

Report on the Intensive-Level Survey  
Of  
The Historic Churches in Ponca City

by

Mary Jane Warde, Ph.D.

For the City of Ponca City, Oklahoma

A Certified Local Government

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## The Intensive-Level Survey of Historic Churches in Ponca City

By Mary Jane Warde, Ph.D.

### **Abstract:**

During March and April 2012, the consultant, Dr. Mary Jane Warde, conducted an intensive-level survey of historic churches in Ponca City, Oklahoma for the City of Ponca City, a Certified Local Government. The purpose was to identify and document at a minimum level churches built before 1967 that might be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Using a list of properties and map prepared by the city government staff, Dr. Warde photodocumented and completed a survey form for each property. During the survey process, one suggested property was found to have been demolished, but three potential properties were added to the list. Of the final thirty-six properties surveyed, six were found to be eligible for the National Register under Criterion C and Criteria Consideration A, while twenty-eight did not warrant further study, generally because renovations or additions reduced their integrity. Two were found to have been listed on the National Register in 2010 as part of the Downtown Ponca City Historic District.

### **Introduction:**

Since its founding in 1893, Ponca City, Oklahoma has been proud of its many churches, some established soon after settlers moved into the new Cherokee Outlet town. About 1927 the *Ponca City News* noted that they were a large factor in community life. By 1932 *Polk's Ponca City Directory* listed twenty-one churches representing at least fifteen denominations, and the number has grown over the decades. They include standard American Protestant denominations, non-denominational groups, a Roman

Catholic church, and a small Jewish temple. Earlier in the twentieth century these churches were usually segregated by race, but Ponca City's churches today may include people of many ethnic backgrounds. However, among the churches surveyed are four that were built by African-Americans in the early twentieth century, and three still serve part of that community. One church that originally served Anglo-Americans is today the spiritual home of a Hispanic congregation that proudly displays the flags of several Latin American countries. Many of the churches surveyed proved to be modest vernacular buildings, but some exhibit the work of prominent architects and popular styles from 1920 to the present. Ponca City is proud of its history and twentieth century architecture, and its many churches have contributed to both, as well as the quality of life in the town.

### **Research Design:**

The research design was that usually followed in scholarly projects. The City of Ponca City supplied a list of thirty-four churches, their construction dates, and a map of their locations to Dr. Warde. She first consulted earlier historic preservation projects on Ponca City to determine if any properties on the list of churches supplied in 2012 had been surveyed and to compare the purpose, limits, and findings with this study. One was the "Intensive Level Survey for Downtown Ponca City" by Michael Cassity in 2008. Four churches—First Baptist Church, First United Methodist Church, First Presbyterian Church, and Albright United Methodist Church—were found to have been included in a study of the central business district east of the railroad track. The "Gateway Historic District Intensive Level Architectural/Historic Survey" by Marlys Bush Thurber in 2001 did not include any of the churches. Neither did the "Architectural/Historic Survey of a Portion of the City of Ponca City" by Meacham & Associates in 1999.

Dr. Warde then visited repositories likely to hold information about Kay County, Oklahoma and particularly its largest town, Ponca City. These included the Oklahoma Historical Society in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Oklahoma, and the Ponca City Public Library in Ponca City. Government Documents at Oklahoma State University provided access to the Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, a standard historic preservation resource for dating buildings and city expansion. The Architecture Library yielded works on the architectural history of churches, Kay County, and Ponca City. The Vertical File of the Ponca City Public Library was especially helpful with its files on various denominations in the town. This library and the Oklahoma Historical Society Library supplied another standard research collection, Polk's city directories, with Ponca City covered from 1931 and 1932 into the 1980s. City of Ponca City staff had supplied legal descriptions and construction dates along with the original list of churches. These sources allowed Dr. Warde to determine or verify the construction dates and to track individual church buildings through, in some cases, successive denominational owners and renovations. Dr. Warde also searched the internet for online articles and found some helpful websites. Among these were the online issues of *Adoremus Bulletin* for general church and Roman Catholic architecture and *Small Synagogues* for Temple Emanuel. Sunset Baptist Church provided a church history on its website as did North East Baptist Church.

Knowledgeable individuals were also helpful. Beverly Bryant at the *Ponca City News*, a life-long resident of Ponca City, was familiar with many of the buildings and their history. Unfortunately most of the smaller churches are not staffed during the week. However, the office staffs of the First Christian Church, First Baptist Church, First

Presbyterian Church, St. Mary's Catholic Church, First United Methodist Church, and Sunset Baptist Church were very helpful. They provided oral or written material. Staff members at Albright United Methodist Church, the Church of God in Christ on West Grand, Brookfield Avenue Wesleyan Church, First Lutheran Church, and Fuente de Agua Viva Asam welcomed Dr. Warde into their buildings and answered questions.

**Project Objectives:**

The object of the project was to determine if churches in Ponca City constructed by 1967 were individually eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. To help the City of Ponca City and the State Historic Preservation Office evaluate their potential eligibility, the survey included visiting each prospective property, photodocumenting it, and filling out a "Historic Preservation Resource Identification Form" based on its current appearance.

**Area Surveyed:**

Staff at the City of Ponca City had already identified churches to be surveyed, based in part on construction dates furnished with legal descriptions collected from the Kay County Courthouse. Those selected lay within the city limits, but no specific boundary was set. Rather, the churches lay within the city limits which expanded outward over time from the original central business district along Grand Avenue. With the refineries located to the south, expansion was generally northward and more recently eastward and westward. The exception is an area to the southeast in Section 34, which was historically black. Churches on the original list of thirty-four lay in Sections 14, 15, 21, 22, 23, 26, 27, 28, and 34, Range 2 East, Township 26 North. Two churches added to the original list lay in Section 34.

### **Methodology:**

Dr. Warde began surveying near the central business district and worked outward, as Ponca City's churches are scattered throughout its neighborhoods and reflect city growth. The orientation of the larger buildings and low early-spring sun also influenced the photodocumentation schedule. Three were on Grand Avenue in the original heart of Ponca City, but three others were along Hartford Avenue north of downtown and in a newer part of town. These were mission churches started with the encouragement of older congregations as Ponca City grew. In the historically black part of town, four pre-1967 churches were found to be grouped no more than two blocks apart near the intersection of South 12<sup>th</sup> Street and East Madison Avenue, once outside the city limits. Only two were on the survey list, but the City of Ponca City staff approved adding Kimbrough Temple A.M.E. Church and Johnson Chapel Church of God in Christ. A third property, Broadway Baptist Church on North Union Street, currently vacant, was also identified and added. As Dr. Warde surveyed and photodocumented each property, she filled in a Historic Preservation Resource Identification Form for it on site.

In the final tally, one property lay in Section 14 and two properties in Section 15 on the far north side. Two were in Section 21, five in Section 22, one in Section 23, and one in Section 26 near the center of town. Four were in Section 34. Eight lay in Section 27, and twelve were in Section 28, the oldest parts of town.

### **Results:**

The following table provides in column 2 the construction date of all churches surveyed. Columns 3 and 4 provide an assessment as to whether they are eligible for the

National Register of Historic Places. The First Christian Church and Harvest Fellowship were listed on the National Register in 2010.

<b>Property</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Eligible</b>	<b>Not Eligible</b>
Albright United Methodist Church	1929-1930		X
Asbury Methodist Church	1960		X
Bethel Tabernacle	1914		X
Bible Baptist Church	1967		X
Bible Holiness Church	1959		X
Broadway Baptist Church	C. 1930		X
Brookfield Avenue Wesleyan Church	1940	X	
Church of God in Christ	1954		X
Connor Chapel AME Church	1919		X
Covenant Community Church	1929		X
Faith Tabernacle	1938		X
First Baptist Church	1949-1950		X
First Christian Church	1923-1925	Listed in 2010	
First Lutheran Church	1934		X
First Presbyterian Church	1953	X	
First United Methodist Church	1925		X
Fuente de Agua Viva Asam	C. 1931		X
Grace Episcopal Church	1952		X
Hartford Ave Church of Christ	1958-1959		X
Harvest Fellowship	C. 1925	Listed in 2010	
International Church of God	1920		X
Johnson Chapel Church of God in Christ	C. 1930		X
Kimbrough Temple AME Church	1946	X	
New Hope Christian Fellowship	1935		X
North East Baptist Church	1967		X
Pentecostal Holiness Church	1925		X
Pioneer Bible Church	1933	X	
Powerhouse of Faith	1950 c.		X
Saint Mary's Catholic Church	1954	X	
St. John's Baptist Church	1927		X
Sunset Baptist Church	1957		X
Temple Emanuel	1964-1965	X	
Trinity Pentecostal Holiness Church	1935		X
Victory Tabernacle	1955		X
Westside Church of the Nazarene	1948		X
Woodlands Christian Church	1957		X
<b>Total</b>		<b>6, with 2 already listed</b>	<b>28</b>

Because churches serve congregations that change in size, focus, and needs that are physically reflected in their buildings, only six of thirty-six surveyed in Ponca City and not previously listed were found to retain enough integrity for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. They were as follows:

Brookfield Avenue Wesleyan Church, 300 E. Brookfield Avenue

First Presbyterian Church, 200 N. 14<sup>th</sup> Street

Kimbrough Temple AME Church, 1029 S. 12<sup>th</sup> Street

Pioneer Bible Church, 300 N. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street

Saint Mary's Catholic Church, 400 S. 7<sup>th</sup> Street

Temple Emanuel, 1100 E. Highland Avenue

Properties owned by religious institutions or being used for religious purposes are not generally considered eligible for the National Register. However, these six churches are eligible under Criteria Consideration A because of their architectural and historical importance to Ponca City's communities. They fall under Criterion C because they reflect the architectural styles found in Ponca City's churches through the first two-thirds of the twentieth century. Furthermore, some represent the works of distinguished twentieth-century architects. An intensive level survey of resources surrounding the intersection of S. 12<sup>th</sup> and S. 11<sup>th</sup> streets with E. Madison Avenue and Dixie Avenue should be conducted along with additional research to determine the eligibility of the buildings in this area.

### **Historic Context:**

Ponca City, Oklahoma is in Kay County in north-central Oklahoma on Indian Territory lands guaranteed by the United States government to the Cherokee Nation in

1835. Following the Civil War, the government forced the cession of these lands west of the 96<sup>th</sup> meridian. During the 1870s and 1880s, it assigned the Osage, Kaw (Kansa), Pawnee, Ponca, Otoe-Missouria, briefly the Nez Perce, and then the Tonkawa tribes to new reservations there. All were near the future site of Ponca City. In the next two decades, non-Indian cattlemen leased these abundant grasslands from the Indian nations even after allotment of the land to individual Indians. In the 1890s, the Miller family operated the 101 Ranch on about 110,000 acres near the future Ponca City. On September 16, 1893 non-Indians were allowed to homestead the Outlet in the last and largest land run.<sup>1</sup>

Ponca City, founded shortly afterward by Burton Seymour Barnes, lay near the Ponca reservation and a mile from the rail line. His townsite had abundant good spring water, and it drew settlers and won a railroad spur. The Ponca City site also had sand and wood from the adjacent Arkansas River bottom, a good limestone quarry near the town for stone and mortar, and clay for making bricks. Later there would also be a glass factory. However, with agriculture and ranching as the new town's first economic base, Ponca City's growth was slow into the early 1900s.<sup>2</sup>

Its settlers quickly established churches in their new town. Residents erected a Methodist church first at Central Avenue and 6th Street. St. Felix Catholic Church was completed next on March 27, 1894 with St. Mary's Parochial School nearby. The Presbyterian congregation finished their first building in 1895. The Christian Church

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<sup>1</sup> John W. Morris, Charles R. Goins, and Edwin C. McReynolds, *Historical Atlas of Oklahoma* (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1976, second edition), 22-23, 46-47.

<sup>2</sup> Louis Seymour Barnes, "The Founding of Ponca City," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 35 (number 2, summer, 1952): 154-162; Max Stokesberry, "Brick Masonry Longtime Tradition for Welches," *Ponca City (Oklahoma) News*, December 12, 1982, "Ponca City," Section X Vertical File, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; interview of Beverly Bryant, by Mary Jane Warde, Ponca City, Oklahoma, April 6, 2012.

members moved a building into Ponca City from the Cross community and used it until 1923. Baptists organized in 1899 and built their first building in 1902. A little later a Methodist revival brought the holiness movement to Ponca City, so during the 1910s and 1920s the Church of the Nazarene, Free Methodists, Pentecostals, and Holiness Church of Christ organized in Ponca City. Church buildings then were clustered near the town center along Grand and Oklahoma avenues. Turn of the century photographs of the early Methodist, First Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene, Presbyterian, and Baptist buildings show modest one or one-and-one-half story Gothic Revival buildings made of wood and ornamented with steeples or belfries and arched windows.<sup>3</sup>

The first three decades of the 1900s brought significant changes to Ponca City. The Miller Brothers 101 Ranch, headquartered just south of Ponca City, expanded its ranching, farming, and food processing operations, while it also supplied entertainment with its rodeos, touring Wild West show, and early motion pictures. In 1908 businessman Ernest Whitworth Marland visited the ranch seeking opportunities in the oil business. He quickly recognized the potential for oil and natural gas production near Ponca City. The town became his headquarters as he drilled for oil, struck it in 1910, and formed several companies which he combined in 1921 into the Marland Oil Company. Ponca City flourished as the shipping point and service center for the productive oil fields in the surrounding area. Even after Marland lost control of his companies to his bankers in

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<sup>3</sup> The Ponca City Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, *The Last Run: Kay County, Oklahoma, 1893* (Ponca City, Okla.: The Courier Printing Company, 1939, 1970 edition), 203-205; unidentified newspaper clipping, "Extend to Early Days of Ponca City," "Ponca City Churches—1<sup>st</sup> Church of the Nazarene," Vertical File, Ponca City Public Library, Ponca City, Oklahoma (hereafter cited as PCVF); The Ponca City News, *History of a Proud Heritage: Ponca City, Oklahoma, A Pictorial History, 1893-1960* (Marceline, Missouri: D-Books Publishing, Inc., 1999), 1, 15, 21, 22.

1928, the businesses continued as the Continental Oil Company, or Conoco, with its headquarters and refinery on the south edge of Ponca City.<sup>4</sup>

By then the oil business had infused the still-young Ponca City with energy, wealth, and a well-educated, sophisticated population, including Jewish merchants and oil industry professionals. Modest homes in the south part of town, nearest the refinery, were built primarily of wood in the vernacular housing of the day, particularly the simpler Craftsman and Bungalow styles. This included a primarily African-American section to the southeast. The brick-paved residential streets closer to the central business district along Grand Avenue east of the railroad tracks were generally lined with larger residences of the businessmen, professionals, and upper level employees of the oil companies and related industries. These houses included more complex Bungalow styles or the grander Colonial Revival, Italianate, Neoclassical Revival, Prairie School, and Tudor Revival styles. The Mission/Spanish Colonial Revival style was particularly popular in Ponca City during this period and appeared on homes, commercial buildings, hotels, apartment buildings, theaters, the City Hall, the public library, and churches.

While Marland set the bar in Ponca City for philanthropy and donations for city improvements, he also brought high architectural style by building in 1914-1916 his first mansion at 1000 East Grand Avenue. Designed by George Forsyth, it was generally Eclectic with elements of the Italianate and traditional Japanese garden design. His second mansion on the east side of Ponca City was even more impressive. The Italianate villa designed by John Duncan Forsyth in the mid-1920s was truly a “palace on the prairie.” Even though Marland lost his fortune soon after the home was completed, other

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<sup>4</sup> Bobby D. Weaver, “Ernest Whitworth Marland,” *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <<http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/M/MA027>> (April 16, 2012).

Ponca City residents followed his lead by employing architects such as John Duncan Forsyth and Oklahoma City's Solomon Layton and associates to design homes and buildings on a less grand scale.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, Ponca City's congregations began to replace their first churches with larger, more substantial buildings while church architecture was changing. The centuries-old Gothic style was facing challenge as new building materials and technology, including the use of steel beams, allowed innovations in architecture. In Europe there was a rebellion against the Gothic style many believed symbolized in its vertical lines the relationship of God, man, and the church.<sup>6</sup> Ironically, Ralph Adams Cram (1863-1942), bored with the Georgian, or Colonial Revival, style common among American churches, led the Gothic Revival movement to counteract what he saw as the negative influences of technological development. Denominations that preferred the Gothic Revival style still prevalent in the early twentieth century American churches were those rooted in the Protestant Reformation. Those present in Ponca City included Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Lutherans, and Methodists. Meanwhile, European architect Walter Gropius (1883-1969) was experimenting with new materials and building techniques that offered fresh possibilities for church designs. American architect Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959) advocated simpler church designs with horizontal lines and the use of organic materials, a variant of the Prairie School style of many new Ponca City homes.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.; E. W. Marland Estate #1, HALS No. OK-5, Historic American Landscapes Survey, State Historic Preservation Office, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Small Synagogues.com, "The Temple in Tepee Territory," <[http://www.smallsynagogues.com/poncacity\\_ok.htm](http://www.smallsynagogues.com/poncacity_ok.htm)> (April 8, 2012). See Bret Carter, *Kay County's Historic Architecture*, Images of America Series (Chicago, Ill.: Arcadia Publishing, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> See Edwin Heathcote and Laura Moffatt, *Contemporary Church Architecture* (Chichester, United Kingdom: John Wiley & Sons, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Mark A. Torgerson, *An Architecture of Immanence: Architecture for Worship and Ministry Today* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 45-57.

Eight churches identified in the course of this survey were built during this second wave of construction, roughly 1914 through 1928. Among them was St. Andrew's Church (now Grace Episcopal Church), actually two buildings. One was a long narrow T-shaped clapboard building erected in 1914 and called the "Guildhall." It is best described as airplane type of the Bungalow/Craftsman. In 1923 at the request of the Ponca City government, it and other buildings on the block created by Grand and Central avenues and 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> streets, were moved to make way for new municipal buildings. Its new location was the 200 block of South 7<sup>th</sup> Street. In 1931 the "Parish House," a larger building set at right angles to it, was built close by. Generally in the same period Connor (or Corner) Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church was built in the 900 block of South 12<sup>th</sup> Street. Still further south in this mostly African-American section of Ponca City, St. John's Baptist Church was built in 1927 about the same time as the neighboring Johnson Temple Church of God in Christ. Closer to the central business district, the First United Methodist Church erected a Gothic Revival brick building in 1920 on South 6<sup>th</sup> Street. Other churches from this period were mostly vernacular, but two shared the Mission/Spanish Colonial Revival style quite popular in Ponca City. The smaller and simpler was the Pentecostal Holiness Church, built in 1925 in the 600 block of North Union Street. Basically it was vernacular but with a Mission/Spanish Colonial Revival façade. The larger was the striking First Christian Church in the 200 block of North 5<sup>th</sup> Street. Asymmetrical and three stories tall, with decorative parapets, porticos, a tiled roof, and a domed bell tower, it complemented the new Ponca City municipal building and public library nearby. About 1927 the local newspaper noted that the property of the

eighteen churches in the town, including three owned by African-American congregations, was valued at \$600,000.<sup>8</sup>

The Great Depression in the 1930s hit Ponca City hard as it did most American towns. Construction continued at a cautious pace through World War II and the 1940s. Fourteen Ponca City churches identified in this survey were from the period, roughly 1929 through 1949. They were generally modest as congregations struggled financially. Albright United Methodist Church, then First Evangelical Church, was completed southwest of the central business district in 1929-1930 as the Great Depression began. Members built Brookfield Avenue Wesleyan Church (then Wesleyan Methodist Church) in 1940 on a pay-as-you-go basis: When funds ran out, they stopped building, so the church had no steeple until recently. The same approach was true of Kimbrough Temple Colored Methodist Episcopal Church on the corner of South 12<sup>th</sup> Street and Dixie Avenue. Spurred on by their minister, Dr. S. E. Kimbrough, members laid brick and set native limestone for their vernacular building. They created decorative details by placing colored glass panes in the windows and setting a stone cross into the front gable. The 35<sup>th</sup> Annual Session of the Muskogee Annual Conference of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church celebrated its completion in 1946 with the congregation.<sup>9</sup>

In spite of the difficult times, some churches employed architects to design new buildings. In 1934 the congregation of the 1<sup>st</sup> Church of Christ Scientist chose Ponca City architect George J. Cannon to design the simple Federal-style building that today houses

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas O. Moehle, "A Story of Grace Episcopal Church, Ponca City, Oklahoma," "Ponca City Churches—Episcopal," PCVF; "Grace Episcopal Looks to Centennial Sunday May 31," undated clipping, *ibid.*; "Church Traces Roots Back to 1898," *The Ponca City News*, October 30, 2005; Carter, *Kay County's Historic Architecture*, 80.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with unidentified member, Brookfield Avenue Wesleyan Church, by Mary Jane Warde, March 14, 2012; Souvenir Program, November 6-10, 1946, "Ponca City Churches—Kimbrough Temple C.M.E. Church," PCVF; Carter, *Kay County's Historic Architecture*, 122.

Pioneer Bible Church at 300 North 3<sup>rd</sup> Street. The same year Cannon designed the original building of the First Lutheran Church at 400 East Liberty Avenue. The First Missionary Baptist Church (now First Baptist Church) congregation had little choice about putting up a new building. About midnight on January 24, 1949 a fire fanned by blizzard winds completely destroyed their church in the largest fire Ponca City had ever seen. Sparks threatened homes blocks away. Only a few months later, the congregation accepted a bid of \$364,750 by the Oklahoma City firm of Ellis, Nicholson, and Cramer to rebuild. The dedication of the new church on the old site occurred in 1950.<sup>10</sup>

Although the fine new First Baptist Church followed the popular Classical Revival style, some sweeping changes in church architecture were occurring by 1950. Fifteen Ponca City churches were identified as having been constructed in the transitional period between 1950 and 1967, the end date, set for this study. Looking at twentieth-century American church architecture, architect Duncan Stroik noted that except for Frank Lloyd Wright few American Modernist architects were interested in designing churches because they considered them irrelevant to modern man. Still, by mid-century Modernist ideas had crept into American church design. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1889-1969), a leading Modernist, came to the United States before World War II. As head of the School of Architecture at the Illinois Institute of Technology, he influenced generations of students. His minimalist maxim “less is more” and concepts such as structural expressionism, which exposed the supporting grid of beams and columns in a building, appeared in American architecture for commercial, professional, and educational buildings. The Modern style for churches was not far behind. Stroik also

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<sup>10</sup> Carter, *Kay County's Historic Architecture*, 103; “100 Years, First Baptist Church, Ponca City, Oklahoma, 1899-1999,” First Baptist Church, Ponca City, Oklahoma.

noted the Vatican II conference (1962-1967) helped open the door to Modern church architecture by emphasizing the congregation along with evangelization and attacking current social problems. Traditional church layout focused attention on the altar and minister, both set apart from the worshipers. In Modern church buildings, though, the focus returned to the congregation and the communal worship first century Christians experienced. Mid-twentieth century architects began to use the circular or semi-circular auditorium in which worshipers could see each other along with the structural frame of their building.<sup>11</sup>

These changes came somewhat slowly to Ponca City, in which traditional styles still predominated into the 1950s and 1960s. Grace Episcopal Church outgrew the Guild Hall and Parish House by 1951-1952 when the members began construction of a new building on the northwest corner of Grand Avenue and 13<sup>th</sup> Street. They sold the Guild Hall (today's Bethel Tabernacle) but split the Parish House into two sections and moved them to the building site of the new church for use during construction. The new building, designed by architect John Duncan Forsyth, resembled a traditional Gothic-style English parish church. Walls of Arkansas harmony ledgerstone and doors with wrought iron hinges and lanterns enhanced the impression. Even after its completion, the Parish House remained in use and was eventually stone-veneered and connected to the new building.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Duncan Stroik, "The Roots of Modernist Church Architecture," *Adoremus Bulletin, Online Edition*, 3 (number 7, October 1997), <<http://www.adoremus.org/1097-Stroik.html>> (April 14, 2012); Arn Henderson, Frank Parman, and Dortha Henderson, *Architecture in Oklahoma: Landmark & Vernacular*. Norman, Okla.: Point Riders Press, 1978), 167-168; Torgerson, *An Architecture of Immanence*, 8-10, 31-40, 57.

<sup>12</sup> "Church Traces Roots Back to 1898," *The Ponca City News*, October 30, 2005; Carter, *Kay County's Historic Architecture*, 123; interview of Greg and Joanna Summers by Mary Jane Warde, March 3, 2012, Ponca City, Oklahoma.

Not long afterward, the new St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church also showed traditional influence. By 1950 the high cost of repairs on the old church made a new building more economical. Construction on the same block as St. Mary's Parochial School began with a new rectory and then the church, completed in 1953-1954. F. M. Olston, an architect from Tulsa, used the Mission/Spanish Colonial Revival style so popular in Ponca City. A colonnade connected the church to the school on the north.<sup>13</sup>

In 1955 the First Presbyterian Church congregation also began construction of a new building set back east of 14<sup>th</sup> Street at Grand Avenue. Architects John A. Shaver and Charles W. Shaver of Kansas City, assisted by Ponca City architect W. R. Brown, designed the large building. Built of Arkansas harmony ledgerstone, it incorporated both Modern and Gothic Revival elements. The clean horizontal and vertical lines, organic materials, front-facing gables, and exposed beams in the nave were Modern, but the tall, narrow arched windows, steep-pitched roofs, and steeple recalled the Gothic Revival.<sup>14</sup> The dedication booklet described the style as "Modified Gothic" or "Modern Gothic."<sup>15</sup>

By 1960, architecture that incorporated Modern ideas was more common in Ponca City. The town was spreading north and west, further from the central business district and the refinery area. New Contemporary homes lined the new streets. Since 1933 the First Baptist Church had led mission work in the northwest part of town and encouraged the founding of Sunset Baptist Church in 1944. In 1957 the Sunset congregation built an auditorium on Greenwood Avenue and added educational wings in 1965 and 1975, creating a large T-shaped building. Likewise, North East Baptist Church was founded in

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<sup>13</sup> *The History of One Hundred Years of a Faith Community: Saint Mary's Parish, Ponca City, Oklahoma, 1894-1994* ([Ponca City, Okla.]: n.p., 1994), 12, 17-19.

<sup>14</sup> Carter, *Kay County's Historic Architecture*, 118-120.

<sup>15</sup> Dedication Booklet, First Presbyterian Church, June 15-July 17, 1955.

1959-1960 with the support of the First Baptist Church and held its first services in the new church building on North Pecan Road in 1966. Asbury Methodist Church, too, was established in 1954 as a mission church with the support of the First United Methodist Church. In 1957 the congregation began construction of their building off Liberty Avenue, with a classroom expansion in 1961. While this addition was generally Contemporary, the lines of the sanctuary design suggested an updated Gothic Revival.<sup>16</sup>

However, Woodlands Christian Church on the corner of 14<sup>th</sup> Street and East Hartford Avenue, an outreach of the First Christian Church, was Post Modern with its large A-frame sanctuary built in 1957. An education wing was attached in 1967. Major remodeling in 2001-2002 added space and facilities to the building while changing the entrance significantly. Two other Ponca City churches exemplified Post Modern architecture. The Church of God in Christ in the 1100 block of West Grand Avenue was originally a 1958 rectangular two-story International-style building. In 1975 an octagonal sanctuary on the south elevation eclipsed the first building. It follows the structural expressionism of the Modernists in the exposed interior beams and S-curved wood supports for the walls and ceiling. A much smaller Post Modern religious facility built during this period was Temple Emanuel at 1100 East Highland Avenue. Jewish merchants, professionals employed in the oil industry, and families had found a warm welcome in Ponca City since its early days, but there were never enough of them to build and support their own place of worship until 1964-1965. Then Harold Kannaday, a Ponca City architect, produced a plan for a Modern building to accommodate multiple activities while it proclaimed its role as a Jewish synagogue. Large tablets engraved with the Ten

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<sup>16</sup>“Welcome to Sunset Baptist Church: An Exciting History,” Sunset Baptist Church, <<http://www.sunsetbaptist.org/history.html>> (April 24, 2012); “Northeast Baptist Began in ‘59,” *Ponca City News* October 10, 1982; “Asbury Methodist Started in 1954,” *ibid.*, undated clipping, PCVF.

Commandments in Hebrew were set into the east and west upper facades. Tall curving brick walls suggested they were cupped in God's hands.<sup>17</sup>

While some churches built in Ponca City in the period from about 1920 through 1967 reflected current architectural trends, its many congregations represented a wide range of religious tradition, focus, financial support, and taste. Some could afford to hire an architect and building contractor and to pay for high-end materials and furnishings. Others, sometimes small and lacking resources, built what they could with what they had. Some church buildings in Ponca City served successive congregations, often from different denominations. For example, today's Victory Tabernacle at 600 East Hartford Avenue was for several years the Central Baptist Church. The plan of the latter in 1994 was to expand south into today's large parking lot and to build an auditorium that would seat as many as five hundred. However, the church later moved to Coleman Road. Likewise, Covenant Community Church at 500 East Emporia Avenue was once Liberty Baptist Church. Life Springs Family Worship Center in the 600 block of West Grand Avenue was Trinity Pentecostal Holiness Church and from 1949 until about 1980 the Grand Avenue Church of Christ until it moved west to a larger building. Other congregations turned buildings erected for entirely different purposes into houses of worship. For example, Harvest Fellowship meets in the 200 block of West Grand Avenue in what was once the Ritz Theater. Several churches recall that early in their history they met in schools. The International Church of God at 700 West Broadway still does. The former Lincoln School was first a Classical building designed by Solomon Layton's firm

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<sup>17</sup> Woodlands Christian Church, "Our History," <<http://www.wmajors.org/wcc/WCC-history.html>> (April 4, 2012); "Woodlands Christian Church Undergoing Major Renovation to 'Fulfill the Vision,'" *Ponca City News*, October 30, 2001; Small Synagogues.com, "The Temple in Tepee Territory," <[http://www.smallsynagogues.com/poncacity\\_ok.htm](http://www.smallsynagogues.com/poncacity_ok.htm)> (April 8, 2012).

in 1920, redesigned and expanded by Kannaday and Timberlake in 1949, and expanded once more by the Ponca City Public Schools in the 1980s.<sup>18</sup>

Church buildings are intended to serve their members. As membership grows or new needs arise, they either move elsewhere or make renovations or additions to their buildings. Few of the churches surveyed in this study retain their original appearance. At the least, most have added ramps, and some have added elevators in tall shafts to meet recent handicapped accessibility regulations. Others, though, have expanded repeatedly as need arose and for the purposes of this survey diminished or erased their integrity. One example is the Hartford Avenue Church of Christ, a 1958 Contemporary building with extensive late 1980s additions on the west and north sides to accommodate its growing membership and community outreach programs. Another is North East Baptist Church, built on North Pecan Road in 1966 to serve Ponca City's northeastward growth. A complete renovation and major expansion about 2000 left only the northwest corner of the original small building visible. The First Baptist Church has now expanded to fill half of a block. The First Christian Church and First United Methodist Church have enclosed spaces between separate earlier buildings. While these developments cause the historic preservationist concern, they are evidence that these churches are thriving and serving their purpose and community.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> "Central Baptist Church Has 60 Years of Service in City," *The Ponca City News*, June 17, 1974; "Two Families Began Grand Ave. Church of Christ," October 10, 1982, *ibid.*; *Ponca City, Oklahoma Polk Directory, 1959* (Dallas, Tex.: R. L. Polk & Company, various years); "Welcome to Sunset Baptist Church: An Exciting History," Sunset Baptist Church, <<http://www.sunsetbaptist.org/history.html>> (April 24, 2012), Carter, *Kay County's Historic Architecture*, 74, 121.

<sup>19</sup> "Church Adds Annex on Hartford Avenue," *The Ponca City News*, October 18, 1987; interview of Larry Cloud and Jerry Lanning, by Mary Jane Warde, Ponca City, Oklahoma, March 24, 2012.

## Annotated Bibliography:

### *Collections:*

E. W. Marland Estate #1, HALS No. OK-5. Historic American Landscapes Survey. State Historic Preservation Office, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

The survey form that provides basic information about a specific property, in this case, the first Marland home in Ponca City.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps.

These early twentieth century maps designed assess fire hazards help date buildings and provide information about building footprints.

Vertical File. Ponca City Public Library, Ponca City, Oklahoma.

A well organized collection of ephemeral materials, including Ponca City's churches.

### *Books:*

Carter, Bret A. *Kay County's Historic Architecture*. Images of America Series. Chicago, Ill.: Arcadia Publishing, 2007.

This useful book consists primarily of a collection of photos of Kay County, Oklahoma buildings from the 1990s through the late twentieth century. Captions discuss architects, style, and context of the building within Kay County history.

"Church Traces Roots Back to 1898." *The Ponca City News*, October 30, 2005.

This useful article describes the evolution of Grace Episcopal Church.

*Dedication Booklet*. First Presbyterian Church, June 15-July 17, 1955.

The booklet includes a fact sheet about the new building as well as photographs taken at the time and before later additions.

First Baptist Church. *100 Years: First Baptist Church, Ponca City, Oklahoma, 1899-1999*. Np.: nd.

The pictorial history booklet supplies information on the development of the First Baptist Church complex.

Franks, Clyda R. *Ponca City and Kay County Boom Towns*. Images of American Series. Chicago, Ill.: Arcadia Publishing, 2002.

With images, captions, and text, this book describes the early development of Kay County towns such as Ponca City.

First Presbyterian Church of Ponca City, Oklahoma. *A Centennial of Serving God: 1894-1994*. [Ponca City, Okla.: First Presbyterian Church, 1994].

This small book combines "A Narrative of Events in the Life of Our Church and Its People During the Past Fifty Years from Pioneer Days to the Present Time, 1894-1944"

with a history of the second five decades of one of Ponca City's most prominent churches.

"Grace Episcopal Looks to Centennial Sunday May 31." Undated clipping, "Ponca City Churches—Episcopal," Vertical File, Ponca City Public Library, Ponca City, Oklahoma.

The clipping describes the expansion of one of Ponca City's landmark churches.

Heathcote, Edwin, and Laura Moffatt. *Contemporary Church Architecture*. Chichester, United Kingdom: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2007.

A generously illustrated work, this book describes the transition of international church architecture from earlier times into and during the twentieth century. It focuses on innovations from great cathedrals to a small Alabama church built with found materials.

Henderson, Arn, Frank Parman, and Dortha Henderson. *Architecture in Oklahoma: Landmark & Vernacular*. Norman, Okla.: Point Riders Press, 1978.

The writers provide a summary and photographs of architecture in the early settlement, reservation, twin territory, statehood, and midcentury periods of Oklahoma.

*History of One Hundred Years of a Faith Community: Saint Mary's Parish, Ponca City, Oklahoma, 1894-1994, The*. [Ponca City, Okla.]: n.p., 1994.

The centennial history of St. Mary's Parish in Ponca City describes events and people associated with the parish from 1894 to 1994.

Moehle, Thomas O. "A Story of Grace Episcopal Church, Ponca City, Oklahoma." "Ponca City Churches—Episcopal," Vertical File, Ponca City Public Library, Ponca City, Oklahoma.

Portions of this memoir describe the Guild Hall, now Bethel Tabernacle, and Parish Hall, now part of the new Grace Episcopal Church.

Morris, John W., Charles R. Goins, and Edwin C. McReynolds. *The Historical Atlas of Oklahoma*. Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1976, second edition.

This classic atlas of Oklahoma includes maps of the Cherokee Outlet Indian reservations and the land leased by cattlemen in the post-Civil War period.

Phillips, Steven J. *The Old House Dictionary: An Illustrated Guide to American Domestic Architecture, 1600 to 1940*. Lakewood, Col.: American Source Books, 1989.

The well-organized and illustrated book helps the writer understand and use the proper term for architectural details.

The Ponca City Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution. *The Last Run, Kay County Oklahoma, 1893*. Ponca City, Okla.: The Courier Printing Company, 1939, 1970 edition.

Pioneers' stories of early days in Kay County are collected in this book. It includes brief accounts of the founding of some Ponca City churches.

*Ponca City, Oklahoma Polk Directory, 1959.* Dallas, Tex.: R. L. Polk & Company, various years.

With their listings of businesses and addresses, Polk's Directories are useful for tracking occupants of a building through time.

Ponca City News, The. *History of A Proud Heritage: Ponca City, Oklahoma, A Pictorial History, 1893-1960.* Marceline, Mo.: D-Books Publishing, Inc., 1999.

Photographs and captions trace the history of Ponca City, Oklahoma's people and buildings.

"*Thine Is The Glory.*" *Golden Anniversary, 1925-1975, First Lutheran Church.* Ponca City, Oklahoma. Waco, Tex.: Campbell Church Directories, 1975.

This is a collection of photographs and information about the First Lutheran Church.

Torgerson, Mark A. *An Architecture of Immanence: Architecture for Worship and Ministry Today.* Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007.

Based on the belief that "Church buildings are visible witnesses of faith, capable of influencing the belief systems of Christians and non-Christians alike," Torgerson outlines the development of modern American church architecture.

Walton, John Brooks. *The Architecture of John Duncan Forsyth.* Tulsa, Okla.: JBW Publications, 2007.

This pictorial book provides information and illustrations of the work of a prominent Ponca City, Oklahoma architect during the early-mid twentieth century.

#### *Articles:*

Stokesberry, Max. "Brick Masonry Longtime Tradition for Welches." *Ponca City News*, December 12, 1982, "Ponca City," Section X Vertical File, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Stokesberry uses interviews with the Welch family to describe building activities in Ponca City. They worked on various commercial buildings and twenty-one churches.

Weaver, Bobby D. "Ernest Whitworth Marland." *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture.* <<http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/M/MA027>>.... (April 16, 2012).

This article gives a synopsis of the life and contributions of E. W. Marland to Ponca City and Oklahoma.

"Woodlands Christian Church Undergoing Major Renovation to 'Fulfill the Vision.'" *Ponca City News*, October 30, 2001.

A photograph and article describes renovations to the church building.

*Interviews:*

Benson, Theresa. By Mary Jane Warde. Ponca City, Oklahoma, March 1, 2012. The interviewee, a pastoral assistant, provided information on renovations to First Christian Church.

Bryant, Beverly. By Mary Jane Warde. Ponca City, Oklahoma, April 6, 2012. A staff member at the *Ponca City News*, Ms. Bryant generously supplied information drawn from a lifetime in Ponca City.

Cloud, Larry, and Jerry Lanning. By Mary Jane Warde, Ponca City, Oklahoma, March 24, 2012.

Cloud and Lanning, both church members, provided information on the renovations to North East Baptist Church.

Summers, Greg and Joanna. By Mary Jane Warde. Ponca City, Oklahoma, March 3, 2012.

These neighbors provided information on Grace Episcopal Church and Bethel Chapel.

*Websites:*

Hartford Church of Christ. "About Hartford, History of Hartford Avenue."  
<[http://hartfordchurch.net/modules/hartford/?tac=About\\_Hartford](http://hartfordchurch.net/modules/hartford/?tac=About_Hartford)> (April 2, 2012).

The site includes information on the expansion of this church.

Small Synagogues.com. "The Temple in Tepee Territory."  
<[http://www.smallsynagogues.com/poncacity\\_ok.htm](http://www.smallsynagogues.com/poncacity_ok.htm)> (April 8, 2012).

The article which first appeared in the *Dallas Jewish Week* in 2002 briefly describes the history of the Jewish community in Ponca City, including the construction of Temple Emanuel in 1964-1965.

Stroik, Duncan. "The Roots of Modernist Church Architecture." *Adoremus Bulletin, Online Edition* 3 (number 7, October 1997). <<http://www.adoremus.org/1097-Stroik.html>> (April 14, 2012).

The architect's helpful article outlines development in twentieth century architecture from the Roman Catholic perspective.

"Welcome to Sunset Baptist Church: An Exciting History." Sunset Baptist Church.  
<<http://www.sunsetbaptist.org/history.html>> (April 24, 2012).

This article provides details of the founding and history of Sunset Baptist Church.

Woodlands Christian Church. "Our History." <<http://www.wmajors.org/wcc/WCC-history.html>> (April 4, 2012).

Information about Woodlands Christian is included on this site.

**Summary:**

Ponca City, Oklahoma is rich in churches, a vital part of the community from 1893 to the present. Thirty-six church buildings built by 1967 fall into the current eligibility time frame. Of these, two are currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places from a 2010 survey, while six are eligible for the National Register under Criterion C and Criterion Consideration A. In architecture, they range from a vernacular building of no distinctive style to both large and small buildings that exemplify several twentieth century styles and were designed by some of Oklahoma's leading architects. Perhaps just as important to their congregations, some have served generations of families from Ponca City's communities. Even those not currently considered eligible have usually expanded and/or been renovated to serve what their congregations see as their purpose, membership, and community responsibilities. Scattered throughout Ponca City's neighborhoods, these buildings can be an additional source of pride to Ponca City and reinforce the importance of historic preservation on a very personal level.

Themes to which the historic churches in Ponca City might contribute include Settlement because building churches was a priority as its first citizens created a new town. These buildings remained important to their descendants, but none of the church buildings from that era survive. The churches are related to Energy because the discovery, extraction, and refining of oil set off and sustained the real growth and development of Ponca City, bringing the prosperity that could support many churches, from the vernacular to those built in the latest architectural styles. The Depression and Recovery are part of church histories in Ponca City because those times dictated when and what types of buildings could be constructed. Lastly, even though Ponca City is a

small city, its churches are part of the Urban experience, acting as community focal points, sustaining those communities, and following the flow of residential patterns through the decades.