

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 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 Trinity Methodist Church
other names/site number Old Trinity Methodist Church

2. Location

street & number northwest corner Broad and Lower streets n/a not for publication
city, town Elizabethtown n/a vicinity
state North Carolina code NC county Bladen code 17 zip code 28337

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	<u> </u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>1</u>	<u> </u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u> </u>	<u> </u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u> </u>	<u> </u> objects
		<u>2</u>	<u>0</u> 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.

William S. Furr, Jr. 8-7-89
Signature of certifying official Date
State Historic Preservation Officer
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 of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Religion: religious structure

Funerary: cemetery

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Work in Progress

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Federal

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation brick

walls weatherboard

roof asbestos

other wood

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Old Trinity Methodist Church, a simple rectangular frame building built ca. 1848, is located on the high west bank of the Cape Fear River at the northwest corner of Broad Street and Lower Street in Elizabethtown. A sizeable church cemetery surrounds the building on three sides, crowding up to the foundation. The Elizabethtown City Cemetery (not included in this nomination) adjoins this cemetery, extending to the edge of the river bluff. Large oaks laden with Spanish moss shade the site. The church is in good condition and retains a good deal of integrity both inside and out.

The church follows a simple, two-story, center-aisle plan with gallery topped by a gable roof. The main facade is in the south gable end facing Broad Street. It rests on a low common bond brick foundation and is faced with plain lapped siding. Corner boards punctuate the ends of each elevation. Large fifteen-over-fifteen light double hung sash windows with plain surrounds are symmetrically placed across the front and side elevations. The roof features a boxed cornice on the flanks and a beaded raking cornice on the gable ends, with a continuous molded eave which returns on the gable ends. A small square belfry with pyramidal roof, pointed wood spire and decorative vents with shaped upper edges rests on the roof apex just behind the main facade.

The main entrance, in the center of the main facade, is an original double door, each leaf containing six flat panels, surmounted by a six-pane transom and set within a slightly shaped surround. The southernmost bay of each side elevation contains a single door, identical to one leaf of the front door, surmounted by a four-pane transom and set within an identical architrave. These provide access to the second floor gallery.

The interior, originally containing a gallery on three sides, was altered in the 1920s when two side rooms in the southern end of the church were partitioned off from the nave, creating a small entrance foyer. At the second floor gallery level, three small rooms were created by added partitions. The lovely gallery, reached from the interior by an enclosed stair which rises in a single flight against the west wall, is intact. The stair railing has rectangular balusters, a shaped, beaded handrail and a square newel with a simple cap. Simple square Doric posts support on three sides the gallery, with a solid, flat-paneled railing. Sections of the original crude built-in bench seating remain on the east side of the gallery.

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The walls inside the church are fully plastered, and feature plain baseboards and simple window surrounds. At the end of the nave is a low raised platform on which the pulpit sits. In front of the pulpit is a curved railing with square wood bannisters, rounded top railing, and octagonal newel posts which separates the clergy from the congregation. The shallow Doric pedimented portico attached to the wall behind the pulpit is an early twentieth century addition. The curved pews, while not original to the church, date to the early twentieth century and blend nicely with the interior design. The wooden floor is probably original, and the ceiling is covered with acoustical tile.

The original stair enclosure in the southeast corner remains, but the stair which led to the gallery in this corner has been removed and the space converted to a closet.

The cemetery around the church contains approximately two hundred tombstones dating from the mid-nineteenth century through the present. Among these stones are some well-preserved late nineteenth century wooden markers.

NOTE REGARDING THE PHOTOGRAPHS

During a site visit to Trinity Methodist Church in 1988, it was determined that the exterior photographs accompanying this nomination accurately depict the property; it has not changed at all since the 1984 and 1985 photographs were taken. Although it was not possible to gain access to the interior, subsequent correspondence with an Elizabethtown resident involved in the preservation of the building confirmed that no alterations whatsoever have been made to the interior and that it has not suffered any deterioration since 1974 when the accompanying interior photograph was taken.

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

Community Development

Period of Significance

ca. 1848

Significant Dates

ca. 1848

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

unknown

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

Trinity Methodist Church is eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion A for its role in the development of Elizabethtown and under Criterion C as a well-preserved example of a late Federal meeting house design. Built ca. 1848 and the oldest surviving meeting house in Elizabethtown, Trinity Methodist Church is one of the few antebellum buildings surviving in this late eighteenth-century county seat situated on the Cape Fear River in Bladen County. The building and its surrounding cemetery recall the town's 1840s economic growth stimulated by the naval stores market for turpentine, the area's leading product. The church also is notable for its delicate Federal style finish, large windows and airy interior with original slave gallery on three sides.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Elizabethtown, the county seat of Bladen County, was established in 1773. Methodism in Bladen County dates back to the eighteenth century as well. The Bladen Circuit was formed in 1787 and included Elizabethtown, Smithville (now Southport), Lumberton, and Wilmington.¹ Methodist pioneer Bishop Francis Asbury made three visits to Elizabethtown, in 1785, 1795, and 1803.² During the second of these visits he "spent the Sabbath in public and private exercises."³ On his last visit, February 8, 1803, he listened to Nicholas Snethen preach at the courthouse before preaching the next day at Clark's Chapel, also in Bladen County.⁴

Despite this early interest in Methodism, Elizabethtown was too small to support a Methodist church in the early part of the nineteenth century. Although the county seat was favorably located on the Cape Fear River, Elizabethtown was slow to grow. Much of Bladen County is in forests, swamps, and bays and the county has remained sparsely populated to the present.⁵ In the 1830s, when the Trinity Methodist congregation was founded, and in the 1840s when the sanctuary was constructed, Bladen County was sharing

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with other southeastern North Carolina counties in the economic growth created by the naval stores market for turpentine, extracted from longleaf pine forests. Because the only other antebellum buildings that have survived in Elizabethtown are isolated residential buildings, old Trinity Methodist Church is the most visible symbol of Elizabethtown's prominence as a community during this period.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In 1834 the Elizabethtown Methodist Church was founded. Two years later Methodist trustees Richard Rhodes, John D. Jones, John Oliver, Absalom Davis, Jr., Joseph C. Lee, William Davis, George Cromartie, Thomas Smith, and John F. Barnes purchased a town lot from Louis Sheridan for \$400. Sheridan was a free black who accumulated a considerable amount of land in Elizabethtown. He sold lots for both the courthouse and the Methodist Church.⁶ Eventually Sheridan went to Liberia "and spent the remainder of his days teaching and preaching."⁷

Shortly after the purchase of the lot a small, temporary structure was built. It was replaced by the more permanent Trinity church building around 1848. The church was dedicated by Daniel McDuffie, a local minister, in 1849. Elizabethtown grew slowly but steadily throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and Trinity reflected that slow but steady growth. Around 1916 Mrs. Emmie Cromartie Covington gave new pews to the church, and in the 1920s two side rooms in the southern end of the church were partitioned off from the nave.⁸

Trinity continued its growth into the 1930s. In 1934 a section of the old slave gallery was converted into Sunday School rooms. In 1943 a building fund was established and land for a new structure was purchased in 1944 and 1950. The new church building was completed in 1954 and since that time has housed the Trinity congregation. The old Trinity church has been well-maintained, however. It is presently owned by the North Carolina Methodist Conference and is being preserved by a group of church members.

The church lot contains a relatively large cemetery with approximately two hundred stones and monuments. A number of Confederate casualties are interred at Trinity. Most of the tombstones date from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but several appear to predate the construction of the church.¹⁰

9. Major Bibliographical References

Asbury, Francis. Francis Asbury in North Carolina: The North Carolina Portions of the Journal of Francis Asbury. Nashville: The Parthenon Press, 1964.

Clark, Hector H. "History of Old Trinity Methodist Church." Privately published. Copy in SHPO file.

Elizabethtown Bicentennial, 1773-1973. Elizabethtown Bicentennial Committee, 1973.

Grissom, W. L. History of Methodism in North Carolina From 1772 To the Present Time. Nashville and Dallas: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1905.

"Old Trinity Methodist Church Grave Stone Records." Unpublished. Copy in SHPO file.

Thomas, Mrs. James G., Letter to Dr. William Price. February 21, 1984. Copy in SHPO file. See continuation sheet

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 # _____
- 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: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 1.01 acres

UTM References

A 17 719730 383420
Zone Easting Northing

B _____
Zone Easting Northing

C _____

D _____

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary for the Trinity Methodist Church property to be nominated is indicated by the bold line on the accompanying "Survey for Trinity Methodist Church" map drawn at a scale of 1"=20' and dated October 26, 1978.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

Being the entire town lot historically associated with the church and cemetery

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Ruth Little(Section 7), Jim Sumner(Section 8)
organization State Historic Preservation Office date 1984, revised 1989
street & number 109 E. Jones Street telephone (919) 733 6545
city or town Raleigh state NC zip code 27611

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¹W. L. Grissom, History of Methodism in North Carolina From 1772 To the Present Time (Nashville and Dallas: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1905), 218-219.

²Francis Asbury, Francis Asbury in North Carolina: The North Carolina Portions of the Journal of Francis Asbury (Nashville: The Parthenon Press, 1964), 69, 138, 203-204, hereinafter cited as Asbury, Francis Asbury in North Carolina.

³Asbury, Francis Asbury in North Carolina, 138.

⁴Asbury, Francis Asbury in North Carolina, 203-204.

⁵Elizabethtown Bicentennial, 1773-1973 (Elizabethtown: Bicentennial Committee, 1973), 2-4, hereinafter cited as Elizabethtown Bicentennial.

⁶Elizabethtown Bicentennial, 4, 51, 54; Hector H. Clark, "History of Old Trinity Methodist Church," privately published, 3-5, hereinafter cited as Clark, "History of Old Trinity Methodist Church."

⁷Clark, "History of Old Trinity Methodist Church," 5.

⁸Elizabethtown Bicentennial, 4, 54; Clark, "History of Old Trinity Methodist Church," 4.

⁹Elizabethtown Bicentennial, 54; Clark, "History of Old Trinity Methodist Church," 4-6; Mrs. James G. Thomas to Dr. William Price, February 21, 1984.

¹⁰"Old Trinity Methodist Church Grave Stone Records," unpublished, 1-21.



