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ALABAMA HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION APPROVES FOUR ADDITIONAL HISTORICAL MARKERS FOR MADISON COUNTY

by

F. Alex Luttrell, III

The Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society Marker Committee completed several new markers in late 1998. Committee members, working with individuals from sponsoring organizations, performed the research, gathered historical data, and wrote and reviewed the text for four additional historical markers: Shiloh United Methodist Church, Tallulah Bankhead / I. Schiffman Building, Goldsmith-Schiffman Field, and Huntsville Slave Cemetery. The text for each of these markers was approved by the local committee and the Alabama Historical Association Marker Committee, and the markers were ordered from the manufacturer. The Shiloh United Methodist Church marker was sponsored and financed by the church and their Choose Life Sunday School class. The Tallulah Bankhead / I. Schiffman Building marker was proposed by Huntsville's Tallulah Bankhead Society, with funding provided by the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs. The Goldsmith-Schiffman Field marker was proposed by Mrs. Margaret Anne Goldsmith Hanaw and financed by the Huntsville City School System. The City of Huntsville provided the funding for the Huntsville Slave Cemetery marker.

One of the four markers has already been erected and dedicated. The congregation of Shiloh United Methodist Church paused to unveil and dedicate their new marker immediately following their regular worship service on March 14, 1999. Because of inclement weather, the entire ceremony took place in the church sanctuary instead of outside at the site of the marker. Mr. Greg Miller, church historian, welcomed the crowd and introduced other participants in the program and those responsible for working on the marker. Mr. Miller also talked about the importance of understanding one's history and learning from the past in order to create a better future. Mrs. Terry Landers then read excerpts from Rev. Anson West's *History of Methodism in Alabama*. According to West, Shiloh was one of seven Methodist Societies in existence in late 1808 when Rev. James Gwinn, a Methodist Circuit Rider, was sent as a missionary to serve the frontier settlers in the "great bend" of the Tennessee River. Following Ms. Landers' history, Mr. Miller announced that his son, Nathan, and Mr. R.D. Cole would unveil the marker immediately following the ceremony. He invited everyone to take a look at it at the conclusion of the service. Mr. Miller then presented the marker to Mr. Alex Luttrell, Chairman of the Marker Committee of the Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society. Mr. Luttrell accepted the marker for both the Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society and the Alabama Historical Association, and spoke a few minutes about the Alabama Historical Association Historical Highway Marker Program which began in 1947. He noted that Shiloh is the third of the seven original Methodist Societies in Madison County to be recognized with a historical marker. The other early
Methodist Churches with markers are First United Methodist Church of Huntsville (formerly Hunt’s Spring) and Ford’s Chapel United Methodist Church in the Harvest area. A marker was also recently erected at the original site of the Lakeside United Methodist Church, the oldest Black Methodist congregation in Madison County. Following Mr. Luttrell’s remarks, Rev. Gary Formby, Huntsville District Superintendent of the United Methodist Church, discussed the significance of the church as a place for the people of the Ryland community to congregate and worship over the past 190 years. Rev. Robert Nance, Pastor of Shiloh United Methodist Church, concluded the ceremony with a benediction. The complete text of the marker is shown on the next page.
SHILOH
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
Organized 1808

In October, 1808, the Western Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church sent James Gwinn, a circuit rider, to the “great bend” of the Tennessee River to formalize existing Methodist Societies. He organized the Flint Circuit to serve frontier settlers in southern Tennessee and Madison County, Mississippi Territory. The first meetings of the Shiloh Methodist Episcopal Church were held in a private home. In late 1819 legislation was enacted which permitted churches to own land and, in 1820, a one-half-acre plot of land known as Shiloh was purchased. An adjoining one-acre plot was added in 1876 to construct a new church. That building burned in the mid 1890’s. Its replacement was destroyed by fire in 1931. The present edifice was then constructed. Shiloh remained as a circuit charge until late 1953, when it began full-time worship services with B.M. McElroy as pastor. Shiloh provided a school for the community until 1917.

ALABAMA HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION 1998

Additional unveiling and dedication ceremonies are being planned for the coming months! The dedication of the Tallulah Bankhead/I. Schiffman Building marker is scheduled for Sunday, April 18, 1999, at 3:00pm.

Also note that the City of Huntsville marker will soon be moved from its original site near the intersection of Church Street and Williams Avenue to its new location on the east side of Church Street at Big Spring Park. This relocation is necessary due to the demolition of the old Chamber of Commerce building and the construction of the new Colonial Bank building and parking garage. The new location for this marker was approved by Huntsville’s Mayor Loretta Spencer upon the recommendation of the Public Space Committee of the Beautification Board.