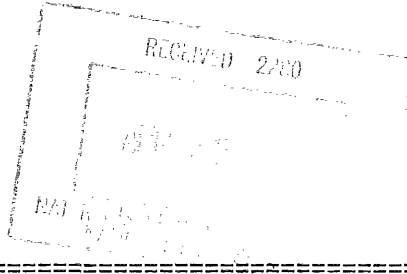


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM



1. Name of Property

historic name Mt. Zion AME Zion Church

other names/site number Varick Chapel, Little Zion

2. Location

street & number 467 Holt Street (corner of Holt & Stone) not for publication N/A  
city or town Montgomery vicinity N/A  
state Alabama code AL county Montgomery code 101 zip code 36104

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets        does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant        nationally        statewide X locally. (        See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Stimulus W. ...  
Signature of certifying official

July 31, 2002  
Date

Alabama Historical Commission (State Historic Preservation Office)  
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 commenting or other official Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. 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): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper Daniel J. Vivia Date of Action 10/4/02

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

5. Classification

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

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

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

- private
- public-local
- public-state
- public-Federal

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

|               |                 |
|---------------|-----------------|
| Contributing  | Noncontributing |
| <u>1</u>      | <u>      </u>   |
| <u>      </u> | <u>      </u>   |
| <u>      </u> | <u>      </u>   |
| <u>      </u> | <u>      </u>   |
| <u>1</u>      | <u>0</u>        |
|               | buildings       |
|               | sites           |
|               | structures      |
|               | objects         |
|               | Total           |

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

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

N/A

0

6. Function or Use

**Historic Functions** (Enter categories from instructions)

|                      |                                |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| Cat: <u>RELIGION</u> | Sub: <u>Religious Facility</u> |
| <u>SOCIAL</u>        | <u>Meeting Hall</u>            |
| _____                | _____                          |
| _____                | _____                          |
| _____                | _____                          |
| _____                | _____                          |
| _____                | _____                          |
| _____                | _____                          |
| _____                | _____                          |

**Current Functions** (Enter categories from instructions)

|                               |            |
|-------------------------------|------------|
| Cat: <u>VACANT/NOT IN USE</u> | Sub: _____ |
| _____                         | _____      |
| _____                         | _____      |
| _____                         | _____      |
| _____                         | _____      |
| _____                         | _____      |
| _____                         | _____      |
| _____                         | _____      |

7. Description

**Architectural Classification** (Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Revivals: Classical Revival

**Materials** (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation brick

roof asphalt

walls Brick

other \_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description** (Describe the historic and current condition on continuation sheet/s.)

=====  
**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 the boxes that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a 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.

**Areas of Significance** (Enter categories from instructions)

|                               |       |
|-------------------------------|-------|
| <u>Politics/Government</u>    | _____ |
| <u>Ethnic Heritage: Black</u> | _____ |
| _____                         | _____ |
| _____                         | _____ |

**Period of Significance** 1955 \_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates** 1955 \_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person** (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) N/A

**Cultural Affiliation** N/A \_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder** N/A \_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Explain significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

=====  
**9. Major Bibliographical References**  
=====

(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 \_\_\_\_\_

=====  
**10. Geographical Data**  
=====

**Acreage of Property** less than 1 acre

**UTM References** (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

|   | Zone | Easting | Northing | Zone | Easting | Northing |
|---|------|---------|----------|------|---------|----------|
| 1 | 16   | 563940  | 3581260  | 3    |         |          |
| 2 |      |         |          | 4    |         |          |

**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 Christy Anderson, National Register Coordinator/Trina Binkley, AHC Reviewer  
organization Alabama Historical Commission date \_\_\_\_\_  
street & number 468 S. Perry St. telephone 334-230-2658  
city or town Montgomery state Alabama zip code 36130-0900

=====  
**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 the SHPO or FPO.)

name Mt. Zion A.M.E. Zion Church  
street & number 455 W. Jeff Davis telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
city or town Montgomery state AL zip code 36104

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 1

Name of Property: Mt. Zion AME Zion Church  
County and State: Montgomery County, Alabama

=====

Mt. Zion AME Zion Church is a one-and-a-half story brick structure. The original 1899 structure reflected the influences of the Gothic Revival style, with its center bell tower and steeple flanked by pointed arched windows. The window treatment was repeated on the side elevations, five windows on each side, and these may be found in the present structure. The windows appear to be 1:1 sash windows with a pointed arch fixed pane capping each window. Rectangular basement window openings, now boarded over, are visible under the nave windows. Though the building dates from 1899, its present form dates from 1921 when the building underwent extensive renovations which removed the central steeple and replaced it with the front twin towers and a central portico which reflect the influences of the Classical Revival style. With the addition of the towers, the side fenestration is 6 bays, the first bay the bell tower and the remaining five identical bays are separated by brick pilasters. The main roofline begins behind the towers and portico, featuring a clipped gable that terminates in a hip at the rear of the building.

The church is oriented on an east-west axis, with the front facade facing west. The entrance is raised above the ground level and features four Doric columns (2 are engaged columns) supporting a wide entablature. A string course visually separates the raised basement from the remainder of the building. As part of the 1921 renovation, the original wood structure was covered with brick veneer laid in running bond. In 1950, the wide center steps were removed, and a divided stairway with a central basement entrance was added. A low, basement level cinder block addition is located to the rear of the building. Three windows behind the altar have been covered over with a synthetic siding material, cut to fit the openings. The interior of the building is inaccessible.

**Current condition of the building**

The Mt. Zion AMEZ Church congregation built a new sanctuary in 1990 and abandoned the church on Holt Street. In 1999, the Alabama Historical Commission placed Mt. Zion on the state's Places in Peril list. The property is currently in a deteriorating condition and is threatened by demolition if a new owner for the building cannot be found. Holes have developed in the roof, causing the partial collapse of the nave balcony and some roof trusses. Several windows have been broken out and not covered. Vegetation covers the east and north facades of the building, as well as the northwest tower. The building retains its form and features and hopefully with recognition of its significance, the congregation will stabilize the building or other interested parties will come forward.

**Archaeological component**

Although no formal archaeological testing has been conducted, the potential for subsurface material is low. Mt. Zion occupies most of the land available in its parcel.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 2

Name of Property: Mt. Zion AME Zion Church  
County and State: Montgomery County, Alabama

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**Statement of Significance**

Mt. Zion AME Zion Church is eligible for listing under Criterion A for its associations with politics/government and ethnic heritage as related to the Montgomery Civil Rights Movement. Following the Rosa Parks trial and conviction on December 5, 1955 Reverend L. Roy Bennett, pastor of Mt. Zion AME Zion Church and head of the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, called for a meeting of church leaders that afternoon at the church to prepare for a mass meeting to be held that evening. At 3:00 p.m., sixteen men met in the pastor's study of Mt. Zion AME Zion Church to organized themselves into a committee to guide the protest that had begun that morning in the form of a bus boycott. The group became The Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), and elected Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., president; Reverend Bennett, vice-president; Edgar French, corresponding secretary; U.J. Fields, recording secretary; and Erna Dungee, financial secretary. The decision was made to invite nine additional people, not present at the afternoon meeting, to join the MIA, creating the twenty-five person executive board. In addition to organization of the MIA, attendees specifically addressed the continuation of the bus boycott, the formation of a resolutions committee to implement the plan, the formation of a transportation committee, and set the agenda for the mass meeting to be held at Holt Street Baptist Church that evening. These early meetings were important in demonstrating a firm but non-violent stance on civil rights and in organizing the movement under the leadership of the black church. The formation of the MIA was crucial in the organization and implementation of civil rights protests in Montgomery.

The property also meets Criterion Considerations A and G. The building is currently owned by Mt. Zion AME Zion Church, but is not used as a sanctuary. The church would like to deaccession the building either through new ownership or demolition. Events associated with the church took place in 1955, which also meets Criterion Consideration G. The meeting that took place at Mt. Zion in 1955 was a critical event in launching an organized civil rights movement in Montgomery.

**Historical Narrative**

The afternoon meeting at Mt. Zion AME Zion Church and subsequent formation of the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) was a direct response to the arrest and conviction of Rosa Parks for her refusal to give up her seat on the bus to a white passenger. While civil rights activity existed in the city, and at Mt. Zion, for years prior to this event, it was the effectiveness of the one day boycott and Mrs. Parks' conviction that prompted the movement to organize and carry out their resolution under the auspices of the MIA.

The series of events that occurred between December 1, 1955 and December 5, 1955 forever altered social perceptions and responses to segregation and disfranchisement in Montgomery. The events surrounding Rosa Parks' arrest and subsequent conviction were by no means the first encounter between the African-American community and strongly enforced segregation, but it did serve as a catalyst for the events that happened in the days that followed. The grievances held by Montgomery's black population toward the bus system's segregation policy were long standing. According to Stephen Millner "Montgomery's laws regulating seating were thought to be particularly harsh and humiliating by local blacks" (Millner: 434).

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks boarded a bus in downtown Montgomery and sat down in an area open to blacks toward the rear of the bus. As more passengers boarded the bus, the empty seats were filled leaving one white person standing. The bus driver, James Blake, requested that Parks and other black passengers in the

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 3

Name of Property: Mt. Zion AME Zion Church

County and State: Montgomery County, Alabama

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front give up their seats. All except Parks complied with Blake's request. When the driver was unable to get Parks to obey the law, he notified the city police who placed her under arrest (Levy, 1992: 51).

The arrest and rough treatment of Mrs. Parks stirred emotions and activity in the black community. December 2, 1955, a meeting of local black leaders; predominantly ministers, chaired by the Rev. L. Roy Bennett, pastor of Mt. Zion AME Zion Church and president of the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance convened. The leaders called for a bus boycott for the following Monday, December 5, in response to Mrs. Parks' arrest. Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, oversaw efforts to inform the African American community of the boycott. According to Walls, 75 percent of Montgomery bus riders were black. Arrangements were made with eighteen African American taxi companies to provide transportation for the same price as bus fare (Walls, 1974:527).

In his capacity as head of the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, Rev. L. Roy Bennett asked the leaders at the December 2 meeting to gather on Monday afternoon. Following Rosa Parks' trial and conviction on December 5, 1955, plans were made for continued action, particularly the continuation of the bus boycott. Sixteen men attended a 3:00 p.m. meeting in Rev. Bennett's study at Mount Zion AME Zion Church. The first order of business was to form an organization that would guide the protest. Ralph Abernathy suggested a name for the group and thereafter they were styled "The Montgomery Improvement Association" (MIA) (Gilliam:216). Upon the formation of the MIA, attendees elected Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., president; Reverend Bennett, vice-president; Edgar French, corresponding secretary; U.J. Fields, recording secretary; and Erna Dungee, financial secretary. The group also decided to invite nine additional people, not present at the afternoon meeting, to join the MIA, creating the twenty-five person executive board.

After establishing the MIA, the group then turned its attention to extending the bus boycott. The first issue discussed was indefinite extension of the boycott. On one hand, they now had a tangible success in the form of the December 5 boycott that could be used as a bargaining lever in talks with whites. However, some argued that an attempt to continue the protest indefinitely might fail, thereby dissipating the value of what had already been attained (Gilliam: 217). The majority of the MIA argued in favor of prolongation. Many of them had felt from the beginning that more than a one-day affair would be necessary to get redress of their complaints. Moreover, their reading community support, as evinced by that day's action, convinced them that a continued effort could be sustained. If the continued protest proved successful, it would allow the MIA to exert much more pressure on white officials. The community would be asked to support an indefinite boycott of the Montgomery bus system at the mass meeting that night (Gilliam: 217). A committee comprised of King, Abernathy, R.J. Glasco, and A.W. Wilson, and two attorneys, Gray and Landford, prepared a resolutions document to present at the meeting.

In addition to planning for the evening meeting, the group also established a transportation committee. Jo Ann Robinson nominated Rufus Lewis as chairman of the committee. His nomination was approved, and R.J. Glasco and W.J. Powell assisted. As part of the transportation committee activities, Reverend Bennett with Rev. W.J. Powell (Old Ship AMEZ) and J.C. Howard (Mt. Zion trustee) organized in the Howard and Howard Funeral Home located at 732 South Holt Street to arrange transportation for people during the boycott.

The afternoon meeting laid the foundation for the evening's mass meeting, which would garner support for further action led by the MIA. Word of the evening meeting spread, and by 7:00 p.m., Holt Street Baptist Church was completely filled.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8, 9, 10, photos Page 4 Name of Property: Mt. Zion AME Zion Church  
County and State: Montgomery County, Alabama

=====

With nearly a decade of leadership that supported and espoused civil rights activity, Mt. Zion AMEZ played a key role, physically and as an active entity, in the beginnings of the Montgomery Improvement Association.

**References Cited**

- French, Edgar N. 1989. "The Beginnings of a New Age." in *The Walking City: The Montgomery Bus Boycott, 1955-1956*, David J. Garrow (ed.). Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Inc.
- Gilliam, Thomas J. "The Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955-56." In *The Walking City: The Montgomery Bus Boycott, 1955-1956*, David J. Garrow (ed.). Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Inc.
- Levy, Peter B. 1992 *Documentary History of the Modern Civil Rights Movement*. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Millner, Steven M. "The Emergence and Career of a Social Movement." in *The Walking City: The Montgomery Bus Boycott, 1955-1956*, David J. Garrow (ed.). Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Inc.
- Walls, William J. 1974. *The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church: Reality of the Black Church*. Charlotte, N.C.: A.M.E. Zion Publishing House.

**Boundary Description**

Boundaries are delineated on accompanying tax parcel map, 1"= 50 feet.

**Boundary Justification**

The church occupies most of the available land on the small corner parcel, all of which is historically associated with the building.

**Photograph Log**

The following information is the same for each photograph:

Name of Photographer: Christy Anderson  
Date of Photograph: July 2001  
Location of Original Negatives: Alabama Historical Commission  
468 South Perry Street  
Montgomery, Alabama 36130-0900

1. Front (west) facade
2. South side, looking northeast
3. Window detail, south side
4. South side, looking northwest





HOLT ST

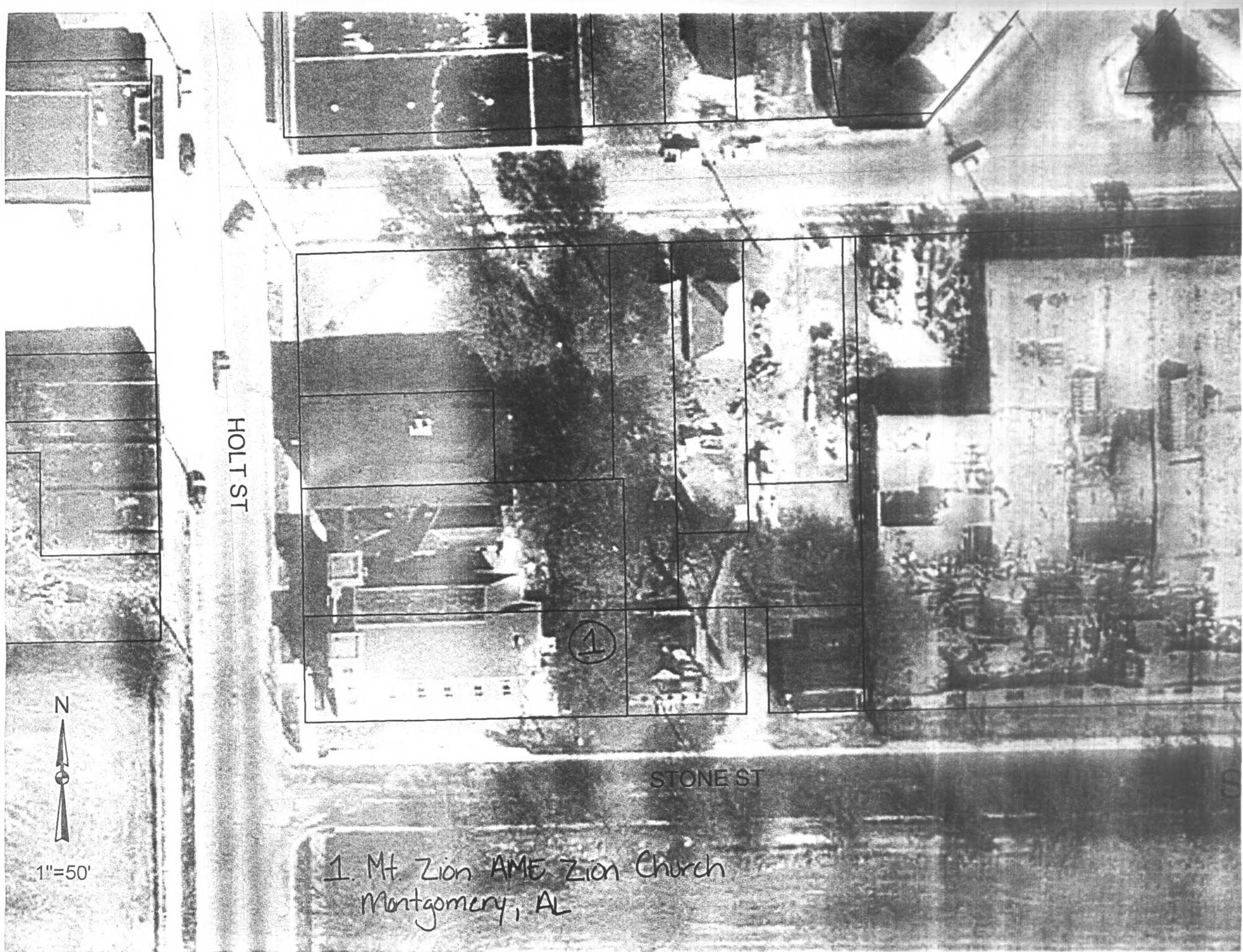
STONE ST

1

1. Mt. Zion AME Zion Church  
Montgomery, AL



1"=50'



HOLT ST

STONE ST

①

1 Mt. Zion AME Zion Church  
Montgomery, AL



1"=50'