

TARBORO HISTORIC DISTRICT CHURCH TOUR

Organized religion in Tarboro began with Baptists after the American Revolution although Anglicans were active during the colonial period. The first Baptist worship service was held in Tarboro in 1819. Following controversies over missionary movements, education and benevolent ventures, two Baptist churches were formed in 1828.

1. **Primitive Baptist Church** (corner of Albemarle Avenue and St. James Street)
Established 1828. Current building constructed in the 1840s

Led by Joshua Lawrence, the Primitive or Old School Baptists actively opposed “the materialistic” activities they felt to be against Baptist principles. Known as “hard shell”, members of the Primitive Baptist Church could not find scriptures to back up “New School” practices. Tarboro played a significant role in the Old School movement as the locale where George Howard published the *Primitive Baptist*.

The church building reflects the Primitive Baptist belief in simplicity. The land where the church stands was originally part of the Town Common and the cemetery was established before the building was constructed. Several Civil War veterans and members of Tarboro’s first families are buried in it.

2. **First Baptist Church** (corner of Main and Wilson Streets)
Established 1828. Current building completed in 1928.

In 1820, what was known as the Missionary Baptist Church was built at Church Street and Hendricks Creek near the Tarboro Male Academy. In the 1828 schism, this building went with Missionary faction as their worship place.

With just 25 members, the church acquired the current Main Street lot in 1890 for \$3,500 and incurred debt because of the land purchase and construction costs. The building was dedicated in 1893 after the congregation subscribed to reduce the debt and brought a minister from Scotland Neck to revitalize the congregation. In order to generate income, a five-room rental cottage that later served as the parsonage was built behind the church 1905. The “note” burned in 1913.

Called “First” Baptist Church beginning in 1923, the congregation launched plans for a new building with \$60,400 pledged. The members broke ground in 1926 and by members doing much of the construction work, completed the building in 1928. The old church was sold to St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church and moved

to East Tarboro in three sections. It was not until 1945 that the mortgage was paid.

The congregation grew to a post-World War II membership of over 600. To accommodate new ministries, a building program included an Education Building in 1965 and a sanctuary renovation in the 1970s.

3. **St. Stephen Missionary Baptist Church** (St. Patrick Street south of East Granville Street) Founded and building completed in 1883.

St. Stephen's first minister and church organizer was Garland Henry White, a former slave born in Virginia in 1832. He served as chaplain of the 28th Regiment of the U.S. Colored Troops during the Civil War and is buried in Arlington Cemetery.

Church Trustees purchased the Tar River property in 1884 to serve 2nd Baptist Church (Colored), founded in 1883. The Rev. T. V. Foster who died in 1974 served as St. Stephen's pastor for many years.

The vernacular Gothic Revival structure was severely damaged in the 1999 floods following Hurricane Floyd. Unlike its neighboring church, St. Paul AME Zion, St. Stephen chose to repair and restore its sanctuary and adjoining buildings. Baptisms were traditionally performed in the Tar River and a now-overgrown path led from the front of the church to the river's edge.

4. **Site of St. Paul AME Zion Church** (St. David and East Granville Streets) Founded circa 1864.

Following the Civil War, black Methodists, both former slaves and free, were evangelized by two new national denominations – AME and AME Zion. Formed as direct result of Bishop James Walker Hood's persuasion of black Southern Methodist congregations to convert to AME Zion faith, the North Carolina Conference was founded in 1864 and the Rev. William Pitts organized Tarboro church shortly thereafter. The American Missionary Association sent Jamaican-born teacher Robert Taylor to begin a school for former slaves in the AME Zion structure.

Built in the 1870s, the church was severely damaged by 1999 floods of Hurricane Floyd and demolished in 2002. The site also contained church bell that was later relocated to new church structure on West Wilson Street that was constructed over a weekend by a missionary group.

5. **Calvary Episcopal Church and Churchyard** (the block bordered by Church, Panola, St. James, and St. David Streets)

Founded 1833. Church building completed in 1867; Parish House and All Saints Chapel completed in 1922. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places and as a *Living Historic Church* of the Diocese of North Carolina.

Only the Episcopal church in Tarboro can trace its roots to pre-Revolutionary War Tarboro when an Anglican chapel, St. Mary's, was established on the banks of the Tar River. Organized services were dormant until after the 1789 founding of the Episcopal Church in the newly formed United States. Calvary Parish was incorporated by Tarboro citizens and admitted into the Diocese of North Carolina in 1833.

The block upon which Calvary stands is comprised of lots conveyed as gifts to the parish. A wooden structure was consecrated in 1840, used by St. Luke's Church, and demolished in 1929. English architect William Percival designed the Gothic Revival church and construction was begun before the Civil War during which the walls were boarded up. A good cotton crop allowed the parish to complete the church by 1867. Hobart Upjohn, son of famed architect Richard Upjohn, designed Memorial Hall and All Saints Chapel, which were completed in 1922. A new book on Calvary's magnificent stained glass windows is available for purchase in the gift shop.

Two Rectors of Calvary Church played a significant role not only in the parish but also in the larger community. The Rev. Joseph Blount Cheshire served as Rector from 1842 until his retirement in 1886. An avid amateur horticulturist, Cheshire sought botanical samples from around the world to plant in the Calvary churchyard, which is today known for its diverse plantings. In the 1920s, Calvary embarked on a mission program to establish congregations across Edgecombe County including in Tarboro's mill villages. The Rev. Bertram Brown's endeavors were recognized with a sundial on the Town Common.

The Calvary churchyard contains many significant graves – those of slaves, Civil War soldiers including General William Dorsey Pender (youngest Confederate General killed in the Battle of Gettysburgh), the Rt. Rev. William Cheshire (Bishop of North Carolina), and Tarboro families. It is still an active cemetery and is individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

6. **St. Luke's Episcopal Church** (corner of Panola and East Pitt Streets)

Founded in 1872. Building completed in 1892. A *Living Historic Church* of the Diocese of North Carolina.

Early members of this parish worshipped in Calvary Church but were moved to their own chapel in the corner of the Calvary Churchyard in 1870. Under

the guidance of the Rev. John William Perry and with support of Calvary's Rector, the Rev. Joseph Blount Cheshire, the congregation made plans for a permanent structure. The current building was completed in 1892 and St. Luke's was consecrated as a parish in 1899.

The Rev. William Perry served as Rector until 1908 and was succeeded by his son-in-law, the Rev. Milton Moran Weston who served until 1958. At that time, St. Luke's reverted to mission status and is currently served by the Rector of Calvary Church serving as St. Luke's Vicar and its own Lay Readers.

The St. Luke's building is simplified Gothic Revival style and contains the original flooring, pews, and altar. The stained glass windows, including the three chancel Tiffany windows, are a combination of memorials to parishioners and donations from other Episcopal parishes in the eastern United States.

- 7. Howard Memorial Presbyterian Church and Old Town Cemetery** (the block bordered by St. James, St. Patrick, Church, and Church Streets)
Founded 1874. Current building completed in 1909.

A small group of Presbyterians began meeting in the Methodist Church in 1867. Led by three women who were all named "Anna", the congregation received permission to build a church on one corner of Old Town Cemetery, the public burying grounds. The "Three Annas" designed a Gothic Revival building that was erected in 1874 at a cost of \$5,500 by the initial twenty-four members.

In 1905, George Howard, a leading Tarboro citizen, announced his desire to erect a new church building as a memorial to his parents. The congregation petitioned the Albemarle Presbytery to change the name to Howard Memorial Presbyterian Church and the new sanctuary was dedicated in 1909. The education wing was added in the late 1950s. The original building was moved to East Tarboro where it served Eastern Star Baptist Church until its demolition following the 1999 floods of Hurricane Floyd. The Town of Tarboro conveyed Old Town Cemetery to Howard Memorial in 2012.

Howard Memorial was active in establishing five mission churches throughout Edgecombe County during the 1920s. It was also during this period that the Rev. Daniel Iverson wrote the well-known hymn, "Spirit of the Living God" in the original pastor's office.

8. **St. James United Methodist Church** (corner of St. James and St. Andrew Streets) Founded in 1784. Present building completed in 1918.

Methodism is rooted in an English movement within the Anglican Church begun in late 1730s. Evangelical-leaning Church of England priests John and Charles Wesley sent ministers and bishops due to a shortage of priests. These missionaries often traveled by horseback, pursued itinerant open-air preaching and were known as circuit riders.

Bishop Francis Asbury (one of the founders of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1784) visited Tarboro in 1803 to preach in the new chapel to a congregation comprised mostly of Africans (unclear if they were slave or free). He presided over the Virginia Conference that met in Tarboro in 1809 with 84 ministers present and over 2,000 people attending two services.

Methodism went dormant in Tarboro after the 1815 death of Bishop Asbury but was soon revitalized in the Tar River Circuit. In 1830, the congregation built a chapel, held a camp meeting, and began to grow. A new church building was dedicated in 1856 on the eve of the Civil War and the congregation shortly thereafter gave the church bell to the Confederate government for war work.

In 1888, St. James became a separate station with 284 members and a church/parsonage property worth \$8,000. Missionary chapels were built in West Tarboro and in the Hart Mill Village. When fire destroyed building in 1915, the congregation met in Tarboro's synagogue until construction of a new church was completed. The first service held in 1918 and the church dedicated in 1931. An educational building was completed in 1953 at cost of \$40,000.

OTHER HISTORIC TARBORO AND PRINCEVILLE CHURCHES AND CONGREGATIONS (*Italics indicate historic building destroyed*)

- *B'nai Israel Synagogue*
- Cobb Memorial Presbyterian Church
- *Eastern Star Missionary Baptist Church, Tarboro*
- St. Catherine of Siena Catholic Church, Tarboro
- St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church, Tarboro
- Union Baptist Church, Tarboro
- *Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church, Princeville*
- Mt. Zion Primitive Baptist Church, Princeville
- *St. Luke Church of Christ (Disciples of Christ), Princeville*

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