

SUMMARY
CHURCH STREET METHODIST CHURCH, 913 HENLEY
NATIONAL REGISTER NOMINATION
KNOXVILLE HISTORIC ZONING COMMISSION MEETING OF 12/18/2008

Church Street Methodist Church is being reviewed for National Register listing by the Tennessee Historical Commission; the Sites Review Committee will meet on January 21, 2008. As part of Certified Local Government responsibilities, a comment is being requested from the Tennessee Historical Commission about your opinion as to the property's eligible for National Register listing. A summary of the architectural description and statement of significance are included below.

Description of Property:

Church Street Methodist Church was built 1930-31, and features Crab Orchard sandstone walls, a central courtyard, notable stained glass windows, and a prominent bell tower, along with other distinguishing characteristics.

Church Street Methodist was designed in the Gothic Revival style by John Russell Pope, with Charles I. Barber as the local architect. The church was built by Worsham Brothers and Italian stonemason T. L. Yon, while the stained glass windows were designed by the Charles Connick Studio in Boston. Design elements like the window molding, trefoils and quatrefoils, and the stone tracery found on the windows. Interior details of arcades, the ceiling truss in the sanctuary, and elaborately carved woodwork, further refine the Gothic Revival design.

Changes made to Church Street Methodist since its construction include the installation of the stained glass windows, installed between 1941 and 1956, and two additions, one made in 1964 and the other made between 1986 and 1989.

Statement of Significance:

Church Street Methodist Church is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under criterion C, for its architecture. The church is the fifth home of the congregation, which began to meet in 1816 in a building on Hill Avenue. The name of the church was carried to its current location from its last (fourth) building which was located on Church Street.

The style of the church was selected from four design proposals prepared by the New York firm of John Russell Pope. Pope was known for designing mansions for some of America's wealthiest families, including the Vanderbilt and Rockefeller families, and the Henry Frick Mansion in New York City. Pope designed the Knoxville home of H. L. Dulin at 3100 Kingston Pike; Dulin was a member of Church Street Methodist. Pope was a graduate of Columbia University in New York and the Ecole des Beaux-arts in Paris, France, and apprenticed with McKim Mead and White before opening his own firm in 1905. Pope also designed the National Archives Building, the National Gallery of Art

and the Jefferson Memorial in Washington, D.C. Most of the designs of Pope's firm were Neoclassical in style. His Gothic designs were known for their major emphasis on the rough dressed ashlar stone walls.

Charles I. Barber, a member of Church Street Methodist, as the principal designer in the Knoxville firm of Barber & McMurry, established in 1915. The son of architect George F. Barber, he also studied at the Ecole des Beaux-arts. Barber designed many of Knoxville's prominent buildings, including homes that resembled elegant country manors, public buildings, and buildings at the University of Tennessee. He became known as one of the outstanding designers of churches in the southeast during the 1940s and 1950s, and served as Chief Architect for the Tennessee Valley Authority during the 1930s.

The respective roles of Pope and Barber in the design of the building are unclear. Both were retained by the church, and both were named on the plans for the building. Barber noted in a newspaper interview of the era that the asymmetrical placement of the spire at the apex of the bell tower was his decision, and was an attempt to balance the southern extension of the arcaded walkway. Church Street Methodist is also very similar to the design for the First Congregational Church in Columbus, Ohio, which was designed by John Russell Pope.

Ground was broken for the church on March 12, 1930, with the cornerstone laid on August 3, 1930. The first worship service in the church was held January 25, 1931. The construction reflected the economic difficulties of the Great Depression of 1929, as the church struggled to pay its financial obligations, and added the organ, carved pulpit, and other interior details very slowly, with 1956 marking the completion of the stained glass windows.

In selecting the Connick Studio to manufacture its stained glass windows, the church selected one of the significant stained glass producers of the 20th century. His influence in the use of transparent glass and symbolism is nationally recognized, as he used stained glass to transform light and color to form a work of art. His work includes the windows for St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City, St. John's Cathedral in Denver, Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago, Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, the University Chapel and Proctor Hall at Princeton University and the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City.

Since its construction, Church Street United Methodist Church has been a significant landmark in Knoxville. Its architecture led President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, on a 1940 trip through Knoxville to dedicate the Great Smoky Mountain National Park, to declare it “. . . the most beautiful church I have ever seen.”