

SUBJECT: A report and recommendation on the proposed designation of First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills as a Local Historic Landmark at 2926 Park Avenue in Walnut Hills.

GENERAL INFORMATION:

Location: 2926 Park Avenue, Cincinnati, OH 45206

Petitioner: Cincinnati Preservation Association, Walnut Hills Area Council, First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills, Vice-Mayor Jan-Michele Lemon Kearney

Petitioner's Address: 812 Dayton St, Cincinnati, OH 45214

Owner: First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills

Owner's Address: 2926 Park Ave, Cincinnati, OH 45206

EXHIBITS:

- Exhibit A Location Map
- Exhibit B Designation Report and Conservation Guidelines
- Exhibit C Historic Conservation Board Staff Report
- Exhibit D Letter of Support
- Exhibit E Historic Conservation Board Recommendation

BACKGROUND:

On September 9, 2023, an application for the designation of First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills as a Local Historic Landmark was submitted by the Cincinnati Preservation Association, Walnut Hills Area Council, First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills, and Vice-Mayor Jan-Michele Lemon Kearney. According to the Cincinnati Zoning Code (§1435-07-2-B), an application for the designation of a Local Historic Landmark shall be forwarded to the City Planning Commission following a public hearing of the Historic Conservation Board.

On October 23, 2023, the Historic Conservation Board (HCB) held a public hearing on the Local Historic Landmark designation application. After receiving evidence and testimony from the Urban Conservator and proponents of the designation, a quorum of six board members voted unanimously to approve and recommend First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills to the City Planning Commission and City Council for approval.

The City Planning Commission is charged with determining whether to follow the recommendation of the Historic Conservation Board (§1435-07-2-B-C). In making such determination, the City Planning Commission shall consider the following factors:

- 1) The relationship of the proposed designation to the comprehensive plans of the city and of the community in which the proposed Historic Landmark is located; and
- 2) The effect of the proposed designation on the surrounding areas and economic development plans of the city; and

- 3) Such other planning and historic preservation considerations as may be relevant to the proposed designation.

The City Planning Commission has the duty to decide whether to approve or deny the designation and forward its decision, whether favorable or not, along with the conservation guidelines, to City Council.

Setting:

First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills occupies a 0.8305-acre site at the southeast corner of the intersection of Park Avenue and Lincoln Avenue in Walnut Hills. The church faces Park Avenue to the west. The education addition is located on the south side of the lot. At the rear of the property is a paved parking lot that opens onto Lincoln Avenue.

This property consists of Hamilton County Parcel 066-0002-0131-90, which is bounded on the north by Lincoln Avenue, on the east by another brick church building, on the south by vacant parcels, and on the west by Park Avenue. To the north, across Lincoln Avenue and Martin Luther King Drive, is Walnut Hills Cemetery.

Historical Overview:

Prior to the Civil War, a small African American community established itself in Walnut Hills. The area attracted early African American residents with the growing community and the establishment of the Lane Theological Institute in 1829, which granted land leases to African Americans, allowing them to build homes. When the congregation of the First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills initially formed within this community in 1856, services operated out of houses and, later, wood-framed church buildings. The present First Baptist Church building was constructed in 1908 with a 500-seat capacity and remains active today. In 1926, the Gothic Revival influenced music addition was completed. With the second addition of the education wing in 1965, the church played a prominent role in the community.

Soon after the completion of the education wing, the Walnut Hills neighborhood faced civil unrest and major transportation projects in the 1970s and 80s, especially Interstate 75 and Martin Luther King Drive, tore through the community. The block north of First Baptist Church was demolished for MLK, taking hundreds of Black-owned homes. The last 50 years saw the demolition of many more buildings around the church and throughout the neighborhood.

General Description:

First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills is a significant example of the Gothic Revival style applied to a church building; it is one of the last remaining original and intact Gothic Revival churches in Walnut Hills. The original structure is largely unaltered on the exterior, looking much as it did when constructed in 1908. The church is a brick masonry building that includes many defining elements of Gothic Revival style, including a large bell tower with a pyramidal roof, arched stained glass windows, and a raised stone foundation. While later additions were added, they do not detract from the original design and are significant in their own right, with the east addition having Gothic Revival influences and the education wing exhibiting a modern style.

Significance:

First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills is nominated as significant under Criteria 1 and 3 of the Cincinnati Zoning Code (§1435-07-1):

1. *Association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history;*

First Baptist Church meets Criterion 1 for historical significance as a representation of the history of political, social, educational, and cultural activities of African Americans in Walnut Hills. The church was one of the first African American congregations organized in the neighborhood. The original church building, constructed in 1908, hosted regular events, including the convention of the National Association of Teachers in Colored Schools (NATCS) in 1915 and 1921. A music annex was completed in 1926, and the music program at First Baptist Church, led by Clinton Gibbs, regularly hosted large events. In 1965, an education addition provided classrooms for Sunday School and community classes on a range of topics. All of these events fall under the period of significance for the church's landmark designation (1908-1972).

3. *Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, method of construction or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction;*

First Baptist Church meets Criterion 3 for architectural significance as an example of Gothic Revival style designed by architect Harry Burbank. A corner square tower with a pyramidal roof, Gothic arched windows, raised stone foundation, and split entry staircase are defining features of this style.

ANALYSIS:

According to the Cincinnati Zoning Code (§1435-01-H3), certain findings must be made before a Local Historic Landmark can be designated by City Council. The building must be found to have historic significance. Historic significance means that the landmark must possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, association, and have attributes that:

1. Are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
2. Are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
3. Embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
4. Have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in history or prehistory.

First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills is nominated under Criterion 1, "Association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history," and Criterion 3, "Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, method of construction or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction".

First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills is historically significant as a religious institution related to the development of the African American community in Walnut Hills and is a significant example of the Gothic Revival style applied to a church building. The designation report and the documentation provided indicate that the building meets both criteria. The building was an important place for religious

and social events during its period of significance and incorporates identifiable architectural features of a large bell tower with a pyramidal roof, arched stained glass windows, and a raised stone foundation. The church is one of the last remaining original and intact Gothic Revival churches in Walnut Hills.

In summary, staff recommends the designation of First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills under sections §1435-07-1(a)(1) and §1435-07-1(a)(3) of the Zoning Code. The documentation in the attached designation and staff report provides conclusive evidence that all required findings may be made for the proposed designation under criterion 1 and 3. The proposed conservation guidelines for the structure are sufficient and have been included.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

The Department of City Planning and Engagement held a virtual public staff conference on the proposed designation on October 10, 2023. Notices were sent to property owners within a 400-foot radius of the subject property, the property owner, and the Walnut Hills Area Council. The applicants, City staff, members of the church Board of Trustees, and one member from the public were in attendance. The member of the public attended for information and had no comment. Additional correspondence was received over the phone in support of the proposed designation. The Walnut Hills Area Council also submitted a letter of support (Exhibit D).

The Historic Conservation Board also held a public hearing at its meeting on October 23, 2023. Three members of the applicant team spoke in support of the proposed designation. No other correspondence was received.

All property owners within a 400-foot radius of the subject property, the property owner, and the applicants, including the Walnut Hills Area Council, were sent notification of the November 17, 2023, City Planning Commission meeting on November 3, 2023.

CONSISTENCY WITH PLANS:

Plan Cincinnati (2012)

The proposed designation is consistent with the Sustain Initiative Area of *Plan Cincinnati*, specifically the Goal to, “Preserve our natural and built environment” (p. 193). This designation will help to preserve this historically and architecturally significant building, making it eligible for state historic rehabilitation tax incentives to be used to renovate the church building.

Walnut Hills Community Plan (1992)

The proposed designation is consistent with the *Walnut Hills Community Plan*. While more recent plans have been completed for areas of the Walnut Hills neighborhood, the study areas of those plans did not include the site of the First Baptist Church. The proposed designation is specifically consistent with the Historical Conservation Goal to “Preserve the architectural resources and historic character of the neighborhood” (p. 41). Within that goal is the strategy to “Use historic conservation legislation as a tool to enhance the historic character of Walnut Hills” (p. 76).

RECOMMENDATION:

The staff of the Department of City Planning and Engagement recommends that the City Planning Commission take the following actions:

- 1) **APPROVE** the proposed designation of First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills as a Local Historic Landmark at 2926 Park Ave in Walnut Hills under criterion 1 and 3 of the Cincinnati Zoning Code (§1435-07-1a); and
- 2) **ADOPT** the conservation guidelines.

Respectfully submitted:



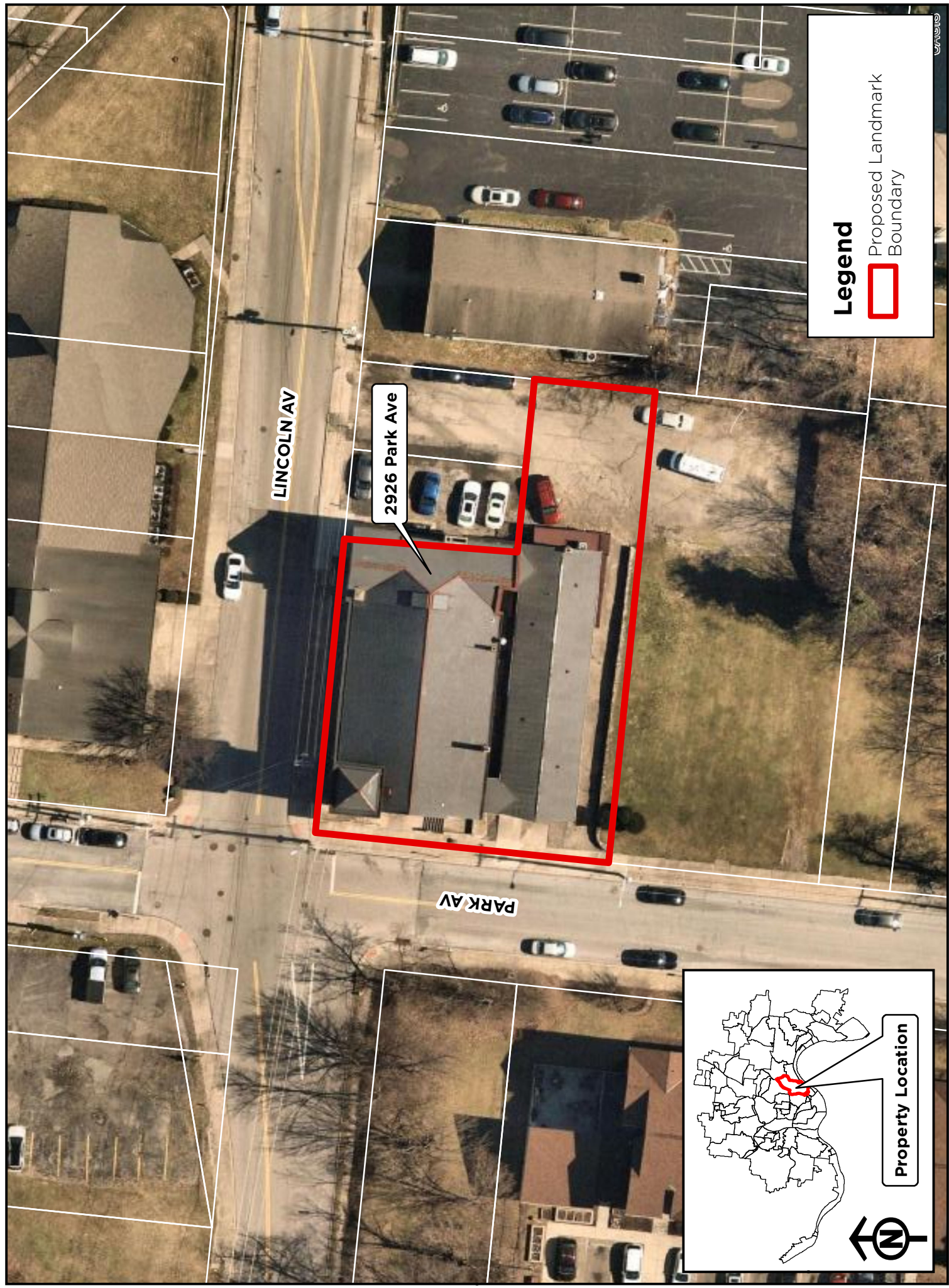
Emily Burns, City Planner
Department of City Planning & Engagement

Approved:



Katherine Keough-Jurs, FAICP, Director
Department of City Planning & Engagement

Proposed Local Landmark of the First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills



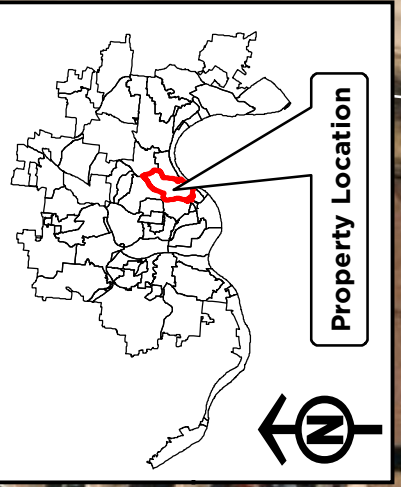
LINCOLN AV

2926 Park Ave

PARK AV

Legend

- Proposed Landmark Boundary



Property Location



HISTORIC DESIGNATION REPORT

**First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills
2926 Park Avenue
Cincinnati, Ohio 45209**

**Submitted to:
Cincinnati Historic Conservation Office**

**Written By:
Cincinnati Preservation Association and Walnut Hills Historical Society**



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Introduction

This report represents the finding and recommendation for local historic landmark designation of the First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills. The report was prepared by Walnut Hills Historical Society and Cincinnati Preservation Association in partnership with the Walnut Hills Area Council and First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills..

Background

The First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills trustees have a vested interest in the preservation of their church building. Having operated out of their location on Park Avenue since 1908, trustees of the church believe that by designating this resource, they will gain access to avenues of funding such as historic preservation grants and Historic Tax Credits, that will aid them in repairing their aging property. The Cincinnati Preservation Association is submitting this local historic landmark nomination on behalf of the Walnut Hills Area Council and First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills.

Boundary

This property consists of Parcel 066-0002-0131-90 of the Hamilton County Auditor's records and includes .8305 Acres. The parcel is generally bounded on the north by Lincoln Avenue, on the east by vacant parcels and a single building on the same block, on the south by more vacant parcels, and on the west by Park Avenue.

Statement of Significance Summary

The First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills is significant under Chapter 1435 of the City of Cincinnati Zoning Code of Ordinances under Criteria 1 (themes of) Ethnic Heritage: Black and Religion. The church is significant under the themes of religious and Ethnic Heritage because it was one of the first African American churches organized in the Walnut Hills neighborhood. The current First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills building was constructed in 1908 as a Gothic Revival Church and designed by architect Harry Burbank for the congregation.

The period of significance begins in 1908, when the current church building was erected and ends in 1972, due to the fact that a historic property must be over 50-years of age. The building meets Criteria Consideration A, as a building owned by a religious institution and used for religious purposes, because its significance is directly connected to the history of political, social, educational, and cultural activities of African Americans in Walnut Hills. The church is also associated with a number of important African American figures in Walnut Hills, including Dangerfield Earley who formed the congregation and was the first pastor of the church from 1863 to 1876, and pianist, composer, and educator Clinton Gibbs who began his tenure as the church's choir

director in 1926.¹ [Irene Kirke, secretary of Industrial Building and Loan and first Black woman notary public in Ohio, 1922. Francis P. Green pastor 1902-c1940. Lizzie Branch, businesswoman and fundraiser.]

Its design reflects the influence of Gothic Revival as applied to a vernacular house of worship in the early 20th century (Figure 1). The church was expanded with an architecturally sensitive addition in 1926. In 1965 a one-story addition on the south side of the building completed the existing structure.

The church is currently being nominated as a local Historic Landmark by the Walnut Hills Area Council and First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills.

Justification of Boundary

The above-described boundary constitutes the entire parcel which the building is located. While the church owns additional property adjacent to the site, it is not related to the integrity or events associated with the significance of the church.

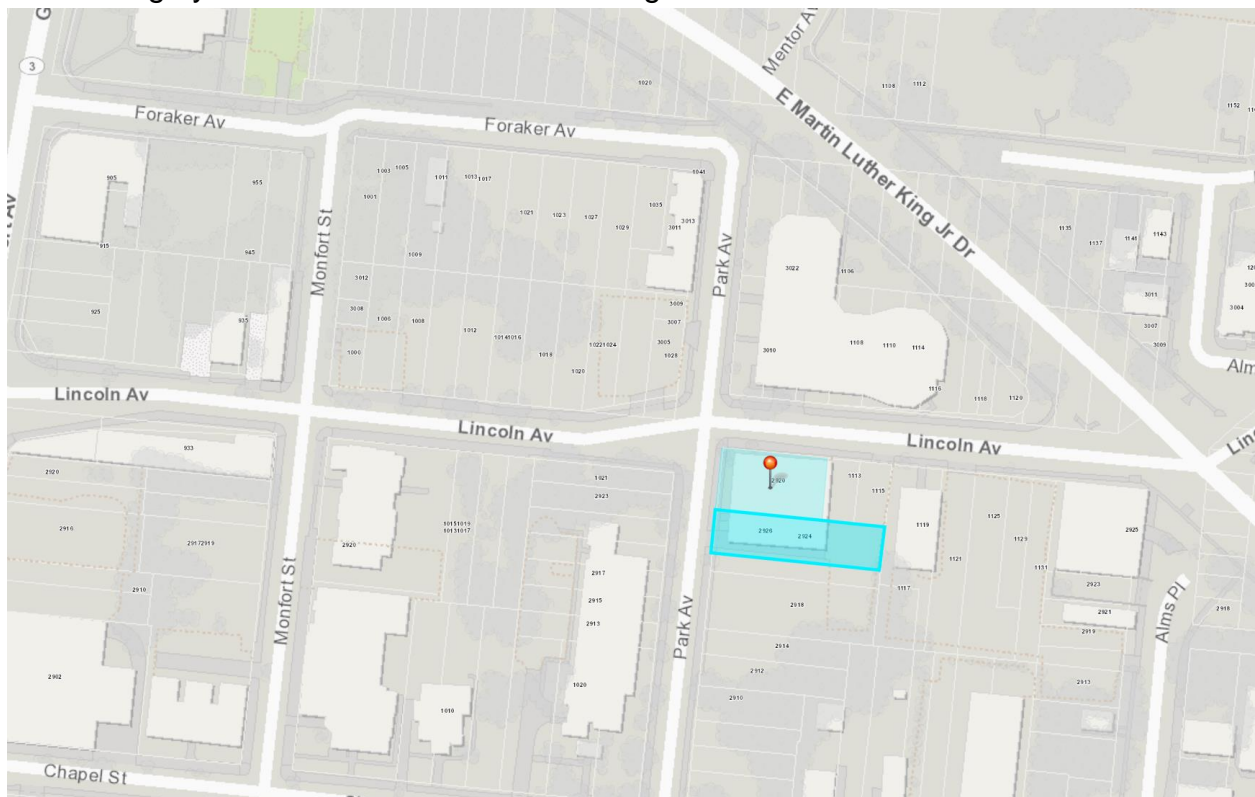


Figure 1: CAGIS Map of the First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills

¹ 137th Anniversary, First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills, booklet, July 2000, page 5-7.

Statement of Significance

First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills is significant because its deeply history with the foundations of religious Black institutions in Cincinnati, especially in Walnut Hills and its association with the civic and social life of the African American/Black Community. This meets criteria 1 as set forth in Cincinnati Zoning Code Chapter 1435 which states that Historic significance means that that the attributes of a district, site, or structure that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association, and that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history. The building is also significant as a Gothic Revival Church built by Henry Burbank under criteria 3 which states that a building can be significant that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction.

Cincinnati Black Religious Historic Context

Ohio, always a free state though subject to the Fugitive Slave Acts of 1789 and 1850, attracted a significant African American population by the 1820s including free-born, manumitted and self-emancipated individuals and families. Cincinnati, across the often-fordable Ohio River from the slave state of Kentucky, was a particularly common destination. The riverbanks with plentiful unskilled jobs loading and unloading steamboats and warehouses were the most common neighborhoods for both Black and Irish laborers. The city also had a small population of Black service workers and entrepreneurs who prospered. Black worshippers in Cincinnati generally did not feel welcome in white churches. From the 1820s they began organizing their own congregations. The two earliest and largest churches with Black preachers and congregations were an AME (African Methodist Episcopal) congregation later called Allen Temple, and the Union Baptist Church.²

Walnut Hills was among the first of the communities to develop on the hilltops overlooking the old city in the basin. In 1794, one of the (white) Cincinnati pioneers, the Presbyterian minister James Kemper, bought a tract of more than 180 acres. He called his bit of wooded land Walnut Hill. He was born into a prodigious family, many of whom joined him, and provided prolific offspring to clear and people his farm from the last years of the eighteenth century. Beginning around 1830 the Kemper family, at the urging of James' son Elnathan, partly bequeathed and partly sold a hundred acres to the Lane Presbyterian Theological Seminary which remained on its original land grant for a hundred years. The (white) faculty, students, support personnel and their families and retainers increased the scope of the community that early on was little more than a

² Nikki Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom: Cincinnati's Black Community 1802–1868* (Ohio University Press, 2005) is the best account of its topic. See also Cissie Dore Hill, *Walnut Hills: City Neighborhood*. (The Cincinnati Historical Society No. 3, 1983). Also useful are two chapters in Sidney Maxwell, *The suburbs of Cincinnati: sketches, historical and descriptive* (Cincinnati, 1870) "Walnut Hills" pp. 133-155, and "Woodburn", pp. 156-166.

frontier settlement on the outskirts of Cincinnati. The earliest African American residents of Walnut Hills worked as cooks and washerwomen serving the seminary communities by the 1840s.³

Antebellum African American residents of Walnut Hills included John I. Gaines, a successful grocer especially to Black steamboat stewards and cooks. Gaines bought a house on what is now Yale Avenue just east of Park Avenue as a sort of retreat from his residence and business downtown. Gaines' nephew Peter Clark, later principal of the Colored High School downtown, lived for a time in his uncle's house.⁴ William H. Parham, son of a wealthy tobacco processor, had a house on Willow Street, now the northern block of Preston.⁵ A less affluent downtown hotel cook with the wonderful name Dangerfield Earley also settled on Willow before the Civil War. It also seems that Dangerfield Earley had some sort of a school in his home for Black children in the neighborhood.⁶

Most of the Blacks in Walnut Hills belonged to one of the downtown churches, but it was quite a trek to the city basin. Sometime in the mid-1850s they began to convene Sunday prayer meetings in their homes. At least retrospectively these meetings were referred to as the First Church on Walnut Hills.⁷ Accounts of the First Church cite Peter Harbeson as the leader of a group of members of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) denomination. Harbeson was a "Class Leader" at Allen Temple, the large AME church in the old Bucktown neighborhood near the Miami Canal between about Fourth and Ninth Streets. Dangerfield Earley was a devout member of Union Baptist; that downtown church rewarded his ardor with a license to preach. During the Civil War Dangerfield and his son Joe both served in the short-lived Cincinnati Black Brigade.⁸

³ On the large and complicated Kemper Family, see Willis Miller Kemper and Henry Linn White, *Genealogy of the Kemper family in the United States* (Chicago, 1899). On Kemper and the Presbyterian Church in Cincinnati, see Joseph Glass Monfort, *Presbyterianism north of the Ohio River from 1790 to 1822* (Cincinnati, 1872) and *First Presbyterian Church on Walnut Hills, 1819-1888* (Cincinnati, 1888).

⁴ Benjamin W. Arnett, *Semi-Centenary Celebration of Allen Temple* (Cincinnati, 1874) pp. 55-56. The Haskins family that bought the house can be traced at the same address through the early twentieth century.

⁵ On William Parham see Arnett, *Semi-Centenary*, pp.102-105 and *passim*. Most cited is John Brough Shotwell, *A History of the Schools of Cincinnati* (Cincinnati, 1902) pp. 449-50.

⁶ On Earley, see Peter Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati: being a report of its labors and a muster-roll of its members* (Cincinnati, 1864) p. 25; Benjamin Arnett, *Semi-Centennial*, p. 62 and *passim*; James Dawson, *Picturesque Cincinnati* (Shillito Co, 1883) p 33.

⁷ On the First Church, see the opening paragraphs of Wilber Allen Page "History of First Baptist" in the Centennial *Souvenir and Program History*, "First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills Archives, Anniversary pamphlets, 1963. Note that the (white) Episcopal Church of the Advent on Kemper Lane a block south of McMillan also began as a house church for Walnut Hills parishioners of downtown churches.

⁸ Page, "History of First Baptist," The standard source for Dangerfield Early is Wendell Dabney, *Cincinnati's Colored Citizens*, (Cincinnati, 1926), pp. 79, 200. More frequently cited is the Writer's Program, *Cincinnati; A Guide to the Queen City and its Neighbors*, pp. 292-295. This discussion spells the surname "Early" and misdates his arrival on

After the Civil War, Walnut Hills began to attract well-to-do residents. Above of the stench of the city basin and blessed with breezes during the sweltering summer, they could enjoy the services already provided to the Seminary and to increasingly wealthy legions of Kempers. By the 1880s, most of these new residents were the families of wealthy white businessmen who could afford to commute downtown in private carriages. (They of course brought along servants and working-class entourages.)⁹

But the growing suburb also attracted Black families – it became an exclusive enclave for free and freed African Americans even earlier in the Reconstruction era. The wealthiest of these were Robert and Georgiana Gordon with their daughter, Virginia. Gordon had amassed a fortune in the competitive coal business. During the Civil War he sold his business and bought Union War Bonds; during Reconstruction he sold the bonds and bought, developed, rented out and sold real estate, mostly in Walnut Hills.¹⁰ (It is worth noting that the white department store owner and hotelier Frederick Alms bought a house next door to the Gordons' two decades later.)

Lane Seminary required only a small portion of its land for the campus. To generate income the trustees offered long-term, modestly priced land leases on plots around the campus, where the lessees could build homes. A hotbed of Antebellum abolitionist thought and activity, after the Civil War the institution self-consciously contracted with Black lessees.¹¹ Thus, the neighborhood for several blocks east of the Seminary on Gilbert Avenue was overwhelming Black by the time of the 1870 census and included many Black homeowners as well as renters.¹²

The Walnut Hills Black religious community likewise grew and diversified during the 1860s. Sources generally agree that Peter Clark, at the time a member of the AME church, organized the meetings in his (uncle's) house, and that Dangerfield Earley led a Baptist contingent. Earley, with his preacher's license, may have sermonized. It is clear that the so-called First Church did not offer full religious services; if nothing else, the

Walnut Hills as 1895 – other dates in the passage make clear the chronology. Brief obituaries appear in the “Our Colored Citizens”, *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, November 30, 1884, p. 4, and in the “From the Queen City”, *Cleveland Gazette*, December 6, 1884, p. 1.

⁹ See note 21 for references.

¹⁰ On Robert Gordon, the standard sources are articles by Carter G. Woodson, “The Negroes of Cincinnati prior to the Civil War,” *Journal of Negro History*, v. 1 n. 1, 1916, pp 1-22 on pp. 21-22 and the more substantial “Robert Gordon a Successful Business Man,” *The Negro History Bulletin*, v. 1 n. 2, November 1937, pages 1 and 3. See also “Robert Gordon, businessman” <https://walnuthillstories.org/stories/robert-gordon/> archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20220705092928/https://walnuthillstories.org/stories/robert-gordon/> and “Robert Gordon: How History lost his Community” <https://walnuthillstories.org/stories/robert-gordon-how-history-lost-his-community/>.

¹¹ A convenient source is Charles Beecher (ed.), *Autobiography, Correspondence, &c., of Lyman Beecher*, v. 2, Chapter 34, “Anti-Slavery Imbrolio.”

¹² On Reconstruction demographics in Walnut Hills see the essays linked from <https://walnuthillstories.org/stories/lincoln-avenue-1870s-and-1880s/>

differences in communion practices required that the folk on Walnut Hills visit their denominational churches downtown to take the sacraments.¹³

In 1862, the AME members of the prayer meetings determined to establish their own church, which they called Brown Chapel. The Episcopal structure of the AME – organized from the top down – meant that the bishop promptly appointed a minister. Phillip Toliver was assigned to the pastorate in 1863 and built a frame church, probably near Chapel and Willow, with around 25 members. In 1867 Benjamin Arnett pastored the Chapel; he would go on to serve Allen Temple downtown, then as an Ohio states legislator, AME Bishop, and finally as president of Wilberforce College. (In the mid 1870s Brown Chapel would build a new brick sanctuary on Park Avenue just north of Chapel Street.)¹⁴

First Baptist History before 1908

After the AME members withdrew in 1863, about 16 worshippers remained in the prayer meeting. Baptists all, they decided to form their own denominational congregation. It took them some time to organize First Baptist. Dangerfield Early was licensed to preach, but actually forming a congregation recognized by the downtown churches required appropriate authorization. Examined by a committee of the Union and Zion Baptist Churches in the city basin, Earley was allowed to organize a board of deacons.¹⁵ Worship services of the prayer group were held in a series of places, mostly homes. By 1874 the church met at the Earley residence on the west side of Willow Street (now Preston) just south of Chapel Street. There were about 75 members. (Brown Chapel AME, for comparison, had about 100 members at the same time.)¹⁶

Beginning in 1876, directories reported two Black Baptist churches in Walnut Hills. Dangerfield Earley continued to pastor the “Willow Street” church in his home. (Even after Dangerfield’s death in 1884 the family home on Willow Street continued to host services.)¹⁷ Deacon Alfred F. Darnell took the pulpit at what was fustily listed as the “First Baptist Church (Colored), Chestnut Street, Walnut Hills.”¹⁸ Darnell’s congregation bought a lot on Chestnut (now Foraker) for \$1,250, and the Black member Frank Reeder built the house of worship for \$850, the cost of a moderate residential home. The sanctuary provided adequate space for the membership of about fifty.¹⁹

¹³ “Centenary History,” Archives of the First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills, Anniversary pamphlet 1963.

¹⁴ “Centenary History,” Archives of the First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills, Anniversary pamphlet 1963.

¹⁵ “Centenary History,” Archives of the First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills, Anniversary pamphlet 1963.

¹⁶ Arnett, *Allen Temple Semi-Centenary* (1874), “Church Statistics,” p. iv, gives membership numbers for both Brown Chapel and First Baptist.

¹⁷ “Church Directory,” *Williams Directory 1880*, p.30 lists both, as does James W. Dawson, *Picturesque Cincinnati*.

¹⁸ *Williams Directory*, June 1877, p. 342. Chestnut is now renamed Foraker.

¹⁹ “Centennial History,” Archives of the First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills, Anniversary pamphlets.

The 1890s proved turbulent for First Baptist. The congregation that had remained in the Earley home split with Darnell in 1892 to form a new Bethel Baptist Church which continued meeting in the house on Willow Street. Bethel announced ambitious plans for a new building, but during the financial panic of the 1890s they came to naught.²⁰ Darnell's First Baptist hired a new pastor, the Rev. Richard D. Phillips, who took over the church on Chestnut Street in 1894. First Baptist's own history lauds Phillips' pastorate as harmonious and prosperous. He did organize a Baptist ministerial alliance, perhaps smoothing the waters in Walnut Hills ruffled by the disputes between Pastor Darnell and his rivals at Bethel Baptist.²¹ The deacons under Rev. Phillips ran a tight moral ship, occasionally "withdrawing the right hand of fellowship" from members over drink, dancing, adultery, and illegitimate births. Most often the accused repented, and the deacons relented.²²

Rev. Phillips resigned in 1901 in order to become the Baptist State Missionary, certainly a suitable move for a successful minister. His departure led to another rough patch for First Baptist. A few pastors passed through the pulpit, and a few more acted as supply. As the centenary history of the church observed, the period "ushered in a crisis for the church. Not only were they without a Shepherd, but without a House of Worship.... The Church Building had been condemned."²³ The church was reduced to renting worship space in the former studio of the Italian sculptor Louis Rebisso.²⁴ After the sculptor's

²⁰ For Bethel's own account of its origins, see "Church History," Archives of Bethel Baptist Church. Ambitious but unbuilt plans for a 500-seat sanctuary appear in "Bethel Baptist Church," *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, March 24, 1894. A memorial stained-glass window for Dangerfield and Georgina Earley still illuminates the sanctuary at Bethel Baptist. (Figure 17)

²¹ "Centennial History," Archives of First Baptist Church, Anniversary pamphlet, 1963. See also "A House Divided," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, November 8, 1891, p. 9; "Cincinnati," *The Appeal*, p. 1: "By a decision of the courts, Rev. A. Darnell was given possession of the pulpit at the First Baptist Church, Walnut Hills, the dissatisfied members will at once organize another church." "Items on the wing," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, March 12, 1892, p.8: "The troubles of the First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills, after a hearing by Judges of Several Courts and a patient public, have at last been submitted to the Baptist Ministers of the City, who will meet Monday at the Avondale Baptist Church for the purposes of adjusting if possible, the differences existing between the several factions of the Church. It is the earnest prayer of friends of all the parties concerned that this will be the final adjudication." It was.

²² "Trustees Minutes," Archives of the First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills, May 13, 1897, "Bro. J C made unconditional acknowledgement to the Church; the acknowledgement was received as satisfactory. Bro A L was absent regularly and the Right Hand of Fellowship was withdrawn. Sister J H was dropped from the role. She should "go home and get straight with her church, and if she so desires come back again."

Ibid., July 16, 1897, Bro. B's name dropped from the role; he was "instructed to go to his church and get rectified and if he so desires obtain his letter, and return."

Ibid., August 12, 1897, "Right hand of fellowship withdrawn from Sister G M for having an illegitimate child. Sister G M made her acknowledgement to the church and was restored."

²³ "Centenary History," Archives of the First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills, Anniversary pamphlets, 1963.

²⁴ Louis Rebisso, the first teacher of modeling and sculpture at the Art Academy of Cincinnati, lived on Lincoln Avenue and had his studio mid-block between Lincoln and Chapel, in the block between Monfort and Park. His neighbors were overwhelmingly African American. Now a rather obscure figure, more information on Rebisso is available at Geoffrey Sutton, "Lincoln Avenue Sculptor: Louis Rebisso" , "Louis Rebisso and the Modeling Arts in

death in 1899, the studio for a decade became a sort of community center in Black Walnut Hills. Owned by Rebisso's (white) widow, it was in this space that the First Baptist Church found refuge.

First Baptist in its 1908 Building

In 1903 First Baptist hired a new minister away from a successful Black Baptist church in Indiana. Frank P. Green²⁵, in his mid-40s, an experienced and respected pastor, was hired on a year-by-year basis. Green first supervised the disassembly of the condemned church on Chestnut, saving the lumber to build a new frame building on the south side of Lincoln Avenue between Park Avenue and Elmwood Street (now Alms Place).²⁶ The church had some debt to clear, and in 1906 the rebuilt house of worship was again condemned, at least as a church. Green set about raising money, retained an architect, and obtained a mortgage of \$10,000 to build the 1908 brick Gothic Revival church still standing at the corner of Lincoln and Park Avenues.²⁷ Green remained as a leader in the Black community in Walnut Hills until his death in 1944.

The large seat auditorium at First Baptist also became an important meeting place for African Americans in Walnut Hills and Cincinnati. An early notable event was the 1915 convention of the National Association of Teachers in Colored Schools (NATCS) held in the (new 1911) Frederick Douglass School in Walnut Hills. The school had a 350-seat auditorium; First Baptist could accommodate 500 visitors. Pastor Green's church hosted the keynote address at First Baptist on July 30, 1915. The address was delivered by William Pickens of Marshall, Texas, who argued for the need of "impartial suffrage" to empower Black voices.²⁸ The principal of Sumner High School in St. Louis – where Peter Clark taught for about 20 years after he left Cincinnati – delivered the next address to the conference, also at First Baptist.²⁹

The NATCS conference demonstrated the close connections between institutions in Black Walnut Hills. Despite occasional disagreements and jealousies, Douglass School and the churches generally cooperated, frequently hosting meetings and fundraisers for each other and for organizations like the nearby Colored Orphans' Asylum. Indeed, the Colored Widows' Home at 2918 Park Avenue was located just a few houses down Park from the First Baptist Church from 1895 through 1918. (In 1918, Horace Sudduth

Walnut Hills", and "Louis Rebisso and Very Large Men on Even Larger Horses". In his studio, he had created among other major works the large equestrian bronze statue of William Henry Harrison still installed in downtown Cincinnati.

²⁵ "Francis P. Green, clergyman" Wendell Dabney, *Cincinnati's Colored Citizens*, p. 280.

²⁶ "Centenary History" Op. Cit.

²⁷ "Centenary History," Op. Cit. "Will Erect New Church," *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*, July 12, 1906, p. 9.

²⁸ "Expects morals to better race," *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*, July 30, 1915, p. 113.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

arranged the purchase of a modern apartment building for the purpose a few blocks east on Lincoln Avenue.)³⁰

During Pastor Green's tenure, many important African American businesspeople in Walnut Hills belonged to the Church. Lizzie Branch ran a business "renovating lace curtains" from her home at 2918 Monfort. Mrs. Branch also did significant business in real estate with Sudduth and made generous contributions to First Baptist. The breadth of her interests in the community is clear from the organizations she served. "She was instrumental in the locating and securing the Old Women's Home, and the Women's Federation Clubhouse. She is prominent in the Y. W. C. A., N. A. A. C. P., U. N. I. A., and every movement for racial uplift."³¹ Abraham Prossett, who owned a grocery store at 1035 Foraker, served the church as a trustee.³² Irene Kirk, secretary – a corporate officer – of Horace Sudduth's Industrial Savings and Loan and the first Black woman licensed as a notary in Ohio, lived in O'Bryonville and joined First Baptist. Even more than Lizzie Branch, she played a business role in many of Sudduth's ventures, including his own real estate business, the investment vehicle Creative Realty, and the Walnut Hills Enterprise company.³³

Many other individuals could be cited. In the mid-1920s, Wendell Dabney reported that Green had grown the church from about 300 members in 1903 (and that number might be an exaggeration) to a thousand. These numbers did not include some 500 members who had been dropped from the roles, mostly owing to death or moving over the decades.³⁴

We can get a sense of the central role of the Church and its building in Walnut Hills by reviewing some of the meetings in the months of May and June in 1921.

- On May 4, 1921, the Cincinnati NAACP called "A Big Mass Meeting" at First Baptist, with the blessing of Pastor Green. The fundraiser was part of a project of

³⁰ See the references in <https://walnuthillstories.org/stories/horace-sudduth-womens-institutions/>.

³¹ On Lizzie Branch, see Wendell Dabney, *Cincinnati's Colored Citizens*, p. 317 and *passim*. The Old Women's Home, a residence mostly for widows, was first located at 2918 Park Avenue, just two doors south of the church; Branch worked with Sudduth on the relocation to the Wheatley Flat Building at 1332 ½ Lincoln Avenue in the late 1910s. The Federation of Colored Women's Clubs purchased a mansion at 1010 Chapel Street in 1925. The Young Women's Christian Association owned a former residence they called the "Blue Triangle club." The Universal Negro Improvement Association, usually associated with the Jamaican immigrant Marcus Garvey, had quite an independent branch in Cincinnati that grew out of an existing organization operated by William Ware.

³² Prossett advertised regularly in Wendell Dabney's newspaper *The Union*; see for example June 21, 1919, p. 4; September 20, 1919, p. 8; March 28, 1920, p. 4. "Prossett and Hardin," Dabney, *Cincinnati's Colored Citizens*, p. 340.

³³ "Irene J. Kirk," Dabney, *Cincinnati's Colored Citizens* p. 258. "Woman Notary Public." *The Union*, September 9, 1922, p1. On her role in the Creative Realty Company, see "The Creative Realty Company," *The Union*, March 1, 1924, p. 4.

³⁴ "Francis P. Green," Dabney, *Cincinnati's Colored Citizens*, p. 280.

the Black “Ministers Meeting” and featured a song with lyrics written for the occasion called “Supplication,” set to the tune of “America” and performed at First Baptist. Thus, Pastor Green’s church dove into politics and Racial Equality.³⁵ The NAACP was headed by publisher Wendel Dabney, a militant integrationist. In addition to the announcement of the meeting, Dabney’s *Union* also ran a news article, “Many are joining,” on the same page.³⁶

- On May 13, the Black “Simon Commandery No. 1” of the Masonic Knights Templar, a so-called “secret society,” held its annual public “Ascension Day Services” at the church. Freemasonry remained a popular social gathering in the Black as well as the white community. As was common, the church gave the society a sufficient blessing to allow it to use the auditorium. First Baptist supported independent African American organizations.³⁷
- The church also supported the community’s young people. On June 18 First Baptist hosted “an evening with our graduates”³⁸ – a tradition that emulated the great Gaines Colored High School graduations in the nineteenth century.³⁹ The 1921 program featured the accomplishments of those students from the Walnut Hills neighborhood who finished at any of the city’s high schools. There were ten graduates in all. Miss Ruth Stevens played a piece on the piano. Ducella Glenn recited a poem called “Life’s Mirror” by the (white) poet Madeline Bridges. Marie Penn sang a solo – the family lived on Park Avenue and her father Irvine Garland Penn, an official in the Methodist Church, came to Cincinnati to head the Freeman’s Aid Society of that denomination.⁴⁰

DeHart Hubbard, who had just graduated from Walnut Hills High School, read his essay “What Athletics Means to a Boy.” Hubbard would go to Paris in 1924, where he was the first African American to win an individual gold medal in the Olympics, in his Walnut Hills specialty the broad jump. A member of Brown Chapel AME, Hubbard would remain tangentially connected to First Baptist for most of his life.⁴¹

Pastor Green offered the invocation at the graduation ceremony, and St. Andrews Episcopal choir master Clinton Gibbs (a member of First Baptist) directed a quartette from his adult Queen City Glee Club who sang a selection from Verdi, and a more popular song by John Metcalf and Catherine Young Glenn. Pastor R.

³⁵ “N.A.A.C.P.,” *The Union*, May 17, 1921, p. 1.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ “Simon Commandery No. 1, Knights Templar, Will Hold Ascension Day Services,” *The Union*, May 8, 1920, p. 1.

³⁸ “At First Baptist,” *The Union*, June 18, 1921, p. 1.

³⁹ The reports of the Colored School Board for the years 1855-1872 are available online from the Cincinnati Public Library, bound together, as *Annual report of the Board of Trustees for the Colored Public Schools of Cincinnati [1855-1871/72]*. The city’s white School Board took over the Colored Schools in 1874; see also *The Annual Reports of the Common Schools of Cincinnati*.

⁴⁰ On Garland Penn, see “Men of the month,” *The Crisis*, May 1918; Wendell Dabney, *Cincinnati’s Colored Citizens*, p 353; Joanne K. Harrison and Grant Harrison, *The Life and Times of Irvine Garland Penn*.

⁴¹ A good introduction to DeHart Hubbard is Bob Roncker, “Before Jesse Owens There Was DeHart Hubbard.”

D. Phillips who had served at First Baptist in the 1890s, visiting from Columbus, offered the benediction.⁴²

- On June 25, 1921, Pastor Green offered a special afternoon service to celebrate the final payment on the 1908 loan for the building. Green's predecessor Rev. Phillips preached the sermon from Corinthians 3, 9. (Green had preached on Colossians 3, 11 in the morning.) The First Baptist choir sang, a collection brought in \$280.60, and Green ceremoniously burned the mortgage. The Black congregation owned its church free and clear.⁴³

A Music Historical Interlude

The 1926 construction completed the Gothic Revival church building, primarily to create a magnificent musical performance space. It is worthwhile to consider the Black musical climate in Walnut Hills during the earlier history of First Baptist Church to understand the context for its architectural significance. In the white musical world, there are repeated stories about the "discovery" of antebellum African American song. In fact, it was African Americans who introduced their own pentatonic and rhythmically complex music into European classical forms. There was always code switching in the community.

The most important vector for the new American music came through the Fisk Jubilee Singers, a small *a cappella* vocal ensemble from the Freedmen's Bureau's Fisk University beginning in 1871.⁴⁴ This choir set out to demonstrate the capabilities of southern Black students to master European classical music. On the road, in their loneliness and sorrow, the Jubilees consoled themselves with spirituals and plantation music from their own traditions, which they cast in the European harmonies they were performing on the tour. These almost accidental Spirituals, presented from the concert stage, took the world by storm. In addition to concerts on the East Coast, in Britain and the courts of Europe, the Jubilee Singers published their arrangements extremely successfully, and those have become canonical.

Another important Reconstruction *Collection of Revival Hymns and Plantation Melodies* was published by the Black Methodist minister Marshall Taylor in 1882.⁴⁵ The collection had Cincinnati and Walnut Hills connections. Taylor at the time was in Cincinnati at the Union Methodist Episcopal Church downtown when he published his more than 100 African American songs. While a distant second to the Jubilee arrangements, the

⁴² "First Baptist Church, Walnut Hills," *The Union*, June 25, 1921, p. 4.

⁴³ "Dedication Day," *The Union*, June 25, 1921, p. 4.

⁴⁴ See, for example, "Fisk Jubilee Singers."

⁴⁵ Marshall W. Taylor, *Plantation Melodies: A Collection of Revival Hymns and Plantation Melodies*. Musical composition by Miss Josephine Robinson. Copied by Miss Amelia C. and Hettie G. Taylor. On Taylor, see the "Author's Preface" to *Plantation Melodies*, and William J. Simmons, "Rev Marshall Taylor, D. D.," *Men of Mark: Eminent, Progressive and Rising* pp. 933-935, and, more substantially by the Cincinnati George W. Williams, *History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1880*, pp. 469-474.

Collection remained in print for more than twenty-five years and served as the main hymnal for many Black Methodist congregations. The book was a family project; the music was copied out for the printer by his nieces Amelia and Hettie Taylor. Both remained in Cincinnati after their uncle's departure, both graduated from Peter Clark's Gaines Colored High School in the West End, and both taught at Frederick Douglass School in Walnut Hills.⁴⁶

In 1885, one of the original Fisk Jubilee Singers moved to Walnut Hills. Jenny Jackson⁴⁷ had married Cincinnati native Andrew J. DeHart, who would become principal of the Elm Street Colored School in Walnut Hills. (Under his leadership it would take the name Frederick Douglass School.) When First Baptist moved to Lincoln Avenue it became a near neighbor both to the school and to the DeHarts. The couple always lived within a block of the school, first on Chapel Street just east of Alms Place, and then on Park Avenue just south of Chapel. Jennie Jackson DeHart continued her touring concert career for some years. Increasingly, however, she sang around Walnut Hills and Cincinnati, and offered voice lessons and coached girls' singing groups. Jenny Jackson DeHart lived until 1910.⁴⁸

It was in this astonishing musical neighborhood that First Baptist Church emerged. From the beginning, the congregation embraced song in worship (not a given in a Baptist church) and used its music as a fundraising tool. The church's own history states that Rev. Darnell organized a choir in 1883.⁴⁹ A July 1887 snippet in the (white) Cincinnati *Commercial Gazette* noted that the First Baptist choir was giving a concert for the new Black Avondale Baptist Church, including an entertainment on Willow Street offered by Mrs. Dangerfield Earley.⁵⁰ In 1888, the church offered a May festival over a period of several weeks.⁵¹

These musical strains came together with others introduced into Cincinnati during the first wave of the Great Migration of African Americans around the time of the First World War. The amalgam is perhaps best observed in a remarkable concert at Fredrick

⁴⁶ See Marshall Taylor's introduction to *Plantation Melodies*. Brief biographies in "Amelia Taylor," Ruth Neely, ed, *Women of Ohio; a record of their achievements in the history of the state*, p. 114. The title page to the edition online is lost; the text refers to the death of Hettie Taylor in 1937.

⁴⁷ For a Walnut Hills-based biographical sketch of Jennie Jackson, see Adina E. White, "'Looking Backward' through the spectacles of Jennie Jackson DeHart," *Noted Negro women: their triumphs and activities*. (Chicago: Donohue & Henneberry. 1893) ed. Monroe A. Majors. On Jennie Jackson's School Girls Glee Club, see "Fair for the old and indigent," Cincinnati *Commercial Gazette*, April 14, 1895, p. 7. And "In Colored Circles," *ibid.*, April 21, p. 4. On her music school, "Benevolent Work of Ladies," *Cleveland Gazette*, November 8, 1890, p. 1.

⁴⁸ See "Jennie Jackson DeHart and the Fisk Jubilee Singers" on her life in Walnut Hills.

⁴⁹ "Centenary History," Archives of the First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills, Anniversary pamphlet, 1963.

⁵⁰ "Our Colored Citizens," Cincinnati *Commercial Gazette*, July 24, 1887, p. 10.

⁵¹ "Items on the Wing," Cincinnati *Enquirer*, May 12, 1888. Rather imperiously, the anglophiles who hijacked the traditional *Sangerfest* and announced it as a "May Festival" objected to others who, offering music festivals in that month, referred to them as a "May Festival."

Douglass School's 350-seat auditorium in 1915. Music Teacher Evermont Robinson, a 1911 graduate of Howard University in music, staged a fully Black, fully classical concert. The chorus consisted of an adult evening class Robinson conducted at the school. The featured work was "Hiawatha's Wedding Feast," based on the Longfellow poem and set to music by the Anglo-African composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor. (A few years earlier Robinson had directed a 1000 voice chorus singing the piece in honor of the fiftieth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation.) The concert featured visiting tenor Rowland Hayes of Boston, one of the first Black concert singers to break into the national and international classical music scene. The composers on the program, in addition to the Anglo-African Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (and the token white Giuseppe Verdi), included African Americans Henry Thacker ("Harry") Burleigh, J. Rosamond Johnson, and Will Marion Cook.⁵²

First Baptist set out to build its 1926 music addition in this cultural context. A block north of the splendid 1911 Frederick Douglass School building, the church eclipsed the music facilities in the school. For decades both venues brought a wide variety of African American music to Walnut Hills.

The most important musician associated with first Baptist, Clinton Gibbs, was born in Kentucky 1892, but settled in Walnut Hills by 1900. As a child he would have attended Principal A. J. DeHart's Frederick Douglass School. He may have been in an elementary classroom of Hettie Taylor. Perhaps he encountered Jubilee Singer Jennie Jackson DeHart in that community. After Douglass, in 1909 he went down the hill each evening to the East Night School in the old Woodward High School building where he graduated in 1913 at the age of 21. Clinton spent one year, 1914-1915, at the University of Cincinnati, studying education in the circle around the great Black educator Jennie Porter. The circumstances around his withdrawal from the university, and from the community of teachers, are lost.⁵³

At about the same time, Gibbs moved with his family to 2817 Preston Street (previously called Willow), a few doors from the Earley home, and a block east of the Frederick Douglass School in the heart of Black Walnut Hills, and two blocks from First Baptist. He would live there for the rest of his life. The Gibbs family also belonged to First Baptist Church by that time.⁵⁴

Clinton Gibbs found his way into another Black community around the African American Carmel Presbyterian Church downtown, a fascinating institution that touched on Walnut

⁵² Geoffrey Sutton, "Douglass School, High Culture, and American Performing Art".

⁵³ Dabney, *Cincinnati's Colored Citizens*, presented a biographical sketch, pp. 308-309. P. A. Tenkotte and J. C. Claypool, "Clinton Gibbs."

⁵⁴ There was no Gibbs in the membership list around 1910. The exact date of their joining is not clear.

Hills.⁵⁵ The Presbytery had recognized Carmel around the turn of the century as a mission congregation but offered little support. The first public mention of Gibbs as a musician came in February 1915. The (white) First Presbyterian Church downtown presented a “Pan-Presbyterian Bazaar” with one evening set aside for African American music. Along with an impressive array of better-known talents, the “choir of the Carmel Church will render two choruses: pianist and conductor, Clinton Gibbs.”⁵⁶

At the height of the progressive era, yet another institution appeared to support the African American community. A new building for Carmel Presbyterian was erected by the carpentry and construction classes of the McCall Colored Industrial School during its second year of operation in 1915.⁵⁷ It is not clear whether Gibbs first entered into the community around the Industrial School, or the Carmel congregation. Whatever the case may be, he served as choir director and piano accompanist at Carmel and became the director accompanist for the McCall Choral Club.

1919 was an eventful year for Clinton Gibbs. He started his own choir, called the Queen City Glee Club, which sang mostly in church settings, often for fundraising events. He moved as music director from Carmel Presbyterian to the larger and wealthier St. Andrew’s Episcopal, the sole African American parish in the primarily white diocese. There he worked with rector Edmund Oxley, a native of Trinidad educated in England.⁵⁸ Oxley came to the US for further study at both Howard and Harvard, before settling in Cincinnati in 1912. Around 1918 Oxley also recruited Black musician Artie Matthews from a church in Chicago. Both Matthews, first known as a ragtime piano composer and arranger, and Gibbs were serious students of European liturgical music.

In 1919 Clinton Gibbs directed one of his first public concerts at First Baptist in Walnut Hills, leading the McCall singers in a Christmas cantata.⁵⁹ The fact that the Negro Industrial School had a voluntary singing group capable of presenting the piece speaks

⁵⁵ Russell Taylor had been a rare African American student at Lane Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Walnut Hills in the late 1890s. The son of Nebraska “Exodusters” – Black families during Reconstruction who relocated to tiny communities in Kansas and Nebraska – Taylor had come to Lane in 1896 from a stint at the Omaha Presbyterian Seminary. A. J. DeHart, principal of Frederick Douglass School in Walnut Hills at the time, had also served a short time with Congregationalist Exodusters in Topeka before his return to Cincinnati in 1885. The two must have been acquainted in the compact Black neighborhood in Walnut Hills. The Presbyterian Board of Missions for Freedmen in Cincinnati, already a bit of an anachronism by the turn of the century, encouraged Russell Taylor to form a group of Black Presbyterians. The community he brought together continued long after Taylor’s return to the great plains in 1898. In 1901, the Presbytery of Cincinnati embraced the congregation as the Carmel Mission, although it provided no permanent place of worship.

⁵⁶ “Colored Choiristers,” *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*, February 10, 1915, p. 9.

⁵⁷ “Colored Industrial School of Cincinnati, Ohio,” Wendell Dabney, *Cincinnati’s Colored Citizens*, p. 35. “A Great Institution,” *Labor Advocate*, January 20, 1917, p. 10.

⁵⁸ “Rev. Edmund Harrison Oxley, DD,” Wendell Dabney, *Cincinnati’s Colored Citizens*, pp. 231-233.

⁵⁹ “Recital by the Queen City Glee Club,” *The Union*, November 22, 1919, p. 6.

volumes about the role of music in the community. It was a modern piece in classical European style, an ambitious undertaking for an amateur choir.

Several other concerts also occurred in the 1908 auditorium before the 1926 Music Annex was built. One brief news item in September 1923 noted "The men's singing class of First Baptist Church, E. P. Good, leader, sang all day Sunday."⁶⁰ With the high interest in music, and tremendous talent, it was a natural thing for the congregation to build its music wing.

First Baptist in its completed 1926 building

The enlarged 1926 building promptly brought First Baptist of Walnut Hills, and pastor F. P. Green, increased prestige. In October 1927, the General Association of Ohio Baptists chose First Baptist as its meeting place. The week-long conclave attracted a "large delegation of the leading divines of this and neighboring states".⁶¹ In February 1934, the Baptist Young People's Union held a mass meeting at Pastor Green's edifice.⁶² In May of the same year the church hosted the Back-To-Sunday School Mass Meeting.⁶³

The church's 1926 addition fitted in with other developments in the near neighborhood. Perhaps the most relevant was the purchase of a mansion at 1010 Chapel Street by the Cincinnati Federation of Colored Women's Clubs.⁶⁴ Many members of First Baptist also participated in local women's clubs, and in the Federation. Each of the clubs, often based in churches, offered a social service to the community. The Club House was located just one block west of First Baptist.

Lincoln Avenue and Chapel Street east of Gilbert Avenue anchored a Black business district that included, in addition to Prosett's grocery,⁶⁵ three generations of Thatcher's Fish and Poultry beginning in 1933,⁶⁶ and drugstores owned over the years by Black pharmacists Archibald Dickerson (1908-1924), Anna Beckwith (1924-1929), and William Langston Mangrum (1935-53).⁶⁷ The immediate neighborhood sported everything from

⁶⁰ "First Baptist Church," *The Union*, September 15, 1923, p. 2.

⁶¹ "Meeting of Ohio Baptists," *The Union*, October 6, 1927, p. 1.

⁶² "East End News," *The Union*, February 8, 1934, p. 4.

⁶³ "East End News," *The Union*, May 3, 1934, p. 4.

⁶⁴ For an introduction, see Andrea Gutman Fuentes, "Cincinnati Federation of Colored Women's Clubs," <https://theclio.com/entry/47768>

⁶⁵ See footnote 51.

⁶⁶ Geoffrey Sutton, "Thatcher's Fish and Poultry."

⁶⁷ On Dickerson see Geoffrey Sutton, "Archibald Dickerson and the Walnut Hills Pharmacy, 1919-1924." On Anna Beckwith, see Wendell Dabney, Cincinnati's Colored Citizens, p. 255-256, and "Cincinnati News," *Chicago Defender*, May 24, 1924, p.20. On Mangrum, see Association of Black Health System Pharmacists, "African American Pharmacists and Sports."

African American dressmakers and tailors to a florist and a photographer.⁶⁸ The church and its members were woven into the fabric of Walnut Hills.

First Baptist Church came into its own musically when Clinton Gibbs “came home” to assume the role of director and accompanist for the choir with the brilliant new organ and choir loft. Gibbs very quickly launched a tradition of presenting three annual cantatas at Christmas, Good Friday and, a few days later, Easter.⁶⁹ Gibbs also collaborated with Loretta Cessor Mangrum, director and accompanist at Brown Chapel AME and wife of the pharmacist, in neighborhood and city-wide concerts of the Classical choral repertoire. These classical concerts were by no means the only ones in the music wing of First Baptist Church. Mrs. Minnie McAdoo organized the first Gospel Chorus. A Gospel Union formed including First Baptist and other Black churches. Once a month the mass choir sang at one of the member churches. On those Sundays, the host church was filled to capacity.⁷⁰

We may get some sense of Gibbs’ talent as a director and vocal teacher if we consider the career of one of his proteges. Estella Rowe, twenty years younger than the director, had a similar life-story.⁷¹ Active in the musical life of the church, Estella Cavanaugh was born in Kentucky and grew up in Walnut Hills. She earned her diploma in 1933 from the East Night School. It was in the community that she became a musician. By the late 1940s Artie Matthews, principal of the Cosmopolitan School of Music, and Clinton Gibbs had her performing classical solos in the Black musical community.⁷² Estella married and became Mrs. Rowe. In 1952 she became the first Black woman to sing in Music Hall in a pops concert for a primarily white audience.⁷³

Estella Rowe was an anchor in First Baptist Church. She served as its secretary for over 40 years. She also served as the keeper of records for the annual Women’s Day

⁶⁸ On Sherman Flower Shop which operated from 1928-2007, see the obituary of Archie Sherman, *Enquirer*, March 13, 2012, p. B3. On photographer Walter Scarborough. see his obituary on the Walker Funeral Homes website, <https://www.herbwalker.com/obituary/Walter-Scarborough>.

⁶⁹ “History of First Baptist Church,” Archives of the First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills, Anniversary pamphlet, 2015.

⁷⁰ “Centenary History,” Archives of the First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills, Anniversary pamphlet, 1963.

⁷¹ She was born Estella Cavanaugh in Kentucky in 1914; by the 1930 census she lived on May Street in Walnut Hills with her mother who supported three children as a laundress. By the mid-1930s the family of three moved to the more upscale address at 1231 Lincoln; both Estelle and her mother cleaned houses. They shared the two-story house with another family.

⁷² “Music Festival one of the best on record,” *Times Star*, June 10, 1946, p. 17.

⁷³ Thea Tjepkema, “Estella Rowe & Wade Mann: First Local Black Soloists with the CSO.”

Services at First Baptist during the 1950s and 1960s. She passed a book each year to the new organizing committee. It remains in the archives, with worship bulletins and photographs gradually changing over from black and white to color. In 1965, Mrs. Rowe herself was a co-chair of the Services.⁷⁴

In another continuing thread in First Baptist's history, Olympian DeHart Hubbard returned to Cincinnati after graduation from the University of Michigan.⁷⁵ A progressive reform city charter led to the creation of the Cincinnati Recreation Department in 1927. It was a modern Civil Service organization, with examinations to determine a list of qualified candidates. Hubbard's University of Michigan education held him in good stead: he scored well on the exam and earned an appointment as the first supervisor of the Department of Colored Work.⁷⁶

Three other departments served the white community: Athletics, Recreation, and Music, each with its own (white) supervisor. Hubbard ran all three functions for the Black community. It is not surprising that he developed a wildly successful athletic program. He also lobbied for more playgrounds and recreation areas, and organized activities especially for children.⁷⁷ Hubbard more surprisingly also provided the third leg of the Recreation stool: he initiated a Black music program. In this project, he reconnected with First Baptist Church.

Clinton Gibbs earned his position as music director at First Baptist about the same time as Hubbard took on his role at the recreation commission. Hubbard set up a series of Black adult community choirs sponsored by the Recreation Commission. In Walnut Hills he recruited Gibbs to lead a community chorus at the Frederick Douglass School. Archie Matthews of St. Andrew's Episcopalian Church led the community chorus at

⁷⁴ See the Archive inventory for First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills. For contemporary press coverage see, for example, "Church of the Week: First Baptist," *Herald*, October 24, 1964, p. 2, or "Womens Day at First Baptist," *Herald*, November 13, 1965 p. 4, when Mrs. Rowe served as co-chair.

⁷⁵ He told a newspaper interviewer "People have wondered at my return to Cincinnati when it offers so small an opportunity in a business and financial way. They forget that money is only a small part of life. My duty is right here in this city The people of this city helped me obtain my education and now I feel that I should give them the benefit of what I learned." "DeHart Hubbard, Olympic Athlete, Gets YMCA Post," *Commercial Tribune*, December 1, 1925, p. 6.

⁷⁶ Andrea Tuttle Kornbluh has contributed two important chapters on the recreation, including discussion of DeHart Hubbard. "Municipal Harmony: Cultural Pluralism, Public Recreation, and Race Relations," Chapter 3, *Historical Roots of the Urban Crisis; African Americans in the Industrial City 1900-1950*. "James Hathaway Robinson and the origins of professional social work in the Black community," *Race and the city: Race, Community and Protest in Cincinnati, 1820-1970*.

⁷⁷ "Play Streets to be opened; children to get supervised recreation; Showers are included," *Post*, June 28, 1924, Bonus Edition, p. 1. "Play streets are open tonight", *Enquirer*, June 30, 1924, p. 10. "Eight Play Streets to be Opened by Community Service Tomorrow," *Commercial Tribune*, June 29, 1924, p. 10. It is worth remarking that the Douglass School music teacher, Evermont Robinson, got a summer job in 1924 supervising segregated Negro playgrounds and "play streets."

Jenny Porter's African American Stowe School downtown. Over the years additional choirs were added. Each choir rehearsed individually each week, but all worked on some of the same music, both classical and Spiritual.

Almost every year, all the Black choruses attended a few "mass" rehearsals, often under the baton of visiting conductors, mixing and balancing hundreds of voices. Often the Recreation Commission then provided concerts in large public venues, most often in Eden Park in Walnut Hills. These concerts eventually became known, even in the white community, as simply the "June Festival."

The concerts had their roots in Department of Negro Recreation initiated by the Negro Civic Welfare Committee of Cincinnati's Council of Social Agencies in the early 1920s. Douglass School music teacher Evermont Robinson collaborated with his brother James, also for a time a teacher at Frederick Douglass School and later the Executive Director of the Negro Civic Welfare Committee, in the creation of Black choirs and community orchestras. (James was quite a musician in his own right.⁷⁸) Hubbard in fact moved the program into the Recreation Department, beginning in 1929.

Ironically, the Black music program in the Department of Colored work grew sufficiently successful that in July, 1938 the Recreation Commission's Department of Music took it over. Despite its decade-long history in Hubbard's department, and the preceding years of Black choirs and orchestras under the Negro Civic Welfare Committee, in 1939 it came the second annual June Festival of Recreation Commission's (white) Department of Music. (Figure 41)⁷⁹ DeHart Hubbard, Clinton Gibbs, Artie Matthews, and Loretta Mangrum continued to rehearse community choirs in Black churches, schools and community centers for many months each year; Hubbard even recruited the great Black athlete, activist and singer Paul Robeson to sing with the Black mass chorus in 1940.⁸⁰

The special musical role emerged in the context of a church otherwise fully engaged in weekly worship, Christian Education, men's and women's groups, and youth programming in a healthy, thriving church.

First Baptist in its 1965 Education Wing

First Baptist Church, a conventional Black Church in stable, middle class Black Walnut Hills, nonetheless stepped into a more outspoken role in the Civil Rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s.⁸¹ In 1965, the congregation, under Rev. Edmondson's leadership, purchased new property on Park Avenue, adjacent to the church, for the purpose of

⁷⁸ Geoffrey Sutton, "Douglass School, High Culture, and American Performing Art."

⁷⁹ "Second Festival of Negro Music Presented before Throng of 2,500 in Eden Park Dell," *Enquirer*, June 5, 1939, p. 3.

⁸⁰ "Here Tonight: Paul Robeson," *Enquirer*, June 18, 1942, p. 12; "June Festival," *Enquirer*, June 19, 1942, p. 9.

⁸¹ "Your Church News," *Cincinnati Herald*, December 25, 1965, p. 5.

building their “Educational Building.”⁸² The church continued its support for and leadership in the neighborhood. Yet the neighborhood was changing. The church hosted an appreciation service for Black city council member Myron Bush just a few months after the opening of the new wing. Bush worked comfortably with the white power structure in the city, but he had pursued Civil Rights during his many years as an attorney. As a council member he served the needs of his Black constituents, especially in assuring that Civil Service jobs in the city were available to the community – even before official affirmative action programs were introduced.

Also in 1965, Mrs. Mary Bowman became supervisor of the children’s band. With Mrs. Bowman in charge, the group began visiting area nursing homes where they would take meals to the sick, share the gospel in song, and attend annual retreats. In an oral history interview with Mrs. Mary Bowman and her daughter, Crystal North, they shared memories of her time as the church’s youth choir director.⁸³ During Mrs. Bowman’s tenure, the church had robust programs for both youth and adults that expanded over the years – and Rev. Edmondson found ways to accommodate the church’s growth. Crystal had fond memories of Rev. Edmondson and how the church flourished under his leadership. She also recalled that before the educational wing was built, there were homes next door that were owned by the church where members, trustees, and clergy could stay when they needed a place to rent. Once the church expanded, youth programs were no longer confined to the basement. Instead, the expansion provided classrooms for middle school-aged kids.

A few years later, the neighborhood and the Church faced civil unrest, especially during the riots of 1967 and 1968. The tremendous destruction and disinvestment from the disturbances were only a part of the stresses placed on the community. Major transportation projects in the 1970s and 80s, especially the construction of I71 and of Martin Luther King Drive, tore through Walnut Hills. The five-lane MLK project condemned the entire block north of First Baptist, at once sundering the previously walkable neighborhood and taking hundreds of Black-owned homes.

The focus of the church’s teachings departed sharply from the practice of a century earlier of concentrating on sin, especially in matters of personal morality. In 1984, the church’s Women’s Day Committee sponsored a free workshop called, “Getting the Facts” — a seminar on topics ranging from “Reducing Your Utility Bills” and “Stress Management” to “Assault and Rape Prevention”.⁸⁴ According to the *Cincinnati Herald*,

⁸² “History,” Archives of the First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills, Anniversary pamphlet for 137th Anniversary, 2000, p. 8.

⁸³ Mary Bowman Oral History, conducted by Deqah Hussein-Wetzel, November 2022.

⁸⁴ “First Baptist to Hold Workshops,” *Cincinnati Herald*, April 21, 1984, p. 6.

around 1991, the church's Youth Ministry Team also held special training workshops.⁸⁵ But these renewed activities push the boundaries of our period of significance.

Gothic Revival Architecture

Gothic Revival Architecture is a style that was influenced and apart of the picturesque and romantic movement in architecture that reflected a renewed taste for medieval design. This was a departure and contrast to the Greek Revival Architectural and classism that was a contemporary of the start of the Gothic Revival period in the 1830s. While the style was introduced and heavily used between 1830 to 1860, the Gothic Style remained popular in ecclesiastical architecture through the early and mid 20th century.

Identifiable features of Gothic Architecture include

1. Pointed arches as decorative element and as window shape
2. Front facing gables with decorative incised trim (vergeboards or bargeboards)
3. Porches with turned posts or columns
4. Steeply pitched roof
5. Gables often topped with finials or cross bracing
6. Decorative crowns (gable or drip mold) over windows and doors
7. Castle-like towers with parapets on some high style buildings

Ecclesiastical Architectural Context of First Baptist Church: First Baptist Church is the best-preserved brick Gothic Revival church in Walnut Hills dating from the period of its construction, 1908-1926. The sanctuary and fellowship space are still owned and used by an active congregation with deep roots in the neighborhood. It is an architectural gem, consonant with ecclesiastical, commercial, and residential styles and details. First Baptist, including its additions, has helped to set the style for Black ecclesiastic architecture in its neighborhood.

First Baptist Church at Park and Lincoln Avenues fits into a rich architectural context in Walnut Hills. A few antebellum buildings remain in the neighborhood. The hilltop population boomed in the Reconstruction years, and especially after the introduction of the Mt. Adams incline and the Gilbert Avenue cable car in the 1880s. Significant residential and commercial structures have survived from this period. Walnut Hills remained a vibrant, modern neighborhood at least through the 1970s. Art deco limestone structures appear among great brick and stone Victorian piles; sleek smoked glass midcentury modern low-rise office buildings (mostly now repurposed) stand in the

⁸⁵ "The First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills". *Cincinnati Herald*, August 24, 1991, p. 6.

shadows of Italianate Streetcar apartments. The neighborhood is still well churched despite the closure of many congregations.

The most striking example of Gothic Revival ecclesiastical architecture is the large stone St. Francis DeSales Catholic Church on the northeast corner of Madison Road and Woodburn Avenue. The building dates from 1887. (Figure 23) The south-facing façade on Madison presents classic high Gothic features – two square corner towers flank a soaring gabled wall with a high rose stained-glass window. Only the tower on the corner sprouted a belfry and steeple rising higher than the gable. At ground level, steps lead to three sets of double doors that adorn the three sections, each enclosed in nested stone Gothic arches. The west elevation on Woodburn uses buttresses to define soaring window bays in the aisles; a transept kicks out toward the avenue; north of the transept the choir extends to a proper semicircular apse. The neighborhood might use this as a Gothic reference specimen. All the details described at First Baptist, and more, are available in a larger scale at St. Francis.

The Catholic Church of the Assumption on the east side of Gilbert Avenue between Taft Road and Yale Avenue, built at about the same time as St Francis, presents a more eclectic take on a Gothic Revival façade. (Figure 42) The interior structure is not as high Gothic Revival as the stone pillars supporting the aisle arches at St. Francis; Assumption (like the First Baptist auditorium) is roofed in a single span.⁸⁶ The Catholic parish no longer exists, but the building still stands awaiting redevelopment for another purpose.

Several (white) protestant churches offer similarly Gothic Revival exemplars. Most traditional is the former Walnut Hills Methodist Church on the south side of McMillan Street at Ashland Avenue, built in brick during the 1880s. (Figure 8) It provided an exemplar in the same material as First Baptist, symmetrical except for an unbalanced steeple and pyramidal roof topping the two square towers. The Methodists were blessed with a large Gothic arch in the central gabled wall including four smaller tracery Gothic arch windows surmounted by three roundels. The placement of the Gothic arch above the entry doors reflects the location of the sanctuary a floor above the entry doors as much as to Gothic tradition. The white Bedford Stone accents presaged the stonework at First Baptist. It offered an architectural reference for Victorian Brick Gothic design the

⁸⁶ Figure 42 appeared in the *Graphic*, August 29, 1885, and also in *Cincinnati and suburbs: the graphic blue book and family directory, 1886-7*. An extensive description appears in "Hill of Churches; Another Handsome Suburban Sanctuary," *Enquirer*, August 17, 1885, p. 8.

way St. Francis did in stone. This reference photograph is purely historical; for the past century the Methodist has been clad in (excellent) faux stone.⁸⁷ (Figure 43)

The (white) Episcopal Church of the Advent at Kemper and Cross Lanes has many Gothic elements at a smaller scale, more like an English country church than a cathedral. The original square stone tower was eventually elevated and castellated. (Figure 44) Advent features both pillared aisles like St. Francis and an open timber roof like Assumption. (Figure 45) The congregation dates from 1855, about the same as the “First Church” in the Black community. Even more than First Baptist, Advent grew in many stages from the first stone auditorium in the 1870s through many nineteenth- and twentieth-century additions, spilling over into the lot to the east and taking the house located there.

Beyond these grand showplaces, the neighborhood was and is home to many more modest houses of worship. A more obvious comparison to First Baptist might be the former (white) Walnut Hills Evangelical Lutheran Church at the southeast corner of what is now Taft Road and Stanton Avenue. (Figure 46) Constructed of stone in about 1890, it is much closer in size and design to the later First Baptist.⁸⁸ The massing and details including pointed arches for most openings follow Gothic patterns; the treatment of the voussoirs above the arches, sometimes in the limestone of the walls and others in different stone, is unusual. The stained glass preceded the similar style of First Baptist, up to the iconic Christian images in the points of the Gothic arches. Indeed, the congregation in the building is now the (Black) Calvary Baptist Church, which relocated from its original downtown location to Walnut Hills. An unbuilt drawing of a proposed Black Bethel Baptist Church from 1894 (Figure 47) bears a striking similarity to Walnut Hills Lutheran.

The most obvious, and closest, comparison church to First Baptist is Bethel Baptist on Alms Place between Yale and Myrtle. We have seen that Bethel was planned during the same wave of condemnations of Black frame churches as First Baptist, and that it too was completed, behind schedule, in 1908. (Figure 10) Bethel has been radically altered, and at first glance it appears architecturally unrelated to First Baptist. Nonetheless, the historical photos show that the two were cut from the same cloth. First Baptist was both the larger and the more elaborate of the two. Its plan was fifty by seventy-five feet; Bethel’s was forty by sixty-five.⁸⁹ First Baptist also had higher eaves; in Bethel the

⁸⁷ The church had several brick preservation treatments by the Cemeline company. The first postcard shows the original brick design; later photographs show it clad in a cement coating applied around 1910. See trade publications *Cement World*, v. 2, n. 12, March 1909, pp. 896-898; and *Concrete*, v. 9, 1909, *passim*. The Ingalls building, Cincinnati skyscraper, was clad in the same material.

⁸⁸ The Walnut Hills Lutheran Church was founded by a group around Frederick Alms, of the Alms and Doepke department store. S. B. Nelson & Co., *History of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, Ohio*, p. 213.

⁸⁹ “Real Estate and Building,” *Enquirer*, July 29, 1906, p. 10.

stained-glass windows in the original auditorium are rectangular; there is no room for arches above. Moreover, while in proper gothic fashion Bethel had a square tower on the southeast corner, that tower was of frame construction, not built to last.

Expansion at Bethel removed the square tower and added a series of more modern, and more boldly modern, exterior architectural styles. (Figure 48) Some have aged more gracefully than others. While the original gothic exterior is completely lost, the character of the nave nonetheless maintains the same early twentieth century ambiance as First Baptist. (Figure 49) The original windows at Bethel ring similar changes on geometrical patterns to those at First Baptist and share the same character. (Figure 17)

The most important architectural landmark in Black Walnut Hills built around the time of First Baptist was the 1911 Frederick Douglass School. (Figure 50) Built on the site of the 1870 Elm Street Colored School, Douglass was a reinforced concrete structure clad in brick, stucco, and terracotta. The school, officially segregated from its Reconstruction beginnings through the mid-1950s (and de facto, in yet another building, to the present day), became a community center. We have seen that its 350-seat auditorium was sometimes used in concert with First Baptist's even larger space for meetings. The lovely landmark of Douglass fell to the wrecking ball in 1980 during a short-lived attempt to integrate the school by eliminating its great historical Blackness.

There are three architectural details common to First Baptist and several other buildings in the immediate neighborhood. The first is an elaborate split staircase.⁹⁰ We have seen that First Baptist added complicated staircases and porches in about 1920, some years after Douglass was built. Such porches had both Gothic ecclesiastical precedents, and more immediate use in the 1911 Frederick Douglass School a block to the south (Figure 50) and the 1895 Walnut Hills High School building at Ashland and Burdette just a few blocks further from First Baptist. (Figure 51) The similarity is especially striking when we compare photos of a Black teachers' convention on the Douglass steps and courtyard in the 1910s (Figure 52), or a class picture at Walnut Hills High School in the late 1910s (Figure 53) with a photo of the First Baptist congregation (Figure 54), arranged similarly on the sidewalks, steps and porches in 1931.

Even later in the century, the use of split staircases as a formal entrance continued. When the original First Baptist building went up, Brown Chapel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) had its own brick building just down the block on Park. In the late 1920's, the AME congregation determined to build a new facility. They purchased a lot across Alms Place from Frederick Douglass School and first dug out a basement in

⁹⁰ Photographs 14 and 16, discussed in the architecture section above, show the old Walnut Hills High School. The current Walnut Hills High School campus, overlooking Victory Parkway from Sulsar and technically in the Evanston neighborhood, was first built in 1931. The original building at Ashland and Victory, which housed several other schools, is now the Schoolhouse Lofts with an unfortunate replacement of the old slate roof, lost in a fire.

1930. The congregation retained the Black architect Edward Birch who designed a modern building finally completed in 1951. The new Brown Chapel was a clean, spare, flat-roofed, yellow brick collection of rectangular boxes descending from a tall narrow column supporting a prominent metal cross to a shorter square tower with double doors opening into a vestibule to the shorter rectangular auditorium with a much larger footprint. (Figure 55) Still, in keeping with the surrounding architecture, Birch thrust a porch with a stairway at a right angle, an ornament common to the nearby schools and to First Baptist; the requisite crowded picture of congregants on the steps was published. (Figure 56)

We have seen how the Educational Wing at First Baptist featured a mid-century modern rectangular wooden lattice with glass panes of many colors, under a slanted eave. (Figures 37) This second architectural feature was also incorporated into other neighborhood churches. When Brown Chapel installed new windows in the 1980s, replacing the aluminum-framed clear glass of 1951, they chose thick glass windows with flush cement (or resin) separators rather than traditional metal framing – so-called *Dalle de verre* stained glass, developed in Europe in the 1930s and popularized there in the 1960s. The work in Brown Chapel is stunning. (Figure 57)

New church construction continued in Black religious communities in Walnut Hills. Corinthian Baptist in Avondale – originally First Baptist of Avondale – was founded and originally constructed around the same time as First Baptist of Walnut Hills. A new building was raised in 1964, around the same time as the First Baptist educational wing. Corinthian adopted strikingly similar colored glass in a vertical lattice with a large cross tucked under the eaves (Figure 58). About the same time, the Metropolitan Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME) church on Melrose Avenue between Oak Street and Lincoln Avenue built a new and decidedly modern facility, also featuring a central (clear) floor-to-ceiling glass section with an even more extremely tapered overhang than the First Baptist educational wing. (Figure 59) The even more recent, and more rakishly modern James Temple Church of God in Christ, just across Lincoln Avenue from First Baptist, outdoes the tapered overhangs of the 1960s, with a narrow, horizontally tapered *Dalle de verre* window folded under an acutely angled frieze board corner. (Figure 60) The architectural progression continued in Black-built churches.

A third detail shared by First Baptist and the 1911 Frederick Douglass School were square towers with pyramidal roofs. This architectural icon crops up all over the neighborhood. The 1895 Hauck building on the southwest corner of McMillan Street and Kemper Lane is the most massive surviving example, replete with full Romanesque decoration in light stone. (Figure 61) Two substantial stone Presbyterian churches (both white) were also constructed in the 1880s. The First Presbyterian of Walnut Hills on the northwest corner of Gilbert Avenue and Taft Road (Figure 62) and Seventh Presbyterian (of Cincinnati) on the southeast corner of Madison Road and Cleinview

Avenue (Figure 63) leave only their lofty square bell towers. Only the Seventh retains its pyramidal roof.

A quarter-century before the Hauck Building, and much closer to First Baptist, the DeVote grocery building from the 1860s was adorned with a square tower with a pyramidal roof thrust up from a corner of the completely secular structure. That building on the northeast corner of Chapel Street and Alms Place fully entered the Black community in the early 1920s when Horace Sudduth's Creative Realty investment vehicle bought it and rented the Chapel Street storefront successively to the Black pharmacists Archibald Dickerson and Anna Beckwith. (Both the drugstore and the building were renamed Peerless.) (Figure 64)

Like Bethel Baptist, Brown Chapel AME has been radically altered since its initial construction. (Figure 57. Compare Figure 55) Most striking to me is the change in the massing. It is almost as though First Baptist had become the model for a conventional Black Church in the neighborhood. Brown's original flat roof gave way to a tripartite gabled façade. The AME church sprouted a square tower with a pyramidal roof; the massive cross of 1951 was removed in favor of a very small one in the place of the First Baptist lightning rod.

With this remodel, Brown Chapel took its place in a row of square towers lined up on Alms place. Two blocks to the north is the DeVote (Peerless) building. (Figure 65) Two blocks north of that, on Lincoln Avenue, is a nineteenth century apartment building over a retail storefront – with a prominent square tower cantilevered diagonally from the red brick building with its white stone trim. (Figure 66 and 67) A block east of that, we complete the circuit to First Baptist. (Figure 68)

Architectural Overview

Architectural Description:

Structure: The First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills building was constructed in three stages. The original portion of the church (1908) is a vernacular church building with elements of the Gothic Revival style; it is clad in brick and features a stone foundation. The building features a front-gable roof with asphalt shingles and a square bell tower with a pyramid asphalt-shingle roof and bracketed iron cornice on the northwest corner. In 1926 the congregation completed a large, architecturally sensitive addition to the east end of the sanctuary to accommodate a pipe organ and music rehearsal rooms, with offices below. Two tall brick chimneys are located between the 1908 and 1926 portions of the building. In 1965 the congregation added an educational building to the south, connected with passageways to the existing building but sited and sized to allow sunlight to reach the south-facing windows in the unified 1908-1926 structure. This

structure has overhanging eaves on the west wall (Figure 2), with a smaller brick chimney attached to the east wall.

The 1908 main façade features a central pointed Gothic arch with a tri-partite stained glass window, with a keystone and stone sill. This was flanked by two wood, double-door entryways topped with stone lintels, accessible via a series of stone steps, with a stone foundation, exposed on the north (Lincoln Avenue) side to show a full-story undercroft. The front entryways are behind decorative brick-wall and stone balustrades. The northernmost stoop wraps around the northeast corner of the building and features another staircase that leads to the north entrance. There is an iron corbelled cornice on the bell tower. The stone foundation of the north wall has an entrance to the undercroft that may date from 1908; another entrance was added along that foundation wall when it was lengthened in 1926.

The church sanctuary windows reflect the structural history. In 1908, both the north and south walls featured six recessed bays with single, pointed stained glass windows in each bay. In 1926, the addition on the east added 2 additional bays at the east end of the north wall. (Two windows from the original 1908 construction were moved to these bays to lend architectural uniformity while new windows were inserted into the first and fifth original bays.) An example of an original window is found in Figure 3.

The 1965 addition features brick veneer-clad walls with a curtain wall and stained-glass entryway with glass double-doors on the west wall. Historically, the original, 1908, building and 1926 addition housed the sanctuary, church offices, classrooms, and activity spaces (Figures 4 and 5). Once the mid-20th century addition was completed, church offices and classrooms moved into the new space (Figure 6). In addition to being an educational space, the classrooms were big enough to accommodate social programs and serve as gathering and meeting spaces for related African American activities.

Site: The First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills is located on a corner site of less than one acre. It is on the east side of Park Avenue and south side of Lincoln Avenue, southwest of the modern Dr. Martin Luther King Drive. The church is surrounded by a vacant, mostly grassy lawn to the south (owned by the church) and a small parking area to the east. The property just east of the church is another brick church building owned by James Temple Church of God in Christ. On the south side of the block are two single-family homes and an apartment complex called Chapel Street Apartments.

Setting: The First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills is located in Walnut Hills. To the north, between Lincoln and Dr. Martin Luther King Drive, is the Transformation Ministries

church. To the west, across Park Avenue on Chapel, is a large senior apartment complex. To the west of the apartments on Chapel Street are the Federation of Colored Women's Clubs and the Manse Hotel—all within the same block. Both the Federation of Colored Women's Clubs and Manse Hotel are Local Historic Landmarks, recognized for their contributions to Ethnic (Black) heritage. Across Chapel Street, the block to the south houses the Spencer Educational Center (formerly the last of three iterations of the historically Black Frederick Douglass School). Also south of Chapel, west of Park Avenue, are approximately ten dwellings, some of which were single-family homes that were split up and converted into multi-family over time. Several once housed important people in the Black community of Walnut Hills.

Statement on Integrity

Location: The 1908 First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills building is in the same location as it was originally constructed and has not been moved. The church retains its integrity of location as it is associated with 20th century religious events. The 1908 building is especially important because the church was built by African American trustees, pastors, and members who raised funds and assumed loans to construct it from the ground up. The building's location is important in recapturing the sense of historical events (and people) associated with the church.

Feeling: The church itself remains extant and continues to serve as a physical representation of an African American Baptist church in the Walnut Hills neighborhood. Because the church's historical character is intact today, it continues to serve as an expression of ecclesiastical aesthetic and relates to the feeling of a sacred Black religious space. The historic integrity of feeling is high for the church.

Setting: Over the last 50 years, many of the buildings around the church (and throughout the neighborhood) have been demolished, leaving pockets of vacant parcels. With most of the buildings that historically surrounded the church gone, the church has a diminished integrity of setting. Even though much of the historic character of the neighborhood has slowly been erased, the church's historic relationship to the street and other extant historic Black buildings like the Manse Hotel and the Federation of Colored Women's Clubs enable the church to retain some of its integrity of setting. Other important buildings nearby include an 1860's retail and apartment building on the northeast corner of Alms and Chapel called the Peerless Building in the 1920s that housed the Black-owned Drug Store and the Walnut Hills Enterprise Corporation's grocery.

Design: The church retains a high degree of integrity of design because no major, incompatible changes were made to the original design, except for the modest 1965 addition. Even that was comfortably completed within the period of significance. The 1908 church building, 1926 addition, and 1960s educational wing addition are all historically significant in their own right. The 1908 building, with a 500-seat sanctuary was a bold, financially risky place not only for worship, but also for mass meetings in Walnut Hills, and even for nationally significant Black conventions. The additions represent changes over time, indicating the increased church membership and program participation during the early and mid 20th centuries. Most notable in the 1926 construction is the congregation's commitment to music, solidified with a \$5400 pipe organ. Overall, the building's historic form, plan, space, structure, style, proportions, ornamentation, and materials have not changed since their construction.

Workmanship: This architect-designed church building continues to represent the physical evidence of the craftsmanship of the artisans and laborers who designed and erected the building. Though the church is more vernacular in style, the methods of construction, materials used, and careful consideration of where additions would be located have enabled the building to retain a high degree of workmanship. From the stained-glass work to the exterior architectural details, the physical evidence of historic crafts that date back to early 20th century design, is apparent on the building.

Materials: The historic materials used to construct the original 1908 building consisted of brick and stone, which remain in-tact today. The iron cornice on the tower, while showing signs of exposure to the elements, is correctly original. The stained-glass windows also remain intact throughout the building, though some of the came and caulking could use attention. The educational wing addition is clad in brick and features a concrete foundation, which dates from the 1960s, which is within the period of significance. In sum, the church retains a high level of integrity of materials.

Association: There is a direct link to the building and its significance as a sacred Black space in local history. This property retains integrity of association because it is the place where First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills events and activities occurred and because the building easily conveys that relationship to observers due to the fact that the physical features holistically communicate the property's historic character. {In addition to ministers and members, we have things like the meeting of the national colored teachers conference and the choir fundraiser for McCall Industrial School.}

Findings

Planning Considerations

Compatibility With Plan Cincinnati: Sustain Goal 2b: “Preserve Our Built History. Preserve our built history with new development incentives and regulatory measures. Cincinnati’s rich history is best exemplified through our historic buildings and by the built environment that helps define a neighborhood’s character....” Landmark designation allows for preservation of a highly significant structure in danger of destruction. It will further allow for state historic rehabilitation tax incentives to be used to renovate the church building, thereby preserving this true Cincinnati landmark for future generations to appreciate and enjoy.

Compatibility with Chapter 1435 CZC

According to Chapter 1435 of the Cincinnati Zoning Code (Historic Preservation), certain findings must be made before a historic structure can be designated by City Council. The structure must be found to have historic significance. Historic significance means that that the attributes of a district, site, or structure that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association, and:

1. That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
2. That are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
3. That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
4. That has yielded, or may be likely to yield information important in history or – pre-history.’

The First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills has historical significance according to Chapter 1435 of the Cincinnati municipal code. The church building meets Criteria 1 because of its historical significance as a religious institution and for its role in the development of the African American community in Walnut Hills. From its beginnings as a church congregation in 1856, the members of the First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills (or the ‘First Church’ as they were then called) had strong ties to the neighborhood, serving a mixed Black religion population composed of Baptists and Methodists, until they split in 1863. The construction of the First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills 1908 building symbolized an era of growth for the congregation and Black community at-large. It was

an important place for religious gatherings and social events during its period of significance. With its strong association to the African American Baptist community, the vernacular brick-clad church with elements of the Gothic Revival style is an excellent example of a well-preserved and carefully maintained historic African American Baptist Church.

The First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills has historical significance according to Chapter 1435 of the Cincinnati municipal code. The church building meets Criteria 3 because of its historical significance as an intact of Gothic Revival Architecture as seen in Ecclesiastical use. It is also one of the last remaining original and intact Gothic Revival Churches in Walnut Hills.

Research Methodology

Research was conducted using primary and secondary sources. Resources include various newspaper articles, First Baptist church archives and oral histories, the Cincinnati Historic Inventory, and Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of Cincinnati.

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The First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills has an extensive set of records dating to the late 19th century. Among these are:

- Trustee Minutes
- Obituaries
- Church Bulletins
- Scrap books with pictures, newspaper and magazine clippings, and private notes
- Letters to and from church officials
- Membership records
- Women's Day Celebration pamphlets
- Anniversary Celebration pamphlets, many narrating the church's history

These documents have been cataloged at https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1LJaJWD5TdGuXDM675Z7InywPpdkiBLDR/edit?usp=share_link&oid=103461199440402050093&rtpof=true&sd=true .

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Photos and Images

**First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills
2926 Park Avenue
Cincinnati, Ohio 45209**

**ALTERATION AND REHABILITATION REVIEW CRITERIA:
GENERAL GUIDELINES**

1. Avoid removing or altering historic material or distinctive architectural features; If it's original and in fairly good condition, try to keep it and repair it.
2. Don't try to make the building look older than it really is. This also applied to any future additions to the building. Do not try and make new additions look like they are original to the building.
3. A later addition to an old building may have gained significance on its own. Don't assume it's worthless just because it's not part of the original building.
4. Repair rather than replace whenever possible. If replacing, replicate the original
5. Be sensitive to distinct features and examples of skilled craftsmanship.
6. Surface cleaning should be done by the gentlest means possible. Don't sandblast or use other abrasive methods. Cleaning may not be necessary at all.
7. New additions should look new. They should be compatible with the existing structure but should not try to copy the old building.
8. When conducting improvements, carefully uncover any original design features that may be buried under layers of improvements. Leave any historic features in place and uncovered.

1. MATERIALS: REPAIR OR MATCH THE ORIGINAL AS CLOSELY AS POSSIBLE.

Original materials should be repaired, restored, and reused whenever possible. Original materials should not be removed or covered. Where necessary, missing or deteriorated material should be replaced with appropriate recycled or new materials that match the original as closely as possible to:

type of material	size of unit	color
shape	configuration	texture
type of joint	placement	detailing
location.		

1. WINDOWS: SHOULD REMAIN OPEN

The original pattern of window openings and their shape and configuration should not be altered. Window openings should not be reduced, enlarged or filled

in on street facades. Replacement windows should match the original in size, color, shape, design and material. Vinyl replacement windows shall not be permitted.

2. Building code and egress requirements are different from what they were when the buildings were constructed. Conversion of window openings to door openings is allowed in order to meet egress and life and safety requirements.
3. **ORNAMENTATION: KEEP ORIGINAL ORNAMENTATION**
The existing architectural features that give buildings their character such as decorative brackets, brickwork, and stone should be preserved. The addition of inappropriate and out-of-character features should be avoided.
4. **MASONRY CLEANING: NEVER SANDBLAST OR DON'T CLEAN**
Cleaning of any masonry is generally discouraged. If cleaning is necessary, it should be done by the least damaging method available, ranging from washing with a mild detergent and soft bristle brushes to low-abrasive chemical cleaning. Sandblasting is not an acceptable method for cleaning; it destroys brick and reduces the life of buildings. Sandblasting brick severely damages the surface.
5. **SILICONE: AVOID WATER REPELLENT COATINGS**
Water repellent coatings (silicone) should never be used unless there is actual water penetration through the masonry units themselves, and if the problem is not caused by faulty or missing mortar, poorly functioning gutters and downspouts, or rising ground water.
If water is penetrating through the masonry to interior surfaces, then only the affected area should be treated, and only after the masonry has been allowed to dry. Painting is more permanent and provides a good measure of waterproofing to masonry walls.
6. **PAINTING: IF IT WAS PAINTED, PAINT IT AGAIN**
Painted brick buildings should be repainted rather than stripped or cleaned to reveal the natural brick color. The color of trim and decorative detailing on a building should contrast with the wall paint color. Unpainted buildings must remain unpainted. Only paint a particular architectural element if it was originally painted.
7. **REPOINTING: USE THE RIGHT CEMENT AND MATCH MORTAR JOINTS.**
Remember that older, softer bricks require a softer mortar. In general, the mortar joint should be concave, as this gives the greatest bond of mortar to brick. Have a test sample analyzed and match the composition and color. Ensure mortar joints match the existing mortar in color, material, and method of application.
8. **APPURTENANCES/AWNINGS: NO NOT COVER IMPORTANT FEATURES**
All appurtenances, such as light fixtures and signs, should be compatible with the building upon which they are to be installed. The installation of canopies and

awnings are not compatible with a vernacular church with elements of the Gothic Revival style, thus is not permissible on this building.

9. UTILITY/SYSTEM INSTALLATION: PLACE THEM INCONSPICUOUSLY

The installation of utility and mechanical systems such as water or gas meters, and central air conditioning units, should be inconspicuously placed and screening should be provided; the installation of such systems should be avoided on the street façade.

10. WALLS AND FENCES: RETAIN THE ORIGINAL

Existing retaining walls, gates and fences should be repaired and retained whenever possible. The installation of chain link fences shall be prohibited on the property.

11. PARKING: LOTS SHOULD BE SCREENED AND LANDSCAPED.

Parking should be designed so as not to detract from the visual quality of the district.

Screening should be sufficient to minimize the view of parked vehicles from other properties, from the street, and other public areas. Screening may employ masonry walls, landscaping and fencing. The design of this screening should be compatible with the district.

Within the interior of parking lots, there should be adequate landscaping, including planting islands containing trees to provide shade and to break up large areas of paving.

12. DEMOLITION: PERMITTED ONLY UNDER CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES

Demolition of existing buildings shall not be permitted unless one of the following conditions exist:

- a. Demolition has been ordered by the Director of Buildings & Inspections for reasons of public health and safety;
- b. The owner can demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Historic Conservation Board that the structure cannot be reused nor can a reasonable economic return be gained from the use of all or part of the building proposed for demolition. This review will be governed by Section 1435-09: Alterations and Demolitions: Certificate of Appropriateness; Minimum Maintenance, of the Cincinnati Zoning Code, ordained by Ordinance No. 217-2012, 1, effective July 20, 2012. Any updates, modifications, or amendments to this section of the Cincinnati Zoning Code or legislation that supersedes Chapter 1435 of the Cincinnati Zoning Code which is established as the "Historic Preservation Code," shall be considered the governing law. +
- c. The demolition request is for an inappropriate addition, or a building of a later period, and the demolition of said structure will not adversely affect the streetscape as determined by the Historic Conservation Board.

NEW CONSTRUCTION/ADDITIONS: COMPATIBLE BUT NOT REPLICAS

The designation is for the First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills. There is only one contributing building on the site. Any additions to the building should not overpower the building and should be sympathetic to the original design.

MATERIALS: The type of materials and their color, texture, scale and detailing should be compatible with the original building. Predominant materials are brick and stone.

SCALE: The scale of new work and its constituent parts should be compatible with the original building and the scale of its parts and should not overpower the historic building.

FORM: The shape, massing and proportions of new work should be compatible with the original building.

DETAILING: The detailing including, but not limited to, the following features and their placement on additions and new construction should be compatible with the building:

Walls	roofs	windows
Eaves	cornices	chimneys
Doors	appurtenances	

HEIGHT: The height of an addition should not exceed the height of the original building.

SETBACK: The setback of new buildings should be comparable to the siting of the original building.

HISTORIC INTEGRITY: Compatibility of new work to original work is required, but imitation of old work in new construction should be avoided.

If original openings are filled in on the side or rear elevations, the outline of the original opening should remain apparent by setting new infill material back from the surface and leaving original sills and lintels in place.

THESE GUIDELINES ARE NOT CAST IN CONCRETE.

They do not force you to do work on your property. They do not force you to “take the property back to the way it was.” They can be waived or adjusted if the owner shows that sticking to the guidelines would cost more than he/she could afford. Ordinary repair and maintenance does not require review by the Historic Conservation Board.

Applicants are encouraged with consult with Historic Conservation Board staff before they finalize their plans and formally apply for a building permit.

ITEM 1

October 23, 2023

**APPLICATION FOR
LANDMARK DESIGNATION
HISTORIC CONSERVATION BOARD PUBLIC HEARING
STAFF REPORT**

APPLICATION #: N/A
 APPLICANTS: Cincinnati Preservation Association; Walnut Hills Area Council;
 First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills;
 Vice-Mayor Jan Michele Kearney
 OWNER: First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills
 ADDRESS: 2926 Park Avenue
 PARCELS: 066-0002-0131-90
 ZONING: RM-1.2
 COMMUNITY: Walnut Hills
 REPORT DATE: October 12, 2023
 STAFF REVIEW: Douglas Owen, Urban Conservator

Nature of Request:

The applicant is requesting a Local Historic Landmark Designation for the property generally located 2926 Park Avenue known as the First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills. The landmark designation is sought for the historic parcel boundary on parcel 066-0002-0131-90. The property is not currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

1435-07-2-A: *Application for the consideration of the designation of a Historic District, Historic Landmark or a Historic Site may be made by the filing of a designation application, in such form as the Historic Conservation Board may prescribe, by the owner of the subject property or by the owner of a property within the area proposed to be designated, by Council or a member of Council, by the City Manager, by the Urban Conservator, by the City Planning Commission, or by a local community organization, including, but not limited to, preservation associations and community councils. No Historic Structure or Historic Site may be demolished or excavated during the pendency of a designation application, which commences upon the filing of a complete designation application.*

Summary and Background:

The First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills building is a Gothic Revival building designed by architect Harry Burbank located at the southeast corner of Park Avenue and Lincoln Street in the Walnut Hills neighborhood. The building, built in 1908, features a corner square bell tower with a pyramidal roof, Gothic arched windows, a raised stone foundation, and a split entry staircase. These are all character-defining features of the Gothic Revival style. The building represents the evolution of the structure with the eastern addition and split staircase added in the 1920s and an education wing completed in 1965 in a modern style. The period of significance (1908-1972) encompasses both the

original 1908 construction, as well as the later additions representing the sympathetic evolution of the building according to the church's needs.

The church retains significance under the themes of religious and ethnic heritage as it was one of the first African American churches organized in the Walnut Hills neighborhood and represents the history of political, social, educational, and cultural activities of African Americans in Walnut Hills. A small African American community had established itself in Walnut Hills prior to the Civil War, with over 50 residents living in a community east of Kemper Lane and north of William Howard Taft by 1856. Early African American residents were attracted to the area by this growing community and the establishment of the Lane Theological Institute in 1829, which granted land leases to African Americans allowing them to build homes. A separate African American business district was soon established west of Victory Parkway, north of Myrtle, east of Kemper and south of Altoona. It was in this context of African American development that the First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills began.

The congregation of the First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills initially formed in 1856, operating out of houses and later, wood-frame church buildings. In 1908, the current brick building was constructed and remains active to this day. With a 500-seat capacity, the church building hosted regular events beyond religious gatherings, including the convention of the National Association of Teachers in Colored Schools (NATCS) in 1915, NAACP meetings in 1921, and many other African American-based organizational and community gatherings. Many prominent members of the Cincinnati African American community were members of the church.

The completion of the 1926 addition resulted in the completion of the church's "Music Annex." Music played an important role in African American culture during this time period and a number of prominent African American musicians settled in Walnut Hills. The music program at the First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills, lead by Clinton Gibbs, regularly hosted large events that filled the church to capacity and also performed at other churches around the City.

With the construction of the 1965 education addition, education programs that were previously held in the basement moved into suitable classrooms within the addition. In addition to regular Sunday School classes, the education wing also housed community events focused on the African American community of Walnut Hills, offering classes on a range of topics, including "Reducing Your Utility Bills," "Stress Management," and "Assault and Rape Prevention."

The First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills is significant under Criteria 1 and 3. Under Criterion 1 (and Criteria Consideration A), it is significant as a reflection of the history of political, social, educational, and cultural activities of African Americans in Walnut Hills. Under Criterion 3, the building is architecturally significant as an example of Gothic Revival style influences as applied to a vernacular religious building by architect Harry Burbank. The Designation Report submitted with this application fully details the historic and architectural significance of the building.



Figure 1. Location of property. Proposed approximate boundary shown in red. Image from Cagis.



Figure 2. Image of subject property facing southeast ca. July 2022. Image from Google.



Figure 3. Image of subject property facing northeast ca. July 2022. Image from Google.

Applicable Zoning Code Sections:

Zoning District: Section 1405 – Multi-Family Residential Districts
Landmark Designation: Section 1435-07

Review Process

The procedure for consideration of an application for designation is detailed in 1435-07-2-B of the Zoning Code. It includes reviews by the Historic Conservation Board, City Planning Commission, and City Council. The complete process and review criteria are included below.

§ 1435-07-2-B. - Report, Public Hearing and Decision.

The procedure for the consideration of an application for the designation of a Historic Landmark, Historic District or Historic Site is as follows:

- a) *Report.* Within sixty (60) days of the receipt of a completed designation application, the Urban Conservator has the duty to prepare and send to the Historic Conservation Board a report and proposed conservation guidelines for the Historic Landmark, Historic District or Historic Site and a proposed boundary map for any Historic District. For a proposed Historic District, the Urban Conservator shall prepare and send to the Historic Conservation Board a list of all structures within the proposed Historic District that the Urban Conservator considers to be Non-Contributing Structures. Not later than thirty (30) days after receipt of the Urban Conservator's report and proposed conservation guidelines, the Historic Conservation Board shall schedule a public hearing on the proposed designation.
- b) *Historic Conservation Board.* After a public hearing on the proposed designation, the Historic Conservation Board has the duty to decide whether to recommend

designation of the proposed Historic Landmark, Historic District or Historic Site and forward its decision, whether favorable or not, along with the proposed conservation guidelines to the City Planning Commission.

- c) *City Planning Commission*. Within thirty (30) days of the transmittal of the decision and recommendation of the Historic Conservation Board, the City Planning Commission shall hold a public hearing to determine whether to follow the recommendation of the Historic Conservation Board. In making such determination, the City Planning Commission shall consider all of the following factors:
- a. The relationship of the proposed designation to the comprehensive plans of the city and of the community in which the proposed Historic Landmark, Historic District or Historic Site is located; and
 - b. The effect of the proposed designation on the surrounding areas and economic development plans of the city; and
 - c. Such other planning and historic preservation considerations as may be relevant to the proposed designation.

After a public hearing on the proposed designation and conservation guidelines, the City Planning Commission has the duty to decide whether to approve or disapprove the designation and forward its decision, whether favorable or not, along with the conservation guidelines to Council.

- d) *Council*. Upon receipt of the decision of the City Planning Commission, Council shall vote to ordain or overrule the City Planning Commission's decision. A simple majority of the members elected to Council is required to ordain a designation; provided, however, if the City Planning Commission disapproves the designation, a two-thirds majority vote of Council is required to overrule the City Planning Commission's decision.

Designation Review

Historic Significance

Staff finds that, based on the attributes and architectural integrity outlined in the Designation Report, the application for the nomination of First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills meets the requirements prescribed in Chapter 1435, specifically §1435-07-1, "Becoming a Historic Structure; Determination of Historic Significance".

The Cincinnati Zoning Code (CZC) § 1435-07-1(a), specifies that a structure or group of structures may be deemed as having Historic Significance if it has at least one of the following attributes:

1. *Association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or*
2. *Association with the lives of persons significant in our past; or*
3. *Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, method of construction or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or*
4. *That has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.*

The Criteria in Chapter 1435-07-1 is based off the criteria for the National Register and in fact models the language exactly. Significance is determined based on if it meets the criteria set forth within the National Register and the local ordinance based upon it.

The Historic Conservation Board is tasked with determining if it meets one of the Criteria set forth in Chapter 1435-07-1 of the Cincinnati Zoning Code and making a recommendation to the Cincinnati Planning Commission and City Council based on its significance.

The applicant is nominating First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills under Criterion 1 - *Association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history* and Criterion 3 - *Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, method of construction or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.*

In Staff's review of the designation report and the documentation provided, the building at 2926 Park Avenue meets the criteria in the following ways:

Criterion 1: *Association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.*

- Represents the establishment and growth of African American congregations and the African American community at-large, especially as related to the Walnut Hills community.
- Represents the history of political, social, educational, and cultural activities of African Americans in Walnut Hills.

Criterion 3: *Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, method of construction or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.*

- The building is a brick masonry building that exhibits many of the defining elements of the Gothic Revival style including a large square bell tower with a pyramidal roof, arched stained glass windows, and a raised ashlar stone foundation.
- The later additions do not detract from the original design of the building and retain significance in their own right with a Gothic Revival influenced east addition built in 1926 and a modern south addition housing the education wing.
- The building is one of the last remaining original and intact Gothic Revival churches in Walnut Hills.
- The building retains exceptional historic integrity, retaining all its major character-defining features.

Conservation Guidelines

The Cincinnati Zoning Code (CZC) § 1435-07-2-C. - Adoption of Conservation Guidelines.

“Conservation guidelines shall promote the conservation, development and use of the Historic Landmark, Historic District or Historic Site and its special historic, architectural, community or aesthetic interest or value. Insofar as practicable, conservation guidelines shall promote redevelopment and revitalization of Historic Structures and compatible new development within the Historic District. The guidelines shall not limit new construction within a Historic District to a single period or architectural style but may seek to preserve the integrity of existing Historic Structures. Conservation guidelines shall take into account the impact of the designation of a Historic Landmark, Historic District or Historic Site on the residents of the affected area, the effect of the designation on the economic and social characteristics of the affected area, the projected impact of the designation on the budget of the city, as well as all of the factors listed in paragraph 1435-07-2-B(c) above. Conservation guidelines shall address Non-Contributing Structures. Approved conservation guidelines shall be published on the City's website and be made available for public inspection in the office of the Urban Conservator.

Staff finds that the proposed First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills Conservation Guidelines present best practice approaches in seeking to preserve the integrity of the exterior of the church building while also making the building eligible for future funding sources including grants and tax credits to help with the upkeep of the building. The proposed Conservation Guidelines cover changes to the exterior of the building. The interior is not proposed to be subject to local review.

The proposed guidelines are also compatible with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

Other Considerations:

Prehearing Results:

- October 10, 2023 – A Joint Staff Conference was held with the Department of City Planning. No opposition to the proposed designation was presented.

Comments Provided to Staff:

Staff received no objections to the proposed designation at the time of the finalization of this report. The Walnut Hills Area Council submitted a letter in support of the designation.

Proposed Work

A development plan has not been presented to the Historic Conservation Office for this building.

Consistency with Plan Cincinnati (2012): This designation is consistent with the Plan Cincinnati goal embodied in the Sustain Initiative, specifically goal #2, preserving our built history as outlined in pages 197-198 of the plan.

Recommendation:

Staff recommends the Historic Conservation Board take the following actions:

1. **RECOMMEND** to the Cincinnati City Planning Commission (CPC) and to the Cincinnati City Council (CC) for the designation of Tax Parcel 066-0002-0131-90, also referred to as 2926 Park Avenue and known as the First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills as a Historic Landmark and the adoption of the related First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills Historic Conservation Guidelines subject to the following conditions:
 - a. Any construction proposed upon the proposed Historic Landmark shall comply with the proposed Historic Conservation Guidelines.
2. **FINDING:** The Board makes this determination per Section 1435-07-1:
 - a. That it has been demonstrated that the First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills meets the conditions of §1435-07-1(a)(1) as the building maintains integrity and *“Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, method of construction or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.”*
 - b. The First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills building has local significance as an excellent example of Gothic Revival style architecture as applied to a vernacular religious building in Cincinnati.
 - c. That it has been demonstrated that the First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills meets the conditions of §1435-07-1(a)(1) as the building maintains integrity and represents an *Association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.*
 - d. The building retains an exceptional level of historic integrity.
 - e. That the proposed First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills Historic Conservation Guidelines are compatible with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation.



**area
council**

2640 Kemper Lane
Cincinnati, Ohio 45206

www.wearewalnuthills.org

City of Cincinnati
Department of Planning and Engagement
802 Central Avenue – 5th Floor
Cincinnati, OH 45202

RE: First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills Landmark Designation Application

Delightful Day,
Walnut Hills is home to past and present moments in history with numerous buildings being a beacon of our city's history.

The Walnut Hills Area Council is excited to partner with the Walnut Hills Historical Society, Cincinnati Preservation Association and First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills to recognize and document the important historical contributions of First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills. The contributions of their congregants, and the building itself tell a story that is important to the fabric of Walnut Hills and the City of Cincinnati.

During the Walnut Hills Area Council March 4, 2023 meeting our membership voted to support the project by being a co-applicant for Landmark Designation. As a council we believe it is imperative to support efforts to preserve historic buildings in our neighborhood, buildings that tell the story of our neighborhood. The First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills is an important part of that story, it is also the story of the Black Church not just in our neighborhood but in the City as a whole.

Thank you for your consideration of this application. We look forward to learning First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills has received Landmark Designation.

Share your joy,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Gardette', written in a cursive style.

Kathryne Gardette
President, Walnut Hills Area Council

October 31, 2023

Cincinnati City Planning Commission
II Centennial Plaza
805 Central Avenue, 7th Floor
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202

Honorable Members of the City Planning Commission:

The Historic Conservation Board (“Board”) transmits herewith the following items for your consideration concerning the proposed First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills Historic Landmark Designation Application:

1. Local Historic Landmark Designation Report.
2. Proposed Historic Landmark Conservation Guidelines.
3. Historic Conservation Office Staff Report dated October 12, 2023.

Summary:

Cincinnati Preservation Association, Walnut Hills Area Council, First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills, and Vice-Mayor Jan Michele Kearney have applied to designate the First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills located at 2926 Park Avenue in the Walnut Hills neighborhood as a Local Historic Landmark pursuant to Cincinnati Municipal Code (“CMC”) Section 1435-07-2-A.

Upon review of the designation application pursuant to CMC Sections 1435-07-1(a)(1) and 1435-07-1(a)(3), the Urban Conservator, prepared a report recommending approval of the landmark designation and the associated conservation guidelines. The Board then, at its regular meeting on October 23, 2023, held a public hearing on the proposed designation at which it heard from the Urban Conservator and proponents of the designation whether the First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills qualifies for landmark designation. Upon considering the designation application (including the designation report and conservation guidelines), the Urban Conservator’s report, and comments received at its public hearing, a majority of the Board’s members present throughout the hearing and constituting a quorum voted to recommend designation of the First Baptist Church of Walnut Hills as a Local Historic Landmark finding that it has Historic Significance based on its association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history and because it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, and method of construction and thus satisfies CMC Sections 1435-07-1(a)(1) and 1435-07-1(a)(3). The Board further resolved to recommend approval of the associated conservation guidelines.

Ave
Mr. Sundermann

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Absent

Mr. Zielasko

Mrs. McKenzie

Mrs. Smith-Dobbins

Mr. Voss

Mr. Yung

The Historic Conservation Board

/s/Allison McKenzie
Allison McKenzie
Historic Conservation Board Chair

/s/David Sturkey
David Sturkey, Staff Attorney
Historic Conservation Board