



PRELIMINARY INFORMATION FORM (PIF) for INDIVIDUAL PROPERTIES

Note: PIFs are prepared by applicants and evaluated by DHR staff and the State Review Board based on information known at the time of preparation. Recommendations concerning PIFs are subject to change if new information becomes available.

DHR No. (to be completed by DHR staff) 044-6467

1. General Property Information

Property name: Oak Level Primitive Baptist Church

Property address: 3932 Philpott Dr

City or Town: Bassett

Zip code: 24055

Name of the Independent City or County where the property is located: Henry County

Category of Property (choose only one of the following):

Building x

Site

Structure

Object

2. Physical Aspects

Acreage: 1-2 acres

Setting (choose only one of the following):

Urban Suburban Town Village Hamlet Rural x

Briefly describe the property's overall location and setting, including any notable landscape features:

The church and cemetery are located on the southwest side of Philpott Drive (Rt. 674), 360 feet southeast of the junction of Blue Ridge View Drive. The church is set back 85 feet from the road and is surrounded by a grassy yard. A small cemetery containing just a few graves is located about 130 feet north-northwest of the church building, and within 30-40 feet of Philpott Drive. About 60 feet south of the building, within the tree line, are the remains of the preacher's stand, consisting of a concrete slab on an embanked concrete block foundation. The superstructure is missing. Behind (west of) the church at a distance of approximately 90-100 feet are twin concrete-block outhouse privies, abandoned and in poor condition. In front of the church is a round concrete well head.

3. Architectural Description

Architectural Style(s): No discernable style

If the property was designed by an architect, landscape architect, engineer, or other professional, please list here: _____

If the builder is known, please list here: _____

Date of construction (can be approximate): c. 1933

Narrative Description

Purposely lacking architectural or visual distinction like most other Primitive Baptist churches, the Oak Level Primitive Baptist Church is a circa 1933 one-story wood-frame building. It has a parged concrete block foundation, vinyl siding over Bricktex siding over weatherboards, an asphalt-shingled front-gable roof, a projecting front entrance vestibule flanked by a single window to each side, and stacked-panel folding doors in front, reached via a flight of six concrete steps. The main block of the church measures 50 feet deep and 30 feet wide. Along the west side elevation are five windows, one of which is smaller than the others and lights a small room at the back of the church. The east side elevation has only four windows of the same size and shape. All except the smaller rear window have 1/1 sashes. At the rear is a concrete block addition containing a fellowship area and bathrooms that replaced the still-extant outhouse privies.

The church interior consists of a nave entered through a front vestibule. The walls and ceilings are treated with modern composite materials such as the panel wainscot, sheetrock, and unusual white ceiling tiles. The pews, arranged primarily in two rows with three aisles, are also modern replacements. Only the original pinewood floors are revealed. At the rear of the church is a raised platform with dais and lectern. The air in the room is circulated by two ceiling fans.

Secondary Resources

- A small, unenclosed **cemetery** containing just a few graves is located about 130 feet north-northwest of the church building, and within 30-40 feet of Philpott Drive. The cemetery has four granite headstones, but the possibility exists for unmarked graves.
- About 60 feet south of the building, within the tree line, are the remains of the c. 1933 **preacher's stand**, consisting of a concrete slab on an embanked concrete block foundation. The superstructure is missing. Outdoor preacher's stands set within wooded areas near Primitive Baptist churches played an important part of the denomination's worship practices. Extant preacher's stands have been recorded by the author at County Line Primitive Baptist Church (031-5124) in Floyd County, Harmony Primitive Baptist Church (017-5161) in Carroll County, and Snow Creek Primitive Baptist Church (033-0135) in Franklin County.
- Behind (west of) the church at a distance of approximately 90-100 feet are twin concrete-block **outhouse privies**, abandoned and in poor condition. A similar privy was recorded at Gravel Hill Baptist Church (011-5142) in Botetourt County.
- In front of the church is a round concrete **well head**.

4. Property's History and Significance (Please do not exceed one page)

The Oak Level Primitive Baptist Church, believed by its members to have been erected in 1933, is relatively well preserved, and because reportedly it was the first Black church in the Oak Level Community--a claim that is perfectly credible yet difficult to verify--and a rare example of a Black Primitive Baptist congregation, it merits evaluation of register eligibility under Criterion A (Black Ethnic Heritage).

Primitive Baptist Churches

The formal separation between "Old School" or "Primitive Baptists" and "New School Baptists" took place at a meeting on September 28, 1832 at the Black Rock Church in Butler, Maryland. Primitive Baptist churches soon arose in the mountainous regions of the American South, where they are found in their greatest numbers. Primitive Baptists do not believe in organized ministerial training, nor hierarchies among the elders who lead each church; distinctions that surely helped promulgate their churches in more remote/less affluent communities. African American Primitive Baptist groups are a unique category of Primitive Baptist. Approximately 50,000 African Americans were affiliated with African American Primitive Baptist churches as of 2005. Since arising in the 19th century, the influence of Primitive Baptists has waned as "Missionary Baptists" became the mainstream. [Wikipedia]

The National Primitive Baptist Convention currently lists only four active Virginia churches in its Sandy Ridge District Progressive Primitive Baptist Association: two in Patrick County, one in Pittsylvania County, and one in Henry County (6 of 10 church listings are in North Carolina.)
[<https://npbcconvention.org/pages/churchlocator>]

The National Primitive Baptist Convention is a group of Black Primitive Baptists that has adopted progressive methods and policies not in keeping with the historical and theological background of Primitive Baptists in general. The Convention was organized in Huntsville, Alabama in 1907. These churches have adopted the use of instrumental music, Sunday Schools, revivals and church auxiliaries. The idea of a national convention is itself foreign to standard Primitive Baptist concepts. They still adhere the Calvinistic or Predestinarian teachings held by other Primitive Baptists, but in a more progressive manner. The NPBC churches continue with Primitive Baptist usage in retaining the observance of feet washing as an ordinance of the church, and in calling their ministers "elder." These churches are not in fellowship with the remaining "old school" white Primitive Baptists. Most of the National Primitive Baptist Convention churches (616 in 1995) are located in the southern United States. [Wikipedia]

After the Civil War, white Primitive Baptists helped former slaves to start their own churches, ordain their own deacons and pastors, and form local associations. The local associations formed a general association in 1907 that was originally known as the Colored Primitive Baptists of America. There are currently churches in 18 states. They embrace some aspects of church life that align them more closely with the other African American Baptist Associations and depart from the traditional Primitive Baptist beliefs such as foot washing after communion. The NPBC also holds conferences in contrast to most Primitive Baptists who consider the local church the focal point.
[National Primitive Baptist Convention- LibGuides, Ernest Miller White Library at Louisville Seminary.
<https://lpts.libguides.com/denominations/npbc>]

Sources

- Peggy Wade, church trustee, personal communication with Mike Pulice, May 2023.
- National Primitive Baptist Convention webpage: LibGuides, Ernest Miller White Library at Louisville Seminary. <https://lpts.libguides.com/denominations/npsc>
- National Primitive Baptist Convention website: <https://npbcconvention.org/pages/churchlocator>
- Wikipedia pages for National Primitive Baptist Convention and Primitive Baptists.

5. Property Ownership (Check as many categories as apply):

Private: x Public\Local _____ Public\State _____ Public\Federal _____

Current Legal Owner(s) of the Property (If the property has more than one owner, please list each below or on an additional sheet.)

name/title: _____

organization: Primitive Baptist Church

street & number: 45 Forest View Dr.

city or town: Bassett state: VA zip code: 24055

e-mail: _____ telephone: _____

Legal Owner's Signature: _____

Date: _____

• • *Signature required for processing all applications.* • •

In the event of corporate ownership you must provide the name and title of the appropriate contact person.

Contact person: Peggy Wade, trustee

Daytime Telephone: 276-618-4198

street & number: 135 Blue Ridge View Dr.

city or town: Bassett state: VA zip code: 24055

Applicant Information (Individual completing form if other than legal owner of property)

name/title: Mike Pulice

organization: DHR

street & number: _____

city or town: Salem state: _____ zip code: _____

e-mail: michael.pulice@dhr.virginia.gov telephone: _____

Date: January 24, 2024



Philpott Dr

Blue Ridge View Dr



674

Oak Level Church

Philpott Dr



FREDRICK FRANK
WADE
DEC 24 1911
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