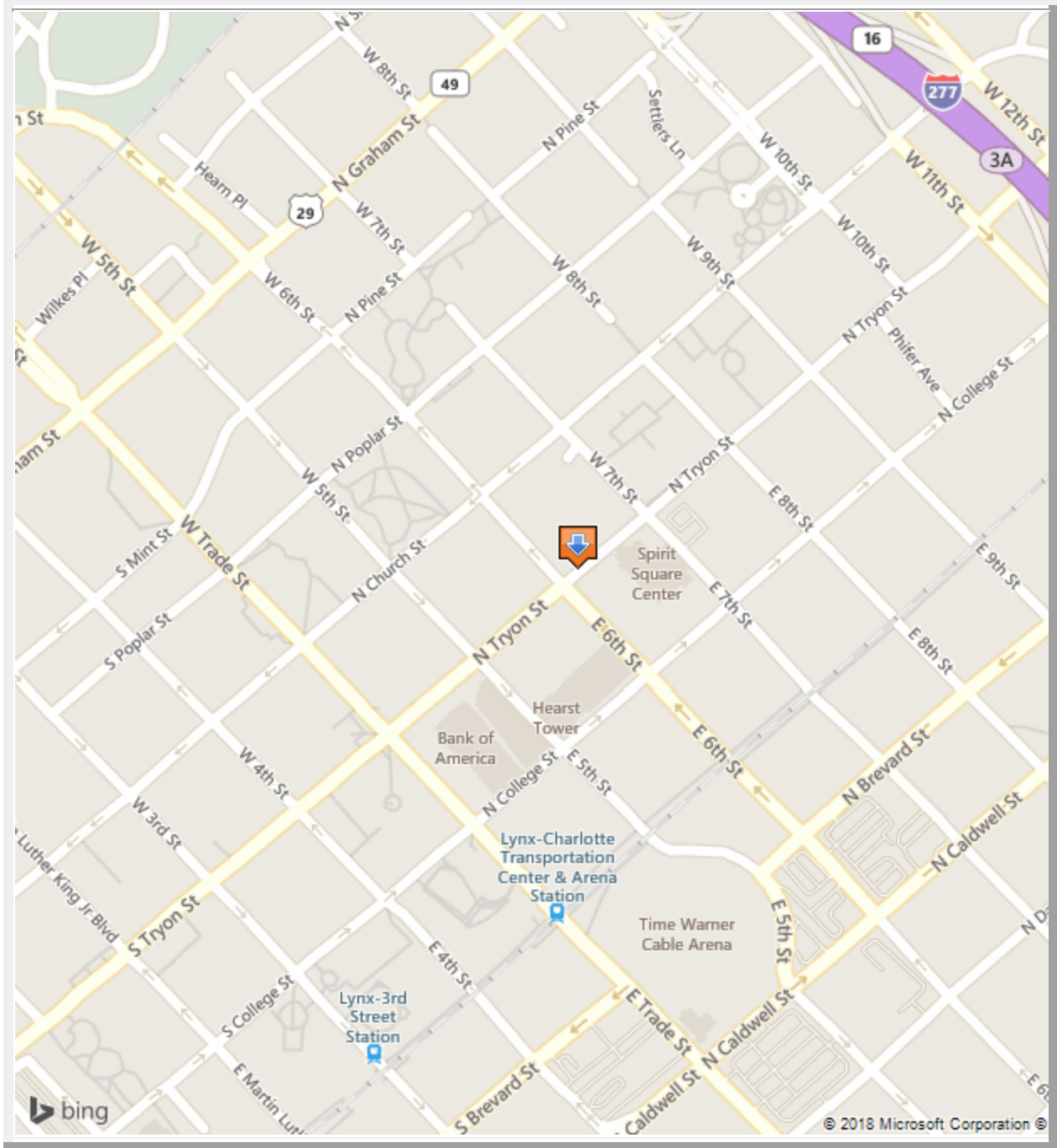


First Baptist Church



This report was written on April 5, 1975



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I. Statement of Purpose: It is the purpose of this document to measure the struture which formerly housed the First Baptist Church of Charlotte, N.C., against the criteria set forth in N. C. G. S. 160A-399.4 and against those established for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places.

II. Measurement against the criteria set forth in N. C. G. S. 160A-399.4:

A. Historical and cultural significance: The structure has considerable significance for the architectural fabric of the city. Constructed between August 1907 and May 1909, the building is an eclectic combination of Romanesque, Gothic, and Byzantine Revival. The large carved oak front doors introduce the visitor to a style of woodwork which persists throughout the sanctuary. The most imposing feature of the structure is the Byzantine Revival central dome. The stained glass windows are superior in quality and design. An impressive balcony surrounds the main sanctuary, thereby highlighting the vertical thrust of the interior toward the magnificent dome. Clearly, especially since no other local example of this style of architecture exists, the structure is of cultural significance to the city of Charlotte.

The historical significance of the structure rests upon the fact that for many years the building housed one of the most influential Christian congregations in the city of Charlotte.

B. Suitability for preservation and restoration: The building is in excellent repair. Therefore the structure is highly suitable for preservation. Very little, if any, restoration is necessary.

C. Educational Value: The educational value of the building rests upon the general contention that it is educational for human beings to visit structures of historical and cultural significance to the local community.

D. Cost of Acquisition, restoration, maintenance, operation or repair: The Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission has no intention of purchasing or recommending public purchase of this structure of this time. The asking price for the structure is \$335,000.00. As stated above, the building is in excellent repair. The cost of maintenance would be a responsibility of the eventual purchaser.

E. Possibilities for adaptive or alternative use of the property: The building is well suited for an adaptive or alternative use. Indeed, a local firm is seriously considering purchase of the structure for such a use.

F. Appraised Value: The Commission does not have knowledge of the appraised value of the structure. However, it can be reasonably assumed that the appraised value would reflect the asking price of the building which, as mentioned above, is \$335,000.00.

5. The administrative and financial responsibility of any person or organization willing to underwrite all or a portion of such costs: Except for the private firm which has expressed an interest in purchasing the structure and adapting it to contemporary use, no person or organization has officially expressed a willingness to shoulder the financial responsibilities associated with preserving or restoring the building.

II. Measurement against the criteria for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places: It is important to note that the structure is not on the National Register of Historic Places. Indeed the Commission has made no efforts to secure such designation for the structure.

A. That possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. The Building does form a viable aesthetic unit, both in terms of itself and in terms of its overall urban setting.

B. That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history. The Commission does not know of any events of broad national significance associated with this building.

C. That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction. It is my judgment that this structure, although of considerable architectural and historical significance to the local community, does not possess sufficient aesthetic value to allow it to overcome the usual exclusion of churches from the National Register.

D. That are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past. The Commission does not know of any individuals of broad national significance whose lives are associated with this building.

E. That have yielded or may be likely to yield information important in prehistory or history. The accompanying reports provide no information to suggest that the structure meets this criterion.

Respectfully Submitted,
Dan L. Morrill, Director
139 Middleton Dr.
Charlotte, N.C. 28207

Telephone: 332-2726

FROM: RESEARCH COMMITTEE

TO: HISTORIC PROPERTIES COMMISSION

SUBJECT: FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH BUILDING

REFERENCE: INFORMATION AND RESEARCH AVAILABLE ON THE BUILDING. (SEE BIBLIOGRAPHY)

Property description: The site is described and bounded as follows: Beginning at a rock on the side of Trade Street at the intersection of Cedar Street and runs with Trade Street towards the Air Line Railroad 52 1/2 feet; thence back towards Fourth Street 192 feet to a stake; Thence in a line parallel with Trade Street 68 feet to Cedar Street; Thence with Cedar Street 190 feet to the beginning. ¹

Date of construction: August 1907 - May 2, 1909.

Historical sketch:

As 1906 drew to a close, members of the church were discussing the need for a new church building. The congregation had grown so much that a larger structure seemed an absolute necessity. Plans were made to begin a new \$50,000.00 auditorium in the spring.

J. A. Durham and R. H. Jordan, trustees of First Baptist Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, paid the trustees of Oliviet Baptist of Charlotte, North Carolina, \$1.00 for the property to build their new church building. ²

The story of the building's erection prepared from information from *The Charlotte Observer*:

"January 14, 1907, the church unanimously and enthusiastically Adopted a recommendation of the deacons that a new church Building be erected. J. A. Durham was elected chairman of the Building committee. Others named to serve were T. S. Franklin, W. C. Dowd, R. H. Jordan, Willis Brown, H. G. Harper, and H. H. Hulten." ³

Pews seating more than one thousand were purchased from the American Seating Company and a Molier organ was installed at a cost of \$5,000.00. A Swedish artist named Olsen, from New York City, did the frescoing and a beautiful picture of Christ, the Good Shepherd, over the pulpit. ⁴

Chimes were added to the organ in 1925. They were the gift of John C. Shepherd and his brothers, in memory of their parents, Marshall Lafayette and Nancy Shepherd. ⁵

A Kilgen organ was installed to replace the Molier in 1938. ⁶

A beautiful marble baptistry, two side balconies, and an air-conditioning system were added in 1946 under the leadership of Pastor C. C. Warren. ⁷

Architectural description: J. M. Mcmichael was chosen to be the architect and the Byzantine architectural scheme emphasizing the central dome effect was adopted. ⁸

Attachments: see attached photo-copy of deed 224:68 and deed 62:184.

Reference

¹ Deed book #224, page 68, filed June 13, 1906, in the register of deeds Office, Mecklenburg County .

² Same as above.

³ From the information of *The Charlotte Observer* as printed in *The Biography of a Thriving Church*, John Marvin Crowe, 1953, page 63-64.

⁴ *The Biography of a Thriving Church*, John Marvin Crowe, 1953, page 64.

⁵ Same as above.

⁶ Same as above.

⁷ Same as above.

⁸ Same as above.

To: Members of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission

From: Frances Gay, Survey Committee

Date: November 13, 1974 .

Re: a formal request for local designation for the First Baptist Church Sanctuary and placement of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg listing of significant structures.

The main sanctuary, a Charlotte landmark to many of Charlotte-Mecklenburg citizens, fronts on N. Tryon St. and is located next to the library. This structure is classified as Romanesque and was built in 1908-1909. The green dome adds individualization to the growing skyline of glass and steel. The boxy shape and arches, characteristic of this architectural Period, is of great importance to the visual architectural heritage which developed as Charlotte began its growth at the turn of the century.

This structure is one of the more distinctive creations of architect James M. McMichael who designed more than one thousand churches. Some of those still standing are: St. John's Baptist and Myers Park Presbyterian, which are all familiar to us. Charlotte has unfortunately lost other

significant McMichael structures in the name of progress. The prize example being the Carnegie Library about fifteen years ago and whose dome and arched windows complemented the First Baptist Church for almost fifty years. Both the Library and the church gave a stately impression which will linger in the minds of many of the "then youngsters" as they either worshipped in the church or studied to acquire knowledge in the grandiose surroundings of the library.

Please note the attached xerox photographs by Jeep Hunter of the *Charlotte News*, July 13, 1972 which emphasizes some of the main architectural features.

1. The magnificent stained glass windows which is an art in itself.
2. The large carved oak doors (the style of woodwork is carefully carried through the interior stairways and vestibule as well as the sanctuary).
3. Portion of the imposing dome on the exterior.
4. The large sanctuary with a full surrounding balcony.

It is the recommendation of the Survey Committee that this structure should be designated and placed on the local listing of significant structures to offer it the ninety day protection afforded all structures on the local list. It is indeed a style of architecture that represents an era that ought not to be wiped from the Charlotte landscape by the hungry bulldozer. It has been the site where many Charlotte leaders have worshipped and seen their beloved city grow and progress beyond their dreams.

In an article by Jane Roehcs in the *Charlotte News* on July 28, 1972, Cleve Scarbrough of the Mint Museum was quoted as saying:

"Ut's an eclectic combination of Romanesque and Gothic with a little Byzantine thrown in and is typical of the type thing that was built at the turn of the century. It gave people a feeling of solidity, of reference to the past. Only time will tell whether it is historically important. It's not my prerogative to say."

The survey committee also recommends that the Historic Properties Commission actively seek an adaptive use to economically support this structure and prevent its demise by the omnipresent bulldozer making way for parking lots or other useless and senseless purposes. With a total of 40,000 feet in the sanctuary and educational buildings adjoining the proposed designated structure, an adaptive imaginative utilization should not be difficult to stimulate.
