

COLLINS T. JAMES: PIONEER PREACHER IN SOUTHWEST GEORGIA

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Introduction

Generations of Blacks were imprisoned in the demeaning system of slavery that denied them freedom and precluded individual actualization. Following that tragedy, Blacks, especially in the South focused their attention to collective uplift and racial advancement. Reconstruction became the pivotal moment in which Blacks set in motion their efforts to redeem themselves from slavery's debilitating effects. Christianity was viewed as a civilizing agent and indispensable for moral development, and was one of the vehicles seized upon to bring about a better life. Some Blacks, before emancipation, had been baptized and experienced Christianity as members of biracial congregations. A few Black men were selected and ordained in these churches and began their preaching careers in bondage. Having no authority and exercising no leadership role in these churches, their ordination into the ministry nevertheless served the needs of slaves who had accepted Christianity.¹ In freedom more Black men entered the gospel ministry. Accepting the challenge of the great commission, and concluding that their brethren needed the gospel, they seized opportunities to preach the word in areas where Blacks lived. Like the Apostle Paul's realization in Ephesus, that a great door and effectual had opened up and there was much work to be accomplished,² Black ministers cast their eyes upon Southwest Georgia where many, just up from slavery, were ripe for the harvest. Possessing a missionary zeal and armed with the Bible, they proceeded to organize churches, preach in destitute regions, and established themselves as pioneers in the gospel ministry.

Many who became preachers during the early years of Reconstruction were like those to whom they preached, former slaves, who also had to overcome the vestiges of slavery and the destitution that continued to plague the race. Nevertheless, the disadvantages common to Blacks during that time did not deter them from preaching the gospel. Despite the fact that they did not possess the tools of sociology, economics, political science, and systematized theology, and many were unable to read and write, Black ministers provided a contemporary leadership for the

¹ See the Thronateeska Chapter, D. A. R., *Albany Baptist Church Book 1860-1870*, Albany, Georgia, 1959; Ralph R. Watson and David Hines were ordained in this church as ministers to its Black members. *The History of the First Baptist Church of Cuthbert* indicates that two Blacks Green McCarthy and John Gaulden were ordained to preach to Blacks.

² 1 Corinthians 16:9 (King James Bible).

masses of freedmen who needed a message of hope and inspiration in the form of role models to elevate themselves above their previous condition.³

Reconstruction was as perilous a time, if not more so, than slavery. Whim could still dictate a blow, even life and death. Although the South was undergoing transformation, the behavior of some Whites toward Blacks remained unchanged from an earlier time. Attitudes and perceptions continued to be informed by a superior-subordinate mentality, and there were those who were unwilling to recognize the former slaves' change in social status. In a time when former masters sought new avenues to deny freedmen their citizenship rights, Black ministers endeavored to provide leadership to deliver the race beyond slavery's lingering effects and new forms of prejudice and discrimination. Thus, Reconstruction witnessed the rise to prominence of Black preachers who endeavored to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ and wield Christianity as a means to uplift a people. Indeed, this was a golden age of the Black minister who rose to prominence as he sought to further the kingdom of God on earth and to elevate his people.

Collins T. James: Spiritual Leader in The Vineyard of the Lord

Many Black men preached the gospel in Southwest Georgia. They were viewed as role models and became leaders in their communities. Moreover, Black ministers were conspicuously in the forefront of the thrust to secure conditions that would improve the race. One of them was Collins James, a "preacher of wide popularity and influence."⁴ The record is vague on C. T. James' early life and what is known is that he grew up in slavery on the Bacon farm in Liberty County. He and A. O. Bacon, the master's son who became a United States Senator, were childhood friends and that closeness remained into their adult lives.⁵ Bacon dramatized their relationship during the Omnibus War Claims Bill debate on the Senate floor in 1909.⁶ At that moment he stated, "If I had only one crust of bread and my Black friend was hungry and had none, I surely would divide it with him. If conditions were reversed he would surely divide his sole crust of bread with me."⁷

The 1979 Centennial Booklet of the Camilla Missionary Baptist Association relates that Collins James and his family moved from LaGrange (Troup County) to Mitchell County. What prompted the relocation and the exact time of their arrival in Southwest Georgia is not known.⁸ However, it can be determined from the history of the Bethel Baptist Church that he was a Mitchell County resident by 1866. The 1870 United States census located James, approximately

³ C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Experience in Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1974), 66-67.

⁴ Margaret Spence and Anna M. Fleming. *History of Mitchell County* [n.p. n.d], 173.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ A. O. Bacon attended common schools in Liberty and Troup Counties. It is plausible to suggest that the Bacon Family moved during slavery from Liberty to Troup County and Collins James accompanied them. Perhaps James moved to take a teaching position in Mitchell County.

thirty years old, in Camilla, where he was a teacher, married to Charity and father to a son named Walter.⁹ According to the 1880 census his household consisted of Charity, Walter Harris, Peter and Betsy Pelote.¹⁰

It was in Southwest Georgia that Collins James embarked upon the path that led him to become a minister of renown who influenced the lives of hundreds, Black and White. An early indication of his religious activities can be found at a Baptist church a few miles outside the town of Camilla. In 1866, James, along with Ralph R. Watson and Godfrey White, organized the Bethel Baptist Church, which is the oldest Black Baptist church in Mitchell County. No record exists to inform whether this group of Blacks withdrew from a biracial congregation. Blacks' withdrawal from biracial churches was a prominent movement following the Civil War. It is significant that so early in Reconstruction that they were able to secure land and materials necessary to build a church. Religious history supports the conclusion that the Black church was born from the spiritual needs of an oppressed people. However, the church not only performed a vital role relative to spiritual enlightenment and moral guidance, Blacks social status and life conditions precipitated its becoming the central entity that embodied their aspirations. In 1866 Southwest Georgia, Blacks needed encouragement and evidence of uplift, the Bethel Baptist Church stood as testimony to progress. In freedom, the church became the institution that helped Blacks cope with life's realities. The establishment of Bethel Baptist Church served this purpose, demonstrated the fruit of collective effort, and signaled Blacks' ability to triumph in the midst of difficult circumstances.

Bethel may have been James' initial effort in planting a church—but it would not be his last. Perhaps it was his ministerial background and work in the religious community that stood out in the Camilla vicinity and he was called upon to assist in organizing Bethel. His literary skills may have been a factor as the church needed a written constitution and a record of its members. Both his education and work in the ministry may have been recognized and he was called upon on the occasion of the church's organization. Later, James became the pastor of the Bethel congregation, succeeding R. R. Watson who was selected as the first spiritual leader. When he became the church's pastor and the duration of his ministry at Bethel have not been determined.

James' popularity in the area can only be imagined as he had probably established a reputation in the secular and religious communities as a teacher and preacher. His second church organization of record occurred some miles beyond Camilla and in another county. Circumstances surrounding the planting of the Weldon Springs Baptist Church in 1867 will

⁹ Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census of the United States: Statistics of the Population*: Washington: Government Publications Office. The history of the Bethel Baptist Church in Mitchell County lists Collins James as one of its organizers. Thus, Reverend James arrived in Mitchell County prior to 1866. Margaret Spence and Anna Fleming indicated that James was about 85 when he died in 1916. This date gives James a birth time around 1831. The 1880 U. S. census estimates James' birth around 1840. James gave an occupation as teacher in the 1870 census. It is possible that he taught in the one-room schoolhouse in the back of J. W. Butler's home on Twitty Street in Camilla.

¹⁰ Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States: Statistics of the Population*: Washington: Government Publications Office.

probably never be fully known.¹¹ It could have been that his reputation preceded him. Perhaps his name was in circulation in surrounding communities as a minister of the gospel; someone from the Weldon Springs area could have been impressed by a sermon he preached and James was entreated to visit for the purpose of organizing a church. A recommendation from another minister may have been the impetus for him to travel to Baker County. It is possible too that he was aware of the community of Blacks there and possessed with a missionary zeal, decided to preach in that destitute region, which led him there to plant a church. In any event, the cause that precipitated the founding of the Weldon Springs Baptist Church is a matter of speculation. In a final analysis, a great harvest of souls, 200 by estimate, formed the church at Weldon Springs and that community had access to the gospel in the person of Collins T. James. At Weldon Springs, this minister laid the foundation for what would become a signature of his ministry and a part of his legacy—pastoral longevity. James' tenure as the spiritual leader of this church lasted for fifty years. Because no records exist of his preaching and other labors at Weldon Springs, the texts and subjects of his sermons must be left to the imagination. Over the course of his fifty years as spiritual leader, only estimates can inform regarding the number of souls who accepted Christ, that were baptized by him, and whose funeral he preached.

In 1868, James added a third church to his ministry when he assumed the reins of spiritual leadership at the New Salem Baptist Church in Baconton.¹² James had a role in organizing this church in 1867, once again along with Ralph Watson. Pink W. Williams was the third minister involved in the church's organization. Following the ministerial procession that occurred with Bethel Baptist, James succeeded Watson as pastor of the New Salem congregation. Reverend James was the shepherd of New Salem for three years before retiring. Exactly what happened that led to James' departure is a matter for conjecture as specifics have not been entered into the church's record. Suffice it to say that something interfered with the relationship that could not be worked out by James and the congregation. The church's history is completely silent on details of the matter, preferring only the word "retire." After James, Reverend P. W. Williams was selected as the church's pastor and he led the congregation for nine years. In 1880, James was recalled to lead New Salem. In this case, clearly, time healed the wounds and erased the bitter feelings that previously existed. This time there was no break in service as he led the congregation faithfully for thirty-six years. Proving his dedication and commitment to the ministry, James was the spiritual leader of New Salem for a total of thirty-nine years.¹³

In a sense, James found his niche in Southwest Georgia, and with a growing reputation, in 1870, was ordained by four ministers, W. N. Chaudoin, David Hill, Ralph Watson, and Callaway to pastor the Union Baptist Church in Camilla.¹⁴ Although there is no record of that

¹¹ There are no records regarding James' tenure at Bethel Baptist Church, so it is not possible to determine if he continued there as pastor at the time he organized the Weldon Springs Church.

¹² New Salem Baptist Church was organized in 1867 by Ralph R. Watson, Collins T. James, and Pink W. Williams. Watson was the church's pastor for one year.

¹³ *History of the New Salem Missionary Baptist Church.*

day's events, it would be reasonable to assert that his installation service was a grand and happy affair. The history of the Union Baptist Church does not provide the name of a pastor prior to Reverend James. Brother Blind Jack, a layman, is credited with conducting the first service under a bush arbor in 1868. James' installation as pastor was a moment of triumph for a congregation that had been worshipping but needed a shepherd to lead them.

A man of many talents, James was a teacher, farmer, preacher, church organizer, and a builder. He was instrumental in replacing the old Union Baptist church structure with a new and larger sanctuary. As a testimony to his devotion to the gospel and the church, James was presented a deed to a parcel of land by Tom Collins. The Union Baptist Church was erected on this site. James' pastorate at Union Baptist spanned forty-six years.

Ministry at the State Level

In May of 1870, James responded to a call from the Ebenezer Baptist Association that had gone out to brethren across the state. He traveled to Augusta and participated in the organizational meeting of the Missionary Baptist Convention of Georgia. The meeting's purpose was to establish a statewide Black religious organization. Reverend Gad Johnson in his May 1884 missionary sermon at the Convention reflected upon the first meeting and gave background to its origin. Johnson stated that there were pastors of Black Baptist churches connected to White associations, "but from the then existing circumstances they saw that it was expedient to withdraw from the White brethren and form themselves into a distinct body." Johnson was referring to prejudice and elaborated further stating that it was "raging in the highest degree."¹⁵

During this five-day meeting C. T. James was selected to be a member of the committee appointed to inquire into the work of the American Baptist Home Mission Society in Georgia. This committee returned a favorable report on behalf of the society and resolved to recommend its works to Black Baptists throughout the state. He was also appointed to preach the 3:00 PM worship service at the Central Church on Sunday, May 15, 1870.¹⁶ By virtue of his attendance at the inaugural meeting of the Missionary Baptist Convention of Georgia; he was declared a life member. Active in the Convention, James later served several years as a member of the Convention's Executive Board.¹⁷

¹⁴ W. N. Chaudoin was a White Baptist minister. Ralph Watson was an ordained minister out of the Albany Baptist Church. Godfrey White was listed as 70 years old in the 1880 census and could not read or write. No first name is given for Reverend Callaway in the history of the Union Baptist Church. This church's history also informs that these four ministers ordained James in 1870. This ordination date raises a question. Was this an ordination or installation service? If it was an ordination service, then it quite possibly means that James was a pastor of three churches prior to this important rite of passage. It has not been determined when James departed the Bethel Baptist Church, but it is conceivable that he was the pastor of four churches in 1870.

¹⁵ Missionary Baptist Convention of Georgia, *Minutes*, 1884, 32.

¹⁶ Missionary Baptist Convention of Georgia, *Minutes*, 1870, 5.

¹⁷ See Missionary Baptist Convention of Georgia, *Minutes*, 1876, 27.

Saint James

The Pearidge Prayer House, an old log cabin on Ferry Road beside a huge oak tree, was the place where some Blacks in Baconton held worship services. In 1876, Collins James, a “dynamic preacher and spiritual leader,” was responsible for transforming this sacred ground into the house that bears his name—the Saint James Baptist Church.¹⁸ It is evident that the membership revered James to the extent that they named the church in his honor. Attorney Major Bacon, for whom the town of Baconton is named, donated the land upon which the “cottage style” church was built. Reverend James and the members labored to construct a “beautiful sanctuary.” On the day of dedication another pioneer minister of Southwest Georgia, Purnell Borders, was called upon to dedicate the church. His sermon for the occasion was entitled, “Upon this rock I will build my church.”

The secular and religious exploits of James in Mitchell County have not been fully documented and will probably defy ever being known in their entirety, but he was surely a person who was influential and well-respected. His devotion to the Saint James Baptist Church was in the making in 1876, and ultimately, he led this congregation for forty years. The selection as spiritual leader of Saint James Baptist Church gave James four pulpits from which to preach the gospel.¹⁹ As pastor of these congregations James influenced the lives of numerous Blacks for decades. His was no doubt a name spoken with respect and admiration by young and old in the households of Mitchell and Baker counties.

Work in the Southwestern Baptist Association

Like the church, for Blacks, the association was also a pioneering religious effort that gained momentum during Reconstruction. Refused fellowship in established White associations, Blacks in the self-reliant fashion that punctuated the era formed their own. In Post Civil War Southwest Georgia, Blacks faced segregation, discrimination, and subordination and recognized the need to organize for mutual aid and support. The religious association was a testimony to Black Baptists’ recognition of the need for cooperative structures, which could articulate an agenda of interests for the denomination, and indeed the community. An association represents the collective voice of ministers and their congregations in a geographic location. It was a voice that could speak louder than that of a single preacher and congregation on religious and secular matters. Black Baptist associations engaged in collective action to confront challenges that faced the community like the salvation of the lost, morality, and education for advancement. Associations were important entities among the Black Baptists in Southwest Georgia. They were defenders of the Baptist faith and acted to preserve order and discipline among the churches. Associations also proved to be an important instrument for racial uplift as they focused on ministerial education

¹⁸ *History of the Saint James Baptist Church.*

¹⁹ In 1876 James was the pastor of Weldon Springs, Union, New Salem, and Saint James Baptist Churches. These were all probably one-Sunday churches at that time.

and the building of schools. Associations were ministerial training grounds and in them were community religious leaders.

Black Baptist Associations began their ascent in Southwest Georgia in 1866, with the formation of the Thomasville union of churches. The Southwestern association followed this forerunner, organizing in 1871. James became involved with the Southwestern association. His reputation as a religious leader, church planter, and builder of churches was well on the way to being established by then. James began affiliating with the Southwestern association in 1873, two years after this union of churches was established. Two of his three churches, Weldon Springs and New Salem, were members of this organization.²⁰ In the Southwestern association, James worked side by side with mentor and friend, Ralph R. Watson, who was the association's treasurer. He became a leader among ministers and would eventually be recognized on a regional and statewide basis. James' presence was evident at the association's fourth annual meeting. During this session he was appointed to preach the Sunday morning Missionary Sermon at the Wooten Grove Baptist Church in Leesburg and served on the Deceased Ministers Committee, which gave a report of preachers who had died since the last meeting. The Sunday schools of the association churches were also organized into districts, and James was the chairman of the First District. As chairman of the First Sunday school District he held a leadership role and responsibility for 15 churches in three counties. He was also selected during the 1874, meeting as a messenger to attend the Black State Baptist Convention.²¹ Collins James continued to work in the Southwestern association for several years being called upon to preach and render service through various committee appointments.²²

A Founder of the Camilla Baptist Association

In 1879, Reverend James launched out on another bold religious mission. Being involved in new beginnings appears to have been a natural part of his life, which was not unusual as this was a time of beginnings and pioneers in religious endeavors. This time he played an integral part in organizing another Black Baptist association in Southwest Georgia. Details illuminating the direct personal interactions and communications that led to the formation of the union of churches will probably never be known and neither will the extent of James' role in founding the Camilla Baptist Association. Perhaps word of this association's organization was spread by ministers who like circuit riders of old brought the news to local churches. Newspapers, dominant media of the day, may have carried an organizational notice of date, place, and time. Letters containing the announcement of an association's impending organization may have arrived at ministers' post office boxes. Ministers familiar with each other and who pastored churches in the same vicinity could have discussed plans to organize an association. Maybe all of

²⁰ Southwestern Baptist Association, *Minutes*, 1873, 12. Collins James' name appears in the Southwestern associations Statistical Table of the Churches, but not in the association minutes. James may not have attended this meeting, but sent a representative, Caleb Carter as a delegate for the churches.

²¹ Southwestern Baptist Association, *Minutes*, 1874, 5, 6, 9.

²² See the Southwestern Baptist Association minutes for 1875 and 1876.

these methods were used to herald the formation of the Camilla Baptist Association. That delegates from five churches met at James' Union Baptist Church in Camilla underscore his significant influence in the association's debut.

On the Friday night before the third Sunday in November 1879, Collins James' pulpit became a very important place as the Camilla Baptist Association was organized. As business was conducted during the inaugural meeting, messengers from the churches represented elected him as the association's treasurer. He served faithfully in this capacity for the organization's first five years. In 1882, he was presented an accolade in the form of \$5.00, a token of the high regards in which the body held him for fidelity as treasurer.²³

During the 1884 annual meeting, James was elected moderator of the Camilla Baptist Association, a position he held for the next thirty-two years, and which ended just prior to the 37th annual meeting²⁴. Upon taking the gavel of leadership, James called attention to the work of the association, urged the brethren to unite and renew their efforts to further the Kingdom of Christ on earth.²⁵ As moderator, James held the highest office in the association and would be recognized as its undisputed leader. That his tenure as moderator lasted for more than three decades is a testimony to his leadership ability, the respect accorded to him by his peers and followers, his dedication to the gospel ministry, and belief in the association as a vehicle to spread the gospel and to uplift and advance Black people.

During James' tenure as moderator the Camilla Baptist Association recognized via a resolution that education for Blacks was an imperative and embarked upon the quest to build a high school. By 1893, under James' leadership, a Sunday School Convention had been added to the association. From its beginning with five churches, the Camilla Baptist Association had grown to thirty-eight congregations in 1902.²⁶

Farmer and Minister

The 1880 census listed Collins James as a farmer and minister. Oral history indicates that he owned 200-plus acres in Mitchell County. Chapter VI of *The History of Mitchell County* by Margaret Spence and Anna M. Fleming, entitled, "*The Negro in Mitchell County*" paid tribute to

²³ Camilla Baptist Association, *Minutes*, 1882, 6.

²⁴ In the 1884 election for moderator James defeated Reverend Purnell Borders by a margin of 45 to 27.

²⁵ Camilla Baptist Association, *Minutes*, 1882, 3.

²⁶ Camilla Baptist Association, *Minutes*, 1902, 16.



Reverend Collins James. Courtesy of the Union Missionary Baptist Church, Camilla, Georgia.

several Negroes who through their life and deeds attracted community attention. Of James it was noted that through thrift and economy he acquired a nice home and well-equipped farm and held other properties. Collins James, over his lifetime, amassed a library of over 300 books. Moreover, he enjoyed the confidence of area Whites and had many strong friends among them.²⁷ Oral history also claims that Reverend James conducted revivals for the White Baptists in Baconton.²⁸ In 1903, and what may have been his last church planting, he was present to assist in organizing the Union Missionary Baptist Church in Moultrie.²⁹

Conclusion

Collins James' reputation extended beyond Southwest Georgia, given that he was selected to participate in the Centennial Celebration of the first Negro Baptist church in the United States, the First African Baptist Church of Savannah. According to the Centennial Celebration program, he was scheduled to lead the Friday, June 15, 1888, praise service.³⁰

²⁷ Spence and Fleming, *History of Mitchell County*, 173.

²⁸ James Henry [pseudo.], interview by author. Baconton, GA, 24 June 2007.

²⁹ *History of the Union Missionary Baptist Church*.

³⁰ E. K. Love, *History of the First African Baptist Church* (Savannah, GA: The Morning News Print, 1888), chapter XVIII, available online at <http://www.reformedreader.org/history/love/chapter18.htm> (accessed January 4, 2008). There is controversy surrounding the First Black Baptist Church in the United States with at least two churches making the claim. The Silver Bluff Baptist Church is generally accepted as the first Black Baptist Church in the United States.

In his role as pastor it is undeniable that he visited many homes to see about members—how many will remain an untold number. He was surely asked to pray for countless who were sick and offered intercession for many others with various physical and spiritual conditions that needed amelioration. The number of funerals that he preached and the families that were consoled across the years must be left to speculation. How many inspirational sermons were delivered from his four church pulpits can only be estimated. The manner of worship experiences that transpired during the course of his ministry and the style of preaching embodied in Reverend Collins T. James are left to imagination. The few details about James' ministry are that he taught Bible study classes, participated in the Baptist Young People's Union, and maintained well-organized Sunday schools.³¹ None of James' sermons have been preserved to inform us of the content of his messages. That he remained pastor of four churches for many years suggests popularity among the membership. The services were probably spiritual affairs mingled with much Christian fellowship led by a charismatic preacher. James' pastoral leadership through the decades demonstrates devotion to his call to the ministry. His years of preaching are evidence that he was concerned about the souls of men and advancing the Kingdom of Christ on earth. From all available accounts and during his time, Collins James was a remarkable individual, beloved leader and preacher in Southwest Georgia.

Then, there were the between Sundays, so much time that is unaccounted for in the documented record. As a farmer he probably labored long hours walking behind a mule or two preparing the ground for planting, patiently waiting for the crops to bear fruit, and then reaping the harvest. There is a parallel that can be seen between James' work as a farmer and his work as a minister. Regarding agriculture, there was a harvest of crops; in religion, there was a harvest of souls. He left a legacy in the religious and secular worlds. In the *History of Mitchell County* as told by Margaret Spence and Anna Fleming, it is said that Collins James "left his family in comfortable circumstances."³² His churches probably benefited from his leadership and pastoral care, and experienced a similar level of spiritual comfort.

Collins T. James rests in peace in the New Salem Baptist Church cemetery in Baconton. How New Salem came to be his final resting place and not somewhere on the grounds of another of his churches has not been documented and can only be speculated upon. He lies between his first wife Charity, who passed June 30, 1898, and his second wife Julia who departed this life September 11, 1900.

James lived longer than many of his contemporaries, even his good friend Senator Augustus O. Bacon. Reverend Collins T. James died September 14, 1916. The written record informs that his funeral was attended by one of the largest crowds ever assembled in Mitchell County.³³ Surely his death was an occasion for tears falling down from all who knew him. Without a doubt, Southwest Georgia lost an outstanding preacher and champion of the gospel ministry one September day. No written record has been found that identifies the minister who

³¹ History of the Saint James Missionary Baptist Church.

³² Spence and Fleming, *History of Mitchell County*, 173.

³³ Ibid.

preached his eulogy or the words that were spoken on that day. It would have been most appropriate, however, for the eulogist to have somewhere said, "well done thou good and faithful servant."

Reverend James had a singular impact on Black Baptist religion in Southwest Georgia for fifty years and what he helped to birth in the latter half of the 19th century is alive and well today. All of the known churches that he helped to organize and pastor, Bethel, Weldon Springs, New Salem, Union, and Saint James are active institutions and their histories recognize his contributions in the role of pastor. In October 2009, the Camilla Baptist Association, which James helped to found and organize at his Union Baptist Church, held its 130th Annual Session. This association has met annually for 130 years with the most recent meeting being held at the Union Baptist in Moultrie, a church that James helped to organize in 1903.

Today, the Baptists are the most prolific religious denomination among Blacks in Southwest Georgia. While it cannot be claimed that this reality is because of Collins James, it must be acknowledge that across many decades that he contributed much to the perpetuation of the gospel and the Baptist denomination in the region. There is a measure of truth though, in the conclusion that minus Collins James the region would have experienced a void in Black Baptist preaching and leadership. When Black Baptists in Southwest Georgia look back to from whence they came, Collins James will figure prominently in their history. If the works of Black Baptist ministers could be characterized as a shining light, the conclusion could be drawn that James' glowed very brightly. It can also be said with some confidence that the labors of Collins James in the gospel ministry bore much fruit. He was an influence in the lives of Black Baptists at a seminal time in history. Were it not for Collins James and granted, others like him, their commitment to Baptist doctrine and dedication to preaching the gospel, the predominance of the Baptist church among Blacks in Southwest Georgia would probably not have reached its present-day proportion.