

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: <b>Pennsylvania</b>
COUNTY: <b>Philadelphia</b>
FOR NPS USE ONLY
ENTRY DATE

**1. NAME**

COMMON:  
**Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church**

AND/OR HISTORIC:

**2. LOCATION**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**419 South Sixth Street**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Philadelphia**

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:

STATE: **Pennsylvania** CODE: COUNTY: **Philadelphia** CODE:

**3. CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) <b>Allen's Tomb</b>

**4. OWNER OF PROPERTY**

OWNER'S NAME:  
**Trustees of Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**419 South Sixth Street**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Philadelphia**

STATE:  
**Pennsylvania**

CODE:  
**42**

**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:  
**Records Department**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**City Hall**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Philadelphia**

STATE:  
**Pennsylvania**

CODE:  
**42**

**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE OF SURVEY:  
**Philadelphia Historical Commission; Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission**

DATE OF SURVEY:  
 Federal  
 State  
 County  
 Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:  
**Philadelphia Historical Commission**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**1313 City Hall Annex**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Philadelphia**

STATE:  
**Pennsylvania**

CODE:  
**42**

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7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The first Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church, on the site of the present church, was a frame building which had been used as a blacksmith shop. It was hauled to the site and, after repairs, was dedicated for use as a church in 1794. In 1805 a new church was erected in the same location and used until 1841. A third church served from 1841 to 1889. It is said that during this time a tunnel was built connecting the church with a Friends Meeting House nearby and used to facilitate the escape of runaway slaves via the Underground Railroad. A fourth church was built in 1889, dedicated in 1890 and is currently in use.

The present Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church has a granite, three-story front with a fourth story tower and is Victorian Romanesque Revival in style. A large circular headed doorway forms the entrance. Stained glass windows made in Heidelberg, Germany, also circular headed, are above the entrance.

A basement crypt houses a museum and Richard Allen's tomb. The museum houses Allen's bible, his pulpit, and other historical items. A bas relief by the famous black artist Henry Ossawa Tanner and the most complete collection known of the Christian Recorder (the official A.M.E. newspaper) are also contained in the museum.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |                                       |  |  |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century  | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 19th Century |  |

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known)

1794 to present

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal              | <input type="checkbox"/> Education              | <input type="checkbox"/> Political                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric             | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic                | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry               | <input type="checkbox"/> Science                        | <u>Afro-American</u>                                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture             | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention              | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture                      | <u>History</u>                                      |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature             | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater                        | _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce                | <input type="checkbox"/> Military               | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation                 | _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications          | <input type="checkbox"/> Music                  |   | _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation            |   |   | _____   |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church is a living memorial to Richard Allen, pre-eminent black leader and founder of the first permanent national association of Afro-Americans. Richard Allen was born February 14, 1760, the slave of Benjamin Chew, a Quaker lawyer. The Allen family, although later sold to Mr. Stockley, was allowed to remain a familial unit.

Allen was allowed to partake of the religious experience early in life and was converted to the Methodist faith. At age 17, Richard Allen was a member of the Methodist Society. Eventually, Mr. Stockley found his religious beliefs would not allow him to "own" slaves and so he arranged for Allen and his brothers to buy their freedom for the amount of two thousand dollars each.

While earning a living, Allen preached throughout Delaware, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. In 1784, Allen was licensed to preach. In 1786, the Methodist elders called him to Philadelphia to minister to the blacks of the congregation at St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church at a 5:00 A.M. service on Sundays. Black participation in church services was tolerated if they occupied the "Negro pews" which were generally in the rear, side, or the galleries of the church, and otherwise kept their place. However, as Allen's preaching attracted more black parishioners to St. George's, white hostilities increased. As tension increased, so did the realization by the blacks that a new church site was necessary since the church elders denied them use of the church for social meetings. An initial alternative was the organization of the Free African Society founded by Richard Allen and Absalom Jones on April 12, 1787. The society was a first attempt at providing a social-religious atmosphere for the blacks in Philadelphia. The society attempted to provide the social services to the needy normally provided by a church agency.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Allen, Richard. Life Experience and Gospel Labors.  
Philadelphia: A.M.E. Book Concern, n.d.

Du Bois, W.E.B. The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study.  
New York: Schocken Books, 1967.

Powell, John H. Bring Out Your Dead: The Great Plague of  
Yellow Fever in Philadelphia in 1793. Philadelphia:  
University of Pennsylvania Press, 1949.

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	° ' "	° ' "		39 56 35	75 09 09	
NE	° ' "	° ' "				
SE	° ' "	° ' "				
SW	° ' "	° ' "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: **One acre**

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE:  
**Marcia M. Greenlee, Historical Projects Director**

ORGANIZATION: **The Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation**      DATE: **July 1973**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**1420 N Street, N. W.**

CITY OR TOWN: **Washington**      STATE: **District of Columbia**      CODE: \_\_\_\_\_

**12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION      NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

<p>As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:</p> <p>National <input type="checkbox"/>    State <input type="checkbox"/>    Local <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Title _____</p> <p>Date _____</p>	<p>I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.</p> <p>_____ Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation</p> <p>Date _____</p> <p>ATTEST:</p> <p>_____ Keeper of The National Register</p> <p>Date _____</p>
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(Continuation Sheet)

STATE Pennsylvania	
COUNTY Philadelphia	
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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The society's influence spread throughout Philadelphia to free blacks in Boston, Newport and elsewhere, but the climate within the church heightened to such a level that separation seemed inevitable. In founding the society, Allen had hoped to allay such a schism, but the heightening of racial bigotry required strong leadership from Allen. In November of 1787 elders of the church attempted to remove Absalom Jones and William White from the church as they knelt in prayer during a Sunday worship service. The commotion caused by this rough treatment forced Richard Allen and Absalom Jones to lead the black parishioners out of St. George's.

After the split with Absalom Jones on the question of the denomination of the new church and with the assistance of Dr. Benjamin Rush, Allen founded the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia in 1793. It was dedicated on July 29, 1794.

The new denomination provided valuable medical and military services to the city of Philadelphia. In 1793, Allen and the members of the Free African Society formed a paramedical staff which saved 200-300 lives during the yellow fever epidemic. Answering Dr. Rush's plea for help, the Society provided invaluable service to the disease-ridden city. They provided all medical and health services necessary from nursing the sick to burial of the dead. The society was wrongly accused of plundering, looting, and overcharging for their services but Allen and Jones answered the allegations to the vindication of the blacks. During the War of 1812, black volunteers under Allen's direction fortified and prepared to defend Philadelphia from British attack.

Allen attempted to create a church which would answer the needs, political, social and economic, of his religious group. The Church attempted to provide services not extended to blacks by the white municipal government in order to help blacks make headway in America. Allen was among those who in January of 1817 opposed the American Colonization Society's emigration scheme to send blacks to West Africa. Allen and the Bethel Church fought the Black Codes and state legislation which would have prohibited blacks to enter the free states of the North. In mid-September of 1830, Allen

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## 8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

chaired a meeting which had three goals: the repeal of the black laws being passed in northern states, the advancement of free blacks, and the abolition of slavery.

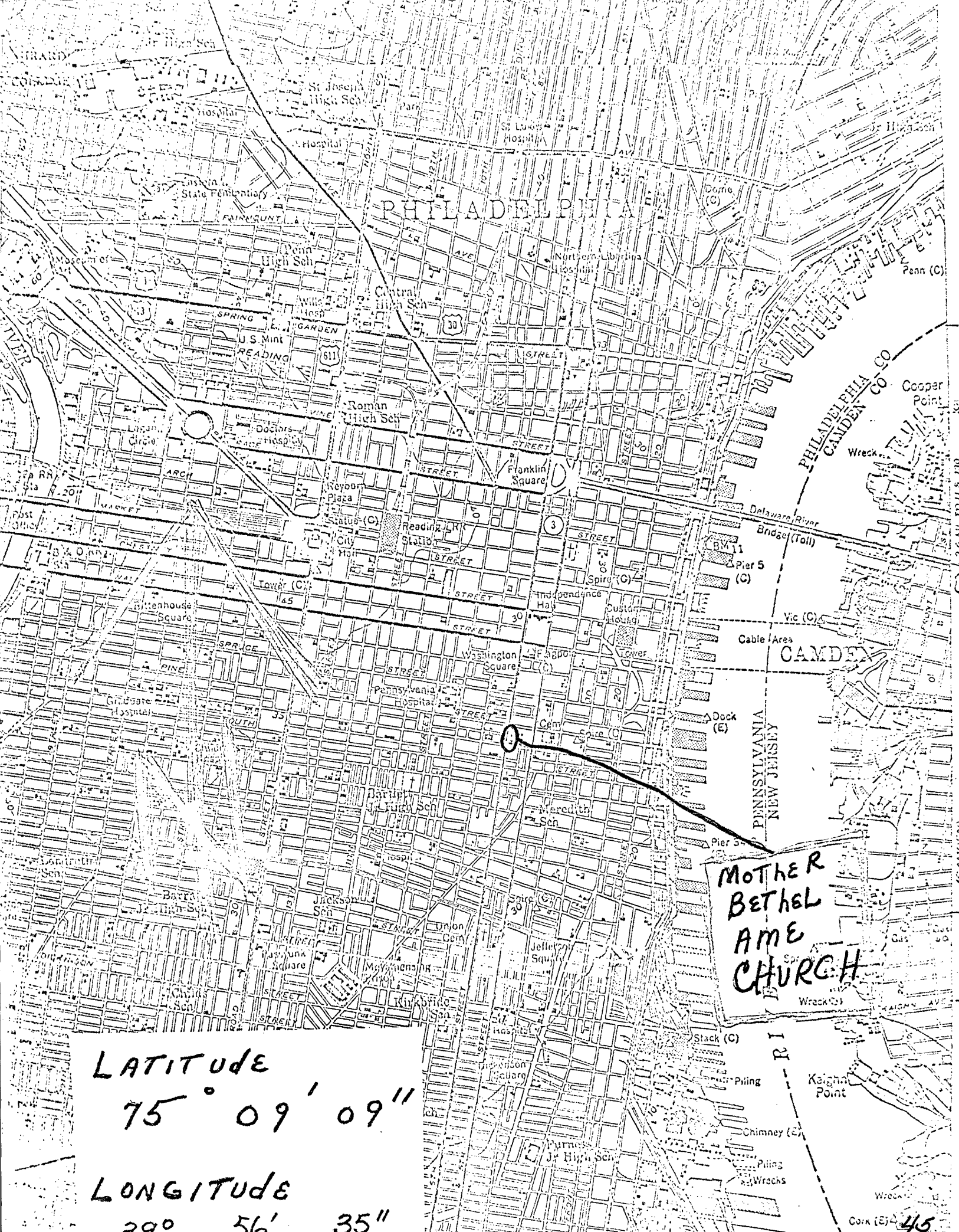
Allen fought throughout his bishopric for the improved condition for the free and enslaved black man. Richard Allen died March 26, 1831.

## 9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Rush, Benjamin. Medical Inquiries and Observations.  
Volume III. Philadelphia: J. Conrad, 1805.

Wesley, Charles H. Richard Allen Apostle of Freedom.  
Washington, D. C.: The Associated Publishers, Inc., 1935.

(Partial Listing)



PHILADELPHIA

MOTHER  
BETHEL  
AME  
CHURCH

LATITUDE  
75° 09' 09"

LONGITUDE  
79° 56' 35"