

# OLD MOUNT CARMEL BAPTIST CHURCH



*This report was written on May 4, 1983*

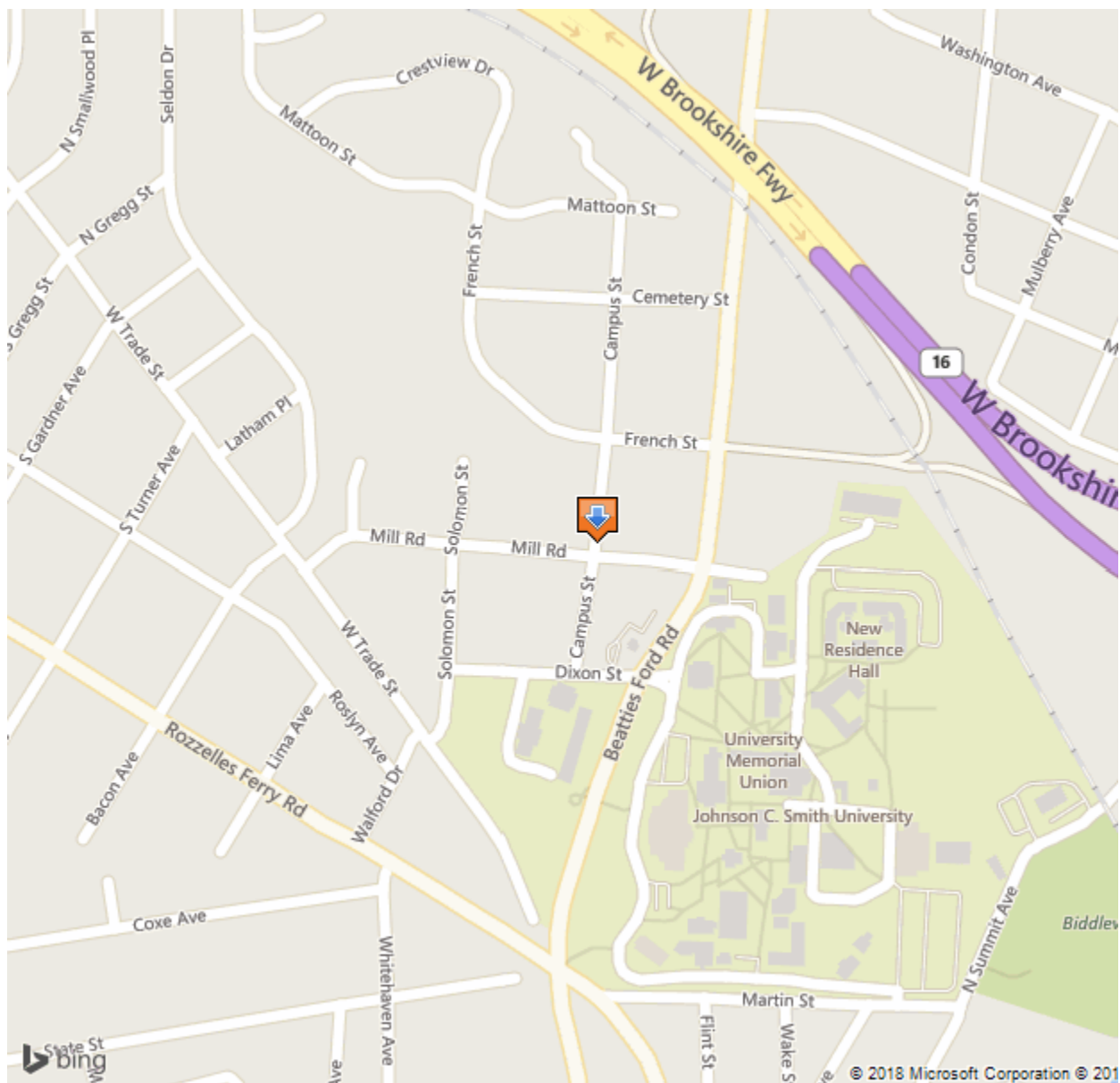
- 1. Name and location of the property:** The property known as the Old Mount Carmel Baptist Church is located at 408-416 Campus Street, in Charlotte, North Carolina.
- 2. Name, address, and telephone number of the present owner of the property:** The present owner of the property is:

Mount Carmel Baptist Church  
3201 Tuckaseegee Road  
Charlotte, NC 28208

Telephone: (704) 394-3525

**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 listed in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 4040 at page 404. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is: 069-011-04.

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

**7. A brief architectural description of the property:** This report contains an architectural description of the property prepared by Thomas W. Hanchett, architectural historian.

**8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria 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 Old Mount Carmel Baptist Church does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) the oldest portion of the building, dedicated on May 8, 1921, was built according to plans prepared by Louis Asbury, an architect of local and regional importance; 2) the building served as the location of Mount Carmel Baptist Church from 1921 until 1977 and, therefore, was a cultural centerpiece of the Biddleville community for more than fifty years; 3) the oldest portion of the building is one of the finer local examples of the Victorian Gothic style.

**b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and/or association:** The Commission contends that the attached architectural description by Mr. Thomas W. Hanchett demonstrates that the Old Mount Carmel Baptist 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 .317 acres of land is \$4,000. The current appraised value of the improvements is \$112,240. The total current appraised value is \$116,240. The property is zoned R6MF.

**Date of Preparation of this Report:** May 4, 1983

**Prepared by:** Dr. Dan L. Morrill, Director  
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission  
218 N. Tryon Street  
Charlotte, North Carolina 28202

Telephone: (704) 376-9115

## *Historical Overview*

*Dr. William H. Huffman*

The Mount Carmel Baptist Church is integrally a part of the history of the Biddleville community, located about a mile and a half to the northwest of the Square in downtown Charlotte. Biddleville was, before its incorporation into the city, the village which grew up next to the present Johnson C. Smith University, and was named after the school's former title, Biddle Memorial Institute (1867-1876), later Biddle University (1876-1923). The school, which was started by the Presbyterian church after the Civil War to educate young black freedmen to become teachers and preachers in the South, was itself named in honor of Major Henry J. Biddle, a Union Army soldier who fell in battle in 1862, and whose widow, Mary D. Biddle of Philadelphia, PA, donated sufficient funds to give the institution a real start.

Biddle Institute's first president, Dr. Stephen Mattoon (1815-1886), a native of New York State with an outstanding missionary record, served from 1870 to 1884, and in 1885-6. Under his able leadership, the school became firmly established as an educational institution of quality, and became one of the leading schools of its kind in the region, and eventually, in the nation. In addition to insuring the survival and growth of Biddle Institute, Reverend Mattoon was largely responsible for the establishment of the village itself. The original eight acres of land for the Institute was donated by Colonel William R. Meyers about 1869, and eventually a total of 95 acres of hilltop farmland were purchased from this famous Charlotte leader for the campus. The original Biddleville was mostly the result of Mattoon's personal acquisition of land next to the school, which he resold to ex-slaves on very modest, affordable terms.

As the school grew in numbers, so did the Biddleville community with its residents, whose religious needs also expanded. In 1878, two years after Biddle University had been chartered by the state legislature with the authority to grant degrees, a small prayer group, which met in various member's homes or under a large oak tree in the village on nice days, resolved to form a Missionary Baptist Church in Biddleville. The decision was undertaken at a meeting held at the home of Mrs. Amanda McClure, and included Cary Etheridge and his wife, W. M. Parks and Mrs. Parks, Mrs. Rachel Ross and Mrs. Winnie Phifer. Since nine members were required to start a new church, the group found it necessary to "borrow" two other Baptists, one of whom was William Davidson of the First Baptist Church of Charlotte. Mr. Davidson was the father of Reverend W. H. Davidson, who was to pastor the Mount Carmel Church for most of the first half of the twentieth century, and was also the great-uncle of the present interim president of Johnson C. Smith University, Mack L. Davidson, Jr.<sup>2</sup>

A site had also been found for the new church: an old shop, formerly a barroom, in the 600 block of Beatties Ford Road, which the owner allowed them to use free of charge. It was here, sometime during the year 1878, that Reverend Elder Eagle, the pastor of the First Baptist Church in Charlotte, formally prefected the Mount Carmel Baptist Church. They continued to meet as a Sunday prayer group until about the end of the year, when, at a meeting presided over by Cary Etheridge, the decision was made to call a pastor. Thus the Reverend Albert Lewis, a student at

Biddle University was called to officiate at worship services which could then include singing, reading of Scripture, prayer, a sermon, offering and benediction.<sup>3</sup>

Reverend Lewis led the Mount Carmel Baptist Church for twenty years, and during his tenure, he organized a board of deacons, a women's missionary society, and a Sunday school. The deacon's board was responsible for the material as well as the spiritual welfare of the church. In some of its earliest decisions, the following rules were adopted: All members were required to live in harmony with one another, and, "if any were found guilty of not speaking to another member, dancing, attending a dance (even without dancing), use of profanity, fornication, adultery, non-attendance of church services and non-attendance of three church meetings without satisfactory excuse, the right hand of fellowship was withdrawn."<sup>4</sup> The women's missionary society, organized in 1883, raised money for the church and provided clothing for children who could not otherwise attend Sunday school. Worship service during this time was held on the second and fourth Sundays of the month, and on the first and third Sundays, prayer services were held with a deacon or missionary member in charge. At the latter meetings, money collected went for the upkeep of the church, but the offerings on preaching Sundays all went to pay the pastor.<sup>5</sup>

As the membership increased, it became increasingly desirable to locate in the church's own quarters, and so in 1883, Cary Etheridge, acting as sole trustee of the church, purchased a one-hundred-foot square lot on Church ( now Campus) Street in Biddleville for \$32.00. After six months labor, the congregation was able to move into the new frame building, which had cost about \$250.00 to build. The pews and the pulpit furniture were made by the men of Mount Carmel, but the new building did not have a baptismal pool, and so a nearby creek branch was used for the purpose. Under the subsequent pastorage of Reverend Samuel S. Person (1902-1906), a student at Shaw University in Raleigh, the membership grew to seventy-eight. His other major accomplishment was to attempt to bring some harmony in the relations with the other two churches of Biddleville, the Gethsemene A.M.E. Zion and Biddleville Presbyterian churches through pulpit exchanges and social meetings. At the time, there was an intense rivalry among the three to keep their own members and recruit newcomers to the community in addition to doctrinal differences of opinion. The minister's efforts apparently achieved some modest success which paved the way for further progress in the future.<sup>8</sup>

It was during the fifty-year pastorage of Reverend William H. Davidson (1914-1964), however, that the church made giant strides in growth and programs. When he answered the call, while still a student at Friendship College in Rock Hill, South Carolina, the congregation numbered one hundred-twenty members, and, under his enthusiastic leadership, it began to grow rapidly.<sup>9</sup> Near the end of World War I, in March, 1918, the church engaged a well-known local architect, Louis Asbury, to draw up plans for a new brick building.

Louis Asbury (1877-1975), in his fifty-some year career in Charlotte, starting in 1908, designed an impressive variety of structures in the city and surrounding area. He was a Charlotte native, the son of S. J. and Martha Moody Asbury, and helped his father build houses in Charlotte in the 1890s. After graduation from Trinity College (now Duke University), Asbury attended architecture school at MIT, and was first employed by two firms in New York City, Rossiter & Wright, then Cram, Goodhese and Ferguson. As Charlotte's first professionally trained architect,

Louis Asbury has hundreds of buildings to his credit: churches, schools, hotels, stores, institutions, and residences for many of the area's prominent citizens. These include the old county courthouse (1926), the Charles P. Moody house on Providence Road (1913), Myers Park Methodist Church (1928), the Law Building (1926), and the Hawthorne Lane Methodist Church(1915).

According to the minutes of Mount Carmel, there was a meeting in October, 1918, of the congregation, where Reverend Davidson submitted his ideas for a new church to those assembled. He indicated that rather than having new plans for a building drawn at considerable expense, already existing plans could be purchased for seventy-five dollars, and the building could be constructed by day labor, instead of a contractor, on a "pay-as-you-build plan," if they could eventually raise \$5,000.00 for the work. His suggestions were immediately accepted, and on October 4, 1918, a building permit was taken out, which showed that a structure of three rooms, with a ground plan of 36 x 50 feet, was to be built according to a Louis Asbury design, and it was estimated to cost \$2,500.00.<sup>12</sup>

In order to raise money for the enterprise, the members were divided into ten teams which were to make progress reports the following February, 1919. They held "mock weddings, fish fries, imaginary trips around the world, chicken dinners, "chittlin' struts," and other imaginative programs to generate funds. By the latter part of the year over \$5,000.00 had been raised, and the groundbreaking took place. Construction of the church was carried out by men volunteers of the church, under the direction of Erastus Hairston, a deacon, while the women prepared meals for the workers.

While construction was under way, it became clear that more money would be needed to complete the project, and three trustees, Robert McClure, J. C. Watt and Wade Chambers volunteered to mortgage their homes to raise the needed funds. Arrangements were made to borrow eleven hundred dollars from a Mrs. O'Neil of Charlotte for a period of twelve months. When her attorney, a Peter Z. Young, discovered that the mortgaged property had a value of nine thousand dollars, he urged her to call in the note after six months, probably forcing foreclosure. When this news became known, the pastor ordered construction to halt, and called a meeting of the congregation to plan a money-raising rally to last for sixty days. During that time, \$1,953.50 was successfully collected, the mortgage was paid, and work resumed.

Soon another problem was encountered in putting up the new building: a shortage of bricks available for purchase. The pastor spent many days walking all over Charlotte from dawn to dusk searching for bricks with no success. Finally, a solution presented itself when the home of a wealthy resident of Myers Park burned beyond repair, and the bricks were bought for twelve dollars a thousand. Although they were bought with the intention of using them for filler, it was soon discovered, after cleaning, that they were pressed brick in good condition, and so were laid as the main structure.<sup>13</sup>

Although it is a Presbyterian-related school, much money was raised for the construction of the church by President Henry L. McCrorey, Dr. Thomas Long and students at Biddle University. Mrs. Davidson, the pastor's wife, told Mr. James R. Webb, Jr., that "...the glee club and band from Biddle will always have a warm spot in the hearts of the members of Carmel because of the

impressive concerts rendered at our church which brought in hundreds of dollars."<sup>14</sup>Final completion of the church was financed through a \$2,000.00, six-year loan from the First National Bank of Charlotte, which was paid three years early.

In April, 1921, the great effort put forth by many dedicated members and friends finally bore fruit; the building was finished. It was dedicated on Sunday, May 8, 1921, complete with new pews, pulpit furnishings and rugs, and the sermon on that day was given by Reverend B. K. Mason, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Charlotte. Just under three years later, in January, 1924, the church held a mortgage-burning ceremony, and their celebration was complete. The old frame building was sold to Reverend William Barbour, who used the materials to construct his own home.

In 1925, the surplus building materials from the original construction were used to build on two new rooms as a wing for a combination choir and classrooms at a cost of seventeen hundred dollars. In spite of the subsequent depression of the 1930s, the church membership continued to rise, and rallies were again held to raise money for a Sunday school annex in 1933. Their efforts were once again successful, and by the third Sunday in June, 1935, the new annex was dedicated. It contained an assembly room, two classrooms, and a basement divided into classrooms and a kitchen.

As a result of subsequent membership drives, enrollment increased to 979 by 1947, and another drive was set in motion for an education building. Relying on their previously successful pay-as-you-build method, the church was able to put up a building of thirteen classrooms, a clerk's office, library and basement, at a cost of about \$25,000, without going into debt. It was completed in 1948.

Thirty years later, however, the community and the church had grown to the point where even larger facilities were justified, and, on April 3, 1977, under the direction of the present pastor, Dr. Leon Riddick, Mount Carmel Baptist moved to a much larger, previously constructed church complex at 3201 Tuckaseegee Road, with an auditorium that seats 825, and a chapel with close to 200 places. The church had come a long way since its original seven prayer-group members in Biddleville in 1878. Presently, the old building is leased to another church denomination but still owned by Mount Carmel.

As the first brick structure in the Biddleville community<sup>21</sup> (aside from the Johnson C. Smith campus), situated squarely in the heart of the surrounding wood frame buildings, Mount Carmel stands as a monument to the joys, sorrows and struggles of the community of which it is so much a part. Its success represents a triumph over the many obstacles facing the residents of the post-Civil War village, and is a symbol of their determination to grow spiritually, socially and economically.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Arthur A. George, *100 Years, 1867-1967: Salient Factors in the Growth and Development of Johnson C. Smith University* (Charlotte: Johnson C. Smith University, 1968); Jack Claiborne, *Jack Claiborne's Charlotte* (Charlotte: Charlotte Publishing, 1974), pp.50-52; "The New South Neighborhoods: Biddleville," Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, 1981.

<sup>2</sup> James R. Webb, Jr., "A History of the Mount Carmel Baptist Church of Charlotte, North Carolina," unpublished Bachelor of Divinity Thesis, Johnson C. Smith University, 1951, pp. 3-6; *Centennial Souvenir Journal Mount Carmel Through the Years. 1878-1978* (Charlotte: Mount Carmel Baptist Church, 1978), p.7.

<sup>3</sup> Webb, pp. 5-6, Journal, p.7.

<sup>4</sup> Webb, p.7.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.8-9.

<sup>6</sup> Mecklenburg County Deed Book 39, p.536, 29 December 1883.

<sup>7</sup> Webb, pp.7-8.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.14-21; Journal, p.8.

<sup>9</sup> Webb, p.34; Journal, p.8.

<sup>10</sup> Louis Asbury's Job List, Louis Asbury Papers #4237, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Job Number 284, 16 March 1918.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*; and information on file at Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission.

<sup>12</sup> Webb, p.36; Journal, p.9; City of Charlotte Building Permit No. 2532, 14 October 1918.

<sup>13</sup> Webb, pp.36-39.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.40.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.40-41.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4



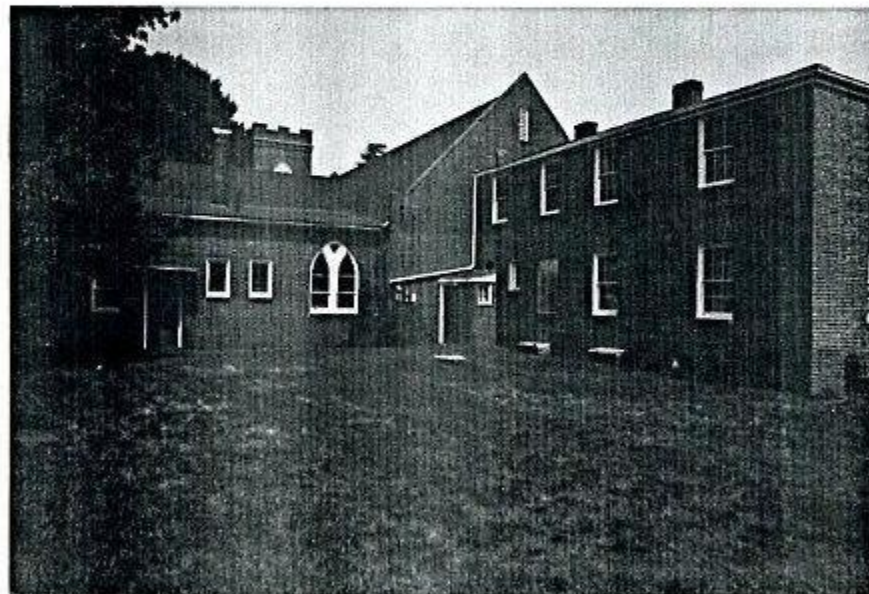
<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp.44-45.

<sup>19</sup> Journal, p.10.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Ione Jones, Charlotte, NC, 1982.

<sup>21</sup> Journal, p.9.

<sup>22</sup> December 1982.



VIEW LOOKING NORTH WEST

## *Architectural Description*

*Thomas W. Hanchett*

The red brick Old Mount Carmel Baptist Church is an example of Victorian Gothic architecture. It was erected 1918-1921 from plans by Louis Asbury, one of Charlotte's foremost early architects. It has been added to several times over the decades as its congregation has increased, but these additions have left the original sanctuary largely intact, inside and out.

The earliest section of the church is the sanctuary, a gable-roofed block five bays deep. The roof is tall and steep-pitched in the Gothic tradition. A pair of triangular vents penetrate the sides. The roof has very shallow eaves along the sides of the building, while at the ends the walls rise above the roofline to form parapet gables.

The front of the church is dominated by a tower at one corner. The tower is visible for some distance up and down the street, marking Old Mount Carmel's unusual mid-block location. The tower is two stories tall with a crenellated top, corbelled cornice, and brick buttressed sides, all hallmarks of the Victorian Gothic style. At the second story there is a long pointed-arched opening on each side, filled with wooden louvers. At the first story of the tower are small, paired, rectangular windows with wooden tracery. These window units are similar to those used in Asbury's Advent Christian Church built on McDowell Street near downtown Charlotte at the same time, and may have been stock lumberyard items. Next to the tower is a recessed front porch in a brick arched opening. A pair of large doors, one at the left, the other at the right, lead into the church vestibules.

The north side of the sanctuary continues the Gothic mode. Brick buttresses divide the facade into five bays. Each bay has a big Gothic pointed arch. The arches are laid up of two courses of brick darker than the body of the building, for decorative effect. Each opening holds a pair of pointed-arched windows with simple tracery.

Inside the high-ceilinged sanctuary, Asbury left part of the roof framing exposed in the Gothic manner. Beams with curved struts span the space, aided by slender tie-beams. Electric lights in Art Deco style milk-glass enclosures, possibly dating from the 1940s, hang from the centers of the tie-beams. The ceiling is of double-beaded tongue-and-groove boards, and similar woodwork is used for a wainscot around the room.

The congregation enters this space at the east end, through the two vestibules. At the west end is the raised altar and choir platform, with a small bandstand off to one side. Doors from the sanctuary lead to two small ante-chambers, one on each side of the platform. Originally one was the pastor's study, with a fireplace and handsome mantel, and the other was perhaps a choir room. With the growth of the building, these rooms are now used as hallways between the sanctuary and the new wings, and as staging areas during services.

The original building received substantial additions in 1925, 1935, and 1947. They reflect the growth of the congregation as the suburbs of Western Heights, Washington Heights, McCrorey Heights, and others were built on the former farmland surrounding the original Biddleville village.

The first addition came only four years after completion of the original structure. The church was extended two bays southward to include office rooms and additional sanctuary space. The new seating area has a sloping floor with pews set perpendicularly to those on the main floor. Under the wing is a full basement containing a kitchen and fellowship hall. Current Mt. Carmel treasurer and thirty-five year member William Simmons remembers "lots of good meals in this place." The exterior brickwork and windows of the wing blend perfectly with the original church. A new, larger pastor's study was probably the next addition in 1935. It is tacked on to the north side of the sanctuary near the rear and opens off the old pastor's study inside. 1947 saw the church's largest addition, a two story classroom wing behind the sanctuary. From the outside it is an awkward-looking brick box with a shallow parapet-gable roof. Inside, classrooms, a library, business office, and a pair of bathrooms flank a central stair hall. As in the other additions, there is no trim beyond a chair rail in most rooms. The most interesting feature of the classroom annex is a second floor trap-door that opens to reveal stairs down to the baptism "pool" located behind the altar. In early days baptisms were held outdoors in a nearby creek. Mr. Simmons remembers that they were later held in a tank below the pulpit. The present tank is located so that all members of the congregation in the sanctuary have a good view of the ceremony.