



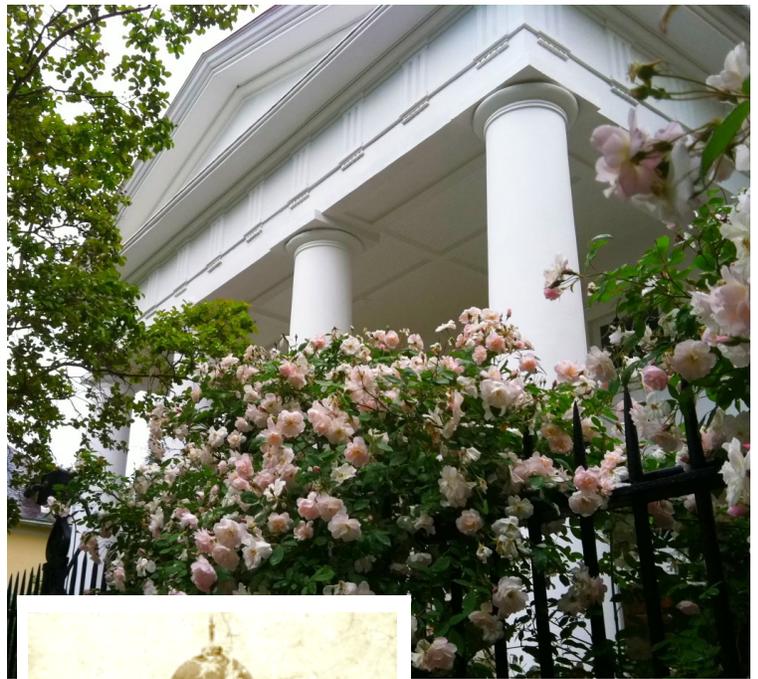
THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH of CHARLESTON, SC

Brief history

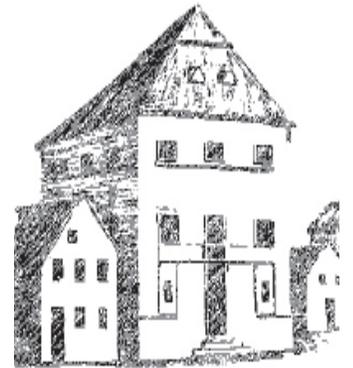
The First Baptist Church of Charleston, the earliest Baptist church in the South, was organized on September 25, 1682 in Kittery, Maine, under the sponsorship of the First Baptist Church of Boston. Late in 1696, the pastor William Screven, and 28 members of the Kittery congregation immigrated to Charleston, South Carolina. Near this time, two groups of settlers came to Charleston, one from southern England and one from Scotland. The Baptists among these groups were soon drawn into William Screven's church. By 1708 he reported that the membership numbered 98.

Late in 1749 Oliver Hart, a young minister from Philadelphia, came to the rescue of the struggling congregation. For thirty years he gave the church Christian warmth and strong practical leadership. Philadelphia was the center of Baptist life in America at that time, and Hart's theological training from there had prepared him well. In 1751 he gathered representatives of Welsh Neck, Ashley River and Euhaw (the three other Baptist churches in the colony) and formed the Charleston Baptist Association, the first in the South. The association soon launched mission work to pioneer settlements and to Native Americans. A fund for educating young ministers helped an impressive number of young men train for ministry, providing leadership for the Baptists in South Carolina and surrounding states. The movement stimulated by the fund led in 1826 to in the founding of Furman University, out of which the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary was established in 1859. From the humble efforts in the early days of the Charleston Association, Southern Baptists trace their beginnings in missions and education. Hart's successor in the church was Richard Furman, a minister of extraordinary ability. From 1787 to 1825 he led the church, the association and the South Carolina Baptists in promoting education and missions. In 1814 he was named the first president of the Triennial Convention, the first national Baptist convention in America. It became the pattern for other state conventions and the Southern Baptist Convention.

After Furman died in 1825, the church continued to grow leading up to the Civil War. The church produced outstanding leaders like J.P. Boyce (founder of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary), H.A. Tupper (Corresponding Secretary of the Foreign Mission Board), Hepzibah Jenkins Townsend (who started the first women's mission society), and Lula Whilden (the first single female missionary to China). History includes the full story, and it must be noted the church compromised its own values by adopting the evil practice of the enslavement of African people. The vast majority of church members prior to the Civil war were enslaved persons who were relegated to stand in the balcony while free members worshiped in the



**Robert Mills Architectural
Drawing c.1822**



**First Baptist Church
meetinghouse c. 1749**

pews on the main floor. The miracle of this period is that so many enslaved persons heard and were transformed by the gospel. After Emancipation, the newly freed members of the church started multiple congregations in the city, many of which have endured to the present day.

The post Civil War period was difficult as the church struggled through economic and natural disasters. Yet, God was still at work to prepare the church for a revival in the Twentieth Century under the leadership of Pastor John Hamrick. Post World War II under Hamrick's leadership, the church grew in membership and influence. The establishment of the First Baptist School in 1949 and the expansion of the campus to Meeting Street and Water Street were key factors in the growth. Building on this foundation the church today continues to serve the city and the world with the eternal truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Sanctuary

In 1822, while Richard Furman was pastor, the long-felt need for a new building was met in the erection of the present house of worship. Among other things, the new building contained a solid mahogany pulpit, material for which was brought from the West Indies. The building was designed by the first American-born architect, Robert Mills, who said, "The Baptist Church of Charleston exhibits the best specimen of correct taste in architecture in the city. It is purely Greek in style, simply grand in its proportions, and beautiful in its detail." It was completed in 1822. The history of the building after 1860 has been marked by three events: The Civil War, in which considerable damage was done by a shell which tore up the organ; the cyclone of 1885; and the earthquake of 1886. These were serious blows to the building, but the brave congregation set to work each time to restore the edifice for the worship of God. In 1883, during the pastorate of A.J.S. Thomas, the pulpit area received extensive modification. In 1966, during the pastorate of John A. Hamrick, the church undertook complete restoration and re-decoration. The Robert Mills pulpit was reconstructed, following carefully the original design. Also, the baptistery was constructed in its present location, and the Wicks pipe organ was installed with all pipes exposed and functioning, a return to the classic concept in organ building. The sanctuary has also gone through some areas of restoration after Hurricane Hugo in 1989.

The Organs

The Erben Organ (c. 1847) The small tracker-action cabinet organ in the rear gallery was built by Henry Erben of New York, one of our finest early-American organs craftsmen. It was purchased by this church in the 1880s from St. Finbars Catholic Church which stood on the site of the present Cathedral of St. John the Baptist. The organ has a divided keyboard of 61 notes, with no pedal stops. The 17 pedal notes simply play pulldowns connected to the lower register of the keyboard.

The Wicks Organ (1992) The organ, built by the Wicks Organ Company of Highland, Illinois, contains 36 ranks, or sets of pipes, installed in four divisions controlled by a three-manual and pedal drawknob console. The organ is divided on each side of the gallery. All visible pipes are "speaking" pipes.

An Invitation

The heritage of First Baptist Church is one of leadership and service, a tradition which continues today. The church has vibrant ministries to all ages and is a leader in international missions support and involvement. Worship in the classical Charleston tradition is ignited by a passion for excellence for the Glory of God. First Baptist Church is an active congregation with a vision of serving God's purpose for generations to come. You are invited to be a part of what God is doing in an exciting future! For more information about special events and the weekly schedule, please see our website.

Chronology

- 1681 William Screven (founder of FBC) baptized at Boston
- 1682 September 25: Church constituted at Kittery, Maine; Screven ordained as pastor
- 1696 Church moves to Charleston
- 1699 Church given plot of land at 61-63 Church Street by William Elliott.
- 1750 Oliver Hart called as pastor.
- 1751 Charleston Baptist Association, oldest in the South, formed under Oliver Hart.
- 1755 Religious Society formed by Oliver Hart, the earliest organization for the education of Baptist ministers in the South.
- 1780 Oliver Hart forced to flee Charleston as it was about to fall into the hands of the British. He never returned. The church was temporarily closed during the British occupation.
- 1787 Richard Furman called as pastor.
- 1811 Hepzibah Jenkins Townsend organized the first women's missions society, the Wadmalaw/Edisto Female Mite Society.
- 1814 Richard Furman elected first president of the Triennial Convention.
- 1819 Work started on present sanctuary. Designed by Robert Mills, America's first native-born architect. Completed January 1822.
- 1848 B.W. and Eliza Whilden called as church's first missionaries to China
- 1860 Civil War, sanctuary damaged by cannon fire from Ft. Sumter.
- 1865 Emancipation of enslaved members, new churches begun by freed members
- 1886 Earthquake caused portico ceiling to cave in. All of Charleston suffered severe damage.
- 1892 Church "officially" closed due to economic hardship and membership losses, but dedicated women kept the church alive in secret prayer meetings. Church revived under Lucius Cuthbert.
- 1934 Vance Havner called as pastor
- 1940 John A. Hamrick called as pastor
- 1949 First Baptist School opened
- 1989 Hurricane Hugo caused extensive damage to the sanctuary which led to renovation.
- 1999 First missions partnership in Central Asia
- 2018 FBS high school campus dedicated on James Island
- 2018 Plaque to honor enslaved members placed at sanctuary door
- 2022 New Learning Center dedicated to provide ministry for future generations

THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH of CHARLESTON

61 Church Street (Sanctuary)
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