

TACONY, TACONY BAPTIST CHURCH

Tacony

4715 Disston Street, north side between Hegerman & Vandike Streets

Philadelphia

Philadelphia County

Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-6692-C

HAOS

PA-6692-C

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

National Park Service

U.S. Department of the Interior

1849 C St. NW

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## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### TACONY BAPTIST CHURCH

HABS No. PA-6692-C

**NOTE:** Tacony's street grid does not lie true to the compass. For the purpose of locating buildings in this report, the roads running NE to SW (ex. Keystone Street and Torresdale Avenue) will be the N-S axes and those running SE to NW (ex. Longshore Avenue and Disston Street) will be E-W axes.

**Location:** 4715 Disston Street, north side between Hegerman and Vandike streets, Tacony neighborhood, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

The Tacony Baptist Church stands on a plot extending between Hegerman and Vandike streets at their intersections with Disston Street. The original church is located at the northwest corner of Hegerman and Disston, with the later church constructed directly to its west at the northeast corner of Vandike and Disston. The main door faces Disston Street.

**Significance:** The Tacony Baptist Church is one of the oldest religious institutions in Tacony. It was organized in 1881 and the first permanent church building constructed on lots donated by the Disston family in 1883. A new church, constructed behind the earlier one in 1915-1916, is significant in its own right as its exterior walls are laid-up entirely with discarded grindstones from the Henry Disston & Sons, Incorporated, Keystone Saw Works.

#### **Description:**

The original church building located on the northwest corner of the intersection of Disston and Hegerman streets retains its original form, but has been the focus of many cosmetic changes. As completed, the church building was sheathed mostly in decorative siding; brick was used on the lower portions of the entrance pavilions.<sup>1</sup> The roof's ridgeline sported decorative iron fretwork and a cupola with a bell-shaped roof. In the intervening years, modern siding has been applied to the walls and smaller replacement windows installed. The lower portion of the entire wall is of brick, the roof is sheathed in slates, and the cupola has disappeared, though its octagonal base remains. The second church structure, adjacent to the original, was constructed in 1916 of stone with a slate roof and appears to have been subject to few exterior changes.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Louis M. Iatarola and Siobhán Gephart, *Images of America: Tacony* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2000), 91, for an early photograph of the building, 92, for an early sketch of the building.

<sup>2</sup>Sanborn Map Company, *Sanborn Maps for Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*, vol. 27 (New York: 1928), 2637, for a site plan.

**History:**

See the historical report for Tacony, HABS No. PA-6692 for more detailed information about Tacony's general development.

Tacony Baptist Church was organized as a mission and Sunday school on December 4, 1881 and the next year a simple frame structure "with a vestibule and tin roof" had been built by John Enochs and painted and finished by the congregation.<sup>3</sup> On December 4, 1882, fifteen men and seventeen women were "accepted and acknowledged" by the Council of Churches and the Tacony Baptist Church was formally chartered.<sup>4</sup> In January 1883, Hamilton Disston donated land to the congregation and on June 24, the cornerstone for a permanent church building was laid.<sup>5</sup> By March 1885, a simple frame structure enlivened by corner entrance pavilions and eclectically-patterned sheathing had opened for worship; by 1893, the interior was lighted by gas and electricity and sat 250 people.<sup>6</sup> It was also noted that in 1893 that no bell had been installed in the cupola of the church.<sup>7</sup> This situation was probably more the result of Disston deed restrictions, which prohibited the ringing of church bells in Tacony, than a lack of funds.<sup>8</sup>

The original church structure served the congregation for thirty years before an active move to construct a larger and more substantial building arose, unfortunately, there were only limited funds available for construction. In order to attain the goal of a new church building, George W. Tyron, pastor of the church, accepted a gift of used grindstones from the Henry Disston & Sons, Incorporated, Keystone Saw Works—these stones were split in half, the flat sides roughly shaped, and the whole laid-up in the wall round side facing in. Approximately 2500 were used in the construction and when he ran out, Tyron reportedly sought out older ones that had been buried on the grounds of the saw works. The congregation again kept costs down by volunteering time to aid in finishing the interior, and leaded glass windows were purchased as memorials to deceased congregation members. The new church seated 425 and was wired with electricity "using the new indirect lighting system." The basement contained a small gymnasium and a kitchen. The original church building was used as a Sunday school after the new structure's 1916 dedication.

The buildings continue to house the Tacony Baptist Church, with services still held in the 1915-1916 portion of the structure and other church activities in the original church building.

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<sup>3</sup>S. F. Hotchkin, *The Bristol Pike* (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs & Co., 1893), 68.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 73; "Church of the Grindstones to be Dedicated Today: Pastor Built Structure Out of Discarded Utensils from Saw Works," *The [Philadelphia?] Record*, 1916, from the Campbell Collection, vol. 15, 74, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, for building capacity. All references to the 1915-1916 church building are drawn from this article.

<sup>7</sup>Hotchkin, 73.

<sup>8</sup>Harry C. Silcox, *A Place to Live and Work: The Disston Saw Works and the Tacony Community of Philadelphia* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 20.

**Historian:** James A. Jacobs

**Sources:**

Campbell Collection, Vol. 15. Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Hotchkin, S. F. The Bristol Pike. Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs & Co., 1893.

Iatarola, Louis M., and Siobhán Gephart. Images of America: Tacony. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2000.

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