

MULTIPLE RESOURCES OF GREENVILLE

BUTLER COUNTY, ALABAMA

Historic Name: First Baptist Church (Colored) Owner: Board of Trustees
 Common Name: First Missionary Baptist Church First Missionary Baptist
 Church, Greenville
 707 South Street
 Greenville, AL

Address: 707 South Street

Acreage: less than one UTM: 16/534520/3521550

Verbal Boundary: Lots numbers one and two of Block number 13 according to the survey of G. K. Armes of the City of Greenville, AL, also described as Lots numbers one and two of Block Number 22, according to the survey of W. P. DeJarnette of the City of Greenville, AL, being the property located at the intersection of South Street and Perry Street, now occupied by the church building.

Date of Construction: 1908

Statement of Significance

Criterion A - Social/Humanitarian:

The First Missionary Baptist Church, as one of three black controlled institutions in Greenville during the early 20th century, is locally significant for its role as the social and cultural focus for a large majority of the city's blacks.

Description:

The First Missionary Baptist Church in Greenville is situated atop a hill along the western edge of the black residential neighborhood on Baptist Hill. Built in 1908, the one-story masonry construction of stucco over brick features a steeply pitched gable roof with a side bell tower and a tripartite arched portico. The bell tower is surmounted by a steeple, and is partially weatherboarded near the top, as is also the gable. The deeply recessed entrance is arched and has double doors.

The main body of the church building has slender false pilasters which separate the sash windows containing textured, mottled stained lights, and there appears to be a corbeled brick cornice along the sides. A large cinder block addition with a gable roof is situated at the north side and along the back. Constructed in the 1950s as a Fellowship Hall, the addition has a paneled double door entrance.

Historical Summary:

The First Missionary Baptist Church of Greenville was organized in 1880 under the leadership of Rev. Parson Stewart as the neighborhood church for the black residential neighborhood on Baptist Hill. It is Greenville's earliest known black missionary Baptist congregation and the town's earliest remaining black church building.

Historically, southern black neighborhood churches played an important and wide-ranging role in fostering the development and growth of black life in the segregated community. The black church acted as defender of public morality, supporting the principles of honesty, hard work and marital fidelity. Because the churches were often the only major organizations actually controlled by blacks, the churches quickly became central institutions in the black communities, and provided a social outlet for a people long denied outside attachments or a means of identification.

In Greenville the result of this development produced two concentrated black neighborhoods, each with a racially and socially independent church. The organization and subsequent growth of the churches represent a local response to the exclusion of blacks from public life in Greenville. The Baptist Hill black neighborhood, the later of the two neighborhoods and the least disturbed by modern development or recent affluence, has historically identified with this church as the hub of its neighborhood activity. The 1908 building was the third building venture of this congregation. The earlier buildings, all of which were situated on this same site were destroyed by fires or storms. For over 80 years the church has opened its doors as the community social center, town hall and place of worship, subsequently serving as the most effective vehicle for internal social control and local reform movements. The "Mother Church" of all black Baptist churches in Greenville, First Baptist today distinctively retains its prominence in the neighborhood as the only church building.