

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name First Baptist Church, Lexington
other names/site number VDHR file no. 117-0027-0063

2. Location

street & number 103 North Main Street N/A not for publication
city or town Lexington N/A vicinity
state VA code VA county Lexington (city) code 678 zip code 24450

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Virginia Department of Historic Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria. (___ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this 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 Baptist Church, Lexington
Name of Property

Lexington, Virginia
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property Category of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply) (Check only one box)

private building(s)
 public-local district
 public-State site
 public-Federal structure
 object

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

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

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

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed
in the National Register**

1 (the church would be considered contributing within the
Lexington Historic District if there were an inventory done
in January 1971 when this district was listed on both the
VLR and NRHP)

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

<i>Category</i>	<i>Subcategory</i>
<u>RELIGION</u>	<u>religious facility (church)</u>

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

<i>Category</i>	<i>Subcategory</i>
<u>RELIGION</u>	<u>religious facility (church)</u>

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Gothic Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

<u>foundation</u>	<u>Stone</u>
<u>walls</u>	<u>Brick, Stucco</u>
<u>roof</u>	<u>Asphalt</u>
<u>other</u>	<u>Wood, Glass, Metal</u>

Narrative Description

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

First Baptist Church, Lexington

Name of Property

State

Lexington, Virginia

County and

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 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 fifty years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Ethnic Heritage (Black)

Architecture

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Period of Significance

1896-1956

Architect/Builder

Bogher, E. N. (architect)

Jones, Richard (carpenter)

Poindexter, Irk (mason)

Moores, the (masons)

Barckhoff, Carl (organ manufacturer)

Significant Dates

1896

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

Primary location of additional data:

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other

Name of repository:

___ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

First Baptist Church, Lexington
Name of Property
State

Lexington, Virginia
County and

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property approximately 0.37 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
17	637290	4183000	3		
2			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	J. Daniel Pezzoni				
organization	Landmark Preservation Associates	date	January 8, 2005		
street & number	6 Houston St.	telephone	(540) 464-5315		
city or town	Lexington	state	VA	zip code	24450

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 the SHPO or FPO.)

name	First Baptist Church Congregation c/o Mrs. Rosalya Mack Wiggins				
street & number	103 North Main Street (PO Box 1009)	telephone	(540) 463-3558		
city or town	Lexington	state	VA	zip code	24450

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.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

First Baptist Church, Lexington
Lexington, Virginia

Section number 7 Page 1

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

Summary

First Baptist Church, Lexington (1894-96) is a large Gothic Revival church of gable-fronted nave form with towers at its two front corners. The northwest-facing church is constructed of stretcher-bond brick on a limestone basement and has asphalt-shingle roofing, round and lancet-arch stained glass windows, an apse, and a belfry and spire on the right-hand tower. The barrel-vaulted auditorium has a gallery on turned posts and the basement classroom and meeting spaces have folding doors with translucent glass panels. The lot on which First Baptist stands, measuring approximately 0.37 acres, is sunk below the grades of Main and Henry streets, which bound the lot on the northwest and southwest sides respectively. The lot is planted in grass and is enclosed by limestone retaining walls. A small branch—a tributary of Woods Creek and the Maury River—flows behind the building. At the south corner of the lot next to the branch is a limestone rubble foundation that is not historically associated with the church. Surrounding lots are developed with mostly historic private residences, fraternity houses, and brick commercial buildings, the latter representing the north end of Lexington's downtown commercial area. First Baptist Church, Lexington, possesses excellent integrity from the period of significance (1896-1956).

Inventory

1. First Baptist Church, Lexington. 1894-96. Contributing building.
2. Foundation. 19th century. Noncontributing site.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

First Baptist Church, Lexington
Lexington, Virginia

Section number 7 Page 2

Description (continued)

Exterior

First Baptist's dominant features are its two front towers. The right-hand tower is the tallest; according to an 1896 account it rises 104½ feet above the foundation. The bottom two stages of the tower are brick and have slightly recessed bays with inward-stepping bases and corbelled tops. (The same wall treatment characterizes the elevations of the other tower, the sides of the church, and its rear elevation and apse.) The first stage has a pair of tall lancet-arch stained glass windows, the normative window type throughout the church. The sunburst design of the glass in the window arches and the heavy molded wood window frames are also typical. On the southwest side of the tower is a side entrance with a lancet stained glass transom and a replacement six-panel metal door. The door is reached by a small platform with a coursed limestone foundation, a railing made from Victorian cast iron fence panels, and a short concrete handicap ramp. The second stage of the tower has chamfered corners with complicated corbelling and stepping of the brickwork at the top and bottom of the chamfers. Three faces of the second stage have round windows, each with clear glass panes and muntins that form a six-pointed star pattern. The two brick stages of the tower are crowned with corbelling (as are the two brick stages of the lower left-hand tower). The third or top stage is a frame belfry with tongue-and-groove sheathing and large rectangular openings with wood louvers. Above rises an octagonal spire that is sheathed in its original shingle-pattern pressed metal. Tall gabled dormer-like features project on four faces of the spire, each containing paired lancet-arch openings with trefoil cutouts above. At the top of the spire is a decorative metal weathervane.

At the base of the shorter left-hand tower is a limestone cornerstone inscribed "1st Baptist Church / July 4, 1894 / W. T. Johnson D. D." The tower's first stage is identical to the first stage of the right-hand tower although it has only a single window. It too has a side entrance with a lancet stained glass transom, a replacement six-panel metal door, and a platform with a cast iron fence railing, although the platform is reached by concrete steps. The front and side of the second stage each have a large lancet-arch opening with wood tracery mostly filled in with beaded tongue-and-groove sheathing and with a row of three clear glass lancet-arch windows at the bottom. The tower has a pyramidal roof with a metal finial (this roof, the roof of the apse, and the main roof are roofed with asphalt shingles). Between the towers is the gabled front façade, which has a large center entry with replacement double-leaf six-panel metal doors and a lancet-arch stained glass transom with a design of a cross above arabesques. Above is a large rose window with heavy muntins that form a six-pointed star design. At the center is a circle of red glass with petals of blue and purple. Other details are in white or yellow glass. The gable is defined by raking courses of stretcher-bond brickwork with a small diamond-shaped vent in the apex and a limestone coping.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

First Baptist Church, Lexington
Lexington, Virginia

Section number 7 Page 3

Description (continued)

Each side elevation has six lancet-arch windows in recessed bays. There is one memorial window: the second window on the southwest side, which has glass in a different color combination, a stylized palm tree design, and a bottom panel inscribed "Presented by / J. A. Pettigrew / Thomas Evans / John Fleming." At the bottom of the roof slopes are wooden ice guards. The apse on the rear elevation is rectangular in plan and has a gable roof and a circular window high on its southeast side with a diamond-shaped pane at the center and radiating muntins. In the apex of the rear gable is a small diamond-shaped vent like that in the front gable.

The basement has walls of coursed limestone rubble with a top course of more regular quarryface blocks. The large windows have six-over-six sash except for one window under the apse which is four-over-four. The main basement entrance is at the back of a deep barrel-vaulted recess in the base of the left-hand tower entry platform. The entrance has a three-light transom and a replacement nine-panel metal door. The front arch of the recess is defined by quarryface voussoirs. From the east corner of the basement projects the utility wing, composed of two shed-roofed brick additions constructed at different times but both apparently in the 1920s. The first addition, which abuts the apse, is a boiler room constructed of handmade brick (presumably reused) with a tall brick flue that extends above the main church roof. The second addition is constructed of sloppily laid brick that is hidden on the two elevations visible from Main Street by a cement rendering scored in imitation of ashlar masonry. This addition has a six-over-six window, panel door, and evidence of a former stove hole on the side facing Main Street. According to a long time church member it was once used for coal storage.

Interior

The interior is characterized by plaster finish walls, wood floors, wood panel doors (with porcelain, pottery, or metal knobs; many with decorative butt hinges), molded wood trim (varnished or painted), and, in many spaces, wainscots of vertical beaded tongue-and-groove. The interior woodwork originally had a "natural finish" that was probably a dark varnish similar to that which survives on unpainted woodwork. The front entry opens into a vestibule with a sloped coffer-pattern pressed metal ceiling. Panel doors lead to stairways in the two towers and double-leaf eight-panel doors open into the auditorium or "audience room" as it was referred to in an 1896 article. The auditorium walls are painted white over the green color they had during the first half of the twentieth century. The auditorium floor slopes to a curved altar dais at the southeast end. Along the three non-altar sides of the space extends a gallery on stout turned posts. The gallery has a stepped floor and a paneled solid railing with beaded tongue-and-groove in the panels. The gallery is reached by four stairs, two in the towers and one to either side of the altar dais. The stairs have turned balusters, plain square upper newels, and square bottom newels

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

First Baptist Church, Lexington
Lexington, Virginia

Section number 7 Page 4

Description (continued)

with molding, fluting, and platter-like finials. The auditorium is furnished with twentieth-century wood pews with carved ends. In the gallery are two types of nineteenth century pews constructed with cut nails. One type is simple in detail and has a seat that is mortised into the end boards and to a central support. These pews are grained and have numerous inscriptions carved or written in pencil on the backs. The other pew type features fluting and turned ornaments on the end boards. One or both varieties of the gallery pews are surviving examples of the pews that formerly stood on the main floor.

The auditorium has a barrel-vaulted ceiling with molded wood ribs that spring from brackets at the top of the walls, molded trim boards that run perpendicular to the ribs, and beaded tongue-and-groove sheathing. The ceiling is presently painted white, although until recent decades it had a dark varnished finish, probably the original treatment. From the midpoint of the ceiling hang globe lights with painted decoration on the milk glass globes. In the apse behind the choir, which is fronted by a low railing with draperies, is an organ manufactured by Carl Barckhoff of Basic, Virginia, and installed in 1918 (see statement of significance section for discussion of Barckhoff). The organ is screened by gilded false organ pipes that rise from a case ornamented with round-arch panels, corner colonnettes, and posts with pinnacles. A white neon cross is mounted to the front of the false pipes. Mounted on the wall to the left of the altar dais is a framed document that commemorates the 1905 burning of the construction mortgage entitled "Gideon's Famous Three Hundred of First Baptist Church, Lexington Va." The document incorporates in its frame metal capsules containing the ashes of the mortgage, and it is illustrated with photographs of deacons and bondsmen who helped finance the construction of the church. It is signed "J. H. Blackwell / Artist Penman / Manchester, Virginia."

Stairs to either side of the altar lead down to the basement. Typical basement finishes include plaster walls (now painted white, formerly painted tan), composition floor tiles on concrete, and a pressed metal ceiling with a reticulated grid pattern (hidden by drop ceilings in a few secondary spaces). Two rows of chamfered posts with molded caps run the length of the basement. Between the posts are folding partitions that create Sunday School classrooms and meeting rooms to the sides. The partitions, added in 1964, have translucent glass panels above solid panels. They are mostly complete on the northeast side but have been partially replaced by sheetrock partitions with hollow core doors on the southwest side. There are also unglazed folding partitions between the individual rooms (some of these have also been replaced with non-folding partitions). At the southeast end of the main central room are two chamfered posts that support a baptismal tank that is accessed through the floor of the pulpit dais in the auditorium. The tank hangs down into the space of the basement and is sheathed with beaded tongue-and-groove boards. At the foot of the two chamfered posts is a speaker's dais with a beaded tongue-and-groove base and between the posts is board infill that creates a sounding

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

First Baptist Church, Lexington
Lexington, Virginia

Section number 7 Page 5

Description (continued)

board. Behind the two posts are men's and women's restrooms that may incorporate or replace men's and women's dressing rooms described in an 1896 article. From this area rise two stairs with solid beaded tongue-and-groove railings. One stair leads up to the apse; the other is no longer in use.

At the northwest end of the main central room are two rooms described in 1896 as a committee room and a pastor's study. The doors to both rooms have one-light transoms. The room on the northeast side, entered through a four-panel door, is the present office. The other room, which has served as a kitchen since at least the 1930s, is entered through a wood and glass panel door. A pass-through with a batten hatch allows food to be passed out from the kitchen. The kitchen has a mix of late twentieth century base cabinets and older furniture such as a table with turned legs and a glass-fronted cabinet. At the far northwest end of the basement, reached through double-leaf eight-panel doors, is a hallway that connects to the main basement entrance through a vestibule. The doorway between the hallway and vestibule also has double-leaf eight-panel doors as well as a three-pane transom (matching that over the exterior door) and a paneled reveal.

The church is surrounded on three sides by a sunken lawn bounded by limestone retaining walls along Main and Henry streets. At the top of the walls are pipe railings added in the mid-twentieth century (possibly in the 1960s). Limestone steps and a concrete walk lead down from Main Street to the main basement entrance on the northeast side of the church. At the west corner of the lot, the corner of Main and Henry, are crude limestone steps that are no longer in use (the pipe railing passes in front of them). At the top of the retaining wall near the right-hand tower entrance is a square limestone block that may once have served as a base for a lamp post. At the south corner of the lot, next to the branch, is a roughly triangular limestone foundation that supports a concrete pavement. The foundation is located at the site of a stone blacksmith shop that is depicted on an 1886 map. The concrete pavement may date to the early twentieth century when the building was apparently rebuilt in frame and used as a garage. In front of the church stands a brick sign with a segmental top and a limestone base. The sign incorporates a glass-fronted bulletin board below an interior-illuminated translucent glass panel painted with the inscription "First Baptist Church The Friendly Church." At the base of the sign is a small metal plaque inscribed "Presented by Woman's Club 1957."

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

First Baptist Church, Lexington
Lexington, Virginia

Section number 8 Page 6

NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Summary

First Baptist Church, Lexington, originally known as Lexington African Baptist Church, was organized in 1867. In 1894-96 the present church building was erected by black masons and carpenters according to a design by architect E. N. Bogher. The Gothic Revival brick and stone church is one of the most visible historic buildings in downtown Lexington, and its two towers are defining features of the town's skyline. Historically First Baptist played a central role in the life of Lexington's African American community. As historian Theodore C. DeLaney Jr. notes, First Baptist "helped the community to meet the challenges of transition from slavery to freedom."¹

Applicable Criteria

First Baptist Church, Lexington, is individually eligible for the National Register under Criteria A and C in the areas of Ethnic Heritage (Black) and Architecture. The church would also be regarded as a contributing building in the state and national register-listed Lexington Historic District, which presently lacks an inventory. The foundation located on the property is listed as noncontributing because it is not historically associated with the church and was acquired in recent decades (it may be regarded as a contributing resource in the Lexington Historic District, however). The period of significance extends from the date of the building's completion in 1896 until 1956, encompassing sixty years of the period of First Baptist's significant association with the Lexington African American community. The church is eligible at the local level of significance.

Acknowledgments

The nomination was sponsored by the First Baptist Church Congregation, represented by church member Mrs. Rosalya Mack Wiggins, and was assisted by church members Elvira Brooks, Edlow A. Morrison, and Mabel Poindexter; C. Vaughan Stanley, Washington and Lee University Special Collections librarian; historians and architectural historians Theodore C. Delaney Jr., Delos D. Hughes, and Pamela H. Simpson; and Jean McRae, Michael Pulice, and Marc Wagner of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

First Baptist Church, Lexington
Lexington, Virginia

Section number 8 Page 7

Statement of Significance (continued)

Historic Context

In 1867 the black membership of Lexington Baptist Church (the present Manly Memorial Baptist Church) petitioned for “letters of dismission” in order to form a separate congregation in Lexington. Blacks had been among the earliest members of Lexington Baptist Church. When the church was founded in 1841 its first convert was Milton Smith, a black man who later served as one of two deacons for the congregation’s black members. Washington and Lee University historian Theodore C. DeLaney Jr. writes that the choice of Smith as the first convert symbolized a desire for inclusiveness on the part of the Lexington Baptist Church congregation’s founders. “If the Baptists had any notion about catching up with the Methodists in evangelization of slaves, that is exactly what happened,” Delaney comments on Lexington’s white Baptists and the Baptists of Virginia in general. He writes:

The Baptist church attracted large numbers of black converts for several reasons. Mainly, the church identified with the masses of underprivileged people in the United States. Highly democratic in its governance, the local church did not answer to higher church authorities. The local, democratic nature of the church permitted its black membership to mold its own forms of worship to conform [to] the community’s needs and culture. The requirement of seminary training prevented newly emancipated blacks from becoming Presbyterian ministers, but no such barrier prevented entry into the Baptist clergy.²

The black members organized Lexington African Baptist Church on September 22, 1867 with the Reverend Milton Smith as the first pastor. The infant congregation was permitted use of the lecture room of Lexington Baptist Church as a place of worship “until they can secure one of their own.” The first church is said to have been a log chapel, followed in 1871 by a frame church (no longer extant) that stood on the northeast side of the present building. In 1888 the trustees purchased a lot next to the 1871 church and on July 4, 1894 the congregation laid the cornerstone of the present building. Historian Kurt E. Schick writes, “Twenty-five dollar bonds were raised by the congregation to begin financing the \$25,000 costs, and some of the church deacons mortgaged their homes to pay for construction. Men of the congregation, friends, and paid laborers worked nights while women held lanterns and brought baskets of food.” The July 5, 1894 *Rockbridge County News* praised the quality of the orations delivered before and after the cornerstone-laying and noted “The work on the foundation of the church is well under way” although “much money yet remains to be collected to complete the building.”³

The congregation chose as its architect E. N. Bogher, who worked as a carpenter and builder in Lexington since the early 1870s. Bogher—whose name was also spelled Boogher or Booker—was the builder of Lexington’s 1890 Methodist Church. Construction was supervised by First

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

First Baptist Church, Lexington
Lexington, Virginia

Section number 8 Page 8

Statement of Significance (continued)

Baptist's pastor, Reverend W. T. Johnson, with several professional builders involved in the project. Richard Jones was the carpenter and the masonry was executed by Irk Poindexter and the "Moore of Amherst." Richard Jones (b. 1835) was listed as a carpenter and Lexington homeowner in the 1900 federal census. According to a history of Lexington's other principal nineteenth century African American congregation—Randolph Street United Methodist Church—a "Black Methodist layman named Richard F. [*sic*] Jones served as the architect and contractor" of that congregation's extant 1892 church, which bears some similarity to First Baptist. Richard Jones also built the stone wall that fronts Stonewall Jackson Memorial Cemetery along Main Street. According to his great-grandson, Theodore C. Delaney Jr., Jones may have been involved in construction projects in a supervisory capacity, and his property near Nelson Street was used to make bricks. Poindexter's first name appears variously as Irk and Ira, and he is said to have been a resident of Lexington. The stone for the foundation, fifty perches total, was donated by Washington and Lee professor James White. Washington and Lee architectural history student Douglas Muller has noted that one of the congregation's leading members during the period was stonemason Jefferson Shields. J. H. Blackwell, the designer of the commemorative mortgage burning document that hangs in the church, was James Heyward Blackwell (1864-1931), a noted Richmond/Manchester educator and businessman.⁴

Detailed information on the church at the time of its completion is contained in an 1896 article, probably from the Lexington Gazette, preserved in the Withrow Scrapbooks at the Washington and Lee University Special Collections in Lexington. The article noted the "practical completion" of the building and the use of its basement for services while the main floor was furnished with gallery pews and chandeliers and the painter added a few finishing touches to the "audience room." The article described the building as follows:

The church is of brick with heavy stone foundation and slate roof. At the west corner rises a tower, covered with metal shingles and reaching a height [*sic*] of 104½ feet above the foundation. The interior is finished in yellow pine with natural finish. The ceiling is of that material. The building is heated with furnaces and lighted by electricity. Comfortable pews of polished oak are arranged in the main audience room. A neat oak pulpit and pulpit chairs grace the pulpit platform.

In the basement is the Sunday School room with a seating capacity of 500. Near the entrance is a committee room and on an opposite side the pastor's study. At the farther end are arranged two dressing rooms for those preparing to be baptized—a room for each sex. The baptismal font is arranged under the pulpit platform immediately above and is 8x12 feet and 4 feet deep.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

First Baptist Church, Lexington
Lexington, Virginia

Section number 8 Page 9

Statement of Significance (continued)

The main audience room has on the floor a seating capacity of 700; in the gallery a seating capacity of 300. The galleries are spacious and extend around the entire wall. Immediately over the pulpit is the gallery for the choir. In the gable of the north end is a circular window of cathedral glass.

The church has a light and airy appearance which is pleasing and inviting. There are numerous Gothic shaped windows on the sides and the windows high up in the gable are so arranged as to give ventilation.

The article also noted that construction began in May 1894; that the church cost \$13,000 to construct; and that the congregation numbered 775. The article concluded: "The house of worship they have erected is a credit not only to the congregation but the community."

The various Sanborn Map Company maps of Lexington provide information on the evolution of First Baptist and its site. The first Sanborn map, dated 1886, shows a two-story brick dwelling (which dated to before 1847) standing where the church was later built. At the location of the stone foundation in the south corner of the lot stood a one-story blacksmith shop of stone construction. The fact that this building was stone suggests it dated to before the Civil War, although it is possible that its construction material owed more to its function and the building was later in date. By 1930 the blacksmith shop had been replaced by a frame automobile storage and repair garage that was presumably built on the same foundation. The garage stood on a separate parcel that was donated to the church by the Wood family. The church then had the garage torn down. For a number of years around the turn of the twentieth century a small frame cobbler's shop stood in the west corner of the lot. The 1871 church stood next to the 1894-96 church until the first decade of the twentieth century when it was removed (by 1907). The present church, first portrayed on the 1897 map, is described on the 1902 map as heated by stoves and lighted by oil lamps. This conflicts with the 1896 newspaper account but is bolstered by architectural and documentary photograph evidence that suggest—for the heating at least—the use of stoves and the later addition of the basement-level utility wing containing a boiler room. The 1907 map notes the building had "hot air furnace" heat and electric lights. The utility wing (both sections) first appears on the 1926 map. It may be that the heating arrangements evolved from stove heat originally; to air heated by a furnace in the basement in the first decade of the twentieth century; and to the present radiator heat supplied from a boiler in the utility wing in the 1920s.⁵

By 1905 the construction debt had been paid. The *Rockbridge County News* reported on the mortgage burning, a "notable [occasion] in the history of the First Baptist church, colored, of Lexington." The paper observed that "an immense congregation filled the building and among

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

First Baptist Church, Lexington
Lexington, Virginia

Section number 8 Page 10

Statement of Significance (continued)

them were many white friends of the church.” According to other accounts the crowd in attendance numbered 1,400 people. Such large gatherings were not uncommon in the history of the church; in 1886 an estimated thousand people attended a First Baptist-organized baptism in the Maury River that converted seventy-five individuals. In the twentieth century First Baptist hosted statewide conventions such as a meeting of the Masonic Lodges of Virginia in 1937 and the Baptist General Sunday School Convention in 1952. The 1937 meeting was described in the *Lexington Gazette* as “the 62nd annual communication of the M. W. Grand Lodge of Virginia, A. F. and A. Masons, Prince Hall Affiliation,” attended by two hundred delegates. New members joined the church in the 1920s and 1930s as blacks from rural areas of the county moved to Lexington, in part so that their children could attend Lylburn Downing School (opened in 1927). Edlow A. Morrison, who moved to Lexington from the county and became a member of First Baptist in 1930, recalls that the church was used for school graduations every other year, sharing that role with Randolph Street Methodist Church. Changes to the church building during the century included the subdivision of the “lower sanctuary” into classrooms in 1964; the removal of two brick flues that served former stoves; the removal of a section of the gallery to accommodate the organ installed in 1918; the addition of the utility wing in the 1920s; and the replacement of the original roof slates with asphalt shingles in the 1960s. The last change was made necessary after “people shooting pigeons off the roof broke too many tiles until the roof developed leaks.” First Baptist’s congregation presently numbers between ninety and a hundred members.⁶

Architectural Discussion

First Baptist Church, Lexington, is representative of the churches erected for the principal congregations of western Virginia’s larger towns during the late nineteenth century in terms of its size, gable-fronted nave form, and Gothic Revival style. In the first edition of *The Architecture of Historic Lexington* (1977), architectural historians Royster Lyle and Pamela Simpson cited church tradition when they wrote “the congregation created the plan for the building by inspecting other churches in the community and selecting features that seemed appropriate.” First Baptist shares a number of features with other prominent churches in Lexington, although sources examined during subsequent research and presented in the third edition of *The Architecture of Historic Lexington* (1999) identified Lexington builder E. N. Bogher as the architect. Church tradition and the other sources do not necessarily conflict; the congregation may have directed Bogher to design a church based on prototypes in the community. Of those prototypes, the 1867 Lee Chapel on the campus of Washington and Lee University bears the closest resemblance to First Baptist. Designed by Virginia Military Institute engineering professor Thomas Williamson, Lee Chapel was the principal inspiration for First Baptist’s earlier 1871 church. The two buildings shared round-arch windows, arched corbel

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

First Baptist Church, Lexington
Lexington, Virginia

Section number 8 Page 11

Statement of Significance (continued)

tables (mimicked by bargeboards in the 1871 church), and centered belfries with concave pyramidal roofs. First Baptist's congregation and its architect again turned to Lee Chapel for inspiration in the design of the 1894-96 building. Both buildings have or had raking stretcher-bond brickwork in their front gables and towers with chamfered second stages—relatively uncommon treatments for churches of the era—as well as rectangular-plan gabled apses (no longer evident at Lee Chapel), vaulted ceilings crossed by rib-like members, galleries, and recessed bays on the elevations—less uncommon treatments. Another Lexington church that influenced First Baptist's design was the no longer extant 1879 Lexington Baptist Church thought to have been designed by Baltimore architect J. Appleton Wilson. As Douglas Muller has noted, the two Baptist churches shared nearly identical octagonal spires with narrow gabled dormers and decorative weathervanes. The top stage of Lexington Baptist's tower, which had large rectangular louvered belfry openings, was similar in form to First Baptist's belfry although more elaborately detailed.⁷

Also of note is First Baptist's organ, installed in 1918. According to a gilt inscription on the keyboard the organ was built by Carl Barckhoff of Basic (City), Virginia. The German-born Barckhoff (1849-1919) acquired control of his father Felix Barckhoff's Philadelphia organ company in 1878 and provided organs to church clients throughout the United States. Basic City is now a part of the city of Waynesboro, Virginia; an inspection of several Waynesboro histories has not turned up evidence of Barckhoff having operated his company or a branch of his company there. The provenience of First Baptist's Barckhoff organ and the possibility that it was manufactured in Virginia would make interesting questions for a more in-depth study.⁸

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

First Baptist Church, Lexington
Lexington, Virginia

Section number 8 Page 12

Statement of Significance (continued)

Endnotes

1. DeLaney, "Aspects of Black Religious and Educational Development," 148.
2. Ibid., 145-147; Morton, *History of Rockbridge County*, 178; Barrett and Moore, *History of Manly Memorial Baptist Church*, 9. Barrett and Moore discovered that there was an independent "Colored Baptist Church" at Jordan's Point near Lexington in the 1840s; when that church was discontinued is unknown. One black member of the Lexington Baptist Church remained with the white congregation.
3. DeLaney, "Aspects of Black Religious and Educational Development," 146; Barrett and Moore, *History of Manly Memorial Baptist Church*, 13; Schick, "Historic Documentation of the Lexington First Baptist Church," 3; *Rockbridge County News*, July 5, 1894.
4. Pamela H. Simpson, Delos D. Hughes, and Theodore C. Delaney Jr. personal communication; Quillin, "Randolph Street United Methodist Church," 71; Taylor, "First Baptist Church," 60; Lyle and Simpson, *Architecture of Historic Lexington*, errata sheet third edition, 76; Wells and Dalton, *Virginia Architects*, 36; Muller, "Architectural Survey of The First Baptist Church," 3 (social history section); Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority website; United States Census.
5. Edlow A. Morrison and Rosalya Mack Wiggins personal communication; Sanborn maps.
6. Edlow A. Morrison personal communication; *Rockbridge County News*, June 1, 1905; Schick, "Historic Documentation of the Lexington First Baptist Church," 3; *Lexington Gazette*, September 17 and 24, 1937; *Centennial Commemoration Book*; *Lexington News Gazette*, September 16, 1992; Morton, *History of Rockbridge County*, 178.
7. Lyle and Simpson, *Architecture of Historic Lexington*, errata sheet third edition, 44, 74; Muller, "Architectural Survey of The First Baptist Church," 3 (social history section), 1, 2 (stylistic history section).
8. Speller.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

First Baptist Church, Lexington
Lexington, Virginia

Section number 9 Page 13

Bibliography

Barrett, John G., and John S. Moore. *A History of Manly Memorial Baptist Church*. Lexington, Va.: 1966.

Centennial Commemoration Book, First Baptist Church (1867-1967). Lexington, Va.: 1967.

DeLaney, Theodore C., Jr. "Aspects of Black Religious and Educational Development in Lexington, Virginia, 1840-1928." *Proceedings Volume X (1980-89) Rockbridge Historical Society*: 139-151.

The Lexington Gazette (the Lexington News Gazette) (Lexington, Va.).

Lyle, Royster, Jr., and Pamela Hemenway Simpson. *The Architecture of Historic Lexington*. Lexington, Va.: Historic Lexington Foundation, 1977.

Morton, Oren F. *A History of Rockbridge County, Virginia*. Baltimore, Md.: Regional Publishing Company, 1973.

Muller, Douglas. "An Architectural Survey of The First Baptist Church, 103 North Main St., Lexington, Virginia." Paper, Washington and Lee University, 1984.

Quillin, Maria E. McLellan. "Randolph Street United Methodist Church." *Rockbridge County, Virginia, Heritage Book*. Rockbridge Baths, Va.: Rockbridge Area Genealogical Society, 1997.

Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority website (www.rrha.org).

Rockbridge County News (Lexington, Va.).

Sanborn Map Company maps of Lexington. Microfilm at Leyburn Library, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Va.

Schick, Kurt E. "Historic Documentation of the Lexington First Baptist Church." Report on file with the Rockbridge Regional Library, Lexington, Va.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

First Baptist Church, Lexington
Lexington, Virginia

Section number 9, 10 Page 14

Bibliography (continued)

Speller, John. Research cited in the article "Pipe Organs in Memphis Churches" posted on the website www.cdom.org.

Taylor, Lavert H. "First Baptist Church." *Rockbridge County, Virginia, Heritage Book*. Rockbridge Baths, Va.: Rockbridge Area Genealogical Society, 1997.

United States Census. Rockbridge County, Virginia, population schedules for 1870 and 1900.

Withrow Scrapbooks. Washington and Lee University Leyburn Library Special Collections, Lexington, Va.

10. Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated area corresponds to City of Lexington Section Map 17 parcel ((1)) 28.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries of the nominated area correspond to the boundaries of the city lot on which First Baptist Church historically and currently stands.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

First Baptist Church, Lexington
Lexington, Virginia

Section number Photos Page 15

PHOTOGRAPHS

All photographs are of:

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, LEXINGTON
Lexington, Virginia
DHR file no. 117-0027-0063
J. Daniel Pezzoni, Photographer

DATE: August 2005

VIEW OF: Northwest (front) and southwest elevations, view looking east

NEG. NO.: 22342

PHOTO 1 OF 4

DATE: August 2005

VIEW OF: Northeast and northwest (front) elevations, view looking south

NEG. NO.: 22342

PHOTO 2 OF 4

DATE: August 2005

VIEW OF: Auditorium

NEG. NO.: 22342

PHOTO 3 OF 4

DATE: August 2005

VIEW OF: Basement

NEG. NO.: 22342

PHOTO 4 OF 4