

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Poplar Chapel A.M.E. Church (1903) is a frame, four bay, basilica style structure located in a rural setting southwest of Rayville. Although the building best fits the "no style" category, Queen Anne Revival influence can be seen in a band of imbricated shingles across the front. Also, the twin towers are remotely related to Romanesque Revival precedents. Despite some alterations, the building retains its National Register eligibility as a rare survivor of a vernacular archetype.

The pitched roof structure culminates in a somewhat monumental front with two forward projecting towers of unequal height. The taller contains a belfry marked by louvered openings while the shorter is merely an architectural "dummy." Both towers have a pyramidal roof and a second skirting roof part way up. These two skirting roofs connect with a band of imbricated shingles which runs across the facade of the church to link the towers. The massing of the asymmetrical facade is enlivened somewhat by the fact that the upper portion of each tower is slightly smaller than the lower. In addition, the massing is further enlivened by a sharp angular frontal gable set between the towers. The exterior of the building is sheathed in narrow gauge clapboards and features oversized corner boards accenting the various parts. To the rear of the church is a contemporaneous service wing which contains the chancel.

The nave is plain and largely modern, with acoustical tile, new six over nine windows and plywood wainscoting. However, the wall covering is superficial and the original beaded board is still underneath. To the rear of the nave is a chancel stage area flanked by service spaces.

Aside from the alterations noted above, the only other noteworthy changes are as follows:

1. In 1926 the entire church was turned on its lot to face a new road which had just been put in by the state. The building itself was not altered.
2. In about 1940, a small enclosed vestibule was added to the entrance between the towers.

Assessment of Integrity

Despite these alterations, the building still retains its significant massing, its exterior accenting elements and most of its exterior surface treatment. In short, it retains its architectural identity. In its present condition it is still one of only two known examples of its vernacular type in northeastern Louisiana.

Significant dates	1903
Architect/Builder	unknown
Criterion C	

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

Poplar Chapel is of local architectural significance as a rare and early example of a vernacular rural black church within the context of northeast Louisiana.

Poplar Chapel is fairly typical of churches associated with rural black congregations from across the South during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It has the basic basilican form with square head windows and an elementary chancel. As with many of the finer examples, the principal elevation is accented with a pair of square towers culminating in pyramidal steeples. These are remotely related to the late nineteenth century Romanesque Revival. Poplar Chapel also features a modicum of Queen Anne treatment in its imbricated shingled band across the front.

Churches of this ilk were undoubtedly the grandest architectural manifestations of rural black life and culture during the period. Expressing the highest aspirations of each community, they were far more pretentious than sharecropper's cabins, cotton houses and plantation stores. This pretension can be seen at Poplar Chapel in its relatively monumental facade with its twin pyramidal towers and its imbricated shingle ornamentation. Churches like Poplar Chapel have not survived in great numbers in northeastern Louisiana. Many were abandoned by rural black populations as they immigrated to the cities. Others, where the congregation survived, were either replaced or were bricked over to give them a new look. As far as the State Historic Preservation Office is aware, Poplar Chapel is one of only two Pre-World War I rural black churches that survive in the region with any degree of integrity.

Major Bibliographical References

1903 cornerstone.

Tape-recorded interviews with older members of the congregation.