

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 determination for individual properties and districts. See instruction in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an 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. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name First Baptist Church of Denver

other names/site number 5DV803

2. Location

street & number 230 E. 14th Avenue /1373 Grant Street [N/A] not for publication

city or town Denver [N/A] vicinity

state Colorado code CO county Denver code 031 zip code 80203-2307

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 [] nationally [] statewide [X] locally. ([] See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title _____ State Historic Preservation Officer _____ Date _____
Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Colorado Historical Society
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria.
([] See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title _____ Date _____
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

- entered in the National Register
[] See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the
National Register
[] See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the
National Register.
- removed from the
National Register
- other, explain
[] See continuation sheet.

First Baptist Church of Denver
Name of Property

Denver, CO
County/State

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

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not count previously listed resources.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing.
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register.

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Function

(Enter categories from instructions)

Religion/religious facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Religion/religious facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and Early 20th Century Revivals
Colonial Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete
walls brick
roof terra cotta
other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

First Baptist Church of Denver
Name of Property

Denver, CO
County/State

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.)

Property is:

- 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 of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Periods of Significance

1938

Significant Dates

NA

Significant Person(s)

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above).

NA

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Musick, G. Meridith

Merrill, Humble and Taylor

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Colorado Historical Society

First Baptist Church of Denver
Name of Property

Denver, CO
County/State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1. 13 501415 4398494
Zone Easting Northing

2. Zone Easting Northing

3. Zone Easting Northing

4. Zone Easting Northing

[] See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Alan Doggett

organization on behalf of First Baptist Church date February 6, 2005

street & number 1373 Grant Street telephone 303.861.2501

city or town Denver state CO zip code 80203-2307

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional Items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name First Baptist Church of Denver

street & number 1373 Grant Street telephone 303.861.2501

city or town Denver state CO zip code 80203

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. 470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 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 Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

First Baptist Church of Denver Denver County, Colorado Section number 7 Page 1

Narrative Description

The present home of First Baptist Church was designed by Denver architect G. Meredith Musick and constructed by the church between 1935 and 1938 in the Georgian Revival style. The church occupies a prominent location at the southwest corner of 14th Avenue and Grant Street with the north entrance directly southeast across 14th Avenue from the Colorado State Capitol building. (See image 1) To the east, across Grant Street is the historic Scottish Rite Masonic Temple and to the west, across the alley, is the historic old Colorado State Museum, the last building designed by Frank Edbrooke. Immediately to the west of the former museum is the Capital Annex where Musick was also the lead architect. The church is in very good condition both inside and out and it maintains a very high degree of integrity in location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association within the existing Civic Center National Register historic district, of which it is a part.

The exterior walls are made of hard burned, mud faced solid brick that was specifically made for the church from local clays and are slightly smaller in size than standard brick.¹ The entire exterior is trimmed in Indiana oolitic limestone (egg and spherical shaped grains rather than crystalline).² All of the windows are multi-paned clear glass in white painted wood frames and are either classically rectangular (4v x 3w panes, or 5x3 panes, or 2x3 panes), long rectangles with arches, or ocular in configuration.

The building has a T-shaped plan. The stem of the T, from north to south, includes the portico, vestibule, narthex, sanctuary/auditorium (with balcony), chancel and baptistery. The cross of the T “wraps” the chancel and baptistery and includes the church offices, parlor, and rooms that were originally part of the church’s graded school program. These rooms are now used for storage, additional office space, and Sunday school. The overall dimensions of the church are 195’ along the east and west façades and 110’ wide at the south façade and 63’ wide at the north entry portico. The church is approximately 40’ high and two stories in appearance with the office/classroom wing a functional two levels while the vestibule, narthex, auditorium, and chancel are primarily open to the vaulted ceilings in each, with the exception of the balcony area above the narthex.

The north façade is symmetrical in layout and serves as the main entrance to the church. (See image 2) This entrance is slightly raised off 14th Avenue with granite steps that lead up to the four grand dark red polished granite columns that frame the entry to the portico. (See image 3) In reality these columns are three separate drums that are not mortared together but instead rest on 1/8” lead plates. Bronze dowels that are two feet long and three quarters of an inch in diameter connect the drums and capitals. At the base, the columns are 28 inches in diameter.³ The Corinthian capitals, the entablature that rests upon them, and the pediment and tympanum above, along with the cornices, and dentils that trim the pediment are from the same Indiana limestone the trims the entire building.⁴ The portico columns frame the three entry doorways into the vestibule of the church. The center door is taller in height and features a scrolled broken pediment under trimmed with dentils, while the two flanking doors are trimmed with a standard pediment and dentils. The door trim/casing is of polished pink Tennessee marble, while the pediments are of limestone.⁵ The granite cornerstone is also located at the base of the northeast corner of this façade.

Immediately behind and above the entrance portico and pediment are the church’s signature tower, spire, and weather vane that reach nearly 160 feet into the air. Rising above the auditorium’s gabled roofline the tower begins with the same mud faced brick used to construct the rest of the church. Transitioning to the Indiana limestone for over 45 feet, the tower is finished off with a grand 40’ copper faced spire. The spire is then capped

¹ Musick, G. Meredith, “Building of First Baptist Church,” Dedication Sunday, Commemorative church handout, December 4, 1938, p. 10.

² Musick, G. Meredith, A Wayfarer in Architecture, (unpublished autobiography manuscript), p. 110.

³ Architectural Plans, First Baptist Church. Sheet 5

⁴ Musick, A Wayfarer..., p. 110.

⁵ Musick, “Building of First Baptist Church,” p. 10.

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet****United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**First Baptist Church of Denver Denver County, Colorado Section number 7 Page 2

with a copper weather vane marking the compass points and is capped with a cast bronze weathercock, a common Protestant symbol of Christ and religious freedom.⁶

To the south and separated by the sanctuary/auditorium are the two small north facing wings that form the school and office areas of the church. (See image 4) Both of these wings to the east and west are nearly identical in appearance, but serve different purposes. The north elevation to the east is 3 feet wider at 25'-4" and faces a small exterior brick patio and landscape area that is off of the interior church parlor and is adjacent to Grant Street. There is a chimney from the church parlor that rises off center to the east on this side. An upstairs 12-pane and a downstairs 15-pane window flank either side of the chimney. To the right, between the flanking window and the eastern façade of the sanctuary there is a doorway from the parlor, and another upstairs 12-pane window. The western wing of the north side lacks the chimney, is shorter in width and the due to a downward sloping grade to the west, the doorway leads out to a metal stairway that steps down to a small parking area off of the alley. Below this door is another stair that runs down parallel to the wall and into the basement, serving as a service entry into the kitchen below. As with all of the other sides, it is constructed with the standard church brick. Typical of the rectangular multi-paned windows on the rest of the building and the secondary entry ways, there is a slightly angled vertical course of brick that caps the windows and doors and each window has a lintel of limestone.

The east and west sides of the church are nearly identical in physical appearance with the exception that the east side, which is along Grant Street, naturally carries a much stronger presence into the surrounding community and as such features an additional entry into the narthex to the north and the main entry into the school and office areas of the church to the south. While matching in appearance and finishes, the western side serves as more of a service point as it is adjacent to the alleyway between it and the old State Museum Building. Regardless, asides from the main level entry points, the description to follow applies to both sides, except as noted.

Starting from the narthex section of the church, the exterior east and west sides are primarily of the standard church brick. As noted, the primary differences in façade layout between east and west occur at this point. The east side has a red flagstone path leading from the Grant Street sidewalk to the double doors into the east narthex vestibule. (See image 5) The doorway is capped with an arched broken pediment and urn and is framed by two cast iron period light fixtures, and wrought iron railings to either side. Above the doorway is a 12-pane double-hung window that looks out from the stairway leading out to the second floor balcony. On the west side, there is no doorway but it is replaced with a similarly trimmed 24-pane window. Both sides feature a gabled roof that meet the slightly taller gabled roof that runs the length of the building. The pediment, cornices, window and trim, and the entablature like line carry over in the previously mentioned Indian limestone and Tennessee marble used on the north side. The tympanums of the pediments are finished with the brick.

Moving to the main body of the church itself, the next portion of the east and west sides that make up the sanctuary/auditorium continue the use of the church brick and are broken with the symmetrical feature element of four arched windows that are 18 ½ feet in height. (See image 6) The wood window frames are original and consist of 16 clear glass panes in the rectangular portion of the window that are topped with an additional 11 panes in the arch. The windows are outlined with a single row of slightly recessed straight stacked brick that differentiates the bond from the rest of the wall along with an additional course around the arch of end facing brick. They also have matching limestone lintels. At the springer points and keystone of each window arch is a block of limestone to serve as an additional accent. Along the east façade and under the arched windows, a window well runs nearly the entire length for the auditorium windows in the basement. These windows are in line with the windows above but are much shorter in height and do not include the arch. Again due to the grade change, on the west façade, these windows are just above grade level. As the east façade is a more prominent feature along Grant Street, it is in front of this location that the landscaped brick patio that was previously mentioned is placed while on the west

⁶ "A New Church Spire." Pamphlet. Estimated date of publishing, 1938.

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet****United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**First Baptist Church of Denver Denver County, Colorado Section number 7 Page 3

side there is a small parking area off of the alley.

The remainder of the east and west sides to the south consist of the office and school wings that make up the “cross” of the T. (See image 6) Similar to the narthex, there are slight differences in appearance that occur due to the uses and geographic orientation of the opposing sides. The primary difference is that the east wing hosts the main entrance off of Grant Street to this functional area of the church, which also doubles as a secondary entrance, (see image 7) through the parlor, to the sanctuary and chancel itself. This entry way is capped with an arched broken pediment and urn on which directly above is a double hung 12 pane window. Both of these are framed in the typical Indiana limestone used throughout. Immediately to the right and left of the doorway are two cast iron light fixtures matching those on the narthex entry and adjacent to each of them is a small six pane window. Completing the symmetry at the entry is a downstairs 15 pane window and an upstairs 12 pane window flanking either side of the door/lamp/window combination. This symmetrical arrangement is again capped with a gabled roof, but with a much simpler pediment that doesn't include dentils, but does have an ocular window in the tympanum with Indiana limestone at its relative compass points surrounded by the standard church brick. To the north of this symmetrical pattern is another symmetrical arrangement of 2 windows each up and down that form the eastern exterior wall of the church parlor. The west façade matches the overall appearance of the east with the exception of another 15 pane window in the place of the doorway.

The southern façade is one of Georgian simplicity with a symmetrical combination of 12 multi pane windows in the full variety of rectangular styles already used elsewhere on the church. (See image 8) At the center of the façade, but partially below grade are the double doors that lead to the stairwell landing to the basement. Flanking these doors is another window well/walkway that runs the length of the façade. This is all capped with the pediment facing for the main gabled roof that run north south across the narthex, sanctuary, chancel, and part of the office and stair areas. This pediment matches the simpler pediment around to the east and west and also has the same tympanum treatment with a small arched window with limestone at its three compass points and brick surrounding.

The interior of the church is in simple harmony with the exterior design using the small churches around London designed by Sir Christopher Wren as a model.⁷ (see images 9 and 10) As such, the plan for the church includes a long rectangular sanctuary, with a center aisle flanked on either side with the original pews that lead from the vestibule to the chancel. The auditorium is approximately 55 feet long running north south and has a width of 40 feet plus two 5 foot wide side aisles. It will seat 900 with an additional 150 that can be accommodated in the balcony that is above the narthex. The primary wall finishes are relatively simple being of ivory colored painted plaster and wood that is accented with subtle color highlights of blue, turquoise, white and gold on the trim, cornices, capitals, archivolt and entablatures. The window treatments are of dark blue velour. Pews and other chancel furnishings are of birch and stained and finished in American Walnut. The auditorium floor is finished in cork and while the aisles have been carpeted over, the cork is exposed where the pews are located. The chancel floor was originally heavily carpeted for appearance, silence and durability, but the carpeting has since been removed, and hardwood oak chancel floor was put in place approximately 10 years ago.

The vestibule is approximately 28 feet wide and 7 feet deep. The floors are finished in a polished red stone, and the walls are covered in a grey/pink marble wainscoting (the architect described this marble only as of “rare quality.”⁸) up to the door height. Above the marble is painted wood cornice, above which springs a barrel vault ceiling that runs the width of the space. At the east and west side walls is an arched niche opening that runs from a foot above the floor to a foot below the ceiling. The walls of the niche are painted plaster half-cylinders that are capped with a half dome. The room is illuminated with an original cylindrical glass and brass trimmed pendant light fixture. Leading from the vestibule to the narthex are 3 doorways with double dual swinging painted wood

⁷ Musick, *A Wayfarer...*, p. 111.

⁸ Musick, “Building of First Baptist Church,” p. 11.

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet****United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**First Baptist Church of Denver Denver County, Colorado Section number 7 Page 4

paneled doors that match in alignment with the main entry doors from the portico.

The narthex is approximately 29.5 feet wide and 12 feet deep and has the same marble wainscoting on the north wall of the vestibule. The original floor material is cork and matches the auditorium floor; however this has been covered with the same carpet used in the auditorium aisles. From the center doorway leaving the vestibule, there is one central portal on the opposing wall of the narthex into the auditorium. Flanking this portal on either side is a waist high to cornice line window panel that allows viewing into the auditorium. Both windows and entry way are trimmed in a lightly carved wood. The cornice line in the narthex is slightly more ornamental with dentils and is capped with a shallower barrel vault spanning the depth of the space. The east and west walls of the narthex both have an open doorway into the adjoining side narthex vestibules. These doorways are both capped with a straight pediment above the cornice lines. The narthex vestibules are wrapped in the same marble wainscoting as the main entry and have the same red stone floor. The north elevation of these vestibules is where the staircases up to the balcony and down to the basement are located. These stairs also have half wall height marble wainscoting to match the main vestibule, and marble steps to the first landing up or down. After that, the walls return to full plaster and the steps are painted concrete. The first landings also have an 8x8 4" terra cotta tile inlay in the marble. The southern wall of each vestibule has an entry way leading to the side aisle of the auditorium. Additionally, the east narthex vestibule has the doorway out to Grant Street, while the west vestibule has a multi paned window in its place. Both side vestibules have the simpler cornice line with a vault to match the narthex.

On either side of the pews that flank the central aisle are side aisles screened by a colonnade of five ivory painted wood columns with plaster Corinthian capitals that have details accented with a deeper toned stain to further differentiate them from the columns themselves. (See image 11) These side aisles permit movement within the church without disturbing the main service. The columns are spanned with a series of archivolt that spring from a series of entablatures that reach across the side aisle from the top of the column capital to the east or west walls of the sanctuary and form a line of four truncated barrel vaults that span the length of the sanctuary auditorium. Together, these elements, frame the previously mentioned arched windows on the interior east and west sides of the sanctuary. The windows are accented with dark blue velour drapery that is normally pulled back for natural light from the clear windows. Beneath the windows are painted wood and screened panels that conceal the recessed radiator units. The archivolt have a simple ornamentation with painted highlights, and from the center of each hang an original brass candelabra electric light fixture. Slightly above the archivolt is a line of dentils that wraps the entire auditorium. On the colonnade side, above the dentils, is another cornice line from which springs the vaulted ceiling that spans the entire auditorium.

Framing, and inset from the east/west edges of the slightly raised chancel, are columns and capitals that match the finish and height of those along the side colonnades. (See image 9) The entablature and cornice that lower the ceiling line on either side of the chancel is the location under which the choir was originally located on either side of the baptistery and communion table. Above these capitals is an entablature and cornice that wraps the three closed sides of the chancel. From the east and west sides of this cornice springs another vaulted ceiling above the chancel that is shorter in span and lower in height than the main vault in the auditorium. The back (south) wall of the chancel conceals the narrow hallway and steps that lead into the small baptistery pool. Although the pool itself is concealed, the centrally located opening of the baptistery that allows this part of the service to be witnessed by the congregation is the dominant chancel element. The pool extends approximately 2 feet from the back wall into the chancel area. The top of the pool is approximately 3 feet up from the chancel floor and this face is wrapped in wood wainscoting that continues around the entire chancel. From the protruding corners "columns" rise up to frame the actual opening and meet the entablature line established earlier. The columns are spanned with a small entablature that is faced with a cartouche. Above this element, is an arched broken pediment with a central urn element. All of this is painted the same ivory color as the rest of church interior but is highlighted with dark blue velour drapery in the opening and a simple narrow brass cross approximately 5 feet in length that hangs down from the entablature. On either side of the baptistery are candelabra niches that are capped with unbroken straight pediments that together reach approximately half of the baptistery height.

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet****United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**First Baptist Church of Denver Denver County, Colorado Section number 7 Page 5

In the attic space above the chancel vault, and behind large gridded wood screens located in the chancel vault and in the arch above the cornice line on the back wall are the 6500+ pipes for the church's full 4-manual, 126-rank Aeolian-Skinner organ. This organ was tonally designed by G. Donald Harrision, a world renowned organ theorist who also designed the Mormon Tabernacle Organ (also an Aeolian-Skinner organ). This organ was installed in 1951 to replace the original organ and is the largest organ in Colorado and one of the 50 largest in the United States. The organ console is located just in front of the baptistery and there are additional openings on the east and west choir walls for the bass pipes.⁹

The southern wing of the church houses the administrative offices and former graded school of the church. This wing of the building is functionally two occupied floors with access between floors from a centrally located open staircase that has simply ornamented iron banisters with oak handrails. This same stairway also leads down to the basement and at the first landing down, is where the southern entry doors come into the building. As previously noted, the main entry to this wing of the building is from a double doorway along the eastern Grant Street façade. Due to its primary original function as a school, the finishes in this wing were more necessarily utilitarian. The walls were painted plaster with a wood trim wainscot line at waist height. Door and window casings are simple painted molded wood from the period, each classroom and hallway typically had a simple carved cornice line meeting a flat plaster ceiling. Some of the rooms have a slightly ornamented beam that divides the ceiling. Simply detailed, but elegant, each of the classroom doors is paneled and contains a rectangular clear leaded glass window with a series of three elliptical inlays that span the window width. The majority of the classrooms and hallways maintain the classic existing or replica school house globe incandescent lighting fixtures in either ceiling mount or pendant form. The architect only notes that this wing is simply finished with colors selected for light and durability with linoleum as the floor covering for moderate cost and durability.¹⁰

Most of the classroom space has been converted into other uses; primarily storage, office, and meeting space but are in overall good to very good condition. The first floor functions as the main offices for the church and there is also a small nursery. The floors have been carpeted over, and the church has recently been going through a rehabilitation effort on the ground floor that is moving up to the second floor. This has included fresh paint in the hallways and the offices that while not matching the original colors, is appropriately kept within the décor of the church. One of the recent efforts has been the restoration of the parlor space to as close to its original appearance as possible. The maple hardwood floors have been refinished and the walls, fireplace mantel, window casings, ceilings, cornices and other trim have been freshly painted along with addition of period furniture.

There is yet more usable church, public, and classroom space in the basement. After coming down the southern central stairwell, on the east side there are 4 original classroom/assembly spaces and another classroom and full commercial kitchen on the west side. Below only this portion is another smaller basement level that houses the boiler room and original coal room. Directly under the chancel is a large adult classroom with a folding partition wall to the north that opens into a large recreation assembly room that is directly under the main church auditorium. The north side of the room opens to a small stage that is below the narthex, and on either side are original choir rooms below that are below the side vestibules and where the front staircases allow entry into the basement. Due to the large number of light wells and grade level windows, there is an adequate supply of natural diffused light in these spaces. As a result, over the years, the rooms in the basement have served many functions. The Dedication Sunday pamphlet noted that with a PA system an additional 600 people could be sat here for overflow on special service events. This space has been used for public events, performances, church socials, and relatively recently, in conjunction with the kitchen as a homeless shelter. As other homeless services have been opened by the city, the church has started a restoration/rehabilitation effort down here as well, and the original maple floors have been refinished and the walls repainted in the auditorium.

⁹ Glen Fisher, Chairman, Property Commission. First Baptist Church. Notes on church organ. August 22, 2004 and January 23, 2005.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 11.

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet****United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**First Baptist Church of Denver Denver County, Colorado Section number 7 Page 6

Modifications:

As the church building approaches its 67th birthday, relatively few modifications have occurred over time. Those changes that have been necessary have been minor and related to wear or changes in church service or function. The exterior of the church remains mostly unchanged with the exception of some aluminum flashing placed on the entablature and pediments around the building to inhibit pigeons. While no longer used as a graded school, the school rooms are intact and in good condition. These rooms have either been converted to offices, storage, or remain empty. The chancel floor was rebuilt and the choir stalls removed. The new chancel oak floor has an angled riser to the congregation flanking either side of the baptistery for the choir to stand. The cork floor in the auditorium aisles has been carpeted over, but the original cork remains beneath.

As mentioned, the areas around the chancel vault were modified in 1951 to accommodate additional openings and screens for the organ pipes. Currently the wood screens are in the process of being changed out to a more sound transparent fabric to improve the output of volume from the organ pipes which is being blocked by about 50 percent. These new screens will be colored to match the existing finishes in the chancel. Additionally, the organ is scheduled for cleaning, tuning, and mapping in February 2005 that will likely identify additional pipes that were added in 1957.

The architect notes that the acoustic tiles on the vaulted auditorium ceiling were originally turquoise blue. These tiles appear to have been painted at some point in time in white to match the ceiling. The church parlor has recently undergone restoration to its original finishes as has the auditorium in the basement. Plans are under way to repaint the other office and class room areas of the school in keeping with the existing décor of the church as much as possible. The pews and other furnishings in the sanctuary are original. The basement auditorium is undergoing the previously mentioned rehabilitation, and funding was recently acquired to start restoration of the windows and doors throughout the church in early 2005.

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet****United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**First Baptist Church of Denver Denver County, Colorado Section number 8 Page 7

Statement of Significance

The 1938 First Baptist Church of Denver is eligible for the National Register under Criterion C for its architectural significance. Designed by one of Denver's top architects of the first half of the twentieth century, G. Meredith Musick, the church is one of the city's rare, well-executed examples of Georgian Revival architecture. Other examples of the style include the 1903 Highlands Christian Church by Cowe and Harvey Architects and the 1903 chapel at St. Elizabeth's Retreat. The Highlands Church has a similar entry portico and column plan. However, the columns are in the Doric order and are not as large nor in the same material as at First Baptist. Additionally, while the primary structure of First Baptist Church continues primarily behind the entry portico, the structure at Highlands Church flanks either side of the portico. A similar structure is also seen in the St. Elizabeth's chapel although the entry portico is a more prominent two level structure compared to the single level flanking structures. While both churches are capped with a cupola, they do not approach the height of the steeple at First Baptist Church.

Already part of the existing National Register Civic Center historic district and a Denver Landmark, First Baptist Church occupies a prominent location in this district and is readily identifiable due to its soaring steeple that can be seen from all approaches and its giant granite portico columns. These columns are constructed from granite from Lyons, Colorado quarried, rough hewn and brought to Denver where they were turned and hand polished on a lathe built on site. At the time, they were the largest polished granite columns in the state.¹¹ One year after its completion, a December 1939 article in *Architectural Record* listed the church as third among the best buildings in Denver.

Showing typical Georgian Revival elements such as pilasters at each exterior building corner, a two-story portico, rectangular multi-paned windows in symmetrical layouts on the side, dentiled pediments, and brick construction, the church is highly representative of the style. Where feasible, local materials were used in the construction, including the previously mentioned mud brick and granite. The Indiana oolitic limestone was cut, molded, and carved in that state.¹² At the conclusion of his description of the church in the "Dedication Sunday" brochure, Musick stated that "unless the building is deliberately razed or destroyed by catastrophe it will stand in good standing for centuries."¹³

The well designed and yet restrained interior is an appropriate and reflective place for worship and is indicative of the intended model of earlier Wren churches throughout London. In addressing those who may have desired a church built around the popular "Akron Plan," where a centrally placed pulpit is surrounded by an upward sloping bowl shaped seating that necessitates a flight up steps up and into the church, the Musick describes the plan here as "...based upon good ecclesiastical usage which has been developed through the centuries," where there are no obstructions in the chancel from the center aisle with all focus directed towards the "centerpiece of the highest ceremony of the Church".¹⁴ Solidly built, both the interior and the exterior of the church remain in very good condition.

G. Meridith Musick was one of Denver's most versatile architects, with excellent examples of work across many styles of architecture. The 1939 *Architectural Record* article which praised the church, noted two other structures among its top five in which Musick is identified as one of the architects: the nearby Art Moderne State Capital Annex (listed first) and the International style Denver Police Building. Known primarily for his work in early modern styles, the First Baptist Church illustrates his ability to design equally memorable buildings in revival styles.

¹¹ Musick, "Building of First Baptist Church," pp. 10-11.

¹² Musick, G. Meridith, *A Wayfarer in Architecture*, p. 110.

¹³ G. Meredith Musick, "Building of First Baptist Church," p. 12.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 4.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

First Baptist Church of Denver Denver County, Colorado Section number 8 Page 8

Born in Arkansas in 1892, and educated in St. Louis and Denver, Musick began his early years of apprenticeships from 1911 to 1913 by working at the offices of Henry Hewitt, William DuBois, Frank Edbrooke, Harry Manning and Jacques Benedict. He went to Detroit from 1916 to 1917 and worked at the office of Smith Hinckman and Grylls before returning to work for Harry Manning in the summer of 1917. From late summer 1917 to the fall of 1923, he worked at the office of Eugene Groves and while there he was also a charter member of the Atelier Denver School which was chartered by the Beaux Arts Institute of Design in New York City. Musick was licensed in 1921 and he opened his own office in October of 1923 and thus began his diversified portfolio. Some of his outstanding Denver design work includes the National Register-listed 1930 Bryant-Webster School, an art deco styled school with Indian style motifs in the brick work, the 1927 Neo-Gothic Republic Building (since torn down), the 1925 Tudor styled Wellshire Country Club, the 1939 Art Moderne State Capital Annex (National Register), of which Musick was the president of the association of six architects, the 1936 Italian Renaissance Revival extension to the U.S. Customs House (National Register) with Temple Buell, and probably the two best examples of International style architecture in Denver – the National Register-listed 1949 Denver University Business School (now part of the Wellington Webb Administration Building) designed in conjunction with three other architects, and the 1940 Denver Police Building with two other architects. Musick retired in 1957, and passed away in March of 1977. A eulogy in the *Denver Post* noted his “monumental impact on the face and skyline of Denver.”¹⁵

Also of note is the tremendous effort by the members of the church and its pastor during difficult times to construct these new facilities. Its existence, style, and impact on the needs of the congregation were very much a sign of the times. While the initial effort for a new building was started with the purchase of the current 14th and Grant land in 1917, World War I and the early years of the Great Depression slowed any effort to build. There was renewed interest starting in the 1930s and with the appointment and leadership of Dr. Clarence Kemper as pastor in 1934 the final drive to build was on. Thorough and original meeting minutes from the Executive Building Council at the time shows a church finding its way through the ups and downs of the early 1930s and all the while developing a well conceived plan and program for achieving its goal. Once started - plans were made, funds were raised, a building was constructed and a mortgage burned in ten short years. During a short lull where the basement had been built, there was uncertainty about when and how to continue with the rest of the construction, Dr Kemper rallied the troops with a handout. While he was speaking from experience, he was prophetic when he said “No church ever gets built which waits for the every member to say ‘this is the time’ ...Church building means find a way, then do it.”¹⁶ Given the soon to follow outbreak of World War II, followed by the Korean War, it’s not hard to imagine that more delays could have occurred if the church had not started building when it did. In the same article Dr. Kemper outlined the need for adequate school facilities, facilities for inspiring worship, and recruiting and retaining new members to the church. While stating this project as the life of the church, he identified his life with the congregation’s in completing it and noted that team work makes a church. Comments from local religious leaders to the church at the time note the success it achieved in this goal:

You have placed at the very heart of Denver – where all must see it - a uniquely beautiful and compelling religious symbol. This is a community service of a magnitude which cannot be measured. -
Dr Charles Wing, The First Unitarian Society

The lover of beautiful church architecture can at last be satisfied by a building which sets forth the beauty and power of religion in our city. The First Baptist Church will hereafter speak for all our churches. - Dr. Vere Loper, First Plymouth Congregational Church.

¹⁵ G. Meredith Musick, *A Wayfarer in Architecture*, multiple pages. Noel and Norgren, p. 213.

¹⁶ Dr. Charles S. Kemper, “Some Factors in Our New First Baptist Church Building Program.” Handout to the congregation. August 12, 1936.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

First Baptist Church of Denver Denver County, Colorado Section number 8 Page 9

There are three prominent things that have always drawn my attention: a pine tree, a mountain, and a church steeple. The beautiful gracefulness of the First Baptist Church steeple will certainly turn our eyes on high. - Dr. Otto Houser, Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church.¹⁷

Historic Context:

Church History Prior to Current Location

Founded just six years after the founding of Denver, the history of First Baptist Church nearly parallels that of the city itself. On December 20, 1863 Walter McDuffie Potter and his sister Lucy arrived in Denver after being appointed missionary to Denver and the Colorado Territory by the American Baptist Ministry Society. Potter first preached to a gathering of 10 people on December 27, 1863 and the First Baptist Church of Denver was formally organized on the May 2, 1864 with 9 constituent members.¹⁸ The original church location at the northeast corner of 16th and Curtis started out with the construction of a cellar and walls 4 feet above ground were built before money ran out. A roof was put over the structure and served as the church's home until 1872 and its potato cellar like appearance led it to be commonly referred to as the "Holy Dug-Out". Unfortunately, due to rapidly failing health Potter passed away in April 1866 at the age of 29.¹⁹

It is interesting to note that despite his young age, Rev. Potter also had a significant impact on Denver then and now. He and his uncle owned fifty acres of land at the foot of 19th street and he and his sister, through the Homestead Act were able to preempt 320 acres of land bordered by 32nd Ave to the South, 38th Ave. to the North, Zuni Blvd to the East and Federal Blvd. to the West.²⁰ Today, this area is commonly known as the Potter-Highlands Historic District. After settlement with the Baptist Home Society, the money from these lands helped to fund the ongoing growth of the church in its early days.²¹

In December 1871, Dr. Winfield Scott assumed the pastorate and guided the construction of the church's second home at 18th and Curtis street starting in 1872 and dedicated in 1873 and served as home to the church until 1883. Dr. Scott left the Denver pastorate in 1875 but his history is an interesting one as well. He organized a Company in the Civil War where he was injured several times. In 1888, Dr. Scott was invited to the Salt River Valley in Arizona to promote Phoenix. Later that year he purchased 640 acres of land in the valley that was later to become known as Scottsdale, Arizona.²²

In 1879 the church began to make plans for a new building that was originally to be sited on the existing property. However, in 1881, a decision was made to purchase four lots on the north side of Stout St. between 17th and 18th Streets and the proceeds from the eventual sale of the Curtis St property went into the new home. This third home of the church was dedicated on May 8, 1883 under the Pastorate of Dr. Reuben Jeffrey and served as its home until the building was sold in mid 1937 as part of the funding effort for the current facility detailed here.²³ President Warren G. Harding attended services in this building during a western trip where he unfortunately died suddenly in San Francisco.²⁴

¹⁷ "Our Church Buildings" Chapter XIII. pp. 23-27.

¹⁸ Maud Stevens, *A Century of Baptist Faith*. (Denver, CO: Distributed by First Baptist Church, 1964), p. 2.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* pp 3-4.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.* pp 5-6,19.

²² *Ibid.* p. 20. and "Scottsdale History," Scottsdale Convention & Visitors Bureau web site, <http://www.scottsdalecvb.com/about/index.cfm?action=history>. and "Winfield Scott Exhibit." Scottsdale Museum web site at <http://www.scottsdalemuseum.com/exhibits.html>.

²³ *Ibid.* pp. 6-7.

²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 23.

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet****United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**First Baptist Church of Denver Denver County, Colorado Section number 8 Page 10

History of Current Location:

As early as 1911 the church began considerations for a new building that began to gain momentum with a committee report in 1917 that found that improvements to the existing building would be too expensive and that even still the building would not meet modern trends. This was paired with the availability and purchase of the then Tritch Estate at 14th and Grant. While the estate was purchased, World War One and the start of the depression brought further efforts to a near standstill until February 18, 1931 when the Church Advisory committee minutes show that they resolved that the church would proceed with the erection of a new building. This was passed by the entire church and the *Denver Post* of February 19, 1931, announced the proposed church at a cost of \$300,000 to \$400,000.

Despite this resolution, and some fund raising efforts, the project continued to lag until when in November 1933, Dr. Clarence Kemper, then Vice President of the Northern Baptist Convention, stopped to preach at the church. The congregation, already aware of his reputation as a church builder and speaker, was so impressed that they offered him the pastorate before he left. Dr. Kemper accepted and the final drive was on with his official arrival in March 1934.²⁵ Church history notes that he immediately identified himself with the church and its heritage, and made it his own. On May 6, 1934 (the 70th anniversary of the church as an institution), Kemper issued the challenge to “rise up and build.”²⁶

The meeting minutes of the church building council in late 1934 show active movement toward that goal. An August 9th meeting identified Dr. Kemper as believing \$150,000 to \$175,000 to be sufficient to build a church seating 1000 and a Sunday school accommodating 500. The Baptist Home Mission Society architects in New York, Merrill, Humble and Taylor, suggested a building type in keeping with the classical architecture around Denver’s Civic Center. The firm believed a colonial edifice of Georgian and Renaissance revival styles would be appropriate. The building committee agreed, but also expressed a desire to hire a local architect. Initial discussions were held in mid-October to identify perspective local architects. On November 1, 1934, the names of S. Arthur Axtens, Jacques Benedict, Frank Frewen and the firm of Marean & Norton were suggested as possible architects. Frank Frewen was the initial choice at this meeting, but the council agreed to meet four days later for a final vote after additional research. At the November 5th meeting, G. Meredith Musick was added to the list. The council decided to do more research and delay a final vote until November 7th. During that meeting, the list was narrowed down to three—Musick, Frewen, and Axtens, each of whom were be asked to make a presentation five days later on November 12th. After hearing the three presentations, the council voted 10-4 in favor of Musick over Frewen, with an additional passed motion to make the vote unanimous. The contract was given to Musick on January 15, 1935, and the preliminary plans were submitted by March 29, 1935, with an estimated cost of \$175,600. The building council accepted the plans without change.²⁷

The ground breaking ceremonies were held on Sunday, June 23, 1935, in conjunction with the Northern Baptist Convention being held in Colorado Springs. Speakers of note included Dr. George Truett, pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas, president of the Baptist World Alliance, and a nationally renowned preacher during that time. Also announced at the ceremony was a surprise \$10,000 donation from the estate of Charles Miller for which the basement auditorium was named after. The *Denver Post* noted that Mr. Miller, who was not a member of any church, while on his walks around the city, had always thought that the 14th and Grant site would be an excellent location for a church. Upon learning that the First Baptist Church was to be built there, he donated a portion of his estate to the church for that purpose.²⁸

²⁵ Ibid. p. 9.

²⁶ Ibid. p. 10.

²⁷ Compiled from Building Council Meeting Minutes on dates noted, Contract between First Baptist Church and G. Meredith Musick, and Preliminary Specifications as submitted on March 29, 1935.

²⁸ “Surprise Gift to Help Erect Church Edifice,” *Denver Post*, June 24, 1935.

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet****United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**First Baptist Church of Denver Denver County, Colorado Section number 8 Page 11

On September 13, 1935 the Building Council decided to move ahead with the construction of the basement and foundations. At this point, there appears to have been a slow period in proceeding with additional construction until Dr. Kemper rallied the congregation again with the "Some Factors in Our New First Baptist Church Building Program" handout of August 12, 1936 where he stated "I shall go the limit of my abilities with you as I have in previous pastorates where heavy tasks were in hand, and I shall expect the same of every member. Team work makes a church." On May 4, 1937, Thomas Bate and Sons were contracted to start construction and the Corner Stone Ceremony was held on July 11, 1937. The last service in the Stout street building was on May 1937 as it was sold and the proceeds put towards the new building. Interim services were held in the education room of the Central Christian Church during construction. On June 5, 1938 the final fitting out and finishing contract was awarded to Wayne Tamminga and in a letter to the building council on November 17, 1938 Dr. Kemper notes the completion of the church. The first service was held on November 27, 1938, with the Dedication Sunday held on December 4, 1938. Dr. Truett again spoke at the ceremony as well as hosting a preaching mission at the church for the week prior. The *Denver Post* noted the services and that over 3500 people were in attendance throughout the day. The December 2, 1938 edition of the Denver Young Men (YMCA) noted the pending opening of the church, the leadership of Dr. Kemper for the church and among Denver religious leaders and cooperation of other Denver religious organizations in providing interim homes for the church. Five and a half years later, on March 26, 1944, the mortgage was burned. The final cost of the church, furnishing, equipment and land was \$253,711.²⁹

Dr. Kemper served until 1945, culminating his pastorate with the "History of Old First" that completely documented the history of the church in Denver until that time. Since that time, the church has hosted the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King and Reverend Jesse Jackson as guest speakers. As the church lost membership from the central city to the suburbs from the 1960s to 1990s, its role changed to that of one to serve the working poor and homeless and offering a bed and a meal to those in need under the guidance of Dr. Melvin Taylor until his death in 1999. Since 2001, the church has been under the guidance of Dr. Gary Bowser and has embarked on the previously noted restorations and renovations while at the same time re-establishing the congregation. In September of 2004, the church celebrated its 140th year as an institution in Denver.

²⁹ Compiled from Building Council Meeting Minutes on the dates referenced, Contract between First Baptist Church and Thomas Bate and Sons, Church records, The Denver Young Men from December 12, 1938, and A Century of Baptist Faith pp 10-11.

³⁰ Wes French, "More Vigor for Integration Urged by Martin Luther King," Rocky Mountain News, April 17, 1962, p. 5.

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet****United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**First Baptist Church of Denver Denver County, Colorado Section number 9 Page 12

Bibliography

- “A New Church Spire.” Pamphlet. Estimated date of publishing, 1938. Available from church archives.
- Bowser, Dr. Gary B. Current pastor, First Baptist Church. Supplementary written notes. August 24, 2004.
- Chapin, L. A. “New Baptist Church Will Cost \$400,000.” The Denver Post, February 19, 1931.
- First Baptist Church Advisory and Building Council Committee Minutes from 1931 to 1938. Available from church archives.
- Fisher, Glen. Chairman, Property Commission. First Baptist Church. Notes on church organ. August 24, 2004.
- French, Wes. “More Vigor for Integration Urged By Martin Luther King.” Rocky Mountain News. April 17, 1962.
- Kemper, Dr. Clarence W. “Some Factors in Our New First Baptist Church Building Program.” Handout to the congregation. August 12, 1936. Available from church archives.
- Musick, G. Meridith. Letter to First Baptist Church. March 29, 1935. Submittal of Preliminary Drawings, Cost Estimates, and Outline Specifications.
- Musick, G. Meridith. “Building of First Baptist Church.” Dedication Sunday. Commemorative church handout. December 4, 1938.
- Musick, G. Meridith. A Wayfarer in Architecture. Autobiography Manuscript. Denver Public Library Western Archives WH772 Box 1.
- “Newly Finished First Baptist Church Opens.” The Denver Post, December 5, 1938.
- Noel, Thomas J. and Norgren, Barbara S. Denver the City Beautiful. Denver, CO: Historic Denver Inc., 1987.
- “Opening of the New First Baptist Church.” Denver Young Men, December 2, 1938. p. 1.
- “Our Church Buildings” Chapter XIII. pp. 23-27. Exact church publication of the period, but cannot be determined. Available from church archives.
- “Scottsdale History.” Scottsdale Convention & Visitors Bureau web site.
<http://www.scottsdalecvb.com/about/index.cfm?action=history>. Accessed May 26, 2004.
- Stevens, Maude. A Century of Baptist Faith: First Baptist Church of Denver, 1864-1964. Denver, CO: First Baptist Church, 1964.
- “Surprise Gift to Help Erect Church Edifice” The Denver Post, June 24, 1935.
- “Winfield Scott Exhibit.” Scottsdale Museum web site at <http://www.scottsdalemuseum.com/exhibits.html>. Accessed May 26, 2004.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

First Baptist Church of Denver Denver County, Colorado Section number 10 Page 13

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The land included in this nomination consists of Lots 35 to 40 inclusive, excluding the rear 8 feet of Lot 40, Block 39, H.C. Browns 2nd Addition, City and County of Denver, Colorado.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The nomination includes all the land historically associated with the church building.

PHOTOGRAPH LOG

The following information pertains to photograph numbers 1-11:

Photographer: Alan Doggett
Date of Photographs: March 2004
Negatives: First Baptist Church

Photo No.	Photographic Information
1	First Baptist Church taken from Grant Street, ½ block north of 14 th Avenue.
2	Granite columns, portico, and entry along 14 th Avenue.
3	North entrance and spire along 14 th Avenue.
4	East entry of narthex and steeple.
5	Arched windows along east sanctuary and east entry to office/school wing.
6	Landscape along Grant Street and north façade of east office/school wing.
7	Close up of east entry to office/school wing.
8	Southern façade with Colorado State Capital background.
9	Sanctuary and Chancel from balcony.
10	Looking north from chancel at sanctuary, vestibule, and balcony above.
11	From chancel platform looking at east colonnade, archivolt, and arched windows.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

First Baptist Church of Denver Denver County, Colorado Section number 10 Page 14

USGS TOPOGRAPHIC MAP
Englewood Quadrangle, Colorado
7.5 Minute Series (enlarged)

UTM: Zone 13 / 501415E / 4398494N (NAD27)
PLSS: 6th PM, T4S, R68W, Sec. 3, N½ SE¼ NW¼ NE¼
Elevation: 5,277 feet Site Number: 5DV803

