

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

FEB

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

## 1. Name of Property

historic name Grace Episcopal Church

other names/site number Mount Nebo Missionary Baptist Church

## 2. Location

street & number 555 Vance Avenue

not for publication N/A

city or town Memphis

vicinity N/A

state Tennessee

code TN

county Shelby

code 157

zip code 38126

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  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 for in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  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.)

Herbert L. Hays  
Signature of certifying official/Title

1/31/05  
Date

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Tennessee Historical Commission

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See Continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

## 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

entered in the National Register.

See continuation sheet

determined eligible for the National Register.

See continuation sheet

determined not eligible for the National Register

removed from the National Register.

other,

(explain.)

for  
Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Edson H. Beath

3/15/05

Grace Episcopal Church  
Name of Property

Shelby Co., Tennessee  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	1	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	1	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Historic Religious Resources of Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee

**Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/religious facility  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/religious facility  
RELIGION/church-related facility  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Gothic Revival  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE  
walls STONE  
BRICK  
roof ASPHALT  
other GLASS/stained glass windows  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** moved from its original location.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property
- G** less than 50 year of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1894 to 1940  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Cook, James B. (1826-1909)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):** N/A

- 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

Name of repository:

Tennessee Historical Commission  
\_\_\_\_\_

Grace Episcopal Church  
Name of Property

Shelby Co., Tennessee  
County and State

## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** Less than one acre Southwest Memphis TN-AK 404 NE

### UTM References

(place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>15</u>	<u>769350</u>	<u>3891953</u>	3	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	4	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>

See continuation sheet

### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title John Linn Hopkins  
organization Hopkins & Associates date May, 2004  
street & number 974 Philadelphia Street telephone (901) 278-5186  
city or town Memphis state TN zip code 38104

### Additional Documentation

submit the following items with the completed form:

#### Continuation Sheets

#### Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 Or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

#### Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

#### Additional items

(Check with the SHPO) or FPO for any additional items

## Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Mount Nebo Baptist Church, c/o Rev. Maurice Dickerson  
street & number 555 Vance Avenue telephone (901) 525-2381  
city or town Memphis state TN zip code 38126

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listing. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P. O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303

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Shelby County Tennessee

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## VII. Architectural Description

The existing building historically known as Grace Episcopal Church was developed beginning in 1894 at 555 Vance Avenue to replace an earlier sanctuary destroyed by fire in 1893. The building comprises a circa 1896 small stone and brick-clad chapel that faces South Lauderdale Street; a larger stone and brick-clad church sanctuary was appended to the north side of the chapel facing north to Vance Avenue in 1905-06; and, a new brick veneered Sunday School building was constructed in 1988 on a portion of the south side of the chapel. Each of these parts of the church is functionally connected to one another, and while they serve as one complex building and are counted as one contributing building, the descriptions that follow treat each individually only for the sake of clarity. An additional building is located on the church property; it is a freestanding, ca. 1948 brick veneered office building that was acquired and incorporated into the existing church complex in 1978. This structure is non-contributing to the significance of the property as a whole.

### The Sanctuary, 1905-06

The principal sanctuary for the church is the portion built in 1905-06. The plan for the church is that of a basic cruciform plan, with the nave and transept covered with a high gabled clerestory, flanked by aisles covered with lower shed roofs. Because the Building Committee for the church knew that their construction budget would not allow full completion of the building from start to finish, the narthex, the larger and smaller bell towers called for in the design of its architect, James B. Cook, were left for completion in a future building phase (see rendering in Section 8). Therefore, the front (north) façade of the building was intended to be an interior wall separating the narthex from the nave, and consequently, it was finished in plain brick as opposed to the rough-faced ashlar employed on most of the rest of the building. Even so, the façade was provided with some architectural details to give the building some character. The apex of the gable roof is crowned with a stone Celtic cross. The clerestory level of the façade is pierced by three thin Gothic-arched lancet windows. The corners of the clerestory level and the corners of the walls of the aisles are finished with stone quoins, not only to give them a more finished appearance, but also to facilitate keying the new masonry into the corner if construction had ever begun again in completing the building. Ca. 1960, the brick façade of the church was covered with Permastone; this material was recently removed from the façade to expose the original brick façade once again. The entrance to the nave is covered with a simple, one-bay, gable-roofed vestibule with battered engaged buttresses at its front corners; the vestibule was constructed of brick but was subsequently covered with Permastone, which remains only here, ca. 1960. The

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entrance is set in a four-center Gothic arch and contains replacement metal frame doors with transoms, and sidelights. Within the vestibule is a six panel double door with a solid Gothic arched paneled transom set in a Gothic arched reveal. Flanking the vestibule are stained glass windows with interlaced Gothic tracery, set beneath a stone Gothic arch with a head mold and carved label stops.

The side (east) façade of Grace Church gives a better impression of the intent of James B. Cook's original design. The façade is covered with regularly coursed, quarry-faced limestone ashlar veneer, and runs six-bays in depth from the front façade with each bay separated by a battered engaged buttress. The first three bays moving from north to south contain the nave and aisles of the sanctuary, each of which contain, on the first story, a stained glass window with tracery divided with three lancet arches lights set below four lancet arched lights in the tracery, all set within a Gothic arch with head mold and carved label stops; on the clerestory level, simple Gothic arched reveals each contain three Gothic arched lights. The next major bay to the south contains the gabled transept, which rises to the full height of the roof of the nave. The transept projects slightly in front of the wall of the aisle, and is supported by battered engaged buttresses set at angle with its corners. The east wall of the transept is dominated by a two-tier arrangement of stained glass lights. On the lower tier are three sashes, each containing three Gothic arched lights, all set beneath a stone label mold with label stops. Above this arrangement is a very large Gothic arched window containing four Gothic arched lights with foliated tracery above. The last two bays of the façade to the south of the transept contain two levels of windows set in rectangular reveals and containing 1/1 double-hung sashes, which provide light to corridors and stairways located to this side of the altar. A small brick addition was made above the roofline to contain heating and air conditioning equipment installed ca. 1952. The addition does not block two Gothic arched clerestory windows, each containing two Gothic arched stained glass lights.

The rear (south) wall of the church is finished in brick instead of stone. The flat gabled parapet wall has a polygonal projection with a hip roof to contain the apse. The apse has one large Gothic arched stained glass window located high on its rear wall; the flanking walls each have a Gothic arched stained glass window located lower on the wall plane. It should be noted that most, if not all of the stained glass lights of the church are covered with Lexan coverings to protect the glazing from damage.



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designed graphics on the ends of each aisle of seats. The side walls of the choir are decorated with pairs of large, blind Gothic arches. Behind the choir, the opening to the apse is spanned by a large Gothic arch that frames the three Gothic arched windows in the apse. The apse originally contained an elaborate high altar, but this feature was removed to provide room for a baptistery after 1939.

With the exception of the windows in the apse, all of the windows in Grace Episcopal are original to the construction of the building in 1905-06; they are notable for the use of distressed clear and pastel colored glass elements, with a shield motif containing an Art Nouveau "McIntosh Rose" at center. The windows of the apse are replacements from 1939.

Beyond the west wall of the choir is the South Lauderdale entrance that also leads to the 1896 chapel; to the east are stairs and corridors leading to the choir and to the chapel.

## The Chapel, 1896

Appended to the rear of the 1905-06 church sanctuary is the 1896 chapel. The chapel was originally entered from South Lauderdale Street through a one-story porch, located just east of the northwest corner of the building. The porch was built of rough-faced ashlar with a flat roof behind a crenellated parapet, and the parapet was supported by piers spanned by a carved stone Tudor arch. When the new sanctuary was built, the porch was retained and turned into an entrance vestibule connecting the two buildings.

The 1896 chapel has an axis under a gable roof that runs perpendicular with the axis of the 1905-06 sanctuary; it is three bays in width and six bays in depth and is constructed of load-bearing, rough-faced limestone ashlar. A small Celtic cross adorns the apex of the gable end facing South Lauderdale Street. The front (west) façade of the chapel has as its only decoration an arrangement of three Romanesque Revival stained glass windows which are set beneath a composite arch composed of a vaguely Gothic arch at center intersecting with flanking Romanesque arches. The entire composition is capped with a continuous hoodmold with label stops. The rear (east) façade of the building is constructed of brick and features a triple Gothic arched window arrangement at center with stained glass lights; originally, a Gothic arched stained glass window flanked the



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center arrangement, but the northernmost of the window reveals was filled with brick at some time in the past. The side (south and north) facades are both obscured by later construction.

The interior of the chapel is laid out in a modified hall church plan, with the center aisles off center of the axis of the space. The ceiling over the nave is supported by a uniquely designed, king post truss system that employs wooden beams detailed with chamfered edges and scrollwork decorations; the truss design is modified by the additional elements of tie rods running from the bottom of the center post of the truss to the beams at the walls. The exposed ceiling of the roof is also supported by wood purlins and wood sheathing, all stained a dark walnut brown.

The side walls of the chapel retain most, if not all of their original rectangular window openings and 1/1 swing sash stained glass lights. The seating of the chapel is arranged to face towards the east, where the lectern and choir were originally located. It is not known when the lectern and choir were removed from the building. A low partition wall was extended across the front of the dais ca. 1990 to create a proscenium arch; the partition wall extends upward only to the height of the original side walls of the chapel. The dais is used as a stage for performances and theatrical presentations.

## **Sunday School Building, 1988**

The Sunday School building and activity center was constructed adjacent to the south side of the chapel in 1988. The building is a one-story, frame, brick veneered structure with no particular architectural influence. The building is set back from the front (west) building line of the chapel by approximately 10 feet and measures the equivalent of five bays in width along South Lauderdale Street and runs nine bays deep along the south property line of the church along Bowdre Place. The building occupies a staggered rectangular footprint under an L-plan gable roof; the building effectively has entrances facing both South Lauderdale Street and the church parking lot lying to the east of the chapel and main sanctuary. The building has narrow boxed eaves, metal slab doors and two-light, metal frame, fixed sashes. Inside, the building contains smaller and medium-sized schoolrooms, offices and a kitchen facility, all located off of a single-loaded corridor running through the building. All of these rooms are minimally detailed. While this is a sizable addition to the church building, its placement and simple design do not detract from the overall architectural integrity of the church.

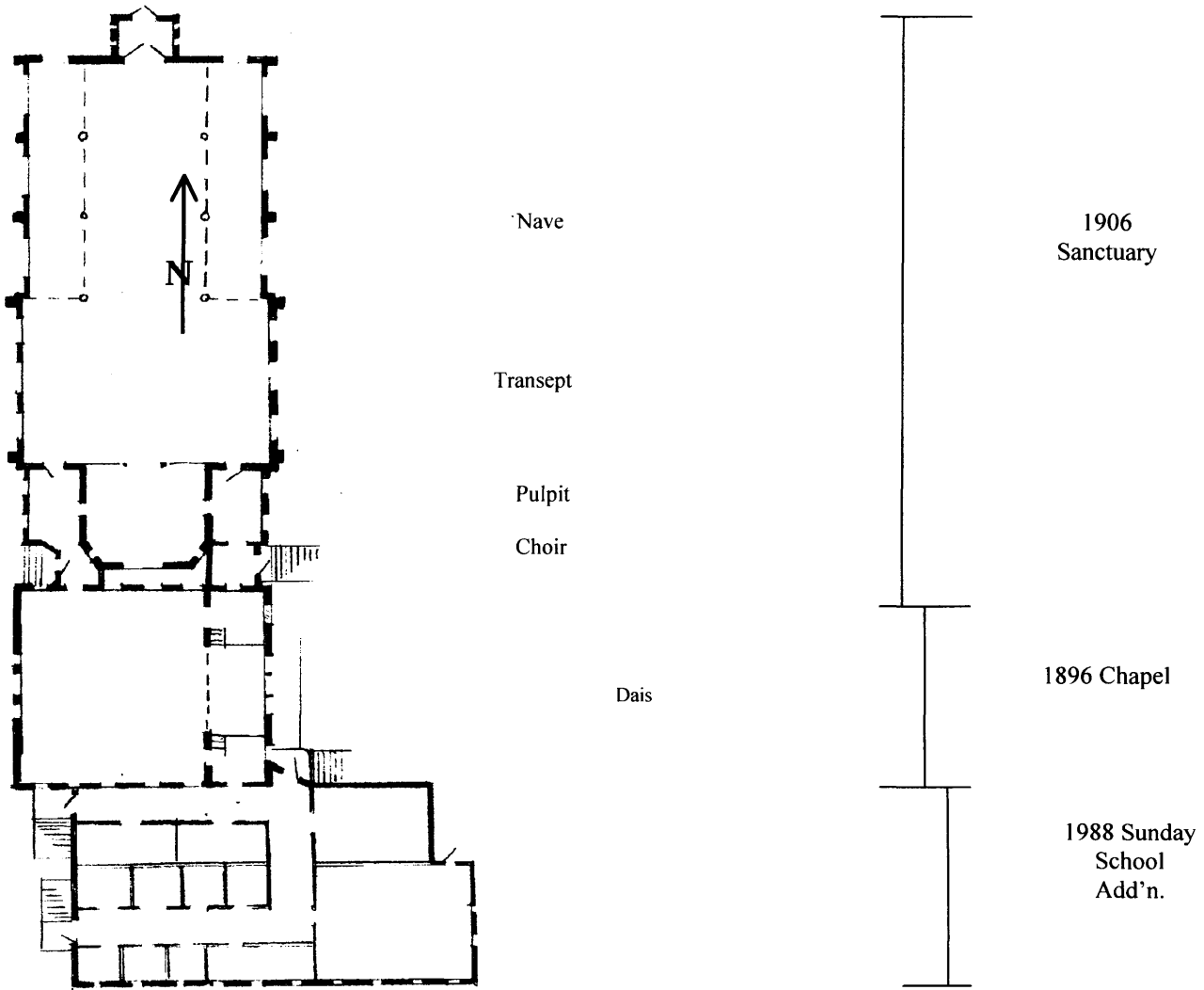


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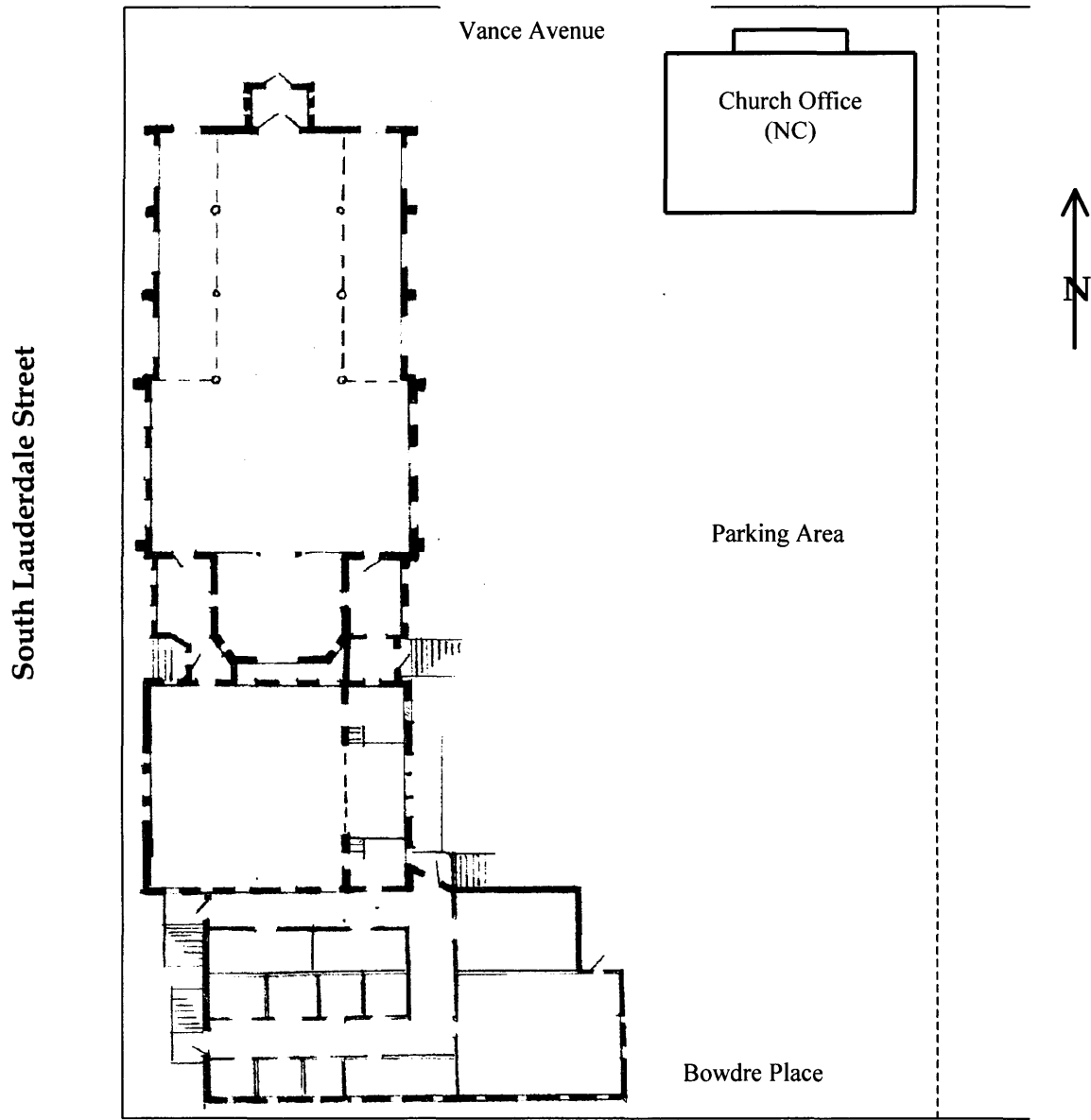
Plan of Grace Episcopal Church, Chapel and  
Sunday School Addition.

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Site Plan of Grace Episcopal Church (not to scale)

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## VII. Narrative Statement of Significance

Grace Episcopal Church (now Mount Nebo Missionary Baptist Church) is nominated under criterion C in the area of architecture for significance as an outstanding example of late-Gothic Revival style as applied to a church property. Designed by James B. Cook (1826-1909) and built in phases in 1896 and 1905-06, Grace Episcopal Church is a good example of late-nineteenth Gothic Revival style in Memphis, and compares well among its contemporaries also built in the Gothic Revival style. The qualities of design Cook brought to the building have been carefully maintained over time by both its original congregation and its second steward, the congregation of Mount Nebo Missionary Baptist Church. The property is nominated under the Multiple Property Submission "Historic Religious Resources of Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee," and meets the registration requirements and standards for architectural integrity set forth in this document.

Grace Episcopal Church was established as the city's second Episcopal congregation in 1852, twenty years after the founding of Calvary Episcopal in 1832 (102 North Second Street, NR 4/27/1982). Grace Episcopal was established to serve the population in the rapidly-growing neighborhoods of the city's south end, an area that only two years before had been the incorporated City of South Memphis. The church occupied several buildings over the next thirty years, beginning in a space above a business located at Third Street and Vance Avenue, and later in space rented on Hernando Street (*Memphis Commercial-Appeal* January 1, 1940). In 1885, the church relocated to a frame building "formerly belonging to a quasi-religious organization" (*Memphis Commercial*, May 20, 1894) located at the corner of Vance Avenue and South Lauderdale Street. The building was renovated for the use of the church and put into service later that year.

By the mid-1880s, the area surrounding Grace Episcopal Church had become something of a study in contrasting communities. On the one hand, major streets in the vicinity of the church such as Beale Street, Vance Avenue, and Pontotoc Avenue, among others, were lined with the large mansions of the old and *nouveau riche*, which, with few exceptions, are now lost. While there were many Episcopalian families among the residents of this area of South Memphis, most maintained their membership at Calvary Episcopal Church in the core of the city's urban center, which had caused Grace to struggle in building a church structure that could reflect its surrounding community. That trend began to change under the innovative and tireless efforts of Dr. George Patterson, who led the congregation from 1885 until his death in 1902. Dr. Patterson had begun to attract new members to the church in the late-1880s and early-1890s, but it was the disastrous fire of November 16, 1893, that destroyed Grace Church that probably changed its fortunes, if only for a few decades.

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Following the fire, the church received many proposals from architectural firms for the design of a new church. Of the plans that were received, the vestry selected the design of Memphian James B. Cook (1826-1909), who was arguably Memphis' premier architect of the last half of the nineteenth century. Cook's original proposal for more a Romanesque Revival-styled church was modified somewhat after consultation with the vestry to include the construction of a small chapel on the southern portion of the lot to serve the congregation's needs until fundraising for the larger sanctuary could be built to its north (Memphis *Commercial*, May 20, 1894, Jones 1980:34). Construction of the chapel was begun later in that year and was completed in time to host Easter services in 1896.



James B. Cook's original design concept for Grace Episcopal Church is shown in this rendering, dated ca. 1894.

Fundraising for the completion of the new sanctuary for Grace Church proceeded along to the point where \$25,000 had been committed. The funding was not adequate to complete the entire project as proposed by Cook, and so the decision was made to proceed with the construction of the nave and apse, and leave the building of the bell tower, narthex and portico for the next phase. Groundbreaking for the new church occurred on January 29, 1905-06, and work had progressed sufficiently to hold a ceremony for the laying of the cornerstone in April (Memphis *Commercial-Appeal*, January 30, 1905, and Jones 1980:44). The project was completed in time to celebrate the services on Easter Sunday (April 15) of 1906 (Memphis *Commercial-Appeal*, November 29, 1938).

At the time Cook completed his proposal for the design of Grace Church, he was reaching the end of his fifty year career as an architect, though he continued to practice up until the time of his death in February of 1909. There are only a limited number of buildings remaining in Memphis and the surrounding area that demonstrate his abilities and his career. Cook's influence in Memphis began in 1857 with his work in the renovation of the Gayoso Hotel (built 1842-1843), a project he revisited late in his career to rebuild the hotel after its destruction by fire in 1899 (part Gayoso-Peabody Historic District NR 7/7/1980). Other extant buildings in Memphis designed by Cook include Trinity Lutheran Church (210 Washington Avenue, 1874-1888), St. Mary's Catholic Church (155 Market Avenue, 1864-1870, NR 8/7/1974), and the renovations to Calvary Episcopal Church in

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1881. Other major projects known to have been designed by Cook outside of Memphis include the Tate County (Miss.) Courthouse in 1875-1876, the Church of Our Savior in Iuka, Mississippi in 1873 (NR 8/09/1991), and Holy Innocents Church in Como, Mississippi in 1872-1873 (NR 11/5/1987).

Apart from his great abilities as an architectural designer, Cook was also an immensely creative engineer, having received degrees in both architecture and civil/mechanical engineering in his youth (Herndon 1975:46). He was the first to survey a practical route for the building a canal across the Isthmus of Panama, the results of which were published in England in 1862. He was an accomplished specialist in cast iron construction, and patented systems for the design and construction of jails and penitentiaries using cast iron systems, considered revolutionary at the time (Herndon 1975:48). He was put in charge of the Confederate submarine battery program during the Civil War, and developed a submerged battery (mine) that could be detonated remotely by electricity. His work during the Civil War with electricity may have led him to become something of a pioneer in the use of electricity in architectural design, at least on the regional level. An example of his cleverness in the employment of electricity in design is found in Grace Church, where Cook incorporated electric lights into the design of the capitals of the interior columns of the church.

"The church will be lit by electricity, and this electric lighting will play an important part in the various renditions of the church service, a blaze of glory or a dim religious light being produced at will. This arrangement of lighting will be for the first time introduced into Grace Church, no other church anywhere having attempted it as yet." (Memphis *Commercial*, May 20, 1894)

Electric lighting had only been demonstrated in Memphis for the first time in 1884, and its use was still in its infancy when Cook designed Grace Church (Harkins 1982:103). Cook would go on to design the pyramid-shaped Memphis Pavilion for the Tennessee Centennial Exposition in Nashville in 1897, which he outlined in electric lights.

With very few exceptions, the sanctuary today looks very much like it did in when completed in 1906. Perhaps the most significant differences between its appearance in 1906 and today are in the stained glass windows of the apse, where three windows fabricated by the Tiffany Studio of New York were originally installed. The windows-- the large center window filled with a depiction of the Ascension, and flanked on either side by smaller windows depicting angels of the Annunciation and the Resurrection-- were acquired from the Tiffany Studio through the efforts of Mrs. W. A. Gage and through donations of Mrs. Gage and others in the church. Three other

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Tiffany windows were installed over the altar in the chapel. All of the Tiffany windows were removed when Grace Church sold the building in 1939, and are now re-installed in the sanctuary of Grace-St. Luke's Episcopal Church (1720 Peabody Avenue, part Central Gardens Historic District NR 9/9/1982).

Apart from the church and chapel, the church complex grew to include an 11-room parsonage and a frame parish hall and another brick structure, the use of which is not clearly known (*Memphis Commercial-Appeal*, November 29, 1938). All of these outbuildings had been demolished by the early 1960s.

Grace Episcopal Church is one of only a handful of 19<sup>th</sup> century Gothic Revival churches surviving in Memphis today. Representatives of the earlier 19<sup>th</sup> century phases of the Gothic Revival include Calvary Episcopal Church, St. Peter's Catholic Church (1852, 190 Adams Avenue, part Adams Avenue Historic District, NR 11/25/1980), and St. Mary's Catholic Church (1864-74, 155 Market Street, NR 8/7/1974) are the most venerated of these. Calvary was planned and designed in a diminutive, restrained form of the Gothic Revival akin to a rural English parish church, laid out with a very simple basilica plan without a columnar screen to divide the nave from the aisles, and with very minimal interior detailing. St. Mary's occupies a middle ground in terms of its overall design: it is a very modest expression of German Gothic Revival on the exterior, expressed mostly in brick construction and minimal detailing, but its interior is quite highly-detailed. St. Peter's occupies the place of the most lavishly detailed of these-- a very imposing, very high-styled Gothic Revival design, laid out in a very formal basilica plan. All of these three buildings remain as good examples of the Gothic Revival applied to churches in the early Victorian period of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

During the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, though, a number of new approaches were taken in America in the design of churches in general and the Gothic Revival in particular. Today, there are only four churches remaining extant in Memphis that can document at least some of these national trends. Trinity Lutheran Church is the earliest of these, built as a modest Gothic Revival church in phases between 1874 and 1888 (210 Washington Avenue, James B. Cook, architect). While the building retains its outstanding original stained glass windows, its interior is modest in detailing and its exterior has been compromised by the addition of Permastone to the brick exterior ca. 1950. First Methodist Church was constructed beginning in 1887 (204 North Second St., NR 3/19/1976) in a Gothic Revival design expressed in its urban scale and constructional polychromy of smooth limestone contrasted with rough-faced blue granite. In contrast with the earlier basilica plans of Calvary and St. Peter's, First Methodist Church was built employing the new "Akron Plan"



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approach to the design of its Sunday School rooms as supplementary seating for the sanctuary, though much of the original interior design and detailing was lost in remodeling of the building over time. St. Mary's Episcopal Cathedral (1895-1926, 692 Poplar Avenue, NR 8/7/1974) is a very vertical and well-detailed church building in the Gothic Revival style, but the vast majority of the design, details and materials of the building were effectively "re-invented" by Bayard Cairns, the last of the three architects who contributed to the design of the church. In many ways, then, St. Mary's is, on balance, more of a 20<sup>th</sup> century church in the Gothic Revival style, though it has some significant 19<sup>th</sup> century elements which remain intact.

Grace Episcopal Church adds a notable contribution to an understanding of Gothic Revival design in Memphis during the late-19<sup>th</sup> century period. The richness in design and detail on both the exterior and interior of the building is both notable in character and in the quality of its preservation. Unlike some of its other contemporaries, the Gothic Revival style in this church was not expressed only through the simple use of the Gothic arch on the interior and exterior of the building. In Grace Episcopal, Gothic Revival styling is also applied in layers to many of its details on windows, doors, column capitals, altar rails and elsewhere. Grace Episcopal compares well as a good example of the Gothic Revival among its contemporaries in Memphis.

The failure to complete the third and final building phase of Grace Church was likely as a result of several factors. The move to build the 1905-06 church had been led by the energies of Reverend Granville Allison, who had successfully re-energized the congregation following the death of the former minister, Dr. George Patterson. Allison's tragic death in less than a year after completing the sanctuary certainly hurt the momentum that may have been in place to complete the tower and narthex. After his death, a series of four ministers tended to the church's needs over the next eight years, and this certainly was also distracting to the congregation. Instead of incurring further debt, the congregation worked diligently to pay off the remaining obligations from the 1905-06 building project. The debt was finally satisfied in April of 1923, and planning to build the tower and narthex were begun again.

Before the momentum towards completing the final building phase could take hold, however, a major generational change began to occur in the neighborhood surrounding Grace Church. The families that had built the large houses and had supported Grace Church with its contributions since the 1890s were beginning to pass away in the 1920s, and their children had long before moved into more modern residences further to the east, in neighborhoods like Central Gardens (NR 9/9/1982), Evergreen (Evergreen Historic District NR 1/11/1985) and others. The stately old Greek Revival and Victorian era mansions were being sold, and more and more frequently, they

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were being redeveloped as multi-family apartments or as boarding houses. The onset of the Great Depression in 1929 probably provided the final blow to the effort to complete the church. In response to the times and to the growing needs of the changing community that surrounded it, the church opened a free clinic for infants and a free kindergarten, which was attended by about 60 children. The neighborhood also was able to take advantage of a thrift shop operated by the church (*Memphis Commercial-Appeal*, November 29, 1938).

The fate of the neighborhood around Grace Church was effectively sealed ca. 1937 when the Memphis Housing Authority targeted the "Turkey Bottom" area of South Memphis for slum clearance, and for the construction of the W. H. Foote Homes housing project. The standards for open space areas and the public apartment buildings themselves caused the project to balloon in 134 acres containing 700 living units. The condemnation of land for the project reached into both traditionally African-American and Anglo-American communities, including a good portion of the middle- and upper-income housing area surrounding Grace Church. Substantial homes, businesses, schools and numerous churches were taken for the \$3.5 million project, effectively smashing the viable base of the community. Both prominent African-Americans and Anglo-Americans rose in protest of the heavy hand being taken by the Memphis Housing Authority in its plans for the project, but the Authority would ultimately prevail (See Public Housing Projects Multiple Property Listing, NR 7/25/1996).

Not far away from Grace Church, another church was threatened with condemnation for the construction of another public housing project, specifically, Mount Nebo Missionary Baptist Church, one of the largest and influential African-American congregations in the city. Organized ca. 1900 at 959 Madison Avenue, the church moved frequently from property to property until about World War I, when, under the leadership of the Reverend Abraham Henderson, the congregation acquired a lot located at 608 South Somerville Street and constructed a small church on the site. A building campaign begun in 1923 resulted in the construction of a basement level for the church plant; the second level sanctuary was completed in 1933 (*Memphis Commercial Appeal Centennial Edition*, January 1, 1940).

It is both sad and ironic, then, that within four years after completing its building on Somerville, the Memphis Housing Authority notified the church that its property would be condemned for the construction of the Lamar Terrace Housing Project, being principally built for occupancy by Anglo-American families at the same time as the Foote Homes project. The church would only receive a total of \$21,000 for its virtually new church property.



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## X. Geographical Data

### Verbal Boundary Description

The property in nomination occupies lots 1 and 2 of Block 55 of the GlidKamp Subdivision, as outlined on the portion of the attached Shelby County Tax Map G-7.

### Boundary Justification

The property in nomination comprises all of the land area historically associated with the development of Grace Episcopal Church (now Mount Nebo Missionary Baptist Church) in Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee.

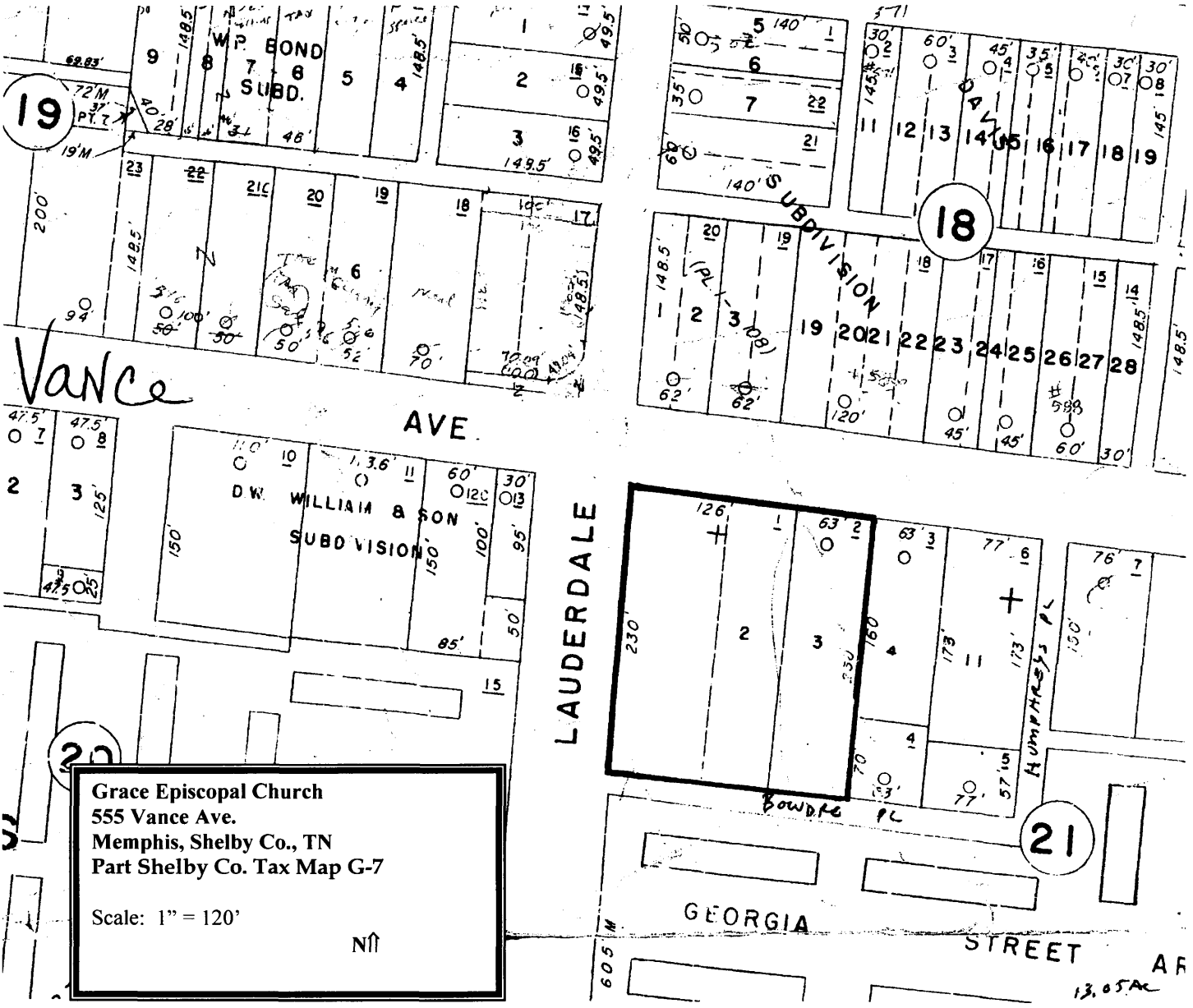
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Grace Episcopal Church  
555 Vance Ave.  
Memphis, Shelby Co., TN  
Part Shelby Co. Tax Map G-7

Scale: 1" = 120'

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## Photographs

Grace Episcopal Church  
555 Vance Avenue  
Memphis, Shelby Co., Tennessee

Photographs by: Robert Dye  
Date: May 2004  
Negatives: Tennessee historical Commission

### Photo 1 of 20

View of the front (north) façade of Grace Episcopal Church, looking generally south.

### Photo 2 of 20

View of the front (north) and side (east) facades of the church, looking generally southwest.

### Photo 3 of 20

View of the side (east) façade of the 1905-06 church sanctuary, looking west.

### Photo 4 of 20

View of the eastern facade of the 1988 Sunday School building (left), the rear of the 1896 chapel (middle), and side of the 1905-06 church sanctuary (right), looking generally west.

### Photo 5 of 20

View of the northern entrance to the 1988 Sunday School building, with the rear façade of the 1896 chapel at right, looking generally southwest.

### Photo 6 of 20

View of the church complex from the southwest looking generally northeast along South Lauderdale Street, showing the side and front of the 1988 Sunday School building at right, the front (west) façade of the 1896 chapel at center, and the 1905-06 sanctuary at left.

### Photo 7 of 20

View of the front façade of the 1896 chapel (right) and the side (west) façade of the 1905-06 sanctuary at left).

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Photo 8 of 20

View of the original entrance to the 1896 chapel, as incorporated in 1905-06 as a vestibule connecting the chapel with the sanctuary.

Photo 9 of 20

View of the interior of the church from just inside the entrance, looking into the apse.

Photo 10 of 20

View across the transept towards the western aisle.

Photo 11 of 20

View of one of the original stained glass windows in the transept.

Photo 12 of 20

View from the choir in the apse toward the entrance doors.

Photo 13 of 20

View of one of the doors leading from the sanctuary to the chapel.

Photo 14 of 20

View of the original Gothic Revival-detailing rail separating the transept from the altar.

Photo 15 of 20

View of the column capitals in the nave when illuminated.

Photo 16 of 20

View of the Art Moderne-styled choir seating installed soon after Mount Nebo Missionary Baptist Church acquired the building in 1939.

Photo 17 of 20

View looking from the rear of the chapel to the dais on its eastern end.

Photo 18 of 20

Reverse view of the chapel looking from the dais to the rear; the original entrance door to the chapel is visible at middle-right.



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Photo 19 of 20

View of the remarkable modified king post truss system employed in the ceiling of the chapel.

Photo 20 of 20

View of the former North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance building adjacent to the church on the east, now used for church offices and community programs.