

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Baker Presbyterian Church is a one-story clapboard structure in the Gothic Revival style. Erected in 1905, the building stands within a large religious compound near the center of town. Lush vegetation on the grounds partially hides the church's two-story crenellated bell tower. With the exception of changes to the building's rear wall which are not visible from the street, the church remains remarkably intact.

The church building stands in the shape of a simple rectangle with a slightly projecting bell tower attached at one front corner. Although hammerbeam-inspired Eastlake decoration highlights the peak of the church's front-facing gable, the crenellated and louvered belfry is the structure's most outstanding architectural feature. The castellated polygonal bell tower rises from a square base, which itself is distinguished by a flaring skirt-roof with tiny decorative brackets. Showing the influence of the Queen Anne style still popular when the church was built, several rows of fishscale shingles differentiate the skirt-roof from the plainer clapboard siding covering the rest of the belfry and the church. The building's pointed lancet windows reinforce its Gothic Revival styling. A large lancet window, subdivided by a simple tracery design into three sections, pierces the facade. Two similarly shaped entrances, each consisting of double doors below three-part pointed windows, open into a vestibule below the belfry. Both sides of the nave are pierced by rows of narrow lancet windows, each holding large one-over-one square panes of colored glass and outlined by smaller panes of colored glass in the Queen Anne style. Each of these windows is also framed by shutters. The Queen Anne glass treatment is repeated within the windows of the apse; however, these openings lack shutters.

The rectangular church nave, entered from the square corner vestibule, is highlighted by a cove ceiling with pressed metal panels depicting a laurel-like design. The original pews, pulpit, and an Eastlake grille with spindles and scrolls which frames the apse, also remain intact. The floor is angled downward from the rear to the front, allowing members of the congregation seated at the rear to look over the heads of other members of the audience.

Assessment of Integrity

The only significant alterations to the church since its construction in 1905 have occurred on the rear of the building. A door has been cut on one side of the apse, while on the other side the wall has been moved a short distance outward to accommodate sound equipment connected to a modern organ. Minor changes to the building include the installation of chimes inside -the belfry, the replacement of the interior wallpaper and part of the ceiling with celotex, the addition of ceiling fans, the replacement of the wooden front steps with brick, and the addition of a ramp with hand rails leading to the east vestibule door. Thus, the Baker Presbyterian Church appears almost exactly as it did in 1905 and retains its National Register eligibility.

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

The Baker Presbyterian Church is locally significant in the area of architecture within the context of the East Baton Rouge Parish community of Baker. The church is one of only a handful of historic buildings left in the community and is the only example of the Gothic Revival style in the city.

Although Baker was founded in 1884 in conjunction with the arrival of the railroad, the majority of the community's architecture is that of a mid-twentieth century suburb. Business needs are met by strip shopping centers typical of commercial development between the 1950s and 1980s.

Most of the city's public buildings and churches also date from this period. Baker's housing is equally unpretentious. With very few exceptions, the dwellings date no earlier than the 1940s. Most of the city's homes are modern slab on grade ranch houses which resemble those found in any other city.

Against this background, the Baker Presbyterian Church is a conspicuous landmark. Of the approximately eight buildings left from the first decade of this century (no earlier buildings appear to survive), the church is one of only three which display both significant age and rich architectural styling. The church is especially noteworthy for its crenellated Gothic bell tower with flaring skirt-roof; its interior Eastlake grille hanging above the apse; its cove ceiling with pressed metal panels; and its lancet windows, many of which also display Queen Anne styling in the treatment of the glass panes. In summary, the Baker Presbyterian Church is an architectural landmark within a community which has lost most of the symbols of its heritage. As such, it is a strong candidate for National Register listing.

Major Bibliographical References

Site visit by National Register staff.

Windshield survey of Baker, Louisiana, National Register staff.

Historic photograph of Baker Presbyterian Church.

Church records documenting date of construction. Copies in National Register file.