

## MT. ZION LUTHERAN CHURCH



*This report was written on September 5, 1989*

**1. Name and location of the property:** The property known as the Mt. Zion Lutheran Church is located at 1605 Luther Street, Charlotte, NC.

**2. Name, address, and telephone number of the present owner and occupant of the property:** The owner of the property is:

Mt. Zion Church of God Holiness  
2634 Marlboro Ave.  
Norfolk, VA 23504

Telephone: None listed

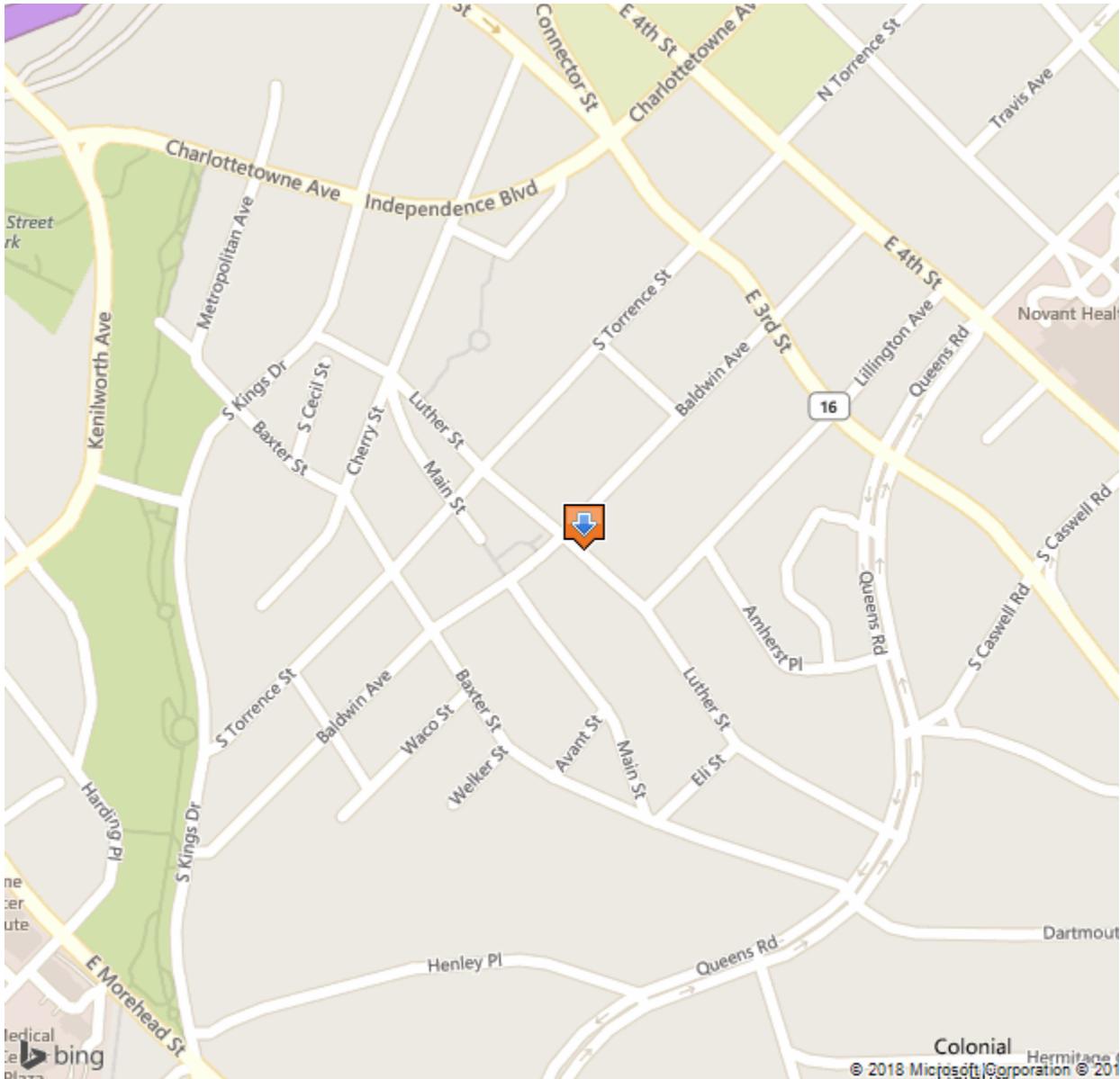
The occupant of the property is:

Mt. Zion Church of God Holiness  
1605 Luther Street  
Charlotte, NC 28204

Telephone: None listed

**3. Representative photographs of the property:** This report contains representative photographs of the property.

**4. A map depicting the location of the property:** This report contains a map which depicts the location of the property.



**5. Current Deed Book Reference to the property:** The most recent deed to this property is recorded in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 3869, page 854. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is: 125-115-24.

**6. A brief historical sketch of the property:** This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Dr. William H. Huffman, Ph.D.

**7. A brief architectural description of the property:** This report contains a brief architectural description of the property prepared by Joseph Schuchman.

**8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria for designation set forth in N.C.G.S. 160A-399.4:**

**a. Special significance in terms of its history, architecture, and/or cultural importance:** The Commission judges that the property known as the Mt. Zion Lutheran Church does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) the Mt. Zion Lutheran Church, erected about 1896, has continuously served as a religious center for the Cherry community, a black residential district developed in the 1890s and early 1900s by John Springs Myers and Mary Rawlinson Myers; 2) the Mt. Zion Lutheran Church was organized by William Philo Phifer ( ? -1911), a leader in establishing black Lutheran churches in Charlotte and its environs; 3) the Mt. Zion Lutheran Church is the oldest structure still standing which has been used as a house of worship in the Cherry community; and 4) the Mt. Zion Lutheran Church is a compelling local example of a simple Gothic Revival style church structure.

**b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and/or association:** The Commission contends that the architectural description by Joseph Schuchman which is included in this report demonstrates that the Mt. Zion Lutheran Church meets this criterion.

**9. Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal:** The Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply for an automatic deferral of 50% of the Ad Valorem taxes on all or any portion of the property which becomes "historic property." The current appraised value of the improvement is \$9,630. The current appraised value of the .91 acres of land is \$11,880. The property is presently exempted from the payment of Ad Valorem taxes. The property is zoned B1.

**Date of preparation of this report:** September 5, 1989

**Prepared by:** Dr. Dan L. Morrill  
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Charlotte, NC 28203

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### *Historical Overview*

*Dr. William H. Huffman*

For fifty years, the Mt. Zion Lutheran Church was an important part of Charlotte's Cherry neighborhood, and its successor continues to serve the community from the

same building. Built about 1896, Mt. Zion served its parishioners until 1946, when it merged with another Lutheran church, but its original building still calls worshipers to service on Sundays.

Although it is often assumed that the Cherry neighborhood was built as a housing area for servants of affluent Myers Park residents, it was in fact laid out as a "model Negro housing development" by John Springs Myers and Mary Rawlinson Myers in the 1890s and early 1900s. Its purpose was to provide good, low-cost housing for black laborers and craft workers well before construction began on Myers Park in 1912 as one of the city's fashionable streetcar suburbs). Located about a mile from the center of town, Cherry (in the early days also called Cherryton or Cherrytown) is situated between The Elizabeth neighborhood on the north and Myers Park to the south.

The land that became Cherry and Myers Park was part of a 306-acre inheritance that John Springs Myers received in 1869 from his father. Over the next twenty years, Myers built his holdings to over one thousand acres in the area south of town. He built a country house on the Providence Road about two miles south of town, and began to entertain the idea that his land could someday be used for a residential area with park-like landscaping. An influential factor for the development of Cherry on part of this land was the Myers' active membership in St. Peter's Episcopal Church. The church had a strong record of ministry to blacks in the city that included the founding of churches, a school and a hospital. In addition, the Myers family itself was known for its interest in the welfare of the town's black citizens (J. S. Myers' father, NV. R. Myers, had donated the land for Johnson C. Smith University after the Civil War).<sup>2</sup> In 1891, Cherry began when Jack Myers recorded a plat with house lots along three new streets located halfway between the city center and his farm cottage. They were part of what is now Main, Cherry and Luther Streets, and the name "Cherry" apparently came from the cherry trees that used to grow on the surrounding hillsides. During the next thirty-odd years, Myers continued to add tree-lined streets with small house lots, churches, a park and a school to the Cherry development, and it was carried on after the mid-1920s by their children. It was quite successful in its purpose of providing good, low-cost rental or owner housing for the city's black unskilled or semi-skilled workers. Lots were sold for fifty dollars on easy terms, and by 1925, 198 of the 305 Cherry households, about sixty-five percent, were resident-owned. The modern misconception about the neighborhood being a servants' quarter arose after Myers Park was built starting in 1912, when indeed a number of servants of those families moved into Cherry.<sup>3</sup>

The story of Mt. Zion Lutheran Church in Cherry is closely connected to its founding pastor, William Philo Phifer ( ? - 1911). After the Civil War, a number of Protestant denominations took steps to establish churches among freed blacks and to train black preachers and teachers to staff them and the schools that were often part of the church. In 1868, the North Carolina Synod of the Lutheran Church licensed the first black Lutheran preacher in the state, Michael Coble of Alamance County, but he left to join the Methodist church in the 1870s. Four more blacks were ordained during the 1880s to serve congregations in Concord, Charlotte, Burlington and Lexington. Among these was William Philo Phifer, who is thought to have grown up on a Phifer plantation near Concord, NC. Possibly educated in Baltimore, he was first licensed by the

Maryland Synod October 7, 1888. The following year, he was received into the North Carolina Synod on August 28, which was followed by his ordination in Charlotte on April 20, 1890.<sup>4</sup>

During the 1880s and early 90s, there was only one Lutheran Church in Charlotte belonging to the North Carolina Synod, St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church on Tryon Street. Shortly after Phifer took up his work in Charlotte, ministry to black congregations in North Carolina was taken over by the Missionary Board of the Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, which was headquartered in St. Louis. Within three years of his ordination in Charlotte, Rev. Phifer had built a congregation of sufficient size that the Missionary Board bought property at "E" and 2nd Streets (now Alexander and 2nd, in the former black community of Brooklyn in Second Ward) in 1893, on which was built St. Paul's Lutheran Church and school.<sup>5</sup>

Three years later, in January, 1896, Phifer organized Mt. Zion Lutheran Church in the new black community of Cherry, and in November of that year the Missionary Board of the Lutheran Synodical Conference bought a lot on Davidson Street (later changed to Luther Street) for fifty dollars from the Myers, and built the present church building.<sup>6</sup> Since there were only thirty heads of household listed in Cherry by 1898, the church membership was small, and remained so throughout its subsequent years. As was usually the case, a small school was also conducted by the church.<sup>7</sup> Mt. Zion was actually the second church in Cherry, the first being the Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, which bought the third lot sold in the neighborhood in 1892. It was located on Luther Street near Providence Road, and still operates today from a new building at Banter and Baldwin Streets.<sup>8</sup>

In October, 1900, Rev. Phifer appears to have organized another congregation, the St. Mark's (Colored) Lutheran Church in the Brooklyn area of Second Ward. In a dispute with the Mission Board, Phifer left Mt. Zion to take over St. Mark's, and the latter bought property for a new church building at Davidson and 3rd Streets with the backing of the North Carolina Synod in 1901. Phifer gave up this post in 1904, when he took up a pastorate in Baltimore, Maryland, where he served until his death in 1911.<sup>9</sup>

Mt. Zion continued to operate under the Mission Board until 1946, when it merged with the St. Paul's Church to form St. Andrews, which was located on the site of the present downtown post offices. At that time the Mt. Zion building was sold to a descendent of the Myers, Mrs. Harriette C. Dwelle. After thirty years of ownership, Mrs. Dwelle sold it to the present owners, the Mt. Zion Church of God, Holiness, in 1976.<sup>11</sup>

Since its construction around ninety years ago in the fledgling Cherry community, the Mt. Zion Church on Luther Street has been an intimate part of a unique Charlotte neighborhood, one that reflects the determination of both black and white leaders in the late nineteenth century to build a better world for its citizens.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Hanchett, Charlotte Neighborhood Survey, Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, 1984.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Perry, "William Philo Phifer," undated typescript, Office of Inclusive Ministry, North Carolina Synod of the Lutheran Church in America, Charlotte, NC; Christopher Drewes, *Half a Century of Lutheranism Among Our Colored People. 1877-1927* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1927), p. 50; Robert Moore, Jr., "A Brief History of Black Lutherans in North Carolina," undated typescript (c. 1975) in Lutheran Archives, Salisbury, NC, pp. 5-7.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.; Mecklenburg County Deed Book 116, p.122,18 Nov. 1896.

<sup>7</sup> Hanchett, cited above; Interview with Laura Kirkpatrick, 1701 Luther Street, Charlotte, NC, 30 August 1985.

<sup>8</sup> Hanchett, cited above.

<sup>9</sup> See note 4.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Richard Perry, Office of Inclusive Ministry, North Carolina Synod of the Lutheran Church in America, Charlotte, NC, 21 August 1985.

<sup>11</sup> Mecklenburg County Deed Book 1222, p.567, 11 Sept. 1946; Ibid., 3869, p.854, 6 Aug. 1976.

### *Architectural Description*

*Joseph Schuchman*

The Mt. Zion Lutheran Church (now the Mt. Zion Church of God Holiness) is a simple Gothic Revival structure which was built in 1896. The church is one of the oldest buildings in Cherry, an early black community, and one of the oldest surviving frame churches within the city of

Charlotte. Although simply executed, the structure is clearly influenced by the Gothic motifs popular at the turn of the century.

Gothic architecture, characterized by the pointed arch and, to a lesser extent, the flying buttress, vaulting rib and moulding, first evidenced itself in the rebuilding of St. Denis Abbey Church in France in the early twelfth century. The style came to dominate medieval architecture, particularly religious building, from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries. The widespread use of the Gothic began to wane, partially in response to the popularity of the Renaissance style and also from the social and aesthetic effects of the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation. But by the mid-eighteenth century, the seeds of the Gothic Revival were being sown in England; the movement achieved widespread popularity in Europe and the United States throughout the mid to late nineteenth century and into the early decades of the present century. While the style was typically associated with ecclesiastical architecture, Gothic Revival motifs were widely adapted to public buildings and even residential construction, from the humblest cottage to the grandest of mansions.<sup>1</sup>

Charlotte's First Presbyterian Church (begun ca. 1842) is Gothic Revival at its most high style. The popularity of the style endured for many years in the Queen City. Gothic motifs are strongly evident in three of the city's finest late nineteenth century houses of worship, St. Peter's Episcopal (1892) on North Tryon Street, St. Peter's Roman Catholic (1893) on South Tryon Street and St. Mary's Chapel (1893) on Kings Drive. In Dilworth, the sanctuary (ca. 1952) and flanking buildings of Covenant Presbyterian Church are arranged around a medieval-inspired courtyard. Gothic arches are even prominently displayed in many of the area's more modern church structures. The style's longstanding popularity was, in no small measure, due to its widespread adaptability. Even less substantial congregations could incorporate Gothic motifs into the most simple meeting place. Modest frame structures incorporating Gothic arched opening are to be found throughout black and white churches in both urban and rural areas of the Piedmont.<sup>2</sup>

Mt. Zion Lutheran Church is a well-preserved example of a simply executed structure incorporating Gothic Revival motifs. The one story structure is of frame construction and rises to a gabled roof. Elevations are weatherboarded; plain cornerboards rise from the base. Fenestration on the rectangular main block is symmetrically arranged. Four/four sash, surmounted by a lancet cap, are the primary glazing material. Exterior openings are framed by plain surrounds. A diminutive one-story entrance pavilion is centered on the front elevation and flanked on either side by a single lancet window. Physical evidence indicates that the gable-roofed pavilion is a later addition although it is known to have been in existence by 1929. Concrete stairs with wrought iron handrails lead to the double leaf six-panel entrance doors. Rectangular wood cut shingles cover the entrance gable.<sup>3</sup>

Side elevations are each three bays deep and were originally arranged identically. In 1976, the rear opening on the west side was converted into a side entrance; a six panel door was installed although an upper portion of the window sash and the lancet arch remain. The rear elevation is blind. A Gothic arched ventilator covering is centrally located on the front gable. A tripped belfry sits atop the ridge line above the entrance; Gothic arched ventilator covers are set within

the front and side elevations. The church originally rested upon brick piers; the cement block underpinning was installed in 1976. Asphalt shingle is the primary roofing material.

The interior of the entrance pavilion is wood paneled; the original tongue and groove sheathing remains visible beneath. The rear wall of the vestibule is weatherboarded, indicating the exterior wall of the original structure. The roof is ceiled in tongue and groove sheathing. Ten panel double leaf doors lead from the tiny entrance vestibule into the small, simply detailed sanctuary. The original tongue and groove wainscot, which encircles the room, has been covered by wood paneling. Above the wainscot, the wall is sheathed in stucco, possibly a later addition. The original tongue and groove ceiling, which rises to the structure's full height, has been hidden by the installation of a drop ceiling. Rhythmically placed window openings are set in simple two-part surrounds. The nave terminates at the raised pulpit, above which is placed a simple wood cross. To the right of the pulpit is a small pastor's study, which is wood paneled. To the pulpit's left are two restrooms, indicated by the words "Brothers" and "Sisters" respectively. Both rooms are partially encircled by a tongue and groove wainscot and may have either been one room or served as part of the pulpit area.

The Mt. Zion Church is a monument to the Christian faith of the early Cherry residents and to the congregation's present members, many of whom live outside the neighborhood but come together to worship their creator. In many ways, the church is also a monument to the existence and survival of Cherry itself.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> P. Furneaux Jordan, *A Concise History of Western Architecture*. (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd. 1959), pages 130, 280-281

<sup>2</sup> Information based upon work previously done by investigator in Union and Mecklenburg Counties, North Carolina.

<sup>3</sup> Sanborn Insurance Company, Charlotte, 1929. (New York, Sanborn Insurance Company, 1929). On microfilm at main branch, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Library. The Cherry neighborhood was not included on any previous Sanborn Maps of Charlotte, so it was not possible to make a comparison between the 1929 building and earlier representations.