



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**

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1. Name of Property

historical name: METROPOLITAN AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL ZION CHURCH

other name/site number: North Methodist Episcopal Church

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2. Location

street & number: 2051 Main Street

city/town: Hartford not for publication: N/A
vicinity: N/A

state: CT county: Hartford code: 003 zip code: 06120

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3. Classification

Ownership of Property: private

Category of Property: building

Number of Resources within Property:

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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. See cont. sheet.

Signature of certifying official: John W. Shannahan, Director, Connecticut Historical Commission; Date: 06/20/94

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 See continuation sheet.
determined not eligible for the National Register
removed from the National Register
other (explain):

Entered in the National Register; Guyton Lapsley 7/22/94

for Signature of Keeper; Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic: RELIGION Sub: religious facility

Current: RELIGION Sub: religious facility

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7. Description
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Architectural Classification:

Gothic

Other Description: N/A

Materials: foundation STONE roof STONE: Slate
walls BRICK other GLASS
STONE

Describe present and historic physical appearance. X See continuation sheet.

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8. Statement of Significance
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Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: state.

Applicable National Register Criteria: A,C

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) : A

Areas of Significance: ETHNIC HERITAGE: BLACK
ARCHITECTURE
RELIGION

Period(s) of Significance: 1873-1943

Significant Dates: 1873, 1926

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: E. H. Waters, builder

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.
X See continuation sheet.

9. Major Bibliographical References

X See continuation sheet.

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 # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- X State historic preservation office Connecticut Historical Commission
- Other state agency 59 South Prospect Street
- Federal agency Hartford, Connecticut 06106
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: 1/2 acre

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

A	18	693060	4628050	B	___	_____	_____
C	___	_____	_____	D	___	_____	_____

X See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: See continuation sheet.

The nominated property includes the parcel known as 2051 Main Street, as recorded in the Hartford Land Records, Vol. 619, p. 178.

Boundary Justification: See continuation sheet.

The boundary includes the extent of the church lot as purchased by the church in 1926.

11. Form Prepared By

Name/Title: Bruce Clouette and Maura Cronin, reviewed by John Herzan,

Conn. Hist. Commission

Organization: Historic Resource Consultants Date: October 30, 1993

Street & Number: 55 Van Dyke Avenue Telephone: 203-547-0268

City or Town: Hartford State: CT Zip: 06106

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Description	Metropolitan A.M.E. Zion Church (North Methodist Episcopal Church) Hartford, Hartford County, CT	7-1
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Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Zion Church is a large brick building built in the High Victorian Gothic style in 1873-1874. Still in use for religious services, it has served the present congregation since 1926, before which it was known as the North Methodist Episcopal Church.¹ The area is a densely built, urban residential and commercial neighborhood along a wide and heavily traveled street. The building measures 60' by 96' in plan and, except for passageways on either side and a small area at the back of the church, almost entirely fills its lot. The building faces east, with the facade (Photograph 1) dominated by a 3 1/2-story gabled projection and towers at each of the front corners. The north tower is the smaller of the two, with its two stories surmounted by a steep hip roof with small gabled dormers. The south tower has three full stories, to which are added a tall gabled belfry with Gothic-arched louvered openings and a slate-covered octagonal spire. Each tower has an entrance at the base, with a wide drip mold, modern double doors, and a banding of stone along the jambs. On the second story of each tower are a set of adjacent small windows, five on the larger tower and three on the smaller. The projecting bay between the towers is symmetrically arranged, with two small openings on the first story, three windows on the second story, a triptych of three large windows on the third story, and a circular window in the gable. The windows all take the shape of blunt-pointed arches and have stone sills, heads, and banded sides. The larger windows are subdivided by tracery into two main panels and are filled with simple painted and stained glass, mostly in floral patterns. There are stepped buttresses with stone coping at all the corners of the building and stone stringcourses between stories. The stone details, the light color of which forms a distinct contrast with the red brickwork, are continued on the sides of the building and, except for the stringcourses, even onto the relatively plain rear elevation (Photograph 2).

On the side elevations, the gable roof slopes down behind the towers, making two full stories; a series of tiny gabled dormers appears halfway up the roof. The side elevations are divided by buttresses into six bays, each with large Gothic-arched windows on the second story and smaller ones below. A small gable-roofed projection at the north rear provides a secondary entrance, and there is another entrance, with an opening in the shape of a shallow pointed arch and

¹The current name, Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, was formally recorded in the Hartford Land Records on January 5, 1940.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Description	Metropolitan A.M.E. Zion Church (North Methodist Episcopal Church) Hartford, Hartford County, CT	7-2
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original double doors of diagonal-board panels, on the south side (Photograph 3).

The exterior is relatively unchanged from its appearance at the time of the church's original construction. An access ramp has been added to the south tower entrance, and an elevator structure has been appended to the south elevation near the southeast corner. Two small enclosed stairways to the basement were constructed on the sides when the basement was remodeled in the 1950s. Some of the stonework has been patched with concrete and painted. Finally, the cornerstone from the congregation's earlier building on Pearl Street was reset into this structure in 1955; it reads "A.M.E.Z. CHURCH / 1858 1898".

The interior is also largely original. In the main room, on the second floor (Photographs 5 and 6), the Gothic motif is continued by exposed ceiling beams with large curved braces that spring from carved corbels set into the walls. An extensive arrangement of tall organ pipes rises from a paneled base behind the centrally placed pulpit, to either side of which is a lectern. Flanking these original furnishings are choir stalls that face the congregation; like the paneled oak pews, the choir stalls appear to date from the 1950s. At the rear of the church, lighted by the triptych window, is a choir loft set between the two towers; the face of the loft is finished with Gothic-arched paneling. Other notable original interior woodwork includes molded surrounds on the doorways leading to the two main aisles and side aisles, paneled double doors, and a dado of narrow beaded oak boards running along the walls of the main room. The dado continues in the vestibule (Photograph 7), where similar beaded oak boards make up the sides of the main stairway, which has Eastlake-inspired newel posts with urn turnings, applied spindles, and floral carvings.

The tracery of the stained glass windows (Photograph 8), many of which memorialize their donors, divides each into two narrow panels with trefoil-arched heads, above which are two circular lights and a single large quatrefoil. The main panels are mostly painted, with black floral and geometric designs, along with floral designs in stained glass at the top. The stained-glass quatrefoil panel consists of two concentric rings of flowers. Unlike most of the church, which appears structurally sound and in good repair, the windows have suffered from deterioration, mostly in the form of faded paint, and serious vandalism that has resulted in numerous broken panes.

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CONTINUATION SHEET**

Significance Metropolitan A.M.E. Zion Church 8-1
(North Methodist Episcopal Church)
Hartford, Hartford County, CT

Summary

The Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church building is significant because for more than six decades it has been the home of one of Hartford's leading African-American religious organizations, one that is a direct descendant of the city's first African-American church (Criterion A). First known as the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church, the congregation was formed in 1833 when the earliest known church, the African Religious Society, which had been formed in 1826, split in two. Located first on Elm Street, then for many years on Pearl Street, and since 1926 on Main Street, the church has been a focal point for many within the city's African-American community, not only as a place for religious worship but also for the social and humanitarian activities associated with it. The church's move to the present building, made necessary by the construction of the Hartford Fire Department headquarters, coincided with a period of rapid growth in the African-American population, as people moved to Hartford to take advantage of opportunities created by the city's industrial expansion and by the spread of tobacco production throughout the Capital area.

The building also has architectural significance because it embodies the distinctive characteristics of the High Victorian Gothic style of architecture (Criterion C). Among these characteristics are the use of medieval elements, such as the arched windows, buttresses, and ceiling beams; a complexity of form created by the dissimilar towers, projecting gables, and dormers; and the use of polychromatic masonry effects.

Although buildings owned by religious organizations or used for religious purposes are not normally eligible for the National Register, the Metropolitan A.M.E. Zion Church qualifies because of its architectural qualities and because of the historical importance of churches in the community life of urban African Americans (Criteria Consideration A).

Historical Significance

As in most eastern American cities, the religious history of Hartford's African Americans followed a distinctive pattern: dissatisfaction with their treatment by white churches, formation of independent congregations, affiliation with national denominations, and growth during several episodes of migration that swelled the city's African-American population. As early as 1816 a group of people, discontented

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Significance Metropolitan A.M.E. Zion Church 8-2
 (North Methodist Episcopal Church)
 Hartford, Hartford County, CT

with their segregation in the balconies of the city's predominantly white churches, began meeting together; in 1826 they formed the African Religious Society and acquired a building on Talcott Street. In 1833 the society divided in two, with those preferring the Congregationalist tradition forming the Colored Congregational Church.¹ The other members formed the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church, purchasing land for a house of worship on Elm Street. By 1856, when the property was bought by the city in order to clear the way for Bushnell Park, the group had already affiliated with the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, a national organization headquartered in New York. The church then built a new building nearby on Pearl Street. Along with an associated school, it became a focus for many within Hartford's African-American community, which numbered 443 people, or 3% of the city's population, in 1850. The church also served as a center for abolitionist activity and, according to tradition, as a haven for runaway slaves on their journey to freedom.

African Americans played a major role in the growth of American Methodism. In 1771, when John Wesley sent Francis Asbury to preach in America, there were only 5,000 Methodists in all the colonies. By 1816, when Asbury (by then the first Methodist bishop) died, there were 212,000. Asbury's fellow preacher in all his evangelical efforts was Harry Hosier, known as Black Harry, and in most northern cities African Americans made up a sizeable portion of those who responded to Methodism's call. Methodism's emphasis on the equality of sinners before God, belief in individual salvation, and general opposition to slavery undoubtedly contributed to its appeal, as did its enthusiastic forms of worship, which, according to many scholars, African-American Methodists fused with West African traditions to create a unique combination of singing and movement that endures to this day.

Despite Hosier's role in the founding of the movement, Methodist churches relegated African Americans to a secondary role. Often they were confined to certain pews, few served as officers, and the "classes," the subgroups within congregations, were usually organized along strictly separate racial lines. In 1796 a group of African Americans withdrew from New York's John Street Methodist Church to form (with Asbury's blessing) Mother Zion Church. In 1820 Mother Zion severed its connection with the white Methodist organization altogether and the following year created the African Methodist Episcopal Zion

¹Later known as the Talcott Street Congregational Church, it is still active today as the Faith Congregational Church.

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Significance Metropolitan A.M.E. Zion Church 8-3
(North Methodist Episcopal Church)
Hartford, Hartford County, CT

Church. Soon independent African-American congregations in other cities began affiliating with the denomination, which elected James Varick of New York its first bishop. Affiliation with such a national organization gave local churches a source for religious publications, supported the training and placement of preachers, and created a sense of belonging to a larger group of people that shared their experience. Among the prominent figures who were members of A.M.E. Zion congregations were Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and Sojourner Truth.

Hartford's A.M.E. Zion Church grew steadily as the city's African-American population increased. After the Civil War, the core of families that had lived in Connecticut since colonial times was joined by numerous migrants from the South. A new and larger church on Pearl Street was built in 1898, by which time the city's African-American population numbered almost 1,900 people. Industrial expansion during World War I and the spread of tobacco culture throughout the Hartford region attracted even greater numbers, so when the church relocated in 1926, it was fitting for it to move into this large and attractive structure.² By the end of the 1920s, there were more than 6,500 African Americans living in Hartford. In addition to holding services, the church sponsored a Christian Endeavor group and a Missionary Society, and several secular organizations such as Masonic groups were closely associated with the church. The church thus served as a social focal point for the community. During the 1960s, Hartford's African-American churches also took on an important political role: the city's African-American ministers formed a coalition that worked to expose discrimination and promote the passage of Civil Rights legislation.

²The building had been built in 1873-1874 by a white congregation and was known as the North Methodist Episcopal Church. Although intended to hold 500 people, the society remained small and was nearly bankrupted by building the church, which remained incomplete for many years. By 1919, however, the group had grown enough to build a new church on Albany Avenue, putting this building up for sale. The next owner was Congregation Emmanuel, which used it as a synagogue for eight years before selling it to the present owners.

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Significance	Metropolitan A.M.E. Zion Church (North Methodist Episcopal Church) Hartford, Hartford County, CT	8-4
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Architectural Significance

Though not extravagant, Metropolitan A.M.E. Zion Church is a good example of the High Victorian Gothic style of architecture. As in other Gothic styles, the High Victorian Gothic drew upon elements commonly found in medieval churches, and such inspiration is abundantly evident in this building, particularly in its pointed arches, buttressed corners, exposed braced ceiling beams, and window tracery. To this basic Gothic formula, High Victorian architects added a greater eclecticism, more complex rooflines and massing, and the use of contrasting color on the exterior.

These latter characteristics are also present in this building. The church is eclectic in its sources, combining Early English doorways with Tudor-arched openings, and adding in Eastlake-inspired stairway ornament to the predominantly Gothic decorative motifs. The dissimilar heights and roof shapes of the two towers contribute to the building's overall complexity of form, as do the projecting gables and the small dormers on the towers and main roof. Finally, the all-important "constructional coloration," as architects of the period termed the use of contrastingly colored exterior materials, is embodied in the building's brick and stone banding on doorways and window openings.

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Photographs	Metropolitan A.M.E. Zion Church (North Methodist Episcopal Church) Hartford, Hartford County, CT	Photos-1
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All photographs:

1. Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church
(North Methodist Episcopal Church)
2. Hartford, Hartford County, CT
3. Photo Credit: HRC, Hartford, CT
4. April, 1993
5. Negative filed with Connecticut Historical Commission
Hartford, CT

Captions:

East elevation (facade), camera facing west
Photograph 1 of 8

West (rear) elevation, camera facing east
Photograph 2 of 8

Detail of side entry, south elevation, camera facing north
Photograph 3 of 8

Detail of cornerstone from earlier church, set in present building in
1955; east elevation, camera facing northwest
Photograph 4 of 8

Interior, looking toward pulpit, camera facing west
Photograph 5 of 8

Interior, looking toward choir loft, camera facing northeast
Photograph 6 of 8

Interior, detail of front stairway, camera facing northwest
Photograph 7 of 8

Interior, detail of stained-glass window, south elevation, camera
facing south
Photograph 8 of 8