

VLR-6/17/87 NR+HP-10/15/87

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 Calvary Baptist Church (DHL File No. 122-73)

and/or common N/A

## 2. Location

street & number 1036-1040 Wide Street N/A not for publication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	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<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 Trustees, First Calvary Baptist Church c/o Dr. Johnny L. White, Sr., Pastor

street & number 1036-1040 Wide Street

city, town Norfolk N/A vicinity of state VA 23504

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Norfolk Courthouse

street & number N/A

city, town Norfolk state Virginia

## 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Survey (File No. 122-73) has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date January, 1978; August, 1986  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Division of Historic Landmarks

city, town 221 Governor Street, Richmond state Virginia 23219

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved	date _____ N/A
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed			

**Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance**

### SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

Designed by the Norfolk architectural firm of Mitchell & Wilcox in 1915, First Calvary Baptist Church is located at 1036-1040 Wide Street, Norfolk. The four story, eleven-bay, Flemish-bond brick building is executed in a Second Renaissance Revival style. The facade and Henry Street elevations are distinguished by decorative terra cotta. The nomination consists of one contributing building, the church, and one noncontributing building, the Griffin-Allen-Wallace educational building which is attached to the church.

### ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The First Calvary Baptist Church at 1036-1040 Wide Street is located in the Huntersville area of Norfolk. The church was built in 1916 after the plans of the Norfolk architectural firm of Mitchell and Wilcox. The facade (west elevation) is located on Wide Street. The facade is distinguished by a two-tier, engaged portico. The portico has engaged terra cotta fluted columns, Corinthian capitals, and terra cotta entablatures. The frieze of the second-story pediment bears the legend, "First Calvary Baptist Church". The portico shelters the main entrance which consists of three round arch openings with double doors. The openings have terra cotta architrave trim. Three terra cotta panels are found above the arches. The facade contains a variety of windows in openings of various sizes. Now blocked, the first and second-floor openings have rectangular lintels with incised keystones and rectangular openings with terra cotta surrounds. The third and fourth stories have pronounced jack arches with keystones in the corner bays and four-part sash windows with over-hanging cornices in the five windows of the central bays.

A bell tower is found on the north corner. It is divided into three sections. The bottom section is brick with elongated round arch openings containing louvered blinds. The middle section is terra cotta and has round arch openings flanked by twin pilasters. The middle section has a terra cotta balustrade. The top section consists of a terra cotta domed belfry with round arch openings flanked by engaged columns with Corinthian capitals. Both the west (facade) and east elevation have a terra cotta balustrade running along the roof line. The balustrade has turned balusters and pinnacles.

The north elevation fronts on Henry Street and, like the facade, is elaborately treated. It has terra cotta pilasters with Corinthian capitals. The single door entrances are topped by pediments supported by brackets. The fenestration is similar to that found on the facade.

Wrapping around the church and joined to the south elevation and rear (east) wall is the Griffin-Allen-Wallace educational building. The educational building was added to the church in 1968 to house church offices and class-rooms. The two-story, stretcher-bond, brick building has glass-door entrances on the east and north elevations. Fenestration consists of glass and aluminum panels.

(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 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/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify) Black History

**Specific dates** 1915-16 ; 1968      **Builder/Architect** Mitchell and Wilcox, Architects

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The First Calvary Baptist Church, Norfolk, is architecturally significant as one of Virginia's most important examples of Second Renaissance Revival-style architecture adapted for ecclesiastical use. Built in 1915-16 after the plans of the Norfolk architectural firm of Mitchell and Wilcox, the church is noteworthy for its terra cotta ornamentation and stained-glass dome. The dome is, in fact, one of the largest found in an early 20th-century Virginia church. The First Calvary Baptist Church was erected for a black congregation of limited means who, through diligence and industry, managed to pay off the construction costs in two years. The church congregation has grown and prospered amidst Norfolk's large and active black Baptist community, which continues to regard the church as a major focal point of black cultural and spiritual life in the city.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Norfolk's black population increased significantly during the first three decades of the twentieth century. At this time the black community grew by nearly 20,000 people. Much of the increase coincided with the migration of blacks from the rural countryside to the city during World War I when the black population grew by a rate of 7.3 percent per year.

The movement of rural blacks to the city, together with the natural increase of Norfolk's long established black community, dictated that social/humanitarian and religious institutions would have to develop and grow to meet the needs of newcomers and old timers alike. This happened in Norfolk during the period 1910 to 1930.

At the heart of the black community was the black church. According to newspaper notices and other records, while almost every denomination claimed a representative, Baptists outnumbered the rest. In 1916 there were fifteen black Baptist Churches in the city of Norfolk with a total church population of 7,696. In the following decade membership among the Baptists increased to 10,093, a growth of 31.1 percent. At the same time the number of Baptist churches increased from fifteen to twenty-two. It was on the eve of this period of sustained growth, in 1916, that the First Calvary Baptist Church was built. Norfolk's First Calvary Baptist Church was formed as a result of the growth of Norfolk's Bank Street Baptist Church, one of Norfolk's early black Baptist congregations.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Lewis, Earl. At Work and at Home: Blacks in Norfolk, Virginia, 1910-1945.  
PH. D. Dissertation: University of Minnesota, 1984.

Virginia Division of Historic Landmarks. Archives File #122-73, "First Calvary Baptist Church", Norfolk. (See Continuation Sheet #4)

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property approx 1/2 acre

Quadrangle name Norfolk, South, VA

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

### UTM References

A 

1	8	3	8	6	0	6	0	4	0	7	9	4	6	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

C 

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D 

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E 

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F 

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G 

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H 

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### Verbal boundary description and justification

#### JUSTIFICATION:

The nominated property of less than one acre includes only the <sup>two attached</sup> church buildings and the land on which they sit. (See Continuation Sheet #4)

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	N/A	code	county	N/A	code
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state	N/A	code	county	N/A	code
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## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Richard C. Cote and Division of Historic Landmarks Staff

organization Division of Historic Landmarks

date 1987

street & number 221 Governor Street

telephone (804) 786-3143

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, Director  
title Division of Historic Landmarks

date August 25, 1987

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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  
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FIRST CALVARY BAPTIST CHURCH, NORFOLK, VA

Continuation sheet #1

Item number 7

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7. SUMMARY DESCRIPTION - Architectural Analysis

It should be noted that both the south and east (rear) elevations were plain and unembellished. The walls of the original building are pierced by fenestration that consists of segmental arch openings and flat arch openings with casement windows.

The interior of the church was renovated in 1979. According to Rev. J. L. White, the pastor of First Calvary, the renovation work was as close to a restoration of the interior as possible within the local building codes. The dominating interior space is the sanctuary. It has a cruciform plan organized into a stage area and a main auditorium seating area that retains the original wooden pews. Additional seating is also provided by balconies which run the perimeter of the south, east and north walls. The balconies are supported by Corinthian columns and pilasters, original to the building. Framing the balconies are structural arches which serve to support a dome, approximately twenty-five feet in diameter. The dome is composed of multiple lights of stained glass in patterns of Christian symbols. A stained-glass cross is found on the west wall.

The remaining space is divided into meeting rooms. The educational building houses the church offices.

RCC

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FIRST CALVARY BAPTIST CHURCH, NORFOLK, VA

Continuation sheet #2

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8. SIGNIFICANCE - Historical Background

In the early months of 1880 the pastor of Bank Street Baptist Church began considering the possibility of organizing another church. Prompted by the number of conversions at his church, the Rev. R. Spiller sought a location to establish a mission church. Spiller subsequently rented a small vacant frame church building on Church Street which first served as a Sunday School Mission. On December 20th, 1880, First Calvary Baptist Church was officially organized and the rented church building purchased. A number of short-term ministers were engaged. However, it was not until the pastorate of Rev. Madison Lewis that the Church took root and prospered.

Under Rev. Lewis, or Father Lewis as most called him, membership within the congregation grew rapidly. The ministry of Rev. Lewis was followed by Rev. Percy J. Wallace under whose pastorate the present edifice was erected. Rev. Wallace assumed leadership of the congregation in 1906, and in 1916 moved First Calvary Baptist Church to its present church building. The Manufacturer's Record for June, 1915, noted that the First Calvary Baptist Church was to cost \$43,065. The record listed the Norfolk firm of Mitchell and Wilcox as architect.

Rossell E. Mitchell and F. Nelson Wilcox were a likely choice for designing the First Calvary Baptist Church. The Manufacturer's Record for February and March, 1915, reveals that the Norfolk firm was responsible for the Sunday School Building and alterations to Bank Street Baptist Church, the mother church of First Calvary. Previously, Rossell Edward Mitchell had executed plans for two churches in Norfolk: Queen Street Baptist Church and parsonage (1908) and the Larchmont Methodist Church (1911). The fact that the firm was involved with the Bank Street Baptist Church was undoubtedly a prime consideration in its award of the contract for the First Calvary Baptist Church.

As completed in 1916, the First Calvary Baptist Church is a Second Renaissance Revival structure, one of a few such churches found in the Norfolk/Tidewater area. One of the church's most distinctive features is its facade. Executed in brick, the facade displays a generous use of terra cotta. Another notable feature is the stained-glass dome. The dome, while not immediately visible from the street dominates the interior, supported, as it is, by massive arches. The dome is one of the most notable ecclesiastical examples of its type found within the Tidewater area. Both features serve to distinguish First Calvary Baptist Church as an architectural landmark, placing it among the best early 20th-century black churches in Virginia. One member who participated in the 1916 dedication recounted the event: "He (Rev. Wallace) lined us all up, two-by-two, and we marched from Church Street to Wide and Henry. I don't remember the song we was singing but we was praising the Lord! And when we reached our new church, Glory be!" 1

(See Continuation Sheet #3)

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FIRST CALVARY BAPTIST CHURCH, NORFOLK, VA  
Continuation sheet #3

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8. SIGNIFICANCE - Historical Background

Within two years, the church building was completely paid for, a significant accomplishment considering the financial resources of the congregation. Records indicate that few families belonging to First Calvary commanded high incomes. Indeed most members of the congregation held a variety of low income positions such as maids, butlers, cooks, laundry workers, small shop keepers and naval base employees, to mention a few. One member of the congregation recalled that, in spite of the high cost of living and low wages, members none-the-less paid the twenty-five or fifteen dollars exacted of men and women in the congregation in order to pay for the church. The congregation also engaged in fund-raising projects.

In 1968, an addition, the Griffin-Allen-Wallace educational building, was attached to the original structure. It is an undistinguished, two-story building constructed of brick and aluminum. The interior of the church was renovated in 1979. According to the pastor, the renovation work was as close to a restoration as was then possible within the local building codes.

RCC

NOTE:

1 "First Calvary Baptist Church", Archives, Virginia Division of Historic Landmarks, p.3, from an interview with Rosa Duncan, April 22, 1987.

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FIRST CALVARY BAPTIST CHURCH, NORFOLK, VA

Continuation sheet #4

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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

White, Johnny L. First Calvary Baptist Church, Norfolk, Virginia. np, 1980.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:

Beginning at a point on the E side of Wide Street at the NE corner of the intersection of Wide Street and Virginia Beach Boulevard; thence extending approximately 150' NE; thence approximately 100' SE; thence approximately 150' SSW; thence approx. 100' WNW to point of origin.

