

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section _____ Page _____

=====

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 08000757

Date Listed: 7/29/2008

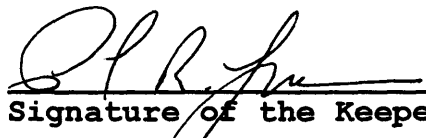
Stateler Memorial Methodist Church
Property Name

Gallatin
County

MT
State

Willow Creek Area MPS
Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.


Signature of the Keeper

7/29/2008
Date of Action

Amended Items in Nomination:

Certification:

The appropriate Level of Significance is: *Local*
[The SHPO omitted the level in certifying the nomination form.]

Significance:

The Areas of Significance should read: *Architecture and Social History*.
[*Religion and Exploration/Settlement* are deleted as areas of significance since they are largely associated with the nineteenth-century church congregation prior to the completion of the current 1915 church building. While important to understanding the historic status of the *congregation* in the region, these themes are not directly associated with specific activities carried out by the *church* after 1915.]

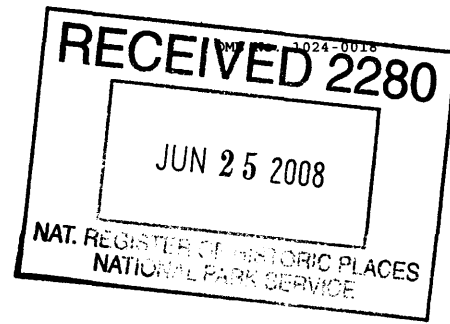
These clarifications were confirmed with the MT SHPO office.

DISTRIBUTION:

National Register property file
Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM



1. Name of Property

historic name: Stater Memorial Methodist Church
other name/site number: United Methodist Episcopal Church of Willow Creek

2. Location

street & number: 303 Main Street not for publication: n/a
city/town: Willow Creek vicinity: n/a
state: Montana code: MT county: Gallatin code: 031 zip code: 59760

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)
Mark F. Sumner/SHTPO 19 JUNE, 2008
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
Montana State Historic Preservation Office
State or Federal agency or bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:
 entered in the National Register Signature of the Keeper Date of Action
 see continuation sheet 8/29/2008
 determined eligible for the National Register
 see continuation sheet
 determined not eligible for the National Register
 see continuation sheet
 removed from the National Register
 see continuation sheet
 other (explain):

5. Classification

Ownership of Property: Private

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> building(s)
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> TOTAL

Category of Property: Building

Number of contributing resources previously
listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing:
*Rural Historic, Architectural, and Landscape
Resources in the Willow Creek Area,
Gallatin County, Montana*

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions:
RELIGION/Religious Facility

Current Functions:
RELIGION/Religious Facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification:
Late 19th & Early 20th Century Revivals:
Gothic Revival, Norman Revival

Materials:
foundation: concrete
walls: concrete block
roof: asphalt shingle
other:

Narrative Description

The congregation of the Willow Creek Methodist Episcopal Church, South built the Stateler Memorial Methodist Church in 1915, an expansive year for both the Willow Creek township and Methodism in Montana. Concrete blocks from the new Trident Cement plant in nearby Three Forks furnished an innovative but economical material for the building. The designers then married the simple, modern technique of concrete block construction with the nostalgic, romantic style of the Neo-Gothic. With its spare, forthright lines, honest materials, and Gothic and Norman Revival flourishes, the Stateler Memorial Methodist Church reflects the practical optimism of Montana's Gallatin Valley area in the first decades of the twentieth century.

The church is a raised one-story building of modified square massing, with a cross-gable roof and a corner bell tower. Reflecting popular construction methods of the 1910s, the gable roof is moderately pitched with exposed eaves supported by projecting rafter ends. The walls are constructed of smooth-faced concrete block stacked in a common bond. Rusticated concrete block quoins and courses at the floor and gable levels add texture to the exterior. A Gothic-arched doorway and windows enrich the design and are framed with wood and low-relief concrete hoods and sills. Large mullioned windows are fixed and divided into vertical rectangular panes, with diamond-shaped panels in the upper arch. A sturdy, square Norman tower, complete with castellated parapet, anchors the building at the northeast corner and emphasizes its medieval feel.

The main façade looks east. A large Gothic window is centered under the front-facing gable. To the right is the tower entrance, which is set back from the front. The tower entrance is an archway that contains a double wooden door with stained glass transoms. The centerpiece depicts a cross, while the flanking windows feature white flowers. In the upper tower, the belfry is enclosed with a louvered vent. Raised crenalate blocks accentuate the tower's parapet at the corners and midpoints. A broken flight of concrete steps with iron handrails leads to the primary entrance. On the lower east wall, openings include a paneled door to the bottom floor and a small, square, daylight basement window at ground level.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7

Stateler Memorial Methodist Church
Gallatin County, Montana

Page 1

The north and south walls are symmetrical under the gable ends, with a large central Gothic window flanked by smaller, similar windows on each side. The flanking windows are double-hung, four-over-four. At the basement level daylight windows are centered under each upper-level window, and are vertically divided into two panes. There are additional small Gothic windows at each side of the front-facing gable and in the north side of the tower. A rear doorway on the south side is accessible via a metal ramp, which is a modern addition.

The west side features two small Gothic window openings, these with stained-glass panes. The colored panes are vertical rectangles stacked in a band of four on the outer half of the window and a band of three on the inner half. Beneath the left (north) window a rear stairwell to the basement level is sheltered by a projecting, gable-roofed enclosure (another modern addition). Also on the west wall are three daylight basement windows, similar to those on the other sides.

On the raised main level, the church interior is arranged to face an elevated altar in the center of the west side of the room. The west side is a step higher than the rest of the chamber. A large modern cross hangs on the wall behind the altar, while an organ and a piano are located in the corners to the left and right. A free-standing pulpit is just south of the altar. The original straight wooden pews are placed to create walkways at center and along each side. Wall-to-wall carpeting covers the floor. The northeast entry tower functions as an antechamber to the church; entrance to the church proper is through a pair of swinging, paneled wood doors at the rear. A second doorway in the southeast rear of the church accesses a cloak and storage room. The main room was originally open to the ceiling and the wooden beams supporting the roof were likely exposed. Memoirs recall that the building was very cold, and so at some point the ceiling in the church was lowered and insulated. Unfortunately the ceiling now aligns with the spring point on the Gothic arches, hiding their peaks. Walls and ceilings are clad with fiberboard and painted white, lending a brightness to the simple interior space. Historic white globe lights are suspended on brass chains from the ceiling.

The basement level is illuminated by the ground level windows. It was formerly used as lodging space for the minister and his family.

The essential structure has a high degree of architectural integrity. There are several original stained-glassed windows, and all window casings are intact. Two later additions—a metal ramp leading to the south entrance and a covered gable shelter to the west entrance—distract only slightly from the original lines of the building. In the interior, integrity is marred somewhat by the dropped ceiling (cutting off the arch of the windows) and the wall-to-wall carpet. If these were to be removed in the future the interior would likely look a great deal as it did at its inception, particularly as the original pews are still in place. The Stateler Memorial Methodist Church retains integrity of location, setting, feeling, and association. Though its integrity of design has been compromised by the modern ramp and gabled shelter, its overall historic design is intact. The workmanship and materials date to the historic period.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria: A, C

Areas of Significance: ARCHITECTURE, RELIGION
EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): A

Period(s) of Significance: 1915 - 1939

Significant Person(s):

Significant Dates: 1915

Cultural Affiliation: n/a

Architect/Builder:

Narrative Statement of Significance

The Stateler Memorial Methodist Church is the second home to the Willow Creek congregation. It was constructed in 1915 to provide a larger space for the activities of the church, thus reflecting the expansion of the congregation, its importance in the community, and Montana's rural population boom during the period of homestead growth. The building is historically significant for numerous reasons. Willow Creek is the oldest Methodist congregation in Montana and one of the longest continuous congregations descending from the Methodist Episcopal Church, South in the country. Its history sheds light on many themes in Montana and U.S. history, among them: the importance of religious movements in western community building; the interconnection of rural and urban development; Civil War strife and migration; and the political, economic and cultural incorporation of the West into the nation. The structure itself is a remnant from the golden years of Montana's agricultural development, a time when settlement flourished, investment flowed, and optimism ran high. Finally, the materials and design of the structure illustrate the impact of industrialization and the expansion of markets in the West at the turn of the last century, as well as the importance of technological innovation in the evolution of vernacular American architecture. For these reasons, the Stateler Memorial Methodist Church is eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion A and C. Historic significance for this religious property is established on the merits of its architectural values and for important historic and cultural forces that the property represents. Because its significance transcends the doctrinal aspects of its history, the property meets Criteria Consideration A. For almost 90 years the Stateler Memorial Methodist Church has served the people of the Willow Creek Valley. While the congregation has dwindled in recent years, the church's long and important history is deeply appreciated by Montana Methodists and local residents. They hope to list the church in the National Register of Historic Places in order to honor that history and preserve it for future generations.

Pioneering Southern Methodist Learner Blackman Stateler preached his first sermon at Willow Creek on Christmas Day, 1864, in the cabin of James and Lucy Nave. He was among friends and countrymen. Like Stateler, many southerners made their way to Montana in the mid 1860s, pushed by the upheaval of the Civil War and pulled by the glittering promise of newly opened gold fields. Stateler left his Kansas home for Colorado in 1862 under threat of mortal violence by anti-slavery agitators. On arriving in Denver, where he had planned to take over the Southern Methodist congregation, he found the minister had fled and the church building sold to Episcopalians. Stateler then received a letter from his wife announcing that their Topeka home was burnt to the ground and she was on her way to Denver. In May of 1864 L.B. and Melinda Stateler headed to Montana in one of Jim Bridger's wagon trains. Here the refugees found a welcoming populace, built a permanent home, and planted a spiritual community that continues to the present day.¹

The Stateler Memorial Methodist Church, now known as the Methodist Episcopal Church in Willow Creek, Montana has long been a social and spiritual center to one of Montana's oldest rural communities. The church was organized during the placer gold era that gave rise to permanent settlement, and its founding members included a number of the pioneering individuals who built the farming community at Willow Creek. The Willow Creek congregation was decidedly southern-leaning at a time when the rifts between Union and Confederate sympathizers still ran deep. This likely increased the community's sense of cohesiveness. Several Southern Methodists from Missouri were settled at Willow Creek even before Stateler's arrival.² Melinda Stateler was said to have walked out to a canyon shortly after her arrival in the area and shouted "Hurrah for Jeff Davis!" She later remarked, "I thought I had never heard anything that sounded so well as the echo coming back from that rocky cliff."³ True to the tradition of the circuit rider, Stateler sought to consolidate his home flock while expanding the reach of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South across Montana.

¹ E.J. Stanley. *Life of Rev. L.B. Stateler*. Nashville: Publishing House of the M.E. Church, South, 1916.

² *Ibid.*, 190.

³ *Ibid.*, 316.

Stateler Memorial Methodist Church

Gallatin County, Montana

Name of Property

County and State

9. Major Bibliographic References

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
 previously listed in the National Register
 previously determined eligible by the National Register
 designated a National Historic Landmark
 recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
 recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data:

State Historic Preservation Office
 Other State agency
 Federal agency
 Local government
 University
 Other -- Specify Repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: less than one

UTM References: Zone: 12 **Eastings:** 449956 **Northing:** 5074646

Legal Location (Township, Range & Section(s)): SE ¼ NW ¼ NE ¼, Section 19, T1N R1E

Verbal Boundary Description

Block 9, Lots 1-4, Willow Creek Original Townsite.

Boundary Justification

The boundary is drawn, based on legally recorded boundary lines, to include the land surrounding the building that has been historically associated with the building and conveys the property's historic setting.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Mary Greenfield

organization:

street & number: 356 4th Street

city or town: Brooklyn

date: June 2008

telephone: (917) 301-2474

state: NY zip code: 11215

with contributions by

name/title: Chere Jiusto

organization: Montana Preservation Alliance

street & number: 516 N Park St, Suite A

city or town: Helena

date: Feb 2003

telephone: 406-457-2822

state: MT zip code: 59601

Property Owner

name/title: Trustees, United Methodist Episcopal Church of Willow Creek

street & number: PO Box 101

city or town: Willow Creek

telephone: 406-

state: Montana

zip code: 59760

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Stateler Memorial Methodist Church
Gallatin County, Montana

Page 2

Methodism and the Western Frontier

In the mid-eighteenth century British clergyman John Wesley launched the revolt against high-church Anglicanism that would become known as Methodism. An evangelical movement emphasizing simplicity of doctrine, self-help, and mutual reinforcement, Methodism flourished on England's industrial frontier—those crowded manufacturing centers where the modern working class was taking shape. As noted by historian E.P. Thompson, Wesley's approach to reaching the new urban masses "succeeded in combining in exactly the right proportions democracy and discipline, doctrine and emotionalism."⁴ Wesley sought to take the word to the people. He advocated preaching outside of the pulpit and encouraged ministers to travel widely. While the system worked well in industrial England, it was ideal for the mobile, unsettled agricultural communities of the western United States. The U.S. branch of the Methodist Episcopal Church was formally organized in Baltimore in 1784; Bishop Francis Asbury, "The Prophet of the Long Road," oversaw the application of the Wesleyan system to American circumstances. Methodist "circuit riders" combined a compelling message with the willingness to travel, and by the 1840s the Methodist Episcopal Church of the United States boasted over one million members.⁵

A circuit rider would often be the first representative of organized religion to reach a newly pioneered western settlement. Working in the revivalist, emotional style of the Great Awakenings, the minister might preach in a rude cabin, a barn, or under the open sky. Afterward, common meetings reinforced the Methodist message. Services included the vigorous singing of traditional hymns, and church members were encouraged to regularly renew their individual relationship with God. Methodism strongly encouraged social cohesion in local communities. It also created links on regional and national levels; circuit riders built ties between far-flung settlements through common literature, modes of worship, and personal ties. Regular large conferences furthered this process of cultural consolidation.

The efficient self-perpetuation of the Methodist system can be seen in the early biography of Reverend Learner Blackman Stateler. Stateler was born in Ohio County, Kentucky in 1811. His maternal grandfather, Ignatius Pigman, had been an itinerant preacher in the Methodist tradition since 1780. Stateler wrote, "I was first licensed, after the old-fashioned way, as an exhorter by John Denham in 1829, and began exercising my gifts. Not long after, I was licensed to preach by William Adams at the quarterly meeting held at old Bethel Church, near where I was born. That was in the year 1830."⁶ Shortly thereafter he received a spiritual "call" to go forth and spread the word. In 1831 he attended the Kentucky Annual Conference, where he was formally admitted as a circuit rider and sent to serve the rapidly multiplying settlements of the state of Missouri. In 1833 Stateler went to work with the Creek Nation in Indian Territory, but he was back in Missouri by the following year. He was ordained as a church elder in 1835 and he married Melinda Purdom in 1836.⁷ Mrs. Stateler would accompany her husband on his travels for the next fifty years.

They worked for many years with tribes on the Kansas area reservations, in particular the Delaware and Shawnee. Although the Stateres remained in Kansas throughout the 1840s and 1850s, the intensifying conflict between the northern and southern states made it increasingly uncomfortable for them. From its inception the Methodist tradition had been strictly anti-slavery, and members were enjoined against holding human property. Ministers in the South, however, argued that advocating abolitionism made it difficult for them to work for the spiritual betterment of anyone, black or white. Tensions grew and when, in 1844, the General Conference deposed a slave-holding bishop, the church split in two. Kentuckian Stateler (there is some evidence that he grew up in a slave-owning home)⁸ became a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and therefore an inadvertent partisan in the bitterly fought battles of the "Bleeding Kansas" era. With the outbreak of the Civil War it was no longer safe for him to remain in the state, leading to the Stateler family's exodus to Montana via Colorado.

⁴ E.P. Thompson. *The Making of the English Working Class*. New York: Vintage Books, 1966.

⁵ Lawrence F. Small, Ed. *Religion in Montana: Pathways to the Present*, V. I. Billings, MT: Rocky Mountain College, 1992.

⁶ Stanley, 14.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 17-136.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Stateler Memorial Methodist Church
Gallatin County, Montana

Page 3

Reverend Stateler was 53 years old when he arrived in Willow Creek. His religious tradition was born in a modernizing England but he had honed his practice of it among the displaced refugees of the reservations and the hardscrabble farmers of the U.S. western frontier. The Civil War was not quite over, and if Melinda's huzzah to Jeff Davis is any indication, the Statelers' scars were still fresh. Their personal history reflected that of the nation. Their next task, building community in southern Montana, echoed the nation's postwar projects of reuniting north and south while incorporating the west into its political, economic, and cultural fabric.

L.B. Stateler and the Willow Creek Valley

The Methodist system of founding bases from which new circuits could be launched was as successful in Montana as it had been elsewhere, particularly given the state's rapid development (due to its mineral resources) and the vast distances between populations (due to its geography). Methodism grew rapidly in Montana. But as the frontier gave way to permanent settlement, the church was no less influential in expanding and perpetuating the communities in which it had taken root. In the Willow Creek Valley, an initial period of settlement in the 1860s and 1870s soon gave way to an era marked by the intensification and diversification of agricultural development.⁹ The coming of the railroads tied the local economy to the global market, accentuating cycles of boom and bust. Technological development improved harvests even as it led to the cultivation of marginal land, with eventually disastrous results. Through every expansion and contraction, the Willow Creek Methodist Episcopal Church both shared in and influenced the fate of the Willow Creek community.

Prospectors struck gold in southern Montana's Alder Gulch in 1863. Within months thousands of fortune-seekers were pouring into boomtowns such as Virginia City and Nevada City. The Statelers first went to Virginia City and later moved to Sappington, where they built a stone house. There were a number of Missourians in Virginia City, as well as a Brother Hardgrove who was also of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Stateler alternated preaching with Brother Hardgrove in "an arbor made of forks set in the ground, on which poles were laid and covered with brush."¹⁰ Settlement of the Willow Creek valley was concurrent with the opening of the Alder Gulch gold fields, as pioneering farmers began tilling its rich bottom lands in order to feed the miners. (Due to Willow Creek's proximity to the Virginia City area, the farming of this valley slightly predated that of nearby Gallatin Valley, which would become the bread basket of the Montana Territory.) Stateler established a preaching circuit between Virginia City and Willow Creek. He reportedly covered as many as 200 miles a week on horseback, and had a hand in starting "all the Methodist Episcopal South churches in the territory," including those "at Anaconda, Corvallis, East Helena, Helena, Heron, Stevensville, and Willow Creek."¹¹ Willow Creek was, however, the first organized Methodist church in Montana.

The pioneers of Willow Creek consisted of two groups: "a number of disaffected Mormons from Utah" and an endogamous community of Southern Methodists from western Missouri.¹² The immigrants were initially squatters by necessity, as there was no way to record claims until 1869. After that date most of the settlers filed on their land under the 1862 Homestead Act; the valley's deep, rich soil and possibilities for irrigation made farming 160-acre tracts a paying prospect. The Union Pacific railroad was completed in 1869. According to historian Edward Laird Mills a "reinforcement" of Southern Methodists arrived in 1871, taking the train to Corinne, Utah and then traveling to Montana by stage.¹³ Soon other Southern Methodist ministers were dispatched to the Territory. The first Helena District conference was held in 1873 at Willow Creek. That meeting launched an effort to construct a permanent home for the Willow Creek church. Built at the north end of the valley in the first Willow Creek townsite, the wood-frame Stateler Chapel was a modest, single-story, gable-roofed building.

⁹ See Bestey Bradley. "Rural Historic, Architectural, and Landscape Resources in the Willow Creek Area, Gallatin County, Montana." National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form. 1993.

¹⁰ Edward Laird Mills. *Plains, Peaks and Pioneers*. Portland, OR: Binforde & Mort, 1947: 23.

¹¹ Small, 138.

¹² Bradley, "Rural Historic, Architectural, and Landscape Resources in the Willow Creek Area, Gallatin County, Montana," E3.

¹³ Mills, 17.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Stateler Memorial Methodist Church
Gallatin County, Montana

Page 4

Wheat production expanded exponentially in the settlement's first decade, and 1873 also saw the erection of a flour mill on Willow Creek. In the same year a Mr. Jaynes opened the town's first store near the Stateler Chapel. In addition to wheat, valley farmers raised oats, potatoes, dairy cows and beef cattle. Still, dramatic fluctuations in commodity prices and the lack of a direct rail link to larger markets constrained growth throughout the 1870s. Some families turned to raising stock, some sold their homesteads, and others rented out their places during this time.¹⁴ In 1883, however, the Northern Pacific rail line made it to the Gallatin Valley. A spur to Willow Creek was completed in 1887, bringing an influx of settlers and activity. As noted by Mills, "The 1880's were the crucial period in Montana Methodist history. The church grew rapidly and that growth came at a time when it determined the future. Economically the state was changing its base from mining to stock-raising, and, to a lesser extent, agriculture. The mining that remained--that of silver and then copper at Butte--was of a sort to permit family life and thus encouraged schools and churches. The long awaited railroads had arrived at last."¹⁵

As Montana's population grew through the 1890s, much marginal land came under cultivation. This was accompanied by an unsustainable trend toward "dry farming." Churches, particularly Methodist churches, also began to proliferate to unsustainable levels. The Methodists were spread widely but thinly across the state's small agricultural settlements.¹⁶ There was also the problem of competition between the northern Methodists and the M.E. Church, South. Writes Mills, "An M.E. presiding elder in Bozeman... complained that after twenty years of work, there was only a nominal membership and four 'practically abandoned churches' in the fertile, prosperous, well-populated Gallatin valley. He ascribed this condition to the double appeal made by Methodism. Southern Methodist occupancy of at least two points had also deteriorated."¹⁷ This cannot be said of Willow Creek, however, which remained an anchor and sponsor for Southern Methodism across the state. In large part this was because of the heroic work of Rev. Stateler. In 1887, due to a shortage of manpower, he became the lone presiding elder for the state of Montana, though this work was undoubtedly made easier for the 76-year old by the existence of the railroad.¹⁸ He is also estimated to have given over \$20,000 in support to churches around the region.¹⁹

L.B. Stateler died in 1896. Services were held in the Stateler Chapel, and attended by leading Methodists from all over Montana. He was buried in Willow Creek next to his wife, Melinda, who preceded him in death by seven years. Although his passing marks the end of the frontier era of Montana Methodism, the church he founded would prove remarkably flexible and resilient in the face of the next century's very different challenges.

Willow Creek and the Stateler Memorial Methodist Church

The history of Willow Creek in the twentieth century is that of Montana in microcosm: a strong boom, a rapid bust, and then a lengthy period of retrenchment. The Stateler Memorial Methodist Church was built at the height of the boom, and it made a strong statement about the congregation's hopes for the future. That it has been continuously inhabited by that congregation through drought, depression and depopulation speaks just as strongly of the tenacity of the religious community founded by Rev. Stateler. The church is a monument not only to Willow Creek's past, but also to its living present.

¹⁴ Bradley, E6.

¹⁵ Mills, 55.

¹⁶ Ibid., 71.

¹⁷ Ibid., 81.

¹⁸ Stanley, 285.

¹⁹ Mills, 85.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Stateler Memorial Methodist Church
Gallatin County, Montana

Page 5

The first years of the century moved quickly in the valley. In 1902 the Bell family of South Dakota purchased 7,000 acres with an eye to speculation. In 1908 the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway built a second spur line through the region. Real estate men began boosting the town. A plat for the townsite was filed by B.S. Adams, of Chicago, in 1910; town lots went briskly at an auction that July. The telephone company ordered a new switchboard, also in 1910, and by 1911 Willow Creek had a Northern Pacific depot. Eugene Thorndike and F. Nelson opened a bank in 1914. Soon the town had a theater, hotels, and all the other complements of civilization.²⁰

While the mining boom had been dominated by single men, the agricultural boom brought families to the state. In 1880 the female population of Montana was twenty-eight percent. By 1920 it was forty-five percent.²¹ Women had always been instrumental to Montana's social institutions. While Reverend Stateler "preached the gospel" his wife, Melinda, provided medical care, serving the settlers as a nurse and midwife. Now, as in other growing towns across the state, the Ladies' Aid Society played a key role in bringing the church into the modern era. The old Stateler chapel lay outside of the new townsite, which was likely a factor in the congregation's 1913 decision to erect a new building in Willow Creek proper. Nina Woodward, Rose Roberts and Minnie Mack organized much of the fundraising. They are remembered especially for driving in a horse-drawn wagonload from the Mack ranch to sell goods for the church.

In its design the building was an intriguing mix of old and new. The style was neo-Gothic, hearkening back not only to a romanticized English past but also, possibly, to the congregation's Missouri roots. St. Louis contained a number of small Gothic churches in the antebellum era. In 1869, just after the war, the city's Centenary Methodist Episcopal Church, South was designed by Baltimore architect Thomas Dixon. The Willow Creek and St. Louis Centenary churches, although obviously vastly different in scale, share a number of similar features. These include the small, stained lancet windows and a square turret with a Gothic-arched door set in the base.²² This is not to say that the design was entirely backward-looking. While the heyday of the Gothic style in the U.S. was in the 1840s and 1850s, the form enjoyed another revival at the turn of the century. Boston architect Ralph Adams Cram was particularly influential, designing a number of small, heavily massed churches, some with towers, that were often imitated in the 1910s and 1920s.²³ (For more on the significance of the Gothic style in American religious architecture, please see the concluding section.)

The church's builders also employed a mix of old and new methods and materials. Horse-power was used to excavate and fill around the foundation. The main structure was of concrete-block construction. While concrete has been used in buildings around the world for millennia, technical improvements in cements and kilns throughout the nineteenth century made masonry construction available on a mass-produced, affordable scale. The blocks for the Stateler Chapel came from the Trident Cement Plant in nearby Three Forks, which commenced operations in 1909 after Daniel Morrison's discovery of a rich limestone deposit there. Following Trident's opening the use of concrete block surged throughout Montana. Concrete block was also wildly popular across the country in this era. Not only was it cheap and functional, it was also aggressively advertised by manufacturers in pamphlets and trade-press articles such as *Cottage of Concrete Block, Erected at a Cost of \$900* (1908), *Believers in Concrete are Strong in Monroe, Mich.* (1907), and *A Remarkable Church of Concrete Block at Decatur, Ill.* (1907).²⁴ Despite its convenience and facility, however, concrete block was not foolproof. Church history recalls that during construction builders were taken by surprise when high winds blew over the south wall. As the workmen were eating lunch, a sudden wind came up and blew the south wall of the new church down. Luck was with them since all were off the building site at the time of the collapse. Had they been working at the time, serious injuries would likely have resulted.

²⁰ See Bradley, "Rural Historic, Architectural, and Landscape Resources in the Willow Creek Area, Gallatin County, Montana."

²¹ Small, 144.

²² See Mary M. Stiritz, "Centenary Methodist Episcopal Church, South, City of St. Louis, MO." National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. 1996.

²³ Kim Lovejoy. "American Religious Buildings: The Late Gothic Revival." *Common Bond* June 1998 12(1).

²⁴ See bibliography compiled by Adrian S. White and David Moyer. "Concrete Block Machines and Buildings--The Early Period of Invention: 1905-1918." Website of the Iowa Office of the State Archeologist. May 2002. <http://www.digitalpresence.com/histarch/concreteblock.html>. Accessed June 10, 2008.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Stateler Memorial Methodist Church
Gallatin County, Montana

Page 6

The new church was completed in 1915, a highpoint for the entire community. Soon after commenced the long decline. The drought of 1917-1921 decimated agricultural production farming. The sky-high wheat prices of the 1910s collapsed with the end of World War I. The Willow Creek Bank failed in 1923. Highway 10, built in the early years of the Depression, bypassed the town, permanently relegating Willow Creek to the status of hinterland.²⁵ Nonetheless the Stateler Memorial Episcopal Church remained a center of social life in the valley, particularly due to the activities of the Ladies' Aid society. The women of the church raised money to help those who were sick or in need, and church suppers and bazaars became major annual events in the lives of local people. Congregant Georgia Hielke remembered that, "Everybody went to anything that was doing up there and we used to have great big dinners." Another church member, Mrs. Chinn, recalled "I can remember we'd have terrific crowds, we'd have to sit them upstairs [in the sanctuary] and have them wait to set the tables." These events ran until the late 1950s, while the Ladies Aid society persisted until 1996.

The Ladies' Aid society was one reason for the remarkable longevity of the Willow Creek congregation. Another was increasing cooperation between northern and southern Methodists, culminating in the reunification of 1939. Despite some friendly tension—Mills reports that a Southern Methodist was willing to give away his hay to a preacher in 1895, until he found out he represented the northern wing²⁶--the two branches worked together intermittently as early as the 1880s. Mills writes, "Through it all, there was a genuine desire for brotherhood. The annual conferences of the M.E. Church, South, were occasionally held in 'M.E.' churches and when the M.E. church held its conference in Butte in 1887, the southern church closed on Sunday and united in the conference services. In 1900, thirty-nine years before unification, a 'Fraternal Conference' was held at Helena."²⁷ This cooperation was essential to the church's survival in sparsely populated districts. As observed by Smalls, "One is reminded of other times of testing: first establishing religion on the Montana frontier, later adapting to the dry years and finding in strategies of cooperation and in comity agreements the means for continuing missions, especially in rural areas."²⁸

It 1939 the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Protestant Church, and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South came together, forming the United Methodist Church that persists to this day. Some lingering differences remain between congregations from the years of separation. Communities descended from Southern Methodism tend, not surprisingly, to be somewhat more conservative in temperament. Ironically, in light of the contributions of the Ladies Aid Societies to the survival of the church, reunification delayed the ordinations of women until the 1950s because of objections from the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.²⁹ Other cultural issues have continued to be the subject of lively debate at regional and national conferences. Still, the Methodist Church has found ways to adapt and thrive over two centuries. As always, its Willow Creek branch looks forward to the twenty-first century with resolve and determination.

Conclusion: Historical and Architectural Significance of the Stateler Memorial Methodist Church

The Stateler Memorial Methodist Church is a key feature in the cultural landscape of the Willow Creek Valley. The historic importance of that valley, one of the earliest agricultural settlements in the Montana territory, is thoroughly developed in the 1993 National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form: "Rural Historic, Architectural, and Landscape Resources in the Willow Creek Area, Gallatin County, Montana." The Lower Willow Creek Rural Historic Landscape District was listed in association and contains over 100 buildings and rural properties reflective of agricultural land-use patterns and historic design features between 1863 and 1940. The Stateler Memorial Methodist Church is located within the northern boundaries of the MPD, and its history descends from the time of initial settlement. The MPD cites the importance of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South to the settlement history of the valley, while Learner and Melinda Stateler's contribution to the area is recognized by the listing of their gravesite as an independent property. The Stateler Memorial Methodist Church reflects the early twentieth century era history of this institution, and of the homesteading boom and intensified agriculture in the region.

²⁵ Bradley, E10.

²⁶ Mills 39.

²⁷ Ibid., 81.

²⁸ Small, viii.

²⁹ Small, 164.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Stateler Memorial Methodist Church
Gallatin County, Montana

Page 7

The church is also significant on its own architectural merits. It is a unique, early example of concrete block construction applied to an ecclesiastical structure in a rural setting. As such, it demonstrates the rapid shifts in modes of building in the industrial age, as well as the ease with which those innovations were disseminated. Pattern books, advertising, and other forms of mass media influenced not just style but also the selection of materials. Expansive industrialization made those materials available, not only through transportation infrastructure but also by spurring the development of factories in places like Three Forks. The very existence of this small but substantial church in rural Montana is a physical reminder of the influence of global markets and commodity speculation on pre-Depression agricultural settlement patterns, as well as of the pervasive reach of technological change in the modern era.

The Stateler Church is also a fascinating example of the evolution and geographic movement of a particular architectural language. The Gothic Revival started in mid-eighteenth century England when Sir Horace Walpole remodeled his country house. The style rapidly became fashionable,³⁰ and if Wesleyanism was one popular response to the Industrial Revolution, the neo-Gothic might be seen as another. But where Methodism was a practical, direct way of reckoning with a changing world, the neo-Gothic moved in the opposite direction by romanticizing a mythical past. In England, groups such as the Cambridge Camden Society and the Oxford Society for Promoting the Study of Gothic Architecture argued that the Gothic hearkened back to a purer era of Christianity, and that its application could lead to theological insights.³¹ This "ecclesiology" movement soon hopped the Atlantic, and the New York Ecclesiological Society formed in 1848.³² A number of influential pattern books promoted Gothic architecture in the U.S., perhaps most importantly *Upjohn's rural architecture: Designs, working drawings and specifications for a wooden church, and other rural structures* (1852), in which Richard Upjohn offered specific advice to small, poor, rural parishes. It has often been argued that Gothic romanticism was particularly popular in the antebellum south. While this point has lately become controversial, there is strong evidence that it was the preferred style for southern Episcopal churches.³³

The ecclesiological movement, with its high-church association, suggestions of mysticism and idolatry, and evocation of the Medieval Roman Catholic church, alarmed some U.S. protestants.³⁴ The neo-Gothic does not seem to have been a particularly popular style for non-Episcopal or non-Catholic American churches before or immediately after the Civil War. Indeed, the St. Louis Centenary church, a possible inspiration for the Willow Creek church, may have been one of the first major Gothic structures built under the Methodist banner. That church was designed by Thomas Dixon, a Baltimore architect. Ecclesiologists had been particularly active in Baltimore, and several members of the selection committee for the Centenary Church were from Maryland or Delaware. In any case, the Centenary Church adapted the Gothic style to the particular sensibilities of the Methodist tradition. Contemporaneous reporting emphasized that the church was designed "so as to bring the preacher as near as possible to his audience." In addition, the floor sloped to emphasize the pulpit and, as in Willow Creek, the organ was on an elevated platform. The room and pews were arranged "to place all the auditors in the same range, as near may be, at equal distances from the pulpit."³⁵ The edifice's small, pointed windows and relatively plain facing also reflect a simple and direct aesthetic.

The St. Louis church shows the adaptation of a popular style to the needs of particular denomination. In the case of the Stateler church, we also see the adaptation of broad trends in design and architecture to suit available resources and local values. The builders made pragmatic use of the plentiful supply of concrete via the Trident plant, and likely relied on the then-current proliferation of design templates for small Gothic churches using modern materials.³⁶ The MPD speaks of a Willow Valley architectural vernacular of

³⁰ Virginia & Lee McAlester. *A Field Guide to American Houses*. New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2006: 200.

³¹ James Patrick. "Ecclesiological Gothic in the Antebellum South." *Winterthur Portfolio*. 15 (2) Summer 1980: 118.

³² *Ibid.*, 120.

³³ *Ibid.*, 117-118.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 138.

³⁵ Stirtz, 8-3. The St. Louis Centenary church was completed in 1870, and a large detachment of Southern Methodists arrived in Montana from Missouri in 1871. The case for a direct influence in building styles is circumstantial but compelling, given the physical similarities between the two structures.

³⁶ See Lovejoy on the third Gothic revival of the early twentieth century. Of particular interest is her discussion of the work of Ralph Adams Cram, "who felt that with creative scholarship the Gothic style could be adapted to the needs of a modern age...Cram's small

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Stateler Memorial Methodist Church
Gallatin County, Montana

Page 8

“tradition, utility and thrift.” With its modest ornament and simple lines, the church reflects this tradition while not surrendering a sense of grace, devotion, and congregational pride.

Criterion A: Religious properties

The Stateler Memorial Methodist Church is an important religious building, significant for housing the longest and oldest Methodist congregation in Montana. And as a descendent of the Southern Methodist branch of that faith, it is an important continuous institution. In addition, the church and its history reflect general patterns of local settlement and the history of the rural Willow Creek community. The church was an important presence that helped to anchor the patterns of settlement and the Stateler Memorial church reflects the growth of that settlement as expansion occurred into the 20th century and took on a permanence that remains to this day. The church is also distinctive for its architectural values, both for its concrete block construction and its neo-Gothic patterning. For these reasons, it meets the requirements for National Register Criteria Consideration A.

Typical of the rural church buildings of Montana, it is simple in stature and design, yet it references formal ecclesiastic design to the extent achievable with limited resources and a small congregation. Reflecting a pragmatic architectural vocabulary of Gothic windows, a Norman tower and concrete block the building is a significant example of ecclesiastic design on a rural scale. In addition, as a fine example of concrete block construction, the church illustrates patterns of local building and the popularity of concrete block masonry during the 1910s in Montana.

For these reasons, the Stateler Memorial Methodist Church, now known as the United Methodist Episcopal Church of Willow Creek, is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places according to Criteria A and C. Historic significance for this religious property is established on the merits of its architectural values and for the important historic and cultural forces that the property represents. Because its significance transcends the doctrinal aspects of its history, the property meets Criteria Consideration A.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9

Stateler Memorial Methodist Church
Gallatin County, Montana

Page 9

Lovejoy, Kim. "American Religious Buildings: The Late Gothic Revival." *Common Bond* June 1998 12(1).

McAlester, Virginia & Lee. *A Field Guide to American Houses*. New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2006.

Mills, Edward Laird. *Plains, Peaks and Pioneers. Eighty Years of Methodism in Montana*. Portland, OR: Binfords & Mort, 1947.

Patrick, James. "Ecclesiological Gothic in the Antebellum South." *Winterthur Portfolio*. 15 (2) Summer 1980: 117-138.

Small, Lawrence F., Ed. *Religion in Montana: Pathways to the Present, V. I*. Billings, MT: Rocky Mountain College, 1992.

Stanley, The Rev. E.J. *Life of Rev. L.B. Stateler; A Story of Life on the Old Frontier*. Nashville, TN: Publishing House of the M.E. Church, South, 1916.

Stanton, Phoebe B. *The Gothic Revival and American Church Architecture: An Episode in Taste, 1840-1856*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968.

Thompson, E.P. *The Making of the English Working Class*. New York: Vintage Books, 1966.

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service. "Centenary Methodist Episcopal Church, South, City of St. Louis, MO." National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. Prepared by Mary M. Stirtz. Unpublished. 1996.

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service. "Rural Historic, Architectural, and Landscape Resources in the Willow Creek Area, Gallatin County, Montana." National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form. Prepared by Betsey Bradley with contributions by Joan Brownwell. Unpublished. 1993.

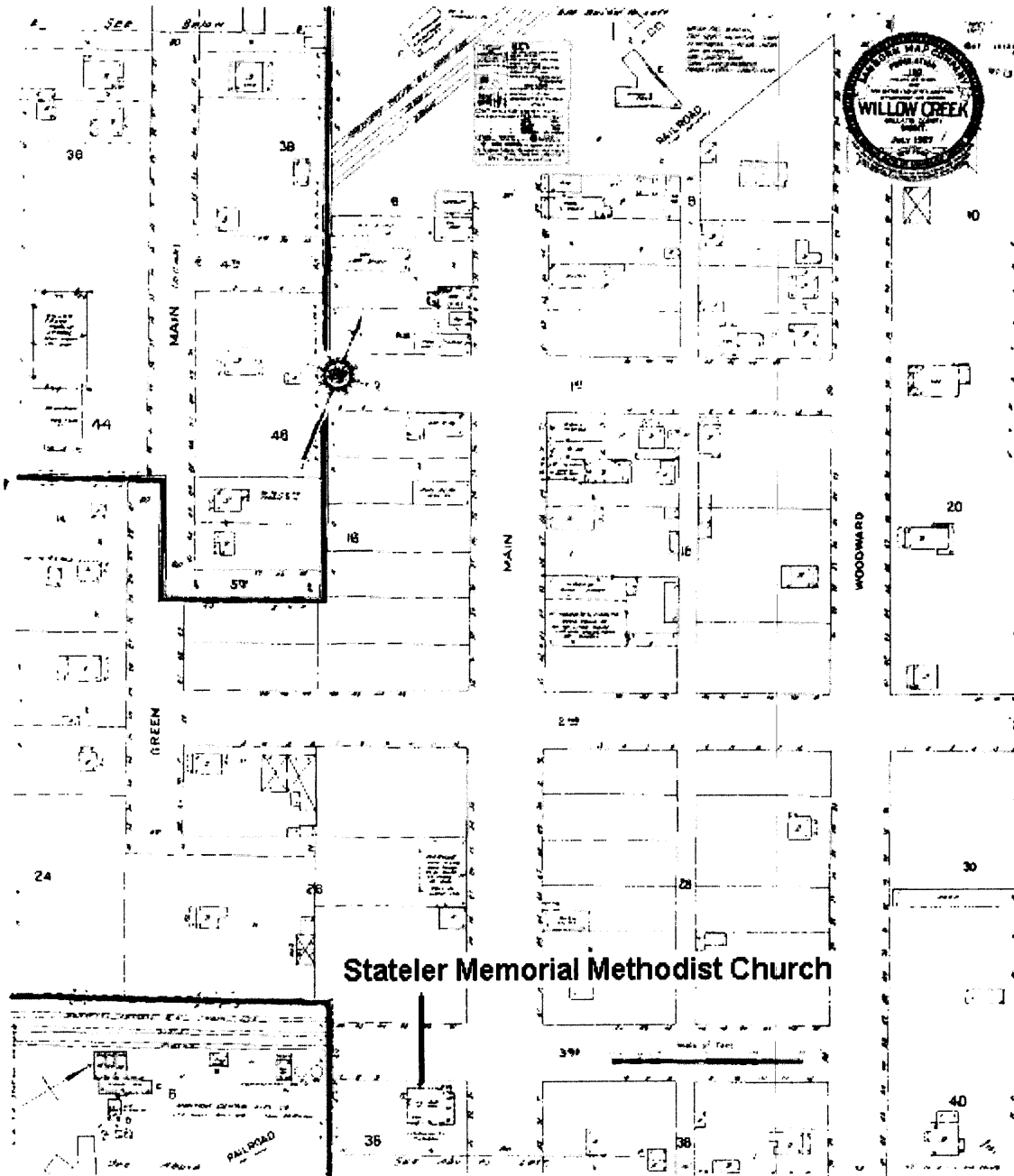
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 10

Stateler Memorial Methodist Church
Gallatin County, Montana

Page 10



Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map, Willow Creek, MT, Sheet 1, 1927.

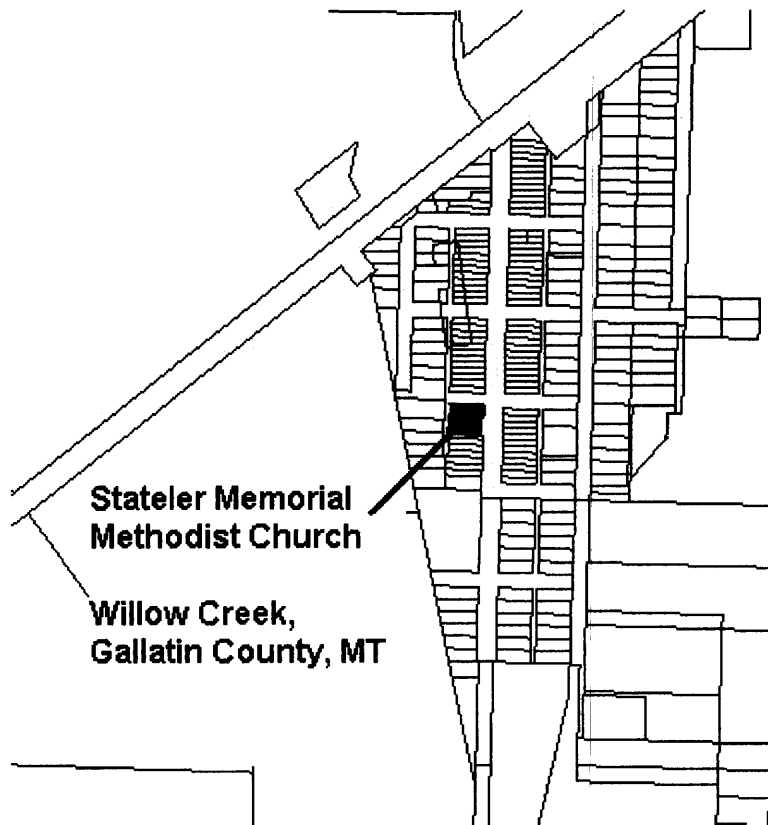
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 10

Stateler Memorial Methodist Church
Gallatin County, Montana

Page 11



Montana Cadastral Mapping Project, detail of parcels in Willow Creek, Gallatin County, MT

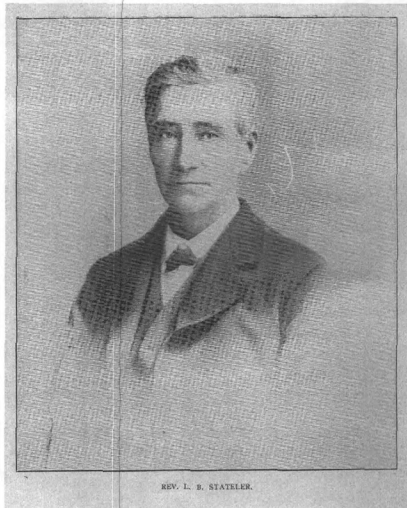
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Historic Photographs

Stateler Memorial Methodist Church
Gallatin County, Montana

Page 12



Photographs of Mrs. Stateler and Reverend Stateler. Photos taken from: Stanley, The Rev. E.J. *Life of Rev. L.B. Stateler; A Story of Life on the Old Frontier*. Nashville, TN: Publishing House of the M.E. Church, South, 1916.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Photographs

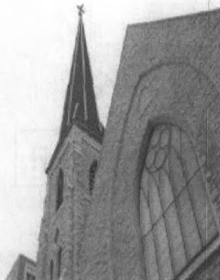
Stateler Memorial Methodist Church
Gallatin County, Montana

Page 13



STATELER CHAPEL, AT WILLOW CREEK, MONT.
Erected in 1873.

Photograph of the original 1873 Stateler Chapel in Willow Creek. Photos taken from: Stanley, The Rev. E.J. *Life of Rev. L.B. Stateler; A Story of Life on the Old Frontier.* Nashville, TN: Publishing House of the M.E. Church, South, 1916.



Detail image of the Centenary Methodist Episcopal Church, South in St. Louis.

http://www.the-vineyard.org/media_uploads/Image/mercy/Centenary%20Church%20-%20small.jpg

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Photographs

Stateler Memorial Methodist Church
Gallatin County, Montana

Page 14

In accordance with the March 2005 Photo Policy expansion, the photos that accompany this nomination are printed on HP Premium Plus Photo Paper, using a Hewlett Packard 100 gray photo cartridge. This combination of paper and inks is included on the NR's list of "Acceptable Ink and Paper combinations for Digital Images." The images are also recorded on a CD-R with a resolution at least 1200x1800 pixels, 300 dpi in "true color" 24-bit format.

Photographer: Chere Jiusto

Date: May 2008

Digital Images on file at MTSHP

Photo Number and Description

- 1 East (front) elevation, view to west.
- 2 North (side) elevation, view to south-southeast
- 3 South (side) elevation, view to north
- 4 West (rear) elevation, view to east
- 5 South and east elevations, view to northwest.