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**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD**  
**Historic Landmark Designation Case No. 11-01**

**Saint Paul African Union Methodist Protestant Church**  
401 I Street, SE  
Square 824, Lot 22

Meeting Date: November 18, 2010  
Applicant: DC Preservation League and Saint Paul AUMP Church  
Affected ANC: ANC 6D  
Staff Reviewer: Patsy Fletcher

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After careful consideration, staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Review Board designate the Saint Paul African Union Methodist Protestant Church as a District of Columbia landmark. It is further recommended that the application be forwarded to the National Park Service for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

**Property Description**

The Saint Paul African Union Methodist Protestant (AUMP) Church, designed by local architect R.C. Archer, Jr. and built in 1924, is located on the corner of 4<sup>th</sup> and I Streets, SE. The one-and-one-half-story, rectangular building with a gabled asphalt roof originally adjoined a block of two story row houses to the east. A modern, modestly scaled structure erected by a working class African-American congregation, the church generates visual interest through its incorporation of traditional, Gothic-Revival architectural elements characteristic of larger houses of worship. These include arched window openings, crenellated battlements, and a tower. Except for a few filled window openings and replacement sashes, Saint Paul Church is substantially intact and retains integrity of materials and feeling.

**Significance**

Saint Paul African Union Methodist Protestant Church is the only church in the District of Columbia evolved from what is considered the oldest incorporated, independent African-American denomination in the country. The AUMP denomination, dating from 1813, is also noted for having initiated America's oldest continuously celebrated, African-American, religious festival, the Big Quarterly, or "August Quarterly," founded in 1814. Although Saint Paul Church itself was not erected until 1924, it is also significant as the very modest place of worship of an early twentieth-century, working-class, African-American community in the industrial environment surrounding Washington's Navy Yard. Additionally, the church has survived two substantial community razing and redevelopment projects—one in the 1940s that resulted in the erection of over 700 units of public housing, and the more recent HOPE VI mixed-income townhomes—that have left it one of the few historic buildings of this neighborhood. Finally, Saint Paul was the first church commission of Washington's second licensed African American architect, R.C. Archer, Jr.

The African Union Methodist Protestant (AUMP) Church, founded in 1805 by the formerly enslaved Peter Spencer, was incorporated in 1813, some three years before the better known and larger African Methodist Episcopal Church. Like the AME Church, the denomination was an offshoot of the Methodist Church, formed as a result of racial discrimination. The Washington congregation of the AUMP Church that became Saint Paul began worshipping as a prayer group in 1900.

The AUMP denomination's Big Quarterly began in 1814 and served as the annual church conference, quarterly business meeting and as a revival. It has been held annually since in Wilmington on the last Sunday of August. It provided a rare opportunity for enslaved people to worship God in community with one another and in the emotional, unrestrained manner carried over from West Africa that many preferred and for which they were shunned by the white congregations. The gathering, which also had a street fair atmosphere, became an interfaith celebration. At its peak in 1879, attendance was 20,000.

John C. Dancy, a leader in the AME Church at the turn of the twentieth century once said that, "Until we had the Negro Church we had nothing of which the race could boast.... The Negro Church, therefore, became the basis upon which would be reared the superstructure of all our subsequent achievements."<sup>1</sup> Saint Paul is one of the few surviving buildings and the only surviving church from the predominantly African-American community that developed in the industrial area between Capitol Hill and the Washington Navy Yard. The construction of the edifice in 1924 signaled the arrival of the church as a central institution of this working class community, which, two generations out of enslavement, sought to establish its place of worship, however modest, that they could call their own.

Saint Paul was designed by R.C. Archer, Jr., whose long career was most noted for his church designs. Saint Paul was both his first important commission and his first church design in Washington. It is an outstanding example of an African-American house of worship constructed as the home of a newly formed working class congregation. Its modest scale reflects the circumstances of its creation and its surrounding neighborhood, while its ecclesiastical design reflects the congregation's pride in their house of worship and their respect for tradition. Saint Paul's building retains a high degree of integrity and is the most intact church building of its type and era erected by an African-American congregation in the southeast quadrant west of the Anacostia River.

### **Registration Criteria**

The Saint Paul AUMP Church merits listing in the DC Inventory of Historic Sites and the National Register of Historic Places for the following reasons:

**DC Criterion B (*history*) and NR Criterion A (*contributes to broad patterns of history*):** as the only Washington, DC church of the oldest independent African American denomination in the country; as the last surviving church in the Navy Yard area of Washington, an area that experienced two periods of widespread demolition and rebuilding since its construction; and as the first church design commission of Washington's second-licensed African American architect.

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<sup>1</sup> Alice Moore Dunbar, ed., "The Future of the Negro Church," in *Masterpieces of Negro Eloquence 1818-1913*, (New York: Dover, 1914, reprinted 2000), p. 339.