

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

1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Simpson Memorial Methodist Church
Other name/site number: Simpson United Methodist Church (current)
Name of related multiple property listing: Historic Resources of East Austin

2. Location

Street & number: 1701 E. 12th Street
City or town: Austin State: Texas County: Travis
Not for publication: [] Vicinity: []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 [x] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria.

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

Applicable National Register Criteria: [x] A [] B [] C [] D

Signature of certifying official / Title: Mark Wolfe, State Historic Preservation Officer
Date: 7/8/15
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: _____

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

Simpson Memorial Methodist Church, Austin, Travis 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 = church

Current Functions: RELIGION/religious facility = church

7. Description

Architectural Classification: Late 19th and 20th Century Revivals: Colonial Revival

Principal Exterior Materials: Brick

Narrative Description (see continuation sheets 7-6 through 7-8)

Simpson Memorial Methodist Church, Austin, Travis County, Texas

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

<input checked="" 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 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: Social History; Ethnic History (Black)

Period of Significance: 1952 - 1965

Significant Dates: N/A

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

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

Architect/Builder: Niggli & Gustafson

Narrative Statement of Significance (see continuation sheets 8-9 through 8-17)

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography (see continuation sheet 9-18)

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: *Austin History Center*

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

Simpson Memorial Methodist Church, Austin, Travis County, Texas

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property: less than 1 acre

Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: N/A

1. Latitude: 30.273197° Longitude: -97.721691°

Verbal Boundary Description: The nominated property is bound on the north by E. 12th Street, on the west by Leona Street, and on the south by a service alley. The eastern boundary is formed by an asphalt parking lot. The legal description of this property is as follows:

Lot A-B, Block 13-14, Outlot 57, Division B, Horton C Q Subdivide

The Travis County Appraisal District identifies this property with ID #197339.

Boundary Justification: Boundaries encompass all property historically associated with the nominated resource.

11. Form Prepared By

Name/title: Barbara Daniels, Historian
Organization: Simpson United Methodist Church
Address: P.O. Box 16218
City or Town: Austin State: Texas Zip Code: 78761
Email: flemcd@gmail.com
Telephone: 512-929-3553
Date: December 2014

Additional Documentation

Maps (see continuation sheet Map-19 through Map-20)

Additional items (see continuation sheets Figure-21 through Figure-28)

Photographs (see Photo Log on page 5 and continuation sheets Photo-29 through Photo-38)

Simpson Memorial Methodist Church, Austin, Travis County, Texas

Photographs

Name of Property: Simpson Memorial Methodist Church (now Simpson United Methodist Church)
City or Vicinity: Austin
County, State: Travis County, Texas
Photographer: Carlyn Hammons, THC Staff
Date Photographed: March 2015
Number of Photo(s): 10

The following images accompany this nomination document. For reference, these images are also included at the end of this document starting with page 29.

TX_Simpson Memorial Methodist Church_0001: Northwest oblique.

TX_Simpson Memorial Methodist Church_0002: Northeast oblique.

TX_Simpson Memorial Methodist Church_0003: Southeast oblique (partial).

TX_Simpson Memorial Methodist Church_0004: South elevation, camera facing approximately west-northwest.

TX_Simpson Memorial Methodist Church_0005: West elevation (partial), camera facing approximately south.

TX_Simpson Memorial Methodist Church_0006: Detail of front (north) entry.

TX_Simpson Memorial Methodist Church_0007: Interior of sanctuary. Camera facing south.

TX_Simpson Memorial Methodist Church_0008: Interior of sanctuary towards balcony. Camera facing north.

TX_Simpson Memorial Methodist Church_0009: Interior view of sanctuary, as seen from the balcony. Camera facing approximately southeast.

TX_Simpson Memorial Methodist Church_0010: Interior view of the Fellowship Hall, formerly the "basement tabernacle." Camera facing approximately southwest.

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.

Simpson Memorial Methodist Church, Austin, Travis County, Texas

Narrative Description

The historic Simpson Memorial Methodist Church (currently known as Simpson United Methodist Church) was built in 1952 in a Colonial Revival architectural style. Designed by the Austin-based architectural firm of Niggli & Gustafson, the gable roofed building is rectangular in plan with a rear ell on the southern end. This rear ell sits on top of a raised basement that was completed in 1925 and served as the congregation's primary church facility for over a quarter-century. The exterior of the church is clad in traditional red brick with painted white trim. Taken together with the prominent gable-front entry portico and the tall steeple, the effect is reminiscent of a colonial New England meeting house.

General Setting

Simpson United Methodist Church is located on E. 12th Street, a heavily traveled east-west thoroughfare, approximately .8 miles east of Interstate -35 and 1.5 miles west of Airport Boulevard. East 12th Street is primarily small-scale commercial in nature with some residences, but the immediate surrounding neighborhood is residential. The church occupies a small, rectangular lot at the southeast corner of E. 12th and Leona streets. The church's primary entrance faces north to E. 12th Street. A concrete sidewalk surrounds the lawn on the west and north sides. A central concrete walkway, enclosed by two low shrubbery plants, leads to five concrete steps and a concrete porch extending across the front of the church at the primary entrance. A brick walkway leads to this central sidewalk from the parking lot on the east. A black and white metal church directory sits at a northwest angle, announcing church programs and events. An Official Texas Historical Marker, awarded to the church by the Texas Historical Commission in 1982, sits at the northwest side of the lawn facing 12th Street.

Landscaping is limited to a grassy lawn established on all sides of the church except for the rear, which is bordered by a narrow, paved alley. On the other side of the alley is a narrow, rectangular, grassy lot. This lot is also church property, and once held a playground, but now serves as overflow parking space when needed. The church's paved parking lot sits to the east of the church and also provides parking for the neighboring one-story, 1980s-era commercial strip building that houses church offices and lease space. This non-historic-age building is not included in the boundaries of the nominated property.

Exterior

The primary elevation, which faces north, is dominated by a gabled portico supported by four simple box columns. The gable is sheathed in vertical wood siding and features cornice returns and a central, half-circle louvered ventilation window. The central entry consists of multi-paneled wood double doors topped by a rectangular, fixed transom. The entry is surrounded by Classical trim, including engaged pilasters supporting a prominent triangular pediment. Two 1/1 sash windows, placed one above the other, are positioned on each side of the doors. These windows replaced the earlier multi-paned ones in the late 1980s; they fill the original openings. The portico is reached by a full-width set of five concrete steps, or by an accessible ramp off the east end of the porch. The highest point of the building is an octagonal steeple and bell tower sitting on top of a rectangular, wood base. The tall steeple and bell tower can be seen from all directions.

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The east and west facades are five bays wide; the bays are separated by red brick pilasters. The northernmost bay holds a circular, multi-paned window above a rectangular blind window. The remaining bays each hold a single sash window atop a simple brick sill and topped by a milk glass transom. The 1/1 clear-glass windows replaced the original multi-paned ones in the late 1980s.

A rear ell sits slightly off-center at the southern end of the church. The bottom floor (raised basement) is the original 1925 tabernacle. Constructed of stone, this level of the building is now covered in a plaster. The top level (which corresponds to the main level of the church) is red brick with white wood trim and windows. The west elevation of the ell provides entry to the upper level via a short flight of stairs on the north end; access is through a single wood door. A single entry door also provides access to the lower level. This entry is centered in the west façade. The upper level holds five, regularly-spaced, 6/6 sash windows. The lower level holds two 1/1 sash windows. The east elevation of the ell is similar to that of the west. The south elevation of the ell is seven bays wide. Seven 6/6 windows are set in the upper level. Six 1/1 windows are set in the lower level; the central bay of the lower level does not contain an opening.

Interior

The interior of the church is designed with a traditional sanctuary that opens off the entry vestibule. A small area for seating and participation in sanctuary services is designed in the west vestibule behind four oak folding doors. A small room to the east of the vestibule is reserved for usher services. A center aisle with fourteen pew rows on each side leads to the altar and chancel. The pews, altar rail, newels, lectern, and pulpit furniture are oak. Red carpet covers the floor. Oak wainscoting is topped by white plaster walls and a white painted wood ceiling. Window surrounds are also oak. All furniture in the sanctuary nave is original, except six ceiling lights hanging by chains. The original schoolhouse-style lights have been replaced. A shallow balcony, defined by a solid low wall, spans the north end of the sanctuary. Access is provided by stairs in the northwest corner.

The nave is separated from the chancel by a low oak railing and three steps. Behind this railing is the altar, pulpit and lectern, with choir seating against the rear wall. Behind the altar is a solid oak dorsal panel with a scroll at the top and a large, round, stained glass window. The original design included a representation of Christ praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. This scene is associated with the scripture (Matt. 26-39). It is the same artistic representation that adorns the chancel of the historic Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia. However to the Simpson congregation's regret, the representation was lost due to a natural disaster in the 1980s. The stained glass artistic representation of "Cross and Crown" is the central focus today.

Single doors on either side of the chancel lead to an educational unit of eleven rooms, as well as a pastor's study, and ladies' and men's lounges, arranged along a long, U-shaped hallway that surrounds the chancel. Finishes in this space consist of wood floors, painted drywall, and wood doors. Although the functions of some of these spaces have changed over time, their physical configuration has been retained. Interior stairs on the west side lead down to what's now known as the Fellowship Hall (historically the 1925 tabernacle).

Originally designed as a traditional worship and education center, this space was converted to a Fellowship Hall in 1952. It is still functional and respected today. The cement floor is scored in square blocks. Four white cement columns support the roof. Walls consist of a mix of painted gypsum board and painted wood paneling. During renovation, air conditioning and florescent lighting were added. The southeast side of the former

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tabernacle was converted into a kitchenette. The floor and walls (including the door on the south side) were covered with tile.

Alterations and Integrity

The historic Simpson Memorial Methodist Church (currently known as Simpson United Methodist Church) possesses a good degree of integrity. Very little has changed since its completion in 1952. Changes that have been made are minor and do not negatively impact the historic character of the property. New windows were installed in the sanctuary. Although they do not exactly replicate the multi-pane design of originals, they do fill the original openings. A weather event necessitated replacing the original stained glass window above the altar. Changes in the configuration and finishes in the Fellowship Hall (former tabernacle) were mostly made during the historic period, though some are more recent. Therefore, while there is some impact on integrity of design and materials, the overall impact on integrity is minimal and the historic character of the building is intact and easily conveys its historic associations.

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Statement of Significance

Simpson Memorial Methodist Church (now known as Simpson United Methodist Church) is a historically African American church located in the historically segregated neighborhood of East Austin. Though the congregation dates from 1880, the nominated building dates from 1952; the rear portion of the building sits atop a basement that was completed in 1925. Throughout its history, and specifically during the period of significance at the height of the local civil rights movement, the church played a significant role in the development of Austin's black community. It served as an agent for social betterment, administered community development strategies, inspired political mobilization, cultivated leadership opportunities, and nurtured educational aspirations. At a time when public facilities were still segregated, the church provided a physical space, structured setting, and supportive environment for members to worship, socialize, organize, and engage in meaningful dialogue about the issues important to their community. They administered a variety of programs to empower the community to achieve social, political, and economic equality.

The historic Simpson Memorial Methodist Church is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion A in the areas of Social History and Ethnic Heritage. The period of significance begins in 1952, which corresponds with the completion of the building that stands today, and ends in 1965, the fifty-year threshold for National Register eligibility. Because the property derives its primary significance from its historical associations and not religious doctrine, it satisfactorily meets Criterion Consideration A for religious properties.

Documentation in Existing Historic Resources Survey

The City of Austin, in response to increased threats to historic properties on the city's east side, initiated a comprehensive historic resources survey of a large part of historic East Austin in the late 1990s. Completed by local preservation firm Hardy, Heck, Moore & Myers, Inc. in 2000, the survey resulted in an inventory of nearly 500 buildings, structures, objects and sites built in part of East Austin before 1955.¹ About twenty percent of these properties were considered to be "high preservation priorities" because they possessed high degrees of significance based upon their architectural value and/or historic associations.

The nominated property, currently known as Simpson United Methodist Church, was among those identified as a High Preservation Priority. The survey identified a total of seven churches constructed prior to 1955 in the project area; six of the seven—including Simpson—were categorized as high priority. Of these, only the Wesley United Methodist Church (at 1164 San Bernard) is currently listed in the National Register of Historic Places (listed in 1985).

¹ Project area boundaries followed East 14th Street on the north, Coletto Street on the east, Pennsylvania/Cotton/San Bernard/Rosewood/East 11th Street/Navasota and East 9th Street on the south, and San Marcos/Curve Street/IH-35 frontage on the west.

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Overview of Early Development in East Austin²

At the end of the Civil War, the area now known as East Austin lay outside the city's eastern boundary, along East Avenue, now IH-35. A few scattered farmsteads lay in the area immediately to the east of the city limits. After the Civil War, the city's population began to spread into this area, and it was subdivided for residential neighborhoods, including several small clusters of freedmen's communities such as Gregorytown, Masontown, and Robertson Hill. This development activity increased rapidly when the railroad arrived in 1871, with much of the activity centered on E. 11th and 12th Streets, the first streets established in the area. Although African Americans were among the first to settle there, European immigrant families also moved to East Austin in large numbers during the 1870s through the 1890s.

By the turn of the century, central East Austin was largely residential with scattered stores, churches and schools. Swedes, Germans, Italians, African Americans, and Hispanics settled largely in ethnic enclaves, although major thoroughfares like E. 11th and 12th Streets were racially mixed. The triangle of land between East 11th and 12th streets was fully developed and occupied almost exclusively by African Americans and many of the city's oldest African American institutions, including churches, schools and lodges were born here.

In the 1920s, however, the East Austin demographic composition changed. City officials had begun a program of "red-lining," a common strategy for racial segregation in southern cities that resulted in the almost complete segregation of African Americans to the east side of town. East Austin was already largely identified as an African American neighborhood, with two significant African American colleges and numerous churches, schools and businesses. When the red-lining process began in earnest in the 1920s, it reinforced the perception of the east side as largely African American, precipitated "white flight" from the racially mixed areas, and set the stage for the further development of the east side as the exclusive domain of African Americans, and later, Mexican Americans.

In 1927 the city of Austin commissioned the Dallas consulting firm of Koch and Fowler to develop a city plan for Austin, which for the first time would include a comprehensive zoning ordinance. Their report was published in 1928. Among the recommendations was a plan to reinforce segregation patterns. In the decade that followed, public schools and other public facilities such as parks and libraries for African Americans were relocated to the east side of Austin, city utilities were denied to African American enclaves elsewhere in the city, and deed restrictions prevented minorities from buying property in most other neighborhoods in the city.

Although some white owners continued to live in their family homes, particularly in the Swedish Hill area, city planning efforts to remove African Americans to East Austin from the central city, and a nationwide intensification of racial prejudice, led to the area's identification as an African American neighborhood. By the 1930s, many Hispanic families had also moved into the area (in areas farther south of E. 11th) for many of the same reasons. By 1950, East Austin was largely identified as a "minority" community populated by African American and Hispanic families, a demographic trend that persisted throughout the remainder of the twentieth

² This subsection is derived from the Historic Context developed for the *Historic Resources Survey of East Austin*, prepared by Hardy, Heck, Moore & Myers, Inc. for the City of Austin, December 2000. On file with the Texas Historical Commission. "East Austin" is defined by the boundaries described in Footnote 1. For a fuller account of East Austin development through the mid twentieth century, refer to the *Historic Resources of East Austin Multiple Resource Area* documentation form (1985), on file at both the National Park Service and the Texas Historical Commission.

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century. In the early twenty-first century, East Austin has become demographically closer to the kind of integrated community that it was in its early developmental years as the area is attracting more and more people who wish to live in close proximity to Austin's urban core.

Simpson Mission Methodist Episcopal Church, c. 1880³

Simpson Mission Methodist Episcopal Church was founded to meet the religious and educational needs of the Gregorytown community in 1880. One of Austin's earliest African American residential sections established by freedmen shortly after Emancipation, Gregorytown was an area located in a triangle between East 11th Street, Rosewood Avenue, and Chicon Street.

In 1879, several members of the Wesley Chapel Methodist Episcopal Church, South, who had settled in Gregorytown were concerned about the safety of neighborhood children, who had to travel to 9th and Neches for Sunday school classes. This challenging route took them through hilly, sparsely populated terrain. There were concerns for their safety on a daily basis. As a result, three of the Wesley church members organized a Sunday school for children of Gregorytown. It was set up in a two-room school, located where the main building of Blackshear Elementary school stands today.⁴ Soon, adults attended Sunday school classes at the small school with the children and they proceeded to organize as the Simpson Mission Methodist Episcopal Church, named in honor of Bishop Matthew Simpson, a pioneer Methodist leader who was also an active political negotiator, an abolitionist, and a noted orator.

Few details of the description of the Simpson church building at Gregorytown are available. However, it is believed that a small, wooden, traditionally designed church was built near the corner of Concho and Gregory Streets. The Simpson congregation worshiped there for 41 years, under the leadership of a number of pastors. Church members dedicated themselves to evangelism, education, mission work, and fellowship as a way to provide support to community members living in a segregated society. Simpson's membership continued to grow with progress in the community, and they began to look for a new, larger home.

Relocating to E. 12th Street

On July 21, 1921, the trustees purchased three lots of the Charleston Q. Horton Estate in the J. H. Patterson Subdivision at 12th and Leona Streets, approximately six blocks north of the church's original location. Reportedly, the congregation wanted to take advantage of the busy E. 12th Street thoroughfare, which could help to establish the church as a focal point in a growing business district. According to oral tradition, the church members saved the bell from the old wooden church; it would ultimately be placed in the new building's tower, where it remains today. They also brought the piano from the Gregorytown church. This is the same piano currently in the Fellowship Hall (formerly the Old Tabernacle).

³ The remainder of this narrative is based largely upon the archival research conducted by church historian Barbara Daniels and published in her 2008 book *Testimony of Faith: A History of Simpson United Methodist Church*. A copy of the book is on file at the Texas Historical Commission.

⁴ Blackshear is located at E. 11th and Chicon.

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The congregation relocated without the benefit of a permanent structure, and so they worshipped under a tent, until a facility could be built. They immediately began work on a rock tabernacle, which was to serve as a temporary worship and education facility until funds for a permanent structure could be secured. Trustee Chair Garfield Wells led the congregation through construction of the tabernacle. Most of the community effort occurred at night, at the end of a hard day's work, without adequate lighting or blueprints. The men of the congregation were responsible for the construction—among them were several ex-slaves and their later family generations, as well as Peter Nesby, a member of the workforce that worked on the construction of the State Capitol of Texas—and the women prepared and brought food. The rock for construction was obtained from a nearby quarry on Sabine Street. The tabernacle (often referred to as the tabernacle "basement" because it was sunk about three feet below grade, and was always intended to serve as the basement of a much larger building) was complete by 1925. This is the same facility that now functions as the church's Fellowship Hall.

The facility was finished just in time to serve a growing membership. The *1925-26 Church Register* recorded a membership of 507. The church quickly won respect from the community and became a favorite among community children. Mrs. Lula Adkins was invited to operate a kindergarten at the church, where many children learned to read and write. Continuing education was enhanced by Luther Strait, Sunday school superintendent, through educational programs for children at Sunday school and Vacation Bible School, which included reading comprehension and art classes. The church worked hard to instill an educational ethic in its young members and encouraged the pursuit of higher education.

With a modest building for worship and education in place, the congregation focused next on providing housing for the pastor. On July 28, 1925, negotiations were made for a new parsonage at 1703 East 12th Street on the lot next to the tabernacle. A large house, the parsonage was constructed of large white wooden siding with special brick trimming by the firm of Mosley and Lott. The parsonage consisted of a living room, dining room, bedrooms, bath, fireplace, and a rear enclosure leisure room. The church's pastoral family occupied it until the mid-sixties. The house no longer stands.

Another important element provided by the church in the 1920s was a playground. Simpson church developed a recreational space for the community for African American families located in the lot immediately south of the tabernacle. The playground was furnished and designed by members of the church and consisted of a "see-saw," a big sand pile, swings, and slides, as well as basketball, softball, and croquet courts. Reverend F. J. Hutchinson, a retired Methodist minister, supervised the playground. He used a small classroom on the southwest side of the tabernacle for equipment checkout and a concession stand. The playground facility filled an important recreational and social need in the community, particularly for black youth. The City of Austin didn't establish a recreational facility for African Americans until 1930, and it was several years before the park (Rosewood Park, four blocks east of the church) was fully developed. Thus, the church continued to reach out and provide to the community accommodations and privileges that were not provided by the City.

In 1939 the church became Simpson Methodist Church following the unification of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the Methodist Protestant Church. Under this reorganization, all black Methodist Episcopal Churches across the nation were placed under the Central Jurisdiction, which separated it racially from the white jurisdictions, which were based upon geographical

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regions.⁵ Throughout this period, the Simpson church continued to improve its mission services and raise money for expanded church facilities. Efforts were slow during the Great Depression and years of economic recovery, but gradually improved post-World War II.

By the time the Simpson church relocated to its new E. 12th location in the mid-1920s, the East Austin neighborhood's transformation to a predominantly African American neighborhood was almost complete. The city's adoption of the 1928 Koch and Fowler plan reinforced segregated patterns. By 1940, nearly 20,000 African Americans called Austin home; almost all of them lived in East Austin or Clarksville. Despite economic, political, and social inequities, however, seventy-five percent of Austin's African American families owned their own homes in 1940; half owned cars.⁶

Building Simpson Memorial Methodist Church, 1952

By the time the congregation began making plans to erect a larger, more permanent building in the mid-1940s, the Simpson church occupied a central place in a thriving business and residential community of residents, businesses, entertainment, churches and schools. Two African American institutes of higher learning—both established in the mid-19th century—were located nearby. Huston College was six blocks east, while Tillotson College was six blocks south. (These two institutions merged in 1952.) The city's only African American high school (Anderson) and junior high school (Kealing) were located two blocks south of the church. On surrounding blocks were the popular Harlem Theater, Yates Drug Store, a barber shop, night clubs, a Harlem and Deluxe Cab Company, a beauty salon, and a service station.

According to an article in the July 24, 1947, issue of the *Austin Statesman*, plans for a new church facility got underway in April 1944. The estimated cost of the building was \$54,000. However, in mid-1947, less than half of that amount had been secured “through grants, donations and loans.” To help make up for the shortfall, the paper reported, the church's youth were collecting dimes, each of which would help purchase a structural clay tile for the new building. Reverend W. W. Baker cited the poor conditions of the tabernacle basement as one of the congregation's motivating factors for a new building, saying that “the failure to build a church with dignity has cost us the loss of effective services to our people in the past. We feel that the Methodist churches of Austin will be proud of the new Simpson, and that the Negro race will feel it a compliment.” He envisioned a new facility that would “benefit his people and through producing better citizens, a benefit to the entire city.” One month later, the paper reported that only an additional \$800 had been raised, but that Baker and trustees had met with the architects to continue work.

In cooperation with the Board of Home Missions and Church Extension of the Methodist Church, the local church board selected Austin-based architectural firm Niggli & Gustafson to design their new church facility. The architects began the plans in 1946, but construction did not begin until 1952. Utilizing the old tabernacle as the foundation for the church, the design included a traditional red brick sanctuary, with an educational unit of eleven rooms, a pastor's study, kitchen, and ladies' and men's lounges. Each detail was calculated and carefully

⁵ The significance of this rigidly segregated church structure is profound, but a full exploration is beyond the scope of this nomination. For more information, see Peter C. Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race: 1930 – 1975* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004).

⁶ Historic Resources Survey of East Austin, 70.

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considered by the congregation, the conference, local architects, as well as E. J. Hammond of the Board of Missions and Church Extension of the Methodist Church in Atlanta, Georgia. In November 1952, a cornerstone was laid. The W. Gremillin Construction Company, based in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, completed the construction. When the Simpson congregation moved into the new building, the church's name changed to Simpson Memorial Methodist Church.

E. J. Hammond's office had the task to secure the remaining funds for this project, which was a loan. Simpson not only made the monthly payments on the new edifice but, within a few months of moving into the new building, the Board of Home Missions and Church Extension of the Methodist Church granted Rev. Wattlely's request to make advance payments, stating "There is no objection to a church making payments in advance and thereby cut down on interest payments. I have known Simpson Church for more than twenty years and rejoice in the advance which has been taken in putting a sanctuary on those basement walls." In 1956, the mortgage was burned, and the church became debt-free.

It is unclear how and why the congregation chose the Colonial Revival style for their new church. They may have been influenced by popular trends. There was resurgence in post-World War II America of the iconic style that reflected country, tradition and stability. Churches designed in the Colonial Revival style proliferated.⁷ In a neighborhood with few architect-designed buildings, the Simpson Memorial Methodist Church, constructed on a busy neighborhood thoroughfare, embodied a quiet and classical dignity that reflected its importance to both its congregation and its larger community.

Activities during the Period of Significance (1952-1965)

The new Simpson Memorial Methodist Church was erected during a period of momentous change, not just in Austin, but across America. During the 13-year period of significance, Austin's schools, parks, and libraries were eventually integrated. Activists organized sit-ins at lunch counters, stand-ins at movie theaters, and marched for equal access to all public facilities. In addition to meeting the spiritual needs of the congregation during this tumultuous time, the church remained committed to public outreach and dedicated itself to strengthening the community's ability to achieve educational, civic, social, and economic equality. The spacious new building, complete with classroom facilities and a large Fellowship Hall, provided a safe physical space and supportive environment to nurture these aspirations. The church cultivated potential leaders by providing a platform from which they could hone their leadership and public speaking skills. It fostered discussions of community concerns and issues and provided economic assistance and charitable donations through the work of missionary groups and benevolent programs. It also continued to invest in the development of black youth by providing social and recreational activities and by promoting the importance of education and providing scholarships for higher education.

Shortly after the congregation got settled in the new church facility, the Education Department expanded its program to an Education Extension Division. This nontraditional, mobile Christian education study program was the first known in the East Austin community, and possibly, the first of its kind in the city of Austin. The popular study was more familiar known as the Home Department Extension Division. The classes were

⁷ Louis P. Nelson, "Placing the Sacred: Reflections on Contemporary American Church Architecture," *Colloquium: Journal of the Yale Institute for Sacred Music* vol 4 (Autumn, 2007): 69-78.

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arranged for a Tuesday evening study in a private home of a volunteer host. The classes were intended for those in spiritual need, no matter if they were church members or not. These classes became so popular, they were arranged according to geographical areas. The studies created a pleasant environment in the neighborhoods, with neighbors attending. Joint classes were held with all geographical units coming together to share information, evaluate progress, identify education and social needs, engage in fellowship, and make connections as engaged citizens of Austin. There was no violence, injuries, property damage, or improper behavior reported in the host neighborhoods. Simpson's Home Department provided assistance to the citizens of East Austin, and by doing so, helped to maintain a growing, developing, appealing city. The Home Department ended in 1962.

Another popular program was the organization called Methodist Youth Fellowship (MYF). The MYF encouraged youth to strive for education, to be the best that they could be in spite of difficulties like generations before. MYF's regular meetings were on Sunday afternoons. Young people got together with their sponsors, for mentoring, Christian discipleship, educational advice, and fellowship. Many of the leaders of this group were affiliated with nearby Huston-Tillotson College. One of these youths was the future Dr. June Harden Brewer (1925-2010). Her family were long-time members of Simpson, and she actively participated in the MYF, continuing as one of the teachers in the Education Department later. She went on graduate from Tillotson College before earning a master degree from Brown University. She later returned to Austin, becoming one of the first five African American women to be admitted to the University of Texas' graduate school. She continued to play an active role in the Simpson church in various capacities.

Another event that sponsored youth for development was the "Les Hirondelles Social Club" that organized in 1956 to assist in the cultural development of young people, both civically and socially. Their greatest interest was in teenagers and young adults. A "Debutante Ball" was held during the summer at which time the Honorees of the Club were presented. This special introduction was made to encourage youth and to aid them as they made the transition to a civic society. In addition, church events were a principal source to get children and youth introduced to a civic and social environment in community events to help their development, which leads to good citizenship in our society. One particular day, on March 29, 1953, the Women's Day Program hosted a panel discussion on youth and the church. The panel discussion included several parents and youth.

The week-long District Christian Education Institutes of the 1950s also provided an important development opportunity for children and teens, allowing them to interact with others in the conference for Christian education, recreation, and worship. As there were limited public accommodations for blacks at that time, members of the host church and their friends offered their homes to a large number district-wide. Lodging for the week was provided in private homes so no one was without a place to stay. District Christian Education Institutes helped to prepare future generations to advance the programs of the Methodist church, and learn the importance of community engagement, not only within the Methodist Church, but humanity at large.

Scholarship programs were an important way for Simpson to assist in the development of its youth, as well. Simpson's Methodist Men's mission program established a scholarship program for academic achieving students in the early 1960s. Also, the Simpson Music Academy provided scholarships to students attending Huston-Tillotson College and other institutions.

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Simpson church always enjoyed a close relationship with Huston-Tillotson College.⁸ Many of the church's members were professors or students and collaborated with the church on a variety of programs, particularly music-based programs, giving students confidence to excel in music and other performing arts and opening up additional educational opportunities. As President of Huston-Tillotson College and a member of Simpson Memorial Methodist Church, Dr. J. J. Seabrook established a special annual Huston-Tillotson College Day at Simpson Church in 1955.⁹ The annual event is held at Simpson in October or November. The college president, students, faculty and friends are in charge of the worship service. Simpson presents the president with a scholarship from the congregation and hosts a dinner in Simpson's Fellowship Hall.

The college's Alpha Kappa Zeta chapter of the Zeta Phi Beta sorority often hosted events at Simpson church in the 1950s, including programs associated with Finer Womanhood Week during which the sorority honored local women for various achievements in the areas of business, education, and community service. The Simpson facilities were also used by the Peoples Business College for graduation ceremonies and other programs.

During the turmoil of the civil rights movement, Simpson was an instrument for the teaching of non-violence and peaceful demonstrations. One example took place on October 19, 1963. Simpson's Methodist Youth Fellowship hosted the MYF of Wesley Chapel and St. Peter's Methodist Church and sponsored a motorcade through the city of Austin before their special program at Simpson that evening. Mr. LaSalle Barnett (Simpson member and NAACP representative), Dr. J. J. Seabrook and other community members listened to the teenagers' concerns. Civil rights, school issues, and protest marches were concerns of these teenagers.

The African American church was typically the best fitting and accommodating stage for public speaking and assembly for discussions about community concerns and human rights issues. Generally, issues of civil rights and American ideals were brought to the church before discussions with the general public or city administration officials. Such issues were brought before the congregation of Simpson Memorial Methodist church regularly. Simpson was an accommodating facility for community needs. In addition, Simpson provided meeting space for various community organizations, including the Austin branch of the NAACP, which held regular meetings at the church. The Austin branch of the NAACP hosted a memorial service for Dr. Martin Luther King on April 4, 1969, at Simpson, one year after his death.

Simpson's pastors were a source of counseling during the civil rights movement. Many citizens were seeking direction amidst the religious and social revolutions that gripped the nation during the sixties. Additionally, Reverend T. R. Watkins, appointed as pastor in 1961, provided an opportunity for citizens to meditate privately by opening the church doors to the East Austin community and to anyone desiring to meditate for personal dedication and renewal during week hours.

With the passing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, some political candidates attended worship services on Sunday mornings at Simpson and mingled with the congregation. Even though Simpson did not endorse candidates, at special times candidates were invited to discuss concerns of the black community. Two of

⁸ Huston-Tillotson College became Huston-Tillotson University in 2005.

⁹ Dr. Seabrook was the first permanent President of Huston-Tillotson College from 1955-1965. Dr. Seabrook was an associate pastor of Simpson from 1955-1973, and interim pastor from July 1-December 31, 1973. His wife, Mrs. Opal McDonald Seabrook, was a third generation member of Simpson Church.

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Simpson's members, James L. Wright and Helen P. Wright, provided instructions for casting ballots and introduced new voting machines to the congregation and other interested persons in the community.

Simpson also sponsored meetings of organizations such as the East Austin Council on Community Affairs, including a series of panel sessions held to gather community input on antipoverty measures, urban renewal proposals, and job training programs under consideration. These meetings were co-sponsored by Simpson's Commission on Christian Social Concerns.

Today, Simpson United Methodist Church continues to provide vital social support programs for an increasingly diverse community. The church operates a prison ministry, after school care and tutoring service, job skills training and career counseling, drug mentoring and support groups, and free health screenings and monitoring services. The church continues to partner with Huston-Tillotson University for campus ministry programs and other affiliated programs.

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Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps.

Simpson United Methodist Church Records.

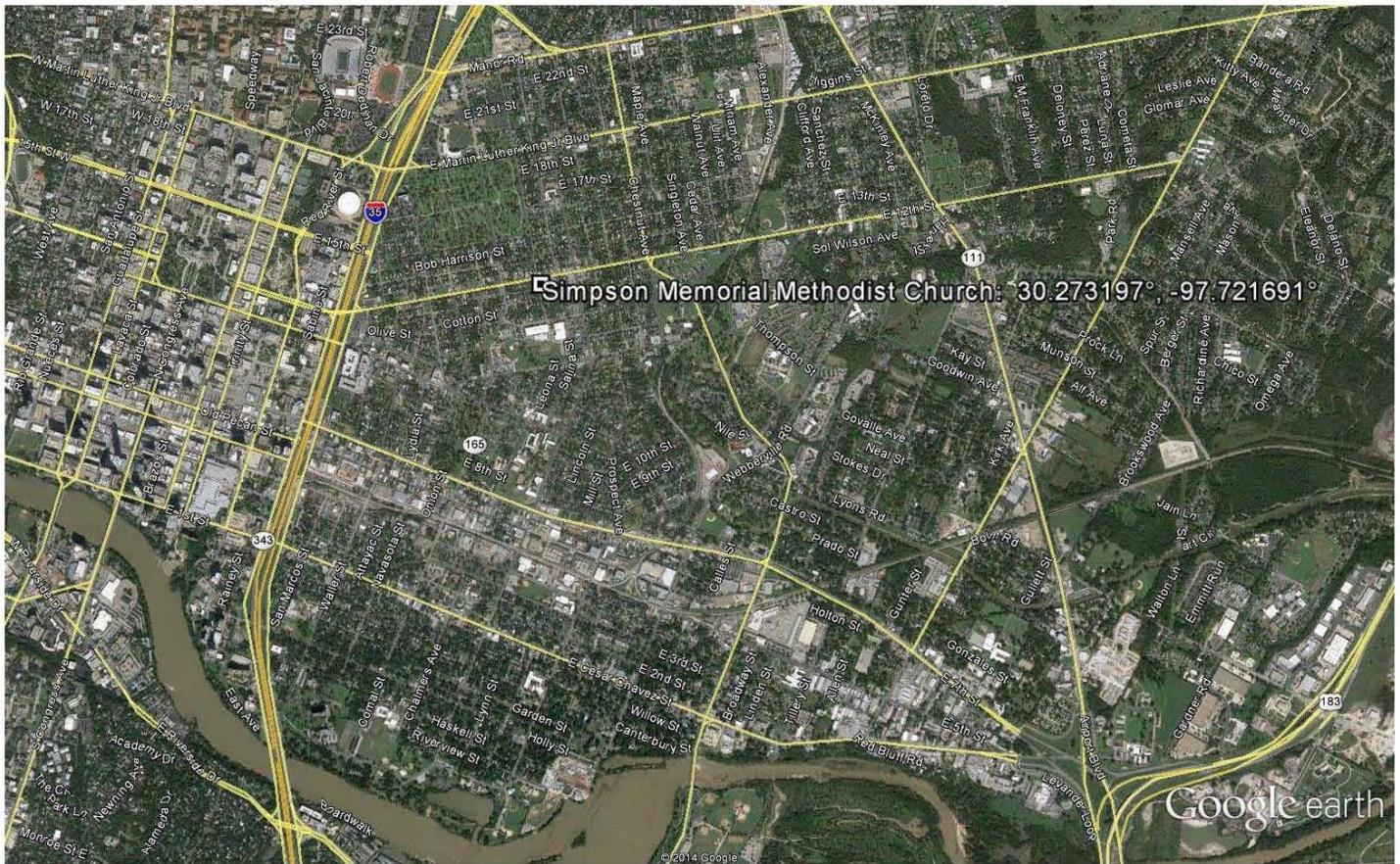
Vernon, Walter N. et al. *The Methodist Excitement in Texas: A History*. Dallas: The United Methodist Historical Society, 1984.

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Map 1: Travis County (shaded) is located in central Texas.

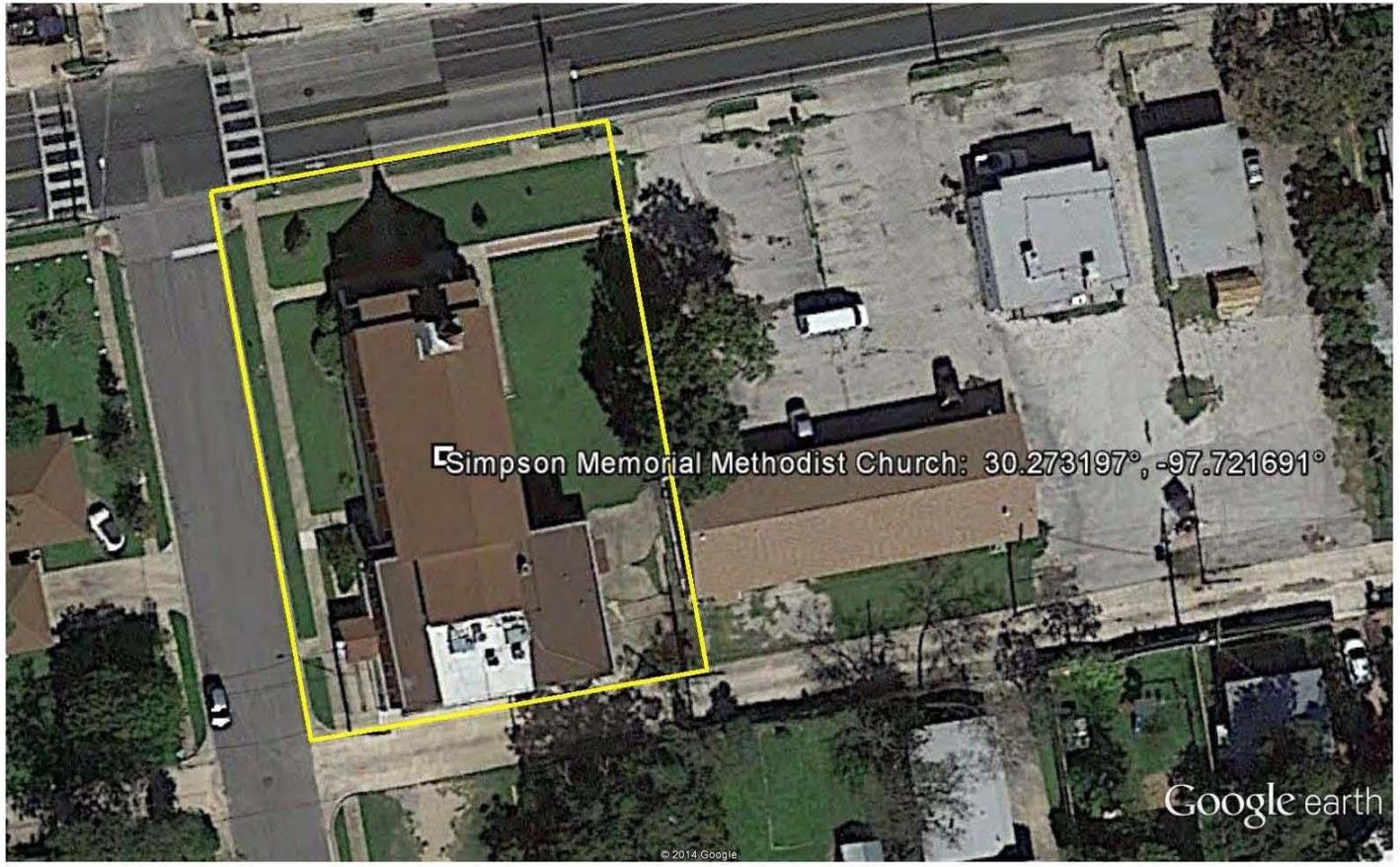


Map 2: Scaled Google Earth map depicts nominated property's location in central Austin.



Simpson Memorial Methodist Church, Austin, Travis County, Texas

Map 3: Scaled Google Earth map depicts property's approximate boundary and locational coordinates.



Google earth



Simpson Memorial Methodist Church, Austin, Travis County, Texas

Figure 1: 1935 Sanborn Fire Insurance map. The 1925 tabernacle (now the basement/Fellowship Hall of the current church) is circled. Detail view on following page.



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Figure 2: Detail view of the 1925 tabernacle (now the basement of the current church) on the 1935 Sanborn Fire Insurance map.

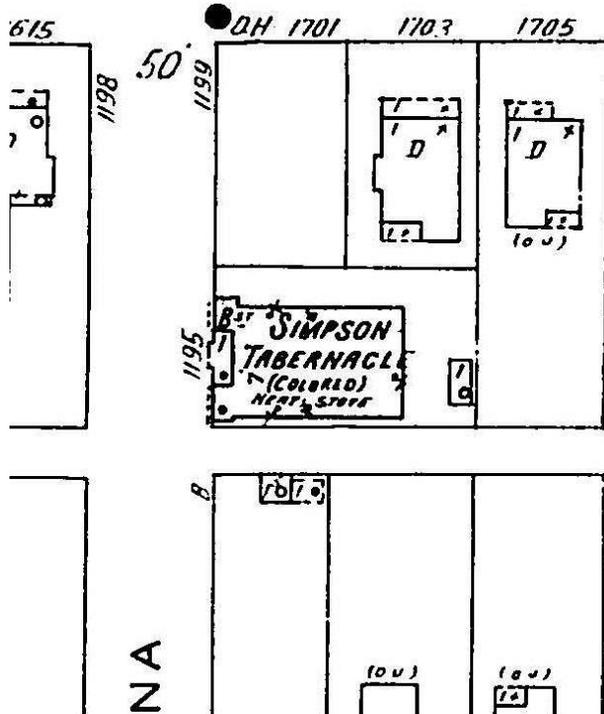


Figure 3: Undated photo of the 1925 tabernacle; camera facing northeast. From *Testimony of Faith: A History of Simpson United Methodist Church*.



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Figure 4: 1962 Sanborn Fire Insurance map. The nominated property is circled. Detail view on following page.



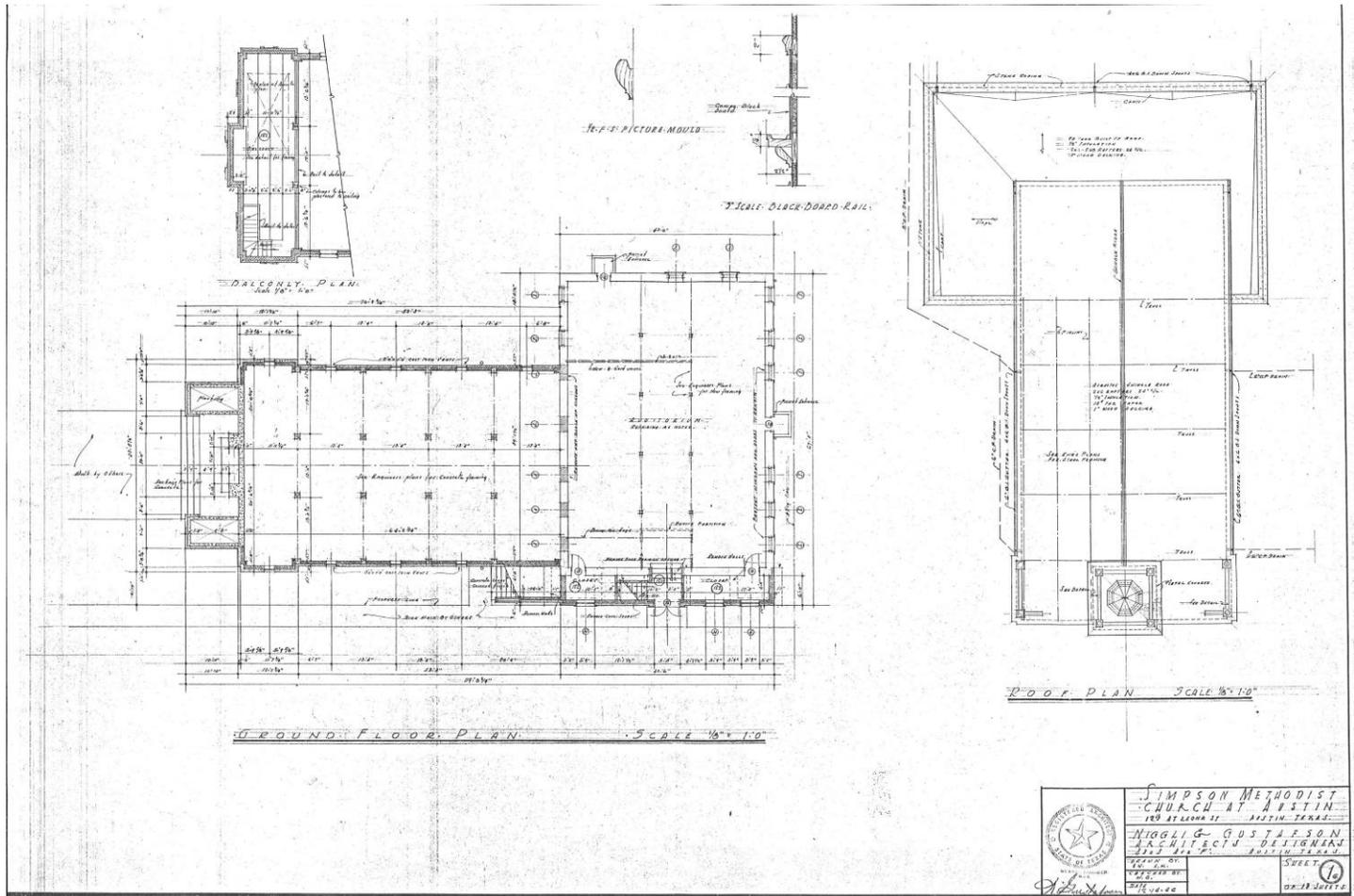
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Figure 6: Undated historic photo depicting the church under construction.



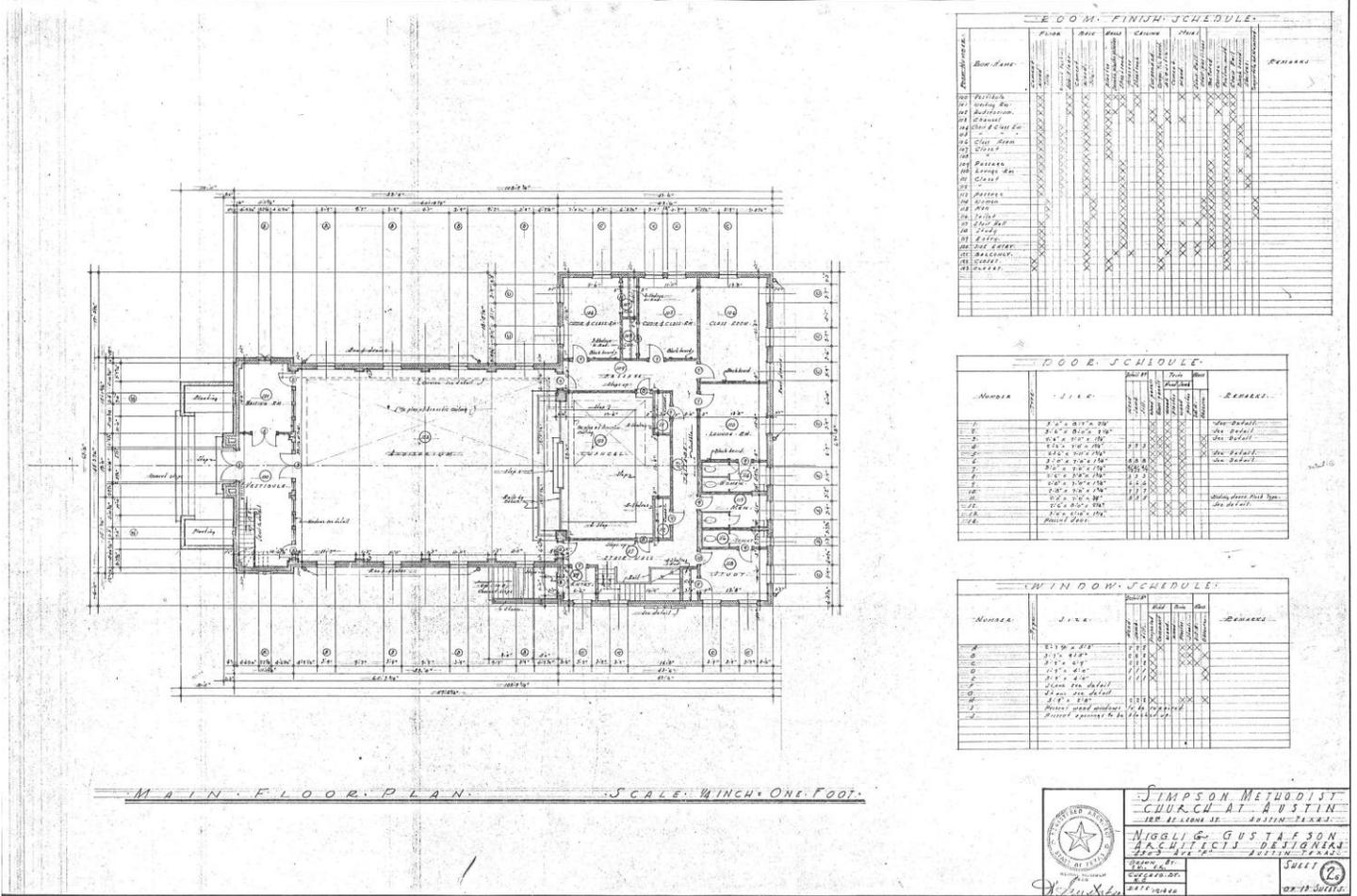
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Figure 7: Architectural plans, ground floor and roof plan.



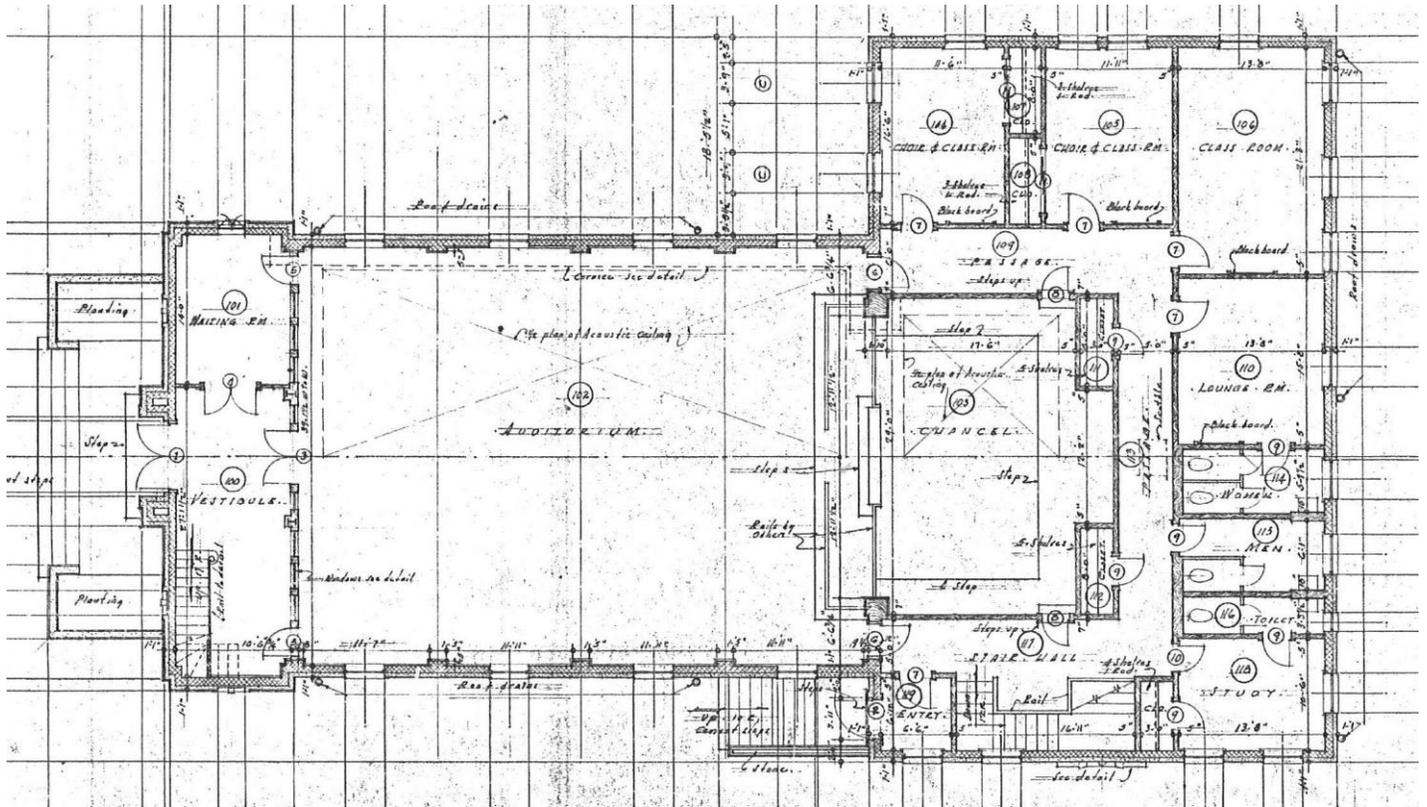
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Figure 8: Architectural plans, main floor. Detail on following page.



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Figure 9: Detail of main floor plan from previous page.



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CURRENT PHOTOS OF THE NOMNATED PROPERTY

The following photos were also submitted to the National Park Service as high quality digital files.

Photo 1: Northwest oblique.



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Photo 2: Northeast oblique.



Simpson Memorial Methodist Church, Austin, Travis County, Texas

Photo 3: Southeast oblique (partial).



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Photo 4: South elevation, camera facing approximately west-northwest.



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Photo 5: West elevation (partial), camera facing approximately south.



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Photo 6: Detail of front (north) entry.



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Photo 7: Interior of sanctuary. Camera facing south.



Simpson Memorial Methodist Church, Austin, Travis County, Texas

Photo 8: Interior of sanctuary towards balcony. Camera facing north.



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Photo 9: Interior view of sanctuary, as seen from the balcony. Camera facing approximately southeast.



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Photo 10: Interior view of the Fellowship Hall, formerly the basement tabernacle. This piano reportedly accompanied the congregation from its original location in Gregorytown to this building in the 1920s.

