

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

DATA SHEET

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED SEP 16 1976  
DATE ENTERED DEC 12 1976

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC Big Levels Baptist Church, Lewisburg Baptist Church,  
Mount Tabor Baptist Church

AND/OR COMMON

Mount Tabor Baptist Church (preferred)

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

Corner of Court and Foster Streets

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Lewisburg

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT  
Second

STATE

West Virginia

CODE

054

COUNTY

Greenbrier

CODE

025

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 type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
			<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
			<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
			<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
			<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
			<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Trustees of Mount Tabor Baptist Church

STREET & NUMBER

Court and Foster Streets

CITY, TOWN

Lewisburg

VICINITY OF

STATE

West Virginia

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Greenbrier County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

Court and Randolph Streets

CITY, TOWN

Lewisburg

STATE

West Virginia

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Mount Tabor Baptist Church is basically a rectangular unit of a simple Gothic style evidenced by such features as the pointed arches at the windows and original doors. Constructed in 1832 of hand-made brick, this 1½-story, meetinghouse-type church was very like the other two old houses of worship in Lewisburg (Old Stone Presbyterian and John Wesley Methodist) in shape and size, being a 36' x 40' structure built on a thick foundation of uncoursed limestone.

Originally its windows were narrow, double-hung sash with small, 9/6 panes and a triangular overlight. There were three such openings on the southwest side and two on the other elevations, except on the northwest (entrance) elevation where two windows served the gallery which was added, with a stairway approach on the outside, about 1844 for the use of blacks (presumably both slave and free). Around the same time, a 30' x 19' basement was excavated under the southeast end of the auditorium, and for years this space was used to house a private day school. It is probable that some time prior to the Civil War a 10' x 16' frame tower was added at the northwest (entrance) to provide a vestibule, new stairway to the gallery and cloak closets. The tower was slightly indented at the gallery level and topped with an octagonal cap and belfry.

The interior is plain but attractive, having painted plaster walls with wooden floor and ceiling. Some believe that the gallery which extends across the rear wall once continued along the sides of the sanctuary as well, but there is no easily discernible structural evidence that this was so.

When large cracks developed in the southwest wall, it became necessary, in about 1900, to rebuild this side, reusing the old brick. Minor changes have been made since 1900 for the sake of comfort and convenience, and in the 1960s a one-story, ten-foot deep addition was placed at the southeast to provide a choir room, study and more space for the baptismal pool. Also, a one-story room was added to the north side of the tower, and the old frame entrance was veneered in brick to make it more in keeping with the rest of the structure.

# 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 checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES      1832, 1884-86      BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Mount Tabor Baptist Church traces its roots back to the 1780s, being among the oldest Baptist units established in what is now southeastern West Virginia. The present building dates from 1832, and its basement and gallery have served on several occasions and for periods extending to years as the location of private and public schools. Of special interest in the evolution of the Mount Tabor Church is its transfer from a white to a black congregation after the Civil War. Such transfers were not uncommon (at least one other occurred in Lewisburg itself), but the adjudging, in effect, in a court of law that the Negroes were the rightful successors to the continuation of the old body of trustees was not only an exceptional method of transfer but also an unusual decision as viewed today.

It was in 1777 that John Alderson, Jr., son of the pastor of Lynville Creek Baptist Church in Rockingham County, Virginia, set out westward, somewhat later settling along the Greenbrier River at a place which took his name. Here he established the Greenbrier Baptist Church from which grew several others in association, including that at Big Levels northwest of Lewisburg.

In 1832 the latter congregation set about constructing a brick church in town. At the time, the thirty members were ministered to by John Spotts, an instructor at the nearby Lewisburg Academy who had converted from Presbyterianism and was ordained at Big Levels Church on May 5, 1832. From this period until the Civil War, the church, which had become known as Lewisburg Baptist, had several pastors, one of whom was Reverend James Remley. Remley, too, had been associated with the Lewisburg Academy, but when he and the principal disagreed on the proper mode of baptism, he withdrew and began a private school which he first conducted in the 30' x 19' basement which had recently been excavated beneath the church.

For several years the congregation had prospered, but during the hard times of war it suffered. By about 1868 the membership had dwindled to less than a dozen, and these began to join other churches. In the meantime, Negroes who previously had worshipped in the gallery as chattels asked the remaining members for permission to continue to use the meetinghouse. The request was granted on condition that repairs be made to the building, for it had deteriorated badly during occupation years of the early 1860s. A Negro minister came after 1869, an event which "was representative of only one of the many doors now open to people who had once been the possessions of others." The congregation renamed the church Mount Tabor, and for several years public school classes were held in the basement.

The period 1884-1886 was perhaps one of the most momentous in the history of the Lewisburg Baptist Church. Although the outcome of legal events affected only this one congregation, their interest today takes on new proportions. In the spring of 1884, William Foglesong, only surviving trustee of the church which for some 15 years had been used continuously by a Negro congregation which had its basis in the former slaves who worshipped in the same building, petitioned the Circuit Court of Greenbrier County to allow sale of the structure and lot so proceeds

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Lewisburg, W.Va. Greenbrier County Courthouse. Records of the Circuit Court and various deed books.  
Mount Tabor Baptist Church. South Hackensack, N.J.: Custombook, 1974.

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1 acre

UTM REFERENCES

A	1, 7	5 4, 8 6, 5, 0	4, 1 8, 3 7, 6, 0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

C.E. Turley, Research Assistant and James E. Harding, Research Analyst

ORGANIZATION

West Virginia Antiquities Commission

DATE

June 9, 1976

STREET & NUMBER

P.O. Box 630

TELEPHONE

(304) 296-1791

CITY OR TOWN

Morgantown

STATE

West Virginia

# 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

*Leonard M. Davis*

TITLE West Virginia State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE September 13, 1976

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST  
 SUPERVISOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE 12/12/96

DATE 12/6/74

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER

PAGE one

8. SIGNIFICANCE (continued)

could be applied toward a new Baptist edifice at nearby Ronceverte.

The following segments of Foglesong's presentment were among the major arguments:

that petitioner is the only surviving trustee and as such since the date last above mentioned [i.e., 1869, fifteen years previous to the petition] has at different times authorized schools to be held in said building and laterally has allowed the colored people of Lewisburg connected with the Baptist denomination to use said building as a house of worship. . . petitioner thinks, believes and alleges that said building is entirely useless to those for whose use it was erected [the white Baptist congregation]. . . .

Reverend A.W. Woodley of the Mount Tabor Church led the struggle against white repossession. Arguments included statements to the effect that the black congregation had made repairs to the building and had been in possession of it for a number of years. Finally, over two years later, the following short pronouncement was made on behalf of the court:

In re Lewisburg Baptist Church.

This cause came on this 8th day of July, 1886, to be heard upon the petition of William Foglesong surviving trustee of the Baptist Church in the town of Lewisburg, exhibits filed with said petition, the answer of the local society and congregation of the Lewisburg Baptist Church, exhibits filed with said answer, general replication thereto, the depositions of witnesses, and arguments of Counsel. Upon consideration thereof, it is by the Court adjudged, ordered and decreed, that the prayer of the petitioner be denied, and the petition dismissed.

The Negroes had the right to elect new trustees to replace dead ones, and as they constituted the only Baptist congregation in Lewisburg, they were declared rightful owners of the church.

An era ended, the Mount Tabor Baptist Church continues today in much the same building as was the center of controversy over ninety years ago.