



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The First Presbyterian Church of Raleigh is sited on the southwest corner of Capitol Square. Built in 1900, the church exhibits the characteristics of the Romanesque Revival style, which was inspired by Romanesque architecture common in Europe from the ninth to the twelfth centuries, A.D. The irregular shape of the red brick building is characterized by asymmetrical massing and a solid, weighty feeling emphasized by the round arched openings and the squat columns with heavy capitals. The hallmark of the Romanesque Revival style is the round arch, and this motif is utilized repeatedly throughout the church. The brick is laid in one to five common bond, and supposedly was salvaged from the original brick church which stood on the same location.

The history of the First Presbyterian Church of Raleigh began on January 21, 1816, when the church was formally organized in the old State House. The Reverend William McPheeters, D.D., was the first pastor, and by 1818 a brick temple-form church stood at the corner of Salisbury and Morgan streets, on the same location as the present church. A frame sessions house was erected on the east side of the building around 1825. This temple-form building presented a pedimented gable and round arched windows. The two religious buildings served many purposes. In 1831 the Supreme Court of North Carolina sat in the sessions house after the old State House burned earlier that year. During the construction of the Greek Revival

Capitol, the Constitutional Convention sat in the church in 1835.

The next event which is relevant to the history of the Presbyterians' building activities was in 1893 when the Reverend Eugene Daniel, D.D., came to the pulpit. Under his ten year pastorate, the present Romanesque Revival building was erected. Plans for a new sanctuary were discussed as early as 1893. In September of that year the construction of a new church building was approved. On November 4, 1896, George W. Waring was contracted to remove the old church and to erect the new one. The temple-form church was demolished in April of 1899, and the new church was begun in June of that same year. It was completed in July, 1900. Little is known of the activities of Mr. Waring, and the architect of this sophisticated building remains but a name.

The Romanesque Revival manner of building was an extremely popular one in North Carolina in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Romanesque characteristics were expressed in domestic, educational, and commercial buildings as well as in religious edifices. Many of Raleigh's outstanding examples of Romanesque Revival architecture, such as the old fire station and the Raleigh High School, have been demolished. Therefore, the First Presbyterian Church is a valuable part of Raleigh's architectural heritage, a vital element in the Capitol Square area.