

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES - REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in "Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms" (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name First African Missionary Baptist Church
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 515 Webster Street
city, town Bainbridge () vicinity of
county Decatur **code** 087
state Georgia **code** GA **zip code** 31717

() not for publication

3. Classification

Ownership of Property:

- private
- public-local
- public-state
- public-federal

Category of Property:

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

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing

Noncontributing

buildings	1	0
sites	0	0
structures	0	0
objects	0	0
total	1	0

Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

Name of previous listing: n. a.

Name of related multiple property listing: n. a.

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination 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 meets the National Register criteria. () See continuation sheet.

Richard Coover
Signature of certifying official

12-18-01
Date

for W. Ray Luce
Historic Preservation Division Director
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

In my opinion, the property () meets () does not meet the National Register criteria. () See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency or bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register

Edson H. Beall 1-28-02

determined eligible for the National Register _____

determined not eligible for the National Register _____

removed from the National Register _____

other, explain: _____

see continuation sheet

for

Keeper of the National Register

Date

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions:

Religion: religious facility

Current Functions:

Religion: religious facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

Late Victorian: Romanesque Revival

Materials:

foundation	Brick
walls	Brick
roof	Asphalt
other	Glass

Description of present and historic physical appearance:

The First African Missionary Baptist Church is a large, Romanesque Revival-style African-American church located in northwest Bainbridge. Bainbridge is the county seat of rural Decatur County in extreme southwest Georgia and is the largest community in the county. The church is located just north of downtown in a formerly residential area. Webster Street, on which the church is located, is mostly industrial with lumberyards next to the church and across the street. A funeral home is located south of the church and the north end of the street is Oak City Cemetery.

Begun in 1904 and completed in 1909, the Bainbridge church is built of brick with its long side to the street. Two entrance towers of differing heights flank a projecting cross gable. The towers are square in plan and topped with tall pyramidal roofs. A principal design element is the elaborate stained-glass windows. Both gable ends and the front cross gable contain a small oculus above a large, round-arched window. Lancet windows are also incorporated into the design—on the gable ends, the sides of the towers, and the front of the auditorium. Decorative brickwork is limited to the water table, stringcourse, and drip molds around the windows and doors.

The interior of the church features an auditorium plan with twelve rows of curved pews arranged in a semicircle with the pulpit in the center. In the apse behind the pulpit is the pipe organ that was installed in 1924-1925. A wood lattice wall was also installed to obscure the organ from view. The sanctuary's white plaster walls contrast with the dark oak window and door surrounds and tongue-and-groove wainscoting. Most significant is the vaulted wood ceiling in which tongue-in-groove beaded boards are set diagonally in framed panels between the larger framing members. Two small storage rooms flank the pulpit. Shortly after the church was built, a small brick addition was

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form **Continuation Sheet**

Section 7--Description

constructed behind the choir. The new addition, which matches the brickwork of the main building, contains the pipe organ and storage space.

The church has sustained few alterations. The original electric light fixtures and steam radiators remain in place, although a new heating system was installed in 1991. In 1950, new oak pews were installed. In 1959, a one- and two-story modern annex building was added to the rear of the church. The flat-roofed, brick-veneer addition serves an education building and social hall and includes a kitchen. More recently, a handicap-accessible ramp was built of concrete across the north entrance tower.

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form **Continuation Sheet**

Section 8--Statement of Significance

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria:

A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): N/A

A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions):

Architecture
Ethnic Heritage: Black

Period of Significance:

1904-1951

Significant Dates:

1904-1909 – First African Missionary Baptist Church constructed.

Significant Person(s):

n.a.

Cultural Affiliation:

n.a.

Architect(s)/Builder(s):

Bynes, Thomas H. (architect)

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form **Continuation Sheet**

Section 8--Statement of Significance

Narrative statement of significance (areas of significance)

The First African Missionary Baptist Church is a monumental African-American church located in the town of Bainbridge in the southwest corner of the state. It is significant in the area of architecture as an outstanding example of African-American church architecture in Georgia at the beginning of the 20th century. Most churches founded and built by blacks in the late 19th century were usually plain, one-room frame structures, rectangular in shape with gable roofs. They had little or no ornamentation or architectural detailing. Sometimes the church had a rectangular wooden steeple, a central tower mounted on the roof, or a tower at one or both front corners. Often these towers were later additions. Side or rear wings may also have been added after the church was originally constructed. Church interiors were usually finished with paneling or plaster and the ceilings were often unfinished.

The First African Missionary Baptist Church in Bainbridge, designed by Thomas H. Bynes, a member of congregation, is a Romanesque Revival-style church that also includes Gothic lancet windows. The interior features a vaulted ceiling covered entirely with tongue-in-groove bead board. Its sophisticated design is a result of the architect's training at the Tuskegee Institute. The financial resources available to the congregation are reflected in the large size of the church and its brick construction, all of which distinguish it from the smaller, frame churches that were more commonly built during this period by African-American congregations in Georgia.

The First African Missionary Baptist Church is also significant in the area of black ethnic heritage because, in addition to its role as a religious institution, the First African Missionary Baptist church served the African-American community in Bainbridge as an important social institution. Like many African-American churches in Georgia and throughout the South, the Bainbridge church served as a center for social and charitable organizations and a focus for civic and political activity.

In *Historic Black Resources: A Handbook for the Identification, Documentation, and Evaluation of Historic African-American Properties in Georgia*, Carole Merritt identifies the church as the center of community life in African-American communities. Following emancipation, the church was often the first building constructed in black communities. Although ex-slaves may have lived in the same or similar dwellings that they had previously occupied, they immediately began to organize and build their own churches. During and after slavery, separate denominations formed black associations. The African Methodists Episcopal (A.M.E.) was the first to organize nationally. In Georgia, regional associations were formed shortly after emancipation with the purpose of organizing and supporting schools.

Most blacks withdrew from white congregations to found their own churches. Sometimes land was granted by white churches or individuals. More often, however, buying land and building a church involved black cooperative activities. In 1877, for example, eighteen members of the White Bluff community south of Savannah purchased 200 acres of land, one acre of which was set aside in 1883 for the construction of the Nicholsonboro Baptist Church.

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form **Continuation Sheet**

Section 8--Statement of Significance

Most extant African-American churches in Georgia date from the late 19th and early 20th centuries when most black congregations were large and wealthy enough to finance the building of monumental structures. In many cases, these churches replaced smaller and simpler churches built earlier in the 19th century. The Bainbridge church is an extraordinary example of an African-American church built during this period.

National Register Criteria

A and C.

Criteria Considerations (if applicable)

The First African Missionary Baptist Church is a religious property that meets Criteria Consideration A because it draws its primary significance from its architectural design, methods of construction, and its historical associations with the African-American community in Bainbridge, Georgia.

Period of significance (justification)

The period of significance begins in 1904 when construction of the church began and ends in 1951 (the fifty-years-of-age end date) to include the period in which the building served as a center for social as well as religious activities in the African-American community in Bainbridge.

Contributing/Noncontributing Resources (explanation, if necessary)

The First African Missionary Baptist Church is the only resource associated with this nomination. There are no other buildings, structures, sites, or objects within the bounds of the National Register property.

Developmental History or Historic Context (as appropriate)

The First African Missionary Baptist Church formed after Emancipation when African-American members of the white First Baptist Church withdrew to establish their own church near the Flint River in an area called Fort Hughes. Later, the congregation moved to a site at the north end of Webster Street where Oak City Cemetery is now located. In 1900, Dr. N. B. Williamson became pastor and began the effort to locate a site and raise funds for a new church. In 1904, the congregation purchased the lot at 515 Webster Street for \$600. Construction on the new church began that same year. Thomas H. Bynes, a church deacon and graduate of the Tuskegee Institute, is believed to have designed the church. Eugene Smith, the principal builder, and his assistant Starling Smith (no relation), were both congregation members. F. L. Patterson donated bricks for the new church, which was completed in 1909.

In 1909 and 1959, the church hosted the General Missionary Baptists Convention of Georgia. Also in 1959, a one-story annex building was added to the southwest corner of the church. The brick-veneer

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form **Continuation Sheet**

Section 8--Statement of Significance

addition serves as an education building and social hall. Currently, the church remains a religious and social center for the African-American community in Bainbridge.

9. Major Bibliographic References

Montgomery, Erick D. National Register Nomination Form. First African Baptist Church. On file at the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Historic Preservation Division, Atlanta, Georgia, 1980.

Merritt, Carole. *Historic Black Resources: A Handbook for the Identification, Documentation, and Evaluation of Historic African-American Properties in Georgia*. Atlanta: Historic Preservation Section, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, 1984.

Previous documentation on file (NPS): (x) N/A

- () preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- () preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been issued
date issued:
- () 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:

- (x) State historic preservation office
- () Other State Agency
- () Federal agency
- () Local government
- () University
- () Other, Specify Repository:

Georgia Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): n.a.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Approximately 0.3 acres

UTM References

Point Zone Easting Northing

A) 16 731810 3421320

Verbal Boundary Description

The National Register boundary is indicated by a heavy black line on the attached map, which is drawn to scale.

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes nearly the entire city lot historically associated with the church.

11. Form Prepared By

State Historic Preservation Office

name/title Steven Moffson
organization Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources
street & number 156 Trinity Avenue, S.W., Suite 101
city or town Atlanta **state** Georgia **zip code** 30303
telephone (404) 656-2840 **date** June 31, 2001
e-mail steven_Moffson@mail.dnr.state.ga.us

Consulting Services/Technical Assistance (if applicable)

(x) not applicable

name/title
organization
mailing address
city or town state Georgia **zip code**
telephone
e-mail

- () property owner
- () regional preservation planner
- () consultant
- () other:

Property Owner or Nomination Sponsor Name and Address

name (property owner or contact person) Robert Jackson
organization (if applicable) First African Baptist Church
mailing address P.O Box 1626
city or town Bainbridge **state** Georgia **zip code** 31717
e-mail n.a.

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form **Continuation Sheet**

Photographs

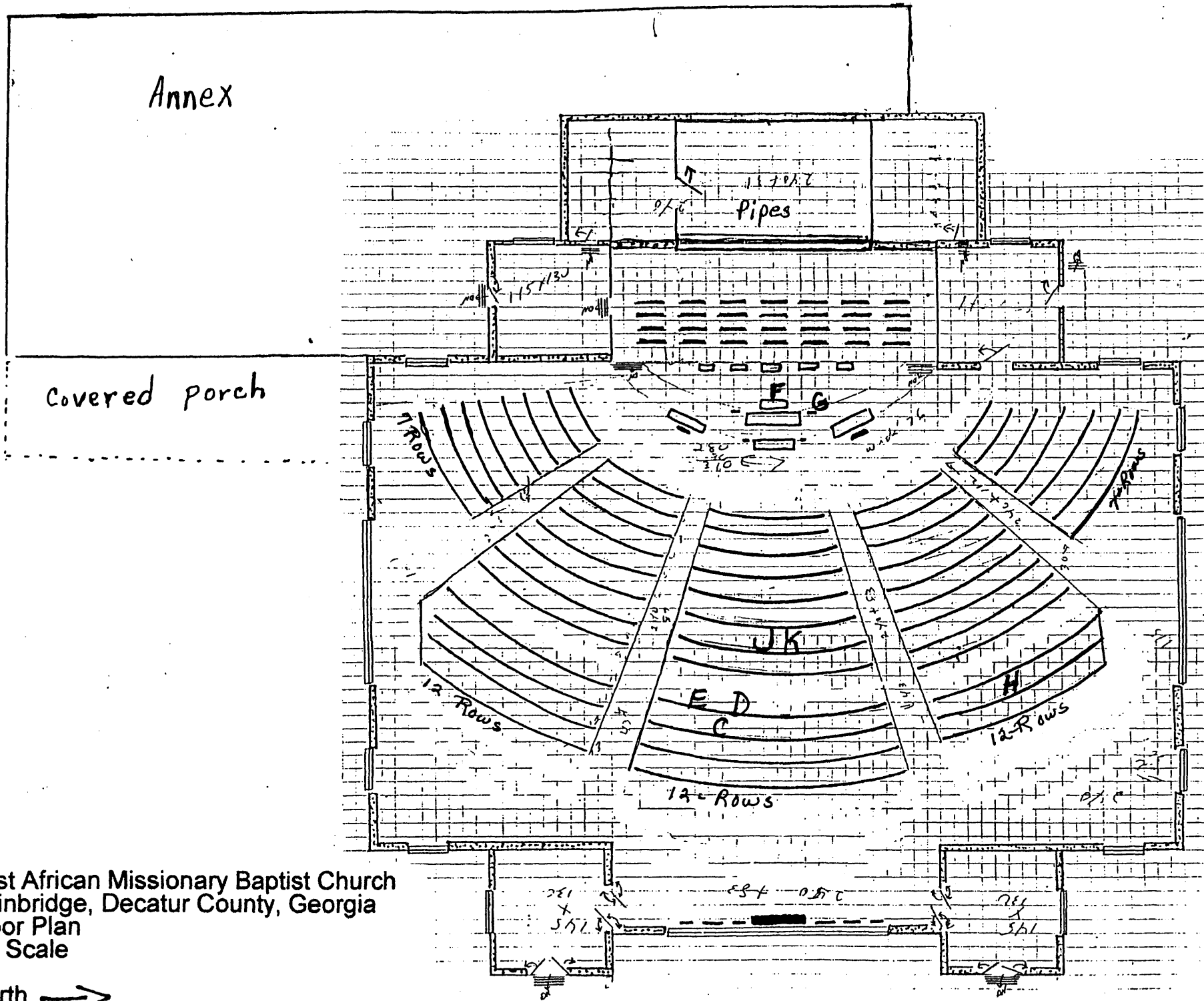
Name of Property: First African Missionary Baptist Church
City or Vicinity: Bainbridge
County: Decatur
State: Georgia
Photographer: James R. Lockhart
Negative Filed: Georgia Department of Natural Resources
Date Photographed: September 2001

Description of Photograph(s):

Number of Photographs: 12

1. Main façade and south side with later addition, photographer facing northwest.
2. Main façade, photographer facing west.
3. Main façade, detail of south entrance tower, photographer facing west.
4. Main façade, detail of cornerstone, photographer facing west.
5. Main façade and north side, photographer facing southwest.
6. North side, detail of windows, photographer facing south.
7. South side with later addition, photographer facing north.
8. Interior facing pulpit, photographer facing west.
9. Interior facing northwest corner, photographer facing northwest.
10. Interior facing north entrance, photographer facing northeast.
11. Interior, detail of windows on north side, photographer facing north.
12. Interior, detail of vaulted ceiling.

HPD version 053101



First African Missionary Baptist Church
Bainbridge, Decatur County, Georgia
Floor Plan
No Scale

North →

First African Missionary Baptist Church
 Bainbridge, Decatur County, Georgia
 Sketch Map
 National Register Boundary
 Scale: 1" = 100'

Item # 4A: Copy from tax map

