

1270

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

**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 West End Church of Christ Silver Point

other names/site number Silver Point Christian Institute

2. Location

street & number 14360 Center Hill Dam Road

N/A not for publication

city or town Silver Point

N/A vicinity

state Tennessee

code TN

county Putnam

code 141

zip code 38582

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.)

E. Patrick McHugh, Jr.

October 30, 2007

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

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:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Edson H. Beall

12.13.07

West End Church of Christ Silver Point
Name of Property

Putnam County, TN
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply) **Category of Property** (Check only one box)

- Private
- Public-Local
- Public-State
- Public-Federal
- Building (s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	Total

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

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

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)
Other: Gable-Front

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)
Foundation Stone; concrete
walls Brick
roof Asphalt shingle
other Wood; glass

Narrative Description

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

See continuation sheet.

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.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Ethnic Heritage: African-American
 Education
 Social History

Period of Significance

1915 - 1957

Criteria Considerations

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

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

Significant Dates

1915

Significant Person

(complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Black, P. H.

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

Upper Cumberland Development District

West End Church of Christ Silver Point
Name of Property

Putnam County, TN
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property Approximately one (1) acre Silver Point, Tenn 326 SW

UTM References

(place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 16 613396 3994541
Zone Easting Northing

2 _____
Zone Easting Northing

3 _____
Zone Easting Northing

4 _____
Zone Easting Northing

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 Randal D. Williams and Dr. Althea R. Armstrong-Ullith
Organization Upper Cumberland Development District date _____
street & number 1225 South Willow Avenue / 1663 Lee Place Telephone 931-432-4111
city or town Cookeville / Detroit state TN / MI Zip code 38506 / 48206

Additional Documentation

submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

Photographs

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 West End Church of Christ Silver Point c/o Evelyn Buck
street & number 14360 Center Hill Rd. Telephone 931-858-2407
city or town Silver Point state TN Zip code 38582

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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West End Church of Christ Silver Point
Putnam County, Tennessee

VII. Narrative Description

The West End Church of Christ Silver Point (WECCSP) is located in unincorporated Silver Point, Putnam County, Tennessee, on Tennessee Highway 141, Center Hill Dam Road, approximately thirteen miles west of the county seat of Cookeville. The current brick church building was constructed in 1915; this building replaced the original frame building that was constructed in 1909. Architect P.H. Black designed the building for the African American community to use as a church and school. The gable front building has brick walls with a central entrance and flanking windows. The side elevations feature sets of paired windows set in arched openings. It stands in a largely rural area and is a typical example of an unadorned country church.

The site of the WECCSP lies on the extreme western edge of the Eastern Highland Rim physiographic province. This is a highly dissected region of limestone and erosion resistant chert, and lies between the Central Basin to the west, and the Cumberland Plateau to the east. The geological properties of the area had a direct bearing on the cultural development of the Upper Cumberland region in that the soils would not support large-scale agriculture. Cultural development on the Highland Rim was focused primarily around small-scale agriculture and timber resources. Small towns and hamlets have dominated the region from the settlement period of the early nineteenth century, to the present.

The present WECCSP structure has been in continuous use since 1915. The building is a substantial rectangular brick building on a foundation of limestone and concrete. The moderately pitched gable roof is covered with asphalt shingles and has a slight eave overhang and boxed cornices.

The south façade of the building contains the front entrance. The church is entered through two wooden doors set in the center with a two light transom. Concrete steps lead to the doors, and there is a concrete porch covered by a gabled porch roof supported by two brick pillars. The porch roof is covered with asphalt shingles, and the gable field is covered with horizontal vinyl siding. There is a concrete ramp for handicapped access that connects to the west end of the porch. The ramp is covered with a shed roof supported by four square wooden columns encased with vinyl. The shed roof is also covered with asphalt shingles. The handicap ramp has metal handrails. On either side of the front doors are original four-over-four double-hung windows topped by a brick segmental arch. The bricks in the segmental arch are slightly darker in color than the brick walls. The window surrounds are covered with aluminum. In the gable field is a rectangular, concrete block set into the brick, which may at one time have held a stone on which the name of the church/school had been inscribed; immediately above this is a half-moon vent covered with horizontal vinyl siding, and capped by a brick arch.

The west elevation of the building contains eight regularly spaced four-over-four double-hung windows, set in pairs, and topped with a brick segmental arch. The east elevation is identical to

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West End Church of Christ Silver Point
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the west in number and arrangement of windows and materials. The surrounds of all the windows are covered with aluminum.

The north elevation contains two openings that were once rear doors, but have been sealed and covered with horizontal vinyl siding. The gable field on this elevation is covered with horizontal vinyl siding.

The interior of the building is a basic, rectangular floor plan with a central aisle leading to the pulpit, flanked by curved pews. The pews are not original to the building, rather they were taken from another church and placed here. The pulpit is set in a recessed alcove flanked by two rooms that serve as a Sunday School. Two steps lead up to the pulpit area. The wall covering is circa 1970 wood paneling. Carpeting covers the floor and the ceiling has acoustical tile also added circa 1970. The current ceiling is the second time that the ceiling of the church has been dropped. The front doors, which are in the south wall, are the only means of entering and exiting the building. Restrooms are located to east and west of the entrance.

To the south of the building, on the front church lawn stands a granite marker, set on a concrete pedestal, capped by wooden boards, that reads:

West End Church of Christ
Formerly
Silver Point Christian Institute
Established 1909

Henry Clay, Sam Womack, and Alexander Campbell served on the Board of Directors. G. P. Bowser was Principal. In 1913 Religion, Algebra, English, History, and Latin were taught. A second building (non extant) housed a printing press used to publish the Christian Echo.

The West End Church of Christ Silver Point is an example of folk vernacular church architecture of the Upper Cumberland African American community. The historical and architectural integrity of the building remain intact, and the cultural significance of this site is without parallel in the African American community of the Upper Cumberland. The building is a tangible reminder and legacy of the early twentieth century efforts to provide for the spiritual and educational development of the local African American community, and its influence is still felt to this day.

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Putnam County, Tennessee**VIII. Statement of Significance**

The West End Church of Christ Silver Point (WECCSP) is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places for its local significance under Criterion A for its African American ethnic heritage in the areas of education and social history. The church was founded by George Phillip (G.P.) Bowser, a prominent preacher and advocate for African American education in the Church of Christ. It is one of the few buildings remaining in Tennessee that represents the efforts of Bowser to provide educational opportunities for the African American population. From its inception Bowser envisioned that the property would serve the religious and educational needs of the community. Furthermore the property represents an attempt by African American leaders in the Church of Christ to establish a Christian school for African Americans in the Upper Cumberland region. The church exemplifies the ideals of the African American community of its time, ideals related to educational and spiritual attainment, and a sense of social solidarity and empowerment. Through its educational efforts, the church trained generations of African American leaders, the results of which are still evident today.

In the antebellum period, the Upper Cumberland region consisted mainly of small subsistence farms tended by individual families with a minimum of outside or "hired" help. As a result of this, the African American population of the Upper Cumberland was relatively small, especially when compared to the labor-intensive areas of the Central Basin, located to the immediate west of the Eastern Highland Rim. The African American population of the Upper Cumberland has remained small, and relatively stable. In 1950, in the post-World War II years, the African American population of the fourteen county Upper Cumberland region was 4,269; in 2000 the population was 3,858 out of a total population of 304,998.¹ The small African American population made the need for education and religion within the community essential; the community had to establish its own priorities and see that they were met, and it was from this realization, that the institution that ultimately became the West End Church of Christ Silver Point (WECCSP) was born.

The genesis of WECCSP began in 1909 with a sermon delivered by Reverend George Phillip Bowser (1874-1950) of Nashville, to the African American congregation of Laurel Hill Church of Christ.² Bowser had been invited to speak to the congregation, and as a result of his sermon, he was recruited to establish a church at Silver Point.³ Bowser was recruited by Sam Womack and Alexander Campbell, two of the most noted African American ministers in Middle Tennessee. Two years earlier Womack started the Nashville Normal, Industrial, and Orphan School which met at the Jackson Street Church of Christ in Nashville. Bowser agreed to establish the church at Silver Point, provided he was also allowed to establish a school for the education of the African American children of the area. Bowser's terms were agreed to and the Laurel Hill congregation and the

¹ 2000 United States Census.

² R. Vernon Bond, *Undying Dedication* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1985).

³ *Ibid.*

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Putnam County, Tennessee

Nashville Normal, Industrial, and Orphan School relocated to the place where WECCSP now stands.

By this time Bowser had established himself as a leading African American figure in the Church of Christ. In 1903 he established the *Christian Echo*, which is still in operation today and is "one of the longest running religious publications in America."⁴

In 1909, Bowser established the Putnam County Normal and Industrial Orphanage (PCNIO) at Silver Point. The building was built by local craftsmen using local materials. There were other buildings on the site at the time, including a printing shop, that have since been razed and are no longer extant. The school's board of directors was Henry Clay, Sam Womack, and Alexander Campbell, all of whom were notable figures in the Church of Christ.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, it was customary for African American children to attend school only four months out of the year. Bowser was instrumental in having this restriction lifted so that African American children could attend school for nine months out of the year in Putnam County. The course of study at PCNIO included religion, algebra, Latin, English, history, and music; grades one through nine were taught. Never before had African American children had access to such an education in the Upper Cumberland. From 1909 to 1913, with the help of sponsors from across the state, the PCNIO provided housing, education, vocation, and religious instruction to the African American children of the region.

In 1913 the Putnam County Normal and Industrial Orphanage became the Silver Point Christian Institute, grades one through eight. Nashville African American architect and builder, P.H. Black led fundraisers for the school. Contributions were made by David Lipscomb and A. M. Burton, president of the Life and Casualty Insurance Company.⁵

By 1915, the church and school were combined into the West End Church of Christ Silver Point, and a new main building was constructed, the building that stands on the site today. The building was designed by P. H. Black, and built by community members using local materials, except for the bricks, which were purchased in Nashville and brought to Silver Point on the Tennessee Central Railroad.

In 1918, Bowser resigned due to frustrations in seeking on-going funding for the school. Despite initial contributions from prominent Church of Christ members, Bowser found it difficult to obtain continuing support for the school from Church of Christ leadership. Despite this, the school he had founded at Silver Point remained in operation until 1959, after which time African American

⁴ Dr. Douglas A. Foster. "An Angry Peace". ACU Today, Online Edition. Spring 2000. available at: www.acu.edu/alumni/acu-today/spring2000/cover02.html Accessed 7/2/2007.

⁵ Bond. *Undying Dedication*.

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West End Church of Christ Silver Point
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children from throughout Putnam County were bused to schools in Cookeville and Algood. The church has remained in operation to the present time.

After leaving Silver Point, Bowser continued to establish churches and schools in various cities. He established schools for African American students in Detroit, Fort Worth, and Fort Smith, Arkansas. He was continually frustrated over the resistance that he often faced within the Church of Christ in his efforts to provide an equal voice and opportunities to Christians regardless of race. Bowser established his last school in 1949, which was the Southwestern Christian College in Terrell, Texas. Along with his contemporary, Marshall Keeble, Bowser is considered one of "the most important leaders of the 20th century" in the Church of Christ.⁶

Although Bowser and Keeble were contemporaries, their views and approaches to issues surrounding integration and civil rights differed greatly. Keeble promoted a belief that his religious message was more important than secular and political issues of integration and civil rights. Ultimately he felt that teaching people to live Christian lives centered on messages found in the Bible would lead in time to greater social justice for all races. On the other hand, Bowser took a more forceful stance and lacked tolerance towards the system of white paternalism that was widespread in the church and in society. As a result, Bowser often found it more difficult to obtain funding from white Church of Christ leaders for his efforts.

In 1920, Bowser was asked by A.M. Burton to teach at a newly founded school in Nashville named the Southern Practical Institute. The school, however, proved to be short-lived. The school's superintendent, C.E.W. Dorris, required that black students and teachers enter through the back door. Bowser and others protested, and the school closed its doors less than six weeks after it first opened.

Educational opportunities for African American children in the Upper Cumberland during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were scarce and poorly funded. Bowser and others recognized the need to provide adequate educational opportunities for African Americans. In the period prior to the founding of the school at West End Church of Christ Silver Point classes were often taught in crude buildings that suffered from a lack of proper maintenance and supplies. The primitive conditions of the rural African American school of the Upper Cumberland was described by W.E.B. DuBois in his seminal work, *The Souls of Black Folk*. DuBois, while a student at Fisk University in Nashville, taught for two summers between 1885 and 1888, outside Alexandria in DeKalb County, approximately twenty miles from Silver Point.

The schoolhouse was a log hut, where Colonel Wheeler used to shelter his corn. It sat in a lot behind a rail fence and thorn bushes, near the sweetest of springs. There was an entrance where a door once was, and within, a massive rickety fireplace; great chinks between the logs served as windows. Furniture was scarce. A pale

⁶ Foster. "An Angry Peace". www.acu.edu/alumni/acu-today/spring200/cover02.htm accessed 7/2/2007.

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blackboard crouched in the corner. My desk was made of three boards, reinforced at critical points, and my chair, borrowed from the landlady, had to be returned every night. Seats for the children - these puzzled me much. I was haunted by a New England vision of neat little desks and chairs, but alas! the reality was rough plank benches without backs, and at times without legs. They had the one virtue of making naps dangerous - possibly fatal, for the floor was not to be trusted.⁷

DuBois' experience was common for the time and place. DuBois called his community "a world", made so by isolation, common hardship in poverty, poor land, and low wages.⁸ Such were the conditions of African American life in the Upper Cumberland of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Institutions such as the West End Church of Christ Silver Point sought to make positive changes in their individual communities.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the first concerted efforts to educate African American children in the rural American South, albeit a segregated South. In the African American community, education and religious training were often seen as being synonymous. The West End Church of Christ Silver Point, and its forerunner, the Silver Point Christian Institute, are examples of this fundamental cultural belief.

The lasting legacy of the West End Church of Christ Silver Point is its influence on the community of Silver Point and surrounding areas. The church and school trained, taught or played host to men such as Sam Womack, Alexander Campbell, Henry Clay, and the "Big Four" of the African American Church of Christ, J. S. Winston, R. N. Hogan, G. E. Stewart, and Levi Kennedy. Through the second half of the twentieth century the church continued to be a gathering place for the African American community of Silver Point.

From the antebellum period onward, the church has been one of the most important social institutions of the African American community; the West End Church of Christ Silver Point is no exception. From its inception, the church and former school have provided a place of identity and congregation for the African American community of Silver Point and western Putnam County, a community that was isolated by geography and culture.

Given its significance to the sociocultural history of the Upper Cumberland, its role in the African American community of the region, and its connection to prominent African American Church of Christ leaders, the West End Church of Christ Silver Point is worthy of inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

⁷ W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997), 75.

⁸ *ibid*

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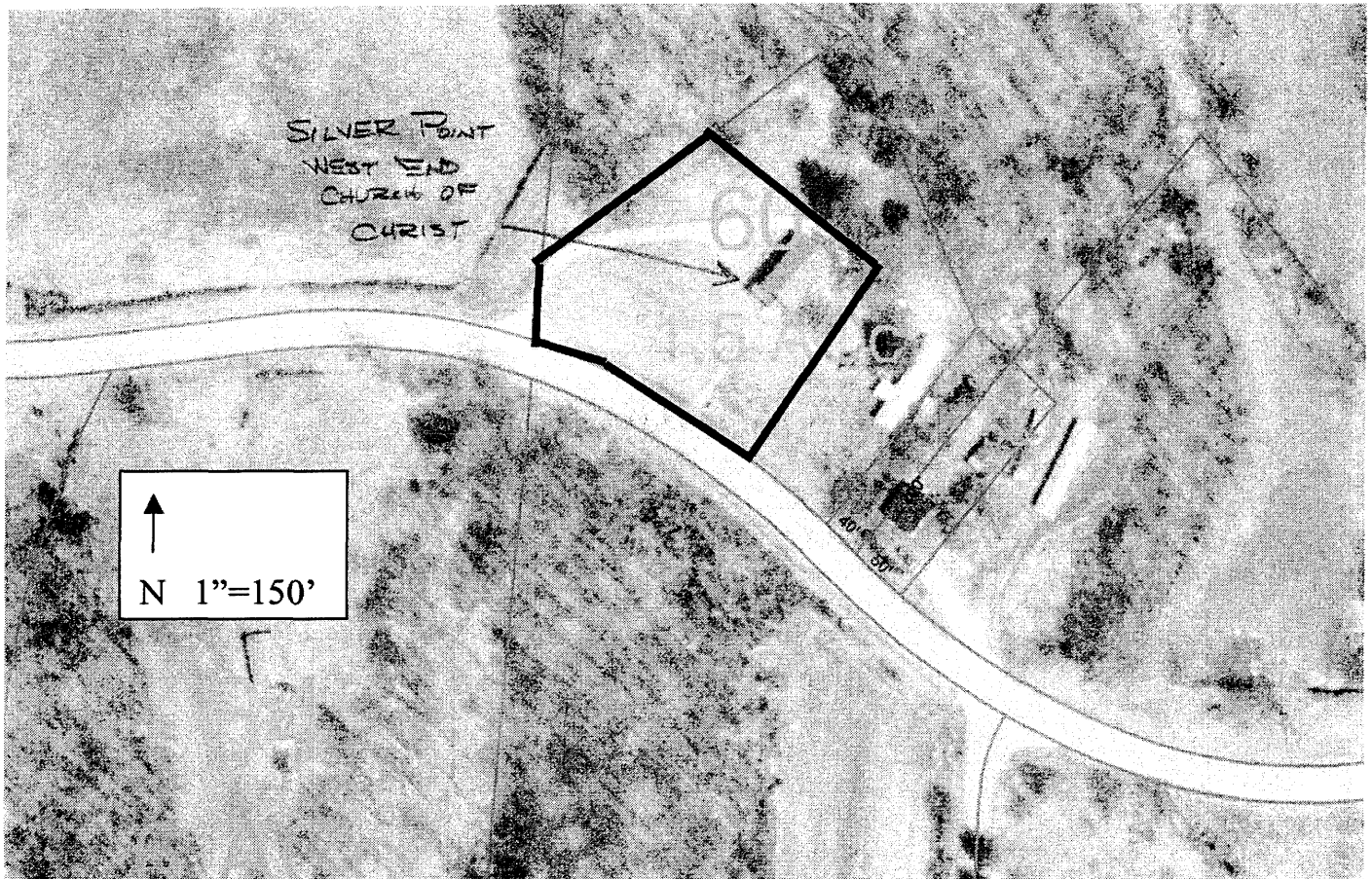
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West End Church of Christ Silver Point
Putnam County, Tennessee

Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description and Justification

The nominated boundary is a portion of parcel 60 as indicated on the enclosed map. The boundary includes the church and immediate yard area. Modern residences to the east and a modern cemetery to the north are excluded from the boundary.



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West End Church of Christ Silver Point
Putnam County, Tennessee

Photographs

Photos taken by: Randy Williams

Date: May 2007

1. South facade facing north.
2. South facade facing north.
3. South facade facing north.
4. South facade facing north.
5. Southeast corner facing northwest.
6. East elevation facing west.
7. Northeast corner facing southwest.
8. North (rear) elevation facing southwest.
9. North (rear) elevation facing south.
10. Northwest elevation facing southeast.
11. West elevation facing east.
12. West elevation facing east.
13. West elevation facing east.
14. Southwest corner facing northeast.
15. Silver Point West End Church of Christ interpretive granite plaque set in concrete facing northeast.
16. Silver Point West End Church of Christ interior facing north.
17. Silver Point West End Church of Christ interior facing south.

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18. Silver Point West End Church of Christ interior facing southwest.
19. Silver Point West End Church of Christ interior facing northwest.

Not to Scale

