

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name James C. Dent House
other names Southwest Community House

2. Location

street & number 156 Q Street, SW not for publication
city or town Washington, D.C. vicinity
state District of Columbia code DC county _____ code 001 zip code _____

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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 nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments).

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments).

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby, certify that this property is:
 entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.
 determined eligible for the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.
 Determined not eligible for the National Register.
 removed from the National Register.
 other (explain): _____

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

James C. Dent
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1		Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/Single Dwelling

DOMESTIC/Single Dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE VICTORIAN/Queen Anne

foundation Brick

walls Brick

roof Not visible

other _____

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

James C. Dent House

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

Section 7 Page 1

Description Summary:

The James Clinton Dent House (more recently known as the Southwest Community House) is an intact, two-story painted brick house located at the corner of 2nd and Q streets in Southwest Washington D.C. Built in 1906 and designed in a vernacular Queen Anne style, the freestanding house is set upon a raised basement and is characterized by its two-bay elevation with the entrance bay recessed from a wider, two-story projecting window bay. A single-story concrete porch which replaced an earlier wood porch of the same form spans the entry bay and wraps around the side of the house.

The house faces north to the street and extends back four bays towards the rear of the lot, with each bay defined by windows on the first and second stories and including a projecting bay and internal chimney on the west side elevation. Because the fenced grassy lot slopes, the basement level is almost fully exposed at the south end of the building.

The Dent house is one of the few surviving dwellings in southwest to have survived Urban Renewal efforts. The house is also unique in that it was historically a detached residence and not built as part of a row or abutting other houses. A stable which originally stood at the rear of the lot is no longer extant.

General Description:

The north (front) elevation of the Dent house faces Q Street and is divided into two bays, including a recessed single entry bay and a wider projecting window bay. The entrance (western) bay is reached by a flight of replacement concrete steps and is covered by a single-story porch. The entry features a pair of original wood and glass doors surmounted by a single-light glass transom with a wood surround. Above the entrance is a single one-over-one double-hung window topped by a segmental arch with a brick hood mould. The wider, projecting window bay includes a pair of 1/1 double-hung wood sash at the first and second stories, set within segmental arched lintels and brick moulds above. Single 1/1 windows light the west side of the projecting bay.

Projecting belt courses form the sills for the first- and second-floor windows and continue around the corner onto the 2nd Street elevation. A third raised belt course is located between the second-floor windows and the cornice. All windows are currently protected by iron bars. At the ground level of the projecting bay, a pair of replacement windows is set within the original opening topped by a wide segmental brick arch with a brick label mould.

The concrete porch floor and iron railings are replacements, but the porch ceiling, with its carved wooden brackets supporting it, and beaded ceiling, appears original.

The west elevation, facing 2nd Street, extends back four bays and includes a series of projections and recessions, corresponding to the front and side wall projecting bays. The northernmost (front) bay of the side wall is unfenestrated with a semi-internal brick chimney stack projecting slightly from the main wall plane. The second bay from the front contains a single double-hung, one-over-one wooden window at the second floor and no opening at the first floor level. The third bay back includes a projecting window bay, like that of the front, with pairs of double-hung windows on both the first and second stories, and at the basement level, with segmental-arched brick lintels and brick hood moulds. The

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

James C. Dent House

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

Section 7 Page 2

sides of this projecting bay are lit by narrow, one-over-one windows in the side walls of the bay at all three levels. The southernmost bay of the wall contains a single, one-over-one double-hung window. As on the front elevation, all windows are below decorative brick segmental arches. In addition to the semi-internal chimney stack to the north of the projecting bay, a second internal chimney projects through the roof near the southern end of the bay.

The east elevation shows the same frieze and belting of the west, but the brick is of lesser quality. Two windows are set side-by-side toward the front of the building in the second story, with plain bluestone sills and topped with an arch of two brick courses. The first story has one door directly beneath the rear window of the upper story and a second door (now blocked up) at the rear. Both doors have a stone step below and brick arches similar to the windows above. Between the rearmost door and the back of the building is one window similar to the others of this elevation but somewhat taller, and blocked up. The porch wraps around the entire east elevation to within about two feet of the rear, supported by brick columns. Concrete stairs with iron railing give access to the porch at about the point of the rear door. Below the porch, two windows can be seen beneath the two doors, of similar design to those above but now bricked up, as is another below the front stairs of the house.

The south elevation is divided into two bays. The first bay contains single, replacement 1/1 double-hung windows at the first and second floors. The second bay contains a smaller similar 1/1 double-hung window at the second floor. There are no decorative projecting belt courses or window heads on this elevation; the window sills are thick and block-like. The roof is lower than at the front or sides, and the cornice consists of two projecting courses of brick with guttering attached. Three half-windows – now blocked up – used to give light to the basement. They resemble the windows of the east elevation with bluestone sills and a raised arch of two courses of brick. The brick here is the same lesser-quality common brick seen on the eastern elevation.

Interior

The interior of the Dent House is not accessible. The owner, PEPCO, would not allow access to the interior of the building.

INTEGRITY

The James Dent House, located on its original site at 2nd and Q Streets, SW, is an important survivor among the small number of remaining late 19th and early 20th century houses that once characterized Southwest, D.C. The brick dwelling is fully intact to its original condition with no additions and only minor alterations including a rebuilt porch having the same configuration as the original. The dwelling's late Victorian massing, including projecting bays and wrap-around porch and its integrated brickwork are intact and representative of the design and craftsmanship of rowhouse architecture from the period. Although the historic setting has been compromised by Urban Renewal efforts, the house's presence alone evokes a strong feeling and association with the past.

+

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad pattern of our history.
- B** Property associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** 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.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

Area of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

SOCIAL HISTORY

ETHNIC HERITAGE/BLACK

Period of Significance

1906-1954

Significant Dates

1906

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

William J. Palmer, Architect

[S.H.] Maddox & Company, Builders

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets)

Previous documentation on files (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- 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
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

James C. Dent House

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

Section 8 Page 1

Summary Statement of Significance:

The history of the southwest quadrant of the original city of Washington has been much recounted, mostly emphasizing the wholesale “urban renewal” demolition of the 1950s that devastated physically and socially a largely African-American neighborhood and paved the way for the construction of the “New Southwest” seen today west of Delaware Avenue. But substantial development preceded this watershed event by decades. Indeed southwest was formerly a bustling if unfashionable mixed-race community of blue-collar families. The James Clinton Dent House is the most significant survivor among the small number of remaining late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century houses that once characterized this earlier southwest. Although a common dwelling form typical of the contemporaneous Northwest neighborhoods, the freestanding brick Dent house was exceptional for Southwest and is all the more exceptional for enduring. The Dent house meets National Register Criterion A with Ethnic History/Black and Social History as the Areas of Significance.

The Dent House qualifies for designation under Criterion A for representing the residential development of “old” Southwest, its African-American and white community, and its churches, as well as emblematic of the rise of the black middle class after Emancipation. The Dent House embodies a uniquely American triumph of the last generation of enslaved people of color who, once emancipated, achieved heights previously denied them. Dent (1855-1908), born into slavery, rose from toil as a farm laborer in tobacco country, to become a lime kiln employee in Washington, before finally obtaining the pastorate of the important Mount Moriah Baptist Church. Through hard work (his own and his wife’s), piety, the attainment of literacy as a young man (possibly before Emancipation), and wise investments, Rev. Dent vaulted himself into an emerging African-American middle class in a single generation. The culmination was a modest affluence commensurate with a position of respectability and authority in the community. Its tangible expression was in investment properties (now demolished), and a comfortable house Dent built late in his life that served as the parsonage for his congregation, owned free and clear, and of a higher quality and larger size than the typical home occupied, and frequently rented, by fellow working-class types. That house today stands as a rare surviving detached dwelling in the eastern section of Southwest, and the last vestige of the Mount Moriah church in its old neighborhood.

The James Clinton Dent House at once represents the myriad modest residences that once filled the southwest quadrant of the city and stands apart as a cut above. Its succession of black and white owners, beginning with the Rev. Dent, typified the solid but unheralded residents of Southwest who built the city, but whose material culture has been overlooked or destroyed over the years.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

James C. Dent House

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

Section 8 Page 2

+

Resource History and Historic Context:

Early History of Southwest Washington

The area between the National Mall, and the Potomac River west of South Capitol Street had been the subject of considerable land speculation in the early Federal period, particularly by James Greenleaf. Unfortunately, plans for gracious homes and a major commercial center along the riverfront amounted to relatively little before the federal government sited an arsenal and the District of Columbia penitentiary along the river and turned James Creek into a southern branch of the Washington City Canal. Located between the canals and the rivers, Southwest made up most of the area then known as “the Island.” Meant to be sources of prosperity, the canals were soon a source of pestilence. The area thus became a modest residential neighborhood for workers at the surrounding military and industrial concerns. An observer of the 1850s later recalled that Southwest “seemed like an overgrown, tattered village which some late hurricane had scattered along the river’s edge.” Before the 1880s Buzzard Point, at the confluence of the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers, was largely unbuilt except for scattered shacks and brick kilns.ⁱ

The land around James Creek began to develop intensively soon after the Civil War, as large numbers of freed slaves joined established white and black communities, forming a relatively mixed and stable population. The alley dwellings built from that time, mostly in the eastern part of the quadrant, were largely inhabited by African Americans.ⁱⁱ

As the Washington City Canal had become increasingly noxious, and the Washington Arsenal had been the scene of several explosions, Southwest had become one of the less desirable parts of the city. In 1873, sewers were laid in the canal bed and the canal was filled – but only as far as James Creek. The creek remained uncovered and polluted for the next fifty years. Thus, the area south of R Street remained predominantly industrial, although poor road conditions limited even non-residential development. By the end of the nineteenth century, there were only a few residences, a school, and church in this vicinity. It was here that a formerly enslaved young black laborer was able to become a minister, buy land and build an impressive home.ⁱⁱⁱ

James Clinton Dent

James Clinton Dent was born in Charles County, Maryland about 1853-1854. He was likely born enslaved into a household of the extended Dent family of planters near Bryantown, but was possibly sold to the Gilroys of Hill Top. James was first enumerated by name (“Clinton Dent”) in the first post-Emancipation federal census of 1870 as a sixteen-year-old farm laborer residing with the Gilroys. The census also indicated that he could read and write by that time.^{iv}

Shortly thereafter, the still teen-aged Dent moved to Washington where, in 1873, he appeared in the city directory as residing at Half Street, SW near O, with Clara Dent, widow of Nathan Dent. From 1876 through 1878, he lived at 1243 3rd Street, SW, working as a laborer and living with his new wife Mary, a seamstress from Virginia. By 1880 the Dents were back on Half Street. Mary was then a washerwoman, a common occupation of the time, and James was employed at a lime kiln. Many of their neighbors, black and white, were employed in the brick-making business at Southwest’s several brickyards. In 1882, James Dent was employed as a driver, likely for the same lime kiln. Two years later, the Dents’ residence was 154 Q Street, SW, and James was again a lime burner. About that time, however, he was ordained a Baptist minister and would soon leave behind other employment.^v

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

James C. Dent House

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

Section 8 Page 3

From 1886 Rev. Dent served as the second pastor of Mount Moriah Baptist Church, a church his wife had helped found four years earlier with some members of Rehoboth Baptist Church. During his 22-year tenure as pastor, the congregation moved from its second to third Southwest location, from 3rd and Van Streets to 2nd Street between M and N.^{vi} When a storm wrecked the new edifice just before its completion in 1891, Dent immediately began plans for its rebuilding, at an eventual cost of \$10,000. The *Washington Bee* described the finished house of worship in 1898 as “a handsome building one story brick, tastefully and beautifully furnished... and with less than \$200 [more] worth of struggle... will be dedicated free of all debts.”^{vii}

If notice in the newspapers was a measure of the standing of a church or its pastor, Mount Moriah and Rev. Dent certainly ranked near the top with prominent African-American churches such as Fifteenth Street Presbyterian, Metropolitan A.M.E., and Nineteenth Street Baptist.^{viii} In July 1895, Mount Moriah hosted the First Washington Baptist Association, a conference of District, Maryland and Virginia ministers. Rev. Dent provided the opening address and was elected moderator and chairman. At the 1901 dedication of the Second Baptist Church, Dent and his choir hosted a program one evening of the week-long festivities, as had the pastor and choirs of Metropolitan AME, and Plymouth Congregational and others on other nights. In 1905, the Colored Social Settlement, founded in 1902 to address poverty among black Southwest alley dwellers, held its first annual “closing exercises” at Mount Moriah. The church continued to support the settlement programs by contributing money to furnish a ward for babies at Camp Pleasant, a summer camp program for African-American children.^{ix} “Success attended his ministry from the beginning,” a Mount Moriah publication recalled in 1915. “Rev. J. C. Dent was a small man in stature, but when you speak of having faith in the Lord, he was a giant.”^x One example of the regard for Rev. Dent for his good works in the community was the bequest of several items by the late W.W. White, an event the *Washington Bee* deemed worthy of publication. And when Dent died in 1908 at the age of 53, out of respect for its long-time leader, the congregation waited a full year before calling a new pastor.^{xi}

The Dent House

The Dents lived at various addresses on Square 603 from at least 1883 through 1908. They purchased a large lot in the mid 1880s and subdivided it into three. Two years later, James Dent constructed a modest frame home for \$400.^{xii}

In 1906 Dent replaced this frame residence with a more substantial brick one at the substantial cost of \$5,000. Rather than simply hire a builder to construct a house from standard plans, or move into a larger home vacated by middle-class whites, as was typical for upwardly mobile African Americans, Rev. Dent engaged white architect William James Palmer to design his home. Palmer was a notable and prolific designer of rowhouses around the turn of the twentieth century.^{xiii}

Palmer was born in Washington, D.C. and is thought to have graduated high school in 1878. Within three years he was practicing as a draftsman. His sturdy two- and three-story brick houses, praised by the *Washington Times* in 1906, graced many up-and-coming neighborhoods in Washington, such as Dupont Circle, Meridian Hill and Columbia Heights. Several of his non-residential buildings, such as the Naval Lodge at 326 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE, and the Union Methodist Episcopal Church at 814 20th, NW, still command admiration.^{xiv} In partnership with Richard E. Crump, Palmer also designed Ebenezer A.M.E. Church. Completed in 1897, as the third Ebenezer sanctuary to stand on the same spot, the Romanesque Revival-style building was described by the *Washington Post* as “one of the finest structures in Southeast Washington.”^{xv}

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

James C. Dent House

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

Section 8 Page 4

As a minister and person of local prominence, Dent may have sought to express his position in society by building a notable residence, which effectively served as the church's parsonage despite being privately owned. It was likely Palmer's work on Ebenezer A.M.E. Church, Capitol Hill's oldest African-American congregation that inspired Dent to retain him for the design of his parsonage. Dent's freestanding brick house must have been the envy of his neighbors. The neighborhood was then a blue-collar area of recently constructed, two-story, frame houses. Indeed, Dent was the only white-collar resident on his street. To the north was a mix of housing types, including rowhouses and clusters of what became notorious alley dwellings. Overall, the neighborhood consisted of about half owner-occupied and half rental housing.^{xvi} Typical assessments of nearby structures ran in the \$100-400 range. Dent's was valued at \$2,000, despite costing considerably more. The closest rival in value was the home of Adelaide Halpine, on lot 9 of Square 603, assessed at \$800 in 1890. Dent also owned lots 16 and 17 adjoining his own house, and built there smaller frame houses that he then rented out.^{xvii}

James Dent lived only two years in his new house, before he died in November 1908. After his death, his widow Mary moved to 124 Q – a frame building she owned – and took in two boarders. She then returned to 156 Q until 1912, living afterward at 130 Q until at least 1914, according to city directories. Her last address was 497 L Street, SW, as she died on March 9, 1917.^{xviii}

Later Owners and Occupants

Patrick O'Toole, a plasterer who lived at 2003 New York Avenue, NW, bought 156 Q from Mary Dent and rented the house to others. He made no significant improvements to the place, judging from the lack of building permits on file; and he led a life so removed from public notice that the only obtainable information on him comes from the brief notices of the city directories. O'Toole also purchased and held on to the houses on lots 16 and 17, but he sold 156 Q to Charles and Mary Norris in 1919. The Norrises seem to have been the only other truly middle-class occupant-owner of 156 Q; Charles was the assistant manager of J. Maury Dove Company, a coal dealer with "wharves & coal pockets" on the Southwest waterfront and other properties in Southwest. After that, the city directories of 1927-29 show Isaac (a cook) and Clara Poston at 156 Q. The property was purchased in 1928 by a real estate financing company, and again two years later by the firm's clerk, William C. Wedding of Riverdale, Maryland. In 1940 Wedding sold the property back to Charles Norris, and after one other individual owner (Julia Lucille Hall, from 1959), it passed to the Potomac Electric Power Company, and then to the Southwest Community House in 1975. Lots 16 and 17 remained in O'Toole's ownership until 1941, and they were purchased by PEPCO in 1974 and the homes were demolished. All other residences on the square have also been razed over time.^{xix}

While 156 Q Street was generally owned by middle-class citizens, most of its tenants were more representative of the neighborhood in which they lived: Mary Green, African-American laundress with two children, renting from Mary Dent in 1910; Oscar and Lucy Sandord, a white wood-yard worker from Virginia, also with two children during the ownership of O'Toole; and, after the Norris and Poston families, two different Flaherty couples (Timothy, an iron worker, and Annie, then Navy clerk William, and Annie T.) occupied the house. For two decades after 1936, the property was occupied by Joel Thompson, an attendant at Saint Elizabeths Hospital, and his wife Annie.^{xx}

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

James C. Dent House

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

Section 8 Page 5

The Gradual Destruction of the Surrounding Neighborhood

Dent's proud house stood unchanged for the first 50 years of its existence, but almost coincidental with its construction began a series of often government-initiated projects that resulted in the piecemeal destruction of the surrounding neighborhood. From almost the beginning of the city's history the southwest quadrant had housed middle- and lower-income workers in a racial and ethnic mix. The Dent House stood near the center of this community. Although the surrounding area was integrated, it tended to be dominated by African Americans in the north and to the east of 4½ Street, and by whites in the south and to the west of 4½ Street, SW. The houses on par with Dent's were generally found west of 4½ Street, later to be demolished.^{xxi}

In 1904, the Washington Sanitary Housing Company (WSHC), a private philanthropic corporation that had built residences in other parts of city, demolished a row of dilapidated frame houses near M and South Capitol Streets for the construction of "sanitary housing" -- modest but modern brick rowhouses intended to offer decent housing for the African-American population of the neighborhood. This replacement of older housing with better but segregated stock continued in intervals to 1931, when the rows of sanitary houses on Half and Carrollsburg Streets were finished. Between 1937 and 1939, the WSHC constructed a number of modest, pleasant, brick apartment buildings (some for black and some for white residents, although still segregated) immediately north of Q Street.^{xxii}

In 1932, in an effort to bring development to the Buzzard Point area south of Q Street, Congress changed the zoning there to an industrial classification from its previous residential and low-intensity commercial status. This coincided with the introduction of railroad tracks extending from the marshalling yards in the near Southeast area and the construction of the still-existing PEPCO station. Some industrial uses did move in, but the chief result of this policy is that the hard-scrabble community that had lived in this area since the beginning of the century disappeared. Today there is very little evidence that anyone had lived in the area.^{xxiii}

As these changes most affected the principally white neighborhood, they caused outmigration that altered the racial mix of the area and contributed to declining home ownership in the area east of Fort McNair. While the rental/owner mix around 156 Q had been about 50/50 in 1900, by 1920 it had changed to 80/20, and by 1930 the Flahertys were among the few white families in the area.

Further destruction of the old neighborhood came in 1934 with the formation of the federal government's Alley Dwelling Authority (ADA), charged to remove the troubled alley dwellings from the city and replace them with better and more modern units. The result was razing of several blocks of substandard, mostly frame houses from the 1880-90s and their replacement by the current James Creek Apartments (1942). In 1958, the ADA's successor, the National Capital Housing Authority, cleared another area just to the north of the Dent House for the Syphax Gardens Public Housing project.^{xxiv}

The areas to the extreme north of the quadrant (between about F Street and the National Mall) had long been lost to government and commercial development. The area west of Delaware Avenue was cleared in the mid 1950s for the federal urban renewal project. Although historic preservation was a minor part of this project, the houses retained were the earliest, Wheat Row, the Thomas Law House, and their peers. No working-class nineteenth- and early twentieth-century buildings were retained west of Delaware Avenue. With this massive rebuilding and social engineering of the southwestern portion of Washington, only the Dent House and a few smaller nearby houses, schools and churches have survived from the vibrant, if architecturally modest community that once filled this part of the city.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

James C. Dent House

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

Section 8 Page 6

In 1978 the Dent house was purchased by Southwest Community House, Inc. (SWCH), a social services provider founded in 1921 as the Mother-Child Center by the Women's Christian Temperance Union. SWCH was the successor to the "Colored Social Settlement" of 1902, the first such organization for African Americans in the city. Southwest Community House continued at 156 Q its traditional work of food distribution, job counseling, housing, and other services that it had provided the community from its founding, bringing the old Dent House into a position of affection among its neighbors that it had once held as the residence of Pastor James Clinton Dent. The organization only recently closed and sold the house to a commercial owner who sold the property to PEPCO.^{xxv}

Summary

The Rev. James Clinton Dent House illustrates the efforts made by African Americans throughout the South after the Civil War to own land, to live in communities of their own race, and to act through their church to improve their condition in this life and the next. Dent rose from slavery to become a minister and landowner. The house he built for himself is the most substantial late nineteenth- or early twentieth-century home in old Southwest, a remnant of the working-class neighborhood it once was, as well as a symbol of progress of his race beyond fulfilling a role as a laboring class.

+

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

James C. Dent House

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

Section 9 Page 1

Major Bibliographical References:

Articles, Pamphlets and Unpublished Manuscripts

DCHPO Architects Directory (2010)

Groves, Paul A., "The Development of a Black Residential Community in Southwest Washington: 1860-1897," in *Records of the Columbia Historical Society, 1973-1974* (1976): 260-275.

Kraft, Brian, "A History of Old Southwest". Unpublished ms, in Washingtoniana Divison, ML King Library.

The Cromwell Family Papers, "Mending Broken Lives," Moorland-Spingarn Research Center.

Mount Moriah Baptist Church, "The Thirtieth Anniversary of the Mount Moriah Baptist Church, Washington, D.C., and the Fifth Anniversary of Our Pastor" (1915) (church archives).

Mount Moriah: Our History, www.mountmoriahchurch.org; interviews and materials from Doris Rousey, church historian

"Southwest Community House (The Aims and Purpose)", pamphlet, 1945; "The Southwest Community House Association, Inc. – Providing Its Community with Qualitive [sic] & Productive Services Since 1921", pamphlet, undated; and DC Council Resolution 4-308, 24 Nov 1981 "To honor and recognize Southwest Community House . . ."; both in the "Settlements" file of the Washingtoniana Division, ML King Library

University of Maryland Historic Preservation Studio, "The Old Southwest – Historic Resource Documentation and Preservation Plan". Privately published, 2005.

Woodlawn Cemetery burial records

Standard Sources

Washington Post, Evening Star, Washington Times, Washington Bee, Colored American, The Southwester

Census records

Recorder of Deeds records

Boyd's City Directories

Building permits

Tax assessment records

Plat maps

+

James C. Dent House
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property .055762 acres (2,429 square feet)

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	<table border="1"><tr><td>1</td><td>8</td></tr></table> Zone	1	8	<table border="1"><tr><td>3</td><td>2</td><td>5</td><td>2</td><td>9</td><td>6</td></tr></table> Easting	3	2	5	2	9	6	<table border="1"><tr><td>4</td><td>3</td><td>0</td><td>4</td><td>1</td><td>1</td><td>2</td></tr></table> Northing	4	3	0	4	1	1	2	3	<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td></td></tr></table> Zone			<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table> Easting					<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table> Northing						
1	8																																	
3	2	5	2	9	6																													
4	3	0	4	1	1	2																												
2	<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td></td></tr></table> Zone			<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table> Easting					<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table> Northing							4	<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td></td></tr></table> Zone			<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table> Easting					<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table> Northing									

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Hayden Wetzel and Patsy Fletcher

Organization D.C. Preservation League and D.C. Historic Preservation Office date August 2010

street & number 301 F Street, NW telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional Items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO)

name PEPCO

street & number 701 9th Street, N.W. telephone _____

city or town Washington, D.C. state _____ zip code 20068

Paperwork Reduction 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. 470 et. seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the 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 Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

James C. Dent House

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

Section 10 Page 1

Verbal Boundary Description:

156 Q Street SW; Square 603, Lot 807 (old Lot 15)

+

Boundary Justification:

This comprises the house and surrounding yard area, the present and historic extent of the property, sufficient to retain its historic setting.

+

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

James C. Dent House

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

Section 10 Page 2

End Notes

- ⁱ Unless noted, information on the general history given in this section is taken from the unpublished manuscript "A History of Old Southwest" by Brian Kraft, deposited in the Washingtoniana Division of the Martin Luther King Library. Specific source references will be found there.
- ⁱⁱ University of Maryland Historic Preservation Studio, "The Old Southwest: Historic Resource Documentation and Preservation Plan", Fall 2005.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.
- ^{iv} Free African Americans were not numerous in rural Charles County before the Civil War, and no black Dents appear in the 1860 census. It was common for slaves to be given or to take the name of an owner's family, and among Bryantown's white Dents, the first name Clinton appears. The 1860 slave schedules indicate that a boy James' age was already living with the Gilroys at Hill Top. Dent's full name is given in the burial records of Woodlawn Cemetery. Prior to that time, his name is cited in records and other accounts variously as Clinton Dent, J. Clinton Dent, J.C. Dent and James C. Dent..
- ^v Not able to establish the relationship of Dent to Clarissa or Nathan Dent. Prior to appearing at 154 Q, Dent was listed in Boyd's City Directory, 1873, 1876, 1877, 1878, 1879, 1880, 1882, 1883 (where he is listed twice – as Clinton, laborer at 1501 Half; and as James, driver, at P between 1st and 2nd, essentially the same address), 1884 (address as Q near 2nd), 1885, 1886. The address 154 Q Street is synonymous with 156 Q Street. The 1900 census shows the Dents had had one child but who was no longer living. Other information on Dent comes from census records, city directories, tax assessments, and the University of Maryland Historic Preservation Studio study "The Old Southwest..." (Fall 2005).
- ^{vi} The City Directory for several years shows Vant Street, SW as opposed to Van Street in other years. The Hopkins Map of 1893, V.2, Plate 9 shows Van Street in the area where the first Mount Moriah would have been located. Plate 8 shows Mount Moriah at its final address in SW.
- ^{vii} www.mountmoriahchurch.org; interview with and information from Doris Rousey, Mount Moriah Church historian. June 4, 1898, p. 4. Mount Moriah Baptist Church is presently located at 17th and East Capitol Streets.
- ^{viii} The *Washington Post* between 1904 and 1906 included Mount Moriah in its Sunday services column.
- ^{ix} *Washington Post*, July 10, 1891 p. 8, which describes the cornerstone-laying. *Washington Bee*, July 13, 1895, image 2; August 29, 1896, p. 5; February 3, 1899, p. 8; November 16, 1901, image 8 [http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov]. For other examples of his civic and pastoral work see: *Washington Bee*, April 12, 1890 p.2; July 25, 1896 p.5; October 10, 1896 p. 4; December 23, 1903 p. 1, and October 22, 1904 p. 8; *Colored American* September 15, 1900 p. 4; *The Times*, October 22, 1900. *Washington Post*, June 10, 1905, p. 4; "Mending Broken Lives", Cromwell Family Papers, Series F, Box 24-7, Folder 84, Moorland Spingarn Research Center.
- ^x Mount Moriah Baptist Church, "The Thirtieth Anniversary of the Mount Moriah Baptist Church, Washington, D.C., and the Fifth Anniversary of Our Pastor" (1915). From the church archives.
- ^{xi} Death announced in *Washington Post*, Nov. 11, 1908.
- ^{xii} D.C. Building Permits #126/18 July 1889, although this building is not listed in the 1890 tax assessment.
- ^{xiii} Permit #1642/November 12, 1906. Palmer is credited with over 430 houses in the 1891-1919 period.
- ^{xiv} Palmer is not to be confused with a prominent local church musician of the same name and period. (See *Washington Post*, June 25, 1904 p. 14 for a biographical note of this other Palmer.)
- ^{xv} For biography on Palmer, see DCHPO DC Architects Directory (2010). November 15, 1897, pg. 11.
- ^{xvi} See the 1900 and 1910 census registers for this information.
- ^{xvii} D.C. Historic Permits Database, DCHPO.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

James C. Dent House

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

Section 10 Page 3

- xviii According to the records of Woodlawn Cemetery, where the couple is buried.
- xix Deed record L 46289/f 263 of 17 Dec 1919. The Norris's were found on the 1910 Federal Census for Washington, D.C.
- xx The 1910 census lists one family living on R Street as truck farmers.
- xxi Paul A. Groves, "The Development of a Black Residential Community in Southwest Washington: 1860-1897", *Records of the Columbia Historical Society, 1973-1974* (1976): 260-275;
- xxii Kraft, p. 18.
- xxiii *Washington Star*, 24 Sept 1932. There were also proposals to change the neighborhood's name to the more attractive Duddington, or Carrollsburgh (sic), *Washington Post* 13 Aug 1932.
- xxiv Kraft pp 18-19; U of Maryland, pp. 70-71
- xxv The history of the House and its various locations are given in an undated pamphlet (the latest date mentioned in the text is 1978) published by the House and found in the files of the Washingtoniana Division. There is some confusion when the name "Mother-Child Center" was adopted – whether from the beginning or from 1931. "Southwest Community House (The Aims and Purpose)", pamphlet, 1945; and D.C. Council Resolution 4-308, November 24, 1981 "To honor and recognize Southwest Community House . . ."; both in the "Settlements -- Southwest" file of the Washingtoniana Division, ML King Library. See *The Southwester* March 2008 p. 3.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

James C. Dent House

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

PHOTOS

The following is common to all photographs:

James C. Dent House
Washington, D.C.
Kim Williams, photographer
September 2010
DC HPO

- 1) View from northwest looking southeast showing north and west elevations
- 2) View looking south showing north elevation
- 3) View looking east showing west elevation
- 4) View looking northeast showing west and south elevations
- 5) View looking northwest showing east side elevation with porch

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

James C. Dent House

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

PHOTOS

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

James C. Dent House

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

MAPS/PHOTOS



James C. Dent House
156 Q Street, SW
(From D.C. Master Address Repository)

