

was valued at \$55,000 and he owned 208 slaves. After his death, he passed some of his wealth to his widow, Charlotte Bryan Fort Ricks (1795-1874) and to his youngest son, Abraham Ricks, Jr. (1825-1878). The 1860 agricultural census recorded Abraham, Jr. owning 44,900 acres of land, which among other things produced 10,000 acres of corn and 52,000 lbs. of cotton. Mrs. Ricks owned 56 slaves that year and Abraham, Jr. owned 19 slaves.

The manor was documented for the Historic American Buildings Survey (AL-362) in 1935. At the time, the house was vacant and in disrepair, however, an old slave cabin was still standing. The house stayed in the Ricks family until 1966 when it was sold to William Kimbrough who restored it. It was added to the National Register for Historic Places (#76000319) in 1976. At that time, the old kitchen with a stone chimney was still intact. Sometime in the 1980s or 1990s, an addition was added to the west side of the house where the kitchen once stood.

Just south of The Oaks Plantation, but not part of the NRHP property, is the Ricks Church, or Church of Christ. This church is said to have been established by Abraham Ricks or his son in the mid-19th century for the slaves or former slaves of the Ricks' plantation. The church also held classes for African American children in the late 19th and early 20th century, known as The Oaks (School).

The Catholic churches of the Shoals have a shared history. Our Lady of Grace, at first referred to as Our Lady's Mission, began across the river in Florence. According to Dr. Suzanne Thurman Makowski in her work, *One Hundred Years of Work and Prayer: St. Joseph Catholic Church, Florence, Alabama 1898-1998*, "During the early war years [of World War II], Rev. Isadore Fussnecker's work was part of the broader attempt of the Catholic Church to reach out to non-white Catholics in response to a 1936 letter from the Sacred Consistorial Congregation encouraging the establishment of more 'Colored Missions' in the United States. American bishops took this admonition to heart, and in 1941 'an intense program on behalf of the Negroes [was] undertaken by' the Bishop of Mobile, Thomas Toolen, D. D., whose diocese [had] 29 'Colored Missions' at the beginning of the year."

The first Catholic church of people of color in the Shoals area was in Florence and was founded between 1945 and 1955 by Father Isadore. Prominent African American entrepreneur and businesswoman, Ms. Bessie Rapier Foster (1882-1963), lent assistance

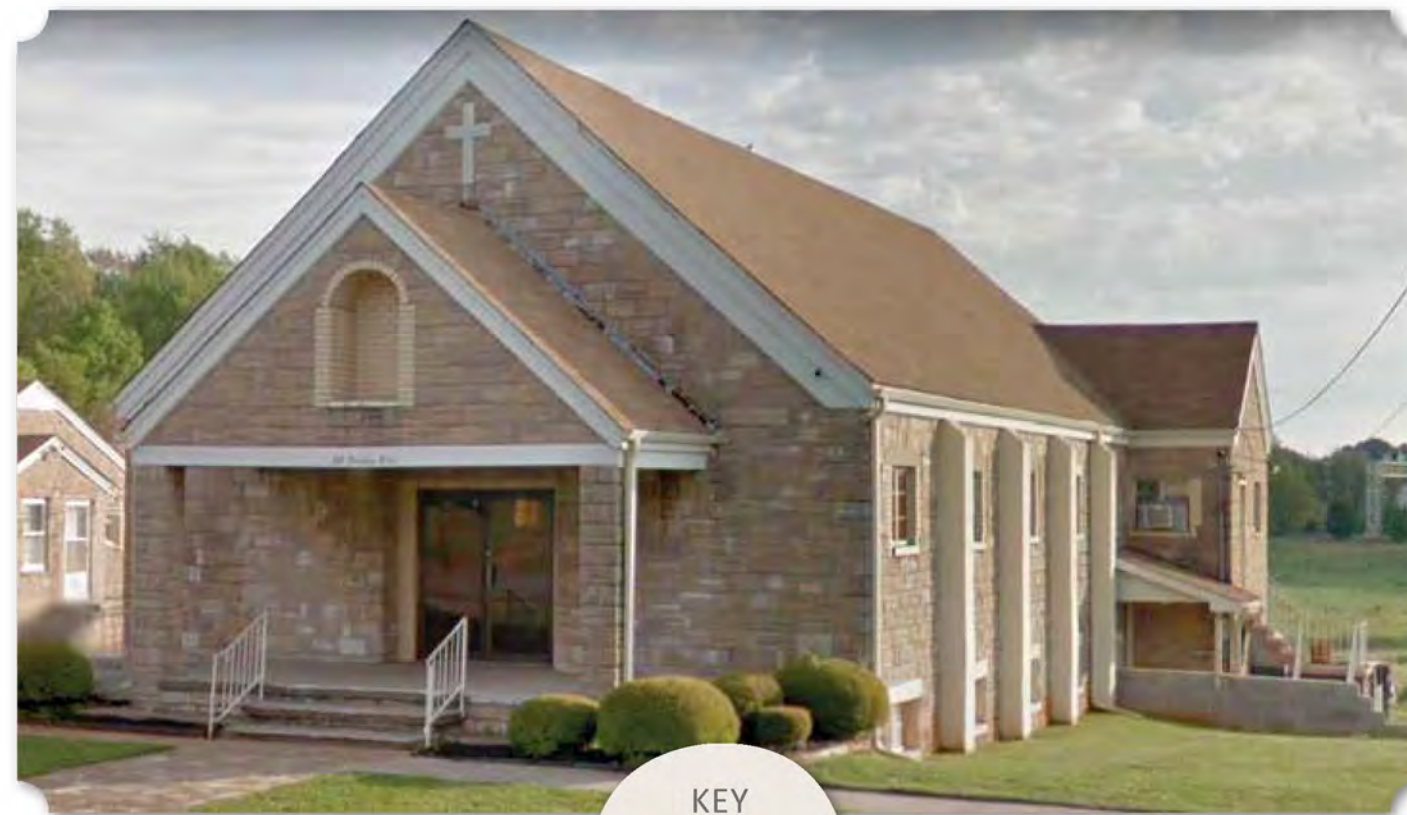


(Above) Photograph of the Interior of Our Lady of Grace Church when it Served the Catholic Church (www.ourladyoftheshoals.org) (Below) Present-day Sterling Boulevard Church of Christ, Formerly, Our Lady of Grace (Google Street View, April 2014)

to this mission's founding. By 1959, the mission moved south to Sheffield. The church that stands on 19th Street, was built by Father Germaine Taylor with help from the Catholic Church Extension Society and Cardinal Cushing. The community raised money for the new church, the biggest contribution came from W. C. Handy, Florence's most renowned Blues musician. Handy put on a benefit concert on Sunday June 12, 1949 at the Princess Theatre in Florence – built in 1928 and partly owned by Louis Rosenbaum. A total of \$11,000 was raised by the crowd that came from all over North Alabama. The official groundbreaking was attended by several Tri-City families, both white and of color.

The mission was short lived however. Once Father Germaine passed away in 1959, the parish was served by Father Brice Joyce, who stayed from 1960 to 1967. Afterwards, the members of Our Lady of Grace joined with Our Lady of the Shoals in Tusculmbia. The church building was sold and it is now Sterling Boulevard Church of Christ.

(Below) Photograph of Father Germaine Blessing the Cornerstone of Our Lady of Grace (www.ourladyoftheshoals.org)



KEY

- COMMUNITIES
- CEMETERIES
- CHURCHES
- PLANTATIONS
- SCHOOLS
- OTHER



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One thing you might not expect to find in the "Baptist Bottom" of Sheffield is a Catholic church. Contrary to much of the history of Alabama, and as noted previously, the Shoals were first settled by the French – most of whom were Catholic. As the Tri-Cities grew, a significant portion of the communities remained Catholic and had an active role in the creation of parishes and missions. The short-lived Our Lady of Grace was once located on the southern end of Sterling Boulevard, or 19th Street.

* Indicates a Historical - Non-Extant Resource