

## THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

The First Baptist Church, dedicated in 1859, occupies the southwest corner of Edenton and Salisbury Streets, opposite Union Square. It is one of four churches bounding the square, a tradition in Raleigh since 1826.

Designed by William Percival, a noted nineteenth century architect, the First Baptist Church is an important example of the then popular Gothic Revival style of architecture. Percival departed from the characteristic picturesque irregularity of the style and adopted a symmetrical composition for the brick building. The pointed, soaring central spire dominates the front (east) facade of the building and features a rose window above the main entrance. The traditional cruciform plan is evident, with the crossings emphatically expressed in the steep gabled transepts. The main level of the building rests on a high basement. Originally the brick facades were stuccoed and deeply scored to represent stone building blocks. Today they are smoothly stuccoed, dramatizing the buttresses, weatherings and label molds, creating sharp contrasts of light and shadow.

Many additions and renovations have occurred over the past century, however, none have enhanced the character of the original church building as successfully as the most recent additions designed by the Raleigh architecture firm of Haskins and Rice in the 1960s. Inspired by the design forms of the Gothic Revival style, the architects created an addition which injects a new vitality into the church. Harmony of color, proportion and ornament have resulted in a sensitive blending of old and new architecture.

The first Baptist Church of Raleigh was organized in 1812 by 23 members of the

Cool Spring Baptist Church of Wake County. These members, listed in church records as five "white male", five "white female", five "colored male" and nine "colored female", held their first services in the State House. Over the years the church prospered in various locations in the city and in 1856, under the pastorate of Reverend Doctor Thomas E. Skinner, the construction of the present church building began. Dr. Skinner came to Raleigh from Petersburg, Virginia and perhaps had become acquainted with the work of architect William Percival there, as he had practiced architecture and civil engineering there before being commissioned to design the First Baptist Church.

This well-known landmark opposite the Capitol Building is the mother church of several Baptist churches in Raleigh. The First Baptist Church is an architecturally beautiful symbol of the successful establishment of one of the major religious institutions in Raleigh.