

The Alabama Methodist Church is an unstyled frame country church located in a rural setting a few miles northwest of the small town of Bernice. The building is set just a few yards back from Louisiana Highway Alt. 2. It has received very few alterations since its 1895 construction.

The simple, pitched roof, gable fronted building's distinguishing exterior feature is a central entrance tower. The tower's first stage is marked by a slightly projecting gable above the door. Then the tower rises above the main roofline in one stage to culminate in an open belfry with a steep faceted spire crowned by a finial. The tower combined with the relatively steep pitch of the main block produces a very vertical building, especially when viewed head on. While the main portion of the church and the tower are sheathed in clapboards, the belfry is built of vertically placed planks. It has a decidedly "homemade" look to it and is leaning slightly to the right as you face the church. Five evenly spaced square head, four over four windows pierce the side elevations, while a small two over two square head window is located on each side of the first stage of the entrance tower. There are two doors on the rear elevation, one to each side. The gabled entrance features fascia boards and corner boards echoing those found on the main block. To each side of the double entrance doors, and of the same height, is a single molded panel. The building rests on blocks of ironstone native to the area. The only exterior alterations are concrete steps with simple metal handrails at all three doors.

Typical of North Louisiana churches of this type is the relatively simple, stark interior. The walls and vaulted ceiling are sheathed in varnished beaded boards. Alabama Methodist is slightly more elaborate than many of its type in that the boards are laid diagonally on the side walls and portions of the wall behind the altar. There is also a wainscot. The simple box-like pews give every indication of being original. The only alteration to the interior is the subdivision of the nave to create a shallow meeting room across the front of the church. This was done in a sensitive manner because the inserted wall's sheathing is very similar to the original (the same gauge and laid diagonally). The wall is pierced by three doors, the central one of which is obtrusive in character. The shallow space across the front of the church created by the wall insertion retains its original character except that the boards covering the walls and ceiling have been painted.

Assessment of Integrity

All in all, the Alabama Methodist Church is very well preserved. It is virtually unchanged on the exterior and retains the bulk of its original interior character, including its wall and ceiling sheathing, wooden floors, and pews. As noted above, the subdivision was done sensitively.

Significant dates	1895
Architect/Builder	unknown
Criterion C	

The Alabama Methodist Church is locally significant in the area of architecture because it is a rare surviving example of an important North Louisiana building type.

The building is a well preserved example of a simple frame country church. As such, it represents a local North Louisiana unpretentious building tradition associated with the settlement patterns of the region. Distinctly different from the older French Catholic southern part of the state, North Louisiana was settled in the 1840s and '50s by Anglo-Saxon Baptists and Methodists migrating westward from the Upland South. The founders of Alabama Methodist arrived in the area in 1849 after a long journey from Shelby County, Alabama. According to tradition, the first church on the site was a log building.

Historically, North Louisiana was characterized by small farms and disbursed settlement patterns. Churches typically were located in remote rural settings. Even in 1895, when the present Alabama Methodist Church was built, the nearest community of any size was roughly twenty miles away. (Bernice, about five miles away, was not founded until 1899, when the railroad arrived.) From an architectural standpoint, these churches are known for their simple, unadorned, often quite stark character, whether they be from the 1870s (the date of the earliest surviving example) or the very early years of this century. The typical surviving example is a rectangular, pitched roof, gable end

building of frame construction with little in the way of decorative detailing (i.e., Alabama Methodist but without the tower).

While they were scattered across North Louisiana historically, churches of the type described above are now rare survivors. For example, Alabama Methodist is the only one remaining in Union Parish, and there are most likely less than a dozen in the eastern half of northern Louisiana where Alabama Methodist is located.

For the most part, churches of this type have been the victim of population shifts. In remote locations, they no longer had congregations large enough to support them by the 1950s and '60s. And, of course, once vacant, a building's future is very insecure. Those that have managed to survive are generally not in full-time use, but have an active and dedicated support group and are used occasionally, with the most popular event being an annual homecoming with dinner on the grounds.

The Alabama Methodist Church has not been in use as a church since the 1960s. Apparently by the mid-1970s the Methodist Church had plans to dispose of the building, but in 1976, the Bernice Bicentennial Committee took on its preservation as a project and the building was transferred to this group. In November 1994, the support group that grew out of this effort, the Alabama Methodist Church Corporation, deeded the church to the Bernice Historical Society.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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