

PH0011711

Form 10-300  
(Rev. 6-72)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

|                  |
|------------------|
| STATE:           |
| COUNTY:          |
| FOR NPS USE ONLY |
| ENTRY DATE       |

JUN 26 1973

1. NAME

COMMON:  
Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church

AND/OR HISTORIC:

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:  
1518 M Street, N.W.

CITY OR TOWN:  
Washington

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT: Congressman  
Walter E. Fauntroy, D.C.

|                               |            |                                 |             |
|-------------------------------|------------|---------------------------------|-------------|
| STATE<br>District of Columbia | CODE<br>11 | COUNTY:<br>District of Columbia | CODE<br>001 |
|-------------------------------|------------|---------------------------------|-------------|

3. CLASSIFICATION

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

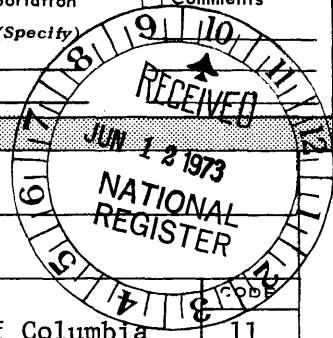
4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:  
Bethel Church Metropolitan

STREET AND NUMBER:  
1518 M Street, N.W.

CITY OR TOWN:  
Washington

STATE:  
District of Columbia



5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:  
Recorder of Deeds

STREET AND NUMBER:  
6th and D Streets, N.W.

CITY OR TOWN:  
Washington

STATE:  
District of Columbia

CODE:  
11

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY: Proposed District of Columbia Additions to the National Register of Historic Places recommended by the Joint Committee on Landmarks

DATE OF SURVEY: March 7, 1968  Federal  State  County  Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:  
National Capital Planning Commission

STREET AND NUMBER:  
1325 G Street, N.W.

CITY OR TOWN:  
Washington

STATE:  
District of Columbia

CODE:  
11

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE:

COUNTY:

ENTRY NUMBER

DATE

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JUN 26 1973

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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 type="checkbox"/> Altered   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unaltered | <input type="checkbox"/> Moved | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site |                                |                                    |

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Metropolitan AME Church was designed in the Victorian Gothic style popular in America in the 1880's. Completed in 1886, the church is eclectic in its use of Gothic motifs which tend to struggle against the heavy brick massing of the building, as is frequently found in the Victorian interpretation of Gothic. Metropolitan AME was designed by an architect-contractor, Samuel G.T. Morsell, of the firm of Morsell and Dearing.

The church faces north on M Street between 15th and 16th Streets, N.W. The red brick, granite trimmed church is approximately 80 x 120 feet with a basement, first story on grade level, and the church proper located on the second floor.

The rectangular church has a five-part facade with central entrance door. On either side of the central door are smaller doors, and the facade is terminated at each end by a square tower. The church has strong horizontal belt courses of granite which divide the church at the ground, first and gallery floor levels. At the points where the belt course intersects with the vertical buttress thrusts, buttress caps of Gothic motif are found.

The projecting central door has a lancet enframing which encloses stained glass over the door. The entire door is capped by a triangular, granite trimmed pointed roof which accentuates the lancet shape of the portal and is, in turn, supported by miniature, foliated, unfluted columns. The motif of the central door is repeated on a smaller scale in the two flanking doors. Above the central door are three lancet windows with trefoil decoration in the spandrels. Above the lancet window is a rose window surmounted by a granite lancet arch. This center section is separated from the remaining facade by buttresses with granite buttress caps. These buttresses terminate in conical shaped pinnacles which penetrate above the roof gable. Atop these pinnacles are decorative iron finials.

Above the smaller doors flanking the central portal are elongated lancet windows with Gothic mullions and granite lancet caps which rise above the third belt course. The gable roof has granite coping and at its crowning is situated an ornamental motif consisting of a pendant supporting two louvered lancet windows enclosed by an arcade and surmounted by a triangular roof.

At either end of the facade are square towers which are neither symmetrically ordered with the rest of the facade, nor do they resemble each other in fenestration. The towers are square and each corner of the tower is defined by a buttress. The towers on either side of the church have varying fenestration on each level: on the west the tower is capped by a quatrefoil cornice and each corner is terminated by a pinnacle with finial; and on the east the tower ends with a crenelated roofline and only one pinnacle. All the main fenestration has granite, lancet hood molds. The west side is five bays deep, and the main, lancet-shaped stained glass windows are found on the second floor level. Each bay is separated by a buttress. The stained glass windows are original to the church and contain the names of the various conferences which donated them to the church.

(Continued on Form 10-300a)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

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 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) completed 1886

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>Social history</u>                               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture             | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention   | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture                      | _____   |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape   | <input 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

The Joint Committee on Landmarks has designated the Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church a Category II Landmark which contributes significantly to the cultural heritage and visual beauty of the District of Columbia. It has in recent times played host to various national protest groups. The church is designed in the Victorian Gothic style popular in America in the 1880's. Completed in 1886, the church was designed by architect Samuel G.T. Morsell (1823-1909), who in 1844 associated with George Dearing (a builder) under the firm name of Morsell and Dearing. Throughout its history, the church has had parishioners who were very important in the black history of Washington, including Frederick Douglass and Altheia Turner.

The history of the Metropolitan AME Church is very important in the development of the AME Church in the District of Columbia. The organization of the church in the District grew out of dissatisfaction among blacks in 1820 with the (white) Ebenezer Methodist Episcopal Church. One group of dissatisfied parishioners organized themselves and sent a petition in 1822 to Bishop Richard Allen requesting admission to the Baltimore Conference. Permission was granted, and the first AME Church in the District was established as the Israel Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church.

After the original Israel Bethel AME Church property was acquired by the U.S. Government, the congregation (in 1870) again petitioned the Baltimore Conference and asked that the name be changed to Metropolitan AME Church. In 1872 the Conference approved the new name. It was also recommended that a new church be built and that "each annual conference be requested to give at least one hundred dollars for the new building." Subsequently, the Israel Bethel Church withdrew from the conference, and in 1884 the General Conference recommended that the Union Bethel Church Society be authorized to build the Metropolitan AME. (Union Bethel AME was organized in a private home for worship purposes; the group petitioned the conference for recognition and a minister, and their request was granted in 1838.)

Metropolitan AME eventually cost \$70,000 to complete. The financing, at times, was difficult. This AME Church, at the time of its dedication, reputedly represented "the largest organized body of Negroes in the world." The church was dedicated in a program which ran through the week of May 30, 1886. Among those participating in the celebration were Bishop Daniel Payne, historian of the National AME Church, Frederick Douglass, and the Honorable Francis Cardozo.

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Much help and information was provided to the staff by Mrs. Josie Johnson, a member of the Metropolitan A.M.E. Church.

"Beyond the Fireworks of '76 - A Study of Historic Sites in the District of Columbia of Special Significance to Afro-Americans" - Prepared by the Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation, December 1972.

The Centennial Budget edited by Benjamin W. Arnet, D.D., 1887-1888.

"The History of the Memorial Windows - Metropolitan A.M.E. Church."

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

| LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY |          |         |           | OR      | 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 |
| NW  | °        | '       | "         | 38°     | 54'   | 19"     | 77°       | 02'     | 09"     |
| NE  | °        | '       | "         |         |   |         |           |         |         |
| SE  | °        | '       | "         |         |   |         |           |         |         |
| SW  | °        | '       | "         |         |   |         |           |         |         |

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 12,408 square feet

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:  
Suzanne Ganschinietz, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION: National Capital Planning Commission

DATE: April 29, 1973

STREET AND NUMBER:  
1325 G Street, N.W.

CITY OR TOWN: Washington

STATE: District of Columbia

CODE: 11

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

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:

National  State  Local

Name: James Banks

Title: Assistant to the Mayor for Housing Programs

Date: JUN 1973

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Robert Van Utley  
Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date: 7/26/73

ATTEST:

[Signature]  
Keeper of The National Register

Date: 7/24/73

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

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

(Continuation Sheet)

|                  |             |
|------------------|-------------|
| STATE            |             |
| COUNTY           |             |
| FOR NPS USE ONLY |             |
| ENTRY NUMBER     | DATE        |
|                  | JUL 26 1973 |

(Number all entries)

7. Description - Metropolitan AME Church

Much of the original interior work of the church still survives. The church proper is located on the second floor and access is provided by staircases located east and west of the main ground floor entrance. The wood used in the interior is of ash with walnut reeding and contains Gothic motifs. The pews, arranged in semi-circular rows, seat 2500 people. In addition, the galleries and the choir seat 500.

Some very fine stencilled decoration is found around the ceiling and above the chair rail. The silver candelabra found in the chancel were given to the congregation by Frederick Douglass.

8. Significance

The funeral service for Frederick Douglass was held in the Metropolitan Church. Douglass' association with the church goes back to its early history when he was an active member of the Bethel Literary Society founded by Bishop Daniel Payne. Many of the parishioners of the church have played an important part in D.C. history. One such parishioner was Mrs. Altheia Turner, the first female communicant of the church, who purchased her own freedom in 1810 and subsequently purchased freedom for many others in her family.

