

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
**National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determination for individual properties and districts. See instruction in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Propertyhistoric name Mount Zion Baptist Churchother names/site number NA**2. Location**street & number 419 North Elgin East Avenue [N/A] not for publicationcity or town Tulsa [N/A] vicinitystate Oklahoma code OK county Tulsa code 143 zip code 74120**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this
☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☒ statewide ☐ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

State Historic Preservation Officer

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

Oklahoma Historical Society

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria.(☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

- ☐ entered in the National Register
☐ See continuation sheet.
- ☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ See continuation sheet.
- ☐ determined not eligible for the National Register.
- ☐ removed from the National Register
☐ See continuation sheet.
- ☐ other, explain
☐ See continuation sheet.

Mount Zion Baptist Church
Name of Property

Tulsa County, Oklahoma
County/State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

☒ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not count previously listed resources.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing.
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources
previously listed in the National Register.**

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Function

(Enter categories from instructions)

Religion: religious facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Religion: religious facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and 20th Century Revivals:
Late Gothic Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation	concrete, limestone
walls	brick
roof	asphalt
other	

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Mount Zion Baptist Church
Name of Property

Tulsa County, Oklahoma
County/State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "X" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☒ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property.
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Ethnic Heritage: Black

Periods of Significance

1948-1952

Significant Dates

1948

Significant Person(s)

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above).

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

William Shakespeare Latimer & Japhee Clinton
Latimer, architects; Chief Boyd, architect;
David Weaver, builder

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State Agency
- ☐ Federal Agency
- ☐ Local Government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository:

Oklahoma Historical Society/SHPO

Mount Zion Baptist Church
Name of Property

Tulsa County, Oklahoma
County/State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than 1 acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1. 15S 231030E 4006125N
Zone Easting Northing

2. Zone Easting Northing

3. Zone Easting Northing

4. Zone Easting Northing

[] See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Cathy Ambler, Ph.D., Preservation Consultant

organization _____ date April 2008

street & number 1129 E. 8th Street telephone 918-584-3566

city or town Tulsa state OK zip code 74120

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional Items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Mount Zion Baptist Church

street & number 419 North Elgin Avenue telephone 918-584-0510

city or town Tulsa state OK zip code 74120

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

**National Register of Historic Places
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National Park Service**

Mount Zion Baptist Church

Section number 7 Page 1
Tulsa County, Oklahoma**DESCRIPTION****SUMMARY**Location and Setting

Mount Zion Baptist Church is located six-tenths of a mile north, northwest of downtown Tulsa. It is situated facing the southwest on the city grid, oriented to railroad tracks instead of the cardinal directions. The church sits just north of and next to Interstate Highway 244, which is part of a highway loop around Tulsa's central business district. The church is within an area in Tulsa historically known as the Greenwood neighborhood, a once-segregated neighborhood where black community members resided and transacted business (see Figure 1, which shows its position on the skewed grid and proximity to I-244).

The church is located at the corner of North Elgin Avenue East, and East Easton Street North. Besides its proximity to I-244 to the south, the church is surrounded by church parking lots on the south and east. To the north, on East Easton Street, there is parking for Oklahoma State University. The closest structures to the church are university buildings to the northeast and northwest, and Greenwood Cultural Center to the east on North Greenwood Avenue. The topography north of the church descends from a hilly area and the church rests on nearly the same plain as the railroad tracks south of I-244.

DESCRIPTION

The three-story church is reserved, late Gothic Revival style architecture (c. 1948), and constructed of buff-colored brick veneer over concrete block. Part of the original 1921 brick church remains at the ground level, although it is not distinguishable from in or outside. The foundation is concrete. The building plan is 60' x 100', with a one story annex along the south façade, which is 12' x 90'. The church's ground level can be entered from the west façade. The sanctuary level of the church is approached through north and south façade ground level doors opening to terrazzo stairs leading to the second level. The center of the second/third level sanctuary is open to the gable roof.

The church plan is cross gable, though the north and south facade gables are abbreviated when compared to those on the east and west. The moderately steep roof is shingled in asphalt. The gable end walls and flat-roofed church towers have high parapets finished with stone coping.

West Façade

The west façade (Photo 0001), which faces North Elgin Avenue East, has three bays including towers of unequal height, and a center bay that has a ground level entry. The entry has paired, glazed, wood slab doors with a metal awning above. On both sides of this entry, there are steel combination fixed and multi-pane casement windows. These windows are glazed with green art glass, and have stone quoins, lintels and sills. The towers project slightly in front of the center bay and rest on stone foundations. A stone string course separates the ground level from the rest of the façade. The towers each have a narrow lancet window interrupted by a spandrel of basket-weave brick. The windows are surrounded by stone quoins and voussiors, and have stone sills. The taller tower has a louvered vent, also finished with stone quoins, lintel and sill. The center bay has three lancet windows interrupted by a spandrel of basket-weave brick. The center window is larger than the windows on either side, but all window sills blend into the string course. The gable apex has a circle vent finished with stone quoins. Decorative details include the brass entry door handles and brass back plates.

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Mount Zion Baptist Church

Section number 7 Page 2
Tulsa County, OklahomaNorth Façade

The north façade (Photo 0002), which faces East Easton Street North, is dominated by the projecting center gable bay, with two asymmetric side bays. The center bay's ground level windows are paired one-over-one, double-hung metal windows surrounded by stone quoins, lintels and sills. The ground level is separated from the stories above by the stone string course which continues from the front façade. The center bay's stained glass lancet windows are large and paired, and finished in the same manner as those on the west façade with spandrels of basket-weave bricks. The center bay at the gable apex has a rectangular louvered vent that is finished the same as the west façade's tower vent.

The bays right of center are the tower, and the bay with windows. The tower has a single lancet window in the third story above a pair of ground level entry doors. These entry doors are glazed aluminum panels, with a lancet stained glass window above. The door surround is stepped stone molding which frames the doors and the lancet window above. To the right side of the door is the corner block, dated 1948, and above the door at the string course is "Mount Zion Baptist Church". Between the tower and central bay, there is a single lancet window at the third level, a single double-hung window at ground level, and a large lancet window interrupted by a basket-weave spandrel, which is above the double-hung. A large downspout visually divides this bay. Similar windows are all finished in the same trim: quoins, voussiors or lintels, and sills. The tower has a rectangular vent identical to the west façade's.

The bay to the left of the center bay has a small lancet window at the third level, which is above a glazed wood slab entry door. This door has a lancet stained glass window above, and the door and window are finished with stone quoins and voussiors. The door is a fire exit from the sanctuary, and the steps and landing exiting from the door are metal. Beneath this door is another door that is now inaccessible due to the placement of a large air conditioning unit in front of it. A second bay to the left of center has a two-story outset with a flat roof. The ground level of this outset has three one-over-one double hung windows, and above the string course there are three rectangular stained glass windows. There a group of three lancet windows above the outset. All windows are finished with stone quoins, voussiors, or lintels and sills. A large downspout visually divides this area of the north facade. Decorative features include the sixteen layers of stepped brick at the gable parapet ends, which create a small column framing the gable which is finished with stone coping.

East Façade

The east façade (Photo 0003), or rear of the church, has three bays defined by the upper level windows. A one-story, gable roof connection for the church addition is at ground level. At the second and third levels, the center bay has a large uninterrupted lancet window which overlooks the inside choir and pulpit, and the side bays have lancet windows interrupted by basket-weave brick spandrels. The stone trim for these windows is the same as on other windows. The round louvered vent is finished as the west façade vent.

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Tulsa County, OklahomaSouth Façade

The south façade (Photo 0004) has a one-story, recessed flat-roofed annex that abuts the ramp to the tower entry door, and runs the length of the church (12' x 90'). The annex roof is tar and gravel, and the parapet wall is finished with stone coping. The annex has a west-facing window with "The R. A. Whittaker-Annex, 1914-1926" above in stone. The lancet window and the entry door in the tower are the same as those in the north façade, but there is ramp access to the entry door rather than a step or steps. This entry is in the shorter tower, and it has no louvered vent. The annex has five single, one-over-one, double-hung metal windows, a glazed wood slab entry door, and a pair, a single, and a pair of one-over-one double-hung windows. There is a flat concrete roof over the entry. The windows are all trimmed in a similar manner as other double-hung windows.

The center bay of the main church has five large lancet windows interrupted by basket-weave brick spandrels, and the gable apex has a louvered vent. To the right of the projecting center bay, the façade wall has small and large lancet windows with interrupting basket-weave brick spandrels. The bay left of center has a large lancet window with brick spandrel, and a small lancet window next to the tower. This window is above a quoin-trimmed area filled with basket-weave brick. These lancet windows are finished as they are on other parts of the church, with stone quoins and voussiors. A large painted sign is on the center bay façade with "Mount Zion Baptist Church, Calvin McCutchen, Pastor".

Interior

The stained glass windows were made in Germany.¹ The window over the baptismal font represents the Jordan River. The window in the front façade is of Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane (See Photo 0005). The ground level of the church is used for small assemblies and there are Sunday school rooms on each side. The annex has the children's department, a food bank, Project Help, and a prayer room. The sanctuary faces northeast and there is a "U" shaped balcony at the rear and sides overlooking the sanctuary seating. The balcony is supported by metal poles attached to the ceiling above (See Photos 0006 and 0007).

ALTERATIONS

There is a one-story, low-pitched shed roof connection between the church and a gym addition at the rear of the church. The G. Calvin McCutchen, Sr., Family Life Center (c.1996) is approximately 95' x 145'. The connection between the church and the Family Life Center steps back twice from the Center's facade which reduces the contact with the church to a small area surrounding double entrance doors. The step back distances the addition from the church and in effect, separates the two buildings visually. The connection between the two buildings has a recessed entry beneath the shed roof and has paired glazed panel metal doors. The church remains the visually dominant building which helps it retain its position of importance. Chief Boyd was the architect for the Family Life Center and David Weaver the builder.²

The Family Life Center has a gable roof and has a regulation-sized gym with a stage at one end. A one-story building segment on the north façade houses a library, dining room, storage, youth, and restrooms, and a board room, minister's and secretary's office. The roof is finished with asphalt shingles. The addition has both buff brick on the one story portion and rock-faced concrete panels on the gym. The addition is sympathetic to the church's Gothic architecture. It has small lancet windows near the roof line of the gym, round windows in the gable ends, a gable roof with parapet wall, and one-

¹ Julius Pegues.

² Ibid.

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over-one double hung windows that are like the replacement windows in the church.

Other alterations include the replacement of only the ground floor windows on the church's north and south facades. The original window material is unknown, as is their replacement date. The replacement windows are one-over-one metal double hungs as noted above. There is a ramp leading to the south façade entry door to accommodate those with disabilities and it covers original steps. All the original stained glass windows are covered with storm and vandal protection, and original entry doors in the north and south facades have been replaced with aluminum frame glass panel doors (see Photos and 0008).

The church is in its original location, and its design, form, plan, space, structure, and style have retained integrity. The quality of the workmanship in the church has not been altered from construction, and original materials (except for a few windows) have not changed. In feeling, the church represents the period the church was constructed. Its period appearance gives the building integrity in location, design, workmanship, materials, and feeling which combine to convey integrity of association. The setting for the church, which was once in a neighborhood with houses, has changed because most of the houses close to the church are no longer extant. However, as noted in the "1921 Tulsa Race Riot Reconnaissance Survey, Final", the church remains within the generally segregated Greenwood community boundaries, or the setting that existed in 1921, and the 1921 Tulsa race riot area retains a high degree of integrity in this respect.³

CONDITION

The church is in good condition.

³ "1921 Tulsa Race Riot Reconnaissance Survey, Final." National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, November 2005, 97.

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Mount Zion Baptist Church

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Tulsa County, Oklahoma**SIGNIFICANCE****SUMMARY**

Mount Zion Baptist Church is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its association with the local black community and as a symbol of the rebuilding efforts in the Greenwood community following the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921. In 2005, a National Park Service Reconnaissance report concluded that the Tulsa Race Riot was of "supreme national significance, perhaps the most significant race riot in the history of the United States." Most of the historic resources directly associated with the riot were destroyed during the event⁴, and many of the resources from the post-riot reconstruction period were destroyed by Urban Renewal efforts after the 1970s. In the Greenwood neighborhood, Mount Zion Baptist Church remains a testimony to the perseverance and tenacity of its congregants and the black community in Greenwood.⁵ The church is significant at the state level as part of the Greenwood neighborhood, which was known nationally, and among other Oklahoma black communities, for its cultural and financial achievements which rivaled New York City as a national center of urban black life.⁶

BACKGROUND

Blacks began to come to Oklahoma during territorial days as slaves to Indian tribes.⁷ Others came during the post-Civil War Reconstruction period when white southerners restored their version of the southern way of life as much as they could. Once Federal troops were gone from the south after Reconstruction, whites had little change in their attitude toward freed blacks. For blacks, the Civil War had created a hope for democracy and freedom, but such hopes were soon quashed by Jim Crow laws and segregation.⁸

Those blacks who could leave the south were looking for a better life, even a "Promised Land", where life could be different from what they had experienced as slaves, freed slaves or children of slaves.⁹ Most immigrated to Oklahoma from Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas. Many settled in more rural regions of what would become the State of Oklahoma. These pioneers established all-black

⁴ No extant resources in Greenwood that date from the riot were identified in the 2005 National Park Service survey (109-118). The only extant resources identified that date to the riot itself are located outside of Greenwood. These include Oaklawn Cemetery, Newblock Park, the Frisco and Santa Fe Railroad Freight Depot, the Drexel Building, Tulsa National Guard Armory, Tulsa Convention Hall, the Tulsa Municipal Building, First Presbyterian Church, the Brady Mansion, and the Tulsa Tribune Building.

⁵ Julius Pegues, personal interview, January 10, 2008. Mr. Pegues said that the church's reconstruction gave everyone hope, and no matter what the tragedy; that [tragedy] could be overcome by faith in God. Mr. Pegues helped build the church as a youth, mixing mortar for the bricklayers.

⁶ "Tulsa, 1921," introduction by Russell Cobb, The Nation, web article, posted August 23, 2001. <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20010820/1921tulsa>, referenced April 22, 2008. Also see Hannibal B. Johnson, Black Wall Street: From Riot to Renaissance in Tulsa's Historic Greenwood District, (Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 1998), 17, 26. Johnson notes that the neighborhood drew a host of nationally prominent African Americans to Tulsa based on its national reputation as a highly successful black community.

⁷ Tracy, Marjorie Ann. "The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921: The Politics of Lawlessness," Masters Thesis, University of Tulsa, 1996, 74-75.

⁸ Gates, Eddie Faye. They Came Searching: How Blacks Sought the Promised Land in Tulsa (Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 1997), 31.

⁹ Gates, *ibid.*, 32. Also see Tim Madigan, The Burning: Massacre, Destruction and the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921 (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, St. Martin's Griffin, 2001), 9.

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towns such as Red Bird, Tullahassee, Boley, Rentiesville or Taft; communities that survive today.¹⁰ These towns expressed a fundamental desire on behalf of the residents for self-sufficiency and economic prosperity. In such towns, blacks were successful business entrepreneurs and managed their own community affairs.¹¹ They developed a sense of belonging and ownership that did not lend itself to an attitude of subservience. Most were literate, and most children attended school.¹² A continuing quest to better their lives led many to Tulsa, especially after oil was discovered in 1905. With the 1912 discover of the Cushing oil field, unheard of riches created economic opportunities for both blacks and white. Some blacks as already long-time residents of the state, brought their experience in self-sufficiency and self-government to Tulsa, and their deep sense of pride in the vitality of black community life.¹³ Whites also came flocking into the territory and many were from the south, so that when the state constitution was written in 1907, Jim Crow laws boldly limited voting rights and segregated all schools.

J. B. Stafford and O. W. Gurley were successful black entrepreneurs in Tulsa before the city was segregated. Stafford and Gurley believed that blacks had the best chance for success by pooling their resources, working together, and supporting one another's businesses. Both men bought tracts of land north of the Frisco tracks, had it platted and sold lots to black families. White real estate investors also bought land and sold only to blacks. By 1906, the black area was named Greenwood for an Arkansas town. The black neighborhood was now in place and it spread north from the corner of Greenwood and Archer Street, the first two blocks of which was known as "Deep Greenwood", or the commercial district.¹⁴ Scott Ellsworth, author of Death in a Promised Land: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921, has mapped the area where black Tulsans lived (see Figure 2).¹⁵

The Greenwood community had a mixed profile of residents, much like any other community. There were an unusually high number of black professionals and businessmen – doctors, lawyers, ministers, dentists, real estate agents, newspaper editors, and merchants in Tulsa. Residents in Greenwood were both the well-off, middle class, and poor. Many of the poorer residents worked for whites as servants in housing areas south of the downtown. Money earned by blacks in Tulsa was spent in Greenwood. In a community where blacks were unwelcome in white businesses, Greenwood merchants provided the services and access to goods they could not get elsewhere. Greenwood developed a life and reputation of its own. By 1921, its population was approximately 11,000, which had access to a hospital, two schools, two movie theaters, public library, two newspapers, thirteen churches, and three fraternal lodges. There were rooming houses, billiard halls, confectioneries, and grocers.¹⁶

A sense of the black community's view of itself is important in understanding how the community rebuilt after the riot. World War I veterans, for example, had returned to Tulsa with pride in service to their

¹⁰ Gates states that at least fifty-eight all-black towns flourished in Oklahoma. The Nation Park Service report, "1921 Tulsa Race Riot, Final," *ibid.*, 15, says there were fifty all-black towns.

¹¹ Zarrow, Alison. Wish You Were Here: Oklahoma's All Black Towns 100 Years after Statehood (Allison Zarrow, 2007), 9. Zarrow suggests there were over sixty all-black towns. This small publication of mostly photos was a result of a Zarrow's fellowship from the Stanford University Haas Center for Public Service.

¹² Tracy, *ibid.*

¹³ 1921 Tulsa Race Riot, Final, *ibid.*, 15.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* Also see James S. Hirsch, Riot and Remembrance: The Tulsa Race War and Its Legacy (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002), 30-31. Hirsch says the street was named for Greenwood, Mississippi.

¹⁵ Published in Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1982, 13l.

¹⁶ Tracy, *ibid.*, 76-7.

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country, ideas about social equality, and a strong sense of their self-worth. On the eve of the riot, the atmosphere in Greenwood was one of pride, independence, and resilience in a strong black community. Residents interviewed long after the riot remember the sense of the black culture sustained there; it was a place of security and safety in the unsafe world in which they lived in the late 1910s.¹⁷ The hope of a promised land in Oklahoma's early days had become in the 1910s, one of ugly race relations.

THE TULSA RACE RIOT

A prelude to the riot began on May 31, 1921, when a black man, Dick Rowland, allegedly assaulted a white girl, Sarah Page. The outbreak of violence that this incident stimulated resulted in the near complete destruction of the Greenwood black neighborhood and business district. With no police or fire department protection (waived off by the angry mob), by June 1, whites had burned nearly 35-40 blocks of homes and businesses, and nearly 9000 individuals were left homeless. The American Red Cross reported that of 1471 houses, 1256 were burned and the rest looted. Both blacks and whites were killed, but most of those who died were black. There was little left of the black community: churches, commercial buildings, homes, hotels, boarding houses – all destroyed.

Perhaps there was no more glaring reminder of the riot to the black community, than the remains of Mount Zion Baptist Church. The church was first organized in 1909, as the Second Baptist Church in a one-room, wood frame school building (Photo 9), and its members were largely former congregants from the First Baptist Church. Not wanting to be "second" to anything, the members renamed their church "Mount Zion". In 1914, the church moved from the school to a former dance hall on North Greenwood Avenue, and then with the help of a north Tulsa builder, the congregation built a frame structure they called the Tabernacle on Elgin Street, while they planned at the same time to build a more permanent church next door. In 1916, construction of a new church began and five years later, April 4, 1921, the church was dedicated (Photo 10). A symbol of determination and growing affluence of the congregation, members raised \$42,000 to construct the church, and they received a \$50,000 loan from an individual for the rest.

When the riot erupted on May 31, 1921, the church played a significant role as black residents defended their community. Whites started a rumor that this church and others were warehouses for arms, and that Mount Zion had been a "rendezvous for the Bolshevik element of the Negroes who are responsible for the outbreak."¹⁸ The building did provide a location where, from the tower, black men could drive away whites intent on burning surrounding homes. Eventually, whites brought a machine gun to the church, and some of the defenders were killed. Mount Zion Baptist Church, less than two months old, was burned with most of the building destroyed (Photo 11). For the congregation, however, it was significant that a kernel of the burned church remained standing. The walls of the first floor meeting room would become the congregation's temporary church in 1937, and the temporary church would be integrated into the 1948-52 building (Photo 12 shows the portion of the pre-riot church which was incorporated into the new Mount Zion church).¹⁹

Although the church had insurance, a riot clause made it worthless. The \$50,000 debt became a divisive issue among the congregants. One group believed they had to repay the debt regardless; another that it was not a debt legally binding on them. At one point, the Goodwin family, church

¹⁷ Eddie Faye Gates's book is a book of testimonials, most of which describe the Greenwood community.

¹⁸ Hirsch, *ibid.*, 107.

¹⁹ A dramatic version of this confrontation is in Madigan, *ibid.*, 155-167.

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members and owners of the Oklahoma Eagle newspaper, helped by paying off some of debt.²⁰ The church split though – those who did not support repayment formed the New Hope Baptist Church in 1926; those that remained with Mount Zion worked to pay off the debt. With such a debt, church members were unwilling to consider rebuilding a new Mount Zion church at that point in time.

The remains of the burned church became a symbol not only of the riot, but also the determination of the congregation to rebuild. For the black community, the burning of their church was more than just another act of racism; it was an act of desecration – the destruction of a vital sacred space within the community. Black churches have long been considered bulwarks of a black community, and they have provided a genuine sense of community for African Americans. Black churches have produced community leaders, and they bolster community unity and autonomy. In a black neighborhood, the relationship between one's community and one's church was intimate. Black churches provided an environment free of oppression and racism. Out of a history of separation and exclusion, black churches rooted themselves as the "souls of the communities" ²¹ in which they stood. To burn a sacred and meaningful place violently is intended by those who do it, to erase history and to create a special sense of horror, outrage and loss.²² White violence and terrorism against Tulsa's black residents were meant to terrify the living, and exert dominance. The fear created by the riot should never be underestimated. During interviews with survivors, the fear, which such violence created, nearly ended communication between blacks and whites in Tulsa.²³

RECONSTRUCTION

Residents of Greenwood began rebuilding almost immediately after the riot, and within a year, many destroyed buildings had been rebuilt. Riot historian, Hannibal B. Johnson, has noted that by 1922, more than eighty businesses had reopened in the business area. The burned-out shells of building had been torn down and new buildings, many of which assumed the forms of their predecessors, were constructed.²⁴ Historian Scott Ellsworth has observed that "the rebuilding of black Tulsa...., particularly that of "Deep Greenwood," is a story almost as great importance as the riot itself." ²⁵ Reconstructed buildings were similar in size, style, and materials as the pre-riot originals, as many were built in the footprints of burned out buildings.

A chart which was been compiled from *Tulsa City Directories* helps convey the significance of the reconstruction of the business area.²⁶

²⁰ This is the family that, during Urban Renewal, would not sell their property unless they could gain title or an option to purchase the remaining commercial strip of buildings along Greenwood Avenue. Tulsa Urban Renewal Authority agreed. The family basically rescued what is the Greenwood commercial area today. See Johnson, *ibid.*, 116.

²¹ Simmsparris, Michele M. From an excerpt "What does it Mean to See a Black Church Burning? Understanding the Significance of Constitutionalizing Hate Speech," University of Pennsylvania Journal of Constitutional Law, (Spring 1998), 127-151.
<http://academic.udayton.edu/race/06hrights/WaronTerrorism/churchburn01.htm>, referenced 1/3/2008.

²² Karenga, Dr. Maulana. "The Outrage, Terror and Talk of Fire." This position statement describes the effects of church burning at http://www.us.organization.org/position_pos4.html. While Dr. Karenga's views were written about contemporary church burnings, the purpose of those who torch churches applies to any time period in our nation's history.

²³ Thiele, *ibid.*, 22.

²⁴ Johnson, *ibid.*, 97-98.

²⁵ Ellsworth, *ibid.*, 108.

²⁶ 1921 Tulsa Race Riot, Final, *ibid.*, 44.

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	1920	1921	1922
Business Establishments	72	108	83
Professionals	30	33	25
Skilled Crafts Persons	14	24	24
Service Workers	19	26	24

By 1922, approximately half of the destroyed churches began to hold worship services again, but it took tenacity for the Greenwood residents to rebuild their homes. Few property owners had insurance, and for those that did, the insurance companies required owners prove that the either city or state was negligent in the protection of their property.²⁷ The city directories again provide information about the reconstruction of residences, however. In 1920, the directories list 1,126 residences; in 1921, 1,149 residences; and, in 1922, 1,134 residences. Many residents who did not have destroyed homes shared them with those that did.²⁸

Greenwood once again became a thriving business and entertainment community, although separation between black and white communities remained almost complete until well after World War II.²⁹ In 1941-42, there were nearly 20,000 black residents, and in 1942, the Greenwood commercial business district, still located at Greenwood and Archer, had 242 black-owned and operated businesses.³⁰

Rebuilding efforts at Mount Zion were slowed by the debt remaining from the construction of the 1921 building. For some time, members met in the home of one of their congregants. Finally in 1937, the remains of the burned church were roofed and worship services resumed there with the congregation sitting on boards over sawhorses. As Greenwood was restabilizing and rebuilding, the members of Mount Zion Baptist Church determinedly paid off their debt. In inspirational minister, Rev. J. H. Dotson started an initiative to help the members see progress. He began a White Elephants Drive, the white elephants representing each \$1500 of the debt. Members could purchase brown patches at \$3.25 to place on the elephants to cover up part of the debt. When all the elephants were covered, the church would be debt free.³¹

On November 23, 1942, the church cleared its debt. It had been a determined effort of twenty-one years, but church members began almost immediately to raise money for a new building. This time, Rev. Dotson used a Joash Chest, where members were asked to deposit at least a dollar a week for the new church. The Joash Chest was a symbol, when filled, of the abundance provided by the congregation. Plans for the towered Gothic structure were drawn by William Shakespeare Latimer and his brother, Japhee Clinton Latimer, architects trained at Tuskegee Institute.³²

Mount Zion's construction efforts first began in 1938, when church members built a parsonage for their

²⁷ Johnson, *ibid.*, 98.

²⁸ 1921 Tulsa Race Riot, Final, *ibid.*, 44.

²⁹ Thiele, Karl. "The Racially Changing Community," Masters Thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1962, 21.

³⁰ 1921 Tulsa Race Riot, Final, *ibid.*, 44.

³¹ Johnson, *ibid.*, 86.

³² J. C. Latimer was beaten up during the Riot, and humiliated by being driven about Tulsa with his hands above his head. His house was ransacked and his clothing worn by the ransackers. Latimer expressed a sense of the violation of his private space. See Mary E. Jones Parrish, Race Riot 1921: Events of the Tulsa Disaster (Tulsa, OK: Out on a Limb Publishing, 1998), 60-61. Also see Tracy, *ibid.*, 25.

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minister, Reverend Dotson. With the same determination mustered to pay off the old debt, the congregation began to build their new church over the first floor of the old one (Photo 12). Figure 3 is a Sanborn Map from 1939, which shows the parsonage completed, and the church under construction. A Time magazine article in February 1945,³³ noted the church's efforts of patience and perseverance – and as a quiet Christian rebuke to racial intolerance. The story was eventually picked up in Facts, a magazine which reached international readers, and donations continued to be sent to the church from people all over the world.³⁴ Both articles brought in much needed contributions as the first bricks of the church were laid.

Volunteers constructed the church with the architect Latimer brothers overseeing the effort, and laying bricks alongside bricklayer, J. B. Harold. Electricians were Major S. Latimer, Jr., and John E. Claybon, trained at Tuskegee Institute. Plasterers were Robert E. Johnson and M. J. Behn. The plumber was B. K. Boone. Interior painters were Fred Latimer (brother of the architects), and James R. Jackson.³⁵ All volunteered to help rebuild the church. The church could not borrow money from a traditional lender, but the Broadhurst Foundation loaned the congregation funds.³⁶ The church borrowed, built what they could, and then borrowed more to continue the construction. Members sacrificed financially to see that the church was finished; some, as retired minister Dr. C. S. McCutchen noted, to their own financial strain.³⁷ The church corner block was laid in 1948, and the church was dedicated October 21, 1952. By 1959, the money borrowed from the Broadhurst Foundation had been repaid.

HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

Mount Zion Baptist Church is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its association with the local black community and as a symbol of the rebuilding efforts in the Greenwood community following the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921.

The Greenwood area has changed significantly since the riot and the post-riot reconstruction period. In the late 1950s, construction of the Inter-dispersal Loop and I-244 resulted in the demolition of many residential and commercial properties in the area.³⁸ Today, the loop runs alongside Mount Zion, and would have been fifteen feet closer to the building had the congregants not protested to the Oklahoma Department of Transportation. Urban renewal in the 1970s removed many, many more houses in the area. When integration finally began, blacks also had the choice to shop and live not just in Greenwood, but anywhere in Tulsa.

Within this much-altered neighborhood, Mount Zion Baptist Church remains a visual reminder of both the riot and the reconstruction process. In 1980, the Greenwood Historic District, consisting of eleven commercial buildings built after the 1921 riot, was determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places by the Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Office. The district consists of one-, two-, and three-story brick commercial style buildings, many abandoned in the 1960s, but most of

³³ Time, February 19, 1945, Vol. XLV, #8, 85.

³⁴ Rev. McCutchen said that Facts magazine is no longer in print. The author was unable to find the publication.

³⁵ Julius Pegues provided these names during the author's interview with him, January 10, 2008.

³⁶ Hirsch, *ibid.*, 183. A New York Times obituary, September 14, 1982, reported that William E. Broadhurst was a Tulsa oil executive and philanthropist. He was a native of Oxford, Kansas, and moved to Tulsa in 1929. He was a former vice president of the Interstate Petroleum Company and the White Eagle Oil Company. He founded the Broadhurst Foundation to assist churches, colleges and other organizations.

³⁷ Hirsch, *ibid.*, 183.

³⁸ 1921 Tulsa Race Riot, Final, *ibid.*, 45.

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which were significantly rehabilitated during the 1980s. Other riot related resources in Greenwood included the Mabel B. Little Heritage House, a ca. 1995 reconstruction built to match an original post-riot residential property destroyed by expansion of the Oklahoma State University campus. The 2005 National Park Service report also identified Greenwood Avenue, the Frisco and Santa Fe Railroad Tracks, and the site of the Royal Hotel as extant resources associated with the riot and the rebuilding process. In addition, only two churches associated with the riot and Greenwood reconstruction have been identified. These are Mount Zion Baptist and Vernon Chapel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E). Rebuilt in 1926, Vernon Chapel A.M.E. is an ornate, red brick Gothic Revival style church. Vernon Chapel A.M.E. was evaluated by the Oklahoma SHPO in 2007, and found ineligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places due to the alteration of the church with two large metal additions on the south and rear of the building. In comparison, the addition to Mount Zion is much more modest, recessed and less apparent from the primary façade. Of the two churches rebuilt in the Greenwood neighborhood, Mount Zion retains a higher degree of integrity in most every aspect.

Mount Zion, when compared to the historic commercial area which fell into decline and disuse in the 1960s,³⁹ sustained an active congregation before and after the riot, through the 1960s, and into the present. The church remained a symbol of vitality in Greenwood through the neighborhood's most difficult and challenging periods from the 1960s, through the 1970s Urban Renewal, to the rehabilitation of the business district in the 1980s. While both the church and business district in Greenwood are important today, the church has retained its strength with congregants from the Greenwood area and from around Tulsa.

The church rebuilt after the riot and endured through difficult times. It has remained a landmark and symbol of the Greenwood neighborhood's and church's persistence to survive after the Riot. It has remained a vigorous cultural institution in Greenwood through the decades, and it is the most intact religious property associated with the reconstruction period after the riot. When the time came for a seventy-fifth year commemoration of the Tulsa 1921 Race Riot, the function was held in Mount Zion Baptist Church.⁴⁰ "The saga of the church before, during and after the Riot is nothing if not inspirational," author Hannibal B. Johnson has written. "Mount Zion Baptist Church remains a living testament to the power of faith and hope and perseverance." "It is a monument to the human spirit – a historical marker at the opposite end of the spectrum from the Riot."⁴¹

³⁹ 1921 Tulsa Race Riot, Final, *ibid.* 71.

⁴⁰ Larson, Jonathan Z. "Tulsa Burning." *Civilization*, Feb/March 1997, Vol. 4, #1, 8, referenced at Ebsco Research Database January 7, 2008.

⁴¹ Johnson, *ibid.* 83, 88, and 94.

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Tulsa County, Oklahoma**PHOTOGRAPH LOG**

Mount Zion Baptist Church, Tulsa, Tulsa County, Oklahoma

Photographer: Cathy Ambler

No.	Subject	Dir.	Date
0001	West Façade	NE	1/03/2008
0002	North Façade	SE	1/10/2008
0003	East Façade	SW	1/10/2008
0004	South Façade	NW	1/03/2008
0005	Stained Glass Window over Choir	NE	1/14/2008
0006	Side Balcony	NNE	1/14/2008
0007	Pulpit from the Rear Balcony	NE	1/14/2008
0008	Sanctuary Rear	SW	1/14/2008
0009	Family Life Addition	SW	1/10/2008
0010	Family Life Addition	NE	1/03/2008

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Figure 1. Mount Zion Baptist Church in
Relation to Downtown Tulsa

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Photos 0001 and 0002. West and North Façades, Looking Northeast and Southwest

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Photos 0003 and 0004. East and South Façades, Looking Southwest and Northwest

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Photo 0005. Stained Glass Window over Baptismal Font, Looking North, Northeast



Photos 0006 and 0007. Side Balcony, and Pulpit from the Rear Balcony, Looking North, North East and North East

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Photo 0008. Rear Addition, Family Life Center, Looking Northeast

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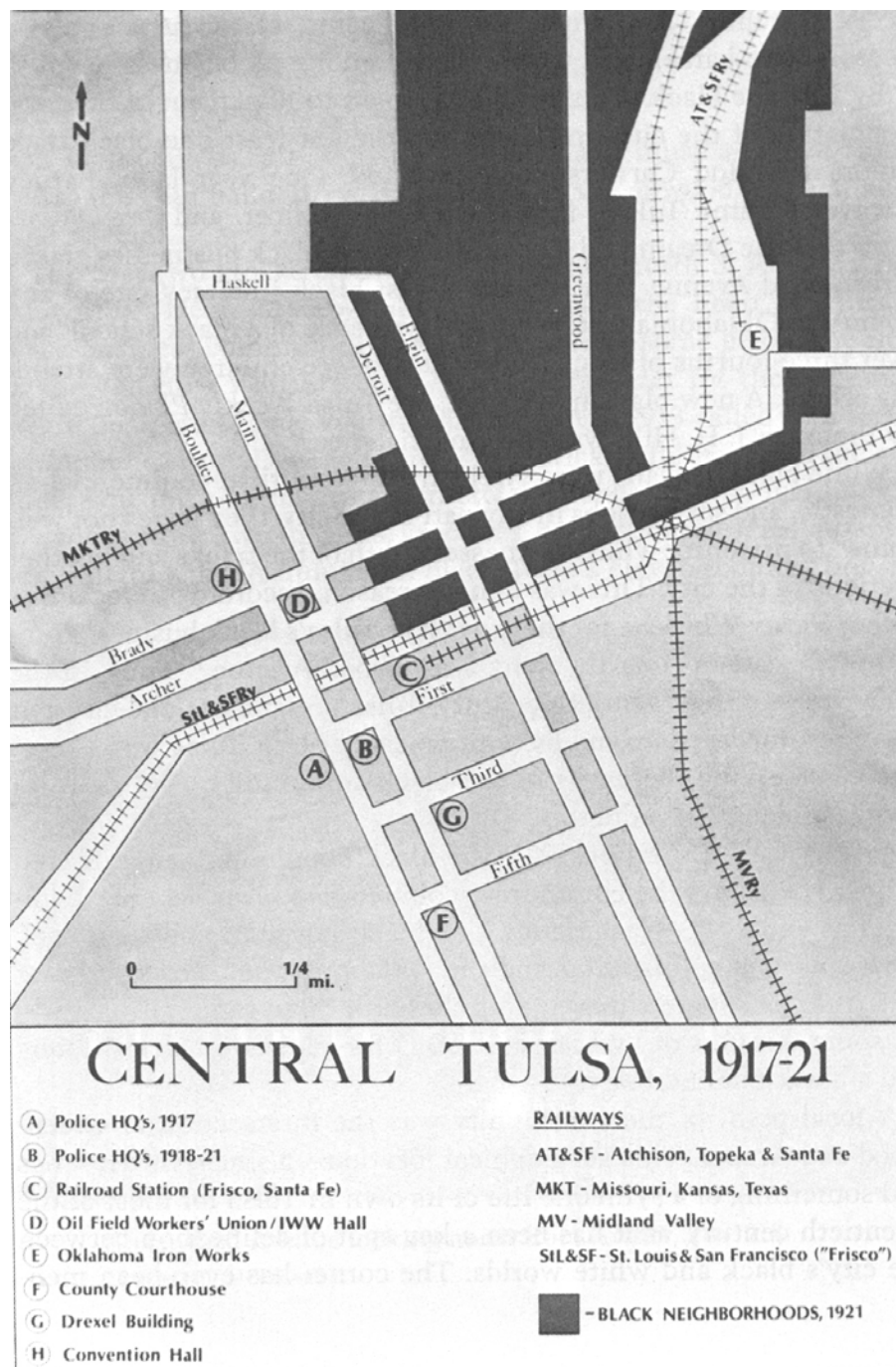


Figure 2, Tulsa's Black Neighborhood, 1921⁴²

⁴² Ellworth, *ibid*, 13.

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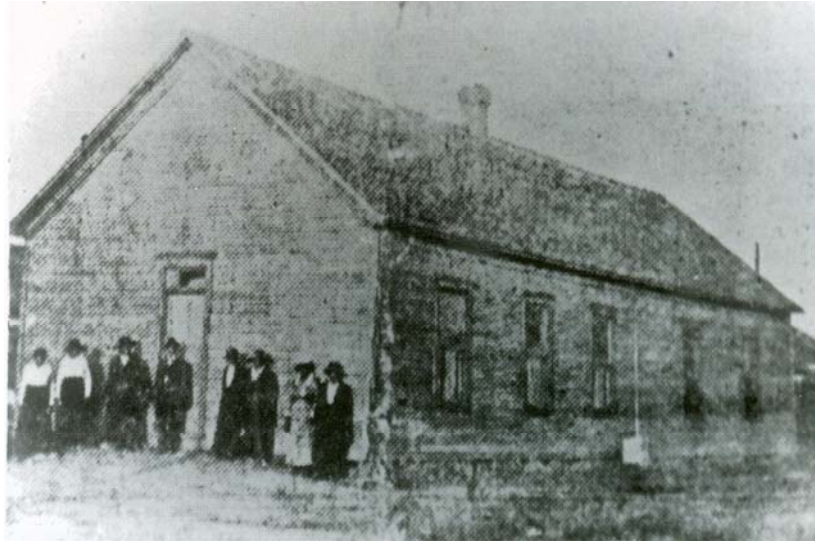
Section number ____ Page 22
Tulsa County, OklahomaPhoto 9. First Mount Zion Church (school building)⁴³

Photo 10. Newly Completed Mount Zion Baptist Church, Dedicated April 4, 1921

⁴³ This photo and all other historic photos come from a history of the church, published by the church on the 85th anniversary of "Many decades of Blind Faith." Mount Zion, The Church that Faith Built.... Then Rebuilt: A Story of Renaissance.

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Photo 11. Mount Zion Baptist Church Burning, 1921

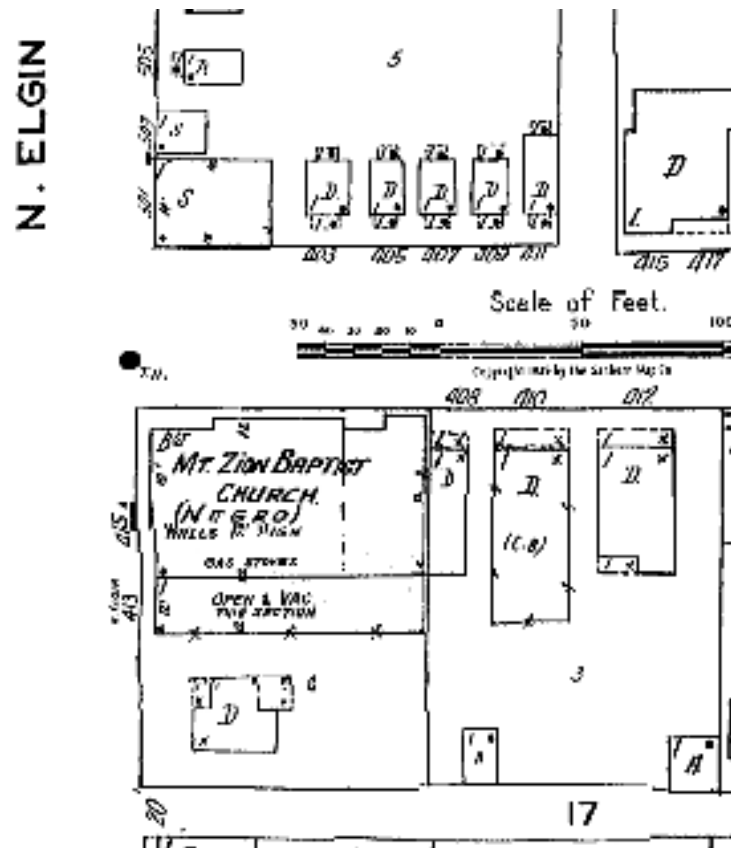


Figure 3. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Tulsa 1915-1939, Vol. 1 (republished) Sheet 4

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Photo 12. Mount Zion Rebuilding and Integrating Old Church, 1945.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Shown on the side of this structure above the window is the stonework reinstalled in the new church annex, recognizing Rev. Whittaker.