

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "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 Christian Church

other names/site number First Church of Christ

2. Location

street & number 126 South Main Street N/A not for publication

city or town Robersonville N/A vicinity

state North Carolina code NC county Martin code 117 zip code 27871

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set for in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Celley Cross SHPO 3/9/05
Signature of certifying official/Title 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 certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet

determined eligible for the National Register.
 See continuation sheet

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other,
(explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

First Christian Church
Name of Property

Martin County, NC
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

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

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	1	buildings
1	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
2	1	Total

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

Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION: Religious Facility

RELIGION: Religious Facility

FUNERARY: Cemetery

FUNERARY: Cemetery

RELIGION: Church School

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE VICTORIAN: Romanesque Revival

foundation BRICK

walls BRICK

roof STONE: Slate

other ASPHALT

Narrative Description

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

First Christian Church
Name of Property

Martin County, NC
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.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or 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

1913

Significant Dates

1913

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

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 _____

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository:

First Christian Church
Name of Property

Martin County, NC
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property .72 acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 18 296463 3966430
Zone Easting Northing
2 _____

3 _____
Zone Easting Northing
4 _____

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Heather Fearnbach and Penne Sandbeck
organization consultants date November 1, 2004
street & number P.O. Box 6363 telephone 919-832-7935
city or town Raleigh, NC 27628 state NC zip code 27628

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

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

Property Owner

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

name First Christian Church
street & number 126 South Main Street telephone (252) 795-4877
city or town Robersonville state NC zip code 27871

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

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P. O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

First Christian Church
Martin County, NC

7. Narrative Description

First Christian Church is located on the east side of Main Street (NC 903) at its junction with Second Street in the small town of Robersonville. The church stands on a 165 by 190-foot lot bordered by the library, fire department, police station, town hall and downtown commercial district to the north and west and tobacco warehouses, a vacant service station and modest, early-twentieth-century residences to the south. Stonewall Masonic Lodge, the oldest non-residential building in Robersonville, occupies a prominent position adjacent to the church. A large education building, a parking lot and a small cemetery are located in back of the church. Boxwoods and evergreen trees line the front and side elevations of the church and education building.

First Christian Church is a one-story, brick, Romanesque Revival building with a cross-gable façade dominated by two sets of three arched stained-glass windows capped with corbelled, blonde-brick hoods. A slate hip roof shelters the main block of the church. The two-story corner bell tower has a corbelled cornice surmounted by a crenellated parapet, arched window openings at the upper story and a small porch with arched entrances on the lower story. Corbelled blonde-brick hoods accent all of the arched openings in the tower. The eight-panel double-leaf front door is set at an angle and surrounded by stained-glass sidelights and a transom. Two single-leaf four-panel doors are recessed in a projecting front-gable entry bay on the northwest corner of the church, one of which has a stained-glass transom. The front-gable entry bay in the center of the south elevation contains a double-leaf door topped with an arched stained-glass transom. Short flights of brick steps provide access to all three entrances. A cast-stone waster table, a cast-stone band at window sill level and a corbelled blonde brick band at window lintel level encircle the church, providing additional decorative interest. A brick handicapped ramp extends from the rear of the building.

The interior is divided into three distinct areas: an entrance foyer (originally a Sunday School classroom) on the southwestern corner of the building, the sanctuary, and a series of small multipurpose rooms on the north end and at the rear of the sanctuary. First Christian Church retains its original Akron plan, although the Sunday School classrooms have been moved to the Education Building. The white plaster walls and ceilings serve as a foil for decoratively grained window and door surrounds with mitered corners, baseboards and other woodwork. Raised-

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2

First Christian Church
Martin County, NC

panel pocket doors separate the sanctuary from the primary entrance foyer. Arched, stained-glass windows illuminate the sanctuary. Period brass fixtures with clusters of opaque glass lights are suspended from wood ceiling medallions. Most of the original theater seats were replaced with curved oak pews in 1950 – only a few remain in the choir loft, which is separated from the congregation pews by a curtained bar. The pews are oriented toward the pulpit and a large Gothic-Revival organ in the northeastern corner of the sanctuary.

Education Building, 1956, Noncontributing Building

A two-story-on-raised-basement, brick, hip-roofed education building executed in six-to-one common bond is located to the rear (east) of First Christian Church. Flat-roofed canopies shelter the primary, double-leaf entrances on the west elevation and a single-leaf entrance on the north elevation. A tall brick chimney with a corbelled stack rises from the southeast corner of the asphalt-shingled roof. The building retains original metal casement windows. The education building was designed by Charles J. Betts of Indianapolis, Indiana and Charles A. Benton and Sons of Wilson and constructed by Julius Martin of Robersonville. Corey and Company of Winston-Salem did the heating, plumbing and electrical work.¹

Cemetery, Contributing Site, Late Nineteenth Century-Present

A small cemetery (approximately twenty-five feet wide and twenty-five feet long) partially enclosed with a wrought iron fence is located northeast of the church. The cemetery includes the graves of James D. Grimes (1845-1914) and his wife, Susan C. Grimes (1852-1899), and H. D. Roberson (1824-1884) and his wife, Martha Hodges Roberson (1824-1877). James Grimes' grave has the most elaborate surviving marker, but five other modest markers are in place. Other grave stones are broken and scattered throughout the cemetery, which is locally known as the "town's pioneer cemetery plot."

¹ Wilbur T. Wallace, *Weekly Herald*, Robersonville, NC, no date.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 3

First Christian Church
Martin County, NC

8. Statement of Significance

Summary Statement

First Christian Church is eligible for the National Register under Criterion C as an representative example of an early-twentieth century Romanesque Revival church. The design of the First Christian Church reflects the influence of popular national architectural styles in North Carolina churches during the first decades of the twentieth century. The 1913 building is one of three of the eight extant Disciples of Christ churches constructed in Martin County during this period that retain sufficient integrity for National Register listing. First Christian Church meets the requirements of Criteria Consideration A as it derives its primary significance from its architectural distinction.

Historical Background

The Robersonville First Christian Church congregation organized in July of 1876 in response to a revival led by Josephus Latham and Stanley Ayers that resulted in twenty-eight baptisms. After meeting in the Stonewall Masonic Lodge for over a year, their first church, a frame building, was completed in August of 1877. Thirty-seven members of the mother church, Zion's Grove Christian Church, transferred their membership to Robersonville soon after. Robersonville Christian was the first church in town and remained the only church for ten years.²

The Sunday School was organized in 1890 and soon enrolled twenty-four members. The Christian Women's Benevolent Missions Auxillary had eleven members in 1911; the overall church membership numbered forty-three that year. Revivals in 1912 and 1913 added ninety-three members to the congregation. The Ladies' Aid Society, organized in 1912, and the Christian Men's Fellowship, organized in 1949, also contributed to the growth of the church.³

² Charles Crossfield Ware, *Albemarle Annals* (New Bern, NC: Owen G. Dunn Company, 1961), 80; Frances M. Manning and W. H. Booker, *Religion and Education in Martin County, 1774-1974* (Williamston, NC: Enterprise Publishing Company, 1974), 133.

³ *Ibid.*; Shelby Jean Nelson Hughes, ed., *Martin County Heritage* (Williamston, NC: Martin County Historical Society, 1980), 10.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 4

First Christian Church
Martin County, NC

The present brick church replaced the frame church in 1913. The first bricks were delivered to the construction site on July 18, 1913 and the church was almost finished by the end of February, 1914. The plastering of the interior was completed in early April, and the church was dedicated on October 19, 1914. One pew, the silver communion service and a bible were saved from the original church. The new building cost about \$10,000 and the church also purchased a two-story parsonage in 1914. The congregation was able to pay off the debt for both buildings in 1934.⁴

The church basement was enlarged in the late 1920s to create an assembly hall and kitchen. A Moller pipe organ was installed in the sanctuary in 1948, and new oak pews and other decorative items were added to the sanctuary in 1950. Reverend J. M. Perry, who served as pastor of the congregation from 1916-1923 and 1932-1952, passed away in 1952. All businesses in Robersonville closed for his funeral. The church continued to grow and in 1953 additional land was purchased for an education building that would include seventeen Sunday School classrooms, a small chapel, a Fellowship Hall with a seating capacity of 200, offices, the pastor's study, a kitchen and restrooms. The ground breaking for the new building, valued at \$100,000, was on May 27, 1954 and the dedication on January 29, 1956. The church membership numbered 301 at that time. A church library was established in 1960 and a new brick parsonage was constructed in 1961. Church membership in 1961 was at an all-time high of 395. The church acquired additional land adjacent to the church in 1964 for use as a parking lot.⁵

Denominational History

Religious reformers Barton W. Stone (1772-1844), Alexander Campbell (1788-1866) and Thomas Campbell (1763-1854) united in 1832 to promote a return to the doctrine, worship and practice of New Testament Christianity. They traveled throughout Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Ohio and West Virginia, organizing congregations known as Disciples of Christ, the Christian Church, and locally, Churches of Christ. The Disciples shared some affinities with Protestant denominations: simplicity of worship, lay ministry, adult baptism, separation of church and state,

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Charles Crossfield Ware, *Albemarle Annals*, 81; Manning and Booker, *Religion and Education in Martin County*, 134.; Shelby Jean Nelson Hughes, ed., *Martin County Heritage*, 11.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 5

First Christian Church
Martin County, NC

stringent rigorous and ascetic morality and freewill doctrine. Efforts to organize a national church never came to fruition. By 1860, as church membership grew to almost 200,000, theological, political, social and economic differences, exacerbated by the controversial issue of slavery, resulted in a schism among the congregations.⁶

Stone and the Campbells were opposed to the American institution of slavery, but the regional spread of congregations in the border states between the north and south included proslavery areas. The lack of a formal national denominational structure precluded a split in the church over slavery and secession, but sectional divisions festered and correlated with later congregational divisions. The more conservative Churches of Christ, located for the most part in rural areas south of the Ohio River, argued for a strict interpretation of the scriptures and objected to the formation of missionary societies and the use of instrumental music in church services. The modern, predominately northern, urban and more affluent Disciples of Christ advocated a more progressive reading of the scriptures. Despite the dissension, congregations continued to grow, doubling by 1875 and including over one million members by 1900. By 1906, the federal religious census recognized the two groups as separate and distinct denominations. It was not until 1968, however, that a representative assembly in Kansas City approved the *Provisional Design for the Christian Church*, officially naming the Disciples of Christ as an independent denomination.⁷

In 1906, the census recorded 159,658 members of the Churches of Christ, with almost two-thirds of that total living in the former states of the Confederacy. By 1994, the Churches of Christ had become a worldwide movement, found in 121 nations. United States membership totaled 1,260,838, with Texas having the most, followed by Tennessee with 169,190 members. The largest single Disciples of Christ congregation in North America is the 9,000-member Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church, an African-American congregation, in Memphis. As Dr. Harold Hazelip of Lipscomb University observes, “historically marked by internal and

⁶ Heather Fearnbach, “Churches of Christ and Disciples of Christ” in *Powerful Artifacts: A Guide to Surveying and Documenting Rural African-American Churches* (Murfreesboro, TN: Center for Historic Preservation, Middle Tennessee State University, 2000), 12.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 6

First Christian Church
Martin County, NC

external controversy, the Churches of Christ remain committed to their ideals. While some representatives have claimed these churches to include the only known Christians, others insist that their commitment is to be 'Christians only' – an ideal which reflects the original goals of unity (nondenominational) and restorationism (restoring primitive practices of the earliest churches)."⁸

The message of the Disciples of Christ movement found fertile ground in some North Carolina Baptist congregations by 1819, as both Disciples and Free Will Baptists relied upon literal interpretation of the Bible as the supreme authority for the spirit and practice of the Church. The earliest annual Disciples of Christ convention in North Carolina was held on February 2 and 3, 1831, at Little Sister Church, seven miles north of Kinston. Thomas Campbell's North Carolinavisit in 1833, during which he preached in the state's eastern towns of Edenton, Greenville, Hookerton and Pantego, resulted in even more converts to the Disciples faith. The oldest Disciples of Christ church in North Carolina is a former Free Will Baptist congregation, Wheat Swamp, in Lenoir County, reorganized under Disciples principles in 1829. Wheat Swamp was listed on the earliest roles of the Bethel Conference of North Carolina Disciples of Christ along with Hookerton (Greene County), Bay Creek, Broad Creek and Concord (Pamlico County), Pleasant Hill and Kinston (Lenoir County), Pfafftown (Forsyth County), Piney Grove (Sampson County), Oak Grove (Pitt County), Beaver Dam and Old Ford (Beaufort County), Mill Creek (Johnston County) and Chinquapin Chapel (Jones County). By 1860 there were 2,500 members of Disciples of Christ congregations in North Carolina.⁹

The first Disciples of Christ congregation in Martin County appeared at Welch's Creek, near Dardens in Jamesville Township in 1841, serving as an alternative to the Episcopal, Methodist and Primitive Baptist churches that were organized in the county by the end of the eighteenth century. The Welch's Creek membership included Native Americans, free blacks, slaves and whites. The church dissolved in less than twenty years, with some members of the congregation

⁸ Ibid., 13-14; Harold Hazelip, "Churches of Christ," in Carroll Van West, et. al. eds., *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* (Nashville, TN: Tennessee Historical Society, 1998), 162.

⁹ Winifred Ernest Garrison and Alfred T. DeGroot, *The Disciples of Christ: A History* (St. Louis, MO: Christian Board of Publication, 1948), 276-280; Charles Crossfield Ware, *North Carolina Disciples of Christ* (St. Louis, MO: Christian Board of Publication, 1927), 64-65.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 7

First Christian Church
Martin County, NC

forming new churches. Some of the black membership organized Uniontown Free Union in 1854, the oldest black church in Martin County.¹⁰

Christian Chapel, located on Wynn Road (SR 1113) in Cross Roads Township, is the oldest surviving Disciples of Christ church in Martin County. The congregation organized in 1857 and the church was constructed around 1869. Taylor's Chapel, a Disciples of Christ church in eastern Martin County, was organized in 1854 but is no longer extant. Zion's Grove, located in the country two miles north of Robersonville, was established in 1872 and was the mother church of the Robersonville Disciples of Christ congregation, organized in 1876.¹¹

Other Martin County congregations formed between 1865 and 1946 include Macedonia Christian Church (1865), Poplar Chapel Church of Christ (1867), Fairview Christian Church (1874), First Christian Church, Robersonville (1876), Hassell Christian Church (1877), First Christian Church, Jamesville (1887), First Christian Church, Williamston (1889), Gospel Light Church of Christ (1902), Maple Grove Christian Church (1910), Oak City Christian Church (1919), Everetts Christian Church (1921), Smithwick Chapel Disciple Church (1932) and Hamilton Church of Christ (1946). Many of these congregations were organized in response to revivals and shared ministers. Only three of these early churches remain architecturally intact, as most were expanded and remodeled over the years.¹²

Architecture Context

The earliest Disciples of Christ churches in North Carolina were plainly finished, frame, front-gable buildings, some of which had previously served as meeting places for Free Will Baptist congregations. Christian Chapel, the oldest extant Disciples of Christ church in Martin County, is representative of this tradition, as are the original Macedonia Christian Church and the Christian Church in Jamesville. Although the 1869 Christian Chapel has been moved and

¹⁰ Manning and Booker, *Religion and Education in Martin County*, 9.

¹¹ Charles Crossfield Ware, *Albemarle Annals*, 21, 82.

¹² Shelby Hughes, ed., *Martin County Heritage*, 6, 9-16, 19-22, 25, 34.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 8

First Christian Church
Martin County, NC

currently functions as a packhouse, it retains some original weatherboards and boxed cornices with deep gable returns. There is evidence that a gallery was located above the entrance. The building was moved in 1950 when the Christian Chapel congregation built a new brick church.¹³

Corinth Christian Church, constructed in 1863 in the Lang's Crossroads Community of Pitt County, is almost identical in appearance and plan to Christian Chapel. First Christian Church in Jamesville, built in 1887, is an example of a simple, front-gable, frame building with unusual decorative embellishments including scalloped, pierced fascia on the side elevations and elaborate window surrounds with decorative lintels. Jamesville First Christian Church was expanded in 1922 and replaced by a larger brick building in 1951.¹⁴

Macedonia Christian Church, built in 1886, is a front-gable, weatherboarded building with two raised-panel front doors and nine-over-six windows. The church was enlarged in 1915 and replaced by a new building in 1942. The new church retains the traditional front-gable form of earlier Disciples of Christ churches and has a series of rear additions dating from 1956 to the present. The old church was sold and moved from the property to be used as tenant housing.¹⁵

By the first decades of the twentieth century, North Carolina Disciples of Christ churches, like churches of other Protestant denominations, reflected the influence of popular national architectural trends. Eight Martin County Disciples of Christ churches were built or remodeled during this period as new congregations were established and old congregations grew in size, all of them manifesting restrained elements of Gothic Revival, Craftsman, Colonial Revival or Romanesque Revival styles. Oak City Christian Church, First Christian Church and Everetts Christian Church are excellent examples of the incorporation of Gothic Revival and Romanesque Revival features into relatively modest churches constructed for the Disciples of Christ congregations of small Martin County towns.

¹³ Thomas R. Butchko, ed., *Martin Architectural Heritage: The Historic Structures of a Rural North Carolina County* (Williamston, NC: Martin County Historical Society, 1998), 147.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 273; Scott Power, ed., *The Historic Architecture of Pitt County, North Carolina* (Greenville, NC: Pitt County Historical Society, 1991), 80.

¹⁵ Shelby Hughes, ed., *Martin County Heritage*, 18-19.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 9

First Christian Church
Martin County, NC

Gothic Revival features such as steeply-pitched gable roofs, pointed-arched windows, castellated towers, patterned masonry and asymmetrical massing were widely incorporated into high-style churches and public buildings throughout the country from the late nineteenth century through the first few decades of the twentieth century. The frame, weatherboarded, Oak City Christian Church, constructed in 1921, incorporates some Gothic Revival elements such as a corner tower and arched stained-glass windows, but its simplicity is very much in keeping with the earlier Disciples of Christ churches in the state. Hassell Christian Church, constructed in 1929, is representative of a more eclectic approach to the Gothic Revival style. The front-gable, brick church, the third building utilized by the Hassell congregation, is characterized by mixture of architectural styles: Gothic Revival pointed-arched windows, Craftsman exposed rafter ends and Colonial Revival stuccoed keystone accents. A projecting front-gable vestibule and side-gable Sunday School wings on the rear of the building almost double its size. Like Oak City Christian Church, First Christian Church in Robersonville and Everetts Christian Church, Hassell Christian Church is a good example of the incorporation of elements of popular architectural styles into the local building vernacular.¹⁶

Hickory Grove Church of Christ, constructed around 1900 in the Sandhill vicinity in Lenoir County, also displays modest Gothic Revival features such as pointed-arched windows. The front-gable church was originally weatherboarded but was brick-veneered in the 1970s. An entry vestibule and a side wing were added at that time, but the church retains a steeple with a broached hip roof similar to the bell tower at Oak City Christian Church.¹⁷

The Romanesque Revival style is represented in even fewer Martin County Disciples of Christ churches. Identifying features of Romanesque Revival buildings include arched windows and entrances, masonry walls (often stone or brick in a combination of colors and textures), corner towers and asymmetrical massing. Everetts Christian Church, constructed in 1922, represents a vernacular, cost-effective approach to the Romanesque Revival style in its use of plain brick and

¹⁶ Thomas R. Butchko, ed., *Martin Architectural Heritage*, 244.

¹⁷ M. Ruth Little, Coastal Plain and Fancy: *The Historic Architecture of Lenoir County and Kinston, North Carolina* (Winston-Salem, NC: Jostens Printing and Publishing, 1998), 389.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 10

First Christian Church
Martin County, NC

modest architectural embellishment, which is also very much in keeping with the restrained exterior appearance of earlier Disciples of Christ churches in the state. Only the windows in the front gable of the sanctuary are topped by corbelled arches, and they originally contained frosted rather than stained glass. The crenellated parapet of the bell tower was covered with a pyramidal roof in a pragmatic remedy for ongoing water damage. The white walls and simple window and door trim on the interior are equally modest, enlivened only by a decorative pressed tin ceiling. Folding, paneled, wooden doors with frosted glass panes separate the sanctuary from the three Sunday School classrooms on the east side of the building. This efficient design, that allowed the partition doors to be opened to provide additional space for the regular worship service, was invented by a Sunday School teacher in Akron, Ohio in the 1860s.¹⁸

First Christian Church in Robersonville is a much more elaborate example of the Romanesque Revival style. The one-story, brick building has a cross-gable façade dominated by two sets of three arched stained-glass windows capped with corbelled, blonde-brick hoods. The two-story corner bell tower has a corbelled cornice surmounted by a crenellated parapet, arched window openings at the upper story and arched entries to a small porch on the lower story. Corbelled blonde brick hoods accent all of the arched openings in the tower. The eight-panel double-leaf front door is set at an angle and surrounded by stained-glass sidelights and a transom. Auxiliary double-leaf entrances on the south and west elevations are recessed in front-gable bays and topped with arched, stained-glass transoms. A cast-stone waster table, a cast-stone band at window sill level and a corbelled blonde brick band at window lintel level encircle the church, providing additional decorative interest. The interior of First Christian Church retains its original Akron plan, grained window and door trim, and plaster walls and ceilings.

Farmville Christian Church in Pitt County, built in 1910, is almost identical in form and plan to Robersonville First Christian Church. The Romanesque Revival brick churches share features such as round-arched stained-glass windows, double-leaf front doors and corner bell towers with crenellated parapets and arched entries. Farmville Christian Church is further distinguished by the vaulted, paneled ceiling in the sanctuary.¹⁹

¹⁸ See Catherine Bishir, *North Carolina Architecture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 325-327 for more on the Akron plan.

¹⁹ Scott Power, ed., *The Historic Architecture of Pitt County*, 404.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 11

First Christian Church
Martin County, NC

Gordon Street Christian Church in Kinston, constructed in 1915, and Broad Street Christian Church in New Bern, built in 1921, are much more sophisticated interpretations of national architectural styles. Gordon Street Christian Church is a monumental tan brick, Romanesque/Byzantine Revival-style building characterized by low massing, octagonal towers, a two-tier lantern dome and paired ogee-shaped entrance arches. Like the Martin County Disciples of Christ churches, Gordon Street's interior was originally arranged in an Akron plan, with Sunday School classrooms separated from the sanctuary with movable partitions. Broad Street Christian Church is an imposing yellow brick, Neoclassical Revival-style building with a pedimented classical façade supported by stuccoed columns. Two projecting front-gable porticoes shelter the entrances to the church, which has a semi-circular interior illuminated by the skylight in a central dome.²⁰

Martin County Disciples of Christ churches constructed in the mid-twentieth century continued to reflect broader national architectural trends. Hamilton Church of Christ, built in 1946, is a traditional front-gable, brick church with a projecting front-gable entry bay with a double-leaf door topped by a transom. Side-gable wings extend from the rear of the building. First Christian Church in Williamston, constructed from 1951 to 1953, is a modernist brick building.²¹

Many Martin County Disciples of Christ churches were brick-veneered in the 1960s and 1970s. Poplar Chapel Church of Christ, a front-gable, weatherboarded building constructed south of Jamesville in 1871, was brick-veneered in 1977. A projecting front-gable vestibule was also added at that time. Fairview Christian Church, also a front-gable, frame building has undergone similar changes. The church was built in 1905, added onto in 1948 and enlarged and brick-veneered in 1968. Building campaigns in 1966 and 1972-73 at Maple Grove Christian Church, constructed in 1910, resulted in a new baptistry, Sunday School rooms, a fellowship hall and brick veneer. Smithwick Chapel Disciple Church, built in 1932, has also been extensively remodeled and brick-veneered.²²

²⁰ M. Ruth Little, *Coastal Plain and Fancy*, 192; Peter Sandbeck, *The Historic Architecture of New Bern and Craven County, North Carolina* (New Bern: The Tryon Palace Commission, 1988), 161.

²¹ Shelby Hughes, ed., *Martin County Heritage*, 11, 13.

²² *Ibid.*, 9, 12, 19, 25, 34.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8, 9 Page 12

First Christian Church
Martin County, NC

Like many other North Carolina churches during the first decade of the twentieth century, First Christian Church features elements of popular national architectural trends. It is one of two extant Romanesque Revival-style Disciples of Christ churches in Martin County, and is by far the most elaborate example of the style. The building features a cross-gable façade dominated by two sets of three arched stained-glass windows capped with corbelled, blonde-brick hoods and a two-story corner bell tower with a corbelled cornice surmounted by a crenellated parapet. A cast-stone water table, a cast-stone band at window sill level and a corbelled blonde brick band at window lintel level provide additional visual interest. Everetts Christian Church also reflects national design trends in the arrangement of the Sunday School classrooms and sanctuary in an Akron plan.

9. Bibliography

Bishir, Catherine. *North Carolina Architecture*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990.

Butchko, Thomas R., ed. *Martin Architectural Heritage: The Historic Structures of a Rural North Carolina County*. Williamston, NC: Martin County Historical Society, 1998.

Fearnbach, Heather. "Churches of Christ and Disciples of Christ." In *Powerful Artifacts: A Guide to Surveying and Documenting Rural African-American Churches*. Murfreesboro, TN: Center for Historic Preservation, Middle Tennessee State University, 2000.

Garrison, Winifred Ernest, and Alfred T. DeGroot. *The Disciples of Christ: A History*. St. Louis, MO: Christian Board of Publication, 1948.

Gates, Errett. *The Early Relation and Separation of Baptists and Disciples*. Chicago, IL: The Christian Century Company, 1904.

Harrell, David Edwin, Jr. *The Social Sources of Division in the Disciples of Christ, 1865-1900*. Atlanta, GA: Publishing Systems, Inc., 1973.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 13

First Christian Church
Martin County, NC

Hazlip, Harold. "Churches of Christ," in Carroll Van West, et. al. eds., *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*. Nashville, TN: Tennessee Historical Society, 1998.

Hughes, Shelby Jean Nelson, ed. *Martin County Heritage*. Williamston, NC: Martin County Historical Society, 1980.

Little, M. Ruth. *Coastal Plain and Fancy: The Historic Architecture of Lenoir County and Kinston, North Carolina*. Winston-Salem, NC: Jostens Printing and Publishing, 1998.

Manning, Frances M., and W. H. Booker. *Religion and Education in Martin County, 1774-1974*. Williamston, NC: Enterprise Publishing Company, 1974.

North Carolina Christian Yearbook of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) of North Carolina. Wilson, NC: Charles Crossfield Ware, 1917-1929, 1945, 1950.

Power, Scott, ed. *The Historic Architecture of Pitt County, North Carolina*. Greenville, NC: Pitt County Historical Society, 1991.

Sandbeck, Peter. *The Historic Architecture of New Bern and Craven County, North Carolina*. New Bern, NC: The Tryon Palace Commission, 1988.

Wallace, Wilbur T. *Weekly Herald*. Robersonville, NC, no date.

Ware, Charles Crossfield. *Albemarle Annals*. New Bern, NC: Owen G. Dunn Company, 1961.

_____. *North Carolina Disciples of Christ*. St. Louis, MO: Christian Board of Publication, 1927.

Whitsett, William H. *Origin of the Disciples of Christ (Campbellites): A Contribution to the Centennial Anniversary of the Birth of Alexander Campbell*. New York, NY: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1888.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 10, Page 14
Photos

First Christian Church
Martin County, NC

10. Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property consists of Martin County tax parcel 07-02188 (.72 acres), as indicated by the heavy dashed line on the enclosed tax map 5715-8956.

Boundary Justification

The nominated tract contains the original site of the First Christian Church plus additional land acquired for the Education Building and parking lot and provides a historically appropriate setting for the property.

Photograph Catalog

All photographs by Penne Sandbeck, P.O. Box 6363, Raleigh, NC, on March 15, 2003.
Negatives located at the North Carolina HPO.

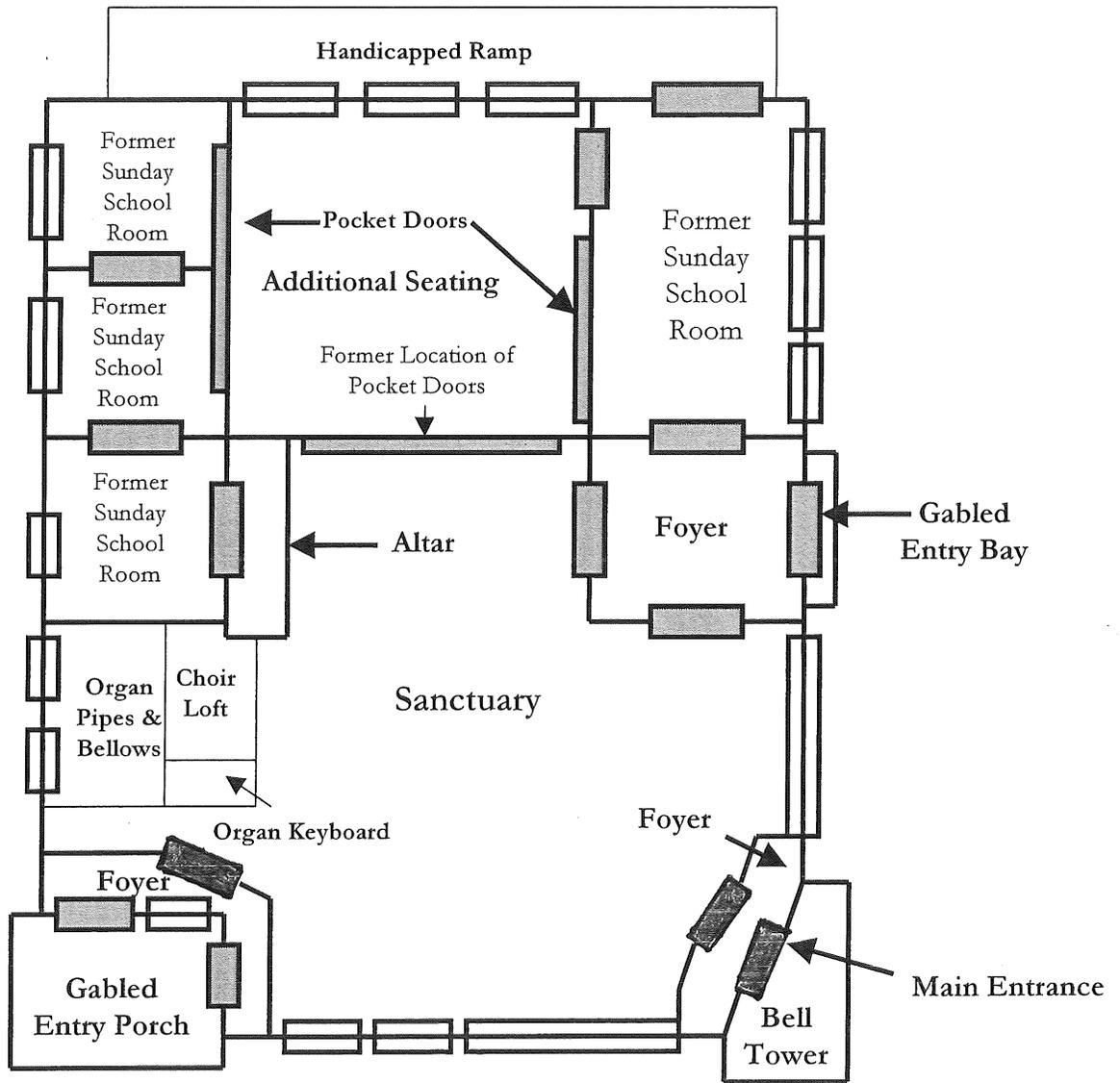
1. North and West Elevations
2. West and South Elevations
3. Sanctuary
4. Education Building
5. Cemetery

First Christian Church
 126 South Main Street
 Robersonville
 Martin County

Heather Fearnbach
 November 2004

1954 Education
 Building

Cemetery



-  Window
-  Door

Schematic Floor Plan

NTS



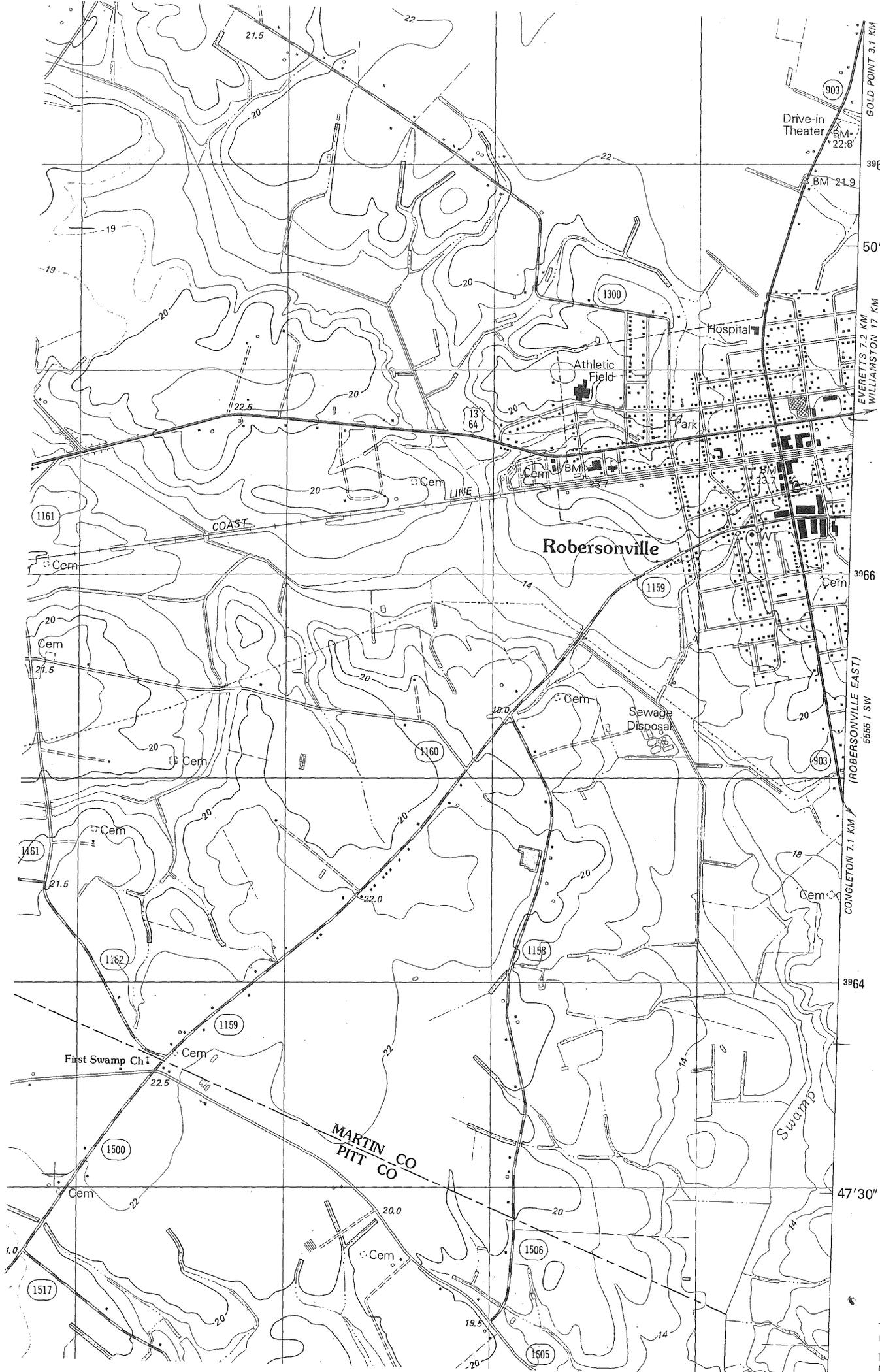
79

Scale 1" = 100'

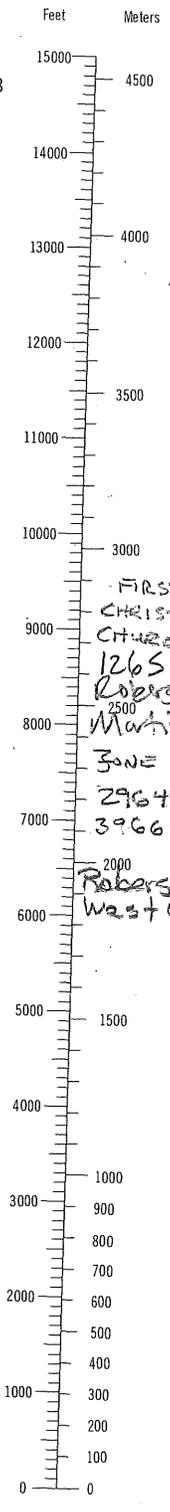
First Christian Church
126 South Main Street
Robersonville, Martin County



78



CONVERSION SCALES



FIRST
CHRISTIAN
CHURCH
126 S. Main St
Robersonville
2500
Martin Cem
3066 E
298463E
3966430 N
2000
Robersonville
West Quad

Feet	Meters
1	.3048
2	.6096
3	.9144
4	1.2192
5	1.5240
6	1.8288
7	2.1336
8	2.4384
9	2.7432
10	3.0480

To convert feet to meters multiply by .3048

To convert meters to feet multiply by 3.2808

