THE FIRST AFRICAN BAPTIST CHURCH

A STUDY OF THE ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION OF A 19TH CENTURY CHURCH HOUSE

A Thesis

by

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Submitted to the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

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August 2015

Major Subject: Architecture

ABSTRACT

African American churches have been examined more for the people and events that took place in the buildings rather than for the building that housed the people and events. While many of these churches were organized in the 18th and 19th centuries the congregations that exist today have abandoned their original edifices, due to growth and physical deterioration, for larger and more modern buildings. If the original building has not been torn down it likely may be in a neglected and dilapidated state. What does not exist is any specific information, process, or record which documents the architecture and construction of the original church buildings. The First African Baptist Church (FABC) began construction in the mid 1850s, and was completed in 1859, built mostly by slaves, as well as free persons of color. FABC was organized on January 20, 1788 making it one of the oldest continuous African American churches in North America. FABC is historically recognized as a significant place, due to the work of the pastors, congregants, and events which have taken place over the past 155 years. If FABC is historically significant, then a record of the building these persons worshipped and worked in, from its design to its construction, is just as significant.

The intent of this study is to examine, document, and develop a record of the existing building of the FABC. This examination will also include a study of the building systems and the materials and methods used for construction.

DEDICATION

I wish to dedicate this thesis to God Almighty, thanking him for His presence in my life and in this work. To my loving parents, Scott and Peggy Hunter, in-laws Joseph and Sarah Lumpkin, brothers and sisters, family and friends. Most importantly, I thank my loving wife Pamela and my beautiful daughter Savannah for their encouragement and support.

Also my love and respect goes to all the ancestors who fought, survived, endured, and achieved to give *me* the opportunity to honor *them* with this writing.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Valerian Miranda, as well as committee members Dr. Violet Johnson, and Dr. Stephen Caffey, for their guidance and support throughout the course of this research.

My thanks to Pastor Thurmond Neill Tillman and the wonderful people at the First African Baptist Church, with special acknowledgement to Ms. Karen Wortham and Mr. Randy Houston. I would also like to thank Mr. Mark Mobley, Ms. Rhonda Cook, Mr. John Bush, Jr., and Mr. Lancaster Graham.

My thanks to Katharine Rapkin, archivist at the Georgia Historical Society in Savannah, Georgia, as well as Luciana Spracher, Director of the City of Savannah Research Library and Municipal Archives.

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INTRODUCTION

Leaders and Worshipers

The church, as an institution, has been the center of life for African Americans since the secret gatherings of slaves in hush harbor meetings over two centuries ago. These secret meetings, usually held at night and in vacated barns or swamps, provided the opportunity for slaves to learn the Christian faith, while attempting to reconcile this new faith with their African roots, culture, and spirituality. Singing about a better day and the creation of preaching styles were developed within these gatherings (Gist-Etheridge, 2005). Born out of these expressions was the foundation of what is today referred to as the institution of the 'black church'.

FABC traces its beginnings to the regular gathering of slaves who worked and lived on the Brampton Plantation, one of several large plantations located three miles from Savannah along the river. Andrew Bryan, who was the son of a slave named Caesar, began the religious movement among the enslaved. Caesar was a slave who was owned by Johnathan Bryan, the owner of the Brampton Plantation. (Savannah Unit, Georgia Writers Project, 1943). Figure 1 illustrates the location of the Brampton Plantation.

Bryan was born in 1737 in Goose Creek, South Carolina but was soon transported to Savannah. Bryan was converted under the preachings of George Liele, an African Baptist minister who is recognized as the founder of FABC (New Georgia

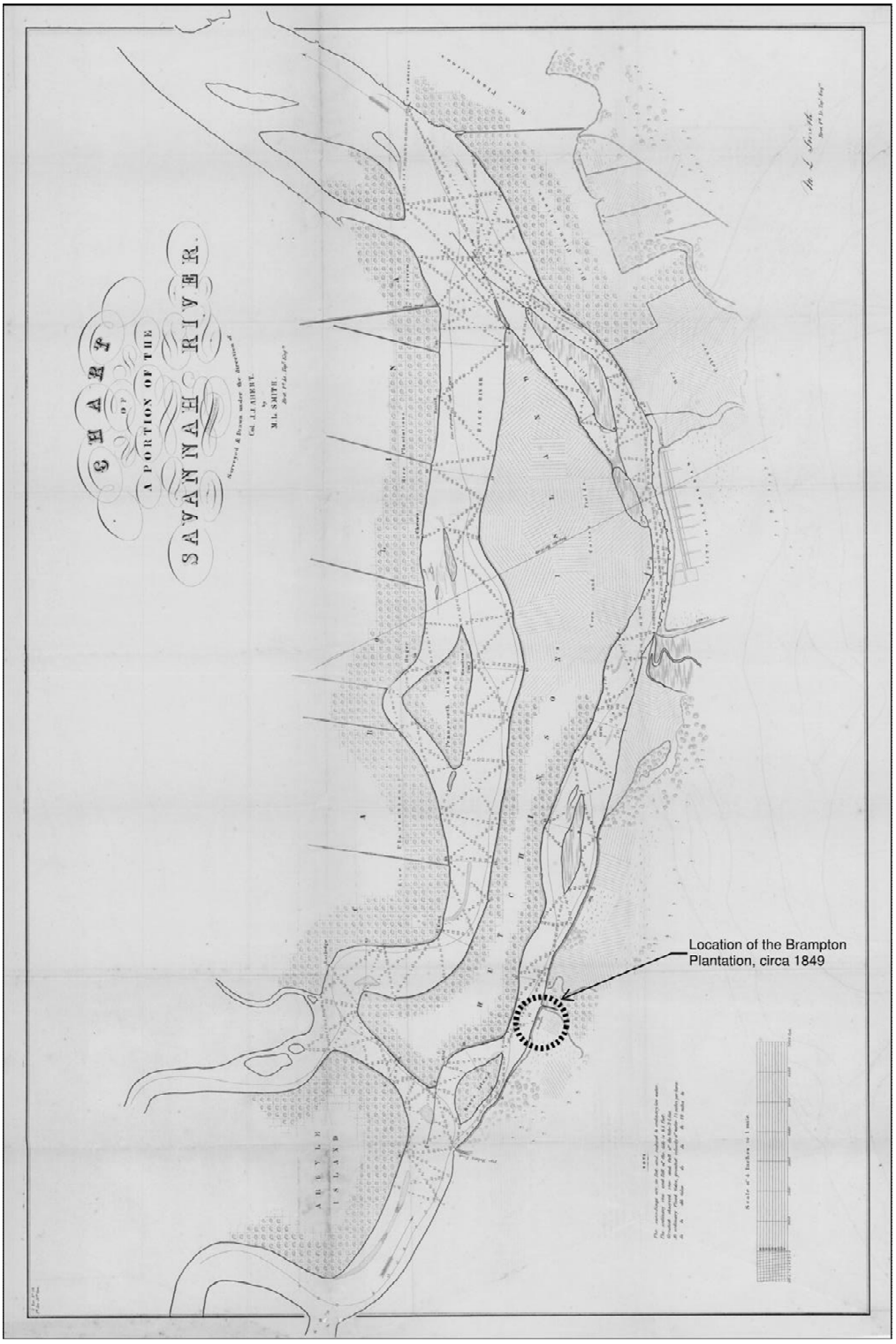


FIGURE 1. Map of a portion of the Savannah River, Surveyed and Dawn under the direction of Colonel J.J. Abert. Map Maker: C.B. Graham, circa 1849 (Image courtesy of the Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.)

Encyclopedia, 2005). Liele, who was born in 1750, felt the call to preach. He was encouraged by his master, Henry Sharp, a Baptist deacon and a Loyalist. Liele was licensed as a probationer in 1773, and for two years he preached in the slave quarters of plantations surrounding Savannah, including the congregation formed at Silver Bluff, South Carolina (PBS, 1998). In 1783 just before departing for the West Indies, Liele baptized Bryan, his wife Hannah, and several other Brampton slaves. When Bryan found himself inspired to preach the gospel, his master allowed him to hold prayer meetings in the Brampton barn. Here for two years slaves from adjoining plantations gathered to listen to Andrew and to sing spirituals. On January 20, 1788, at Brampton's barn, FABC was organized with 67 members by Reverend Abraham Marshall, a white evangelist, and Jesse Peter, a slave. Bryan was ordained the first pastor of the church. At the time of Andrew Bryan's death in 1812 his congregation had built a church on a lot which they had bought from him in 1797. This is the same site on which the First Bryan Baptist Church now stands in Yamacraw Village (Savannah Unit, Georgia Writers Project, 1943). FABC grew steadily with 575 members in 1788, 850 members in 1802, and 2,795 in 1831.

The effort to purchase the current site of the FABC and the existing church building on it was led by Andrew Marshall, the third pastor of the FABC, in the mid-19th century (Johnson, 1985). Under Marshall's leadership church membership increased significantly with many of these new members impressed with Marshall's preaching. The Sunbury Baptist Association (SBA), also impressed, invited him to preach at a Sunday service of the 1826 convention-the only time that a black was invited to preach

to the body. In 1828 the church reported to the SBA that it had 2,275 members; this number increased to 2,417 in 1830, when the church also reported that 76 persons had been baptized since the last convention. The following year Marshall reported to the convention that there would be conducted a revival 'the fruits of which was that 313 new members were added' to the church's roll. This tremendous accomplishment reflected the mark of an outstanding evangelist. The church's membership far exceeded that of any other church in the Association and represented about twenty-five percent of the Association's aggregate membership (Johnson, 1985). With this kind of unprecedented growth, Marshall began plans to find a suitable building for his church.

The Savannah Baptist Church (SBC), a church originally established in 1800 and today known as the First Baptist Church, had plans to move their congregation away from their Franklin Square site to a new location. With FABC in need of a larger facility to support their growing congregation, they approached SBC, expressing interest in purchasing their existing church building and land. SBC sold their church building and the land to FABC on May 10, 1832. SBC sold the property to FABC at the price of $1,500.00, with FABC placing a down payment of $1,000.00 on the property. FABC completed the transaction by paying the remaining balance of $500.00 on the church property one month early, on November 1, 1832 (Johnson, 1985). FABC took ownership of the vacated SBC building and Marshall continued to grow and witness to new parishioners as well as act, through his ministry, as a spiritual and social advocate.

After over twenty years of worshiping in the former SBC, the building could no longer support the growing number of persons. Further, the building began to

deteriorate after over sixty years of service. As a result, Marshall and church members developed a plan to demolish the existing building and to begin the effort, in 1856, to raise funds in order to build a new edifice on the same site (Johnson, 1985).

In the mid-1850s, the church members of FABC began construction on their new edifice. Having saved their money with the intent to buy their freedom, the church members instead funded the building effort. The building was built by people who worked at several plantations along the Savannah River, where slaveowners allowed them to work on the construction of the building at night. Through inspiration from the pastors of the FABC, enormous and unprecedented church membership growth, and general acceptance of the developing African American church from the Anglo clergy, the membership of the church continued their construction efforts, completing the new building in 1859. This building became the first brick edifice owned by African Americans in the state of Georgia (McDonough, 1993). When the church building was completed, all of Savannah took notice:

> A very handsome new brick edifice now occupies the site of the old wooden church on Franklin Square, so long occupied by the congregation of the First African Baptist Church, under the pastoral charge of the late Andrew Marshall. The building has been erected as an expense of about $5,000, a large part of the money having been contributed by the congregation. To complete their church it will require some $6,000 more; for aid in raising which sum the congregation now appeal to their white Christian friends. Until their church is completed their meetings are held in the basement of the building, where each Sunday a large congregation of earnest and devout worshippers are instructed in the Baptist faith by Wm. Campbell, the worthy success of their old pastor. By small weekly contributions the members of the church have accumulated the funds already expended-by such contributions they will continue to do what they can, but they ask for assistance to enable them to hasten the completion of their church. With this view a subscription list has been opened and will soon be presented to our benevolent citizens. The congregation is deserving of the sympathy of our

> Christian community, from whom we feel confident they will receive liberal aid (Savannah Daily Morning News, 1860).

Nearly thirty years later, in 1886, the FABC found itself in need of more building space because of the continued growth of the church. As a result, expansion plans began to develop to add new space to the existing building (Love 1888). At the July Conference of 1886 Mr. John E. Grant, a prominent member of the church, made a nice speech and motioned to buy the property in the rear of the church. This was carried. A purchasing committee was appointed with plenary power, consisting of Deacons J.H. Brown, chairman; C.L. DeLamotta, Alexander Rannair, March Haines, F.J. Wright, and Mr. R.P. Young. The property was bought for five thousand eight hundred and sixty-seven dollars and forty-five cents ($5,867.45). This was engaged in August, 1886, and the last dollar paid on the 6th of April, 1887. Every note was met without any delay whatever (Love, 1888).

Statement of Purpose

The intent of this study is to examine, document, and develop a record of the existing building of the FABC. This examination will also include a study of the building systems and the materials and methods used for construction.

Literature Review

Much of what has been written regarding the church documents its history and growth, with much of this information strongly focusing on the following:

1. The church's early organization at the Brampton plantation.
2. The founding and early work of the pastors of the church
3. The acknowledgement of the 'colored congregation' by the white church establishment.
4. The documentation of the purchase of the Franklin Square site.
5. The events that took place which eventually lead to the justification of the construction of a new edifice.

During the 1780's the Brampton plantation became the center of a movement that was to give its name far greater importance in history than it would have known simply as the home of Jonathan Bryan, patriot. This movement progressed, not in the colonial house where eminent men of the state were probably often guests of their fellow Council member, but in the fields, the barns, the row of little huts that sheltered the slaves. It was the growth of evangelism that led to the organization of the first Negro Baptist church in North America. Dr. Albert J. Raboteau, a scholar of African and African American religion, studied and later wrote on a concept he coined the 'invisible institution' (Raboteau, 2004). This term referred to the quiet birth and development of the African American religious experience. From plantation barns to secret 'hush harbor' meetings, slaves struggled with the attempt to understand, and eventually create, a manner of Christian worship while preserving their African spiritual heritage (Gist-Etheridge, 2005). The convergence of these events, and the attempt by slaves to

understand Christianity as a manner of worshiping a deity unfamiliar to them, ultimately led to the organization of the FABC on the plantation of Jonathan Bryan.

Methodology

A process of gathering information and data for the verification of existing physical conditions will include a review of the various building systems such as structure and foundations, design precedent, and the building envelope and interior finishes. The framework to be used will consist of the following:

Collection of Data

- Sources of collection such as books, newspaper articles, historic maps, construction and architectural journals, profession reports, and photographs, as well as organizations like the City of Savannah and the Georgia Historical Society.
- Methods of collection such as site visits, access to library and archival information, and internet accessibility.
- Processes of collection such as copies of photographic imagery.
- Formats

Organization of Data

- Categorization of collected data from various sources allows the development of specific topics in this study to have a measure of substance from a variety of disciplines that may have impacted the church building.
- Review and sort for common ideas within collected data. This type of exercise supports the 'triangulation' of information which is necessary to provide credibility and consistency in arriving to conclusions.
- Develop a chronological order of the collected data. Sequencing gathered information provides a time line context that can run consistent with, and further justify, historical events which may have occurred in FABC building.

Analysis of Data

The analysis of data and information of the church building will offer the chance to examine the various existing building systems as well as offer the opportunity to study existing church models that the FABC may have been able to draw design inspiration from. A review of this gathered information may help determine whether the FABC church building is possibly a physical template of an Anglo church building motif. The establishment of the architectural context is also relevant in this study because it will help frame the physical urban context that the FABC was built.

Analysis of the gathered data and information may help answer the following questions:

1. At the time construction began on the FABC, in the mid-1850s, a number of architectural styles were reflected in the design of a number of churches built in and around Savannah. Many of these buildings were designed by architects. It has not been confirmed that FABC was designed or influenced by an architect or a design professional, unlike its sister church, the First Bryan Baptist Church, located blocks from the FABC. First Bryan Baptist Church is an African American congregation born from the FABC, whose church building was designed by an Anglo civil engineer, John B. Hogg (Waymarking, 2014). The question for FABC: Was there an architectural or design influence of any kind from a person or professional, or did the builders of FABC observed existing church structures and imitated the look, scale, size, and proportion in the construction of their edifice?
2. The builders of FABC were mostly slaves, likely from the Brampton and Hermitage plantations. The slaves were trained to do a number of technically oriented tasks, one of which was to make bricks (Savannah Unit, Georgia Writer's Project, 1943). FABC's original building envelope is a 'four wythe' wall system (a structural system consisting of four walls of brick with mortar between each wall). Further, the general framing of the building is wood. The roof framing system of the church is of heavy timber and purlins. A site plan of the Hermitage plantation confirms the presence of a sawmill on the property (Joyner, 2003). The question for FABC: How did slaves, living in

the antebellum south, procured and assembled the necessary building materials to construct a building they would come to own?

Significance of Research

The significance of the study will be the following:

1. This study can serve as a foundational template capable of being used to survey, examine, and develop the architectural design and construction for various African American places of worship in the United States built in the 19th and early 20th century.

2. This study can begin the discussion of the historical and architectural differences between urban African American church building design with that of rural African American church building design.

3. Attempting to understand the meaning of the church building to the parishioners functioning as a 'character' in the narrative of not only the African American community but the Savannah community as well.

CHAPTER II

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND PROPERTY

Site Review

The FABC is located at 23 Montgomery Street in Savannah, Georgia. The church is directly across the street from Franklin Square, within the Franklin Ward area of downtown Savannah. The building is considered a contributing property within the Savannah National Historic Landmark District (the District). The District was established in 1966 and is recognized on the National Register of Historic Places. Franklin Square is an urban park consisting of a fountain, landscaping, and pedestrian seating. The square is part of a larger network of similar urban parks throughout the downtown core of Savannah, whose design was inspired by the colony of Georgia's founder, James Oglethorpe (Jackson, 2003). Franklin Square is bordered by various multistory buildings reflecting various business uses. Much of these uses is located in brick buildings, while more recently constructed buildings near Franklin Square are of contemporary architecture design and materials.

The church building is sited on a city block. To the immediate west of the building is a surface parking lot which the FABC owns. The church also owns another surface parking lot directly across the street to the north. This parking lot is used as a revenue stream of income for the church as it charges a fee for parking to those persons, typically visitors to Savannah, wishing to visit the various retail and restaurants located around Franklin Square. The church site is bordered by West Bryan Street to the north;

Montgomery Street to the east; West Saint Julian Street to the south; and Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard to the west.

FIGURE 2. East elevation and main entrance of the First African Baptist Church
(Photograph by the author)

The east façade of the church faces Montgomery Street, as shown in Figure 2. The cornerstone, dating the 1859 completion of the construction of the church, is locate in the center arch of the façade, along with a stained glass window image of the founder of FABC, George Leile. The steeple is a prominent feature on this building elevation, which marks the location of the main entrance to the church.

FIGURE 3. South elevation of the First African Baptist Church
(Photograph by the author)

Figure 3 shows the south facade of the building, facing West Saint Julian Street, highlights arches over the windows as a design feature. The entire building was finished with a stucco application directly over the original brick exterior walls after 1936. There is a door on this façade, located a couple of steps below the sidewalk, which provided access to the lower level fellowship hall. Access to this side entrance is by a concrete ramp.

FIGURE 4. West elevation of the First African Baptist Church
(Photograph by the author)

Figures 4 shows the west façade of the building facing Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. illustrates the bay shaped pulpit with two stained glass windows installed. Mechanical equipment which service the building, as well as a private parking lot for the church staff, is located on this side of the building. The expansion to the original 1859 building was added on the west end of the church in 1887-1888 (Love, 1888). The parking lot once held a tailor shop and drug store, dating back to 1888 (Sanborn, 1888).

FIGURE 5. North elevation of the First African Baptist Church
(Photograph by the author)

The north façade of the church, as illustrated in Figure 5 and facing East Bryan Street, has the same arch detail over the windows as on the south façade. There is also a door, located on this façade, which provides access to the lower level fellowship hall.

FIGURE 6. Aerial view of the First African Baptist Church (Image courtesy of Google Earth, 2014)

According to a study of buildings in downtown Savannah by the Historic Preservation Department of the Chatham County – Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC), there is documented evidence that at the time construction on the FABC began in the mid 1850s, there were very few buildings in the immediate vicinity of the church site. The Franklin Ward Historic District Map has both historic and non-historic buildings. Figure 6 shows the current location and context, from an aerial perspective, of the FABC. Figure 7 was developed to graphically illustrate the appearance of Franklin Ward as it would have appeared in 1855, having removed all buildings from the drawing that were built after 1855. Another map, Figure 8, illustrates Franklin Ward as it appeared in 2011.

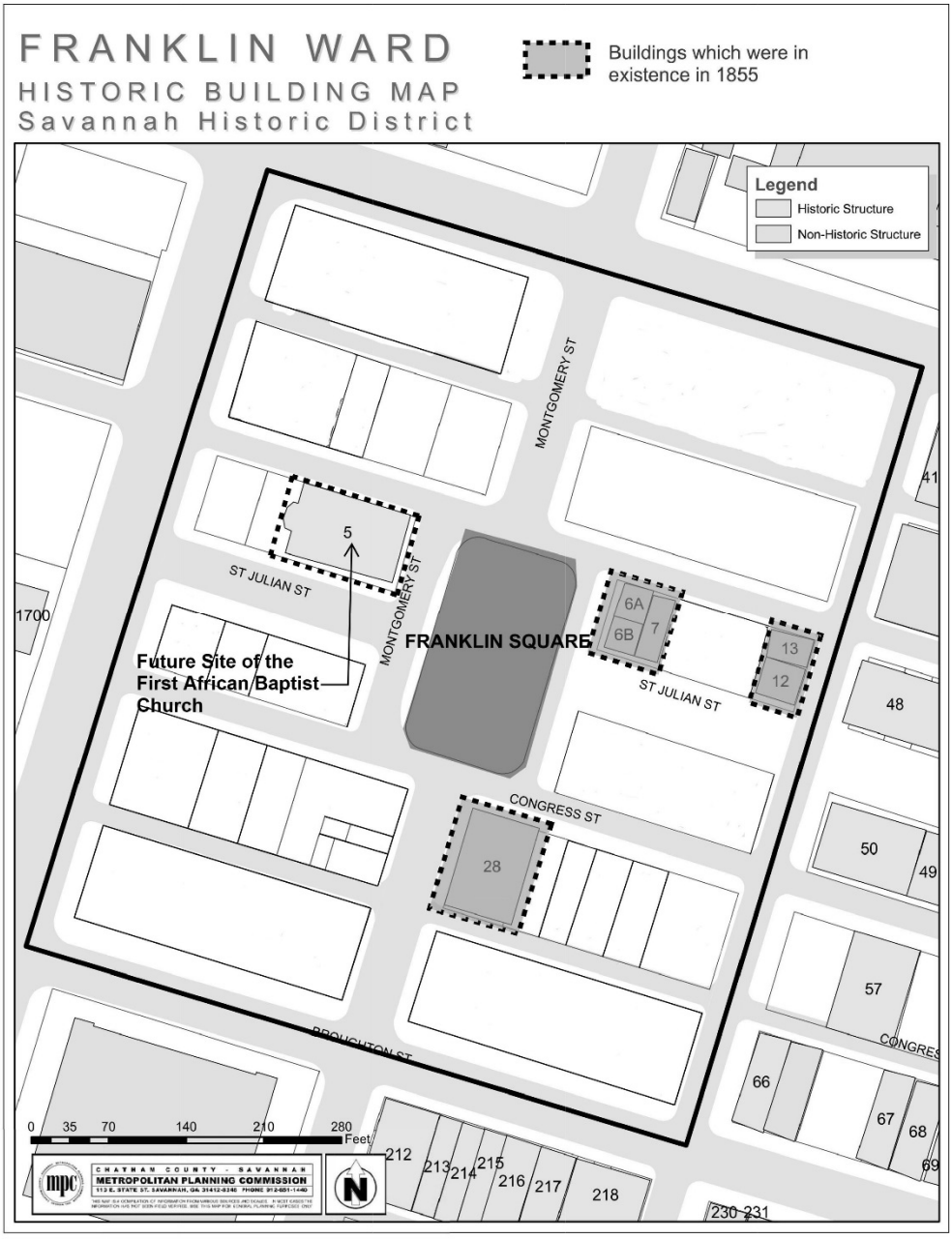


FIGURE 7. Franklin Ward Historic Building Map amended by Photoshop to illustrate the area as it appeared in 1855 (Image courtesy of the Historic Preservation Department of the Chathan County – Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission, 2011)

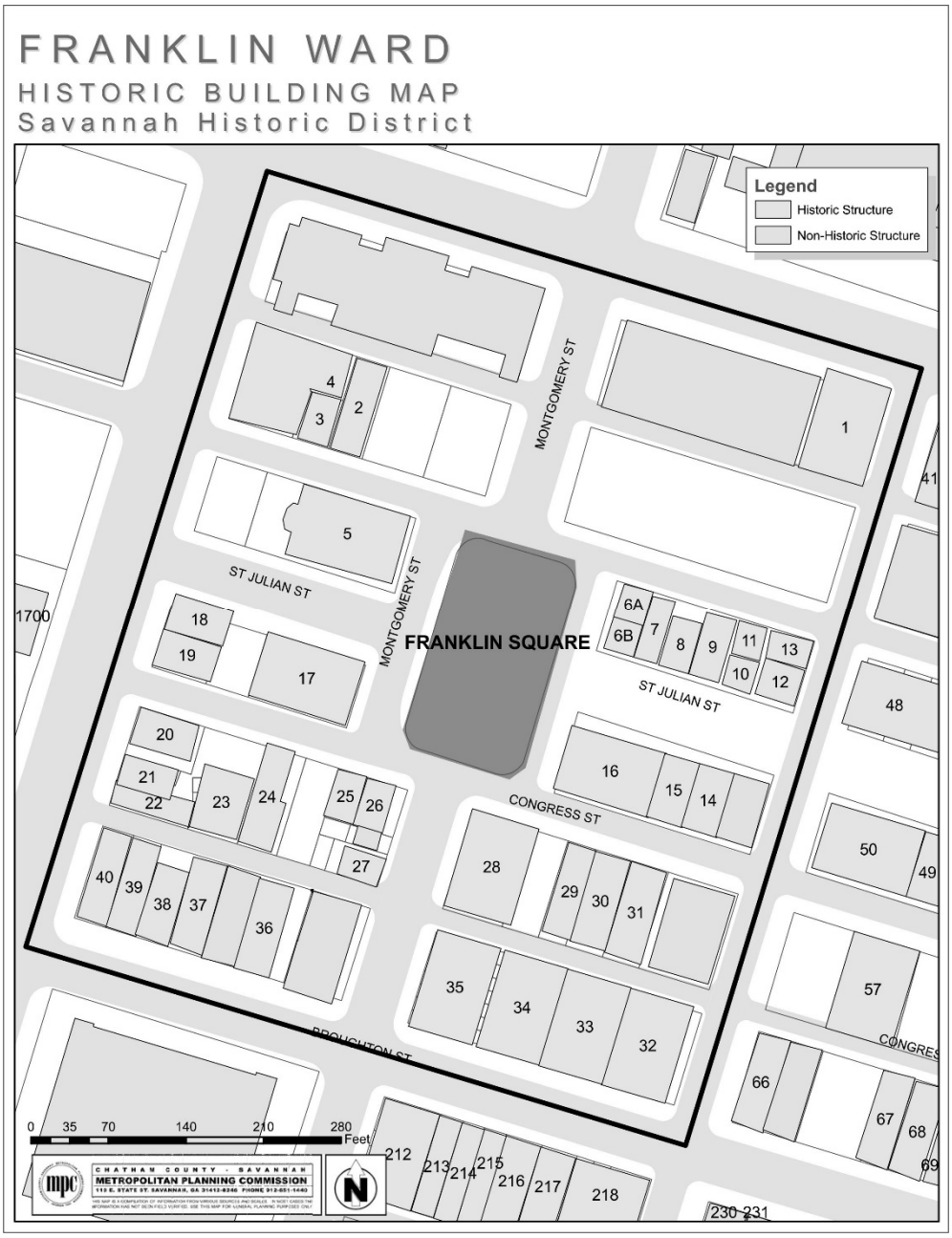


FIGURE 8. Franklin Ward Historic Building Map Circa 2011 (Image courtesy of the Historic Preservation Department of the Chatham County – Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission, 2011)

Franklin Ward

Map Number	Address	Date Added	Date Built	PIN No.
1	301-305 West Bay Street (1 Jefferson Street)	1973	1893	2-0016 -02-001
2	418 West Bryan Street	2000	1910	2-0016 -03-006
3	420 West Bryan Street	1973	1912	2-0016 -03-005
4	14 Martin Luther King Boulevard (422 West Bryan Street)	2000	1891 / 1924	2-0016 -03-004
5	23 Montgomery Street	1973	1859	2-0016 -09-001
6A	317 West Bryan Street (20-22 Montgomery Street)	1973	1846	2-0016 -11-006
6B	317 West Bryan Street (20-22 Montgomery Street)	1973	1846	2-0016 -11-006
7	316 West Saint Julian Street	2002	1870	2-0016 -11-006
8	314 West Saint Julian Street (313-315 West Bryan Street)	2002	1870	2-0016-11-006
9	312 West Saint Julian Street (311 West Bryan Street)	2002	1860	2-0016 -11-006
10	310 West Saint Julian Street	2002	1884	2-0016 -11-006
11	306-308 West Saint Julian Street (307 West Bryan Street)	2002	1870	2-0016 -11-006
12	302 West Saint Julian Street	1973	1855	2-0016 -11-006
13	301-305 West Bryan Street (19 Jefferson Street)	1973	1855	2-0016 -11-006
	25-29 Jefferson Street (301-303 West Saint Julian Street) (302-304 West Congress Street)		1950	
14	305 West Saint Julian Street (306 West Congress Street)	1973	1892	2-0016 -11-006
15	307 West Saint Julian Street (308 West Congress Street)	1973	1892	2-0016 -11-006
16	309-315 West Saint Julian Street (310-312 West Congress Street)	1973	1902	2-0016 -11-006
17	27 Montgomery Street (405-415 West Saint Julian Street)	1973	1891	2-0016 -11-006
18	30 Martin Luther King Boulevard (28)	2002	1883	2-0016 -09-003
19	32 Martin Luther King Boulevard (30)	1973	1883	2-0016 -09-004
20	419-423 West Congress Street (36 Martin Luther King Boulevard)	1973	1875 / 1906	2-0016 -16-005
21	38 & 40 Martin Luther King Boulevard	1985	pre 1898	2-0016 -16-013
22	42 Martin Luther King Boulevard	2000	1916 / 1955	
23	411 West Congress Street	2000	1872	2-0016 -16-025
24	409 West Congress Street	1973	1872	2-0016 -16-003
25	405 West Congress Street	1973	1870	2-0016 -16-014
26	(401-403 West Congress Street)	1973	1867	2-0016 -16-001A
	31 Montgomery Street			
	35 Montgomery Street			
27	37-39 Montgomery Street	2000	1916	2-0016 -16-001C
28	30-38 Montgomery Street (317 West Congress Street)	1973	1855	2-0016 -15-006
29	315 West Congress Street	1973	1871	2-0016 -15-004
30	311 West Congress Street	2002	1914	2-0016 -15-003
31	307-309 West Congress Street	1973	1875	2-0016 -15-002
	301-305 West Congress Street			
32	300-308 West Broughton Street	1973	1854 / 1913	2-0016 -15-0011
33	310-314 West Broughton Street	1973	1872	2-0016 -15-0012

FIGURE 9. Franklin Ward Historic Building Matrix Circa 2011 (Image courtesy of the Historic Preservation Department of the Chatham County – Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission, 2011)

Figure 9 documents all the buildings in Franklin Ward. An analysis of this building matrix shows the building map numbers, addresses, and the date upon which

the buildings were constructed. Figures 10 and 11 illustrate the site of the FABC in 1888 and 1916.

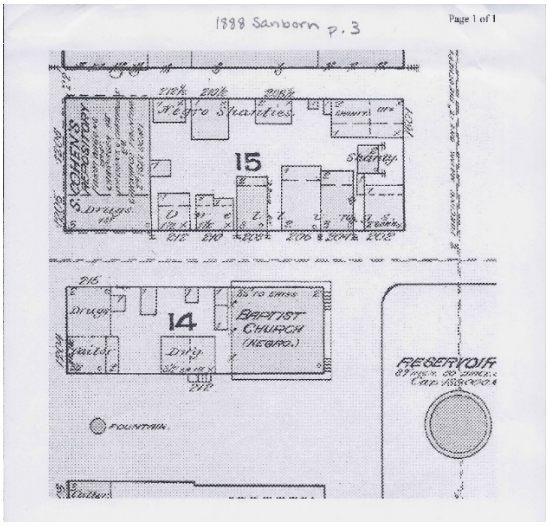


FIGURE 10. Site of the First African Baptist Church prior to building expansion circa 1888
(Image courtesy of Sanborn Maps located at the Georgia Historical Society)

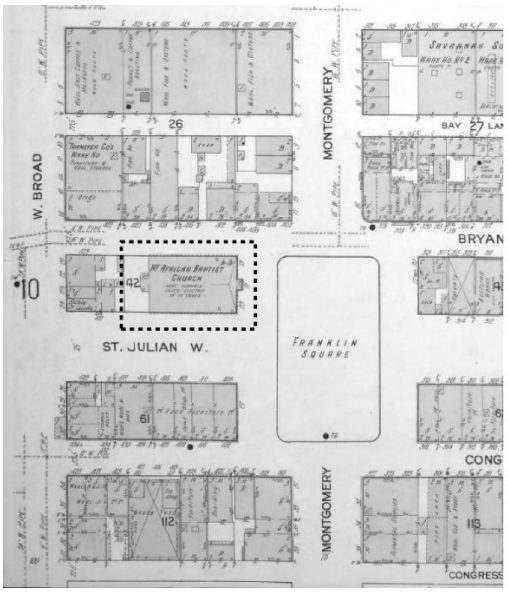


FIGURE 11. Site of the First African Baptist Church prior to building expansion circa 1916
(Image courtesy of Sanborn Maps located at the Georgia Historical Society)

CHAPTER III

DESCRIPTION OF PRECEDENT OF SIMILAR CHURCHES

Church Design Precedent

At the time construction began on the FABC, in the mid-1850s, a number of architectural styles were reflected in the design of many buildings built in and around Savannah. Many of these buildings were designed by influential architects living in Savannah, as well as those internationally known who travelled to Georgia to practice. These designers were able to take advantage of the prosperity of planters in the Savannah area, who gain wealth from cash crops such as rice and cotton. By 1820 Savannah was the eighteenth largest city in the United States, and had established its preeminence as an international shipping center, with exports exceeding $14 million dollars. Cotton remained the principal export until the American Civil War (1861-1865), when it made up 80% of the agricultural products shipped from Savannah (Sullivan, 2003).

Among the many ways prosperity was displayed was in the construction of public buildings, places of worship, and private residences. Popular architectural styles of the time were the Federalist and Georgian. Two of the most widely prominent design styles was English Regency, a form of classical design practiced in England during the regency of the future King George IV from 1811-1820, and the Greek and Classical revival. English architect William Jay, who arrived in Savannah in 1817, and trained in the Regency style, design beautiful mansions such as the Richardson Owens-Thomas House (1819), the William Scarborough House (1819), and the Alexander Telfar House

(1819). Jay would leave Savannah for England in 1822 as one of the city's most influential designers.

The Irish-born architect Charles B. Cluskey (1808-1871) arrived in Savannah in 1838 and stayed for almost a decade, becoming known for his antebellum architecture influenced by the Greek revival style. The elite of Savannah, prospering from neighboring plantations, hired him to design their town houses, including the Champion-McAlpin-Fowlkes house in 1844. He served as city surveyor of Savannah from 1845 to 1847, when he went to Washington with plans to renovate the White House and Capitol (few of his ideas were carried out, however). Another antebellum architect, John Norris (1804-1876), flourished in Savannah between 1846 and 1860. His most famous landmark is the Savannah Customs House, which was constructed between 1848 and 1852 in the Greek revival style, with its mammoth portico. He also designed many more notable structures throughout the city in the same general style, including the Andrew Low House in 1849. A competitor of his was John B. Hogg, who hailed from South Carolina. Hogg's most notable structure is the Trinity United Methodist Church at 225 West President Street. The church was built with the famous 'Savannah grays,' or stucco-covered gray brick. It is with this church building, as well as two others, all designed and built during this period of prosperity, which a design precedent study of FABC begins.

Three churches, all built prior to the FABC, were aesthetically influenced by the stylistic building designs of the many buildings being constructed in Savannah. The inspiration of the design of FABC is the inquiry, either by an architect who had direct

control over the look of the church building, or whether the builders of FABC, who also provided labor for the construction of many buildings in Savannah, observe and studied existing church building examples and adapted the style and look of these churches as something they could replicate for their own edifice. The three churches to be studied are Trinity United Methodist Church, Christ Church Episcopal, and First Baptist Church. These three churches have been singled out as examples of a style, image, form, and scale which is similarly reflected in the design of the FABC. Figure 12 shows the location of the three churches to be studies in proximity to FABC while Figure 13 documents the look of the FABC in a 19th century photo.

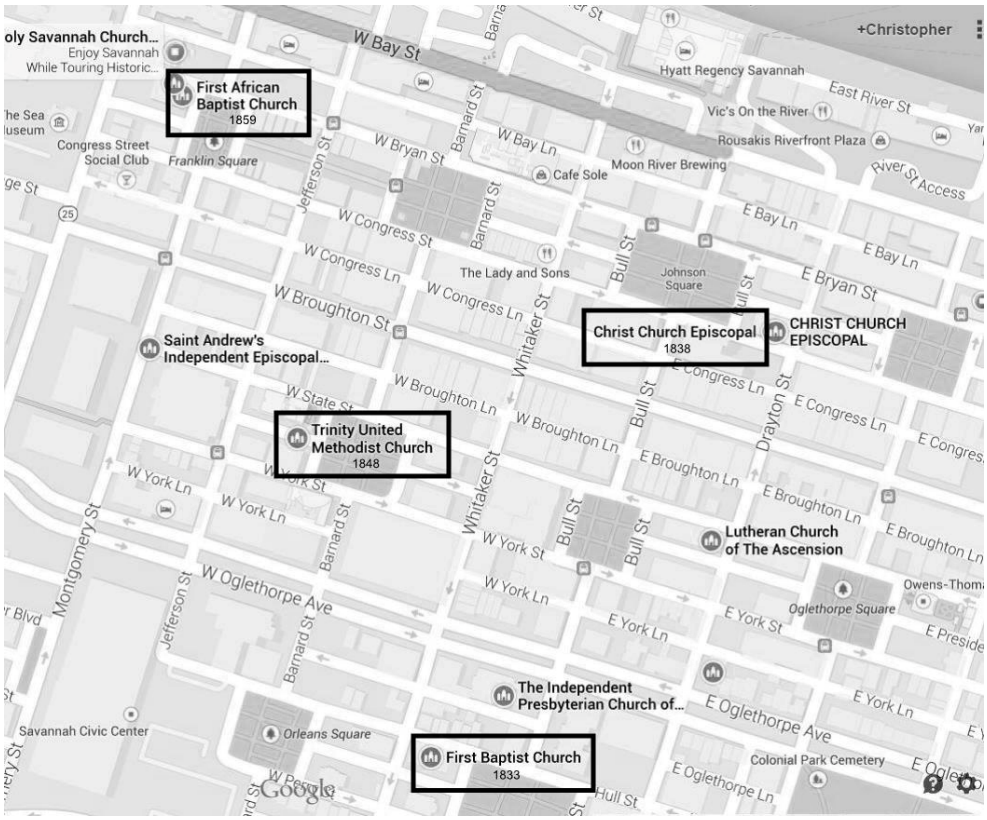


FIGURE 12. City of Savannah map of the locations of FABC, Trinity UMC, Christ Church Episcopal, and First Baptist Church, circa 2015. (Image courtesy of Google, 2015)

FIGURE 13. 19th century image of the First African Baptist Church with the original brick façade exposed
(Image courtesy of the book Savannah Revisited: History Architecture Restoration)

Trinity United Methodist Church

The cornerstone of Trinity Church was laid on February 14, 1848. The land had been the garden of the Telfair Family and was purchased for the sum of $8,500.00. The church is located on Telfair Square. The church was designed by John B. Hogg and illustrated in a 1936 photo in Figure 14. The church, its sanctuary, and one-story educational building were constructed at a cost of $20,000.00. The solid masonry walls are 'Savannah Gray brick', finished with stucco. Virgin long-leaf Georgia pines were hand hewn for the framing, flooring, and wainscoting. The boards were cut to the taper

of the tree and fitted together. The interior of the sanctuary, similar in design to the Wesley Chapel in London, England, was fully restored in 1969 (Trinity UMC History, 2012). In 2005, the church accomplished a complete exterior restoration. The stucco had cracked and failed in many places, therefore the non-original stucco on the east, north, and south facades of the building was removed. The brickwork was re-pointed as necessary with mortar to match the original, and any severely deteriorated bricks were replaced with matching ones. The building was then re-stuccoed with a custom mix formulated to match the original. Additionally, the new stucco was scored in the same pattern and dimensions of the original stucco, an unknown but important aesthetic element that was discovered underneath the original stucco layers. Sandstone was patched and repaired as necessary with a custom-color, mineral-based patching compound specially formulated for sandstone (Lominack, Kolman, and Smith Architects, 2005). The final cost of the restoration, which included work on the wood capitals of the two columns on the east façade as well as the repainting of the doors and windows, a new roof, and new copper gutters and downspouts, was $800,000 (Lominack, Kolman, and Smith Architects, 2005 and Mobley, 2007)

John Hogg (who later changed his name to Howard), was a surveyor for the city of Savannah from 1855 to 1879 (Gamble, 1900). He would later design the First Bryan Baptist Church, a sister church to FABC, in 1873. The present edifice was completed on January 20, 1888 at a cost of $30,000.00 and it is current in use today (Waymarking.com, 2008 and First Bryan Baptist Church website, 2013).

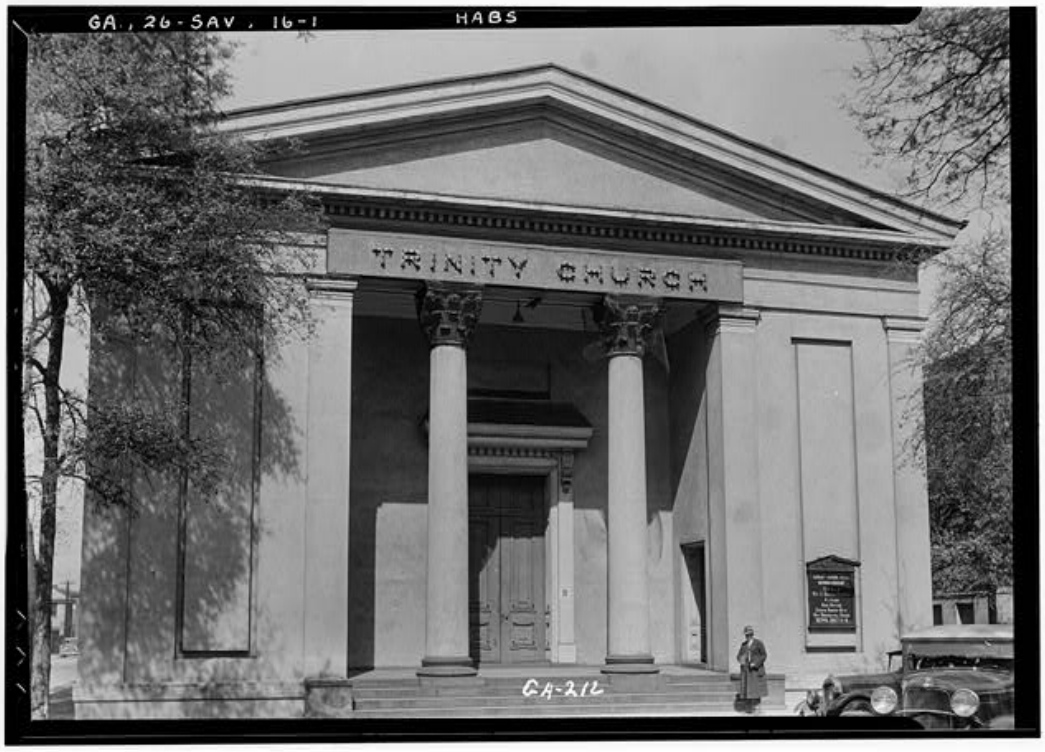


FIGURE 14. East elevation of the Trinity United Methodist Church, Savannah, Georgia circa 1936
(Image courtesy of Historic American Buildings Survey Project)

Christ Church Episcopal

On February 12, 1733 the Colony of Georgia and Christ Church, a mission of the Church of England under the ecclesiastical authority of the Bishop of London, are founded, making Christ Church the first house of worship established in Georgia. The cornerstone of the first Christ Church building is laid in 1744. On July 7, 1750 the new building is dedicated. By 1796 this church building is burned in the Great Fire, which also destroys most of the city. The church was rebuilt, but was greatly damaged by the gale of 1804. The current church building, designed in the Grecian Ionic order of architecture, was commenced in 1838, with the cornerstone being laid on February 26th.

This church was designed by James Hamilton Crouper (Jones, 1890). According to the Historic American Buildings Survey Project report dated August 19, 1936 the building was constructed with a brick foundation stuccoed and scored to resemble stone. The building's exterior walls were also of brick and covered with stucco (Bush-Brown, 1936). Figure 15 and Figure 16 shown the façade of the Greek revival church at it appeared in 1870 and 1934 respectively. Figure 17 shows the main sanctuary as it appeared in 1870 from a 1935 photo from the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) project.

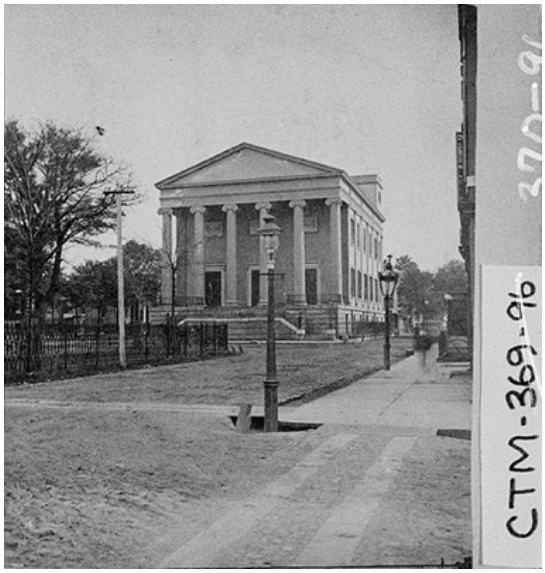


FIGURE 15. Elevation of the Christ Church Episcopal of Savannah, Georgia, circa 1870
(Image courtesy of Historic American Buildings Survey Project)

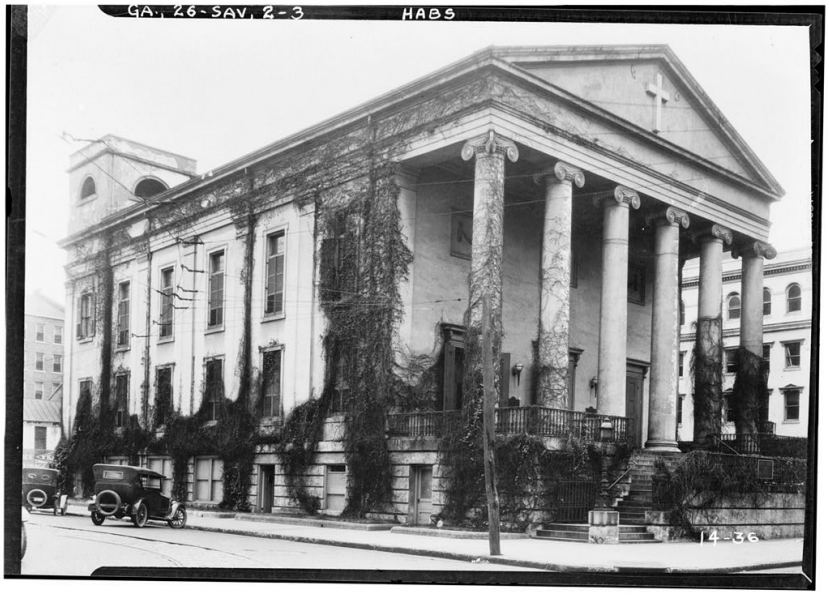


FIGURE 16. Elevation of the Christ Church Episcopal of Savannah, Georgia, circa 1934
(Image courtesy of Historic American Buildings Survey Project)

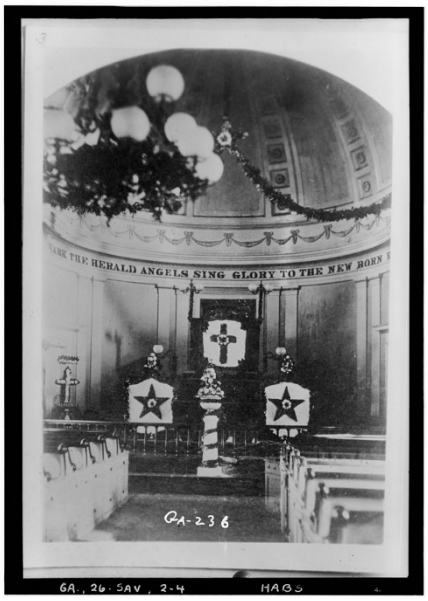


FIGURE 17. Center aisle interior of the Christ Church Episcopal of Savannah, Georgia, circa 1870
(Image courtesy of Historic American Buildings Survey Project)

First Baptist Church

The First Baptist Church was chartered on November 26, 1800, and soon the first meeting house was built on Franklin Square. The cornerstone of the present church on Chippewa Square was laid on February 2, 1831, and the building was completed in 1833. This Greek revival structure is the city of Savannah's oldest standing house of worship. The sanctuary was enlarged in 1839, improved from time to time, and completely renovated in 1921. The most recent renovations were in 1966, 1989-1990, and 1998-1999 (First Baptist Church website, 2001). This church was designed by Elias Carter, whose original design for the church consisted of Savannah's gray brick walls covered with stucco, a recessed portico, and a cupola, as shown in Figure 18. In the renovation of 1921-1922, architect Henrik Wallin's design called for more of a Greek temple form. As a result the cupola was removed, the portico enclosed for a narthex, and the front extended to create a new portico, and the entire building clad in limestone, shown in Figure 19 (Savannah Images Project, 2015 and HABS Report, 1983).

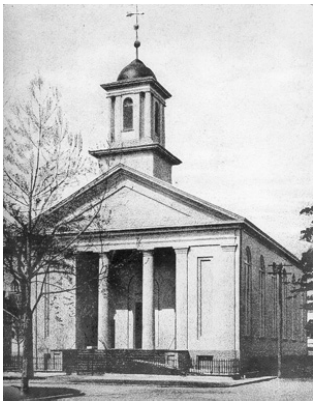


FIGURE 18. Elevation of the First Baptist Church of Savannah, Georgia, circa 1921
(Image courtesy of Savannah Images Project)

FIGURE 19. Primary entrance of the First Baptist Church of Savannah, Georgia, circa 1936
(Image courtesy of Historic American Buildings Survey Project)

FIGURE 20. Rear elevation of the First Baptist Church of Savannah, Georgia, circa 1936
(Image courtesy of Historic American Buildings Survey Project)

FIGURE 21. Interior of main sanctuary of the First Baptist Church of Savannah, Georgia, circa 1936
(Image courtesy of Historic American Buildings Survey Project)

Figure 20 shows the rear of the church and Figure 21the interior of the main Interior sanctuary of the church. Both photos were part of the HABS project.

Analysis

My analysis of the three churches compared to the design of the FABC include the following:

- The three (3) churches were all standing before FABC began construction in the 1850s. This is confirmed by the Franklin Ward history maps (Figures 7, 8, and 9) located in the site review chapter of this document. The three (3) buildings provide an existing template for the builders of FABC to have observed and studied.

- All three (3) churches are located in the downtown Savannah district, within blocks of the FABC site. Proximity can provide a creative inspiration for the design of a building. In this case, proximity created an aesthetic context for FABC to be influenced. The religious use applied to the buildings was

architecturally expressed in the image of Greek temples, reinforcing a design motif of how the form of a 19th century church building developed in Savannah.

- All the churches were constructed of the Savannah Gray bricks, with the exterior walls of each church constructed as four wythe bearing walls. Similar construction methods for the walls and roofs of these buildings provide a stable and consistent application of the use of materials in 19th construction. Bricks, used as a building material for thousands of years, have not changed in application or use. It was used in the 19th century as a structural bearing unit, assembled to support roof structures and floor joists. The introduction of structural steel in building design of the 20th century began to diminish the use of brick bearing walls (Britannica Online Encyclopedia, 2015).

- Two of the churches were cladded with stucco. FABC however did not apply stucco to its exterior walls until sometime after 1936, when HABS photographs documented FABC as a brick building. Like the use of brick, stucco, as a building material, dates back in use to the Greeks as well as Aztec architecture of Mexico and Islamic architecture of North Africa and Spain (Britannica Online Encyclopedia, 2015). The application of stucco to the three precedent churches was typical in building construction in Savannah at this time. The question here is why stucco was not applied to FABC. I conclude that for the builders and parishioners of FABC, it may have been more important and relevant that their building remain brick in its final appearance because of the significance and value brick buildings represented.

- Each design precedent church has at least five (5) tall arched windows on its longitudinal elevations (Trinity UMC). Christ Church and First Baptist have six tall arched windows. FABC has six (6) tall arched windows on its longitudinal sides. Like FABC, all the precedent churches have interior center aisles, similarly pitched roofs, and similarities in size and scale, each being one story in height, and all with a lower level. The overall form, as well as the stated physical qualities of the precedent churches, are all consistent with one another, and these qualities are reflected in some capacity in FABC. These items continue to reinforce the design motif that such a building designed to these formal qualities may be imaged to be a church. This aesthetic logic is present in our society where a certain image of a building can suggest the building's use (i.e., a bell tower atop a church or a schoolhouse; a bank building that looks like a Greek temple, representing stability, security, and permanence; and a house with a pitched roof, chimney, and the door centered on the main façade). This type of imagery serves society in a way that allows humans to have an anthropomorphic relationship with buildings, while allowing the building to be formally influenced in its contextual environment. FABC adopted this imagery application as its formal quality resembles the three precedent churches, while

adding to the image of how a small church house in 19th century Savannah developed.

- Timber members were used in the framing of each building. Like bricks and stucco, wood is a natural and old building material. In southern Georgia, wood was an easily accessible material, with renewable capabilities, and represented a major cash industry for the Savannah economy. Wood's use and application for these church buildings was applied in the interior of each building, both in its use as a finishing material (i.e., flooring, etc.) but for use as a primary material for the production of furniture.

The strongest and consistent influence on all four churches was the labor used to construct the buildings. The builders of the design precedent churches were trained in brickmaking, stucco application, the hewing of timber, and learning to create the necessary joinery for the wood members to work as assembled units. This training likely took place at the Hermitage plantation, located adjacent to the Brampton plantation. The Hermitage was a manufacturing center for bricks, metal products, and timber cutting. The builders also learned the construction methods of the time in order to build not only the church structures, but most of the buildings in Savannah.

Based on the review and analysis of the three precedent churches, and comparing them to FABC, I conclude that that these three churches directly influenced the form, aesthetics, and constructability of the FABC.

CHAPTER IV

DESCRIPTION OF THE PHYSICAL BUILDING

Architectural Drawings

The architectural drawings presented in Figures 22 to 27 document the current building design of the FABC. These drawings were produced by a local Savannah architectural firm, Gunn, Meyerhoff, and Shay, in 1995, which the church hired to make some renovation changes to the building. Among the changes made to the building were the following:

- Provide a new exterior concrete ramp and new railing to match the existing wrought iron railing. The new ramp is located on the south side of the building and leads from the sidewalk to an entrance at the lower level of the building.
- Provide an office for the pastor as well as an adjacent office located on the lower level of the church.
- The installation of a new elevator with an adjacent machine equipment room. The elevator connects the lower level to the main sanctuary level.

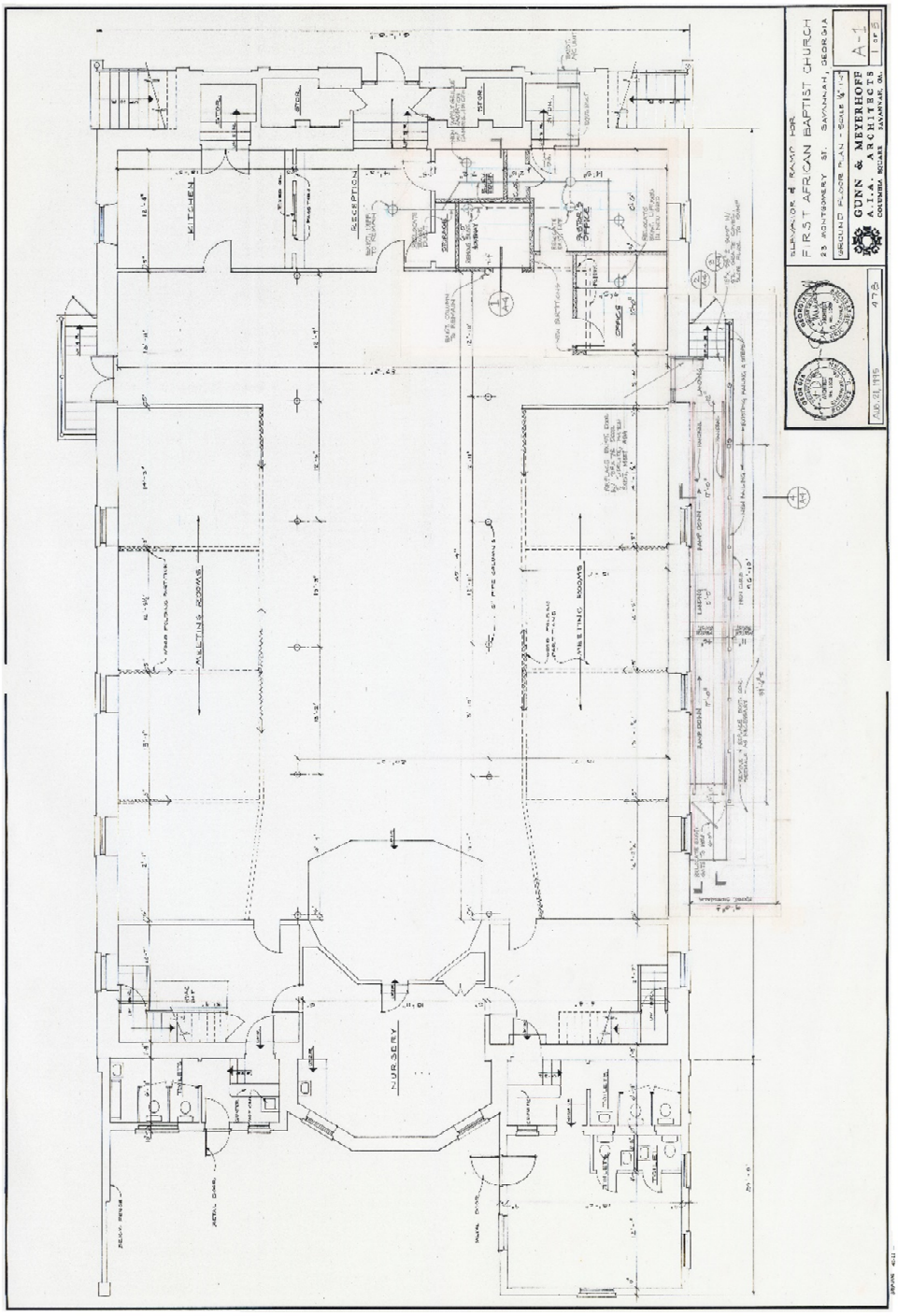


FIGURE 22. Lower Level Floor Plan of the Fellowship Hall
(Drawing by Gunn, Meyerhoff, and Shay Architects, Savannah, Georgia)

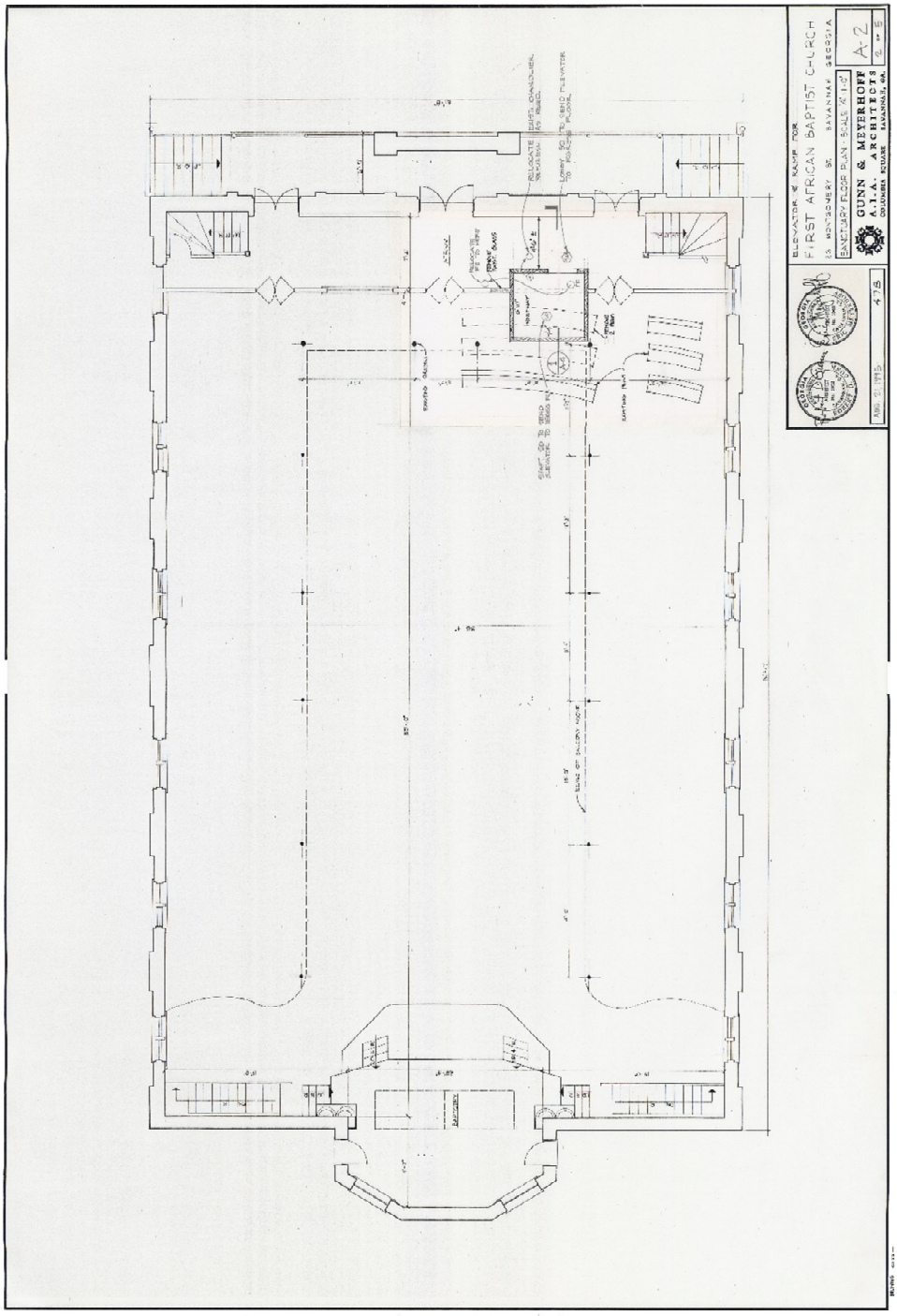


FIGURE 23. First Floor Plan of the Sanctuary Hall
(Drawing by Gunn, Meyerhoff, and Shay Architects, Savannah, Georgia)

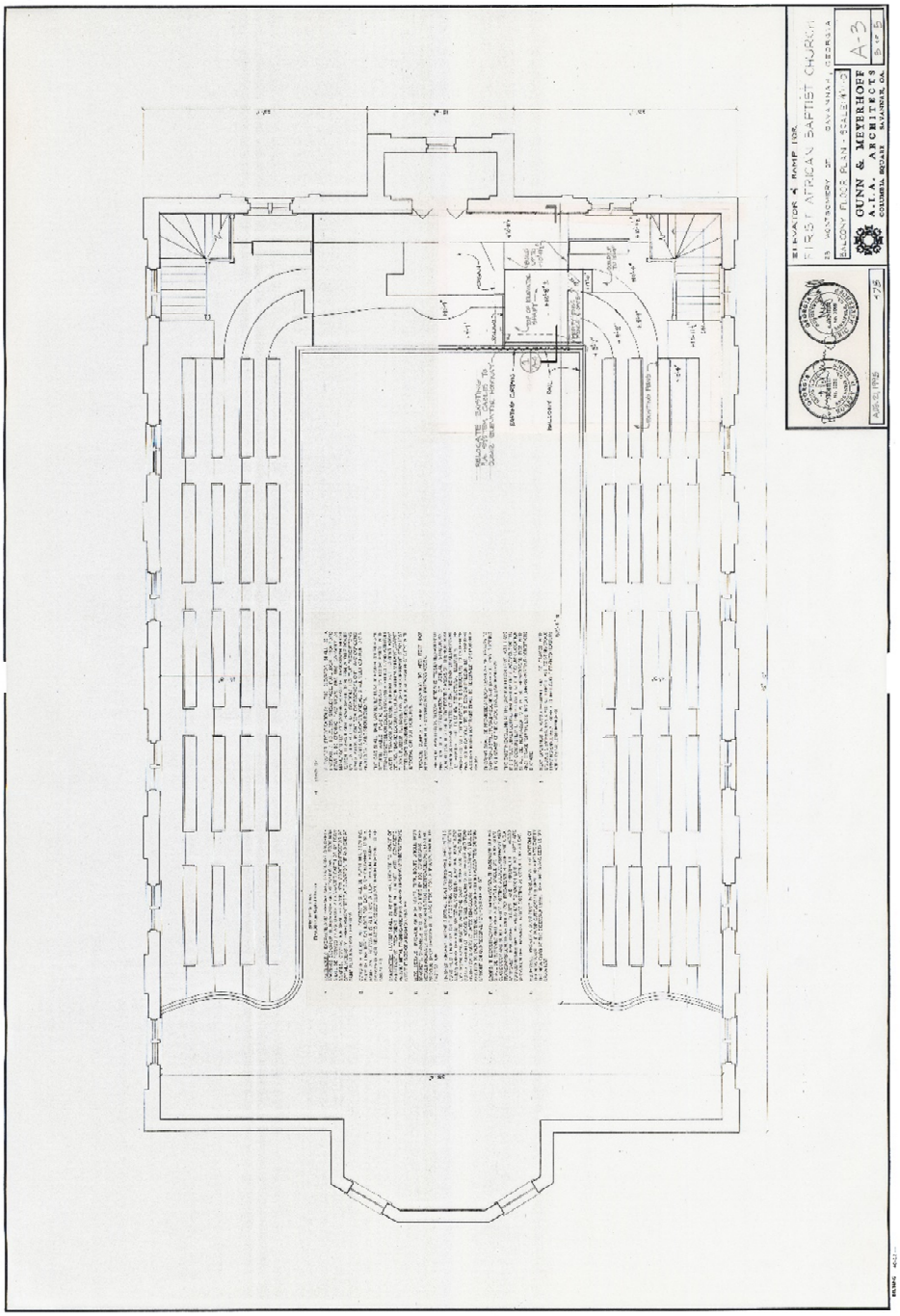


FIGURE 24. Second Floor Plan of the Balcony Level
(Drawing by Gunn, Meyerhoff, and Shay Architects, Savannah, Georgia)

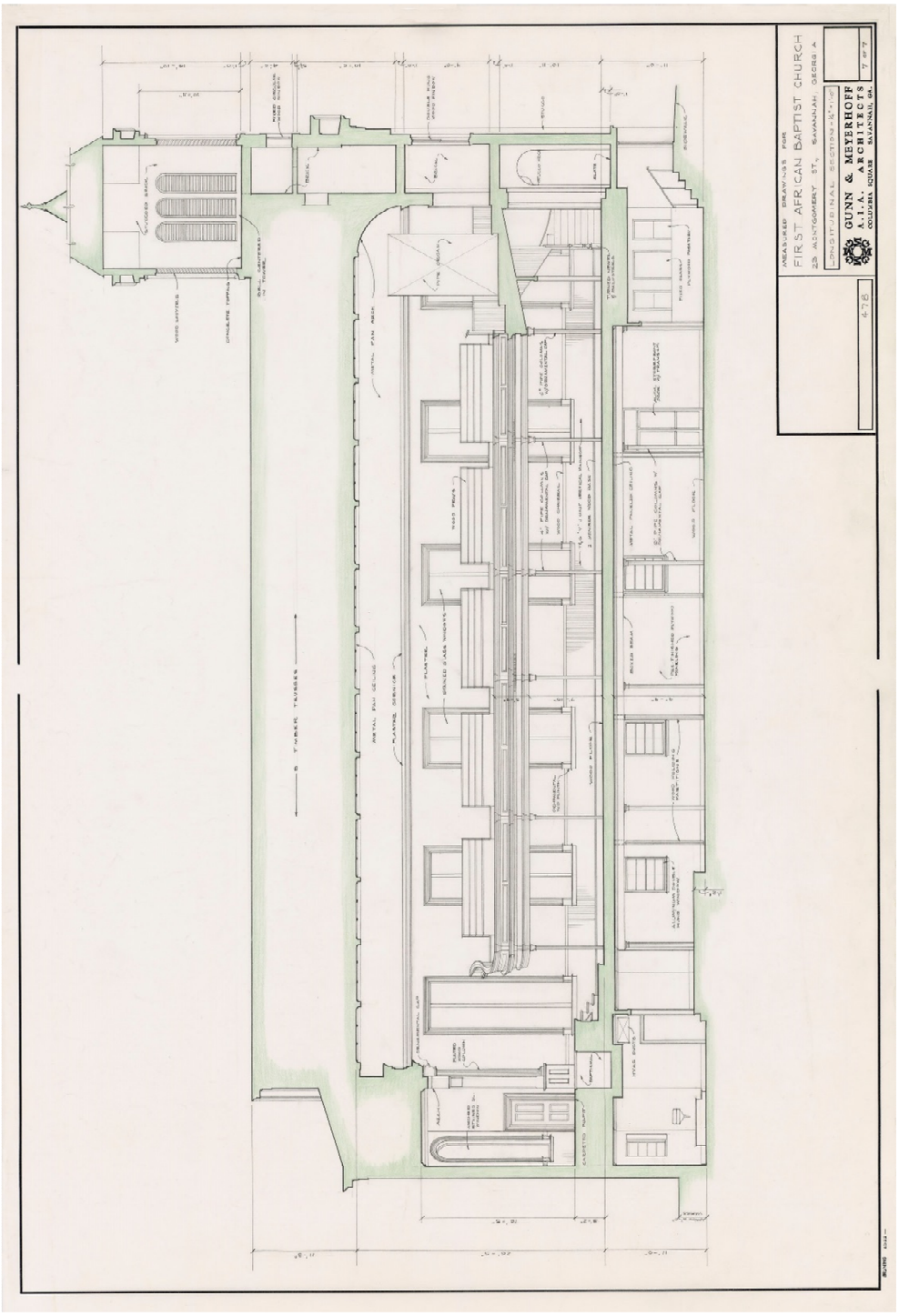


FIGURE 25. Longitudinal building section
(Drawing by Gunn, Meyerhoff, and Shay Architects, Savannah, Georgia)

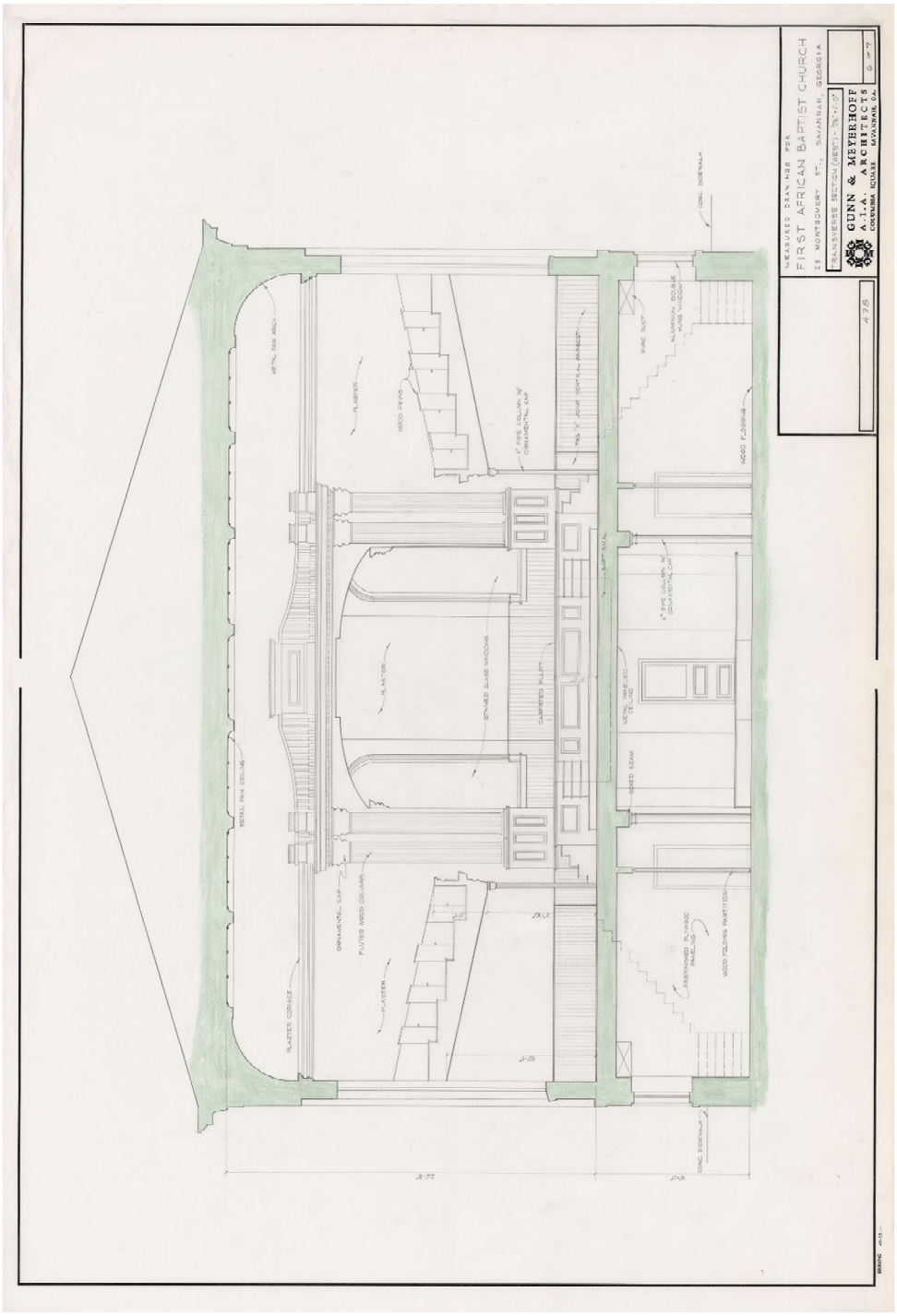


FIGURE 26. Transverse building section
(Drawing by Gunn, Meyerhoff, and Shay Architects, Savannah, Georgia)

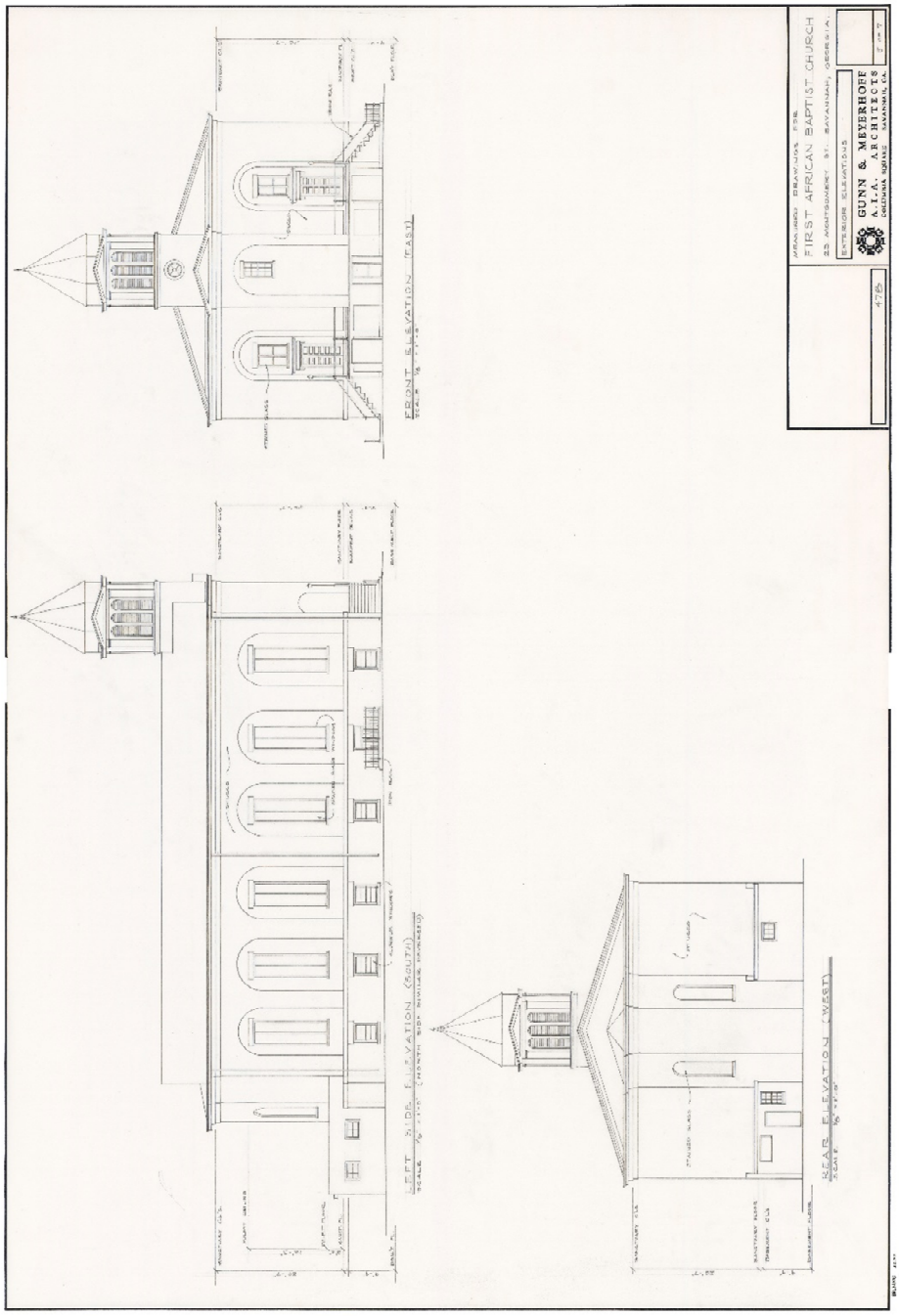


FIGURE 27. Building elevations
(Drawing by Gunn, Meyerhoff, and Shay Architects, Savannah, Georgia

Building Foundation

The foundation of the church is of masonry construction. Most 19th century foundations were of either stone or brick masonry laid directly on the subsoil in an excavated trench. The foundation masonry was laid about twice as wide as the upper foundation wall, and the width was diminished slightly as each course was laid, resulting in a wedge-shaped cross-section at the bottom of the foundation wall. The wider bottom of the foundation masonry served to distribute the weight of the building walls over a wider soil area, thus reducing the pressure on the soil and lessening chances of building settlement (Jones, 2001). There are small openings along the sidewalk located at the base of the building, directly under each window, as shown in Figure 28. The sidewalk opening is covered with a removable metal grate. Once the grate is removed there is a clear view of the foundation wall of the church below grade. The brick wall below the sidewalk is not covered and is fully exposed.

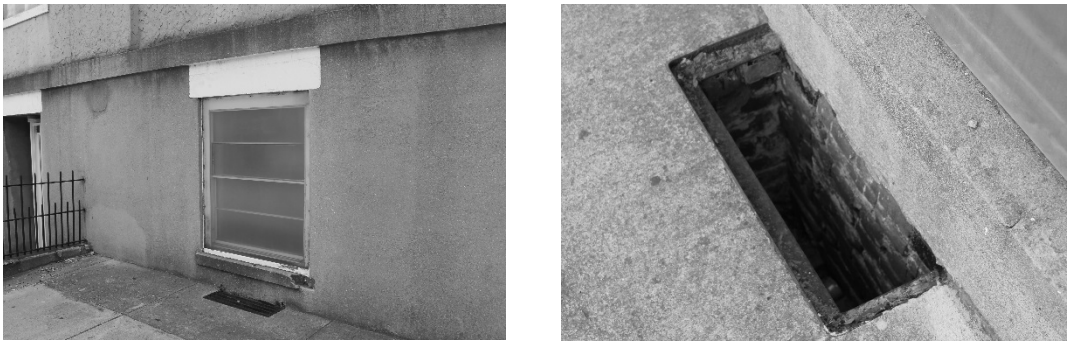


FIGURE 28. Brick foundation detail below sidewalk of the First African Baptist Church (Photograph by the author)

There is a crawl space directly beneath the floor system of the lower level fellowship hall, estimated to measure about four feet clear from the bottom of wood floor boards to the ground. Figure 29, Figure 30, and Figure 31 shows that the floor framing is a system of wood beams and joists which tie into the perimeter brick foundation. The foundation / wall system is a load bearing assembly, in which the wall not only carries its own weight, but the weight of another structural member, such as a beam, column, or truss.

By the time the FABC was built, masonry construction was required in Savannah, in response to a devastating fire in January 1820 which consumed most of the city and destroyed over 400 buildings (Coulter, 1939). Per the 1854 city ordinances, any building taller than 20 feet was required to be constructed with non-combustible materials, including the roof (Henry, 1854).

FIGURE 29. Wood beams in crawl space framing into perimeter brick foundation at the First African Baptist Church (Photograph by the author)

FIGURE 30. Wood beams in crawl space over brick grade beam of the First African Baptist Church (Photograph by the author)

FIGURE 31. Opening in floor with view of column masonry step footing of the First African Baptist Church (Photograph by the author)

Perimeter Masonry Bearing Walls

The historical account that the slaves who built the church made the bricks used in its construction is supported by accounts documenting activities at the Hermitage plantation. The Hermitage plantation, located along the Savannah River as shown in Figure 32, was known for its manufacturing of bricks, lumber, and iron products in addition to its agricultural production. The manufacturing of bricks, particularly the Savannah gray brick type, made Hermitage the primary source for the supply of masonry for building construction in Savannah (Savannah Unit, Georgia Writers Project, 1943). The Savannah gray brick type was made from gray clay found on the plantation, near the river bank. The brick, which is actually a reddish brown color, was popular because of its low cost of production and its subsequent low selling price (McAlpin, 2006).

The perimeter walls of the church is a four wythe wall system. A wythe is a continuous vertical section of a wall, one masonry unit in thickness, and tied to its adjacent vertical section or sections by bonders, metal ties, or grout (Acme Brick, 2009). This type of wall assembly is a series of vertical brick walls built with grout between each wall. The church wall section is composed of four (4) brick walls held vertically together by three (3) applications of grout. Together this type of wall section can provide a very strong, fire resistant structure. Arches are framed within the masonry wall sections, providing an aesthetic feature to the facades of the building, creating an undulating detail which can cast shadows and provide an interesting look to the masonry walls of the building.

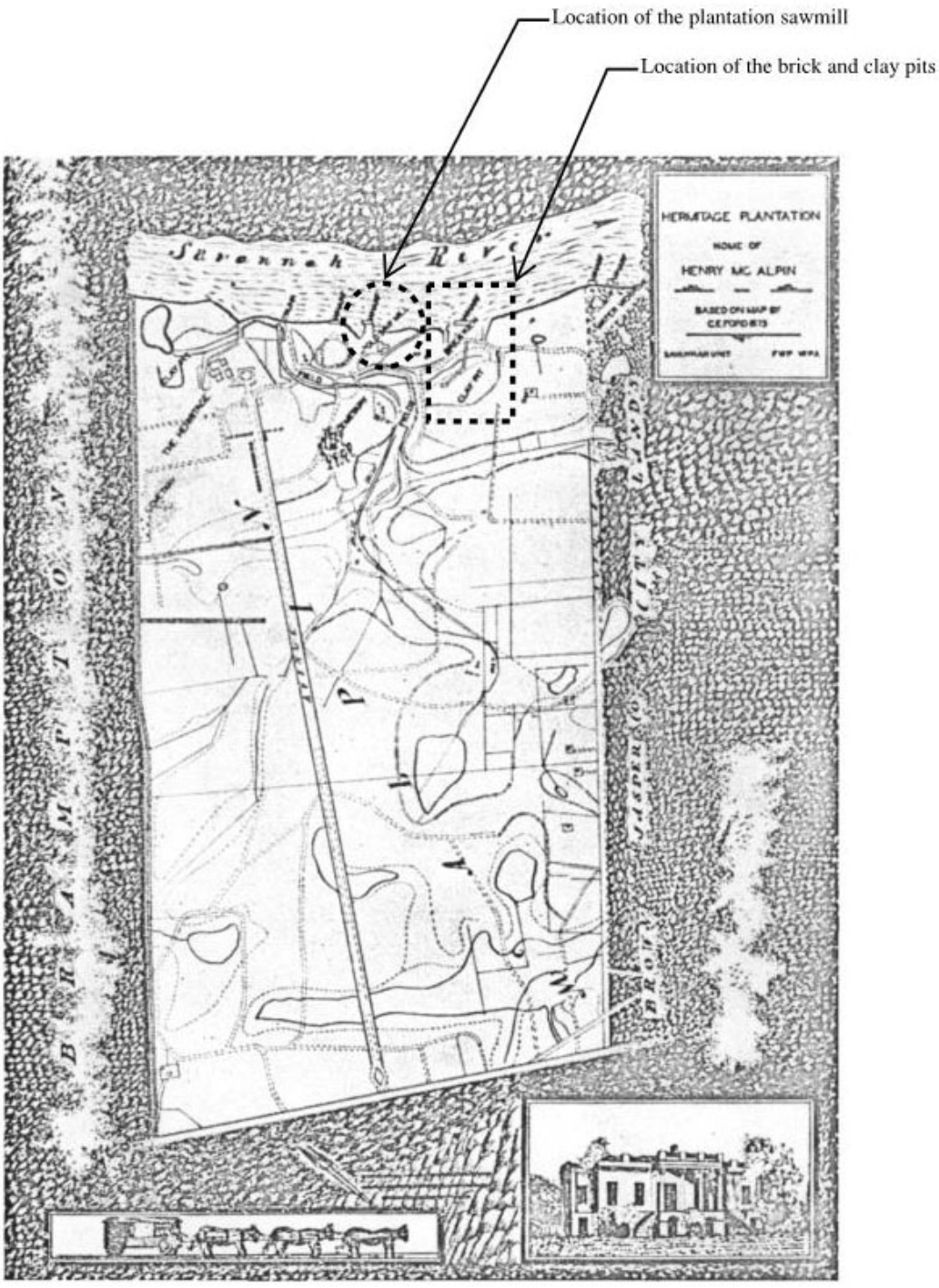


FIGURE 32. Site plan of the Hermitage River Plantation.
(Image courtesy of the Savannah Unit Georgia Writers' Project)

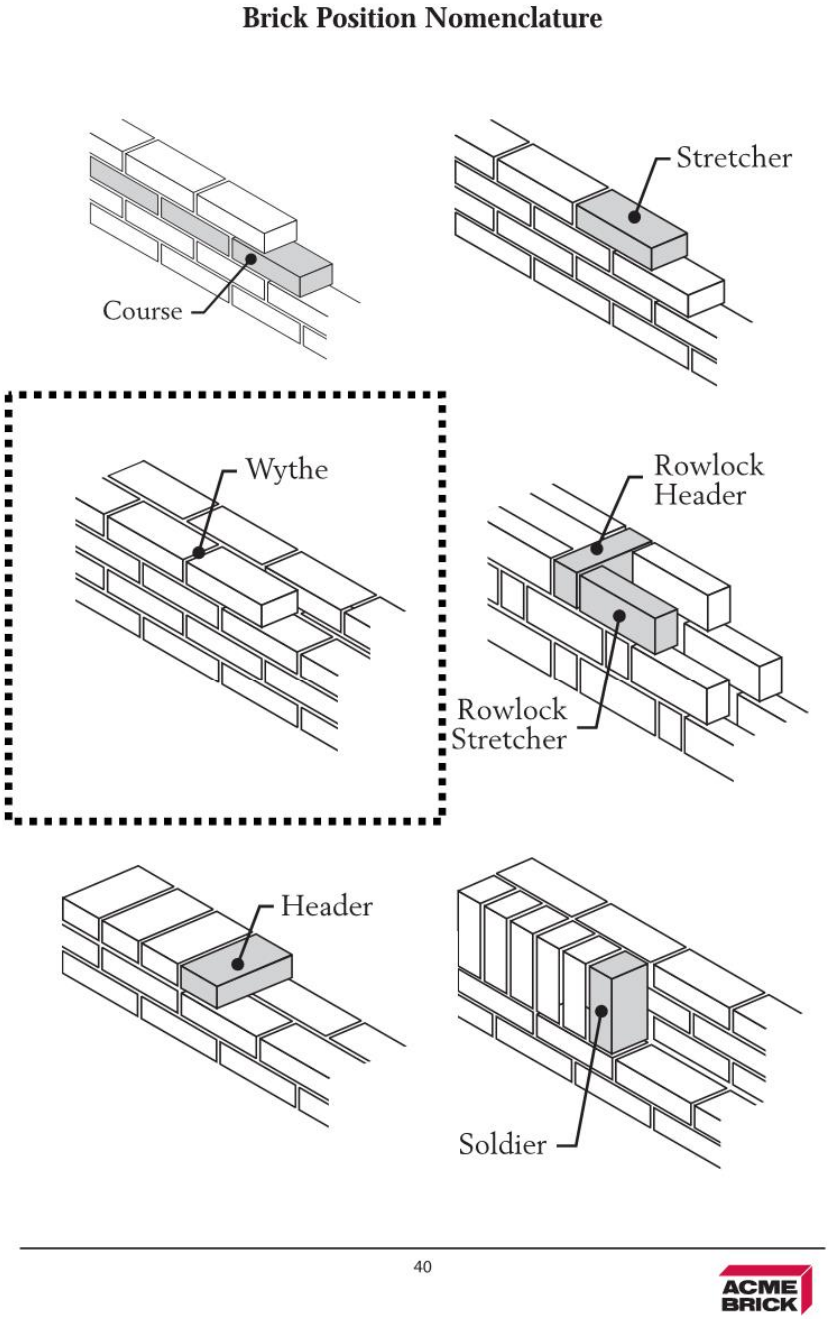


FIGURE 33. Example of a multi brick wythe solid masonry wall system
(Image courtesy of Acme Brick Company, 2009)

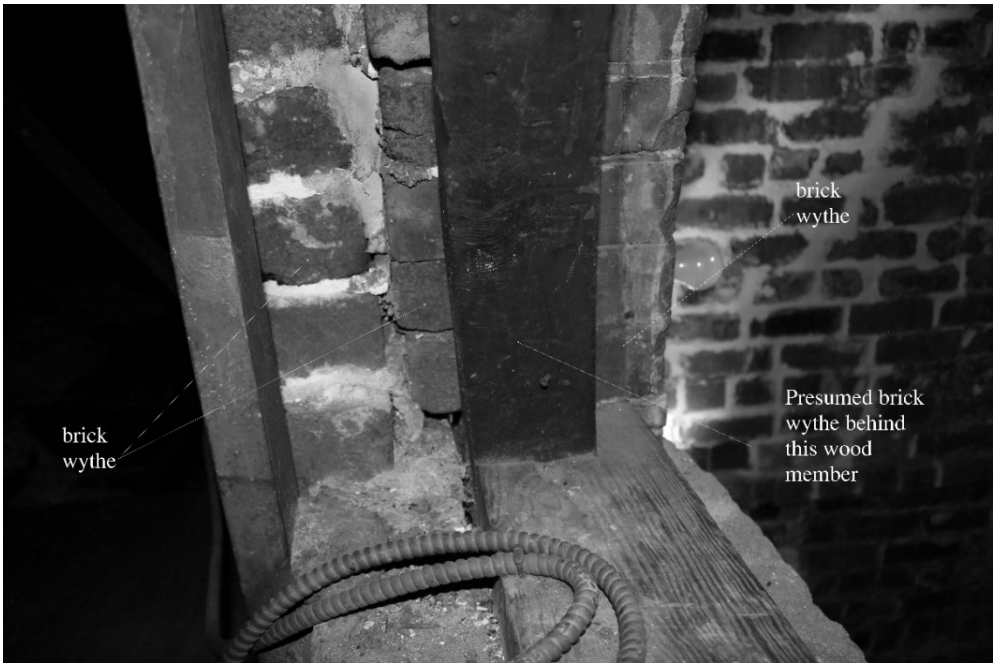


FIGURE 34. Image of a multi brick wythe wall in the bell tower of the First African Baptist Church (Photograph by the author)

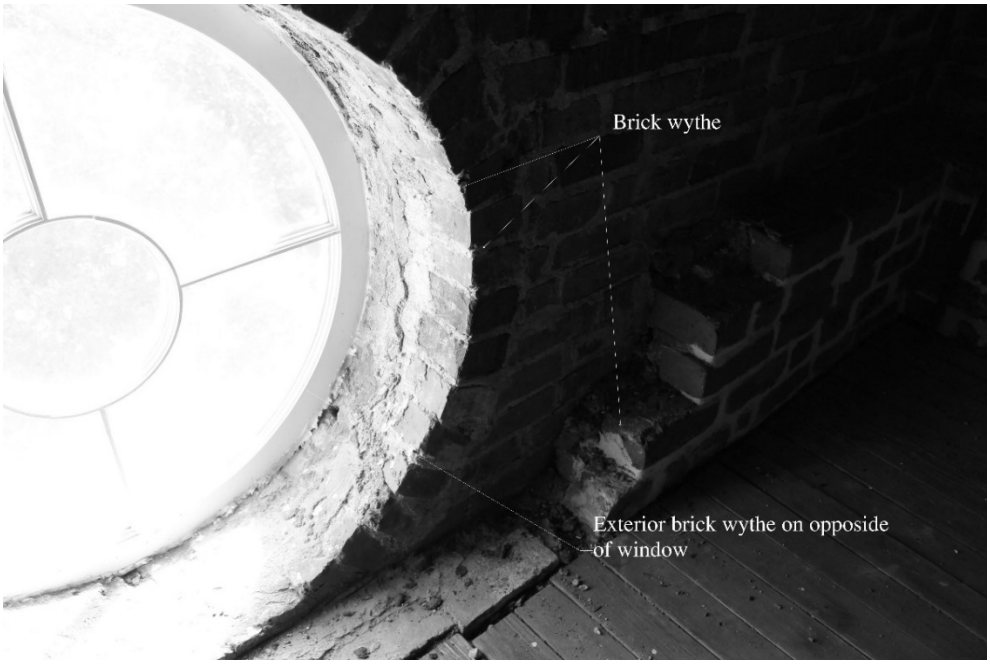


FIGURE 35. Image of a multi brick wythe wall in the bell tower of the First African Baptist Church (Photograph by the author)

Figure 33 shows a graphic example of a wythe wall, while Figure 34 and Figure 35 are photos of the wall section details in the bell tower of the FABC.

Floor Framing and Structural Columns

The structural system of the church consist of wood joists which frames the flooring for the fellowship hall, the main sanctuary, and the upper balcony. A wood tongue and groove floor is applied throughout the building. The main sanctuary has a series of 4" pipe columns, which support the floor framing system for the upper balcony, while the fellowship hall has a series of 6" pipe columns, as shown in Figure 36. Figure 37 shows a columns penetrating the wooden flooring in the fellowship hall. The pipe columns support the main sanctuary floor framing system.

FIGURE 36. Image of the pipe columns in the Fellowship Hall of the First African Baptist Church. (Photograph by the author).

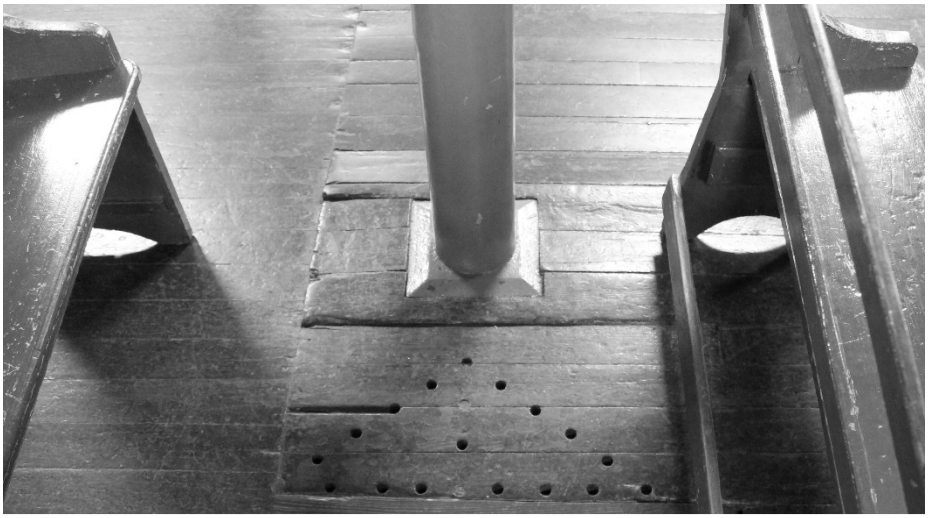


FIGURE 37. Image of the pipe column at wood flooring in the Fellowship Hall of the First African Baptist Church. (Photograph by the author)

The fellowship hall has a series of pipe columns which are supported by masonry step footers, shown in Figure 38, with a solid cut stone located at the top of each masonry footer. Figure 39 shows the stepping pattern at the base of the foundation walls, where the footer base is spread wide to allow the structural load from the columns to be more evenly distributed to the ground. A series of primary wood beams and joists have been used to frame and support the balconies.

FIGURE 38. Stone atop masonry step footing supporting pipe column above, at the First African Baptist Church
(Photograph by the author)

FIGURE 39. Profile of masonry step footing and wood beams in crawl space at the First African Baptist Church
(Photograph by the author)

Roof Framing and Roof Finish

The roof of the church is a gable in configuration, and it is covered with a white membrane for water drainage, as shown in Figure 40. There is a lightning protection system installed on the roof. Figure 41 shows the lighting protection cabling located at the ridge of the roof.

FIGURE 40. Image of the finished roof system. (Photograph by the author)

FIGURE 41. Image of the finished roof system (Photograph by the author)

The roof of the building is supported by eight (8) heavy timber wood members, with wooden joists framing into a ridge beam. The wood members of the framing system are notched into one another and held in place by a joint application technique called a mortise and tenon, shown in Figure 42. The roof of the church consist of vertical and horizontal wood members supporting smaller wood joists through the use of a purlin joint, shown in Figure 43. At the end of the truss is a purlin which is attached to the top of the truss by a 'birdmouth' notch cut as shown in Figure 44. The joints are further held in place with the use of tapered wooden pins (nails), illustrated in Figure 45. I have not been able to find and document any method which the builders of FABC could have used for cutting members and raising them into place on the building. There is documented evidence that the Hermitage plantation, located immediately next to the Brampton along the Savannah River, did have a saw mill (Savannah Unit Georgia Writers' Projects, 1943).

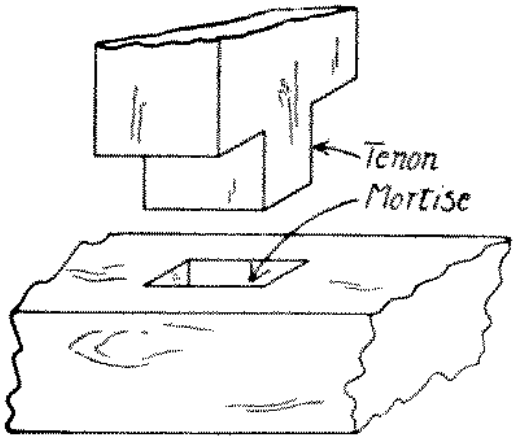


FIGURE 42. Image of a typical mortise and tenon connection.
Image can be located at www.timerframe-tools.com/reference/handwork-in-wood/mortise-and-tenon-joints/

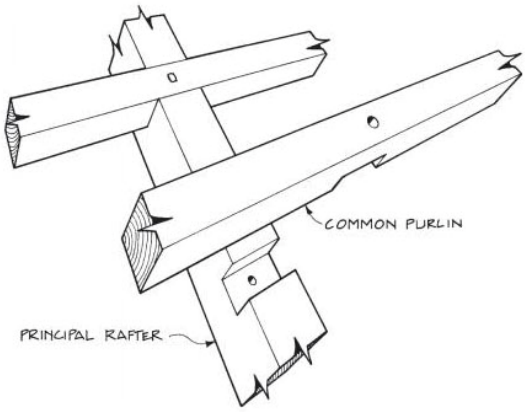
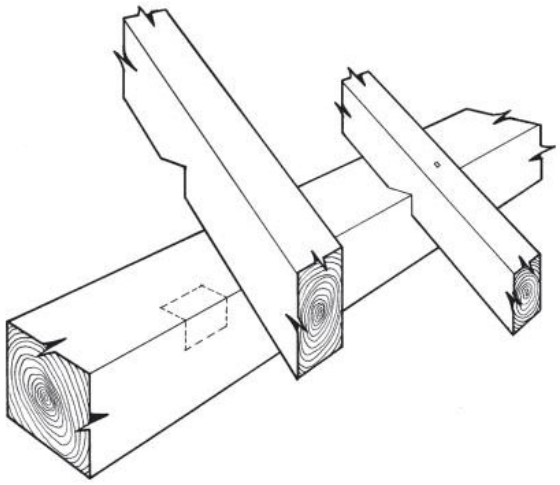


Fig. 31. To avoid unduly weakening principal rafters, deep-section purlins are notched or halved where they cross.

FIGURE 43. Image of a purlin joint. (Image courtesy of Historic American Timber Joinery)



Figs. 18 and 19. Above (18), a simple birdsmouth cut on the outside of the purlin plate is quite common in Dutch barns. A pin or spike is used to secure it. Below (19), rafters are reduced to a consistent, smaller size where they pass over the purlin plate. Only the pin resists thrust.

FIGURE 44. Image of a birdmouth joint. (Image courtesy of Historic American Timber Joinery)

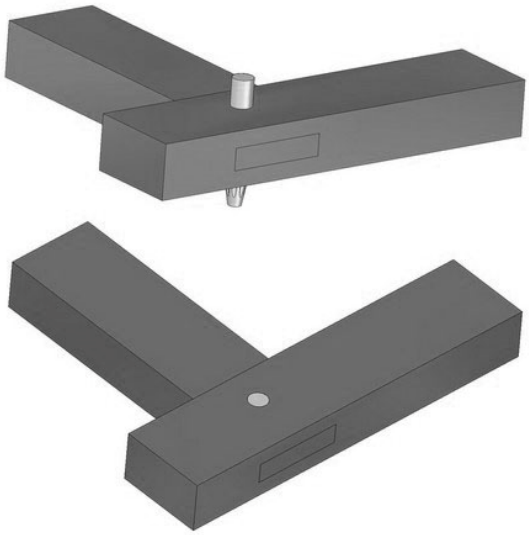


FIGURE 45. Image of a mortise and tenon joint connection held together by a tapered wooden pin
Image can be found at www.craftsmanspace.com/knowledge/wooden-pins-and-drawboring:html

FIGURE 46. Image of heavy timber structural members framing the roof of the church building.
(Photograph by the author)

FIGURE 47. Image of wood purlins, using a birdnotch joint, supported by heavy timber structural members. (Photograph by the author)

FIGURE 48. Image of tapered wooden pins (nails). (Photograph by the author)

Figure 46 shows the roof framing with heavy timbers, located directly above the main sanctuary. Insulation has been blown into place to create a thermal envelope. Figure 47 is an example of a birdnotch joint used in the roof framing of the church building, while Figure 48 illustrates an example of a pinned connection as well as a notching joint from one beam to its supporting member.

Construction techniques which may have been available may have required the entire truss to be assembled on the ground and raised into place atop the load bearing masonry walls through a device called a gin pole. Figure 49 and Figure 50 are graphics illustration the operation of the gin pole.

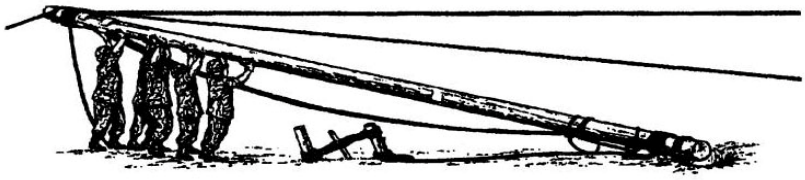


Figure 5-2. Erecting a gin pole

FIGURE 49. Image of the erection of a gin pole.
(Image courtesy of the Army Field Manual FM 5-125)

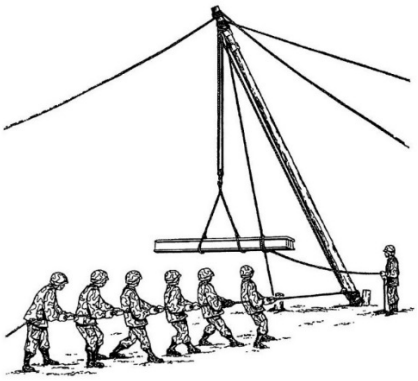


FIGURE 50. Construction method for raising a beam via use of a gin pole.
(Image courtesy of the Army Field Manual FM 5-125)

In raising the trusses of a church they should be put together on the main floor and well secured…when you have got one raised and placed to its proper place and well braced, slip the gin along to where the second one is to stand. A good set of hands working under a master workman will generally be able to complete the whole in one day (Lockwood, 2005). A gin pole consists of an upright spar that is buoyed at the top to maintain it in a vertical or nearly vertical position and is equipped with suitable hoisting tackle. The vertical spar may be of timbers, a wide-flange steel beam section, a railroad rail, or similar members of sufficient strength to support the load being lifted. The load may be hoisted by hand tackle or by hand-or engine 'driven hoists. The gin pole is used widely in erection work because of the ease with which it can be rigged, moved, and operated. It is suitable for raising loads of medium weight to heights of 10 to 50 feet where only a vertical lift is required. The gin pole may also be used to drag loads horizontally toward the base of the pole when preparing for a vertical lift (Army Field Manual, 2007). The gin pole is particularly adapted to vertical lifts. Sometimes it is

used for lifting and pulling at the same time so that the load being moved travels towards the gin pole just off the ground. When used in this manner, attach a snubbing line of some kind to the other end of the load being dragged; keep it under tension at all times. Use tag lines to control loads that you are lifting vertically. A tag line is a light line fastened to one end of the load and kept under slight tension during hoisting (Army Field Manual, 2007).

Stucco Application and Wood Trim Detailing

The application and use of stucco as an exterior finish on buildings in Savannah is common, as was documented in the design precedent review of both the Christ Church and the Trinity United Methodist Church. When construction was completed on FABC in 1859, there was no stucco applied to the exterior of the building. The 'Savannah Gray bricks', used to construct FABC remained exposed until sometime after 1936. It was at this time that the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) study was conducted on FABC. Figure 51 and Figure 52 provides photographic evidence from the HABS study that the building continued to be exposed brick at least to December 30, 1936. This means that for nearly 80 years, the FABC brick building was exposed to the natural elements of sun, rain, wind, and cold.

FIGURE 51. Image of church building from the Historic American Building Survey, circa 1936.

FIGURE 52. Image of church building from the Historic American Building Survey, circa 1936.

FIGURE 53. Image of stucco finish and exposed brick. (Photograph by the author)

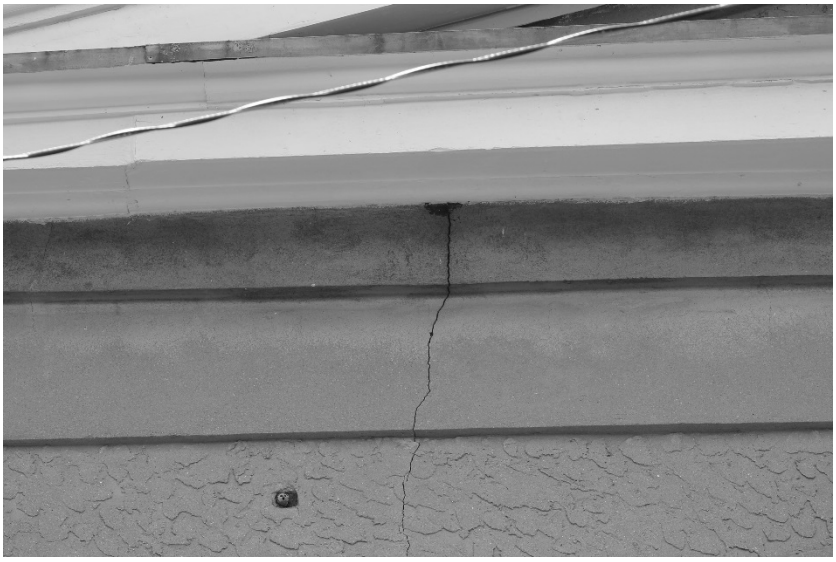


FIGURE 54. Image of cracking in the stucco finish. (Photograph by the author)

FIGURE 55. Image of stucco finish and exposed brick. (Photograph by the author)

The current condition of the stucco shows a slow deterioration of the finish, with some small cracking and portions falling off the building, exposing the brick underneath. Figures 53, Figure 54, and Figure 55 are photographic examples of the deterioration.

Wood trim is used as an accent detail primarily over openings in the exterior wall at the doors. Concrete lintels are used to span the opening for the windows. Wood trimming is original to the building, with detailing at the head (top) of the doors. Trimming is also located at the raking cornice at the roof. The HABS 1936 photographs show that the wood elements on the building façade have not been painted. It can be concluded that sometime after 1936 paint was applied to the wood trim elements. Time is beginning to impact small portions of the wood, with small cracking appearing in a few wooden members, as shown in Figure 56.

FIGURE 56. Image of cracking wood trim. (Photograph by the author)

Stained Glass Windows

The original windows to the FABC were operable clear windows which allowed air movement within the sanctuary (Lane, 1977). The current stained glass windows were later installed in the 1880s having been documented as inscription in one of the glass panels; a result of the efforts of the Reverend George Gibbons Glass Club, who were members of the church charged with raising the funds needed to pay for church expansion (Love, 1888 and FABC glass inscription, 1878 to 1884). The rectilinear stained glass window located on the east elevation of the church is in honor of the church founder, George Liele, shown in Figure 57, while the windows of the other six pastors are located in the pulpit bay area, as shown in Figure 58. The stained glass windows in the main sanctuary provides a visual account of church history, shown in Figure 59, while Figure 60 is a detail photograph of the images of the church pastors. It

is possible that the installation of the stained glass windows in the bay area was coordinated with the general church expansion at the west (pulpit) end of the building, which began in 1887 (Love, 1888).

FIGURE 57. Image of stained glass window of George Liele on east elevation of the church. (Photograph by the author)

FIGURE 58. Image of stained glass windows in the pulpit bay of the first six pastors. (Photograph by the author)

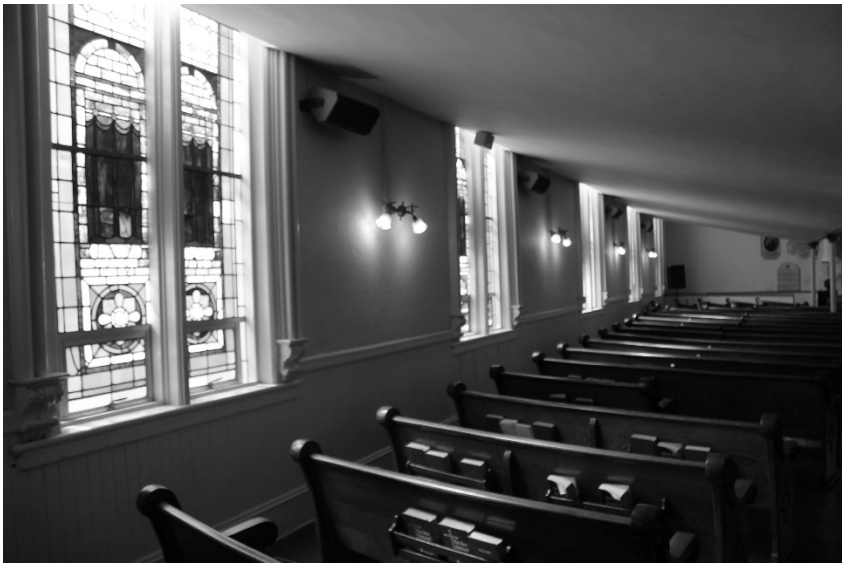


FIGURE 59. Image of stained glass windows located in the south wall of the building.
(Photograph by the author)

FIGURE 60. Detail image of the church pastors in the stained glass windows in the pulpit bay of the building
(Photograph by the author)

Prior to the installation of the stained glass windows, FABC had a problem protecting their windows as noted in the following report from an 1876 edition of the Savannah Morning News:

> Some of the congregation of the First African Baptist Church complain that the windows of their church, on Franklin Square, are frequently broken by the bad boys playing in that neighborhood (Savannah Morning News, 1876).

Today, all the stained glass windows are protected from damage by the placement of plexiglas panels covering each exterior window as shown in Figure 61.

FIGURE 61. Image of protective plexiglas panels on the exterior of the building.
(Photograph by the author)

The Church Steeple and Bell

When construction of the FABC building was completed in 1859 it did not have a steeple. The original steeple was a wooden frame and brick structure built atop the east entrance of the church, standing at a height of about 100 feet (FABC, 2011), shown in Figure 62.

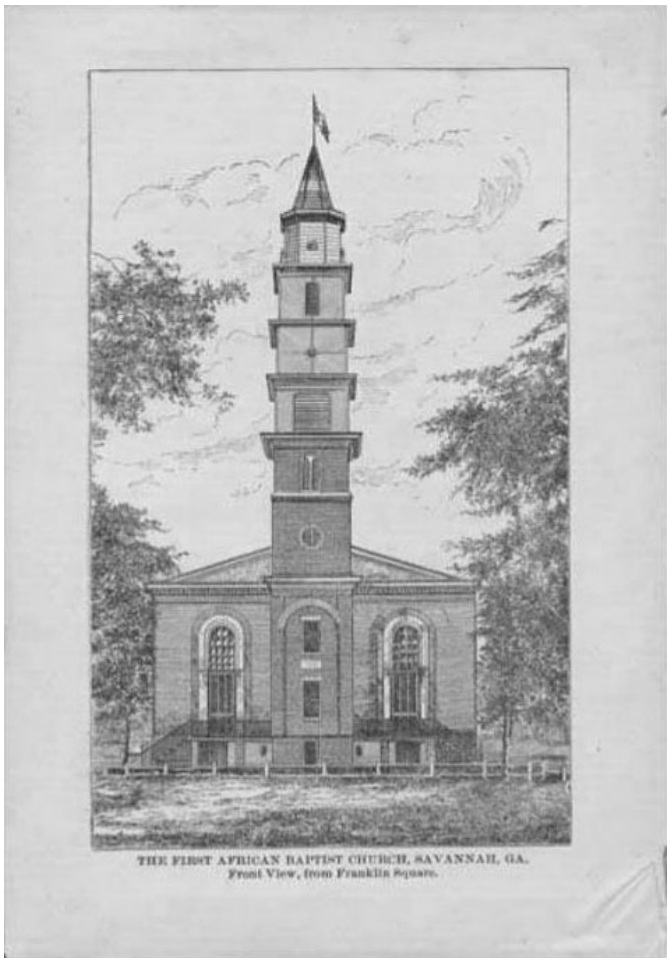


FIGURE 62. Image of east elevation of the building with the 100 foot steeple.
Image can be located at http://docsouth.unc.edu

The photograph shown in Figure 63, taken between 1883 and 1892 by William E. Wilson, confirms that the tower was standing as early as 1883. The tower can be seen in the upper left corner of the image. On August 27, 1893 a major hurricane strikes Savannah. The unnamed storm put Hutchinson Island under water. Tybee Road was under water as well. The storm surge ranged from 17 feet to more than 19 feet (Savannah Morning News Timeline 1800, 2010). The steeple was destroyed in this storm (FABC, 2011). The current steeple was constructed after the first, with the earliest documentation of its existence in 1936 as shown in the HABS photographs of the church. Evidence may exist which could document the construction of the current steeple prior to 1936.

FIGURE 63. Image of the one hundred foot steeple of the First African Baptist Church located in the distance. (Image courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society)

The current steeple is accessible by a series of ladders which are vertically connected through openings in the floor. The space where the bell is located is constructed of light metal framing with a topping slab of concrete, which is showing signs of deterioration through cracks in the floor. The walls of the steeple appear to be concrete with metal plates installed at angles in each corner. These walls serve as a foundation for the wood framing that forms the conical top of the steeple. The outside of the steeple is finished with stucco.

In 2001 the FABC engaged the services of the 'House Doctor'. The House Doctor, owned by Charlie Angell, is a local general contractor who specialized in historic restoration of commercial exteriors and interiors and residential restoration and remodeling. Charlie and his team of craftsmen undertook a complete, 'ground up' restoration of the FABC steeple, beginning with structural remediation and including exterior restoration to perfectly match the building's original appearance. Having diagnosed the situation (the entire steel superstructure had rusted out in parts) and with Kern Coleman and Company serving as supervising engineer, the House Doctor installed steel I-beam supports under the steeple and prepared and coated other areas of rusting with specialized primers and rust inhibitors. With the structure stabilized, Charlie Angell and his team replaced missing and loose brick and concrete and caulked all visible cracks. This included exterior repairs and refinishing, including stucco repair. Final touches included a rebuilt staircase leading to the steeple and roof, repair to damaged eaves and front entry roofs, and installation of new, custom-milled windows

and louvers. (The House Doctor, 2001). Figures 64 to 67 are photographic evidence of the steel stabilization work performed in the church steeple.

FIGURE 64. Image of steel structural members in the steeple of the church. (Photograph by the author)

FIGURE 65. Image of steel structural members in the steeple of the church. (Photograph by the author)

FIGURE 66. Image of steel structural members in the steeple of the church. (Photograph by the author)

FIGURE 67. Image of steel structural members in the steeple of the church. (Photograph by the author)

According to an inscription on the steeple bell, in 1888 the bell was produced and installed by the McShane Bell Foundry, a company founded by Henry McShane in 1856

in Baltimore, Maryland. The bell is made of bronze, is mounted on its original wooden wheel and metal frame, and is located in the current steeple and still operational. Figure 68 and Figure 69 are photographs of the bell. Figure 70 and Figure 71 show the roofing area directly above the location of the bell.

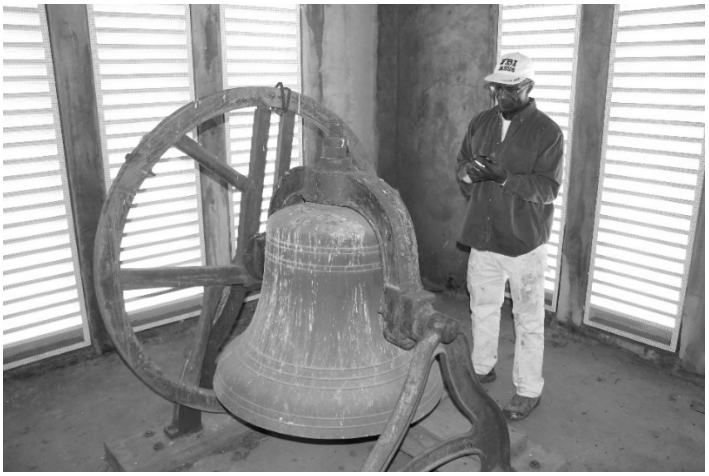


FIGURE 68. Image of original steeple bell (Photograph by the author)

FIGURE 69. Image of inscription on steeple bell (Photograph by the author)

FIGURE 70. Image of the interior of the existing steeple.
(Photograph by the author)

FIGURE 71. Image of the interior of the existing steeple.
(Photograph by the author)

The Church Organ

The church organ, located in the east balcony of the sanctuary of the church, dates back to 1834, as shown in Figure 72. According to Jim Abraham and Justin Gunther, both preservation professors at the Savannah College of Art and Design, the story of the instrument begins with Henry Erben, one of the most renowned organ builders of the 19th century. Erben, the son of the preeminent organist Peter Erben, lived in New York. He was one of the first manufacturers to start selling organs to churches in the South. According to Professor Gunther, only three Erben organs made their way to Savannah: Christ Church on Bull Street commissioned one in 1831, St. John the Baptist Church commissioned one in 1834, and St. John Episcopal got one in 1836. The only one to survive was the one at St. John the Baptist, which at that time was located on Drayton Street. The team's research then revealed that in 1876, when the church moved, the organ remained in the Drayton Street building, which was subsequently used by an African-American congregation, not necessarily connected with First Baptist, for a while as well as an archive building for the Catholic Church. In 1888, First African did an expansion of their building. The organ got donated from the Catholic Church to First African, and we think that it corresponds with the major building campaign. The organ was used by the oldest black congregation in the country as their organ from 1888 until it falls silent in 1952 (Savannah Morning News, 2013).

The Organ Historical Society developed a report in 2013 based on their review of the organ in FABC. Their findings are as follows:

- The organ is in a gallery-level case at the rear of the room. There is an attached keydesk.
- The organ is in an unaltered state from its installation.
- The organ is not in playable condition.
- The organ has one manual. 10 stops.
- Slider chests. Mechanical key action
- There are draw knobs in vertical rows on flat jambs. No combination action. Flat straight pedalboard.
- Most pipes are gone.

This report did document that the FABC was interested in having it restored and at the time this report was prepared, FABC was seeking estimates for the work. (The Organ Society, 2013). Figure 73 shows the extent of repair needed for a portion of the organ while Figure 74 shows the organ's kinetic blower, a device that provides wind to the organ pipes.

FIGURE 72. Image of the church organ located in the balcony (Photograph by the author).

FIGURE 73. Image of the rear of the church organ (Photograph by the author).

FIGURE 74. Image of kinetic organ blower located in the bell tower of the building. (Photograph by the author)

Mechanical, Electrical, Plumbing, and Gas Systems

The church has two (2) heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) units located in the lower level of the church, as Figure 75 illustrates. There are four (4) condensing units located on the exterior, near the west parking lot, with two of the units shown in Figure 76. Ductwork to carry conditioned air throughout the building has been installed in a sensitive manner as to respect the historic nature of the interiors of the church. Figure 77 shows an existing HVAC floor grate located in the main sanctuary. I have not found any documentation as to when the building installed mechanical air conditioning, but according to the Savannah Electric and Power Company, a possible time frame may have been in the 1950s:

> Savannah Electric and Power Company continued to expand despite the demise of the streetcar. Ranges, refrigerators, ovens, toasters, and irons revolutionized the kitchen and greatly increased the need for electric power. Savannah residents got relief from their sweltering climate with the introduction of air conditioning, and the increased local demand, combined with the growth of military bases and the uptake of other counties into the power system, proved to be a strain on the Riverside plant in the 1950s. The plant was updated in the 1930s and again in the 1950s (Barlement, 2014)

FIGURE 75. Image of one of the HVAC units. (Photograph by the author)

FIGURE 76. Image of a pair of condensers. (Photograph by the author)

FIGURE 77. Image of HVAC floor grate in the sanctuary. (Photograph by the author)

Savannah's electric lighting and power industry developed simultaneously with the streetcar. The first incandescent bulb for commercial use was developed by Thomas Edison in 1879, and the open-coil dynamo generator, which converts mechanical energy from coal or steam into electrical energy, was perfected by C.F. Brush in 1880. These two inventions, along with the development of the AC/DC system for the long-distance transmission of electricity, would be instrumental to the nation's growth. Brush Electric Company of Savannah-the forerunner of Savannah Electric-was organized in 1882. Soon four lighting towers, powered by a coal-fueled engine, rose above the city's business district. By the early 1890s new arc lighting illuminated the growing area south of the city. Incandescent lights first appeared at a jewelry store on Broughton Street, and in 1893 the first private residence was wired for electric service. When Brush Electric was incorporated in 1902, the company also merged with the Parsons Railway. The newly named Savannah Electric was now responsible for lighting the city's recently paved streets and houses and for powering the trolleys that carried passengers along the major thoroughfares. By 1912 the company was serving more than 3,400 customers, and the Savannah Power Company built the Riverside power plant on River Street to meet the demand for electric power. Savannah Power Company sold electricity to Savannah Electric until 1921, when the two companies merged (Barlement, 2014). According to FABC history, electric light fixtures were introduced to the building between 1885 and 1900, during the pastorate of E.K. Love (FABC, 2011). This time frame would run consistent with the overall introduction of electricity to the city of Savannah. Today, electrical power is fed throughout the building from wall mounted

distribution panel boards which are located on the lower level of the building, as shown in Figure 78.

Plumbing systems, mainly the restrooms, are located on the lower level of the building, along with a kitchen. There is a concrete baptismal pool located beneath the floor of the pulpit.

Gas was the primary source of energy which provided lighting in the building, before the conversion to electricity in the late 1800s. Figure 79 and Figure 80 shows one of the many gas fixtures which continue to exist today, and are being used for lighting with various types of bulbs. Figure 81 is an access opening to a crawl space below the fellowship hall, containing electrical conduit.

FIGURE 78. Image of wall mounted electrical panelboards
(Photograph by the author)

FIGURE 79. Image of gas light fixture in the sanctuary.
(Photograph by the author)

FIGURE 80. Image of chandelier in the sanctuary
(Photograph by the author)

FIGURE 81. Image of floor access opening to crawl space
(Photograph by the author)

Conveying and Data Technology Systems

In 1995 the FABC hired the local architectural firm of Gunn and Meyerhoff, known today as Gunn, Meyerhoff, and Shay, to make some renovation changes to the building. The single major change was the installation of a hydraulic elevator, which connects the lower level of the building to the main sanctuary. The elevator does not traverse to the upper balcony level.

The church is wired for internet access and has wi-fi capability.

Finishes and Furnishings

An important part of the church building's history are the various finishes and pieces of furniture.

The church was dedicated on May 5, 1861 (Savannah Daily Morning News, 1861). The event was marked by a report in the newspaper which also discussed the physical condition of the new building:

> The new and tasteful house of worship just finished by this congregation, on Franklin Square, will be dedicated with appropriate exercises on Sabbath next, the 5th inst., (to-morrow) (Savannah Daily Morning News, 1861).

The report continues:

> The building is of brick. The first story or basement is the lecture room. The main audience room contains a large gallery on the sides and end, and will seat 700 persons. It is neatly finished and painted. The pulpit is white, the pews oaked, and the aisles covered with oil cloth. The gallery has an organ of good tone, and the church has a well-organized choir. The house has cost upwards of ten thousand dollars, all but $1,500 of which has been paid. The trustees, the owners of the members, citizens generally, and especially Baptists, are invited to attend the Dedication, and to contribute to the payment of the debt (Savannah Daily Morning News, 1861).

The Savannah Morning News reported the following about the new church chandelier:

> An elegant twenty four light chandelier for the First African Baptist Church reached here yesterday from Philadelphia by the steamship Wyoming, and will be shortly placed in position (Savannah Morning News, 1879).

Four days later the newspaper reported the following:

> The handsome chandelier for the First African Baptist Church, which arrived last week, was put up on Saturday and last night was lighted. The church was crowded and the congregation were greatly pleased with the fine illumination (Savannah Morning News, 1879).

The chandelier was installed a few years before electricity was introduced to the City of Savannah in 1882 and is shown in Figure 82.

FIGURE 82. Image of original chandelier in the main sanctuary
(Photograph by the author)

The pews of the church were built by slaves and attached to the floor (FABC, 2011). Currently, many of the original pews have been removed from the main sanctuary and are stored on the lower level of the building. The pews on the balcony level, shown in Figure 83, are original to the building and have not moved since their installation.

FIGURE 83. Image of original pews in the balcony of the church (Photograph by the author)

The ceiling design resembles that of a 'nine patch quilt' pattern. This type of design draws inspiration from many designs woven into blankets as hidden messages to convey to runaway slaves where safe harbors may exist (Dobard and Tobin, 2000). The ceiling is made of stamped metal, attached to a wooden frame which is part of the roof of the church. Quarter round metal pieces help the finish ceiling make a smooth transition to the walls. Figure 84 illustrates the metal pattern located directly above the main sanctuary and Figure 85 shows the attic side of the quarter round ceiling details.

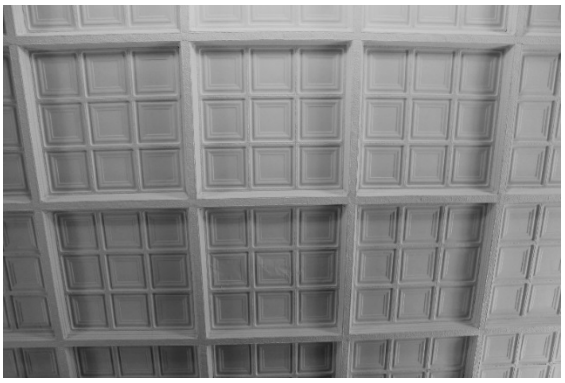


FIGURE 84. Image of the stamped metal ceiling in the sanctuary.
(Photograph by the author)

FIGURE 85. Image of the stamped metal ceiling and framing from the attic. (Photograph by the author)

On the floor of the lower level of the building there are a drilled holes in the floor which form an African symbol. These symbols are repeated throughout the lower level and the symbol forms a Kongo comogram called Yowa, the Kongo sign of cosmos and the continuity of human life (Thompson, 1984). Figure 86 is a graphic of the Kongo sign, while Figure 87 shows the sign detailed in the wood flooring of the fellowship hall.

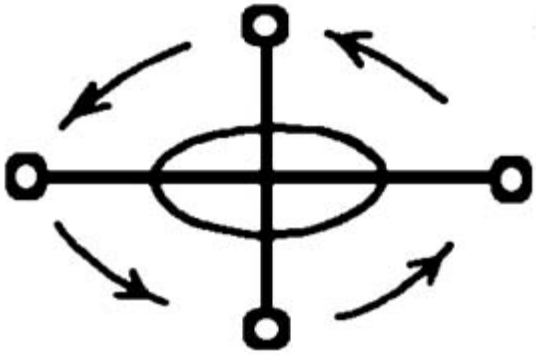


FIGURE 86. Image of a Kongo comogram.
(Image courtesy of the book Flash of the spirit: African and Afro-American art and philosophy)

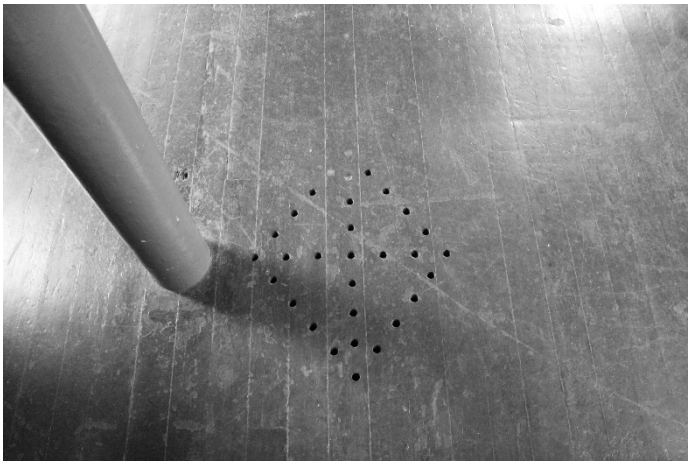


FIGURE 87. Image of a Kongo comogram on the lower level of the church.
(Photograph by the author)

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

Analysis

The following is the analysis of my study:

1. The design precedent buildings influenced the look, scale, and proportion of the FABC. The builders of FABC, likely having experience building many other structures in Savannah, including churches, observed the manner in which form, scale, and use of materials were applied to the three (3) precedent churches and simply may have imitated it. This study did not find any documented evidence that a design professional was involved in any way. This answers the earlier stated question in this study on whether an architect or similar professional directly influenced the design of FABC.
2. This study provided evidence that the builders of FABC indeed raised funds, solicit funding from the greater Savannah community, and either procured the necessary materials for construction or made the products needed, such as the bricks, to construct their church building. With some of the builders of the church likely residents of either the Brampton or particularly the Hermitage river plantations, they obtained the skills of brickmaking, the hewing of lumber, and the knowledge of applying construction techniques and tools available in the mid-19th century to construct their building.

3. The foundation and perimeter masonry bearing walls appear to be in good condition. During my observation of the building I did not see any interior cracking of finished materials. Cracking would suggest that there was building movement and / or differential settlement, and cracking would likely occur, at the corners of doors and windows. It would be logical to conclude that after over 150 years of existence, barring any current external influence such as an earth tremor or the compromise of the bearing capacity of the soil that the building would have settled upon its foundation, reducing but not eliminating the possibility of movement.
4. The building frame of metal columns, wood floor joists, and heavy timber construction, from what can be observed, also appear to be in good condition. As observed and photographically documented, the floor joists in the crawl space appear solid, but this conclusion may change if a more extensive and complete review of all the floor joists in the crawl space were to occur. The heavy timber members used to frame and support the roof of the building also appear in good condition. This study has documented that structural work was conducted on the church steeple, with the intent of stabilized the steeple. Also noted in this study is the current condition of the flooring in the steeple. There are small holes as well as exposed metal reinforcing in the floor where a topping of concrete has worn away. This is cause for concern for the floor condition of the steeple, as it would need to be further investigated by a hired design professional and / or general contractor for proper technical analysis.

5. As some point in time beyond 1936 the church building had stucco applied to its exterior walls. As observed during the preparation of this study there are cracks and small holes in the stucco, exposing the red brick underneath. There are observable signs of water damage in the corners of the walls and ceiling in the sanctuary. The building would need a complete technical review to determine the potential extent of water access and damage.
6. As documented in this study, the church organ is a historically relevant and valuable piece of equipment that needs major restoration to be brought back to working order. There does not appear to be any observable negative structural problems where the organ resides in the balcony, but physical access to the instrument is a challenge that needs to be addressed.
7. The church building does not have an automatic fire sprinkler system or fire suppression system of any kind. Not only does this lack of protection puts the occupants at risk, but also the church building and the historic artifacts within it. A challenge to be aware of is the need to sensitively install and coordinate the location of sprinkler lines and sprinkler heads within the building so as not to compromise the historic integrity of the building while providing practical water coverage for the building. Floor space would need to be reserved for the placement of a fire riser room, with easy access to the local fire department.

Note that this analysis is not meant to serve as a substitute for a technical building analysis conducted by a licensed design professional or general contractor.

This study is academic in intent, and draws upon empirical evidence based on the observation and documentation of the current physical conditions of the building. If physical improvements are to be made to the building it is recommended that licensed design professionals and / or a general contractor be hired to perform a technical review, prepare a report, and to provide written recommendations which may be used to guide any physical improvements proposed for the building.

Conclusion

Since the church building was one of only a few standing at Franklin Square in 1859, the building was easily recognizable and stood virtually alone on its immediate site with open surroundings. FABC affectionately earned the name the 'brick church', and as time passed, a community was built around the edifice.

This study documents that the church displays various different physical conditions. In addition to the stated analysis of some of the building systems, there is a need to consolidate the current bookstore and the area of the church where historic artifacts are stored and consider a church expansion effort which would provide a small museum space to adequately display all the church's collections of books, papers, articles, and furnishings like the original pews and the original preacher's gopher wood pulpit. Further, a restoration effort must be undertaken for the church organ. As documented in this study, this instrument carries great value and is the last of its kind delivered to Savannah dating back to the 1830s.

In general, the building will need a major restoration, something which has never been done for FABC. There has been discussion by the congregation that such an

architectural undertaking may include the removal of the stucco from the exterior walls of the church to once again highlight the Savannah Gray bricks, as well as the reconstruction of the original 100 foot steeple from the 1880s. The sanctuary would also need to address handicap seating in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 as well as a review of the current building code to address egress issues and the need to provide a fire protection system for the building.

CHAPTER VI

RECOMMENDATION AND FUTURE WORK

Recommendation

The single most important recommendation to be made, based on this study, is establishing the process of historic designation of the church building at local, state, and national levels. Currently, this church is recognized as a 'contributing property' because it is located in the Savannah Historic District, one of the largest national historic landmark districts in the United States. FABC, because of its history, events, persons, and architecture, makes this building a historically relevant candidate worthy of recognition.

The Georgia Historical Society has a 'Georgia Historical Market Program' which annually recognizes successfully selected candidates for a state recognition marker. This is important because demarcation will help establish value and importance at the state level, recognition which likely would be important as the process would proceed to the national level.

The Historic Preservation Division of Georgia is the state's historic preservation office, or SHPO, established by the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. The ultimate goal for the church is to be declared a historic place through the National Register of Historic Places, a program which is part of the National Park Service of the United States Department of the Interior. Federal recognition would begin with the state SHPO. The church congregation must engage these organizations to not only provide the proper historic recognition, but to also raise awareness of the

cultural value of the building and history to a level where proactive activity toward restoration and longevity can be achieved.

Future Work

There are efforts which exist today that document African American churches across the United States, such as the Texas State Historical Association Handbook of African American Texas communities, the Tennessee Rural African-American Church Survey, conducted by the Center for Historic Preservation in Tennessee, and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Historic Preservation Division. The primary research regarding African American churches needs to expand beyond people and events to include the documentation of the physical buildings and their impact on those people, events, and the communities the churches served. Many of these buildings were the physical heart of black neighborhoods, and parishioners would walk to services. Many neighborhoods, communities, and even Freedmantowns were developed around these buildings. In today's world, vehicular transportation has replaced walking, and the idea of the neighborhood church is nearly lost to time. Most of the megachurches that are built or being built now are not located in established African American communities. These facilities serve tens of thousands of people where FABC was originally built to serve just 700 persons, the slave population of the city of Savannah. The Historic Property Information Forms (HPIF) provided by the Georgia SHPO, require information about significant persons and activities which occurred at a building under consideration for designation, thus tying people and events to their buildings. Continued and expanded research would provide more relevant information of architectural aspects of these

buildings, while providing an opportunity to explore a broader topic of the impact these sacred buildings had on the people who built them. What did the 'brick church' mean to a prideful people recently freed from the institution of slavery, as they sought to build communities for themselves? What Afrocentric symbols exist in the design and construction of these houses of worship? How much cultural remnants survived the Middle Passage and passed on from generation to generation, and how it was reflected in the church buildings built at this time? Can any construction techniques used at this time be traced back to African building techniques? How is the black church experience reflected in its church design? These questions support the idea that architecture by African Americans of the past needs further study, for it can continue to add to the African experience in America, while recording the creation, growth, and sustainability of the church building as a valued reflection of the struggles and triumphs of an enduring people as well as an example of a unique contributor to the American architectural experience.

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