

VLR - 4/19/83 NRHP - 7/21/83

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only
received
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH (VHLC 122-40)

and/or common N/A

2. Location

street & number 418 East Bute Street N/A not for publication

city, town Norfolk N/A vicinity of

state Virginia code 51 county (in city) code 710

3. Classification

| Category | Ownership | Status | Present Use |
|---|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> district | <input type="checkbox"/> public | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied | <input type="checkbox"/> agriculture |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private | <input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied | <input type="checkbox"/> commercial |
| <input type="checkbox"/> structure | <input type="checkbox"/> both | <input type="checkbox"/> work in progress | <input type="checkbox"/> educational |
| <input type="checkbox"/> site | Public Acquisition | Accessible | <input type="checkbox"/> entertainment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> object | <input type="checkbox"/> in process | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted | <input type="checkbox"/> government |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> being considered | <input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted | <input type="checkbox"/> industrial |
| | N/A | <input type="checkbox"/> no | <input type="checkbox"/> military |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> museum |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> park |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> private residence |
| | | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> scientific |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> transportation |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> other: |

4. Owner of Property

name Board of Trustees, First Baptist Church

street & number 418 East Bute Street

city, town Norfolk N/A vicinity of state Virginia 23510

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Norfolk City Hall

street & number N/A

city, town Norfolk state Virginia 23505

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

title Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1982 federal state county local

depository for survey records Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission, 221 Governor Street

city, town Richmond state Virginia 23219

7. Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

Check one

unaltered
 altered

Check one

original site
 moved date N/A

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

Located on East Bute Street at the edge of Norfolk's downtown, the 1906 First Baptist Church is a massive, but sophisticated, Romanesque Revival edifice dominated by a richly ornamented facade of rough-faced, pink granite ashlar and limestone trim. The principal element of the facade is a tall, eight-level corner tower with a multiplicity of window types. Adding a lightness to the otherwise ponderous composition is a huge, central round-arch window of stained glass. The facade would be symmetrical except that the flanking tower is only half the height of its companion. Behind the facade is an exceptionally plain nave covered by a vast gable roof, the plainness resulting from the fact that the nave was intended to be hidden from view by neighboring buildings. Unfortunately, the original context of the church has been lost with the destruction of virtually all surrounding contemporary buildings through urban renewal projects, so that the church now stands virtually isolated. The church is in a good state of preservation, retaining most of its original interior appointments.

ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

First Baptist Church was designed by Chattanooga architect Reuben Harrison Hunt. Its facade is constructed of pink New England granite with Indiana limestone trim and is stylistically similar to the facade of another of Hunt's works, the Court Street Baptist Church, erected in 1903 in nearby Portsmouth. Like the Court Street church, the facade of First Baptist is divided into three main sections. These consist of a recessed center section flanked by two towers. On both churches, the towers are connected by an arcade.

The east tower of the First Baptist Church serves as the main entrance and is the much taller of the two. The tower has both flat-arch and round-arch openings with colored-glass panes. The tower's uppermost section has a row of four narrow windows on each face and is covered by a pyramidal roof. The roof is flanked by four small turrets. Indiana limestone is used as a trim to accentuate the tower's various stages and openings. This use of limestone as trim is followed throughout the facade. The first story of the center section is fronted by an arcade composed of three round arches. The arches are supported by paired colonettes with carved floriated capitals. A large, round-arch window with stained glass dominates the center section. The facade's western tower, like that on the Court Street Baptist Church, is squat and duplicates the three lower sections of the east tower. It is topped by a pyramidal roof. Like the east tower, it has an entrance on the first story. The nave, meant to be blocked from view by no-longer-extant neighboring buildings, is severely plain. It is executed in six-course-American-bond brick and is covered by a very large gable roof. Fenestration consists of paired rectangular openings on the lower story with paired square openings above, all filled with stained glass. A small apse, with a projecting chimney stack, is found on the rear (north) elevation. A 1961, functional-style educational building completely envelopes the rear elevation. The educational building is a brick, two-story structure topped by a flat roof.

(See Continuation Sheet #1)

8. Significance

| Period | Areas of Significance—Check and justify below | | | |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> community planning | <input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499 | <input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic | <input type="checkbox"/> conservation | <input type="checkbox"/> law | <input type="checkbox"/> science |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599 | <input type="checkbox"/> agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> economics | <input type="checkbox"/> literature | <input type="checkbox"/> sculpture |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> education | <input type="checkbox"/> military | <input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799 | <input type="checkbox"/> art | <input type="checkbox"/> engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> music | <input type="checkbox"/> theater |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899 | <input type="checkbox"/> commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement | <input type="checkbox"/> philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> transportation |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900- | <input type="checkbox"/> communications | <input type="checkbox"/> industry | <input type="checkbox"/> politics/government | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify) black history |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> invention | | |

Specific dates 1906

Builder/Architect Reuben H. Hunt

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Norfolk's First Baptist Church houses a worshipping community that arose out of the city's first Baptist congregations to nurture a strong sense of leadership and identity for the black community in the antebellum period. Built in 1906 on the site of the original church of 1830, the monumental Romanesque Revival structure is among the best representatives of its style in the state and was designed by the noted early 20th-century Tennessee architect Reuben H. Hunt, whose practice centered on Southern ecclesiastical buildings, most notably in Birmingham, Chattanooga, and Dallas. His work included Court Street Baptist Church in nearby Portsmouth. The building, with its unusually large scale and imposing quality, reflects the growing economic strength of Norfolk's black community by the end of the 19th century as well as the important position of black religious institutions in the urban life of the South in more recent times.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The history of the congregation of First Baptist Church, Bute Street in Norfolk, dates to its organization in 1800 by David Biggs and Thomas Everidge of the Court Street Baptist Church in Portsmouth. Made up of whites, free Negroes, and slaves, the Norfolk congregation by 1805 had grown considerably and had adapted the Borough Church--abandoned by Norfolk Anglicans with the disestablishment--as its worship place. With the black population of Norfolk estimated at 45 percent at the beginning of the 19th century, a substantial portion of the early membership of the church was black. By 1816, however, several white members of the congregation became dissatisfied with the large numbers of blacks in their midst and left to form the Cumberland Baptist Church. The original congregation continued to occupy the Borough Church building. Although the congregation remained an integrated community and was led by a white pastor, the First Baptist Church became known as a "colored" congregation. In 1830 three free black trustees paid \$250 for the present Bute Street site and erected a sanctuary there later known as the "Old Salt Box." In 1839 some Negro members left to form another congregation known as the Bank Street Church. From this time on for the remainder of the 19th century, the sanctuary of the First Baptist Church was known as the Bute Street Church.

During the entire antebellum period, all black congregations were required to have white pastors. Free blacks filled the posts of deacons, trustees, and clerks of the congregation, however, and the congregation had the right to call and dismiss pastors as well as the responsibility for paying their salaries. This situation provided an important arena for training free blacks for leadership positions. Leaders of the Bute Street congregation provided basic education to its members in addition to theological and moral

(See Continuation Sheet #1)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(See Continuation Sheet #3)

Bogger, Tommy L. "History of Norfolk's Blacks Is a Story of Determination," The (Norfolk) Virginian-Pilot and the Ledger-Star, Special Supplement, 25 April 1982.
_____. "The Slave and Free Black Community in Norfolk, 1790-1865." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1976.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 1/2 acre

Quadrangle name Norfolk South, Va.

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

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| Zone | | Easting | | | | Northing | | | | | | | | |

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| Zone | | Easting | | | | Northing | | | | | | | | |

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| Zone | | Easting | | | | Northing | | | | | | | | |

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| Zone | | Easting | | | | Northing | | | | | | | | |

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| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Zone | | Easting | | | | Northing | | | | | | | | |

Verbal boundary description and justification The First Baptist Church is located at 418 East Bute Street on the northern edge of Norfolk's downtown. The church is bounded on the south by Bute Street; on the east by 410 East Bute; on the west by 422 East Bute Street, both vacant areas; and on the north by a public alley. The structure is situated on an irregular lot

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries (See Continuation Sheet #3)

state N/A code county N/A code

state N/A code county N/A code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Staff

organization Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission date March 1983

street & number 221 Governor Street telephone (804) 786-3144

city or town Richmond state Virginia 23219

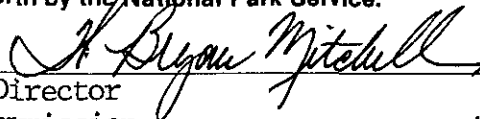
12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature



H. Bryan Mitchell, Executive Director
title Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

date APR 19 1983

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, NORFOLK, VA

Continuation sheet #1

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7. DESCRIPTION -- Architectural Analysis

On the interior, the vast sanctuary is dominated by a large pipe organ set in an arched alcove. Below it is a baptistry painted in imitation of stone with an open font. The woodwork of the pulpit area, the galleries, and choir loft is all paneled in stained wood. The gallery runs along the church's south, east, and west walls, with steps flowing down directly onto the pulpit platform. The church retains its original pews. The gable is expressed on the interior with the ceiling and principal rafters sheathed in pressed-tin panels. The rear area of the church serves as offices.

The church was originally surrounded by a residential neighborhood. Unfortunately, this context has been lost with the destruction of virtually all surrounding buildings through urban renewal projects. Except for some low, modern commercial buildings nearby, the church now stands isolated.

RCC

8. SIGNIFICANCE--Historical Background

instruction. The black church provided a place for both slaves and free blacks to meet, socialize, and exchange ideas. Black churches such as First Baptist thus acted as a training ground for the freedom that was to come with emancipation. According to one authority on the subject, "...the church became the most important institution in the black community and it epitomized the adaptive genius of the transplanted African in modifying aspects of the slave masters' culture to his own purposes."¹

Following Federal occupation of Norfolk in 1862, the Reverend Lewis Tucker became First Baptist Church's first black pastor, and he continued in that capacity until 1870. For the next three decades the largest concentration of blacks in the city occupied the old downtown area of Norfolk and was served by First Baptist Church, Bute Street.

By the end of the 19th century, blacks in Norfolk had obtained a level of prosperity and property ownership that was nearly unrivaled in the state. According to an article in Science in 1906, the increased wealth of blacks as property owners in Virginia towns and cities increased from 4.65 million in 1891 to 6.35 million in 1903, a percentage in excess of white property holdings during the same period and a rate higher than the percentage increase in the black population.² The Negro church was recognized as the "only sound institution of Negroes which started in the African forest and survived slavery."³ A Nation article of 1904, in discussing an 1898 Atlanta conference, said that the black church in America had preserved remnants of African tribal life and remained the center of contemporary Negro social life. The article noted that in large Southern cities, black church leaders were highly respected by whites in their communities.

It was in this positive economic and social atmosphere that the present First Baptist edifice was erected in 1906 under the leadership of their respected pastor, Richard H.

(See Continuation Sheet #2)

United States Department of the Interior
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FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, NORFOLK, VA

Continuation sheet #2

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8. SIGNIFICANCE--Historical Background

Bowling, Sr. Norfolk's economy was thriving at the time, reflective of the city's growth as a transportation and shipping center. The building was designed by the successful Tennessee architect Reuben H. Hunt, who was responsible for Portsmouth's Court Street Baptist Church (1903). According to older members of the congregation, much of the actual construction of the present building was done by members of the church; bake sales were held to raise funds to purchase bricks and to offset the construction cost of \$52,000. From contemporary church records, it is apparent that the "Old Salt Box" was replaced in 1877 by a brick structure which served the congregation until 1904.

Upon completion in 1906, the building received much praise in the press. The (Norfolk) Virginian-Pilot called the building the "handsomest church owned by the race in the south."⁴ The (Richmond) Planet, reporting on the 30th Annual Session of the Virginia Baptist State Convention held in the new sanctuary, called it "a magnificent church edifice."⁵ The mayor of the city of Norfolk gave a formal address of welcome to the delegates at the dedication calling the church "a monument to the race which would be handed down from a race that loved God."⁶

First Baptist Church has continued to serve the urban black community of Norfolk throughout the 20th century. In 1960 an education building was added to the church complex, designed by black Norfolk architect Harvey N. Johnson, who was also responsible in his younger days for the Attucks Theatre, Norfolk (National Register of Historic Places, 1982), built in 1920. The church sanctuary is a tribute to the important position held by the church in black history as well as an important landmark to the remarkable history of the black community in Norfolk.

MTP

¹Tommy L. Bogger, "History of Norfolk's Blacks Is a Story of Determination," The (Norfolk) Virginian-Pilot and the Ledger-Star, 25 April 1982, Special Supplement, p. K-10, col. 1.

²Charles E. Edgerton, "Progress of the Negroes of Virginia as Property Owners," Science 23 (1906): 608.

³Nation 78 (26 May 1904): 405-6.

⁴(Norfolk) Virginian-Pilot, 6 May 1906, p. 4, col. 2.

⁵The (Richmond) Planet, 12 May 1906, p. 1, col. 1.

⁶Ibid.

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FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, NORFOLK, VA

Continuation sheet #3

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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Collins, Brinston, ed. The Evolutionary Development of Residential Patterns in Norfolk, Virginia, 1900-1980. Norfolk: Tidewater Legal Aid Society, 1981.

Edgerton, Charles E. "Progress of the Negroes of Virginia as Property Owners." Science 23 (1906): 608.

Nation 78 (26 May 1904): 405-6.

"Norfolk, the First 300 Years." The (Norfolk) Virginian-Pilot and the Ledger-Star, Special Supplement, 25 April 1982.

(Norfolk) Journal and Guide, 27 October 1962, p. 16, col. 1.

(Norfolk) Ledger, 18 April 1964, no page.

(Norfolk) Ledger/Dispatch, 5 May 1906.

The (Richmond) Planet, 12 May 1906, p. 1, col. 1.

Taylor, Lavert H. Recent pastor of First Baptist Church, Norfolk, Va. Telephone Interview, June 1982.

"Thirtieth Memorial Service for Reverend Richard H. Bowling, Sr." 25 July 1943. (Pamphlet).

Withey, Henry F. and Elsie R. Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased).

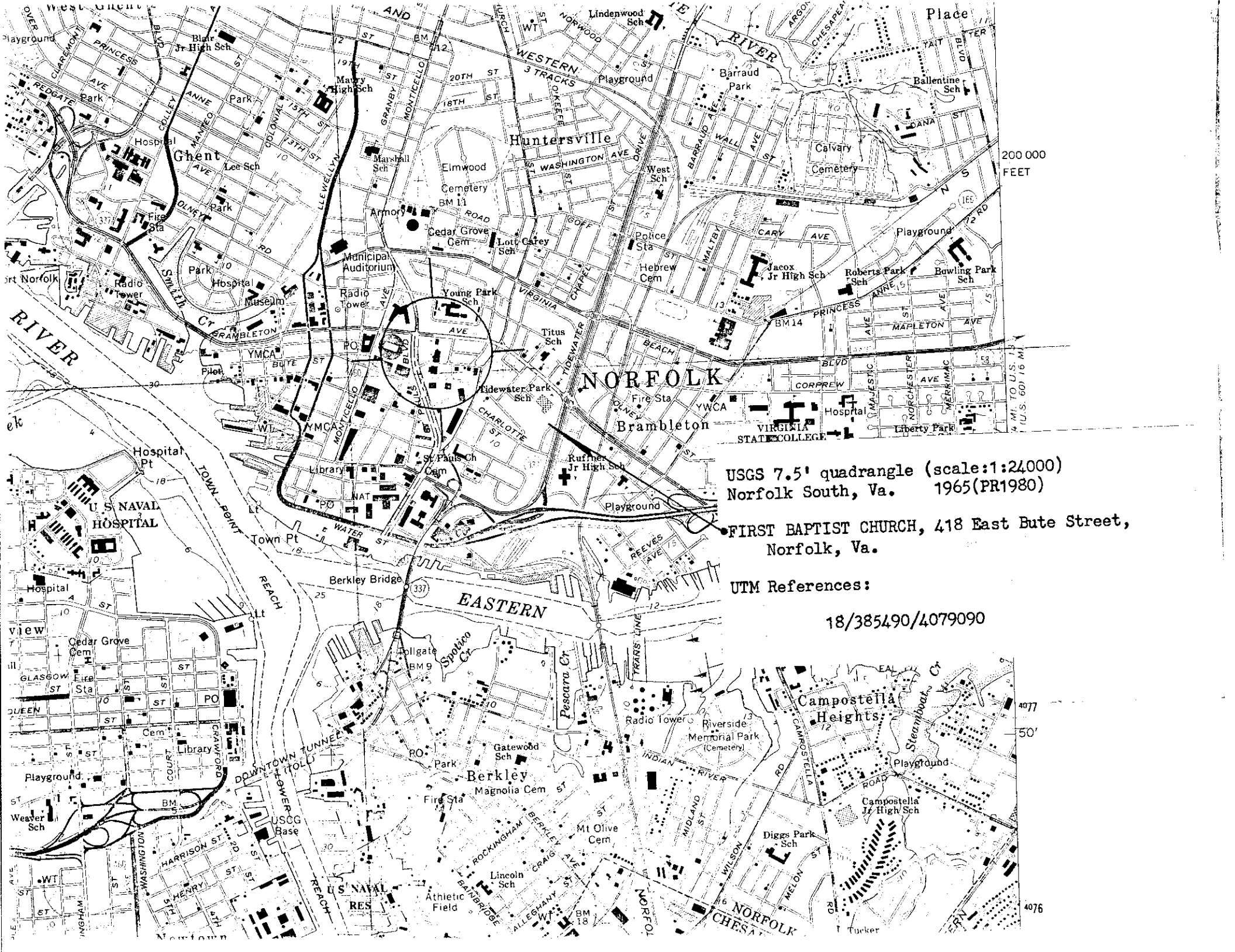
Los Angeles: Hennessey and Ingalls, Inc., 1970, pp. 309-310.

Richmond, Va. Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Archives. Norfolk file 122-40, First Baptist Church. Photocopies of material from files of First Baptist Church.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA--Verbal Boundary Description and Justification

measuring approximately 81.5' x 202.51', the former fronting on East Bute Street. (Norfolk City Assessor Bill #75862, Lots 412-420 East Bute Street)

Boundary Justification: The First Baptist Church has occupied this site since 1830 when the congregation purchased the property for \$250. The congregation has maintained a church on the site since that time. The bounds have been drawn to coincide with those of the above-mentioned city lot.



200 000
FEET

USGS 7.5' quadrangle (scale:1:24000)
Norfolk South, Va. 1965(PR1980)

•FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 418 East Bute Street,
Norfolk, Va.

UTM References:
18/385490/4079090