of the tower. Its blunt pointed-arch opening is outlined by a series of three concentric arches springing from smooth columns with floriated capitals, and the entry's drip molding terminates in similarly carved corbels. Centered above the entry is a datestone. There is another similar entrance in the middle of the main body of the church, and a third in a gabled projection off the east side aisle. Above the main entry is a single large pointed-arch window. The

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New Britain, Connecticut

## Description (continued):

second-story east aisle window, like those in the clerestory, is shaped like a triangle with convex sides. The three-story, square-plan tower's upper stages include a belfry with paired arched louvers, dormers with clock faces on all four sides, and a tall octagonal spire punctuated by tiny arched windows. The spire's turned finial is 170' above street level.

In the interior of the church (Photographs 7 and 8), the nave and aisles are separated by large arches which rest upon slender clustered columns with floriated capitals. Alternating voisoirs of the arches are slightly darker in color. Arched wooden roof braces spring from carved corbels and bear against large beams. There are quatrefoil ornaments in the area between the peaks of the arched braces and the joining of the beam pairs. The aisle ceiling beams have straight diagonal braces with trefoil ornaments. The oak pews, which are raised slightly above floor level, are decorated with Gothic-arched panels and leaf carvings. The vestibule or narthex of the church (Photograph 10) contains some oak paneling and large leather-covered doors on iron strap hinges leading to the main room. The interior is largely original. In 1895, the nave was remodeled to accommodate a huge organ against the south wall, and some of the front pews were removed to make room. The present gallery at the north end, with its paneled railing (Photograph 8), replaced an earlier, smaller gallery at that time. Then in 1928, the organ was removed, exposing the original south window. The present chancel arrangement was installed at that time, with paneled walls and choir pews facing each other behind the pulpit and lectern. Also dating from 1928 is the present ceiling decoration, a series of small applied beams in place of earlier stencilled plaster work. To the rear of the nave, within the apse, is a large church parlor. It was originally a small chapel and was the first part of the church to be finished. When Erwin Chapel in the parish house was completed, the area was converted to an auditorium and was known as the Stage Chapel. Some of the original Gothic bracing remains.

A passageway connects the church to the 1889 gabled-roofed brownstone parish house (Photograph 11), which was designed by the same architect and shares all the church's principal details. Originally, the building had large open classroom and assembly spaces, but the interior was successively partitioned off into smaller spaces in the 1920s, 1956, and 1962. Two of the more important spaces remain, however: the conference room at the north end, which has three original stained-glass windows

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New Britain, Connecticut

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Description (continued):

(two by the L.C. Tiffany studio); and the Erwin Chapel on the east side (Photograph 12), which has simple Gothic interior detailing and stained-glass windows dating from 1889 to 1958.

NOTE

1. The Baptists united with the church in 1974.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally  statewide  locally

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)  A  B  C  D  E  F  G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE  
RELIGION  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance

1865-1929  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Dates

1865, 1889,  
1929  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

George F. Meacham, Architect

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

New Britain's South Congregational Church is primarily significant as a substantial and well-preserved example of Gothic Revival architecture (Criterion C). Both the 1865 church and the 1889 Parish House embody the distinctive characteristics of this Victorian revival style: steep gable roofs, pointed-arch openings, and medieval details such as stepped buttresses, floriated carved capitals, quatrefoil motifs, and arched roof trusses. The buildings retain nearly all their historical appearance, both inside and out, including the original iron fence. Although the interior of the church was somewhat altered in 1895 and again in 1928, most of the existing detail is original. The church reflects the early years of the style in its simple tracery, relatively restrained ornament, and single type of stone. At the same time, the polychrome roof slates, tooling on the quoin and surround stones, and subtle shading on the interior arches look forward to the more elaborate Gothic Revival churches of the later Victorian age. Although Gothic architecture had cultural and religious significance for Roman Catholic and Episcopal churches, the use of the style for a Congregational parish (one which allowed the use of clerical robes only in 1909) had little liturgical meaning. Rather, the choice of Gothic architecture for South Church illustrates how an aesthetic of richly detailed ornament and a Romantic fascination with the past had thoroughly permeated American culture in the Victorian period.

Both the church and parish house were designed by Boston architect George F. Meacham (1831-1917). The Harvard-educated Meacham won a design competition for the Public Gardens in 1860, and he drew the plans for many church, school and other institutional buildings in the Boston area, including Hollis Street Church, the Y.W.C.A., the Home for Little Wanderers, and Channing Church in Newton. Many appear to have been in the richly detailed Gothic style of South Church. For the New Britain project, the first sketches for the church were made by Hammett Billings, an architect who also worked with Meacham on Boston's Tremont Street Methodist Church. (1)

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A

- 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: N/A

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property Approx. .5

UTM References

A 

1	8
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6	8	4	6	4	0
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4	6	1	4	7	6	0
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Zone Easting Northing

B 

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Zone Easting Northing

C 

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D 

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See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The nominated property includes the entire parcel at 90 South Main Street, shown as Lot 103, Map 382, in the records of the New Britain Assessor.

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**Boundary Justification**

The nominated property includes the interconnected church buildings and adjacent small areas of plantings.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Bruce Clouette and Matthew Roth, Reviewed by John Herzan, National Register  
organization Historic Resource Consultants date February 16, 1989  
street & number 55 Van Dyke Avenue telephone (203) 547-0268  
city or town Hartford state CT zip code 06106

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New Britain, Connecticut

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Statement of Significance (continued):

Although their architectural value is their chief claim, the buildings are also significant for their association with a religious organization which historically was an active part of New Britain's community life (Criterion A). The South Church society was established in 1842. Its separation from the first Congregational parish symbolized the growth of New Britain, as the rapidly industrializing town of 3,000 people outgrew a single Congregational society. From an initial 120 charter members, the society grew steadily, as evidenced by the provision of seating for 700 people in the present church, started in 1865. As an urban church, South Church sponsored many church-school and social outreach activities, and when the Parish House (which was built to accommodate these functions) was dedicated in 1889, the speaker was the Rev. Graham Taylor, a proponent of the Social Gospel who later achieved national prominence. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the church, though still overwhelmingly of "Yankee" ethnic origin, addressed itself to New Britain's immigrant majority by providing worship services and Bible study in languages other than English, with special success among Armenians, Persians ("Assyrians"), and Italians. The church's Italian mission lasted until 1946 and the Assyrian mission until 1958. In 1929 the church first used its motto, "In the heart of the city, for the heart of the city."

The architectural significance and high artistic value of the church and parish house qualify the property for listing despite the general exclusion of properties owned by religious institutions or used for religious purposes (Criteria Consideration A).

NOTE

1. James F. O'Gorman, "H. and J. E. Billings of Boston: from Classicism to the Picturesque," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 42 (March, 1983): 65-66. The single sheet of Hammett drawings is at Stowe-Day Foundation, Hartford, Connecticut. The initial design lacked a clerestory, had the position of the two towers reversed, and made the chapel extend at right angles from the rear rather than locating it in the apse.

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Major Bibliographical References:

A Half-Century of the South Congregational Church, New Britain:  
South Congregational Church, 1893.

Brooks, Kate B. A History of the South Congregational Church from  
Its Separation in 1842 to January 1, 1938. New Britain:  
South Congregational Church, 1938.

Obituary of George F. Meacham, Boston Evening Transcript,  
December 4, 1917.

New Britain Record, January 17, 1868.

Wiard, Oliver M. Condensed History of the South Congregational  
Church, New Britain, Connecticut. New Britain: South  
Congregational Church, c.1965.

———. Memorial Windows, South Congregational Church. New  
Britain: South Congregation Church, c.1968.



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Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Photographs \_\_\_\_\_ Page 1

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All Photographs:

1. Name: SOUTH CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
2. Location: New Britain, CT
3. Photo Credit: HRC, Hartford, CT
4. Date: February, 1989
5. Negative location: Connecticut Historical Commission  
Hartford, CT

North and east elevation, view southwest  
Photograph 1 of 12

North elevation, view south  
Photograph 2 of 12

Addition at rear of property, view northeast  
Photograph 3 of 12

Detail of entry in tower, north elevation, view south  
Photograph 4 of 12

Detail of stonework, west elevation, view northeast  
Photograph 5 of 12

Detail of fence, northwest corner of property, view southeast  
Photograph 6 of 12

Interior of church, view south  
Photograph 7 of 12

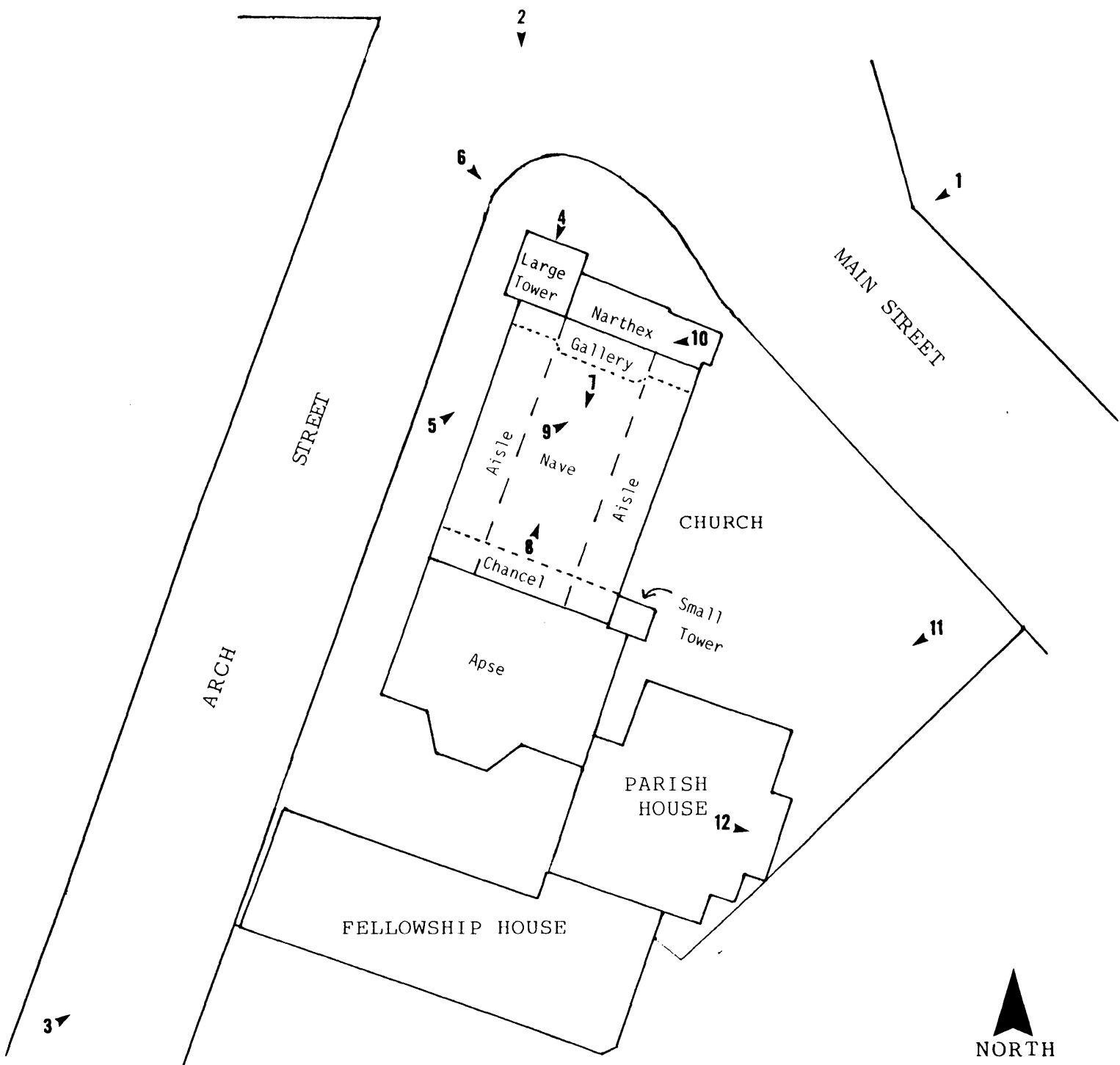
Interior of church, view north  
Photograph 8 of 12

Detail of pews, view northeast  
Photograph 9 of 12

Interior of church vestibule, view west  
Photograph 10 of 12

Parish house, east elevation, view southwest  
Photograph 11 of 12

Erwin Chapel, parish house, view east  
Photograph 12 of 12



SOUTH CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

New Britain, Connecticut

3 Photo Position

Scale: Approx. 1" = 50'