

Women's photography club working to preserve historic church through pictures

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[Judy Holmes of Chicks that Click took this photograph of Trinity CME Church in Augusta. The historic structure is slated for demolition.](#)

A regional women's photography club, Chicks that Click, has taken on a community service project to raise awareness about a historic black church in Augusta, Georgia that may be demolished, Trinity Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME).

The church's origins date to 1840, when congregants met beneath a brush arbor. It is said to be older than the CME branch of Methodism and the church is considered a sister church of St. John United Methodist Church in Augusta.

The church's history, from the current Trinity CME Church's website, said St. John UMC supplied white pastors for Trinity CME during its first 13 years. Then, Trinity members pooled resources and a Rev. James Harris, said to be a slave preacher from Athens, Georgia, served as Trinity's first pastor.

On April 1, 1998, the church and property were deeded to Atlanta Light and Gas Co., with the last church service to be conducted in that building being done the following day.

The current Trinity CME Church is now in a different neighborhood, according to Robert Williams of the nonprofit Miracle Making Ministries.

Chicks that Click meets monthly at Sweetwater Baptist Church in North Augusta, South Carolina. Membership is by referral, but those who are interested in becoming active with the group are welcome to contact Pamela Cook and Judy Holmes for more information about photo shoots and workshops: pamacook@gmail.com or judyholmes@gmail.com.

Efforts to save structure not entirely new

"Trinity CME figures into our organization's community redevelopment efforts," Williams said. "Our plan was to restore the building and the property was acquired by Miracle Making Ministries in 1998. (The nonprofit has leased the building from Atlanta Gas Light.) We own a lot of real estate in the area where the church sits and we've torn down some houses and rehabilitated others."

Williams said he's spent 15 years raising money for the Trinity CME building and Miracle Making Ministries did make infrastructure improvements to the building during that time.

"It served as a 'base camp' for our inner city after-school programs and more," Williams said. "We retrofitted it to our use."

However, Williams said his organization had to vacate the building in 2003, so the contamination cleanup by Atlanta Gas Light could begin.

"We have succeeded for a time in delaying demolition," Williams said. "The church was slated for demolition in the spring."

Williams said there is more than one option other than demolition to accomplish the necessary cleanup without razing the church, but he said alternatives will likely require significant money and support from parties interested in preserving the historic structure.

Images helping to create a visual record of church

Chicks that Click formed in 2013, with six charter members. It has since grown to include more than 50 members, according to co-founder Pamela Cook. The club is open to women by member referral and is based in North Augusta, South Carolina.

Members are from McCormick, Saluda, New Ellenton, Hepzibah, Waynesboro and other places. Many come from what's known as Central Savannah River Area, made up of 13 counties in Georgia and five in South Carolina.

The club meets monthly and meetings include workshops, guest speakers and photography competitions.

The club's photographs have been part of a month-long gallery display at the McCormick Arts Council at the Keturah. Among those displayed are at least one of Trinity CME.

Chicks that Click members' work will also be displayed and for sale as part of McCormick's Bells and Whistles 29835 festival in April.

Dec. 17, the club presented 42 images to the Lucy Craft Laney Museum of Black History in Augusta, for use in a future display in 2016. (The museum has been instrumental in getting a historical marker for the Trinity CME property.)

Christine Miller-Betts, executive director of the Lucy Craft Laney Museum of Black History in Augusta said the Chicks that Click images of Trinity CME are slated for an exhibit at the museum, likely in September.

"'Mother' Trinity is and has been on a list of endangered historic properties for several years," Miller-Betts wrote in a document emailed to the Index-Journal.

The photography club credits Miller-Betts with helping members obtain access to the inside of the church, and, Miller-Betts also posed for one of Pamela Cook's photos taken inside the church, titled "Amazing Grace."

"The photographs will be in our archives," Miller-Betts said of the more than 40 images given to the museum. "We keep praying there will be a way to preserve the church and address the contamination...It's such a lovely church..."

"When you walk in, it's almost as if someone is still there, even if there isn't," Miller-Betts said. "You can just imagine the music and the ministers. It's a very worthy preservation project."

Cook said a Facebook post regarding the fate of Trinity CME Church set things in motion for the club's photography project, to raise awareness about the church. The church has been condemned and is in disrepair.

In June of this year, the club was granted permission to photograph the church, grounds and surrounding neighborhood.

"There are people trying desperately to keep the church from being destroyed," Cook said. "A few of the pews are no longer there and none of the pulpit furniture is there. There is significant structural damage. If not fixed soon, the building stands to be lost to deterioration. There are spots you can see daylight.

"In the pictures we took, there is evidence of the sanctuary being added on to many times," Cook said. "It was a growing, thriving church for a long time. It's a beautiful building. Our goal is to help preserve it through pictures, particularly if it's going to be torn down. We wanted there to be good records to document the building."

According to articles in The Augusta Chronicle, Trinity CME's sanctuary was built by former slaves and the sanctuary is scheduled for demolition as part of Atlanta Gas Light's project to remove ground contamination in the area.

The Augusta Chronicle reported in February that the project involves removal of coal tar, a chemical byproduct of gas manufacturing. A former gas plant operated at Eighth Street and Walton Way in Augusta from 1852 to 1955.

The vacant church is said to be too structurally unsound to move it during cleanup.

Carol Grady, 68, a retired registered nurse from McCormick, has been interested in photography for more than a decade. She is one of the club members who photographed the church.

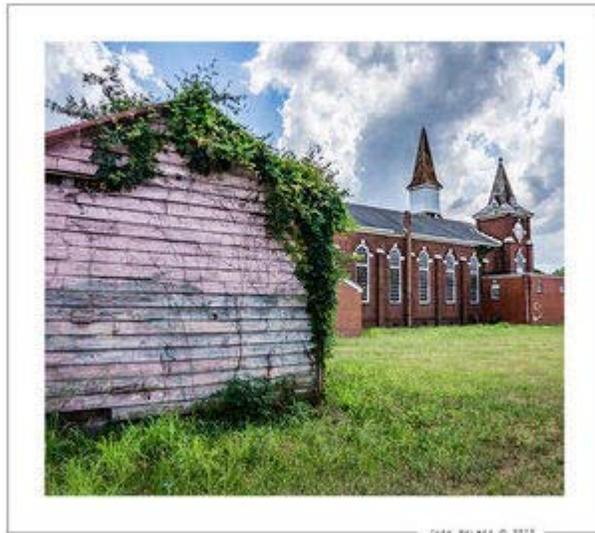
"Looking at the dilapidated state of the church, I tried to look for the beauty within that," Grady said. "The stained glass of the church was really beautiful, with rays of the sun coming in, even highlighting cobwebs."

Kendall Adams, photographer and program director and instructor with Piedmont Technical College's commercial art program, has served as a judge for Chicks that Click shows and as an instructor for the club's classes and workshops. He first connected with the group about three years ago.

"When this group wraps their arms around something, there is no letting go," Adams said. "If you have an opportunity to see the entire collection of images they have as a group, it really makes a statement. There are some extremely dynamic images."



Linda McFarland photographed stairs leading to a balcony in Trinity CME Church in Augusta. Through the double doors, the sanctuary is visible.



ABOVE:Judy Holmes photographed this original structure still standing on the property of Trinity CME Church in Augusta. The church is in danger of being demolished and the North Augusta, SC-based Chicks that Click photography club is raising awareness of the church's plight through pictures.**LEFT:**Linda McFarland photographed stairs leading to a balcony in Trinity CME Church in Augusta. Through the double doors, the sanctuary is visible.



Pam Cook photographed this image, "Canal at Night," depicting the Augusta Canal and Trinity CME Church.



Christine Miller-Betts, executive director of the Lucy Craft Laney Museum of Black History in Augusta, poses for a photograph titled "Amazing Grace," taken by Pamela Cook, inside the historic Trinity CME Church, which is slated for demolition