

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name First Missionary Baptist Church

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 819 Cypress Street N/A not for publication

city or town New Bern N/A vicinity

state North Carolina code NC county Craven code 049 zip code 28560

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 nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Stephen J. Crow SHPO 4/29/97
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> other, (explain): _____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

First Missionary Baptist Church
Name of Property

Craven, N.C.
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)
Historic African American Churches
in Craven County, N.C.: 1864-1947

**Number of contributing resources previously listed
in the National Register**
-0-

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Religion: religious structure

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Religion: religious structure

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Gothic

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation brick

walls brick

roof metal

other wood

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

First Missionary Baptist Church
Name of Property

Craven N.C.
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- 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.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Religion
Ethnic Heritage-Black
Architecture

Period of Significance

1906-1947

Significant Dates

1906

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

First Missionary Baptist Church
Name of Property

Craven, N.C.
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than 1 acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	1 8	3 1, 34, 0, 0	38 8, 7 44, 0
	Zone	Easting	Northing
2			

3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing
4			

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title M. Ruth Little

organization Longleaf Historic Resources date Jan. 31, 1997

street & number 2709 Bedford Ave. telephone 919-836-8128

city or town Raleigh state NC zip code 27607

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name _____

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

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. 470 *et seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 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 Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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First Missionary Baptist Church, Craven Co., N.C.

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First Missionary Baptist Church

7. Physical Description

First Missionary Baptist Church, completed in 1908, is a well-preserved brick Gothic Revival style sanctuary on a level grassed lot facing Cypress Street in New Bern. The church faces north to Greenwood Cemetery, an historic African American cemetery established by 1872. To the sides and rear are frame and brick single family dwellings dating from the 1920s to the 1960s. The church has been closed during the past year while the congregation raises funds for restoration.

The rectangular front-gabled nave is three bays wide and five bays deep, with a two-stage entrance tower on the east side. To the rear extends a small gabled chancel flanked by the choir room and minister's study, surmounted by low hip roofs. The church rests on a raised basement, with brick walls laid in one-to-five bond (now covered with paint). The main entrance, in the tower, is reached by a set of more recent brick stairs. A double replacement door, surmounted by a pointed arch transom of colored glass, leads into a vestibule. Beside the door is a marble cornerstone inscribed:

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

A.D. 1906

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First Missionary Baptist Church, Craven Co., N.C.

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Brick buttresses with concrete caps accent the corners and separate the bays of the building. The first stage of the tower is illuminated by tall narrow rectangular wooden windows, with smaller rectangular ventilator openings in the upper stage. These openings now contain louvered metal vents. The tower terminates in a crenellated parapet accented with stuccoed panels. The gabled roof of the nave is covered with standing seam metal, concealed at the front and rear by a brick parapet wall with a stepped brick cornice. Side eaves are also finished with a stepped brick cornice.

The front gable of the nave is pierced by three large pointed arch windows, the central window taller and wider than the flanking ones. Each bay of the side elevation contains a single pointed arch window. These windows have small square colored glass panes, not currently visible on the exterior because they are covered with plywood. The basement is lit by rectangular, three-over-three wooden sash windows with clear glass. The front gable contains a set of three small arched wooden ventilators. All windows have concrete sills and wide stuccoed labels. The rear hipped extensions have rectangular sash windows and a door in each outside wall, reached by brick steps of more recent construction. The rear wall of the entrance tower has a basement entrance, sheltered by a hipped-roof porch with plain posts, constructed about 1950.

The interior of the nave is finished with original hardwood floors, beadboard wainscot, plaster walls, and a vaulted plaster ceiling. The doors and windows have molded surrounds with corner blocks with circular medallions. A semicircular arch, finished with Doric pilasters and a flat-paneled arch soffit, opens to the baptistry, located in the chancel. Centered in the rear wall is an

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First Missionary Baptist Church, Craven Co., N.C.

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arched window. The baptismal pool is set beneath the floor, concealed by a lid when not needed. Originally, a platform extended across the entire front of the church, with the choir seating on the left side and the deacons and deaconesses (church mothers) seating on the right side. In 1977, when the hand-pump pipe organ was replaced with the present electric organ, Georgian Revival style cabinets were built flanking the baptistry to enclose the organ pipes, and the platform was made smaller, extending only in front of the baptistry. Original doors lead into the pastor's study to the right of the baptistry and to the choir room to the left of the baptistry. All pews, replacements of the original pews, have been removed and are in storage.

In the northeast corner of the sanctuary, an open stair descends to the basement. The stair has turned newels, a molded handrail and turned balusters. The basement was updated in the 1960s when a church day care center was opened, and has a linoleum floor, plywood panelling on the walls, and supports enclosed with wooden boxing. The ceiling joists are now exposed. Original wooden partitions divide the space into several rooms.

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First Missionary Baptist Church, Craven Co., N.C.

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8. Statement of Significance

First Missionary Baptist Church is believed to be the second oldest African American Baptist congregation in New Bern. Established in 1869 as Cedar Grove Baptist Church, the church changed its name to First Missionary Baptist Church in 1906 when it built the current Gothic Revival style brick sanctuary on Cypress Street. During the first decade of the twentieth century, under the leadership of dynamic Rev. A.L. E. Weeks, the church operated a large school, the New Bern Industrial and Collegiate Institute, next door (now demolished). As the architecturally significant sanctuary of a historic black congregation, the First Missionary Baptist Church building is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C (architecture) and A (religion and ethnic heritage-black), as discussed in the Multiple Property Documentation Form, "Historic African American Churches in Craven County: 1864-1947."

Historical Background

According to church tradition, the congregation was founded in 1869 as the Cedar Grove Baptist Church. Its first pastor was Rev. Henry Johnson; the sanctuary was a small white frame building located in the southeast section of Greenwood Cemetery.¹ This early history is not corroborated through documents, as no early records of the church have survived.

From 1875 to the present, Cedar Grove's history is clearly documented. First documentation of the church's existence appears in the first published history of black Baptists in North Carolina.

¹ Bessie Davenport Williams, Bessie Jordan Cherry (Newkirk), et. al, "History of First Missionary Baptist Church," 1990. (Copy in file).

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First Missionary Baptist Church, Craven Co., N.C.

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Cedar Grove Baptist Church served as the site of the first session of the New Bern Eastern Missionary Baptist Association in 1875. This association, which included churches in Craven, Jones, Pamlico, Beaufort and Hyde counties, grew out of the Old Eastern Missionary Baptist Association established in James City, a freedmen's settlement on the Trent River, in 1865.² Cedar Grove church leaders evidently played a primary role in the organization of this new regional association of Baptist churches.

According to church tradition, Rev. Johnson served the church until 1881, succeeded by Rev. Christmas who served until 1885, Rev. Smyer until 1893, and Rev. Slade until 1897.³ Under Rev. Slade's ministry, the church finally gained title to its sanctuary and parsonage. On January 3, 1895 the City of New Bern sold the church trustees for fifty dollars the tiny lot at the corner of Greenwood Cemetery, only 35 feet wide and 45 feet deep. The church sanctuary, described as fronting on Cypress Street, and the parsonage to the rear are points of reference for the boundary description. The city expressed its "wishes to promote the cause of the Christian religion" and gave permission to erect suitable buildings for church and school purposes. The church trustees at this time were J F. Hamm, Mitchell Bryant, Albert Fields, Nelson Smith, Joseph Etheridge, Willie Gibbs, and Joseph Jackson.⁴ This belated deed, apparently executed after the church had been on the site for twenty-five years, probably legalized an informal lease agreement whereby the church used city property.

² J. A. Whitted, *A History of the Negro Baptists of North Carolina* (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton Printing Co., 1908), 83.

³ "History of First Missionary Baptist Church," 1990.

⁴ Craven County Deed Book 15, 333.

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First Missionary Baptist Church, Craven Co., N.C.

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In 1898 Rev. Alfred Leonard Edward Weeks became pastor. His tenure, lasting until 1912, encompassed the church's period of greatest crisis and triumph. When Rev. Weeks arrived in New Bern, he found the educational opportunities for blacks to be lacking. He obtained a lot across from the church, at the corner of Cypress and West streets and built the New Bern Industrial Collegiate Institute, a two-story forty-five by sixty-five foot frame building with four classrooms on the first floor and an assembly room on the second floor, in 1902.⁵ The elementary school, which became known as Weeks School, had an enrollment of three hundred students.⁶ In contrast to most of the schools established by Baptists for African Americans during the period, this school was the product of individuals rather than the denomination. Funding came from the Home Mission Society and the white and African American people of New Bern. Black real estate developer and political leader Isaac Smith made the largest individual donation.⁷

In March 1905 fire destroyed the church building. Rev. Weeks used his connections to raise money for a lot and new building not only from New Bern citizens, but even travelled North to solicit aid.⁸ Isaac Smith and the Citizens Bank of New Bern conveyed a 100-foot square lot

⁵ Alan D. Watson, *A History of New Bern and Craven County* (New Bern: Tryon Palace Commission, 1987), 573; interview with Dorothy Bryan, New Bern, November 14, 1996.

⁶ Watson, *A History of New Bern and Craven County*, 600.

⁷ Whitted, *A History of the Negro Baptists of North Carolina*, 180-182.

⁸ "History of First Missionary Baptist Church."

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First Missionary Baptist Church, Craven Co., N.C.

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facing the cemetery, just east of the school and across the street from the original church lot, to J. F. Hamm and others, trustees for the Industrial Collegiate Institute of New Bern in 1906.⁹ These trustees, in turn, deeded it to the trustees of Cedar Grove Baptist Church: J. M. B. Wooten, Decatur Jones, Henry H. White, George Ireland, Nelson Smith, A. Fields and Joseph Ethridge. At this time the church changed its name to the First Baptist Church, and the trustees deeded the lot to the First Baptist Church of New Bern, Col. (Colored) in order to legalize the name change.¹⁰ Immediately, the trustees mortgaged the lot to the American Baptist Home Mission Society in order to raise money to "erect or possess a House of Worship."¹¹

Work on the new church began shortly afterward, with the cornerstone laid in the same year, 1906. The new brick building had the first, and only baptismal pool in town for some time.¹² Other Baptist congregations held baptisms in First Baptist's baptistry. The entrance tower had a steep pointed spire which disappeared sometime after 1923.¹³

The 1908 history of Negro Baptists in North Carolina praised Rev. Weeks's work as "the wonder of North Carolina," and lamented the opposition of many of the older Baptist ministers to this

⁹ Craven County Deed Book 159, 565.

¹⁰ Craven County Deed Book 160, 475.

¹¹ Craven County Deed Book 158, 575 and 581.

¹² "History of the First Missionary Baptist Church."

¹³ This is visible in the 1923 Wooten-Moulton photo of "Tent City," in possession of Dorothy Bryan, New Bern.

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young, bold leader.¹⁴ During his service, First Missionary Baptist Church was brought into the vanguard of efforts to improve opportunities for the race in the state. Race leader Booker T. Washington lectured at the church in the spring of 1907.¹⁵ The Weeks School prospered, but in 1909 Weeks angered the black community of New Bern when he wrote, in a fund-raising effort, some uncomplimentary remarks about eastern North Carolina blacks which got back to them. Weeks left New Bern in 1912 and the school closed at this time.¹⁶

Although the Great Fire of 1922 burned right up to the church, the brick building was not harmed. Fire victims were sheltered in the basement. The building is shown clearly in the background of a 1923 photograph of the "Tent City" erected behind the church to house the victims of the Great Fire.¹⁷ The gabled, weatherboarded school building is also visible in this photo. In later years the school building became an apartment building and then was demolished. A third building in the church complex visible in this photo is the two-story frame parsonage, built between the church and the school in 1920. One of the carpenters was William Edward Hawkins (father of Dorothy Bryan).¹⁸

¹⁴ Whitted, *A History of the Negro Baptists of North Carolina*, 180-182.

¹⁵ "100th Anniversary Bulletin, First Missionary Baptist Church," copy in file.

¹⁶ "100th Anniversary Bulletin, First Missionary Baptist Church," copy in file; interview with Dorothy Bryan.

¹⁷ Photograph by Wooten-Moulton, New Bern, in possession of Dorothy Bryan, New Bern.

¹⁸ Interview with Dorothy Bryan.

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Rev. John L. Jordan (father of Bessie Jordan Cherry) served the church from 1916 to 1926, during which time the mortgage debt was paid off.¹⁹ In the 1910s and 1920s the First Baptist Church choir became well known throughout the area. The choir was led by the Cooke family of musicians from 1916 to 1922, and later by outstanding musicians, Dan Reynolds and his mother Julianne Reynolds. The choir even had a violinist, unusual for that day.²⁰

In the 1960s church member Johnny Floyd started the first day care center in New Bern in the basement of First Missionary Baptist Church. Both black and white children attended the center. Bessie Davenport Williams served as the first director; Constance Evans Bronner was one of the first teachers; and member Frances Hatch Jones taught at the center for fifteen years.²¹ Other new initiatives during the period were the founding of a Vacation Bible School, purchase of a new organ, and beautification of the church interior. Church activities during the 1980s included the organization of a church Cub Scout Troop and the securing of a church van for handicapped members.²² In the early 1980s the General Baptist State Convention officially changed the names of all member churches to incorporate the word "Missionary." Thus, the First Baptist Church became the First Missionary Baptist Church. In 1995 it was discovered that a major restoration of the building was needed. The congregation decided to close the building and to worship temporarily in another space while restoration funds are being raised. The church seeks listing in the National Register of Historic Places as a preservation planning tool and to assist in fund-raising.

¹⁹ "History of the First Missionary Baptist Church."

²⁰ Interview with Dorothy Bryan: 100th Anniversary bulletin.

²¹ Interview with Frances Hatch Jones. New Bern. November 15, 1996.

²² "100th Anniversary Bulletin."

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First Missionary Baptist Church
Craven Co., N.C.

Major Bibliographical References

Craven County Deeds.

“100th Anniversary Bulletin, First Missionary Baptist Church”, copy at the State Historic Preservation Office.

“History of First Missionary Baptist Church”, 1990. Copy at the State Historic Preservation Office.

Interview with Dorothy Bryan.

Interview with Frances Hatch Jones, New Bern, November 15, 1996.

Watson, Alan D. *A History of New Bern and Craven County*. New Bern: Tryon Palace Commission, 1987.

Whitted, J.A. *A History of the Negro Baptists of North Carolina*. Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton Printing Co., 1908.

Williams, Bessie Davenport, Cherry, Bessie Jordan, et. al, “History of First Missionary Baptist Church”, 1990. Copy at the State Historic Preservation Office.

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First Missionary Baptist Church, Craven Co., N.C.

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10. Verbal Boundary Description

The parcel, a rectangle 110 feet by 100 feet, is shown in the accompanying Craven County tax map: Parcel 8-6-347.

Boundary Justification

This parcel constitutes the entire property historically associated with First Missionary Baptist Church sanctuary.

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Photographs:

The following information pertains to all photographs:

Photographer: M. Ruth Little

Date: November 1996

Location of negatives: North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, Raleigh

- A. Overall view from northeast

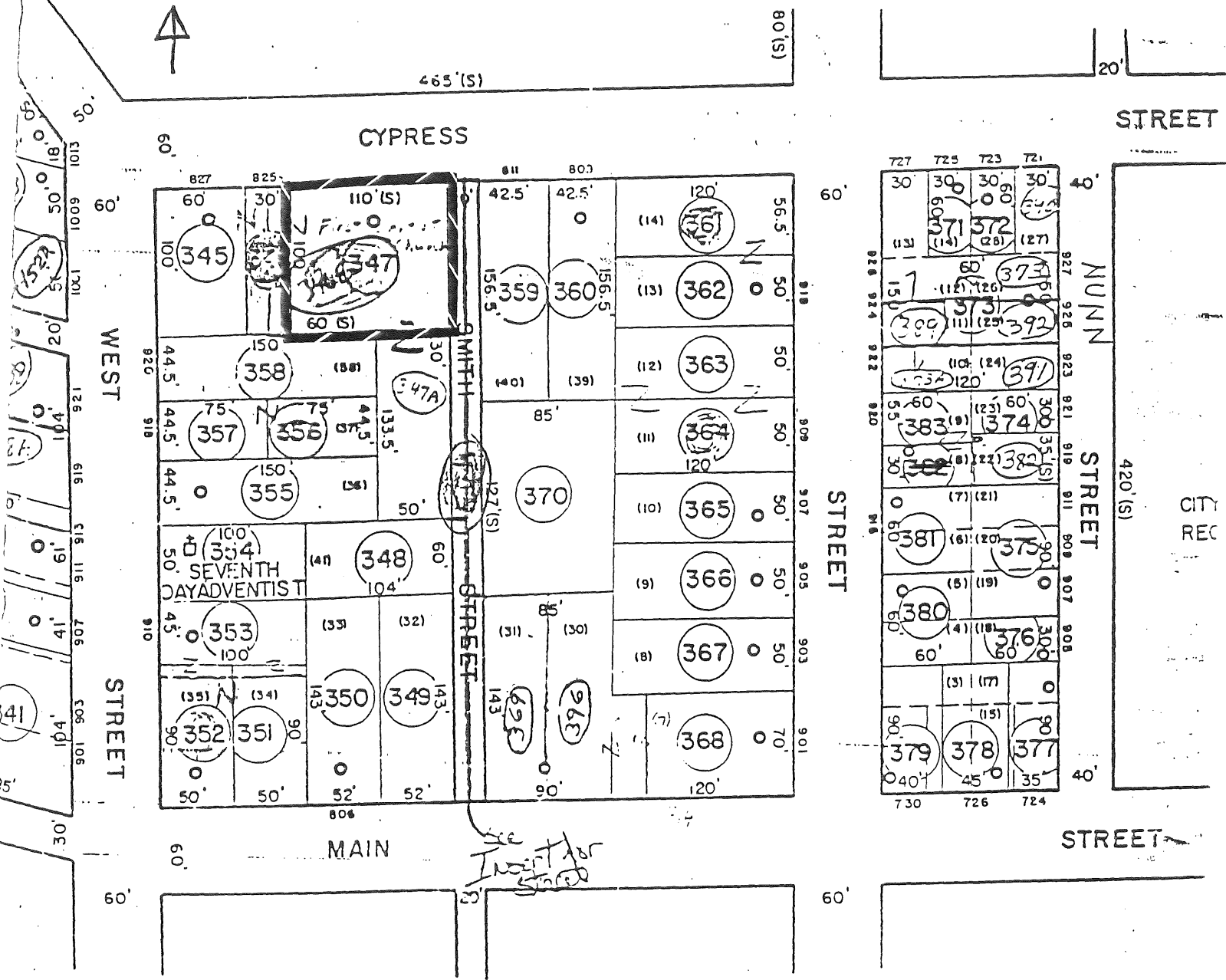
- B. View of entrance tower from northeast

- C. Rear view from southeast

- D. Documentary view of interior, ca. 1980

First Missionary Baptist Church
 Craven County Tax Map:
 Parcel 8-6-347
 Scale: 1 inch = 100 feet

348-008



NTY, NORTH CAROLINA
 TOWNSHIP NO. 8

Scale - 1" = 100'

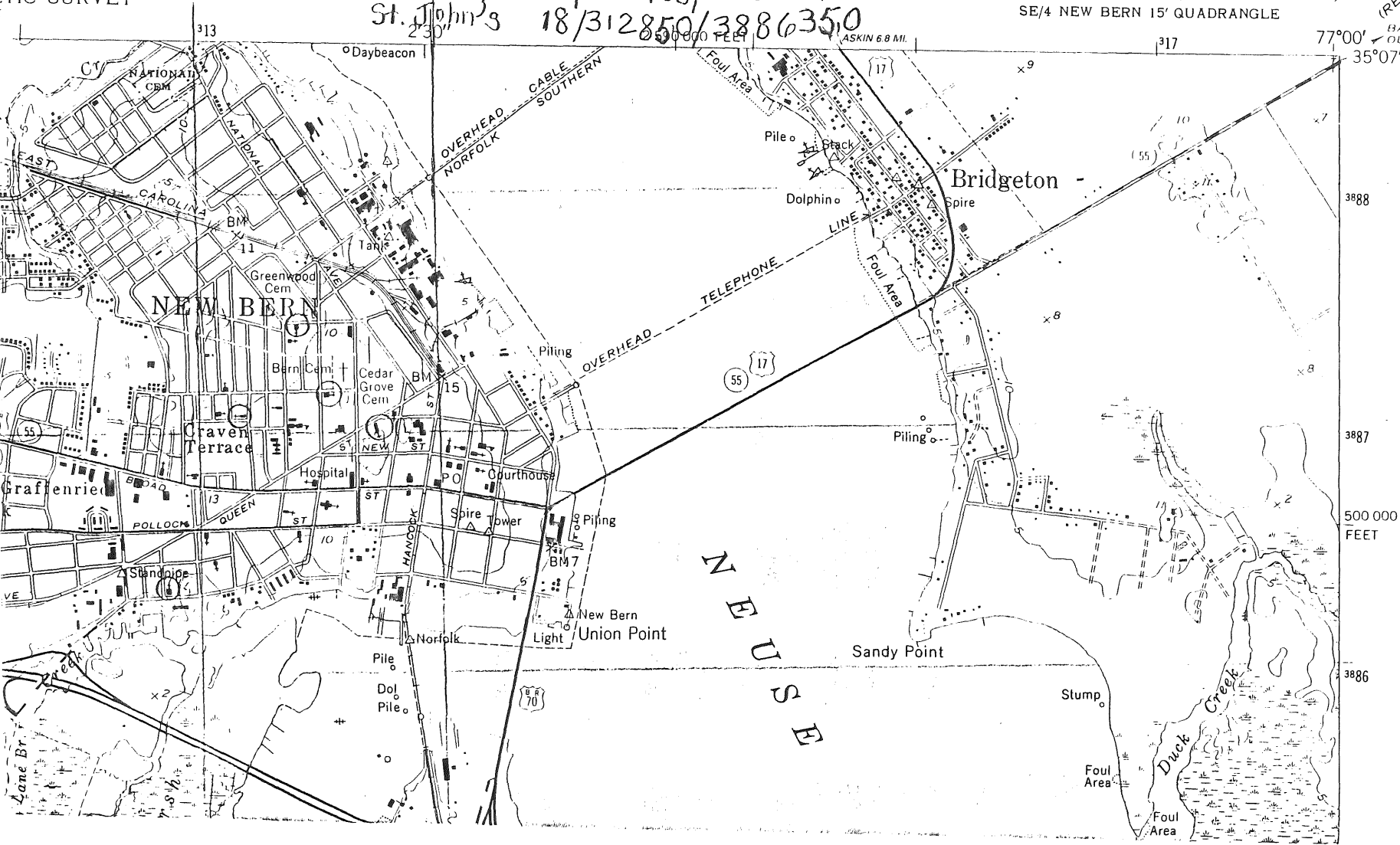
Photo No: JF3-158

STATES
COMMERCE
TIC SURVEY

St. Peter's 18/313740/3887000
Rue Chapel 18/313180/3887070
Ebenezer 18/313530/3887150
First Baptist 18/313400/3887440
St. John's 18/312850/3886350

Craven Co.
NEW BERN QUADRANGLE
NORTH CAROLINA
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)
SE/4 NEW BERN 15' QUADRANGLE

5694 III NW
(RELSBORO)
BAYBORO 11 MI.
OLYMPIA 22 MI.



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