Double Springs A.M.E. Zion Church & Cemetery

On July 7, 1899, the Trustees of the Double Springs African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Zion Church purchased a half-acre of land on Old Huntsville Road to “be used, kept maintained, and disposed of as a place of Divine Worship.” The land was a small portion of 1,250 acres belonging to D.P. Mast that had been a part of the Panther Creek Plantation, established by Colonel Joseph Williams in 1767. Mast purchased the acreage in 1895 for $8,800 at a public sale. The 1899 deed records that the trustees of the church, listed as Augustin Douthit, Frank Matthews, Junius Glenn, and Robert Bitting, purchased the land for $1. The deed expressly required that a church be built upon the land within a reasonable amount of time.

The church’s oral tradition begins in the late 1800s, following Emancipation, when services were held in a brush arbor somewhat north of the current site, closer to West Bend. When the site of the first worship services was reclaimed, church members built a new brush arbor at a second site, near two springs. These two springs gave the church its name, Double Springs. Enslaved African-Americans, who were owned by the Williams family and lived at Panther Creek Plantation, had worshipped in a log church located nearby but “down the hill”.

In accordance with the terms of the deed, the congregation of Double Springs A.M.E. Zion Church raised funds to construct the church and accomplished that goal in 1903. Money to fund construction came from tithes and offerings, and from sales of lemonade and food. The wood-framed church was one story high with a gable roof. A square bell tower with a gable roof rose from the ridgeline, just behind the entrance façade. The exterior walls were covered in wooden clapboards, and the ends of the roof rafters were exposed under deeply overhanging eaves. Two pairs of paneled wood doors provided entrance into the sanctuary. Attached to the side walls of the main block of the church stood one-story wings with shed roofs; these were a later improvement to the structure. Corner boards defined the edges of the main block and terminated the front wall of each wing. The church rested on a concrete block foundation and was lit with four-over-four windows and oil lamps. The interior walls were finished with flush-board sheathing. Mid-nineteenth century pews provided seating, and a wood-burning stove gave heat during cold weather. In the mid-twentieth century, electricity was connected to the church.

Until the Carver School opened in 1946, the church also functioned as a school for African-American children on weekdays. One teacher taught children from grade one through grade eight. The last teacher at Double Springs was Ms. Ruth Smith, who began teaching grades one through three in Lewisville when the state began to provide bus transportation for students.

At the time of the original architectural survey of Forsyth County in 1979, Double Springs A.M.E. Zion Church was one of the oldest and best-preserved rural African-American churches surveyed. By the late 1970s, however, many of the original congregants had passed or moved away. The last service was held at Double Springs on June 27, 1982, after which many of the remaining members
began to worship at New Hope Zion A.M.E. Church in nearby Lewisville. The vacant church building became an attraction for vandals and other criminal activity, causing the former members to dismantle the building and bury it on the site.

In addition to the constructing a building, Double Springs A.M.E. Zion Church established a cemetery on the land. The earliest marked burials, from 1903, are of husband and wife, Glenn and Charity Jarrett. Thirty-four known burials, including the Jarretts, date from 1903 to 2015. Family names found in cemetery records include Bitting, Campbell, Douthit, Gilmer, Glenn, Harrington, Hart, Kimbrough, Partlow, Puryear, and Williams. According to Tommy Campbell, the Double Springs site is also the location of the original Panther Creek Plantation slave cemetery. In 2005, a marker honoring men, women, and children owned by the Williams family was placed in the cemetery. Its inscription reads, “In memory of the Williams slaves who worked at the Panther Creek Plantation from 1767 to 1865.”

This information is also available at the Forsyth County Historic Resources Commission web site: www.ForsythCountyHRC.org