

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

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

For HCRS use only
received
date entered

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

VLR: 06/16/81 NRHP: 07/08/82

1. Name

historic Court Street Baptist Church

and/or common

2. Location

street & number West corner Court and Sixth streets n/a not for publication

city, town Lynchburg n/a vicinity of congressional district Sixth (M.Caldwell Butler)

state Virginia code 51 county (in city) code 680

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	educational
site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	entertainment
object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	government
	<input type="checkbox"/> n/a 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Trustees of Court Street Baptist Church

street & number P. O. Box 733

city, town Lynchburg n/a vicinity of state Virginia 24505

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Clerk's Office, Lynchburg City Courthouse

street & number 900 Court Street

city, town Lynchburg state Virginia

6. Representation in Existing Surveys (2) (See Continuation Sheet #

(1) Historic District Survey, Lynchburg, Va. title has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date May 1976 federal state county local

depository for survey records City of Lynchburg, Division of Planning

city, town Lynchburg state Virginia

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site	
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input 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

In its basic plan and outline, Court Street Baptist Church recalls a typical New England meetinghouse of a much earlier period in American architecture. Its simple rectangular form, with a tower projecting slightly from the center of the facade and terminating in a spire above, differs little from the familiar meetinghouse prototype. While the overall proportions of the church are somewhat retarditaire for its 1879 date, its details show an affinity with the prevailing architectural styles of the period, or at least a nodding acquaintance with them. Italianate features are most predominant, notably in the windows. Those on the ground floor have segmentally arched upper sash which are capped with slightly protruding brick segmental hood molds. The larger windows lighting the auditorium above are round arched with protruding brick arched hood molds. Another prominent feature, which reflects the then-popular Second Empire style, is the mansard roof of the tower. This feature provides an effective transition from the square tower base to the octagonally sectioned belfry stage above.

The basic rectangular body of the church measures 60 feet on the facade and extends back 101 feet. Matching the tower projection on the front, and almost of the same dimensions, is a small chancel projecting from the rear of the church. Foundations of the church are of stone laid in a random pattern. Walls are of red brick; those in the facade are hard-pressed and, according to an account of the building at the time it was completed, were "pressed at the Richmond kilns."

The facade is organized into a triple arrangement, with the projecting tower forming the central element. A segmental arch covers the first-floor main entrance, which is approached by a single flight of granite steps. The granite, like the pressed brick used in the facade, came from Richmond. Above the door is a triple-sectioned window with each section covered by a semicircular arch. Just below the sill of this window is a stone with the date 1879 incised. Fenestration of the tower is completed with a roundel, containing spoke tracery, above the triple window. On either side of the tower, the facade of the church contains paired fenestration on each floor. The "windows" on the ground floor, and the lower section of those above, however, are blind. A raking brick cornice caps the facade on each side.

The chief external feature of the church is the spire, which rises from the brick tower. The tower is surmounted by a slate-covered mansard roof with an arched lucarne, or dormer, filled with louvres on each of the four faces. Above is an octagonally sectioned belfry with louvred rectangular openings in each of its eight sides. Above, a copper-clad spire, also octagonal in section, tapers to a finial with a copper ball. The copper ball is 9½ feet in circumference and weighs 34 pounds. The finial is 167 feet above the ground level of the church, making the building by far the tallest structure in the city when it was new.

Each side elevation is six bays long with a door in the central bay of the ground floor. These side doors, and another at the rear of the building, were noted in the newspaper account of the church when it was nearing completion and were cited as evidence that "should a panic occur, from fire or other causes, the building could be emptied at short notice."

The interior of the church contains a ground floor with assembly hall and Sunday School rooms, and the main sanctuary is on the second floor. The main entrance opens into a vestibule which extends across the entire width of the building. Doors open on axis from the

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input 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 1879 **Builder/Architect** Robert Calhoun Burkholder

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Court Street Baptist Church is Lynchburg's chief black architectural landmark. Begun in 1879 and completed in 1880, it was then the largest church edifice in the city, with its spire the tallest object on the downtown skyline. The church was designed by a local white architect, R. C. Burkholder, but black labor was used exclusively in its construction, and black artisans were in large part responsible for the decorations and furnishings of the auditorium. Although a number of nearby residents initially objected to the building of a black church on what was then one of Lynchburg's most fashionable residential streets, as construction progressed the white community began to applaud the congregation for its accomplishment. When the church was completed, the editor of the Daily Virginian spoke for all in declaring that "it stands an almost imperishable monument to the vigor, enterprise and religious zeal of the society to which it belongs."

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

On March 5, 1879, the citizens of Lynchburg were informed by the Virginian that "The Court Street Baptist Church, colored, at which the calamity occurred last fall, is being pulled down. The material will be used in a new church building, corner of Court and Sixth Streets. The lot was purchased by a citizen." Between those concise lines lay a story of so much local interest that there was no need to repeat what everyone in town already knew. The "calamity" was indeed that. At a wedding in October 1878, an alarm was given that the crowded balconies were collapsing. Although the alarm was false, the ensuing melee resulted in the deaths of eight persons, who were trampled and crushed in the attempt to evacuate the building. Remembrance of that tragedy would find expression in the new building, where the iron supports of the balcony were made to extend below the basement to rest on solid rock. Behind the short notice that the lot was purchased by a citizen lay another story, one amplified by a historical sketch published by the church in 1960:

At that time, Court Street was where the homes of the prominent and rich white residents lived, and during the days of slavery they wanted to keep the Negro slaves near them in their worship services in order to observe their loyalty. However, when Freedom came, they had no further interest in them, and they wanted to force the Negroes to move their worship place from the prominent Court Street residential section of the city. But, since Negroes had worshipped on that street since it was the center of the town, the colored congregation was just as determined to remain on Court Street with the Church.

When it was learned that the black congregation intended to purchase a lot near the site of the old building, the owner was offered a substantially larger amount by several whites to prevent the sale. This attempt failed, however, for the trustees had placed a deposit of \$100 on the lot and had entered into a binding agreement to pay the balance of \$2,400 within a certain amount of time. Pressure then was put on the city's banks and loan

9. Major Bibliographical References

Historical Committee. A History of the Court Street Baptist Church of Lynchburg, Virginia.
 Lynchburg, Va. 1960.
Lynchburg Virginian and Lynchburg Daily Virginian, various issues 1879-1881 (copies at
 Jones Memorial Library, Lynchburg, Va.)
 Ryan, Richard. "Robert C. Burkholder." M.A. thesis, University of Virginia, Charlottesville.

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 6,000 sq. ft.

Quadrangle name Lynchburg, Va.

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

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 Zone Easting Northing

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Verbal boundary description and justification The boundary forms a rectangle encompassing just the structure and measuring 60' x 101', with 60' fronting on the west side of Court Street.

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

state	N/A	code	county	N/A	code
state	N/A	code	county	N/A	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title S. Allen Chambers

organization N/A

date June 1981

street & number 1237 31st Street NW

telephone

city or town Washington

state D. C. 20007

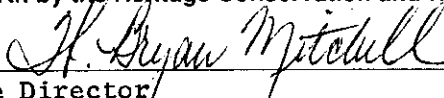
12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature



H. Bryan Mitchell, Executive Director

title Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

date MAY-10 1982

For HCRS 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
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

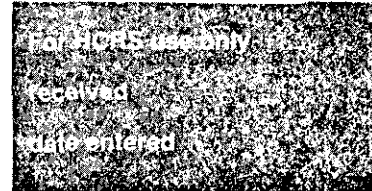
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Court Street Baptist Church, Lynchburg, Virginia

Continuation sheet #1

Item number 7

Page 1



7. DESCRIPTION

entrance across the vestibule to the assembly room. On either side of the entrance, single-flight stairs rise to the vestibule of the sanctuary above. The stairs rise against the front wall and account for the blind arcades, rather than glazed openings, noted on the exterior. From the upper vestibule, three doors give entrance to the auditorium. Although a number of interior changes have been made over the years to the auditorium, a description which appeared in the Lynchburg Virginian when the church was completed still suffices to give an accurate picture of its main features:

This room is 50 by 88 feet and is apportioned into three aisles--right, left and centre and six sections of pews each $7\frac{1}{2}$ feet in length. The floor is to be covered with a carpet of church pattern, now being made to order in an Eastern city. A pulpit of beautiful design and workmanship, finished after the style of the interior, gracefully decorates the elaborate altar, beneath which the baptismal font is located. The floor is supported by ten iron columns resting on a solid rock foundation. These columns, $21\frac{1}{2}$ feet in length, also extend to the galleries and become prominent supports thereof. The room is lighted by eight Venetian windows of stained glass on each side, and one of memorial design at the rear of the pulpit. Upon the latter is inscribed the names of the unfortunate victims of the disaster which occurred to the Church, October 16th 1878. At night, a pyramidal chandelier of seventy-two gas burners, suspended from the centre of the arched ceiling, together with three triple burners on each side, two on each end, and two near the pulpit, all ignited by electricity, will do the work of illumination. The finishing of the woodwork will be in white and black walnut. The walls are already frescoed in panels and other appropriate designs. The arch in the ceiling just over the chandelier is so artistically wrought and frescoed as to represent by day a canopy of clear blue sky, and by night, a starry vaulted firmament. It is 34 feet in circumference, $11\frac{1}{4}$ feet in diameter, $5\frac{1}{3}$ feet deep, and is surmounted by a conveniently arranged register to regulate upper ventilation. The height of the ceiling from the auditorium floor is 28 feet.

A gallery of three sections, extends across the front and along the East and West sides, containing four rows of pews, and affording a full view of the pulpit and speaker from any point of observation. The gallery is reached by means of two stairways from the auditorium hallway, one at the right and one at the left. In the front section a large pipe organ and a well trained choir will be stationed. At the rear of the organ loft is a room that may be utilized by the singers, and others on special occasions. The gallery is lighted by eight stained-glass windows on a side and the walls are finely wainscotted and frescoed in harmony with the auditorium. The frescoing was done by Mr. H. O. Wilkins of Selma, Ala. At night, gas jets arranged on either side and a drop light above the organ, will illuminate the entire orchestra. Great care has been bestowed upon the acoustic properties of the auditorium and galleries as shown by the curvatures and rounded corners everywhere visible. The building will be heated by means of a furnace

(See Continuation Sheet #2)

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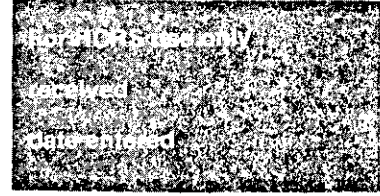
**National Register of Historic Places
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Court Street Baptist Church, Lynchburg, Virginia

Continuation sheet #2

Item number 7,8

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7. DESCRIPTION

in the basement. As the capacity of the building is twenty five hundred, every possible precaution against accident has been taken. Beside the main front entrance, there are also entrances at the side and rear.

Of the remaining features mentioned in this early account, perhaps the most impressive are the stained-glass windows. They are of simple geometrical patterns, are filled with vivid glass in primary colors, and were manufactured in Lynchburg by William Hefferman. The pulpit was supplied by a black artisan, J. W. Green, also of Lynchburg. The original pews and trim also remain. Unfortunately, neither the frescoed ceiling over the chandelier nor the frescoed walls remain. In 1899 the auditorium was repainted, and a new organ was installed. At the same time electric fixtures replaced the gaslights, but the original seventy-two-light chandelier was retained and electrified. During the pastorate of Dr. Edgar T. Thornton (1943-53), the auditorium was again repainted, a new roof was put on the church, and the large assembly hall on the ground floor was partially divided into small classrooms.

SAC

8. SIGNIFICANCE

associations to refuse a loan to the congregation, but this ploy was thwarted when the church members gathered their savings together and contributed enough to cover not only the purchase price of the lot, but also several thousand dollars in construction costs for the actual building. That the congregation could come up with such an amount on short notice is explained in the church history by the racial tension that prevailed in Lynchburg in the postbellum era:

At a time when colored people did not trust the white people too much... most of the members of the church had their savings at home between mattresses, or wrapped in socks, and small bags stuck in the attic, or in cavities over the mantles.

After the lot was purchased, the cornerstone was laid, and in reporting on that occasion, the editor of the Virginian informed his readers that "This, we understand, is to be quite a handsome structure, and one of the largest in the state. Mr. R. C. Burkholder is the architect. To be finished by Oct. 1." That deadline was not met, however, and the building was not completed until July 1880. During the interim, the local papers furnished a number of articles describing the building and the progress of construction. In one of these accounts, the editor of the Virginian informed his readers that he had visited the carpentry shop of "J. W. Green, colored (who) showed us a pulpit, designed and made by himself, for the Court Street Baptist Church." The editor described the pulpit as "of solid walnut, with an Italian marble top, and covered with silk, with pendants and tassels." He closed his account by wondering "how so neat a job could have been made entirely by hand" and concluded that "the church might have paid more money for worse work in New York or Boston." Despite the condescending tone of the editor's report, his account and others like it helped persuade the citizens of Lynchburg that the church would be an asset to the city and not a liability. As for Court Street, it continued for many years to be regarded as a fashionable address,

(See Continuation Sheet #3)

**United States Department of the Interior
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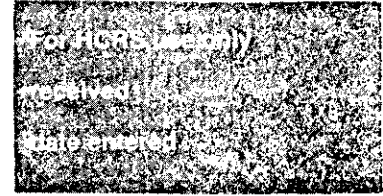
**National Register of Historic Places
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Court Street Baptist Church, Lynchburg, Virginia

Continuation sheet #3

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8. SIGNIFICANCE

and a number of large mansions, as well as churches for white congregations were soon built nearby.

Largely unchanged since its completion, the modified Italianate building is the largest remaining example of the work of architect and builder Robert C. Burkholder. Burkholder came to Lynchburg just prior to the Civil War. After serving the Confederacy, he returned to the city and became in the ensuing decades one of Lynchburg's most prominent architects.

The building houses a congregation that was formally organized in 1843, when the African Baptist Church officially separated from the parent First Baptist Church. As was typical in the antebellum South, the ministers of the new congregation continued to be appointed by the parent white congregation, and white custodians attended all its services. An old theatre, purchased for the new group, was remodeled and served the congregation until a fire destroyed it in 1858. The congregation then moved to a converted tobacco factory that stood nearby on Court Street between Fifth and Sixth streets. This temporary church was replaced in 1867 by the building which was demolished after the tragedy.

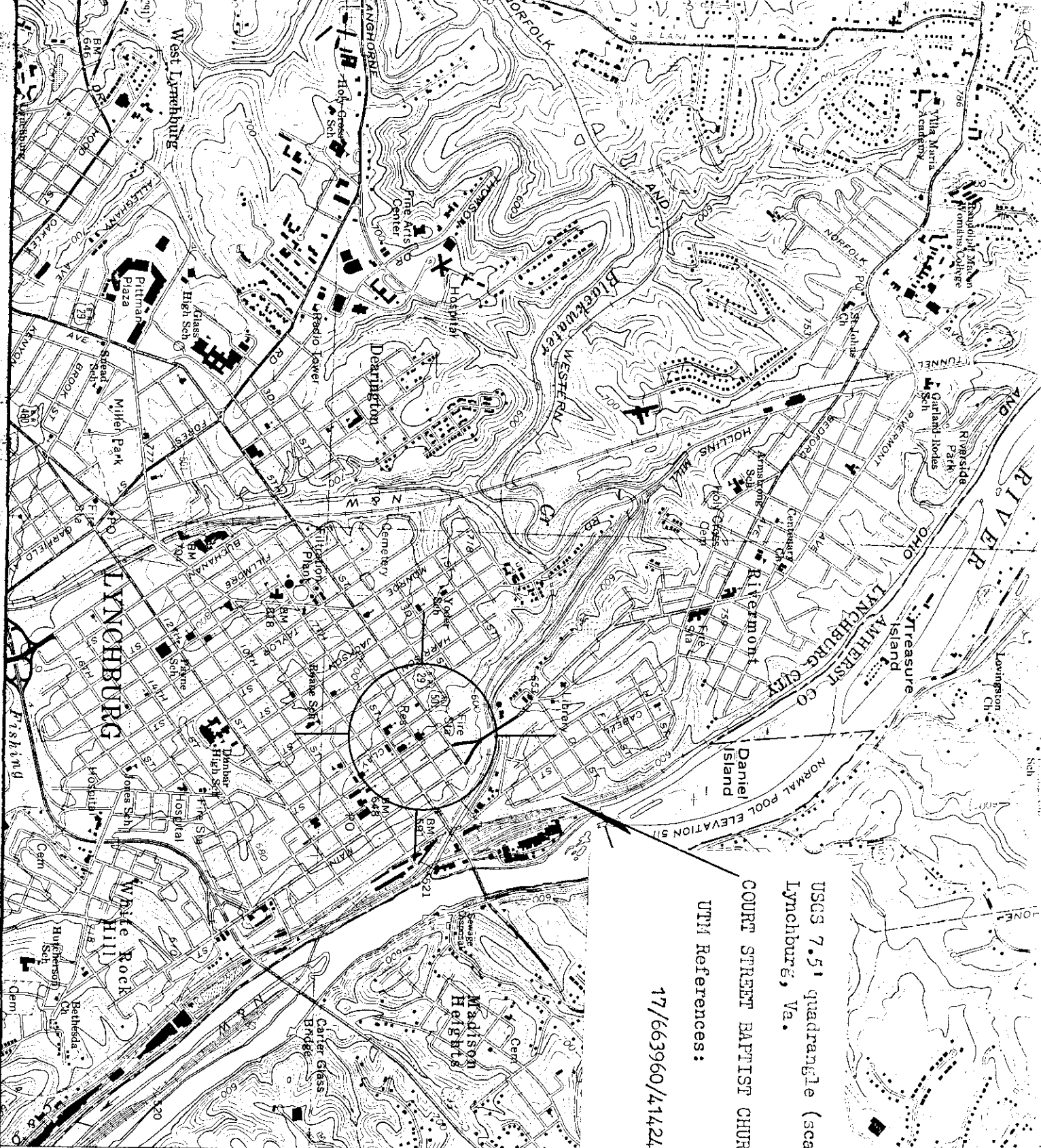
Largely through the efforts of the minister and members of Court Street Baptist Church, the Virginia Baptist Convention authorized the establishment of the Lynchburg Seminary in 1886. The Reverend Phillip Morris of Court Street Church served as the first president of the institution, which was later named the Virginia Theological Seminary and College. Its main building, Hayes Hall, and the home of one of its most distinguished graduates, Anne Spencer, both in Lynchburg, are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

During the later 19th century, the church organized a number of Sunday Schools in outlying sections of Lynchburg to serve members who might not otherwise have been able to attend worship services. From these several schools, a number of separate congregations were later organized. Court Street Church is regarded as the mother church of all the city's black Baptist congregations and still houses a large and active congregation, well aware and appreciative of the building in which they worship. In addition to its own considerable architectural and historical interest, the church building forms an integral component of an impressive grouping of late 19th-century churches on the hill above Lynchburg's downtown business district. It is, in fact, one of the two oldest structures in this "ecclesiastical compound," and its spire is still a notable, if no longer dominant, feature of the Lynchburg skyline.

SAC

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

- (2) Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Survey
1980 State
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission
221 Governor Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219



4145
 (KELLY) N
 5158 E NE

USGS 7.5' quadrangle (scale:1:24000)
 Lynchburg, Va.
 1963 (PR1978)

COURT STREET BAPTIST CHURCH, Lynchburg, Va.

UTM References:

17/663960/4142450

4141

4142

251