

**NORTH CAROLINA STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE**  
**Office of Archives and History**  
**Department of Cultural Resources**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**

**First Baptist Church**

High Point, Guilford County, GF0550, Listed 1/8/2009  
Nomination by Beth Keane  
Photographs by Beth Keane, October 2006 and July 2007



Overall front view



Rear view

**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 any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/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 (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

**1. Name of property**

historic name First Baptist Church

other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Location**

street & number 701 East Washington Drive not for publication N/A

city or town High Point vicinity N/A

state North Carolina code NC county Guilford code 081 zip code 27265

**3. 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. (  See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official                      Date

North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources  
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 commenting or other official                      Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I, hereby certify that this property is:	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> other (explain): _____	_____	_____
_____		
_____		

First Baptist Church  
Name of Property

Guilford County, NC  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)  
  
 private  
 public-local  
 public-State  
 public-Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)  
  
 building(s)  
 district  
 site  
 structure  
 object

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

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

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**  
N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: RELIGION Sub: religious facility  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: RELIGION Sub: religious facility  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification** (Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Revivals – Late Gothic Revival  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials** (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick  
roof Asphalt  
walls Brick  
\_\_\_\_\_  
other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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County and State

**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 the boxes that apply.)

A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

B removed from its original location.

C a birthplace or a grave.

D a cemetery.

E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

F a commemorative property.

G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1907-early 1950s  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1907, 1916, early 1950s  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Unknown  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**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)**

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

Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_



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**Narrative Description**

The 1907 First Baptist Church is located on an approximately one-quarter acre lot on the northeast corner of East Washington Drive and Hobson Street in an historic African American urban neighborhood situated immediately northeast of High Point's downtown commercial district. The main façade of the church fronts on East Washington Drive, while the west side of the building parallels Hobson Street--with only slight setbacks from the adjacent sidewalks. A large two-story annex, with the main entrance facing Hobson Street, was added to the north side of the church in 1916. The 1910 two-story brick Kilby Hotel (NR 1982) is located opposite the church on the northwest corner of Hobson and East Washington. Two additional lots owned by the church, but not included in the nomination, comprise a paved parking lot immediately north of the church and a grassy lot with several trees east of the church, formerly the site of the parsonage that burned in the 1970s.

First Baptist Church has a complex building history that includes two major periods of construction for the church, a significant interior remodeling of the church, and the construction of a large annex for Sunday school classrooms and offices to the rear. As originally built in 1907 in a medieval (mostly Romanesque) revival style, the brick gable-front church featured a tower with a spire stepped back from the west end of the main façade, a rose window in the front gable, and a one-story portico across most of the façade with a one-story entrance vestibule at the east end (see Exhibit 1, 1911 Sanborn Map). In the process of enlarging the sanctuary in the early 1950s, the tower with spire and the vestibule were removed; a new façade was built closer to East Washington Drive, appropriating the footprint of the original portico and widened with matching short crenellated entrance towers at each end; and a short belfry was added to the front end of the gabled roof (see Exhibit 3, 1956 Sanborn Map).

Church Exterior

The symmetrical composition of the main façade belies the overall irregular form of the main block of the church. The east entrance tower fully extends beyond the sanctuary's east wall, all of which dates to the original construction in 1907, while the west end of the west entrance tower is flush with the west wall of the sanctuary. The tripartite compositions of the side walls are similar, with a taller central gabled pavilion, yet there are significant differences. On the original east wall, the gabled pavilion projects slightly; on the west side, the pavilion extends further from the central gable-front mass of the building so that it appears more as a cross-gabled wing, and the bays to either side are flush with the central bay, extending from the original gabled core with one-story flat roofs. Sanborn maps reveal that the northern flat-roofed bay is original, while the gabled middle bay was "bumped out" when the rear annex was built in 1916.

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Most of the southern flat-roofed bay dates to the early 1950s remodeling, occupying much of the footprint of the 1907 tower with spire (see Exhibits 2 and 3, 1917 and 1956 Sanborn Maps).

The appearance of the church's façade can be attributed primarily to the building's expansion and renovation in the early 1950s. The primary entrances to the church are through eight-foot-high, multi-paneled, double wood doors set in wood frames located on the front elevation of the corner towers. Each door opens into a square vestibule. Above each door is a round-arched, stained-glass transom in a molded wood frame, surmounted by three rows of header bricks. Each window includes the following inscription: "Enter to Worship, Leave to Serve." An iron electric lantern hangs above each door. Both entrances are close to grade. Installed within the last fifty years, a small concrete handicapped access ramp flanked by a wrought-iron railing rises from the west to lead to the east-side door. A brick water table runs along the west, north, and east walls of the church and the rear annex.

The four corners of the crenellated towers project and have pyramidal cast-stone caps, while the tower merlons and the rakes of the central gable have molded cast-stone coping. In between the two towers, the tall gabled façade features a large, triple-lancet, stained-glass window with Y-tracery in a single pointed-arched opening. Flanking this window on either side are slender round-arched, stained-glass windows. The 1908 rose window removed from the original façade is centered over the pointed-arch window, mostly in the gable. The high, steeply-pitched gable roof is interrupted at the apex of its southern end by a short, square-in-section brick bell tower with a wood cornice surmounted by a short pyramidal copper spire sheathed in copper and topped by a pinnacle with a finial. The belfry is flush with the main façade and features two slender round-arched vents with brick sills on the front, as well as one on each of the east and west sides. In 2005, a new roof of composite shingles replaced a previous shingle roof.

A marble cement plaque affixed near the lower corner of the front elevation of the east-side tower reads: "First Baptist Church, 1907, Rev. O. S. Bullock, Pastor." A second stone plaque located on the façade of the church between the lancet window and the east-side tower reads: "First Baptist Church, Restoration Renovation, 1980 by, Christan Builders, Inc., Brentwood, Tenn., Rev. F. L. Andrews M. Div; D.D., Pastor, A Gospel Lighthouse." This plaque refers to interior cosmetic remodeling done to the sanctuary in 1980.

Generally, Norman or Romanesque in character, the 1907 east wall of the church is distinctively different than the façade, the towers, and the southern two bays of the west wall. The original brick found on the east wall is smoother in texture and has more color variation than the wire-cut brick used in the early 1950s renovations. In addition, the window openings and cornices of the 1907 east wall feature bolder and more robust treatments than the updated sections of the church. The east wall is divided into three parts but with a slightly projecting,

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central, one-story, cross-gable section. The stained-glass, round-arched windows are in clusters of three with the middle windows taller than the flanking windows. In addition, the windows in the gabled pavilion are taller than the clusters on either side. A single rough-cut granite sill runs uninterrupted under each grouping and each individual window surround displays rough-cut granite keystones and springer stones and two rows of header bricks. Iron cross bars protect the lower portion of each window. The large central window in the middle cluster has been pierced with an air conditioning unit. An exterior chimney, possibly added during the 1980 interior remodeling, is located on the north side of the gabled bay. A decorative motif of slightly corbelled bricks in the shape of a round-arch is centered in the gable. The gable terminates not at a point, but in a flat rectilinear configuration topped by a simple corbelling and a cast-stone ball finial. Another ball finial tops the short decorative buttress located at the end of the southern rake of the gable. A similar buttress with finial was removed to construct the chimney. A small shed-roof wood enclosure located adjacent to the north end of the east elevation encloses a staircase descending to the basement.

Two-story, slightly projecting, brick pilasters, rising above the roof line, divide the west facade (Hobson Street side) into three parts, mimicking the east side. Here, however, the wire-cut bricks of the middle and south bays, dating to the 1950s expansion, are more uniform and somewhat redder in color than the original bricks on the west wall. The central one-story, cross-gable section has molded cast-stone coping on the rakes of the steep gable and the tops of the pilasters. At the apex of the gable rests a pinnacle that consists of a round ball of cast stone on a rectangular brick base. A slender round-arched vent with a brick sill is centered in the gable. As on the east façade, round-arched, double-hung, stained-glass windows set in molded wood frames are arranged along the west elevation in clusters identical to those on the east façade (including the air conditioning unit inserted in the central window of the middle cluster). Two rows of header bricks surmount the round arches of the gable vent, and the windows of the middle and south bays, which have wood sills, brick springers, and no keystones. In contrast, the treatment of the 1907 bay is identical to the east side with the additional features of brick corbelling and crenellation at the roof line.

Annex Exterior

A large square two-story brick annex was added to the north side of the church in 1916. Built on a slope, the annex has a raised basement delineated by a corbelled brick water table. The annex features a flat roof with a wide wood cornice, wide overhanging eaves, and a central hexagonal clerestory with circular, frosted windows within square frames and a mansard-like roof. The remaining windows in the annex are mostly paired, round-arched, one-over-one, double-hung sash, set in wood frames with brick sills, and topped by two rows of header bricks. The main entrance into the annex is centrally located on the west side (Hobson Street) and is



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flanked by two-story brick pilasters. The entrance, protected by a hip roof, has a modern glass door with a round-arched transom and is flanked by single windows on either side. The west facade has four additional windows at the first level and six, symmetrically arranged, at the second level.

A ramp and steps descend to a below-ground entrance on the east end of the north side of the annex. A modern double-leaf glass door opens into a below-grade fellowship hall. Former windows with straight arches at this level have been bricked over. Seven windows in two different sizes are symmetrically arranged at the first and second levels of the north façade, the smaller windows illuminating the restrooms on the first and second levels. The east facade of the annex has six pairs of windows, symmetrically arranged at both levels. Air conditioning units pierce the east foundation and several windows on the west, north and east sides.

Church Interior

Except for the entrance vestibules in the two towers, the interior of the 1907 church consists primarily of a large open nave with a floor gently sloping down towards the altar. Two narrow side aisles and two wider interior aisles organize the pews into three sections. With the expansion of the interior to the west (towards Hobson Street), the tall gabled south and north walls are off-center in the large expanse of the nave and the middle row of pews are not centered on the altar, which itself is slightly off-center in the gable of the north wall. The only interruption of this large, open space is the west vestibule which juts into the southwest rear corner of the nave.

Light filtering through the stained-glass windows gently illuminates the interior of the nave. The central and largest window on each of the east, south, and west walls depicts a biblical scene. The triple lancet window on the south wall features a rendition of Jesus standing on a pedestal and holding a staff, with "1950" inscribed near the bottom. The west window depicts "the agony in the garden" with Jesus kneeling at prayer with a light from heaven shining on him and three disciples behind him. The east window shows Jesus appearing to Mary Magdalene after he was crucified. Only one other window—the central window in the south bay of the east wall—illustrates a scene: John baptizing Jesus, with a dove descending from heaven. All of the remaining windows in the sanctuary and vestibules have stained glass in decorative patterns. Several incorporate commemorative plaques. The rose window, high on the south wall contains the longest inscription: "This window given by the Sunday School Children, M. A. Hoover Sup't. 1908."

Overall, finishes within the sanctuary are simple. The original or early vertical-board wainscot terminates at the window sills and is topped by a molded chair rail. The walls above the

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wainscot and the ceiling are smooth painted plaster. Pilasters on the west wall, wide baseboards, and a wide molded cornice provide embellishment. The multi-faceted nave ceiling, which somewhat echoes the changing pitch of the building's roofline, appears to have been dropped and reconfigured from the original, most likely during the early 1950s enlargement of the sanctuary. The ceiling is flat and at its lowest level at the south and north bays of the west side of the sanctuary, rising several feet at the central bay, which also maintains a flat ceiling. On the east side of the sanctuary, the ceiling rises at a steep pitch directly from the wall junction, with the exception of the center bay, which is similar to its counterpart on the opposite wall. Each side rises to a flat central section that stretches down the middle of the church but stops several feet short of the south wall where it rises to accommodate the rose window—a configuration that is rather awkward because it blocks the view of the upper half of the rose window from the parishioners seated in the pews. Gothic-style electric lanterns, added in the 1940s, hang from long chains fixed to the ceiling. Several radiators are situated along the side walls of the nave. The vestibules are similarly finished with vertical-board wainscot and plaster walls and ceiling.

When the annex was built in 1916, the north wall of the church was removed so that the annex assembly room would be open to the church from which it could be partitioned off by folding doors. This arrangement provided room for an overflow crowd to participate in the service. Remodeling of the church interior in the 1940s entailed closing off the annex by adding a centrally positioned chancel set on a curved platform; behind it, a raised choir with stadium-style pews, and behind the choir, a baptismal pool were installed (see floor plan, Exhibit 4). The choir and baptismal pool project into the former assembly room of the annex as a large rectilinear box. Two tall, paneled pilasters frame the round-arched opening to the choir, which has a barrel-vaulted ceiling. The baptismal tank, located so that all members of the congregation in the sanctuary have a good view of the ceremony, is separated from the choir by a Palladian arch supported by tapered Tuscan columns. The north wall behind the baptismal pool is painted with a scene of Jesus being baptized in the River Jordan by John the Baptist. Each level of the chancel, choir, and baptismal area is set off by handsome paneling with round-arched, inlaid panels. The 1940s-era chancel furniture comprises three chairs, the pulpit, and two small side tables, all crafted in a Gothic motif. Also during the 1940s remodeling, the original pews were replaced with the current oak pews. The carpet covering the sanctuary's original wood floors was added in the 1980s.

Annex Interior

A small antechamber and a vestibule lead from the sanctuary to the northwest stairwell. A set of double-leaf doors, set at a diagonal, open from the stairwell into the main-level assembly room, a spacious area with the central section open to the elevated clerestory ceiling, revealing

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the circular frosted clerestory windows. Projecting from the south end of the assembly room, a tall box-like structure with plain walls (the back and sides of the choir and baptismal tank installed in the 1940s) to take up much of the former assembly room space; the underside of this structure is elevated a full story to create a low ceiling at the south end of the room. Along the north and east walls are a ladies restroom and lounge area, the pastor's office, and two classrooms. Groups of six three-panel folding doors with upper lights form the interior wall of the north-side lounge and the two east-side classrooms. The middle two doors of each grouping swing open to allow entrance into the rooms (see floor plan, Exhibit 4).

The northwest stairs ascend to a small foyer at the second level. Doors, again set at an angle, open from the foyer onto a narrow semicircular balcony that overlooks the assembly room. The balcony is enclosed by a waist-high wall paneled in wainscot and surmounted by an iron railing. Classrooms, a choir room, and a lounge area are located around the perimeter, with similar arrangements and doors as the main level. Two narrow halls, located on either side of the balcony, are flanked on one side by additional classrooms. The baptismal pool, the choir, and several storage closets are also accessed from the halls.

The ante-chamber, vestibule, and outer perimeter rooms at both levels are finished with wainscot, molded chair rails, plaster walls and ceilings, and wood floors. In addition, each outer room has two round-arched windows allowing natural light into the rooms. The assembly room has carpeted floors and wainscot. At the balcony level, the wall between the second-story doors and the clerestory windows is covered with tongue-and-groove vertical paneling and molding. Near the coffered ceiling, large arched wooden braces with decorative ends mark the divisions between the clustered doors. The stair walls feature tongue-and-groove vertical-board wainscot. Square newel posts, with inset rectangular panels and square caps, are located at the bottom of the steps, at the landing, and at the top. The arched windows set in the west and north walls provide natural light for the stairwell.

The basement consists of a spacious fellowship hall with a small kitchen, storage room, and boiler room. New tile floors, plaster walls, textured ceiling paint, and fluorescent lights define these spaces. In addition, a modern glass door, positioned in the northeast corner of the fellowship room, opens to steps that ascend to the parking lot.

Integrity Statement

First Baptist Church remains on its original location on a prominent corner of a historically African American neighborhood. The setting has not changed significantly since its construction, as the area remains predominantly an African American neighborhood and is surrounded by several early-twentieth-century commercial buildings significant to the

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community. Feeling and association for the church remain essentially the same today as the day it was originally constructed. Post 1950s alterations are of a cosmetic nature only.

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**Statement of Significance**

As High Point's oldest African American church building, housing the city's oldest African American congregation of any denomination, First Baptist Church stands as a landmark of High Point's historic architecture. The church has held a commanding presence in the urban neighborhood since its construction in 1907 and assists in representing the vital role the church has played in the every day lives of its members as a place for worship and community gatherings. First Baptist Church is an outstanding local example of a transitional style of church architecture incorporating elements of both the Romanesque Revival, principally seen in the original 1907 structure, and Gothic Revival, as evidenced in the early 1950s renovation and expansion. First Baptist Church satisfies Criteria Consideration A for religious properties as it meets National Register Criterion C for architecture as a significant example of ecclesiastical architecture of the first half of the twentieth century in High Point. The period of significance extends from 1907 to the early 1950s.

**Historical Background**

The pioneering founder of First Baptist Church, Reverend Harry Cowan, was born into slavery on January 20, 1810, near Mocksville, North Carolina. Cowan joined the Baptist church at the age of sixteen and two years later he was granted special privileges to preach and to marry and baptize fellow slaves by his master, Thomas Lincoln Cowan. Harry Cowan married Susan Horan, the slave of William H. Horan, in 1836 and they had at least six children. After Thomas Cowan's death in 1856, Harry became the slave of Charlotte Cowan Jenkins when she received him in the division of her father's estate. During the Civil War, the Reverend Cowan served as body servant to General Joseph Johnston, one of the most senior general officers in the Confederate States Army. After his wife, Susan, died sometime between 1870 and 1873, Cowan married Mary Whitehead Kesler, a former slave (Wineka, *Salisbury Post*, May 23, 2007).

After the Civil War and emancipation, Reverend Cowan founded the Dixonville Baptist Church in Salisbury in 1866. He went on to organize forty-nine more churches in the state, including First Baptist Church of High Point in 1871, and it is estimated that he baptized approximately 8,500 people. He was also the founder and first moderator of the Rowan Baptist Association, an organization that started in Salisbury, Rowan County, in 1877 with three churches. The organization of First Baptist Church of High Point took place in a school building (no longer standing) on Perry Street, several blocks east of the current church. Reverend Cowan was installed as pastor, with Albert Miller, Peter Gray, Dock Carr, and W. P. Hinton forming the Board of Deacons. Reverend Cowan served the church from 1871 until 1873 and then Reverend Zack Horton took over from 1873 to 1874 (Leach, pp. 4-6).

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Soon after the church's organization, plans were made for the purchase of a site upon which to build a church. A parcel at the bottom of a hill, near the school on Perry Street was selected and the land, once known as "Baptist Bottom," was donated by Jane Edmonson. Reverend J. B Richardson, a white minister, assisted the church by giving his personal note for the first bill of lumber. The thirty-two- by forty-foot frame church was erected and put in service in 1875. Reverend Anthony Welborne served as the first pastor of the newly constructed church, then known as the Baptist Church of High Point. At the time, it was the only African American church within a twenty-five mile radius of the city. It kept this name until about the turn of the twentieth century, when it became known as First Baptist Church. The small frame church served the congregation from 1875 until 1906. In addition to Reverend Welborne who served from 1875 to 1900, Reverend D. S. Soultter was minister from 1900 to 1901 and Reverend M. A. Alexander from 1902-1905 (Leach, p. 4).

Chartered in 1859 with a population of 250 people, High Point grew rapidly. The first of many furniture factories opened in 1888 and the first hosiery mill in 1905. By 1890, there were approximately 1,200 African American citizens in the High Point area. The black citizens of the city were a cheap and needed labor source for the burgeoning furniture and textile industries of High Point. Many also found employment as domestic servants. Racial segregation dictated that blacks established their own communities where they could live, shop, and worship apart from white citizens. Black citizens initially built homes along Main and Wrenn streets, several blocks west of Washington Street. By the early twentieth century, Washington Street (currently known as East Washington Drive), a broad, dirt road with stepping stones at crossings, became a popular area for the African American population to reside and open modest businesses. Minority-owned grocery stores, barber shops, cafes, and hotels opened up along Main Street and Washington Street (McPherson, p. 90-91).

As First Baptist Church membership expanded, its frame building became inadequate for the congregation. In response, the church moved several blocks west to its present site on the northeast corner of Hobson Street and East Washington Drive. The lot was bought in 1907 from R. Willis Hinton, one of High Point's successful African American entrepreneurs, and a brick structure, approximately fifty by seventy feet, was erected the same year. A mortgage was taken out on October 14, 1908, by the trustees of the First Baptist Church in the amount of \$1,644.89 for the labor and material furnished in building the new church (Deed Book 207, p. 125). At approximately the same time, a two-story frame parsonage (no longer extant) was built on the lot immediately east of the church, facing East Washington Drive. A Sunday school annex was added to the rear of the church in 1916. The church, the parsonage, and the annex were erected under the pastorate of Reverend Dr. Oscar S. Bullock who served from 1905 to 1920 (*History of the Negro in High Point, NC, 1867-1950*, p. 12).

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The 1916 annex provided the congregation with additional room for an assembly room, a pastor's study, four classrooms and a ladies' restroom on the main level; six classrooms and a men's restroom on the second level; and a kitchen and fellowship in the basement. The main sanctuary accommodated approximately 600 parishioners, and when moveable partitions separating the sanctuary from the assembly room were opened, it was possible to accommodate an audience of 1,200 (*History of the Negro in High Point, NC, 1867-1950*, p. 12).

Additional pastors who served at First Baptist Church include Reverend Samuel L. Parham (1921 to 1930), Reverend Fisher R. Mason (1930 to 1940), Reverend William F. Elliot (1941 to 1958), Reverend Leonard L. Macon (1958 to 1959), Reverend George L. Brown (1959 to 1967), Reverend Dr. Frazier L. Andrews (1968 to 2002), and Reverend Dennis H. Leach Sr. (2003 to present) (Leach, p. 5). Under the leadership of Reverend Elliot, the interior of the church was remodeled in the 1940s. The altar was moved from the northwest corner of the sanctuary to the center, the elevated choir loft was installed behind the altar, and the baptismal pool was added behind the choir loft. New altar furniture was obtained, the original pews were replaced with new oak pews, and the floors were carpeted throughout the church and the annex (*History of the Negro in High Point, NC, 1867-1950*, p. 13-15).

The changing needs of a growing congregation led to the expansion and remodeling of the church in the early 1950s. The original tower that was stepped back from the west end of the main façade was removed and a new façade was built closer to East Washington Drive, appropriating the footprint of the original portico and tower. At the same time, the façade was widened with matching short crenellated entrance towers at each end, a small belfry was added to the front end of the gabled roof and a large Gothic-style stained-glass window was installed in the lower main facade of the church. Sometime after 1956, a two-story dwelling that had been located on church property behind the annex was removed (Sanborn Map Company of High Point, 1911-1956). In the late 1960s, under Reverend Andrews's administration, window air conditioner units were added, a concert model organ was installed, and the rear parking area was enlarged (Leach, p. 8).

First Baptist Church has served as an anchor to the black community during the one hundred years it has stood on the corner of East Washington Drive and Hobson Street. The imposed segregation that forced most African Americans to reside in "black only" neighborhoods resulted in the close daily interaction of people with diverse levels of education. The First Baptist Church served as a primary community center for the neighborhood, accommodating many functions in the large fellowship hall located in the basement.

Reverend William F. Elliot, Pastor of First Baptist Church from 1941 to 1958, also served during this time period as the president of local chapter of the National Association for

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the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Perhaps inspired by Reverend Elliot, the congregants of the First Baptist Church became more involved in the civil rights movement during the 1960s. Marches were organized and conducted from the church by Reverend Elton B. Cox, who involved students from William Penn High School. These marches reportedly were the first instances of high school students organizing and demonstrating for civil rights in North Carolina. Several members of the church, including Dr. Otis Tillman, M.D., Elmer Trusse, and Walter McRae, joined the efforts and were subsequently arrested. When Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. visited High Point in 1966, he spoke at First Baptist Church as it was the only black church in town willing to hold meetings in support of the civil rights efforts. Katherine Whitted, a senior member of the church, remembers several meetings taking place at the church regarding race issues, with the church sanctuary filled to capacity. A number of skirmishes between High Point's African American and white citizens took place on the corner of Centennial and Washington Drive in the mid-1960s. The church leadership helped to minimize the fighting by holding community wide meetings and calling for calm (Leach interview with church members, August, 2007).

During Reverend Andrews's leadership from 1968 until 2002, the church continued its commitment to the Washington Drive area. The members held numerous food drives and the "father's table" was housed in the church to feed the indigent. Church members also participated in homebound committees assisting the elderly, while substantial contributions were made for housing units for low income families in the area. Known as London Woods, the homes are located about one mile northeast of the church (Herndon, p. 8).

First Baptist Church continues today to serve as a spiritual and social resource center for its congregation and the local African American community. The church remains well known for its community activism including participation in civil rights protests and missionary work. Although very few official church records survive, supporting information was gathered from Sanborn maps, past church bulletins and unpublished documents relating to the history of the church written by church members, as well as oral history with current members of the church.

**Architectural Context**

Romanesque architecture, or Norman architecture as it is generally termed in England because of its association with the Norman invasion, describes a medieval style of European architecture found primarily on churches and monasteries built between A.D. 1000 and about 1250. Historians in the late eighteenth century coined this name, the "Romanesque," because the half-rounded arches in these medieval buildings reminded them of structures still standing from the time of the ancient Romans—nearly a thousand years earlier. During this time period, ribbed vaults, buttresses, clustered columns, ambulatories, wheel windows, spires, and richly carved



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door tympanums became standard features of ecclesiastical architecture. The basic architectural forms and units of the style remained in slow evolution throughout the medieval period (<[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gothic\\_architecture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gothic_architecture)>).

The widespread introduction of a single feature, the pointed arch, brought about the stylistic change that separates Gothic from Romanesque. The arch enabled European church builders to break with the tradition of massive masonry and solid walls penetrated by small openings and enabling them to design churches constructed with lighter building materials, while incorporating large windows, flooding the sanctuaries with light. Along with the arch came the development of many other architectural devices, including the flying buttresses, pinnacles, and traceried windows which typify Gothic ecclesiastical architecture (<<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gothic-architecture>>).

The Romanesque style was revived in America at approximately the same time as its more popular medieval cousin, the Gothic Revival. As early as 1846, Romanesque half-round masonry arches appeared on James Renwick's design for the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., a building that resembles a massive medieval church with castle-like additions. This style of stone architecture was subsequently adopted for other public buildings throughout the country, remaining popular until the middle of the twentieth century (<[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romanesque\\_architecture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romanesque_architecture)>).

Gothic Revival was based on French, English, and German precedents from the late twelfth through the middle of the sixteenth centuries. English born Richard Upjohn, the founder and first president of the American Institute of Architects, was a key figure in introducing the Gothic Revival style to the United States and in defining nineteenth-century church architecture. His churches, and those illustrated in publications like his *Rural Architecture* (1852), served as patterns for countless buildings throughout the country (LaChiusa, [www.4.bfn.org/bah/a/archsty/gothic/index.html](http://www.4.bfn.org/bah/a/archsty/gothic/index.html)). Many examples of the Gothic Revival style, particularly those that are vernacular, incorporate elements of more than one antecedent medieval style in addition to the Gothic, such as the round arches and crenellation of the Romanesque.

Gothic Revival architecture in the United States peaked between 1840 and 1865, but it remained a popular style for church architecture right up through the third quarter of the twentieth century. The style is typically elaborate and decorative, although there are numerous examples of modest, vernacular edifices throughout the South. Usually of masonry construction in the twentieth century, the style features vertical proportions, stained-glass lancet windows, and bell towers. Stylistic elements may include tracery, gargoyles, pinnacles, battlements, and carved stone ornamentation (LaChiusa, <[www.4.bfn.org/bah/a/archsty/gothic/index.html](http://www.4.bfn.org/bah/a/archsty/gothic/index.html)>).

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During the steady influx of settlers into Guilford County following the Civil War, local church design consisted of uniformly unadorned, simple rectangular meeting houses. Church designers in urban areas began adopting the increasingly popular Gothic Revival style during the latter half of the nineteenth century when denominations supplied official publications on church building to assist local congregations with imitating the current fashion. According to Catherine Bishir in *North Carolina Architecture*, “the Gothic Revival style became so universally accepted during the late nineteenth century that its most specific stylistic elements, including a pointed arch, a triangular headed door or window, and a tower became standard indicators of a church” (pp. 311-313).

The Great Depression and World War II precluded the construction of many new sacred structures during the 1930s and 1940s. It was not until the suburban development of the early 1950s that new houses of worship sprang up in response to the expansion of urban centers. Through the mid-1960s, a conservative approach that incorporated the eclectic historic antecedents of late nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century continued to dominate sacred architecture. Mid-twentieth-century churches rendered in the Gothic Revival style tend to be streamlined, often exhibiting the influence of Modernism.

A photograph has not been found of First Baptist Church as built in 1907, but remaining original elements and Sanborn insurance maps reveal that it incorporated the combination of Romanesque, Gothic, and other generic medieval elements that characterized the early-twentieth-century ecclesiastical architecture idiom known as The Gothic Revival. These features included a steeply pitched gable-front roof, a tower on the west elevation, a rose window in the gable, and crenellation at certain portions of the roof line. The interior incorporated a sloping floor, allowing a maximum number of seats from which to see and hear the preacher. The remodeling of the First Baptist Church in the early 1950s continued the medieval theme with the addition of two crenellated corner towers and a large Gothic-style window in the center of the lower main façade.

A number of early- to mid-twentieth century churches stand in High Point, almost all exhibiting variations of the Gothic Revival or Colonial Revival styles. The most architecturally distinctive examples of the Gothic Revival style to survive include three built for white congregations—St. Mary’s Episcopal Church, constructed in 1927-28, the 1928 First Presbyterian Church, and Wesley Memorial Methodist Church, built in 1958. Each of these churches is architect-designed and executed in stone. The earlier two churches are more academic renditions of the English version of Gothic Revival, incorporating broad front gables, pointed-arch stained-glass windows, stone trim and buttresses, and steeply pitched roofs. The First Presbyterian Church features a Gothic-inspired, crenellated rear corner tower with tall corner pinnacles. The 1958 Wesley Memorial Methodist Church blends modern and gothic

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architectural features, creating a Neo-Gothic design. The large stone building features a long nave with very tall walls, a shallow-pitched gable-front roof, and stained glass windows with attenuated tracery in rectangular openings that rise the full height of the nave side walls. The nave is flanked by a tower of stone that rises in multiple stepped-back tiers to culminate in a cooper-sheathed spire (Briggs, pp. 168, 174, 218).

African American congregations in High Point, as elsewhere, also embraced the Gothic Revival style for their houses of worship. Their churches tended to be designed and built by local, talented craftsmen, often members of the congregation. Many of the churches feature broad front gables flanked by one or two towers, often of unequal height. In the first half of the twentieth century, the larger, more prosperous congregations usually built their churches of brick and incorporated medieval details such as crenellation, pointed-arched, stained-glass windows, corbelling, and, occasionally, some stone detailing.

Besides First Baptist Church, there are only two surviving early-twentieth-century churches in High Point built in the Gothic Revival style for black congregations. The 1907 Brooks Memorial Methodist Church (SL 1978) is a modest frame church with simple Gothic Revival details. The rectangular gable-front building features a distinctive tower centered on the façade. Additional details include a steeply pitched roof, pointed-arch windows, clapboard siding, and exposed eaves. The church has been fairly altered, however, and is in a deteriorated condition (Briggs, p. 143). In contrast, the 1928 (former) St. Mark's Methodist Church, on East Washington Drive several blocks east of First Baptist Church, is an imposing brick building in the Gothic Revival style that replaced an earlier sanctuary on the site. The presence of the earlier, impressive First Baptist Church on the same street likely influenced the decision of the African American Methodist congregation to rebuild their church in the same style. St. Mark's features two crenellated towers of unequal size flanking a broad front-gable façade. A large pointed-arch, stained-glass window with Y-tracery, flanked by two smaller pointed-arch windows, is positioned in the upper part of the façade (Briggs, p. 158).

When members of First Baptist Church decided to expand their church and rebuild the façade in the early 1950s, they, in turn, were likely influenced by the design of St. Mark's Methodist Church, as suggested by the placement of two crenellated towers flanking the broad gable-front façade, while also incorporating a large, pointed-arch, stained-glass window with Y-tracery, flanked by two smaller windows, in the center of the façade. First Baptist also faced the new sections of their church with wire-cut brick, copying the brick used in the construction of St. Mark's.

Churches have a long tradition of building, rebuilding, remodeling, and adding on to their houses of worship as the needs of their congregation evolve, as their coffers rise and fall, and as

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architectural styles come in out of favor. The majority of congregations add on to the rear or side of the church when more space is needed, often buying up land around them to buffer their buildings and to enlarge their parking lots. Many congregations abandon their old church in favor of building a more modern church in an entirely new location.

First Baptist Church followed the tradition of expansion and remodeling, first in the typical manner of adding to the rear and reworking the interior and later in a way contrary to the norm by rebuilding the front of the church. When it became obvious that more space was needed in the sanctuary, the church expanded in the only feasible direction left by moving the main façade closer to East Washington Drive and bumping out the front part of the west side. A decision was made to continue with the familiar Gothic Revival style that represented to them what a “real” church should look like. In place of one recessed tower, they built two crenellated corner towers and installed a triple-lancet stained-glass Gothic window in the facade. The resulting overall composition respected the original design by repeating certain established motifs such as round-arched windows and crenellation, yet expressed the mid-twentieth century design preference for clean lines in the use of the masonry wire-cut brick and simplified detailing.

First Baptist Church has presented this face to the world for the past fifty-eight years. Although the congregation had an opportunity to abandon their familiar sanctuary and rebuild in another area of High Point, they decided to remain where they have been for more than one hundred years and continue their tradition of providing an anchor and a safe haven for the surrounding neighborhood.

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**Section 10 – Geographical Data**

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The boundaries of the nominated property coincide with the boundaries delineated for parcel 18-00-0228-0-0007-00-045 on the accompanying Guilford County tax map. The lot measures 75 feet by 134 feet.

**Boundary Justification**

The boundaries encompass the original parcel of land historically associated with the building.