



The City of Seattle

Landmarks Preservation Board

400 Yesler Building Seattle, Washington 98104 • (206) 625-4501

LPB-389/80

REPORT ON DESIGNATION

Name of Property: The Seattle First Baptist Church,
1121 Harvard Avenue

Legal Description: AA Denny's, Broadway Addition, Block 136, Lots 2 & 3.

At its meeting held on September 17, 1980 the City of Seattle's Landmarks Preservation Board voted to approve the designation of the Seattle First Baptist Church as a City of Seattle Landmark based upon satisfaction of the following criteria for designation of City Ordinance #106348:

SECTION 3.01 (4) IT EMBODIES THE DISTINCTIVE VISIBLE CHARACTERISTICS OF AN ARCHITECTURAL STYLE, OR PERIOD, OR OF A METHOD OF CONSTRUCTION:

The church is designed eclectically in the English Perpendicular Gothic style. It is well and authentically executed, with rich details in terra cotta. Its most striking feature is its handsome corner tower with copper sheathed spire. This tower, with those of St. Joseph's Church on Capitol Hill, Holy Rosary in West Seattle, Blessed Sacrament in the University District, Bethany Presbyterian on Queen Anne Hill, and Trinity Episcopalian Church on First Hill, combined, provide a sextette of our most outstanding church towers in the City. Although the Gothic style is a bit foreign to the nature of Protestant churches such as First Baptist, nonetheless the internal Protestant, auditorium, form is well expressed in the exterior of this church.

SECTION 3.01 (6) BECAUSE OF ITS PROMINENCE OF SPATIAL LOCATION, CONTRASTS OF SITING, AGE OR SCALE, IT IS AN EASILY IDENTIFIABLE VISUAL FEATURE OF ITS NEIGHBORHOOD OR THE CITY AND CONTRIBUTES TO THE DISTINCTIVE QUALITY OR IDENTITY OF SUCH NEIGHBORHOOD OR THE CITY:

Since its erection, this church and especially its prominent tower have been attractive, dominant and highly visible element on the skyline of First Hill, and indeed, of the backdrop of the Downtown.

Features identified for preservation include the entire exterior of the church.

Issued: September 30, 1980

EARL D. LAYMAN, City Historic Preservation Officer

BY: *R. Deering*
R. Deering, Board Coordinator

Administered by the Office of Urban Conservation, The Seattle Department of Community Development

**City of Seattle**

Department of Community Development/Office of Urban Conservation

Landmark Nomination Form

Name Seattle First Baptist Church **Year Built** 1908-1912
(Common, present or historic)

Street and Number 1121 Harvard Avenue

Assessor's File No. 197820-1185

Legal Description **Plat Name** Denny's AA **Block** 136 **Lot** 2,3
Broadway Add.

Present Owner Seattle First Baptist Church **Present Use** Religious

Address 1121 Harvard Avenue

Original Owner Same **Original Use** Religious

Architect U. Grant Fay, Russell & Babcock **Builder** Erikson Construction Co.

Description: Present and original (if known) physical appearance and characteristics

Seattle First Baptist Church is an eclectic assemblage of English perpendicular gothic elements arranged irregularly around an early twentieth century protestant auditorium space. Designed by Fay, Russell & Babcock and built between 1908 and 1912, its external massing is characterized by a central clerestoried octagonal form framed between two square based towers rising from opposite corners. It is most commonly recognized by the tower and spire at the Harvard Ave facade which rises to a height of 160 feet. The tower at the Seneca St. facade is similarly proportioned at the base, but is terminated without a spire at a height of approximately 70 feet. Major entrance porches project from the base of each tower to provide access to the sanctuary, and a third entrance porch, located at the north corner, provides direct access to the social hall at the lower level. The church is constructed of load bearing brick exterior walls faced with red oriental brick and granite terra cotta. Structural steel engineered by Henry W. Bittman is used extensively to provide for unobstructed space in the sanctuary and the social hall directly below it. A low, polygonal slate roof covers the auditorium.

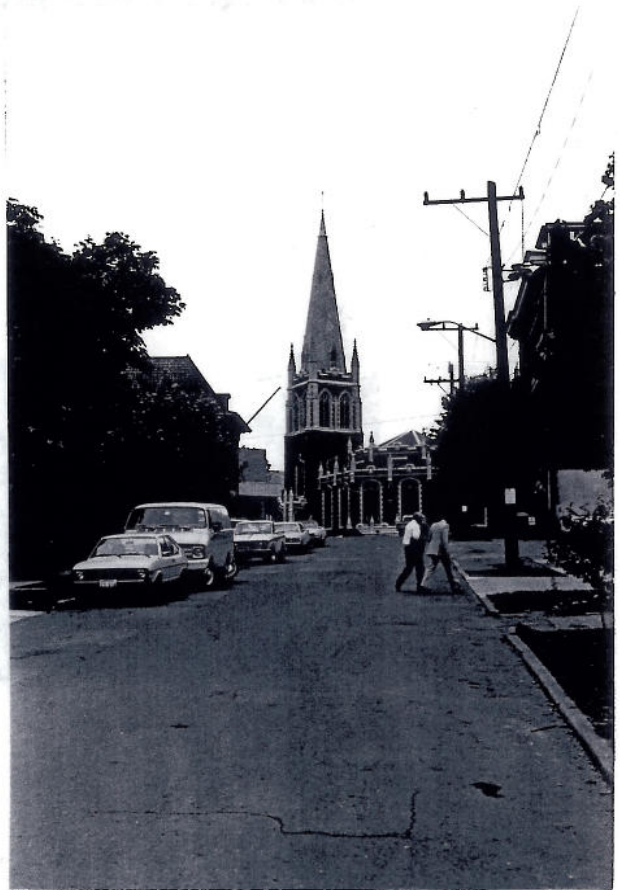
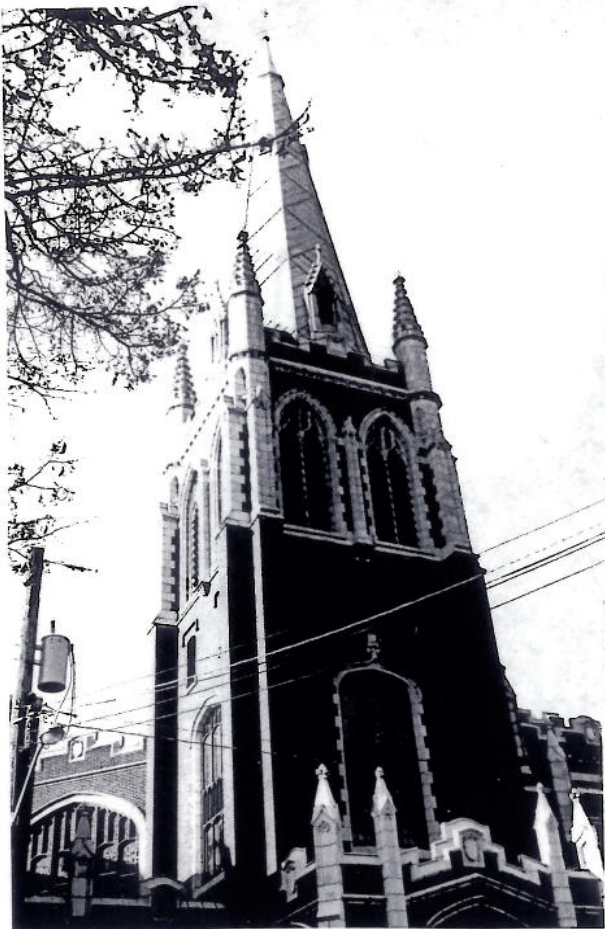
The elevations and towers of the First Baptist Church are designed exclusively with English gothic detailing and fenestration. Portals and windows open beneath and are generally organized into bays defined by buttresses. Window casings and buttress details are executed in terra cotta, frequently detailed with quoins. At the street facades of the octagonal sanctuary, fenestration includes six tall openings which combine two levels of windows separated by decorative spandrels. Similar openings occur at slightly higher levels in each of the towers, and broader windows, also with shallow gothic arches, open into the north and south galleries. The main story parlors are fenestrated with simple rectangular windows and transoms. Pairs of lancet windows occur near the top of each tower with the larger and more elaborately detailed examples reserved for the dominant Harvard Avenue tower. Walls are terminated with terra cotta crenellations and copings, and the buttresses are capped with terra cotta finials. Larger octagonal finials with imbrications cap the buttresses of the Harvard Avenue tower. The octagonal spire is sheathed in a herringbone pattern of copper plates, and detailed near its base with four steeply gabled, terra cotta dormers.

Statement of significance

Despite its unorthodox external form, the First Baptist Church represents one of the more impressive examples of English gothic eclecticism in Seattle. Designed in 1908 by U. Grant Fay of Seattle and Russell and Babcock of Tacoma, the composition is dominated by an outstanding 160 foot high tower and spire, correctly proportioned and detailed in the English gothic idiom. Fenestration and detailing are stylistically consistent and appropriately scaled. Color and contrast are introduced with the use of dark red oriental brick exterior walls, light colored granite terra cotta detailing, slate roofing, and a copper clad spire. At the time of its construction, the church was regionally recognized for its early and innovative use of structural steel.

The First Baptist Church achieves its greatest significance, however, from its siting and location, and subsequently the prominence of its tall tower and spire. Built upon a commanding elevation at the northeast corner of First Hill, the church appears as the Hill's dominant architectural feature from a wide area to the north of the church along Broadway, and east of the church along Madison Street, where it stands proudly against a contrasting backdrop of central business district office towers. At closer range, the tower and spire create a dramatic medieval image, visually terminating Harvard Avenue at its hilltop turning point immediately in front of the church. The First Baptist Church contributes in a most significant way to the richness and variety of First Hill's urban townscape, and to the distinctive quality and identity of the district.

The present church building represents the third house of worship for one of Seattle's earlier congregations. Established in 1869, the first church building was built of frame construction on Fourth Avenue between James and Cherry Streets in 1872. A second church was constructed between 1897 and 1899 on the same site, but extensive regrading of Fourth Avenue circa 1905 left it 26 feet above grade, and rendered the building impractical for use and eventually unsafe. A new lot was acquired at the northwest corner of Broadway and Madison, and in 1908 was traded for the present site, largely due to apprehensions that streetcar noise along Madison Street would disrupt services. Construction of the present church began in 1908 and was completed in 1912.



Photographs:



Submitted by: Office of Urban Conservation

Address 400 Yesler Building, Seattle WA 98104

Phone 625-4501

Date _____

Reviewed _____

Historic Preservation Officer

Date 5/7/80