

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 Baptist Church, East Thomas
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 419 11th Court West N/A not for publication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.)
Russell Johnson 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 Daniel J. Vinz Date of Action 4/19/05

First Baptist Church, East Thomas
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 Brick; Concrete
walls Brick
roof Asphalt Shingle
other Metal; Wood; Glass

Narrative Description

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

See continuation sheets.

First Baptist Church, East Thomas
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
Architecture

Period of Significance
1939, 1958-1963

Significant Dates
1939, 1958, 1961

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

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Architect/Builder
Prowell, James, builder

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 Baptist, East Thomas Church
Name of Property

Jefferson County, Alabama
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property Less than one acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>16</u>	<u>514580</u>	<u>3709180</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 20, 2003
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 Baptist Church, East Thomas Church (Rev. Johnnie Howze)
street & number 419 11th Court West Telephone 205-252-2633
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 Baptist Church, East Thomas, Jefferson County,
AL

VII. Description

First Baptist Church, East Thomas is at 419 11th Court West, north of the Smithfield housing projects, on a narrow urban lot surrounded by residences dating largely from the 1920s to the 1950s. Built in 1939, the church is a gable-front, twin towers brick building, with an asphalt shingle roof that rests on a raised brick and concrete basement.

The north façade has three distinct sections. Low-angled pyramidal roofed towers of unequal heights (the west tower is taller) are in plane on sides and defined on front by an approximate nine-inch projection from the façade. The towers each have straight-head metal-frame windows of slag glass painted blue with painted glass lights: occluded belfry vents are near the top of each tower. The towers flank a three-bay central recessed entrance. On the balcony level are three metal-frame one-over-one windows of slag glass painted blue/green. The central double entry has commercial-style aluminum and glass doors, installed c. 1985. The front terrace is behind a concrete-capped parapet wall that is partially covered by a flat metal canopy with decorative metal posts, installed c. 1985. The sanctuary of the facade is marked by a soldier course.

The east elevation has six bays, with four-pane metal-framed slag glass windows painted blue/green on both the sanctuary and the basement levels. A chimney flue separates the final rear bay from the others.

The west elevation is similar, except it has a two-level wooden handicap access, with wood rail. The handicap access partially obscures the dedication marker placed at the northwest corner.

The south elevation is symmetrical on the sanctuary level, with exterior metal doors, installed c. 1985, flanking two metal-framed two pane windows with slag glass painted blue/green. A square brick chimney flue is near the southeast corner. Access to the rear sanctuary doors is by a metal flat platform, with metal railing, that is supported by four metal posts. A metal staircase is at the southeast corner. The basement level of the south elevation has been altered, with the installation of new brick (that does not match the pattern of the original varitone brick) and a metal door on the east side of the section. This alteration, which is largely obscured by the metal platform and staircase, dates c. 1985.

The interior, while changed from its 1939 appearance, retains its appearance from the Civil Rights era of 1956 to 1963. The vestibule contain men's and women's restrooms situated in the tower corners. Its original balcony, supported by four square posts, remains intact. There are two aisles dividing the oak pews, with carpeted over the pine flooring in the aisles. There is a central pulpit on the dais with choir pews and baptistery behind. The coved ceiling is overlaid with ceiling tiles, c. 1958 while the original; old tongue-and-groove walls are now overlaid with plaster and wood paneling, an alteration also dating c. 1958. In the basement, there is a large fellowship hall, with kitchen, as well as Sunday School rooms. The floor is concrete and the ceiling is of acoustical tiles. These spaces remain unaltered from the 1950s, although the kitchen equipment was updated in the 1980s.

The church meets the registration requirements for church buildings in the Birmingham's Civil Rights Movement, 1933-1979 MPS. Judging from a historical photograph of the church's sanctuary, taken during a mass meeting in 1958, the church retains a high degree of integrity in setting, location, design, materials, workmanship, and association. Although changes in the materials and workmanship have occurred in the interior spaces, these changes largely were just applied over the historic materials, which remain in place.

Archaeological Component

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

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VIII. Significance

Organized on March 21, 1938, First Baptist Church, East Thomas is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A, as one of the leading churches involved in the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights in the Civil Rights era and under Criterion C for its architectural significance as one of the best extant examples of the dual-tower Gothic Revival-influenced church buildings constructed by African Americans in the middle decades of the twentieth century in Birmingham. It meets the registration requirements for Criterion A and Criterion C as found in the Birmingham's Civil Rights Movement, 1933-1978 MPS.

The church hosted at least two documented mass meetings of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR). 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.

The first ACMHR took place on June 23, 1958, and was documented by a photograph in the ACMHR *Annual Report* for that year. The photograph is one of the few of an early ACMHR meeting. It shows a packed house with people crowded into the pews on the sanctuary and balcony levels. The minister was Rev. J. A. Hayes, who was an active member of the ACMHR hierarchy, especially in the East Thomas neighborhood that is north of the Smithfield neighborhood. In its 1958 annual report, the ACMHR listed the 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."

Notes taken by Birmingham policemen record a second ACMHR mass meeting on March 20, 1961, at the church. At the meeting Rev. Edward Gardner, Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, ACMHR treasurer W. E. Shortridge, and a Rev. Harrison of Mt. Carmel, spoke on the topics of presenting a \$25,000 insurance policy to Shuttlesworth; the presence of police and the police monitoring of the meetings, and about the general need to uplift morality in the community.

On April 22, 1963, during Project C, a judge ordered the arrest of Rev. Hayes, along with other prominent ministers, for violating a city ordinance and a court injunction against street demonstrations. Eventually this case developed into the landmark Supreme Court ruling of *Shuttlesworth v. Birmingham* (1969).

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First Baptist Church, East Thomas meets the registration requirements for Criterion A as listed in the Birmingham's Civil Rights Movement, 1933-1979 MPS. The church was an important strategy center for the Movement as it hosted mass meetings of the ACMHR and these meetings covered important civil rights topics such as police brutality. Congregation members, led by Rev. J. A. Hayes, also met here to plan their involvement in the Project C demonstrations of 1963.

In addition to its significant involvement with the Civil Rights Movement, the church is also eligible under Criterion C as an extant significant example of the twin-tower, Gothic Revival-influenced brick building constructed by African Americans in Birmingham in the early twentieth century. The contractor was James Prowell, who took the vernacular tradition of the twin-towered gable-front church and translated it into an effective statement of church architecture set within a residential neighborhood. Few of the primary architectural elements of this form of craftsmanship have been altered, which is a rarity among the Civil Rights churches of Birmingham. The slag glass windows, the balcony, and pulpit are all important interior elements of this building.

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IX. Bibliography

Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR) Meeting and Police Department Records, Eugene ("Bull") Connor Papers, Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Birmingham, Alabama.

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

Eskew, Glenn. *But for Birmingham.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

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 23, 2003. In possession of the author.

First Baptist Church, East Thomas 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

The nominated boundaries of First Baptist of East Thomas Church at 419 11th Court West are represented by Lot 5, Block 15 of the Spaulding addition as indicated on the attached Jefferson County Tax Map 01-22-27-3, Sections SW ¼ 27, Township 17 South, Range 3 West. The boundaries contain all of the historic property significantly associated with the First Baptist of East Thomas Church.

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Photographs

First Baptist Church, East Thomas
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

North façade, facing south
1 of 10

East elevation, facing southwest
2 of 10

East elevation, facing northwest
3 of 10

West elevation and south elevation, facing northeast
4 of 10

South elevation, facing north
5 of 10

Sanctuary, facing south
6 of 10

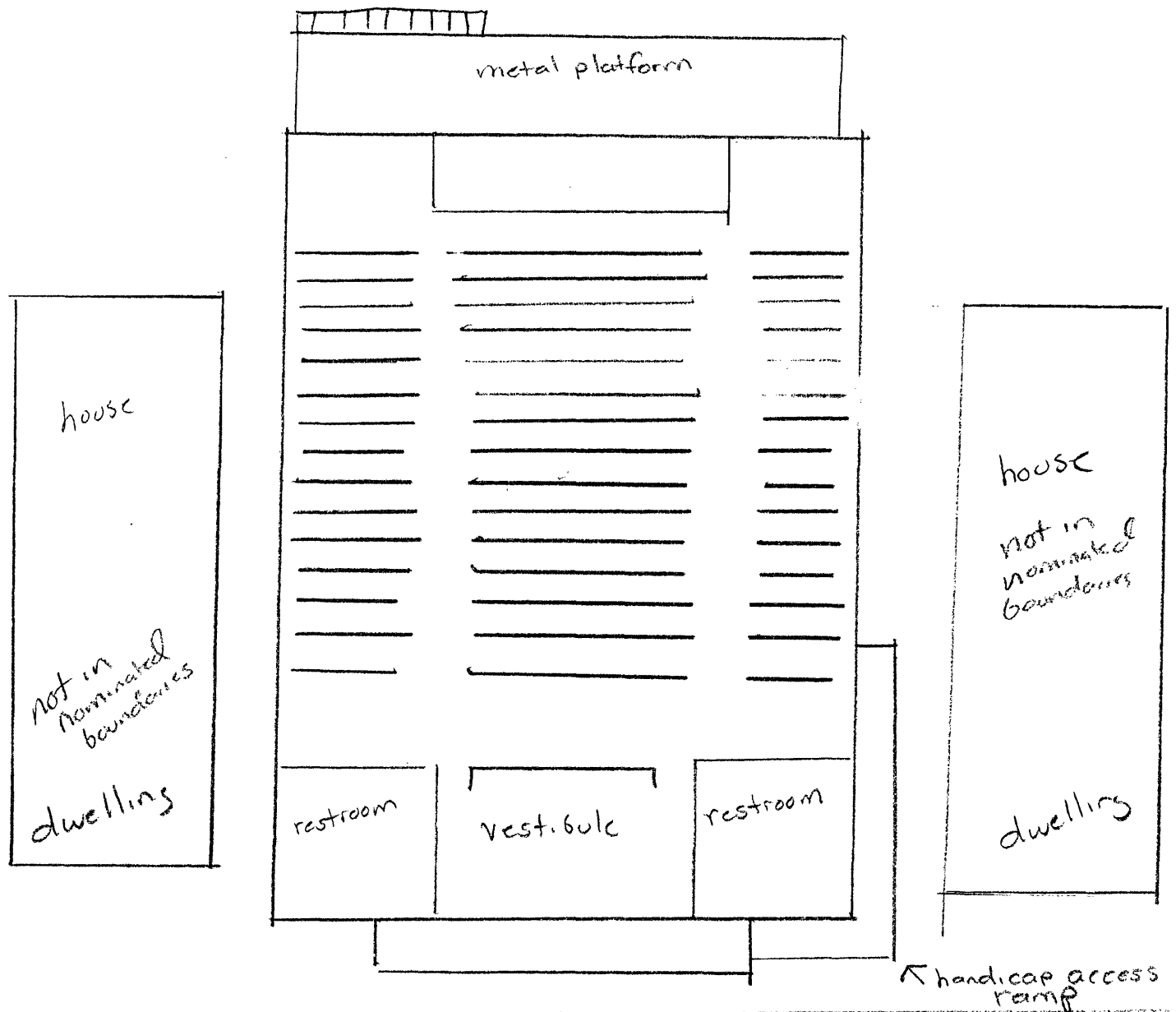
Sanctuary, facing east
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Sanctuary, facing west
8 of 10

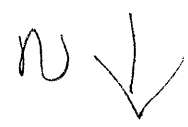
Sanctuary, facing north from pulpit
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Balcony, facing west, with tin-clad ceiling
10 of 10

parking area



11th Court West



1st Baptist, East Thomas
2003: NTS