

The brick shed was purchased in 1857 by the local African American Methodist congregation and became a school for Freedmen and their children supported by either the American Missionary Association or the Freedmen's Bureau after Emancipation. In 1879, the church was reorganized as the African Methodist Episcopal Church. According to the church history, Jacob Wytch came to Florence in 1879 as a valet for a superintendent of the Methodist church. Mr. Wytch is credited with forming the AME Church in Florence. This most likely is the same Mr. Wytch who went on to be a successful merchant and grocer in Florence.

In order to raise funds to purchase a lot of land on the corner of Court and Alabama streets in 1895,

the church held a "Fair and Supper" at the county courthouse. With the lot purchased, the old building was dismantled and the bricks were reused to build a new church. When the cornerstone was laid, the church was deemed St. Paul AME Church.

The church stayed at that location until 1968 when it relocated to South Cherokee Street in the Canaan neighborhood, across the street from Burrell Slater High School. When the church moved, it brought the old bell, the memorial stained-glass windows, and the two previous cornerstones. This new church was named Greater St. Paul AME Church. The long and rich history of the church is important to its congregation and the community at large. Many significant members of the community have been associated with the church over its nearly 180-year history. Former pastors include Rev. William Wise

(Left) Photograph of the Second Incarnation of the St. Paul AME Church before it was Torn Down in the 1960s (Florence-Lauderdale Public Library via Facebook.com) **(Below)** Aerial Photograph of Second Incarnation of the St. Paul AME Church before it was Torn Down in the 1960s (Florence-Lauderdale Public Library via Facebook.com)



(Above) Photograph of St. Paul African Methodist Episcopal Church, 2010 (Historical Marker Database www.HMdb.org, User Sandra Hughes)

Handy, grandfather to famed musician W.C. Handy, and Rev. Charles Bernard Handy, his father. W.C. Handy purchased one of the memorial windows moved from the second church to the third.

A historical marker notes the location of the original church at present-day Veterans Drive and Court Street and another at the current location on South Cherokee Street. Early 20th century maps of Florence are too crowded to depict the church on the corner of Court and Alabama streets. By 1936, the church is depicted, but not labeled. The 1971 topographic map indicates the church in its current location.

17 ■ ■ Hickory Hill Plantation* and John Coffee Servants' Cemetery

General John Coffee (1772-1833) served as a cavalry commander under Andrew Jackson during the War of 1812. Coffee was one of the founding fathers of Florence and a trustee of the Cypress Land Company. He is sometimes credited with planning the design of Florence and hiring the original surveyor. His plantation was called Hickory Hill and was located just north of Florence along Cox Creek.

A cemetery known as John Coffee Servants Cemetery is the old slave cemetery, a one-acre area of land that is all that is left of the plantation. It is currently surrounded by development including a large Walmart

(Below) 1936 USGS Topographic Map of Hickory Hill Plantation and John Coffee Servants' Cemetery, Florence, Alabama Quadrangle

