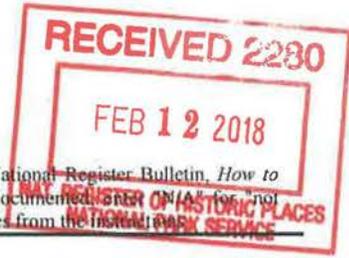


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service



# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations 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 National Park Service

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name Bethel Methodist Church  
Other names/site number First Methodist Episcopal Church; Bethel Memorial Methodist Church; Bethel United Methodist Church  
Name of related multiple property listing N/A

## 2. Location

Street & Number: 703 North Cumberland Street  
City or town: Morristown State: TN County: Hamblen  
Not For Publication:  N/A Vicinity:  N/A Zip Code: 37814

## 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

*Claudia DeStefano* 2/9/10  
Signature of certifying official/Title: Date  
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Tennessee Historical Commission  
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

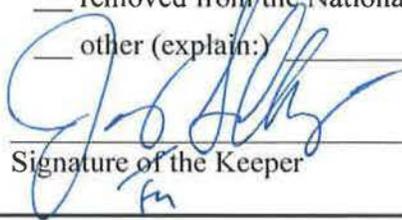
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**4. National Park Service Certification**

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

3.28.2018  
 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	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

**Current Functions**

RELIGION/religious facility

RELIGION/religious facility

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

LATE 19<sup>th</sup> & EARLY 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS: Gothic Revival

**Materials:**

Principal exterior materials of the property:

BRICK; WOOD/weatherboard; SYNTHETICS/vinyl;  
GLASS; METAL/aluminum; CONCRETE

**Narrative Description**

Constructed from 1907 to 1908, Bethel Methodist Church is located at the northwest intersection of North Cumberland Avenue and East 6<sup>th</sup> North Street, in a commercial area in Morristown, Hamblen County, Tennessee (pop. est. 30,000). The church is located approximately one-quarter of a mile north/northwest of downtown Morristown. The church is a cross-gable building of frame construction, with a brick veneer exterior and a concrete block foundation. The original portion is one-story, with a two-story rear addition with a basement on the west elevation that dates to 1951. The façade (east) fronts North Cumberland Avenue and features a two-story tower with a square base and a pyramidal roof. The property has retained sufficient integrity to represent the 1908 and 1951 building campaigns, especially in terms of location, design, workmanship, feeling, and association.

**Setting**

Bethel Methodist Church is located in a commercial area approximately one-quarter of a mile north/northwest of Morristown's downtown. Morristown is the county seat of Hamblen County, with an approximate population of 30,000. The church is located at the northwest intersection of North Cumberland Avenue and East 6<sup>th</sup> North Street, with a façade set approximately twelve feet back from North Cumberland Street (*Photographs 28 & 29*). A set of concrete steps leads from the sidewalk to the primary entry on the bell tower. A paved parking lot (graveled until 1996) is approximately 45 feet wide by 150 feet long, and is

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located to the rear of the church building on a separate parcel. Grassed land surrounds the primary elevations, with wooded land located beyond the parking lot. Constructed on a commercial street, the property is currently adjacent to an automobile repair shop and across the street from the now-vacant Morristown College campus.

**Bethel Methodist Church (contributing building, c.1908)**

Exterior

The cross-gable church building has a facade oriented towards North Cumberland Avenue on the east, with side elevations facing the north and south. The frame church rests on a continuous brick foundation on the 1908 section, with a continuous concrete block foundation on the 1951 section. The windows on the original church have cast concrete sills with double rows of headers lintels. The 1951 section includes a basement level that is below grade from the 1908 section; the building is set on a hill that slopes toward the west. The exterior walls are clad in brick veneer, with gable fields clad in replacement siding (c.1951). The 1908 section is clad in bricks fired on the nearby Morristown College campus (*Photograph 7*). Two primary entrances are located on the façade, with secondary entrances on both the south and west elevations.

The façade (east elevation) features a projecting, front-gable roof section with two recessed, side-gable roof eaves, and a tower on the southeast corner (*Photograph 1*). The cross-gable roof is clad in asphalt shingles, and the gable fields are covered in vinyl siding. A brick interior chimney is located off-center in the left side-gable section. While the original gables featured wood weatherboard siding, modest wood trimwork, and a circular vent, they were clad in replacement siding in the 1951 period of renovation and addition. The tower features a square base with a brick exterior, a slightly tapered vinyl-sided square second story, and a pyramidal roof clad in the original tin shingles. The façade is six bays wide (D, W, 2D, W, W, W) with the first bay as a six-panel replacement door (c.1989) below a single-light transom window. This entry is located on the recessed side-gable section, and leads to a small chapel. The second bay, the primary entry, is a set of six-panel double doors below a single light transom window. The doors are replacements, which are set within the base of the tower and open to an interior entry vestibule. The windows on this section feature triangular brick arches with diamond-shaped concrete capstones and concrete sills. While the fenestrations retain their original size and the arches and capstones are original, the stained glass and exterior storm windows were added in 1951, assumedly replacing more simple glass windows. The final bay is substantially recessed from the façade: a six-panel wood door, serving as a handicap-access entry to the 1951 addition, via a concrete ramp with an iron balustrade. Quarter-height brick buttresses are located at the corners of the façade elevations and the corner of the tower. At the southeast corner of the tower is a marble dedication stone that reads “First M.E. Church 1908” (*Photograph 8*).

The south elevation features the three-story 1951 addition on the left side, and the one-story 1908 section on the right (*Photograph 3*). The 1951 addition has brick veneer exterior on the upper story, with the bottom two stories set in the concrete block foundation. Windows on the 1951 section are eight-over-eight and six-over-six, double-hung wood sash, topped by flat brick arches and above brick sills. A six-panel door below a flat brick arch provides entry to the lower level, accessible via a wood ramp. Windows on the 1908 section are replacement three-over-two (horizontal) and two-over-two (horizontal), double-hung metal sash. Dating to the 1951 renovations, the replacement windows fit the original fenestrations and are located within the original brick segmental arches and above concrete sills.

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The 1951 addition comprises the entirety of the west elevation, featuring the upper story clad in brick veneer and the bottom two stories clad in concrete block (*Photograph 5*). First- and second-story windows are eight-over-eight, double-hung wood sash with brick lintels and concrete sills. The upper story is four bays wide (W, W, W, W), with a vinyl-sided gable centered over the two interior bays. The middle two windows have been enclosed with vinyl siding. The bottom floor features two lower-level access doors, the first covered by a projecting shed-roof and the second by a front-gable roof entry porch.

The north elevation features the side of the 1908 front-facing gabled section, followed by the projecting front-gable roof 1951 addition. A small front-gabled extension projects from the far left side, featuring quarter-height brick buttresses and a tall, segmental-arched window that has been enclosed with vinyl siding. The following four bays are three-over-two (horizontal), double-hung metal sash; these are 1951 windows within the original fenestrations. The 1951 addition projects from the rear of the north elevation, featuring a vinyl-sided gable field and additional double-hung sash windows.

### Interior

The church's interior demonstrates several campaigns of renovations, from 1951 to the mid-1980s. The original plan of the 1908 section remains, though the major addition in 1951 was accompanied by many modifications to the church's finishes. The top floor of the church building contains the narthex, the nave, a small chapel, a kitchen, the pastor's study, and another small office space.

Upon entering via the double doors in the tower, one is in a small entry vestibule, separated from the narthex by an opening surrounded by simple wood trim. The narthex features wood wainscoting and a wood chair rail, simple wood trim around doors and windows, and carpeting over the wood floors. Three façade-elevation stained glass windows added in 1951 are visible from the vestibule (*Photograph 10*). A pair of original one-light, four-panel wood doors open into the nave. The doors are flanked by narrow one-light sidelight windows (*Photograph 11*).

The nave features a vaulted ceiling covered in modern plaster, a wood chair rail and wood wainscoting, and wood floors (*Photographs 12 & 13*). This room demonstrates several modifications, especially to finishes such as the plastered ceiling and the walls. The wood floors date to 1951. The central aisle is flanked by two rows of wood pews (c.1951). Accessible via three carpeted steps, the altar features a wall clad in vertical wood paneling, a simple wood pulpit, and choir.

The small chapel is accessible via a wood door that centrally located on the left side of the nave (*Photograph 18*). It is also accessible from the façade. The small chapel serves as a secondary meeting and worship space, and features mid-twentieth century wood paneling and carpet over the floors. Other rooms on the left side of the nave include a small hallway leading to two bathrooms and a small kitchen space. The hallway, bathrooms, and kitchen have replacement wood floors, dating to approximately 1985.

The pastor's study is accessible via an elevated two-panel, wood door to the right of the altar. This small room has wood baseboards, carpeted floors, and simple wood trim around the windows. A second small study adjoins this room, also located to the right of the altar, separated by a two-panel, wood door. Both interior rooms have simple wood trim and baseboards, modern plaster walls, and carpeted floors.

The second floor of the church building is accessible via stairs from the upper-level hallway. The second floor has four classrooms along the building's west elevation, two large interior storage rooms, and a small

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closet and bathroom along the south elevation. An interior hallway separates the four classrooms and the interior storage rooms, featuring wood trim around the doors and floors original to the 1951 addition (*Photographs 19 & 20*). Each classroom features original 1951 wood floors, simple wood baseboards, and plaster walls. One interior storage room houses the church's HVAC equipment (*Photographs 21-23*).

The stairs continue down to provide access to the basement-level floor. The basement level includes a closet, a modern kitchen, and a large room that serves as a community space and dining room. Floors on this level are all modern wood, dating to approximately 1985. Walls in the dining room are concrete block, with modern fluorescent light fixtures and some exposed HVAC tubing (*Photographs 25 & 26*).

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**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 N/A**

(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/Black

RELIGION

SOCIAL HISTORY

**Period of Significance**

1908-1968

**Significant Dates**

1908, 1951, 1960

**Significant Person**

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

N/A

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### **Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph**

Bethel Methodist Church, located in Morristown, Hamblen County, Tennessee, is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under criterion A for its associations with African-American heritage as it relates to Religion and Social History. Bethel Methodist Church reflects the evolution of Methodism within African-American congregations after the Civil War and through the mid-twentieth century, and it served as a significant cornerstone for the black community of Morristown throughout the same time period. The period of significance is defined from 1908, when the existing property was constructed, until 1968, the fifty-year marker. Constructed in 1908 with a significant addition in 1951, the church retains substantial integrity to reflect its evolution, especially in the areas of location, design, workmanship, feeling, and association.

### **Narrative Statement of Significance**

#### **Religion**

In the years immediately following the Civil War, the church served as the most significant institution in African-American life, functioning as a cultural center and an opportunity to establish traditions and stability. Several major denominations thrived in Tennessee in the decades following the Civil War. Though the Church of Christ, Church of God, Baptist, and Presbyterian Churches all served the black population of Tennessee, this nomination will explore the evolution of the Methodist Church, as represented by Bethel Methodist Church. In a time of conflict and change, Bethel Methodist Church “grew to become the Methodist religious center for the black community in Morristown and beyond.”<sup>1</sup> Bethel Methodist Church’s history is emblematic of the evolution of the Methodist Church in East Tennessee and representative of the significant role of the black church in the South.

#### *Context: Methodism surrounding the Civil War*

In its origins, Methodism in the United States maintained an anti-slavery position, welcoming both white and black congregants to church. In 1784, the Methodist Episcopal Church was founded at the Christmas Conference in Baltimore, Maryland, where they instituted the rule that Methodist ministers could not have slaves. Two black ministers were licensed to preach at this conference. Under Francis Asbury, who served as Bishop from 1784 to 1816, the earliest Methodist Episcopal Churches in the United States all had both white and black members.<sup>2</sup> In 1790, black members made up twenty percent of the 57,631 documented Methodists in the United States.<sup>3</sup> However, in the early nineteenth century, the inevitable conflicts surrounding racial disparity in the United States began to manifest within the church, and several new denominations branched off from the Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1816, the African Methodist Episcopal Church was founded by Richard Allen, followed by the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Zion in 1821.<sup>4</sup> While many enslaved people and free blacks moved to join these new denominations, conflict remained within the Methodist Episcopal Church as to the topic of slavery. In 1844, the Methodist Episcopal Church foreshadowed what would occur in the United States as a whole; the North and South branches of the church split over the

<sup>1</sup> JoVita Wells, ed., *A School for Freedom: Morristown College and Five Generations of Education for Blacks, 1868-1985* (Morristown, TN: Morristown College Press, 1986), 18.

<sup>2</sup> Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 49.

<sup>3</sup> United Methodist Church, “Timeline: Methodism in Black and White,” accessed August 14, 2017, <http://www.umc.org/resources/timeline-methodism-in-black-and-white>.

<sup>4</sup> Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church*, 52-57.

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subject of slavery, establishing the Methodist Episcopal Church, North, and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Such animosity continued within the church, and the country, leading up to the Civil War.

Throughout the Civil War, East Tennessee Methodists were officially part of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South; however, the region was as conflicted in its orientation within the Methodist Episcopal Church as in its overall perspective of abolition and secession. The region was part of the Holston Conference, South. In 1860, there were 4,156 black members of the Holston Conference, South, and more than half (2,301) of these members were in East Tennessee.<sup>5</sup> Four years later, there were 4,659 black members of the same conference, with a similar proportion of congregants worshipping in East Tennessee.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, by 1870, the Holston Conference, South had far less black members: only 190, segregated into two specifically black districts. For a broader picture, in the overall Methodist Episcopal Church, South, the number of black congregants dropped from 207,766 before the war to 78,742 in 1866.<sup>7</sup> These statistics serve to illustrate the Civil War's effect on the Methodist Episcopal Church in East Tennessee and the broader South.

Dissent and competition within the Methodist Episcopal Church continued after the Civil War. While the war "formally ended in April 1865 at Appomattox, the internal civil war in Southern Appalachian Methodism was just getting started," and this conflict would have broad implications for the origins of Bethel Methodist Church.<sup>8</sup> In the Reconstruction Era, the Methodist Episcopal Church, North "launched an ambitious and aggressive missionary pattern in the defeated southern states," founding churches, schools, and providing financial aid to recently freed enslaved people.<sup>9</sup> In East Tennessee, the Holston Conference, North was founded in 1865, in direct competition with the Holston Conference, South.<sup>10</sup> Throughout the decades following the Civil War, members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, North seized property abandoned or under-utilized by the Southern branch to found new congregations. One such property in East Tennessee was the Church Street Methodist Church in Knoxville (NR, 3/10/2009). At a General Conference in 1880, the East Tennessee Conference was formed as a specifically black conference that included the Morristown area. Their first meeting was in Greenville in October 1880, with about 2,760 members.<sup>11</sup>

Supported by Northern Methodists, newly-formed black conferences within the Church, and new buildings and property, black communities could now create autonomous congregations. According to C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya in *The Black Church in the African-American Experience*, "the first early black Methodist churches were organized by free black people in the North in response to stultifying and demeaning conditions attending membership in the white-controlled Methodist Episcopal churches."<sup>12</sup> Missionary efforts to found schools also aided in this goal. Through missionary groups such as the Methodist Freedman's Aid Society, the Methodist Episcopal Church, North continued its outreach to freedmen and its

<sup>5</sup> Isaac Patton Martin, *History of Methodism in the Holston Conference* (Knoxville: Methodist Historical Society, 1945), 110.

<sup>6</sup> Martin, *History of Methodism in the Holston Conference*, 144.

<sup>7</sup> Durwood Dunn, *The Civil War in Southern Appalachian Methodism* (Knoxville: the University of Tennessee Press, 2013), 136.

<sup>8</sup> Dunn, *The Civil War in Southern Appalachian*, 124.

<sup>9</sup> National Register of Historic Places, Multiple Property Documentation Form, Historic Rural African American Churches in Tennessee, 1850-1970, E-11.

<sup>10</sup> Dunn, *The Civil War in Southern Appalachian Methodism*, 116.

<sup>11</sup> Martin, *History of Methodism in the Holston Conference*, 174.

<sup>12</sup> Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church*, 47.

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occupation of past Methodist Episcopal, South strongholds. The “impact of the [Northern church] missionary efforts went hand-in-hand with the creation of African-American education institutions that helped to produce the pastors and leaders of early churches.”<sup>13</sup> It is within this context of Northern outreach, missionary efforts, new educational opportunities, and a conflicted Methodist Episcopal Church that Bethel Methodist Church found its origins.

Such multi-faceted attempts at outreach into Southern states were embodied by the Methodist Episcopal Church, North in Morristown, the creation of Morristown College, and Bethel Church. In 1881, the Freedman’s Aid Society founded the Morristown Normal and Industrial College in Hamblen County, originally as an elementary and high school. The Society appointed Judson S. Hill to lead the school. Hill, a white Methodist Episcopal minister, initially served as minister of the (still extant) Centenary Methodist Church of Morristown. However, a black congregation, part of the East Tennessee Conference by 1880, was immediately adjacent to Morristown College and soon provided a home church for its students.

#### *Origins of Bethel Methodist Church*

The first iteration of Bethel Methodist Church was organized immediately following the Civil War, in a schoolhouse on Old Holt Road, a road adjacent to present-day church site on the west.<sup>14</sup> The schoolhouse was also used by Mrs. Almira Stearnes, a Northern missionary also credited for the first educational efforts for recently-freed enslaved people in Morristown. Located on a lot purchased from J.N. Carriger (an early Hamblen County settler) in 1868, the school building would also provide space for the earliest meetings of Judson S. Hill’s Morristown College efforts.<sup>15</sup> Bethel Methodist Church originated as First Methodist Episcopal Church, with its first official minister documented as Owen N. Hypsher in October of 1881.<sup>16</sup> Hypsher was also present at the first meeting of the aforementioned East Tennessee Conference in Greenville in October 1880.<sup>17</sup> From 1881 on, the church can trace a clear continuation of its pastors. By 1888, under the leadership of W.T. Marley, the church already acknowledged its need to grow. On May 27, 1888, Mack Fulton, J.M. Walker, and Andrew Newherne, “trustees of the M.E. church at Morristown,” paid Sarah Carriger ninety-five dollars for an adjoining lot, documented in the deed as “land south of the lot on which the M.E. Church now stands.”<sup>18</sup> Through the end of the nineteenth century, the church then known as First Methodist Episcopal Church maintained an important role in the black community of Morristown.

The first decade of the twentieth century saw the construction of the present-day church building. In 1900 and 1901, two years of college courses were added to the adjacent school, and the school was re-named the Morristown Normal and Industrial College in 1901. As more students attended the adjacent school, the congregation of the “‘home church’ for Morristown College” grew.<sup>19</sup> In January 1907, Judson S. Hill donated additional land that had been part of the College’s holdings to the congregation. The land held by Judson S. Hill and his wife Laura E. Hill was deeded to Mack Fulton, Rankin Lee, Alfred Carmichael, Andrew Newherne, and Judson S. Hill, as Trustees of the First Methodist Episcopal Church of Morristown,

<sup>13</sup> National Register of Historic Places, Historic Rural African American Churches in Tennessee MPDF, 1850-1970, E-30.

<sup>14</sup> Multiple authors, “Historical Sketch of Bethel United Methodist Church, 1880-2012,” n.d., 1.

<sup>15</sup> Grainger County Register of Deeds (lost to fire); Wells, *A School for Freedom*, 6.

<sup>16</sup> Multiple authors, “Historical Sketch of Bethel United Methodist Church, 1880-2012,” 1.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Hamblen County Register of Deeds, Book 7, Page 551.

<sup>19</sup> Wells, *A School for Freedom*, 18.

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for one dollar.<sup>20</sup> The land was given to the trustees “for the use and benefit of the ministry and membership of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the U.S.A.”<sup>21</sup> With a new plot of land, located at the northwest corner of Cumberland Street and Sixth North Street and immediately west of the College property, the trustees could commence construction of a new building.

*Construction of existing church building and early twentieth-century history*

Construction on the existing Bethel Methodist Church took place between 1907 and 1908. Under the leadership of Reverend D.T. Turner, a cross-gable, wood-frame church was constructed. The church features a first-floor brick exterior, clad in bricks that were fired in the kilns on the adjacent Morristown College campus.<sup>22</sup> The gables were clad in wood weatherboard siding, with wood trimwork at the gable peaks, and a corner facing tower. The original building consisted of a small entry vestibule within the tower, a narthex, a large nave, and a small chapel on the south side (*See Figure 1*). The church opened for services in 1908, and it “grew to become the Methodist religious center for the black community in Morristown and beyond.”<sup>23</sup> The church is noted as the First Methodist Episcopal Church at 700 North Cumberland in the Morristown City Directories from 1915 to at least 1926, with most years also featuring a note of “colored” in parentheses next to the church’s address.

Not only was the church aligned with the innovative and wide-reaching education programs of Morristown College, but it also provided a space for community meetings in a town increasingly marked by the Jim Crow laws of the early twentieth century. The era was a “nadir of race relations throughout the South,” marked by lynching, violence, segregation of public spaces, and strongly unequal opportunities.<sup>24</sup> In response, black communities turned to their churches for guidance. Churches served as the primary meeting spaces for black communities, “important as a nurturing center for African-American identity.”<sup>25</sup> Even better, noted Tennessee historian Bobby Lovett, was when prominent churches were adjacent to schools and community institutions. The 1922 Sanborn map notes the First Methodist Episcopal Church as immediately across the street from Morristown College, and adjacent to a social lodge/hall (*see Figure 2*). This intersection of education, religious, and social facilities allowed Bethel Methodist Church to be a major hub for Morristown’s black community. From 1908 to 1939, most of the meetings of the (segregated) East Tennessee Conference were held at Bethel Methodist Church.<sup>26</sup>

The year 1939 was also another significant year in the organization of the overall Methodist Church. The Northern branch of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the Methodist Protestant Church adopted a plan for reunion, establishing the Methodist Church. The Methodist Church established five jurisdictions around the United States, based on geographical region. However, black Methodists were excluded from this union, and isolated into a sixth jurisdiction, the Central

<sup>20</sup> Hamblen County Register of Deeds, Book 25, page 430.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Multiple authors, “Historical Sketch of Bethel United Methodist Church, 1880-2012,” 2.

<sup>23</sup> Wells, *A School for Freedom*, 18.

<sup>24</sup> National Register of Historic Places, Historic Rural African American Churches in Tennessee MPDF, 1850-1970, 36.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> James V. Lyles, *Hard Trials, Great Tribulations: A Black Preacher’s Pilgrimage from Poverty and Segregation to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Bloomington: Xlibris, 2014).

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Jurisdiction, which was officially segregated.<sup>27</sup> The Central Jurisdiction was non-geographical and based solely on race. After 1939, the annual session of the East Tennessee region's Central Jurisdiction branch were held at Morristown College, for business aspects, and at Bethel, for worship and other religious activity.<sup>28</sup> By 1949, the First Methodist Episcopal Church was referred to as Bethel Methodist Church, noted as specifically "colored" in the Morristown City Directory.<sup>29</sup> Not only were black Methodists segregated in their own communities, but they were segregated within the broader church organization.

Because Bethel Methodist Church was segregated from the overall Methodist community through the mid-twentieth century, the church had to rely on internal groups for financial and organizational support. The Women's Home Missionary Society was organized as early as 1881, with the Ladies Aid Society organized in the early 1900s. These groups were united to form the Women's Society of Christian Service in 1940.<sup>30</sup> The women's groups planned events, supported the ministers, and organized fundraising activities. One internal club of young women within the church, the "Elizabeth Wilson Dudley Group," organized a major regional revival in the spring of 1930. They later joined with a second group to collect Octagon soap coupons, which were in turn redeemed for money and utilized to fund roof repairs for the church.<sup>31</sup> Such internal groups are just one example of the resourcefulness inherent in a strong church community, and the ways the church responded to segregation.

The period of significance for Bethel Church extends into the mid-twentieth century, as the church remained a critical religious and social cornerstone for the black community of Morristown and the surrounding region. After the Methodist Church was established in 1939, the Central Jurisdiction was officially segregated by the overall Church. According to Lincoln and Mamiya,

"the effect of this action was to institutionalize a black Methodist Church, literally a church within a church. Not until 1966 [1968] when a merger with the Evangelical United Brethren Church was effected, was the Central Jurisdiction officially abolished. True integration in the church failed to follow desegregation. In practice if not in policy, black Methodists remained separate."<sup>32</sup>

In the mid-twentieth century, efforts to "fix" racial disparity further institutionalized racial conflicts. However, Bethel Methodist Church continued to play a strong role within its community.

In the 1940s and 1950s, Bethel continued to have increasing numbers of congregants. In 1951, it became necessary to improve and expand the present church. Under the leadership of Reverend James R. Cannon and Miller W. Boyd, President of Morristown College, the church began a substantial program of addition and renovation. A two-story brick addition was constructed on the rear of the church, with a basement level built below grade. The basement included a dining room, a modern kitchen, a furnace room, and bathrooms. On the first floor were classrooms for Sunday school and other educational programs, and several storage rooms. The addition on the second floor provided a pastor's study, choir room, ladies lounge, small chapel,

<sup>27</sup> National Register of Historic Places, Historic Rural African American Churches in Tennessee MPDF, 1850-1970, E-36.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Morristown City Directory, 1949.

<sup>30</sup> Multiple authors, "Historical Sketch of Bethel United Methodist Church, 1880-2012," 2.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church*, 67.

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and bathrooms. On the second floor were classrooms for Sunday school and other educational programs. The 1951 renovation also included new pews, and other interior modifications to the nave and altar, including wood siding and a new wood pulpit.<sup>33</sup> By 1953, Bethel Methodist Church was officially called Bethel Memorial Methodist.<sup>34</sup> Benefitting from these additions, by 1960, Bethel Methodist Church was the largest black church building in Morristown. Other black churches in Morristown and Hamblen County decided to hold a regional Vacation Bible School at Bethel, which was largely successful for at least four years.<sup>35</sup>

### Social History

While Bethel Methodist Church is not known for major contributions to the Civil Rights events of the mid-twentieth century, the church did have a connection to the movement. Noted by Lincoln and Mamiya, “prior to the Reconstruction period and particularly after its failure, black churches in the South performed a variety of roles and functions that could easily provide the transition to the arena of protest and electoral politics.”<sup>36</sup> In general, the Methodist Church promoted civil rights and equality, and was supportive of broad community-based attempts to improve education and living conditions. However, “Methodist churches [often] lacked the building size and leadership potential to play a primary role in the Civil Rights Movement in rural Tennessee in the 1950s and 1960s.”<sup>37</sup> Bethel’s unique role as the largest black church in its community allowed them to be an exception to that rule, and their connection and proximity to Morristown College made the church a recognizable entity to outside groups interested in Civil Rights outreach.

In the height of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, a group of seminary students at the Union Theological Seminary in New York City were inspired by the lunch counter sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina and other Southern cities. Such increased conflict in the South “demanded an active response ... for many students who had studied religion and philosophy only in the classroom.”<sup>38</sup> In April 1960, Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke at Salem Methodist Church in Harlem. A student at the Union Theological Seminary, Jane Stembridge, attended his speech and later asked how she could help; King encouraged her to go south. Stembridge organized a group of seminarians including John Collins, Franklin “Chris” Gamwell, and Charles Helms to spend the summer of 1960 in service to black churches in the south. One pastoral team went to a United Methodist Church in Greenville, South Carolina, one team went to an A.M.E. church in Talladega, Alabama, and Chris Gamwell went to Morristown to work with Reverend Maurice King at Bethel Methodist Church.<sup>39</sup>

Gamwell also worked with Paul Edwards, the current dean of students at Morristown College. Working alongside Reverend King, Gamwell spent the summer working within the church, aiding in its outreach programs and assisting in ministry. Gamwell and King also attempted to reach across racial lines to whites in Morristown. One Sunday evening, they organized a gathering of prominent white citizens of Morristown at

<sup>33</sup> Multiple authors, “Historical Sketch of Bethel United Methodist Church, 1880-2012,” 2.

<sup>34</sup> Morristown City Directory, 1953.

<sup>35</sup> Multiple authors, “Historical Sketch of Bethel United Methodist Church, 1880-2012,” 3.

<sup>36</sup> Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church*, 206.

<sup>37</sup> National Register of Historic Places, *Historic Rural African American Churches in Tennessee MPDF, 1850-1970*, E-12.

<sup>38</sup> David P. Cline, *From Reconciliation to Revolution: the Student Interracial Ministry, Liberal Christianity, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2016), 4.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

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Bethel Methodist Church, “likely the first time whites in Morristown had set foot in a black church.”<sup>40</sup> Gamwell also attempted to work with local black teenagers who were interested in gaining access to the one movie theater and three drive-in theaters in town, which were all racially segregated. Gamwell and King met with each of the three drive-in owners, though the owners did not end up opening their theaters to black residents. Gamwell returned to Union Theological Seminary at the end of August 1960, commenting that the primary benefit was “not to the community served but to the people who participated in it. It educated us.”<sup>41</sup> Inspired by racial disparities in Morristown and the broader South, Gamwell, John Collins, and other seminarians would go on to create and run the Student Interracial Ministry, a major Civil Rights organization similar to the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).<sup>42</sup> For eight years, the Student Interracial Ministry continued the work that originated with Gamwell at Bethel Church, where black pastors would be placed in white churches and vice versa. By accepting Gamwell into their congregation, during the summer of 1960, Bethel Methodist Church aided the Civil Rights effort of the mid-twentieth century.

In 1968, the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church joined to form the United Methodist Church. This also dissolved the segregated Central Jurisdiction, and black Methodists and black Methodist churches were re-integrated into their geographical conferences. Bethel became known as Bethel United Methodist Church, and is part of the Holston Conference to the present day. Bethel UMC has hosted church services for Morristown College homecomings throughout the twentieth century, and though the College is no longer extant, many current parishioners are alumnae of the school. The current pastor, Reverend Edwin Cunningham, is noted in church history as the second white pastor at Bethel Church, and he has served as the minister for twenty-five years.

### **Integrity**

The National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form “Historic Rural African-American Churches in Tennessee, 1850-1970,” prepared by the MTSU Center for Historic Preservation in 1999, defines three distinct periods in the history and architecture of African-American Churches: 1) Creating a Tradition, 1850-1890; 2) Maintaining Traditions in an Era of Jim Crow Segregation, 1890-1945; and 3) the Modern Era, 1945-1970. Bethel Church uniquely fits into all three of these, though the period of significance for the nomination and the extant building relates only to the second and third periods. This MPDF provides substantial context for an exploration of Bethel Church’s overall integrity. The MPDF begins by explaining that early black churches could be classified as “no style,” showing elements from several categories of forms and styles. However, from 1890 to 1945, the design of black churches took on more distinctive characteristics. In the larger towns and county seats of Tennessee, older and more established congregations, (like Bethel) began to construct their own landmark buildings at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These usually took the form of multi-story buildings of brick and concrete, some with varying interpretations of the late Gothic Revival style.<sup>43</sup> Bethel Church, with its modest lancet windows, wood trimwork on the original gables, and three-part tower, fully represents this transition towards increasing architectural detail at the beginning of the twentieth century.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>43</sup> National Register of Historic Places, Historic Rural African American Churches in Tennessee MPDF, 1850-1970, E-43.

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While the legal and societal restrictions of the Jim Crow era in Tennessee usually resulted in the construction of modest, vernacular church buildings, the Civil Rights era was accompanied by a widespread trend of church building improvements. Such improvements were also explored in the MPDF, which states that “it is clear that the years 1945 to 1970 were important years of change and improvement,” with “at least 67 African-American churches either built or remodeled significantly between 1945 and 1960.”<sup>44</sup> Church buildings with indoor plumbing, electricity, and more space became possible with the challenge and eventual removal of segregation laws and norms.<sup>45</sup> In the early 1950s, the Bethel building underwent a significant amount of exterior and interior modifications, including a multi-story rear addition. These 1950s adaptations allowed the church to continue to grow and evolve; it became the largest black church building in the area, so it could host regional vacation bible schools, Methodist conference meetings, and homecomings for Morristown College. Such significance within the community in the mid-1950s and 1960s even allowed the church to host the origins of a national Civil Rights group, the Student Interracial Ministry. Therefore, while modifications to the church building’s original 1908 design might often challenge a property’s integrity, in this case, the 1951 modifications are significant in their own right and representative of overall trends in African-American churches in Tennessee.

Located within the city limits of Morristown and immediately adjacent to the Morristown College campus (no longer extant), Bethel Methodist Church retains integrity of **location**. The property’s **design** adequately reflects both its origins in 1908 and the building’s 1951 modifications, featuring the original cross-gable form and a two-story rear addition with a basement level. The arrangement of fenestrations from both the 1908 and the 1951 sections remain intact, along with the overall interior layout.

As of the present day, the property’s **setting** has undergone some modifications. The 1922 and 1931 Sanborn maps show the church as located on the same street corner, across the street from Morristown College. In 1922 and 1931, the property immediately south from the church, across 6<sup>th</sup> Street, is a one-and-one-half-story residence which exists today as a parsonage. The property immediately north from the church, on the same side of Cumberland Avenue, is a lodge/social hall. A one-story, flat-roof commercial building was constructed between the church and the lodge in 1949; at one point, it served as a Greyhound bus station. It is currently an automobile repair shop. The Morristown College site underwent a period of neglect in the 1990s and early 2000s, and was fully demolished by 2017. A paved parking lot was added to the rear of the property in the mid-1970s. However, as the church was built in a commercial setting of a continually evolving downtown, these changes do not pose a major challenge to the property’s integrity of setting.

Bethel Methodist Church has also experienced substantial modification to its **materials**, in attempts to improve as the church’s congregation and outreach grew. The wood weatherboard siding originally applied to the front and side gable fields was replaced in the 1951 renovations, and the 1908 windows were replaced with metal double-hung sash in 1951. The church also demonstrates a substantial amount of interior modifications, including replacement floors on each level, modern plaster walls, and a plaster ceiling within the church. However, as explored previously, these modifications reflect a common trend in mid-century renovations of African-American churches, and do not conflict with the property’s overall integrity. Integrity of **workmanship** is still visible in the church building’s overall form, the exterior bricks fired on the

<sup>44</sup> National Register of Historic Places, Historic Rural African American Churches in Tennessee MPDF, 1850-1970, E-50.

<sup>45</sup> National Register of Historic Places, Historic Rural African American Churches in Tennessee MPDF, 1850-1970, E-51.

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Morristown College campus on the 1908 portion, and interior details such as the wood floors in the addition. As a still active congregation, a cornerstone of Morristown's black community, and a congregation that retains strong ties to Morristown College, Bethel Methodist Church retains a strong integrity of **feeling** and **association**. The nominated building continues to reflect Bethel Methodist Church's significance in religion, social history, and within Morristown's broader black community.

Bethel Methodist Church  
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## 9. Major Bibliographic References

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### Bibliography

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- Dunn, Durwood. *The Civil War in Southern Appalachian Methodism*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2013.
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- Lamon, Lester C. *Blacks in Tennessee, 1791-1970*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981.
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- Morristown City Directories: 1915, 1916, 1919, 1922, 1926, 1949, and 1953.
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- National Register of Historic Places. Multiple Property Documentation Form, Historic Rural African American Churches in Tennessee, 1850-1970.
- Oral interview, Grady C. Winegar, United Methodist Church: Holston Conference. Conducted in Knoxville, TN, August 7, 2017.
- Wells, Jovita, ed. *A School for Freedom: Morristown College and Five Generations of Education for Blacks, 1868-1985*. Morristown, TN: Morristown College Press, 1986.

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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 #	X	Other
	recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey #	Name of repository: United Methodist Church, Morristown district	
Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): HB00337			

Bethel Methodist Church  
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**10. Geographical Data**

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**Acreage of Property** 0.17 acres **USGS Quadrangle** Morristown, TN – 163 SE

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84:

1. Latitude: 36.21855 Longitude: -83.295578

**Verbal Boundary Description**

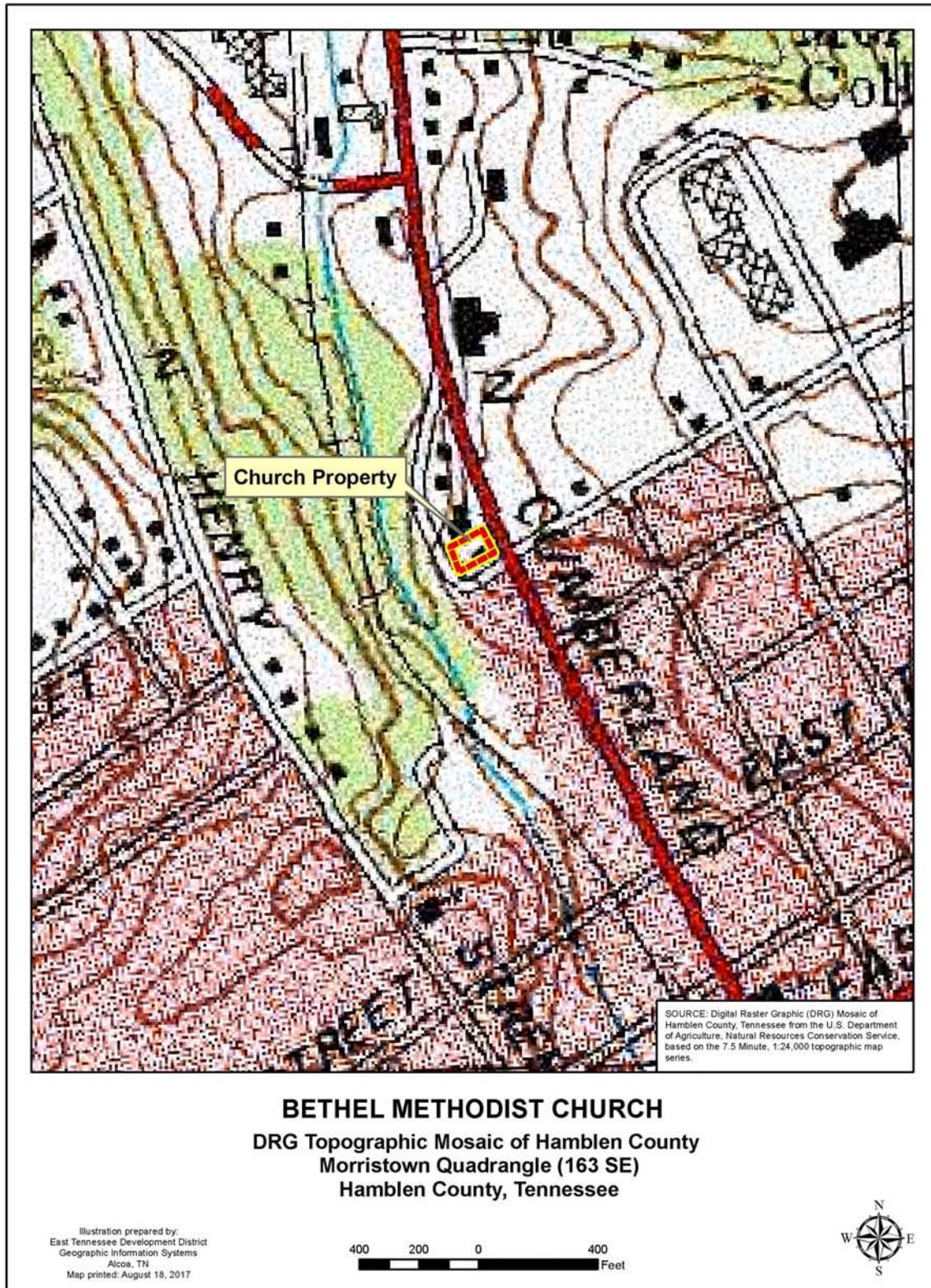
The boundary for Bethel Methodist church begins at the northwest junction of North Cumberland Street and Old Holt Road. From this point, the boundary runs north/northwest along North Cumberland Street approximately 82 feet, then west/southwest along the northern edge of the church building, then south/southeast approximately 76 feet, before returning approximately 82 feet to the point of origin.

**Boundary Justification**

The boundary represents the 0.17 acre parcel that has been historically associated with the Bethel Methodist Church. The church also owns the paved parking lot located immediately west/southwest of the church building, and the immediately adjacent property to the south; however, these are located on separate parcels and are not included in the National Register boundary.

Bethel Methodist Church  
Name of Property

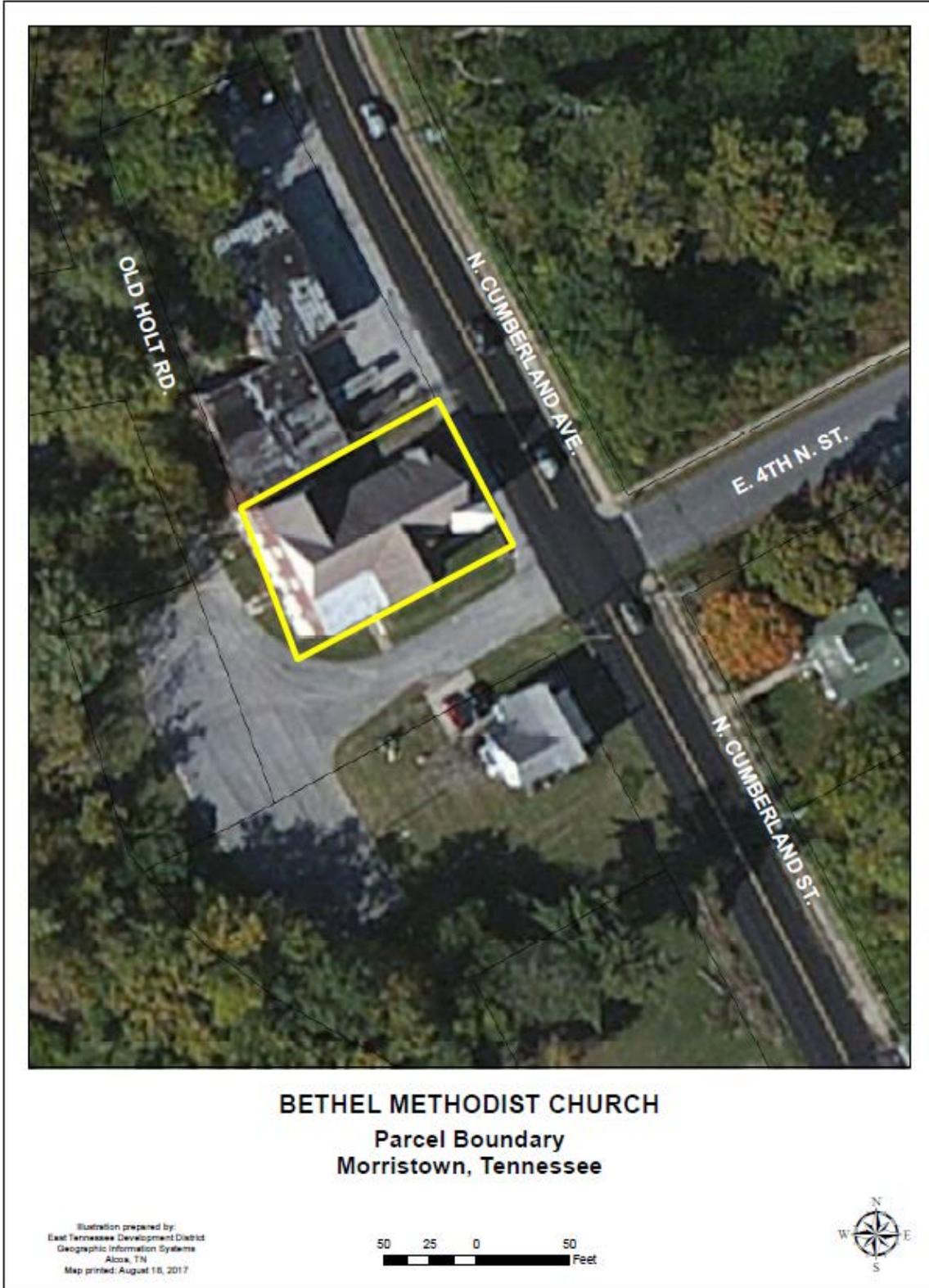
Hamblen County, TN  
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**Location Map:** 2010 USGS Topographic Map, Morristown Quadrangle, 163-SE.

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**Boundary Map: Parcel Boundary for Bethel Methodist Church**

Bethel Methodist Church  
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**11. Form Prepared By**

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Name Lindsay Crockett, Historic Preservation Planner

Organization East Tennessee Development District

Street & Number 216 Corporate Place Date September 2017

City or Town Alcoa Telephone 865-273-6003

E-mail lcrockett@etdd.org State TN Zip Code 37701

**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.

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**Photo Log**

Name of Property: Bethel Methodist Church  
City or Vicinity: Morristown  
County: Hamblen County State: Tennessee  
Photographer: Lindsay Crockett  
Date Photographed: July 26, 2017

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

- 1 of 29. East elevation (façade). Photographer facing west.
- 2 of 29. Southeast oblique. Photographer facing northwest.
- 3 of 29. South elevation. Photographer facing north.
- 4 of 29. Southwest oblique. Photographer facing northeast.
- 5 of 29. West elevation. Photographer facing east.
- 6 of 29. Northeast oblique. Photographer facing southwest.
- 7 of 29. Brick detail, south elevation. Photographer facing north.
- 8 of 29. Keystone detail, east elevation. Photographer facing west.
- 9 of 29. Interior view of narthex. Photographer facing northwest.
- 10 of 29. Narthex and stained glass detail. Photographer facing southeast.
- 11 of 29. Interior doors separating nave and narthex. Photographer facing east.
- 12 of 29. View of nave. Photographer facing west.
- 13 of 29. View of nave. Photographer facing east.
- 14 of 29. Wainscoting detail, nave wall. Photographer facing north/northeast.
- 15 of 29. Nave detail. Photographer facing northwest.
- 16 of 29. Main floor hallway. Photographer facing southeast.
- 17 of 29. View of kitchen. Photographer facing west.
- 18 of 29. Small chapel. Photographer facing northwest.

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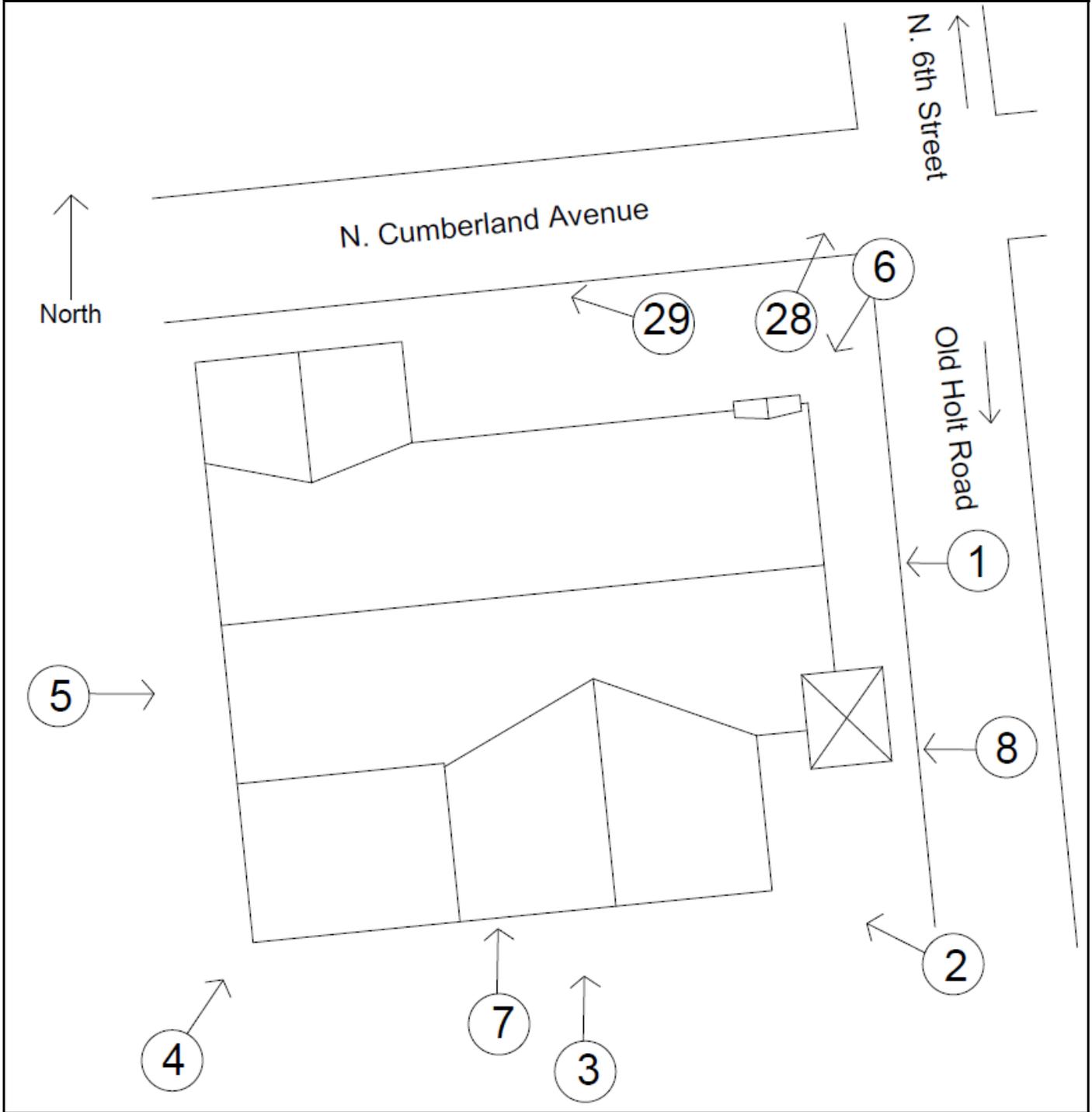
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- 19 of 29. First floor hallway. Photographer facing southeast.
- 20 of 29. First floor hallway detail. Photographer facing southeast.
- 21 of 29. Classroom view. Photographer facing southwest.
- 22 of 29. Classroom view. Photographer facing southwest.
- 23 of 29. Classroom view. Photographer facing southwest.
- 24 of 29. Basement hallway. Photographer facing southeast.
- 25 of 29. Dining room view. Photographer facing northwest.
- 26 of 29. Dining room view. Photographer facing southwest.
- 27 of 29. Basement kitchen view. Photographer facing southwest.
- 28 of 29. View of North Cumberland Avenue and Old Holt Road. Photographer facing northeast.
- 29 of 29. View of North Cumberland Avenue. Photographer facing northwest.

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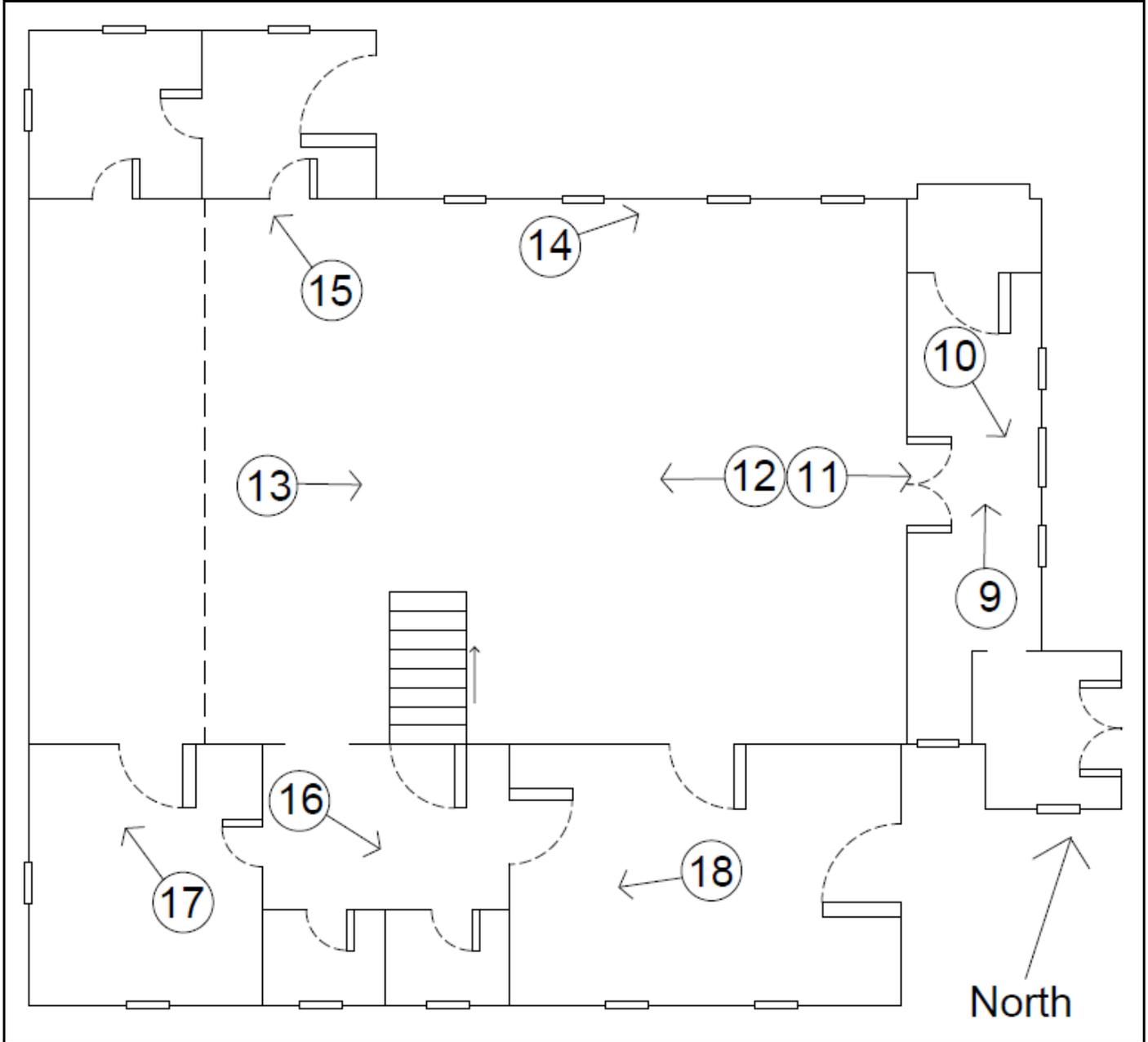
**Site Plan** (not to scale)



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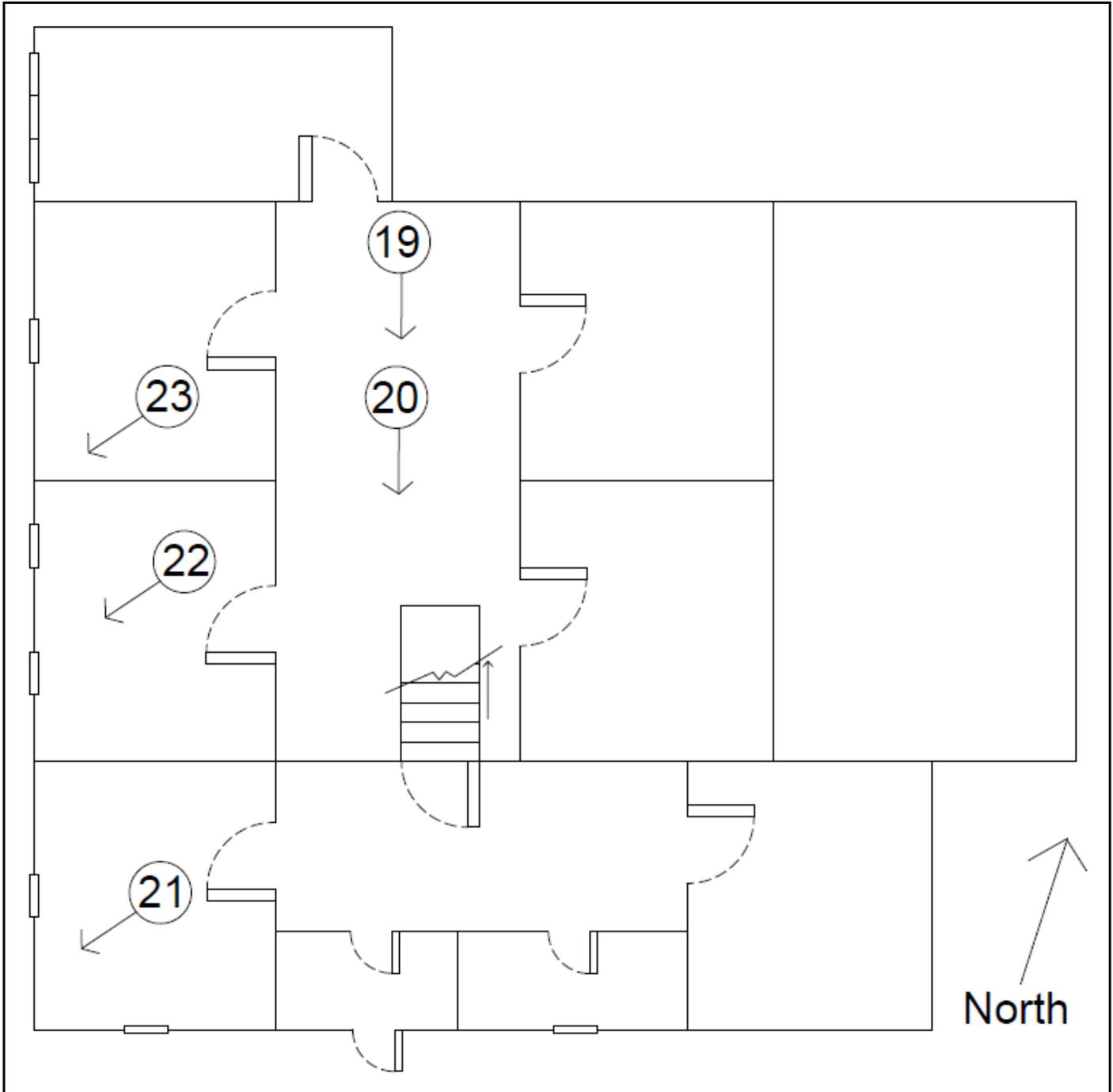
**Main Floor Plan** (not to scale)



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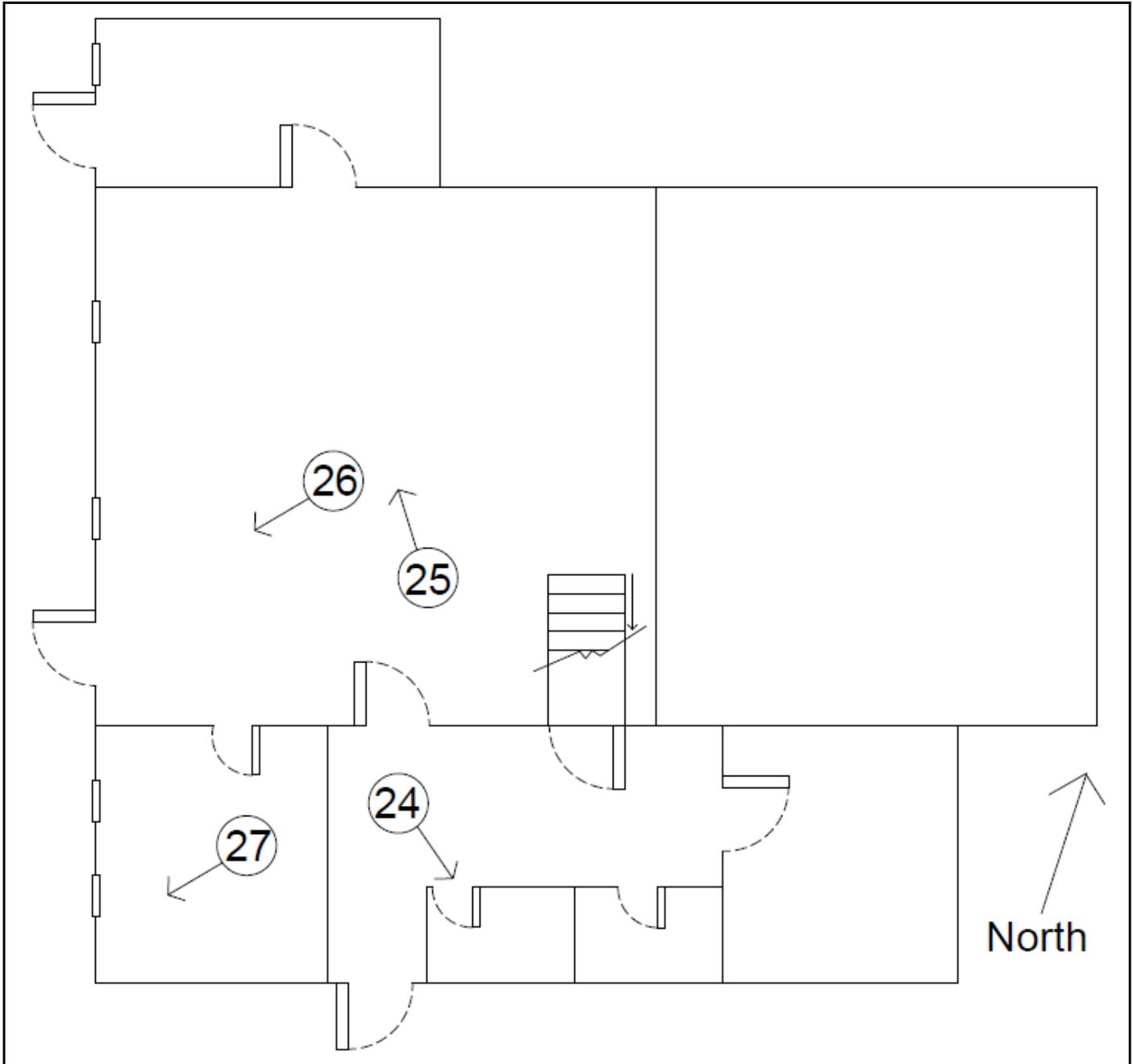
**First Floor Plan** (not to scale)



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**Basement Plan** (not to scale)



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**Figure 1:** c.1910 photograph of original Bethel Methodist Church building. Source: Bethel UMC records.

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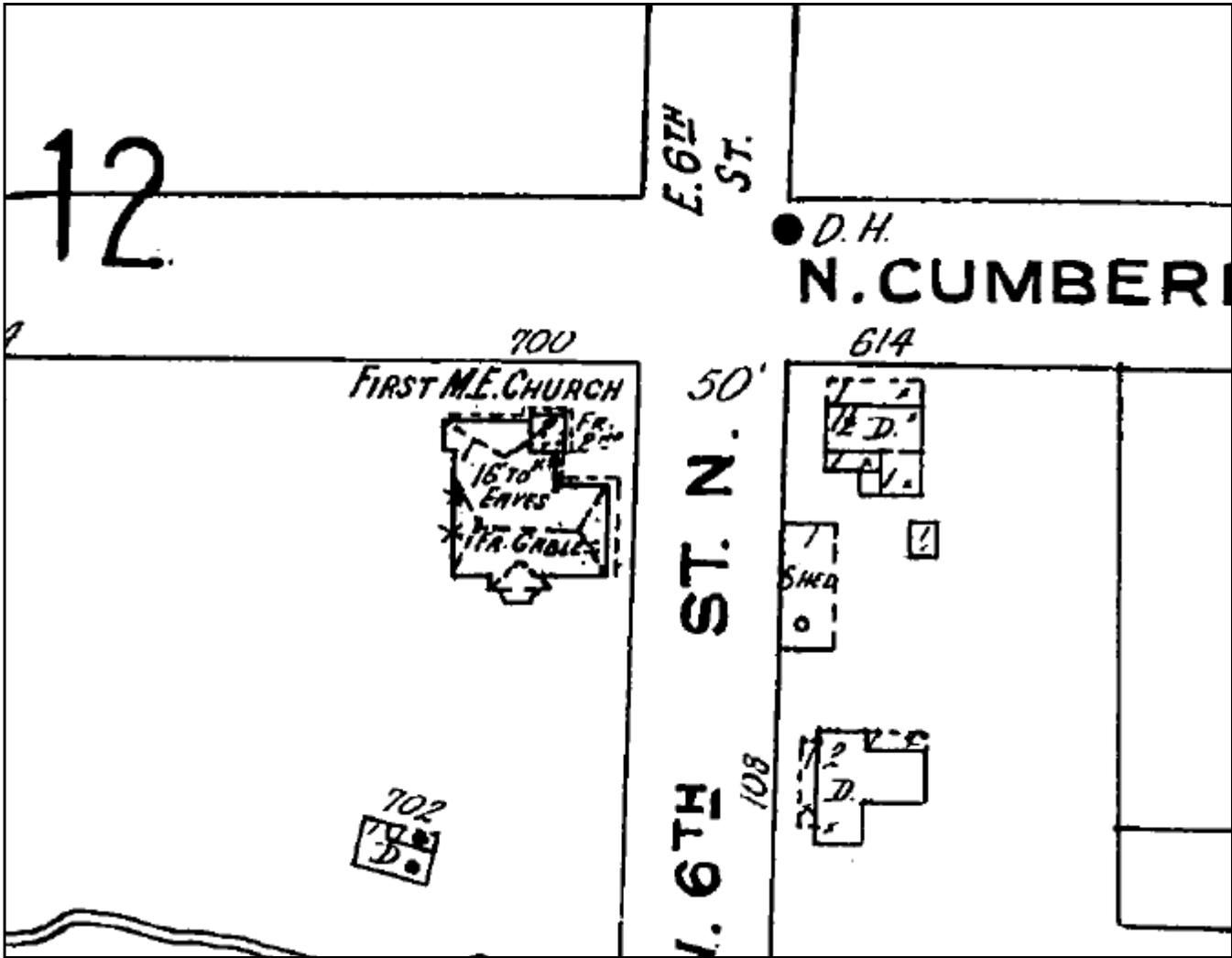


Figure 2: 1922 Sanborn Fire Insurance map showing church building.



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National Park Service

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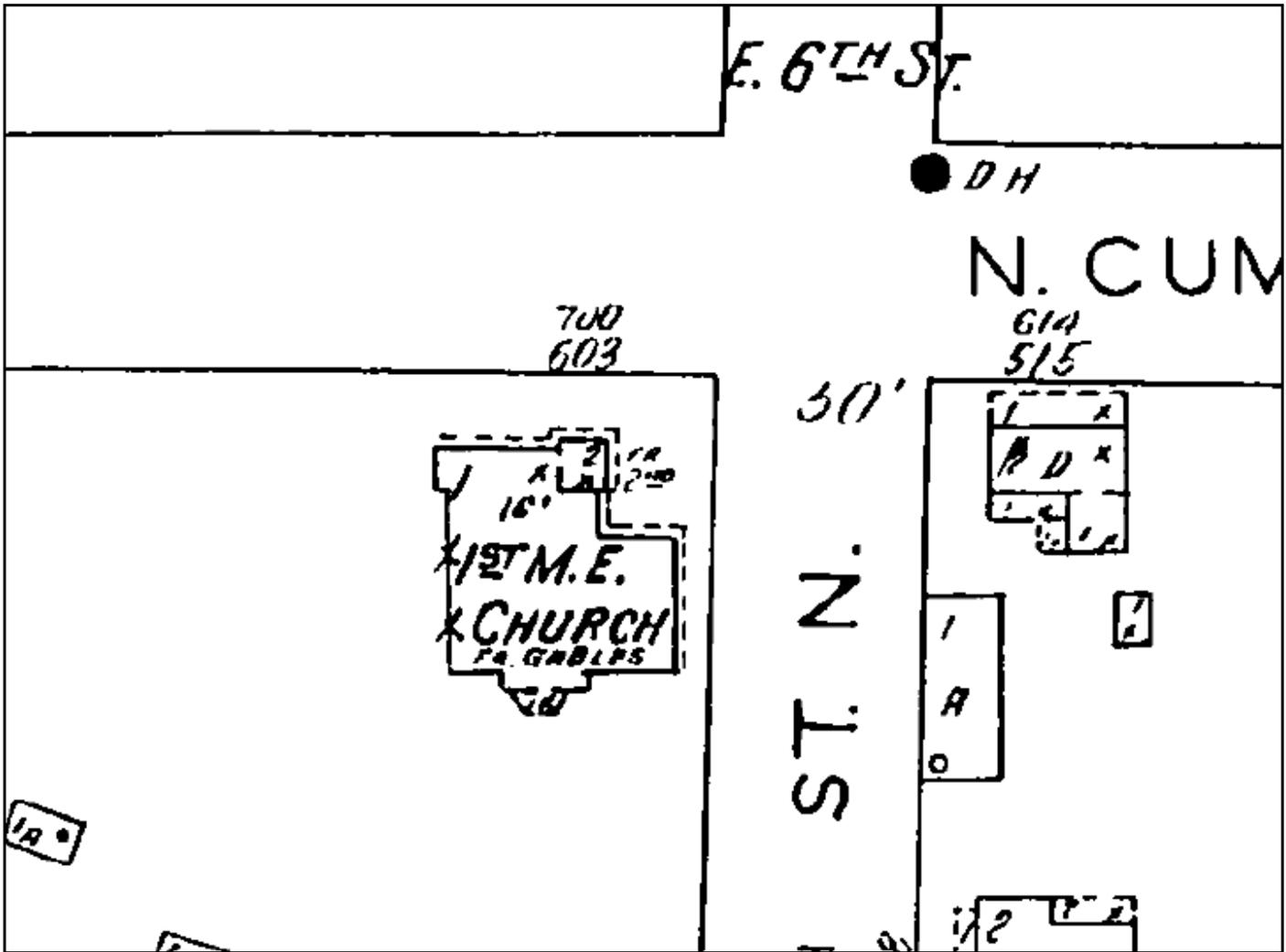


Figure 3: 1931 Sanborn Fire Insurance map showing church building.



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National Park Service

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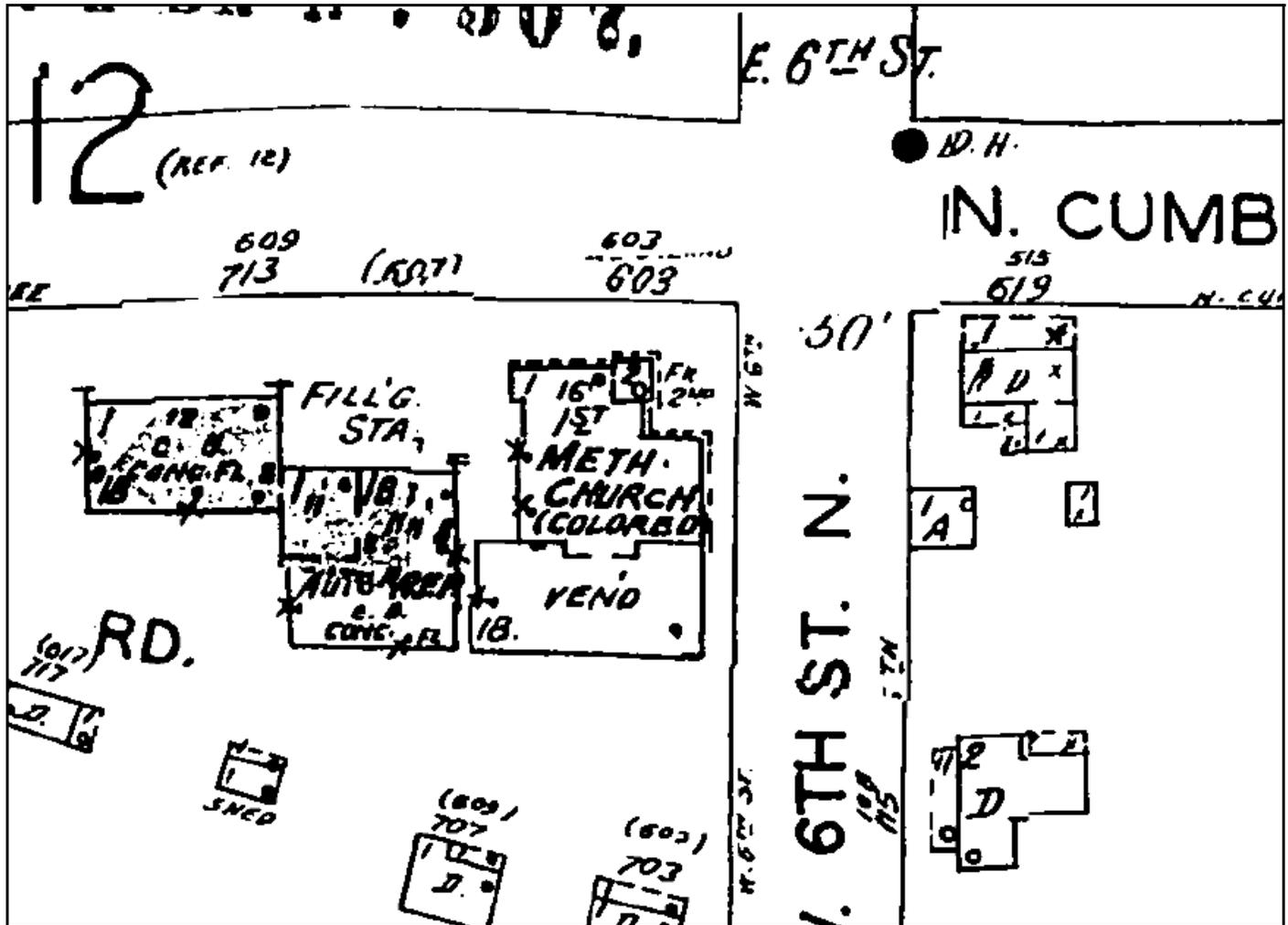
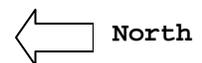


Figure 4: 1962 Sanborn Fire Insurance map. Note rear addition. Church is still noted as “colored” in 1962 map.



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Figure 5: 1935 USGS Topographic Map, Morristown Quadrangle.



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National Park Service

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**Figure 6:** 1939 USGS Topographic Map, Morristown quadrangle.

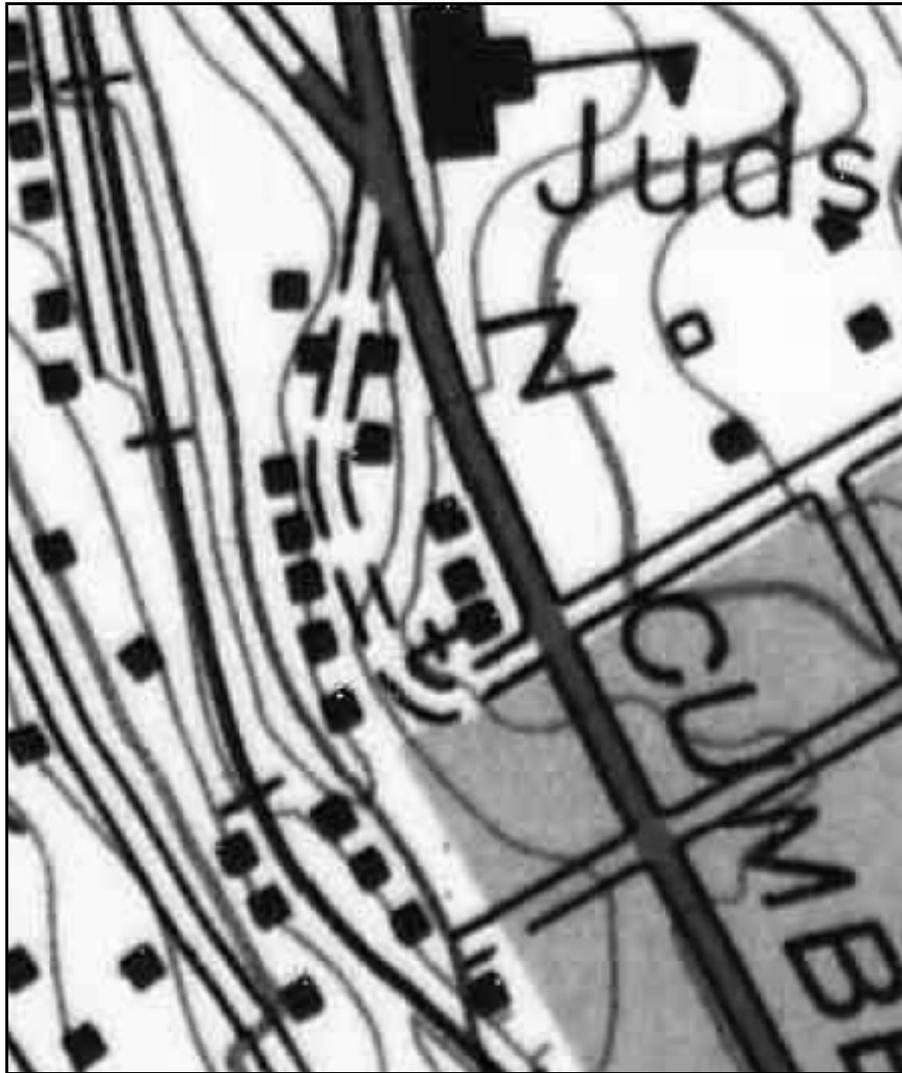


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**Figure 7:** 1961 USGS Topographic Map, Morristown quadrangle.







NO  
PARKING

CHILDRENS CHURCH  
Classes for ALL Ages  
Rev. A. Rose  
581-8921  
WE WELCOME YOU!  
STARTING  
June 4th  
10 am

BETHEL  
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
PASTOR  
REV. EDWIN CUNNINGHAM  
CONTACT NUMBER 581-8921  
SUNDAY WORSHIP 11:00 A.M.



THE  
GUEST CENTER



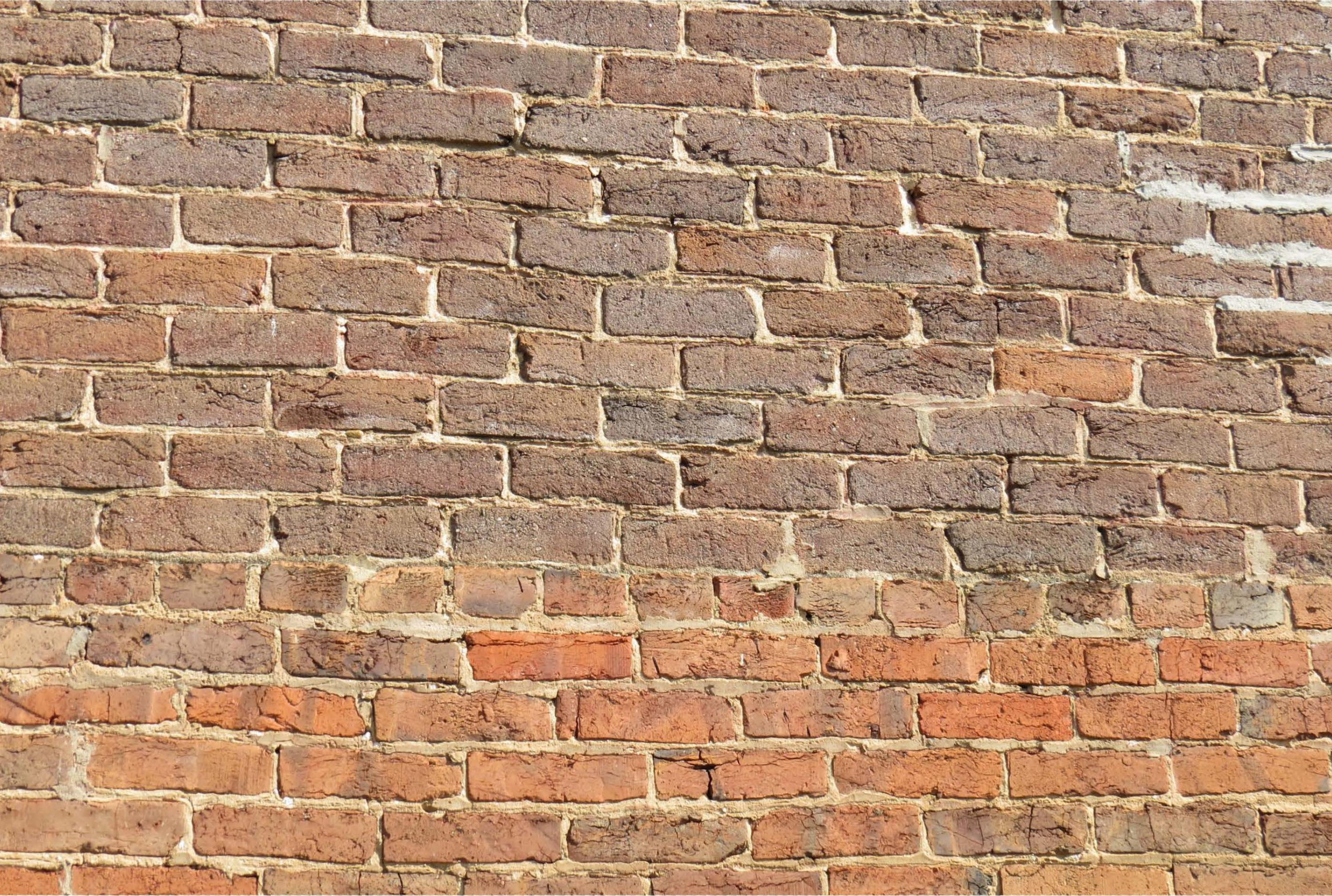




THEL  
DODIST CHURCH

CTOR:  
CUNNINGHAM  
9:45 a.m.  
HIP 11:00 a.m.

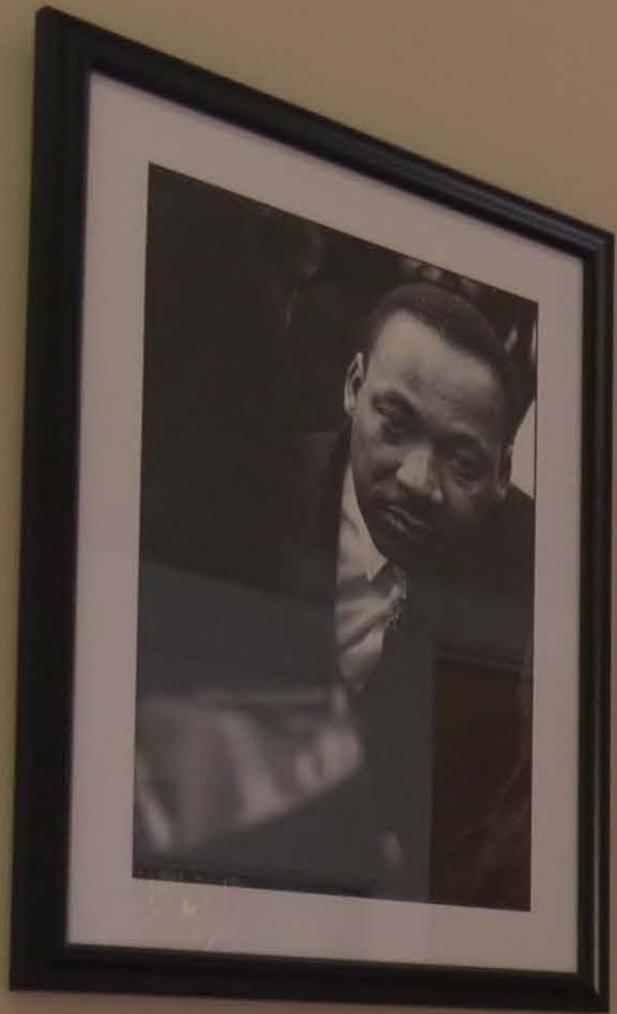
  
HANDICAP  
ACCESSIBLE



FIRST  
M. E. CHURCH  
1908.























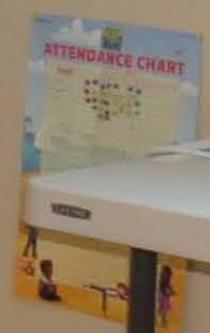








Happy Birthday!









RESTROOM

EX



3000  
COLD  
ED BOWL  
TERRIBLE  
ADVENTS  
AT O'FRIGS

Sprite  
Coca-Cola



CUMBERLAND

Old Holt  
Cumberland

STOP



**CHILDREN'S CHURCH**  
(Classes for ALL Ages)  
STARTING  
June 4th  
10 am  
WELCOME YOU!

**BETHEL  
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**  
PASTOR: REV. EDWIN CURRINHAM  
SUNDAY SCHOOL: 9:45 AM  
WORSHIP SERVICES: 10:45 AM

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action:

Property Name:

Multiple Name:

State & County:

Date Received: 2/12/2018      Date of Pending List: 3/9/2018      Date of 16th Day: 3/26/2018      Date of 45th Day: 3/29/2018      Date of Weekly List:

Reference number:

Nominator:

Reason For Review:

Accept       Return       Reject      3/28/2018 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments:

Recommendation/ Criteria

Reviewer Jim Gabbert      Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2275      Date \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION:    see attached comments : No    see attached SLR : No

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 37243-0442  
OFFICE: (615) 532-1550  
E-mail: [Claudette.Stager@tn.gov](mailto:Claudette.Stager@tn.gov)  
(615) 770-1089

February 8, 2018

J. Paul Loether  
Deputy Keeper and Chief,  
National Park Service  
National Register of Historic Places  
1849 C Street, NW, Mail Stop 7228  
Washington, DC 20240

*National Register Nomination*

- *Bethel Methodist Church, Hamblen County, Tennessee*

Dear Mr. Loether:

The enclosed disks contain the true and correct nomination for listing of the *Bethel Methodist Church* 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](mailto:Holly.M.Barnett@tn.gov).

Sincerely,

Claudette Stager  
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

CS:hb

Enclosures(2)