

Spring Hill: The Faith of a Community

From its beginning, Spring Hill has been anchored by organizations of faith and worship. Platted in 1911, the subdivision saw its first church in 1912. Religion's early days were associated primarily with three churches: Spring Hill Missionary Baptist Church, St. Matthew's Missionary Baptist Church, and Bethel A.M.E. Church.

The Church Archives Inventory

Financed by the Works Progress Administration (WPA), under President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, the Church Archives Inventory sought to compile a nationwide survey of churches. These records offer unique glimpses into communities and their places of worship. Surveys in Hillsborough County were conducted around 1940 and records for the state of Florida total almost 6,000.

Spring Hill Missionary Baptist

In 1912, this was the first church established. An account from the Church, notes that before 1915, it shared a building with an A.M.E. congregation. The owner decided to sell the building to the first church that could raise \$100, and Spring Hill M.B. was up to the task. Under the leadership of Rev. Henry M. Dillard, appointed in 1932, Spring Hill MB moved into its location on the north side of W. 3rd St., west of Nebraska Ave. It is believed that the church occupied this location until it moved out of Spring Hill in 1949.

New Spring Hill Missionary Baptist Church today.



Bethel A.M.E.

Established about 1918, it is believed to have been in the same location since then. Records indicate it has been located at the corner of 10th Street and Okaloosa Ave. since at least 1926 and it is identified by name on maps as early as 1931. Unfortunately, Bethel was not included in the WPA's inventory and little is known about its early years.



Modern view of the Sasser Memorial Fellowship Hall at Bethel A.M.E. Church and the July 25, 1955 Tampa Times publication of its building permit..

St. Matthew's Missionary Baptist



St. Matthew's Baptist Church, 1952, Courtesy Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System

In 1926, some parishioners from Spring Hill MB., led by Rev. Matthew Myers, broke off to form a new congregation: St. Matthew's Missionary Baptist Church. In its first 30 days, it held services in the Bethel A.M.E. Church building on W. 4th Street (now Okaloosa Ave.). Soon after, the church built a small, wooden structure at 1032 Yukon St. on land donated by Rev. Myers. It continued in Spring Hill until after 1996, when it became New St. Matthew's Missionary Baptist Church and relocated to 50th Street in Tampa.



New St. Matthew's Missionary Baptist Church today.

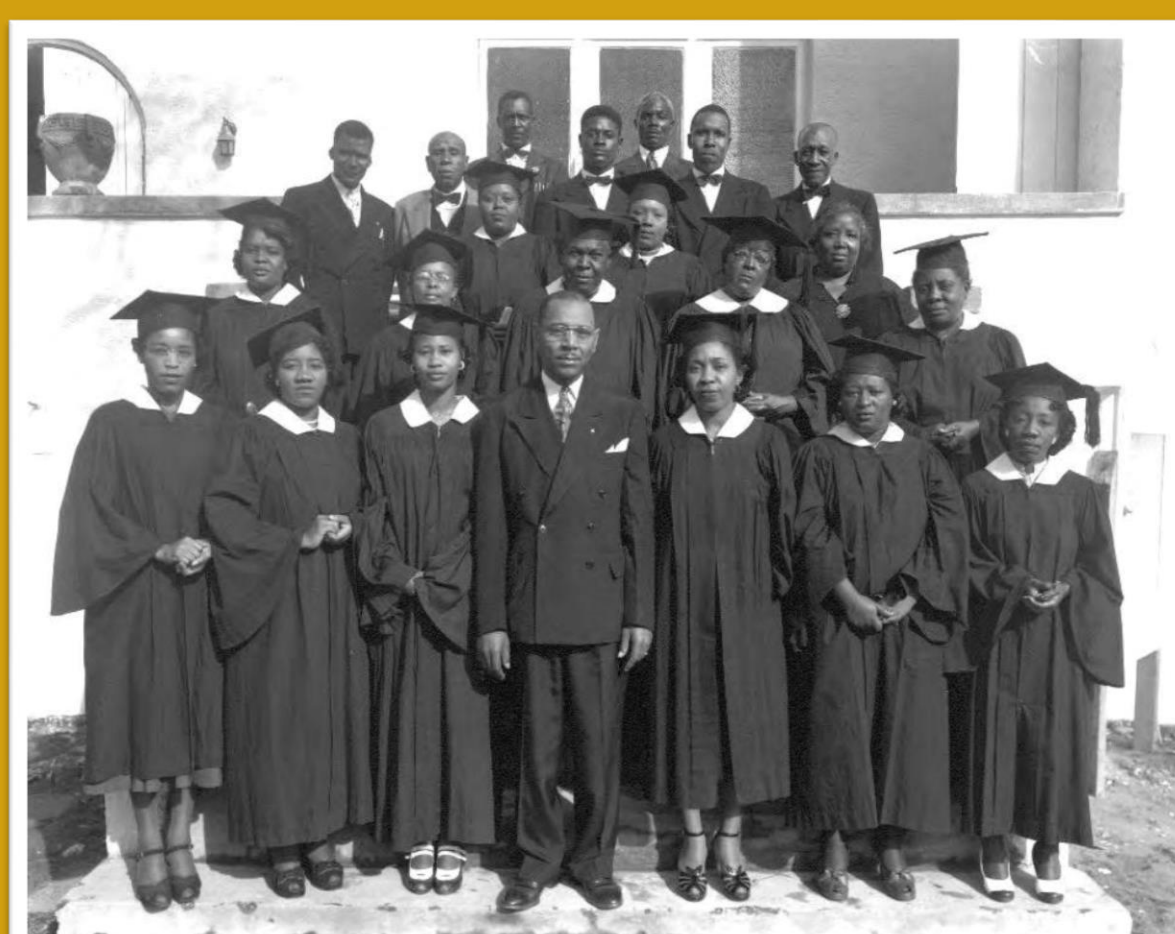
St. John's Missionary Baptist

Although located in Tampa, not Spring Hill, St. John's MB had an influential role in Spring Hill's development. It was established in 1908 by Rev. Henry M. Dillard, who would later move with his family to Spring Hill. According to Spring Hill M.B. Church, around 1915, Rev. Dillard, by then an experienced pastor at St. John's, provided leadership to the Church as it established a permanent home. Rev. Dillard later served Spring Hill M.B. Church as its pastor, even though he no longer resided in Spring Hill at the time,

Notice in *Tampa Tribune*, Oct. 16, 1939, advertising a concert by Rev. Dillard's St. John's choir. Typical of the Jim Crow era, it identifies the choir as "Negro" and indicates a reserved section for white attendees.

NEGRO CONCERT

The St. John negro jubilee singers will sponsor a concert of spirituals and folk songs tonight at 8 o'clock at the St. John Missionary Baptist church, Cass and Governor streets. A section will be reserved for white persons.



Congregation members, St. John's Missionary Baptist Church, 1949. One of the first publicly available photos of the Church, it was taken 5 years after Rev. Dillard's death.

Courtesy Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System

Spring Hill Today

Today, Spring Hill is a community of many diverse faiths. Although all of the original churches except Bethel A.M.E. have moved out of Spring Hill, the community is currently home to many churches of a variety of faiths. Here are just a few:



Iglesia de Dios la Hermosa - Occupies the site of the original St. Matthews M.B. Church



Emmanuel Church of Deliverance, Apostolic Faith, Inc.



Ambassadors of Christ Temple of Prayer- Occupies the site of the original Spring Hill M.B. Church



New Bethel A.M.E.



Iglesia La Verdad