

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only  
received **MAY 16 1983**  
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic Denmark Presbyterian Church

and/or common The Denmark Church

**2. Location**

street & number Jackson-Denmark Road (Main Street) N/A not for publication

city, town Denmark N/A vicinity of

state Tennessee code 047 county Madison code 113

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	N/A <input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name Memphis Presbytery - Congregation of the Denmark Church

street & number 1750 Union Avenue, Suite 21M

city, town Memphis N/A vicinity of state Tennessee 38104

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Madison County Court Clerk

street & number Madison County Courthouse - Main Street

city, town Jackson state Tennessee 38301

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title N/A has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date N/A N/A federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records N/A

city, town N/A state N/A

## 7. Description

### Condition

excellent     deteriorated  
 good         ruins  
 fair          unexposed

### Check one

unaltered  
 altered

### Check one

original site  
 moved    date \_\_\_\_\_

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The 1854 Denmark Presbyterian Church is a two-story, gable-roofed Greek Revival church of frame construction located in the rural settlement of Denmark, Tennessee, southwest of the Madison County seat of Jackson. It is situated on a relatively flat lot facing Main Street and is surrounded by scattered houses and farmland. The building exhibits a simple interpretation of the Greek Revival style and retains an outstanding degree of its architectural integrity.

The first-story front elevation of the church is divided into four bays by simple Doric pilasters. The two central bays form a recessed entrance with a single Doric pier in antis. The two flanking bays contain the enclosed stairwells to the second story. The front elevation of the second story has two 8/8 windows below a string course and the gable of the roof. The side elevations of the church contain four windows per floor with those on the second story being early 8/8 and those on the first story being c. 1950 horizontal lights with inset panels forming a pointed arch. The rear elevation has two windows on each story of the same type and arrangement as those on the other facades.

The two doors of the recessed entrance which open into the sanctuary are double-leaf doors with moulded panels and a transom above. Similar but shorter doors give access to the stairwells. The rear and side walls of the entrance are covered with flush weatherboards.

The simplicity of the exterior is reflected on the church's interior. Occupying all of the interior space, the sanctuary is relatively unaltered except for the addition of large acoustical panels on the walls (which can easily be removed). Three rows of original box pews face a dais with a lecturn and a simple Greek Revival reredos. Although the pews have lost their doors, they are an extremely rare example of box pews in West Tennessee. The ceiling and floor of the sanctuary are covered with plain poplar boards. The second story of the building contains three simple rooms.

There are no outbuildings on the church's property. A small wooden framework supporting a mid-nineteenth-century bell is located next to the church on the east side. A plaque to a prominent Denmark citizen, H. Fonville Neville, stands next to the church sign near the front of the building.

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** 1854                      **Builder/Architect** Snipe Brothers of Denmark

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

The Denmark Presbyterian Church is nominated under National Register criteria A and C for its historical and architectural significance to the town of Denmark and Madison County, Tennessee. Built in 1854, the church is significant for its important historical associations with the town of Denmark at its most thriving point of development during the mid-nineteenth century and for its historical role as the center of social and religious activities for the community. The building is also important as an outstanding local example of a rural church of the Greek Revival period. The two-story gable-roofed church exhibits a vernacular interpretation of Greek Revival ecclesiastical architecture with its simplified temple front.

Denmark, established about 1821 by settlers from North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia, was chartered by the State of Tennessee in 1829. Its town plan was laid by three men who also organized the first Presbyterian church in West Tennessee which later united with the Denmark church about 1833. Denmark developed rapidly with about seven or eight dry goods businesses, a grocery store, whiskey shop, and hotel by 1840. During the 1850s, Denmark experienced its finest days and was considered one of the most promising towns of West Tennessee with seventeen stores, a number of boot and shoe shops, harness shops, cabinet maker shops, several saloons, and two hotels. The town had three lawyers, eight doctors, and one undertaker. The outlying area was filled with farms and plantations. During this period Denmark became a center of social and religious life in the southeastern section of West Tennessee. Egbert Haywood Osbourne, a regional poet and lecturer, noted that the people of Denmark were "recognized as among the most refined, educated, and wealthy of the land."

Religion and education were of primary interest to the inhabitants of Denmark. Three churches were established by the mid nineteenth century, including the Denmark Presbyterian Church. Several schools were operating, including both a male and a female academy with about 150 pupils attending during the 1850s who came from surrounding counties and northern Mississippi.

After the 1850s, Denmark declined to a large extent. A considerable number of men from the town served in the Confederate Army during the Civil War. In the course of the war, the Denmark village was occupied by both Union and Confederate forces. The most important military engagement fought in Madison County occurred a few miles south of Denmark on the Medon Road (now Britton's Lane). Nearly as devastating as the war in the long run were fires that ravaged Denmark on several occasions (burning 17 stores in 1860, 6 more in 1866, and 3 in 1903) and a storm that blew away several homes in 1909. Fires since 1924 have taken dozens more of Denmark's buildings. Another blow to the town was the fact that the railroad bypassed Denmark, despite local efforts to attract the railroads. By the 1960s, Denmark was little more than a rural store and the Denmark Presbyterian Church. (The 1970 census showed Denmark's population to be 69.) The store, which also houses Denmark's post office, dates to the early twentieth century. Denmark today also has several scattered houses. The Denmark Presbyterian Church, however, is the town's remaining building that best represents its history.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Page

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 1.8 acres

Quadrangle name Denmark, Tennessee

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

**UTM References**

A 

1	6	3	1	8	6	4	0	3	9	3	3	7	2	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing							

C 

Zone		Easting				Northing							

D 

Zone		Easting				Northing							

E 

Zone		Easting				Northing							

F 

Zone		Easting				Northing							

G 

Zone		Easting				Northing							

H 

Zone		Easting				Northing							

**Verbal boundary description and justification** The 125' x 250' lot of property nominated is a single tract of land outlined in red on the map. The original map drawn on a scale of 1" = 400' is located at the Madison County Property Assessors Office.

**List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries**

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Cathryn C. Holland, Community Development Coordinator

Southwest Tennessee

organization Development District

date June 30, 1981

1804 Highway 45 Bypass

street & number Suite 300 - Watkins Towers

telephone 901/668-1144

city or town Jackson

state Tennessee 38301

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

Deputy

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

*Herbert L. Hargreaves*

title Executive Director, Tennessee Historical Commission

date 4/18/83

For NPS use only

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

Entered in the National Register

date 6/16/83

for *Albion Byrum*  
Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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The Denmark Presbyterian Church's association with the town's history and period of prosperity are illustrated by the role it played and events that took place there. Its history begins with the year 1821 when five members first began meeting and organized on Cub Creek, about five miles from the present church building. The church grew so rapidly that it was granted a charter in 1831. In 1833, the permanent location of the small band of Presbyterians was moved to the town of Denmark, where a log schoolhouse was used by all the area's denominations. Because of conflict with the large Baptist congregation in Denmark, the Presbyterians erected, within only six days, a church house of their own that was called "Jonahs Gourd" because of its rapid growth. (This church house was located just east of the present building, and it is no longer extant.) At the peak period of Denmark's prosperity, the Presbyterians built a second meeting house, the present Denmark Presbyterian Church.

The present Denmark Presbyterian Church was erected by the Snipes brothers with slave labor. The members were the "most cultured, wealthiest, noblest stock the Carolinas could send forth." The Reverend J. W. Gillaspis was the first minister of the church and served continuously for 27 years. He received \$1200 a year from the church, an amount that was considered extravagant for the 1850s.

In 1861, Reverend Gillaspis preached to a group of young Confederate soldiers before they marched away to war. These young men were known as the "Denmark Danes." After the services the men formed outside the church and their Captain, John Ingram, was presented with a flag made by the ladies of Denmark. The men then marched to Jackson and joined the Sixth Tennessee Regiment.

During the Civil War the church yard served as a Union bivouac. According to tradition, two of General Nathan Bedford Forrest's men were attending church on Sunday with their sweethearts. A detachment of Union soldiers under Col. Fielding Hearst of McNairy County, rode up into the yard and searched the church for the two men. Escape was made possible by their hiding under the hoop skirts of the young ladies.

The Presbyterian Church also housed the Masonic Lodge, which was located in the upper part of the building and had 154 members during the nineteenth century. This room also served as a prison for eighty-seven Federal soldiers who surrendered after the Battle of Britton's Lane.

The town of Denmark had its share of lawless visitors; the best known was John Murrell who lived south of Denmark. Murrell is said to have occupied the pulpit of the Presbyterian Church while his gang stole the worshiper's horses in 1833.

Located on the grounds is an old bell erected shortly after the church was built in 1854. The bell, cast in North Carolina, is said to contain silver donated by the ladies of the church. The bell tolled when the "Danes" marched away and tolled when they came home. It has called the people of Denmark to worship for over a century, and also has served as a fire alarm.

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Much has been written on the history of the Denmark Presbyterian Church and many oral traditions have been passed on. Much of its historical significance lies in the fact that it is the oldest church in the Memphis Presbytery. The structure is sound and is in excellent condition. Members of the Denmark Church take great pride in its heritage and leadership in shaping Denmark and Madison County. Although there are other religious denominations in Denmark, the Presbyterian Church is referred to as The Denmark Church. The membership of the church has run into six generations. Church services are still held on the first and third Sunday in each month.

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"Denmark Meetings Lifted Souls Before Railroads Passed By and Settlement Pined,"  
Fonville Neville, The Jackson Sun, Centennial Edition, 1948, p. 7.

"Denmark Presbyterian Church," West Tennessee Historical Society Papers, Robert  
Hardee, Denmark, Tennessee, October 1980, p. 88d.

"Denmark, Tennessee - The First 150 Years," West Tennessee Historical Society Papers,  
Dr. James Edmonson, October 1980, pp 88-95.

Historic Madison, Emma I. Williams, 1946, pp 292-323.

"Map of Denmark - 1860," West Tennessee Historical Society Papers, Jane Neville  
Hardee, Jackson, Tennessee, October 1980, p. 88h.

Papers and Documents of the late Fonville Neville, local historian of Denmark,  
Tennessee Room - Jackson/Madison County Library, Courtesy E. I. Williams.

"Presbyterians Foiled Baptists at Denmark by Running Up 'Jonah's Gourd' in Six Days,"  
The Jackson Sun, Centennial Edition 1948, p. 6.