

# A Brief History

## THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH of CHARLESTON, SC

### *The Oldest Baptist Church* IN THE SOUTH

First Baptist Church, 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 brought to Charleston the methods he had learned there. 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 Indians and began a fund for educating young ministers. And impressive number of young men received aid from the fund and during two generations provided leadership for the Baptists in South Carolina and surrounding states. The movement stimulated by the fund culminated in 1826 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. Furman's stature has not been excelled in South Carolina since his death in 1825. He is buried near the southeast corner of the present church building.

Following Furman, the church was served by Basil Manly, Sr., a devout and able man, who played a major part in establishing the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. When he left the church, he became president of the University of Alabama. A brilliant succession of strong pastors followed Manly. They included, W.T. Brantley, E.T. Winkler, A.J.S. Thomas, Lewis Hall Shuck, Lucius Cuthbert, R.W. Lide and John A. Hamrick. About forty ministers grew up in the church, including H.A. Tupper, second corresponding Secretary of the Foreign Mission Board (now the International Mission Board); and James Petigru Boyce, founder of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.



First Baptist Church  
meetinghouse c. 1749

### *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.

**Above: c.1822 Robert Mills Architectural Drawing**

# 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. The 11:00 am worship in the classical Charleston tradition is ignited by a passion for excellence for the Glory of God. The 8:30 am service is a less formal,

contemporary worship. 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 call our church office.

## THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH of CHARLESTON

61 Church Street (Sanctuary)  
 48 Meeting Street (Parking/Offices)  
 Charleston, South Carolina 29401  
 843-722-3896 | www.fbcharleston.org

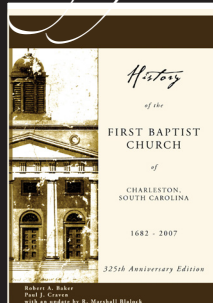
# Chronology

## FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

- 1681, July William Screven (founder of FBC) baptized at Boston
- 1682, Sept. 25 Church constituted at Kittery, Maine; Screven ordained as minister.
- Mid 1690s Church moves to Charleston, SC
- 1699, July 18 Church given plot of land at 61-63 Church Street by William Elliott.
- 1713 William Screven dies at age 84.
- 1750, Feb. 16 Oliver Hart called as pastor.
- 1751, Oct. 21 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, Feb. Oliver Hart forced to flee Charleston as it was about to fall into the hands of the British. He never returned.
- 1787, Oct. 18 Richard Furman called as pastor. Is instrumental in establishing religious liberty in South Carolina.
- 1811 First organized women's work for missions in the South begins as church members organize 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.
- 1822, Jan. 17 Sanctuary dedicated.
- 1825, Aug. Richard Furman dies.
- 1826-1837 Dr. Basil Manly serves as pastor, later helps establish Southern Baptists first seminary.
- 1860 Church reports largest membership - 1,926 members (white and black)
- Civil War Shells destroy the organ and Furman plaque, damage pulpit.
- 1883, July New pulpit, baptistry and platform installed.
- 1885, Aug. 25 Tornado nearly destroys roof of building, furnishings damaged.
- 1886, Aug. 31 Earthquake causes portico ceiling to cave in.
- 1892 Church almost closed due to economic hardship and membership losses. Revived under leadership of Rev. Lucius Cuthbert.
- 1934 Vance Havner assumes pastorate.
- 1940 Dr. John A. Hamrick called as pastor.
- 1949 First Baptist Church School opens.
- 1966-1969 Extensive renovation effort included placing new baptistry in apse, restoration of Mills designed pulpit and installation of Wicks Organ.

# gift shop

If you are interested in viewing the items below, please stop by the church office, Monday - Friday, 8:00 am - 4:00 pm



**History of the First Baptist Church of Charleston**  
 Reprint with updated information and detailed index { \$35.00 }

Benefits the Margaret A. Kelly Ministerial Scholarship for Seminary Students



### Sterling silver jewelry

Various items available at various prices Benefits the Lottie Moon Offering for International Missions



**Watercolor print**  
 (by Carol Ezell-Gilson) Various sizes and prices Benefits the Future Development Fund