

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Methodist Church of Richmond
Other name/site number: St. John's United Methodist Church (current)
Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

2. Location

Street & number: 400 Jackson Street
City or town: Richmond State: Texas County: Fort Bend
Not for publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following levels of significance:
 national statewide local

Applicable National Register Criteria: A B C D

Mark Wolfe State Historic Preservation Officer Date 4/24/14
Signature of certifying official / Title
Texas Historical Commission
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.
Signature of commenting or other official Date
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:
 entered in the National Register
 determined eligible for the National Register
 determined not eligible for the National Register.
 removed from the National Register
 other, explain: _____

Edson H. Beall Date of Action 6-13-14
Signature of the Keeper

Methodist Church of Richmond, Richmond, Fort Bend County, Texas

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Private
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Federal

Category of Property

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions: RELIGION / religious facility

Current Functions: RELIGION / religious facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification: LATE 19th and EARLY 20th CENTURY REVIAVLS: Late Gothic Revival

Principal Exterior Materials: Brick

Narrative Description (see continuation sheets 7-6 through 7-10)

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

<input type="checkbox"/>	A	Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
<input type="checkbox"/>	B	Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	C	Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
<input type="checkbox"/>	D	Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations: A: Religious Property

Areas of Significance: Architecture

Period of Significance: 1922 - 1955

Significant Dates: 1922, 1929

Significant Person (only if criterion b is marked): N/A

Cultural Affiliation (only if criterion d is marked): N/A

Architect/Builder: Nelson, Carl N. (architect)

Narrative Statement of Significance (see continuation sheets 8-11 through 8-17)

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography (see continuation sheets 9-18 through 9-19)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office (Texas Historical Commission, Austin)
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository:

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): N/A

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10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property: less than 1 acre

Coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (use decimal degree format)

Datum if other than WGS84: NA

1. Latitude: 29.582380 Longitude: -95.761929

Verbal Boundary Description: SJUMC property encompasses approximately three-quarters of a city block (Block 110) and is roughly bounded on the north by Morton Street, on the east by 4th Street, on the south by Jackson Street, and on the west by 5th Street, and on the southwest by the 1869 McFarland House and 5th Street. The property sits on Block 110, Lots 1-4, 5-7 (N 15'), 8-11, and 12-14.

Boundary Justification: The boundaries for SJUMC are determined by the current, legally recorded property boundaries. The property retains all of its historic property lines, as established by the Church upon its purchase of the land in 1910; the property boundary was expanded to include additional lots to the north and northwest of the 1910 property line to accommodate later building additions.

11. Form Prepared By

with assistance from THC staff

Name/title: Ruth Werner, Member
Organization: St. John's United Methodist Church
Address: 1111 Edgewood Drive
City or Town: Richmond State: Texas Zip Code: 77406
Email: Werner527@aol.com
Telephone: 281-342-8381
Date: 8/1/2013

Additional Documentation

Maps (see continuation sheet Map-20 through Map-24)

Additional items (see continuation sheets Figure-25 through Figure-31)

Methodist Church of Richmond, Richmond, Fort Bend County, Texas

Photographs

Name of Property: Methodist Church of Richmond
City or Vicinity: Richmond
County, State: Fort Bend County, Texas
Photographer: Dybala Photography and Herman Klawitter
Date Photographed: October 11, 2011 and February 15, 2014
Number of Photos: 10

TX_Fort Bend County_Methodist Church of Richmond_0001.tif
Aerial view of the nominated property. The 1922 church is in the foreground. Camera facing approximately north-northwest.

TX_Fort Bend County_Methodist Church of Richmond_0002.tif
Primary elevation of the 1922 church. Camera facing approximately north-northeast.

TX_Fort Bend County_Methodist Church of Richmond_0003.tif
South (primary) elevation of the 1922 church. Camera facing north.

TX_Fort Bend County_Methodist Church of Richmond_0004.tif
Detail of the primary entry, 1922 church. Camera facing north.

TX_Fort Bend County_Methodist Church of Richmond_0005.tif
East elevation, 1922 church. Camera facing west.

TX_Fort Bend County_Methodist Church of Richmond_0006.tif
West elevation, 1922 church. Camera facing approximately southeast.

TX_Fort Bend County_Methodist Church of Richmond_0007.tif
East elevations, from left to right: 1922 church (partial), 1929 Wessendorff Educational Building, and the 2000 Wendt Hall (partial).

TX_Fort Bend County_Methodist Church of Richmond_0008.tif
Rear (west) and south elevation of the 1929 Wessendorff Educational Building. Camera facing approximately northeast.

TX_Fort Bend County_Methodist Church of Richmond_0009.tif
Interior of the 1922 church. Camera facing approximately east-northeast.

TX_Fort Bend County_Methodist Church of Richmond_0010.tif
Interior of the 1922 church. Camera facing north.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Methodist Church of Richmond, Richmond, Fort Bend County, Texas

Narrative Description

The historic Methodist Church of Richmond, currently known as St. John's United Methodist Church (SJUMC), is located in the heart of historic downtown Richmond, Fort Bend County, Texas, situated on the corner of Jackson and 4th Streets. Its original 4,788 square-foot rectangular sanctuary is a rather distinctive building, offering not only a place of worship but a piece of architectural history. Built in 1922, with additions in 1929, 1955, and 2000, the Methodist Church of Richmond represents the town's oldest continuing Methodist congregation. The red brick church was built according to plans drawn by Houston architect Carl N. Nelson, and is most closely associated with the Late Gothic Revival architectural style with its masonry-clad exterior, prominent corner towers, Tudor arch entries and windows, and terra cotta trim. Today, the 1922 church is the core of the church campus that includes the main sanctuary, the Wessendorff Educational Building (1929, with an extension in 1955), and Wendt Hall (2000), all of which are internally connected and share compatible design characteristics. In accordance with National Park Service Guidelines, this property is counted as a single unit, as it represents "a building or structure with attached ancillary structures, covered walkways, and additions."

Geographical Setting

The nominated property is located in downtown Richmond, the county seat of Fort Bend County (with an estimated population of 11,679 in 2010). Richmond and Fort Bend County were both established in 1837 in the Republic of Texas. Developers Robert Handy and William Lusk named Richmond for Handy's hometown, Richmond, Virginia; the county was named for the 1822 cabin built and used as a fort in the bend of the Brazos River at Richmond.

The Methodist Church of Richmond is located in the heart of downtown Richmond next to the McFarlane House¹ and across the street from the 1909 Fort Bend County Courthouse.² County buildings and small-scale commercial buildings characterize the immediate neighborhood. Other streets have turn-of-the-century homes and large oak trees. To the north of the downtown area, one block from the Methodist Church, is the 1858 railroad line heading west across the Brazos River and passing to the outskirts of Richmond; this railroad track line is still in use today. To the north of the railroad track is Morton Cemetery, established in 1826.

The Methodist Church is situated on the northwest corner of Jackson and 4th Streets, on a flat lot that extends from north to the south. The church faces south onto Jackson Street, also known as U.S. Highway 90, the primary artery through town. In its entirety, the church forms a complex comprised of the original 1922 sanctuary building with the attached 1929 Wessendorff Educational Building on the north side. Together, they occupy the original site purchased by the congregation in 1910.³ The Methodist Church has continuously occupied the site and church. In 2000, another addition, known as Wendt Hall, was added to the north of the Wessendorff Educational Building and parallels Morton Street on the north. The 1922 church sits at the southeast corner of the church lot; the Wessendorff Educational Building and the Wendt Hall addition form the

¹ Designated a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark in 1985.

² Designated a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark in 1980, listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1980, and designated a State Antiquities Landmark in 1992.

³ Fort Bend County Deeds Records, Book A, pg. 62.

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northeast, north, and northwest boundaries of the property. All of the building components are internally connected and are counted as a single resource.

The 1922 Church

The original component of the current complex is the 1922 church, designed by Houston architect Carl N. Nelson. The building's base, edges, windows, and quoins—all outlined in white terra cotta—provide a sharp contrast to its red brick veneer. The church forms a rectangle approximately 57 feet across and 84 feet long. The exterior is articulated by steps leading to three pointed-arch entries with a porch behind the arches leading to the three main doors to the interior. With its tripartite division, the front facade of the church projects a Gothic Revival appearance, especially in massing, with the central block flanked by two towers, and the articulation of pointed arch openings. These towers signal the prominent corner location of the church, mark the main entrance into the building, and give the building a vertical emphasis. The tower rooflines are now flat, but they originally were crenellated parapets, a feature that was removed in the mid-1950s due to chronic roof leaks. Windows on the second and third levels of the towers, as well as the main body, also employ the pointed arch design. The uppermost windows are pointed lancets, while those on the center level are set as wider, more flattened Tudor arches; the tripartite windows on the bottommost level of the towers lack the arch design so prominent elsewhere. Where windows are grouped as pairs or in threes, the interior framing forms a subtle illusion to Gothic tracery. The combination of the dominant towers and arched openings give a distinct Gothic Revival impression to the building.

Yet the revival style is only part of a hybrid mixture of architectural styles. On the west and east elevations, the towers feature the same fenestration pattern and detailing as on the primary elevation. On the main body, though, the gable roof with exposed rafter tails becomes a dominant horizontal feature over the main body of the church. Three Tudor arched, stained glass windows are evenly spaced along these elevations and correspond to the church's main interior volume. At the rear of each these secondary elevations is a single, half-glazed wood door sheltered by a shed roofed canopy supported on heavy, triangular wood braces. Above this sits a narrow, lancet window. These secondary entrances are topped by a widely overhanging gabled roof that features decorative wood brackets. The west elevation opening provides access to the small, square room used as the sacristy, while the door on the east elevation opens to a small, square vestibule that now allows passage to the educational building next door.

The expressed gabled roof structure, modest overhangs with exposed rafter ends, low massing, and decorative, triangular knee supports for the eaves and porch roofs are all characteristics of a bungalow or Craftsman style. Contributing to the mixture is the almost Georgian-like treatment of regularly defined openings and layers by a high contrast of colors between the red brick veneer and the white terra cotta base, copings, window trim, and painted eaves. The varied mixture of styles blends into a rather distinctive church that offers not only a place of worship but a piece of architectural history.⁴

⁴ Holt, Dan, Architectural Description of Sanctuary, Ray B. Bailey Architects, Inc., 4100 S. Shepherd, Suite 100, Houston, Texas, 77098, 1983.

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The construction of the sanctuary is wood framed walls with red brick veneer on all four elevations, raised wood framed floor structure with perimeter brick stem walls and crawl space. The roof structure is a wood framed gabled roof with slate singles.

1922 Church, Interior

The interior is wood framed walls with white sheetrock walls and ceiling. It has dark wood trim around the arched windows and doors, a dark wood baseboard, a dark wood chair railing around the walls, and dark wood paneling. The interior is organized in a terminal liturgical arrangement in which the whole of the body faces one direction towards the primary focus. Two parallel, uniform rows of wood pews (nine on each side of the center aisle) face the slightly raised chancel containing a central altar and flanking pulpit and lectern.

On the south side is the bowed balcony reached by a four-level stairway in the southwest corner tower. The balcony is wood framed covered with plaster and has a bowed brass rail on top to complete the front of the balcony. To the east of the balcony is a storage room.

In the middle of the east and west sanctuary walls are tri-paneled stained glass windows depicting Bible stories. On either side of these windows are paired stained glass windows. All of these windows correspondingly include dark wood framing with tri-panels in the arched tops of the windows. The center window on the east is of Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane and was donated in memory of Mary Louisa Blakely by her daughter Kate Winston. The central window on the west depicts a nativity scene and was donated in memory of Jennie Jones by her husband T.B Wessendorff and daughters.

On the north wall is the recessed altar area in the middle, and the entire length of the north wall and recess has dark wood paneled wainscoting approximately eight feet tall. The paneled wainscoting has set-back panels with wood carved trim at the tops and reversed beveling on the other three side lengths. There are five wood panels extending approximately four feet on top of the wainscoting with additional ornate carvings at the top of each of these five panels. On top of the paneling sits a three-pane arched stained glass window also outlined with dark wood. Depicting the risen Christ, this window was donated by George W. Armstrong in memory of his mother Mary I. Armstrong. The paneling on the north side was added in 1955 and the stained glass window on this wall was raised to sit on top of the upper panels. Originally the altar area was outlined with a brass kneeling rail in the front with a velvet curtain hung behind the rail; this was removed in 1955. This change corresponds to the transition from a central pulpit to a central altar arrangement; the window had to be raised in order for those seated in pews to be able to see it above the altar. The pulpit and a lectern stand on either side of chancel, between the altar and the nave. On the northeast and northwest sides of the wall paneling are doors that, when closed, are also wood panels with trim at the top. On the northwest side, the door leads into the sacristy room. On the northeast side, the door leads to an open room that further leads to a passage to the Wessendorff Educational Building.

The light fixtures suspended by chains from the ceiling are metal with six opaque glass panels on each. The floor is wood and has been carpeted. The white pitched ceiling is wood frame covered with sheetrock.

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1929 Wessendorff Educational Building (expanded in 1955)

The two-story Wessendorff Educational Building, built in 1929, was also designed by architect Carl N. Nelson of Houston and was built by W. H. Nicholson & Brothers of Houston. This two-story building is a wood framed, red brick veneer structure attached to the rear of the church with a red brick passageway. The passageway can also be entered from an exterior door that opens from 4th Street. This door, a modern metal and glass single door flanked by narrow sidelights, is topped by an arched fixed pane transom and surrounded by a Tudor arch molding. The passageway's roofline features a stepped parapet reminiscent of that on the primary façade of the main church.

Because of the additions, only the primary elevation of the Wessendorff building is easily visible. It faces east on to 4th Street. The first story of this building has four one-over-one rectangular windows with a white sill. The second story has five similar windows; however, the central three are each topped by arched, fixed pane transoms surrounded by Gothic arch molding of white plaster. The parapet is topped with white coping and utilizes a stepped design similar to that on the primary façade of the main church. The roof structure is wood framed with a built-up flat roof of tar. The floor structure is a concrete slab covered with tile and carpeting inside. The window trims and doors are dark wood. On the first floor are several classrooms, a kitchen, offices, restrooms and a gathering room. Upstairs are classrooms and office space. Between the two stories, there is a stairway at the entrance on the east side and another on the west end. The rear third of this building was constructed in 1955 and utilizes the same red brick veneer and window designs.

T. B. Wessendorff, a prominent Richmond lumberman, funded the building, in memory of his wife. A white outlined 1929 commemorative plaque naming those on the building committee is on the first story exterior wall on the southeast corner of the building.

The Wendt Hall Addition (2000)

To accommodate a growing congregation and wider variety of activities, a Memorial Fellowship Hall was added north of the Wessendorff Educational Building in 1969. Thirty years later, it was no longer adequate to serve the needs and mission of the church, and was torn down in order to construct the much larger Wendt Hall addition. Connected internally to the Wessendorff building via an enclosed passageway that runs parallel to 4th Street, the main exterior entrance to this "wing" is located on the west, under a covered porte-cochere. This two-story building runs the length of Morton Street between 4th and 5th Streets. There are three service doors along the Morton Street elevation, and a secondary entrance along 4th Street. The passageway that internally connects the wing to the Wessendorff boasts a set of double glass doors that also enter out on to 4th Street.

The Wendt Hall addition's red brick veneer is a slightly different hue than that used on the historic portion of the church. The fenestration does not follow a regular rhythm and appears sparingly on the first floor in the form of single windows with simple stone sills. Second floor fenestration is slightly more regular and windows are capped by triangular stone hoods, a simplified and stylized rendition of the Gothic arch used on the historic portions of the building. The stepped parapet detailing of the original church is also copied on parts of the Wendt Hall addition. A stone belt course runs horizontally at the second floor level around the wing.

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Integrity

The historic Methodist Church of Richmond has undergone few alterations since completed in 1922. Significant changes include the addition of connected expansions, including the 1929 Wessendorff Education Building (with additional expansion in 1955), which was designed by the same architect to be compatible with the architectural style of the church. The exterior of these components remain virtually unchanged since original construction. The interior of the sanctuary has also seen little alteration aside from the switch from a center pulpit to central altar, a design change which resulted in the addition of paneling to the north wall as well as raising the height of the north stained glass window. These changes took place within the period of significance for the property. Wendt Hall, the most recent addition, is a large presence on the church campus, but it is compatible with the original architecture of the church and does not detract from the architectural integrity of the historic components. With its simplified decorative elements and with the primary exterior entry located on the opposite corner of the large campus, it is clearly subordinate to the historic components of the church, leaving the 1922 sanctuary as the easily identifiable core of the historic campus. In its original location, and in a setting comparable to that which existed historically, the Methodist Church of Richmond retains sufficient integrity of design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association to convey its historical and architectural significance.

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Statement of Significance

The Methodist Church of Richmond (currently known as St. John's United Methodist Church) is a unique and very distinctive building of architectural history in Richmond and Fort Bend County. Completed in 1922, the church is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture, as an excellent example of an intact Gothic Revival church. The red brick church with terra cotta trim was built according to plans drawn by architect Carl N. Nelson and includes thirty-two stained-glass windows. The church is home to the oldest established congregation in Richmond (1839); the congregation has continuously occupied the property since 1910. The main church building is designed primarily in the late Gothic Revival style, and is the only such example in the city of Richmond. The architectural significance of this building is based upon the quality design of the 1922 sanctuary and the 1929 Wessendorff Educational Building addition, which itself was expanded in 1955. The Wendt Hall addition (2000), while outside of the period of significance, is a modern design compatible with the original design idea, functional intent, aesthetics, and quality of the historic components of the church complex. The complex is preserved in good condition, as faithful generations of congregation members have maintained the integrity of the historic building over the years. The period of significance for this property begins in 1922, which is when construction commenced on the sanctuary through 1955, when the Wessendorff Educational Building addition was complete. Because the property derives its primary significance from its architectural distinction, it satisfactorily meets Criterion Consideration A for Religious Properties.

Richmond, a Brief Community History

In 1822, Stephen F. Austin brought in 300 families to colonize Texas, with permission of newly independent Mexico. Fifty-six of these families settled along the Brazos River and other waterways in the area that became Fort Bend County in 1837.

During the runaway scrape to avoid the Mexican troops during the Texas Revolution, this area was abandoned in early 1836. After the Battle of San Jacinto, April 21, 1836, settlers returned to their land; the Republic of Texas was formed, and counties began taking their shapes. Richmond was planned by developers Robert Handy and William Lusk and named for Handy's home, Richmond, Virginia; much of the land belonged to Jane Long, referred by some as the Mother of Texas, and whose home site was just south of Richmond on the west side of the Brazos River.

The city incorporated in 1837 and was named the county seat for Fort Bend County that was also created in the same year. The second president of the Republic of Texas, Mirabeau Bonaparte Lamar, had his home just outside Richmond. Both Long and Lamar are buried in Richmond's 1826 Morton Cemetery.

The railroad came from Houston to Richmond in 1858, and the railroad tracks are still located in the original area. The turmoil of the Civil War and the postwar effects of abolition upon the county plantations economically resulted in a sustained downturn for Fort Bend County. As economic conditions got better, the agriculturally based county grew; Richmond remained a small commercial center surrounded by ranching, sugar, com, and cotton crops. Large frame homes were built in Richmond around the tum of the century, and

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several still exist. In 1909, a new brick courthouse was built in Richmond and has been joined over the years with several other modern buildings housing county offices and the county court system.

For the first half of the twentieth century, Richmond remained a small town with an economy driven by agriculture and supporting industries, though it was boosted somewhat in the 1930s by the discovery of oil in the area. The population was just over 1,200 in 1920 and rose only to 2,000 by 1940. In the post-WWII years, though, the population grew steadily as the town soon became home to those who commuted to the bustling and prosperous city of Houston. By 1960, nearly 3,700 people called home. In 2012, the population of Richmond was approximately 11,800.

Methodists in Richmond

Under Mexican law, Catholicism was the rule until it gradually faded during the Republic of Texas days as early as the 1830s. Before the Catholic rule ended, the banned practice of Protestantism was present, and by 1824 there were circuit riders in Fort Bend County. A Methodist missionary--the Rev. Henry Stephenson--preached in and around Fort Bend County as early as 1824. By the end of 1836 the United States Methodist Church had appointed missionaries to the new Republic of Texas. A small group organized in Richmond as early as 1839.⁵

In the late fall of 1838, Rev. Jesse Hord, a native of Tennessee, came to the Republic of Texas as a missionary from the Mississippi Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. He crossed the Sabine River at Gaines Ferry on November 29, 1838. His assignment was Houston and the surrounding coastal country between the Trinity and San Antonio Rivers. He reached Richmond Christmas night, 1838. His diary for December 26 says, "Spent in Richmond; preached at night to a good congregation; good feeling, much interest; the Holy Spirit rests upon many. Hallelujah! God is love."⁶

By January 22, 1839, Rev. Hord was back in Richmond and founded a congregation of six persons. The eleventh session of the Texas Conference was held in Richmond in 1850. Presumably there was a structure then, but the first sanctuary recorded was built in 1857, a modest frame structure on the northwest corner intersection of 4th Street and Houston Street.⁷

In 1857 the minister was James E. Ferguson. The 1860 U.S. census taker found the Ferguson family "domiciled at John Shaefer's boarding house in Richmond." He was probably the first Methodist minister to permanently live in Richmond; his son, James E. Ferguson, Jr., became governor of Texas in 1915.⁸

During the Civil War days, there was a decline in the church's membership, but the congregation never disbanded while it withstood the trials of war. Following the Civil War, the African American congregants separated to organize their own church.

⁵ Clarence R. Wharton, *History of Fort Bend County* (San Antonio: The Naylor Co., 1939) , 55.

⁶ Macum, Phelan, *A History of Early Methodism in Texas, 1817-1866* (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1924), 294; Homer S. Thrall, *A Brief History of Methodism in Texas* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church South., 1889), 54.

⁷ Thrall, 54.

⁸ Wharton, 55.

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The Methodist trustees purchased the land at Jackson and 4th Streets in 1910. Prior to building the sanctuary, a parsonage was built in 1912 next to the McFarlane House on Jackson Street. When a new parsonage was built in 1965 at another location, the 1912 parsonage was used as a youth building until the completion of the Memorial Fellowship Hall in June 1969. The old parsonage-youth building was sold and moved out of town.

The congregation built a new sanctuary on the property in 1922; it was formally dedicated on March 17, 1923. The building was completely free of debt when the congregation moved in for the first worship service. The financing came largely from proceeds of World War I Liberty Bonds purchased and donated by members. Carl N. Nelson of Houston was the architect for this building; Fred Wammel of Richmond was the builder, working for the sum of six dollars per day.⁹

The construction of the new church building was part of a much larger pattern of religious building programs across the state. The first three decades of the twentieth century were a period of tremendous population and economic growth in Texas, due in no small part to the discovery of rich oil and natural gas deposits. Statewide, the membership of the Methodist Church more than doubled in this short time period and ushered in a new era of church building.¹⁰

Architectural historian Willard B. Robinson notes that Texas Methodist organizations built in a variety of modes during the first third of the twentieth century, but the Gothic style ultimately became the most prominent. Influenced by English sources and reflecting a revived interest in Medievalism, the Gothic style “seemingly recall[ed] the English roots of the Wesleyan denominations.”¹¹ Architects freely interpreted the style and the result is numerous variations in design, most of them based upon the basic compositional theme of a central auditorium and flanking towers.¹² A hallmark of the style, the towers (or a single tower) were commonly placed on the front, generally in pairs, but sometimes alone or to the side. The towers terminated in parapets or in tall spires. Other common elements were side gables employed along the nave and tracery in the major openings.¹³

Architects and scholars debated over the appropriateness of the Gothic style for evangelical Protestant religions. Some felt that thirteenth century Gothic did not represent Protestant beliefs; it was incongruous to revive a medieval style unless one intended to utilize medieval rites of worship. However, others deemed the Gothic style as the one most suitable for invoking holy associations and religious feeling, making it appropriate for all Christian use.¹⁴ Design was important for influencing the senses. The interiors were meant to “induce silence and inspire reverence,” while exteriors “were intended to obtain dignity and project beauty.”¹⁵ Methodists, among other denominations, reinstated the traditional form of the chancel with a communion rail and kneeling step. Furthermore, they deemphasized the importance of clear sound and personal comfort that had

⁹ Antoinette D. Reading, *A History of SJUMC* (unpublished: June 4, 1972), 1.

¹⁰ Willard B. Robinson, *Reflections of Faith: Houses of Worship in the Lone Star State* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 1994), 135-137.

¹¹ Robinson, 181.

¹² Robinson, 167.

¹³ Robinson, 181.

¹⁴ Robinson, 158-159.

¹⁵ Robinson, 178.

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characterized earlier designs because it detracted from the spiritual senses.¹⁶ Though not as elaborately detailed as examples in larger urban settings, the Methodist Church of Richmond's design is typical for a small community. Often clients in smaller towns commissioned architects to scale down versions of popular building styles produced on a much grander scale in urban settings. The architect tailored the output to the client, providing whatever scale and elements would fit within the budget, while still maintaining modernity. Nonetheless, the church's design clearly announces its purpose and is readily identifiable as an ecclesiastical property.

The early twentieth century also saw an increased interest in the church's role in social welfare programs and education, especially Sunday school and Summer Bible School or camp. From 1900 to 1930, enrollment in Methodist Sunday schools statewide increased from 85,000 to 285,000.¹⁷ To accommodate the increased social and educational programs, churches needed additional space. Typically, the church itself retained its individual identity and maintained visual dominance. Educational spaces were constructed either in separate or attached buildings.¹⁸ In the case of the Methodist Church of Richmond, the educational facility (the 1929 Wessendorff Building) was designed as a subordinate wing attached to the rear of the church. The Akron Plan, popular at the turn of the century for placing classrooms immediately adjacent to the sanctuary, soon fell out of favor, as did cubical plans and semi-circular auditorium seating.¹⁹

The Methodist Church of Richmond was just one of many to take on new building programs in the early 20th century, and it did so without incurring large amounts of debt. This was not the case for many congregations, however. Some undertook expansion programs by taking out loans and when the effects of the Great Depression became dire, they lost or came close to losing their facilities. In Dallas, for example, the Tyler Street Church lost their new building to foreclosure (with outside assistance, they eventually were able to reclaim it), and the Munger Place and First Methodist churches of Dallas nearly suffered a similar fate.²⁰

Like other aspects of American society, post-WWII prosperity brought a new era of expansions and "[Methodist] building programs became a common pattern for the next fifteen years, with almost every church experiencing some form of physical expansion or renewal."²¹ The need for expanded facilities was driven partly by an increase in membership. Membership rates rose about 30% on average from 1945 to 1960 in most Texas Methodist conferences. However, increased programming also accounts for the need for expanded facilities. Aside from traditional weekly worship services and Sunday school classes, the church began to offer youth programs, adult fellowship meetings, and educational classes during the week, along with an assortment of entertainment and fellowship programs especially for families. The increased membership, coupled with an impressive increase in programming, required the addition of church personnel. More personnel meant an increased demand for offices and administrative work spaces.²² In Richmond, the Wessendorff Educational

¹⁶ Robinson, 180.

¹⁷ Spellmann, Norman W., "Methodist Church," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/imm01>), accessed November 16, 2013. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

¹⁸ Robinson, 176.

¹⁹ Robinson, 177.

²⁰ Walter N. Vernon, et al, *The Methodist Excitement in Texas* (Dallas: The Texas United Methodist Historical Society, 1984), 276.

²¹ Vernon, 291.

²² Vernon, 291-293.

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Building was expanded by approximately one-third during this post-WWII building boom to accommodate additional classroom and office needs. The original architect, Carl N. Nelson, had passed away by this time; local architect W. C. Hausler was responsible for the expansion.

Architect Carl N. Nelson, 1865-1946²³

Architect Carl N. Nelson was born in Sweden in 1865 and immigrated to the United States with his parents at a young age. Nelson supported himself through four years of technical education in preparation for a career as an architect. Upon completing his studies, he secured employment with an architect in Galesburg, Illinois, working there for a number of years before relocating to Burlington, Iowa. In Burlington he enjoyed a rapid rise to prominence, both professionally and socially, receiving many important commissions of the day in Burlington and surrounding towns.

By 1908, he had gained enough esteem among his peers to secure the vice-presidency of the Iowa Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (Burlington Chapter). Many of his designs during his residency in Iowa were limited to the residential and civic spheres, with no known examples of religious commissions. Nelson's early career demonstrated his great diversity and talent with commissions including: private residences, schools, municipal buildings, and industrial buildings.²⁴

In December 1888, Nelson married Tena Olson, and the couple had three children: Alna, Veda, and Tessie. He was a political independent, not aligning with any particular party, and a member of several fraternal and social organizations, including Herald Lodge (No. 54), Independent Order of Odd Fellows, and a sportsmen's club. Nelson and his family made the move to Houston around 1910. In 1920, Mr. and Mrs. Nelson were living on Colorado Street in Houston with their daughter, Veda, who had married Lawrence B. Gunderson, a blueprint draftsman. Although Nelson was not working in 1920, by 1930 Nelson and his wife had relocated to the home of their daughter Alna Winne, on Polk Street, during which time he was working as a building architect.²⁵

There is little research on Nelson's life and work in Texas; however, several churches in the greater Houston area can be attributed to him, providing, at the very least, a cross-segment of his contributions to the built environment. In 1922, he was commissioned to design the Methodist Church of Richmond, fifteen miles southwest of Houston.

One of the most significant commissions for Carl N. Nelson was Heights Christian Church, which was completed in 1927 in Houston. Exuding eclectic classical styling, the church was erected in the burgeoning Houston Heights area. According to the National Register nomination for the church, located at 1703 Heights Boulevard, the building possesses the following architectural attributes: "Two-story brick church, basically square with flat roof, recessed three-bay entrance front behind triple arches, pilasters in Doric style support entablature above arches; contrasting stone trim; round rosette stained-glass window in center of front facade (east) above arches flanked by small arched windows with detailed hood molds and protruding keystones."

²³ Biography and architectural career of Carl N. Nelson written by Clinton Drake, Fort Bend County Historical Commission.

²⁴ Biographical Review of Des Moines County, Iowa: containing biographical sketches of many of the prominent citizens of to-day and also of the past (Chicago: Hobart Pub. Co., 1905), 478.

²⁵ "Texas, Deaths, 1890-1976," index and images, Family-Search (<http://familysearch.org/pal:IMM9.LJJF5F-3NY>: accessed 09 Aug 2012), Carl N. Nelson, 08 Apr 1946; citing reference CN 17978, State Registrar Office, Austin, Texas.

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According to Opera in the Heights, a non-profit, regional opera company who now owns and operates the structure, a ground breaking ceremony was held featuring Houston celebrities Mayor Oscar F. Holcombe and Dr. Edison F. E. Oberholtzer. The building dedication took place on Oct 23, 1927, with Nelson and contractor P. H. Fredericks both in attendance.²⁶

In 1929, Nelson received a second commission from the Methodist Church of Richmond to design a two-story educational building in the same architectural style as the 1922 sanctuary. Builders W. H. Nicholson and Brothers of Houston were hired to carry out the plans for the building, which was funded by T. B. Wessendorff, a prominent lumberman, in memory of his wife.²⁷

Having established his reputation in Richmond and Houston, Nelson was naturally called upon when another Richmond congregation, Sacred Heart Catholic Church, wished to erect a structure for worship. Construction commenced on January 15, 1935, with the foundation and walls completed by the time of the jubilant celebration of the cornerstone laying on March 11, 1935. Built at a cost of \$8,000, the floor plan typifies the Basilican subset of the Romanesque Revival style with a long, narrow nave (80 x 30 feet), and two sacristy wings (12x14 feet). According to Nelson, parishioners and others who donated labor and offered materials at "rock bottom prices" offset the building cost. The facade features semi-circular arches over windows and doors with geometric medieval ornamentation on the arch surrounding the main entrance. The structure features a gabled roof with an offset, square tower featuring an embattled parapet and horizontal beltcourse. The surface features red brick with thin mortar joints. Perhaps Nelson designed the church in the Romanesque Revival style to provide architectural continuity within the town as the 1894 jail, a dominant structure among the landscape, was designed in the same style and still operated when the church was designed.²⁸

CONCLUSION

Two authorities have recognized the church for its significant architecture in the heart of old Richmond along with its continuity of use by the same group. The Methodist Church of Richmond (currently known as St. John's United Methodist Church) was designated a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark in 1983 and United Methodist Historic Site (#106) in 1982. The church is now nominated to the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture as a building that embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type and period of construction.

Designed in 1922 by architect Carl N. Nelson, the red brick church with white terra cotta trim is most closely associated with the late Gothic Revival style. It is the only example of the style in the city of Richmond. Representative features include monumental paired towers, lancet windows, Tudor arched openings, and stained glass windows. True to the time period, the church is not a pure example of the Gothic style, but rather incorporates an eclectic blend of design and detailing, a testament to the architect's advanced skills of combining diverse styles to create a coherent, distinctive whole. The church complex is complimented by the addition of the Wessendorff Educational building, also designed by Nelson with Gothic detailing. The addition of the wing in 1929 (and its expansion in 1955) is representative of building programs taking place throughout

²⁶ National Register of Historic Places, Heights Christian Church, Houston, Harris County, Texas, National Register #83004438.

²⁷ *Houston Post* (Houston, TX), Oct. 27, 1929.

²⁸ "Catholic Church Corner Stone Laying Sunday," *The Texas Coaster* (Richmond, TX), Mar 14, 1935.

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the larger Methodist community in Texas in response to increased membership and greater variety and scale of programming, all of which demanded additional space and spatial arrangement. Though the Wendt Hall addition of 2000 dates from outside of the period of significance, it is a modern design compatible with the original design idea, functional intent, aesthetics, and quality of the historic components of the church complex. Representing the oldest established congregation in Richmond (1839), the historic components of the church retain a high degree of integrity. Because the church derives its primary significance for its architectural distinction, it meets National Register Criterion Consideration A for religious properties.

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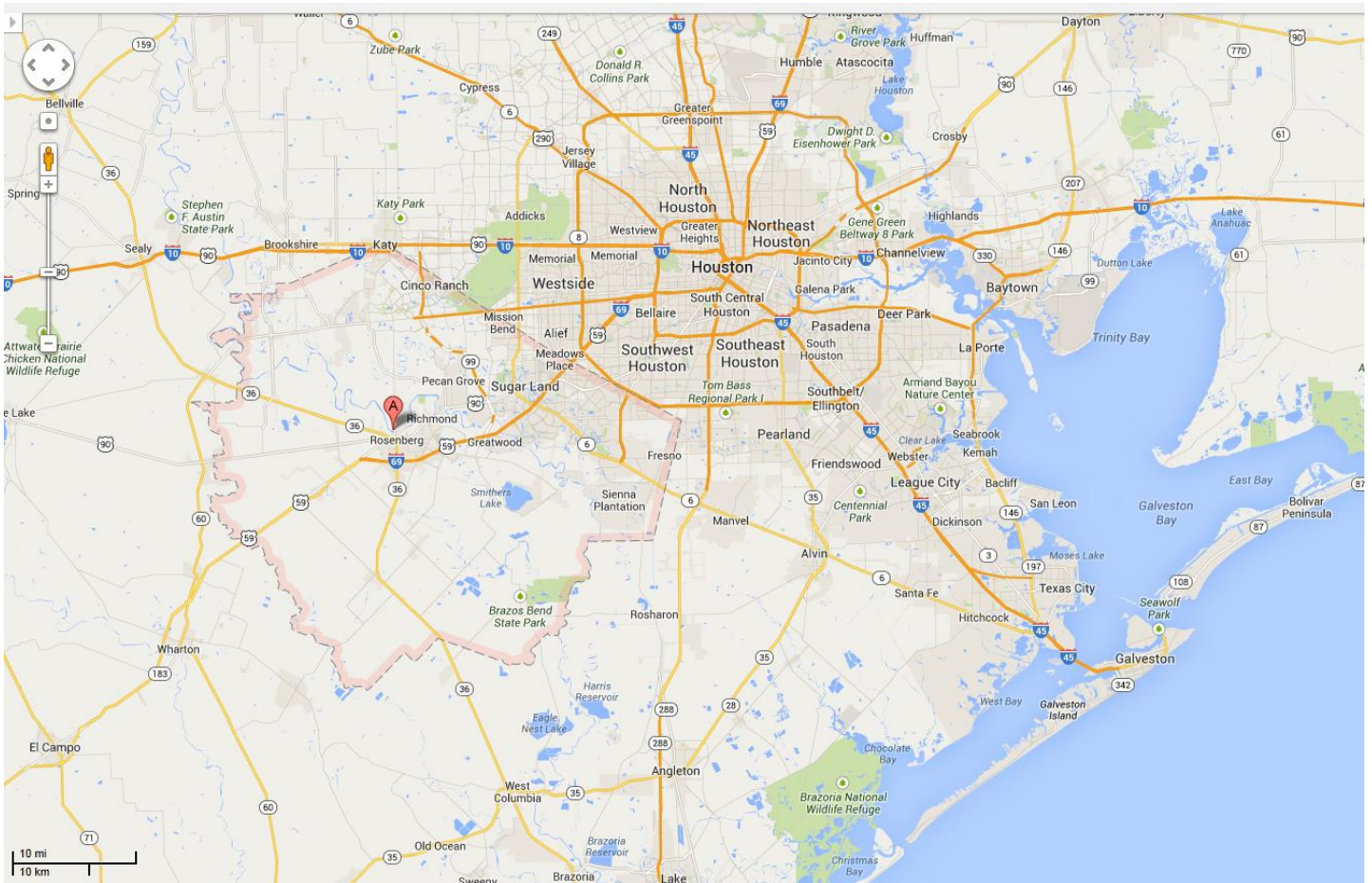
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Map 1: Fort Bend County (shaded) is located in southeast Texas.

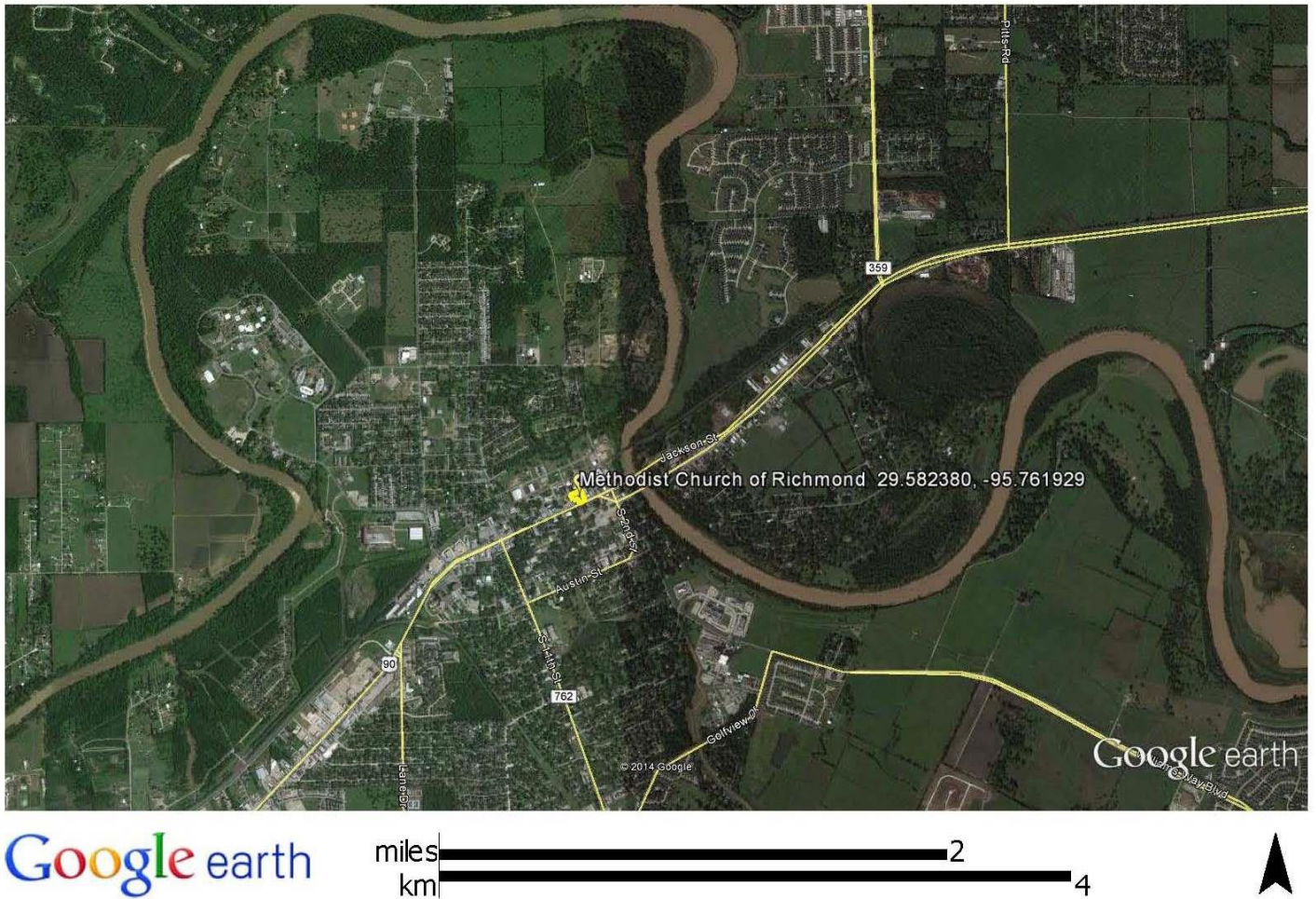


Map 2: Richmond is located near the center of Fort Bend County, approximately 30 miles southwest of downtown Houston (Harris County).



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Map 3: Scaled Google Earth map depicts locational coordinates for the nominated property within the larger city of Richmond.



Methodist Church of Richmond, Richmond, Fort Bend County, Texas

Map 4: Scaled Google Earth map depicts locational coordinates and boundary for the nominated property.

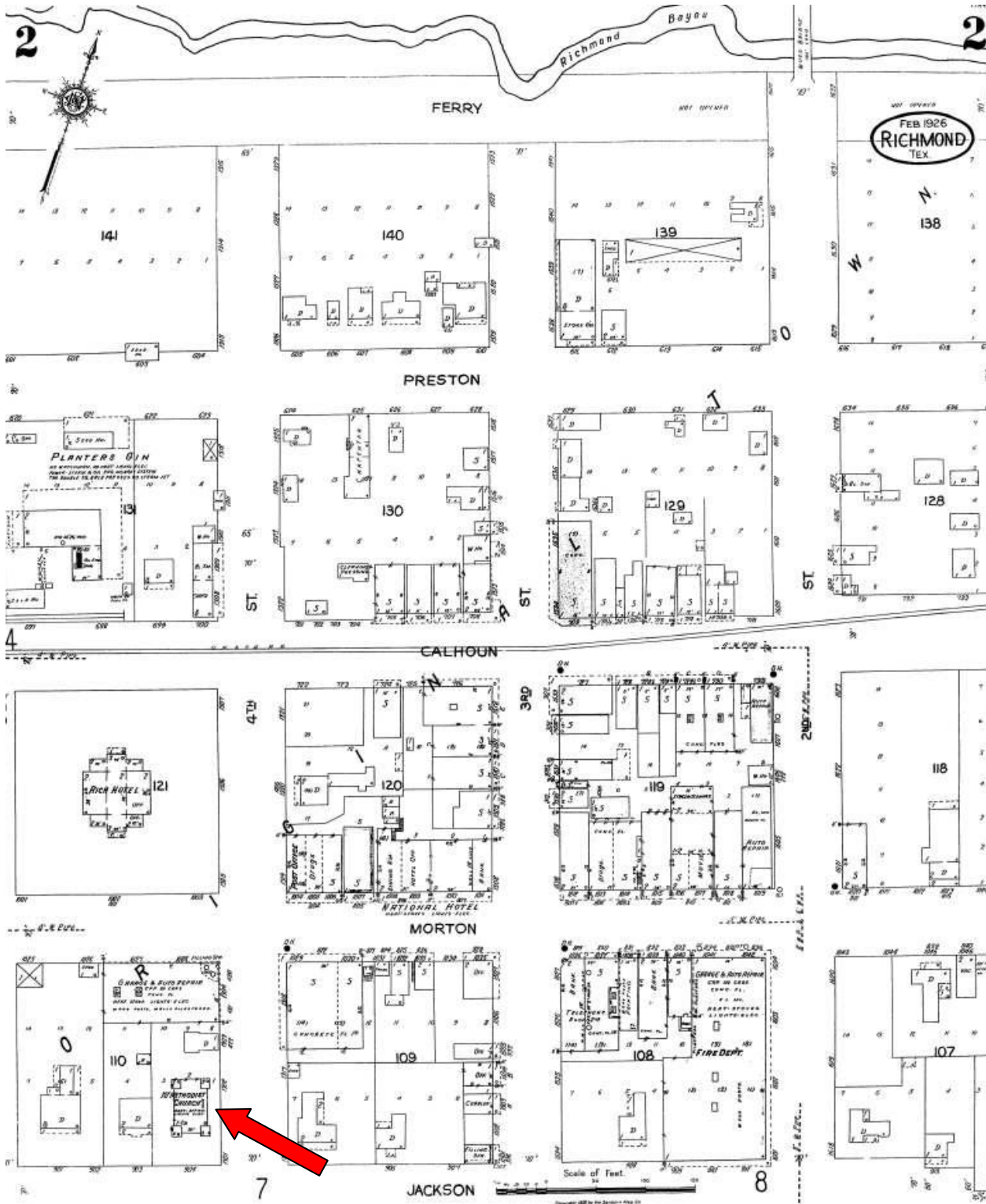


Google earth



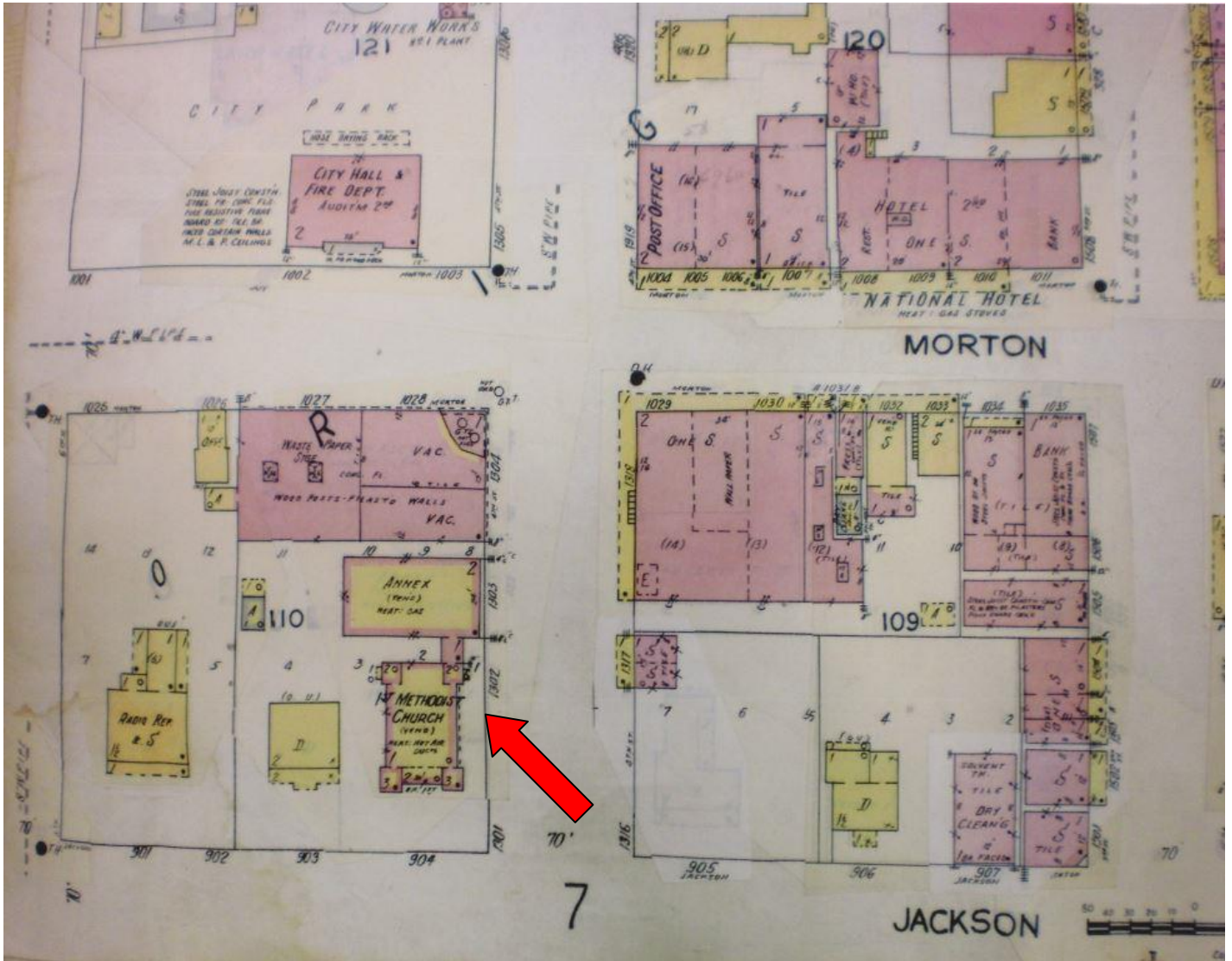
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Map 5: 1926 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. Arrow denotes property location.



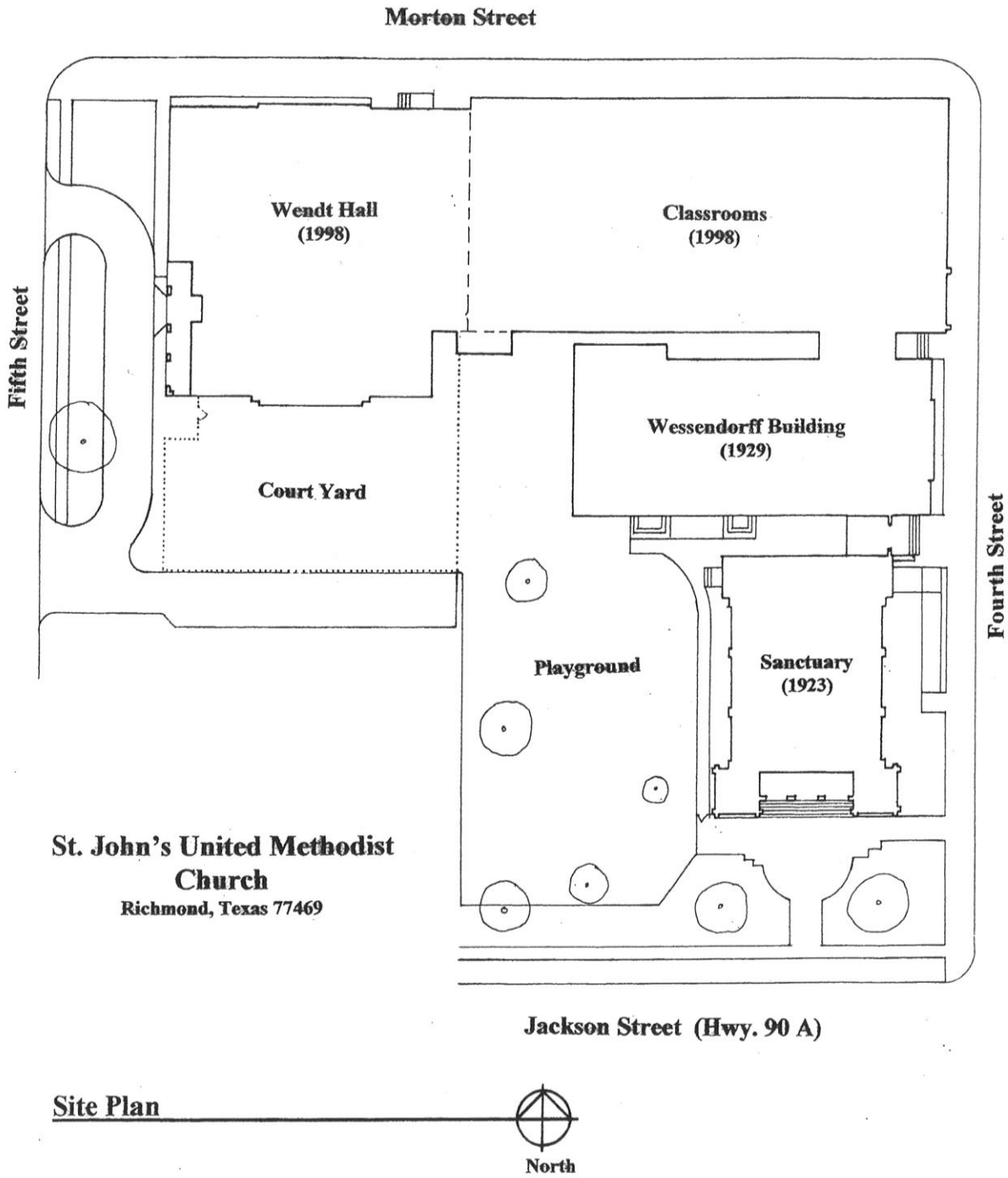
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Map 6: 1942 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, detail. Arrow denotes property location.



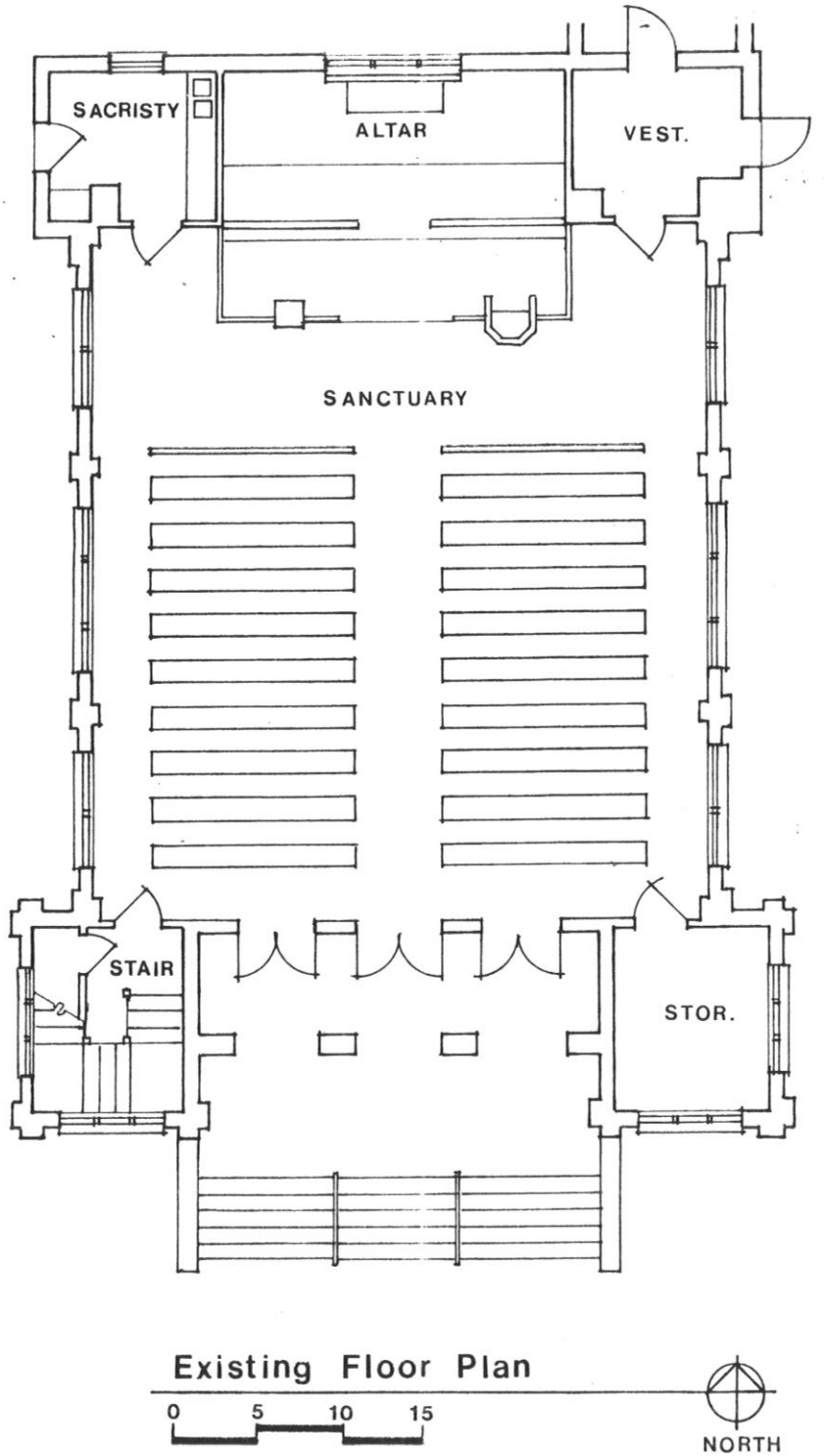
Methodist Church of Richmond, Richmond, Fort Bend County, Texas

Figure 1: Current site plan of the nominated property. No scale.



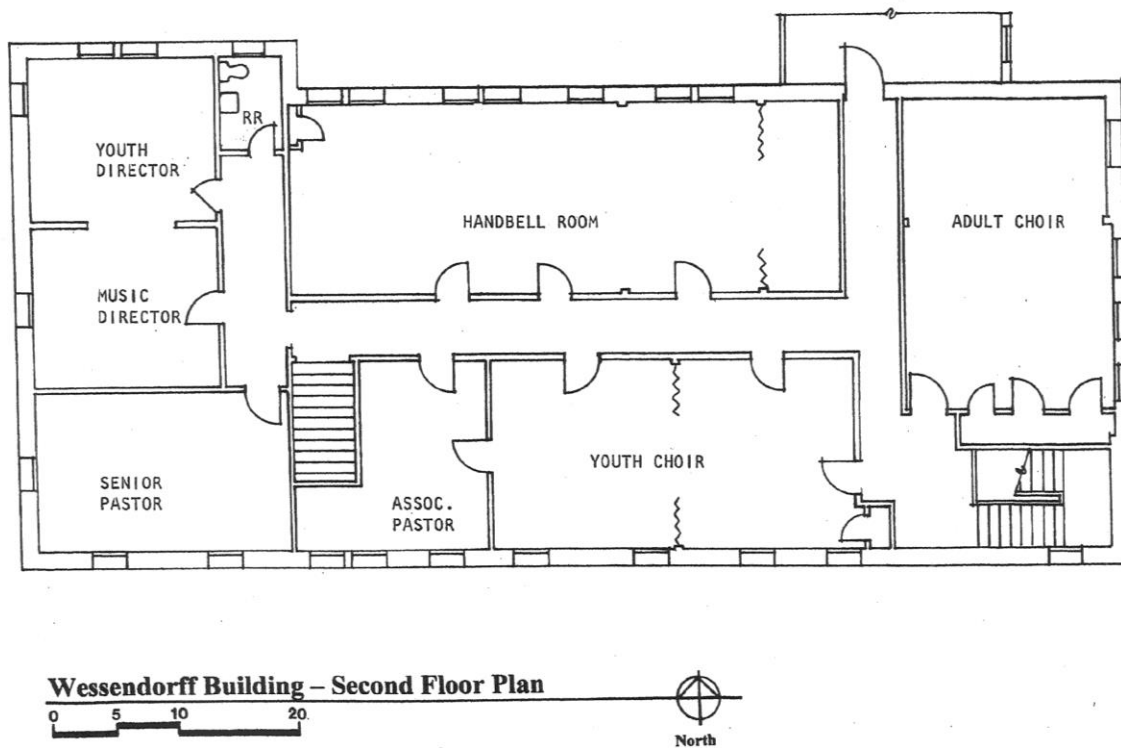
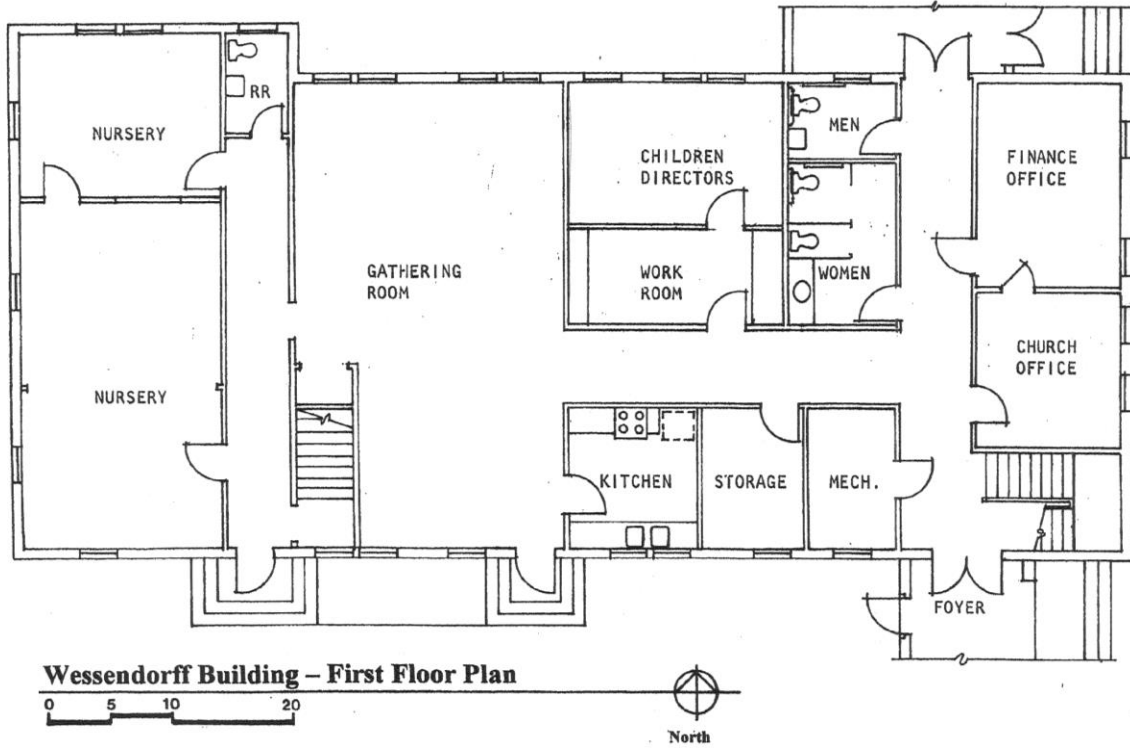
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Figure 2: Current interior plan of the 1922 Sanctuary.



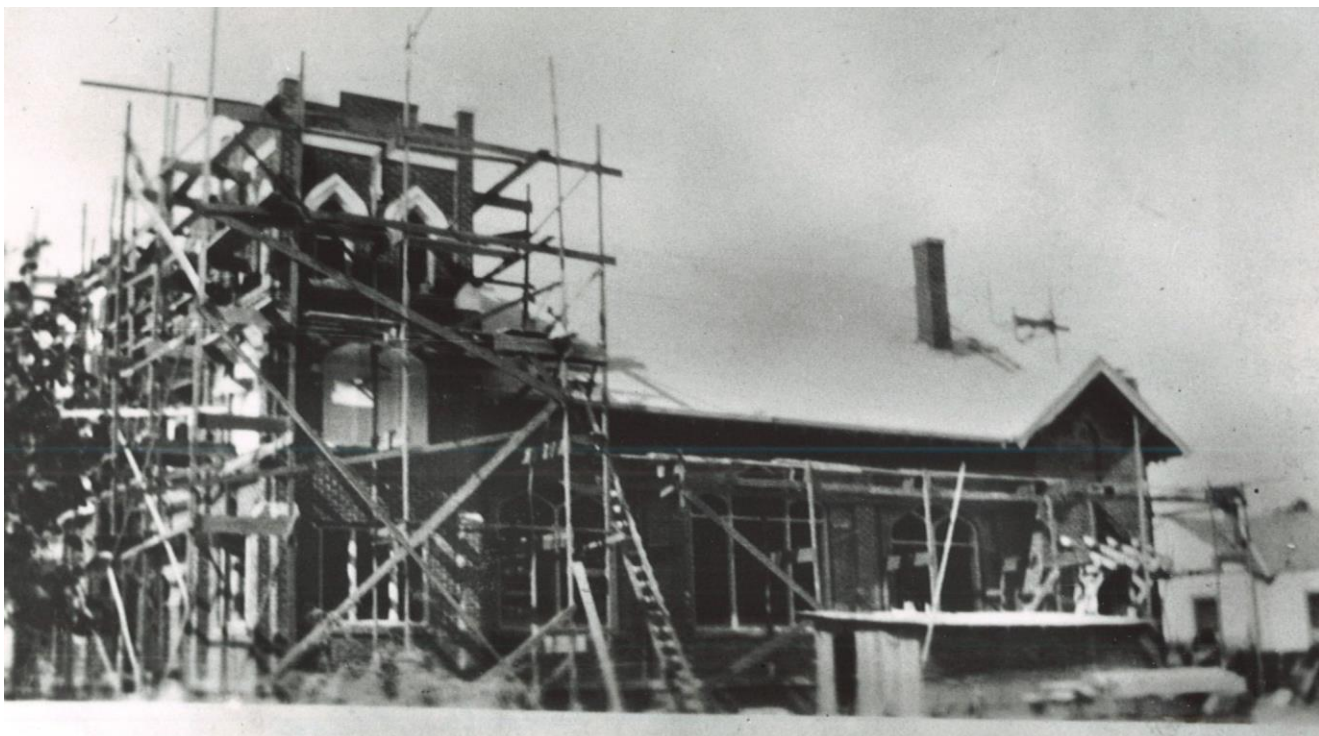
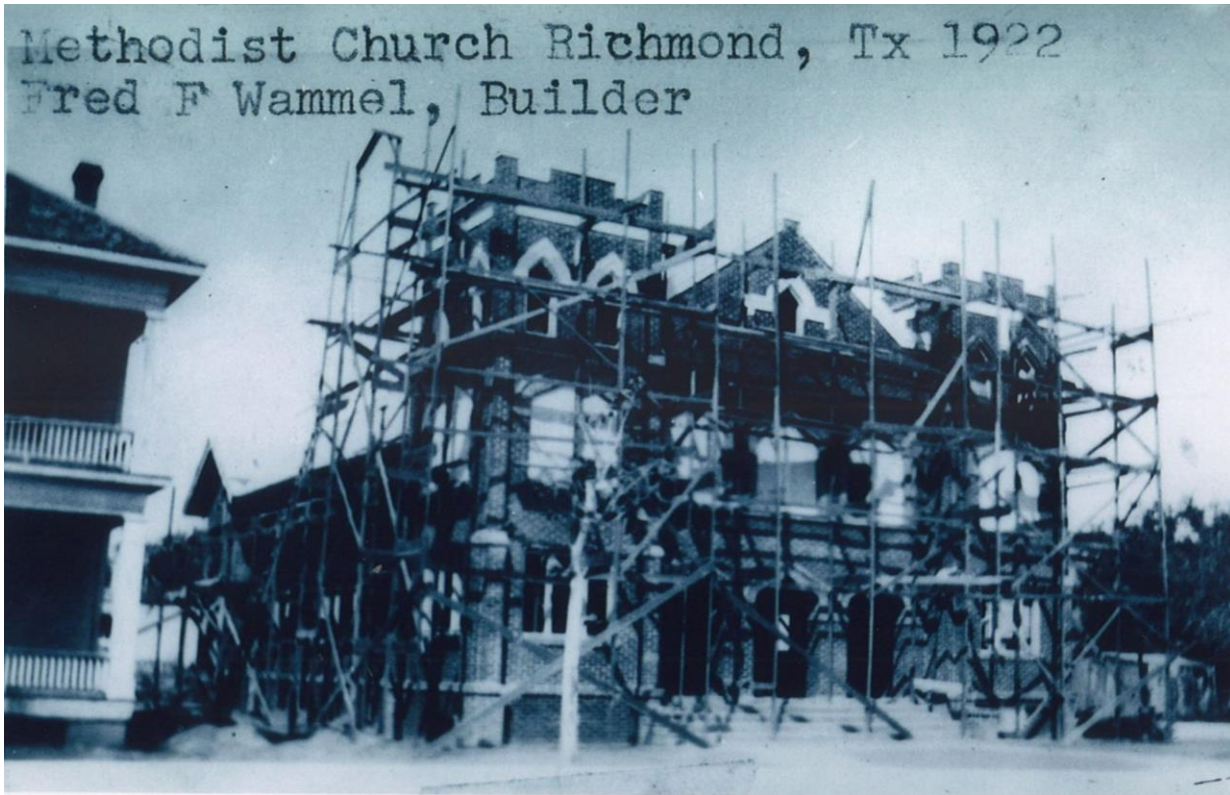
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Figure 3: Current interior plan of the Wessendorff Educational Building.



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Figures 4 and 5: Historic photos of the 1922 sanctuary under construction.



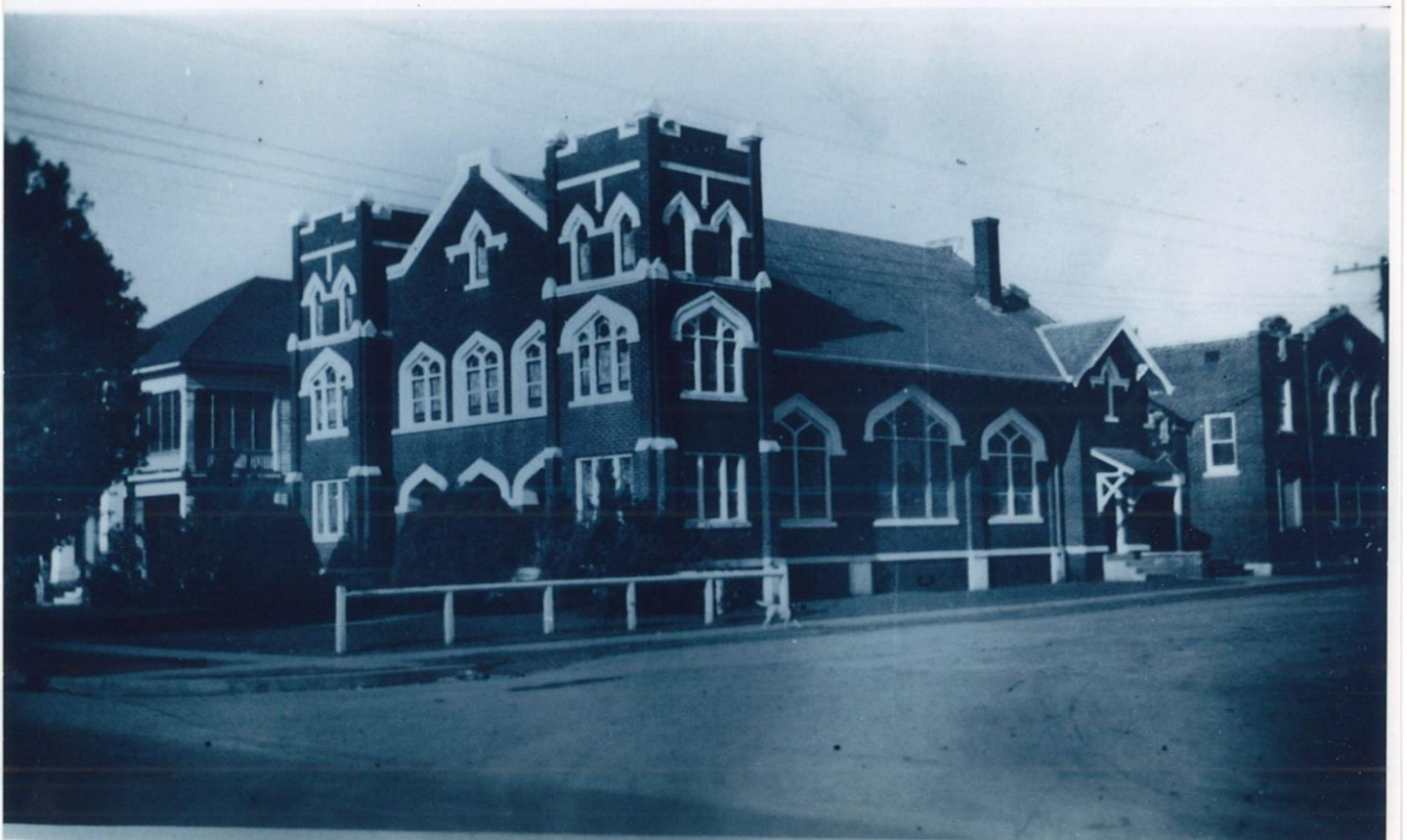
Methodist Church of Richmond, Richmond, Fort Bend County, Texas

Figure 6: The nominated property shortly after completion, c. 1920s. Camera facing approximately northwest.



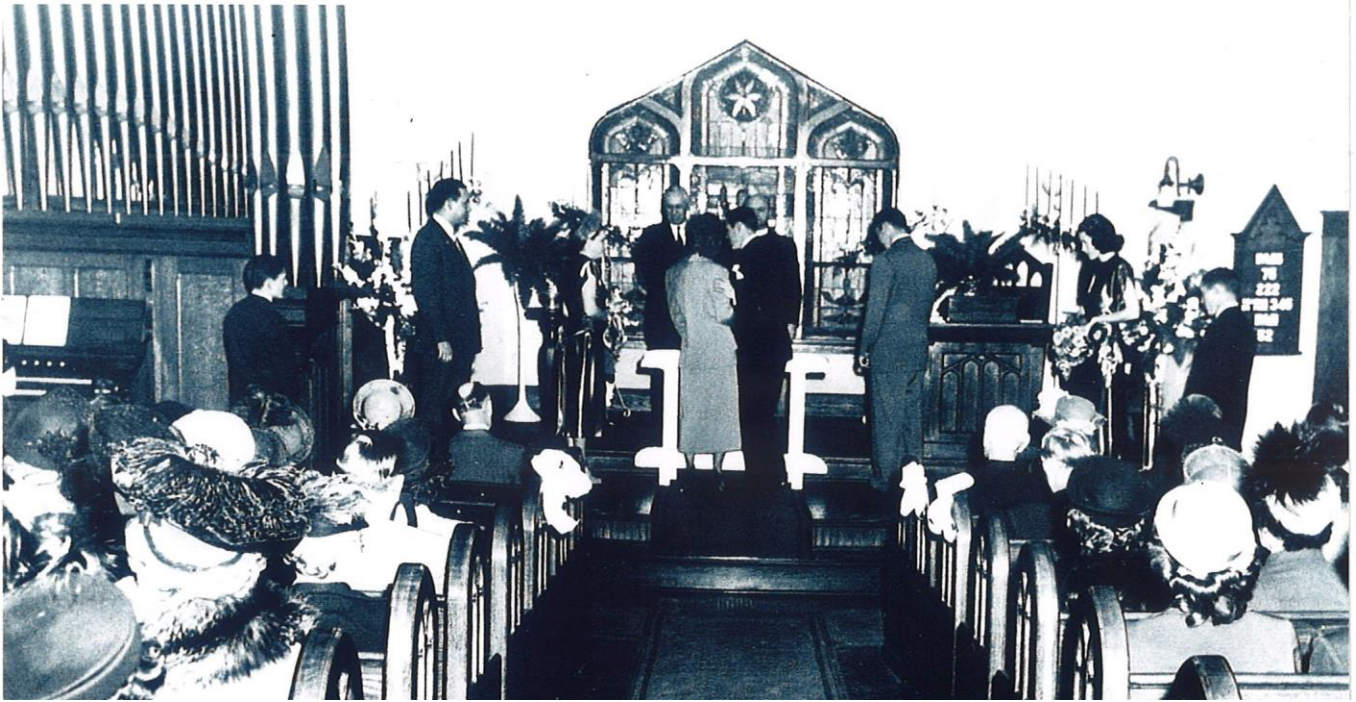
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Figure 7: The nominated property, c. 1942. Camera facing approximately northwest.



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Figures 8 and 9: Interior view of the sanctuary, facing north towards the altar, c. 1948 (top) and 1962 (bottom).





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Sunday School
9:45





