

St. Paul Baptist Church is a simple frame c.1910 country church with no stylistic influences. It is located in a fairly remote setting in an area known to locals as Hickory Flats. Immediately adjacent to the old church is a modern St. Paul Baptist Church. The old church, no longer in active use, is virtually unchanged from the period when it also served as a public school.

The church is sheathed in narrow gauge clapboards. A forward-projecting tower, attached at the corner, anchors the façade. The tower has a hipped roof and vented openings on each side, near the eaves. The main roof extends to form a skirting roof around the tower at mid-point. The entrance is located on the side of the tower. One wonders if the church was built with a school in mind, for the façade has no windows, and it is here where the blackboard is located. Two-over-two windows pierce the side elevations. Along one side elevation is the remains of a chimney which serviced a heating stove. At the rear are a set of paired two-over-two windows at the center, with what was originally a door to each side. (One of the doors is boarded over.)

The interior survives virtually unaltered. The walls and ceiling are finished in narrow gauge boards. The ceiling is vaulted. At each rear corner, framing the altar, is a tiny room. A historic blackboard occupies several feet of the front wall. The "Morehead Public School" sign above the blackboard is fairly recent.

The only change to the exterior (other than the boarded over rear door) has been the installation of a long and thin name plate (made of wood) to the façade.

Significant Dates:	1919-c.1945
Architect/Builder:	unknown
Criterion:	A

St. Paul Baptist Church is significant in the areas of education and ethnic heritage because it represents a major phenomenon in the development of educational facilities for African-Americans – "public" school held in a church. In the early to mid twentieth century the building provided the only education available to children in the immediate area. The period of significance begins in 1919, the first documented use of the building as a school, and ends c.1945 when school ceased to be held there.

Historic Context:

Louisiana for the most part did not make significant progress in public education until the early twentieth century, whether for whites or blacks. The watchword among late nineteenth century politicians was retrenchment. While provision for public education existed on paper, funding was woefully inadequate for even a single school system, let alone the dual system mandated by segregation. The end result was shameful for both races -- more so, of course, for African-Americans, who received significantly less funding.

Doggedly determined that their children would have an education, blacks often relied upon their own resources, small as they were. What typically developed was a "public" school that was and wasn't. Actually it was a public-private effort with blacks providing a building and the school board providing some funding, perhaps for a teacher and some supplies. (The arrangement varied from place to place.) The building was space in a lodge or benevolent association hall, or more likely, a church. As T. H. Harris, State Superintendent of Education from 1908-1940, observed: "In most cases Negro churches were used for schoolhouses and the only equipment in these churches were the benches used for church services."

African-American churches (Protestant) doubling as schools were commonplace in rural Louisiana in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They remained the sole source of public education in some rural areas of the state into the 1940s. Instruction was not religious – there just happened to be "public" school held in a church, or sometimes a one room schoolhouse on church property.

St. Paul Baptist Church

As is typical for "church schools," documentation is fairly scanty for the early years. School board minutes show that on November 1, 1913 the superintendent was authorized to establish a "negro school" at Hickory Flat. (The name of the community is sometimes given as Hickory Flat, sometimes Flats.) But whether school began immediately thereafter is not known. The earliest available documentation of St. Paul's use as a public school is from 1919, via a published account of former teacher Solomon Cole. Educated at Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, Cole and

his wife returned home to Hickory Flats and St. Paul Baptist Church September 27, 1919. Cole was asked by the school board to be in charge of the school in the church, which he referred to as Morehead Public School. Morehead was the name of a family in the area.

Sam Captain, the oldest former student interviewed for this nomination, was born in 1917 and attended grades 1 through 6 in the candidate. He recalls being a student of Cole's but was quite certain the school was known by the name of the church. Other former students indicated the same. Perhaps both names were used— one by the school officials and another by the local community. A surviving report card for 1935-36 bears the name Morehead Public School. Both names are being given as historic names for the purposes of this nomination.

According to Cole's memoir, published in 1979, there were 168 students enrolled in the school when the school board asked him to take charge, and only one teacher. Two more teachers were hired at his request. One can't help but wonder about Cole's recollections. The number of students sounds too high, and it would have been most unusual for even a white rural school to have 3 teachers. Former students interviewed for this nomination, whose recollections date from the 1920s through the mid-1940s, recall only one teacher (which would have been typical). Students sat on church benches. The church remained the area's public school until the mid-1940s. A new St. Paul Baptist Church was built in the 1960s, but most fortunately, the congregation chose to retain their old building.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Interviews with former students Berdia Sherman, Allen Morehead, Joseph Robinson and Sam Captain.

Cole, Solomon Lovejoy. *From Whence I Came*. Reverend Cole's autobiography was privately published in 1979.

Allen Parish School Board Minutes, November 1, 1913.