The background of the cover is a detailed illustration of a Gothic-style stained glass window. It features four tall, narrow windows with pointed arches, separated by decorative tracery. The glass is colored in shades of green, yellow, and brown, with intricate leaded glass patterns. The text is overlaid on this background.

HISTORIC
CHURCHES
OF SELMA
PRIOR TO 1925

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HISTORIC CHURCHES OF SELMA PRIOR TO 1925



Religion was an essential thread of the fabric of life in early Selma. When the Selma Town and Land Company was formed and lots were determined for sale to the early settlers, four lots were set aside and given to the four major religious groups of the community. These four were Methodists, the Baptists, the Presbyterians and the Cumberland Presbyterians. All four of these denominations immediately built churches on the plots assigned to them. The only church still located on its original plot of ground is the Church Street United Methodist Church, and the present building is the third building built on the same location to house the congregation.

Episcopalians, Roman Catholics and Jews quickly established themselves in Selma. The Episcopal Church organized in 1838, the Roman Catholic Church in 1850 and the Jewish congregation in 1867. Although there are a number of antebellum church buildings in Dallas County, there is no remaining antebellum church building in the city limits. The numerous antebellum churches in Selma prior to the War-Between-The-States were either burned during the Battle of Selma or later torn down to build newer and larger structures to house the growing congregations.

Recognizing the importance of church family in the life of the community and the significance of architectural variety to Selma's tourism potential, the Office of Planning and Development of the City of Selma sought to identify the early structures housing Selma's religious society. A grant received from the Alabama Historical Commission for the purpose of compiling a booklet on the historical churches of Selma was tied to the church buildings themselves, to identify and document those structures with historic and architectural significance. An arbitrary date of 1925 was chosen as the cut off date of construction of selected churches to prevent the project from becoming unwieldy and the community was asked to participate in the selection process. There may be existing structures that have been inadvertently omitted although they fit the criteria for inclusion but we have made every effort to keep this from happening.

Histories were submitted by local churches meeting the criteria and Historian Alston Fitts researched the church histories, adding information where necessary. Lastly, the histories were edited by Project Manager Elise Blackwell and photography and design by Madden & Associates. We hope that this booklet will become a useful educational tool for all Selmians and one to be referred to on a regular basis.



HISTORIC CHURCHES OF SELMA

PRIOR TO 1925

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QUEEN OF PEACE CATHOLIC CHURCH

EIGHTEEN HUNDRED SIXTY NINE

309 WASHINGTON STREET



Queen of Peace has the distinction of being built from the ruins of war. When this Gothic church was erected in 1869, stones from the old Confederate Arsenal were used as building material.

Selma's Catholic community dates back to 1850. The tiny congregation met in private homes to attend Masses offered from time to time by priests who would come from St. Peter's in Montgomery. Not until 1862, when the War had brought an influx of Irish laborers, did Selma Catholics get a resident pastor, Father Andrew Gibbons. After the War, a number of Union soldiers married Southern girls and settled in Selma; and on St. Patrick's Day, 1869, construction began on what was first called the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Father John J. O'Leary was the pastor who directed the effort, with generous support from many of Selma's Protestants. German architect A. Von Fichert designed the Gothic church.

In 1880 the priests of the Society of Jesus, or Jesuits, took charge of the parish and made it the center for their central Alabama missions, which stretched from Demopolis to Anniston. They erected St. Andrew's Hall, the building next to the church, to serve as a boy's school. The columns originally belonged to the Masonic lodge in Cahawba. In 1881 the Madames of the Sacred Heart arrived to set up a convent and girl's school on Broad Street (where People's Bank is now.) The Sisters of Mercy took over Sacred Heart Academy in 1891 and continued to teach Selma youth until 1971.

In 1931 the Jesuits turned over Assumption to the diocesan clergy. Father Francis McCormick carried out a major renovation of the church in 1934. During the 1950s a new school was built on Summerfield Road to replace Sacred Heart Academy.

Selma's second Catholic parish was founded in 1937 by the Society of Saint Edmund (or Edmundites) to serve the city's African American community. Saint Elizabeth's Mission on Broad Street served black Catholics until 1970. In that year Bishop John May called the parishioners of Assumption and Saint Elizabeth's together and called on them to merge into one integrated parish. Father Nelson Ziter, S.S.E., served as the founding pastor of the new parish, which took the name of Our Lady, Queen of Peace.

Selma Catholics have produced several priests and sisters, and one bishop, Most Rev. Moses B. Anderson, S.S.E., auxiliary bishop of Detroit. Perhaps their most famous "son" was the young parishioner who grew up to become Auburn's fabled football coach, Ralph "Shug" Jordan.





ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

EIGHTEEN HUNDRED SEVENTY FIVE

210 LAUDERDALE STREET



Saint Paul's Episcopal Church was organized in Selma in 1838 with its first church building being located one block east of its present location on Lauderdale Street. The Rev. Lucien Wright set up a school in the basement with help from the Ladies' Educational Association. The original church was destroyed by fire during the Battle of Selma, in which the rector, the Rev. J.H. Ticknor, was wounded and several parishioners were slain. Surviving parishioners met at Dallas Academy until a temporary church could be erected at the same location.

In 1871, the parish's building committee contracted with the famous architectural firm of Richard and Richard M. Upjohn of New York to build a new church. Saint Paul's is the largest of only five Alabama churches using plans of this famous firm. The first service in the new church took place on Easter Sunday of 1875.



The building has changed only slightly since its construction. The stained glass windows behind the main altar, depicting scenes from the life of Saint Paul, were donated by the family of General William J. Hardee, the first parishioner buried from the church. The elaborate Italian mosaic altar and reredos depicting the Easter angel, designed by the Lamb Company of New York, was donated to Saint Paul's in memory of George Baker, a vestryman, in 1894. The mosaic of the Annunciation in the transept chapel was donated in memory of Mary Harriet Suttle, a young parishioner who died in 1992. Interestingly enough, descendants of the same Italian craftsmen who created the earlier mosaic crafted this one as well.

The other stained glass windows are of many different styles and ages. The rose window above the front door, with its symbols of evangelists and the sacraments, was given to the church by members of the Sunday School. The last two nave windows on the left facing the altar were executed by the Lewis Comfort Tiffany Company of New York. Clara Weaver Parrish, a member of this parish, worked as a designer for Tiffany and these windows were made as memorials for her parents and her husband. Each of the other windows was given in memory of various members of the parish.

In 1924, the cloister and parish hall were added, built of bricks said to have been from Alabama's first capitol building at Cahawba. In the large room on the second floor, there is a large stained glass window that was designed by Mrs. Parrish and executed by the Tiffany Company. It depicts the wedding feast at Cana and is perhaps the most striking art in the complex.

Historically, St. Paul's has played a major role in the affairs of the Episcopal Church in Alabama and the nation. Five of the eleven Alabama bishops have been elected or consecrated in Dallas County either at St. Paul's in Selma or at St. Paul's in Carlowville. Two rectors have become bishops; and in 1926, a former member of the vestry, John G. Murray, was elected the first Presiding Bishop of the Church in the United States.

During the voting rights movement in 1965, an Episcopal seminarian from New Hampshire, Jonathan Daniels, worshipped regularly at this church. He has since been canonized as a saint by the



REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

EIGHTEEN HUNDRED SEVENTY EIGHT

627 JEFF DAVIS AVENUE



In 1874 the Rev. Lewis Johnston, the first African American to be ordained a Reformed Presbyterian minister, arrived in Selma to preach the Gospel. On June 11, 1874, he formed a school to teach former slaves. The school was initially called Geneva Academy, but was later renamed Knox, after the Scots reformer John Knox.

On May 21, 1875, a congregation was organized, and within three years the present church building was erected on North Avenue (now Jeff Davis). The building originally had a steeple with a bell that was rung for funerals, but it was removed at some time in the pastorate of the Rev. Claude Brown. Knox Academy was located on the site now occupied by the Community Action Agency.

Because the church was built long before the advent of air conditioning, the building was built as a raised cottage to facilitate the movement of air for ventilation and the windows originally had closable shutters. Some of the windows are original...note the "wavy" look. Vinyl siding was placed on the outside in 1992 and replacement shutters were made by John Moss. Sometime during the pastorate of the Rev. Robert Hemphill, there was an accident involving the front steps leading to the sanctuary and the entire steps had to be rebuilt. The difference in the bricks of the church and the steps is notable as the older bricks on the church are softer, hand-made bricks.

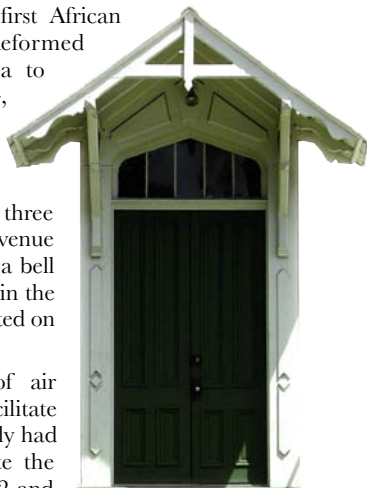
Pastors of Reformed Presbyterian played an important role in Selma's black community for many years. Rev. George M. Elliot (pastor, 1877-1890) was one of the founders of the Alabama State Teachers Association in 1882, and served as its second president. Rev. Solomon Kingston (pastor, 1903-1927) was a leader for many years. He led the group of black citizens who convinced the Selma City Schools to establish Payne Elementary as a school for the blacks of North Selma.

During the depression the burden of supporting Knox Academy became too much for the church and the facility was sold to the city, which continued Knox as a public school. The old Academy building was later demolished and replaced by the Community Action Agency building. The present Knox Elementary School is located behind the old building site.

The Rev. Claude C. Brown, pastor from 1942 until his death in 1975, organized the Ralph Bunche Club, which evolved into a black branch of the YMCA, winning United Way funding in 1947. Brown later led the drive to build the branch of the YMCA on Minter Avenue, which now bears his name. Calvin Jones, another member of the congregation, directed the Brown YMCA until his death in 1984. During this time the church, because of its distinctive architecture and historical importance, was placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Two ladies of the congregation have lent their names to Selma landmarks. Sophia P. Kingston (1859-1934) founded the first school in East Selma in 1905 and ran it for 17 years until the city took over. Kingston Elementary School is named in her honor. Mrs. Susie B. Anderson (1896-1995), who ran Burwell Infirmary after the death of Dr. Burwell and founded the Anderson Nursing Home in 1966, is warmly remembered for her kindness. Susie B. Anderson Homes are named in her honor.

When the Concerned White Citizens of Alabama came to Selma to march for black voting rights, it was Knox Reformed Presbyterian Church they chose as their base headquarters.





FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

E I G H T E E N H U N D R E D N I N E T Y T H R E E
3 0 1 B R O A D S T R E E T



The Rev. Francis Porter organized a Presbyterian congregation here on December 22, 1838. Within a year a wooden building had been erected at the corner of Dallas and Washington Streets. This was on one of the four lots designated for churches in the original plan for Selma in 1819. Later, under the leadership of Dr. Richard B. Cater (pastor from 1845 to 1851) the congregation moved to its present location at the corner of Dallas and Broad where work was begun on a brick structure in 1847, which would house the congregation for over 45 years.

The Rev. Richard Small served the congregation during the Civil War and died in the Battle of Selma. Legend says that the Lady Banksia rosebush by the manse shed all its petals when the pastor's body was brought to the manse. This bush was saved when the 1852 manse was later demolished and replanted next to the current educational building, which was erected on the same site.

The church grew rapidly under the Rev. W.J. Lowry, who took over as pastor in 1865. First Presbyterian developed a keen missionary spirit, helping to found Alabama Avenue Presbyterian Church in 1875. Three members of the church won attention as missionaries: Dr. Goldsby King, whose family established mission hospitals in China, Brazil and Belgian Congo; the Rev. Samuel Lapsley, who died serving in the Congo; and the Rev. Lucius De Yampert, a missionary to the Congo who founded the Sylvan Street Presbyterian Church in 1904. The Presbytery of Shepherds and Lapsley, to which most Presbyterian churches in central Alabama belong, takes its name in part from Samuel Lapsley.

The Rev. Russell Cecil came as pastor in 1889, and in 1893 the congregation decided to tear down its old church and build a new one at a cost of \$25,000. At about this time a controversy arose about the new city clock, which was to be placed in the building. On October 10, 1893, the City Council had approved an expenditure of \$925 for a Seth Thomas clock with dial six feet in diameter to be placed in the tower of the new Presbyterian Church. In a meeting two months later, one of the councilmen objected to city putting the clock in the tower because the dial was 14 inches below the prescribed minimum height of 60' above the ground. After special meetings, the City Council met December 18, 1893, and approved a resolution stating the city would put the clock in the tower if the church would make good its offer to raise the dial five feet. This stipulation was met and the new building was dedicated June 3, 1894 with the city clock in the new church tower, which gave rise to the joke that "Selma runs on Presbyterian time." The W.P. Armstrong family donated the stained glass window of Jesus with the children. The faces of the three children recall those of three Armstrong children who died young.

The next major changes in the church came during the pastorate of Noah J. Warren, who came in November of 1939 and stayed for almost 19 years. In 1942, a manse was purchased at 735 King Street and the old manse adjacent to the church was converted into an education building. In January 1953 the 100-year-old manse building was demolished and a new Westminster Center was erected in its place. The fellowship hall, which was part of this construction project, was later named the Warren Room.

The present church building was almost unchanged for 50 years until a major remodeling in 1967. The building next to the church on Broad Street was constructed from the old Foodland grocery in 1990 and serves as a senior nutrition center as well as an extension of other church facilities.



FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH ON M. L. K. STREET

EIGHTEEN HUNDRED NINETY FOUR



MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. STREET

Before 1866 black and white Baptists worshipped together, the slaves with their masters, and there was only one First Baptist Church. After emancipation, First Baptist deacon Alex Goldsby and a group of other freedmen asked their “Dear Friends and Former Masters” for help in starting a school, and Selma’s first school for African-Americans was opened in the basement of First Baptist located at this time on the corner of Church and Alabama.

After the War Between the States the white members of First Baptist offered their black fellow worshippers \$2,000 to help them in building their own church, which was set up on Saint Philip Street. The Rev. John Blevins was the first pastor. Hardy’s SELMA describes “a splendid church building on St. Philip Street, organized in 1866 with 800 members with regular services by eminent colored preachers.”

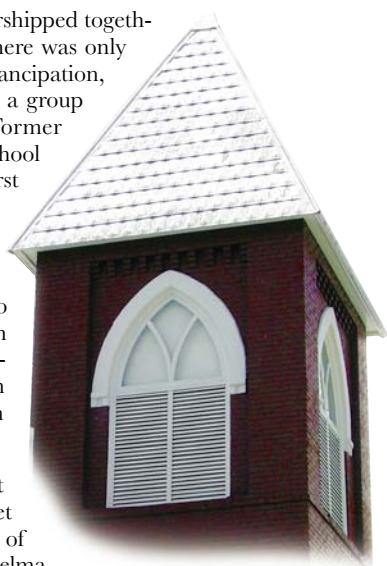
Selma University was started in the basement of First Baptist on January 1, 1878, and classes continued to meet there until the end of the first semester in May. Later members of the congregation joined with the new president of Selma University to set up a new congregation, Tabernacle Baptist Church, in 1885.

In 1894, under the leadership of pastor C.J. Hardy, a new building was erected on Sylvan Street (now Martin Luther King, Jr. Street.) David West, a member of the congregation, served as the architect. As one of the largest black churches in the city, First Baptist has been the site of many school graduations.

During the voting rights movements of the 1960’s, a number of mass meetings were held at First Baptist. While Brown Chapel served as the headquarters for the marches, First Baptist played a prominent role. Among other things, it served as the center for the distribution of food and clothing donated by supporters of the movement.

On May 1, 1978, a tornado struck First Baptist, tearing off much of the roof. Under the leadership of the Rev. M.C. Cleveland, the congregation resolved to rebuild the church. The congregation met at Selma University and the Edmundite Memorial Chapel until the building could be restored. The restored church was rededicated December 5, 1982. It has since been declared a national historical site.

First Baptist continues to play a prominent role in the Selma community and serves as the starting point for the Voting Rights Walking Tour established by the City of Selma in 1994.





CUMBERLAND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

EIGHTEEN HUNDRED NINETY EIGHT
(SELMA AVENUE CHURCH OF CHRIST)

1315 SELMA AVENUE



When the Selma Town and Land Company was formed in 1817 and parcels of land were put up for sale, four lots were designated to four major churches and given to the c o n g r e g a t i o n s .

The Cumberland Presbyterians, who first organized as a denomination in Tennessee in 1810, were one of those churches. Selma's Cumberland Presbyterians built their first church at the corner of Church Street and Dallas Avenue, on one of the lots set aside for that purpose. In 1894 Nathaniel Waller, George L. Waller, James N. Montgomery and James S. Bridges, "the session of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church at Selma," purchased the lot at the corner of Selma Avenue and Green Street. Within a few years a brick structure had been erected on the site. This simple cruciform plan church is defined by its imposing bell tower and dominating hip roof. The bell tower is centered on the front of the church but contains an asymmetrical porch defined by a pilaster and freestanding Romanesque column and is capped by a tall pyramidal roof.

In 1906 the Cumberland Presbyterians attempted to unite with the Presbyterian Church in the U.S. but without complete success. Membership in the local church dwindled, and in 1923 J.S. Bridges, "the only surviving trustee of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church" got permission from the Birmingham Presbytery to sell the property.

The Trustees of the Church of Christ of Selma purchased the property for \$1500, stating their determination "to build congregations that will use only what the New Testament orders and requires, rejecting all innovations and inventions of men, such as organs and all other kinds of instrumental music."

The Church of Christ in this area dates back to the late 1800s. Brother Charlie Landers of Highland Home, Alabama, conducted meetings and preached in northern Dallas County, successfully converting a few souls to Christ. In the early 1900s, some of those converts found Brother F.J. Turner, Sr. holding services in his home on Washington Street in Selma. These groups united and grew and in 1923 bought the meeting house located on Selma Avenue that belonged to the Cumberland Presbyterians. Here the church prospered and the facilities were enlarged from time to time. The relocation of the meeting place in 1966 from Selma Avenue to its present location near Houston Park in west Selma has provided a facility that allows for continued growth.

After the old 1898 church was vacated, the Franklin Street Church of Christ, with an active and growing membership, became its new stewards in October 1983. The name remains the Selma Avenue Church of Christ.





TEMPLE MISHKAN ISRAEL

EIGHTEEN HUNDRED NINETY NINE
506 BROAD STREET



The earliest Jewish settlers came to Selma in the early 1800's and organized themselves in 1867 to establish a Jewish cemetery in East Selma. On July 10, 1870 they formed a congregation under the name "Mishkan Israel" which means the dwelling place of Israel. The first formal services were held at Harmony Hall in September of that year.

For many years the congregation was able to hold services only twice a year, on Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish New Year) and Yom Kippur. In 1876 the congregation rented the old Episcopal Church for use as a Sabbath School and Rabbi G.I. Rosenberg began offering regular services.



Under the leadership of Rabbi Edward S. Levy (rabbi from 1887-1907) the congregation determined to build a synagogue on Broad Street. Ground was broken for the new building on June 13, 1899 and the present Temple Mishkan Israel was dedicated with impressive services on February 23, 1900. Located on the North side of Broad Street, the Temple is inventoried in the Old Town Historic District. Its façade is constructed of red brick with the entrance featuring a three-arched portico. The temple is of Romanesque design and is comprised of two symmetrical towers and raised octagonal roofed sanctuary. The center gable features a stained glass Star of David window, which is also found on the North and South gables. The Romanesque architecture is closely related to the style of R.H. Hunt, a Chattanooga architect.

Members of Mishkan Israel's congregation were vital to the early economic growth of Selma. Many of the stores and businesses that lined the streets of downtown Selma were once owned and operated by members of the Jewish community. In the early 20th century, families such as Adler, Barton, Bendersky, Benish, Bloch, Eagle, Eliasberg, Elkan, Fink, Hohenberg, Kahn, Kayser, Kenningstal, Klotzman, Leva, Liepold, Lilienthal, Meyer, Rothchild, Schuster, Siegel, and Thalheimer ran local businesses. Before Eastern European immigrant Sam Zemurray went on to run United Fruit Company, the largest importer of its kind, he operated a fruit stand on Washington Street. By 1870, Jews had established a cemetery, a social club, and formed the state's second oldest Jewish congregation, Mishkan Israel.

The prominent part played in Selma affairs by members of Mishkan Israel in the community is shown by the election of three Jewish mayors, Simon Maas (1887-89), Marcus J. Meyer (1895-99) and Louis Benish (1915-1920.) The congregation also provided a United States Congressman, William Lehman, and Assistant Secretary of Defense Marx Leva. Strongly represented in local government and city activities, members have served as Water Commissioner, City Attorney, and on the Selma City Council, Selma School Board, and Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors. Women of Temple Mishkan Israel have always been active participants in community life also, forming the Ladies Hebrew Association. There was a second congregation in town called Bnai Abraham, which set up a synagogue on Green Street. It proved unable to sustain itself, and its surviving members eventually joined Mishkan Israel.

There has been no resident rabbi in Selma since the death of Rabbi Lothair Lubasch in 1976. The handful of Jews left in Selma is struggling to maintain their historic building with the support of their friends in the Christian community.



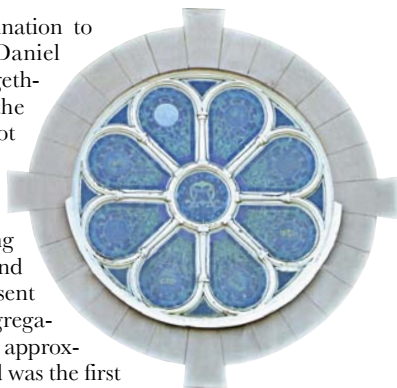
CHURCH STREET UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

NINETEEN HUNDRED ONE

214 CHURCH STREET



The Methodists were the first denomination to organize in Selma, with Rev. Daniel Norwood uniting eleven members together in a wooden church at the corner of Dallas Avenue and Church Street – the very lot laid aside for their use by the Selma Land Company in 1817. Originally called the First Methodist Church, this congregation is now the Church Street United Methodist Church. The Methodists also have the distinction of being the only church remaining on the original plot of ground assigned to them by the Selma Land Company. The present building is the third structure to house the Methodist congregation on this site. The first was a little frame building located approximately where the Educational Building is now. The second was the first brick building completed in 1856 and the third was the present building completed in 1902. The beautiful stained glass rose window on the Dallas Avenue side of the sanctuary was placed as a memorial to the founders. Each petal memorializes one of the founders.

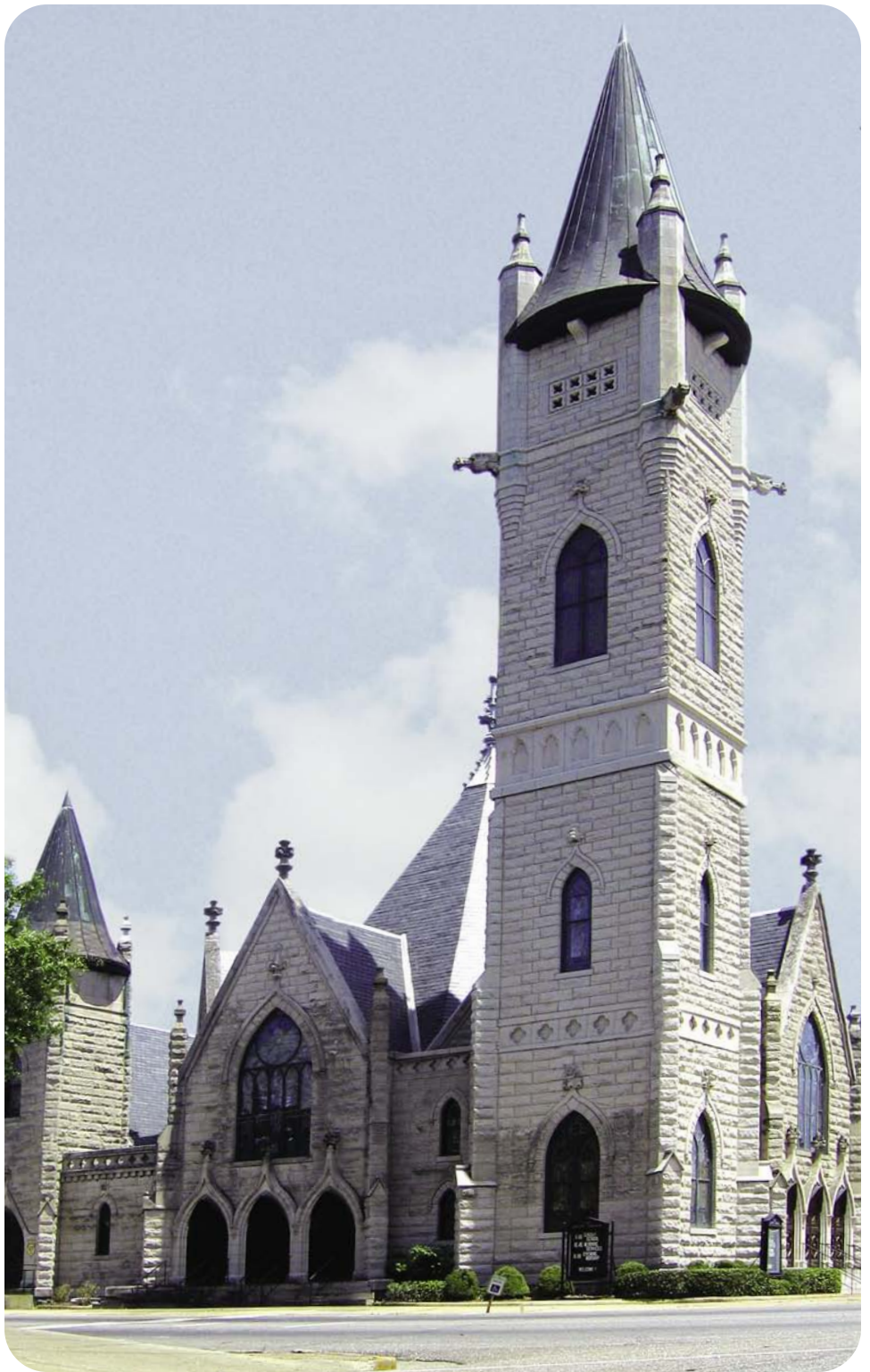


In 1851 the original wooden structure was torn down to make way for a two-story brick edifice. Thomas Helm Lee, the architect who built Sturdivant Hall, designed this impressive structure. It included a large basement where the congregation's African-American members worshipped for many years.

In 1890 a severe storm hit the church during choir practice, toppling the steeple and sending it crashing down into the sanctuary. By God's mercy nobody was hurt, and the congregation voted to rebuild the church. The first bricks were laid on March 7, 1901 by Mrs. P.T. Vaughan, Mrs. Emma Hooker, Mrs. H.H. Stewart, Mrs. D.M. Callaway, Mrs. T.P. Whitby, Mrs. W.P. Hurt and other loyal members of the church. The pastor at this time was Dr. W.P. Hurt. The task was completed on July 27, 1902. The result was a Romanesque building of inspiring proportions, which has served the active congregation well during the ensuing years. The marble baptismal font in the sanctuary is the gift of the congregation of Temple Mishkan Israel, who were grateful for being allowed to hold services in the church while their own temple was being erected.

As the congregation grew several additions were made including the adult Sunday School building, the Educational Building, and the brick parsonage now used as classrooms and the youth center. As a memorial to their parents the children of Dr. and Mrs. O.V. Calhoun furnished the handsome Calhoun Parlors, which have been used by the entire Community. The latest addition to the Methodist Complex was the purchase and renovation of the Old Buick Motor Company building for use as a fellowship hall and cafeteria. This addition is also used by many other community organizations.

Prominent members of the congregation have included Paul Grist (1899-1982), longtime director of the YMCA for whom the Grist YMCA, Camp Grist and Grist State Park are named and Frances John Hobbs (1843-1938), who was one of the founders of the Society of United Charities, which founded Selma's first charity hospital.



FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF SELMA

PINETEEN HUNDRED FOUR

325 LAUDERDALE STREET



Selma's Baptists first organized in May 1842, but did not enjoy a building of their own until 1850, when they erected a building at the corner of Church Street and Alabama Avenue.

First Baptist's pastor Noble Leslie DeVotie resigned his post to serve as chaplain to the Selma troops leaving for the Civil War. He drowned in Mobile Bay becoming "the first casualty of the Civil War." During World War I, First Baptist pastor John A. Davidson followed DeVotie's example, resigning his post to follow the troops to France. Unlike DeVotie, he survived the war and later served a second time as pastor during World War II.

After the Battle of Selma, First Baptist was the only church open for Sunday services. The Federal officers during the federal occupation of Selma therefore, attended these services. After the Civil War, African-American Deacon Alex Goldsby asked and received permission from Pastor J.B. Hathorne to open Selma's first school for African-American youth in the church's basement in 1866. The church later contributed \$2,000 to help the black members start their own church on St. Phillip Street.

First Baptist has contributed a number of outstanding leaders to the state Baptist association. Judge Jonathan Haralson served as president of the Alabama Baptist Convention from 1874 to 1891, and as president of the Southern Baptist Convention from 1880 to 1892 (the longest term ever served by a SBC president.) H.S.D. Mallory later served as president from 1899 to 1904. Kathleen Mallory headed the Women's Missionary Union from 1912 to 1948.

The congregation decided in 1900 to build a new church at its present location, Dallas Avenue and Lauderdale Street. The architecture reflects the admiration of the period for High Gothic. Gargoyles serve as rain spouts on the massive stone tower and the original slate roof has just recently been replaced. Stained glass windows from the old church were saved and installed in the new one.

Among these are splendid windows and a magnificent tile mosaic designed by Selma artist Clara Weaver Parish when she was with the Tiffany Company of New York. The first two contractors encountered difficulties with building and the Architects, Wilson and Edwards recommended the contract be canceled. Finally Ernest Lamar, the chairman of the Building Committee, took charge of the task himself. The first service in the new church was held in September 1904, but it was 1909 before the costs were paid off and the church could be formally dedicated.

The present sanctuary is of full gothic design and houses two Tiffany windows. A Mr. McKibbon was contracted to build the splendid woodwork within the church. The pulpit furniture is also of Gothic design. Additions to the church over the years have included the Mallory Room in 1917, which was built for additional Sunday School space and is used for worship seating. The first Sunday School building in 1923, now known as the Old Education Building was added and a balcony seating 166 was constructed in 1956. In 1962 construction began on a new three story educational building and its parking lot was completed in 1989.

First Baptist's energy is such that it has produced a rash of daughter churches over the years. Among these are First Baptist Church on MLK, Jr. Street (1894), Central Baptist {now Valley Grande} (1896), West End Baptist (1943), Northside Baptist (1944), Water Avenue Baptist (1945), Elkdale Baptist (1952), Selmont Baptist (1946), Fairview Baptist (1956), and Summerfield Baptist (1973.)



ALABAMA STREET METHODIST CHURCH

PINETEEN HUNDRED FOUR

(ALABAMA AVENUE CHURCH OF GOD)

2259 ALABAMA AVENUE



The early Methodists of Selma saw East Selma as a fruitful field for mission work. Hugh Ferguson donated some land on the Burnsville Road (now known as Water Avenue), a group of Church Street parishioners raised \$500.00, and a “neat wooden building” was erected there in 1861. This mission church attracted only a few members at first, and during its early years its pastor preached there once a month or less. What is now known as the Barrett Road United Methodist Church began in 1866 as East Selma Methodist Episcopal Church, an appointment in the Summerfield District. Dr. A.H. Mitchell served as presiding elder and C.D.N. Campbell served as preacher in charge.

In 1869 a zealous new pastor, W.S. McDaniel, gave the church a new energy, and in the years that followed it began to grow, to organize a Sunday School, and to make a difference in the community. Hardy’s Selma (1879) pays the congregation a tribute saying, “really no church in the city is doing more real good than the East Selma Methodist Church.” In 1891 the church changed its name to the Water Street Methodist Church.

In 1901 the church purchased two lots at the corner of Vine and Alabama Street, a part of Lapsley’s Garden. Gillenwater Contractors and Builders constructed a red brick building with beautiful stained glass windows. The building is a vernacular interpretation of the High Victorian Gothic style and is distinguished by its stylized gothic windows, asymmetrically placed tower and asymmetrical massing, and its stone trim used to emphasize the windows and doors. The first services at the new location were held on April 14, 1904. Early City Directories refer to this as “the Second Methodist Episcopal Church,” but it gradually became known as the Alabama Avenue Methodist Church. A brick education building was erected in 1951 next to the church, replacing the wooden building that had been there.

While repairs were being made at some time, a small box was discovered near the cornerstone. The box contained a white organdy apron placed there by the Ladies Aid Society. On the apron are the names of families who made the Alabama Avenue Church possible. Family names include Acker, Ambrose, Binford, Burfitt, Butler, Burden, Foster, Garner, Gillenwater, Gilmer, Hutchings, Jacobs, LaPorte, Little, Russell, Thomas, and Wilson.

In September 1978 the congregation made the difficult decision to relocate a second time. The Lord’s Tabernacle Church of Holiness USA was interested in the property, and in May 1979 the sale was approved although never completed. Under the leadership of pastor Norman G. Williams, the old congregation moved out to West Selma. Groundbreaking on a sanctuary and fellowship hall took place on September 7, 1980 on Barrett Road and is now known as the Barrett Road United Methodist Church. The cornerstone from the Alabama Avenue church was incorporated into the new building.

The Alabama Avenue United Methodist Church building was sold to the Sylvan Street Church of God (also known as the Martin Luther King, Jr. Street Church of God) for \$65,000.00 on September 9, 1980. The church currently provides a day care there as “the Alabama Avenue School of God,” with Otis T. Woody as executive director.



FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH

NINETEEN HUNDRED SIX

(DISCIPLES OF CHRIST)

1209 SELMA AVENUE



First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) was organized in 1852 when the Rev. P i c k n e y B. Lawson converted Mr. and Mrs. E.C. Lavender along with their cook, Elvirie. C h u r c h services were held for two years in the Lavender home, which was located on the southwest corner of the present day intersection of Broad Street and Dallas Avenue. By 1854, with 30 members, the congregation made the decision to erect a church building. A lot was purchased on the corner of Alabama Avenue and Green Street and a small brick building was constructed. A marble slab placed over the entrance read, "First Christian Church, Selma, Alabama, erected 1854 AD."

Barely surviving the Civil War, the congregation persevered and in 1880 hired their first resident pastor, Rev. J.S. Kendrick, although he divided his time between Selma, Cambridge and Richmond. Five years later Rev. Sherman B. Moore became First Christian's first full time minister and the parish began to grow in earnest. In 1902 the minister suggested building a new and larger church to house the growing congregation.

A lot was purchased at the corner of Selma Avenue and Franklin Street and in 1905 W.W. McKibbin was awarded the contract to construct a building along the lines of the "Akron Plan" which was conceived in Akron, Ohio in 1869 by Lewis Miller. The "Akron Plan" was "an attempt to make church buildings multi-functional by placing Sunday School classrooms around the perimeter of an assembly room which also opened into the worship space as overflow seating." Some of the hallmarks of the Akron Plan seen in the First Christian Church, Selma are: built of rusticated stone (cast stone), a domed sanctuary in a centralized plan, two main facades, a corner entrance, an amphitheater style auditorium with curved pews in concentric arcs, aisles that radiate from the pulpit, a slightly ramped floor in the auditorium, classrooms that radiate from a common area or assembly room which is separated from the auditorium, folding doors that shutter the classrooms from the common area, and tall pocket doors that allow the assembly room and the auditorium to be combined as one space or to function independently. Constructed at a cost of between \$15,000 and \$16,000, the new church was dedicated on June 10, 1906.

A number of changes have been made in the church, which as originally constructed had no plumbing, heating or electricity. Most of the classrooms have been converted into bathrooms, a kitchenette, and storage rooms. In 1986 the curved pews arranged in concentric arcs in the Sunday School assembly area were removed. The space was converted into a parlor or reception area known as "the Allen Room" in honor of Dr. W.E. Allen, a leading member of the congregation who served as president of the Selma School Board and performed countless services to the poor of the community.

The marble slab from over the door of the original church was intended to have been placed in the wall of the new building. The slab was accidentally broken during construction so a new stone was placed in the wall. In 1986 the old slab (presumed to have been discarded) was found under a stairway. It has been framed and placed in the Allen Room.

A new education wing was added in 1963 next to the church. The entrance design and exterior materials match the 1906 building so well that the casual eye cannot detect that there are fifty-seven intervening years between the construction of the buildings.

A list of outstanding members of the First Christian Church would have to include "The Sleeping Prophet," Edgar Cayce, who taught Sunday School for twelve years while he lived and worked in Selma.



ALABAMA AVENUE PRESBYTERIAN

NINETEEN HUNDRED EIGHT
(LORDS TABERNACLE OF PRAISE
TOWER OF PRAYER)
1817 ALABAMA AVENUE



Joseph Hardie and H. I. McKee, both elders of First Presbyterian Church, led an effort to establish a Presbyterian Church in East Selma. They rented a small wooden building on Alabama Avenue and engaged Rev. John McBride to conduct services there. In December of 1872 the evangelist, Rev. James Watson, conducted a revival on the site, bringing some twenty-five conversions. Thus it became possible on January 12, 1873, to formally launch the Alabama Avenue Presbyterian Church.

Rev. Peter Gowan of Charleston was called to be Alabama Avenue's second pastor in May 1873. Under his leadership the congregation quickly outgrew the small chapel it had been using. A Mrs. Weaver donated land on the north side of Alabama Avenue and the congregation built a new frame building there at the northwest corner of Alabama Avenue and Range Street (now Marie Foster Boulevard.) This handsome church building was dedicated in an impressive ceremony on September 28, 1875.



As "the Oldside Presbyterian Church," as some people called it, the congregation played a significant role in the community. Elder Harvey L. McKee was the only male in the interfaith group that organized the Society of United Charities in 1894, and played an important role in that society. Rev. Gowan served as pastor for eleven more years.

Rev. E.B. Robinson became pastor in 1906, and under his leadership a new brick building was erected in place of the old one. The building cost between ten and twelve thousand dollars. Stained glass windows placed in the church are in memory of Mr. V.B. McMillian, Dr. George W. Check, Mr. J.A. Stephenson, Mr. J.S. O'Gwynn, Mrs. Martha Warner, Mrs. Sara Gatchell, Mrs. George Griffith, Rev. W.O. Wardlaw, and Mr. T.W. Rogan.

This late 19th century/early 20th century Arts and Crafts style church is distinguished by its half-timber and stucco gables, bay window and cloistered side porch, all of which are details derived from Medieval English Architecture.

In 1965 Rev. Cecil Williamson became pastor of Alabama Avenue Presbyterian Church. Under his leadership the congregation decided to relocate in West Selma, building what is now called Crescent Hill Presbyterian Church. The old building was sold to the First United Pentecostal Church for \$28,000, and later passed to the Lord's Tabernacle of Praise.



BROWN CHAPEL AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

PINETEEN HUNDRED EIGHT

410 MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. STREET



Before Emancipation, Selma's black Methodists worshipped with their masters at Church Street Methodist Church. After they were freed, they began meeting separately, at first in private homes and eventually in the basement of the Hotel Albert (then called simply the Broad Street Hotel.)

On August 31, 1867, African Methodist-Episcopal missionary John Turner addressed the group meeting at the Hotel Albert. In conclusion he asked those present who wished to unite themselves with the African Methodist Episcopal connection to stand up; the congregation stood as one man. Rev. Godfrey B. Taylor became the first pastor. In the following year, the first state conference of the AME Church was held in Selma on July 25th under the leadership of Bishop John Mifflin Brown.

In 1869 the new congregation bought a plot of land on Sylvan Street and built a church there, which they named "Brown Chapel" in honor of the bishop. Hardy's Selma (1879) pays tribute to the "splendid brick church building on Sylvan street, capable of seating 900 people, with services regularly conducted, and a Sabbath School numbering over 800 scholars."

Brown Chapel played an important role in the development of Selma from early times. As Rev. W.H. Mixon put it, "We must educate, or we will perish." Rev. Charles E. Harris and eight lay members of the parish bought a piece of land on which to build, and in 1889 Payne Institute came into being. Thus Selma had a Methodist college until 1922, when a split in the state AME conference led to the college being transferred to Birmingham, where it became Daniel Payne College and later ceased to exist.

In 1908, under the leadership of Rev. A.J. Hunter, the congregation resolved on erecting a new building. A.J. Farley of Beloit served as the architect, and an imposing Romanesque structure with Byzantine and Mission style influence was erected. It follows the traditional cruciform plan and the front elevation evokes mission style architecture with its twin bell towers capped by octagonal domed spires and Spanish baroque gable over an arcaded porch.

Perhaps Brown Chapel's greatest moment in the spotlight came in 1965. Circuit Court Judge James Hare's injunction had forbidden all mass meetings, and most churches were afraid to defy a court order. However, Rev. P.H. Lewis, with the full support of his presiding elder I.H. Bonner, agreed to defy the order by opening the doors of Brown Chapel to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and on January 2, 1965, the voting rights movement got underway. Brown Chapel served as the site of most of the meetings that followed, and it was from Brown Chapel that the marches to Montgomery left on March 7th (Bloody Sunday,) March 9th (Turnaround Tuesday,) and March 21st (the day when the Selma-to-Montgomery March finally began.) The City of Selma researched and funded the placement of historic wayside exhibits on MLK, Jr. Street in front of Brown Chapel that create a self guided tour of the voting rights movement in Selma, Alabama.

The National Funeral Directors of America erected the monument to Dr. King in front of the church in 1978.



MOUNT ZION PRIMITIVE BAPTIST CHURCH

PINETEEN HUNDRED TWELVE
1306 UNION STREET



In 1898 Rev. W.M. Gardner, Rev. E.M. Morton, Sister Letha Miller and a few others began discussing the need for a church. They rented a small frame house on Parkman Avenue for services and began baptizing people in Valley Creek. Rev. Gardner served as the first pastor, with Rev. Morton as his assistant.

As the congregation grew, it needed more room in which to worship. A frame building was erected on Union Street where the congregation still meets. Rev. C.J. Sams became pastor in 1900, and twelve years of growth followed. In 1912 the old wooden building was torn down and the present brick structure was erected. To the distress of the congregation Rev. Sams was called away by the Primitive Baptist Church Association to work at its college in Tallahassee, Florida.

Under the leadership of Pastor Rev. Scott, Mount Zion served as the site for a national meeting of the National Primitive Baptist Convention in the USA.

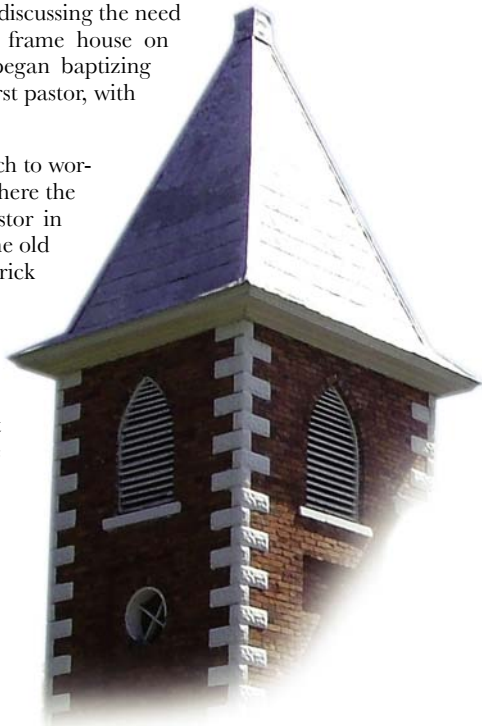
In 1923 Mount Zion formally dedicated its church building. Rev. R.J. Thomas was the pastor at that time.

In 1933 the church passed through a serious crisis. During the trauma of the Great Depression, several of its members left Mount Zion to found two new Primitive Baptist community churches: Little Canaan and Union Grove. These were hard times for Mount Zion, but its "faithful remnant" kept the faith and persevered.

In 1950 Rev. B.F. McDole took charge as pastor. He was to serve longer than any other pastor, and his fourteen years of dedicated leadership were climaxed by the erection of a new education building. Its cornerstone was laid on September 15, 1963. A few months earlier, on June 23, 1963, the pastor and members of Mount Zion braved the wrath of the White Citizens Councils by hosting one of the early mass meetings by the Voting Rights Movement.

In 1973 Mount Zion served as host church for a tri-state meeting of the Primitive Baptist Convention.

Elder Bryan Starks of Uniontown was called to take charge of Mount Zion on March 3, 2000. Under his leadership the church has completed the construction of a Fellowship Hall.





GREEN STREET BAPTIST CHURCH

FIFTEEN HUNDRED TWENTY TWO
1200 GREEN STREET



The Green Street Baptist Church of Selma, Alabama, was organized in 1881 by a group of members led by the Reverend John Blevins. They were affiliated at one time with the Saint Phillips Street Baptist Church, which we now know to be the First Baptist Church on Martin Luther King, Jr. Street. The congregation met in a store on the corner of Green Street and McCreary Avenue, and according to Hardy's History of Selma, this church family was composed of a membership of about 200, and a Sunday School numbering about 300 children.

It was Green Street's second pastor, the Reverend Larry Bryant, who erected the congregation's first church, a wooden frame structure. This building did not accommodate the members and was very uncomfortable. Inside there were three lanterns hanging from the ceiling with a tin lamp on each of the side walls. There was a very small platform, which was shared by the minister and children who sat along its edge. Later, on July 29, 1892, a new brick church was dedicated. After his death, however, the congregation fell on hard times.

In 1905 J.A. Martin, D.D. took over as pastor. Dr. Martin, who was already serving as treasurer of the Alabama Baptist State Convention and a trustee of Selma University, brought his energy and enthusiasm to bear on building up Green Street Baptist Church.

One of his plans was a new, more impressive church building. He had a dream one night in which he saw the plans for a new church. He then went to architect and contractor A.J. Farley to have his dream translated into reality. Soon an imposing Romanesque church of brick and stone was rising in place of the old one. In June of 1922, the new Green Street Baptist Church was dedicated.

In 1958 Rev. Charles Lett became pastor and the 27 years that followed saw a host of accomplishments. Green Street's congregation supported the voting rights movement in 1965 and the food for the marchers was prepared in Green Street's kitchen and transported out to the sites along Highway 80 between Selma and Montgomery.

Rev. Lett achieved one "first" after another in the years that followed. He was the first black chairman of the Selma School Board on which he served for many years. He was the first black president of the Ministerial Association of Selma and received a host of other honors. In 1985, however, friction developed within the congregation. Rev. Lett withdrew with his followers to organize Calvary Missionary Baptist Church north of Selma, and Rev. Kirk Ellison, Jr. took over as pastor of Green Street.





TABERNACLE BAPTIST CHURCH

P I N E T E E N H U N D R E D T W E N T Y T W O
1 4 3 I B R O A D S T R E E T



When Rev. Edward W. Brawley became president of the Alabama Baptist Normal and Theological School (now Selma University) in 1884, he decided that the students and faculty needed their own church. In January 1885 several members of First Baptist (then “the Philip Street Church”) joined him in establishing a new congregation, which met at first in the University’s chapel.

On July 5th the congregation incorporated under the title of “Tabernacle Baptist Church” and began working on a new place of worship. A building was erected on Minter Avenue next to the present structure. Rev. Brawley had to mortgage his library to pay the costs of construction and, unfortunately, ended by losing the library, which was sold at public auction.

In 1922 a new two-story building with a raised basement was erected. Constructed in a complex symmetrical plan, the sanctuary portion of the building features a cross plan with an interesting gabled roof. A dome encircled by a clerestory is located at the intersection of the gables, and four two-story “towers” are located at the corners where the sections of the cross join. An unusual feature is the construction of the two principal facades and the three flanking corner towers in a yellow brick and construction of the south and west facades and the southwest tower in red brick, which was taken from the first church building. All of the windows feature geometric designs with the exception of the east window, located at the gallery level in the rear of the sanctuary. This window depicts the baptism of Jesus and is a notable feature of the church. An African-American architect, David T. West, who had previously designed First Baptist on Martin Luther King Street and several of the buildings at Selma University, was the architect. David West was also a deacon of Tabernacle Baptist Church.

Tabernacle’s members have been men and women who made an impact in the state and sometimes in the nation as well. Its founder, Rev. Brawley served as president of the National Baptist Association in 1891. Mrs. R.T. Pollard served as president of the Alabama Women’s Association. R.B. Hudson served as secretary of the National Baptist Association from 1908 to 1931. David V. Jemison, pastor from 1902 to 1929 and again from 1936 to 1954, served as president of the Alabama Baptist Convention from 1917 until his death, and as president of the National Baptist Convention from 1941 to 1953. He also served as Vice President of the Baptist World Alliance. His son Theodore Jemison, who grew up in Selma, also served as president of the National Baptist Convention and was one of the founders of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

D.V. Jemison was succeeded by Louis L. Anderson, who served from 1955 to 1995. When civil rights activists from SNCC were trying to find a church where they could have Selma’s first mass meeting, it was Rev. L.L. Anderson who offered Tabernacle as the place. This gesture enabled Tabernacle to play a significant role in the struggle for racial equality in Selma. Other churches followed its example and the Movement became a reality in Selma.

Tabernacle is eligible for listing on the Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage under the criteria of civil rights history and architecture. Architecturally, it depicts a notable example of the Classical Revival style of architecture, which became popular in the early twentieth century, and it stands as a landmark to the African-American community in Selma. Proud of their church, the congregation is very supportive of preserving the history and architectural integrity of the building.

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HISTORIC CHURCHES OF SELMA

PRIOR TO 1925



Selma's growth and stability through the years has been led by the community churches' commitment to God.



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