

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: Simpson Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church

other name/site number: Simpson Memorial United Methodist Church

2. Location

street & number: 607 Shrewsbury Street

not for publication: N/A

city/town: Charleston

vicinity: N/A

state: WV county: Kanawha code: 039 zip code: 25301

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: Private

Category of Property: Building

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>	sites
<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>	structures
<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: N/A

Name of relate property listing: N/A

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4. State/Federal Agency Certification  
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As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. \_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

William J. ...  
Signature of Certifying Official

6/26/91  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria. \_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

=====  
5. National Park Service Certification  
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I, hereby certify that this property is:

\_\_\_ entered in the National Register  
\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_ determined eligible for the  
National Register

\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_ determined not eligible for the  
National Register

\_\_\_ removed from the National Register

\_\_\_ other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Keeper

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

=====  
6. Function or Use  
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Historic: Religion

Sub: Church

Current : Religion

Sub: Church

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7. Description

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Architectural Classification:

Late 19th and 20th Century  
Revival

Other Description: Late Gothic Revival

Materials: foundation Concrete roof Slate  
walls Brick other \_\_\_\_\_

Describe present and historic physical appearance. X See continuation sheet.

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8. Statement of Significance

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Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: Local.

Applicable National Register Criteria: A

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) : A

Areas of Significance: Ethnic Heritage: Black  
Social History

Period(s) of Significance: 1914 - 1941

Significant Dates : 1914-15 (date of construction)

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: David Dick, architect, Charleston, WV  
Conker Brothers, Contractor, Charleston, WV

State significance of property, and justify criteria, considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.  
X See continuation sheet.

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The Simpson Memorial United Methodist Church anchors the north end of Shrewsbury Street in a historic African-American neighborhood near the business center of Charleston, Kanawha County, West Virginia. A nearly square building on a high foundation, the high pitched hipped roof with platform and tall square bell tower lend the brick edifice a singular presence in downtown Charleston close to busy Interstate Highway 77.

At the time of construction in 1914 Simpson was part of a vital residential neighborhood interspersed with large houses, places of business, schools, and other churches. A principal thoroughfare of the black community was brick-paved Shrewsbury Street, along which passed much of the enclave's traffic - and an occasional parade - on the way to the busy point of merger at Washington Street where several of the city's most prominent black businesses were located. During the 1960s and 70s the neighborhood changed as the result of inner city housing developments and population shifts. Today there are fewer black residences and business establishments.

Simpson Memorial United Methodist Church is of late Gothic Revival styling with features common to many American Protestant churches of the early 20th century. The central cubic mass with high hipped roof is balanced at the corner with a 4-story square bell tower. The truncated tower has lost its distinctive stone parapet and stone corner finials, while cresting along the platform of the main roof also disappeared some years ago. The effect of these losses however is minimal because the handsome dark red ironspot brickwork and limestone trim provide other significant exterior decorative details. Smooth limestone banding coupling window openings, and limestone surrounds detail the pointed arch windows of the entrance elevation. The dominant window facing Shrewsbury Street is the centrally placed huge tracery window containing wood mullions and openwork; a corresponding large window pierces the north facade. Another important Gothic feature at the front elevation is the limestone label molding above the flat-headed openings of the bell tower's third level. A limestone cornerstone to the right of the entrance double door contains the inscription "Simpson Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church" and the dates 1866, 1887, and 1914.

The auditorium of the church is commodious; its space contains an Akron-style seating plan and balconies at the east and north walls. The great Gothic windows, and secondary windows, flood the sanctuary with colored light. The eastern window, damaged by a fire in 1988, was replaced with a nearly exact copy depicting Jesus with the flock. The north window portrays Jesus in the garden. Fire damage to the church's historic fabrics was minimal. An important additional interior detail is a large moveable screen on the west side of the auditorium which can be raised to provide overflow space. When the screen is lowered it provides

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Simpson Memorial United Methodist Church is little changed after nearly a century of service to the community. Resting upon secure concrete slab foundations, and a foundation of strong congregational support, Simpson's future seems assured.

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The Simpson Memorial United Methodist Church (Simpson Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church) is a focal point of a central Charleston neighborhood that has been, for many years, home of African-Americans. The church is significant to the community which has traditionally carried out economic and cultural practices important in maintaining its historical identity. Many residences and businesses have disappeared from the Shrewsbury Street neighborhood, particularly following urban developments of the 1960s and 70s. These changes, however, have not erased the community's identity which is prominently represented in the well-preserved 1914 Simpson Memorial United Methodist Church. The church therefore meets Criteria Consideration A because it derives primary significance from historical importance; it is also eligible under Criterion A for its significant association with cultural traditions of the community. Because of the church's prominent location and large membership, its role in the day-to-day life of the neighborhood was considerable. Its meeting rooms, halls, and offices were regularly utilized by a large segment of the local population.

**THE CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL  
SIGNIFICANCE OF SIMPSON MEMORIAL**

by Vance F. Ross

Simpson Memorial United Methodist Church stands as a landmark to a significant era in Charleston and the Kanawha Valley. In the first half of this century, a teeming African-American population occupied the neighborhood surrounding this church building. Businesses that successfully supplied the needs of this community were housed nearby: pharmacies, grocery stores, hair salons, funeral homes, schools and other churches. Most of these institutions exist no more. Simpson Memorial is a tangible reminder of those prosperous times. The period of significance, therefore, begins at the time of construction, 1914-15, and ends in the 1940s (1941).

As well, Simpson Memorial Church survived the immorality of a segregated denomination. In a time when bigotry assumed the sanction of Methodism, Simpson Memorial was birthed, grew and thrived. Once serving 700 members, Simpson Memorial remains a crucial congregation in the now desegregated United Methodist Church, and a necessary reminder of that checkered past.

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The congregation continued its worship in the Quarrier and Dickinson Street edifice until 1914 when the lot and church building were sold. The proceeds from this sale were used to purchase a lot at 607 Shrewsbury Street and to begin construction of the present church edifice that was completed during the pastorate of the Reverend Julius Carroll in 1915.

The church has made steady progress through the years, aided by the reorganization of Methodism in the United States in 1939 when three great churches of this faith, namely the Methodist Episcopal, the Methodist Episcopal South and the Methodist Protestant Church, after years of negotiation, agreed upon a plan of union. It was on May 10, 1939 that these three great church units united to form the Methodist Church, and the Episcopal was dropped from the name of Simpson. Thus, it was that the Reverend Herbert A. Green (1936-42) was the first pastor of Simpson to serve under this union.

Another forward step in Methodism was an amendment to the Constitution of the Methodist Church which provided that churches of the Washington Conference shall be a part of those annual conferences in which they are geographically located. Thus, on June 9, 1965, Bishop Fred G. Holloway, presiding at the 120th Annual Session of the West Virginia Conference (white), read the names of those churches, which included Simpson, transferred from the Washington Conference into the West Virginia Conference. Bishop Holloway expressed words of welcome and fellowship, with Bishop Edgar A. Love of the Washington Conference present to make grateful response. This significant change occurred during the pastorate of the Reverend B. Milton Hargrove at Simpson.

In 1969, still another union was to come into existence. This included the West Virginia Conference of the former Methodist and former Evangelical United Brethren Churches, as well as that part of the former EUB Virginia Conference within the state of West Virginia. Thereafter, United Methodist became the official name of Methodist churches.

The late Bishop Matthew W. Clair, who was elected to the Episcopacy at the General Conference in 1920 was licensed to preach by Simpson Church in 1889. Others licensed to preach through Simpson were George Wilcher, Tazwell Teal, Esmond Powell, John W. Essex, William A. Spriggs, W.A. Stewart, A.P. Parker, Christopher A. Scott, George Wooding, Marsden Cabell, John H. Woods, Homer Davis, who has served as District Superintendent of the Charleston District, and Paul H. Easley, teacher and Director of Campus Ministry at Clark College, and Assistant Pastor of Ben Hill United Methodist Church of Atlanta, Georgia.

There were three ministers of Simpson who received the second call to administer the church: Rev. C.G. Cummings (grandfather of Mrs. Charlene Byrd), Rev. John W. Waters, and Rev. John H. Woods.

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Finally, as the only African-American United Methodist Church in the city, Simpson Memorial continues a religious heritage unlike any other. Within the African-American cultural matrix, Simpson Memorial upholds a worship tradition that differs significantly from other Black churches. While heavily influenced by European liturgy, the theology and rites that comprise liturgy emanate distinctly from the African-American experience. This makes for rich worship, a type found nowhere else.

SIMPSON MEMORIAL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

by James D. Randall

For over a hundred years, the Black Church has been the hub from which have emerged many of the involvements of our lives.

Church records reveal that the nucleus of the congregation of Simpson was organized during the Civil War. Shortly before the end of the war in 1865, the members conducted their worship services under white ministers in the basement of the old Asbury Methodist Church (which later became the State Street Methodist Church, and now Christ Church Methodist). Asbury was built in 1833 on Virginia Street in the block between Summers and Laidley Streets, near the present area of the Berman Building:

The Washington Conference (Black) of the Methodist Church was organized in 1864, one year before the Simpson group began worshipping. However, there is no record that Simpson had an organized congregation before the year 1865. The Washington Conference sent Simpson its first minister in 1866, the Reverend C.O. Fisher who served until 1869. The congregation continued to worship in the church basement of Asbury during his pastorate.

Around 1869 the congregation moved into a building on Quarrier Street near Capitol Street. By 1870 the congregation had grown in sufficient numbers to erect a church home. Thus the church officials purchased a lot near the corner of Quarrier and Dickinson Streets and built their first church, a frame structure.

In January 1887, this structure, the third church home of Simpson was destroyed by fire. The reconstruction of a more stately edifice was begun immediately on the same site and was completed in 1888, becoming one of the most outstanding Black Churches in the state and in the Washington Conference. In 1888 the church was officially named Simpson Methodist Episcopal Church in honor of Bishop Simpson.

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Throughout the long history of Simpson, it is interesting to note that only three parsonage structures have been owned by the church. The first was a four-room house on North Rand at Young Street which was used from 1865 to 1897. The second one at 212 Brooks Street was built under the pastorate of the Reverend Daniel W. Shaw (1896-1901). Rev. Shaw is listed in church records as a revivalist and noted for his eloquent sermons. The late Mrs. E.L. James, Sr., Daughter of Rev. Shaw, lived in the parsonage as a child. Many children (the Carrols, the Brownes, the Harpers, the Woods, the Clarks, the Hargroves) of Simpson ministers lived in the parsonage on Brooks Street. Two of them, Lantha Loraine Clark, daughter of Rev. and Mrs. Ernest P. Clark, and Johnny Hargrove, son of Rev. and Mrs. B. Milton Hargrove were born while their parents lived there. The third parsonage was located on McGovran Road in the South Hills section of Charleston. Rev. Harry Coleman and his family were the first pastoral family to occupy this structure, followed by Rev. Frank Horton and his family. The West Virginia Conference recommended that all of the Methodist Churches provide their pastors with a housing allowance that would permit them to live in a place of their choice instead of the church's parsonage, which may or may not be to their liking. Thus after the pastorate of Rev. Horton, Simpson abandoned its ownership of parsonages.

Pastors who have served Simpson since Rev. Coleman are Rev. Ramsey Bridges, who was the first Black minister to become a District Superintendent in the West Virginia Conference; Rev. Frank Horton, who is doing missionary work in Africa; Rev. William Pace; and the present pastor, Rev. Nathaniel Turner-Lacy.

In the spring of '88 a fire of undetermined origin destroyed the large beautiful stained glass window on the front of the church. Much smoke and water damage occurred to the interior of the sanctuary. Fortunately, an out-of-state company was able to duplicate the window. With the installation of new carpeting and pew cushions the sanctuary has been restored to its original beauty.

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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### SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE

Under Criterion A and Criteria Consideration A the Simpson Memorial United Methodist Church is eligible for listing in the National Register because of its significant role in the historic and cultural milieu of central Charleston's Shrewsbury Street neighborhood. The church building, dating to 1914-15, is the oldest in the area; its size and architectural character lend it an especially prominent place in time. The other black church building in the immediate area dates to the 1950s. Simpson thus provides a direct link with the neighborhood's earlier period of growth and social prominence, and significantly represents that period of Shrewsbury's history when the churches of African Americans were the centers of a multitude of social and ethnic forces. The following, from the WPA Writer's Project, West Virginia: A Guide to the Mountain State, 1941, illustrates the case in point:

Today, the church is perhaps the greatest social force in the life of a Negro community. Ministers are molders of public opinion; controversial subjects involving politics, labor, and prohibition are often discussed from the pulpit. All day sings, box suppers, chicken dinners, lectures, and occasional political rallies are held in the churches, which are used as social centers as well as places of worship. Protracted meetings, generally held during the winter season, are anticipated not only as a time for spiritual regeneration, but as important social events. In larger communities church basements are equipped with recreational facilities and are open to the public.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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See continuation sheet.

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository: Simpson Memorial United Methodist,  
Charleston, WV

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10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of Property: less than 1 acre

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing      Zone Easting Northing

A	<u>17</u>	<u>445040</u>	<u>4244820</u>	B	<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>
C	<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>	D	<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>

Verbal Boundary Description:      See continuation sheet.

Parcel 32, 100' across front; 113' south side; 92.5' west side; 108' north side. Kanawha Co. office of the Assessor, City of Charleston, East Charleston, Map No. 11, 11/17/65.

Boundary Justification:      See continuation sheet.

The lot represents the tract historically associated (since 1914-15) with the present church building.

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11. Form Prepared By

=====

Name/Title: James D. Randall, Charleston, and Rodney Collins, SHPO

Organization: SHPO, Cultural Center      Date: May 2, 1991

Street & Number: Capitol Complex      Telephone: (304)348-0240

City or Town: Charleston      State: WV ZIP: 25311

(NPS Form 10-900)

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Bibliography

- Ballard, Dr. Bishop Matthew W. Clair, Sr.: A Biography. West Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church and Monroe County Historical Society, Buckhannon, W.V., 1973, pp. 14, 15.
- Minutes of the combined Trustee Board and the Building Committee, Simpson Memorial United Methodist Church, Charleston, W.V., 1913-14.
- Randall, James D. and Anna Evans Gilmer. Black Past. Charleston, W.V., 1989, pp. 88-90; 118.
- Randall, James D. West Virginia Historic Properties Inventory Form for Simpson Memorial United Methodist Church, WV SHPO, Cultural Center, Charleston, W.V., 4/12/91.

CHARLESTON WEST QUADRANGLE  
 WEST VIRGINIA—KANAWHA CO.  
 7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)  
 SW/4 CHARLESTON 15' QUADRANGLE

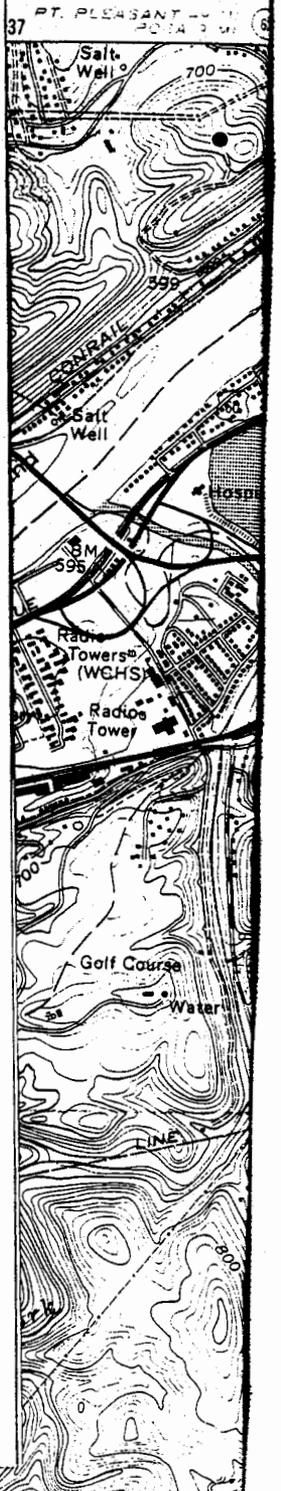
4660' NE  
 (BIG CHIMNEY)



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UTM  
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SIMPSON MEMORIAL  
 UNITED METHODIST  
 CHURCH  
 607 SHREWSBURY ST.  
 CHARLESTON, KANAWHA  
 CO.  
 W.VA.

4245  
 STATE CAPITOL 1 MI.  
 WEST VIRGINIA TURNPIKE 1.2 MI.  
 KANAWHA CITY 2.3 MI.  
 WEST VIRGINIA TURNPIKE 3.4 MI.  
 119  
 61  
 20'





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