

## HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY - BUILDING AND STRUCTURES

Please send completed form to: National Register and State Register Coordinator,  
State Historic Preservation Office, Department of Economic and Community Development,  
One Constitution Plaza, 2nd Floor, Hartford CT 06103

\* Note: Please attach any additional or expanded information on a separate sheet.

### GENERAL INFORMATION

Building Name (Common) First Presbyterian Church of New Haven

Building Name (Historic) First Presbyterian Church of New Haven

Street Address or Location 704 Whitney Avenue

Town/City New Haven Village \_\_\_\_\_ County New Haven

Owner(s) The Presbytery of Southern New England Inc. 704 Whitney Ave., New Haven CT 06511  Public  Private

### PROPERTY INFORMATION

Present Use: RELIGION: Religious facility; church

Historic Use: RELIGION: Religious facility; church

Accessibility to public: Exterior visible from public road?  Yes  No

Interior accessible?  Yes  No If yes, explain During church events or by appointment

Style of building MODERN MOVEMENT: New Formalism Date of Construction 1966

Material(s) (Indicate use or location when appropriate):

- |   |   |   |                                       |  |
|---|---|---|---------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clapboard  | <input type="checkbox"/> Asbestos Siding        | <input type="checkbox"/> Brick  | <input type="checkbox"/> Wood Shingle | <input type="checkbox"/> Asphalt Siding  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fieldstone   | <input type="checkbox"/> Board & Batten         | <input type="checkbox"/> Stucco                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Cobblestone  | <input type="checkbox"/> Aluminum Siding |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concrete (Type <u>cast-in-place floor</u> ) | <input type="checkbox"/> Cut Stone (Type _____) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other <u>Structural clay tile</u> |                                       |  |

#### Structural System

- Wood Frame  Post & Beam  Balloon  Load bearing masonry  Structural iron or steel  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

#### Roof (Type)

- Gable  Flat  Mansard  Monitor  Sawtooth  
 Gambrel  Shed  Hip  Round  Other \_\_\_\_\_

#### (Material)

- Wood Shingle  Roll Asphalt  Tin  Slate  Asphalt Shingle  
 Built up  Tile  Other \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Stories: 1 1/2 Approximate Dimensions 70' x 94'

Structural Condition:  Excellent  Good  Fair  Deteriorated

Exterior Condition:  Excellent  Good  Fair  Deteriorated

Location Integrity:  On original site  Moved When? \_\_\_\_\_

Alterations?  Yes  No If yes, explain: Addition, 2005

**FOR OFFICE USE:** Town # \_\_\_\_\_ Site # \_\_\_\_\_ UTM \_\_\_\_\_

District:  S  NR If NR, Specify:  Actual  Potential

**PROPERTY INFORMATION (CONT'D)****Related outbuildings or landscape features:**

- Barn     Shed     Garage     Carriage House     Shop     Garden  
 Other landscape features or buildings: Paved drive & parking area at west side, mature shade trees, playground

**Surrounding Environment:**

- Open land     Woodland     Residential     Commercial     Industrial     Rural  
 High building density     Scattered buildings visible from site

## • Interrelationship of building and surroundings:

The church is located on a level 1.23-acre parcel at the northwest corner of Whitney Avenue and Huntington Street in a neighborhood of 19th- and early 20th-century single- and multi-family homes. The site is located in the Whitney Avenue National Register Historic District but is listed as non-contributing due to its recent date of construction. To the west is the Prospect Hill National Register Historic District.

• Other notable features of building or site (*Interior and/or Exterior*)

The church building is a gable-roofed rectangle, 70' x 94' in plan, nine bays long by five wide. The gables face west and east. A dramatic steeply-pitched roof rises from a low one-story height along the north and south walls, with deep overhangs sheltering the openings along those walls. The roof reaches a height of 45 feet at the ridge. A notch at the peak slightly to the west of center contains skylights lighting the interior.

See continuation sheet.

Architect 1966: John G. Dinkeloo, James P. Owens, Jr. Builder \_\_\_\_\_  
 2005: Christiaan Dinkeloo

## • Historical or Architectural importance:

The First Presbyterian Church of New Haven is significant as an elegant example of Modernist design using timeless materials - heavy timber framing, clay tile, glass, and wood shingles - for an effect that is both abstract and yet evocative of past religious and vernacular building traditions. It is also notable as a rare example of the design work of John Dinkeloo and James Owens, Jr., both partners in the firm of Roche and Dinkeloo and Associates (now KRJDA) but both primarily involved in the technical design and administrative aspects of the firm.

See continuation sheet.

## • Sources:

Brown, Elizabeth Mills; *New Haven: A Guide to Architecture and Urban Design*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1976.  
 Carley, Rachel D., *Tomorrow is Here: New Haven and the Modern Movement* (Privately printed by the New Haven Preservation Trust, New Haven CT) June, 2008.

Hudnall, Amy L. 1981. HRI 1074. *New Haven Architectural Survey*. Map/block/lot: 218/0510/01900.

See continuation sheet.

Photographer Charlotte Hitchcock Date 8/06/2016

View Multiple Views Negative on File NHPT

Name Charlotte Hitchcock Date 12/11/2016

Organization New Haven Preservation Trust

Address 922 State Street, P.O. Box 8968, New Haven, CT 06532

## • Subsequent field evaluations:

Latitude, Longitude: 41.329816, -72.914703

**Threats to the building or site:**

- None known     Highways     Vandalism     Developers     Renewal     Private  
 Deterioration     Zoning     Other \_\_\_\_\_     Explanation \_\_\_\_\_

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### Interrelationship of building and surroundings (*continued*):

The structure consists of a heavy timber framed basilica-type layout, with paired wood columns framing the full-height central nave and forming side aisles aligned with entry doors – two each in the east and west elevations. The columns are 14-inch yellow pine, sourced from suppliers of telephone poles and detailed simply with industrial-type steel hardware at the column bases and at connections with bracing and with heavy timber rafters. The roof deck of heavy timber tongue-and-groove planks is also exposed on the interior. Outside of these aisles two rows of smaller rooms range along the north and south outer walls, providing space for offices, classrooms, and toilets. Above these rooms is a structural ceiling which allows the space of the sanctuary to extend visually to the exterior wall line, for some attic-like storage space and for placement of acoustical material.

The eastern six bays form the sanctuary, with an interior wall separating it from the western three bays, designed as a gathering space known as the Copeland Room. The lower walls are constructed of dark red-brown structural clay tile while the upper walls of the gable ends and of the interior separation wall are glazed with large-scale glass panels. The tile walls comprising the building envelope are offset toward the interior of the structural column lines so that they articulate a distinction between supporting structure and weather-tight enclosure.

Perimeter spaces are day-lit by pairs of French doors centered in the bays, thus providing both light and egress. The main building entrances are solid doors with glazed sidelights located in the east and west end walls between pairs of columns. Square vestibules projecting into the interior provide air locks at each entry door. The floor is a concrete slab with carpet finish.

The original scheme placed the altar below the skylights, with seating facing west along the long axis. Within a year of its 1968 occupancy, the congregation found that they preferred a more intimate arrangement with pews facing north and the altar and lectern placed in the north aisle. The pews, altar, and lectern are custom-built in simple designs with square steel tube framing and wood plank surfaces, and were easily re-configured. An organ was installed in 1969, at the east end in an alcove formed by the entry vestibules. The church building was used in this form until 2005, when an addition, the Owens Community Building, was built adjacent to the north, connected by a covered outside walkway. The addition provides a larger and air conditioned gathering space, full kitchen, and new classroom, infant, and toddler spaces, along with accessible toilet rooms.

### Historical or Architectural importance (*continued*):

This congregation dates back to 1886, when the Presbyterian Church in New Haven was located downtown. The community grew to as many as 500 in the 1920s, but the numbers shrank in the years of the Great Depression, due to differences in belief and practice, as well as economic conditions. Eventually the First Presbyterian congregation sold the downtown property and purchased the present site, where they worshipped in a carriage house at the rear of the property. In the early 1900s, the property had been the home of Hobart B. Ives, head of the H. B. Ives Hardware Company. By the 1950s, the owner was William R. Shaffer, and the congregation acquired the property from his estate.

After ten years, the congregation decided to undertake construction of a new church on the site; the new building replaced the existing main house and carriage house. The designers were two members, John Dinkeloo and Jim Owens, both architects with Eero Saarinen's firm and its successor firm of Roche and Dinkeloo. Saarinen (1910-1961) had relocated his offices from Bloomfield, Michigan to Hamden,

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Connecticut shortly before to his untimely death. Kevin Roche and John Dinkeloo emerged from the transition as partners in a successful and renowned design firm.

The budget for the church was minimal and the building was designed and constructed with economical materials from industrial sources, and by using excess material from one of the architects' prior projects. The yellow pine columns were re-purposed telephone poles, while the clay tile exterior walls were built of leftover material from the New Haven Coliseum, designed by Roche and Dinkeloo and just completed (opened in 1969).

The design is fully Modernist in its simplicity and clarity of structure and function. Yet it resonates with the religious building traditions of prior centuries, whether one is reminded of the early Christian basilica, the wooden stave churches of Northern Europe, the timber construction of colonial New England, or the craftsmanship of Adirondack camps. Sketches from the design process illustrate how the design evolved from an initial model based on an Early Christian basilica with clerestories in the upper walls of the nave. A Modernist interpretation had flat roofs over the nave and aisles. The final scheme, with the introduction of the sweeping roof covering nave and side aisle spaces, simplified the concept dramatically. It clarified the expression of the sanctuary as the significant space, with the small side rooms sheltered under the main roof.

For both Owens and Dinkeloo, the design of their community's place of worship was a unique opportunity. Both were involved in the areas of their profession that dealt with the execution of building projects – more with construction detail and administration than with the overall design scheme. They worked somewhat in the background, not garnering the public renown of Eero Saarinen or Kevin Roche. This building is a singular example of the design work of these two architects, and clearly a labor of love.

Newspaper coverage at the time by the *New Haven Register* referred to the popular perception of the building as designed in "telephone pole Gothic." With its clean lines and simple details, it combines Modernism with folk-art qualities. The church has been treasured by its owners and has been carefully maintained with continued guidance from Jim Owens through the recent building campaign on which he collaborated with architect Christiaan Dinkeloo (a son of John Dinkeloo) on the design.

### Architects:

**John Gerard Dinkeloo** (1918-1981) was born in Holland, Michigan. He received a Bachelor of Architecture, in Architectural Engineering from the University of Michigan in 1942. He served in the Naval Construction Battalion during World War II. After the war he was head of production for Skidmore, Owings & Merrill in Chicago. He joined the firm of Eero Saarinen in 1950. Dinkeloo was involved in work on the General Motors Technical Center in Warren, Michigan, at the time one of the largest and most technically sophisticated postwar projects. He became a Saarinen partner in 1956, and moved to Hamden, Connecticut when the firm relocated. After Saarinen's death in 1961, Dinkeloo continued the firm with Kevin Roche. An unassuming man, John Dinkeloo was well known and widely respected. He innovated in technical building components including the design of reflective curtain wall glazing, with structural Neoprene gasket seals, and the use of weathering steel in exposed structures.

**James P. Owens, Jr.** (b. 1936) attended the University of Michigan and received his Bachelor of Architecture in 1959. He joined Eero Saarinen and Associates in 1957 while he was a student, and went on to become a project manager with Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo and Associates. In 1982, Owens became a principal of the firm. Projects from the 1960s include: CBS headquarters building in New York City; Union Carbide world headquarters in Danbury, Connecticut; Deere & Company headquarters in Moline, Illinois; expansions of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.

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### Sources (*continued*):

Interviews: with Bruce Peabody at the site, by C. Hitchcock, 12/21/2016; with Jim Owens by telephone, 1/12/2017.

AIA Historical Directory of American Architects,  
<http://public.aia.org/sites/hdoaa/wiki/Wiki%20Pages/What's%20here.aspx>

Devlin, William, and Bruce Clouette. 1988. Whitney Avenue Historic District National Register Nomination No. 88003209. National Park Service.

First Presbyterian Church of New Haven  
Church web site, accessed 12/21/2016 at: <http://fpcnh.org/about-us/about-the-building/>  
Booklet commemorating celebration of 125 years. 2011.

Fitch, James Marston. 1973. *American Building: the Historical Forces That Shaped It, Second Edition*. New York: Shoken Books.

Glueck, Grace. 6/16/1981. Dinkeloo, John G., obituary. *New York Times*.

KRJDA web site (formerly Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo and Associates). Page for James Owens, AIA.  
Accessed 12/21/2016 at: [http://www.krjda.com/Sites/FirmPrincipals\\_Owens.html](http://www.krjda.com/Sites/FirmPrincipals_Owens.html) .

### Maps and aerial views:

Bing Maps accessed at: <https://www.bing.com/mapspreview>

Google Maps accessed at: <https://www.google.com/maps/> .

Metz, Don and Yuji Noga. 1966. *New Architecture in New Haven*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

New Haven Modern web site. New Haven Preservation Trust. Accessed at: <http://newhavenmodern.org/>

Owens, James P., Jr. 2011. PowerPoint presentation for First Presbyterian Church of New Haven celebration of 125 years.

Streuli & Puckhafer Engineers with City Engineer Cassius Kelly. 1911. Plate 10. *Atlas of New Haven*. Boston: Walker Lithograph & Publishing Company.

Wright, Gwendolyn. 2008. *USA: modern architectures in history*. London: Reaktion Books.



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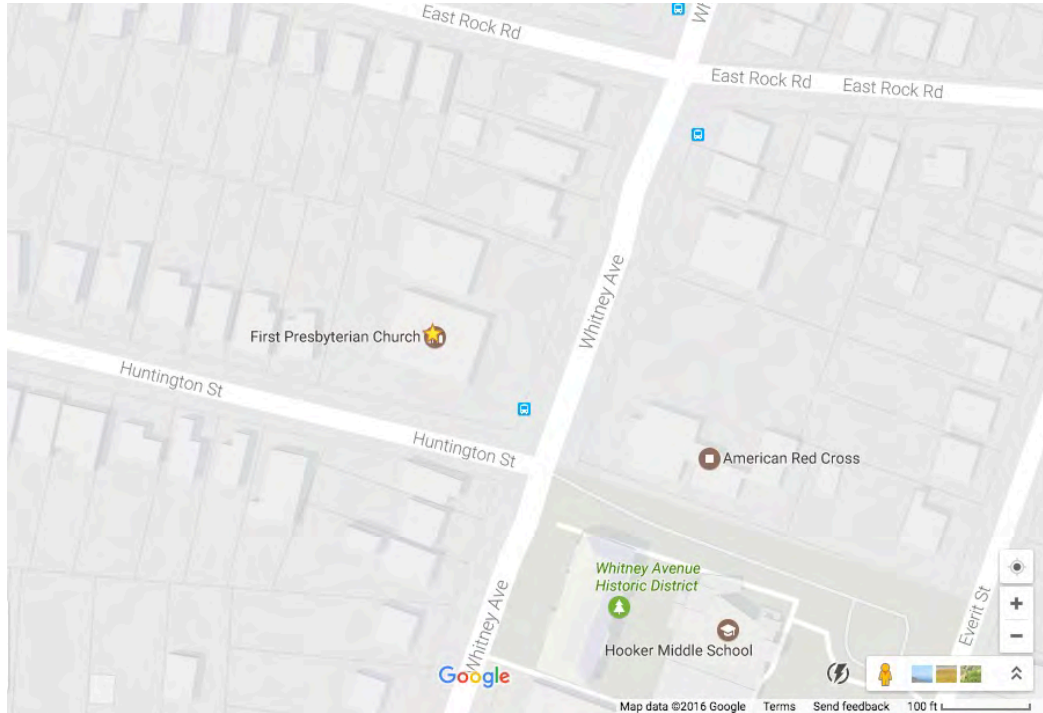


Figure 1. Location map of First Presbyterian Church, 704 Whitney Avenue. Image from Google Maps accessed 12/13/2016.

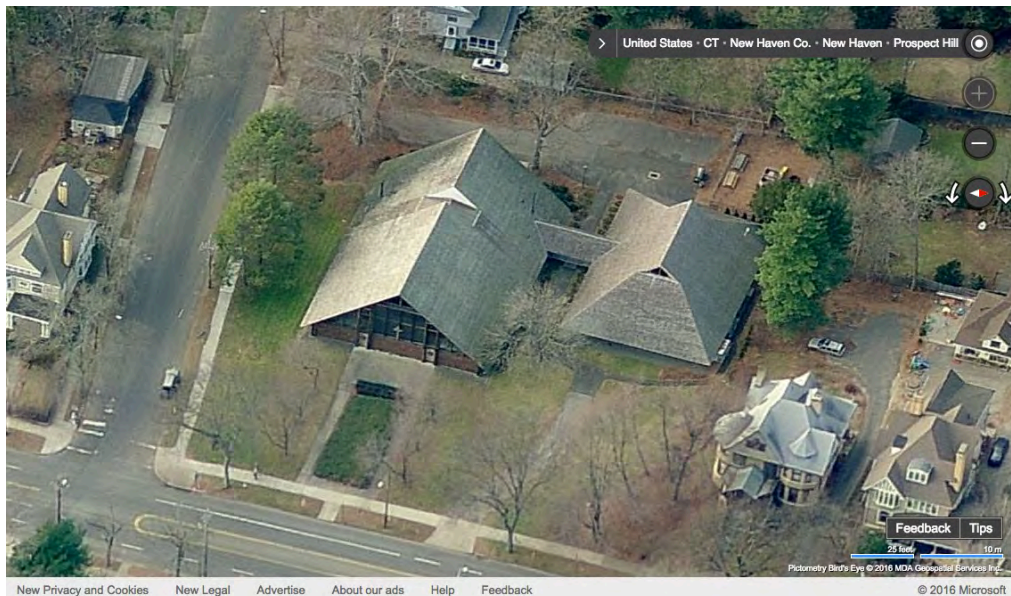


Figure 2. East aerial view of First Presbyterian Church, 704 Whitney Avenue. Image from Bing Maps accessed 12/13/2016.

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Photo 3. East view of First Presbyterian Church, 704 Whitney Avenue, camera facing west.



Photo 4. Southeast view, camera facing northwest. Note the original signage at right.



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Photo 5. Northeast view; camera facing southwest.



Photo 6. Detail view of south elevation, camera facing north.



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Photo 7. Detail view of the southeast corner; camera facing northwest.

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Photo 8. Southwest view from the rear driveway, camera facing northeast.



Photo 9. Interior view of the sanctuary, camera facing east, showing the organ at the east wall.



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Photo 10. Interior detail view of the altar and lectern placed along the north wall of the sanctuary, camera facing northwest. Pews and furnishings were designed and built by the architects and parishioners.



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Photo 11. Interior view of the sanctuary, camera facing northwest, showing the skylights and glass partition between the Copeland Room to the west, and the sanctuary.

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Photo 12. Interior view of the Copeland Room, camera facing south. Doorway at rear leads to pastor's office (right) and Sunday school rooms (left) along the south side.



Photo 13. Interior view of a typical Sunday school room on the south side, camera facing east. The door at left rear leads to the music director's office.



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Photo 14. Photo of site before construction, with main house and carriage house at rear, camera facing west.  
Photo courtesy of Jim Owens.

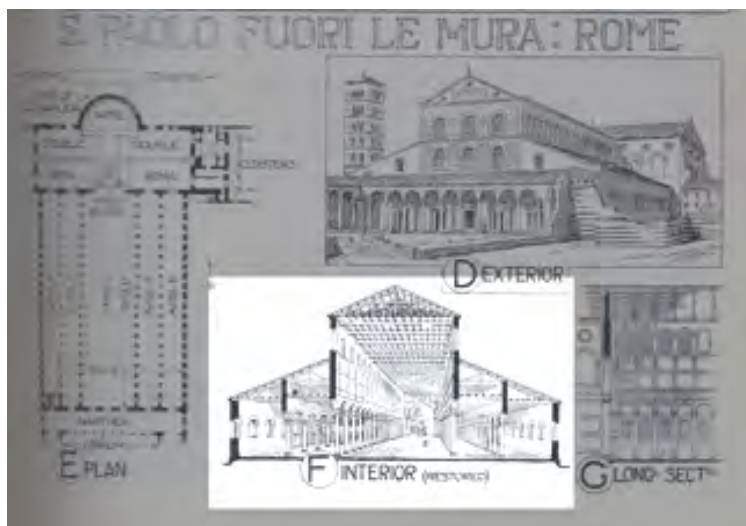


Figure 15. Inspiration for the plan – Early Christian basilica building type. Illustration and architectural drawings that follow are courtesy of Jim Owens.



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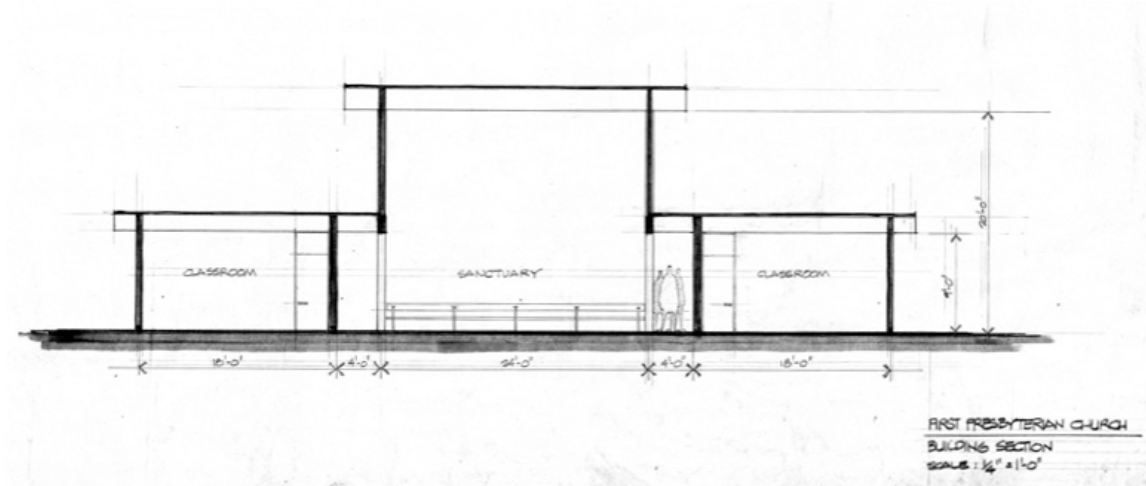


Figure 16. Schematic design section for scheme with flat roofs, 1966, Jim Owens and John Dinkeloo.

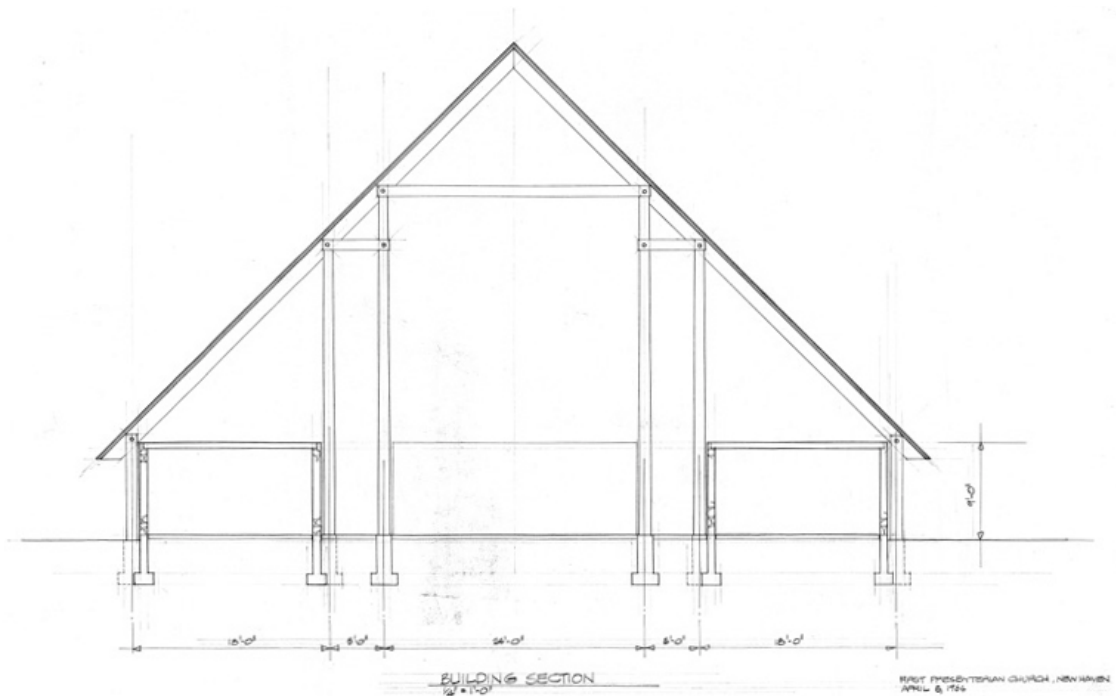


Figure 17. Design section for scheme with single pitch gable roof, 1966, Jim Owens and John Dinkeloo.

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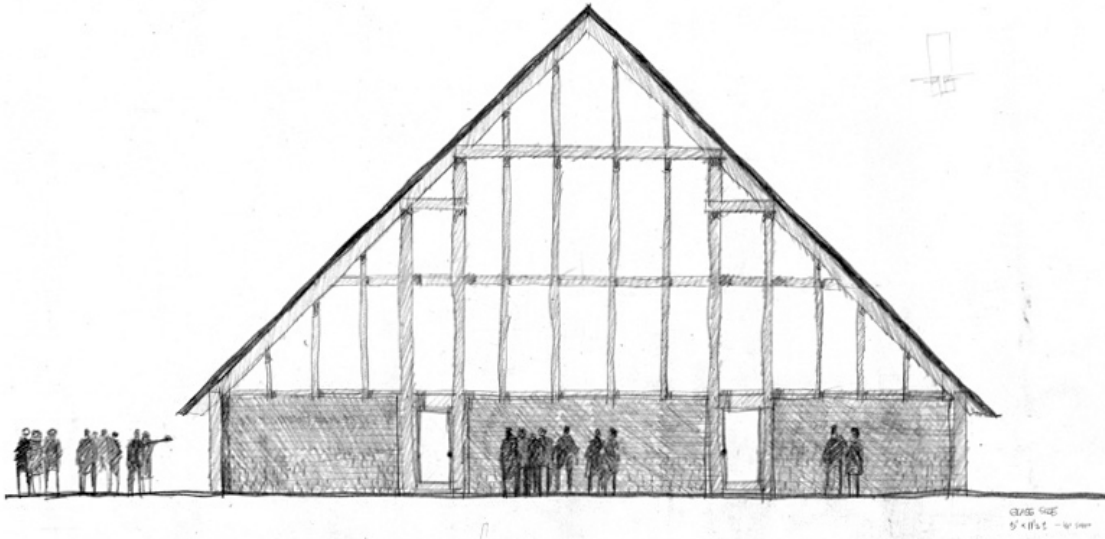


Figure 18. Sketch for east elevation, 1966, Jim Owens and John Dinkeloo.

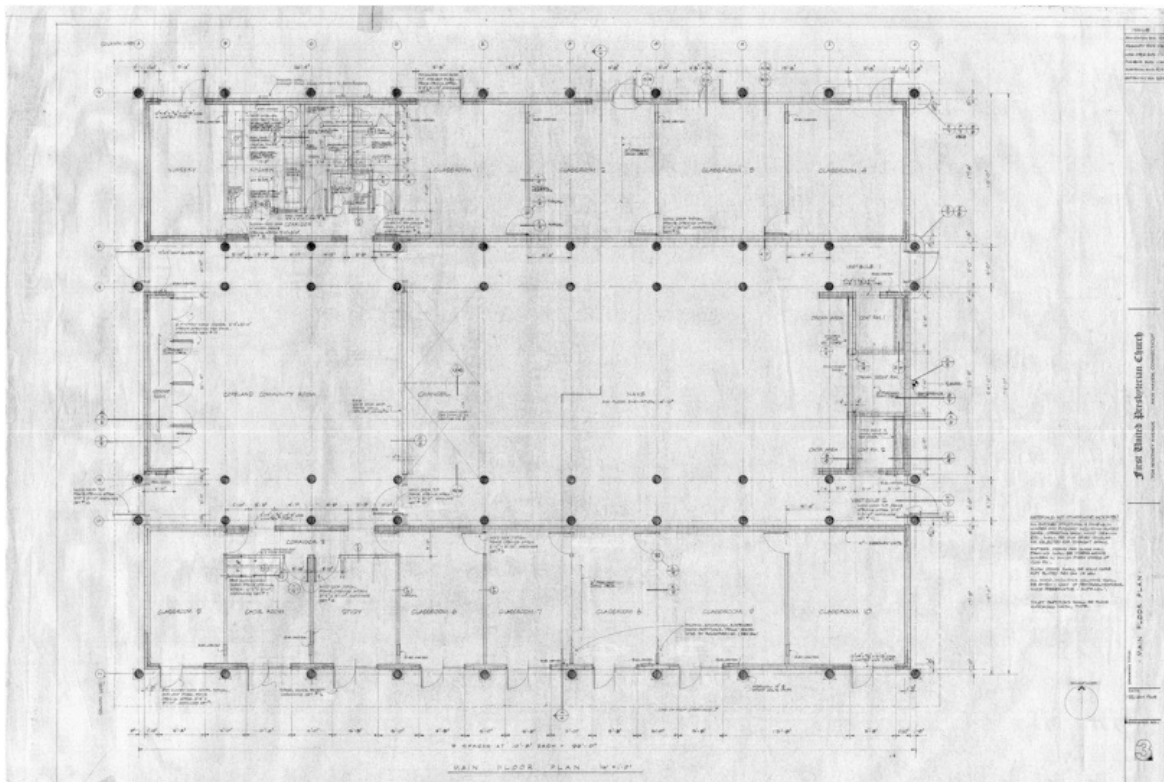


Figure 19. Building plan, 1966, Jim Owens and John Dinkeloo.

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Photo 20. Photograph during construction, camera facing west. Photo courtesy of Jim Owens.