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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

### 1. Name of Property

historic name St. Paul A.M.E. Church

other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Location

street & number 402 W. Edenton St.

N/A not for publication

city, town Raleigh

vicinity

state North Carolina code NC

county Wake

code 183

zip code 27603

### 3. Classification

#### Ownership of Property

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

#### Category of Property

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

#### Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
_____	_____ sites
_____	_____ structures
_____	_____ objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:  
N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register -0-

### 4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

William S. Fain, Jr.  
Signature of certifying official

29 Sep 87  
Date

State Historic Preservation Officer

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

### 5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register.  See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:)

Amy Schlegel

11/5/87

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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**6. Function or Use**

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Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Religion: religious structure

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Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Religion: religious structure

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**7. Description**

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Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Late Gothic Revival

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Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation brickwalls brickwoodroof asbestosother granite

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**Describe present and historic physical appearance.**

St. Paul A.M.E. Church is a bold example of red brick and wood American Gothic Revival. The result of a long building campaign which began in 1884, the building was nearly complete in July, 1909, when a fire gutted the structure. Rebuilt within the walls, it was rededicated in 1910. Influenced by pattern books and certainly built by parishioners, the excellent execution is a reflection of traditional black involvement in the masonry trades in North Carolina.<sup>1</sup>

Located on a corner lot in downtown Raleigh, the church sits almost flush with the street on its south, east and north sides. The land slopes slightly to the west where the change in elevation is accomodated by the story-and-a-half with raised basement Sunday School wing which is attached to the two story gable roofed building.

Because of the participatory, teaching-oriented services of this denomination the plan of the church is almost square, but from the steep gabled roof downward this equilibrium is effaced. The south facing facade consists of a deep entry porch and one-story narthex between towers. The towers are pulled out beyond the roof line, from the corners of the church. The southwest tower is roofed at the second stage; the southeast tower rises four stages to louvered, steep dormers and finials.<sup>2</sup> Doors located in the south face of each tower give access to the auditorium and contain stairs to the gallery. In the center bay an elaborate wooden gabled and decorated porch shelters a wide, paneled and diagonally sheeted matchboard door. Above the entry, contained in a single opening, is a large stained glass window of three pointed lights beneath a sexpartite tympanum.

The Sunday School on the west side is more simply articulated but follows the general plan of the bays and buttresses on the east. The north wall of the church is undecorated.<sup>3</sup>

The vertical rhythm of towers, buttresses and windows contrasts with the relatively smooth orange-red brick and mortar of the walls and the flat white wooden tracery and jambs of the stained glass windows. These also form a foil to the elaborate brick work. About 1984 the brick mortar joints were repointed in a manner that the mortar is more obtrusive than it was originally. The only other alteration to the very well-preserved building is the rebuilding of the southeast steeple cap, also in 1984. The present cap is a smaller, aluminum-sided version of the 1910 cap.

The brick wall decoration takes many forms: for example, above the entry and flanking the deep base of the central window are panels of ten rows of brick laid sawtooth. Above the windows on either side of a louvered bent a diamond pattern is inlaid, and more sawtooth courses fill the top of the pediment. Substituting for the stonework tracery of traditional Gothic, the second stage of the tower has sawtooth panels around the rose windows, and the fourth stage has flat corbelled arches in two rows above  See continuation sheet and below open work grills.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally     statewide     locally

Applicable National Register Criteria     A     B     C     D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)     A     B     C     D     E     F     G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Period of Significance

Significant Dates

Architecture  
Ethnic Heritage: Black  
Politics/Government

1884-1910

1884  
1909  
1910

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

Architect/Builder

Leak, Rev. R. W. H.

Unknown

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

St. Paul A.M.E. Church is a striking, picturesque American Gothic structure which exhibits in its elaborate brickwork the excellence of the black mason's craft in Raleigh during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and is therefore eligible for the National Register under Criterion C. St. Paul embodies not only important characteristics of the national style but also significant vernacular interpretations of the style evolved by the black masons who built the church and who also contributed significantly to the development of the urban fabric in North Carolina. The building is of major significance to the religious history of Raleigh because it was built by the first independent black congregation formed in Raleigh to house their expanded membership, and is therefore eligible for the National Register under Criterion A. Begun in 1884 and formally opened in 1901, the church was a bold effort on the part of the congregation to worship in a structure equal in appearance to the churches of the white community of Raleigh. Ministers associated with St. Paul Church were leaders of the black political community during the Reconstruction Era. One of the best known of St. Paul's ministers was the Rev. R. W. H. Leak, pastor during the 1880s and 1890s during the time that he became a prominent leader for black Republicans and edited the Outlook, the second Negro newspaper in Raleigh. St. Paul is therefore eligible under Criterion B for its association with Rev. Leak.

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property \_\_\_\_\_ less than 1 acre

UTM References

A 

1	7	7	1	2	8	1	0
Zone		Easting				Northing	

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing	

C 

Zone		Easting				Northing	

D 

Zone		Easting				Northing	

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property occupies the city lot at the northwest corner of West Edenton and North Harrington streets, being Parcel Number A-90-13 as shown outlined in red on the accompanying Raleigh Tax Map Sheet 551.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The nominated property includes only the city lot which belongs to the congregation and is occupied by the church building and related parking spaces.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Charlotte V. Brown, Architectural Historian and William Bushong, Historian (revised by Ruth Little)  
organization State Historic Preservation Office date Oct. 2, 1980; June 1987  
street & number N.C. Div. of Archives & History, 109 E. telephone (919) 733 6545  
city or town Jones St., Raleigh state NC zip code 27611

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Entering the church, a shallow, dark narthex holds four steps up to the doors of the auditorium. The auditorium is almost square and is ramped downward slightly toward the north end. In front of the north wall is a semicircular altar rail, raised altar, choir, and pipes of the organ. Steps rising to either side of the choir give access to a robing room and pastor's study.

A wide, sloping gallery is attached to the east, west and south walls of the auditorium between the windows. It rests on thin iron columns with flattened capitals and helps enhance the feeling of an open, dynamic preaching space in which no one is very far from the speaker.

The major feature of the interior, however, is the magnificent wooden ceiling. Triangular trusses spring from brackets placed between the second tier of windows to support elliptical wooden arches that rise to the ridge beam. The bottom chord of each truss is a deep tripartite molded beam. Five pointed arches in gradually decreasing size fill the web and below the truss upright is a turned pendant. The ceiling is sheathed in dark stained matchboards. These features enhance the sharply pointed, deeply splayed surrounds of the second register of windows.

The nave walls are cream colored rough plaster. Dark stained carved oak pews, wainscot and paneling on the gallery face combine with warm light from the stained glass windows to create a sense of intimacy.

The Sunday School is attached directly to the auditorium and is separated from it by three vertical wooden slatted screens which roll up into a deep fascia. This device is also used in the school to create separate classrooms allowing them to be thrown open to create one large space. Beneath the school hall is a half basement with dining room and kitchen facilities.

St. Paul's is a highly individualistic but very American adaptation of the Gothic Revival to this setting. The plan, which substitutes an almost square auditorium for the traditional unidirectional nave, is consistent with similar adaptations of the Gothic Revival by Protestant denominations. The execution of the exterior has elements of vernacular interpretation in the elaborate brickwork which relates it to other known work by black builders in North Carolina. As a whole, the realization of the church is impressive. It is a potent symbol for the enduring faith of the black community which it represents. It also represents the high degree of skill and assimilation of style which could be found among the black craftsmen of this city and region.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Some sources have disputed the idea that St. Paul's was rebuilt within its walls, suggesting rather, that this building is essentially a 1910 fabric but stylistically and physically, this seems unlikely. Moreover, the Sanborn maps for 1903 show a plan identical to that existing today and the Sanborn map for 1909 shows the same plan and notes that the church was "partially destroyed by fire, to be rebuilt." This is more consistent with the fabric and the internal evidence of dedicatory plaques which note that the church was rededicated in 1910.

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FOOTNOTES cont'd:

2. A drawing of St. Paul's reproduced in the News and Observer, Raleigh, North Carolina, July 7, 1909 shows a radically taller steeple than the one currently in place and an undated photo used on the bulletin of the church shows a taller steeple than the current cross gable roof. It is uncertain when the present steeple was altered.
3. According to accounts of the fire, this wall toppled inward and its present condition, ie., mixed brick in age and color supports the hypothesis that the walls essentially remained after the fire. It also shows a blocked-in round window which on the inside is covered by a round painting.

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The congregation which formed St. Paul's Church in 1865 was the slave membership of the Edenton Street Methodist Church. The black members attended services there until 1846, but due to the rapid growth of the congregation, it became necessary for the blacks to attend their own services in the church basement. This arrangement continued until 1853 when the white Methodists bought old Christ Church, a wooden frame building located on the corner of New Bern Avenue and Wilmington Street. The black membership moved the old church to the corner of Edenton and Harrington Streets and they began to hold their services in the relocated structure beginning in 1854.<sup>1</sup>

The black congregation remained under the guidance of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South until the Emancipation. In 1865, the membership severed its ties with the Edenton Street M.E. Church and joined the African Methodist Episcopal Conference, a black denomination organized by Richard Allen in 1816.<sup>2</sup> At the South Carolina Conference of the A.M.E. Church, Bishop Daniel A. Payne appointed the Reverend George A. Broadie from the Canada Conference as the pastor of St. Paul's Church in Raleigh, thereby giving the church its first black pastor and establishing the denomination in the city.<sup>3</sup>

The ministers of St. Paul's Church took a leading role in the organization of black political activity during the Reconstruction Era. Blacks in North Carolina held their first lawful assembly at St. Paul's Church at Raleigh in 1865. Delegates from a two hundred mile radius gathered at the church and drafted a series of proposals calling for the repeal of unjust racial laws and for the betterment of the social condition of the black race in North Carolina.<sup>4</sup> Throughout the post-bellum period, the pastors and the membership of St. Paul's Church continued the spirit of that first lawful meeting of blacks and provided the state with some of its finest black spokesmen in the Reverend Henry Eppes, Stewart Ellison, and the Reverend R.W.H. Leak.

Henry Eppes was a self-educated man from Halifax County and a bricklayer and plasterer by trade as well as a Methodist minister. In 1868, the people of Halifax County chose Reverend Eppes as their representative to the state constitutional convention of that year. Eppes went on to serve as state senator from Halifax County for five terms and while in Raleigh, he also became the pastor of St. Paul's Church.<sup>5</sup> Yet another prominent black political figure to emerge from the St. Paul's congregation was Stewart Ellison, a trustee of the church.<sup>6</sup> Ellison's political career encompassed representing Wake County in the legislature, holding the office of alderman in Raleigh, and directing the state penitentiary.<sup>7</sup>

Black participation in politics faded after Reconstruction when the so-called white "Redemption" movement re-established the Democratic party in the state. During the last decade of the nineteenth century, however, St. Paul's Church renewed its involvement in public affairs when political changes enabled blacks throughout North Carolina to re-enter the political arena. At that time of the Republican-Populist coalition known as the fusion era, the Reverend R.W.H. ("Parson") Leak played a prominent role in the Republican party as a leading voice for the black man.<sup>8</sup> Leak chaired a convention of dissenting black Republicans held at Raleigh in 1896 to express their dissatisfaction with the party's choice of Daniel A. Russell for Governor, who they considered to be a racist, and endorsed the Populist candidate, William A. Guthrie.<sup>9</sup> Upon the request of

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the Democrats in the Legislature, Leak continued his moderate political course and spoke out for state aid for higher education at a time when a bill to provide a substantial appropriation to the University of North Carolina was being bitterly contested by members of his party in the Fusionist legislature of 1898.<sup>10</sup>

It was during the pastorship of Reverend Leak that the blacks began the construction of a new brick building to house their congregation. It is not known whether Leak formulated the plan for the building himself or solicited professional advice, but the structure built under the supervision of Stewart Ellison and inspired by Leak received praise from the local papers as "one of the handsomest colored churches in the south."<sup>11</sup> In 1884, the congregation laid the cornerstone for a building which took over twenty-five years to erect. Money for the materials trickled in slowly from a poor congregation. Washer-women, maids, nurses, and cooks gave every penny they could above their meager subsistence "taking the garments from their backs and food from their mouths" to contribute to the building fund.<sup>12</sup> Those church members fortunate enough to own a home mortgaged, and in many cases lost, their homes to collect money for the church. The building of the church became the consuming passion of the congregation. Periodically, solemn meetings were held at which members pledged to live on bread and molasses to add funds to the collection in order that the building committee might buy needed construction materials.<sup>13</sup>

By April 1898, the skilled artisans of the church's membership had brought the building to a stage of completion that drew an observation from the News and Observer (Raleigh): "Parson Leak's church, after many years of struggle, is almost completed. This is a very creditable brick edifice of the Gothic design, and when completed will have cost \$10,000."<sup>14</sup> The congregation did not officially celebrate the completion of their church until the second Sunday in May, 1901. A two week rally was held and ministers from various denominations gave sermons nightly at the church, but the highlight of the event was a speech delivered to the congregation on May 16 by Governor Charles B. Aycock to mark the historic occasion of the completion of the building.<sup>15</sup>

At the time of the celebration, the congregation had not added the spire to the church as was called for in the plans, and it took seven years for them to make the final arrangements. The materials for the construction of the spire and the slate for the replacement of the wooden shingle roof were on the site in July, 1909, and the membership looked expectantly toward the final completion of the church sometime in August of that year.<sup>16</sup> Tragically, the congregation never saw the building they began in 1884 completed. A freak accidental fire ignited by a Fourth of July toy ballon carrying fireworks, which had lodged itself in the rain gutter, caused irreparable damage to the roof and the interior of the church.<sup>17</sup>

Blackened walls were all that remained of the building the following morning. Newspaper reports tried to assess the damages, quoting figures from \$45,000 to \$75,000.<sup>18</sup> A great outpouring of sympathy followed the tragedy with prominent citizens of the black and the white community contributing to the rebuilding of the burnt brick shell. A combination of donations, insurance money, and bank loans enabled the congregation to quickly rebuild their church within its original brick walls. The completion of the work of the building was celebrated eleven months after the fire in June, 1910.<sup>19</sup> Today, this edifice still houses the St. Paul's A.M.E. congregation which has worshipped on this lot as both slave

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and free men for over one hundred and twenty-six years, and it remains an inspirational representation of the struggles and sacrifices of its membership.

FOOTNOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Alice Carrington Jones, "The History of St. Paul A.M.E. Church", Souvenir Program of the Board of Religious Education. Raleigh: St. Paul A.M.E., 1956. See also The Writer's Program of the Works Projects Administration, Raleigh, Capital of North Carolina. New Bern: Owen G. Dunn, 1942. For the sale of the lot for the relocation of Christ Church, see Deed between James G. Mitchell and wife and G.W. Peck and others, trustees, December 21, 1853, Deed Book 20, p. 167; and for the eventual sale of the church and lot to the black congregation in 1867, see Deed between Lewis Peck and others, trustees, and Henry Hunter and others, trustees, July 15, 1867, Deed Book 25, p. 329. Wake County Courthouse, Raleigh, North Carolina.

<sup>2</sup> For the large part, Black Methodist membership in North Carolina is organized into four denominations; the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Black United Methodists. After the Civil War the black denominations engaged in fierce competition in the South to enroll the freedmen, who had for the most part been members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. St. Paul's A.M.E. Church in Raleigh was one such congregation that left the white Methodist Episcopal Church, South to join the A.M.E. denomination organized in Philadelphia in 1816 by Richard Allen, and it should not be confused with the A.M.E. Church formed in New York in the 1790's by James Varick, which later adopted Zion to its title to become the A.M.E. Zion Church. For a discussion of Black Methodism in North Carolina and the distinctions between the four denominations, see Joseph B. Bethea, "Black Methodists in North Carolina" Methodism Alive in North Carolina, ed. O. Kelly Ingram. Durham: Duke University Divinity School, 1976. pp. 85-97.

<sup>3</sup> Official Council, Bethea A.M.E. Church, Compiler. Minutes of the South Carolina Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, First Three Sessions 1865, 1866, 1867. Greensboro: Bethel A.M.E. Church, 1967. pp.2-3.

<sup>4</sup> "Negro History Manuscript" Willis G. Briggs Papers, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina, p. 10. See also Charles N. Hunter to Fred A. Olds, April 27, 1926, Fred A. Olds Papers, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. For the dates of Eppes' senate service, 1869-74, 1887, see John L. Cheney, Jr., North Carolina Government, 1585-1974. Winston-Salem: Hunter Publishing Company, 1975. pp. 449, 451, 458, 466, and 845. Hereinafter cited as Cheney, North Carolina Government. See also Frenise A. Logan, The Negro in North Carolina 1876-1894. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964. p. 27. Hereinafter cited as Logan, The Negro in North Carolina.

<sup>6</sup> Like Eppes, Ellison had a similar educational background and was employed in the building trades. See Logan, The Negro in North Carolina, p. 29.

<sup>7</sup> For the dates of Ellison's political service in the legislature, 1870-74, 1879, see Cheney, North Carolina Government, pp. 453, 455, and 459. For information regarding city

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service and direction of state penitentiary, see Logan, The Negro in North Carolina, p. 29.

<sup>8</sup> See Dorothy A. Gay, "Crisis of Identity: The Negro Community in Raleigh, 1890-1900." North Carolina Historical Review, Volume L, No.2 April, 1973. pp. 121-140. Hereinafter cited as Gay, "Crisis of Identity". See also Josephus Daniels, Editor in Politics, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941. Hereinafter cited as Daniels, Editor in Politics.

9: Gay, "Crisis of Identity" p. 124.

10 Daniels, Editor in Politics. pp. 106-7.

11 The Gazette (Raleigh), December 5, 1896. I am indebted to Karl Larson for this citation which identifies Stewart Ellison as the contractor for the St. Paul's A.M.E. Church. Quotation taken from the News and Observer (Raleigh) July 7, 1909.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 News and Observer (Raleigh) April 10, 1896.

15 News and Observer (Raleigh) May 14, 1901.

16 Evening Times (Raleigh) July 6, 1909.

17 Ibid.

18 See News and Observer (Raleigh) July 7, 1909 and the Evening Times (Raleigh) July 6, 1909.

19 News and Observer (Raleigh) June 2, 1910.

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