

**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 National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. 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.

LISTED:
VLR 3/16/2017
NRHP 6/5/2017

1. Name of Property

Historic name: First Baptist Church
 Other names/site number: VDHR #137-5071
 Name of related multiple property listing:
N/A
 (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 727 Scotland Street
 City or town: Williamsburg State: VA County: Independent City
 Not For Publication: N/A Vicinity: N/A

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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 at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national ___ statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A ___ B X C ___ D

Signature of certifying official/Title: **Date**
Virginia Department of Historic Resources
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official: **Date**

Title : **State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government**

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION: religious facility

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION: religious facility

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7. Description

Architectural Classification (**Enter categories from instructions.**)

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS: Colonial Revival

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: ASPHALT; BRICK; CONCRETE; METAL;
Steel

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

Constructed in 1956, the two-story, front-gabled, Colonial Revival-style First Baptist Church stands on Scotland Street in downtown Williamsburg, less than half a mile northwest of the restored colonial area of the city. Norfolk architect Bernard Spigel's design for the building combines a Wren-inspired form, Williamsburg Restoration exterior and interior finishes, and modern construction techniques such as a poured concrete foundation, concrete block walls with brick veneer, and metal roof trusses. The church features a 108-x-36.5-foot sanctuary and narthex with activity rooms below, an imposing square tower and spire at the south entrance, and a hipped-roofed wing extending east from the north end of the sanctuary. For a century before moving to the church on Scotland Street, the congregation had worshipped at its church building on Nassau Street in the historic area of Colonial Williamsburg. Just as the congregation was preparing to expand the Nassau Street church, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation purchased that property for an amount sufficient to pay for the cost of a new building and donated the 0.54-acre building site on Scotland Street. Removal of the nineteenth-century building from the heart of the historic area conformed with the Foundation's vision at the time, which focused on recreating Williamsburg's late colonial appearance to the exclusion of architectural fabric postdating that period. While negotiating the agreement with the congregation, the Foundation engaged Bernard Spigel to provide a cost estimate for constructing a building similar to the Mahan Street First Baptist Church in Suffolk, Virginia, which he had designed in 1951. The

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church in Suffolk and First Baptist Church in Williamsburg are of comparable scale, layout, and materials and may be the only churches Spigel designed. Most of his work consists of apartment complexes and commercial buildings. While the design of First Baptist Church is derivative of Mahan Street First Baptist Church, Spigel made concessions to the Williamsburg Restoration's interpretation of the Colonial Revival style with compass-headed windows and Chippendale rails on the exterior. On the interior, his use of an ambulatory to house the baptismal pool simultaneously allows the pool to be on a focal axis of the church, but inconspicuous while not in use to avoid impinging on the interior treatment and style.

Narrative Description

Site Description

The church property, along the north side of Scotland Street between Armistead Avenue and Braxton Court, consists of three parcels. The church stands on the westernmost 0.54-acre parcel acquired by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and gifted to the First Baptist Church in 1954. The two adjacent parcels to the east, acquired in 1968 (0.409 acre) and 1976 (0.341 acre), contain surface parking. The property is in an area of commercial, institutional, and residential buildings, though most are small in scale and only two to three stories tall. The open lawn of a 40-foot-wide vacant parcel along the west side of the property buffers the church from the yards of a residence on Scotland Street and residences along Braxton Court, a 1920s residential cul-de-sac developed by and for African Americans. A block with a mix of commercial and institutional buildings to the south separates the church from the campus of the College of William and Mary. To the east and north is a large, irregularly shaped parcel with a low-rise garden apartment complex in its southeastern corner.

The church lot has varying topography. A masonry retaining wall west of the church appears to extend along the entire western boundary of the property. The church is rectangular in footprint with an L-shaped wing on the northeast. An elevator tower and covered entry were added ca. 2009 to the north side of the wing. A copse of pine and cedar southeast of the church are on an adjacent lot owned by the church. A large deciduous tree shades the southwest corner of the church and a ramped entrance. Another large tree is south of the rear wing. The parking areas extend north and west and continue behind the church building, providing access to the covered entry and service entrance. A small, rectangular brick courtyard at the juncture of the church building and the wing is bordered by a retaining wall on its south and east sides.

Southeast of the church building, a small brick "tombstone" style sign rests on a brick plinth with piers on either side. The metal two-part sign consists of an upper fixed, pentagonal section with a cross and the following text beneath:

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
ORGANIZED IN 1776

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The larger lower section includes a case with a glass door and a section with removable letters for announcing service times, sermons, and meetings. A tablet-style historic marker stands east of the main central entrance to the church.

The church is set back slightly from the brick sidewalk along Scotland Street. Three paved entrances approach the church building from the sidewalk. In front of the main entrance is a broad set of bull-nosed brick steps (rising three high at the west and two at the east due to a change in grade). Low brick walls line the sides of these steps, which rise northward to a brick plaza. North of the plaza is a set of six bull-nosed brick steps with two tubular metal safety railings on the interior (positioned so as to divide the stairway into thirds) and sloping brick walls along the sides. At the top of the staircase is an entrance terrace. West of the central entrance is a ramp that ascends north, then west, and east to arrive at the entrance terrace. The ramp has low brick walls on either side of it. East of the central entrance is a brick path that extends to the north along the east side of the church building and connects to the entrance plaza by a brick walkway and two steps. North of this intersection, the path continues north with a set of descending steps, a level path, one part of which is lined on either side by brick walls and the other by low shrubs. The path continues north to a set of brick piers with concrete caps and lanterns on top flanking a set of steps that descend into the small courtyard at the juncture of the church and the rear wing.

Exterior Building Description

The church is a front-gabled building with a central square tower supporting a steeple that intersects the front gable. The church and the rear wing are laid in stretcher Flemish bond with five courses of stretcher bond to each Flemish bond course. The rear wing has a hipped roof, and both the church and the wing roofs are clad in slate shingle.

The facade of the church has a pedimented front gable with a square brick tower interposed. The tower projects slightly from the face of the elevation and extends above the roof ridge. Resting atop the brick tower is a square frame base with a smaller footprint. This weatherboard-clad structure with round louvered vents on all four faces is set off by a wood Chippendale rail and has a molded cornice. The frame base supports an octagonal wood drum with rectangular louvered vents on four faces and a molded cornice. The drum is topped by a metal steeple, with an octagonal base that tapers to a point, supporting a metal Latin cross. From the level of the church entry, the tower, steeple, and cross rise nearly 44 feet.

The central entrance consists of a double-leaf door, with eight raised panels on each leaf and a single rectangular transom housed in a paneled recess that spans the entire door. The recess is topped by a broken pediment with dentils. Behind the pediment is a round brick panel framed by two courses of corbeled rowlock bricks. Centered in front of the panel and within the broken pediment is a wooden cross. The front corners of the tower are highlighted by square pilasters supporting a frieze and a dentilled pediment that spans the width of the tower. Flanking the tower on the building's façade are round, stained glass windows within a rowlock frame. A low

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stringcourse and molded brick water table seen on the facade extends around the church building.

The west elevation of the church has seven compass-headed wood sash windows with wood sills. Each window has twenty lights in the lower sash, twenty lights in the square portion of the upper sash, and eight lights in the semicircular portion above. The rounded portion of each masonry opening has a rowlock arch with a stone keystone and stone springers. The basement level has twelve six-over-six wood, double-hung, sash windows with wood sills.

The east elevation of the church has five compass-headed wood sash windows, matching those on the west elevation. The basement level has six six-over-six wood, double-hung, sash windows with wood sills. At the north end of the east elevation of the church, where it joins the rear wing, two arched masonry openings with stone springers and key stones mark a sheltered entrance leading into the basement level of the church.

The south elevation of the rear wing has four nine-over-six wood, double-hung, sash windows with wood sills on its lower level and five six-over-six wood, double-hung, sash windows with wood sills above. A three-course belt course between the floors wraps around this wing. The east elevation of the rear wing has four nine-over-six wood, double-hung, sash windows with wood sills on its lower level and four six-over-six wood, double-hung, sash windows with wood sills aligned above.

The north elevation of the complex is irregular. The gabled end of the church portion has a pedimented gable pierced by a round louvered vent in a rowlock brick frame. West of center is an exterior brick chimney that pierces the pediment and the roof eave. The main level of the gable end has a rounded stained glass window in a rowlock arch. In the basement level are three six-over-six windows and a single-leaf, four-panel, four-light door. The connection between the church and the larger portion of the wing has a six-over-six window on both the basement and main levels. The north elevation of the wing originally had a door and window on the lower level and three windows above. A two-story elevator tower with a metal hipped roof and a one-story mechanical room with a metal hipped roof have been added between the window and door below, and between the eastern window and two western windows above. A hipped-roof porte cochère supported by brick piers extends from the door at the east side of the addition, north past the elevator tower to the edge of the drive/parking area.

Interior Building Description

The church has a narthex at the entrance. The east side of the narthex, set off by engaged fluted posts carrying a frieze and molding, has an open two-run stair with a paneled lower wall and a door to an enclosed stair to the basement below. The stair services a three-bay balcony that overlooks the nave and is enclosed by a low raised-panel wall with two fluted posts and two fluted pilasters. The west side of the narthex, once a cloak room, has engaged fluted posts and metal posts defining an area now used to display interpretive panels and artifacts about the history of the church. There is a flush-mount light fixture in this area. The central portion of the

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narthex has a brass Williamsburg-style chandelier and a double-leaf door flanked by single-leaf doors in a molded surround with a broken pediment opening into the nave. Inside the nave, these doors are divided by fluted engaged posts that carry a projecting molding that defines the balcony above.

The nave is carpeted and has a dropped plaster ceiling and a crown molding. Brass pendant fixtures hang above the congregation. The chair rail forms the stool and apron of the windows. Two sets of pews are arranged with a central aisle and side aisles to the east and west. The north wall has a large arched opening supported by fluted posts. Flanking the opening are single-leaf doors and fluted pilasters in the corners. Extending south of the arched opening is a raised semicircular chancel with five chairs and a lectern. Wrapping this chancel is a lower platform with an altar set on center. A low raised-panel wall divides the chancel area from the choir, which is housed behind the arched opening. The dividing wall creates a squared-off area between the choir and chancel that houses the organ. The choir area is semicircular in plan with three panels set off by fluted pilasters on either side of a central arched stained glass window depicting Christ in prayer. The window is directly above a tiled baptismal pool with steps to the east and west accessed by the doors and halls that flank the arched opening at the chancel.

Below the main level of the church and in the wing are auxiliary spaces. Beneath the nave is a double-loaded corridor with bathrooms and classrooms that empties into a large choir room toward the north. North of the choir room is a small hall with an exterior door to the north, a boiler room to the west, and kitchen to the east. The kitchen abuts the main assembly space, which takes up most of the first floor of the wing. The second floor contains pastoral offices, storage, and bathrooms. The majorly of these spaces have tile or commercial-grade carpeting on the floors. Some original doors remain. Lighting consists largely of rectangular, flush-mount fixtures that accommodate fluorescent bulbs.

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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.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

- ARCHITECTURE
- COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT
- RELIGION
- SOCIAL HISTORY
- ETHNIC HERITAGE: African American

Period of Significance

ca. 1956-1962

Significant Dates

1956: Completion of First Baptist Church building on Scotland Street
June 26, 1962: Visit and speech by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Spigel, Bernard

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

First Baptist Church is locally significant under Criterion A in the area of Religion. As the home of the oldest continuously active African American congregation in the United States, the church provides a link to the story of a religious community that has endured for some 250 years while overcoming religious prejudices and oppression. Prior to the American Revolution, the non-denominational congregation faced the restrictions imposed by the British Empire, which mandated state support to the Anglican Church while limiting the rights of dissenting denominations to worship and proselytize. While the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom of 1786 protected the right to exercise whichever faith an individual chose, during the antebellum period the African American congregation had to endure egregious interference in its church organization and worship. Mandated oversight of worship by white ministers and special conditions for membership in the Dover Baptist Association derived from centuries of legislation and custom that severely restricted the rights of free African Americans and protected the institution of slavery.

The church is also eligible under Criterion A at the local level in the areas of Social History and Ethnic Heritage: African American because of the role of both the congregation and the clergy in promoting the advancement of rights and opportunities for the local African American community. Evidence includes the post-Civil War involvement of the church in general education and theological education for African Americans in Williamsburg and surrounding areas, the election of the congregation's minister to state-wide political office in the 1870s, and local involvement of the clergy and congregation in organizations and activities of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s.

Under Criterion C, the church is locally significant in the area of Architecture as one of two known examples of ecclesiastical architecture by Bernard Spigel, a prominent Virginia architect best known for his commercial buildings and apartment complexes, including the National Register-listed Chamberlayne Gardens in Richmond. His design for First Baptist Church is a superbly executed example of a church building outside the historic area of Williamsburg that embodies modern construction techniques with an interpretation of the Colonial Revival style heavily influenced by the Colonial Williamsburg Restoration's architectural vocabulary. The church retains excellent integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

First Baptist Church is locally significant under Criterion C in the area of Community Planning and Development. To a greater extent than most towns and cities across the United States, the City of Williamsburg has been influenced in its planning, development, and architectural character for nearly a century by one of the oldest historic preservation institutions in the country. Since the program of restoration funded by the Rockefeller family began in the 1920s, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation has transformed the downtown area, which previously

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had consisted of a collection of buildings representing multiple periods but with a high proportion of surviving eighteenth-century architectural fabric. Over the course of decades, the Foundation has restored dozens of buildings, rebuilt others based on archaeological and documentary evidence, and undertaken the removal of post-eighteenth-century buildings (such as the First Baptist Church on Nassau Street) so that an area of approximately 120 acres extending for 1.3 miles along the city's former Main Street consists almost exclusively of restored or reconstructed buildings of the second half of the eighteenth century. The construction of First Baptist Church on Scotland Street documents the extraordinary influence of the Foundation in the city's architectural appearance, not only in the removal of a major public building from the historic area but also the penetration of the Williamsburg Restoration-influenced Colonial Revival style into adjoining areas—an influence that endures with Colonial Williamsburg Foundation's representation on the city's architectural review board.

Finally, First Baptist Church qualifies for National Register listing under Criteria Consideration A as a religious property that derives its primary significance both from its historical importance (as explained above under Criterion A justifications) and from architectural importance (as explained above under Criterion C justifications).

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

The First Baptist Church, constructed on Scotland Street in Williamsburg in 1956, houses the longest continuously active African American religious congregation in the United States. The congregation began in the early 1770s as a non-denominational group of both enslaved and free African American worshippers who met in the open air at Green Spring Plantation, about 2 miles west of Williamsburg, and then in town by 1776. The early establishment and continuous history of this African American congregation is remarkable given the obstacles it faced. Prior to the American Revolution, the congregation survived restrictions on non-Anglican nominations. As the African Baptist Church beginning in 1781, the congregation endured despite general objections to free assembly of non-whites and later the mandated oversight by white ministers following the Nat Turner slave insurrection of 1831. In fact, the church thrived in the first half of the nineteenth century with the construction of a building in 1828 and, after an 1834 tornado, its replacement in 1856 with a more substantial brick church on Nassau Street. Following the Union Army's occupation of Williamsburg in 1862 and then during the Reconstruction period, the congregation played an increasingly significant role in the development of Williamsburg's African American community. Renamed The First Baptist Church of Williamsburg in 1863, the congregation helped to serve local African Americans' educational needs by housing a Quaker-run school and later a theological school as well. During Reconstruction, the Rev. John Dawson led the church while also exercising political leadership, with his service in the Senate of Virginia from 1874 through 1877. During the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the

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congregation remained vibrant and improved its building on Nassau Street with support from members of widely varied economic status.

In 1954, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation offered to purchase the Nassau Street church property for a price high enough to fund construction of a new building on a Scotland Street parcel that it would convey as a gift. Moving the congregation and removal of the mid-nineteenth-century church from the historic area was consistent with the Foundation's mission at the time: recreating the late colonial architectural fabric of Williamsburg without the intrusion of buildings from later periods. The Foundation engaged Bernard Spigel to estimate construction costs for a building comparable to the Mahan Street First Baptist Church in Suffolk, Virginia, which he had designed for an African American congregation in 1951. Spigel then served as architect for the new church building on Scotland Street. Although derivative of the Suffolk building, the First Baptist Church embraces the Williamsburg Restoration's interpretation of the Colonial Revival style. After occupying the new building in 1956, the congregation continued to play a significant role in the development of Williamsburg's African American community. The Rev. David Collins was installed in 1958 and soon steered the congregation toward an active local role in the crusade for social justice. Highlights include Collins' participation in a protest against hiring practices at the Williamsburg A&P grocery store and membership in the Virginia Christian Leadership Conference as well as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. On June 26, 1962, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke at First Baptist Church, underscoring its prominence in the Civil Rights Movement.

Developmental History

The Congregational History (Late 18th century to 1954)

First Baptist Church traces its origins to a non-denominational congregation of both enslaved and free African Americans who worshipped in the open air under a brush arbor at Green Spring Plantation, about 2 miles west of Williamsburg. In 1776, Robert F. Cole, a Williamsburg resident, invited the congregation to use his carriage house for worship services.¹ Prior to the American Revolution, enslaved African Americans in Williamsburg and surrounding areas typically worshipped in a segregated context with local white residents and plantation owners at Bruton Parish Church, part of the officially state-sanctioned Anglican denomination, which received funding through the tithes of all property owners regardless of faith. So-called dissenting denominations such as Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, and non-denominational groups had only limited religious freedom under the colonial regime.

In the late eighteenth century, the congregation affiliated itself with the Dover Baptist Association. Under the vigorous leadership of two enslaved preachers, Moses and Gowan

¹ Tommy Bogger, *Since 1776: The History of the First Baptist Church, Williamsburg, Virginia* (Williamsburg, Virginia: First Baptist Church, 2006), 12.

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Pamphlet (an enslaved server at the King's Arms Tavern later manumitted in 1793), the membership grew from about 200 to 500 individuals, attracting membership among enslaved and free African Americans, who together made up approximately half of Williamsburg's population. Nor was the congregation exclusively made up of town residents. Diaries and other accounts of the customs of enslaved Virginians indicate that it was common for enslaved plantation workers to travel great distances in their limited free time away from toil in order to attend social and religious gatherings. This suggests that the congregation included residents of surrounding counties.²

In addition to helping increase church membership, Pamphlet successfully advocated for the autonomy of black congregations within the white-led Dover Baptist Association. After initially forbidding individuals of African descent from preaching, the Association relented and allowed Pamphlet and his successors to both preach and baptize. In 1792, the Williamsburg church was received into membership in the Association. This status further established the credentials of what was called the African Baptist Church and it thrived under Pamphlet's leadership through his death in 1810. Over the next two decades, the church continued to grow under the leadership of other African American preachers whose names are unknown due to a gap in church records. This successful period culminated with the construction of a dedicated church building in 1828.³

Only three years later, Williamsburg's African Baptist Church experienced a harsh reversal in fortunes. In August 1831, an enslaved Baptist preacher and self-proclaimed prophet named Nat Turner led a slave insurrection that resulted in the killing of 57 whites in Southampton County. Initially, some Virginians responded by proposing emancipation, and others suggested further danger from slave revolt could be prevented by the forcible "colonizing" (deporting) of free African Americans out of the Commonwealth. Instead, the House of Delegates enacted legislation to further restrict the rights of African Americans in Virginia. Since Turner was a literate religious leader, laws were directed against teaching African Americans to read and write and against the independence of black congregations.⁴

In Williamsburg, officials required the African Baptist Church to be led by a white minister and to purge its rolls of "suspicious persons." Not only did the congregation's African American minister, Rev. John Dipper, have to give up his leadership of the church, he also fell under the scrutiny of a previously unenforced 1806 law requiring enslaved persons manumitted after that date to leave Virginia; he moved to New York. The purge of the rolls also decreased membership from 700 to 400 by 1832. Throughout the remainder of the antebellum period, the church would officially function under the leadership of white ministers. Some of this leadership was perfunctory, however, and certain ministers such as the Rev. Scervant Jones fulfilled pastoral

² *Ibid.*; Christy S. Matthews, "In Search of Freedom: Eighteenth-Century Williamsburg's African-American Experience," in *Williamsburg, Virginia, A City Before the State, 1699-1999: A 300th Anniversary History*, ed. Robert P. Maccubbin (Williamsburg, Virginia: City of Williamsburg, 2000), 51.

³ Bogger, *Since 1776*, 13.

⁴ E. S. Root, "The Virginia Slavery Debate of 1831-1832" (2015, September 23). In *Encyclopedia Virginia*. Retrieved from http://www.EncyclopediaVirginia.org/Virginia_Slavery_Debate_of_1831-1832_The

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duties without pay. Beneath the veneer of official oversight by white ministers, in fact, several African American ministers continued to lead worship services. In 1838, two African American church leaders even represented the church at the Dover Baptist Association meetings.⁵

During this period, the church also suffered a major setback from natural disaster, when an 1834 tornado destroyed the church building. While the African Baptist Church suffered a loss of independence in the 1830s through 1850s, it also had to make do by worshiping in temporary quarters such as the eighteenth-century Powder Magazine. Eventually, however, the construction of a new building became a high priority and received enthusiastic support from white Baptists, including Rev. Scervant Jones, who helped raise \$5,000 for a building fund. A new church on Nassau Street was completed in 1856 and would serve the congregation for the next century.

Early in the Civil War, the Army of the Potomac determined to capture the Confederate capital at Richmond by advancing northwest from Hampton up the James-York Peninsula. Although the campaign ultimately failed by early July 1862, Union forces had captured Williamsburg during a battle just east of town on May 5 and maintained control throughout the rest of the war. Following that date, Virginia's restrictive laws against religious and educational freedom were no longer in effect in Williamsburg. Enjoying this climate of freedom, in 1863, the African Baptist Church congregation changed its name to the First Baptist Church of Williamsburg. That same year, the First Baptist Church and other African American Baptist churches in Norfolk, Elizabeth City County, and Hampton asserted their newfound autonomy by breaking away from the Dover Baptist Association to form the Norfolk Virginia Union Baptist Association.⁶

During the Union Army occupation of Williamsburg, the church underscored its contribution to the advancement of opportunities for local African Americans by opening its doors to a school operated by the Friends (Quaker) Freedman's Association. Offering both day and evening classes for up to 143 students per day, the school continued to serve local African Americans under the Freedman's Bureau from 1867 to 1870, when a system of state-wide public education was established. Church records indicate that the church was the site of a theological school for training African American Baptist ministers in the late 1860s. Through 1885, when a public school building for Williamsburg's African American children finally opened, the church's Sabbath School helped to fill an educational gap. The church's 250-volume library also played an important role in providing educational support for the African American community.⁷

Commitment to education as well as political participation of local African Americans received impetus from the Rev. John Dawson, installed as minister in 1867. Unlike many of the earlier pastors who had received limited education in antebellum Virginia, Dawson was a New York native who had graduated from the Preparatory School of Oberlin College in Ohio. Dawson's

⁵ Bogger, *Since 1776*, 15-17.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 27-28.

⁷ Linda Rowe, "African Americans in Williamsburg, 1865-1945," in *Williamsburg, Virginia, A City Before the State, 1699-1999: A 300th Anniversary History*, ed. Robert P. Maccubbin (Williamsburg, Va.: City of Williamsburg, 2000), 122; Bogger, *Since 1776*, 27.

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energetic leadership extended to political office. During Reconstruction, African Americans made up more than 60 percent of all registered voters in Williamsburg and adjacent James City and York counties. Dawson's popularity and respect within the community led to his election to the Senate of Virginia for the 1874 through 1877 terms. His political involvement continued locally through the 1890s with his service as Williamsburg treasurer.⁸

During the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the congregation remained vibrant and improved its building on Nassau Street with support from a congregation of widely varied economic status. The most generous contribution (\$1,000) came from Samuel Harris, an African American entrepreneur who owned a grocery store and other business and was the wealthiest resident of Williamsburg at the time. In 1893, major remodeling was completed with a 15-foot westward expansion of the building on Nassau Street. Following Dawson's retirement in 1913, renovations and improvements continued under the leadership of Rev. Edward McCreary.⁹

Although the church suffered financial difficulties in the 1930s and early 1940s, by 1947 fundraising efforts were underway for the proposed construction of an annex to house various church functions, such as a kitchen, pastor's study, multipurpose room, a choir room, and a baptismal pool. On July 5, 1953, an official groundbreaking ceremony marked the beginning of the construction project even though further fundraising was needed.¹⁰

First Baptist Church on Scotland Street

Only two weeks after the groundbreaking, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation offered to purchase the church property on Nassau Street for a price high enough to fund construction of a new building and a building site on Scotland Street that it would convey as a gift.¹¹ Moving the congregation and removal of the mid-nineteenth-century church from the historic area was consistent with the Foundation's mission at the time: recreating the late colonial architectural fabric of Williamsburg without the intrusion of buildings from later periods. One consequence of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation's relocation of downtown property owners was a more segregated community. Whereas African American and white businesses and residences had been scattered throughout downtown, the relocation occurred during the Jim Crow era and tended to concentrate African American residential areas in certain neighborhoods, including Scotland Street, on Henry Street south of Francis Street, and on Nicholson and Botetourt streets.¹²

The Foundation engaged architect Bernard Spigel to estimate construction costs for a building comparable to the Mahan Street First Baptist Church in Suffolk, Virginia, which he had designed

⁸ Bogger, *Since 1776*, 30; Rowe, "African Americans in Williamsburg, 1865-1945," 121.

⁹ Bogger, *Since 1776*, 42, 55; Rowe, "African Americans in Williamsburg," 125-126.

¹⁰ Bogger, *Since 1776*, 66-67, 69; Colonial Williamsburg Foundation [CWF], First Baptist Church files [correspondence and news clippings], CWF Corporate Archives, Goodwin Building, Williamsburg, Va.

¹¹ CWF, First Baptist Church files.

¹² Rowe, "African Americans in Williamsburg, 1865-1945," 127.

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for an African American congregation in 1951. On September 14, 1953, Spigel authorized Silas S. Kea and Sons, building contractors in Ivor, Virginia, to prepare an estimate of construction costs based on his 1951 plans and specifications. Colonial Williamsburg also provided copies of the plans to the congregation. After receiving an estimate of \$166,552 from Silas S. Kea and Sons, on October 12 Spigel forwarded the information to Duncan Cocke at Colonial Williamsburg. In the cover letter, he noted that the estimate reflected a general rise in building costs since 1951, but part of this could be offset by obtaining competitive bids for each subcontract involved in the Williamsburg church contract. Sewerage construction would add \$3,000 to the project.¹³

By the summer of 1954, the church agreed to an offer of \$130,000 for the Nassau Street property plus the donation of the building site on Scotland Street. Due to the loss of Williamsburg court records in the Civil War, no deed for the Nassau Street property could be located, but a special commissioner used testimony from longstanding church members to certify the chain of title for the conveyance. On August 6, the Foundation and the Church completed the sale of the Nassau Street property. Selected as the project architect, Bernard Spigel completed drawings for the church building on Scotland Street on October 11, 1954.¹⁴

Architectural Discussion

Bernard Betzig Spigel, was born in Richmond, Virginia, in 1895 and died in Norfolk in 1968. He was a graduate of the Carnegie Institute of Technology. In 1917 he enlisted and served in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. After the war he settled in Norfolk and established an architecture practice that grew to become Spigel, Carter, Zinkel and Herman. Spigel's work was diverse and included single- and multiple-family residences, rental housing for the military, commercial buildings, banks, hotels, schools, libraries and healthcare facilities. Two known churches designed by Spigel are First Baptist Church in Williamsburg and Mahan Street First Baptist Church in Suffolk, Virginia—both built for African American congregations. Architect/engineer Sheldon Leavitt, employed briefly by Spigel in the 1940s, was not aware of any other church designs by Spigel or his firm.¹⁵

Why Colonial Williamsburg Foundation reached out specifically to Spigel is unclear. The Foundation was acquainted with many architects in Virginia, some of whom who had worked for the Foundation. For example, Milton Grigg had worked for Perry, Shaw, & Hepburn on the Williamsburg Restoration from 1929 to 1933 and was also noted for his church designs.¹⁶ Given the civil rights climate in Virginia in the 1950s, perhaps the Foundation sought out an architect

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*; Bernard Spigel, First Baptist Church architectural drawings, on file at First Baptist Church.

¹⁵ Sheldon Leavitt, personal communication via telephone interview with Mary Ruffin Hanbury, December 16, 2016.

¹⁶ John E. Wells and Robert E. Dalton, *The Virginia Architects, 1835-1955: A Biographical Dictionary* (Richmond: New South Architectural Press, 1997), 174–175.

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who had experience working with an African American congregation with the expectation that the First Baptist Church congregation might hire him to design its new church building.

Much has been written of the work of Colonial Williamsburg and its impact nationally as a tastemaker for the Colonial Revival style. In the case of First Baptist Church, there is a documented connection between the Foundation and the congregation. Although Colonial Williamsburg used plans and specifications of Bernard Spigel to estimate a building cost, it is not clear if the Foundation required or suggested that the church hire Spigel. First Baptist Church, likely on the strength of the involvement of Spigel by Colonial Williamsburg in their negotiations, hired him to design their new building.

Spigel's Mahan Street Baptist Church in Suffolk was completed in 1951. The Williamsburg church is quite similar. Both have a sanctuary with a parish hall addition to the rear. Both are brick, pedimented, front-gabled churches with central towers supporting steeples, and have large sash windows along the sides of the nave. The Williamsburg church however adapts the Suffolk design to a more Colonial Revival "Williamsburg" vocabulary.

First Baptist Church Williamsburg is an adaptation of Mahan Street First Baptist Church with an emphasis of Colonial Revival detailing found in the restored colonial city. Unlike the rectangular sash windows in the Suffolk church, the windows along the side of the nave in the Williamsburg church are compass-headed, a colonial feature found at nearby Bruton Parish Church. The facade of the Williamsburg church is more ornate than that of the Suffolk church, with the tower projecting from and imposed upon the pedimented facade. The tower's edges create pilasters for a second pediment above the entrance, which has its own broken pediment at the door surround. The Williamsburg facade is more complex and evidences greater mastery of forms and trim. The Suffolk church has a rail at the tower of upright pickets with a continuous top rail. The Williamsburg church has a Chippendale railing at the tower, similar to that at the nearby Robert Carter House and the Williamsburg Craft House. The octagonal drum and steeple, though not unusual features in ecclesiastical architecture, are similar to those at Bruton Parish Church. The use of a tawny beige paint scheme for the external wood trim is ubiquitous in Williamsburg and used at First Baptist Church as well.

The interiors of the Williamsburg church are relatively simple in the narthex and nave. Spigel's design solution to accommodate the baptismal pool simultaneously emphasizes baptism's central role in the denomination without disrupting the quiet order of the Colonial Revival interior. The sanctuary is designed to house a choir in the curved apse, with the organ, clergy, and altar to the south. Fluted pilasters carry an entablature across the north end of the church interior curving in the apse. At the centerline of the apse is a cased opening, compass-headed to match the window beyond, which is a stained glass window depicting Christ in prayer. Below the window is a baptismal pool. Spigel has put the pool at the center of an enclosed ambulatory, placing it at a central focal point of the church interior. By screening the pool itself and its access, he hides the spaces used for robing and avoids an awkward juxtaposition of these spaces with those needed for regular worship services.

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The church retains a high degree of integrity in all areas. Some support spaces have been refurbished with new carpet and flooring and a new covered entrance and elevator tower have been added at the rear. The exterior of the church and interior of the sanctuary are largely unchanged from the architect's drawings

First Baptist Church and the Civil Rights Movement

After occupying the new building in 1956, the congregation continued to play a significant role in the development of Williamsburg's African American community. The Rev. David Collins was installed in 1958 and soon steered the congregation toward an active local role in the crusade for social justice. Highlights include Collins' participation in a protest against hiring practices at the Williamsburg A&P grocery store and membership in the Virginia Christian Leadership Conference as well as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. On June 26, 1962, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke at First Baptist Church, underscoring its prominence in the Civil Rights Movement.¹⁷

The church has continued to attract attention from prominent activists and has advocated for the recognition of African Americans in Williamsburg. Church members, along with other Williamsburg residents, were influential in planning a small local housing development occupied by African Americans and naming it Crispus Attucks Place for the victim of the Boston Massacre in the Revolutionary War. On October 13, 1990, the church was filled to capacity for a speech by the Reverend Jesse Jackson, who was visiting Williamsburg in support of Local 32 of the Food and Beverage Workers of the AFL CIO. In 1995, Civil Rights heroine Rosa Parks visited First Baptist Church on June 4, 1995, forty years after her act of resistance to bus segregation in Montgomery, Alabama.¹⁸

The sturdily constructed, finely crafted First Baptist Church remains in excellent condition and in 2015 was the focus of celebrations for the restoration of a relic from its Nassau Street property. Installed at the old church in 1886, a brass bell had ceased to be functional in the 1950s. When conservators from the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation completed restoration, the church installed the bell in the church and it was rung by hundreds of members of the community and visiting dignitaries. The "Let Freedom Ring" celebrations culminated with a commemorative ceremony at the Smithsonian Institution, where President Obama and his family rang the bell on September 24, 2015. Since then, the bell has been reinstalled in the church tower.¹⁹

¹⁷ Rex Ellis, "The African-American Community in Williamsburg (1947-1998)," in *Williamsburg, Virginia, A City Before the State, 1699-1999: A 300th Anniversary History*, ed. Robert P. Maccubbin (Williamsburg, Va.: City of Williamsburg, 2000), 236.

¹⁸ Opelene Davis, First Baptist Church Preliminary Information Form. On file, Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, Va.

¹⁹ First Baptist Church, <https://www.letfreedomringchallenge.org/Home/History>

First Baptist Church

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9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

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Davis, Opelene. First Baptist Church Preliminary Information Form. On file, Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, Va.

Ellis, Rex. "The African-American Community in Williamsburg (1947-1998)." In *Williamsburg, Virginia, A City Before the State, 1699-1999: A 300th Anniversary History*, ed. Robert P. Maccubbin, 231–245. Williamsburg, Va.: City of Williamsburg, 2000.

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http://www.EncyclopediaVirginia.org/Virginia_Slavery_Debate_of_1831-1832_The;

Rowe, Linda. "African Americans in Williamsburg, 1865-1945." In *Williamsburg, Virginia, A City Before the State, 1699-1999: A 300th Anniversary History*, ed. Robert P. Maccubbin, 121–135. Williamsburg, Va.: City of Williamsburg, 2000.

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<http://research.history.org/DigitalLibrary/View/index.cfm?doc=ResearchReports%5CRR1621.xml>

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Spigel, Bernard . First Baptist Church architectural drawings, on file at First Baptist Church.

Wells, John E., and Robert E. Dalton. 1997. *The Virginia Architects, 1835-1955: A Biographical Dictionary*. Richmond: New South Architectural Press.

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 # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): DHR No. 137-5071

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1.29 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84:
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 37.273982 | Longitude: -76.711050 |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

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Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The historic boundary is drawn to coincide with the perimeters of three contiguous tax parcels, recorded by the City of Williamsburg as parcels 465-03-00-D, 465-03-00-00-A, and 465-03-00-C. The true and correct historic boundary for First Baptist Church appears on the attached maps, entitled "Location Map" and "Sketch Map."

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary on the attached map encompasses the three contiguous parcels of the church property, which includes the church building, church grounds, and surface parking as well as the property's historic setting and all known associated historic resources.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: David Lewes, Historian; Mary Ruffin Hanbury, Architectural Historian,

organizations: William and Mary Center for Archaeological Research;
Hanbury Preservation Consulting

street & number: 327 Richmond Road

city or town: Williamsburg state: VA zip code: 23185

e-mail: dwlewe@wm.edu; maryruffin@hanburypreservation.com

telephone: (757) 221-2579; (919) 828-1905

date: December 21, 2016

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date,

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etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

The following information is common to all photographs:

Name of Property: First Baptist Church

City or Vicinity: Williamsburg

County: N/A

State: Virginia

Photographer: Mary Ruffin Hanbury

Date Photographed: October 2016

View: Exterior, general view, looking northwest.

Image: VA_Williamsburg_FirstBaptistChurch_0001.tif

View: Exterior, facade, looking north.

Image: VA_Williamsburg_FirstBaptistChurch_0002.tif

View: Exterior, entrance, looking north.

Image: VA_Williamsburg_FirstBaptistChurch_0003.tif

View: Exterior, terrace, looking northwest.

Image: VA_Williamsburg_FirstBaptistChurch_0004.tif

View: Exterior, general view, looking northwest.

Image: VA_Williamsburg_FirstBaptistChurch_0005.tif

View: Exterior, portion of church to north of tower (left) and wing (right), looking northwest.

Image: VA_Williamsburg_FirstBaptistChurch_0006.tif

View: Exterior, church and wing, looking west-northwest.

Image: VA_Williamsburg_FirstBaptistChurch_0007.tif

View: Exterior, church and wing, looking west

Image: VA_Williamsburg_FirstBaptistChurch_0008.tif

View: Exterior, wing, looking northwest.

Image: VA_Williamsburg_FirstBaptistChurch_0009.tif

View: Exterior, wing, looking west.

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Image: VA_Williamsburg_FirstBaptistChurch_0010.tif

View: Exterior, church and wing, looking southwest.

Image: VA_Williamsburg_FirstBaptistChurch_0011.tif

View: Exterior, church, looking west.

Image: VA_Williamsburg_FirstBaptistChurch_0012.tif

View: Exterior, church, looking northeast.

Image: VA_Williamsburg_FirstBaptistChurch_0013.tif

View: Exterior, window detail.

Image: VA_Williamsburg_FirstBaptistChurch_0014.tif

View: Interior, narthex, looking west.

Image: VA_Williamsburg_FirstBaptistChurch_0015.tif

View: Interior, narthex, looking east.

Image: VA_Williamsburg_FirstBaptistChurch_0016.tif

View: Interior, narthex, looking northeast.

Image: VA_Williamsburg_FirstBaptistChurch_0017.tif

View: Interior, balcony, looking west.

Image: VA_Williamsburg_FirstBaptistChurch_0018.tif

View: Interior, nave, looking south.

Image: VA_Williamsburg_FirstBaptistChurch_0019.tif

View: Interior, nave, looking southeast.

Image: VA_Williamsburg_FirstBaptistChurch_0020.tif

View: Interior, nave, looking northeast.

Image: VA_Williamsburg_FirstBaptistChurch_0021.tif

View: Interior, nave, looking northwest

Image: VA_Williamsburg_FirstBaptistChurch_0022.tif

View: Interior, nave, looking north.

Image: VA_Williamsburg_FirstBaptistChurch_0023.tif

View: Interior, nave showing detail of chancel and choir, looking north.

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Image: VA_Williamsburg_FirstBaptistChurch_0024.tif

View: Interior, baptismal pool.

Image: VA_Williamsburg_FirstBaptistChurch_0025.tif

View: Interior, doors in second-floor wing.

Image: VA_Williamsburg_FirstBaptistChurch_0026.tif

View: Interior, furniture from earlier church in second-floor wing.

Image: VA_Williamsburg_FirstBaptistChurch_0027.tif

View: Interior, kitchen, looking east.

Image: VA_Williamsburg_FirstBaptistChurch_0028.tif

View: Hallway in lower level of church, looking south.

Image: VA_Williamsburg_FirstBaptistChurch_0029.tif

View: Choir room in lower level of church, looking south.

Image: VA_Williamsburg_FirstBaptistChurch_0030.tif

View: Assembly room in lower level of wing, looking southeast.

Image: VA_Williamsburg_FirstBaptistChurch_0031.tif

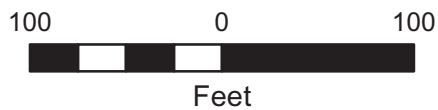
Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

LOCATION MAP
First Baptist Church, City of Williamsburg, VA
DHR #137-5071



1 inch = 100 feet

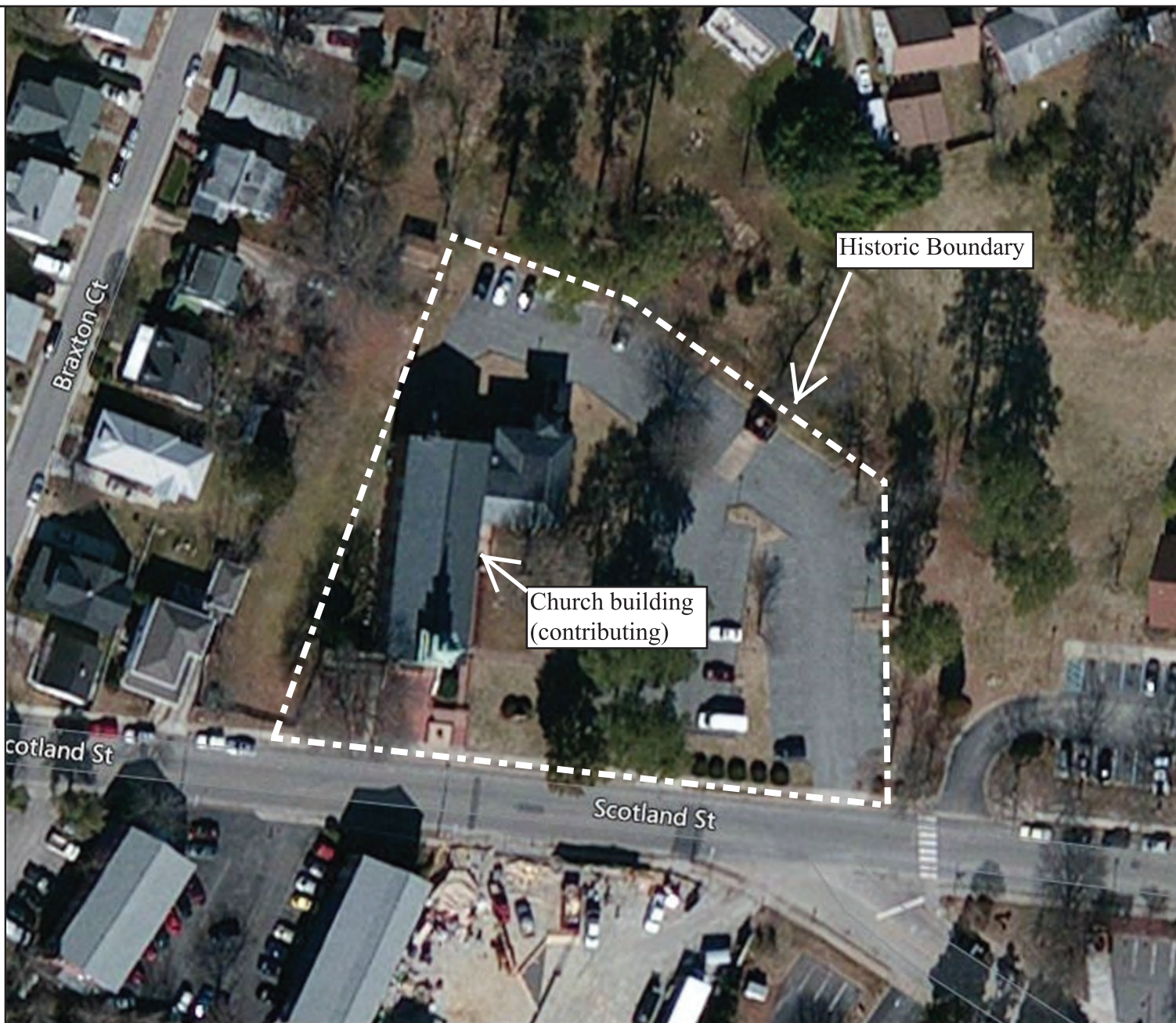


SKETCH MAP

First Baptist Church

City of Williamsburg, VA

DHR No. 137-5071



Feet

0 20 40 60 80

1:1,128 / 1"=94 Feet

Title:

Date: 4/10/2017

DISCLAIMER: Records of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) have been gathered over many years from a variety of sources and the representation depicted is a cumulative view of field observations over time and may not reflect current ground conditions. The map is for general information purposes and is not intended for engineering, legal or other site-specific uses. Map may contain errors and is provided "as-is". More information is available in the DHR Archives located at DHR's Richmond office.

Notice if AE sites: Locations of archaeological sites may be sensitive to the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) and Code of Virginia §2.2-3705.7 (10). Release of precise locations may threaten archaeological sites and historic resources.

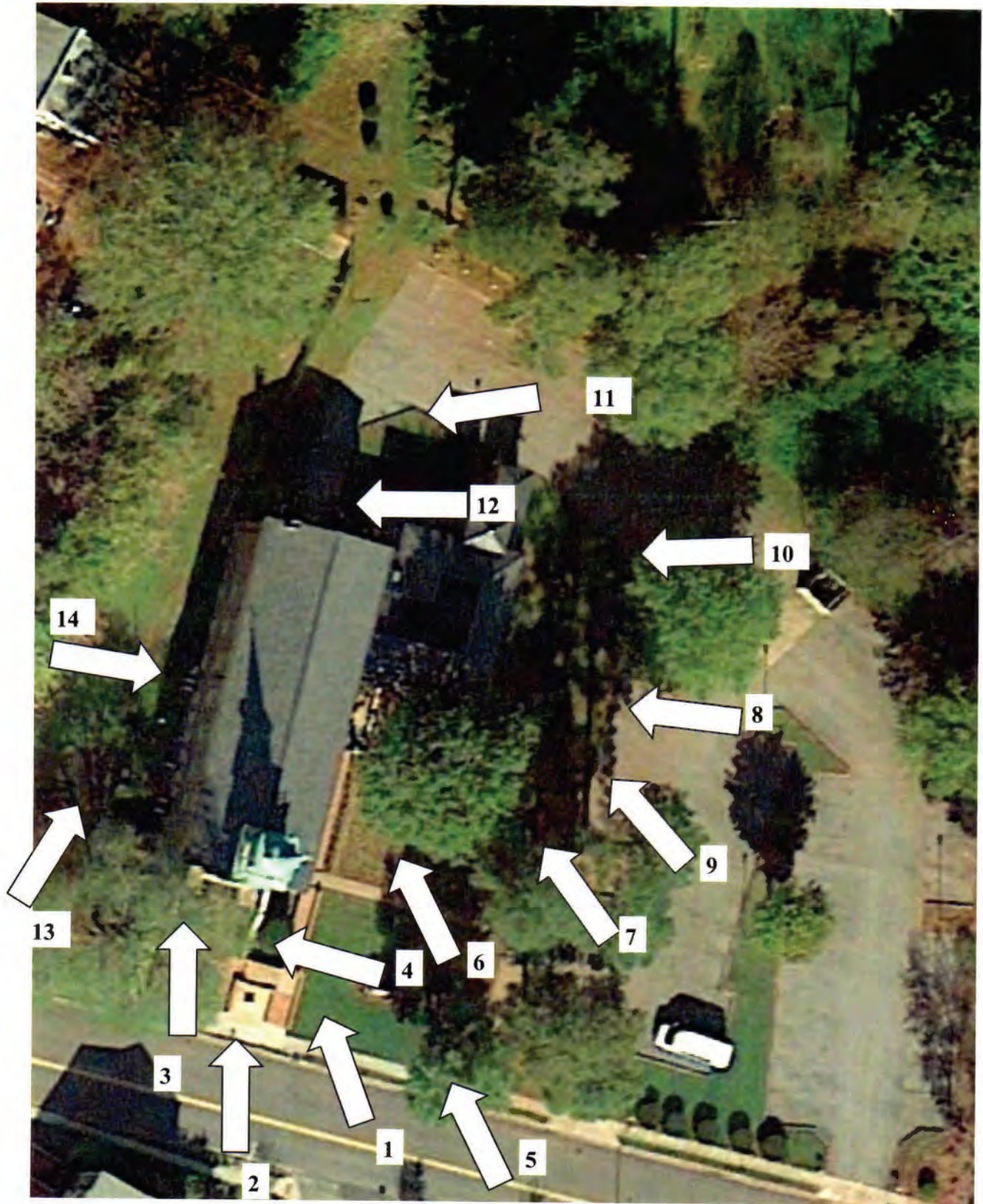
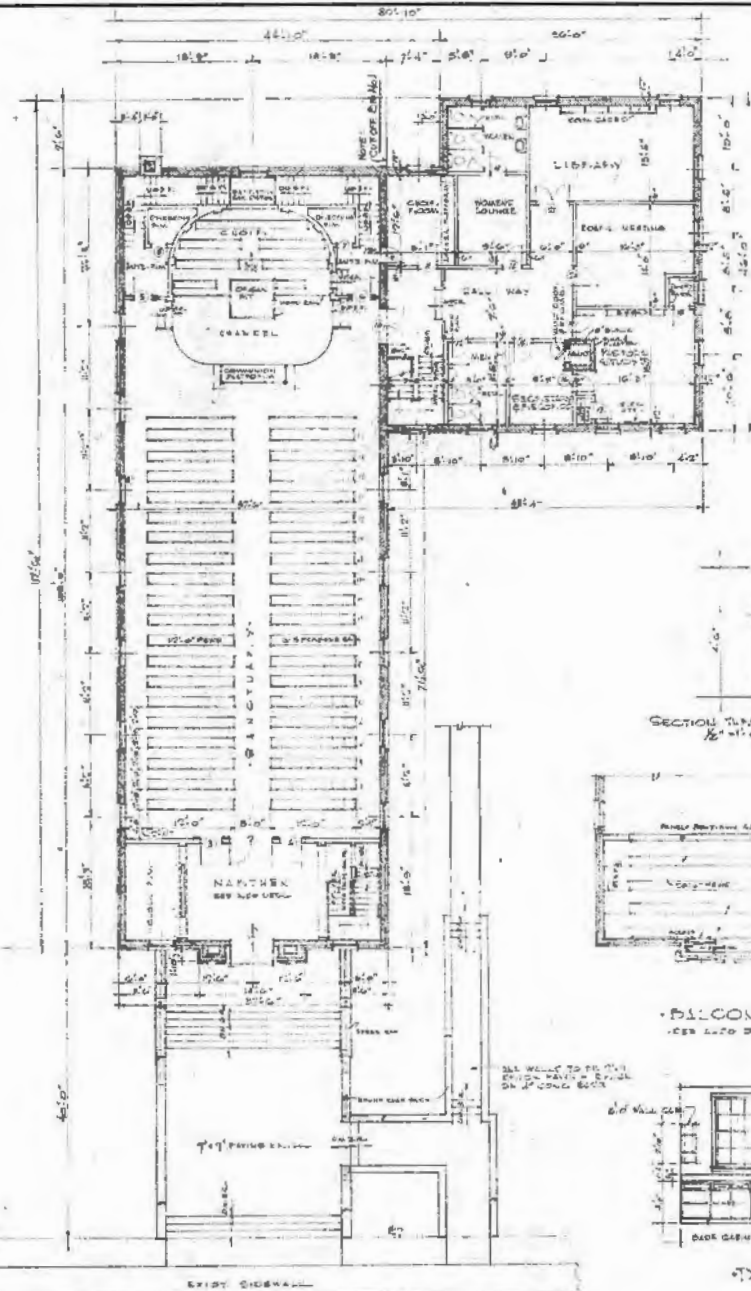


PHOTO KEY

First Baptist Church
City of Williamsburg, VA
DHR No. 137-5071



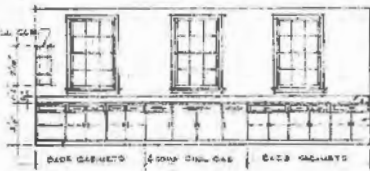


• MAIN FLOOR PLAN •

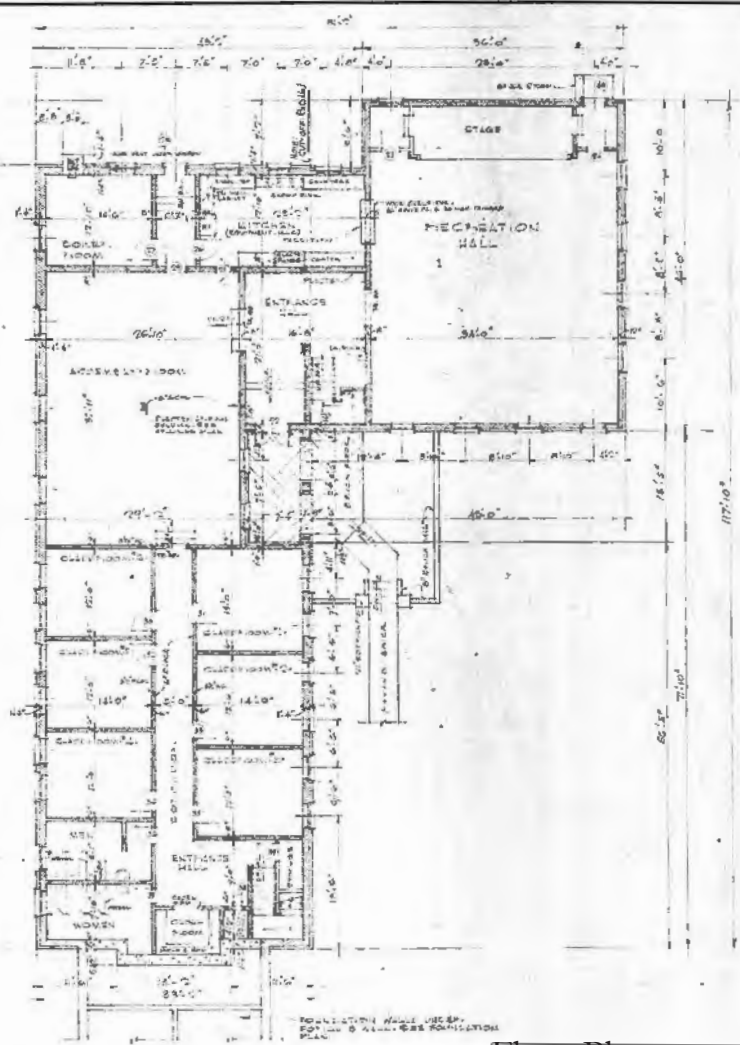
SECTION thru BOROADS



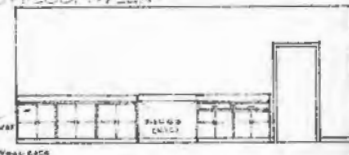
• BALCONY PLAN •
SEE ALSO DETAIL DRAWING



TYPICAL KITCHEN CABINET ELEVATIONS •
SCALE: 1/4" = 1'-0"



• GROUND FLOOR PLAN •

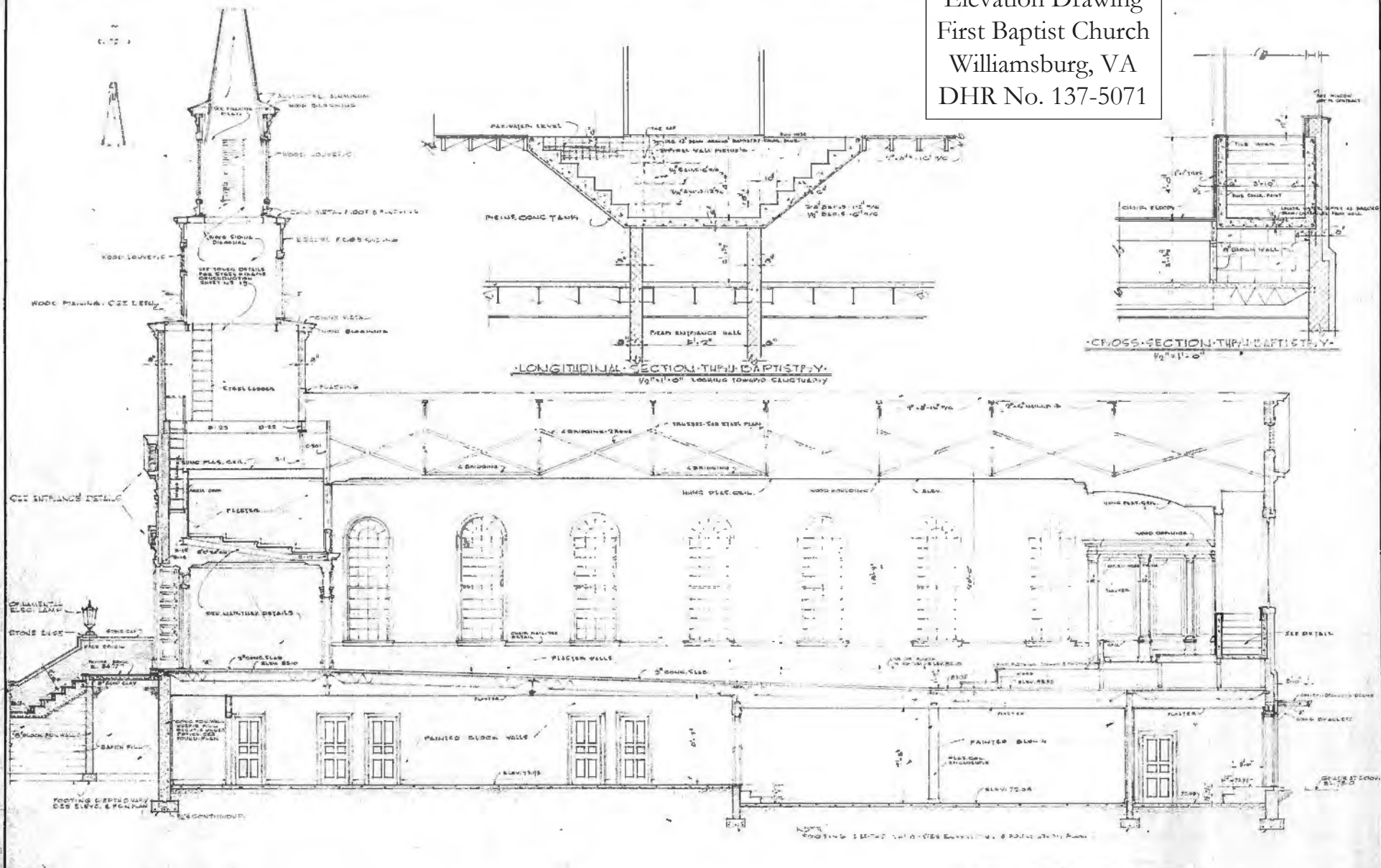


• FLOOR PLAN • SCALE: 1/4" = 1'-0"

Floor Plans
 First Baptist Church
 Williamsburg, VA
 DHR No. 137-5071

DRAW. NO. 2033	ARCHITECT BERNARD B. SPIGEL AIA 300 KREWE BUILDING NORFOLK, VIRGINIA	REVISIONS	PROJECT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH WILLIAMSBURG, VIRGINIA	SHEET NO. 3
DATE 11-17-54				OF 19

Elevation Drawing
 First Baptist Church
 Williamsburg, VA
 DHR No. 137-5071



CONTRACT NO. 2035	ARCHITECT BERNARD S. SPIGEL AIA 200 GREENE BUILDING ROFOLLE, VIRGINIA	REVISIONS	PROJECT NO. FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH WILLIAMSBURG, VA	SHEET NO. 6 OF 19
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