NPS FORM 10-900 (Rev. 8-86) OMB No. 1024-0018 [SD-SHPO # ECA-OH-597-1/89]
[use paper with at least 25% cotton rag content, use NLQ or LQ printer]

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 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 "NA" 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.

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1. Name of Property
historic name: Sterling Methodist Church
other name/ site number: NA

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2. Location
street & number: 5 miles east and 1 mile north of Bruce   /NA/ not for publication
city, town: Bruce   /XX/ vicinity
state: SOUTH DAKOTA   code: SD   county: Brookings   code: SD 011   zip code: 57220

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3. Classification

Ownership of Property:	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property:		
		Contributing	Noncontributing	
/XX/ private	/XX/ building(s)	1		buildings
/ / pubic-local	/ / district			sites
/ / public-state	/ / site			structures
/ / public-federal	/ / structure			objects
	/ / object	1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing:
NA_____

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: ___0___

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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.

_____ _7/13/87___
Signature of certifying official   Date

_South Dak SHPO_____
State or Federal agency or 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 or bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

  I, hereby, certify that this property is:
  _X_ entered in the National Register
  ____ see continuation sheet   _____ _10/19/89_
  ____ 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

6.   **Function or Use** (enter categories from instructions)
Historic functions: Current Functions:
RELIGION/Religious Structure   RELIGION/Religious Structure

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7.   **Description**
Architectural Classification: Materials:
(enter categories from instructions)   (enter categories from instructions)
OTHER: Nave Plan Church   foundation Concrete
                                            walls Wood

                                            roof Asphalt
                                            other NA

Describe present and historic physical appearance: /XX/ see continuation sheet

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8.   **Significance**
Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in
     relation to other properties: / /   / /   /XX/
                                    nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria   /XX/ A   / /B /XX/C / /D

Criteria Considerations /XX/A / /B / /C / /D / /E / /F / /G

Areas of Significance (enter from instructions)
Ethnic Heritage/European
Architecture

Period of Significance   Significant Dates
1893-1939   1893
                                           1895
                                           1928

Significant Person   Cultural Affiliation
NA   NA

                                           Architect/Builder
                                           Unknown

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations,
   and periods of significance noted above   /XX/ see continuation sheet

9. **Major Bibliographical References**   /XX/ see continuation sheet

Previous documentation by NPS:
/ / 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:
/XX/ State historic preservation office
/ / Other State agency
/ / Federal agency
/ / Local government
/ / University
/ / Other
Specify repository:
South Dakota Historical Preservation Center

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10. **Geographical Data**
Acreage of property: Less than one acre

UTM References:
A = 14 /   /676-100/   /4924-680/   B = / /   /   /   /   /
C = / /   /   /   /   /   D = / /   /   /   /   /
    ZONE   EASTING   NORTHING   ZONE   EASTING   NORTHING

Quad: Brookings N.E.   Scale: 1:24000

                                          / / see continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description:

                                          /XX/ see continuation sheet

Boundary Justification:

                                          /XX/ see continuation sheet

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Situated on a small acreage in north-central Brookings County, the Sterling Methodist Church is a relatively unadorned nave plan church edifice. Rising from a poured concrete basement, the wood frame walls are clad with clapboard siding. The building is capped by a gable roof covered with diamond-shaped asphalt shingles. A narrow brick chimney rises along the outside of the east (rear) gable end. Projecting upward at the west (front) gable end is a broad square bell tower/narthex topped by an open belfry and a wooden steeple. Much of the surface area of the upper part of the bell tower is clad with fishscale shingles. A short lancet arched overlight caps the wide entry door. A shed-roofed annex to the south of the narthex covers an interior stairway leading to the basement. Each axial facade is pierced by four elongated lancet arched windows with clear glass lights.

In keeping with Methodist doctrine and liturgy, the interior decor is fairly modest. A simple wooden altar with a large Cross hanging over it fill a semicircular-arched niche at the front of the sanctuary. Other items around the altar include a small pulpit, a piano, and chairs for the pastor and the reader. The sanctuary is encircled by a short wainscot. Congregation seating, consisting of several wooden pews, is separated from the altar by a linear altar rail. Originally, seating consisted of wooden chairs, which are still used in the basement fellowship hall. A number of other original fixtures, such as a communion table, Bible, collection plate, clock and oil lamp, are found about the sanctuary. The basement is divided into a furnace room, a small kitchen, and a fellowship hall.

Located east of the church are two small wood frame privies of unknown date of construction. Just east of the privies is a cemetery bearing the graves of many of the church founders and area pioneers. Many gravemarkers are inscribed in German. Neither the privies nor the cemetery are contained within the boundaries of the nominated property.

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Under Criteria A and C of the National Register Criteria, the Sterling Methodist Church is significant in the areas of ethnic heritage/European and architecture. It is associated with the pioneer settlement of a small group of German Methodists in northern Brookings County. It is also a very well preserved and rare example of a European-influenced Methodist nave plan church, a design not commonly used by Methodist congregations in South Dakota. Under the South Dakota Historical Preservation Plan, the property relates to the following historic contexts: IV. Permanent Rural and Urban Pioneer Settlement, B. 8. Ethnic Enclaves/Germans; and IV. H. Religion.

Religious denominations throughout South Dakota in the early stages of settlement and development used designs for their churches that were more or less distinctive to their group. The subtle differences among these groups were produced by a wide variety of influences, including ethnicity, doctrine, social institutions, and other traditions. Most Methodist congregations were formed by people of old-American stock from eastern states or by English immigrants. Because of this American and Anglican influence, their church designs generally were based on a popular American L-shaped form with a tower at the intersection of the two legs of the ell. Standard plans using this configuration were published by the Methodist Board of Church Extension for adoption by local congregations; thus, there are dozens of such churches across the state. (see "Oldham Methodist Church," Kingsbury County, National Register of Historic Places, 1987) On the other hand, founders of the Sterling Methodist Church were mostly German immigrants who migrated from southern Minnesota. The influence of continental European models is evident in their application of a simple nave plan, which was also available through pattern books at the time and used mostly by Scandinavian and German Lutherans. In South Dakota, early nave plan Methodist churches are rare. Although the Sterling Church features some Gothic Revival components such as lancet arches, the building is basically plain in keeping with Methodist teachings. Even the tower is less ornate than those of its neighboring Lutheran churches, offering an interesting and historically informative contrast to the built environment of the region.

While Brookings County in east-central South Dakota was created in 1862, it remained essentially unsettled until 1869. The county was officially organized in 1871, but rapid development materialized only after the entry of the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad in the late-1870s. The City of Brookings, near the center of the county and platted in 1879, is the seat of government and principal regional commercial hub. In 1878, homesteaders, many of them European immigrants, began arriving in Sterling Township. A small group of German Methodists who migrated from southern Minnesota filed on lands in the extreme northeastern corner of the township. To the east of them a group of Danish Lutherans settled. A larger group of Norwegian Lutherans

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established farms roughly west, north, and south of the Germans. Soon immigrant churches of these various ethnic traditions dotted the landscape. Area towns Bruce and White were founded in 1881 and 1884 respectively.

In general, German Methodist congregations were located only sparsely throughout southern Minnesota and Dakota Territory, where Scandinavian and German Lutherans predominate. Hence, the circuits were large and stations quite scattered. The Sterling congregation was formed in 1878 and considered a part of the Marshall, Minnesota, "mission." In 1884, members chartered the German Methodist Episcopal Church of Sterling Township under the Northwest German Conference at Sioux City, Iowa. By 1891, they had a new charter as the First German Society of Methodist Episcopal Church. Similar other German Methodist congregations soon formed at Elkton and White. At first services, led by Pastor Wilhelm J. Wesphal, were held in various members' homes. Construction of the church edifice began in 1893 and was completed 1895.

As customary in most 19th Century Protestant churches, men sat on the left of the aisle while women sat on the right. Services were conducted entirely in German until 1916, when anti-German sentiment precipitated by World War One ran rampant. Illustrating this common passion of the times, an area non-German neighbor painted a yellow stripe around the Sterling Church as an act of hostility toward things German. During and after the war, younger generations desired a complete switch to English for Sunday services. Eventually, strictly German congregations disappeared as they merged with nearby English-speaking Methodist organizations. Most have become part of the United Methodist Church.

The congregation enlarged the size of the church in 1928. At that time they extended the east gable end sixteen feet adding a fourth bay to the axial length of the building. They also installed the poured concrete basement under the nave and the annex south of the narthex. Lancet arched windows to match those of the original construction were procured at Canby, Minnesota. On April 2, 1928, the church was rededicated as the Sterling Methodist Episcopal Church of the Dakota Annual Conference. In 1959, the name was changed to simply Sterling Methodist Church.

Electric lights were added in the early 1940s. In 1953, the basement space was improved. When the District 58 rural school closed in 1964, member Keith Reed obtained the bell from that school and installed it in the church belfry.

Over the years the church has been affiliated with congregations at Ash Lake, Elkton, White, Bruce, and Brookings. In is now part of the Aurora-Sterling-White charge. It is the only rural church in the township that remains in regular use. Current members are descendants of the original founders.

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The period of significance of the nominated property extends from its date of construction beginning in 1893 to 1939, the established 50-year cut-off date for the National Register. The property derives its significance from its historical and architectural distinction and therefore qualifies for listing in the National Register under Criteria Consideration A. The cemetery is not included in the nominated property, because it does not satisfy Criteria Consideration D.

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Brookings County Press. (Brookings, South Dakota). October 28, 1879.

Brookings (South Dakota) Daily Register. June 1950. December 24, 1958. August 16, 1964. June 29, 1979.

Erpestad, David and David Wood. "The Architectural History of South Dakota." Ms. Vermillion, SD: State Historical Preservation Center, N.d. Chapter 8 (Early Churches). pp. 11-13, 14-15.

Kerr, Clare. Personal Interview by Marjorie Thom at Rural Brookings County. February 28, 1989.

Parker, Donald Deen. "Founding of the Church in South Dakota." Ms. Brookings, SD: South Dakota State University, History Department, 1962.

Reed, Vida (Workman). Personal Interview by Marjorie Thom at Rural Brookings County. February 15, 1989.

Sandro, G. O. "History of Brookings County Prior to 1900." Unpublished M.A. Thesis. University of South Dakota. 1935.

"Sterling United Methodist, Sterling Township, Brookings, South Dakota, 1884-1984." M.s. N.p. 1984 (Centennial Booklet).

White (South Dakota) Leader. September 20, 1984.

Workman, George P. Personal Interview by Marjorie Thom at Rural Brookings County. December 13, 1988.

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:

The nominated property is bounded by a set of imaginary lines that intersect to form a rectangle around the rectangular building. The western boundary line lies 15 feet west of the west wall of the bell tower/narthex and runs parallel to that wall. The northern boundary line lies 15 feet north of the north axial wall of the church and runs parallel to that wall. The eastern boundary line lies 15 feet east of the east gable end wall of the church and runs parallel to that wall. The southern boundary line lies 15 feet south of the south axial wall of the church and runs parallel to that wall. The property is located in the Northwest Quarter of the Northwest Quarter of the Northwest Quarter of Section 1, Township 111 North, Range 50 West, 5th Principal Meridian, in Brookings County, South Dakota.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION:

The boundaries of the nominated property are set to include only the church building and to exclude all other features of the church yard as well as any public roadway. The privies and the cemetery do not meet the criteria or criteria considerations for listing in the National Register.

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PHOTO DOCUMENTATION

1.
Sterling Methodist Church
Bruce Vicinity, Brookings County, South Dakota
by John Rau
October 1988
Neg.: South Dakota Historical Preservation Center
West (front) and south facades, camera facing northeast
Photo No. 1

2.
Sterling Methodist Church
Bruce Vicinity, Brookings County, South Dakota
by John Rau
October 1988
Neg.: South Dakota Historical Preservation Center
East facade, camera facing west
Photo No. 2

3.
Sterling Methodist Church
Bruce Vicinity, Brookings County, South Dakota
by John Rau
October 1988
Neg.: South Dakota Historical Preservation Center
South facade, detail of lancet arched windows camera facing north
Photo No. 3

4.
Sterling Methodist Church
Bruce Vicinity, Brookings County, South Dakota
by Margorie Thom
March 1989
Neg.: South Dakota Historical Preservation Center
Interior, camera facing east
Photo No. 4