Kalamazoo Local Historic District Study Committee Report for the First Baptist Church Building.

Location: 315 W. Michigan Avenue, Kalamazoo County Michigan

1. Charge of the Committee
On April 30, 2007, the Kalamazoo City Commission amended Chapter 16 of the Code of Ordinances (Local Historic District) and appointed the Kalamazoo Historic Preservation Commission as its permanent, standing Historic District Study Committee. The Kalamazoo Historic Preservation Commission as established in Chapter 2 of the Code of Ordinances for the City of Kalamazoo will fulfill the duties of the historic district study committee set forth in section 3 of 1970 P.A. No. 169, MCL 399.203 as amended.

Pursuant to that charge, the Kalamazoo Historic Preservation Commission has undertaken a study to determine the feasibility of local historic district designation, and will make a recommendation to the City Commission for the following: First Baptist Church Building, whose address is: 315 W. Michigan Avenue, Kalamazoo, Michigan 49007.

2. Composition of Committee Membership
Members of the Historic Preservation Commission include:

1) Chair Joshua Koenig  Director, Undergraduate Advising & American, Public Environmental, Architectural History & Historic Preservation instructor, WMU

2) Regina Gorham  Collections Manager, Kalamazoo Valley Museum.


4) Lenee Powell-Wilson  Community Care Nurse, Veterans Administration, Battle Creek.

5) Kyle Hibbard  CAD Designer, Foodservice Design/Dealer Maintenance, Stafford-Smith Inc.

6) Katherine White  Associate Curator, The Henry Ford

7) Fred Edison  Innkeeper, Festive West Bed & Breakfast

3. Name of the Historic District Studied
First Baptist Church Building
4a Verbal Boundary Description
Kalamazoo's First Baptist Church sits on the northeast corner of "Church Square", which is part of the original plat of what is now the City of Kalamazoo, then known first as "Brunson" and later corrected to "Bronson." The lot is bounded on the north by West Michigan Avenue, on the east by Church Street, on the south by the now-empty lot on which the historic First Reformed Church building sat (it was demolished 11-25-20), and on the west by the historic First Congregational Church building and its parking lot. Church Square is located near the northwest corner of the Bronson Park National Register Historic District (#83000855), which is an irregularly shaped, seven-block area in the heart of Kalamazoo, and sits directly north of the west half of Bronson Park.

4b Visual Boundary Description
MAP – See Appendix #1

4c Legal Boundary Description
159 - D ORIGINAL PLAT NE 1/4 OF BLOCK KNOWN AS CHURCH SQUARE

4d Boundary Justification
The boundaries of this district concur with the legal boundaries of the lot on which the First Baptist Church Building is located.

5. History of the Proposed District
The Village of "Brunson" was platted in 1831; its name later corrected to "Bronson." The area within the plat includes today’s Bronson Park and its surrounding National Register Historic District, and is located on land formerly occupied and owned by ancestors of today's Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatomi.

In 1821, the Band signed a treaty surrendering its tribal land to the United States government. As a result, a nine-square-mile area along the Kalamazoo River was reserved for the Band. In 1827, the Michigan Territorial Government Treaty retracted the reservation, and members of the band were forcibly moved from the area and the compact community they had established. Those who remained in the greater area mostly scattered to sections of the Gun Lake prairies, 25 miles north of Kalamazoo.

On November 1, 1830, Stephen Richardson and his brother-in-law Titus Bronson each bought eighty acres of this land from the U.S. Government. Today's Rose Street was the north-south dividing line between their two eighty-acre parcels. Bronson's (E ½ of SW ¼, Section 15) was on Rose Street's east side, while Richardson's (W ½ of SW ¼, Section 15) was on the west. The two platted Brunson/Bronson in 1831, and Richardson's land became home to what has since become identified as the now well-known "Four Squares" found on the 1831 plat map.

As Kalamazoo’s very first economic development incentive, the Four Squares were set aside for public and religious use. The plat map notations read in part:
The public square Jail square and Academy square are 16 rods square. The above streets and squared (sp) are appropriated for the use and benefit of the County. The Church Square is Sixteen rods square, and is appropriated to the four first religious denominations who may form societies in the foregoing Town and erect buildings thereon one fourth to the benefit of each society.

That 1831 plat map shows the marked squares bounded by what are now known as W. Michigan Avenue, Rose, South, and Park Streets. The incentive worked. Within the next three years, the State government located the county seat and land offices to Bronson.

In 1836, nearly $2 million worth of land was sold in Kalamazoo at $1.25 an acre. Within a decade, all the squares were partially or fully developed. A Courthouse was built in 1838 (NE.) Church Square, (NW) was fully populated by 1852 with Baptist, Methodist, Episcopal and Congregational houses of worship. A Jail and Academy were built in their respective SW and SE squares.

**Context: The National Register Historic District**

In 1983, following several decades of historic resources surveys, the Bronson Park National Register Historic District was approved by the National Park Service as part of a Multiple Resource nomination for Kalamazoo. The First Baptist Church is one of the seventeen extant contributing resources and now-empty lots identified in this District.
side of W. Lovell St.); then continues east and then north at S. Park Street, to encompass the Ladies Library building (east side of S. Park Street), and continues north along S. Park Street to the lot on which the former First Church of Christian Science building stood and the First United Methodist Church building stands (both on the west side of S. Park Street), and then moving north to the point of beginning.

Inside the boundary, the following other resources are also included, along Academy and W. South Streets: the empty lot on which the First Reformed Church building stood (north side of Academy St.), the Civic Theater, First Presbyterian Church, Kalamazoo City Hall, and Park Club buildings, all along the south side of W. South Street.

**Context: Outside the Four Squares**

Bronson Park, along with the activity of Courthouse and Church Squares, quickly made the immediately surrounding area the focus of a residential building boom which became home to some of the City's best-known public servants, merchants and professionals.

These included Pioneer Justus Burdick, early drugstore owner D. A. McNair, and Nathaniel Balch, who served as County Prosecutor, State Senator, Bar Association president and village president. They and their families were joined by construction company owners Frederick Bush and Thomas Patterson, civil engineer and surveyor Luther Trask, and others, including Frederick Curtenius, Samuel Ransom, Josiah Hawes, and Joel Perrin, many of whom also served the infant community in a variety of ways.

By 1880, more homes were added, including those belonging to Amariah Prouty, Joseph Cornell, William Lawrence and attorney, constitutional convention delegate, and village president Hezekiah (H.G.) Wells. By the middle-1880s, several of the still-available lots were filled with homes. About this same time, however, nearby land uses began to change. In 1882, the Dankmar Adler and Louis Sullivan designed Academy of Music replaced Justus Burdick's home, and in 1893, a new Library was completed at the southeast corner of Rose and South Streets. These changes began a subtle shift from residential to the civic uses. That shift continued and strengthened over the next forty years, slowly but steadily transforming this area to today's “Civic Center.”

About 1929, the City began its first city-wide master planning effort with assistance from Planner Jacob Crane. Plates I and II of Crane's plan (shown here) represent this area, including Church Square and the gable-roofed First Baptist Church, thus indicating the high level of importance he and others placed on the City's first platted area.
In Plate I (looking west). Crane envisioned the new City Hall (left) and a spot which soon became the Civic Theater, along with the Presbyterian Church along the park’s south side, the Christian Science and Methodist Churches on the west (top), the Congregational, Baptist and Reformed Churches and YMCA on Church Square, and a not-yet-built new County Courthouse on its Square.

Plate II (looking north) shows no residences remaining that are immediately adjacent to Bronson Park, as Crane’s proposed Civic Center would be when completed.

Context: The Four Squares
Bronson Park
The County jail’s demolition in 1845 rendered the southwest Square vacant, except for the extant circular mound, which appears to have been built by an ancient indigenous cultural group. The results of a ground-penetrating radar investigation were interpreted, and a report issued in mid-2020, but it has not yet been publicly shared. With the jail’s removal, the enduring roots of today’s Bronson Park began to take hold.

In 1854, having petitioned the village to have Academy Square on the southeast vacated of its 1838 school building, citizens finally just picked it up, moved it into the street and set it on fire, thereby rendering both southern Squares for park use. And, since 1864, the 3.6 acre park has occupied these two southern squares of the original four.
Courthouse Square
Planning for the first courthouse on this Square began in 1836, shortly after Stephen Richardson's four square set-aside. The chosen style was then growing in favor -- a two-story Greek Revival. In 1866, the county enlarged the building, but things grew cramped again, and in the early 1880s, voters approved construction for a new, larger courthouse. Completed in 1885, the second courthouse was designed in the Renaissance Revival style by Edward Fallis from Ohio. That building was razed in 1935, following calls and approval for a new combined courthouse and jail. Its replacement, which stands today, was completed in 1937. It is one of three government buildings (local, state and federal) in the district, and one of two district examples erected under federal Great Depression/New Deal make-work construction programs created to relieve economic hardships. The County Courthouse was built under the Public Works Administration.

Church Square
As noted on the original plat, the land here was free to the first four congregations to claim it and build a house of worship. The Episcopalians built first, on the square's northwest corner, in 1837. Though the Baptists made the first claim to land on the square, it finished its first building there in 1841, (four years after the Episcopalians,) and so were the second congregation to locate there. They were followed by the Methodists, on the southwest corner in 1842, and the Congregationalists in 1852, on the southwest corner. From there, the history gets a bit complicated. For the purposes of this report, the following describes the individual development of each corner of the square, except the northeast corner, which is found later, under "History of the First Baptist Church Building."

Church Square, SE Corner (home of the now-demolished historic First Reformed Church Building)
The Methodists hold the title of longest-organized congregation in the City. Beginning in 1830, Methodist circuit rider James T. Robe performed the first Christian services held in Kalamazoo. The Methodists made the third claim on Church Square, completing their Greek Revival building on this site in 1842, facing Church Street. They outgrew the building and departed in 1866, having sold the church building to the Dutch Reformed congregation.

The Dutch Reformed congregation was formed in 1850 after pioneer Paulus denBleyker decided to settle here. The congregation met first in businesses' and stores' second floors, and in 1852, in Kalamazoo's first [denominationally-shared] ecumenical church building on South Street, east of Rose. By the middle 1860s, that was too small, so they bought and moved into the Methodist's former Church Square building. When they outgrew that building, they erected a new white clapboard church on the site. It was the first church on Church Square to face Bronson Park, and dedicated in 1871.
In 1910, the First Reformed building was extensively renovated, with a brick veneer applied to its frame, an enlarged pulpit, new stained glass windows and a stairway, taking the building from somewhat Romanesque to more of a Tudor style. The congregation later added an educational wing on its west side, c1950s, and remained here until 2006, when it closed the building and joined the Second Reformed Congregation. In 2016, the First Congregational Church purchased the property, and demolished the original building and educational wing in November, 2020.

Church Square, NW Corner (now the First Congregational Church's parking lot)
St. Luke’s Episcopal Church congregation formed in 1837 and built a small frame building on this corner that year. It was followed in 1848 by a significantly larger brick church building designed by New York architect Richard Upjohn. Richard Upjohn was a cousin to Uriah Upjohn, the father of Kalamazoo’s William Erastus “W.E.” Upjohn, who founded the Upjohn Company in Kalamazoo.

In 1859, St. Luke’s congregation split. When some parishioners left the “Square” church, another member bought and donated it to the Young Men’s Christian Association of Kalamazoo (YMCA). The YMCA demolished the Richard Upjohn-designed church building and completed its first building on the site by 1892. In January 1911, that building was destroyed by fire, and by September, a new building took its place, to which an addition was added in 1941. The YMCA moved to Maple Street in 1970, and First Congregational Church then bought and demolished the “Y” for its parking lot.

Church Square, SW Corner (present-day site of First Congregational Church complex)
Having located in two earlier sites since 1834, the Congregationalists moved into their new brick building here in 1852, filling the Square’s remaining open lot. In 1887, membership growth was evident, and by 1890, a new Byzantine-influenced church here was dedicated. At the very end of 1925, that building was destroyed by a fire.

Much of First Congregational’s present-day complex was designed by New York architect Aymar Embury II. Completed in 1928, it included a sunken garden facing Bronson Park. In 1946, members recommended significant alterations which were finally completed in 1960. New construction on the former garden site had doubled the size of the parish house, and another addition filled in between it and the sanctuary, together providing Sunday school classrooms and other spaces. This work was co-designed by Edward Coe Embury and Kalamazoo’s Stone, Smith and Parent Architects. In the late 1970’s, the building’s primary entrance was later shifted from Bronson Park to the parking lot.

Church Square, NE Corner: History of the First Baptist Church and Building
The People
The circumstances under which the area developed were unusual, and particularly so when Kalamazoo’s civic center, or “heart” expanded as a direct result from the
donated Four Squares. A short and incomplete list of people associated with the First Baptist's Church's development on Church Square and Kalamazoo are noted here.

The first European-American religious leader to visit Kalamazoo was Baptist minister Rev. Leonard Slater, in 1826. Slater stayed overnight on his way to Niles (and later returned). Eight years after that, in 1835, Baptist minister Rev. Jeremiah Hall began preaching at his father-in-law's home (Maj. Ezekiel Ransom) and during this period, the congregation organized with fourteen members.

Samuel Durant reported that the first building on this corner was started elsewhere and intended for a lot set aside for a school where today’s Kalamazoo Institute of Arts is located. However, following an unknown disagreement or misunderstanding, the Baptists bought it, moved it here and finished it, holding its first services in 1841.

Several First Baptist Church leaders played a very significant role in the creation and operation of today’s Kalamazoo College, an institution known worldwide for its exceptional liberal arts’ educational curriculum and study abroad program. Early known as the Michigan and Huron Institute, Rev. Hall secured a site on what was then known as Arcadia Hill (today’s College campus), and in 1835, helped raised funds from the village to build that school, and in its early years, many large functions, including commencements, were held at First Baptist Church.

However, the relationship between the institution and its supporting congregation became seriously strained over time and involved Lucinda Hinsdale Stone and her husband, Dr. James A. B. Stone, who served as faculty and administrators of the new school between 1843 and 1863. Lucinda Hinsdale Stone’s relationship to the church and wider society is further addressed under the Criteria B section of this report.

In 1826, on the way to the Carey Mission in Niles, early Baptist Missionary Leonard Slater and his wife, Mary French Ide, stayed overnight with a French trader and small group of Native Americans in a settlement where Riverside Cemetery now sits. Taken by the view, Rev. Slater vowed to return. After a short stint in Niles, the Slaters moved to the Thomas Mission in Grand Rapids and then to Prairieville in 1836, living among Native Americans. Rev. Slater learned their language and continued to use it when he moved to Kalamazoo in 1851, following his wife’s death. It is reported that he visited Prairieville on Sundays to preach, and later, after attending services at Kalamazoo’s First Baptist Church, would emerge and preach to waiting Native Americans. Slater died in 1866 and is buried in Kalamazoo’s Riverside Cemetery.

New Englanders Stephen Richardson and Titus Bronson platted the Town of Bronson (later corrected to Bronson) in 1831. Titus Bronson had settled here in 1829, and is commonly referred to as Kalamazoo’s founder, though there is strong evidence that the Four Squares set aside at the time of platting belonged not to Bronson, but to his brother-in-law, Richardson.
The Baptist Church’s first Deacon was **Major Ezekiel Ransom**, who, following his Revolutionary War and President Washington’s staff service, settled here in 1835, and was instrumental in the creation of today’s Kalamazoo College. Ezekiel Ransom was the father of Samuel Ransom, below, and seventh Michigan Governor, Epaphroditus Ransom.

Baptist congregation member **Samuel Ransom**, who was brother to Governor Epaphroditus Ransom and also a First Baptist deacon. He lived nearby at Park and Academy Streets, and earned his living through real estate development, along with his bakery, meat market and sawmill. He too helped establish Kalamazoo College.

American lawyer and writer **Charles Guiteau**, gave a talk on the “Second Coming of Christ” in the basement of First Baptist Church in 1879. In 1881, Guiteau shot President Garfield, who died two months later.

Kalamazoo builder-architect **H. (Henry) W. Coddington** carried out a number of well-known projects during his career. In addition to his work at First Baptist, he designed, worked on, or built: Ladies Hall (Lower Hall), for what is now Kalamazoo College; the 1867 Kalamazoo Female Seminary; the former 1867-69 Methodist Episcopal Church at Lovell and South Rose Streets; St. Luke’s Episcopal Church (1886), its later parish house (1893), and the former S. Burdick Street Post Office (1892). Coddington also re-built the burned down Kalamazoo Steam Brewery in 1867 on what is now Oakland Drive.

Chicago architect **William C. Jones** designed the 1911-12 First Baptist remodeling. Over a decades-long Chicago Midwestern career, first with Holabird and Roche (now Root), Jones helped design Chicago’s 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition buildings, and later worked with architect Gilbert Turnbull and on his own. Elsewhere in Kalamazoo, his 1914 First Church of Christ Scientist (part of the Bronson Park National Register District; demolished 2019) was the progenitor for his later Rock Island Christian Science church building, and his 1917 Boone, Iowa church for the Trinity Lutheran congregation.

Kalamazoo architect **Ernest Batterson** was a versatile designer, working on institutional and residential buildings throughout southwest Michigan. He moved from Battle Creek to Kalamazoo and first worked with local architect Rockwell LeRoy. In 1919, he struck out on his own, eventually designing many homes in the Hillcrest, Orchard Hills and West Main Hill neighborhoods (mostly extant), school buildings, the former Salvation Army building on N. Rose Street (extant), the Modernist Douglas Community Center (extant), as well as his largest, the Kalamazoo building, and the First United Methodist Church at Park and Academy Streets (also part of the Bronson Park National Register District; extant).

Planner **Jacob L. Crane**, a Michigan native, graduated from the University of Michigan and studied Landscape Architecture at Harvard. He had established his planning business in Chicago by the time he worked in Kalamazoo in the late 1920s, and went on to work for the federal housing and home finance agencies, and served as the federal
government’s housing coordinator during World War II. Later, Crane returned to city planning, working in the mid- and far-west, as well as 25 foreign countries.

Kalamazoo architect Randall Wagner graduated in the University of Michigan Class of 1920. He worked on several nearby churches during his career, including First Methodist and the St. Augustine Cathedral Complex, as well as other area churches and schools.

Anna Dorothy Wylie, wife of former Rev. Dr. T. Thomas Wylie, joined the congregation when her husband was called to serve First Baptist as its new pastor in middle-1930s. She helped forge new projects and relationships within the congregation and greater Kalamazoo. Her leadership led church youth in a reciprocal visitation program with black youth and their families in Washington DC, as well as work with Big Brothers and Big Sisters in Kalamazoo, and “Little” Brothers and Sisters programs at First Baptist, for children in need of support. These activities led to the beginning of a similar public school initiative that was the forerunner of Kalamazoo’s Headstart program.

Chicago architect Edward Jansson, who worked with Wagner on First Baptist's 1951 renovation, is recognized for his church designs throughout the Midwest.

The First Baptist Building
The Baptists replaced their 1841 building here with one completed in 1855. Text from the Seventy-Five Years' History of First Baptist Church of Kalamazoo MI, 1911 indicate it was built by parishioners:

"The walls and foundations are substantial about us today. The last work of an aged hewer of stone, Father Gregg, who was a member of the church at that time, was done on this building and it has answered the bond he gave the church, that they were "Baptist foundations and should never fail."

The congregation held its first services and dedicated the new building in 1856. Its pews were sold at auction to cover construction expenses; while congregants, who had previously been baptized in the Kalamazoo River, took comfort in having a building that would now accommodate making that commitment to their church.

Changes to the First Baptist Church Building Over Time
Although its appearance has changed, the base of the building finished in 1855 mostly survives today. Work completed over the next century addressed the building’s safety and reinforced its structure, while also reorganizing and adding space through several additions, most of which have been in place long enough to have established significance in their own right.

1857 Church historian George Kohrman notes that already, by 1857, the walls had begun to move outward, and unidentified work took place at that time to address the issue.
On the building’s completion, a city-maintained clock and fire alarm were installed in the bell tower, underneath a tall, slender steeple. In 1865, the steeple was deemed unsafe and removed. It took 100 men to pull it down. A shorter steeple soon took its place, and the clock and fire alarm survive in today’s extant tower.

The congregation hired Kalamazoo contractor and architect H.W. Coddington in 1870 to design a program to again shore up the walls, which in turn brought about a major remodeling of the interior. The work encompassed substantial repair to and raising the roof’s peak, and raising the tower to accommodate that additional roof height. The remodeled roof had an integral ventilation system comprised of wood air ducts and circular vents in the auditorium ceiling and floor. Those on the ceiling were opened and closed from the bell tower with a rope and weight system. The ventilation dormers for this system are extant (three on each slope of the roof), as are the ones in the sanctuary floor, now covered with carpet.

Other major work at this time included: a) replacing the auditorium’s flat ceiling with a delicately flattened, Gothic-style vaulted one, b) replacing the full-width balcony along the north end of the auditorium with one that wraps the east, north and west walls to add stability the auditorium. The new balcony terminated with graceful stairs at the south end of the auditorium, c) tied the east and west walls to the new semi-circular organ and choir, and, d) an apse addition on the south wall. Additional work included new stained glass in the auditorium’s east and west windows and a narthex-entrance on the north, facing W. Michigan Avenue. According to church records, John Phillips, a member and carpenter with a shop on E. Water Street did most of the interior work.

The building’s brick exterior was parged with cement. The c1865 replacement bell-tower steeple was removed and remodeled, and the narthex-entry widened and fitted with entry doors of wood and plate glass. Additional ventilation and electric work were also accomplished, as well as the rearrangement of some interior space. A Kalamazoo Gazette article from December 6, 1912, mentions that windows, except those on the east and west sides of the auditorium were replaced at this time. Chicago architect William C. Jones designed this project, and the exterior of the 1855 church building part of the (now larger) complex we see today is largely the result of this 1912 work.

Another alteration just discovered as the result of the demolition of the First Reformed Church building to the south, whose site is part of Church Square; the south walls of First Baptist have been uncovered, and a 1911 addition revealed and subsequently confirmed through a Kalamazoo Gazette article. Located on the southwest corner, along the west wall, a heating plant was constructed, with a story above it for classroom use.

Planning began in earnest for a church house/education wing as the congregation grew. Working with plans from Dr. George Merrill at New York’s Northern
Baptist Convention Bureau of Architecture, Kalamazoo's Ernest Batterson adapted the plans for a four-story addition, removing the northwest corner tower in the process. Its first three (of four) floors were completed and furnished in 1932.

1949 The fourth floor of the church house/education wing was finished, including the children’s chapel.

1951 Either at this time or in the interim since 1912, the apse was walled off from the altar, and the altar widened, which required the removal of the balcony stairs at the south end of the auditorium. A more modern altar space was thus created, with a lower, stepped floor, whose lowest level thrust further out toward the pews. Choir seating was enclosed in this re-arranged space with wood paneling, as were the new organ’s pipes above.

At this time, a small, two-story addition was added to create a southeast corner entry. That space today holds an office and choir rehearsal room. This work was designed by Edward Jansson of Chicago. Local architect Randall Wagner managed the project.

1958-1971 Images provided by church members show the narthex’s cornice, below the battlements, was removed during this period, giving the upper part of the narthex a smooth plane.

1976 A small elevator annex was added on the south side of the bell tower. Floors 1-3 and the basement of the Church House were remodeled according to plans provided by Kingscott Associates.

1980 A tornado swept through downtown Kalamazoo, and First Baptist was not immune to its affects. The building’s roofing was replaced as a result, along with 400 individual window panes that were almost entirely located in the church house/education wing.

1998 The changes to the altar space made at this time largely still reflect what happened in 1951, but with three exceptions. A new Letourneau organ was installed, and the additional pipe structure was designed to fill the reopened apse. At the same time, the Baptistry was relocated to the west side of the choir from the center, choir seating and its enclosure were removed, the floor raised, leveled and widened to better accommodate worship services and secular uses. The organ’s presence and these changes have supported the congregation’s efforts to increase the building’s use for arts and cultural events, and the organ is listed in the Organ Historical Society Pipe Organ Database.

First Baptist’s many stained glass windows are registered on the Michigan Stained Glass Census; their makers are unknown.
Today
First Baptist’s congregation has shrunk over the past half century, not unlike that of many other long-time religious institutions. At the time of this writing, information on its website shares the following:

“...declining attendance and growing operating deficits brought the church to the brink of closing in January, 2015. The church, however, voted to spend its accumulated funds to do something new and different. This led to the hiring of Rev. Dr. David L. Nichols and a bold plan to share the building with non-profit organizations.”

At this time, planning is moving forward to sell the building to the Kalamazoo Nonprofit Advocacy Coalition (KNAC) The congregation will continue worship services there.

Potential Threats to First Baptist Church Building
As a result of the shrinking congregation’s financial inability to maintain the building, coupled with Kalamazoo’s increasingly favorable downtown development market -- the most prominent threat to the First Baptist Church Building is inappropriate new alterations to the building or new development in place of the building.

The County sold the Courthouse building, next door to the east, to a local developer in 2018 which has not yet announced its plans. The recent demolition of the historic First Reformed Church building immediately south also threatens the established historic and physical character of Church Square, and thus the physical and visual context of the National register district in which the First Baptist Church building resides.

6. Statement of Significance
The First Baptist Church Building is significant for its association with historical events, persons, type and period characteristics, and the work of local and regional masters.

Period of Significance: 1855-1951
The period of significance begins at the time of the original church building’s completion, and ends at 1951, when the church house/educational addition and choir area remodeling were completed, all of which has gained significance in its own right.

Areas of Significance: Architecture, Community Planning and Development, Religion

Criteria A. The First Baptist Church Building is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
In 1827, the government took back the land which Kalamazoo’s Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatomi owned through an earlier reservation agreement, including that upon which the First Baptist Church Building sits today. In late 1830, the United States Government sold 80 acres each from the near center of that former reservation to Stephen Richardson and Titus Bronson, which they platted the following year.
Bronson and Richardson hailed from Connecticut, and seemingly well-understood the incentive for growth potential that could be immediately realized if the County Seat was moved to Kalamazoo. Presumably by previous agreement, they carried out the first act of community planning here when they agreed to set aside four "Squares" of Richardson’s 80 acres, near the plat’s center, for four specific uses: Courthouse, Jail, Academy and Church -- if the County Seat became Kalamazoo. That is exactly what happened shortly after the plat was prepared. Soon thereafter, the federal land office was moved to Kalamazoo from White Pigeon (1835.)

As the Four Squares developed over time, including construction of the Baptist congregation's first and not long after, second building on Church Square, the surrounding area on the west, south and east began to emerge as a core residential community in Kalamazoo, while land to the north began to be used for commerce. For another three decades, this first residential development period continued. Then, in 1881, a slow shift began to what exists there today. The following half century or so completed the shift to the second period of development, where new churches, institutions and civic uses came to dominate the landscape around the Four Squares.

This move of early residential to other uses in early community cores is well-established throughout much of the United States. However, to our knowledge, it is not clearly established that private development incentives like Richardson’s and Bronson's donated Four Squares here were used elsewhere at the time of founding.

As the area evolved into its third development period, this transition was codified in Kalamazoo's first "official" governmental planning effort, carried out by planner Jacob Crane. His efforts focused on the importance of what we already had in this specific area, using the terms: "Public Buildings, Civic Center, and City Beautiful." Since that time, the 1929 plan Crane envisioned was completed, and has remained largely unaltered. The ongoing presence of what is now Kalamazoo's oldest extant house of worship, the First Baptist Church, plays a significant role in all of the development phases.

**Criteria B. The First Baptist Church Building is associated with the lives of significant persons in our past.**

Among other important persons related to the Church that are noted earlier in this report, First Baptist member Lucinda Hinsdale Stone's work touched not just the church, but also the district, community and nation in extraordinary ways. The Kalamazoo Public Library’s web pages dedicated to her life are titled: “Educator. Feminist and “Mother of Clubs.”

Born in Hinesburg, Vermont in 1814, Lucinda Hinsdale was a voracious learner. By age 13, she was a student at Hinesburg Academy, and was teaching summer school by age 15. Knowing no college would accept her as a woman student, she excelled in
literature, Greek and Latin, all of which helped advance her education. When Hinsdale left the Academy, she worked as governess to three children on a Natchez, Mississippi plantation, where she was both introduced to slavery and became an abolitionist.

In 1840, at about twenty-six years of age, Hinsdale returned and married Hinesburg Academy’s principal, Dr. James Stone, in Grand Rapids. After several years in Massachusetts, the Stones were called to Kalamazoo in 1843, when Dr. Stone was appointed principal of the Kalamazoo Branch of the University of Michigan.

Lucinda Hinsdale Stone’s journey continued, as a suffragist, an active, progressive First Baptist member and a community leader. At first, she taught part time at the Kalamazoo Branch, and was later named head of the Ladies Department. Female students were then attending classes with male students, using a shared curriculum. The Stones implemented these and other “radical” new policies together, with Lucinda leading, while also implementing rigorous academic standards. As a result, the College was awarded its state charter in 1855, and substantially grew its enrollment.

Despite this success, trouble came to a head a bit more than five years later. The College’s conservative administrators from First Baptist Church were displeased with Dr. Stone’s financial administration, with the college’s co-educational focus, and the use of liberal literature and publications in the classroom, among other complaints. These included the church-based administrators’ position that the Stones were too religiously tolerant.

The school was growing and breaking barriers, but in fact, the Stone’s progressive policies were the problem for First Baptist administrators, and in 1863, the Stones resigned from the College. The following year, Dr. Stone was called to trial by First Baptist Church for sexual misconduct and found guilty; a development that deeply divided the entire community. The accusations were later proved wrong, but the damage was done. The College, having by then lost the majority of its students over these conflicts, struggled to survive for decades.

Following their departure from the College, the Stones and two sons, Clement and Horatio, bought the Kalamazoo Telegraph newspaper. By 1866, both Mrs. and Dr. Stone were working for the Telegraph, and together the family operated the paper until 1874.

Lucinda Hinsdale Stone continued to write for the paper, but that work did not hinder her other activities. By the end of the 1860s, her influence in Kalamazoo and society in general had grown substantially. Among her efforts were the creation of “traveling” schools for female students, who visited Europe with her to learn about its history and culture. She also reorganized the Kalamazoo Ladies’ Library Association (LLA), which had started in the 1840s and formally organized in the 1850s. Between 1860 and 1867, she arranged for the First Baptist Church to provide space for the LLA’s collection and meetings. Following that, and a move to Corporation Hall for a period, the LLA became the first Ladies’ Library in the country to construct its own building.
The LLA building was completed in 1879, is listed in the National Register of Historic Places, and is among Kalamazoo’s locally-designated historic properties as well. It is the oldest women’s club in the state and the third oldest in the country. Mrs. Stone’s reorganization took place at a time when most colleges still did not admit women, and study clubs like Kalamazoo’s LLA were one of their few avenues of continuing education. Mrs. Stone spoke of these things and others in her address at the 1893 World’s Fair in Chicago, which she visited as a representative of women’s clubs.

She also organized the Twentieth Century Club, the Michigan Federation of Women’s Clubs, and the Women’s Press Association. She served as executive secretary of the Women’s Auxiliary Association. In the 1870s, she began writing a weekly newspaper column called "Club Talks" which advised women’s clubs and answered inquiries. And in addition to these things, she traveled the country, speaking at new women’s clubs.

Another of her local achievements was the organization of the Unitarian-Universalist People’s Church of Kalamazoo, where Reverend Caroline Bartlett was hired in 1889. A woman of substance herself, Bartlett (later, Crane,) was also a reformer and activist, and it seems no surprise she was hired for this job while Mrs. Stone was still active.

As Lucinda Stone continued to work with other well-known suffragists, including Susan B. Anthony, she was also long-active and ultimately successful in lobbying the University of Michigan to admit female students and hire female faculty. With that accomplished, she encouraged one of her former students, Kalamazoo’s Madelon Stockwell, to apply at the University, and Stockwell became the first woman admitted there. Stone was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University in 1890, and a little more than a century later (1983), was inducted into the Michigan Women’s Hall of Fame.

Lucinda Hinsdale Stone died in 1900, having arrived in Kalamazoo more than a half-century earlier, at first emerging as a liberal leader among a Baptist congregation and an educational institution born of Baptist roots. Later as a local, statewide and national leader, leaving behind an exceptional record of successful efforts in support of women’s education, women’s clubs and women’s rights.

Criteria C. The First Baptist Church Building embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, that represents the work of masters, possesses high artistic values, and a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.

Description
As noted in the 1983 Bronson Park National Register of Historic Places District designation, the Gothic-style First Baptist Church building is the oldest standing church
building in Kalamazoo, one of west Michigan's earliest Gothic churches, and one of Michigan's oldest Victorian-period houses of worship.

The building's form, with its heightened gable style roof, rectangular nave, square tower at the northeast corner and overall shape and massing remain intact. Of the alterations described earlier in this report, parging the brick exterior in 1911-12 had the greatest effect on the original building's exterior appearance.

Today, the exterior of the original 1855 building's primary facade presents a full-width, two-story narthex with two, lighted, flattened Gothic-arch double entry doors that are topped with pairs of small Gothic stained glass windows. Stepped-back stair towers with additional Gothic (second floor) and square windows (main floor) are located on either side of the entry doors; all are topped with a crenelated roof treatment. The narthex-entry walls are treated with a set of three slender, full-height buttress-like pilasters between and on either side of the doors and at the corners of the stair towers. Large black lanterns flank the doors. Over the left door, an inset plaque reads "First Baptist Church, Erected 1853." Over the right door, an inset plaque reads "Remodeled 1912."

Behind the narthex, the gable-roofed auditorium section rises with a monumental Gothic window in the center of the second level, which is flanked by quarter-sized examples and a small rectangular ventilating window at the top of the gable.

The substantial clock-bell tower rises from the facade's northeast corner, its historic equipment intact, along with a "new" 1950 motor for the clock. The former Church Street entrance there is closed. Tall slender Gothic windows ascend to the church's eave height underneath small rose windows (which filled the round opening left by the clock faces when the tower and clock were raised.) Above these is the raised historic clock. The Church Street facade has a series of five upper-story Gothic windows; the northern-most is partially covered with the elevator annex, and the southern-most is partially covered by the 1951 southeast rear addition.

As you enter the 1855 section of the building from Michigan Avenue at ground level, the fellowship area is straight ahead and consists of a large open space which may be in part subdivided with roll-down partitions that were part of the 1912 remodeling. The 1976 elevator addition is located at the east wall of the fellowship area. The church auditorium is directly above in the second floor, and accessed from the stairways at either end of the narthex. Auditorium seating is divided into three sections, with aisles between and on either side. The altar/choir stage projects into the auditorium space, a change believed to have taken place when the extant organ was installed.

The 1929-1932 and 1949 addition exterior remains largely unaltered. Located on the auditorium building's west facade, it has a rectangular footprint. It's twin gabled-end sections face east and west at the front (Michigan Avenue) and rear, and the cross-gable center section and chimney stack fill the space between. A single-story, four-
window bay faces north toward W. Michigan Avenue. The roof of the cross-gable section has four gable-front dormers facing west. On the addition's east side, much of its exterior wall has been pulled back from the original church building to create an interior, uncovered light court (although the architect's plans for the second floor show this was, at least at some point, to be covered at that level.)

The addition is veneered in variegated Indiana limestone, which runs in varied-height horizontal courses. It is entirely fenestrated with steel casement windows which carry multi-colored glass pieces set into an overall diamond pattern. The window frames are rectangular in shape except for one set of three Gothic shaped ones set in the south gable. The windows appear in singles, as well as sets of two, three and four.

A flattened Gothic arch front doorway holds double doors with four lights with diamond-patterned leaded glass over two panels, and is accompanied by lanterns that match those at the main narthex-entry. The doorway is topped with an inscription that reads: "Ye Shall Know the Truth."

The addition's interior includes front and rear stairways that bookend the light court and lead to the light court's steel-windowed main corridors. Original plans for the building show a mixture of large and small rooms on each floor for the nursery, assembly and large and small classrooms, rest and coat rooms, offices, the Pastor's study, and on the fourth floor, a recreation room and children's chapel at the front and rear of the building. Church historian George Kohrman has reported that the first and fourth floor extant plans are original, and major alterations to the second and third floors were carried out in the 1970s. The addition’s historic stairs, main corridors, light court and general circulation pattern have not been significantly affected.

**Conclusion and Legacy**

The formation of Kalamazoo's First Baptist congregation and its building are deeply rooted in Kalamazoo history through its association with historical events, the lives of some of Kalamazoo’s most important early Euro-American settlers, and its architecture. This church building is not only the oldest extant house of worship in the City, but has been cited a number of times as a distinguished example of important local and regional religious architecture.

This National Register of Historic Places district's resource, despite alterations over the years, maintains its ability to tell its important story through its physical presence, and thus, retains a strong level of integrity in terms of the role it has played in greater Kalamazoo's architecture, community planning and development, and religious histories.

Therefore, with the support of its owners, we recommend that the Kalamazoo City Commission act immediately to create a Local Historic District to protect this building, whose presence demonstrates and helps bring this segment of our history to life, and supports Kalamazoo's unique character and sustainability.
7. Photographs
See Appendix #2

8. Resource Counts and Percentages
The proposed district contains one contributing resource. 100% of the properties contribute to the district.

9. List of Historic and Non-Historic Resources
Historic Resources: First Baptist Church Building
Non-Historic Resources: None

10. Bibliography
Newspapers
Kalamazoo Gazette dates vary between 1912-1986, and are listed below by ascending date:
Dec. 6, 1912, p1 and p5. To Rededicate Cathedral-Like Structure On Sunday
Feb. 28, 1932, np. Baptists Dedicate New Church House
Feb. 5,1961, n.p. First Baptist to Mark 125 Years
Feb. 8, 1986, A5. First Baptist has a birthday

Newspaper name not identified, from the Kalamazoo Public Library Subject, Historic Sites and Buildings Files:
Oct. 11, 1929, Baptists Approve $135,000 Church Building Plans.

Scholarly Works & Studies
Knauss, Carol. A History of Bronson Park, Kalamazoo, Michigan From 1829 To 1940.

O'Connor, Pam. Kalamazoo Local Historic District Study Committee Report for the properties currently included in the Bronson Park National Register Historic District (#83000855) February 5, 2019. Available on request from the City of Kalamazoo Historic Preservation Coordinator

Websites
https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2189&context=dissertations

http://hdl.handle.net/10920/3495

https://archive.org/stream/HistoryOfFirstBaptistChurchKalamazooMI1911/History-of-First-Baptist-Church-Kalamazoo-1911_djvu.txt
https://www.encorekalamazoo.com/upfront/five-faves-architects-and-builders

http://www.kpl.gov/local-history/women/lucinda-hinsdale-stone/

Kalamazoo Public Library; First Baptist Church. Accessed 3-23-20.
https://www.kpl.gov/local-history/kalamazoo-history/religion/first-baptist-church/

http://www.michiganstainedglass.org/index.php


Other
The Annual Meeting and Reports for 1975 and 1976, The First Baptist Church; WMU Archives, First Baptist Church Collection

Email correspondence between Pam O’Connor and George Kohrman, First Baptist Church member. 3-26-2020 and throughout May, 2020.

Email correspondence between Pam O’Connor and David Brose, regarding the Batten and Brose report to Wightman Associates, Kalamazoo, on the ground penetrating radar assessment of the Bronson Park Mound. Between 11-19-20 and 11-24-20.


Thomas, James M., Compiler and Publisher. Kalamazoo County Directory with a History of The County From Its Earliest Settlement; 1869 and 1870. Stone Brothers, Book and Job Printers. Kalamazoo, MI.
Appendix #1. Visual Boundary Description

Appendix #2 Photos Historic & Current

Exterior
1. G. Kohrman. c1860-62.firstbaptist_8x10_de (Courtesy George Kohrman)
   c1860; looking W-SW
2. KPL.1871-84.45912104921_fdba5b5ec6_k (Courtesy Kalamazoo Public Library)
   c1871-1884; looking SW
3. KPL.1894.23326200526_d8807d0005_c (Courtesy Kalamazoo Public Library)
   1894; image on right, looking SW
4. KPL.c1940.30840707157_e01e160ad4_h (Courtesy Kalamazoo Public Library)
   c1940; looking S-SW
5. KVM.1955.03_0387 (Courtesy Kalamazoo Valley Museum, via the Kalamazoo Public Library)
   1955; looking S
6. SRF.MichW 315 2018-10-09 N church house blue doors (Courtesy Sharon Ferraro)
   2018; church house/education annex door; looking S
7. SRF.MichW 315 2018-10-09 NEcor (Courtesy Sharon Ferraro)
   2018; looking SW
8. SRF.Ferraro.MichW 315 2018-10-09 Nfront (Courtesy Sharon Ferraro)
   2018; looking SW

Interior
1. G. Kohrman.FBCafter1871b (Courtesy George Kohrman)
   after 1871; looking S
2. KPL.Interior.1951.32667819578_04a4a6b169_c (Courtesy Kalamazoo Public Library)
   1952; looking S
   (From Organ Historical Society online database, taken by Chad Boorsma)
   2012; looking S
   (From Organ Historical Society online database taken by Chad Boorsma)
   2012; looking N-NE
5. G. Kohrman.FBCattic.Shows.Added brickHeight (Courtesy George Kohrman)
   date unknown; direction unknown; at left, shows diagonal line through brick where height was added to gabled roof
Other

1. FBCclock1 (Courtesy George Kohrman)  
date unknown; Working Clock Motor

2. FBCclock2 (Courtesy George Kohrman)  
date unknown; Extant historic (non-working) Clock Motor

3. FBCfire (Courtesy George Kohrman)  
date unknown; Extant historic (non-working) Fire Alarm apparatus

Notes:
- Originally prepared and submitted by Pamela Hall O’Connor, July 2020, for the Kalamazoo Historic Preservation Commission, at the request of the First Baptist Church Team* with assistance from and thanks to: George Kohrman, Maria Perez-Stable, Lynn Houghton, and Sharon Ferraro.

*First Baptist Church Team members:  
  Pastor David Nichols  
  Joyce Standish  
  Quinton Slovacek  
  Attorney Leo Goddeyne

- This amended edition of the original report was completed in December, 2020, and incorporates comments received from the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office in November, 2020. Our thanks to George Kohrman and Joyce Standish once again for their help with this edition.
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH SINGLE RESOURCE LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT
First Baptist Church – 315 West Michigan- Kalamazoo, Kalamazoo Co., MI
(1) First Baptist ca 1860 (northeast corner)
(3) First Baptist ca 1894 (First Baptist on right)

(2) First Baptist ca 1870-85 (northeast corner)
(4) First Baptist 1940 (northeast corner – north/front)
(1) First Baptist 1955 (north/front)
(3) First Baptist ca 1994 (northeast corner – east side)

(2) First Baptist - Doors to annex
(4) First Baptist – north/front
(1) First Baptist – historic interior – facing south – ca 1871
(3) First Baptist facing south with organ - 2020

(2) First Baptist – historic interior – facing south 1952
(4) First Baptist – facing NE - 2020
(1) First Baptist – added height of brick in attic over sanctuary
(2) First Baptist – working clock motor
(3) First Baptist – historic (non-working) clock motor
(4) First Baptist – historic (non-working) fire alarm