

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received

JUL 26 1988

date entered

See Instructions in How to Complete National Register Forms  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Thematic Group of Rural Churches of Baldwin County

and/or common

2. Location

street & number See individual forms

NA not for publication

city, town

N/A vicinity of

congressional district 1

state Alabama

code AL

county Baldwin

code 003

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	NA	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Multiple Ownership

street & number See individual forms

city, town

vicinity of

state

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Probate Judge's Office, Baldwin County Courthouse

street & number

P. O. Box 651

city, town

Bay Minette

state Alabama

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Baldwin County Historic Building Survey  
title Alabama Inventory has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date October 1987 - 1970-Present  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Mobile Historic Development Commission/Alabama Historical Commission

city, town

Mobile/Montgomery

state Alabama

## 7. Description

**Condition**

excellent  
 good  
 fair

deteriorated  
 ruins  
 unexposed

**Check one**

unaltered  
 altered

**Check one**

original site  
 moved date \_\_\_\_\_

**Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance**

The Baldwin County Architectural Site Survey revealed a county with an overwhelmingly vernacular architectural tradition. Though national styles are recognizable in many instances, they are invariably executed in common materials. The Survey revealed Baldwin County's churches to be among the highest style buildings surviving. These churches were the focus for small communities and the most ambitious buildings many of them would erect. Since the historic courthouse and city halls of Baldwin County have been lost, the churches remain as significant surviving examples of public architecture.

Though these religious buildings reflected a higher degree of style than houses, they were nevertheless executed in the same materials. Timber was abundant and readily available from numerous saw mills and was a logical material choice throughout the 19th century and well into the 20th. Whether the church was erected by back country Baptists or recent immigrants out of Chicago, frame and beaded board were the builder's preference. By the 1920s brick and ornamental concrete block were available and utilized by congregations that could afford them. Though many houses were built of the same materials, churches employed them much more creatively and in higher architectural expressions.

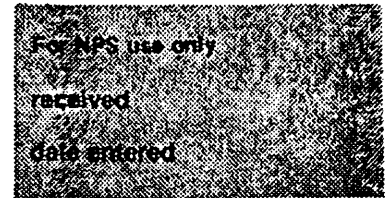
In short, Baldwin County's historic churches, though constructed over a wide span of years, share some basic philosophical and physical elements. Philosophically they are conscious statements of architectural style in communities where simple residential and commercial buildings were the rule. Yet physically they are built of common materials that were widely available. These materials, whether frame, beaded board, ornamental concrete block or brick, were executed in stylistic variations not employed in residences. Therefore Baldwin County's surviving historic churches are among the highest style buildings ever constructed in this rural locale.

The oldest surviving church in Baldwin County was built in 1853 on Montgomery Hill near Tensaw. This simple Greek Revival structure is typical of 19th century rural churches with its frame construction and one room sanctuary. Yet its resemblance to a Greek temple, and use of interior graining and paneling sets it far above any of the houses built in the area at the time. In addition, the slave gallery is an eloquent statement on the social arrangements of a slave society. Even though this church was constructed by a local craftsman, it is the highest style building in Tensaw.

Gothic Revival stylistic influences are visible in the Latham Methodist Church (Latham, 1906), St. Paul's Episcopal Church (Magnolia Springs, 1901) and Swift Presbyterian Church (Mifflin, 1907). In addition to lancet windows

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and corner towers, each of these building's interior is clad in beaded board. Though a common enough material in rural houses, it is given a decorative emphasis in each of these churches. Latham Methodist Church (Latham, 1906) has an impressive interior with vertical beaded board wainscoting and horizontal beaded board above which curves into the ceiling. St. Paul's Episcopal Church (Magnolia Springs, 1901) has vertical beaded board walls with slanted wainscoting and a vaulted ceiling. Swift Presbyterian Church (Mifflin, 1907) features vertical beaded board walls with a chair-rail.

By the 1920s ornamental concrete block had become a popular building material, particularly in the southern half of the county. Three churches in the nomination were built of this material: Lebanon Chapel A.M.E. Church (Fairhope, 1923), Twin Beach A.M.E. Zion Church (Fairhope, 1925) and St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Church (Loxley, 1924). Though ornamental concrete block was popular with home builders at this time, its use in each of these churches is particularly elaborate. Quoins, water tables, belt courses and elaborate window surrounds are all common elements in these churches. Lebanon Chapel (Fairhope, 1923) has a vaulted beaded board ceiling with exposed trusswork, whereas Twin Beach Church (Fairhope, 1925) has a barreled beaded board ceiling and plastered walls. St. Patrick's Catholic Church (Loxley, 1924), though now a public library still retains its vaulted ceiling.

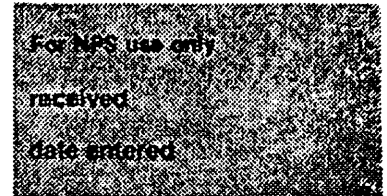
For wealthier congregations brick became the material of choice. The First Baptist of Bay Minette (Bay Minette, 1914) and the Elberta Lutheran Church (Elberta, 1927) employ this material to good effect. The Baptist Church features a recessed portico with tall white Tuscan columns whereas the Lutheran Church mimics medieval building traditions with its massing and window treatment.

That a congregation couldn't afford to erect a handsome brick edifice did not prevent the building's being a distinctive statement. The Stockton Methodist Church (Stockton, 1929) was built from an old school torn down on site. The church's massive square brick columns and flush board facade harken back to Neo-Classical design.

Whether a congregation built a frame Gothic Revival Church or a brick Neo-Classical one, the building served as a focus for community pride. Nineteenth century skylines were distinguished by their spires. In the county, though people might live in simple houses, their churches invariably exhibited architectural style.

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Survey Methodology

The Thematic Group of Rural Churches of Baldwin County is a direct outgrowth of the Baldwin County Architectural Site Survey. This survey was conducted from October 1985 to October 1986 by John Sledge, Architectural Historian of the Mobile Historic Development Commission. The survey consisted of photographs and architectural descriptions of over 1300 buildings that were fifty years of age or older in Baldwin County, all referenced with U. S. Geological survey maps.

In analyzing the architectural variety and high integrity of the historic churches of Baldwin County, it seemed apparent that they were best treated as a thematic National Register nomination. Parenthetically, most of the churches selected had printed histories available, thereby greatly simplifying the research.

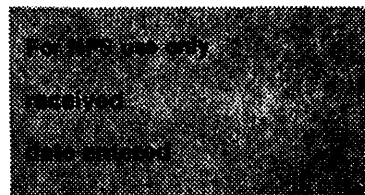
Though one church in the nomination was at one time Roman Catholic (St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Church, Loxley, 1924), two other historic Roman Catholic churches in Baldwin County are excluded. This is because the Archdiocese of Mobile withheld its permission to include these two Roman Catholic churches. Descriptions of the excluded Roman Catholic churches, as well as a complete enumeration of the more modest or altered churches, are included in Appendix I.

Buildings in this nomination have been categorized as follows:

Contributing Buildings	10
Non-contributing Buildings	4
Contributing Sites	<u>3</u>
Total	17

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Appendix I

Complete Enumeration of Historic Churches in Baldwin County

Currently on National Register	1
Potentially eligible for National Register	13
Not eligible	13
Total surveyed	<u>27</u>

Breakdown of Potentially Eligible Churches

Nominated in thematic group	10
Withheld by owner's request	3
Total potentially eligible	<u>13</u>

Total potentially eligible nominated	<u>10</u>
--------------------------------------	-----------

Historic Churches by Baldwin County Architectural Site Survey Numbers:

-Currently on National Register

BA 1307 (Daphne Methodist Church)

-Not Eligible

- |                        |                           |
|------------------------|---------------------------|
| BA 1120 (altered)      | BA 1657 (non-historic)    |
| BA 1131 (non-historic) | BA 1668 (non-historic)    |
| BA 1136 (altered)      | BA 1711A (altered)        |
| BA 1241 (vinyl siding) | BA 1719 (asbestos siding) |
| BA 1272 (altered)      | BA 1746 (moved)           |
| BA 1603 (altered)      | BA 1917 (altered)         |
|                        | BA 2218 (altered)         |

-Nominated in Thematic Group

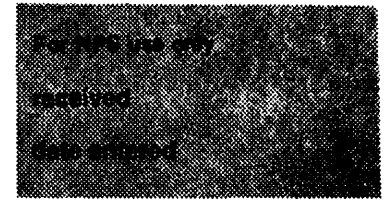
- BA 1019 (Montgomery Hill Baptist)
- BA 1029 (Latham Methodist)
- BA 1056 (Stockton Methodist)
- BA 1171 (Loxley Catholic)
- BA 1351 (Twin Beach A.M.E.)
- BA 1361 (Lebanon Chapel A.M.E.)
- BA 1747 (Elberta Lutheran)
- BA 1766 (Swift Presbyterian)
- BA 1856 (St. Paul's Episcopal)
- BA 2219 (Bay Minette First Baptist)

-Nomination from Thematic Group withheld by owner's request

- BA 1008
- BA 1585
- BA 1701

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II. Descriptions of those withheld by owner's request

1) BA 1008

UTM: 16/429/790/3453/170

Blacksher Chapel  
West side Highway 59, Blacksher  
Construction date: c. 1890

Owner: Mrs. Thomas Earl  
c/o Earl's Sawmill  
Tensaw, Al.

One story; frame; 3x3 bay; brick piers; gable roof front with 1½ story square center tower engaged; tower has pyramidal roof; louvered lancet; central entrance, triangular transom here and on windows; tongue and groove interior; original pews and chancery rail; apse rear.

2) BA 1585

UTM: 16/411/140/3373/970

St. Mary's Sacred Heart  
Bayfront, Battles Wharf  
Construction date: 1876

Owner: Catholic Archdiocese of Mobile  
400 Government Street  
Mobile, Al. 36602

One story; frame; gable roof front with transepts; lancet windows, stained glass; attached flat roof porch covers full facade, balustraded with massive boxed columns; central entrance; beaded board interior, vaulted ceiling.

3) BA 1701

UTM: 16/429/830/3353/640

Our Lady of Bon Secour  
Co. 10  
Construction date: 1880

Owner: Catholic Archdiocese of Mobile  
400 Government Street  
Mobile, Al. 36602

One story; frame; 3x4 bays; gable roof front; lancet windows; centered, engaged two story tower with hip roof; attached gable porch probably a later addition.

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** 1853-1929 **Builder/Architect** Unknown/Various

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

Criterion C-Architecture:

These ten rural Baldwin County churches represent the highest architectural expression in communities whose building stock was predominantly simple. Local craftsmen used common materials including frame, brick and concrete block to create high stylistic expressions. Interior features which variously include barrel vaulted ceilings, wood graining, wainscoting and a slave gallery contribute greatly to the high design quality of these churches.

Historical Summary

Baldwin County's earliest church must date to the 18th century when Catholic priests held mass along the Eastern Shore and interior rivers. Unfortunately Baldwin's earliest churches were destroyed along with almost all other vestiges of the Colonial era.

The county became American territory in 1813 and part of the state of Alabama in 1819. Many of the older Creole families moved to New Orleans as the Mobile Bay area experienced an influx of American settlers. The Americans founded communities along the Tensaw River in north Baldwin County, including Tensaw, Red Hill (Latham) and Stockton. These newcomers were overwhelmingly Protestant, primarily Methodists and Baptists.

The early to mid-nineteenth century churches of north Baldwin County were small frame buildings. Many congregations were so small that they met in members' homes and were serviced by a circuit rider minister. It was not uncommon for Methodists and Baptists to worship together in "union" churches.

As north Baldwin's rural hamlets established themselves, more substantial churches were erected. The earliest surviving church in Baldwin County, Montgomery Hill Baptist Church in Tensaw, reflects the growing strength of a rural congregation. The scattered planters and lumbermen in the Tensaw area had worshipped at the Holly Creek Union Church, a joint congregation of Methodists and Baptists. By the early 1850s the Baptists were strong enough to build their own church and contracted for the fine Greek Revival building that now stands. The congregation hovered at around a hundred souls, including negroes, until after the Civil War when it declined.

Methodists in the vicinity of Latham, a few miles south of Tensaw, worshipped in a log cabin as early as 1847. By 1886 they were able to erect a frame church which was subsequently destroyed. The present church was constructed in 1906 and illustrates the congregations' strength and financial resources at the time.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet.

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property See individual forms

Quadrangle name Tensaw, Magnolia Springs, Foley, Vaughn, Bay Minette North, Daphne, Silverhill and Elberta

Quadrangle scale 1:24 000

A 

Zone	Easting			Northing					

B 

Zone	Easting			Northing					

C 

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

D 

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

E 

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

F 

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

G 

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

H 

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Verbal boundary description and justification

All properties lie within Baldwin County.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county N/A code

state N/A code county N/A code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title John Sledge/Architectural Historian

organization Mobile Historic Development Commission date December 30, 1987

street & number P. O. Box 1827 telephone (205) 438-7281

city or town Mobile state Alabama

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature [Signature] July 21, 1988

title State Historic Preservation Officer date

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

[Signature] date 8/25/88  
Keeper of the National Register

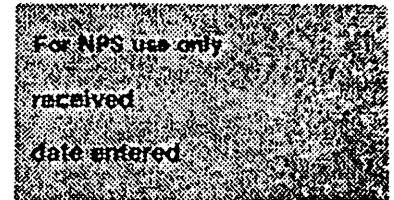
Attest: date

Chief of Registration



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A little further south on the high bluffs east of the Tensaw River, Stockton flourished as a small hamlet. As early as 1845 local Methodists and Presbyterians worshipped together. Yet it was not until 1885 that the Methodists officially organized. Their first building was destroyed by fire. Another was constructed of materials from an abandoned school house and dedicated in 1929.

North Baldwin's most populous town owed its genesis to the railroad laid across the county in 1865. Bay Minette grew as a lumber and farming center and became the Baldwin County seat in 1901. As was common in the area, local Methodists and Baptists worshipped together in a "Union" church constructed in 1870. By 1878 the Baptists were strong enough to build their own church. Another was erected in 1895 yet as the congregation grew this building proved inadequate. In 1915 the Baptists contracted for a truly ambitious brick church, the most imposing yet built in the county.

The pattern of church building in north Baldwin County was a logical progression in style and expense as each congregation grew and prospered. From simple beginnings in member's houses or log cabins, more ambitious plans were made and executed as they became feasible. The four surviving historic churches in north Baldwin County are all second or third buildings for their congregations and reflect a culmination in wealth and taste.

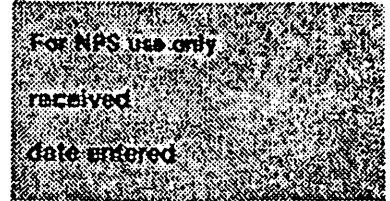
The Eastern Shore of Mobile Bay had long served as a summer retreat for Mobilians. Most of these people were Catholic or Episcopalian, yet because of the resort nature of the area, churches were of less importance than in permanent communities. A Catholic Church constructed at Battles in 1876 and a substantially altered Episcopal Church at Point Clear still stand (see Appendix I).

Fairhope, founded by midwestern Utopians in 1894, conspicuously lacks historic churches. Though the community indeed had them, they have since been destroyed. Only a black A.M.E. Church, originally not within the city limits, survives. Lebanon Chapel was constructed in 1923 and served a small congregation. South of town Twin Beach A.M.E. Church stands much as it was built in 1925. Unlike Lebanon Chapel, Twin Beach Church is the latest in a series of buildings destroyed by fire and storm. Indeed, the pattern common in north Baldwin County may be seen to be repeated here by a black congregation.

Magnolia Springs, situated along the Magnolia River in south Baldwin County, became popular as a resort in the late 19th century. Though occupied long before its resort status, Magnolia Springs lacked a formal church. Wealthy northerners formed an Episcopal Congregation in the 1890s and by 1901 had erected a handsome Gothic Revival building.

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Recent congregations are the rule in south Baldwin County. Other than a few fishing enclaves along the rivers and bay, the southern sections of the county were a vast pine haven until after the turn of the century. Track laid south from Bay Minette deep into south Baldwin opened the area to truck farmers and lumbermen in 1905. New communities sprang up, including Mifflin, a lumber town which included a Presbyterian Church built in 1907.

Many of the people who came to farm central Baldwin County were ethnic immigrants who came via big midwestern cities like Chicago. Attracted by cheap land prices and a long growing season these immigrants established a number of communities, like Elberta, and settled into existing towns like Loxley. Elberta was founded by Germans in 1905. They formed a Lutheran congregation in 1906 and built a rude frame church. By 1927 they were able to erect a much more elaborate church, in keeping with the town's growth. Loxley's immigrants founded a Catholic congregation and erected an ornamental concrete block Church in 1924.

Though the historic churches of Baldwin County vary widely in their construction dates, the formation of the congregations conforms to the settlement patterns of the county. With only three exceptions, all of these churches represent second or third replacements of earlier buildings. The present buildings survive as the highest architectural expressions of their locale.

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date entered

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Major Bibliographical References

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Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

Multiple Resource Area  
Thematic Group

Name Rural Churches of Baldwin County TR  
State ALABAMA

Nomination/Type of Review

Date/Signature

- |                                   |                                     |                                     |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Cover                             | Entered in the<br>National Register | Keeper <u>Melrose Byrum</u> 8/25/88 |
| 1. First Baptist Church           | Entered in the<br>National Register | Keeper <u>Melrose Byrum</u> 8/25/88 |
|                                   |                                     | Attest _____                        |
| 2. Latham United Methodist Church | Entered in the<br>National Register | Keeper <u>Melrose Byrum</u> 8/25/88 |
|                                   |                                     | Attest _____                        |
| 3. Lebanon Chapel A.M.E. Church   | Entered in the<br>National Register | Keeper <u>Melrose Byrum</u> 8/25/88 |
|                                   |                                     | Attest _____                        |
| 4. Montgomery Hill Baptist Church | Entered in the<br>National Register | Keeper <u>Melrose Byrum</u> 8/25/88 |
|                                   |                                     | Attest _____                        |
| 5. St. Mark's Lutheran Church     | Entered in the<br>National Register | Keeper <u>Melrose Byrum</u> 8/25/88 |
|                                   |                                     | Attest _____                        |
| 6. St. Patrick's Catholic Church  | Entered in the<br>National Register | Keeper <u>Melrose Byrum</u> 8/25/88 |
|                                   |                                     | Attest _____                        |
| 7. St. Paul's Episcopal Church    | Entered in the<br>National Register | Keeper <u>Melrose Byrum</u> 8/25/88 |
|                                   |                                     | Attest _____                        |
| 8. Stockton Methodist Church      | Entered in the<br>National Register | Keeper <u>Melrose Byrum</u> 8/25/88 |
|                                   |                                     | Attest _____                        |
| 9. Swift Presbyterian Church      | Entered in the<br>National Register | Keeper <u>Melrose Byrum</u> 8/25/88 |
|                                   |                                     | Attest _____                        |
| 10. Twin Beach A.M.E. Church      | Entered in the<br>National Register | Keeper <u>Melrose Byrum</u> 8/25/88 |
|                                   |                                     | Attest _____                        |