



William Francis Galvin
Secretary of the Commonwealth

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UNION BAPTIST CHURCH, NEW BEDFORD, APPROVED FOR NOMINATION TO THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Secretary of the Commonwealth William Francis Galvin is pleased to announce that the Massachusetts Historical Commission approved Union Baptist Church in New Bedford for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places at its March 12, 2008 meeting. The nomination will be submitted to the National Register of Historic Places at the National Park Service in Washington, DC, for final consideration and designation.

“The Massachusetts Historical Commission is dedicated to preserving the Commonwealth’s rich architectural, cultural, archaeological, and historic resources,” Secretary Galvin said. “Inclusion of this property on the National Register will help to protect our heritage for generations to come.”

The Union Baptist Church in the West End neighborhood of New Bedford is historically significant as an enduring religious institution associated with New Bedford’s people of color and their role in the history of the city. The church is the outgrowth of the city’s oldest African American church and is its only African American Baptist congregation. It is the successor of the New Bedford church most closely associated with fugitives from American slavery, who formed an unusually large proportion of the local population of African descent. Some of those surviving fugitives and their descendants helped found Union Baptist in 1895 including William H. Carney Jr. (1840-1908), who achieved nationwide fame for his bravery during the Fifty-fourth Regiment’s assault on Fort Wagner in 1863. Carney and his parents and siblings were all fugitives. Carney was the first person of African descent to win the Congressional Medal of Honor. In addition, the church’s congregation included a notable number of Cape Verdeans who, by marrying African-American members of the congregation, abandoned their native Catholicism and served as exceptions to the separation popularly perceived to exist between the African American and Cape Verdean communities. The church is also architecturally significant. With its cornerstone laid in 1899, the building was designed by Nathaniel Cannon Smith, New Bedford’s most prominent architect at the turn of the 20th century. One of Smith’s very rare commissions for a religious facility, the church was designed in Smith’s characteristic Shingle Style with Colonial Revival features. The sanctuary has an auditorium plan with an open truss-work ceiling and a large arched window.

The Union Baptist Church is one of 8 historic resources around the Commonwealth approved for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places by the Massachusetts Historical Commission at this meeting.

Secretary Galvin serves as Chairman of the 17-member board, which meets regularly and considers historic resources eligible for the National Register four times a year.

The National Register is the nation’s official listing of significant historic resources. In Massachusetts, there are over 65,000 properties listed in the National Register. The Massachusetts Historical Commission has been administering the National Register of Historic Places program in Massachusetts since 1966. The Massachusetts Historical Commission is the office of the State Historic Preservation Officer and the State Archaeologist. It was established in 1963 to identify, evaluate, and protect important historical and archaeological assets of the Commonwealth. Visit our website to learn more about the Commission’s programs (www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc).

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