

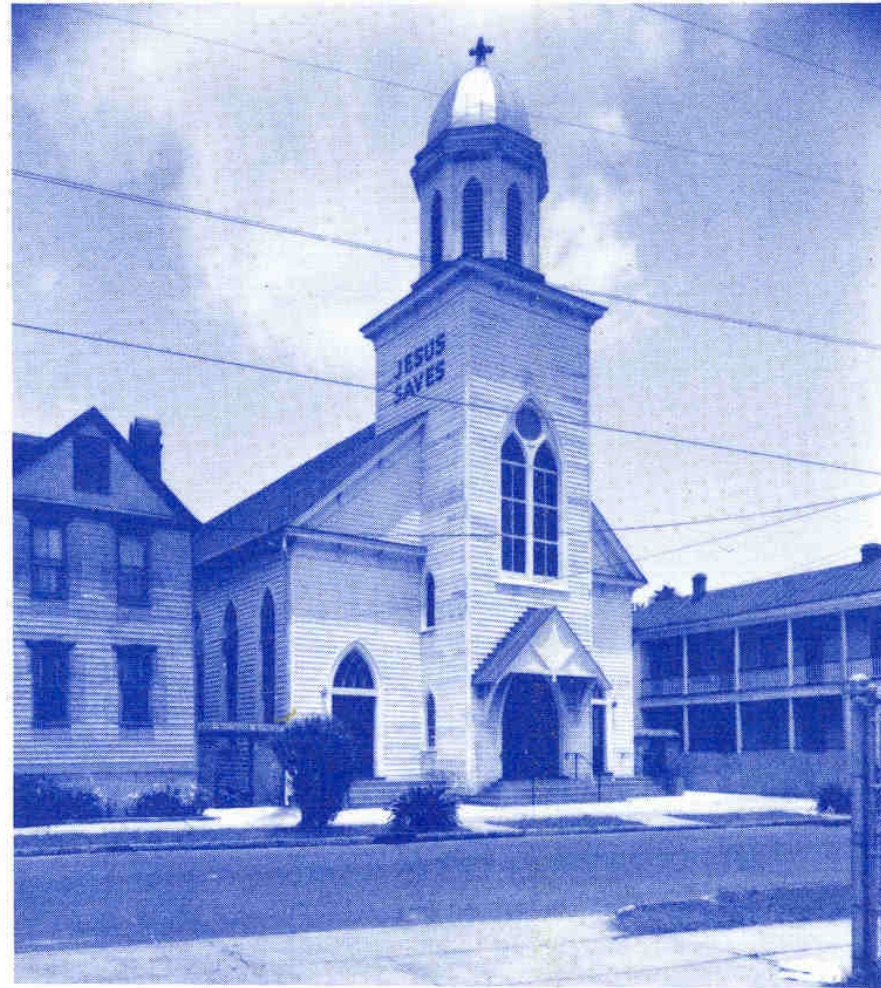


Central Baptist Church of Charleston, SC Historic Report

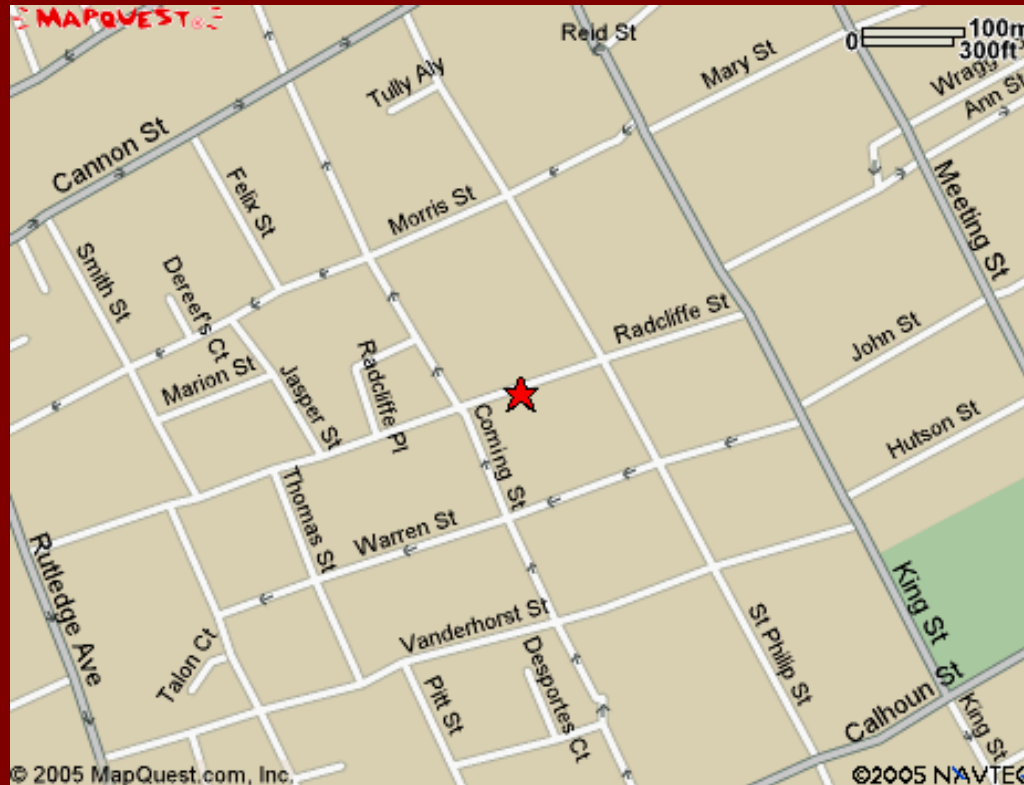
Presented By: Margaret
Langford, Carolyn Roberts, Ann
Simpson, and Lauren Hummer

Photograph by Lissa D'Aquisto, courtesy of City of Charleston

Historical Overview

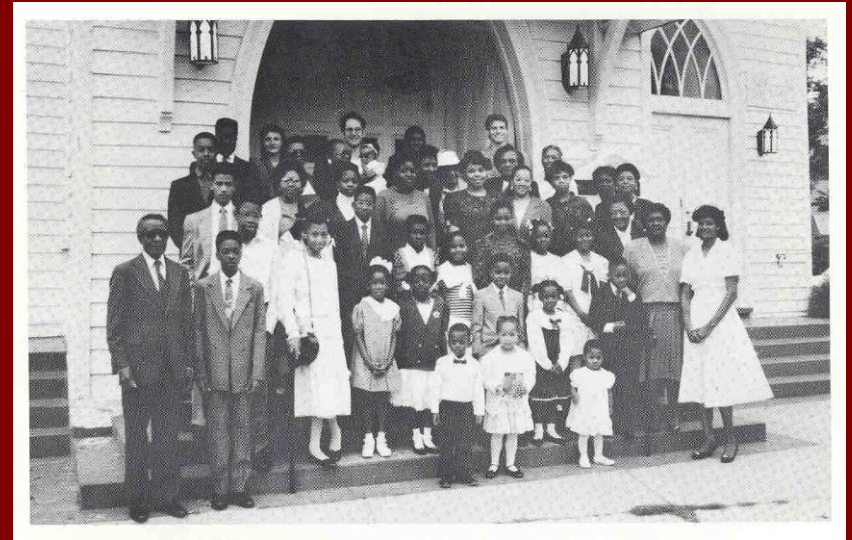


NAME: Central Baptist Church of Charleston, SC; National Register No. 770012717



LOCATION: 26 Radcliffe St. Charleston, SC, 29403-6916. The Central Baptist Church and its grounds sit between Coming Street and St. Philip Street, one and a half blocks west from the intersection of Radcliffe Street and King Street.

PRESENT OWNER, OCCUPANT, AND USE: Presently, the Central Baptist Church is owned and occupied by the Central Baptist Church. It is currently used for religious worship, after-school programs and senior citizen programs.



SIGNIFICANCE: The Central Baptist Church was completed in 1893 and is considered the first church in Charleston founded and constructed entirely by African-Americans. The structure reflects Carpenter Gothic and Italianate influences and remains in excellent condition. Perhaps the most significant features of the structure are the large folk-art murals portraying biblical scenes including the Crucifixion, the Ascension, and the Resurrection of Christ which date back to 1915.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1891-1893. The congregation was founded in 1891 when the construction of the church began. Members of the church worshipped in 2 other nearby locations until the church was completed in August of 1893.
2. Architect: John Pearson Hutchinson Sr. was hired as a negro carpenter, building contractor, and non-licensed architect. He was also a Deacon of the church.
3. Original and subsequent owners, occupants, uses: In 1898, Mary Jane Whittemore left the building to her children (Lydia Rhodes, Cephaline Rhodes, and Lyman Rhodes) as a last will and testament. Later, the ownership of the church was passed from the Rhodes children to Charles Jagar (February, 1904). Subsequently, Charles Jagar deeded the church to Emille Jagar in September of 1918. In September of 1929, the church then passed into the ownership of Margaret Jagar, Emille's wife. Margaret Jagar then passed the ownership of the church on to the church's trustees: Herman Boone, Wilmot Fraser, Albert Hunt, B.L. Cook, Harry Rhett, Theodore Alston, Mathias Weathers, and Herbert Mack (1965). Finally, in 1991, the ownership of the church was transferred from the trustees to the Central Baptist Church of Charleston, SC. It has been, and continues to be, used as a place of worship and for the purposes of after-school and senior citizen programs.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: The church was planned and built by members of the congregation (many of them Deacons), namely, Mr. R.C. Murray (carpenter), Mr. John F. Drayton (carpenter), Mr. Edward F. Gailliard (paint contractor), Mr. John P. Hutchinson, (carpenter, contractor, non-licensed architect), and Mr. Thomas Pinckney (carpenter and general contractor).

5. Original plans and construction: The 2-story, linear plan church is an example of the Carpenter Gothic vernacular style of architecture with added Italianate influences. Features of the church indicative of its style and period are the central double doors with protective hood, octagonal belfry and dome (now square in plan), tower window with plate tracery, interior gallery on three sides, and interior frescoes and murals. The church is of clapboard construction and is essentially “Meeting House” in design, with the exception of the tower.
6. Alterations and additions: A pipe organ was installed on the second floor of the church in 1922. The inability of the organ to operate following years of inactivity forced the church to install a much smaller organ on the first floor of the church several years later. In the 1940's, an addition was built in the back of the church consisting of changing rooms, a restroom, and the pastor's office. In the 1950's, the church's original copper-top octagonal steeple was replaced by a square tower. Also, during the 1950's and 1960's, under the direction of Reverend Gerald Hamilton, a central heating system was installed. In addition, renovations to the church from 1968-1976 and repairs made due to damage caused by Hurricane Hugo in 1989 included installing carpet to replace the hardwood floors and relocating the choir pews from the second floor to the main floor of the sanctuary. A major addition was subsequently built onto the back of the church in 1991-1995, which includes a large, open gathering space/meeting area, a kitchen, a nursery, several small classrooms, restrooms, and a few church offices.

B. Historical Context:

The Central Baptist Church, considered to be the first church founded and constructed by African-Americans in Charleston, started construction in 1891 after 221 members of the Morris Street Baptist Church broke away to form their own congregation. The newly formed congregation worshipped for several months at 246 Meeting Street, then, in 1892, the congregation moved to an unoccupied building on Radcliffe Street. In August of 1893, after the church prospered and church membership began to grow, the congregation was able to move into its current location at 26 Radcliffe Street in downtown Charleston, South Carolina.

After becoming acquainted with members of the church at a women's auxiliary of the South Carolina Missionary Baptist Education convention in Greenville in 1912, Amohamed Milai, a native of Calcutta, India was invited to Charleston. A recent convert to Christianity, Milai offered to paint a testament to his newfound Christianity on the walls of the church in exchange for a scaffold and room and board for him, his wife, and his three children. He began his artistic endeavor in 1912 and completed the murals in 1915. The murals include portrayals of the procession to Golgotha, a baptismal scene, the Crucifixion, the sepulcher and burial scene, the Resurrection, Mary Magdalene at the sepulcher, Peter and another disciple on the road to Emmaus, and the Ascension. The artist even went so far as to paint a skyscape on the church's ceiling, depicting numerous clouds across a clear blue sky. The works are said to be reminiscent of the Medieval Florentine painter Giotto. The church is the only church in the tri-county area that contains these kinds of artistic treasures on its upper walls.

The structure has been used continuously since its original construction and is said to contain the original galleries and pews, excepting those of the choir. Milai's murals have recently (2002) undergone a major restoration effort. The restoration was led by Catherine Rogers who was assisted by Craig Crawford. Following the restoration, the murals were rededicated in a ceremony in 2003 during the Spoleto Festival. The church is privately owned and has about 200 members, most of the educators. It was added to the National Register of Historic places in 1977 as Building No. 77001217.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Church has both Carpenter Gothic and Italianate features. The tall, pointed arch windows and doors are in the Gothic style while the details are mostly Italianate. The main building is a centralized plan with one large room, used as the sanctuary.
2. Condition of fabric: The church structure and grounds are both in good condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

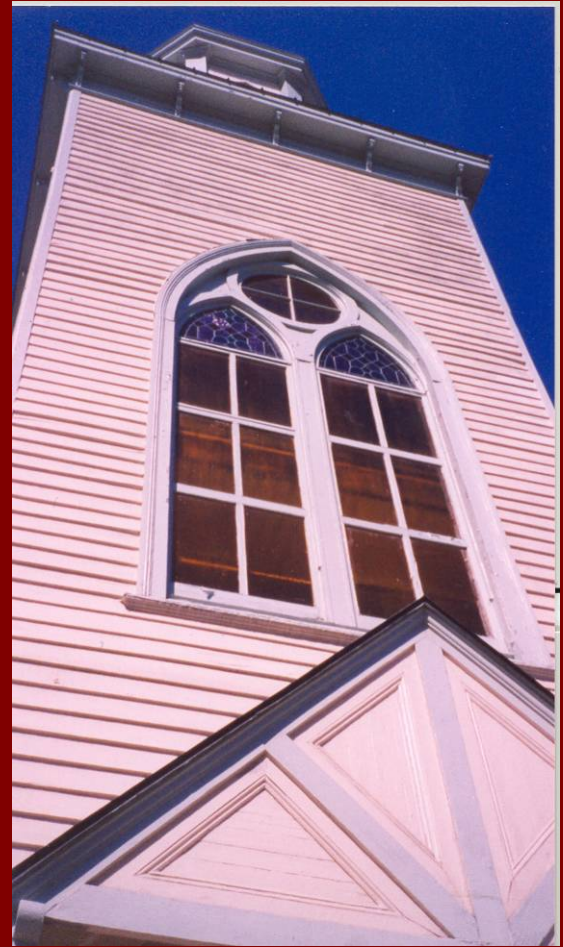
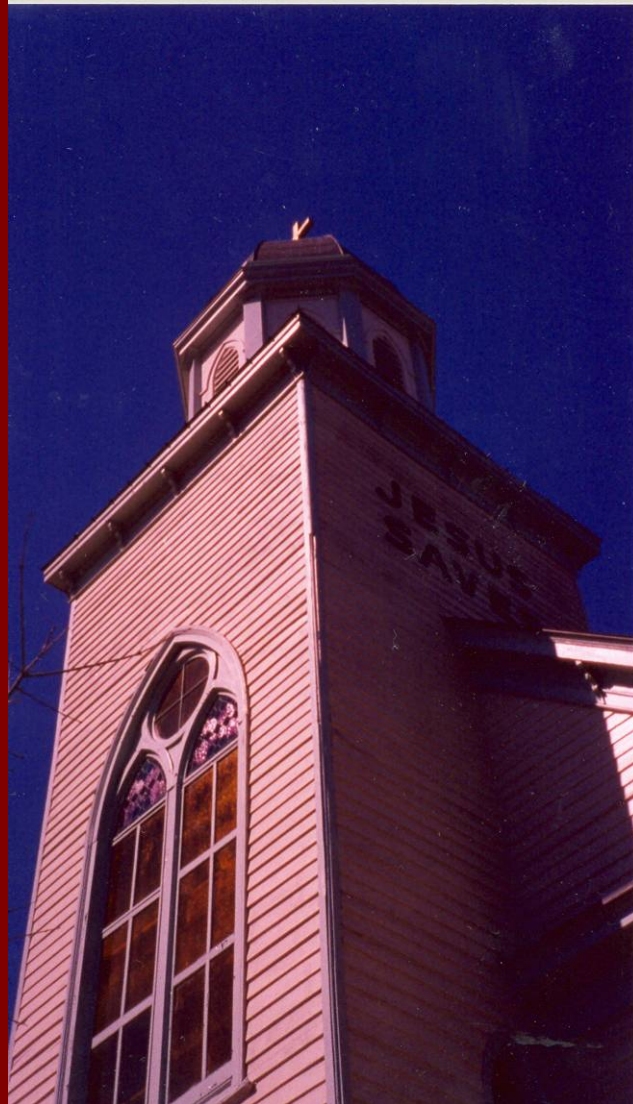
1. Overall dimensions: There are two stories and three bays. The church consists of the main rectangular building; a smaller, shorter wing in the rear; and a small square tower projecting from the façade.
2. Foundation: The foundation is made of brick.
3. Walls: The walls are beige clapboard siding with some patina of age. There are thin aquamarine pilasters on the corners. There is a narrow, pale blue belt course spanning the front gable.
4. Structural system, framing: The church is built with a wooden frame and the walls are curtain walls.
5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: A small porch spans the façade, including the tower front. It is made of brick and the bottom three steps are covered by cranberry-colored carpeting, while the top step is exposed brick. The central part of the porch, across the tower, has a shallow gable-front standing seam tin roof (essentially, a large hood) with overhanging eaves, a boxed cornice and large brackets of pale blue color. The gable has exposed king pole trussing, and these trusses are also painted light blue.

6. Chimneys: There is one small brick chimney at the rear of the original church.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: There are three sets of double doors on the façade. The central doors are pointed, pale blue and have interesting W-shaped paneling. The double doors flanking the central tower are rectangular also pale blue, and paneled with pointed arch windows above.
 - b. Windows and shutters: On each side of the church there are eight tall, narrow pointed windows with pale blue trim and tracery. These appear to be triple hung. On the rear wing of the church there are two pointed windows of the same type on each side, and two on each side of the chimney in the rear; these are smaller than the main windows on the sides and are double hung. There are two small pointed windows on each side of the tower and a large pointed window with double lancet panes, a circular pane, and stained glass on the tower front. The lower windows on the sides of the tower are double hung and have the same tracery as the windows on the sides. The upper windows are casements and include an attractive tracery pattern. Finally, the double side doors of the façade are capped by pointed windows, trimmed in pale blue, and have tinted panes.

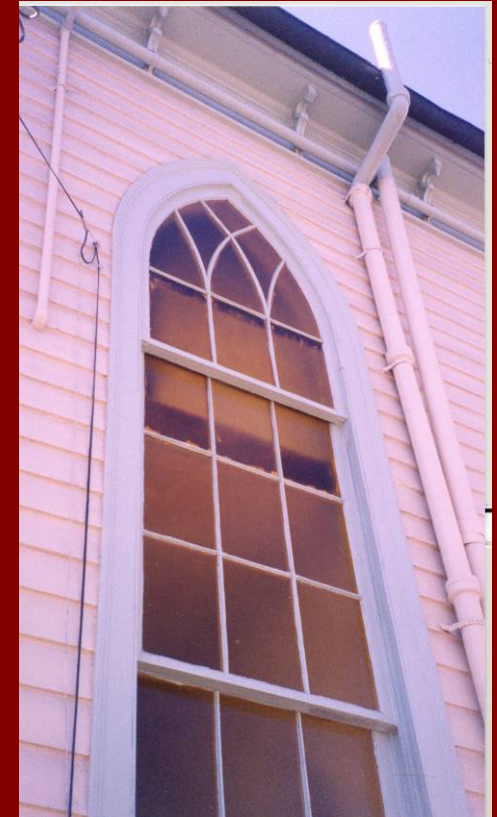
8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The main part of the church has a metal gable front roof of moderate height, as does the wing. The tower has a low hipped roof, and the lantern on top of this has a metal, octagonal, ribbed dome.
- b. Cornice, eaves: The eaves are light aquamarine blue. The cornice is the same pale blue and goes around most of the building, including the tower and the rear wing. Spaced at regular intervals are small but noticeable curving brackets.
- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: The tower is square and projects from the façade of the main building. There is an octagonal lantern on top with pointed windows. It is topped by a ribbed octagonal metal dome. Adorning the east and west side of the tower is a message stating, “Jesus Saves,” in large, black block letters.

Exterior



Exterior

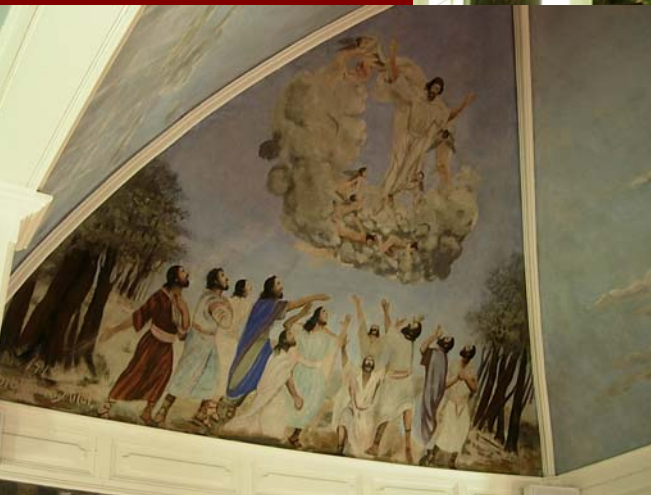


C. Description of Interior:

1. **Floor plans:** The three front entrances of the church open into a vestibule which is paneled with tongue and groove boards laid in diagonal patterns. The vestibule leads into the sanctuary which features three long rows of pews and a gallery along the sides and in the rear. The front of the church features a semicircular apse which is raised and delineated by a Gothic arch with fretwork and a frieze. The interior of the church also incorporates a number of other carved wooden details, including square fluted columns on pedestal bases, paneled wainscoting, turned balusters, and a raised-paneled cornice with pendants. The second floor of the structure is more like a balcony, which runs along the back and 2 sides of the church. A staircase leading to the second floor is found near the eastern most entrance of the church. A small addition to the back of the sanctuary includes a restroom, a meeting room, and changing rooms for the choir. The more current addition, known as the Fellowship Hall, is also a linear planned structure with very high ceilings. Radiating from the central gathering area are a nursery and one classroom separated from one another by a small restroom on the western side, four classroom on the northern side (three of which can be made into one large classroom with the use of retractable walls), and restrooms, a kitchen, and office space on the eastern side.
2. **Stairways:** The church has one main stairway. It leads to the second floor and can be found on the left hand side as you enter the eastern-most entrance of the church. The stairway is equipped with a simple wooden hand rail and the steps are carpeted with the same red carpet as the first floor of the church. It is enclosed by walls and includes one turn which separates the stairs by a platform. There is also a platform at the top of the staircase which then leads to the door to the second floor.

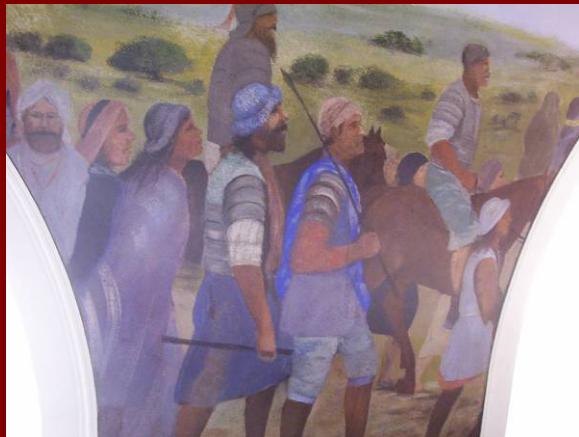
3. **Flooring:** The first floor of the church, including the stairway and the pulpit, is carpeted with a bright red, low pile/nap carpet. Before a renovation of the church after 1950, the first floor of the church had hardwood floors. In contrast, the second floor of the church has unfinished wooden flooring. The gathering hall/meeting area in the new addition has laminate wood floors. The classrooms and office area in the addition, which includes the pastor's new office, have carpeted floors. Also, the kitchen in the addition has linoleum tile floors.
4. **Wall and ceiling finish:** The walls and ceiling of the original church structure are made of plaster, whereas the walls and ceiling in the new addition are constructed from drywall. The ceiling of the sanctuary is decorated with a skyscape, depicting numerous clouds across a clear blue sky. The upper walls of the church and the wall behind the baptismal font are adorned with murals painted by Amohamed Milai. The Procession to Golgotha painted on the west side wall is 75 feet long. The painting depicting the Baptismal scene behind the baptismal font on the lower north wall is 8 by 10 feet. The Crucifixion, located on the northwest upper wall, measures 8 by 12 feet, while the sepulcher and burial scene painted on the north upper wall measures 8 by 9 feet. The Resurrection, featured on the northeast upper wall is 8 by 10 feet and the scene on the east wall, which is 75 feet long, depicts Mary Magdalene at the sepulcher, Peter and the other disciple, the empty tomb, and Cleopas and another disciple on the road to Emmaus. Finally, on the north upper wall, a depiction of the Ascension spans 12 by 24 feet. The artist signed and dated the work on both the northwest and northeast upper walls.

Murals



Murals:

The Procession to Golgotha



Murals



The Crucifixion



The Resurrection

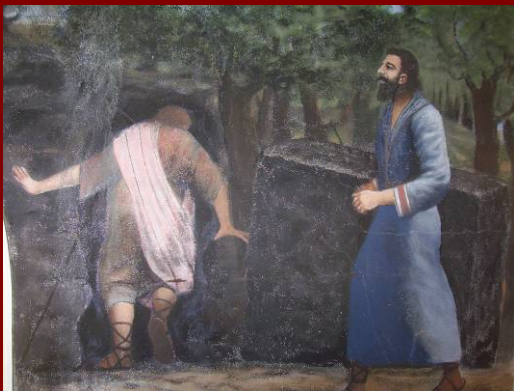
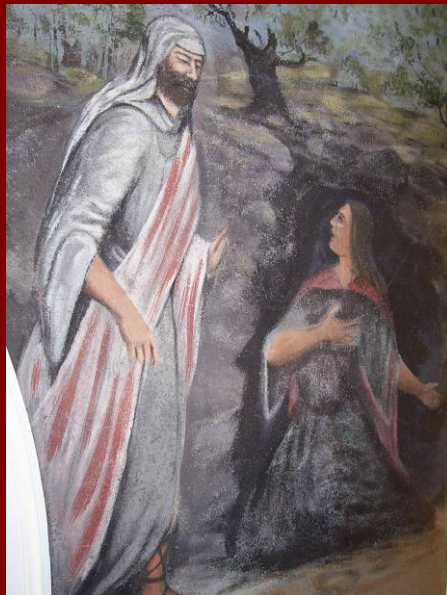
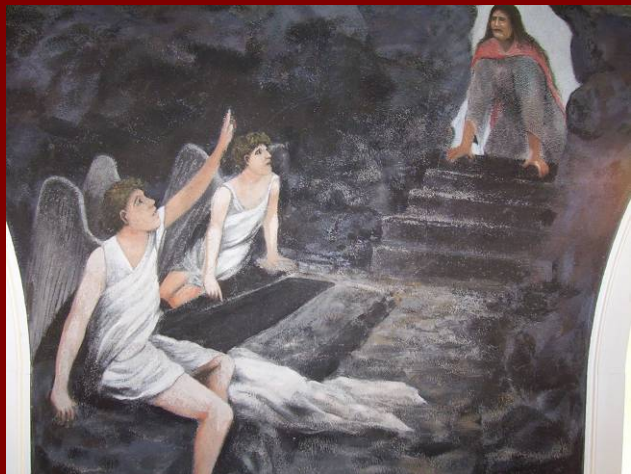


Burial and Sepulcher Scene



The Ascension

Murals



5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The most significant doorways in the church are the three double-door entrances, the central taking on a pointed arch shape and the two flanking doors maintaining the traditional rectangular shape with paned, pointed arch windows in the upper portion. Other doors within the main structure emulate the pointed arch approach, while doorways in the addition reflect a standard rectangular shape. All of the doors in the main structure are constructed of wood.

b. Windows: There is a pointed arch window with double lancet arches (with decorative stained glass) and a circular window within the main point. The side windows are long, narrow pointed arches with attractive tracery designs. The large side windows are triple hung; the smaller ones have more intricate tracery and are casement. These windows create a dramatic lighting effect as the stained glass changes/colors the character of the sunlight entering the room. Windows in the new addition are standard rectangular casement windows that are 4/4.

6. Decorative features and trim: The front of the church features a semicircular apse which is raised and delineated by a Gothic arch with fretwork and a frieze constructed of wood. The interior also features square fluted columns on pedestal bases, paneled wainscoting, turned balusters, and a raised-paneled cornice with pendants

7. Hardware: There are various styles of brass hardware.

8. Mechanical equipment:

- a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: The church, including the addition, is equipped with central heating and air. The central heating system was installed in the late 1950's, while the air conditioning system was installed at a later time. Ventilation of the church was previously achieved through the opening of the long, narrow windows lining the walls of the sanctuary; however, this is no longer necessary.
- b. Lighting: A large, decorative chandelier hangs from the middle of the ceiling in the sanctuary of the church and acts as the main source of light, aside from sunlight through the windows. The new addition features fluorescent lighting fixtures in the classrooms, and globe-shaped lighting fixtures attached to the ceiling fans in the gathering hall.
- c. Plumbing: A restroom was added to the church in the 1940's when a small addition was constructed onto the back of the church. The most recent addition to the church contains modern plumbing with a small restroom attached to the nursery and gender designated restrooms on the east side near the kitchen.
- d. Original furnishings: The church is said to contain the original galleries and pews, excepting those of the choir. The original organ, installed in 1922, still sits on the second floor of the structure, but is non-operational.

Interior



Interior



Interior



D. Site:

1. **Historic landscape design:** There is very little room for landscaping around the Central Baptist Church. There is a small paved parking lot to the right of the church when facing the principal façade. A paved/brick walkway flanked by several decorative bushes leads up to the entrance of the new addition. Some of the bricks used in the walkway have the names of the members who bought them engraved into the top.
2. **Outbuildings:** An addition was added on to the main church building in 1991-1995. Prior to this addition, there was a Victorian single house that was being used as an Adult Education Center. In preparation for the new addition, the house was moved to 156 Coming Street where it continued its use as the Adult Education Center. The Fellowship Hall (the new addition) is used as a meeting area for parishioners and education (Sunday school) purposes.

Site



DATE COMPLETED: 11-14-63

REVISIONS			
REVISION NUMBER	FIELD CHECK	FIELD CHANGES	FIELD ENTER
1	3-1-63	3-1-63	3-1-63
2	3-1-63	3-1-63	3-1-63
3	3-1-63	3-1-63	3-1-63

APPROXIMATE SCALE IN FEET

0 50 100 200

TAX MAP COMPILED FROM DEED, PLAT RESEARCH AND FIELD RECONNAISSANCE. ALL MEASUREMENTS ARE TO THE NEAREST FOOT. BUILDINGS ARE NOT PLOTTED TO EXACT SCALE OR LOCATION.

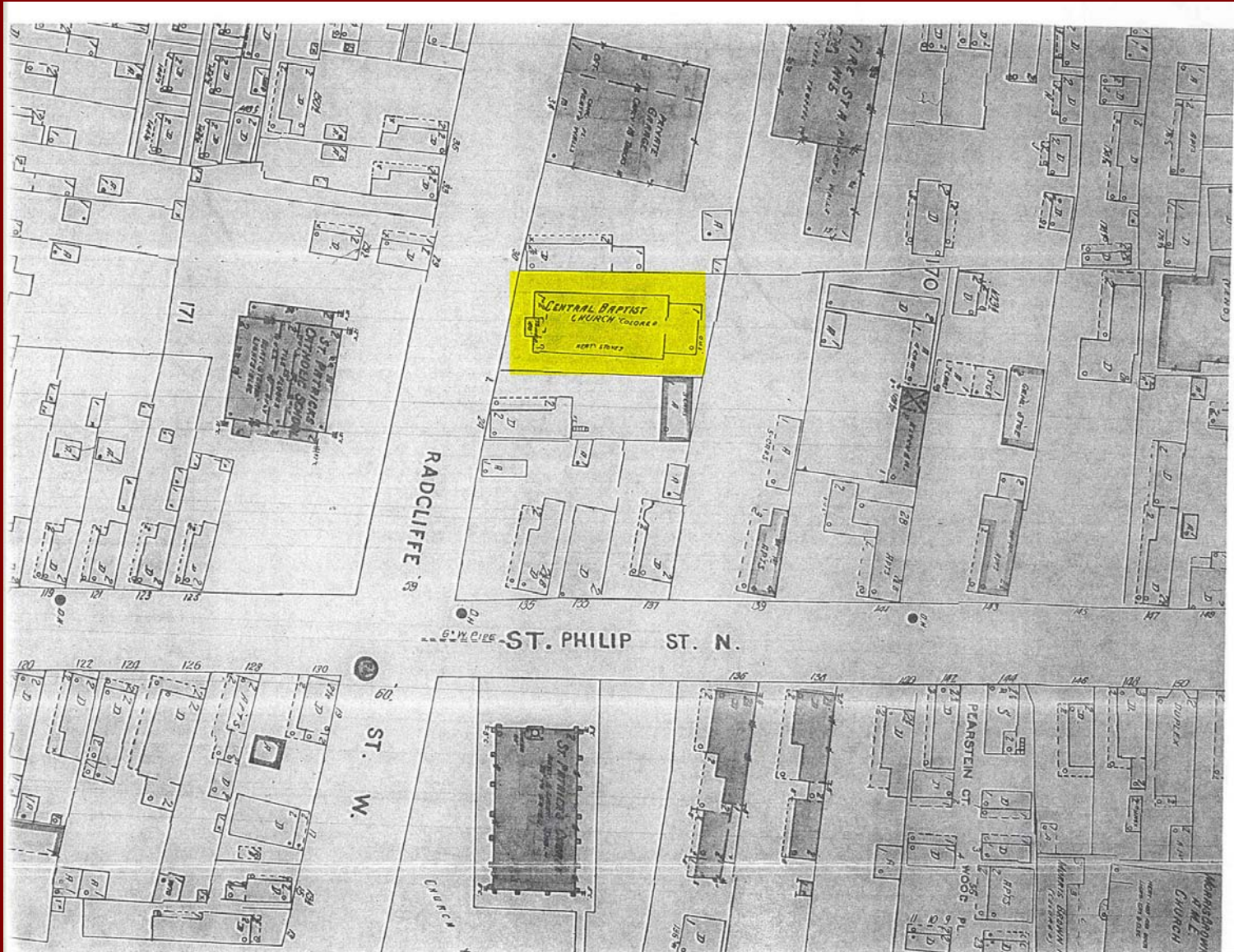
TAX MAP PREPARED BY THE COUNTY ASSESSOR'S OFFICE. THE CHARLESTON COUNTY BOARD OF ASSESSMENT CON- VOKS RESERVES THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO SELL THIS MAP. NO RESALE OR REPRODUCTION FOR RESALE PURPOSE IS PERMITTED.

TAX DISTRICT NO.	7-1
SCHOOL DISTRICT NO.	20
AREA	CITY OF CHARLESTON
AERIAL PHOTO NO.	2-563, 3-601

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CHARLESTON COUNTY, S. C.

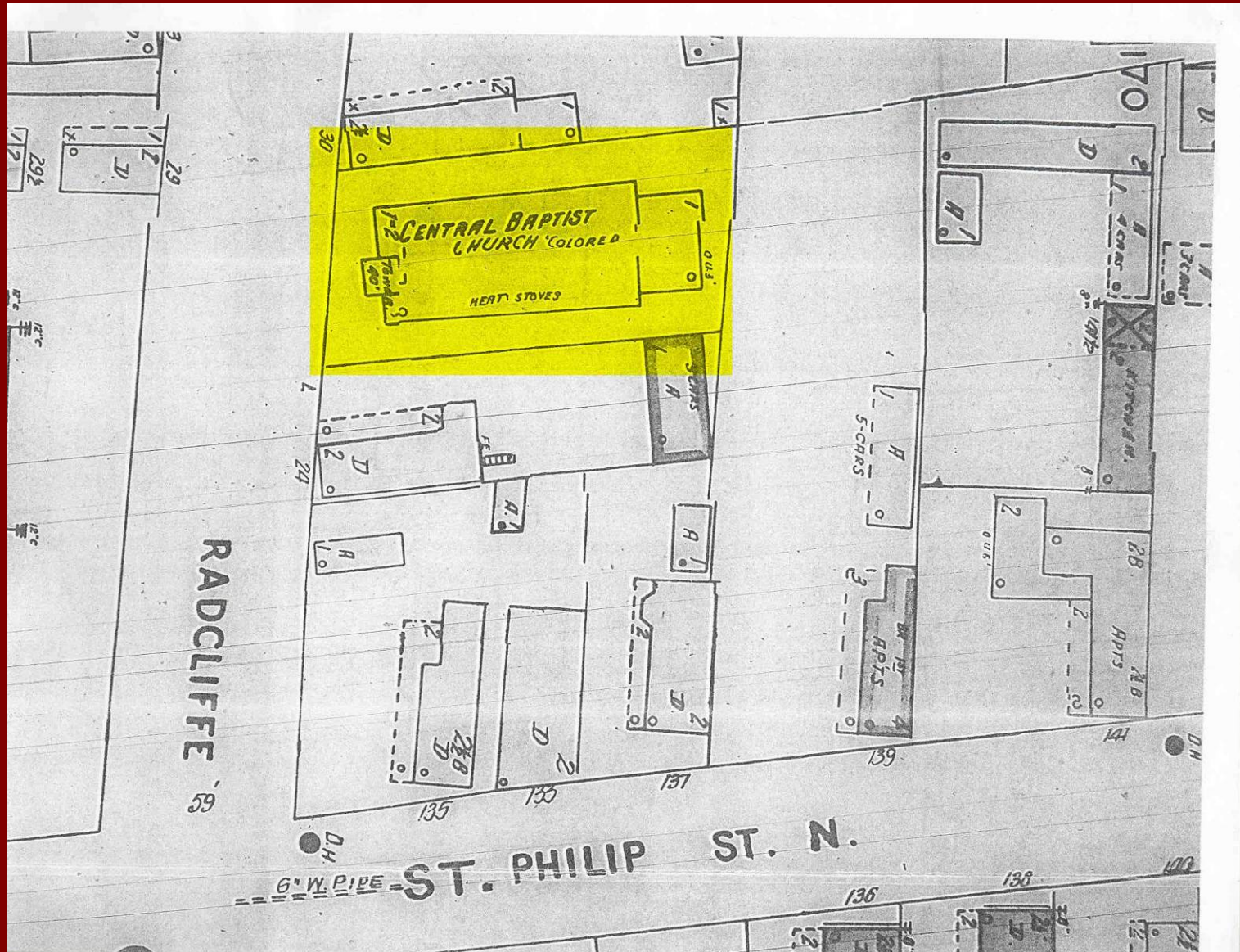
Maps

Sanborn

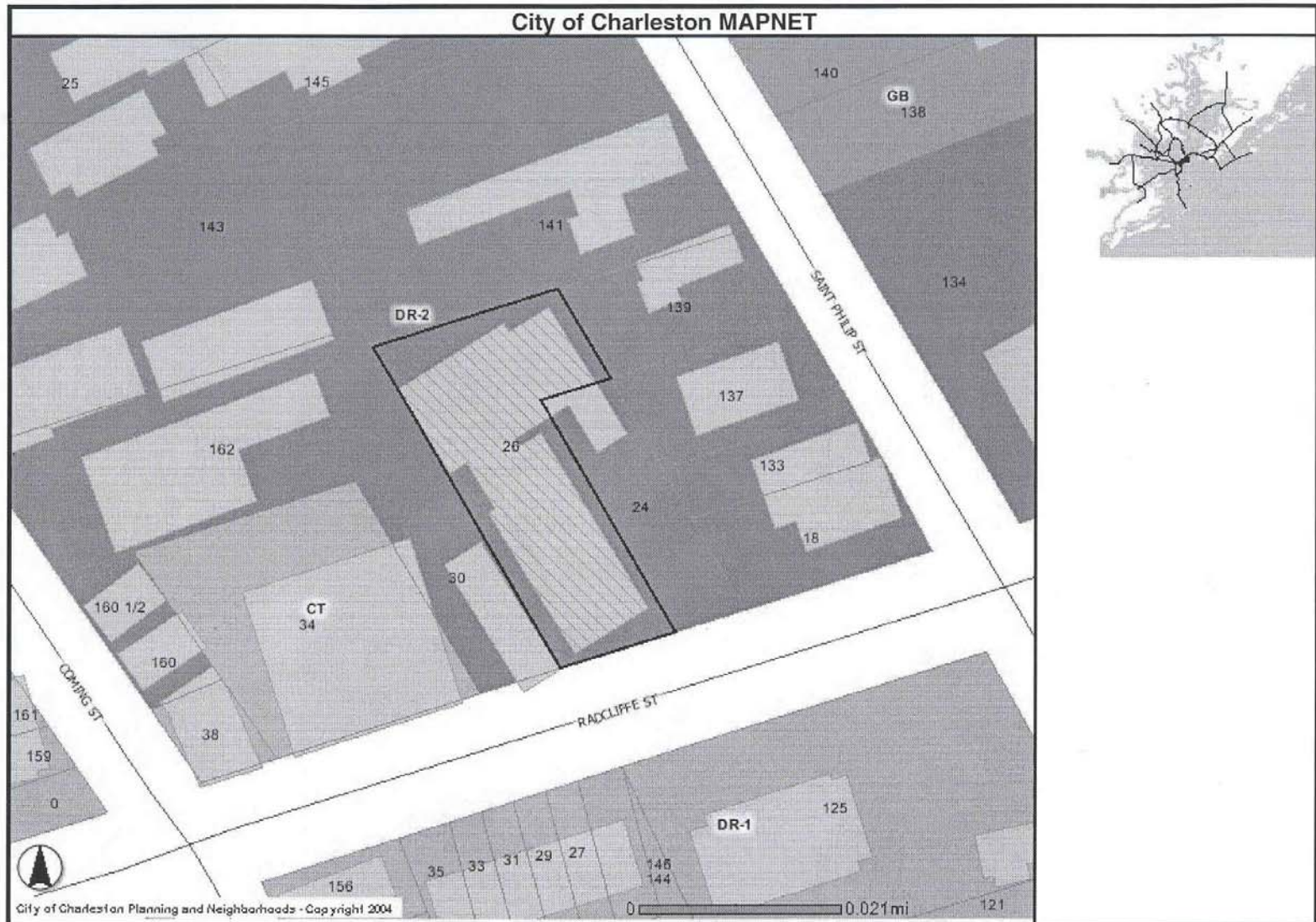


Maps

Sanborn (Magnified)



Maps



PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural drawings: None available

B. Early Views:

- o Sanborn Map, 1902, Microfilm, Pg. 18, from Charleston County Public Library, South Carolina Room.
- o Title of Real Estate, Register of Mesne Conveyance, Charleston, SC. Book E-85. pg. 170
- o Deed, Register of Mesne Conveyance, Charleston, SC. Book E-82. pg. 170.
- o City of Charleston Board of Architectural Review, *The Founders, Planners, and Builders of Central Baptist Church*. Charleston, SC. (date not known).

C. Interviews:

- o Alfred Grant (Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Central Baptist Church of Charleston, SC). Interview by Carolyn Roberts. 2 April 2005. Written and transcribed. Charleston, SC.

D. Bibliography:

Books:

- o The Preservation Society of Charleston. The Churches of Charleston and the Lowcountry. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994.
- o Poston, Jonathan H. The Buildings of Charleston. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997.
- o Scrapbooks of Charleston SC Architectural Inventory. 1973.

Brochures, periodicals, and Misc. Sources:

- o City of Charleston Board of Architectural Review Tax Map #466-12-3
- o City of Charleston MAPNET City of Charleston Planning and Neighborhoods. © 2004
- o McNulty, Kappy, National Register of Historical Places Inventory – Nomination Form., August 16, 1977
- o City of Charleston Board of Architectural Review, 1987, Staff Review Sheet, Charleston, SC.
- o City of Charleston Board of Architectural Review, 2001, Application, Charleston, SC.
- o Parker, E. M., 1973. “Souvenir Journal of the Rededication of Central Baptist Church, 26 Radcliffe Street, Charleston, South Carolina. The Reverend J. DeLong Dash, Pastor, January, 8-14, 1973”.
- o “100th Anniversary, 1891 – 1991, Reverend Michael R. Pigg, Pastor, Central Baptist Church, 26 Radcliffe Street, Charleston, South Carolina.” 1991.
- o Conley Smith, “Church Members get charge from new copper-top steeple,” *The Post and Courier*, 5 July 1990, Pg. 2.
- o Karen Green, “Murals Reflect Mystery”, *The News and Courier*, 17 December 1975, section 1-E.
- o Dave Munday, “Protecting an Aging Gift,” *The Post and Courier*, 3 September 2002, Section 1-B.

E. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

Tindall, George Brown. South Carolina Negroes. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1952.

F. Supplemental Material:

Photographs: taken in April of 2005 by Carolyn Roberts, Lauren Hummer, and Ann Simpson.

PART IV: PROJECT INFORMATION

This report was prepared for ARTH230 Introduction to Historic Preservation at the College of Charleston in the Spring of 2005. It was compiled by the joint efforts of Lauren Hummer, Margaret Langford, Carolyn Roberts, and Ann Simpson.