

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST
DETERMINATION OF ELIGIBILITY FORM

NR Eligible: yes ___
no ___

Property Name: First Mt. Olive Freewill Baptist Church Inventory Number: B-5120
Address: 809-811 W. Saratoga Street Historic district: ___ yes X no
City: Baltimore Zip Code: 21201 County: Baltimore City
USGS Quadrangle(s): Baltimore West
Property Owner: Mt. Olive Freewill Baptist Church, Inc. Tax Account ID Number: 18130173001
Tax Map Parcel Number(s): _____ Tax Map Number: 18
Project: Red Line Corridor Transit Study Agency: Mass Transit Administration
Agency Prepared By: John Milner Associates, Inc.
Preparer's Name: Katherine Larson Farnham Date Prepared: 1/23/2006
Documentation is presented in: Enoch Pratt Free Library--Maryland Room vertical files
Preparer's Eligibility Recommendation: ___ Eligibility recommended X Eligibility not recommended
Criteria: ___ A ___ B ___ C ___ D Considerations: ___ A ___ B ___ C ___ D ___ E ___ F ___ G
Complete if the property is a contributing or non-contributing resource to a NR district/property:
Name of the District/Property: _____
Inventory Number: _____ Eligible: ___ yes Listed: ___ yes
Site visit by MHT Staff ___ yes X no Name: _____ Date: _____

Description of Property and Justification: *(Please attach map and photo)*

The First Mt. Olive Freewill Baptist church is a tall Gothic Revival brick church, three stories in height with a four-story central bell tower on the front gable end. The church has a steep-pitched front-gabled roof clad in slate shingles and featuring pyramidal corner buttress finials that project upward, as well as flat-topped side buttress projections along the nave. The entire church is clad in Formstone siding with a horizontal stone pattern, with the exception of one front corner buttress on the bell tower where the original brick is exposed. All windows are modern stained glass. The front of the church is three bays wide, and the bell tower projects a short distance from the main block. The front corners of both bell tower and main block have stepped full-height buttresses. The bell tower section is one bay wide and contains a gabled projecting entrance surround on the first floor. This entrance has a Gothic arched opening containing a modern glass and steel double-lead commercial door and a stained-glass transom featuring an open Bible. There are no openings on the second level of the bell tower, but the third level contains a large modern Gothic-arched stained glass window divided into six "panes." The fourth floor of the bell tower has paired lancet vents and has steep cross-gabled rooflines on all four sides with stepped cementitious cornice ornament. A narrow eight-sided slate-roofed spire topped with a cross rises from the top of the bell tower. Deteriorated Gothic-arched dormer vents adorn four sides of the spire. The main block of the church has one bay on either side of the bell tower, each containing an additional entrance on the first floor. These entrances are Gothic-arched, recessed slightly, and have double-leaf modern commercial glass doors and stained

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[Signature] Reviewer, Office of Preservation Services Date: 7/26/06
[Signature] Reviewer, National Register Program Date: 8/7/06

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glass transoms. On the second floor are three-section Gothic-arched single windows. An elaborate set of stone steps provides access to all three front entrances. The church nave is six bays deep, with two-story four-pane lancet-shaped stained glass windows. Two angled projecting cement-covered belt courses run around the entire façade below these windows and span the buttresses, bell tower, and front wall as well. The lower level of the church has basement windows. At the rear, the church has a shallow octagonal apse.

Two other buildings are part of the church "campus," which is fenced with a small grassy area, parking lot, and trees on the east side facing Fremont St. Immediately west of the church on Saratoga St. is a modern cement and standing-seam-metal building, approximately three stories tall. Behind the church and set at an angle is a three-story hip-roofed former school building, which has been covered with stucco. The school has a center four-bay-wide by three-bay-deep pavilion with two two-bay-long, two-bay-deep side wing sections. Its east side is parallel to Fremont Ave. and it faces northwest. It has an asphalt shingled roof and one-over-one double-hung sash windows, all of which appear to be replacements. The stucco cladding obscures most of its architectural details, but it appears to have been a brick building with Gothic Revival details. The front of the center pavilion has a recessed double entrance on the first floor, which is sheltered by a modern awning system. Above the entrance are paired Roman-arched windows with a Gothic-style hood molding above. The top floor has a gabled wall dormer. The rear of the building is flush and eight bays long. The school now appears to be used as office space by the church.

This church was constructed in 1867 as the splendid new home of St. Paul's German Evangelical Lutheran Church. This German-speaking congregation, founded in 1835, had outgrown its old quarters at Holliday and Saratoga Streets as German immigrants swelled its ranks. The new church's 190-foot steeple was the tallest in the city, and the architecture was described as Gothic in the best German tradition, and reminiscent of churches in Germany. The interior seated 1,000 and featured elaborate painted ceilings with arabesques and foliated arches, a carved white marble altar made in Germany, and the three steeple bells were also German-made. St. Paul's Lutheran was nicknamed "the boxmakers' church" since so many congregants worked in the box industry. The church opened a parish school in 1869 and flourished for years. However, German speakers began to decrease, and an English-speaking church (Emmanuel Evangelical English Lutheran) broke off in 1888. A new parsonage with rear garden was built next door on Saratoga St. in 1897, completing the campus. However, membership was beginning to decline as successive generations lost the ability to speak German. In an effort to keep members, weekly English services were finally held beginning in 1910, though one German service was preserved. The church school closed in 1914 and the building was converted to a parish hall.

Even before World War I, the surrounding Poppleton neighborhood began to deteriorate into slums populated increasingly by poor blacks, and the white German and German-descended congregation members moved away to the suburbs. While other churches moved out of the inner city to survive, St. Paul's remained. In 1938, urban renewal arrived and the decrepit small homes within the block were razed, with the exception of the church, its parsonage and school, and the tiny house formerly inhabited by Edgar Allan Poe. Three-story public housing buildings, the Edgar Allan Poe Homes, soon surrounded the old church campus. The parsonage had been vacated by this point, but in 1941, the church began using it as an outreach center for servicemen, providing free sleeping quarters and recreation rooms. The church was renovated in 1942, and hung on through the war years, dedicating itself to helping servicemen.

In 1953, St. Paul's finally purchased land in Catonsville and prepared to leave the inner city. New sanctuary facilities were built in Catonsville in 1954-1956, and the church finally moved in 1956. The old building was purchased in 1956 by a black congregation, the First Mt. Olive Freewill Baptist Church, which renovated the buildings and dedicated a new cornerstone in 1973. The old parsonage was either demolished or encapsulated into a new building next door to the church.

Despite its interesting history, the First Mt. Olive Freewill Baptist Church and its associated school building have been heavily and

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unsympathetically renovated since 1956. The application of Formstone to the church and stucco to the school has obscured the original details and appearance of both buildings, and the replacement of all windows and doors with modern materials has eroded any remaining historic exterior integrity. Construction of the ultra-modern abutting west building in place of the former parsonage further detracts from the church's historic appearance. Due to severe loss of integrity, the church property does not meet NRHP criteria or criteria considerations, and is recommended not eligible for the NRHP.

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First Mt. Olive Freewill
Baptist Church
809-811 W. Santry
St.
MHP#: B-5120

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West

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Fa.



B-5120

First Mt. Olive Freewill Baptist Church

Baltimore City, MD

Kate Farnham

6/22/2005

MD SHPD

View to SW

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First Mt. Olive Freewill Baptist Church

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General view to SW

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View of front entrance, to SE

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Detail of steeple, to SE

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View to W of former school bldg. (rear)

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