

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name St. Thomas Primitive Baptist Church

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

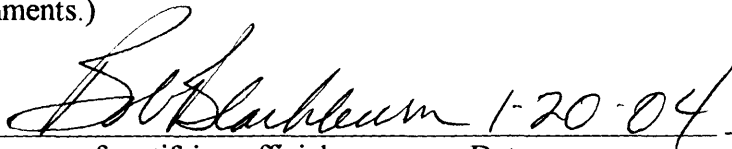
street & number 5th Street, north of intersection with Chimney Mountain Road not for publication N/A

city or town Summit, Oklahoma vicinity N/A

state Oklahoma code OK county Muskogee code 101 zip code 74401

3. 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant ___ nationally ___ statewide X locally. (N/A See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

 1-20-04

Signature of certifying official Date

Oklahoma Historical Society, SHPO
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 commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register
See continuation sheet.

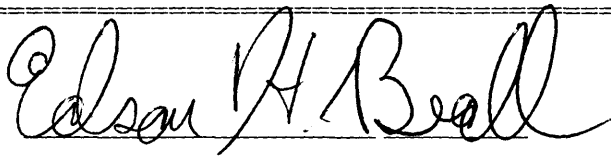
determined eligible for the
National Register

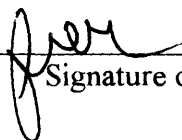
See continuation sheet.
determined not eligible for the

National Register

removed from the National Register

other (explain):

 5/3/04

 Signature of Keeper Date
of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

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

Category of Property (Check only one box)

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

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u> 1 </u>	<u> 1 </u>	buildings
<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u>	sites
<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u>	structures
<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u>	objects
<u> 1 </u>	<u> 1 </u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: RELIGION Sub: Religious Facility

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: RELIGION Sub: Religious Facility

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Other: Gable Front Church

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE: sandstone

roof ASPHALT

walls STONE: sandstone

other N/A

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

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.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- 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.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT

ETHNIC HERITAGE: Black

Period of Significance 1922-1950

8. Statement of Significance (Continued)

Significant Dates 1930

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Thomas, L. W. (Rev.), ET. AL., builders

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

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: St. Thomas Primitive Baptist Church, Summit (South Muskogee), Oklahoma

10. Geographical Data

Acres of Property Less than One (1) acre.

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	15	280565	3949760	3	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____	4	_____	_____

N/A 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 DeRutha "Dee" Richardson - St. Thomas Primitive Baptist Church; edited by Jim Gabbert, Architectural Historian, OK/SHPO

organization Clerk date September 30, 2003

street & number 105 Crabtree Road telephone (918) 687-6576

city or town Muskogee state OK zip code 74403

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 the SHPO or FPO.)

name St. Thomas Primitive Baptist Church

street & number Route 4, telephone (918) 687-6576

city or town Summit (So. Muskogee) state OK zip code 74401

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St. Thomas Primitive Baptist Church
name of property
Muskogee County, Oklahoma
county and state

SUMMARY

The St. Thomas Primitive Baptist Church is a one-story, front-gabled, stone building, measuring 60' X40', constructed 1929-30. The church sits at the top of a low hill, on the north edge of the rural town of Summit, Oklahoma. The church was built by and named for the founder of this rural Black town, Elder Lee Wilbur Thomas, who was the first minister of the church. Elder Thomas and his members used stone and natural rocks, cultivated from the natural resources of the town itself, and sometimes carried one rock at a time to the building site. To the south of the Church building is the Church's cafeteria. This building, constructed of cement blocks, measures 30' X 40', and was completed in 1990. East of the church building is the empty lot where the W.E.B. DuBois School once stood. To the north is a fence line with screening trees, separating the church yard from pastures; to the west are empty lots. The St. Thomas Primitive Baptist Church has undergone some alterations, such as a handicap ramp on the south edge of the church's entrance, but historic and architectural integrity still remain constant.

EXTERIOR DESCRIPTION

The St. Thomas Primitive Baptist Church is a one-story, rectangular, stone, gabled building. It measures 60' X 40', and sits on a stone foundation. Better known as "The Church Upon The Hill," the front entrance faces the "morning sun".

The walls of the church are load-bearing stone, quarried nearby. The yellowish sandstone is laid up in a regular ashlar with simple, raked mortar joints. There is evidence of patching and repointing with newer, portland cement mortar in some areas. A cornerstone is located on the south edge of the east facade. It reads:

ST. THOMAS P. B. Church – ORGANIZED APRIL 18, 1923 – ERECTED 1929-1930 – DEACONS
A.C. CALLAWAY C.C. CARTER T.W. WOFFARD N.B. BENFORD C.D. DOBBINS L.W.
THOMES, PASTOR F.D. GARDNER, CLERK

The east, or primary facade, features a centered, gabled porch. The porch is supported by two stone, corner piers and is enclosed by a low, stone wall. The flanking the central, concrete steps are two squared, tapered, wooden columns. The gable of the porch roof is sheathed in wide weatherboard; this sheathing extends down on the columns and created a distinctive opening centered over the steps. A wheelchair ramp has been added to the south side of the porch, necessitating the removal of part of the original stone wall. Flanking the front steps are two evergreen bushes.

Entry is gained to the building by paired, steel slab doors centered on the facade. These are non-original. Flanking the porch are single, 1/1 wooden windows with clear glass. The windows are inoperable and are covered with aluminum-framed storm windows. They feature flat, stone lintels and slightly projecting stone sills. The sills and lintels are monolithic. The windows are recessed approximately 8 inches. Centered just below the apex of the gable is a single, rectangular vent opening with a wooden louvre.

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The west, or rear, facade features a drop wing. The roof of the rear wing is approximately 18 inches below the main roof and the walls are inset approximately 4 feet on each side. There are four windows in the rear addition; single 1/1 windows flank paired 1/1 windows that are centered in the facade. Each opening features a projecting, monolithic sill. The flanking, single windows have flat, monolithic stone lintels, but the paired opening has a concrete lintel. Each of the side walls of this wing has a single door, with a concrete lintel. The doors are non-original, steel slab doors. There are concrete steps with iron balustrades leading to each entry.

The north and south sides of the main body of the church building are identical. Each features four, regularly spaced window openings. Each is a single 1/1, wood window with aluminum storms. The glass is clear. Sills and lintels are monolithic.

The roof of the building is gabled, with non-original composition shingles. The eaves and rafters are boxed. A decorative board is appended to the eave end of the fascia board. A square cupola is located on the ridge at the east end of the roof. Capped with a pyramidal roof, the cupola is sided with wide weatherboard and has louvred openings on each side. This tower houses the original bell which was used many years ago to alert the community of a death in the community, and or to send various messages to citizens in the community.

To the south of the church building stands a single-story, gabled, concrete block building constructed in 1990. This building serves as the cafeteria. Measuring 30'X40', it is oriented perpendicular to the church. It has a single, metal door centered on the east side and small 1/1 windows seemingly randomly dispersed on the four walls. It is a non-contributing building.

The exterior of the church building retains excellent integrity. The porch's wooden siding is newer, but undated as to its application. It does not disrupt the design of the building, nor does the addition of a wheelchair ramp seriously impact the fabric of the building.

INTERIOR DESCRIPTION

Just through the front steel double doors is revealed a small rectangular vestibule. To the south of the vestibule is the men's restroom; the north end of the vestibule houses the women's restroom. Two decorative wooden doors with small see-through windows separate the vestibule from the sanctuary. These doors serve as a dividing point just before entering the sanctuary area, which features the largest portion of the church's interior. The major portion of the sanctuary seats face the west. Additional seats are north and south along the outside walls, perpendicular to the other seats. The pulpit area is on an elevated stage – one step from the main floor area, and extends across 3/4th of the church's front area. Directly behind the pulpit is situated a choir stand which is elevated above the pulpit by one step. The choir stand expands over 1/4 of the area behind the pulpit. To the right of the choir stand or south is the Pastor's study; to the left or north of the choir stand is the choir-computer room. These rooms are located in the rear drop wing. The pastor's study and choir rooms have one entrance/exit door each.

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ALTERATIONS

The St. Thomas Primitive Baptist Church has undergone some interior and exterior renovations. Inside bathrooms have been added, but were included to keep the original roof intact. This was done by decreasing the seating capacity of the sanctuary, partitioning off the space reserved, and adding running water and plumbing and fixtures for two separate bathrooms—one for men (on the south side), and one for women, located north of the church entrance vestibule. All original exterior doors were replaced with steel doors for durability and protection of property housed inside. The original dark paneling have been treated and painted white in front, choir stand, and choir/computer room to brighten up and to give a feeling of warmth and purity. Original wood/coal stoves were replaced with gas stoves, and now the church has central heat and air. The floor, beginning at the entrance room of the church, the two bathrooms, down the center (between two sections of sanctuary seats) on to the front of the pulpit, the pulpit itself, up to the choir stand and extending on both sides of the choir stand (to the Pastor's study and Choir/Computer room) have been carpeted. All other areas display original wood floors.

With the exception of the added handicap ramp and rail, front porch carpet and handrail and carpet for the front steps; the historic and architectural integrity of the St. Thomas Primitive Baptist Church remains constant. The church continues to maintain integrity of location, setting, design, materials, and workmanship, and conveys the feeling of its past environment. St. Thomas Primitive Baptist Church is still one of the oldest structures standing in Summit and currently being utilized for original activities. It is still known as "The Church On the Hill."

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SUMMARY

The St. Thomas Primitive Baptist Church is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its historic significance to the early settlement and development of the all-Black town of Summit, Oklahoma. The town was founded in 1922 by Lee Wilbur (L.W.) Thomas, an African American minister from Texas. L.W. Thomas founded the town of Summit as well as the St. Thomas congregation and spearheaded the construction of the stone church. It was completed in 1930. The church building is the oldest, intact, public building in the town and served a central role in the socio-cultural development of the town. Because the site was purchased, named, developed and maintained by the founder of town and the church itself, the St. Thomas Primitive Church is the best representative of the development of the local community by L.W. Thomas. The church meets Criterion Consideration A as a religious property deriving its primary significance from historic associations, representing the development of the town of Summit.

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

Lee Wilbur, "T. W." Thomas, was born August 18, 1896 in Mexia, Limestone County, Texas to Boston and Bettie Thomas. He became a Christian when quite young and joined Sardis Primitive Baptist Church of Mexia, Texas which is located south of Dallas and east of Waco. He was called to preach at age 22. He pastored churches in Mexia, Doyle, Corsicana and Dallas, Texas, before moving to Oklahoma in 1922. He served as moderator of the Zion Primitive Baptist Association of Texas until his health began to fail him. He was also president of the National Primitive Baptist Convention of Texas and Oklahoma. Thomas held property in Texas that eventually supported ten producing oil wells, providing him with a substantial income.¹

L. W. Thomas was a philanthropist. He was interested in education of youth and devoted considerable time and money to that end. He was founder and trustee of the St. Paul College at Mexia. He was a devout Christian and educator, and was a trustee of The Farmers Improvement College, a school in Texas fashioned after Tuskegee, which was located in Fannier County.

Thomas moved to Muskogee, Oklahoma in July, 1922. He had a vision of creating a model community for African-Americans - a self-sustaining, independent community for Blacks and governed by Blacks. Thomas' vision was not so different from those of Edwin McCabe, the Kansan who sought to create a Black colony in the newly-opened Oklahoma Territory in the late 19th century. Thomas, investing over \$100,000, purchased the entire town site of

¹ "Buildings Model Town for Negro," *Muskogee Times*, November 11, 1922, page 2; also, West, C.W., "Texan Founded Summit for African-Americans," *Muskogee Phoenix*, September 21, 1999, page C-1.

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South Muskogee and surrounding lands. He renamed the townsite "Summit."²

The town of South Muskogee was platted in 1910 by the South-Muskogee Town Company in the NW 1/4 of Section 29, Township 14 North, Range 18 East. Prior to its platting, the location of South Muskogee was a whistle-stop known as Summit. The station served a dispersed agricultural community made up of lands allotted to Creek Indians and Creek Freedmen. The owner of the property adjacent to the station, consisting of 135 acres, was E.D. Sweeney, who sought to take advantage of the MKT rail line that ran through his quarter section. In 1914, an addition was made to the original plat, adding the S 1/2 of the SW 1/4 of Section 20, Township 14 North, Range 18 East to the original plat.³ The seventy-four blocks of the South Muskogee townsite never really developed to the potential that Sweeney envisioned and the entire town and the development company became available for purchase by L.W. Thomas in 1922. Thomas financed the construction of a general store building and a cotton gin to provide some momentum to his town. He focused his marketing efforts to African-Americans in his native state of Texas, offering both lots in the town and small acreages in the surrounding area. Thomas promoted not just cotton, but also the raising of vegetables and other truck crops for markets in Muskogee and Tulsa.⁴

Thomas' vision began to take root immediately; in an interview in the *Muskogee Times*, he stated that '(I)t is my desire to help my fellow man. I've plenty of money and I believe there is a big field open to the negro with money who is altruistically inclined.'⁵ His philanthropy and philosophy attracted a number of people to the town in the first few months and the town began a growth spurt. Thomas recounted his dream for the town:

I shall recommend diversified farming. I shall preach the growing of smaller and better crops. I shall see that members of my colony are furnished with the best of seed and that they are instructed in the tilling of the grain or vegetable.

At all times I shall endeavor to furnish a market for the product of the Summit farmer.

Ten years from now it is my prediction that motorists will shift gears when going through Summit. Instead of stepping on the gas and 'making' the town at a mile a minute, they will heed our city limit sign and look the cotton and melon fields over.⁶

² "Building..." and West

³ Plats for South-Muskogee and South Muskogee Development Company's 1st Addition, on file, Muskogee County Clerk.

⁴ "Building..." and West

⁵ "Building..."

⁶ *Ibid.*

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Thomas did not foresee, though, the effects of the Great Depression. Ten years down the line, his once thriving little colony, like so many other grand endeavors, began to wane in the disastrous agricultural economy.

SAINT THOMAS PRIMITIVE BAPTIST CHURCH

St. Thomas Primitive Baptist Church as built by L. W. and his membership. April, 1923, marked the founding date of this church, and it was so named in L. W. Thomas's honor. The church elected him as pastor, a position he faithfully accepted and held until his death, April 11, 1953.

His funeral was largely attended by his many admirers from Mexia, Texas to Kansas City. Rev. M. T. Whitaker, Pastor of Mt. Lebanon, P. B. Church of Waxahachie, Texas officiated. Masons from Texas, with whom Rev. Tomas was connected came and performed their services.

A Primitive Baptist Minister, L. W. Thomas was the founder of the St. Thomas Primitive Baptist Church. On April 18, 2:00 p.m., 1923, twenty-six individuals met in the frame building of Du Bois School and organized the St. Thomas Primitive Baptist Church. Worship continued to be held in the school building until the present building was completed in 1930. These twenty-six individuals built St. Thomas Primitive Baptist Church with materials they gathered from the natural resources of Summit, Oklahoma. The collection of these materials took several years, and were taken to the tallest focal point of the town, literally a stone at a time, until they felt that enough stone was gathered to begin the building process.

It has been suggested that of all the institutions within the all-Black town of Summit, the church was probably the strongest source of the community cohesion and was the one social institution in which Blacks had total control. Besides meeting spiritual needs, the church provided an opportunity for self-expression, recognition, and leadership. It laid the foundation for social and economic reform in a segregated society. Church records reveal that the Senior Mission, The Junior Mission, Sunday School, Choir, B. T. U. and Usher Board are largely responsible for the progress of the church. June, 1923, The First Communion Service was held; April 15, 1934, marked the church's first anniversary program; October, 1948, St. Thomas Primitive Baptist Church held its first Education Convention; July 21, 1958, the church held its first homecoming celebration. Regular worship service was on the 3rd Sunday of each month. This tradition continued for over 70 years. Today, however, services are held each Sunday of the month.

St. Thomas Primitive Baptist Church became an integral part of the daily life of the town of Summit, Oklahoma. It not only regulated the spiritual expression of the daily life of the community, but also the public conduct of its members. Because the church was located "on a hill," the church bell was used to communicate, through its different tones, news of importance -- sickness, and deaths of community members and friends, a fire, and also, to call people to worship. This practice continued at least through the early 1950's.

As the original settlers grew older, their children graduated from the community's only high school, DuBois High School, the children gradually moved away, their parents, relatives and friends died, and the town sustained a substantial decrease in population. DuBois High School was annexed to Muskogee Public Schools in 1957, and the

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school then became a grade school. Once a beautiful place to rear children, Summit, Oklahoma, became heavily populated with settlers from another state. These individuals were given permission to move their trailer houses, and move into abandoned houses in an effort to keep the educational system functional, by meeting an enrollment stipulation. There were a rash of fires in the community of Summit, Oklahoma. Many of the original homes were destroyed. A fire destroyed DuBois School in the late 1990's. With the burning of DuBois School, St. Thomas Primitive Baptist Church became the only historic focal point of the community.

Currently, Summit, Oklahoma has a population of less than 200 people, and there are approximately 5 families living in Summit that are original to the settlement of the town. Summit is part of the declining population statistics and loss of economic structure of rural towns, especially Black settlement, across Oklahoma and the nation.

SIGNIFICANCE

As noted, the grand vision of L.W. Thomas to create a self-sustaining, African-American colony centered on the town of Summit was never quite fulfilled. Early promise, shown in the creation of institutions such as St. Thomas Primitive Baptist Church, the post office, the cotton gin, and the small business district, fell by the wayside as the tides of economic misfortune swept through the area. The growth of the town, which was not incorporated until 1980, stagnated during the 1930s and, after the closing of the separate school and its subsequent annexation into the Muskogee district, the town lost another of its focal points.

DuBois School, like many small town schools, provided the community a sense of place and pride. Its closure as an legally mandated, all-black school, diminished this sense of place. The churches of the town continued their role as centers of religious and social activity. Dubois School was listed in the National Register of Historic Places (84003161) as a part of a Thematic Resources nomination for Educational Resources in Oklahoma's All Black Towns. It burned in 1991. There are no historic business buildings left in town and most of the housing stock is of newer construction. The two churches in town are both well-established congregations, however, only St. Thomas retains its historic integrity. As such, it remains the only intact, historic building in the town. It is the best reflection of the dreams and desires of L.W. Thomas – a physical symbol of his plans to create a self-sufficient colony, built on a solid foundation from the ground up by the residents themselves.

The St. Thomas Primitive Baptist Church is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A, for its direct association with the founding and growth of the town of Summit. It has direct ties to the visionary of the planned African-American colony, L.W. Thomas, and as such is the single extant edifice that represents his dream. It retains excellent integrity of location, design, setting, feeling, workmanship, association, and materials. The church meets Criterion Consideration A as a religious property deriving its primary significance from historic associations, representing the development of the all-black town of Summit.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

INTERVIEWS

Gardner, Fred Douglas, Jr., former Mayor of Summit; deacon at St. Thomas P.B. Church, interview with De Rutha Richardson.

Thomas, Erma Lee Lyons, daughter-in-law of L.W. Thomas, former mayor, interview with De Rutha Richardson.

OTHER SOURCES

Minute Books of the Conferences of the St. Thomas Primitive Baptist Church, Summit, Oklahoma, June, 1940-August, 2003.

Muskogee Phoenix, 21 September, 1991.

Muskogee Times, 11 November, 1922.

Plat Books, #3, #4, Muskogee County Clerk's Office.

SECTION 10

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Lots 18-28, block 18; lots 20-22, Block 19, South Muskogee Development Company's First Addition to the Town of South Muskogee.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The nominated area includes all of the land historically associated with St. Thomas Primitive Baptist Church.