**Marker Text**

Congregation was formed in 1879; reorganized in 1882 by the Reverend John R. Miller and a core of determined members. The present building, formerly a theatre, was acquired in 1913. This African-American church, like many others, has served its members as an educational and social foundation as well as a religious institution.

**Report**

While some of the marker's statements are accurate and supported by primary source documentation, the church's two founding dates cannot be substantiated by accessible primary source documentation. This review will point out discrepancies in the documentation of the church's early history, provide context on Baptist churches in Indiana, and present specific examples of how the Second Baptist Church served Columbus's African American community as an educational, social, and religious foundation.

During segregation, African Americans developed their own churches to meet their communities' spiritual needs.

[1] During the migration of African Americans from southern to northern states in the late 1800s, the number of black Baptists increased.[2] There were a total of 15 black Baptist churches in Indiana in 1867, which grew to 53 churches by 1877. From 1867 to 1887 the number of congregants increased from under one thousand to approximately 5,500.[3]

According to historian Gwendolyn Crenshaw, churches are the "oldest and most enduring organizations in the African American community." They are also "the oldest self-help institutions within the community."[4] In addition to fulfilling the religious needs of its members,[5] Second Baptist served as a center of activities in the African American community of Columbus. For example, the congregation hosted a variety of social events including festivals,[6] socials,[7] dinner parties,[8] picnics.[9] Many clubs and organizations, some attached to the church and others not, used the church as a meeting space including the Reapers club society,[10] Good Samaritans,[11] Colored Odd Fellows,[12] and Daughters of Ruth.[13] Cultural and educational events were also hosted in the church building including concerts,[14] lectures,[15] and school presentations.[16] Additionally, Second Baptist and its congregants served as a center for community support and charity activities. For example after the death of a church member, the church's Mothers Society provided aid to her family.[17]

It is difficult to confirm both the initial founding date of the Second Baptist Church and the re-establishment of the church by Reverend John Miller in 1882. IHB staff has been unable to locate any sources confirming the congregation's first founding date in 1879.[18] The earliest newspaper sources only date as far back as 1884 and no other primary source evidence is extant.

According to an article in a 125th celebration publication for the Indiana Missionary Baptist State Convention (1982), Reverend John R. Miller organized the Second Baptist Church in 1882. His was reportedly the third attempt to establish a black Baptist congregation in Columbus. However, he left the congregation in 1891, but was recalled when the church began to fall apart.[19] Some of this narrative is confirmed by newspaper articles. The earliest record of Miller's connection to the church is the newspaper article from 1884. An 1890 city directory for Columbus marks John Miller as Pastor of the "Colored" Baptist Church for that year. However, another man named Reverend Isabel is identified as pastor in Columbus newspapers for 1893 and most of 1894. Miller seems to have moved to another church and then returned to the Columbus Second Baptist church around 1894. Two 1894 newspaper articles identify Miller as the "new" pastor of the Church, and an 1895 article states that he was "recalled for an indefinite period," suggesting that he had been a Pastor of the church previously. However, no sources could be found confirming Miller's involvement in re-establishing the church in 1882.

According to a tax record submitted by the applicant, the congregation acquired a theatre building in 1913, as the marker text states, which was renovated the following year to meet the church's needs.[20]

In 1915, Second Baptist Church was located on Ninth and the Northwest corner of Reed. The directory marks the church as "colored" and the pastor as Reverend James Smith.[21] This location is confirmed by a 1927 Sanborn map.[22]

The eastern association of colored Baptist churches of Indiana held their annual meeting in the church in 1894.[23] Revivals and camp meetings were a regular fixture in the church's calendar.[24]

The congregation purchased property for the church in 1886.[25] By 1891, a *Columbus Herald* article stated that a "new Baptist Church, belonging to the colored people of the city is approaching completion."[26]

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[1] Emma Lou Thornbrough, "The Negro in Indiana: A Study of a Minority," *Indiana Historical Collections*, vol. 37 (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1957): 368.

[2] For more information on African American migration in the United State, see this Library of Congress website.

[3] Emma Lou Thornbrough, "The Negro in Indiana: A Study of a Minority," *Indiana Historical Collections*, vol. 37 (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1957): 369.

*All newspaper articles are from NewspaperArchive.com unless otherwise indicated* (Columbus, IN: Bartholomew County Historical Society, 1976): 104; *Atlas of Bartholomew co., Indiana; to which are added various general maps, history, statistics, illustrations, &c* (Chicago, IL: J.H. Beers and Company, 1879), p. ?.

[4]Gwendolyn Crenshaw, "Indiana African-American Landmarks and Their History," *Black History News & Notes*, no. 56 (May 1994): 2.

[5] Baptisms, funerals, revivals, prayer meetings, church services, etc. *Columbus Daily Herald*, June 20, 1891, n.p.;

[6] "Cake Walk," Columbus Daily Times, October 11, 1895, n.p.; Columbus Herald, November 5, 1883, n.p.

[7]Columbus Daily Times, December 9, 1893, n.p.;

[8] "Coon with Coon Gravy," Columbus Daily Herald, November 27, 1891, n.p.

[9] "Picnic," Columbus Herald, June 25, 1884, n.p.

[10] "Colored News Notes," Columbus Daily Times, July 16, 1899, n.p., accessed NewspaperArchive.com.

[11] "Colored Good Samaritans," Columbus Daily Herald, April 27, 1892, p. 1;

[12] "Colored Odd Fellows," Columbus Daily Herald, April 4, 1892, n.p.; "The C.U.O.O.F.," Columbus Daily Herald, April 1, 1892, n.p.;

[13] Columbus Daily Herald, December 8, 1891, n.p.

[14] "Colored News Notes," Columbus Daily Times, June 4, 1897, n.p., accessed NewspaperArchive.com.

[15] "Second Baptist," Columbus Daily Times, December 23, 1895, n.p., accessed Newspaper Archive.com; "Colored Schools," Columbus Daily Times, December 21, 1895, n.p., NewspaperArchive.com; "Colored News Notes," Columbus Daily Times, May 14, 1895, n.p.; Columbus Daily Herald, March 6, 1891, n.p.

[16] "Children's Day," Columbus Daily Herald, May 21, 1894, n.p.;

[17] "Colored News Notes," Columbus Daily Times, August 1, 1899, n.p., accessed NewspaperArchive.com.

[18] According to the *History of Bartholomew County Indiana—1888*, the Second Baptist Church appeared in a map of Columbus in the "Illustrated Atlas of Bartholomew County--1879" located on the southeast corner of Fifth Street and Mechanic Street. Staff located the Atlas, however, the map of Columbus is illegible. *History of Bartholomew County Indiana—1888: An annotated edition of the Bartholomew County Section of the 1888 Bartholomew County History, including biographies, with addition of new editor's notes, addenda articles, old photographs and maps,*

[19] James R. Bradley and William R. Johnson, Jr., "125th Celebration of the Indiana Missionary Baptist State Convention, July 30-August 6, 1982," 160.

[20] 1996 Property Tax assessment for Second Baptist Church, submitted by applicant.

[21] *Carson's Directory of the City of Columbus, Indiana for 1915-1916, vol. I* (Louisville, KY: Carson Directory Co., 1915), 19.

[22] *Columbus Indiana Sanborn Company Map, January 1927* (New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1927).

[23] "Ministerial Meet," *[Columbus, Indiana] Daily Times*, August 1, 1894, p. 2;

[24] Columbus Herald, July 21, 1893, p. 4;

[25] "Basket Meeting," Columbus Herald, October 2, 1886, n.p.

[26] The Columbus Herald, April 14, 1891, n.p.