

# FORM B – BUILDING

Assessor's Number    USGS Quad    Area(s)    Form Number

Four empty rectangular boxes for Assessor's Number, USGS Quad, Area(s), and Form Number.

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING  
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD  
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

**Town/City:** Lowell, MA

**Place:** (*neighborhood or village*):  
Downtown

## Photograph



**Address:** 99 Church Street

**Historic Name:** First Baptist Church

**Uses:** Present: Religious Property

Original: Religious Property

**Date of Construction:** ca. 1826

**Source:**

**Style/Form:** Greek Revival

**Architect/Builder:** Unknown

**Exterior Material:** Wood Clapboard

Foundation: Brick

Wall/Trim:

Roof: Asphalt Shingles

**Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:**

**Major Alterations** (*with dates*):

1900, Addition of octagonal brick baptistery, extension of façade, Greek Revival details; Singleton

1959, Addition of contemporary 2.5 story brick structure; Arthur Englund

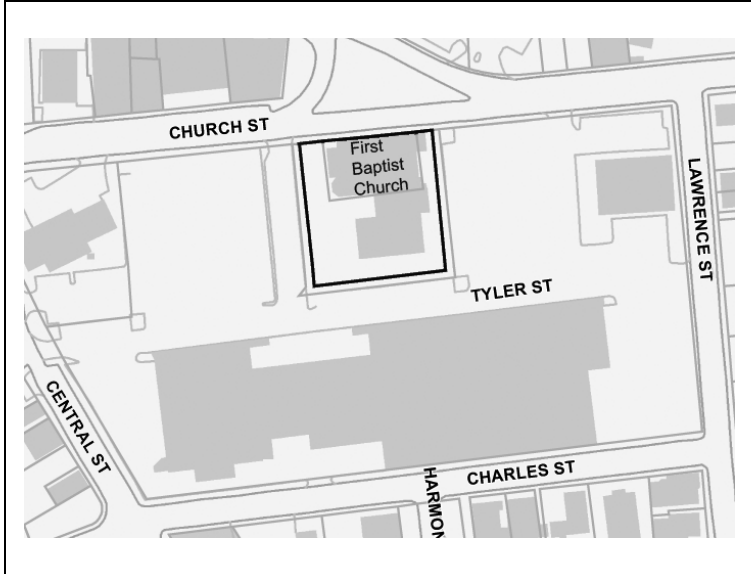
**Condition:**

**Moved:** no     yes     **Date:**

**Acreage:**

**Setting:** Urban, Post WWII strip mall shopping plaza.

## Locus Map



**Recorded by:**

**Organization:**

**Date** (*month / year*):

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Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

*If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.*

*Use as much space as necessary to complete the following entries, allowing text to flow onto additional continuation sheets.*

## ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

*Describe architectural features. Evaluate the characteristics of this building in terms of other buildings within the community.*

Excerpt taken from Religious Architecture of Lowell<sup>1</sup>

### EXTERIOR

The founders of the First Baptist Church had a modest structure designed. This new church had some Greek Revival elements, but mainly followed the typical New England church style with a tripartite entranceway, a large bell tower, and a plain building constructed of white clapboard.<sup>6</sup> During 1900 the church was enlarged by a designer named Singleton. At this time, the facade was extended, an octagonal addition was built to the right of the church, and a small room was added to the left rear. Greek Revival elements were added as well.

The Greek Revival elements give the present church a similarity in style with the works of Asher Benjamin, for example, the First Congregational Church in New Haven, Connecticut, 1812-14. Four large pilasters topped with Corinthian capitals frame the three facade entrances. The center doorway is decorated with a rounded, broken pediment while those on either side are topped by unbroken pedimental structures. The pedimental motif is carried to the top of the facade. This dominant pediment is lined with large dentils and contains a round window in its center. The dentils are continued along the cornice lining the sides and back of the church. The side windows have been changed from the original church. Initially, there were three rows designating the basement, the sanctuary, and the balcony. Today, the two upper rows of windows have been made into one.

The bell tower remains the same. It is situated on top of the main church and breaks the pediment of the gabled roof with its square bottom. It rises in two sections decorated with rounded arches. The octagonal structure to the right of the main church is interesting for its design, but does not follow the same Greek Revival style of the facade. The brick addition contains offices added during 1960.

### INTERIOR

The sanctuary of the First Baptist Church is reached by climbing a series of steep steps. The narthex is divided into three sections demarcated by a series of round archways. The center leads to the steps, and the two side arches lead downstairs. The narthex is decorated with light oak paneling and beige painted walls. At the top of the stairs are two piers with Corinthian pilasters to either side. The dentil decoration seen on the exterior is repeated along the cornice in the narthex.

The sanctuary exemplifies the elegance often found in Protestant churches constructed during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It follows the design of the traditional meetinghouse with an assembly hall plan. The walls, pews, and altar are painted off-white and have light oak trim. The Greek Revival elements used on the exterior of the building are repeated in reduced proportions in the sanctuary.

The ceiling structure is angled and rectangular in shape. It is constructed to add height to the sanctuary, and is supported by a series of open trusses or modified hammerbeams. The pews for the congregation are placed in a semi-circular formation. These curved pews are decorated with a carved egg and dart motif.

The balcony runs along the four walls of the sanctuary and is supported by a series of iron posts or columns. The frieze is decorated with alternating horizontal and square panels with pilasters interrupting the design at specific intervals. The organ is located in the balcony over the pulpit. It is covered with off-white painted wooden panels that also contain such Greek Revival elements as pilasters with Corinthian capitals and a cornice lined with dentils.

The pulpit is situated on a raised platform directly beneath the organ. At one point it was approximately four feet higher, but was lowered during one of the renovations. The octagonal pulpit is to the left of the platform, and each side is decorated with a vertical

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panel similar to those decorating the balcony. There is an altar in the center of the platform, and behind it is a draped niche that hides the baptismal pool. The niche is framed by fluted pilasters and topped by a light oak beam. During baptisms the drape is opened. On the wall in back of the pool is a mural painted by Janet Lambert Moore, a Lowell Market Mills artist. Illusionistically, she has painted a river that runs through a wooded landscape and appears to flow into the baptismal pool.

## HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

*Discuss the history of the building. Explain its associations with local (or state) history. Include uses of the building, and the role(s) the owners/occupants played within the community.*

The congregation of First Baptist Church started in 1822 as small group of people holding prayer meetings in member's homes; most notably that of Jonathan Merrill, owner of the Merrimack Manufacturing Company. As the congregation grew Merrill provided them with meeting space in one of his factories, much to the disapprobation of his Episcopal colleague, Kirk Boott. The First Baptist Meeting House was officially established in 1826, the same years as the incorporation of the town of Lowell. It was second only to Saint Anne's Episcopal Church established only a few years prior.

It is unclear how the location was selected for the site of the First Baptist meeting house but one narrative provides a possibility:

The selection of the spot on which the church stands has a somewhat romantic interest. A young lady, who was baptized and admitted to the church soon after its organization, was importuned by Mr. Thomas Hurd, an early manufacturer in Lowell, to enter his mill as an operative. She had objections on account of the distance of the mills from her home, but finally said: "I will come- and work for you if you will give our little church a lot of land to build a meeting-house on." " I will," was the prompt reply, and the result was that the present site was selected. The land thus donated by Mr. Hurd[.]<sup>3</sup>

Due to the lack of information available on Hurd it is unclear as to what his motives may have been. He was an original shareholder in the church and in 1827 Thomas Hurd leased part of his property to the First Baptist Meeting House in Lowell for 2,000 years. Hurd included a few conditions in his lease, aside from paying rent, one cent annually, members must maintain and keep open the established rights of way for the public, and most importantly the site "shall be kept and used as a site for a meeting house and the meeting house there on as a place of public worship exclusively for the denomination of Christians called [illegible] Baptists." If any of these conditions are broken the property will revert back to the ownership of Hurd's heirs.<sup>4</sup>

As Lowell continued to flourish the church grew rapidly, welcoming many of the new immigrants that came to Lowell. On national level the Baptist church supported the anti-slavery movement, later leading to denominational splits. On a local level several of First Baptist's prominent members were involved with the Abolition movement and actively welcomed new members from the African Meeting House in Boston.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

- (1) First Baptist Church. Religious Architecture of Lowell. Vol. 2. Cheney PhD, Liana; Cassidy, Donna; Gill, Nancy. Landmark Printing. 1984
- (2) History of Middlesex County Massachusetts: with sketches of many of its pioneers and prominent men. Vol. II. Hurd, Duane Hamilton. J.W. Lewis & Co. 1890.
- (3) Lease Agreement between T. Hurd and The First Baptist Meeting House Lowell, May 13, 1827, Northern Registry of Deeds 6-424

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*[Delete this page if no Criteria Statement is prepared]*

**National Register of Historic Places Criteria Statement Form**

Check all that apply:

- Individually eligible       Eligible **only** in a historic district  
 Contributing to a potential historic district       Potential historic district

Criteria:     **A**     **B**     **C**     **D**

Criteria Considerations:     **A**     **B**     **C**     **D**     **E**     **F**     **G**

Statement of Significance by \_\_\_\_\_

*The criteria that are checked in the above sections must be justified here.*