

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NR 10-09-86

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

date entered

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

1. Name

historic First United Methodist Church

and/or common

2. Location

street & number 723 Center Street not for publication

city, town Little Rock N/A vicinity of

state Arkansas code county Pulaski County code 119

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A 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
		<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 First United Methodist Church

street & number 723 Center Street

city, town Little Rock N/A vicinity of state Arkansas 72201

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Pulaski County Courthouse, Records Office

street & number Markham Street & Broadway

city, town Little Rock state Arkansas

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title N/A has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date federal state county local

depository for survey records

city, town state

7. Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

Check one

unaltered
 altered

Check one

original site
 moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

SUMMARY

Little Rock's First United Methodist Church is one of Arkansas' best examples of Romanesque Revival architecture. Located on a downtown corner, this building features two street facades rich in finely executed brick details. The juxtaposition of red pressed brick and rusticated granite provides an interestingly textured backdrop for the abundance of stained glass windows.

ELABORATION

In plan, First United Methodist Church features a large gabled nave with central transept. This arrangement results in an auditorium-like interior which, with U-shaped balcony, seats over 900 people. Three of the four corners of this building are marked by square towers of varying heights. Pyramid roofs, gabled parapets and pairs of tall, narrow stained glass windows lend a sense of verticality to the towers that this massive Romanesque Revival structure otherwise lacks. Smooth pressed brick is highlighted by the rusticated granite foundation and details, especially along the parapet and at window and door openings. Two-story window panels are found in groups of twos and threes throughout the church building and these are further accented by beautifully crafted ribbed brick arches. This series of arches is repeated on the west, or principal, elevation as a part of the entrance treatment. Rusticated granite arches and stone columns encase the three pairs of entrance doors which each feature a stained glass fanlight. A band of terra cotta arches above these doors defines the interior floor levels and serves as a base for the west rose window. Magnificent rose windows are also located on the north and south facades.

The interior of the First United Methodist Church remains much as it was on the day of its dedication in 1900. Two-story columns, an arched ceiling (60 feet high), and the wrap-around balcony or gallery, provide the type of lofty interior space appropriate for worship. Although the interior was redecorated in 1931 as a part of the First Church's Centennial celebration, the original pews, pulpit furniture, and stained glass windows remain in place. A focal point of the sanctuary is John Parks Almand's organ grill, located behind the pulpit and choir loft. The design, executed in plaster and wire mesh, is a modification of a window in the Municipal Palace of Piacenza, Italy, one of the world's most famous examples of Romanesque architecture.

First United Methodist Church now extends along the entire block of Center Street on the east side between 7th and 8th Streets. In addition to the original building located on the southern part of this half block, the church has expanded north to include first an Education Building (1951) and later an Activities Building (1971). Both of these additions have been handled sympathetically in terms of materials and stylistic details.

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/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input 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 type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1899-1900 **Builder/Architect** Frank B. Gibb, Little Rock, Arkansas

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

SUMMARY

The First United Methodist Church is an important element of the architectural and religious heritage of Little Rock. This handsome brick and granite structure was one of a very few examples of the Romanesque Revival style in Arkansas, and as such is an important component of the surviving historic resources in Little Rock as well as the entire state. Completed in 1900, this building is home to the oldest Methodist congregation in the city and has served as the "Mother Church" for the organization of many other Methodist congregations. The term "Cathedral of Methodism" was used frequently during the 1920's when referring to Little Rock's First Methodist Church. This appellation was a reflection of its large membership, which ranked it not only first in Arkansas Methodism but also as one of the nine largest churches in Southern Methodism.

ELABORATION

Designed by well-known Little Rock architect Frank Gibb in 1896, the First United Methodist Church is his only identified commission in the Romanesque Revival style. Gibb was better known for his Classical Revival work (Ada Thompson Memorial Home, Little Rock, National Register listed 8/05/75). Typical of Romanesque Revival structures are the square towers with pyramidal roofs that flank the primary facades, and the repetitious use of semi-circular Roman arches both to define window and door openings and for decorative detailing. These Romanesque details and the outstanding brick craftsmanship displayed in the First United Methodist Church combine to result in "one of the handsomest churches in the entire southwest" according to an Arkansas Gazette article printed the day of the building's dedication.

The original church building remains relatively unchanged from its 1900 appearance. The only exterior alteration has been a realignment of the Center Street entrance stairs. A product of the 1931 Centennial celebration was a redecorating of the sanctuary, which resulted in a new lighting system, a new organ, and a new decorative organ grill designed by Little Rock architect John Parks Almand (Little Rock Central High School, National Register listed 8/19/77; Medical Arts Building, Hot Springs, National Register listed 12/01/78). Additions to the church facility have been handled sensitively, utilizing the same color brick and employing similar yet constrained design details. The 1951 Chapel and Education Building is connected to the original building by a breezeway that features three granite arches. An Activities Building was completed in 1971 and houses statewide Methodist Headquarters offices.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 2

The congregation of the First United Methodist Church was organized in 1831, making it the oldest Methodist Church in the city of Little Rock. From 1868 to 1914 at least five other Methodist churches were established as "missions" of First Methodist, earning this church the title of "Mother Church." One of these offspring congregations is Winfield Methodist Church (National Register listed 12/22/82). The general growth of Protestantism in America in the early twentieth century was paralleled by the progress and growth which, by the 1920's, brought First Methodist Church into a position of prominence. According to the Christian Advocate published in Nashville, Tennessee, of 17,504 churches in Southern Methodism, First Methodist of Little Rock was one of the nine largest. Other churches on this elite list were located in Houston, Dallas, Fort Worth, Memphis, Birmingham, St. Louis, Washington D.C., and Oklahoma City.

Many of Little Rock's most prominent citizens have been, and continue to be, active members of the First Methodist Church. Perhaps the most distinguished member was Governor George Donaghey who served for over a decade as Chairman of the Board of Trustees. His expertise in the building industry (He was responsible for the construction of three downtown office buildings and as Governor oversaw completion of the Arkansas State Capital) was undoubtedly an asset in guiding the maintenance and improvement of the First United Methodist Church's physical plant.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Minutes, Board of Trustees, First United Methodist Church, Little Rock, AR
Minutes, Board of Stewards, First United Methodist Church, Little Rock, AR
Deed Book 1, pg. 597; Deed Book 156, pag. 506; Deed Book 661, pg. 377. All
Deed Books are in Recorder's Office, Pulaski County Courthouse, Little Rock, AR

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property Less than one acre

Quadrangle name Little Rock, AR

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

1	5	5	6	6	5	0	0	3	8	4	4	4	4	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B

Zone			Easting				Northing							

C

Zone			Easting				Northing							

D

Zone			Easting				Northing							

E

Zone			Easting				Northing							

F

Zone			Easting				Northing							

G

Zone			Easting				Northing							

H

Zone			Easting				Northing							

Verbal boundary description and justification

Lots 5 and 6, Block 87, original town.

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

state N/A code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Mrs. James H. Rice, Jr., Chairman, History Committee, Colonel A. J. Almand, Trustee
and member of History Committee, edited by AHPP staff.

organization First United Methodist Church date 10/15/85

street & number 723 Center Street telephone (501) 372-2256

city or town Little Rock state Arkansas

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

Wilson Sale

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date

9-8-86

For NPS use only

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

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

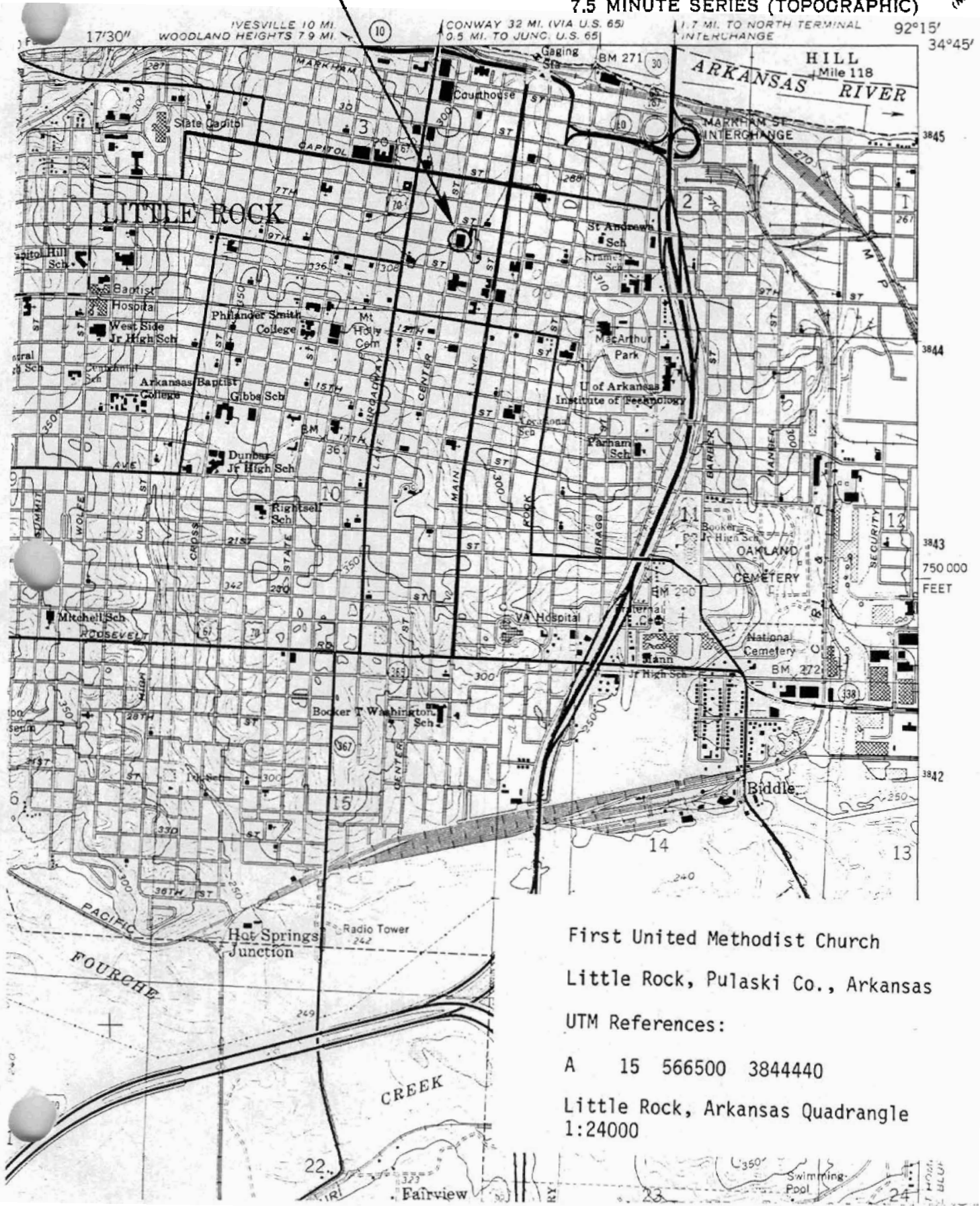
date

Chief of Registration

First United Methodist Church

LITTLE ROCK QUADRANGLE ARKANSAS 7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

7553 1 SW
(MC ALMONT)



First United Methodist Church
Little Rock, Pulaski Co., Arkansas

UTM References:
A 15 566500 3844440

Little Rock, Arkansas Quadrangle
1:24000

