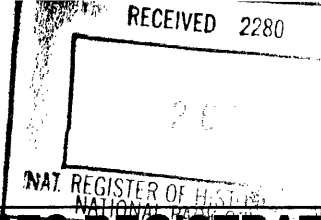


4/13
OK



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 the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" 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.

1. Name of Property

historic name Bethel AME Church
other names/site number Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church

2. Location

street & number 4683 Bell Street
city, town Acworth (N/A) **vicinity of**
county Cobb **code** GA 067
state Georgia **code** GA **zip code** 30101

(N/A) not for publication

3. Classification

Ownership of Property:

- private
- public-local
- public-state
- public-federal

Category of Property:

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

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing

Noncontributing

buildings	1	0
sites	0	0
structures	0	0
objects	0	0
total	1	0

Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: N/A

Name of previous listing: N/A

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

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 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 the National Register criteria. () See continuation sheet.

Richard Clowes
Signature of certifying official

3-20-02
Date

W. Ray Luce
Historic Preservation Division Director
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

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:

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:

see continuation sheet

Edson H. Beall 5/9/02

[Signature]
Keeper of the National Register Date

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions:

RELIGION: religious facility

Current Functions:

RELIGION: religious facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

LATE VICTORIAN: Romanesque

Materials:

foundation	BRICK
walls	BRICK
roof	ASPHALT
other	N/A

Description of present and historic physical appearance:

The Bethel AME Church is located on a corner lot at the intersection of School and Bell streets in Acworth, Cobb County, Georgia. The church is located in the historically African-American section of the city, which is north of the railroad and the downtown commercial area.

Summary Description

The Bethel AME Church was built c.1882. The Romanesque Revival-style church is constructed of brick laid in a common-bond pattern and has a front gable roof (photograph 1). Exterior features include round-arched, four-over-four, double-hung windows and decorative brickwork in the gable ends and pilasters along the sides (photographs 2 and 4). The front vestibule and two asymmetrical bell towers were added in 1895 (photograph 5, cornerstone). The vestibule features round-arched, four-over-four, double-hung windows and double entrance doors with a fanlight. The towers also feature similar round-arched windows and both have conical metal roofs. The south tower retains the original bell.

The interior of the church is arranged as a central-aisle plan with rows of modern pews (photographs 6 and 7). The pulpit area features a semicircular raised platform with a balustrade (photograph 8). Both the balustrade and the pulpit are original to the church. There is a choir platform on the left side at the rear of the sanctuary. Significant interior features include the patterned beadboard ceiling; the original plaster walls with beaded, tongue-and-groove wainscoting and a chair rail; decorative door and window surrounds; and original wood floors under modern carpeting.

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 7--Description

Changes to the building include replacing the original glass panes with Plexiglas (original sashes and frames were retained); adding sheetrock, paneling, and linoleum to the vestibule; and converting one of the rear windows into a door leading into the rear addition. A concrete-block rear addition was constructed in 1973 and houses a foyer, restrooms, and a kitchen (photograph3). The landscaping around the church is minimal with mature trees and shrubs.

Full Description

The following description was prepared by Leslie Brown, preservation consultant, Acworth, Georgia. "Bethel AME Church," draft National Register of Historic Places Form, March 22, 2000. On file at the Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Atlanta, Georgia.

The Bethel AME Church is located on a corner lot at the intersection of School and Bell Streets in a traditional African-American neighborhood. It stands perched on a hill several blocks north of the railroad and the downtown commercial district of Acworth. The brick church is built in the Romanesque style with a central block flanked on the north and south sides by bell towers of different heights both with conical steeples. The original central block (the sanctuary) was built c.1882 (see attachment 1, pre-1895 photograph of the church). The 1871 deed recorded the land purchase; the actual structure appears on an 1882 deed.

The church consists of three major sections: the c.1882 sanctuary, the 1895 vestibule with its bell towers, and a 1973 rear addition. The sanctuary and vestibule are constructed of six-course common-bond, load-bearing brick walls on a brick foundation. The rear addition is constructed of concrete blocks. The front -gable roof is covered with asphalt shingles.

The exterior features four round-arched windows on the north and south sides of the building. The windows are four-over-four, double-hung with textured, green Plexiglas panes (a 20th-century change from the original glass). Most of the windows retain their historic wood sashes, muntins, and framing. As originally constructed c.1882, the front façade had two windows on the front (east) and rear (west) facades as well as double entrance doors. When the vestibule was added in 1895, the front façade windows were modified into doors for access to the base of the towers. These doors are typical of late 19th-century styling with rim-lock hardware and vertical panels. On the rear façade, the lower sash of a window was removed, and a door installed to allow access into the 1973 addition. The front gable of the church features brick corbeling along the eaves and a round window, 52 inches in diameter, in the center.

The 1895 vestibule and its towers feature four-over-four, double-hung, round-arched windows, and the central entrance features a fanlight. Seven-foot double doors replaced the original nine-foot-tall double doors.

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 7--Description

A cornerstone located on the eastside corner of the vestibule, bears the following inscription:

Bethel A.M.E. Church
J.R.FLEMING PASTOR
Presented by
J.T. DOBBS
R. NELSON, Con.

The north side of the cornerstone reads:

Erected
April, 1895

The south bell tower is approximately 10 feet taller than the north tower and has two round-arched windows above the ground level window. Both of the bell towers are topped by a seven-foot, metal, conical roof. The north tower is topped with a flame, and the south tower with a cross.

The interior of the sanctuary is arranged as a central-aisle plan with 18 modern pews aligned on either side. There is a semicircular platform located against the west wall with a two-foot high kneeling rail along the outer perimeter. The three pews on the choir platform appear to be of late 19th- or early 20th-century vintage. The pulpit sits at the center of a smaller platform atop the larger platform. Both the railing and the pulpit are original to the church and date c.1882.

The sanctuary has a magnificent herringbone-design, coffered ceiling made of 3 1/2" beaded, tongue-and-groove boards stained dark brown and varnished. Three historic brass-and-glass-globe light fixtures hang from the ceiling. The walls are the original plaster with beaded, tongue-and-groove wainscoting of the same dark brown stain, capped by a two-inch chair rail. The round-arched windows and doors feature molding with a round corner block paterae. The floor of the sanctuary is the original, tongue-and-groove pine floor that is now covered with modern carpeting.

The main entrance to the sanctuary from the vestibule is through double swinging doors 5'x 6'8", probably installed in the early 20th century. Hinge marks on the doorframe indicate that the original doors were 9-feet tall. There is a transom above these doors with a fanlight above the transoms.

Two smaller doors located on either side of the main sanctuary entrance open into the ground floor of each of the towers. They have the same arched molding as the window surrounds.

Architectural investigations reveal that before the 1895 addition of the vestibule, two windows were located approximately two feet closer to the double doors, and it is believed that the window casings were reused as doorframes. The tower access doors probably date to 1895 and the construction of the bell towers.

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 7--Description

At the south side of the rear wall of the sanctuary, there is a 2'9" x 9'6" window that now looks into the 1973 kitchen addition. What was the matching window, near the northwest corner, is now a door that provides access to the kitchen and rear foyer. The original upper sash of the window remains, however the lower sash was removed and the opening altered to accommodate the access door.

The interior of the vestibule was altered c.1970 with a sheetrock ceiling, wood paneling on the walls, and vinyl floor covering. One of the original (c.1882) hand-made, slatted pews sits in the southeast corner of the vestibule.

Now serving as the pastor's study, the base of the north tower also has a modern dropped sheetrock ceiling and paneled walls. The original beaded tongue-and-groove ceiling remains beneath the modern ceiling.

On the south side of the vestibule, a plywood door opens into the base of the south bell tower. The walls are covered with modern paneling and the ceiling is plywood. Above this ceiling is evidence the original unpainted brick structure with penciled mortar joints.

An extensive survey of the church bell was conducted by the Verdin Company in July of 1998. The resulting report indicated that although cast-iron church bells are extremely difficult to date, the bell is definitely historic and probably original to the bell tower construction, based on its large size (33 ¼" in diameter). Bells of this size and material were not manufactured in large quantities after the turn of the century. The report also indicates that the bell was manufactured by the York Bell Foundry of Hillsboro, Ohio, which was founded in the 1860s to manufacture cannons and ammunition during the Civil War.

The truss system is clearly visible in the attic space above the sanctuary. Two brick chimneys that once served the stoves of the original heating system can be seen near the center.

The rear addition is divided into three areas –the foyer, restrooms, and kitchen. Three outer walls are cement block, and the wall that adjoins the sanctuary is the original rear exterior brick wall.

The landscaping around the church is minimal with a short front lawn, a few scattered rose bushes, shrubs, and a mature pecan tree at the rear of the building. A poured concrete driveway arcs across the northeast corner of the lot and gravel has been spread on both sides to designate parking areas. The steep slope leading from Bell Street up to the grounds has seven concrete steps with a modern black iron railing.

Five poured concrete steps lead up to the front entrance doors. Oral interviews indicated that these steps cover an earlier rounded series of steps that were probably built around 1895.

At one time a wood-framed parsonage stood where the brick and plywood church sign is now located. This house fell into disrepair and was demolished after World War II. A well was located behind the parsonage, however, no evidence remains of either structure.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria:

A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): N/A

A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions):

ARCHITECTURE
ETHNIC HERITAGE: black

Period of Significance:

c.1882-1952

Significant Dates:

c.1882 – construction of the church

Significant Person(s):

N/A

Cultural Affiliation:

N/A

Architect(s)/Builder(s):

N/A

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 8--Statement of Significance

Statement of significance (areas of significance)

One of two historic African-American churches in Acworth, Bethel AME Church continues to serve as a community landmark building in the historically African-American section of the city.

The Bethel AME Church is significant in the area of architecture as an excellent, intact example of a brick, Romanesque Revival-style church. The c.1882 church retains its character-defining exterior features including its Romanesque Revival-style round-arched windows and decorative brickwork including corbelling and pilasters along the sides of the building. In 1895, two asymmetrical towers and vestibule were added to the front façade. The vestibule features round-arched, four-over-four double-hung windows and double entrance doors topped by a fanlight. The towers feature Romanesque Revival-style round-arched windows and conical metal roofs. The interior of the church is significant for its central-aisle plan and historic finishes. The church retains its distinctive, patterned beadboard ceiling; plaster walls; tongue-and-groove wainscoting; decorative wood window and door surrounds; and original pulpit on a raised dais. The church also retains its historic cast-iron bell manufactured by the York Bell Foundry in Hillsboro, Ohio.

The church is significant in the area of ethnic heritage: black for its association with the African-American community in Acworth. According to the context Historic Black Resources: A Handbook for the Identification, Documentation, and Evaluation of Historic African-American Properties in Georgia (1984) by Carole Merritt, in the years following emancipation, often the first building constructed by African-Americans was a church, and the church served not only the spiritual needs of the community but also fostered social interaction. Bethel AME Church is one of two historic African-American churches in Acworth. In 1864, the Bethel AME Church was formed, and oral histories reveal a connection between former slaves in the Acworth area and the early church organizers and congregation. During this time, the Bethel congregation shared a church building with the Zion Hill Baptist Church, with each congregation meeting on alternate Sundays. In 1871, land was purchased by the trustees of the church, and the present building was constructed c.1882. In 1895, during the ministry of J.R. Fleming, the vestibule and two towers were added. Fleming served as pastor from 1895 through 1897 and was responsible for the construction of several churches in neighboring communities. A parsonage was once located on the property but was demolished in the 1950s. There is no cemetery associated with the church and members are buried in Liberty Cemetery, the city cemetery. Currently, there are approximately 90 members of the church with between 20-25 attending services.

National Register Criteria

Bethel AME Church is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its association with the historic African-American community in Acworth. The church has served as a focal point of the community from its construction c.1882 until the present day. The church is eligible for the National Register under Criterion C as an excellent example of a Romanesque Revival-style small town church.

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 8--Statement of Significance

Criteria Considerations (if applicable)

Bethel AME Church is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria Consideration A as a religious property deriving its primary significance for its architectural design. The church is an excellent example of a small town African-American, Romanesque Revival-style church.

Period of significance (justification)

The period of significance begins with the construction of the church in c.1888 and ends with the end of the historic period, 1952, for its continued association with the African-American community in Acworth.

Contributing/Noncontributing Resources (explanation, if necessary)

The church is the only resource on the property and it is contributing.

Developmental history/historic context (if appropriate)

The following historical narrative was prepared by Leslie Brown, Acworth, Georgia. "Bethel AME Church," draft National Register of Historic Places Form, March 22, 2000. On file at the Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Atlanta, Georgia.

Acworth, Georgia is a small community approximately 40 miles north of Atlanta, located in the 20th Land District of Cobb County in what was originally Indian Territory. In 1832, following a treaty with the Cherokee Nation, Georgia held the last of its land lotteries to distribute the Cherokee land to its citizens. Within this same year, the state divided Greater Cherokee County into ten smaller counties thus creating Cobb County. Bethel AME Church is located on Land Lot 32, which was originally granted to Berry Jones of Bulloch County in 1839.

The greatest catalyst for growth in the area was the arrival of the Western & Atlantic Railroad in 1842. Among the first settlers was Alexander Northcutt who became the first stationmaster and accordingly named the settlement Northcutt Station. In 1843, the town was renamed "Acworth" by Joseph Gregg, a civil engineer with the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers. On December 1, 1860, Acworth was incorporated as a circular town extending in all directions from the railroad depot. After the Civil War, the town was reincorporated and officially recognized as the "City of Acworth" in August of 1903.

The 1840 census indicates that there were 181 heads of household, all listed as farmers. However, by 1850, the arrival of the railroad caused a marked increase in population, and shopkeepers, bankers, a hatter, a schoolteacher, a brick maker, cotton broker and a real estate agent were included on the census for that year.

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 8--Statement of Significance

According to the 1851 tax digest for Cobb County, few citizens in the district owned many slaves; most had only one, with a few owning seven or eight. The 1860 Federal census showed that there were 3,829 slaves in Cobb County and approximately 240 in the 20th District, which includes Acworth. Most of the former slaves and their children who stayed in the area after the Civil War became farmers and farm laborers.

In 1864, the Bethel AME Church congregation was formed, and oral histories reveal a connection between former slaves in the Acworth area and the early church organizers and congregation. At that time the Bethel congregation shared a church building with the Zion Hill Baptist Church, with each congregation meeting on alternate Sundays. In 1871, George McConnell, Benjamin Davenport, and Mitchell Saddler, trustees of the Bethel AME Church, purchased one acre of land from L.L. Robertson for the sum of \$27. A deed dated 1882 indicates that Land Lot 32 in District 20 was purchased from Colonel E.L. Shuford and Kate Shuford for the sum of \$90 by the AME Church trustees: John Buffington, Wyeth(Wyatt) Dobbs, Henry Hesterly, Ezekiel Buffington, and Peter Carter. The 1882 deed states that a building referred to as the AME Church was already standing on that property. According to the AME Historical Society in Nashville, Tennessee, it was common practice for congregations to delay constructions of a church building after purchasing land for monetary reasons. Thus, it is assumed that the founding congregation built the sanctuary of the church between 1871 and 1882. The Acworth Presbyterian Church records indicated that around 1880 the church donated \$10,000 in scholarship funds to educate a pastor for the Bethel AME Church.

In 1895, during the ministry of J.R. Fleming, the vestibule and two towers were added. A marble cornerstone was affixed to the masonry of the northeastern tower recording the date of April 1895 as well as the following:

Bethel A.M.E. Church
J.R.FLEMING, PASTOR
J.T. DOBBS
R. NELSON, Con.

Research found that J.R. Fleming was ordained in 1890 as a deacon and in 1894 as an elder. He was assigned to several churches within the state of Georgia. From 1895 through 1897, he served as pastor of the Bethel AME Church. Pastor Fleming was also responsible for the construction of churches in several other communities.

The evolution of the building continued during the 1960s and 1970s with some modern changes to the building with the replacement of the original glass lights with Plexiglas, modern carpeting over the original wood floors in the sanctuary, and the 1973 construction of the concrete-block rear addition, which contains a foyer, restrooms and a kitchen.

Today the church building stands as a reminder of a time when its historic bell was the "voice" of the community, announcing Sunday morning and holiday services as well as serving as the neighborhood

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 8--Statement of Significance

fire alarm. The congregation not only focused on Christian worship but the structure has served continuously as a community building for a variety of purposes. Throughout its history, the Bethel AME Church has been an important part of the African-American community and is recognized historically significance as one of Acworth's finest monuments to the past.

9. Major Bibliographic References

- Brown, Leslie. "Bethel AME Church," draft National Register of Historic Places Form, March 22, 2000. On file at the Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Atlanta, Georgia
- Carrie Dyer Women's Club. Acworth, Georgia from Cherokee Country to Suburbia. Acworth, GA: Star Publishing Co., 1976.
- Evans, Clement A., Gen. Towns, Events, Institutions and Persons, Vol. 1. Atlanta: State Historical Association, 1906.
- Merritt, Carole. Historic Black Resources: A Handbook for the Identification, Documentation, and Evaluation of Historic African-American Properties in Georgia. Atlanta: Historic Preservation Division, 1984.
- Roth, Darlene R. Architecture, Archaeology and Landscapes: Resources for Historic Preservation in Unincorporated Cobb County, Georgia. Cobb County Historic Preservation Commission. 1988.
- Temple, Sarah Blackwell Gober. The First Hundred Years A Short History of Cobb County, in Georgia. Atlanta: Cherokee Publishing Company, 1980.
- Wright, Richard R. The Centennial Encyclopedia of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Philadelphia: A.M.E. Church, 1960.

Previous documentation on file (NPS): (X) N/A

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been issued
date issued:
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State Agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other, Specify Repository:

Georgia Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): CO-AC-124

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one acre.

UTM References

A) Zone 16 Easting 714283 Northing 3771994

Verbal Boundary Description

The National Register boundary is indicated on the attached tax map with a heavy black line.

Boundary Justification

The proposed boundary includes the land historically associated with the church and is the current legal boundary.

11. Form Prepared By

State Historic Preservation Office

name/title Gretchen B. Kinnard/National Register Coordinator
organization Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources
mailing address 156 Trinity Avenue, S.W., Suite 101
city or town Atlanta **state** Georgia **zip code** 30303
telephone (404) 656-2840 **date** March 14, 2002
e-mail gretchen_kinnard@mail.dnr.state.ga.us

Consulting Services/Technical Assistance (if applicable) () not applicable

name/title Leslie H. Brown/preservation consultant
organization N/A
mailing address 5564 Brookgreen Drive
city or town Acworth **state** Georgia **zip code** 30101
telephone (770) 590-0602
e-mail N/A

- () **property owner**
(X) **consultant**
() **regional development center preservation planner**
() **other:**

Property Owner or Contact Information

name (property owner or contact person) Bill Tann
organization (if applicable) Bethel AME Church Board of Trustees
mailing address 4683 Bell Street
city or town Acworth **state** Georgia **zip code** 30101
e-mail (optional) N/A

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Photographs

Name of Property: Bethel AME Church
City or Vicinity: Acworth
County: Cobb
State: Georgia
Photographer: James R. Lockhart
Negative Filed: Georgia Department of Natural Resources
Date Photographed: April 2001

Description of Photograph(s):

Number of photographs: 10

1. Front (east) façade; photographer facing west.
2. Front (east) and north facades; photographer facing southwest.
3. Rear (west) and north façades; photographer facing southeast.
4. Detail of window, north façade; photographer facing south.
5. Detail of cornerstone and front façade; photographer facing southwest.
6. Interior, view of sanctuary; photographer facing northwest.
7. Interior, view of sanctuary; photographer facing east.
8. Interior, detail of pulpit; photographer facing west.
9. Interior, detail of interior of bell tower; photographer facing southeast.
10. Interior, detail of bell pull in bell tower; photographer facing northwest.

(HPD WORD form version 11-03-01)



**BETHEL AME CHURCH
COBB COUNTY, GEORGIA**

SITE PLAN

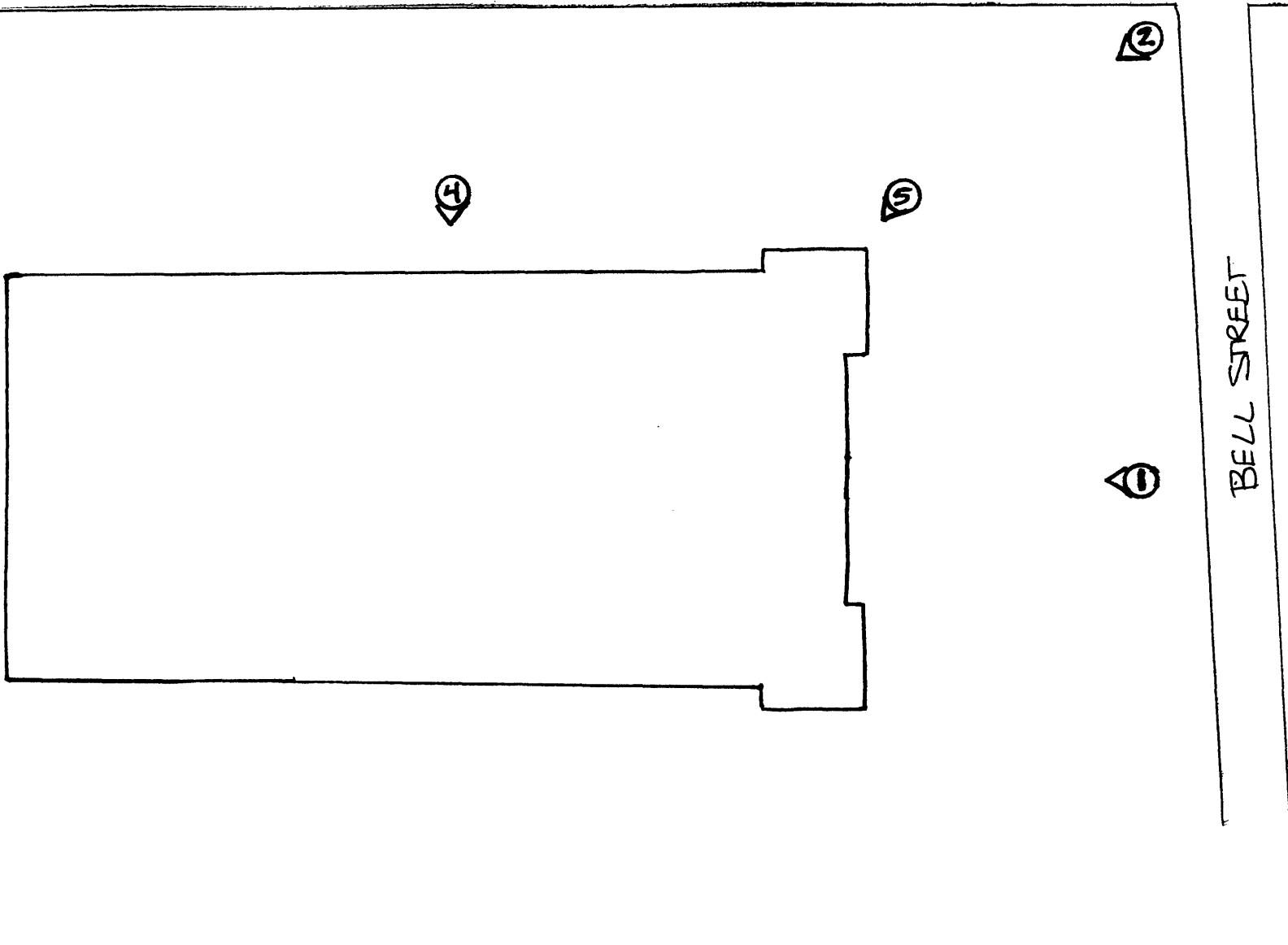
PHOTOGRAPHS/DIRECTION OF VIEW: ①

NORTH: ↑

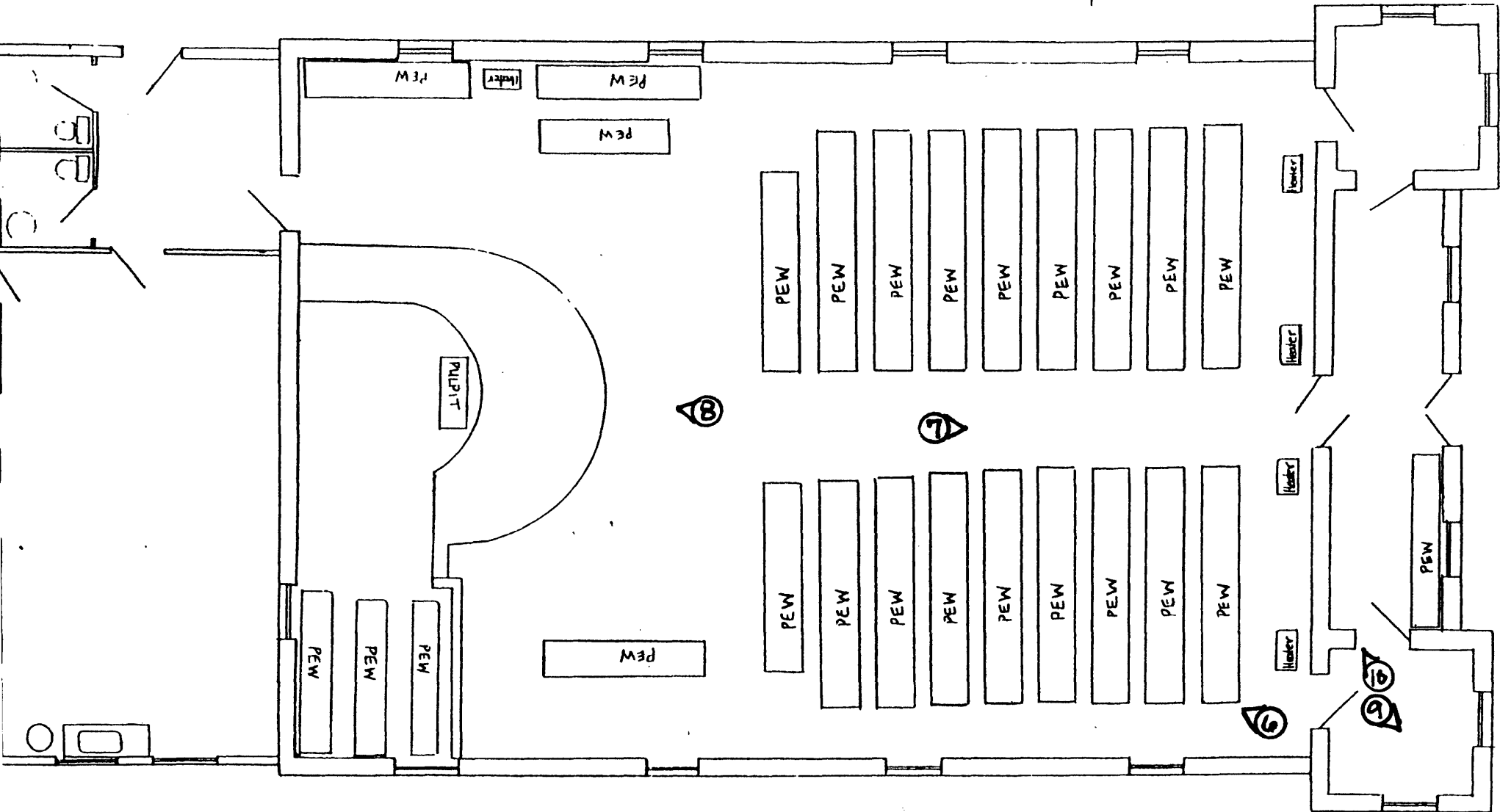
SCALE: NOT TO SCALE

SCHOOL STREET

BELL STREET



Bethel A.M.E. Church, Acworth, Georgia



BETHEL AME CHURCH
COBB COUNTY, GEORGIA
FLOOR PLAN
PHOTOGRAPHS/DIRECTION OF VIEW: ①
NORTH: ↑
SCALE: NOT TO SCALE
SOURCE: LESLIE BROWN, CONSULTANT