

# NEW SALEM BAPTIST CHURCH

**Tams, Raleigh County**

**Construction Date: 1921**

**Threat: Maintenance;**

**Funding; Reversion Clause**

The New Salem Baptist Church is the only building that remains in the coal camp in Tams. A racially segregated community, Tams was divided into Colored Town, American Town, and Immigrant Town. This congregation consisted of black miners and their families, who resided in the northern section of Tams. The Gothic Revival church was built in 1921 after the board of trustees of the congregation approached W. P. Tams, Jr., who owned the company town, requesting that a church be built for them. Tams obliged and provided the funding for the construction of the church. The congregation was able to repay Tams in 1928 and received a clear title to the property. However, a reversion clause in the deed apparently states that the parcel will revert to ownership by the present Western Pocahontas Land Company should it cease to be used as a house of worship.

The church reached its peak during the 1930s, serving 350 members. Once Tams sold his mine in 1955, the community emptied with the eventual closure of the mine, and the town began to decay. Outside coal companies bought many of the buildings and removed them from the community. The last residents of the community of Tams left in the 1980s, and every structure in the black camp of Tams has now

disappeared, with the exception of the New Salem Baptist Church.

For over 90 years, there has been an active congregation at the church, and its goal is to continue holding services in the community that many of the congregation once called home. With a congregation of about 10 members, maintenance is the chief issue for the church, as is maintaining the property as a church for the long-term. The congregation and all other engaged parties agree the church should be preserved perpetually as a monument to the communities that once

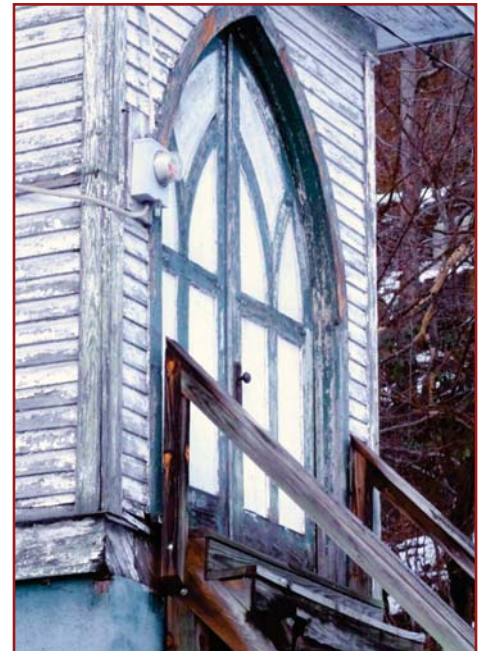
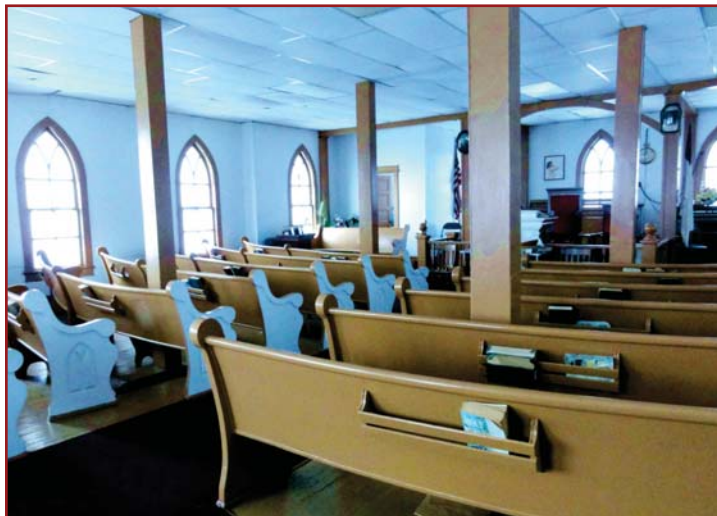


The congregation continues to accept donations to maintain the church, which has become a popular tourist attraction to those riding the ATV trails throughout the Winding Gulf.

**ENDANGERED  
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populated the Winding Gulf and as a memorial to the former black community of which the church is the sole remnant.



**Preservation Alliance of West Virginia**

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