

**NORTH CAROLINA STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE**  
Office of Archives and History  
Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**

**St. Stephen United Methodist Church**

Lexington, Davidson County, DV0577, Listed 8/6/2021

Nomination by Heather Fearnbach, Fearnbach History Services, Inc.

Photographs by Heather Fearnbach, October 2019



Façade (west elevation), looking east



1921 sanctuary, looking east

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 St. Stephen United Methodist Church

other names/site number St. Stephen Methodist Episcopal Church

## 2. Location

street & number 102 East First Street

N/A not for publication

city or town Lexington

N/A vicinity

stat North Carolina

code NC

county Davidson

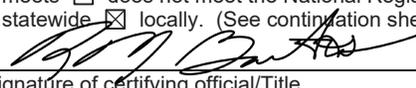
code 057

zip code 27292

e \_\_\_\_\_

## 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 for 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.)



Deputy SHPO 7/6/2021

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

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:

entered in the National Register.

See continuation sheet

determined eligible for the National Register.

See continuation sheet

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**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 count.)

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

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)  
N/A

**Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**  
N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION: Religious Facility  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION: Religious Facility  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Colonial Revival  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK  
walls BRICK  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
roof ASPHALT  
\_\_\_\_\_  
other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description**

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

**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)

Ethnic Heritage: African American  
Architecture

**Period of Significance**

1921-1971

**Significant Dates**

1921  
ca. 1950

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

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: Davidson County Historical Museum  
Davidson County Public Library, Lexington branch.

St. Stephen United Methodist Church  
Name of Property

Davidson County, NC  
County and State

## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** 0.21 acres

### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)  
See Latitude/Longitude coordinates continuation sheet.

1	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	3	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	4	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>

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 Heather Fearnbach  
organization Fearnbach History Services, Inc. date 3/31/2021  
street & number 3334 Nottingham Road telephone 336-765-2661  
city or town Winston-Salem state NC zip code 27104

## 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 St. Stephen United Methodist Church, Reverend Dr. Arnetta E. Beverly, pastor  
street & number 102 East First Street telephone (336) 249-1813  
city or town Lexington state NC zip code 27292

**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 listing. 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 20303.

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Davidson County, NC

## Section 7. Narrative Description

### Setting

Lexington's street grid is rotated approximately thirty degrees from true cardinal direction alignment. For ease of description, this document is written as if St. Stephen United Methodist Church (UMC), which actually faces southwest on an approximately 0.21-acre lot at East First and North Salisbury streets' southeast corner, faces due west. Located two blocks south of Main Street, the sanctuary occupies a transitional zone between the downtown commercial district to the north and west and a residential area to the south and east. The congregation also owns two adjacent undeveloped lots encompassing 0.51 acres south of the church.<sup>1</sup> A portion of the north parcel is a gravel parking area.

Landscaping is minimal. Evergreen shrubs flank the front entrance and the angled metal-frame church sign at the lawn's northwest corner. The sanctuary's slight elevation above street grade necessitated the City of Lexington's construction of the short brick retaining wall along the concrete sidewalk at the lawn's west edge in conjunction with East First Street's late-twentieth-century widening. The wall is within the parcel boundary. The low mid-twentieth-century formed-concrete retaining wall that extends along the north lot line is in the municipal right-of-way. A concrete-block retaining wall built in the 2010s borders the narrow swath of lawn east of the church. Evergreen shrubs partially mask the painted dimensional lumber accessibility ramp erected in late 1998 that rises from the parking lot to a landing at its west end, turns, and continues to a landing at the rear wing's south entrance. The ramp has square posts and railing pickets and a board floor.

The surrounding area includes a 1934 commercial building on East First and North Salisbury streets' northeast corner that now serves as a fitness center, a 1960 garage and 2003 warehouse east of St. Stephen UMC, and a 1988 manufactured home and 1982 apartments south of the church. The primary entrance of the 1930 First Reformed United Church of Christ (originally the First United Church of Christ), situated on East First and North Salisbury streets' northwest corner, is on East Center Street. First Reformed Church's holdings include buildings constructed in 1963, a parking lot, and several vacant parcels, all on North Salisbury Street's south side west of St. Stephen UMC.

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<sup>1</sup> White Lexington physician Jacob C. Leonard Jr. and his wife Mary Moffitt Leonard conveyed the two adjacent undeveloped parcels to St. Stephen UMC church trustees on October 7, 1971. The one-and-one-half-story dwelling with a one-story rear wing and front and rear porches that fronted East First Street on the lot south of the sanctuary and the small one-story building that stood behind the dwelling were demolished between 1929 and 1948. A one-story dwelling with projecting front-gable bay and a front porch occupied the lot to the south through the mid-twentieth century. Davidson County Deed Book 485, p. 38; Sanborn Map Company, "Lexington, N. C.," Sheet 5, June 1929 and March 1948.

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## Site Evolution

Sanborn maps document the area's evolution. The June 1885 map depicts a two-story "Colored Church" on Salisbury Street's south side west of the Davidson County jail. The sanctuary, which had been constructed around 1837 by Lexington's white Methodist congregation, was destroyed by an 1886 fire. First Street terminated at Salisbury Street at that time, but by July 1890 First Street had been extended, bisecting the block bound by Center and Second streets.<sup>2</sup> St. Stephen's lot at Salisbury and First streets' southeast corner was vacant until the congregation erected a one-story, rectangular, weatherboarded building with a projecting entrance and bell tower fronting First Street in 1892. When the congregation built a more commodious sanctuary in 1921, the frame 1892 church was moved west and rotated ninety degrees to serve as the classroom wing. The 1892 tower and rear apse were removed and the entire building brick-veneered to create a more uniform appearance. The portico was erected in the late 1940s or early 1950s.<sup>3</sup>

## St. Stephen United Methodist Church, 1892, 1921

### *Exterior*

St. Stephen UMC comprises a one-story front-gable-roofed 1921 sanctuary with a small one-story north 1921 wing and a gabled rear classroom wing, formerly the congregation's 1892 sanctuary, which was rotated ninety degrees in 1921. The redbrick walls are running bond above a five-to-one common-bond foundation topped with corbelled stretcher and header courses. A marble cornerstone inscribed with "St. Stephens M. E. Church, rebuilt 1921, Rev. P. I. Wells, Pastor" is inset at the west elevation's north corner. Vinyl siding covers the building's wood-sheathed gables and eaves.

A two-story entrance and bell tower with a brick base projects from the façade's center. Painted pressed-metal shingles sheathe the tower's frame upper section and its pyramidal roof topped with a pointed finial. Rectangular louvered vents pierce the tower beneath its molded cornice. A gabled circa 1950 Colonial Revival-style portico with four square concrete posts and a round-arched stained-glass

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<sup>2</sup> The jail at Salisbury and Second streets' southwest corner remained in use until 1958 when a new courthouse and jail complex was constructed at 110 West Center Street. The Salisbury Street jail was demolished in late 1979. Sanborn maps, Sheet 2, June 1885 and July 1890; "Jails of Davidson County," undated narrative in the "Old Davidson County Jail" survey file at the NC SHPO, Raleigh.

<sup>3</sup> The 1892 building, labeled "St. Stephen's M. E. Church (Colored)," on the 1896 Sanborn map, was located further east on the property than the 1837 sanctuary. The portico is not depicted on the 1948 Sanborn map but had been erected by 1963. A series of 1963 newspaper articles such as the following example include photographs of the church. "Negro Youths Admit Shooting: One Killed, One Wounded Here Last Night," *The Dispatch*, June 7, 1963, p.1; Sanborn maps, Sheet 3, March 1896; Sheet 8, December 1923, Sheet 5, March 1948.

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window centered in the triangular vinyl-sided pediment shelters the primary entrance: a double-leaf flat-panel metal door installed in 2003 with a rectangular stained-glass transom set in a segmental-arched opening.<sup>4</sup> A flight of brick and concrete steps with a metal handrail rises from the sidewalk to the entrance.

All window openings have slightly projecting brick sills, but lintels vary. Original double-hung stained-glass sash displaying foliate and geometric motifs illuminate the 1921 sanctuary. Four south elevation and two north elevation windows have round-arched double-header course lintels. In the hip-roofed one-story north wing, flat-arched lintels capped with corbelled header courses top the rectangular double-hung stained-glass sash at the west elevation's center as well as two matching sash and the replacement single-leaf six-panel door on the north elevation. A short flight of concrete steps with metals railing rises to that entrance. On the south elevation, a gabled frame canopy rests on painted brick side walls that flank concrete steps leading to the below-grade single-leaf replacement basement door. This entrance provided the only basement access until a flight of stairs was added at the 1921 sanctuary's northwest corner in the 1950s.<sup>5</sup>

The rear wing (former 1892 sanctuary) features Gothic Revival-style pointed-arch window openings with soldier-course lintels. Two double-hung stained-glass sash on the north elevation match the windows in the 1921 sanctuary, while the original double-hung sash on the east (rear) elevation have a combination of original colored-glass panes and textured and clear-glass replacement panes. A small air conditioning unit with a louvered vent has been installed beneath the cornice on the east elevation between the two central windows. At the wing's south entrance, a door with a two-panel base and a glazed upper section and the tinted-glass pointed-arch transom above it were installed in March 2016 in what was previously a window opening.<sup>6</sup>

## *Interior: 1921 Sanctuary*

St. Stephen UMC's physical evolution is clearly visible in the interior, where decorative woodwork distinguishes each construction phase. The 1921 building's first story comprises the west entrance vestibule in the tower base, the sanctuary, and a projecting north wing containing a west room with additional seating and the north entrance foyer. Original plaster walls, narrow floor boards, beadboard wainscoting with molded chair rails, tall baseboards, window and door surrounds with butt corners, single-and-double-leaf paneled-wood doors, rolling wood overhead doors, and a coffered beadboard

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<sup>4</sup> St. Stephen UMC Building Committee, interview with Heather Fearnbach, February 27, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> The door replaced a late-twentieth-century six-panel door. An 1892 multipane pointed-arch wood sash in poor condition was removed from the transom location.

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ceiling are intact. The woodwork has a dark lacquered finish. Some of the ceiling panels were replaced in 2007 after suffering water damage from a leaking roof.<sup>7</sup>

At the sanctuary's west end, two sets of swinging double-leaf wood doors with two-vertical-panel bases and square glazed upper sections on the entrance vestibule's north and south walls provide egress. The vestibule ceiling was lowered in 2001 as an energy-saving measure.<sup>8</sup> The bell remains in the tower. An acoustical panel covered with a diamond-patterned grille is centered on the sanctuary side of the upper portion of the tower's east wall.

Three sections of oak pews are oriented toward the semi-circular altar platform at the sanctuary's southeast corner. Late-nineteenth-century altar furniture—three Eastlake-style chairs, a podium, and a rectangular Craftsman table—rests on the platform's lower tier, which has a curved low wood communion railing with groups of three turned balusters. A second railing—with wood posts, a brass handrail, and a red velvet curtain separates the altar from choir seating. North of the altar, a Hammond electric organ and a piano stand in front of the rolling wood overhead doors between the 1921 sanctuary and the rear wing's large open classroom. The rolling door handle plates are stamped with the manufacturer's name and patent dates: "J. G. Wilson Mfg. Co., NY, 3 W 29<sup>th</sup> St" and "Pat. June 1889, Jan. 21, 1890." Two square niches at the top of the east wall house speakers for the church sound system.

Congregation members donated the stained-glass windows in 1921 in honor of Annie E. McRary, Mary and Richard Ayers, and church trustees Lewis H. Albright, Roscoe C. Crawford, Coston L. Douthit, Hampton M. Oliver, H. Lewis Payne, Robert B. Russell, and Charles M. Wooten. One of the women's fellowship groups, the "Alive Circle," installed carpeting in the sanctuary and purchased the Hammond electric organ during the mid-twentieth century. Members also funded the installation of Gothic Revival-style brass lantern pendants in 1988. When the new lights were hung, one 1921 schoolhouse-style fixture with an opaque-glass globe was moved from the sanctuary to the room at its northeast corner.<sup>9</sup>

A central square wood post and flat-board surround support the wide opening between the sanctuary and the north room, which contains six white-painted wood benches. Five of these benches appear to have been constructed in the 1960s, but one is a portion of a pew from the former 1892 sanctuary. The Packard pump organ in the north room's northwest corner, manufactured by Fort Wayne Organ Company, was used in the sanctuary before the electric organ's acquisition. Two raised-five-panel

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<sup>7</sup> St. Stephen UMC Building Committee, interview with Heather Fearnbach, February 27, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.; St. Stephen UMC Donation Book, in the possession of St. Stephen UMC, Lexington, North Carolina.

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doors—one on the north room's east wall and the other at the 1921 sanctuary's northeast corner—provide north entrance foyer egress. A transom with three textured-glass panes surmounts the matching door at the rear wing/former 1892 sanctuary entrance on the foyer's east wall.

## *1921 Rear Classroom Wing (Former 1892 Sanctuary)*

The rear wing now comprises a foyer and office at the south end, a large open central room, and three storage rooms and two restrooms lining the east and north walls. The altar in the 1892 sanctuary was at what is now the central room's south end. Building committee members remember that the altar remained in place until the room was remodeled in the 1970s to create a south foyer and office, central Sunday school classroom, choir room and small classroom adjacent to the east elevation, and two restrooms at the wing's northeast corner. Faux-wood sheet paneling sheathes partition walls added in the 1970s. Lewis Ayers and his wife donated some of the furnishings in memory of the Ayers family and Lewis Albright.

The wing retains original beadboard wainscoting with alternating reeded and flat sections and a ceiling with a central section that matches the wainscoting and a flat-board border. The dropped-acoustical-tile ceiling hides the original ceiling, which, along with the upper portions of plaster walls, is visible from the small balcony at the sanctuary's north end. The balcony railing matches the ceiling and wainscoting. An internal square stovepipe chimney rises between the first and second windows from the east wall's south end. The wing was updated in 2016 when St. Stephen UMC and Open Hands of Davidson County, Inc. partnered to open Mercy Station Stephen, a community assistance center. Modifications include painting, removing the dropped ceiling from the foyer and covering the walls with smooth gypsum board, sheathing the food storage room's walls and ceiling with epoxy-coated gypsum board, and replacing plumbing and electrical systems.<sup>10</sup>

## *Basement*

The basement originally served as storage and mechanical rooms and contained a coal furnace. It was not otherwise used until circa 1980, when the congregation converted the west room into a fellowship hall. Painted faux-wood paneling sheathes the walls, and a long counter separates the kitchen on the south wall from the room's seating area. Open Hands of Davidson County, Inc. painted, updated lighting, removed carpeting, coated the concrete floor with epoxy, and replaced the counters, sink, and dropped-acoustical-tile ceiling.<sup>11</sup> An enclosed flight of stairs at the room's northwest corner leads to

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<sup>10</sup> Bob Harmon, managing director, Open Hands of Davidson County, Inc., telephone conversation and email correspondence with Heather Fearnbach, January 2020.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

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the 1921 sanctuary. A single-leaf two-panel door on the east wall provides access to the rear wing/former 1892 sanctuary's basement, an unfinished space that houses HVAC equipment. The single-leaf door on the south elevation provides exterior egress.

## Integrity Statement

St. Stephen UMC remains on its original site and the surrounding area appears much as it did during the period of significance, thus allowing for integrity of setting, feeling, and association. The church also possesses integrity of design, materials, and workmanship. The building attained its current footprint upon the 1921 construction of a one-story gabled sanctuary that encompasses the relocated frame 1892 Gothic Revival-style sanctuary as a rear classroom wing. The entire building was brick veneered in 1921. The 1921 sanctuary has a traditional front-gable roofed form and projecting pyramidal-roofed entrance and bell tower. In addition to its symmetry, the sanctuary is distinguished by Colonial Revival stylistic elements including round-arched door and window openings, double-hung stained-glass windows, and redbrick running-bond walls above a five-to-one common-bond foundation topped with corbelled stretcher and header courses. Painted pressed-metal shingles sheathe the tower's upper section and roof. The circa 1950 gabled portico with four square concrete posts and a round-arched stained-glass window centered in the triangular pediment is also a typical feature of Colonial Revival-style sanctuaries. Original plaster walls, narrow floor boards, beadboard wainscoting with molded chair rails and tall baseboards, window and door surrounds with butt corners, single-and-double-leaf paneled-wood doors, rolling wood overhead doors, and a coffered beadboard ceiling remain in the 1921 sanctuary. The 1892 wing retains original beadboard wainscoting with alternating reeded and flat boards and a ceiling with a central section that matches the wainscoting. Post-1971 modifications necessary to facilitate the building's ongoing use do not appreciably diminish its integrity.

## Archeological Potential Statement

St. Stephen United Methodist Church is closely related to the surrounding environment. Archeological deposits, such as structural remains of the initial church constructed on the property, debris associated with the 1886 fire and 1963 riot, and other remains which may be present, can provide information valuable to the understanding and interpretation of the property. Information concerning the development of Lexington's African American community and events associated with the Civil Rights Movement, as well as structural details of church construction, can be obtained from the archeological record. Therefore, archeological remains may well be an important component of the significance of the property. At this time no investigation has been done to document these remains, but it is likely that they exist, and this should be considered in any development of the property.

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St. Stephen United Methodist Church  
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## Section 8. Statement of Significance

St. Stephen United Methodist Church is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for African American ethnic heritage. The congregation has played an important role in the religious, social, and political life of Lexington's black residents from its formation in 1868 until the present. The church's creation manifested the increased civic, political, and religious freedom afforded African Americans during Reconstruction. Its perseverance demonstrates the importance of religion as a unifying institution. The 1921 construction of a new sanctuary and reuse of the 1892 sanctuary as a classroom wing manifest the congregation's resilience, growth, and prosperity. St. Stephen UMC is the oldest black congregation in the Lexington District of the Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church, and is further distinguished by occupying Lexington's oldest extant African American sanctuary of any denomination. Throughout the twentieth century, the congregation undertook community service projects and facilitated civic and fraternal organization establishment. During the 1960s, the church served not only as a place of worship, but also as a forum for civil rights movement meetings and planning sessions. Civil rights leader and attorney J. Kenneth Lee recalled that many community meetings took place at St. Stephen and other African American churches in Lexington at that time.<sup>12</sup>

St. Stephen UMC is also eligible for the National Register under Criterion C as an intact example of Colonial Revival-style early- to mid-twentieth-century ecclesiastical architecture. The 1921 sanctuary has a traditional front-gable form and a projecting pyramidal-roofed entrance and bell tower. In addition to its symmetry, Colonial Revival stylistic elements include round- and flat-arched door and window openings, double-hung stained-glass windows with foliate and geometric motifs, and redbrick running-bond walls above a five-to-one common-bond foundation topped with corbelled stretcher and header courses. Painted pressed-metal shingles sheathe the tower's upper section and roof. A gabled circa 1950 Colonial Revival-style portico shelters the tower entrance. The interior contributes to the overall high integrity, with original plaster walls, narrow floor boards, beadboard wainscoting with molded chair rails and tall baseboards, window and door surrounds with butt corners, single-and-double-leaf paneled-wood doors, rolling wood overhead doors, and a coffered beadboard ceiling remaining in the 1921 sanctuary. The 1892 wing retains original beadboard wainscoting with alternating reeded and flat boards and a ceiling with a central section that matches the wainscoting. St. Stephen UMC meets the requirements of Criteria Consideration A as it derives its primary significance from its architectural style and historical association with Lexington's African American community. The period of significance begins with the 1921 expansion and remodeling and continues until 1971. The building's function after 1971 is not of exceptional significance.

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<sup>12</sup> J. Kenneth Lee, telephone conversation with Heather Fearnbach, June 23, 2008.

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## Historical Background and African American Ethnic Heritage Context

The Reconstruction era began on a high note as Lexington's African American residents asserted their hard-won civil, political, and religious rights. According to local tradition, a small contingent of formerly enslaved persons organized King Methodist Church in 1868, initially meeting at a site on Old Greensboro Road. The group did not have a permanent place of worship until 1874, when members paid \$400 for the sanctuary that had been constructed around 1837 by Lexington's white Methodist congregation on Salisbury Street's south side. On November 8, 1872, trustees of the white Methodist church sold the building to white Guilford County farmer Thomas B. F. James for use by a predominantly white congregation, but stipulated that African American worshipers would be allowed to hold services the first Sunday of each month for one year. Although slaves and free blacks had been able to attend services prior to emancipation, they were relegated to the balcony. King Methodist Church's 1874 purchase of the Salisbury Street property coincided with the completion of the white Methodist congregation's \$5,000 Classical Revival-style sanctuary on South Main Street. King Methodist Church became known as St. Stephen Methodist Episcopal Church by 1885, following member and community leader Robert Baxter McCrary's successful petition for the name change.<sup>13</sup>

The circa 1837 sanctuary was destroyed by a fire on March 23, 1886.<sup>14</sup> It is unknown where the St. Stephen congregation worshipped for the next six years, but on February 20, 1892 the Methodist Episcopal Church Board of Church Extension loaned St. Stephen trustees \$200 to purchase additional property in order to erect a new church. Construction of a frame Gothic Revival-style sanctuary commenced soon after.<sup>15</sup> This auspicious event was followed by the 1893 installation of Reverend Robert E. Jones, the congregation's first African American pastor. Jones' tenure was less than a year, as he was ordained a deacon in 1893 and became an elder in 1896. From 1898 until 1900, Reverend A. H. Newsome served parishioners of St. Stephen Methodist Episcopal Church and Thomasville's St. John Methodist Episcopal Church. Newsome received a \$400.00 annual salary and paid \$31.00 for

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<sup>13</sup> The exact construction date of the first Methodist Episcopal sanctuary is unclear; secondary sources provide dates ranging from 1833 to 1841. Most sources assert that the church was constructed soon after Hugh McCrary donated a quarter-acre lot adjoining the quarter-acre at the intersection of East First Street and North Salisbury Streets that Moses Brock conveyed to the Methodist Episcopal Church trustees in 1833. The congregation, which became First Methodist Episcopal Church, South, merged with a Methodist Protestant congregation to form First Methodist Church in 1940. J. R. McCrary, "History of the Methodist Church at Lexington, N. C.," *The Dispatch*, February 16, 1942; Joseph W. Lasley, "A Bicentennial Feature: Our Historic Churches, St. Stephen Church, Lexington," December 11, 1984, p. 2; Myra Thompson, "Area Methodists Began on Salisbury Street," *The Dispatch*, March 19, 1990, p. 1; M. Jewell Sink and Mary Green Matthews, *Pathfinders: Past and Present: A History of Davidson County, North Carolina* (High Point: Hall Printing Company, 1972), 162; First United Methodist Church Formal Dedication Program, May 14, 1978.

<sup>14</sup> "State News," *Charlotte Observer*, March 26, 1886, p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> St. Stephen UMC Historical Committee, "A Celebration of History at St. Stephen United Methodist Church, Lexington, North Carolina, February 13, 2005," program in St. Stephen UMC's files, Lexington, North Carolina.

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parsonage rent in 1900, when membership of both congregations totaled 220. Twelve teachers instructed an average of 105 of the 196 men, women, and children registered to attend Sunday school.<sup>16</sup>

Reverend Pinckney Isaac Wells (1882-1954) led the St. Stephen and St. John congregations from 1917 until 1924. He resided between Thomasville and Lexington.<sup>17</sup> Wells oversaw the 1921 construction of St. Stephen's second sanctuary at a cost of \$1,500. The brick-veneered building encompasses the frame 1892 church as a rear classroom wing. A furnace and a stove heated the church, which was illuminated by electric lights.<sup>18</sup>

Many congregation members lived and worked near the church; others resided on farms outside the city limits.<sup>19</sup> City directories revealed some information about the church trustees honored on a stained-glass window in the 1921 sanctuary. Roscoe C. Crawford worked at Lexington Chair Company and lived with his wife Ethel and son Kenneth, a student at 115 East Third Street. Coston L. Douthit, current pastor Arnetta Beverly's great-grandfather, was employed at C. M. Thompson Sons, a building supply company at 109 East Second Avenue. He lived with his daughter Lillie, a domestic, at 209 North Pine Street in 1928. Charles M. Wooten worked in a general store at 214 East Second Avenue in 1928 and as a janitor at Davidson Hospital in 1937. He resided at 110 Raleigh Road with his wife Florence. Lewis H. Albright, a plasterer, and his wife Mary lived at 402 Greensboro Road. Robert B. Russell, a fireman for the graded schools, and his wife Essie resided at 308 East Fourth Street. Hampton M. Oliver was a porter for the Winston-Salem Southbound Railway. Henry Lewis Payne, a janitor at the Commercial Bank of Lexington, and his wife Jessie lived at 106 Raleigh Road.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to maintaining a significant physical presence in downtown Lexington, St. Stephen UMC served as a social hub for the African American community. Musical programs, plays, church suppers, holiday celebrations, and other events were regular occurrences. The congregation has always upheld a tradition of community service and encouraged civic and fraternal organizations such as the Masons

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<sup>16</sup> Linda D. Addo and James H. McCallum, *To Be Faithful to Our Heritage: A History of Black United Methodism in North Carolina* (Winston-Salem: Hunter Publishing Company, 1980), 130, 136, 138; *Official Journal of the Forty-Second Session of the North Carolina Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church held at Reidsville, N. C. October 11-15, 1900* (Greensboro: C. F. Thomas, book and job printer, 1900).

<sup>17</sup> Reverend Pinckney Isaac Wells was the son of minister Isaac Wells, who served Forest City's Well Springs Camp Ground, a Methodist Episcopal congregation, from around 1875 until 1900. Isaac Wells had two other sons, John and William, who also became ministers in the North Carolina Conference. Addo and McCallum, *To Be Faithful to Our Heritage*, 29-30.

<sup>18</sup> "Thomasville Department," *The Dispatch*, October 5, 1920, p. 8; Addo and McCallum, *To Be Faithful to Our Heritage*, 168; St. Stephen UMC Historical Committee, "A Celebration of History at St. Stephen United Methodist Church."

<sup>19</sup> St. Stephen UMC Building Committee, interview with Heather Fearnbach, June 27, 2008.

<sup>20</sup> Ernest H. Miller, *Lexington City Directories* (Asheville: Commercial Service Company, 1928-1929 and 1937).

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to hold meetings at the church. Female members organized a chapter of the Home Missionary Society, later known as the Ladies Aid Society, in the late nineteenth century. Bettie Clark, Hannah Crawford, Emaline Douthit, Meamie McCrary, Eva Perryman, Lizzie Phillips, and Martha Wagner were early members. The group, which became the Woman's Society of Christian Service in 1939, assisted local families with basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter. Members included Carrie Albright, Mary Albright, Ella Bradshaw, Annie Carter, Maggie Craven, Ethel Crawford, Pearl Crump, Ellen Curry, Nettie Hicklen, Maggie McCrary, Annie Murray, Mary Neely, Annie Oliver, Jessie Payne, Carrie Thomas, Lula Spaugh, Mary Springs, Nellie Roan Wells, and Florence Wooten. City directories indicate that quite a few of these women worked outside the home: Annie Carter as a domestic, Maggie Craven as a cook, Ethel Crawford and Mary Springs as laundresses, Nettie Hicklen as a cook at Davidson Hospital, and Annie Oliver as a nurse. The women divided into circles in the 1930s and 1940s, supported Bennett College with donations, and participated in North Carolina Methodist Conference activities such as the "School of Missions" as instructors and students. The "Alive Circle," created in the mid-1930s, installed carpeting in the sanctuary and purchased the Hammond electric organ. In the late 1950s and 1960s, the women adopted a patient at Dorothea Dix Hospital.<sup>21</sup>

The congregation satisfied the church mortgage by 1952. Mid-twentieth-century pastors including Glenn A. Brooks, Calvin L. Gidney, and Henry Joyner Jr. resided in the parsonage at 335 East Fourth Street. Church membership continued to grow, encompassing 122 members in 1964.<sup>22</sup> St. Stephen UMC's prominent community leadership role undoubtedly contributed to the fact that the church served not only as a place of worship during the 1960s, but also as a local strategy center for civil rights movement meetings and planning sessions. Civil rights leader and attorney J. Kenneth Lee recalled that many such meetings took place at St. Stephen UMC and other African American churches in Lexington at this time.<sup>23</sup>

Local civil rights activism escalated after approximately fifteen African Americans were denied admittance to the Carolina Theater and the Lexington Lanes Bowling Alley on June 5, 1963. A large crowd gathered, but dispensed without incident. The following evening, a white mob formed at the intersection of East First and North Salisbury streets, just outside St. Stephen UMC and the neighboring First United Church of Christ, which had a white congregation. Mob members began

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<sup>21</sup> Emma Pemberton, Eunice Sellers, Clora Smitherman, Sharon Scott, "History of St. Stephens United Methodist Women," undated manuscript in St. Stephen UMC's files, Lexington, North Carolina; Miller, *Lexington City Directory*, 1937.

<sup>22</sup> The parsonage's street address was changed from 401 to 335 East Fourth Street in the 1940s. Charles W. Miller, *Lexington City Directories*. Asheville: Southern Directory Company, 1941-1965; "Financial report for the closing of the parsonage, November 13-1972-December 4, 1972," St. Stephen UMC, Lexington, North Carolina; St. Stephen UMC Historical Committee, "A Celebration of History at St. Stephen United Methodist Church, Lexington, North Carolina."

<sup>23</sup> J. Kenneth Lee, telephone conversation with Heather Fearnbach, June 23, 2008.

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throwing “rocks, bottles, and anything else handy” at African Americans in the crowd, and they retaliated. Shots were fired, resulting in the death of automobile mechanic Fred Glenn Link of Lexington and the injury of High Point Enterprise photographer Art Richardson. Seven black and two white men were initially arrested in connection with the shooting; the numbers of defendants charged with disorderly conduct, engaging in a riot, assault, carrying concealed weapons, or murder grew to thirty-one by the beginning of the trial on June 20. None of the white defendants retained counsel. African American attorneys J. Kenneth Lee of Greensboro and Richard C. Erwin Jr. of Winston-Salem represented most of the black defendants.<sup>24</sup>

St. Stephen UMC was damaged by gunfire during the riot, and the City of Lexington eventually compensated the church for damages after the mayor appointed a committee to investigate the shooting.<sup>25</sup> This committee, called the “Good Neighbor Council,” included white members Reverend Marlin T. Schaffer (pastor of First United Church of Christ), Howard Wilkinson, and Everett Sicheloff, and African American members George Singleton (furniture plant worker and community leader), David Moose, and Woody Nealy. The Good Neighbor Council recommended that “the City Council take action toward immediate desegregation of all public (municipally owned) facilities in Lexington” at a June 13 meeting.<sup>26</sup>

Lexington’s African American community protested the incarceration of three men—Joe Poole, William Chester Johnson, and Roosevelt Smith—facing first-degree murder charges after the riot. One of the most notable events associated with St. Stephen UMC occurred on the weekend of July 13-14, 1963. On Saturday morning Reverend Henry Joyner of St. Stephen UMC, Harvey Henderson, Roger Nichols, Betty Haslins, and other local NAACP officials met with police chief V. G. Price to obtain permission for a peaceful demonstration the following afternoon. Approximately 105 men, women, and children assembled around 2:15 pm on Sunday and “took a quiet walk” from St. Stephen UMC to the Davidson County Courthouse, where they kneeled, prayed, and sang three songs before returning to the church. *The Dispatch* reported that five hundred people gathered to watch the march and forty-seven law enforcement officers—Lexington police, sheriff’s deputies, and state highway patrolmen—were stationed along the route. After a brief meeting upon their return to the church, local NAACP youth advisor Harvey Henderson and nine young men and women conducted a “test” of the Lexington

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<sup>24</sup> “Negro Youths Admit Shooting: One Killed, One Wounded Here Last Night,” *The Dispatch*, June 7, 1963, p. 1; “Riot Trials Begin Here,” *The Dispatch*, June 20, 1963, p.1; “Hearings Underway Here in First Degree Murder Charges,” *The Dispatch*, June 28, 1963, p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> Tonya Lanier, “St. Stephen United Methodist Church,” North Carolina Study List Application on file at the NC SHPO, Raleigh.

<sup>26</sup> “Immediate Desegregation is Recommended in Lexington,” *The Dispatch*, June 14, 1963, p. 1.

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Municipal swimming pool, where they paid admission and swam for about twenty minutes before the pool closed for the day.<sup>27</sup>

Civil rights activism in the 1960s also brought change in religious arenas, including the overarching Methodist Conference organization. The Central and Western Districts of the North Carolina-Virginia Conference became part of the Western North Carolina Conference in March 1968. After the conference merger, the Woman's Society of Christian Service changed its name to United Methodist Women (UMW). St. Stephen UMW members served on district boards—Elizabeth Banks as Mission Coordinator of Christian Global Concerns and Eunice Sellars and Irene Harris on the nominating committee—and attended the School of Christian Mission at Pfeiffer College. St. Stephen's UMW remains active in the community, contributing to charitable causes, providing college scholarships for members, and pursuing spiritual study. Two female ministers, Arnetta E. Beverly and Elizabeth Carson, have come from the congregation.<sup>28</sup> Dr. Beverly, a Lexington native, was baptized at the church in 1946, attended with her parents and grandparents as a youth, and returned in 2017 to lead the congregation as its first female pastor. A Duke Divinity School and Drew University graduate, her prior postings include St. Matthews United Methodist Church in Greensboro, where she was also the first female pastor. In 1987, Dr. Beverly became the first African American to serve on Lexington's city council.<sup>29</sup>

In 2016, St. Stephen UMC and Open Hands of Davidson County, Inc. partnered to open Mercy Station Stephen, a community center offering emergency food assistance, clothing, household items, and toiletries. Director Bob Harmon manages the program housed in the rear wing and basement fellowship hall. Two participants joined St. Stephen UMC in late 2017, becoming the congregation's first white members. The St. Stephen UMC congregation currently comprises 78 members, approximately 36 of whom regularly attend services.<sup>30</sup>

## Methodist Episcopal Church - United Methodist Church Denominational History

The Fourth Methodist Conference met in Baltimore on May 21, 1776 and formed the Carolina Circuit, which was the first Methodist Circuit located entirely within North Carolina. Reverends Edward Dromgoole, Francis Poythress, and Isham Tatum were appointed to the circuit, which encompassed

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<sup>27</sup> Henderson had been arrested on Saturday night for writing worthless checks, but posted bond in time to lead the Sunday demonstrations. "Demonstration Here Tomorrow," *The Dispatch*, July 13, 1963, p. 1; "Demonstration is Uneventful: Negroes Swim in White Pool," *The Dispatch*, July 15, 1963, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> "History of St. Stephens United Methodist Women;" Elizabeth Banks, Clora Smitherman, Helen Long, Janice Tate, "Report of United Methodist Women, 1992," in St. Stephen UMC's files, Lexington, North Carolina.

<sup>29</sup> Arnetta E. Beverly, telephone conversation with Heather Fearnbach, January 7, 2020.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

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683 members. They added 257 members the first year, making the Carolina Circuit one of the largest in the colonies.<sup>31</sup>

Henry Evans, a free black Virginia preacher and shoemaker, stopped in Fayetteville on his way to Charleston in 1780 and decided to stay and minister in the community. He is credited with organizing North Carolina's first racially inclusive congregation, as his services drew large numbers of African American and white worshippers. Shortly before Evans died in 1810 Bishop William Capers stated that "he was the father of the Methodist Church, both black and white in Fayetteville, and the best preacher of his time in that quarter."<sup>32</sup>

North Carolina's Yadkin Circuit, organized in 1780, served an area that included what are now Rowan, Stanly, Montgomery, Davidson, Davie, and Randolph counties. Andrew Yeargan was appointed pastor of the circuit's first eleven members. The circuit encompassed 348 Methodist congregants by 1783, and in 1784 the Salisbury Circuit, which included Davidson County, was created. Jesse Lee served as the circuit preacher, and as membership grew pastors Isaac Smith, Hoshua Hartley, and Hope Hull were also assigned to the Salisbury Circuit. The Virginia conference absorbed the Yadkin and Salisbury circuits in 1803, and they remained in that jurisdiction until the North Carolina conference was formed in February 1837. By January 1838, the North Carolina Conference included 45,062 white members, 3,566 African American members, and 80 Sunday schools.<sup>33</sup>

The Methodist Episcopal Church, North, aggressively pursued a missionary program in the southern states at the end of the Civil War, often taking over abandoned buildings of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. In 1868, when King Methodist Church was organized in Lexington, North Carolina, eight black Methodist conferences existed in the United States. The Lexington congregation hosted the North-Carolina Virginia Conference annual meeting in 1874, 1893, and 1923. Although the efforts of the mainstream Methodist church never achieved the success of evangelizing and church building associated with the African Methodist Episcopal or African Methodist Episcopal Zion churches, national black Methodist Episcopal membership rose to 250,000 by 1896. In 1926, the North Carolina Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, had 3,990 black and 19,495 white members. St. Stephen Methodist Episcopal Church pastor P. I. Wells, who also led Thomasville's St. John Methodist Episcopal Church, was the conference statistician. The United Methodist Church, formed in 1939, unified the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the Methodist Protestant Church, creating five white jurisdictions based on geographical region. A sixth

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<sup>31</sup> "Bicentennial Celebration of the North Carolina and the Western North Carolina Conferences of the United Methodist Church, Duke University, April 3, 1976," program in St. Stephen UMC's files, Lexington, North Carolina.

<sup>32</sup> Addo and McCallum, *To Be Faithful to Our Heritage*. 11-12.

<sup>33</sup> J. R. McCrary, "History of the Methodist Church at Lexington, N. C.," *The Dispatch*, February 16, 1942; First United Methodist Church Formal Dedication Program, May 14, 1978.

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African American jurisdiction, called the Central Jurisdiction, encompassed all of the black conferences and missions in the United States. “The effect of this action,” according to scholars C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, “was to institutionalize a black Methodist Church, literally a church within a church.”<sup>34</sup>

The United Methodist Church remained segregated until 1966, when the Evangelical United Brethren Church merger officially abolished the Central Jurisdiction. It took several years, however, to integrate the African American congregations into the regional jurisdictions. The Central and Western Districts of the North Carolina-Virginia Conference became part of the Western North Carolina Conference of the Southeastern Jurisdiction in March 1968. Lincoln and Mamiya note that “true integration in the church, however, as in society at large, failed to follow local desegregation. In practice if not in policy, black Methodists remained separate from white Methodists.”<sup>35</sup> Diverse, multiracial congregations remained rare through the late twentieth century.

In 1990, eleven of the forty-six United Methodist bishops in the United States were African American, including Leontine T. C. Kelley, who was the first female bishop in any Methodist denomination. Total Methodist church membership numbered 9.4 million, with 2,600 of 38,000 congregations being predominately black.<sup>36</sup>

St. Stephen UMC is the oldest African American congregation in the Lexington District of the Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church. The majority of black United Methodist congregations in North Carolina are located in the piedmont. Scholars Linda D. Addo and James H. McCallum assert that this is due to an unofficial historic agreement that the African Methodist Episcopal Church (A. M. E. and A. M. E. Zion) would pursue members in eastern and coastal North Carolina, while the Methodist Episcopal, now United Methodist, Church would cultivate congregations in piedmont and western North Carolina. The presence of Bennett College in Greensboro undoubtedly also served to inspire the concentration of Methodist Episcopal congregations in the area.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> “Colored Conference Closed Sunday,” *Charlotte News*, November 18, 1918, p. 2; “Minutes and Official Journal of the North Carolina Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church,” Madison, N. C., October 27-31, 1926, p. 32-33; C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 67; Teresa Douglas, Heather Fearnbach, Rebecca Smith, and Carroll Van West, “United Methodist Church,” in *Powerful Artifacts: A Guide to Surveying and Documenting Rural African-American Churches* (Murfreesboro, TN: Center for Historic Preservation, Middle Tennessee State University, 2000), 24-25.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 67.

<sup>37</sup> Addo and McCallum, *To Be Faithful to Our Heritage*, 39-40.

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## Lexington and Thomasville African American Church Architectural Context

St. Stephen UMC, Lexington's oldest extant African American sanctuary, is eligible for the National Register under Criterion C, significant at the local level as an intact example of Colonial Revival-style early- to mid-twentieth-century ecclesiastical architecture. Many Protestant churches displayed Craftsman, Classical, Colonial Revival, Gothic Revival, or Romanesque Revival features during that period. St. Stephen UMC's 1921 sanctuary manifests the pervasive popularity of the nationally prevalent Colonial Revival aesthetic. Noted architectural historian Richard Guy Wilson asserts that the Colonial Revival is "the United States' most popular and characteristic expression. Neither a formal style or a movement, Colonial Revival embodies an attitude that looks to the American past for inspiration and selects forms, motifs, and symbols for replication and reuse."<sup>38</sup>

The 1921 sanctuary has a traditional front-gable form and projecting pyramidal-roofed entrance and bell tower. Painted pressed-metal shingles sheathe the tower's upper section and roof. In addition to symmetry, Colonial Revival stylistic elements include round- and flat-arched door and window openings, double-hung stained-glass foliate and geometric-motif windows, and redbrick running-bond walls above a five-to-one common-bond foundation topped with corbelled stretcher and header courses. A gabled circa 1950 Colonial Revival-style portico with four square concrete posts and a round-arched stained-glass window centered in the triangular pediment shelters the tower entrance. The restrained overall appearance of the exterior is very much in keeping with other modest churches constructed for Methodist congregations in small North Carolina towns.

On the interior, white plaster walls serve as a foil for woodwork with a dark lacquered finish: narrow floor boards, beadboard wainscoting with molded chair rails and tall baseboards, window and door surrounds with butt corners, single-and-double-leaf paneled-wood doors, rolling wood overhead doors, and a coffered beadboard ceiling. The use of rolling overhead doors to separate sanctuaries from Sunday school classrooms has been a common component of ecclesiastical design since the 1870s. The former 1892 sanctuary retains original beadboard wainscoting with alternating reeded and flat boards and a ceiling with a central section that matches the wainscoting.

The dearth of extant late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century records related to Lexington's early African American congregations makes it impossible to delineate how many churches existed during this period. However, the 1925-1926 city directory lists eight African American congregations and their pastors: Benjamin F. Thomas, St. Stephen Methodist Episcopal; W. G. Anderson, Shady Side Presbyterian, H. M. Ellis, First Baptist; T. S. Grier, Ezekiel A. M. E. Zion; James Williford, Fire

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<sup>38</sup> Richard Guy Wilson, *The Colonial Revival House* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2004), 6, 89.

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Baptized Holiness; Harrison Hoston, Baptist; A. C. Miller, Baptist.<sup>39</sup> Mid-twentieth-century sanctuaries associated with three of those congregations survive.

Shady Side Presbyterian Church's cross-gable-roofed brick 1940s sanctuary, which stands approximately two blocks southwest of St. Stephen United Methodist Church at 217 East Center Street, replaced an earlier building at the same location. The original sanctuary's stuccoed crenellated belltower was reused in the 1940s building, which like St. Stephen, has double-hung-round-arched stained-glass windows and a gabled portico. However, Shady Side Presbyterian's portico is embellished with fluted columns and a stuccoed pediment with an oculus. The one-story gable-roofed brick parsonage south of the church was erected in 1950.<sup>40</sup>

Lexington's Union Baptist Church was organized in 1884 with guidance from Summer Hill Baptist Church, which had been constituted in 1867. Union Baptist's name reflects its 1905 sanctuary's East Third Avenue location across the street from Union Depot on a lot donated by Henry M. and Laura Hargrave. Reverend S. D. McIver headed the church by 1954, when contractor Oliver Burkehart constructed the front-gable-roofed stuccoed sanctuary at 110 Lincoln Avenue that remains in use by the congregation. A vinyl-sided belfry with a pyramidal spire topped with a cross rises from the blue-finish-corrugated-metal roof that replaced an asphalt-shingle roof in the 2010s. The building has a north shed addition and a gabled rear wing.<sup>41</sup>

The Ezekiel A. M. E. Zion congregation, founded in 1907, has worshipped at its running-bond red-brick T-plan 314 East Fourth Street building since 1941.<sup>42</sup> The front-gable sanctuary features a stepped corbelled parapet with a narrow flat center and sloping cast-stone-capped shoulders. The parapet edges project beyond the wall plane above banded brick pilasters. Flat-arch lintels with cast-stone quoins and corner blocks surmount the stained-glass windows, which have rectangular hoppers. The cast-stone cross and recessed variegated-brick panel at the façade's center are partially obscured by the one-story red-brick entrance vestibule with a vinyl steeple and cross-topped pyramidal spire that was a later addition. Concrete steps and a long accessibility ramp facilitate egress. The more simply executed two-story side-gable rear wing has a gabled corbelled parapet, soldier course lintels, and double-hung six-over-six wood sash. An open breezeway covers the wing's side entrance and spans the short distance between the church and adjacent one-story gable-roofed red-brick parsonage.

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<sup>39</sup> Miller, *Lexington City Directory*, 1925-1926.

<sup>40</sup> Sanborn maps, March 1913, December 1923, June 1929, March 1948; Davidson County property tax cards. The extant sanctuary is shown on the March 1948 Sanborn map.

<sup>41</sup> Summer Hill Baptist Church became First Baptist Church. Union Baptist Church cornerstone; Union Baptist Church, "One Hundred Fifth Anniversary of Union Baptist Church, 1884 - June 11, 1989," and "Souvenir Journal: 120<sup>th</sup> Celebration of First Baptist Church," Union Baptist Church vertical file at the Davidson County Public Library, Lexington.

<sup>42</sup> Ezekiel A. M. E. Zion Church cornerstone.

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Other extant historic Davidson County African American Methodist churches include the former St. John Methodist Episcopal Church at 8 Church Street in Thomasville. The congregation, established in the late nineteenth century, constructed the sanctuary in 1914, while N. J. Pass was pastor, to replace an earlier frame church. St. John Methodist Episcopal Church was dedicated in 1919 during the tenure of Reverend Pinckney Isaac Wells, who also served the St. Stephen congregation in Lexington at that time.<sup>43</sup> The one-story, rusticated concrete block, Gothic Revival-style church has a cruciform plan, a corner entrance/bell tower with a double-leaf entry and wood shingles on its upper half, buttresses, and arched stained-glass and replacement windows. The 1947 rear concrete block addition contains classrooms, a fellowship hall and an annex named in honor of Sally Clodfelter. The congregation merged with Hoover Chapel Methodist Church in 1970 and built a new church on James Avenue in 1980. The former St. John Methodist Episcopal Church housed Iglesia Wesleyana/El Buen Pastor in 2004, when it was added to the North Carolina Study List as one of the few intact early-twentieth century African American churches in Thomasville and for its vernacular Gothic Revival style.<sup>44</sup>

In comparison to the aforementioned churches, St. Stephen UMC is particularly significant due to its high level of integrity and Colonial Revival style. The symmetrical 1921 sanctuary has a traditional front-gable-roofed form with a projecting entrance and bell tower and displays Colonial Revival features such as brick walls, round-arched stained-glass windows, and the circa 1950 pedimented portico. Original interior elements including plaster walls, narrow floor boards, beadboard wainscoting with molded chair rails and tall baseboards, window and door surrounds with butt corners, single-and-double-leaf paneled-wood doors, rolling wood overhead doors, and the coffered beadboard ceiling have been carefully preserved.

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<sup>43</sup> Addo and McCallum, *To Be Faithful to Our Heritage*, 29-30.

<sup>44</sup> Heather Fearnbach, inventory entry for the former St. John Methodist Episcopal Church, "Thomasville, North Carolina 2004 Comprehensive Architectural Survey," Edwards-Pitman Environmental, Inc., report on file at the NC SHPO, Raleigh, NC; "Groundbreaking held for Central Methodist," *Thomasville Times*, August 4, 1979.

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Davidson County, NC

## Section 10. Geographical Data

### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Latitude: 35.823789 / Longitude: -80.251105

### Verbal Boundary Description

St. Stephen UMC's National Register boundary encompasses all of 0.21-acre Davidson County tax parcel number 6725-02-97-1018, as indicated by the bold line on the enclosed map. Scale 1" = 60'

### Boundary Justification

The tax parcel that serves as the National Register boundary contains the property historically associated with St. Stephen UMC's 1921 sanctuary. The congregation's parsonage was located several blocks away at 335 East Fourth Street.

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Davidson County, NC

## Photographs

All photographs by Heather Fearnbach, Fearnbach History Services, Inc., 3334 Nottingham Road, Winston-Salem, NC, on October 21, 2019. Digital images located at the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office in Raleigh.



1. Façade (west elevation), looking east

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Davidson County, NC



**2. South elevation (above) and 3. Northwest oblique (below)**



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4. Northeast oblique (above) and 5. 1921 sanctuary, looking east (below)



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6. 1921 sanctuary, looking west and 7. 1921 north wing, looking north



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Davidson County, NC



8. Former 1892 sanctuary, looking south (above)  
9. Basement fellowship hall, looking south (below)

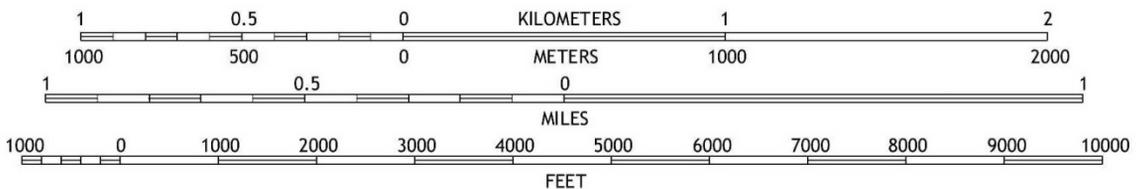


**St. Stephen United Methodist Church**  
**102 East First Street, Lexington**  
**Davidson County, North Carolina**  
**Location Map**

U. S. Geological Survey  
Lexington West Quadrangle, 2019



SCALE 1:24 000



**St. Stephen United Methodist Church**  
**102 East First Street, Lexington, Davidson County, North Carolina**  
**National Register Boundary Map**

1892

1921

Latitude: 35.823789  
Longitude: -80.251105

North  
Salisbury  
Street

National Register Boundary  
Davidson County tax parcel #6725-02-97-1018

East  
First  
Street



one inch equals sixty feet

Heather Fearnbach, Fearnbach History Services, Inc. / April 2021  
Base 2018 aerial photo from Davidson County GIS at  
<http://webgis.co.davidson.nc.us/website/DavidsonGIS>

**St. Stephen United Methodist Church**  
**102 East First Street, Lexington, Davidson County, North Carolina**  
**Schematic Floor Plan and Photograph Key**

