

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICENATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

JUN 20 1978

DATE ENTERED

JUN 28 1978

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Bethel Presbyterian Church

AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Route 552

\_\_\_ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Westside Community

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Fourth

STATE

Mississippi

VICINITY OF  
CODE

28

COUNTY

Claiborne

CODE

021 ✓

**3 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:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

First Presbyterian Church

STREET &amp; NUMBER

609 Church Street

CITY, TOWN

Port Gibson

VICINITY OF

STATE

Mississippi 39150

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.Office of the Chancery Clerk  
Claiborne County Courthouse

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Market Street

CITY, TOWN

Port Gibson

STATE

Mississippi 39150

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Statewide Survey of Historic Sites

DATE

1972

\_\_\_ FEDERAL  STATE \_\_\_ COUNTY \_\_\_ LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Mississippi Department of Archives and History

CITY, TOWN

Jackson

STATE

Mississippi 39205

# 7 DESCRIPTION

## CONDITION

## CHECK ONE

## CHECK ONE

EXCELLENT

DETERIORATED

UNALTERED

ORIGINAL SITE

GOOD

RUINS

ALTERED

MOVED DATE \_\_\_\_\_

FAIR

UNEXPOSED

### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Bethel Presbyterian Church, facing southwest on a grassy knoll on the east side of Route 552 north of Alcorn and approximately three miles from the Mississippi River shore, is representative of the classical symmetry and gravity expressed in the Greek Revival style. Anchoring the pedimented, three-bay facade of the rectangular, gable-roofed structure is a prominent, square central tower. The two stories of the latter are divided by a cornice and frieze which continue across the facade and around the remaining elevations. The graceful solidity of the pile is enhanced by Doric order pilasters with open panels that fortify the corners of the sanctuary and the tower and articulate the three bays of the northwest and southwest elevations. The water table is punctuated with original cast-iron ventilators of an indented rectangular form with lozenge-patterned piercing and a decorative border in a Greek key design (four extant on the northwest elevation and two on the south-east). Originally, the brick exterior walls were stuccoed and scored to resemble ashlar masonry of an unknown color. At some point the stucco finish was washed with a brick color and later painted gray.

Hood molds surmount the windows and entrance way of the church, lending a Gothicizing effect to the classicism of the overall composition. Apparently none of the nine-over-nine, double-sash windows are original, although they fit the original openings and are probably of the same configuration as the old ones. In the early twentieth century, when the structure was used as a public school, the windows on the northwest and southeast elevations were extended upward to interrupt the cornice line, thus providing more light for the interior. The exterior three-panel, double-leaf doors with fixed fourth panel above appear to be original, though the hardware has been replaced.

The interior of the building is without significant decorative detail. The two vestibule windows have the only remaining wooden sills. Double-leaf, four-panel doors, probably dating from the late nineteenth century, lead from the vestibule into the sanctuary, which contains twelve apparently original wooden pews with scrolled arms and single-plank sides and backs. Originally, a straight stair along the southwest wall of the sanctuary near the entrance gave access to a slave gallery that spanned the rear.

On November 6, 1943, the church was struck by a tornado, which caused severe damage to the exterior walls and interior finish, as well as the destruction of an octagonal spire presumably not contemporary with the construction of the building. The southeast and northeast (rear) elevations were rebuilt without the scored and stucco finish, and every effort was made to restore the original configuration of the windows on the southeast and northwest sides. When the interior of the building was reconstructed, a concrete floor was laid, concrete was applied over the brick walls, and simple wooden molding was placed around the ceiling of flush wooden planks laid lengthwise. The gallery was not rebuilt. Recently the exterior of the building was painted white and the water table black.

A well at the north corner of the building is constructed of brick, with the wellhead stuccoed and extending about three feet above ground.

# 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 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 checked="" 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 1828-1830

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Organization of the Bethel Presbyterian Church, fourteen miles southwest of the town of Port Gibson, Mississippi, marked an important step in the expansion of Presbyterianism into the Old Southwest during the first half of the nineteenth century. Bethel Church also brought concomitant educational and sociological benefits to its immediate area. The architectural significance of the structure lies in its application of classical detail to a form small in scale yet striking in the context of its rural setting.

Before construction of the present church, Presbyterians in the vicinity were served by the Bayou Pierre Church, an 1807 log building near Port Gibson and "The Little Church down Hubbard's Lane," a small building located at the rear of the Hubbard and Batchelor plantations, approximately three miles east of the town of Rodney. By 1824 a block of families composed of church members from both congregations decided to organize a separate church closer to their homes. On January 26, 1828, the Mississippi legislature granted a charter to the group, called the "Presbyterian Congregation on Bethel," and William Young, Lewellin Price, John Magruder, and Smith C. Daniell were named as trustees. The church was built between 1828 and 1830 on a one-and-one-half-acre site donated by Lewellin Price and was served by the Reverend Zebulon Butler, pastor also of the First Presbyterian Church of Port Gibson.

The Bethel congregation assumed an active role in promoting educational opportunities for the region, and, on January 14, 1830, hosted a meeting of the Education Society, formed to establish a college under the care of the Presbyterian Church. In April, 1830, the Presbytery of Mississippi received and approved the proposal to open the school, to be known as Oakland College, and appointed Dr. Jeremiah Chamberlain as president. Classes were held at Bethel Church until construction of a building on a site two miles south, with funds contributed by the Bethel congregation. For nearly three decades, Oakland College flourished, attaining an excellent reputation throughout the South, but the coming of the Civil War forced the closing of the school and the suspension of services at Bethel Church. The Oakland College Church was organized in 1860, serving both the college community and the Bethel congregation until 1871. In 1879 the Oakland College property was sold to the state of Mississippi, and the trustees reorganized the college as Chamberlain-Hunt Academy (a secondary school) in Port Gibson. Services were resumed at Bethel Church in 1884.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

"A Brief Sketch of Bethel Church." Mimeographed. Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Division of Historic Preservation, Statewide Survey File, undated.

Claiborne County, Mississippi. Chancery Clerk. Deed Book S:315. Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Microfilm.

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY One and one-half

QUADRANGLE NAME St. Joseph, Miss.-La.

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:62500

UTM REFERENCES

3531

A 15 676925 31100350

B         

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C         

D         

E         

F         

G         

H         

## VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Beginning at a stake on the northwest corner of Matthew Boll's tract on the eastern boundary of Oakland College--land whence a small gum bears south 85½ degrees west 56 links--and a port oak north 43 degrees west one chain two links, thence north

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

STATE CODE COUNTY CODE

STATE CODE COUNTY CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Jack A. Gold, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

Mississippi Department of Archives and History

DATE

April, 1978

STREET & NUMBER

P. O. Box 571

TELEPHONE

(601) 354-6218

CITY OR TOWN

Jackson

STATE

Mississippi 39205

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL   

STATE   

LOCAL X

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

*Dawn Maddox*

TITLE Director, Division of Historic Preservation

DATE June 12, 1978

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

*Charles A. ...*  
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE 11-28-78

ATTEST: *Jann H. ...*  
CLERK OF REGISTRATION

DATE 11/20/78

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 & 9 PAGE 1

8 - SIGNIFICANCE

The building was used as a public school during the early part of the twentieth century, forcing major interior alterations. Damages from a tornado in 1943 resulted in the partial rebuilding and restoration of the sanctuary. Currently, services are conducted at the church once a month, with the Reverend David Daniels of the Port Gibson First Presbyterian Church officiating.

9 - MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Gold, Jack A., architectural historian. Personal interview with Mr. C. H. Johnson, President, Chamberlain-Hunt Academy, Port Gibson, Mississippi, January 17, 1978.
- Hutchinson, J. R. Reminiscences, Sketches and Addresses. Houston: E. H. Cushing, Publisher, 1874.
- Laws of the State of Mississippi, Passed at the Eleventh Session of the General Assembly in the Town of Jackson. Jackson: Peter Isler, State Printer, 1818.
- Lowrance, William B. "The Story of Bethel Presbyterian Church." Mimeo-graphed. Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Division of Historic Preservation, Statewide Survey File, 1950.
- Lowrance, William B. The Story of the Old Bethel Presbyterian Church. Port Gibson, Mississippi: The Reveille Press, 1955.
- Lowrey, Priscilla. The Introduction of Presbyterianism into Mississippi: From the Entrance of Early Presbyterian Settlers to the Formation of the Synod of Mississippi in 1835. Master's thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois, 1974.
- Montreat, North Carolina. Presbyterian Historical Foundation. Bethel Presbyterian Church Records, 1829-1836.

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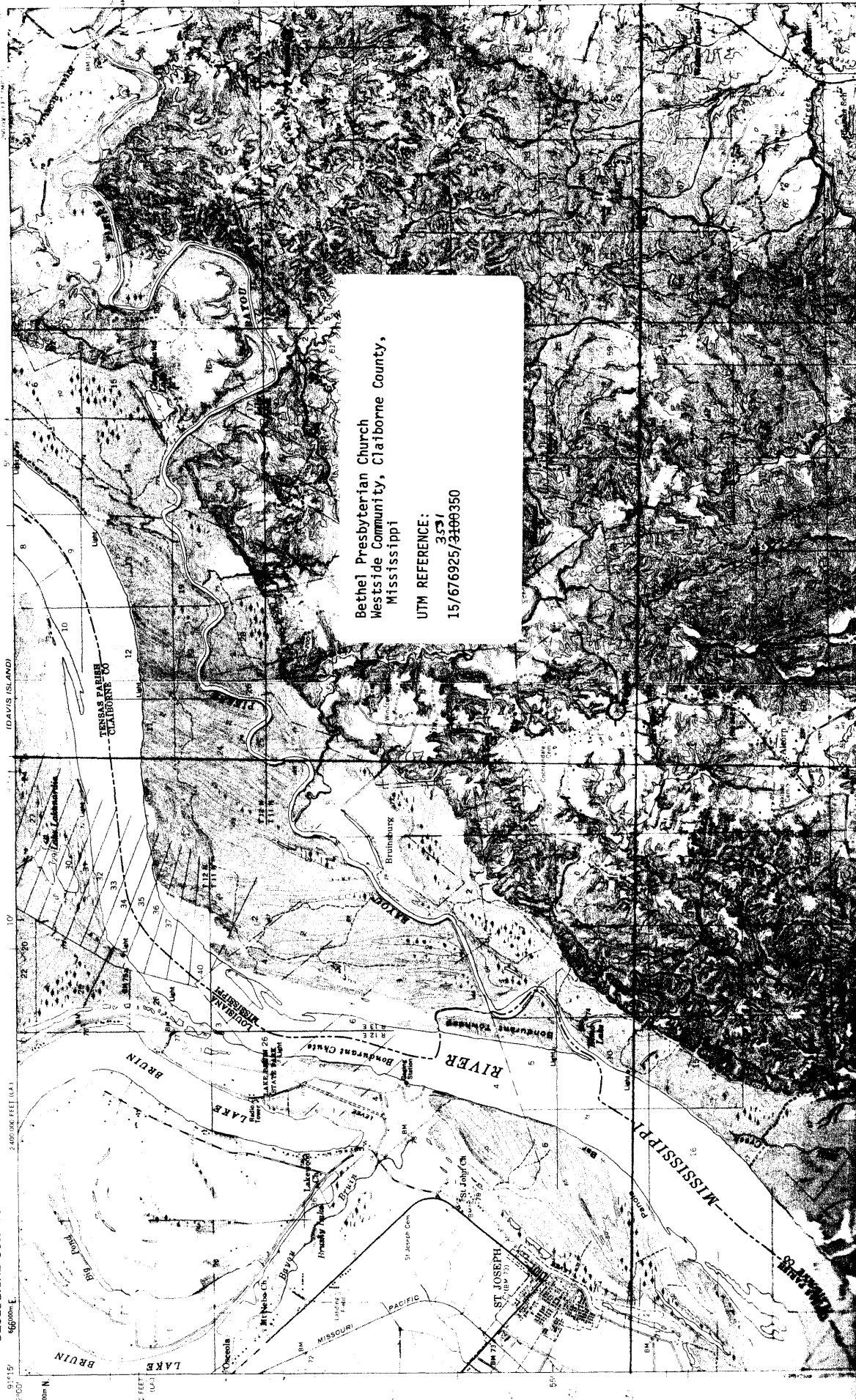
CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 10 PAGE 2

10 - GEOGRAPHICAL DATA (Verbal Boundary Description)

9 degrees east along said college boundary 3 chains 96 links to a stake whence a small elm tree bears south 52 degrees west 20 links said stake being the southwest corner of Isaac Bogart's lot. Thence south 50 degrees east along the southwestern boundary of Isaac Bogart's lot 6 chains 12 links to a stake in the middle of the Rodney road, whence a gum bears north 50 degrees west 48 links thence south 60 degrees west keeping in the middle of the Rodney road 3 chains 64 links to a stake. Thence north 50 degrees west along the north-eastern boundary of Matthew Bolls' lot 3 chains to the place of beginning.

WACHLEFFORD  
LAKE



Bethel Presbyterian Church  
Westside Community, Claiborne County,  
Mississippi  
UTM REFERENCE:  
3531  
15/676925/3100350