

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Name of Property

County and State

Name of multiple property listing (if applicable)

Section number _____ Page _____

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 100004694

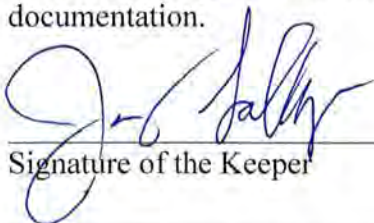
Date Listed: 11/27/2019

Property Name: Frierson Chapel (Historic Rural African American Churches in TN MPS)

County: Robertson

State: TN

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.



Signature of the Keeper

11.27.2019

Date of Action

Amended Items in Nomination:

Section 5: Classification

Category of Property: The category is hereby changed to BUILDING

Despite it being a multi-component property, the size, scale, and nature of the other resources are such that they are not a primary focal point of the property

Resource Count: The resource count is hereby changes to 2 Contributing buildings, 1 contributing site for a total of 3 contributing resources

Section 7: Inventory

The schoolhouse ruin lacks integrity as a building and since there is no claim of archeological significance, it is not evaluated as a contributing site. Instead, it should be considered a feature of the property and is hereby not included in the resource count for Section 5.

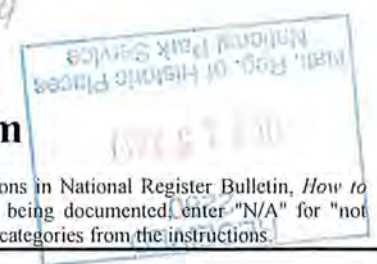
The Tennessee State Historic Preservation Office was notified of this amendment.

DISTRIBUTION:

National Register property file

Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

41694



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 National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any 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.

1. Name of Property

Historic name Frierson Chapel
Other names/site number New Bethel Methodist (Colored) Church
Name of related multiple property listing Historic Rural African American Churches in Tennessee, 1850-1970

2. Location

Street & Number: Approx. 0.20 miles off Old Coopertown Road
City or town: Coopertown State: TN County: Robertson
Not For Publication: N/A Vicinity: N/A Zip: 37172

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 forth 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 at the following level(s) of significance:

national statewide local

Applicable National Register Criteria: A B C D

Claudette Star 10/18/2019
Signature of certifying official/Title: Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Tennessee Historical Commission
Date
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.
Signature of Commenting Official: _____ Date _____
Title: _____ State of Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

Frierson Chapel
 Name of Property

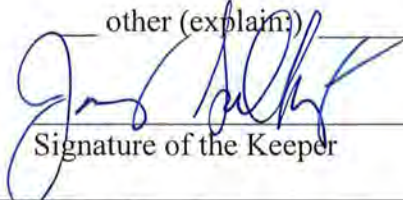
Robertson, Tennessee
 County and State

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register

other (explain):


 Signature of the Keeper

11.27.2019
 Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
2	0	buildings
2	0	sites
0	0	structures
	0	objects
4	0	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Frierson Chapel
Name of Property

Robertson, Tennessee
County and State

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/religious facility

FUNERARY/cemetery

EDUCATION/schools

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Other:

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property:

STUCCO; ASPHALT; WOOD; GRANITE; LIMESTONE

Narrative Description

The Frierson Chapel Methodist Church is located two-tenths of a mile off Old Coopertown Road and near TN State Route 49 in Coopertown, Robertson County, Tennessee. Nestled among a grouping of trees, Frierson Chapel is situated at the end of a meandering unpaved dirt drive primarily used to access adjacent and nearby working farms as well as the church. This isolation and rural setting allowed the congregation to meet undisturbed and out of sight, in many ways. In 1992, the Frierson Chapel congregation closed its doors and ceased to exist as a church due to low attendance and accessibility issues. The congregation dates back to 1870, but the existing building was constructed in 1946. The property includes the chapel, the remains of a schoolhouse, cemetery, women’s outhouse, and a well.

1. Church, 1946 Contributing Building

Frierson Chapel Methodist Church is a two-room, L-shaped wooden building, with a stucco exterior. The main chapel is rectangular, and there is a Sunday School room sitting perpendicular to the main building on the southwest corner. The main entrance stairs are concrete and lead up to a wooden portico. The green shingles on the exterior are a unique design element. The gabled roof is covered in metal sheets. There is a

Frierson Chapel
Name of Property

Robertson, Tennessee
County and State

secondary entrance in the Sunday School on the western side, located in the corner where the main building and this second room meet.

The west façade of the church is the front entrance to the church structure, with a symmetrical placed nested porch entry under a wooden triangular portico supported by two square wooden columns. At the porch entry, concrete steps lead up to meet the wooden portico and landing; both the steps and landing are comprised of concrete block construction. Exterior green shingles define both the roofline along with the nested triangular portico covering the building’s original main entrance, and where an original double leaf, three-panel white door once existed leading into the main chapel. The dedication stone for the church, located to the left of the main entrance, is situated at the same level as the concrete entrance (landing), providing only the name of the church pastor and the date of construction.¹

The east elevation is the rear of the church. There are a total of four windows, all facing the cemetery. Two of the windows are part of the addition, and two are part of the church. There is a large crack going down the edge of the eastern wall. The green shingles mark the roofline of this side of the building as well.

The prominent feature on the south elevation is the Sunday School room. There is one window on this, and metal piping for electricity. The doorway on the southwest side is covered by a wooden overhang, and has cinder block steps leading up to the building. There are two windows on the main church building.

The interior has the original 1946 pulpit. The pews are arranged with a center aisle the original wooden altar railing that separates the pulpit from the congregation’s seating. Holes in the roof were recently filled to keep animals and rain out. There is a chimney on the northern wall, surrounded by two windows. The original floors and wainscoting are intact. The Sunday School room’s beadboard ceiling is still intact as well. The floor is bowed as the foundation is failing, but many original floorboards remains and can be restored. There are several structures on the property other than the chapel. The remnants of the Coopertown Colored School, which opened in late 1800s is to the northeast. Southwest of the chapel is the women’s outhouse. Lastly, the Frierson Chapel Cemetery is to the east, behind the chapel.

2. Cemetery, c. 1880-1960, Contributing site

Located directly behind Frierson Chapel is a cemetery that dates at least c. 1880. The cemetery is a contributing site as it was a public space and documents a service provided by the church. It is a partially enclosed space, surrounded by barbed wire fencing, which is covered in foliage, and a tree line. There is no signage that explicitly identifies the space as a cemetery, however this is made evident by the presence of grave markers. The cemetery is in fair condition; there is a lot of overgrowth, which makes it difficult to find unmarked graves as well as identify marked ones. Parallel depressions are found throughout the cemetery and provide evidence of unmarked graves. In addition to the depressions, the cemetery is full of both marked and unmarked stones. The number of stones and graves present at this cemetery is currently unknown.

¹ Carroll Van West states that “Dedication stones, or date markers, are another important way the church buildings themselves serve as key historical documents about the church’s origins and development. In analyzing the totality of the material culture associated with the rural African American church, they become the dominant feature and a key element to the identification of the building and of its historical importance, Carroll Van West, “Historic Rural African American Churches in Tennessee, 1850-1970 Multiple Property Nomination” National Register nomination (NR 11/30/99).

Frierson Chapel
Name of Property

Robertson, Tennessee
County and State

While there is brush covering the cemetery grounds that needs to be removed, it is important to note the presence of wisteria, which is often found at African American cemeteries, throughout the site. Wisteria is a long-living, non-native, invasive species used as an ornamental plant. The absence of it among other parts of the property suggest it was intentionally planted and cultivated in the cemetery.²

3. School ruins, c. 1946 Contributing Site

Only the northeast part of an addition to the wood frame school is still standing. This was the hot lunch addition added after the original structure was built. There is one doorway, facing the southwest and two window frames facing the east, toward the cemetery. As ruins, the site provides location, material, and other information about this building, while it has very little recorded in local history yet this site further documents the social work of the church to provide educational opportunities for local African American children. In 1867, Tennessee's first post-Civil War public education law was passed which required separate schools for white and African American children, thus setting the stage for Tennessee's racially segregated public school system for the next century.³ Even as Tennessee's public school system evolved and matured throughout the first decades of the 20th century, segregation remained a defining component of education in Tennessee when the school was built in 1946. During this era, state laws were enacted through the Tennessee Legislature, which became known as "Jim Crow Laws," instated as education state statutes (1925) and state codes (1932) requiring racial segregation of both elementary and high schools to be maintained as separate facilities for white and Negro children.⁴

The main one room schoolhouse has collapsed. It was a wood frame structure with one entrance, a left-oriented doorway with cinder block stairs leading into the building. The metal sheet roof is visible among the remnants.

4. Outhouse, c. 1946 Contributing Outbuilding

The women's outhouse is southwest of the chapel. This structure is a rectangular wooden building, with a metal sheet roof. There is a cinder block toilet within. The men's outhouse is no longer standing, and its location is unknown.

² "Wisteria sinensis (Sims) DC." Tennessee Invasive Plant Council. <http://www.tnipc.org/invasiveplants/plant-details/?id=26>. [1 March 2018].

³ "Provide for the Reorganization, Supervision and Maintenance of Free Common Schools." *Tennessee Public Act of 1867*: Chapter 27, Section 17 (Schools for Colored Children). State of Tennessee, Second Adjourned Session, 34th General Assembly, 1866-1867 (Nashville, Tennessee): 39-40.

⁴ "Establish and Maintain a Uniform System of Public Education," *Tennessee Public Act of 1925*: Chapter 115, HB No. 780, Section 13 (Elementary Schools) & Section 14 (High Schools). State of Tennessee, 64th General Assembly, 1925 (Nashville, Tennessee): 349-353.; Black Past. "(1866) Jim Crow Laws: Tennessee 1866-1955," (3 January 2011). Available [online]: <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/jim-crow-laws-tennessee-1866-1955/>.

Frierson Chapel
Name of Property

Robertson, Tennessee
County and State

5. Well, c. 1946 Noted Not included in Inventory

A square well cap made of poured cement sits nearly flush to the ground in the brush and overgrowth located just west of the school ruins. There is a hole in the center of the well cap that likely held a pitcher pump or similar hand pump mechanism for drawing water, as access to water was so important to these schools.

Site and Setting

The site of the Frierson Chapel Methodist Church which includes the surrounding grounds and cemetery, remnants of a school house, outhouse and well are intact and retain their historic integrity exemplifying a rural African American church, as well as African American education and social history. Frierson Chapel, situated off Old Coopertown Road, the Frierson Chapel property and its resources on the site have seen limited, yet understandable changes since the acquisition of the property by the area's African American community. Originally founded as the New Bethel Methodist (Colored) Church on a one-acre site deeded in 1870, and later an additional half acre was deeded for the church graveyard in 1880. By 1880, boundaries of the property were established that included a church, the Coopertown Colored School, and cemetery. In 1892, property from R. G. Glover's estate was deeded to the New Bethel Methodist Colored Church to establish a one-room school house for area African American children. Today, the site presently known as Frierson Chapel is surrounded by predominantly agricultural uses which includes a nearby tobacco barn, other various agricultural cropland, as well as intermittent pockets of areas outlined by tree-lined forested areas.

Integrity

Frierson Chapel meets the registration requirements for Historic Rural African American Churches in Tennessee, 1850-1970 Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF) as an individual church building that has extant outbuildings and a church cemetery on the same property lot. According to the integrity guidelines set forth in the MPDF coversheet, the church meets the registration requirements in its location, association, setting, feeling, design materials, and workmanship. Few alterations have occurred to the church building since its original construction and there are no additions to the building. The historic cemetery dates to the acquisition of the property in 1880 and contains a majority of known burials prior to 1943 continuing through the period of significance.

Frierson Chapel
 Name of Property

Robertson, Tennessee
 County and State

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.)
 Property is:

- 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 old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ETHNIC HERITAGE; African American
SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance

1946-1970

Significant Dates

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

N/A

Frierson Chapel
Name of Property

Robertson, Tennessee
County and State

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

The Frierson Chapel Methodist Church located off Old Coopertown Road in Coopertown, Tennessee, is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its local significance associated with African American ethnic heritage, specifically in the area of social history in Robertson County from 1946 to 1970. In addition, the property meets the registration requirements in the Historic Rural African American Churches in Tennessee, 1850-1970 Multiple Property Nomination Form. The Frierson Chapel has two other related primary resources –cemetery (c. 1880), and a school site (c. 1910). The site of Frierson Chapel was originally known as the New Bethel Methodist (Colored) Church, of which a congregation had existed at this site since 1870. Additional acreage was deeded in 1880 for a church cemetery, and in 1892 property was added again and explicitly deeded for a school house. In 1946, the church was rebuilt for the fourth time and renamed for then pastor, W. D. Frierson, situated within the Springfield Parish of the Clarksville District. Although the period of significance ends in 1970 Frierson Chapel continued on this site as a congregation until late May 1992.

Narrative Statement of Significance

Early Coopertown Area

The community today known as Coopertown, located in southern Robertson County, Tennessee is centered on the juncture of Highway 49, Old Coopertown Road and Burgess Gower Road. Although not officially incorporated until 1996, the Coopertown community situated in this area of Robertson County has remained largely agricultural and rural with historic origins prior to the formation of Robertson County as well as Tennessee statehood dating back to 1796. According to Goodspeed, by 1825 the area was originally known as Nave’s Crossroads following David Nave’s settlement in the vicinity and where he later built a blacksmith shop. As pioneer settlement progressed, followed by initial small-town development in the area that included early business establishment, particularly needed to support the area’s thriving whiskey industry. Upon the arrival of the first pioneer settlers to Robertson County, the art of making whisky became an early economic activity that grew to require the employment of an increasing number of coopers from the area employed in the manufacture of barrels for the nearby Red River Mills Distillery. Eventually, a rural village arose located in the Robertson County’s Thirteenth Civil District and quickly became known as Coopertown, and included an early stagecoach line running through the Coopertown community, Turnersville, and Port Royal, connecting early transportation networks between Nashville, Tennessee and Hopkinsville, Kentucky.⁵

By late 1838 and 1839, the Coopertown community witnessed several waves of Cherokee Indian emigrants removed from east Tennessee, western North Carolina, and northern Georgia along Old Coopertown Road and later became known as the Trail of Tears route through Tennessee. The “Northern Route” followed along Old Coopertown Road/Burgess Gower Road which saw the forced movement of thousands of Cherokee Indians and their slaves from their homelands upon signing the New Echota Treaty. Along their

⁵ Goodspeed *Histories of Montgomery, Robertson, Humphreys, Stewart, Dickson, Cheatham, and Houston Counties of Tennessee*, 1886. Available [online]: <https://www.tngenweb.org/goodspeed/robertson/history.html> [23 May 2019].

Frierson Chapel

Name of Property

Robertson, Tennessee

County and State

journey many Indians died from disease, fatigue, exposure, including starvation as they traveled on foot or by wagon, arriving into Robertson County from Cheatham County, after crossing at a ford (Frey Ford Road) on Sycamore Creek.⁶ From here they continued north along Martin Chapel Road through Coopertown on what is known today as Old Coopertown Road, and after crossing TN State Road 49, they followed Burgess Gower Road northwest to Charlie Maxie Road passing near Joseph Washington's Wessyngton Plantation at Turnersville.⁷ As they continued along Charlie Maxie Road, they crossed the confluence of Millers Creek and Honey Run Creek, and then followed Ed Ross Road to a point where the route is now a private farm access road, and cut off from the main road. The remainder of the route through Robertson County then follows Tobey Darden Road near the Harmony Church and continues toward the Montgomery County line.⁸

In 1850, Goodspeed states that after decades of increasing support for temperance societies, the Sons of Temperance erected a building in Coopertown which included a hall as well as a store-room upstairs. The Tennessee State legislature chartered the Sons and Daughters of Temperance group in 1848 and became among the strongest temperance organizations in the state.⁹ During the following year, a post office was also placed in that same building which included a stock of goods by W. W. Glover and James Graves. Despite the town's business involvement in the whiskey industry, Coopertown never had a saloon and very little liquor was sold there. Some of Coopertown's early businesses at that time included: Davis & Son and Hinkle & Glover, general merchandise; R. G. Glover (physician), drugs; F. M. Watts, steam flouring-mill; J. J. Reeves, undertaking; Scruggs & Reeves, blacksmithing; S. W. Frey and R. G. Glover, physicians.¹⁰

From the earliest settlement of the area known as Coopertown, settlers pursued basic survival, subsistent agricultural production, and worked to establish a civil society and culture using the area's abundant available resources to build houses, create home goods, as well as make clothing for themselves and their families. Other crucial activities also included the organization of schools and the formation of churches to assist in creating a sense of community, while also taking care of their spiritual needs as well. The earliest known area school was located on Old Coopertown Road and Tennessee Highway 49, where Coopertown

⁶ Yolanda G. Reid and Rick S. Gregory. *Robertson County, Tennessee: Home of the World's Finest Celebrating 200 Years*. (Paducah, KY: Turner Publishing Company, 1996): 35-36.

⁷ John F. Baker. *The Washingtons and Wessyngton: Stories of my Family's Generational Journey to Freedom*. (New York, NY: Atria, 2009): 65.

⁸ Benjamin C. Nance. *The Trail of Tears in Tennessee: A Study of the Routes Used During the Cherokee Removal of 1838*. (Nashville, TN: Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation Division of Archaeology, 2001: 32, Available [online]: https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/environment/archaeology/documents/reportofinvestigations/arch_roi15_trail_of_tears_2001.pdf [28 May 2019].

⁹ Kay Baker Gaston, *Boarder States: Journal of the Kentucky-Tennessee American Studies Association*. "Tennessee Distilleries: Their Rise, Fall and Re-emergence," No. 12, 1999, (Murfreesboro: Middle Tennessee State University), Available [online]: <http://spider.georgetowncollege.edu/htallant/border/bs12/fr-gasto.htm> [23 May 2019].

¹⁰ *Goodspeed Histories of Montgomery, Robertson, Humphreys, Stewart, Dickson, Cheatham, and Houston Counties of Tennessee*, 1886. Available [online]: <https://www.tngenweb.org/goodspeed/robertson/history.html> [23 May 2019].

Frierson Chapel

Name of Property

Robertson, Tennessee

County and State

Elementary now stands; a school has been at this location since before 1910 until present today. The oldest known church is the Battle Creek Baptist Church, organized in 1844 on one acre deeded from James Watt and where a meeting house had already existed, named for nearby Battle Creek¹¹. Later in 1866, the Coopertown Church of Christ was formed with approximately forty members, which included founding members Dr. R.G. Glover (local physician), J. L. York, and Albert Lipscomb and their families, with R. B. Tremble, Elder.¹²

Although prior to 1800, a vast majority of the Robertson County area's inhabitants used no slave labor, still a few early settlers in the area brought slaves with them to assist in their agricultural production efforts. The socio-economic structure of Robertson's early population was made up of large landowners who owned slaves, large land owners who had no slaves, commercial and professional people, small landed farmers, the landless, bonded slaves, as well as a small contingent of free blacks.¹³ The 1860 Robertson County Census records 29 free colored persons living in Robertson County, while 4,861 colored persons were considered bonded slaves, and a white population of 10,375 which combined to total a population of 15,265 people in Robertson County.¹⁴ The land in Robertson County was ideally suited for agriculture, primarily the labor intensive tobacco crop. By 1859, Robertson County had 729 slave owners, with most slaveowners possessing few slaves according the breakdown of slave ownership as follows: 140 people owned a single slave, while 591 possessed less than 9 slaves.¹⁵

As economic growth, prosperity and early town building began to take hold across the county, by the 1860s economic progress and development opportunities were hampered upon Tennessee's secession in June 1861 followed by Civil War. Although very little military action occurred within Robertson County's borders, following the war the area remained under Union control until 1867 when Tennessee was readmitted to the Union in July 1866. The effects of the Civil War affected whites as well as blacks as both were significantly impacted from the war's unprecedented physical destruction, human displacement, agricultural decline, and economic upheaval. As a result, the long-term consequences of slavery's demise also saw Tennessee's labor system no longer resemble its antebellum predecessor of chattel slavery. Instead, a new land tenancy system was developing; however, that process was still far from complete and yet it would have political, social and economic consequences for generations.

¹¹ The site of the 1780 Indian conflict at Battle Creek near Coopertown, Tennessee, Yolanda G. Reid and Rick S. Gregory. *Robertson County, Tennessee: Home of the World's Finest Celebrating 200 Years*. (Paducah, KY: Turner Publishing Company, 1996): 20.

¹² *Goodspeed Histories of Montgomery, Robertson, Humphreys, Stewart, Dickson, Cheatham, and Houston Counties of Tennessee*, 1886. Available [online]: <https://www.tngenweb.org/goodspeed/robertson/history.html> [23 May 2019].

¹³ Yolanda G. Reid and Rick S. Gregory. *Robertson County, Tennessee: Home of the World's Finest Celebrating 200 Years*. (Paducah, KY: Turner Publishing Company, 1996): 27.

¹⁴ Robertson County, Tennessee. Eighth Census Population Abstract. United States Census, 1860. (Washington, D.C.: 1864): 466.

¹⁵ Yolanda G. Reid and Rick S. Gregory. *Robertson County, Tennessee: Home of the World's Finest Celebrating 200 Years*. (Paducah, KY: Turner Publishing Company, 1996): 57.

Frierson Chapel
Name of Property

Robertson, Tennessee
County and State

Reconstruction in Coopertown

Following the Civil War, the area in and around Coopertown remained a small rural farming community largely based on agricultural production which included both white and black inhabitants just as it had been for many years throughout much of the early to mid-nineteenth Century. Coopertown, like many small rural communities following Reconstruction and lasting until the turn of the century, would realize the establishment of a new economic, political, social and cultural order among blacks and whites. Yet, while the Civil War's end brought about the demise of the institution of slavery, still black and white citizens had to develop new social and economic rules in which to govern and conduct their changing relationship between both races. For many formerly enslaved African Americans now considered freedmen, they faced the challenges of obtaining land, creating a livelihood, reconnecting and providing for their families, as well as developing their own institutions such as churches and schools, as well as creating social organizations and places in Robertson County. For African Americans living in rural areas like Coopertown, life often centered around the church because of the limitations of accessibility to social facilities and organizations to them, which included transportation opportunities.

Beyond regular religious services, black churches also hosted picnics, fairs and festivals in many communities, while churches offered Sabbath schools where children were taught the Bible and Christian principles on Sundays. Selected social topics were also discussed as a means of reinforcing African American community values for self-help, race pride and community solidarity. Following the Civil War, under the protection of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Constitutional Amendments and the Civil Rights Act of 1866, African Americans enjoyed a period where they were allowed to vote, actively participate in the political process, acquire the land of former owners, seek their own employment, and use public accommodations. It is during this time that the New Bethel Methodist (Colored) Church was established representing not only the resilience of the formerly enslaved, but also the importance of the church as the single most significant institution in African American life and community; a sacred burial space, religious, educational and social gathering place. However, opponents of this progress soon rallied against the newly acquired freedoms of former slaves and began to find means to erode their hard-fought recent gains by enacting "Jim Crow" laws.¹⁶

Following the U.S. Supreme Court overturn of the Civil Rights Act of 1875, "Jim Crow" laws were passed that separated blacks from whites. Between 1866 and 1955, Tennessee's Legislature enacted twenty Jim Crow laws which included six requiring school segregation, four which outlawed miscegenation (mixing of the races), three which segregated railroads, two requiring segregation for public accommodations, and one which mandated segregation on streetcars. An 1869 law barring segregation "declared that no citizen could be excluded from the University of Tennessee because of race or color but then also mandated that instructional facilities for black students be separate from those used by white students." And as late as 1954, "segregation laws for miscegenation, transportation and public accommodation [remained] in effect" in Tennessee and throughout most southern States.¹⁷

¹⁶ Black Past. "(1866) Jim Crow Laws: Tennessee 1866-1955," (3 January 2011). Available [online]: <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/jim-crow-laws-tennessee-1866-1955/> [23 May 2019].

¹⁷ Ibid.

Frierson Chapel
Name of Property

Robertson, Tennessee
County and State

Constructed during the Jim Crow era when many African American churches were being burned down, rural churches like Frierson Chapel were historically set on the outskirts of the “white world” and hidden from the public view.¹⁸ Also not surprising during this era, considering the disenfranchisement of the African-

American population on various fronts, is the fact that many rural African American churches also tended to assemble other related buildings, structures and sites located on or adjacent to the church property.¹⁹ Situated on approximately 1.9 acres, the nominated site entails a simple chapel, remains of a schoolhouse, a cemetery, woman’s outhouse, and a well located at the end of a meandering unpaved dirt road, well-defined by a tree line and swales, and passes by an old tobacco barn and adjacent agricultural fields. Beyond this isolated rural setting that allowed the congregation to meet undisturbed and out of sight, the church’s surroundings further add to the historical environment of the Frierson Chapel, which is set within the larger landscape of settlement as a place of significant symbolic importance to the African American community. The historic Frierson Chapel and the site encompasses a period of significance that begins in 1880 with the land acquisition, establishment of a cemetery, and later a school and ends in 1970 when the church remained an active congregation, with its role in the community intact for another twenty-two years until it closed its doors in May 1992.

New Bethel Methodist Colored Church

In April 1870, Joseph J. Felts deeded land for the New Bethel Methodist (Colored) Church that eventually would become Frierson Chapel to Nathan J. Glover, William J. Williams, and Joseph Y. Lane, church trustees. The latter may be listed in the 1870 Census, District 13 for Robertson County. The listing is for a Joe Lane, age 29, who was a cooper. He was married to M.A. Lane, who was listed as a “mulatto” and housekeeper. Located off Old Coopertown Road, the church was founded as the Methodist Church (Colored) at New Bethel upon the purchase of a one-acre lot for forty dollars from Joseph J. Felts, an area farmer.²⁰ In the state of Tennessee, there are only two known African American church buildings that remain from the congregations founded between 1863 and 1870 but there are many church locations, such as that of New Bethel/Frierson Chapel that date to this transformative period in Tennessee history.²¹

New Bethel was a Colored Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church. West states that specifically through the work of William E. Capers of Virginia, “the Methodist church was the first mainstream white denomination

¹⁸Carroll Van West, “Assessment Guidelines for Nominating Historic Rural African-American Churches to the National Register of Historic Places,” *Powerful Artifacts: A Guide to Surveying and Documenting Rural African-American Churches in the South* (Center for Historic Preservation, July 2000): 34.

¹⁹ Carroll Van West, *Powerful Artifacts*, 39.

²⁰ Robertson County, Tennessee, Deed Book 15, April 1870: 36; Deed Book 20, April 1880: 494; Deed Book 54, April 1892: 331. Together these three original deeds reference the land acquisition by the church trustees establishing the New Bethel (today called Frierson Chapel) Church site.

²¹ Carroll Van West, *Powerful Artifacts*, 27-32.

Frierson Chapel

Robertson, Tennessee

Name of Property

County and State

to actively bring evangelism to Tennessee slaves.”²² The idea of African Americans breaking away from the Methodist Episcopal Church, South to form their own institution and tend to matters more central to black communities was formally discussed at the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal, South in New Orleans in 1866. Despite the CME Church not having formally split from the Methodist Episcopal, South until 1870, the Capers CME Memorial Church in Nashville dates to 1866 and its leaders played a key role in the emergence and then formation of the separate CME institution that came four years later.²³ Isaac Lane, a formerly enslaved person, helped found both the CME Church and Lane College, a CME institution.²⁴ Carroll Van West writes that, “In that year, Capers members along with about forty black Methodists in West Tennessee broke from the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and formed an independent denomination more reflective of issues central to the black community. Advanced education, community involvement through outreach, and spiritual growth were just a few of the tenets of the founding group, that became the CME Church in America on December 16, 1870, in Jackson, Tennessee.”²⁵ The newly established New Bethel (later Frierson Chapel) eventually affiliated as a CME congregation.

Originally, the CME church existed as “old segregated ‘colored churches’ within the White Methodist Church, South.”²⁶ White conservative members of the church pushed black congregants to create a separate space within the ME Church, South, where blacks would worship apart from whites. In doing this, white members of the ME Church, South, were able to deter blacks from joining African Methodist Episcopal (AME) or African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) congregations. The push for this “separate but equal” type division in the church resulted from heightened racial prejudices during the Reconstruction era. West writes, “that white members wanted the black churches out of their organization.”²⁷ This notion depicts the “veil” that W.E.B. DuBois spoke about in *The Souls of Black Folks*. African Americans were forced to exist in the periphery, behind a veil that separated whites and blacks. The physical expression of that “veil” at Frierson can be seen through the long, hidden, unpaved drive that leads up to Frierson Chapel.

By the late 1800s and early 1900s, the northern counties of Tennessee, including Robertson County, were in a depression due to the falling prices of tobacco, the area’s main cash crop. Dark-fired tobacco barns are a critical feature in Robertson County’s historical landscape. In an effort to drive up prices and demand for tobacco, local townsmen labeled themselves as vigilantes, dressed in hoods, and armed themselves with weapons. The men rode on horseback and carried out acts of violence against both white and African

²² Ibid., 24.

²³ Charles Henry Phillips, *The History of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in America: Comprising Its Organization, Subsequent Development, and Present Status* (Jackson, Tennessee Publishing House C.M.E. Church, 1898), 23.; Carroll Van West, “Historic Rural African American Churches in Tennessee, 1850-1970 Multiple Property Nomination” National Register nomination (NR 11/30/99): Section E, page, 9.

²⁴ Carroll Van West, *Powerful Artifacts*, 11-12.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 11.

²⁷ Carroll Van West, *Powerful Artifacts: A Guide to Surveying and Documenting Rural African-American Churches in the South* (Center for Historic Preservation, July 2000): 11.

Frierson Chapel

Name of Property

Robertson, Tennessee

County and State

American citizens. For this, they became known as the tobacco night riders of the Black Patch War. Common attacks included guerilla warfare and lynching, but also included destruction of property, barns, and livestock. The violence subsided around 1907-1909 due to public backlash and rising tobacco prices. The last efforts of night riders ended in 1914 with the start of World War I. It should be noted that there is a ca. 1900 dark-fired tobacco barn along the gravel path that leads back to Frierson Chapel, linking the agricultural, racial, economic and social histories to that location. While proximity helps better understand these linkages, it is currently not known if these attacks affected the Bethel congregation.²⁸

In April 1880, after the church was founded, J.J. Felts transferred one half acres to the church trustees, Shedrick Frey, James M. Williams, and Franklin Lane, for fifteen dollars that encompassed the church graveyard at New Bethel Methodist Church (Colored). An additional one acre was sold to Henry Demonbreun by the executors of Dr. R. G. Glover's will and testament in April 1892. This land was also deeded to the church trustees specifically to create a one room school for African American children. By c. 1880 the boundaries of the nominated property were established—a place that included a church, school, and cemetery.

The school, officially named Coopertown Colored School, was number two in school District Fourteen, although the church is in Civil District Thirteen. The school's earliest known records date back to 1892 and cite Callie Lucas as the sole teacher, with a salary of \$25. Please refer to Appendix A for a complete list of teacher names, dates, and salaries. The Tennessee Board of Education began in 1907 and required more records be kept of all registered educational institutions. The first Annual Statistical Report from 1921 said Coopertown Colored School had three single desks, nine double desks, but a total enrollment of thirty-one students for the year.²⁹ While the building was not equipped to house all students in a single day, the average daily attendance hung around thirteen.³⁰ The classroom conditions were significantly worse than the students' white counterparts. The lighting was marked as "poor," water was determined unsanitary for drinking, there was not a library, and the building was heated with an "ordinary stove."³¹ Over time, the language in the reports changed, and was later removed, to ensure that the quality of the buildings and its resources did not look as dire.

For example, the lighting quality was no longer assessed, but the number of windows were counted; the number of desks and library increased, but student enrollment still outnumbered the available resources.³² By the 1940s, only student enrollment was assessed in the equivalent reports.³³ The school offered grades one

²⁸ Rick Gregory. *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, "Black Patch War," (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society), <https://tennesseencyclopedia.net/entries/black-patch-war/>, Available [online]: 1 March 2018; for more information on the Black Patch War, see Christopher Waldrep, *Night Riders: Defending Community in the Black Patch, 1890-1915* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University, 1993).

²⁹ "Colored Elementary Schools," Annual Statistical Report Robertson County Schools, 1921-1922, Schools Collection, Robertson County Archives.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² "Colored Elementary Schools," Annual Statistical Report of Robertson County Schools, 1931-1932, Robertson County Education Records.

Frierson Chapel

Name of Property

Robertson, Tennessee

County and State

through six. At some point, an additional room was built, attached to the school for a hot lunch program. Coopertown Colored School officially closed in 1959 to be consolidated with Bransford School in Springfield, the larger African American school in the county at that time.³⁴ It should be noted that Coopertown Colored was not a Rosenwald School, as it was built much earlier than the program started. The school site documents an initiative undertaken by the community without the aid of a national program or the resources of the local county school system.³⁵ Upon the school's consolidation in 1959, it further documents both the state and local efforts to incorporate the small rural school located on the site of the Frierson Chapel Methodist Church in order to provide a "separate but equal" educational facility for African American students within Robertson County who would attend Bransford School in Springfield, Tennessee.

In 1943, a tornado destroyed the church building. It was rebuilt in 1946 and named Frierson Chapel after the pastor at the time, Reverend W.D. Frierson, which is also include in a dedication stone at the present building. A newspaper clipping at the Robertson County Archives reports that the congregation of Frierson had to rebuild their church and schoolhouse four times because the buildings had been burnt down three times before. Although, the article that references this event is from a local Coopertown resident scrapbook kept by S. W. Frey beginning in 1889, the date and newspaper source for this article is unknown.³⁶

Frierson Chapel closed its doors in late May 1992 due to low attendance numbers, an aging congregation, and accessibility issues. Dissolution papers were drawn up to discontinue the church and the remaining membership was placed with the St. John United Methodist Church in Springfield, Tennessee. It is during this time that the official church directory was lost. In May 2013, the remaining members persuaded the United Methodist Church to donate the property to the Town of Coopertown. Since then, community members have worked to collect as much information about its history as possible. In Fall 2013, the Tennessee Preservation Trust listed it as one of its Ten in Tennessee properties to save, in hopes of drawing more attention to the community's preservation efforts.³⁷

³³ "Colored Elementary Schools," Annual Statistical Report of Robertson County Schools, 1941-1942, Robertson County Education Records.

³⁴ Yolanda Reid (County Historian), an interview with the Robertson County Historian, Robertson County Archives, Springfield, Tennessee, November 8, 2018.

³⁵ Robertson County, Tennessee, Deed Book 15, April 1870: 36; Deed Book 20, April 1880: 494; Deed Book 54, April 1892: 331; Together these three original deeds reference the land acquisition by the church trustees establishing the New Bethel (today called Frierson Chapel) Church site.

³⁶ S. W. Frey Scrapbook, area resident of Coopertown who began this scrapbook in 1889, Robertson Count Archives, Springfield, Tennessee.

³⁷"Frierson Chapel." Town of Coopertown, Tennessee. http://www.coopertowntn.org/Calendar/Frierson_Chapel/; Yolanda Reid. *Robertson County Tennessee Cemetery Records, Additions & Corrections*. Springfield, Tennessee: Robertson County Archives, September 2012); the information gathered about Frierson comes from sources available at the Tennessee State Library and Archives, Coopertown City Hall, the Robertson County Archives, and a variety of secondary sources. Community members played a key role in this process by gathering information from residents of Coopertown, including the MTSU-CHP students who assisted in compiling information for the National Register nomination for the Frierson Chapel Methodist Church,

Frierson Chapel
Name of Property

Robertson, Tennessee
County and State

Today, Frierson Chapel is among some of the oldest extant African American church sites located in Robertson County from the Jim Crow era. This trend of multiple uses encompassed on one site of black church buildings and situated within small towns or rural areas is significant under Criterion A for social history during and noted for the Jim Crow Era in the Historic African American Churches Multiple Property Documentation Form. With a period of significance from 1946-1970, this property represents the struggle of rural African Americans in Robertson County during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to maintain not only a sense of community and cohesiveness, but to offer support for spiritual growth and outreach, including cultural and educational advancement despite existing social mandates, economic constraints, and racial segregation.

Frierson Chapel
Name of Property

Robertson, Tennessee
County and State

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Frierson Chapel
 Name of Property

Robertson, Tennessee
 County and State

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West, Carroll Van, "Historic Rural African American Churches in Tennessee, 1850-1970 Multiple Property Nomination" National Register nomination (NR 11/30/99)."

Previous documentation on file (NPS):		Primary location of additional data:	
preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)			State Historic Preservation Office
previously listed in the National Register			Other State agency
previously determined eligible by the National Register			Federal agency
designated a National Historic Landmark			Local government
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #			University
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #			Other
recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey #		Name of repository:	
Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):			

Frierson Chapel
Name of Property

Robertson, Tennessee
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1.9 **USGS Quadrangle** South Springfield

(Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates. Delete the other.)

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84:
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 36.436050, | Longitude: -86.958151 |
| 2. Latitude: 36.435904, | Longitude: -86.956609 |
| 3. Latitude: 36.435230, | Longitude: -86.958407 |
| 4. Latitude: 36.435477, | Longitude: -86.956742 |
| 5. Latitude: 36.435478, | Longitude: -86.957249 |
| 6. Latitude: 36.435171, | Longitude: -86.957346 |

Verbal Boundary Description

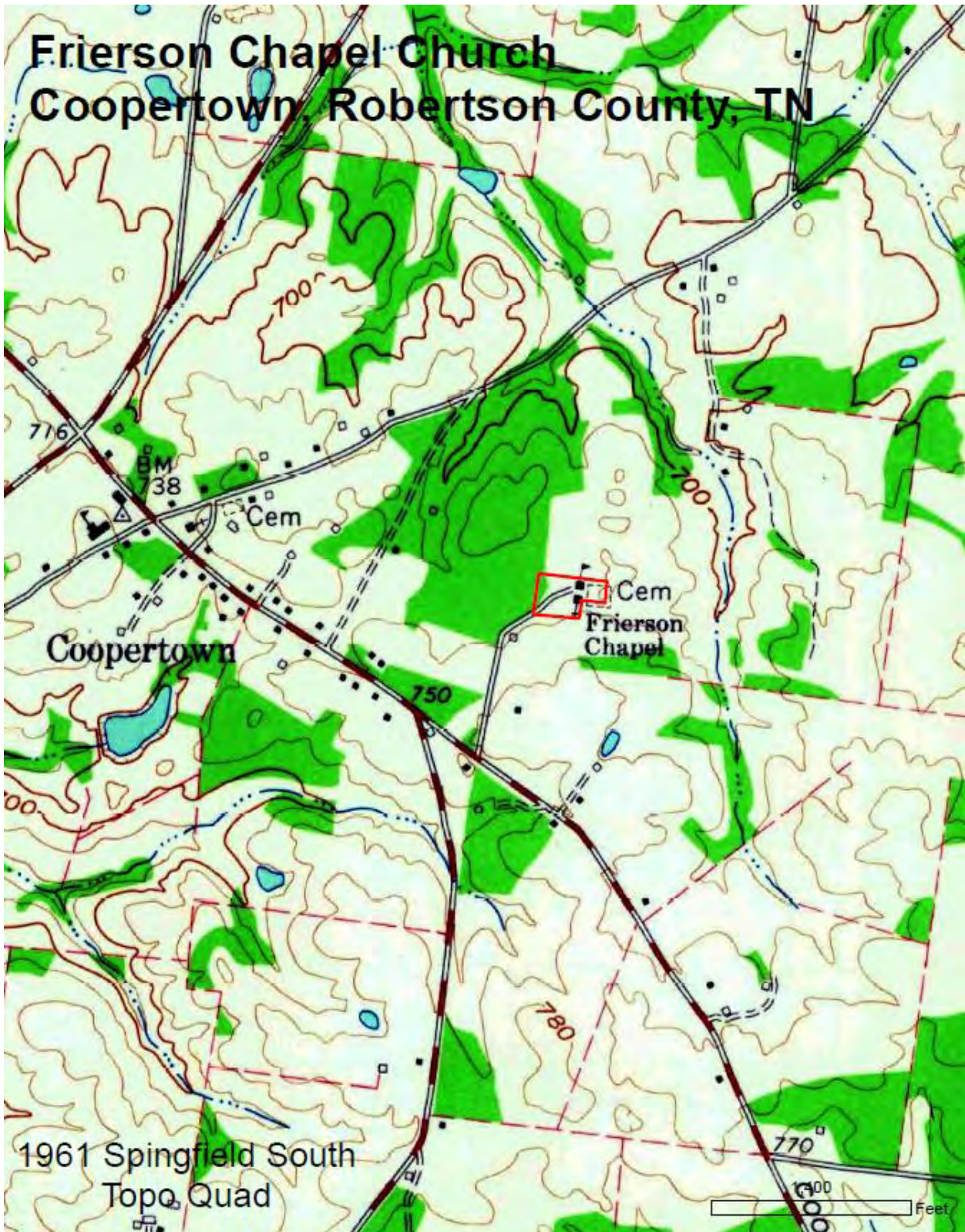
Frierson Chapel Methodist Church, located 0.20 mile off Old Coopertown Road inside Coopertown, Tennessee, city limits, is a half mile from Highway 49 in Robertson County. The nominated property consists of approximately 1.9 acres on parcel 118, Robertson County tax map 11. The property includes both wooded areas and open, as well as an historic modest L-shaped church and cemetery, and the remains of a women's outhouse and well that are associated with late nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth century rural African American churches and their ethnic heritage.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries for the nominated property includes 1.9 acres historically associated with the congregation known originally as the New Bethel Colored Church until 1946 when it was renamed Frierson Chapel Methodist Church after then pastor, W. D. Frierson. The map scale used for this nomination is the only scale available for this rural area of Tennessee.

Frierson Chapel
Name of Property

Robertson, Tennessee
County and State



National Register Location Map, Springfield South USGS Topo

Frierson Chapel
Name of Property

Robertson, Tennessee
County and State



National Register Boundary Map, Tennessee Tax Assessor, Robertson County Tax Map 11, Parcel 118

Frierson Chapel
Name of Property

Robertson, Tennessee
County and State

11. Form Prepared By

Name Tonya Blades (GNRC) and Savannah Grandey (MTSU Center for Historic Preservation)

Organization Greater Nashville Regional Council

Street & Number 220 Athens Way, Suite 200 Date May 28, 2019

City or Town Nashville Telephone 615/862-8857

E-mail tblades@gnrc.org State TN Zip Code 37228

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to map.
- **Photographs** (refer to Tennessee Historical Commission National Register *Photo Policy* for submittal of digital images and prints)
- **Additional items:** (additional supporting documentation including historic photographs, historic maps, etc. should be included on a Continuation Sheet following the photographic log and sketch maps)

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 listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).
Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Frierson Chapel
Name of Property

Robertson, Tennessee
County and State

Photo Log

Name of Property:
City or Vicinity: Coopertown
County: Robertson State: Tennessee
Photographer: Savannah Grandey
Date Photographed: February 20, 2018 and October 8, 2018

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 24. Front façade (#1). Photographer facing east.
- 2 of 24. Northwest oblique (#1). Photographer facing southeast.
- 3 of 24. North elevation (#1). Photographer facing south.
- 4 of 24. Northeast oblique (#1). Photographer facing southwest.
- 5 of 24. East elevation (#1). Photographer facing west.
- 6 of 24. South elevation (#1). Photographer facing north.
- 7 of 24. Southwest oblique (#1). Photographer facing northeast.
- 8 of 24. Founder's stone on front façade/west elevation (#1). Photographer facing east.
- 9 of 24. Setting of church building adjacent to school ruins (#1 & 3). Photographer facing east.
- 10 of 24. Unpaved roadway to district. Photographer facing northeast.
- 11 of 24. Unpaved roadway from district. Photographer facing west.
- 12 of 24. School ruins (#3). Photographer facing northeast.
- 13 of 24. East elevation of school ruins (#3). Photographer facing northwest.
- 14 of 24. Cemetery (#2). Photographer facing northwest.
- 15 of 24. Cemetery (#2), outhouse in background. Photographer facing southwest.
- 16 of 24. Plot fencing in cemetery (#2). Photographer facing south.
- 17 of 24. Plot fencing in cemetery (#2). Photographer facing east.
- 18 of 24. Grave markers (#2). Photographer facing northeast.

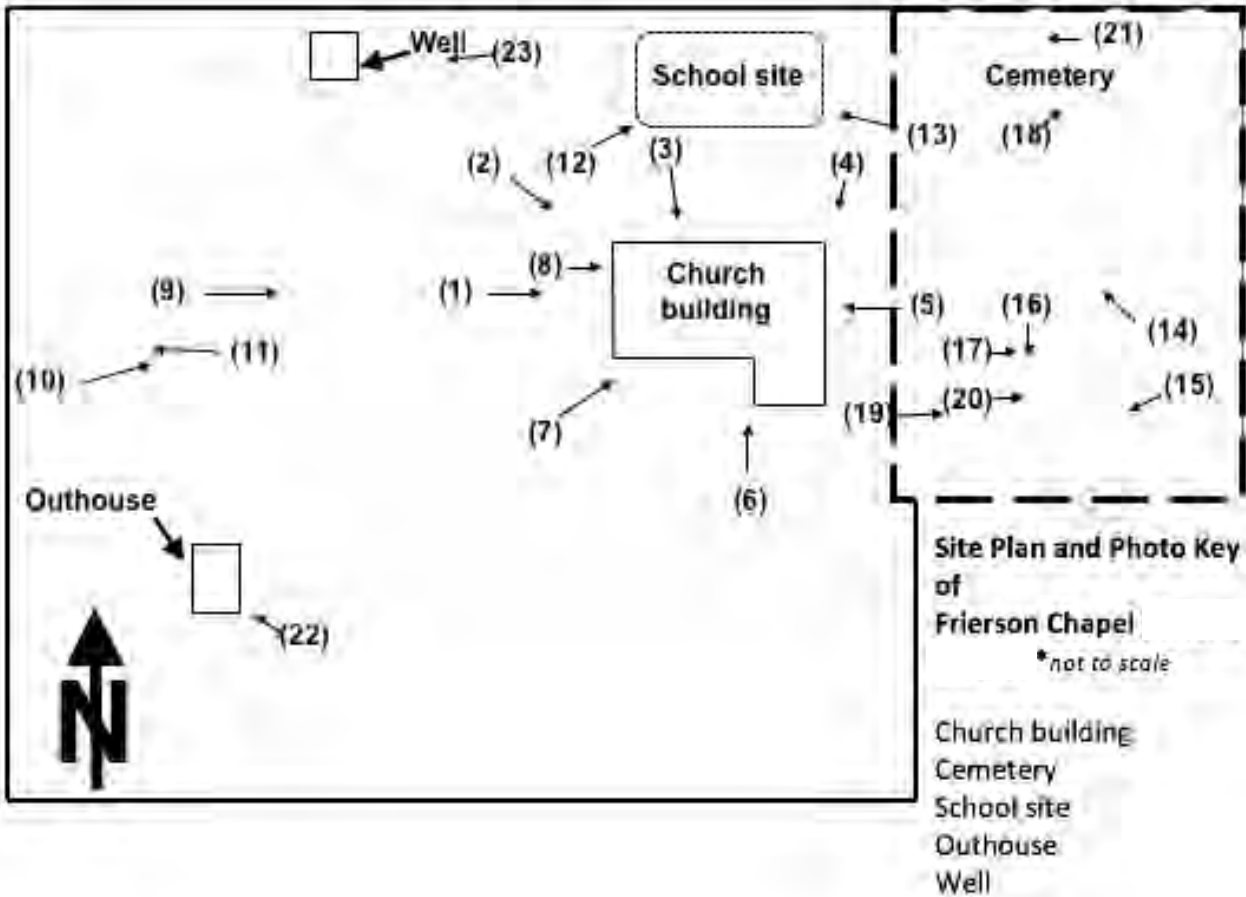
Frierson Chapel
Name of Property

Robertson, Tennessee
County and State

-
- 19 of 24. Damaged headstone (#2). Photographer facing east.
- 20 of 24. Grave marker (#2). Photographer facing east.
- 21 of 24. Grave depression along northern side of fence surrounding cemetery (#2). Photographer facing west.
- 22 of 24. East and south elevations of outhouse ruins (#4). Photographer facing northwest.
- 23 of 24. Well (#5). Photographer facing west.
- 24 of 24. Interior of church building (#1). Photographer facing east.

Frierson Chapel
Name of Property

Robertson, Tennessee
County and State



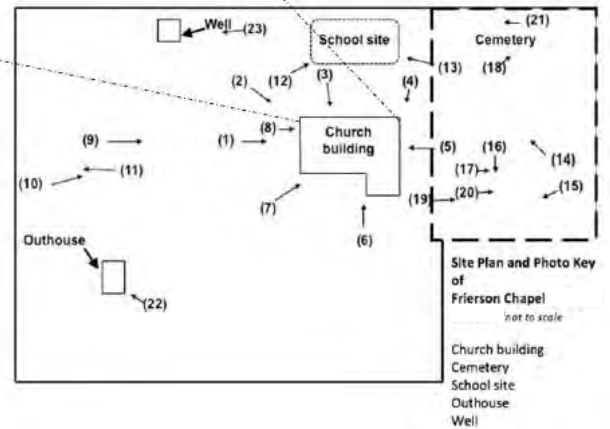
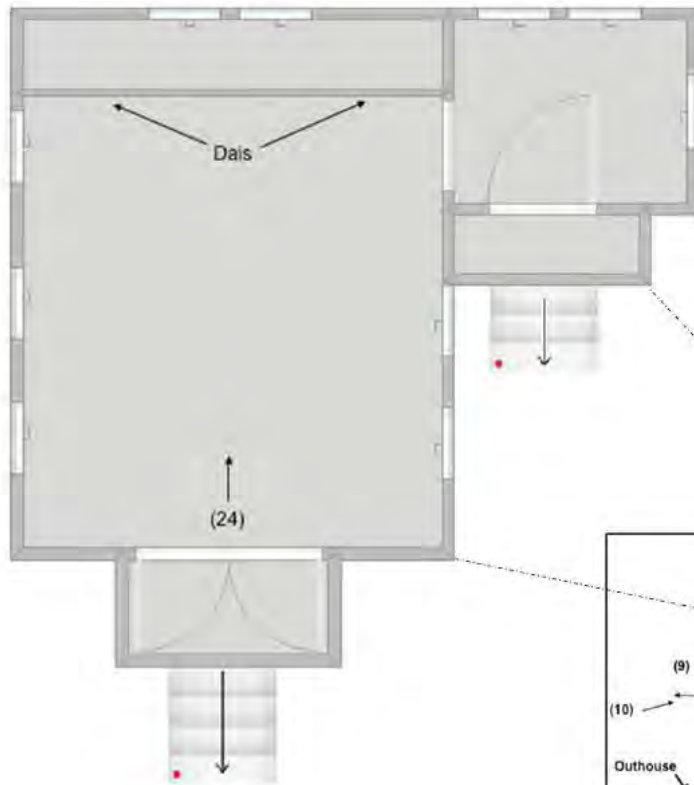
Site Plan with photo locations keyed to plan

Frierson Chapel
Name of Property

Robertson, Tennessee
County and State

CHURCH FLOOR PLAN

Frierson Chapel
floorplan with interior
photos keyed
*not to scale



Floor Plan with photo locations keyed to plan















FRIERSON CHAPEL

METHODIST CHURCH

JUNE 30, 1946

W.D. FRIERSON

PASTOR























19

11



TOLEMAN
IMMANUEL
BENATHY
PARNALI
1911
1911









UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action: Nomination

Property Name: Frierson Chapel

Multiple Name: Rural African-American Churches in Tennessee MPS

State & County: TENNESSEE, Robertson

Date Received: 10/15/2019 Date of Pending List: 11/12/2019 Date of 16th Day: 11/27/2019 Date of 45th Day: 11/29/2019 Date of Weekly List:

Reference number: MP100004694

Nominator: SHPO

Reason For Review:

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Appeal | <input type="checkbox"/> PDIL | <input type="checkbox"/> Text/Data Issue |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SHPO Request | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape | <input type="checkbox"/> Photo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Waiver | <input type="checkbox"/> National | <input type="checkbox"/> Map/Boundary |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Resubmission | <input type="checkbox"/> Mobile Resource | <input type="checkbox"/> Period |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other | <input type="checkbox"/> TCP | <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 50 years |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> CLG | |

Accept Return Reject 11/27/2019 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments: Meets the registration requirements of the MPS

Recommendation/ Criteria: Accept / A

Reviewer Jim Gabbert Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2275 Date _____

DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments : No see attached SLR : **Yes**

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.



TENNESSEE HISTORICAL COMMISSION
STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
2941 LEBANON PIKE
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37214
OFFICE: (615) 532-1550
E-mail: Claudette.Stager@tn.gov
(615) 770-1089



October 7, 2019

Ms. Joy Beasley
Keeper of the National Register
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places
1849 C Street, NW, Mail Stop 7228
Washington, DC 20240

National Register Nomination

- *Frierson Chapel, Robertson County, Tennessee*

Dear Ms. Beasley:

The enclosed disks contain the true and correct nomination for listing of the *Frierson Chapel* to the National Register of Historic Places. We received no comments.

If you have any questions or if more information is needed, please contact Holly Barnett at (615) 770-1098 or Holly.M.Barnett@tn.gov.

Sincerely,

Claudette Stager
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

CS:hb
Enclosures(2)