

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number _____ Page _____

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 91000307

Date Listed: 3/29/91

Collins Chapel CME Church and Site
Property Name

Shelby
County

TENNESSEE
State

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.

Patrick W. Andrews
Signature of the Keeper

3/29/91
Date of Action

=====
Amended Items in Nomination:

Section No. 7: The nomination was amended to identify the 1928 bungalow immediately to the west of the church building as a contributing building and the 1913-17 row house to the west of that (not acquired by the church until the 1980s) as a non-contributing building.

Section No. 8: The period of significance was amended to read 1913-1963.

These amendments were confirmed by phone with Elizabeth Straw of the Tennessee SHPO (3/28/91).

DISTRIBUTION:

- National Register property file
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

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National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

FEB 10 1991

NATIONAL REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Collins Chapel CME Church & Site
other names/site number Collins Chapel Colored Methodist Episcopal Church,
Collins Chapel Christian Methodist Episcopal Church

2. Location

street & number 678 Washington Avenue N/A not for publication
city, town Memphis N/A vicinity
state Tennessee code TN county Shelby code 157 zip code 38105

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	2	1 buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	1	_____ sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	_____	_____ structures
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	_____	_____ objects
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	3	1 Total

Name of related multiple property listing:
N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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 forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Arthur L. Anger
Signature of certifying official Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer Date 2/6/91
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.

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this 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:)

Patrick W. Anderson Signature of the Keeper Date of Action 3/29/91

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION: religious structure

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION: religious structure

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)OTHER: Gothic & Classical Revival Influence

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICKwalls BRICK

roof ASPHALTother STONE

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Collins Chapel Colored (now Christian) Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church is situated on the northwest corner of Orleans and Washington in a mixed-use area near downtown Memphis. Across the street from the church is the Victorian Village Historic District (NR 12/11/72) which contains Memphis' best examples of Victorian architecture. The site of the present-day church, built in 1913, at 678 Washington Avenue, has been the historic location of a succession of church buildings serving the Collins Chapel CME congregation since 1859.

The present church building could be considered the fourth building constructed in the same location as the first Collins Chapel CME Church, although two of the "new" buildings are rebuilt from earlier buildings. The first church building, constructed in 1860, was destroyed by fire in the 1866 Memphis race riot. The church was rebuilt in 1867, again as a frame structure. Between 1885 and 1887, the church contracted with William Burrows to have the entire structure bricked. In 1905 the church was partially destroyed by fire and later rebuilt and refurbished. In 1913 the church suffered another fire when the church was struck by lightning, causing heavy damage.

The current building was constructed after the last fire. It appears that an entirely new facade was constructed in 1913 and a back bay added to the rear of the church to house a boiler. Comparing photographs of the church from 1898 and 1908 with the photographs dating from 1925 to the present, it is apparent that the front of the church was altered significantly between these two periods. The banding and windows are different, the roof pitch is lower, and the towers were shortened. An arched parapet wall appears to have been added to the facade, completely changing its appearance. The steeple apparently was not reconstructed after this fire.

In 1945, a wind storm damaged the bell tower of the church. Comparing the 1933 photograph with more recent ones, it shows that after the storm, the tower was lowered slightly to its present height and appearance. Records indicate that repairs in the amount of approximately \$500 were made to the roof, gutters and parsonage. The bell was not replaced in the tower due to a weak supporting structure.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION
SOCIAL HISTORY
ETHNIC HERITAGE: Black
OTHER: Civil Rights

Period of Significance

1913 - 1963

Significant Dates

1913

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Burrows, William H., builder

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Collins Chapel Colored (now Christian) Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church and Site is significant under criteria A and criterion consideration A and G for its importance in Black history as it relates to religion, social history and civil rights in the city of Memphis. The period of significance is from 1913 to 1963, the date of construction of the fourth church through the leadership of the Reverend David S. Cunningham. The church site was the location of the formation for the religious congregation known as the "Mother Church" of the Colored (now Christian) Methodist Episcopal Connection in Memphis and the suburban area. This congregation played an important local role in the establishment of the CME Church in America. Collins Chapel played an continuous role in the development of the CME Church throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

It was at Collins Chapel that The Christian Index, the second oldest African-American religious periodical in America, was established in 1869. Five of Collins Chapel's pastors served as editor for The Christian Index. In addition five pastors of Collins Chapel went on to become bishops of the CME Church. It was at Collins Chapel that The Christian Index, the second oldest African-American religious periodical in America, was established in 1869. Five of Collins Chapel's pastors served as editor for The Christian Index. In addition five pastors of Collins Chapel went on to become bishops of the CME Church. The membership of Collins Chapel played an important role in the social history of Memphis through their collective contributions as prominent professionals, religious leaders, and civic leaders. Members of Collins Chapel also played an important role in the early Civil Rights movement of Memphis from the 1917 establishment of the NAACP and into the early 1960s.

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

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 # _____

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of property less than one acre

UTM References

A

1	6
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7	6	9	8	4	0
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3	8	9	3	0	2	0
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Zone Easting Northing

C

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B

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Zone Easting Northing

D

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Northwest Memphis, TN-ARK 404NE

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The Boundaries for Collins Chapel CME Church and Site include all of lots 3-25, 26, 27, 28, 29 of Shelby County Tax Map F-8. See attached map.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundaries for Collins Chapel CME Church and Site include all of the property historically associated with the church and is sufficient to protect the historical integrity of the church and site.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Milbery Heard, Intern; Lydia Henegar, Pres. Analyst; Rebecca Harrison,
organization Div. Housing & Comm. Dev./Collins Chapel date January 1991
street & number 701 N. Main/ 246 Jones telephone (901)576-7370/527-8121
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The current Collins Chapel CME Church is a two story, brick, gable roof building with raised basement, two corner towers, and a center round arched pediment. The vernacular building reflects Gothic Revival influence with its rose window, pointed arched entrance surround with quatrefoils. The round arched center pediment reflects the Classical influence of the early Twentieth century. The entrance was modified in 1976 with a street level entrance and stained glass windows.

Above the entry is an inscription stone which reads, "Collins Chapel CME Church" A corner stone is located on the southwest corner lists the founding date, 1859; the date the church was rebuilt, 1913; and the pastor and trustees of the church in 1913. Memorial stones to the Trustees of the church are located at the base of both towers. These commemorate the building of the church and significant individuals important in church history. A plaque near the entrance from the Society of Professional Journalist, Sigma Delta Chi, designates the church as a "Historic Site in Journalism" for the establishment of The Christian Index first published in 1869.

The east and west elevations of the church have symmetrical fenestration divided by pilasters. The basement level and first story windows are flat while those on the second level are round arch head with a segmental arch lintel with key stone and stop blocks. On the rear elevation (north) is one round arch window which contains a stained glass cross dating from the circa 1965.

On the south facade are the only surviving stained glass windows, circa 1905 or 1913, which were once found in all window openings. All others were removed and replaced by opaque glass during the 1976 renovations. The remaining examples of stained glass are the Gothic arch transom above the main entrance and the windows in the corner towers. The transom contains a center rosette and diamond pattern design and above it, centered in the gable is a circular light with radiating star pattern.

Exterior building trim consists of decorative brick work and cast stone belt courses, window sills and the entry surround. The stone work around the entrance and above the two upper story tower windows contains quatrefoil designs.

On the east side of the church is a one story wing, known as the fellowship hall, which is composed of a small wing constructed circa 1955 that connects the church with a small, circa 1898, shotgun style house. (This house dated from at least 1898 as it can be seen in the photo from The

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History of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church.) This house abuts the sidewalk on Orleans Street. The wing originally consisted of the pastor's study, secretary's office, a small chapel, the church library, and the youth center. The wing now serves as a fellowship hall and meeting rooms.

In addition, the two lots directly to the west of the church are also associated with the history of Collins Chapel. These four lots thus form a corridor of sites associated with Collins Chapel, CME church. In 1928, Collins Chapel purchased the property immediately west of the church known as the Union Aid Hall. It had been the hall for the Mutual Aid Society, a fraternal organization to which many Collins Chapel parishioners belonged. The hall was torn down and a Bungalow style house was built on the property to serve as the parsonage. The house is a one story brick house with faux timbering in the porch overhang. There is a two story stucco addition on the rear. The house now serves as the church offices.

In 1913 or 1917, the Owen family's two story brick townhouse was built at 674 Washington, two doors down, west of the church to replace their old house which was torn down. The Owens were charter members of Collins Chapel. The family had owned and lived on the property since 1850, nine years before the lot for Collins Chapel was purchased from the family. The house was occupied by descendents until the late 1970s and was deeded to the church in 1982. The house is currently vacant.

The interior of the church retains its basic plan since it was reconstructed in 1913. The lower level of the church, with entrance on Washington Avenue, contains four Sunday School classrooms, prayer room, nursery, choir room, telephone room, two lounges, two restrooms, a kitchen and two storage rooms off the kitchen. The sanctuary still retains many original features including hammer beams, balcony, and overall layout. The decorative quatrefoils on the pulpit chairs and lecture stand match the ones found in the stone work surrounding the outside entry. The organ pipes on the walls of the choir stand date from 1919, although they serve only as decorative features at this time.

The main entrance to the sanctuary is on Washington Avenue through a set of double door that open into a small vestibule with stairs to the left, elevator to the right which lead to the second floor. On the second floor is a small vestibule with stained glass widow and stairs leading to the balcony. A double door entrance leads into the sanctuary which has carpeted center and side aisles and two rows of cushioned pews. The chancel is divided with communion table in the center pulpit and lectern on the left and right; choir seats are directly behind. There is a room to

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the left for preparation of communion and stairs to the right and left. The left stairs lead outside and the stairs on the right lead to the lower level. Antique chandeliers hang from the ceiling along with light fixtures on the side walls.

In 1976 there was a need for repairs that called for remodeling the church. This was completed in 1977 under the direction of Memphis architect Charles Miller. The major exterior alterations consisted of removal of the front steps, installation of an elevator for use by the handicapped, and removal of most of the 1890 stained glass windows which were replaced by opaque glass windows. Stained glass salvaged from the side windows was reinstalled where the front doors had been. On the interior, alterations included removal of the church benches and replacement with modern benches, and rearrangement of the ground floor vestibule to accommodate the elevator to the second floor sanctuary. However, some of the older furnishing, dating from 1905 and/or 1913, are still in use including the pulpit chairs, lecture stands, conferences table, and three pews.

Although the church has undergone a series of remodelings since the 1913 reconstruction date, the church building retains much of its original form. The site, basic design, and side exterior walls remain the same, changes to the front of the building were for handicap access and the change of the bell tower was due to an "act of God" during a period when construction materials were scarce after World War II. The interior sanctuary retains many of its original features including the floor plan, prominent U-shaped balcony supported by Tuscan columns, hardwood floors in the balcony, hanging chandeliers, and exposed truss system.

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The black members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South left in vast numbers to join one of the African Methodist denominations, which were associated with black man's freedom, because of their desire to break ties with the church of their former masters. Blacks were also encouraged by the southern Methodist pastors to join one of these churches, because they did not want them to join the Methodist Episcopal Church, North. During and after the Civil War, representatives of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Methodist Episcopal Church, North and other northern denominations came to the South to recruit members. The first two of these were independent black denominations which had been in existence since the early 1800s. White protestant ministers from the North established several black churches and schools during this time period in Memphis, including Lincoln Chapel Congregational Church (1862) and Centenary Chapel Methodist Episcopal Church, North (1865). However these did not go over well, because blacks wanted black pastors.

By 1870, more than enough annual conferences had been established to form the new denomination. Collins Chapel was one of the leading congregations at this time. In December of 1870, the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church was formed during the Organizing General Conference held at First Methodist Episcopal Church, South of Jackson, Tennessee. Two delegates from Collins Chapel attended: Augustus Bostic, a prominent layman of the church, and the Rev. Benjamin Bullard. Augustus Bostic served as chairman of the Committee on Episcopacy at the conference and led the delegation in the election of the first two bishops of the CME Church.

Also during this historic assembly, it was resolved that a publishing house was to be established in Memphis, and The Christian Index was made the official publication of the CME Church with the Rev. Samuel Watson, a former minister of Wesley Chapel, named its first editor. Since then, editors of the paper have been elected every four years at the CME General Conference. A Publishing Committee was also created which was to be composed of the Presiding Elder of the Memphis District, the pastor stationed at Collins Chapel, and Augustus Bostic.

When the delegates left Jackson in 1870, they were part of a new denomination, the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in America, the first independent black denomination to be founded in the South. The black pastors of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South had requested and received official release from the Methodist Episcopal (ME) Church, South, rather than seceding from it. This experience was unlike that of the northern black Methodist denominations. The African Methodist Episcopal (AME) and

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AME Zion Churches both withdrew from the ME Church, North, without the aid or blessings of their parent church. The CME Church consequently held close ties with the ME Church, South for many years.

Also, some black ME Church, South congregations had come to reject the ME Church, South denomination because of its position on slavery before the Civil War. These congregations had switched allegiances to the AME and AME Zion Churches, and were not interested in joining the new CME denomination which still had ties to the "slavery church." The ME Church, South deviated during this time about deeding church property that still belonged to the ME Church, South over to the black congregations that had left the denomination and decided it had no responsibility to turn over property to those congregations that had deserted it for other denominations. But since the CME Church was set up on friendly terms with the ME Church, South, property was readily deeded over to the CME congregations.

Among the reasons the ME Church, South did not want to deed property to northern-sponsored congregations was its fear of continuing political domination by the North over the South after the Civil War, and the ME Church, South did not want its property used to perpetuate Northern rule. Most of the AME and AME Zion congregations regularly hosted meetings urging black migration to the North and advocating the continued occupation of the South by Union troops. Therefore, of its own volition, at the Organizing General Conference of 1870, the CME Church adopted a section of its discipline regarding church buildings that said "they shall in no wise be used for political purposes or assemblages" (Lahey, pp. 180-181,207). This action was made as a gesture of good will toward the ME Church, South, and because the black pastors felt strongly at that time that spirituality should not be polluted by politics. Thus, the CME Church originally prohibited the use of its church facilities for any political purpose. In later years, in response to changing philosophy regarding social action and the responsibility of the church to support the Civil Rights movements, this position was modified to allow the churches to have political assemblies that affected civil and social rights (e.g. voter registration drives and rallies), and to exclude only political activities that endorsed a particular political party (Rev. William Smith, telephone interview by Henegar).

Growing sentiment for equality during the 1940s and 1950s led to an assault on the very name of the Colored Methodist Episcopal denomination. When the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church was so named in 1870, the leaders chose the name as an indicator of the denominations self-determination by blacks, in a time and in a region of the country that defined institutions by race,

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using the terminology prevalent at the time. However, by 1950 the CME denomination had spread to the north and west and was trying to serve multi-racial and multi-religious communities. "Colored" was outdated in terms of how blacks referred to themselves and was a barrier to non-blacks and others unfamiliar with the denomination who might see the name as an indication of racial exclusiveness. On May 12, 1954, at the General Conference a resolution recommending a name change was approved. Five days later, on May 17, 1954, Rec. J.B. Boyd, a former pastor of Collins Chapel CME Church, made a motions that "Colored" be replaced by "Christian," Thus preserving the CME abbreviation. This motions passed and the denomination name officially changed to Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. Ironically, May 17, 1954, is better known historically as the day the U.S. Supreme Court handed down its landmark Brown v. Board of Eduction decision which declared segregated schools unconstitutional and which in some ways formally marked the beginning of the Civil Rights movement. The CME Church name and change reflected the denominations concern for racial equality and growing involvement in Civil Rights issues.

The Christian Index

In 1868, the Memphis Colored Conference convened at Collins Chapel Church. At this session, the conferees passed a resolution to establish a periodical under the name, The Christian Index. The first issue appeared in October 1869. It was published at an unknown location in Memphis until after the formation of the CME Church in 1870, and has been published at the CME Publishing House (originally and currently located in Memphis) ever since. The paper is the official organ of the CME Church, serving as the medium for the exchange of ideas and plans regarding the Church.

This periodical was instrumental in the impending formation of the CME Church. It is the second oldest black religious periodical newspaper in continuous publication since its beginning. In 1979, Collins Chapel was designated a "Historic Site in Journalism" by the Society of Professional Journalists, Sigma Delta Chi, for the establishment of the paper.

Early on in its publication, The Christian Index served the five Annual Colored Conferences that had been formed by that time, which were as follows: the Memphis, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Georgia Colored Conferences. Today there are over 6,000 subscribers in all fifty states, and in Ghana, Haiti, Jamaica, Liberia, and Nigeria.

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In 1917, the Memphis branch of the NAACP was organized, the first chapter located in the South. Six of the fifty-three charter members of the chapter were members of Collins Chapel. Among them were William Burrows (a contractor and trustee of Collins); Dr. A. L. Thompson (an obstetrician, professor of medicine, and Board member of Solvent Saving and Trust Company); N. C. Cleaves (former pastor of Collins and bishop of the CME Church); Dr. J. B. Martin (a wealthy druggist and owner of two drug stores); and Dr. W. A. Lynk (founder and president of the University of West Tennessee Medical School). In addition Collins Chapel was an institutional charter member. By 1919, the branch had grown to 1,024 citizens. This was quite an accomplishment as it was considered dangerous to join the NAACP in cities below the Mason-Dixon line due to the hostility of some white citizens who viewed it as a very radical organization.

The CME Church during this time was expanding into other regions of the country, and new leadership outside the South encouraged action for racial equality. The Christian Index, still published in Memphis, began to urge that blacks support the NAACP and speak against Jim Crow (Christian Index 9/23.1920, 3/28/1935, 25/1948, 5/20/1954, 8/26/1954). Thus, the period of apparent inactivity during the 1930s and 1940s was in fact a time of growing militancy for the CME church, as well as for black Americans in general (Tucker, p. 109).

The struggle for racial equality in the 1930s and 1940s in Memphis were marked by the absence of direct involvement by black ministers. Instead, the early movement was led in Memphis by black business and professional groups supporting political rights and labor unions. The CME Church wanted explicitly to keep politics out of the church. In 1940, historian Ralph Bunche wrote, "The Negro preachers of Memphis as a whole have avoided social question." He continued sarcastically, "They have preached thunder and lightning, fire and brimstone . . . but about the economic and political exploitation of the Negro in Memphis they have remained silent," (Bunche, pp. 1147-1148; Tucker, p. 102). This image plagued the Memphis black clergy well into the 1950s and the modern Civil Rights movement.

During the 1940s the black church in Memphis shifted slowly in the direction of racial protest. A new militancy emerged in response to World War II, as black Americans recognized the hypocrisy of fighting a war to end Nazi racism in Europe while ignoring racial discrimination at home in the American South. Individual clergymen began to speak out against racial inequality, beginning with Rev. George Albert Long of Beale Street Baptist

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Church. But Memphis clergymen did not rush into protest as a group. Significantly Rev. Long and his church did not belong to national organizations such as the National Baptist Convention, The NAACP, and the Urban League. But outspoken ministers who followed Rev. Long did belong to mainline denominations and other organizations, and consequently represented many followers. A trend toward clergy involvement in social action began when in January, 1954, Rev. Van J. Malone became the first minister to be president of the Memphis NAACP chapter.

In 1955, local politicians Republican Lt. George W. Lee and Democrat J. E. Walker, both black insurance magnates, joined forces and developed a plan to increase the number of black voters in Memphis. On August 17, 1955, over 200 ministers and other leaders organized the Ministers and Citizens League (MCL), whose mission was to coordinate the voter registration effort. The effort registered 5,000 voters, but the effort to have a black elected to the school board failed. The MCL had organized the participation of black clergy, and it continued registration efforts and began other efforts to pressure for desegregation in Memphis, through the churches (Tucker, p. 107).

The clergy's involvement in civil rights issues had begun in 1955 when black politicians insisted they join the Ministers and Citizens League. Five years later in 1960, the clergy had become confident of their role as community leaders and were less dependent on their political allies. When the student sit-in movement came to Memphis, in March 1960, the ministers immediately endorsed it without waiting to see what the politicians would do (Tucker, p. 116).

The MCL supported the Memphis branch of the NAACP in integration lawsuits between 1956-1960. In 1959 the MCL once again supported a candidate for the school board and held several rallies during the campaign to increase black awareness, including a rally addressed by the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. Again the black candidates lost, but this time Memphis clergy had been leading the effort.

On March 19, 1960, forty-one LeMoyne and Owen College students were arrested for entering segregated libraries. David S. Cunningham president of the NAACP and pastor of Collins Chapel (1954-63), called an emergency meeting that night for clergy support of the students. The seventy or so pastors that attended went to the jail to await the release of the students, and were joined the next day by hundreds of protesters at the police station. Rev. Cunningham preached to an overflow crowd at MT. Olive CME Church. (Commercial Appeal, 3/21/1960).

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That evening the black ministers formally resolved to join forces with the students and the NAACP. Three thousand clergy and laymen met and approved an economic boycott of downtown merchants. "Reverend Cunningham's NAACP chapter organized daily picket lines to protest discrimination at downtown lunch counters; the students extended their sit-ins to the large department stores; and churches held 'freedom marches' every Sunday where members left their pews and presented themselves at the front of their churches to donate what they could to a fund for paying fines of arrested protesters," (Tucker, p. 115). By the fall of 1960, segregation began to give way in Memphis. Buses were desegregated in September, libraries in October, and Overton Park Zoo in December. Throughout 1961 the Memphis ministers supported the NAACP boycotts, picketing, sit-ins and marches downtown. By November, 1961, suffering merchants had relented to black demands; February 6, 1962, downtown Memphis was desegregated. Memphis was one of few cities that desegregated solely as a result of local efforts.

Significance

Collins Chapel CME Church and site is exceptionally significant under criterion A and criterion considerations A and G for its role in the religious and political life in the African-American community in Memphis and for its role in the Memphis Civil Rights movement. Today Collins Chapel appears to be the first African-American religious congregation to still exist in Memphis. The church has owned its own building since before the Civil War and it is therefore locally significant as an early example of the establishment of separate black religious congregations. Collectively, many members of the congregation played important roles in civil rights and religion

Collins Chapel was not the first black congregation in Memphis with its own church building, however, it is the longest one still in existence today. The first black church in Memphis, Toncray's (or the African) Church, was built in 1837. This Primitive Baptist church was organized and built by an eccentric white mechanic and silversmith, Silas T. Toncray, who was a pastor on the side. His congregation was primarily black and was turned over to the black worshippers after his death in 1847. However, with increasing regulations on black worship, the church soon after ceased to exist. (Tucker, pp. 4-5)

Other early black churches in the Memphis area were Baptist. Both Salem Baptist and Beale Street Baptist (NR 2/11/71) were founded in about 1863. Salem Baptist, located in Fort Pickering (now South Memphis), was founded

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by Africa Bailey, a former slave who was liberated by the Union Army. Church tradition indicates that Beale Street Baptist (or First Baptist Church, Beale Street) was founded by the Rev. Morris Henderson and a group of former slaves. Avery Chapel (1863), 882 Trigg Avenue, was the first AME church in Memphis. Founded by a black missionary from the North, Avery Chapel was the church of the dark-skinned masses. This characterization contrasts with that of Collins Chapel, which was a church with genteel servant tradition. (Tucker, pp. 21-23)

Collins Chapel represents a continuing congregation from 1859 to the present. The congregation has continued to flourish throughout the years first as an African-American group owning property and constructing a building in antebellum Memphis and later surviving riot and fires that destroyed buildings, either in whole or part. The current building dating from 1913 reflects the growth of a strong and active membership that played an important local role in the national development of the CME church and an important role in the politics of the civil rights movement of Memphis.

Many Collins Chapel church members have played important roles in the religious and social life of the African American Community, including the establishment of the second hospital for African Americans in the City in 1908-1910 when segregationist laws were coming into effect, and also during the Civil Rights Movement. Many of the pastors and members of Collins Chapel were civic leaders in the black community. After 1900 a new middle class emerged in the church that consisted of professionals that believed in supporting family, purchased property, educating children, paid debts and voted on principal.

Support for the NAACP chapter of Memphis, the first in the south, was strong from Collins Chapel. The Church and six of its members were charter members of the Memphis Chapter of the NAACP. Membership drives were held (and still are) at the church on a yearly basis. Rev. David S. Cunningham, pastor of Collins Chapel from 1954 to 1963, was the first-vice-president of the Memphis NAACP chapter in 1956 and 1957. He was president in 1958, 1959 and 1960. During his tenure as an officer the NAACP was primarily pursuing desegregation through the legal system, filing lawsuits to desegregate Memphis State University, city buses, public libraries, public schools, and parks and recreational facilities.

Collins Chapel is a good example of an institution that has played an important religious and civic role in the city of Memphis. The church and site are an important example of the local support given to a new denomination through its strong leadership from both the clergy and the lay

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leaders. It is also representative of leadership in the community during the civil rights movement through the support of many of the church's members under the leadership of David S. Cunningham, pastor (1954-1963) and president of the Memphis NAACP chapter (1958-60) placed Collins Chapel into the forefront of the civil rights movement during the early 1960s with the beginning of the boycotts lead by Cunningham as chapter president of the NAACP that resulted in the desegregation of Memphis.

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Collins Chapel CME Church and Site

Collins Chapel CME Church & Site
678 Washington Avenue
Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee
Photo by: Kim Isbell and Emmerson Abel
Date: May 1990
Negs: Tennessee Historical Commission
Nashville, Tennessee

#1 of 14
South facade, facing north

#2 of 14
East & south facades, facing northwest

#3 of 14
East & north facades, facing southwest

#4 of 14
West and south facades, facing northeast

#5 of 14
West and north facades, facing southeast

#6 of 14
North facade, facing south

#7 of 14
Interior detail, sanctuary

#8 of 14
Interior detail, sanctuary

#9 of 14
Interior detail, sanctuary

#10 of 14
Interior detail, window

#11 of 14
Interior detail, window

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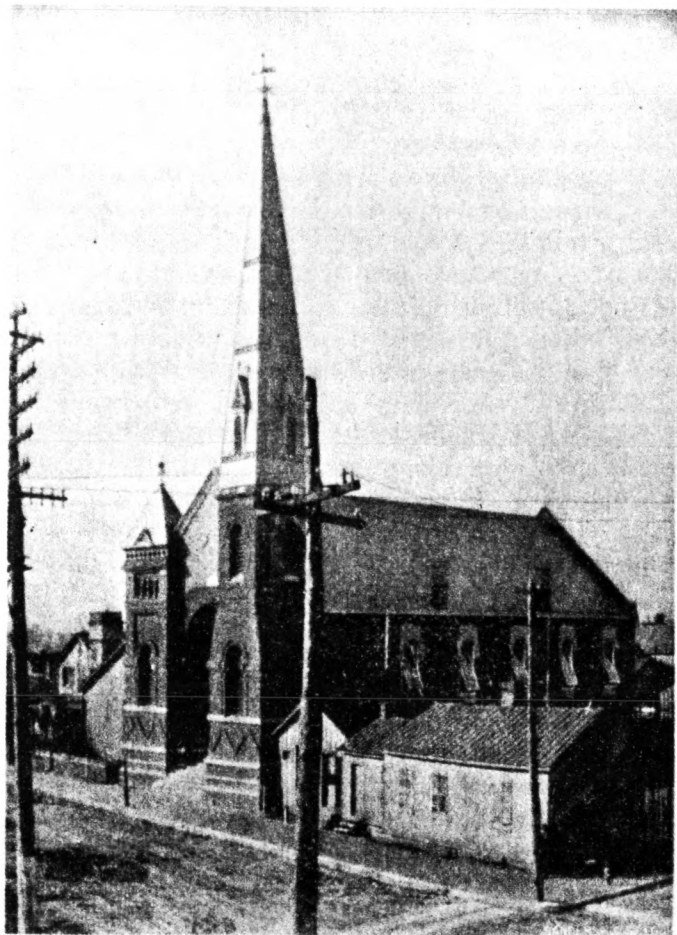
**National Register of Historic Places
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Section number Photos **Page** 2 Collins Chapel CME Church and Site

#12 of 14
Interior detail, fellowship room

#13 of 14
Owen House and parsonage, facing northeast

#14 of 14
Owen House and parsonage, facing southeast



The Collins Chapel CME Church of Memphis, TN one of the leading congregations at the time of the organization of the CME Church. Richard H. Vanderhorst preached here during the 1870 General Conference of the M.E. Church, South.

Waxahachie. The East Texas Conference was organized with seven presiding elders' districts.¹⁰ In January, 1872 he organized the Louisiana Conference. The effectiveness of the work of the two bishops might be seen in the fact that in March, 1873, Bishop Miles could report that there were fourteen annual conferences comprising the CME Church.

We have spoken of the impression Bishop Miles made when he

*Collins Chapel CME Church & Site
Memphis, Shelby County, TN*



The Trinity CME Church of Augusta, GA which was the host church for the Called General Conference in 1873. Lucius H. Holsey and Robert S. Williams were elected bishops while pastoring this church.

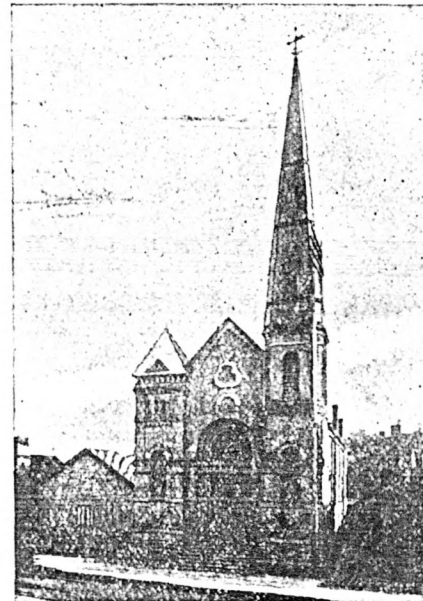
preached in Nashville following the organization of the CME Church. Richard H. Vanderhorst was no less impressive to those who heard him. Phillips provides one of the few descriptions of the appearance of Vanderhorst in recalling the session of the Georgia Conference held by Vanderhorst in December, 1871 at Milledgeville, GA., the hometown of Phillips when the latter was a boy of thirteen. Phillips writes that Bishop Vanderhorst preached a sermon from II Peter 1:10, "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; if ye do these things, ye shall never

This photo comes from an older book published 1898.

United States it is obvious to all that the honor of being a delegate to this conference was a great one.

There is a belief existing, though it may be erroneous, that the Lord will take care of those to whom he has entrusted the expounding of his word, and that he will make them not only powerful instruments for good, but that he will see that they prosper. Such seems to be the case in the life of Rev. J. C. Martin. Not only has his ministry among his people been blessed with great and lasting results, but he him-

people whose activities have been confined to matters outside of the business world. He is not only a great church financier, but he has ably looked after his own financial interests and every dollar that he has earned is an honest dollar and the result of his own business judgment. He is the wealthiest of our local ministers, and probably at the head of the ministry in this connection. His wealth is not the result of mere luck; it is simply the result of a shrewd and active brain. He has valuable property wherever he has located



COLLINS CHAPEL

self has prospered in the material affairs of life. He has not neglected the opportunity of looking after his temporal as well as spiritual interests. He has always known the potency of the dollar and has governed himself accordingly. He was endowed by nature with rare foresight and judgment and he has a sense of business possessed by very few

in the ministry, and has identified himself with the substantial interests of every community where fortune has decreed for him to labor. He is one of the leading business men of Memphis. He is one of the directors of the Solvent Savings Bank and Trust Company of this city, and, also, a member of the Hayes Undertaking Company. Among

Collins Chapel CME Church & Site
Memphis, Shelby Co., TN



A FINE CHURCH FOR AN EARLY PERIOD, BEALE ST., MEMPHIS, TENN.

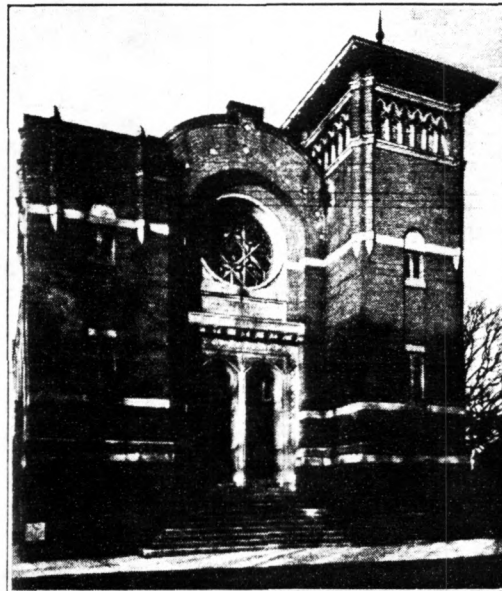
from which the churches were built. There seems to have been a mental picture which directed the building of churches. Often those who lived in huts and small cottages would supply the money for the erection of a \$50,000 Church and they delighted in making the sacrifice. The Beale Street Baptist Church at Memphis, Tennessee, was built at a cost of \$100,000 and there was a very small debt left when the work was finished. The members were just out of slavery.

The large churches at first did not have many departments. The Sunday School and prayer meeting were the extent of the activities aside from the preaching service. In later years these large spaces have been cut up into rooms for auxiliaries and church clubs. There has always been some interest in missions in Negro churches, but the interest centered in Africa for the most part. It is in very recent years that any interest in other fields has been shown by the churches. This may be due to the lack of information concerning other fields, or

it may be due to that fact that Negroes came from Africa and inherited a preference for that country.

The Spirit of Conciliation

There is a strong element of conciliation in the Negro which results from his religious nature, it is thought. Hatred is not deep seated. He can not hold malice over a long period. Meditation often brings his better nature to the surface, although the provocation may be severe. The Negro can not successfully resist the spirit of forgiveness when approached in apparent sincerity by one who has wronged him. The Negro believes in the existence of a God who awards good deeds and punishes bad deeds. Notwithstanding the newfangled theories that are becoming more or less popular among the educated ones, the Negro can not easily get rid of the idea of "hell" for the bad and "heaven" for the good. This belief has somewhat of a restraining influence upon the masses. It is thought by some of the influential religious leaders that it will not be best for the Negro himself nor for the country as a



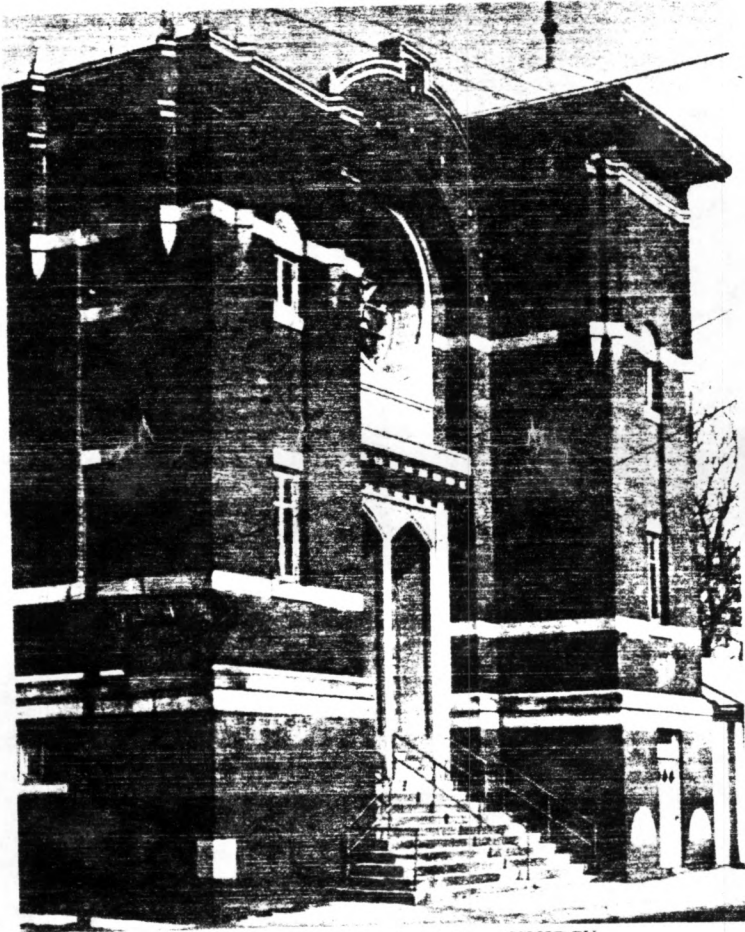
COLLINS CHAPEL, C. M. E. CHURCH, MEMPHIS, TENN.

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Memphis, Shelby Co. TN

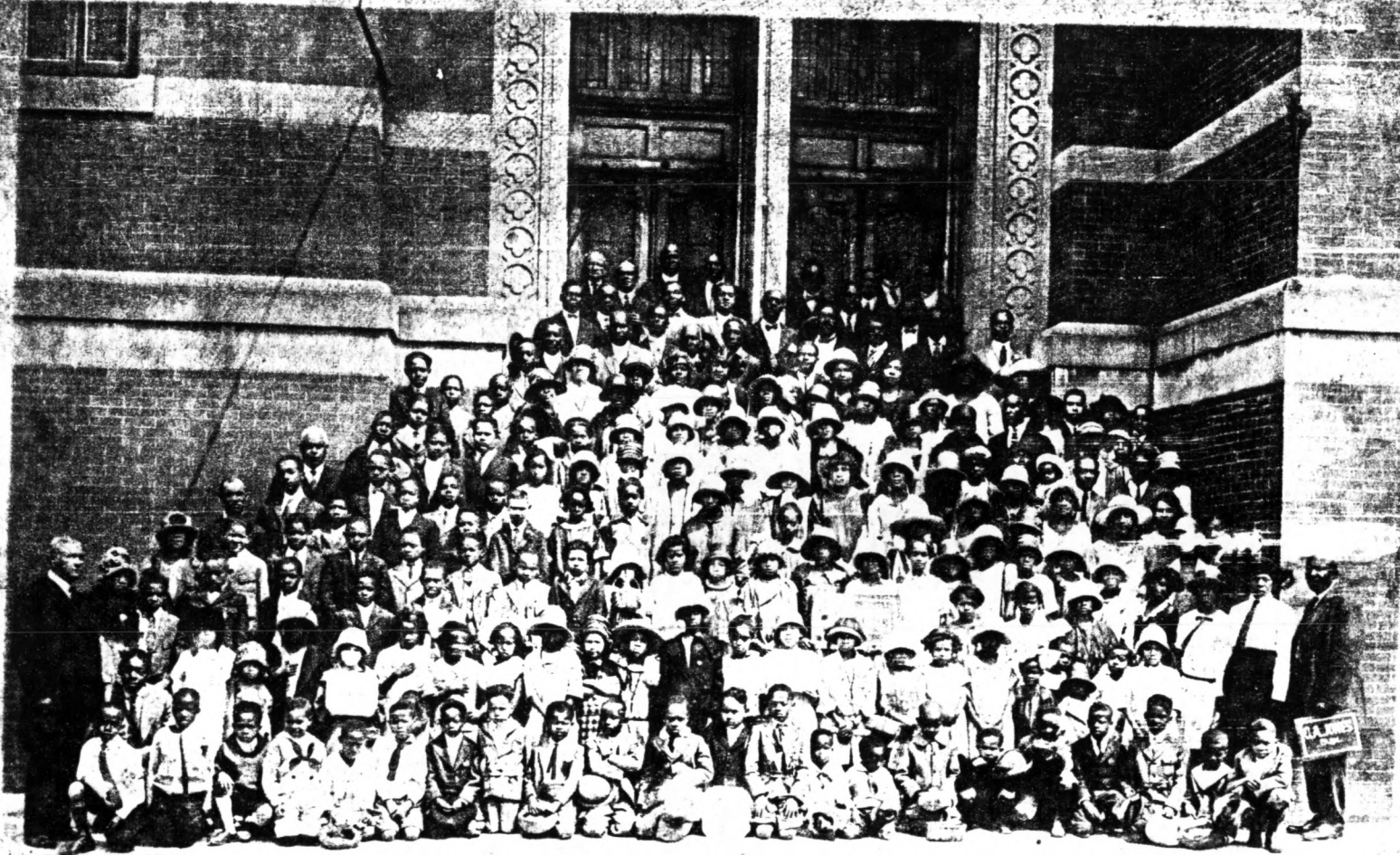
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Memphis, Shelby Co., TN



THE OLD CHURCH



COLLINS CHAPEL C.M.E. CHURCH
678 WASHINGTON AVENUE
MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE 38105



COLLINS CHAPEL CME SUNDAY SCHOOL EASTER 1925

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Memphis, Shelby Co., TN