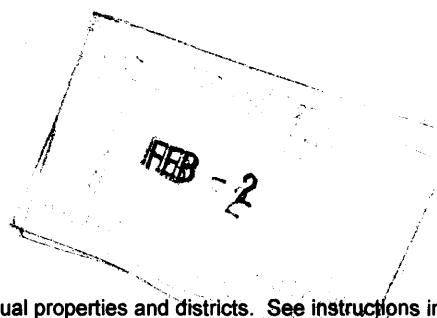


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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 "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "P/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (P S Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name First Baptist Church (Linden Avenue)

other names/site number Mount Olive Cathedral C. M. E. Church

2. Location

street & number 538 Linden Avenue

not for publication N/A

city or town Memphis

vicinity N/A

state Tennessee

code TN

county Shelby

code 157

zip code

38126

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 for 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.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

Herbert J. Hays 1/31/05
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Tennessee Historical Commission

State or 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 certifying 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

for
Edson H. Beall

3/15/05

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in count)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal
- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	
0	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

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

Historic Religious Resources of Memphis, Shelby Co., Tennessee

Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/religious facility

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/religious facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Classical Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE
walls STONE
STUCCO
roof ASPHALT
other GLASS/stained glass windows

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 boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** moved from its original location.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property
- G** less than 50 year 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): 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 # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1906-07 - ca. 1952

Significant Dates

N/A

Significant Person

(complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Hunt, R. H. (1862-1937)

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:
Tennessee Historical Commission

First Baptist Church (Linden Avenue)
Name of property

Shelby County, Tennessee
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Approximately one acre Northwest Memphis TN-AK 404 NE

UTM References

(place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>15</u>	<u>769342</u>	<u>3892238</u>	3	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
	Zone	Easting	Porting		Zone	Easting	Porting
2	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	4	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>

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 John Linn Hopkins
organization Hopkins & Associates date May 2004
street & number 974 Philadelphia Street telephone (901) 278-5186
city or town Memphis state TN zip code 38104

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 SH O) or F O for any additional items

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SH O or F O.)

name Mount Olive Cathedral C.M.E., c/o Rev. Dr. Stanley M. Wilburn
street & number 538 Linden Avenue telephone (901) 527-8292
city or town Memphis state TN zip code 38126

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 listing. 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 Reduction Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303

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First Baptist Church (Linden Avenue)
Shelby County, Tennessee

VII. Description

First Baptist Church was developed in 1906-1907 on the equivalent of a quarter city block located at 538 Linden Avenue at the northwestern corner of Linden Avenue and South Lauderdale Street in the Driver Subdivision of South Memphis. The church was designed in the Classical Revival style as interpreted by the noted architectural firm of R. H. Hunt & Company, headed by Reuben H. Hunt (1862-1937). The basic organization of the load-bearing stone masonry building is a composed of an interpretation of a Byzantine church plan, with an appended Akron Plan Sunday School facility along its northern side. A two-story Sunday School Annex was added to the west side of the church in 1923, and the sanctuary remodeled to expand its seating area; the identity of the architectural firm associated with the design of the Sunday School Annex is not known. The First Baptist Church outgrew its building and sold this property in 1951 to Mount Olive Cathedral C.M.E. Church, who made minor changes to the property when placing the building in service for their use. These alterations included the re-orientation of the pulpit and pews to face north into the original Sunday School wing of the building; constructing a choir riser behind the pulpit; and, removing a short section of the balcony where it crossed the windows of the east wall of the sanctuary. Mount Olive continues as the property's steward today. The setting of the church was densely suburban residential in character when the church was originally built; however, over time, the residential character of the area gave way to other uses. Today, the neighboring properties are composed of a parking lot for the church on the west; vacant lots across Linden Avenue to the south; the Abe Scharff Y.M.C.A. across South Lauderdale to the east; and, the Hunt-Phelan House (NR 2/11/1971) to the north. There are no other buildings associated with the church property.

The front (south) façade of the building is composed of the original church façade on the east, and the front façade of the 1923 Sunday School Annex located beside it to the west. The Sunday School Annex will be discussed later. The façade of the church building is two-stories in height above a raised basement and five bays in width, finished with load bearing dressed faced ashlar. The low-pitched hip roof is set behind a plain parapet wall, and is surmounted by a low dome raised on a short drum. The focal point of the front façade is its tetrastyle portico with a full pediment, supported by monumental columns with bases, Tuscan shafts and Scamozzi capitals; the pediment contains an ocular window surrounded by a laurel wreath with garland. A full entablature extends from the portico across the front façade and continues along the sides. The 1/1 double-hung, stained glass sashes of the second story are set in rectangular reveals with double back-banded architraves; the exceptions are the two windows on the outside corners of the second story level, which are set in semi-circular arched

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architraves with keystones. These and all other stained glass lights are believed to be original to the construction of the building in 1906-07. Three entrances are centered between the columns; the center entrance contains a multi-panel double door set in a double back-banded architraves with a cornice and a stained glass transom, while the flanking entrances contain only single-leaf doors with a cornice and stained glass transoms above. The entrances are accessed by a short run of steps that spans the width of the portico; the stairs are flanked by stepped wing walls that have the original cast iron post top light fixtures at their top.

The side (east) façade of the church building is a complex arrangement of massing that extends ten bays in depth along South Lauderdale Street. The southeastern corner of the church extends one bay to the north and then recedes one bay in depth to the line of the principal façade; the façade contains a semi-circular arched stained glass window on the second story, a blind spandrel panel between the stories and a rectangular stained glass window on the first story. The façade continues one bay in width to the north; the rectangular window reveals in this bay contain stained glass windows. A three bay wide section then projects slightly, and features a full pediment supported by monumental pilasters with Tuscan shafts and Doric capitals; the rectangular stained glass windows of this portion of the façade are paired and have a blind spandrel panel between stories. To the north of this feature is the original Sunday School wing of the church, which projects forward of the principal façade by one bay. The Sunday School wing is visually divided into two parts. An entrance and stair bay makes up the southern portion of the wing, and features an architrave with a full entablature supported by pilasters with Tuscan shafts and Doric capitals; above the entrance is a blind spandrel panel and semi-circular arched stained glass window. The classroom area of the Sunday School wing projects slightly forward of the entrance bay, and contains four bays of single stained glass windows separated between stories by blind spandrel panels.

The rear (north) façade of the church runs five bays in depth to the west. A small portion of the first bay of the façade is covered with dressed faced ashlar; the balance is faced with brick laid in common bond. The windows of this façade are plain 1/1 double-hung sashes.

The side (west) façade of the 1906-07 church was incorporated as an interior wall when the Sunday School Annex was constructed in 1923. The Sunday School Annex is organized as U-shaped addition composed of two, two-story, four-bay deep blocks elevated on a basement, and joined together and to the original church building by a corridor running south to north along the original west church façade. The space between the Sunday School blocks acts as a

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First Baptist Church (Linden Avenue)
Shelby County, Tennessee

light well for the interior rooms; a portion of this light well was enclosed for the addition, ca. 1970, of an elevator and mechanical core adjacent to the corridor.

The front (south) façade of the 1923 Sunday School Annex is separated from the main church by a one bay wide, one bay deep recess; the recess is covered by an extension of the flat annex roof. The roof is hidden behind a plain parapet wall with a center-stepped section above the center three bays of the façade. The entire façade is spanned by a full entablature, which wraps the corner onto the side (west) façade. The facade of the annex is five bays in width, divided into three vertical sections by monumental pilasters with Tuscan shafts and Doric capitals; the pilasters spring from a water table that separates the first and second story from the exposed basement level. The center section of the façade contains three individual window bays with 1/1 double-hung sashes; the flanking bays contain paired 1/1 double-hung sashes. All of the windows on the second story also feature single-light fixed sash transoms. The basement level also contains 1/1 double-hung sashes in the same configuration as their respective bays above; the exception is the entrance located at the southeastern corner, which contains a single, metal frame replacement door flanked by single-light, metal-frame sidelights.

The side (west) façade of the annex is two-stories tall and nine bays in depth elevated above a raised basement, with a load-bearing brick masonry façade. The parapet wall has a tile coping and steps downward from south to north. The windows of the second story of the façade are 1/1 double-hung sashes with single fixed light transoms; the windows of the first story and basement level are simple 1/1 double-hung sashes.

The original arrangement of the interior of the church is extraordinarily complex, and it has been made more so by the alterations to the sanctuary subsequent to its acquisition by Mount Olive Cathedral C.M.E. in 1951. Immediately inside of the entrance to the church is a lobby or narthex that extends across the entire front of the building, with entrances to the sanctuary opposite the center entrance doors and through columnar screens at either end of the lobby; a stair to the mezzanine is located near the entrance in the northwestern corner of the lobby.

The sanctuary is octagonal in plan and rises to a ceiling that is the equivalent of two stories above the floor of the auditorium. The ceiling is decorated by a pattern of major and minor coffer beams; the major coffer beams are supported by large console brackets that connect opposing corners of the octagon to delineate a large rectangular space at center. The space thus created opens to a coved vault that rises another half story above the floor. The cove of the vault is lined with curved, tapered, and paneled pilasters with Ionic capitals, which were

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First Baptist Church (Linden Avenue)
Shelby County, Tennessee

designed so that when viewed from immediately below, the pilasters would appear to have straight sides. The pilasters "support" another coffer beamed ceiling in the vault; the beams serve as a supporting framework for the sashes that make up the ceiling's skylight. The glazing of the skylight has been painted over to reduce the impact of its solar heat gain.

Each of the four larger walls of the octagonal plan have a proscenium-like arch set a few in front of their plane featuring curved corners that mimic the curve of the cove vault in the ceiling. On the south side of the sanctuary, an arch spans a portion of the terraced mezzanine-level seating located immediately above the entrance. On the side (east) wall, the arch frames two levels of paired stained glass windows; a portion of the original mezzanine spanned the spandrel between the sets of windows, but was removed ca. 1952. Opposite this wall on the west, the arch spans a blank wall that originally was filled with a bank of organ pipes removed in 1951 and reinstalled in First Baptist's new church building. Opposite the entrance on the north wall, the arch spans an opening that frames the existing pulpit and terraced choir riser installed ca. 1952 that extends up to the mezzanine level of the original Sunday School wing. There are three Sunday School rooms on the mezzanine level behind the choir; these rooms are separated from the choir by an arrangement of five sets of three, three-panel, single-light doors hung as bi-fold pair and a single-leaf door, each set with a three light transom above. To the side (east) of the choir is a room lined with five 1/1 double-hung sash lights, and a six-panel door with a single-light transom. This large room contains a fireplace with its original oak mantle and overmantle, and may have been originally used as a nursery.

On the first floor behind and to the side of the choir riser are another series of three original Sunday School rooms, each enclosed by the same arrangement of bi-fold and single-leaf doors with transoms. On the east side of the choir riser is another large room, originally used as a Sunday School room but now used as a chapel.

On the floor of the sanctuary, the pews are arranged in straight rows perpendicular to a center aisle axis with the pulpit with the main entrance from the foyer. The pews are ca. replacements 1952. The exact arrangement of the sanctuary before its alterations ca. 1952 is not entirely clear due to the lack of historic plans or documentary photographs. However, based upon physical evidence, written descriptions, and the memories of church members, much of the plan can be determined.

In the original configuration of the church, the pulpit was located on the short corner wall between the arch containing the organ pipes and the arch that opens to the current pulpit and

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choir. The choir was originally seated in front of the organ pipes. The seating for the congregation was arranged in arced segments radiating outward from the pulpit as its center. A center aisle led directly from the pulpit to opposite short wall of the octagonal plan, connecting with the sanctuary entrance in the southeast corner. The existing mezzanine level above the entrance is only a portion of the original mezzanine configuration, which continued across the east side of the sanctuary in a "dog-leg"-like arrangement (Caudill 1989:34).

The area currently occupied today by the pulpit and choir contained the original Sunday School rooms of the church, designed employing the so-called "Akron Plan" principles. A terraced mezzanine extended across this space beginning at the level of the existing floor on the eastern and western sides. The three Sunday School rooms on both levels could each be divided in half by lowering a tambour screen. All of these screens have been removed save for one; the removal of the screens probably occurred ca. 1952. The entire Sunday School area behind the archway was able to be closed off from the rest of the sanctuary by lowering tambour screens on both levels, or opened to allow additional seating for very large audiences on special occasions. The same was true of the Sunday School rooms along the perimeter, whose doors could be folded open to provide an unobstructed view of the sanctuary (Caudill 1989:34-35 and *Memphis Commercial-Appeal* July 1, 1906).

The Sunday School annex built in 1923 is composed of two square blocks in plan, connected by a corridor that runs three-quarters of the depth of the building to a light shaft that separates the rear third of the church from the annex. The entrance to the annex is on the basement level, and immediately behind the entrance foyer are two runs of cast and wrought iron stairs that lead to the first and second stories. The basement level contains a variety of large and small rooms devoted to administrative, mechanical and classroom spaces. The first floor level has administrative uses and a choir practice room in the southern block, and a large classroom complex in the northern block. The classroom space originally was developed with small, glass partitioned group classroom spaces developed around the perimeter, surrounding a large classroom at center. The classrooms originally were entered through single-light, single-panel door flanked on one side by a 1/2 length oversized sidelight, all topped with a two-light transom. On the second story, the front wall containing the door, transoms and sidelight all were removed ca. 1952 to create unimpeded use of all of the spaces. On the third floor, both blocks share the pattern of small classrooms arranged around the perimeter of a larger room, and the original glazed partitions, transoms and doors have been retained for use. The intent of the glazed partitions as a means of allowing natural light to filter into the entire space is easily discernable.

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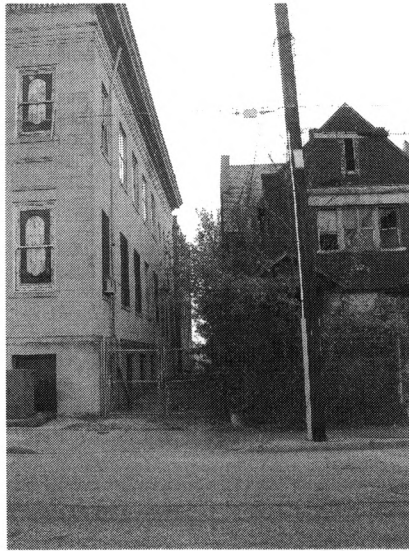
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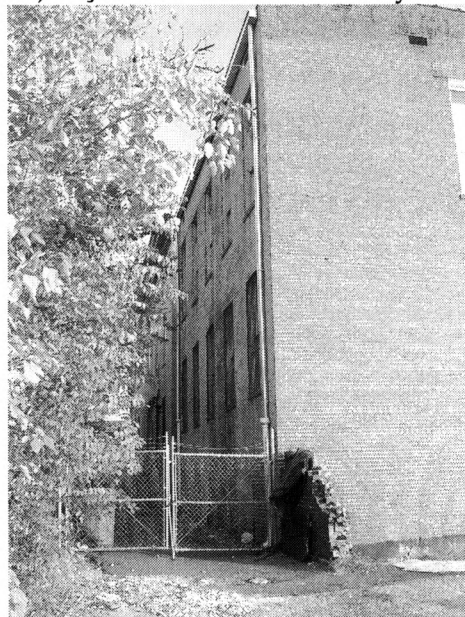
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First Baptist Church (Linden Avenue)
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Rear (north) façade of 1906-07 Sunday School wing.



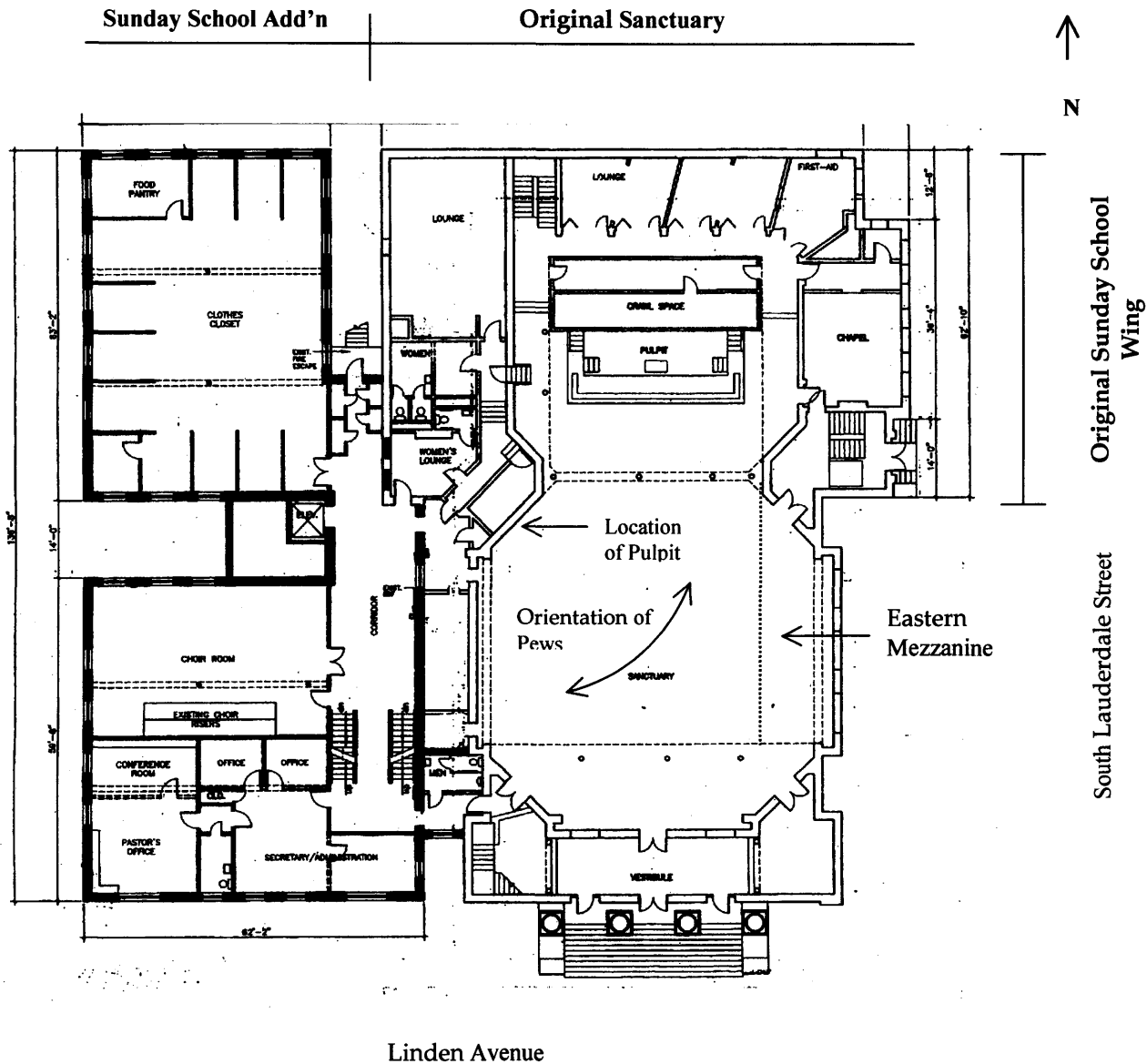
Rear (north) façade of 1923 Sunday School addition.

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First Baptist Church (Linden Avenue)
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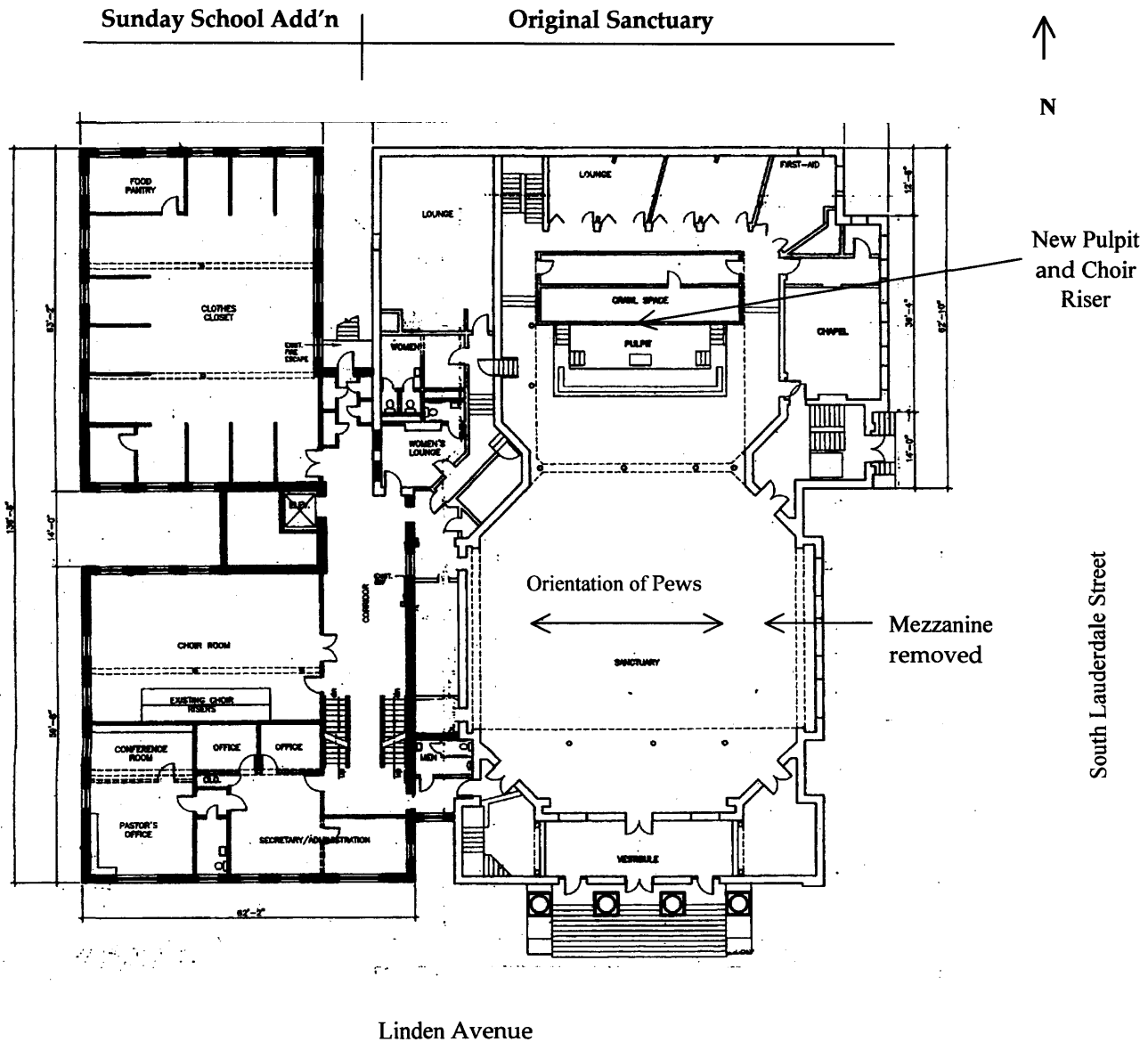
Some features of the original plan of First Baptist Church, prior to ca. 1952.

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First Baptist Church (Linden Avenue)
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Existing plan of First Baptist Church, as altered ca. 1952.

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First Baptist Church (Linden Avenue)
Shelby County, Tennessee

VII. Statement of Significance

The First Baptist Church (Linden Avenue), is being nominated under criterion C in the area of architecture for its significance as an early local example of the Classical Revival style. The period of significance for First Baptist Church (Linden Avenue) begins with its construction in 1906-07 and lasts through ca. 1952, the first year of its use by a successor congregation, Mount Olive Cathedral C.M.E. Church, when modifications were made to adapt the church for its purposes. The construction of the church with its pedimented portico supported by bold limestone columns with Scamozzi capitals introduced a renewal in the use of Classical design in church buildings in Memphis, which proved to be a trend that lasted for the rest of the twentieth century. The construction in 1923 of a new Sunday School Annex in a compatible design in the Classical Revival style effectively doubled the mass of the building and added to its sense of monumentality. Later changes by the C.M.E. congregation are in keeping with the classical detailing of the building. The church building is one of only two known examples of the work of the extensive career of Reuben H. Hunt (1862-1937) that exist in the Memphis area. The nomination of this property is consistent with the registration requirements and standards for architectural integrity set forward in the Multiple Property Submission "Historic Residential Resources of Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee."

The First Baptist Church at 538 Lauderdale Avenue is the third of the four church buildings constructed as sanctuaries for the congregation. The practice of the Baptist faith in Memphis began in 1839, when a small group of Baptists began meeting in the community's school and public meeting house in Court Square; in 1842 or 1845, depending upon the account, the congregation moved into a former residence donated to the congregation by Geraldus Buntyn, a wealthy cotton planter who was also a charter member of the church (see Goodwyn Street Historic District, NR 3/9/1990). The house was located on Second Street in mid-block between Jefferson and Adams Street.

In 1845, the Baptists embarked on a building campaign to construct their first true church building. Construction began in 1846 on a two-story Greek Revival church, located on the same lot, and it is believed that before construction began, the congregation had their earlier building moved to the back of the lot to allow services to continue for the duration. The finished building measured about 45 feet in width and about sixty feet in depth, and featured a pedimented hexastyle portico supported by fluted columns and Doric capitals (Caudill 1898:101). The Sunday School was

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First Baptist Church (Linden Avenue)
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located on the basement level, with the auditorium of the church raised above it. The architect of the building is unknown.

The members of First Baptist Church were among other congregations in the city who helped to renew the city's optimism following the devastating Yellow Fever Epidemics of 1878-1879 by investing in a major building in the 1880s. Construction on the remodeling of the old Greek Revival building and transforming it into dramatic Late-Victorian Gothic Revival church began in 1886 and was completed in 1888. The architect of the project is not known as present, but based upon its quality, the most likely candidates for the work were either James B. Cook (1822-1909), architect of St. Mary's Episcopal Church (1868-1874, NR 8/7/1974), Temple Israel (Poplar Avenue, 1884, demolished ca. 1955), Grace Episcopal Church (1894-1905, NR pending), and First Baptist Church (Beale Street Baptist Church, 1869 NR 2/11/1971), among others; or, Edward Culliat Jones (1826-1902), architect of First Presbyterian Church (1884, NR pending), Central Baptist Church (398 Second Street, 1885, demolished ca. 1935), and the D. T. Porter Building (1894, NR 4/18/1979), among others. The renovation of First Baptist Church created yet another tall spire on the Memphis skyline, joining First Presbyterian, First Methodist, and Temple Israel in substantial new buildings between 1883 and 1890, and all located within roughly a block of First Baptist.

First Baptist Church flourished in its new home, steadily adding to its membership as the city's economy recovered and its population expanded rapidly in the 1890s and early 1900s, causing them to add new Sunday School rooms to the church in 1904 (Caudill 1989:34). Just as this project was nearing completion, however, Shelby County government announced its plans in 1905 for the construction of a great new courthouse building that would fill the block bounded by Adams, Second, Washington and Third streets (Shelby County Courthouse, James Gamble Rogers and H. D. Hale, architects, 1909, part Adams Avenue Historic District NR 11/25/1980). In spite of the political power that First Baptist could potentially wield against the project, the membership instead voted to accept a \$75,000 buyout from the county government and began to look elsewhere for a new church site (Caudill 1989:25).

The availability of building sites for a new, large church in the downtown area of the city was limited. The rapidly expanding economy and influx of new residents to work in the city's growing manufacturing and distribution industries had led to a building boom in downtown. This, plus the realization that the church's membership was no longer living in the downtown area, caused the church to look outside of the downtown area, eventually settling on a site on Linden Avenue in the midst of a relatively affluent neighborhood of old South Memphis.

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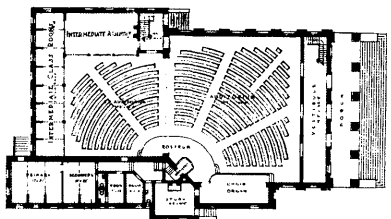
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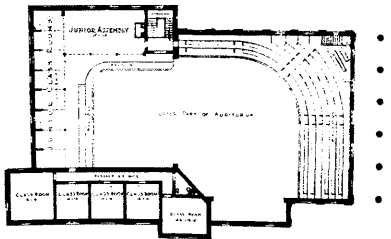
First Baptist Church (Linden Avenue)
Shelby County, Tennessee

"The decision to locate the new church home at the northwest corner of Linden and Lauderdale was made because it was felt to be the central location for the membership which was scattered widely over the city. Very few of the members of the church lived in the far out easterly direction. Since at least ninety percent used streetcars, the site chosen was more convenient for them." (*Memphis Commercial-Appeal*, October 21, 1906).

The Building Committee of First Baptist Church turned to the architectural firm of R. H. Hunt & Company of Chattanooga, who were generally regarded as the preeminent firm in the region in the design of churches and other large public buildings. The construction work planned by Hunt was to be completed in two phases, starting with the Sunday School wing on the north side of the sanctuary, to be followed by the construction of the sanctuary itself. The building contract was let on July 1, 1906, and groundbreaking for the Sunday School took place on July 4th. Work on the Sunday School phase was completed and put into use on June 2, 1907; the completion of the sanctuary and its formal dedication followed on November 3 of the same year. Once completed, the sanctuary could seat 750; the Sunday School, when opened to the sanctuary, could seat an additional 500 people (Caudill 1989:34-35).



PLAN XXX.—FIRST FLOOR. THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, MURFREESBORO, TENN.
R. H. Hunt, Architect, Chattanooga, Tenn.



PLAN XXX.—SECOND FLOOR. THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, MURFREESBORO, TENN.

Reuben H. Hunt (1862-1937) began practicing architecture in Chattanooga in 1882, and developed one of the most prolific architectural firms in the Southern United States, specializing, to a degree, in the design of churches and public buildings, including colleges, courthouses, auditoriums, public schools, and libraries. The breadth of the firm's work is simply astonishing, and while some of their building designs were formulaic, they never failed to be impressive buildings. Hunt tapped into a market generally in the South, where fast-growing communities, no matter their size, were starved for new, impressive buildings that reflected their great optimism and civic pride. By example, Hunt designed dozens of courthouses in Georgia. While Hunt's design for a courthouse in one

part of Georgia might look in many ways quite similar to another courthouse built a hundred miles away, both buildings made impressive statements for the local communities that used them, and that was largely all that mattered. By way of another example, the design of First Baptist Church on Linden Avenue in Memphis was remarkably similar in style and plan to that of the First Baptist Church of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, and both were completed at about the same period of

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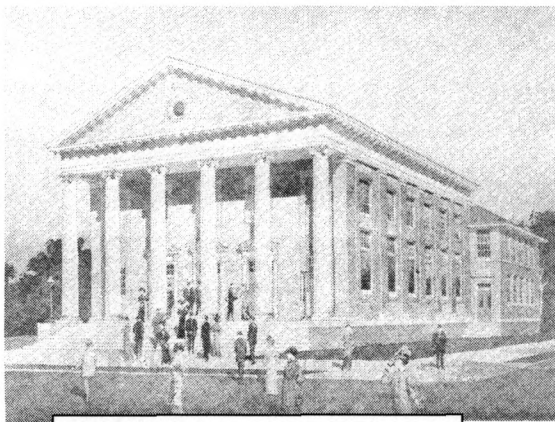
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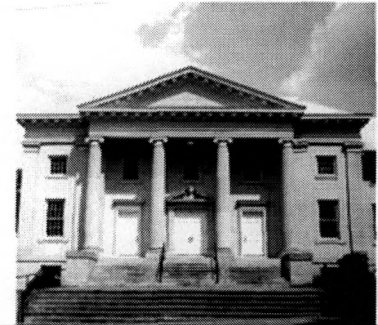
First Baptist Church (Linden Avenue)
Shelby County, Tennessee

time.¹ If anyone among either congregation was aware of the similarities, they doubtless did not care. Their concern was that their building be well built, completed on budget, be efficient in its use, and would make an impressive statement about their congregation within their own community. The church is also similar to the ca. 1916 Northside Presbyterian Church in Chattanooga (NR 9/15/1980).



First Baptist Church Murfreesboro

Hunt was also a clever marketer of his firm's services, and he freely lent examples of his designs to magazines and publications to promote his work to a wider audience. By ca. 1900, Hunt had begun to develop a very successful



Northside Presbyterian Church,
Chattanooga. ca. 1916

branch of his firm's business in the area of ecclesiastic architecture, and he published his own design catalogue *Modern Church Designs* ca. 1910 to promote even more church business. He developed strong relationships with several of the national administrative bodies of various denominations, most notable the Southern Baptist Association and the Southern Methodist Conference, both based in Nashville. The Sunday School Boards of both organizations (and others) distributed pamphlets and booklets to their member congregations designed to aid in the planning and administration of a building remodeling or new construction program. The Sunday School boards published advice on planning the small-, medium-, and large-scale church building through publications like *Church and Sunday-School Buildings* (1917), and *How to Remodel the One-Room Church Building* (ca. 1920), among many others, all of which contained at least some of Hunt's church designs.

Though Hunt's success in other cities and other states was prolific, it is somewhat surprising to note that only one other building designed by his firm is located in Memphis, specifically, the second sanctuary for Bellevue Baptist Church, built in 1923-24 (70 North Belvedere Boulevard, now Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church). Since Hunt's firm was at work across town on the

¹ Plan of the First Baptist Church of Murfreesboro, Tennessee (above), by R. H. Hunt, architect, ca. 1905. The floor plans of this church are remarkably similar to those of First Baptist Church in Memphis, and this offers some insight into what its original floor plans were like before its modifications in 1923 and ca. 1952. From P.E. Burroughs's *Church and Sunday School Buildings*, 1917.

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Bellevue project, it is suspected that they may have also been hired to do the design of the Sunday School Annex for First Baptist Church in 1923, but this is not conclusively known.

While Hunt's design for First Baptist Church in Memphis may have had similarities in plan and design to other contemporary churches produced by his firm in other cities, the design of First Baptist in Memphis did introduce the Classical Revival style to the city. More importantly, however, was the model the new church served in establishing a public mindset in favor of forms of Classical Revival and Colonial Revival architectural styles for the design of churches, especially among Protestant denominations. The Gothic Revival style may still have remained the preferred style for churches through the rest of the 20th century in Memphis, but if so, its edge numerically over churches designed with Classical Revival or Colonial Revival influences was small.

Prior to the construction of First Baptist Church in 1906-07, the last church building built in Memphis in any form of Classical design had been the Greek Revival edifice built for First Baptist Church in 1846. In the sixty-year period between the construction of these two buildings, churches were designed in a variety of mostly Gothic, Italianate and Romanesque Revival styles familiar to the last half of the nineteenth century in America. The Baptist's shift from the Victorian to a form of the Classical Revival as designed by Hunt did not occur in a vacuum. Beginning in the early-1890s, social and political leaders in Memphis began a strong Progressive Reform movement in the city, based on City Beautiful planning and design principles embodied in the design of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1892-93. The Beaux Arts form of Classicism introduced at the Chicago World's Fair emerged in Memphis just after the turn of the new century with James B. Cook's design for the new Gayoso Hotel (1901, 123 South Front Street, part Gayoso-Peabody Historic District NR 5/7/1980) and the North Memphis Savings Bank building in 1901 (Max Furbringer, architect, 110 Adams Avenue, part Adams Avenue Historic District, NR 11/25/1980). This was followed in 1906-09 by James Gamble Rogers and H. D. Hale's monumental design for the new Shelby County Courthouse, the building that had displaced First Baptist to their new home on Linden Avenue (140 Adams Avenue, part Adams Avenue Historic District).

Many of the members of the First Baptist Church were also closely affiliated with the reform movement in the city, and the Classical Revival design proposed by Hunt was received as a reflection of the city's Progressive spirit and the architectural influences which went along with it. Once the precedent was set with the construction of First Baptist Church, other new churches established in the newer suburbs of the city followed suit by selecting classically-inspired designs for their sanctuaries. The first of these was the Beaux Arts-inspired St. John's Methodist Church at 1207 Peabody Avenue in 1907-08, designed by B.C. Alsup and Neander Montgomery Woods, Jr.

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(part Annesdale Park Historic District, NR 12/22/1978), and the new Colonial Revival sanctuary for First Congregational Church, designed by Jones & Furbringer in 1909-10 (234 South Watkins, NR 7/21/1980). From this point through the end of the twentieth century, examples of Classically derived church buildings were built during each decade, and were spread among all quarters of the city. A representative few include Temple Baptist Church (1918, 986 South Cooper Street, part Cooper-Young Historic District, NR 6/22/1989), Union Avenue Methodist Church (completed 1923, 2117 Union Avenue, NR 3/6/1987), Eastland Presbyterian Church (1933, 3741 Jackson Avenue), Metropolitan Baptist Church (1949, 767 Walker Avenue), St. John's Episcopal Church (1950, 3245 Central Avenue), and Grimes Memorial Methodist Church (1960, 4659 Summer Avenue). Forms of Gothic Revival, Craftsman, Romanesque Revival, Modernism and the International style were also employed in the design of twentieth century Memphis churches, but classically inspired styles had a major impact on shaping church architecture and the communities that surrounded them. The design of First Baptist Church established this trend in 1906-07.

First Baptist Church continued to flourish in the 1920s and 1930s, and continued to add new members at an extraordinary pace. By the end of the 1930s, the active membership stood at 2,531, and an average of 700 in attendance at regular services on any given Sunday. The church began to receive inquiries from members about the possibility of relocating to another part of the city, and formed a search committee in September of 1938 (Caudill 1989:61). The committee returned the recommendation to acquire the Hyde property at the northeast intersection of Poplar Avenue and East Parkway, plus an additional lot next door, for a total of \$26,000 (Caudill 1989:61). However, before the church could move on initiating a building campaign for the new property, World War II intervened.

A renewed effort to build a new First Baptist Church got underway at War's end, and by November of 1947, the church was able to announce the sale of the Linden Avenue building to Mount Olive Cathedral C.M.E. Church for the sum of \$100,000. The sale of the church was negotiated by Judge John W. McCall, on behalf of First Baptist, and the Reverend W. A. Johnson of Mount Olive, and the terms of the sale permitted First Baptist to remain in its former church for up to ten years, pending the construction of their new building (*Memphis Commercial Appeal*, November 17, 1947). Reverend Johnson had been discussing the possibility of the sale with the deacons of First Baptist since the acquisition of the Poplar and Parkway site was first announced in 1938.

Just a few months short of the date for the move of Mount Olive into the former First Baptist sanctuary, Reverend Johnson died suddenly, unable to fulfill his dream. Out of respect for

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Reverend Johnson and his vision, the members of First Baptist Church offered to host the funeral in their church, where the service was held on December 17, 1950 (*Memphis Commercial-Appeal* December 28, 1950). First Baptist Church was finally able to move into its new church complex for its dedication on December 2, 1951; Mount Olive Cathedral C.M.E. moved in soon after, and celebrated its new church home by retiring the debt on the building on December 18, 1951 (Shelby County Deed Book 2866:118).

Over the next year, according to church members, Mount Olive made a number of changes to the building that effectively brought it to its present-day appearance: these changes included the alteration of the original Sunday School wing to provide for a choir riser, the relocation of the pulpit, and the removal of the eastern portion of the auditorium mezzanine. The work was finished ca. 1952, which effectively brings about the conclusion of the church building's period of historical significance. Overall, the changes are in keeping with the original style of the church building.

Over the years since, Mount Olive Cathedral C.M.E. Church has flourished and remained a cornerstone of the C.M.E. denomination and South Memphis community that it serves, in spite of demographic changes that have occurred in the area. It maintains a strong commitment to the preservation of its mission, and to the preservation of its historic church home.

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Deed Book 2866:118, December 18, 1951.

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X. Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

The listing of the First Baptist Church (Linden Avenue) is confined to Lots # 11 and 12C of Block 10 of the Driver Subdivision, as shown on the attached portion of the Shelby County Tax map G-7, measuring 150 feet along South Lauderdale Street and 275.77 feet along Linden Avenue in the City of Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee.

Boundary Justification

The nominated property comprises the parcel associated with the development of the First Baptist Church during the period of its significance of 1906-07 to ca. 1952. It includes the church building located on lot #11 and a portion of lot #12C and the adjacent parking area located on the remainder of lot # 12C.

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Photograph List

First Baptist Church (Linden Avenue)
538 Linden Avenue
Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee

Photographed by: Robert Dye
Date: May 2004
Negatives: Tennessee Historical Commission

Photo 1 of 11

View of front (south, Linden Avenue) façade of First Baptist Church (Linden Avenue) facing north, showing the main sanctuary (right) and the Sunday School annex (left).

Photo 2 of 11

View of the front (south, Linden Avenue) and side (east, South Lauderdale Street) facades of First Baptist church, looking generally northwest, with the original Sunday School area projecting towards South Lauderdale at far right.

Photo 3 of 11

View of the side (west) façade of the Sunday School annex, facing east.

Photo 4 of 11

View of the main sanctuary of First Baptist Church, looking north to the pulpit and choir riser as altered ca. 1952. The blank arch that once contained the organ pipes for the church is at far left; the windowed area at far right once had an extension of the mezzanine across the spandrel between the first and second levels of windows.

Photo 5 of 11

Reverse view of photograph 4, showing the view of the front (south) entrance to the sanctuary at lower center, and the mezzanine above, along with the vaulted skylight of the sanctuary.

Photo 6 of 11

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View of the Sunday School rooms beneath the current choir riser behind the pulpit, showing the arrangement of bi-fold and single leaf doors for each Sunday School room.

Photo 7 of 11

View of the current chapel of the church to the east of the pulpit, originally used as a primary or secondary Sunday School room.

Photo 8 of 11

View of the Sunday School rooms on the second level behind the current choir riser, showing the door configuration of the Sunday School rooms at left, and the larger nursery room to the east.

Photo 9 of 11

View of the interior of the nursery room of the mezzanine level behind the existing choir, showing its original mantle and doorway to the rear stair beyond at right.

Photo 10 of 11

View of the stairs and entrance to one of the Sunday School rooms of the 1923 annex.

Photo 11 of 11

View along the hall of the second level of the Sunday School annex, showing the well-preserved original arrangement of glazed partitions, doors and transoms.