

## PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**LANDMARK NAME:** Mount Carmel Missionary Baptist Church

**OWNER:** Mount Carmel Missionary Baptist Church

**APPLICANT:** Lue A. Williams

**LOCATION:** 1407 Valentine Street – Freedmen's Town National Register Historic District

**30-DAY HEARING NOTICE:** N/A

**AGENDA ITEM:** VI.b

**HPO FILE No.:** 08PL57

**DATE ACCEPTED:** Feb-29-08

**HAHC HEARING:** Apr-17-08

**PC HEARING:** Apr-24-08

### SITE INFORMATION:

Lots 4 & 5, Block 54, W. R. Baker Addition, SSBB, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a two-story brick church and parsonage.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

Mount Carmel Missionary Baptist Church is a historic church located within the boundaries of the Freedmen's Town National Register Historic District, a community settled after Emancipation that was once a thriving center of black social, cultural, religious, and commercial activity in Houston. Organized in 1915, the Mount Carmel congregation has served as a vital spiritual and community institution in the community for over 90 years. Mount Carmel Missionary Baptist Church was the eighth of approximately fifteen denominational churches organized in Freedmen's Town, and was the fifth Baptist church to be established in the historic community. Today, Mount Carmel is one of only nine historic congregations remaining in Freedmen's Town.

The current two-story church building and parsonage, located at the corner of Ruthven and Valentine, were built in 1940. Two towers flank the main facade of the church building, which contained fifty-four double-sash windows when built. The church and parsonage were constructed of pine lumber from the church pastor's own lumberyard in East Texas, and sat on brick piers. Both buildings were remodeled and faced with brick in 1954. Although 75% of the Freedmen's Town Historic District's buildings have been demolished, the district remains extremely significant architecturally and historically. The few historic buildings remaining in the district are even more significant today, and represent a strong element of community sentiment and pride.

Mount Carmel Missionary Baptist Church meets Criteria 1, 3, 4, 5, and 8, and is a contributing building to the Freedmen's Town National Register Historic District - all considerations for Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation.

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

Mount Carmel Missionary Baptist Church has served as a vital spiritual and community institution in Freedmen's Town since the congregation formed in 1915 as Nelson Chapel Baptist Church. On July 1, 1915, church trustees Richard Jesters, A. Shackelford, E. D. Allen, and B. Coleman purchased property on Robin Street between Cushing and Gentry Streets in Freedmen's Town. During this time, there were at least nine Baptist churches in the community. One year later, under the leadership of Reverend John D. O'Quinn, the church was relocated to Ruthven at Sherman Street, also in Freedmen's Town. The congregation changed its name to Zion Rock Baptist Church between 1918 and 1921 before being

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renamed Mount Carmel Missionary Baptist Church in response to a sermon in 1921 by Reverend Romeo C. Austin.

After the departure of Reverend Austin, Reverend E. C. Cannon served as pastor for a year and a half. On January 6, 1925, the Reverend J. M. Bradley was called and accepted the pastorate of Mount Carmel and served for a period of twelve years. Marcellus Roberson, Richard Mack, Johnson Childs, and Will Anderson served as trustees. The following auxiliaries were established during Reverend Bradley's pastorate: Ushers and Nurses Aid, Choir, Baptist Young People's Union, Sunday School, and Mission. Under Reverend Bradley's leadership, the present site of the church, Lot 5 in Block 54 of the W. R. Baker Addition at Ruthven and Valentine, was purchased.

In October 1937, Robert T. Bingham, a native of Oklahoma, became pastor and served the church until 1952, guiding the church through a time of growth and change. Reverend Bingham attended Conroe Normal and Industrial College in Montgomery County, Texas, and received his Bachelor of Theology degree that same year. In 1940, church trustees purchased Lot 4 adjacent to the church. The old building was torn down and a new building was built to face Valentine Street. Lumber was hauled from Pastor Bingham's lumberyard in East Texas to Houston for the construction of the church. In his spare time, Pastor Bingham personally cut and prepared the lumber, and members of the congregation helped erect the building. The two-story building was constructed of pine and sat on brick piers. Two towers flanked the main facade of the building, and a bell was placed in one of the towers to announce important occasions. The building had three main entrances and fifty-four double-sash windows. A nine-room parsonage with two baths was built next to the church. In the meantime, choirs #1 and #2, a youth department, and male chorus were formed under the direction of Sister Mary Bingham, the pastor's wife.

In early 1953, Reverend Carrington was called but served for only a brief period of time before being given a vote of dismissal by the membership. In November 1953, Reverend Luther E. Brown became pastor of Mount Carmel. In 1954, the church and parsonage were completely remodeled with W. C. White as the building contractor. The church and parsonage were bricked, along with a complete reconstruction of the pulpit, baptistry and choir stand. Other additions to the church were a cafeteria furnished with a steam table, a modern public address system, a grand piano, and a rebuilt organ. External additions consisted of a large mural of the statue of Jesus, bricked flower beds, and a neon sign that could be seen several blocks away. A church school bus was also purchased. Thirteen additional auxiliaries were organized: Bible Band, Mother's Union, Mission Chorus, Male Chorus, Radio Choir, Youth Chorus, Brotherhood Union, Usher Board No. 2, Youth Usher Board, Deaconess Boards No. 1 and 2, Children's Choir and The Brown Refiner's Spiritual Singers. A special outreach ministry called "The Fisherman" was also organized. The members wore fishhook pins and once a month went door to door witnessing to residents in the community. The church also achieved tax exempt status and a clear title to its property. After twelve years of service Reverend Brown left to organize a church in another part of town.

Mount Carmel's next pastor was Wilbur Johnson. During his pastorate, the church continued to grow. A food pantry was established to aid residents of the community. Reverend Johnson served for twelve years until he left to establish a church on the north side of town. Even though the church was without a pastor, it was able to acquire an attorney to help with incorporation. On December 10, 1980, the church received its charter. Deacons Charles J. Williams, Sr., Harold B. Williams, Brady Williams, and Edward Thompson were the incorporators. The State requested that the church use the official name of 'Mount Carmel Missionary Baptist Church of Fourth Ward' in its charter as there were so many Mount Carmel Missionary Baptist churches on file.

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Reverend Erskine McClain accepted the call as pastor in 1981 and served two years. In May 1983, Reverend Cecil B. Herndon was called as pastor of the church. Under his guidance, a cafeteria was added to the church, a van was purchased, and the food pantry was reestablished. Outreach programs included counseling to the general community, the use of the church for weddings, funerals, and meetings, and worship services for churches that were remodeling or building a new facility. In 1988, Reverend Herndon left to pastor a church in Atlanta, Georgia. Four months later, Wilbert Baker was called as pastor and served briefly. After his departure, Reverends Kenneth E. Parker, Joseph Tyler, and Craig Burton each served for a period of at least three years at the church. In 2001, the church was in constant prayer for a spiritual leader. By this time, Reverend Herndon had moved back to Houston and accepted the invitation to take the helm of the church again.

Reverend Herndon continues to serve the church today. The church plans to eventually host historical tours, become a Red Cross shelter, and to serve again as the headquarters of the Fourth Ward Health Educational Center for Youth founded by Darrell Patterson. The building was designated as “contributing” to the historic district in 1984 when listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Recently a plaque denoting the National Register designation was installed on the building. The building was also the recent recipient of an Official Recorded Texas Historical Landmark subject marker which was granted by the Texas Historical Commission.

Mount Carmel Missionary Baptist Church is listed as a contributing building to the Freedmen’s Town National Register Historic District established in 1984. Almost 75% of the Freedmen's Town Historic District’s buildings have been demolished, yet the district remains extremely significant both architecturally and historically. Since its organization, Mount Carmel Missionary Baptist Church has aided the community in important ways. Today, as one of the few remaining historic churches in the Freedmen’s Town District, Mount Carmel Missionary Baptist Church continues to serve as an important spiritual and civic leader in Houston’s Fourth Ward.

Mount Carmel Missionary Baptist is part of a three-phase initiative to establish a Historic Sacred Corridor through the restoration of four of eight endangered historic churches and to develop an African Heritage Church History Archives, exhibition spaces, and audio/video enhancements for public education programs.

Architectural planning began in November 2005, and continues in collaboration with the Rutherford B. H. Yates Museum Inc, assistance of Ray & Hollington Architects, Fretz Construction Company, and the R. B. H. Yates Prairie View A & M Architecture Internship Program and the University of Houston and Houston Community College accredited Archaeology Field School Program.

### **ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY:**

In 1940, church trustees purchased Lot 4 adjacent to the church, tore down the old church building, and built a new church to face Valentine Street. The two-story building was constructed of pine lumber, from the pastor’s own lumberyard in East Texas, and sat on brick piers. Two towers flanked the main facade of the building, one of which contained a bell. The building had three main entrances and fifty-four double-sash windows. A two-story, nine-room, two-bath parsonage with two baths was built next to the church. In 1954, the church and parsonage were completely remodeled. The exterior of the wood-framed church and parsonage were faced with brick, and the pulpit, baptistery and choir stand were reconstructed.

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**BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

Harris County Contract Records, Volume 802, Pg 611.  
 Harris County Deed Records, Volume 350, Pg 238; Volume 660, Pg 625; Volume 1169, Pg 70.  
 Houston City Directories, 1917, 1918, 1922, 1949.  
 Mount Carmel Missionary Baptist Church documents.  
 Sanborn maps, 1924 and 1934.

*The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented with additional research and sources by Diana DuCroz, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.*

**APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION:**

The HAHC shall review each application for designation of a protected landmark that is included in an application for designation of a landmark at the same time and in the same manner as it reviews and considers the application for a landmark. The HAHC and the Planning Commission, in making recommendations with respect to a protected landmark designation, and the City Council, in making a designation, shall consider whether the building, structure, site, or area meets at least three of the criteria in Section 33-224, or one of the criteria in Section 33-229, as follows:

**S    NA** **S - satisfies    NA - not applicable**

Meets at least three of the following (Sec. 33-229(a)(1):

- (1) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area possesses character, interest or value as a visible reminder of the development, heritage, and cultural and ethnic diversity of the city, state, or nation (Sec. 33-224(a)(1);
- (2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event (Sec. 33-224(a)(2);
- (3) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is identified with a person who, or group or event that, contributed significantly to the cultural or historical development of the city, state, or nation (Sec. 33-224(a)(3);
- (4) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area exemplify a particular architectural style or building type important to the city (Sec. 33-224(a)(4);
- (5) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area are the best remaining examples of an architectural style or building type in a neighborhood (Sec. 33-224(a)(5);
- (6) Whether the building, structure, object or site or the buildings, structures, objects or sites within the area are identified as the work of a person or group whose work has influenced the heritage of the city, state, or nation (Sec. 33-224(a)(6);
- (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present (Sec. 33-224(a)(7);

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- (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride (Sec. 33-224(a)(8)).

**AND**

- (9) If less than 50 years old, or proposed historic district containing a majority of buildings, structures, or objects that are less than 50 years old, whether the building, structure, object, site, or area is of extraordinary importance to the city, state or nation for reasons not based on age (Sec. 33-224(b)).

**OR**

- The property was constructed before 1905 (Sec. 33-229(a)(2));

**OR**

- The property is listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places or designated as a “contributing structure” in an historic district listed in the National Register of Historic Places (Sec. 33-229(a)(3));

**OR**

- The property is recognized by the State of Texas as a Recorded State Historical Landmark (Sec. 33-229(a)(4)).

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends that the Houston Planning Commission accept the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and recommend to City Council the Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation of Mount Carmel Missionary Baptist Church at 1407 Valentine Street.

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SITE LOCATION MAP  
MOUNT CARMEL MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH  
1407 VALENTINE STREET  
NOT TO SCALE

