

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

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

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 89000241      Date Listed: 4/10/89

Solomon Wesley United Methodist Church      Camden      New Jersey

Property Name      County      State

Multiple Name

-----  
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.

*Linda M. Clelland*  
Signature of the Keeper

April 10, 1989  
Date of Action

=====  
Amended Items in Nomination:

Criteria consideration A has not been checked although it is justified.

DISTRIBUTION:

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

241

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

FEB 26 1989

NATIONAL REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties... See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms...

1. Name of Property

historic name Solomon Wesley United Methodist Church

other names/site number

2. Location

street & number 291-B Davistown Road (Asyla Road)

NA not for publication

city, town Blackwood, Gloucester Township

vicinity

state New Jersey

code 034

county Camden

code 007

zip code 08012

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- private, public-local, public-State, public-Federal

Category of Property

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

Number of Resources within Property

Table with 2 columns: Contributing, Noncontributing. Rows for buildings, sites, structures, objects, Total.

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards...

Signature of certifying official

Date 02/09/89

Signature of certifying official

Asst. Commissioner for Natural & Historic Resources/ Deputy SHPO

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register. See continuation sheet. 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 4/10/89

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

---

**6. Function or Use**

---

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

---

Religion

---

---

Funerary

---

---

---

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

---

Religion

---

---

Funerary

---

---

---

---

**7. Description**

---

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

---

Mid-19th century vernacular

---

---

---

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation 

---

Rusticated cast stone

---

walls 

---

Asphalt

---

roof 

---

Asphalt

---

other 

---

---

---

**Describe present and historic physical appearance.**

---

The Solomon Wesley United Methodist Church is located in the center of Gloucester Township in the former village of Davistown. This early village of modest dwellings stretched in a linear direction along Davistown Road. Although much of the village has been replaced by modern residences, the mid-nineteenth-century church, prominently sited close to the road, and its cemetery to the rear survive. Architecturally, the building displays a vernacular gabled form common to churches in rural settings throughout the nineteenth and well into the twentieth centuries. Characterized by its simple gable fronted silhouette, the Solomon Wesley Church exhibits one of the variations of this form, namely, the side entrance tower that rises to a pyramidal roof.

The one-story church, erected in 1850, is built of frame on a rusticated cast stone foundation that was constructed circa 1920. The building is clapboarded and sheathed with mid-twentieth-century asphalt siding. The front gable of the nave is lit by a round-arched, stained glass, double hung window that features paired arches rising from green hues to blues to a crowning round light. A concrete stoop leads to the square entrance tower's double doors which are set in a thin entablature surround. The tower rises to an asphalt-shingled pyramidal roof. The side elevations of the church are identical, each fenestrated by three registers of pointed 4/4 double hung windows, recalling the Gothic Revival. These windows of wood sash and frames are glazed with blue and red lights. While these windows appear to be pointed on the exterior, the interior reveals that the uppermost sash are actually rectangular and partially infilled with triangular blocks of wood to give the illusion of pointed windows. Two-light windows fenestrate the rusticated cast stone basement. The building has an asphalt-shingled roof with a simple overhang. In 1969 a one-story rear addition with a shallow gabled roof was constructed. Functioning as the pastor's office, this space is fenestrated with rectangular openings. Circa 1980, the cornerstone of the church was removed, its location presently unknown.

The interior of the church contains features dating from the 1850 construction date and an 1890s renovation. The church is first entered through the vestibule in the tower. Original grained paneled doors along an angled wall of the vestibule then open to the sanctuary. Within this single open room are the original mid-nineteenth-century pews, pulpit, and turned balustrade that once fronted the entire altar. That rail was partially removed in the 1960s to permit a central passage to the altar which contains Gothic Revival chairs at the pulpit. The church has narrow pine floors which likely date from the 1890s renovations. At that time, innovations in machined millwork allowed the installation of grooved door and window surrounds with bosses, beaded wainscot, and molded chairrails in even modest structures such as the Solomon Wesley Church. A subsequent development was the transition from oil lamps to electricity during the 1920s. Two metal light fixtures from that period hang above the aisle.

The 1969 rear addition, used as an office, is paneled as is the basement which is accessed by a wooden stair in the northeast corner of the church. The basement has a concrete floor and modern windows.

Behind the church is the cemetery, marked with gravestones of the Davis family and other community members. To the west of the church is the site of the former Davistown School, although no remnants of it remain. The resource as nominated contains one contributing building and one contributing site.

See continuation sheet

**8. Statement of Significance**

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

nationally     statewide     locally

Applicable National Register Criteria     A     B     C     D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)     A     B     C     D     E     F     G    N/A

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)  
Black Ethnic Heritage

Period of Significance  
1850-1930

Significant Dates  
1850

Cultural Affiliation  
N/A

Significant Person  
N/A

Architect/Builder  
Unknown

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Solomon Wesley United Methodist Church and Cemetery are significant as representatives of Davistown and the community of freed slaves that established itself there in the early nineteenth century. The building is one of two black churches and the only one from the mid-nineteenth century identified in Gloucester Township. As an important black cultural resource in the style traditional of rural churches of the period and as a historical landmark to the Davistown community, this resource appears to be eligible for the National Register under Criterion A for black ethnic heritage.

The Solomon Wesley United Methodist Church, built in 1850, stands today as one of the few reminders of the black village of Davistown. The village, established at the turn of the eighteenth century, was part of a "mile long parcel of land"<sup>1</sup> left to Lindley Davis in the 1790 will of Daniel Bates. Bates, a leading layman of the Bethel Methodist Circuit, also provided Davis, a black woman, with \$200 and her family's freedom. Davistown, or Davisville, grew to be a small, close-knit community primarily composed of Davis family members.

Employment for the community was mostly on neighboring farms and in the nearby marl pits. Though never a prosperous village, sixty years after the village's founding, the community was able to afford the cost of constructing a church for the town's worship. On May 8, 1850, a society for the purpose of establishing a church was founded by the African Methodist Episcopal Congregation belonging to the Mount Zion Circuit. On May 9, 1850, Zachariah and Catherine Davis deeded a half acre of land along Davistown Road for the construction of a church to Solomon and Noble Davis and three other black men from the county for \$25.00. The deed required that the land, which had originally been part of a tract belonging to Arthur Boyer, be used "to build and erect a Meeting House, a Place of Worship and for a Burial Ground for members of the said Society."<sup>2</sup> The derivation of the church's name, "Solomon Wesley" remains unknown. However, it can be hypothesized that the church was called the Wesley Methodist Episcopal church after John Wesley, the Methodist religious order's founder. The name "Solomon" could have been added in tribute to Solomon Davis, one of the church's original founders and the father of Zachariah Davis. The Solomon Wesley cemetery has veterans from the Civil and Spanish Wars, WWI, and WWII, as well as original Davis family members interred there.

When founded in 1850, the Solomon Wesley Church was an African Wesleyan Methodist Episcopal church, a branch of Methodism that was started in Philadelphia in 1787 when racial discrimination issues divided members of the mother church. Between 1813 and 1917, many black congregations formed independent churches including the African Methodist Episcopal Church which was formally organized in 1816. This

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A  
 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 # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary location of additional data:  
 State historic preservation office  
 Other State agency  
 Federal agency  
 Local government  
 University  
 Other  
Specify repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property .5 acre (21,780 sq. ft.)

UTM References

A 

|      |   |   |         |   |   |   |   |          |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|------|---|---|---------|---|---|---|---|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1    | 8 | 4 | 9       | 6 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 4        | 4 | 0 | 4 | 5 | 9 | 0 |
| Zone |   |   | Easting |   |   |   |   | Northing |   |   |   |   |   |   |

B 

|      |  |  |         |  |  |  |  |          |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|------|--|--|---------|--|--|--|--|----------|--|--|--|--|--|--|
|      |  |  |         |  |  |  |  |          |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Zone |  |  | Easting |  |  |  |  | Northing |  |  |  |  |  |  |

C 

|      |  |  |         |  |  |  |  |          |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|------|--|--|---------|--|--|--|--|----------|--|--|--|--|--|--|
|      |  |  |         |  |  |  |  |          |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Zone |  |  | Easting |  |  |  |  | Northing |  |  |  |  |  |  |

D 

|      |  |  |         |  |  |  |  |          |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|------|--|--|---------|--|--|--|--|----------|--|--|--|--|--|--|
|      |  |  |         |  |  |  |  |          |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Zone |  |  | Easting |  |  |  |  | Northing |  |  |  |  |  |  |

Runnemedede, NJ Quad

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the nominated property is delineated as Block 13101, Lot 34 on the Township of Gloucester Tax Map 131.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the entire lot that has historically been associated with the property.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Carol A. Benenson/N. Catharine Claypoole  
organization KKFS date March 1988  
street & number 219 North Broad Street, 9th floor telephone (215) 561-1050  
city or town Philadelphia, state PA zip code 19107

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**Section number 8 Page 2Solomon Wesley United Methodist Church,  
Gloucester Township, Camden County, New Jersey

branch of the church was located predominately in the northern states until after the Civil War when it spread to the South and eventually across the nation.<sup>3</sup> In 1939, there was a rejoining of many of the different Methodist branches into a single Methodist Church. This was followed by the merger of this church with some other branches in 1968 to form the United Methodist Church, of which Solomon Wesley is now a member. Its governing body at the time of its founding was most likely the New Jersey Methodist Conference, however, shortly thereafter in 1864 it became part of the Delaware Conference. The Delaware Conference, the first all black conference in Methodism, was organized by Bishop Edmund S. James in Philadelphia as a nongeographical conference extending through Delaware, the eastern shore of Maryland and Virginia, eastern Pennsylvania, New Jersey and the region to the north.<sup>4</sup> In 1965, this conference was dissolved and the Solomon Wesley Church was transferred, along with the other black churches in the vicinity, to the Southern Jersey Conference.

Architecturally, the church built by the community stands as a representative of one of two types of black churches commonly being built in the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> The simpler of the two, a rectangular frame form with a gabled roof and square entrance tower, as seen in the Solomon Wesley Church, is most often associated with rural black churches. As the church complex grew, camp meeting grounds for the congregation were located beyond the church and in the 1870s, a school was built to the church's side. The Davistown Colored School, also known as "Davistown District 23" was the only black school which ever existed within Gloucester Township. It discontinued its operations in 1899 and the students were transferred to the Grenloch School. The school was torn down in the early 1900s along with many of the original homes along the Lindley Davis tract.<sup>6</sup>

In 1886 Davistown was given recognition as a village of Gloucester Township. At one point the church's membership numbered between 100 and 200 people. Though now the church's congregation and village population have decreased significantly, community pride is still exhibited in the yearly anniversary celebration of the town's founding family on "Davis Day." The noted day, which draws individuals outside of the congregation to the church, celebrated its 125th anniversary in 1975 when the late Edwin Davis, Lindley Davis' great great grandson, still resided in the village. His account of the history of the community indicates that many of the founding families left Davistown in the 1920s, which terminates the period of significance.

The mid-nineteenth-century church and cemetery are significant as the principal vestige of the black individuals who, given their freedom, established and maintained the village of Davistown. The village flourished during an era in which many black Methodist congregations nationwide formed independent churches, of which Solomon Wesley Church stands as the only nineteenth-century representative in Gloucester Township. Therefore, for its cultural association with black history in an area in which limited resources of this heritage survive, the Solomon Wesley United Methodist Church and Cemetery appear to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 3

Solomon Wesley United Methodist Church,  
Gloucester Township, Camden County, New Jersey

---

**FOOTNOTES**

1. Helen B. Merkle, The Historic Churches of the Township for Gloucester, New Jersey (New Jersey: Historical Society Township of Gloucester, 1976).
2. U.S. Recorder of Deeds, Camden County, New Jersey. Book K, page 306.
3. Frank S. Mead, Handbook of Denominations, 2nd ed., Rev. Samuel S. Hill, (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1985), page 164.
4. Robert B. Steelman, What God Has Wrought (New Jersey: United Methodist Church, c.1986), page 253.
5. Robert Craig, Black Historic Sites in New Jersey (New Jersey: New Jersey Historical Commission, 1984), page 21.
6. Merkle.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 2

Solomon Wesley United Methodist Church,  
Gloucester Township, Camden County, New Jersey

---

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Beers, Frederick W. State Atlas of New Jersey. New York: 1872.
- Camden County Cultural and Heritage Commission Files.
- "Come and Worship". A pamphlet prepared by the Solomon Wesley United Methodist Church, 1987.
- Craig, Robert. New Jersey Black Historic Places Survey. Camden County, New Jersey: New Jersey Historical Commission, 1982.
- Creely, J.M. Map of Gloucester Township. New Jersey: 1908.
- Davis, Edwin. "The History of Davistown". A history of the town by a community member.
- Davis, Tony. "Church Observes 125 Years on Land Bequeathed to Slave." Camden Courier Post. 29 September 1975.
- Interview with Rev. Richard Steelman, South Jersey Methodist Conference Historian, November 1987.
- Mead, Frank S. Handbook of Denominations in the United States. 2nd ed. Rev. by Samuel S. Hill. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1985.
- Merkle, Helen B. The Historic Churches of the Township of Gloucester. Gloucester, New Jersey: Historical Society Township of Gloucester, 1976.
- Merkle, Helen B. The History of Gloucester Township. Gloucester, New Jersey: Historical Society Township of Gloucester.
- Nunan, P. Map of the Township of Gloucester. Camden, New Jersey: 1850.
- Prowell, George R. The History of Camden County, New Jersey. Philadelphia: L.J. Richards & Co., 1886, page 680.
- Recorder of Deeds, Camden County, Camden, New Jersey.
- Steelman, Robert B. What God Has Wrought. Pennington, New Jersey: The United Methodist Church, c.1986.

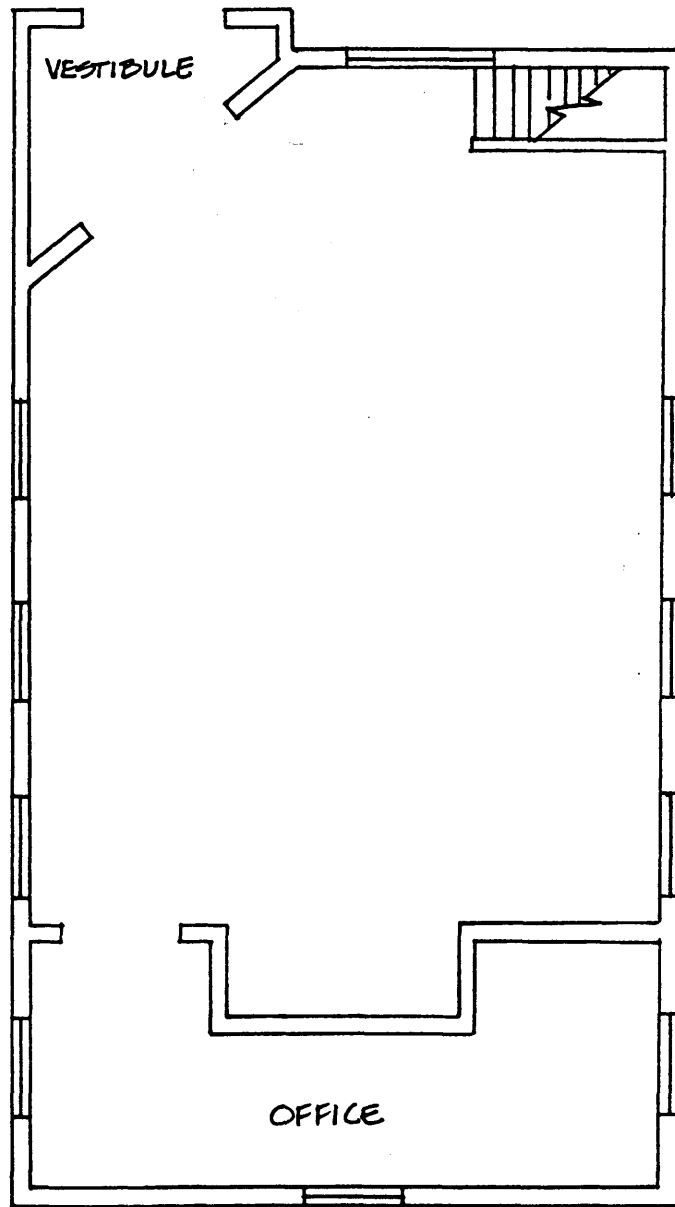


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_ Solomon Wesley United Methodist Church,  
Gloucester Township, Camden County, New Jersey

---



NOT TO SCALE

SUB-PLANS  
SCALE: 1" = 200'

Solomon Wesley United Methodist Church  
Gloucester Township  
Camden County, New Jersey

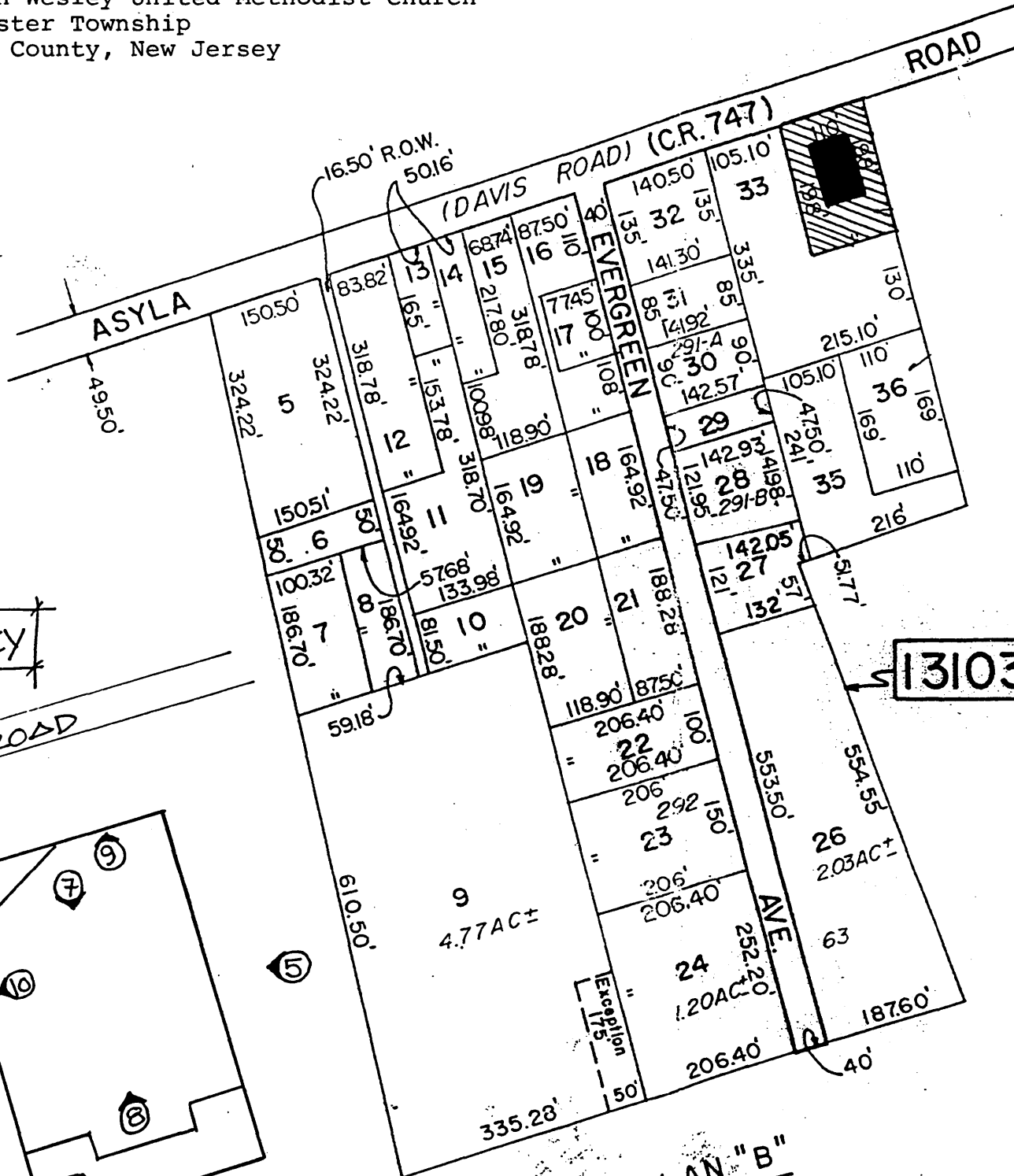


PHOTO KEY



⑫ IN BASEMENT

SUB PLAN "B"