



FIRST UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



This report was written on Feb 28, 1977

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as First United Presbyterian Church is located at 400 N. College St. in Charlotte, N.C.

2. Name, address and telephone number of the present owner and occupant of the property: The present owner and occupant of the property is:

Seventh St. United Presbyterian Church USA, Inc.
400 N. College St.
Charlotte, N.C. 28202

Telephone: 376-8014

3. Representative photographs of the property: This report contains representative photographs of the property.

4. A map depicting the location of the property: This report contains a map depicting the location of the property.

compete successfully for power and status. Consequently, blacks began to create their own institutions, where they could develop and practice the skills which the dominant culture rewarded and where they could sustain and nurture one another. Especially important to the emerging black community were its churches. Energetic and resourceful blacks associated membership in the white man's church with the institution of slavery and therefore had no desire to continue to worship there. Mrs. Kathleen Hayes of Charlotte, N.C., summoned the black members of First Presbyterian Church to "come down out of the gallery and worship God on the main floor." Rev. Samuel C. Alexander, a white Presbyterian missionary from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, came to Charlotte soon after the war and purchased property at what is now Davidson and Third Sts., where Mrs. Hayes and her small band commenced to worship.

Apparently, the black congregation prospered, because on February 20, 1873, the "Charlotte Colored Presbyterian Church" bought for \$900 the lot at E. Seventh & N. College Sts. owned by F. W. and Laura A. Ahrens. On December 20, 1876, the congregation secured a loan of \$800 from the Church Erection Fund of the Synod of Atlanta and Presbytery of Catawba. Tradition holds that the black Presbyterians moved into a structure which had been used by a Lutheran congregation. The documents in the Register of Deeds Office, however, do not support this contention. The congregation most probably continued to meet at Davidson and Third Sts. until the new facility was completed. In any case, the black Presbyterians were worshipping in a substantial structure at E. Seventh and N. College Sts. in 1877. Established in 1866 as the Colored Presbyterian Church of Charlotte, the congregation renamed itself the Seventh Street Presbyterian Church.

The present edifice was erected in the mid-1890's during the pastorate of R. P. Wyche. On July 13, 1896, the Board of Trustees secured a loan of \$1000 from the Church Erection Fund of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. Apparently, this money was used to complete the new building, which had begun to rise in 1894. The building was constructed by the members themselves, working in evenings and on weekends. Supervising much of the work was Mr. William Pethel, a prominent member of the church who resided at 500 N. Myers St. The members were no doubt pleased by the product of their labor. The structure was among the more notable houses of worship in the City and certainly bore testimony to the advance of the black people of the region. Seventh Street Presbyterian Church merged with Brooklyn Presbyterian Church in 1968 to form the First United Presbyterian Church. The congregation continues to occupy the building at N. College and Seventh Sts. Throughout its history the church has participated prominently in the evolution of the black community of Charlotte, N.C. It was intimately associated with the early history of Biddle Memorial Institute, later Johnson C. Smith University. Indeed, Stephen Mattoon, President of Biddle Institute and grandfather of Norman Thomas, was one of its ministers.

7. A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains an architectural description prepared by Jack O. Boyte, A.I.A.

8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria set forth in N.C.G.S. 160A-399.4:

a. Historical and cultural significance: The First United Presbyterian Church is historically and culturally significant for two reasons. First, it is one of the older Gothic Revival Churches in the City of Charlotte. Second, it is an important document in the history of the black people of Charlotte, N.C.

b. Suitability for preservation and restoration: The structure is in good repair and certainly can be preserved in its current configuration.

c. Educational value: The property has educational value as an important document in the black history of Charlotte, N.C.

d. Cost of acquisition, restoration, maintenance or repair: At present the Commission has no intention of purchasing this property: It assumes that all costs associated with renovating and maintaining the structure will be paid by the owner or subsequent owners of the property.

e. Possibilities for adaptive or alternative use of the property: The structure would be suitable for a variety of purposes. However, the Commission hopes that the building will continue to be used by the First United Presbyterian Church as a House of Worship.

f. Appraised value: The current tax appraisal of the structure itself is \$59,290 and for the .414 acres of land \$45,130. The Commission is aware that designation of the property as a historic property would allow the owner to apply annually for an automatic deferral of 50% of the rate upon which the Ad Valorem taxes are calculated.

g. The administrative and financial responsibility of any person or organization willing to underwrite all or a portion of such costs: As indicated earlier, at present the Commission has no intention of purchasing this property. Furthermore, the Commission assumes that all costs associated with the structure and property will be met by whatever party now owns or will own the property.

9. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria established for listing in the National Register of Historic Places: The Commission believes that the property known as the First United Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, N.C., does meet the criteria of the National Register of Historic Places. Basic to the Commission's understanding of the purpose of the National Register. Established in 1966, the National Register represents the decision of the Federal Government to expand its listing of historic properties to include properties of local and State significance. The Commission believes that the First United Presbyterian Church is of local historic significance and therefore meets the criteria for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

10. Documentation of why and in what ways the property is of historic importance to to Charlotte and/or Mecklenburg County: The property known as the First United Presbyterian Church is historically important to Charlotte, N.C., because it houses the oldest black

Presbyterian congregation in the City. It is also one of the older Gothic Revival structures in Charlotte, N.C.

Bibliography

An Inventory of Older Buildings In Mecklenburg County And Charlotte For the Historic Properties Commission.

F. W. Beers Map of Charlotte.

LeGette Blythe and Charles Brockmann, *Hornets' Nest* (Charlotte, N.C.: MacNally of Charlotte 1961), p. 214.

Charlotte City Directory (1879-80, 1893-94, 1896-97, 1897-98).

Lydia C. Pride, "Early History of Seventh Street United Presbyterian Church, U.S.A."

Records of the Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office.

Records of the Mecklenburg County Tax Office.

Sanborn Insurance Maps.

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Architectural Description

Throughout the nineteenth century religious architectural design was strongly influenced by the great European Gothic churches, whose beginnings went as far back as the twelfth century. In the nineteenth century there seemed to be a universal feeling that Gothic forms and church buildings belonged together. American architects followed this mode consistently in church designs. A number of handbooks on the style were published by mid-century. So during the early

Gothic Revival period, as well as in the late period, designers copied the mannerisms of true Gothic, and this resulted in a distinctive eclectic style.

Facing south at the corner of College and Brevard Street, the Seventh Street Presbyterian Church building is an extraordinary example of this eclectic architectural style. A rectangular structure measuring some 54 feet across the front and 70 feet deep, the original building rests on a high solid brick foundation wall enclosing a partial cellar. Exterior walls are all American bond consisting of repeated header courses separated by five courses of stretchers.

The entrance elevation on Seventh Street features a high gabled center section flanked on each side by large square buttressed towers. The left, or western, corner tower soars through three tiers to a four sided, slate covered spire terminating in a large cross. At the first floor doubled paneled entrance doors are cantered in the tower base, set in a pointed arch frame with wooden tracery above the doors. In the gabled center section is another double door entrance, flanked by narrow, high, diamond light windows with pointed arch heads. At the right there is a single matching window centered in the tower base. A continuous brick band formed by three projecting courses defines the second tier level. The left corner tower has two small pointed arch windows at the second level. In the center section are three tall narrow diamond light windows centered over the entrance doors below. The right tower terminates at this level with a steep pitched roof covered in slate shingles. Above the second tier another three brick band defines the third level. In the corner tower are two tall pointed arch louvered openings which enclose the tower bell room on four sides. The center gable at the third tier features a large circle louvered vent in the gable wall and has stepped brick corbeling at the gable rake. Dark flashed brick are used in feature details such as horizontal bands, corbeling and above pointed arches.

On the west side the grade slopes to the rear, exposing the cellar wall. Centered in this wall is a cellar entrance door with a ventilating transom window. Above the door frame is a curved brick arch formed by three header courses of flashed brick. A small gabled roof cover of later construction now shelters this entrance. Along the exterior brick cellar wall, forward of this door, a brick stairway rises in a covered outside arcade to a pair of doors which lead to the nave. Now enclosed with metal louvers, the arcade has two pointed outside arches. The inside nave wall has a pointed arch stained glass window beside the similarly arched door opening.

Another feature of the west side is a high gabled wing which forms half of the side facade. Defined by buttressed pilasters at each corner, this gable has a three section stained glass window centered at the nave level. Wooden dividing mullions rise to carved geometric tracery in an upper pointed arch. Each of the three sections has a pivoted lower ventilator. Flanking this window are two narrow side windows, again with Gothic arch tops. In the high gable wall is a large circular louvered red vent banded with flashed brick headers. At the rake of this roof are corbeled, stepped brick features similar to those in the front gable.

On the opposite side, facing the east, the facade mirrors the composition of the west side. Where the arcaded stairway occurs on the west, there is no east stair. In this wall, rather, there are two stained glass windows with typical Gothic arches above.

At the rear the original wall is now concealed within an addition added soon after the turn of the century. This addition is only large enough to provide a study, an organ chamber, and a choir room at the north side of the sanctuary. Also in this wing is a second stairway leading to the cellar.

In plan the church follows a classical cross form. Front and rear walls form the high gables described above, and at each side of the crossing shallow wings extend to like sized high gable walls. The slate covered roof surfaces also follow this cross form and have a small cupola above the intersection of the ridge lines at the crossing. This cupola has four slate covered roof surfaces rising steeply to a ball and point crest. At third points in the main roof slate surface, there are four rows of slate with chamfered edges. These special shapes create a typical Victorian fish scale tile pattern.

At the front there is a shallow narthex at the center. From this room there are two pairs of paneled wood doors, glazed in the upper half with opaque patterned glass, leading to side aisles in the nave. Through the tower doors at the west front corner one enters a small square anteroom which also opens to the side aisle of the nave. In the east front tower is a winding oak stairway which rises to a small balcony at the second tier level. Having a solid curved rail arching out from the rear nave wall, this balcony is a narrow platform facing the main auditorium, and was likely the choir loft in the original plan.

Upon entering the sanctuary through any of the several exterior doors one encounters a soaring space of carefully scaled proportion and finished with skillfully executed details. Through stained glass windows on three aides, natural light floods the auditorium. This soft illumination enhances the warmth of the dark stained woodwork throughout the room. A high wainscot of beaded pine strips runs continuously around the perimeter. Above this the walls are smooth plaster rising to the spring line of the ceiling vaults. Where window openings occur the windows are surrounded with angular plaster jambs rising to pointed Gothic arches above. Window stools all occur at the top of the wainscot rail.

Typical of Gothic Revival interior design, the ceiling is formed with a series of ribbed, pointed vaults of narrow beaded wood. Above the crossing these ribbed vaults come together in a spectacular canopy over the pulpit platform. Below this crossing there is a remarkable chandelier of massive proportions. Crafted in a manner which indicates that it was originally for gas, the fixture provides a highly decorative feature in the center of the nave.

This fine building is an extraordinary example of church design most popular during the late Victorian period in Charlotte. During this time the prospering Queen City saw a number of congregations from many different denominations erect new buildings. With few exceptions these new buildings were done in this late Gothic Revival style. The First United Presbyterian Church building is historically significant as an example of this important architectural style. In addition, its unique origin from the efforts of one of Charlot