

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

GOVERNMENT STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: GOVERNMENT STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Other Name/Site Number: N/A

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 300 Government Street Not for publication:___

City/Town: Mobile Vicinity:___

State: AL County: Mobile Code: 097 Zip Code: 36602

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property	Category of Property
Private: <u>X</u>	Building(s): <u>X</u>
Public-local: ___	District: ___
Public-State: ___	Site: ___
Public-Federal: ___	Structure: ___
	Object: ___

Number of Resources within Property	Noncontributing
Contributing	
<u>1</u>	_____ buildings
_____	_____ sites
_____	_____ structures
_____	_____ objects
<u>1</u>	_____ Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: N/A

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

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4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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.

Signature of Certifying Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property _____ meets _____ does not meet the National Register criteria.

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 _____
- _____ Determined eligible for the _____
National Register
- _____ Determined not eligible for the _____
National Register
- _____ Removed from the National Register _____
- _____ Other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: Religion

Sub: Religious Facility

Current: Religion

Sub: Religious Facility

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification:
Greek Revival

Materials:
Foundation: Granite
Walls: Stucco
Roof: Tin
Other Description:

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Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

A classic example of the Greek Revival style, the building measures 62' 5" by 98' 8" and sits on the northwest corner of Government and Jackson Streets in downtown Mobile. It is of brick construction, stuccoed and scored to simulate ashlar. The building is one story over a raised basement, with a gable roof to the street. The facade is distinguished by the distyle-in-antis configuration, featuring Ionic columns with flanking pilaster for two bays to either side. Of note are the entrance doors, which feature rectangular panels above to compensate for the monumentality of the facade. The doors are double, four in paneled wood. The side bays are divided by pilasters, and the full height probably triple-hung sash with clear panes. The building features a full entablature with denticulation along with cornice, and a pedimented gable. The original antefixae are no longer present. An original two-step battered octagonal tower blew down in an 1852 storm and has never been replaced.

Government Street Presbyterian Church is notable for its intact Greek Revival interior. There are three entrances from the portico into the sanctuary. The main double doors lead directly into a glassed vestibule (c. 1950) with double glass and wood doors right and left. Double glass and wood doors open into side vestibules east and west. These each feature a balustraded curved staircases from the basement to gallery and double wood and glass doors into the sanctuary.

The sanctuary itself features an open plan with two aisles. Pews are original and now feature cushioned seats (1976). The original pew doors were removed in 1893, but the plugged hinge holes remain. The floor is hardwood with carpeted aisles. A U shaped gallery wraps around the interior sanctuary and is supported on fluted columns, copied from the Tower of Winds in Athens (40 B.C.). The gallery itself features a Greek key molding and rosettes above. The balcony design is based on Plate 48 from Minard Lafever's *Beauties of Modern Architecture*. There are original pews in the gallery and over the entrance there is a pipe organ dating from 1911. The organ rest on a paneled base with Ionic pilasters and entablature. A pair of doors on each side lead into the stairwell behind the organ.

The platform and pulpit, dating from about 1893, is large dias with fluted Ionic pilasters and full entablature around the base. Steps lead up to either end. There are two Tiffany urns on marble bases, dating from the 1890s. Documentary evidence suggest that the predecessor dias was close to the original in materials and dimensions. Behind the altar is a pylon-like screen framing an engaged Corinthian tetrastyle and topped by antefixae, as in the Choragic Monument of Lysicrates. Interior walls are plastered brick, the full height stained glass windows date from c. 1905 and are very plain. The windows have plain surrounds but a dado base. There is a full entablature at the ceiling, featuring rosettes and denticulation.

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The most notable interior feature is the diagonally coffered ceiling. The coffers are diamond shaped, some have recessed, lighting fixtures and they are plastered with beaded borders. The primary lighting fixtures are copper disks suspended by chain. These date from the 1950s and mimic the classical interior in their use of Acanthus leaves and fluted shafts and rosettes under the disks all round.

The basement serves as a kitchen and meeting area, with modern tile floors. Brick vaulting is visible under the front steps, an area used as a small chapel.

A rear T addition extends nine bays to the rear, or north. This is the result of additions in 1905 and 1916. The 1905 addition consists of seven bays with a crossing gable roof. Although two stories high, the scale matches that of the church. Windows are 6/6 double hung sash, divided by classical pilasters, the whole topped by full entablature, denticulated cornice and pedimented gable, as in the main church. The remaining two bays were added in 1916 by architect C. L. Hutchisson, Sr., and match the 1905 addition, though with a flat roofline above. The 1905 and 1916 additions feature a series of rooms radiating off of hallways. These rooms have been renovated a number of times over the years and retain little original fabric.

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: Nationally: X Statewide: Locally:

Applicable National Register Criteria: A B C X D

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

NHL Criteria: 4
Exception: 1

NHL Theme(s): XVI: Architecture
 D. Greek Revival

Areas of Significance: Architecture

Period(s) of Significance: 1836

Significant Dates: 1836; 1852; 1893; 1905; 1916

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: James Gallier
 James Dakin
 Charles Dakin

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State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

Government Street Presbyterian Church is significant as one of the oldest and least-altered Greek Revival-style houses of worship remaining in the United States today (see appendix for list of major U.S. examples surviving as of 1992). Cited by Talbot Hamlin in his pioneering 1944 study of the American Greek Revival movement,¹ the church has been more recently described by Roger C. Kennedy in *Greek Revival America* as a "candidate for title of America's most beautiful Greek Revival church."² The building also illustrates one of the earliest extant religious usages in America of the distyle-in-antis Grecian portico, eventually adopted for countless house of worship throughout the country.³

Born out of the distinctive New York strain of American Greek Revival pioneered in the late 1820s and 1830s by Ithiel Town, Alexander Jackson Davis, Minard Lafever and a handful of others, Government Street Presbyterian was one of the first American urban churches beyond Manhattan itself to mirror the far-ranging influence of these gifted practitioners. Today the church ranks among the most intact of the Town/Davis/Lafever-type religious edifices left anywhere. (Of the five surviving Manhattan examples listed in the appendix, only St. Joseph's Church [1834] is older than Government Street, while evidently none have retained the same degree of interior integrity. An example comparable to Government Street, though exhibiting a hexastyle portico rather than the distyle-in-antis formula, is the 1832 First Presbyterian Church of Troy, New York.)

Besides being a remarkably intact example of the Town/Davis/Lafever formula for Greek Revival church design, Government Street also anticipates such well-known southeastern landmarks of Greek Revival religious architecture as Charleston's Temple Beth Elohim (1841)--designated an NHL in 1980, Richmond's St. Paul's Church (1845), Tabb Street Presbyterian (1843) in Petersburg, Va., and Nashville's William Strickland-designed St. Mary's Cathedral (1845).

¹ See Hamlin, Greek Revival Architecture in America. New York: Oxford University Press, 1944) p. 231.

² See Kennedy, Greek Revival America (New York: Stewart Tabori & Chang, 1989), p. 399.

³ Although Robert Mills had employed a distyle-in-antis arrangement at the Sansom Street Baptist Church in Philadelphia as early as 1808, Town and Davis's now-destroyed Carmine Street Church in Manhattan (c. 1827) apparently marked the first use of this format on a fully-developed, temple-fronted house of worship of Greek Revival design. See Hamlin, pp. 52 and 151; also Plate X.

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The architects of Government Street Church, James Gallier and his partners, the brothers James and Charles Dakin, were direct products of Town/Davis/Lafever school of American Greek Revival, as well as its chief purveyors to the Gulf states of the Old South.⁴ Indeed, Gallier practiced briefly with Lafever in New York, while the Dakins worked with the firm of Town and Davis, before all three men came southward in 1834 to seek their fortunes in the booming cotton economy of New Orleans and Mobile.⁵ Today, Government Street Church, together with the Old New Orleans City Hall (now Gallier Hall), built between 1845 and 1850 and designated an NHL in 1974, exist as two most important southern examples of the Greek Revival-style institutional work of this distinguished architectural trio.

The well-preserved and little-altered "auditorium" interior of the church is a virtual textbook of Greek Revival detailing, adhering closely to plates published in Lafever's 1835 edition of *The Beauties of Modern Architecture*.⁶ Except for the loss of its tall steeple in an 1852 hurricane, as well as the replacement of original sash windows by stained glass at the turn of the century, the exterior likewise remains unaltered. A Sunday

⁴ See Hamlin (p. 225). The Town/Davis/Lafever interpretation of the Greek Revival, as spread to the South by James Gallier and Charles and James Dakin, produced in the 1830s and early 1840s five major churches in the two Gulf Coast metropolises, New Orleans and Mobile. In New Orleans, these included Christ Church (1834-37), similar in appearance to New York's first Ascension Church (1827-29) by Town and Davis; First Presbyterian (1834-36); and the First (Carondelet Street) Methodist Church (1837-38)--all now destroyed. In Mobile, besides the Government Street Presbyterian Church, there was also Christ Episcopal Church (1838-40). Christ Church, Mobile, still stands, but has lost its original interior. References: Mary Louise Christovich and others, New Orleans Architecture, Vol. II, The American Sector, pp. 21-27 (published for The Friends of the Cabildo by the Pelican Publishing Co., Gretna, La., 1972); Elizabeth Barrett Gould, From Fort to Port: An Architectural History of Mobile, Alabama, 1711-1918 (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1988), pp. 66-71; James Gallier, Autobiography of James Gallier, Architect (Paris: E. Brier, 1864), pp. 12-21.

⁵ The design of Government Street Church adheres closely to James Dakin's design for the no-longer extant Washington Street Methodist Church of 1832 in Brooklyn, one of his major commissions before immigrating to the South two years later. See Arthur Scully, Jr., James Dakin, Architect: His Career in New York and the South (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), pp. 17, 82 [Plate 3].

⁶ Both James Gallier and James Dakin had contributed plates to Lafever's previous publication, The Modern Builder's Guide (1833) and may have not only delineated but helped develop designs for the second publication, Beauties of Modern Architecture, which appeared two years later.

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school wing added to the rear of the church in 1903 complemented the original design and left the original fabric of the structure largely undisturbed.

CONSTRUCTION HISTORY

The Government Street Presbyterian congregation formally organized in 1831, and by the middle of the decade was in desperate need of new quarters. The new lot for Government Street Presbyterian Church was purchased for \$10,000 in 1836 at the northwest corner of Government and Jackson Streets. The older church and lot, also on Government Street a few blocks to the east, was sold.

Henry Hitchcock, a local millionaire, was instrumental in the construction of the new church, serving on the building committee and financing much of the project. In December of 1835, Hitchcock ran the following ad in the *Mobile Daily Register*:

"To builders: separate proposals from carpenters and masons for building a Presbyterian Church at the NW corner of Government and Jackson Streets in the City of Mobile will be received by the Building Committee until the 24th of December, next. The carpenter's proposals will embrace the covering of the roof, and all the carpenters, jointers, builders, glaziers and plumbers work. The mason's proposals will embrace the excavations for the foundations, and all the brick, plasterers and stone cutters work, and also a proper stage all around the exterior of the building, the work to be entirely completed by the first of October, next. The specifications and drawings can be seen at the office of the Mobile Steam Cotton Press and Building. H.H. Hitchcock and J.K. Collins Building Committee."⁷

Of course the drawings and specifications had been provided by Gallier and Dakins.

The church cost \$60,000 to build and originally featured a steeple. The bricklayer, Thomas James, claimed over \$40,000 of the total, not surprising since the building was almost entirely of brick covered in stucco. Granite for the building arrived on the brig *Comet* and "joiners work" from New York aboard the *St. John*.⁸ Thus the church was a mixture of local and imported talent and materials.

⁷ Mobile Register, December 2, 1835.

⁸ Scully, Arthur James Dakin, Architect (Baton Rouge: LSU Press 1973), p. 71.

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The local press hailed the new building as an "ornament to the city,"⁹ and travellers during the antebellum years often commented on it. As completed the church was a stunning high style example of the Greek Revival, inside and out. The finished product was featured on the border of the 1838 La Tourette Map of the City of Mobile. In addition to the distinctive distyle-in-antis facade, the church featured a prominent steeple. The original floorplan of the church was much the same as today, with the exception of pews to either side of the pulpit, which would later be removed. As was customary in some congregations, pews were rented by the members, and the pews featured individual doors. Original windows were plain glass which helped light the interior.

From the instant of its completion the church became an important local landmark eliciting comments from the 19th century visitors to the port city. The Englishman J.S. Buckingham wrote in 1842,

"Of churches, the Presbyterian is the largest and most beautiful. Its exterior is not in the best taste, but its interior is unsurpassed in chasteness of style and elegance of decoration in the United States. There is a singular, but at the same time a very happy union of the Egyptian and Greek, in the elevated pulpit; and the semi-Theban and semi-Corinthian portico, which seems to rise behind the platform, with the rich diagonally-indented ceiling, and luxurious sofa-like pews, make this interior altogether the most strikingly beautiful I ever remember to have seen."

Disaster struck in 1852 when a hurricane knocked over the steeple and inflicted less serious damage on the rest of the building. The church session noted,

"the moderator was authorized to appoint two elders to a committee to ascertain if it was desirable and expedient to restore the steeple to the church and to ascertain the cost of same including all other necessary repairs to the church."¹⁰

The Ladies of the congregation even formed a "steeple society" to raise funds, but the committee ultimately recommended the steeple not be replaced.

The next substantial change came in 1869 when a cypress floor was laid in the lecture room downstairs. The existing stone floor had provoked discomfort due to rising damp. In 1870 the pulpit came under criticism, as "our pastor and his predecessors had complained that it was very oppressive and uncomfortable to preach in." Despite this early complaint, action wasn't taken

⁹ Mobile Register, June 1, 1837, p. 2.

¹⁰ Bates, Charles D. The Archives tell a story of the Government Street Presbyterian Church (Mobile 1859), p. 101.

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until 1893, when it was noted, "the session of the church have watched with great interest the progress of the work of constructing a new platform and pulpit. In its completion they are highly gratified with the improved appearance of the whole church."¹¹ In addition, "the doors have been removed from the pews."

Though the church had been lit by gas and natural light, in 1898 electricity was introduced, "provided that all the wires shall be concealed."¹²

By the turn of the century, the church was in need of more space, especially for Sunday School. A building committee was formed and subscription sought during 1902 for an addition. Though the initial goal was ten thousand dollars, the committee was "not quite sure that a building in harmony with the architecture and beauty of our present church, such a building as we can all be proud of," was possible for that amount.¹³ It was felt that at least twelve thousand dollars would be needed. By June of 1903 architects F. Lockwood and Walter Seymour were employed "to draw plans and specifications for the proposed Sunday School building," to be known as the Burgett Memorial Building. George A. Robinson, Contracting Company was to be employed in actual construction. Per the committee's recommendations, twelve thousand dollars was the amount of the contract.

Lockwood and Seymour's addition crossed the rear of the church, making it a T. They matched the original church in scale, materials and fenestration, with an entrance on Jackson Street. In addition, stained glass windows were placed in the main sanctuary. The pews to either side of the pulpit were removed to provide access to the addition. A new organ was added in 1911 and is still in use.

Government Street Presbyterian was hit by a hurricane again in 1916, and some \$2500 was spent on unspecified repairs. Further, it was proposed to take advantage of the situation to enlarge the Burgett Memorial Building to the rear or north. Twenty thousand dollars was proposed for the project.

Mobile architect C.L. Hutchisson Sr., was chosen to make the addition. Hutchisson was particularly skilled at blending additions with existing design. His enlargement consisted of two bays to the north, again matching materials, fenestration, scale and design. In respect to symmetry, the cross gable of the Lockwood and Seymour addition was now out of balance, since the addition had a flat roof.

¹¹ Sessions Minutes, Government Street Presbyterian Church Vol. II.

¹² Bates, p. 103.

¹³ Bates, p. 261.

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The sanctuary was renovated in 1950 with the addition of the present lighting fixtures, and the glass booth (which serves as a foyer) just inside the main entrance. In 1976 the pews were recovered and the interior carpeted and painted. Other than these minor changes, the interior of the church is substantially as it was designed, overwhelmingly Greek in character and feel.

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APPENDIX

LISTING OF MAJOR EXISTING GREEK REVIVAL CHURCHES IN AMERICA

Alabama

Government Street Presbyterian Church, Mobile (1835-37),
Gallier & Dakin

Christ Church, Mobile (1838-42), Cary Butt, Original interior
destroyed.

Georgia

Christ Church, Savannah (1839), original interior altered.

Trinity Methodist, Savannah (1844)

Maine

First Congregational Church, Ellsworth (1835)

Maryland

Lloyd Street Synagogue, Baltimore

Massachusetts

St. Paul's Cathedral, Boston (1820), Alexander Parrish (NHL)

Mississippi

Trinity Church, Natchez (Federal-style remodeled in 1838-40),
later interior changes

First Baptist, Jackson (1848)

Missouri

St. Louis Cathedral, St. Louis (1834)

New York

St. Joseph's Church, New York (1834)

St. James' Church, New York (1837), Minard Lafever

Mariners' Temple (formerly Oliver Street Church), New York (1842)

Old Whaler's Church, Sag Harbor (1844)

Village Community Church, New York (1846, gutted twice & rebuilt)

First Presbyterian Church, Troy (1832)

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Ohio

Cathedral of St. Peter in Chains, Cincinnati (1845, interior gutted 20th C.)

Pennsylvania

St. Andrew's Church, Philadelphia (1822)

St. Luke and Epiphany, Philadelphia (1839-40)

Pine Street Presbyterian, Philadelphia (1845)

Rhode Island

Manning Chapel, Providence (1834)

South Carolina

Temple Beth Elohim, Charleston (1841) (NHL)

Second Baptist (now Centenary Methodist), Charleston (1842)

Bethel Methodist, Charleston (1853)

Spring Street Methodist, Charleston (1858)

Westminster Presbyterian (now Trinity Methodist), Charleston (1858)

Tennessee

St. Mary's Cathedral, Nashville (1844-45), original exterior refaced in ashlar and interior extensively altered in 20th C. Wm. Strickland, architect.

Virginia

First Baptist, Richmond (1841), interior gutted. T.U. Walter, architect.

Washington Street Methodist, Petersburg (1842), interior greatly altered

Tabb Street Presbyterian, Petersburg (1843)

St. Paul's Episcopal, Richmond (1845)

First Presbyterian, Lexington (1845)

Wisconsin

First Presbyterian, Racine (1851)

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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Robert Gamble. *The Alabama Catalogue*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press. 1987.

Elizabeth B. Gould. *From Fort to Port: An Architectural History of Mobile, Alabama*. University of Alabama Press. 1988.

Roger G. Kennedy. *Architecture, Men, Women, and Money in America*. New York: Random House. 1985

Arthur Scully, Jr. *James Dakin, Architect*. Baton Rouge: LSU Press. 1973.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- 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: #AL-1
- Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other(Specify Repository): Mobile Historic Development Commission

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: Less than one (1) acre.

UTM References: Zone Northing Easting

A 16 3395470 400050

Verbal Boundary Description:

Begin at the northwest corner of Government Street and Jackson Streets, proceed thence north 134.4 feet to a point, thence west 110.4 feet to a point, thence south 134.4 feet to a point on the north side of Government Street, thence east 109.3 feet to the point of beginning.

Boundary Justification:

The boundary conforms to the present legal dimensions of the lot. The lot historically has been occupied by the Government Street Presbyterian Church since its founding.

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11. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: Mr. John Sledge, Architectural Historian
Mr. Robert Gamble, Architectural Historian

Org.: Mobile Historic Development Commission

Street/#: P.O. Box 1827

City/Town: Mobile

State: Alabama

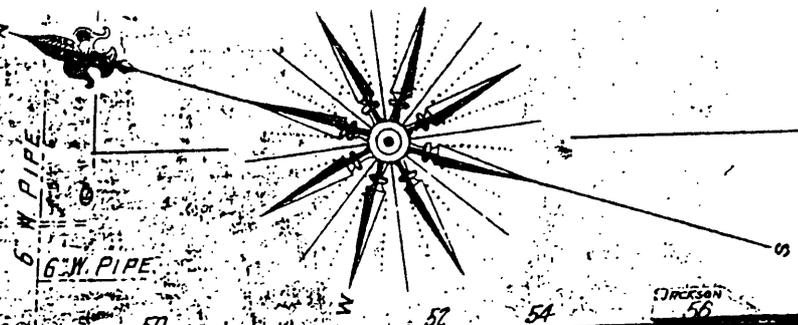
ZIP: 36633

Telephone: (205) 438-7281

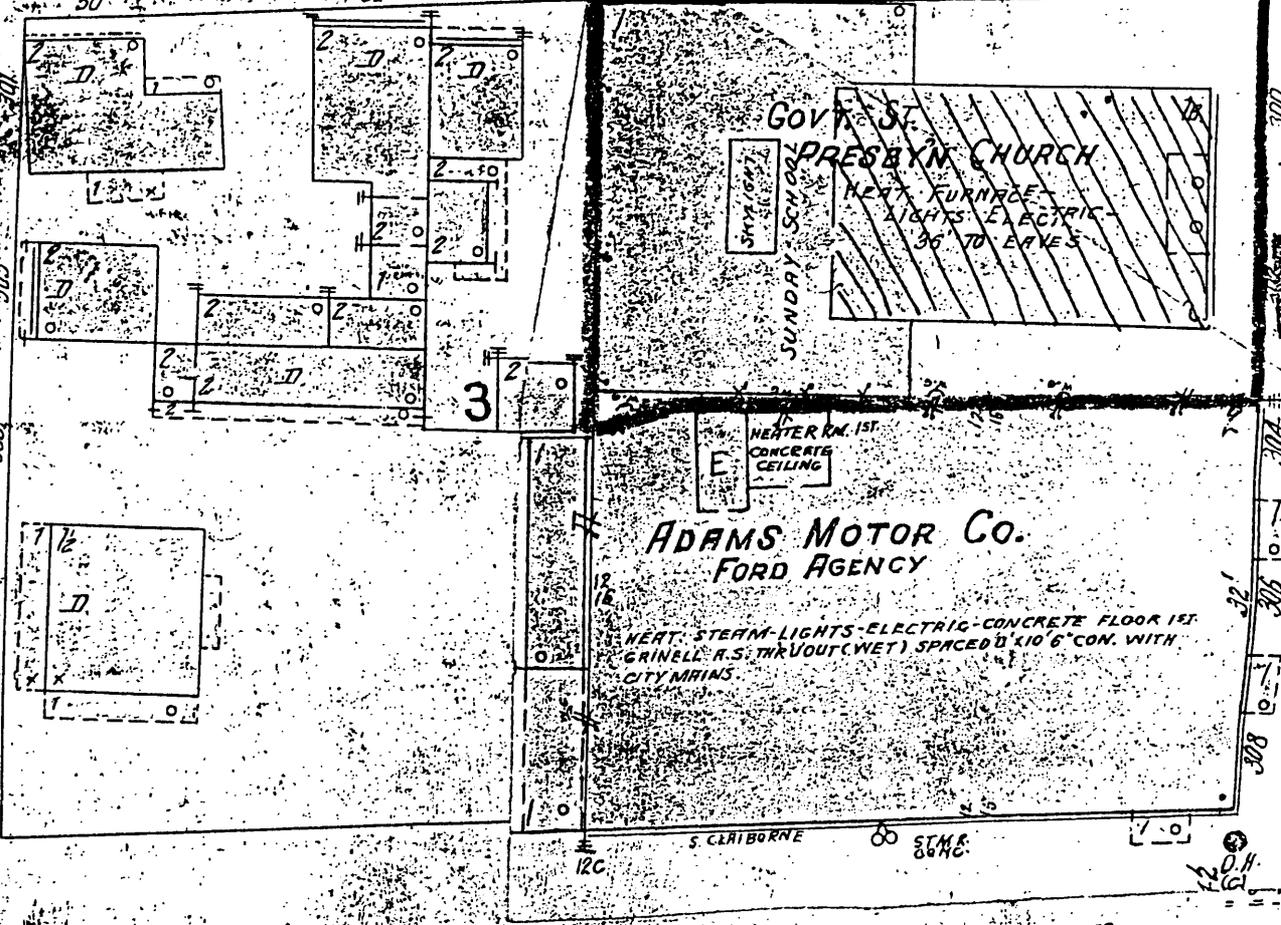
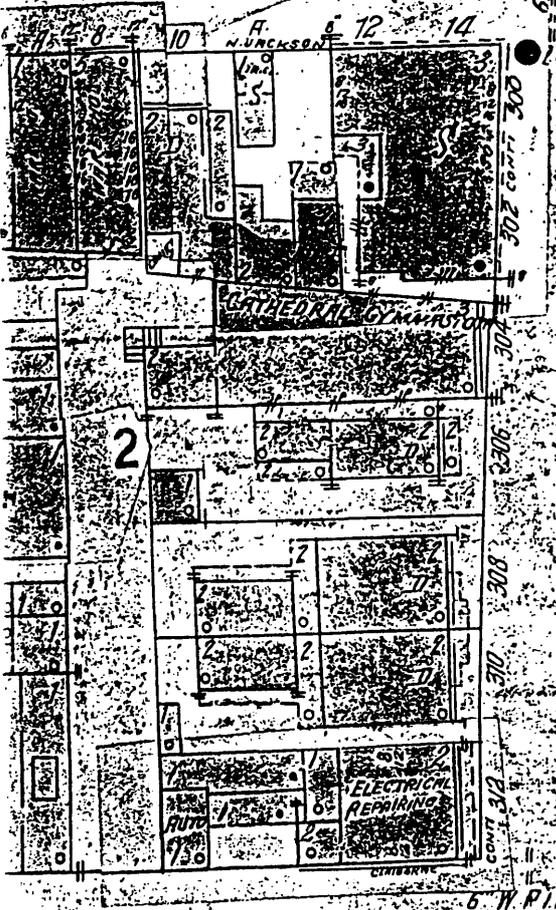
Date: April 2, 1992

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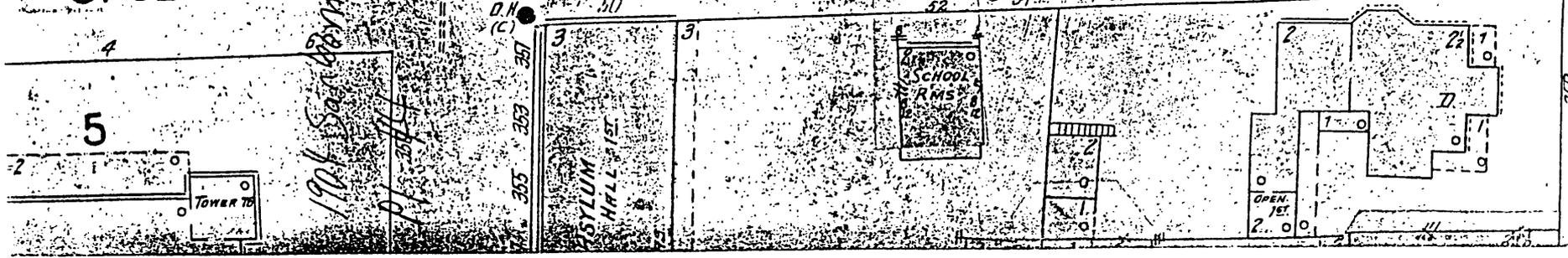
S. JACKSON



D.H. (C) 8" W. PIPE
50
6" W. PIPE
D.H. (C) 15
100



S. CLAIBORNE



1904 Sat. 10/11
1911-1914

NHL Portion