

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service



National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

NATIONAL REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16).

1. Name of Property

historic name Pilgrim Baptist Church other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 732 W. Central Ave. city, town Saint Paul state Minnesota code MN county Ramsey code 123 zip code 55104

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: [X] private, [] public-local, [] public-State, [] public-Federal. Category of Property: [X] building(s), [] district, [] site, [] structure, [] object. Number of Resources within Property: Contributing 1, Noncontributing 0, Total 1. Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0.

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this [X] 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 forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property [X] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria. [] See continuation sheet. Signature of certifying official Ian R. Stewart Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer Date March 4, 1991 State or Federal agency and bureau Minnesota Historical Society

In my opinion, the property [] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria. [] See continuation sheet. Signature of commenting or other official Date State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is: [X] 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:). Entered in the National Register. Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Religion, religious structure

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Religion, religious structure

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Romanesque Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete

walls brick

roof asphalt/shingles

other _____

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

See continuation sheet

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Ethnic Heritage, Black

Social History

Period of Significance

1928- 1940

Significant Dates

1928

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

Rev. L. W. Harris

Architect/Builder

Contractor: L. W. Baumeister

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

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

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 # _____

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository:

Fort Snelling History Center
Saint Paul, Minnesota

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property Less than one acre

UTM References

A

1	5
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4	8	9	7	1	0
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4	9	7	7	4	9	0
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Zone Easting Northing

B

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Zone Easting Northing

C

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D

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property is:

Lot #14 & 15, Block #12, Butterfield Syndicate Addition #1, City of Saint Paul.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the city lots that have historically been associated with the property.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jacqueline Sluss

organization Thomas R. Zahn & Associates, Inc. date July 16, 1990

street & number University Club, 420 Summit Ave. telephone (612) 221-9765

city or town Saint Paul state Minnesota zip code 55102

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Pilgrim Baptist Church, built in 1928 at 732 W. Central Avenue, is located on a corner lot in the Summit-University neighborhood one block north of Interstate 94. The church structure is a simple late Romanesque Revival style building faced with brown pressed brick laid in five course American bond, with white concrete trim. The church has a gable roof with a low projecting parapeted gabled ends with metal coping. The dominant gable peak on Central Avenue is crowned with a decorative concrete cap-stone with an embedded masonry cross. The church roof, including the roof of the education wing to the south, is covered in asphalt shingles.

The main facade, on the north-facing gable end, displays a centered three-door entry. Each of the three sets of double metal doors, divided by brick piers, visually supports a patterned brick panel framed in a brick and concrete rounded arch. The center set of doors have narrow cruciform windows.

Above the entry is a row of five equi-spaced rectangular stained glass windows. Centered on the gable and above the windows is a stained glass "rose" window with cruciform brick and wood muntins.

The five bay side walls have rounded arched stained glass windows at the clearstory level and rectangular 1/1 sash in the side aisles. All windows have concrete sills, and except for the clerestory windows, all display aluminum combination storm windows. The church has very short transepts with a side entrance on the Grotto Street facade. The entrance doors are metal with nine light windows. The side entrance is protected by an arched metal canopy. The Grotto entrance, similar to the Central Avenue entrance, visually supports a patterned brick panel framed in a brick and concrete arch. Behind the Grotto Street transept is a brick educational wing that was added to the south end of the church in 1949.

A unique feature of this church is a series of stained glass windows installed in the clerestory which portray the church's symbols, important past ministers of Pilgrim Baptist and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The contractor for the building was L.W. Baumeister. The church is in good condition.

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The Pilgrim Baptist Church is significant under criterion A for its direct and indirect participation in a broad spectrum of activities related to the social, political and spiritual life of the St. Paul and Minneapolis Black communities. The church is also significant under criterion B for its association with the Reverend L.W. Harris whose tenure (1922-1941) with the church spans the period of significance. Although the primary focus of the activities of the Pilgrim Church is the St. Paul community, the participation of the Reverend L.W. Harris in events associated with both St. Paul and Minneapolis, justifies its significance within the context of the Twin Cities. Pilgrim Baptist is the only Black Church in the Twin Cities that is eligible for nomination to the National Register under the 50 year criteria. The period of significance begins with the construction of the church in 1928 and extends to 1940.

When the present Pilgrim Baptist Church was built in 1928, it followed the movement of the Black population from the old city center up the hill to the Rondo neighborhood. At this time, the church had already established a sixty-five year history of service to Blacks in St. Paul. It is the second oldest Black congregation established in the state of Minnesota and the oldest in St. Paul. The church was officially organized in 1866 by a group of ex-slaves and their leader Robert Hickman, who arrived in St. Paul in 1863 via the Mississippi River from Boone County, Missouri, a Compromise State. The 1928 edifice represents the third but only surviving church building of the Pilgrim congregation.

Pilgrim Baptist Church is one of several pivotal institutions within the St. Paul Black community that worked together (and continue to exist and work together) during the designated period of significance to protect civil liberties, to assist in job placement, to ease the period of adjustment for newcomers, to offer opportunities for education, recreation and social activity, and to inform Blacks in St. Paul of the issues that concerned them. Blacks did not historically occupy a single geographical area in St. Paul until the Rondo Avenue (now Concordia Avenue) area began to attract significant numbers of Blacks in the 20s and 30s and this area did not become predominantly Black until the 1950s and 1960s. Despite the lack of a common geographical base, the St. Paul Black community has a long tradition of political and social activism. This activism is marked by a high degree of cooperation between private, public and parochial organizations as well as a core of membership and leaders.

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Although Black churches, nation wide, have never embraced the whole of the Black-American population, they have traditionally had an influential role in the larger Black community for several reasons: they have been a forum of freedom of expression in a society that generally denied or ignored minority expression, they have been a major source of educated Black leadership both in and out of the church, they have nurtured the growth of major civil rights and social welfare groups, they have served as a meeting place for other Black organizations and, since the turn of the century, they have reached out into the community with educational and social service support groups. Benjamin Mays, noted Black scholar wrote that the Black church was important as a bastion of freedom of expression in contrast to the segregated life within the larger society and provided an outlet for leadership, organizational and oratorical qualities within the Black community.

The membership of Pilgrim Baptist, as well as the membership of other Black congregations in St. Paul, furnished many leading activists, businessmen and women, and politicians. The role of the clergy in community affairs was minimal until after 1900 when congregations began to stabilize and churches could afford to seek out and maintain dynamic preachers. The role of the church nation-wide began to develop a more secular side. After that date, the Black clergy in St. Paul began to take on a more influential role in church and community affairs. By virtue of Pilgrim's membership and cooperative relationships with other organizations, events and decisions that were seminal to the community's economic, political, intellectual, and spiritual growth, were nurtured by the church.

As early as 1870, a core of leadership comprised of self-educated religious and business leaders (as well as members of the laboring class and homemakers), was making strides to organize literary groups, fraternal organizations, and churches in the St. Paul Black community. Many of these leaders came from the Pilgrim Church membership. By the early 1880s, this group of leaders/activists made a concerted effort to attract doctors, lawyers and educated professionals for the burgeoning community who needed their services. One of the most important events of this period was the establishment in 1885 of the Black owned and operated newspaper *The Western Appeal* (later *The Appeal*). Its pages kept readers abreast of local and national events and the intellectual debates of the times. It pointed out that the two most important

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platforms for the expression of social and political interests among Blacks in St. Paul were the church (after 1900) and the Black press. Together, they educated and influenced the thinking of the local community.

The ten years between 1900 and 1910 were marked by the formation and dissolution of several national organizations with Black memberships whose agendas were of a national scope and focused on the intellectual debates of the time as well as the specific issues of lynching, de jure and de facto discrimination, economic self help and racial solidarity. Many St. Paul Black leaders, including *Appeal* editor John Quincy Adams, were active in the debate that represented a philosophical split from the "go-slow" philosophy of the former slave Booker T. Washington to the more immediatist views of the Harvard educated W.E.B. Du Bois. This philosophical split resulted in the formation of the DuBois' Niagara Movement in 1905. Frederick McGhee, St. Paul's first Black criminal lawyer was one of fifty-nine men from seventeen states to participate in the Niagara Falls convention and later became chairman of the Niagara Movement's Legal Department.

After 1910, St. Paul Black leaders began to shift their energies to a more local agenda and this change resulted in the organization of three institutions that would become part of a cooperative network of organizations that have survived until the present: the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (1913), the local chapter of the Urban League (1923) and the Hallie Q. Brown Community Center (1929). Pilgrim Baptist history was closely interwoven with these organizations during the period encompassing the Great Depression and Roosevelt's New Deal.

In 1928, the year Pilgrim Baptist Church was built, the Black population of St. Paul was roughly 4,000 people. The total population was scattered across the city in several enclaves, but the movement to the Rondo Avenue area between Rice and Lexington had begun as early as 1900. The largest employers of Blacks were the railroads and the meat-packing plants, both industries head-quartered in St. Paul. When the depression hit, these steady jobs disappeared. By 1938 the St. Paul Urban League estimated that 69 percent of local Blacks were either on relief or were participating in one of the New Deal programs. This rate of unemployment is contrasted to a 25 percent rate among Whites in 1939.

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The period between 1920 and 1940 was marked by a high level of change in all aspects of Black American life, changes that were also felt and reflected in the larger society. These events were monitored by both the local Black religious and secular institutions. In broad terms, those events included the beginning organization of Black labor, the Depression, New Deal Programs, the exodus of Blacks from the Republican Party, a rise in overt acts of racial terrorism, and the coming of age of two multi-racial national organizations, the NAACP and the Urban League, both founded in 1910. The 1920s and 30s was also the time frame for the Harlem Renaissance and the political radicalization of many Black intellectuals. Writers and artists of the time developed ideas about economic self determination, race pride, and cultural heritage.

A review of the local Black press indicates that the St. Paul Black community was not isolated from the mainstream of events. Many Renaissance intellectuals, artists, social workers and labor organizers spoke in Minneapolis and St. Paul: Langston Hughes spoke at the University of Minnesota in 1935 and was a guest of the fraternity smoker at a private home in Minneapolis. Writer James Weldon Johnson addressed the Minnesota legislature to support the Minnesota anti-lynching law in 1935. Author, intellectual and founder of the NAACP, W.E.B. DuBois was brought to Minneapolis by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in the same year. George Schuyler, Harlem Renaissance writer and editor of the *Pittsburgh Courier* was on a tour of thirty-four American cities when he appeared at the Hallie Q. Brown Center in 1935. Elmer Anderson Carter, editor of the Urban League's publication *Opportunity* spoke at the YWCA. James W. Ford, Vice-Presidential candidate for the Communist party, spoke in a private home in St. Paul in 1937. Zora Neale Hurston, the Renaissance writer known for her works about southern Black folklife addressed a group at the University of Minnesota in 1937. In 1938, educator Mary M. Bethune was the guest speaker at the St. Paul YWCA and George Washington Carver spoke at the Lyceum theater in Minneapolis.

Within this national and local milieu of changing Black America, the church was also evolving and reaching out into the community and establishing relationships with other race institutions. Reflecting the larger national pattern, the Pilgrim Church building was regularly used as a meeting place for the St. Paul NAACP and Urban League, the Sterling Club, the fledgling Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, and Masonic and fraternal orders. It was even used as a recital hall and art gallery for local student artists. In 1934, Pilgrim Church was awarded the "Old Wooden Bucket" for its outstanding efforts on behalf of the Community Chest

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Drive, the organization that helped fund the St. Paul (at that time the Twin City Urban League) and the Hallie Q. Brown Center. In cooperation with the local NAACP, Pilgrim circulated NAACP petitions through its membership concerning the passage of the federal Castigan-Wagner anti-lynching law. In 1939, Pilgrim hosted national NAACP Director of Branches William Pickens, who spoke on the topic "The Negro, A Challenge to American Democracy."

Pilgrim Baptist Church and its minister Reverend L. W. Harris, eventually became more active in the dialogue surrounding local and national issues. In 1934, for example, the Black clergy gathered in Minneapolis for a discussion of the situation with the Scottsboro Boys trial (five young Black men condemned to death for the alleged raping a white woman in Alabama) and to raise money for the legal appeal. Pilgrim Baptist Reverend Harris, as the keynote speaker at this meeting, spoke out on what he perceived as a less than clear-cut stand by the national organization of the NAACP on the case and praised the work of the International Labor Defense. His opinion was carried by Cecil Newman's papers, *The Minneapolis Spokesman* and the *St. Paul Recorder*. In 1935 when the Twin City Ministerial Alliance sponsored a retreat, Reverend Harris moderated discussions on the Black church, Black crime and health, the church and social agencies, the church and the press, and church architecture. The major inquiry of the retreat was "What Can the Church or Church People do About It?".

In January of 1936, Harris was chosen by the Twin City Ministerial Alliance as a delegate to the first convention of the National Negro Congress in Chicago that would meet in February. It was attended by representatives from more than 40 states. The N.C.C. was begun by labor organizer, editor, and lobbyist A. Philip Randolph in hopes that this umbrella organization could consolidate the influence of existing race organizations. (The organization, undermined by accusations that it was Communist affiliated, lasted only a few years before Randolph resigned his presidency in 1940.) The convention passed a set of resolutions calling for support of the Costigan-Wagner Federal Anti-Lynch Bill, urging a Senate Investigation of Lynchings in the U.S., and condemning all existing and proposed gag-laws and Jim Crow laws prohibiting Blacks for full participation in constitutional rights. In April, when the local Twin City Council of the National Negro Congress elected officers for the first year, Pilgrim Baptist Reverend Harris was elected its first president. As the first item on its agenda, the fledging organization passed a resolution to send Minnesota Congressmen

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telegrams urging support for the threatened WPA Project #1 that employed up to 100 Black artists in Minnesota.

In April of 1937, the Twin City Ministerial Alliance addressed the Minnesota Legislature about the issue of under-representation of Blacks as state employees (22 positions out of 16,000). Pilgrim Baptist Reverend Harris addressed the morning session of the Senate. In 1939, at a meeting of Joint Labor Council representatives, Urban League members and members of the Twin City Ministerial Alliance, Harris publicly advocated his support for the organization of Black labor in St. Paul. (That year a local meat packing plant would lay off 20 Black laborers.)

Throughout his tenure with Pilgrim Baptist Church, Reverend Harris would speak out on a variety of issues that were central to the goals of the Black community: achievement of equal representation in employment opportunities, enjoyment of equal protection by the law, and the right to organize in labor unions. During his tenure, Pilgrim Baptist Church was open to emerging organizations that ultimately evolved into important organizations within the St. Paul Black community: the NAACP, the Urban League, and the Hallie Q. Brown Community Center. Reverend Harris would serve on the board of all three of these organizations. These organizations, along with Pilgrim and other Black churches, often shared a common membership and constituted the core of activists within the community. This system of cooperation between groups provided cohesiveness and continuity to the St. Paul and larger Twin City Black community.

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