

Bethlehem Baptist Church

Intersection of Wall and Gilmore streets

Barnwell

The congregation of Bethlehem Baptist Church was organized by the black members of the Barnwell Baptist Church in 1833. The group was not recognized as a separate unit, however, until 1868, when the congregation purchased the old 1829 Barnwell Baptist Church, which stood on the present site and had been vacated after the white congregation constructed a new building around 1850. The black congregation worshiped in the building until 1898, when the present church building was built. A vernacular interpretation of the Victorian architecture of the last two decades of the 19th century featuring Queen Anne and Gothic details, the present building was constructed by members of the congregation using materials from the old building.

Promoting the education of African Americans was an early concern of the Bethlehem Baptist Church. According to church tradition, the congregation organized the Bethlehem Association to provide funds for black education. The association helped to found Morris College in Sumter, South Carolina, and to establish a black high school in Barnwell. The church has been in continuous use since its construction and is conscientiously maintained. [CA 7/10/79, 79002374]