

PARSONAGE, DEXTER AVENUE KING MEMORIAL BAPTIST
CHURCH
(Pastorium, Dexter Avenue Baptist Church)
309 South Jackson Street
Montgomery
Montgomery County
Alabama

HABS AL-997
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

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Location: 309 South Jackson Street, Montgomery, Montgomery County,
Alabama

The Parsonage for the Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church is located at latitude 32.373001, and longitude -86.296128. The coordinate represents the western terminus of the roof ridge of the small cross gable above the porch on the front (west) façade. This coordinate was obtained using Google Earth imagery dated September 23, 2012, and its datum is World Geodetic System of 1984 (WGS-84). The location of the Parsonage of the Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church has no restriction on its release to the public.

Significance: Constructed in 1912, for over seven decades between 1920 and 1992 the house at No. 309 South Jackson Street was home to a succession of twelve pastors for the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church (Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church since 1978).¹ From late 1954 through early 1960, Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King lived in parsonage with their growing family.² On January 30, 1956—after previous threats to Dr. King in response to his leadership of the Montgomery Bus Boycott—an unknown person threw a bomb onto the front porch while Mrs. King, a friend, and daughter Yolanda were in the house. The bomb exploded, shattering the front windows and causing significant damage to the north side of the porch and the garage; fortunately no one was hurt in the blast. Dr. King was out of the house at a meeting and quickly rushed home where he diffused an angry and armed group of supporters with a speech emphasizing the need for non-violence even in the wake of violence. The bombing brought national attention to the Montgomery Bus Boycott as well as Dr. King's leadership and dedication to the ideal of non-violence as a key feature of the struggle for civil rights. No one was ever arrested for the crime. The house was restored in 2003 and presently function as a museum.

¹ Ellen Mertins and Mary Ann Neeley, National Register of Historic Places nomination form for "Pastorium, Dexter Avenue Baptist Church," National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1981; "Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church & The Dexter Parsonage Museum: History," accessed online, 9 Jun. 2014: < <http://www.dexterkingmemorial.org/history.cfm> >.

² For the history of the Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church, including Dr. King's time there while pastor, see: James A. Jacobs, "Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church," HABS No. AL-994, Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), National Park Service, U. S. Department of the Interior, 2009-10.

**PARSONAGE, DEXTER AVENUE KING MEMORIAL BAPTIST CHURCH
HABS No. AL-997 (Page 2)**

Description: The parsonage is a spacious one-story house topped by a tall hip roof and fronted by a full-width porch; its form is typical for early-twentieth-century domestic architecture in the South. The house is sheathed in weatherboards. Its decorative details are limited mainly to carved rafter tails under the eaves of the main roof and porch roof that, from a distance, resemble classical dentils, and four simple, unfluted Doric columns on the front porch between which run sections of railing with turned balusters. The columns and rafter tails of the otherwise vernacular house are a nod to Colonial Revival styling, which was rising in popularity for domestic design during the first decades of the twentieth century. The façade is further embellished by a central door surrounded by sidelights and transoms, and a small cross gable featuring a round-headed attic window positioned above the two southernmost bays (of five). This pair of bays also steps out from the rest of the wall plane under the porch. Historic photographs of the house after the bombing document that a gable was once positioned over the northern two bays, a frame garage had been appended to the north side of the house by the 1950s, and the full columns were once half columns set on square brick plinths.