

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

**National Register of Historic Places**  
**Continuation Sheet**

_____
Name of Property
_____
County and State
_____
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page 1

**Supplementary Listing Record**

NRIS Reference Number: RS100002547

Date Listed: 08/17/2018

Property Name: Vernon A.M.E. Church

County: Tulsa

State: OK

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This Property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper

9/17/2018  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

=====  
Amended Items in Nomination:

**Significance:**

*Criterion Consideration G* is removed, as the period of significance was revised to end in 1964 with the Church's pivotal involvement in the statewide Civil Rights movement.

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The OKLAHOMA SHPO was notified of this amendment.

**DISTRIBUTION:**

- National Register property file
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

**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 instructions.



**1. Name of Property**

Historic name: Vernon A.M.E. Church

Other names/site number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of related multiple property listing:  
NA

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

**2. Location**

Street & number: 311 North Greenwood Avenue

City or town: Tulsa State: OK County: Tulsa

Not For Publication:  Vicinity:

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_ national X statewide \_\_\_ local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A \_\_\_ B \_\_\_ C \_\_\_ D

Signature of certifying official/Title:		Date	
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 or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	

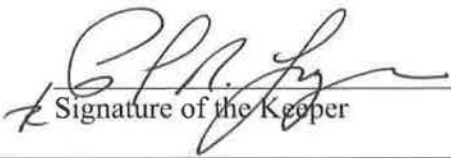
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**4. National Park Service Certification**

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

08/17/2018  
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

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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Religion: Religious Facility

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Religion: Religious Facility

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Revival:

Classical Revival

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**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Brick

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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### Summary Paragraph

Located in the historic Greenwood neighborhood, the Classical Revival church construction started in 1919 and was completed in 1928. The brick church faces west onto Greenwood Avenue and has US highway 412 to the south, the Greenwood Cultural Center to the west and Oklahoma State University Tulsa branch to the north. The church historically was surrounded by housing and businesses, which are no longer extant. Prominent features of the church are the towers at each corner of the façade and the tripartite entry. While the education wing was added to the church in 1959, it is historic in its own right, therefore the church maintains excellent historic integrity.

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## Narrative Description

The façade, west elevation, is divided into three parts. The corner towers are identical. The first and second floor each has a single one-over-one hung stained glass window. The upper sash has an arched pane. The sill of each window is stone. The third floor of each tower has a one-over-one double hung window. Each window has a sill with brackets and a triangular window hood. The towers are topped with a metal arched hipped roof with a finial. The eave of the tower has dentils around all four elevations. The central portion of the façade serves as the entry. The two double entry doors were replaced in 1974 and are flanked by engaged Ionic columns. Directly above the entry is an entablature with “VERNON A.M.E. CHURCH” in gold letters. The entablature also has dentils. Above the entablature is a stone balustrade. The second floor has four stained glass one-over-one windows with stone sills. The third floor has four one-over-one stained glass windows with stone sills. The top sash is a pointed arch. The windows have a large pediment window hood. On either side of the entry is an engaged brick column with a stone Christian cross in line with the third floor entry window hood. The brick columns have stone Ionic capitols supporting a stone pediment with dentils. There is a metal gable front roof that extends above the pediment. Notable on the façade, above the main entry, is a t-shaped neon sign that reads “VERNON A.M.E. CHURCH” of the cross bar and “WELCOME” on the post.

The south elevation raised basement is evident here. From west to east there are six, one-over-one double hung windows, one metal door and a metal door between the basement and first floor level. The tower at the southwest corner is similar to the façade. The first and second floor has a single one-over-one hung stained glass window. The upper sash has an arched pane. The sill of each window is stone. The third floor has a one-over-one double hung window. The window has a sill with brackets and a triangular window hood. The main floor of the south elevation has three stained glass windows. The main portion of the window has two narrow one-over-one windows flanking a wider one-over-one window. The upper portion of the window is arched and has six small panes that follow the arch and a small single square pane and a single arched pane in the center. At the parapet is a dentil detail that extends from the tower to the rear elevation. At the southeast corner is a single double hung one-over-one window on the first and second floor.

The rear, east elevation, has a single one-over-one double hung window at the corner of the first floor and two one-over-one stained glass windows in the center of the first floor. The second floor has four fixed pane windows.

The tower at the northwest corner is similar to the façade. The first and second floor has a single one-over-one hung stained glass window. The upper sash has an arched pane. The sill of each window is stone. The third floor has a one-over-one double hung window. The window has a sill with brackets and a triangular window hood. The basement level is concealed by the 1959 education wing. The main floor of the south elevation has three stained glass windows. The main portion of the window has two narrow one-over-one windows flanking a wider one-over-one

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window. The upper portion of the window is arched and has six small panes that follow the arch and a small single square pane and a single arched pane in the center. At the parapet is a dentil detail that extends from the tower to the rear elevation.

The 1959 education wing is one-story along the east elevation and extends to two stories on the east elevation. The gable front one-story wing has a double entry on the west elevation with a gable front porch supported by thin columns. The north elevation has ten two-over-two hung windows and a slab metal door in the one-story section. The two story section has no openings on the north or west elevation.

Interior:

The main space on the interior is the sanctuary. The alter features a central pulpit with a choir loft behind. The seating has a central aisle. At the rear of the sanctuary is a second floor loft with wood details. The Sanctuary is kept in pristine condition. The craftsmanship in the millwork reflects the excellence to detail done by master carpenters of the time. The stained glass windows enhance the beauty of the overall interior of the building.

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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

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- 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



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**Areas of Significance**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Ethnic Heritage: Black  
Social History  
Community Planning  
and Development  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**  
1914-1953  
1954-1964  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**  
1914, 1921, 1925  
1959, 1964  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**  
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**  
Unknown  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

In 2005, a National Park Service report concluded that the Tulsa Massacre was of “supreme national significance, perhaps the most significant race riot in the history of the United States.”<sup>1</sup> Most of the historic resources directly associated with Greenwood were destroyed during the Massacre and many of the resources from the period of post-massacre reconstruction were destroyed by Urban Renewal efforts of the 1970s. Vernon A.M.E Church remains a testimony to the resilience of the Greenwood neighborhood. Vernon African Methodist Episcopal Church is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places at the state level of significance under Criterion A, Ethnic Heritage, based its role in understanding race relations in the United States under legal segregation; for Community Planning and Development for its representation of the initiation and growth of segregated community within the city of Tulsa as well as reconstruction after the 1921 massacre; and finally for Social History for its depiction of racial intolerance against African Americans. Criteria Consideration A is applicable as this is a religious institution.

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

The Tulsa Massacre was one of America’s great tragedies. It is a story of opportunity, success, destruction, and reemergence. Centered in Greenwood, it comprises an area once termed “the Black Wall Street,” with the boundaries of Pine to Greenwood Avenue; Frisco Railroad Tracks; North Lansing Avenue; and MLK Jr. Boulevard (a.k.a. Cincinnati Avenue) which encompassed the concentration of successful businesses, churches, housing, hospitals and schools owned and operated by African Americans. During this period African-Americans could not live among whites as equals or patronize their businesses. This led to money circulating in the community and creating a thriving town within a town.

Migration to Oklahoma began during territorial days as slaves to Indian tribes.<sup>2</sup> Others came during the post-Civil War Reconstruction period when white southerners restored their version of the southern way of life. Once Federal troops left the south after Reconstruction, whites had done little to change their attitudes towards freed African-Americans. The Civil War had created a hope for democracy and freedom, but such hopes were soon quelled by Jim Crow laws and segregation.<sup>3</sup>

Those leaving the south were looking for a better life where they could experience non-slave conditions. Most immigrated to Oklahoma from Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas.

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<sup>1</sup> National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. *1921 Tulsa Race Riot: Reconnaissance Survey*, (November 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Tracy, Majorie Ann. “The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921: The Politics of Lawlessness,” Masters Thesis, University of Tulsa, 1996, 74-75.

<sup>3</sup> Gates, Eddie Faye. *They Came Searching: How Blacks Sought the Promised Land in Tulsa*. (Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 1997), 31.

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Many settled in rural areas creating all-black towns such as Summit, Boley and Rentiesville; communities that survive today. With more than fifty of these towns in the State, they developed a sense of belonging and ownership that did not lend itself to an attitude of subservience. Most were literate and children attended school.<sup>4</sup> A continued quest to better their lives led many to Tulsa, especially after oil was discovered in 1905. When the 1912 discovery of the Cushing oil field occurred, the population in Tulsa boomed.

J.B. Stafford and O.W. Gurley were successful entrepreneurs in Tulsa before the city was segregated. They believe that if African-Americans pooled their resources, worked together and supported each other's businesses, they would succeed. Both men bought tracts of land and sold only to African-Americans. By 1906, the area was named Greenwood. The neighborhood was now in place and spread north from the corner of Greenwood and Archer Streets.

The community had a mix of residents including high numbers of doctors, lawyers, ministers, dentist, real estate agents and businessmen. Residents made up all of the classes: well-off, middle class and poor. Money earned by the residents was spent in Greenwood. Tulsa, where segregation was engrained, Greenwood merchants provided goods and services that they could not get in other parts of the city. The Greenwood neighborhood developed a life and reputation of its own. By 1921, the population was approximately 11,000 people who had access to a hospital, two schools, two movie theaters, a public library, two newspapers, thirteen churches and three fraternal lodges. There were also rooming houses, billiard halls, confectionaries, and grocers.<sup>5</sup>

Understanding the pride of Greenwood is important for understanding the aftereffects of the Massacre. Not only had people who lived and/or founded the all-black towns moved to Tulsa but those who served their country after World War I had also returned. They came to Tulsa rightly with a sense of social equality and a strong sense of self-worth. Prior to the Massacre, the atmosphere in the Greenwood neighborhood was one of pride, independence and resilience. Greenwood was a place of security and safety in the unsafe world of segregation.

The surface calm in Greenwood was broken when a white mob gathered at the county courthouse the night of May 31, 1921, to take custody of an African American teenager who allegedly attacked a young white woman in a downtown elevator. From recent horrific experience, Tulsans knew that if the young man was turned over to the mob, he would be lynched or, at the very least, whipped, tarred, and feathered; no matter that charges had yet to be filed, trial had yet to be held, and a sentence had yet to be pronounced. White vigilantes at the courthouse, already enraged by the allegations, were further incensed by the arrival of a small cadre of armed African American men sworn to protect the accused from being lynched.

The alleged attack of a white woman, coupled with the presence of armed African American men, elicited an outbreak of anger from the white mob. Tensions mounted as the night wore on and at one point shots rang out. That was all it took to send the vigilantes racing from the courthouse to the armory and on toward the exclusively African American Greenwood neighborhood. After

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<sup>4</sup> Tracy, 74-5.

<sup>5</sup> Tracy, 76-7.

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several skirmishes and exchanges of gunfire along the way, the mob forcibly evicted residents, looted their belongings, and set fire to their homes, literally consuming the district.

An estimated 9,000 residents were left homeless. No one has ever been able to accurately count the number of African Americans and whites who lost their lives in the Tulsa massacre, though the figure likely ranges in the hundreds.<sup>6</sup> In some ways, the attack on Greenwood was typical of other racial events of the period (1898-1921); white vigilantes spurred by fear and race hatred set upon African Americans for an alleged or perceived crime or affront against them. But for sheer size, destruction of property, lost lives, and national outrage, the Tulsa Massacre of 1921 surpasses them all.

Residents of Greenwood began to rebuild almost immediately after the Massacre, within a year, many destroyed buildings had been reconstructed. Historian Hannibal B. Johnson noted that by 1922, more than eighty businesses had reopened in the Greenwood area. The burned out shells of buildings had been torn down and new buildings were constructed.<sup>7</sup> Reconstructed buildings were similar in size, style and materials as pre-massacre originals. Based on Tulsa City Directories, in 1921 there were 108 businesses and in 1922 there were 83.

By 1922, approximately half of the destroyed churches began holding worship services again but it took tenacity for the Greenwood residents to rebuild their homes. Few property owners had insurance and for those that did, the insurance companies required owners to prove that the city or state was negligent in the protection of their property.<sup>8</sup> Greenwood once again became a thriving neighborhood again despite the segregation still in place through the 1940s.

Vernon African American Episcopal Church

Vernon African American Episcopal Church's origin dates back to 1905 when African Methodism first came to Tulsa, Indian Territory, with Rev. J.E. Roy as pastor. It started in a one-room house located at 549 North Detroit Street. In 1906, Rev. R. A. Devers and a small group of worshippers met in Gurley Hall at 114 North Greenwood Avenue. Soon, they moved to Barksdale Hall on East Archer. The membership grew from 8 to 16. During Rev. Devers one-year tenure, the congregation started its first building program at Archer and Hartford Streets. This building, a small frame house, was completed the next year under Rev. G. H. Burton and was named "Burton Chapel" in his honor. The membership grew to 71.

In 1908, the Trustees purchased the present site, 307 N. Greenwood Avenue, for \$290.00, with a down payment of \$100.00. By this time, many members were added. The congregation voted to change the name from "Burton Chapel" to "Vernon," honoring Registrar of the Treasury, W. T. Vernon who was appointed by then President Theodore Roosevelt in 1906 and reappointed by President William Howard Taft in 1910.

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<sup>6</sup> NPS, 26.

<sup>7</sup> Johnson, Hannibal B. *Black Wall Street: From Riot to Renaissance in Tulsa's Historic Greenwood District*. (Austin, Texas: Eakin Press, 1998), 97-98.

<sup>8</sup> Johnson, 98.

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In the years leading up to the Massacre, Vernon had purchased additional land, which encompasses all of the present church. By 1914, the old church was torn down and the brick basement for the new church was paid for and constructed. The events of June 1, 1921 left this new brick basement in ruins.

Vernon A.M.E. played a pivotal role during this time of destruction. The church became an important monument to the community. While homes, schools, and businesses were destroyed, Vernon was still able to open its doors and allow events to carry on as planned. For instance, not long after the massacre, Vernon opened its doors to the Booker T. Washington graduating class of 1921, which allowed these young men and women to have a place for graduation. The church property was also used for various community events; trying to give some normalcy after a tragic event.

Immediately after the destruction of Greenwood, then pastor, Rev. P. W. DeLyle, and his family were temporarily housed in the rear of the church basement while the parsonage was rebuilt. On November 6, 1922, they moved into the newly reconstructed house. Seating capacity of the church was increased; pulpit furniture was installed; plans and blueprints for the present structure were made. A building fund of \$1,100.00 was accumulated. An estimated 200 people were added to the church roll, increasing its membership to approximately 400. While the Tulsa Massacre may have destroyed what was initially built at this location, it did not stop the Vernon A.M.E. Church from reconstructing and growing within the Greenwood community. The main church building was finally completed in 1928 and opened with great fanfare and joy.

CIVIL RIGHTS ERA

The decades following the Tulsa Massacre of 1921 reasserted the division between African Americans and whites, so much so that in the years following the “riot,” one study on segregation by the United States Commission on Civil Rights described the situation in Tulsa as, “an invisible wall had seemingly been erected between blacks and whites that almost completely isolated one race from the other.”<sup>9</sup>

Vernon A.M.E Church continued to grow in stature and membership. By 1940, membership rose to 800. All debts were paid and membership in clubs and organizations increased. A neon sign of welcome was erected. It was a beacon to those near and far in need of spiritual guidance. One of its most notable Pastors was Reverend Ben H. Hill. He brought to Vernon a rich background of experience in church and educational work. From the very beginning, certain characteristics of the Hill regime stood out. Under his leadership, attendance grew and the first tithing program was initiated. It was under his administration that a series of organizations were perfected that would enable every member to participate actively in the affairs of the church and feel a responsibility for each project attempted. One of those most notable projects was taking a group of children from the church to the famous March on Washington; certainly not the first foray into Civil Rights but an important one.

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<sup>9</sup> United States Commission on Civil Rights- Oklahoma Advisory Committee, School Desegregation in Tulsa, Oklahoma: A Report (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1976), 3.

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Ministers in Tulsa viewed their responsibility in the civil rights movement in a decidedly different manner than other ministers throughout Oklahoma. While ministers in Oklahoma City avoided the slightest controversy caused by addressing the divisive issue, the ministers of Tulsa supported the movement from its inception. Several of Tulsa's African-American ministers began to create plans of action designed to address the severely prejudicial treatment of blacks within the city in the 1950s. The group, which drew its inspiration from the non-violent methods of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., included among its number: Reverends B.S. Roberts, Ben H. Hill (Vernon A.M.E.), G. Calvin McCutchen, and T. Oscar Chappelle.<sup>10</sup>

Vernon A.M.E Church played a direct role in the civil rights movement in Tulsa. During the restaurant sit-ins in Oklahoma City, Clara Luper, the sponsor of the restaurant sit-ins, spoke at the Vernon A.M.E. Church. She challenged the audience to replicate the successes that the Youth Council had in Oklahoma City. One of the primary concerns addressed by Luper was once again leadership among blacks. She asked, "Who is concerning themselves about our young, to lead them into the serious ventures of social action that works for a better community?"<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, while women and men who supported civil rights for blacks abounded in Tulsa, efforts to achieve change were fractured, much as it had been in Oklahoma City before the sit-ins headed by Luper's group. In both cities, the movement needed something to unify the various people and organizations fighting for the same goal but using different means to achieve it.

In 1960, the civil rights movement in Tulsa received a needed boost when Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. came to deliver an address at the First Baptist Church. Reverend Ben Hill of Vernon A.M.E. introduced King as "the living Moses."<sup>12</sup> Reverend Hill was the president of the North Tulsa Ministerial Alliance and the Tulsa Chapter of the NAACP. Churches, like Vernon A.M.E. under the leadership of Hill, dealt with the question of how much churches would contribute to the more aggressive civil rights tactics taken by civic organizations.

Driven by two organizations headed by Tulsa young people, the Student Committee on Human Rights and the Youth Council of the NAACP, demonstrations began in March of 1964 with a Freedom March Parade. The march planned to draw attention to a five-fold program of issues including; "voter registration, Federal Civil Rights legislation now pending in Washington DC, Strong city ordinances on public accommodations, and better job opportunities."<sup>13</sup> Moving on a pre-planned route, the staging location was Vernon African Methodist Episcopal Church. From there the marchers continued to Boulder Park with signs displaying civil rights mottos like, "Jim Crow Must Go," "We Shall Overcome," and "Freedom Now."<sup>14</sup> The march went off without difficulty.

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<sup>10</sup> Hannibal B. Johnson, Black Wall Street, 111

<sup>11</sup> "Who Cares in Tulsa," in the *Oklahoma Eagle*, August 13, 1959.

<sup>12</sup> "Live Together As Brothers Or Die Together As Fools," in the *Oklahoma Eagle*, August 4, 1960.

<sup>13</sup> "Protest March Scheduled Here Mon.," in the *Oklahoma Eagle*, March 26, 1964.

<sup>14</sup> "Clara Luper, Militant Fighter, And OC Youths Join March," in the *Oklahoma Eagle*, April 2, 1964.

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Residents of Greenwood began rebuilding almost immediately after the tragic events of 1921; within a year many of the destroyed buildings were reconstructed. Vernon A.M.E Church endured through these difficult times. While it was not completely rebuilt until 1928, the church continued to serve the Greenwood community immediately after the massacre until the doors formally reopened in 1928. The church property has remained a landmark and symbol of the Greenwood neighborhood persistence. It is symbolic of the reconstruction that occurred immediately after the tragedy of 1921.

The Greenwood area has changed significantly since the Massacre and the post-massacre reconstruction. In the late 1950s, construction of the inter-dispersal loop and I-244 resulted in the demolition of many properties in the Greenwood neighborhood.<sup>15</sup> Urban renewal in the 1970s removed many houses in the area. When integration finally began in Tulsa, African-Americans had the choice to shop and live in all of Tulsa. This had a massive impact on the Greenwood neighborhood.

Within this much altered neighborhood, Vernon A.M.E. Church remains a visual reminder of the Massacre and the reconstruction process. Where once there were multitudes of churches to serve the Greenwood neighborhood, only Vernon A.M.E. Church and Mt. Zion Church (NRIS #08000847) stand as reconstructed buildings and congregations in the immediate post-Massacre Tulsa. While Vernon A.M.E. church had been determined as not eligible in 2007, the understanding of the church additions and the church's role in the Civil Rights movement were not fully understood. With additional research into the additions and the role of the church itself in Civil Rights, the justification for eligibility at the state level of significance was clear.

Vernon A.M.E rebuilt after the Massacre and endured through difficult times. It has remained a landmark and symbol of Greenwood; that symbolism continued into the Civil Rights movement as Vernon A.M.E. played a vital role regarding civil rights in Tulsa, one of two major cities in the State of Oklahoma that led the charge for equal rights state-wide. The Vernon A.M.E. Church is significant at the state level under Criteria A for its association with Ethnic Heritage: Black, Community Planning and Development and Social History.

Period of Significance

The period of significance begins with the construction of the church and extends through 1964 when Vernon A.M.E Church served as the staging area for the Tulsa Civil Rights march. While the church continued its role in the Civil Rights movement through modern times, the hosting of the march in 1964 is the culminating event that marked its direct involvement with the state-wide Civil Rights movement.

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<sup>15</sup> NPS, 45.

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

- Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)  
Brophy, Alfred L. *Reconstructing the Dreamland: The Tulsa Riot of 1921, Race, Reparations, and Reconciliation*. Oxford: University Press, 2002
- Ellsworth, Scott. *Death in a Promised Land: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982.
- Gates, Eddie Faye. *They Came Searching: How Blacks Sought the Promised Land in Tulsa*. Austin, Texas: Eakin Press, 1997
- Gates, Eddie Faye. *Riot on Greenwood: The Total Destruction of Black Wall Street*. Austin, Texas: Eakin Press, 2003
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- Johnson, Hannibal B. *Black Wall Street: From Riot to Renaissance in Tulsa's Historic Greenwood District*. Austin, Texas: Eakin Press, 1998.
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Vernon A.M.E. Church

Name of Property

Tulsa, Oklahoma

County and State

***Government Reports***

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“Clara Luper, Militant Fighter, And OC Youths Join March.” *The Tulsa Oklahoma Eagle*. April 2, 1964.

***Other Primary Sources***

Sanborn Map Company. *Insurance Maps of Tulsa, Creek Nation, Indian Territory*. New York: 1903, 1905, and 1907

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Vernon A.M.E. Church  
Name of Property

Tulsa, Oklahoma  
County and State

U.S. Bureau of the Census. Population Schedules, 1870, 1880, 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930.

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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

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

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

---

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** less than 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 36.161597

Longitude: -95.986265

Vernon A.M.E. Church  
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**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Section 01, Township 19, Range 12 W; Lots Ten (10) through Sixteen (16), Block Three (3),  
TURLEYS ADDITION to the City of Tulsa, Tulsa County, Oklahoma, according to the Recorded  
Plat thereof.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundaries include all of the land that has historically been associated with the church.

---

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Leroy Alfred, Al Barber, Arglenda Friday, Ruth Gaines, Jane Malone, Veola  
West, Monica Williams-Haynes; edits by Lynda Ozan

organization: Vernon AME Historical Preservation Committee

street & number: 311 North Greenwood

city or town: Tulsa state: Oklahoma zip code: 74120

e-mail monmw@att.net/lozan@okhistory.org

telephone: 918-812-8606

date: 29 January 2018

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**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 this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

**Photographs**

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Vernon A.M.E. Church  
 Name of Property

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 County and State

**Photo Log**

Name of Property: Vernon A.M.E. Church

City or Vicinity: Tulsa

County: Tulsa State: OK

Photographer: Lynda Ozan

Date Photographed:

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

Photograph Number	Subject	Direction
0001	Façade and South Elevation	Northeast
0002	Façade	East
0003	South Elevation	North
0004	East and North Elevation	Southwest
0005	Interior Stained Glass windows	

**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.





VERNON A.M.E. CHURCH

WELCOME

VERNON A.M.E. CHURCH





FAITH HALL

VERNON A.M.E. CHURCH

FANTASTIC  
SAVERIES









RESERVED  
PARKING  
FOR  
CITY OF  
MILWAUKEE  
OFFICIALS  
AND  
COURT  
PERSONNEL  
NO PARKING  
EXCEPT AS  
AUTHORIZED

RESERVED  
PARKING  
FOR  
MILWAUKEE  
POLICE  
OFFICERS  
AND  
SUPPORT  
PERSONNEL  
NO PARKING  
EXCEPT AS  
AUTHORIZED





National Register of Historic Places  
Memo to File

# Correspondence

The Correspondence consists of communications from (and possibly to) the nominating authority, notes from the staff of the National Register of Historic Places, and/or other material the National Register of Historic Places received associated with the property.

Correspondence may also include information from other sources, drafts of the nomination, letters of support or objection, memorandums, and ephemera which document the efforts to recognize the property.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action: Resubmission

Property Name: Vernon A.M.E. Church

Multiple Name:

State & County: OKLAHOMA, Tulsa

Date Received: 7/3/2018      Date of Pending List:      Date of 16th Day:      Date of 45th Day: 8/17/2018      Date of Weekly List:

Reference number: RS100002547

Nominator: State

Reason For Review:

<input type="checkbox"/> Appeal	<input type="checkbox"/> PDIL	<input type="checkbox"/> Text/Data Issue
<input type="checkbox"/> SHPO Request	<input type="checkbox"/> Landscape	<input type="checkbox"/> Photo
<input type="checkbox"/> Waiver	<input type="checkbox"/> National	<input type="checkbox"/> Map/Boundary
<input type="checkbox"/> Resubmission	<input type="checkbox"/> Mobile Resource	<input type="checkbox"/> Period
<input type="checkbox"/> Other	<input type="checkbox"/> TCP	<input type="checkbox"/> Less than 50 years
	<input type="checkbox"/> CLG	

Accept       Return       Reject      8/17/2018 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments: The Vernon A.M.E. Church is of statewide significance under National Register Criterion A in the areas of Ethnic Heritage-Black, Social History and Community Planning and Development. The Vernon A.M.E. Church is a critically important symbol of the historic Greenwood African American community in Tulsa. The Church, with construction initiated at this site in 1914, was at the center of the developing commercial and residential neighborhood of Greenwood and had a pivotal place in the events of 1921 and the Tulsa Massacre. Even more importantly, the church (1928) is an extant symbol of the rebuilding and reconstruction process that occurred post riot and the enduring social, cultural and religious significance of such properties to the broader Greenwood community.

Recommendation/ Criteria: Accept National Register Criterion A.

Reviewer Paul Lusignan

Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2229

Date 08/17/2018

DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments : No      see attached SLR : **Yes**



**Oklahoma Historical Society**  
**State Historic Preservation Office**

*Founded May 27, 1893*

Oklahoma History Center • 800 Nazih Zuhdi Drive • Oklahoma City, OK 73105-7917  
(405) 521-6249 • Fax (405) 522-0816 • [www.okhistory.org/shpo/shpom.htm](http://www.okhistory.org/shpo/shpom.htm)

April 23, 2018

J. Paul Loether  
Keeper and Chief National Register and  
National Historic Landmark Programs  
National Park Service  
1849 C Street NW, Mail Stop 7228  
Washington D.C. 20240



Dear Mr. Loether:

We are pleased to transmit five National Register of Historic Places nominations for Oklahoma properties. The nominations are for the following properties:

Downtown Altus Historic District, Altus, Jackson County  
Pioneer Telephone Company Warehouse and Garage, 1-13 NE 6<sup>th</sup> Street,  
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma County  
Reverend L.W. Thomas Homestead, 5805 Oktaha Road, Summit, Muskogee County  
Cheairs Furniture company Building, 537 South Kenosha Avenue, Tulsa, Tulsa  
County  
Vernon A.M.E. Church, 311 North Greenwood Avenue, Tulsa, Tulsa County

All members of the Historic Preservation Review Committee (state review board) were present for the public meeting at which each of these nominations was considered and the recommendation to the State Historic Preservation Officer was formulated. Therefore, the member possessing the requisite professional qualifications for evaluation of each nominated property participated in the recommendation's formulation.

We look forward to the results of your review. If there any further questions regarding the nominations, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Lynda Ozan  
Deputy State Historic  
Preservation Officer

Enclosures



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

56 2547

# 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 instructions.



### 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Vernon A.M.E. Church

Other names/site number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of related multiple property listing: \_\_\_\_\_

NA

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

### 2. Location

Street & number: 311 North Greenwood Avenue

City or town: Tulsa State: OK County: Tulsa

Not For Publication:  Vicinity:

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_ national X statewide \_\_\_ local  
Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A \_\_\_ B \_\_\_ C \_\_\_ D

[Signature] 4/23/18  
Signature of certifying official/Title: Date

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 or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

Returned

Vernon A.M.E. Church  
Name of Property

Tulsa, Oklahoma  
County and State

---

**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

Date of Action

---

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Returned

**Category of Property**

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

Vernon A.M.E. Church  
Name of Property

Tulsa, Oklahoma  
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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Religion: Religious Facility

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Religion: Religious Facility

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Returned

Vernon A.M.E. Church  
Name of Property

Tulsa, Oklahoma  
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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Revival:  
Classical Revival

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**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Brick

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

---

### Summary Paragraph

Located in the historic Greenwood neighborhood, the Classical Revival church construction started in 1919 and was completed in 1928. The brick church faces west onto Greenwood Avenue and has US highway 412 to the south, the Greenwood Cultural Center to the west and Oklahoma State University Tulsa branch to the north. The church historically was surrounded by housing and businesses, which are no longer extant. Prominent features of the church are the towers at each corner of the façade and the tripartite entry. While the education wing was added to the church in 1959, it is historic in its own right, therefore the church maintains excellent historic integrity.



Vernon A.M.E. Church

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## Narrative Description

The façade, west elevation, is divided into three parts. The corner towers are identical. The first and second floor each has a single one-over-one hung stained glass window. The upper sash has an arched pane. The sill of each window is stone. The third floor of each tower has a one-over-one double hung window. Each window has a sill with brackets and a triangular window hood. The towers are topped with a metal arched hipped roof with a finial. The eave of the tower has dentils around all four elevations. The central portion of the façade serves as the entry. The two double entry doors were replaced in 1974 and are flanked by engaged Ionic columns. Directly above the entry is an entablature with "VERNON A.M.E. CHURCH" in gold letters. The entablature also has dentils. Above the entablature is a stone balustrade. The second floor has four stained glass one-over-one windows with stone sills. The third floor has four one-over-one stained glass windows with stone sills. The top sash is a pointed arch. The windows have a large pediment window hood. On either side of the entry is an engaged brick column with a stone Christian cross in line with the third floor entry window hood. The brick columns have stone Ionic capitols supporting a stone pediment with dentils. There is a metal gable front roof that extends above the pediment. Notable on the façade, above the main entry, is a t-shaped neon sign that reads "VERNON A.M.E. CHURCH" of the cross bar and "WELCOME" on the post.

The south elevation raised basement is evident here. From west to east there are six, one-over-one double hung windows, one metal door and a metal door between the basement and first floor level. The tower at the southwest corner is similar to the façade. The first and second floor has a single one-over-one hung stained glass window. The upper sash has an arched pane. The sill of each window is stone. The third floor has a one-over-one double hung window. The window has a sill with brackets and a triangular window hood. The main floor of the south elevation has three stained glass windows. The main portion of the window has two narrow one-over-one windows flanking a wider one-over-one window. The upper portion of the window is arched and has six small panes that follow the arch and a small single square pane and a single arched pane in the center. At the parapet is a dentil detail that extends from the tower to the rear elevation. At the southeast corner is a single double hung one-over-one window on the first and second floor.

The rear, east elevation, has a single one-over-one double hung window at the corner of the first floor and two one-over-one stained glass windows in the center of the first floor. The second floor has four fixed pane windows.

The tower at the northwest corner is similar to the façade. The first and second floor has a single one-over-one hung stained glass window. The upper sash has an arched pane. The sill of each window is stone. The third floor has a one-over-one double hung window. The window has a sill with brackets and a triangular window hood. The basement level is concealed by the 1959 education wing. The main floor of the south elevation has three stained glass windows. The main portion of the window has two narrow one-over-one windows flanking a wider one-over-one

Vernon A.M.E. Church

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window. The upper portion of the window is arched and has six small panes that follow the arch and a small single square pane and a single arched pane in the center. At the parapet is a dentil detail that extends from the tower to the rear elevation.

The 1959 education wing is one-story along the east elevation and extends to two stories on the east elevation. The gable front one-story wing has a double entry on the west elevation with a gable front porch supported by thin columns. The north elevation has ten two-over-two hung windows and a slab metal door in the one-story section. The two story section has no openings on the north or west elevation.

Interior:

The main space on the interior is the sanctuary. The alter features a central pulpit with a choir loft behind. The seating has a central aisle. At the rear of the sanctuary is a second floor loft with wood details. The Sanctuary is kept in pristine condition. The craftsmanship in the millwork reflects the excellence to detail done by master carpenters of the time. The stained glass windows enhance the beauty of the overall interior of the building.

Returned

Vernon A.M.E. Church  
Name of Property

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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

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- 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

Vernon A.M.E. Church  
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**Areas of Significance**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Ethnic Heritage: Black  
Social History  
Community Planning  
and Development  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**  
1919-1953  
1954-1968  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**  
1919, 1921, 1925  
1959  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**  
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**  
Unknown  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Returned

Vernon A.M.E. Church

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

Vernon African Methodist Episcopal Church is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places at the state level of significance under Criterion A, Ethnic Heritage, based its role in understanding race relations in the United States under legal segregation; for Community Planning and Development for its representation of the initiation and growth of segregated community within the city of Tulsa as well as reconstruction after the 1921 massacre; and finally for Social History for its depiction of racial intolerance against African Americans. Criteria Consideration A is applicable as this is a religious institution.

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

The Tulsa Massacre was one of America's great tragedies. It is a story of opportunity, success, destruction, and reemergence. Centered in Greenwood, it comprises an area once termed "the Negro Wall Street," with the boundaries of Pine to Greenwood Avenue; Frisco Railroad Tracks; North Lansing Avenue; and MLK Jr. Boulevard (a.k.a. Cincinnati Avenue) which encompassed the concentration of successful businesses, churches, housing, hospitals and schools owned and operated by African Americans. During this period African-Americans could not live among whites as equals or patronize their businesses. This led to money circulating in the community and creating a thriving town within a town. This neighborhood also had a number of churches, most notably the "mother churches," each with its own story of beginnings, destruction, and reconstruction.

Vernon African American Episcopal Church's origin dates back to 1905 when African Methodism first came to Tulsa, Indian Territory, with Rev. J.E. Roy as pastor. It started in a one-room house located at 549 North Detroit Street. In 1906, Rev. R. A. Devers and a small group of worshippers met in Gurley Hall at 114 North Greenwood Avenue. Soon, they moved to Barksdale Hall on East Archer. The membership grew from 8 to 16. During Rev. Devers one-year tenure, the congregation started its first building program at Archer and Hartford Streets. This building, a small frame house, was completed the next year under Rev. G. H. Burton and was named "Burton Chapel" in his honor. The membership grew to 71.

In 1908, the Trustees purchased the present site, 307 N. Greenwood Avenue, for \$290.00, with a down payment of \$100.00. By this time, many members were added. The congregation voted to change the name from "Burton Chapel" to "Vernon," honoring Registrar of the Treasury, W. T. Vernon who was appointed by then President Theodore Roosevelt in 1906 and reappointed by President William Howard Taft in 1910.

In the years leading up to the Massacre, Vernon had purchased additional land, which encompasses all of the present church. By 1914, the old church was torn down and the brick

Vernon A.M.E. Church

Name of Property

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basement for the new church was paid for and constructed. The events of June 1, 1921 left this new brick basement in ruins.

Vernon A.M.E. played a pivotal role during this time of destruction. The church became an important monument to the community. While homes, schools, and businesses were destroyed, Vernon was still able to open its doors and allow events to carry on as planned. For instance, not long after the massacre, Vernon opened its doors to the Booker T. Washington graduating class of 1921, which allowed these young men and women to have a place for graduation. The church property was also used for various community events; trying to give some normalcy after a tragic event.

Immediately after the destruction of Greenwood, then pastor, Rev. P. W. DeLyle, and his family were temporarily housed in the rear of the church basement while the parsonage was rebuilt. On November 6, 1922, they moved into the newly reconstructed house. Seating capacity of the church was increased; pulpit furniture was installed; plans and blueprints for the present structure were made. A building fund of \$1,100.00 was accumulated. An estimated 200 people were added to the church roll, increasing its membership to approximately 400. While the Tulsa Massacre may have destroyed what was initially built at this location, it did not stop the Vernon A.M.E. Church from reconstructing and growing within the Greenwood community. The main church building was finally completed in 1928 and opened with great fanfare and joy.

CIVIL RIGHTS ERA

The decades following the Tulsa Massacre of 1921 reasserted the division between African Americans and whites, so much so that in the years following the "riot," one study on segregation by the United States Commission on Civil Rights described the situation in Tulsa as, "an invisible wall had seemingly been erected between blacks and whites that almost completely isolated one race from the other."<sup>1</sup>

Vernon A.M.E Church continued to grow in stature and membership. By 1940, membership rose to 800. All debts were paid and membership in clubs and organizations increased. A neon sign of welcome was erected. It was a beacon to those near and far in need of spiritual guidance. One of its most notable Pastors was Reverend Ben H. Hill. He brought to Vernon a rich background of experience in church and educational work. From the very beginning, certain characteristics of the Hill regime stood out. Under his leadership, attendance grew and the first tithing program was initiated. It was under his administration that a series of organizations were perfected that would enable every member to participate actively in the affairs of the church and feel a responsibility for each project attempted. One of those most notable projects was taking a group of children from the church to the famous March on Washington; certainly not the first foray into Civil Rights but an important one.

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<sup>1</sup> United States Commission on Civil Rights- Oklahoma Advisory Committee, School Desegregation in Tulsa, Oklahoma: A Report (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1976), 3.

Vernon A.M.E. Church

Tulsa, Oklahoma

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Ministers in Tulsa viewed their responsibility in the civil rights movement in a decidedly different manner than other ministers throughout Oklahoma. While ministers in Oklahoma City avoided the slightest controversy caused by addressing the divisive issue, the ministers of Tulsa supported the movement from its inception. Several of Tulsa's African-American ministers began to create plans of action designed to address the severely prejudicial treatment of blacks within the city in the 1950s. The group, which drew its inspiration from the non-violent methods of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., included among its number: Reverends B.S. Roberts, Ben H. Hill (Vernon A.M.E.), G. Calvin McCutchen, and T. Oscar Chappelé.<sup>2</sup>

Vernon A.M.E Church played a direct role in the civil rights movement in Tulsa. During the restaurant sit-ins in Oklahoma City, Clara Luper, the sponsor of the restaurant sit-ins, spoke at the Vernon A.M.E. Church. She challenged the audience to replicate the successes that the Youth Council had in Oklahoma City. One of the primary concerns addressed by Luper was once again leadership among blacks. She asked, "Who is concerning themselves about our young, to lead them into the serious ventures of social action that works for a better community?"<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, while women and men who supported civil rights for blacks abounded in Tulsa, efforts to achieve change were fractured, much as it had been in Oklahoma City before the sit-ins headed by Luper's group. In both cities, the movement needed something to unify the various people and organizations fighting for the same goal but using different means to achieve it.

In 1960, the civil rights movement in Tulsa received a needed boost when Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. came to deliver an address at the First Baptist Church. Reverend Ben Hill of Vernon A.M.E. introduced King as "the living Moses."<sup>4</sup> Reverend Hill was the president of the North Tulsa Ministerial Alliance and the Tulsa Chapter of the NAACP. Churches, like Vernon A.M.E. under the leadership of Hill, dealt with the question of how much churches would contribute to the more aggressive civil rights tactics taken by civic organizations.

Driven by two organizations headed by Tulsa young people, the Student Committee on Human Rights and the Youth Council of the NAACP, demonstrations began in March of 1964 with a Freedom March Parade. The march planned to draw attention to a five-fold program of issues including; "voter registration, Federal Civil Rights legislation now pending in Washington DC, Strong city ordinances on public accommodations, and better job opportunities."<sup>5</sup> Moving on a pre-planned route, the staging location was Vernon African Methodist Episcopal Church. From there the marchers continued to Boulder Park with signs displaying civil rights mottos like, "Jim Crow Must Go," "We Shall Overcome," and "Freedom Now."<sup>6</sup> The march went off without difficulty.

Residents of Greenwood began rebuilding almost immediately after the tragic events of 1921; within a year many of the destroyed buildings were reconstructed. Vernon A.M.E Church

<sup>2</sup> Hannibal B. Johnson, Black Wall Street, 111

<sup>3</sup> "Who Cares in Tulsa," in the Oklahoma Eagle, August 13, 1959.

<sup>4</sup> "Live Together As Brothers Or Die Together As Fools," in the Oklahoma Eagle, August 4, 1960.

<sup>5</sup> "Protest March Scheduled Here Mon.," in the Oklahoma Eagle, March 26, 1964.

<sup>6</sup> "Clara Luper, Militant Fighter, And OC Youths Join March," in the Oklahoma Eagle, April 2, 1964.

Vernon A.M.E. Church

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endured through these difficult times. While it was not completely rebuilt until 1928, the church continued to serve the Greenwood community immediately after the massacre until the doors formally reopened in 1928. The church property has remained a landmark and symbol of the Greenwood neighborhood persistence. It is symbolic of the reconstruction that occurred immediately after the tragedy of 1921 and the symbolism continued into the Civil Rights movement as Vernon A.M.E. played a vital role regarding civil rights in Tulsa. The Vernon A.M.E. Church is significant at the state level under Criteria A for its association with Ethnic Heritage: Black, Community Planning and Development and Social History.

Returned



Vernon A.M.E. Church

Name of Property

Tulsa, Oklahoma

County and State

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

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Ellsworth, Scott. *Death in a Promised Land: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982.

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Hirsch, James S. *Riot and Remembrance: America's Worst Race Riot and Its Legacy*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002.

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Ross, Don. *A Century of African-American Experience/Greenwood: Ruins, Resilience and Renaissance*. Tulsa, Oklahoma: The Greenwood Cultural Center, 2003.

Williams, Ed, project director. *The Greenwood Cultural Center: Jewel in the Crown*. Virginia Beach, VA: The Donning Company Publishers, 2008.

Vernon A.M.E. Church

Name of Property

Tulsa, Oklahoma

County and State

**Government Reports**

National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. *1921 Tulsa Race Riot: Reconnaissance Survey*. November 2005.

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United States Commission on Civil Rights-Oklahoma Advisory Committee. School Desegregation in Tulsa, Oklahoma: A Report. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1976.

**Internet, Newspaper and Magazine Articles**

*Oklahoma Legends: Tulsa – Oil Capital of the World*. Legends of America: A Travel Site for the Nostalgic & Historic Minded. <http://www.legendsofamerica.com/ok-tulsa.html> accessed September 9, 2011.

Chapman, Lee Roy. "The Nightmare of Dreamland: Faye Brady and the Battle for Greenwood" in *This Land: Oklahoma's First New Media Company*. Vol. 2, Issue 11. Tulsa: This Land Press, September 1, 2001.

Commander, Tulsa Post African Blood Brotherhood, "The Tulsa Riot" in *The Crusader*, Vol. IV, No. 5, editor Cyril Briggs (New York: July 1921).

O'Dell, Larry. "All-Black Towns" <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/A/AL009.html> accessed August 1, 2011.

"Clara Luper, Militant Fighter, And OC Youths Join March." *The Tulsa Oklahoma Eagle*. April 2, 1964.

**Other Primary Sources**

Sanborn Map Company. *Insurance Maps of Tulsa, Creek Nation, Indian Territory*. New York: 1903, 1905, and 1907

Sanborn Map Company. *Insurance Maps of Tulsa, Oklahoma*. New York, 1911, 1915, 1938.

Vernon A.M.E. Church  
Name of Property

Tulsa, Oklahoma  
County and State

U.S. Bureau of the Census. Population Schedules, 1870, 1880, 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930.

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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

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

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
  - Other State agency
  - Federal agency
  - Local government
  - University
  - Other
- Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** less than 2

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 36.161597

Longitude: -95.986265

Vernon A.M.E. Church  
Name of Property

Tulsa, Oklahoma  
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**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Section 01, Township 19, Range 12 W; Lots Ten (10) through Sixteen (16), Block Three (3),  
TURLEYS ADDITION to the City of Tulsa, Tulsa County, Oklahoma, according to the Recorded  
Plat thereof.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundaries include all of the land that has historically been associated with the church.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Leroy Alfred, Al Barber, Arglenda Friday, Ruth Gaines, Jane Malone, Veola  
West, Monica Williams-Haynes; edits by Lynda Ozan

organization: Vernon AME Historical Preservation Committee

street & number: 311 North Greenwood

city or town: Tulsa state: Oklahoma zip code: 74120

e-mail monmw@att.net/lozan@okhistory.org

telephone: 918-812-8606

date: 29 January 2018

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**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 this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

**Photographs**

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Vernon A.M.E. Church  
 Name of Property

Tulsa, Oklahoma  
 County and State

**Photo Log**

Name of Property: Vernon A.M.E. Church

City or Vicinity: Tulsa

County: Tulsa State: OK

Photographer: Lynda Ozan

Date Photographed:

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

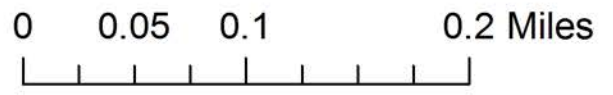
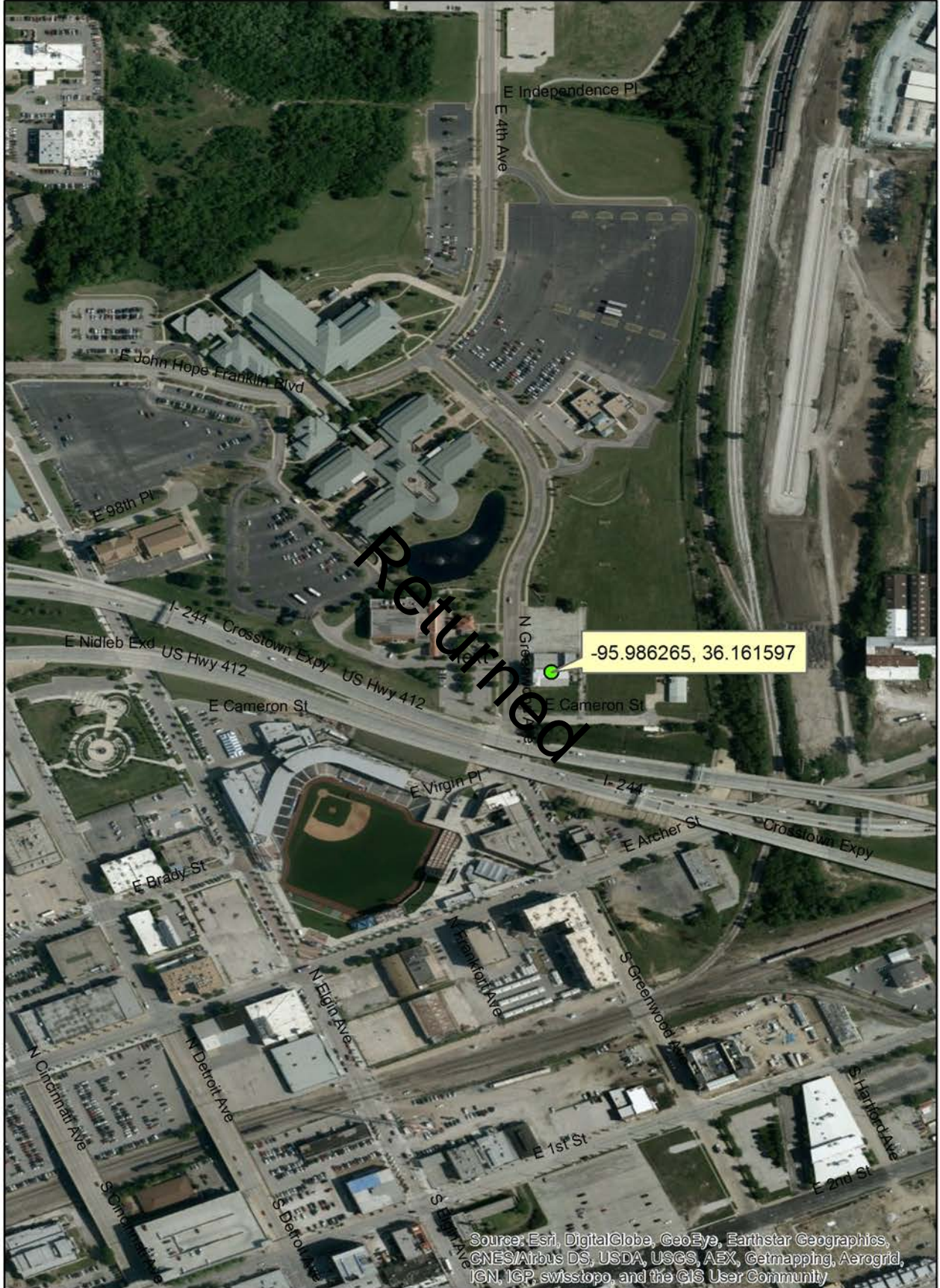
Photograph Number	Subject	Direction
0001	Facade and South Elevation	Northeast
0002	Facade	East
0003	South Elevation	North
0004	East and North Elevation	Southwest
0005	Interior Stained Glass windows	

**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.



Vernon A.M.E Church  
311 North Greenwood Avenue  
Tulsa, Tulsa County, Oklahoma



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action: Nomination

Property Name: Vernon A.M.E. Church

Multiple Name: \_\_\_\_\_

State & County: OKLAHOMA, Tulsa

Date Received: 4/25/2018      Date of Pending List: 5/16/2018      Date of 16th Day: 5/31/2018      Date of 45th Day: 6/11/2018      Date of Weekly List: \_\_\_\_\_

Reference number: SG100002547

Nominator: State

Reason For Review:

Accept       Return       Reject      6/7/2018 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments: VERNON A.M.E. CHURCH, Tulsa County, OKLAHOMA  
National Register of Historic Places - Return Comments:  
The current nomination is being returned for substantive revisions related to the documentation. Reconsideration will be completed upon correction of the items noted below and resubmission of the required materials to the National Park Service. While the church appears to be eligible for listing in the National Register, the current nomination fails to address several aspects of the historic context in sufficient detail to justify listing at this time.

Recommendation/ Criteria: RETURN

Reviewer Paul Lusignan  Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2229 Date 6/7/2018

DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments : **YES**      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.



**VERNON A.M.E. CHURCH**  
**Tulsa County, OKLAHOMA**  
**National Register of Historic Places - Return Comments:**

**Significance:**

The body of the significance narrative revolves around the events of the Tulsa Riots/Massacre and their repercussions to the local community, yet the nomination provided very little contextual discussion regarding the events of 1921, the period leading up to it, and the immediate aftermath. While the history may be well known to local citizens, outside readers are left with only a vague understanding of the events and themes associated with the 1921 period. The nomination should provide at least a brief synopsis of what exactly the Tulsa Massacre was and how events played out in the local community. The fact that the Vernon A.M.E. Church was almost alone in its physical and social "survival" of the local Riots, can be made even more significant with a better understanding of the scale and breadth of the events of 1921. The narrative need not be extensive, but the nomination should not assume that readers have a previous knowledge of the period. [Much of that material may be available from the previous draft Tulsa Riot nomination or in the NPS report on the events of 1921.]

The statewide level of significance needs to be better justified. As it currently stands the nomination focuses on local events and the local significance of the church property. In order to establish state level significance the nomination will need to directly justify how events in Tulsa affected the larger Oklahoma community. There is little dispute that the 1921 Riot/Massacre constituted events of state and even national importance, but how does the church's part in the story rise to that level?

In addition, the nomination mentions the development of "mother churches" in the Greenwood neighborhood. If Vernon was such a mother church that might be worth expanding upon to support the local significance of the property above and beyond the events of 1921 and the rebuilding of the community.

The period of significance, particularly the end date, should be directly justified; not just that it ends with the 50-year mark, but that it is extended to incorporate the years of civil rights advocacy and the completion of the adjacent social hall as a mark of the prominence of the congregation within the community.

Criterion Consideration G needs to not only be checked, but a brief justification should be provided outlining how the property meets the consideration guidelines.

At one point the nomination (Section 7) states that construction started in 1919, yet the narrative on page 9-10 notes 1914 as the date of the initial basement construction. Please clarify.

If there are any additional questions regarding these comments please contact me directly at 202-354-2229, [paul\\_lusignan@nps.gov](mailto:paul_lusignan@nps.gov).



Paul R. Lusignan, Historian  
National Register of Historic Places  
National Park Service

6/7/2018





## Oklahoma Historical Society

Founded May 27, 1893

### State Historic Preservation Office

Oklahoma History Center • 800 Nazih Zuhdi Drive • Oklahoma City, OK 73105-7917  
(405) 521-6249 • Fax (405) 522-0816 • [www.okhistory.org/shpo/shpom.htm](http://www.okhistory.org/shpo/shpom.htm)

July 2, 2018

Joy Beasley  
Keeper of the National Register  
of Historic Places  
National Park Service  
1849 C Street NW, Mail Stop 7228  
Washington D.C. 20240



Dear Ms. Beasley:

We are pleased to transmit the nomination for the Vernon AME Church located in Tulsa, Tulsa County Oklahoma. This resubmittal is in response to the request for additional information by Paul Lusignan.

We look forward to the results of your review. If there any further questions regarding the nominations, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Lynda Ozan  
Deputy State Historic  
Preservation Officer

Enclosures