

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number _____ Page _____

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 05000299

Date of Listing: April 20, 2005

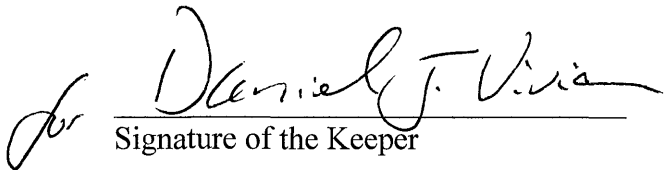
Property Name: First Ebenezer Baptist Church

County: Jefferson

State: Alabama

The Civil Rights Movement in Birmingham, Alabama, 1933-1979
Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.


Signature of the Keeper

April 20, 2005
Date of Action

=====
Amended Items in Nomination:

Section 8. Statement of Significance

The period of significance is hereby changed to 1958-1965 to more accurately reflect the period in which the church and its congregation played an important role in the Civil Rights movement in Birmingham.

The year 1965 is hereby added as a significant date to reflect the significance of the voter registration workshops held at the property in that year.

These changes were discussed with and approved by the National Register staff of the Alabama SHPO.

The Alabama State Historic Preservation Office was notified of this amendment.

DISTRIBUTION:

- National Register property file**
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)**

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name First Ebenezer Baptist Church
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 420 Graymont Avenue North, Smithfield N/A not for publication
city or town Birmingham N/A vicinity
state Alabama code AL county Jefferson code 073 zip code 35204

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set for in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)
William A. Brown March 3, 2005
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
State Historic Preservation Office, Alabama Historical Commission
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See Continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:
 entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet
 determined eligible for the National Register.
 See continuation sheet
 determined not eligible for the National Register.
 removed from the National Register.
 other,
(explain:)

Signature of the Keeper Carol A. Shull Date of Action 4-22-05

First Ebenezer Baptist Church
Name of Property

Jefferson County, Alabama
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in count.)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Birmingham Civil Rights Movement, 1933-1979 MPS

Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGIOUS: church

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGIOUS: church

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Gothic Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete;
walls Brick

roof Asphalt Shingle
other Metal; Wood; Glass; Canvas

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See continuation sheets.

First Ebenezer Baptist Church
Name of Property

Jefferson County, Alabama
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations
(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)
Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** moved from its original location.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance
(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions)

Social History
Ethnic Heritage: African American

Period of Significance
1958-1963

Significant Dates
1963

Significant Person
(Complete if Criterion B is marked)
N/A

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Architect/Builder
Unknown

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- Previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State Agency
 - Federal Agency
 - Local Government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository: Birmingham Historical Society,
Birmingham Public Library

First Ebenezer Baptist Church
Name of Property

Jefferson County, Alabama
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property Less than one acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>16</u>	<u>515890</u>	<u>3708000</u>	3	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	4	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Carroll Van West, with earlier material by Linda Nelson and Marjorie White
organization Center for Historic Preservation date March 25, 2004
street & number Middle Tennessee State University—Box 80 telephone 615-898-2947
city or town Murfreesboro state TN zip code 37132

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location
A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name First Ebenezer Baptist Church (Rev. Robert E. Dawson, pastor)
street & number 420 Graymont Avenue North telephone 205-251-3319
city Birmingham state Alabama zip code 35204

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listing. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P. O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

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First Ebenezer Baptist Church, Jefferson Co., AL

VII. Description

First Ebenezer Baptist Church is an attractive twin-towered red brick church, with a brick and concrete foundation and an asphalt shingle gable roof. It sits in a residential section of the four-lane Graymont Avenue. To the east of the building is a former gas station business, now a car wash business, while houses from the mid-twentieth century are to the church's rear, its west elevation, and across the street.

The south façade has five symmetrical bays on the first story level and three symmetrical bays on the second story level. The second story windows provide light to the church balcony. Central wooden double doors, with beveled glass, define the entrance, which is reached via concrete steps that have a metal railing. A canvas awning, supported by four thin metal poles is over the front-door entrance. Flanking the front doors are four-pane metal casement windows, with slag glass painted in blue. To either side of the entrance are eight-pane metal casement windows of slag glass painted blue on the first story, while the balcony level has three similar windows. Above the balcony windows there are narrow louvered vents in the towers and a square louvered vent in the gable peak. A soldier course marks the first-floor level.

The east elevation has four primary bays defined by sets of single windows, *i.e.*, two single windows in close proximity but not paired; these are longer than the facade windows by the addition of another panel of two lights, and the lower sash is operable. The windows all have slag glass painted blue. A fifth bay contains a side entry, with a brick and concrete stoop with a metal rail and a metal awning, the latter of which was installed c. 1970. To the north of the door are two symmetrical six-pane casement windows with slag glass painted blue.

The west elevation is similar to the east. It has four primary bays defined by sets of single windows, *i.e.*, two single windows in close proximity but not paired; these are longer than the facade windows by the addition of another panel of two lights, and the lower sash is operable. The windows all have slag glass painted blue. The north end of the elevation, however, differs from the east elevation. A brick and concrete handicap ramp, with metal railing, extends from the third bay windows north to a double metal entrance door. The ramp and the door date c. 1970. To the north of the door are two symmetrical four-pane casement windows with slag glass painted blue. Somewhat centered above the door and windows at the top of the cornice is a metal-framed eight-pane casement window, with slag glass painted blue.

The north (rear) elevation contains two distinct levels. On the lower level, there is a small utility vestibule extension at the northwest corner with a metal door, installed c. 1990; in the center are six-over-six wood double-hung clear glass windows; and the northeast corner has a four-over-four double-hung clear class window. The upper level has four symmetrical tinted sheet glass single pane windows. A square metal ventilation grill is at the gable point of the roof.

A small vestibule, with restrooms located in the twin towers, leads to an auditorium-like sanctuary. It has a slightly coved plain flat ceiling covered with acoustical tile overlay and recessed fluorescent lights, installed c. 1990. The entire rear wall behind the dais is wood-paneled, c. 1970. The room is flat-floored with a double aisle; the sections of pews open up in a characteristic right-angle turning of the front ones to face the center. The pulpit is in the center of a low dais and the choir behind is fitted with refurbished theatre chairs, while the baptistery is covered by a curtain in a low arch in the wall to the preacher's right hand. The floor is carpet over hardwood floors. Behind the pulpit are Sunday School classrooms and an office for the pastor. The balcony is unchanged, except for carpet over hardwood floors.

The church meets the registration requirements for church buildings in the Birmingham's Civil Rights Movement, 1933-1979 MPS. It retains a high degree of integrity in setting, location, materials, workmanship, design, and association to the exterior of the building. The interior of the church received remodeling c. 1970 when wood paneling was installed and c. 1990, when a dropped ceiling and new interior lighting were installed. Its original spaces, original church furniture, walls, floors, and the ceiling over the balcony remain extant.

Archaeological Component

Although no formal archaeological survey has been conducted, the potential for subsurface materials remains.

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First Ebenezer Baptist Church, Jefferson Co., AL

VIII. Significance

First Ebenezer Baptist Church is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its social history associations with the Civil Rights Movement in Birmingham, from 1958 to 1963, and for its significant associations with African-American ethnic identity in the Smithfield neighborhood of Birmingham. The property meets the registration requirements for Criterion A significance set forth in the Birmingham's Civil Rights Movement, 1933-1979 MPS.

Rev. W. H. Perry established the First Ebenezer Baptist Church congregation on February 28, 1941 and led the effort to have the present church building finished and occupied by 1942. A comparatively small church, the congregation is associated with the urban boom in Birmingham brought about by the increases in industrial (iron, steel, and foundry) production during World War II and the hiring of additional African-American laborers. The church's significant association with the Civil Rights Movement in Birmingham is associated with the work of Rev. John F. Hardy, one of the deacons who helped to establish the church in 1941-42. Hardy was the church's minister from 1952 to 1981, a thirty-year era during which he led his congregation to be activists within the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights.

According to an interview with former ACMHR secretary Lola Hendricks, conducted by the Birmingham Historical Society, First Ebenezer Baptist Church was one of the key North Birmingham congregations supporting the ACMHR in its early years of 1956-58. In its 1958 annual report, the ACMHR listed First Ebenezer Baptist Church among a number of others "where we have met—so many times" and where the doors had been "generously opened for us." In this listing, the ACMHR asserted that "This is a people's movement—of all the people. Nothing stops the people from enthusiastically coming each night to sing, pray and to give. These are Mass heroes." Historians of the Civil Rights Movement have long discussed the intersection of faith and activism in the mass meetings held at various Birmingham churches. Historian and Baptist minister Wilson Fallin, Jr., emphasized:

The influence of the African-American church and its peculiar culture on the ACMHR stands out most vividly in the organization's weekly mass meetings. These meetings were essentially African-American church worship services. The meetings began with a thirty-minute devotional service made up of prayers, spirituals, and meter hymns, followed by singing by the ACMHR choir. The presider, usually ACMHR vice-present, the Reverend Edward Gardner, offered brief remarks. A local supporting pastor delivered a sermon. President Shuttlesworth then made some remarks and the ushers took up the offering. The meetings were very emotional with much shouting. . . The emotionalism of the mass meetings, as in an African-American church, provided not only emotional release but also the courage to fight the forces of segregation in a hostile environment. (Fallin, 15-16)

Furthermore, the mass meetings were important tools of oral communication for a society that had few other public options, since open discussion of civil rights strategies over the airwaves or in print could provoke severe reactions from white extremists. Furthermore, activists knew that to reach the core working-class residents of their neighborhoods, meetings in the churches were much more effective venues than print or electronic media. It was thus at the churches where activists, often a combination of local ministers, community leaders, and the occasional visitor from another Civil Rights hotbed, relayed the important messages and key strategies to be debated and carried out. The churches were safe havens in an often hostile environment.

Rev. Hardy led congregation meetings at the church in 1963 to debate and plan the congregation's participation in the Project C demonstrations of April and May 1963. In 1965, the church was the site of voter registration workshops, led by local Democratic activists, ACMHR members, and Mrs. H. L. Russell, a staff member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, who worked in Birmingham on voting rights issues.

First Ebenezer Baptist Church was a significant strategy center, where mass meetings of the ACMHR took place as early as 1958 and where strategy meetings about the Project C demonstrations occurred in 1963 and voting rights in 1965.

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First Ebenezer Baptist Church, Jefferson Co., AL

IX. Bibliography

Annual Report, 1958, Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights. Birmingham: ACMHR, 1958.

Fallin, Wilson, Jr. "Rock Solid Faith: African American Church Life and Culture in 1956 Birmingham." Marjorie L. White and Andrew M. Manis, eds. *Birmingham Revolutionaries: The Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth and the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights.* Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000. 7-18.

Hendricks, Lola. Interviews with Marjorie L. White. 1999. Birmingham Historical Society.

Fieldwork notes, July 24, 2003. In possession of the author.

First Ebenezer Baptist Church Files, Birmingham Historical Society Civil Rights Collection-Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights and Civil Rights Churches Files, Birmingham Historical Society, Birmingham, Alabama. Files include Board of Equalization Records, City Directory Trace, and Photographs.

White, Marjorie L., *A Walk to Freedom-The Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth and the Alabama Movement for Human Rights.* Birmingham: Birmingham Historical Society, 1998.

X. Verbal Boundary Description and Justification

New Ebenezer Baptist Church is at 420 Graymont Avenue North, identified as Lot 13-A, a resurvey of lots 13-14, Block 39, Smithfield as marked on the attached Jefferson County Tax Map01-22-35-3, Sections SW ¼ 35, Township 17 South, Range 3 West . The nominated property includes all of the historic property associated with the First Ebenezer Baptist Church.

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Photographs Page

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First Ebenezer Baptist Church, Jefferson Co., AL

Photographs

First Ebenezer Baptist Church
Birmingham, Jefferson County, AL

Photographs (exterior) by: Carroll Van West
MTSU Center for Historic Preservation
July 2003

Photographs (interior) by: Birmingham Historical Society
January 2000

Negatives: Alabama Historical Commission
468 S. Perry St.
Montgomery, AL

South façade, facing north
1 of 12

South façade, facing northwest
2 of 12

West elevation, facing southeast
3 of 12

East elevation, facing northwest
4 of 12

North elevation, facing south
5 of 12

Balcony ceiling detail, facing north
6 of 12

Sanctuary from pulpit, facing south
7 of 12

Sanctuary wall, facing west
8 of 12

Sanctuary wall, facing east
9 of 12

Sanctuary and pulpit, facing north
10 of 12

Sanctuary and pulpit, from balcony, facing north
11 of 12

Pulpit and choir seating, facing north
12 of 12

First Ebenezer Baptist Church
NTS: 2003
Birmingham, Alabama

Gragmont Avenue

