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 of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property
   historic name Trinity Methodist Church
   other names/site number Old Trinity Methodist Church

2. Location
   street & number northwest corner Broad and Lower streets
   city, town Elizabethtown
   state North Carolina code NC
   county Bladen code 17
   zip code 28337

3. Classification
   Ownership of Property
   [x] private
   [ ] public-local
   [ ] public-State
   [ ] public-Federal
   Category of Property
   [ ] building(s)
   [x] district
   [ ] site
   [ ] structure
   [ ] object
   Number of Resources within Property
   Contributing 1
   Noncontributing 1
   buildings
   sites
   structures
   objects
   Total 2
   Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

4. State/Federal Agency Certification
   As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this 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 ☑ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. ☐ See continuation sheet.

   [Signature]
   [State Historic Preservation Officer]
   [State or Federal agency and bureau]
   Date 8-7-89

   In my opinion, the property ☑ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. ☐ See continuation sheet.
   [Signature of commenting or other official]
   [Date]
   [State or Federal agency and bureau]

5. National Park Service Certification
   I, hereby, certify that this property is:
   ☑ 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:)

   [Signature of the Keeper]
   [Date of Action]
6. Function or Use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)</th>
<th>Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religion: religious structure</td>
<td>Work in Progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funerary: cemetery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. Description

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Architectural Classification (enter categories from instructions)</th>
<th>Materials (enter categories from instructions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>foundation brick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>walls weatherboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>roof asbestos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>other wood</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Old Trinity Methodist Church, a simple rectangular frame building built ca. 1848, is located on the high west bank of the Cape Fear River at the northwest corner of Broad Street and Lower Street in Elizabethtown. A sizeable church cemetery surrounds the building on three sides, crowding up to the foundation. The Elizabethtown City Cemetery (not included in this nomination) adjoins this cemetery, extending to the edge of the river bluff. Large oaks laden with Spanish moss shade the site. The church is in good condition and retains a good deal of integrity both inside and out.

The church follows a simple, two-story, center-aisle plan with gallery topped by a gable roof. The main facade is in the south gable end facing Broad Street. It rests on a low common bond brick foundation and is faced with plain lapped siding. Corner boards punctuate the ends of each elevation. Large fifteen-over-fifteen light double hung sash windows with plain surrounds are symmetrically placed across the front and side elevations. The roof features a boxed cornice on the flanks and a beaded raking cornice on the gable ends, with a continuous molded eave which returns on the gable ends. A small square belfry with pyramidal roof, pointed wood spire and decorative vents with shaped upper edges rests on the roof apex just behind the main facade.

The main entrance, in the center of the main facade, is an original double door, each leaf containing six flat panels, surmounted by a six-pane transom and set within a slightly shaped surround. The southernmost bay of each side elevation contains a single door, identical to one leaf of the front door, surmounted by a four-pane transom and set within an identical architrave. These provide access to the second floor gallery.

The interior, originally containing a gallery on three sides, was altered in the 1920s when two side rooms in the southern end of the church were partitioned off from the nave, creating a small entrance foyer. At the second floor gallery level, three small rooms were created by added partitions. The lovely gallery, reached from the interior by an enclosed stair which rises in a single flight against the west wall, is intact. The stair railing has rectangular balusters, a shaped, beaded handrail and a square newel with a simple cap. Simple square Doric posts support on three sides the gallery, with a solid, flat-paneled railing. Sections of the original crude built-in bench seating remain on the east side of the gallery.

See continuation sheet
The walls inside the church are fully plastered, and feature plain baseboards and simple window surrounds. At the end of the nave is a low raised platform on which the pulpit sits. In front of the pulpit is a curved railing with square wood bannisters, rounded top railing, and octagonal newel posts which separates the clergy from the congregation. The shallow Doric pedimented portico attached to the wall behind the pulpit is an early twentieth century addition. The curved pews, while not original to the church, date to the early twentieth century and blend nicely with the interior design. The wooden floor is probably original, and the ceiling is covered with accoustical tile.

The original stair enclosure in the southeast corner remains, but the stair which led to the gallery in this corner has been removed and the space converted to a closet.

The cemetery around the church contains approximately two hundred tombstones dating from the mid-nineteenth century through the present. Among these stones are some well-preserved late nineteenth century wooden markers.

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NOTE REGARDING THE PHOTOGRAPHS

During a site visit to Trinity Methodist Church in 1988, it was determined that the exterior photographs accompanying this nomination accurately depict the property; it has not changed at all since the 1984 and 1985 photographs were taken. Although it was not possible to gain access to the interior, subsequent correspondence with an Elizabethtown resident involved in the preservation of the building confirmed that no alterations whatsoever have been made to the interior and that it has not suffered any deterioration since 1974 when the accompanying interior photograph was taken.
Trinity Methodist Church is eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion A for its role in the development of Elizabethtown and under Criterion C as a well-preserved example of a late Federal meeting house design. Built ca. 1848 and the oldest surviving meeting house in Elizabethtown, Trinity Methodist Church is one of the few antebellum buildings surviving in this late eighteenth-century county seat situated on the Cape Fear River in Bladen County. The building and its surrounding cemetery recall the town's 1840s economic growth stimulated by the naval stores market for turpentine, the area's leading product. The church also is notable for its delicate Federal style finish, large windows and airy interior with original slave gallery on three sides.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Elizabethtown, the county seat of Bladen County, was established in 1773. Methodism in Bladen County dates back to the eighteenth century as well. The Bladen Circuit was formed in 1787 and included Elizabethtown, Smithville (now Southport), Lumberton, and Wilmington. Methodist pioneer Bishop Francis Asbury made three visits to Elizabethtown, in 1785, 1795, and 1803. During the second of these visits he "spent the Sabbath in public and private exercises." On his last visit, February 8, 1803, he listened to Nicholas Snethen preach at the courthouse before preaching the next day at Clark's Chapel, also in Bladen County.

Despite this early interest in Methodism, Elizabethtown was too small to support a Methodist church in the early part of the nineteenth century. Although the county seat was favorably located on the Cape Fear River, Elizabethtown was slow to grow. Much of Bladen County is in forests, swamps, and bays and the county has remained sparsely populated to the present. In the 1830s, when the Trinity Methodist congregation was founded, and in the 1840s when the sanctuary was constructed, Bladen County was sharing...
with other southeastern North Carolina counties in the economic growth created by the naval stores market for turpentine, extracted from longleaf pine forests. Because the only other antebellum buildings that have survived in Elizabethtown are isolated residential buildings, old Trinity Methodist Church is the most visible symbol of Elizabethtown's prominence as a community during this period.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In 1834 the Elizabethtown Methodist Church was founded. Two years later Methodist trustees Richard Rhodes, John D. Jones, John Oliver, Absalom Davis, Jr., Joseph C. Lee, William Davis, George Cromartie, Thomas Smith, and John F. Barnes purchased a town lot from Louis Sheridan for $400. Sheridan was a free black who accumulated a considerable amount of land in Elizabethtown. He sold lots for both the courthouse and the Methodist Church. Eventually Sheridan went to Liberia "and spent the remainder of his days teaching and preaching."7

Shortly after the purchase of the lot a small, temporary structure was built. It was replaced by the more permanent Trinity church building around 1848. The church was dedicated by Daniel McDuffie, a local minister, in 1849. Elizabethtown grew slowly but steadily throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and Trinity reflected that slow but steady growth. Around 1916 Mrs. Emmie Cromartie Covington gave new pewts to the church, and in the 1920s two side rooms in the southern end of the church were partitioned off from the nave.8

Trinity continued its growth into the 1930s. In 1934 a section of the old slave gallery was converted into Sunday School rooms. In 1943 a building fund was established and land for a new structure was purchased in 1944 and 1950. The new church building was completed in 1954 and since that time has housed the Trinity congregation. The old Trinity church has been well-maintained, however. It is presently owned by the North Carolina Methodist Conference and is being preserved by a group of church members.

The church lot contains a relatively large cemetery with approximately two hundred stones and monuments. A number of Confederate casualties are interred at Trinity. Most of the tombstones date from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but several appear to predate the construction of the church.10
9. Major Bibliographical References


Grissom, W. L. History of Methodism in North Carolina From 1772 To the Present Time. Nashville and Dallas: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1905.


10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 1.01 acres

UTM References

A 1.7 71.9 73.0 3.8 3.4 2.2
Zone Easting Northing
B
C

D

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data: X State historic preservation office

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary for the Trinity Methodist Church property to be nominated is indicated by the bold line on the accompanying "Survey for Trinity Methodist Church" map drawn at a scale of 1"=20' and dated October 26, 1978.

Boundary Justification

Being the entire town lot historically associated with the church and cemetery

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Ruth Little(Section 7), Jim Sumner(Section 8)
organization State Historic Preservation Office
date 1984, revised 1989
street & number 109 E. Jones Street
city or town Raleigh
county Wake
code NC
state NC
zip code 27611
National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

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1 W. L. Grissom, History of Methodism in North Carolina From 1772 To the Present Time (Nashville and Dallas: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1905), 218-219.


3 Asbury, Francis Asbury in North Carolina, 138.

4 Asbury, Francis Asbury in North Carolina, 203-204.


6 Elizabethtown Bicentennial, 4, 51, 54; Hector H. Clark, "History of Old Trinity Methodist Church," privately published, 3-5, hereinafter cited as Clark, "History of Old Trinity Methodist Church."

7 Clark, "History of Old Trinity Methodist Church," 5.

8 Elizabethtown Bicentennial, 4, 54; Clark, "History of Old Trinity Methodist Church," 4.

9 Elizabethtown Bicentennial, 54; Clark, "History of Old Trinity Methodist Church," 4-6; Mrs. James G. Thomas to Dr. William Price, February 21, 1984.
