

MULTIPLE RESOURCES OF GREENVILLE

BUTLER COUNTY, ALABAMA

Historic Name:	Butler Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church	Owner:	African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church & Trustee Board
Common Name:	Butler Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church		c/o Mr. James Cannedy, Chairman 508 South Park Greenville, AL

Address: 407 Oglesby

Acreage: less than one UTM: 16/535/490/3520/770

Verbal Boundary: Parcel #5, north half of Lot 18 on Taylor Tract and known as part of Section 23, Township 10, Range 14 in the City of Greenville. (See red line on the attached map.)

Date of Construction: 1913

Statement of Significance:

Criterion A - Religion:

The Butler Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church building is significant as a local manifestation of the A.M.E. Zion Church Extension Program which during the early 20th century provided financial relief to struggling local A.M.E. Zion churches. The Church Extension Program of the A.M.E. Zion Church was begun during the late 19th century to assess the condition and needs of church properties within the general conference and introduce creative methods of expansion. The program was supported by an annual public collection taken from each A.M.E. Zion congregation and later supplemented by donations, bequests and appropriations from the general conference funds. When the original Butler Chapel building burned in 1911, the congregation was aided by the Church Extension Program, and within two years the present building constructed. This incident paralleled the creation of a system to secure loans from the Church Extension Department to build churches and parsonages.

Criterion A - Social/Humanitarian:

The Butler Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church, as one of three black controlled institutions in Greenville during the early 20th century, is locally significant for its role as the social and cultural focus for a large majority of the city's blacks.

Criterion C - Architecture:

The Butler Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church is significant as the most imposing and highly detailed early 20th century black-built building remaining in Greenville, Al. Completed in 1913 as the replacement for the original 1867 structure (burned 1911), the Butler Chapel church building is an eclectic-late Victorian design incorporating Medieval and American Colonial elements and details such as crenelated towers, lead glass windows, a projecting bay, fan lighted windows and rubbed brick arch work. Although several other black denominations have constructed later church buildings on Methodist Hill, none compare with the quality of workmanship exhibited in the Butler Chapel building.

Description:

Located in the center of the Methodist Hill residential neighborhood, the Butler Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church is a one and a half story brick building with a steeply pitched gable roof. The building is most reminiscent of Greenville's 1891 First Baptist Church (razed 1954) in its form and basic stylized features, although it lacks the refinement of an architect-designed construction. The building's particularly fine workmanship (executed by members of the church congregation) and well proportioned lines clearly articulate the desire to achieve a distinctive and permanent structure.

Butler Chapel was built in 1913 following a 1911 fire which destroyed the original church building and is an eclectic-late Victorian design incorporating Medieval and American Colonial elements and details.

The facade of the building features a flat-top projecting bay with brick belt coursing along the top and rounded arch windows containing lead glass. Flanking the bay are crenelated towers, also with brick belt coursing, containing double door entrances surmounted by Roman-influenced rubbed brick arch work. The rubbed brick treatment is repeated throughout as either round or jack arches surmounting the bays of the facade which include a variety of louvered windows and vents situated along the towers and piercing the gabled pediment. Along the sides of the building brick pilasters are symmetrically spaced dividing the exterior walls into nine sections; each alternating section containing a triple hung sash window surmounted by a fanlight.

The interior features include hardwood floors, paneled walls and window and door trims. A one-story annex building extending from the west side of the main building was added in 1959 to accommodate Sunday School classes and kitchen facilities. Today that section during the weekdays serves as a community day care facility. A one story frame bungalow built in the 1920's as the church parsonage is situated at the extreme northeast corner of the lot facing Oglesby Street. This building is included in the nomination as a contributing structure.

Historical Summary:

Butler Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church is the earliest known independent black congregation in Greenville. Unlike Baptist churches which formed on the local level first, the A.M.E. Zion churches were highly organized and received considerable direction and assistance from a General Conference. As a result, the A.M.E. Zion denomination required very little outside missionary or philanthropic aid. During the Reconstruction era the denomination flourished, targeting the ex-slaves of the South as the ideal audience for the doctrines and disciplines of the A.M.E. Zion Church which promoted freedom, justice and equality.

Local legend holds that the Butler Chapel congregation organized in 1867. In that same year Bishop J. J. Clinton presided over the first statewide convention of the A.M.E. Zion Church in Alabama at Mobile with 71 ministers representing over 6,000 members across the state. Although little is known about the church prior to the 1890's it is certain that Butler Chapel is the earliest social institution fully controlled by blacks in Greenville. Its wide-ranging influence in the community is most evident in the organization of Butler County's earliest known black high school.

The A.M.E. Zion church's commitment to foster character-building and scholastic advancement among its congregants began in 1800 with the first Zion church building in New York which provided accommodations for a school. When a larger building was erected in 1820, a school facility was added to the church building. Educational arrangements of this kind continued until the Nat Turner uprising in 1831. Little was accomplished by the denomination until the late 19th century.

In Alabama there were three A.M.E. Zion school ventures. The first in Tuscaloosa, Jones Institute lasted until 1900 when it was then merged by the General Conference with the second school venture in Greenville. The third school, Zion Institute became a local project, serving primarily the local A.M.E. Zion churches. The Greenville school was organized in 1893 as Greenville High School at Butler Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church. The original building provided classroom space for the school from its inception in 1893 until 1898 when the present site of the school was purchased.

Butler Chapel's original church building burned to the ground April 19, 1911. The reconstruction of this church building reflects another area of self-help fostered by the A.M.E. Zion Church. Beginning in 1872 the General Body of the A.M.E. Zion Church appointed a committee to assess the conditions and needs of the church properties within the general conference and introduce some creative methods of expansion. This interest in safeguarding and expanding local church properties resulted in the establishment of a ministration department in 1892 known as the Church Extension Department and of the Connectional Board. This board, composed of bishops of the church, the General Secretary and General Stewart, was entrusted "to hold in trust monies and property for the ministers and members of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church." The purpose of these holdings was to aid in the erection and improving of churches and parsonages of the denomination. An account of the number of churches erected or repaired in each district was made and provisions for making loans from the General

Board were then outlined. Support for the program was provided by local congregations in annual public collections. These collections were later supplemented by donations, bequests and appropriations from the general conference funds. Butler Chapel received emergency assistance from the Extension Department, and within two years the new church building was completed on the same site of the original Butler Chapel Church building.

Butler Chapel remains the first and only A.M.E. Zion Church in Greenville, but it is also a local testament of black group's material progress. Its location in Greenville's more affluent early black neighborhood is evidence of the church's wide-ranging role as the neighborhood center of economic and social development.

Seeking to achieve a structure of distinction, members of the congregation apparently patterned the building after the design of Greenville's late 19th century First Baptist Church (razed 1954). Although through the years, several other black denominations have constructed later church buildings in the black residential community on Methodist Hill, none compare with the quality of workmanship exhibited in the Butler Chapel construction.

Today Butler Chapel remains the earliest and only A.M.E. Zion place of worship in Greenville, Alabama.

