

Located on a major two lane street on the edge of downtown Leesville, the First United Methodist Church (1920) reflects the architectural eclecticism of the time. Here the Craftsman style is combined with a touch of the Mission Revival to create a distinctive landmark. The church looks much as it did when constructed, with the exception of a rear complementary addition and an addition to the side which reads as a free-standing building.

Although at first glance the First United Methodist Church reads as one story, it is actually two. The main worship space rests on a high brick basement story containing offices and meeting rooms. The building has a T-shaped footprint. A massive gable end roof, with the roof ridge perpendicular to the street, covers the worship space. It culminates at the front in a wider flat-roofed pavilion crowned with a pronounced Spanish mission style gable pierced by a curvaceous vent in the Baroque manner. The gable is almost a story in height, reaching a few inches higher than the peak of the main roof. Its sinuous shape and that of the vent are set off from the red brick background with cast cement painted white. The same white against red brick contrast is found in coping along the parapet and window lintels. Beneath the Mission Revival gable is a prominent Craftsman style entrance porch of wood painted white. A wide flight of stairs with a low masonry wall to each side rises a full story to the low-slung porch with its grouped posts set on brick bases. The porch gable features vertical wooden members applied to its front (clearly a reference to English half-timbering) and exposed rafter tails and struts at the eaves. There are two sets of double leaf entrance doors. A small Craftsman style porch on the principal side elevation marks the entrance to the basement story.

In the 1950s a large complementary hipped roof addition was made at the rear. It has a porch on one side that is identical to the original side porch. In more recent years an addition was constructed a few yards to the side of the original church. It connects via a one story wing to the 1950s rear addition.

The auditorium-like worship space is fairly simply detailed. The ceiling features an exposed beam ceiling and what are presumably the original chandeliers. While the chandeliers feature Gothic motifs, they have an overall Craftsman character. The worship space's handsome multi-color stained glass windows with their ogee arch design were added in the 1950s. The choir loft and altar are set with an alcove framed by a rounded proscenium.

Assessment of Integrity:

While the additions admittedly are large, their impact has been relatively minimal. The 1950s addition is at the rear, in the same color of brick, and is low-key. The side addition, while contemporary in design, reads as a free-standing building. All in all, the original church has a strong and quite distinctive architectural character, and it is this character which is visually dominant.

SIGNIFICANT DATES:	1920
ARCHITECT/BUILDER:	Unknown
CRITERION:	C

The First Methodist Church is of local significance as an architectural landmark within the parish seat of Leesville. With its strongly articulated Craftsman-Mission Revival façade, the church is quite distinctive, especially within the context of the city's largely modest historic building stock.

Leesville was founded in 1871, the same year Vernon Parish was created. It remained a small hamlet, however, until the Kansas City Southern Railroad arrived in the 1890s, making possible a lumber boom which lasted until the 1920s. A second period of growth came with the establishment of Camp Polk (now Fort Polk) in 1941. Leesville was and is the parish's only town of any size, and its population was only between roughly one and three thousand in the "golden age" of the lumber boom. Leesville had a large lumber mill (Nona Mills) within the town limits, and a second mill, with its own company town, was located nearby.

Despite this period of considerable prosperity (and attendant rapid population growth), the historic buildings seen today in Leesville are for the most part modest and lacking in architectural distinction. Only about 8-10 make a strong enough architectural statement to be termed architectural landmarks (among 150-200 buildings which are fifty years old or older). Old photos, recollections and other sources reveal that the lumber boom left Leesville with a number of "up-market" Queen Anne and/or Colonial Revival houses, but sadly almost all of these are gone. A three-block historic central business district survives, but most of its buildings are of a fairly standard commercial vernacular variety. And other than the First United Methodist Church and the Vernon Parish Courthouse, there are no historic institutional buildings of any distinction. In fact, all of the other churches and schools are fairly new. Within this context, the First United Methodist Church is a striking landmark to even a casual observer. With its Craftsman entrance porch reached via a monumental

flights of stairs and its strongly articulated Mission gable rising almost a full story, the building has a commanding presence belied by its relatively small size.

Historical Note:

In 1898 seventeen Methodist families from the Nona Mills Lumber Company consulted the Reverend S. S. Holladay, a Methodist circuit rider, about forming a church in Leesville. On April 13, 1899, a meeting was presided over by Rev. Holladay with 34 members present. That December the Reverend J. M. Alford was appointed the first pastor of the Leesville church. A lot for a church, located across the street from the present site, was purchased in 1900. The original church, a wood frame building, was destroyed by a storm in January 1918.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

LA SHPO staff knowledge of Leesville, based upon field experience.

Smith, Steven D. *A Good Home for a Poor Man: Fort Polk and Vernon Parish, 1800-1940*. National Park Service, 1999.