

PH 0662917

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

DATA SHEET

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED FEB 15 1978
DATE ENTERED MAY 22 1978

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 **

various

AND/OR COMMON

First Bryan Baptist Church

LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

575 West Bryan Street

___ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Savannah

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

1st - Ginn

___ VICINITY OF

STATE

Georgia

CODE

13

COUNTY

Chatham

CODE

051 ✓

CLASSIFICATION**CATEGORY**

___DISTRICT

 BUILDING(S)

___STRUCTURE

___SITE

___OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

___PUBLIC

 PRIVATE

___BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

___IN PROCESS

___BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS OCCUPIED

___UNOCCUPIED

___WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE YES: RESTRICTED

___YES: UNRESTRICTED

___NO

PRESENT USE

___AGRICULTURE

___COMMERCIAL

___EDUCATIONAL

___ENTERTAINMENT

___GOVERNMENT

___INDUSTRIAL

___MILITARY

___MUSEUM

___PARK

___PRIVATE RESIDENCE

 RELIGIOUS

___SCIENTIFIC

___TRANSPORTATION

___OTHER:

OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

First Bryan Baptist Church

STREET & NUMBER

575 West Bryan Street

CITY, TOWN

Savannah

___ VICINITY OF

STATE

Georgia

LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Chatham County Courthouse, Deed Records

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Savannah

STATE

Georgia

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Survey of Chatham County

DATE

January 17, 1976

___FEDERAL STATE ___COUNTY ___LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Historic Preservation Section, Dept. of Natural Resources

CITY, TOWN

Atlanta

STATE

Georgia

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 (slightly)	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The First Bryan Baptist Church is located at 575 West Bryan Street in a section of Savannah, Georgia, known as Yamacraw. The plan of First Bryan is basilican with nave and aisles separated by a colonnade supporting a gallery. The north front and east and west side elevations are comprised of five bays. These side bays are demarcated by full-height pilasters that frame tall windows. In the entrance elevation, pilasters demarcate the two outside bays. The three center bays, apportioned by two piers, form a recessed portico with tripartite entrance. The effect of the full-height pilasters and piers used in the design of the church is to give a vertical orientation to a religious structure in the most inexpensive way possible. A massive pediment which points to the small wooden steeple completes the front elevation.

Light is the most important element in the design of the church. The brilliant white stuccoed external walls reflect almost all the light which falls upon them. Where the block is pierced, the large vertical translucent windows let in as much illumination as the surrounding mass sends back.

The clean severity of the front elevation is broken up and relieved by the play of light on the shallow rectangular recesses in the piers and the deep shadows of the recessed portico.

The journey from the outside to the inside is one of contrast. One moves from the bright facade to the recesses of the shadowed portico through the cramped narthex and finally into the light-filled and airy nave.

Once inside, the visual focus is the choir behind the pulpit, which is even more illuminated than the nave due to the large side windows and the full-scale stained glass central window. This stained glass window is divided into six panels, five of which contain images of former pastors.

The aisles and narthex are separated from the nave by a fluted Ionic colonnade. The four wooden columns per side support an entablature surmounted by the gallery fronting. This handsome white horizontal member helps keep attention focused on the social nature of this particular congregational setting by making the space more intimate and contained. A simple pressed tin ceiling with leaf motif, slightly vaulted at the edges, caps the interior space.

Two very nice details within the church are the pews and the organ. The wooden pews are simple, yet elegant, with gentle rounded curves emphasized by hand-carved detailing. The organ pipes are enclosed in a delicately crafted cabinet complete with Corinthian pilasters and dentil molding.

Besides the addition of the choir in 1945, it appears that very little remodeling has taken place since 1888. Electric lights have supplanted the gas lamps and the windows have been replaced, but the overall constellation of the church remains unaltered. A wooden prayer chapel, which used to be behind the church, was demolished

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CONTINUATION SHEET Description ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 2

in the 1940's during construction of project housing. In 1951-53, an education annex was constructed adjacent to the church. Its white stuccoed walls with pilasters as well as its rectangular north-south orientation conform to the style and massing of First Bryan.

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input checked="" 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

Present church built 1873

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

Plan drawn by John B. Howard

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The First Bryan Baptist Church is a direct descendent of the congregation organized under the leadership of Andrew Bryan in 1788. This original congregation was the first black Baptist church in North America.

Andrew Bryan, a carpenter six days of the week, began his preaching career as a slave on the plantation of Jonathan Bryan in Chatham County. He had been baptized along with his wife Hannah, Kate Hogg, and Hagar Simpson by George Liele, a recently freed slave who was on his way to Jamaica, in the summer of 1783. Shortly after his baptism, Andrew Bryan began preaching to other slaves at Brampton, his master's plantation. Jonathan Bryan apparently encouraged Andrew's preaching, no doubt believing, as did many whites at the time, that the acquisition of a Christian morality would serve to inhibit slave uprisings. Andrew first preached in a barn at Brampton. Mr. Edward Davis allowed the growing number of worshippers to erect "a rough wooden building" on his land in Yamacraw. Then, in January of 1788, the Revs. Jesse Peter (black) and Abraham Marshall (white) visited this congregation. Rev. Marshall baptized forty-five converted and officially ordained Andrew Bryan as pastor.

Under Andrew Bryan's leadership, the small congregation sought various places of worship. Their new church was often hampered and harassed by segments of the white population who remained unconvinced that such freedom of worship and assembly was compatible with chattel slavery. However, there were whites who assisted the search for a permanent place to worship as well as argued the cause of Andrew Bryan before the public and the courts.

Jonathan Bryan, Andrew's master, died in 1788. In the enumeration of the inventory and appraisal of his estate recorded May 22, 1789, listed under "chattel" are Andrew, Hannah, and Sampson, Andrew's brother and first deacon of the new church. Shortly after the death of his master, Andrew, with the help of several whites, purchased his freedom from a new master who had inherited him. In an indenture recorded 26th June, 1790, "free Andrew" bought a lot (Number 12, Oglethorpe Ward) from Thomas Gibbons for 27 pounds sterling. Gibbons, an attorney and one of the prominent men in Savannah who assisted Andrew in his attempts to exercise religious freedom, had purchased the same lot two weeks earlier from Jacob C. Waldhauer for 25 pounds sterling.

During the early years of the church's existence it underwent several periods of persecution and harassment. Slave uprisings in the West Indies, and reputed insurrections elsewhere, increased white fears that a slave revolt could erupt in Savannah.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Rev. James M. Simms, The First Colored Baptist Church in North America.
 Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1888.

History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia. Atlanta, 1881.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one

QUADRANGLE NAME Savannah, GA.-S. C.

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24000

UTM REFERENCES 610

A

1	7	4	9	0	6	4	0	3	5	4	9	3	2	0
ZONE				EASTING				NORTHING						

B

ZONE				EASTING				NORTHING					

C

ZONE				EASTING				NORTHING					

D

ZONE				EASTING				NORTHING					

E

ZONE				EASTING				NORTHING					

F

ZONE				EASTING				NORTHING					

G

ZONE				EASTING				NORTHING					

H

ZONE				EASTING				NORTHING					

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Beginning at the northwest corner of the property line on Bryan Street proceed easterly approximately 200 feet to the northeast corner of the lot on which the

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
-------	------	--------	------

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Steve Henson, Intern

ORGANIZATION

Historic Preservation Section, Dept. of Natural Resources August 1977

STREET & NUMBER

270 Washington Street, S. W.

TELEPHONE

(404) 656-2840

CITY OR TOWN

Atlanta

STATE

Georgia

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

Elizabeth A. Lyon

2/7/78

TITLE

Acting State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

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

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

W. H. Cole

DATE

5-22-78

ATTEST:

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

DATE

5-12-78

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CONTINUATION SHEET Significance ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

Believing that a group of Negroes meeting unsupervised by whites, regardless of announced purpose, was a threat to social stability, Andrew's church was periodically forced to abandon meeting places and services. The ultimate triumph in the establishment of a stable black church in ante-bellum Savannah is a remarkable achievement and a witness to the dedication and forbearance of its organizers and the whites who helped remove the numerous obstacles set in its path.

In an indenture dated September 4, 1793, James Whitfield and William Bryan (son of Jonathan Bryan) acquired "In trust for a free Black man called and known by the name of Andrew Bryan a Preacher of the Gospel by Lawful Authority ordained" all that lot of land situated "at Yamacraw above the City of Savannah ... known by the Number Seven (7) in the Village of St. Gall fronting Bryan or Odingsell Street." This lot is today the site of the First Bryan Baptist Church, a direct descendent of Andrew Bryan's original congregation. The property itself may be the longest continually held property by blacks in the United States.

As is characteristic of American denomination history, several churches have evolved from Andrew Bryan's first church. A white Baptist church was organized in Savannah by Rev. Henry Holcombe in 1800. This church did not directly grow out of Bryan's congregation of course, but a number of members of the Negro congregation changed their affiliation to Holcombe's church. Those who did so were generally house servants in the city, whose status was a notch above the farm slave. In December of 1802, another Negro congregation was organized in Savannah. It seems certain that this new church was a product of white concern over the growing size of Andrew Bryan's membership. Masters could, of course, simply prohibit their slaves from attending services; but for those who believed that church could contribute to the stability of the community, a second black congregation was the preferred solution.

A rift in the first church in 1832, when Andrew Marshall, Andrew Bryan's nephew, was pastor, caused a more substantial shake-up in black Baptist affiliation in Savannah. This particular event is also significant and of considerable interest for American religious history.

In 1832 Savannah was visited by Alexander Campbell. Campbell, from Kentucky, was at that time referred to as the "new-light" preacher and was expounding what was considered to be heretical Baptist doctrine. Campbell, it should be noted, later became the founder of the Disciples of Christ (Christian Churches), a

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CONTINUATION SHEET Significance ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 3

denomination that remains a powerful exponent of conservative Christianity. Rev. Marshall invited Campbell to preach to his congregation. This invitation upset many orthodox Baptists in the Savannah area who believed Campbell's doctrine of strict Biblical literalism undercut many Baptist practices. Campbell argued that where the Bible remained silent, so must the churches. That is, the Bible was to be the only precedent for the church practices as well as doctrine. Apparently, Rev. Marshall intimated that he accepted Campbell's views. This precipitated considerable disunion within the congregation. The church became so divided and volatile that in several instances city officials were forced to quell disputes. Eventually, the dissension lead to schism and Rev. Marshall and a majority of the congregation left the church. According to Simms' history, Rev. Marshall's followers were composed largely of the female members, who comprised a majority of the congregation. Simms also records that all of the ordained deacons sided with the minority, under the leadership of Deacon Adam Johnson. It was Johnson who was largely responsible for maintaining the integrity of the remaining members as a church.

The proceedings of the Sunbury Association, of which the first church had been a member, in dealing with this schism are complex and somewhat arbitrary. A major question which eventually arose was which of these two congregations, Rev. Marshall's or the members who continued in the first church, was heir to the title, tradition, and prestige of Andrew Bryan's first black Baptist church. The debate has continued into the twentieth century, although today the First Bryan Baptist Church and the First African Baptist Church celebrate a joint anniversary. By virtue of its location in the Savannah Historic District, the First African Baptist Church is already on the National Register of Historic Places.

The congregation which remained in Andrew Bryan's first church continued their significant involvement in the affairs of the black community as well as their importance to the city as a whole. In January of 1865, less than one month after the Union army had taken control in Savannah, 20 freedmen assembled at a meeting in the Green-Meldrin house with General Sherman, Secretary of War Stanton, and Quartermaster Meigs, to discuss the dispensation of the blacks in the area. Among those representing the black community were Rev. Ulysses L. Houston, pastor of the congregation at Andrew Bryan's first church, Rev. Garrison Frazier, former pastor at this church who served as spokesman for the group, Alexander Harris, a licensed minister of the congregation, and Andrew Neal, a deacon in the church. Thus, membership of this church made up 20% of those leaders of the black community who were instrumental in the issuance by General Sherman of Special Order no. 15 which set aside the Georgia Sea Islands for the settlement of freedmen.

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CONTINUATION SHEET Significance ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 4

In 1867, this congregation was chartered in Chatham County under the new name of First Bryan Baptist Church, in recognition of Andrew Bryan. The church had been given the denotation of the Third African Baptist Church by the Sunbury Association after the schism in 1832.

Rev. Ulysses L. Houston, one of the leaders present at the historic meeting with General Sherman, was elected state legislator from Bryan County. He took a leave of absence from his pastorate to serve from 1868-70 as one of the 33 black Reconstruction legislators in Georgia. Rev. Houston was again occupying the pastorate in 1873 when the Bryan congregation decided to take down the wooden meetinghouse constructed by Andrew Bryan and erect a new church.

A plan for the new brick structure, drawn up by John B. Howard, city surveyor and civil engineer, was accepted in September, 1873. The cornerstone was laid October 13 of that year to joyous celebration and ceremony. According to the Savannah papers that covered the event, by the time the ceremonies commenced "it was almost impossible to obtain even standing room." Black Masons from the Grand Lodge, Eureka and Hilton Lodges marched to the church site, preceded by the Washington Cornet Band. After the laying of the cornerstone, Rev. H. M. Turner reviewed in a lengthy speech the history of the First Bryan church and its importance to the black community and Savannah. The papers recorded that a collection taken up after his address netted sixty dollars towards construction costs as well as "the promise of a considerable amount more from some of the whites present." It is significant that all of the actual construction of the new church was done by black artisans and labor, under the occasional supervision of a white architect.

The history of the First Bryan Baptist Church is of major significance to the story of blacks in Georgia. Not only is this church a descendent of Andrew Bryan's first black Baptist church in North America, occupying the same ground that Bryan consecrated in 1794, but many of its members throughout its history have been of major significance in Savannah and Georgia history. The story of the ante-bellum years of the church's existence is one of persecution and forbearance. However, this story also records a side of southern history which is less well publicized. Many whites in Savannah during the years before the Civil War were instrumental in the ultimate triumph of this congregation. The history which the story of this church unfolds is a significant thread in the fabric of Georgia history. First Bryan, still occupying this 1873 structure, remains a vigorous force in Savannah's evolution, and a major landmark in black history.

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CONTINUATION SHEET References ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 2

John W. Davis, "George Liele and Andrew Bryan, Pioneer Negro Baptist Preachers," in The Journal of Negro History, Vol. 3, No. 2 (April, 1918).

"Rise of Early Negro Churches," in Documents section of The Journal of Negro History, Vol. 1, No. 1 (January, 1916).

Josef C. James, "Sherman at Savannah," in The Journal of Negro History, Vol. XXXIX, No. 2 (April 1954).

Bob Lee, "Oasis: Something providing Relief from the Usual: Refuge," in Outdoors in Georgia, January, 1976.

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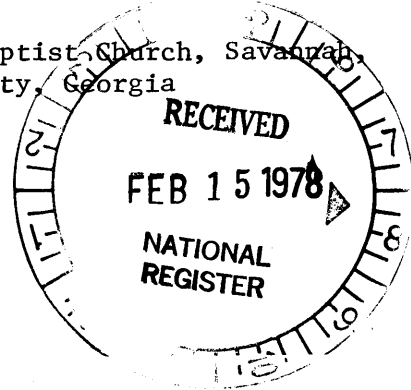
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CONTINUATION SHEET Geographical Data. ITEM NUMBER 10 PAGE 2

building stands; thence southerly along the east edge of the building to the rear lot line; thence westerly along the rear lot line to the southwest corner of the property; thence northerly to the point of beginning.

First Bryan Baptist Church, Savannah
Chatham County, Georgia



CITY SAVANNAH

Legend

- Non-structural sites
unnamed sites of an
significance.
- ▲ Structural sites
sites identified as sig
an architectural surv

Bartram Trail



Key

1. Bonaventure Cemetery
2. Savannah Water Distribution Center
3. DeLyon-de la Motta Cemetery
4. House at Corner of Spruce and Wilson Streets
5. First Bryan Baptist Church
6. 911 E. Waldburg Street
7. 808-812 E. Park Street
8. 906-910 E. Park Street

