

# MONTANA HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL INVENTORY

Site # 024

Legal Description: Original Town Block 0-17, Lots 2, 3, & 4

Address: 215 5th Ave. South

Ownership name: First Presbyterian Church

private  public address: 215 5th Ave. South, Lewistown, MT 59457

Roll # 4 Frame # 15



Historic Name: First Presbyterian Church

Common Name: First Presbyterian Church

Date of Construction: 1912  estimated  documented

Architect: Wasmansdorff & Eastman

Builder: T.J. Tubb

Original Owner: First Presbyterian Church

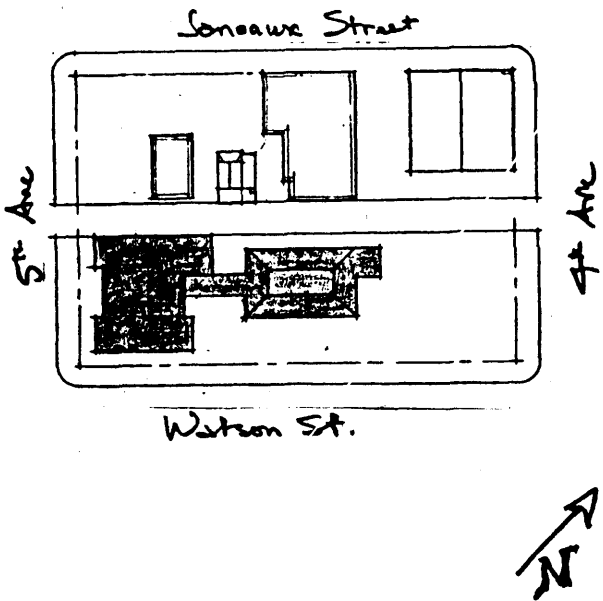
Original Use: Church

Present Use: Church

Research Sources:

- abstract of title
- city directories
- plat records/maps
- sewer/water permits
- tax cards
- obituaries
- building permit
- biographies
- Sanborn maps — dates: 1913, 1922, 1929

Bibliography: Information from minutes published in "The Presbyterian Church's Fifty Years in Lewistown, MT" Montana Magazine of Western History, Winter 1978



Location map or building plan with arrow north.

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:** Describe present appearance of structure/site, then contrast and compare that with it's original appearance, noting additions, alterations, and changes in materials. Discuss significant architectural features.

This description includes two connected structures: a 1912 cut stone church and a more recently completed brick-wing addition.

**Cut stone church:** This stone ecclesiastic structure features a high square sanctuary that culminates in a four-part pyramidal ceiling that is created by the intersecting wood shingle gable roofs above. The south corner of the structure has a three-story square crenellated bell tower. There are two dressed stone string courses at floor lines of the bell tower. The end walls of stone project above the roof with cut stone parapets; the gables are "shouldered" (called crow steps in brick) at the edges of the roof. There are numerous engaged buttresses with dressed stone weathering caps at setbacks as they progress up the walls. Oculus windows occur near the apex of the gable end walls. A cornerstone with the date "1912" can be seen from Fifth Avenue. Windows are all gothic arches, the jambs are dressed stone that is splayed, and most have stained leaded glass. A dressed stone cornice with dressed stone dentils decorates the top of the walls of a flat roof wing of the structure at the north corner of the building. Rafter ends are typically exposed at the edge of the roof. A recent change to the entry was made that consists of adding a vestibule of cut stone over CMU on the southeast wall of the church; a cut stone sign was attached to the bell tower at the same time. Secondary doors are handsome (original) inset panels doors with original hardware. Basement windows are wood; a plywood storage shed is attached to the back of the church.

Brick Addition: This part of the complex basically houses administrative and educational functions and is a one-story Norman brick (1/3 running bond) building with a wood shake "hat" roof (combination low slope hip with a monitor). The fascia is undercut and constructed of several painted boards in width. Regularly spaced vertical battens are applied over the fascia; the soffit of the overhang is painted plywood. The southeast elevation exhibits a random composition of small fixed lites in the brick; a fenestration of vertical modulations combining wood casement and fixed windows are used elsewhere around the building. All sides of the structure are brick; the foundation is concrete.

The church qualifies for register listing under Criteria C; the stone part of the structure is very prominent and dominates the addition. It is a very strong architectural statement and is visually distinct from the connected addition.

Classification: 1912 church - This ecclesiastical structure is derivative of Gothic or Gothic revival influences.  
Brick wing - contemporary architecture

7/2/8

**HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:** Justify how the persons, important events, and/or historical patterns associated with the structure/site and surrounding area lend the property significance.  
The Presbyterian Church of Lewistown is associated with events that reflect significant settlement patterns and development in Central Montana.

In July 1890, Rev. Samuel E. Wishard, Superintendent of Missions for the Presbytery of Montana, and Rev. George Edwards started out on a tour of the Judith Basin and carried their small missionary as far as Lewistown, the County Seat of Fergus County. They found a community of around 400 citizens, 2 or 3 stores, several saloons, and no ordained minister in the County. (Rev. W. W. VanOrsdale, Methodist, was an ordained missionary and he lived in Philbrook.) A small M.E. Church and a Roman Catholic Church furnished all the religious instruction for the town. Rev. Edwards first conducted services in an 1883 school house until a Presbyterian Church and manse were built in 1893. Rev. Ernest Wright, Pastor at the time the present church was built, arrived in Lewistown in December 1908 and found "a city of stone" in a period of rapid growth. By 1909 a building committee was at work planning to either enlarge the church or build a new one to meet the growth of the congregation.

Outside of the Sunday services and Sunday school, the Ladies Aid Society (Homeworkers) was the most active part of church life. Their bazaars, dinners and programs were community events and they boasted of their ability to make \$100 on each chicken dinner. While debates were going on regarding building, the final argument seemed to be by Rev. Albert Pfaus, who said, in addressing the congregation: "The Homeworkers now have no specific object for which to work; a new building would provide such an objective." The vote was to build.

Plans drawn by the local firm of Wasmandorff and Eastman were accepted on July 25, 1911, and work proceeded at once on the stone edifice. The availability of good building stone attracted many stonemasons to the fledgling city, including a sizable community of Croatian craftsmen. The Presbyterian Church is a fine example of the

**INTEGRITY:** Assess the degree to which the structure/site, and surrounding area accurately convey the historical associations of the property.  
Both constructions are original; the church entrance has been altered. Both structures are located on their original sites. The church represents traditional architectural thinking for religious structures of the time; the quality of stone construction is noteworthy, however, and is a very dramatic example of the "stone methodology" identified with Lewistown.

**INFORMATION VALUE:** Explain how the extant structure/site may demonstrate or yield information about its historic use or construction.

**FORM PREPARED BY:** Ken Sievert, Historical Arch  
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Address: P.O. Box 739, Lewistown, MT 59457  
Date: February 16, 1984

**GEOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION:**

Acreage: Less than one acre

USGS Quad: Lewistown S15 T15N R18E MPM

UTM's:

stone masonry building tradition that characterizes the early architecture of Lewistown.

Sandstone slabs for the new church, quarried south of Lewistown, were hauled to the construction site on "stone boats" and sub divided, on the site, into the approximate size needed for building. The large stones, which weigh from 140 to 180 pounds per cubic foot, were then fashioned into precisely dimensioned blocks, using hand chisels, hammers and mallets, by the skilled stonecutters.

The corner stone was laid on May 28, 1912, and the rock face ashlar walls rose rapidly. Formal dedication of the First Presbyterian Church took place on January 12, 1913.

The following year, among the toasts made at the First Dedication Anniversary Banquet, was one by Mrs. Rudolf Von Tobel titled: "Chicken Bones as Building Stones", or "A Two-Hundred Woman Power Church".