

WASHINGTON
COPY

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

For HCRS use only

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received

date entered NOV. 7, 1980

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic First Universalist Church

and/or common

2. Location

street & number 55 Villa Street not for publication

city, town Elgin vicinity of congressional district 13th

state Illinois code 012 county Kane code 089

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: Storage

4. Owner of Property

name H.Q.W. Properties

street & number 263 DuPage Street

city, town Elgin vicinity of state Illinois

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Recorder of Deeds

street & number 719 South Batavia Avenue

city, town Geneva state Illinois

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title See continuation sheet has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date federal state county local

depository for survey records

city, town state

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Continuation sheet Representation in Existing ~~State~~ Number 6

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- 1) Illinois Historic Structures Survey.
October 1972
State Survey
Illinois Dept. of Conservation
Springfield, Illinois

- 2) Elgin Area Landmarks
1975
Local Survey
Elgin Historical Society
Elgin, Illinois

- 3) Architecture and Historical Urban Neighborhoods on the Fox River
1976-7
County Survey
Kane County Urban Development
Geneva, Illinois

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Built in 1892, the First Universalist Church is a two-story masonry structure designed to conform to the shape of a watch. While this configuration, made in honor of the Elgin National Watch Company, is evident in plan (see drawing), the exterior of the church is inspired by the Richardsonian Romanesque style. The church occupies a triangular lot at the intersection of Villa and State Streets, a site located at the top of the Fox River Bluff overlooking downtown Elgin. Its unique roof lines as well as its location make the church a predominate landmark. *DURING*

The body of the church has 16 sides topped by a tent roof. Protruding at its southeast corner is a tower with a conical roof that rises to the same height as the body. The tower is flanked by two identical one-story entranceways that are marked by gabled roofs and pediments. Two bays of the body - the largest, centrally-located bays on the northeast and southwest - are articulated in a similar fashion, with their gables projecting from the tent roof.

The exterior combines intricate brick work of various patterns with a 4 ft. high stone base and water table. Window heads and sills are also of stone; accenting the tower are stone stringcourses and a dentil-lined cornice. On 8 bays of the body, the first and second floor windows are visually linked by the slight projection of flanking pilasters which are tied by a wide relieving arch. All windows - about 40 altogether - are the original stained glass designs.

The composition of interior rooms includes an auditorium at ground level, a balcony at the second floor, washrooms, and lounge ½ story below grade, and an organ room and office ½ story above grade. Located in the tower is a circular staircase and vestibule. Flanking the pulpit is a symmetrical double stairway with carved wooden banisters. Brass chandeliers and smaller brass light fixtures are intact, as are the hardwood floors and a glazed tile fireplace. The course plaster walls are trimmed with oak. Lastly, a tracker pipe organ, one of three still working in the world, is original to the church.

Adjacent to the church is Unity Hall, the original Universalist Church which was built in the 1860s, moved to the back of the lot, and converted to a Sunday School when the present church was built. It has been substantially altered and is not included in this nomination.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1892 **Builder/Architect**

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The significance of the First Universalist Church lies in its architectural synthesis of the Richardsonian Romanesque style and a commemorative design that links the Universalists to the development of Elgin. The Universalist community's dynamic energy and progressive philosophy provided the catalyst to make Elgin both the "Watch City" and the "City of Churches." Until its purchase by its present owners in May 1979, the building was the oldest church structure in continuous use in Elgin.

In 1866 the Universalists built their first full-sized church, Unity Hall, on the site of the present church. In the same year, the Elgin National Watch Company (then known as the National Watch Company) took possession of their first permanent building and "commenced in earnest the manufacture of watches." In order to attract this industry and to assist a stagnant community, four Elgin citizens donated 35 acres of land and bought stock as an inducement for the company to locate in Elgin. One of the benefactors, Silvanus Wilcox, was a trustee of the Universalist Church.

Beginning in 1866, and for the next century, Elgin's pride and leading landmark was its watch factory. The production of the finest quality jeweled watches brought both national and international recognition to the city. In its prime, the watch factory was the largest in the world, containing 21.3 acres of floor space, employing 4,000 persons, and producing 4,300 movements daily.

It was therefore imaginative and fitting that in 1890, when the Universalists were in need of a larger facility, their church was planned to assume the shape of a watch. George Hunter, then superintendent of the watch factory, conceived the design and supervised construction. Hunter was one of the "Seven Stars," the original watchmakers who came to Elgin from the East to start the factory.

In plan, the building resembles a hunting case watch. The body of the church is the case (the roof represents the cover), the balcony/choir loft is the hinge, and the tower is the snap of the case. With this arrangement in mind, the pulpit then becomes the numeral XII on the face of the watch.

Interior fittings were of the finest quality. The most prominent and unusual furnishing was a tracker pipe organ, donated at a cost of \$3,000. It was built in 1892 by John W. Steele & Sons, Springfield, Massachusetts, and boasts 14 ranks of pipes and two manuals. The organ is principally operated by mechanical action; only the blower, which feeds air into the pipes, is electrified. It is one of only ten trackers of its kind built, and only one of three still operating today.

At this time, the Universalists were also prominent in other aspects of community development. Their church was the setting of many social and civic activities. The congregation also assisted many newly-organized religious groups in Elgin by allowing the church to be used temporarily until suitable permanent locations could be acquired. There is a high concentration of churches in the area just north of the site.

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Continuation sheet

Significance

Item number 8

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Today there are few reminders that the Elgin National Watch Company existed. In 1966 the watch factory was demolished; now, two entrance pillars are all that remain on the site. Elsewhere in the city, only a few street names, an observatory, and the First Universalist Church are associated with the company that made "Elgin" and "pocketwatches" indistinguishable. It is fortunate for Elgin that this historical tie is embodied in the unique concept and extraordinary structure of the First Universalist Church.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 1/2 acre

Quadrangle name Elgin

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UMT References

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Zone Easting Northing

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Zone Easting Northing

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Verbal boundary description and justification Lot 3,4,5 and west 33 ft. of the N 1/2 of Lot 2 in block 5 of the original town of Elgin on the east side of the Fox River, in the City of Elgin, Kane County, Illinois

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code

state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title 1. Roy Quiriconi, part owner
2. Lisa Rowland, Architectural Historian

organization 1. N/A
2. Illinois Department of Conservation date April 23, 1980

street & number 1. 263 DuPage Street
2. 405 East Washington Street telephone 1. 312/697-5010
2. 217/785-1171

city or town 1. Elgin
2. Springfield state Illinois

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title Dir. Ill. Dept. of Conservation date 6/27/80

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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Continuation sheet Major Bibliographical References **Item number 9**

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Aift, E.C. Elgin Area Landmarks; A Community Heritage. Elgin Area Historical Society, 1975.

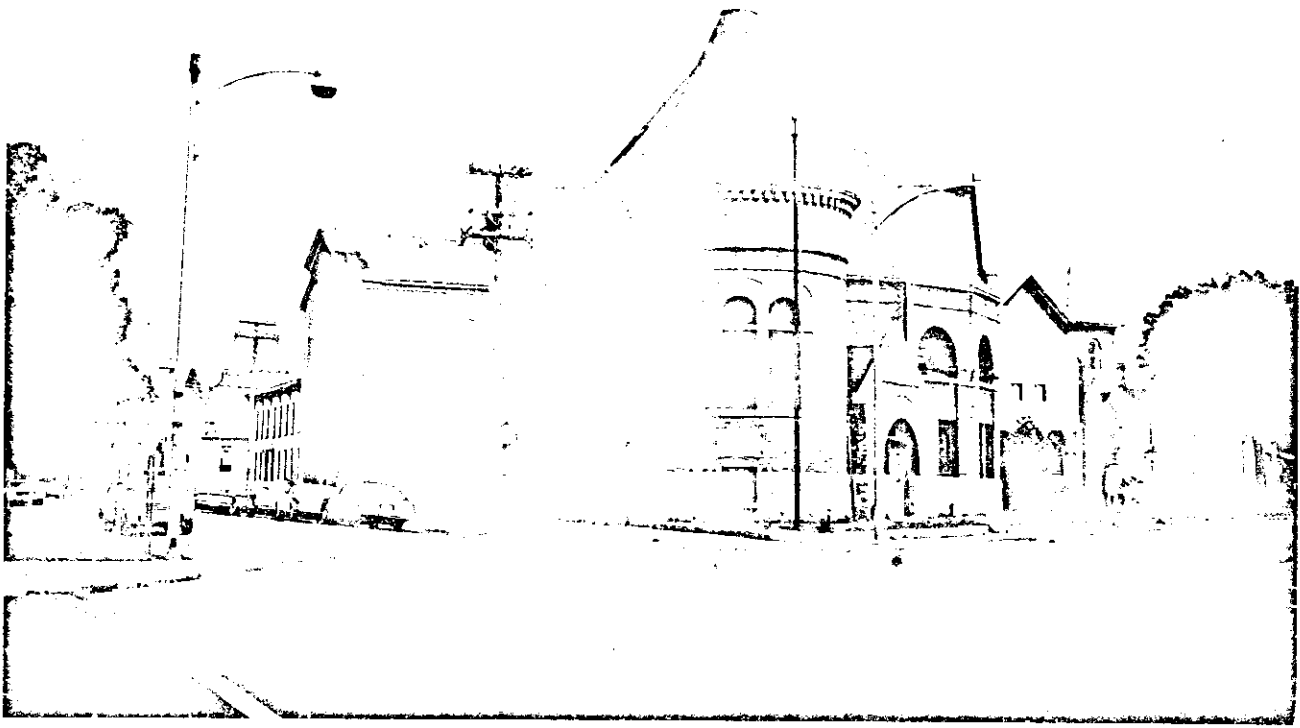
Architecture and Historic Urban Neighborhood on the Fox River. Kane County Urban Development, Geneva, Illinois.

Balch, Rev. W.S. Universalist Church. 1972-3.

Distelhorst, Ruth. "Guild Discovers Tracker Organ." Elgin Courier.

Inventory of Historic Structures in Kane County, Interium Report. Illinois Historic Structures Survey, October 1972.

Saunders, Blanche L. "Red Velvet Carpet, Choir Loft, and Famous Church Suppers of Universalists Recalled Today." The Elgin Sunday Courier, January 18, 1920.



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