

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The First United Methodist Church of New Iberia is a one-story stucco-over-masonry Italian Renaissance style building with a two-story front corner bell tower. Erected in 1891, the original Gothic Revival building suffered serious fire damage to its spire, slate roof, and underlying roof structure in January 1907. However, the congregation repaired and rebuilt, in the process remodeling the building to its present stylistic appearance. Located in downtown New Iberia, the sanctuary stands very close to the street and has almost no green space to cushion it from nearby noise and traffic. For the record, the church is being nominated for its 1907 Italian Renaissance exterior. The property also includes a 1939 education building and a 1960 education building.

The exterior's Italian Renaissance styling was created by applying decorative details to the building's asymmetrical Gothic Revival shell. These decorative elements include an enclosed, arcaded loggia-like entrance with multi-layered concrete arches springing from massive concrete piers; a campanile-like bell tower; an oculus and round arched windows. The larger round arched windows contain double and triple arched divisions inscribed within the larger openings. In an attempt to make the building appear even more Italian, the 1907 craftsmen also added extended purlins beneath the eaves to mimic the Italian villa style. The building's red tile roof and stucco wall covering are also characteristic of Italian architecture. The stucco was added to hide the fire damaged bricks.

The church is entered through the loggia-like vestibule, added during the 1907 remodeling. Its interior space consists of one large room with a projecting entrance alcove opposite a wide but shallow chancel. Equally wide and shallow transepts give the floorplan just the suggestion of a cross. The bell tower, containing mechanical equipment on the first level, stands on the corner where the alcove and streetside transept meet. The sanctuary ceiling is both supported and decorated by a wooden scissors truss with hammerbeam supports and ornamental hanging pendants suggestive of the structure's Gothic Revival origin. Other noteworthy interior features include the wooden altar rail, pulpit, and curving pews. Colorful stained glass windows light the sanctuary on three sides.

Alterations/Assessment of Integrity:

The church has experienced only one structural change since its 1907 remodeling. In 1939 an arcaded hallway was attached to the exterior of the chancel wall in order to connect the sanctuary to a newly constructed education building. Otherwise, thanks to a meticulous restoration carried out between 1986 and 1987, the building appears much as it did in 1907. Components of the restoration included:

1. restoration of the stained glass windows and the installation of a layer of plastic to protect them,
2. removal, cleaning, and reinstallation of the original clay tile roof, including replacement of felt and flashing,
3. replastering of the entire exterior using the original lime plaster mix,
4. repainting the exterior in a color other than the original,
5. replacement of the old copper gutters and downspouts with new copper replicas, and
6. refinishing of the original interior woodwork.

Because the 1930s structural addition was executed in the style of the building and the recent restoration used authentic materials and methods whenever possible, the integrity of the church remains intact. As the only example of the Italian Renaissance style in Iberia Parish, the First United Methodist Church is a strong candidate for listing in the National Register.

Contributing/Non-Contributing Elements:

The 1939 education building is listed as a contributing element because it echoes the Italian Renaissance styling of the church and is fifty years old. Relevant features include the red tile roof, the stuccoed exterior walls, and round arch windows. As noted above, the education building was linked to the church via an arcaded hallway at the time of construction. Because this linkage is nothing more than a connector hallway and, more importantly, because the education building clearly reads as a separate building, it is being counted as a separate contributing element.

Located adjacent to the 1939 education building is a 1960 education building. It, of course, is listed as a non-contributing element.

Significant dates	1907; 1939
Architect/Builder	unknown
Criterion C	

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The First United Methodist Church of New Iberia is locally significant in the area of architecture because it is a landmark among the city's early twentieth century non-residential buildings. It is also the only example of the Italian Renaissance style within Iberia Parish.

Although New Iberia contains a wealth of architecturally significant buildings in the nineteenth century French Creole, Greek Revival, Romanesque, Queen Anne, and Eastlake styles, its early twentieth century architectural patrimony is fairly undistinguished. With the exception of a Georgian Revival post office, a few noteworthy Colonial Revival homes, and an Art Deco theater, the community's collection of twentieth century buildings consists mostly of holdover Queen Anne cottages and plain bungalows. Against this background, the Italian Renaissance styled First United Methodist Church is notable as a rare example of the eclectic revival of historic styles which occurred after the turn of the twentieth century. A review of the approximately 876 buildings listed in the Historic Structures Survey for Iberia Parish also indicates that the church is the parish's only example of the Italian Renaissance style.

In addition, a disproportionate number of New Iberia's outstanding buildings are found within residential neighborhoods. The community's central business district has been altered greatly, and except for a few Victorian examples, New Iberia's remaining non-residential structures can be characterized as square, two-story buildings, often of party wall construction. The First United Methodist Church, with its distinctive massing created by a steeply pitched roof and accompanying campanile with independent pyramidal roof, stands out as a notable visual landmark against these boxlike structures.

Other noteworthy characteristics of the church's Italian Renaissance styling include its arcaded loggia-like entrance of layered arches springing from massive piers and its oculus and round arched windows with additional arched openings inscribed within. Extended purling, a red tile

roof, and a stucco exterior also add to the building's Italian character. The 1939 education building, with its red tile roof, stuccoed exterior, and round arch windows, reinforces this character.

Major Bibliographical References

Louisiana Historic Structures Survey for Iberia Parish, Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office.

Site visit by National Register staff.

Babineaux, F. Michael, "Methodist Church Has Long, Colorful History to Restore," letter to the editor, Daily Iberian; copy in National Register file.