

Resolved, that in-as-much as there is too much conflict for two separate congregations to worship in the same building, it is proper to revoke the agreement heretofore made with the Colored people, granting them the use of the church building for a weekly prayer meeting.

Resolved further, that we the white members of this church, agree to aid the Colored people in the erection of a suitable house of worship for themselves.

-August Term Minutes – 1869

Mount Canaan Baptist Church was founded in 1870 after the African-American membership made a request to its parent church, Good Hope Baptist Church, to become independent and organize a church of their own. African-Americans comprised about one-third of the entire membership of Good Hope.

Misconceptions and misleading explanations have not substantiated the real reason for the request of the African-Americans to organize their own church, however, documents in the records of First Baptist Church dating as far back as 1835 revealed that African-Americans were treated as a separate congregation under the scrutiny and control of the white congregation. There was no shared authority or responsibility in the church membership. African-American members were identified only by their first names as the slave(s) of their owner.

Dr. William H. McAlpine who was born a slave in Talladega and educated in white private schools, founded Mount Canaan Baptist Church. Dr. McAlpine became the first pastor and remained at Mount Canaan for five years. Seeing the need to organize the first seven local African-American Baptist churches, he left in September 1875 and organized the Rushing Springs District. After successfully accomplishing this goal, Dr. McAlpine ventured to organize churches on the state and national levels. Thus, he organized the Alabama and National Baptist Conventions and served as president of both organizations.

Dr. McAlpine's devout dedication to uplifting the spiritual, educational and social needs of the African-American people earned him the distinction of a founder of Selma University. He served the university as its second president.

Mount Canaan and Good Hope did not completely sever ties until the 1930s. According to some white parishioners, African-Americans worshipped at Good Hope from time to time as late as 1929 but were seated in the balcony of the church.

Mount Canaan assumed a very active role during the civil rights struggles of the 1960s. Civil rights groups often prayed, met, and mapped strategies for the massive movement within the walls of Mount Canaan. This church has refused to break faith with this rich history and continues to live up to its Christian responsibility by

taking an active and leading role in civic and political issues.

Mount Canaan was originally built on its present site but was destroyed by a storm in the spring of 1912. The church was rebuilt in 1913. The façade contains the bricks from the original 1870 building. The bell is believed to have come from Good Hope Baptist Church (now First Baptist Church). Some improvements to the building were begun in 1980. A full scale renovation effort was completed in 1986 which included the addition of an educational wing consisting of a library, computer room, fellowship hall/kitchen, pastor's study, superintendent's office and Sunday School room. The new wing was dedicated on June 22, 1986.

APRIL 11, 1984

MOUNT CANAAN BAPTIST CHURCH

DEEMED A SIGNIFICANT LANDMARK

BY

THE ALABAMA HISTORICAL
COMMISSION

And Added To

THE ALABAMA REGISTER OF
LANDMARKS AND HERITAGE