Church Street Church

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Recommended Citation
Available at: https://louis.uah.edu/historic-huntsville-quarterly/vol21/iss2/9

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The Church Street Church is a building that should be preserved because it has historic significance as well as architectural interest.

The congregation [which first occupied the building] was organized before the 1880's by a group of Christians from Aberdeen, Mississippi. When they came to Huntsville, they couldn't find a church so they just worshiped in an old home on West Clinton Street. The congregation prayed and hoped for a real church building to worship in. Then, sometime in 1880, with help from the Muscle Shoals Missionary Baptist fund, they bought land and built a church on Steele Street. The Church was the First Baptist Church, but it was known as the Steele Street Baptist Church. While at this location, many pastors came and went doing what was necessary.
After a while, the congregation got too big for the church so they had to build a new building on Church Street. It was still First Baptist Church, but it was known as the Church Street Church.

The church building changed over the years as the congregation was able to make improvements and respond to the needs of its members. At first, in 1925, only the basement of the church was dedicated. A couple of years later, under the pastorate of Reverend J. M. Butler, the upper story of the church was started.

In 1941, the mortgage was paid under the leadership of Reverend Oscar Tucker. And in 1950, the church got a central heating and cooling system, an indoor baptismal facility, and a modern kitchen.

In 1955, the steps were remodeled to permit a rest between the two flights of stairs, making it easier for older members to attend. And in 1957, a clinic was opened, new windows were installed, and Bibles and hymnals were placed in the pews.

During the 1960's the church became a refuge for people striving for freedom. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. visited the First Baptist Church several times during the civil rights movement. We talked to Mrs. Horace Snodgrass, whose husband was pastor for many years, and here is what she told us about one of Dr. King’s visits. “It was a Monday night
during a garbage workers' strike. Children from all over the city had formed a choir to preform for Dr. King. Dr. King spoke at Oakwood College before he spoke at First Baptist. He spoke after the choir sang."

On July 29, 1973, a tragedy took place in the pulpit of the church. Reverend Snodgrass, who had led the congregation for 24 years, died while leading a funeral. The assistant pastor, Reverend Emanuel E. Cleaver, became the pastor.

As time passed, the church grew and grew, and in 1981 the congregation had to move to a new building on Blue Springs Road, which is their present location. Led by Dr. Julius Scruggs, the membership of First Missionary Baptist is now at about 2,000.

The Church Street Church building is presently being used by Hope Community Church. This church has been in use ever since it was built. It has been used by many congregations as a place to grow until they are able to get in their own church building. In other words, it helps churches get on their feet. This Church Street church is very important to our community because for over seventy years it has continually been a place of worship.

**Dorothella Littlepage** will be in the sixth grade at Chapman Middle School. She is a member of First Missionary Baptist Church and her parents were married the Church Street Church building. She loves to read and also enjoys making things with paper such as origami cranes. Her favorite part of studying architecture was learning about different materials and their strengths and weaknesses.

**Holly Rodes** was at Colonial Hills Elementary last year and will also be a sixth grader at Chapman Middle School in the fall. Her hobbies are reading books and collecting porcelain figures. Her favorite building type is Queen Anne.
Dorothella and Holly would like to thank Mrs. Horace Snodgrass, Mrs. Lilly Winston, Mrs. Ann Benson, and Mrs. Veronica Curtis for helping them with this article. They also found information in the Huntsville Heritage Room at the public library.

LEFT: Church Street Church details by Dorothella Littlepage

BELOW: Three Church Street Church detail drawings by Holly Rodes