

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received NOV 21 1985  
date entered DEC 30 1985

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

1. Name

historic Mount Zion Baptist Church

and/or common

2. Location

street & number 413 North Church Street not for publication

city, town Salisbury vicinity of

state North Carolina code 037 county Rowan code 159

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 checked="" 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"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Mr. J. O. Wilks, Chairman cc: Reverend S. R. Johnson, Jr., Pastor  
Mount Zion Trustee Board Mount Zion Baptist Church  
street & number 204 South Lloyd Street 1134 Laurel Street  
city, town Salisbury, NC 28144 vicinity of Salisbury, NC 28144 state

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Office of the Register of Deeds  
Rowan County Office Building  
street & number 402 N. Main St.  
city, town Salisbury, NC 28144 state

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

The Architecture of Rowan County  
title by Davyd Foard Hood, 1983 has this property been determined eligible? \_\_\_ yes  no  
date 1983 \_\_\_ federal  state \_\_\_ county \_\_\_ local  
depository for survey records Survey and Planning Branch, Division of Archives and History  
city, town Raleigh state NC

## 7. Description

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

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

The Mount Zion Baptist Church complex (comprised of a sanctuary built in 1907 and a brick-veneered educational/manse wing added between 1913 and 1920) survives as an important example of the religious and educational development of a black Baptist congregation during the past eight years at the same location. The addition of the brick veneer between 1922 and 1929 represents the growing affluence of the congregation and their determination to remain here at a site much imbued with their history.

The present red brick church is an example of the American Gothic Revival style. The church sanctuary is notable for its simple detailing and symmetrical arrangement of stained glass lancet windows and small triangular shaped windows in the second story.

The cornerstone on the north corner of the church says that the Mt. Zion Baptist Church was built in 1867 by Rev. H. Cowan and rebuilt in 1907 by Rev. R. F. Mason. The location of the first church within the Salisbury township from 1867-1896 has not been determined. In 1893,<sup>2</sup> the Mt. Zion Baptist Church trustees purchased a parcel of land on N. Church Street. The Sanborn Map of 1896 shows a vacant rectangular shaped building and a dwelling at this location. By 1902, the Sanborn Map indicated that the vacant building was being used by the Mt. Zion Baptist congregation. The 1907 Sanborn Map shows that a church had been built on the site. The present church complex is located on this same narrow lot within the block bounded by N. Church, W. Kerr, W. Cemetery, and N. Main. The plan of the church on the Sanborn Map of 1907 is the same as the plan of the present sanctuary.

The initial building and expansion of the church complex took place between 1907 and 1922, during Rev. R. F. Mason's pastorate.<sup>3</sup> In 1907, the church was a frame structure and was finished with pebble-dash by 1913. The expansion of the church between 1913 and 1920 included a private elementary school/Sunday school and manse wing added to the rear southeast elevation.<sup>4</sup> During the same<sup>5</sup> period, a basement was built under the sanctuary and a three-sided balcony added.

Between 1922 and 1931,<sup>6</sup> and probably in the late 1920s, the sanctuary was covered with a brick veneer. The brickwork is fairly simple. Done in common bond, there is a double row of raised course brick where the basement and the first floor meet. The upper arches of the windows and doors are also surrounded with a double row of brick headers.

During the early 1970s,<sup>7</sup> two towers were removed from the front facade because of leakage in the roof. It was less costly to raze the towers than rebuild them. An early photo indicates that one of the towers was a belfry. Both towers were capped with an octagonal conical roof and finials on each of the corners.

The recessed exterior spaces between the original projecting towers and the transept of the sanctuary have been filled in with one-story restrooms. These infills were probably contemporary with the 1920s brick veneer, or shortly thereafter.

The present sanctuary of the church complex has a hipped roof with three gable roof ells. It is five bays on the front northwest facade and northeast elevation and six bays long on the southwest elevation. The sanctuary has symmetrically-arranged openings on each

## 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 checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

**Specific dates** 1907, 1913–1920, late 1920s **Builder/Architect** unknown

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Mt. Zion Baptist Church is a black Baptist church located in the Rowan County seat of Salisbury. The congregation was organized in 1867, while the present church building was built in 1907 on land purchased by the congregation in 1893.

Mount Zion was one of a number of congregations founded by Harry Cowan (1810–1904), a man born into slavery who became one of the leaders of the black Baptist church in North Carolina. Mt. Zion is believed to be the second black Baptist church in the county. Cowan was pastor of the congregation from 1867 until 1891. Fisher Robert Mason was pastor from 1902 until 1929, a period that saw construction of the present building. By 1920, a large brick-veneered frame educational wing/manse was added to the structure. The educational wing housed an important school from 1920 to 1928, under the leadership of Mrs. Mason. The Sunshine School offered religious and academic training for grades one through six at a time when such schooling was not always readily available for young blacks. The brick veneer was probably added to the sanctuary in the late 1920s. During Mason's tenure, Mt. Zion became one of the largest and most influential black churches in Salisbury, a position that it has maintained under the pastorate of William Wyatt and current minister Samuel Johnson, Jr.

### Criteria Assessment:

- A. Mount Zion Baptist Church is associated with the organization and growth of black religious congregations in piedmont North Carolina in the late-19th and 20th centuries. The building being nominated has been the sanctuary for the congregation since 1907.
- B. Mount Zion Baptist Church is associated with the life of Reverend Harry Cowan (1810–1904), the "father of the (Black) Baptist preachers in North Carolina," who organized the congregation, and the life of Reverend Fisher Robert Mason (1878– ), during whose ministry (1902–1929) the present building was essentially completed.
- C. Mount Zion Baptist Church embodies, on a modest scale, the distinctive characteristics of the late Gothic Revival style in church architecture. Although the church complex being nominated dates from a series of building programs in the 1910s and 1920s, it does, in its simplicity, have a cohesiveness and reflects the congregation's commitment to worship at this place.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet.

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name Salisbury, N. C.

Quadrangle scale 1:24 000

### UTM References

A 

1	7	5	4	8	2	2	0	3	9	4	7	3	8	0
Zone				Easting				Northing						

B 

Zone				Easting				Northing						

C 

Zone				Easting				Northing						

D 

Zone				Easting				Northing						

E 

Zone				Easting				Northing						

F 

Zone				Easting				Northing						

G 

Zone				Easting				Northing						

H 

Zone				Easting				Northing						

### Verbal boundary description and justification

The property included in this nomination is Tract 59 on the Rowan County (Salisbury Township) Tax Map. 11. This tract included all the church property at this site.

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

state N/A code county N/A code

state code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Historical research by Jim Sumner, staff, Division of Archives and History  
Architectural description by Cindy Craig, Consultant to the Division of  
Archives and History

organization N. C. Division of Archives and History date August 28, 1985

street & number 109 E. Jones Street telephone (919) 733-6545

city or town Raleigh state North Carolina 27611

# 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 William S. Phipps

title State Historic Preservation Officer date October 10, 1985

### For NPS use only

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

Amy Schlager date 12/30/85  
Keeper of the National Register

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_  
Chief of Registration

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elevation. All the doors and windows have an arched lancet form. On the front facade, paired entrance doors in batten are located in the original tower areas. These doors flank the central gabled section of the front facade. Surmounting each door is a lancet-shaped stained glass transom. There are stained glass windows on each elevation except for a Queen Anne lancet window located on the southwest side of the Sanctuary. This window has a large central pane with small surrounding panes. The stained glass has stylized floral motives within an overall geometric framework. The colors are muted green, red, yellow, and blue. These windows were given as memorials by members of the church during Reverend Mason's pastorate, 1907-1922. The middle section of the front facade, set off by a gabled roof projection, has a large three-part stained glass window with a Palladian-style window above. Two smaller stained glass windows, with small triangular stained glass windows above, flank the large central window.

The brick veneered wing at the rear of the sanctuary consists of an educational/Sunday school facility and a manse. This two-story wing has a hipped roof with three gable roof projections. A belfry with a four sided conical roof and finial juts out from the northeast corner of the wing. The bell in this tower was once in the front facade belfry. There is a louvered window in the tower. The educational/Sunday school facility is seven bays long on the northeast and southwest elevations. Two-over-two sash windows on the first floor are Queen Anne, featuring two large panes surrounded by smaller side panes of colored glass. The second story windows are the usual two-over-two sash. The manse terminates the southeast end of the complex and has five bays on the northeast, southeast, and southwest sides with an inset porch on the northeast elevation. The windows in this section are also two-over-two sash.

The interior of the spacious sanctuary has a simple two-aisle plan, a three-sided balcony, and a raised chancel and choir. The auditorium is entered from the two vestibules in the first story of the original towers. Stairways in the vestibules have simple square newels and balustrade and rise to the balcony. Paired eight-paneled doors set at 45-degree angles open into the auditorium. The balcony, enriched with tongue-and-groove ceiling, runs along the northeast, northwest, and southwest walls and is supported by simple square wood piers. The oak pews in the balcony have gothic motifs and appear to be contemporary with the balcony addition, built between 1913 and 1922. The three ranks of pews below are more recent. The chancel and choir are raised two feet. Stairs on either side of the raised chancel lead to the choir sections which are enclosed by a balustrade. A pipe organ, ca. 1880, (purchased by the church in 1912) is located in the right choir section. An electronic organ stands next to the pipe organ. On the wall behind the altar, pilasters and a cornice enframe a cross. This ornamentation is recent.

Overall, the interior is simply finished and detailed except for the ornateness of the stained glass windows. The walls of the auditorium are of painted sheetrock above a wainscoting with vertical tongue and groove. The ceiling, which was lowered six inches in 1976, has 2 x 4 foot fissure tile. There are two hanging globe light fixtures in the auditorium, simpler globe fixtures under the balcony and two ceiling fans. All doors have symmetrically molded surrounds with corner blocks.

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In the southeast wall of the sanctuary in the left choir section, eight eight-horizontal-paneled hinged doors in pairs of four open into a large room in the Sunday school/manse wing. This "multi-purposed" room is sometimes used for overflow from the auditorium. A stairway here leads to second-story classrooms. The four classrooms are off of a center hall; they are simply finished. From 1920-1928, Fannie Mason, wife of Reverend Mason, operated the Sunshine Mission School in the Sunday school facility. This day school functioned as a private academic and religious school for children of members or non-members of the church. Adjacent to the Sunday school is the manse. Entered from the inset porch on the northeast elevation, the manse has a living room, office, kitchen, and dining room on the first floor and four bedrooms on the second floor. The door and window surrounds and wood paneling on the walls in the Sunday school/manse wing appear to be modern.

The plan of the Mt. Zion Baptist Church is fluid; small vestibules in the original front towers open into the spacious sanctuary which opens into a larger Sunday school/manse wing. The sanctuary is particularly outstanding for its symmetrically-arranged stained glass lancet windows and second-floor triangular-shaped windows which brighten the balcony. Though the 1907 church has been slightly altered, expanded and covered with a brick veneer, it nevertheless recalls the progressive accomplishments of a black Baptist congregation in the first decades of the twentieth century. The church survives as a religious and educational complex of remarkable importance to the black community of Salisbury.

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Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>The Sanborn Maps of 1907 and 1913 indicate that a church had been built on this site. The cornerstone on the north corner of the sanctuary also states that the church was rebuilt in 1907 by Rev. R. F. Mason. The Sanborn Map of 1922 indicates that the educational/manse wing had been built and was covered with brick veneer.

<sup>2</sup>Rowan County, Register of Deeds, Book 76, page 101, Salisbury, NC.

<sup>3</sup>Miss Cornelia McKenzie remembers through family tradition that the church was originally a frame structure with pebble-dash. The Sanborn Map of 1907 notes that the building was to be stuccoed. The Sanborn Map of 1913 notes that the church was stuccoed.

<sup>4</sup>The Sanborn Map of 1922 shows that the school/manse wing had been built. According to Reverend Mason's daughter, Evelyn M. Hunt, a private school called the Sunshine Mission School was opened in this wing in 1920.

<sup>5</sup>This information came from an informal church history compiled by the members to celebrate the 117th year of the church's founding.

<sup>6</sup>The Sanborn Map for 1922 shows that the sanctuary is stuccoed while the recently constructed educational wing is veneered. The Sanborn Map for 1931 shows that the sanctuary has also been (brick) veneered by that date.

<sup>7</sup>Mr. O. J. Wilks, a board member and a contractor, was the source of this date, 1973.

<sup>8</sup>Each window bears the name of the donor, the person memorialized, and Reverend Mason's name.

<sup>9</sup>Salisbury Evening Post, October 8, 1982. "One Hundred Year Old Organ is back in service at Mt. Zion Baptist."

<sup>10</sup>Rev. R. F. Mason's daughter, Evelyn M. Hunt, attended the school which was in operation until 1929, the year Reverend Mason left Mt. Zion Baptist Church. Ms. Hunt has written an essay about the school. This is in the file on the church at the Survey and Planning Branch, Division of Archives and History.

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The Mt. Zion Baptist Church is located in the Rowan County seat of Salisbury. The black Baptist congregation dates from 1867, while the present church building was constructed in 1907 on land owned by the congregation since 1893. The church was one of many in the western Piedmont founded by Harry Cowan, considered the "father of the Baptist preachers in North Carolina.

Harry Cowan was born into slavery near Mocksville in 1810. His owner, Thomas L. Cowan, was one of Rowan County's largest landowners. Thomas Cowan encouraged Harry Cowan to take up the ministry to the extent possible to a slave and granted him preaching, baptizing, and marrying privileges in his extensive plantations. In 1866, Cowan founded a black Baptist church in the eastern Salisbury community known as Dixonville. The next year he founded Mt. Zion, ostensibly to satisfy the needs of freed men<sup>2</sup> in the northern part of town unable or unwilling to travel the distance to Dixonville.

After the Civil War, black Baptist churches broke away from their white brethren in the state fairly quickly. The black Baptist Educational and Missionary Convention was organized in Goldsboro in 1867, the same year that saw the founding of Mt. Zion. Shortly afterwards, black Baptists began to organize local associations. The Rowan Baptist Association was organized in 1877 in a Salisbury hospital later used by the Dixonville congregation. Reverend Cowan was active in the creation of this association and was the first moderator. The Rowan Association contained sixty-five churches by the early part of the twentieth century and<sup>3</sup> was considered one of the strongest associations in the early years of the convention.

Cowan continued as pastor of Mt. Zion until 1891. It is not certain where the congregation met during this time, but it is likely that they "worshipped under brush arbors."<sup>4</sup> Reverend Cowan died in 1904<sup>5</sup> at the age of 94. He was credited with organizing 49 churches and baptizing 8,500 people. He was replaced by<sup>6</sup> a Reverend Minnifield who served Mt. Zion for only a brief period in the early 1890s. In 1893,<sup>7</sup> the trustees of the church purchased the present church lot from George Wright for \$625.

Mt. Zion was apparently without a pastor until 1902 when it called Fisher Robert Mason to that position. Mason was born in Davie County in 1878. He came to Salisbury in 1898 to study at Livingstone College, where he paid his way through school. Mason was pastor from 1902 until 1929. During his tenure, Mt. Zion underwent a dramatic increase in size. Reverend Mason was regarded as an inspiring preacher and a first-rate administrator. The congregation increased from 50 to 600 members while the physical plant value increased from about \$700 to \$30,000, according to Mason. The 1907 building replaced<sup>8</sup> a smaller facility, and was continually upgraded and expanded while Mason was pastor.

The most important addition to the physical plant after the 1907 construction of the church was the education wing and manse, added by 1920. Mason was deeply interested in education and served as principal of Salisbury's graded schools from 1908 until 1912. In 1904, he married Fannie Bryant, a daughter of Reverend William and Mrs. Elizabeth Bryant.



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Mrs. Mason opened the Sunshine School at Mt. Zion in 1920. The school served grades one through six and offered both religious and academic training. At a time when educational opportunities for blacks were limited, the Sunshine School offered a service not easily obtainable for many of its students. A number of its students became prominent professionals in and around Salisbury.

The school closed around 1928 due to Mrs. Mason's ill health. The next year Reverend Mason left Mt. Zion. He was replaced by William M. Wyatt, also a graduate of Livingstone College. It was his task to consolidate the gains made during the pastorate of Reverend Mason during the difficult years of the Great Depression and the Second World War. Wyatt was a native of Dinwiddie, Virginia, and came to Mt. Zion from Lexington's First Baptist Church. Like his predecessors, at Mt. Zion he was active in the Rowan Association, and other local and state-wide Baptist association. Changes in the physical plant during the Wyatt pastorate include the removal of two towers in the early 1970s.

Reverend Wyatt died in 1973. He was replaced by the present minister, Reverend Samuel R. Johnson, Jr. Reverend Johnson was one of the founders of Salisbury's interdenominational Downtown Church Association and has actively promoted the restoration of the church.

Almost from the very end of the Civil War, Mt. Zion has maintained a position of religious and social significance in the black community of Salisbury. The construction of the present building in 1907 and its subsequent expansions helped solidify that position. The short-lived but important school operated in the 1920s gives the church an added area of prominence. This educational importance adds to the strong local historical significance of Mt. Zion.

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<sup>1</sup>J. A. Whitted, A History of the Negro Baptists of North Carolina (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, 1908), 199, hereinafter cited as Whitted, A History of the Negro Baptists of North Carolina.

<sup>2</sup>Whitted, A History of the Negro Baptists of North Carolina, 199-200; M. W. Williams and George W. Watkins, Who's Who Among North Carolina Negro Baptists (publisher unknown, 1940), 226.

<sup>3</sup>Whitted, A History of Negro Baptists of North Carolina, 34-40; M. A. Huggins, A History of North Carolina Baptists (Raleigh: General Board, Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, 1967), 267-268.

<sup>4</sup>Whitted, A History of Negro Baptists of North Carolina, 93.

<sup>5</sup>Whitted, A History of Negro Baptists of North Carolina, 11, 200.

<sup>6</sup>"The Historic Mount Zion Baptist Church," unpublished church program, 6, hereinafter cited as "The Historic Mount Zion Baptist Church."

<sup>7</sup>Rowan County Deed Book 77, p. 101.

<sup>8</sup>"The Historic Mount Zion Baptist Church", 7; Information supplied by Cindy Craig, copy in file.

<sup>9</sup>Sanborn Insurance Maps, Salisbury, North Carolina, 1913, 1922; "The Historic Mount Zion Baptist Church," 7; Information supplied by Cindy Craig; Mrs. Evelyn B. Hunt to Cindy Craig, July 2, 1985. Mrs. Hunt is a former pupil of the school.

<sup>10</sup>"The Historic Mount Zion Baptist Church," 8; Whitted, A History of Negro Baptists of North Carolina, 383.

<sup>11</sup>"The Historic Mount Zion Baptist Church", 8-9.

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"Historic Mount Zion Baptist Church, The." Unpublished church program. Copy in file.

Huggins, M. A. A History of North Carolina Baptists. Raleigh: General Board, Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, 1967.

Hunt, Mrs. Evelyn to Craig, Cindy. July 2, 1985.

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Sanborn Insurance Maps. Salisbury, North Carolina, 1913, 1922.

Whitted, J. A. A History of Negro Baptists of North Carolina. Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, 1908.

Williams, M. W. and Watkins, George W. Who's Who Among North Carolina Negro Baptists. Publisher unknown, 1940.