

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.

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1. Name of Property

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historic name **East Avenue Tabernacle Associated Reformed Presbyterian Church**

other names/site number Great Aunt Stella Center

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2. Location

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address **927 Elizabeth Street** not for publication N/A
city or town Charlotte vicinity N/A
state **North Carolina** code **NC** county **Mecklenburg** code zip code **28204**

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3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide X locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Jeffrey Crow SHPD 11/17/04
Signature of certifying official Date

North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

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6. Function or Use
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Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat:

Sub:

Religion

Religious facility

Religion

Church school

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Recreation and Culture

Sub: Community Center

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7. Description
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Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and early 20th century Revivals (Classical Revival)

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation

concrete

roof _____

copper, slate, asphalt

walls _____

brick, wood, plaster

other _____

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

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8. Statement of Significance
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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.

 X 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 1914, 1925

Significant Dates 1914
1925

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder McMichael, James Mackson

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(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 # _____

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

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Property Owner
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(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Self-Help

street & number P.O. Box 3619 telephone 956-4400

city or town Durham state NC zip code 27702-3619
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Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Introduction

The East Avenue Tabernacle Associated Reformed Presbyterian Church is located at the edge of uptown Charlotte, at the northeastern boundary of the Second Ward. The triangular site is just east of McDowell Street, bordered on the northeast by Elizabeth Avenue and on the southeast by East Trade Street. The elevated John Belk Freeway passes immediately behind the site; Elizabeth Street continues under it and East Trade Street dead-ends at the church parking lot. Once a fashionable residential neighborhood, the site is at the edge of the county government complex. The sites of former mansions on East Trade Street are now occupied by apartment buildings, but the historic view corridor down Trade Street has been preserved.¹

The building is composed of a two-story sanctuary, built in 1914, and a four-story educational wing added to the south side of the sanctuary in 1925. All walls are load-bearing masonry, varying from twenty-one inches (on lower floors) to eighteen inches in thickness, built on concrete slabs with concrete foundations. Roofs are copper, slate, and ballasted membrane. Floors are framed with steel girders and wood floor joists; hardwood floors are largely intact. The restroom floors were covered with ceramic tile on every level in 1997, and the third floor conference room floor was covered in carpet also in 1997. Interior walls and ceilings are plaster on lathe and, in recently remodeled areas in the educational wing, gypsum wall board.

The Sanctuary, 1914

The sanctuary is built on a raised basement, a common device in classical design. The Greek cross plan has a central octagon with shallow wings that terminate in low parapeted walls, duplicating the shape of the gabled roofs. These two-story wings - the arms of the cross - are linked to the facade (northwest) side by rounded, one-story exedra² with sloping roofs, so that the two-story cruciform is evident. On each side of the altar (southeast) wing, rooms protrude from the sanctuary, containing service elements like stairs, bathrooms, and offices.

The sanctuary is roofed by a copper dome raised on a masonry drum with limestone quoins; the drum is punctuated by alternating square and circular

¹ A new parking garage at the corner of Trade and McDowell was required to be set back from the centerline of Trade Street to preserve the view corridor. During these negotiations the tip of the triangular lot was deeded to the City of Charlotte to allow for a bend in Trade Street around the garage (Deeds 838-23 and 345-43; *Charlotte Observer*, March 26, 1974).

² The term exedra has been used here for convenience. While these rooms are segments of circles, they are not true exedra because they are not open to the interior of the sanctuary, but rather are closed off and accessed by doors.

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windows that light the stained glass oculus below the dome. The common bond brick walls are relieved by limestone sills, headers, water table, and coping as well as by geometric brick recesses. The limestone water table begins at the level of the porch floor and continues across the facades of the sanctuary and educational building. Two rows of soldier courses run across the façade of the sanctuary, forming the heads of windows on the first and second levels.

A monumental porch is attached to the front (northwest) façade, extending the entire width of the narthex. The porch roof is gabled with a brick pediment, trimmed with dentil molding and with a semicircular fanlight. The porch roof is supported by Ionic columns, with two engaged pilasters in the narthex wall. The double entry doors are surmounted by another small pediment, with two stained glass windows above. On each side of the doors a plaque recalls the founding of the church and the service of its pastors. A wood handicap accessible ramp with wood rail and pickets is on the East Trade Street side of the entrance to the sanctuary. The handicap accessible ramp terminates at the monumental porch.

The side elevations of the sanctuary (northeast and southwest) are identical. Four rectangular windows are at basement level, with the limestone water table acting as header. The two-story end walls have a three-part arrangement of window openings above the limestone water table. Like the other windows of the sanctuary, they are glazed with stained glass that illustrates various biblical verses.³ At the first level are four rectangular windows, two ganged in the center, and one on each side. The center window at the second story is framed by a semicircular limestone arch with keystone; this arch, like those of the smaller arched windows on each side, spring from the decorative soldier course. Above the central window there is a limestone cross flush with the face of the brick. Between the first and second floor windows is a set of inset decorative brick panels. Below the second floor center window is a set of three decorative panels, "ganged" together, the end panels being wider than the panel in the center to match the width of the first floor windows below. The decorative panels on either side of the center panel match the width of the first floor windows below. Taken as a whole, the decorative panels mimic the placement of both the first and second floor windows to complete the three-part arrangement of the façade.

On the northern side of the end walls, the exedra are punctuated by three rectangular windows, with a single window below the water table. Above the exedra are four rectangular windows, two ganged in the center, and a single one in the side of each of the main wings. The soldier course runs across the

³ See working file.

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heads of these upper windows, with a wood cornice above; above the cornice a diamond-shaped piece of limestone is inset at the centerline of each window. On the other side of the end wall the rear rooms protrude six feet. This part of the façade is distinguished by a three bay arrangement. At the west end is a door surmounted by a pediment; above is a circular window surrounded by a soldier course and punctuated by four limestone keystones. Next to the door are six pairs of double hung windows, four above the water table, and two below. A wood cornice, continuing the line of the cornice at the front of the church, extends across the elevation of the service block, with ornamental limestone insets above.

One enters the sanctuary via the narthex, which has stairs to the choir loft on either side. The interior of the sanctuary is a two-story octagon with balcony and choir loft above. In the center of the room is a skylit, stained glass oculus, located beneath the dome. Each wing of the cross plan is framed by a large arched fascia, with the plastered underside of the gable visible above. The altar area, elevated like a stage several steps above the floor, is located in the western wing. A large pipe organ, dated 1969, is recessed behind an arched opening in the west wall. On either side of the altar area is a large, arched-top stained glass window. Two stories of stained glass windows light the side wings, with seating below and balcony above. The choir loft in the eastern wing has no window, as it is located behind the pediment.

The ground floor of the sanctuary is flush with the second level of the educational wing. All floors are carpeted, and wall and ceiling surfaces are plaster. The total seating capacity of the sanctuary is four hundred thirty-eight, with two hundred eighty-seven on the main level and one hundred fifty-two in the balcony. Wood pews, original to the building, are on the main sanctuary level. Folding wood seats in the balcony are also original to the building. A new pipe organ was installed in 1969, built by the Wicks Organ Company of Illinois.⁴ The sanctuary was carpeted (1952); air-conditioning was installed in the fellowship hall (1956) and later, in the sanctuary (1960). In 1957 the kitchen and dining hall were moved from the first floor to the ground floor, and the class arrangement was redesigned.

The balcony in the main sanctuary space has painted wood flooring. The steps both going to and located within the balcony are also painted wood construction. The railing at the balcony is a simple pipe handrail painted black to match the painted wood floor.

⁴ "History of the Church"; *Charlotte Observer*, October 6, 1950.

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The exit stairs on each side of the altar are painted wood construction and are also original to the building. The treads are painted wood with rubber skid mats. The handrails are also wood with wood pickets and decorative wood post caps. The double exit doors in the stairs that lead directly to the exterior are wood with a stained glass transom.

The restrooms, located on both levels of the sanctuary, were renovated in 1997 to meet the accessibility code at that time. The floors and walls were covered in ceramic tile and new plastic partitions were installed. Offices on the second floor of sanctuary portion were renovated in the 1997 renovation. New partition walls were added while the original hardwood floors were left intact. At that time an acoustic tile ceiling was also installed.

The Educational Wing, 1925

The elevations of the educational wing, four stories high, continue the rhythm and detailing of the sanctuary facade. A limestone band, approximately twelve feet above interior floor level, continues the datum established by the water table; it wraps around the educational wing, changing height above the double entry doors on the north and south elevation with a pediment-shaped detail.

On the side (northeast and southwest) elevations the entry doors, with fanlight above, are recessed within a semi-circular limestone arch with keystone. Above the doors are commemorative plaques, and above these are six-over-six double hung windows that light the stairwells. Next to these doors, a fenestration pattern commences that continues around all elevations. Above the limestone water table, there are four six-over-six double hung windows at each floor level. At the first floor, windows have limestone sills and are capped with a continuous soldier course; on the upper levels, the headers are limestone. The windows diminish in height as one moves up the elevation (window heights are seven feet, six feet, and four feet respectively). The windows at the top floor are arched, wrapped by a soldier course and punctuated by three limestone keystones. Below the water table are two small, square windows, only one of which is aligned with the windows above.

The massing of the long rear (southeast) elevation is broken up by the projection of the central office suites. The fenestration pattern of the side elevations continues, but here the windows are grouped in pairs. The keystones between the upper, arched windows are extended to link the pair together. On the portions of the rear wall that are not projected, windows are grouped singly.

The interior of the educational wing is organized around a wide hall on each

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floor. Offices open onto the hall, and stairs are accessed at either end. Offices on the third and fourth floors are separated by French doors that are original to the building; box beams are exposed along the plaster ceiling.

In 1957 when the kitchen and dining hall were moved from the first floor to the basement in the main sanctuary portion of the building, the classroom arrangement was redesigned in the education wing.

In 1997 minor changes were made to the interior of the education wing. Restrooms on all floors were renovated to comply with the accessibility code. Identical to the sanctuary, the walls and floors were covered with ceramic tile and new plastic partitions were installed.

The first floor former gymnasium was renovated in 1998 to accommodate a charter school. Partition walls were added to delineate classroom and office spaces for the charter school currently occupying the first and second floors of the education wing. Wood doors with divided lights and side windows were installed in openings formerly housing overhead gymnasium doors in order to close off the corridors from the classroom spaces. The second floor office walls were left in their original condition; however a two-hour rated ceiling was installed throughout the second floor.

Minor renovations occurred on the third and fourth floor offices in 2003. New office walls were added within existing office spaces. The 1997 renovation that altered the layout of the restrooms altered the west end offices on all floors. The exit stairs were also renovated in 1997 and provided with fire rated walls to separate them from the corridor.

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Summary

The East Avenue Tabernacle Associated Reformed Presbyterian Church meets National Register Criterion C for architecture. The church, located at the intersection of East Trade and Elizabeth Streets, was designed by James M. McMichael (1870-1944), a prolific architect of local and regional importance. As Charlotte's leading church architect, McMichael designed fifty-two churches in Charlotte and its vicinity.¹ The East Avenue Tabernacle Church represents the evolution of McMichael's particular brand of classicism, and a signature design that he later repeated with variations in other cities, notably Waughtown Baptist Church in Winston-Salem(1919).² The sanctuary of the East Avenue Tabernacle, built in 1914, as well as McMichael's addition of 1925, retain architectural integrity, having received only minimal alterations. The church also meets Criterion Consideration A for religious buildings due to its local architectural significance.

Historical Background

The evolution of church architecture in Charlotte can be understood in the context of the changing character of downtown Charlotte during what has been called the "New South" era. Prosperous and populous by the end of the nineteenth century, downtown Charlotte was gradually given over to banking and other commercial enterprise. Several of the old parishes remained in buildings erected in the nineteenth century, preserving a certain stability in the downtown area.³ As land became available on the main thoroughfares and most parishioners had not yet moved to the suburbs, several other congregations established churches in center city. As these congregations grew and prospered, they eventually rebuilt in a grander fashion; James M. McMichael was architect for all of these center city congregations.

¹ McMichael's obituary described him as a "noted church designer" who had designed nine hundred churches (*Charlotte Observer*, October 4, 1944). McMichael apprenticed and subsequently practiced for six years in Philadelphia before coming to Charlotte in 1901, presumably because he was commissioned to design the Carnegie Free Library (completed 1903; see below). He maintained offices in Richmond and Miami, and had supervising architects in other locations. He never went to college, but was often introduced as "Dr. McMichael" ("Historic Architecture Foundation", brochure dated 1981 on James M. McMichael, presumably written by his son, David S. McMichael,, Robinson-Spangler Carolina Room, Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County; "First Ward Neighborhood Guide", Charlotte-Mecklenberg Historic Landmarks Commission, www.cmhpf.org; accessed December 2, 2003).

² E. Ramsey, "East Avenue Tabernacle A.R.P. Church", Survey and Research Report for the Charlotte-Mecklenberg Historic Landmarks Commission, www.cmhpf.org; Waughtown Baptist Church Survey File, SHPO, Raleigh.

³ The First Presbyterian on West Trade Street, Saint Peter's Epsicopal Church on North Tryon, and Saint Peter's Catholic Church on South Tryon (T. W. Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City*, Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1998, p. 188).

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The Presbyterian Church was particularly strong in the Carolina Piedmont: most of the early settlers of Mecklenburg County were Scots-Irish Presbyterians who made their way south from Pennsylvania in the mid-eighteenth century on what was known as the "Great Wagon Road".⁴ The Associated Reformed Presbyterian Church had been created through the merger of two branches of the Presbyterian Church in the United States in 1782.⁵ The first Associated Reformed Presbyterian Church in Charlotte was established in 1873 in a small frame building at College and Fifth Streets; in 1891 it moved to a prestigious location at northwest corner of South Tryon and Third Streets.

Between 1900 and 1910, institutions controlled by upper class families - churches, hospitals, and other facilities - began to move to the suburbs, a phenomenon that appears to have predated the automobile.⁶ This trend was already in evidence in 1897, when the Associated Reformed Presbyterian decided to organize a mission church in the suburbs as a memorial to twenty-five years of work by the Church. Around the same time, some young men of the Church began to hold prayer meetings in the suburbs on Sunday afternoons. They eventually asked permission to establish a Sabbath School in a place that would not be associated with any particular Church or mission. Two committees worked independently on the selection of sites for the Sabbath School and the mission Church. In the end, they chose the same block on North McDowell Street. It seems that the location at the edge of uptown was close enough to the suburbs to fulfill the Associated Reformed Presbyterian's desire for a mission church.⁷

In 1898, a Sabbath School was established in a recently completed residence at the corner of North McDowell and 5th Street, in the charge of the officers and teachers of the school at the uptown Associated Reformed Presbyterian Church.⁸ At the same time, plans were drawn for the construction of a church on a vacant lot at the corner of North McDowell and East Avenue, which had been recently been used as a foundry. The lot was purchased from Vinton Liddell for \$2,750, and the church was built in 1899 by a Mr. Grady at a contract price of \$5,400. The new Church received help from the First Associated Reformed Presbyterian and other churches in the Synod, and assumed a debt of \$3,375. The East Avenue

⁴ T. W. Hanchett, "The Growth of Charlotte", Charlotte-Mecklenberg Historic Landmarks Commission, www.cmhpf.org.

⁵ The Associated Synod of the South withdrew from the national body in 1833 because of differences over the issue of slavery (W. H. Huffman, "An Historical Sketch of the First A.R.P. Church", 1986, SHPO Survey Files). For a history of the A.R.P. Church, see www.arpsynod.org/who.html.

⁶ T. W. Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City*, p. 200.

⁷ "History of the Church."

⁸ The upstairs of the house was used as an assembly hall, and the basement as a primary room; a family lived in the other half of the house ("History of the Church").

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Avenue Church opened in September 1900 with eighty members.⁹ Dr. W. W. Orr was installed as pastor November 29, 1901, and served the church for twenty-seven years. In 1901 a parsonage or manse was built next to the church at 10 North McDowell Street, adjacent to a newly created mid-block alley, for \$2500.¹⁰

In a sermon on the occasion of the sixth anniversary of the establishment of the Church, Dr. Orr gave thanks for the "great field" in which the Church was given to labor. "...[W]e are in the best city in the south," he said, "a growing, progressive city, and we occupy the best section in this best city." At the same time, he noted that the present church - only six years old - has served its day. It is neither large enough, nor sufficiently convenient, nor in keeping with the demands of our growing work. Our work, our section of the city, demands a modern church building. If we expect to meet the increasing demands of a growing city and keep pace with its magnificent growth, then we must erect a modern church building...¹¹

A "modern" building was thus seen as necessary for the image the Church wished to project and for its location in the city. In late 1910, the *Charlotte Observer* reported that the East Avenue Tabernacle had purchased an "elegant triangular piece of property located at the corner of Elizabeth and East Avenue, paying for it \$10,000." The site provided a "model church situation", extending from the intersection of these avenues with McDowell almost to Town Creek; it would not only allow for a "commodious structure, but will permit the retention of a splendid lawn". The article noted that the East Avenue Tabernacle was the most flourishing Associated Reformed Presbyterian church in the city and perhaps in the entire synod; the new church would be the second of two splendid new churches in recent years, the other being the Chalmers Memorial Church in Dilworth.¹²

⁹ The building committee was composed of S. S. McNinch, T. M. Shaw, J. G. Baird, and J. B. McLaughlin. The property was purchased by S. S. McNinch and his wife Julia, and the church was built by 1900 (Deed Books 129, p. 405 and 129, p. 627; 1900 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, sheet 24; "History of the Church") The reported inauguration date and the amount of debt assumed by the new church differs in the Church history and in the 1906 sermon by Dr. Orr (*Charlotte Daily Observer*, November 26, 1906); the latter has been used in the above text, since it is from a contemporary source).

¹⁰ 1905 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map; Deed Book 129, p. 405. This lot was also purchased by S. S. McNinch and his wife Julia on May 10, 1901, suggesting that the East Avenue Associated Reformed Presbyterian was not yet a legal entity.

¹¹ *Charlotte Daily Observer*, November 26, 1906.

¹² *Charlotte Observer*, November 23, 1910. The purchase was not finalized until April 29, 1911, the date of the deed (Book 277, p. 398, Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds). The East Avenue Tabernacle was the fourth Associated Reformed Presbyterian Church in the county and the second within the city limits (E. Ramsey, "Survey and Research Report on the East Avenue Tabernacle Church", Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, www.cmhpf.org).

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In 1910 the church elders invited design proposals for the new church building, and fifteen different architects submitted plans. The designs of four Charlotte architecture firms were selected as finalists, and on February 20, 1911, these firms were invited to present their projects and discuss how the buildings were to be erected. Several days later, J. M. McMichael, "an architect in the Trust building", was awarded the contract for the new East Avenue Tabernacle Church. Construction was projected to begin that spring, and it was hoped that the new church would open a year later.¹³

According to the East Avenue Tabernacle archive, however, McMichael did not draw up the plans until May 1912. The church, built by contractor S. L. Vaughan, was inaugurated in 1914; at the same time a parsonage was built behind the church. In order to finance the construction of the new building, the old church and parsonage on North McDowell Street were sold along with two lots at the rear of the new site. The East Avenue Tabernacle archive reports that cost of the church and parsonage were \$40,000 and \$8,500 respectively.¹⁴

The original church building, built in 1899, was a shingled Victorian, resembling a large house in massing and materials. The more monumental design of the new building accords with Church's perception of its role in the community and the prominent site it had selected. As one of the two thoroughfares that divided Charlotte into four wards, East Trade Street has tended to reflect changing aesthetic preferences of Charlotte's social and political elite.¹⁵ While the street had already begun its slow decline, it was still considered a prestigious location. At the edge of uptown on the dividing line between the First and Second Wards, the site of the church was on a section of East Trade Street still dominated by the grand houses of wealthy citizens. It attracted residents from the First Ward and from the emerging Elizabeth neighborhood.¹⁶

¹³ *Charlotte Evening Chronicle*, February 16 and February 23, 1911; *Charlotte Observer*, November 23, 1910.

¹⁴ While most of the money was raised through the sale of the old buildings and donations within the parish, the Church received \$1,500 from Andrew Carnegie, one-half the cost of the pipe organ ("History of the Church"; 1929 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map).

By 1929, the old church had been demolished but the parsonage building on North McDowell was still standing. We have found no evidence to support the claim that the former church building burned down, and that this was the reason for building a new church (E. Ramsey, "The East Avenue Tabernacle Church"). The 1911 Sanborn map shows the old church still standing, and the parish had initiated the purchase of the new lot the previous year. The church history relates that the building was sold, along with the parsonage.

¹⁵ D. Morrill, "The First Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church", Survey and Research Report for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, 1981, www.cmhpf.org.

¹⁶ E. Ramsey, "The East Avenue Tabernacle Church".

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The Gothic style had been the preferred style for church architecture, but the Associated Reformed Presbyterian had a traditional preference for churches in the classical style. McMichael, who had already designed the two prominent churches described above, must have been an obvious choice. He popularized the domed central plan church and was referred to as the "church dome architect."¹⁷ His design for the East Avenue Tabernacle Church, with its monumental porch and prominent dome, raised on a drum, would have provided the kind of image that the church elders desired.¹⁸

Aside from what can be inferred from the building itself, little is known about McMichael's design process and his interaction with the congregation. McMichael presumably designed the stained glass windows, which were almost omitted due to budgetary constraints. The pastor, Dr. Orr, paid for the windows personally until sufficient funds could be raised through donations. Church legend relates that the windows were made in Italy, and that their delivery was delayed by the outbreak of World War I. The church was apparently pleased with McMichael's work, because a decade later he was asked to draw up plans for a new educational wing for a fee of \$1,850. The building was built in 1925 on the site of the 1914 parsonage by contractor J. P. Little & Sons for the sum of \$65,000, financed primarily through loans. This debt, which took twenty years to repay, was a severe financial burden on the church.¹⁹

Shortly after the completion of the educational building, Dr. Orr was succeeded by his son, Rev. E. N. Orr, who served until 1950. Dr. Henry E. Pressly was installed as pastor in 1950, and a new parsonage or manse was built at 2231 Hastings Drive, south of downtown near the Presbyterian Queens' College. During the thirty years of Pressly's pastorate, various renovations were undertaken which left the integrity of the buildings largely intact.

In the period following World War II the East Avenue Tabernacle Church experienced increasing difficulties. As the flight to the suburbs accelerated

¹⁷ "Historic Architecture Foundation", brochure dated 1981 on James M. McMichael, presumably written by his son D.S. McMichael (Robinson-Spangler Carolina Room, Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County).

¹⁸ It should be noted that later in his career, McMichael designed two Presbyterian churches in the Gothic Revival style, including one for the Associated Reformed Presbyterian Church at North Tryon Street (1927). This reversion to the Gothic may reflect the new conservatism among the civic leaders of the 1920's. Dan Morrill sees this church as a "somewhat unimaginative and predictable expression of Gothic revivalism" ("The First Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church"). The other Gothic Revival church was the Myers Park Presbyterian Church (1928).

¹⁹ "History of the Church." Again, there is a discrepancy regarding the completion date: the Church history reports that the building was completed on July 15, 1925, but the building permit was not filed by the contractor until August 17, 1925 (Building Permit file for 1925, Robinson-Spangler Carolina Room).

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the district was given over to government buildings, including a new courthouse and a jail. As the area became less residential, crime increased. At the same time, the Church could not match suburban parishes in terms of amenities like parking, daycare, and outdoor play space. The building itself was deteriorating and there were no funds to undertake the necessary repairs. From a pre-war high of 1,200, the membership of East Avenue Tabernacle had declined to 900 by 1950; by the 1980's the number of active members had dropped to 400, most of whom commuted from the suburbs.²⁰ In 1992 the parish voted to sell the building and build a new church in the suburbs. While the new church building never materialized, in 1998 East Avenue Tabernacle merged with the Craig Avenue Associated Reformed Presbyterian Church.

In 1997 a local businessman and philanthropist, Bruce Parker, purchased the building and converted it into a community center, named after his Great Aunt Stella, a missionary who had spent her life in the mountains of North Carolina. Various non-profits, including the Charter School, rent space in the building, and the sanctuary is still used for Sunday services by the Uptown Christ Covenant Church.²¹

Architectural Context

James M. McMichael (1870-1944) was a leading church architect in the Charlotte area. McMichael designed fifty-two churches in Charlotte and its vicinity during his prolific career. McMichael's churches were a progression of his ideas on classicism, the East Avenue Tabernacle Associated Reformed Presbyterian Church being a clear example of classicism within a Byzantine cross plan.

McMichael's free interpretation of classical forms can be understood within the context of late Beaux Arts classicism. His design for the Carnegie Free Library (1903), which served as the public library of Charlotte for decades, is typical of the Beaux Arts classicism used in many institutional and commercial buildings of the period.²² East Avenue Tabernacle Associated Reformed Presbyterian Church was one of three churches McMichael designed in center city Charlotte between 1909 and 1914 that incorporated Byzantine and Roman

²⁰ *Charlotte Observer*, July 14, 1986; E. Ramsey, "East Avenue Tabernacle."

²¹ *Charlotte Observer*, July 25, 1992; E. Ramsey, "East Avenue Tabernacle."

²² Popelliers, et. al., *What Style is It? A Guide to American Architecture*, Washington, DC: The Preservation Press, 1983; pp. 70-1; A photo of the library is on display in the Public Library outside the North Carolina Room. For McMichael's churches, see individual Survey and Research Reports, www.cmhpf.org, and survey files at the State Historic Preservation Office, Raleigh.

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Mecklenburg County, NC

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elements.²³ McMichael's churches were based on an Eastern cruciform plan, with a grand, octagonal sanctuary under a wide dome. His church designs defy simple categorization: they are best understood as classical designs strongly influenced by turn-of-the-century eclecticism.

The East Avenue Tabernacle provides an interesting contrast to the Chalmers Memorial Associated Reformed Presbyterian Church in the suburb of Dilworth, which was built by members of the East Avenue Tabernacle several years before the church at East Trade and Elizabeth (1909-1910) Streets.²⁴ The Associated Reformed Presbyterian church traditionally favored classical church designs, so it is not surprising that they chose the classical style in an era dominated by Gothic Revival churches. The Chalmers Memorial Church, however, is a single nave church, typical of eighteenth and early nineteenth Century American churches based on English Renaissance designs.²⁵ The choice of a central plan, domed sanctuary for the downtown Associated Reformed Presbyterian Church was a more innovative choice that resulted from a design competition. The Church elders must have judged McMichael's design as best exploiting "that elegant triangular piece of property" at the end of an important view corridor along East Trade Street, one of the two main commercial thoroughfares of the city.²⁶

The East Avenue Tabernacle represents the development of McMichael's use of the Byzantine cross plan, which he used in his two earlier churches in center city. The First Baptist Church, the earliest of the three churches (1909), was erected next to the Library and was intended as a companion to it. Its tripartite façade is mannerist and eclectic. Square, domed side towers flank the central pedimented bay which conceals a low, wide dome. Entry doors are set into the narthex wall, framed by an engaged architrave and pilasters. A large semicircular window with stained glass panels is the focus of the central bay.

²³ The other two churches were the First Baptist at 318 North Tryon Street (1909) and the Little Rock A. M. E. Zion at the corner of East Seventh and North Myers (1911), both in the First Ward. The latter is the only known church in Charlotte that McMichael designed for an African American congregation ("The Little Rock Zion A. M. E. Church", Survey and Research Report for the Charlotte-Mecklenberg Historic Landmarks Commission, 1981, www.cmhpf.org). Interestingly, these three churches, along with McMichael's Gothic First Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church at North Tryon and 11th Street (1926), are all used as cultural centers (Charlotte Observer, July 12, 1998).

²⁴ "History of the Church", archive of the Tabernacle Associated Reformed Presbyterian Church, on file with the Craig Avenue Tabernacle Church, Charlotte. Dr. Dan Morrill, University of North Carolina, Charlotte, pointed out the contrast between the two churches in a personal conversation, 11/25/03.

²⁵ The architects were Hunter and Gordon of Charlotte, and the contractor was R. N. Hunter Company ("Dilworth: Charlotte's Initial Streetcar Suburb", Dilworth Historic District, Charlotte, 1978, pp. 55, State Historic Preservation Office Survey Files).

²⁶ Charlotte Observer, November 23, 1910; Charlotte Evening Chronicle, February 16, 1911;

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The windows of the side towers are grouped in threes, and in a mannerist gesture McMichael staggered the lower windows, interrupting the stone rustication.

The two later churches - Little Rock Zion A.M.E. (1911) and East Avenue Tabernacle Associated Reformed Presbyterian (1914) - show a progression toward a more restrained classicism. In both these churches, monumental porches are appended to the narthex wall. The Little Rock A.M.E. Zion Church retains the side towers, here topped by domed belfries. As in the First Baptist Church, the pediment crowns the narthex wall. A three-bay Ionic porch frames three sets of entry doors, with a balcony above. In contrast to the rusticated walls of the First Baptist Church, walls are unornamented brick with simple limestone detailing; the tripartite window openings of the earlier church appear in the three-bay porch, with three pairs of doors.

The East Avenue Tabernacle, the last of these churches, also has an entry porch, here of the Ionic order. Design-wise the façade, differs significantly from the others. First, the pediment is brought forward to top the porch, making it more monumental. Second, the side towers have been suppressed, emphasizing the octagonal central space and cruciform plan in massing and elevation. One-story exedra with sloping roofs link the arms of the cross, the solution used in Byzantine churches.²⁷ The dome, narrower in diameter than its predecessors, is prominently raised on a drum. The articulation of the building parts is thus clearer and more architectonic.

While the pedimented porch, Ionic columns and engaged pilasters, and plain brick walls evoke a more elemental classicism, there remain areas of expressive detailing: decorative brick recesses, limestone bands and coping, and circular windows on the side elevations. These elements are further developed in the 1925 school addition, where paired, arched windows framed by limestone bands reappear, characteristic of McMichael's earlier Romanesque work.

²⁷ In McMichael's Waughtown Baptist Church (1919), the wings are linked by one-story, square rooms, resulting in a less fluid elevation.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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CONTINUATION SHEET

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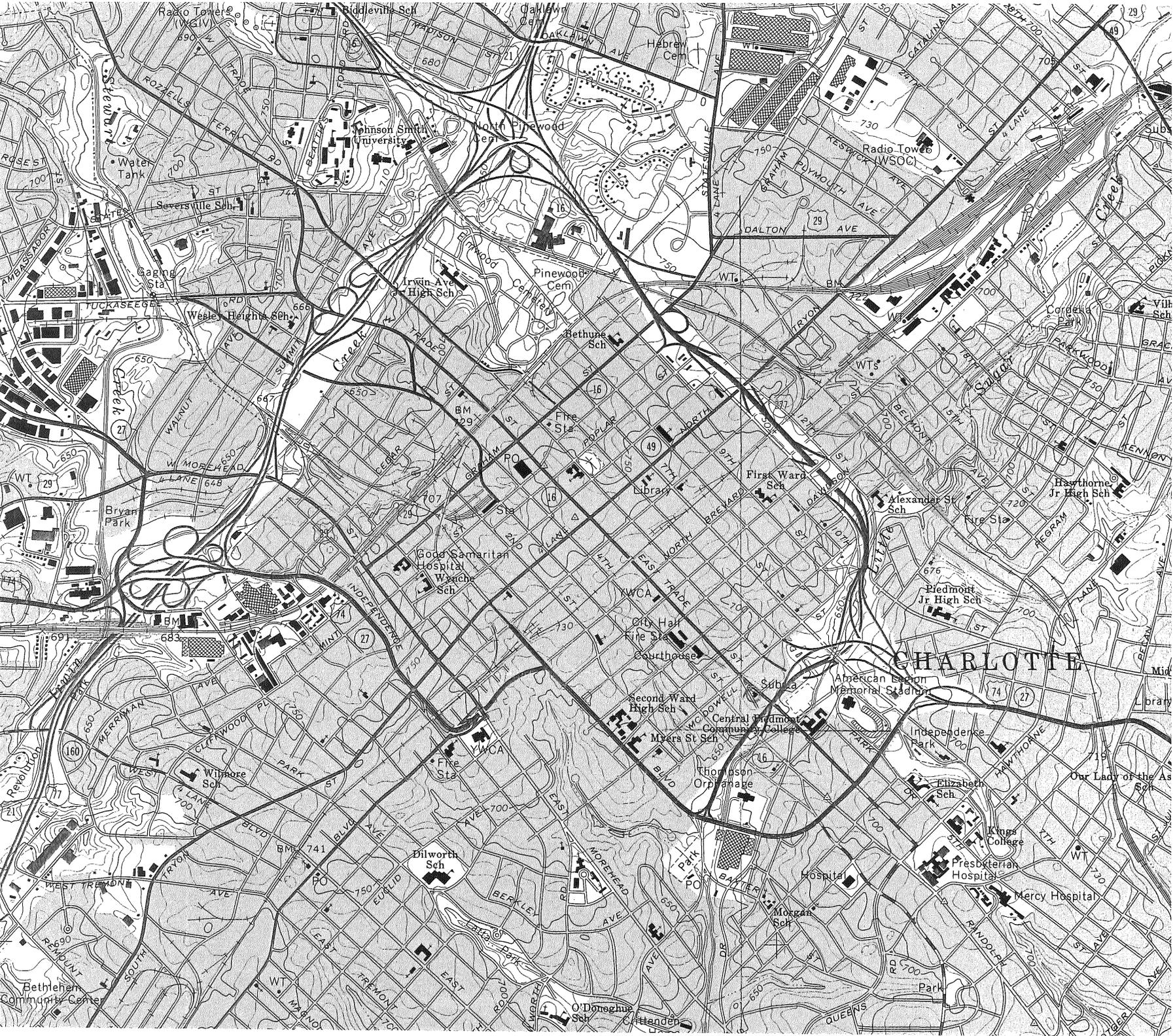
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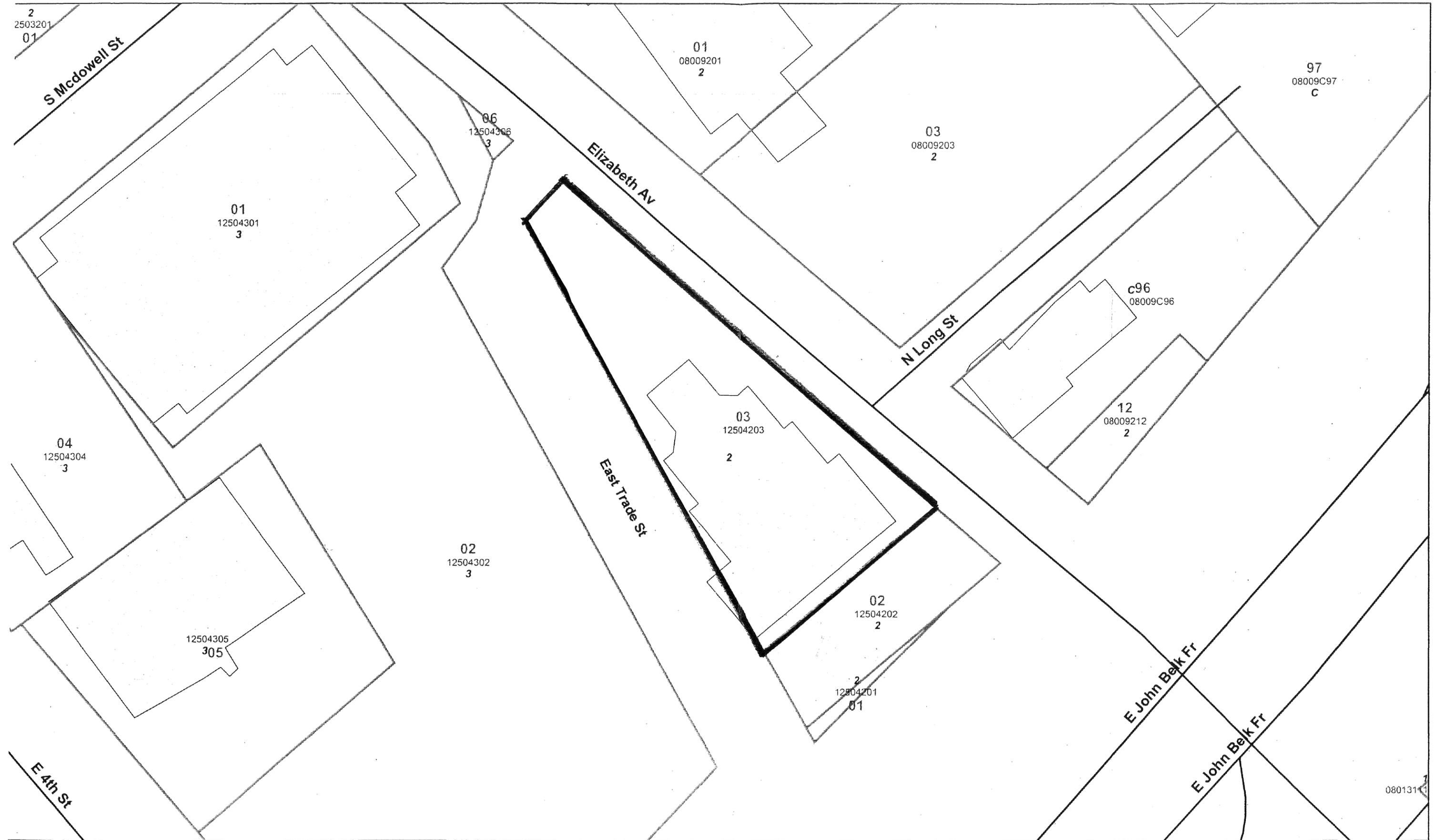
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Legend
 □ Building Footprints
 - Streets
 Lot Number (23)
 Map Block (Smaller Italic Nos)
 ▭ Parcel Boundary

Legend
 — Creeks, Streams
 Existing 100 Yr Flood Plain
 S.W.I.M. BUFFER

*Note: red lines indicate selected parcel(s); 8 digit numbers are parcel I D's

NOMINATION BOUNDARY

1 inch equals 50 feet



jhb 11/20/3

**East Avenue
 Tabernacle A.R.P. Church**
 926 Elizabeth Ave
 Selected Parcel: 125-042-03
 Official Tax Map

