

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form



1984  
1984

See Instructions in How to Complete National Register Forms  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Black Protestant Churches of Muskogee TR

and/or common

2. Location

4

street & number (See continuation sheet) N/A not for publication

city, town N/A vicinity of congressional district

state Oklahoma code 40 county Muskogee code 101

3. Classification

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Thematic	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
			<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<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 (See continuation sheet)

street & number

city, town N/A vicinity of state

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. (See continuation sheet)

street & number

city, town state

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Oklahoma Landmarks Inventory has this property been determined eligible? yes  no

date 1983 federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Oklahoma Historic Preservation Office - Oklahoma Historical Society

city, town Oklahoma City state Oklahoma 73105

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

2 S 982

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Black Protestant Churches of Muskogee thematic nomination consists of four religious buildings constructed between 1903 and 1928. All are located in the black residential community of Muskogee which has historically had the largest black community of any urban center in Oklahoma outside of Oklahoma City and Tulsa.

All four are Protestant churches -- two Baptist and two Methodist. These two denominations were the most active among Oklahoma blacks since the 1830s when missionary activity began in Indian Territory. Baptists and Methodists have been the most predominant faiths in terms of black membership ranking first and second, respectively, in the Federal religious censuses of 1906, 1916, 1926, and 1936. Each of the four churches reflected the social and spiritual needs of the Muskogee black community, which numbered over 7,000 at the time of the churches' construction, and served as a stabilizing social institution and source of community cohesiveness for black families during the era of racial separatism in Oklahoma.

All four properties have red brick wall finishes although one has been painted. All have gable roofs, three of which have intersecting gables. Three of the four buildings feature towers and considerable ornamentation. Decorative features include segmental, round, and Gothic arched openings, crenellation along tower roofs, and stained glass windows.

Although two of the four have additions to the rear (Ward Chapel A.M.E. in 1948 and Central Baptist in the mid-1950s), they do not detract from the overall architectural integrity of the buildings. The other two, First Baptist and Spencer Memorial, retain their original character, texture, and design. None of the four properties has ever been vacant and have held continuous religious services since their construction.

All are detached buildings landscaped with a variety of trees and shrubs.

The four buildings included in the Black Protestant Churches of Muskogee thematic nomination are:

- (1) First Baptist Church (1903)
- (2) Ward Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church (1904)
- (3) Central Baptist Church (1908)
- (4) Spencer Memorial United Methodist Church (1928)

These four structures comprise the oldest surviving black churches in Muskogee which retain both their historic and architectural integrity. There are two other black Protestant churches in Muskogee, however, one has been significantly altered and the other is no longer in use.

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date entered

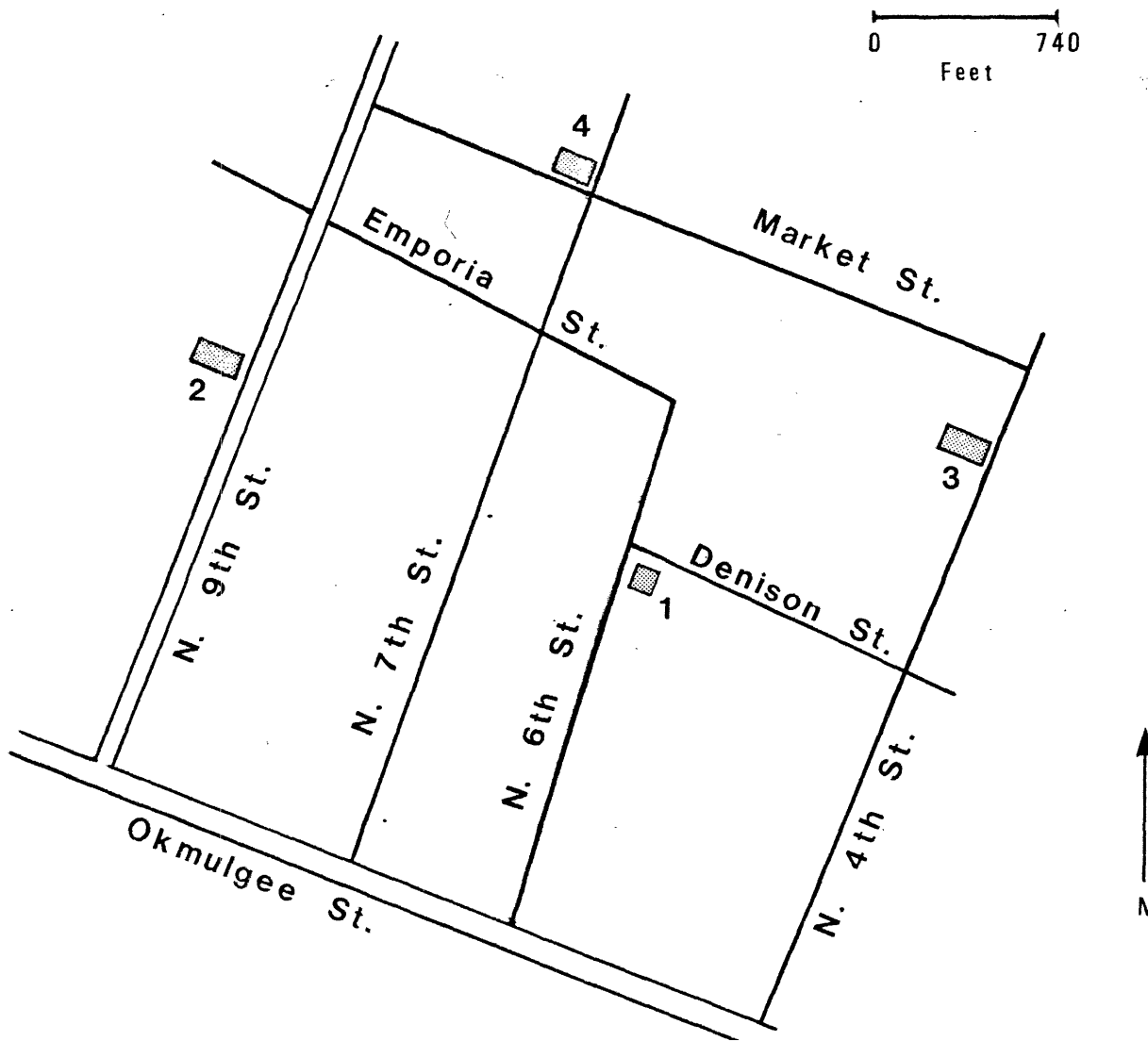
Continuation sheet Description

Item number 7

Page 9

## Black Protestant Churches of Muskogee

- 1 First Baptist
- 2 Ward Chapel A.M.E.
- 3 Central Baptist
- 4 Spencer Memorial United Methodist



# 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 type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input 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 type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify (Ethnic))
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

**Specific dates** 1903-Present      **Builder/Architect** Unknown

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

The Black Protestant Churches of Muskogee thematic nomination is historically significant because: (1) the four properties constitute the oldest and best remaining examples of black Protestant churches in Muskogee, and (2) they are among the oldest and best preserved social institutions in the black community of Muskogee, the largest black community in Oklahoma outside of Oklahoma City and Tulsa.

From the date of its founding in 1872, Muskogee quickly developed as the major urban center of Indian Territory. Because of suitable soil for cotton production, the town soon emerged as a principal trading, storage, and processing center for cotton producers. Muskogee also became a major rail center for Indian Territory as three railroads laid tracks through the town during the period from 1872 to 1885. In 1904, oil and gas fields were opened in the surrounding area and one of Indian Territory's first petroleum refineries was completed in Muskogee shortly thereafter.

Muskogee's commercial and industrial growth continued to flourish. By 1910, there were six railroads with fourteen passenger trains daily and Muskogee became division headquarters for the Katy, Missouri Southern, Muskogee Union, and Pullman Company. Muskogee boasted of three cotton gins, a cotton compress, a vitrified brick plant, a concrete block plant, two daily newspapers, and four weekly papers.

All of these facilities brought increased population. In 1910 Muskogee had reached 25,275 and was the second largest city in the new state of Oklahoma, exceeded only by Oklahoma City.

Because of the industrial and commercial growth of Muskogee, it became an attractive urban center for black migrants seeking employment, especially those who were living in rural areas of eastern Oklahoma. Historically the black population of Oklahoma had been concentrated in old Indian Territory because the black freedmen of the Five Civilized Tribes had settled there following the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 and a majority of the all-black towns, a movement of the 1890s and early 1900s, has been established in that area.

Muskogee's 25,278 population in 1910 consisted of 7,831 blacks, or approximately 31 percent. Its thriving black community had developed a business district including several retail stores, physicians and attorneys offices, a black-owned bank, and a black newspaper, the Muskogee Cimeter. The black residential and commercial development was accompanied by the establishment of several social institutions including schools, fraternal orders, and churches.

Organized religion among blacks in Indian Territory dates to the 1830s when the Five Civilized Tribes brought their black slaves from the southeastern United States. The most active denominations among blacks in Indian Territory were the Baptists and Methodists who completed successful missionary work in the region. By 1906 black church membership in the Twin Territories was approximately 26,000 with Baptists and Methodists ranking one and two in the total.

Three of the four Protestant churches included in this nomination were constructed either shortly before or immediately following statehood in 1907: First Baptist (1903), Ward Chapel African Methodist Episcopal (1904), and Central Baptist (1908). The fourth, Spencer Memorial Methodist, was built in 1928. All were constructed during the beginning stages of Muskogee's black community growth or during the peak of its

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Inventory—Nomination Form

received

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Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 2

development. Because of their Baptist or Methodist affiliation, they reflect the earlier missionary activity of these two denominations among blacks in Indian Territory. These four churches in Muskogee represent the one social institution -- religion -- over which blacks had reasonable control. These churches, therefore, exerted powerful influence within the black community of Muskogee. They were the centers of community cohesiveness and served as focal points to which blacks could turn to for spiritual inspiration as well as to escape secular problems. They provided opportunities for self-expression, recognition, and leadership and proved to be a foundation for social and economic reform in a segregated society.

The First Baptist and Ward Chapel A.M.E. Churches built in 1903 and 1904, respectively, were the first churches erected to serve the black community of Muskogee. Constructed prior to statehood in 1907, they housed congregations which had been established much earlier. First Baptist evolved from a mission school founded in 1877 for blacks and Indians and Ward Chapel's congregation was formed in November of 1883. Both congregations outgrew their original meeting places and new churches were constructed in the early 1900s.

Central Baptist, completed in 1908, was the second black Baptist church in Muskogee and the third black Protestant church erected. It reflected the growing black community of Muskogee which had reached over 7,000 by 1910 and the fact that blacks in Oklahoma were overwhelmingly affiliated with the Baptist denomination.

Spencer Memorial Methodist, constructed in 1928, is the second oldest black Methodist church in Muskogee and has retained its historic and architectural integrity for more than 55 years. Its construction reflected that Muskogee's black community remained stable and that by 1920 still numbered over 7,000.

All four buildings have housed continuous religious services since their construction-- First Baptist for more than 80 years, Ward Chapel A.M.E. for over 79 years, Central Baptist for over 76 years, and Spencer Memorial Methodist for over 55 years. These four black Protestant churches played a vital role in the religious, social, and ethnic history of Muskogee's black community by providing a place of worship for early black residents as well as a social outlet for black families during a period in Oklahoma's history when the black church was a stabilizing and cohesive social force for blacks living in a segregated society.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

(See continuation sheet)

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property Each property is less than one acre

Quadrangle name (continuation sheet)

Quadrangle scale (cont. sheet)

UMT References (continuation sheet)

A 

Zone	Easting			Northing					

B 

Zone	Easting			Northing					

C 

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D 

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E 

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F 

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G 

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H 

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Verbal boundary description and justification

(See continuation sheet)

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	<u>N/A</u>	code	county	code
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state	code	county	code
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# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Bryan Brown Supervised by Dr. George Carney

organization Department of Geography date February, 1984

street & number Oklahoma State University telephone 405-624-6250

city or town Stillwater state Oklahoma 74078

# 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 C. E. Metcalf date 7-30-84

title \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

[Signature] date 7/31/84

Keeper of the National Register

Attest: [Signature] date \_\_\_\_\_

Chief of Registration

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

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Continuation sheet

Item number

Page 1 of 1

Multiple Resource Area  
Thematic Group

dnr-11

Name Black Protestant Churches of Muskogee Thematic Resources  
State Muskogee County, OKLAHOMA

*Cover* \_\_\_\_\_ 9/25/84

Nomination/Type of Review

Date/Signature

1. First Baptist Church

~~Substantive Review~~ Keeper

*Beth Grovono* 9/25/84

Attest

2. Ward Chapel A.M.E. Church

~~Substantive Review~~ Keeper

*Beth Grovono* 9/25/84

Attest

3. Central Baptist Church

~~Substantive Review~~ Keeper

*Beth Grovono* 9/25/84

Attest

4. Spencer Memorial United Methodist  
Church

~~Substantive Review~~ Keeper

*Robert* \_\_\_\_\_

Attest

5.

Keeper

Attest

6.

Keeper

Attest

7.

Keeper

Attest

8.

Keeper

Attest

9.

Keeper

Attest

10.

Keeper

Attest