
6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Religion: religious structure

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Religion: religious structure

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)Late Gothic Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation brickwalls brick

roof asphaltother woodconcrete

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Mt. Sinai Baptist Church (1921) is a handsome, intact, two-story, three-bay deep, rectangular, gable-front, red brick, Late Gothic Revival ecclesiastical-style building located on a large city lot at 512 Henry Street in a residential neighborhood a few blocks north of the central business district of Leaksville, now Eden. The west-facing church is prominently sited at the crest of a hill on Henry Street which slopes away to the north and south. Neighboring residences are located to the north and across the street at the west. A sizeable gravel parking lot is located immediately south (right) of the church.

The building rests on a full raised brick basement which is lit by paired one-over-one sash windows. The symmetrical main (west) elevation of the church is composed of a tall gable front flanked by square two-stage crenellated bell towers incorporated at each corner. The matching towers, as opposed to towers of unequal height, are characteristic of churches built for black congregations in North Carolina during the late 19th and first half of the 20th centuries. The sanctuary is approached by a long flight of concrete steps which occupy the full width of the main elevation between the towers. The stairs ascend to a trio of double-leaf doors with panels and lunettes, set in simply corbelled round arches. Centered above the doors at the level of the sanctuary balcony is a large pointed arch tracery window. This window, as well as an identical one behind the choir on the rear, east elevation, the lunettes, pointed arch tower windows, and the three Y-tracery windows on each side elevation, contain finely crafted and brightly colored stained glass. Tall, pointed arch louvered ventilators are located in the second stage of the towers, as well as in the gable front. On the rear elevation, a shallow projecting wing with hip and gable roof contains the choir area and robing rooms.

The double-leaf main entrances open on a small vestibule and the sanctuary beyond. In contrast to the steeply pitched gable roof, the ceiling of the sanctuary is a gambrel defined by a grid of encased beams. The smooth plaster walls are painted a cream color, an attractive contrast with the dark pine door and window surrounds and vertical beaded board wainscot and balcony front. Two carpeted aisles separate three banked rows of varnished pine pews ornamented with pointed arch end panels. These pews are probably replacements, with those in the shallow balcony, located in the area above the vestibule, the original pews. The balcony pews are composed of a simple plank seat with beaded board back rest and simply sawn, curved end panels. At the east end of the sanctuary, an elevated, slightly curved, two-tier platform extends the width of the auditorium. An organ, communion table, and two pine chairs with pointed arch padded back rests are arranged along the front of the platform at ground level. Two steps up, the first tier of the platform contains a simple pine

 See continuation sheet

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture
Ethnic Heritage: Black
Religion

Period of Significance

1921-1937

Significant Dates

1921

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Hopper, James M.

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

Mt. Sinai Baptist Church, formed in 1888, is the oldest black Baptist Church in Eden (formerly Leaksville) and one of the two earliest separate churches for blacks in Eden. This striking brick Gothic Revival style sanctuary, built in 1921, is the second building of the congregation and, because of its imposing architecture, is one of the major black landmarks in Eden. The earlier small frame church, no longer standing, was built circa 1891 on a nearby site. The Mt. Sinai congregation is associated with the post-Civil War move in the South to establish separate churches for black congregations, and was founded during the period when Baptists were in the process of becoming the most popular denomination for North Carolina's black population. Mt. Sinai was designed and built by the J. M. Hopper Construction Company. J. M. Hopper, who owned a large brickyard and lumberyard in town, was the area's pioneer builder from the late 1880s to the 1940s. The brick structure is a representative example of early twentieth century Gothic Revival ecclesiastical architecture, symbolic of urban sophistication during this period. Mt. Sinai bears a striking resemblance to the 1918 sanctuary of the First Baptist Church in nearby Reidsville, (the oldest black church in that town) which was probably also built by Hopper. One of the major distinctions between the two sanctuaries is that Mt. Sinai has towers of equal height, while those of the First Baptist Church are of unequal height. Matching towers, although atypical of the Gothic Revival style, are characteristic of churches built for black congregations in North Carolina during the late 19th and first half of the 20th centuries. Mt. Sinai Baptist Church meets Criteria Exception A because of its historical and architectural significance. The period of significance is ended at the fifty year mark, 1937, because the church has continued to function throughout the 20th century and there is no logical ending point for its significance.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Brown, Claudia Roberts. A Tale of Three Cities: Eden's Heritage, Eden, NC: Eden Historic Properties Commission, 1986.

"Hisotry of Mt. Sinai Baptist Church." Unpublished typescript. Copy in file.

Logan, Frenise A. The Negro in North Carolina, 1876-1894. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964.

Rockingham County Deed Books. Microfilm copies. Raleigh: Archives and History.

Rodenbaugh, Charles (ed.). The Heritage of Rockingham County, N.C. Winston-Salem: Hunter Publishing Company with the Rockingham County Historical Society, 1983.

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property approx. 1 acre

UTM References

A

1	7	6	1	0	3	0	0	4	0	3	9	2	4	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B

Zone			Easting				Northing							

D

Zone			Easting				Northing							

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The property on which the sanctuary sits is a lot, 252 ft. wide and 165 ft. deep, outlined in red on the enclosed tax map, Rockingham County Tax Map 7979.06, block 49, parcel 1518.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The lot nominated here is the entire lot historically associated with the sanctuary. The educational building behind the church sits on a separate parcel, not included in this nomination.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jim Sumner and Ruth Little

organization State Historic Preservation Office date March 1987

street & number NC Division of Archives & History telephone (919) 733-6545

city or town Raleigh state NC zip code 27611

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pulpit-lectern and three chairs like those below. The pulpit is probably a replacement; it appears to be about the same vintage (1960s?) as the ground floor pews. The second tier, one step higher, contains the choir area which is recessed into a pointed arch alcove which frames the large stained glass window in the east wall. The basement of the church contains one large room used as a Fellowship Hall and a few small offices.

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Mt. Sinai Baptist Church is located in the Rockingham County town of Eden (formerly Leaksville, Spray, and Draper) on the edge of a small black neighborhood in old Leaksville. Mt. Sinai is the oldest black Baptist Church in Eden, formed during a period when Baptists were in the process of becoming the most popular denomination for North Carolina's blacks. The Baptists' "uncompounded mode of administration and control which granted to all members an equal voice in congregational matters" and their ministers' "earnestness, passion and eloquence" helped that denomination acquire an estimated 123,000 black North Carolinians by 1888.¹ It was in that year that a group of about twenty black residents of Leaksville formed Mount Sinai. The congregation, under the leadership of its first minister, the Reverend B. F. Palmer, first met in a small schoolhouse on Henry Street.² Another early black congregation was organized about 1888 in Eden...the St. John's Methodist Church, which met on Patrick Street. These are believed to be the first two separate black congregations in Eden.

In 1891, the congregation acquired a one-quarter acre tract on Monroe Street in Leaksville from Mrs. Louise Morehead and others. The church and its trustees, Jack Broadnax, Henry Richardson, and Peter Galloway, paid a token one dollar for the small lot. Shortly thereafter, a frame church was constructed.⁴ The congregation grew slowly but steadily under the leadership of Reverend Palmer and at least four successors until it outgrew its first sanctuary.

In 1920, Reverend C. W. Webb became minister and the church members voted to construct the present, larger church. On March 11, 1920, they bought a nearby larger lot on which to build the new church. The trustees paid \$300 to A. W. Dunn and wife Sallie Gray Ivie Dunn for lot number one of the division of the Cynthia Dillard Home Place, on Henry Street.⁵ The church was built by local builder James M. Hopper and completed in 1921.⁶ The first sanctuary has been demolished. In her 1986 Eden inventory publication, A Tale of Three Cities, architectural historian Claudia Roberts Brown wrote that Hopper is "recognized today as the area's pioneer builder, for he erected many of the houses, stores, factories, schools, and churches throughout Rockingham and surrounding counties from the late 1880s to the 1940s." Like Mt. Sinai, many of these are brick structures, for Hopper owned a brickyard on the south bank of the Dan River near Leaksville in addition to a lumberyard beside the railroad tracks in the Leaksville business district.

Mt. Sinai had a least seven ministers from 1920 to 1936. In 1937, F. S. Smith became pastor of the church. Smith would have the longest and most successful tenure of Mt. Sinai's ministers. During Smith's stay the church purchased additional land, purchased new pews and pulpit furniture, organized a Pastor's Aide Society, reorganized the Missionary Circle, instituted a Vacation Bible School and greatly improved Mt. Sinai's financial condition. Smith remained pastor until his

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death in 1961. Dr. W. B. McLaughlin was pastor from 1963 to 1971. During his tenure a youth choir was formed, a bus was purchased and physical improvements were made in the church, most notably the installation of a gas heating system. In 1972, during the pastorship of Richard Adams, the church purchased additional land to the south. During the pastorate of Robert S. Geiger, Jr., from 1972 to 1980, the church built a new parsonage and purchased a piano, a public address system, and a new van. In the early 1980s, Mt. Sinai again purchased adjoining property.

Under the leadership of present minister Allandus Wright Jr., Mt. Sinai continues to have an active membership and play an important role in Eden's religious life. The church approaches its centennial as a significant part of the town's black heritage.

A Tale of Three Cities states that Mt. Sinai is "the most architecturally distinctive of Eden's black churches." Its Gothic Revival style was particularly popular for churches in rapidly-urbanizing towns in the early 20th century. Mt. Sinai is typical of black church sanctuaries built during this period throughout North Carolina, and therefore has local architectural significance. In addition to eligibility for the Register under Criterion C, this well-preserved landmark is eligible under Criterion A because it makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the broad pattern of black religious history in the nineteenth century. This sanctuary is symbolic of the new prosperity and pride of black congregations following emancipation.

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¹ Frenise A. Logan, The Negro in North Carolina, 1876-1894 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), 164-165.

² "History of Mt. Sinai Baptist Church," unpublished typescript, copy in file, hereinafter cited as "History of Mt. Sinai Baptist Church."

³ Charles D. Rodenbaugh (ed.), The Heritage of Rockingham County, N.C. (Winston-Salem: Hunter Publishing Company with the Rockingham County Historical Society, 1983), 119.

⁴ Rockingham County Deed Book 91, p. 362.

⁵ Rockingham County Deed Book 222, p. 51.

⁶ "History of Mount Sinai Baptist Church."

⁷ Claudia Roberts Brown, A Tale of Three Cities: Eden's Heritage (Eden, N.C.: Eden Historic Properties Commission, 1986), p. 52.

⁸ "History of Mount Sinai Baptist Church."