

**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 for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

**1. Name of Property**

historic name Olive Branch Missionary Baptist Church  
other names/site number Olive Branch Baptist Church, VDHR 009-0135

**2. Location**

street & number 5982 Joppa Mill Rd. not for publication N/A  
city or town Moneta vicinity X  
state Virginia code VA county Bedford code 019 Zip 24121

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets     does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant     nationally     statewide X locally. (    See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official Date  
**Virginia Department of Historic Resources**  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property     meets     does not meet the National Register criteria. (    See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I, hereby certify that this property is:  
    entered in the National Register  
        See continuation sheet. Signature of Keeper \_\_\_\_\_  
    determined eligible for the National Register  
        See continuation sheet. Date of Action \_\_\_\_\_  
    determined not eligible for the National Register  
    removed from the National Register  
    other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

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Olive Branch Missionary Baptist Church  
Bedford County, VA

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property** (Check as many boxes as apply)

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

**Category of Property** (Check only one box)

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

**Number of Resources within Property**

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>  1  </u>	<u>  1  </u>	buildings
<u>  1  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	sites
<u>  0  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	structures
<u>  0  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	objects
<u>  2  </u>	<u>  1  </u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register   0  

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)   N/A  

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions** (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat:	Sub:
<u>  RELIGION  </u>	<u>  religious facility: church  </u>
<u>  FUNERARY  </u>	<u>  cemetery  </u>

**Current Functions** (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat:	Sub:
<u>  RELIGION  </u>	<u>  religious facility: church  </u>
<u>  FUNERARY  </u>	<u>  cemetery  </u>

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification** (Enter categories from instructions)

  Gothic Revival  

**Materials** (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation   stone    
 roof   metal    
 walls   wood    
 other   concrete  

**Narrative Description** (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria** (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations** (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance** (Enter categories from instructions) Religion, Ethnic History: African-American

**Period of Significance** 1896-1957

**Significant Dates** 1896

**Significant Person** (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) n/a

**Cultural Affiliation** n/a

**Architect/Builder** unknown

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**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 # \_\_\_\_\_



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**7. Summary and Site**

Built ca. 1896, the Olive Branch Church is located in southern Bedford County, not far north of State Route 24, the major east-west artery through the area. The church, a cemetery, and a non-contributing outhouse are situated at the intersection of routes 747 and 801, on the east side of the intersection, and on the south side of 747 and the east side of 801. The main entrance to the property is from Route 747. The white frame church faces due south. The area is predominantly rural, but there are several single family dwellings in the immediate vicinity.

**Description**

The Olive Branch Church is constructed of frame and clad with plain weatherboards, painted white. Most of the weatherboards appear to be original, exhibiting square-headed machine-cut nails and multiple layers of paint. The original main block of the church has a front gable roof, a raking cornice with returns, and three evenly-spaced six-over-six windows on each side elevation, with clear glass having replaced stained glass at some point in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The window sash and surrounds are original. The main block was added onto, circa 1920, when a large frame section across the rear was constructed. It is essentially a transept, giving the building a T-shape. The windows are Craftsman-style 6-over-1 double-hung wood sash. In the late 1990s, small shed-roofed flanges were added to each side of the church front, below the bell tower. The flanges provide for a small bathroom to the right as one enters the church, and a cloak room to the left. The rear addition has a kitchen space in the basement, while the original section and front addition have no basement. Although the crawlspace is inaccessible, a view through a small opening in the basement reveals that the original section has a rubble stone foundation and a hand-hewn, squared, hardwood sill. The attic spaces are also inaccessible. The bell tower appears to be original to the building and is its most distinctive element. It consists of a square base through which the church is entered, sheltered by a standing-seam pent roof that wraps around to each side. Above the pent roof is a smaller square section housing the bell, still in place. There are Gothic lancet openings on the front and each side elevation, but with fixed wooden louvers instead of glazing, surmounted by a molded wooden cornice. The tower roof is pyramidal and steeply pitched. At its apex is an interesting and unusual fixture fashioned of tin. It resembles a fleur-de-lis but has an obelisk-like central portion with a ball finial at the top, and finally a short spire reaching skyward. A brick stove flue rises up the exterior of the east side elevation. It is constructed of machine-made brick and is square in cross-section. It does not appear to be original.

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The interior of the church is in good condition, although the once dark Victorian woodwork, including the beaded matchboard wainscot has been painted white, and there is now an acoustical-tiled dropped ceiling. The walls are papered and the floor carpeted. Light fixtures are modern replacements. The pulpit is located beyond a broad wooden arch, in the 1920s rear addition. A few of the original pews still exist, but most have been replaced with more comfortable modern pews. An old player piano sits against the front wall of the sanctuary.

**Secondary Resources**

There is a cemetery on the east side of the church, on which there are six post-1960 graves maintained, but many other graves are now unmarked. There is evidence that numerous uncarved stone grave markers were thoughtlessly pushed into a pile some years ago. A brief survey report from 1973 states that "The cemetery has many simple fieldstone markers." Today none remain in place. Nevertheless, the cemetery is considered to be a contributing site for the purposes of this nomination.

A one-seat, board-and-batten outhouse is located at the rear of the cemetery. It has long been out of service and left in very poor condition, and therefore not considered a contributing building for the purposes of this nomination.

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## **8. Statement of Significance**

The Olive Branch Missionary Baptist Church evokes the history of rural Bedford County's African American community, as it once played a central role in the lives of those living in the Moneta area in the southern part of the county. Although the church congregation is said to have formed in 1881, the land on which the present church was erected was deeded on March 2, 1896 by Robert & Mary Mead to trustees Thomas Cullen, Henry Board, Fletcher Pullen, and Albert Pullen of the Olive Branch Colored Missionary Baptist Church, "for a place to erect a house for public worship." The edifice continues to be used for the same purpose to this day, and so has been maintained and preserved, to a large degree, ever since. The small frame church was built that year at the intersection of two well-used local roads, and it drew its original membership from the area's farming families. A cemetery was established behind the church, marked today by a scattering of early fieldstone memorials and a handful of more modern inscribed memorials.

### **Justification of Criteria**

The Olive Branch Missionary Baptist Church and Cemetery are eligible under Criterion A in the area of Religion because of their association with the black Baptist missionary movement in America, and in the area of Black Ethnic Heritage for their association with the history of Bedford County's African American community. The period of significance begins at the date of the church's construction in 1896 and approximate period of establishment of the cemetery about the same time, and extends to 1957. This reflects the church's continued use to the present and into the future for the purposes for which it was originally founded; continuing the tradition of home missionary activity emphasized by the black Baptist Missionary Movement. The church and cemetery are eligible at the local level of significance.

### **Historical Background**

#### The Black Baptist Missionary Movement in America

The black Baptist church has a tradition of missionary activity that began in Virginia in 1815 with the creation of the African Baptist Missionary Society of Richmond, which was organized by two black ministers, Collin Teague and Lott Carey. In 1821, Lott Carey went to Liberia as a missionary under the auspices of the American Colonization Society. Carey explained his motivation: "I am an African and in this country, however meritorious my conduct and respectable my character, I cannot receive due esteem for either. I wish to go to a country where I

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shall be estimated by my merits not by my complexion.”<sup>1</sup> In addition to the antebellum establishment of missionary activity in West Africa, the tradition of black Baptist home missionary service began in 1832 with the creation of the American Baptist Home Mission Society in New York. Black Baptist home missionary activity ceased in the South in 1845 when the Southern Baptist Convention withdrew from the American Baptist Home Mission Society, but the movement revived during the Civil War when Home Mission Society instruction was offered to newly emancipated slaves. The society explained that its missionary activity among southern blacks emphasized “the making of character rather than making better servants for the white race.” The black Baptist home missionary movement led to the widespread postbellum creation of black Baptist Sunday schools throughout the South. The missionary Sunday schools succeeded, according to a 1911 outline of Baptist history, because they offered southern blacks “the best chance to learn. . . . These schools did the work of the day school. Thousands learned how to read and write . . . and many became preachers and are among the leaders of the people.”<sup>2</sup> By 1900, black Baptist church membership had risen to 3 million out of a total of 9 million blacks.<sup>3</sup> Early in the twentieth century, Virginia had 900 black Baptist churches, an equal number of black Sunday schools, and a total membership of 275,000.<sup>4</sup> It is this tradition of home missionary activity and Sunday school instruction that Olive Branch Missionary Baptist Church has drawn upon from the time of its establishment in 1896 to the present.

Olive Branch Church History

In March 1896, Robert and Mary E. Mead granted one-half acre of land in Bedford County at the forks of Joppa Mills and Flint Hill roads to Thomas Pullen, Henry Broad, Fletcher Pullen, and Albert Pullen for \$12.50. The three Pullens and Henry Broad received the land as trustees “for a place to erect a house for public worship . . . to be known as the Olive Branch Col[ored] Missionary Baptist Church so long as it [is] used for a place for Public divine worship.”<sup>5</sup>

The 1900 manuscript census for Bedford County, Virginia, records both the grantors and grantees listed in the land transfer. The Meads, a white couple in their fifties, sold the half-acre for Olive Branch Church to the four black trustees, all born before Emancipation. Fletcher Pullen, born in 1862, farmed land he owned free of mortgage in Bedford County; though he was illiterate, his wife Virginia could read and write; they had four children age seven and younger. Albert Pullen, born in 1858, and wife Emma lived in Danville by 1900. The deed of transfer lists Albert Pullen as owner of land adjacent to the Meads. Thomas Pullen, born in 1847, farmed the land he owned in Bedford County with his wife Steptoe; this household included twenty-year-old son Hulbert, listed as a farm laborer, and five other children. Everyone in the family except the youngest one-year-old daughter could read and write. Henry Broad, born in 1847, owned farmland in Bedford

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County with wife Sophy; though neither could read or write, their household included a black servant, Elizabeth Jordan, age eighteen, who was literate.

The Olive Branch Colored Missionary Baptist Church is the second Colored Missionary Baptist Church recorded in the Bedford County Grantee index for churches. The first entry for a Colored Missionary Baptist Church was in 1889.<sup>6</sup> The Church Grantee index records no subsequent entries for Olive Branch, so the additional two-thirds-acre parcel included in the current plot showing the contiguous church cemetery was probably transferred by will, perhaps from descendants of Albert and Emma Pullen, who owned land adjacent to the original half-acre deeded to the church.

Olive Branch Missionary Baptist Church was the home church of Rev. Noel C. Taylor, pastor of High Street Baptist Church in Roanoke, and Roanoke's first and only black mayor, who served from 1975 to 1992. Rev. Taylor's father, Noel A. Taylor, was a deacon of Olive Branch Missionary Baptist Church, and the Taylors were distantly related to the original Pullen trustees of the church. Rev. Taylor preached his first trial sermon at Olive Branch Church before 1955 when he was called to serve First Baptist Church in Clifton Forge.<sup>7</sup> Rev. Taylor, as the congregation's most famous son, subsequently preached at some of the Olive Branch Church homecomings, held annually to raise donations for the church.<sup>8</sup>

Current Olive Branch trustees remember weeklong church revivals when new members would come to the front mourning bench to pray and become new converts. Sunday school classes were grouped by age for adults, intermediates, and children. The church received quarterly Sunday school books, which they used to prepare the Sunday school classes. Sunday school union services were held every fifth Sunday on a rotating basis among five different local country churches, including Olive Branch. Sunday school classes were taught first; then everyone made a meal of covered dishes brought to the service; and finally all heard a sermon delivered by a visiting pastor. Other well-known pastors in addition to Rev. Noel C. Taylor preached sermons at Olive Branch annual homecomings, and the special collections taken then were used to sustain the church.

The church has retained several Bibles from the 1870s and 1880s printed by the New York American Bible Union and the New York American Bible Society. Most monument markers in the church cemetery have been disturbed and are no longer in place. An original burial headstone records the life of Obry Hobson, born in 1897, who served in World War I and died in 1958.

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Current trustees of Olive Branch Church report that by 1993 the church was leased to a white congregation because too many members of the original church had died. During the time of the white pastorate, central heat, bathrooms, and air conditioning were added to the church. By 2004 the white pastor had died and Rev. Alfred Smith received his calling to head Olive Branch Missionary Baptist Church as his first pastorate. Services are now held the first and third Sundays of the month and attended by as many as 30 or 40 people.

Olive Branch Missionary Baptist Church held an anniversary celebration August 20, 2006, featuring singing by Nancy Boss, a granddaughter of former church elder Ruben Turner. The anniversary sermon will be given by Mildred Turner, a niece of Roben Turner who is also a cousin of Rev. Smith.<sup>9</sup>

Endnotes

1. C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Duke University Press, 1990), 45.
2. Lewis G. Jordan, *Negro Baptist History* (Nashville, TN: Sunday School Publishing Board, 1930), chapter 11, "The Work of the American Baptist Home Mission Society for the Negroes of the United States." This chapter was authored in 1911 by H. L. Morehouse, corresponding secretary of the society and namesake of Morehouse College in Atlanta.
3. Edwin S. Gaustad and Philip L. Barlow, *New Historical Atlas of Religion in America* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 69.
4. Jordan, *Negro Baptist History*, 344.
5. Deed Book 73, p. 469, Bedford County Circuit Court, Bedford, Virginia.
6. Lincoln and Mamiya explain that the nature of Baptist polity provides for the absolute independence of each local church, and that the affiliation of any local Baptist church with any larger Baptist society or convention can be terminated at any time on the vote of the local congregation (*The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 25-26). Therefore, probably too much significance should not be placed on the affiliation between Olive Branch Missionary Baptist Church and other Bedford County black churches of similar name.
7. Interviews with Noel C. Taylor's wife, Barbara Jean Taylor, and daughter Sabrina Taylor Law, July 21, 2006. *Reflections of the Life of Rev. Dr. Noel C. Taylor*, High Street Baptist Church, Roanoke, Virginia, no date.
8. Interviews with Barbara Jean Taylor, July 21, 2006, and with Olive Branch Church trustees Jane L. English, Annie Mae Craghead, Marion Gates, Rufus Calloway, Marion L. Craghead, and Rev. Alvin E. Smith, July 20, 2006.
9. Interview with Nancy Boss, July 21, 2006.

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**9. Bibliography**

Boss, Nancy. Telephone interview, July 21, 2006.

Deed Books, Bedford County Circuit Court. Bedford, Virginia.

Gaustad, Edwin S., and Philip L. Barlow. *New Historical Atlas of Religion in America*. Oxford University Press, 2001.

Jordan, Lewis G. *Negro Baptist History*. Nashville, TN: Sunday School Publishing Board, 1930.

Law, Sabrina Taylor. Telephone interview, July 21, 2006.

Lincoln, C. Eric, and Lawrence H. Mamiya. *The Black Church in the African American Experience*. Duke University Press, 1990.

Olive Branch Missionary Baptist Church Trustees, Bedford County, Virginia. Interviews with Rufus Calloway, Annie Mae Craghead, Marion L. Craghead, Jane L. English, Marion Gates, and Rev. Alvin E. Smith, July 20, 2006.

*Reflections on the Life of Rev. Dr. Noel C. Taylor*. High Street Baptist Church, Roanoke, Virginia, no date.

Taylor, Barbara Jean. Telephone interview, July 21, 2006.

U.S. Manuscript Census, Population, 1900. Bedford County, Virginia. Microfilm.

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**10. Geographical References**

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The nominated parcel boundary conforms to that as shown on accompanying Bedford County GIS tax/real estate map, identified as parcel 179 A 9, and as outlined in yellow on the accompanying Virginia Department of Historic Resources aerial image.

**Boundary Justification**

The nominated parcel boundary is the historic legal parcel boundary, which includes the church, cemetery, and surrounding yard.

**Photographs**

Olive Branch Missionary Baptist Church (DHR #009-0135)  
Bedford County, Virginia

Photographer: Michael Pulice      Date: May 2006

Digital images stored at the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

1. Church interior, facing rear of building.
2. Church exterior, rear of building, facing south.
3. Church exterior, front of building, facing east.
4. Church exterior, front of building, facing northeast.