

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

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

1. Name

historic First Christian Church of Burlington

and/or common

2. Location

street & number 415 South Church Street

not for publication

city, town Burlington

vicinity of

state North Carolina

code 027

county Alamance

code 01

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Trustees of First Christian Church of Burlington

street & number 415 South Church Street

city, town Burlington

vicinity of

state North Carolina

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Alamance County Courthouse

street & number

city, town Graham

state North Carolina

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Architectural Inventory of Burlington has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1981-82 federal state county local

depository for survey records N.C. Division of Archives and History

city, town Raleigh

state North Carolina

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed	(Added to)	

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The First Christian Church of Burlington occupies a large corner lot at the northwest edge of the Central Business District. Its large size, salient features of two main temple facades and a dome, and contrasting materials lend the blocky form a monumental grandeur. The dominant presence of the structure is further enhanced by the absence of any tall, obscuring foliage against the building and by the small scale and minimal height of the non-descript buildings at the other corners of the intersection. A small lawn with a few low pruned shrubs fronts the main northeast and southeast sides of the building, while paved parking lots extend from the other two sides.

Of the building's four units, the original, 1920 sanctuary, augmented by a classroom wing erected at the same time extending from its southwest side, is by far the most architecturally distinctive due to its basic design and rich Neoclassical Revival styling. At the time of its construction, the form of the building was known as an Akron type—a centralized structure with a dome and at least two identical facades, well suited to a corner lot. This example of the type is sheathed in a brown and orange variegated brick and consists of two stories above a stone water table and raised brick-faced basement. The basement becomes a full ground story with the descending grade of the lot to the west. All vertical corners are accented with brick quoins. The basically square shape of the First Christian Church is refined to give the appearance of an octagon with the angling of the north and east corners. Heightened plasticity of form is achieved with the stepping back of these angled corners and the pedimented projection of the largest, central portion of each of the northwest, northeast and southeast facades. These projections modify the form so that it is reminiscent of the Greek cross type.

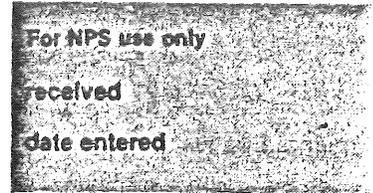
On the northeast and southeast facades, the projections are tetrastyle temple fronts, marking the principal entrances and approached by flights of stone steps. A handsome cast iron lantern of a tapered fluted column supporting a white glass globe rises from each of the retaining walls flanking the stairs. Behind both sets of monumental Tuscan columns, the walls contain three narrow, two-stories-tall stained glass windows with stone sills and corner blocks. Double doors with stained glass windows and transoms are situated in the end walls of the recessed porticoes. The smaller windows flanking the porticoes and in the angled corners also are filled with stained glass and feature stone surrounds, further embellished in the first story with raised molded lintels. In the angled corner facing the intersection of Church and West Davis streets there is a bronze commemorative plaque. The stained glass windows above this plaque and adjoining it in the first story of the northeast facade were taken from the earlier First Christian Church building that formerly stood at the south corner of the intersection.

A tall wooden entablature with a dentilled frieze and a modillioned cornice ties together all three exposed facades of the sanctuary block while creating a contrast to the brick surfaces below. A much simpler and smaller entablature and cornice continues at approximately the same height around the much plainer block attached to the southwest side of the sanctuary. This simpler cornice is topped with a brick parapet that hides a flat roof. At the center of the low hipped roof above the sanctuary, a hemispherical wood-framed dome covered with stucco rises from an octagonal base pierced with four vents in each side. An octagonal oculus crowns the dome.

The sanctuary may be entered through any of the three small narthexes leading from the side walls of the porticoes. The richly appointed sanctuary continues the Neoclassical style of the exterior, though in a less imposing character due to the pale colored walls and infusion of light through the very colorful stained glass windows. All of the neoclassical decoration is executed in carved wood painted white. At the west corner of this large open space the pulpit and altar are situated on a raised platform. Behind the altar, a very elaborate pedimented surround enframes a metal cross mounted to the wall. The innermost portion of the surround is a keystone arch, while the pediment is decorated with dentils and supported by consoles ornamented with anthemions. On the northwest wall, a very tall and broad, keystone arch surrounds the organ pipes, in front

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of which the panelled choir and organ stalls are situated. Vivid stained glass windows rise from the molded chair rail that runs unbroken along all of the walls. The walls are painted a pale gray above the rail and a darker gray below. All of the tall windows portray scenes from the life of Christ, while the smaller windows are filled with geometric and heraldic designs. Each of the three sets of double doors, with stained glass windows and transoms, has a molded architrave surround; above, there is a raised and molded lintel surmounted by a flat stepped and pedimental form. The ceiling consists of intersecting encased heartwood beams at the periphery, breaking to the dome that occupies most of the expanse. At the top of the dome, stained glass fills a small wooden grid.

The floor slopes downward slightly toward the corner altar. The pews in the sanctuary proper are arranged in three banks, each bank angled and containing pews of varying lengths to create the effect of an amphitheatre in their orientation to the altar. At the south side of the sanctuary there is a very tall post and lintel doorway the fullwidth of the room. This opening originally contained folding doors that separated the sanctuary from a large hall open two stories with a shallow balcony along its southeast and southwest walls. When the church was enlarged in 1953, the folding doors were removed and the hall became part of the sanctuary with the installation of pews in the same arrangement as those in the sanctuary proper, so that the seating now forms a half-circle. On the first floor and the balcony, banks of folding doors conceal interconnected classrooms along the southwest and southeast sides of the sanctuary expansion.

A few feet southwest of the original church, a three-story educational building was constructed in 1953. It is practically identical in exterior design to the west wing of the original building, with a water table above the first story and a molded cornice and brick parapet above the third. It is connected to the original building by an enclosed hallway bridge at the second story. A small one-story office wing in brighter red brick with modern steel-framed windows was erected on the southwest side of the educational building in 1980.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1920 **Builder/Architect** David Fitch, Contractor

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

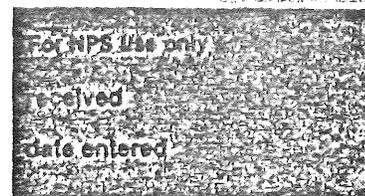
The First Christian Church of Burlington is one of the city's two outstanding examples of Neoclassical Revival style church architecture. It was completed in 1920 for one of the first congregations to develop from the Union Church, one of the community's first buildings for worship and education. The distinctive brick building stands at the northwest edge of the Central Business District as a reminder of Burlington's early twentieth-century prosperity that yielded a spate of buildings in the fashionable period revival styles.

The plasticity of the design featuring ancient Roman motifs is an example of the unusual Akron church type, of which the hallmarks are a domed sanctuary in a centralized plan and two main facades, here consisting of monumental temple fronts.

Criteria Assessment

- A. The First Christian Church of Burlington is associated with the growing prosperity of the city during the first three decades of the twentieth century.

- C. The First Christian Church is one of Burlington's foremost institutional examples of the Neoclassical Revival style.

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Burlington's First Christian Church (United Church of Christ) traces its beginning back to the 1860s when the need arose in the community, then named Company Shops, for facilities for worship and education. In 1869, the North Carolina Railroad Company deeded a tract of land on the northeast side of the tracks to a board of directors for construction of a church/school building. A two-story frame structure with a pedimented front was erected immediately and named Union Church. At least five Protestant denominations, including the Christian, shared the building for several years, until they each became large enough to formally organize congregations and build their own churches.¹

Following the precedents set by the Lutherans and Presbyterians in 1879,² the Christians formed a congregation in 1884 when an itinerant preacher, the Rev. Jeremiah W. Holt, who had been serving Christian churches in the area for several years, decided that Company Shops needed its own Christian Church.³ According to Mrs. H. Russell Clem, who compiled a history of the First Christian Church in 1961, Rev. Holt was "Not only a good preacher and organizer but also a prominent teacher, ... a gregarious and popular leader in the community."⁴ Apparently he also taught school at the Union Church building.⁵ On February 16, 1884, following a sermon by the Rev. Holt, the First Christian Church of Company Shops was formally organized with eighteen charter members signing a statement of principles. Rev. Holt remained the pastor of the congregation, which continued to use Union Church, until 1887 the year the town changed its name to Burlington; he was succeeded by the Rev. J. U. Newman.⁶

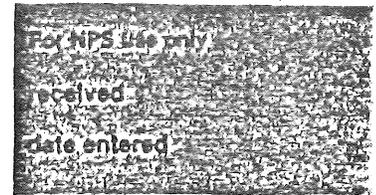
The town's population more than tripled in the 1880s, and by 1890 the Christian congregation needed its own church building. That year they organized a building committee, which in 1891 recommended purchase of a plot of land owned by Dr. B. A. Sellars at the south corner of Church and West Davis streets.⁷ In November, 1893, the \$4,000 cross-gable-roofed church building with lancet windows and three-stage bell tower with an octagonal steeple was completed.⁸ Mrs. Clem relates that the Church's Sunday School organized the same month depleted the Union Church's Sunday School of most of its teachers and pupils. Dedication of the new building took place in December, 1893. With the move to the new church, the congregation changed its name to the First Christian Church of Burlington.⁹

The congregation grew steadily over the years as Burlington prospered and expanded, so that by the 1910s another, larger edifice was required. A new site was selected across the street from the 1893 church at the west corner of Church and West Davis streets. The building committee selected a design known as an Akron church. The hallmarks of this unusual building type, of which less than thirty are believed to have been built in the country, are the domed sanctuary in a centralized plan and two main facades, well suited to a corner site.¹⁰ The committee commissioned local contractor David Fitch, who also built scores of bungalows and period revival style houses throughout Burlington.¹¹ Built at a cost of \$100,000.00, the new church was ready for occupancy in 1920. The 1893 church and lot were sold for \$11,000.00 in 1922, and the following year the new building was dedicated.¹²

Since then, as the First Christian congregation grew, it has made additions to the 1920 facility as needed, rather than abandon the distinctive building. In 1953, an educational building was constructed in the same basic style and materials used in the 1920 building, to which it was attached by a second-story enclosed "bridge." Appended to the south side of the 1953 building a modern one-story office addition was built in 1980. Recently, the sanctuary has been restored.

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Notes

(This nomination is based primarily upon information gathered by Allison Harris.)

1

Durward Stokes, Company Shops: The Town Built By a Railroad (Winston-Salem; John F. Blair, 1981), pp. 93 and 100.

2

W. T. Lasley, "Union Church: Cradle of Religion, Education," The City-County Newspaper week ending 2 April 1977, p. 8A.

3

Mrs. H. Russell Clem, The History of The First Congregational Christian Church, privately printed, 1961, p. 1.

4

Ibid.

5

Stokes, p. 105.

6

Clem, p. 1.

7

Ibid., p. 2.

8

W. T. Lasley, "First Christian Cradled in Union," The City-County Newspaper, 29 December 1979.

9

Clem, p. 2.

10

Interview with Dr. Winfred Bray, pastor of the First Christian Church by Claudia P. Roberts in Burlington, N.C., 24 May 1983.

11

Telephone interview with Miss Edna Fitch, daughter of David Fitch, conducted by Claudia P. Roberts, 25 May 1983.

12

Clem, p. 3.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheets

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than 1 acre

Quadrangle name Burlington, N.C.

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

1	7	6	4	0	4	6	0	3	9	9	5	3	8	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D

Zone		Easting				Northing								

E

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H

Zone		Easting				Northing								

Verbal boundary description and justification

Block 72, Lot 104, Burlington Tax Maps, Map #21

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

state N/A code county N/A code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Claudia P. Roberts

organization Consultant to the City of Burlington

date 6-1-83

street & number 425 South Lexington Avenue

telephone (919) 227-3603 Ext. 79

city or town Burlington

state North Carolina

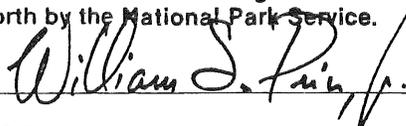
12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature



title State Historic Preservation Officer

date November 16, 1983

For NPS use only

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

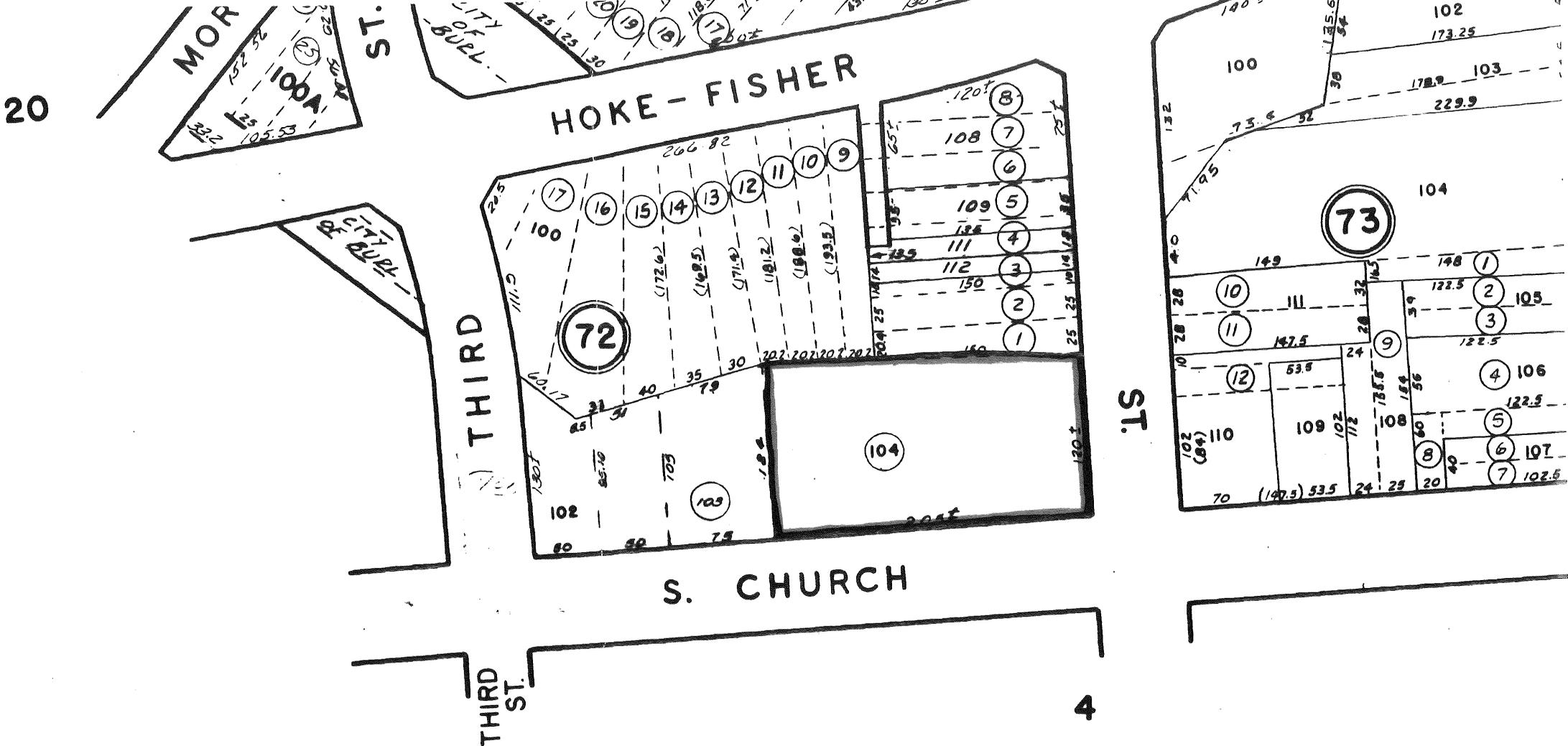
date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration



B. A. SELLARS PB. 2 P. 46
 FRONT ST. UNITED METHODIST CH. &
 CITY OF BURLINGTON PB. 22 PG. 94
 FRONT ST. UNITED METHODIST CH. 23 21
 N.C. STATE BD. TRANSPORTATION PROJ. NO. 9-8070125 (WEBB AVE)

FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH

ALAMANCE COUNTY, N. C.		
SCALE	TOWNSHIP	DATE
1" = 100'	BURLINGTON	1948
MAP 21 BLOCKS 71-74		
VIRGIL W. JOYCE MAPPING COMPANY		

REV. 4-81
 REV. 1-78

