

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Trinity United Methodist Church

AGENDA ITEM: A

OWNERS: Trinity United Methodist Church

HPO FILE NO.: HP2026_0351

APPLICANTS: Same as Owner

DATE ACCEPTED: Dec-4-2025

LOCATION: 2600 Holman Street

HAHC HEARING: Feb-12-2026

SITE INFORMATION: Lots 1-8 and 17-20 Block 1, Smith Furniture Co. Section 2. The property consists of a 1951 sanctuary/education building and parsonage and a 1946 former church building, remodeled and connected to the 1951 buildings with a new addition in 1990. The designation applies only to the 1951 sanctuary/education building and parsonage.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark/Protected Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

Trinity United Methodist Church is a mid-century-modern church building designed by George Pierce – Abel B. Pierce and built in 1951 for Trinity United Methodist Church. From its beginnings with the enslaved congregation of Houston's earliest Methodist church, Trinity United Methodist Church grew to become one of the primary institutions for Black Houstonians. The 1915 Red Book of Houston describes Trinity as “the mother” of the ten Methodist Episcopal churches in Houston and “the forerunner of the sister Methodist churches, the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church.” The original c. 1851 church building, built on Houston Methodist Church property by its Black congregants, was moved to Travis and Bell, on property the trustees acquired in 1866, shortly after Emancipation. Pastor Elias Dibble and several trustees who helped to acquire the new church property also helped to secure other significant properties for the African American community, including Emancipation Park and Olivewood Cemetery. Trinity Church and its members had a role in the establishment of the Mutual Aid Society of Houston, the Gregory Institute, Wiley College, and Texas Southern University. In 1867, Trinity Church served as the location of the organization of the Texas Mission Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church (North). In its subsequent buildings on the Travis and Bell property, the church served its own congregation as well as the larger Black community of Houston.

After the church was heavily damaged by fire in 1946, the congregation acquired property in Houston's Third Ward at Holman and Live Oak and hired architects George Pierce – Abel B. Pierce to design a new building. The 1951 sanctuary is a relatively early example of post-World War II modern religious architecture in Houston. It exemplifies the use of traditional church forms with restrained modernistic detailing that typified modern church design in this transitional era. In the early 1990s, the congregation acquired the former Pilgrim Congregational Church at Live Oak and Berry, remodeled it to resemble the 1951 church building, and connected it to the 1951 building with an addition. In 1995, the congregation hired artist Laura Jean Lacy to design 11 new stained-glass windows depicting Black history and the Civil Rights movement along with traditional religious themes. The windows, though relatively new, are a fitting addition for an institution that has had such an important impact on Houston's Black community dating back to its original enslaved members.

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Trinity United Methodist Church meets Criteria 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, and 8 for Landmark designation and Criterion 1 for Protected Landmark designation. The building was designated a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark (RTHL) in 2025. This nomination was written by Emily Ardoin with Preservation Houston.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

Trinity United Methodist Church

Following the Civil War, churches were the primary institutions that allowed newly emancipated Black citizens to establish a sense of social bonding and autonomy as they moved around and established communities. As Reconstruction gave way to the Jim Crow era, religious institutions expanded to fill the social and communal gaps created by segregation. Churches offered opportunities for education, economic support, and social development for African American communities who were otherwise excluded from these services.

Black religious life grew rapidly with settlement following the Civil War. The two earliest African American congregations in Houston were Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church, which grew out of First Methodist Episcopal Church South, and Antioch Baptist Church, founded in 1866 by formerly enslaved African American congregants. Religious leaders were instrumental in establishing some of Houston's earliest Black institutions, including Emancipation Park, Olivewood Cemetery, and benevolent societies and educational institutions.

The Methodist Episcopal Church South, which included Methodist churches in Texas, split from the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1844 over the issue of slavery. In January 1867, Bishop Matthew Simpson of the Methodist Episcopal Church (North) came to Houston and organized the Texas Conference, originally named the Texas Mission Conference, at what is today Trinity United Methodist Church. The post-Civil War vision that the Methodist Episcopal Church would be a fully integrated conference proved unworkable, so in 1872, the African American, German, and Anglo churches divided into three conferences, with the African American churches remaining in the Texas Conference. When the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church South, and the Methodist Protestant churches united in 1939 under the name "Methodist Church," the African American churches were again segregated into their own conference, the "Central Jurisdiction" of the Methodist Church. The conferences were finally integrated following the 1968 merger of the Methodist Church with the Evangelical United Brethren to become the United Methodist Church.

The Texas Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church was established in 1841 with Reverend Thomas O. Summers (1812-1882) assigned to a combined Houston and Galveston district. When the two districts were split in 1842, Reverend Summers went to Houston. Summers established the Houston Methodist Church and laid the cornerstone for its first building on March 2, 1843. He was transferred to the Alabama Conference later that year, and the church was completed in 1844. From its beginning, the Galveston/Houston district of the Texas Annual Conference included Black congregants. The Houston Methodist Church congregation included enslaved Black members; the congregation was segregated with Black members seated in galleries or served at different times. An African Mission was formally established in Houston by 1848 with Orceneath Fisher (1803-1880) serving as the pastor. A few years later, likely in 1851, members of the African Mission at the Houston Methodist Church constructed a separate building for their worship services at Travis and Milam (no

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longer extant). For a period of time after Emancipation, the white community referred to the separate church as the “Freedmen’s Methodist Church” or “Freedmen’s Methodist Episcopal Church.”

Reverend David Elias Dibble (1811-1885) was born enslaved in the state of Georgia on December 9, 1811. He joined the Methodist Episcopal Church at age 14 in 1825, and he was brought to Houston in 1837. Beyond his work at Trinity Church, Reverend Dibble helped to establish several early Black institutions in Houston, including the Gregory Institute, the Mutual Aid Society of the City of Houston, Emancipation Park, and Olivewood Cemetery.

Church history holds that Rev. Dibble presided over a meeting in March of 1865 at the home of Richard Brock (1824-1906) to organize a new church. On February 7, 1866, a deed was recorded from C.C. Speers to “Elias Dibble, Preacher in Charge and Charles Chatman, John Sessums, Peter Jackson, Peter Noble, Edward Brooks, Frank Vance, and Sam Noble, Trustees of the African Methodist Church of Houston” for Block 319, SSBB bounded by Travis, Bell, Milam and Clay. Instead of building a new sanctuary, leaders of the Trinity congregation moved the c. 1851 church building to the new property. The *New Orleans Advocate* noted the importance of the incorporation and acquisition:

The trustees have filed the certificate of their election, and are thus the second incorporated society among colored people in Texas. They will now hold and control their own Church property, as, under the new order of things, they are guaranteed the rights of property, and may protect it before the law.

The Texas Mission Conference was organized on January 3, 1867 at Trinity Church, called “the Houston M. E. Church” at the time. Elias Dibble, Samuel Osborn, James Davis, George Edward Brooks, and Joseph Welch were transferred to the newly formed Texas Conference. Elias Dibble was ordained as a deacon at this time.

In 1879, the cornerstone was laid for a new wood-frame church building (no longer extant) under Reverend John K. Loggins (c. 1836-1910). The building committee included Frank Vance, Thomas Freeman and Professor H. C. Hardy. The new church was dedicated December 20, 1882 under Reverend I. B. Scott (1854-1931). The 1882 church building served the Trinity congregation until it was severely damaged by the 1900 Storm. The building underwent extensive renovation and repair, and the new church was dedicated under Rev. Wade Hampton Logan (1857-1922) with a “Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church Entrance Day” on May 18, 1902.

The 1902 church building was again severely damaged in a fire on July 24, 1946. The building suffered extensive damage, including the loss of the roof, church records, the organ, and other valuable items. Services were held in the basement of the church until Trinity sold the property to First Methodist Church in 1949. Trinity held services in the Calanthe Building (extant) from 1949 to 1951, when the congregation moved to a newly acquired property in Houston’s Third Ward.

Architects George Pierce – Abel B. Pierce designed a church building for the new property, and contractor James B. Dent constructed the building. Allen E. Norton, dean of the Houston College for Negroes (now Texas Southern University), chaired the building committee. The architects designed the church to accommodate 453 parishioners in the sanctuary with “adjoining dining and assembly rooms, separated by removable partitions and plate glass” to seat 234 additional people. A second story at the

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rear (southwest side) of the sanctuary was included for educational use, and a separate parsonage and office building was designed for the east side across an enclosed courtyard. In 1950, the cost was projected to be \$135,000. Members of the Heights Masonic Lodge no. 280 laid the cornerstone for the new building on December 10, 1950.

Trinity United Methodist Church has a rich history of serving the community beyond its church congregation, and this tradition continued at the new campus. The new location moved the church to one of the centers of African American life at the time, near the Houston College for Negroes (now Texas Southern University), Yates High School, Houston Negro Hospital (now Riverside General Hospital, NRHP 1982), the Eldorado Ballroom (NRHP 2021), and Emancipation Park, which its pastor, Elias Dibble, had helped establish in 1872. Community events documented in the *Houston Chronicle* in the new church include a convention of the Texas Association of Colored Graduate Nurses in 1951, a baccalaureate sermon for Yates High School graduates in 1955, and a reception for new public-school retirees of the Houston Classroom Teachers Association in 1955. The Citizens Committee for Welfare Development, which sought to establish homes for Black children and elders who lacked housing, was established during a meeting of religious and community leaders at the church in 1958.

Trinity United Methodist Church remains part of the Texas Annual Conference. The church is in the Metro District with Dr. Elijah Stansell, District Superintendent. The present pastor of Trinity United Methodist Church is The Reverend Ed C. Jones, III.

George Pierce & Abel B. Pierce

The 1951 building was designed by Houston architects George Pierce – Abel B. Pierce, during a 21-year partnership that began in 1948. The architects, who were not related, both studied at the Rice Institute (now Rice University) under William Ward Watkin. Abel Brown Pierce, Jr. (1909-2004) was born in St. Paul, Minnesota on October 20, 1909. He earned a Bachelor of Arts from the Rice Institute in 1930 and a Bachelor of Architecture from the University of Pennsylvania in 1932. George F. Pierce, Jr. (1919-1998) was born in Dallas, Texas on June 22, 1919. He earned his Bachelor of Arts at the Rice Institute in 1942 and a Bachelor of Science in Architecture, also at the Rice Institute, in 1943.

Before their partnership, Abel Pierce worked as a draftsman and designer for Harry D. Payne and a draftsman and job supervisor for Nunn & McGinty. George Pierce worked as a draftsman for Fooshee & Cheek in Dallas and for Nunn & McGinty and Kenneth Franzheim in Houston. He partnered with Herbert Cowell from 1946 to 1947 and worked on his own from 1947 to 1948. George Pierce also worked as an instructor at the Rice Institute from 1945 to 1946 after serving in the United States Navy as an ensign. He served as Secretary-Treasurer of the Texas Society of Architects in 1953 and chair of the Chapter Affairs Committee from 1955 to 1960. He was named a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects in 1961.

Trinity Methodist Church was a relatively early commission for George Pierce – Abel B. Pierce and their only known design for a house of worship. Watkin included the design as an example in his 1951 book *Planning and Building the Modern Church*. The architects won an AIA Houston Honorable Mention for the project in 1953. Their later high-profile projects included the Houston Museum of Natural Science (1964), the master plan and two terminal buildings at Bush Intercontinental Airport

(1969), and several campus buildings at both the University of Houston and Rice University. E. J. Goodwin, Jr. and Robert B. Flanagan were appointed as additional partners in the Pierce – Pierce firm in 1959. Goodwin had joined the firm in 1952, and Flanagan had joined in 1953. After Abel Pierce established a separate practice in 1969, the firm reorganized as Pierce Goodwin & Flanagan in 1970. The firm changed its name to Pierce Goodwin Alexander in 1976 and again to Pierce Goodwin Alexander & Linville by 1989. Now known as PGAL, the firm remains in operation as one of the largest architecture firms in Texas.

Architectural Significance

The 1951 Trinity United Methodist Church building is a relatively early example of post-World War II modern religious architecture in Houston, predicated by projects such as St. Rose of Lima Parish Hall and School (1948), Congregation Adath Emeth Synagogue (1948), and Congregation Emanu El Temple (1949). Zion Lutheran Church (3606 Beauchamp, Travis Broeche) and First Unitarian Church (5200 Fannin, Thomas E. Greacean) were built the same year. Trinity exemplifies the use of traditional church forms with restrained modernistic detailing that typified modern church design in this transitional era. Architect George F. Pierce described the design as “conservative contemporary style intended to represent our present life-style but to live in good taste beyond our ever-changing, short lived design trends.” It is one of relatively few architect-designed modernist churches in Houston built by predominantly Black congregations. Others include Mount Corinth Missionary Baptist Church (4901 Providence, Travis Broesche, c. 1954), First Shiloh Baptist Church (4420 Lyons Ave., John S. Chase, 1955), Greater Zion Missionary Baptist Church (3201 Trulley St., John S. Chase, 1958), Saint James United Methodist Church (1218 Wilson St., Conrad B. Akins, 1957), Boynton Chapel United Methodist Church (2812 Milby St., John S. Chase, 1958), Mount Zion Baptist Church (2400 Nagle St., John S. Chase, 1963), Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church (3826 Wheeler Ave., Howard Barnstone and Gene Aubry, c. 1967 – demolished), and Pilgrim Congregational United Church of Christ (3115 Blodgett Street, Lawrence A. Collins, 1971).

Churches similar in form remained popular through the 1950s as many religious buildings retained their traditional plans while others evolved into more novel forms. Examples of the traditional form include later architect-designed churches such as Mount Corinth Missionary Baptist Church, Westminster United Methodist Church (5801 San Felipe St., Smart & Whitehead/James B. Dent, c. 1954), and St. Matthew’s United Methodist Church (4300 N. Shepherd Dr., C. A. Johnson and Walter B. Johnson, 1958), and more modest examples including Ebenezer United Methodist Church (7302 N. Main St.), Pleasantville United Methodist Church (1403 Demaree Ln.), and Calvary United Methodist Church (4819 Denmark St.).

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

Trinity United Methodist Church is a complex of three attached buildings located at the corner of Holman and Live Oak Streets in Houston’s Third Ward. The surrounding neighborhood is primarily residential. The primary building is a double-height chapel with an axial plan and rear balcony and a two-story volume with a fellowship hall and classrooms at the rear (southwest). This building has a moderately pitched tar-and-gravel gabled roof with a subtle flying gable facing Holman Street. The building is clad in pink St. Joseph brick veneer with redwood trim. Three protruding header courses and one protruding stretcher course create a band around the base of the building beginning directly below

the windows. The chapel and classrooms create a T shape with a square tower in the interior corner on the northwest side. The tower is topped with a slender copper spire and square cornice. The primary building entrance is located at the bottom of the tower; a newer breezeway supported by square brick columns leads from this entrance to the sidewalk. A covered secondary entrance is located near the northwest corner facing Live Oak Street. Four large stained-glass windows are located along the side wall of the narthex, and two smaller stained-glass windows are located on the protruding bays at the outer edges.

The northeast elevation facing Holman Street is the rear wall of the chancel. This elevation is symmetrical with the center portion of the wall protruding below the gable. This portion is defined by protruding header courses extending the full height of the wall and a built-in brick planter around the base. A large wood cross and stained-glass rose window form a Celtic cross in the center of the elevation. On the northeast side, a one-story wing extends toward the southeast and connects to a covered breezeway leading to the parsonage. A breezeway also extends southwest along the southeast elevation with infilled windows below the covering and four stained-glass windows along the narthex above. The southwest (rear) wall of the chapel building has ganged metal-framed casement windows at the first and second stories. A recessed entrance is present on the first story at the northwest edge, and the southeast side connects to a one-story enclosed hallway leading to the education building.

The 1951 parsonage is a two-story building with a one-story former garage facing Holman Street and a one-story volume at the southwest corner. The one-story volumes are visually connected along the northwest and southeast sides. The roofs on the one-story portions are hipped; the two-story portion has dual shed roofs. Most of the building is clad in vertical wood siding. The one-story portion is clad in wood shingles on the southeast and southwest sides and brick veneer on the northwest and northeast sides. A former garage door facing Holman Street is infilled with vertical wood siding. Windows throughout the parsonage are vinyl. Windows facing Holman Street are horizontal fixed windows on the first story and horizontal sliding windows on the second story.

Restoration History

In 1990, Trinity acquired a 1942 building at the corner of Live Oak and Berry Streets and subsequently remodeled it to match the Trinity campus. The building originally belonged to the Pilgrim Congregational Church (now Pilgrim Congregational United Church of Christ), another primarily Black congregation that relocated in 1942 from their original location at Wilson and Cleveland in the Fourth Ward. Trinity constructed a new hallway addition to connect the remodeled Pilgrim building to the Trinity chapel community room.

Overall, the chapel and parsonage retain their appearance from 1951; the church campus also retains the residential setting of its period of significance. Design and material alterations are relatively minor. Exterior alterations include the addition of a pedestrian covering on the northwest side from the sidewalk to the main entry doors, replacement of the entry doors in 1990, apparent replacement of the second-floor rectory windows with vinyl windows, and removal of the former parsonage garage door and infill with vertical wood siding.

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The original northwest and southeast windows were replaced in their original openings in 1995. The church commissioned Dallas artist Laura Jean Lacy (1932-2023) to design 11 new stained-glass windows depicting Black history and the Civil Rights movement along with traditional religious themes. Eight of the windows include people and images representing historic themes including the Old and New Testaments, the civil rights movement, Black women, Black Methodists, and the Camp Logan Third Battalion, 24th United States Infantry. Three abstract, geometric windows combine African American quilt designs, symbols of the Trinity, and the North Star, symbolizing freedom for enslaved people seeking liberation. A committee of congregation members completed historical research and collaborated with the artist on the themes.

This was the second of three similar commissions produced by Lacy. She had previously completed a larger commission for St. Luke Community United Methodist Church in Dallas in 1993, and she completed a third for New Hope Baptist Church in Dallas in 2000. These commissions were all preceded by two sets of prints she made for the Southern California-Arizona Conference of the United Methodist Church in 1973 and 1978. The prints depicted "Biblical Images Through the Black Experience" and the church's board of education commissioned them for use as an educational tool in Black religious schools. Lacy intended for her stained-glass commissions to serve an educational purpose as well.

The former Pilgrim Congregational Church has been altered more significantly, though its original church form is still apparent. The c. 1990 renovation included the addition of brick veneer and vertical wood exterior cladding, replacement of the entry porch, replacement of the gable vent with a rose window, removal of the front windows, alteration of the side windows, extension of the roof eaves and rake, and addition of a secondary entrance on the southwest side.

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The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented with additional research and sources by Samantha de Leon, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.

APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION

Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation

(a) The HAHC, in making recommendations with respect to designation, and the city council, in making a designation, shall consider one or more of the following criteria, as appropriate for the type of designation:

S	NA	S - satisfies	D - does not satisfy	NA - not applicable
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	(1) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area possesses character, interest or value as a visible reminder of the development, heritage, and cultural and ethnic diversity of the city, state, or nation;		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	(2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event;		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	(3) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is identified with a person who, or group or event that, contributed significantly to the cultural or historical development of the city, state, or nation;		

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- (4) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area exemplify a particular architectural style or building type important to the city;
- (5) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area are the best remaining examples of an architectural style or building type in a neighborhood;
- (6) Whether the building, structure, object or site or the buildings, structures, objects or sites within the area are identified as the work of a person or group whose work has influenced the heritage of the city, state, or nation;
- (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present;
- (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride.

AND

- (9) If less than 50 years old, or proposed historic district containing a majority of buildings, structures, or objects that are less than 50 years old, whether the building, structure, object, site, or area is of extraordinary importance to the city, state or nation for reasons not based on age (Sec. 33-224(b)).

Sec. 33-229. Criteria for protected landmark designation

S	NA	S - satisfies	D - does not satisfy	NA - not applicable
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	(1) Meets at least three of the criteria for designation in section 33-224 of this Code;		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	(2) Was constructed more than 100 years before application for designation was received by the director;		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	(3) Is listed individually or as a contributing structure in an historic district on the National Register of Historic Places; or		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	(4) Is recognized by the State of Texas as a Recorded State Historical Landmark.		

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to City Council the Landmark Designation of the Trinity United Methodist Church at 2600 Holman Street.

HAHC RECOMMENDATION **[LEAVE BLANK FOR HAHC REPORT – INCLUDE FOR ACTION REPORT]**

The Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommends to City Council the Landmark Designation of the **[Full Name of Landmark]** at **[Address]**.

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EXHIBIT A PHOTOS

TRINITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
2600 HOLMAN STREET



Northeast (front) elevation, facing southwest



Northeast and northwest elevations, facing south

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Northwest elevation, facing southeast



New connector and renovated Pilgrim Baptist Church, facing south from Live Oak St.

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Courtyard, facing northeast



Courtyard and parsonage, facing northeast

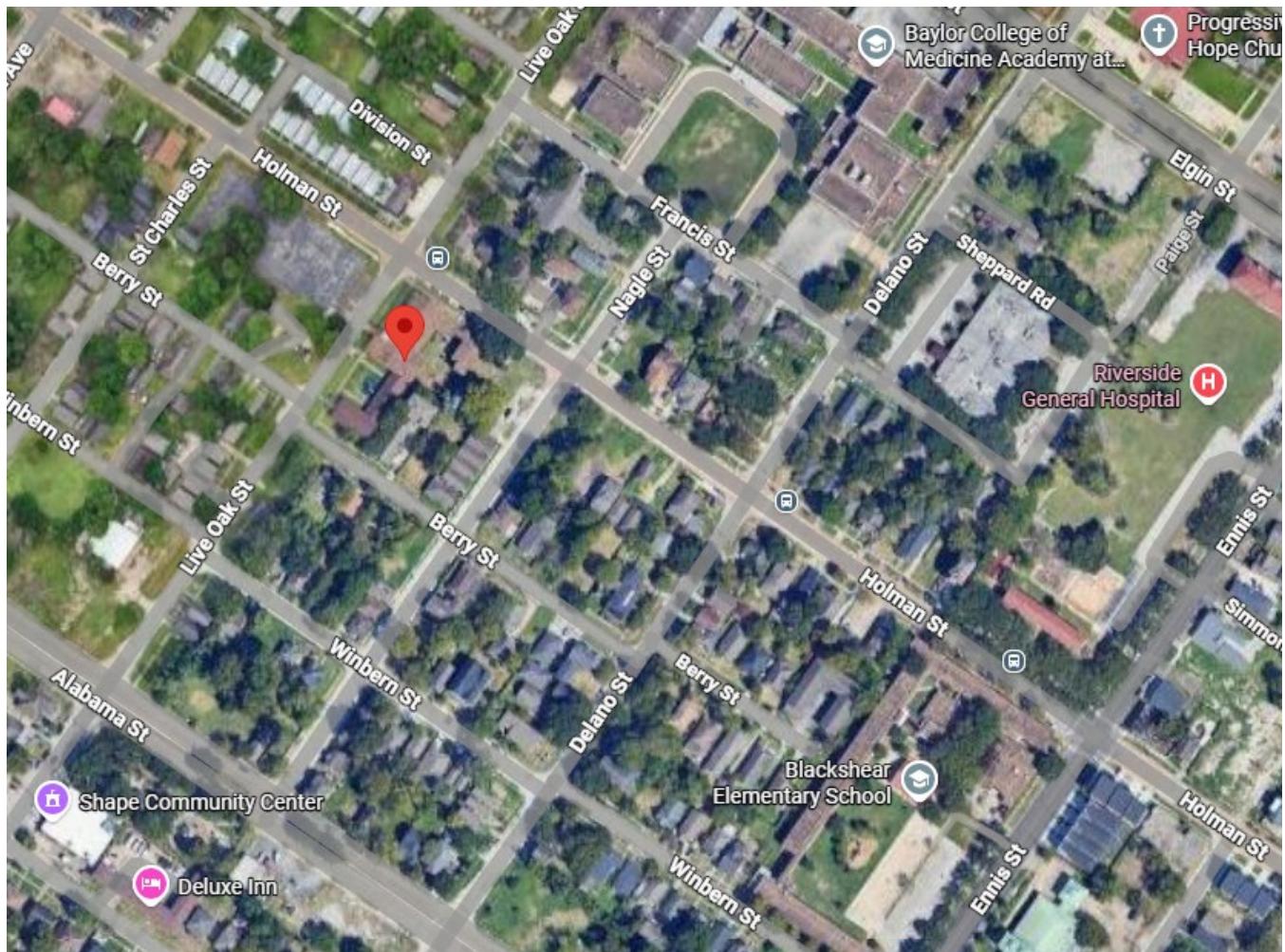
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EXHIBIT B SITE MAP

TRINITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
2600 HOLMAN STREET



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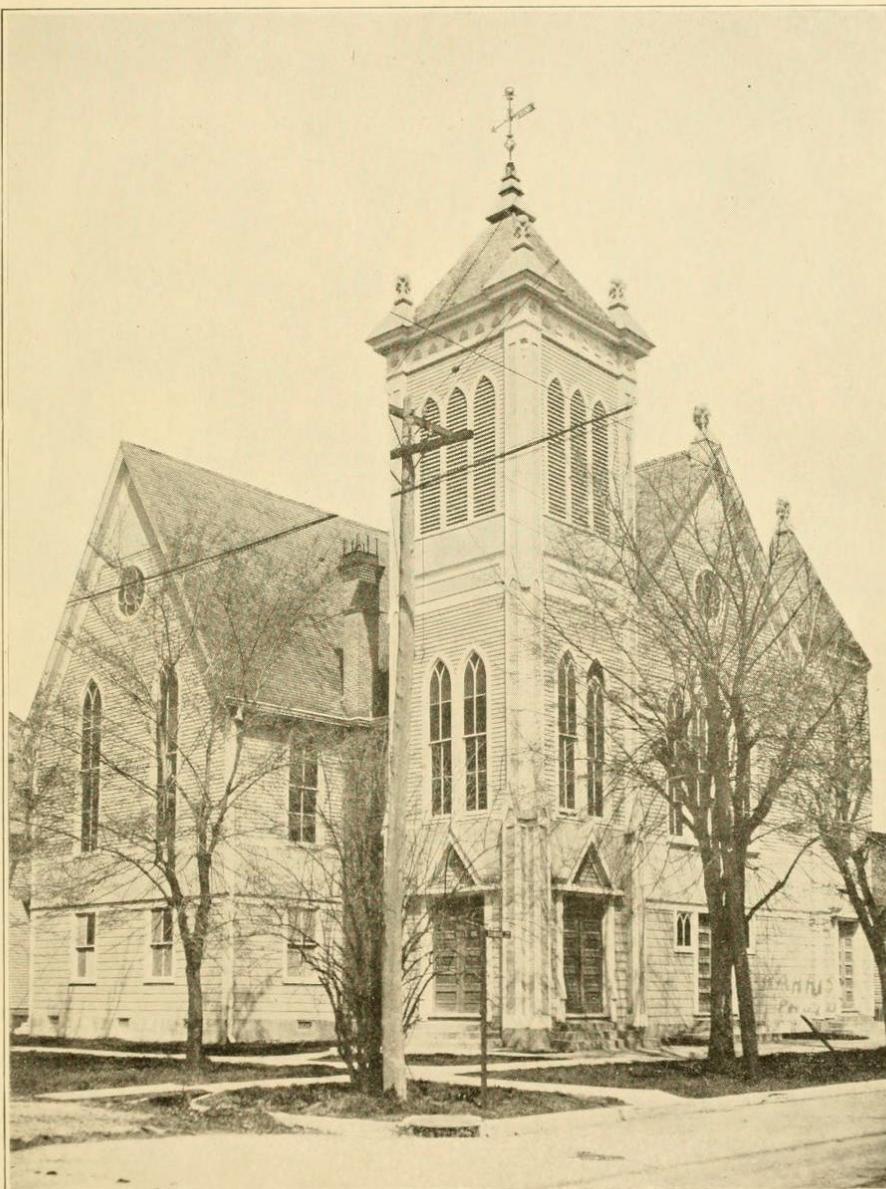
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EXHIBIT C
HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS
TRINITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
2600 HOLMAN STREET

THE RED BOOK OF HOUSTON

33



Trinity M. E. Church, 1410 Travis Street.

Trinity M.E. Church 1901 building (demolished), 1915. *Red Book of Houston*, 33.

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NEW TRINITY METHODIST CHURCH

Trinity United Methodist Church 1951 building, c. 1951. Courtesy of Trinity United Methodist Church.

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Pilgrim Congregational Church, photo of 1942 building at Live Oak and Berry, date unknown. Facing southeast from Live Oak Street. Courtesy of Pilgrim Congregational Church.

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EXHIBIT D
SANBORN MAP – VOLUME 9, 1950
TRINITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
2600 HOLMAN STREET

