

PH 05 01816

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

DATA SHEET

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED AUG 2 1977

DATE ENTERED JAN 18 1978

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

* SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

NAME

HISTORIC St. John's Methodist Episcopal Church

AND/OR COMMON

LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER 17 miles east of Raton, N.M. on
State Highway #72

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Raton

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

#1

STATE

New Mexico

CODE
35

COUNTY
Colfax

CODE
007

CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH
- PUBLIC ACQUISITION**
- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE**
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

PRESENT USE

- AGRICULTURE
- COMMERCIAL
- EDUCATIONAL
- ENTERTAINMENT
- GOVERNMENT
- INDUSTRIAL
- MILITARY
- MUSEUM
- PARK
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- RELIGIOUS
- SCIENTIFIC
- TRANSPORTATION
- OTHER:

OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Ben F. Sumpter

STREET & NUMBER

218 Elm Street

CITY, TOWN

Dumas

VICINITY OF

STATE

Texas 79029

LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Colfax County Clerk's Office

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Raton

STATE

New Mexico

REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

State Register of Cultural Properties

DATE

February 28, 1975

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

New Mexico State Planning Office, 505 Don Gaspar

CITY, TOWN

Santa Fe

STATE

New Mexico

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Erected in 1897-8 by homesteading families St. John's Methodist Episcopal Church is a 24'x36' pitched-roofed, stone structure located near the center of Johnson's Mesa, an imposing geological formation in northeastern New Mexico. Situated just south of the Colorado border, the mesa is a vast plateau approximately 12 miles long and 5 miles wide which overlooks the town of Raton, the largest community in that part of New Mexico and county seat of Colfax County. Access to the mesa's rolling pasture and farm lands is gained by a precipitous road running east from Raton through Yankee Canyon which climbs sharply between dense thickets of locust and Gambel's oak to the rim of the plateau 1000' above the surrounding plains. Spreading in all directions from the church yard, the countryside is dotted with sets of deserted buildings which mark the homesteads of the first settlers who founded the community and built St. John's Church 80 years ago.

Constructed of indigenous broken-coursed red sandstone the masonry in the church walls was originally pointed with a crude mortar similar to adobe. This material has gradually deteriorated and cement now bonds the stone work in the walls, which have been recently reinforced by a new concrete foundation. The concrete has been extended into a 3' apron across the entrance in the north facade. White sandstone, also quarried nearby, was used to form the quoins which embellish the corners of the building and in the details around the three arched windows on each side of the church and the arched doorway in its north end. The windows, of double hung construction with four over four lights, are equipped with heavy green wooden shutters for protection from the mesa's severe winter blizzards. During the summer the shutters are removed as is the red painted storm door, also a winter necessity. In 1976 the roof was covered with grey-green composition shingles which blend with the dark green trim around the eaves.

Centered over the entrance in the north facade under the apex of the roof is a small sandstone plaque in which the following inscription has been carved:

St. John
18 M. E. 97
Church

At the structure's northeast corner a more recent memorial of red marble mounted on a cement block base is inscribed as follows:

Among the families that built this church are:

E. N. Burch
J. P. Dale
Charlie English
Thomas Floyd
Ed Gillum
George Honeyfield
John Rankin

(See Continuation Sheet Page 1)

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 checked="" 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 checked="" 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/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES Constructed 1897-8

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Since its dedication in 1898 St. John's Methodist Episcopal Church has been the traditional social and religious center of the northern New Mexico agricultural community atop the high plateau known as Johnson's Mesa. One of the last areas in Colfax County to be settled, the mesa is surrounded by a steep rock escarpment which made it almost inaccessible except by horseback until the last years of the 19th century when a crude wagon road was built on the mesa's west flank. Undaunted by the short, 100-day growing season and the bone chilling winter temperatures, the mesa's first settlers were miners from the nearby coal camp of Blossburg who came as homesteaders seeking economic independence and a better life. Soon joined by immigrants from the mid-West, the newcomers found that the mesa's fertile soil would produce good crops in a normal year. They proceeded to establish a stable community but after World War II the rigorous climate and remote location led to a gradual return to summer grazing as the primary land use. Today the church remains as a monument to the homesteaders' courage and determination, attributes recalled each August 14 when the descendants of these pioneers gather for an annual day of celebration which includes religious services and a bountiful "basket picnic."

During the 1870s Colfax County cattlemen began trailing their herds up the steep slopes of the mesa to graze its nutritious grasses during the summer months. One of the first to make use of this free pasture on the public domain was Arkansas-born Elijah Johnson who gave his name to both the mesa and to Johnson Park, just south of the plateau, where he made his headquarters. No permanent settlement took place, however, until the summer of 1887 when Marion Bell, the first of the Blossburg miners, hauled his wagon up the west side of the mesa and planted a crop. Although he was soon joined by other aspiring farmers, it was customary during the first years for the men to return to the financial security of the mines during the winter months after the harvest had been gathered. In early 1893 the settlement had grown sufficiently so that the Raton Range, Colfax County's leading newspaper, could report, "There are twenty-one ranchers permanently domiciled on Johnson's mesa."

Despite the fearful winter blizzards, which in January, 1892 claimed the life of Samuel Horner, an early Mesa settler, and the continual problem of maintaining the road to Raton, the community continued to grow. Satisfactory yields of oats, wheat and potatoes were raised and marketed in Raton, Trinidad (Colorado) and other nearby towns. Many tons of the native grasses

(See Continuation Sheet Page 1)

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Territorial Archives of New Mexico, State Records Center and Archives,
Santa Fe, New Mexico.

U.S. Census Reports, 1870, 1880.

New Mexico Territorial Census, 1885.

Raton Range, January 15, 1892-July 13, 1899.

(See Continuation Sheet Page 2)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Approximately 2 acres.

UTM REFERENCES

A

1	3
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5	7	0
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8	2	0
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4	0	8	5
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4	8	0
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 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B

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 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

John Baxter, Archivist

ORGANIZATION

State Records Center and Archives

DATE

July 25, 1977

STREET & NUMBER

404 Montezuma

TELEPHONE

827-2321

CITY OR TOWN

Santa Fe

STATE

New Mexico

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.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Thomas W. Hahn

TITLE

State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

7-27-77

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST:

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

11/18/78

DATE

1-17-78

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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A heavy carved wooden door topped by an arched transom made of colored glass forms the building's entrance. Just inside the door, which is never locked in summer, is a small stand holding a guest book which lists the church's visitors. Extending over the cream painted floor is a red carpet runner which reaches from the entrance to a simple 4' high lectern standing on a low platform at the south end of the room. The smooth plastered walls are painted white as is the pressed metal ceiling. Furnishings consist of two rows of dark brown pews, four heavy arm chairs arranged on the platform behind the lectern and an upright piano finished in golden oak. A simple 6'x4' cross hangs on the south wall. The structure has never been wired for electricity or had plumbing installed. Two small outhouses stand south of the church.

Except for the new foundation and roof few changes other than routine maintenance have been made to the church during its 80-year history. To provide greater strength and stability, three heavy iron rods run the full length of the building between the roof and the ceiling and protrude at each end where they are secured by large nuts. The church has always been a source of pride to the descendants of the community's first residents who continue to return to the mesa to look after the building and attend the annual August reunions which commemorate the anniversary of its dedication.

#8

were cut for hay which found a ready demand in the era of horse-powered transportation. Early farmers found that their most reliable source of income came from the cream checks provided by small herds of dairy cows. They also kept a few beef cattle and horses but these were subject to the depredations of wolves and coyotes.

When the community was well established the homesteaders, most of whom were devout Methodists, decided that the time had come to erect a place for religious worship. Donations were solicited with many of the settlers agreeing to contribute their labor or the use of their teams in lieu of cash which was always a scarce commodity. Although it was hoped that work could begin in 1896 it was not until the following summer that the foundation of St. John's was actually laid. Two kinds of sandstone, red for the walls and white for the quoins and door and window details, were quarried nearby and hauled to the building site. It is said that the masonry work was under the direction of a craftsman from Blossburg named Johnson. In August 1898 the interior plastering was completed and on the 14th of that month the church was "offered to the Lord free of debt."

People came from all over Colfax and Union Counties for the dedication
(See Continuation Sheet Page 2)

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ceremonies in which sermons were given by three Methodist ministers, including Mr. A. P. Morrison of Albuquerque, Superintendent of the Methodist Episcopal Church (English) in New Mexico. During the services fourteen persons declared themselves ready for salvation of whom six were accepted for immediate church membership and seven were admitted conditionally. The disposition of the fourteenth is not recorded. Afterwards, the picnic, with its abundance of fried chicken and homemade pies and cakes, was enjoyed by all. The following year the ritual was repeated and since then has become an annual tradition.

Another important holiday on the Johnson Mesa calendar was the Fourth of July. In 1899, Independence Day was celebrated with a baseball game in which the single men opposed the married men followed by foot races, horse races and, surprisingly for Methodists, dancing. An important feature of both celebrations was political orations by local leaders on issues of the day ranging from the perennial need for better roads to "Free Silver." Well aware of the necessity for political action to improve their lot the Mesa residents were able in 1898 to elect one of their number, E. M. Hastings, to the important post of county commissioner. He was followed in 1900 by E. N. Burch who was reelected twice. During the same period a lively column of mesa news was published in the Raton Range which focused attention on local problems and gossip. In August, 1898 the correspondent exhorted mesa residents to aid their neighbor George Hart, who was incapacitated by a broken leg, by harvesting his crop.

As time went on the population of the Mesa declined as families moved away for various reasons. Land was consolidated by those remaining. Today few continue to live on the plateau particularly during the winter months. The annual August celebrations at St. John's continue, however, with succeeding generations returning to the Mesa each summer to pay tribute to the fortitude of their ancestors.

#9

Anderson, George B. History of New Mexico: Its Resources and People.
2 Vols. Los Angeles, 1907.

Floyd, Thomas. "History of the Johnson Mesa." Address given at St. John's Methodist Episcopal Church, August 14, 1937.

Maher, Raymond E. "Farms in the High Country," New Mexico. Vol. 23,
No. 5, May, 1945.