

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED NATIONAL REGISTER/GEORGIA REGISTER NOMINATION

1. Name: First Presbyterian Church of Atlanta

2. Location: 1328 Peachtree Street NE, Atlanta, Fulton County, Georgia

3a. Description: First Presbyterian Church of Atlanta is situated on approximately three acres at the northwest corner of Peachtree and 16th Streets in midtown Atlanta. It is immediately north of the High Museum of Art, about one mile west of Piedmont Park, and two miles north of downtown Atlanta. Originally constructed from 1915-1919, the church has undergone three additional phases of construction, expanding to meet the evolving needs of its congregation and surrounding community. The first phase, designed in the Late Gothic Revival style by well-known Atlanta architect, Walter T. Downing, was completed in 1919. It faces Peachtree Street and includes the narthex, sanctuary, parlor, chapel, initial meeting room, and the lower portion of the bell tower, encompassing the majority of the building's front (east) facade. The front elevation is dominated by the sanctuary and bell tower, which exhibit character-defining features of the Late Gothic Revival style including the use of pointed arches for window and door openings, window tracery, the emphasis on verticality with the bell tower and in detailing such as slender engaged piers and strip buttresses, and its utilization of sandstone as the primary building material. Later expansions of the church include the A. Ten Eyck Brown-designed 1928-1929 upper bell tower and two three-story brick additions with sandstone window and door surrounds along 16th Street; the expansive 1959-1961 one- to three-story additions, also with brick veneer and sandstone surrounds, covering all of the property north of the first two phases; and the final 1999 construction of the four-story, brick and sandstone Smith Christian Community Center addition on the corner of 16th Street and Arts Center Way. The church features fourteen large stained glass windows, seven of which were created by Tiffany Studios. Six of the Tiffany windows and four windows designed by D'Ascenzo Studios, all composed of colorful opalescent glass, are located in the sanctuary, the most elaborate interior space. The Late Gothic Revival style extends into the sanctuary with the continued use of the pointed arch, stone quoining, and emphasis on verticality. Interior finishes in the sanctuary include rough plaster walls, a molded and pierced wood truss ceiling, and original tile work in the aisles between the curved pews. Other spaces in the church interior are less ornate, but many consist of original plaster walls and ceilings, oak wainscoting or detailing, and hardwood or tile floors. The narthex, chapel, and Wirth Room also contain stained glass windows by Tiffany Studios and Willet Studios.

3b. Period of Significance: 1919-1969

3c. Acreage: approximately 3 acres

3d. Boundary Explanation: The proposed boundary is the current legal boundary, which is also the historic boundary.

4a. National Register Criteria: Criterion C; Criteria Consideration A

4b. National Register Areas of Significance: Architecture, Art

4c. Statement of Significance: Founded in 1848, the congregation of First Presbyterian Church of Atlanta (originally Presbyterian Church of Atlanta) acquired a lot at the corner of Peachtree and 16th Streets in 1914 on which to build a larger church in a then more residential area of Atlanta than their original Marietta Street location. Walter T. Downing was selected to design the first phase of the church in 1915 in the Late Gothic Revival style, and the church continued to expand throughout the 20th century with additions designed by other prominent Atlanta architects employing elements of the style. First Presbyterian Church is significant under Criterion C in the area of architecture as an excellent, intact example of a Late Gothic Revival-style church and for its association with prominent Atlanta architects Walter T. Downing, E.C. Wachendorff, and A. Ten Eyck Brown. The Late Gothic Revival style, popular in ecclesiastical, educational, and commercial architecture during the early twentieth century, is demonstrated in the church's repeated use of the pointed arch, emphasis on verticality, utilization of stone as the primary building material, and detailing such as window tracery and crenellation. The church's Late Gothic Revival-style design exhibits the work of architect Walter T. Downing, who designed the initial 1915-1919 church complex; E.C. Wachendorff, who oversaw the completion of Downing's designs following his death in 1918; and A. Ten Eyck Brown, who completed the bell tower and designed the 1928-1929 addition. All three architects were prolific in Georgia, designing many public and some residential buildings in the popular styles of the day. First Presbyterian Church of Atlanta is also significant under Criterion C in the area of art due to its collection of exceptional stained glass windows by three master stained glass designers and studios: Louis C. Tiffany of Tiffany Studios, Nicola D'Ascenzo of D'Ascenzo Studios, and Willet Studios. The Tiffany and D'Ascenzo windows, also known as the ten history windows in the church's sanctuary, were installed between 1919 and 1940. Tiffany's windows showcase his innovative use of opalescent glass and his creation of many new, rich colors in stained glass. Following Tiffany's death in 1933, D'Ascenzo completed the final four designs, emulating Tiffany's methods. Later windows designed by Willet Studios and installed in the sanctuary, chapel, and narthex represent a revival in interest in more traditional Gothic-style windows typical of 13th century France, favoring deep red and blue hues and stylized figures in contrast to Tiffany's expanded palette and more representational, realistic-looking figures.

4d. Suggested Level of Significance: First Presbyterian Church of Atlanta is significant at the local level as an excellent, intact example of a Late Gothic Revival-style church, for its association with prominent Atlanta architects, and for its large collection of exceptional stained glass windows by three master stained glass designers and studios.

5. Sponsor: The First Presbyterian Church of Atlanta sponsored the nomination and prepared the nomination materials.