

OHIO HISTORIC INVENTORY

Ohio Historic Preservation Office
567 E. Hudson St. Columbus, Ohio 43211
614/297-2470



1. No.		2. County LOR		4. Present Name(s) First Church in Oberlin		<input type="checkbox"/> Coded	
3. Location of Negatives O.H.I.O. Resource				5. Historic or Other Name(s) First Church			
		Roll #	Exp. #	Facing			
Front		2	21A	NW			
Rear		2	20A	NE			
6. Specific Address or Location 106 North Main				17. Date(s) or Period 1842-44		17b. Alteration Date(s) 1845	
6a. Lot, Section or VMD Number 09-00-075-110-051				18. Style or Design Greek Revival		High Style <input type="checkbox"/>	
7. City or Village Oberlin				18a. Style of Addition or Element(s) Gothic Revival (rear wing)		Elements <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
8. Site Plan with North Arrow				19. Architect or Engineer Richard Bond, Boston		30. Foundation Material Stone	
				19a. Design Sources		31. Wall Construction Brick Bearing	
				20. Contractor or Builder		32. Roof: Type Gable Pitch Moderate Material Composite Shingle	
9. U.T.M. Reference				21. Building Type or Plan Basilican Plan Church		33. No. Bays Front 3 Side 5	
Zone Easting Northing				22. Original Use, if apparent Church/Religious Structure		34. Exterior Wall Material(s) Brick, Stretcher or Running Bond	
<input type="checkbox"/> Site <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building				23. Present Use Church/Religious Structure		35. Plan Shape Rectangular	
<input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object				24. Ownership <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Private		36. Changes (Explain in #42) Altered, Minimal. Additions	
11. On National Register ? Yes		12. N.R. Potential ?		25. Owner's Name & Address, if known First Church of Oberlin 106 North Main Street Oberlin OH 44074		37. Window Type(s) 6 over 6, Double and Triple-hung	
13. Part of Estb Hist Dist? No		14. Dist. Potential ? Yes		26. Property Acreage 2.025		38. Bldg. Dims. approx. 135 ft. X 100 ft.	
15. Name of Established District (N.R. or Local) NR: Oberlin College thematic nomination				27. Other Surveys in Which Included McQuillin (75)		39. Endangered? No Explain:	
16. Thematic Association(s) Religion: Christianity: Congregational				28. No. of Stories 2 and 1/2		40. Chimney Placement Unknown	
29. Basement? Yes				41a. Distance from road		41b. Frontage on road 266.0 ft.	
42. Further Description of Important Interior and Exterior Features This vernacular, brick church conforms to a simple rectangular plan, with a gable roof and high foundation. Seven sandstone steps that extend across the full width of the building lead to the front entrance. The front façade has three double-door entrances with rectangular, multi-paned transom windows. The doors and three six-over-six, double-hung windows directly above are located in slightly recessed portions of the front-facing wall. Above every window and door is a plain, stone lintel, and each window has a stone sill. The gable ends have cornice returns, and the window openings located within the gables have wooden vent screens. The sides of the sanctuary have six-over-six, triple-hung, windows. A large tower sits on the ridgeline above the central entrance. (cont.)							
43. History and Significance In 1835 Arthur and Lewis Tappan persuaded Charles Grandison Finney to move to Oberlin to direct the theological department and train missionaries at Oberlin College. When Finney left New York for Oberlin, his friends gave him a big tent for his meetings. This tent served for seven years as Oberlin's community church and as the site of commencement services. Finney organized community commitment to build a new church in 1841, and a citizen committee worked for a year to develop plans and raise funds (Oberlin News-Tribune). Rev. Finney then turned to the college's newest benefactor, Willard Sears, who asked (cont.)							
44. Description of Environment and Outbuildings (see #52) First church is at the northwest side of the intersection of two State Route, 511 and 58. These are busy thoroughfares for both in town and through town traffic.				46. Prepared by M. Fedelchak-Harley; L. Previll			
45. Sources of Information Lorain County Courthouse: Lorain County tax records. O.H.I.O. Resource Center: Oberlin Historic Preservation Commission Files; Oberlin News-Tribune, March 29, 1935. Blodgett, Geoffrey. Oberlin Architecture College and Town: A Guide to its Social History. Oberlin College, 1985. Blodgett, Geoffrey, "Father Finney's Church," Timeline, Ohio Historical Society, Jan-Feb, 1997.				47. Organization O.H.I.O. and H.P.C.			
				48. Date Recorded 9-30-2000			
				49. Revised by			
				50a. Date Revised			
				50b. Reviewed by			

51. Condition of Property

☐ Excellent☒ Good/Fair☐ Deteriorated☐ Ruin☐ Destroyed/Burned

Date _____

54. Farmstead Plan



52. Historic Outbuildings and Dependencies

Barn Type(s)

☐ Corn Crib or Shed☐ Summer Kitchen☐ Silo☐ Smoke House☐ Spring House☐ Ice House☐ Designed Landscape Features☐ Privy☐ Garage

53. Affiliated OAI Site Number(s) _____

OAI Completed? _____

Archaeological Feature:	Observed	Expected on Basis of Archival Research
Well	<u>No</u>	<u>No</u>
Privy	<u>No</u>	<u>No</u>
Cistern	<u>No</u>	<u>No</u>
Foundation	<u>No</u>	<u>No</u>
Structural Rubble	<u>No</u>	<u>No</u>
Formal Trash Dump	<u>No</u>	<u>No</u>
Other _____	<u>No</u>	<u>No</u>

42. Further Description of Important Interior and Exterior Features (Continued from page 1)

The interior has stadium-like seating and much of its original woodwork. To the north, the main building is connected to a two-story, gable roof, activity building (circa 1860), by a 20th century enclosed brick walkway with green metal panels, it provides handicapped access. A building similar in appearance to the walkway extends perpendicular from the activity building. It is also a 20th century addition and it has a kitchen and large meeting room. The rear of the church has a small playground with a recently added iron fence.

43. History and Significance (Continued from page 1.)

prominent Boston architect, Richard Bond, to design the church. In December 1841 Finney traveled to Boston, approved the plans for a Greek Revival hall with seating-in-the round (Finney's preferred congregation arrangement) and mailed the plans to Oberlin. The community decided that the details required a democratic vote; the structure was reduced in size; Greek Revival details were constrained; mortise-and-tenon joinery replaced iron bolting; and the circular seating on the ground floor was replaced with less costly rectangular pews. Ground was broken in March 1842 with Deacon Thomas P. Turner, a carpenter from Vermont, in charge. The foundation sandstone was hauled from nearby quarries. Walls were constructed of locally fired bricks, and crossbeams came from hardwood trees on a nearby farm. The congregation voted to add a cupola with clock and bell tower, but these were too costly and the clock and bell were never added. As completion approached in 1844, the community was financially drained and the project was \$500 short of completion. A proposal to auction pews was debated in a series of meetings and the final compromise reserved seats in the front for the elderly, the infirm, and the deaf, and for the theological faculty. Other pews went up for auction. The money was raised and the seating arrangement now reflected the community's social hierarchy. Despite extensive absences, Finney remained minister in First Church until 1872. when membership in the church made it the second largest congregation in the nation, surpassed only by Henry Ward Beecher's Plymouth Church in New York. Additions to the north have continued, as have renovations to the church itself. In 1882 stained-glass windows were installed, to be replaced with clear bubble-glass in 1927. And in 1892 the Doric columns that supported the balcony were removed and replaced with the current iron posts (Blodgett). In 1908 extensive alterations were made and a new \$7,500 organ was installed. It was the gift of Mr. Charles M. Hall of Niagara Falls, N.Y. "The alterations and renovations were made under the direction of Messrs. Patton and Miller, architects, of Chicago, at a cost of \$13,000" (OC General Catalogue, 1908).

This church is significant for its design and its history. It was, when built, the largest structure west of the Alleghenies. Over the years many people of national prominence have spoken in this building, including Frederick Douglass, Mark Twin, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Woodrow Wilson. The church also served as the center of college and community religious life for many years. It was listed as an Oberlin City Landmark in 1975. It was listed on the National Register as part of the Oberlin College thematic nomination in 1978.