

First Presbyterian Church
19 North Sixth Street
Fernandina Beach
Nassau County
Florida

HABS No. FL-278

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Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

HABS No. FL-278

Location: 14 North Sixth Street, Fernandina Beach, Nassau County, Florida.

Present Owner: Trustees of the First Presbyterian Church.

Present Occupant: First Presbyterian Church.

Present Use: Sanctuary.

Significance: The First Presbyterian Church is probably the oldest remaining religious building in Fernandina. It is a good example of how the New England Meeting House style found its way out of that geographic region due to migration to frontier areas like Florida in the 1850s.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: ca. 1860. The First Presbyterian Church of Fernandina was built before the Civil War during the pastorate of Rev. Archibald Baker. The exact date cannot be determined since the first minute book of the church has been lost. (Church History) However, it is known that a bell was installed in the belfry in late March 1860. (East Floridian, March 29, 1860) This fact and the fact that the property on which the building site was probably purchased in early 1860 combine to give the above probable date of erection.
2. Architect: Unknown.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The church building was built on lots 10 and 11 of Block 30 of the original plat of the City of Fernandina lithographed and issued by the Florida Railroad and enlarged, revised, and reissued by the Florida Town Improvement Company. The chain of title is drawn from the Deed Books of Nassau County, Florida:

1860 Deed, February 2, 1860, recorded April 5, 1860 in Book G, page 294. Lot 10 of Block 30 was sold for \$200 by Trustees of the Florida Railroad to Trustees of the First Presbyterian Church

1860 Mortgage Deed, February 2, 1860, recorded
February 23, 1860 in Book G, page 249. A
\$140 mortgage was taken out on lot 10 of
Block 30 by
Trustees of the First Presbyterian Church
to
Joseph Finegan

4. Original plans, construction, etc: None known. The present sanctuary is the original church. It appears that this building had a small rectangular structure attached to the center of the west wall. (Sanborn map, February 1891; It cannot be determined conclusively that this extension was in fact original).

The church in its primary state probably contained windows of clear glass with a 6/6 pattern. These apparently fitted into the present window openings.

The main door in the east wall was originally as high as the window openings. There is physical evidence in the structure which shows that this opening has been filled in to shorten the height to its present status. (The older door is also shown in a photograph of the church contained in a composite photograph of Fernandina).

The belfry is probably original, but the arched openings were opened and not louvered as they are now. (Photographs)

5. Alterations and additions: At some undetermined date the door of the main entry was shortened. A smaller door was installed. The front porch could have been installed at this time.

In 1908 the King's Daughters (a young women's church organization) sponsored the replacement of the interior ceiling with virgin pine timber. (Church History)

In 1905 the church went in debt for \$2,200 for the installation of the present pipe organ. Church tradition has it that the Andrew Carnegies of nearby Comberland Island paid one-half of the cost for this organ. (Church History)

The installation of the organ resulted in the extension of the west end of the church. The previous attached structure was apparently replaced by a larger one to house the organ and to provide a pastor's study. The ends of the west wall were angled out approximately 44 degrees.

A 1908 photograph indicates that the glass paned windows had louvered panels placed on the upper sections.

In 1911 the Fellowship hall was added to the north of the church. This structure originally contained a kitchen and auditorium. (Church History)

The memorial windows were installed in the church during the pastorate of the Rev. W. Overstreet, around 1926. (Church History)

In 1948 four classrooms were added to the 1911 addition. It appears that since that time two of the classrooms were removed to enlarge the auditorium to its present size.

In 1958 the educational building at the rear of the church and located on lots 4 and 5 of Block 30 was attached to the 1911-1948 classroom building. This project cost around \$35,000. (Church History)

- B. Historical Context: The First Presbyterian Church in Fernandina was organized in May 1853 and services were held in Timanus Hall a frame building on the corner of Second Street and Center Street (Atlantic Avenue). In 1860 the congregation apparently began to have services in the new structure.

With the coming of the Civil War, the building was used to house Federal troops during the occupation of Fernandina.

In 1949-1950 the church classrooms provided space for the overflowed school system in Fernandina. (Church History)

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: Photograph contained in a composite group of pictures of Fernandina. This photograph shows the main facade with the original full length doors. A copy of the composite is in the possession of Helen Litrico of the Amelia Island Corporation. n.d.

Photograph of main facade of church printed on a 1908 church bulletin. This view shows the windows with the louvers on the upper portion of them. In the photograph collection of the Fernandina Beach Public Library, Fernandina Beach, Florida. ca. 1908.

Post Card, looking southwest showing the main facade of the church. In possession of George Davis, Fernandina Beach, Florida. n.d.

2. Primary and unpublished sources:

Fernandina Beach, Florida. First Presbyterian Church. Minute Books.

Florida Abstract and Title Insurance Company. "Tract Book."
Fernandina Beach, Florida.

Nassau County. Deed Books. Nassau County Courthouse, Fernandina
Beach, Florida.

3. Secondary and published sources:

Fernandina, East Floridian, March 29, 1860.

History: First Presbyterian Church, Fernandina Beach Florida;
1858-1958. Fernandina Beach: First Presbyterian Church, 1958.

Sanborn Map and Publishing Company. Fernandina, Florida, February
1891. New York: Sanborn Map and Publishing Company, 1891.
In Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida, Library East,
Map Room.

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Map and Publishing Company, 1897. In Gainesville, Florida:
University of Florida, Library East, Map Room.

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Map and Publishing Company, 1903. In Gainesville, Florida:
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Sanborn Map and Publishing Company, 1909. In Gainesville,
Florida: University of Florida, Library East, Map Room.

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Sanborn Map and Publishing Company, 1926. In Gainesville,
Florida: University of Florida, Library East, Map Room.

Prepared by: Phillip A. Werndli
Historian
HABS-Fernandina Beach, Florida
August 27, 1974

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This church, built in ca. 1860 is a fine example of the meeting house style of ecclesiastical architecture.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: This single story structure measures 38' (three-bay front) by 98' (five-bay side). Rectangular in plan, a vestry and organ chamber addition has been added to the west.
2. Foundations: Masonry piers support wood frame floor beams.
3. Wall construction: The exterior is sheathed with clapboards with simple corner pilasters painted white.
4. Structural system, framing: 6" x 6" corner columns with intermediate 3" x 6" studs make up the wall system with modified king-post trusses support the gable roof. Modern intermediate members have been added to aid in support of the roof.
5. Porches, stoops, bulkheads: The main entrance is articulated by a simple entry porch with gable roof and louvered pediment. Simple doric columns and engaged pilasters support the porch.
6. Chimneys: There are no chimneys attached to the building. The adjacent fellowship hall has one chimney.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance consists of double wood paneled doors.
 - b. Windows: All windows are stained glass framed by simple flat pediments. Transoms integral with the glass pattern are at both top and bottom of the window opening.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Gable roofs over main sanctuary, entry porch, and fellowship hall are covered with modern asphalt shingles.
 - b. Cornices, eaves: A simple cornice predominates. Brackets dominate the cornice of the bell tower above.
 - c. Towers: The bell tower, square in plan is directly above the narthex. It is divided vertically in two sections with the highest containing the bell and has round-headed louvered openings on all four sides. The upper section has been added on top of an existing hipped roof forming the floor of the belfry.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. First floor: Rectangular in plan, the structure is divided into entry hall or narthex and sanctuary with organ chamber and vestry addition behind the choir. There is one central and two side aisles with pews divided by center boards. The altar is raised on a platform with pulpit directly behind on axis flanked by two chairs. The organ console and choir behind and above (three steps) is separated by a choir rail.
 - b. Balcony: In addition to main level seating a balcony above the narthex at the east end of the sanctuary contains three tiers of portable seating.
2. Stairways: A single dog - leg with winder rises to the balcony. Evidence indicates a doorway at the midpoint of the stair. It no longer exists.
 3. Flooring: Hardwood floors predominate with carpet in the aisles and at the altar.
 4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls are painted a pale green over plaster above a simple wainscot. The pine ceiling is tongue and groove beaded edge paneling in a diamond pattern. A heavy cornice moulding is of pine and is evident only on the side walls. The altar, pulpit, and choir on axis is framed above by a flat arch supported by two columns on either side and is of the doric order. They are stained to match choir doors and organ case facade.
 5. Doorways and doors: The narthex is separated from the sanctuary by swinging bevel edge glass panel doors. The larger central aisle as two doors with single doors at the side aisles. Two doors flank the wall behind the choir leading through the organ chamber to the vestry room. Smaller in height and width they blend with the panel motif below the organ case. In the north wall double doors painted white open into the adjacent fellowship hall.
 6. Decorative features and trim: The west wall of the sanctuary, behind the choir, is composed of a decorative wood panel and a single rank of facade organ pipes. Seated above the wood panel partition, these pipes rise to the arch above forming a screen across the organ's pipework behind and are supported by two ionic and leaf motif pilasters. Doors on either side match the medium stain.

7. Mechanical equipment: A contemporary heating and air conditioning system is evident with ducts and vents in the corners of the room and within the east wall. Lighting is accomplished by incandescent lamps hung from the ceiling above the central aisle and pews.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The structure is located on North Sixth Street with its entrance facing east.

Prepared by: Charles Edwin Chase
Field Supervisor, HABS
Fernandina Beach, Florida
August 1974

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the Bicentennial Commission of Florida. Under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, this project was completed during the summer of 1974, at the HABS Field Office, Fernandina Beach, Florida, by Charles Edwin Chase, (University of Florida), project supervisor; Phillip A. Werndli, (University of Florida), project historian; Janice Fahey, (Rhode Island School of Design), and Frederick Wiedenmann, (University of Florida), architects; Grady J. Reich, Jr., (University of Texas), and Roger Swayze, (University of Oregon), student architects.

ADDENDUM TO:
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PHOTOGRAPHS

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