

Alabama Register Property Information



1. Name

historic Antioch Baptist Church

and/or common same

Inv. #
1156
Wilcox Co.
Survey

2. Location

street & number Claiborne Street

city, town Camden — vicinity of

state AL county Wilcox

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 type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

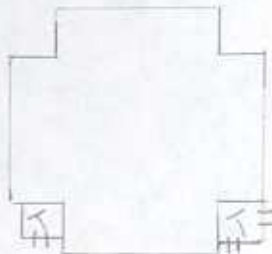
4. Owner of Property

name Antioch Baptist Church

street & number c/o Albert Gordon P O Box 415

city, town Camden — vicinity of state 36726

5. Please use space below to sketch floor plan/site plan.



AL 41

6. Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

Check one

unaltered
 altered

Check one

original site
 moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

7. 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 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 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 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 type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
<input type="checkbox"/> invention				

Specific dates

Builder/Architect

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

8. Major Bibliographical References

9. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property _____

Quadrangle name _____

Quadrangle scale _____

Verbal boundary description and justification _____

10. Form Prepared By

name/title Jennifer

organization _____ date _____

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____

11. Please submit color slides of the property with this form.

12. Please return ALABAMA REGISTER form to:

ALABAMA REGISTER COORDINATOR
ALABAMA HISTORICAL COMMISSION
725 MONROE STREET
MONTGOMERY ALABAMA 36130

Albert

~~Alvin~~ Gordon 682-9145

Mrs. Alphenie Thomas 682-5155 ✓

Rosetta Anderson - (d) 682-4683
(n) 682-4776

Ollie Peavy 682-5141

Essie Gordon 682-9482

Added to AR
11/13/96

ANTIOCH BAPTIST CHURCH
Camden, Wilcox County

Owner:

Antioch Baptist Church
c/o Albert Gordon
P.O. Box 415
Camden, Alabama 36726
334-682-9145

SUMMARY:

Organized in 1870 and rebuilt in 1924, the Antioch Baptist Church is a one-story cross-gabled frame building featuring a cruciform plan and two dominant facade towers. The church maintains significance for its architecture and for its role in two historic movements: the rapid expansion of the African-American church immediately following the Civil War and the Civil Rights movement of the 1960's.

DESCRIPTION:

See written description prepared by Nathan Farris following site inspection August, 1996.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

The Antioch Baptist Church is eligible for listing on the Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage under Criteria A and C, for its religious, social, and architectural significance. Organized in 1870 and rebuilt in 1924, it depicts an architectural example of an early-twentieth-century rural black church constructed during a period of rapid church growth. It is furthermore significant for its role as an ethnic religious institution which impacted two historic movements: the rapid expansion of the African-American church following the Civil War and the Civil Rights movement of the 1960's.

HISTORICAL SUMMARY:

During the years immediately following the Civil War, the establishment of the black church was significant to the emergence of a new black community. Especially in rural areas, blacks had few opportunities during the antebellum period for establishing their own social and religious institutions. This opportunity came with freedom, and the black church quickly became the central institution of the black community, with black ministers emerging as community leaders. This remarkably rapid process had occurred by 1870, by which time there were practically no black members in the white Southern Baptist or Methodist churches. Baptist churches, traditionally loosely structured and individually autonomous, were particularly quick to organize, since local congregations did not depend upon the direction of a higher governing body.¹

Following this pattern, the Antioch Baptist Church was organized in Camden around 1870

¹Peter Kolchin, First Freedom: The Responses of Alabama's Blacks to Emancipation and Reconstruction (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, n.d.) 107-127.

and soon constructed the core of the present building. Church records and tradition hold that Reverend Henry Allen and Trustees Sam Jefferson, Elijah Baldwin, and Henry Gubbard provided the early leadership, and J. D. McCaskey furnished the property, though title was not recorded until 1880. Another early pastor is believed to have been E.N. Dixon. With the exception of Jefferson, these men were listed in the 1880 federal census, and Allen was additionally found in the 1870 listing. Records also reveal that a local white family named McIntosh made available to the church the property across Claiborne Street for use as a cemetery, and graves dating from 1870 may be found here. Though membership records of the early church have not survived, Antioch soon became an established institution in the community, and it is believed to have been the earliest black congregation in Wilcox County.²

The early twentieth century saw a period of prosperity for Antioch. Under the leadership of Reverend W. B. Foster, the congregation grew to almost a hundred members. Generous contributions resulted in major structural renovations in 1924, when the sanctuary was widened and corner towers added to the facade. The church flourished under Rev. Foster, but upon his resignation (date unknown), many members chose to follow him to a new fellowship.³

During the 1960's, Reverend S. J. Freeman became pastor at Antioch and was instrumental in involving the church in the Civil Rights Movement. Its location in the county seat of Camden, along with its leadership role in the black community, made it a logical site for organizing blacks. With the support of the congregation, Antioch opened its doors to Civil Rights leaders Martin Luther King in 1963. Involvement in the movement was a risk to local blacks, who faced both physical and economic threats. Church members recall marches being held which began at Antioch church and terminated at the Wilcox County Court House. They also remember blacks boycotting white businesses, being jailed for involvement in the movement, and once arming themselves against an anticipated Ku Klux Klan raid on Antioch. In spite of threats of violence, blacks in Wilcox County achieved the right to vote, and today hold almost every public office in the county.⁴

Antioch church has been instrumental in producing much of this leadership, as it continues to serve its congregation and community as a significant social and religious institution. However, membership has declined to around thirty, and services are now held every second and fourth Sunday, with Sunday School being held each week. Church members point to the lack of young adults in the congregation as being a reason for the declining roles, and ideas such as establishing a day care center in the church might help to keep it a vital part of the community. Damage to church windows have recently produced some fears of vandalism, especially with the recent church burnings which have been reported in the state.⁵

²Dorothy Taylor, AHC summer intern, interviews with church members and research in local newspapers, Summer, 1996.

³Dorothy Taylor.

⁴Dorothy Taylor.

⁵Dorothy Taylor.

DESCRIPTION--ANTIOCH BAPTIST CHURCH

Antioch Baptist Church of Camden, Wilcox County, Alabama, is an approximately 1½ story tall frame church constructed on a cruciform plan. The receding corners of the cross-shape of the plan have been filled in with four rooms--two bell towers on the south side of the church and the pastor's study and the lady's lounge on the north side.

Antioch Baptist Church is situated on a gradual bend in Camden's Claiborne Road. The most notable African American neighborhood in Camden borders it to the north. To the south of the church, on the other side of the road, lies an area once (and to some degree still) the industrial area of Camden, which was centered on the railroad spur that connected the town with larger rail systems. Directly across the road from Antioch is its nearest neighboring building, a concrete block commercial structure built in the 1930's as Sadler Motor Company. The lot on which Antioch sits is uneven, dropping off towards the north and west. A concrete block retaining wall holds part of the site in place very near the west side of the church building. A baptismal is located directly to the rear (north) of the building. The east side of the building fronts on a gravel and grass open space used for parking.

Antioch Baptist Church is an approximately 1½ story frame cruciform plan religious structure. The interior sanctuary space still reads as a cross, although the exterior form takes on a more rectangular shape since the recessed corners of the structure have been filled in (still definitely in the historic period) with two bell towers on the south (front) facade and two withdrawing rooms on the north facade. The four ends of the cruciform core of the structure are gabled, with

louvered vents featured in all but the northern gable. The roof is currently covered with asphalt shingles. The two bell towers are surmounted by steeples. The eastern bell tower has a tiered design, composed of the main entrance block, surmounted by a smaller rectangular drum, which is in turn surmounted by the cubic belfry with a pyramidal roof and louvered vents, which is finally topped by a cross. The west bell tower is a simple rectangular form surmounted by an elongated pyramidal steeple. The two rooms added on the north end of the church have a partially hipped shed roofs. All walls are clad in an overlapping novelty-board of a sort, except the northern end of the cruciform core which is clad in regular weatherboarding. The exterior of the church is painted white. The building is elevated on brick piers which show two or three phases of construction: the church has apparently been raised and leveled over time. One pier on the south side of the structure contains a cornerstone which reads "Antioch Baptist Church built by Rev. H. Allen 1870. Rebuilt 1924, Rev. W. B. Foster, Pastor."

The main entrance to Antioch Baptist is on the eastern side of the eastern belltower. It features a gothic arch transom and eight-panelled double doors of indeterminate age. The door and transom are framed by a broad, low relief molding. The southern door of the eastern bell tower is a single leaf eight panelled door with a round transom somewhat wider than the door itself. The same broad, low relief molding used around the main entrance descends from the ends of the rounded transom and flanks the door several inches outside of the door jamb itself. The western bell tower features only one entrance, on its southern side, and a gothic window on its western side. The entrance through the western tower features an eight paneled door surmounted by a gothic arch transom. The steps to the main entrance are of a slightly rounded dias form and are composed of brick with corrugated surfaces, presumably to avoid slipperiness. The secondary east belltower entrance features cast concrete steps. The entrance to the west bell tower has

concrete block steps.

Sets of gothic arch windows adorn the east, west, and south end of the cruciform core of the building. They probably at one time also adorned the north end as seams can still be seen in the weatherboarding where presumably windows were removed. The gothic arch windows are arranged in a triple cluster in the center of the facades where they occur. These trinity groups of windows are equidistantly flanked by single gothic arched windows. Though the window panes themselves have now been painted white on the exterior, their initial colors are visible on the interior. The windows panes are of an opaque "marbelized" glass, of a white and light blue color arranged in a checkered fashion.

The ladies' lounge addition to the west of the church has a gothic window and a six paneled exterior door led up to by wooden stairs. The pastor's study addition on the east facade has a six paneled door led to by stairs with a concrete block base and upper stairs of a cast concrete of the "Century Steps" brand.

The interior of the church has largely been covered in modern times with some sort of synthetic panelling. The ceiling has been dropped and fluorescent lighting installed. The pews are of a coniferous wood (pine?), as is the altar furniture. This portable furniture on the inside of the church may be over 50 years old. The floors are wooden. The altar area consists of a two tiered dias, with the altar itself and the chairs for the pastor and elders on the lower tier and the choir area on the upper tier.

The structure of the church itself appears to be of a type of construction more closely related to older, heavy timber construction methods than balloon framing. The structural timbers have both circular saw marks and vertical saw marks. "Extra parts" of the church, particularly gothic windows, can be found in the exposed crawlspace underneath the building. Though a 1925

Sanborn Insurance map indicates that the structure was originally heated by a stove, no trace of this remains today.

THE CAST OF CHARACTERS FOR THE FOUNDING OF ANTIOCH BAPTIST CHURCH OF
CAMDEN, ALABAMA

HENRY ALLEN, TRADITIONALLY FIRST MINISTER OF THE CHURCH--LISTED IN THE 1870 ALABAMA FEDERAL CENSUS AS A SOUTH CAROLINA BORN FORTY-THREE YEAR OLD BLACK BRICK MASON APPARENTLY WITH A WIFE AND SEVEN CHILDREN, HE APPEARS TO HAVE HAD NO TAXABLE ESTATE AT THAT TIME. IN 1880, HENRY ALLEN WAS AGAIN LISTED AS A BRICK MASON AND WAS RECORDED TO BE ABLE TO READ BUT NOT WRITE. HIS WIFE HENNY, WHO WAS BORN IN VIRGINIA, AND COULD APPARENTLY BOTH READ AND WRITE. BY 1880, THEY HAD HIS FIVE CHILDREN, HER FIVE CHILDREN FROM A PREVIOUS MARRIAGE, A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW, A FARM LABORER, AND A BLACKSMITH'S ASSISTANT ALL LIVING IN THEIR HOUSE.

ELIJAH BALDWIN, TRUSTEE OF THE CHURCH AT ITS FOUNDING--WAS IN 1880 LISTED AS A 43 YEAR-OLD BLACK FARMER WITH A VERY LARGE EXTENDED FAMILY LIVING AROUND HIM. HE COULD APPARENTLY READ BUT NOT WRITE.

E.N. DIXON, PERHAPS AN EARLY PASTOR OF THE CHURCH--LIVED NEXT TO ALLEN IN 1880. HE WAS LISTED AS A 32 YEAR-OLD MULATTO MINISTER. HE LIVED WITH HIS WIFE J. H. AND HIS DAUGHTER MARY. ALL OF THEM WERE FROM SOUTH CAROLINA. THE MINISTER AND HIS WIFE WERE BOTH LISTED AS BEING FULLY LITERATE.

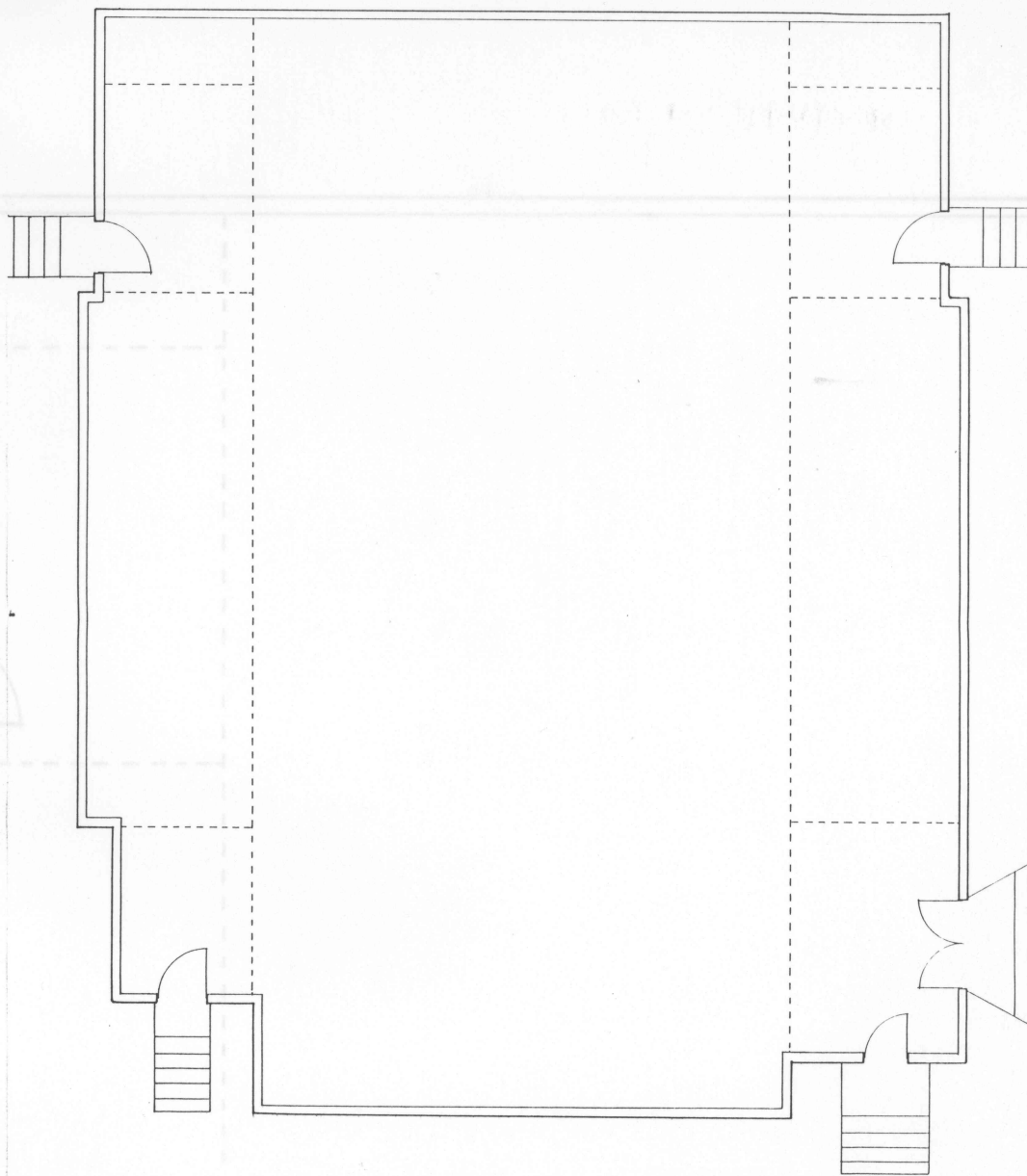
J. G. (OR J. D.) McCASKEY, PURCHASER OF THE CHURCH LOT--McCASKEY FIRST APPEARS IN WILCOX COUNTY RECORDS AROUND 1880. IT IS NOT KNOWN WHETHER HE IS AT ALL RELATED TO THE WIDOW MARY McCASKEY AND THE SCHOOL TEACHER THOMAS McCASKEY THAT APPEAR IN PRIOR RECORDS. McCASKEY WAS LISTED IN THE 1880 CENSUS AS A NORTH CAROLINA BORN 48 YEAR-OLD WHITE BAPTIST MINISTER. HE, HIS WIFE, AND THREE CHILDREN WERE ALL CONSIDERED ILLITERATE. THEY WERE LISTED IN THE REHOBOTH PRECINCT (IN THE NORTHWEST OF THE COUNTY). WHY OR HOW THE PROBABLY RELATIVELY POOR PREACHER PURCHASED THE LOT FOR THE CONGREGATION OF ANTIOCH

IS A BIT OF A MYSTERY. AMONG THE POSSIBILITIES IS THAT HE WAS ACTING ON BEHALF OF SOME BROADER BAPTIST ORGANIZATION OR THAT HE WAS ACTING ON BEHALF OF THE CONGREGATION THEMSELVES (SINCE HE WAS WHITE HE MIGHT HAVE HAD AN EASIER TIME PLACING BIDS AT THE AUCTION, DEPENDING ON THE ATTITUDES OF THE SHERIFF AT THE TIME).

THE MCINTOSH FAMILY--RELATIVELY PROSPEROUS MIDDLING PLANTERS IN THE ANTEBELLUM PERIOD, THEY HAD PROBABLY MOVED TO ALABAMA IN THE MID-1820'S FROM NORTH CAROLINA. THE SEVERAL BROTHERS (OR OTHERWISE RELATED) MCINTOSH HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS IN 1860 ARE ALL "FARMING" BY OCCUPATION EXCEPT ONE PHYSICIAN. DAVID M. MCINTOSH, S.M. MCINTOSH, AND NEIL MCINTOSH ARE THE ONLY ONES TO REMAIN IN WILCOX COUNTY BY 1870. BOTH OF THE LATTER MEN HAD THE VALUE OF THEIR ESTATE DECLINE OVER THE DECADE. DAVID MCINTOSH MANAGED TO SEE HIS WEALTH INCREASE BY 1870, HOWEVER, MAINLY IN THE FORM OF ADDITIONAL LAND HOLDINGS. IN 1870, MISSISSIPPI BORN DAVID MACINTOSH, THE MOST PROBABLE CANDIDATE TO HAVE ALLOWED THE PARISHONERS OF ANTIOCH TO START BURYING THEIR DEAD IN THE MCINTOSH CEMETERY, WAS A 42 YEAR-OLD FARMER WORTH \$9000 IN REAL ESTATE AND \$1400 IN PERSONAL ESTATE. BY 1880, HE AND HIS WIFE WOULD HAVE 8 CHILDREN. A LATER DAVID MCINTOSH WAS MAYOR OF CAMDEN AROUND THE WORLD WAR I ERA. HE WAS OFTEN CALLED "MR. DAVE" OR "UNCLE DAVE", AND WAS NOTED FOR HIS PROGRESSIVE FARMING TECHNIQUES AND FINE CATTLE, AS WELL AS HIS HABIT OF RIDING HIS HORSE INTO TOWN WELL AFTER AUTOMOBILES HAD BECOME POPULAR.

THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN MCINTOSH FAMILIES--IN 1870, CENTERED AROUND THE FARM OF THE WHITE MCINTOSHES ARE NUMEROUS BLACK FAMILIES WHO TOOK UP THAT NAME AFTER THE CIVIL WAR. BLACK MCINTOSHES ARE FOUND ELSEWHERE THROUGHOUT THE COUNTY IN 1870. BY 1880, THE BLACK MCINTOSHES HAVE MOVED TO VARIOUS PLACES IN THE

COUNTY, NO LONGER SEEMING TO BE CONCENTRATED IN ONE GEOGRAPHIC AREA. IN
1870, AFRICAN-AMERICAN MCINTOSHES ALL SEEM TO HAVE SOME DEGREE OF WEALTH,
AVERAGING AROUND \$200 IN PERSONAL ESTATE. ONE BLACK MCINTOSH AT LEAST WAS A
CARPENTER BY TRADE, BUT MOST SEEM TO HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN AGRICULTURE.



ANTIOCH BAPTIST CHURCH,
CAMDEN, ALABAMA

