

# Fourth Street Baptist Church Owensboro, KY

By Jerry Long  
c.2024



Fourth Street Baptist Church, 821 West Fourth Street, Owensboro, KY



**Owensboro Examiner, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 24 March 1876, p.5:**

THE colored people announce a dinner for the 27th inst., to be spread at City Hall. Proceeds to be used in supplying the Fourth street Baptist church (col'd) with a bell-tower.



**Owensboro Examiner, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 29 June 1877, p.5:**

The Fourth Street Baptist Church (colored) not only has a new belfry, but it is receiving a thorough painting. The Third Street Baptist Church, steeple and all, would be materially benefited by a liberal spreading of oil and paint.



**Owensboro Examiner, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 12 July 1878, p.5:**

The committee appointed by our colored citizens to superintend the erection of a school-house on the lot adjoining the Fourth Street Baptist Church, let out the contract on Monday evening last for the erection of a one-story brick 30x50 feet The building will be constructed with reference to putting on an additional story at some future day.



**History of Daviess County, Kentucky,  
Inter-State Publishing Co., Chicago, IL, 1883, pp.376-377 & 384:**

[pp.376-377] Fourth Street Baptist Church (colored). — This society was organized many years ago, when records were not very sacredly kept. They worshiped at first in a log building which stood almost directly in a ravine, since filled up, just below where St. Stephen's Church now stands. Isom Howard was their minister for many years. The present church building, a brick, between Elm and Poplar streets, was built before the war; seating capacity, 500 or more. Since it was first built, twenty feet addition has been made to the rear or north end. It is now eighty feet long by forty wide.

As pastors of this church, Mr. Howard has been succeeded by Revs. DuPuy, Caldwell, Edward Newsom and Moses Harding, the present incumbent, who has been here nearly seven years. There are now about 500 members. There have been over 600, but a few years ago a new church was formed from it, who have their headquarters in the eastern

part of the city. The Sunday-school has an average attendance of 80 to 100. Nelson Talbntt is the present Superintendent.

The principal revivals have occurred under the ministrations of Rev. Newsom, who added over 100 to the church, and Rev. Norris, from Henderson, who conducted a revival here resulting also in the addition of over 100 to the church. Mr. Harding has added about 300 to this church.

[p.377] Center Street Baptist Church (colored). — This has also been called "Snow Hill Baptist Church;" the name does not yet seem to be settled. It is comparatively young and weak. A frame church has been commenced on Snow Hill, probably 34 x 50 feet in dimensions, but when the frame was up and roof and siding on work ceased. The society holds regular religious services, however. Rev. A. Merrifield has been pastor here. Rev. Salter is the present minister.

[p.384] Third Street Colored (or African) Methodist Episcopal Church. — This church was organized many' years ago, by Rev. Dunahy, with twenty-five or thirty members. Met for worship in Megill's Hall. The pastors since then have been Revs. Yocum, Frost, O. B. Ross, Ferguson, Sherman, and the present one is Rev. Taylor. The membership has increased to 119, and is in a prosperous condition. Class-leaders: Dora Henderson and Mr. Humphrey. The church building was erected in 1873; size, 60x30 feet; cost, \$16,000; location, near the corner of Third and St. Elizabeth streets.



**Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 6 July 1893, p.5:**

**THE CORNER STONE LAID.**

The corner stone of the new Fourth-street colored Baptist church was laid Sunday. Rev. J. H. Garnett, of Louisville, conducted the services. The building is to be completed in a year and is to cost \$20,000. Nearly half of this sum has been raised.



**Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 8 June 1894, p.1:**

**TO AID THE COLORED PEOPLE**

An Appeal for Help to Finish the Fourth-street Church. At the tent meeting last night, Rev. S. E. Smith, pastor of the Fourth-street Baptist church, colored, made an appeal for aid in the construction of the church now in course of erection. It was necessary, he said, to raise about \$1,000 to put the building in shape so as to entertain the general association of colored Baptists, which meets here in August. Rev. Fred D. Hale offered the following resolution, which was adopted:

*Resolved*, That we, the united congregations of the First and Walnut-street Baptist churches of Owensboro, heartily sympathize with the commendable and earnest efforts of the colored

Baptist church to complete their elegant and commodious house of worship; that we commend the enterprise to the citizens of Owensboro and vicinity as one worthy of their practical help, and that we now take a collection to help them in their present emergency.

A collection was then taken and \$110.42 in cash and subscriptions realized.

This church when completed will t one of the largest auditoriums in tb city, seating about 1,000 persons. The walls are now up and ready for the roof.



**Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 19 December 1895, p.6:**

COLORED CHURCHES.

Fourth Street Baptist Church (colored), of which the Rev. S. E. Smith, is the pastor, is the finest church building belonging to the colored people in the state, having a seating capacity of 2,000 and will cost when completed, about \$30,000.



**Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 25 February 1898, p.5:**

FIRE IN A CHURCH.

The Fourth-Street Colored Baptist Church Burned.

At about 1 o'clock this morning fire broke out in the Baptist church, colored, near the gas plant, and the building was badly damaged before the blaze was extinguished. The church furniture and organ are a loss, and the building will no more be used as a place of worship, as the congregation has a new unfinished church on the same lot. The building and furniture were valued at about \$5,500, with insurance on everything but the organ.



**Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 30 June 1898, p.1:**

CHURCH DEDICATION.

Fourth-Street Colored Baptist Church to Be Consecrated Today.  
It is Handsome, Modern Building and Cost the Congregation \$30,000.

Probably the finest church building in the state owned by colored people and used by them as a place of worship, is the Fourth-street colored Baptist church, which is to be dedicated today. It is not yet completed, although, little remains to be done to it. Every dollar has been paid on it to date, and there is no debt hanging over it. When it is finished it will represent an expenditure of nearly \$30,000. The building is almost solely due to the energy and diligence of the pastor, Rev. S. E. Smith.

The dedication services will begin at 8:30 this morning. There will also be services at 2 and 7 :30 p. in. Rev. Smith will have charge of the various services, and will be assisted by a number of able preachers from other parts of the state.

Following is a description of the church, prepared by the pastor : "It is built of brick, trimmed with stone. A large gallery sweeps across the front. The main auditorium, with an elevated floor is 70x50 feet. Around this and beneath the gallery are large class rooms, separated by folding doors and windows, and all opening out into the main auditorium. The ladies' parlor, 20x17, and one class room similar to those below, open into the hall on the second floor. Each auditor in the auditorium, gallery and class rooms is in sight of the speaker's stand and in hearing of the speaker's voice. The dimensions of the building are 100x50 feet. All of this space is under one roof within four walls, and capable of being thrown open into one immense auditorium, which, with the gallery, will comfortably seat 2,000 people."



**Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Tuesday, 12 July 1898, p.2:**

FOURTH-STREET (COLORED) BAPTIST CHURCH.



The dedicatory services of the Fourth-street Baptist church were held Sunday. The attendance was between 2,000 and 2,500, and the meeting was a grand success. There was no disturbance at any time, and everything went off pleasantly. A collection was taken up, the proceeds of which were \$675. The church was beautifully decorated, many of the flowers being furnished by white people. There were excursions from, Louisville, Evansville, Russellville and other points. The services were conducted by the Pastor, Rev. S. E. Smith, assisted by Rev. B. S. Reed, Rev. J. D. Rouse, of Evansville, Rev. P. H. Kennedy, and others.



**Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 14 June 1903, p.3:**

Card of Thanks.

For the last ten years the colored congregation, known as the Fourth-street Baptist church, has been making a heroic effort to erect and pay for a house of worship. During this time we don't

believe even our best friends know of the struggles that have been made. It is a well known fact that we have one of the handsomest buildings ever erected in Kentucky for colored people. It is a credit to Kentucky, as well as an honor to our own beautiful city. It has cost about \$28,000. Our white friends made it possible for us to succeed in this great work. .We are practically out of debt, and I take this method to thank the Messenger and the hundreds of white people that have not only given us financial aid, but have ever spoken kind words about us and our work. We have just raised about \$900 and paid it on the church. It would not be out of place to say the money to erect the church was raised here in Owensboro.

From this date no one is authorized to solicit aid on books or otherwise for said church.

I shall never forget the good white citizens and my own people for standing by me so nobly in such a great undertaking. Yours in His Name.

S. E. SMITH,  
Pastor Fourth-street Baptist Church.



**Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 1 September 1907, p.3:**

FOURTH STREET BAPTIST CHURCH  
Has Its Tower Completed at a cost of \$1,650 By A. Killian.

The tower on the Fourth-street Colored Baptist church has been completed and received. The best material and workmanship was used throughout. The height of tower is 100 feet and it cost \$1,650. The plans were drawn by A. Killian. The same architect's plans have been accepted for alterations on a Baptist church at Murray, Ky.



**A History of the Daviess-McLean Baptist Association of Kentucky, 1844-1943,**  
**Rev. Wendell H. Rone, 1943, pp.19-20 and 85:**

NEGRO MEMBERS

It is a strange bit of information to many that in the days prior to and even after the Civil War the Baptist Churches of this section had many negroes in their membership. These negroes were slaves who belonged to many of the white members of the churches. As late as the year 1875 we note that the churches reported negro members in their membership lists. Even after that many of the older negroes remained members to their death. Many of the older brethren and sisters among our white churches can remember such cases. These old negroes were often referred to as "Uncle" or "Aunt" so and so because of their character and deep toned piety.

The records of most of the churches organized prior to the Civil War contain the names of these negro members. They are referred to in the following manner. . . . Charles, the property of Will Jones, etc. On many occasions the negro members were permitted to organize churches of their own under the supervision of the white brethren. As they very often had members of their own race who were called to preach the white brethren would ordain them to serve the colored congregations. When this was not possible the white pastors often served and directed them in

their worship service. It is an admirable thing that the white brethren were concerned about the negroes and saw to it that they had the Gospel preached to them. Many of the revivals in the white churches saw numbers of the colored people make professions of faith in Christ and their consequent baptism into the fellowship of the white churches.

The negroes were given all the privileges of church membership with the white brethren but that of voting in the business meetings. This was not allowed because their masters might influence their vote to the detriment of the church. They generally sat in a special section of the church reserved for them. When the time came for them to observe the Lord's Supper one of the white brethren would superintend the service if one of their own preachers was not present. Records show that on many occasions the white brethren would secure a white pastor to minister to their spiritual needs. After the Emancipation Proclamation was set forth in 1863 the white brethren began to assist the colored members in organizing churches of their own. For that reason the majority of the Negro Baptist Churches in the Green River Country were organized after that date.

The Negro members were subject to the disciplinary action of the church the same as the white members. Records are plentiful to show that they were dealt with for stealing from one another and their masters, fighting among themselves, immoralities, non-attendance, contempt of the church, and many other things. Generally after such disciplinary action became necessary they were later restored by repentance and acknowledgment to the church. 'What was true of them was also true of the white members. -

No record of the number of colored members is given in the minutes of the Association until the year 1851. From then on to the year 1877 a column is given each year to the numbers in each church. To give you some conception of their large number we include a few of those lists:

1851 .....	337 colored	1829 whites
1856.....	339 colored	1735 whites
1865.....	675 colored	2525 whites
1866.....	377 colored	2873 whites
1871,.....	58 colored	3622 whites
1876.....	5 colored	4254 whites

For many years the First Baptist Church, of Owensboro, Kentucky, had more colored members than white. In 1854 there were 184 colored and only 80 whites; in 1857 it was 213 to 87; in 1860 it was 215 to 110, etc. The church at Pellville reported 2 colored members in 1877. This was the last report by any of the churches of the number of colored members in their membership.

[p.85] In the year 1833 the population of the village [Yellow Banks – Owensboro] was about 200, with many of this number being slaves of the landowners of the surrounding territory. According to the History of the Fourth Street Colored Baptist Church, the first congregational worship of the colored Baptists was held in a log cabin at the corner of what is now known as Walnut and Second Streets. Services were held in this cabin as early as 1830 by Elder Potts, who was noted as the best reader among the colored people of the community. The cabin belonged to a man by the name of Phil Thompson, who was later killed in a fight with a man named Jeffrey. In the year 1835 a log church was erected on the west bank of the ravine near the site of the log cabin mentioned above. This old log church was the sanctuary of the colored Baptists of all this region for over fifteen years. The building was built of rough logs with a fireplace made with large flat stones and a stick chimney plastered with mud. The fireplace was large enough to burn wood eight or ten feet in length. The seats were slabs with legs set in auger holes and the lighting was furnished at night by the blaze from the fireplace or tallow-dipped candles and wick lamps.

According to this record the colored Baptists were the owners of the first property used for any kind of a House of Worship in the city of Owensboro. This was before the organization of any religious denomination was perfected in the city, so the record can easily stand on its own merits.



**Sixty Years of Owensboro, 1883-1953, William Foster Hayes,  
Messenger Job Printing Co., Owensboro, KY, 1944, p.217:**

**NEGRO CHURCHES**

Of these the Fourth Street Baptist Church is by far the largest. Its building is a large brick one on West Fourth Street and there is a large membership, including many of the most prominent Negroes in the city. For a number of years the Rev. S. E. Smith was its pastor, later the Rev. C. C. Sykes. The present pastor is the Rev. O. M. Locust, who came from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in September 1943.

Other churches of our colored population, with their pastors as of May, 1941, are as follows:

- St. Paul A. M. E.—Corner Seventh and Elm Streets. Rev. L. Harvey, pastor.
- Zion Baptist—Mechanicsville Short Ninth Street. Rev. Jeff Dixon, pastor.
- Center Street Baptist—Rev. J. W. Wright, pastor.
- Tenth Street Baptist—Rev. J. H. Jacobs, pastor.



**History of Fourth Street Baptist Church, 1959 Pamphlet:**

The first church property bought and owned by any Christian group in “Yellow Banks” now Owensboro, Kentucky was at the intersection of Second and Walnut Streets by the membership of what is now the Fourth Street Baptist Church. This was done in 1830. The church was built of logs. The seats were slabs with legs set in auger holes.

“The fire place was made with large flat stones and a stick chimney plastered with mud. It was large enough to burn eight or ten-foot wood.”

Light was furnished at night by the blaze from the fire place or tallow dipped candles and wick lamps. This was done eight years before the building of the First Baptist Church (white).

The present site of the Fourth Street Church originally was two acres and covered the space now occupied by the Western High School and other residence properties between Poplar and Elm Street. The first brick church was built on this property, remodeled several times, lasted until 1888. In February of that year it was consumed by fire. Under the administration of Rev. S. E. Smith, D.D., the present structure was built in 1893.

The pastors who have served this church in the last one hundred twenty nine years are: Isom Howard; S. Berry; Moses Harding; S. E. Smith, D.D.; W. H. Williams; C. C. Sykes; Stephen Griffith; C. E. Newsome; C. H. Clark, D.D.; A. D. Hart, D.D.; E. H. Smith, D.D.; O. M. Locust. The present pastor serving his fourteenth year: Q. L. Jones, D.D.





Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 13 July 1969, p.1B:

## 4th Street Baptist Church Forming Plans For Building

By Linda Connelly, Messenger & Inquirer, Staff Writer



TO BE REPLACED – Fourth Street Baptist Church, erected in 1893 and considered to be an outstanding work of architecture, will be replaced in the future. High renovative costs make repair of the present structure improbable.

New building plans are being formulated for the Fourth Street Baptist Church, the first Negro Baptist Church in Owensboro.

The church, built in 1893, at 821 W. 4th St., is classed among outstanding architectural works in Kentucky, and now is showing the toll of its 76 years.

"Nothing lasts forever" and, following, the recommendations of architects in Evansville and Owensboro, according to the Rev. W. R. Brown, pastor, the committee investigating possibilities for the church were informed that "the cost of repairs would be as much as, if not more than a new church."

As a result, the committee voted to construct another church at the site of the present one. The decision to build is the result of a five-year study.

"First we have to raise enough money to insure credit from local businesses" said the Rev. Mr. Brown, "then we can work out a time-table and start construction."

The church committee working on the future building foresees a modern structure.

"We went to architecture shows in Nashville in order to decide on the type building that we wanted" said the Rev. Mr. Brown. "We found that a modern type is the most desirable as well as economical."

The new building will be a legacy from the past and the 58-year period preceding the building of the now 76-year-old church.

Prior to establishing a separate congregation, Negroes used a corner of the First Baptist Church in Owensboro, built in 1835, near the old O&N railroad depot. From this corner, Negroes could attend the services conducted by the white clergy.

Written permission from white masters was required for baptisms of black converts. In the days when "Slavery was ordained by God," as the doctrine decreed, the Negro ministers, known as "exhorters," were subordinated to the will, criticism and dictation of their masters. Exhorters preaching equality or liberty for their people were barred from ministry.

Later, in 1843, the Negro Baptists of Owensboro were allowed to hold their services in a log hut. The hut, belonging to Phil Thompson, was located at the corner of Main and Walnut Streets at the site of the old ravine.

A new log church replaced the hut in 1867 on the west bank of the ravine. This church was the sanctuary for all the Negro Baptists in the area for the next 20 years. Hewn of rough logs, the interior was furnished with slab seats with legs set in auger holes.

Evening light was provided by a stone fireplace, with a mud plastered stick chimney, tallow dipped candles and wick lamps.

The log church soon burned and another makeshift church was constructed on Fourth Street, the site of the present church, to accommodate the growing congregation of more than 100 members.

The rate of the church's growth in population quickly exceeded the capacity of the church. The pastor at that time, the Rev. Charlie Clark, took immediate control of the situation and began soliciting funds for a new church, netting a total of \$1,300 and some land was sold to the Owensboro Board of Education to supplement the fund.

Eventually, the largely expanded congregation realized their dream of their own church and the Fourth Street Baptist Church was erected costing approximately \$35,000.



**Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 7 January 1972, p.1B:**

**Fourth Street Baptists Plan New Building**

Demolition of an Owensboro landmark, the Fourth Street Baptist Church at 821 W. 4th St., and two houses adjacent on the west began Thursday to make way for construction of a new church.

The decision to raze the 79-year-old church building and to construct a new structure followed a seven-year study which showed that cost of repairs would be as much as, if not greater than a new church. The church, built in 1893, was the first Negro Baptist Church in Owensboro.

Destruction of the houses at 825 and 901 W. 4th St., which were recently purchased by the church from Mrs. Mary L. Itson and Robert McHenry Jr. respectively, will provide additional building space.

Tentative plans for the new building, which is being designed by Max Bisson and Associates, call for a one-story brick structure with an educational wing. Off-street parking facilities will be provided.

Construction on the building "will hopefully begin within 1972," the Rev. W. R. Brown, pastor, said.

Until construction on the new church is complete, Sunday services will be held in the Goodloe School gymnasium, 820 W. 3rd St.

Charles Gaddis and Sons was awarded the contract for demolition of the three structures.

Fourth Street Baptist Church, classed among the outstanding architectural works in Kentucky, was erected at a cost of approximately \$35,000.



**History of Owensboro. KY Facebook Website**  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/HistoryofOwensboro> ):



Pictures of the old Fourth Street Baptist Church as it was being torn down in January 1972



[Note by Jerry Long] – This picture was added to the “History of Owensboro, KY” Facebook site in 2015. The contributor misidentified the church as the St. Stephen Cathedral in 1900. It is the Fourth Street Baptist Church. The picture was made at the time of the dedication of the new church building in July 1898



**Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Saturday, 9 December 1972, p.3A:**



**Groundbreaking Planned  
For New Baptist Church**

The Fourth Street Baptist Church, 821 West 4th St . will hold a groundbreaking ceremony for a new church building at 2:30 p m Sunday.

The new building will be erected at the site of the old church, which was raised in early 1972 It will consist of a one-floor plan auditorium, education rooms and a parking lot.

The exterior design is modern Gothic constructed of brick, with a fiber glass spire. Windows will have various shades of amber cathedral glass. Two stained glass windows from the old church building will be used on the interior.

The sanctuary will have a vestibule off of which will be an usher’s room with a ladies’ lounge,

The educational portion of the structure will have 13 classrooms, restrooms, nurdserly, office, pastor’s study, choir room, fellowship hall and kitchen. Separate dressing rooms are to be provided for the sanctuary.

Max H. Bison and Associates are the architects with Lanham Brothers the general contractors.

Dr. W. R. Brown is the pastor of the church.



**Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 5 December 1973, p.6C:**

**4th Street Baptist  
to be dedicated  
at Sun. ceremony**

Dedication ceremonies for the new Fourth Street Baptist Church will be held Sunday, preceded by three evenings of worship services.

A family prayer service will be held tonight by the deacons and trustees of the church. On Thursday night, the Daviess-McLean Baptist Association will present a worship service with the Rev. T.A. Prickett, pastor of the Seven Hills Baptist Church, as guest speaker. The Rev. J.V. Case Jr., superintendent of missions for the association, will preside with music furnished by the Hall Street Baptist Church choir.

The Rev. R.L. McFarland will be the moderator and guest speaker Friday night with the Green River Valley District Association honoring the new church. The Green River Valley Combined Choir -will provide the music.

Dr. Homer E. Nutter, pastor of the First Baptist Church, Lexington, Ky., will be guest minister during Sunday's dedication program. He has served as moderator of the General Association of Kentucky Baptists and is now chairman of the board of regents at Kentucky State University, Frankfort.

Dr. Nutter will speak at the morning worship service and again at the dedication service which will be followed by an open house for the invited public.

Pastor of the new edifice is the Rev. W.R. Brown who is being praised for keeping the congregation together during the many months of construction work on the new church.

The new building is a one-floor plan with Gothic design at the entrance which is surrounded by Indiana limestone and white wood paneling.

The exterior is of light, reddish brown brick with roof shingles of the same color. Windows are of various shades of amber cathedral glass. Two stained glass windows from the old church have been preserved for use in the new one.

Pews are of dark oak wood. The sanctuary, with lounges for men and women, has a blue-green carpet blending with the seat pads on the pews.



**History of Owensboro and Daviess County, Kentucky,  
Hugh O. Potter, Herff Jones-Paragon Publishing, Montgomery, AL &  
Louisville, KY, 1974, Chapter VIII – Early Religious History, pp.52:**

Up to the year 1885 the following additional Baptists churches were organized in Daviess County: ... Fourth Street (1843), ... Center Street (1863)...



**Owensboro's First Church, 1835-1985: The Sesquicentennial  
History of the First Baptist Church, Owensboro, Kentucky,  
Rev. Wendell Holmes Rone, Sr., Progress Printing Co., Inc.  
Owensboro, KY, 1985, p.236:**



Fourth Street Baptist Church,  
Owensboro, founded 9 May 1835



Dr. S. E. Smith

Long-Time Pastor of the Fourth Street Baptist Church; and Leader in Erection of the Above New Church Building in 1893.

The above House of Worship was erected in 1893, after a disastrous fire had destroyed the 1858 Brick House of Worship. It had been enlarged by an addition of twenty feet to its length in 1881. It stood until 1972, at which time it was razed to make way for the Modern and Beautiful New Building. The 1893 Building was erected at a cost of \$30,000.00. Brethren Theodore Brookings, Robert Roan, Joe Robinson, William H. McFarland, T.C. Valentine, William Griffith, and Sister Georgia Howard formed the Building Committee.

This was the fourth House of Worship used by the Church. The first two were log structures, located at Second and Walnut Streets. Attorney Phillip Thompson provided the first (1830); the White Branch erected the second (1835) and third (1858); and the Congregation erected its fourth and fifth Buildings, as well as the Annex of 1881.



**Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Monday, 7 November 2005, p.3C:**

**Church celebrates anniversary**

Fourth Street Baptist holds 'Guided by  
the Light' ceremony to mark 175 years

By David Blackburn, Messenger-Inquirer

Speakers at the Fourth Street Baptist Church's 175th anniversary celebration Sunday knew God's love and mercy were the reasons for its longevity.

They praised that in song and word, then symbolically passed that spirit along to younger generations during part of the two-hour, music-laden event at 821 E. Fourth St.

In a "Guided by the Light" ceremony, older members passed along a candle-shaped light down through younger members, each representing 25 years of the church's history.

"That is God's eternal light, and it will never go out. That's what we celebrate today," Pamela Hamilton, anniversary committee chairwoman, told a nearly full sanctuary.

"We should never forget where we came from and who has brought us to where we are," said the Rev. Willie Grubbs, guest speaker and pastor of Tenth Street Missionary Baptist Church.

Tenth Street's choir provided special music. The Rev. George Edward Sebree has been Fourth Street's pastor since 1982.

"I just stopped by today to tell you you need to remember God's blessings," Grubbs said, citing the 23rd Psalm and David's praise for still waters, green pastures and a restored soul.

"You've come a long ways since 'African Branch,' " he said, referring to the name of the black worshipers section of the Baptist Church of Owensboro.

They started worshipping together in 1830 in a log cabin on Main Street.

A log cabin with sawn wooden slabs that seated eight white members and 18 slaves was built in 1835, followed by the segregated brick First Baptist Church in 1838.

The first church built near the current site went up in 1858 but burned in 1888.

Fourth Street Baptist got its name in 1866 when the congregation became a full-fledged Baptist church.

Membership grew to nearly 1,000 in the late 1950s, but the current building, erected in 1973, now has 418 members.

"This, at one time, was a neighborhood church," said member David Kelly, 58, who grew up in the church. "Now it is a commuter church."

Some residents now live on the city's outskirts or moved to other towns or states, he said.

It is still a tight-knit church, with seven or eight families comprising about 60 percent of the members, Kelly said.

"What we have to do is expand beyond those," he said. "We have to appeal to those who are new to the community."

The church has recently bought property along Elm, Third and Fourth streets, but has no plans for it yet, Kelly said.

Some possibilities include adding parking space, an activities building and Sunday school classrooms, he said.

For Hamilton, the church's blessings include becoming a believer since becoming a member six years ago.

"I have found Fourth Street to be my church family, and we are a family," she said after the celebration.



## Daviess County's Fourth Street Baptist Church unveils state historical marker

By Renee Beasley Jones, Messenger-Inquirer:

Fourth Street Baptist Church — the oldest Black church in Daviess County — celebrated its rich history on Thursday.

The church, which is 190 years old, now has an official state highway marker in its front lawn. Church leaders unveiled the Kentucky Historical Society plaque in front of a crowd of local government officials and community leaders.

The Rev. Mario Pearson, who leads the congregation, is the church's 18th pastor. He read aloud the names of all the preachers who preceded him.

"This is an amazing event," Pearson said after the celebration ended. "I am so blessed to be here and to be part of this wonderful event."

The application process for a state historical marker can be lengthy, taking several months.

Pam Smith-Wright, Owensboro City commissioner and mayoral candidate, attends Fourth Street Baptist Church.

She spearheaded the effort to get the marker.

It reads:

"In 1830, a Baptist church began in a log cabin-house, which was provided for Black worshipers by Philip Thompson. The congregation was first led by Black Baptist Minister Oliver Potts. The Black Baptist Church was founded after the Civil War & in 1866 was named Fourth Street Baptist Church. It is the oldest African American church in Daviess County."

Smith-Wright read the church's history to the crowd.

The congregation formed in the early 1800s. The church body consisted of Blacks and Caucasians who worshipped together — often in equal numbers.

"When slaves started outnumbering slave owners, they gave us our own church," Smith-Wright said.

The mother church still exists. It is First Baptist Church in Owensboro.

While reading the history at the event, Smith-Wright paused after becoming emotional.

Currently, the nation is embroiled in racial tension, she later explained.

"This whole world is messed up, and the stuff that is going on in our country is just unbelievable. And to think that one day we were all worshipping together and caring about each other," Smith-Wright said.



Kentucky Historical Highway Marker erected in 2020 by the Kentucky Historical Society and Kentucky Department of Highways. Marker is located in Owensboro, Daviess County, KY on West 4th Street east of Poplar Street, on the left when traveling east.

Inscription: Fourth Street Baptist Church – In 1830, a Baptist church began in a log cabin-house, which was provided for Black worshipers by Philip Thompson. The congregation was first led by Black Baptist Minister Oliver Potts. The Black Baptist Church was founded after the Civil



War & in 1866 was named Fourth Street Baptist Church. It is the oldest African American church in Daviess County.



**Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 17 November 2023, pp.1A & 2A:**



A state historical marker explains the significance of Fourth Street Baptist Church at 821 W. Fourth St. in Owensboro. The church will celebrate its 193rd anniversary at its 11 a.m. service on Sunday.



## **Continuing to worship**

Fourth Street Baptist  
Church celebrates  
193rd anniversary

By Freddie Bourne, Messenger-Inquirer



The Rev. Mario C. Pearson Jr., senior pastor of Fourth Street Baptist Church, right, speaks to the congregation during the church's 193rd anniversary service as First Lady Rhonda Pearson, executive pastor, raises her hand in worship on Sunday.

The Sunday service at Fourth Street Baptist Church was a day of celebration as the congregation rang in its 193rd anniversary.

For the Rev. Mario C. Pearson Jr. — who celebrated his 13 years as pastor for the church in July — the milestone, and those preparing for it, were worth acknowledging.

“It’s a great day,” he said Sunday before the start of the service. “As a senior pastor, it feels good that the members of the church spearheaded everything. I just sat back and watched everything come together.

“One-hundred and ninety three years is a very, very long time for a church to be in existence,” Pearson said, “and I look at some of the pictures throughout the church just to go back in history to see what God has done for this beautiful church.

“I’m excited and humbled to be the pastor of the church at this time,” Pearson said.

Mary Helen McCormick, who read aloud the church’s history along with fellow members Olga McKissic and City Commissioner Pam Smith-Wright, said the church first began in 1830 as the “first congregational workshop of colored Baptists in Owensboro” that took place in a log cabin.

A log church was then built on “the west bank of the ravine on ground crossed by Main Street” in 1835, McCormick said, initially called the “African Branch” of the Owensboro First Baptist Church that served as the sanctuary for Baptists in the entire region for over 15 years.

In 1858, a third meeting house for the branch was built before being “buried to the ground” in 1888, McCormick said.

McCormick said a fourth location was built at its current site in 1893 and became a “landmark for the city and surrounding communities” before the structure was razed in 1972.

The current building was built the following year under the direction of then-pastor, the late Rev. W.R. Brown, and held its first service on Nov. 25, 1973 — just under 50 years ago.

The church, which has the distinction of being the oldest African-American church in Owensboro and Daviess County, experienced obstacles during its 190th anniversary in 2020 due to the height of the coronavirus pandemic.

However, Pearson feels the tough times don’t last and the participation is still healthy.

“... I look at the strength of (the) church, especially for our youth department where some Sundays we have 60 kids back there in our youth church,” Pearson said, “and I’m very inspired that many of our seniors are still here with us. We have a couple (of) couples that are over 90-plus years old that are still serving here.

“It helps me know that God still has His hands on this church,” he said. “His promises ... will come to pass regardless of what goes on in this world.

Vivian Johnson, who has been with the church for “over 60 years,” has familial history dating back for generations.

Her maternal great-grandfather S.L. Barker served “many offices” within the church and her paternal grandmother, Juanita Jackson, took on the role of the secretary of Sunday school.

Johnson, herself, has been a former Sunday school teacher and the director of vacation Bible school.

“I’ve got a lot of roots here,” she said.

And Johnson finds the legacy of the church has continued simply “through the grace of God.”

“I have seen God move in this church,” she said, “and knowing that and seeing that, that’s why I’m still here praising Him.”

Hugh Harris, who’s been a member of the church since 1966, feels the congregation is in good hands.

“(Rev. Pearson) is well thought of here and he represents himself very well,” he said. “I think that’s one thing that keeps the church together.”

For the occasion, the church invited the Rev. Connie Baltzell, pastor at St. James Baptist Church in Evansville, to give the service’s sermon.

Baltzell is no stranger to the church, as he’s visited for over the last 30 years.

Baltzell said he had a friend that started preaching at Fourth Street Baptist Church during that time and invited Baltzell to provide the Benediction at one of the services — eventually leading to exchanging contact information and then becoming assistant pastor for some time.

Baltzell finds it to be a “homecoming” and “revival” every time he returns.

For the 193rd anniversary service, Baltzell’s sermon focused on one word: — “until” — from Psalm 73.

“There are times when we in the ministry seem like, ‘What’s the use?’ — for what’s going on economically, socially, nationally with the climate that we have as far as what we’ve done with Gaza and Israel and et cetera, and locally with so many justice issues and civil rights,” he said Sunday. “I want to encourage the congregation not to give up — that we need to continue to come to worship.”



## Pastors of the Fourth Street Baptist Church

Listing by Jerry Long

Using the book, History of Daviess County, Kentucky (1883), Daviess County Black marriages and the Owensboro, KY newspapers I was able to document the following pastors of the Fourth Street Baptist Church. Ministers listed may have had other years of service that were not documented. In some prior listings S. Berry and Stephen Griffith are shown as being pastors but no documentation establishing their service was found.

Isom Howard (1846-1867)  
Rev. Dupuy (pre 1875)  
Robert Caldwell (1868-1870)  
C. Edward Newsom (1872-1876)  
Moses Harding (1876-1886)  
Charles H. Clark, D.D. (1886-1891)  
Samuel E. Smith, D.D. (1893-1905)  
Allen Daniel Hurt, D.D. (1905-1910)  
William Henry Williams, D.D. (1910-1923)  
Edward H. Smith, D.D. (1923-1939)

Christopher Columbus Sykes (1939-1942)  
Ora Marcus Locust (1943-1946)  
Quintus L. Jones, D.D. (1946-1960)  
William R. Brown (1961-1979)  
George Thomas (1980)  
R. Lamont Jones (1980)  
George Edward Sebree (1982-2007)  
Walter Da'Mond Davis, IV (2007-2008 )  
Mario Cedric Pearson, Jr. (2010-2024)

