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## Florence Bethel Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America

The Florence Bethel Cumberland Presbyterian Church is located on the southeast corner of the intersection of East Alabama and South Walnut streets in Florence. Formerly known as the Cumberland Colored Presbyterian Church, a historical marker in front of the church calls it “the ‘Mother Church’ of the Presbytery.” The church was established in 1898 when the property was deeded by the city of Florence. By 1918, the church had bought the property on Alabama Street and built a frame church. The congregation at the time was led by Rev. Holt Smith. An annex and the Jerome Robinson Education building were planned in 1948 by Rev. Earl McDonald. The annex was later named after the Reverend. In 1997, the church officially became the Florence Bethel CP Church in America.

The historical topographic maps concur with the history of the church. It was constructed two years

**(Below)** Photograph of Florence Bethel Cumberland Presbyterian Church, 2009 (Historical Marker Database [www.HMdb.org](http://www.HMdb.org), via User Sandra Hughes)



after the 1916 map and first appears on the 1936 USGS topographic map. However, the church is not labeled due to the density of the city.

# 11

## Florence City Cemetery

The Florence City Cemetery dates to the founding of the city and the state in 1818. The earliest known plat map does not include the cemetery, as it only goes as far east as Chestnut Street. However, the cemetery was part of the original plan. Like most large, planned cities, the cemetery originally was located beyond the city limits. By the late 19th century, the city had grown on the west side and the cemetery was no longer isolated. Today, the cemetery is surrounded by the city of Florence.

The cemetery covers over 30 acres between present-day East Tennessee, Limestone, South Plum, and Magnolia streets. There are nearly 9,000 people buried there, from early settlers to prominent African American Florentines. The cemetery is the final resting place for the son and brother of Ferdinand Sannorner, the surveyor of Florence; two former state Governors of the O’Neal family; and several of the prominent African American businessmen of Florence.

Florence City Cemetery was the principal cemetery for over 130 years, and it has an African American section where several well-known citizens of color are buried, including many of the businessmen and professionals of Florence. Dr. Charles Grey (unknown-1908) was a young physician who came to Florence to practice and succumbed to tuberculosis. Henry M.O. Terry (1878-1936) was a notable undertaker; his wife, Josephine, is buried with him. Famed beautician Ms. Bessie Rapier Foster (1887-1963) is buried here, along with her mother, Susan Rapier (1881-1927). Robert Buckingham (1873-1940) and his wife, Hellon (or Helen), owned a grocery store in Florence in the 1910s and 1920s. Famous “You Better Move On” singer-songwriter, Arthur B. Alexander, Jr. (1940-1993), originally

from Sheffield, was brought back to Florence for his burial. Lastly, two former slaves and body servants of Confederate soldiers, George Washington Seawright (1848-1931) and Reuben Patterson (1833-1928), are both laid to rest here. They both went into business in Florence at the turn of the 20th century.

# 12

## Forks of Cypress

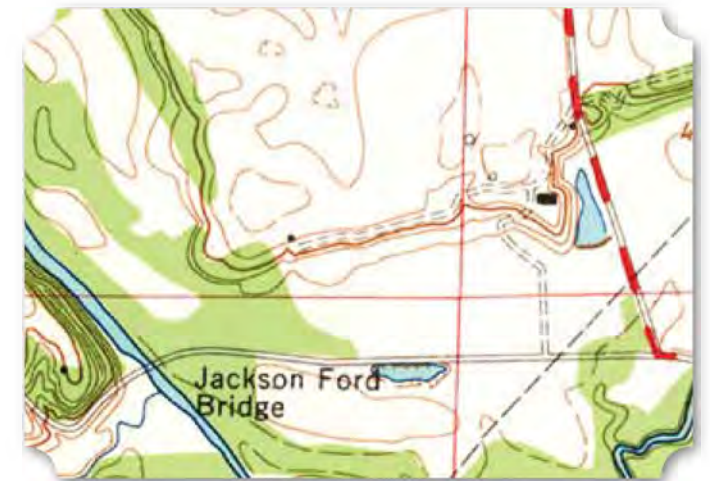
The Forks of Cypress was a plantation located northwest of Florence at a fork in Cypress Creek. The plantation was established in 1818 by James and Sarah Jackson, and the large house was built about 1830. The manor house was designed by William Nichol, but was built by skilled, enslaved, African American artisans on the plantation. The house is known for its limestone foundation and 23 brick columns. In its prime, the columns and house were plastered in lime, horsehair, and molasses. Unfortunately, the house was struck by lightning in the summer of 1966, and all but the brick columns burned.

**(Below)** 1936 USGS Topographic Map of Forks of Cypress, Florence, Alabama Quadrangle



### KEY

- COMMUNITIES
- CEMETERIES
- CHURCHES
- PLANTATIONS
- SCHOOLS



**(Above)** 1957 USGS Topographic Map of Forks of Cypress, Florence, Alabama Quadrangle **(Below)** 1971 USGS Topographic Map of Forks of Cypress, Florence, Alabama Quadrangle



A cemetery is located to the east of the house. Besides the well-kept family cemetery for the white slave owners and their descendants, there is a substantial slave cemetery, also known as the “Black Servants’ Cemetery,” about 200 feet from the family cemetery. The slave cemetery has about 250 graves, most of them only marked by field stones, the rest are completely unmarked. According to the National Register nomination form, the only evidence of who might be buried here comes from the census records of 1840 through 1870 and James Jackson’s will. When James Jackson died in 1840, he had 85 slaves at Forks of Cypress. The slaves were listed by both first and last name – a distinction rarely afforded