

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Mt. Canaan Baptist Church  
Other name/site number: NA  
Name of related multiple property listing: NA

2. Location

Street & number: 60 Sycamore St.  
City or town: Paris State: Texas County: Lamar  
Not for publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐

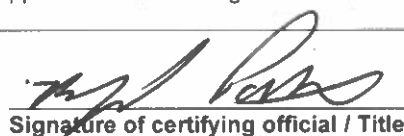
3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  
(☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility) meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the  
National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my  
opinion, the property (☒ meets ☐ does not meet) the National Register criteria.

I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following levels of significance:

☐ national ☐ statewide ☒ local

Applicable National Register Criteria: ☒ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D

  
Signature of certifying official / Title

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

5/20/24  
Date

Texas Historical Commission

State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register  
☐ determined eligible for the National Register  
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register  
☐ removed from the National Register  
☐ other, explain: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Mt. Canaan Baptist Church, Paris, Lamar County, Texas

## 5. Classification

### Ownership of Property

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Private
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Federal

### Category of Property

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

### Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	1	objects
1	1	total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

## 6. Function or Use

**Historic Functions:** Religion: religious facility

**Current Functions:** Religion: religious facility

## 7. Description

**Architectural Classification:** Late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Revivals: Gothic Revival

**Principal Exterior Materials:** Wood, Asphalt shingles, Glass

**Narrative Description** (see continuation sheets 7-6 through 7-8)

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>A</b>	Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>B</b>	Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>C</b>	Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>D</b>	Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations:** Criteria Consideration A (Religious Properties)

**Areas of Significance:** Social History, Ethnic Heritage: Black (*local level of significance*)

**Period of Significance:** 1910-1974

**Significant Dates:** 1910

**Significant Person** (only if criterion b is marked): NA

**Cultural Affiliation** (only if criterion d is marked): NA

**Architect/Builder:** NA

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (see continuation sheets 8-9 through 8-14)

## 9. Major Bibliographic References

**Bibliography** (see continuation sheet 9-15 through 9-16)

### Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested. Part 1 approved on (date)
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

### Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State historic preservation office (*Texas Historical Commission, Austin*)
- ☐ Other state agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☒ Other -- Specify Repository: Lamar County Historical Society

**Historic Resources Survey Number** (if assigned): NA

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## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property:** Less than 1 acre

### Coordinates

#### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: NA

1. Latitude: 33.648348° Longitude: -95.555452°

**Verbal Boundary Description:** Property ID# 19958 TEXAS & PACIFIC ADDITION, BLOCK 5, LOT E PT OF 11 & E PT OF LOT 12, 60 SYCAMORE ST (0.152 acres)

**Boundary Justification:** The boundary includes all property historically and currently associated with the nominated building.

## 11. Form Prepared By

Name/title: Sandra Massey (Member) with assistance from Bonnie L. Tipton (Historian), Texas Historical Commission and Dr. Corey Capers (Assoc. Professor of History, Texas State University-San Marcos)

Organization: Mt. Canaan Baptist Church

Street & number: 60 Sycamore St.

City or Town: Paris State: TX Zip Code: 75460

Email: [skmassey4@yahoo.com](mailto:skmassey4@yahoo.com)

Telephone: (903) 227-0669

Date: 8/1/2022

## Additional Documentation

**Maps** (see continuation sheets MAP-17 through MAP-18)

**Additional items** (see continuation sheets FIGURE-19 through FIGURE-31)

**Photographs** (see continuation sheets PHOTO-32 through PHOTO-42)



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## Photograph Log

Mt. Canaan Baptist Church  
Paris, Lamar County, Texas  
Photographed by Bonnie L. Tipton  
July 25-26, 2022

Photo 1: Looking west at Mt. Canaan Baptist Church and Cotton Compress where congregants historically worked.

Photo 2: Looking southeast across the Texas & Pacific Railway tracks at the church (center background), compress (right), and former gin (left).

Photo 3: North elevation, camera facing south.

Photo 4: Northeast oblique showing one of two main entrances. Camera faces southwest.

Photo 5: Detail of northeast tower.

Photo 6: Original cornerstone beneath siding on the west elevation. "Mt. Canaan Baptist Church, Erected 1910, Rev. M.B. Atkins"

Photo 7: Northwest oblique showing the second of two main entrances. Scalloped fascia is original. Camera looks southeast.

Photo 8: West elevation showing rear addition. Camera looks northeast.

Photo 9: Dentilled wood molding and modest "capitals" top corner posts. Camera looking northwest at south elevation.

Photo 10: Rear (south elevation) additions supported the growing congregation. Camera looks north.

Photo 11: Historic-age siding on the east elevation. Camera looks northwest.

Photo 12: Sanctuary. Camera looking southwest.

Photo 13: Sanctuary. Camera looking northeast.

Photo 14: Baptismal and mural on south wall of sanctuary.

Photo 15: Hallway, view west.

Photo 16: Original molding, transom, and door inside the dining room. Camera looks east.

Photo 17: The kitchen (now enclosed) is in an area that was likely a porch added in 1939. Looking south inside the southwest corner of the building.

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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## Narrative Description

Mt. Canaan Baptist Church, built in 1910 in Paris, Lamar County is a one-story wood frame church with a modified cross plan. Though modest in size, the church easily retains its historic ecclesiastic identity with Gothic Revival asymmetrical corner towers. It is of pier and beam construction with a mix of wood and vinyl siding and an asphalt shingle cross gabled roof. Located two blocks south of the Texas & Pacific Railway tracks, it is on a grassy lot across from the Paris cotton oil mill and refinery. The church and industrial buildings are the only extant resources that document the TP Community, a working-class African American enclave that developed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century at the southern edge of Paris. An Official Texas Historical Marker honoring the congregation's history located on the property is a non-contributing object.

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## Setting

Mt. Canaan Baptist Church is at the southernmost city limits of Paris, Lamar County, approximately one mile south of the county courthouse and across the former Texas & Pacific Railroad tracks. It is on a corner lot at Sycamore Street between South Main Street and Church Street, two primary thoroughfares in Paris. The large Paris Cotton Oil Mill and Refinery is across South Main Street. Many congregants, particularly in its early years, worked for the mill or railway company. Topographically, the area is flat with mature trees. Streets around the church are paved but without curbs or sidewalks. Historically, the historically African American neighborhood was known as the "TP Community" (a name that referenced the rail line) with modest frame residences next to cotton industry buildings on blocks around the church. Today, Mt. Canaan Baptist Church is the only extant resource left of that community. The area is characterized by light industry buildings between vacant lots.

The nominated boundary is a 0.15-acre lot with the sanctuary sited against the east property line and set back from the roadway. Because the lots at the corner of S. Main and Sycamore are undeveloped, there is a large grassy lawn surrounding the front and west sides of the building. Mature trees characterize the south end and east side of the property. A concrete sidewalk is centered with the church's north elevation and starts after the drainage ditch. It curves to the northeast and northwest corner entrances. A wood ramp for wheelchair access leads to the northwest entrance. An Official Texas Historical Marker (2015) is a non-contributing object standing alongside the sidewalk leading to the northeast entrance. (See Figure 12 for marker text.)

## Mt. Canaan Baptist Church

### *Exterior*

Mt. Canaan Baptist Church, built in 1910 in Paris, Lamar County, is a modest one-story wood frame church with a modified cross plan and asymmetrical corner towers that stands as a vernacular expression of Gothic Revival ecclesial style. It is of pier and beam construction with a mix of clapboard, wood, and asbestos siding and an asphalt shingle cross gable roof. Over the decades, efforts to refurbish and repair the church resulted in material alterations and rear additions that expanded the building's footprint. Windows in the 1910 section are non-historic metal frame in the original openings, likely installed c. 1950. The church also has non-historic doors, wood and asbestos siding, and roof materials.

The **north** elevation, facing Sycamore Street, is characterized by the steeply pitched front gable and asymmetrical corner towers. Original bargeboard with scalloped ends decorates the otherwise plain roofline. This detail is repeated on the west and east gables and above entrances. A paired window, originally 4/4 wood frame, punctuates the center of this elevation. A large metal cross is above the window. Non-historic wood siding now covers the once exposed pier and beam foundation and the church's cornerstone. **(Photo 6)**

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Entrances to Mt. Canaan Baptist Church are in the towers built into the northeast and northwest corners of the cross plan. This design feature reflects the early 20<sup>th</sup> century popularity of Gothic vocabulary in religious architecture. Historically, each entrance was double doors with a simple wood surround and transom. Non-historic double doors replaced the original and siding covers the transoms. Each tower is chamfered at entrance level and rises above the roofline as four-sided with pyramidal roofs. Spires originally topped both towers. The northeast tower is taller and may have housed a bell. The northwest tower is shorter and squatter without any elaborations.

The **west** elevation faces S. Main Street and the oil mill. There are two distinct parts to this façade that demonstrate the building's physical evolution: the main 1910 sanctuary structure and a recessed addition added after 1946 and modified through the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The main sanctuary portion is fenestrated (north to south) with a single window, paired windows under the gable, followed by another single window and a small window for the interior restroom. These last two windows are evidence of the 1939 addition that infilled the rear wing's west and east elevations, which are now covered by non-historic vinyl siding and the continuous roof line. The post-1946 rear addition is recessed approximately three feet from the main sanctuary's wall plane. **(Photo 8)** Its west elevation is faced with an early 20<sup>th</sup> century lap siding and wood panels with corrugated metal at the building's base. Wood dentil cornice molding **(Photo 9)** under the roofline may date to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Its location here suggests the material was removed from one part of the original structure and reused here. Three non-historic windows punctuate the addition's west elevation.

The **south** elevation has three converging rooflines illustrating different alterations the church made in the mid-and late-20<sup>th</sup> century. The west section, covered in a partially hipped roof, is clad in 1930s-era drop siding and continues the dentilled cornice molding. The east section, slightly recessed from the west section, has a shed roof with a mix of wood paneling and siding and paired late 20<sup>th</sup> century metal frame windows. **Photo 8**, taken where these sections converge, shows modest classical vocabulary expressed in a corner wood post with a flat "capital" and the dentilled molding. These materials also evidence a pattern of reuse in improvement projects the church periodically undertook. However, it is not clear if other wood "columns" existed on other parts of the building.

The **east** elevation is close to the property line and partially obscured by trees. Like the west elevation, there are two distinct parts to this façade: the main sanctuary structure and a recessed addition added after 1946 with its own modifications made up to 1970. From north to south, the first three window openings are symmetrical with the west façade. Alterations to the sanctuary include an added door (covered by a metal awning) with concrete steps and a small window where the original rear wing was infilled in 1939. Further south, a wood porch extends from the post-1946 addition, which is recessed from the sanctuary section. The addition has lap siding, a door opening to the porch, and paired windows with simple wood molding. Wood siding infill was used to retrofit mid-20<sup>th</sup> century windows into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century window opening.

### *Interior*

Mt. Canaan Baptist Church's interior is designed with a traditional sanctuary that opens off the two entry vestibules. The sanctuary historically and currently occupies the church's 1910 footprint. Pews are arranged in a center row of eight with two rows of pews in the west and east wings, all facing the altar. The wood floors, recently refinished, are original. Furniture—pews, altar, piano, lectern—ceiling fans, drop ceilings, and wood panel wainscot date to 1970 and later. Two pews for the church's choir face the congregation from behind the altar. A baptistry is centered on the south wall with a mural of Jesus that was painted by a church member in the 1940s.

The church's rear floorplan evolved between 1939 and 2024. Single doors on the south walls of the east and west sanctuary wings are evidence of the first (1939) addition that created, what is now, a small classroom (west) and meeting room (east). A narrow hall runs parallel to the sanctuary with restrooms, office, and small lounge. Double doors from the hallway lead to the dining and kitchen areas in the rear addition. Common materials throughout the

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interior included red carpeting, vinyl flooring, and beadboard walls. Evidence of re-purposing historic materials is also apparent on the interior. The post-1946 dining room, for example, features a wood door with wood molding and transom more common to early 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings.

### Integrity

Mt. Canaan Baptist Church retains integrity to convey its historic significance, especially aspects of location, design, setting, feeling, and association.<sup>1</sup> It is at its original location south of the Texas & Pacific railroad tracks in the former TP Community. Despite the loss of the 1911 Bankhead School and residences, the church and remaining industrial and railway resources convey the historic setting. The building's historic design is evident in its modest scale, asymmetrical corner towers, cross-plan, overall form, and interior arrangement. Since its original construction in 1910, the small self-supporting congregation has built rear additions, made interior alterations, and performed routine repairs to improve, modernize, and maintain the building for subsequent generations. Evident in this work is a pattern of reusing historic materials to supplement non-historic materials in new construction and/or repairs. As one of three extant Black churches in Paris, and the only socio-cultural institution resource associated with this particular Black enclave, these refurbishing efforts highlight the building's ongoing importance to the local community. Thus, the period of significance extends up to 1974 and includes these material changes. Mt. Canaan Baptist Church remains strongly associated with its descendant community, whose recent preservation efforts include obtaining an Official Texas Historical Marker.

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<sup>1</sup> Integrity issues for sites associated with people of color and marginalized communities have been well documented. However, although the historic places may lose some integrity, the importance of these places to the marginalized communities is significant and strong. See National Council on Public History's History@Work blog post, "Repairing National Register Nominations: Underrepresented Communities and Integrity," available online at: <https://ncph.org/history-at-work/repairing-national-register-nominations-underrepresented-communities-and-integrity/>, 21 July 2020; National Trust for Historic Preservation's "Preserving African American Places: Growing Preservation's Potential as a Path for Equity," available online at: <https://savingplaces.org/equity-report>, October 2020; and the recent opinion by Sara Bronin, "How to Fix a National Register of Historic Places that Reflects Mostly White History," in the *Los Angeles Times*, available online at: <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2020-12-15/historic-preservation-chicano-moratorium-national-register>, 15 December 2020 for additional discussion around integrity and minority spaces.

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## Statement of Significance

The 1910 Mt. Canaan Baptist Church is an African American church in Paris, Lamar County. Its congregation was initially organized in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and worshipped in members' homes. In 1903, trustees purchased land in the TP Community, an African American working-class residential district named for the Texas & Pacific Railway. The congregation constructed a wood frame vernacular Gothic Revival church, completed in 1910, to serve the neighborhood's mill workers, cotton ginner, and teachers. For more than 120 years, Mt. Canaan Baptist Church provided a venue that nurtured and supported Black Parisians socially, economically, politically, and spiritually. It is the oldest extant African American church building, having survived the 1916 fire that devastated Paris, and one of three extant resources associated with the city's once-thriving Black community. It is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion A in the areas of Social History and Ethnic Heritage: Black. The period of significance begins in 1910 and ends in 1974, the 50-year threshold for listing in the National Register. The property derives its primary significance from its historical associations, and thus satisfactorily meets Criteria Consideration A (Religious Properties).

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## African Americans in Paris, Lamar County

Lamar County was established as an act of the Fifth Congress of the Republic of Texas on December 17, 1840 and organized by election on February 1, 1841.<sup>2</sup> What became Paris, the county seat, began as a settlement along the Republic's Central National Road, which connected it to Dallas and San Antonio. Since its beginning, Paris has served as the economic and governmental center of Lamar County and northeast Texas. The arrival of the Texas & Pacific Railroad in 1876 and the Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe Railroad in 1887 and the tracks created de facto town limits for Paris at its south, west, and north sides. By the 1880s, five railroad lines serviced Paris and the city, along with Texarkana, became a major transportation hub for cotton, lumber, and other manufactured goods.

The most profound influence on the town, however, came from the cotton industry. For more than 100 years, practically every aspect of cotton was realized in Paris, from cotton grading, brokering, and processing to shipping. It was the single most principal factor shaping its social, economic, architectural, and cultural development.<sup>3</sup> Paris Oil & Cotton Company compress, refinery, and warehouses were built in 1880-1881, and a nearby cottonseed oil mill was built in 1882-1883. This industrial area, one mile south of the county courthouse, grew around the Texas & Pacific Railway tracks and passenger and freight depots. By 1910, it included the Transcontinental Cotton Company, furniture and canning factories, wholesalers, and numerous warehouses.<sup>4</sup>

Paris's prosperous cotton industry sparked its first major population boom. Between 1880 and 1890, it jumped from 3,900 to 8,250 people. Of the total reported, 2,000 newcomers were working-class African Americans.<sup>5</sup> The cotton gin and oil mill offered employment opportunities in processing and distribution. Other major employers were the railway companies transporting freight and passengers through Paris. Industrial and railway jobs were more stable and

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<sup>2</sup> The nominated building's contextual history is related to the MRA *Historic Resources of Paris, Texas* but that document does not outline social history themes under which Mt. Canaan Baptist Church is evaluated. Adapted from: National Register of Historic Places, *Historic Resources of Paris, TX*, Paris, Lamar County, Texas, National Register #64000850.

<https://atlas.thc.texas.gov/NR/pdfs/64000850/64000850.pdf>; Louise W. Hagood and Skipper Steely, *The Paris Cotton Press, 1880-1978*, Texas Historical Commission Marker Application, 2013. On file at the Texas Historical Commission. National Register of Historic Places, *Historic Resources of Paris, TX*, Paris, Lamar County, Texas, National Register #64000850. Rev. Michael Massey, *Mt. Canaan Baptist Church*, Texas Historical Marker Application, 2015. On file at the Texas Historical Commission.

<sup>3</sup> Haywood and Steely, "Context."

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Haywood and Steely, "Context."

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offered more autonomy to African Americans than sharecropping. Seasonal work in cotton planting and harvesting also created a transient labor force of African Americans, many of whom came to Paris from neighboring states.

As a result of the city's strong economy and labor market, a relatively affluent Black middle-class and working-class community developed in the 1880s and thrived through the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. This area, north of the courthouse, was roughly bounded by Pine Bluff (south), E. Provine (north), E. 27<sup>th</sup> (east) and S. Church (west), with neighborhoods called Boardtown and Grangertown.<sup>6</sup> A business district, called "Guest's Corner," was near the intersection of E. Tudor and N. 24<sup>th</sup> (now NE 5<sup>th</sup>). Black-owned businesses along Tudor Street included the Alhambra and Buford Theaters, tailors, barbers, teamsters, butchers, grocers, physicians, undertakers, and shopkeepers. In 1884, a segregated school was established on North Jefferson Street. Later named Gibbons High School (1918), it provided Black students secondary education through the mid-century. Churches, all within a half-mile of each other, were the community's most important institutions: St. Paul's Baptist and Olive Branch Baptist, an African Methodist Episcopal Church, two Colored Methodist Episcopal Churches, a Christian Church, and a Congregational Church.<sup>7</sup>

A second, smaller Black enclave also developed in south Paris at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1887, the Texas & Pacific (T&P) Railway platted a 14-block residential addition across from its tracks (**Figure 2**). Affordable lots attracted African American buyers, like M.J. and Josie Booker and Mt. Canaan trustee Will Johnson, who built modest wood-frame homes in blocks next to the Paris Oil & Cotton Company. Residents, many of whom worked for the railroad and cotton industries, called it the TP Community, and Mt. Canaan Baptist Church (1910) and the Bankhead School (1911) were its anchoring institutions. Despite its geographic separation, TP Community had a familial, cultural, social, political, and economic connection to Paris's larger Black community. In 1917, for example, a patriotic parade traveled a mile south from Pine Street to Sycamore Street and terminated at Mt. Canaan Baptist Church. There, crowds listened to military veterans who encouraged patriotic support for U.S. armed forces fighting in World War I.

Racial violence against African Americans increased dramatically in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many longtime white residents found the surge of Black newcomers to be a threat to Paris's established order as they had "fewer ties to local leaders and to churches and other institutions."<sup>8</sup> Their fears seemed to be a trigger for greater hostility and violence. In 1893, the gruesome and highly ritualized lynching of Henry Smith brought national attention to Paris. Smith, "an outsider" who moved to Paris from Arkansas in 1888 was an inviting scapegoat, having "a reputation as a troublemaker and a drunk."<sup>9</sup> Accused of murdering a white child, a mob paraded Smith around the city before taking him to an open field by the T&P depot (near the future site of the nominated church) where he was tortured before thousands of onlookers. One year prior to Smith's murder "whites lynched four [B]lacks in Paris, three of them on September 6 for "rioting" and another on September 23 for rape."<sup>10</sup> White political leaders at the local and state levels rationalized and defended the lynchings, and racial violence against African Americans in Paris and Lamar County continued through the 1920s.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The latter area was named for C.C. Granger, a Northern transplant who came to teach school in Paris and sold parts of his property to African Americans. "Quiet Juneteenth Planned for Paris," *Paris News*, June 18, 1947; "Backward Glances," *Paris News*, February 27, 1953.

<sup>7</sup> City Directories, 1902 and 1917, on file at the Paris History Center.

<sup>8</sup> Walter L. Buenger, *The Path to a Modern South: Northeast Texas Between Reconstruction and the Great Depression* (Austin, 2001), 19.

<sup>9</sup> Buenger, 22.

<sup>10</sup> Buenger, 19-26.

<sup>11</sup> Brandon Jett, "Paris is Burning: Lynching and Racial Violence in Paris and Lamar County, 1890-1920," *East Texas Historical Journal* 51, no.2 (Fall 2013): 40-44.

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The outbreak of World War I and the wartime demand for cotton instigated continued economic growth for Paris. Widespread prosperity enabled the city to quickly rebuild following the devastating conflagration of 1916. In March 1916, a massive fire leveled more than 1,440 buildings causing \$11 million in damages.<sup>12</sup> Mt. Canaan Baptist Church was spared, but the area consumed included most of the Black district north of the courthouse. **(Figure 10)** At least six of the community's ten churches were damaged or destroyed in the fire, including: St. Paul's Baptist Church (628 N. 22<sup>nd</sup>), Olive Branch Baptist Church (722 N. 22<sup>nd</sup>), Calvary Tabernacle/Mt. Calvary Baptist Church (NE Corner E. Booth and N. 23<sup>rd</sup>), Ebenezer AME Church (702 N. 24<sup>th</sup>), Truevine Christian Church (NE corner Tudor and Cross Streets), and Rusk Street Congregational Church (604 N. 21<sup>st</sup>). Astonishingly, the community rebuilt its residences, churches, businesses, and Gibbons High School within four years.<sup>13</sup> The city's total population actually grew between 1910 and 1920, from 46,500 to 55,700.

Despite (or maybe because of) the success of Paris's Black community and institutions, anti-Black hostility continued as evidenced in the 1920 lynching of two Black men, only one example of the 43 Black Texans lynched between 1883 and 1923 and the last in Lamar County. Herman and Ervin Arthur, sharecroppers, were lynched and burned on July 6, 1920 after shooting J. H. and William Hodges, the owners of the land they rented following a dispute over an alleged debt.<sup>14</sup> The white mob chained the Arthurs remains to a truck dragging them through the African American neighborhoods. Afraid of a race riot, the mayor deputized armed volunteers to quash any would-be Black reprisal. Black Parisians, led by veterans from World War I, were united in opposition to the lynching and but stayed in their homes armed in self-defense.<sup>15</sup>

After the lynching, African American Parisians fled Lamar County "on an unprecedented scale."<sup>16</sup> The local Prince Hall Masonic Lodge helped the rest of the Arthur family move to Chicago, and some sympathetic whites and many more followed them. White leaders and prominent citizens worried the negative national attention over the Arthurs lynching and the mass exodus would negatively impact the city's economy, which was still rebuilding following the 1916 fire. Paris Mayor J.M. Crook arranged a meeting between a delegation of white politicians and leaders with a delegation of prominent Black citizens, led by Baptist ministers C.N. Hampton and Samuel Brackeen, as an appeal to the Black community not to leave. Their attempts did not work. From 1920 to 1930, the number of African Americans

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<sup>12</sup> "On March 21, 1916, a fire swept through Paris that consumed 264 acres and 1,440 buildings and killed three people. Property loss was estimated at \$11 million. Paris was founded in the mid-1840s, and many of the town's historic structures were lost in the fire including the Federal Building and Post Office, the Lamar County Courthouse and Jail, City Hall, numerous commercial buildings, and several churches. Substantial rainfall in Paris last occurred 51 days prior, and winds gusting up to 60 mph that day likely contributed to the city's dryness. Although no one is certain how the fire started, it is known that there was a small trash fire burning near Sid Long's timber warehouse on SW 4th street and Frisco Avenue, and an alarm was sounded at 5:30 p.m. The high winds quickly set fire to roof shingles in the surrounding blocks. Mayor Ed H. McCuiston sent out appeals to nearby fire departments after he decided that widespread conflagration was imminent. Bonham, Cooper, Dallas, Honey Grove and Hugo, Oklahoma, answered the call, and the fire was under control by 3:30 a.m. Chamber President Henry P. Mayer prepared a sign for a meeting the following day that simply read "Smile." The slogan was adopted quickly and encouraged residents to rebuild the city with optimism. The Civic League, which had organized just two days before, shifted its focus from beautification to sanitation because the fire left many residents living in tents and shacks. Paris was reconstructed quickly with the help of out-of-town architects, local builders, and citizens." – Official Texas Historical Marker #18466, "Origin of the Paris Fire of 1916."

<sup>13</sup> Gibbons High School, originally opened in 1884 but moved to a larger site on E. Provine where it operated through the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>14</sup> The Arthur brothers, along with their families, were vacating the property after a dispute with the Hodges over an alleged debt. When the Hodges showed up demanding payment. When the Arthurs refused, the Hodges knocked over a stove full of food and threatened to kill Herman. Herman, who was a veteran, refused to pay or stay. Both parties had shotguns and the Arthurs shot the Hodges in self-defense. They subsequently left for Oklahoma but were apprehended and brought back to Paris to be lynched. Buenger, *The Path to a Modern South*, 167-168.

<sup>15</sup> Jett, 53-54 and Buenger, 168.

<sup>16</sup> Jett, 54.

**Mt. Canaan Baptist Church, Paris, Lamar County, Texas**

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in the county shrank from 12,970 to 9,382, a loss of 3,588 citizens.<sup>17</sup> In Paris, the total population growth between 1920 and 1930 was less than 700 (from 15,020 in 1920 to 15,649 in 1930), evidencing the direct effects of racial violence against the Black community.<sup>18</sup>

The northwest section of Paris continued to be the center for Black life through the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. “During those years [1916-1954],” local June Key remembered, “Paris was totally segregated but was a real and viable surviving community within a community. In its areas it had most of what [white people] had in other parts of town except it was owned and run by [sic] blacks.”<sup>19</sup> She listed numerous types of establishments including: Black-owned drug stores, grocery stores, beauty parlors, a newspaper, and movie theater. City bonds funded the construction of fire and police stations and a bus line ran through the business district. Guest’s Corner “was the hub of activity... You name it—we had it—and there was never a dull moment—from the very formal high-class gowns, tuxes and tails, theater shows and dance contests to murder.”<sup>20</sup> Juneteenth celebrations, picnics, and other public events were held at Record Park, a segregated city park dedicated in 1946.<sup>21</sup> During World War II, a segregated U.S.O. was built adjacent to the business district on Tudor. Churches provided important venues for the community to discuss political, social, and economic issues. These secular gatherings included the Colored Civic League and Democratic Voters League in the 1940s and 1950s.

On the south side, the TP Community remained a small enclave of several blocks between the Texas & Pacific and the Paris and Mt. Pleasant Railroad tracks. Modest wood-frame residences and several stores were constructed on blocks surrounding the church (**Figs. 5-7**). The Bankhead School, built two blocks east of Mt. Canaan in 1911, operated until c. 1965 when the local school district integrated Bankhead and Gibbons High School with the white public schools. Through the mid-and-late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the neighborhood’s development was limited to auto, industrial, and rail-related buildings but it remained a residential area through the early 1970s.

By the 1950s, the city’s African American community declined following the steady demise of its business district. Following integration, many businesses in Guest’s Corner shuttered between 1950 and 1960. Locals recalled that long-time proprietors either died or moved out of state as disinvestment caused additional closures.<sup>22</sup> Paris’ overall population grew slowly through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, peaking at approximately 25,000 in 1980. At that time, West Texas’ cotton companies came to dominate the industry in which Paris had once thrived. In 1982, a powerful tornado destroyed hundreds of commercial, institutional, and residential buildings across Paris. The natural disaster, decreasing population, and fewer employment opportunities further instigated the decline of Paris’s African American community. All but three landmarks—St. Paul’s Baptist Church, the CME church, and Mt. Canaan Baptist Church—associated with Paris’s Black history were subsequently demolished.

### **Mt. Canaan Baptist Church**

Mt. Canaan Baptist Church is the oldest Black church building in Paris, Texas. It is one of three extant historic Black churches in the city and of the three, the only one located in the city’s southside. Between its founding and the 1970s it played a significant role in establishing and maintaining a strong Black community in south Paris with ties as far away as Dallas to the southwest and Texarkana to the east. Churches, such as Mt. Canaan, provided a sanctuary in the

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<sup>17</sup> Jett, 43.

<sup>18</sup> “Paris’ Population 18,660 1940 Census Report Shows,” *The Paris News*, June 20, 1940.

<sup>19</sup> June Key, “Black Community of Paris was Once a Thriving Social Center,” *The Paris News*, February 2, 1997.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> “Negro Citizens Plan Dedication,” *The Paris News*, May 26, 1946.

<sup>22</sup> “Business Thrived at Guest’s Corner,” *The Paris News*, May 30, 1999.



Mt. Canaan Baptist Church, Paris, Lamar County, Texas

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face of anti-Black violence and racism. In the midst of such hostility, the church undertook its work of saving souls and building community.

The origin of Mt. Canaan Baptist Church was in prayer gatherings held in the northwest part of Paris at an area then known as Chisum's Ranch. Chisum's Ranch was a well-known Black settlement established and owned by the late W. C. (Tony) Chisum. All the houses, including a schoolhouse (known as the Red School) were painted boxcar red. In 1887, the Santa Fe Railway took over the greater part of the property for shops, round house, and switch tracks, which displaced the community. Some of these early congregants moved into the historically Black neighborhoods in Paris. They met in house-to-house prayer meetings until the gathering grew too large. A small church was then organized in a house in Abrams Alley northwest of the county courthouse.

The church's founding congregation, which first began to have weekly prayer meetings in the homes of members in 1886, follows the post-bellum pattern of Black Americans establishing independence from the supervision and patronage of white denominations.<sup>23</sup> As scholar Alwyn Barr has written, "separate Black religious denominations, especially the Baptist and Methodists, continued to grow during the late nineteenth century. Negro [sic] Baptists organized a state convention [that] counted. . . 50,000 members by 1880 and grew to 111,138 in 1890 because of its participatory style and the autonomy of congregations."<sup>24</sup> That the emerging Mt. Canaan congregation maintained its identity after the demolition of the Chisum Ranch Community instead of joining the other Black Baptist churches in Paris is consistent with the character of Black freedom. Rather than being individualistic, it was communal in nature.<sup>25</sup> Church congregations provided a means to maintain the integrity of communities of transplanted rural Texans, with their distinctive needs and means of religious expression.

By c. 1900, Rev. J. B. Adkins assumed leadership of the congregation and it was under him that Mt. Canaan's Board of Trustees was organized. Adkins worked alongside four trustees: Brother Noel Lee, Brother John Black, Brother Will Johnson and Brother Dolphus Heard to establish the church. A warranty deed from 1903 documents they purchased the nominated property from M.J. and Josie Booker, a Black couple who lived in the TP Community.<sup>26</sup>

In 1910, congregants constructed a one-story wood frame church with Gothic Revival towers and a large interior sanctuary (**Figure 4**). The new church was in an area of Paris not yet serviced by any religious group. Church historian Virginia Harris recalled that most of the male members of the church worked at the oil mill, the cotton compress, and the cotton gin—all located within three blocks of Mt. Canaan. Following the completion of its sanctuary, Mt. Canaan thrived, gaining members from the laboring community in which it was embedded as well as outliers in the county who travelled to the church by train.

Many members of the congregation were teachers and administrators of the Bankhead School, a segregated school organized in 1911 by the TP Community and the only school for Black students on the south side of the town. It was located on 3rd Street SE, south of the Texas & Pacific Railroad tracks, just a few blocks from the church. For many years, Mt. Canaan hosted numerous graduations and events for Bankhead School.

Notices of church activities appeared 100 miles away in the region's most important Black newspaper, the *Dallas Express*, which shows Mt. Canaan's ties to Black communities and churches throughout the region. For example, on September 6, 1919 the *Express* reported, "The Baptist District Missionary Institute convened last week at the Mt.

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<sup>23</sup> Alwyn Barr, *Black Texans: A History of Negroes in Texas, 1528-1971* (Austin, 1973), 66.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>25</sup> C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, 1990), 6.

<sup>26</sup> Lamar County Clerk, Property Deed Records, Book 116, 418.

Mt. Canaan Baptist Church, Paris, Lamar County, Texas

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Canaan Baptist Church.”<sup>27</sup> Nearly two months later the Express reported on a revival at Mt. Canaan led by a preacher from Texarkana:

The Mt. Canaan Baptist Church had a successful revival, baptized 40 members, raised \$112.09, restored 40 members. Rev. Evans conducted the revival. A banquet was given in honor of pastor Widlow and the Rev. Evans of Texarkana. The church is in splendid condition. The Rev. Evans is a great preacher.<sup>28</sup>

Through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Mt. Canaan’s location was both a boon and hinderance for the church. Although newspapers like the *Paris Morning News*, *Paris News*, and *Dallas Examiner* reported a variety of secular activities held at Paris churches, few mention Mt. Canaan. Doubtless, it was difficult to attract graduation ceremonies, plays, community group meetings, music performances, and visiting speakers from the larger sanctuaries (like Mt. Zion A.M.E. and St. Paul’s Baptist Church) in the heart of the city’s Black community. By the 1940s, however, Mt. Canaan became the primary venue for Bankhead School’s performances and ceremonies, as well as, secular picnics for the TP Community. It was the only building in this area of Paris where Black people could freely congregate during an era of strict racial segregation that barred them from using other public buildings.

Unlike the city’s other churches, Mt. Canaan drew its congregation from rural areas, transient workers, and the isolated enclave in which it was built. Today, congregants state that people rode in on train cars to attend weekly services.<sup>29</sup> This pattern continues today as many congregants travel from other communities to attend their home church. Paris’ cotton industry also remained healthy through the early postwar period, leaving the congregation’s original demographic intact. Its location also protected the building from the 1982 tornado that destroyed hundreds of commercial, institutional, and residential buildings throughout Paris.

## Conclusion

The 1910 Mt. Canaan Baptist Church is a historically African American church in Paris, Lamar County. Its congregation was initially organized in the late 19th century and worshipped in members’ homes until 1910 when they constructed a wood frame vernacular Gothic Revival church. For more than 120 years, Mt. Canaan Baptist Church provided a venue that nurtured and supported Black Parisians socially, economically, politically, and spiritually. It is the oldest extant African American church building, having survived the 1916 fire that devastated Paris, and one of three extant resources associated with the city’s once-thriving Black community. It is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion A in the areas of Social History and Ethnic Heritage: Black. The period of significance being in 1910 and ends in 1974, the 50-year threshold for listing in the National Register. The property derives its primary significance from its historical associations, and thus satisfactorily meets Criteria Consideration A (Religious Properties).

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<sup>27</sup> *Dallas Express*, Dallas, Texas, September 6, 1919, p. 10.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, October 30, 1919, p. 3

<sup>29</sup> Bonnie Tipton, Interview with Mt. Canaan Congregants, July 25, 2023.

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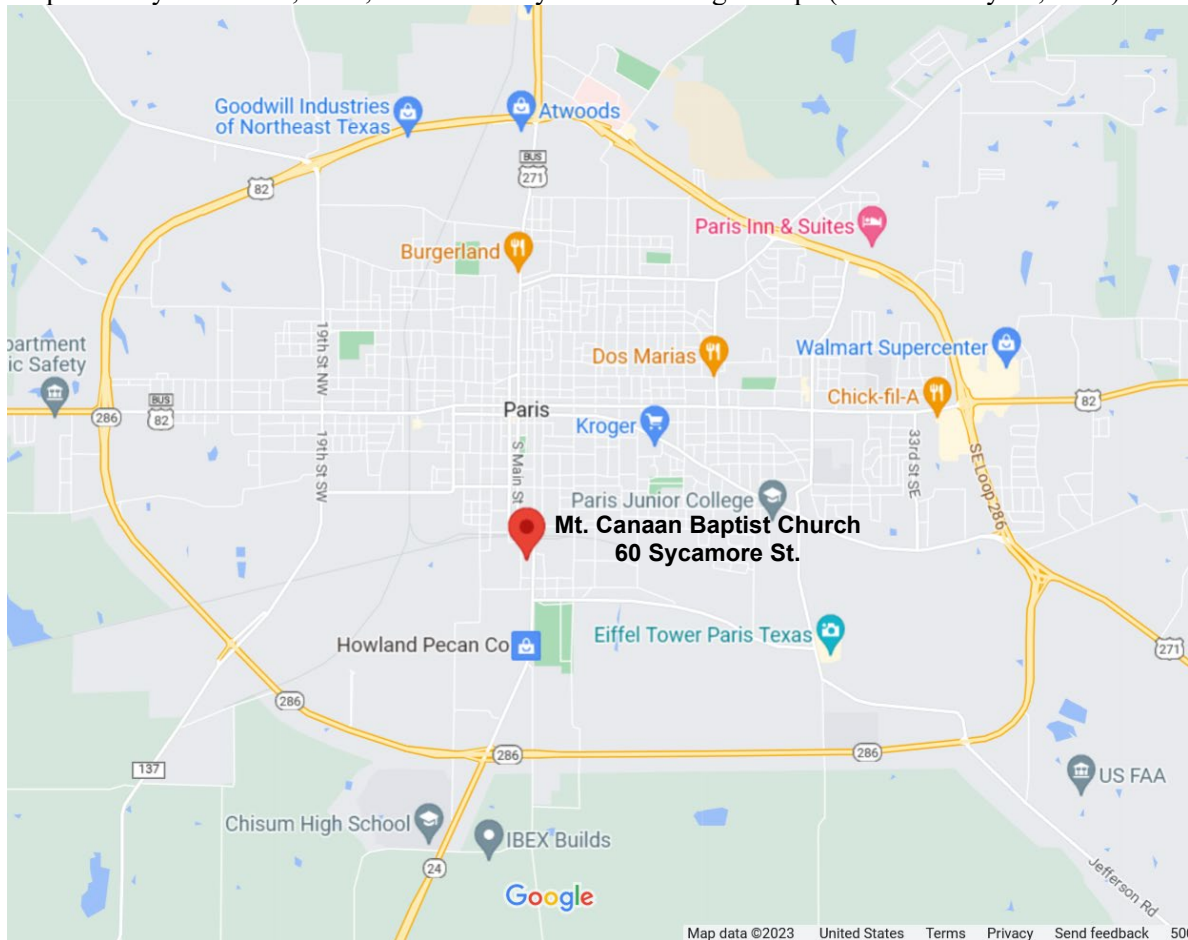
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## Maps

Map 1: Lamar County, Texas

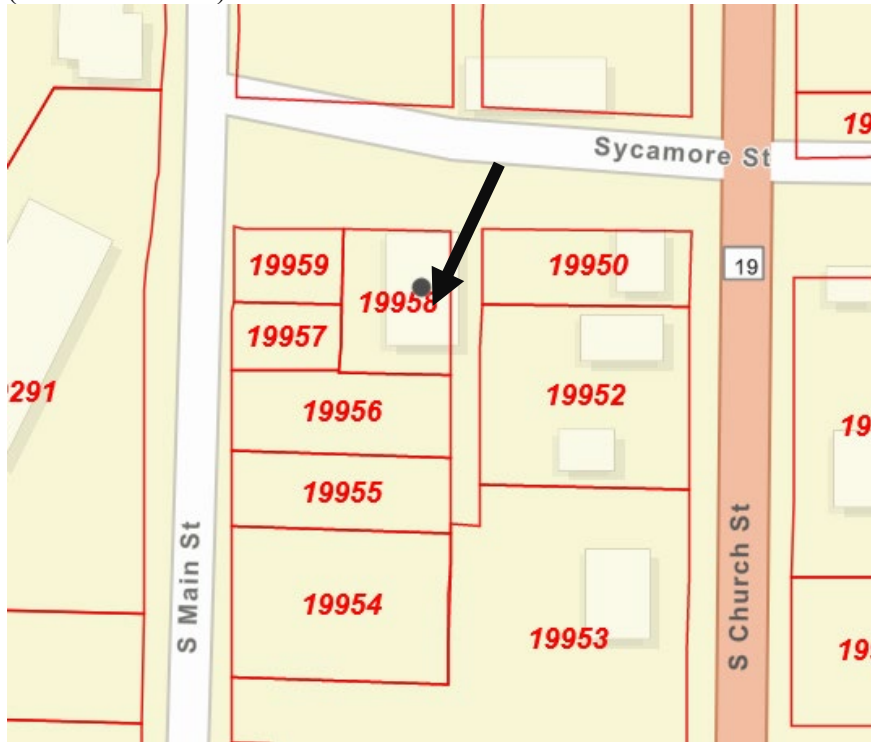


Map 2: 60 Sycamore St., Paris, Lamar County. Source: Google Maps (accessed May 15, 2023)

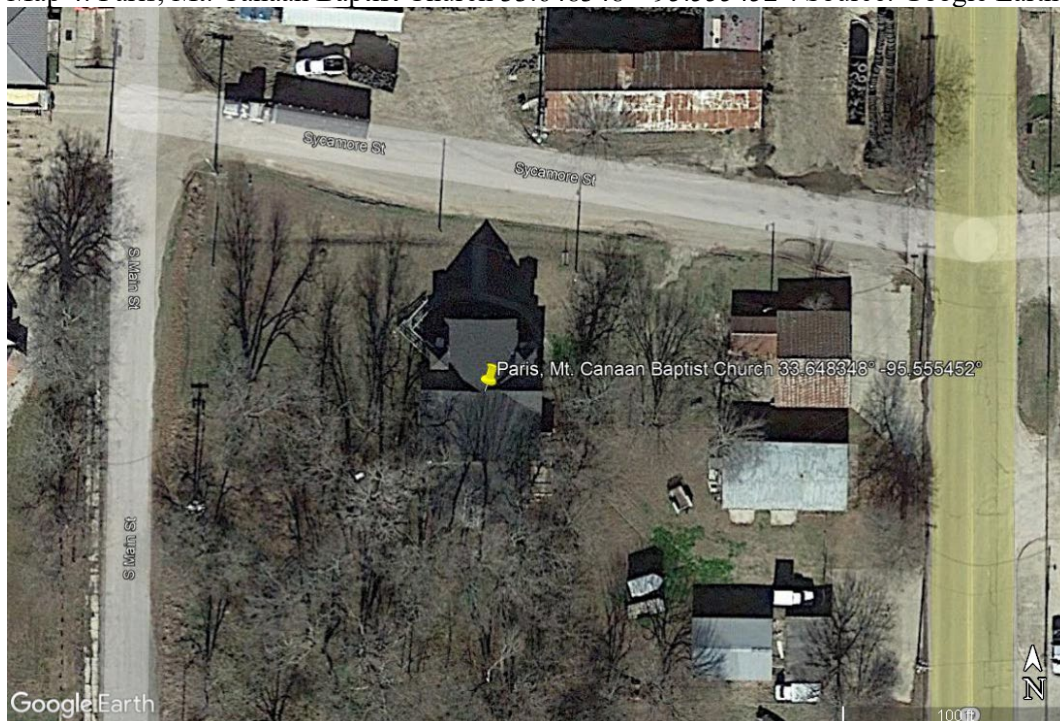


Mt. Canaan Baptist Church, Paris, Lamar County, Texas

Map 3: Property ID# 19958 TEXAS & PACIFIC ADDITION, BLOCK 5, LOT E PT OF 11 & E PT OF LOT 12, 60 SYCAMORE ST (0.152 acres). Source: Lamar County Appraisal District <https://lamarcad.org/interactive-map> (accessed 5/15/23).



Map 4: Paris, Mt. Canaan Baptist Church 33.648348° -95.555452°. Source: Google Earth (accessed 5/15/23).





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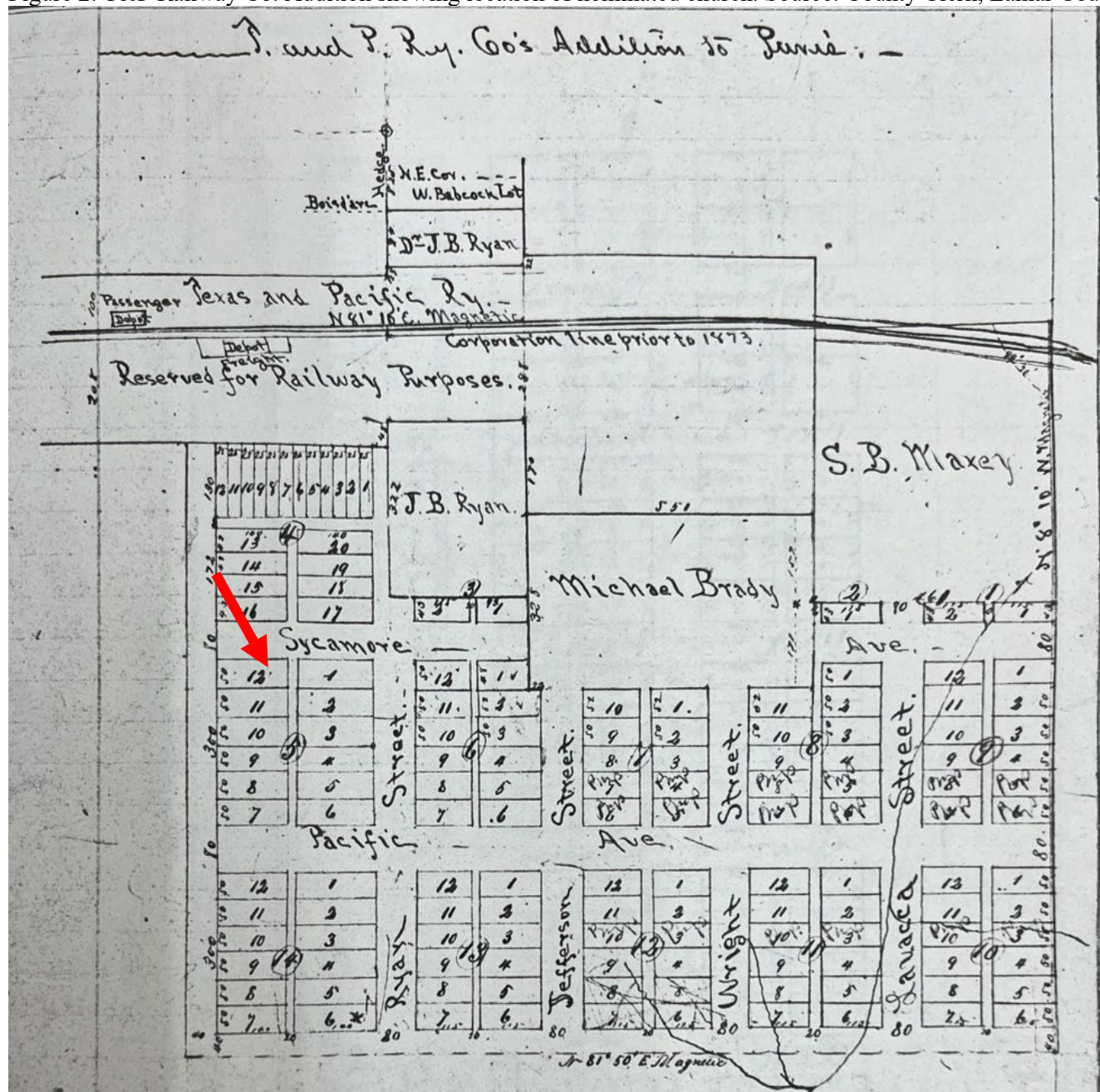
## Figures

Figure 1: Lamar County in 1900. Source: Rand McNally And Company. Texas Railroads. Chicago, 1900. Map.  
<https://www.loc.gov/item/98688561/>.



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Figure 2: T&P Railway Co. Addition showing location of nominated church. Source: County Clerk, Lamar County.





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Figure 3: January 27, 1903 Warranty Deed, Lamar County Deed Record, Book 129, pg. 556-557.

"That We, M.J. Booker and Josie Booker...of the County of Lamar and State of Texas for and in consideration of Twenty-five (\$25.00), to us in hand paid by John Black, Will Johnson, and Dolphus Heard, Trustees of Mt. Canaan Baptist Church...grant, bargain, sell, and convey unto...the following described tract..."

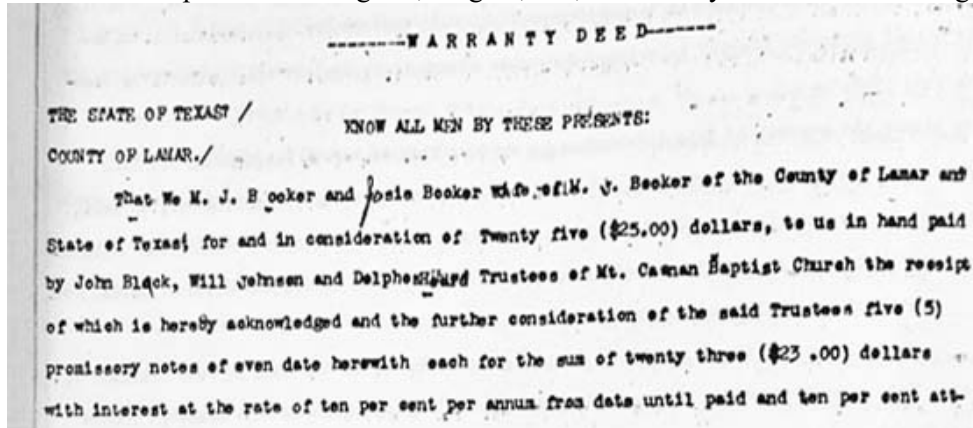
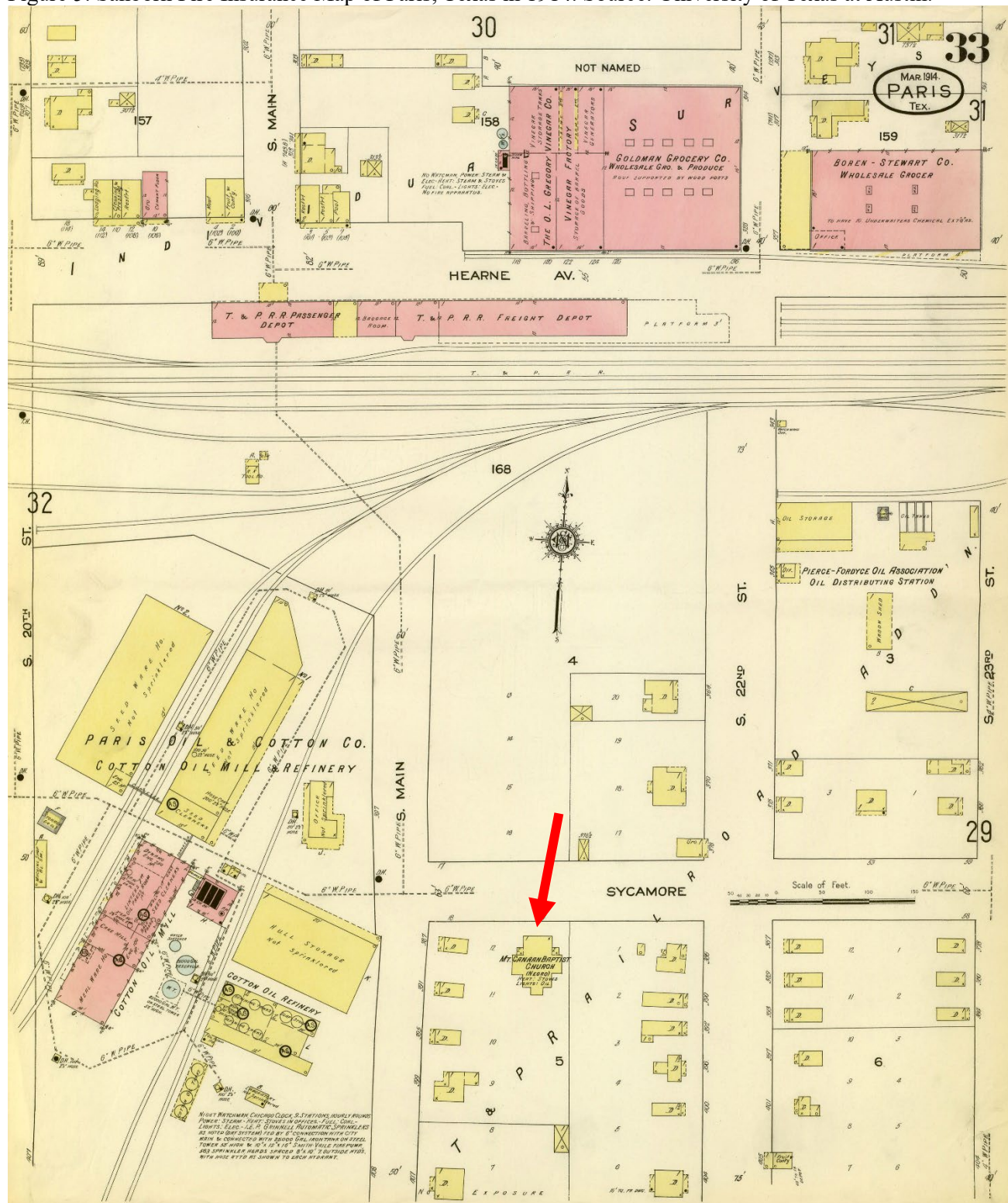


Figure 4: Mt. Canaan Baptist Church, c. 1910. Source: Texas Historical Commission Historical Marker Files.



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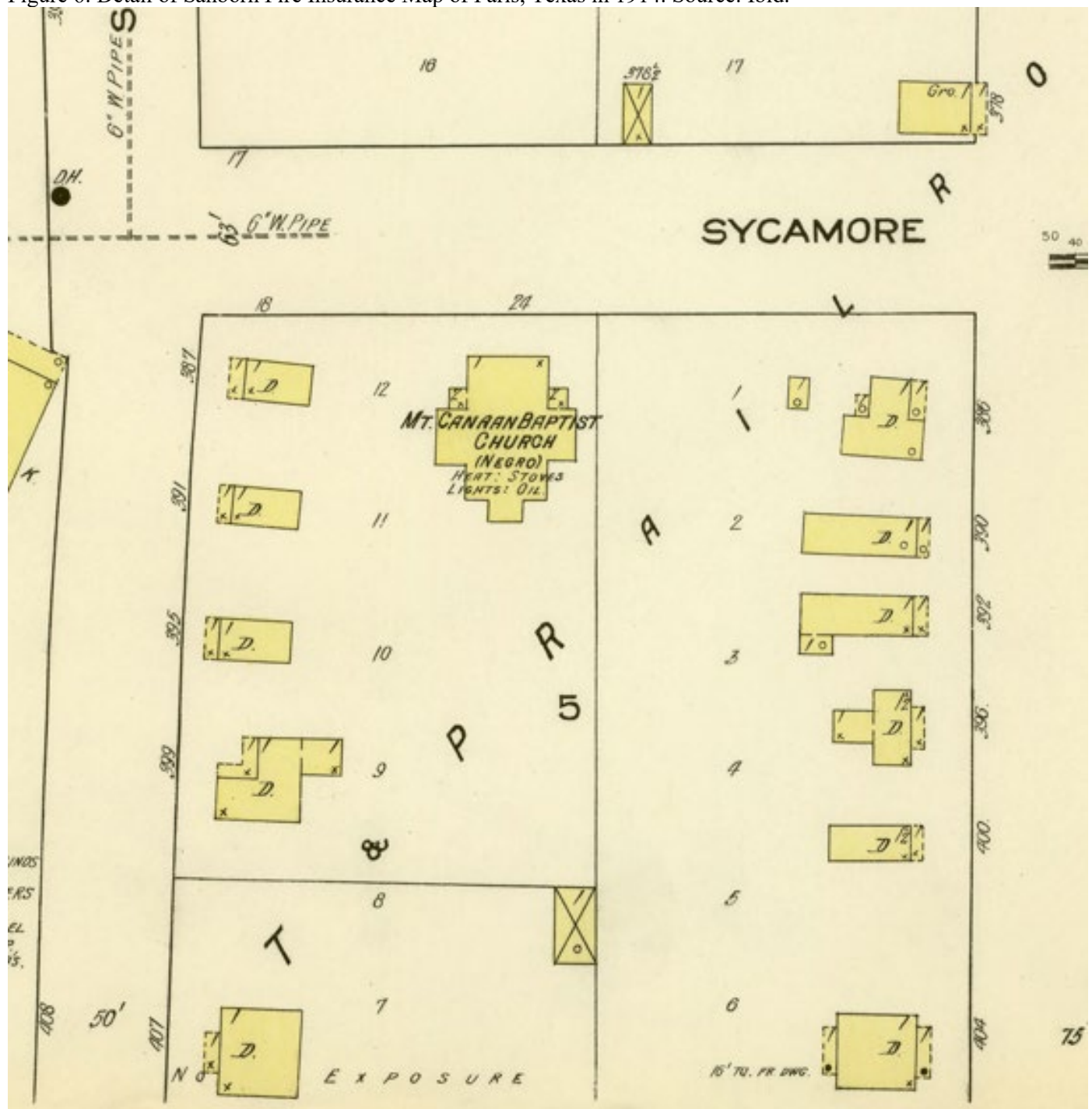
Figure 5: Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Paris, Texas in 1914. Source: University of Texas at Austin.



Original located at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin

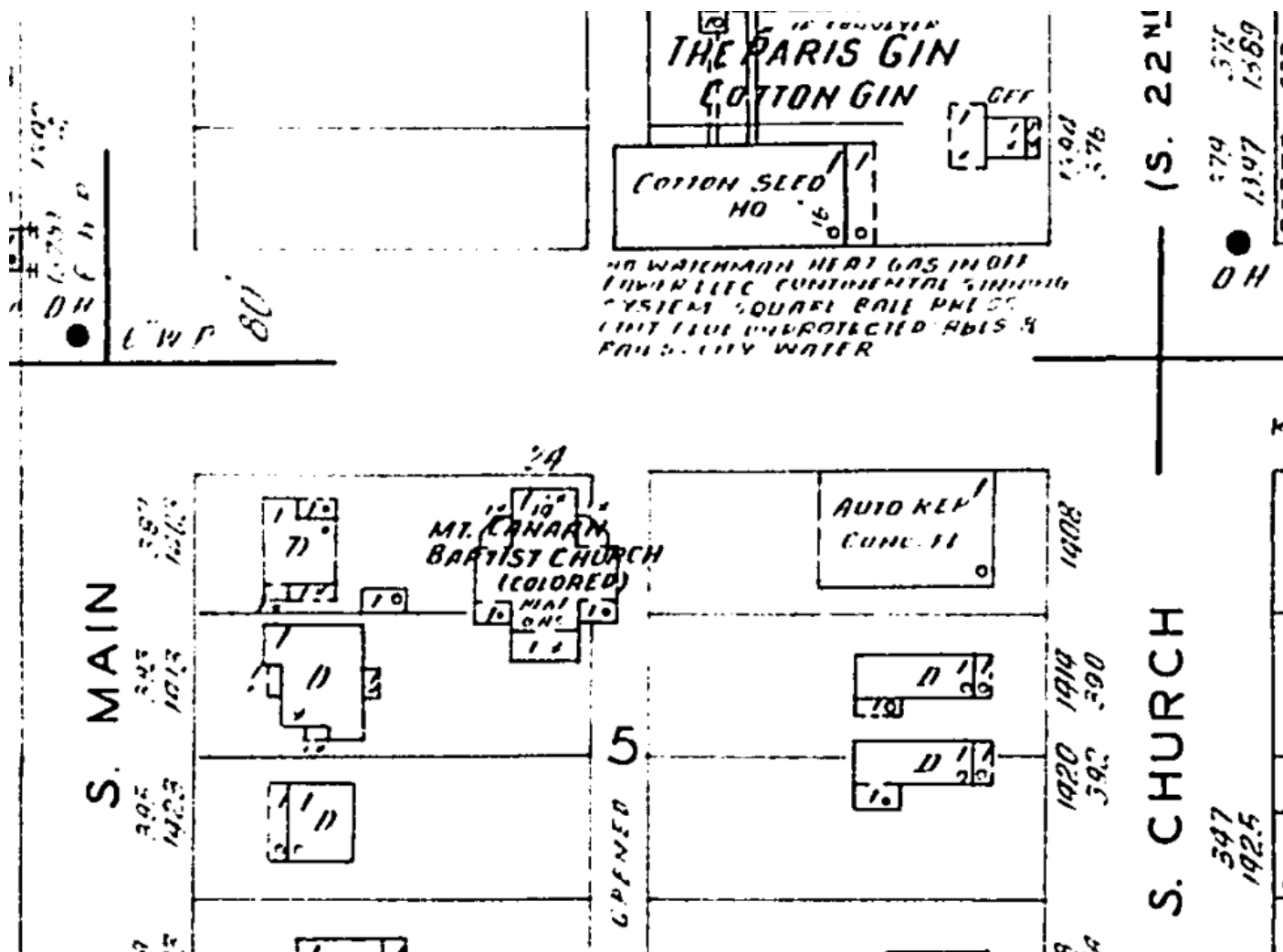
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Figure 6: Detail of Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Paris, Texas in 1914. Source: Ibid.



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Figure 7: Detail, Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Paris (1946), p. 24 showing rear additions.

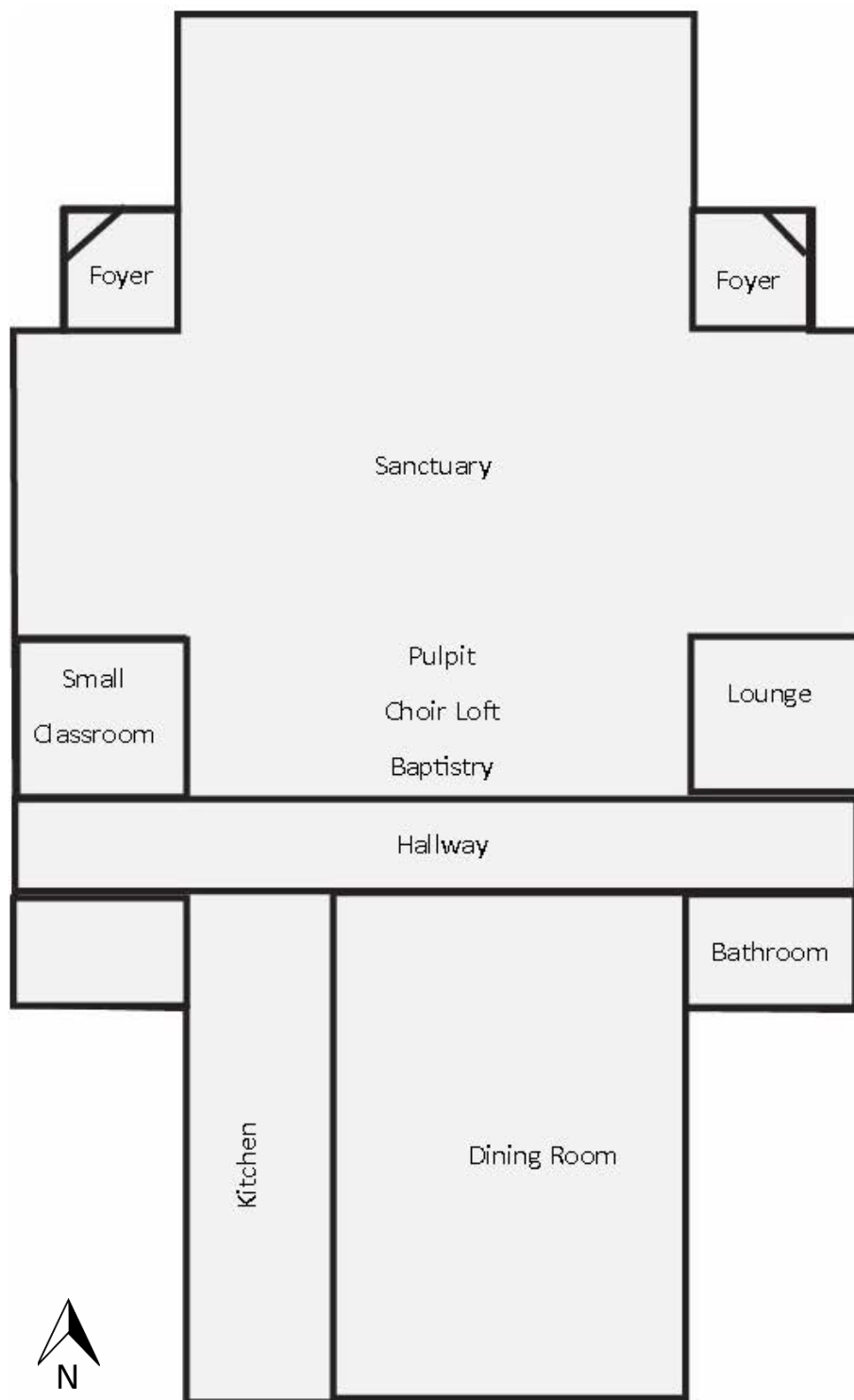




Mt. Canaan Baptist Church, Paris, Lamar County, Texas

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Figure 8: Floorplan (not to scale)



Mt. Canaan Baptist Church, Paris, Lamar County, Texas

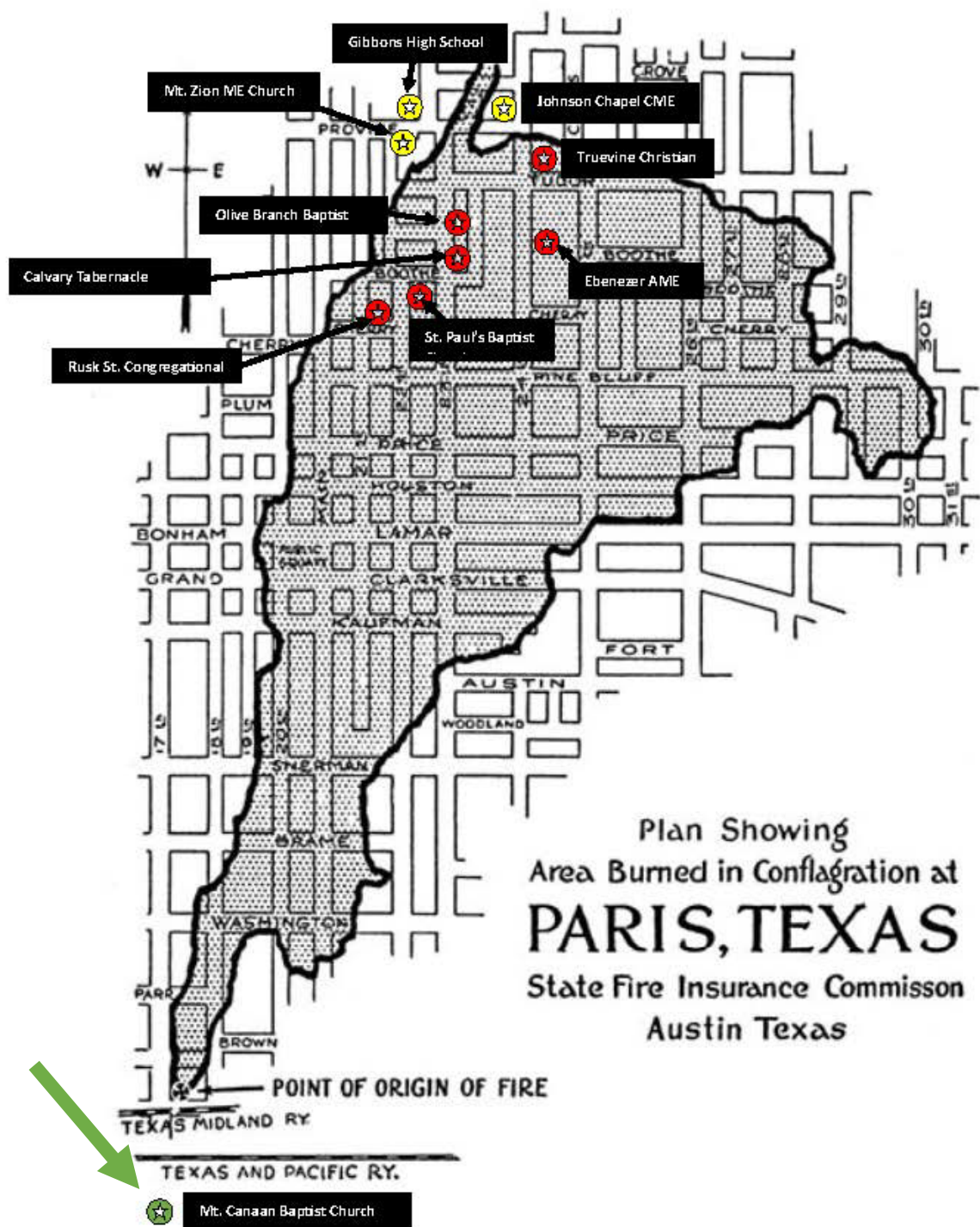
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Figure 9: Estimated evolution of the building's rear additions.



Mt. Canaan Baptist Church, Paris, Lamar County, Texas

Figure 10: Map of 1916 Paris fire and locations of African American churches. Source: Texas State Library and Archives cross-referenced with 1914 Sanborn map and 1911 city directory. (Note: Gibbons High School was the segregated school for Black students and one church, Quail's Chapel, is outside the scope of the map.)



Mt. Canaan Baptist Church, Paris, Lamar County, Texas

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Figure 11: The nominated church is one of three extant early 20<sup>th</sup> century religious buildings associated with Paris' African American community. Below: St. Paul Baptist Church (1918) and the C.M.E. Church (1918) built these sanctuaries after they lost their previous structures in the 1916 fire. Source: Photos by the authors.





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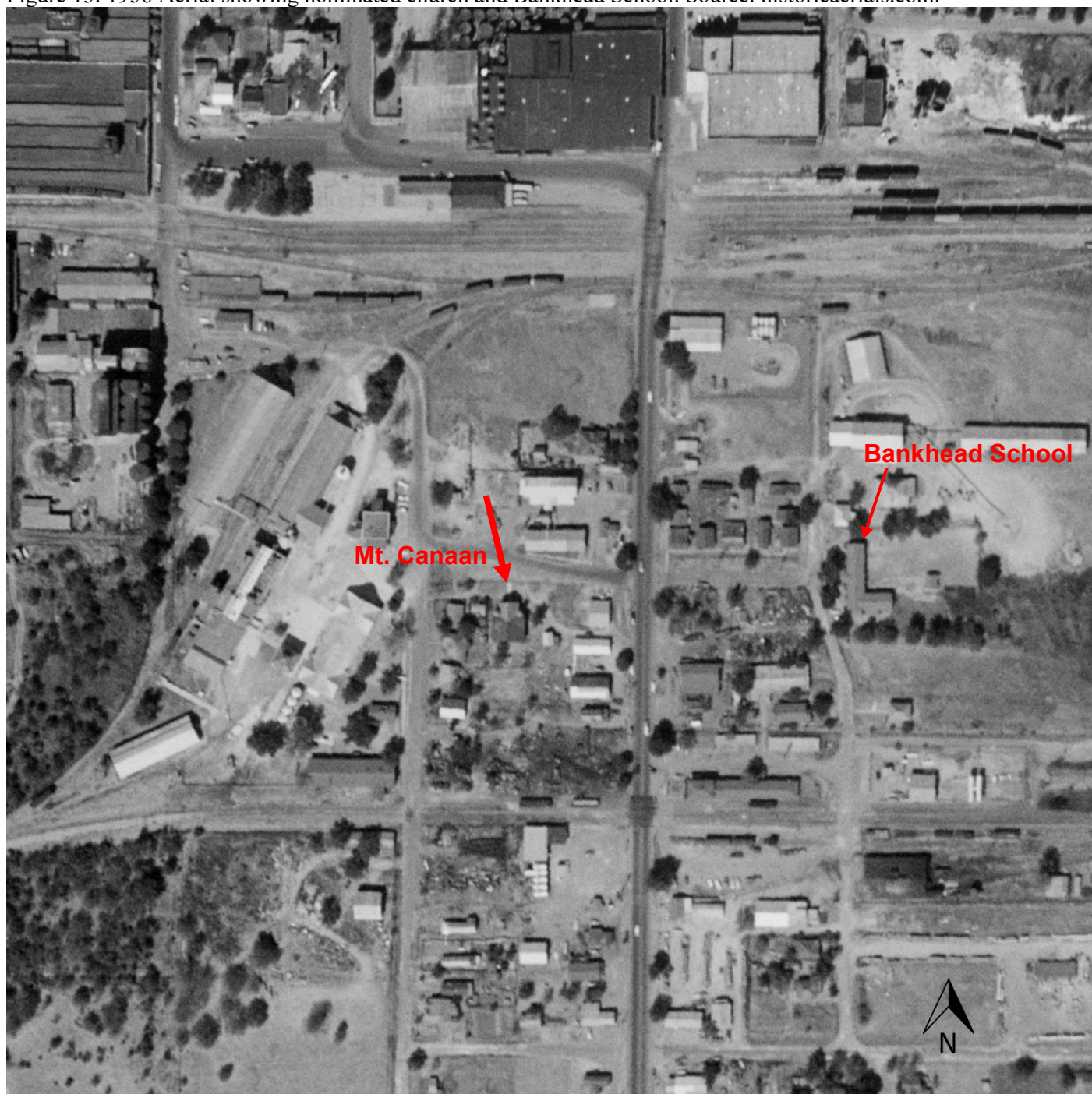
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Figure 12: Official Texas Historical Marker (Undertold Marker Program, 2015):

Following emancipation, several Paris black free men and women formed informal congregations to practice their new spiritual rights. These former slaves found Baptist theology, with its egalitarian notion of redemption and informal nature of worship, especially appealing. Mt. Canaan Baptist church originated in temporary prayer gatherings held in the African American community at the area of Chisum's Ranch, a neighborhood in northwest Paris. When the homes were demolished to make way for a new railroad, the displaced residents settled in southern Paris next to the cottonseed oil mill, compress, and cotton processing plants. This new African American neighborhood, called the TP community because of its proximity to the Texas & Pacific Railroad, was where Rev. Sam McCarley formally established Mt. Canaan Baptist Church in 1886. The railroad and the booming cotton industry employed many blacks in the area. Worship services were held in members' houses until the current church was built in 1910 under the leadership of Rev. J.B. Adkins. Mt. Canaan catered to the marginalized African Americans of the TP community, including mill workers, cotton ginner, and teachers at nearby Bankhead Elementary School, the only school in Paris for African American students. In 1939, the congregation purchased more land and remodeled the church. More renovations followed in 1970, including a baptism annex, cement steps, and a back porch. Despite these additions, the building itself remains largely unchanged. Mt. Canaan Baptist Church continues to serve its historic community.

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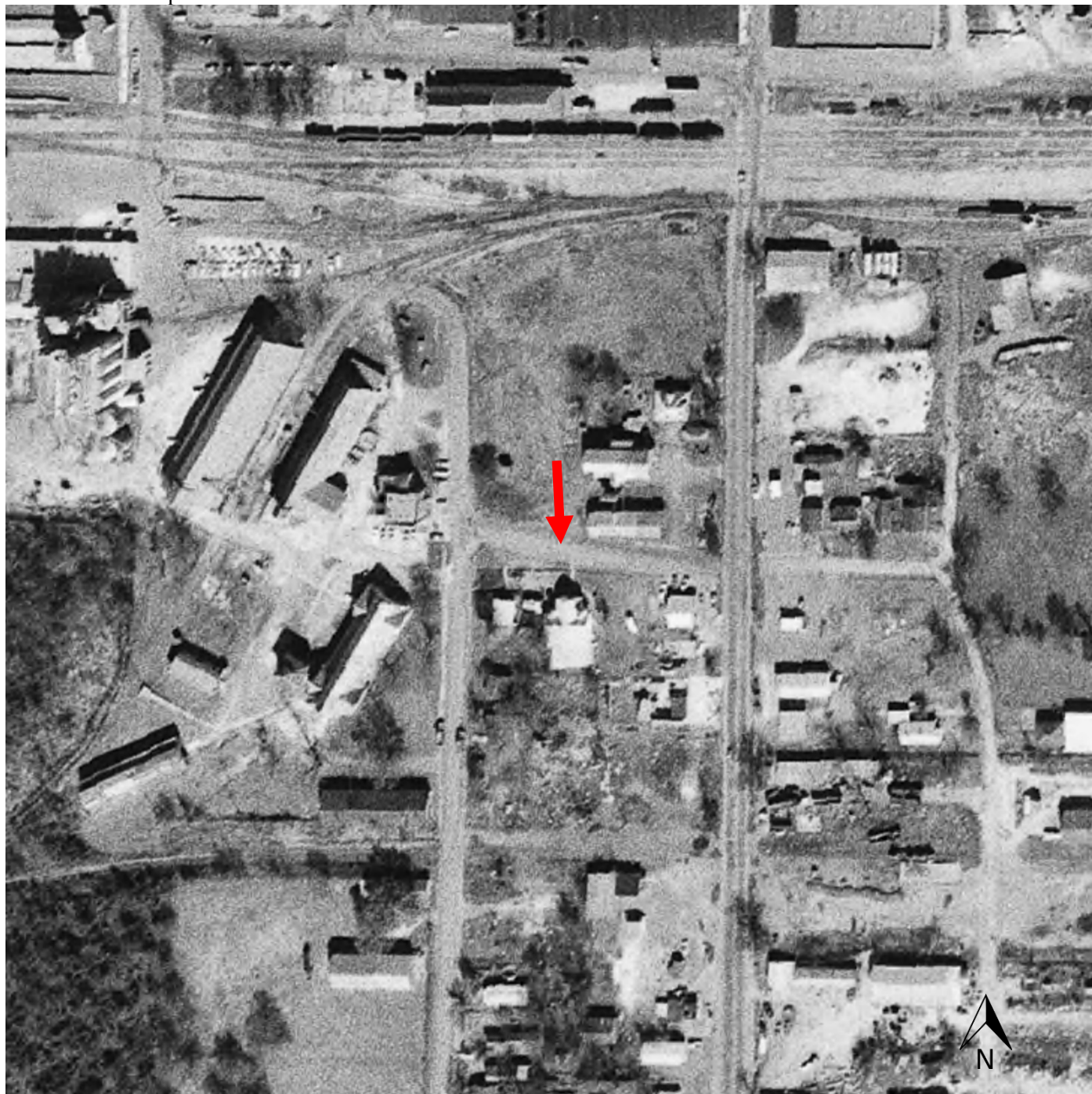
Figure 13: 1956 Aerial showing nominated church and Bankhead School. Source: historicaerials.com.



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Figure 14: 1976 Aerial. By the late 1970s, many residences and the Bankhead School were gone. The red arrow points to Mt. Canaan Baptist Church.





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**Photographs**

Mt. Canaan Baptist Church  
Paris, Lamar County, Texas  
Photographed by Bonnie Tipton  
July 25-26, 2022

Photo 1: Looking west at Mt. Canaan Baptist Church and Cotton Oil Mill & Refinery where congregants historically worked.





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Photo 2: Looking southeast across the Texas & Pacific Railway tracks at the church (center background), oil mill (right), and former gin (left).





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Photo 3: North elevation, camera facing south.





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Photo 4: Northeast oblique showing one of two main entrances. Camera faces southwest.



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Photo 5: Detail of northeast tower.



Photo 6: Original cornerstone beneath siding on the north elevation. "Mt. Canaan Baptist Church, Erected 1910, Rev. M.B. Atkins"





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Photo 7: Northwest oblique showing second of two main entrances. Scalloped trim is original. Camera looks southeast.





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Photo 8: West elevation showing rear addition. Camera looks northeast.



Photo 9: Dentilled wood molding and modest “capitals” top corner posts. Camera looking at south elevation.





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Photo 10: Rear (south elevation) additions supported the growing congregation. Camera looks north.



Photo 11: Historic-age siding on the east elevation. Camera looks northwest.





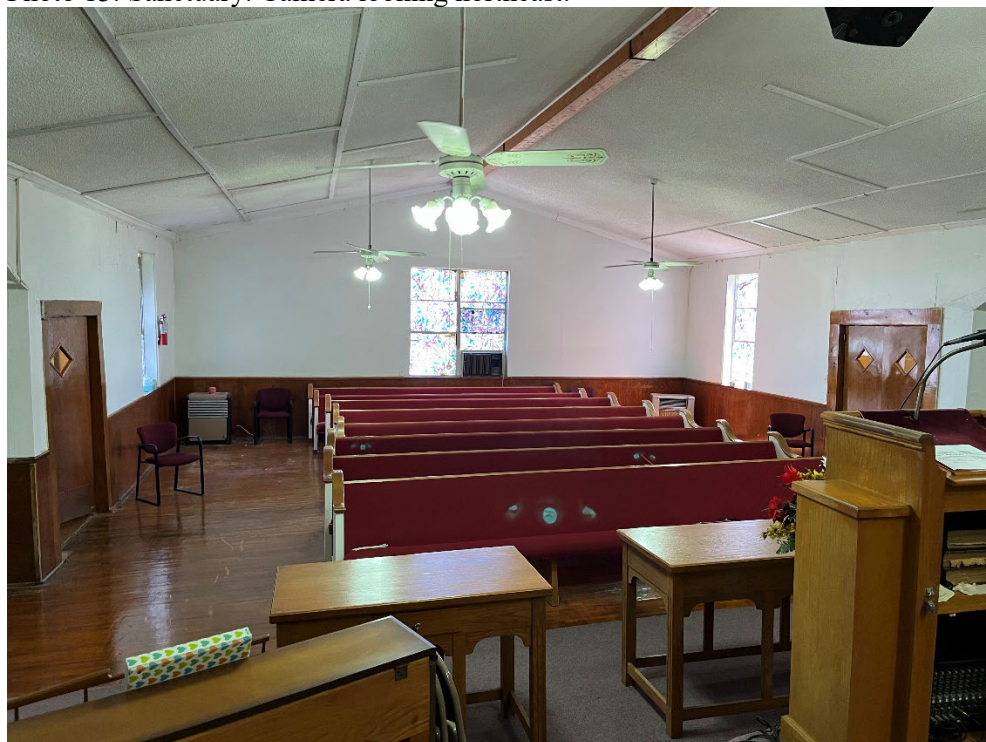
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Photo 12: Sanctuary. Camera looking southwest.



Photo 13: Sanctuary. Camera looking northeast.



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Photo 14: Baptistry and mural on south wall of sanctuary.



Photo 15: Hallway, view west.





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Photo 16: Original molding, transom, and door inside the dining room. Camera looks east.



Photo 17: The kitchen (now enclosed) is in an area that was likely a porch added in 1939. Looking south inside the southwest corner of the building.



~ end ~